

# YOUR PARLIAMENT A GUIDE TO THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS /  
DÁIL ÉIREANN / SEANAD  
ÉIREANN / LEINSTER HOUSE /  
1 TAOISEACH / 166 TDS /  
1 CEANN COMHAIRLE /  
60 SENATORS /  
1 CATHAOIRLEACH /  
15 GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS /  
WWW.OIREACHTAS.IE



## *Your Parliament*

A Guide to the Houses  
of the Oireachtas

## The Houses of the Oireachtas – An Introduction

Oireachtas is an Irish word which is used to describe our parliament. In Ireland we have two Houses of Parliament, Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann form a very important part of our democracy. Democracy is a type of government. It means that citizens have a say over how they are governed. We make our views known by voting at elections when we choose people to represent us in parliament.

People who are elected to Dáil Éireann are known as TDs. People who are elected to Seanad Éireann are known as Senators.

There are 166 TDs in the Dáil and they meet to decide who will form the Government. The Taoiseach then forms a government and the government take decisions about what type of laws we need and how much money we should spend on important things like schools and hospitals.

Every time the government wants to make a new law or when it decides how to spend money it has to present the plan to the Dáil. TDs will take a hard look at the plan and see if they agree with it. TDs will often take a vote to see if they want the plan to go ahead. They then inform the Seanad of their plans.

As we choose the TDs and Senators who sit in Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann this means that our views are represented when decisions on new laws and policies are made. Decisions are made after the issues are looked at by the members of the Dáil and Seanad. The Government need a majority to get their policies passed. That way the views of all the people are heard. That is how democracy works.

Discover more 

For further information about  
the Houses of the Oireachtas:

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**OIREACTHAS IS AN IRISH WORD WHICH IS USED TO DESCRIBE OUR PARLIAMENT**

**LEINSTER HOUSE – THE HOME OF IRISH DEMOCRACY**

Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann are located in a building called Leinster House. Leinster House is on Kildare Street in the centre of Dublin, you'll find it next to the National Museum and the National Library.

**How Leinster House got its name:**

Leinster House is a very old, historic building. It was built in 1747 by James Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald was a rich, powerful man who lived in Kildare and he built the house so he had somewhere to stay when he was in Dublin. 20 years later James Fitzgerald was made Duke of Leinster and so his house in Dublin was called Leinster House. That's the name that the building is still known by today.

**Leinster House becomes home to the Houses of the Oireachtas:**

The Fitzgerald family sold the house some years later to the Royal Dublin Society (RDS). The RDS used the building as its headquarters. When Ireland gained its independence in 1922 the RDS allowed our new parliament, called Dáil Éireann, to meet in Leinster House and our parliament has been located there ever since.

**What you will see in Leinster House:**

Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann meet in Leinster House. There have been a lot of extensions to the building since the Fitzgeralds first built Leinster House, but some of the features of the house built in 1747 can still be seen. For instance the dining room that the Fitzgeralds used is now home to the Oireachtas reading room.

If you visit Leinster House you'll enter through the gates on Kildare Street and then walk up to the main door. Leinster House is a busy place, with TDs and Senators working at passing laws and debating matters of importance to us all. Inside Leinster House you'll see portraits of famous Irish politicians.

Leinster House is home to the Irish parliament and we would like to see as many people as possible, especially young people, visiting our parliament and witnessing democracy in action. Every year, around 100,000 people visit Leinster House. We hope you can make it some day!

**WHAT HAPPENS IN DÁIL ÉIREANN**

Dáil Éireann is a busy place. Usually, it meets on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in Leinster House. Dáil Éireann ensures that our democracy works and that the decisions of government have the support of the TDs who we elect. Here are just some of the important things that happen in Dáil Éireann:

**Electing a Taoiseach and a Government:**

At a general election the citizens of Ireland vote to elect TDs to Dáil Éireann. There are 166 TDs. Most TDs are members of political parties and some TDs are independent.

After a general election, the Dáil meets. One of the TDs is elected Taoiseach. Taoiseach is an Irish word and it means 'leader'. The Taoiseach chooses his or her cabinet which is generally made up of 15 people who are known as Ministers. Ministers take charge of Government Departments, such as the Department of Education and Science or the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Taoiseach and the Ministers meet every week to discuss important issues and make decisions.

Generally the Taoiseach and the Government hold their jobs for five years. Usually, general elections take place every five years.

**Leaders' Questions:**

Each day in Dáil Éireann the leaders of political groups ask the Taoiseach or another senior member of government about important issues that people are concerned about. It could be a question about the economy, jobs, hospitals, schools or a question about the environment.

The Taoiseach will tell TDs when and what the government plans to do about the issue.

These questions ensure that Dáil Éireann discusses matters that affect our everyday lives.

This part of the Dáil's work is often reported on radio and television news, in the newspapers and on the internet.

**Question Time:**

Each Minister is in charge of a Government Department. Here are some examples of Government Departments:

**The Department of Education and Science**

This is a very busy Department. Part of its work includes looking after primary and secondary schools. The Department takes decisions such as should a new gym or a new extension be provided in a school or if the exam system should be changed. It is also in charge of school transport.

**The Department of Foreign Affairs**

This Department is in charge of Ireland's relationships with other countries and with the European Union. It is also in charge of the money we give to the developing world through Irish Aid.

**The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government**

Climate change, recycling and water quality are just some important things that this Department deals with. The plans we have to tackle climate change and increase recycling come from this Department. The Department also plays a part in running the Green Flag scheme for schools.

In all there are 15 Government Departments and they are very active in all areas of Irish life. To ensure that there is debate about the plans and actions of each Department TDs

in the Dáil ask questions of the Minister in charge. Every day in Dáil Éireann one Minister will spend about 90 minutes answering questions from TDs. TDs ask more than 45,000 questions each year.

**Approving The Budget:**

Each year the Government presents a budget. The budget sets out how much money the Government will spend on a range of areas, such as schools, hospitals, sport and old age pensions. The budget will also show where the Government plans to raise the money for this spending.

The budget is debated in Dáil Éireann and can only go ahead if the majority of TDs are in favour of it. If the majority of TDs reject the budget then the Taoiseach and the Government have to resign. It's that serious!

Each year when Dáil Éireann debates the budget there is lots of coverage on TV, radio and in the newspapers and on the internet.

**Passing New Laws:**

One of the most important tasks of Dáil Éireann is making new laws. Most new laws are proposed by the Government after the Taoiseach and Ministers have discussed the issue. For instance they might decide to introduce a new law that would increase or decrease the age at which you can drive a car or set a limit on the hours that young people who are at school can work.

The proposed new law has to be debated in Dáil Éireann, and then in Seanad Éireann. This detailed look at the proposed law is very important and ensures that the law is fair and just.

TDs will first debate the reason why the new law has to be introduced. Then a group of TDs will form a committee which will examine the law line by line. It's a long process! These TDs can try to change parts of the law. A proposed change to the law is called an amendment. TDs will often take a vote to see if the majority of them want to amend the law.

When the committee has finished its work the proposed law is brought back to a full meeting of Dáil Éireann where TDs examine the amendments the committee might have made or that the Minister is proposing. Finally all TDs in Dáil Éireann have to approve the proposed law. If the TDs don't agree that it is a good idea they will take a vote. The majority of TDs have to vote for the proposed law to get it approved.

**Private Members' Business:**

Most of the work that the Dáil does involves examining the plans proposed by the Government. However, opposition TDs can also put forward their ideas or their proposals for a new law. When Dáil Éireann meets time is set aside for TDs who aren't in government to introduce their ideas. These ideas are debated and usually a vote takes place to decide if the proposal should go ahead.

**What Else Do TDs Do?**

TDs lead very busy lives. They work very hard in Dáil Éireann and they also work very hard in their community. TDs give advice and help people in their community. They work with groups such as charities, youth groups, and local sports clubs to improve things for everybody in the community.

TDs spend a lot of time dealing with special interest organisations, such as charities, groups working in the developing world and environmental interest groups. They will ensure that the knowledge that these groups have is given a voice in Dáil Éireann.

TDs often appear in the media, giving their point of view on important issues. They will also spend time developing new ideas and policies on issues that they are interested in.

**QUICK QUIZ: TAOISEACH IS AN IRISH WORD. WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN ENGLISH? WHAT IS A MINISTER IN CHARGE OF? WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN FOR SPENDING MONEY CALLED? IF YOU WERE A TD, WHAT NEW LAW WOULD YOU PROPOSE?**

**DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR LOCAL TDs ARE? IF NOT USE THE OIREACTHAS WEBSITE WWW.OIREACTHAS.IE TO FIND OUT!**



**THE CEANN COMHAIRLE**

Following a general election the first thing that TDs do is elect a Ceann Comhairle. Ceann Comhairle is an Irish word and it means head of council.

The role of the Ceann Comhairle is to make sure the rules of Dáil Éireann are followed. It's a bit like being a referee!

Like a referee the Ceann Comhairle has to be independent and fair. He or she doesn't favour any political party.

The main duties of the Ceann Comhairle are:

- » Ensuring debates take place in an orderly manner
- » Calling on disruptive TDs to leave the Dáil
- » Declaring the result of votes
- » Calling on TDs to speak
- » Selecting matters of importance to be discussed

As well as ensuring that all the business in the Dáil happens according to the rules, the Ceann Comhairle has a number of other important jobs. The Ceann Comhairle is the chairperson of a Committee that examines the rules of the Dáil and proposes any changes to the rules. The Ceann Comhairle is also a member of the Council of State. The President sometimes calls on the Council of State for its advice.

The Ceann Comhairle represents Dáil Éireann at important national and international conferences.

**SEANAD ÉIREANN**

Seanad Éireann looks at the decisions that Dáil Éireann makes and can ask Dáil Éireann to take on board the changes that it suggests.

There are 60 Senators in Seanad Éireann and they are elected in different ways.

43 Senators are elected by County Councillors, TDs and outgoing Senators.

11 Senators are appointed by the Taoiseach.

6 Senators are elected by people who have graduated from universities.

Every time Dáil Éireann agrees that a new law should be introduced the Seanad then looks at the proposal. If the majority of Senators want to change part of the law then Dáil Éireann has to look at the issue again.

Senators can also bring forward their own proposals for new laws or new ideas. Like Dáil Éireann there is time set aside in Seanad Éireann each week so that these issues can be discussed and debated.

Every morning when it is in session, Senators will discuss what business they will do that day. Like Dáil Éireann this debate is called the 'Order of Business'. During the debate Senators will suggest that they have a discussion about an issue. This ensures that Seanad Éireann can discuss issues that affect the daily lives of you and your family.

Senators have a very busy schedule. Like TDs they spend a lot of time talking to groups that have a strong interest in an issue such as homelessness or human rights to ensure that their opinions are heard.

Senators often appear on TV, radio or in the newspapers giving their opinions on important issues.

**CATHAOIRLEACH**

The Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann has an important job. Just like the Ceann Comhairle he or she ensures that the rules of Seanad Éireann are followed.

The Cathaoirleach is elected by the members of Seanad Éireann when they meet after the election.

The Cathaoirleach is independent and fair and doesn't favour one side or the other during a debate.

The main duties of the Cathaoirleach are:

- » Ensuring debates take place in an orderly manner
- » Calling on disruptive Senators to leave the Seanad
- » Declaring the result of votes
- » Calling on Senators to speak

The Cathaoirleach also sits on a committee that examines the rules of Seanad Éireann and suggests changes to those rules. Like the Ceann Comhairle, the Cathaoirleach is also a member of the Council of State.



**QUICK QUIZ: CEANN COMHAIRLE IS AN IRISH WORD. WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN ENGLISH? NAME TWO IMPORTANT DUTIES OF THE CEANN COMHAIRLE IN DÁIL ÉIREANN?**

**WANT TO KNOW MORE? WHY NOT DO AN INTERNET SEARCH ON THE WORD 'CEANN COMHAIRLE'? CAN YOU FIND OUT THE NAME OF THE CURRENT CEANN COMHAIRLE?**

**DID YOU KNOW? ONE OF THE FIRST EVER HOT AIR BALLOON FLIGHTS IN IRELAND TOOK OFF FROM THE GROUNDS OF LEINSTER HOUSE IN 1783!**



**QUICK QUIZ: WHICH FAMILY BUILT LEINSTER HOUSE? IN WHAT YEAR DID THE OIREACTHAS BEGIN USING LEINSTER HOUSE?**

**WANT TO KNOW MORE? CHECK OUT WWW.OIREACTHAS.IE THE WEBSITE OF THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS. IT'S GOT LOTS MORE INFO ABOUT LEINSTER HOUSE AND WHAT YOU'LL SEE THERE.**

**THERE ARE 60 SENATORS IN SEANAD ÉIREANN**



**QUICK QUIZ: HOW MANY SENATORS SIT IN SEANAD ÉIREANN? HOW MANY SENATORS SIT IN SEANAD ÉIREANN? WHO APPOINTS 11 PEOPLE TO SEANAD ÉIREANN? WHO MAKES SURE THE RULES OF SEANAD ÉIREANN ARE FOLLOWED? WHO ELECTS THE CATHAOIRLEACH?**