



**TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS**

**AN COMHCHOISTE UM DHLÍ AGUS CEART,  
COMHIONANNAS, COSAINT AGUS CEARTA NA mBAN**

**An Dara Tuarascáil**

**Rannpháirtíocht na mBan i gCúrsaí Polaitíochta**

**Deireadh Fómhair 2009**

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**HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS**

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, EQUALITY DEFENCE AND  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

**Second Report**

**Women's Participation in Politics**

**October 2009**

**(PRN. A9/1468)**





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## **Foreword by the Chairman, Brendan Kenneally T.D.**

The Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights has a wide-ranging remit covering many issues affecting all the citizens of Ireland.

Pursuant to its Orders of Reference, the Joint Committee, on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009, agreed to establish a sub-Committee called the "sub-Committee on Women's participation in Politics".

The sub-Committee's main objective was to examine the challenges facing women who wish to pursue a career in politics at local, national and European levels.

With this aim in mind the sub-Committee set about its task by inviting former female politicians to make a presentation before the sub-Committee detailing their personal experiences before, during and after their time in politics.

The sub-Committee also heard evidence from leading academic, Professor Yvonne Galligan who has carried out a number of detailed studies on the role of women in politics.

The sub-Committee met in public on 24<sup>th</sup> June and 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009 and following consideration of the evidence presented to the sub-Committee, this report, formally agreed by the Joint Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2009, contains details of subsequent findings and, more importantly, its recommendations to address this anomaly.

I would like to thank Ms Liz O'Donnell, Ms Gemma Hussey and Ms Niamh Bhreathnach for their contributions to the sub-Committee.

I would also like to thank all the members of the sub-Committee for their participation and in particular Senator Ivana Bacik who acted as Rapporteur.



Brendan Kenneally T.D.  
Chairman

October 2009



## **Recommendation of the Joint Committee**

The Joint Committee supports the recommendations in the Rapporteur Report.

28<sup>th</sup> October 2009



# Appendix A

## Members of the Joint Committee

### **Deputies:**

Thomas Byrne (FF)  
Niall Collins (FF)  
Sean Connick (FF) (Government Convenor)  
Jimmy Deenihan (FG)  
Charlie Flanagan (FG)  
Brendan Kenneally (FF) (Chairman)  
Dinny McGinley (FG) (Vice-Chairman)  
Michael Mulcahy (FF)  
Denis Naughten (FG)  
Darragh O'Brien (FF)  
Brian O'Shea (LAB) (Opposition Convenor)  
Pat Rabbitte (LAB)  
Noel Treacy (FF)

### **Senators:**

Ivana Bacik (IND)  
Lisa McDonald (FF)  
Denis O'Donovan (FF)  
Eugene Regan (FG)



## Appendix B

### Orders of Reference

**Dáil Éireann on 23 October 2007 (and 25 October 2007\*) ordered:**

“(1) (a) That a Select Committee, which shall be called the Select Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights consisting of 13 members of Dáil Éireann (of whom 4 shall constitute a quorum), be appointed to consider -

- (i) such Bills the statute law in respect of which is dealt with by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Defence;
- (ii) such Estimates for Public Services within the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Defence;
- (iii) such proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 159, concerning the approval by Dáil Éireann of the terms of international agreements involving a charge on public funds; and
- (iv) such other matters

as shall be referred to it by Dáil Éireann from time to time;

- (v) Annual Output Statements produced by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Defence; and
- (vi) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted and commissioned by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Defence as it may select.

(b) For the purpose of its consideration of matters under paragraphs (1)(a)(i), (iii), (iv), (v) and (vi), the Select Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 83(1), (2) and (3).

(c) For the avoidance of doubt, by virtue of his or her *ex officio* membership of the Select Committee in accordance with Standing Order 92(1), the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Defence (or a Minister or Minister of State nominated in his or her stead) shall be entitled to vote.

(2) The Select Committee shall be joined with a Select Committee to be appointed by Seanad Éireann to form the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights to consider -

- (i) such public affairs administered by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Defence as it may select, including, in respect of Government policy, bodies under the aegis of those Departments;
- (ii) such matters of policy, including EU related matters, for which the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Defence are officially responsible as it may select;
- (iii) such matters across Departments which come within the remit of the Minister of State with special responsibility for Integration Policy as it may select;

Provided that members of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Joint Committee on Education and Science shall be afforded the opportunity to participate in the consideration of matters within this remit;

- (iv) such matters across Departments relating to women's rights as it may select;
- (v) such related policy issues as it may select concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by Members of the Government or by the Oireachtas;
- (vi) such Statutory Instruments made by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Defence and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas as it may select;
- (vii) such proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues as may be referred to it from time to time, in accordance with Standing Order 83(4);
- (viii) the strategy statement laid before each House of the Oireachtas by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Defence pursuant to section 5(2) of the Public Service Management Act 1997, and for which the Joint Committee is authorised for the purposes of section 10 of that Act;
- (ix) such annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of bodies specified in paragraphs 2(i) and (v), and the overall operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of these bodies, as it may select;

Provided that the Joint Committee shall not, at any time,

consider any matter relating to such a body which is, which has been, or which is, at that time, proposed to be considered by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to the Orders of Reference of that Committee and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993;

Provided further that the Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session, or publishing confidential information regarding, any such matter if so requested either by the body concerned or by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform or the Minister for Defence; and

- (x) such other matters as may be jointly referred to it from time to time by both Houses of the Oireachtas,

and shall report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

- (3) The Joint Committee shall have the power to require that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform or the Minister for Defence (or a Minister or Minister of State nominated in their stead) shall attend before the Joint Committee and provide, in private session if so desired by the Minister or Minister of State, oral briefings in advance of EU Council meetings to enable the Joint Committee to make known its views.
- (4) The quorum of the Joint Committee shall be five, of whom at least one shall be a member of Dáil Éireann and one a member of Seanad Éireann.
- (5) The Joint Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 83(1) to (9) inclusive.
- (6) The Chairman of the Joint Committee, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be Chairman of the Select Committee.”

**Seanad Éireann on 24 October 2007 ordered:**

“(1) That a Select Committee consisting of 4 members of Seanad Éireann shall be appointed to be joined with a Select Committee of Dáil Éireann to form the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights to consider –

- (i) such public affairs administered by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Defence as it may select, including, in respect of Government policy, bodies under the aegis of those Departments;
- (x) such matters of policy, including EU related matters, for which the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Defence are officially responsible as it may select;

- (xi) such matters across Departments which come within the remit of the Minister of State with special responsibility for Integration Policy as it may select;

Provided that members of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Joint Committee on Education and Science shall be afforded the opportunity to participate in the consideration of matters with this remit;

- (xii) such matters across Departments relating to women's rights as it may select;
- (xiii) such related policy issues as it may select concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by Members of the Government or by the Oireachtas;
- (xiv) such Statutory Instruments made by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Defence and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas as it may select;
- (xv) such proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues as may be referred to it from time to time, in accordance with Standing Order 70(4);
- (xvi) the strategy statement laid before each House of the Oireachtas by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Defence pursuant to section 5(2) of the Public Service Management Act, 1997, and for which the Joint Committee is authorised for the purposes of section 10 of that Act;
- (xvii) such annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of bodies specified in paragraphs 1(i) and (v), and the overall operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of these bodies, as it may select;

Provided that the Joint Committee shall not, at any time, consider any matter relating to such a body which is, which has been, or which is, at that time, proposed to be considered by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to the Orders of Reference of that Committee and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act, 1993;

Provided further that the Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session, or publishing confidential information regarding, any such matter if so requested either by the body or by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform or the Minister for Defence; and

(viii) such other matters as may be jointly referred to it from time to time by both Houses of the Oireachtas,

and shall report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

- (2) The Joint Committee shall have the power to require that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform or the Minister for Defence (or a Minister or Minister of State nominated in their stead) shall attend before the Joint Committee and provide, in private session if so desired by the Minister or Minister of State, oral briefings in advance of EU Council meetings to enable the Joint Committee to make known its views.
- (3) The quorum of the Joint Committee shall be five, of whom at least one shall be a member of Dáil Éireann and one a member of Seanad Éireann.
- (4) The Joint Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 70(1) to (9) inclusive.
- (5) The Chairman of the Joint Committee shall be a member of Dáil Éireann.”



# **Appendix C**

## **Women's Participation in Politics**

**(Rapporteur Report of Senator Ivana Bacik)**



## **Sub-Committee on Women's Participation in Politics**

### **Report**

#### **Background**

At a meeting of the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009, it was agreed at the initiative of Senator Ivana Bacik to establish a sub-Committee on Women's Participation in Politics, to be chaired by Deputy Brendan Kenneally, to report within a six-month period.

#### **Orders of Reference:**

That a sub-Committee (to be called the sub-Committee on Women's participation in Politics) be established pursuant to Standing Order 83(3) to:

1. analyse the challenges facing women in relation to entry into politics at local, national and European levels;
2. examine potential initiatives which may encourage more women to consider a career in politics;
3. consider whether a policy of 'positive discrimination' which has been successfully used in other European countries, could be adopted in Ireland;
4. make recommendations to enhance the role of women already active in the political arena;

and shall report thereon to the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights by 31 October 2009.

#### **Composition of Sub-Committee:**

Deputy Brendan Kenneally (Chair), Sean Connick TD, Noel Treacy TD, Jimmy Deenihan TD, Brian O'Shea TD, Senator Lisa McDonald, Senator Ivana Bacik (Rapporteur).

#### **Sub-Committee Meetings:**

The sub-Committee held two public meetings; 24<sup>th</sup> June and 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

#### **Draft Report:**

This draft report is submitted for the consideration of the sub-Committee at its next meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009, prior to consideration by the Joint Committee at a meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

#### **Ivana Bacik**

**(Rapporteur)**



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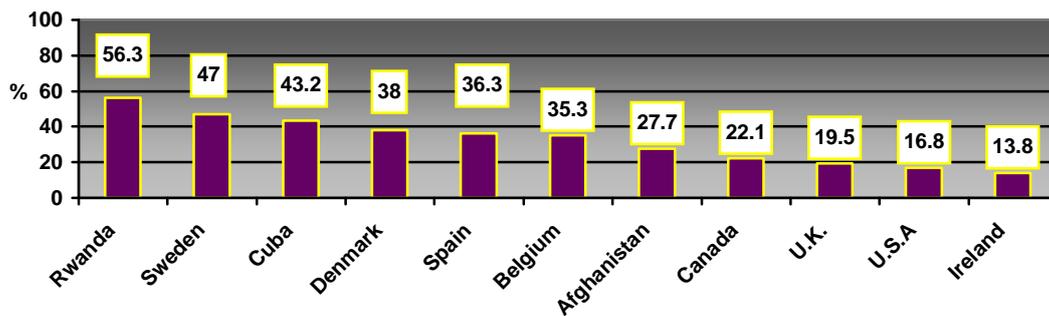
# 1. INTRODUCTION – WOMEN IN IRISH POLITICS

## 1.1 General Elections

Women account for half of the Irish population, yet the proportion of women TDs has never exceeded 14 per cent. To put it another way, the Dáil has always been at least 86% male.

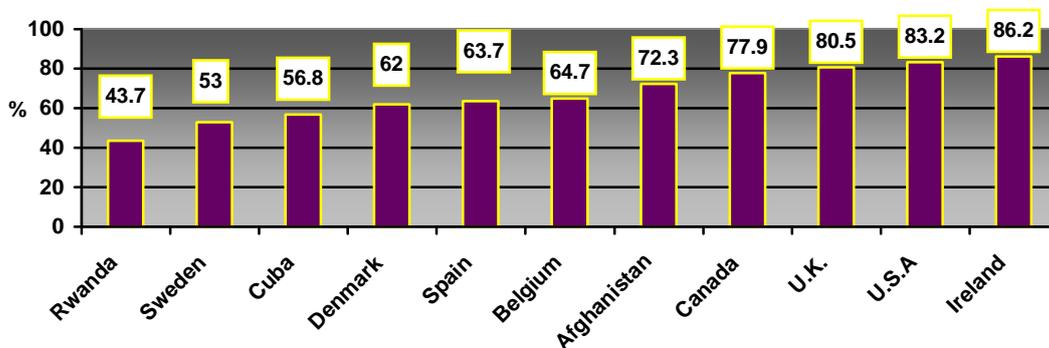
Since 1990, when Mary Robinson was elected as Ireland’s first woman President, Ireland’s rate of women’s political representation has reduced drastically. In 1990, Ireland was in 37<sup>th</sup> position in the world classification of women’s representation in the lower or single house of national parliaments.

However, by October 2009 Ireland had fallen to 84<sup>th</sup> position, with 23 women TDs out of 166 (13.8%); ranked equally with Djibouti in East Africa (*www.ipu.org*). This is well below both the world average and the internationally recommended figure of 30% (a critical mass of women politicians). Compared to the percentage of women in other national parliaments, Ireland performs very poorly indeed:



**Figure 1: Percentage of Women in Select National Parliaments Worldwide 2009.**  
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org/praline](http://www.ipu.org/praline)); reviewed on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

Represented in another way, the Dáil has one of the highest proportions of male politicians in any national parliament in the world:



**Figure 2: Percentage of Men in Select National Parliaments Worldwide 2009.**  
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org/praline](http://www.ipu.org/praline)); reviewed on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

## **1.2 Local and European Elections**

At local level, the picture is no better. Women's representation on councils has been consistently low over many decades, reaching a very modest 15% only in 1999. At the 2004 local elections, women filled 152 county and city council seats, amounting to only 17% of councillors.<sup>1</sup> Following the 2009 local elections, the position has actually worsened, with women constituting only 16% of councillors elected; and men representing 84% of councillors.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in those elections, two county councils, Clare and Wicklow, and Waterford City Council returned just one woman each; out of 32 seats in Clare, 24 in Wicklow and 15 at Waterford City Council.<sup>3</sup>

The National Women's Council (NWCI) conducted a survey of women candidates in the 2009 local elections, finding that women had had very negative experiences, including bullying, intimidation and offensive comments from members of the public; and paternalistic attitudes within political parties. Over 80% of the candidates surveyed agreed that a critical mass of women is needed in politics to overcome these problems, and in launching the survey the NWCI recommended that legislation be adopted to compel political parties to put forward greater numbers of women candidates at the next general election.<sup>4</sup>

Following the 2009 European elections, Ireland has three women out of a total of 12 MEPs, representing 25%. Again, this represents a reduction from the 2004 elections, when five women were elected out of 13 MEPs (38%).

## **1.3 Reasons for Increasing Women's Political Representation**

### **1.3.1 A more representative democracy**

Women make up more than half of the population and electorate in most countries, yet continue to be seriously under-represented in political and public decision-making. Because of this, individual governments and political parties have increasingly become committed to achieving the goal of 'parity democracy' (equal representation of women and men).

It is universally acknowledged that balanced participation by women and men in political decision-making leads to more truly representative and effective democracies; and better and more efficient policy making. As former TD Gemma Hussey stated at the sub-Committee, "women bring different life experiences, priorities, knowledge and a different style of decision-making." (24/06/09 – p532). Similarly, former TD Liz O'Donnell commented that unless more women enter politics, "It will come to a point where decisions taken, from which women are absent in large numbers, will lack credibility in a democracy." (24/06/09 – p540).

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Environment 2005, p.217.

<sup>2</sup> National Women's Council of Ireland, 'How Can we Increase Women's Participation in Politics?', July 2009, at [www.nwci.ie](http://www.nwci.ie).

<sup>3</sup> *Irish Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

<sup>4</sup> National Women's Council of Ireland, 'How Can we Increase Women's Participation in Politics?', July 2009, at [www.nwci.ie](http://www.nwci.ie).

Indeed, she remarked that in Ireland, “our democracy is unfinished” because so few women participate in politics.

This view is shared by the UN Committee established under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which has asserted that:

“the concept of democracy will have real and dynamic meaning and lasting effect only when political decision-making is shared by women and men and takes equal account of the interests of both.”<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3.2 Advantages for Political Parties**

In individual political parties, the advantages of taking positive steps to increase women’s participation are obvious – among them the possibility of increasing the pool of talented candidates; and of increasing the party’s national vote share.

### **1.3.3 Public Support**

The need to increase the numbers of women in politics is generally recognised in Ireland. In the Irish National Election Study of 2007, two-thirds of the public said they wanted to see more women in politics. Other surveys have made the same point, including the EuroBarometer survey of women and the European elections. The National Women’s Strategy 2007-16 includes an objective to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in Ireland.

### **1.3.4 Increased Choice for Voters**

In any democracy, voters should have a balanced choice of candidates. But in many Irish constituencies at election time, no women candidates are fielded by the leading political parties, leading to reduced or restricted voter choice.

In the 2007 General Election, women constituted less than 20% of candidates overall.

Indeed, as Professor Yvonne Galligan stated at the sub-Committee, at least 60% of constituencies had no women candidates from either of the two largest political parties at that election. Fianna Fáil fielded no women candidates in 28 constituencies; and Fine Gael presented no women candidates in 30 constituencies, meaning that:

“In these cases voters had no gender choice; there may have been a geographical or social choice but there was no gender choice available.”  
(09/09/09 – p557)

In fact, in nearly 12% of all Dáil constituencies in 2007, an all-male ticket was presented to voters; in five constituencies out of the total of 43, no women candidates stood, even as independents.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation no. 23 (1997), at para 14.

<sup>6</sup> The five constituencies were: Cork South West, Dublin North East, Limerick West, Meath West and Roscommon/Leitrim South.

### 1.3.5 International Obligations

Under international law, states are obliged to ensure equal participation of men and women in political and public decision-making.

In particular, the Council of Europe has adopted a Recommendation urging European states to ensure a more balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making. The Council has advised governments to adopt special measures, including positive action measures and legislative reforms, to advance women's participation (Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)3).

The European Commission's Road Map for equality 2006-10 made promotion of equal representation between men and women in decision making a priority.

The Irish government has made commitments to improve the numbers of women in decision-making by signing up to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). One of the main objectives of the Beijing Platform was "women's equal access to and full participation in power-structures and decision making".

Ireland has been criticised for some years by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for the low representation of women in elected office. In 1999 and again in 2005, the Committee recommended that the Irish government should adopt temporary special measures such as quotas to increase the numbers of women in public office.<sup>7</sup>

These temporary special measures are expressly permitted in Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which states that:

"Temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination..."

In 2005, the UN CEDAW Committee also recommended that "research be carried out under the aegis of a parliamentary committee into the root causes of the lack of progress in this area."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See: Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee: Ireland Report (1999), para 190; Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee: Ireland Report (2005), para 33.

<sup>8</sup> Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee: Ireland Report (2005), para 33.

## **2. COMMITTEE ORDER OF REFERENCE 1: Challenges facing women in relation to entry into politics at local, national and European levels**

### **2.1 Experience of Former Women TDs**

Former women TDs Niamh Bhreathnach, Gemma Hussey and Liz O'Donnell spoke at the sub-Committee meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009 and outlined the obstacles that, in their experience, faced women in politics.

These were, in summary:

- A legacy of conservative and traditional gender stereotypes
- Women tend to lack confidence compared to their male counterparts
- Women are more likely to lack the finance and the networks necessary to run an election campaign
- The political culture in Ireland in the main is tailored for men
- The political culture is not family friendly and participation in political life can be particularly difficult for mothers of young children
- Women are less likely than men to succeed in the political party candidate selection process
- No sanctions are imposed on political parties which fail to ensure equal opportunities for women
- The electoral system poses particular obstacles for women candidates

### **2.2 International Research on Challenges for Women: the 'Five C's'**

International research shows that the same or similar challenges face women in to entry into politics throughout the world, summarised as follows:

- *Childcare* – women are more likely to have this responsibility
- *Cash* – women have less access to resources than men
- *Confidence* – women are less likely to go forward for selection
- *Culture* – a gendered culture is prevalent even within left-wing parties
- *Candidate selection procedures* – the processes by which political parties select candidates has been identified as posing a significant obstacle to women's political participation

These five key challenges (the 'Five C's') will be examined in turn.

#### **2.2.1 Childcare**

Women are still presumed to bear the primary responsibility for childcare in Irish society, yet political systems traditionally have not been constructed to facilitate those with caring responsibilities.

At the sub-Committee, Niamh Bhreathnach commented in this regard that:

“Women in Ireland have what we call a ‘triple burden’. They have the burden of education, career and family. Now we want to add the burden of politics to that” (24/06/09 – p540).

Clearly, the reform of political structures to accommodate the caring or family responsibilities of women politicians would also facilitate male politicians with such responsibilities.

Professor Galligan explained at the sub-Committee that the Scottish Parliament reorganised parliamentary rules and times of sittings “to reflect the fact that political women and men were more than just political representatives, that they have family lives as well” (09/09/09 – p561).

Jimmy Deenihan TD suggested that the use of technology, and the availability of video-conferencing and distance voting facilities in particular, might be considered as a means of dealing in part with the issue (24/06/09 – p546). This suggestion was met with general interest and approval.

The National Women’s Council has argued that:

“...one of the principal barriers to a career in politics is the absence of childcare supports. Many decades of Government inaction have led to the development of a childcare crisis which restricts women’s opportunities to .. engage in time-demanding career choices such as that of politics...The absence of adequate family-friendly policies makes it almost impossible for parents of young children, particularly women who bear the more considerable caring role, to enter a career which is demanding, insecure and where the hours are not family-friendly.”<sup>9</sup>

Although there is now a crèche in the Oireachtas, the structures of sitting days and meeting times, both at Dáil and local council level, have not been reformed to accommodate the caring responsibilities of politicians.

In their research into the experiences of women politicians, Knight and Galligan found that “the long hours culture of parliamentary politics has repeatedly been identified by women legislators as a disincentive to women’s political participation.”<sup>10</sup> They concluded that

“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

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<sup>9</sup> National Women’s Council of Ireland, *Irish Politics: Jobs for the Boys!* (Dublin; 2002), p22.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Knight, Yvonne Galligan, & Una Nic Giolla Choille, “Equalizing Opportunities for Women in Electoral Politics in Ireland: The Views of Women Members of Parliament”, in *Women and Politics* (Vol. 26(1) 2004; pp1-20), p3.

earlier, reserving Monday as a ‘family day,’ and increasing the number of ‘committee only’ days.”<sup>11</sup>

Although statutory maternity leave is not available to women members of the Oireachtas since they are not employees, women TDs or Senators who give birth in office should be entitled to automatic pairing arrangements.

### 2.2.2 Cash

Lack of finance poses a substantial impediment to women seeking to participate in political life. In particular, the costs associated with running a political campaign can adversely affect women, who tend to have less access to financial resources than men. For example, women in Ireland currently earn 22% less than their male counterparts<sup>12</sup>.

Because women also bear greater childcare responsibilities (often keeping them out of the workplace for extended periods), they are less likely to have access to the resources associated with funding access to political life.

In her submission to the sub-Committee, former TD Liz O’ Donnell emphasised this issue, stating that:

“Many women lack the finance and the networks which would allow them to raise money to fund their election campaigns. That is where the parties must step in and assist. If they were really serious about getting more women to participate in their parties and run for election under their party flag, they must help them to fund raise and facilitate and mentor them in overcoming obstacles... Women have networks but men have different networks, particularly economic networks, which are much more favourable in terms of men’s participation” (24/06/09 – p537).

Professor Yvonne Galligan reiterated this concern. From her own research, and meetings with women from all political parties, “the issue of how they finance political campaigns has come up repeatedly”. She continued:

“This obviously is a bigger question for women than for men because it often brings into play the personal aspect of politics in addition to the more public aspects, particularly when women may not have independent incomes from employment in their own right... Political parties must address the issue of financing women’s political campaigns in a particular manner. Moreover, they must explore these questions with female candidates because their financial needs often extend beyond the issue of election literature. They may extend to support for housekeeping or family care services and similar issues that male candidates often are not obliged to address” (09/09/09 – p556).

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<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Knight, Yvonne Galligan, & Una Nic Giolla Choille, “Equalizing Opportunities for Women in Electoral Politics in Ireland: The Views of Women Members of Parliament”, in *Women and Politics* (Vol. 26(1) 2004; pp1-20), pp14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Seamus McGuinness, Elish Kelly, Tim Callan, & Philip J. O’Connell, *The Gender Wage Gap in Ireland* (The Equality Authority, Ireland; 2009).

In a recent study examining the views of women members of the Oireachtas, Knight and Galligan found that certain measures aimed at addressing the difficulty for women candidates in accessing finance gained cross-party support:

“Seventy percent of women representatives to the Oireachtas supported the establishment of a foundation, such as EMILY’s list, to finance women’s electoral campaigns. Sixty-three per cent of them favoured a proposal to provide earmarked state funding for women candidates until a certain target of representation was reached... Sixty-two percent of our respondents favoured a legal requirement that the parties allocate campaign funding proportionately to women candidates. Fifty-nine percent believed that parties should voluntarily provide additional funds to support women candidates.”<sup>13</sup>

EMILY’s List is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in the US, which raises money from private funders to support women running for politics. The name is an acronym for “Early Money is Like Yeast” (it makes the dough rise).<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2.3 Confidence

Women tend to lack sufficient confidence to participate as actively as men in political life generally, and in particular to lack the confidence to put themselves forward for selection in political parties. As Professor Yvonne Galligan explained:

“This is more than just being shy about speaking in public. It is a consequence of women being less connected with politics than men in the first instance and so being less familiar with the world of politics. They see politics as a tough, confrontational arena and do not feel comfortable taking part in the power struggles that constitute political life” (09/09/09 – p552).

Liz O’Donnell suggested one way in which this could be addressed:

“...Politics is a daunting, frightening sort of theatre. When one does not come from a political background one cannot imagine being successful there unless one who, in a benign way, is mentoring and encouraging and giving a little support. The mentoring issue within political parties is extremely important. All parties should have in place mentors to encourage younger women, who perhaps are involved in the organisation but do not have quite yet the confidence to cross that bridge into public life. A little encouragement goes a long way.” (24/06/09 – p543)

The suggestion that good mentoring practices are an advantage to women when they seek to enter political life was generally accepted at the sub-Committee hearings.

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<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Knight, Yvonne Galligan, & Una Nic Giolla Choille, “Equalizing Opportunities for Women in Electoral Politics in Ireland: The Views of Women Members of Parliament”, in *Women and Politics* (Vol. 26(1) 2004; pp1-20), p10.

<sup>14</sup> See [www.emilyslist.org](http://www.emilyslist.org)

Former women members recalled that they had been encouraged to become politically active in a number of ways and for different reasons, including:

- their membership of networks like the Women’s Political Association;
- receiving direct requests to join from acting politicians;
- strong pro-equality policies adopted by particular political parties

Liz O’Donnell simply stated that. “I joined a party in which there was space for me” (24/06/09 – p533).

International research emphasises that female role models already active in politics can particularly encourage women to join political parties or stand for nomination:

“Women politicians serve as role models, and the heightened presence of women in parliament is an important form of recognition of the equal status of women. The visible presence of women in public life might raise female aspirations, induce other women to engage in politics and contribute to the broadening of career and life choices for women.”<sup>15</sup>

In an Irish context, Knight and Galligan referred to initiatives taken at other times to ensure support for women in politics, such as the cross-party women politicians’ network ‘Club 84’, which was started in 1984 to support the election of more women candidates. In their research, they noted that “Nearly three quarters of women parliamentarians support the revitalisation of such efforts.”<sup>16</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Culture**

During the sub-Committee meetings, members of the Oireachtas made numerous references to the issue of “culture” as a barrier to women’s participation in political life. Although women no longer face overt discrimination in entry to politics, the political culture itself is a harder barrier to tackle.

At the sub-Committee, Professor Galligan emphasised how the culture within political parties can obstruct women’s progress:

“As parties are mainly led and run by men, the culture of behaviour and the informally accepted norms of language, views and expressions can mean that parties are uncomfortable places for women to be. Party networks too are often more at the disposal of aspiring men than women, and networks of influence and economic support are important elements in securing a nomination to run and in financing a campaign.” (09/09/09 – p552).

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<sup>15</sup> Anne Peters & Stefan Suter, “Representation, Discrimination, and Democracy: A Legal Assessment of Gender Quotas in Politics” (pp174-200), in McClain & Grossman (Eds.) *Gender Equality: Dimensions of Women’s Equal Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press; 2009), p194.

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Knight, Yvonne Galligan, & Una Nic Giolla Choille, “Equalizing Opportunities for Women in Electoral Politics in Ireland: The Views of Women Members of Parliament”, in *Women and Politics* (Vol. 26(1) 2004; pp1-20), p12.

For example, political meetings are often held in pubs, a sphere from which women may traditionally have felt excluded; or else they are held at times that are not suitable for women with childcare responsibilities.

In her submission, Niamh Bhreathnach recalled that one branch in her constituency had no women members, because “The branch used to meet in a pub at noon on a Sunday which was not quite conducive to women attending” (24/06/09 – p547).

Referring to this issue, Professor Galligan said that:

“If a constituency meeting or a political meeting is being held in a room above a pub, for instance, ..that is not often a place where political women will feel comfortable in going, and often if a political woman appears at a meeting on her own for the purposes of engaging in that discussion, people might also find comments that question her motivation for being there in the first place. These subtle expressions that question a woman’s right to engage in a political environment in her own right are signals which women pick up on and which come from the culture of that political party in terms of how it perceives women and women’s status in their party and in society.”(09/09/09 – p563).

In their research, Knight and Galligan linked the issue of childcare to the cultural barriers that women face:

“The fact that childcare is identified as an important barrier to women’s advancement is indicative of the weight of traditional cultural attitudes in Ireland, even among women who have managed to get elected to the highest legislative office. It suggests that in Ireland, as elsewhere, ‘culture continues to be a significant influence on proportion of women parliamentarians, even with the introduction of prior structural and institutional controls.’”<sup>17</sup>

This illustrates a wider cultural barrier for women in politics, whereby childcare tends to be seen as a woman’s responsibility rather than a male responsibility. This is unlikely to change until fathers are given greater recognition in the workplace; and until paternity leave is introduced separately and alongside maternity leave.

But attitudes to childcare do not represent the only cultural barrier facing women. As Peters and Suter conclude, “the overall masculine image of politics” remains powerful, and this can mean both that women do not see themselves as politicians; and that voters also assume that the stereotypical “politician” must be a man.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kathleen Knight, Yvonne Galligan, & Una Nic Giolla Choille, “Equalizing Opportunities for Women in Electoral Politics in Ireland: The Views of Women Members of Parliament”, in *Women and Politics* (Vol. 26(1) 2004; pp1-20), p16.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Peters & Stefan Suter, “Representation, Discrimination, and Democracy: A Legal Assessment of Gender Quotas in Politics” (pp174-200), in McClain & Grossman (Eds.) *Gender Equality: Dimensions of Women’s Equal Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press; 2009), p183.

### 2.2.5 Candidate Selection Procedures

Political party selection procedures have been identified as the single most important obstacle to women's political participation.<sup>19</sup> This problem was also repeatedly mentioned at the sub-Committee hearings. Professor Yvonne Galligan suggested that the candidate selection process does not take seriously the need to increase the numbers of women selected:

“As we clearly see, this process [the candidate selection process] is not working to bring women forward in any significant numbers. Although all parties have made efforts to attract more women to run, the result is less positive than everyone would wish. Therefore it is incumbent on us to address closely how the proportion of women candidates can be increased.” (09/09/09 – p552).

As Liz O' Donnell pointed out:

“When women are elected to this House they tend to be very successful and take leadership roles in their parties. They generally do well in politics and rise to the top once elected. The big stumbling block is the nomination process and getting off the starting blocks to start a political career..” (24/06/09 – p549).

In a 2009 report on women in European politics, the European Commission for Democracy through Law confirmed this, commenting that:

“In general, political parties play a prominent role for balancing gender representation in parliament since they nominate the candidates for elections. The nomination process is the most critical one for women's access to parliament.”<sup>20</sup>

Dahlerup and Friedenvall say that the nomination process is highly secretive, so that:

“most often voters have very little knowledge of how the candidates they choose between have emerged. Although voters may be able to choose candidates, they do so only after political parties have limited the options. Thus, parties are the real gatekeepers to public decision-making bodies.”<sup>21</sup>

As Professor Yvonne Galligan has pointed out, “candidate selection is aptly described as the ‘secret garden’ of politics, and this garden is highly male-dominated.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Yvonne Galligan, ‘Women in Politics’ in Coakley & Gallagher (Eds.) *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* (Oxon: Routledge; 2005), p.289.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission for Democracy Through Law, *Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics* (Adopted by the Council for Democratic Election, Venice; 2009), para 124, p19.

<sup>21</sup> Drude Dahlerup & Lenita Friedenvall, *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and their Implementation in Europe* (European Parliament, Brussels; 2008), p17.

<sup>22</sup> Yvonne Galligan, “Bringing Women In: Global Strategies for Gender Parity in Political representation” (pp219-236) in *U.Md.L.J., Race, Religion, Gender and Class* (Vol. 6; 319), p332.

In examining the barriers facing women in politics in a 2009 report, the European Commission similarly identified the selection and nomination process as a key obstacle, stating that:

“Improving the gender balance in elected assemblies is not a question of getting more women to vote, it is more about having more women candidates and ensuring that the political parties give them a better chance of being elected. If political parties can commit to equal representation and at the same time there is concerted national and European action to promote a more rapid erosion of gender stereotypes and attitudes towards women in power, then there are real opportunities for change.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> European Commission, *Women in European Politics – time for action* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities; 2009), p41.

### **3. COMMITTEE ORDER OF REFERENCE 2: Potential initiatives which may encourage more women to consider a career in politics**

#### **3.1 Initiatives Suggested at sub-Committee Hearings**

Having identified the main challenges facing women in entry to politics at all levels, a range of potential initiatives were suggested at the sub-Committee hearings:

- The education system should be used to encourage more women into politics through civic education programmes in secondary schools, for example
- Women should be encouraged to gain confidence through involvement in local issues and activism in local politics
- Political parties should assist women candidates with raising funds to run campaigns
- New technologies could be used to facilitate women (and men) who have family obligations to participate actively in political debates (eg through video conferencing)
- Moral obligations and political pressure should be placed on political parties to change their structures to make space for women
- Political parties should embark on recruitment drives for more women members, and ‘head-hunt’ prominent women as candidates
- Political parties should offer mentoring for women members and prospective candidates to help them gain confidence
- Legislation should be introduced, backed up by sanctions, for political parties to ensure that a certain proportion of women candidates emerge through their selection procedures (reference was made by former Deputy Niamh Bhreathnach to a recently introduced Labour Party Bill which would make provision for this)

#### **3.2 Types of Initiative Adopted in other Countries**

Various types of initiative have been successful in other countries in achieving increased levels of women’s participation:

**3.2.1 Awareness Raising Campaigns;** some countries have engaged in national awareness raising campaigns to try and promote greater numbers of women in politics. In Iceland in 1999, a public advertising campaign focused on challenging traditional presumptions about gender, and featured prominent members of the Icelandic parliament and party leaders in unexpected settings (such as a woman MP appearing to shave; and a male party leader trying on high heeled shoes). This campaign was well financed, was regarded as valuable in changing attitudes, and could easily be done in Ireland. In Portugal in 1994, the parliament opened specially for a day, and existing and former elected women representatives were invited to sit alongside an equal number of male representatives in a mock ‘gender parity’ parliament – creating a powerful visual image of how a parliament made up of half men and half women would look. This event was used by Senator Bacik as the model for the ‘Oireachtas Women’ event held in the Dáil to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the election of Constance Markievicz on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

- 3.2.2 Supports for Women through Mentoring, Training and Networking;** a comprehensive range of supportive measures is outlined in the Council of Ministers Recommendation 2003(3); they include leadership training programmes; support for women’s political networks; the creation of a ‘data bank’ of potential women candidates, to be developed either by a national women’s NGO or by the State (a useful example exists in Norway).
- 3.2.3 Voluntary Positive Action Measures (political party quotas);** under this model political parties introduce voluntary quotas to determine the percentage of women to be selected as election candidates. There are no sanctions if parties do not maintain quotas. Since no legislation is required, political parties in Ireland could institute this quickly. However, these voluntary party quotas have been particularly effective in List PR systems and might not operate so effectively in the Irish electoral system. They also require commitment from each political party, particularly the largest parties, in order to be effective. These measures are well established in Scandinavian countries.
- 3.2.4 Mandatory Outcome Measures (reserved seat quotas);** these are measures mandating that a certain number of seats in parliament be reserved for women. These “reserved seat” measures are applied in some African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries, for instance, but are not generally used in European countries and might be open to challenge under EU law. The European Commission has stated that candidature for election is not an employment relationship, and does not fall within the scope of EU employment equality laws. In the absence of any binding decision from the European Court of Justice on this issue, the question as to whether “reserved seats” for women in the Dáil or Seanad would breach EU laws remains open.<sup>24</sup> However, the European Commission for Democracy Through Law has recently stated that “Reserved seats for women are not considered as a viable and legitimate option in Europe.”<sup>25</sup>
- 3.2.5 Mandatory Opportunity Measures (electoral gender quotas);** these are laws requiring that a stated percentage of candidates nominated within political parties must be of each gender, backed up by a series of specified penalties. In Ireland new legislation would be required to implement this model, but it would not be problematic legally, as the electorate would make the final choice on the candidates presented before them. The rationale for such measures is that they compensate for existing obstacles to women’s access to politics, and they are usually introduced on a temporary basis, with a “sunset clause” inbuilt so that once the stated proportion of women is reached the law lapses. Laws providing for these “electoral gender quotas” are now in place across more than 100 states, particularly in Europe and Latin America. More than half of all Latin American states have now introduced such quotas.

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<sup>24</sup> See Meg Russell & Colm O’Cinneide, “Positive Action to Promote Women in Politics: some European comparisons” (2003) 52 *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 587, at p.607.

<sup>25</sup> European Commission for Democracy Through Law, *Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’s Representation in Politics* (Adopted by the Council for Democratic Election, Venice; 2009), para 120, p18.

In Europe, some of the best examples of states with these laws, reviewed below, are: France, Belgium, Portugal and Spain.

### 3.3 Electoral Gender Quotas (Candidate Quotas)

In her submission to the sub-Committee, Professor Yvonne Galligan emphasised the importance of these mandatory opportunity measures, or electoral gender quotas, in achieving change for women:

“Perhaps the most effective strategy to date has been that of gender quotas. The spread of quotas as an instrument for redressing the gender imbalance in parliaments has grown considerably since the signing of the UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. Today, quotas of various kinds can be found in more than 100 countries. In Europe, five countries have passed candidate quota legislation, binding on all parties, ranging from a 33% gender quota in Portugal to a 50% quota in France and Belgium, with Spain and Slovenia in between at 40% and 35% respectively. Their enactment has made a difference. In Spain, women’s representation in parliament has gone from 28% in 2000, before the passing of the quota law, to 36% in 2008. In Belgium, women members of parliament have increased from 12% in 1995 to 37% in 2007. In France, the application of the parity law to municipal elections increased women’s representation from 26% in 1995 to 49% in 2008.” (09/09/09; p.553).

This view on the effectiveness of quotas in the selection of candidates is confirmed by all the available research and by the widespread use of quotas in recent years – as Peters and Suter say, ‘Electoral gender quotas have recently boomed in democratic states.’<sup>26</sup>

In fact, the first gender quota in the world was a party quota introduced in Argentina in the 1950s by the Peronist Party for congressional elections; but since the 1980s in particular, voluntary party quotas and mandatory candidate quotas have been adopted in a wide range of states, notably in Latin America and in Europe.

The European Commission on Democracy Through Law has stated that:

“Besides the electoral system, the effective implementation of gender quotas is an institutional factor of paramount importance. Actually gender quotas provide one of the most notable powers for women’s parliamentary representation today. Not surprisingly, the Committee of Ministers recommends that [Council of Europe] member states should consider adopting legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at all levels....”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Anne Peters & Stefan Suter, “Representation, Discrimination, and Democracy: A Legal Assessment of Gender Quotas in Politics” (pp174-200), in McClain & Grossman (Eds.) *Gender Equality: Dimensions of Women’s Equal Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press; 2009), p199.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission for Democracy Through Law, *Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’s Representation in Politics* (Adopted by the Council for Democratic Election, Venice; 2009), para 8, p3.

In an examination of quotas in politics, Dahlerup has written that the introduction of quotas at the selection and nomination stage can begin a process within political parties in which the party leadership places more emphasis on trying to recruit a greater number of women candidates:

“Electoral gender quotas have been criticised for restricting the free choice of the voters. This discussion rests on a naïve perception of how the electoral system works in most countries. The voters can in most systems only choose the candidates that the political parties have selected. Because the political parties are the gatekeepers to political positions, it is not the freedom of the voters but rather the freedom of the party organisation to choose only men candidates that is being restricted by electoral gender quotas. Gender quotas give the voters a chance to choose women as their representatives, an opportunity that is especially significant in open list systems.”<sup>28</sup>

Peters and Suter have noted however that electoral quotas do not work on their own:

“Electoral quotas have barely increased the female presence in parliaments when introduced as a single measure. They only seem to work when accompanied by placement requirements, compliance incentives, strict enforcement, and complementary policies. Because in liberal parliamentary multiparty democracies, the political parties remain the most important actors to promote or impede women’s empowerment, the political will of party leadership remains decisive.”<sup>29</sup>

The EU Commission has similarly concluded that:

“Positive action in the form of electoral gender quotas can help bring about rapid change, but they are not a guarantee of success... The way in which political parties allocate candidates to winnable seats or distribute them on lists has a significant part to play in the limited success to date in electing more women from the available candidates. Some types of electoral system are more open to promoting favoured candidates than others and the result is that women candidates are too often left with a low chance of being elected.”<sup>30</sup>

### 3.4 Arguments for and against Electoral Gender Quotas<sup>31</sup>

#### *Arguments Against Quotas*

- Political representation is a question of merit – let the best candidate for the job win.

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<sup>28</sup> Drude Dahlerup, “Conclusion” (pp293-307), in Drude Dahlerup (Ed.) *Women, Quotas and Politics* (Routledge; 2006), p303.

<sup>29</sup> Anne Peters & Stefan Suter, “Representation, Discrimination, and Democracy: A Legal Assessment of Gender Quotas in Politics” (pp174-200), in McClain & Grossman (Eds.) *Gender Equality: Dimensions of Women’s Equal Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press; 2009), p199.

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, *Women in European Politics – time for action* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities; 2009), p7.

<sup>31</sup> Taken from: [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org) (accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009) and EU Parliament, *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and Their Implementation in Europe* (2008), p.18-19.

- Quotas are discriminatory, since one group of candidates will be favoured at the expense of better qualified candidates who are set aside. Thus, quotas represent reverse discrimination, where better qualified men will lose out in order to achieve a quota for women.
- Quotas are undemocratic, since voters should have the final say on who is to represent them.
- Many women do not want to be elected just because they are women. Quotas contribute to a suspicion that women have been promoted thanks to their sex rather than their talent.

#### *Arguments For Quotas*

- Quotas for women do not discriminate. Rather they compensate for existing barriers that hinder women from receiving their fair share of political seats, and they prevent further barriers and mechanisms of exclusion.
- Quotas for women do not discriminate against individual men. Rather quota rules limit the tendency of political parties to nominate mostly men, and compel them to seek out active and competent female candidates. For the voters, the opportunities are expanded, since it now becomes possible to vote for parties with women candidates.
- Quotas are a quick method for increasing the number of women elected. Introducing quotas thus accelerates the process and leads to major leaps in the number of women elected.
- Quotas, formal or informal, are already in use for other categories in nomination processes – such as geographical territories, trade union interests, occupation, age and so on.



**4. COMMITTEE ORDER OF REFERENCE 3:  
Whether a policy of ‘positive discrimination’ which has been  
successfully used in other European countries, could be adopted in  
Ireland**

**4.1 Voluntary or Mandatory Measures?**

A review of other European states shows that the most effective positive discrimination policies used are either the “voluntary political party quotas” or “mandatory electoral gender quotas” referred to above.

While the adoption of voluntary quotas has led to real improvements in women’s representation in Scandinavian countries, they can only be effective where the largest political parties are fully committed to them. By contrast, the advantage of the mandatory or legislated “electoral gender quota” is that it can be more effective in a shorter time frame, by ensuring that all parties must comply with the same principles.

Whether candidate quotas are adopted on a voluntary or mandatory basis, they are generally only on a temporary basis, with a built-in “sunset clause” providing that they will lapse once certain targets are met.

It has been suggested that different types of quotas may work better in some electoral systems than others. However, the European Commission for Democracy through Law recently reviewed the impact of electoral systems on women’s political representation, concluding that the vast majority of PR systems used in Europe do not disfavour women, although the best combination appears to be: PR list systems in large constituencies and/or a nationwide district, with a legal threshold, closed lists and a mandatory quota and effective sanctions for non-compliance.<sup>32</sup> The Commission recommended that gender quotas be adapted and modified to suit the particular conditions of each country; the type of electoral system is not definitive.

**4.2 Voluntary Measures**

Sweden is seen as a particularly strong example of an effective voluntary system of quotas, since it currently has the highest percentage of women in parliament in Europe and is positioned second in the world tables. In 1979, the Swedish political parties first joined together to demand gender equality in political life. All parties then introduced the famous 40-60 principle, meaning that they each had to nominate no fewer than 40% of either gender for all levels of election. In the mid-1990s the “sandwich” or “zipped” nominations lists were introduced, so that every second name on nomination lists is that of a woman.

In Sweden, the success of these voluntary measures has required a sustained commitment from each political party over a long period of time – three decades. If change is to be brought about within a shorter time frame in Ireland, legislation imposing mandatory measures seems the preferable option.

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<sup>32</sup> European Commission for Democracy Through Law, *Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’s Representation in Politics* (Adopted by the Council for Democratic Election, Venice; 2009), para 121, p18.

### 4.3 Mandatory Measures

It has been found that “the most effective form of candidate quotas with placement mandates and enforcement mechanisms exists in four European states: France, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain.”<sup>33</sup> All four of these have legislation providing for mandatory quotas within political parties.

In France, the French Parity Law, introduced in 2000, requires that 50% of election candidates to regional and general elections be of either gender. A system of financial sanctions is in place where political parties fail to comply, so that their level of public funding will be reduced accordingly. The law has had success in a short time frame in a country with traditionally low levels of female representation, and has made a particularly significant difference at local level, where women’s representation increased from 26% in 1995 to 49% in 2008.

The law was less effective at national level, where parties tended to place women lower than men on their national lists. However, a 2007 amendment introduced a “zipping mechanism” to ensure that women candidates would be placed at every second or third position on the list – the equivalent of providing for “winnable seats” in the Irish electoral system. Following this amendment, female representation in the French National Assembly rose from 12.3% in 2002 to 18.5% in the 2007 elections.

### 4.4 Case Study - Belgium

In 1994, the “Smet-Tobback law” was introduced in Belgium, aimed at increasing the proportion of women candidates at all political levels; communal (local), European Parliament, federal and regional elections. This law stipulated that no electoral lists would comprise more than two-thirds of candidates of the same sex, but that as a temporary measure, at least 25% of candidates would be female. This was followed by the 2002 gender quotas act, stating that female candidates would make up half of the positions on each party’s electoral list, including at least one out of two top positions. The 2002 quotas act was fully implemented for the first time in 2007 for elections to the Senate and House of Representatives and was applied to the European Parliament election 2009. If any party fails to comply, their list of candidates is rejected by the electoral commission.

Writing about the Belgian experience, Petra Meier has commented that:

“...unlike .. other countries, the Belgian provisions do not give parties the option of ignoring the quotas, for instance, by paying a fine.... The only sanction applied is that electoral lists that do not conform to the quota provisions are not accepted. Since this excludes parties from participating in an election, parties respect the gender quota provisions.”<sup>34</sup>

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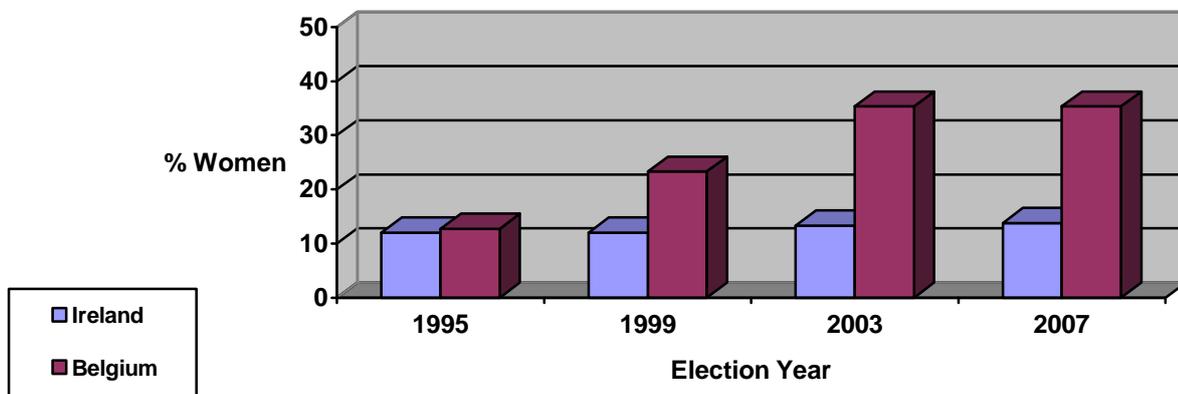
<sup>33</sup> Anne Peters & Stefan Suter, “Representation, Discrimination, and Democracy: A Legal Assessment of Gender Quotas in Politics” (pp174-200), in McClain & Grossman (Eds.) *Gender Equality: Dimensions of Women’s Equal Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press; 2009), p177.

<sup>34</sup> Petra Meier, “Belgium: a best practice put in perspective” (pp42-50), in *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and Their Implementation in Europe*, p44.

It is useful to compare Belgium and Ireland in terms of changes in women's participation. Until the 1990s, women's representation in the Belgian parliament was consistently low at between 5-10% of all deputies.<sup>35</sup> In 1995, Belgium was in 34<sup>th</sup> position in the world table of women's representation in parliament with 12.7% women. At that time, Ireland was very close to the Belgian position, ranked at 37<sup>th</sup> place with women constituting 12% of Dáil Deputies.

By 1999, following the introduction of the first gender quota law in Belgium in 1994, the percentage of women in the Belgian parliament had increased to 23.3%, improving their world ranking to 13<sup>th</sup> place. However, without any positive action measures having been taken in Ireland, the Irish position had disimproved during the same period, remaining at 12%, with a world ranking of 47<sup>th</sup> place.

Today, women constitute 35.3% of the members of parliament in Belgium, which is in 14<sup>th</sup> place in the world tables.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, only 13.8% of TDs in Ireland are women, and Ireland languishes at 84<sup>th</sup> place in the same tables.



**Percentage of Women in Parliament: Ireland and Belgium compared.**

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org/praline](http://www.ipu.org/praline)); reviewed on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

#### 4.5 Case Study - Spain

Among EU countries, Spain has had one of the most remarkable rises in women's participation in national parliament following the introduction of a gender quota law. In 1977, women made up only 6% of deputies in Spain. After the 2008 election, this had increased to 36.3%. In 2004, Spain's ruling Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) appointed the first Government with an equal number of male and female Ministers.<sup>37</sup>

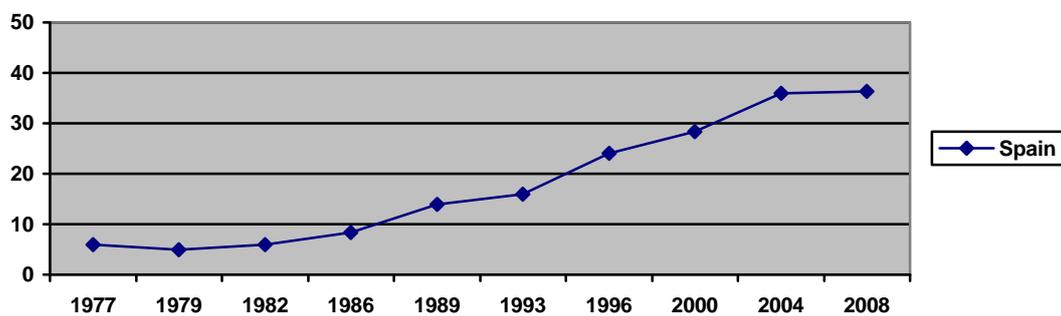
<sup>35</sup> Petra Meier, "Belgium: a best practice put in perspective" (pp42-50), in *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and Their Implementation in Europe*, p44.

<sup>36</sup> [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org). Some other sources give a figure of 36.7% for Belgium; [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org). Belgium has fallen in the world rankings, despite improving the share of women in parliament, because overall so many states have improved in terms of women's representation in recent years.

<sup>37</sup> Christina Alnevall, "Spain: towards a more gender equal state" (pp92-99) in *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and Their Implementation in Europe*, p95.

The PSOE (Spanish Socialists Workers' Party), one of the two dominant Spanish parties, adopted internal party gender quotas in the 1980s, which had an immediate impact on the numbers of PSOE women elected. When the PSOE entered government, it introduced electoral gender quota legislation setting out a 60:40 gender provision for political posts. This was amended in 2007 through the Equality Law (Ley de Igualdad), which introduced the "principle of balanced presence".

All political parties are now required to have a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 60% of either sex among their candidates in all elections (general, regional, European and local elections). The law was first applied in the local and regional elections of May 2007 and the general election of March 2008. In simple terms, the law states that no more than 60% of each party's candidates must be of the same gender.

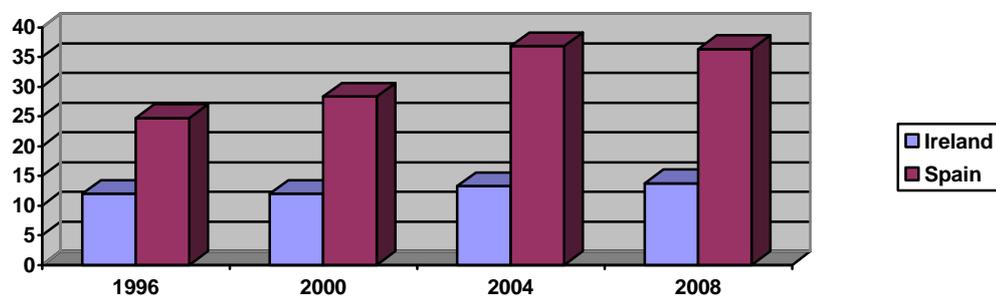


**Changes in percentage of Women in the Spanish Parliament over time**

Source: Figures taken from Christina Alnevall's table of political party representation in Spain; in "Spain: towards a more gender equal state".<sup>38</sup>

Following this law, as Professor Galligan pointed out at the sub-Committee, women's representation in the Spanish parliament has gone from 28% in 2000, before the passing of the quota law, to 36% after the 2008 elections (12<sup>th</sup> in the world tables).

Again, the contrast with the lack of improvement for women in Irish politics is very stark:



**Percentage of Women in Parliament: Ireland and Spain compared.**

(Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org/praline](http://www.ipu.org/praline)); reviewed on 12th October 2009.)

<sup>38</sup> Christina Alnevall, "Spain: towards a more gender equal state" (pp92-99) in *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and Their Implementation in Europe*, p.96.

**5. COMMITTEE ORDER OF REFERENCE 4:  
Recommendations to enhance the role of women already active in the  
political arena**

**5.1 Summary of Findings**

Ireland's record on women's political representation at all levels is very poor; and it has disimproved over recent elections. There is strong public support for taking action to encourage more women to enter politics; and Ireland also has international obligations to adopt positive action measures to achieve better representation levels.

The challenges facing women on entry into politics can be summarised under five headings: childcare; cash; confidence; culture; and candidate selection procedures. Each of these challenges needs to be addressed, and it is clear from research and experience elsewhere that a whole package of reforms is necessary.

Experience both in Ireland and in other countries shows that change does not happen for women in politics unless some positive action is taken. A review of the experience in other countries shows that the pace of change will vary depending on the positive action model used, adapted to the particular electoral system in each country.

The adoption of voluntary positive action measures by political parties in other countries has tended to achieve change more slowly than the provision of mandatory legislative targets. Belgium and Spain offer particularly strong examples of how rapid change can be achieved through the imposition of such targets through legislation.

Thus, it appears that the single most effective reform for women in Ireland would be the introduction of mandatory positive action measures through legislation requiring political parties to adopt gender targets or quotas in their candidate selection process.

If such legislation were to be adopted in Ireland, its framing would be critical. In Belgium, for example, under the Smet-Tobback law, a maximum limit is placed on candidates of each gender i.e. parties are penalised if more than two-thirds of their candidates are of one gender. This may be a better formula than provision for a minimum number of women candidates.

A realistic sanction would also have to be imposed where political parties exceed the target prescribed, perhaps based on the French model of financial penalties.

Finally, passing a 'candidate quota law' alone would not bring about increased levels of women's participation. Such a law would have to be accompanied by a package of other measures, to include civic education programmes; financial supports; facilitation of childcare and family responsibilities; a data bank; mentoring and training programmes; and support for women's networks.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Recommendations are made to address each of the five challenges previously identified as facing women in their entry to politics at every level.

### **5.2.1 Childcare**

The “long hours” culture in politics, and the lack of accommodation for childcare and other caring responsibilities, are factors which discourage women in particular from being more politically active.

It is recommended that changes to political party processes and Council/Oireachtas sitting times and arrangements are necessary to ensure that childcare and other family caring responsibilities can be accommodated, both for men and women in politics.

In particular:

- Political party meeting times and venues should be reviewed and adjusted to accommodate the caring responsibilities of party members;
- Childcare supports should be provided for parents in politics, and the Oireachtas crèche maintained;
- Although statutory maternity leave is not available to women members of the Oireachtas since they are not employees, women TDs or Senators who give birth in office should be entitled to automatic pairing arrangements;
- The rules and sitting times of the Oireachtas, and of local Councils, should be changed to make them more “family-friendly”;
- Increased use should be made of videoconferencing and distance voting facilities to ensure that those with caring responsibilities may participate in Committees, for example, from home.

### **5.2.2 Cash**

Lack of resources is another major factor inhibiting women’s progress in politics.

There is cross-party support for the introduction of mechanisms to provide greater resources to support women’s political activity, and it is recommended that the following measures, in particular, should be introduced:

- The establishment of a national fundraising campaign dedicated to raising money from private donors to finance women’s electoral campaigns;
- State funding to be earmarked for women candidates until a certain target of representation is reached;
- The voluntary provision of additional funds by political parties to support women candidates.

### **5.2.3 Confidence**

Women tend to lack sufficient confidence to participate actively in political life generally, and to put themselves forward for selection in political parties.

It is recommended that positive steps should be taken to encourage more women to become active in political parties, and to put themselves forward as candidates, in particular:

- Political parties should be encouraged to introduce recruitment drives specifically aimed at women, seeking to identify, “head-hunt” and recruit women in local areas, both as party members and potential candidates;
- Mentoring programmes for new women members and aspiring women candidates should be introduced within the political parties;
- Leadership training programmes should be provided for aspiring candidates by political parties;
- The State should provide support for women’s political networks such as the former network “Club 84” or the Women’s Political Association at local, national and European level.

#### **5.2.4 Culture**

Although women no longer face overt discrimination in their entry to politics, the political culture itself, and the “overall masculine image of politics”, remain as powerful barriers for women’s increased participation in politics.

It is recommended that specific steps be taken to address ongoing cultural barriers for women, in particular:

- The education system should be used to encourage more women into politics through civic education programmes in secondary schools, for example;
- Female role models should be identified and used in school and voter education programmes, to change the stereotypical image of the “male politician”;
- To challenge the cultural barrier for women entering politics whereby childcare is always seen as a woman’s responsibility, the issue of fathers’ rights and paternity leave in society more broadly should be reviewed;
- An advertising campaign like that initiated in Iceland should be considered, with the participation of politicians from all parties, again aimed at challenging traditional stereotypes of male politicians;
- A national data bank of potential women candidates should be established, administered either by the State, or a national NGO like the NWCI, on a constituency by constituency basis.

#### **5.2.5 Candidate Selection Procedures**

All the recommendations above are important to encourage greater participation by women in politics, but a difficulty still remains for women in getting selected as candidates by political parties at local, national and European level.

Different models for reform of candidate selection procedures have been reviewed.

The model of reserving seats for women in parliament is not used in European countries, and might be problematic under EU gender equality laws.

Although the voluntary political party quotas have been effective in some countries, notably Sweden, they require strong commitment by individual political parties, and generally take many years before results may be seen.

Experience elsewhere in Europe, especially in Belgium and Spain, shows that legislative electoral quotas might be more effective in the Irish political system.

Thus, it is recommended that candidate quota legislation be adopted, modelled on that used in France, Belgium and Spain, to oblige each political party to impose a maximum limit on the proportion of candidates of any one gender selected to run in elections at local, national and European levels.

Such legislation should be introduced on a temporary basis only, and would have an inbuilt “sunset clause” to ensure that when targets are met, the law will lapse.

The legislation should provide initially, based on the original Belgian model, that no party could have more than two-thirds of their candidates of one gender in the next general election.

The proportion of women required could then be revised upwards for candidate selection procedures in the 2014 local elections.

Although there is no equivalent of a list system in Ireland, and no electoral commission to accept or reject candidate lists as in Belgium, a system of financial penalties should be imposed based on the French model, so that parties that do not achieve the target of at least 33.3% women candidates for the next general election, for example, would receive reduced levels of state funding as a result.

Clearly, such legislation would require support from all the political parties to ensure that it would be effective. But it is also clear that there is widespread concern about the low levels of women in Irish politics.

Unless effective positive action measures are adopted, Ireland will continue to languish at the bottom of the international league tables for women’s representation, and our democracy will remain “unfinished”.

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## **Appendix D**

**Transcripts of Public Hearings**

**24<sup>th</sup> June and 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009**





## **Experiences in Public Life: Discussion.**

**Chairman:** I am delighted to welcome Ms Gemma Hussey, Ms Liz O'Donnell and Ms Niamh Bhreathnach. Each of them has a unique experience of political life and the sub-committee is grateful to them for taking time to share this with us this afternoon. In a future meeting we will hear from Professor Yvonne Galligan from Queen's University Belfast. Senator Ivana Bacik has been appointed rapporteur to the sub-committee and will prepare a report for it following our consideration of the various issues involved. I thank so many former lady Members for attending today in the Visitors Gallery.

I propose that each of our guests make a brief opening statement, to be followed by a question and answer session.

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** I congratulate the sub-committee for taking this matter up. It has been a long time coming but better late than never and we are delighted to be here. I am hoping the sub-committee will pursue this subject and that Government and political parties will be faced with their responsibility to acknowledge our failures and take steps to begin real reform. The sub-committee will undoubtedly inform itself about the many countries that have faced up to opposition and taken steps, legislative and voluntary, to get women into parliament and government. They did so because they knew countries are weaker without women.

The sub-committee asked us to say some words about our own experiences. I entered politics because of the great work of Margaret Waugh who founded the Women's Political Association in 1970. I had the great privilege to be elected chair in 1972. There are people in this room who were also involved in that organisation. We changed its name to the Women's Political Association from the Women's Progressive Association as we wanted to call a spade a spade.

The WPP was founded to address the catastrophic lack of women in politics. Over a period of years many women put in a huge amount of work and in the 1980s it appeared as if that work was paying off as the number of women in the Dáil and Seanad increased. By 1990 with the election of Mary Robinson as President of Ireland, it seemed to augur well that the situation would further improve. Unfortunately, that did not happen. There are many reasons for that but certainly apathy set in. In the absence of any programme from any Government or real initiatives from any political party, nothing improved and stagnation occurred. The old stereotypes reasserted themselves and the Irish legacy of conservatism and control over women by other bodies, notably church and State, has still not been shaken off.

Ireland, alas, is among the worst countries in the world for women's participation in public life which offends against the idea of real democracy. We all know that women bring different life experiences, priorities, knowledge and a different style of decision-making. People like me and others who are present, going back to the time I went into Government, were in such small numbers that we did not have the critical mass to change the nature and style of politics, which is what needs to be done.

Scandinavia and other countries have achieved that critical mass. It is not only in Europe that countries have taken major steps to increase the number of women in politics. Where this happens, the style of politics changes and the social provisions for the population change. Most of the countries of Scandinavia are models of modern democracy. It is no accident that they are ruled 50:50 by men and women.

I was told an interesting story the other day by a woman banker who was not very senior but had heard I was appearing before the committee. She said that in terms of banks and property companies rampant testosterone played no small part in the madness of the Celtic tiger years. Greed and fear was played out in deals and loans. She asked where were the women in the key Ministries and in the political bodies who were supposed to control the situation on

behalf of the people. The answer, of course, is that there were no women in the key roles in those top Ministries and bodies.

Research on countries that have made the breakthrough shows that the best way to achieve a breakthrough is to get a coalition of leadership from politics, women already in politics, civil society organisations and feminist organisations, all of which can come together and play a part. The matter of a quota, a word which is so frightening to Irish people, has to be examined. Where quotas have worked, they have done much to bring women forward in politics. Reserve seats have to be looked at as well as penalties and sanctions on parties who do not obey the rules. This was done to great effect in France which has made great breakthroughs. This issue has to be worked from the top. That is the reason I am delighted the committee is taking on this work on which I wish it well. This may be day one of a breakthrough for women in Ireland and for Ireland itself.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** I thank the Chairman, Deputies, Senators, and former Members of the Oireachtas. Given the context in which we are invited to appear before the committee, it is important that I would admit that my principal motivation in going into politics was because I saw the dearth of women in public life. Although I had been active in the Women's Political Association and had worked as a volunteer on Mary Robinson's election campaign and was a fully qualified lawyer I would not have crossed the bridge into politics unless I had been persuaded and facilitated by the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Mary Harney, who was then a Minister of State. The issue of confidence has to be looked at. There are many women in society who are active in their own professions, such as health, medicine, engineering, architecture and so on, yet the breakthrough has not come about in terms of equality of participation for women in politics. I am pleased the committee, perhaps for the first time, is looking at this particular issue. Those of us who are committed to the participation of women in politics and see the need for women at the highest level of public policy making have been talking about this for years but it is important that it comes into this forum, the democratic forum, for such debate.

It might be said by some at this time of huge social economic trauma in Ireland, with the Government otherwise occupied with very compelling matters of the day in terms of rebuilding our society, that it is self-indulgent of us to talk about the participation of women in politics but as Ms Hussey has said there has never been a more important time for the participation of women at the highest level, if as a society and a body politic we are to rebuild our institutions and the economic and regulatory frameworks. That is what we are charged with as a society. There has never been a more important time to allow women have an input into that rebuilding of our institutions and the new regulatory frameworks. On all the boards that are being established, there is a huge talent bank of women, from all professions and none, working in the voluntary sector and in all parts of Irish life who should be involved with the rebuilding of our economic and social structures.

That was my story. I joined a party in which there was a space for me. I did not come from a political background and neither do many women. Not many women are actively involved in traditional political parties but I was facilitated and joined a party which had space for me. This brings me to the point that women have better opportunities in small parties. The facts bear this out. The smaller parties in the Oireachtas — my party sadly demised — the Labour Party, Sinn Féin and the Green Party have more space for women because there is the possibility of being offered a nomination to run for a winnable seat, not as a sweeper for other candidates, but to get elected in one's own right. The obstacle for women lies with the nomination process. In smaller parties, because there is space, one does not have to unseat a man to be given a nomination. That is where there are opportunities for women.

[Ms Liz O'Donnell.]

In the larger traditional parties, such as Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the dearth of women is astonishing in a modern progressive democracy. Those parties, as large organisations, have to look at their institutional procedures for facilitating women to get on tickets. That is where the problem lies. Once women get past the convention and are nominated they do very well. The difficulty is in getting a nomination for a winnable seat. That is where quotas come in, an issue we can discuss later. I am sure there will be questions about the quota system. I would be loth to put any quota or requirement by law on the electorate. If quotas were to be placed that should be done within political parties themselves to ensure they put forward women for election rather than requiring the electorate to elect, say, two women out of every constituency.

The public should be able to vote for whoever they wish, free of any gender bias, but there should be an onus on the political parties to ensure the electorate is offered the choice to vote for women candidates in elections.

The women who preceded us in the Oireachtas did tremendous work. Many women politicians in this House, although there have been few, such as Nuala Fennell, Gemma Hussey and Monica Barnes, set the standard and broke all of the rules at the time. Younger women entering politics forget the contribution those women made to the body politic in what was a lonely time for women in politics.

As I am giving testimony having served as a woman Minister of State and Deputy for 15 years in the Dáil, in terms of a workplace, I never experienced any discrimination or even sexist attitudes from party colleagues, men or women. It is important to put on the record that I was always treated with courtesy, equality and respect by every Member of the House.

There are possibly ways in which the political culture and the life of a politician could be tweaked to make this career more family friendly for all of us, not only women, but it is, in the main, a profession that is tailor-made for men as it currently stands. It is a difficult terrain or women, particularly women with small children. I do not know how one overcomes that. It is about choices and giving people as many choices as possible in a modern civilised society, bearing in mind the time that a woman needs to be with children, in terms of intensity of care when children are young, is a very short period in a woman's working life. As in other professions, concessions and allowances should be made for the divided loyalties of younger women politicians who are mothers of small children. I look forward to questions from members.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** I endorse the comments made on the welcome we were given by the Chairman on the occasion of this opportunity to share our experiences with the committee. I wish the committee well in its work. We all have a vested interest in positive outcomes emerging from its deliberations.

I will start by telling my story of how I became very involved in the participation of women in the Labour Party. Some 35% of Labour Party Deputies are women. One might ask whether that is down to luck or planning. I would respond by saying that we worked very hard to achieve that. We all share an experience with the WPA. Having joined it and being encouraged by it to enter party politics, I chose the Labour Party because the equality document, for which we can give Mary Robinson a share of the credit for its preparation, was very inspiring. I took up my membership of the party with enthusiasm. When I arrived at a constituency branch office in Dún Laoghaire the party did not have one woman Deputy in the Dáil or one woman Senator in the Seanad, nor did it have a woman on the platform at its annual conference. We had this wonderful document with great aspirations between its two brown covers, funded by Socialist International Women, but we still had not committed ourselves to moving from the policy to the practical.

We got courage and confidence from the WPA. I come from a generation who were educated, as my mother would say, above our station. It was not enough for me to go to meetings and find that the men were giving all the answers. We began to search the documentation that was available through our membership of Socialist International Women and discovered that in Chile it had passed a resolution that committed all branches of Socialist International Women to commit themselves to working for women. We took that sentence and that document and began to work on how the Labour Party could put that into practice.

We have a PR system. I agree with Liz O'Donnell when she said the challenge lies with the parties. With our political system, we cannot slot into what the French or the Argentinians did. Considerable research has been done on this and it is available to the committee. I have Yvonne Galligan's extract and I thank the committee for sending me that. We committed ourselves to slotting women into the party organisation at branch and constituency level because they were not very visible in the organisation. Ten years of work went into this. It probably took that long for women to be encouraged and to be seen to get support. We took the reserve seats on the national executive. I was one of the people who won one of the first reserve seats. The time one could retain that seat was limited and then one had to participate in the general contest. Through that kind of work on the executive and in our constituencies, the gender of those with seats on the platform at the party's annual conference began to change. More women addressed the conference and contested the officerships, not only the seats, on the national executive. We were given a huge boost when the Labour Party was in a position to nominate Mary Robinson as a presidential candidate and the outcome of that election was successful. We were working well and to be a feminist in politics was very positive. It was seen as an asset to the party political system. However, that has faded.

Having regard to the committee's terms of reference, all the parties have a women's officer and the women's officer in the Labour Party is Kirsty Hanafin. We have worked on identifying the obstacles to women's participation in politics and on recommendations to overcome them. We have identified and discussed the six Cs, cash, connections, culture, children, confidence and career. Male candidates probably experience those problems in one way or the other but they come forward time and again for women. The issue is how we can help women to overcome those obstacles. Some 87% of our TDs are men and 80% of councillors are men. Such representation of our population does not represent a balance in terms of gender. That must be addressed and the issue is how to address it.

The second issue the committee asked us to address was the potential initiatives that could be taken. I do not know if the committee is aware that Deputy Ciarán Lynch, our spokesperson on local government, brought forward a Bill — the Electoral (Gender Parity) Bill — to mark International Women's Day 2009. The committee might examine that Bill. Through the mechanism of funding political parties, it requests the political parties to ensure initially that 20% of the candidates they put forward are women, that then be increased to 30% and then to 40%. It has a lovely sunshine clause that when that later representation is achieved, that rather than seeking the 50% target representation, that the Bill will lapse. It is a short Bill and I will make it available to the committee.

In terms of progressing this work further, there is considerable work to be done. I will sum up what can be done by reference to a phrase that was commonly used in business circles in the 1990s, namely, "the tone from the top". If the tone from the top is that we want this to work, then it will work. When one notes the 7% of women Fianna Fáil Deputies and the 9% of women Fianna Gael Deputies, it appears that the bigger parties have a bigger problem in this respect. Alice Glenn used the expression that for male Deputies, voting to increase women's participation would be like turkeys voting for Christmas. There is no job creation in Leinster House. If more women are to come in here, some men will have to leave. There is a lot of

[Ms Niamh Bhreathnach.]

work to be done. Work has to be done on the quota of female members of committees, they do not yet have such a quota. We had fun in the VEC in Dún Laoghaire this week. When I was Minister I had provided for a gender quota for councillors represented on the VECs. There was some panic this week in that respect, but that provision had to be made. Nudging, encouraging and being nice in seeking such gender representation did not work. When the Labour Party put standards and targets into its constitution, they had to be met. I recommend that the sub-committee examine that method and the research or experience in that regard. If we do not have it with us here, we certainly have access to it and would be delighted to make it available.

**Chairman:** I thank the three speakers for their presentations. I call Senator Bacik.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I thank the former Members who spoke today, and the former Members in the Visitors Gallery. It is great to see that level of interest in this initiative among women who have served as Deputies or Senators. I am also grateful to the Chairman and my colleagues in the justice committee for agreeing to my suggestion that we establish this sub-committee. It grew out of the Oireachtas women's event that I organised and which the Cathaoirleach and the Ceann Comhairle so graciously hosted on 9 December 2008. That event, to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Constance Markievicz's election, showed us how a parity democracy would look when we saw the Dáil nearly half full of women, all of whom had been elected in the past or are currently Members of the Oireachtas.

I am grateful to the witnesses for their eloquent presentations and for setting the scene. Ireland does extremely poorly in international league tables on women's representation. It is currently 87th in the Interparliamentary Union league. There are only 23 female Deputies out of a total of 166, just over 13%, and we have never achieved a number of women Deputies above 14%. Indeed, as Ms Hussey said, Ireland has slipped back from what appeared to be a breakthrough in the late 1980s and early 1990s in terms of women's representation.

The sub-committee's brief is to examine how we can achieve positive change. I am honoured to be the rapporteur and I am anxious to ensure that this is an action-focused sub-committee, that is, that it examines what action can be taken to achieve an outcome. Ms Bhreathnach spoke about the noble aspirations contained in many documents that do not translate into outcomes in terms of increased numbers of women representatives. She also put it very starkly to my male colleagues that increasing the number of women will necessarily lead to a reduction in the number of men. All the witnesses expressed very well how important it is for a functioning democracy to have representative levels of men and women. There is a collective good in that regard.

The witnesses' experience has emphasised for the committee the importance of mentoring and having strong female role models, as well as collective action through the women's political organisation. Ms O'Donnell emphasised the difficulty in political parties, especially large parties, at the nomination stage and selection conventions. Professor Yvonne Galligan will give a presentation to the sub-committee later in the summer. Her research certainly shows the selection level is an obstacle for women to run as candidates in local, national or European elections. What do the witnesses believe is the single most important political initiative we can recommend and, hopefully, ensure is adopted at the top levels of Government that will achieve an outcome of more women being selected by political parties? That appears to be the difficulty.

Ms Bhreathnach referred to the gender parity Bill which the Labour Party has introduced. That would operate by imposing a financial sanction on political parties that do not achieve the selection of a certain number of women candidates. That model is being used in France and has been used in Denmark. In fact, the sunset clause was introduced once the Danish

levels of women's representation reached 40%. It is now no longer necessary because the culture changed. The difficulty, of course, is that our culture is still the problem. There is no longer overt discrimination, as Ms O'Donnell has said. The difficulty is cultural and that is the hardest to tackle. What is the single most important political initiative? Is it something like the gender parity Bill, which provides for financial sanctions, or should there be more specific quotas and reserved places in political parties? Do the witnesses have one major idea they believe the sub-committee should explore which might have been used elsewhere but which the sub-committee can recommend?

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** Any recommendation should be addressed to the parties. It is up to the individual parties to embrace the concept that our democracy is unfinished while there is still such unequal participation by women. Once that concept is accepted there will be a moral obligation and huge political pressure on the political parties, particularly the larger ones, to make space for women. They must change their structures. I feel bad lecturing to bigger parties because I came from a small party where there was such space. It always had a significant number of women at organisational, national executive, leadership and local levels. It happened because it was a new party. It is the older, more traditional, institutional parties which need to examine their systems and actively make space for women by changing. I am not familiar with their systems but it is up to them to accept voluntarily that our democracy is unfinished and that their parties will flounder unless they have more women.

There is a huge appetite for more women in public policy making positions at the highest level. When women are on the ticket, they tend to do well. When they are elected, our experience is that women rise very quickly to the top of their parties in terms of leadership and Front Bench positions. Women work well as politicians. They just need to be assisted at the starting blocks, which are currently very much an obstacle race for them.

Finance is also an issue. Many women lack the finance and the networks which would allow them to raise money to fund their election campaigns. That is where the parties must step in and assist. If they are really serious about getting more women to participate in their parties and run for election under their party flag, they must help them to fund-raise and facilitate and mentor them in overcoming obstacles. Many of the women who might be considering running for election tend to be young women, possibly with young children. Things will have to be made easier for them, as they were for me. I was always facilitated, helped and given plenty of support at election time to make it easier. Women have networks but men have different networks, particularly economic networks, which are much more favourable in terms of men's participation.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** Professor Galligan has identified what I consider to be the biggest stumbling block, namely, the selection convention. I consider selection conventions to be the blood sport of a political party.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** It is the bear pit.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** People come out of the woodwork and vote for candidates but when it comes to getting that candidate elected they might not be as enthusiastic or visible during the campaign. That is the savage part of politics, and it is why the parties must adopt internally a commitment to reach a certain figure. In the VEC we had to go back to our partners in our alliance in Dún Laoghaire council, Fine Gael, because we had to meet requirements in that regard in legislation.

Senator Bacik mentioned France. It provided for financial penalties but there were people in France who actually paid the penalties rather than choose the women. That was interesting.

[Ms Niamh Bhreathnach.]

Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians. It identifies a number of seats that must be filled. Given the democratic magic of proportional representation, of which I am a great fan, it is up to the parties to run the candidates. The parties must be committed. That is the reason I favour the gender parity Bill, which has financial provisions. I hope the subcommittee will examine it and, perhaps, try it out on Professor Galligan. I agree with her identification of the selection process as the place where parties, if they are committed, can get involved in terms of the slate of candidates they put to the electorate.

It is interesting that in the recent debacle in Iceland, the country has turned to women politicians. We would say, in a defining moment, that men are very good at power but women are problem solving people. We would bring a difference to the situation. When one considers the challenges facing society and the next generation, or our children, which is particularly special to women, we can bring problem solving to bear. Who can say that problem solving is not something the biggest political parties need help with?

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** I have a brief answer to the question. Unlike Liz O'Donnell and Niamh Bhreathnach, I am not starry-eyed about the voluntary aspect. It has been shown all over the world where steps have been taken, backed up by legislation, that that is the only way the breakthrough has been achieved. When the breakthrough has been achieved the legislation can fade because the momentum takes over. While it would be nice if all the parties, including the two big ones, came out with voluntary quotas, nothing works voluntarily. We are talking about getting hands on power here, not about a garden party. One must be tough and say that Ireland is really disgraceful in this respect. It is a faulty democracy and does not have women participating in politics in any numbers, so what are we going to do about it? From the very top, the legislative body should say that it is going to do something about this. They are introducing laws every day of the week on other things.

A couple of the figures are interesting. Ms Yvonne Galligan, who will be addressing the subcommittee, has a lot more material other than that marvellous paper which was so kindly circulated. She had more up-to-date material. A figure from that particular paper struck me, however. In 68 countries, 160 political parties have adopted mandatory party quotas by law. The critical mass of women in a parliament is identified as approximately 30% plus. The countries with 30% plus have quotas, which is how they got there. They did not get there by people making pious promises or parties saying they would do this and that. They got there by the hard graft of legislation and penalties.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** It worked in France.

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** Even though in France some of them paid the fines instead of having the women, nevertheless, it worked there on the whole.

I notice that the sub-committee's terms of reference mention "a policy of 'positive discrimination' which has been successfully used in other European countries". It is not just European countries, however. We are inclined in Europe to suffer from a certain centrist attitude. In South America there are interesting examples of how they have changed things. In answer to Senator Bacik's question, I really think we have to be stronger than just exhortation and having parties stating at annual ard-fheiseanna that they are going to have more women in politics. That is not enough. We need to back it up with laws at this stage. The time has passed for aspirations.

**Deputy Noel Treacy:** I warmly welcome our three former Ministers and all their former Oireachtas colleagues here. I was asked by colleagues to sit on this committee and it is a big

challenge. I have listened with interest to what has been said. In a few weeks' time I will be 7 years in the House, having fought ten elections. To answer the question as to what women bring to politics at any and every level, I would say they bring a real balance to debates and management of the political environment. Their presence has made a huge, positive contribution in all my political activities. Whether it concerns a public meeting, a Government meeting, a party political meeting or a conference, the participation of women brings real balance, which leads to better debate and conclusions. It also leads to better behaviour from everyone's perspective, but especially the male perspective.

I am not sure we can find a situation that will change everything dramatically or rapidly. I come from a party in which women have had a long involvement, from Countess Markievicz to Máire Geoghegan-Quinn and others. All the good people present came in between. Over the years, we have done our utmost to change opportunities and bring about further participation by women at every level of our political party, Fianna Fáil. Even at national executive level, we always had serious competition for 15 ordinary members of the party to be elected at ard-fheiseanna to that management body. Anyone could run for those posts and there was massive electoral competition to get there, both by male and female candidates. We changed that system, increasing 15 national executive places to 20, of which ten would be male and ten female. All of a sudden the competition went away and now the problem is to get willing participants. We now have about 25 or 30 — never more than that — seeking 20 places on the national executive. In the past, however, when there were 15 places and everyone was in the melting pot, 40 or 50 candidates would often run for that office. It is difficult to know what system would create the change. I am not sure whether quotas or financial penalties are the answer. As Members of the Oireachtas, we certainly must examine how political parties are funded. I believe that by and large the State should be funding political parties in their totality. If we did that, we could bring in quotas and financial penalties on a wider basis. Those penalties could easily be imposed. The State, via the Standards in Public Office Commission or whoever oversees that situation, could ensure penalties were imposed dramatically and effectively when people did not make the contribution they should have made.

In the recent local elections we changed our candidate selection process. We went away from these wonderful conventions where we were able to galvanise massive momentum into huge success and decided that we would select. We had a minimum requirement of one female candidate per grouping. We achieved that, by and large, but we did not achieve it electorally. It did not work and, as a result, we have more or less disenfranchised some of our people who feel we went away from the democratic process and should have maintained that rather than doing what we did. It is difficult to know which way is best and how we are going to find that balance.

I listened with interest to what our three contributors said, particularly to Ms Hussey. She said she believes that conservatism is still rife and that church and State are still in control, or that they are controlling the situation to a degree. I would have thought we were long past that. I believe that in a modern society, equality is absolute. There is no way people can be discriminated against either by law or action. We are in a strong position and are equal to the best when it comes to that.

I agree with what Ms O'Donnell and Ms Hussey said, that it was never more important to have women in politics than now. Ms O'Donnell also referred to the talent bank that women are. I remember that, back in 1983, our political party ran a national conference under the title, Women Leading Change. We wanted to get that change and it worked for 18 months or two years but then it died away. We tried in different ways to bring women to the fore. I remember when I was a Minister of State with responsibility for science and technology that we established

[Deputy Noel Treacy.]

a talent bank of women in that area. We picked the brightest and best throughout the nation to be part of a national talent bank so that they would be available to serve on State boards. To go back to Ms O'Donnell's earlier point, this is the big challenge for everybody, particularly women who are mothers of young children. We offered positions on boards to many women but they could not give it the time or make the commitment. That is a difficult situation.

I refer to the winnable seat. If women are selected to go forward, they should be given the same amount of support by the political parties. Politics is a very competitive environment and women have played a huge role in the development of this State. The women who have served this country in office have done an outstanding job at every level. We all have an important responsibility to create an environment in which it would be more advantageous and positive for women to enter the political arena.

External factors mitigate against the performance of women and ridicule them unfairly. Over the past year, it has become obvious that some with major responsibilities do not get fair coverage for the efforts they make.

Those outside politics and those involved in it have an important responsibility to ensure we recognise the commitment, ability, effectiveness, balance and contribution women have made to our society. We must try to find a formula which is all embracing and enables women of any age to enter the political arena and participate therein with success.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** Deputy Treacy made a number of points and his contribution was very interesting. I admire the length of his career and his ability to get re-elected to this House.

**Deputy Noel Treacy:** I get elected with much help from many women.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** That is something. Professor Michael Marsh of Trinity College is doing work because the idea of women voting for women is not universally acceptable to women. There is ongoing research in this regard. For political parties, gender is not the most important thing; it is achieving a majority.

There is not a family friendly environment. I refer to the statistics in other countries in regard to women's participation. In Sweden it is 47%, in Finland it is 42%, in Cuba it is 36%, and in Argentina it is 35%. What is common to all those countries is very good child care policies. Women in Ireland have what we call "a triple burden". They have the burden of education, career and family. Now we want to add the burden of politics to that.

I beg to differ with Deputy Treacy who said women should be given the same help as men. If they are coming from behind and are not coming through in numbers, the parties must look to see what they can do to level the playing pitch.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** I wish to respond to Deputy Treacy's comment that in his experience what women bring to politics is balance, whether to Cabinet discussions or public meetings. That is exactly what we hope to achieve by having more women in politics. It will come to a point where decisions taken, from which women are absent in large numbers, will lack credibility in a democracy. We should be reaching a point where we are saying that a bunch of guys have made a very important decision but there was not a woman in the room. That is about the feminisation of policy-making and introducing a gender-based ingredient which is about women's perspectives, experiences and their thought processes and different way of working. That is what we are trying to achieve, namely, to ensure democratic decisions which are mandated by the people are made with an input from women who represent more than half the population.

I would go as far as to say that currently many of the decisions made at the highest level in public life are made without the input of women and, therefore, lack democratic credibility. That is a very serious issue and is why I am glad we are having this debate. It is the sort of discussion we, in the women's movement, have been having for 20 or 30 years.

It is very welcome that we have been given this opportunity in this forum to make these points. I hope clear recommendations for action to be taken to resolve this big deficiency in our democracy will come out of this process.

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** Deputy Treacy will forgive me if I pick up on something he said. I do not for one minute believe women today are still subjugated by church and State, although when I went into politics, women were. We still had battles over minor things like contraception. We had just achieved the situation where the children's allowance was paid to the mother by right. Up to that point, women's lives were extraordinarily controlled by church and the State, which backed up the church with laws which kept women down.

I wish to make it clear that what I said was that we have not yet shaken off the legacy of those years when women's lives were so completely controlled. If we had, we would have 50% of women in politics and 50% of women at the top of business, and not all bankers and property developers would be men.

If women had 50% representation, this sub-committee would not have been convened to examine the situation. We think we have made progress but we have not. We have a long way to go.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** It is important to note, given the upcoming Lisbon referendum, that many of the reforms which have helped women in terms of their mobility in society and including anti-discrimination legislation, equal pay and maternity legislation did not come from this House or the body politic in Ireland but from Europe.

When going out to vote, women, in particular, must bear that in mind. Most of the benefits we enjoy as women in terms of equality on a day-to-day basis have come from the efforts of the European Union and not from any reforming instincts of these Houses, whether among men or women.

**Deputy Brian O'Shea:** I welcome Ms Hussey, Ms O'Donnell and Ms Bhreathnach and thank them for their contributions. I also welcome the other former Members present. We have two former Ministers for Education here, namely, Ms Hussey and Ms Bhreathnach. What further role can the education system play in terms of bringing about a change in societal attitudes in regard to the part women play in politics or preparing girls more effectively to play a greater role in the political system or in society at large?

I remember in the 1980s a Deputy, who was not from my party, decided not stand again and defend his seat. I was intrigued and asked why he was not standing. He said this was no life for a family man. This cuts both ways.

Ms O'Donnell said the small parties provide more opportunities for winnable seats. However, there is an issue for the larger parties, namely, the multiple seat constituency where there may be a number of Deputies from the one party representing a constituency. This can lead to a huge amount of activity in the constituency, including clinics and all the work that goes with them. That is extremely demanding for everybody. It is certainly anti-family. I am not advocating that we change the proportional representation system but it is a factor. How can we address it?

[Deputy Brian O'Shea.]

Ms O'Donnell also raised the confidence issue which I have encountered and quite surprised me. Women say they would not be able to do something or are not up to it. How does one change that attitude?

There is some variance between the three speakers in regard to the quotas. That is something with which Senator Bacik will deal in time.

Essentially, my questions would be as follows. What about the education system? Does it have a role? Can it have a more effective role? Ms Hussey explained her comment earlier on church and State, that it was more an issue when she was elected here and became a Minister. I would have thought it is much less of an issue nowadays in terms of controlling people or keeping people in their place. Matters have improved a great deal, yet we are not seeing the number of women emerging that would be practical.

There may be a theme from what has been said. The country is in a fairly shocking state and there is the rebuilding of the economy to be undertaken. Maybe the theme should be how we put that recovery operation in place but make sure that there is room for women so that they are encouraged and can take their places there. I thank the delegation. This has been extremely useful to all of us.

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** The Deputy is correct that education is all important. It was a long battle to get anything approaching social and political education as a serious subject on the agenda. It still is not. Ms Bhreathnach did all sorts of wonderful things after me. I tried to get it going in terms of making civics something meaningful. The then curriculum and examinations board recommended a strong subject with strong examination levels in citizenship and in social and political education, but that was watered down and dropped, and today it is still not a major subject in schools although I feel strongly that it should be.

To change the subject, in general, girls' schools never went in for the kind of robust debates that boys' schools did. When I went to university I found very few of the girls took part in the major societies; it was an exception when somebody like Deputy Harney became very prominent in university societies because it was usually men.

I do not agree with what was said about the multi-seat PR system. It should be changed and I feel strongly about that. We have a disastrous electoral system. It leads to seven days and nights a week work for the Deputies sitting opposite, and that applies even more to Ministers. It imposes on politicians a life which is not conducive to the best kind of government. That is really all I have to say. I thank the Deputy for his input.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** I will take up the point about civics. The curriculum had been examined and the subject had disappeared. I encountered terrible difficulty as a Minister in exciting the civil servants in the then Department of Education about the importance of civics. Finally, mesmerised, the Secretary General came to see me and asked what I really wanted out of this. I said that I wanted the electorate to be able to pick up the election literature that comes through their doors and undertake a critical analysis of the promises and the record of achievement in it. He went away and, finally, the programme was re-jigged and put back into the system. During Deputy Michael Woods's time as Minister, the examination and the status of the examination was another matter.

In patriarchal society there is not a great deal of interest in these matters. I will put it as strongly as that. Why would one want to change something if it will damage an easy position? If Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael can be returned here with majorities with women accounting for 7% or 9% of their number, why change the system because they all are holding on to their seats? That is important. I looked at the Canadian model and I would recommend it to anybody

who is interested in civics. The work the Canadians do through the education system is well worth examining.

We examined books when we reviewed this matter. When I arrived we still had, tá Mamaí sa chistin agus tá Daidí amuigh ag glanadh an charr, and we had to take these pictures out of school books. That was not today or yesterday. We put gender quotas on committees and we changed the composition of the boards of management. We did a great deal of work, but it is hard work and one must be totally committed to doing it. That is the message I would give to the committee, to be totally committed to delivering an objective. It is about harnessing the talents of women, not closing the door and leaving us out.

In the education field, I despair of the universities. They are the leaders and the challengers. They are bringing us to the cutting edge, and one takes a look and asks where women feature there.

For all of these branches, there is a gender problem in primary school where there is an absence of men as teachers. Gender is not just to do with women and that is what we will address today. In delivering a balanced society, one must look at a system that excludes women because women have a great deal to offer. I hope the committee is committed and I am delighted that it has asked us to come here today and share our views.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** Two former Ministers for Education have dealt adequately with the need for better voter education, civics, etc., in school with which I agree. On the confidence issue, a good way for women to gain confidence is to run for local election. I was so pleased to see so many women ran in the recent local elections. It is a good place to find one's feet, learn how to speak in public, learn how our democratic systems work at local level, and of course, it is hugely educational because the work and subject matter of local politics is extremely important. It includes housing, sanitation, transport, environment and all of the matters which greatly influence the way men and women live in our communities.

The first step is to get more women involved and elected in local politics and from that one will find confidence grows quickly. That was certainly true in my case. When I was approached by Deputy Harney to think about entering politics, I thought immediately I could not possibly do that. I had never known a politician. There is nobody involved in politics in my family. My immediate reaction was that I could not do that rather than saying when can I start, which maybe for a man would be the usual response. That is the way it was. I was a highly educated adult and had two small children. I should have felt competent and confident to do that.

However, politics is a daunting, frightening sort of theatre. When one does not come from a political background one cannot imagine being successful there unless one has somebody who, in a benign way, is mentoring and encouraging and giving a little support. The mentoring issue within political parties is extremely important. All parties should have in place mentors to encourage younger women, who perhaps are involved in the organisation but who do not have quite yet the confidence to cross that bridge into public life. A little encouragement goes a long way.

**Chairman:** I have made a note of that. That is the first time this afternoon any of the delegates have mentioned local politics. The vast majority of those who end up as politicians in this House have come through the local authority network. Should our concentration be on getting the balance right there because if we do not have enough women serving on the city and county councils, by extension we cannot have them in the national Parliament? Should our concentration be on that rather than on trying to immediately solve the problem at national level?

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** I do not agree. Given my views on the electoral system, the national legislators should be exactly that and we should have a much stronger system of local government where people genuinely have power and run their local areas. National legislators should do their work nationally; one should not have to follow the other. I speak as someone who never served on a local authority and I do not see why people should have to do so to be involved at national level. That is just a view.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** I would disagree. Local representation is a fantastic learning opportunity for women and, indeed, men, who want to come into politics. I agree with the abolition of the dual mandate. I always believed that local and national politics should be totally different spheres, which is now the case. However, in order to increase the critical mass of women generally involved in politics, it would be important to focus on local elections, particularly in the context of removing obstacles for nomination.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** As someone who has returned to local government, I must state that I find it very fulfilling because one is dealing with one's parish, one's family and the services they require. I admit that I feel disgracefully under-powered, if I could put it in that way. However, being involved in local government allows one to be close to ordinary people.

The Labour Party set itself the goal that 30% of its candidates elected in the recent local elections would be women. We achieved a figure of over 29%. That was a deliberate strategy. No hostages were taken and no excuses were accepted. We have set ourselves further targets in this regard and hope that by 2014, 50% of our candidates elected will be women.

As to whether it is easier to be a female candidate, one's campaign is certainly less expensive to run. Given that one is known to one's immediate family and neighbours and one has taken one's children to school and met other parents, it is easier to communicate with certain people. Since the advent of mobile phones and e-mail, people can find one at 2 a.m, so it is a full-time job and it is very difficult to find a cut-off point. As a result of the fact that it is a smaller arena, one's preferences tend to come from one's geographical situation. While some people may have been surprised that I returned to local government, I find it a satisfying occupation, particularly in light of my experience in the Houses. Too many Deputies pretend they are councillors and far too many councillors pretend they are Deputies. I am, therefore, absolutely in favour of the separation of the two.

**Chairman:** Many councillors want to be Deputies.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** On the point about local politics being a suitable theatre for young women with small children, it is certainly more manageable for them. If one is operating at local level, one is not obliged to be hundreds of miles away from home and one gets to see one's children and one's husband now and then.

**Deputy Jimmy Deenihan:** I welcome Ms Hussey, Ms O'Donnell and Ms Bhreathnach. I served with each of them in the Houses of the Oireachtas during the past 25 years and I am of the view that they, and some of those present in the Visitors Gallery, made a major contribution to national politics.

I have always found it easy to work with women, be it in politics or in community organisations. I accept that what I am about to say is somewhat of a sweeping statement but I have generally found women more reliable than their male counterparts in the context of executing certain tasks. In my experience, if a woman gives a commitment, she follows through on it.

As far as committees are concerned, I have always believed in taking responsibility myself. However, it has been my practice to give women responsibility for particular tasks because

they always execute them well. If one takes this analogy further and applies it to the sphere in which we operate, it is obvious that our society could only gain if more women were involved in local and national politics. When one considers that more than 50% of the population is female, it should follow that a similar percentage of women should be involved in politics. Female representation in the Dáil stands at 13%, while in the Seanad it is 22%. These figures will have to be improved considerably. I hope this report will be of assistance in that regard.

In the previous Dáil, I was rapporteur in respect of a report on women in sport. I accept that politics is a different type of sport. The report to which I refer was quite effective at the time and it contained a number of recommendations which certainly improved the lot of women in sport. In the first instance, the report highlighted the matter and led to a major conference being held at Croke Park. The report to which I refer raised the profile of women in sport to a considerable degree and it also highlighted the lack of facilities — providing examples of instances where women were obliged to share changing rooms with their male counterparts, etc. — available to them.

The exercise in which our guests are engaging is extremely important. I would not underestimate the potential of their report to have some impact on the system. For that reason alone, what they are doing is a worthwhile exercise. People continually come before the various committees in order to present their views. That is part of the democratic process and, in the end, these individuals may not achieve very much. However, I am convinced that our guests' presence at this meeting and the exercise in which they are engaged will achieve something.

I am of the view that more women must become involved in politics at local branch level. Fine Gael operates a system of one person one vote. Whereas I know such a system can be abused — for example, by someone recruiting a large number of members to a particular branch in order to ensure his or her selection as a candidate — it provides everyone with a feeling that they are involved and that they have a say. When it comes to selecting a candidate to run for the party, everyone has a vote. As a result, if more women were involved at local branch or constituency level, there is a better chance that one of their number might be selected as a candidate. I have also found it to be the case that not all women will vote for a female candidate. This is another issue that must be addressed. I do not know why this is the case but it is certainly a factor.

I served as my party's spokesperson on arts, sport and tourism in the previous Dáil. At that stage, the National Women's Council of Ireland carried out a study on the membership of State boards. I checked the position with regard to tourism, which is driven by women. I examined the membership of the various tourism boards and discovered that hardly any of them contained women. As a result, I saw to it that the matter was put to a vote in the Dáil at that time. The position has improved in the interim but during the period to which I refer I suggested a quota system should be introduced, via legislation, in respect of the boards of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. The then Minister stated that in view of the fact that all ten people serving on a particular board could be women — if they were good enough — there was no need to set a quota or a percentage.

My suggestion at the time was that 40% of the membership of these boards should be women. Such a percentage is enshrined in certain items of legislation but not in others, so there is a contradiction. I am of the view that we should recommend that 40% of the membership of State and semi-State boards should be made up of women. In addition, a similar percentage should apply in respect of VECs and county development and partnership boards. If women are to make an impact, it is important that they should be involved at local and national level. I agree with Ms O'Donnell and Ms Hussey regarding the importance of local participation

[Deputy Jimmy Deenihan.]

and that if one is not involved locally, this should not be a bar to one being involved on a national level.

If a person wishes to become a Deputy, generally speaking he or she must have a high profile. The only reason I was asked to enter politics was because I was a Gaelic footballer. That was the only reason. Seán Kelly, MEP, gained election to Europe on foot of his participation in the GAA. If one does not gain election in this way, one must inherit one's seat from a family member. In such circumstances, it is problematic for women to gain election because it is difficult for them to build up a high profile. Some of them do build up such profiles but not to the same extent as their male counterparts. That is another disadvantage which women face. If a man wishes to gain a high profile, he must move in certain circles and appear at a large number of social events. The women find it difficult to do that because at times they believe that if they are seen at too many events on their own, for example, people start to ask questions. It poses difficulties and challenges for them which men do not have. These are two aspects which women have to overcome in order to become representatives. Most of the questions have already been asked.

I refer to the use of modern technology by women who live more remotely from Dublin. Would it be possible to use modern technology such as video-conferencing? For example, if a joint committee was in progress, would it be possible for a woman with young children to be at home in the west of Ireland and communicate with the committee by means of videoconferencing? This may be taking it to an extreme, but there is the question of distance voting. Would it be possible for someone to vote from a centre near home? This would accommodate women. Is there any way that modern technology could make life easier and facilitate the involvement of women who have family obligations? As Ms O'Donnell said, could we help them more?

Members of this sub-committee such as Senator Bacik and myself will have to come up with realistic proposals which hopefully will ensure that more women will be involved in politics. I wish to give an example from the recent local elections. In Tralee my party had just one candidate out of a total of 12 candidates. I decided to go out and try to head-hunt two prominent women. I was successful and both of them were elected. We now have three representatives where there was only one before. It proves the point that well known women have an advantage. If they are involved in local community initiatives they will have the connections. That was proved to me when two women with high profiles who were not associated with the party were elected based on their connections with their community at grassroots level. I ask for the delegation's views on the use of technology.

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** Deputy Deenihan's idea is very imaginative and it should be explored. Modern technology is changing the lives of young people who are much younger than all of us. His idea is a very good example of lateral thinking, looking at different ways of allowing for participation, both for men and women. We should bear in mind in this debate that every child has a father as well as a mother and in most cases there is a couple. Deputy Deenihan's idea of exploring new ways using modern technology is a great idea.

I am aware of the fact that he was such a distinguished footballer before he became a Dáil Deputy. In my time I was foot-slogging around the country trying to get women involved in politics and in doing that, I achieved a high profile which then got me elected to the Seanad through the National University of Ireland constituency. However, as Deputy Deenihan said, that was achieved by my having a high profile. There is no reason that women cannot have high profiles just like men as this is not so difficult nowadays. Deputy Deenihan referred to

boards of State bodies requiring 40% women members. I had the impression there was a definite State policy that all State boards——

**Deputy Jimmy Deenihan:** It is not a statutory requirement. It is a policy but it is not in legislation. I know because I had this argument and also from my own experience of the legislation.

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** I remember way back when I was Minister and was filling vacancies on State boards in the area of education, I was following a policy by which I asked that every nominating body should nominate both men and women and this created all sorts of difficulties for some bodies who were of the view that no women were available or suitable. One had to be a little bit tough about it and suggest they did not nominate anybody if they could not find any women. We succeeded in getting women onto the boards but there were not too many people doing this at the time. Where an effort is made one can get the talented women.

Deputy Deenihan talked about the importance of women at branch level. Why do the big parties such as Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil not have a policy of positive recruitment of women to local branches over a six-month period? This could be a project for 2010 or whatever, with targets of women making up at least 50% of the membership of branches and that they would not be making the teas and such work.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** It would be a very useful recommendation from this sub-committee to have an audit of the numbers of women on State boards to see how real the earlier commitment made by successive Governments has been. When I was a Minister of State there was a commitment to have a ratio of 40:60 men and women on all State boards and agencies and relevant authorities appointed by the Government. It would be interesting to see how women are faring in that regard. Such representation would go a long way towards allowing women to influence policy, quite apart from politics. There should be women on State boards who are not involved in politics but who have significant assets and knowledge and professional talent to bring to the corporate governance of organisations. An audit would be a little reminder to the Government of this earlier commitment and would be useful. It might result in a clarification of that commitment to representation of 40:60 on boards.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** I hope Deputy Deenihan is successful in getting all the women involved. Political parties have to look at how local branch meetings are organised such as the business of the meeting, the treasurer's report, the clearing of the debt from the last election. Women organise themselves and their meetings in a different way. I did an audit in the Labour Party at one stage. I telephoned all the branches and discovered there was a branch in one of our constituencies that had no women members. Then I discovered that the branch used to meet in a pub at noon on a Sunday which was not quite conducive to women attending.

I refer to the new technology such as YouTube which is the way people like us should be going. We can hand it to the next generation. It is possible through YouTube and the new technology to become a celebrity because this is really what it is about. Kicking the football, travelling the country, overnight celebrities are being invented out of the new technology. I love Deputy Deenihan's idea of looking at other ways of conducting business. We as women must address the issue of a family-friendly environment. There must be fathers here who want to go home and there must be women who want to come here. I note that Senator Bacik will be drawing up recommendations.

**Deputy Seán Connick:** I welcome the ladies. It is a very interesting presentation and debate. I welcome in particular the former Members of the Oireachtas. I was interested in the com-

[Deputy Seán Connick.]

ments about the Scandinavian and Canadian models and this is an area which may provide more information.

Like Ms O'Donnell I was approached in 1999 and asked to run for the local party at town council level and there is much merit in this approach of seeking out the candidates who have the potential to get elected. I am always cautious about imposing quotas.

In her final contribution, Ms Hussey made the point that the bigger parties should encourage more women. Fianna Fáil does so at officer board level, at cumann level. When it comes to the voting rights of the cumann, we must have one female vote among the three votes in each cumann. We are encouraging more women to become involved at a local level. In the recent local elections in Wexford three out of our 25 candidates were women, two of whom were sitting councillors. Both the sitting councillors lost their seats and the new candidate was not elected, which is very disappointing because they are all very capable ladies and very good individuals. The problem was that they were not successful in getting elected.

Work needs to be done on seeking out and finding the proper candidates. Work needs to be done if we follow Deputy Deenihan's suggestion whereby we handpick people we believe are capable of delivering the seat. The three witnesses are all very successful politicians. I would have admired, supported and at times given out about all of them individually when I saw them appear on television programmes.

**Chairman:** I apologise but I must interrupt the Deputy. Senator Bacik needs to leave for a division in the Seanad and we will be wrapping up shortly. I ask her to make a brief comment before she goes.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I apologise to Deputy Connick. I am conscious that I have already missed one division in the Seanad. As rapporteur I really appreciate the contributions from our three guests and also the very creative ideas proposed by my colleagues on the sub-committee. We have some good food for thought and there is much material for us to consider at future meetings and ultimately put in our report. I thank the witnesses and apologise for having to leave early.

**Deputy Seán Connick:** I wish to raise a number of issues about women campaigning. As a wheelchair user I recognise that it is important that female candidates are not pigeon-holed. They should not seek support simply because they are women. Women are much more capable and do not need to make that argument. They should be seen as broad-spectrum candidates as I would have liked to have seen myself. However, the fact that a candidate is female or in my case a wheelchair user tends to cloud to some degree the judgment on occasion, although this is not true of people who know us or have worked with us. Do the candidates have any views on women running on women's issues as opposed to putting themselves on the field of play as broad-spectrum candidates like everybody else, which is the proper approach?

When I am socialising I find that women are much more engaging when it comes to discussing politics. When out at a social function at night I find that women are much more engaging than men. I enjoy going to speak at a girls' school or to observe a debate. I find the boys are too cool in fifth and sixth year and do not want to know about it, whereas girls are much more engaging. With many school trips to Leinster House I have been lucky or unlucky to be caught for sometimes up to two hours of questioning in the AV room because they are so engaging, which augurs well for the future.

I believe women are making the breakthrough at all levels. I see that throughout the structure of society, particularly the people with whom I deal in various organisations. I find them

extremely capable. It is only a matter of time before that breakthrough will happen in politics. Do the witnesses feel we are making a breakthrough, particularly given that three members of the Cabinet are female? The Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, became the first female Tánaiste in 1997 and obviously we have a female Tánaiste at the moment. Do the witnesses have any thoughts about 20% of the Cabinet being female?

This has been a very interesting exercise and I hope the witnesses have enjoyed the experience. We will do our best to make positive recommendations so that they are not back in five years with no progress having been made. We would like to think we can move the issue forward.

**Ms Liz O'Donnell:** I take the point that progress has been made on female members of Cabinet. However, that does not take away from the fact that there are only 23 women in the Dáil, which is a House of 166 Deputies. When women are elected to this House they tend to be very successful and take leadership roles in their parties. They generally do well in politics and rise to the top once elected. The big stumbling block is the nomination process and getting off the starting blocks to start a political career. When Deputy Connick says there has been progress, I do not agree there has been sufficient progress. It cannot be stated that it is progressive in 21st century Ireland that we have very low participation rates of women in Parliament. When I looked after the overseas aid programme we funded programmes in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. All of our budgets were absolutely contingent on these developing countries having total equality of access to education, health and other services. In other words, our overseas aid development programmes were gender-proofed. This may explain why there are higher participation rates among women in politics in emerging democracies in Africa than is the case in Ireland today.

The Deputy asked whether we thought it better to be a broad-spectrum politician. Yes, of course. Women are broad-spectrum politicians. There is no such thing as a women's issue; all issues are women's issues. The economy, health, war and peace are all fundamentally equally the concern of women and men. The objective is not to have women elected to do womanly things but to have women elected so that they can participate on an equal basis in running the country. That is what I hope the feminisation of politics will bring about.

**Ms Gemma Hussey:** I agree with Ms O'Donnell about women's issues. There was a time when that question was constantly asked. In the Government in which I served, there were two men who had no difficulty in involving themselves in all the debates on so-called women's issues. They were the then Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, and Deputy Ruairí Quinn. Deputy Quinn was never afraid to describe himself as a feminist. He was ahead of himself in those times. Nowadays there are those social issues, which are what we are talking about, and as Ms O'Donnell says, the broader spectrum issues that affect everyone in the country.

We might fall into the problem of complacency because there are three women in the Cabinet. It is not possible to get away from the fact that women are under-represented in every other area of politics and in every other powerful area of the country, even in the teacher unions. The majority of teachers are women and at primary level, unfortunately, they are the overwhelming majority. However, the leadership of teacher unions who enter discussions about pay and other issues are men. That is reflected in every area. For example, the spokespeople for nursing unions are men. We have all that difficulty. We are in danger of being complacent. However, with the help of this committee's work I am sure there will be a breakthrough.

**Ms Niamh Bhreathnach:** I know Deputy Connick said at the beginning that he would be loth to put targets in place. However, he represents a party 7% of whose Deputies are women. Based on the statistical trends, if we keep going at the pace his particular party is going, it will

[Ms Niamh Bhreathnach.]

be nearly the next century before we actually reach some sort of parity. Accepting that it needs to hurry things along a little, I certainly think the involvement in branches, etc., is important. In my day I called it the visibility. The Labour Party used to be able to operate without a woman in sight. When women began to appear and began to take their places we were accepted to be good serving committee members. I would encourage that, but I would ask the Deputy to be somewhat more ambitious in the target.

I take the point that was made about the comparison between being in a wheelchair and being a woman. When political discussions are taking place, Mr. Barack Obama has to be mentioned at some stage. When Mr. Obama decided to run in the presidential election in the US, he did not allow himself to be pigeon-holed. When I was campaigning, I steered away from going to the pub every night. When I was helping male colleagues to get elected, we used to go to the pub. As Deputy Deenihan said, people tend to ask why one is in the pub buying rounds of drinks. Perhaps there is something in Irish political culture that makes that necessary. Maybe the publicans will encourage us to come back. I accept that we may campaign in a slightly different manner.

I would like the bigger parties to set targets. Those who say it is sad that there are so few women in the Oireachtas should bear in mind that it is as a result of hard work, rather than luck, that women comprise 35% of the parliamentary party of the Labour Party. The Labour Party had to take action in 1987 when it had no women in the Dáil, in the Seanad or on the platform at its party conference. I will make all of our information and research available to the sub-committee. It is a pleasure to have been asked to come here and talk to the subcommittee about the matters that first caused us to get involved in politics. I wish the subcommittee well.

**Deputy Noel Treacy:** I thank the former officeholders for returning to the Oireachtas. I suggested that we should consult these great people. Their advice and wisdom will be of benefit to us. I hope some more of their counterparts will attend future meetings of the sub-committee. I look forward to listening to them.

**Chairman:** We have had an interesting discussion this afternoon. I was struck by the remarks that were made about civic education. The witnesses were quite right to argue that we need to ensure that civic education becomes a serious subject at second level. That would give people a greater insight into what happens politically. It would be beneficial from a societal point of view. The sub-committee will consider the matter. I thank Ms Hussey, Ms O'Donnell and Ms Bhreathnach for attending this meeting. I thank the former Members of the Oireachtas who are in the Visitors Gallery. I thank the members of the committee for their contributions. We will examine what has been said with interest when we are compiling our final report on this issue.

The sub-committee adjourned at 4.10 p.m. *sine die*.



## WOMEN IN POLITICS: DISCUSSION

### Business of Sub-Committee.

**Chairman:** Apologies have been received from Deputies Brian O'Shea, Jimmy Deenihan and Seán Connick. Unfortunately, some party conferences are taking place. The minutes of the meetings of 13 and 24 May have been circulated. Are the minutes agreed? Agreed.

### Women in Politics: Discussion.

**Chairman:** I am pleased to welcome Professor Yvonne Galligan to our meeting and to welcome former lady Members of the Oireachtas to the Visitors Gallery. Professor Galligan is a leading academic on the role of women in politics and has conducted a number of detailed studies in this area. The sub-committee is grateful to her for taking the time to appear before us to share her findings with us. I propose we invite Professor Galligan to make a brief opening statement and to follow this with a question and answer session.

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** I thank the Chairman, Deputies and Senators for the invitation to appear before them today to speak on women's participation in politics. I would like to address the substantive areas contained in the terms of reference of this committee and look forward to having a conversation on these points and related issues after my presentation.

In Ireland, there is a general view that there should be more women in politics. In the Irish national election study of 2007, some two thirds of the public said they wanted to see more women in politics. Other surveys, such as the Eurobarometer survey of women and the European elections and the post-local elections survey by the National Women's Council, make the same point. This is in a context where women constitute less than 20% of general election candidates in 2007 and less than 25% of local election candidates in 2009. This committee has heard at first hand from the eminent women politicians who appeared before it of the practical challenges women face as they contemplate a political career. These challenges, which are found in all countries where women are poorly represented in politics, present particular challenges to women wishing to enter political life.

One of the major issues that arises time and again is that of child and family care. While a majority of the public support the idea that women are entitled to work while raising a family, they also expect women to be the primary care givers. Thus, for women actively considering a political career, the problems of reconciling family and political life loom large. A second issue that comes to the fore is that of confidence. This is more than just being shy about speaking in public. It is a consequence of women being less connected with politics than men in the first instance and so being less familiar with the world of politics. They see politics as a tough, confrontational arena and do not feel comfortable taking part in the power struggles that constitute political life.

Third, the difficulty women face in financing a political career needs to be considered. This is a particular hurdle for women who are economically dependent on another but would like to become public representatives. In recognition of this fact, many countries have an EMILY's List or similar financial support mechanism for women candidates.

Fourth is the issue of culture. In this regard, I would like to focus on the culture of political parties rather than on the wider societal culture. As parties are mainly led and run by men, the culture of behaviour and the informally accepted norms of language, views and expressions can mean that parties are uncomfortable places for women to be. Party networks too are often more at the disposal of aspiring men than women, and networks of influence and economic support are important elements in securing a nomination to run and in financing a campaign.

Finally, there is the candidate selection process. As we clearly see, this process is not working to bring women forward in any significant numbers. Although all parties have made efforts to attract more women to run, the result is less positive than everyone would wish. Therefore, it

is incumbent on us to address closely how the proportion of women candidates can be increased. To turn candidacies into seats though, it is also important to consider where women run. Thus, two elements need to be considered in tandem: increasing the proportion of women candidates and selecting them in constituencies where their party has a chance of winning one seat or more.

Much attention has been given to practical ways to increase the proportion of women in elected office. One strand has addressed the supportive strategies needed to attract women into political careers. These include mentoring, training and actively supporting promising women. There are many examples in Europe, some of which are conducted by parties, some by independent women's organisations and others by governments. In the interests of brevity, I draw the committee's attention to the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making. This recommendation contains a comprehensive range of supportive measures to enhance women's participation in politics. It complements the EU recommendation of 1996 calling on member states to introduce appropriate measures to achieve the balanced participation of women and men in decision making.

Perhaps the most effective strategy to date has been that of gender quotas. The spread of quotas as an instrument for redressing the gender imbalance in parliaments has grown considerably since the signing of the UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. Today, quotas of various kinds can be found in more than 100 countries. In Europe, five countries have passed candidate quota legislation, binding on all parties, ranging from a 33% gender quota in Portugal to a 50% quota in France and Belgium, with Spain and Slovenia in between at 40% and 35% respectively. Their enactment has made a difference. In Spain, women's representation in parliament has gone from 28% in 2000, before the passing of the quota law, to 36% in 2008. In Belgium, women members of parliament have increased from 12% in 1995 to 37% in 2007. In France, the application of the parity law to municipal elections increased women's representation from 26% in 1995 to 49% in 2008.

The second form of quota that is widely found in Europe and elsewhere is the voluntary party quota. As it is not a legal requirement, each party quota is adopted at a different time. Therefore, women's parliamentary representation improves more slowly than under the legislated quota provisions. Voluntary party quotas have been highly effective in list PR systems in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. Most parties have adopted a 40% or 50% gender quota. The requirement to alternate the candidates by gender, so that women and men have an equal chance of being elected, has been an important element in making this provision effective. The Christian Democrats in Sweden, for example, have a 50:50 party quota, which delivered 38% women MPs in the most recent election. The similar rules adopted by the German SPD party translated into women winning 36% of the party's parliamentary seats.

The success of legislated and voluntary party quotas has a strong relationship with the rules governing the rank ordering of candidates. The Irish system is different in so far as the electorate does the rank ordering, which makes the selection of women for seats that a party perceives as winnable even more important. In this regard, a party's prospects of winning more than one seat in a constituency need to be taken into account. While parties can introduce voluntary quota requirements, the European experience points to the agreement of local party organisations to the voluntary quota as being essential if this form of affirmative action is to be implemented successfully. Such agreement contributes to the incremental nature of voluntary quotas. It is important the introduction of voluntary or legislated candidate quotas initiates a process within political parties in which the recruitment of women candidates is taken more seriously than it has been.

[Professor Yvonne Galligan.]

We need to consider where Ireland can go from here. The form of quota that is adopted tends to be closely related to the relevant electoral system. Some political parties in the UK, which has single member constituencies, have decided that the introduction of a quota at the aspirant stage, which shapes the pool of potential candidates, is the most appropriate system. The UK Labour Party requires all-woman shortlists for half of its vacant seats. In list PR systems, a candidate quota with rank order rules can be applied. While our system of PR — the single transferable vote — rules out rank ordering by parties, it allows parties to make choices at the aspirant and candidate selection stages. In advance of the 2007 general election, 17 Deputies across Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Labour Party indicated they were retiring from their constituency seats. The 17 vacancies were contested by 29 non-Deputy candidates from the parties in question, of whom six, or 20%, were women. If a gender balanced replacement policy had been in effect, it would have resulted in the fielding of approximately 15 women and 15 men. This would have raised the overall gender ratio of the candidates from the parties in question from 84% male and 16% female to 80% male and 20% female.

A relatively small numerical change in candidate gender balance when considering the filling of party vacancies can increase the proportion of women running for election. If it had been decided that vacant seat contests should involve a gender balance of 40:60 in favour of women, 18 women and 11 men would have been selected to fill the vacancies I have mentioned. This would have improved the overall candidate gender ratio to 78% male and 22% female. This small illustration points to the value of gender balancing candidate selection when vacancies arise through the retirement of sitting Deputies. It can be part of a wider effort to gender balance party candidate tickets at constituency and national level. After all, in a democratic society it is incumbent on parties to provide voters with choices that reflect the geographical, social and gender diversity of the public. This will not come about of its own accord as women's representation has remained stagnant since 1992.

It is important to have a combination of efforts to encourage women into politics and provide opportunities for women to run for office. Encouragement can take the form of practical measures to make women with an interest in politics feel they belong to a particular political party, are respected and valued for the skills, views and experience they bring and are supported by party members in developing their leadership role. Providing opportunities for such women calls for carefully crafted affirmative action that combats entrenched privilege. Quotas are a means to achieving this end. This is a programme with a medium to long-term view. European experience shows that it takes about three elections to evaluate the effectiveness of measures of this kind.

I am aware that quotas are a controversial subject and have given rise to concerns that some women will be seen as so-called quota women and their legitimacy as political representatives will be diminished as a result. This view stems from viewing politics as being the efforts of individuals rather than the structuring of opportunities for some and exclusion for others. Democratic representation is about making use of the widest range of a polity's views, talents and resources to the greater good. Women are an equal part of the polity and have a responsibility to share in the decisions made for society. Our political system must find ways of bringing women's knowledge to bear on the challenges Irish society faces. In this task, the report of the sub-committee will be of great significance and I wish members well in their deliberations.

**Chairman:** May we publish Professor Galligan's statement?

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** Yes.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** As rapporteur to the sub-committee, I thank Professor Galligan for making my job much easier by outlining in a clear and concise manner some of the key findings

from research done elsewhere and expressing some important ideas on where we can apply this research and various models in Ireland. This will make the task of the sub-committee easier when we draw up our report in the coming weeks.

I seek more detail on several of the points raised by Professor Galligan. She pointed out that different strategies are needed to increase levels of women's political representation and referred to a range of a supportive strategies which are outlined in the Council of Europe's 2003 recommendation. Will Professor Galligan expand on which of these supportive measures she regards as most important? I note, in particular, the example she cited of the EMILY's List system, under which financial support is provided for women candidates in different countries. Could we apply this mechanism in Ireland and, if so, how could it be done?

Professor Galligan then focused on the issue of gender quotas and affirmative action measures, noting that the former have been the most effective strategy to date in other countries for increasing women's representation. She also helpfully outlined the widespread use of different types of quota. My assistant, Aoife O'Driscoll, and I have prepared and circulated by e-mail a briefing note for sub-committee members. The note includes a table listing the types of quota systems and levels of women's representation in the countries of the European Union and European Economic Area. We may use this table in our deliberations. Professor Galligan's paper also gives a clear summary of the use of these systems. On the issue of quotas, my focus is on how we can apply a similar idea and if a quota system is the best way of achieving change in Ireland. As Professor Galligan states there has been stagnation in the level of women's representation since 1992, so clearly something is needed beyond the supportive measure she mentioned. If we are looking at some form of affirmative action, should it be a mandatory or a voluntary system? Professor Galligan emphasises the need to look at the type of electoral system, that voluntary quotas have been effective in list proportional representation systems where the political parties present a national list to the electorate and it is easy then to provide for a 50:50 gender balance list. Is that appropriate in a proportional representation single transferable vote system such as in Ireland?

If we are looking at some form of affirmative action, be it mandatory through the legislative model or voluntary, where the political parties all agree to take on a target, how do we counter the argument to which Professor Galligan referred at the end of her presentation, where she pointed out that quotas can be controversial and that there are concerns that some women will be seen as quota women and their legitimacy diminished? Those are some of the arguments that have been used against quotas. In our briefing document for other members we have presented some of the arguments for and against quotas and perhaps the key arguments against them are as follows: first, an element of tokenism in their use, an argument raised by Professor Galligan; second, that they are in some way undemocratic; and third, they are discriminatory against potential male candidates. I would welcome Professor Galligan's views on how that argument can be countered in an Irish context if the sub-committee is to recommend some form of target or affirmative action policy.

I thank Professor Galligan for her excellent presentation.

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** I thank Senator Bacik for raising a range of questions that all strike at the heart of women's political representation and their under representation. I will begin by addressing the different strategies that have been used in other countries and those that have proved most effective. It is very clear that in order to encourage women into political life, a wide range of strategies and different forms of encouragement need to be used. These can range from civic education taken at school level but also perhaps importantly in communities at adult level, encouraging women to feel engaged with the political process and then further developing their interest in becoming politically active. My colleagues in Belfast in Northern Ireland in the organisation Women into Politics do major work in that regard in terms of

sensitising women in the community to political engagement and activism and that is a very good model in terms of looking at what works in a particular context and what brings women into political life. The other important area in terms of encouraging women to run as candidates is actions that mentor women and support them in different ways. Many women are sometimes hesitant to make the step from being a member of a political party to actively seeking candidate selection. Sometimes that concern can be alleviated by good mentoring policies and practices that demystify the role of the public representative and show women that they can bring their talents and skills to bear on that function. Again there are many examples of mentoring and shadowing of political women done formally and informally and I understand the Labour Party here has a mentoring system for women who are aspiring candidates.

The third area is finance. In all my meetings with political party women of all persuasions and from all backgrounds the issue of how they finance political campaigns has come up repeatedly. This obviously is a bigger question for women than for men because it often brings into play the personal aspect of politics in addition to the more public aspects, particularly when women may not have independent incomes from employment in their own right. Consequently, programmes such as EMILY's List which operates in the United States and Australia, in particular, as well as in other countries, are ones under which donations are gathered from the public and given to an independent finance organisation which holds them in trust and donates finance to female candidates. There are various rules governing whatever setting it is in which such donations take place which may be of interest in an Irish context. One way or another, political parties must address the issue of financing women's political campaigns in a particular manner. Moreover, they must explore these questions with female candidates because their financial needs often extend beyond the issue of election literature. They may extend to support for housekeeping or family care services and similar issues that male candidates often are not obliged to address.

Broadly, it is necessary to have in place such soft measures and supportive strategies which can assist women to enter political life and certainly raise their ambitions to do so. Moreover, using political women who are already there as role models is an important way of bringing women into political life, as is engaging women's interest in politics.

As for the voluntary and mandated measures under discussion regarding the entire area of affirmative action, one noticeable pattern one finds across the world is that those countries in which women's representation in parliament is 30% or more are the ones that have in place affirmative action policies. Consequently, it is no accident that, for example, the Netherlands, Sweden and Spain have highly positive levels and a more gender-balanced parliament in each case because this comes directly from the effect of some form of affirmative action, be it legislated or voluntary. This pattern also holds beyond Europe. In many instances, such affirmative action measures have been adopted because in each of these democracies it is considered necessary to have women's talents and experiences engaged in problem solving for society and the public good.

As I outlined in my presentation, there are different methods and mechanisms. However, in the Irish context, the reason I chose the example of vacant seats was that in the case of such seats the individualised and personalised nature of Irish politics is less pronounced than in contests being fought by, for example, sitting Deputies. A vacant seat provides an opportunity to gender balance the composition of the party ticket. It can occur in two ways: it can occur through the retirement of a sitting Deputy or through a political party deciding that it wants to add another candidate to the list. In a way that is a seat not spoken for in an Irish context. It is likely that if parties were prepared to voluntarily commit to gender balancing where there was a vacancy or where a new candidate was to be added to a list, over time it would enable an increase in the proportion of women running as candidates. Importantly, as I raised in my

presentation, it would also give those women candidates a decent chance of winning a seat because where an incumbent steps down for one reason or another, there is obviously party support which provides an opportunity for the party to retain the seat. I included that example in my presentation to show how in an Irish context the STV and list system could make it possible to gender balance party candidates.

The other issue with regard to increasing women's low representation is that of voter choice. When one looked at the candidate lists or lists presented by parties in constituencies in the last election, it was very clear that for the two larger parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, at least 60% of the constituencies were male dominated with no women candidates from these parties. Fianna Fáil fielded no women candidates in 28 constituencies, while Fine Gael did not field a woman candidate in 30 constituencies. Parties are there to filter the representatives they put forward from which people make choices as to whom they want to select. In these cases voters had no gender choice; there may have been a geographical or social choice but there was no gender choice available. In redressing this, some attention in the form of affirmative action needs to be paid to it. That is why I raised the issue of vacant seats as a strategy and one route to addressing this problem.

The third question suggests women who come through such a system in some way feel as tokens, that it undermines their legitimacy and is discriminatory against male candidates. The point of the discussion is that quotas are really not seen as a way of discriminating against men *per se* but of compensating for the structural problems and barriers I discussed in the earlier part of my statement. One cannot state there are inadequate women in politics or that they are less skilled or experienced in terms of the knowledge they can bring to and the contribution they can make in solving the problems we face today. In fact, as politics have become an entrenched, male dominated endeavour, it has become increasingly difficult for women to break through that cultural and structural barrier. Quotas represent an effort to break the barrier which excludes women from political life and to give voters a choice. Quotas or, more correctly, affirmative action can be used as temporary measures to address particularly persistent problems. It is surprising that women's representation has not increased since 1992, given that there is equal representation in so many other areas. The measures could be reviewed after three elections or some other defined period of time and if they were effective at breaking through the cultural barrier, they could be removed because women's participation would have become self-sustaining.

**Chairman:** In her reply to Senator Bacik Professor Galligan noted that a women's group in the United Kingdom was funding various female candidates. From where did that group get its funding?

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** The organisation in question is a private one and is funded by its donors. It was probably established by women entrepreneurs or philanthropists. It was not necessarily funded from the state's purse in the United Kingdom.

**Deputy Noel Treacy:** I warmly welcome Professor Galligan and thank her for her assistance to various Oireachtas committees. I also acknowledge the attendance of former Members and pay tribute to them for the contributions they have made individually and collectively as women parliamentarians.

Professor Galligan stated: "Our political system must find ways of bringing women's knowledge to bear on the challenges society faces." I agree wholeheartedly but this is a huge challenge. I do not know the correct formula to achieve this goal. Irrespective of the nature of the formula, however, if it increases the number of women in politics, there will be no danger that they will be treated with less respect. As a male politician with 27 years experience, it is my

[Deputy Noel Treacy.]

opinion that once a woman is elected, she receives the same rights and respect as her male counterparts. That is only as it should be.

The difficulty arises in finding a formula to deliver elected women to the political system. My party has attempted to achieve this objective. This year we even changed our selection process from a very democratic system of selecting candidates for election at conventions to an interview process in order to create a gender balance on the ticket. Regrettably, we lost out on two counts. First, we lost the goodwill of our organisation by denying members their democratic right to select the candidates they considered to be most suitable and, second, we lost the goodwill of the electorate. Of course, that was not the fault of the women concerned.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** It may have been for other reasons.

**Deputy Noel Treacy:** I can understand that. We tried to change our system to deliver but were excoriated in certain areas for so doing. There are three electoral areas in my constituency and we re-elected one woman in each. All three were very good outgoing councillors. In the last but one local elections we selected an additional candidate in line with the suggestion made today. This is the best way to deliver female candidates and one or two ended up in Parliament after being added to the ticket at the last general election. It gives a guarantee that a person will be on the party ticket, although individual parties will have their own system in that regard. The person whom we selected at the last but one local elections was highly professional and well regarded but was, unfortunately, beaten by a single vote. We were sure we would have the same candidate this time around and our intention was that she would be ready for national politics in the future. However, try as we might, we could not persuade her to re-enter the arena. I am sure women will agree that if a woman is unsuccessful in her first attempt, she tends not to have a second go. This is also a challenge.

Women are role models and have played a major role in politics. Successful political women have left a real mark on the politics of the island, North and South. Nowhere is this the case more than in Northern Ireland where Professor Galligan operates professionally. Ms Monica McWilliams and her colleagues in the Women's Coalition played a significant role in the peace process and did an outstanding job in a brave and open way, against huge odds. As with other politicians in Northern Ireland, they were not rewarded for their efforts but they were there when they were needed to bring common sense, reality and humanity to a difficult situation. Before them, Ms Mairead Corrigan, Ms Betty Williams and the Peace People had a difficult time but they provided huge leadership and commitment. It was high risk and very brave work which impacted at a critical time in Northern Ireland. Mrs. Nuala O'Loan also made an outstanding contribution, one that has changed the whole system in Northern Ireland. Her steadfast and even-handed leadership and capacity to absorb the challenges she faced speak for her contribution.

If we are to change the system, it will be for each political party to do so. We all have to find a mechanism whereby we can engage women and give them the role they should have. Society and politics are much better and more balanced with the engagement and involvement of women. I suggest we start at local authority level to create a structure and an environment — whether by quotas or otherwise — in which female candidates can participate. As it evolves and role models emerge, at both national and international level, we can tweak the system to ensure we have a greater percentage of women in the national Parliament. I am not sure if that is the right approach but it is my suggestion.

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** I thank Deputy Treacy for his very interesting comments. The issues he raises are very important and address the practicalities which are the nitty-gritty of the problem. I am aware of the efforts Fianna Fáil has been making in candidate selection

strategies and it is unfortunate that the goodwill of the party organisation at constituency level was lost. As I stated, for action in this area to be effective and sustainable in the longer term, the local party organisations must engage in the process within their parties and bring that to the discussion.

Sometimes parties turn their minds to candidate selection issues at a point when it is close or relatively close to an election but this issue needs a longer lead-in time in order to prepare a party organisation to accept that it may need to develop an ideal candidate. The picture that must appear in the minds of the local party organisation is one which includes women as well as men, rather than an automatic preference for male candidates. In a way, in its efforts to select more women candidates and in being more sensitive to the gender imbalance, Fianna Fáil was not really appreciated by its local organisations, which probably had a different picture of an appropriate candidate.

There is a process of learning which must take place and that is why it is very useful to open this to discussion internally. Fianna Fáil has been proactive in developing a national gender action plan for the party and for setting targets for bringing more women forward as candidates for various elections, as well as officerships throughout the party.

Some resistance to that point is probably inevitable but that is not a sufficient reason to abandon these efforts. I encourage Deputy Treacy and his party colleagues to continue their efforts in that regard.

The Deputy also hit on a very important point regarding women not running a second time around. That has been identified in many countries as a major problem as when women enter the political fray and are unsuccessful, they are less inclined to try again. This is where the support mechanisms I spoke about earlier can come into play so women do not have to feel as if they have not only failed to get a seat for the party but that they are somewhat inadequate as representatives. It is the job of the political party to be sensitive to that and support promising women by providing them with mentoring, connections to political party life and with a role in the party that can enable both the women and the party to keep their political ambitions alive until the following election. It is an important issue for political parties.

The Deputy mentioned the Women's Coalition, which sadly is no more. It had a notable effect in addition to its important role in the peace process. It sensitised the other political parties to the importance of running women candidates in their parties as well. Part of the success of the Women's Coalition is that it sensitised other parties to that question and those parties responded accordingly. It is quite likely that parties on the nationalist side in particular would not have the level of women's candidacies — over 25% — that they now have if it were not for the Women's Coalition. Many of the questions Deputy Treacy raised need to be teased out at party level and can also form part of the recommendations of the report as members go further into that during committee proceedings.

**Deputy Noel Treacy:** I thank the Professor. We will not mention our records.

**Senator Lisa McDonald:** I thank the Professor for her presentation and welcome her to the committee. I am sorry I missed the initial part of her presentation. I found what she said very interesting. Am I right in saying her principal suggestion is that we should concentrate on party quotas, or quotas for elections as they arise? I found it interesting that Deputy Treacy reckoned we should start at local level. That is probably the case but I imagine that representation at local level is higher than that at national level. Having served at both levels, my experience is that for a woman it is probably easier to be involved in politics at local level, given the constraints of child care etc. I imagine the cost of child care is not the same burden at local level that it is at national level, which brings me to my next question. Has Professor Galligan looked at the urban-rural divide in this regard? From my perspective, and as I look around Leinster

[Senator Lisa McDonald.]

House, there appears to be stronger representation from Dublin and the greater Dublin area from where one can commute to work, than from rural constituencies where one has to leave on a Tuesday and return on a Thursday. I imagine that if those statistics were further broken down one would see that by and large such women have foregone motherhood as an option in their pursuit of a political career. That is a shame because if we are to have women in politics they should not be only one type of woman. We need to have more mothers in politics. I say this, having a ten-week-old baby.

This matter is a bugbear of mine and I shall speak to those involved when I get a chance in the near future. I was sitting having my breakfast on a day in July when there was a very close vote in the Seanad which the Government won, perhaps by one vote or by the casting of the Cathaoirleach's vote. A number of Senators were interviewed and asked why the numbers were so close. The truth is that it is a close-numbered situation, but I was cited as one of the reasons for the vote being so close. I nearly fell off my chair because I was paired and was no part of the reason for the closeness of the vote. I thought this was a despicable thing to say. It was not said by a member of my party but at the same time the perception is there that if a woman in politics has a child she can almost bring down the Government by having her child and being on maternity leave, *mar dhea*, because I must call it "maternity leave".

In the wider world and in Irish society maternity protection and other matters have moved on very much but here in Leinster House there seems to be a mystique about them. If one has a child and is in politics one is perceived as being weak, or as not having the time for one's profession. That is a shame. It is a cultural issue. I notice Professor Galligan mentioned culture in her speech but the culture needs to start here rather than end here. Although we have moved on in business and in wider spheres of employment this has not happened in Leinster House. When people rush back a week after having a child it does every woman a disservice. It is not realistic and is not the reason women are involved in politics. I make the point because in my view that reaction was a bit "off".

Has the Professor looked at the situation whereby parties tend to run dynastic candidates? Many women in politics were, so to speak, the daughters of their fathers before them. Perhaps that helps them with financial and fund-raising issues because there is an entire political machine in place and these people know where to go to get funding, etc. That culture is present. I would like to know what the professor thinks of the fact that Ireland is such a small country but it is difficult for a woman to enter the political sphere who is not part of this machine.

Professor Galligan and Deputy Treacy alluded the fact that a party will not accept women if they are not part of a dynasty, where one has a father who has, unfortunately, met an early demise or has decided to retire and is still around to keep an eye on things. There is a culture and unless one is part of it, especially in my party, Fianna Fáil, one will not ultimately be successful. As I said, it ties in with fund-raising.

Professor Galligan mentioned mentoring and it is a good idea, but the mentors need to be mentored. We need to examine it because a lot of mentoring goes on for all candidates, which is fair enough. Every new female or male candidate is mentored in the same way and that is perfectly acceptable. However, the mentors are used to dealing only with men because it is a man's world in the political sense. Women comprise 50% of the population but the rules were written by men. Mentors need to realise they are dealing with a different animal in terms of a female, and they will not give them the same "wink, wink, nudge, nudge, slap on the back" type of reaction they might get from a male candidate because women tend to be more straight forward, which is part of the reason they are not as successful with the electorate.

I noted that in the first part of her presentation Professor Galligan stated that in the national election study of 2007 two thirds of the public said they wanted to see more women in politics.

I imagine if one asked the two thirds concerned if they voted for the women that were on the ballot papers in their constituencies, they would say “No”. Women do not support women and we are divided into four subsections of our sexes whereby different women are competing with their own and there is a lot of guilt surrounding that. I would like to know what Professor Galligan has to say on those points.

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** I thank Senator McDonald and congratulate her on her recent happy event. Is it a boy or a girl?

**Senator Lisa McDonald:** A girl.

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** She will have a wonderful role model in the Senator. The Senator raised a number of points. The first point I would like to address is the question of local elections, a point Deputy Treacy also raised and to which I forgot to respond. It is very clear that local elections and politics are very important stepping stones for national politics and very important arenas for local democracy in its own right. I suggest any of the thoughts and recommendations of this committee should bear the local, as well as the national, arena in mind and perhaps combine both rather than focusing on a particular one.

None the less, local elections and politics are very important. While women’s representation at local level is better than that at national level, it is only marginally better at 16%, which says there is something happening within the political culture as a whole if political women are not getting selected to run at local level and, therefore, not getting the opportunity to be elected at local level. This question is multi-levelled and multi-layered and goes to the culture of political parties as much as anything else in terms of their ideal, identikit candidate, even at local level. I want to point to the importance of the local level and it being the pool from which national candidates come and the importance of nurturing women’s local careers and ambitions at that level.

The members are right when they say there is an urban-rural divide in that most of the women elected to the Dáil come from urban constituencies. It is almost as if in our urban constituencies, parties are more prepared to run the risk, in their eyes, of running women candidates. In the last local elections, in some of the Dublin council seats parties ran all-women tickets rather than the tickets of women and men, which was very interesting for me to see and the first time I have seen it. In rural areas the pattern of candidate selection is much more traditional and much less gender balanced than in urban areas. Therefore the Dublin area and the Leinster area in general are more gender balanced than any of the other regions of the country. This needs to be looked at. I do not know to what extent that relates to the fact that in urban areas, certainly in the Dublin and broad Leinster area, Leinster House is more accessible.

Certainly it has been said many times by parliamentary women that striking the balance between having a political career and having a family life is a very difficult struggle. That has been found right across the board in all societies. In the Scottish Parliament, for instance, which had the opportunity of setting its rules afresh and from the very beginning, one of the measures it put in place was a recognition that members of the Scottish Parliament, both men and women, were also fathers and mothers and were entitled to have time with their families in the course of their political careers and so organised the rules and the times of parliamentary sittings to reflect the fact that political women and men were more than just political representatives, that they had family lives as well. Being sensitive to that question is an important issue. How one balances for each individual person the political world and the family world also reflects the obligations that society imposes on mothers and fathers. Society often expects women to bear the bulk of the child caring and, therefore, political women often feel quite stressed because of the expectation that they have to bear this responsibility more than they perceive their male colleagues or their male partners need to bear it.

[Professor Yvonne Galligan.]

One suggestion may be that Leinster House itself, if it is to be the role model and send the signal out for society, considers for its political members and staff how it balances this work-life question and issue. This may open up another area where not only will it address the needs of political representatives but will send a strong signal to society as a whole that being a parent is the responsibility of both parents. This is something the committee may wish to consider.

In relation to the family seat question, it has been clear that many women rely on the family seat connection and certainly the political family connection somewhat more than political men do, although male political representatives also rely heavily on it. It works both ways but women rely marginally more heavily on it than political men do. Again that is partly a symptom of the difficulty women face in making the breakthrough into political life. At the end of the day there are only so many political families in the country and there are not enough to deliver a gender equal Dáil. There must be ways other than the political family route of bringing more women into politics. That is why the local elections route is so important. It is also why supportive measures are important because, again, political families serve the function of socialising the younger generations of that family to a career of public service and the demands political life presents. This is not necessarily a socialisation that people outside family dynasties receive and the parties need to compensate for that advantage which women and men from political families have. This is where the active, open and transparent measures of mentoring and supporting women in their political leadership roles come to bear and which are part and parcel of the committee's brief.

The Senator raised a point I have heard often, that women voters do not support women candidates. That is partly as a result, perhaps, of women voters not having the choice of women candidates from their party presented to them. However, it is a generally recognised fact on a wider, global basis that women voters do not always support women candidates and that many male voters support women candidates. Our objective, therefore, is to give voters maximum choice. That is what we are trying to do in this exercise and in other countries too. It is about giving voters a choice in order that democratic decision making is truly democratic, truly reflective of the wide range of interests that women and men hold in society and truly delivers a more rounded and comprehensive outcome in terms of the decisions taken for the public good.

**Chairman:** In her reply Professor Galligan mentioned the importance of the local elections route. I agree. The committee is not focusing on just one route. The mistake made in the past was that we tended to look at our national Parliament and tried to increase the number of women in it. However, we will never do so if the pool of women candidates is not available. The only place one will find that pool of candidates is among the women who are members of local authorities. We must build from the ground up.

Professor Galligan also mentioned the culture of political parties more than once. Is that where we must start? If we do not put the foundations and building blocks in place, this will not work. We must go back to the local elections to start. It might take a little longer but what we have done has not worked. Professor Galligan said it would take three elections before we would find out whether it was working. Must we start there?

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** The Chairman is right to identify local politics as the pool from which national candidates can come. It is only exceptional individuals who come through any other route. The Seanad is also a pool from which national candidates come.

**Chairman:** They are often councillors because they are elected by councillors.

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** Exactly. In the last local elections the overall proportion of women running as candidates was 25%. The overall outcome was that 16% of the councillors

were women, which is, in fact, down from the previous local elections when 19% of the councillors were women. The Chairman is quite correct. Much attention must be paid to the selection of candidates for the local elections and that percentage needs to be increased significantly if, in the process of filtering out candidates for the national level, the national level number must be raised. I am suggesting that one may wish to look at both the local and the national level at the same time. There are still women at local level among that 16% who would be excellent candidates at national level and attention must be given to filtering the candidate selection process to enable the emergence of those women who are interested at the local level and who have the promise of being excellent candidates for Dáil Éireann. As the Chairman pointed out, the issue is very much how political parties within their organisations perceive women's candidacies to be legitimate candidacies in their own right, and the extent to which they accept women as political equals and having an equal entitlement to run for political office, be it at local or national level.

In my discussions with women from all parties engaged in the issue of women in politics, many women tell me that they feel uncomfortable in the male-dominated cultures of their political parties and while it is quite okay for them to take on supportive roles, they are not encouraged to take on leadership roles. In fact, in some cases they are actively discouraged from taking on individual leadership roles. This discouragement can take the form of remarks that may devalue their contributions to political debate. They may not be given the space to speak at local meetings. It may be that the meetings themselves are held in places where women feel somewhat less comfortable in going. If a constituency meeting or a political meeting is being held in a room above a pub, for instance, which is often where many political meetings were held traditionally, that is not often a place where political women will feel comfortable in going, and often if a political woman appears at a meeting on her own for the purposes of engaging in that discussion, people might also find comments that question her motivation for being there in the first place. These subtle expressions that question a woman's right to engage in a political environment in her own right are signals which women pick up and which come from the culture of that political party in terms of how it perceives women and women's status in their party and in society.

I am not necessarily pointing the finger at any political party because these particular issues of culture to which I refer are witnessed in many political parties, not only in Ireland. For example, in other countries women who are prospective candidates can be asked who will mind their children while they run for political office whereas that question is not asked of male candidates who run for political office. The standing afforded to women and the extent to which they are accorded equality with men — in the context of the recognition of their right to be involved and respect for their contribution to political debate — must be addressed by political parties across the board.

**Chairman:** Senator McDonald referred to the urban-rural divide. Obviously, it is far easier for a woman in Dublin to be involved in politics because she can return home at night. The position is not the same for someone who is obliged to travel to the capital city from elsewhere in the country. At a previous meeting Deputy Deenihan referred to the possibility of using video conferencing to allow women to remain at home while still permitting them to participate in some way. Has such a method ever been tried?

**Professor Yvonne Galligan:** To the best of my knowledge, I have not come across it but I am not stating it does not happen. However, I have not heard about it previously. It appears to be an excellent use of modern technology. While it might not work for plenary sessions, it might work quite well for committee meetings and other activities of the Houses. It is a very interesting idea. It might also relieve the pressure not only on female elected representatives but also on their male counterparts who live long distances from the Dáil and who have

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demands on their time which require them to be located close to home. If a male or female Member of the Houses was ill, was well enough to be able to communicate by means of video conferencing but was not sufficiently healthy to undertake a long journey, it would be an eminently sensible arrangement to put in place.

**Chairman:** Yes. That is a matter we might pursue on another occasion.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I join Deputy Treacy in welcoming the former women Members and other observers with an interest in this matter to the Visitors Gallery. It is great to see so many people in attendance because it shows the interest there is in this issue. I also congratulate Senator McDonald on the birth of her child. As a mother of young children, I am conscious of the fact that it is easier to be involved in politics if one lives in Dublin. It is much easier thanks to the work of former women Members who lobbied hard for the establishment of the Oireachtas crèche, of which I have become a grateful user and which facilitated my attendance in the Houses last year when my baby was very young. These are matters which, as the Chairman stated, we must consider in the context of the organisation of the Oireachtas and how it operates. The crèche has proved extremely important for Dublin-based Members who are parents.

The information Professor Galligan has provided will inform our report in great measure. I am conscious that many of the comments made and questions put by members focused on the culture of political parties. It is clear from the literature that the political parties are the gatekeepers of what is often called “the secret garden of the nomination process”. As Professor Galligan stated, the procedures employed in that secret garden can often be murky or opaque. It is important that the sub-committee should try to make recommendations that will address the difficulties for women in overcoming this political culture which continues to obtain within the parties and in the context of their gatekeeping activities regarding the way forward in increasing women’s representation. We will be focusing on matters at both local and national level.

I hope to work with my assistant in preparing a draft report for the next meeting of the subcommittee. I suggest such a meeting be held in private in the next three to four weeks.

**Chairman:** That is fine, particularly in view of the fact that we set ourselves a target of making our report by the end of October.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** Yes, I am conscious of the deadline.

**Chairman:** That should give us adequate time in which to prepare a report.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I will certainly have something to present to the sub-committee at its next meeting.

**Chairman:** That is great. I sincerely thank Professor Galligan for attending. Her contribution was extremely informative and we thank her for assisting us in our deliberations on this matter. I thank members for their attendance and contributions. I also thank the former Members of the Oireachtas who are present in the Visitors Gallery for attending.

The sub-committee adjourned at 3.55 p.m. *sine die*.