

## Glossary of Terms

**Acts** – laws that have been passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas and signed by the President.

**“Abbeylara” Judgment** – the Supreme Court ruled that Oireachtas committees can NOT make findings of fact about any individual which might affect their livelihood or reputation. A proposal to change this provision was defeated in a referendum in 2011.

**Agenda** – the government sets the weekly Dáil schedule of business and it is put to the Dáil for agreement every day on the *“Order of Business”*. A typical week in the Dáil is attached in Appendix 1.

**Attorney General** – the legal adviser to the Government.

**Backbencher** – a TD who isn’t a Minister or a main spokesperson for a political party

**Bills** – draft laws which have not yet been approved by both the Dail and the Seanad.

Before they become law, they must pass through 5 stages in the Dail and the Seanad:

*1<sup>st</sup> Stage (Introduction)* – the text of the Bill is published.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Stage* – Members have a general discussion about the principles of the Bill and what it is intended to achieve.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Stage (Committee)* – Members (in the Dail it’s normally a committee) go through the Bill line by line and make suggestions (called amendments) to improve it.

*4<sup>th</sup> Stage (Report)* – another line-by-line examination of the Bill, where further changes can be made.

*5<sup>th</sup> Stage* – Each House has a final discussion on the Bill but no changes may be made at this point.

Bills can be introduced in either the Dáil or the Seanad and when it goes through the 5 stages it goes to the other House where the process begins again from 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage.

**Budget** – the Government’s annual financial plan where changes are announced to taxation and/or the way public money is spent.

**Cabinet** – the Government consists of up to 15 members, including the Taoiseach and the Tanaiste.

**Cathaoirleach of the Seanad** – the Chairperson of Seanad Éireann (the Senate).

**Ceann Comhairle** – the Chairperson of Dáil Éireann, who oversees the proceedings and ensures that the rules and procedures of the House are followed.

**Committees** - Every government department has a committee which examines its legislation, funding and all other matters for which a Minister is responsible. Oireachtas Committees deal with a huge amount of parliamentary business outside the more formal chambers of the Dáil and the Seanad. Committees are also the only forum where members of parliament can engage with the public.

*Main types of committees:*

*Select Committees* are made up of members of just one House (either the Dail or the Seanad).

*Joint Committees* are made up of members of both Houses, working together.

**Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG)** – the independent person appointed to ensure that public money is managed and spent properly.

**Dáil Éireann** – the House of Representatives, currently made up of 166 TDs, but this number will be reduced to 158 at the next election.

**Divisions (Votes)** – each House makes decisions either by consensus or by voting, called a division.

**Estimates** – Every year, each government department presents a plan for expenditure to the Dáil. These plans are usually examined in some detail by committees before approval by Dáil Éireann.

**EU Directive** - a piece of legislation from the EU which every country is obliged to implement e.g. the Habitats Directive, which forced us to introduce the ban on turf-cutting in protected bogs.

**European Commission** – the executive arm of the EU (i.e. like our government) which proposes legislations, implements decisions and looks after the day-to-day running of the EU.

**European Council** – made up of the Heads of Government of each of the Member States, the President of the Council (Herman van Rompuy) and the President of the EU Commission. It has no power to pass legislation but it sets the priorities and general policy direction of the EU. Meetings of the Council are called EU Summits.

**European Parliament** - the parliament of the European Union, made up of 766 MEPs who are elected by 375m European citizens. Ireland has 11 MEPs and we will be electing our representatives in May this year. The Parliament works with the EU Commission and the EU Council to pass legislation.

**Green paper** – a discussion document published by the Government, inviting the views of the public and civil society groups.

**Guillotine** – a time-limit on a debate in either House or on any of the stages in the passing of a Bill.

**“Heads” of a Bill** – a brief description of the detail of a draft law, before it is “translated” into more technical legal language by the lawyers in the Attorney General’s Office.

**Houses of the Oireachtas** – Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

**Leaders Questions** – every day when the Dáil is in session, each opposition leader is given the opportunity to ask the Taoiseach (or Tanaiste) a brief question on a matter of public importance.

**Order of Business** – at the start of the main business in the Dáil, the Taoiseach announces the government business to be taken that day. The Leader of the House does the same thing in the Seanad.

**Order paper** – the document which sets out the business before each House. It is available every day at [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie)

**Pairs (or pairing)** – when a Member (normally a Minister) is unable to be in the House for a vote, s/he is “paired” with a member of the opposition, who will not vote even if they are in attendance. This arrangement ensures that the Government aren’t unfairly penalised if, for example, Ministers have to be away on government business.

**Parliamentary Questions (PQs)** – Dáil Éireann sets aside time every day where TDs can formally ask questions of Ministers about issues relating to their Departments. Each Minister answers questions in the Chamber on a rota basis or members can ask questions on any day for a written reply.

**Parliamentary Inquiries** – the Dáil and Seanad occasionally ask committees to conduct formal inquiries into matters of significant importance, such as the DIRT Inquiry or the soon-to-be-established Banking Inquiry. Witnesses can be forced to hand over documents and to give evidence under oath.

**Parliamentary Parties** are groups of TDs, Senators and MEPs from the same party, who generally meet every week in Leinster House to discuss policy issues and other political party business.

**Private Members Business** – 3 hours are set aside every week for opposition parties and groups to choose the business to be taken in each House. This is normally a debate on an issue of major political importance or a Private Member’s Bill (a draft law published by a TD or a Senator who is not a Minister)

**Public Accounts Committee** – known as the public spending watchdog, this Dáil committee ensures that there is accountability and transparency in the way that government departments and agencies spend and manage taxpayers’ money. They have been in the

news recently because of their meetings about the financial issues in the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC).

**Seanad Eireann** – the Senate (or Upper House), made up of 60 Senators.

**Separation of Powers** – the Constitution provides for 3 separate organs of State – the Parliament, the Government and Courts. None of these institutions can interfere with the work or functions of the others.

**Standing Orders** – the rules and procedures of each House, which clearly set out how business is to be conducted.

**Statutory Instruments**, also known as secondary legislation, are generally Ministerial Orders, Regulations and bye-laws. They are not specifically passed into law by the Houses of the Oireachtas but the power to create them has been delegated by law to a Minister or Agency.

**Technical Group** – in the current Dail, there is a group of independent members and smaller parties who have joined together to form a group so that they can have access to speaking rights and other rights in the Dáil Chamber.

**Topical Issues** – Members of the Dáil can raise issues of concern with any Minister and every day, the Ceann Comhairle selects four of these matters, each for a 12-minute debate.

**Whip** – every political party has a Whip, whose job is to encourage members of the party to vote in a particular way in the Dáil or Seanad. “Losing the whip” generally means that the Member is expelled from his/her parliamentary party, normally after voting against the party on a particular matter.

**White papers** are generally published by departments when they wish to set out government policy on a matter.

## Typical week in Dáil Éireann

|                  |  |   |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | P.Q.s to a Minister                          | 2.00 p.m. - 3.15 p.m. <i>(75 mins)</i>      |
|                  | Leaders' Questions (Taoiseach)               | 3.15 p.m. - 3.36 p.m. <i>(21 mins)</i>      |
|                  | P.Q.s to the Taoiseach                       | 3.36 p.m. - 4.36 p.m. <i>(60 mins)</i>      |
|                  | Order of Business (Taoiseach)                | 4.36 p.m. - 5.06 p.m. <i>(30 mins)</i>      |
|                  | Topical Issues                               | 5.06 p.m. - 5.54 p.m. <i>(12 mins x 4)</i>  |
|                  | Government business                          | 5.54 p.m. - 7.30 p.m.                       |
|                  | Private Members' Business                    | 7.30 p.m. - 9.00 p.m. <i>(90 mins)</i>      |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | P.Q.s to a Minister                          | 9.30 a.m. – 10.45 a.m. <i>(75 mins)</i>     |
|                  | Government business                          | 10.45 a.m. – 12 noon                        |
|                  | Leaders' Questions (Taoiseach)               | 12 noon – 12.21 p.m. <i>(21 mins)</i>       |
|                  | Order of Business (Taoiseach)                | 12.21 p.m. - 12.51 p.m. <i>(30 mins)</i>    |
|                  | Topical Issues                               | 12.51 p.m. - 1.39 p.m. <i>(12 mins x 4)</i> |
|                  | Government business                          | 2.40 p.m. - 7.30 p.m.                       |
|                  | Private Members' Business                    | 7.30 p.m. - 9.00 p.m. <i>(90 mins)</i>      |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | P.Q.s to a Minister                          | 9.30 a.m. – 10.45 a.m. <i>(75 mins)</i>     |
|                  | Government business                          | 10.45 a.m. – 12 noon                        |
|                  | Leaders' Questions (Tánaiste)                | 12 noon - 12.21 p.m. <i>(21 mins)</i>       |
|                  | Order of Business (Tánaiste)                 | 12.21 p.m. - 12.41 p.m. <i>(20 mins)</i>    |
|                  | Government business                          | 12.41 p.m. - 4.42 p.m.                      |
|                  | Topical Issues                               | 4.42 p.m. - 5.30 p.m. <i>(12 mins x 4)</i>  |
| <b>Friday</b>    | <i>(Every fortnight)</i>                     |   |
|                  | Committee Report<br>or Private Member's Bill | 10.00 a.m. – 12 noon                        |
|                  | Private Member's Bill                        | 12 noon - 2.00 p.m.                         |