

## Seanad Reform

The original concept of a Second House was good and remains valid. However, over the years, politicians have corrupted this concept and have manipulated it to suit their own ends.

The Seanad has degenerated into an incubator for prospective TD's and a rest home for failed TD's. Its original purpose has been diminished as a result. It is no longer a Second House but has become a leaky roofed lean-to attached to the First House.

To restore the Seanad to its original purpose requires the introduction of a simple rule. "No one who has ever stood for election for a local council or the Dail may be elected, or appointed, to the Seanad. No one who has been a member of the Seanad may stand for election to the Dail or a local council."

This should not be seen as disenfranchising anyone, merely a practical limiting of choice to protect the Seanad. Career politicians still have local government and the Dail to accommodate their political career paths.

The Panels and Register of Nominating Bodies within the Seanad electoral system should be reviewed to reflect a changed Ireland.

"Agriculture" should be changed to "Natural Resources" which would widen the catchment.

The University Panel should be opened up to all Irish citizens with third level qualifications, regardless of where they were gained.

A Diaspora Panel should be established to give voice to those who have emigrated.

The Taoiseach's 11 should be done away with. If party politics is removed from the Senate then ensuring a government majority should no longer be an issue.

Senators should only be allowed one term in the Seanad. Fresh ideas reflecting current thinking.

The distribution and number of Senators should be reviewed. Senators should not have constituencies. Geographical spread should be considered instead. Dublin City and the four provinces(including Northern Ireland), perhaps. 5 regions X 6 panels would allow 2 Senators per panel per region whilst retaining existing number of 60 Senators.

Senators should not be members of the Oireachtas pensions system. Instead, their existing pension contributions should be funded for the duration of their time in the Senate. Portable pensions are common amongst a workforce where changing employers is now a fact of life. Only civil servants now have "jobs for life".

The electorate for each panel should be active participants in the sector the panel represents, not Oireachtas members or local councillors. This would further de-politicise the Seanad.

The funding used to supply Senators with constituency offices and secretarial services should be withdrawn. The monies saved should be set aside to fund a "Senate Research Bureau" staffed by ex-civil servants, researchers, analysts and political interns to provide a research and analysis service to all Senators.

Staff should be recruited on to standard commercial contracts of employment and should not become permanent civil servants. The staff should represent the Seanad, and not be allocated to individual Senators. This would prevent constituency services offices being brought in the back door.

This bureau should be accommodated within the government estate within, or close to, the Seanad.

If successful this bureau could widen its remit to provide research and analysis for TD's as well. The Dail budget for TD services could be adjusted to support this extension of services. Funding for TD's secretarial and research staff could be reduced and the budgetary savings transferred to the enlarged bureau.

The increased bureaucracy created by the new electorates and the checking and monitoring of credible association with particular panels, third level qualifications or genuine diaspora electorates could be handled by the newly created "Seanad Research Bureau".