



LESSON PLAN

How laws change society

Learning outcome 3.10

Investigate how individuals or groups have used the law to bring about change in society

Students will learn

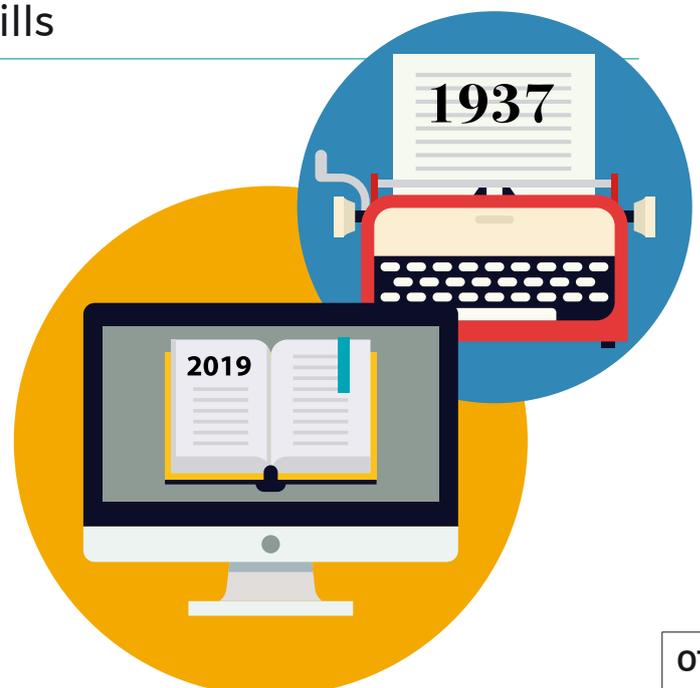
- ▶ About how laws shape society over time
- ▶ How to examine a law and see the change it brought about
- ▶ About the issue of gender equality in Ireland

Materials

- ▶ Slide show
- ▶ Factsheets: Acts – one factsheet for each group, five in total
- ▶ Worksheet: Thoughts on gender equality in Ireland – one for each student

Assessment for learning/Key skills

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



1 Recap how laws are made and changed

SLIDES 3-5

Recap how laws are made and amended to shape society. Highlight the fact that as times change, so too do laws.

2 Gender equality in Ireland

SLIDE 6

Introduce the issue of gender equality and ask the students their opinions on the matter. Outline the changes in gender equality during the past century.

Note: For information on the changing status of women in Ireland, see the following links.

www.irishecho.com/2013/05/10-things-a-woman-could-not-do-in-ireland-in-1970

www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1666-women-and-society

SLIDE 7

Laws which improved gender equality were passed in each of the years shown on the slide. Ask students to guess what the changes may have been, given the dates.

3 Five gender equality Acts

SLIDE 8

Divide the class into five groups and give each group one of the **Acts factsheets** (see pages 4-8). Ask each group to research their Act and prepare to make a presentation on it to the class.

Note: You could ask students to use an online presentation tool such as **Flipgrid**.

SLIDES 9-13

Ask each group to make their presentations to the class.

4 **Worksheet: Thoughts on gender equality in Ireland**

SLIDE 14

Discuss whether gender equality has been fully achieved and if not, why not. Show the European Institute for Gender Equality links and play the **Gender Equality Index game**.

Ask students to consider where the issues the Acts dealt with could go next.

Note: For information on the current status of women in Ireland, see the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/node/684_en

SLIDE 15

Give each student a copy of the **Worksheet: Thoughts on gender equality in Ireland** (see page 9) and ask them to write a short opinion piece giving their thoughts.

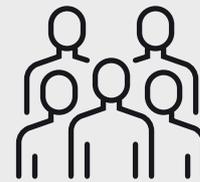
Extension activities

Create a meme highlighting one of the issues raised in this lesson.

Make a collage of images capturing the lives of women in one of the years discussed.

Compose a tweet which might have been sent telling that one of the Acts featured in this lesson has been passed.

Examine the **Constitution of Ireland** for all references to women, in both the articles and amendments, and write a short report on your findings.



Representation of the People Act 1918

This Act was passed by the Westminster Parliament and applied to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It greatly increased the numbers of people who could vote in parliamentary elections. Previously, men had to occupy a property of a certain value in order to qualify for a vote. The 1918 Act allowed all men aged 21 and over to vote. Men in the armed forces could vote from the age of 19.

Women aged at least 30 who occupied a property of a certain value, or who were married to a man who did, were also permitted to vote. At that time, some universities had their own parliamentary representatives elected by their graduates. The 1918 Act permitted female graduates aged at least 30 to vote in their university constituencies.

A separate Act in the same year permitted British and Irish women to stand for election to the House of Commons. In the general election of that year 17 women stood for election and one was elected.

Equality of voting rights for men and women was achieved in Ireland in 1922 when the Irish Free State was created. It was 1928 before this equality was achieved in Great Britain. The suffrage movement had fought for many years to achieve this in both Britain and Ireland. One of the best known Irish suffragettes was Hannah Sheehy Skeffington.



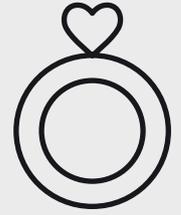
“If a woman is short of food, is she not hungry? If she works hard, is she not tired? If she suffers from unpleasant conditions of labour, is she not equally impoverished and weakened by these conditions? Why cannot the argument for women be based upon the simplest and most straightforward reason—the reason that they are human beings...and if the franchise is a weapon that they need for their self-defence and for the protection of their interests and of their labour, women need it just as much as men.”

Earl Russell, House of Lords, 17 December 1917



Resources

www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/case-study-the-right-to-vote/the-right-to-vote/birmingham-and-the-equal-franchise/1918-representation-of-the-people-act
www.oireachtas.ie/votail100



Married Women's Status Act 1957

This Act allowed women to own property in their own right. It also made women liable for their own debts. It was seen as an important step in the rights of women. It also allowed for one spouse to sue another in court.

The United Nations passed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952, and in 1957 another convention about the nationality rights of married women. A supporter of this Act was Senator Owen Sheehy Skeffington, son of Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, a suffragette who had fought for women's right to vote in the early 20th century.



"To put it shortly, I may say that the object of the Bill is to put married women in the same legal position as single women and men. In other words, it means to get rid once and for all of the disabilities under which married women at present suffer, not alone in regard to their property but also in regard to their ordinary rights in contract and tort."

James Everett TD, Minister for Justice, Dáil Éireann, 8 November 1956

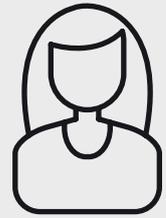


Resources

www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1957/act/5

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/1956/35

richardkennedysolicitors.wordpress.com/2011/01/31/the-family-home-and-women-in-irish-law



Civil Service (Employment of Married Women) Act 1973

Until 1973, all women who worked in the Civil Service had to give up their job once they got married. This was known as the “marriage bar”. The marriage bar had been introduced by a regulation by the Minister for Finance in 1924, which stated: “Female Civil Servants holding established posts will be required on marriage to resign from the Civil Service.”

Many private companies upheld the same practice, based on the expectation that a husband would provide for his wife. The marriage bar was included in the Civil Service Regulation Act 1956, which stated: “Women holding positions in the Civil Service, other than positions which are declared excepted positions under subsection (2) of this section, are required to retire on marriage.”

Even after the 1973 Bill became law, it took some time before the numbers of women in the workforce increased. One of the politicians who fought for a change to this law was Senator Mary Robinson, who later became President of Ireland.



“I have pleasure, therefore, in introducing this Bill, which has been well described as the women’s Magna Carta and which will abolish an old injustice while not forgetting the less fortunate members of our society. This Bill represents a new deal for women and is a step in our plan towards abolishing all discrimination against women.”

Peter Barry TD, Minister for Transport and Power, Seanad Éireann, 25 July 1973



Resources

www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1973/act/17

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/1973/26

www.ictu.ie/blog/2019/10/14/the-marriage-bar-a-ban-on-employing-married-women/



Equal Status Act 2000

The Equal Status Act ensures equality of all citizens on nine grounds, one of which is gender. It prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. The Act was amended in 2004 by the Equality Act.

The Act gave powers to the Equality Authority to work towards the elimination of prohibited conduct, promote equality of opportunity in relation to the matters to which the Act applies and to provide information to the public on and to keep under review the working of the Act.

The Equality Authority has since been dissolved and its functions transferred to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.



“There is no doubt there has been discrimination against women golfers. A few clubs do not allow women to be members, which is hard to believe in 2000. Other clubs allow women to be associate members only. That means they have limited playing time and usually cannot play at weekends. They cannot vote and, therefore, cannot have a real say in decisions affecting members such as fees, playing times and so on. These rules appear to assume women do not work and should play midweek rather than at weekends. This patriarchal view of women is entirely unacceptable.”

**John O’Donoghue, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Seanad Éireann,
23 February 2000**



Resources

www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/1999/19

www.ihrec.ie



Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012

The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 regulates the amount of money political parties can accept in donations and requires them to disclose who is making donations.

It also provided that political parties would face a cut of half their State funding received under the Electoral Act 1997 if they did not have at least 30% women and 30% men candidates at the next general election. The general election of 2016 was the first to which this Act applied. All parties met the 30% threshold and a record number of women TDs were elected. The required proportion of women and men will increase to 40% seven years after the 2016 general election, after February 2023.



“The proportion of men to women in the population is approximately 50:50 but this has never been reflected in Dáil representation. Just over 15% of the Members of Dáil Éireann are women. The fact that this is the highest level of female representation achieved in the history of the State says something. It has taken too long to travel this short distance. Experience shows that if we leave matters alone, the situation will not improve as quickly or as significantly as we want. We cannot continue to drift along in respect of this matter. We must take action.”

**Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government,
Seanad Éireann, 2 February 2012**



Resources

www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/36

www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2011/79/

data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2018/2018-01-24_impact-of-gender-quotas-on-election-to-dail-eireann_en.pdf



Worksheet

Thoughts on gender equality in Ireland

