



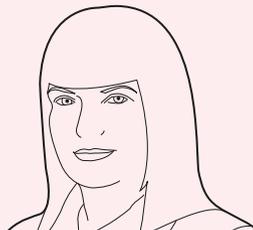
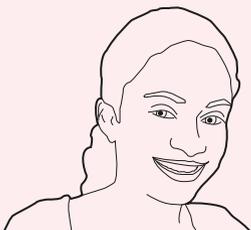
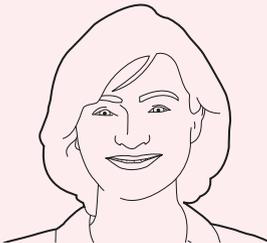
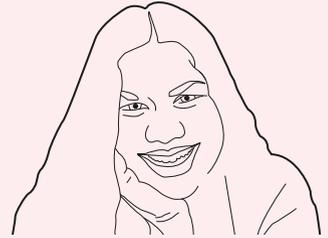
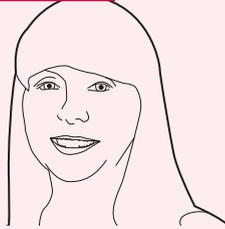
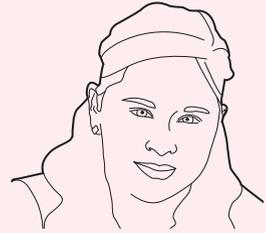
A Parliament

of all Talents:

Building a

Women-friendly

Oireachtas





**A Parliament of all Talents:
Building a Women-friendly Oireachtas**
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Published September 2013 by
National Women's Council of Ireland
ISBN 978-0-9926-849-0-7

About National Women's Council of Ireland

We are the leading national women's membership organisation seeking equality between men and women. National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) represents over 165 member groups from a diverse range of backgrounds, sectors and locations.

We exist to lead, and to be a catalyst for change, in the achievement of equality between women and men by articulating the views and experiences of our members.

Our vision is of an Ireland and a world where there is full equality between women and men.

Our beliefs and values shape how we work, key among these are:

- Feminism
- The need for solidarity between women and representation of the diversity of women across decision making structures
- The value of care and the need for the redistribution of care work between women and men
- Protection and respect for the bodily integrity of women and girls
- The importance of human rights, global interdependence and sustainability in all its forms
- The leadership role of women in the achievement of a more equal society.

Acknowledgements

Research for this report was conducted as part of NWCI's 'Women in Politics and Decision-Making' project. NWCI would like to express our gratitude to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust for their on-going support of the project.

The primary research for this report was conducted by Eóin Murray, Áine Collins was a research assistant and additional research was conducted by Darcy Lonergan. Noelle Moran conducted the final proof-read of the text but all errors belong to the author.

A range of external individuals commented on various drafts of the content. As a number of them requested anonymity we have opted to keep them all anonymous. These individuals included both public representatives and researchers from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour and Sinn Féin; staff from the Houses of the Oireachtas, and a number of academic researchers. We are very grateful for their time, expertise and honesty.

Politicians from each of the main political parties contributed their stories to the report and we are very grateful for their openness.

The Board and Members of NWCI were also involved in a consultation process and we would like to thank all of those who participated.



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Foreword



When the Commission on the Status of Women first reported in 1973 women in politics and public life was a key priority. Since then National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) has prioritised actions to encourage women in to public life. We do this because we believe our decision-making processes should have equal numbers of women and men. But more importantly we believe that women can make a significant impact on the political process by working towards a feminist society, grounded in equality.

The impact of women's exclusion from the political process is everywhere: from budgets and cut-backs which target women to the treatment of women in the Magdalene laundries.

There have been successes in the past forty years – including the recent introduction of quotas. Many NWCI members around Ireland were central to this successful campaign. But quotas are not the panacea to the chronic problem of women's under-representation in politics. NWCI has also worked closely with the Constitutional Convention on increasing women's participation in public life, removal of the clause on women in the home and reform of the electoral system.

All of these are important parts of the jigsaw. Now is the time to also focus on retaining women in our political system. The risk of electing increased numbers of women only for them to leave politics after one term in office is very real. To assist this we need a parliament and a political process fit for the 21st century.

One of the most fundamental reforms needed is to change how our parliament operates. This will help to not only ensure we welcome and keep more women, and more diverse types of women, in politics but also that we fundamentally shift how politics is seen and experienced by citizens.

Such a new parliament must become part of building a new society on values of equality, diversity, participation and meaningful citizen engagement: a truly democratic society.

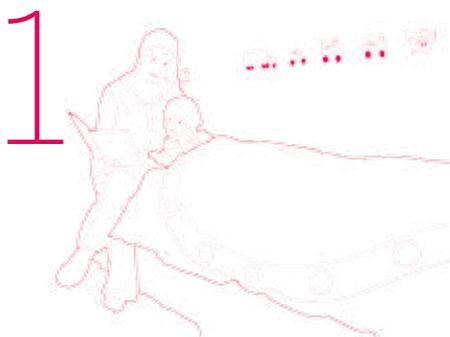
Orla O'Connor
Director, NWCI

Recommendations:

6 ways to build

a women-friendly

Oireachtas



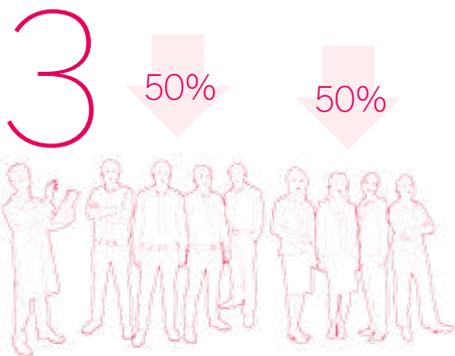
Create a family-friendly Oireachtas

- ✘ Introduce maternity leave for women politicians
- ✘ Introduce paternity leave for all men, including male politicians
- ✘ Work more business hours and discontinue the practice of all-night debates
- ✘ Introduce video-conferencing and remote-voting.



Promote women to Cabinet and devolve power to Oireachtas members and committees

- ✘ Apply a 40% gender quota for Cabinet appointments
- ✘ Whip system reform should promote collaboration and creativity
- ✘ Committee chairs elected by secret ballot, more participation by civil society; all outputs should be equality proofed.



3 Conduct a gender audit in the Oireachtas

- The Oireachtas Commission should conduct a gender audit of the Oireachtas and establish a clear plan, including benchmarks and indicators, for making the institution's policies and practices more gender sensitive.



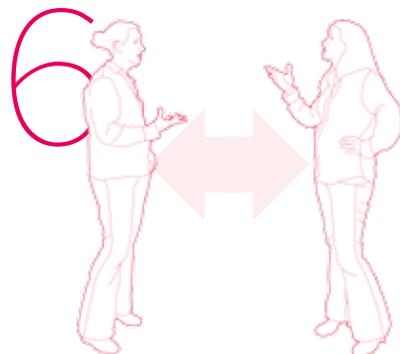
4 Develop rules which promote a culture of respect

- The Ceann Comhairle should lead the development of a 'Code of Conduct' for acceptable & respectful behaviour in the Oireachtas among members and staff.



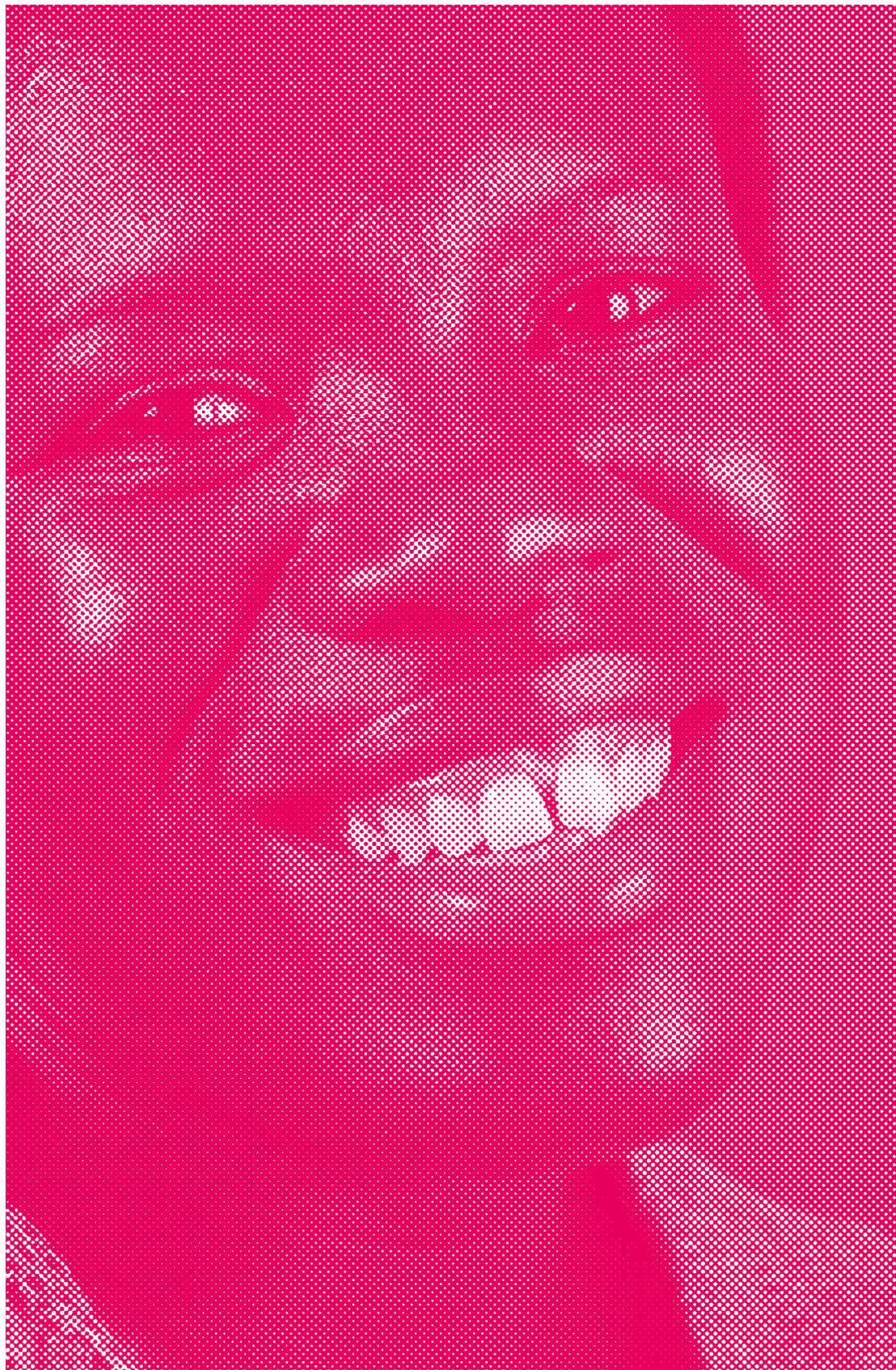
5 Investing in politicians

- TDs should be given gender-sensitivity training so that they understand why and how to introduce equality and gender analysis in to their daily work
- 'Continuing Professional Development' programmes for Oireachtas members should be delivered in partnership with an academic institution.



6 Promote solidarity among women politicians

- All political groupings should designate a small amount of their funding to the establishment of a women's caucus with an independent secretariat.



Introduction

This report proposes reforms to create an Oireachtas where the role and contribution of women is valued. It seeks to create an Oireachtas which will help women see politics as a viable career option.¹

It identifies six areas of reform aiming to increase diversity in the parliament, improve the effectiveness of the decision-making process, and improve the parliamentary and political commitment to building a more equal society.

The focus is on the parliament for two reasons. Firstly, it is where decisions are made which affect all of our lives. Women deserve and need to be at the table. Secondly the Oireachtas is the symbol of our democratic life and should become an inclusive symbol, one that all women can feel ownership over: a “parliament of all talents.”²

The next general election will see the application of a candidate quota system. There is a significant risk that more women will be elected but that they will feel alienated from our masculine political culture and step down at a subsequent election. The reforms in this report seek to prevent this situation from arising.

Introducing the practices, policies and values of equality in to our parliament will help us achieve equality in the rest of our society. The parliament should become a model for a modern, inclusive workplace.

¹ The document was written and finalised while the future of the Seanad was uncertain. The term Oireachtas is used to include both Seanad and Dáil Éireann and the recommendations can, largely, be applied to both Houses of the Oireachtas, with some limited exceptions.

² Fiona McKay is to be credited with the phrase which gives us the title of this report “A parliament of all talents”. She uses it extensively, including in this analysis of the Scottish assembly elections of 2003. *Women and the 2003 elections: keeping up momentum*, p2. http://www.scottishaffairs.org/backiss/pdfs/sa44/SA44_Mackay.pdf. For NWCI it represents a positive emphasis on valuing diversity, not just between women and men but also including diverse groups of women.

Structure of the report

The report is built around six recommendations. Each section opens with the recommendation, continues with a rationale for that recommendation, and includes case-studies of best practice from other countries, as well as the voices of women and men politicians about their experiences. The recommendations are also summarised at the start of the report. The introduction examines why Ireland has so few women in politics and the history of our masculine parliamentary culture. The first recommendation looks at how to create a more family-friendly Oireachtas, the second recommendation looks at how to promote women-friendly political processes and give women more power in the political system, the third recommendation looks at conducting a gender audit of the Oireachtas, the fourth recommendation at developing rules which promote a culture of respect, the fifth recommendation examines how we should invest in the growth and development of our politicians, and the sixth and final recommendation looks at building solidarity among women politicians by establishing a women's caucus.

Why are there so few women in Irish politics?

"We need to change the politics, not the women."

Catherine Murphy T.D.

In 1990 Mary Robinson was elected President of Ireland: this was a new beginning. Only two years later Dick Spring led the largest number of women politicians into Dáil Éireann. For women's participation in politics it seemed like the issue was resolved: Ireland was on the path to progress.

Unfortunately, all was not so well. From the dizzying heights of the 1990s Ireland's level of representation of women in politics slid to levels that placed it firmly in the lower half of all the international measurement tables. Ireland went backwards while much of the world went forward.

Ireland's low representation of women in politics is a symptom of a society which structurally has excluded women. Although Constance Markievicz was Western Europe's first woman Cabinet Minister women were perceived as 'intruders' in Irish politics. From our outdated 1937 Constitution which assigned women to a place in the home, to the Magdalene laundries, Irish society has treated women

as second-class citizens. *Irish society is built by men, for men.* This deep-seated reality – known as patriarchy – is then codified in a system of laws and policies to uphold and preserve it. They integrate in to each aspect of our society, including our parliamentary culture:

“Men largely dominate the political arena; largely formulate the rules of the political game; and often define the standards for evaluation. Furthermore, political life is organised according to male norms and values, and in some cases even male lifestyles. For instance, politics is often based on the idea of ‘winners and losers’, competition and confrontation, rather than on systematic collaboration and consensus, especially across party lines. It may often result in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics. Thus, when women do participate in politics, they tend to do so in small numbers.”³

This rejection of Ireland’s male-style politics is evident in the statistics collected by the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU), the body which ranks countries for women’s participation in politics through national parliaments. After the Meath East by-election their listing places Ireland in a tied position with North Korea in 87th place.⁴ Ireland now lags behind European counterparts who have adopted affirmative action measures to remedy the problem. Representation of women in Dáil Éireann has never exceeded 15.8%, and the current 26 women representatives out of 166 is a record high.

Meanwhile, our all-powerful 16-member cabinet has 2 women and 14 men. Our ballot papers are lists of men: 8 out of 10 candidates at the last election. Research shows only 3 out of 10 voices in current affairs radio is a woman’s.

³ *Women in politics: beyond numbers.* IDEA (2009), p36.

⁴ *Women in national parliaments.* Inter-Parliamentary Union (2012). Correct as of January 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

The barriers for women's participation in politics are encapsulated in the "5 C's":⁵

- ↘ **Cash** – women earn, on average, 14% less than men, so have less resources to deploy in expensive election campaigns
- ↘ **Care** – women do the overwhelming majority of care and domestic work leaving less leisure time to build the essential networks and relationships
- ↘ **Confidence** – acutely conscious of the maleness of the system women sometimes do not put themselves forward but prefer to be asked to run for election
- ↘ **Candidate selection** – political parties are the gatekeepers and tend towards selecting male candidates
- ↘ **Culture** – the male-designed and dominated culture is off-putting to many women.

These arguments are more fully developed in the 2009 Oireachtas report by the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights on women's participation in politics. This report will focus on the fifth "C" – parliamentary culture.

⁵ *Report on women's participation in politics* (2009). Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights. http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/committees30thdail/j-justiceedwr/reports_2008/20091105.pdf

The history of our masculine parliamentary culture

Today, our parliament expresses a largely unspoken set of masculine values, reflected in its cultural and institutional practices.

Culture is the ‘rulebook’ we use to learn how to behave. Our culture is so dominant we don’t think about it and don’t feel it intruding on our lives: it feels like *common sense*, even if often *it is not*. We refer to these rules unconsciously and automatically. In the Oireachtas the ‘rulebook’ is complex and nuanced. Some of it is formally written down, much of it is not. It includes the explicit and unwritten codes of conduct. It also includes the rituals and practices. Fianna Fáil’s Dara Calleary has observed how culture becomes normalised:

“We have a career and a profession that is not friendly towards anybody, regardless of one’s gender and age. Perhaps those of us who are in here are so like mice running around in a cage, as it were, that we do not see that...new members elected to the house see that but their desire changes because they get sucked in...”⁶

Ireland’s political culture is rooted in our colonial past. As with most aspects of the new State the politicians and senior civil servants tasked with designing a new system (in both 1921 and again in 1937) looked to the United Kingdom as a model. This model had a number of distinctive features, including a bi-cameral, adversarial chamber system where power was centralised to the Cabinet, particularly to the Prime Minister.

The Westminster system was dominated by the Victorian gentleman’s clubs of the period: the *Reform Club* (home of the Liberals), the *Carlton Club* for Conservatives.⁷ Membership of these clubs was based on class and gender to such an extent that they became key targets for the Suffragette movement. Even the Labour Party developed ‘Working Men’s Clubs’, meeting in male-dominated environments. The Houses of Parliament were designed in 1835 by Charles Barry whose name was synonymous with the design of the

⁶ *The road to 50/50: gender quotas in Ireland*, 50/50 Group (2012), p81.

⁷ Margaret Thatcher was the only woman allowed membership of the Carlton Club.

men's clubs.⁸ Charles Dickens described Westminster as the “best club in London.”

Scottish academic Fiona MacKay outlines the gendered Westminster parliamentary culture, which includes:

“institutions and practices...centre[d] around zero sum games, from the winner-takes-all electoral system, notions of indivisible parliamentary sovereignty, executive dominance of the legislature, to the gladiatorial and competitive political culture of ‘hostile strangers’ favouring, rhetoric, speechifying, posturing, and arcane practice over cooperation, consensus-seeking and real discussion of alternatives.”⁹

In Ireland the first Dáil of 1918 met in the Round Room in the Mansion House. The parliament was semi-circular and unicameral, part of what the *Irish Times* later described as a “solemn act of defiance”.¹⁰ However, the early Dáil relied heavily on the Westminster system for its rules and practices. This is perhaps not surprising given the inexperience of many of TDs and a prevailing culture which focused on examining and critiquing the British system.¹¹ Ultimately, all defiance was dropped and the Free State Dáil became an adversarial chamber with a lower house. Formulators of the 1922 Constitution introduced a referendum and the ‘citizen’s initiative’ to keep the centralised Cabinet in-check.¹² De Valera later removed this power from citizens while keeping the Seanad and the centralised Cabinet system.

Ireland even adopted the language of the Westminster system. For example the term ‘Whip’ refers to the “whipper-in” an 18th-century hunting term referring to the hunter’s assistant who drives away straying hounds back to the main pack.

⁸ “London clubs and Victorian politics”, Seth Alexander Tévoz, in *History Today* vol. 2 (2013).

⁹ *Institutionalising “new politics” in post devolution Scotland: “nested newness” and the gendered limits of change*, Fiona MacKay, SPA (2009), p8.

¹⁰ “A solemn act of defiance”, Fintan O’Toole *Irish Times*. <http://www.irishtimes.com/indepth/oireachtas/a-solemn-act-of-defiance.htm>

¹¹ *New Beginnings: Constitutionalism and Democracy in Modern Ireland*, Bill Kissane (UCD Press, 2011), p25.

¹² *Ibid.*, p40.

Ireland's revolutionaries stayed with the system they had become familiar with – the Westminster system. Politics in Ireland became the preserve of men, conducted in an adversarial style, and focusing on representing largely male-oriented policy concerns.¹³ The impact of this is still to be felt in the culture of our political institutions today.

Masculine culture in the Oireachtas

From NWCi's perspective the cultural practices and institutional values of the Oireachtas are male ordered. These practices and values include:

- ↳ Hierarchy is valued over participatory decision-making
- ↳ Competition is valued over collaboration
- ↳ There is little or no work-life balance
- ↳ Business is often done outside the Dáil chamber, on weekday nights in the pub
- ↳ Members vote on the party line, even when their personal views differ from it – because of the Whip system which helps enforce party discipline
- ↳ Debates are “win-lose” because of the adversarial debating and voting system
- ↳ Members heckle speakers from other parties
- ↳ Important decisions can be made during dramatic late-night sessions
- ↳ Members cannot take breaks for maternity or paternity leave
- ↳ Weakness and vulnerability are not acceptable: even for physical or mental illnesses. A number of high profile cases in recent years have shown that when members are faced with serious health issues they are expected to pretend nothing is happening and still be seen to perform their duties.

¹³ Cf. Fiona MacKay's paper for the Scottish Political Studies Association *Institutionalising “new politics” in post devolution Scotland: “nested newness” and the gendered limits of change*. <http://www.psa.ac.uk/2009/pps/Mackay.pdf>

Diversity of women and men in the Oireachtas

Evidence is strong that increasing diversity in business leads to a better quality of decision-making and better performance.¹⁴ This has held true in politics also where studies “show that if group leaders actively facilitate minority opinion, the group is more likely to get a right answer (where a right answer is available).”¹⁵

The record of poor decision-making processes in banks and trading rooms throughout the world is still felt. Diversity breaks through the likelihood of “group-think” and helps create a better decision-making environment where all ideas and perspectives are welcomed.

In addition our democracy is more complete when a diverse range of individuals and social sectors engage fully in participation and in representation of their own perspectives, particularly in the formulation of policy. One stark way to think about this is that when formulating policy on maternity it is important to have people who have given birth in the room contributing to the decision-making process.

Iris Marion Young argues:

“persons from one perspective or history can never completely understand and adopt the point of view of those with other group perspectives and histories.”¹⁶

Anna Grodzka is the only trans-sexual parliamentarian in the world. She has spoken about the fact that since her election to the parliament issues of concern to her are now in the discourse, whereas before they were not:

“It’s almost two years since a breakthrough which triggered a process of change in Poland...the first openly gay MP, Robert Biedron, and I were elected. Our party demands the adoption

¹⁴ *Gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship*. OECD (2012), p91.

¹⁵ “Deliberation’s darker side” by Archon Fung, in *National Civic Review* (winter 2004), p50.

¹⁶ “Multiculturalism and citizenship: a critical response to Iris Marion Young” Ronald Beiner, in *Educational Philosophy and Theory* vol. 38, no. 1 (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p27.

Diversity and decision-making – the evidence

In recent years there have been a proliferation of studies which examine the impact of diversity on decision-making. There is some mix in the evidence, but overall the picture presented is that diversity promotes better decision-making.

Research broadly divides into three categories.

1. Reports which identify lack of diversity as a contributory factor in poor economic and financial decision-making, particularly in relation to the financial crises:

- ↳ Peter Nyborg's investigation into the banking crisis identified lack of diversity as a key contributory cause for governance failures in Irish banks
- ↳ The European Commission described the crisis as "very male" *Women in economic decision-making in the EU* (2012)
- ↳ "Gender diversity can contribute to tackling group-think. There is also evidence that women have different leadership styles, attend more board meetings and have a positive impact on the collective intelligence of a group". *EC Green Report* (April 2011).

2. Reports which point to a strong link, in some cases causal and in others correlative, between increased diversity at board level and better performance, including profitability.

↳ MacKinsey & Co.'s study of 100 companies found positive links between those companies with 3 or more women on their Board and performance indicators in the Organisational Health Index (OHI)

↳ The European Commission has argued that "equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes is an economic necessity". *More women in senior position: key to economic stability and growth*. European Commission (2010)

↳ A study of FORTUNE 500 companies showed that companies with the most women on boards outperformed those with the least by 16% on sales and 26% on invested capital returns. *The bottom line: corporate performance and women's representation on boards (2004–8)*, by Carter & Wagner (2011).

3. Reports which do not see any positive relationship between women and performance or associate a limited negative impact with women and performance.

↳ Although the emphasis is on experience as much as gender a report for the Bundesbank argued that women who lacked experience were promoted too early and encouraged unnecessary risks in German banks and were a "contributory cause of the crash"

↳ *Are women really more risk-averse than men?* Julie A. Nelson, Tufts (2012).

of a civil partnerships bill, a gender recognition act, bills safeguarding equal rights and opportunities for women in the labour market, prohibition of hate speech and introduction of anti-discriminatory laws...despite the fact that such measures have not yet become law in Poland, the need for their adoption has entered public consciousness.”¹⁷

Irish politics, however, has been remarkable for its lack of diversity, even despite the significant changes in the population of the State between the most recent censuses. For the purposes of describing diversity NWCI uses a number of key categories:

- ✚ Women with disabilities
- ✚ Women from ethnic and/or religious minorities, including Traveler women
- ✚ Rural women
- ✚ Economically or socially marginalised women, including: women living in poverty, women with HIV, women that head one-parent families
- ✚ Women from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities
- ✚ Young women

Given the enormous diversity of individuals within each of these groups, not to mention between each of the groups, a range of strategies will be required to increase their representation with the Oireachtas. Increased diversity throws up its own set of challenges regarding effective representation. In simple terms: would a male Traveller represent the perspective of women Travellers? While this is an interesting discussion for political theory, clearly compromises have to be made on the basis that some representation is better than none. These compromises have to be acknowledged and then measures introduced to tackle them, such as ensuring that civil society groups have the opportunity to be heard during the legislative process.

¹⁷ International day against homophobia and transphobia; lecture to the Kalaidescope Trust by Anna Grodzka MP, London 17 May 2013. Transcript provided to NWCI via e-mail.

Opening Power to Diversity scheme

Only 3 of the 564 candidates in election 2011 were naturalised Irish citizens. Arising from this, and based on recommendations from the 2003 study by the Africa Centre 'Positive Politics' an internship programme for migrants was established. It is run jointly by Crosscare and the Houses of the Oireachtas (funded by the Department of Justice) and involves the placement of migrants as interns with members of the Oireachtas for short work placements.

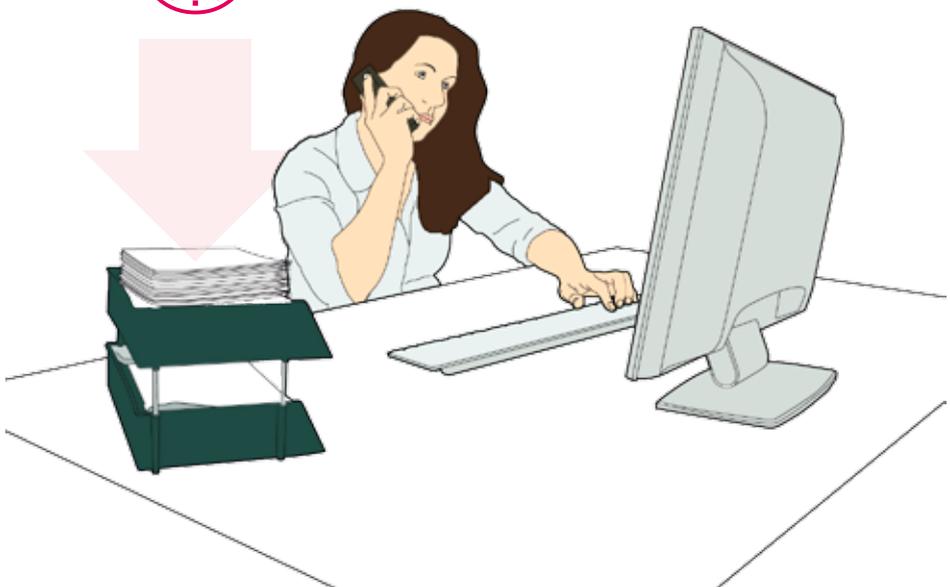
The Oireachtas should be wary of the extremities of the unpaid internship culture which exploits inexperience for cheap/free labour: a principle of politics is that people should be paid to enable participation from as wide a sector of the population as possible. However, a scheme such as this could be expanded to place special emphasis on women from diverse backgrounds, particularly women with disabilities and Traveller women who remain significantly under-represented in the political system.



Work business hours



Stay in the office all night



Recommendation 1:

Create a

family-friendly

Oireachtas

- Introduce maternity leave for women politicians
- Introduce paternity leave for all men, including male politicians
- Work more business hours and discontinue the practice of all-night debates
- Introduce video-conferencing and remote-voting.

Rationale

Women in Ireland are responsible for most of the care and domestic work, even when both partners in a relationship are working. The unrealistic expectation of politicians to prioritise their work over all else is to the detriment of politics. It asks parliamentarians to sacrifice family life to succeed, placing an extra burden on women. Secondly, it disadvantages those who don't have the means to put themselves forward because of care responsibilities, including lone parents, 90% of whom are women.

Former Minister of State Liz O'Donnell has described the system as:

“a harsh, male-dominated working environment. It is competitive and aggressive and can take its toll on your health and relationships...It is not family friendly. It is tailor made for men, either single or married with supportive spouses.”¹⁸

Balancing family life with work is a difficult task, tremendously so in a job that demands erratic hours of work and lengthy commutes. This is supported by research conducted by Dr Mary C. Murphy of UCC which found that “all respondents pointed to a negative impact, particularly in terms of having less time with their families and having minimal free time.”¹⁹

As a consequence of what Sinn Féin's Mary Lou McDonald has labelled as the “family-hostile hours” the national decision-making process misses out on the valuable experience and insight of the people with these experiences.

Modifications in hours can make the work place a more effective and efficient body. The employers' confederation, IBEC, lists the following reasons for companies to introduce family-friendly work practices:

- ↘ Improved staff retention
- ↘ Improved productivity by staff

¹⁸ “Coverstar”, L. O'Donnell, in *Irish Tatler* (October 2010), p23.

¹⁹ *First time TDs: socialisation of new parliamentarians in Ireland* (2012), p6. Accessed via <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~leg/Murphy.pdf>

- Greater flexibility from staff
- Potential to reduce costs
- Reduction in employee stress
- Reduction in number of employee sick days.

Maternity and paternity leave for politicians

New parents in the Oireachtas face problems too: maternity leave is not available for women politicians, and paid long-term leave for fathers is not on the national agenda either. Politicians are not legally classified as ‘employees’, and so do not enjoy the same statutory entitlements as an employee. Many politicians are also uncomfortable with the idea of allowing someone else replace them for a period of time as that poses the risk of allowing a potential political competitor to deal directly with constituents or the media.

Women and Men in the Swedish parliament

“The most interesting aspect of the Swedish Parliament is not that we have 45 percent representation of women, but that a majority of women and men bring relevant social experience to the business of parliament. This is what makes the difference. Men bring with them experience of real life issues, of raising children, of running a home. They have broad perspectives and greater understanding. And women are allowed to be what we are,

and to act according to our own unique personality. Neither men nor women have to conform to a traditional role. Women do not have to behave like men to have power; men do not have to behave like women to be allowed to care for their children. When this pattern becomes the norm then we will see real change.”²⁰

Birgitta Dahl, former Parliamentary Speaker, Sweden.

²⁰ *Women in parliament: beyond numbers*. IDEA (updated 2009), p36.

Maternity leave: what do other countries do?

Other countries use different mechanisms to deal with the challenge.

- ↳ “In Portugal, Article 5 of the Statute of Members (Law No. 7/93 of March 1993) allows temporary substitution on “important grounds” – which include “taking maternity or paternity leave” The Statute also provides that temporary substitution does not result in loss of income.
- ↳ In Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland and the Netherlands, the substitute is the next person on the electoral list.
- ↳ In Australia, a report was commissioned called *Options for Nursing Mothers*. The report was commissioned because of a concern that the parliamentary

arithmetic may shift from a large overall majority to a narrow majority after an election. There was significant concern that introducing proxy voting would be a “dangerous precedent”; in the end the first proxy vote was cast in October 2008 based on clearly developed principles.²¹

- ↳ In New Zealand a proxy voting system exists where proxy votes are defined as: “a means by which a member who is absent from the Chamber and cannot vote in person has his or her vote recorded. A proxy may be of an open nature applying to all business for an indefinite period and leaving it to the proxy holder as to the way in which the vote will be exercised. It can be applied to a specific vote, or be withdrawn at any time.”²²

Paternity leave

If a male TD becomes a father he can rest assured that his female partner is at home receiving support from the State or her employer to care for the child. A woman TD has no such comfort. Her male partner is not entitled to any meaningful paid leave. Fathers must take more responsibilities for childcare if women are to have more opportunities for political participation at the highest levels.

²¹ *Gender sensitive parliaments*. IDEA (2012), p94.

²² David McGee, *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* (Dunmore Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp. 213-4.

For Irish society at large NWCI advocates the introduction of a Scandinavian model of childcare which is based upon a publically funded, quality and affordable childcare system. This would include 26 weeks paid maternity leave, 10 days paid paternal leave and 26 weeks paid parental leave shared out between the father or a mother, depending on the family context.

The table below indicates the kind of childcare model in 7 EU States. It shows a strong co-relation with a high quality childcare model, including paternity or parental leave and the percentage of women in parliament. Countries like the UK and Ireland where fathers have both less responsibilities, and less opportunity, to care for their young children tend to have lower participation of women in public life.²³

Country	Strong paternity/ parental leave benefits	% of women in politics
Denmark	Yes	39.1
France	Yes	26.9
Italy	Yes	31.4
Ireland	No	15.8
Norway	Yes	39.6
Sweden	Yes	44.7
United Kingdom	No	22.5

²³ Leave models from *An accessible childcare model*. NWCI, p26. Percentage of women in parliament from Inter-Parliamentary Union league table, correct as of 26 August 2013.

Work business hours

There are two problems with Dáil sitting hours. Firstly, the normal sitting hours of the Dáil are not business hours and, secondly, important debates happen through the night.

The lack of normal sitting hours is often supported by TDs, particularly from rural areas, as the most efficient way to do business and to ensure politicians keep a link to their constituencies on non-sitting days.

However, as the Oireachtas itself identified:

“...the long hours culture of parliamentary politics has repeatedly been identified by women legislators as a disincentive to women’s political participation... The main finding of this analysis is the high degree of consensus among women legislators that the parliamentary schedule should be adjusted to accommodate family care responsibilities. This support transcended party, self-interest or time of service.... More than eighty percent of women members of the Oireachtas supported three proposals advanced to make the parliamentary timetable more family friendly – ending the parliamentary day earlier, reserving Monday as a ‘family-day’, and increasing the number of ‘committee only’ days.”²⁴

Political scientist David Farrell goes even further:

“Why can’t the Dáil meet on a regular 9-5, Monday-Friday (or Monday-Thursday) basis? As reported in the public accounts committee, this could save the public exchequer a lot of money (on over-time payments to staff). It would also be more family friendly (one of the factors in our low numbers of women TDs). And it would help to reduce the parish-pump focus of our politicians, because they would have less time in their constituencies.”²⁵

²⁴ *Women’s participation in politics*. Joint Houses of the Oireachtas Report, p12.

²⁵ *Political reform: at a snail’s pace*. Available at <http://politicalreform.ie/2012/01/14/political-reform-at-a-snails-pace/#more-3155>

The Oireachtas should run a series of pilots of new working hours on a trial basis. A pilot scheme would allow members to see which hours worked in practice for them.

Align with the primary-school terms

Although there has been some progress to match the Oireachtas calendar with the school calendar this has not happened as a formal matter of policy or practice. In 2013 schools were on Easter break from 22 March to the 8 April while the Oireachtas rose on the 29 March, not sitting again until the 16 April.

By aligning the calendar more closely to the school calendar in terms One and Two it would be easier for politicians to spend time with their families and plan holidays. In the summer term the Dáil is now expected to sit until July and this is a reasonable practice which even contains some space for further extension if required.

End the late-night debates

Many of the most serious decisions are made at times which are neither family-friendly nor suitable for effective decision-making. Since 2008 this includes debates on the bank guarantee, the wind-down of the IBRC and the legislation for the X-Case. The X Case debate even resulted in an incident where one male TD grabbed his female colleague, shining a national light on the sexist culture. Speaking on RTÉ's Prime Time Mary O'Rourke quipped:

"what woman would want to go in to a career to get shouted on at 3 o'clock in the morning. Sure we've got more sense!"²⁶

This problem can be dealt with swiftly by the Government committing to no longer holding any late-night debates.

²⁶ *Prime Time*, RTÉ One. Broadcast Tuesday 26 February 2013.

Video conferencing and remote voting

Technology has been a significant factor in changing work practices throughout the world. It has liberated employees from being tied to their desks and created new types of interactions. In 2007 a pilot was conducted to look at the potential of e-consulting in the Oireachtas.²⁷ Despite the reported success of this pilot, the process has yet to be rolled out as common practice.

In 2010, Senator Fidelma Healy Eames explained "...there are things that can be done to improve how things are run to make [working in politics] easier for women or parents. Video conferencing is one, and...remote voting."²⁸ Both video conferencing and remote voting would allow women with family responsibilities to work from their constituency offices. Fianna Fáil has endorsed remote voting in their recent *Gender Equality Action Plan*.²⁹ Video conferencing could also be used – as is being considered by the House of Commons – to allow politicians to interact with their constituents and to hold clinics from their Dáil offices.

Cisco systems and the House of Commons

A House of Commons investigation with Cisco Systems, a large ICT provider, indicated that:

"The range of ICT solutions in use at Cisco shows what can be achieved with modern technology beyond those services currently available at Westminster, for example:

- ↘ the use of wireless technology as standard
- ↘ computer-based telephony (generally using Voice over Internet Protocol – VoIP),

²⁷ E-Consultation Research Project: *Evaluation of the houses of the Oireachtas pilot e-consultation for the proposed broadcasting bill*, G. H. Fagan, P. McCusker, M. Murray, D. R. Newman, and D. O'Donnell (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.ictparliament.org/sites/default/files/econsultation.pdf>

²⁸ "Coverstar", F. Healy Eames, in *Irish Tatler* (October 2010), p24.

²⁹ *Gender Equality Action Plan*. Fianna Fáil (2013), p11.

- ↘ extensive use of audio and video conferencing
- ↘ online management tools, such as web-based expenses, supplies and pensions systems, and online training
- ↘ ICT systems which look and feel the same to a user wherever they might be in the world."³⁰

Parliaments and video conferencing in other countries

Over a third of parliaments worldwide now have video conferencing facilities in Committee rooms³¹ with around one third of these parliaments actually employing them for Committee work:

- ↘ The Australian parliament uses video conferencing for committee discussions, counting those using video facilities as part of the quorum
- ↘ The Dutch parliament has used multi-national video-conferencing to improve contact with its overseas dominions as well as holding a session with Ireland's Joint Committee on Social Protection
- ↘ Google Hangout has been used by activists to film Cartmanshire Council meetings using just personal laptops – such technology could easily be adapted for use in Oireachtas committees
- ↘ The Scottish Assembly uses video conferencing to enable evidence taking from across Scotland and the world³²
- ↘ In the Westminster Hansard has proposed that MPs could conduct clinics through video-conferencing facilities to increase availability to constituents.³³

³⁰ *House of Commons Administration Committee, second report*. Available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmadmin/498/49805.htm#a4>

³¹ *World e-parliament, report 2012*, p79. Available at http://www.ictparliament.org/sites/default/files/wepr2012_-_chapter4.pdf

³² *Microsoft's Vision for Parliament*. Microsoft (2007), p7.

³³ *Parliament of the Future*. Hansard (2007), p67.

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Mary Lou McDonald, Sinn Féin

The second time I was running for election was for the European election. I was expecting my first child - our slogan at the time was “Delivering for Dublin”... I thought it was priceless!

When you're elected, particularly to the European Parliament, it upends all of your arrangements. At this stage, baby had arrived, so I am a mother for the first time, and then I am elected to this parliament not having been a member of any other elected forum. So that was a lot to take on in one bite... There's a lot more women in the European Parliament and the working processes are much more collaborative. That's not to say that there isn't debate, controversy and even conflict, but politics is done in a different way. Maybe it's because it's on an international stage and arena, it doesn't feel as sharp.

So I had my first child just as I was elected [to the European Parliament], and in the course of the mandate, I had my second child, and I took my maternity leave.

When I was having the child, I said “Right, I'm going to have to sort myself out”, and I was sent from the Oireachtas to the Parliament, from the Parliament to the Oireachtas, and the bottom line was, and is to this day, there are no arrangements for maternity leave.

There's no provision for it because it's not to be done. That's the reality of it. I remember being very frustrated going over and back and trying to establish things, but there were no rules and no provisions. That's just the way it was. And that's the way it still is. So you know if you're talking about getting women into politics, I mean a basic thing is that for reproductive purposes women go through a particular



process at certain stages in their lives... But that was it, there is no provision.

So, I took a number of months. It coincided with the summer break. But I took what any working mother would take as maternity leave. I brought my kids with me, and there was a crèche in the Parliament. I have to say it was very, very good; the kids were well-catered for there.

I remember actually coming back off maternity leave and bumping into a politician, who said to me “where have you been?” Because obviously I had been out of circulation for a couple of months, and I said “I had the baby”, “Oh right, yeah, yeah”; “I took maternity leave”. And I always remember him saying “politicians don’t take maternity leave”. And I said “I tell you what, this politician does, and did, and now I’m back”.

Fast forward to the re-election, and there was a whole hullabaloo questioning my attendance records. And without going into the ins and outs of it, it was used to try and discredit me, to give the impression that I was some kind of a slouch that wasn’t really interested in the job. Now I have many shortfalls, I’d be the first to put my hand up, but I’m not lazy. If I take something on, I’ll deliver it. ...And I know, as a practicing politician, that that issue, around me missing a space of time, was deliberately seized upon and used cynically and disgracefully to undermine me. Now, I didn’t get re-elected, that’s politics, you get over that. But it was done in a very calculated way and it was a horrible experience. I also took note of those politicians who wouldn’t play ball with it, ’cause there was a number of them, in fairness to them. But for the most part because they wanted to win their seats they didn’t care if they were doing somebody an injustice.

I was elected to the Dáil subsequently, I remember going in the first day and sitting down and looking around at the rest of your peers, with whom you’re in indirect competition with. It’s a completely different type of politics you’re engaging in.

Open participation in decision making to all



Keep decision making within small, elite groups



Recommendation 2:

Promote women to

Cabinet & devolve

power to Oireachtas

members &

committees

- Apply a 40% gender quota for Cabinet appointments
- Whip system reform should promote collaboration and creativity
- Committee chairs elected by secret ballot, more participation by civil society; all outputs should be equality proofed.

Rationale

The Irish government has an unusually hierarchical and centralised decision-making system. Most meaningful decisions are taken at Cabinet or Ministerial level and there is very little space for backbenchers to influence policy or legislation. Women tend not to receive Cabinet appointments, thus excluding them from the place where decisions are made. Cabinet decisions are then enforced through a Whip system which is focused on maintaining discipline. Finally, the committee system does not have enough power to make a significant impact on legislation or enforce Cabinet accountability. The combined impact of this is to further alienate women from involvement in the political system where their career path and potential impact are limited.

Women, in government and in opposition, want to make a difference. To do this successfully women must be given access to the places where decisions are made and given the authority to make those decisions. The processes of parliament need to support this empowerment.

One woman TD spoke to NWCi about how backbenchers received instructions from the party Whip to appear in the Chamber for Leader's Questions when there is no possibility of backbenchers making a contribution but every possibility of the party leader appearing on the TV surrounded by their backbenchers. This focus on optics over meaningful participation leads to feelings of alienation. "A lot of them are very disheartened" said Independent TD Stephen Donnelly of colleagues he had spoken to on the backbenches.³⁴ Donnelly argued that the lack of input or control of backbenchers in the legislative process contributes to the culture of aggression and frustration.

To tackle this NWCi believes that Cabinet appointments should be opened up to women, the Whip system reformed to promote cross-party cooperation and creativity and more power devolved to committees to empower individual Oireachtas members to shape legislation and hold Cabinet to account.

³⁴ "Backbench TDs in the Dáil" [Video file]. S. Donnelly, 29 June 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qV-f0ym19Uk>

Scotland: good policies are not enough

The Chamber in Holyrood (an assembly, rather than a sovereign parliament) was established with the ambition to be more open and inclusive. When the Assembly was being designed great care was taken to embrace the idea of equality in the space and practices of the new body:

- ↘ A hemi-spherical chamber to encourage dialogue and consensus
- ↘ Speakers address each other by first names
- ↘ Business hours are worked, linked to the school-term
- ↘ A strong committee system which operates 'full-time' and can choose to meet outside Holyrood in other parts of Scotland.

An equality declaration was made at the opening of the assembly that all legislation should be guided by the principle of equality (though is not formally equality proofed)

Despite these generally positive measures Scotland's assembly has not retained women, seeing a drop from close to 40% to just over 35% today. There has also been a drop in the number of women candidates at elections. Four reasons have been identified for the decline in women:

- ↘ A lack of quotas at candidate selection phase
- ↘ A shift towards more male-dominated parties (i.e. SNP)
- ↘ Women have not fared as well as their male counterparts in securing promotion
- ↘ Debates have not managed to avoid the heckling and aggression of Westminster.

Scotland shows the importance of quotas for electoral recruitment, rigorous application of debating rules and also the need to promote women into senior positions once they are elected.

Apply a 40 percent gender quota for Cabinet appointments

The Irish system is currently heavily weighted towards the power of the Executive. The Executive maintains the power to drive and enforce the legislative process and appoint committee chairs. Women have been largely excluded from the Cabinet system.

No more than three women have ever sat in Cabinet at any one time, including the current Government which includes two full Cabinet members and the first woman Attorney General, an *ex officio* Cabinet member. After Constance Markievicz, 1922, it took until 1979 when Máire Geoghegan-Quinn became a Minister. Only 14 women have been appointed to the Cabinet's 197 positions (7%) since the foundation of the State. Referring to her service as a minister for 5 years former Minister of State Liz O'Donnell said "I am as rare as a unicorn".³⁵

³⁵ "Coverstar", L. O'Donnell, in *Irish Tatler* (October 2010), p23.



Election	Governing party	Office	Women	Men	% women
1993	Fianna Fáil & Labour	Cabinet	2	14	12.5
		Minister of State	3	13	20
1994	Fine Gael, Labour & Democratic Left	Cabinet	2	14	12.5
		Minister of State	4	15	21
1997	Fianna Fáil & Progressive Democrats	Cabinet	3	13	18.7
		Minister of State	2	15	11.7
2002	Fianna Fáil & Progressive Democrats	Cabinet	3	13	19
		Minister of State	2	15	12
2007	Fianna Fáil, Greens & Progressive Democrats	Cabinet	3	12	20
		Minister of State	2	18	10
28th* Government	Fianna Fáil, Greens & Progressive Democrats	Cabinet	3	12	20
		Minister of State	2	18	10
2011	Fine Gael & Labour	Cabinet	2	13	13
		Minister of State	4	11	27

Women in Cabinet 1993-2011, Centre for the Advancement of Women in Politics (QUB).³⁶

³⁶ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/Irishhtmls/Irishministers.htm>, accessed on 28 August 2013.

Political scientist Matthew Wall argues that the implications of this for an “emasculated parliament” is that “the real decisions [are] made elsewhere”.³⁷ To ensure women are more involved in the decision-making process NWCI believes in the introduction of a quota system for Cabinet appointments so that women comprise 40% of all appoints to the senior Cabinet positions. While it is considered acceptable to consider geographic representation it should also be normal to consider gender representation of the population at large as well.³⁸

This quota system can be underpinned by a re-assessment of the criteria for making Cabinet appointments to include different forms of expertise – academic, professional, personal, as well as communication and decision-making skills – into account.³⁹ This will help bolster women who come from careers outside of politics.

Reform the Whip system to promote collaboration and creativity

“‘Whip’ refers to the ‘whipper-in’ an 18th-century hunting term referring to the hunter’s assistant who drives away straying hounds back to the main pack.”

The impact of the Whip system on women’s participation in politics is threefold. Firstly, some women will be inhibited from getting involved in politics because the system is seen as too hierarchical. Secondly, the Whip system re-enforces the masculine, combative ‘winner-takes-all’ culture as it assumes that one ‘side’ has a monopoly on good policy. Finally, as a consequence of these the Whip system stifles collaboration in problem-solving and leads to a culture where politicians tend not to take the initiative to develop individual policy proposals outside of the main programme for government.

³⁷ <http://politicalreform.ie/2011/03/29/what-did-tds-do-and-who-did-they-represent-in-the-previous-dail/>

³⁸ Cf. Noel Whelan at the at the MacGill Summer School 2010.

³⁹ *Expertise and the policy cycle: energy, environment, and resources center*, J. Barkenbus (University of Tennessee, 1998).

Challenges to the Whip system are extremely rare and government adoption of opposition proposals are even rarer.⁴⁰

The primary purpose of the Whip, is to “keep the hounds from straying”, a function of an over-centralised Cabinet system where the strongest form of it, the “three-line” Whip, is always enforced on every issue. Writing in *The Irish Times* former Labour TD Derek McDowell argued:

“Our democracy is stifled and distorted by a whip system that effectively excludes 90 per cent of TDs from the decision-making process. Almost all decisions are taken by a small number of TDs and their officials. Nobody else matters.”⁴¹

However, while the Whip system certainly causes problems it is as much a symptom as a cause of Ireland’s political malaise. The Irish Whip system is a function of the Cabinet’s desire to maintain discipline on matters of policy. So long as Ireland has a hierarchical political system a Whip of some form seems inevitable.

NWCI believes reforms can be made to the Whip system. These reforms should operate on the basis that no party has a monopoly on good policy. They should promote collaboration and creativity across party-lines, in both committees and in the Dáil chamber. This should be done through a relaxation of the three-line Whip, loosening the Whip at committee level, increased acceptance of opposition and individual amendments, and better pre-publication consultation processes with the Dáil and civil society groups.

⁴⁰ For example: of the 7 Ministers who provided a statistical information to a parliamentary question by Regina Doherty only 2 indicated that any changes to legislation had come as a result of interventions from the Seanad. <http://www.thejournal.ie/regina-doherty-dail-questions-seanad-effectiveness-1055841-Aug2013/>. Of the 165 amendments proposed to the ‘Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill’ none were accepted by the Government, including those proposed by a member of the Cabinet, illustrating the importance of Cabinet agreement in passing any legislation.

⁴¹ *Credibility of the Dáil depends on reforming the stifling whip system* by Derek McDowell, 2 May 2013. <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/credibility-of-the-d%C3%A1il-depends-on-reforming-the-stifling-whip-system-1.1379441>

Devolve power to members through the committee system

The committee system ought to be the main arena in which politicians can affect policy and legislation and hold the Cabinet to account. However, in recent years it has become a place for political simony where the spoils are divided for party loyalists. In order to provide a meaningful role for women, and men, involved in backbench politics, as well as to improve the levels of participation, consultation and involvement of a wide array of groups, the committee system needs a radical overhaul. As Fine Gael observed in *New Politics*

“Ireland stands out in Europe in the degree of control that the Government exercises over the Committee system, severely limiting the ability of Dáil committees to work properly.”⁴²

In the spirit of his party’s manifesto commitment Eoghan Murphy has argued that:

“If the Oireachtas committee is where the individual legislator is meant to get in to the detail of pieces of legislation or other national issues...We may need to reform the existing committee structure. We may also need to create new kinds of committees.”⁴³

The potential scope of reform options for Oireachtas committees is vast. Reforming Committees with a view to increasing the attractiveness of politics to women needs to include four broad dimensions:

Firstly, an increase in power given to individual members to influence the budget, legislation and policy, as well as to direct the behaviour of ministers.

Secondly, parties should encourage women TDs to stand for elections to committee chair and vice-chair positions, through a secret ballot system, which empowers committee members to make the decisions.

⁴² *New Politics*. Fine Gael (2010), p19.

⁴³ *Reforming Dáil Éireann* by Eoghan Murphy TD (2013), p15. Available at <http://www.eoghanmurphy.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/EMurphy-ReformingDailA5Booklet-PRINT.pdf>

Thirdly, civil society groups should be involved in meaningful consultation processes where their views are listened to and valued. This would also help to ensure that disenfranchised and marginalised groups have a more central involvement in influencing policy. While some moves have been made to increase the involvement of civil society groups (eg. the Health Committee debates on abortion held in the Seanad chamber) there has been little in the way of good practise which shows that committees are listening to and taking on board the inputs of civil society.

Finally, the outputs, reports and recommendations of all committees should be subject to equality and gender proofing before they are issued. Thirty countries use a version of this approach worldwide today. One model is to allow gender equality committees to debate the impact of all legislation from a gender equality perspective. A watchdog role may also be played by a specialised civil service body who conduct equality audits on all Committee and/or legislative outputs.

An increase in the power of the Committee system, and a targeted focus on improving equality, would give women in politics a clear sense of the potential to influence policy and make a difference. This will be a motivating factor in ensuring that women remain involved in elected politics.

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Susan O’Keeffe Labour



Politics is definitely not for the faint hearted, you have to be very certain about what you believe in and what you want to achieve...

Here you are encouraged to get up and speak and throw stuff at each other. That doesn’t happen in an office, you do your level best to try and work with your colleagues. The adversarial element of politics – a lot of women find it a waste of time.

A strength women bring is that they tend to collaborate while men tend to compete. Once you have a community that is largely male you have a competitive environment...Competition can be a good thing but collaboration also has a value. In this environment collaboration is not valued, recognised, not supported or seen for what it could offer. For me the whole idea of having more women in politics is in order to change the environment so it becomes more collaborative.

I find it odd in a working environment to find a ‘club’ element at the heart of it. There is something important about allowing, and encouraging, and supporting people from the public to come in and see how we do business... Back when you had a lot of rural politicians, there was less cars and poorer roads so people stayed here, lived here so they had to make a life for themselves. You couldn’t blame them it was pretty bloody awful being away from home so of course they went to the bar and went to dinner and hung out together because that’s what you do. That allowed that



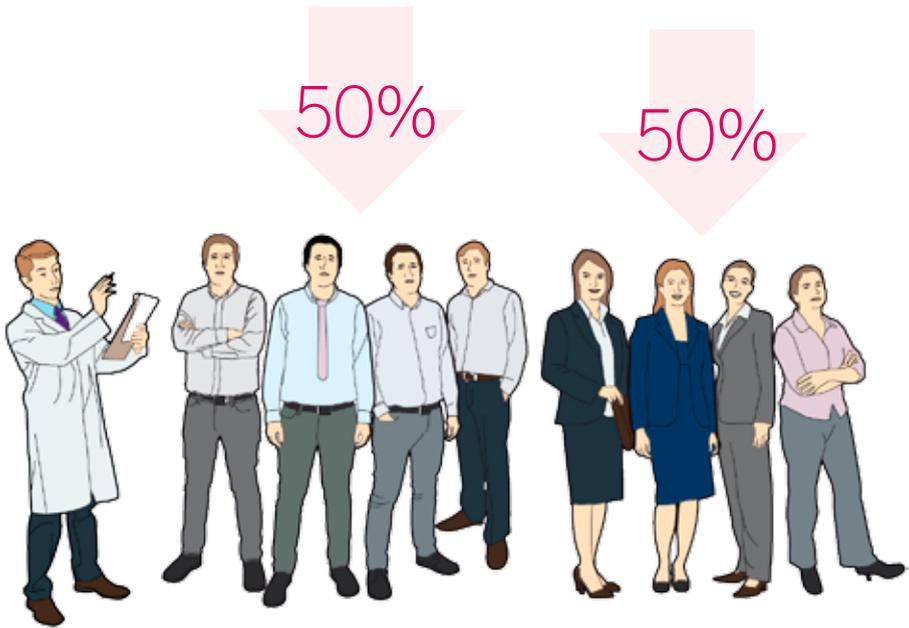
tradition to be built up where that's what people did in here, so going to work was 'ok we pop into the Dáil but we go back into the bar as well'. Not everyone was drinking mass amounts but it was the cultural way and still is.

When kids are brought here we bring them to the bar, we give them a soft drink but it is still the bar. We don't have a visitor centre. That is one of the things I would change, there ought to be a room were kids, visitors groups have a room where they can sit comfortably and be given a soft drink.

I live out of a suitcase - my children all understand that they can communicate with me by phone and have done all their lives but it is very difficult sometimes and you can tell by the tone of their voices that they just want you to be there and yet again you have to say '*I'm sorry I am not there*'. If you're ill that can be quite stressful or if you're away and you're thinking you should be here [Oireachtas], there is a lot of personal stress. I often drive from here on a three hour drive and I arrange meetings for when I reach Sligo and then make it home by midnight. That would be normal. I would try to do that. Then you work in the constituency at the weekend.

I take one day a weekend where I do no appearances, it's my family day. I don't care what people say about that because that is really important for your sanity, to be able to slouch around the house or take the dog for a walk or do the history revision with my child or take her to her ballet class... Someone said to me once '*I wouldn't of thought you'd be at a frivolous thing like this with the budget coming*' and I said '*unless you call my daughter frivolous*' I said, '*she's performing*'.

Gender audits to ensure fair representation



Male dominated groups, agendas and issues



Recommendation 3:

Conduct a gender

audit in the

Oireachtas

- The Oireachtas Commission should conduct a gender audit of the Oireachtas and establish a clear plan, including benchmarks and indicators, for making the institution's policies and practices more gender sensitive.

Rationale

The Oireachtas is a large and complex body. Today the Oireachtas employs a large staff of public servants, pays the salaries of political party staff and is responsible for the safety and well-being of citizens who visit. To account for all of these and other dimensions, a large body of policies and practices have evolved over time, in some cases by design and in other cases through historical accident. To assess these practices is a large task which would take months. However such an assessment would help to ensure that the Oireachtas becomes a welcoming place for women as members, and as staff or as visitors.

The sense of women being excluded is quietly supported by the history of the Oireachtas as an institution. This is neatly illustrated by the dominance of photographs of men on the Oireachtas walls. The Houses of Oireachtas Commission, established in 2004, governs the day-to-day management of the Oireachtas, its staff and its facilities.

A wide range of policies, strategies and procedures applies to the civil service staff within the Oireachtas. The Oireachtas Commission's Code already commits the institution to promoting positive workplace values, preserving health and safety and implementing socially and environmentally sustainable work practices. No reference is made to promoting equitable or gender sensitive practices.

Gender is not currently incorporated in the strategic plan of the Commission or the strategic plan of the communications section. Assessing the impact of planning and resourcing on staff is an essential lens in understanding the different challenges faced by women and men. The first step for achieving this is to understand the operations and practices of an institution through a gender audit.

An audit would aim to:

- ↘ Identify and analyse gender segregated data on staffing and employment, including any gender pay-gap
- ↘ Collate all current work practices and policies and an assessment of how well they are being applied
- ↘ Develop benchmarks and indicators for future progress on the recommendations

International gender audits

A gender audit was conducted in the Rwandan Parliament, which has the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world (53%). This ‘Internal Participatory Gender Audit’ examined the rules and regulations of the senate, HR manuals, training plans, and staff lists, to clearly demarcate problems and areas for improvement.

The Rwandan audit was conducted in keeping with the International Labour Organisation’s principles for a participatory gender audit:

- ↳ “Generate understanding of the extent to which gender mainstreaming has been internalised and acted upon by staff
- ↳ Assess the extent of gender mainstreaming in terms of the development and delivery of gender-sensitive products and services
- ↳ Identify and share information on mechanisms, practices and attitudes that have made a positive contribution to mainstreaming gender in an organisation
- ↳ Assess the level of resources allocated and spent on gender mainstreaming and gender activities
- ↳ Examine the extent to which human resources policies are gender-sensitive
- ↳ Examine the staff sex balance at different levels of an organisation
- ↳ Set up the initial baseline of performance on gender mainstreaming in an organisation with a view to introducing an on-going process of benchmarking to measure progress in promoting gender equality
- ↳ Measure progress in implementing action plans on gender mainstreaming and recommend revisions as needed
- ↳ Identify room for improvement and suggest possible strategies to better implement the action plan.”

From *A Manual for Gender Audit Facilitators*. ILO (2009).

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Cllr Sarah Reilly Fine Gael
Dáil researcher



I've worked now with two male TDs and a female TD. There are a lot of women working in the Oireachtas but I have yet to see a heavily pregnant woman around the place. Very few women are in here starting out in family life because it is such a hard lifestyle for someone with a family. There's no such thing as maternity leave, no facilities for nursing and anyway the demands of constituents don't end because you're nursing your baby. Your constituents will remember when they are voting. Irish society still places pressure on women to be in the home and to be the great nurturer in the family.

I wonder how I could realistically have a family and have a career in politics? The Dáil schedule runs until 10 or 11 at night, the hours are not family friendly and there is little or no care, or attention, given to family-friendly hours. I do think Dáil business could be done between 0900-1700. Speaking to an empty chamber doesn't have much impact beyond the speech being on the public record. We need to think about ways to use technology to run committee and Dáil meetings: there are other ways of doing business.

During the debate on gender quotas one junior minister stood up and said "aren't you all looking lovely today". The men are more inclined towards the banter and the screaming matches: a lot of it is a waste of time and it all costs taxpayers money. There needs to be respect within the workplace: speaking out of turn and throwing around comments can be popular among some

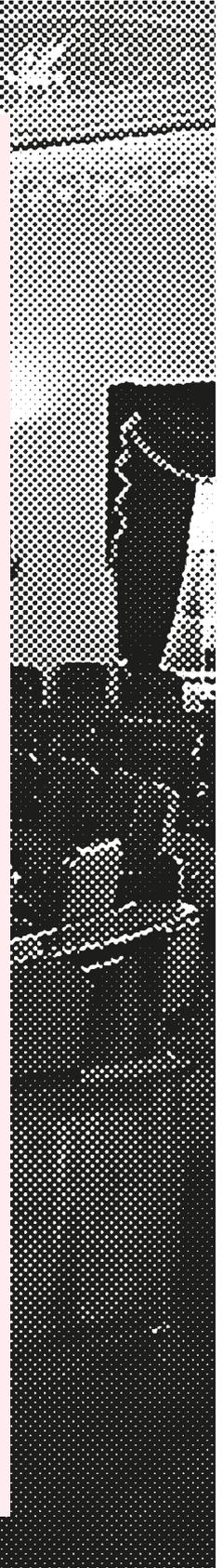
constituents but it is not how people should behave in a workplace.

The Council job is hard because you're in the limelight. I am the only woman on the council with 8 males. I've had as rough a time as any of the men; perhaps at times they even thought I was an easy target.

I haven't and would never show my emotions or my vulnerabilities in public. Nobody wants a weak, emotional representative because people think politicians should be there to fight their corner. Even though you enter politics because of a passion and because you believe in something you can't show emotion. Look at how Roisin Shorthall was portrayed as throwing her toys out of the pram. I wonder if she had been a man would it be portrayed as 'standing up for what you believe in'?

If I had to change one thing in the Oireachtas it would be to make it more family friendly through hours, through maternity leave.

At Council level I am sad that the government didn't bring in quotas for the local elections. It would be great to have more women to make it feel less like an old boys' club.



Respectful behaviour and communication



Heckling and disrupting speeches



Recommendation 4:

Develop rules

which promote a

culture of respect

- The Ceann Comhairle should lead the development of a 'Code of Conduct' for acceptable and respectful behaviour in the Oireachtas among members and staff.

Rationale

The principles of respect for the dignity of every person are integral to our understanding of a modern workplace. The Oireachtas should function as the role model for other organisations across Ireland. Sadly, *some* members of our national parliament have yet to apply this principle in their day-to-day activities.

While a gender audit of the Oireachtas will help uncover a range of processes which need to be overhauled there are some areas where the need for reform is evident already. The Ceann Comhairle can take the lead in promoting these reforms. At the centre of this reform must be a system of rules which outline what is expected of all members and hold to account those responsible for infractions.

In 2011 the Houses of the Oireachtas received 5,800 complaints from members of the public about the aggressive style of debate in the Dáil. Heckling and disruption can disadvantage women, as well as men, who don't conform to traditional masculine stereotypes or who haven't been schooled in the ways of University debating chambers. There is clearly considerable public support for introducing more productive styles of debate into our political system. This change would make Dáil debates less intimidating and alien, and make women's voices more likely to be heard, including more diverse groups of women.

One argument against changing the debating culture is that the current adversarial system facilitates dissent and debate. However, it is very unusual in Oireachtas debates to develop any real accommodation for the perspective of the 'Other'. It is either win or lose. Amendments proposed by the opposition are almost universally voted against: even when the government is planning similar legislation at a later stage. Success and failure is assessed based on points scored and opposition amendments are considered points lost.

In recent times the parliamentary culture has been exposed as having strongly sexist undertones. The poor behaviour inside the Chamber continues outside as well, leading Regina Doherty to describe the Dáil as an "archaic and anti-women...old boys' club."⁴⁴ The Ceann Comhairle now regularly reminds members of the public's dislike for barracking and school-boy debating behaviour.

⁴⁴ Department of Justice conference on 'Women in Politics' conference, Dublin Castle, 14 January 2011.

Promoting good practise – NWCI's equality charter

Against the backdrop of economic recession NWCI and the National Collective of Community based Women's Networks (NCCWN) organised a national consultation process for the development of an equality charter.

This charter, supported by women nationwide, seeks to promote women's effective participation in decision-making structures within organisations, to promote collation and usage of gender de-segregated data in hiring and employment statistics, and encouraging the inclusion of diverse groups of women.

The Charter operates in tandem with 'Codes of Behaviour' by promoting best practise rather than detailing, or penalising, bad practise. Organisations sign up to and display the Charter on their walls as a visible display of their commitment to gender equality.

To tackle sexism in all its forms the Oireachtas needs to develop rules for members and staff which should penalise any behaviour which is considered sexist. The code should specifically state what constitutes unacceptable behaviour:

- Inappropriate and/or unwanted touching
- Name-calling
- Interruptions during debates
- Sexist, racist or other derogatory 'jokes'
- Behaviour which would reasonably be deemed to breach equality legislation
- Anti-bullying stipulations
- Guidelines on behaviour inside and outside the Oireachtas, including on social media.

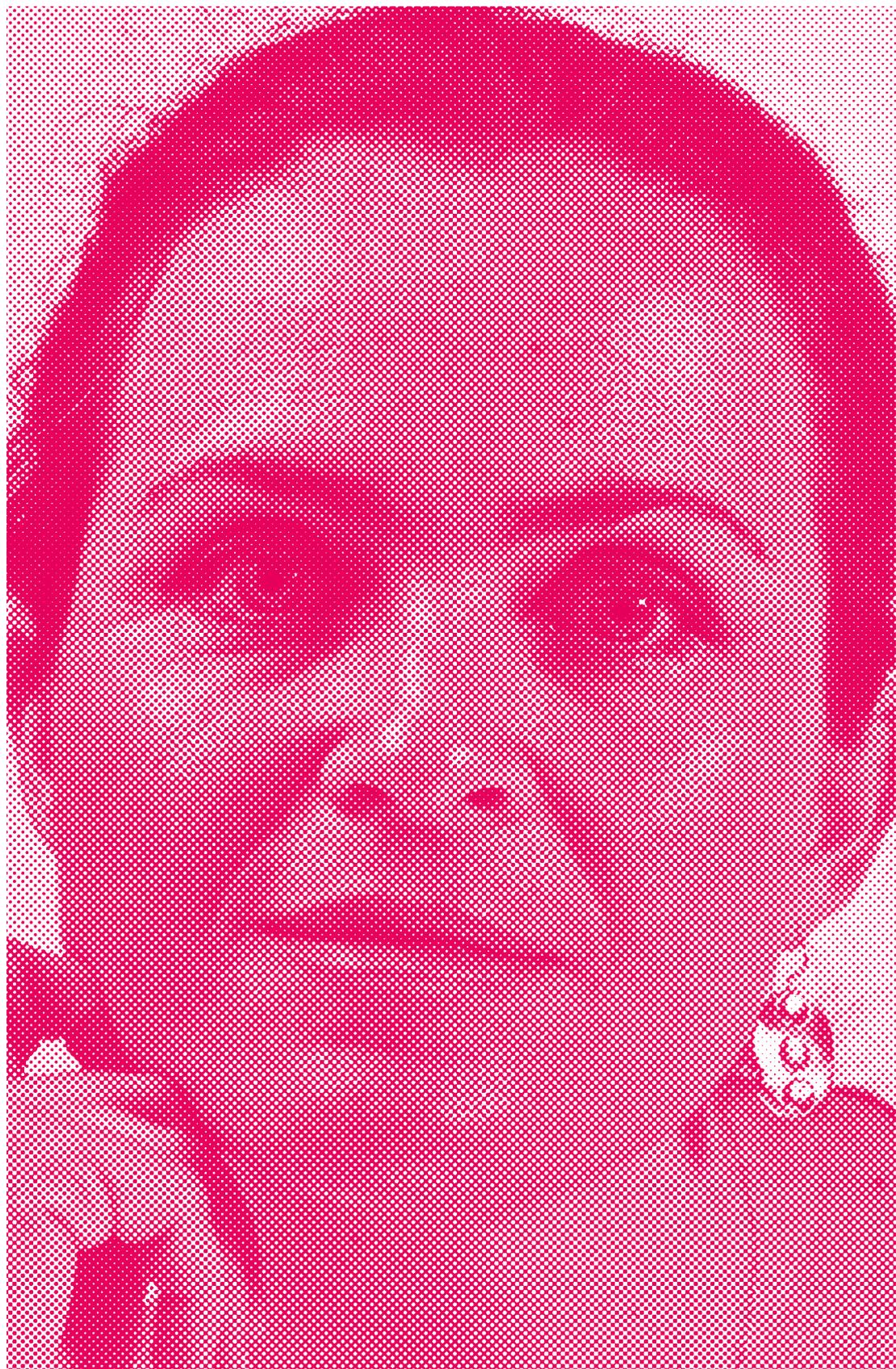
For Oireachtas members this code would be applied by the Oireachtas Committee on Procedures and Privileges while for staff it would be through the appropriate human resources channels. While it may be considered as an update to the existing Codes of Conduct⁴⁵ it would – more usefully - be a separate code focused on ensuring respect, and preventing sexism and harassment. The code should also provide provisions to support whistle-blowers who wished to highlight sexist behaviour.

Examples of sexist behaviour in the Oireachtas

- ↳ Mary Lou McDonald was interrupted over 60 times during a 30 minute Dáil speech. It provoked an unprecedented public response to the Ceann Comhairle's office.
- ↳ Tom Barry grabbed his colleague Áine Collins during a late-night debate on abortion and later apologised whole-heartedly
- ↳ After sexist remarks made about her by male colleagues, Mary Mitchell O'Connor described feeling hurt by the experience⁴⁶
- ↳ David Norris used sexist language about Regina Doherty in a debate on the Seanad.
- ↳ Taoiseach Brian Cowen ordered Labour Party Leader Eamon Gilmore to “rein in” his deputy Joan Burton

⁴⁵ *Code of Conduct for members of Dáil Éireann other than office holders.* Available at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/press/codeofconduct.htm>

⁴⁶ “Miss Piggy comments really hurtful to me”, Mitchell O'Connor, R. O'Grady, 13 July 2011. Retrieved from: <http://www.independent.ie/national-news/mitchell-oconnor-miss-piggy-comments-really-hurtful-to-me-2820513.html>



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Mary Mitchell-O'Connor
Fine Gael



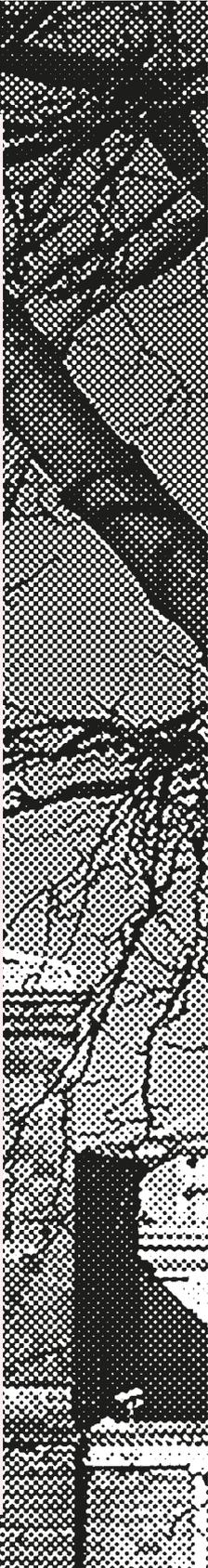
If you want to hear the culture of the Dáil you need only look at today's debate where a politician stood up and asked about the Taoiseach being on the cover of *Playboy* magazine. I stood up and suggested that he should read *Time* magazine, he might benefit from it. He turned around and said "don't be stupid".

Being a woman politician is hectic and demanding. There are great and lovely people and some nasty people. It has impinged massively on my home life. But it is exciting to see how our country is being turned around and to work with those who are doing it.

Because there are fewer of us, in politics, women have to be twice as good. You need to be very well prepared. A lot of men stand up and waffle with little or no preparation and women are more circumspect and wouldn't do it. Some of the women in the Dáil have had plenty of negative headlines but women internalise the hurt they experience as a result of that. Men shrug it off as 'just politics' whereas I would have gone to talk to the women and empathise with them.

Clare Daly's treatment was appalling: they talked about "50 shades of grey", a reference to her clothes but also with sexual undertones. They talked about her husband in a way that men's wives are never spoken about.

I was speaking at an event recently about women who have been abused in the home. I showed my emotions



and people assumed that meant I had been abused. But I came in to politics because I cared about children and about improving education as well as other issues. That's why I show my emotion.

Our policy-making culture is dominated by young men with little or no experience outside of politics who are concerned with the media and the next press release. There isn't necessarily deep thinking going on. There isn't real thinking about how people will react or feel to the policy decisions. Women politicians might put people at the fore-front of the decisions being made.

We need to develop the critical mass so that when we are in the chamber it feels like it isn't all men, and at the policy level the first question to be asked would be "how does this affect people?" That will help us to create a more healthy environment for making decisions about our country; at the moment it is not healthy.

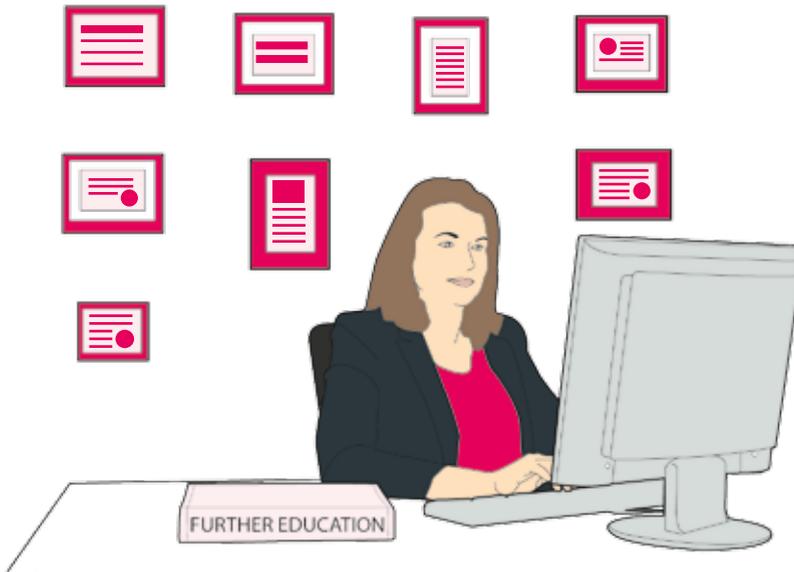
My training as a politician was as a county councillor. There was a limited induction and we were assigned a civil servant as a mentor but we had very little contact. When you come in here you are expected to just paddle your own canoe although we get very good support from the party on press and administration.

The Fine Gael women do support each other as friends and as an advice group.

I've heard phone calls in here at ten o'clock at night "mammy, come home"; exam time is very tough and I wouldn't be able to do it if my kids were young.

If I had little children (mine are big now) it would be relatively easy for me [as a Dublin TD]. For a rural TD the current hours work well so they don't have to spend all of their time in Dublin. But I would still want to be there to support them, to put them to bed at night, to know who their friends are. I wouldn't sacrifice my boys for this.

Encourage continuation of learning and development



Offer no further training for politicians



Recommendation 5:

Invest in

politicians

- TDs should be given gender-sensitivity training so that they understand why and how to introduce equality and gender analysis in to their daily work
- ‘Continuing Professional Development’ programmes for Oireachtas members should be delivered in partnership with an academic institution.

Rationale

Ongoing education and investment in people is a cornerstone of high quality organisations. But for our politicians little or no further education takes place. The consequence is politicians fend for themselves. They uncover information from the Oireachtas library service or supportive NGOs. The skillsets of politicians are not developed over time so our politicians are not given the chance to reflect, learn and improve. Nor do politicians have any appreciation of the differing impact of policies on women and men. To overcome these challenges Oireachtas members should be given a far more intensive training programme with 'cradle-to-grave' learning supports focused on policy as much as technology. All training should have a strong focus on gender.

In the UK training is provided to new parliamentarians with a view to helping them "achieve their full potential" in their roles. This is in contrast to the Irish system where the limited induction training is focused only on the mechanics of the Oireachtas and not on the policy and legislative priorities of the Government.

The experience of two Councillors in Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown who were prevented from taking further money towards third-level degree courses showed that not only is further learning and education not encouraged, to some extent it is even being clamped down on by the Standards in Public Office body.⁴⁷ This policy risks legitimising the current public perception that TDs are "only in it for themselves".

Effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) should be a hallmark of our political system. It will help to attract high calibre candidates, including women, who know that they will be able to use CPD to improve their performance on behalf of constituents.

In Ireland for induction and CPD training any 'political' issues are carefully avoided due to a reluctance of civil servants to overstep the boundaries of their positions by imposing standards on politicians, or elevating the ideological interests of one party over another.

⁴⁷ cf. *Ethics watchdog ends councillors college course perk* (September 2012). <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/ethics-watchdog-ends-councillors-college-course-perk-28814543.html>

However, dealing with policy issues, based on legislative priorities, will help equip politicians to perform their functions better. It is up to them how they deal with the issues they learn about. Part of the induction and CPD training should include equality mainstreaming. Creative use of relationships between the Oireachtas and bodies funded by the State (eg. political science departments or some NGOs) are possible.

Specific training on gender and equality will assist Oireachtas members in understanding the gendered nature of Irish society, the social impact of that gendering, and how the fulfilment and promotion of women's rights is an investment in building a better society.

Oireachtas training should seek to:

- Be non-party political but should lead to an increased understanding of policy issues (based on legislative priorities) and improve skills
- Introduce gender and equality in theory and practice at an early stage
- Help TDs and Senators to realise their full potential so they can better serve constituents.

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Jim Glennon
former Fianna Fáil TD



I was born into a political family; my father and grandfather were Fianna Fáil men, both councillors; my mother was on the other side of the fence though. The family environment in which I grew up in was political, but very community-focused. I remember licking envelopes when I was six years of age.

The multi-seat constituency is, to my mind anyway, the system's major weakness, with time consuming local meetings being the second problem. You have to go to meetings because your constituency colleagues – your rivals – will be there; that is invariably the primary, usually the only, reason for going.

These meetings are also one of the root causes of politics' gender imbalance. There would have been midweek nights when I'd covered three meetings and was still in the pub half an hour after closing time. It was never heard of to do the business of these meetings over the phone in the office, as could and should happen; that is the culture that lingers on.

I couldn't have done politics when my children were young, even though I was already doing a busy job. When I got into politics it became Monday 8am to Saturday 8pm. I was so knackered that on a Sunday I'd only get out of bed at mid-day and I'd then sit in an armchair until I was ready for bed again! After about 6 months of this I asked myself 'what the hell is going on here?; this is just ridiculous.' But there was no room for half-measures.



...I remember a particular trip to an international conference. There was a 4pm reception – I was struck by the number of women in the room. And by the fact it was over at 5.30pm. We had the meeting the next morning, there was no lobbying the night before; we went in, did our piece, decision was made, got on with it - and went home. It was totally business-like and in stark contrast with how we operate here. It's no coincidence that the gender balance at that meeting was slightly female dominated.

The combination of the time away from family and the need to conduct a lot of work through socialising around the environs of Leinster House can also be problematic. This can put a significant amount of pressure on members, especially those from rural areas who can be away from their homes and constituencies for extended periods of time.

We must remember that the parliament is a forum for communication and debate, and was designed in a time when communication was effected, almost exclusively, by word of mouth. The current structure largely ignores the revolution that has taken place in communications and hasn't kept pace with developments; 160 TD's is way too many. I would query the very structure of the parliament - for example the necessity to be in the chamber to vote. Members don't go in to the chambers to listen to debates anymore and thats perfectly understandable.

I'm very much in favour of the single seat constituency, gender quotas (for a fixed period at least), sittings 11 months of the year from 2pm Monday, to 12 noon Friday ending daily at 5.30pm and optimising and indeed exploiting the advantages of modern technology.

Promote communication and support among women politicians



Women politicians are isolated and removed from each other



Recommendation 6:

Promote solidarity

among women

politicians

- All political groupings should designate a small amount of their funding to the establishment of a women's caucus with an independent secretariat.

Rationale

Promoting solidarity among women is a key mechanism for finding solutions outside of traditional party lines. Other countries have taken measures to support women's caucuses which promote solidarity and policy action among women.

Irish politicians are wary of crossing party lines as the adversarial nature of the political divide exposes them. Although there are cross-party groups on some issues (eg. Palestine, family planning, African development) these are the exception rather than the norm.

In the past the Women's Political Association (WPA) existed as a forum for women TDs to meet and discuss issues of common concern. Attempts have been made to resuscitate versions of the WPA by some women. Ivana Bacik organised a number of initiatives to promote women in political life, including once-off meetings as well as a photograph of all living, current and former, women Oireachtas members. Mary Mitchell O'Connor organised a 'wine and cheese' evening to take place in Dáil Éireann, open to all women politicians, for the purpose of building networks and offering support to one another. However, to date no caucus has been successfully established.

Women's caucus – making a difference

- ↘ In Finland there is a women's caucus which meets regularly to share issues of common concern among women, called the Network of Women Finnish Deputies. They meet over information-sharing lunches to which even Cabinet ministers are invited

promulgate legislation; its powers to scrutinise draft bills are merely informal and voluntary. It proposed two bills in 2009 on developing gender neutral language in all legislation and on the issue of violence against women
- ↘ Argentina established a women's caucus by resolution of the Senate in 2009. The Caucus was specifically aimed at female senators of any political grouping. It set out to "advise, consult, oversee and monitor laws, policies and government actions related to equal rights and opportunities and the mistreatment of men and women". It does not have a budget but it can

↘ In Peru a women's caucus was established as part of a process of inter-party dialogue and consensus building. It has three levels of decision-making: a general assembly; a coordination committee with one delegate from each political grouping; and an elected, annually rotating position of president/spokeswoman. It is an informal gathering, not a function of the parliament (as in Argentina).

A caucus can have a dual impact: it can promote solutions across party boundaries but it can also become a place where women act as informal mentors to other women during difficult political periods. During a *Prime Time* debate on quotas Gemma Hussey and Mary O'Rourke spoke openly about an agreement they had of not engaging in *ad hominem* attacks or barracking style debates while the other was speaking.

A women's caucus in the Oireachtas could make a significant difference in developing a cross-party approach to problem solving. In other countries caucuses have been responsible for:

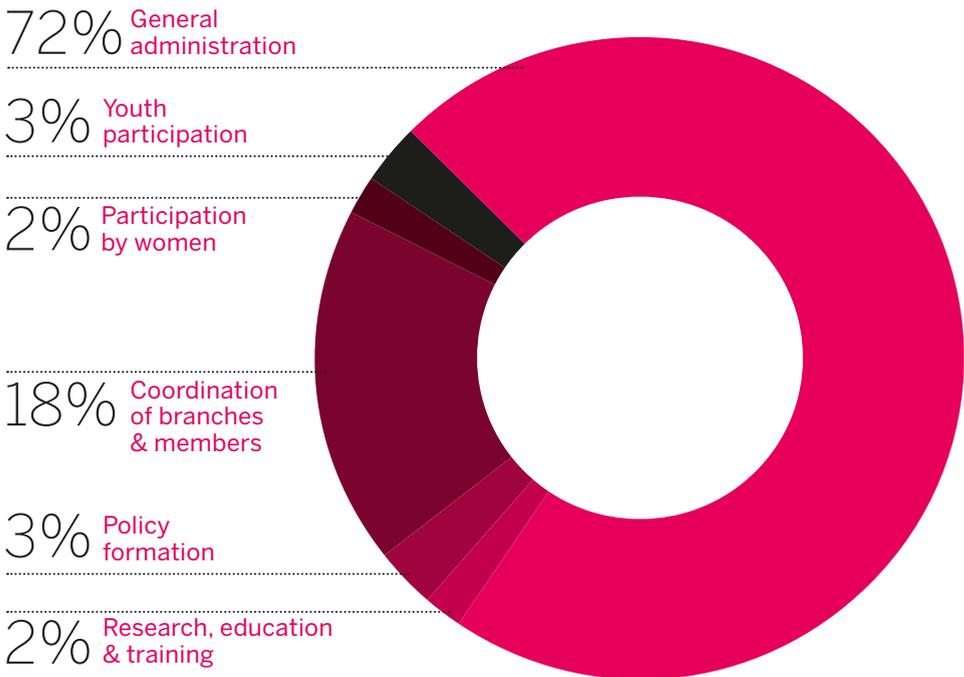
- ✚ Providing informal and formal mentoring for newer members
- ✚ Challenging institutional sexism in the parliament
- ✚ Improving specific policies relating to women
- ✚ Giving women new platforms to advance a common agenda.

Different countries have different mechanisms for promoting and supporting the work of the caucus. In many developing world countries the caucus is supported by overseas development aid. In other countries women in the caucus fundraise for its operations.

The Electoral Act of 1997 makes provision for parties to make "payments made to a qualified party under this Part shall be deemed to include provision in respect of expenditure by the party in relation to the promotion of participation by women and young persons in political activity."

However, research by Claire McGing in NUIM shows that parties are not investing in this:

% Breakdown of total party expenditure



One mechanism to promote the participation of women in politics would be for each political party/grouping to assign resources to a women's caucus in the Oireachtas. This would ensure the viability of the caucus, allow it to staff an independent secretariat which would help the caucus to promote its work free from the more day-to-day political concerns of the system.

One model for this is the European Association for African politicians – AWEPA – which is based in the Oireachtas and maintains a full-time staff member reporting to a committee of parliamentarians.

Conclusion

Ireland's parliament – the Oireachtas – has achieved much over its history. However, like many other institutions of the State women have not been integrated into the heart of the Oireachtas. Nor have policies promoted gender equality as a goal in themselves. Our political culture, so dominated by men, still sees gender equality as a 'women's issue' left on the margins of any discussion on policy. In fact gender equality is a pressing social and democratic concern.

Our parliament must become the symbolic, and actual, home of gender equality. To achieve this the parliament has to make itself more attractive to Members, staff and citizens who enter it.



Houses of the Oireachtas

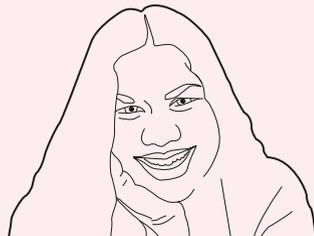
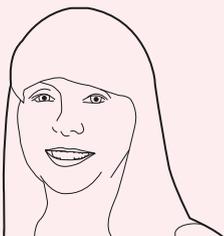
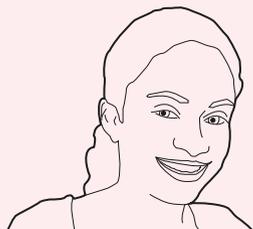
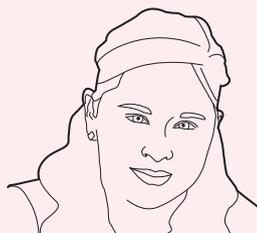
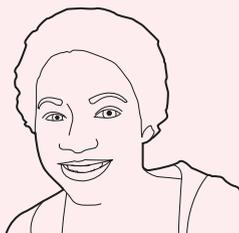
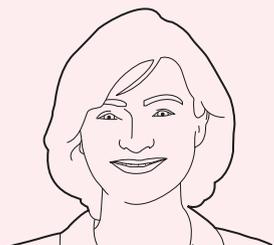
A women friendly Oireachtas



Houses of the Oireachtas

Activists and politicians at a gathering to celebrate the introduction of quotas legislation to the Seanad





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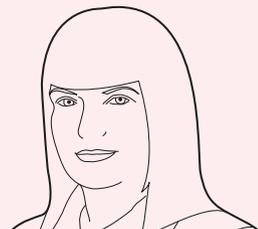
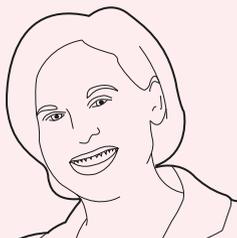
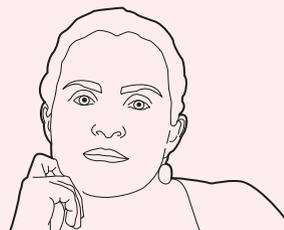
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Registered Charity No. CHY11760

Published October 2013 by

National Women's Council of Ireland

ISBN 978-0-9926-849-0-7



978-0-9926-849-0-7