



THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM & THE PRESIDENT

LEARNING OUTCOME

Committees are an important part of the work in Parliament and this lesson explains how they can monitor what goes on inside the Houses. This lesson also discusses the role of the President in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

The work of parliament is very broad and sometimes very detailed. Members have to deal with an ever-increasing volume of business. The committee system gives them more opportunities to take part in the work of the parliament.

This is one of the four Committee Rooms in Leinster House. Committees are formed to make sure that Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann can review the work of the Government, TDs and Senators.

Each of these committees examine a specific area of Government business, such as Transport or Foreign Affairs. Generally speaking the committees mirror Government Departments. Committees examine proposed legislation in detail, monitor Government spending and often invite organisations with a special interest in a topic to contribute to their work.

Committees are also the only forum where Members of the Parliament may interact with the public. Journalists and members of the public are allowed to attend public meetings and you can also watch the proceedings online.

THE PRESIDENT

The President is the head of State. A president is elected by the people every seven years. The official residence of the President is Áras an Uachtaráin in the Phoenix Park in Dublin. Candidates for the presidency must be at least 35 years of age.

Usually political parties put forward candidates to contest this election. Independent candidates can also stand if they get the support of four local councils or 20 members of Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann. However, when a president is chosen he or she does not take an active role in party political issues.

The Constitution gives the President important, if limited, powers. The President, on the advice of the Taoiseach, dissolves Dáil Éireann and a general election is called. The President, after a vote in Dáil Éireann, formally appoints the Taoiseach and other members of the Government.



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THE PRESIDENT

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The President signs into law every piece of legislation passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. If the President believes that a law may be in conflict with the basic law laid out in the Constitution then he or she may decline to sign the law and will ask the Supreme Court to decide if the law is constitutional.

The Supreme Court is the most important court in Ireland. It reviews issues to ensure that they are in accordance with the Constitution.

Before taking the decision to send a law for review by the Supreme Court the President will seek advice from a body called the Council of State. The Council of State consists of senior judicial and political figures such as the President of the High Court, the Attorney General, former Presidents and Taoisigh and seven people that the President nominates.

ACTIVITY

Find out who the current President of Ireland is by going to www.president.ie

Answer the following questions:

- 1) When was s/he first elected President?
- 2) Find out five interesting facts about the President.
- 3) Name the members of the current Council of State.
- 4) Who was the first President of Ireland?
- 5) Two Mary's have been President of Ireland. Who are they?