



HOW THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS WORK

LEARNING OUTCOME

This lesson tells you what makes up the Houses of the Oireachtas and gives detailed information on Dáil Éireann, the Taoiseach and the Government. The activities in this section will assist students in learning more about the parties that are represented in Dáil and Members of the Government.

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy. The National Parliament or Oireachtas consists of the President and two Houses: Dáil Éireann which is the House of Representatives and Seanad Éireann or the Senate.

The functions and powers of these houses originate from the Constitution of Ireland that was enacted by the People on 1st July, 1937.

The Houses of the Oireachtas are situated at Leinster House, on Kildare Street in Dublin. And I'm now standing here in the main Dáil Chamber.

The Constitution gives each House the power to make its own Standing Orders or Rules and the power to have penalties if they're ever broken.

The Oireachtas has sole and exclusive power to make laws depending on the obligations of our membership in the European Union as provided for in the Constitution.

Dáil Éireann gets priority when it comes to the life of the Parliament, in that a general election to Seanad Éireann must take place no later than 90 days after the dissolution of the Dáil.

When it comes to making laws or legislation, the Constitution says that Seanad Éireann cannot delay indefinitely the process of legislation.

Although Seanad Éireann can make recommendations for Bills to amend the Constitution and Money Bills or financial legislation, they can only start out in Dáil Éireann.

Dáil Éireann is the House where the Government or The Executive is formed. As well as making laws, each House can examine government policy and administration and criticise it where they think it's necessary.

If the Government fails to keep the support of the majority of its members, it could result in either the Dissolution of the Dáil and a General Election being called or the formation of a successor or replacement Government.



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Dáil Éireann is the primary legislative body. Members of Dáil Éireann are known as TDs. 158 TDs are elected by the people to represent them in Dáil Éireann.

TDs are elected in constituencies, which are geographical areas. At present there are 40 constituencies. The shape and size of constituencies is decided by an independent body called the Constituency Commission (www.constituency-commission.ie).

Most TDs who are elected are members of political parties. The current political parties who have TDs in Dáil Éireann are:

- Fine Gael
- The Labour Party
- Fianna Fáil
- Sinn Féin
- Socialist Party
- People Before Profit Alliance
- Anti-Austerity Alliance
- Independents for Equality Movement
- Independence 4 Change

TDs who are not members of political parties are known as Independents. One of the 158 TDs is elected to chair the proceedings of Dáil Éireann. This person is known as the Ceann Comhairle. The Ceann Comhairle makes sure that the rules for debate in Dáil Éireann are followed. The Ceann Comhairle is impartial and does not favour one political party or another. The Ceann Comhairle is automatically returned to the next Dáil and does not have to contest the general election.

Dáil Éireann has important functions:

- It holds Government to account
- TDs can ask questions of the Government
- It debates important issues
- It approves the spending of public money
- It studies, debates and approves new law

ACTIVITY 1

1) How many Independent TDs are there in Dáil Éireann?

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/tdssenators/tds/>

2) Find out who the current Ceann Comhairle is at

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/tdssenators/officeholders/>

3) Who is the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann?

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/tdssenators/officeholders/cathaoirleach/>



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The Taoiseach and The Government

Following a general election, Dáil Éireann elects a Taoiseach. The Taoiseach then goes on to appoint the Government. Members of the Government are known as Ministers and each Minister is in control of a Government department, such as the Department of Finance or the Department of Education and Skills. There are currently 15 Ministers, including the Taoiseach. That is the maximum allowed by the Constitution. The Taoiseach and Government Ministers are often called 'the Cabinet'. The Taoiseach is the head of Government and he nominates the other members of the Government and is in charge of how the Government goes about its business. The Taoiseach regularly answers questions in Dáil Éireann in relation to important issues of the day and the management of his department.

Generally speaking, each Minister is in charge of a Department. In the current Dáil there are 15 Government Ministers but 16 Departments. The current Government departments are:

- Department of Taoiseach
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Department of Defence
- Department of Finance
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
- Department of Justice and Equality
- Department of Education and Skills
- Department of Health
- Department of Social Protection
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
- Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
- Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
- Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs



ACTIVITY 2

To find out who An Taoiseach, An Tánaiste and the different Ministers are go to:

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Taoiseach_and_Government/List_of_Ministers_Ministers_of_State/

In each department civil servants carry out the day-to-day work of implementing Government policy.