

The logo for Fórsa, featuring the word "FÓRSA" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. A small red arrow points upwards from the letter 'O'.

Time to stand with SNAs.

Who is Fórsa?

Fórsa is the second largest union on the island of Ireland and by far the largest trade union voice in the Irish civil and public service.

Fórsa represents more than 15,000 education staff in schools and early education, as well as clerical, administrative, management staff in institutes of technology and education and training boards.

There are more than 12,000 special needs assistants in the Fórsa trade union. We have members in every constituency, county and parish in the country.

#RespectForSNAs

What is the #RespectForSNAs campaign?

#RespectForSNAs is the campaign to highlight the value of the role of special needs assistants (SNAs), following the Department of Education's refusal of a union claim for a new minimum qualification for SNAs, which has not been altered since the introduction of the 'Childcare Assistant' scheme in 1979.

This is a campaign to gain recognition and respect for the role of SNAs by establishing a qualification for new entrants to the job which reflects the complexities of the role.

Why does this campaign exist?

The union had sought a relevant QQI level six qualification, or the equivalent, to be essential criteria when new SNAs are hired. Many schools already seek a level six qualification, and don't appoint new SNAs unless they at least hold a level five QQI award.

The department has conceded that a review might be necessary at some point in the future, given the length of time since the qualifications were set: However the department hasn't committed to any timescale, nor does it accept that a level six qualification is desirable, preferring instead to leave decisions to individual schools.

The origins of the current minimum qualification date back to the introduction of the Childcare Assistant scheme within schools in 1979. Since then the role of the SNA has undergone considerable changes which have not been reflected in the minimum qualification.

UCD has stated the SNA training course should be accredited at level six or level seven, yet the Department of Education refuses to give SNAs the recognition they deserve for completing the programme.

What is happening with the campaign?

Our members are currently getting in touch with their local representatives about the campaign. We are asking TDs and Senators to:

1. Support the minimum qualification campaign.
2. Promote awareness of complex role of SNAs in supporting students.
3. Encourage others to engage with, and learn about the work of our SNAs.



Conference

On December 4th Fórsa will be hosting an online conference on the issue of minimum qualifications for special needs assistants. We will be hearing from workers, representatives and academics in the field. The conference will be an opportunity for the campaign to outline, in significant detail, the case for new minimum qualifications.

Political briefing

On Wednesday December 8th, the campaign will host an online briefing session for political representatives and their offices. This briefing will introduce the campaign and outline the case for new minimum qualifications for SNAs.

We will be inviting all members of the Oireachtas to attend and we hope to see many of you there. You will receive communication about the event from Fórsa HQ.

Key points in the #RespectForSNAs campaign

- The campaign involves over 12,000 Fórsa members.
- The original qualification standards were set in 1979.
- The Department of Education has already acknowledged that a review might be necessary at some point in the future.
- The overwhelming majority of SNAs already hold the grade six qualification sought.
- Ireland is out of step with international standards for the qualifications required from an SNA.