



**Tithe an  
Oireachtais  
Houses of the  
Oireachtas**

# **Guidance Note: Making Witness Submissions and Oral Presentations to Oireachtas Committees**

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## Introduction

If you have been invited to attend a Committee meeting, this guidance note should be read together with the [Witness Protocol](#). Most attendance at Committee meetings is voluntary. If you have been compelled to attend a Committee meeting you should also read the [Guidelines for Witnesses on Compellability](#)

You should also note that if you are appearing before an Oireachtas Committee, you will be referred to as a "witness" and the information you share with the Committee will be called "evidence".

## Why do Committees want to talk to the public and stakeholders?

Oireachtas Committees routinely invite interested persons or bodies to give evidence by way of written or oral presentation on any matter in its Work Programme. These can include Ministers, civil and public servants, representatives of non-Governmental organisations other interest groups and individuals. It is through the Committees that much of the detailed work of the Houses of the Oireachtas is conducted. Committees have a range of functions including scrutinising the operation of Government Departments, examining policy issues and considering proposed legislation in detail before it becomes law.

## Do I need to make a written submission to a Committee if appearing as a witness?

In advance of making an oral presentation to the Committee, a witness will normally be asked to make a written submission if they have not already done so. This can provide an opportunity for the witness to brief the Committee and elaborate on issues which there may be limited time to discuss during a meeting.

Receiving such a submission in advance also gives Committee members an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the matters on which a witness is to present and is likely to form the basis for members' questions during a meeting. It can contribute to a more meaningful and focussed discussion.

## Guidance for witnesses on making a written submission in advance of attending a meeting

### What should I include in my submission?

Your letter of invitation to attend a Committee meeting will specify what your submission should include. This will normally comprise a **submission document** with briefing material, an **opening statement** and a **covering email/letter**. It is important that you read the letter of invitation carefully.

If you have already submitted briefing material, the Committee may ask you to elaborate on specific areas or respond to certain questions.

### Submission document

Unless otherwise specified in your letter of invitation, your submission document should include:

- a brief introduction, for example, explaining your area of expertise
- any facts or information (evidence) that you have to offer from which the committee might be able to draw conclusions, or which could be put to other parties for a response
- links to any publications you refer to- there is no need to send such publications as attachments

- any recommendations to the Committee; be as specific as possible and summarise your recommendations at the end of the document
- an executive summary of the main points made in the submission in the case where your document is more than 10 pages long

### **Opening Statement**

An opening statement is a statement read by a witness towards the start of his/her engagement with the Committee before questioning and discussion with the witness begins. The statement normally draws attention to the key points in the witness's submission document. The letter of invitation will specify how long this should be but, if not, you should aim for 750- 1500 words (a maximum of 5-10 minutes when read).

### **Covering email/letter**

A covering email/letter should accompany your submission document and opening statement. In your covering email/letter, you should include any further contact details such as a mobile numbers and any special requirements in relation to your attendance at a Committee meeting, or any other general matters you may wish to draw attention in advance of the Committee meeting. Keeping personal information in a separate covering letter facilitates the publishing of a submission document, should a Committee decide to do so at some point, without revealing personal details.

### **Tips on writing your submission document**

- ✓ Keep your submission concise and to the point. Do not include any unnecessary or superfluous material that does not relate directly to the topic.
- ✓ Avoid arriving at conclusions or making recommendations without indicating the supporting facts or evidence.
- ✓ If you refer to other publications, include links to the publications. There is no need to send them as attachments.
- ✓ Please remember to number your pages and it is helpful to number paragraphs also.
- ✓ Ensure your submission is in MS Word format or searchable pdf format.

### **Important Information**

- Your submission should be directly relevant to the topic on which you were invited to speak and as stated in your letter of invitation.
- The Committee cannot consider submissions which deal with cases relating to individuals.
- You should not criticise or make charges against any person(s) or entity, by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable or otherwise include anything that might be regarded as damaging to the person's or entity's good name.
- You should be careful not to comment on matters currently before a court of law or matters in respect of which court proceedings are imminent. If you anticipate such issues arising, you should discuss with the Committee Clerk how this might affect what you can submit.

- Most Committees engage with public policy issues. The Committee is not a forum for making personal representations or promoting a product, service or business, and you should not attempt to do so.

### Making a submission is a public process

The operations of a parliament are a public process, and you should be aware that any documents submitted to a Committee including your identity may be published either, in whole or in part, as part of a Committee report, or separately, if the Committee decides to do so.

Note also that the Committee reserves the right not to accept your submission, and it is not obliged to publish any part of it.

### Sending your submission

- Your letter of invitation will specify how to send your submission. It should normally be sent in pdf or Word document format to the Committee's email address and for the attention of Clerk of the Committee in question.
- Submission deadlines given in the letter of invitation must be observed.
- Once received, the Clerk will ensure that it is circulated to all Committee members.

### How your submission will be dealt with

- You should expect to receive an acknowledgement of receipt within 2 working days.
- The Committee Clerk will circulate your submission to members of the Committee in advance of your attendance at a Committee meeting.
- You should expect to be questioned on the material supplied to the Committee during the meeting.

## Guidance for witnesses on making an oral presentation to an Oireachtas Committee

### How does a Committee decide who to invite to a meeting?

Committees receive many requests for meetings, and they need to be sure that the topic is within remit and forms part of the Work Programme of the Committee before they agree to a meeting.

Invitations to public meetings are issued by each Committee based on the item or area of the Work Programme under consideration at the time, and the time available.

### Can I participate remotely?

If you are unable to attend in person, it may be possible to attend the meeting by video conference from your preferred location. You should contact the Clerk in relation to this.

Depending on the arrangements for a meeting, remote attendance may also be at the request of the Committee. Arrangements for remote participation will be explained to you by the Clerk and normally included in the letter of invitation.

### Do I need to send anything in advance?

If requested to attend a Committee meeting as a witness, the letter of invitation may request a submission. This will normally comprise a **submission document** with briefing material, **an opening statement** and a **covering email/letter**.

### Is there a dress code in Parliament?

The established practice is that Members, staff and visitors to the Houses of the Oireachtas should wear business attire, or similar clothing in keeping with the status of parliament. Please note that the wearing of emblems that can be regarded as political in nature is not permitted.

### Are the Committee Rooms wheelchair accessible?

The Oireachtas Committee Rooms are fully accessible for wheelchair users. However, it would be helpful if you could let the Committee Clerk know as soon as possible if there are any other facilities or assistance you require.

### How can I observe a Committee meeting?

All public Committee meetings can be viewed live or after the event on the Oireachtas website. The schedule of meetings at [www.oireachtas.ie/en/Committees/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/Committees/) will indicate the venues in which public meetings of Committees are taking place. The “watch and read” panel in the centre of that page provides links to the feed coming from each venue.

Persons who wish to view the proceedings of either House or a Committee from within the parliamentary premises must be sponsored by a Member of the Houses. That Member will inform the Parliamentary Usher staff accordingly and your name will be placed on a list for access. However, if you have been formally invited to attend a Committee meeting your name will already have been placed on an access list for that meeting.

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### What is the normal format for a Committee meeting?

The focus of the session is on the Committee putting questions to you, about your written submission. Unless requested, there is no need to read your full written submission as the Members will already have received it. Your opening statement should summarise your written submission and highlight the main points. Questions will then be put to you by Members of the Committee. These questions are designed to clarify aspects of your submission, to seek information relevant to the Committee's functions and to allow you to expand on any points made in your submission. During the meeting, it may be helpful to take a note of the various questions, so that you do not overlook any of the issues raised.

### During the meeting are there any protocols you should follow?

When entering the Committee Room, go directly to the seats set aside for you, as directed by the Committee staff. You should normally remain seated in your place until the session has been concluded by the Chair.

### How do I address the Members of the Committee?

You should address the Members by their titles i.e. Deputy X, Senator X etc. Office holders should be addressed by their title e.g. Chair, Taoiseach, Tanáiste, Minister. In the Committee Rooms the names of the Members, followed by (T.D.) to denote a Deputy and (S) to denote a Senator, are electronically displayed on the front of the desks.

### Is there any presentation equipment?

All the Committee Rooms have facilities for displaying videos and PowerPoint slides. If you wish to use these facilities, you must make a request to the Clerk one week in advance of your planned attendance at the meeting informing them of this and stating what the intended digital format to be used will be. Please also supply a copy of the presentation then.

There are some disadvantages to using presentational facilities that you should be aware of when considering a request to use them. The information contained in these types of presentations may be lost on those watching the meeting remotely (not present in the room). Also, only the spoken word forms part of the official record of the meeting and your presentation will not be included in the official report.

### Can I use any other electronic equipment?

Only the equipment already installed may be used. In order to protect the sound and recording systems, other electronic devices such as pagers, mobile phones, laptop computers, tape recorders and radios, are not permitted. The use of mobile phones is strictly prohibited, and they must be switched off (silent mode is not enough) in the Committee Rooms when a Committee is meeting.

### How long will the meeting be, and will there be any breaks?

Committee meetings vary considerably in length. The length of the meeting depends on the item of business being considered and whether there is more than one group making a

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presentation. Meetings of 2 hours or less will usually not have a planned break.

It is possible, however, that a meeting may have to be interrupted to allow Members to vote in either Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann. If this happens, the break will be for approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Voting is an important part of a Member's role and it is not intended as a discourtesy to you if the meeting is interrupted for this reason. It will be resumed as soon as possible.

For a longer meeting, a break may be planned either to allow Members to attend specific proceedings, e.g. Leaders' Questions in the Dáil, or for a meal break.

### Will the meeting be broadcast?

Making an oral presentation to an Oireachtas Committee is a public process. The meeting will generally be conducted in public unless specifically stated.

All Committee meetings held in public can be viewed live or as a recording via the Oireachtas website. A useful starting point for locating the meeting you wish to view is the "watch and read" panel in the centre of the Committees page at [www.oireachtas.ie/en/Committees/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/Committees/)

Televised coverage of Committee meetings held in public are broadcast within the Leinster House complex and are available for subsequent public broadcasting by RTÉ and TV3. Each week selected meetings are also broadcast live on the dedicated Parliamentary channel Oireachtas TV and all public Committee meetings are replayed over the course of the week. For more information on where you can see Oireachtas proceedings and Committee meetings on our [Oireachtas TV page](#).

A transcript will be published on the Committee website in due course. So, everything you say at the meeting will be publicly available.

### What do I do when the meeting has concluded?

If attending a meeting in person, the same protocol applies when leaving as when you are entering the Committee Room, (unless the meeting has formally adjourned). You should leave quietly, taking care not to interrupt ongoing business. Please return your security badge to the desk on your way out. Witnesses must exit the campus via Kildare Street Gate.

If attending a meeting online as a remote witness, you can click on the **Leave Meeting** button when your contribution or the meeting has ended.

If you have agreed to forward additional material in response to a question, that material should be forwarded to the Committee Clerk, who will distribute it to all Committee Members.

### Can I get a copy of the meeting transcript or the webcast or video?

The transcript of the meeting will be available on the Committee web site normally within 7-8 working days of the meeting.

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## Matters arising from the meeting

If there is any matter arising from the meeting that you wish to bring to the attention of the Committee, you should contact the Committee Clerk.

If, following the meeting, you feel you have been adversely affected by a statement made during the course of the meeting, you should bring this to the attention of the Clerk. You should also consult [www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/utterances-having-an-adverse-effect/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/utterances-having-an-adverse-effect/).

## Usáid Gaeilge

Is beartas de chuid Sheirbhís Thithe an Oireachtais é fáilte a chur roimh úsáid na Gaeilge agus éascaíonn an tSeirbhís úsáid na Gaeilge leis an tSeirbhís.

Más mian leatsa Gaeilge a úsáid, ná bíodh aon drogall ort é sin a chur in iúl dúinn.

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