



LESSON PLAN

Debate a Bill

Learning outcome 3.5

Discuss strengths and weaknesses of democracy

Learning outcome 3.7

Explain how laws are made, enforced and evolve over time

Students will learn

- ▶ About the issue of lowering the voting age
- ▶ How a Bill progresses through the Houses of the Oireachtas
- ▶ To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the legislative process

Materials

- ▶ Slide show
- ▶ Extract from Bunreacht na hÉireann – a copy for each student
- ▶ Bill * – a copy for each student
- ▶ Committee Stage Amendments – a copy for each student
- ▶ Worksheet: Form your policy and prepare your speech – a copy for each student
- ▶ Minister's instructions – one copy
- ▶ Ceann Comhairle's instructions ** – one copy
- ▶ A bell or similar for the Ceann Comhairle to keep order (a cup and spoon would do)

* The Bill provided is a mock Bill, not a real one.

** The wording provided for the Ceann Comhairle is a simplified version of the procedure used in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Assessment for learning/Key skills

- ▶ Role play
- ▶ Communicating
- ▶ Working with others
- ▶ Managing information and thinking



Introduction

In this activity, students will learn how Bills are debated in the Oireachtas. Then the class will hold a mock Dáil debate on a Bill in three separate stages. The students will take on various roles: Ceann Comhairle, Minister and TDs. The teacher acts as Clerk of the Dáil, assisting the Ceann Comhairle to chair the debates. The activity will take approximately two hours in total, so you will need to split it across two or three classes.

The topic of the Bill is the minimum age for participation in parliamentary politics. The Bill would amend the Constitution to allow people to vote in Dáil elections from the age of 16.

1 Explain how Bills are debated in the Oireachtas

SLIDE 3

Every Bill must be debated in both Houses of the Oireachtas before it can be made law.

If a TD brings forward a Bill, it is debated in the Dáil first. If it is passed in the Dáil, it then goes to the Seanad.

If a Senator brings forward a Bill, it is debated in the Seanad first. If it is passed in the Seanad, it then it goes to the Dáil.

If both Houses pass the Bill, it is sent to the President, who signs it into law. Once it is signed, it is known as an Act.

SLIDE 4

If the purpose of a Bill is to change the Constitution of Ireland, a referendum must be held to see if the people of Ireland agree.

SLIDE 5

In each House, the debate on a Bill is divided into five stages.

Note: Dáil Committee Stage is often taken by the relevant Oireachtas Select Committee.

SLIDE 6

Case study: Protection of Children's Health (Tobacco Smoke in Mechanically Propelled Vehicles) Act 2014

Open the Bill page and show the following points of information:

- ▶ The Act prohibits the smoking of tobacco products in vehicles where children are present.
- ▶ It also gives powers to the gardaí to enforce it.
- ▶ The Bill was sponsored by three private members – private members are not members of the Government.
- ▶ The Bill was introduced in the Seanad.
- ▶ It progressed through the five stages in the Seanad before passing to Second Stage in the Dáil.
- ▶ The Bill took more than two and a half years from First Stage to enactment.
- ▶ New versions of the Bill were published after changes were made on Committee Stage and Report Stage in the Seanad.
- ▶ After being signed by the President, the Bill was published as an Act and translated into Irish.

2 Introduce the debate role play

The class will take on the roles of TDs and debate a Bill through the five stages in the Dáil.

Distribute the **Extract from the Constitution of Ireland** (see page 8) and the **Bill** (see pages 9-10) to each student.

SLIDE 7

Show how the Constitution of Ireland defines the age at which people can stand for election to the Dáil (21) and the age at which people can vote in Dáil elections (18).

Say the Government wanted to reduce the voting age to 16. To do this, the Government would write a Bill to amend the Constitution and introduce it in the Dáil.

SLIDE 8

Show the extract from the Bill and explain that it simply substitutes a new number for the existing one.

Note: The Bill is in Irish as well as English because the Constitution is in both languages.

3 Assign roles

SLIDE 9

Assign roles as follows:

Ceann Comhairle	Chairs the debate, does not speak on the Bill and does not vote in divisions* unless there is a tie	One student
Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government **	Introduces the Bill; speaks and votes in favour of it	One student
Other Government party TDs	Speak and vote in favour of the Bill	40% of students
Opposition party TDs	Speak and vote against the Bill	30% of students
Independent TDs	Free to support or oppose the Bill	30% of students
Clerk	Advises the Ceann Comhairle on procedure, speaking order and timing; counts votes in the event of a division	Teacher

* Division: The point in parliamentary proceedings where a question or amendment is put to a formal vote by Members.

** This particular Minister sponsors the Bill on behalf of the Government because the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is responsible for elections.

4 First Stage

SLIDE 10

Remind the class that on First Stage, **the Bill is initiated or presented to the House.**

Explain that when a TD who is not a member of the Government wants to introduce a Bill, they must ask the Dáil's permission to introduce it.

Show the video extract of First Stage of the Litter Pollution (Amendment) (Dog Litter Control) Bill 2019 (2 minutes).

The Bill we are discussing is sponsored by a Government Minister, so permission is automatically granted. This means First Stage is not taken in the Dáil, and the Bill proceeds directly to Second Stage.

5 Prepare for Second Stage

SLIDE 11

Remind the class that on Second Stage, **the general principles of the Bill are debated.**

Show the extract from the Seanad Second Stage of the Parent's Leave and Benefit Bill 2019, 9 October 2019 (5 minutes).

At the end of our debate, the Ceann Comhairle will ask the House to agree that the Bill is passed on Second Stage. Because this is a Government Bill, the Ceann Comhairle assumes that the House agrees to pass the Bill. If any TD disagrees, they may call a division of the House by saying, "Vótáil".

SLIDE 12

Allocate speaking time to each group. The groups must choose spokespersons and share out their time among them.

The Minister will make the opening speech outlining the effect of the Bill and why the Government wants to implement it. They will also make a closing speech at the end of the debate, responding to the arguments made by the other TDs.

SLIDE 13

Give the Ceann Comhairle the **Ceann Comhairle's instructions - Second Stage** (see pages 15-16).

Give the Minister the **Minister's instructions** (see pages 13-14).

Give each student a copy of the **Worksheet: Form your policy and prepare your speech** (see page 12) and allow them time to prepare their speeches. They can use the facts on the slide. The Minister can work with the other Government party TDs or alone.

The clerk notes the names of the speakers and the time allocated to each one.

6 Second Stage debate

Arrange the seats in a semicircle with Government party members on one side, Opposition party members on the other and Independents in the middle.

The Ceann Comhairle and clerk sit at the head of the room. The clerk gives the Ceann Comhairle the list of speakers and time allocated and informs the Ceann Comhairle when each speaker's time is up.

The Ceann Comhairle calls the meeting to order and adjourns the House at the end of the debate.

7 Prepare for Committee Stage

SLIDE 14

Remind the class that on Committee Stage, **the Bill is examined section by section and TDs can propose changes to the Bill, called amendments**. Amendments are published in advance of the debate and copies are handed out.

Show the Committee Stage debate on the Microbeads (Prohibition) Bill 2019. This took place in the Oireachtas Select Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on 27 November 2019 (5 minutes).

During our debate, two amendments will be proposed. The Ceann Comhairle will invite TDs to move their amendments and allow time for a discussion on them. If amendments are agreed to, the text of the Bill will be changed.

The Ceann Comhairle will also ask the House to agree to each section. Because this is a Government Bill, the Ceann Comhairle assumes the House agrees to each section. TDs can call divisions as before by saying "Vótáil".

SLIDE 15

Give the Ceann Comhairle the **Ceann Comhairle's instructions - Committee Stage** (see page 17-18)

Give each student a copy of the **Committee Stage Amendments** (see page 11).

Discuss the effect of the amendments. Amendment No. 1 would reduce the age at which people can stand for election to the Dáil to 18. Amendment No. 2 would change the voting age to 17 instead of 16.

Assign the two amendments to two TDs. During the Committee Stage debate, these TDs will move the amendments and make a speech outlining to the Minister why he or she should accept the amendment.

If the Minister accepts an amendment, the amendment is made and the text of the Bill is changed. If the Minister rejects the amendment, the TD proposing it can withdraw it or press it to a division.

In this case, the Minister will reject both amendments. Ask the TD who moves Amendment No. 1 to withdraw it and ask the TD who moves amendment No. 2 to press it to a division.

Allow a short time for the Ceann Comhairle, Minister and TDs to prepare for Committee Stage.

8 Committee Stage debate

Arrange the seating as for the Second Stage debate.

Make sure students have copies of the Bill and amendments. If any amendments are agreed to by the House, students can write the change into their copies of the Bill.

The Ceann Comhairle calls the meeting to order and adjourns the House at the end of the debate.

9 Prepare for Report and Final Stages

SLIDE 16

Remind the class that on Report Stage, **only amendments arising out of Committee Stage are considered**. No new amendments can be proposed at this stage.

On Final Stage, the Minister usually makes **final statements** on the Bill and thanks the TDs for their participation in the debate. Other TDs may also speak. The Ceann Comhairle asks the House to pass the Bill. TDs may disagree and call for a final vote on the Bill.

Show the Report and Final Stage debate on the Consumer Protection (Gift Vouchers) Bill 2018, 6 November 2019.

In this case, we have no Report Stage amendments so we proceed to Final Stage.

Give the Ceann Comhairle the **Ceann Comhairle's instructions - Report and Final Stage** (see page 19)

Allow a short time for the Ceann Comhairle, Minister and TDs to prepare for Final Stage.

10 Report and Final Stage debate

Arrange the seating as for the Second Stage debate.

The Ceann Comhairle calls the meeting to order and adjourns the House at the end of the debate.

11 Conclusion

SLIDE 17

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the process by which the Oireachtas debates and passes Bills.

→ Extension activities

Choose a recent Bill that has been debated on Second Stage in the Dáil or Seanad. Give students the links to the video and written report of the debate. Assign each student one speaker.

Ask students to answer the following questions:

- ▶ Does the speaker support the Bill?
- ▶ Identify three arguments the speaker makes.
- ▶ How convincing did you find the arguments?
- ▶ How do you rate the speaker's delivery of the speech?

Suggested Bills

Choose one of these Bills or search the Houses of the Oireachtas website for one that interests your students:

Electoral (Amendment) (Voting at 16) Bill 2016

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2016/63/

Free Education (Prohibition of Fees and Charges) Bill 2018

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/47/

Children's Digital Protection Bill 2018

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/133/

Provision of Objective Sex Education Bill 2018

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/34/

Prohibition of Conversion Therapies Bill 2018

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/39/

Extract from the Constitution of Ireland

DÁIL ÉIREANN

ARTICLE 16

1 1° Every citizen without distinction of sex who has reached the age of **twenty-one years**, and who is not placed under disability or incapacity by this Constitution or by law, shall be **eligible for membership** of Dáil Éireann.

2° i All citizens, and

ii such other persons in the State as may be determined by law,

without distinction of sex who have reached the age of **eighteen years** who are not disqualified by law and comply with the provisions of the law relating to the election of members of Dáil Éireann, shall have the **right to vote** at an election for members of Dáil Éireann.

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AIRTEAGAL 16

1 1° Gach saoránach, cibé acu fear nó bean, ag a bhfuil **bliain agus fiche** slán agus nach gcuirtear faoi mhíchumas nó faoi mhíthreoir leis an mBunreacht seo ná le dlí, tá sé **intofa ar chomhaltas** Dháil Éireann.

2° i Gach uile shaoránach, agus

ii cibé daoine eile sa Stát a cinnfear le dlí,

cibé acu fir nó mná, ag a bhfuil **ocht mbliana déag** slán agus ná cuirtear faoi dhícháilíocht le dlí, agus a chomhlíonann coinníollacha an dlí i dtaobh toghcháin comhaltaí do Dháil Éireann, tá **ceart vótála** acu i dtoghchán comhaltaí do Dháil Éireann.



Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill
2020

Bill

Entitled

An Act to amend the Constitution.

WHEREAS by virtue of Article 46 of the Constitution any provision of the Constitution may be amended in the manner provided by that Article:

AND WHEREAS it is proposed to amend Article 16 of the Constitution:

Be it therefore enacted by the Oireachtas as follows:

Amendment of Article 16 of the Constitution

1. Article 16 of the Constitution is hereby amended as follows:
 - (a) “sé bliana déag” shall be substituted for “ocht mbliana déag” in subsection 2° of section 1 of the Irish text,
 - (b) “sixteen years” shall be substituted for “eighteen years” in subsection 2° of section 1 of the English text.

Citation

2. (1) The amendment of the Constitution effected by this Act shall be called the Thirty ninth Amendment of the Constitution.
(2) This Act may be cited as the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Act 2019.



An Bille um an Naoú Leasú is Tríocha ar an mBunreacht (Toghcháin Dála), 2020

Bille

dá ngairtear

Acht chun an Bunreacht a leasú.

DE BHRÍ gur cead, de bhua Airteagal 46 den Bhunreacht, foráil ar bith den Bhunreacht a leasú ar an modh a shocraítear leis an Airteagal sin:

AGUS DE BHRÍ go bhfuil beartaithe Airteagal 16 den Bhunreacht a leasú:

Achtaítear ag an Oireachtas ar an ábhar sin mar a leanas:

Airteagal 16 den Bhunreacht a leasú

1. Leasaítear leis seo mar a leanas Airteagal 16 den Bhunreacht:
 - (a) cuirfeadh “sé bliana déag” in ionad “ocht mbliana déag” i mír i d’fho-alt 1° d’alt 1 den téacs Gaeilge;
 - (b) cuirfeadh “sixteen years” in ionad “eighteen years” i mír i d’fho-alt 1° d’alt 1 den téacs Sacs-Bhéarla.

Lua

2.
 - (1) An Naoú Leasú is Tríocha ar an mBunreacht a thabharfar ar an leasú a dhéantar ar an mBunreacht leis an Acht seo.
 - (2) Féadfar an tAcht um an Naoú Leasú is Tríocha ar an mBunreacht (Toghcháin Dála), 2019 a ghairm den Acht seo.

DÁIL ÉIREANN

An Bille um an Naoú Leasú is Tríocha ar an mBunreacht
(Toghcháin Dála), 2019—AN COISTE

Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections)
Bill 2020—COMMITTEE STAGE

Leasuithe
Amendments

SECTION 1

ALT 1

1. In page 1, between lines 15 and 16, to insert the following:
 - (c) “ocht mbliana déag” shall be substituted for “bliain agus fiche” in subsection 1° of section 1 of the Irish text,
 - (d) “eighteen years” shall be substituted for “twenty-one years” in subsection 1° of section 1 of the English text.

1. I leathanach 2, idir línte 15 agus 16, a méid seo a leanas a chur isteach:
 - (c) cuirfear “ocht mbliana déag” in ionad “bliain agus fiche” i mír i d’fho-alt 1° d’alt 1 den téacs Gaeilge;
 - (d) cuirfear “eighteen years” in ionad “twenty-one years” i mír i d’fho-alt 1° d’alt 1 den téacs Sacs-Bhéarla.

—Name of TD moving the amendment: _____

2. In page 1, line 12, to delete “sé bliana déag” and substitute “seacht mbliana déag”.
and
In page 1, line 14, to delete “sixteen years” and substitute “seventeen years”.

2. I leathanach 2, líne 12, “sé bliana déag” a scriosadh agus “seacht mbliana déag” a chur in a ionad.
and
I leathanach 2, líne 14, “sixteen years” a scriosadh agus “seventeen years” a chur ina ionad.

—Name of TD moving the amendment: _____



Work sheet: Form your policy and prepare your speech

To reduce the minimum age of voting in Dáil elections from 18 to 16.

please tick the box you agree with

Do we agree or disagree with the proposal in the Bill to reduce the minimum age of voting in Dáil elections?

Agree

Disagree

Do we agree that 16 is the right age, or would we choose a different age?

16

Different age

Do we think the people of Ireland are likely to accept or reject the proposal in the referendum that will follow the Bill?

Accept

Reject

What arguments will we make to support our view?

What arguments do we think our opponents will make and how can we argue against them?

Would we propose any other changes to the Constitution's rules about Dáil elections?

Who will our speakers be and how will they divide their time between them?
(Give the Clerk a list of speakers and the amount of time each one will have.)

Minister's instructions

Second Stage

At the beginning of Second Stage, you move that Second Stage be taken now. Then you outline the provisions of the Bill and explain why the House should pass it.

Use this script to get started.

MINISTER: **I move that the Bill be now read a second time. I am pleased to bring the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill 2020 forward. The Bill proposes to amend the Constitution of Ireland to reduce the minimum voting age in Dáil elections from 18 to 16. If the Bill is passed by both Houses, it will require a referendum before the Constitution can be amended.**

The Government decided to bring forward the Bill because...

Give overall reasons why the Government decided to give younger people the opportunity to participate in politics.

Explain why the House should agree to the Bill.

I look forward to hearing the Deputies' views on the Bill and I hope they will support it. I commend the Bill to the House.

Committee Stage

On Committee Stage, two amendments will be moved in turn. TDs will ask you to accept the amendments. Use this script to respond to the amendments.

Amendment No. 1

MINISTER: **I thank the Deputy. It is an interesting point, however I cannot accept the amendment. If passed, the Bill will require a referendum, and we cannot ask people to vote on two different changes to the Constitution in one Bill. Some may support the reduction in voting age but not the reduction in the age of TDs. The measure the Deputy proposes would have to be brought forward in a separate Bill. I therefore ask the Deputy to withdraw the amendment.**

Amendment No. 2

MINISTER: **I thank the Deputy. The Constitutional Convention recommended that the voting age be reduced to 16. Other organisations such as the National Youth Council of Ireland agree that 16 is the right age. The Cabinet discussed the issue and concluded that 17 would not go far enough to include younger people. I therefore ask the Deputy to withdraw the amendment.**

Minister's instructions

Report and Final Stage

On Final Stage, The Ceann Comhairle will call on you to propose that the Bill do now pass, and you can make a statement on the Bill.

You could:

- ▶ thank the Deputies for their contributions and their support for the Bill
- ▶ briefly outline why the Bill will be a good thing
- ▶ say you hope the Seanad will pass it and that it can proceed to a referendum

MINISTER: **I propose that the Bill do now pass. I thank the Deputies for the very worthwhile debate we have had...**

Ceann Comhairle's instructions – Second Stage

As Ceann Comhairle your job is to chair the debates and keep order.

You call each TD to speak and tell them how much time they have. If they go over time, ask them to finish their speech.

TDs should speak only when you call them to. They should not interrupt each other. They should speak only on the Bill and not make any personal attacks on each other.

When you ask the House if a question is agreed, assume the House agrees to it. If a TD disagrees with your ruling, they can challenge a division by saying "Vótáil".

Here are some useful phrases:

"Order please."

"Please do not interrupt the Deputy/Minister."

"The Deputy/Minister without interruption."

"Thank you, Deputy. Your time is up. Please resume your seat."

"Deputy, you are out of order."

Ceann Comhairle's instructions – Second Stage (continued)

Script

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **Order please. The Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill 2020, Second Stage. I call on the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.**

Allow the Minister to speak for the allocated time, then call on the other TDs in the order given by the Clerk. When all TDs have spoken, call the Minister to respond.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **The question is that the Bill be now read a second time. Is that agreed? Agreed.**

If the House agrees to the question, the Bill is passed on Second Stage and you close the debate.

If anyone says "Vótáil", hold a vote.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **On the question that the Bill be now read a second time, a division has been challenged. Deputies please vote now.**

TDs vote by a show of hands. The Clerk counts the votes, writes the result down and hands it to the Ceann Comhairle. If the division results in a tie, you have the casting vote.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **On the question that the Bill be now read a second time:**

Members in favour: ____

Members against: ____

The question is carried. / The question is lost.

Close the debate.

PROCEED
TO THIS
SECTION

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **That concludes Second Stage of the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill 2020. The House is adjourned.**

Ceann Comhairle's instructions – Committee Stage

TDs may speak only on the specific amendment or section in question. If the Minister does not accept a TD's amendment, the TD may withdraw it or press it to a division. If the TD presses the amendment, you ask the House to vote on it.

Committee Stage

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **Order please. The Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill 2020, Committee Stage. Section 1. I call Deputy _____ to move amendment No. 1.**

The Deputy moves the amendment and explains to the Minister why it should be accepted.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **The Minister to reply.**

The Minister responds and says whether the amendment will be accepted.

If yes:

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **The amendment is made.**

If no:

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **Deputy, are you withdrawing the amendment?**

In this case the Deputy will withdraw the amendment.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **Amendment withdrawn. I call Deputy _____ to move amendment No. 2.**

If the Deputy presses the amendment, call a vote.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **On the question that the amendment be made, a division has been challenged. Deputies please vote now.**

TDs vote by a show of hands. The Clerk counts the votes and writes the result down.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **On the question that the amendment be made:**

Members in favour: ____

Members against: ____

The amendment is carried. / The amendment is lost.

Ceann Comhairle's instructions – Committee Stage (continued)

Once amendment No. 2 has been dealt with, proceed as follows.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **Is section 1 agreed to? Agreed.**

*TDs may not agree to a section.
If that happens, call a vote as before.*

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **Section 2. Is section 2 agreed to? Agreed.**

*TDs may not agree to a section.
If that happens, call a vote as before.*

*When both sections have been dealt with,
you close the debate.*

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **That concludes Committee Stage of the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill 2020.
The House is adjourned.**

Ceann Comhairle's instructions – Report and Final Stage

On Final Stage, TDs may make brief statements on the Bill. You then ask them to agree that the Bill is passed. If a TD disagrees, they may call for a vote.

Report and Final Stage

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **Order please. The Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill 2020, Report and Final Stage. As there are no Report Stage amendments, we proceed to Final Stage. I call on the Minister to propose that the Bill do now pass.**

The Minister may make a brief statement. If other TDs wish to speak, you may allow them to but ask them to keep it brief.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **The question is that the Bill do now pass. Is that agreed? Agreed.**

If the House agrees, the Bill is passed and you close the debate.

If a TD does not agree, hold a vote.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **On the question that the Bill do now pass, a division has been challenged. Deputies please vote now.**

TDs vote by a show of hands. The Clerk counts the votes, writes the result down and hands it to the Ceann Comhairle. If the division results in a tie, you have the casting vote.

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **On the question that the Bill do now pass:**

Members in favour: ____

Members against: ____

The Bill is passed. / The Bill is defeated.

Close the debate.

PROCEED
TO THIS
SECTION

CEANN COMHAIRLE: **That concludes Final Stage of the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Dáil Elections) Bill 2020.**

If the Bill is passed.

The Bill will now be referred to Seanad Éireann.

The House is adjourned.