

Date Printed: 04/21/2009

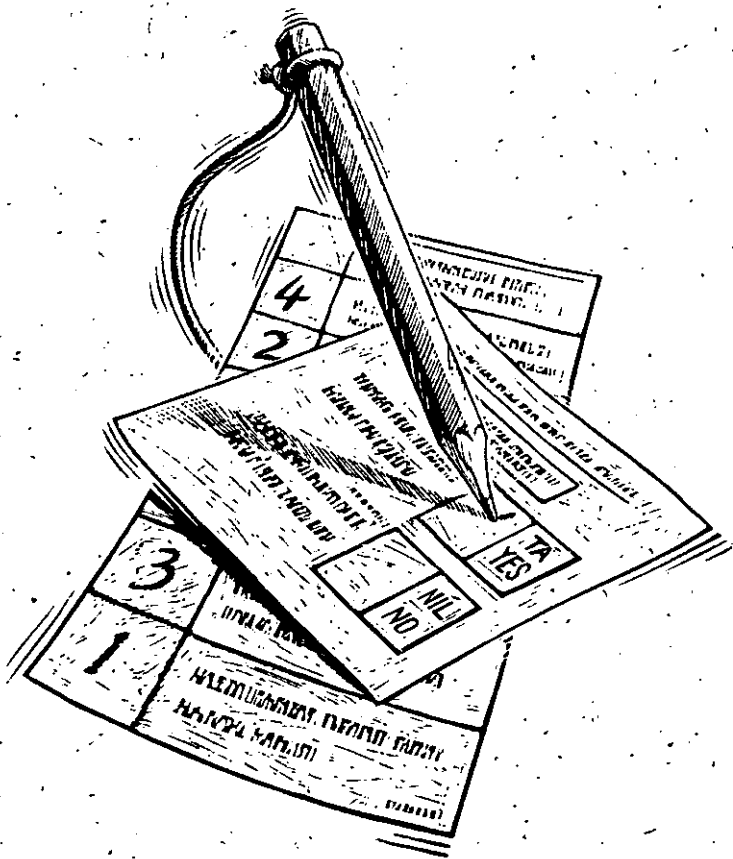
JTS Box Number: IFES_65
Tab Number: 18
Document Title: How the Seanad is Elected
Document Date: 1994
Document Country: Ireland
Document Language: English
IFES ID: CE00862



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How the Seánad is Elected

(Senate or Upper House
of Parliament)



1. Structure of the Seanad

The Seanad is composed of 60 members. Eleven members are nominated by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), 6 members are elected by university graduates and 43 are elected from panels of candidates representing specified vocational interests.

2. Who Can Become a Senator?

Every citizen of Ireland over 21 years of age who is not disqualified by the Constitution or by law is eligible to be elected to the Seanad. A member of the Seanad is referred to as Seanadóir or Senator. Persons undergoing a prison sentence in excess of six months, undischarged bankrupts and persons of unsound mind are disqualified for election. Certain occupations are incompatible with membership of the Seanad, for example, members of the judiciary, senior officials of the institutions of the European Union, civil servants, whole-time members of the Defence Forces and Gardaí (police).

3. Time of Election

A general election to the Seanad must take place not later than 90 days after the dissolution of the Dáil (Lower House of Parliament). The dates for the various stages of the election (nomination, polling, etc.) are appointed by order of the Minister for the Environment.

4. Method of Election

The elections are held on the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote and by secret postal ballot.

PANEL MEMBERS

5. Election of 43 Panel Members

Before each General Election five panels are formed of candidates having knowledge and practical experience of the following interests and services respectively:

- (i) Cultural and Educational Panel: – National language and culture, literature, art, education, law and medicine;
- (ii) Agricultural Panel: – Agricultural and allied interests and fisheries;
- (iii) Labour Panel: – Labour, whether organised or unorganised;
- (iv) Industrial and Commercial Panel: – Industry and commerce, including banking, finance, accountancy, engineering and architecture;
- (v) Administrative Panel: – Public administration and social services, including voluntary social activities.

6. Register of Nominating Bodies

The Seanad returning officer (Clerk of the Seanad) maintains a register of bodies entitled to nominate candidates to the panels of candidates. To be eligible for registration as a nominating body, an organisation must be concerned mainly with and be representative of the interests and services of one or other of the panels. A body cannot be registered in respect of more than one panel.

Organisations which are mainly profit-making concerns are not eligible for registration. The register is revised annually.

7. Nomination of Candidates

Each nominating body registered in respect of a panel may nominate a fixed number of candidates for that panel. These candidates comprise the nominating bodies' sub-panel of the different panels. Any four members of the newly elected Dáil or outgoing Seanad may nominate one candidate for any panel but each member may join in only one nomination. These candidates form the Oireachtas (Parliament) sub-panel. Thus each panel is divided into two sub-panels – the nominating bodies sub-panel and the Oireachtas sub-panel. A specified minimum number of members must be elected from each sub-panel.

8. Number of Elected Members

The number of members to be elected from each panel and the minimum number which must be elected from each sub-panel are as follows:

Panel	Number of members	Minimum no. to be elected from each sub-panel
Cultural and Educational	5	2
Agricultural	11	4
Labour	11	4
Industrial and Commercial	9	3
Administrative	7	3
Total	43	

9. Who Can Vote?

The following persons may vote at a general election of panel members:

- Members of the incoming Dáil,
- Members of the outgoing Seanad,
- Members of county councils and county borough councils.

Each elector has only one vote in respect of each panel even if he is qualified in more than one respect. The electorate numbers approximately 1,000.

10. The Poll

The returning officer issues to each voter a list of the candidates nominated for each panel, indicating the bodies or persons who made the nominations. On the day appointed by order of the Minister for the Environment, the returning officer sends by registered post to each voter five ballot papers (one for each panel) showing the names of the candidates in alphabetical order, their addresses and descriptions and the sub-panel for which each is nominated. The political affiliation, if any, of the candidates is not shown on the ballot papers. The voter, after completing a declaration of identity in the presence of an authorised person, marks on each paper the order of his/her choice of candidates and returns the ballot papers by registered post to the returning officer.

11. The Count

There is a separate count for each panel. The ballot papers are sorted in accordance with the first preference shown on them. To facilitate counting each vote is given a value of 1,000. The appropriate value of his/her first preference votes is credited to each candidate. The quota is the minimum number of votes necessary to guarantee the election of a candidate. It is ascertained by dividing the total value of the valid votes by one more than the number of seats to be filled and adding one to the result. If, for example, the total value of the votes cast in relation to a panel is 900,000 and there are 5 seats to be filled, the quota will be 150,001, that is

$$\frac{0.9m}{6} + 1$$

It will be seen that, in this example, only five candidates (the number to be elected) could possibly reach the quota.

If the value of a candidate's votes equals or exceeds the quota, he/she is deemed elected unless his/her election would make impossible the election of the minimum number of members from each sub-panel. If a candidate receives more than a quota, the surplus is distributed to the remaining candidates in accordance with the next effective preference shown on the ballot papers. Where the maximum number of candidates has been elected for a sub-panel, the values of the votes of the remaining candidates on that sub-panel are distributed in accordance with the next effective preference shown on the ballot papers concerned. If no candidate has a surplus, the lowest candidate is excluded and his votes distributed at the value at which he received them. A candidate cannot, however, be excluded if his/her exclusion would make impossible the election of the minimum number of members from each sub-panel.

12. Bye-Elections

When a casual vacancy occurs in the Seanad through the death, disqualification or resignation of a panel member, the vacancy is filled by bye-election. Nine members of the Oireachtas may nominate a candidate in relation to an Oireachtas sub-panel vacancy; a nominating body for the relevant panel may nominate a candidate for a vacancy in a nominating bodies sub-panel. The electorate at a bye-election is composed of the members of the Dáil and Seanad, 225 in all. Voting is by secret postal ballot. The counting procedure is the same as at a Seanad General Election but without the modification necessary to ensure that a minimum number is elected from each sub-panel.

UNIVERSITY MEMBERS

13. Election of 6 University Members

Constituencies

The constituencies for the election of university members to the Seanad are the National University of Ireland and the University of Dublin (Trinity College). Each elects 3 members. The other universities and institutions of higher education are not represented in the Seanad at present.

Who Can Vote?

Every citizen of Ireland who has reached the age of 18 years and who has received a degree, other than an honorary degree, from the university concerned is entitled to be registered as an elector. The electorate of the National

University of Ireland numbers 84,000 approximately and that of the University of Dublin 24,000 approximately. The electoral roll is maintained and up-dated by the university concerned.

Nomination of Candidates

Candidates must be nominated by two registered electors for the university. Eight other registered electors for the university must assent to the nomination. There is no requirement that a candidate must be a graduate of the university concerned or be connected with it in any way.

General Election

Within 7 days after the dissolution of the Dáil, the Minister for the Environment is required to appoint the relevant dates for the conduct of a general election of university members to the Seanad. The election is conducted by a returning officer who is an officer of the university concerned. Voting is by post and the election is held in accordance with the principles of proportional representation, each elector having a single transferable vote. When issuing ballot papers the returning officer also issues a form of declaration of identity which must be completed by the elector in the presence of a witness and returned with the ballot paper. The count is conducted in the same manner as a count at an election of members to the Dáil.

14. Bye-Elections

When a casual vacancy occurs through the death, disqualification or resignation of a university member, the vacancy is filled by bye-election. The procedure at a bye-election is the same as that at a general election of university members.

15. Seanad Electoral Law

The law relating to the election of members to the Seanad is contained principally in Articles 18 and 19 of the Constitution of Ireland (IR£1.30), the Seanad Electoral (Panel Members) Act, 1947 (IR£14.70), the Seanad Electoral (Panel Members) Act, 1954 (IR£2.10) and the Seanad Electoral (University Members) Act, 1937 (IR£8.55). These publications are available from the Government Publications Sale Office, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

16. Other Leaflets

Other leaflets available in this series are as follows:

How the President is elected

The Referendum in Ireland

How the Dáil (Lower House of Parliament) is elected

European Parliament: How Ireland's representatives are elected

The Register of Electors

Information for Voters with Disabilities

Department of the Environment
September, 1994