

### Irish standard coveted internationally

Last Wednesday, 10 February, The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) received an award in Vienna, Austria for its Tourism Accessibility Standard.

Irish standard, I.S. 373 (2013), also known as the “Universal Design for customer engagement in tourism services” was awarded the title of Most Innovative policy at the Zero Project Awards on Wednesday night. The standard was first published in 2013; it is a collaborative project between the NSAI, the National Disability Authority, the Equality Authority, and Fáilte Ireland.

The standard helps providers to “ensure their products and services are more accessible to a wider variety of visitors”. It does this by giving them with a toolkit and a set of guidelines that help them improve various different types of communications, such as written, verbal and electronic.

Organisers said that this is proof that Ireland is “a world leader in the development of standards for universal design”.

Further, Senior Design Advisor at the National Disability Authority and Chairperson of the NSAI Technical Committee, James Hubbard, said:

“When implemented, this standard benefits everyone; from the mum with a buggy, to an elderly person hard of hearing, and to those with severe disabilities. Research carried out on businesses that use the standard demonstrates that it does improve customer communications and increase sales.”

Both the standard and the toolkit are freely available to download. The former can be found at [standards.ie](http://standards.ie) and the latter at [universaldesign.ie](http://universaldesign.ie).

### St James’ staff to strike

Last month, the staff of St James’ Hospital were informed that, to avail of parking at the hospital, they would now have to pay a €500 annual charge. This is, in part, due to construction of the new National Children’s Hospital on the campus. There is also a proposed charge of €500 per annum for an area named St James’ Steel. Staff at the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham have also been landed with a €350 per annum parking fee; however, parking will remain free in the evenings and weekends at that site.

This charge was to be levied from the start of 2016. The decision to introduce it was, apparently, taken without consultation with the union.

On Thursday 11 February, SIPTU members voted on whether or not to take industrial action. A huge majority (93%) of members who participated in the vote voted in favour of strike action. It is expected that the date and duration will be decided soon. In the meantime, SIPTU said that they are available to the management for “meaningful discussions”.

### Maths performance an issue for one in six 15 year olds

A new study published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states that one in six Irish students (aged 15) are “low performing” in maths.

The study, “Low Performing Students: Why They Fall Behind and How to Help Them Succeed” was published on Wednesday, 10 February and uses data regarding 15 year olds, collected in 2012.

Some of the main findings are:

- 17% of students are low performers in maths, 10% are low performers at reading, and 11% at science.
- 7% are classed as below par in all three. The OECD average is 12%.
- The number of low performers was down 4.4% between 2006 and 2012.
- Where 80.8% of students were “over the baseline in all subjects”, 6.8% of students performed low all subjects.
- 29.7% of low performers were from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Irish low performers were, on average, doing 4.5 hours (mean) of homework a night. This figure was relatively high in comparison with other countries.
- Principals reported that the two highest reasons for low performance in maths in schools were little or no pressure from parents to excel academically (32.7%) and low expectations from teachers (28.6%).

The report makes recommendations for tackling this low performance. This includes the design of policies which would reduce inequalities in access to early education and targeted support to those in disadvantaged areas. OECD’s director for Education and Skills, Andreas Schleicher, noted that the gains, both economic and social, from tackling this problem far outweighed the cost of improvement.

### Funds allowed to clamp down on gangland violence

Dublin is currently in what Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD, has called “a revenge cycle”. This is, of course, in response to the recent gangland retaliation killings in the city.

Ahead of the funeral of David Byrne, who was killed at the Regency Hotel earlier this month, and Eddie Hutch Snr’s funeral later in the week, Minister Fitzgerald has assured the Garda Commissioner, Nóirín O’Sullivan, that funding will be available to members of the Gardaí to ensure safety on the streets “until the current threat of revenge attacks passes – and then beyond that, if required.”

A “huge” operation is now in place, with the numbers of armed gardaí on the streets being close to that of when Queen Elizabeth visited the city in 2011.

Referencing the recent threats to journalists, the Minister said, “Where there is a threat to journalists, there is a threat to everyone in society ... There is no question, we will stand them down. We have done it before in Limerick and after the death of Veronica Guerin.”

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# This week in Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann and Committee Meetings

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The 31st Dáil has been dissolved by the President.

The President will summon the new Dáil on Thursday 10th March 2016.  
Seanad Éireann adjourned sine die.

Following the dissolution of the Dáil, Dáil committees and Joint  
committees are also dissolved.