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» HOW TO... Work with Joint Oireachtas Committees

## » How to Work with Joint Oireachtas Committees

Joint Oireachtas Committees have a key role in shaping and influencing legislation and policy. You can use the Joint Oireachtas Committees (JOCs) both as a resource and as a target audience for your policy message.

## » Structure of the Oireachtas

The Oireachtas is the Parliament. The Oireachtas is sometimes called 'the Dáil' but this is misleading. The Oireachtas actually consists of three houses – An t-Uachtarán (the President), Seanad [Senate] and the Dáil. The Dáil has 166 deputies or TDs, (Teachta Dála), elected in a general election every five years. The function of the Dáil is to elect a government and Taoiseach (Prime Minister), pass the Budget and enact legislation.

The Seanad is the upper house of the Oireachtas. A new Seanad is elected soon after each Dáil election is completed. The Seanad has 60 members – 11 are appointed by the Taoiseach, the others are elected by electoral colleges. Legislation approved by the Dáil must also be debated and approved by the Seanad.

The Presidency is the third house of the Oireachtas. The Presidency signs off on legislation. The President has queried the content of some laws on occasion.

## » The Joint Oireachtas Committee

Each House of the Oireachtas has power under its Standing Orders (Rules) to form committees for specific purposes. There are four types of committees – Standing, Select, Joint and Special (rare). Select committees are made up of the members of one house only, either Dáil or Seanad. **The Joint Committees** are Select Committees from both Houses sitting and voting together. **The Joint Committees** have a role in scrutinising the work of government departments.

The Joint Oireachtas Committees meet in public session and their meetings are televised. The media and the public may attend. Some committee chairpersons are members of the Opposition and it is not the practice for ministers or ministers of state to be chairpersons.

The Joint Committees 2002—2007 are:

- **Joint Committee on Agriculture and Food**
- **Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs**
- **Joint Committee on Education and Science**
- **Joint Committee on Environment and Local Government**
- **Joint Committee on European Affairs**
- **Joint Committee on Finance and Public Service**

- **Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs**
- **Joint Committee on Health and Children**
- **Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights**
- **Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs**
- **Joint Committee on Transport**

The Joint Committees have the power to:

send for persons, papers and records receive submissions and hear evidence from interested parties or groups discuss and draft proposals for legislative change print and publish minutes of evidence and related documents require attendance of ministers to discuss current policies require attendance of ministers to discuss proposals for legislation require attendance of principal office holders in bodies in the State that are wholly or partly funded by the State.

## » Working with Joint Oireachtas Committees

Here's how you can work with Joint Oireachtas Committees or use them as a resource:

- Ask to receive a list of future Bills at the beginning of each Dáil session from the Chief Whip's Office at the Department of the Taoiseach, Tel: 01 662 4888
- Check [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie) every Friday to see what committees are meeting the following week and what are the topics of their discussions or
- Receive an email alert every Friday of committee schedules by contacting: the Public Relations Office, Leinster House, Dublin 2. Tel: 01 618 3066, email: [info@oireachtas.ie](mailto:info@oireachtas.ie)
- Get to know the Clerks of the Joint Oireachtas Committees. These are public servants who service the committees. They can give very helpful advice on how to access them
- Make a submission to a Joint Oireachtas Committee on a pending Bill
- Request to meet with a Joint Oireachtas Committee to increase members' awareness of certain issues or to present research and recommendations for legislation and policy. You should write to the chairperson of the Joint Oireachtas Committee. By making a presentation to a Joint Oireachtas Committee your policy viewpoint becomes a matter of public record
- Give a Joint Oireachtas Committee information to inform their debate. Send 25 copies of the information to the Clerk of the committee, preferably one week in advance. To get the contact

details for each clerk, check on each Joint Oireachtas Committee's section on:  
[www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie)

- Put the Joint Oireachtas Committee members on your mailing list. Members are listed on the website above
- Give briefings and presentations that are very concise and to the point. Don't just name the problem offer practical recommendations and potential policy solutions also.

#### Useful information and resources

##### Publications

Harvey, Brian (2002) Working for Change: A Guide to Influencing Policy in Ireland. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency

##### Websites

[www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie)