

INTERIM REPORT of the
SUB-COMMITTEE on DÁIL REFORM

Adopted by the sub-Committee on 5th April 2016

Interim Report of the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform

1. An order of the Dáil of 10th March 2016 provided for the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform to consider matters of Dáil reform and make an interim report to the Dáil by 6th April 2016.
2. On 11th March 2016 all members were invited to make written submissions on Dáil reform to the sub-Committee by 3 p.m. on 16th March 2016. Nominations were also sought for membership of the Committee.
3. 14 deputies made individual submissions, while 8 submissions were received from parties or groups and one submission was received from a private citizen. In total, 23 submissions were received.
4. The following members were nominated to the sub-Committee:

Deputy Thomas Byrne, Fianna Fáil; Deputy Regina Doherty, Fine Gael; Deputy Brendan Howlin, Labour Party; Deputy Catherine Murphy, Social Democrats; Deputy Eoghan Murphy, Fine Gael; Deputy Paul Murphy, PBP-AAA; Deputy Darragh O'Brien, Fianna Fáil; Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív, Fianna Fáil; Deputy Louise O'Reilly, Sinn Féin; Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Sinn Féin; Deputy Thomas Pringle, Independent; Deputy Shane Ross, Independent Alliance; Deputy Eamonn Ryan, Green Party; and Deputy David Stanton, Fine Gael.

The following Members have been nominated as substitutes: Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett, PBP-AAA, as a substitute for Deputy Paul Murphy; Deputy Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy, Fine Gael; Deputy John Halligan, Independent Alliance, as a substitute for Deputy Shane Ross; and Deputy Brendan Ryan, Labour Party.

5. The sub-Committee first met on 23rd March 2016 and discussed the following matters:
 - The establishment of a business committee responsible for the scheduling and timetabling of Dáil business, in particular the provision of additional time to opposition Members;
 - Rules governing technical groups allowing for more than one technical group and fewer members to form a technical group;

- Provision for dedicated Committee time to avoid crossover with Dáil time;
- Reform of the parliamentary question system; and
- Votes to be taken at a fixed time instead of at various times throughout the day and provision to allow for formal abstentions in votes.

6. At its second meeting on 5th April 2016, the sub-Committee agreed the following:

(a) Voting – proposal to include abstentions

This proposal allows members to formally register their abstention in a vote. Current voting procedures allow for members to vote either “Tá” or “Níl” only. However, under the new proposal, a member may register an abstention in the chamber if he or she chooses not to vote “Tá” or “Níl”.

(b) Business Committee

The proposal is that a Business Committee be established which would meet to agree the sessional and weekly agenda of business for the Dáil. The intention of the Business Committee is to give all groups represented in parliament some access to, and some control over, the business coming before parliament. Further, it aims to bring transparency to the process of setting the daily, weekly and sessional agendas for business in terms of the items of business and the order and time slots for business items.

The Business Committee will aim to operate by consensus. Representatives of the Government parties shall propose Government business and non-Government business shall be initiated by other parties/groups. The Business Committee shall publish a report each Thursday of the business to be taken for the following week and this will be taken in the House on the following Tuesday.

(c) Splitting Plenary and Committee Time

This proposal allows business on sitting days to be split between Committee work and Plenary work. Committees will meet from 5 – 8 pm on Tuesdays and between the hours of 9 am and 12 noon on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The Plenary sessions of the Dáil shall be from 2 – 9 pm on Tuesdays, from 12 noon to 9 pm on Wednesdays and from 12 noon to 8 pm on Thursdays. This proposal provides for 22 hours for

Plenary business exclusively and up to 36 hours of exclusive Committee meeting time. This proposal, taken in conjunction with the fixed time for voting and improved planning of parliamentary business, will enhance family friendly working arrangements for members.

(d) Groups

The sub-Committee decided to amend the following rules in relation to groups by:

- i. reducing the size of a group to a minimum of 5 members and
- ii. permitting more than one technical group to be formed.

Rotas and speaking rights will continue to be determined on a proportional basis.

(e) Fixed time each week for the taking of all divisions

The sub-Committee agreed to set a single time for all divisions on a given day, excluding those:

- on the Order of Business,
- in relation to suspending a member for disorderly conduct, and
- on Committee and Report stages of Bills.

It has been agreed that postponed divisions will take place on Thursday afternoons at approx. 3.15 pm which will encourage a family friendly policy.

(f) Adequacy of replies to Questions: powers of the Ceann Comhairle

The sub-Committee agreed to reinstate Sessional Order 40A to allow for a process for a written appeal by any member to the Ceann Comhairle in relation to the adequacy of a Ministerial reply to Oral Questions, Topical Issues and Written Questions. Where the Ceann Comhairle upholds a member's complaint, his decision shall be laid before the Dáil. The two day notice requirement will be extended to four working days with sanctions for repeat offenders. It was agreed the Ceann Comhairle should also be empowered to rule on the relevance of an oral reply on the spot to address cases where the Ceann Comhairle is of the opinion that there is a clear failure to impart the information sought.

7. The detail of the agreed proposals will be included in draft Standing Orders which will be brought before Dáil Éireann for final approval.
8. This interim report is submitted to the House for members' views. In the light of these, the sub-Committee will give further consideration to the matters therein, and will submit a final report for consideration by the House in due course.
9. Future meetings of the sub-Committee will discuss the following matters:
 - 6th April – Scheduling of Dáil business, Parliamentary Questions and Topical Issues;
 - 13th April – Matters relating to Oireachtas Committees and financial scrutiny;
 - 20th April – Scheduling of legislation and related matters; and
 - 27th April – Agreement of final report of the sub-Committee.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL TD
CEANN COMHAIRLE