

## **THE MICHAEL LITTLETON MEMORIAL LECTURE**

### **The Citizens' Assembly: An Exercise in Deliberative Democracy**

**Delivered by the Hon. Mary Laffoy, Chairperson of the Citizens' Assembly**

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2017**

#### Establishment of the Assembly and its Mandate

The starting point in demonstrating how the Citizens' Assembly (the Assembly) is an exercise in deliberative democracy is identifying and analysing the source of its authority and its background.

The Assembly was convened pursuant to a resolution of both Houses of the Oireachtas passed in July 2016. The resolution approved the calling of a Citizens' Assembly "to consider the following matters and to make such recommendations as it sees fit and report to the Houses of the Oireachtas". The resolution then set out five matters, namely;

- (i) the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution;
- (ii) how we best respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population;
- (iii) fixed term parliaments;
- (iv) the manner in which referenda are held; and
- (v) how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change.

The resolution directed that the Assembly first make a report and recommendation on the first matter, the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, to the Houses of the Oireachtas and that, on receipt, the report would be referred for consideration to a Committee of both Houses which, in turn, was directed to report its conclusions to the Houses for debate. The resolution also directed the Assembly to report and make recommendations to the Houses of the Oireachtas on each remaining matter as soon as it had completed its deliberations, but in any event not later than one year from the date of the first Assembly meeting. Having assessed the situation during its deliberations, the Assembly concluded that it needed to hold more meetings than was envisaged in the resolution over a longer period to fulfil its mandate properly. At the request of the Assembly, and with the assistance of the Department of the Taoiseach, both Houses extended the Assembly's work period. Accordingly, the Assembly has approximately an additional four months to conclude its work.

The structure of the Assembly was stipulated in the resolution. It was provided that membership of the Assembly would consist of 100 persons as follows:

- a Chairperson to be appointed by the Government; and
- 99 citizens entitled to vote at a referendum, randomly selected so as to be broadly representative of Irish society.

The appointment of substitutes subject to the same selection criteria was also authorised.

The resolution also gave directions and guidance as to how the Assembly should conduct its work as follows:

- The Assembly would agree its own rules of procedure for the effective conduct of its business in as economical a manner as possible.
- An Expert Advisory Group would be established to assist the work of the Assembly in terms of preparing information and advice.
- The Assembly would seek such expert advice as it considers desirable.
- The Assembly was given a discretion to invite and accept submissions from interested bodies.
- The manner in which the matters under consideration by the Assembly would be determined was laid down as -

“all matters before the Assembly will be determined by a majority of the votes of members present and voting, other than the Chairperson who will have a casting vote in the case of an equality of votes.”

I have the honour of having been appointed as Chairperson of the Assembly by the Government. In accepting the appointment, I was conscious that I was taking on a difficult task.

There is no denying that the first topic which the Assembly considered, the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, has been an exceptionally contentious and sensitive issue, one that has been the subject of much public engagement and media commentary.

At the commencement of our work, I was aware that there was much debate about the rights and wrongs of the Assembly as a vehicle for a discussion on a topic such as this. At the outset, I gave my commitment that I as Chairperson would do my utmost to facilitate an

open, transparent, detailed, and most importantly, a balanced discussion on this complex and challenging matter.

In relation to all of the matters to be considered, I did however take some reassurance from the final paragraph of the resolution, as no doubt it assured the ordinary members of the assembly subsequently appointed who took on a similarly difficult task, that the process would ultimately be of benefit to all of the people of Ireland. In the last paragraph, the Government gave a commitment, which it is appropriate to quote, which stated:

“the Government will provide in the Houses of the Oireachtas a response to each recommendation of the Assembly and, if accepting the recommendation, will indicate the timeframe it envisages for the holding of any related referendum.”

#### Assembly’s predecessor: the Convention on the Constitution

In the Assembly’s First Report presented to the Oireachtas on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2017 (the First Report), it was recognised that the Assembly is an exercise in deliberative democracy. It was also recognised that an institution which preceded it, the Convention on the Constitution (the Convention), which was established by a resolution of both Houses of the Oireachtas in July 2012, was also an exercise in deliberative democracy. However, there are a number of differences between the mandate and structure of the Convention, on the one hand, and of the Assembly, on the other hand, which it is worth recording.

First, while the mandate of the Convention was expressed to be to consider matters specified and to make such recommendations as it saw fit and to report to the Houses, in other words, it was in terms exactly the same as the mandate of the Assembly, on each of

the eight matters on which the Convention was mandated to make recommendations its recommendation could necessitate an amendment of the Constitution and a referendum. Two examples illustrate this. One of the matters was “provision for same-sex marriage”, which was recommended by the Convention and which resulted in a successful referendum. Another matter was “removal of the offence of blasphemy from the Constitution”, which the Convention recommended but in relation to which a referendum has not yet been held. In contrast, two of the matters on which the Assembly was convened to consider, namely, the matter in relation to the ageing population and the matter in relation to climate change, *ex facie* did not point to any requirement to amend the Constitution. As it has transpired, having regard to the voted recommendations of the Assembly on each of those matters, the result of the deliberation on each does not require an amendment of the Constitution.

Secondly, the structure of the Convention differed from that of the Assembly in that, while it consisted of 100 persons, the membership comprised, in addition to a Chairperson to be appointed by the Government and 66 citizens selected in the same manner as the 99 citizen Members of the Assembly, members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and members of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The only other difference between the Convention’s mandate and the Assembly’s mandate was that the Convention was not expressly mandated to appoint an Expert Advisory Group.

I mention that, because, as I have repeatedly stated, the assistance which the Assembly has received from the four Expert Advisory Groups established to date has been invaluable.

I believe that the assistance provided to the Assembly by each of the members of each of the Expert Advisory Groups has been one of the distinguishing features of this process. On

each occasion the Assembly has benefited from the most expert, and most brilliant participants on issues arising, who have given of their time so generously. The State owes each of them a debt of gratitude and I truly believe that their involvement in the process and in helping myself and the Secretariat navigate through some of the most complex and challenging issues facing Irish society is one of the most noteworthy features of this process, and that this collaboration with academia, professionals and administrators is something which is of benefit beyond the work of the Assembly.

Two years before the establishment of the Assembly, the Convention presented its final report, the Ninth Report, in March 2014. In his introduction to the Ninth Report, the Chairman of the Convention, Tom Arnold, stated:

“The establishment of the Convention with citizens and politicians was an innovative experiment in deliberative democracy.”

Notwithstanding the differences between the mandate and structure of the Convention and that of the Assembly, which have been outlined, the Assembly cannot be seen as “an innovative” experiment in exercising deliberative democracy in this jurisdiction. As regards the fundamentals of the process, the Assembly is not significantly different from the Convention. Indeed, it has to be acknowledged that the Secretariat of the Assembly, and I, as Chairperson, had the good fortune to have in the work practice of the Convention, its operational principles and its manner of reporting a template for the work of the Assembly. We are extremely grateful to Tom Arnold, to the Secretariat of the Convention and to all its advisors for the availability of the Convention model, which forms the basis of the approach adopted to the work of the Assembly, which is ongoing.

The Assembly has completed its work on two of the matters the subject of the Oireachtas resolution – on the Eighth Amendment and on the ageing population. As referred to earlier, the First Report was presented to the Oireachtas 29<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The second Report on the ageing population (the Second Report) was presented to the Oireachtas on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2017. The deliberations on a third matter, climate change, have been completed and the Report is being prepared and will be presented to the Oireachtas in the New Year.

Preliminary work on the remaining matters, each of which has Constitutional implications, has commenced and is ongoing. The Members' deliberations on the manner in which referenda are held will take place over one weekend – the weekend of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018. One weekend- 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March 2018 - has been assigned for the Members' deliberations on the final topic, fixed term parliaments.

Following receipt of the First Report, in accordance with the resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas, a Committee of both Houses was established, which has been considering the First Report and the Assembly's recommendations over the past four months and is due to report to the Houses later this week. Accordingly, it would obviously be inappropriate for me to make any observations whatsoever on the substantive work of the Assembly on that matter or its outcome. Therefore, in describing the work of the Assembly as an exercise in deliberative democracy in this lecture, I will refer to the work and deliberations on the topic of the ageing population.

## What does Deliberative Democracy Mean?

As previously noted, in the First Report to the Oireachtas it was recognised that the Assembly is an exercise in deliberative democracy, as was the Convention. The explanation of the concept of deliberative democracy contained in the First Report, which was based on the meaning given in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, commenced as follows:

“Deliberative democracy is a school of thought in political theory that claims that political decisions should be the product of fair and reasonable discussion and debate among citizens.”

It was explained that deliberative democracy claims that citizens should arrive at political decisions through reason and the collection of competing arguments and viewpoints.

I must acknowledge that I was totally unfamiliar with the term “deliberative democracy” before I became engaged in the Assembly’s work. While I have developed an interest in the concept over time, I must make it clear that at all times my perspective on the concept and on giving effect to it has been that of an ordinary individual who is wholly bereft of the knowledge and skills of a political scientist. Indeed, I hope that political scientists will critically assess whether the work of the Assembly can properly be regarded as an exercise in deliberative democracy which is, and has been, of benefit to the people.

In conducting my own assessment for this lecture, I have found one academic publication to be of particular assistance. That is “*Democratic Innovations*” by Graham Smith published by Cambridge University Press in 2009. Of particular interest for my purposes is Chapter 3 entitled: “Mini-publics: assemblies by random selection”. What I understand the author to mean by a mini-public is an assembly involving a small group of citizens who are randomly

selected. The main focus of that chapter is on the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly, which was established by the government of British Columbia in 2004 and was charged with reviewing the province's simple plurality electoral system, and, if necessary, recommending an alternative system. It involved 160 citizens, described by Smith as "(near-) randomly selected", which involved a female and a male from each electoral district plus two citizens' with Aboriginal backgrounds. As described by Smith, that Assembly took place over 11 months during which the citizens were engaged in learning and deliberating about electoral reform. At the conclusion of its work, it recommended that the then current electoral system should be replaced by a version of single transferable vote. An interesting feature of that assembly was that the legislature had committed itself to a province-wide referendum based its recommendation. The referendum took place in May 2005 but the recommendation to change the electoral system was not carried because one of the two thresholds in place for the referendum to pass, that at least 60% of the votes across the province would be in favour of the change, was not reached. That assembly is widely recognised as an innovative experiment in deliberative democracy and it has been the subject of much academic commentary. While, it differs from the Assembly in some respects, the commentary by Smith on the value of its institutional design is relevant in assessing the Assembly. Smith lays particular emphasis on the mode of selection and the form of interaction between the citizen members, which gives rise to inclusiveness and considered judgement.

With that in mind, I will now outline the core elements of the establishment and operations of the Assembly, which I believe demonstrate how it as an exercise deliberative democracy. It is appropriate that I emphasise that practically everything which follows is to be found in

the two Reports of the Assembly already presented to the Oireachtas and is also on the Assembly's website.

### Democracy

In considering whether the Assembly can be regarded as an exercise in deliberative democracy and, in particular, as being democratic the fundamental aspect of the process is the selection of the Members.

### Member Selection

The 99 citizens who, apart from the Chairperson, are members of the Assembly, in accordance with the requirement of the resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas have been randomly selected so as to be broadly representative of Irish society and the substitutes, who have been appointed to date to replace Members who have withdrawn, have been selected on the same basis. At the outset, following a competitive tendering process, RedC Research and Marketing Limited (RedC) was appointed to recruit the Members and the replacements. To comply with the resolution, the recruitment was undertaken so that the Members, chosen at random, would be broadly representative of the following demographic variables as reflected in the census: age, gender, social class and regional spread. The recruitment process has been outlined in the First Report of the Assembly and a comprehensive document compiled by RedC, which explains the methodology used to determine the demographic quotas of individuals required, is available on the Assembly's website. While I am conscious of the fact that some members of the public have expressed concerns that the recruitment process was not truly representative because some counties were not represented from the outset, on the basis of my

understanding of the process, I am satisfied that the recruitment process was, in reality, democratic.

In analysing the random selection process conducted in British Columbia, Smith refers to a “sampling problem”, which relates to the element of “self selection” in the recruitment process, in that citizens are under no obligation to participate, so that those who are invited can choose not to participate. Smith observes that the element of self selection does appear to have some effect, citing that in the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly participants tended to be more politically knowledgeable and civically active than the general population. Indeed, that point was made by RedC in its document on methodology referred to earlier, in that it acknowledged that the fact that a financial incentive was not offered to encourage participation might result in a group that have a stronger civic interest than a truly representative sample. Nonetheless, I am satisfied that the methodology used by RedC, as explained in that document, which is available on the Assembly’s website and contains details of the selection of random sampling points and how area stratification was used, demonstrates that, the Members, have been and are broadly representative of Irish society.

### Key Principles

That the Assembly is a democratic institution is also obvious in the adoption of the key principles on which it operates.

At the inaugural meeting of the Assembly in October 2016, I outlined what I saw as my role as Chairperson. My role, as I described it then, and I believe it to be even more firmly now, is to create an environment where the Members can have a mature discussion about the

issues before them, where the material considered is fair and balanced, and is presented in a format which is as accessible and comprehensive as possible.

In order to achieve such a balance right across the work programme of the Assembly it is essential that its structure, principles and rules and procedures make this balance possible.

At that inaugural meeting, the Members adopted the following six key principles as governing the work of the Assembly:

- Openness;
- Fairness;
- Equality of voice;
- Efficiency;
- Respect ; and
- Collegiality.

Those key principles are so similar to the operational principles which underpinned the work of the Convention, as set out in the Ninth Report of the Convention, that the Assembly might justifiably be accused of plagiarism!

As Smith discloses, the development of a “statement outlining a set of shared values” was one of the first activities undertaken by the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly and its members committed themselves to those values, which, broadly speaking, are reflected in the key principles adopted by the Members of the Assembly here. Smith observes, citing a

number of earlier publications, that such procedural values and rules set important parameters for acceptable behaviour and, where the participants are involved in their drafting, it helps citizens to develop a sense of ownership and control over the process.

### Member Ownership and Control

A feature of the Assembly's structure and process which, in my view, also ensures that the Members have a sense of ownership and control over the process is the existence of the Steering Group. The detailed Rules and Procedures under which the Assembly operates, which are appended to the First Report and to the Second Report, provide for the establishment of the Steering Group to support the Assembly in the efficient and effective discharge of its role and functions. In addition to the Chairperson and the Secretariat, the Steering Group consists of a representative group of Members elected by the wider Assembly membership. As is outlined in the Second Report, during the consideration of the matter on the ageing population there were twelve Members on the Steering Group who generously gave their time and energy to attend two meetings in Dublin in advance of the deliberations on that topic at the weekend meetings in June and July 2017. The benefit of the Steering Group is that the Members, through it, get an opportunity to have an input into the formation of the agenda and the selection of speakers for the weekend meetings. While the format of the weekend proceedings, the agenda and the selection of speakers are proposed by the Secretariat in conjunction with the Chairperson and with the assistance of the Expert Advisory Group, the input of the Steering Group is of tremendous importance in ascertaining the views of Membership as a whole. Moreover, its participation helps to inform the Membership as a whole of the particular topic under consideration. In essence,

the involvement of the Steering Group ensures that the Members have a sense of ownership and control over the process.

### Transparency

A key principle to which I attach considerable importance is that listed first – Openness. From the outset the Assembly agreed that it would operate with complete transparency. With the exception of one private session and the Roundtable Discussions, which will be explained later, all of the proceedings during the weekend meetings are held in public. That means that members of the media and observers who apply to attend may attend. The proceedings are broadcast live on the Assembly's website. In addition, all papers and presentations of the speakers and all documentation furnished to the members are posted on the website after the meeting. The documentation relevant to the matter addressed therein has been appended to each of the two Reports which have already been presented to the Oireachtas. In short, the public can readily ascertain all of the information presented to the Members. The deliberations of Members after they have heard expert speakers or persons with first hand experiences or advocacy groups are conducted in private to promote engagement and interaction by the members. However, as will be explained later, each Roundtable Discussion is usually followed by a public session, in which the members can question the speaker or speakers they have heard and during which the Assembly is given a feedback of the deliberations which occurred at each table.

### Secret Ballot

At the conclusion of the proceedings on a particular topic, the Members express their views on each of the questions which may or may not give rise to a recommendation by secret

ballot. This reflects the design of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly, in that, although the citizens there worked together in learning about the electoral systems, their decisions were made through secret ballot. It is to be inferred from Smith's commentary in contrasting mini-publics in which citizens are polled individually with those in which the participants come to a collective decision after a period of deliberation, that where citizens are not required to make decisions as a group – rather their opinions are sought in private – the risk that deliberation in small groups may lead to group polarisation is avoided. Apart from that, from the perspective of an ordinary individual, I consider that the secret ballot, which is the cornerstone of our democracy, is the correct approach.

#### Deliberation/ Considered Judgement: Features

Being satisfied that the Assembly is a democratic institution, I will now demonstrate its deliberative nature in reaching a considered judgement on the matter before it. Once, again Smith's commentary is of assistance in identifying the ingredients of a process which will result in a considered judgement. Having stated that advocates of mini-publics place a high premium on their capacity to enable citizens to come to considered judgements, Smith identifies three specific features of mini-publics that motivate considered judgements. First, the citizens hear evidence of a range of witnesses who have been carefully selected to present an overview of the relevant issues and they are given an opportunity to cross-examine the experts to not only clarify particular points, but also to raise issues that may not have been covered in presentations. Secondly, each citizen has the opportunity to discuss the issue under consideration with other citizens with a diversity of social

perspectives. Finally, the design of the process can be said to orientate citizens towards consideration of the public interest, rather than their own self interest. Smith also suggests that there are two particular features of the design of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly that aid participants in coming to considered judgement. The first is that the "charge was clear". Using the terminology in the resolution of the Oireachtas, that means that the matter to be considered by the Members is clear. The second is the time factor in coming to a considered judgement.

### Members' Deliberation

I propose considering how the features identified by Smith are reflected by reference to the manner in which the proceedings of the Assembly were conducted on the second matter the Assembly was mandated to consider – how we best respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population.

As is recorded in the Second Report presented to the Oireachtas on that matter, as it was formulated in an extremely broad terms, it was agreed by the Assembly that it would be considered by reference to two relevant, but separate and distinct, topics. The first topic was the provision in the State for long term support and care for the ageing population. The second topic was entitled "Pensions, Income and Retirement". Both of those topics, which were agreed by the Members, were clear and precise. In terms of time, the members had a weekend to consider each topic. On each weekend they heard from experts and they had time for deliberation.

## Experts

Taking the first weekend as an example of the deliberative process, the Members heard from six experts who delivered papers and presentations on aspects of the provision of long term support and care, ranging from demographic trends and projections to current practice in Ireland as to the options available, the funding of long term care in Ireland and models of care in other countries. They also heard two recorded interviews given by a woman and a man as to their personal experiences, one of receiving care at home and the other of receiving care in a nursing home setting. A man who is a full time carer of his mother also gave a presentation from the carer's perspective. Like most presentations to the Assembly, the papers and presentations of the experts were undoubtedly complex and required deep concentration. However, the Members had received the papers which were to be delivered in advance of the weekend meeting and they had an opportunity to consider them. Moreover the papers and presentations were posted on the Assembly's website after they were delivered.

## Submissions

An important feature of the conduct of the Assembly's work is the submissions process. In the case of every matter considered to date submissions have been invited from the public and there has been a surprisingly good response from the public to date. As regards the second matter, the submissions process is described in the Second Report and there is appended to that Report a summary of the submissions received from individual citizens, professionals and academics, and advocacy groups. The submissions were published on the

Assembly's website as they were received and were available to the Members for their deliberations.

### Roundtable Discussions

The main opportunity the Members have to discuss the issues under consideration at a particular weekend meeting is at the so called Roundtable Discussions. What happens on the floor is that the Members sit in groups of six or seven, depending on the attendance, at 14 round tables. Each table has a facilitator and a note-taker. The appointment of facilitators and their role is described in detail in the First Report delivered to the Oireachtas and in the "Practical Guide to Facilitation at the Assembly" which is appended to the Report. At the public sessions, the facilitator speaks for a Member who does not wish to speak in public.

To illustrate the level of deliberation which occurs during a weekend meeting, what happened at the meeting on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June, which lasted approximately six and a half hours, is informative. There were two Roundtable Discussions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. In the morning, having heard from a Senior Statistician from the Central Statistics Office and from a Consultant Physician in geriatric medicine, the Members had a Roundtable Discussion which lasted for 35 minutes. That was followed by a questions and answers session during which the speakers answered questions raised by the Members. During that session, which lasted 45 minutes, the Assembly as a whole received a feedback on the discussions which had taken place from the facilitator at each table. On that day more than one third of the time was spent by the Members in discussion, questions and

answers and feedback sessions. On the following day, Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> June, there were two Roundtable Discussion sessions, one following a presentation by a Professor of Business and Economics. The second discussion was described as a “brainstorming” session and its objective was to ascertain the issues which the Members wished to have covered at the next weekend meeting.

At the next weekend meeting, on the Sunday, the Members voted on the recommendations to be made to the Houses of the Oireachtas on both topics considered on the second matter. The voting process, which I consider to be central to the integrity of the Assembly, is described in detail in the Second Report.

I believe that the foregoing outline, albeit a brief outline, of what happened on the floor of the Assembly at the weekend meeting in June 2017 clearly demonstrates that the first two features which Smith identified as motivating considered judgement were present. The presence of the third feature – orientation of Members towards consideration of the public interest – may not be so clear cut. However, having referred to the independent facilitation system, which was in place during the British Columbia process, Smith observed that independent facilitation can help orientate citizens towards mutual respect and understanding and ensure that deliberations are free and fair. That is particularly relevant because during all of the Assembly’s deliberations, there was an independent facilitation system in place. Earlier, Smith had outlined how the grouping of the citizens in the British Columbia process was organised, stating that the citizens were assigned randomly to the groups and the membership changed each weekend. A similar approach in relation to group rotation on a weekend basis, is adopted at the weekend meetings of the Assembly, which, I

believe ensures that the key principles are observed, in particular, fairness, equality of voice and respect.

### Research

While I have no doubt that considered judgement was realised from the Members deliberations, and will continue to be realised, I cannot express either agreement or disagreement with Smith's statement that there is plenty of evidence of citizens changing their opinions as they hear evidence and deliberate with their fellow citizens. However, it is important that this be independently ascertained. That is why experts in political science are engaged in observing and surveying the Assembly's work. Since November 2016, in collaboration with the Irish Research Council, research is being carried out with a view to gaining a better understanding of the perceived deliberative quality of the Assembly and its modus operandi. The research is being carried out by Professor David Farrell of University College Dublin and Dr Jane Suiter of Dublin City University. A brief description of the manner in which the research is being conducted is contained in the Assembly's First Report.

### Concluding Observations

I want to conclude with some further observations. Since July 2016 I have been conscious of the fact that a cynicism still prevails in some quarters and among some people in relation to the value of a process such as the Assembly. This commentary and the gaze of external

parties, including the media, has no doubt been amplified by the fact that the Assembly's first topic was one of the most divisive and difficult subjects in public life in Ireland.

However, the Assembly format has allowed the Members to consider such a divisive and difficult matter as the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution in a manner which was unique in consideration of such a matter in an Irish context.

I, as Chairperson, listened to the requests of my fellow Members when devising the work programmes for each of our weekends. Throughout those weekends, we had open feedback sessions when we heard from the Members about what they wanted to hear to allow them make informed decisions about the matters before them. What a Citizens' Assembly format allowed us to do was to respond to the needs of the Members, a representative sample of ordinary members of Irish society, about what questions they wanted to have answered and who they wanted to hear from.

I responded to the requests of the Members and provided the information to them based on facts and expert testimony. This evidence-based approach to discussion and policymaking is standard best practice. However, history of the debates on some of the issues before the Assembly demonstrates that this approach has not always been adopted in the past.

It has also allowed us to involve the wider public in much larger numbers than has been seen in traditional engagement mechanisms. The number of persons who took the time to make submissions to the Assembly on the Eighth Amendment and on Climate Change is a particular demonstration of this.

My final observation is to remark upon the dedication of the Members of the Assembly. The sense of civic duty and commitment to the process has been a constant source of amazement and inspiration to me as Chairperson. Having chaired this process for over 12 months now, it is clear to me that, despite the cynicism and sense of alienation which can and does exist and which is unhealthy for our society and, ultimately, poses dangers for our democracy, many people still care about what is written in our Constitution, about political values and standards, about investing in the health of our democracy in order to create a better future for our country. I know that this is something which Tom Arnold remarked upon at the end of the Convention process in the ninth report and I am heartened that we both share the same perspective on this point.

I too hope that the work of the Assembly has already contributed, and continues to contribute, to the vision of a better future.