



DEMOCRACY ACTION

Organise a consultation

Strand 3: Exploring democracy

Organise a consultation with the student body on matters of interest to them

Materials

- ▶ Slide show
- ▶ Worksheet 1: Analyse an Oireachtas Committee meeting
- ▶ Worksheet 2: Analyse an Oireachtas Committee report
- ▶ Invitation to Committee meeting
- ▶ Submissions call template
- ▶ Committee report template

Assessment for learning/Key skills

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



Introduction

Use this lesson pack to undertake a consultation on a matter of interest to the students. This activity mirrors the consultations undertaken by Oireachtas Committees.

Students will take on the following roles:

- ▶ Committee members led by the Chairperson
- ▶ Committee staff led by the Clerk of the Committee

Working together, they will select an issue to investigate, identify the stakeholders in your school or community, consult with the stakeholders and write a report on the consultation.

You could select an issue that concerns your school or one that affects your local area.

The class could work together to produce one report, or they could break into groups and each group produce a report.

Development

1 Before the consultation

Introduce the Oireachtas Committees

SLIDE 2

Briefly outline Oireachtas Committees:

- ▶ Oireachtas Committees advise the Houses of the Oireachtas on a range of areas.
- ▶ Committee members include TDs and/or Senators.
- ▶ Committees also scrutinise Government expenditure and debate proposed legislation.
- ▶ Some Committees mirror Government Departments, some are established for a special purpose.

SLIDE 3

Example of an Oireachtas Committee that mirrors a Government Department:

The Committee on Children and Youth Affairs considers and reports on matters relevant to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

SLIDE 4

Example of an Oireachtas Committee that was established for a special purpose:

The Committee on Climate Action was established specially to consider the third report and recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly entitled **How the State can make Ireland a Leader in tackling Climate Change**.

Decide the issue you want to consult on

SLIDE 5

One of the jobs Oireachtas Committees do is to hold **consultations** on a specific issue and make **recommendations** to the relevant Government Minister.

Choose an issue that the students are interested in.

Some ideas to get you started:

- ▶ Should the school uniform be abolished in our school?
- ▶ Should smartphones be banned on school grounds?
- ▶ To what extent is bullying a problem in our school and what action should the school take?
- ▶ Are the fees/voluntary contributions appropriate and should they be increased, decreased or abolished?
- ▶ How much is the school contributing to the local community and how could we do better?

Give examples of issues Committees have investigated:

- ▶ Medicinal cannabinoids
- ▶ Cyber security for children and young adults
- ▶ The right to die with dignity
- ▶ Tackling childhood obesity
- ▶ Climate action
- ▶ Healthy eating in schools

Define who the stakeholders are

SLIDE 6

Stakeholders are people who are **affected** by the issue or who are **interested** in it.

When the Committee on Health held its consultation on medicinal cannabinoids, it identified the following stakeholders:

- ▶ Doctors working for the Health Products Regulatory Authority
- ▶ A neurologist at St. James's Hospital
- ▶ The mother of a child who has a type of epilepsy that may be treatable with medicinal cannabinoids

SLIDE 7

Examples of stakeholders the students may identify are:

- ▶ Student council
 - ▶ School management
 - ▶ Parents
 - ▶ Teachers
 - ▶ Community organisations
 - ▶ Local residents
 - ▶ Local councillors
-

Discuss how you will consult

SLIDE 8

Choose some ways to investigate the issue:

- ▶ Read about the issue
- ▶ Invite certain people to make written submissions, e.g. all students
- ▶ Go on a fact-finding trip, for example to a school that does not have a uniform
- ▶ Invite stakeholder representatives, such as the chairperson of the parent-teacher association, to a Committee meeting

When the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs held a consultation on tackling childhood obesity, it:

- ▶ Consulted research on the issue including the **Growing up in Ireland study**
 - ▶ Invited members of the public to send written submissions
 - ▶ Held 12 meetings with stakeholders
-

Decide what your output will be

SLIDE 9

Usually a Committee writes a **report** that documents:

- ▶ The issue and the reason for the investigation
 - ▶ How the investigation was undertaken
 - ▶ Who the Committee consulted with and what their opinions were
 - ▶ The conclusions the Committee came to about the issue
 - ▶ Recommendations to the Government on action it should take
-

Assign roles

SLIDE 10

- ▶ Assign some students to be **members** of the Committee and others to be **staff**.
- ▶ Appoint one of the Committee members as **Chairperson** of the Committee.
- ▶ Appoint one of the staff members as **Clerk** to the Committee.

Note: You could allow students to decide among themselves who will take which roles and allow Committee members to elect the Chairperson.

Hold an initial Committee meeting

SLIDE 11

Hold an initial meeting to make a **detailed plan** for the consultation.

Note: Defining the scope of the consultation helps make sure your investigation does not spread out to include extra issues.

SLIDE 12

The Chairperson calls the meeting to order and leads the Committee to formally agree exactly:

- ▶ What they want to find out
- ▶ Who the stakeholders are
- ▶ Which methods they will use
- ▶ When they expect to conclude the consultation and publish the report

The Clerk and staff document these decisions.

Homework

Assign each Committee member a Committee meeting from the **Examples of Committee consultations** (see page 9) and ask them to complete **Worksheet 1** (see page 10).

Assign each staff member a Committee report from the **Examples of Committee consultations** (see page 9) and ask them to complete **Worksheet 2** (see page 11).

Note: The **Examples of Committee consultations** provides a selection of Committee consultations on various topics. Choose one or more that are suitable for your class or browse the Committees section of the Houses of the Oireachtas website to find others.

2 The Consultation

Having chosen an issue, identified the stakeholders, decided on the methods to be used and set a timeframe, your class is ready to begin the consultation. Allow time for the groups of students to do the following tasks.

The Clerk to the Committee:

- ▶ invites stakeholders to attend a Committee meeting, using the **Invitation to Committee meeting template** (see page 12)
- ▶ publishes an open call for written submissions, if required, using the **Submissions call template** (see page 13)

Note: Stakeholders who attend Committee meetings are referred to as “witnesses”. The Clerk usually invites them to prepare a written submission and a short opening statement summarising their views on the issue the Committee is investigating, which they will read at the beginning of the meeting. The written submissions and opening statements can be included in the report.

Committee staff:

- ▶ research the issue and prepare briefing papers for Committee members
- ▶ assist the Clerk with correspondence

The Chairperson of the Committee:

- ▶ asks staff to research specific aspects of the issue
- ▶ arranges a fact-finding trip, if required

Committee members, including the Chairperson:

- ▶ read research briefing papers prepared by staff
 - ▶ read written submissions from witnesses, if available
 - ▶ attend the fact-finding trip, if required
-

Hold at least one Committee meeting with witnesses

Note: Remember this is just a simulation of an Oireachtas Committee meeting. Although it is structured, it does not have to be too formal.

Before the meeting:

- ▶ Committee staff set up the meeting room with a table and chair for each member and witness arranged in a circle or U shape and seats for the staff to observe the meeting.
- ▶ The clerk welcomes the witnesses and receives copies of their opening statements.
- ▶ Committee members prepare their questions.

At the meeting:

- ▶ The chairperson calls the meeting to order and welcomes the witnesses.
- ▶ The clerk sits beside the chairperson and assists but does not speak as part of the meeting.
- ▶ The chairperson calls on each witness to make an opening statement and asks them to conclude when their time is up.
- ▶ The chairperson calls on each Member in turn to ask questions of the witnesses and asks them to conclude when their time is up (the chairperson can also ask questions).
- ▶ Staff and members take detailed notes of the witnesses' answers.
- ▶ The chairperson thanks the witnesses and declares the meeting adjourned.

3 The Report

Committee members decide on their conclusions

Committee members consider all the evidence they have gathered: research, submissions, opening statements and the discussions with witnesses.

The Committee holds a meeting to agree what their conclusions are. They also decide what actions they recommend the school take.

Committee staff and members work together to produce the report

Look at some **Oireachtas Committee reports** (see page 9). You don't have to read them all, but they will give you an idea of what your report should contain.

You can use the **Committee report template** (see page 14) as a guideline structure for your report.

The Committee publishes the report and sends copies to the stakeholders

The Committee may try to get publicity for the report by holding a launch event.

Conclusion

Discuss the consultation process with the class.

- ▶ How do they feel the consultation went?
- ▶ What would they do differently if they were to do it again?
- ▶ How difficult was it for the Committee members to agree on the conclusions and recommendations?
- ▶ How useful do they think the Oireachtas Committee system is?
- ▶ What issues would they like an Oireachtas Committee to investigate?

Examples of Committee reports and meetings

1. Committee on Education and Skills - Report on tackling of obesity and the promotion of healthy eating in schools

Meeting

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/2017-10-24

Report

data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/reports/2018/2018-07-11_report-on-tackling-of-obesity-and-the-promotion-of-healthy-eating-in-schools_en.pdf

2. Committee on Education and Skills - Uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships

Meeting

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/2018-11-15

Report

data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/reports/2019/2019-09-25_report-on-hearings-relating-to-the-uptake-of-apprenticeships-and-traineeships_en.pdf

3. Committee on Health - Legalisation of medicinal cannabis

Meeting

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health/2016-11-24

Report

data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_health/reports/2017/2017-01-20_report-on-medicinal-cannabinoids_en.pdf

4. Committee on Children and Youth Affairs - Cybersecurity for children and young adults

Meeting

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/2017-12-06

Report

data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/reports/2018/2018-03-29_report-on-cyber-security-for-children-and-young-adults_en.pdf

5. Committee on Children and Youth Affairs - Tackling childhood obesity

Meeting

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/2018-07-11

Report

data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/select_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/reports/2018/2018-11-14_report-on-tackling-childhood-obesity_en.pdf

6. Committee on Justice and Equality - Right to die with dignity

Meeting

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/2017-11-22

Report

data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/reports/2018/2018-06-25_report-on-the-right-to-die-with-dignity_en.pdf



Worksheet 1: Analyse an Oireachtas Committee meeting

Answer the following questions using the video and written transcript of the Committee meeting assigned to you. You may wish to watch some of the meeting and also scroll through the transcript to find the information you need. You do not have to watch or read the whole meeting.

Name of Committee

Topic of consultation

Give details of three of the Committee members who attended the meeting

	Name	Party
1		
2		
3		

Give details of three of the witnesses who attended the meeting

	Name	Organisation	Why I think the Committee invited them
1			
2			
3			

Briefly outline three points made by witnesses at the meeting

1		
2		
3		

Give three questions that Committee Members asked

	Member	Question
1		
2		
3		



Worksheet 2: Analyse an Oireachtas Committee report

Answer the following questions using the Committee report assigned to you. You do not have to read the whole report.

Name of Committee

Topic of consultation

Give one reason why the Committee decided to hold a consultation on this topic

Give details of three stakeholders identified in the report

	Name	Organisation	Why I think the Committee identified them as a stakeholder
1			
2			
3			

Give three recommendations the Committee makes in the report

1	
2	
3	

Briefly outline three facts that you learned from the report

1	
2	
3	

Invitation to Committee meeting template

Invitation to make written submission and attend meeting

<TITLE OF COMMITTEE>

<ADDRESS>

<PHONE NUMBER>

<EMAIL ADDRESS>

<DATE>

Dear _____,

The Committee on _____ invites you or a representative from your organisation to **attend a meeting** of the Committee to discuss the topic of _____.

The meeting will take place at <time and date> in <location>.

An invitation to attend the meeting has also been extended to _____.

At the meeting you will be invited to make an **opening statement** on the matter of no more than __ minutes, and this will be followed by questions from members of the Committee.

It is also requested that you make a **written submission** on the topic, which the Committee will examine as part of its consultation on the matter.

Please confirm your attendance at the meeting as soon as possible by email to _____. Please include the names and titles of any other people in your organisation who wish to attend the meeting.

Please send a copy of your written submission and your opening statement by email to _____ in advance of the meeting.

The material you provide to the Committee may be included in the Committee's report on the issue.

Yours sincerely,

Clerk to the Committee

Submissions call template

Call for written submissions on _____

The Committee on _____ invites written submissions from interested groups or individuals on _____.

The Committee will consider any suitable written submissions received and may decide to invite contributors to public hearings.

Closing date

The closing date for receipt of submissions is _____.

How to send your submission

Please email an electronic document to the Clerk to the Committee at _____.

What to include in your submission

Your submission should comprise the **submission document** and a **separate covering letter**.

In the covering letter, please include:

- ▶ your name, postal address, email address and contact telephone number
- ▶ if the submission is on behalf of an organisation, your position in the organisation
- ▶ a brief outline of why you are making the submission
- ▶ an indication of whether you would be willing to appear in public session at a Committee meeting

In the submission document, please include:

- ▶ a brief introduction, for example, explaining your area of expertise
- ▶ any factual information that you have to offer from which the Committee might be able to draw conclusions, or which could be put to other parties for their reactions
- ▶ any recommendations to the Committee; be as specific as possible and summarise your recommendations at the end of the document

Please remember to number your pages.

Your submission may be included in the Committee's report on the issue.

Committee report template

Front page	Include:	School name/logo
		Committee name
		Title of report
		Date of publication
Contents	List the contents and page numbers.	
Chairperson's foreword	A general statement by the Chairperson about the background to the consultation, importance of the report and the Committee's hopes for future action on the issue. The Chairperson might also thank the participants.	
Introduction	You could include:	The reason the Committee undertook the consultation
		An outline of the current situation regarding the issue
		A summary of the Committee's consultation on the issue
Engagement with stakeholders	List:	The dates on which witnesses attended Committee meetings
		The written submissions received from members of the public
		The dates and location of fact-finding trips
Discussion	You could include:	The current situation regarding the issue
		A comparison with other schools/areas/countries
		A summary of the research on the issue
		A summary of the discussion with stakeholders
		If the consultation is on a proposal to change policy, you could include arguments for and against the change
Recommendations	List the Committee's recommendations for action on the issue.	
Appendices	Committee membership	List the Committee members.
	Stakeholders	List the stakeholders.
	Opening statements	Provide copies of opening statements by witnesses who attended Committee meetings.
	Written submissions	Provide copies of written submissions received.