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Higher civil servants urged to vote in favour of strike action plan by Ictu

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THE EXECUTIVE committee of the Association of Higher Civil Servants has strongly urged its members to vote in favour of strike action planned by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Ictu) for the end of the month.

Ictu is proposing a one-day stoppage on March 30th in organisations which have not met the terms of the national pay agreement signed last autumn or agreed an alternative arrangement. The move could affect public sector services and much of the private sector.

In a memo to its branch secretaries, the Association of Higher Civil Servants said its executive had decided that if further action was contemplated after March 30th it would have to hold a second ballot of members.

It also said it would be necessary to hold separate ballots in respect of the association's members in the commercial semi-State sector, such as those in An Post and the Irish Aviation Authority: "The executive committee will be strongly recommending members to vote in favour of strike action."

Meanwhile, Siptu, the country's largest union, has also begun balloting members on the proposed industrial action. It is asking members to vote in a separate ballot to endorse the 10-point plan drawn up by Ictu as its blueprint for economic recovery. Siptu said the country was facing one of the greatest crises in its history and "the implications for working people and their families are enormous".

Siptu said tens of thousands of workers now had no agreements governing their pay and conditions. "We must be resolute about the demand for a fair approach. Accordingly, we are pressing ahead with ballots for mandates to conduct a campaign of industrial action to achieve either compliance with the Transitional Agreement which has been reneged upon or an agreed alternative to replace it," the union said.

Meanwhile, informal contacts were said to be continuing yesterday between the Government and trade unions about a possible resumption in talks on an agreed economic recovery programme.

- Students at University College Dublin are voting over the next two days on whether or not to strike over the possible reintroduction of third level fees.

The referendum asks students if UCD students union should organise a one day shut down of the college, to send a message to the Government. Some 20,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students could be affected by such action.