



Tithe an Oireachtais

Houses of the Oireachtas

MAKING SUBMISSIONS AND PRESENTATIONS TO OIREACHTAS COMMITTEES

Why do Committees want to talk to the public ?

Most Oireachtas Committees have the power to invite interested persons or bodies to make oral presentations on any matter on its Work Programme that the Committee decides to consider. Over 1,000 witnesses appear before Committees on an annual basis. These can include Ministers, civil and public servants, representatives of non-Governmental organisations and other interest groups. It is through the Committees that much of the detailed work of the Oireachtas is conducted. The Committees scrutinise the operation of Government Departments, examine policy issues and consider legislation in detail before it becomes law.

Why should you make a submission to a Committee?

Making a submission to a Committee may allow you to influence the outcome of its work. The Committees provide an opportunity for the public to input directly into the work of the Oireachtas. Committee work better informs the Members on the policy issues on a particular topic.

How does a Committee decide who to invite to a meeting?

Committees receive many requests for meetings and they need to be sure that the topic comes within their functions and fits in with the Work Programme of the Committee before they agree to a meeting. If you believe you can contribute to the work of a Committee, the best approach is to send the Committee a written submission for consideration first. The Committee will then decide if an oral presentation is required. The purpose of an oral presentation is to enable you to clarify and expand on your written submission and to allow the Committee Members to ask questions and seek additional information.

Invitations to public meetings are issued by each Committee on the basis of the particular item or area of the Work Programme under consideration at the time.

How do I contact a Committee?

Your point of contact with a Committee is the Clerk to the Committee (the Committee Clerk). The Committee Clerk is the main adviser to the Chairman and Members of the Committee. All documents and correspondence for the Committee should be addressed to the Committee Clerk. Individual Committee contact details are available on the separate factsheet "Oireachtas Committees of the 31st Dáil / 24th Seanad".

MAKING A WRITTEN SUBMISSION

How do I make a written submission?

Submissions should be addressed to the Committee Clerk (of the relevant Committee). Submissions may be sent by post (on paper) or by email. Email is the preferred option. If you do not receive an acknowledgement, you should contact the Committee Clerk, to confirm that the submission was received.

What information should I include?

As a general guideline, written submissions should consist of a separate document accompanied by a covering letter. Submissions should be presented as concisely as possible. The covering letter should contain your name and contact details (telephone and postal address and, if available, an email address). If the

submission is on behalf of an organisation, you should indicate your position in the organisation.

The main document should contain the following information:

- A brief introduction, for example, explaining your area of expertise;
- Any factual information that you have to offer from which the Committee might be able to draw conclusions, or which could be put to other parties for their reactions;
- Any recommendations for action by the Government or others which you would like the Committee to consider for inclusion in its report to the House (recommendations to the Committee should be as specific as possible and should be summarised at the end of the document); and
- An executive summary of the main points made in the submission, if your document is more than 10 pages long.

Paragraphs and pages in your document should be numbered to assist the Committee.

Is there any restriction on what I can include?

You should be careful not to comment on matters currently before a court of law, or matters in respect of which court proceedings are imminent. If you anticipate such issues arising, you should discuss with the Committee Clerk how this might affect what you can submit.

You should not make comments or allegations of a personal nature – please see also the paragraph below on *“Parliamentary privilege — your rights and duties”*.

The purpose of Committee meetings is to discuss policy issues. The Committee is not a forum for promoting a particular product or business.

Making a submission is a public process

The Committee is not obliged to accept your document once it has been submitted, nor is it obliged to publish any or all of the submission if it has been accepted. However, the operations of a parliament are a public process. Any submissions made to a Committee may be published, either as part of a Committee report, or separately, if the Committee decides to do so provided you have not specifically requested that your submission be treated as confidential. Publication can include posting of the submission on the website and in hard copy as part of a Committee report.

MAKING AN ORAL PRESENTATION

What happens if I am invited to a meeting of a Committee?

Having received and studied your written presentation, the Committee may decide that it needs to discuss the topic with you in more depth. The best way to do this will be in person at a public meeting of the Committee. Once the Committee decides that you will be invited to attend, the Committee Clerk will contact you to arrange a suitable date for your presentation. A confirmation letter usually follows.

What happens if I can't come to a meeting, can I participate remotely?

You might not be able to attend for any number of reasons. Sometimes it will be possible to re-schedule the meeting, but sometimes it might not be possible. Where you are unable to attend in person (possibly because of distance, work commitments or travel costs¹) it may be possible to hold the meeting by video

¹ Witnesses appear before Committees because they want to influence the outcome of the work before the Committee. Therefore, they meet their own expenses even if they need to travel some distance to attend a meeting.

conference. We will require advance notice to arrange this, so please consult the Committee Clerk as soon as possible in the process.

Do I need to send anything in advance?

Any presentation materials, including speaking notes and PowerPoint presentations must be submitted to the Committee Clerk at least two working days in advance to allow for advance electronic circulation to Members. There is no guarantee that material, which has not been received within the specified advance period, will be used at the meeting.

If you are attending on behalf of an organisation, please also send the Committee Clerk the names and job titles of the people who will be attending the meeting. It is usually left to the organisation to decide which of its members or staff should be present. Whoever is nominated to attend should, however, be sufficiently familiar with the topic to brief the Committee fully and answer any questions.

I've never been in a Parliament before – is there a dress code?

The established practice is that Members, staff and visitors to the Houses of the Oireachtas should wear business attire, or similar clothing in keeping with the status of parliament.

I've never been to the Houses of the Oireachtas before – where are they and how do I get in?

The Houses of the Oireachtas are located in Leinster House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2.

- *Arriving by public transport*

Leinster House is within 5 minutes walk of the St. Stephen's Green LUAS stop and of Pearse Station for DART or mainline rail services. It is also served by numerous buses, including the number 128 from Busáras / Connolly Station and the numbers 92 and 46E from Heuston Station.

- *Arriving by car.*

Kildare St. is a one-way street running north to south. If you are coming from the south side of the city, turn down Dawson St. from St. Stephens' Green, and then turn right at Molesworth Street. Leinster House is directly in front of you. If coming from the north side of the city, follow the side of Trinity College to Nassau Street and take the first right turn, just after the Kilkenny Design shop, into Kildare Street. Leinster House is half way up the street on the left hand side. There is no parking available for visitors in Leinster House, but there are two car parks nearby, on Kildare Street and Setanta Place, and there is also metered on-street parking in the area.

- *Reception*

When you arrive, please go to the glass pavilion at the Kildare Street entrance. You will be greeted by one of the Parliamentary Ushers, who will direct you to the Committee Rooms. You will need to be signed in and be given a visitor's badge by another Parliamentary Usher at the reception desk. As you will understand, all of this takes a bit of time, so please aim to arrive about 15-20 minutes before your scheduled speaking time.

Can I get into a Committee meeting if I arrive without notice?

Access to Leinster House is by invitation or prior arrangement only and limited by space constraints. In order to access the Committee meeting, either to observe or to participate, your name must be on the access list. It is essential to confirm your attendance with the Committee Clerk at least one working day in advance of the scheduled meeting. Please indicate your area of interest and/or your association with any lobby group or other organisation.

Are the Committee Rooms wheelchair accessible?

The Oireachtas Committee Rooms are fully accessible for wheelchair users. However, it would be helpful if you can let the Committee Clerk know as soon as possible if there are any other facilities or assistance you require.

Do I go into the Committee Room immediately when I arrive or will I be called in?

The rules of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Standing Orders) allow for visitors and authorised representatives of the press to be present during a public meeting of a Committee. However, both press and visitors are excluded when the Committee is meeting in private. Therefore, you should always wait to be called before entering the Committee Room.

Do I need to tell anyone that I've arrived?

There is a waiting area just outside the Committee Rooms and you will see one of the Parliamentary Ushers at the desk. You should introduce yourself to the Parliamentary Usher and let him/her know which Committee meeting you are attending. If the meeting has not already begun you may ask to see the Committee Room in advance to familiarise yourself with the layout.

Where do I wait to be called?

Sometimes delays are unavoidable, but every effort will be made to keep them to a minimum. In the event of a delay, as long as the Parliamentary Usher knows you have arrived, you may wait in the waiting area or in the coffee dock (on the floor above) if you wish. A staff member will call you from there when the Committee is ready for you. There is chilled water available in the waiting area and, of course, coffee and other refreshments may be purchased in the coffee dock. Food and drink may not be brought into the Committee Rooms. However, water is supplied on the tables.

What is the normal format for a Committee meeting?

The focus of the session is on the Committee putting questions to you, about your written submission. There is no need to read your full written submission as the Members will already have received it. Your opening remarks should be restricted to a short statement (usually about five minutes) summarising your written submission and highlighting the main points. Questions will then be put to you by the Chairman and Members of the Committee. These questions are designed to clarify aspects of your submission, to seek information relevant to the Committee's functions and to allow you to expand on any points made in your submission. The Committee Chairman may permit a few Members to pose questions before you reply, so you should take a note of the various questions, so that you do not overlook any of the issues raised.

During the meeting are there any particular protocols I should follow?

When entering the Committee Room, go directly to the seats set aside for you, as directed by the Committee staff. You should remain seated in your place until your contribution to the meeting has concluded.

How do I address the Members of the Committee?

You should address the Members by their titles, Deputy X, Senator X etc. Office holders should be addressed by their title, i.e. Chairman, Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister. In the Committee Rooms the names of the Members are displayed on the front of the desks.

Is there any presentation equipment?

All of the Committee Rooms have facilities for displaying videos and PowerPoint slides. If you wish to use either facility you must supply the video and/or slides to the Committee Clerk two working days in advance of the meeting. This is to allow for virus checking of the media supplied as well as the circulation of the documents to the Committee Members. If you are using electronic presentation aids, remember that only the spoken word forms a part of the official record of the meeting. The official record is posted on the Committee's website although the Committee may decide to publish your submission separately. The Committee Rooms do not have whiteboards or flipcharts.

Can I use any other electronic equipment?

Only the equipment already installed may be used. In order to protect the sound and recording systems, other electronic devices such as pagers, mobile phones, laptop computers, tape recorders and radios, are not permitted. The use of mobile phones is strictly prohibited and they must be switched off (silent mode is not sufficient) in the Committee Rooms when a Committee is meeting.

Using microphones

There is no need to turn microphones on or off, as the sound operator will do this. You should try to avoid knocking the table, or tapping it with fingers or pens, as the sound will be picked up by the microphones.

How long will the meeting be and will there be any breaks?

The average Committee meeting lasts approximately 2 hours, although some meetings may be shorter and some considerably longer. The length of the meeting depends on the item of business being considered and whether there is more than one group making a presentation. Meetings of 2 hours or less will usually not have a planned break.

It is possible, however, that a meeting may have to be interrupted to allow Members to vote in either Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann. If this happens, the break will be for approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Voting is an important part of a Member's role and it is not intended as a discourtesy to you if the meeting is interrupted for this reason. It will be resumed as soon as possible.

For a longer meeting, a break may be planned either to allow Members to attend specific proceedings, e.g. Leaders' Questions in the Dáil, or for a meal break.

Will the meeting be broadcast?

Making an oral presentation to an Oireachtas Committee is a public process. The meeting will be conducted in public session and will be televised within the Leinster House complex. Footage of the meeting will also be made available to broadcasting organisations and the meeting will be webcast, making it available worldwide on the internet. The proceedings of Committees in public session, typically recorded but occasionally live, are now broadcast on a pilot basis on UPC Channel 801. The objective of transmitting Committee proceedings is to give the public increased access to the ongoing work of Oireachtas Committees. This arrangement is being undertaken in the context of developing a dedicated Parliamentary TV channel.

A transcript will be published on the Committee website in due course. So, everything you say at the meeting will be publicly available. Please tell the Committee Clerk whether your speaking notes and/or presentation slides may also be released to the media.

Parliamentary privilege — your rights and duties

You are protected by absolute privilege² in respect of the presentation you make to the Committee. This means that you have an absolute defence against any defamation action³ for anything you say at the meeting. However, you are expected not to abuse this privilege. If your statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity⁴, the Committee may direct you to stop your remarks. If you disobey that direction, the privilege attaching to any subsequent statements (made following the direction) will be reduced to qualified privilege⁵, meaning that you do not have the same level of protection from legal action.

You should therefore –

- o confine yourself to giving answers which are connected to the subject matter of the proceedings in hand,
- o respect the established parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, you should refrain from criticising or making charges against any person(s) or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable,
- o avoid statements which may adversely affect the good name or reputation of named or identifiable individuals or entities outside of the Houses, and
- o avoid any comments about an issue that is currently before a court of law, or about which court proceedings are imminent, because your comments could prejudice the judge or jury in the case.

Can I observe other presentations to the Committee?

If the public part of the meeting is already in progress when you arrive, you are welcome to observe proceedings from the public gallery before being called to make your own presentation. When the Committee is ready for you, the Committee Clerk will call you to the table. You may also return to the public gallery after your own contribution if you wish.

While seated in the public gallery you may not take notes or record the proceedings in any way. You should not interrupt the meeting by talking, clapping etc., and you should not try to communicate with Members of the Committee or other participants.

² *Absolute* privilege, which is a complete defence to a defamation action, applies even where the words complained of are published with knowledge of their falsehood and with the intention of injuring another. Malice is irrelevant to the applicability of the defence.

³ “defamation action” is defined in the Defamation Act 2009 as
“(a) an action for damages for defamation, or
(b) an application for a declaratory order,
whether or not a claim for other relief under this Act is made;”.

⁴ “defamatory statement” is defined in the Defamation Act 2009 as “a statement that tends to injure a person’s reputation in the eyes of reasonable members of society”.

⁵ *Qualified* privilege, arises where a communication is made upon an occasion of qualified privilege and is fairly warranted by it; it is a good defence in the absence of malice. An occasion of qualified privilege arises where a person who makes a communication has a duty (legal, social or moral) or an interest to make it to the person to whom it is made, and the person to whom it is made has a corresponding duty to receive it.

Do I need to do anything after the meeting?

The same protocol applies when leaving as when you are entering the Committee Room, (*unless* the meeting has formally adjourned). You should leave quietly, taking care not to interrupt ongoing business. Please return your security badge to the desk on your way out.

If you have promised to forward additional material in response to a question, that material should be forwarded to the Committee Clerk, who will distribute it to all Committee Members.

Can I get a copy of the meeting transcript or the webcast or video?

The transcript of the meeting will be available on the Committee web site approximately 3-4 working days after the meeting.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service provides live and recorded webcasts of the Dáil, Seanad, and four Committee Rooms, on the Internet, on the Oireachtas network, and on the Government Networks. To see the webcasting service click on "Watch & Listen" on the home page of the Oireachtas web site (www.oireachtas.ie).

Live webcasting is available in the following formats:

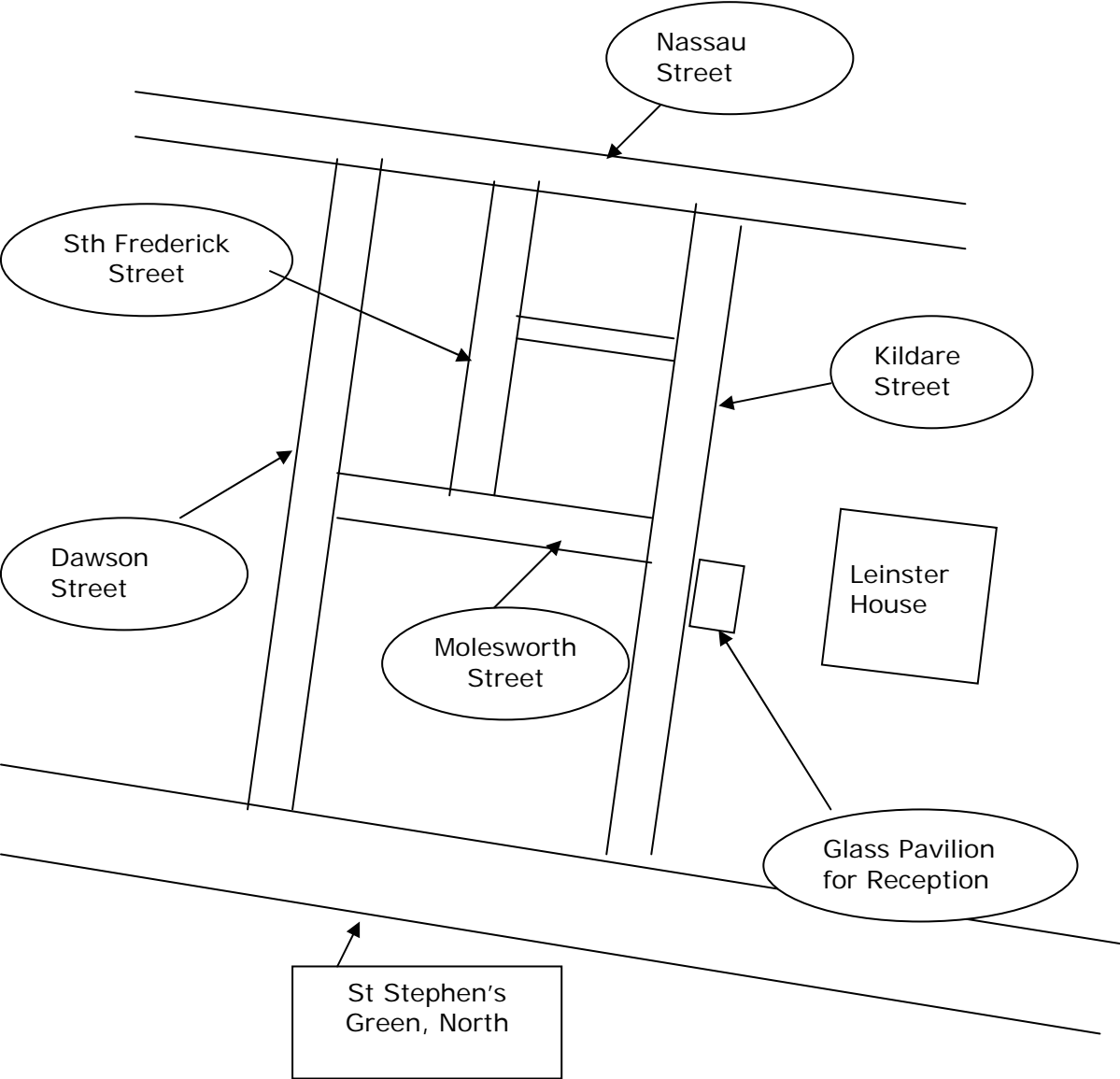
- Windows Media Player video and Internet radio;
- Flash;
- IPTV MPEG4.

Recordings are usually available within two days of a meeting. Users may also create their own links to video clips of webcast recordings using a simple tool. These links to the video clips can be included in an email or on a web page.

The webcasting service is managed by the eDemocracy Unit using feeds provided by the Broadcasting Unit, and is provided in association with HEAnet, Ireland's National Research and Education Network. If you have any difficulty accessing the service, please contact the eDemocracy Unit at eDemocracy@oireachtas.ie

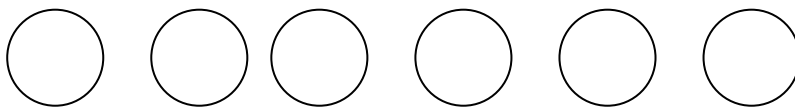
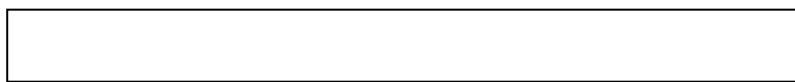
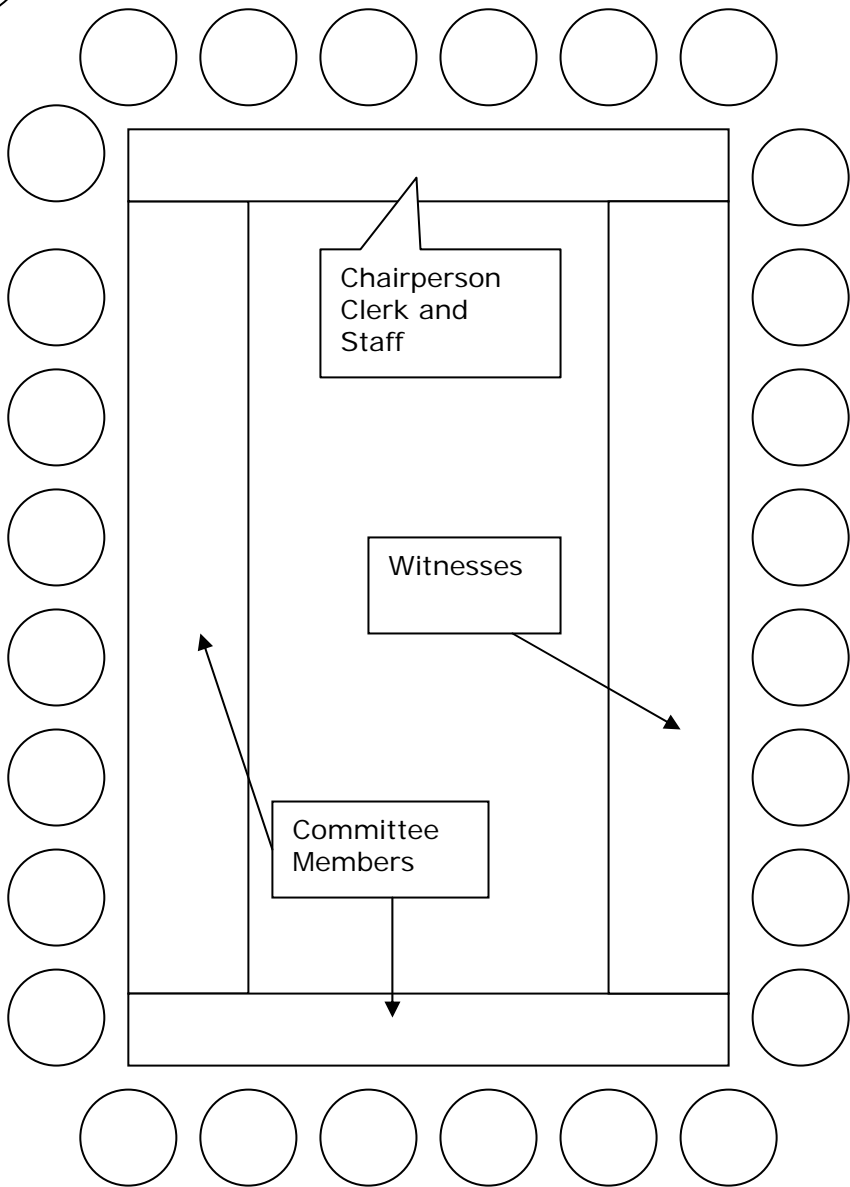
There is a charge for providing a video of the meeting. For inquiries, please send an e-mail to broadcast@oireachtas.ie, or telephone (01) 618 3789.

Vicinity of Leinster House

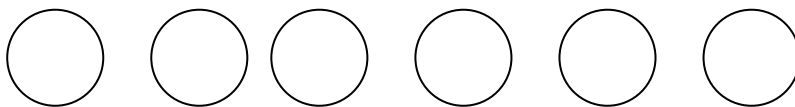


Layout of Committee Room 1

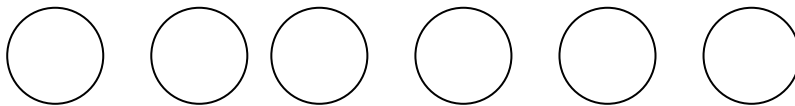
Sound Booth



Six Press Places (with desks)



Public Gallery
30 seats



Layout of Committee Rooms 2, 3 and 4

