

Q. What is the Citizens' Assembly?

A. The Citizens' Assembly is a body formed from the citizens of Ireland to deliberate on a number of issues which have been referred to it by the Houses of the Oireachtas. It broadly follows the model used for the Convention on the Constitution which ran from 2012-2014.

This model provides a platform for a cross-section of the public to hear presentations from experts and civil society groups and to engage in rational and reasoned discussion, and to then make recommendations to the State on the options available.

The Assembly has been asked to look at the following issues:

- (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;
- (v) how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change.

The Assembly may also be asked to consider other matters that may be referred to it.

Q. Who is the Chairperson?

A. On 27 July, the Government appointed Ms Justice Mary Laffoy, Judge of the Supreme Court, to be the Chairperson of the Assembly.

Q. Who are the Members and why have I been chosen?

A. There will be 100 Members of the Assembly, including the Chairperson. Members are being chosen at random to represent the views of the people of Ireland, and will be broadly representative of society as reflected in the Census, including

age, gender, social class, regional spread etc. They must also be on the electoral register to vote in a referendum. You have been selected as you meet the criteria in the categories described above.

Q. How will the meetings be run and what will my role be?

A. You don't need to have any specialist knowledge of the topics. The point of the Assembly is to provide for informed discussion and debate, to allow all sides of the argument to be heard and to hear the opinions of the Members.

Generally speaking the format for the meetings will be as follows:

- Introductory remarks by the Chairperson
- Expert presentations
- Presentations from civil society and advocacy groups
- Consideration of submissions by Members of the public
- Question and Answer Sessions and Debates
- Roundtable discussions

Following these discussions, all matters before the Assembly will be voted upon and recommendations based on the majority view of the Members will be made to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Government will then provide 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.

Q. Will I get paid for my attendance?

A. Members will not be paid for their time in taking part in the Assembly. Accommodation for the Members will be provided

for in the hotel where the Assembly is taking place and meals will also be provided. Travel expenses will also be paid.

Q. I know nothing about the issues being considered and I'd be embarrassed to speak in front of people who do.

A. At the first meeting, Members of the Assembly will receive guidance on all aspects of the job so they will be fully prepared and confident that they can contribute to the work programme. Advice and support will also be available at all times during the course of the year.

Q. What about my privacy?

A. Your name and general area where you come from (e.g. Wicklow, Dublin 15 etc) will be made available on www.citizensassembly.ie. Other personal details of the Members will be treated in strictest confidence and will not be given to any third parties.

Plenary meetings of the Assembly will be live streamed via the same website.

Q. Where will the Assembly be based?

A. Assembly meetings will be held in a hotel within a 20km radius of Dublin. The selection process for a suitable venue is underway and therefore the exact venue is not yet known. Further details will be made available to Assembly Members in due course.

Q. How often will the Assembly be meeting?

A. It is envisaged that there will be up to 10 weekend meetings of the Assembly over the next year. It is therefore expected to

meet about once a month. Meetings will not take place during Christmas or Easter. Meetings will typically run all day Saturday and a half day on a Sunday. For anyone travelling from outside of Dublin, accommodation will be provided on the Friday night also.

The inaugural meeting of the Assembly will take place in October 2016 in Dublin Castle (exact date to be confirmed). A full draft schedule of further meetings will be made available at that time.

Q. Am I expected to go to all the Assembly meetings?

A. It may be that you can't commit to the full work programme but we would ask you to attend as many weekends as possible over the course of the year. If you can't make a particular meeting, a substitute will be appointed to take your place on that occasion.

The Assembly will have a website where all documentation and papers will be available in good time before every meeting. If you don't have access to the internet, all papers will be posted to you.

Q. Can I attend with a partner or friend?

A. Unfortunately in order to ensure a representative sample we cannot recruit people and their friends or partners. Your partner/friend may come with you on the weekends, but may not take part in the Assembly itself. No expenses etc will be paid in respect of the partner/friend.

Reflections from various Members of the Convention on the Constitution (2012-2014)

“I hope that this form of direct democracy will lead to a better opinion of decision-making by Members of the public and greater citizen involvement on the political process.”

“I will never forget my time on the Convention with a brilliant group of well-meaning strangers who eventually became good friends. It has definitely been the most rewarding experience of my life.”

“At the start I wasn’t sure what I was getting involved in but as time went on, I realised how important it was to many people and I now have opinions on subjects I would never have thought about.”

“The power of open, reasoned and informed discussion was brought home to me on 3 occasions when I ended up voting the opposite way to what I had intended at the start of the weekend.”

“With little knowledge of politics or the constitution, I found that it was made easy for us to understand – I was never made feel ridiculous and everyone was approachable.”

“I enjoyed the experience and it has made me want to get more involved with things rather than being a spectator.”

Excerpts taken from the Ninth Report of the Convention on the Constitution