



At Home in the New House?

A Study of Ireland's First-Time TDs

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INTRODUCTION

'... those elected to public office are expected to possess indefinable qualities to accomplish an indescribable job' (Coghill et al. 2008a, p. 74).

Life as a TD¹ is no ordinary life. It is unlike any other career or profession in terms of the responsibilities associated with it; the varied skills it entails; the broad range of competencies it requires; and, the multi-faceted demands it makes of individuals.

Although Article 15 of Bunreacht na hÉireann² outlines the core functions of the Irish Houses of the Oireachtas,³ the minutiae of the TD's day-to-day role is not explicitly detailed here. The job description may be vague, however, it is broadly accepted that a TD performs three key roles: law-making, scrutiny of government and constituency work (Coakley and Gallagher 2010).

To be deemed suitable for public office, TDs are not obliged to have specific qualifications or training. There is no clear job description which attaches to the role. The criteria for judging the success of a parliamentarian in fulfilling their roles and duties are related solely to a TD's future electoral fortunes and are rarely judged according to any other measures. And yet politicians are charged with directing and overseeing the business of the state and making decisions of fundamental importance to all of society. Simultaneously, there is a growing and broader realisation that being a

¹ Teachta Dála (TD) is the Irish term for a member of Dáil Éireann, also referred to as a Dáil Deputy.

² Bunreacht na hÉireann is the Irish term for the Irish Constitution.

³ The Irish Oireachtas comprises the two houses, Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) and Seanad Éireann (Irish Senate), and the President of Ireland. The Dáil possesses the largest number and variety of powers.

parliamentarian constitutes a profession in its own right (see Saalfeld 1997 and Costa and Kerrouche 2009). If this is so, it begs some questions and considerations as to the detail and demands of that *profession*.

The professionalisation of parliamentarians is taking place in tandem with an increasingly complex contemporary political, economic and media environment. In Ireland, this has been especially so since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008. Public disenchantment with the institutions of the state has grown in response to the perceived failings of the political class in dealing effectively with this new and difficult environment.

The dramatic outcome of the 2011 Irish General Election altered the Irish party system and revealed the extent of public discontent. The election produced an exceptionally high level of turnover of TDs – 84 of the 166 TDs of the 31st Dáil were not members of the 30th Dáil.

76 or 45% of current Dáil members were never TDs before.

This represents the first-time since 1923 that a majority of those elected did not belong to the previous Dáil. It also represents a break with traditional experience, in that Dáil turnover rates have typically averaged between 20% and 30%. The election of a large number of new TDs in 2011 was accompanied by an expectation that reform would figure high on the political agenda and that the culture and practices of the Oireachtas (and other state institutions) would change. All political parties produced election manifestos which promised political reform, although they prescribed different formulas for achieving change.

This report acknowledges the backdrop against which the 2011 generation of TDs won

their Dáil seats. It looks in detail at their early experience of life as a TD. It highlights how they have adapted to their role as first-time TDs – their views of parliament; the supports that have been available to them; their early working practices; and their hopes and expectations.

The report considers the extent to which Dáil Éireann has developed into a modern and professional parliamentary institution which enables its members to be the finest TDs they can be. It suggests ways in which the institution can nurture political representatives of calibre who are sufficiently knowledgeable, skilled and confident to undertake their duties responsibly and effectively.

This study of Ireland's 2011 intake of new TDs utilises the methods and approaches employed by the Hansard Society in the UK in their analysis of new Westminster MPs (see Rosenblatt 2006 and Korris 2011). The Irish research is informed by two surveys of all new TDs conducted between 2011 and 2012.⁴ Further data was collected during a series of semi-structured interviews with a cross-party selection of new TDs and key Oireachtas officials during 2011-2013. Information on new TDs is also gleaned from McMorrough (2011) which includes responses to a series of questions put to Ireland's 2011 intake of TDs.

This report is a summary of the outcomes and findings of the research. It also includes an overview and assessment of the induction and orientation process for new TDs which includes the views of TDs themselves, officials involved in the delivery of the process and

(best) practice in other parliamentary systems. This examination of the induction and orientation process also connects with a wider academic literature on parliamentary socialisation (Rush and Giddings 2011). The broader aim of the research is to determine if and how new TDs have been enabled to fulfil their roles as public representatives, including as parliamentarians, and thereby, contribute to the rehabilitation of a much-criticised parliamentary institution.

IRELAND'S NEW TDs

The result of the 2011 Irish General Election ushered in substantial change in terms of the relative size of Irish political parties. Fianna Fáil lost 58 of the 78 parliamentary seats it had won in the 2007 Dáil election. Its coalition partner, the Green Party, failed to return a single TD. In contrast, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, Sinn Féin and Independents recorded substantial electoral gains. The natural impact of these developments meant that Dáil Éireann lost a large number of incumbents⁵ and welcomed a high number of new TDs with no previous parliamentary experience. The 2011 General Election was also notable for the elimination of a number of political family dynasties (Stafford 2011, p. 349). The new TDs were scattered across the party spectrum.

⁴ 84 new TDs were surveyed. Survey 1 was distributed in October 2011 and received 43 responses (50%); Survey 2 was distributed in June 2012 and received 25 responses (30%). These response rates compare favourably with those recorded for the equivalent Westminster surveys.

⁵ 45 sitting TDs lost their seats. In addition, 39 incumbents decided not to contest the 2011 General Election. Of these, 23 were Fianna Fáil TDs.

Party	Total No. of Seats ⁶	No. of New TDs ⁷
Fine Gael	76 ⁸	34
Labour Party	37	19
Fianna Fáil	20	3
Sinn Féin	14	9
United Left Alliance	5	3
Independents	14	8

In addition, a number of constituencies witnessed substantial change in personnel as a consequence of the high level of turnover. Two three seat constituencies returned six new TDs (Cork South-West and Kerry South) and a number of other larger constituencies returned a high proportion of new TDs (Donnelly, 2011).

14 or 18% of Ireland's 76 new TDs are female – a figure which is comparatively low by international standards, but in keeping with the overall proportion of female representation in Dáil Éireann.

The youngest new TD was 25 years old on election day, the oldest was 67. The average age of new members is 43 years old.⁹

All of Ireland's new TDs have been educated to second level – 25% concluded their

⁶ These figures reflect the distribution of seats immediately following the 2011 general election. The Labour Party seat tally has changed as a consequence of party resignations and a bye-election victory in October 2011. The number of Fianna Fáil seats has also changed and currently stands at 19 following the death of Brian Lenihan Jnr.

⁷ Fine Gael returned an additional first-time TD in March 2013 when Helen MacEntee won a bye-election seat in the Meath East constituency. The total number of Fine Gael first-time TDs therefore currently stands at 35. The departure of Colm Keaveney from the Labour Party in June 2013 means that the current number of first-time Labour Party TDs has reduced to 18 and the number of Independents has increased by one.

⁸ Excluding the Ceann Comhairle (Speaker of the House), the total number of Fine Gael TDs is 75.

⁹ Six new TDs do not specify their age.

education there. 45 or 60% of new TDs have university qualifications and a further ten have attended other higher education institutions. This marks a distinction with earlier periods when TDs were comparatively less educated than parliamentarians elsewhere (Gallagher 1985).

New TDs come from a variety of career backgrounds. Just over a third indicated that they were full-time public representatives prior to their election to Dáil Éireann. A large number are drawn from the teaching profession – 15% of new TDs were formerly teachers. Ten new TDs have a background in business and five worked in the agriculture industry. The same number were employed in the legal sector and three were publicans. Other first-time TDs came from sectors including the construction industry, postal service, IT, sales, engineering, trade unions and youth work.

The vast majority of new TDs have some form of previous political experience. Local government appears to be an important training ground for new TDs. 68 new TDs have experience as elected local government representatives. In addition, two new TDs have previously been elected to the European Parliament, one has sat in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster, and 13 have been members of Seanad Éireann. Just seven of Ireland's 76 new TDs have never held political office previous to their 2011 election to Dáil Éireann.

Previous Political Office	No. of New TDs ¹⁰
European Parliament	2
Seanad Éireann	13
Northern Ireland Assembly/MP	1
Local Government	65
None	7

¹⁰ A number of new TDs have experience in more than one political institution.

MOTIVATIONS

New TDs pointed to a range of factors which motivated them to run for election in 2011. A decision to seek election was generally dominated by at least one of three motivations – an aspiration to ‘make a difference’, a desire to better serve constituents and a lifelong ambition to be a TD.

In the case of those who wished to effect change and make a difference, a number of the 2011 generation of new TDs believe that they bring youth, energy and new ideas to national politics and to Dáil Éireann. For example, a new Fianna Fáil TD stood for election ‘to bring new energy and fresh ideas to national politics’. A Fine Gael colleague echoes this sentiment: ‘I believed it [was] time for a younger generation of politicians who have fresh ideas and are committed to helping the people’. A first-time Labour Party TD sought election because of a genuine belief that he ‘could be part of a team of people that can make a real difference to the future of Irish society’. A party colleague was similarly motivated and professed to wanting to be part of ‘a new generation of political leaders, intent on reforming politics’. A new Fine Gael TD ran for the Dáil as he felt that ‘the country was calling on a new generation and new calibre of public representative to step up to the mark’. An Independent first-time TD was motivated to seek election in order to contribute to ‘radically reform[ing] the political system’. Two first-time female TDs were motivated by a desire to correct the under-representation of women in Dáil Éireann (all quotes taken from McMorrough 2011). These sentiments were echoed during face-to-face interviews with TDs.

These motivations to pursue political reform and institutional change are typical of new TDs. Such views imply that new TDs are

dissatisfied with the political status quo, and moreover, many see their role as public representatives as potentially differing from that of their longer-serving colleagues.

I know I have loads to learn, but learning is different to morphing into what came before me (New Fine Gael TD).

To what extent these expectations concerning change are either met or facilitated is mediated by the socialisation process which new TDs encounter following election to Dáil Éireann. How new TDs come to understand and perform their role as parliamentarians is subject to a range of socialising forces, including previous experience of politics, and influences such as family and friends, colleagues, party/technical group, officials and the media. It is clear however, that the 2011 generation have definite views in relation to the contribution they wish to make. Their ability to meet this expectation can be either aided or thwarted by the socialisation process.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Despite their direct experience of Irish politics, many TDs were surprised and, in many cases, taken aback by the high demands of the job. New TDs admitted to feeling overwhelmed during their initial months in Dáil Éireann. Deputies noted a sense of anxiety and nervousness and many were unsure of their place and role, and of what precisely the job entails.

In contrast to their longer serving colleagues, new TDs are immediately faced with a range of tasks and challenges. First and foremost, many must establish constituency office/s and employ staff. For a number of new TDs, this was a considerable undertaking and one that dominated their early weeks as TDs.

Political parties also assign specific party responsibilities and roles to TDs. This is generally more onerous for new opposition TDs. The smaller size of opposition parties meant that a number of new TDs were assigned spokesperson duties and extra committee membership, in addition to their other roles and functions. A new Sinn Féin TD and a new Fianna Fáil TD noted the added pressure and increased workload which such responsibilities entail.

New TDs are also faced with a deluge of information on their arrival in Dáil Éireann which they must quickly distil and process. As one first-time Fianna Fáil TD noted, ‘both the environment and the processes were new’. The new arrivals are also subject to immediate constituency demands. One new Fine Gael TD referred to an ‘onslaught of communication and correspondence’, which he was initially ill-equipped to deal with. The media environment was also stressful. For one new Fine Gael TD, the biggest surprise was the ‘unrelenting negativity of the media’ which ‘tries to catch you out’. Not all new TDs dealt effectively with their new surroundings. Some were left feeling overwhelmed, inundated, and even beleaguered.

The early months were horrendous, verging on unbearable, and I contemplated leaving (New Fine Gael TD).

I felt like I was keeping my head above water (New Fianna Fáil TD).

Others – particularly Independents and some Sinn Féin members – were taken aback by the formality of the institution and its rituals and traditions: ‘My first impression was that the place was very formal ... I don’t do formal very well’. Other new TDs questioned the need for a large number of ceremonial staff and labelled these elements of the institution ‘archaic and outdated’.

The majority of new TDs, however, were primarily conscious of the fact that they had a job to do. All felt an acute sense of duty to constituents and country. Many also felt a sense of honour and pride in being elected to Dáil Éireann. According to one new Labour TD, all of these feelings were coupled with ‘energy and enthusiasm’ on the part of the new arrivals, whilst a new Fine Gael member noted ‘a business-like start’ to the parliamentary term.

It is interesting to note that even those TDs with extensive political experience and established public profiles were taken aback by their new political roles. Those who had previously served as Senators admitted to being unprepared for life as a TD and were surprised by the demands and rigours of their new role.

I was not prepared for the life of a TD – the job is completely different to what I had envisaged (Former Senator).

Starting out as a TD was a mind-blowing experience (Former Senator).

Seanad Éireann is strikingly different to Dáil Éireann (Former Senator).

Overall, new TDs’ first impressions were mixed and marked by a sense of both pride and anxiety. Even for those with extensive political experience, the Dáil Éireann working environment is new and surprising. The early demands of office are pressing, challenging and uncharted, and some new TDs initially struggle to cope. Such struggles are alleviated over time, but difficulties and challenges linger and are evident in relation to many aspects of a new TD’s work and life.

THE PARLIAMENTARY ROLE

Parliamentary institutions are unusual workplaces. The range of issues they consider, the mechanics of their operation, and the customs and traditions they exhibit lend them distinctiveness. Moreover, all parliamentary institutions possess an underlying culture. Habits and behaviours formed by convenience and custom co-exist alongside specific values, assumptions, norms of seniority, deference and loyalty. Becoming acquainted with this new institutional setting and understanding its complex dynamics can be daunting for new TDs.

New TDs satisfaction ratings with their new institutional environs suggest that they perceive some difficulties with the manner in which Dáil Éireann operates. Over 60% of respondents were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the following aspects of the institution:

- Arrangement of government business
- Voting in Dáil Éireann
- Parliamentary questions
- Parliamentary motions and resolutions
- Parliamentary debate of bills
- Private Members' Business
- Joint and Select Committees.

Reasonable levels of satisfaction with aspects of Dáil Éireann should not detract from the fact that at least 25% and in some cases up to 40% of new TDs are not satisfied with these dimensions of parliamentary activity.

Other aspects of the operation of the Dáil elicited greater negativity. 48% of respondents recorded 'not very satisfied' or 'not at all satisfied' with the sitting hours of Dáil Éireann and many expressed alarm at the prospect of four day sittings. The monthly Friday morning sittings are also viewed with some disquiet by new TDs. 45% were likewise

unhappy with the relationship between the Dáil and Seanad. A similar number were also dissatisfied with 'Topical Issues' and over 50% were dissatisfied with the arrangement of non-government business.

Frustration among new TDs is palpable and many are troubled by the nature of the institution. A new Fine Gael TD recalled how he once spoke to an empty Dáil chamber; another lamented the quality of debate and others queried the value of Question Time. New TDs however, are particularly frustrated by the limits they face in exercising influence within Dáil Éireann.

We work in an unproductive environment that does not allow us to work to the best of our abilities (New Labour Party TD).

The system is a straitjacket (New Labour Party TD).

I was shocked by how prohibitive the institution is and how restricted TDs are (New Independent TD).

Both opposition and government TDs feel some degree of frustration with their parliamentary role. For first-time opposition TDs, there is disillusionment with the way in which the opposition is constrained by government. Many are frustrated by the unresponsiveness of government to opposition amendments and perceive a poor degree of accountability and openness. One new Independent TD expressed dismay at the tone of political debate in Dáil Éireann suggesting that the chamber is a 'theatre' where 'personal attacks are common-place' and Question Time is about 'taking lumps out of each other'.

First-time government TDs also experience some dissatisfaction with their parliamentary role based on an inability to influence the party and/or government position. There is

some sense that backbench government TDs tend to be ignored. One new Fine Gael TD admitted that were it not for some specific roles he has been assigned within the party, life as a backbencher would be frustrating. He further noted that ‘the talents of backbenchers are not being sufficiently exploited’. A party colleague felt even more aggrieved and admitted that life on the backbenches has left him ‘disappointed, disillusioned and disenchanting’. A new Labour TD admitted that she has on occasion felt angry about the ‘constraints’ which attach to being a government TD.

A new Sinn Féin TD distinguished between opposition and government TDs – suggesting that the latter are primarily constituency representatives, whereas opposition TDs perform a wider range of both constituency *and* parliamentary functions, including shadowing Ministers, tracking statements, developing policy positions and submitting Priority Questions.

All new TDs sit on committees and a majority enjoy this dimension of their parliamentary role. Indeed it appears to be one parliamentary arena where many new TDs feel most empowered and where they see their influence as being constructive and meaningful. A new Sinn Féin TD regards participating in committees as allowing him to ‘make a contribution’. A Fine Gael colleague noted that committees are ‘where consensus emerges and some flexibility exists for ordinary members to influence policy and Ministers’. A number of new TDs advocated the introduction of a committee week as a means to further enabling their committee role and some expressed a desire to spend more time on committee work.

Not all new TDs however, find committee work influential and rewarding. One new Independent TD has relinquished his

committee positions and others find it difficult to commit sufficient time and energy to committee duties, largely as a consequence of the other, largely constituency, demands they face. In addition, some TDs feel overwhelmed by the number of committees they serve. 36 first-time TDs sit on three or more committees and many admit to finding it near impossible to dedicate sufficient time and energy to each. One new Fine Gael TD suggested that TDs should only sit on one committee and that there should be a greater assessment of aptitude in assigning Deputies to a committee.

In terms of what they judged to be priorities for parliamentary reform, new TDs highlighted a large range and number of issues. Reform proposals included:

- Improve quality of parliamentary debate
- Development of committee system and introduction of committee week
- More speaking time for backbenchers
- Changed (more family-friendly) sitting hours
- Enhance relations with the Seanad.

Many of these reform proposals were highlighted in the election manifestos of political parties in 2011, but the bulk of them have not been introduced. Where reforms have been initiated, for example, the introduction of Topical Issues debates and additional sitting hours on the first Friday of every month, they have not been widely welcomed or supported by new TDs. One new Fine Gael TD notes: ‘These improvements have not been built upon, and initial reforms now require reform themselves’ (Murphy 2013, p. 6). The same TD produced a comprehensive document entitled *Reforming Dáil Éireann: A View from the Backbenches* in April 2013 which advocates for a range of changes which ‘do not require new legislation or constitutional reform, but simply political

will on our part' (p. 2). The document points to an awareness of the flaws of the current Irish parliamentary system as perceived by one who works within its confines. Notably, not all new TDs support the proposals expressed in this document. New government TDs in particular, recognise the limits to any reform process which might impinge on executive power.

New TDs harbour genuine concerns about the obstacles they face in exercising their legislative and non-legislative parliamentary role. They arrived in Dáil Éireann with high hopes as to the role they might play in affecting change. However, their ability to contribute, to influence, to oversee and to promote reform is checked by the operational parameters of the institution, the dominance of the Executive and the power of political parties.

THE CONSTITUENCY ROLE

A frustration with parliament extends to other dimensions of the role of the TD, namely the constituency role.

Irish TDs traditionally dedicate substantial time, energy and resources to servicing their constituencies. The early behaviour of the 2011 generation of new Irish TDs is no different. The 2011 survey of new TDs which informs this research revealed that when the House is sitting, 65% of respondents dedicate at least 40% of their time to constituency work. When the House is in recess, all respondents, bar two, spend between 50% and 100% of their time focused on constituency work. The trend is even more marked in the second survey conducted in 2012. When the House is sitting, over 70% of new TDs devote at least 40% of their working week to constituency work. When the House

is in recess, 57% of respondents spend 90% of their time working on constituency issues.

Indeed it may conceivably be the case that first-time TDs are even more assiduous when it comes to constituency work than their longer-serving colleagues. Of more significance however, is the fact that TD engagement with constituency is also qualitatively different. In a broader examination of the role of parliamentarians, research points to:

'The increasing complexity of an MP's role including the growing demands on their time brought about, in part, through increased pressure from a more informed and articulate constituency' (Lewis 2012, p. 700).

New TDs were asked which particular constituency roles they find most challenging. The majority – one third of respondents – pointed to their role as caseworkers. One respondent stressed the 'sheer volume' of casework, while another suggested that her casework was at 'barely manageable levels'. It is clear too that new TDs are responsive to their constituencies, even when faced with challenging and sometimes 'unsolvable' casework (as one new TD labelled it).

Over 50% of new TDs run at least 10 constituency clinics per month. They also run or attend many other constituency related events including public meetings, openings, launches, funerals and matches. Almost half of respondents attend up to 25 such constituency events per month. For new rural TDs in particular, the demands of constituency can be especially challenging, verging on overwhelming. A number of rural TDs noted that the geography of a constituency can be an 'impediment' in that it often requires extensive time spent travelling and less time at the desk.

In terms of what has surprised new TDs most during their first two years in the job, the constituency dimension to the job was again noted. Responses to the question included: 'the amount of constituency work', 'volume of work', 'massive workload', and 'amount of constituents contacting office'. The amount of time and resources spent on constituency work is clearly considerable and frustrates many new TDs.

The frustrations are generally built around a difficulty in managing a balance between constituency and parliamentary duties.

I WANT to spend more time on parliamentary business (New Fine Gael TD).

The balance between constituency and parliamentary work is impossible (New Fine Gael TD).

I spend 95% of my time on 5% of the people (New Labour TD).

One new Sinn Féin TD noted that his constituency workload has increased since his days as a local councillor. He similarly notes that, paradoxically, his influence is now lessened in relation to some constituency queries, for example, local housing issues. In his previous local government role, he was better enabled to assist constituents, and yet the queries and expectations of constituents have increased subsequent to his election to Dáil Éireann.

One new Fine Gael TD noted a particular frustration with spending time on constituency issues which were not resolvable, and yet a pressure exists to be seen to be directly addressing the concerns of constituents. A party colleague adopted a more pragmatic approach and accepted that a TD 'cannot meet every demand'.

A compulsion to ensure re-election is acutely felt by the majority of new TDs. It is this self-imposed pressure which motivates many new TDs to be responsive to constituents, even when they may instinctively feel that their time and energy may be better spent on other duties. One new Fine Gael TD noted that parliamentary work is of 'slim electoral benefit', whereas constituency work pays electoral dividends. New TDs of all political hues admitted that re-election ambitions inform their commitment to constituency work. Irish TDs are not unusual in this respect: 'The fact that all MPs are driven by the desire to be re-elected is a permanent finding of all research into political elites' (Costa and Kerrouche 2009, p. 335). New Irish TDs were however, keen to note that re-election ambitions do not mean that TDs capitulate to all constituency demands or promote outcomes with which they fundamentally disagree.

The constituency element of a TD's role is busy and intensive, but not wholly unpleasant. Interestingly, a third of survey respondents suggest that casework was the most rewarding aspect of their constituency role. One respondent qualified her choice, noting that 'issue resolution' was fulfilling and gratifying. A new Fine Gael TD noted the satisfaction he felt in relation to the role he played in attracting new jobs to his local area. There is an acute sense too among many new TDs that contact with constituency is important and valuable. A new Independent TD acknowledged that he enjoys constituency work, and in particular meeting constituents. A new Labour Party TD pointed out that proximity to constituency provides an awareness and understanding of the needs and interests of society. This was a sentiment shared by other Dáil colleagues and one which is common to parliamentarians in other states. For example, research has shown that

constituency casework provides Belgian MPs with 'a sense of competence and effectiveness, which they often do not get through their activities in parliament' (De Winter 1997, p. 142).

Constituency work is central to the work of the TD. It is time-consuming and often challenging. It can sometimes prevent new TDs from fully engaging with other (parliamentary) duties. However, constituency work is simultaneously a satisfying and important dimension of the TD's role. The broader dynamics of the Irish political system and Irish political culture force a link between constituency service and re-election. This is a reality which all TDs face and one which they would be folly to ignore. The challenge new TDs face is not how to eradicate their constituency role, but how to adequately balance it with other duties.

SUPPORT FOR NEW PARLIAMENTARIANS

New parliamentarians rely heavily on support, advice and assistance from the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. The service performs a wide range of duties including: providing expert advice on parliamentary procedure; library and research services; ICT services; committee clerking; media and communications; translation services; catering; security; payroll; and human resources. Overall new TDs are largely satisfied with many aspects of the administration of Dáil Éireann. More than 90% of respondents are 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the following aspects of the administration of the House:

- House Services (Bills, Journals and Questions Offices, Editor of Debates, Translation Section)
- Committee Secretariat

- Catering
- Superintendent of the Houses – Security, Building and Estate management
- Human Resources

Very high levels of satisfaction are recorded for Member Services including the One Stop Shop – 75% of respondents are 'very satisfied' and 25% are 'fairly satisfied' with the services provided. The One Stop Shop is primarily an information service relating to salary and allowances which is available to all TDs. New TDs are also very appreciative of the support available to them from Library and Research Services. However, over two years into their first parliamentary term, new TDs recognise that there are deficiencies in the supports which are available to new arrivals. High levels of satisfaction co-exist with a desire on the part of new TDs for the provision of *additional* assistance, information and training.

INDUCTION AND ORIENTATION

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service delivers an induction and orientation programme to new TDs. Planning begins well in advance of a general election. The Election Preparation Group (EPG) – which began to meet one year prior to the February 2011 election – was chaired by the Assistant Secretary Corporate and Members Services of the Houses of the Oireachtas and involved representatives from all administrative sections. The group planned to cater for the anticipated influx of a large number of new TDs in 2011. Much of this preparation was focused on information documentation on role, human resource issues and the provision of offices and IT facilities to new members.

The work of the EPG was primarily driven by the officials who composed it. Communication and consultation with the political parties did

take place but for the most part, the preparation process was co-ordinated by the administrative wing of the Houses of the Oireachtas. In some cases, individual political parties had plans in place to deal with the needs and requirements of new TDs. However, these plans differed across parties in terms of their content and focus and for the large number of new independent TDs, party support was not available.

The Oireachtas induction and orientation programme is essentially built around four pillars. On arrival in Dáil Éireann all new TDs are provided with a detailed introductory handbook; are invited to attend an introductory information session; are allocated a Member Liaison Officer; and, have access to the One Stop Shop. The provision of this level of information and support for new TDs reflects well on the Houses of the Oireachtas Service which has been instrumental in progressing and improving the induction and orientation process since its inception in 1992.

In terms of designing and rolling-out an induction and orientation programme for new TDs, political parties tended to leave the detail to officials. There is some wisdom in this approach, as the Houses of the Oireachtas Service are best placed to provide much of the information and many of the facilities to which new TDs are entitled. This nevertheless promotes a rather narrow view of what an induction and orientation programme might entail. Such an approach overlooks some of the more sensitive needs of new parliamentarians. One new Labour TD suggested that the induction and orientation process involved 'a huge amount of information', but little discussion of 'the *actual* role of a TD'. He added that the process provided 'no formal setting for a deep understanding of parliament'. This approach however, is very like offerings in other

parliamentary institutions. In Italy, for example, a similar approach is adopted which relies on 'passive learning', 'the transmission of documentary material', and 'illustrations of the main procedural requirements' (Piccirilli and Zuddas 2012, p. 675).

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

One area where new TDs particularly favour the provision of increased assistance is in relation to Dáil procedures and the legislative process. Less than 15% of respondents were 'very satisfied' with the seminars on Dáil procedures provided as part of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service induction programme. A number of respondents suggested that the level of training provided was limited, basic and involved 'lots of documentation'. Many new TDs recommended a more frequent, detailed and frank introduction to this aspect of the institution. Responses to the 2011 survey question 'Thinking back to your arrival in Dáil Éireann and the induction you received, what assistance, if any, do you think should have been provided, but was not?' highlighted this deficiency. Responses included calls for more training on: 'the development of legislation'; 'how legislation works'; 'rules of the House'; 'how the House works'; 'the legislative process'; 'operation of the House'; and 'Dáil procedures'.

The induction felt like a 'ticking the box' exercise with more emphasis on entitlements as opposed to training (New Fine Gael TD).

Training on parliamentary procedures and bills should take place with staff over half a day (New Fine Gael TD).

Clear information about how the House and the legislative process work, instead of being handed a Standing Orders book (New Labour Party TD).

70% of respondents to the second survey in 2012 felt they would benefit from additional assistance on parliamentary procedure. This figure suggests that even as TDs eased into their new roles, deficiencies in their knowledge and skills base continued to be considered troublesome. Interviews with TDs further confirmed this view with a majority of first-time TDs advising that more training on the legislative process is imperative. Some TDs admitted that even two years into the job, they are still not fully conversant in the detail of the legislative process and the procedural rules of the House. This is not unusual and reflects similar experience elsewhere. A study of Canadian parliamentarians notes that even after serving several terms in office, MPs lack a clear understanding of their role. Those same MPs recommended 'better training on the breadth of their roles and on legislative aspects of it' (Coghill, Lewis and Steinack 2012, p. 506).

In identifying what skills or knowledge they wish they had acquired before becoming a TD, almost 50% of new TDs suggested legal training and/or greater political knowledge. In more specific terms, new TDs advocated a more methodical and detailed overview of their duties and responsibilities. One new Labour TD suggested that an early training seminar might usefully 'explore the political week'. A new Fine Gael TD supported greater assistance on 'how to read/draft a bill'. A first-time Sinn Féin TD favoured greater advice on parliamentary and priority questions, while a party colleague noted that there is 'little information on how to draft amendments'. It is clear that officials alone may not be best placed to deliver this type of detailed legislative advice and assistance. The involvement of parliamentary leaders and political parties is, therefore, imperative in designing and directing this type of training favoured by new TDs.

The legislative function of parliament is admittedly one of the more complex features of the operation of Dáil Éireann and it is not surprising that some TDs strain to grasp the fundamentals of the system. The Parliamentary Careers Project has recorded similar deficiencies in other parliaments.

'Most parliamentarians lack formal training in the law which presupposes prior KSAs [knowledge, skills and abilities] in fulfilling the legislative function. However, even parliamentarians who were previously lawyers recognise the desirability of training related to a parliament's legislative function' (Coghill, Lewis and Steinack 2012, p. 512).

It is clear that new TDs struggle with the complexity of Ireland's legislative process and the detail of Dáil rules and procedures. However, in terms of enhancing their engagement with Dáil Éireann, new TDs are largely in favour of greater and ongoing assistance, advice and guidance.

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Another issue which new TDs find challenging, is dealing with the media. TDs work in a media-saturated environment. The media industry operates on a 24-hour basis and produces readily available and easily accessible information. Intense public scrutiny is directly related to the growth of existing and new media forms. In tandem, new social media tools facilitate direct and immediate access to politicians. Many TDs expressed surprise at the role and impact of the media.

The important role the media plays in your career (New Fine Gael TD).

The level of disdain many media personalities have for elected TDs (New Fianna Fáil TD).

*Unrelenting demand of public and media
(New Fine Gael TD).*

Most new TDs recognise that the media has a job to do and is an important force in Irish society. However, many feel aggrieved by the ways in which the national media covers Irish politics. New TDs alluded to what they perceived as a lack of fairness and limited serious debate. High levels of distrust of the media are evident and engagement is highly selective. One new Fine Gael TD noted: ‘the less I have to do with them [media], the better’. A new Fianna Fáil TD admitted that he ‘avoids any engagement with the media’.

Irish TDs demonstrate a willingness to engage with new social media facilities. A 2012 study reveals that 84% of all Irish TDs are on Twitter compared with just 39% during the previous Dáil.¹¹ 67 or 88% of first-time TDs are on Twitter, and notably, the most active tweeters are new TDs. The ready access to TDs which Twitter (and Facebook) facilitate often creates new pressures and demands, and sometimes results in high levels of stress. One new Labour Party TD views some posts to his Facebook and Twitter pages as constituting ‘adult cyber-bullying’. A new Fine Gael TD spoke of ‘horrendous abuse’ on Facebook and Twitter.

Although many new TDs have engaged with the media, in all its forms, many are conscious of their limitations in dealing effectively with this dimension of the job. 48% of respondents feel they would benefit from assistance in ‘dealing with the media’. Over 25% of new TDs identified communication skills as being transferable from their previous occupations

¹¹ The league table of TD Twitter followers was compiled by PR firm Murray Consultants in early 2012. New Fine Gael TD, Alan Farrell, recorded the largest number of tweets followed by other new TDs, Labour’s Ciara Conway, and Fine Gael TDs, Jerry Buttimer and Paschal Donohoe.

to their new role as parliamentarians, further underscoring the importance of this skill base. Additional assistance in improving communication skills was the second most cited form of assistance (after assistance on parliamentary procedure) which new TDs would have valued on their arrival in Dáil Éireann.

Most political parties deliver communications/media training to their members. Indeed, parties appear to prioritise this type of instruction over all others. Training is typically delivered by PR consultancy companies. New TDs are generally positive about the assistance, but would favour it being delivered earlier (one party did not deliver this training until 2012 i.e. one year after the election) and more intensively. One-to-one in-house media training is offered to all TDs by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. However, during the first year of the 31st Dáil, just one Deputy availed of this training.

It is clear that the relationship between new TDs and the media is not harmonious. Helping first-time TDs to manage their engagement with the media is important and some provisions are in place to assist Deputies. However, the communication skills a TD requires are broader than this and include an ability to represent views and attitudes in parliament, a capacity to communicate with and on behalf of constituencies, and also an aptitude for listening. Communications training in its current form – which is focused on media skills – may not be delivering this range of skills.

WELFARE OF TDs

Such is the uniqueness of the job of the parliamentarian that it is unsurprising that many appear to have been unprepared for the

role. It is clear that Ireland's new TDs were initially overwhelmed by the demands of their new position. Many expressed their surprise at: 'how hard TDs work and the amount of pressure they are under', 'size and variety of workload', 'amount of competing demands on a TD's time', 'how much information I am supposed to process and retain', and 'degree to which people expect results'.

The workload of a TD is high – all but three of 23 respondents work a minimum of 60 hours per week. 70% spend at least an additional 10 hours travelling for the purposes of work. 60% of respondents took 20 days annual leave or less between March 2011 and July 2012. Most TDs work weekends, either holding clinics and/or attending local events. Costa and Kerrouche (2009, p. 337) note the ever-increasing workload facing parliamentarians in all Western democracies. These include: 'an increasing number of laws which are longer and more complex, increasingly technical means for controlling the executive, mounting petitioning from citizens and lobbies of all kinds'.

Work-life balance is problematic for new TDs. Over half are either 'not at all satisfied' or 'not very satisfied' with their work-life balance. In response to a question querying the impact of being a TD on personal and family life, responses were overwhelmingly negative.

It is not a family-friendly profession (New Sinn Féin TD).

I under-estimated the impact becoming a TD would have on my family and friends. I have very little time to myself now (New Fine Gael TD).

You give up your personal/family life (New Fine Gael TD).

Many new TDs paid tribute to the sacrifices their families make in order to facilitate their political career.

First-time TDs are also troubled by the nature of their engagement with constituents. The onset of the financial crisis has altered the type of issues which TDs are confronted with. O'Leary (2011, p. 337) has noted that the issues facing TDs at the constituency level 'are now more of a personal nature, such as sex abuse, marital problems, financial problems and domestic violence'. Many TDs (and often their assistants too) are deeply affected by the trauma and despair which they encounter on a daily basis.

A number of new TDs also find life in Dublin 'lonely'. This is especially the case for TDs who spend Tuesdays to Thursdays away from home. One new female TD with young children noted that the 'loneliness' can often be acute.

The work is hard, the hours are long and it is not great fun (New Sinn Féin TD).

Being a TD is a very lonely job (New Fine Gael TD).

Life as a TD is difficult, demanding and stressful (New Independent TD).

I like the job, but not the institution (New Sinn Féin).

For some first-timers, Dáil Éireann is not a friendly place. One TD suggested that this may be explained by a degree of tension between new Deputies and their longer-serving colleagues. The re-ordering of the political party system in 2011 has meant a new dynamic for Fine Gael and Labour TDs in particular. In contrast to earlier periods, many TDs now share constituencies with party colleagues. This has heightened the competition between TDs and has had a

negative impact on the sense of collegiality among Deputies. One new Fine Gael TD noted that this changed environment prevents him from asking constituency colleagues for advice. The consequence is that not all TDs see Dáil Éireann as a friendly environment.

Despite the difficulties and stresses, 84% of respondents to the first survey aspired to make politics a long-term career and 82% aspired to become a Minister. Similar figures are recorded in the second survey. All new TDs who responded to the question 'Do you intend to stand for re-elections?' answered in the affirmative. Interestingly, one-third of those surveyed did not answer these questions in the second survey. Instead some respondents included ambiguous responses such as 'maybe' or 'undecided'. Interviews also revealed some reservations among new TDs in relation to their long-term political career plans. One rural based TD suggested that the long commute from his constituency to Dublin would be difficult to sustain long-term. A new Fine Gael TD suggested that the 'human costs' of being a TD are 'high' and a number of first-time TDs were not enthusiastic about the possibility of a long-term political career, if it were to be one confined to the backbenches. It is nevertheless apparent that a majority of new TDs aspire to enjoy a long-term career in politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dáil Éireann is an institution which faces some difficulties in asserting its relevance and elevating its reputation. Calls for political reform, many of them voiced by parliamentarians themselves, suggest an acute awareness of the challenges the institution faces.

For the 2011 generation of new TDs, their early experiences of Dáil Éireann have been mixed. Admittedly, they have assumed their new roles at a difficult time. Despite the difficulties they have encountered in adapting to the job however, they remain enthusiastic about their ability to effect change and most new TDs profess to 'loving' their job.

Any new job comes with challenges and stresses and the job of a TD is no different. What is distinctive about Ireland's new TDs, however, is they assume their new found responsibilities without a job description. To correct this anomaly would demand some wider agreement as to what a TD's role is or should be, and this is unlikely to materialise. However, in noting the multi-faceted role which TDs undertake, it is possible to design and deliver an induction and orientation process which better meets their requirements and interests. It demands a systematic identification of the needs of new TDs and a clear decision as to the precise objectives of an overhauled induction, orientation and training programme. However, there is a clear dilemma here:

Should a revised induction and orientation process seek to socialise new recruits in ways which make them similar to their longer serving colleagues? Or should the process empower and enable new TDs to engage differently with Dáil Éireann?

It is this consideration which goes to the heart of the matter. A revised induction and orientation process would certainly contribute to the modernisation and professionalisation of Dáil Éireann. This type of change is not necessarily commensurate with a process of political reform, where reform involves a re-balancing of the executive-parliament relationship. Nevertheless, there may be some legitimate suspicion on the part of the executive that developing the facilities,

resources and supports available to parliamentarians may contribute to a process which strengthens parliament. Change which is seen to enable or elevate parliament is often viewed as being anathema to a strong executive and successive Irish governments have generally resisted political reform processes of this nature, despite promises to the contrary (Murphy 2006). Although parliamentary capacity-building does not constitute political reform per se, it may be construed as such. It is somewhat troublesome therefore that the development of the induction, orientation and training process is heavily dependent on political leadership, namely the will of the executive.

Central to the rolling-out of an improved parliamentary capacity-building process is political leadership.

A parliamentary capacity-building process is first and foremost about supporting new parliamentary arrivals and enabling them to be effective politicians. Ultimately, this involves nurturing knowledgeable, skilled and confident TDs. Deputies such as these collectively strengthen the profile, character and operation of the institution – they are to be valued, rather than feared.

'There needs to be some acceptance on the part of the executive that a strengthened legislature is not a fundamental challenge to its ability to govern, but rather an essential means of underpinning and enhancing its own legitimacy' (Lord Norton of Louth 2012, p. 526).

The Irish executive however, may not share such a conception of initiatives such as those proposed here.

Welcome

The transition to life as a TD is not straightforward and the early days can be especially daunting. One means of assisting new TDs during this initial period is through a welcome process. Other legislatures mark the election of new parliamentarians with a variety of events, often hosted by the Prime Minister and other senior parliamentary figures. In the US, new Congressional members are invited to a lunch in the White House with the President and the Speaker of the House also hosts a dinner for the new arrivals. In the US too, each member of Congress receives a congressional pin – the design of which changes with every Congress (Sidlow 2007, p. 38).

In the UK in 2010, new members met in the Commons Chamber and sat in mixed groups rather than along partisan lines. For many of those present, this was a useful means of generating a collective rather than partisan atmosphere. The new MPs were addressed by senior Commons officials and also the new and former Leaders of the House, as well as other senior party figures. The event continued over coffee and concluded with a 'class of 2010' group photograph (Fox and Korris 2012, p. 565-566).

Since 1997, the outgoing Ceann Comhairle has hosted a lunch for new members. The event is also attended and addressed by senior Oireachtas staff. Other political leaders and parties however, tend not to be involved. A more inclusive function, involving other political parties and leaders, and maybe even the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), may be more symbolically powerful.

An 'Open Day' in Leinster House for new TDs is also a potentially effective means of introducing new Deputies to the Oireachtas. TDs would be invited to 'drop in' to different

offices and to meet directly (and informally) with Oireachtas staff. A number of new TDs also expressed a desire to be introduced personally to key parliamentary figures, including the Clerk to the Dáil and the Ceann Comhairle.

Events, ceremonies, rituals and presentations can be symbolically important. They also

serve a practical purpose by introducing new members to an institution; easing the transition to life as a parliamentarian; and, contributing to the socialisation process. They can too trigger an early sense of collegiality and camaraderie by facilitating introductions and promoting a common purpose and shared endeavour among members of all political hues.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

INITIATIVE	DETAIL
Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome Reception • Lunch/Dinner Event • Symbolic Presentation • Oireachtas Open Day
Tone and Tenor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Assisting TDs to fulfil their potential ...</i> • Political Involvement in Design, Planning and Delivery • Broader Suite of Training Offerings
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member Liaison Officers • Political (Parliamentary) Mentors
External Contributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing and Former Parliamentarians • Senior Officials • Academics, Experts, Specialists and Journalists
Policy Briefings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off-Site Delivery • Major/Upcoming Policy Challenges • Involvement of Experts • Chatham House Rules
Constituency Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time Management • Human Resource Management • Managing Constituent Expectations
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly compulsory ... • Attendance recorded and published • E-learning

Tone and Tenor

An induction and orientation process can play a role in assisting new TDs to *'fulfil their potential'*. In Dáil Éireann, this conception of the induction and orientation process is not evident, primarily because the process is designed and delivered by the Houses of the

Oireachtas Service who are constrained by the parameters they work within. Input from political leaders and political parties is limited. Civil servants are sensitive to the limits of their role and are careful not to behave in ways which may be construed as political. The involvement of political leaders and clearer

political direction from key political figures in Dáil Éireann however, would allow officials to experiment with a range of new methods and approaches.

In the UK, key political figures are more closely associated with the planning, design and execution of the induction and orientation programme. In the case of the 2010 Westminster election, the Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party emphasised that any induction programme should involve consideration of 'how the new MPs could fulfil their potential' (Fox and Korris 2012, p. 562). This facilitates the development of a broader suite of offerings which may involve mentoring, external contributors, policy briefings and targeted training. In Ireland, there is some evidence to suggest that new TDs are open to a more extensive induction, orientation and welcome process. 58% of respondents believe that TDs should be required to undertake Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training and a majority are also in favour of developing the breadth and depth of supports available to new TDs.

Mentoring

On their arrival in Dáil Éireann, every new TD is assigned a Member Liaison Officer who assists them to become familiar with the Houses of the Oireachtas, its services and physical environs. Officers are experienced staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service who volunteer for the position. Officers are provided with a training session and resource information to assist them in supporting a new TD. It is generally the case that the more experienced Liaison Officers are assigned to Independent TDs who do not enjoy back-up and support from a political party.

Member Liaison Officers introduce new TDs to the institution and address any queries or questions which the new entrants might have. The arrangement does not quite constitute a 'mentoring' process as such a process implies that the new member is supported by someone who has direct and first-hand experience of the role i.e. an existing (or former) politician. However, officers can never truly or fully appreciate the dynamics and demands of the role of a TD, or at least not in a way that politicians themselves can.

Some political parties in Dáil Éireann have experimented with a political mentoring process, whereby experienced TDs mentor their newer colleagues. The process however, has been conducted on a sporadic and largely informal basis and has excluded the majority of political parties and new TDs.

Survey and interview data reveals that the vast majority of new TDs would welcome a formal mentoring process. On their own initiative, new TDs sought advice from current and former TDs both before and after their election to Dáil Éireann. TDs are not averse to advice from past and present TDs and a high proportion of new TDs advocate formalising such an approach.

External Contributors

The manner in which induction, orientation and training is provided by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service relies almost exclusively on an in-house approach. There is no involvement in the delivery of seminars by existing or former TDs. It is also the case that non-political external contributors such as academics, journalists and experts, are under-utilised. In the UK, sessions provided by the Institute for Government (IFG) and the Hansard Society, involve external actors, including sitting politicians, who contribute

(often frankly) under Chatham House rules (Fox and Korris 2012, p. 570).

Contrary to assumptions, TDs expressed no objections to broadening the range and number of contributors. Indeed, they explicitly supported such an initiative and harboured no reservations about its potential introduction.

New TDs were especially well-disposed to using existing and former parliamentarians in the provision of training. Indeed, many strongly advocated the involvement of seasoned politicians as advisable and sensible. First-time TDs saw value in being exposed to the experiences and perspectives of their predecessors.

Policy Briefings

In providing information to new TDs, the Oireachtas Service is largely focused on introducing new members to the institution. The emphasis is on the mechanics of Dáil Éireann's operation. There is little focus on the non-administrative, policy concerns of the new Dáil. The political party system may lessen the need for policy briefings, but many new TDs were open to the provision of policy briefings where they are delivered by experts and address issues likely to be on the agenda of the new Dáil.

In the US, the Bipartisan Programme for Newly Elected Members of Congress is delivered by the Institute of Politics at Harvard University. It complements the orientation provided by the US House leadership. The programme is a multi-day event which delivers intensive seminars on major public policy issues to new Congressional members. Key areas of discussion include climate change, federal budget, America's youth and the media,

among others. Contributors to the programme include current and former senior officials from Congress, the White House, cabinet departments, regulatory agencies, as well as journalists, academics, experts and other respected authors and thinkers.

An additional consideration here is the issue of ethics. In the context of recent controversies, there may be merit in including consideration of political ethics in any future training programme (although it is covered in the Members' Handbook). Coghill et al. note that: 'internationally, an increasing number of chambers are providing advice and training for members on how to handle ethical issues and the appointment of independent parliamentary officials with related responsibilities is spreading' (2008b, p. 12).

In the delivery of briefings, the UK experience suggests that sessions which were delivered outside of the House of Commons framework were often more popular than those provided in-house. Being physically removed from the institution may facilitate improved interest and deeper engagement in the induction process.

Constituency

Servicing the constituency is central to the role of a TD. It consumes a large portion of their time and it is also a source of both frustration and satisfaction for many new TDs. Aside from training on the constituency database, Dáil Éireann does not provide any other dedicated training for TDs in dealing with the constituency component of their work. This is not unusual.

'Parliamentary training programmes generally do not address more basic and practical matters such as dealing with constituency problems' (Donohue and Holland 2012, p. 536).

However, given the increasing demands which TDs face and the growing complexity of their constituency roles, they may benefit from practical advice on, for example, managing constituent expectations, responding to constituents, human resource management and prioritisation and time management. On the latter issue, survey responses and interviews suggest that new TDs struggle to prioritise and to manage their time. Yet, there is no dedicated time management seminar on offer to new TDs. A large number of new TDs are supportive of tailored time management training which recognises the unique nature of parliamentary and constituency work.

Attendance

The demands on TDs' time are immense and they are often geographically removed from Dublin and Leinster House. As a consequence, attendance is typically modest. Attendance at training seminars during the first year of the 31st Dáil was moderate. It is clear that new TDs have not been assiduous in exploiting the training opportunities which currently exist.

Political parties do not compel their TDs to attend training sessions and this can adversely affect attendance. Were political leaders to be more closely involved in the content and design of training and were they to be more robust in encouraging new TDs to participate, attendance would likely increase. For this to happen however, political leaders must understand and appreciate the benefits of parliamentary capacity-building, and not view it either negatively or indifferently. It may too

ensure greater complementarity in the provision of training by both the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and individual political parties.

An alternative means to ensuring that new TDs engage more deliberatively with training opportunities may be achieved by publishing a record of attendance in the Annual Report of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

An enhanced e-learning portal is also a potentially useful way of aiding new TDs introduction to Dáil Éireann without requiring their physical attendance at seminars. Short online tutorials available via an intranet portal and utilising learning software tools including, for example, Panopto and Adobe Connect, may be more convenient and accessible to new TDs. The Danish and Italian Parliaments already utilise this approach and technology (Piccirilli and Zuddas 2012).

CONCLUSION

The introduction of a more comprehensive range and number of supports for new TDs is effectively about *enabling* the newest generation of parliamentarians to be effective public representatives. It is clear that the 2011 intake are hard-working, optimistic and ambitious. Their ambition however, is largely grounded in aspirations to become a Minister. This entails membership of the Executive, a different branch of the political system.

This ambition masks the biggest challenge Dáil Éireann faces, namely the absence of an appealing, rewarding and fulfilling long-term **parliamentary career**. This in turn undermines the status of the institution. Furthermore, it does not cultivate a strong interest in or willingness to invest in parliamentary capacity-building. Moreover, it may be the case that political parties and key

parliamentary leaders do not fully appreciate the merits of a more sophisticated induction process focused explicitly on developing TDs' knowledge, skills and abilities. There is a failure too to understand that a more focused training and support system for TDs may pay dividends in terms of the vitality of the institution, its contribution to good governance and the longer-term benefits to society. Pioneering research by Coghill *et al.* (2008a) concludes:

'Raising the level of parliamentary performance to a recognised and measurable standard of professional competence must not only enhance the contribution of parliamentarians in providing effective government but also extend their contribution by facilitating further activities of value to society after they have left their parliamentary careers. If it achieves these goals it will also lift public respect for parliamentarians as individuals and for the institution of parliament itself' (Coghill et al. 2008a, p. 94).

TDs need to have knowledge, capacity and confidence to carry out the tasks of their office. Parliamentary capacity-building programmes provide some basis for developing and enhancing varied forms of political aptitude. This is important not merely for the vitality of Dáil Éireann and the political system more generally, but also because the Oireachtas provides the pool of talent from which future Irish political leaders will be drawn. Developing a new approach to parliamentary capacity-building is, first and foremost, an exercise in professionalising and modernising the institution. In turn and in time, such an initiative *may* help to challenge some of the more problematic features of Dáil Éireann. This is not political reform in the traditional sense, but it may be a step in that direction.

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