

**WORKING
FOR
CHANGE**

A guide to
Influencing policy
in Ireland

Brian Harvey



WORKING FOR CHANGE

A guide to Influencing policy in Ireland
Brian Harvey

First published, 1998
2nd edition, 2002
3rd edition, revised and updated, 2008

© Brian Harvey is an independent social research consultant.

The views expressed are the author's and not necessarily those of the
Combat Poverty Agency

ISBN no. 978-1-905485-56-7

Part 1 Working for change

Preface	5
1 Introduction to the political and administrative system	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Improved access to decision-making	8
1.3 Distinctive characteristics of the Irish political system	9
2 Getting to know the system	13
2.1 Oireachtas	14
2.2 Taoiseach	24
2.3 Government, cabinet and ministers	25
2.4 President	27
2.5 Government departments	28
2.6 Local authorities	31
2.7 National agreements	38
2.8 Consultative and advisory bodies	38
2.9 Semi-state bodies	40
2.10 Political parties	41
2.11 Courts	42
2.12 Ombudsman services	44
2.13 North-south institutions	45
2.14 European Union	47
3 Devising a strategy	53
3.1 Setting clear objectives	54
3.2 Using information, documentation and research	56
3.3 Presenting your case effectively	60
3.4 Resources for policy work	62
3.5 Protests, direct action and other strategies	63
3.6 Personal skills to influence decision-makers	64
3.7 Networking and coalition-building	69
3.8 Devising a media strategy	70
3.9 Publications and newsletters	75
3.10 The mailing list	77
3.11 Devising an information strategy	79

4	Applying the strategy	85
4.1	Where and how policy is made	86
4.2	Persuading people a problem exists	88
4.3	Shaping the response of government	90
4.4	Ensuring a decision is implemented	92
4.5	Maintaining your influence	93
4.6	Working with public representatives	95
4.7	Working with public bodies	100
4.8	Working with the consultative process	101
	 Acknowledgements	 107

Part II Directory

A directory of organisations, agencies and departments is published separately to accompany this guide.

Finally, the Directory provides a listing of those groups likely to be most relevant to voluntary and community organisations wishing to influence the political and administrative system.

Preface

The Combat Poverty Agency is committed to producing and promoting resource materials for the community and voluntary sector. The purpose of this guide *Working for change - a guide to influencing policy in Ireland* is to provide a handbook for voluntary and community organisations in Ireland on how to influence the policy-making process. The guide is targeted at community development groups and organisations actively working against poverty and social exclusion, for example in the areas of unemployment and labour market issues, educational disadvantage, local and community development, urban and rural poverty, housing policy, drugs, work with women and community arts. It is designed for national organisations and local community groups.

It must be stressed that this book is a guide, not a blueprint. It is designed to be of assistance to groups seeking to bring about change and to demonstrate, through a number of case studies, how policy can be influenced. The guide is accompanied at the end by a directory of policy-making bodies and information sources.

An important part of the guide is the inclusion of case studies. Their purpose is to bring a practical dimension to this publication. These are designed to be illustrative only and should not be taken as complete, definitive histories of the stories in question. Of necessity, they showcase examples where voluntary and community organisations have succeeded in changing or modifying policy, or, at least, made some progress in getting a hearing for their viewpoint. For every such success, there must be examples where groups have not influenced policy or the authorities in the way they would have liked. Finally, the comment should be made that the case studies inevitably simplify complex issues. In each one, there may be many actors and people involved and it is always difficult to know whose intervention was actually decisive.

Chapter 1 introduces the Irish political system and its relationship with voluntary and community organisations working to overcome poverty and social exclusion.

Chapter 2, *Getting to know the system*, outlines and describes the key elements of the Irish political and administrative system from the Oireachtas to ombudsman services and concludes by taking a quick look at the European Union.

Chapter 3, *Devising a strategy*, starts from the perspective of a voluntary or community organisation setting out to influence the political system, examining such questions as setting objectives, finding resources and networking. It goes on to look at media strategies and mailing lists.

Chapter 4 is entitled *Applying the strategy*. It examines how a group or organisation may effectively work with the political system, public representatives and public bodies.

Finally, the Directory provides a listing of those groups likely to be most relevant to voluntary and community organisations wishing to influence the political and administrative system.

1.

1.1 Introduction

Voluntary organisations and community groups have become increasingly aware of the links between decisions taken by government and the authorities on the one hand and the situation of the groups with which they are working on the other. Poverty is directly related to the way our economic system operates and the way the resources of the state are allocated. Poverty has much to do with who has access to power, who influences decisions and who has the resources and skills to lobby successfully and who does not. Indeed, it is possible to define poverty as a group's lack of influence over the decisions which affect it. Powerful groups in society are rarely poor.

Despite the activities of voluntary organisations, community groups and campaigning organisations, poverty remains a serious, persistent problem in modern Irish society. Ireland has the second highest level of relative poverty in the European Union. Fundamental inequalities in Irish society are remarkably impervious to change. Individual problems remain difficult to solve – for example long-term unemployment, the living conditions of Travellers, homelessness and discrimination against women - to name just a few. Often, it seems that groups working for change can, at best, only achieve marginal improvements. It may also take a long time.

In theory, it is open for any citizen to make a case to government for changes in policies. In theory, the government listens carefully, weighs options and makes the best decision for everyone. In reality, one's ability to influence decisions is dependant on other factors - social class, status, money, recognition, knowing the policy-makers, understanding how the system works and communicating one's message in an articulate and effective manner. Because they are relatively poorly resourced compared to the groups and bodies they are trying to change, voluntary and community organisations must be disproportionately effective compared to their size. They must 'punch above their weight'.

Policy-making is the term given to the process whereby the government and the authorities reach decisions, set out priorities, satisfy competing interest groups and lay down the underlying approaches to their work. The taking of decisions in any democratic society involves the complex interplay of many groups - government ministers, civil servants, politicians, media and lobby groups. It is rarely a clean, clear-cut process where we can see all the participants in the open at every stage. The decisions taken at the end of a

INTRODUCTION TO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM



Policy-making is the term given to the process whereby the government and the authorities reach decisions, set out priorities, satisfy competing interest groups and lay down the underlying approaches to their work.



process are often quite different from the ones anticipated at the very beginning. Although problems can be quickly identified, sometimes the full dimensions and solutions only emerge in the course of time. Quite often, decisions are not taken at all, despite much activity taking place and the process ends with government either delaying a decision, shelving it or passing the problem on to someone else. In many cases, it is difficult to make out who or what has had the decisive influence in getting something done, or, in some cases, making sure something is not done. Strategies which work in one area do not necessarily work in another.

Many voluntary organisations and community groups are now involved in trying to influence policy-makers and decision-makers. Their activities cross a wide range, such as:

- At local level, community groups trying to get much-needed services into their areas;
- At local and regional level, community groups trying to get health services and other statutory agencies to devise responses to acute social problems, such as drugs and educational under-achievement;
- At national level, voluntary organisations attempting to get government committees to recommend changes in policy that vitally affect their members; or arguing for changes in economic and budgetary policy so as to make Ireland a more inclusive society.

The purpose of this guide is to provide information and resources so that this task may be undertaken more effectively.

1.2 Improved access to decision-making

Although influencing policy is difficult and often very slow, there are some features of the Irish political environment which make it easier. The voluntary and community sectors have consolidated, become

Role of voluntary and community organisations

‘The state acknowledges the role of the voluntary sector in contributing to policy making and the pursuit of common objectives.’

Whitepaper, Supporting voluntary activity, 2000

‘Respectful dialogue allows government, citizens and communities to seek the common good, while acknowledging differences. A successful society depends on partnership - with citizens, civil society, elected public representatives, the public services, businesses and trade unions, all contributing in different ways.’

Active Citizenship, 2007

more professional in their approach and have attracted levels of staff, volunteers and equipment that would have been difficult to imagine twenty years ago. The role of voluntary and community organisations is now recognised at national level, with voluntary and community organisations participating as a social partner in the national agreement, Towards 2016. The government white paper Supporting Voluntary Activity lays down the principle that the strengthening of the role of voluntary and community organisations is part of citizenship and building a more participatory democracy. The government has endorsed the concept of 'active citizenship' and with it, the concept that all people should be helped in contributing to the life and activities of the state.

There have been political changes which make the decision-making machine more accessible. Governments have made increasing use of consultative bodies, task forces and forums in their work. Committees of deputies and senators, called Oireachtas committees, call officials to appear before them and ask them to explain their actions and performance. Ireland has taken on a wider range of international obligations (e.g. conventions of the United Nations and Council of Europe), which set down requirements on our government to report on how it fulfils these obligations, for example in the area of the welfare of children. These provide opportunities for non-governmental organisations to issue rival reports. Many voluntary organisations have joined networks of European organisations which open up new channels of information and influence.

1.3 Distinctive characteristics of the Irish political system

Although the Irish political system shares many common characteristics with Britain and our constitution shares some characteristics with those of that the United States, it is distinctive. Some of these characteristics, such as accessibility and the localised role of public representatives, may work to the advantage of voluntary and community organizations. Others such as poor resources and secrecy may work to their disadvantage.

Accessibility

Although the Irish state is a centralised one, Ireland has a relatively accessible political system. It is relatively easy for an individual, a community group or a voluntary organisation to get in contact with and meet a member of the Dáil, senator or councillor. The level of contact between the public representative and individuals and groups in each constituency is quite high. Most public representatives live in their constituencies and make themselves accessible through their clinics. Some voluntary organisations are even on first-name terms with their public representatives - something which amazes voluntary and community organisations in continental Europe.

Case Study

Getting a hardship fund

About 800 Irish prisoners find themselves in prison abroad at any one time - mainly in Britain and continental Europe - some convicted, others detained, charged or awaiting trial. This can be a time of considerable financial hardship for them and their families, with the costs of flying relatives out, documentation and translation. Some jail conditions are poor and prisoners need clothes, phone cards, toiletries and books. Families often face poverty with the sudden loss of their breadwinner.

The Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) argued that there was a need for some form of hardship fund to meet these costs. The Commission managed to get a reference to the need to provide practical help for prisoners into the national agreement the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. The fact that this was recognised in a national agreement was an important point of leverage in getting a response from government. Officials had to acknowledge that must be considered as a national policy issue.

After years of persistently drawing attention to the problem, the ICPO eventually got an invitation to present its case to the human rights sub-committee of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs. The ICPO members had a prepared script and they then answered questions from deputies and senators. They found the deputies and senators were interested in 'real figures and hard information, not anecdotes and bleeding heart stories'. ICPO drew attention to the unacceptably slow progress on the issue. The real significance of the session was that first, all of this went on the public record. Second, Department of Foreign Affairs representatives were in attendance and the ICPO's remarks in such a public forum stirred them into action. A committee was set up to look into the situation of prisoners and two years later it recommended a hardship fund now be established.

Lessons

- Campaigns take a long time.
- Get a text written into the national agreement. This is a big help.
- An Oireachtas Committee can be crucial in progressing an issue, especially if departmental officials are present.
- 'Real figures and hard information, not anecdotes and bleeding heart stories' are crucial.

Voters value politicians who they can contact easily, who get things done locally and who are seen to be busy on their behalf.

Localised role for public representatives

Under proportional representation, deputies are under pressure at the next election not just from candidates from the other parties, but also from their own party. They must be able to show an ability to produce the best local service and be prompt and effective in dealing with constituency enquiries. Politicians who have a reputation of always being away in Dublin, never in the constituency and who don't meet people or answer letters or phone calls may not be re-elected. Voters value politicians who they can contact easily, who get things done locally and who are seen to be busy on their behalf. The downside to this is that the same politicians who are attending to local business don't have much time left to be legislators or deal seriously with national policy issues.

A poorly resourced system

An important negative characteristic of the Irish political system is that it is poorly resourced by public funds. Deputies and senators must do most of their policy work themselves. As a result, the ordinary member of the Oireachtas is poorly equipped to research subjects in detail, draft legislation or make in-depth policy contributions. Because they lack their own research facilities, most deputies or senators are delighted to receive information, commentary and analysis on important issues from voluntary organisations and community groups.

The problem of under-resourcing is probably worse in local government and an even greater burden falls on councillors. The local authorities, although they carry out development and planning tasks, do not have research departments to assist them plan the other aspects of their work. The level of documentation which they produce about their own work is limited.

The political system in Leinster House is one which is not only under-resourced but severely overloaded, like most political systems everywhere, with thousands of groups, organisations and interests clamouring for attention. The average deputy or senator - often

Making it easier

Influencing the Irish political system is difficult, but some features of our political and administrative system make things easier

- Accessible public representatives
- High standard government information on the internet
- Media interested in reporting the work of voluntary and community organisations
- Government commitments to working with voluntary and community organisations

the primary target for the interest of the voluntary or community organisation - has a huge range of tasks to attend to in a given day. These include answering letters, e-mails and phone calls, making representations on behalf of constituents to ministers or civil servants, attending to the needs of the party at national and branch level, showing around school tours, getting through a mound of documentation as it comes in and then attending the house to speak or to vote. The nature of this hectic schedule has important implications for how voluntary and community groups should approach the public representative in question.

Secretive system

Although some parts of the Irish political and administrative system are open to public scrutiny (e.g. the Oireachtas, courts, local authorities), other parts are not. The people voted, in a referendum in 1997, to support the principle of cabinet confidentiality, the outcome being that government decisions remain secret for 30 years (in other countries, government decisions are notified to the press or posted on the internet immediately). Traditionally, government reports could be withheld for years before publication. A substantial amount of decision-making and the basis on which it is made is thus concealed from public view. On the plus side, though, Irish government internet sites are considered some of the best in Europe, both for the volume of information available and user-friendliness.

The guide now provides a description of the Irish political and administrative system.

Charities, campaigning and influencing policy

Many voluntary organisations have a charity number (sometimes called a CHY number) given to them by the Revenue Commissions. This provides certain tax exemptions (e.g. corporation tax). Over 7,100 bodies have such exemption (sometimes this is termed, not always accurately, charitable status).

Voluntary and community organisations taking either public money or organizing their own fund-raising are expected to register with the new Charities Regulatory Authority.

You may not register with the regulator if your prime objective is to promote a political party, candidate or cause. There are no known cases of organisations having their status affected as a result of their broader work alerting public attention to the problems of poverty.

Case Study

Pragmatism and principle

Funding for social housing has been provided since 1984, but voluntary organisations providing social housing have long sought better funding schemes - not just more money but easier procedures. Respond! the national social housing organisation worked hard to get improvements in what became the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme (CLSS). The new scheme required a ministerial order, which meant that working closely with the civil servants in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government was the focus of the campaign. Respond! sent submissions to the department, but also sent them to the Construction Industry Development Board, to make sure that other key players were with them. In its approach, Respond! stressed how, if there were some specific improvements to the government scheme, it could provide solutions to the government's problem of the need to build more social housing. Respond! offered working models. These showed exactly how better housing could be delivered and illustrated and how it could offer better value-for-money and lower margins than commercial house-builders, along with a social approach - housing projects with community facilities and creches.

Despite this, there is still much to be done to overcome remaining problems in the scheme, to ensure that voluntary organisations are involved in policy-making (not just implementation) and to win more trust for the role of voluntary organisations in housing.

Lessons

- Propose pragmatic solutions to government in which you can help them to achieve their objectives while serving your own.
- At the same time, continue to persistently press for 'bigger picture' reforms and better relationships.



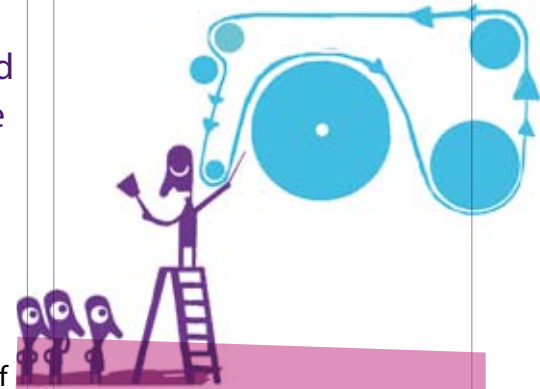
2.

The political system in Ireland is not static. Over the past twenty years, new parties have risen to the fore and even entered government; the way in which the state bodies do their business has changed significantly; and the culture of public administration has altered with ideas of strategic management. It will certainly continue to change.

This chapter describes the functions and roles of the main centres of power where decisions are made in Ireland, namely:

- The Oireachtas;
- The Taoiseach;
- Government and government ministers;
- The civil service;
- Local authorities;
- National agreements;
- Consultative and advisory bodies;
- Semi-state bodies;
- Political parties;
- Implementation bodies;
- The courts;
- North-south bodies and
- Ombudsman services.

GETTING TO KNOW THE SYSTEM



Oireachtas

President

Signs legislation, but may refer legislation to the Supreme Court

May convene Oireachtas for message of national importance

Dáil

Elects or dismisses Taoiseach and government

Debates, passes legislation

Makes ministers accountable

Approves budget

Debates issues of concern

Seanad

Debates, passes legislation

Makes ministers accountable

Debates issues of current concern

Case Study

Persevering...

It is sometimes said that there are three key elements to influencing policy: persistence, persistence and persistence. An example is Priorswood Community Development Project (CDP) which has tried for ten years to address the problem of joy-riding in north Dublin. At the start, the project set up meetings across the northside - Priorswood itself, Darndale, Belcamp, Edenmorea and Bunnratty - trying to involve the city council, the gardai, the youth service, the drugs task force, and the health services in a coherent response to the problem. The project commissioned two research reports, the first to document the problem locally and the second to look at the academic research on what was known about joy-riding. The project did its own research on the needs of young people locally. This was interesting, because it showed that car maintenance and engine repair courses, a widely-used response to joy-riding, would attract only limited support, so it did not rush in to do such a project. As a result of the research, Priorswood CDP came to be seen as an 'expert' on the problem of joy-riding and would get phone calls whenever joy-riding was in the news.

Despite its strategic and logical approach to the issue, the CDP found it very difficult to make progress and to attract the support of some of the key statutory bodies involved.

Continued on page 15

2.1 Oireachtas

The centre of power in Ireland is the Oireachtas, or Parliament. Many people refer to it as 'the Dáil', but this is misleading. The Oireachtas actually consists of three parts, although it is true that the Dáil is the most important of them. The Oireachtas has three houses - the President, the Seanad [Senate] and the Dáil. Each has an important role to play in our system of government. The role of each is determined by the 1937 Constitution, which lays down the authority of the different parts of the Oireachtas and the balance of powers between them.

The Dáil has 166 deputies or TDs (Teachta Dala), elected in a general election, which must take place every five years. The function of the Dáil is to elect a government and Taoiseach (prime minister), pass the budget and enact legislation. The Dáil must sit in Dublin and is located in Leinster House, Kildare Street, Dublin. Its sessions are open to the press and (with a ticket from a TD), members of the public. It has the power to over-rule the Seanad.

The upper house of the Oireachtas is the Seanad. A new Seanad is elected soon after each Dáil election is completed. The Seanad has 60 members, 11 of whom are appointed by the Taoiseach, the others being elected by electoral colleges. The Seanad is less powerful than the Dáil. Senators may not amend the budget, introduce a constitutional amendment or change a money Bill. There is no system of parliamentary question there. Despite that, its importance is often under-estimated and in other respects its powers are similar. Legislation approved by the Dáil must also be debated and approved by the Seanad. The Seanad is considered to play an important role as a forum for raising and exploring social and other issues. Every single word that every member says is written down and formally becomes part of the parliamentary record.

The third house of the Oireachtas is the President. This post was originally considered to be largely ceremonial, but it expanded in

Who makes up the Seanad?

The Seanad has an unusual composition. 43 members are elected on what is called the panel system. There are five panels (cultural & educational; agricultural; labour; industrial & commercial; administrative). Nominations may be made by professional bodies and, in the case of some panels, voluntary organisations (one applies to the clerk of the Seanad to register as a nominating body); and also by members of the Oireachtas. The electorate comprises new members of the Dáil; outgoing members of the Seanad; and all county councillors.

Six members are elected by university graduates: three from the Dublin University (Trinity College) constituency and three from the colleges of the National University (the university colleges of Dublin, Cork, Galway and Maynooth). Finally, 11 are appointed by the new Taoiseach. It is possible for government ministers to be senators, but this is rare.

Plans are under consideration for a reform of the Seanad along the following lines:

- Seanad to be increased to 65 members, with the Cathaoirleach automatically re-elected.
- 26 seats filled in a national election held every five years, probably on the same day as the European or local elections. The voting system would be the proportional representation list system. This would be the first direct election of senators since the 1920s.
- The two university seats would become a single 6-seat constituency.
- 20 senators to be elected by county councillors under the same voting system as at present.
- Taoiseach nominees to increase to 12.

the 1990s. In practice, the presidency can have an important role in shaping public opinion and articulating popular concerns. The actual parliamentary powers of the President are limited. A President may:

- Refer a Bill passed by the Oireachtas to the Supreme Court to test its constitutionality;
- Refer a Bill to the people for referendum, following petition by a majority of the Seanad and a third of the Dáil;
- Address the Oireachtas on a matter of national concern;
- Refuse a dissolution of the Dáil, asking a divided Dáil to try again to find a new Taoiseach.

To be elected, a President must be nominated by at least 20 deputies or by at least four county councils, or an outgoing President may nominate herself or himself, but only once. If there is more than one nomination, then all the people vote. There is no provision in Ireland for a vice-president and when there is a vacancy (e.g. death or resignation of the president), presidential powers are exercised by a commission consisting of the Chief Justice and the speakers of the other two houses - the Ceann Comhairle of the Dáil and the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad. Some of the key roles of the Oireachtas are now described.

Electing a Taoiseach and government

Following a general election and after electing a chairperson or speaker (Ceann Comhairle), the main task of the Dáil is to elect a new government. Each party, or, more likely, each group of parties puts forward a candidate to be Taoiseach and the candidate with a majority is then appointed by the President. The Taoiseach then names a team of senior ministers (up to 15), who, once approved by the Dáil are then appointed by the President. Next, ministers of state are approved by the Dáil. Governments may last several years, although it is not unusual for the Taoiseach to change ministers from time to time, a process sometimes referred to as 'a re-shuffle'.

From the point of view of policy, each government is guided by its party manifesto and its programme for government. Before an election, each party issues its manifesto: what each party says it will do. After an election, the parties that enter government negotiate, generally over several weeks, a Programme for Government (PfG): what the parties will do together.

Governments are also generally bound by the national social partnership agreement between government and the social partners then in force or agreed for the next period of time, even if the agreement has been made by a previous government. National agreements often straddle periods of government, even several governments. The present agreement, Towards 2016, covers a full ten years, 2006-2015. Any newly elected government will follow a mixture of its own new policies and continue many of those of the outgoing government.

Continued from page 14

Although the local authorities are now establishing new local policing forums and although they are supposed to involve community organisations, the CDP finds it very hard to find out information about them and to find a place or a role within them. In an attempt to redefine the problem and seek fresh solutions, the project set up what is now called a 'Safety Forum' which will attempt to address local safety issues that go beyond joy-riding.

Despite a conspicuous lack of progress, the project intends to persist with tackling joy-riding and related issues in and around Priorswood. It intends to find places on the policing forum and find champions in the gardai sympathetic to addressing the issue in a systematic way, searching for new solutions in the safety forum.

Lessons

- The project has put in place the building blocks of success: local research, local knowledge, with a wider report to situate the problem of joy-riding in a wider context. It has worked hard at consultation with the local communities and continues to do so.
- It avoided mistakes. It did not rush into a fashionable car maintenance course because local research suggested this would achieve only limited results. Energies and money were not wasted on a project that would probably not have worked.
- In setting up the safety forum, the project has tried a fresh approach and tried to redefine the problem and its solutions.
- It continues to identify structures and people which hold out the possibility of more positive outcomes, in the anticipation that its patience and perseverance will eventually pay off.

The process of electing a government is mirrored by the opposition parties. They appoint 'front bench spokespersons' (so-called because they sit on the front seats in their party's place in the Dáil and Seanad) to follow the work of individual ministers and cross-examine them for their inadequacies and expose their short-comings. If there are several parties in opposition, then one government minister may have several opposition shadows.

Passing the budget

The prime task of any government is to pass its programme of public spending and taxation. Without this the country cannot function.

First, during the spring each government department prepares estimates of the activities, projects and spending it would like to carry out in the following year. There is then a period of lengthy negotiation over the summer and autumn with the Department of Finance. This Department scrutinises each departmental programme carefully and normally tries to hold spending down. The outcome is confirmed by the cabinet, which resolves any final areas of disagreements between departments.

Second, the Minister for Finance prepares the formal budget day statement, outlining how the government plans to get the money required to meet these estimates. The budget may involve changes in taxation. The budget is approved by the Dáil in stages the immediate tax measures the same day, the general provisions next. If the government has a good majority, approval of the budget is normally a formality, but if it fails, one may expect a general election to be called (this happened in 1982). The Seanad may not reject the budget, but may send a 'recommendation' to the Minister for Finance.

The estimates of spending are published at the same time and are formally called 'the estimates'. They are normally divided between the largest part, current spending (day-to-day expenses) and capital spending (e.g. new buildings, hospitals etc). The amounts are listed under about 50 main headings or 'votes' which coincide with the main spending programmes of government departments and state agencies.



President's role in legislation

Bill

Normally signed automatically, but if there is doubt

Convene Council of State

> Sign?

> Or refer to the Supreme Court?

> or refer to people, following Oireachtas petition?

If approved, sign

Documents which shape overall government policy

- Party manifestos
- Programme for Government
- National partnership agreement

Estimates and budget

Groups lobby

Departments propose

Department of Finance moderates competing demands

Cabinet decides

Minister for Finance presents budget and estimates ('budget day')

Dáil approves

Then: Finance Bill, Social Welfare Bill

> Further reading: Hilary Curley: Finding your way around the budget, Combat Poverty Agency

The general and specific measures of the budget are implemented in a Finance Bill and the social welfare measures in a separate Social Welfare Bill (these sometimes include details not announced in the budget speech or subsequent modifications). The debate on the budget provides the opportunity for the Dáil, its parties and individual deputies to comment on all aspects of economic policy. Many do so in the course of wide-ranging speeches in which poverty is frequently raised as an issue. Both the Finance Bill and the Social Welfare Bill provide opportunities for groups to lobby again on the details of changes in budgetary policy and the estimates.

Legislation

The second function of a government is to pass legislation. Legislation may be divided into primary legislation (Bills which become Acts and are law) and secondary legislation (detailed regulations which have legal effect). Although these are not formal categories, legislation ranges from the enabling (permitting agencies or bodies to take certain action) to mandatory (requiring agencies to do certain things) to the prohibitive (e.g. changes in the criminal law). Some legislation is implemented by state agencies and local government; some by the police and the courts.

Debates on new draft laws (Bills) take up a considerable part of the time of the Dáil. About 40 Bills may be passed by the Oireachtas each year, covering such diverse issues as crime, environmental protection, the promotion of trade and industry, workers' rights, the welfare of children, Ireland's adherence to international agreements or regulations governing the operation of state bodies. Most Bills are introduced by the government. Since the 1970s, there has been a tradition of individual members or opposition parties introducing legislation. In more recent times, governments have been more prepared to adopt such Bills and, often with amendments, pass them into law.

Most Bills are introduced in the Dáil, though some start life in the Seanad instead. Bills must be approved by both houses or be deemed

Case Study

Link the local to the national

The National Youth Council of Ireland had long sought increased funding for youth work - but also knew how difficult it was to make a case for youth work activities. Many youth groups around the country were struggling, with only a single staff member. 'Politicians understand formal education, which is very concrete: schools and school buildings. By comparison, youth work activity seems vague and imprecise'. The member organisations of the National Youth Council adopted a twin-track strategy:

- They met as many politicians as they could locally, not in Leinster House. Youth groups and young people themselves went to see politicians in their clinics to persuade them.
- They showed them what practical effect improved funding would have for their local youth club. "This is what more funding would mean here." A second staff member would enable youth groups to clear their waiting lists of young people looking for a service. Concrete help could be provided to young people at risk. New facilities could be built.

Before the campaign, annual funding for youth work was €26.8m. Now it is €43.7m.

Lessons:

- Work with local members of the Oireachtas.
- Show concretely how a particular change will lead to a local improvement.

Stages of legislation

- 1 Bill is published and circulated
- 2 Approved in principle. A member may speak only once.
- 3 Also called committee stage. A member may introduce amendments. Bill is discussed line by line. A member may speak frequently. Normally done by committee, sometimes the whole house.
- 4 Report stage: government may present considered amendments. Opposition may present amendments again.
- 5 Final stage: Bill is confirmed.
 - * Must go through all these stages in each house.
 - * Once signed by the President, becomes an Act.

It is sometimes said that there are three key elements to influencing policy: persistence, persistence and persistence.

to be so approved. A Bill amended by the Seanad goes back to the Dáil, which can eventually overrule the Seanad. Any one deputy or senator may introduce an amendment. Once passed by the Dáil and Seanad, a Bill is sent to the President for signature. The President may refer it to the Supreme Court to test its constitutionality (this has been done 14 times, e.g. the Equal Status Bill); or refer it to the people on the petition of half the Seanad and one-third of the members of the Dáil (this has never happened). Once a Bill is signed, it is termed an Act, dated to the year of its signing (not the year when the Bill was introduced, which could be many years earlier).

All Bills go through five stages, in both houses. Traditionally, the third stage was considered by all members in a full session in the main chamber of the Dáil. Although this may still happen, it is now the norm for each Bill to go to a committee. These committees meet outside the Dáil chamber and in adjacent committee rooms. They cover different subject areas, the intention being to draw in deputies interested in specializing in that subject. These committees consider and amend the Bill point by point. Once they have finished, the Bill is then 'reported back' and sent for fourth and fifth stages which are normally very short and only a formality (called the report and final stages). It is unusual for Bills to be amended on the fourth or fifth stage, though the opposition may sometimes press the point on a much-disputed Bill (📁 For more on Oireachtas committees see section 4.8).

Bills are normally guided through each house by the minister responsible. The minister introduces the Bill, speaks about its virtues and, during committee stage, decides whether to accept amendments or not. The committee stage can be quite lively, with opposition deputies trying to persuade the minister to accept their amendments, or, if not, trying to get on-the-record commitments from him about how the Bill will operate. The minister is normally assisted by a small number of senior civil servants who sit close by to provide advice during the debate (The civil servants may whisper to the minister but not contribute to the debate). The same procedure is followed in the Seanad, where ministers must also steer their Bills through the

Oireachtas committees

- Foreign affairs
- European affairs
- Justice, equality and law reform
- Finance
- Agriculture
- Arts, sport & tourism
- Communications
- Enterprise, trade & employment
- Environment
- Health
- Education & science
- Social & family
- Transport
- Public accounts
- Joint committee on the constitution

- Joint committee on the Good Friday agreement
- Joint committee on children (constitutional amendment)
- Joint committee on economic and regulatory affairs
- Joint committee on climate change and energy
- Joint committee on EU scrutiny

Dáil questions

- Leaders
- Priority
- Oral
- Written

Checklist for asking questions

- What is the purpose of asking the question?
- What information is sought?
- Priority, oral or written?
- How can it extract the maximum response?
- Who is the best deputy to ask the question?
- How do I get the reply afterwards?

house. Sometimes, during committee stage, a minister will give a commitment to look at a particular issue again and come back with a government amendment on the fourth stage.

In addition to Bills, the Oireachtas must approve secondary legislation. These are regulations (called statutory instruments and ministerial orders) issued by ministers to govern, in detail, the work of their departments. Several hundred are issued each year, covering such diverse areas as minimum temperatures in nursing homes, shipping fees, aviation standards, product safety, to the length of the fishing season for particular species. Such regulations are announced by the minister in writing on the order paper of the Dáil and, unless revoked, are automatically deemed to be passed within 21 sitting days. It is most unusual for a regulation to be debated, still less vetoed or revoked, so it is a passive rather than an active process. Either house may annul a statutory instrument by a simple majority.

Who decides what is discussed in what order? Each day, the government presents its order of business to the house (in the Dáil, the Taoiseach; in the Seanad, the Leader of the House). This normally takes the form of a printed order paper- green for the Dáil and yellow for the Seanad - numbering each issue the government wishes to discuss that day. Sometimes the opposition contests this, but there is a system whereby representatives of each party meet in advance to try reach agreement on the order of business. Sometimes the government will limit debate on a particular issue, imposing a time limit on debate. This is called the 'guillotine' and is normally stoutly resisted by the opposition.

Accountability

The third main function of the Oireachtas is a broader one concerning accountability and debate. Time is set aside for questions and debates so that issues may be raised and ministers may be made accountable. A number of mechanisms exist for ministers to be cross-examined about their work, for governments to be questioned about their record and for new issues to be brought to the surface. These are questions, adjournment debates and motions.

Examples of questions (Dáil)

* To ask the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs about the progress made in reducing the hardship caused to individuals and society by drug use and will he make a statement on the matter

* To ask the Minister for Social & Family Affairs for his views on the fact that 290,000 people (including one child in ten) are living in consistent poverty and if he will make a statement on the matter

* To ask the Minister for Social & Family Affairs to clarify the circumstances in which people on Community Employment can claim rent supplement and the application of these rules for lone parents

* To ask the Minister for Social & Family Affairs the rate of social spending in Ireland compared to other European countries, the European Union average and will he make a statement on the matter

Case Study

Concrete objectives

The National Youth Council of Ireland has long been concerned with the problem of early school leaving in Ireland. In particular, the council took the view that the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) must have more resources. But rather than vaguely look for 'more money', the council set a target figure of 90 educational welfare officers for the NEWB and argued the case at the national social partnership negotiations for what became *Towards 2016*. The council met with quite some resistance. Its figures on early school leaving were challenged and the Department of Education and Science argued that things were improving and a lot was already being done. But the council stuck to its figures and specific target and worked with other organisations concerned with the issue, like the teacher unions.

The council re-iterated the need for action on the area both at plenary national social partnership meetings and bilateral meetings with the department. Eventually, *Towards 2016* gave a commitment for 100 officers by 2009, divided between the NEWB and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). This was not the precise outcome sought for, but in 2007 funding was allocated for 20 new posts in the National Education Welfare Board, a start.

Lessons

- Concrete objectives are very important.
- Work with allies.
- Be persistent. Relay the same message in different places, using reputable research that gives one confidence.

Case Study

Using foreign examples

Galway Simon Community used the United Nations declaration on human rights as a successful means to improve the policies of Galway City Council. The council was drawing up a policy on anti-social behaviour which would set down the circumstances in which anti-social people could legally be evicted from their homes. This was obviously something that would concern any organisation working with homeless people.

Here, Galway Simon Community, in partnership with other service providers and representing the city's Community Forum, argued that any such policy must be in line with international human rights standards.

Galway Simon convened a group of providers of services and drafted a document: *Review of anti-social behaviour policy*, which it circulated to councillors and other voluntary and community organisations concerned with the issue, for example Traveller groups. This looked at the human rights context, the problems of anti-social behaviour in other countries and good practice responding to the problem. National housing experts were brought in to give talks. Next, Galway Simon Community argued the document in the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) of the City Council, where the Simon Community was well placed as one of the representatives of the voluntary and community sector. This was a tough process. Galway Simon argued the case over a long period of time but received support from other organisations which sat in on the meetings. Councillors were briefed throughout. Those who were unsympathetic were persuaded to at least not oppose the proposals.

In the end, they succeeded in getting a human rights dimension into the procedure, getting the SPC and then the council to agree a new policy. People accused of anti-social behaviour must now, under the new policy, have a right to a hearing and the right to representation. If an eviction is still to go ahead, it is mandatory for there to be a case conference of the appropriate agencies (Health Service Executive and social welfare offices). Then there is a subsequent right to social and other services.

Continued on page 21

Questions

In the Dáil, an hour is normally set aside each day so that ministers may answer questions on matters that concern their brief. Questions go to the different ministers in rotation, so that each minister may expect to answer questions every month or so. Questions may be divided into leader's, priority, oral and written, all being listed on the order paper on the appropriate day.

First, there is also a procedure for the leaders of the main political parties to question the Taoiseach and only the Taoiseach. This happens every week.

Second, priority questions are asked by opposition spokespersons to government ministers, allocated to the opposition parties according to their size. Five are normally asked each day and only the questioner is expected to ask supplementary questions to cross-examine the minister concerned (though sometimes other deputies interject).

Third, there are ordinary oral questions in which any deputy may put down a question for oral answer by a government minister. He or she will be cross-examined by the deputy who asked the question and/or other deputies until the Ceann Comhairle rules that there has been sufficient discussion on the issue and the house moves on to the next question. Any oral questions not reached that day are normally recycled as written questions. Written questions must be answered within three sitting days. They are not debated, nor are the ministerial replies formally read out aloud, but the text is always included on the formal, published record of the house like the others. There are many more written questions than oral ones.

Questions are asked in order to get information from ministers about their policies, the administration of their department, or to get statistical data that may not be otherwise published. Questions are unlikely, on their own, to change policy, but repeated questioning of a minister around a particular issue or set of issues can embarrass, send strong signals of public concern, sow doubt or unease about

Examples of debates

- * State of the health services (Dáil)
- * Tackling crime (Dáil)
- * Road safety (Dáil)
- * National drugs strategy (Seanad)
- * Access to primary education (Seanad)

Examples of adjournment debates

- * Child care services (Dáil)
- * Deployment of Gardai (Dáil)
- * Need to improve legal aid services (Dáil)
- * Cancer services (Seanad)
- * Need for new light rail services (Seanad)
- * Applications for citizenship (Seanad)

particular policies and find weaknesses in the basis on which policies are devised.

Questions can be an effective means of lobbying and pressurizing ministers and their departments, though there are advantages and disadvantages for each type, written and oral. With oral questions, ministers can be cross-examined on the spot, but one must wait until that minister's turn comes around. Written questions are a faster procedure, though the responses can sometimes be evasive and unhelpful. Questions may not be asked outside the time when the Dáil is sitting and may not be asked in the Seanad. About 20 oral questions are answered each day and those not reached may be reallocated for written answer. Deputies are happy to ask questions. It provides a service without committing them personally to a particular line of policy or action. Each deputy may ask unlimited numbers of written questions, but the same question may not be asked again for another six months (this is not strictly observed). Most parliamentary questions are asked because groups or individuals have requested deputies to act on their behalf ('there's a story behind each question', one political commentator once observed). Organisations can make a general request to a deputy to ask a question (though they should be very clear about the information they are seeking). More skilled groups offer to write the text themselves.

Motions and debates

Both houses make provision for debates on issues of current concern. There are several ways this is done. First, a single member may ask for the house to be adjourned to debate a matter of urgent national importance (in the Dáil, this is called a 'standing order 32'). Doing so is at the discretion of the Ceann Comhairle or the Cathaoirleach and is normally refused. However, the member concerned may get some favourable publicity for having tried to do so. More likely to succeed is a procedure called private notice questions. The purpose of this procedure is to facilitate a debate on a prominent, urgent matter of national concern raised by several deputies and which could not be

Continued from page 20

Lessons

- Learn from relevant foreign examples.
- Get oneself well placed in local social partnership structures.
- Press the case persistently over a long period of time.
- Bring in outside help.
- Ask for and get the support of other voluntary and community organisations.

Structure of government departments (15)

Minister
 Special advisors
 Minister of state
 Secretary General
 Divisions
 Units, sections

Cabinet committees

European affairs
 Health
 Climate change and energy security
 Housing, infrastructure and public private partnerships
 Social inclusion, children and integration
 Science, technology and innovation



Well presented opposition motions can put ministers under a lot of pressure. Worse, government deputies may express their sympathy for some of the criticisms made by the opposition. The minister must respond to criticism and can be often pressured into giving commitments for improvements.

otherwise speedily debated or discussed. Such notices must be lodged on the day of the intended debate. Accepting private notice questions is at the discretion of the Ceann Comhairle. There may be none for weeks and then several. When one is allowed, the minister responds and a short debate follows (about half an hour).

Second, the government may propose that time be set aside for discussion on a contemporary topic. On the order paper, these are normally termed 'statements' in which the minister whose subject area is covered introduces a debate, whereupon opposition speakers and other deputies respond. These tend to be less contentious areas of policy in which there is genuine all-party concern - sometimes international issues - and where there is no formal motion for agreement or disagreement.

Third, motions may be put down for a formal debate. The time for such debates is allocated between the different party blocks. Private members' time is generally allocated for three hours twice a week, normally on succeeding days. Each party normally gets a block of time every two or three months. Debates are not a priority in the Dáil or Seanad's work, but they can be an important means by which issues and problems may be articulated. The exception is a confidence motion in the government, which automatically supersedes any other business (if it is carried, the government is expected to resign, as once happened in 1982).

What type of motion is debated? In general, government parties tend to put down motions congratulating the government on its performance. Opposition parties use debating time to raise issues which concern them. Naturally, they tend to be more critical. A vote is normally taken at the end of each such debate (unsurprisingly, the government normally wins). At first sight, such debates may seem to be a futile exercise. However, well presented opposition motions can put ministers under a lot of pressure. Worse, government deputies may express their sympathy for some of the criticisms made by the opposition. The minister must respond to criticism and can be often pressured into giving commitments for improvements.

Government departments

Taoiseach
 Finance (including the Public Service)
 Foreign Affairs
 Education & Science
 Health & Children
 Social & Family Affairs
 Environment, Heritage and Local Government
 Enterprise, Trade & Employment
 Justice, Equality & Law Reform
 Agriculture, Food & Fisheries
 Defence

Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs
 Transport & Marine
 Arts, Sport & Tourism
 Communications, Energy & Natural Resources

Strategic Management Initiative

To follow the reform of the public services, go to: www.bettergov.ie

Civil service: general service grades (and staff numbers)

Secretary General & Deputy Secretary (20)
 Assistant Secretary (134)
 Principal (591)
 Assistant Principal (1,674)
 Administrative Officer (237)
 Higher Executive Officer (2,762)
 Executive Officer (3,805)
 Staff Officer (1,323)
 Clerical Officer (10,115)
 Others (10,046)

Adjournment debates

What is called the 'adjournment debate' takes place at the end of each Dáil session of the Dáil and Seanad. Here, any deputy or senator may put down a motion for an issue of public administration, rather than policy, to be discussed. Normally the motion begins: The need for the Minister for X to ensure that.... The norm is for up to four such motions to be taken each day in the Dáil, and three in the Seanad. If a motion is accepted (the ruling is made by Ceann Comhairle or, in the Seanad, by the Cathaoirleach) then the member has five minutes or so to make the case. The minister must then respond, though there is no subsequent exchange of views. Adjournment debates are an effective means of keeping the pressure up on ministers and their departments on a given issue; obtaining commitments; and getting issues put on the record. They are not always an effective means of getting media publicity, because they often take place late at night when the media have gone home. Because adjournment debates are taken once the other debates have ended and often late at night, they can be an irritant for ministers and civil servants who have to wait around until other debates are concluded. Motions for the adjournment must be submitted by noon that day, which enables moderately urgent issues to be raised speedily.

The Dáil and Seanad transact a range of other business, such as approving treaties, selecting delegates for international missions or organisations, appointing tribunals, receiving foreign dignitaries, debating the most recent European summit or taking reports from ministers on current issues. The Dáil and Seanad are generally in session from the end of January to the end of March; from the end of April to the end of June; and from early October until mid-December. Neither house sits weekends nor Mondays. Sitting hours are normally 2:30pm till late (Tuesday); 10:30am till late (Wednesday) and 10:30am to 5pm on Thursday. The Dáil may sometimes work till 8pm or 9pm, sometimes even into the early hours. Friday sittings are infrequent and there is no question time that day.

The Dáil and Seanad are generally in session from the end of January to the end of March; from the end of April to the end of June; and from early October until mid-December.

> Further reading:

A guide to influencing the health services,
Combat Poverty Agency.

Examples of green papers

Green paper on pensions

Towards a sustainable energy future
for Ireland

Case Study

Working with politicians for ambitious but achievable objectives

In combating poverty the actual level of the lowest social welfare rate for a single person is a crucial issue. CORI Justice (the Conference of Religious of Ireland) sought to have that rate benchmarked at an adequate level since the mid-1980s. The initial benchmark sought was that identified by the Commission on Social Welfare in 1985 - one eventually achieved in 1999. But that level was clearly not sufficient to ensure that people had sufficient income to live life with dignity.

The proposal to benchmark the lowest rate at 30% Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE) was rejected by the Benchmarking Social Welfare Working Group which was established under the national agreement *Programme for prosperity and fairness*. CORI Justice then set out to convince government to include this target in the review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy which was to be published in early 2002. CORI produced a great deal of research to show the implications and consequences of achieving and maintaining such a target. It also argued for this proposal in a wide range of policy arenas and engaged with a range of policy-makers on this issue. The end result was that the government included a target in its National Anti-Poverty Strategy review to raise the lowest social welfare for a single person to €150 a week in 2002 terms by 2007. In 2002 €150 was 30% of Gross Average Industrial Earnings.

Continued on page 25

2.2 Taoiseach

The most important person in the political decision-making machinery is the Taoiseach (plural: Taoisigh), normally the leader of the governing party or the main party of government. The Taoiseach is the person elected to lead the government by a new Dáil. The role broadly corresponds to that of prime minister in other countries. The Taoiseach has the ultimate responsibility for all government policy and in practice, the Taoiseach takes particular responsibility for national economic strategy, the security of the state and Northern Ireland policy. The actual powers of the Taoiseach are to choose government ministers (though they must be approved by the Dáil and are, in turn, appointed by the President); to call a general election (with the consent of the President, which is normally given); and to chair the cabinet. It is this role, as chairperson of the government, which puts the Taoiseach in a strong position to lead and to steer an agenda through government. Different Taoisigh interpret their roles in different ways, some seeing themselves as chairing a cabinet, others as adopting a much more forward leadership role. In addition to his national role, the Taoiseach is specifically responsible for the actions of the Department of the Taoiseach.

Second in line to the Taoiseach is the Tánaiste. In a coalition government with a coalition partner with a significant number of seats, this position is normally held by the leader of the second largest party. The Tánaiste chairs the cabinet and answers to the Dáil in the absence of the Taoiseach (for example, if out of the country on business). Should both be absent, the Minister for Finance is the next most senior minister.

Examples of white papers

Foreign policy (Challenges and opportunities abroad)

Rural development (Ensuring the future)

Early childhood education (Ready to learn)

Regulation (Regulating better)

Irish aid

Examples of strategies

Quality and fairness, a system for you - the national health strategy

National climate change strategy, 2007-2012

Our children - their lives, the national children's strategy

People, places and potential - the national spatial strategy.

Local administration

Local authorities (113) of which

county councils (29), city councils (5) and borough and town councils (80)

City & county enterprise boards (35)

Vocational Education Committees (33)

Harbour authorities (18)

Fisheries boards (7)

Regional assemblies (2)

Regional authorities (7)

2.3 Government, cabinet, government ministers

When people talk of the 'the government', they normally refer to the ministers who comprise the cabinet, each being responsible for a specific government department. After each general election, photographs are taken of 'the new government' of cabinet ministers, eagerly ready for their new tasks and responsibilities. Under the Constitution, Ireland must have a government of not less than seven and not more than 15 ministers. Some ministers may run more than one government department at a time.

Ministers are expected, with the assistance of their civil servants, not only to run their departments efficiently, but to develop policy frameworks, guidelines, values and priorities. Some ministers have been social reformers.

The government, or the cabinet, normally meets every week and takes the main decisions of national importance. Individual ministers must bring important decisions (e.g. proposed legislation, major policy proposals, white papers, big projects) concerning their own departments to the cabinet for approval. This normally takes the form of a Memorandum for government which outlines the proposal, its costs and implications. Memoranda are first circulated to other government departments and ministers for their comments or observations (informally called 'obs'). This stage provides an opportunity for other departments to amend, improve, better co-ordinate, or in extreme cases hold up the proposals of other departments.

There is normally a queue of such decisions going to cabinet for decision. Indeed, a logjam here can slow down the process of policy-making at a crucial stage. The deliberations of the cabinet are secret: ministers inform the Dáil of government decisions if and when they choose to or if asked about particular issues by the Dáil or the media. Apart from government ministers, the other people who normally attend cabinet meetings are the Attorney General, who is the legal advisor to the government; and the secretary of the government, who is a senior civil servant and may also be Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach.

Continued from page 24

Having set the target, though, the government did not take the necessary steps in the budgets of 2003 and 2004 to move towards achieving this target. Further action was required. Fr. Sean Healy, Director of CORI Justice received an invitation to attend the annual 'think-in' of the main government party (Fianna Fáil) in Inchydoney, Co. Cork in September 2004. He used the opportunity to reiterate the proposal that social welfare be raised to 30% of GAIE and identified a pathway that would see this target being met on time. As the government still had three budgets (2005, 2006 and 2007) before a likely election Seán Healy proposed that the target be met in three steps by raising the minimum social welfare rate in those three budgets by €14, then €17 and then €20 respectively.

This discussion came at a good political moment. The CORI proposals were well researched. They looked at alternative ways of achieving improved social welfare objectives and they also took account of other possible unintended consequences (e.g. poverty traps, incentives to work). CORI published extensive socio-economic commentaries and was well regarded for the way in which it argued its case on the airwaves and to groups all over the county.

Lessons

- Accurate, in-depth research is important.
- Show government how proposals can solve problems.
- Present one's case in a way that is challenging but achievable, convincing and 'do-able'.
- Anticipate objections, cost your proposals, foresee impacts and be 'responsible'.
- Criticise when it is merited (e.g. the earlier tax cuts), but be quick and generous to praise when credit is due.

Responsibilities of councillors (reserved functions)

Policy

Estimates

Development plans

By-laws

Nominations

> Details of the different departments of the local administration may best be found in the green pages at the beginning of each telephone directory.

Local authorities, communities and social inclusion: the main elements

Social Inclusion Unit

Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)

City or County Development Board

Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) group

Traveller accommodation consultative committee

City or county childcare committee

Community Forum

Joint policing committees

> Further reading on local government, elections:

Hilary Curley: Finding your way around local government, Combat Poverty Agency.

Mary Kerrigan: That's politics!, A guide to politics in Ireland.

Case Study

The campaign for social finance

Voluntary and community organisations have often found it a struggle to get money for capital investment, such as buildings, even if they could later generate revenue. Banks were reluctant to lend to non-commercial bodies and there were all kinds of problems over guarantees and security. What was needed was a system of 'social finance'. The Dublin Employment Pact, Pobal, Clann Credo and the Westmeath Employment Pact joined forces to work for a national system of social finance. Their campaign had a number of stages:

First, they commissioned research by a leading consultancy company, which confirmed that lack of access to social capital was a significant problem. Meantime, lobbying by several organisations including the Conference of Religious of Ireland got the concept written into the national agreement and it also appeared in the Programme for Government. The pacts then widened the campaign to include new groups and commissioned a second report, which explained exactly what a social finance scheme in Ireland would look like (In the common interest - the case for social finance in Ireland). They organised a launch for it in Department of the Taoiseach - a good address to persuade people to come to. They also persuaded the Taoiseach himself to launch it.

To get such a scheme actually under way required more work, so the group convened a national steering group on social finance. There were 14 people in the group, including some of the country's leading financial institutions and a former governor of the Central Bank, as well as voluntary and community groups. This steering group widened the campaign and commissioned a second report, which explained exactly what a social finance scheme in Ireland would look like. In the common interest - the case for social finance in Ireland was targeted primarily at policy makers and launched by finance minister Brian Cowen.

At the time, there was some pressure on the government to apply a levy on the banks. A commitment to social finance offered a more palatable, softer way out, so it was a good moment politically. When the final report was ready, the group asked the Minister for Finance to launch it in his own constituency. Although not everything that the Dublin Employment Pact and the Westmeath Employment Pact sought was in the final scheme, most of it was. €25m was committed to the 'Social Finance Initiative'.

Continued on page 27

Cabinet sub-committees

Some important work of the government is carried out by cabinet sub-committees. These committees consist of groups of key ministers working together intensively on a particular problem either for a short period or on an on-going basis. They report back to the full cabinet on their progress and expect their colleagues to endorse their deliberations, conclusions and recommendations. These committees may be ad hoc and short term, but since 1997 there has been a cabinet sub-committee on social inclusion, intended to ensure the better co-ordination of social inclusion policies across a range of government departments. Here, the rules of cabinet confidentiality still apply. Although Oireachtas members may ask about who is on it and when it meets, no information is available about what is discussed or decided.

Junior ministers

In addition to the ministers of the government, the Taoiseach appoints junior ministers. These are now termed ministers of state, numbering 20 (originally they were called 'parliamentary secretaries'). Each junior minister is assigned to a government department - some to more than one simultaneously. Each is termed 'minister of state at the department of...'. A minister of state normally has a defined set of responsibilities within a government department, so these ministerial titles can be quite long (e.g. Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with special responsibility for integration policy and Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment with special responsibility for lifelong learning, youth work and school transport). Such titles change from time to time, enabling new policy areas to be developed (e.g. the appointment of a minister of state responsible for horticulture). The minister of state answers questions in the Dáil about these responsibilities and will stand in for the senior minister if absent. A minister of state may not attend cabinet meetings, except by invitation

Consultation and consultation...

Some local authorities have more sophisticated consultative systems than others. Dublin City Council operates in five areas, each with an area committee of councillors (north-west, north central, central, south east and south central), meeting monthly. Important from the perspective of action against poverty is the holding, every three months, of meetings between the area committees and the partnerships of the respective areas in which the partnerships have the opportunity to present the work they do - and the policy issues arising.

Is this something that could happen further afield?

> Further reading: Strengthening our voice - a guide for community sector participation in local decision-making and Tools for change - a community work resource from the Community Workers Cooperative, 1st floor, unit 4, Tuam road Centre, Tuam rd, Galway, tel 091 779 030, fax 091 779 033, info@cwcc.ie, www.cwcc.ie

for a specific topic. Successful ministers of state may become full government ministers later in their political careers.

Special advisors

An important innovation in government in the 1970s was that of political or special advisors (some governments developed more senior posts - that of programme manager). Advisors can provide ministers with political advice and expertise. Advisors have an important role in ensuring that the minister's policy has maximum impact and that it does not become delayed in the administrative machine (some have been called 'enforcers'). Because advisors have fast and routine access to their minister, they are important points in the policy process.

Oversight

The government also includes a range of oversight or watchdog bodies. Their duties range from ensuring that public money is spent for the purposes for which it is intended (Comptroller and Auditor General) to bodies for the protection of the citizen and consumer (e.g. Ombudsman, Data Protection Commissioner, National Consumer Agency). Some are an integral part of the civil service, whilst others are bodies with independent powers and authority (e.g. Equality Tribunal).

 Oversight bodies, Directory, 2.1

2.4 President

The President's general role is, generally to uphold the constitution, but specifically to:

- Sign Bills into law once due legal process has been followed;
- Be commander in chief for the armed forces;
- Consider legislation for reference to the supreme court; and
- Represent the country abroad (though travel abroad is permitted only with the consent of the government).

Continued from page 26

Lessons

- Be persistent. It took two research reports, a final report and several years of work to bring this project to fruition.
- Use social partnership to get the idea written into the national agreement. This was a definite help in legitimizing the idea.
- The two employment pacts worked very consciously with the political and financial establishment. While the result was a compromise, it was a result worth getting. The campaign was also prepared to ask leading financial figures to join in something that might appear marginal to their interests - and they did so.



Towards 2016: the negotiating parties (community and voluntary pillar)

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Congress Centres Network for the Unemployed
Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) Justice Commission
National Youth Council of Ireland
National Association of Building Co-operatives

Irish Council for Social Housing
Society of St Vincent de Paul
Age Action Ireland
Carers Association
The Wheel
Disability Federation of Ireland
Irish Rural Link
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament

Children's Rights Alliance
Protestant Aid

Many voluntary organisations find that they have most of their dealings with one particular department and sometimes with one particular unit. Having a constructive relationship with that unit is, therefore, important.

The President may convene a meeting of the Oireachtas so as to address it on a matter of national importance (Mary Robinson convened the Oireachtas for addresses on Ireland’s role in Europe and on emigration). The President is assisted and advised in these duties by the Council of State, which comprises ex-Taoisigh, senior justices and political figures and others chosen personally by the President (Presidents Robinson and McAleese appointed representatives of voluntary organisations). While the President may not directly address political questions, the President’s activities may send out subtle but well understood political signals. Presidents sent out important messages when they visibly supported the work of voluntary, community and women’s organisations, including some which were politically unpopular.

2.5 Government departments

Each minister is responsible for a government department. Government departments are the core of the civil service. The question as to who really runs the country - the minister or his civil servants - has long been a focus of discussion for political scientists and the subject of political situation comedies (the most famous being the British television series, Yes, Minister).

Departments are divided into divisions, sections and units, each with a set area of responsibility. For example, the Department of Social and Family Affairs has units for planning, pensions, legislation, voluntary and community services, international affairs, family affairs, short-term schemes and long-term schemes, with regional offices as well. Many voluntary organisations find that they have most of their dealings with one particular department and sometimes with one particular unit. Having a constructive relationship with that unit is, therefore, important.

Public officials who work in departments are recruited by public examination and selected by an independent appointments

Membership of NESF

- Oireachtas
- Business, trade union, farming pillars
- Non-Governmental organisations
- Government departments
- Local government
- Independent members

Examples of voluntary organisations represented on NESF

- National Women’s Council
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Conference of Religious in Ireland
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- Children’s Rights Alliance
- Carers Association
- Irish Rural Link
- The Wheel

- Pavee Point
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- Senior Citizens Parliament
- Irish Council for Social Housing
- National Traveller Women’s Forum
- Integrating Ireland
- One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN)

commission. The civil service has a series of general service grades, the managerial positions rising from executive officer upward to departmental secretary general. A principal officer is normally responsible for a unit and is an important person in determining the thinking and policy of that unit. Below principals are assistant principals and other grades.

While most of the work of government departments focuses on the administration of on-going services and entitlements, changes in services and policies are also an important part of their work. A more dynamic model of the role of the government department is now in development. Under the Strategic Management Initiative, launched by the government to modernise public administration in 1994, departments are now expected to have strategic plans, with objectives, targets and performance indicators. These may be put out to public consultation and are important reference documents.

There are 15 government departments (though some titles represent several departments which have been merged or have changed names). Traditionally, all were headquartered in Dublin, but in recent years, important parts were decentralised to different parts of the country. Politically, each is headed by a minister, in some cases assisted by one or more ministers of state. The administrative head is the Secretary General of the department. Departments vary in size, from those with large numbers of staff (e.g. Department of Social and Family Affairs) to others which are quite small (e.g. Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism). Some have responsibility for large numbers of semi-state bodies (e.g. Enterprise, Trade & Employment), others for very few (e.g. Defence).

The work of each government department is governed by legislation and circulars. Circulars are issued by departments instructing its units and subordinate bodies how to carry out their work. Although circulars are essentially procedural, many deal with issues which reflect policy questions. Generally each has a number, followed by the year in question (1/09, 2/09 etc). Some are termed guidelines (e.g. Strategic policy committees-guidelines for establishment and operation). They do not have legal

Case Study

Demonstrating for rural transport

For people who live in rural areas and who not have cars, a public transport scheme is a critical aspect of their lives. Irish Rural Link (IRL), together with other groups, campaigned for what was eventually introduced as a pilot scheme called the Rural Transport Initiative. The problem was that four years later, it was still a pilot scheme and received only limited funding (€3m annually). Even though a review of the scheme by consultants recommended that it be mainstreamed, there was no desire by government to do so. Although the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (CRAAG) was sympathetic, the more crucial Department of Transport appeared much less so.

Eventually, after years of patience, Irish Rural Link organised a noisy demonstration outside Leinster House. Six busloads of rural transport users came to Dublin, (up to 300 people). The story was on the current affairs programmes (e.g. RTE radio that evening) and the passengers were interviewed about the importance and value of the service. Member organisations of IRL met with government deputies. There were lots of colour stories in the local papers, buses being a photogenic aspect to the stories. IRL made a point of continuing to brief government officials, so that they could hear the case from within.

The demonstration gave the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the opportunity to make a good case to his colleagues that it was now time for something to be done. The outcome was that funding rose to €9m. The scheme is now funded as an annual budget line in its own right, not a pilot. There is still a lot of work to be done to complete the mainstreaming process, but the action broke the stalemate.

Lessons

- Demonstrations can break a stalemate, but they must be well organised, media-friendly and supplement normal lobbying activity.
- Keep allies on side at all times

Examples of NESF reports

The policy implications of social capital
Early childhood care and education
Care for older people

Examples of NESC reports

The developmental welfare state
Investment in quality - services, inclusion and enterprise
Housing in Ireland - performance and policy

Examples of commissions and advisory bodies

Working group on the cost of disability
Lone parent payment review group

Case Study

Committees to reach objectives

Ever since the 1960s, private rented accommodation was a problem area in Irish housing, often with poor people living there in bad conditions and landlords enjoying all the benefits of lack of regulation. Disputes between landlords and tenants ended up in the courts, a slow, expensive and cumbersome way of resolving differences.

To change all this required a substantial piece of legislation - a prospect not favoured at either departmental or owner level. But could some kind of committee break this deadlock? Threshold persuaded the government to establish a Commission on the Private Rented Sector, charged with investigating the situation and making recommendations for improvements. Threshold emphasised the importance of a more equitable system to prevent hardship for tenants and stressed the cost and wastefulness of landlord-tenant issues blocking up time in the courts.

The terms of reference of the Commission were to get a consensus between all the different interests involved (including property owners) on what reforms could be achieved. Obviously there was the danger that the Commission might do nothing and nothing might follow, so Threshold kept up the pressure for reform both during and after the deliberations of the commission, keeping the issue in the public eye. The growing involvement of middle-class people in both letting and renting, coupled with the rising number of people on rent supplement causing a burden on government resources, meant that there was external pressure for a positive outcome.

Continued on page 31

effect, but departments and the local authorities are expected to abide by them. Traditionally, these were not routinely made public although they are more available nowadays. Voluntary and community organisations may press for circulars to address issues which concern them. Examples are those issued by the Department of the Environment to local authorities about estate management and on procedures for assessing the level of homelessness.

Where departmental policy is found: green papers, white papers and strategies

Government policy as a whole and departmental policy may be found in green papers, white papers and strategies. These are prepared by departments and ministers and approved by government. A green paper is a document for discussion, while a white paper indicates firm government intentions (though it can still leave the door open for some changes). Sometimes, white papers are issued without there being a preceding green paper. Not all policy decisions go through this orderly process. To give two examples, the decision of the government to decentralise government departments was made in the course of a budget speech, while the replacement of the health boards by the Health Service Executive followed a report by consultants.

The number of green papers and white papers has declined in recent years, the government instead adopting an increasing number of strategy papers, whose function is similar to white papers, but broader in nature. Strategies generally include an analysis of an issue, the government's response so far, the underlying assumptions of the government's new approach, the objectives set, implications, targets and systems for monitoring and evaluation. The Department of Health and Children, for example, has both a framework strategy (Quality and fairness - a health system for you), and a series of detailed strategies covering specific areas of health policy (e.g. A strategy for cancer control, Obesity - the policy challenges).

Mechanisms for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

- Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration, chaired by the Taoiseach, including the ministers responsible for Enterprise, Trade & Employment; Education & Science; Social & Family Affairs; and Tourism, Sport & Recreation;
- Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) in the Department of Social & Family Affairs, with an annual social inclusion report;
- Liaison officers or units in each department;

- Senior officials group;
 - Social inclusion consultative committee, meeting twice a year;
 - Annual social inclusion forum;
 - Oireachtas committee on social and family affairs;
 - Application of poverty impact assessments in each government department to test impact of that department's work in promoting social inclusion.
- > Poverty and inequality - applying an equality dimension to poverty-proofing. From Combat Poverty Agency and the Equality Authority

National political parties

- Christian Solidarity Party
- Communist Party of Ireland
- Fianna Fail
- Fine Gael
- Green Party
- Labour Party
- Progressive Democrats
- Sinn Fein
- Socialist Party
- Workers Party
- Socialist Workers Party

2.6 Local authorities

Local authorities in Ireland comprise 29 county councils, 5 city councils and 80 town councils (including a sub-group of borough councils). They vary in size. City councils have up to 52 members; county councils up to 48 members; and most town councils 9 members (a small number has 12). Ireland is considered by outsiders to be a centralised state. Our local authorities have much less power than our continental counterparts. Despite that, local authorities are important centres of power, for they administer a number of essential services and have an important role in public administration, such as in roads, health, housing, environmental services (e.g. parks) and libraries.

Officials of the local authorities are recruited through the Local Appointments Commission. Like the national civil service, they have grades, the most senior of which is the city or county manager. To carry out the ceremonial roles of the local authority, each year city councillors elect a mayor for their city while county councillors elect a cathaoirleach. Eventually, these positions may be popularly elected.

The local authorities are controlled by councillors, who are chosen in local government elections held every five years (2009, 2014 etc). Turnout in local elections is lower than general elections, less than 60%. County council meetings are held every month. Their principal role is the operation of the development plan, but they have other important functions (see below). Council meetings are attended by the press and (sometimes requiring a ticket from a councillor) by citizens.

The role of a councilor may be broader than his or her role in the local authority alone. Many are elected to represent the local authority on other local bodies (e.g. vocational education committees); councillors comprise the electorate for most of the seats of the Seanad; and many enter the councils in order to go on to a national political career.

In addition to local government, there are two regional assemblies; seven regional authorities; 33 Vocational Education Committees;

Examples of court actions highlighting policy issues

Deportation of children of foreign nationals

Right to marriage of gay and lesbian people

Motorways and archaeological sites

Test cases as a form of working for change

The Free Legal Advice Centres has, over the years, supported a number of citizens to bring important issues of law and rights through the courts. An example was that of Foy, in which FLAC successfully supported Lydia Foy to obtain recognition of her change in gender.

> FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres Ltd.)

13 Lower Dorset street, Dublin 1,
tel: 874 5690, fax: 874 5320,
info@flac.ie, www.flac.ie

Continued from page 30

The commission duly reported, coming up with the hoped for commitments for reform. The next task was to get good legislation in place. Here, Threshold provided legislative text for the departmental officials. A Threshold representative presented the organisation's view on an ad hoc board appointed to advise on the proposed legislation and much of this was incorporated into the Act. The legislation, which eventually became the Residential Tenancies Act, extended the rights of tenants, set down longer periods of notice to leave, limited notice to six specified reasons and provided a dispute resolution service. Not everything Threshold wanted was achieved (e.g. rental deposit board), but it was a compromise that provided the first reform in a generation.

Lessons

- Some objectives cannot be achieved immediately, so a consensus-building committee is one way of breaking a stalemate.
- It is necessary to keep the issue in the public eye even when reform is under way.
- Offer solutions to government (a cheaper, better system of regulation) and draft the text of legislation.

18 harbour authorities; and seven regional fisheries boards. The functions and roles of the local authorities are now reviewed.

Current role and functions

Local authorities vary in size from those with large numbers of staff and sizeable budgets (for example Dublin City Council), to town councils, which have extremely limited resources. They are funded by central government, local charges and rates on businesses. Local authorities are responsible for the following main areas of work:

- housing planning and provision;
- non-national roads;
- water supplies and sewerage;
- fire and emergency services;
- development in general and the development plan, in particular;
- environmental protection; and
- recreation and amenities.

Although the term 'local authority' refers to both the elected councillors and administration run by officials, there are important divisions of function. Elected councillors are responsible for broad policy questions, the estimates, development plans, by-laws and nominations to other bodies (these are called reserved functions). All other decisions are made by the city or county manager and the staff. The manager may attend and speak at local authority meetings, but not vote. Whilst the actions of the city or county manager and the officials are accountable to the councillors, in practice the managers and officials have scope to establish their own style, policies and approaches to many issues of local development.

Ombudsman type services

Office of the Ombudsman, 18 Lower Leeson st, Dublin 2, Tel 639 5600, fax 639 5674, local 1890 223030, ombudsman@ombudsman.ie, www.ombudsman.ie

Office of Information Commissioner, 18 lower Leeson st, Dublin 2, Tel 639 5689, fax 639 5676, info@oic.ie, www.oic.ie

Financial Services Ombudsman, 3rd floor, Lincoln House, , Lincoln Place, Dublin 2, tel 662 0899, fax 662 0890, local 1890 882090, enquiries@financialombudsman.ie, www.financialombudsman.ie

Broadcasting Complaints Commission, 2-5 Warrington Place, Dublin 2, tel 676 1097, info@bcc.ie, www.bcc.ie

Commission for Communications Regulation, Abbey Court, Irish Life Centre, Lower Abbey st, Dublin 1, tel 804 9600, fax 804 9680, info@comreg.ie, www.comreg.ie

Advertising Standards Authority, IPC House, 35-9 Shelbourne rd, Dublin 4, tel 660 8766, fax 660 8113, info@asai.ie, www.asai.ie

Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier st, Dublin 2, 671 8633, fax 671 8391

Garda Siochana Ombudsman Commission, 31-5 Bow st, Smithfield, Dublin 7

Tel 828 0370, fax 828 0731, info@gsoc.ie, www.gardaombudsman.ie

Pensions Ombudsman, 36 Upper Mount st, Dublin 2

Tel 647 1650, fax 767 9577, info@pensionsombudsman.ie, www.pensionsombudsman.ie

Press Council, Press Ombudsman: www.presscouncil.ie

The five-yearly development plan is one of the most important functions of the local authority. Traditionally, development plans dealt mainly with physical planning, rezoning and new housing. Following the Planning & Development Act, 2000 local authorities are now expected to consult more broadly, deeply and inclusively, using a variety of methods and to invite participation during the early pre-draft phase of the plan. The local authority is the primary planning authority and has the power to approve, reject or approve with conditions all planning applications.

Appeals may be made to an independent board, An Bord Pleanála. Local authorities have an important role in the regulating and enforcement of environmental standards (e.g. noise, air, water pollution). Under the legislation which governs these standards (e.g. Public Health [Ireland] Act, 1878; Water Pollution Act, 1977; Air Pollution Act, 1987) there are procedures for making complaints to the local authorities when breaches may have occurred. This may result in a prosecution or the review of a pollution licence.

Relationship with voluntary and community organisations


Looking at their work with voluntary organisations and local communities:

- Under the Housing Act, 1988, local authorities are expected to consult with voluntary organisations in their area about the provision of social housing, especially for vulnerable groups such as homeless people. Consultative fora should be established.
- Under §9 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 1992, local authorities are expected to draw up plans for housing management, which may involve arrangements for the participation by local communities in the management of their estates.
- Under the Planning & Development Act, 2000, local authorities must take into account, in their planning, the needs of sustainable development, recreational amenities and the provision of

Further advice

National Consumer Agency, Wilton Park House, Wilton Place, Dublin 2, local 1890 432 432, info@consumerconnect.ie, www.consumerconnect.ie,

European Consumer Centre: 13a Upper O'Connell st, Dublin 1, tel 809 0600, fax 809 0601, ecc@indigo.ie, www.eccdublin.ie

 Directory, for further information

Case Study

Going to the ombudsman

New systems for disposing of landfill and recyclable waste may be good for the environment, but they are a headache for many poor families who cannot afford the waste charges for privatised services. The result is an accumulation of rubbish, with some occasionally burned in back yards. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government says that if poor people can't afford to dispose of their rubbish, either the local authorities or the department responsible for social welfare should do something about it.

Several local branches (conferences) of the Society of St Vincent de Paul responded by paying for skips to take away the accumulated rubbish and, in some cases, for pest control. The situation became even more absurd in two neighbouring estates in Cork. One had the Cork city public collection (with a waiver scheme). The other got a private service contracted by the city council (with no waiver scheme). The Society of St Vincent de Paul co-ordinated a series of case studies to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is empowered to investigate 'maladministration', which, clearly happens when the authorities charge one group for a service but not another in an identical situation.

Lessons

- It is important to get behind the situation to look at the national picture. Paying for skips and pest control is the outcome of a national policy that has failed - so the national problem has to be addressed. In particular, this story emphasises the need for poverty - proofing in environmental policy.
- There are ways of raising such issues through complaints mechanisms.

New systems for disposing of landfill and recyclable waste may be good for the environment, but they are a headache for many poor families who cannot afford the waste charges for privatised services.



community services. Local area development plans may be drawn up. Local authorities must set out a strategy for meeting all the housing needs in their areas, including those in need of social housing. Here, 20% of all housing must be social or affordable housing, or a cash contribution may be given by developers instead.

New structures were developed in the 1990s to support the work of local communities, voluntary organisations and community groups, with a focus on social inclusion:

- Each city or county must have a City or County Development Board of 25 members drawn from councillors and the social partners, including voluntary and community organisations. Boards must be representative of local development bodies, (e.g. area-based or community partnerships, rural development groups (e.g. LEADER).
- Each city or county development board must draw up a 3 to 5 year strategy for local economic, social and cultural development, with an audit of existing facilities and services in each county and city area, outlining how such services should develop and signing up other statutory bodies for their execution. Such plans are expected to have a focus on social inclusion.
- Each local authority should have a social inclusion working group to co-ordinate programmes, measures and activities against poverty. In practice, these are called 'SIM groups' or Social Inclusion Measure groups and voluntary and community organisations are normally invited to participate.
- The detailed policy-making work of the local authorities is overseen by Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). Each local authority typically has four SPCs with titles such as:
 - Economic development and planning;
 - Environment;
 - Transport & infrastructure;
 - Housing, social and cultural development.

European Union: contact points in Ireland

> European Commission, 18 Dawson st, Dublin 2; tel 634 1111, fax 623 1112, www.ec.europa.eu/ireland

European Commission, Windsor House, 9-15 Bedford st, Belfast BT2 7EG, tel 048 9024 0708, fax 048 9024 8241, www.ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom

> European Parliament, 43 Molesworth st, Dublin 2, tel 605 7900, fax 605 7999, www.europarl.ie

> European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), square de Meeûs 18, B 1050 Brussels

Tel: 322 226 5850, fax: +32 2 226 5869; team@eapn.skynet.be, www.eapn.org

> The European Platform of Social Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provides links to a range of social policy voluntary organisations in Europe: www.socialplatform.org

> The Combined European Bureau for Social Development provides information on community development in Europe and links to community development organisations: www.cebsd.org

- Each SPC meets four or five times a year and is headed by a Director of Services.
- SPCs comprise elected representatives (two-thirds of their membership) and sectoral interests (one-third). Minimum membership is nine people.
- The following are the sectors represented on the SPCs:
 - Agriculture and farming;
 - Environment, conservation and culture;
 - Development and construction;
 - Business and commercial;
 - Trade union;
 - Community, voluntary & disadvantaged.
- SPCs must pay attention to gender balance, foster social inclusiveness in line with the principles of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and involve the community, voluntary and disadvantaged sector.
- In selecting external members of the SPCs, local authorities must consult widely and give representative organisations the opportunity to nominate members under their own procedures. Their representatives should have a broad knowledge. Nominating groups should be representative, be democratically run, be accountable and have a broad (rather than single issue) remit.
- Local authorities may also establish area committees for detailed consultation at local level. Some local authorities do this, but not all.

In addition to the city or county development plan, local authorities are required to adopt plans in the following areas:

- Social and affordable housing;
- Traveller accommodation;
- Arts strategy.

Contacting MEPs

> MEPs can be contacted in their constituencies, in the same way as other public representatives; through the European Parliament office in Dublin; or through the European Parliament offices in Brussels, Belgium or Strasbourg, France. Most MEPs prefer to be contacted through the European Parliament office in Dublin, 43 Molesworth st, Dublin 2, tel 605 7900, fax 605 7999, www.europarl.ie

Case Study

Changing the European constitution

Changing the European constitution could only be described as an ambitious task for a small network of community groups concerned with poverty - but that's exactly what the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland set out to do. When the constitution, subsequently called the 'reform treaty' was in preparation, EAPN in Europe sought a clause in the policy section of the text committing the European Union to take account of the fight against poverty in all areas of policy. To get such a clause included would require the support of at least one member government prepared to put it forward at Council level, which could of course be the Irish government.

EAPN Ireland presented its case to the Taoiseach at a meeting of the Forum on Europe, the national body set up to promote debate on European issues and a place where EAPN Ireland was already well known. EAPN had promoted the idea of such a clause at regional Forum meetings around the country and in the press over a long period of time. When the Forum held its main national meeting to discuss the constitution, EAPN had its text ready and left a copy on everyone's desk. The Taoiseach agreed at the meeting to support the clause, in principle. The Taoiseach then set up further meetings with the European affairs minister to agree the final wording. The Irish government duly put it forward at the Council meeting and it was included in the reform treaty (article III -17). Having it there places an obligation on the EU to take account of poverty in all its policies, including those for economic competition.

Lessons

- Identify and participate in forums where your organisation can meet key decision-makers, present views consistently and build credibility.
- Have a text ready of exactly what you want.
- Even if it seems like a long shot at the beginning, be prepared to ask!
- Make it clear that there is wide national interest in the principle behind a decision, even if the details are more technical.

Social Inclusion Units co-ordinate the work of the authority in the area of social inclusion, developing social inclusion strategies and Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies (sometimes called 'LAPSIS') and are an important point of contact for voluntary and community organisations.

Local authorities are expected to establish a number of further consultative systems:

- Traveller accommodation consultative committee;
- Community fora (or forums), for the representation of voluntary and community groups. In some cases, voluntary and community organisations concerned with social inclusion are also organised as community platforms.

Although not formally introduced as part of the local authority structure, city and county childcare committees operate in the main 33 local authorities.

Since the early 2000s, Social Inclusion Units have been established in the local authorities. Ten were initially set up, with the number set to extend to half the authorities by 2009. These units co-ordinate the work of the authority in the area of social inclusion, developing social inclusion strategies and Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies (sometimes called 'LAPSIS') and are an important point of contact for voluntary and community organisations.

Under the Garda Síochána Act, 2005, provision was made for the establishment of joint policing committees in each local authority area (114), comprising councillors, local Oireachtas representatives, gardai and voluntary and community interests.

Regional authorities

Regional authorities were introduced in Ireland in 1994. They were established principally to oversee the European Union structural funds in each region. Originally there were eight regional authorities. In 2000 the government introduced a new tier of regional assemblies, reflecting the two new zones in which the structural funds operated:

- The Border, Midland and Western Assembly, based in Ballaghadereen, Co Roscommon, with 29 members and

Forum on Europe

National Forum on Europe
 State Apartments, Dublin Castle,
 Dublin 2
 Tel 670 5900, fax 670 5877.
 info@forumoneurope.ie,
www.forumoneurope.ie

Voluntary and community members of the observer pillar of the Forum on Europe

Action from Ireland, AfRI
 ComhIamh
 Community Workers Cooperative
 Concern
 Conference of Religious of Ireland
 Justice Commission
 European Anti-Poverty Network
 Irish Countrywomen's Association

Islamic Cultural Centre
 Jewish Representative Council
 Macra na Feirme
 National Women's Council
 National Platform
 National Youth Council
 Peace & Neutrality Alliance
 People with Disabilities in Ireland
 The Wheel

- The Southern and Eastern Assembly, with 41 members, based in Waterford.

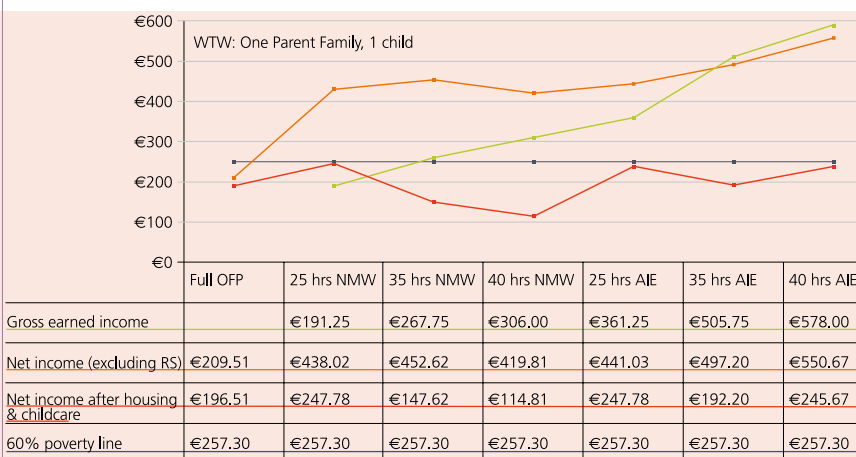
The members are drawn from the county councils and other local authorities in the two areas. Their task is, broadly, to co-ordinate public services in each region and, specifically, to monitor the operation of the European Union structural funds round 2007-2013. They have a small staff.

Health Service Executive

Health services were provided by the local authorities until 1970 and then by health boards. In 2005, the new Health Service Executive was introduced, with a centralised national structure. Under the new system, policy is decided by the Department of Health & Children and these policies are executed by the Health Service Executive. The HSE operates through four regions and 32 Local Health Offices (LHOs). The Health Service Executive publishes an annual Service plan explaining how it plans to deliver its services each year. The HSE is probably the principal funder of voluntary and community organisations through what were called \$65 grants (now called \$39 grants). These grants enable the HSE to fund voluntary organisations providing health or related services. Although the HSE is designed only to execute policy it may prove impossible to clinically separate policy and execution. The HSE has a number of regional forums to which councillors are invited; expert advisory groups; and other thematic forums convened from time to time which will, in their own way, shape policy.

Vocational Education Committees

Vocational Education Committees (VECs) provide a range of local educational services, schools and specialised services (e.g. adult education, youth services). Each VEC is headed by a chief executive officer and has at least 14 members, eight of whom are appointed by the appropriate local authority. Each VEC school should be run by a committee comprising VEC members, parents and a teacher. VECs are funded by local rates and central government. Besides the provision of technical education, which is their main responsibility, VECs have also developed responsibilities for youth work (e.g. in Dublin, the City of Dublin Youth Service Board) and adult education (through local education boards).



Case Study

Use of research to make the case: *Out of the traps*

OPEN, the One Parent Exchange Network, works for lone parents, one of the groups at highest risk of poverty in Ireland. Both government and voluntary and community organisations agree on the importance of finding work opportunities for lone parents. The experience, though, of many lone parents was that low paid work meant that they lost welfare entitlements and ended up worse off. This is called a 'poverty trap'. Working with the European Anti Poverty Network (Ireland) (EAPN), OPEN commissioned research which was published as *Out of the traps*. The research looked at practical cases of what happened to lone parents and unemployed people entering the workforce and the financial consequences. *Out of the traps* illustrated the situation with a series of vivid graphs to show just how the welfare-to-work system worked (or, in this case, didn't work well).

Because it was well-researched and the figures could not be contested, the Department of Social and Family Affairs considered the case that had been made. Publication coincided with consultations around the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

EAPN played a prominent role in bringing a series of headline messages about poverty and unemployment traps to the many groups involved. The result was that the department replaced a first €60 income disregard with a €75 disregard. The old system of 50% assessment on €60 to €90 was replaced by a 75% assessment with no ceiling, removing some of the disincentive against work.

Lessons

- Well documented research, sharply presented, clearly illustrated, can open the door to dialogue with government departments and real improvements in welfare.
- Headline messages based on such research, brought to a wider audience, will build a strong momentum for change.

See table left.

Case Study

Research to pave the way for new services

One Family works every day with families experiencing divorce or separation. Children are often caught in the middle of such situations but the vast majority of children want to maintain relationships with both parents and keep their lines of communication open. The organisation obtained funding from the Family Support Agency to explore the need for child and family contact centres in Ireland which would support contact by children with their parents following separation or divorce. The research included study visits to such centres in other countries where they are working successfully and receive significant state funding. Following its completion, the Family Support Agency and the Minister for Social and Family Affairs both made a stated commitment to seriously consider the research and to explore further the potential to set up child and family centres in Ireland.

Lessons

- Practical research on models at work in other countries can be an effective instrument in opening doors to change.

2.7 National agreements

Since 1987, economic and social policies in Ireland have been more and more determined by national social partnership agreements between government, employers, farmers and trade unions, the parties being called the 'social partners'. About ten years later, voluntary and community organisations were invited to join, constituting what became known as a fourth 'voluntary and community' pillar. Originally, these national social partnership agreements covered about three years at a time, but the present one, Towards 2016, covers a full ten years (2006-2015). From the point of view of government, these agreements provide a stable framework for policy development and a positive industrial relations environment and, for trade unions, gains in wages and industrial conditions. For both trade unions and voluntary and community groups, they provide an opportunity to negotiate a wide range of short to medium-term social policies, as well as participation in the committees overseeing the agreement and with them, access to departmental officials.

Towards 2016 is managed by what is called a 'partnership steering committee' which meets quarterly and involves all the social partners. This is a good place for voluntary and community groups to raise issues which might not be making sufficient progress in addressing poverty and social exclusion. Some voluntary and community groups, though, have criticised the agreements as not doing enough, but either way, the agreements have a central place in the policy environment.

2.8 Consultative, advisory and monitoring bodies

In carrying out its work, the government is advised by a range of advisory and policy-making bodies. These shape the broad framework of economic and social debate outside the Oireachtas, take in the views of the social partners, provide recommendations for government and can be a place where dissatisfaction with government may be voiced. There are two broad national advisory bodies, NESF and NESF; specialist bodies; and monitoring and implementation bodies.

NESC and NESF

The two main bodies dealing with national economic and social policy issues are the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF).

NESC was established in its present form in 1973 and is composed of representatives of government departments, the four social pillars and independently appointed members. Besides providing a forum where the social partners may raise contemporary economic and social issues, the secretariat of NESC has presented, over the years, a series of informative, lengthy and thoughtful research reports on new, intractable or difficult social policy questions (e.g. emigration, rural development).

The National Economic and Social Forum was established much

later (1994) as a means of consulting with a wider range of groups on economic and social questions. NESF has been important for bringing in those who had been traditionally outside the consultative process - women, youth, unemployed people, the elderly, those with a concern for the environment, people with a disability and the disadvantaged. Their representatives are chosen by a range of designated organisations. NESF has produced a series of reports and recommendations. Generally, they are shorter than those of NESC, emphasizing policy more than research, with a stronger focus on social exclusion and unemployment.

Specialist advisory bodies

The government appoints a range of specialised advisory bodies which provide advice and recommendations. These may be sub-divided into several types:

- Temporary, once-off commissions, which have a limited time span and are required to produce a report within a given period of time (e.g. cost of insurance);
- Advisory bodies, with a permanent or semi-permanent but advisory role. Examples are the National Council on Ageing and Older People;
- Permanent semi-state bodies which have a range of functions in the development of economic and social activity, but whose role also includes advising government on policy matters. An example is the Citizens Information Board which develops citizen information services and advises the government on social welfare matters;
- Monitoring bodies, for example prison visiting committees.

Advisory board and commission members are generally appointed by the minister responsible for the area of policy concerned. The minister normally attempts to select representatives of the many interests or groups involved in the issue (e.g. professionals, experts and advocates), though it has also been common for ministers to appoint people as a reward for political loyalty. Membership of state advisory boards is prized because it provides access to policy-making networks and influence.

Implementation bodies

A growing feature of government in the past number of years has been the growth of implementation bodies. These arose from the recognition by government that it was not enough for governments to set up commissions, approve their reports and simply command departments and state agencies to carry out their recommendations. Increasingly, people in public administration began to notice how difficult it was to execute decisions. They saw how good decisions could be impeded by the lack of resources or by weak political support or frustrated by bureaucrats, non-governmental organisations and well-placed élites which disapproved. Unless specific mechanisms were put in place to make sure recommendations were carried out,

Case Study

Using research to work around obstacles

Sometimes political obstacles are so strong that it appears impossible to make any progress. An example is the Habitual Residency Condition (HRC), which denies social welfare to people who have not been a legal and 'habitual' resident for at least two years. This was a particular problem for Cork Simon Community, which supports several hundred homeless people from many of the new EU states that joined in the 2000s. The government has been unyielding in its application of the HRC - but in an attempt to work its way around the problem, Cork Simon Community persuaded the city council, through the Cork Homeless Forum, to fund research into the needs of foreign nationals who find themselves homeless. This should and could be the beginning of changing the policy. The fact that Cork City Council is supporting the research has legitimised their concerns and will definitely help.

Lessons

- Research can be a useful starting point to changing a policy, however unyieldingly applied; and
- Official endorsement of those concerns should, over time, be some assistance.

Case Study

Opening jobs for Travellers, early school leavers

The Dublin Employment Pact achieved two small, but significant changes, when South Dublin County Council began to actively recruit Travellers for outdoor work (parks, pavements, cleaning, walls, graffiti removal) and the Dublin City Council dropped the requirement that all clerical staff in the council have a Leaving Certificate.

Few, if any Travellers, had ever worked for the county council. Dublin Employment Pact's *EQUAL at work* project researched and highlighted the possibility and desirability of extending outdoor work to Travellers. South Dublin County Council, in co-operation with Traveller voluntary and community organisations, set up a stall in a training centre, encouraging Travellers to apply. Participants were offered a one-year induction course. In its first year, 12 started and eight finished the course.

One of the keys to the success of the idea was the professional interest of the council's managers in the situation of Travellers, the county manager being a member of the government's high-level advisory body on Travellers. The county council also liked to be seen as a model and a leader in enlightened local authority policy. Subsequently, the Taoiseach issued a circular to all the local authorities recommending the South Dublin example as one which they should follow.

Clerical work traditionally required the Leaving Certificate, which was understandable. But it ruled out the participation of early school leavers, most Travellers and many older workers who never had the opportunity to take the exam. Based on research by *EQUAL at work*, the Dublin Employment Pact proposed that instead, there be 'competency-based recruitment' in which broader aptitudes would be taken into consideration. This was discussed at length in the council's partnership committee, a type of works council bringing together the social partners. Here, the views of the trade unions were important, especially to make sure there was no danger of these jobs being downgraded. Competency-based recruitment was accepted by the council as a better way to go. The council went further, providing summer job placements for Traveller students, in the hope that this would open up for them the possibility of applying for clerical work. The Department of the Environment then instructed the local authorities to replace the Leaving Certificate requirement with competency-based recruitment, opening up potentially 6,000 jobs.

Continued on page 41.

they might well gather dust.

Governments have increasingly begun to pay attention to devising mechanisms to ensure that policies, once adopted, are effective. To take three cases, implementation groups were set up to oversee the implementation of the landmark reports on women, people with disabilities and Travellers. In the area of poverty, considerable attention was given to the problem of implementation when the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) was introduced, (now the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion). The strategy had a lengthy statement on how its recommendations would be implemented and progress checked. Another example of implementation bodies at work may be found in the national strategy against drugs. These comprise four main elements:

- Cabinet sub-committee on social exclusion, drugs and local development;
- National Drugs Strategy Team;
- 14 local drugs task forces;
- Regional drugs task forces.

The purpose of the cabinet sub-committee (which is also responsible for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion) is to give political leadership to the fight against drugs, assess progress and resolve organisational problems that stand in the way of the resolution of the problem. The purpose of the National Drugs Strategy Team is to draw together a governmental, expert and non-governmental group to ensure the effective co-ordination of the government's strategy. The function of each local drugs task force is to develop local responses to the drugs problem in identifiable priority areas. Each local group is required to draw up a development plan which, following assessment, is to receive funding to develop a comprehensive set of local responses to the drugs problem.

2.9 Semi-state bodies

There are over 200 semi-state boards and bodies in Ireland. The concept of the semi-state body dates back to the 1920s, when the first Irish governments set up development agencies to oversee key national tasks (e.g. electrification by the Electricity Supply Board). Since then, semi-state bodies have proliferated as the tasks of developing a modern society have become ever more complex. Semi-state bodies may be divided into three broad categories (though there may be some overlap between the three):

- Commercial. These are agencies designed to fulfill an economic, public service or developmental role in the economy (e.g. Bord Gais, Bus Eireann).
- Regulatory and oversight. These are bodies designed to set standards for the operation of an industry, occupation, profession or area of society or to oversee legislation. Examples are the

Radiological Protection Institute, the National Milk Agency, the Legal Aid Board and the Environmental Protection Agency;

- Promotional and advisory. These are agencies designed to provide quality, professional advice on specialised areas of policy and to promote or support a particular aspect of public policy. Examples are Sustainable Energy Ireland, the Library Council and the Crafts Council.

Whilst government ministers appoint the boards of these bodies and have overall responsibility for their work, their day-to-day running is left to the bodies concerned. They may, within broad limits, develop their own policies and approaches to the areas of work for which they have responsibility. This gives them a certain independence from government, which from the point of view of voluntary and community organisations can be a mixed blessing. Semi-state bodies can take a valued developmental role, free from political interference, but, lacking direct responsibility to the Oireachtas, may be difficult to hold to account. Some have the authority to make grants.

In the event, most have a strong sense of accountability and respond to public concerns. Most semi-state and advisory bodies issue annual reports and accounts and are reasonably accessible. Most have a staff structure modelled on civil service lines, while recruiting their staff from the open market. They vary in size and approach. Some of the smaller advisory or regulatory bodies having a mere handful of staff, while others, for example, the commercial semi-state bodies, have thousands of workers.

All semi-state bodies are ultimately accountable to a department and government minister, with a civil servant or a section providing a line of communication into that department. Ministers and other politicians tend to listen carefully to what they say and they are routinely consulted in the broad policy areas affecting their field of work. Semi-state bodies may therefore provide an additional channel of communication whereby policy may be influenced.

Although membership of most state advisory bodies and semi-state boards is highly competitive, this is not always the case. Voluntary organisations rarely propose people associated with them for membership when vacancies arise. There is nothing to stop them from approaching the minister concerned and asking to be represented or have a candidate considered.

2.10 Political parties

Although political parties have no stated, formal role in the government of the country, in practice, their role is of enormous importance. Ireland has eleven political parties. Party manifestos shape the programmes for government which provide the overall policy framework for each new government. Lobbying groups which can get their key proposals included into a party manifesto (and the subsequent programme for government) have a substantial advantage in achieving their policy objectives if that party gets into government.

Continued from page 40.

Lessons

- The importance of research in paving the way for change;
- Proposing solutions and concrete changes with measurable results;
- Using the structures of social partnership (competency-based recruitment);
- Attracting the support of champions within the system (Travellers in outdoor work) and local authorities anxious to set a good model;
- Mainstreaming the process afterwards.



Whilst the most publicly visible activity of a party is to fight elections and amass the funds necessary to do so, policy discussions and debates are core activities of political parties, even though they may only be visible during the annual party conferences or when an issue becomes contentious.

Around the details and the margins of the big policy issues, parties compete with each another to satisfy or impress the different interest groups, including voluntary and community organisations, because their members have votes.

Government ministers, opposition spokespersons, deputies and senators also listen carefully to what their ordinary members are saying, whether that be at branch meeting constituency level or further up (for example, national conference (ard-fheis)). They provide a useful test of what people want, or, for that matter, will not put up with; and enable new issues to surface inside the political process. The larger political parties are organised in branches which generally correspond to a parish or similar level (in Fianna Fáil, they are called cumann. Terminology varies from party to party). Each branch sends delegates to a constituency council which, in turn, elects delegates to a national council. Each large political party has a national headquarters, run by a general secretary, normally assisted by a small administrative staff. Some have research staff and each of the main parties has a youth wing with a youth officer. For their names to appear on the ballot paper, parties must register.

Whilst the most publicly visible activity of a party is to fight elections and amass the funds necessary to do so, policy discussions and debates are core activities of political parties, even though they may only be visible during the annual party conferences or when an issue becomes contentious. An important and often unappreciated feature of being in a political party is that one may meet politicians quite frequently. Deputies, senators and councillors try to go to branch meetings as often as they can and they are present at the higher levels of decision-making within the party (constituency council, national council). Parties have been trying to make themselves more accessible recently, with some running recruitment campaigns and others setting up attractive websites.

Traditionally, voluntary organisations interested to win over political parties thought in terms of getting the annual conference to agree a particular policy. Once this happened, so the theory went, the party concerned was obliged to implement it in government or when it got into government. In practice, the party conference is now a much less important instrument of policy-making and more of a media event. Instead, policies are developed by study groups, activists interested in particular policies, youth wings, university branches and others and then circulated, gaining ground and acceptance depending on how vigorously they are promoted. Voluntary and community organisations rarely work directly with political parties or their members' branches, but there is no legal or other reason why they should not do so. One of the main benefits of working with activists or policy-makers in the parties is that the party activists often develop an interest in the issue concerned - sometimes a lifelong one - which they may be in a position to see through several years later.

2.11 Courts

The courts open a number of possibilities to influence policy and decisions. People have long used Irish courts either as a direct means

of rectifying what they believe is an injustice or as an indirect means of highlighting a case or an issue. Cases must be taken by individuals (they are called plaintiffs when they do so), though they may be backed by voluntary or community organisations. Some lawyers have an interest in social justice issues and are prepared to be involved in this area of work.

The Irish legal system has always resisted being forced into a making judgements on social matters which they believe are more appropriately the concern of the Oireachtas. Nevertheless, there are many aspects of policy where the interpretation by the courts of laws made by the Oireachtas (or the British law before that) may be important. People have gone to court to challenge the operation of the social welfare system, planning decisions and other actions where they believe the authorities have acted unlawfully.

Another line of approach is to argue that governments have failed to carry out their responsibilities. Activists working for homeless young people brought a string of cases to the courts to try to compel the health services to provide appropriate accommodation for them. Some have managed to get injunctions or court orders against the actions of government, semi-state bodies or the local authorities to stop them doing something, following which the matter goes to court for a hearing. Plaintiffs have sometimes invoked European law (civil legal aid, for example, was introduced, because a woman took a case that the lack of such a scheme meant that she could not access justice, contrary to international law). Sometimes, too, they have been disappointed. The Sinnott case, in which the Supreme Court ruled that a severely disabled young man did not have a right to educational services, showed some of the limits of what could be achieved.

There are two main advantages to taking a court case. First, the legal system can actually produce a change in policy where political action alone has been unsuccessful. The courts can make rulings that have materially improved the circumstances of the groups going to court. Second, a court case generates considerable publicity for a cause. Advocates have the opportunity to present their case in open court and can normally expect their viewpoint to be well publicised. The government or official side will be cross-examined and the weakness of its position may be highlighted.

The principal problems with taking court action are cost, speed and the danger of reversal. First, individuals have to bear the costs of taking such actions themselves and these costs can be very expensive (in the High Court, several thousand euros a day). Should they lose, they must not only pay their own costs, but those of the winning party as well (though the judge may charge costs to the state if the matter is adjudged to be one of public interest; and some lawyers will take a case on a no-win, no-fee basis).

A second problem is speed. Although injunctions may be obtained speedily, court hearings take some time to be called. Some cases may drag on for years and may end less conclusively than the party which took the action had hoped. Third, governments may, following

Case Study

Changing national policy - from the local level

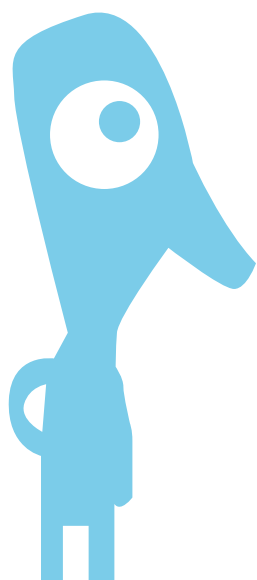
Access to public buildings and public spaces has been an enduring difficulty for people with disabilities. In Galway, the Galway City Partnership tried to address the problem by a certification system whereby new buildings must have a disability access certificate that would be a formal part of the building code. At present, building must comply with a series of regulations, like Part B, which sets minimum fire standards. But disability was not covered and because of this and other anomalies in planning law it was legally possible to construct inaccessible public buildings.

The Galway City Partnership appointed a disability access officer who worked closely with the Galway City Council for the introduction of a compulsory disability access certificate. Not only did leading voluntary organisations concerned with disability support the campaign, but Galway City Council gave it a formal endorsement in writing. The proposal was formally sent to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, making sure that the department knew the strength of support for the proposal. The partnership also took the opportunity of a visit by the Minister of State to the city to remind the department of the importance of making progress. Eventually the proposal was accepted and brought into law by ministerial order. The certificate will mean that new buildings must have accessible entry, circulation, egress (exits), doors, toilet, visual signage, sound alarms and ramps.

Lessons

- Have a clear idea of what you want and how it would work. A disability access certificate was a straightforward concept to get across.
- Get backing from statutory bodies.
- Take advantage of opportunities to remind people of the need for progress.

Although the ombudsman investigates individual complaints only, there is nothing to stop a voluntary organisation backing an individual in the course of a complaint; and voluntary and community organisations have met the office to discuss policy issues arising from public administration of government services.



an unfavourable court outcome, appeal to a higher court (imposing further costs on those who took the case), or if they lose there, overturn the basis for the judgement by introducing new legislation.

To take a court case, an individual who believes that a public body has not followed lawfully proper procedure applies to the High Court for judicial review. The plaintiff is given the opportunity to state a case, as is the body concerned. The High Court may not rule on the merits of the case, but only on the procedural question at issue. In the case of a public or private body acting in a way which abridges the rights of other citizens, a complainant may ask the court for an injunction. Assisted by a barrister, the complainant makes his case to the judge. If persuaded of the case, the judge issues an interim injunction (possibly for a week) against the body concerned until the matter comes to a hearing where the other side has the opportunity to make a defence. The court may then issue an interlocutory injunction to stop the body while the case proceeds to a full hearing. This could take some time.

For those who cannot afford legal aid, there are the services of the Legal Aid Board, which has centres in most counties of the country. There are several problems with Legal Aid Board services. The first main hurdle is that the board does not, as a general rule, support cases in which a group of people has an interest (in other countries, these are sometimes termed class actions). It may only support a case taken by an individual. Second, there may be delays in the law centres. The centres concentrate on family law cases. A person looking for help may still have to wait several months. Third, there is a very restrictive means test.

2.12 Ombudsman services

Since the 1980s, there has been a growth of ombudsman services. The office of the ombudsman was set up to investigate cases of alleged maladministration, inaction and delay by government departments, health boards and local authorities. Some important parts of the public service are still excluded from its operation, most prominently the Environmental Protection Agency. Complaints about the administration of social welfare services are one of its areas of activity. Although the ombudsman investigates individual complaints only, there is nothing to stop a voluntary organisation backing an individual in the course of a complaint; and voluntary and community organisations have met the office to discuss policy issues arising from public administration of government services.

The office of the ombudsman is independent and appointed by the Oireachtas to whom an annual report is made, rather than being responsible to a government minister. The task of the ombudsman is to try to obtain a resolution of the problem between the individual and the government agency, one on which both parties are content to sign off and thereby close the case. Although the focus of the work of the office is on assisting individuals, where a pattern of problems emerges, the ombudsman often takes up, in the annual report, themes

and issues which arise from these complaints. The ombudsman may carry out investigations and reports on systemic problems and make recommendations as to how government agencies should change their procedures or approaches.

The concept of having ombudsman services, or regulators, has now extended into a number of fields of public life, such as pensions (Pensions Ombudsman) and the police (Garda Ombudsman Commission). Broadcasting had a system of regulation for RTE (the Broadcasting Complaints Commission), since extended to other broadcasters and more recently to the press (the Press Council, Press Ombudsman). In banking and financial institutions, there is a Financial Services Ombudsman, while communications and postal services are overseen by the Commission for Communications Regulation.

Again, these procedures are designed essentially for individual complaints, but groups have often publicised complaints made by individuals on behalf of their organisation, or with their encouragement. Even if complainants do not win their case, the associated publicity can ultimately have the effect of changing practices within government or private companies or deterring future malpractice (for example, the outcomes of Broadcasting Complaint Commission decisions are published in the RTE Guide). For further advice on pursuing complaints and either citizen rights, you can contact the National Consumer Agency and, for European issues, the European Consumer Centre.

Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act was introduced to enable citizens to have access both to government records and to personal information. Public bodies covered by the Act are required to publish and make available a manual outlining their structure, organisation, functions, powers, duties and services; details of their records; details of the procedures for obtaining records; the names and designations of members of staff responsible for these records; and the rights of citizens to review and appeal.

A person (whether acting as an individual or on behalf of an organisation) wishing to obtain information under the Act must make a request in writing to the head of the public body concerned, along with payment of the appropriate fees. If refused, an applicant may ask for an internal review (another, larger fee is payable) and, if still refused, review by the information commissioner (who in practice is also the ombudsman) (a further, larger fee is then payable). Fees may also be levied for searching for material in the course of a request. There is a wide set of exempt areas, activities and organisations which are excluded from the operation of the Act. The set of charges, exemptions and procedural hurdles are such that other avenues for obtaining information are likely to be faster so the Act is probably only valuable as an instrument of last resort.

Case Study

Working through social partnership for disability access: The Cliffs of Moher

The Clare Centre for Independent Living, known as the Disabled People of Clare (DPOC), has a strategy of using local social partnership as a means of working for social inclusion in the county. This includes getting places on the transport Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) of the county council, the Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) group, the Clare Community Forum and the Clare Social Inclusion Forum. Specifically, the DPOC sought good standards of access when the new visitor and tourist attraction was developed by Clare County Council at the cliffs of Moher.

DPOC asked the county council to go to the National Disability Authority and to use Part M of the building regulations, in order to get the best standards available. It also asked them to go beyond the standards where they could (e.g. widths of doors for wheelchairs). When the work was concluded, their members made an access visit, and found that the building had been completed to a high standard. However, outside, there were problems with parking spaces, parking location and gravel surfaces and the DPOC suggested solutions. Working through the Director of Community & Enterprise, the DPOC asked to meet with the county engineer to resolve the remaining difficulties. This was done and he responded with a three-page letter outlining how the outdoor facilities would be improved over the coming number of months.

Lessons

- It's important to find and get places in local social partnerships (e.g. SPCs, SIMs) in order to make the case and make contact with the relevant officials.
- It's helpful to direct statutory bodies to the appropriate state authorities for standards (here, the National Disability Authority and the building regulations).
- Give credit where credit is due, but also put forward practical solutions to remaining problems.

Case Study

Trying alternatives

North Kerry Together (NKT) is a community partnership which, among other activities, provides skills training in the area around Listowel. NKT normally worked with the state training agency, but, hoping to introduce new courses in construction, tiling, floor-laying and welding, decided to try an alternative approach. They put together a new and different grouping of providers and funders: the Department of Social and Family Affairs, which had funding for employment facilitation; and the Vocational Education Committee (VEC). NKT prepared the ground with both an employer skills survey and a training needs analysis. NKT found a champion in the VEC. The principal of the local school was on their board and anxious to promote the meeting of the needs of the area. A first round of courses is already under way.

Lessons

- If existing avenues are slow or don't work well, try others.
- Find local champions who will promote your cause.
- Always have good research to hand.

2.13 North-south institutions

The Belfast agreement in 1998 was important, first and foremost, for establishing a process for bringing a permanent peace to the island, but second, for the establishment of new institutions which will grow in importance over the years. These structures are important both for government and non-governmental organisations. They represent a sizeable investment in public administration. At its core is the Joint North South Ministerial Council, located in Armagh and staffed by civil servants from both governments, flanked by new structures designed to promote better co-operation between the governments and parliaments of the British Isles. The following implementation bodies were established:

- Waterways Ireland;
- Food Safety Promotion Board (Safefood);
- Trade & Business Development Body (InterTrade Ireland);
- Special European Union Programmes Body;
- Tourism Ireland;
- North-South Language Body, Foras na Gaeilge; and
- The Loughs Agency.

Other matters were defined as co-operation areas, as follows:

- Transport;
- Agriculture;
- Education;
- Environment;
- Health. Here, the Institute of Public Health in Ireland was established and has already published extensively in the area of health inequality ( Directory).

An important part of the agreement was the establishment of a new human rights framework, bringing both parts of the island into line with the European convention on human rights. The Republic's Human Rights Commission has responsibility to review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in relation to human rights and make recommendations to government, either on its own initiative or as requested on measures to strengthen, protect or uphold human rights. This is important in addressing the rights of social groups which have, to date, received inadequate protection under the Irish constitution and human rights law.

Co-operation on social policy issues has not been a prominent aspect of governmental co-operation so far, but the common north-south chapter of the National Development Plan: Transforming Ireland 2007-2013 commits the two governments to co-operation in relation to social inclusion and to supporting the role of the voluntary and

community sector in promoting north/south social inclusion, equality and reconciliation. The Belfast agreement also gave a commitment to 'an independent consultative forum appointed by the two administrations, representative of civic society, comprising the social partners and other members with expertise in social, cultural, economic and other issues'. This held out the possibility of a policy forum where voluntary and community organisations could progress common north-south issues of social concern and bring them to the attention of their respective governments for action.

2.14 European Union

The European Union has become an important part of the Irish political landscape, with significant consequences for the work of voluntary and community organisations:

- The European Union is increasingly taking decisions which affect day-to-day life in Ireland and our economic and social policies. From the Single European Act, 1987, to the Treaty of Lisbon 2007, more and more political, social and economic decisions came to be taken by the member states acting together rather than by individual countries on their own and set the tone for decisions and actions by the Irish government.
- Many policy areas of work of the European Union directly affect the areas of interest of voluntary and community groups, in such fields, for example as women's rights, discrimination and rural development. The European Union is now more involved in social policy issues and the struggle against social exclusion - though not as much as many would like.
- Irish law is increasingly European law. The Oireachtas is expected to pass into Irish law an increasing range of decisions taken at European level by the governments of Europe, the Commission and the Parliament.
- Many voluntary organisations and community groups have attracted money under various European Union funding programmes, such as the structural funds.
- Many voluntary organisations and community groups have taken part in European activities in order to influence decision-making in Ireland. Some voluntary organisations and community groups have used Europe as a means of influencing the domestic decision-making environment, or even to embarrass the Irish political and administrative system to come into line with European standards. They have brought European policy issues into the Irish situation so as to change things here (this is now called 'downloading'). Irish governments and administrations like to be seen as good Europeans and as acting in line with best European practice.

Whether one favours the process of European integration or not, it is an important feature of the Irish administrative and political system.

Case Study

Getting fuel poverty on the agenda

Getting fuel poverty onto the political agenda has often proven to be a tough struggle, but Energy Action has used several methods to try to make progress. Energy Action started by getting proposals for insulation and central heating into the party manifestos (including Fianna Fail's manifesto). They then managed to get a budget for action on fuel poverty (€6m) into the subsequent green paper on sustainable energy. Working with ministerial advisors was one of the key elements of success here.

Some government departments still proved difficult to convince, so Energy Action commissioned a large-scale research exercise, *Houses for the 21st Century*, with a report done in University College Dublin. This led to the next advance, with pilot schemes launched in Donegal, Monaghan and Dublin. A further challenge was that, within government, there was no energy auditing or rating system, with no prospect of the government establishing such a system. Here, Energy Action built up its own technical expertise and devised an auditing system.

Lessons

- Work with ministerial advisors.
- Commission credible research.
- Get the appropriate texts and wording into party manifestos and green papers.
- Pilot schemes are a way forward.
- Be prepared to develop a high level of in-house technical expertise.

'Lobbying Europe' also means lobbying the Irish government in advance of the decisions it takes at European level.

How decision-making in the European Union is different

Many books have been written about how to influence European decision-making and many more, undoubtedly, will be written in the next number of years. As a result, only the briefest summary is given here of how to influence European decision-making. The decision-making process in Europe is different from Ireland, in a number of important ways. The main differences are as follows:

- Voluntary organisations and community groups must understand the level and nature of the European Union's competence (this is the legal term) in a given field of activity. This may vary enormously. The European Union acts strictly within the legal powers given it, having considerable authority in some areas (e.g. agriculture, labour market), a growing authority in new areas (e.g. environment, consumer policy, health and education) but none in others (e.g. housing policy, where it has no competence).
- The decision-making process within the European Union can be, in some respects, quite different from that in Ireland. Decisions are made in the course of complex procedures involving the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The Commission, which is normally compared to the civil service, has the right to draw up and initiate legislation in its own right, unlike most domestic civil services. It is considered the engine of the European Union and, as a result, is the target of the attention of most organisations.
- Although we refer to decisions being taken 'by Brussels', this term can be misleading. All important decisions must be approved by the Council of Ministers, where Ireland is one of the member states and shares in that decision. This normally happens to be taken in Brussels. 'Lobbying Europe' also means lobbying the Irish government in advance of the decisions it takes at European level.

Ways of influencing Europe

Some voluntary organisations and community groups have approached the European institutions with the specific intention of promoting a change in policy. Whilst some have done so out of a general European policy concern, many have 'gone to Europe' because Irish governments have been unwilling to listen to them here. They calculate that an intervention by the Commission, the European Parliament or one of the other institutions will promote a change which they have encouraged at home and possibly unblock a campaign which has failed to progress in Ireland. Again, it is important that they inform themselves carefully as to the way and manner in which Europe has the legal authority to deal with the issue which concerns them and its often different procedures.

The European Union provides a number of points by which Irish citizens and organisations may influence the European process. These are:

- Lobbying the Commission for new policies, changed policies,



initiatives, legislation, or funding programmes;

- Persuading the Council, through the Irish government, to amend proposals from the Commission;
- Persuading the democratic institutions to amend legislation, introduce reports and make the Commission accountable. Here one may enlist the support of Irish public representatives in the European institutions:
- Members of the European Parliament (12);
- Irish members of the Economic and Social Committee (9); and
- Our members of the Committee of the Regions (9).

Like a national parliament, the European Parliament is asked to approve legislation and the Union's budget. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) may ask questions in the parliament, contribute to debates and introduce resolutions and reports on issues of current concern. The commissioning of reports is an important aspect of the work of the European Parliament. MEPs can ask for a report to be prepared on a particular topic. A rapporteur (reporter), normally a fellow MEP, is then appointed to research the issue and report back to the Parliament, normally several months later. This report will then propose a series of actions to be undertaken by all the European institutions, often with recommendations to national governments and member states, which outlines the research or policy findings and the detailed background to the report. Irish voluntary and community organisations have contacted rapporteurs in order to contribute to these reports which have, in turn, shaped European thinking on these issues for some time. The process of compiling reports gives MEPs the scope to develop particular interests and areas of expertise. Several Irish MEPs have made a name for themselves by pursuing issues in this way. Some groups in Ireland will then quote European Parliament reports to support their case for change here.

Many national Irish voluntary and community organisations join networks of European voluntary organisations in order to influence policy. About 200 hundred such networks now exist, most having a small professional staff to lobby the European Commission, Parliament and other institutions (for example the European Anti-Poverty Network). Irish voluntary organisations are active members of European networks. These provide access to the European policy-makers in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg. The Platform of European social NGOs attempts to influence the European Union towards more enlightened social policies, while the European Anti-Poverty Network brings together national and international groups concerned with poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Irish voluntary and committee groups have been active participants in such networks.

It is possible make a complaint to the European Commission that one's rights under the European treaties have been abridged; taking a case to the European Court of Justice; petitioning the European Parliament. Making a complaint to the Commission is simplicity itself.

Case Study

Travellers in the public service

A priority area of work for Pavee Point has been to improve the employment of Travellers, in general, and to develop work opportunities in the public service, in particular. This has taken the form of the Civil Service Traveller Internship Programme, one involving 23 Travellers in the first six-month internship programme. Getting the programme this far has taken years and can be traced to a first meeting between Pavee Point and the Public Appointments Service and the Department of Finance in 2002.

The first internship scheme was trialled by the Department of the Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. Other departments (e.g. Justice, Equality and Law Reform) and bodies (e.g. High Level Working Group on Travellers) subsequently took an interest and the idea was subsequently extended as the civil service internship programme in 2006. Of the first 42 applicants, 32 were approved, placed in government departments and agencies and paid at clerical officer rates. Pavee Point would like to make the programme longer to and ensure that it provides sustainable employment for the participating Travellers.

At the start, Pavee Point worked hard to promote a positive image of Travellers, challenging popular assumptions about Traveller attitudes to work. Pavee Point ran an EQUAL programme project, which published research: *Job vacancies...Vacant Jobs*, which illustrated how Travellers wanted to work in mainstream employment. Pavee Point then explored the various possibilities with the High Level Advisory Group on Travellers and government departments (especially Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs). The internship programme was a concrete practical project at a time when government was impatient for progress to be made on Traveller issues.

Lessons

- The need for good research;
- The value of a demonstration project (EQUAL);
- The value of specific work to attack prejudices and stereotypes, replacing them with a positive image of Travellers;
- Starting with a pilot project, then moving on to mainstreaming;
- Working through the existing channels (e.g. high-level group);
- The value of small but concrete projects.

Case Study

Reversing cuts

When governments introduce cuts, it can be quite difficult to get them reversed - but that's what Crosscare's CentreCare did, along with other organisations. When the Minister for Social and Family Affairs reduced the eligibility for rent supplement, many agencies dealing with social hardship were outraged. But CentreCare knew that outrage was not enough. They were conscious that departmental officials had told them: "don't just feed us stories, give us real evidence and then we can do something about it".

CentreCare commissioned research to examine the precise outcomes and impact. The research, called *Creating Crisis* gave a new meaning to the term 'evidence-based research' because it presented no less than 90 examples of how the changes had led to real, personal, individual hardship. The research was simple and clear and had strong headline messages ("Rent administrators need to listen" "Homeless people should be exempt"). It received good publicity, including morning current affairs radio interviews. The research showed the decision in poor light and when a new minister came in, it was quickly reversed.

Lessons

- Good research and solid evidence is necessary.
- Combine this with strong publicity and clear messages.

One writes a letter to its Dublin office and the Commission takes over from there. It is obliged to investigate such complaints.

Getting involved in the structural funds in Ireland

Traditionally, Ireland was a substantial beneficiary of European Union funding. We have since become a net contributor. Even still, some European funding continues to flow into Ireland. Almost all the funds go into national structural fund programmes devised between the Commission and the member governments of each state. These follow the priorities of each national government. The structural funds can be important instruments in addressing social exclusion. Some structural fund programmes address social exclusion directly, some indirectly and others have the potential to do so. The current structural funds comprise:

- Two regional operational programmes funded by the European Regional Development Fund, one for the Border, Midland and Western region and the other for the Southern & Eastern region;
- One European Social Fund programme, covering the whole country;
- The Peace III programme of co-operation in the area of peace and reconciliation with Northern Ireland; and the
- INTERREG IV cross-border programmes with Northern Ireland and Wales.

Voluntary organisations and community groups have a keen interest in ensuring that the structural funds are effective in tackling problems of poverty. There are a number of European Union monitoring bodies in Ireland to oversee the operation of the structural funds. There is a monitoring committee for each of the operational programmes, comprising representatives of government departments, the various directorates of the European Commission and the social partners (including the voluntary and community pillar). The committees provide a point whereby the operation of the structural funds may be questioned and where issues of how the funds are spent may be raised. The committees are required to carry out evaluations of the operation of the funds, both at their mid-term and at the end of the programming period.

Influencing policy further afield

Some Irish voluntary organisations and community groups have attempted to influence policy through Ireland's membership of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe is a much older body than the European Union, dating to 1951, and has a much wider membership (e.g. Russia). Although politically much less powerful than the European Union, membership of the Council of Europe involves Ireland in a number of legal obligations, (e.g. European convention on human rights (1950), European social charter (1961, revised 1996)). Some are actionable in the European Court of Human Rights.

Some voluntary organisations and community groups have tried to influence policy further afield, for example in the United Nations

(UN). These are mainly groups concerned with development or other international issues which are dealt with at this level (e.g. human rights, welfare of children, disarmament).

Ireland is obliged, because it has signed a number of United Nations conventions (e.g. Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights; Covenant on civil and political rights; Convention on the rights of the child), to submit reports to the UN on its performance under these various international agreements. Most such reports are submitted at intervals of several years by the Department of Foreign Affairs, which in turn works with the department of government most involved in the issue. These reports are then scrutinised by UN committees, generally in Geneva or New York, which invite comments from non-governmental organisations from the countries concerned. Some voluntary organisations have used these opportunities to challenge their national reports for not giving a true picture of the country. They have submitted what are called 'shadow reports', the upshot being that the Irish government has been summoned to explain itself. This can be quite troublesome to the Irish government and embarrassing when reported in the media and can have the effect of encouraging a change in domestic policy, standards and practice. Under the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention of torture, voluntary organisations can invite in teams of inspectors without the government's permission. This is a sophisticated form of lobbying that requires a certain amount of research and investigation, but can prove to be effective. Some organisations take this route as an indirect, roundabout, but effective means of influencing domestic policy.

Case Study

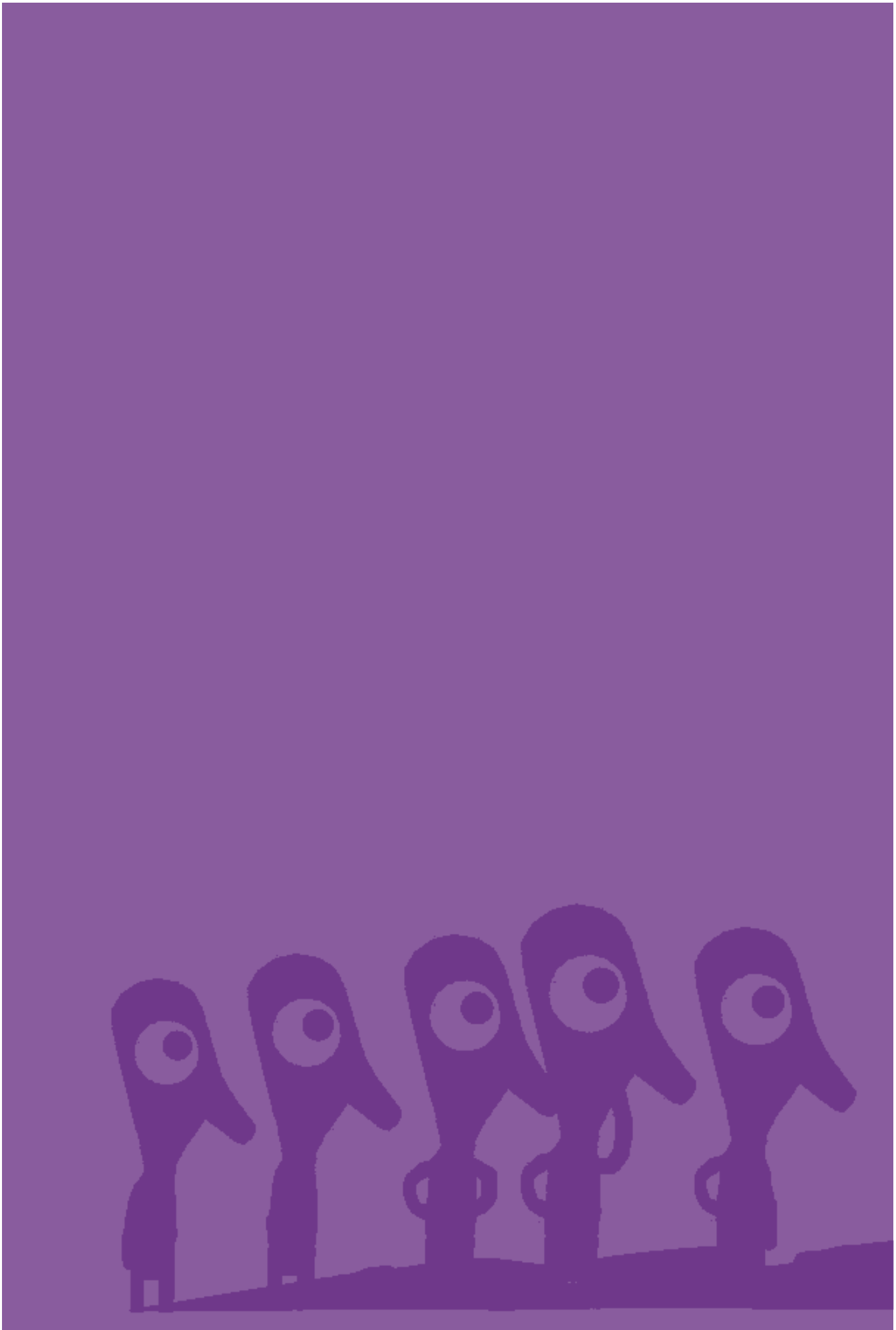
Pressing a simple concept in the right place

Ringsend Action Project, Dublin is a pioneer of both community action and social housing, building an initial 12 houses and then a further 29. Ringsend also fell within the area of operations of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA). The chairperson of the Ringsend project was also on the DDDA board. When the DDDA proposed that a minimum of 20% of people working in construction in the area be local people, the Ringsend Action Project took the opportunity to suggest that at least 20% of housing in the area should be social and affordable housing. This subsequently became a paragraph in the DDDA development plan.

Some time later, the Minister for the Environment (Noel Dempsey) was invited by Ringsend Action Project to visit the social housing project and to stay on informally for tea afterwards. The action project outlined what it was doing and mentioned the minimum 20% social housing. "Do you think this could work nationally?" the minister asked and the project suggested that it might. The project heard no further about the idea, but it came at a time when the government was looking for new ways of increasing the output of social housing. Next, the minimum 20% appeared as Part V of new planning legislation, requiring at least 20% of all new housing to be social or affordable housing right across the country. Was this the result of the chat over tea?

Lessons

- Ringsend Action Project's experience in building social housing meant that it had credibility with the minister and his department.
- Be prepared to put forward ideas to people up the line, be they development boards or ministers. They may progress further than can be imagined.



3.

So far, this guide has looked at the political system, how it operates and the opportunities it presents for voluntary organisations and community groups. Now is the time to examine how voluntary organisations and community groups may best mobilise themselves to devise a strategy to influence the political and administrative system.

The key things to do are to:

- Set clear objectives;
- Use information, documentation and research to influence the decision-making process;
- Present one's case to decision and policy-makers;
- Get the issue onto the political agenda;
- Get the issue discussed and debated, persuading the government to deliver the right response.

DEVISING A STRATEGY



Ways voluntary organisations and community groups begin to change things

Stop and think!

Document the problem you are dealing with.

Talk to other organisations in a similar situation.

Ask other people, locally and further afield, what they think should be done.

Ask people in local government, national government and experts.

Ask national organisations concerned with the issue.

Get a facilitator to work through the issue with you.

> Further reading: Siobhan Lynam: Integrating policy into work planning, Combat Poverty Agency

Case Study

A broad-based campaign

The CADIC Coalition, formerly known as the Campaign Against Deportation of Irish Children, contributed to the introduction of a new procedure that prevented a substantial number of deportations of family members of Irish citizens and also the deportation of Irish citizen children – with resultant hardship for both children and their parents. In what was called the L&O case, the Supreme Court had confirmed that non-Irish parents of children born in Ireland had no automatic right of residence with their children in the state. About 18,000 families were immediately affected and in theory at least, many faced deportation. The government issued what were referred to as §3 letters to some parents. The letters gave the opportunity either to leave voluntarily or to find reasons on what basis they should not now be deported and a number of parents were subsequently issued with deportation orders. The CADIC Coalition responded with a combination of:

- A media campaign;
- Lobbying of deputies, senators;
- Creating a coalition of support;
- Direct provision of information and support to parents of Irish citizen children and organisations around the country working with these parents;
- Building up relationships with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, with whom contact had been minimal; and
- Legal means - judicial reviews, developing legal arguments, seeking legal opinion and issuing judicial proceedings.

The CADIC Coalition's principal aim was that there would be a proper, fair and transparent system in place in which the interests of the child should be paramount, with no blanket deportations. It put forward a series of what it considered to be reasonable, administratively sound procedures. The minister eventually introduced a new system with set, stated criteria. In the end, 16,993 parents were given permission to remain and 1,119 were refused under the scheme.

Continued on page 55

The government has now accepted, in policies such as: Supporting voluntary activity and Active citizenship, the principle that voluntary and community organisations should be consulted at a number of levels. Despite this, some voluntary and community organisations find it awkward to negotiate policy issues and to criticise statutory bodies which are also their main funders. This is of course difficult, but there are few examples of voluntary and community organisations suffering financially from making a contribution to policy-making. To the contrary, groups which make a sustained contribution to policy questions may win added respect and funding.

3.1 Set clear objectives

Although this is a truism, the first problem a voluntary organisation or community group faces is to define the issue or problem which it is facing. Many efforts come to grief because voluntary organisations and community groups do not spend enough time defining their cause and do not put enough work into planning. This is understandable, for they often wish to rush into action and do not want to waste time. Campaigning is defined as 'a systematic course of purposeful action for a specified purpose' - in other words, it has precise aims and objectives and is pursued with a sense of a direction. 'Making people aware of a problem' or 'creating greater public awareness' is not campaigning.

For most voluntary organisations and community groups, policy issues arise in the normal course of their day-to-day work. As they come across problems and concerns, they begin to ask: Why is this a problem here? Who seems to have decided this and why? Is there anything that can be done about it? As a result, individuals, organisations and groups ask these questions and begin to think about how they can change things in the midst of all the other activities they are undertaking. Voluntary organisations and community groups have become much more experienced in planning their work and have begun to build influencing policy more and more into their everyday work. Community development projects have learned how to draw up

Planning checklist for voluntary organisations and community groups

What is the problem, the difficulty, the issue?

Why is it a problem? Why are its effects so serious? What costs does it impose?

What do we want done about it?

Who exactly do we want to do what?

Is this a problem of policy, the allocation of resources, procedures or what?

What are the benefits, to whom, if this problem is solved?

area profiles and area plans, many of which confront the problems of lack of investment and services in their areas. This process provides a useful opportunity to reflect on:

- The links between local poverty and national policies;
- The area's crucial short- and long-term needs;
- The most critical areas of under-investment;
- What actions could make the most difference to the area soonest and in the long-term;
- The area's ability to influence the political and administrative system;
- The human resources of the area and the people involved in the project;
- Other priorities and objectives for the area.

The first and most important thing for a group to do is to define precisely what it wishes to achieve - in the short term (say, over the next number of months), the medium term and the long term (e.g. the next number of years). These definitions can be very useful in defining the various stages of a programme to influence policy.

Voluntary organisations and community groups must reach agreement between themselves as to the nature of the issue, before they try to convince others. The various options must be thoroughly thrashed out. They must win a mandate from their own communities and supporters on:

- The course or courses of action which they plan to pursue;
- The policies they are trying to change;
- Where they are directing their campaign;
- The style of the campaign (e.g. publicity, confrontation);

Checklist for launching a programme to influence decision-making

- Have we agreed our objectives?
- Have we assembled our case?
- What is our programme, our specific proposals?
- Who do we plan to influence to do what?
- Who are our supporters?
- What are we going to do next?

- Who is our contact person?
- Do we have people, more research lined up to come in later?
- Have we a clear and agreed mandate from our members?

Continued from page 54

Lessons

- The merit of targeted, external media action while building a relationship with the department simultaneously;
- The need to establish a relationship with the government department and administrative bodies, providing expertise so as to work through solutions;
- The need for a broad-based campaign of lobbying and coalition-building, bringing together service providers, advocates, legal practitioners and the representative voice of families.



Good research, information or documentation is a pre-condition for any attempt by voluntary and community organisations to influence policy or decision-making.

- Allies and supporters to be engaged;
- The possible consequences and impacts, good and bad.

If groups do not win a clearly understood mandate for their engagement in the policy process, internal divisions may show up at a later date. These can be very destructive. Planning a programme to influence decision-making is one of the most difficult but important activities for a voluntary organisation or community group. Good advance planning can make all the difference between success and failure or between making the best use of one's energies and wasting effort.

3.2 Use information, documentation, research

Good research, information or documentation is a pre-condition for any attempt by voluntary and community organisations to influence policy or decision-making. Research reports are generally given weight by the media and treated seriously by government departments, though on their own they will achieve very little. One word of caution: research by itself will not change policy. Many research reports, particularly when not accompanied by follow-up strategies, have been ignored. It is better to view research as an important starting point for changing policy.

Research is an essential element in influencing policy-makers for a number of reasons. The authorities may have been genuinely unaware of the existence of a particular problem. Groups often forget that although the nature of the problem which they are addressing may be blindingly obvious to them, it is not necessarily so to others, nor is its size, scale or consequences. That is why groups must devote time to explaining why their problem is a problem, what effects it causes, how it could be remedied and the benefits of doing so.

Sometimes, voluntary organisations and community groups are told they are exaggerating, or that they are getting upset about one or two isolated instances, which prove nothing. Good research will establish

Mobilizing, involving those most affected by poverty

ATD Fourth World is a voluntary organisation, originating in France, which has developed an expertise in involving those most affected by poverty to define their own solutions and policies to overcome social exclusion.

> ATD Fourth World, 31 Mountjoy sq,
Dublin 1
Tel 8558191,
atdfourthworld@eircom.net,
www.atdfourthworld.ie

the true nature of a problem or an issue. Research will point the way to solutions and can analyse ways in which similar problems have been overcome elsewhere.

Voluntary organisations and community groups will be asked for documentation sooner or later. They may be cross-examined about what they are saying sooner than they expect, so it is always better to be prepared. Some groups may find out that some arguments which they had planned to use are, in fact, not sustainable. Voluntary organisations and community groups and their representatives must ensure that their research and information are always accurate, carefully presented and not exaggerated.

Thoroughness and attention to detail are essential. There are few quicker ways to discredit a cause than to present inaccurate or unreliable information. There is nothing worse for a public representative than to argue a case for a group passionately, only to find that the facts have not been right. Facts alone will not convince people to change, but wrong facts can be fatal.

It is important that voluntary and community organisations make their research accessible to policy-makers and their own supporters, friends and allies. It is often useful to publish the key findings of research in a summary, especially for busy people who do not have time to read the full report. This could be part of the main document, or published separately.

Community groups are likely, by definition, to be in the business of documenting the needs, problems and assets of their local area, often on an on-going basis. Again, this is essential if the group is to make a successful case for investment, for facilities or for other needs to be met. There is a range of such documentary information which can be obtained from government information sources and state agencies. These can, in turn, be compared to national figures and standards. The Central Statistics Office divides the country into several thousand district electoral divisions (DEDs), each with a

Case Study

Structures matter

When the government announced new structures for local development organisations and community partnerships (the 'cohesion process'), many voluntary and community groups disagreed. They disapproved of proposals to reduce the representation of voluntary and community groups and that the chairperson would be appointed by the government. Believing that the proposals would undermine local initiative for social inclusion, the Community Partnership Network ran a long campaign to persuade the government to restore the level of voluntary and community representation and for partnerships to elect their own chairpersons.

The network's approach was patient argument with the departmental officials responsible, repeating the message consistently and persistently, both verbally and in writing. The network gave examples of why the original system worked well and the negative consequences of a change. The network attempted to maintain internal lines of communication with the departmental officials, inviting them to many of their meetings, so they could better understand views and feelings on the issue. The network did raise the issue publicly, at a European seminar on local partnership hosted in Dublin by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Between the network's persistent behind-the-scenes work and more vocal public pressure by others, the department eventually changed its mind.

What research can do

Collect information about an area, a problem

Quantify its size, explain its nature, present a picture

Examine, measure the consequences of poverty

See how other people resolve these problems

Analyze the existing set of policies and their shortcomings

Present, cost options

Suggest solutions

Make recommendations.

Case Study

Documenting from the very beginning

The Northside Local Education Committee, with the Community Development Network Moyross, tracked the increasing difficulty which children from disadvantaged estates experienced, over the years, in trying to find places in secondary schools in Limerick. This was a key issue if the problem of early school leaving were to be tackled effectively and if the children of the area, especially boys, were to have any job or career prospects. The committee highlighted the difficulties to the Department of Education & Science in the course of correspondence for several years and expressed the concern that a population bulge would cause ever greater problems in the future.

The crisis broke one year when 54 children were refused places in the city's secondary schools. All came from disadvantaged areas - 17 from Moyross itself. The committee documented the situation, including exactly where the refused children came from. They sent off letters to the Minister for Education, his department, the principals and assistant principals in the city and the Education and Welfare Board. Through the Limerick City Community Forum they raised the issue with the Social Inclusion Measures Group and the City Development Board. With the help of concerned parents, meetings were organised.

Although the city schools claimed that they operated a random selection process and that it was a resources problem, the committee disputed this and, assisted by the education welfare officers, encouraged and supported parents to take formal discrimination complaints under §21 of the Education Act. This imposed considerable paperwork burdens on the schools. The committee made formal proposals for a fair allocation policy, so that all children would be informed of places at the same time and that additional resources would be allocated to assist schools in coping with behavioural problems if necessary.

Continued on page 59

population of several thousand people and can provide print-outs of each DED by population (these are sometimes called small area population statistics). Other agencies can provide information on standard of living indicators, the environment, training services, crime rates and so on (e.g. Environmental Protection Agency, FAS, gardai etc) as is appropriate to them. Groups should therefore give careful consideration to the range of reports which they are likely to need and the time and money they will need to accumulate and analyse them.

Research: the beginning of something, not the end

Many voluntary organisations and community groups regard the publication of a research report or a report which makes their case as the end of a process. In fact, it is the beginning of the next, most important stage in the process of influencing policy. But often, groups are exhausted by the time of publication and the next stage can fall short of what it can achieve. Research reports can be particularly effective if the groups which commission them think in advance of:

- Who they plan to send them to;
- What they want to come out from the report;
- What they would like the report to have achieved in, say, a year's time.

For a report to be effective, a budget should be set aside for promoting it. Some groups will spend thousands on commissioning research and publishing a nice book at the end, but begrudge a few hundred euros on getting it out into the hands of those who might be able to act on it (in fact, it is also possible for organisations to recoup some of their costs by charging for sales).

Research reports should obviously be sent, in the first instance, to those in the decision-making loop, be they officials, public representatives or semi-state bodies. They should also be well distributed within the research community itself - to university libraries, public libraries, specialised libraries, research bodies, known

Where to get information for research

Local library (many have a local section)
University and college libraries
Government Publications, Dublin
Government departments
Semi-state boards, bodies and agencies

Local authorities, health services
Combat Poverty Agency
Pobal
Central Statistics Office
European Union, Dublin & Belfast
Specialised libraries
All of these groups on the internet!

researchers, consultancy companies and experts. Many government departments and many semi-state bodies have their own libraries. Staff rely on the reports there to inform them. These libraries may circulate accessions lists to their staff.

Once the report starts to be widely quoted by others, it is considered to be even more influential. It means the report continues to generate a momentum long after it is launched. The more professional voluntary organisations and community groups hold back some of their best information and supporting personalities until the later stages of a campaign. They realise that launching all their research at the first phase may mean that they run out of steam later. When organisations are able to announce fresh research findings, it creates a sense of momentum.

Some groups send their reports to officials, specifically asking them to read them and give them back comments. Statutory bodies are generally prepared to meet organisations or groups on specific or substantial research or policy documents. Reports can make a considerable impact if they are used as the basis for meetings with officials and public representatives or are the subject of parliamentary questions or debates (e.g. What action has the minister taken following the report XYZ...?). Very few public representatives or officials will refuse point-blank to read a report (though they may be more cagey about how well they have read it or what they will do about it). For sympathetic individual officials or public representatives, a report can add weight to a proposal or policy for which they have already been pressing for some time.

Use conferences to launch research, progress the issue

Many voluntary organisations use conferences as an important means of influencing policy and decision-making. Although conferences may involve a considerable amount of work, they have a number of distinct advantages:

- They are useful opportunities for launching research reports, policy recommendations and other proposals;

The policy background: further reading

Suzanne Quin, Patricia Kennedy, Anne Matthews, Gabriel Kiely (editors): Contemporary Irish social policy and
Gabriel Kiely, Anne O'Donnell, Patricia Kennedy, Suzanne Quin (editors): Irish social policy in context, both published by University College Dublin Press

Continued from page 58

RTE publicised the issue and interviewed the parents of the affected children. This brought an immediacy to the situation. RTE put the Minister for Education and Science on the spot and it was quickly apparent that he was familiar with the situation and had read the file. The Department of Education & Science attended the Limerick City Development Board. When this became a difficult issue there, the minister travelled to Limerick and met the principals, parents and community groups. He demanded that a solution be found. The schools introduced a new system, one guaranteeing a place for everyone, with all applicants in the affected areas informed at the same time. The system was extended to all disadvantaged districts the following year.

Lessons

- Document a problem from the very beginning, even before it becomes a live public issue. Document it in detail. Don't presume that the department or the minister won't read the file.
- Reach a view as to who is responsible and what can be done.
- Put forward proposals to solve the problem.
- Develop a correspondence with the principal government agency involved.
- Build alliances with other community groups and statutory bodies, as these can prove to be crucial.

Groups should select a spokesperson or a number of persons comfortable with talking to meetings, entirely familiar with the group's research and with good personal communication skills.

- They provide an opportunity for the statutory agencies to respond, preferably favourably;
- Conferences attract other agencies interested in the issue, supporters and sympathisers, providing networking opportunities;
- They may attract media publicity;
- They are a good way of building allies around an issue;
- They are a launching pad to the next stage of the campaign.

3.3 Presenting your case effectively

Voluntary organisations and community groups attempting to influence policy or decision-makers will, sooner or later, find themselves making oral or written presentations.

Examples of bodies which take oral presentations are committees of the local authorities and Oireachtas committees. Many groups find the experience intimidating, but the invitation is, of itself, a sign that the group is making progress. Groups should select someone or a number of persons comfortable with talking to meetings, entirely familiar with the group's research and with good personal communication skills. They should anticipate difficult questions and prepare responses carefully. It is important that the group brings a written statement to leave behind, along with appropriate documentation.

To present one's case in writing requires a different set of skills. The principal components of a written policy presentation or submission are:

- A briefing note on the group, explaining its origins, why it exists, the services and activities it already provides. These things may be obvious to every member of the group, but they are important if the group is to assert its right to speak for the people that are its concern. More practically, some of the readers of the document may not even know of the group's existence or what it does.

Typical information in small area reports by the Central Statistics Office

Numbers of people living in the area (divided into houses, flats etc)

Age groups (0-4, 5-14 etc)

Household types (e.g. single, couple, couple with children)

Persons per household, per room

Work status of people in the area (e.g. student, unemployed, sick, at work)

Employment for those at work (e.g. transport, professional, agricultural)

Age of leaving school

This census compared with previous ones, thereby showing trends

> www.cso.ie



- The group's analysis of the problem, using the best research, information and documentation available;
- An outline of the solution the group favours, why it would work, the benefits of following this course of action and the costs of not doing so. Voluntary organisations and community groups should be as clear as possible about what they want (resources, a change in the law, a government circular or whatever). A generalised statement that 'more should be done' about a problem will make little difference.
- A summary of the main points.

In preparing a policy submission, it is often useful for voluntary organisations and community groups to consider, in addition to their own policies, an analysis of government policy and the various other options which are on the national policy menu. This puts the group's proposals in a wider context and shows that it has an understanding and appreciation of other points of view. It is often also useful for the group to state what are the key assumptions and values which shape its own views and approach. For pre-budget submissions, groups should pay attention to what may be feasible and realistic within the national finances (this does not mean that one has to, or should, abandon more ambitious long term aims).

Voluntary organisations and community groups often find it difficult to find a suitable presentation style. Although it is possible to send much longer documents to civil servants than members of the Oireachtas, many are nevertheless too long. It is always better to provide one page that people read - than ten more brilliant pages that go unread. Additional material can always be supplied separately, in supplementary documents or annexes.

A good test is to give the report to people who know nothing about your organisation, ask them to read it and then ask them if they understand the report. Reports, policy documents and submissions do not need to be glossy or fancy. Clarity is more important. However,

Never spend too little effort on research

"With research comes knowledge, with knowledge comes authority, with authority comes conviction and with conviction comes a greater chance of success. Don't economise on research."

Des Wilson

Case Study

Using annual reports creatively

CARELOCAL, the Dublin organisation working for older people, has been providing direct services to vulnerable older people living alone for over 35 years. Funding has generated entirely from donations, fundraising events and once-off grants. Four years ago CARELOCAL began the process of applying for core funding from the Health Service Executive (HSE). One of its tools of persuasion was its simple but colourful, neatly designed and attractively presented annual report which outlined its activities with older people and its ambitions. The annual report was sent, with an appeal for core funding, not only to the HSE but also to health service managers, the health service expert advisory group on older people and the Minister of State responsible. It was also sent to 24 Dublin TDs. Here it seems to have been especially effective. Many of the TDs then made enquiries with the HSE about the prospects for CARELOCAL receiving core funding, so that the HSE was inundated with their representations.

A further complication was that, in the course of a short period of time, no less than five persons went through the post of acting manager for services for older people in the local health office and each had to be briefed in turn about CARELOCAL's case and its merits. The annual report was a useful and accessible tool for informing new managers about the work of the organisation. CARELOCAL believes that it is now closer to its goal of obtaining core funding for its essential community-based services for older people.

Lessons

- Use annual reports, not just to report on one's work, but to seek organisational objectives.
- Ask people not just to read annual reports but to act on them.
- Go to a wide range of groups to ask for support.
- New public servants must be briefed when they come into their posts, particularly if that happens frequently.

Case Study

Working fast with media and politicians

The Rape Crisis Network Ireland found itself in a major challenge when, in the aftermath of an unexpected court outcome, the government gave serious consideration to lowering the age of sexual consent, something which the network wished to maintain at 17 years. The issue blew up very fast. An Oireachtas Committee, the joint committee on child protection, was set up to consider the implications of the court outcome. The committee made 62 recommendations, one of which was to lower the age of consent.

The network drafted, at short notice, a briefing document called simply: *Whose age of consent is it anyway?* The Rape Crisis Network:

- Contacted and briefed the committee members and their party colleagues while they were finalising their decision;
- Because of the legal, ethical, moral and child protection complexities involved, contacted and briefed the advisor of the leader of the opposition, so that the leader's views would be well formed and robust. When he did speak, many of his phrases reflected their contribution and made quite an impact.
- Briefed a wide range of interests, including the churches.

The network's approach to the media attempted to give a language to a generalized, but not well articulated, public concern about the age of consent and to turn it into concrete political positions. On the day the Oireachtas Committee presented its recommendations, the network used the press conference presentation to put forward its case. Network representatives appeared on every news and current affairs programme that day and the next morning. The network found out in advance who was going on television current affairs such as *Prime Time*, *The Late Late Show* and *Questions and Answers* so as to brief key spokespersons, in advance, on the age of consent, should the issue come up during the programme itself. The debate was taken up by a wide range of organisations and interests, many of whom the network continued to advise and brief. In the end, the age of consent was kept at 17 years, neutral both for gender and sexual orientation.

Continued on page 63

some groups can make false economies by not binding their reports nicely or by using photocopiers with poor quality. It is worth paying for a clear presentation; likewise, a 50c folder can make quite a difference to the appearance of a policy submission.

3.4 Resources to fund policy work

Attempts to influence the political and administrative machine cannot be run on fresh air, although many have been run on surprisingly few resources. Taking on policy work has important resource implications. These must be balanced against the organisation's continued provision of services. Budgeting for policy work will also help to anticipate costs and keep them within reasonable limits.

In the first instance, resources must be allocated so that voluntary organisations and community groups may organise their case and present their basic policy documents. This may involve research (which can be expensive), drafting reports, circulating them for discussion and then launching and disseminating them. This will inevitably involve computers, photocopiers and the range of office supports that they require.

To influence the political and administrative system will use up resources in telephoning, postage, letters and forms of communications generally. Many groups send out regular mailings - be they newsletters or occasional material - to the full range of decision-makers that they try to reach. These costs may run into thousands each year. What groups may often forget to budget for is the price of buying in information. This could include the cost of parliamentary debates, relevant government reports affecting their area of interest and other information so that they may stay up to date. Much of this information is available in specialised libraries, but it is always useful to have such material ready to hand. Downloading reports from the web will save money as will circulating information by e-mail, but there will still be some costs.

Keeping a policy or research report on the agenda. Is it:

A subject of parliamentary questions?

Raised on the adjournment debate in the Dáil or Seanad?

The subject of a motion in the Dáil or Seanad?

Referred to by deputies, senators during their speeches?

A topic in the media?

Discussed in the Dáil or Seanad?

Under discussion in NESC, NESF or other leading advisory bodies?

Mentioned in national agreement monitoring meetings?

The subject of departmental reports, green papers or white papers?

Discussed in meetings with governmental officials?

A subject in correspondence and meetings with policy-makers?

Sold out?

Some lobbying costs can be offset, for example by membership fees, appeals for funds, sales of publications and applications for grants to cover some of these activities. Some organisations run conferences and similar events at a profit to subsidise these activities (although there are other good reasons for doing so). Some trust funds will explicitly support organisations active in trying to influence policy; while others are prepared to fund research and publicity material that may be used as part of on-going efforts to influence policy.

3.5 Protests, direct action and other strategies

Some groups use direct action as a means of influencing decision-makers, either on their own or to supplement more conventional means of influence. Greenpeace, for example, used direct action very effectively in its campaigns against whaling and nuclear power. The action was always accompanied by photographs with strong messages. Direct action has fallen out of favour in recent years but despite that, well-publicised, imaginative and creative direct action, can, if applied in conjunction with other forms of lobbying, be effective in creating pressure for change.

Sometimes voluntary organisations will take direct action when the danger of the action they oppose is imminent and complaints through the normal channels will simply be too late (e.g. overnight demolition of a listed building). Others may use it because they have little access to power or policy-makers or because no one seems to be listening. Imaginative and creative direct action with a strong visual appeal may be particularly successful. Protests can take the form of marches, rallies, vigils, street theatre, climbing trees, blocking roads, overnight sleep-outs, chaining oneself to railings etc.

Polling

One of the least used means of influencing policy is the opinion poll. Voluntary organisations and community groups have been unsure about using opinion polls or how to set about doing them. A poll which shows strong support for the stance taken by a voluntary

Continued from page 62

Lessons

- Work simultaneously with politicians and the media.
- Be prepared to work very fast, drafting and redrafting briefing documents.
- Keep in touch with advisors, researchers and media.
- Try to articulate broader public concerns in short but effective messages.
- Focus on key politicians (e.g. Oireachtas Committee chairperson and members; leader of the opposition).
- Pay attention to detail with the media, briefing participants in current affairs programmes.

Checklist for launching a research or documentary report

Who will get it?

What are you asking them to do with it?

What would you like it to have achieved in a year?

Do you have the budget to promote it effectively?

> Further reading: Siobhan Airey: Communities,voicesandchange-reporton the policy work of the CDPs, FRCs and partnerships, Combat Poverty Agency.

Influencing policy takes time and patience, both because of the slow nature of the decision-making process and its ability to absorb change only gradually. Becoming known, making a case, convincing people and building a reputation take a long time.

organisation or a community group will tell decision-makers that ordinary people are on the group's side and will make them much more likely to consider their views more carefully. Public representatives and governments generally do not like to swim against the tide of public opinion. There are two ways of doing opinion polls. One is to pay a polling agency to add additional questions to the routine polling conducted for national newspapers on voting intentions and national political questions. Another is for the group to organise its own poll. However, it must have credibility, ask objective questions and cover a large sample. At the end of the day, groups are not obliged to publish the results. For those who do, publication of an opinion poll can make a good news story.

3.6 Personal skills to influence decision-makers

It has been said that the three main human qualities required to influence policy are persistence, persistence and persistence. This is certainly true. Influencing policy takes time and patience, both because of the slow nature of the decision-making process and its ability to absorb change only gradually. Becoming known, making a case, convincing people and building a reputation take a long time.

Voluntary organisations and community groups routinely underestimate the time and energy it will take to get policy changed. Many comment ruefully that if they had known that it would have taken ten years to get the policy change they sought, they might never have started. For example, proposals to improve the legal framework for children in Ireland (it dated to 1908) were first made in 1968, but the Child Care Act was not passed until 1991 and even then it was phased in slowly. Most efforts to change social policy have been more rapid. Sometimes, after years of trying, a breakthrough can take place quite rapidly. For voluntary organisations and community groups, perhaps the key lesson is the importance of setting some early,

Making a pre-budget submission

Get your submission in to the policy makers in good time (though you may publicise it later).

Make sure it is different from the previous year.

Send it to the right ministers, departments, Oireachtas committees, media.

Pay attention to costs and where they will be met.

tangible, modest and short-term objectives. Achieving them can give members the heart and confidence to keep going.

Representatives of voluntary organisations and community groups should have a personable manner - be that in person, on the phone, or on paper. This does not mean that the representative should lack conviction - quite the contrary - but that the person has a sense of proportion. This means appreciating what can be done and what cannot; making a distinction between what can be achieved now and in a few months and in a few years; and an understanding that there is another point of view about the problem. Politicians and administrators value people who understand the range of pressures that are on them. Expressed another way, they do not like and find it difficult to deal with people who appear to be fanatics, who expect to win all their demands immediately or who make it plain that they just do not like politicians or officials.

The key choice of spokesperson emphasises the importance of the group making a good match of all positions and skills within the group - chairpersons who can chair meetings, treasurers who are happy with handling money and representatives who are comfortable about speaking to officials and public representatives. It is important that voluntary organisations and community groups make a wise choice about who is their public face and who has the most appropriate communication skills. That person is not necessarily the leader of the campaign - indeed, good leaders and groups will be able to recognise who has the best such skills and it may well be someone else in the background.

There are many additional benefits to an organisation that result from active participation in trying to influence policy and decision-making. The organisation becomes much better known and will, in the course of time, attract more money and more volunteers. This may give it the confidence and the resources to expand its services. At a personal level, the people active in the process become more confident, more

Tips for making an oral presentation

Make sure it is appropriate for the people and the occasion.

Make links with the audience.

Make it short. Most speeches are far too long.

Find out the names of the people you are talking to.

Have headings for the talk.

Like radio interviews, try to get across four or five main points.

Show conviction, but do not be over-emotional or fanatical.

Be friendly, personable, good humoured

Case Study

Changing a funding programme

On behalf of the community and voluntary sector in the region, the Donegal Community Workers Cooperative (CWC), influenced the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to make substantial changes to the Peace III programme. They believe that this will make it a more effective instrument in promoting peace and reconciliation. First, the Co-op applied to the SEUPB to provide a small grant to run a consultation exercise on the draft operational programme. This involved 110 people in three different meetings. The CWC then put forward many recommendations based on these meetings. Two of these focused on:

- The need for projects to be delivered through peace plans prepared by local authorities in consultation with voluntary and community organisations, instead of area action plans;
- The delivery of projects through a number of developmental partnerships, modelled on the European EQUAL programme. This was based on their experience of having worked within an EQUAL partnership. The Co-op also cited evidence from the European Anti-Poverty Network that this was an effective system of delivery.

Both proposals were accepted for the new operational programme.

Lessons

- Be prepared to make proposals to organise consultations around an issue.
- Offer solutions, based on good practice and international models. The CWC was able to show how the new programme could be delivered.

Voluntary organisations and community groups - if they are to successfully influence the decision-making process - must convey an image that they are serious, they know what they are doing, they can debate and discuss issues coherently and that people can do business with them.



assertive and develop skills which stay with them for the rest of their lives, even if they move on to other organisations or into other fields of work. These skills could vary from public speaking to organizing events, using computers, design or writing.

Leadership

An essential part of trying to influence the decision-making process is a belief that it is possible to do so. This may seem like a truism, but many voluntary and community organisations include jaded people who do not really think that they can make an impact. This is understandable. Many voluntary organisations and community groups have had disheartening experiences of dealing with officialdom and the authorities. Part of good leadership is convincing people that, with perseverance and skill, they can successfully make an impact on decisions. If the view is widely held and articulated that the group is wasting its time in trying to influence the decision-making process, this can be corrosive and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

For many voluntary organisations and community groups, the question of the image they convey and the tone they strike may seem to be a distraction to them. In fact, these are important matters. Voluntary organisations and community groups, if they are to successfully influence the decision-making process, must convey an image that they are serious, they know what they are doing, they can debate and discuss issues coherently and that people can do business with them. This does not mean that they should signal a preparedness to compromise, but they should set people in government at ease about dealing with them. Even the group's name can be very important in conveying an image or impression. Campaign groups should always give themselves a positive, upbeat title (Concerned citizens for...), rather than a negative one (Campaign to stop..., or Protest against...).

Likewise, people in local and national government, semi-state bodies and public representatives will listen most to people who can demonstrate a firm command of the issues and can shape them in

What should go into a submission or a policy submission

Who we are
 What our group does
 How long we have been there
 The services we provide
 The activities we carry out
 What the problem is, in our view
 What is our view of its extent and nature?

The reputable and independent sources of information we rely on
 What are the negative consequences of this problem (pain, suffering, hardship)?
 What can be done about it?
 What are the various proposals under consideration, if any?
 What we think should be done
 What the solution would look like
 The benefits of solving the problem

The costs of not solving the problem
 Our vision of the solution

such a way as to invite a positive response by government. Groups should be able to point to solutions. It is important that attacks on government are de-personalised and that they are couched in terms of 'bad policies' rather than 'bad people'. People under personal attack find it twice as hard to change a policy. When groups feel it necessary to make strong criticism, it is always wiser to focus on the policy, not the person. Although campaigns can work by increasing pressure on government, they work equally well by reducing resistance on the other side through making it easier for people in government to change their minds by seeing the benefits of the solutions put forward.

Voluntary organisations and community groups which run their affairs efficiently and are seen to do so can be persuasive. Policy-makers and decision-makers and the media often warm to organisations which know what they are trying to achieve, can answer enquiries quickly and are up to date. They are more likely to presume that what they are looking for is well thought out and correct. Efficiency and accuracy will impress. Bad administration can be very wasteful of people and money, and create doubt among sympathizers whether the cause an organisation is promoting is worthwhile or not.

Regrouping and pacing

Trying to influence decision-makers can be a difficult, slow process. Sometimes, especially at the beginning, it may be difficult to see if any progress is being made. There will inevitably be set-backs and frustrations which will be a test for the leadership, the members and the supporters of any campaign. Worse, organisations may be divided, become destabilised and face splits. Not least, groups can underestimate the importance of bringing their own members, supporters and friends along with them - consulting them, explaining the various stage of their campaign and keeping them up to date with progress. This emphasises the importance of continuous, on-going, democratic consultation. Three aspects of a campaign are especially important here.

Case Study

Improving local knowledge

Several local authorities have developed Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies, (LAPSIS), for example, in Wicklow and Laois. Even with the benefit of information from providers such as the Central Statistics Office, identifying the pattern of poverty locally can be quite challenging. This is doubly a problem in some parts of Dublin where, due to fresh investment and housing, overall living standards have risen but some acute poverty remains (e.g. docklands).

In the north west of the city, then undergoing regeneration, the Ballymun Anti-Poverty Network obtained funding to explore the idea of geo-mapping with the National University of Ireland in Maynooth. This is a system of mapping, street by street, social welfare, FAS and city council and Health Service Executive data, identifying those small areas most dependent on welfare and health services. Over time, trends in use of these services can be followed and improvements noted. The intensely local nature of the mapping means that services can be effectively targeted for those most likely to be in need.

Lessons

- Up-front investment in research as part of the area anti-poverty strategy can prove crucial.
- Be prepared to develop new, imaginative types of information systems to suit your purposes.
- Get help from experts in related fields of work (e.g. mapping).

How to make presentations count

Be short, rather than long. Make every word count. Don't repeat anything.

Provide a single page summary at the start.

Have a table of contents and a list of tables at the start.

Don't crowd the page - leave plenty of white space. Use a new page for a new section.

Use headings, tables, charts and graphs to break up the presentation.

Use short sentences rather than long sentences.

Use short paragraphs rather than long paragraphs.

Avoid jargon.

Make sure it is proof-read.

Take out silly mistakes.

Groups can underestimate the importance of bringing their own members, supporters and friends along with them - consulting them, explaining the various stage of their campaign and keeping them up to date with progress. This emphasises the importance of continuous, on-going, democratic consultation. Groups can underestimate the importance of bringing their own members, supporters and friends along with them - consulting them, explaining the various stage of their campaign and keeping them up to date with progress. This emphasises the importance of continuous, on-going, democratic consultation.

- **Making mistakes.** In the first instance, all voluntary organisations and community groups seriously engaged in trying to influence the decision-making process will make errors and mistakes. Hopefully, these will not be too disastrous and the group will recover. The aphorism 'one learns from one's mistakes' is absolutely true, for the group will learn from the difficulty and go on to the next stage of the work. This stresses the importance of always being self-critical. Some groups enlist the help of external evaluators to assist them in this process.
- **Pace.** In the second instance, groups must learn to pace their work. One cannot try to influence the process of decision-making at 100% effort all the time, for the group and its members will soon get burned out. For national voluntary organisations, decision-making within the political system is at its most active when the Oireachtas is in session. Many groups pace their activities around these times of year, being less pressurised at other times (e.g. the summer) but preparing the way for the next stage. Even though they deal with difficult and serious issues, some groups have learned how to take time out to relax and to celebrate their successes.
- **Reconsider.** In the third case, organisations may wish to reconsider their attempts to influence the decision-makers. Have the objectives changed? Are they too ambitious? Are the outcomes worth the energy being expended? Are other priorities within the organisation suffering? In order to make a bigger impact, is more information needed at this stage? Is more money needed to get the message across? Are there ways of repackaging and representing proposals in new and more exciting ways? Are there ways of consulting members, friends and supporters more effectively on these problems? Some voluntary organisations and community groups have re-launched their campaigns with fresh information and research, with new branding, logos, fresh information material and a different approach.

Some costs of influencing the decision-makers

Research	Telephones, internet, e-mail
Headed paper, graphics	Postage
Campaign documents, supporting and promotional material	Stationery
Computers, printers	Newsletter
Photocopiers	Annual report
Supplies for computers - toner, ink cartridges, paper	Subscriptions to books, reports and publications
	Hiring rooms for public events

3.7 Networking and coalition-building

One of the great strengths of voluntary organisations and community groups is their ability to network, work horizontally and share with one another in their attempts to influence decision makers and policy makers. In a competitive policy-making environment, alliances make more and more sense in sharing personnel, resources and opportunities to lobby. The community pillar of the national social partnership agreement is an example of what voluntary and community organisations can achieve by working together.

There are several reasons why voluntary organisations and community groups network, build coalitions and share their experiences. Some coalitions can be deliberately temporary, others long - enduring. There are several reasons for forming coalitions:

- To establish a collective voice to speak on an issue;
- To neutralise potential opposition;
- To win broad support for a cause;
- To create the impression - indeed, the reality - of a campaign that has a very broad base of support;
- To share resources - human, financial, organisational.

Other organisations are generally prepared to be supportive of campaigns. Officials and public representatives will often ask themselves: "How big is this campaign?" An indication that it has widespread support can encourage them towards a new policy. By building a broad coalition behind an issue, voluntary organisations and community groups are better able to share their experiences, their knowledge of who to contact and where and how to survive difficulties.

Making policy documents work for you

Who should it be sent to?

Is there a mailing list?

What impact would you like it to have made in a year or so?

Should it be sent to other groups, organisations, the media, the libraries?

Should you post it on your website?

Case Study

Using legal, appeals and administrative procedures for change

The Free Legal Advice Centres, FLAC, used a variety of legal, appeals and administrative procedures in their work to ease hardship for people denied social welfare because of the Habitual Residency Condition (HRC). This had required people to be legally in the country for a minimum period of two years to qualify for social welfare. In particular, FLAC assisted parents appealing decisions in Child Benefit cases, as this formerly universal payment was denied to parents in situations where it was deemed that they do not satisfy the HRC.

FLAC's approach included:

- Representing parents in initial applications and appeals
- Informing other NGOs and relevant partners about the report of the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe regarding the illegality, under the European Code of Social Security, of requiring substantial periods of residence for citizens of the European Economic Area to comply with the HRC;
- Exchanging information with other NGOs working in the sector about individual appeals decisions where child benefit has been awarded to parents. Such decisions are not usually published, but FLAC and others have used a number of positive decisions in the hope of inspiring more enlightened decisions by other appeals officers later.

As a result:

- The two-year residency requirement for HRC is no longer relied upon and the focus has been shifted to another of the five existing criteria, the 'centre of interest', in which the applicant is required to establish that his or her centre of interest is in Ireland. This applied initially to people from the European Economic Area but was extended later to non-EEA citizens.
- A number of parents have now been awarded child benefit, breaching the blanket denial and opening up the possibility to others.

It is very difficult to influence decision-makers unless they are persuaded that there is some underlying public concern 'out there'. The level of media interest in a topic is often the yardstick by which this is judged.

3.8 Media

Voluntary organisations and community groups wishing to influence policy and decision-makers will, sooner or later, find themselves working directly with the media and devising their own set of publications to influence others. Many handbooks have been written about public relations and working with the media. This guide concentrates on media work where it relates most closely to influencing policy, namely:

- Influencing decisions and policies through the media; and
- Assembling a media list.

Most voluntary organisations and community groups in the business of influencing policy find that they work with the media from time to time (only very well entrenched and powerful insider groups can avoid working with the media altogether). Expressed another way, it is very difficult to influence decision-makers unless they are persuaded that there is some underlying public concern 'out there'. The level of media interest in a topic is often the yardstick by which this is judged. More positively, the media can focus and intensify interest in and concern about an issue, to the extent that decision and policy-makers feel obliged to respond. Work with the media can add considerable weight to the work being done to influence decision-makers. It reminds them that the organisation is still there and looking for change. Sustained criticism by a voluntary organisation or community group in the media can be very effective in securing change, although the group concerned may be quite unaware of the effect it is having within the system. Continued media activity can undermine confidence in bad policies and create a climate for fresh solutions.

Influencing decisions and policies through the media

The media have a key role in shaping the political agenda and how it is perceived. Politicians in particular are enormously conscious of how they present themselves and in turn how they are portrayed by and in

Checklist for assessing progress

How does the group:

Review its work?

Consult its members, friends, supporters?

Reconsider its objectives?

Slow down? Take time out?

Celebrate success?

the media. They are aware that a negative perception of them, or their party, can have a damaging effect on their future electoral prospects. They wish to be seen as capable, confident, sensitive, caring people. They pay considerable attention to what is being said and written about them in newspapers and on television and radio. Likewise, government departments, local authorities and state agencies like to see a positive image projected of themselves and their work. Although officials are generally not in a position to argue back in the same way, they are equally anxious to avoid an impression that they are out of touch, harsh or unresponsive to the needs of the community.

This atmosphere should create a favourable climate where voluntary organisations can make their case. But, despite these promising factors, voluntary and community organisations often find it difficult to interest the media in their stories, causes and problems; sustain that interest over time; and help keep their concerns on the political agenda.

There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, voluntary organisations are often seen to be 'worthy but dull', forever running fund-raising events, one more like the other and 'whinging' about their lack of money. In the midst of all this, the media sometimes find it difficult to see a policy issue, though there may well be one. Compared to the much greater numbers who cover business or party politics, the media have few correspondents dedicated to cover social action. Some have a poor appreciation of social policy, and issues get lost in the bigger battles over economic policy or the confrontations of the various political parties. Positively, though, a small number of correspondents and columnists do have a serious, professional interest in social issues.

Some community and voluntary organisations have made good use of the national media, the press, radio and television. Others have managed to get their case across to a range of specialised magazines, journals and periodicals. Community groups have opened up opportunities in local radio, which has high listenership rates and where they have been successful in getting the community perspective

Basic skills required for media work

- Writing a press release
- Knowing what is newsworthy
- Organizing a press conference
- Handling relationships with journalists
- Doing an interview for radio (or television)

Case Study

Changing the structures means changing the policies

Lifford/Clonleigh Resource Centre in Lifford, Co. Donegal worked with the Health Service Executive in Donegal to have a stronger focus on the needs of the local community in health services and policies. This was prompted by the establishment in the area of one of the pilot primary care teams in 2003. The primary instrument was the Lifford/Castlefinn Community Health Forum, which comprises representatives of community groups in the area, including representatives of disadvantaged groups and communities, with individuals also entitled to contribute. As a result, community health needs and priorities are now assessed, articulated, spelled out and transmitted to the health services. The HSE provided some community worker and secretarial support.

An important structural development was that forum representatives attend the meetings of the Primary Care Team which plans, designs and delivers community health services, including projects with the forum itself. The outcome has been focused development in the following areas:

- Parents and toddlers;
- Older people;
- Lone parents
- Transport;
- Youth; and
- Carers.

There have been further specific improvements in doctor practice times and locations; new projects on integrated care (diabetes and asthma); the extension of the primary care centre; and the recruitment of a social worker, occupational therapist and physiotherapist.

Lessons

- The value of a regular forum where community health needs can be, defined, expressed and prioritised;
- The importance of a structure whereby the outcomes can be fed back into decision-making within the health service, especially the primary care team, with a view to early response and improvements.

Choosing a good spokesperson or public relations officer (PRO) for the media is an important task for a voluntary or community organisation. The person should be selected for communication skills and is not necessarily the group's chairperson.



across. Coverage of activities by voluntary and community groups in provincial newspapers has risen in recent years. Other groups have been adept at forcing the political system to respond to their pressure and have got influential political commentators and news staff really interested in their issues. Some send in their own 'opinion pieces' to the newspapers where they are published.

Choosing a good spokesperson or public relations officer (PRO) for the media is an important task for a voluntary or community organisation. The person should be selected for communication skills and is not necessarily the group's chairperson. These skills may be divided into technical skills (e.g. ability to write to-the-point press releases, radio interviews) and personal skills (being personable to the media, having a sense of judgement about what to say and what not to say). Some voluntary organisations and community groups have extremely successful spokespersons, to the extent that they are invited to contribute to a wide range of radio or television programmes on issues much broader than the original cause where they started (e.g. chat shows, panel programmes). This can add to the group's reputation.

It is important to have a spokesperson who has the trust of the group, the authority to act and is comfortable doing media work. PROs cannot wait for the next committee meeting before deciding what to say to a journalist or not and may have to seize media opportunities at short notice. On the other hand, it is reasonable to expect that PROs be well briefed about what they may say and may not say and what is not the group's policy. Either way, there must be a clear understanding about the nature of the role and the work to be done. Having a good PRO or public face is an important investment for a voluntary organisation and it may be worth thinking of additional training, help or support for the person concerned.

There are many ways of working with the media. Some groups work in a very structured way, with a series of events to encourage media interest in their concerns over the year (e.g. annual report, annual conference). They plan the launches of the research reports carefully,

Ways of working with the media

- Press conferences
- Press releases
- Press briefings
- Photo events and opportunities
- Offering comments, interviews
- Proposing articles, features
- Seminars and conference events
- Launches of reports
- Ready-to-go stories and photos on the website

hold press conferences at particular points in the year and organise a calendar of events months ahead, specifically designed to attract media attention.

Other voluntary organisations and community groups are much more opportunist, issuing frequent comment through press releases, sending in reports and stories as they arise, stirring debate in the Letterstotheeditorsection, joining phone-ins, even telephoning a radio station on a quiet news evening and offering to do an interview there and then. Although this can be hard work, an issue which appears regularly or continuously in news or features, on radio and television, or in the specialised press, can create the impression of a strong groundswell of public opinion favouring change.

There is a range of important skills involved in media work. The main skills are:

- Targeting media work carefully (the Irish Times is read by decision-makers, but the Irish Independent has a big readership, especially in rural areas);
- Timing (calling a weekly local newspaper when it is first being written, not when the presses are already running);
- Contacting the right person (for radio, the producer, not the presenter);
- Having ready-to-go publicity material and a stock of photographs;
- Writing short, sharp copy with sharp, clear and simple messages that can be adapted quickly for the news pages.
- Recognising a good story and having a feel for what is newsworthy.

Case Study

Implementation: not as straightforward as it seems

Treoir, the organisation for unmarried parents and their families, welcomed the passing of the Status of Children Act, 1987 which came into force in 1988 and resulted in the abolition of the status of 'illegitimacy' which provided less rights to children born outside marriage. Treoir members were surprised that many government services seemed to be unaware that the Act had been passed, or of the implications for lone parents and their children.

A survey of member organisations found a picture of considerable confusion and misinformation. Accordingly, Treoir found themselves in a position of having to provide information and training on how the Act should be implemented. They organised workshops, printed (at their own expense) information leaflets about the Act, briefed social workers and wrote letters to the paper to explain the situation. It took some time for the Act to operate smoothly.

Lessons

- Don't presume that governments will put implementation systems in place.
- Anticipate the problem of implementation in advance.
- Think about how you can contribute to the process of implementation, including ensuring that governments face their responsibilities.

Media for voluntary organisations and community groups

Local papers

Local radio

National radio, television

National daily papers, Sunday newspapers

Specialised magazines, journals

International media

Case Study

Using 'the policy document' to make a difference

Writing and presenting a policy document may appear to be a routine task, but it's one of the most important things that a voluntary or community organisation can do. The Irish Childcare Policy Network (ICPN) was an initiative originally launched by the Border Counties Childcare Network (BCCN) - but its first task was to reach agreement and consensus across such a diverse sector as to what its aims should be. This took time, but it was achieved and gave the subsequent campaign its cohesion.

Since then, the Irish Childcare Policy Network (ICPN) has launched a series of policy documents explaining its case. These range from general policy documents to others designed around specific events e.g. the general election. The ICPN asked for and took in advice from policy experts in Britain and Ireland as to how it should present its case.

The standard format is for ICPN to state:

- Who the Irish Childcare Policy Network is. This is important for those who do not know.
- What its guiding principles, beliefs and objectives are, so people can understand 'where it is coming from';
- A list of its members. Readers will recognise names, making them more comfortable about the group.
- The general changes it seeks: a capitation grant for every child in pre-school; subsidised services; a quality development fund and a family support service;
- The specific changes it seeks, such as:
 - 1% of gross national product to go on childcare by 2014;
 - Free pre-school services for children for a year before school;
 - Extended maternity leave to 26 weeks.

Continued on page 75

Assembling a media list

For voluntary organisations wishing to influence policy, media work will have a number of angles. They must aim particularly at those forms of media most seen by policy-makers. They must target carefully. This may mean an emphasis on the specialised press, the broadsheet newspapers and niche radio and television programme. They must work hard on the policy dimension of their work, always emphasizing the policy implications arising from human interest stories. They must be able to get their story, their issue, their problems into a number of media and into many different corners on a very regular basis. Each will be another reminder of the need for action on the problem in question.

To do this, the first task is to bring together a media list. Once a group decides that it wishes to influence a policy or decision; has set down its proposals; and has a spokesperson, its next task may be to assemble a list of the media with which it wishes to work. In any media organisation, there are many branches (e.g. news, features, business, arts). Within each organisation, there will be particular individuals the organisation may wish to contact – such as the social affairs correspondent, or the political correspondent, or people who have regular columns. There is a media listing in the IPA Yearbook, while producers of each programme may be found in the RTE Guide.

Directory.

Some voluntary organisations and community groups may have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved through the media. Some media are more important than others. For most community groups, getting into the local papers and local radio is something they should expect to achieve. That may be all they need to do. They are unlikely to attract the interest of Sky Television and it may not be worth their while to try. Most national voluntary organisations will find themselves concentrating on the national press and radio. There has been a substantial growth in the specialised media in recent years and

Important attributes of a spokesperson

Understands the members of the group

Appreciates differences of opinion in the group

Is entirely familiar with the group's case and objectives

Is easy to reach, at home, at work or on a mobile. (It can be wasteful to build up interest in the media - but not be there when they call back).

some voluntary organisations have devoted efforts to getting coverage in them (for example, education magazines, women’s papers). Others have sent articles for publication in journals which they know are read extensively by decision-makers (for example, Administration, Studies).

An important aspect of working with the media is getting maximum value from the experience. Some voluntary organisations and community groups keep scrap-books of clippings of their coverage in the press (or videos or tapes of their television and radio appearances) and either use them in their annual report, in displays or send them on to some of the people they are trying to influence. In effect, it is an indirect but powerful way of saying ‘The media think we are important - you should too’. Keeping scrapbooks and tapes is always valuable for later reference purposes.

Finally, even groups which develop good media strategies can experience frustrations. Some good campaigns on policy issues may not get the attention they deserve or may get no attention. Sometimes, journalists in a hurry misunderstand important issues. Others can reinforce negative images of an area or its people, despite one’s best efforts to the contrary. As with all other aspects of attempting to change policy, persistence is essential and is likely to be rewarded.

3.9 Publications, newsletters

Newsletters, magazines and publications can play a crucial role in the way voluntary and community organisations influence policy. Although most newsletters start as a means of helping members of the group to keep in touch with each other, many evolve, in the course of time, into important ways of enabling organisations to define issues, keep up pressure and persuade other people to see their point of view. Many have very modest beginnings and develop into influential organs of opinion. Most are published quarterly, some more frequently. Good newsletters do not have to be glossy, but they must have a clear message and a sense of purpose, be well written and have a neat

Tips for writing a good press release

One page only

Your logo or headed paper at the top - quickly recognizable

Date and time issued

Your contact names and phone numbers at the bottom

Tell the story in your opening line - who, what, why, when and where (the five ‘w’s)

The most important news in the first paragraph

Information of decreasing importance in the second and third paragraph

Write it so it is ready to go straight to the news page

Include some quotable quotes ‘Speaking at the meeting, the chairperson, A.B. said...’

(Embargo date and time, if one is being used)

Continued from page 74

These are precise, measurable targets. Either you achieve them or you don’t. ICPN did not just say ‘we want more childcare’ but was very specific in outlining exactly what it thought was necessary. People in government know what is expected of them and what they are supposed to do. The message is reinforced by pithy sub-titles, like: ‘The Irish Childcare Policy Network - promoting increased government investment in children’s care and education’.

The policy documents are broken down under clear headings, such as ‘Key messages and recommendations’, so readers can inform themselves quickly. Its policy documents are generally short, listing, for example, four priority proposals. This is much more likely to make an impact than an apparently endless shopping list. The ICPN has also pressed for quality European-level standards. While these are desirable in themselves, they also mean that the organisation is more likely to be perceived as a professional contributor to the debate. ICPN has cited, in support, proposals and policies from bodies such as the National Economic and Social Forum and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as well as policies in Northern Ireland.

Although the campaign for childcare in Ireland still has a long way to run, some specific gains have been achieved. These include: one government department - the Office for the Minister for Children - being responsible, (responsibility was passed around up to five before); and extensions in maternity leave and parental leave.

Lessons

- An important, first function of a policy document is to achieve agreement in the voluntary and community organisations themselves.
- Be specific in what you are looking for.
- Look around, locally, nationally and internationally, for documents, help and advice;
- Presentation, clarity and brevity all matter.

Case Study

Using international law

Ireland ratified the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1992. The Convention requires the government to make a 5-yearly report on its progress in implementing the Convention to the UN committee on the Rights of the Child. There is provision within the system for voluntary and community organisations, referred to as Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), to make and then present a 'shadow report' to outline the issues from a non-governmental perspective.

The Children's Rights Alliance organised a consultative process that led to the production of an Irish NGO shadow report: *From Rhetoric to Rights*. Among other things, this drew attention to the high level of child poverty in Ireland. The UN examination procedure was for the Irish government to make its presentation in the autumn, but, in advance, the UN committee invited the Children's Rights Alliance to present the findings of its report *From Rhetoric to Rights* to the Committee in June, in Geneva, three months earlier. This was an intense three-hour session of presentation followed by a question and answer session. The Alliance outlined its concerns in many areas, such as child poverty and the system of direct provision for refugees and asylum seekers. The Alliance also organised, separately, a children's report created by children themselves, including a number of children from a background of extreme disadvantage (homelessness, refugees). A representative group of children had a private hearing with the committee.

In due course, the government came to make its presentation that September. The delegation was led by the minister responsible. This was a day-long public hearing, attended, among others, by the Alliance and the press. The Irish government had to respond to many of the issues raised by *From Rhetoric to rights* and the presentation of the alliance three months earlier.

Later, the UN committee came to issue its conclusions and recommendations. These impressed on the government the need to take more effective action on child poverty. The Children's Rights Alliance continues to cite these committee recommendations in its pre-budget submissions and media work to spur government action. Over the years, the UN process has led to a number of specific changes in Ireland, such as the introduction of a National Children's strategy and an Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

Continued on page 77

presentation. Many organisations now do electronic newsletters, which can be composed and sent out quite quickly and at less cost than traditional printed newsletters, while some do both.

Newsletters enable voluntary organisations and community groups to explain the issues and problems as they see them; to create a sense of who they are, what they are doing and why people should listen to them; and to report on the progress of their campaigns. Newsletters can be very effective in commending politicians and officials who support and help their campaign. Conversely, adverse publicity in such a newsletter can have quite an effect in unsettling people. Internally, they can be an excellent way of involving people in a campaign.

Good newsletters can - and should - take some time to prepare, write, design and lay out. Printing and postage costs can make them moderately costly (though several defray costs by getting in subscriptions). Nevertheless, they can be a cost-effective means of keeping an issue on the political agenda; reminding officials and public representatives that the issue which concerns them has not gone away; iterating and reiterating the policies that must be changed; and demonstrating that the organisation is on top of the issue. Good newsletters will carry news of the progress a campaign is making, provide interesting information and stimulate new support. Newsletters can have a positive effect in mobilizing members and other voluntary organisations. Some groups get the most out of their newsletters by using them to publish details of reports and research that they would otherwise have to publish separately. Others send their newsletters into key media contacts - such as national newspapers, provincial press and local radio - encouraging them to take up the news and views published, which they often do.

Good newsletters carry news - preferably fresh, original information about the issues which concern the group. Good newsletters carry editorial opinion, which should be labelled 'Editorial', a space where the organisation may formally express its point of view (This is the single part most likely to be noticed by the other media). Photographs

Who gets your newsletter?

Your members?

Other voluntary and community organisations?

Friends and sympathisers?

Public representatives? Their advisors?

Officials in local and national government, semi-state bodies?

The media?

can be helpful, be they commissioned by the organisation concerned or bought from agencies (political parties will oblige with photographs of their public representatives). After a while, the newsletter will find itself quoted elsewhere and be relied on as an important source of information and organ of opinion. Some organisations do not get the most out of their newsletters and sometimes use their scarce resources to explain, without comment, government decisions and schemes when there is plenty of official information available in any case.

Related to newsletters, annual reports have an important role in the media strategy of voluntary organisations and community groups.

Using annual reports effectively

Although most voluntary organisations publish annual reports, not all use them effectively as a means of influencing decision makers. Many organisations present dull, self-congratulatory annual reports with boring staff photographs and pages of accounting tables, moreover spending considerable resources in doing so, and missing a great opportunity to present their case for change. Although annual reports are primarily published in order to provide a means of accountability for the organisation to the public and the tax-payer (and it is important that they do that), they can also have an important role to play in the work of winning friends and influencing people. New documentation, photographs illustrating issues of current concern and information presented in a lively and hard-hitting manner in an annual report can make it a strong force for change. Good annual reports also have a strong slogan reflecting the issue of the year, with 'annual report' in the subtitle.

3.10 Mailing lists

Most voluntary organisations and community groups neglect the mailing list as a tool. Looking after the mailing list is considered one of the least desirable chores, one attended to only occasionally and normally by a junior person in the organisation.

Getting the most from the annual report

Does it convey the image of an organisation that wants to influence policy?

Does it analyze the situation facing its clients and what can be done to make it better?

Does it present the organisation's main policy objectives?

Does it remind the authorities of what is expected of them?

Does it present fresh research and information?

Continued from page 76

Lessons

- Although they may seem very distant, international law and conventions can be a useful way of putting pressure on the government to address issues of poverty.
- The process does require a certain level of organisation, policy skills and mobilisation, but can yield a good return in policy changes.
- International obligations provide strong incentives for governments to 'get their house in order' and make reforms by particular dates - which provide opportunities for voluntary and community groups to press their policies.
- Although processes like these appear to be adversarial and confrontational, they can actually be very effective in opening up channels between voluntary and community groups, on the one hand, and government departments on the other. Governments normally don't like to be seen to be publicly at odds with voluntary and community organisations. They can open up a constructive dialogue.
- The real test of the effectiveness of the international recommendations is for NGOs in Ireland to continue to use them to support their policy work, as the alliance still does.



Case Study

The brown envelope campaign

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) decided on a novel approach to promote its campaign to improve social welfare for women. In particular, the NWC member organisations sought improvements in four distinct areas: pensions for women; a change in qualified adult status (so that women could qualify for social welfare in their own right rather than as dependents); an improved situation for women working on family farms and businesses; and changes in provisions on parenting. All of this was carefully researched by Mary Murphy in *A woman's model for social welfare reform*. The NWC ran focus groups around the country to progress the campaign.

Rather than embark on another march or demonstration, the focus groups recommended that there be a standard letter, with the four demands, signed individually by women all over the country, giving their names and addresses at the end. Each would be put in a brown envelope and given in to the Minister for Finance. Brown envelopes were topical at the time, because tribunals investigating corruption had been learning of the role of brown envelopes in politics. It was an eye-catching idea.

Eventually, 11,500 brown envelopes were collected, each with an individual letter in it for the Minister for Finance. Sacks of them were handed in at the Department of Finance, with many photographers present. Other politicians turned up in support. A Fine Gael senator introduced a debate on the women's proposals. The outcome was positive. The proposals on pensions, farms and businesses were included in the subsequent *Programme for government*. The proposals on qualified adults were included in the green paper on pensions and some of the parenting proposals were included in the government announcement of new schemes to assist lone parents. Officials in the Department of Social and Family Affairs told the NWC that they had been seeking changes like this from the Department of Finance - but the brown envelope campaign had helped them to make their case.

Continued on page 79

This could be a mistake. In reality, the mailing list may be one of its most important tools. One may even say that an organisation is only as good as its mailing list and the last time it was revised. In effect, the mailing list is the organisation's statement of who it wishes to influence in the political system. It should contain the contact details of all the people in the decision-making apparatus at local and national level; supporters, friends and fellow-travellers; the media; as well as one's own members. Some organisations break down their membership list according to the type of publication they receive, for example, the newsletter, annual reports, research reports, appeals and so on.

Looking after the mailing list is a responsible task which must be attended to regularly and at a high level. Alert voluntary organisations and community groups add people who have spoken in the media on their issue, public representatives who express an interest and other people who they feel ought to be on it. They are always on the look-out for other people who they think they should be reaching. They routinely add people who come to their organisation looking for information. Sometimes the person responsible for the list passes it around to committee members from time to time, asking them to check it for accuracy and changes.

Voluntary and community organisations must be vigilant as to civil servants or local government officials who move from one section to another or from one department to another. They must follow politics and watch when the opposition parties reshuffle their various spokespersons or change their spokespersons in the Seanad. In dealing with the media, they must watch which specialised correspondents have changed their assignments, or programmes which have changed their name or even gone off the air. All this is part of keeping up to date on the job. Looking at it another way round, sending out mailings to people who have changed career, politicians who have passed away or to defunct newspapers or long-gone radio programmes creates a bad impression and is wasteful. But the more a mailing list is checked and passed around to a wide group, the less likely this will be to happen.

How often do you check your mailing list?

- Every week?
- Every month?
- Every year?
- Never?

Who checks the mailing list?

- One person?
- The whole committee?

3.11 Information strategy

A key issue for voluntary and community groups wishing to influence the decision-making process is to get useful information on the groups they are dealing with. Investing in acquiring information is an important preliminary step in influencing the political and administrative process.

Voluntary organisations may wish to give consideration to what they expect their on-going information needs to be. Several groups make a big sweep for information at the start of their work to influence policy - but neglect to take out subscriptions to ensure that they continue to stay up to date. Others adopt the approach of 'Get it if it's free'. This has the double disadvantage of acquiring free information which may be of limited value and passing over quality information which costs some money but which may be essential for any proposals for change to succeed. Although some types of documents may be free (e.g. annual reports of organisations or state agencies), there are many sources of information which are worth going to some trouble to obtain or which are worth paying for. It may be useful for voluntary organisations and community groups to be more strategic and:

- Consider their information needs both now and over the next number of months or years;
- Draw up a list of worthwhile publications which should be requested or subscribed to over this period of time;
- Set aside storage space and devise a cataloguing system so that this information can be accessible to the organisation and its members;
- Allocate a budget accordingly;
- Have someone responsible for making sure that incoming information is then circulated within the organisation.

Next the guide examines where one can obtain basic information on the political and administrative system in Ireland; where one can

Continued from page 78

Lessons

- Thorough research was the starting point.
- The Department of Finance was targeted because it ultimately decides all resources and financial issues.
- The NWCI made four concrete, specific demands - not an endless shopping list.
- The campaign was a great way to mobilise people. Although it was a national campaign, the brown envelopes with their individual letters were organised locally. It was especially effective in involving women who would probably not go on a march or a demonstration, but would be more than prepared to sign an individual letter.

Revising the mailing list

Will you revise it after the next general, local or European election?

Will you revise it the next time a minister is moved or changed?

Will you revise it when the new schedule of radio programmes comes in?

Will you include the new Sunday paper on the list?

Notethatifyouhaveanelectronicmailinglist, youneedtocheckthatyoucomplywiththe requirements of the Data Protection Act.

A key issue for voluntary and community groups wishing to influence the decision-making process is to get useful information on the groups they are dealing with. Investing in acquiring information is an important preliminary step in influencing the political and administrative process.

obtain on-going information; important information points; and information on the European Union.

Information on the political and administrative system

This guide provides only an outline of the political and administrative system in Ireland and how it operates. Many voluntary and community organisations may wish to learn much more about how the system functions and how policy questions are decided.

There are several ways of doing so.

- Texts on the Irish political system, both for students and for the general reader.
- The Institute of Public Administration. This is the national organisation committed to the study and improvement of public administration in Ireland. It publishes books about public administration, issues a journal (Administration), has a library, runs training courses and is well known for its annual Yearbook of public administration in Ireland. Its Yearbook provides full details on national and local administration, the media, business and commerce, as well as details of professional and voluntary organisations. It names officials and their responsibilities. Nearly all people in government and the public service have a copy on their desks, which shows how valuable it is to them. It is not overstating it to say that without it, one is not serious about influencing policy. It is expensive - and well worth it. Membership of the institute is open to individuals interested in public administration.
- Government departments and agencies. They provide a large volume of user-friendly information on their websites, rated among the best in Europe.

Most government, semi-state, advisory and similar bodies publish annual reports. These are normally available, free of charge, on request from the organisation concerned (their addresses may be found in the IPA Yearbook) or may be downloaded from their

Government and politics

John Coakley & Michael Gallagher:
Politics in the Republic of Ireland, 4th
edition, PSAI press.

The Yearbook

> The Institute of Public Administration publishes a comprehensive annual Yearbook and diary, which provides a comprehensive listing of national government, civil service, local government, state agencies, media, voluntary and community organisations: Institute of Public Administration, 57-9 Lansdowne rd, Dublin 4, tel 668 6233, fax 668 9135, information@ipa.ie, www.ipa.ie

websites. Most annual reports provide details of the members of the board, the functions of the organisation, how it fulfils its responsibilities and a list of the organisation's publications. Those which award grants normally provide a full range of details. Some state bodies also publish strategic plans, periodicals, magazines, occasional reports, policy documents and their own research. If still unable to find the right information, voluntary and community organisations should simply telephone the appropriate body or agency and ask. Most are more than happy to help.

All the discussions of the Dáil and Seanad are recorded and published, including written answers to questions. Debates are normally posted the following day on the website and the printed version within a couple of weeks after the day of the sitting concerned in reports. They provide a verbatim account of all the debates. This record is valuable in recording the commitments given by ministers. One can tell what interests concern individual deputies and senators and judge who makes the most useful contributions. They can also be the source of up-to-date research and information. Small voluntary organisations and community groups may find it difficult to set aside the time to read parliamentary reports but they are essential for serious attempts to influence decision-making over time. Several libraries keep bound volumes of the debates (with indexes). An archive of all debates since 1919 has now been posted on the Oireachtas website and is available on CD.

Important information points

All government departments have press and information officers (including the Oireachtas). So too do some state bodies and agencies. Their primary role is to work with the media but they will also help voluntary organisations and community groups with enquiries. Many government departments and state agencies have their own libraries. Whilst in most cases these are designed to meet the internal needs of staff, some are open to outside users.

The principal omnibus information service is Government Publications. This has a walk-in office in Molesworth st, Dublin but takes written

Small voluntary organisations and community groups may find it difficult to set aside the time to read parliamentary reports but they are essential for serious attempts to influence decision-making over time.



Top government sites

Oireachtas: www.irlgov.ie/oireachtas

Government: www.irlgov.ie

The Central Statistics Office is the principal information point for statistical information in the state. The CSO publishes the census, labour force survey, household budget survey, unemployment figures and a vast range of national economic and social statistics.



orders through its address in Claremorris, co Mayo. Most government publications are available there and staff will search the catalogues to try to help callers with requests for particular information.

The level of documentation provided by local administration in Ireland is much less than central government and there is no national point at which their publications are distributed. Enquiries must be made with each appropriate body. Some local libraries will provide information about the work of their local authority.

Three state agencies, the Citizens Information Board, the Combat Poverty Agency and Pobal have important roles as providers of information. The Citizens Information Board has, quite apart from a network of Citizens Information Centres all around the country, a team of information officers. It provides bulletins on social policy issues (e.g. Voice, Relate) and offers an information portal to a range of official information (www.citizensinformation.ie). The Combat Poverty Agency has a number of publications, a magazine Action on Poverty Today and a library on poverty issues (www.combatpoverty.ie). Pobal has also assembled a substantial volume of information, especially with a local focus (www.pobal.ie).

For those with access to them, university libraries are, by definition, important sources of information. The universities are copyright libraries and are required to obtain and keep all books published in Ireland (for Dublin University (Trinity College) this applies to Britain as well). Universities also hold theses submitted by students, which may be helpful if one's area of interest is not otherwise well researched. Finally, many public libraries will have reference sections on Irish government, politics and administration.

The Central Statistics Office is the principal information point for statistical information in the state. The CSO publishes the census, labour force survey, household budget survey, unemployment figures and a vast range of national economic and social statistics. Enquiries may be made to the CSO office in either Dublin or Cork. Details

Keeping up with the Dáil and Seanad

> Dáil and Seanad debates are available on the web at www.oireachtas.ie

In paper format, they may be bought individually from Government Publications, Molesworth st, Dublin 2 or by annual subscription from Government Publications, Mail Order Section, Unit 20, Lakeside Retail Park, Claremorris, Co. Mayo, posted to one's office or home

> The archive of debates may now be found at: www.oireachtas-debates.gov.ie

> National newspapers cover debates in the Dáil and Seanad. However, such coverage is often limited to important or contentious national issues before going-to-print deadlines and may be of limited value to voluntary and community organisations interested in detailed discussions on particular social issues which affect them. Likewise, RTE television and radio cover key debates. Check in the weekly RTE Guide.

> The Combat Poverty Agency provides regular bulletins on coverage of issues of poverty and social exclusion in the Oireachtas, called DáilBrief. This is irregular, coming out when the Dáil and Seanad are in session and is available only on e-mail. There is no charge. Contact the agency and ask to be put on the mailing list. info@combatpoverty.ie

of CSO regular weekly and monthly information releases may be requested or may be viewed on the website (www.cso.ie). For many state agencies, advisory bodies and researchers, the Central Statistics Office is often a first port of call. The CSO also assembles localised information in what are called its small area statistics (> 3.2 above).

Information on the European Union

The output of information by the European Union nowadays is huge and it is sometimes difficult to know where to start. From the point of view of voluntary organisations and community groups, perhaps the most useful guidelines are as follows:

- For people wishing to obtain walk-in information, the European Commission has an information centre in Dublin, which provides information sheets and deals with enquiries.
- The main university libraries are termed European Documentation Centres, which mean that they hold all EU publications. European Documentation Centres must be open to European citizens on request. EDCs may be found at University Colleges Dublin, Cork and Galway; in St Patrick's College, Maynooth; Dublin University (Trinity College); the University of Limerick; Queen's University Belfast; and the University of Ulster in Coleraine.
- Obtaining information through the internet is probably the fastest, simplest most comprehensive and satisfactory method. The European institutions have invested considerable time and effort into providing comprehensive websites with news, documents, reports and other information. The best way to do this is to go to the universal website, called the 'Europa' site: <http://europa.eu>

This then offers people choices for the different European institutions. For those interested in social policy issues, the most useful approach is to go the Commission: <http://europa.eu.int/comm> and then the directorate general responsible for social affairs: http://europa.eu/comm/employment_social/index

One may even say that an organisation is only as good as its mailing list and the last time it was revised. In effect, the mailing list is the organisation's statement of who it wishes to influence in the political system.

Some useful addresses


Combat Poverty Agency,
Bridgewater Centre
Conyngham rd, Islandbridge, Dublin 8
Tel 670 6746, fax 670 6760,
info@combatpoverty.ie,
www.combatpoverty.ie

Citizens Information Board
www.citizensinformation.ie


Pobal www.pobal.ie

Central Statistics Office
Skehard rd , Cork
Tel 021.453 5000, fax 021.453 5555,
information@cso.ie, www.cso.ie

Also at: Ardee rd, Rathmines, Dublin 6,
Tel 497 7144, fax 497 2360

 See information sources, Directory.

Voluntary organisations and community groups seriously interested in taking part in influencing developments in Europe are advised to join or take part in some way in the work of European networks which are most appropriate for their field of activity.

- Voluntary organisations and community groups seriously interested in taking part in influencing developments in Europe are advised to join or take part in some way in the work of European networks which are most appropriate for their field of activity. 200 such networks now exist and they can be the most economical way of following issues and gaining access to European information. The most helpful here may be the European Anti-Poverty Network (www.eapn.org) and the European Platform of Social NGOs (www.socialplatform.org).
 - Voluntary organisations and community groups which expect to have regular contact with the European institutions are advised to obtain some directories of the principal officials and their responsibilities. The Commission publishes its own inter-institutional directory and a number of commercial directories are also available. Each directorate general normally has what is called an 'organigram' which is a tree diagram of all the key officials and their phone numbers.
-  For further details on information sources for the European Union, see Directory.

Information on Europe

The Europa site: www.europe.eu

European Union in Ireland

> European Commission, 18 Dawson st, Dublin 2; tel 634 1111, fax 623 1112; www.ec.europa.eu/ireland

European Commission, Windsor House, 9-15 Bedford st, Belfast BT2 7EG, tel 028.90.240708, fax 028.90.248241, www.europa.eu.int/unitedkingdom

> European Parliament, 43 Molesworth st, Dublin 2, tel 605 7900, fax 605 7999, www.europarl.ie

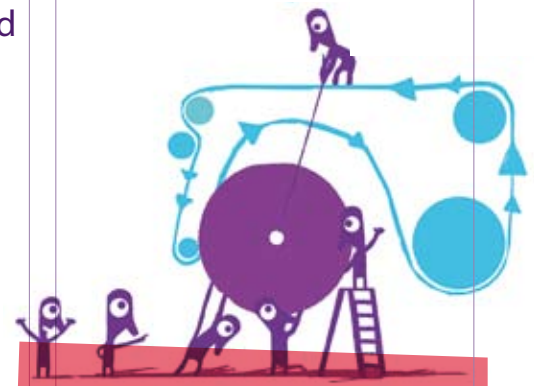
> For more details on the European Union, see Directory.

4.

This chapter looks at how voluntary organisations and community groups may best plan their approach to influencing policy and decision-makers, such as:

- Identifying where and how policy is made;
- Persuading people that a problem exists;
- Shaping the response of government;
- Ensuring the decision is implemented;
- Maintaining influence on the political and administrative system;
- Working with public representatives;
- Working with public bodies; and
- Working with the consultative process.

APPLYING THE STRATEGY



Where to start

Is this a local matter or a national matter, or both?

Who (if anyone) has the legal responsibility here?

Who is also involved in the problem?

Should we approach officials, or elected representatives, or both?

If we approach officials, who is the appropriate person? At what level?

Who do we want to do what?

Administration and politics in Ireland are a complex interplay of government departments, ministers, civil servants, politicians, the media, public opinion, political parties, the social partners, local government, advisory bodies, lobby groups and semi-state agencies.



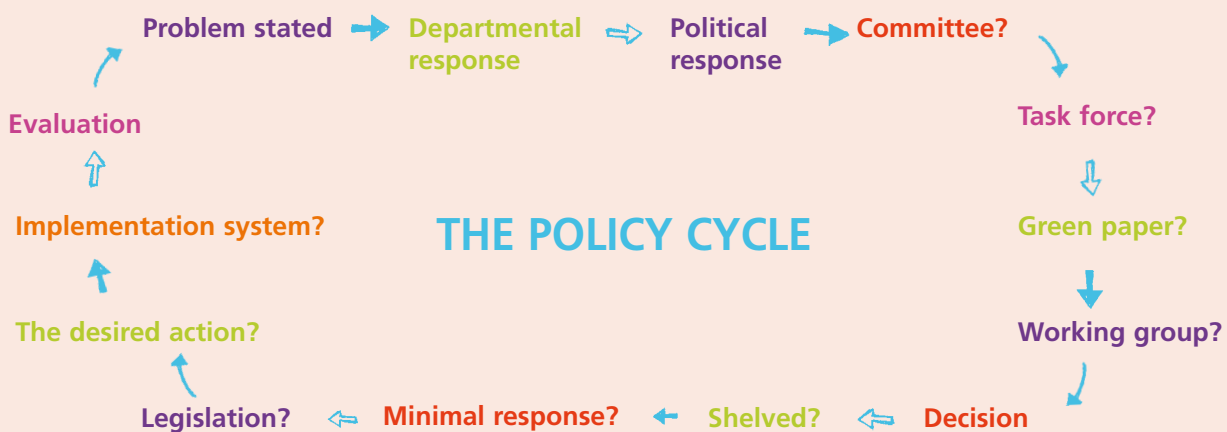
4.1 Where and how policy is made

There is no straightforward answer to the question: How is policy made in Ireland? In theory, there is something called the policy-making cycle. Issues are defined; government considers options; a decision is taken; monitoring and implementation systems are set up; and, when the policy is evaluated, an improved policy is introduced and the cycle begins again. In reality, nothing is ever as neat and tidy as this, although some of these key stages can often be discerned.

From the point of view of community and voluntary organisations, to get a concern successfully addressed by the political and administrative system may seem a daunting task. With so many centres of power and decision-making, knowing which one to identify and prioritising where to start is critical.

Administration and politics in Ireland are a complex interplay of government departments, ministers, civil servants, politicians, the media, public opinion, political parties, the social partners, local government, advisory bodies, lobby groups and semi-state agencies. To influence decision-making successfully involves working with many of these different groups. Few succeed by working with one or two of them alone, but by building up sympathy and support in a number of places simultaneously. Attempts to influence decision-making which concentrate on Dáil deputies but which do not attempt to reach the relevant government departments may be unlikely to succeed; and vice versa. Effective lobbyists will make sure that semi-state bodies which have an interest in the matter that concerns them are, if not on their side, at least not against them. They will also work hard to ensure that their issue has been well aired in the media, that it has been portrayed sympathetically there and that a climate of opinion has been created which favours change.

Most political analysts take the view that for change to take place, a number of bodies must be influenced and a climate must be created where the benefits of the change proposed are considered to outweigh



the disadvantages. Political change often happens when the cost of not changing becomes greater than the cost of changing. Several parts of the decision-making apparatus must be convinced of the need for change in order for it to happen.

Deciding on where exactly to concentrate one's work is one of the most difficult challenges. To complicate things further, parts of the political and administrative system may very well be sympathetic to a cause proposed by a voluntary or community organisation - but other parts may not be. There are many cases where a government has privately favoured a change, but where it has been afraid of the strength of opposition from well-entrenched lobby groups which could make that change electorally expensive. There are times when members of the Oireachtas favour a change, but government departments do not and vice versa. Sometimes central government may favour a change, but local government may not and vice versa. Even within government departments and local administration, there may be contradictions as well. Some officials may support and welcome changes proposed by voluntary and community organisations, but some of their colleagues may not, or other departments may not. Thus pressure groups must work in an environment that may fluctuate and exhibit many contradictory features. Although we tend to imagine that the government has 'one view' on an issue, this is often not the case.

Some groups spread themselves very widely in their approach to the decision-making system. They do not just go to the obvious places – such as government departments and the minister responsible - important though that is. They also ask a wide range of deputies and senators (sometimes receiving support from individuals they least expect). They build up support among councillors and the local authorities. They ask the youth wings of political parties to endorse their view. They ask trade unions to support their campaign by passing a motion and sending it on to the appropriate authorities. Within months, their issue has started to pop up everywhere and a climate has been created where change becomes a possibility. Yet, where they will

Most political analysts take the view that for change to take place, a number of bodies must be influenced and a climate must be created where the benefits of the change proposed are considered to outweigh the disadvantages.

What groups can ask government to do

New legislation

Statutory instruments, ministerial orders, government circulars

New resources; or moving resources from one area to another

Exhortation, education, training

New or changed consultative procedures, which bring in a new range of actors

Financial incentives

Administrative changes, improved co-ordination

Introduce, change the means of implementation

New or changed services

Perhaps the most difficult stage of getting access to decision-makers is persuading decision-makers that a problem exists in the first place and that they need to accept responsibility for it.

achieve the crucial breakthrough is not always obvious - and it may be where it is least expected.

4.2 Persuading people that a problem exists

Policy-making is a dynamic process in which a range of actors come together to make, unmake, change or reverse a decision. Perhaps the most difficult stage of getting access to decision-makers is persuading decision-makers that a problem exists in the first place and that they need to accept responsibility for it. The work of government, the Oireachtas and politicians is already an overburdened one in which the system is trying to handle many more issues than its resources can manage. Trying to get yet another issue on to the crowded policy-making map is often the biggest hurdle a group may face. Once the centres of power come to accept that the problem is one which should be addressed, the next most difficult stage is to define the issue in such a way that the system can cope with it and the right options can be considered for its solution.

The most crucial people in any given issue are not always obvious - sometimes it is a minister, sometimes an official, sometimes elected representatives, occasionally a ministerial advisor, sometimes a shifting balance between them. Voluntary organisations and community groups will need to spend some time trying to assess exactly who are the most critical people to address. This can be very difficult at times, for public agencies can be quite plausible in attributing problems to other parts of 'the system'. Voluntary organisations and community groups often face the serious issue of identifying who they think should be responsible so as to pursue the appropriate authority accordingly.

A critical stage in any attempt to influence policy is the first time it is discussed by decision-makers. Many voluntary and community organisations become frustrated when their issue is first aired, debated or discussed - whether that be in the health board, the county

Stages of a policy change for policy-makers

Acceptance that a problem exists

Defining what the issue is

Considering a series of actions that responds to the problem or the issue

Anticipating the legislative and resource implications

Considering other views, opposition

Appointment of committees, task forces etc

Taking the decision

Carrying it out

Implementing, monitoring the change

Evaluation

council chamber, a state advisory body or the Oireachtas. After all, “Nothing happened”, they say. “They talked about the problem, but they never did anything”, they complain. “They waffled on and we got nowhere”.

In fact, to get an issue debated is the first and best sign of progress in influencing decision-making. It means that the group’s issue has, maybe at last, been recognised as important - more important than many other competing and pressing concerns. Once a minister, deputy, senator, official makes a statement about the issue, it goes on the record. This gives the group an opening to go back to the person concerned and make a challenge (or congratulate and encourage future action). Officials and public representatives are often quite taken aback to be contacted about something they have said and may be prepared to agree to a meeting to clear the air. Groups can use this as an opportunity to build a more constructive relationship, especially with people with whom they might have disagreed.

Parliamentary debates can be, especially when contributors have been given useful information by voluntary and community organisations, a useful means of consolidating some policies, or sowing doubt about others. A minister who is given a hard time in a debate, or an official given a difficult reception in local administration will remember the experience for some time. Well-briefed public representatives can cross examine ministers quite effectively, asking a minister about particular information, or a relevant report, or knowledge of other particular facts and so on. When this happens, ministers and their departments know they will have to deal more thoughtfully with the organisation behind the briefings. Some voluntary organisations and community groups even keep records of quotes of what ministers, officials or public representatives said about particular issues or their commitments to them, to remind them months or years later at a suitable opportunity.

Many groups often lose heart, when, after fighting hard to get an issue on the agenda, there is then an unsatisfactory debate;

No government department wishes to initiate a change that will cause problems or precipitate knock-on effects with other departments or lobby groups or cause unintended consequences.

Decision-makers say they listen to people who...

Know exactly what they want

Make their case early in a policy process

Recognise the difference between what can be achieved in the short, medium and long term

Are up to date, know their field and are on top of their issue

Provide regular and always accurate information

Approach officials at the appropriate level (neither too high up nor too low down)

Appreciate that there is another side to the argument

Know the limits of what they can achieve

Are to the point

Leave a page behind each time.

> Details of members of the Oireachtas are available at www.oireachtas.ie and some have individual websites.

> Details of councillors are available from individual county or city council websites or from www.environ.ie/en/localgovernment/localgovernmentadministration/localauthorities/

Quick and immediate change is difficult to achieve. In an over-burdened decision-making system and with finite resources, government lacks the flexibility and capability to do so, unless there is an urgent crisis.

contributors show they don't understand the issue; and the reaction of the political system is negative or complacent. But, in practice, the statements made and the response given can serve as the basis for the next stage of the work of persuading people further to one's point of view. Ministers are very conscious, especially in the Oireachtas, that they must not mislead the house over matters of fact, however unintentionally.

4.3 Shaping the response of government

The authorities, in general, and governments, in particular, often take some time to respond to problems and issues in a variety of ways. The thing they are least likely to do is to provide an immediate response that fully meets the demands of the lobbying group. Quick and immediate change is difficult to achieve. In an over-burdened decision-making system and with finite resources, government lacks the flexibility and capability to do so, unless there is an urgent crisis. Governments tend to put problems 'under review'; delegate civil servants to write reports; or appoint committees to work at a problem. Most reviews are purely internal but may lead to a report, a policy document, or a even a green paper or a white paper. Other review bodies bring in people from outside the public service and attempt to build a consensus around an issue.

The process of 'review' is not necessarily a cynical exercise. Governments know that they cannot produce an immediate response. They often have limited in-house expertise. They want to look at all the options; predict the costs and benefits involved; try to get a consensus between all the actors involved; and bring in as wide a range of expert opinion as possible. Often, they are genuinely unsure of the best course of action. Whilst committees, task forces and working groups have certainly been appointed as delaying actions, it would be a mistake to always view them as an exercise in manipulation. Although they can be delaying actions, they can also be used by voluntary organisations to push through much-needed changes (see case studies).

What a member of the Oireachtas can do

Ask a question (priority, oral, written) (Dáil only)

Raise a matter on the adjournment of the house

Introduce, speak on a motion

Introduce a Bill

Put down amendments to a government Bill

Arrange a meeting with a minister

Make representations to a minister

Write to a state agency or any other body

Introduce a constitutional amendment (Dáil only)

Speak on a Bill, motion, or issue.

> Leinster House 6183000 (also LoCall Dáil 1890 337889, Seanad 1890 732623). Public relations office 6183066. Callers who know the extension of their member should dial 618 and then the four-digit number.

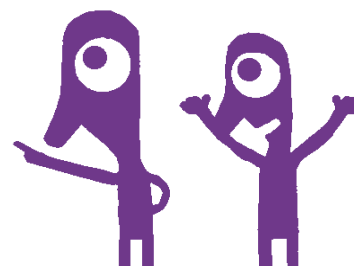
At this stage, the perspective of other groups becomes important. Although pressure groups are not obliged to consider other people's points of view, this is not true of government. No government department wishes to initiate a change that will cause problems or precipitate knock-on effects with other departments or lobby groups or cause unintended consequences.

Governments are, (when making a policy decision), always conscious of the likely reaction of their supporters, on the one hand, and the opposition on the other. They have an eye to the broader public reaction - is this something they can take credit for, or will it get them involved in a mess from which they cannot extricate themselves? Although government decisions should be based on the objective realities of a problem, the political consequences and public perceptions are also important in the taking of decisions, even though they perhaps should not be.

When voluntary organisations and community groups try to influence policy they must ask themselves: Who else is involved in this? What will they say? How can we make sure they see our point of view? What will public perceptions be?

Once the critical consultation has taken place, or a report, green paper or white paper is published, the decision-making process enters a decisive stage. The government may indicate its intention of acting immediately on the report's findings and recommendations; it may be non-committal; or it may even repudiate the document concerned. The fate of the issue in question at this stage will depend on a variety of factors: the costs; the attitudes of the departmental officials most closely involved; the interest of the minister and the minister of state; the views of other departments; the attitude of the opposition; reactions within the political parties; the way the problem is perceived by the media; the views and contributions of other interest groups; and the continued level of interest and pressure of the lobbying groups.

Although government decisions should be based on the objective realities of a problem, the political consequences and public perceptions are also important in the taking of decisions, even though they perhaps should not be.



Some voluntary organisations registered to nominate senators

Alzheimer Society

Inclusion Ireland

Disability Federation of Ireland

People with Disabilities in Ireland

Irish Wheelchair Association

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland

Irish Kidney Association

Irish Foster Care Association

The Drama League of Ireland

Irish Countrywomen's Association

Irish Georgian Society

National Youth Council

Irish Deaf Society

Library Association

> www.oireachtas.ie

Even when a policy is changed or amended, legislation passed, or resources allocated, work may only be beginning. In the past, lobbying groups may have paid insufficient attention to thinking of assessing whether the change that they managed to obtain actually produced the desired results.

The authorities will respond differently to the different styles and approaches of the lobbying groups, how representative they appear to be and their relative power compared to other groups. Efforts by voluntary organisations and community groups to influence policy do not always have clear-cut, clinical outcomes. They rarely achieve everything they want. Sometimes, groups do not know if they have 'won' or not, because the outcomes and decisions that result from their activities may emerge in a very fragmented, sometimes confusing way.

If legislation is required, the process of change can become very fraught and slow. Government permission is required for the drafting of a Bill. Once the decision in principle is approved, a Bill goes to the office of the Attorney General for drafting (the parliamentary draftsman). All Bills must be checked carefully for compatibility with other laws and the constitution. Bills must then take their place in the queue. Once the draft Bill emerges, it must be approved by cabinet and the other ministers. Time to pass it must be found in the parliamentary timetable where it vies for priority with other Bills. Most Bills take months to get through. Some take years and others never make it at all. Should a general election be called, all Bills automatically lapse (though there is a procedure to fast-track them back into the order of business in a new government).

For these reasons, voluntary and community groups may wish to ask themselves: can change be achieved by simpler, faster methods? Here, there are a number of options: such as a statutory instrument, a ministerial order, a departmental circular, education campaigns, or the reallocation of resources, a grant scheme, or a pilot scheme.

4.4 Ensuring a decision is implemented

Even when a policy is changed or amended, legislation passed, or resources allocated, work may only be beginning. In the past, lobbying groups may have paid insufficient attention to thinking of assessing whether the change that they managed to obtain actually produced the desired results. How is it monitored and by whom? Were there unintended consequences no one expected? If so, how can the issue

'I am a single page man'

"I don't make any bones about it - I operated the department on the basis of no long files, no long reports. Put it on a single sheet. If I need more information I know where I can get it".

Albert Reynolds,
former Taoiseach and minister

be brought back into the political system for further consideration? In political science, this is now called 'implementation theory'.

The study of implementation emphasises the importance of organisations giving attention to how they can ensure the outcomes they seek. This may involve:

- Making a case for implementation bodies in the original proposal;
- Asking the government (or statutory agencies) to set up implementation bodies;
- Setting down criteria to test and measure the effectiveness of the policy changes sought (e.g. performance indicators);
- Setting up watchdog groups;
- Getting resources for research to measure the outcome of changes resulting from the government decision
- Requiring annual reports.

Implementation is an area of work where voluntary and community organisations are often quite weak. Implementation is not glamorous. It requires a lot of attention to detail; possibly some technical skills; an ability to bring the issues back into the system and a lot of persistence.

Implementation is an area of work where voluntary and community organisations are often quite weak. Implementation is not glamorous. It requires a lot of attention to detail; possibly some technical skills; an ability to bring the issues back into the system and a lot of persistence.

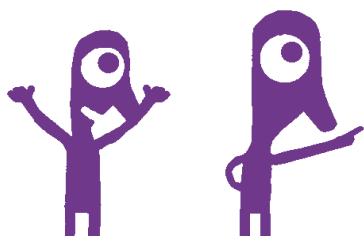
4.5 Maintaining your influence

To influence policy and decision-making is always most difficult first time round. The organisation is then an outsider group. It finds it difficult to know where to start and how to begin. Once a group has engaged with the political system once, things become easier. Its members will have built up contact with individual deputies, senators, civil servants, leaders of semi-state bodies, local authority officials and councillors and so on. The longer these last, the more it is likely to become an insider group.

Checklist for meeting one's public representative

- Select two or three people.
- Appoint people who can get their case across articulately.
- Agree on what each party will do next.
- Arrange to keep in contact. Provide a phone number.
- Write afterwards to express thanks, noting the points of agreement and work to be undertaken.

Sometimes, the relationship to government and the decision-making system becomes so intimate that groups are afraid to criticise people with whom they now have an inter-dependent relationship, for fear of losing their place in the heart of government.



Some organisations prefer to maintain outsider status by choice, campaigning aggressively at a distance from the political system. They may have an ideological aversion to dealing too closely with government; they may be wary of any compromise; or they may feel they can be more effective by changing public opinion through effective campaigns in the media. Some outsider groups may be very small and, while they have the resources for such high-profile work, they do not have the time or people to sit on committees. The disadvantage is that their influence is very difficult to measure. Greenpeace may be an example of a high-profile outsider group.

Most outsider groups, however, are really outsider groups which want to be insider groups. They want to enter the corridors of power and do business with officials and get to the heart of the decision-making system. They are reformist at heart, with modest objectives which they are determined to achieve. As people in government come to know them better, consultation becomes easier and more regular and may be arranged at shorter notice. The more experienced groups become so involved that they come to learn more and more of what is going on. In time, some of their representatives may be appointed to the very advisory bodies that they themselves lobbied several years ago. Even further along, they may be consulted, as a norm, whenever the government proposes a change, or even be tipped off about the proposals of rival organisations. In other words, they become an essential, integral part of the decision-making landscape themselves. They can see the effect of their representations and point to aspects of policy which they have changed.

Sometimes, the relationship to government and the decision-making system becomes so intimate that groups are afraid to criticise people with whom they now have an inter-dependent relationship, for fear of losing their place in the heart of government. They will not rock the boat by issuing angry press statements when they do not get their way, for fear of offending people they now know quite well. As they become muted, this is sometimes referred to as the 'capture' of interest groups by government and they are called 'prisoner' groups.

Checklist before approaching a government department

Why?

What do we want the department to do?

Can the department deliver?

Are we talking to the right people in the department?

At this stage, new, more radical outsider groups may start raising the critical issues once again and the entire process begins afresh. Only a few insider groups either choose or manage to keep a high profile, being an integral part of the decision-making system, yet prepared to be forcefully critical at the same time (the Irish Farmers Association is perhaps the best example of the high-profile insider group).

Most governments and authorities prefer a relatively predictable and controlled environment in which to do their work. They do not like surprises, nor do they like to be in a permanent state of tension or hostility with significant groups who wish to influence them. Accordingly, most are prepared to go a certain distance to establish links, consultation and some form of a stable relationship with pressure groups. Voluntary organisations and community groups may wish to give attention as to what kind of long-time relationship with the political system they would like - and the resources, time and personnel they need to commit to make that work. The more organisations become insider groups, the more time and personnel they have to give to sitting on advisory committees and the time-consuming process of consultation. Do they have the human and financial resources to support this work? Is there the danger that the original aims of the organisation will be lost? What if the authority being lobbied is also your funder?

Having identified the general principles of devising a strategy, the guide now looks at how to work with individual parts of the political and administrative system.

4.6 Working with public representatives

Working effectively with public representatives is a crucially important activity for organisations and groups wishing to influence policy. Here, the various aspects of working with public representatives are discussed.

Most governments and authorities prefer a relatively predictable and controlled environment in which to do their work. They do not like surprises, nor do they like to be in a permanent state of tension or hostility with significant groups who wish to influence them.

Why governments appoint commissions

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They are not sure what to do - As a holding action, so as to consider various options and their implications - In order to try build a political consensus about what to do next, not just with the other political parties, but with all the interested parties - To try get in expert opinion on a knotty problem - As a delaying action, possibly due to lack of resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To get better coordination between government departments, local administration and voluntary organisations - To try to resolve inter-departmental rivalry - To monitor a programme which has run for some years - To legitimise a new area of government action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To anticipate the effects of decisions taken elsewhere or the external environment (e.g. the Information Society) |
|---|---|---|

'Making a deputy aware of a problem' is not a sufficient reason to contact one or to organise a meeting unless the group has a clear set of ideas as to what should actually be done about it.

What public representatives have the power to do

It is essential that voluntary organisations and community groups know what they want a deputy, senator or councillor to do - and what that person can actually do. Many go in with the vague notion that somehow a member can somehow 'sort out' the problem. This vague purpose can lead to imprecise and unsatisfactory results. Deputies are not all-powerful, though they have certain means of influence. 'Making a deputy aware of a problem' is not a sufficient reason to contact one or to organise a meeting unless the group has a clear set of ideas as to what should actually be done about it. Sometimes groups approach their deputy about a matter which really has to be sorted out at local level, or at the other extreme, at European level.

Other organisations, by contrast, are extremely focused. They want their deputy to arrange a meeting for them with a minister, to ask a parliamentary question, to speak on a Bill, or even to introduce legislation for them. Deputies and senators are generally very happy to take up an issue with a department, a minister, or a colleague; or ask parliamentary questions. This involves them in a defined amount of work, with little or no political cost. Most are prepared to raise matters on the adjournment debate if they feel there is a case. Deputies are more reluctant to commit themselves to strong policy positions, especially controversial ones, since that may put them at odds with their party or alienate other voters. They are cautious about speaking on Bills and putting down amendments unless they are sure they have the time available to do this and they can trust the group to present a well-stated case to them that does not have other, negative consequences for them later.

How public representatives can best help

Voluntary groups and community organisations must therefore give considerable attention to what they want their public representative to do. In the Oireachtas, repeated questions, adjournment debates and motions can produce an effect over time. Although such work is tedious, it is often the most effective way in which members of the Oireachtas

Oireachtas committees

For details of Oireachtas committees and members:

www.oireachtas.ie

Click 'committees'

can help in the long run. Some groups are more ambitious and look for legislation and ask members to introduce private member's Bills. Trying to get a Bill through is a campaign that will involve a long time and requires a lot of supporting documentation. Bills are problematic, because deputies and senators have no special resources to help them with this (the parliamentary draftsman works only on government Bills). Furthermore, they take years to work their way through the system and fall when there is a general election. Groups must therefore be prepared to do the drafting work themselves (this is often not as difficult as it seems) and help the member steer it through. On the other hand, a successful Bill can produce a political change that is likely to be irreversible and can be a focus for a campaign.

Members of the Dáil

Sometimes the first task of a group is to find out who is their public representative. For the Dáil, the country is divided into 42 constituencies, each with three, four or five deputies. Outside Dublin and Cork, constituencies generally follow county boundaries, though some counties may be grouped together. The names of each deputy are listed on the Oireachtas website and in the IPA Yearbook. More simply, one may contact Leinster House and ask. Then it is important to decide which one to approach, or to approach all of them for the constituency. For the sake of neutrality, most community organisations approach each of their deputies, partly to see who can be the most effective but also to prevent the issue being cornered by one political party or individual rather than another. Most deputies do not take offence at their fellow members being approached. There is little they can do about it anyway and most expect groups to seek the support of all the political parties on a given issue. Organisations that have gone to the trouble of personally meeting a large number of members often find that this pays off when the issue which concerns them comes up and a large number of knowledgeable deputies or senators rise to support them.

For national voluntary organisations without a local connection, the problem of who to approach is somewhat different. Most will



Structures matter

Once you change who decides a policy, you change the policy.

Voluntary organisations and community groups may wish to give attention as to what kind of long-time relationship with the political system they would like - and the resources, time and personnel they need to commit to make that work.

approach ministers, deputies, senators or councillors who have a particular interest in the subject concerned or they will approach opposition spokespersons who cover their area of interest. This is the most common thing to do. In terms of timing, approaching public representatives and their parties in the period coming up to an election may be especially effective.

Members of the Seanad

Identifying a senator to support one's cause presents a different set of problems, since senators have a different set of constituencies. The obvious approach is to ask the appropriate party spokesperson in the senate on the particular issue. University graduates have clearly identifiable representatives, though in practice many people who approach the university senators have no connection at all to the colleges in question. A more practical approach is to find out which individual senators are interested in the issue in question, or to locate one who lives nearest to the group in question (there are proportionately more senators for the rural areas). Many senators are aspiring candidates for the Dáil and are active in local politics, so this should not present a difficulty.

Many groups underestimate the value of the Seanad. Although its powers are less than those of the Dáil, it is possible to introduce and amend Bills in the Seanad, debate private members motions there and raise matters on the adjournment. Senators have a lighter workload than the deputies of the Dáil, which means that they may be able to devote more time to policy questions and participate more actively in the joint committees of both houses. Several, particularly the university senators, have made an exceptional contribution to policy issues. At certain times, the Seanad may be found in session when the Dáil is not.

The ability of voluntary organisations to nominate Seanad candidates has, likewise, been poorly appreciated. In 1977, for example, the National Youth Council ran a candidate for the Seanad in order to highlight issues affecting Irish youth. The Simon Community

Poverty impact assessments

> Details of guidelines are available from the Office for Social Inclusion
www.socialinclusion.ie/pia.htm

supported a senator campaigning on issues of poverty and homelessness. It is open to national voluntary organisations to register as bodies which can nominate candidates for election to the Seanad under some of the panels and, thereby, raise issues which concern them. However, once registered, they are not obliged to run candidates. Instead, some wait for independent Seanad hopefuls or party senators to come to them for a nomination. Nominating bodies may then remind senators elected through their nomination and get favourable access to that senator subsequently.

Councillors

The names of councillors (though not their home addresses) are listed in the IPA Yearbook. Alternatively, one may contact the nearest local authority (e.g. the county council) and ask for the names, addresses and phone numbers of the councillor for one's district or ward. Councillors may ask formal questions of officials (echoing the procedure in the Dáil). They can take up issues with officials in writing or personally and put them under pressure to respond more effectively to local need. Councillors have the authority to introduce a motion supporting a particular cause or the work of a group, and to have it discussed and adopted. They may arrange for the group to have the opportunity to address the council, though this is only likely to happen if the council has already expressed a concern about the issue. The councillor may arrange for the group to address one of the many committees of councillors in local government, which may be less prestigious but might be more useful. Presentations to the local authority may generate considerable press coverage, thereby giving the issue a further boost. Finally, councillors may be helpful intermediaries in fixing meetings with local authority officials. The councillor may also help by attending the meeting in question.

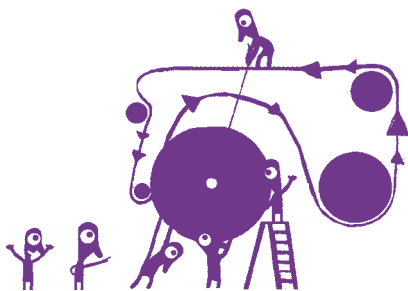
The importance of local government is often underestimated by voluntary and community organisations. The issues which affect city and county managers at local level frequently find their way into the thinking and policies of the Department of the Environment & Local Government at national level. For example, the department is careful, in developing housing policy, to consult with local authority housing managers to ascertain their problems and concerns. Vocational Education Committees have close links with the Department of Education & Science and so on. Groups which successfully influence local government may therefore be having an effect on national thinking of which they may be unaware.

First meeting

Most groups make their first approach to a public representative by letter, stating who they are and outlining their case. It is important that groups are brief and to the point. Deputies may receive hundreds of letters and e-mails a day and busy people do not have time to read long letters. Accordingly, the group should explain its case on one page only, though there is nothing to stop it supplying additional material either then or later. Many voluntary organisations and groups approach their first meeting with their deputy, senator or councillor

It is important that groups are brief and to the point. Deputies may receive hundreds of letters and e-mails a day and busy people do not have time to read long letters. Accordingly, the group should explain its case on one page only, though there is nothing to stop it supplying additional material either then or later.

Ideally, a relationship with a deputy, senator or councillor should mature over time and the two parties should learn to trust, respect and value one other. Public representatives value voluntary organisations and community groups which provide them with regular, accurate and useful information; who understand the limits of what they can do; and who give them credit for work done.



with trepidation. Normally they may meet them either in their official offices (Leinster House or the county hall respectively) but sometimes in their clinic or even in their home. Constituency clinics are generally held out of normal working hours, often in a room over a pub or shop, the times being advertised on notices placed on shop fronts and in local newspapers. For groups meeting their deputy in Leinster House, there are often delays as the member tries to get away from previous meetings, or a vote in the house or other business. Such meetings are often short, since the deputy will have a range of meetings before and afterwards. This means that the group must explain its case reasonably quickly and make efficient use of the time available. There may well be interruptions from the phone, with people coming in and out.

Developing the relationship

Ideally, a relationship with a deputy, senator or councillor should mature over time and the two parties should learn to trust, respect and value one other. Public representatives value voluntary organisations and community groups which provide them with regular, accurate and useful information; who understand the limits of what they can do; and who give them credit for work done. Voluntary and community organisations in turn value public representatives who keep an issue alive for them, giving them support and useful advice.

Working with political parties

There are several ways of influencing political parties, such as by meeting the general secretary, headquarters research and policy staff, a particular policy committee, or by getting an introduction to particular people in the party with a shared interest. Some organisations have arranged meetings with the youth wings of parties. Youth groups are often keenly interested in policy questions and have good access to the 'adult' party. Others have got to meet the front bench or front bench committees of opposition parties - the very people who cross-examine government in the Oireachtas and may later become ministers themselves. Some voluntary and community organisations offer to speak to branch meetings about their particular concern or interest. The results from doing so are rarely immediate, but they can be significant in the medium and long term. Sometimes, opposition parties set up review groups to overhaul their policies while in opposition and invite outside views. These provide additional opportunities.

4.7 Public bodies

Approaching government departments and semi - state bodies is different from dealing with public servants. Departments operate within a given set of boundaries and policies. Public servants are not expected to subvert existing sets of policies (whereas some politicians love to do so). On the other hand, they can welcome support for existing sets of policies and current departmental priorities and there can be considerable latitude for what can be done within existing boundaries. In dealing with government departments, voluntary organisations and community groups often find the pace less frenetic

than Leinster House, with less pressure for media attention and immediate results. Issues can be considered in a more reflective way, meetings can be longer and documentation and research can be considered in more detail. Civil servants have more time to read and study documentation than members of the Oireachtas.

As is the case with approaching deputies and senators, the first consideration for a group in approaching a government department is: "Why? What do we want them to do? Are we talking to the right people?" Again, the group must have a clear idea what they expect the department to do in response. Is it to allocate resources, issue regulations, change procedures, or what? The answer to this question is not always straightforward, as the boundaries between government departments can often be blurred and the distinctions between national and local government equally unclear. Issues of child welfare, for example, have often crossed several departmental boundaries (Health, Justice, Education). The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government may insist that a particular problem is a local authority's responsibility. With equal conviction, the latter may insist that the former is responsible. The same problems arise in the relationship between the Department of Health & Children and the Health Service Executive. So the first problem a voluntary organisation or community group faces is which part of which department to approach, why, what it wants it to do and how that department relates to other departments and organisations.

The second problem for a group to decide is which officials to approach. The IPA Yearbook lists officials responsible in each department and their rank, providing a similar listing for the officials of the local authorities. Most will approach the head of each unit, but may in the event find themselves dealing with a more junior person either in correspondence or in person. It is a mistake for groups to assume that they should necessarily aim to deal with very senior people all the time. Matters of policy and practice are often decided by people further down the line who are regarded as the department's expert on a particular issue. The people above will normally respect and defer to the more junior official's judgement and are slow to overturn it simply because of strong representations made on the outside. 'Go to the top' is normally bad advice - because if the top person says no, then you are out of options from the start.

4.8 The consultative process

Government and the Oireachtas consult groups, organisations and the many different interest groups of society in different ways - both on an on-going basis and through particular mechanisms. The principal ones are:

- Temporary commissions, task forces and review bodies;
- Oireachtas committees; and
- The local consultation and planning process.

The first problem a voluntary organisation or community group faces is which part of which department to approach, why, what it wants it to do and how that department relates to other departments and organisations.

There is not yet a tradition of governments reporting back on how they responded to submissions, what they were able to accept and what not (and why).

Governments use commissions extensively in their work (sometimes they have other titles, such as working groups, task forces, initiatives and so on). For voluntary and community organisations, they provide a window of opportunity to influence the decision-making process. Even if the commission does not act as fulsomely on their proposals as they would like, the resulting report can often be a valuable reference document for some time to come.

Voluntary and community groups are, of course, free to make proposals to national or local government, state agencies, or any body at any time. Many groups make policy submissions to government departments from time to time - either to inform general departmental thinking or to address a specific issue. Several groups find the preparation of these policy documents to be of considerable internal value to their own organisation, for they help to sort out their own internal policies and priorities and oblige them to assemble their own documentation and information. Officials in these departments generally do read these documents. Most officials like to stay up-to-date with the thinking, approach and views of voluntary groups, both for its own sake and because to do so may give them ideas for the development of these and other services in the future. Many voluntary groups and community organisations will ask for a meeting on their policy submissions. This can provide a useful occasion for the exchange of ideas on the text in question, as well as give the organisations concerned an idea of departmental thinking.

A widely-used strategy is for voluntary organisations and community groups to present a policy submission in response to an invitation from a government committee, commission, review group, task force or other group preparing a white paper or a green paper. These occasions provide an opportunity for organisations to make a case with other groups and build up pressure for change. Some committees not only take written submissions but also ask for oral presentations. This gives groups the opportunity to meet the individual members of the committee in person. Some groups specifically request such meetings.

Many committees consult with those whom they consider to be the key players. The most important feature of such committees is that there is the expectation that the views of these organisations will be taken into account in the analysis and recommendations and that government action will follow. Voluntary organisations and community groups often criticise committees which fail, in their view, to take adequate account of their proposals; and criticise governments which fail to act on foot of their reports.

Government commissions which wish to receive views normally advertise in the national press. They generally give organisations a month or so to respond. A contact person in a government department is normally identified. Organisations and individuals who make proposals are normally sent a complimentary copy of the eventual report and their contribution is acknowledged in the annexe (whether or not any note is taken of what they say). They may be invited to its launch.

The consultation process in Ireland is still a relatively primitive one, compared to other European countries. The normal format is that groups are invited to send in written submissions. Later, they try to figure out if and how they had any influence. This mono-dimensional system can cause a lot of frustration. There is not yet a tradition of governments reporting back on how they responded to submissions, what they were able to accept and what not (and why). The Commission on the Family not only invited written submissions, but also had a comment line and a public consultation, while wider means of consultation were used during the development of the National Children's Strategy. The Forum on Europe holds town-hall type meetings. But these examples are unusual and the voluntary and community sector has a challenge to persuade state bodies to follow more enlightened, sophisticated and inclusive forms of consultation.

Next, the guide reviews how voluntary and community organisations may best approach and work with Oireachtas committees; and participate in the local processes of consultation.

Oireachtas committees


Oireachtas committees were established in the 1990s as a means of handling the committee stages of Bills more efficiently. Until then, the committee stage was handled by a committee of the whole house, with all deputies entitled to attend. These committee stages were often very long and were attended only by the small number of deputies interested in that particular topic. Oireachtas committees were introduced as dedicated committees on a particular topic (e.g. transport). At the beginning of a new Dáil and Seanad, individual deputies sign up to those committees of most interest to them. They tend to be assigned on the basis of interest, seniority and the need for a party balance on committees. Some deputies and senators belong to several committees, a few to none at all. Nowadays, when a Bill goes to committee, it goes into one of these specialised committees. A transport Bill, for example, will go to the transport committee. Generally, committees shadow departments and ministers, but some bring together a mixed set of different issues (e.g. justice, equality, defence & women's rights). It is normal for the topics, titles, membership and terms of reference to be agreed between government and the main opposition parties. Opposition deputies chair some of the committees.

Some Oireachtas committees limit themselves mainly to handling only the committee stages of Bills. Others, though, take a much broader view of their role and hold discussions on particular topics, to which ministers, departmental officials, non-governmental organisations and other interested bodies may be invited. Some voluntary and community groups actually ask for the opportunity to make a presentation to an Oireachtas committee. In addition, the Oireachtas will agree to the appointment of ad hoc Oireachtas committees to deal with particular themes (e.g. climate change, the constitution). These are particularly suited for outside consultation.

Despite the activities of voluntary organisations, community groups and campaigning organisations, poverty remains a serious, persistent problem in modern Irish society.

The role of voluntary and community organisations is now recognised at national level, with voluntary and community organisations participating as a social partner in the national agreement, Towards 2016.

Although the Irish state is a centralised one, Ireland has a relatively accessible political system. It is relatively easy for an individual, a community group or a voluntary organisation to get in contact with and meet a member of the Dáil, senator or councillor.

Several Oireachtas committees  (See Directory 2.1) ask for submissions and proposals from time to time, generally on specific subjects of interest to them. Some have commissioned research and have interacted with a range of external groups. Sometimes, voluntary organisations and community groups ask on their own initiative to meet Oireachtas committees. This provides a useful opportunity to meet a number of deputies and senators at a time, to get a dialogue going on the questions concerned, to build up support and to have the presentation noted for the record.

Each committee is assigned a clerk from the staff of Leinster House (names are listed in the IPA Yearbook). Joint committees comprise both senators and deputies. For voluntary organisations and community groups, making a presentation to a committee can provide useful publicity (the media are normally present: see case study). The support of a committee can be quite a boost and carry considerable moral effect. Note that debates within Oireachtas committees are not reported as a formal part of the published Oireachtas debates. Each issues its own transcripts.

Local consultation process

Leaving aside local economic and social development, the most frequent point of contact between community groups and the local authorities may concern planning applications. Applicants for planning permission must file an application with the authority (where it is open to inspection); place a notice in the newspaper; and erect a notice at the site itself. Local authorities are obliged to consider all objections made by individuals and organisations. There is no set form for objections, which range from the short and hand-written, to extensive, well documented reports. A community group dissatisfied with the decision of a local authority to grant a permission may appeal, within a month, to An Bord Pleanála (a fee is required), which appoints an inspector to report and then adjudicates the matter. Community groups may (at extra cost) ask the inspector for an oral hearing and this will normally be granted where significant issues of public interest are involved. Oral hearings are conducted by the inspector, who invites (or may compel) interested parties to present their views before filing a report with recommendations. These public hearings can provide a significant opportunity for local planning and environmental issues to be presented by community groups and to be heard before the local and even national press.

Large-scale developments, such as factories, urban development projects and infrastructural schemes are required under European law to have Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). The developer must commission a study of the likely effect of a proposed development on the environment; the statement must be available on request; and it must then be assessed by the local authority before permission is given. Industrial, chemical and pharmaceutical developments must also apply for an Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) Licence from the Environmental Protection Agency. Developers applying for an IPC must advertise their intention in a manner similar to a planning

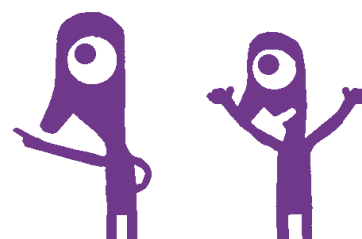
application, giving the opportunity for objections to be made by individuals and community groups to the Environmental Protection Agency. In some other areas of work, other forms of inquiry may be held (e.g. metro, light rail). These provide further opportunities for voluntary and community organisations to present their views.

Local authorities are obliged to draw up a development plan every five years and to initiate a process of consultation. The plan is normally put on display for a number of months. Written comments are invited at three stages: pre-draft, draft and plan. Although the number received may be quite considerable, it is unclear how much attention each receives and what overall impact they have. The impact which community groups make may well depend on their ability to mobilise public and press interest outside the consultative process itself.

Poverty Impact Assessment

Finally, it should be remembered that all government departments, state agencies and local authorities are required, under what were originally called poverty-proofing guidelines, to indicate clearly the impact of any proposal on groups in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty. This process is now called Poverty Impact Assessment, and requires these bodies to 'assess policies and programmes at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and on inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction'. Guidelines as to how this should be done have been issued by the Office for Social Inclusion. They provide an important opportunity for voluntary and community groups to work with statutory bodies on how they actually carry out such assessments.

It should be remembered that all government departments, state agencies and local authorities are required, under what were originally called poverty-proofing guidelines, to indicate clearly the impact of any proposal on groups in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty.



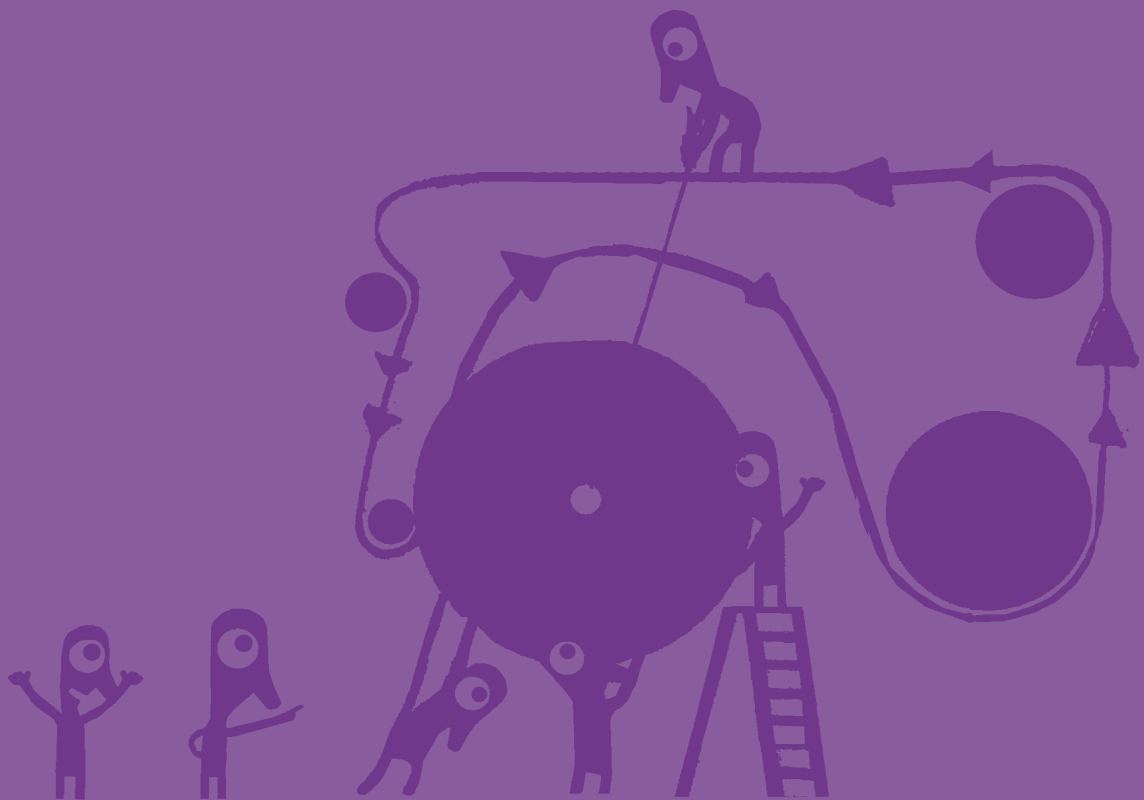
Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank all those who assisted with the research, provided case studies or responded to requests for information. First, he wishes to renew his thanks to those who kindly assisted in the first and second edition. Here, in the third edition, he wishes to thank:

Rev Alan Hilliard, Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas; Rev Pat Cogan, Cathy Lanigan, Respond!; James Doorley, National Youth Council of Ireland; Marlene O'Connor, Galway Simon Community; Fr. Sean Healy, SMA, Conference of the Religious in Ireland; Bob Jordan, Threshold; Larry Fulham, Westmeath Employment Pact; Philip O'Connor, Dublin Employment Pact; Seamus Boland, Irish Rural Link; Paul Ginnell, European Anti Poverty Network Ireland; Paul Sheehan, Cork Simon Community; Candy Murphy, One Family; Brendan Hennessy, Society of St Vincent de Paul; Josephine Keaveney, Disabled People of Clare; Deiric O Broin, Nordubco; Charlie Roarty, Energy Action; Robert Carey, North Kerry Together; Hilka Becker, Irish Refugee Council; Joe Grennell, Ringsend Action Project; Kerry O'Leary, Campaign Against the Deportation of Irish Children; Juan Carlos Azzopardi, Community Network Moyross; Sheila Whelan, Tosach; Alan O'Neill, Men's Network; Veronica Bon, Mid West Community Development Support Agency; Cliona Sadleir, Rape Crisis Network Ireland; Camille Loftus, One Parent Exchange Network; Maeve Halpin, CareLocal; Sean Regan, Community Workers Cooperative, Galway; Angela Holohan, Community Workers Cooperative, Donegal; Framework, Waterford; Emma Freeman, Axis Ballymun; Catherine Hickey, Free Legal Advice Centres; Margaret Malone, Wicklow County Council; Yvonne Murphy, Laois County Council; Toni McCaul, Community Partnership Network, Middleton, Co Cork; Robin Hanan, Irish Refugee Council; Yvonne Fleming, Centrecare; Maire O'Leary, Health Service Executive, Donegal; Marie Mc Laughlin, Health Service Executive, Donegal; Ronnie Fay, Pavee Point; Mary Doheny, Priorswood Community Development Project, Dublin; Frank Naughten, Partners for Transformation; Stuart Williams, ATD Fourth World; Orla O'Connor, National Women's Council of Ireland; Denise McCormilla, Border Counties Childcare Network; Maria Corbett, Children's Rights Alliance.

Within the Combat Poverty Agency itself I would especially like to thank for their comments and assistance: Joan O'Flynn, Barbara Walshe, Julie Smyth, Michelle Griffin and Margaret O'Gorman. For permission to re-produce artwork from *Out of the traps*, thanks are due to Paul Ginnell (EAPN), Frances Byrne (OPEN) and the author, Camille Loftus.

Brian Harvey



WORKING FOR CHANGE

A guide to Influencing policy in Ireland

Brian Harvey

Part II: Directory

Contents

1	Oireachtas and government	3
1.1	The Oireachtas	4
1.2	The government	5
2	State agencies and semi-state bodies	15
2.1	Oversight bodies	16
2.2	State agencies concerned with social policy, social and legal services and action against poverty	21
2.3	State agencies promoting culture and the arts	23
2.4	Economic development bodies	24
2.5	Training and employment organisations	26
2.6	North-South institutions	26
3	Local administration	29
4	Advisory bodies	33
5	Research bodies	37
6	Social partner organisations	41
6.1	National social partner organisations	42
6.2	Voluntary and community organisations	44
7	Media	53
7.1	National radio and television	54
7.2	National press	56
8	European Union	59
8.1	Irish representation in Brussels	61
8.2	Council of Ministers	61
8.3	European Commission	62
8.4	Special agencies of the European Union	63
8.5	European Parliament	65
8.6	Economic and Social Committee	66
8.7	Committee of the Regions	66
8.8	European Court of Justice	67
8.9	European Ombudsman	67

First published, 1998
2nd edition, 2002
3rd edition, 2008

© Brian Harvey is an independent social research consultant.

The views expressed are the author's and not necessarily those of the Combat Poverty Agency.

ISBN no. 978-1-905485-55-0

Introduction

The purpose of this directory is to provide basic information on the Oireachtas and government, state agencies and semi-state bodies, local government, advisory bodies, social partners, key national voluntary organisations and research bodies, the media and EU institutions and agencies, commenting, where appropriate, on the relative importance and relevance of these different bodies. The description of each body briefly outlines its status, function, composition and work and provides contact details.

The directory should be read in conjunction with Part I. The information provided in Part I is generally not repeated here. The directory is not intended as an exhaustive guide to Irish government and public administration. It focuses on those aspects likely to be of most relevance to voluntary and community organisations interested in poverty and social exclusion.

Phone numbers, faxes, Locall numbers, e-mails and websites are given where available (Locall numbers enable one to call anywhere for the cost of a local call). Callers from outside Dublin should note that they dial 01 before Dublin numbers. For the other regions, the prefix is given before the phone number (021, 091 etc). Callers from the Republic to Northern Ireland numbers are given the 048 prefix which they should use in the Republic, but if they are calling from within Northern Ireland, they should be aware that this is the equivalent of an 028 number. Where European numbers are given, callers should first dial 00 for an international line and then the rest of the number as indicated.



1 Oireachtas and government

1.1 The Oireachtas

The Oireachtas (National Parliament) consists of the President and two houses: Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

President

The President is the head of state and has a limited number of defined constitutional functions. The President is advised by the Council of State which comprises seven ex-officio members (senior politicians and justices), ex-Taoisigh, and seven people appointed directly by the President.

The President
Áras an Uachtaráin
Phoenix Park
Dublin 8

Tel 617 1000
Fax 617 1001
www.president.ie

Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann

The two houses of the Oireachtas are located in Leinster House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2. They comprise the 166 members of the Dáil and the 60 members of the Seanad.

Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Tel 618 3000
(also Locall Dáil 1890 337889,
Seanad 1890 732623)
info@oireachtas.ie
www.oireachtas.ie

Callers who know the extension of their Dáil or Seanad member should dial 618 and then the four-digit extension number. Personal callers may leave in one letter for each deputy in their constituency (the staff will not accept bundles of letters for

everyone). The website offers information on the Oireachtas, members, committees, legislation in progress, the order of business, parliamentary debates and an archive of all debates from 1919.

Oireachtas committees

The Oireachtas comprises the following main committees. Each has a clerk assigned to it, contactable through the main Leinster House number.

Foreign affairs
European affairs
Justice, equality and law reform
Finance
Agriculture
Arts, sport and tourism
Communications
Enterprise, trade and employment
Environment
Health
Education and science
Social and family affairs
Transport
Public accounts
Joint committee on the constitution
Joint committee on the Good Friday agreement
Joint committee on children
Joint committee on economic and regulatory affairs
Joint committee on climate change and energy
Joint committee on EU scrutiny

Committee secretariat:
comm.sec@oireachtas.ie

1.2 The government

The government comprises the 15 senior ministers of the cabinet and 20 junior ministers (Ministers of State). The cabinet is chaired by the Taoiseach. Cabinet meetings, normally held weekly, are attended by cabinet ministers, by the secretary of the government and by the attorney general who provides legal advice. The Department of the Taoiseach is described first, followed by the other departments in alphabetical order. All the departments can be accessed from an omnibus web:

www.gov.ie

Department of the Taoiseach

The Department of the Taoiseach is responsible for assisting the Taoiseach in carrying out the functions of head of government. In addition, the department is responsible for:

- the national agreement (Towards 2016);
- National Economic and Social Council (see advisory bodies);
- National Economic and Social Forum (see advisory bodies);
- Central Statistics Office (see research bodies);
- Strategic Management Initiative;
- Law Reform Commission (see advisory bodies);
- Active citizenship.

The department also includes the National Centre for Partnership and Performance, which is a small unit designed to support the national agreement and spread models of good practice in social partnership. The Strategic Management Initiative is the drive to ensure greater efficiency, purpose and strategic planning within each state agency and government department.

The Active citizenship office is located in the department.

The number of cabinet committees varies. Currently there are six: European affairs; health; climate change and energy security; housing, infrastructure and public private partnerships; social inclusion, children and integration; and science, technology and innovation. The cabinet committee on social inclusion meets monthly.

Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2

Tel 662 4888
Fax 678 9791
Locall 1890 227227
www.taoiseach.gov.ie

Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

The main functions of the department are the promotion of agriculture and the food industry; the setting and regulation of standards in farming and animal health; the operation of EU schemes (European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development) and sea fisheries.

Department of Agriculture and Food
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Tel 607 2000
Fax 661 6263
Locall 1890 200510
info@agriculture.gov.ie
www.agriculture.gov.ie

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism

The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is a small government department with responsibility for the many forms of arts and culture, sport and recreation and the promotion of tourism. It is the lead department for several state agencies such as the National Gallery, the National Concert Hall and the National Archives.

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Tel 631 3800
Fax 661 1201
Locall 1890 383000
web_master@dast.gov.ie
www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie

Attorney General, Office of the

The Attorney General advises the government on legal and constitutional matters and has responsibility for the drafting of parliamentary Bills.

Office of the Attorney General
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2

Tel 631 4000
Fax 676 1806
info@ag.irlgov.ie
www.attorneygeneral.ie

Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

This department is a new configuration of different departmental elements, which cover the regulation of communications,

broadcasting, sustainable energy, electricity, gas, petrol, postal services, mining and inland fisheries. An important agency working under the department is Sustainable Energy Ireland, which has responsibility for promoting more enlightened energy practices and has supported initiatives against fuel poverty.

Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
29-31 Adelaide Road
Dublin 2

Tel 678 2000
Fax 678 2449
www.dcenr.gov.ie

Sustainable Energy Ireland
Glasnevin
Dublin 9

Tel 836 9080
Fax 837 2848
info@sei.ie
www.sei.ie

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

This department dates to 2002 and was formed from bringing together elements of the old Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the rural development section of the Department of Agriculture and parts of the former Department of the Gaeltacht. The department assumed direct responsibility for the development of the voluntary and community sector and accrued a series of funding programmes, to the extent that it is now one of the largest funders of voluntary and community organisations working in the era of social inclusion. Funding streams range from a number of small, distinct funds to the Community Development Programme

(with 200 projects) to the dispersal of dormant accounts.

The department has taken over local development, the strategy against drugs, the regulation of the voluntary and community sector and the cohesion process of ensuring coordination at local level.

The department is responsible for Pobal, which delivers programmes and support to the voluntary and community sector, such as the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme. Here, measures for unemployed people, young people and community development are delivered through 38 area-based partnerships (co-ordinated by PLANET) and 30 community-based partnerships (co-ordinated by the Community Partnership Network). Pobal has a range of resources for voluntary and community groups, ranging from research reports to periodicals to handbooks on local development.

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Dún Aimirgin
43-49 Mespil Road
Dublin 4

Tel 647 3000
Fax 647 3051
Locall 1890 478847
eolas@pobail.ie
www.pobail.ie

Community Development Programme
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Teeling Street
Tubbercurry
Co Sligo

Tel 071 918 6700
Fax 071 918 6750

Pobal
Holbrook House
Hollis Street
Dublin 2

Tel 240 0700
Fax 661 0411
enquiries@pobal.ie
www.pobal.ie

PLANET
(Partnership for Local Action Network)
68 Main Street
Gorey
Co Wexford

Tel 053 942 2788
Fax 053 942 2902
www.planet.ie

Community Partnership Network
Midleton Community Enterprise Centre
Owenacurra Business Park
Knockgriffin
Midleton
Co Cork

Tel 021 461 3432
www.cpn.ie

National Drugs Strategy Team

The national strategy against drugs, led by the National Drugs Strategy Team, comprises representatives of government departments, agencies and voluntary and community organisations. It works in cooperation with local drugs task forces, whose role is to draw up and carry out community-based local action plans for treatment, rehabilitation, education, prevention and the curbing of supply.

National Drugs Strategy Team
4-5 Harcourt Road
Dublin 2

Tel 475 4120
Fax 475 4045

Department of Defence

The primary role of the Department of Defence is to protect the state against external aggression, but the Department also has responsibility for peace-keeping operations with the United Nations and civil defence. It funds the work of the Red Cross.

Department of Defence
Parkgate
Infirmary Road
Dublin 7

Tel 804 2000
Fax 670 3399
Locall 1890 251890
webmaster@defence.irlgov.ie
www.defence.ie

Department of Education and Science

The Department of Education and Science has responsibility for education policy, the inspecting of schools, the maintenance of education standards, the psychological service, literacy, special education and initiatives against educational deprivation. The department now has a social inclusion unit. The main national authority for further education and training awards, FETAC, is, for convenience, listed here.

Department of Education and Science
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

Tel 889 6400
Fax 878 7932
www.education.ie

Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)
East Point Plaza
East Point Business Park
Dublin 3

Tel 865 9500
Fax 865 0067
information@fetac.ie
www.fetac.ie

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has overall responsibility for industrial policy and the labour market, including the legal protection of workers, health and safety and, through FÁS, community employment. It is responsible for the European Social Fund in Ireland under the structural funds. Agencies which work under the department include the Employment Appeals Tribunal, the Labour Court, the Labour Relations Commission, the Companies Office and the Office for the Director of Corporate Enforcement (the last two are important for the regulation of voluntary and community organisations which take the legal form of companies).

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Tel 631 2121
Fax 631 2827
Locall 1890 220222
www.entemp.ie

and

65a Adelaide Road
Dublin 2

Tel 631 2121
Fax 631 3267

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is responsible for planning, housing and homelessness, roads, environmental protection, traffic, water supplies and urban renewal. It is the department responsible for coordinating the work of local government in Ireland. Here the department plays an important role in promoting both the social inclusion work of the local authorities and the reformed structures of local government which promote the participation of voluntary and community organisations. The Local Government Social Inclusion Group (LGSIG) in the department supports the development of social inclusion units in the different local authorities.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Custom House
Dublin 1

Tel 888 2000
Fax 888 2888
Locall 1890 202021
department@environ.ie
www.environ.ie

Homeless Agency

The Homeless Agency is listed here, although it is a cross-sectoral body which brings together the work of local housing authorities, the health boards and voluntary organisations, in the greater Dublin area. The Homeless Agency was formed in order to plan, co-ordinate and deliver quality services for

homeless people according to a three-year integrated strategy. The thrust of the agency's work is to involve voluntary and statutory agencies, working in partnership, to follow agreed plans that assist homeless people into appropriate long-term housing and independence. The agency is advised by a consultative forum. It carries out research, provides training supports, monitors the development of services, administers funding programmes and publishes a magazine, Cornerstone.

Homeless Agency
Parkgate Hall
6-9 Conyngham Road
Dublin 8

Tel 703 6100
Fax 703 6170
homeless@dublincity.ie
www.homelessagency.ie

National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee

The National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee has the task of advising the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on how the provision of accommodation for Travellers can best be advanced. It also deals with issues around consultation with Travellers, the management of accommodation, its implementation, coordination and monitoring.

National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
Custom House
Dublin 1

Tel 888 2121
ntacc@environ.ie

Department of Finance

The Department of Finance is the body responsible for national economic policy, taxation, public spending and the operation of the public service. It is the lead department for the structural funds and the National Development Plan. The Department is also responsible for the Office of Public Works, which is responsible for the upkeep and development of government property. This is a broader role than the title suggests. It includes drainage, flood relief, aspects of schools, government publications and national parks.

Department of Finance
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2

Tel 676 7571
Fax 678 9936
Locall 1890 661010
www.finance.gov.ie

National Development Plan
Information Office
15 Lower Hatch Street
Dublin 2

Tel 639 6280
Fax 639 6281
Locall 1890 230030
csfinfo@csfunits.irlgov.ie
www.ndp.ie

Office of Public Works
51 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

Tel 647 6000
Fax 661 0747
Locall 1890 213414
info@opw.ie
www.opw.ie

Department of Foreign Affairs

The Department of Foreign Affairs' responsibilities include the representation of Ireland abroad; the diplomatic service; relationships with Britain and Northern Ireland; the welfare of Irish emigrants; and development aid and cooperation (Irish aid). The department provides a key link between Ireland and the European Union as well as with other international organisations (e.g. United Nations and Council of Europe). A specific unit deals with the situation of Irish emigrants (Irish abroad).

Department of Foreign Affairs
Iveagh House
80 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

Tel 478 0822
Fax 478 1484
Locall 1890 4267000
dfa@dfa.ie
www.dfa.ie

Department of Health and Children and Health Service Executive (HSE)

Because many voluntary and community organisations work in the health area, they find themselves dealing with the Department of Health and Children or its executive agencies. The function of the Department of Health and Children is to define health policy, while it is the duty of the Health Service Executive (HSE) to execute it. The department has a section responsible for primary care and social inclusion, as well as units responsible for disability, older people and mental health.

The HSE operates through a board and chief executive, four regions and 32

Local Health Offices (LHOs). The HSE has national directors, each to provide leadership in key areas. These are: primary care, mental health, chronic care, disabilities and social inclusion. The Health Service Executive publishes an annual Service plan explaining how it plans to deliver its services each year, issuing annual reports on performance subsequently. There is consultation with local authority councillors through regional health forums (four, according to the four regions).

The HSE is guided by expert advisory groups, each comprising up to 20 people, contributing in a personal capacity and drawn from health professionals, clinical experts, patients, clients and service users (though not voluntary and community organisations as such). Titles of user groups to date include children, diabetes, mental health, older people, cardiovascular health, disability, maternity services and oral health.

The full title of the department is important. It also has responsibility for policy for children. Here, an Office of the Minister for Children was established and a minister of state made responsible. While its primary duty is the putting into effect of the National Children's Strategy, the office also has responsibility for child welfare and protection, youth justice services and early years education policy.

The department is assisted by a number of executive units and regulatory and advisory bodies, such as the Mental Health Commission; the National Council on Ageing and Older People; the Women's Health Council; and the Social Services Inspectorate.

Department of Health and Children
Hawkins House
Dublin 2

Tel 635 4000
Fax 635 4001
Locall 1890 200311
www.dohc.ie

Health Service Executive (HSE)
Oak House
Millennium Park
Naas
Co Kildare

Tel 045 880 400
Fax 1890 200 893
www.hse.ie

Mental Health Commission
St Martin's House
Waterloo Road
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4

Tel 636 2400
Fax 636 2440
info@mhcirl.ie
www.mhcirl.ie

National Council on Ageing and Older People
22 Clanwilliam Square
Grand Canal Quay
Dublin 2

Tel 676 6484
Fax 676 5754
info@ncaop.ie
www.ncaop.ie

Women's Health Council
Abbey Court
Irish Life Centre
Abbey Street Lower
Dublin 1

Tel 878 3777
Fax 878 3710
info@whc.ie
www.whc.ie

> Further reading:
A guide to influencing the health services,
Combat Poverty Agency

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Although the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is best known for its work in the area of law enforcement, policing, the prisons, the courts, criminality, probation and censorship, it has a range of other functions of interest to voluntary organisations and community groups. The department is also responsible for civil legal aid, immigration, probation services, childcare services and community policing. The department has the lead role in the promotion of the government's agenda for equality, taking in the Equality Authority and the National Disability Authority. The department is advised on policies on crime by the National Crime Council.

The Garda Síochána is a national police force (unlike many European forces which are local), led by a commissioner, who is appointed by the Minister for Justice. The force is divided geographically into six regions: the Dublin Metropolitan Area (Dublin, with parts of Wicklow and Kildare, sub-divided into five divisions) and five other regions, subdivided into 18 divisions, which are generally based on counties.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
72-76 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

Tel 602 8202
Fax 661 5461
Local 1890 221227
info@justice.ie
www.justice.ie

National Crime Council
4-5 Harcourt Road
Dublin 2

Tel 476 0047
Fax 476 0080
info@crimecouncil.gov.ie
www.crimecouncil.ie

Irish Prisons Service
Monastery Road
Clondalkin
Dublin 22

Tel 461 6000
Fax 461 6027

Probation and Welfare Service
Smithfield Chambers
Smithfield
Dublin 7

Tel 872 0280
Fax 872 2737

Garda Síochána
Phoenix Park
Dublin 8

Tel 666 0000
www.garda.ie

Department of Social and Family Affairs

The Department of Social and Family Affairs, based in Store Street, Dublin, emerged from the original Department of Social Welfare and is the body responsible for the development and delivery of the social welfare system in Ireland. The

department is the lead agency for the Combat Poverty Agency, the Citizens Information Board and the National Pensions Board. It is home to the Family Support Agency, which carries out a range of actions to support families, including support for over a hundred Family Resource Centres (it has a national policy forum).

Several parts of the department are of particular interest to voluntary and community organisations, such as the family affairs unit, the pensions policy unit and the section for short-term schemes, child income support and social insurance. The department also has a network of regional offices throughout the country. A separate agency, the Social Welfare Appeals Office, is responsible for appeals against social welfare decisions.

Department of Social and Family Affairs
Áras Mhic Dhiarmada
Store Street
Dublin 1

Tel 874 8444
Fax 704 3868
info@welfare.ie
www.welfare.ie

Family Support Agency
St Stephen's Green House
Floor 4
Earlsfort Terrace
Dublin 2

Tel 611 4100
Fax 676 0824
familysupport.agency@welfare.ie
www.fsa.ie

Family Resource Centre National Forum
The Digital Hub
157 Thomas Street
Dublin 8

Tel 707 1929
info@familyresource.ie
www.frcnf.com

Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)

The Department of Social and Family Affairs was responsible for the original National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the subsequent National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2013. It established an office specifically designed to drive the strategy, the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI). OSI is one of a series of mechanisms designed to support the National Action Plan:

- Cabinet sub-committee on social exclusion, drugs and local development, chaired by the Taoiseach;
- Liaison officers in each department;
- Senior officials group;
- Application of poverty impact assessments in each government department;
- Monitoring of progress with the assistance of bodies such as the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Economic and Social Forum;
- Annual Social Inclusion Forum.

The Office for Social Inclusion has a wealth of information and publications on social inclusion and poverty issues, poverty impact assessment guidelines for poverty-proofing and details of events and activities.

Office for Social Inclusion
Áras Mhic Dhiarmada
Floor 5
Store Street
Dublin 1

Tel 704 3854
Fax 704 3031
osi@welfare.ie
www.socialinclusion.ie

Department of Transport

The Department of Transport is responsible for roads, aviation, rail and buses. For voluntary and community organisations, its main relevance may lie in its responsibility for public transport (e.g. rail, buses, rural transport, access issues) and road safety.

Department of Transport
44 Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Tel 670 7444
Fax 677 3169
Locall 1890 443311
www.transport.ie



2 State agencies and semi-state bodies

There are several hundred state offices, agencies and state-sponsored bodies in Ireland. A number of these are of particular interest to voluntary and community organisations concerned with social policy. The principal ones are described and listed here. Most state agencies have boards appointed by the government. Most are led by a director or chief executive officer and recruit staff from outside the civil service. Most issue annual reports on their work, which are generally provided free of charge, on request.

They are divided here into:

- Oversight bodies (2.1);
- State agencies concerned with social policy, social and legal services and action against poverty (2.2);
- State agencies promoting culture and the arts (2.3);
- Economic development bodies (2.4);
- Training and employment organisations (2.5); and
- North-South institutions (2.6).

2.1 Oversight bodies

These are bodies designed to oversee the work of government. Sometimes these are termed 'watchdog' bodies. Their functions are to check that the work of government is done in a proper manner and that the rights of citizens are protected. Some have a very specific regulatory role. Those which are most relevant to voluntary organisations and community groups concerned with social policy are listed here.

An Bord Pleanála

An Bord Pleanála is the appeal board for planning decisions made by the local authorities.

An Bord Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

Tel 858 8100
Fax 872 2684
bord@pleanala.ie
www.pleanala.ie

Comptroller and Auditor General, Office of the

The primary role of the Comptroller and Auditor General is oversight of government spending, from central government departments to health boards and universities. Each year, the Comptroller and Auditor General issues an annual report which reviews the work of government departments and agencies, drawing attention to shortcomings, waste and irregularities.

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General
Treasury Building
Dublin Castle
Dublin 2

Tel 603 1000
Fax 603 1010
postmaster@audgen.irlgov.ie
www.audgen.ie

Data Protection Commissioner, Office of the

The basic role of the Data Protection Commissioner is to protect the rights of individuals in relation to personal data kept by others on computer. State, commercial, private, voluntary and other agencies that keep personal computer data such as mailing lists are required to register with the Commissioner.

Office of the Data Protection Commissioner
Canal House
Station Road
Portarlinton
Co Laois

Locall 1890 25231
info@dataprotection.ie
www.dataprotection.ie

Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency has powers and functions designed to promote high standards of environmental protection. These include the licensing and control of large-scale waste and industrial activity, the monitoring of environmental quality, implementing European Union legislation, advising public authorities of their environmental functions, assisting local authorities in environmental protection, the compiling of information on the state of the environment, research and databases.

Environmental Protection Agency
PO Box 3000
Johnstown Castle Estate
Co Wexford

Tel 053 916 0600
Fax 053 916 0699
Locall 1890 335599
info@epa.ie
www.epa.ie

Equality Authority Equality Tribunal

The task of the authority is to work against discrimination in nine distinct areas: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, age, race, membership of the Traveller community and religious belief, under both Irish law and our European obligations. The authority promotes family-friendly work practices, works to combat racism, carries out a broad range of research, links to voluntary organisations and holds seminars. Complaints and claims of unlawful discrimination should be made to the Equality Tribunal, which is located beside the authority but is a separate, independent body.

Equality Authority
2 Clonmel Street
Dublin 2

Tel 417 3333
Fax 417 3331
Locall 1890 245545
info@equality.ie
www.equality.ie

Equality Tribunal
3 Clonmel Street
Dublin 2

Tel 477 4100
Fax 477 4141
Locall 1890 344424
info@equalitytribunal.ie
www.equalitytribunal.ie

Information Commissioner, Office of the

The role of the Office of the Information Commissioner is to act as an appeal body for citizens refused access to documents under the Freedom of Information Act. The commissioner's decision is final, though one may appeal to the courts on a point of law. The Office of the Information Commissioner is an independent one, like that of the Ombudsman. The commissioner has the power to seek documents, compel witnesses, make binding decisions (subject to review by the High Court on a point of law), and must review the operation of the Act and compliance by public bodies.

Office of the Information Commissioner
18 Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2

Tel 639 5689
Fax 639 5676
info@oic.ie
www.oic.ie

National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)

The role of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) is to monitor the problem of racism in Ireland, to advise government on issues of racism, to develop a more integrated approach to racism across government, to raise public awareness of the problem, to promote

action against racist crime and to offer training services.

National Consultative Committee on
Racism and Interculturalism
2nd floor
Jervis House
Jervis Street
Dublin 1

Tel 858 8000
Fax 872 7621
info@nccri.ie
www.nccri.ie

National Consumer Agency

The National Consumer Agency is the watchdog body to provide consumer information, defend and represent consumer rights and enforce consumer legislation. The agency took over the former functions of the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs.

National Consumer Agency
Wilton Park House
Wilton Place
Dublin 2

Calls and complaints 1890 432432
info@consumerconnect.ie
www.consumerconnect.ie

Ombudsman, Office of the

The role of the Ombudsman (originally a Swedish term) is to investigate complaints by individuals concerning public administration. The Ombudsman's remit includes central government, health boards, local authorities, telecommunications and the postal services. The ombudsman is independent and is responsible to the Oireachtas, to whom an annual report is made. The ombudsman is able to both take up individual complaints and address wider

issues which concern maladministration, delay or unfairness.

Office of the Ombudsman
18 Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2

Tel 639 5600
Fax 639 5674
Locall 1890 223030
ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie
www.ombudsman.ie

Ombudsman for Children's Office

This is a specialised office designed to promote and protect the rights of children; and to take up complaints about the treatment of children in public administration, hospitals and schools.

Ombudsman for Children's Office
Millennium House
52-56 Great Strand Street
Dublin 1

Tel 865 6800
Fax 874 7555
Locall 1890 654654
oco@oco.ie
www.oco.ie

Other ombudsman services and regulators

Advertising Standards Authority
IPC House
35-39 Shelbourne Road
Dublin 4

Tel 660 8766
Fax 660 8113
info@asai.ie
www.asai.ie

Broadcasting Complaints Commission
2-5 Warrington Place
Dublin 2

Tel 676 1097
info@bcc.ie
www.bcc.ie

Commission for
Communications Regulation
Abbey Court
Irish Life Centre
Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1

Tel 804 9600
Fax 804 9680
info@comreg.ie
www.comreg.ie

Financial Services Ombudsman's Bureau
3rd Floor, Lincoln House
Lincoln Place
Dublin 2

Tel 662 0899
Fax 662 0890
Locall 1890 882090
enquiries@financialombudsman.ie
www.financialombudsman.ie

Garda Síochána
Ombudsman Commission
31-35 Bow Street
Smithfield
Dublin 7

Tel 828 0370
Fax 828 0731
info@gsoc.ie
www.gardaombudsman.ie

Press Ombudsman and Press Council:
www.presscouncil.ie

Pensions Board

The Pensions Board is the state agency appointed to safeguard the rights of members of occupational pensions schemes, to register pensions schemes, to advise the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on pension matters and to act on behalf of people in pension schemes who are concerned about their entitlements. Its board is drawn from trade unions, employers, government, the pensions industry and professional groups. For grievances, there is a pensions ombudsman.

Pensions Board
Verschoyle House
28-30 Lower Mount Street
Dublin 2

Tel 613 1900
Fax 631 8602
pb@pensionsboard.ie
www.pensionsboard.ie

Pensions Ombudsman
36 Upper Mount Street
Dublin 2

Tel 647 1650
Fax 676 9577
info@pensionsombudsman.ie
www.pensionsombudsman.ie

Refugee Appeals Tribunal

The Refugee Appeals Tribunal deals with appeals against a recommendation of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

Refugee Appeals Tribunal
6-7 Hanover Street East
Dublin 2

Tel 474 8400
Fax 474 8410
Locall 1890 201458
info@refappeal.ie

Revenue Commissioners, Office of the

The task of the Revenue Commissioners is to collect taxes due in the state, fairly and efficiently. While the Commissioners do not have a role in advising particular taxation policies, they do advise the Minister for Finance on budgetary and other problems and issues relating to taxation and duties. The reports of the Revenue Commissioners are valuable sources of information on the country's taxation system.

Voluntary and community organisations working in the area of social inclusion may claim exemption from most taxes because they operate for charitable purposes (the relief of poverty is defined as a charitable purpose). To do so, they apply for a charitable number (CHY number) from the Revenue Commissioners.

Office of the Revenue Commissioners
Dublin Castle
Dublin 2

Tel 647 5000
Fax 647 5307
www.revenue.ie

Charities Section
Government Offices
Nenagh
Co Tipperary

Tel 067 63400
Fax 067 32916
Locall 1890 666333
charities@revenue.ie

2.2 State agencies concerned with social policy, social and legal services and action against poverty

Citizens Information Board

The Citizens Information Board is the fourth iteration of an organisation formerly known as the National Social Services Board and then Comhairle. The Citizens Information Board is the national agency responsible for the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social services. It is best known for its extensive network of Community Information Centres around the country, but it also provides a range of resources that are used by voluntary and community organisations. Most useful here are its directory of organisations, its magazine on developments in the social field (Relate, Voice), with programmes in the area of training, advocacy and social mentoring.

Citizens Information Board
Hume House
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4

Tel 605 9000
Fax 605 9099
information@ciboard.ie
www.ciboard.ie

Combat Poverty Agency

Combat Poverty Agency is the state agency responsible for developing national strategies against poverty. Its role is to advise the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on measures that should be taken against poverty, to carry out research into poverty, to develop pilot schemes, to promote public awareness of poverty and to provide support for community groups

and other organisations active in the struggle against poverty.

The agency publishes an annual report on its work and makes a yearly submission on national budgetary strategy to the Minister for Finance. In addition to supporting research work carried out by voluntary and community organisations, the agency carries out its own research into poverty.

Combat Poverty has published an extensive range of books, briefings and reports on poverty in Ireland, varying from an analysis of the level and nature of poverty to specialised reports on distinct aspects of poverty. The agency publishes the bi-monthly magazine Action on Poverty Today and has a library which is open to voluntary and community organisations.

Together with Pobal, the agency runs Border Action, which delivers important parts of the Peace III programme in the border counties.

Combat Poverty Agency
Bridgewater Centre
Conyngham Road
Islandbridge
Dublin 8

Tel 670 6746
Fax 670 6760
info@combatpoverty.ie
www.combatpoverty.ie

Border Action
M:Tek 2 Building
Armagh Road
Monaghan

Tel 047 71340
Fax 047 71341
info@borderaction.ie
www.borderaction.ie

Legal Aid Board

The Legal Aid Board administers civil legal aid under the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and subsequent regulations. These set down the provision of legal aid and advice in civil cases to people who are financially eligible and whose case is considered to have legal merit. There are 30 law centres throughout the country. The board also operates the Refugee Legal Service, which provides legal advice and assistance to asylum seekers at all stages of the asylum process, and a Refugee Documentation Centre.

Legal Aid Board (Head office)
Quay Street
Cahiriveen
Co Kerry

Tel 066 947 1000
Fax 066 947 1035
Locall 1890 615200
www.legalaidboard.ie

(Dublin office)
47 Upper Mount Street
Dublin 2

Fax 662 3661
Locall 1890 615200

National Disability Authority

About 350,000 people are estimated to have a disability of some kind. The National Disability Authority was established to protect the rights of people with disabilities; to develop policies for people with disabilities; to carry out research; to monitor services and standards; to advise the minister and to encourage equality for people with disabilities.

National Disability Authority
25 Clyde Road
Dublin 4

Tel 608 0400
Fax 660 9935
nda@nda.ie
www.nda.ie

National Educational Welfare Board

The National Educational Welfare Board has the formal responsibility of ensuring that all children receive an education. The board has a network of regional offices and employs education officers. The board's work has strong links to issues of educational disadvantage, school attendance and early school leaving.

National Educational Welfare Board
16-22 Green Street
Dublin 7

Tel 873 8700
Fax 873 8799
Helpline 1890 363666
info@newb.ie
www.newb.ie

Reception and Integration Agency

The Reception and Integration Agency was set up to plan and co-ordinate services for asylum seekers and refugees; to promote the integration of those permitted to remain in the state; and to respond to a crisis situation of refugee arrivals. The Agency should not be confused with the Irish Refugee Council, which is a voluntary organisation.

Reception and Integration Agency
Block C
Ardilaun Centre
94 St Stephen's Green West
Dublin 2

Tel 418 3200
Fax 418 3271

2.3 State agencies promoting culture and the arts

The Arts Council

The Arts Council is the state's agency set up to promote public interest in the arts and to advise government on artistic matters. The council provides grants to individuals and organisations engaged in artistic activity. It supports the work of local authority arts officers in promoting the arts at local level.

The Arts Council
70 Merrion Square
Dublin 2

Tel 618 0200
Fax 676 1302
Locall 1850 392492
info@artscouncil.ie
www.artscouncil.ie

The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council is responsible for proposing policies for the better protection of Ireland's archaeology, landscape, flora and fauna, waterways, wildlife, gardens and architecture, as well as providing public education in these areas.

The Heritage Council
Kilkenny

Tel 056 777 0777
Fax 056 777 0788
mail@heritagecouncil.com
www.heritagecouncil.ie

The Library Council

The Library Council (An Chomairle Leabharlanna) advises local authorities on the development of local library services and provides grants for local library service developments under the Public Library Grants Scheme.

The Library Council
53-54 Upper Mount Street
Dublin 2

Tel 676 1167
Fax 676 6721
info@librarycouncil.ie
www.librarycouncil.ie

2.4 Economic development bodies

Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Bord Iascaigh Mhara is the state agency responsible for the development of the seafood industry, including aquaculture, along with diversification in coastal economies.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Crofton Road
Dún Laoghaire
Co Dublin

Tel 214 4100
Fax 284 1123
info@bim.ie
www.bim.ie

Dublin Docklands Development Authority

This is a state agency tasked with the rejuvenation and strategic development of the commercial, residential, cultural, educational and employment potential of the Dublin docks area, both north and south of the river.

Dublin Docklands Development Authority
52-55 Sir John Rogerson's Quay
Docklands
Dublin 2

Tel 818 3300
Fax 818 3399
info@dublindocklands.ie
www.dublindocklands.ie

Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland is the state agency established to promote tourism development, working closely with the industry to make the sector as dynamic as possible.

Fáilte Ireland
88-95 Amiens Street
Dublin 1

and

Baggot Street Bridge
Dublin 2

Local 1890 525525
info@failteireland.ie
www.failteireland.ie

Forfás

Forfás is the national board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation. It has overall responsibility for:

- Enterprise Ireland, which promotes indigenous industry;
- IDA Ireland, which attracts foreign direct investment; and the
- Science Foundation

Forfás
Wilton Park House
Wilton Place
Dublin 2

Tel 607 3000
Fax 607 3030
info@forfas.ie
www.forfas.ie

Enterprise Ireland
Glasnevin
Dublin 9

Tel 808 2000
Fax 808 2020
www.enterprise-ireland.com

Shannon Development

The purpose of Shannon Development is to promote the industrial and economic development of the Shannon region,

which takes in not only Clare but Limerick, north Tipperary, north Kerry and south Offaly; not only large-scale projects but small-scale activities in the areas of rural development and small businesses. Shannon Development, founded in 1959, was one of the first bodies in the state committed to ideas of integrated regional and local development.

Shannon Development
Shannon
Co Clare

Tel 061 361 555
Fax 061 361 903
info@shannondev.ie
www.shannondev.ie

Teagasc

Teagasc is the state body responsible for advisory, education, training and research services for agricultural and rural communities, with eight centres around the country. Its board is appointed by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, but includes nominations from other organisations. Teagasc is an important source of information and policy on agriculture and rural development (e.g. survey of farm incomes).

Teagasc
Oak Park
Carlow

Tel 059 917 0200
Fax 059 918 2097
info@teagasc.ie
www.teagasc.ie

Údarás na Gaeltachta

The role of Údarás na Gaeltachta is to promote industry and services in the Gaeltacht regions and to preserve and

extend the use of the Irish language in the area. The board is unusual insofar as 17 members are directly elected by the people of the Gaeltacht, and three are appointed by the minister.

Údarás na Gaeltachta
Na Forbacha
Gaillimh

Tel 091 503 100
Fax 091 503 101
eolas@udaras.ie
www.udaras.ie

Western Development Commission

The Western Development Commission was set up to promote the economic and social development of the seven western counties of Clare, Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Donegal and Sligo. It works to develop strategic initiatives in cooperation with the national, regional and local bodies of the area.

Western Development Commission
Dillon House
Ballaghaderreen
Co Roscommon

Tel 094 986 1441
Fax 094 986 1443
info@wdc.ie
www.wdc.ie

2.5 Training and employment organisations

FÁS

FÁS (Foras Áiseanna Saothair) is an important agency for voluntary and community organisations. It operates the Community Employment schemes, under which about 22,000 workers receive employment training at any one time, most working for voluntary and community groups. With a billion euro budget, FÁS trains around 80,000 persons a year, and runs 64 employment service offices and 20 training centres. Its functions are to operate training and employment programmes, provide advisory services and support community-based enterprise, paying special attention to the long-term unemployed and early school leavers.

FÁS
27-33 Upper Baggot Street
Dublin 4

Tel 607 0500
Fax 607 0600
www.fas.ie

2.6 North-South institutions

The Belfast agreement of 1998 introduced a range of new institutions between the Republic and Northern Ireland and also with Great Britain. The north-south institutions had a low profile during their early years, because of the difficulties in finalising the agreement, but it is likely that their importance and influence will grow in time. At their centre is the North South Ministerial Council, based in Armagh, which is staffed by civil servants from both governments in Ireland. Its reports provide useful information on the state of north-south cooperation and the areas where the respective governments and agencies are working together.

Under the Belfast agreement, the following north-south bodies were established:

- Waterways Ireland, Enniskillen;
- Safefood, Dublin;
- Intertrade Ireland, Newry;
- Special European Union Programmes Body, Belfast;
- North-South Language Body, Dublin and Belfast;
- Tourism Ireland, Dublin and Coleraine; and
- The Loughs Agency, Derry.

Those likely to be of most interest to voluntary and community organisations are the Special EU programmes body and the North-South language body. There is also a cooperation body in the area of health and health inequality. In addition, human rights commissions were established to underpin the human rights aspects of the agreement and these have implications for social rights.

North South Ministerial Council
39 Abbey Street
Armagh BT61 7EB

Tel 048 3751 8068
Fax 048 3751 1974
info@ministerialcouncil.org
www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org

Institute of Public Health

Health was listed as one of a number of cooperation areas under the Belfast agreement, but no specific institutions were proposed at the time. Nevertheless, the Institute of Public Health was subsequently set up as a north-south body in order to tackle inequalities in health, strengthen partnerships in health and contribute to public health surveillance and information. It does this through research, training and policy advice. The Institute has published background documents for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, a report on Irish health in a European context and studies of social and gender inequalities in mortality.

Institute of Public Health in Ireland
5th floor
Bishop's Square
Redmond's Hill
Dublin 2

Tel 478 6300
Fax 478 6319
info@publichealth.ie
www.publichealth.ie

Irish Human Rights Commission

The Irish Human Rights Commission has an important role in reviewing legislation and policy, case work and education. The Commission focused its initial work on the administration of

justice; economic, social and cultural rights; racism; disability; gender and equality issues.

Irish Human Rights Commission
Jervis House
Jervis Street
Dublin 1

Tel 858 9601
Fax 858 9609
info@ihrc.ie
www.ihrc.ie

North-South Language Body

This comprises the Ulster-Scots Agency and Bord na Gaeilge, now Foras na Gaeilge. The task of Foras na Gaeilge is the promotion of the Irish language throughout the island, advising the two governments, carrying out research, supporting projects and encouraging education through Irish.

Bord na Gaeilge
7 Cearnóg Mhuirfean
Baile Átha Cliath 2

Tel 639 8400
Fax 639 8401
Locall 1850 325325
eolas@forasnagaeilge.ie
www.gaeilge.ie

Special European Union Programmes Body

This body is responsible for the oversight and operation of the Peace III programme, which has a high level of involvement of voluntary and community organisations and the INTERREG IV cross-border cooperation programme and has regional offices in Monaghan and Omagh.

Special European Union Programmes
Body (SEUPB)
6 Cromac Place
Belfast BT7 2JB

Tel 048 9026 6660
Fax 048 9026 6661
info@seupb.org
www.seupb.org



3 Local administration

Local administration in Ireland comprises:

- Local authorities (114);
- Regional assemblies (2) and Regional authorities (8);
- Vocational Education Committees (33);
- Fisheries boards (7);
- Harbour authorities (18).

Local authorities

The local authorities are elected in local elections every five years. They may be sub-divided into county councils (29), city councils (5) and borough and town councils (80).

Elected members are responsible for policy, estimates, development plans, by-laws and nominations to other bodies (reserved functions). The operational functions of the local authorities are carried out by officials. Each major local authority is headed by a manager (the county manager or city manager) who participates in local authority meetings (though may not vote). City councils have up to 52 members; county councils up to 48 members; and most town councils have 9 members (a small number has 12).

Each local authority normally meets monthly at a regular set time and their on-going work is carried out by sub-committees.

The authorities are responsible for the following main areas of work: housing; roads; water supplies and sewerage; fire and emergency services; development; environmental protection; and recreation and amenities.

The actual operation of these areas is divided between the councillors (reserved functions) and the manager (the rest). Each local authority is structured through:

- Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), covering the following areas:
 - Economic development and planning;
 - Environment;
 - Transport and infrastructure;
 - Housing, social and cultural development (titles may vary from one local authority to another).
- City or County Development Boards, comprising 25 members, charged with drawing up and carrying out multi-annual plans for economic and social development.

A number of elements are of importance for voluntary and community organisations:

- Social Inclusion Units (about half the local authorities);
 - Social Inclusion Measures groups (also called 'SIM groups');
 - Community forums (or fora) (some with community platforms);
 - Traveller accommodation consultative committees;
 - City and county childcare committees;
 - Joint policing committees.
- > For addresses of individual local authorities, see IPA Yearbook and Diary or green pages of the regional telephone directory.
- > Further reading: Hilary Curley: Finding your way around local government, Combat Poverty Agency.

Regional assemblies Regional authorities

When the reformed structural funds were introduced in 1989, the country was divided into seven, later eight, regions (border, Dublin, mid-east, midland, mid-west, south-east, south-west, west). In 2000, the country was re-divided for the structural funds into two much larger regions, each with regional assemblies: the border, midlands and western region; and the southern and eastern region.

The task of the regional authorities is broadly to co-ordinate public services in each region and, specifically, to monitor the operation of the European Union structural funds. Although the 'assembly' part of the title covers councillors from the region, voluntary and community groups are more likely to find themselves dealing with their secretariats. Their reports on the operation of the structural funds include a substantial body of information on the regions and their socio-economic characteristics.

Despite the emergence of the two large regional assemblies, the eight old regional authorities remain in operation.

**Border, Midland and Western
Regional Assembly
The Square
Ballaghaderreen
Co Roscommon**

**Tel 094 986 2970
Fax 094 986 2973
info@bmwassembly.ie
www.bmwassembly.ie**

**South and Eastern Regional Assembly
Assembly House
O'Connell Street
Waterford**

**Tel 051 860 700
Fax 051 879 887
info@seregassembly.ie
www.seregassembly.ie**

- > For the eight regional authorities, see IPA Yearbook and Diary.

Vocational Education Committees

There are 33 VECs in the country, broadly based on counties and a number of other designated areas. Each VEC is headed by a chief executive officer, while the actual committee has not less than 14 members, of whom eight are appointed by the local authority. VECs are primarily responsible for vocational schools, but their main contact with voluntary and community organisations is likely to be through their work in the area of training, adult education and youth services.

- > For addresses, see IPA Yearbook and Diary, or regional telephone directory.

Fisheries boards

There are seven regional fisheries boards, located in Dublin; Ballyshannon, Co Donegal; Ballina, Co Mayo; Limerick; Clonmel, Co Tipperary; Macroom, Co Cork and Galway.

- > For contact points, see IPA Yearbook and Diary, or regional telephone directory.

Harbour authorities

There are 18 harbour authorities.

- > For addresses, see IPA Yearbook and Diary, or regional telephone directory.



4 Advisory bodies

Government is assisted in its work by a number of advisory bodies. These range from internal working groups to temporary committees, task forces and commissions, on the one hand, to permanent advisory groups on the other. From the perspective of social policy, the most influential permanent bodies advising the government are the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and the Law Reform Commission. Originally these groups grew up on separate paths. The NESC and NESF were since brought together in a new structure – the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO). Later, the National Centre for Partnership and Performance was added.

National Economic and Social Council (NESC)

The National Economic and Social Council dates in its present form to 1973. Its role is to:

- Advise government on economic and social policies, either on its own initiative or following a request by the government;
- Provide a forum for discussion on economic and social policies for government with the social partners;
- Research reports on particular economic and social issues, providing analysis, commentary and recommendations; and
- Make periodic reports on broad national economic and social strategy.

The Council has a small research staff and secretariat. The members of the Council are drawn from the four social pillars (five from the community pillar). The Council has published over a hundred major

reports, ranging from economic policy to emigration and rural development. Most NESC reports are lengthy and include considerable volumes of useful information, with analysis of social and economic issues. While some sketch out broad paths for economic and social development, others focus on much more specific issues or test out new policy ideas. A standard format is for the council's reports to include an independent research report, accompanied by the Council's own comments. The Council's reports are influential and are circulated to members of the Oireachtas as a matter of course.

National Economic and Social Council
16 Parnell Square East
Dublin 1

Tel 814 6300
Fax 814 6301
Locall 1890 203 006
info@nesc.ie
www.nesc.ie

National Economic and Social Forum (NESF)

The National Economic and Social Forum is much broader than the National Economic and Social Council. It includes members of the Oireachtas and voluntary and community organisations representing the disadvantaged. The purpose of the forum is to develop economic and social policy initiatives, build a national consensus on economic and social policy and provide opportunities for the discussion of new means of addressing social and economic problems.

The forum's membership comprises the following elements:

- Oireachtas members;

- Business, trade union, farming pillars;
- Non-governmental organisations;
- Government departments;
- Local government; and
- Independent members.

NESF policy reports tend to be much shorter than those of NESC, are approved more rapidly and have a focus on issues of social disadvantage. These reports can enable new policy issues to be progressed and are influential in shaping thinking on these issues within government and the Oireachtas.

The fact that government representatives, Oireachtas members of political parties, the traditional social partners and voluntary and community organisations back particular reports gives a strong impetus for their implementation. NESF reports are available from the secretariat.

National Economic and Social Forum
16 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

Tel 814 6300
Fax 814 6301
Locall 1890 203006
info@nesf.ie
www.nesf.ie

Law Reform Commission

The Law Reform Commission advises the government on how the law in Ireland (including private or public international law) may be reformed, improved or updated. The normal process is for the commission to undertake research and consult with interested parties before presenting proposals to government. In the course of this work, it has issued numerous working papers, consultation papers and reports (available from the commission).

Several voluntary organisations have found the commission's endorsement of their proposals for a change in the law to be helpful in campaigns for law reform (e.g. charities law).

The Law Reform Commission has a board (commissioners) appointed by government and acts independently.

Law Reform Commission
35-39 Shelbourne Road
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4

Tel 637 7600
Fax 637 7601
info@lawreform.ie
www.lawreform.ie



5 Research bodies

Government is assisted in its work by a small number of state bodies that have research tasks. The most prominent of these is the Central Statistics Office which has a general responsibility for collecting statistical information and making it available to government, agencies and citizens.

There are a number of specialised state agencies that have an important research role. It is normal practice for governments, when looking for research to be done, to ask appropriate research agencies to carry out these tasks, or else to contract them out to independent or private organisations. There are no state bodies dedicated solely to research in the social policy area.

In practice most research on social matters has been carried out by the National Economic and Social Council, the National Social and Economic Forum, and, in the area of poverty, by the Combat Poverty Agency.

In addition to government agencies which carry out research roles, there are a number of other organisations that carry out research. They range from non-profit bodies (e.g. Economic and Social Research Institute) to international and local commercial consultancies and individual researchers.

Many research bodies have their own libraries. Some are open to the public, either generally or by appointment. Organisations may wish to send their reports there, in any case.

Central Statistics Office

The Central Statistics Office collects, compiles, analyses and disseminates statistical information on the economic and social life of the country. The CSO is best known for the five-yearly censuses which survey all the households in the state.

The results of each census are published in detailed volumes covering such topics as age, sex, marital status, occupations and household composition. Small area population statistics for urban districts, rural districts, towns and district electoral divisions can be of considerable use in compiling area profiles for community organisations.

CSO publications follow a series of regular and well structured categories (agriculture, demography, trade, industry, building, the labour market, vital statistics, prices and services), with additional publications and summaries following particular topics. They are made available in a variety of ways, such as statistical releases, publications and on-line. The information service is located in the Cork office and enquiries are welcome in writing, by phone or by e-mail.

Central Statistics Office
Skehard Road
Cork

Tel 1890 313414
information@csa.ie
www.csa.ie

also at:

Ardee Road
Rathmines
Dublin 6

Tel 489 4000
Fax 497 2360

Chief Science Adviser to the Government, Office of the

The government now has a science advisor, whose task it is to advise the government on issues of science and technology.

Office of the Chief Science Advisor
Wilton Park House
Wilton Place
Dublin 2

Tel 607 3270
Fax 607 3059
info@c-s.ie
www.c-s.ie

Economic and Social Research Institute

The Economic and Social Research Institute is not a government agency, but a non-profit institute which researches issues of contemporary economic and social concern. Much of its work is done on contract for government, agencies and the private sector (e.g. evaluations of the structural funds). It is best known for its economic commentaries (which are always well publicised), but all its reports carry considerable weight with policy-makers and the media.

Although the balance of its reports tend to focus more on the economic than the social, the ESRI's research is extensive and well worth the attention of voluntary and community organisations.

Economic and Social Research Institute
Whitaker Square
Sir John Rogerson's Quay
Dublin 2

Tel 667 1525
Fax 668 6231
admin@esri.ie
www.esri.ie

Health Research Board

The Health Research Board's task is to carry out research into appropriate health issues, either on its own initiative or as requested by the minister and to promote an improved knowledge of population health. The board has assembled health information systems in the areas of mental health, disability and drug misuse.

Health Research Board
73 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Tel 676 1176
Fax 661 1856
hrb@hrb.ie
www.hrb.ie

National Cancer Registry Board

The role of the National Cancer Registry Board is to collect and analyse information on the nature, level and types of cancer in Ireland, to promote research into cancer and to publish an annual report based on its findings.

National Cancer Registry Board
Elm Court
Boreenmanna Road
Cork

Tel 021 431 8014
Fax 021 431 8016
info@ncri.ie
www.ncri.org

TASC – a think tank for action on social change

TASC is a new think tank which declares its interest to be in 'progressive social change'. It has already undertaken a 'democratic audit' and published on pensions, transport, local government, housing inequality and the accountability of public bodies.

TASC
26 South Frederick Street
Dublin 2

Tel 616 9050
Fax 675 3118
contact@tascedt.ie
www.tascedt.ie



6 Social partners

The purpose of this section is to list and provide details of:

- National social partners (6.1)
- National voluntary and community organisations (6.2).

6.1 National social partners

The four pillars of the national agreements are:

- Employers and Business (Irish Business and Employers Confederation, Construction Industry Federation, Small Firms Association, Irish Exporters' Association, Irish Tourist Industry Confederation, Chambers Ireland);
- Trade unions (Irish Congress of Trade Unions);
- Farmers (Irish Farmers Association, Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, Irish Cooperative Organisation Society and Macra na Feirme);
- Community Pillar (> 6.2, below).

The first three social pillars are now reviewed.

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)

The Irish Business and Employers Confederation, IBEC, provides economic, commercial, employee relations and social affairs services to thousands of companies and organisations from all sectors of economic and commercial activity. It covers such issues as economic affairs, employee relations, pay, employment law, taxation, competition, the environment, trade and transport. It also represents the collective views of the business community to government, including those on social policy, and is regarded as an influential shaper of thinking in government and the Department of Finance.

Irish Business and Employers Confederation
Confederation House
84-86 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Tel 605 1500
Fax 638 1500
www.ibec.ie

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is the representative body for trade unions in Ireland, bringing together 58 unions with a combined membership of hundreds of thousands of people. The congress co-ordinates the work of trade unions in Ireland, helps to resolve industrial disputes and represents the needs of trade union members to government. The congress presents policy proposals to government, covering diverse issues, and is represented on a wide range of advisory bodies. The congress has a small number of full-time staff, some of whom are engaged in research and information work.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions
31-32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

Tel 889 7777
Fax 887 2012
congress@ictu.ie
www.ictu.ie

Irish Cooperative Organisation Society (ICOS)

The Irish Cooperative Organisation Society is the national organisation which supports and co-ordinates the work of the cooperative movement in Ireland.

Irish Cooperative Organisation Society
84 Merrion Square
Dublin 2

Tel 676 4783
Fax 662 4502
info@icos.ie
www.icos.ie

Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)

The Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association is a national organisation representing farmers, concentrating on livestock farmers. It has six national committees, one of which concentrates on rural development.

Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association
John Feely House
Dublin Road
Limerick

Tel 061 314677
Fax 061 315737
info@icmsa.ie
www.icmsa.ie

Irish Farmers Association (IFA)

The Irish Farmers Association is the main national organisation representing Irish farmers. It is organised on a county and branch basis, with a national headquarters in Dublin and membership of the European Farmers organisation, COPA. It is one of the most active lobbying bodies in the state.

Irish Farmers Association
Irish Farm Centre
Bluebell
Dublin 12

Tel 450 0266
Fax 455 1043
www.ifa.ie

Macra na Feirme

Macra na Feirme is one of the most important organisations for Irish rural young people (age range: 17 to 35), focusing on agriculture, sports, travel, public speaking and performing arts, with thousands of members in hundreds of clubs. Macra has representation on over a dozen other national policy-making bodies and is considered one of the most influential voluntary organisations in the country. Many members of the Oireachtas learned their skills in Macra.

Macra na Feirme
Irish Farm Centre
Bluebell
Dublin 12

Tel 426 8900
Fax 426 8999
www.macra.ie

6.2 National voluntary and community organisations

There are thousands of voluntary and community organisations in Ireland. It would be impossible to list them all in this guide, so this section lists those most associated with work against poverty and social exclusion in Ireland, focusing on members of the community pillar and national networks against poverty.

Age Action Ireland Ltd

Age Action Ireland brings together both organisations and individuals concerned with the welfare of older people, including their quality of life, and those most vulnerable among them. It has become well known for its media work for older people; training and information; its work with elected representatives and state agencies; and as an information and policy resource for people interested in older people and ageing.

Age Action Ireland
30-31 Lower Camden Street
Dublin 2

Tel 475 6989
Fax 475 6011
info@ageaction.ie
www.ageaction.ie

Carers Association

The development of the Carers Association reflects a recognition of the volume of work undertaken by family carers, now estimated to number over 150,000 people. The association provides resource centres and information and advice for its members. It has campaigned for social, health and welfare policies to improve the situation of carers and the quality of caring through research, policy documents and pre-budget submissions.

Carers Association
Prior's Orchard
6 John's Quay
Kilkenny

Tel 056 772 1424
Fax 056 775 3531
www.carersireland.com

Children's Rights Alliance

This is an umbrella body of eighty organisations, specifically pledged to secure the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, 1992 (taking an active part in the monitoring process) but with a broad remit for children's rights, welfare, policies and services generally. Attacking child poverty has been a specific focus of the work of the alliance, which has pressed for reforms through government agencies, social partnership and the Oireachtas.

Children's Rights Alliance
4 Upper Mount Street
Dublin 2

Tel 662 9400
Fax 662 9355
info@cra.iol.ie
www.childrensrights.ie

Community Workers Cooperative

The Community Workers Cooperative is a national association of people and organisations active in participative, community-based initiatives addressing poverty and exclusion throughout the country. It was formed to provide a focus to promote community development as a strategy for social change and to build a national platform to pursue policy agendas drawn from local,

community-based action on poverty and exclusion issues.

The cooperative has been to the forefront of the development of the justice, social inclusion and solidarity agenda in Ireland and publishes both regular and occasional texts (e.g. Building peace and democracy in Ireland, north and south – the role of the community and voluntary sector). The cooperative in Donegal has played a leading role in the Peace III programme.

Community Workers Cooperative
1st floor, Unit 4
Tuam Road Retail Centre
Tuam Road
Galway

Tel 091 779 030
Fax 091 779 033
info@cwci.ie
www.cwci.ie

18 Celtic Apartments
Pearse Road
Letterkenny
Co Donegal

Tel 074 912 8792
Fax 074 912 9067
cwcdl@eircom.net

Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI)

The Conference of Religious of Ireland brings together the main religious orders involved in teaching, nursing and community work, coordinating and supporting their work and representing their interests to government. In the area of poverty, the justice office in CORI has become well known for its sharp commentaries on government budgetary policy as well as addressing the wider issues of exclusion and inequality through books, research, policy papers, briefing

documents, socio-economic reviews, conferences and media work.

Conference of Religious of Ireland
(Justice Office)
Bloomfield Avenue
Dublin 4

Tel 667 7363
justice@cori.ie
www.cori.ie/justice

Disability Federation of Ireland

The Disability Federation of Ireland is the representative body for organisations working with people with a disability in Ireland, with over 150 associated organisations, for which it provides information, training, advice and representation both at national and regional level.

The federation presents the needs of people with disabilities to government (working particularly with the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive); carries out research; argues for reforms such as income support based on the cost of disability (Being disabled costs more); and makes a series of broad recommendations to government, be that on the budget or the longer-term economic and social strategies.

Disability Federation of Ireland
Fumbally Court
Fumbally Lane
Dublin 8

Tel 454 7978
Fax 454 7981
info@disability-federation.ie
www.disability-federation.ie

European Anti-Poverty Network

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) was established at the same time as a number of networks against poverty in the other member states of the European Union. It is affiliated to the European Anti-Poverty Network in Brussels.

The role of the European Anti-Poverty Network in Ireland is to act as a channel of information on developments in poverty in Ireland and Europe; to articulate the specific issues of poverty in Ireland in a European context; and to keep member organisations up to date on poverty issues in Europe. EAPN Ireland has over a hundred member organisations and has been an active contributor to the Forum on Europe and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

European Anti-Poverty Network
5 Gardiner Row
Dublin 1

Tel 874 5737
Fax 878 1289
eapn@iol.ie
www.eapn.ie

Forum of People with Disabilities

The Forum of People with Disabilities is established to be an organisation of people with disabilities, to promote their rights as citizens and especially their right to be consulted about issues that affect them.

Forum of People with Disabilities
1st floor
21 Hill Street
Dublin 1

Tel 878 6077
Fax 878 6170
info@fpd.ie

Gay and Lesbian Equality Network

The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) has been to the forefront in promoting equality in Ireland for gay and lesbian people. The network has campaigned on legislative reform, social welfare policy and questions of discrimination, documenting the problem of exclusion with the Combat Poverty Agency in the original report Poverty – lesbians and gay men.

Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)
Fumbally Court
Fumbally Lane
Dublin 8

Tel 473 0563
Fax 454 6663
admin@glen.ie
www.glen.ie

Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas

The Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas is a commission set up by the Catholic bishops in Ireland. Most of ICPO's work comprises prison visiting, casework and supporting families at home, but it also has a strong policy focus on improving the situation for Irish prisoners held abroad (mainly in Britain, continental Europe and the United States).

Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas
Columba Centre
Maynooth
Co Kildare

Tel 505 3154
Fax 601 6401
icpo@iecon.ie

Irish Council for Social Housing

Over 18,000 homes have been provided through social housing. The Irish Council for Social Housing is the umbrella body bringing together over 300 voluntary housing associations providing small, medium and large-scale schemes for older people, homeless people and disadvantaged groups. Apart from providing advice and assistance for its members, the council has both a technical and policy role in improving the environment for the delivery of social housing and promoting more enlightened housing policies.

Irish Council for Social Housing
50 Merrion Square East
Dublin 2

Tel 661 8334
Fax 661 0320
info@icsh.ie
www.icsh.ie

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed represents local centres for unemployed people and underemployed people. The core of the organisation is the various centres for the unemployed in the main cities and towns. The aim of the INOU is full employment and the elimination of long-term unemployment. The INOU has been to the fore in shaping the welfare-to-work agenda in such a way as to maximise opportunities for unemployed people.

The organisation publishes a range of information leaflets, reports, policy analysis and a regular monthly Bulletin. The organisation is affiliated to the European Network of the Unemployed.

In addition, a network of centres for the unemployed is run by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (> Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 6.1, above).

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Araby House
8 North Richmond Street
Dublin 1

Tel 856 0088
Fax 856 0090
inou@iol.ie
www.inou.ie

Irish Refugee Council

The Irish Refugee Council aims to ensure that the Irish system for receiving refugees and asylum-seekers conforms to international law and human rights; promotes public understanding of asylum and refugee issues; and attempts to meet the networking information and advocacy needs of the asylum-seeking and refugee community.

The Irish Refugee Council provides legal advice for asylum seekers and seeks to influence government policies toward refugees through policy papers and research (several publications have been issued addressing the legal, social and human rights situations of refugees).

Irish Refugee Council
88 Capel Street
Dublin 1

Tel 873 0042
Fax 873 0088
refugee@iol.ie
www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

Irish Rural Link

Irish Rural Link is a national network of organisations and individuals concerned with rural development, especially policies that address the particular problems of social exclusion in the rural areas. It has focused on improved government strategies for rural development, addressing particular issues such as public services (e.g. transport, post).

Irish Rural Link
Moate Business Park
Clara Road
Moate
Co Westmeath

Tel 090 648 2744
Fax 090 648 1682
www.irishrurallink.ie

Irish Senior Citizens Parliament

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament was set up as 'the voice of the elderly' to represent the interests of older people to government, health boards and local authorities, with over 90,000 members represented in more than 300 affiliated organisations. Its concern is to secure a decent standard of living for older people, a proper level of public services and recognition of the elderly in social partnership. Policy documents outline a range of improvements which it believes are necessary in public services, pensions, caring services, housing and taxation.

The Parliament is considered to be a politically effective organisation,

presenting a series of well-argued and carefully costed proposals to government and the Department of Finance.

Irish Senior Citizens Parliament
90 Fairview Strand
Dublin 3

Tel 856 1243
Fax 856 1245
seniors@iol.ie
www.seniors.ie

Irish Traveller Movement

The Irish Traveller Movement brings together over 90 groups and organisations working with Travelling people. Its members are committed to upholding the distinct ethnic identity of Travelling people and seeking their equality in partnership with settled people. The movement seeks to promote improved policies for the accommodation, welfare and legal protection of Travellers.

Irish Traveller Movement
4-5 Eustace Street
Dublin 2

Tel 679 6577
Fax 679 6578
itmtrav@indigo.ie
www.itmtrav.com

NALA – National Adult Literacy Agency

NALA is the national agency concerned with the promotion of adult literacy in Ireland, aiming to ensure that all adults with reading and writing difficulties gain access to the best quality training, resources and assistance. NALA is not just involved in training but has worked hard to raise the profile of literacy issues through research and comparison

with other countries so as to improve investment here.

NALA
76 lower Gardiner Street
Dublin 1

Tel 855 4332
Fax 855 5475
literacy@nala.ie
www.nala.ie

National Association of Building Cooperatives (NABCO)

NABCO specifically represents housing cooperatives, carrying out a promotional, representative, training information and developmental role for rental and ownership coops.

National Association of Building Cooperatives (NABCO)
33 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Tel 661 2877
Fax 661 4462
www.nabco.ie

National Women's Council of Ireland

The National Women's Council is the representative body for women's organisations in Ireland. The aim of the council is to highlight the inequality and injustice experienced by women, make representations to government for the improvement of their situation and empower women to reach their full potential. The council represents women's views to government, takes up issues of discrimination, monitors the progress of actions bringing about equality and

provides advice to women on social and health issues that may affect them.

National Women's Council of Ireland
9 Marlborough Court
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

Tel 878 7248
Fax 878 7301
info@nwci.ie
www.nwci.ie

National Youth Council of Ireland

The National Youth Council of Ireland is a long-established representative body for Irish youth organisations. Its members include national, regional and specialised youth organisations, spanning the range of youth groups from uniformed organisations to groups concerned with special issues affecting youth. As well as representing the needs of Irish youth to government, the council campaigns for improved youth services. The council is represented on several national social partnership bodies and the European Union's Economic and Social Committee.

National Youth Council of Ireland
3 Montague Street
Dublin 2

Tel 478 4122
Fax 478 3974
info@nyci.ie
www.youth.ie

Older Women's Network

The Older Women's Network comprises individual and organisational members and aims to assist women in personal development and to contribute to decision-making. It provides training information and a policy forum, with a

strong focus on the situation of women who have been disadvantaged during their lives.

Older Women's Network
Senior House
All Hallows College
Grace Park Road
Dublin 9

Tel 884 4536
Fax 884 4534
ownireland@eircom.net
www.ownireland.ie

One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN)

18% of all families in Ireland are one parent families. OPEN is the national network of lone parent self-help groups joined together to represent the interests of lone parents living in poverty and social exclusion. It aims to promote their inclusion and progression within society. OPEN has contributed a range of research reports and papers as well as a regular newsletter. It works closely with government departments, the media and other organisations to promote policy change.

One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN)
7 Red Cow Lane
Smithfield
Dublin 7

Tel 814 8860
Fax 814 8890
enquiries@oneparent.ie
www.oneparent.ie

Pavee Point

Pavee Point has been a pioneering service for Travellers, developing a range of services, policies and ideas, challenging

the treatment of Travellers and arguing for the participation of Travellers in decision-making. The aim of Pavee Point is to improve the situation of Travellers through education, training, socio-economic development, human rights and social justice, through a variety of projects covering diverse areas such as health, media, Europe, culture, childhood, youth and the situation of women.

Pavee Point
46 North Great Charles Street
Dublin 1

Tel 878 0255
Fax 874 2626
pavee@iol.ie
www.paveepoint.ie

People with Disabilities in Ireland

People with Disabilities in Ireland Ltd (PwDI) is a representative cross-sectoral structure through which people with disabilities can participate in and influence the decision-making process on matters of concern to them. It is an independent campaigning body working in the areas of advocacy and promoting equality.

People with Disabilities Ireland Ltd (PwDI)
4th floor
Jervis House
Jervis Street
Dublin 1

Tel 872 1744
Fax 872 1771
info@pwdi.ie
www.pwdi.ie

Protestant Aid

Protestant Aid is one of the original members of the community pillar. Founded in 1836, Protestant Aid relieves distress by the granting of financial help on a non-denominational basis. It is associated with the Brabazon Trust which provides sheltered housing for over a hundred elderly people.

Protestant Aid
74 Upper Leeson Street
Dublin 2

Tel 668 4298
Fax 660 3292
protaid@eircom.net
www.protestantaid.org

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the largest voluntary organisation of social concern working with people who live in poverty in Ireland today. It is a lay Christian organisation with 9,600 members in a thousand local groups which provide friendship, material aid and other assistance to the needy.

The society's small national office supports the work of the local groups, takes up national issues with the government and is well known for its annual submission to the Minister for Finance on how the budget should be more effective in relieving poverty. Other issues are addressed to the political system in the From the ground up programme. Despite being a large national organisation, it is very decentralised, with only a small headquarters staff. Most of the work is done by local branches, called conferences.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul
91-92 Sean McDermott St.,
Dublin 1

Tel 838 6990
Fax 838 7355
info@svp.ie
www.svp.ie

An Taisce – The National Trust for Ireland

An Taisce is one of the country's oldest voluntary organisations in the environmental area (1948) committed to the protection of the natural and built environment. An Taisce lobbies government, contributes to development plans, reviews environmental impact assessments, provides information on environmental issues and runs educational programmes. Under the Planning Acts, it must be consulted on a number of planning proposals.

An Taisce
Tailors' Hall
Back Lane
Dublin 8

Tel 454 1786
Fax 453 3255
info@antaisce.org
www.antaisce.org

The Wheel

The Wheel is a national body bringing together a broad range of groups and individuals with a common concern for the promotion of voluntary and community action. The Wheel provides services in the areas of: training; advice; information (magazine Le Chile); forums where common interests can be discussed (these are called 'spokes', e.g. the health spoke); and resources on how groups can organise (e.g. Solid foundations).

The Wheel has brought a series of policy issues to the attention of the government in such areas as the regulation of the

voluntary and community sector; funding; fundraising; and what form dialogue should take between the state and the sector.

The Wheel
Irish Social Finance Centre
10 Grattan Crescent
Inchicore
Dublin 8

Tel 454 8727
Fax 454 8649
info@wheel.ie
www.wheel.ie



7 Media

The media may be divided into:

- Radio and television;
- National press;
- Provincial and local press;
- Specialised press.

Most of the provincial and local press date back many years, some to the 18th century. Most such newspapers are organised on a county basis. The specialised press ranges from news-stand magazines with wide distribution to journals with quite limited circulation.

Radio may be divided into the national broadcasting channel (RTÉ), commercial radio which is licensed on, broadly speaking, a county by county basis and about 20 community radio stations.

- > Details of the international press, the provincial and local press, the specialised press and local radio may be found in the IPA Yearbook and Diary and in local telephone directories.

Here, the guide provides a limited range of contacts which may be of value to voluntary and community organisations.

7.1 National radio and television

Radio Telefís Éireann is the national public broadcasting service. RTÉ transmits four radio channels (Radio 1, 2FM, Lyric FM, Raidió na Gaeltachta) and two television channels (RTÉ 1 and Network 2). Full details of programmes and their producers may be found in the weekly RTÉ Guide, available on news stands.

RTÉ has local offices in Belfast, Galway, Limerick, Castlebar, Sligo, Athlone, Waterford and Dundalk. Raidió na Gaeltachta has out-offices in Donegal and Kerry. TG4 is an independent state-sponsored body, while TV3 and Channel 6 are commercial channels. Independent Network News is important because it is the main news supplier to local radio.

RTÉ
Donnybrook
Dublin 4

Tel 208 3111
Fax 208 3080
info@rte.ie
www.rte.ie

Raidió na Gaeltachta
Casla
Conamara
Co na Gaillimhe

Tel 091 506 677
Fax 091 506 666
rng@rte.ie
www.rmag.ie

TG4
Baile na hAbhann
Co na Gaillimhe

Tel 091 505 050
Fax 091 505 021
eolas@tg4.ie
www.tg4.ie

TV3
Westgate Business Park
Ballymount
Dublin 24

Tel 419 3333
Fax 419 3300
info@tv3.ie
www.tv3.ie

Independent Network News
62 Lower Mount Street
Dublin 2

Tel 662 9555
Fax 662 9556
newsdesk@indnetworknews.com

Channel 6
Avoca Court
Blackrock
Co Dublin

info@channel6.ie
www.channel6.ie

BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)
Ormeau Ave
Belfast BT2 8HQ

Tel 048 9033 8000
Fax 048 9033 8800
www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/

Ulster Television
Ormeau Road
Belfast BT7 1EB

Tel 048 9032 8122
Fax 048 9024 6695
info@u.tv
www.u.tv

7.2 National press

The national press comprises the newspapers listed below. Details of circulation are published by the papers themselves on a weekly basis while the quarterly Audit of Bureau of Circulations is often published in the national newspapers.

As the listing shows, several titles belong to the same publishing house (e.g. Evening Herald, the Irish Independent and the Sunday Independent; in Cork the Irish Examiner and the Evening Echo). In practical terms, this means that reporters and their subsequent reports may overlap between the different titles.

In Northern Ireland, the Newsletter is politically associated with the unionist perspective and the Irish News with the nationalist viewpoint (the Belfast Telegraph takes a more middle position).

This listing covers domestically produced papers, but a number of British papers, such as the Daily Mail and the Sunday Times, also publish Irish editions.

Irish News
113-117 Donegall Street
Belfast BT1 2GE

Tel 048 9032 2226
Fax 048 9033 7505
www.irishnews.com

Belfast Telegraph
124-144 Royal Avenue
Belfast BT1 1EB

Tel 048 9026 4000
Fax 048 9055 4506
www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk

Newsletter
45-56 Boucher Crescent
Belfast BT1 6QY

Tel 048 9068 0000
Fax 048 9066 4412
newsdesk@newsletter.co.uk
www.belfasttoday.net

Irish Examiner, Evening Echo
Academy Street
Cork

Tel 021 427 2722
Fax 021 427 3846
www.irishexaminer.com
www.eveningecho.ie

Irish Independent, Sunday Independent,
Evening Herald
Independent House
Talbot Street
Dublin 1

Tel 705 5333
www.independent.ie

The Irish Times
24-8 Tara Street
Dublin 2

Tel 675 8000
Fax 675 8036
www.ireland.com

Irish Daily Star
62A Terenure Road North
Dublin 6W

Tel 490 1228
Fax 490 2193
news@the-star.com
www.irishdailystar.com

Sunday Business Post
80 Harcourt Street
Dublin 2

Tel 602 6000
Fax 679 6496
info@sbpost.ie
www.thepost.ie

Sunday Tribune
15 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Tel 631 4300
Fax 631 4390
editorial@tribune.ie
www.tribune.ie

Sunday World
Independent House
18-32 Talbot Street
Dublin 1

Tel 884 9000
Fax 884 9001
news@sundayworld.com
www.sundayworld.com



8 European Union

The European Union, with its various elements, is an important organisation, although the actual numbers of people working there are small. This guide provides information on the main European Union institutions and those likely to be of most interest to Irish voluntary organisations and community groups involved in social policy issues. This section reviews the work of the main institutions of the European Union:

- Irish representation in Brussels;
- Council of Ministers;
- European Commission;
- Special agencies of the European Union;
- European Parliament;
- Economic and Social Committee;
- Committee of the Regions;
- European Court of Justice;
- European Ombudsman

The main European Union site is:
<http://europa.eu>

This site is an excellent starting point. It offers routes into all the European Union's institutions and they are in turn sub-divided into main headings, such as policies, what's news, documents, reports and so on.

In Ireland itself, there is the National Forum on Europe. This is a neutral public space where views on European integration can be discussed. The forum itself does not take a partisan position. It works through both national and regional meetings and has a formal involvement of civil society as well as, in practice, active participation by voluntary and community groups. It is not a European institution as such,

being established by the government and political parties as a forum for debate.

National Forum on Europe
State Apartments
Dublin Castle
Dublin 2

Tel 670 5900
Fax 670 5877
info@forumoneurope.ie
www.forumoneurope.ie

8.1 Irish representation in Brussels (COREPER)

Ireland is represented in Brussels by its permanent civil service representation, called COREPER. The Irish representation generally includes a civil servant assigned to cover the work of each domestic Irish government department. COREPER prepares the work of the Council of Ministers (> 8.2, next), so groups wishing to influence the position of the Irish government in council meetings must work both through the relevant national government department at home and its representative in COREPER.

Irish Representation (COREPER)
Rue Froissart 89-93
B 1040 Brussels
Belgium

Tel 322 230 8580
Fax 322 230 3203

8.2 Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers is the Brussels secretariat both for the meetings of national government ministers and the four-times-a-year heads of government meetings. The term 'council of ministers' can refer to the council of prime ministers, or agriculture ministers, or social and employment ministers, whenever the governments of the member states gather to decide policies together.

For voluntary and community organisations, the importance of the council secretariat is that it runs the business of the ministers in between meetings and prepares the documentation, papers and briefings for the next meeting. The council sometimes uses the shorthand Latin word 'Consilium' to describe its location.

Council of Ministers
General Secretariat
Rue de la Loi 175
B 1048 Brussels
Belgium

Tel 322 285 6111
Fax 322 285 7397
www.consilium.europa.eu

8.3 European Commission

The Commission is the civil service of the European Union. Along with the Parliament, it is the institution with which voluntary organisations are most likely to have contact. The Commission initiates policy, legislation, funding programmes and ideas such as European years dedicated to particular themes and topics. The Commission is divided into directorates-general, or DGs, which are, broadly speaking, the equivalent of government departments. The structure of the Commission is different from our own civil service, with its concepts, titles, method and logic derived from the French, Napoleonic system of public administration.

The main directorate-general with which voluntary organisations are likely to be in contact is DG EMPL. This stands for the directorate general for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities. It deals with initiatives and programmes dealing with poverty, equality, discrimination, disability and a broad range of social policy issues. Other directorates general with which voluntary organisations may come in contact are: the DGs for agriculture (for rural development); freedom, justice and home affairs; health; consumer protection; regional affairs (for the structural funds) and communications (for issues of citizenship). Like EMPL, many DGs have shorthand titles, like REGIO (regional affairs) or COMM (Communications).

European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B 1049 Brussels
Belgium

Tel 322 299 1111
www.ec.europa.eu

For the directorates-general:
www.ec.europa.eu/dgs/

DG EMPL:
www.ec.europa.eu/dgs/employment_social

The European Commission has information offices in Dublin and Belfast, which provide a range of publications and can respond to enquiries. Should a citizen wish to take a complaint that one's rights under Union law have been abridged, this is the starting point.

European Commission
18 Dawson Street
Dublin 2

Tel 634 1111
Fax 623 1112
www.ec.europa.eu/ireland

European Commission
Windsor House
9-15 Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7EG

Tel 048 9024 0708
Fax 048 9024 8241
www.ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom

8.4 Special agencies of the European Union

The European Union has a small number of special agencies, distributed in the different member states (for example, the European Central Bank, in Frankfurt, Germany). The following are those most likely to be of interest to voluntary and community organisations.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

This is an institution whose role is to research and compile information on the state of vocational training in Europe and contribute to thinking and policy as to how it should evolve in the future.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
PO Box 22427
Thessaloniki
GR 55102
Greece

Tel 30 2310 490111
Fax 30 2310 490102
info@cedefop.europa.eu
www.trainingvillage.gr

European Court of Auditors

The European Court of Auditors is the body which monitors European Union spending and whose role is comparable to that of the Comptroller and Auditor-General in Ireland. Apart from extensive routine monitoring, special reports are also issued. These have covered areas of interest to voluntary and community organisations, such as the European Social Fund and programmes in the border areas.

European Court of Auditors
Rue Alcide de Gasperi 12
L 1615 Luxembourg

Tel 352 43981
Fax 352 439342
euraud@eca.eu.int
www.eca.europa.eu

European Environment Agency

The European Environment Agency is responsible for the collection of comparable information on pollution, environmental conditions and sustainable development in the different member states.

European Environment Agency
Kongens Nytorv 6
DK 1050 Copenhagen
Denmark

Tel 45 3336 7100
Fax 45 3336 7199
www.eea.europa.eu

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (often called 'the European Foundation' for short) is an action-research body which has developed, as a theme of its work, social exclusion and community development, including publications such as Local community involvement – a handbook for good practice and Active citizenship and community involvement – getting to the roots.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
Wyattville Road
Dublin 18

Tel 204 3100
Fax 282 6456
postmaster@eurofound.europa.eu
www.eurofound.europa.eu

European Investment Bank

The European Investment Bank is the body which makes available loans on favourable terms for the development of small and medium-size businesses and infrastructure. Most of its loans are indirectly delivered through intermediaries, such as state agencies, banks and the structural funds. There is a section in the bank responsible for Ireland.

European Investment Bank
Blvd Konrad Adenauer 100
L 2950 Luxembourg

Tel 352 43791
Fax 352 437704
info@eib.org
www.eib.org

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

The task of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction is to collect and analyse information on drug abuse in the different member states, identify trends and point to common solutions to the problems of drug addiction. An annual report of its findings is issued.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
Rua da Cruz de Sta. Apolonia 23-25
P 11049 045 Lisbon
Portugal

Tel 351 21 1811 3000
Fax 351 21 1813 1711
info@emcdda.europa.eu
www.emcdda.europa.eu

Fundamental Rights Agency

The Fundamental Rights Agency, built on the earlier work of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism, Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia, whose role was to monitor racist and fascist crime and incidents in Europe, reports on the legal and policy issues arising and outlines ways in which governments, agencies and citizens can work together for a more tolerant European society.

The Fundamental Rights Agency extends these tasks to the upholding and development of human rights in the Union through information, analysis and advice. It is required to consult with non-governmental organisations through a Fundamental Rights Platform.

Fundamental Rights Agency
Rahlgasse 3
A-1060 Vienna
Austria

Tel 43 1580 3037
Fax 43 1580 3099
information@eumc.eu.int
www.eumc.at/fra

8.5 European Parliament

Many voluntary organisations will be familiar with the European Parliament through the work done there by Irish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Whilst the European Parliament is much less powerful than national assemblies, it has procedures for introducing reports and resolutions, making the Commission accountable, the amending of legislation and control over the budget.

Irish Members of the European Parliament may be contacted through the European Parliament office in Dublin or through offices in their constituencies.

The Parliament itself is homed in Strasbourg, France, though most of its meetings take place in Brussels. The secretariat is in Luxembourg.

European Parliament
43 Molesworth Street
Dublin 2

Tel 605 7900
Fax 605 7999
www.europarl.ie

Secretariat
European Centre
L 2929 Luxembourg

Tel 352 43001
Fax 352 4300 24842

Allée du Printemps
BP 1024
F 67070 Strasbourg Cedex
France

Tel 333 8817 4001
Fax 333 8825 6501

rue Wiertz
B 1047 Brussels
Belgium

Tel 322 284 2111
Fax 322 284 6924

8.6 Economic and Social Committee

The Economic and Social Committee fulfils a role slightly similar to the Seanad in Ireland. It has much less power than the European Parliament, but it must be consulted by the Commission and the Council of Ministers on economic and social questions. It has influence, rather than power. All legislation and key policy proposals in the economic and social area must go the Committee, which has the opportunity to comment (its comment is called an Opinion).

The Economic and Social Committee has the authority to issue opinions on any subject it chooses on its own initiative (called an own-initiative opinion). These can be useful in helping policy issues to move forward.

Ireland has nine members on the committee. They are appointed by government following nomination by the traditional social partners (the National Youth Council may nominate a member).

Economic and Social Committee
Rue Belliard 99
B 1040 Brussels
Belgium

Tel 322 546 9011
Fax 322 513 4893
info@eesc.europa.eu
www.eesc.europa.eu

8.7 Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions fulfils a function similar to that of the Economic and Social Committee and is a second upper house. It must be consulted on new proposals in the area of regional policy and may develop opinions on its own initiative. Ireland has nine members, all drawn from the local authorities (in broad proportion to party representation).

Committee of the Regions
Rue Belliard 101
B 1040 Brussels
Belgium

Tel 322 282 2211
Fax 322 282 2325
www.cor.europa.eu

and in Ireland may be contacted at:

11 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

Tel 874 5018
Fax 878 8080

There is also a representation office for the Irish regions in Brussels:

Irish Regions Office
Rond Point Schumann, 6 (9th floor)
B 1040 Brussels
Belgium

Tel 322 282 8474
Fax 322 282 8475
www.iro.ie

8.8 European Court of Justice

The European Court of Justice is the body which adjudicates on European law, normally after referral there from a national court in one of the member states. For citizens who believe that their rights under European law have been abridged, the process normally starts by the person making a formal complaint to the Commission. The Commission then takes up the matter on behalf of the citizen.

Recent court judgments and their associated press releases are posted on its website. New cases may, depending on the circumstances and criteria, go initially to the Court of First Instance.

Just as the council goes under the shorthand of the 'consilium' the court uses the shorthand term 'Curia'.

European Court of Justice
Palais de la Cour de Justice
L 2929 Luxembourg

Tel 352 43031
Fax 352 4303 2600
www.curia.europa.eu

8.9 European Ombudsman

The function of the European Ombudsman is to investigate complaints of maladministration by the European institutions (e.g. refusal to supply documents). The annual report gives a good idea of the issues taken up and the methods followed.

European Ombudsman
Avenue du Président Robert Schuman 1
BP 403
F 67001 Strasbourg Cedex
France

Tel 333 8817 2313
Fax 333 8817 9062
euro-ombudsman@europarl.eu.int
www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int