

HSE announce new Winter Initiative

The HSE has announced its Winter Health Initiative last Friday, 9 September. It will come into effect in October/November of this year.

Detailed in the Initiative are the following:

- All acute hospitals will have an extra 58 Transitional Care bed approvals per week;
- Community Intervention Team (CIT) services are to be expanded to support five acute hospitals;
- In addition to the 300 beds added last year, 55 acute care beds will be provided at five hospitals where there is a problem with overcrowding (Beaumont Hospital, Midland Regional Hospital in Tullamore, Midland Regional Hospital in Mullingar, Naas General Hospital and University Hospital, Waterford);
- Increased focus on Flu vaccinations for communities;
- Mercy University Hospital Cork will be provided with 18 new step-down beds;
- Numbers of those waiting to be discharged from hospitals will be reduced, through new supports and pathways to enable them to move home or to a suitable community;
- Some 950 home-care packages will be made available; and
- The minor injury services in Dublin will be expanded in order to provide care for 100 extra patients every week.

Amongst criticism that this plan will not fix the resource issues in the Health sector, the HSE's Director General, Tony O'Brien, has assured both patients and practitioners that these measures are simply a start to the reforms that work towards a solution to the overcrowding issues in Irish hospitals.

The impact of these measures will be monitored closely.

Varadkar promises quick processing of HMV payments

Last week, HMV shocked workers by announcing that the company would be liquidated the day before redundancy packages were due to be paid. Yesterday, Sunday 11 September, Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD, ensured that the applications for Redundancy and Insolvency payments made by former HMV workers would be processed expediently, as soon as they are received from the liquidator.

Redundancy payments are available to anyone who has more than two years of continuous service, is over 16 years of age, whose employment is insurable under the Social Welfare Acts. Workers are paid two weeks statutory redundancy payment for every year of service, plus one extra week. This payment is allocated based on the length of time with the company, and their level of pay. It will not exceed €600 a week.

Insolvency payments are available when a company enters into liquidation or receivership. The scheme entitles employees to wages, holiday or sick pay, certain pension contributions, and where minimum notice is not served, payment in lieu of such. Statutory awards such as awards made by the Employment Appeals Tribunal or the Rights Commissioner are also covered. The payments are calculated on the basis of an employee's weekly wage, to a maximum of €600 per week. A maximum of eight weeks' arrears will be paid.

AIB considers Vulture Fund sale

It is believed that AIB are planning to sell some of their loans to so-called "Vulture Funds". This would improve their position in the eyes of potential investors.

The state-owned bank currently has a loan book totalling €1.8bn in non-performing loans. They are weighing up plans to sell a portion of these loans, which were secured on investment property across the country, to a vulture fund. This is ahead of the bank's plans to re-privatise.

At the moment, AIB are focusing on non-performing loans secured on a buy-to-let basis, and would ideally not like to sell on family homes.

A spokesperson for the AIB spoke to the Sunday Business Post. They said, "Our primary objective is to work with borrowers under stress to return their borrowings to a satisfactory position." They are also said to be in talks with David Hall, who has been very public in his condemnation of Vulture Funds of late.

During the summer, a European Stress test showed that both AIB and Bank of Ireland were performing poorly, falling extremely low in the rankings among the 51 lenders tested by the European Banking Association.

This comes amidst Government plans to close the loophole that allow these companies to buy bad loans, usually mortgages, with little to no consideration to the human cost. It is expected these reforms will be announced with Budget 2017 plans next month.

ASTI hardens approach to "ad hoc" Junior Cert oral exams

The ASTI has passed judgement on teachers preparing Junior Cert students for Irish (and other language) exams. Teachers are now banned from preparing students for their oral Irish, Spanish, French or German exam. As a result of this, students may be expected to do the full 100% of the exam in writing. Up until now, Junior Cert candidates could take 40% of their exam as an oral examination.

The ASTI had previously decided that teachers were not allowed to adjudicate their own student's oral exams. Now it has ruled that teachers may not "make, facilitate or cooperate with any arrangements for any student to participate" in any oral exam for a language. Leaving Cert curriculums will still include an oral component. The ASTI's position is that all oral exams should be carried out by the State Examinations Commission, as is the case with the Leaving Cert.

The response to the measures has been significant, with teachers leaving the union in protest.

The reforms were to coincide with the development of a Junior Cert curriculum that contained more Continuous Assessment. This year's Junior Cert students were due to sit two classroom-based exams in English, which would contribute to 10% of the overall grade. If teachers do not provide these exams, students will only be able to earn a maximum of 90% in their English exam.

The ASTI is currently balloting its members for industrial action as a result of Junior Cert reforms, and the Lansdowne Road Agreement.



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Notes from the Editor

Please note that PAI's conference, "Brexit: Some implications for public policy and public administration in Ireland" has been rescheduled. It will now take place on Friday 21 October. We are pleased to announce that EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, will deliver the Keynote Address. Other speakers will include economist Jim Power and former union leader Blair Horan.

Issue 2 of *The Public Professional* is now available. Members can access it for free through our website. Non-members can buy print or digital versions on a copy-by-copy basis, or through a yearly subscription.

If you have any questions or comments, you can contact our editor, Shauna, at editor@pai.ie.

Upcoming Public Affairs Ireland Conferences



Policy Development and Legislation in a Changed Political Environment: How has a minority Government impacted on the legislative process?

Friday 30 September,
9.30am to 1pm,
in the PAI Building.

[Book here.](#)

Addressing the Housing Crisis

Thursday 06 October,
9am to 1pm
Westbury Hotel

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Brexit: implications for public policy and public administration in Ireland

Friday 21 October,
9am to 1pm,
The Alexander Hotel.

[Book here.](#)

This week in Dáil Éireann

Adjourned until 2.00 p.m. on Tuesday 27 September 2016

This week in Seanad Éireann

Adjourned until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday 28 September 2016

This week's Committee Meetings

Tuesday 13 September

Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach (Joint)
CR2, LH 2000 11 a.m.
AGENDA: Rising costs of Motor Insurance (resumed)
Session A 11 a.m. [Mr. Jonathan Moloney, Irish Road Haulage Association; Mr. Joe Herron, Irish Taxi Drivers' Federation; and Mr. Paul Redmond, Car Rental Council; and Mr. Neil McDonnell, Freight Transport Association Ireland]; and
Session B 2.30 p.m. [Mr Ken Murphy and Stuart Gilhooly, The Law Society of Ireland and; Mr Paul McGarry SC and Ms Sara Moorhead SC - The Council of the Bar]

Budgetary Oversight
CR3, LH 2000 1 p.m.
AGENDA:
Session A: 1 p.m. Private Session
Session B: 2 p.m. Pre-Budget Statement [Representatives from the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC)]

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Joint)
CR1, LH 2000 2.30 p.m.
AGENDA: Pre-budget meeting [Representatives from the Irish Farmers' Association, Irish Creamery Milk Supplier Association, and Macra na Feirme]

Thursday 15 September

Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach (Joint)
CR2, LH 2000 11 a.m.
AGENDA: Rising costs of Motor Insurance (resumed)
Session A: 11 a.m. [Mr. Conor Faughnan, Director of Consumer Affairs, AA Ireland; Mr. Kian Griffin, Underground Ireland; and Mr. Eamon Timmins, Chief Executive Officer, Age Action Ireland];
Session B: 2.30 p.m. [Mr. Dermott Jewell, Consumers' Association of Ireland]; and
Session C: 4 p.m. [Mr. Mark Fielding, ISME; Ms. Patricia Callan and Mr AJ Noonan, SFA; and Mr Neil Walker and Dr Michael Gillen, IBEC]

European Union Affairs (Joint)
CR1, LH 2000 11.30 a.m.
AGENDA: The Priorities of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU [His Excellency, Mr. Dusan Matulay, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Ireland]

Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources (Joint)
CR4, LH 2000 12 noon
AGENDA: The Digital Single Market [Mr. Andrus Ansip, EU Commission Vice-President for the Digital Single Market]
Members' Interests of Seanad Éireann CR3, LH 2000 2 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Wednesday 14 September

Future of Healthcare (Select)
CR1, LH 2000 9 a.m.
AGENDA:
Session A: 9 a.m. Work Force Planning and Health Service Reform [Dr. Stephen Kinsella, Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of Limerick]
Session B: 11 a.m. The role of IT in Healthcare Reform [Mr. Richard Corbridge, Chief Information Officer, HSE]

Justice and Equality (Joint)
CR2, LH 2000 9 a.m.
AGENDA: Engagement with Mr. Patrick O'Connor, Chairperson Designate, Charities Appeals Tribunal

Housing, Planning and Local Government (Joint)
CR4, LH 2000 9.30 a.m.
AGENDA: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness [Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government]

Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach (Joint)
CR3, LH 2000 11 a.m.
AGENDA: Rising costs of Motor Insurance (resumed) [Mr. Conor O'Brien, Mr. Stephen Watkins and Mr. Maurice Priestley - Injuries Board; and Mr. Gary Dunne and Mr. Ronan Mulligan, The Society of Actuaries in Ireland]