GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC POLICY REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Diploma stage examination
8 December 2005

From 2.00pm to 5.00pm
plus ten minutes reading time from 1.50pm to 2.00pm

Instructions to candidates

*Answer **four** questions in total.*
One** compulsory question from **Section A
One** compulsory question from **Section B
Two** out of the three questions from **Section C

The question in Section A carries, in total, 50 marks.
The question in Section B carries, in total, 20 marks.
The questions in Section C each carry a total of 15 marks

Where a question asks for a specific format or style, such as a letter, report or layout of accounts, marks will be awarded for presentation and written communication.

PRE-SEEN MATERIAL

Read the articles and data that follow and then address each of the Requirements for Question 1

The Democracy Commission
Challenging politics

Disempowered & disillusioned but not disengaged – Democracy in Ireland
A progress report, May 2004

1.   Background

1.1   The independent Democracy Commission was set up to respond to widespread concerns about the nature of democracy in Ireland, in both the Republic and Northern Ireland.

1.2   An initiative of two think-tanks, TASC and Democratic Dialogue, both of which are concerned with issues of equality and social justice, the Commission was asked to consider the question of the capacity of our democracy to be inclusive, participatory and egalitarian in the twenty-first century.

1.3   Twelve people have committed to this work, acting in a voluntary capacity and supported by a Secretariat provided by TASC. The Commission intends to complete its work by the Autumn of 2005.

1.4   Through its work, the Commission seeks to broaden the discussion on democracy in Ireland as widely as possible by looking at how we define democracy and the implications of a redefinition on constitutional and institutional processes.

1.5   It intends to include views from all sections of Irish society. The aim is to:
   • gather available information on opportunities for and barriers to real participative democracy within Irish political institutions, with particular emphasis on social inclusion and the under 25s,
   • review international best practice and identify options for new forms of democratic political institutions,
   • assess alternative forms of citizen participation and political representation.

1.6   In its approach the Commission has been asked to take account of the following issues:
   • the reasons for disconnection from the political process, concentrating on the under 25s and those living in socially disadvantaged areas,
   • the role of "civil society" and the possibility to effect change outside formal political involvement,
   • the potential for North-South co-operation and mutual lesson-learning,
   • the media as a channel for and a creator of the values shaping our political participation,
   • issues of multi-level governance, looking at the relationship between public and private bodies at the local, regional, and supranational levels,

- the debate surrounding rights-based culture which hinges on extending rights from the political and civil sphere to encompass the social, economic and cultural.

1.7   This progress report is published just 10 months after the Commission began its work in July, 2003, following its launch in June. It is being issued as an expression of the Commission's intent to promote ongoing and open discussion as a key principle of participatory democracy.

1.8   In this context it should be noted that while the Commission has been very active during the last ten months as outlined in the following paragraphs, the task it has been set is a challenging one. We are very conscious that as yet the soundings we have taken are both preliminary and partial. Nonetheless we are convinced that a clear agenda of the issues which need to be considered more fully and of the questions which need to be asked is now taking shape. We want to share our emerging perspective on this agenda with as wide an audience as possible. This is not simply to provide information, although this is an important objective, but more importantly to seek input and comment, so that the agenda may be deepened and expanded as appropriate.

1.9   To date meetings have been held with the general public; organisations in the Community and Voluntary sector; community activists; and the Political Parties in the Republic of Ireland. [1]

1.10   Advertisements were placed in the national newspapers requesting written submissions from the public. To date more than one hundred submissions have been received.

1.11   The Commission has held a number of consultations and discussions with groups, organisations, academics and other individuals; has taken part in meetings and conferences organised by other groups addressing issues relevant to its work; and conducted exploratory primary research.

1.12   The Commission is working on an all-Island basis. The approach being taken is one of primary focus on the institutions of the Republic of Ireland. Nonetheless the Commission takes due account of the relationship between the two parts of the Island with particular reference to the new dispensation as a result of the Belfast Agreement.

1.13   The Commission's approach of consultation and dialogue will inform and be informed by the findings of an audit of the current state of democracy in Ireland, conducted separately in both jurisdictions. This democracy audit will provide the evidentiary basis and analysis which the Commission will use to guide its concrete proposals. It will be based on the research framework provided by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) based in Sweden. One of the particular merits of the Democracy Audit is its flexibility as a research methodology. A research team from the two sponsoring organizations, TASC and Democratic Dialogue, are currently in the process of designing the Audit in the context of a detailed brief from the Commission.

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[1] Suitable date has not yet been arranged with the Flanna Fail Party. It is also intended to seek meetings with the political parties in Northern Ireland.

1.14 The Commission has twelve members:
- David Begg, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions,
- Dr Ruth Barrington, senior public servant,
- Prof Ivana Bacik, Reid Professor of Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at Trinity College Dublin and practising barrister,
- John Hanafin, Fianna Fail Senator and former deputy Lord Mayor of North Tipperary,
- Stewart Kenny, non-executive Director of Paddy Power plc,
- Sr. Bernadette MacMahon, Co-ordinator of the Vincentian Partnership for Justice,
- Prof Elizabeth Meehan, Director of the Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research at Queen's University Belfast,
- Nora Owen, former Minister for Justice and former deputy leader of Fine Gael,
- Donal Toolan, disability rights activist, actor and award-winning journalist,
- Tony Kennedy Chief Executive of Co-operation Ireland,
- Mark Mortell, Company Director and head of corporate and financial practise at Fleishman-Hillard Saunders, International Communications Consultants,
- Caroline Wilson, Good Relations Officer, Belfast City Council.

1.15 Four of the Commissioners, Ruth Barrington, Tony Kennedy, Mark Mortell and Caroline Wilson, were appointed recently. Kim Bartley and Leanne Hyland have both had to withdraw from active involvement due to pressure of other commitments and their contribution is very much appreciated.

1.16 The Commission is chaired by David Begg and is indebted to Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and ex-United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who has taken on the role of International Counsellor to the Commission.

1.17 Dr Clodagh Harris is the Coordinator of the Democracy Commission project and is Secretary to the Commission.

1.18 The Democracy Audit Project is led by Paula Clancy, Director of TASC, and Robin Wilson, Director of Democratic Dialogue. The research is overseen by a steering group comprising:
- Dr John Baker (UCD),
- Dr Teresa Brannick (UCD),
- Paula Clancy (TASC),
- Professor Elizabeth Meehan (QUB),
- Robin Wilson (Democratic Dialogue),

1.19 The Commission was struck by the high response rate to its calls for submissions and by the level of interest in and co-operation with its work. It wishes to thank those individuals and groups who made submissions, attended Commission events, and assisted in the organisation and facilitation of Commission consultations.

1.20 Further information on the submissions received to date, the main themes raised with the Commission, and the Commissioners can be found on our website www.democracycommission.ie

1.21 In keeping with its desire to extend discussion and debate on this progress report and on wider issues of democracy on the island of Ireland, the Commission welcomes:
- Hard copy or electronic submissions from individuals and organisations,
- Invitations to address and/or participate in relevant gatherings,
- Invitations to organise an event with specific interest groups.

If you wish to engage with the Commission in any way please contact at democracycommission@tascnet.ie or at: No. 26, South Frederick Street, Dublin 2.

2.   What the commission has heard to date

2.1   From its consultations, the Commission is convinced that Irish people as a whole are neither politically uninterested nor apathetic; the large numbers of people who protested against the War in Iraq provides the most recent demonstration of political engagement. There is, however, an impression of disempowerment and disillusionment among many of those we have talked to. In the context of available research and other evidence on patterns of behaviour and analyses of attitudes, the Commission is of the view that this is a matter of significance in considering the question of the health of our democracy.

2.2   The sense of disenchantment is best exemplified in the declining rates of participation in political elections. The overall turnout in the last general election in the Republic at 63% was 3% below that of the previous election and this decrease is an ongoing trend. It is quite possible that participation rates will fall even further in the elections next month. A recent Eurobarometer poll shows that fewer than 1 in 3 intend to vote in Ireland in the European elections next month.

2.3   A CSO survey of attitudes conducted after the last general election in the Republic of Ireland in 2002 found that a worrying 4 in 10 of Irish people believe that their public representatives do not care about the opinions of ordinary people, while even fewer believe that politicians are honest.

2.4   Underlying these general statistics concerning the whole population are even more worrying trends in relation to particular sub-groups.

2.5   Considerable attention is being given to discovering the reasons behind the now well established pattern that an ever-increasing proportion of young people are not connecting with the institutions of representative democracy. At the last general election in the Republic just over 40% of those aged 18–19 voted, mirroring the situation in the UK for its last general election in 2001. The worry is that this has long-term implications.

2.6   Some of the reasons for this arise from administrative obstacles, such as not being registered and the timing of elections etc (see section on voting issues – 2.33). However, what has also been identified is that when non voting is a deliberate and conscious choice exercised by young people, we are talking more of disillusionment rather than apathy. Phrases such as 'engaged sceptics' resonate, suggesting that young people are interested in the issues but mistrustful of politicians.

2.7   Of equal concern are the people within Irish society who are disengaged by virtue of disability or the socio-economic conditions of the area in which they live.

2.8   In all elections, those living in marginalized communities are considerably less likely to vote than the general population, for example CSO data shows that just 58% of the unemployed voted in the last general election compared with 75% of those with work. This leaves a significant group of people underrepresented at the decision-making table and in danger of their interests being factored out in the policy-making process. The cycle is then perpetuated by this sense of exclusion.

2.9   A recent study of voter participation in Dublin's South West inner city included an analysis of reasons for non voting. The survey found that there were strong similarities in respondents' reasons for not voting in either the general, local or by-elections – the main reason given was that people saw no point in voting as nothing ever changed.

2.10   The Commission is aware that the ideal of a participatory democracy has been discussed and debated, with numerous definitions and emphases. Without entering these important debates the Commission is of the view that a political system which promotes and facilitates widespread and representatively diverse democratic participation is critical to achieving not just the perception but the reality of popular control. Engagement of this nature would include, but not be limited to, a belief in and commitment to participation in elections as a civic virtue.

2.11   At this early stage in its deliberations and with all the caveats presented earlier, the Commission, in the following paragraphs, sets out some of the key issues raised with it during its consultations to date. These begin to tease out the complex set of concerns with our current democratic arrangements and the kinds of obstacles that a number of individuals and groups identify in realising the twin democratic principles of popular control over decision-making and political equality. In this way the agenda for the work of the Commission over the coming year becomes clear.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

2.12   In various fora there were many concerns raised about the current structures and practice of government in the Republic and a deep sense of concern with the suspension of the Assembly in Northern Ireland. The kinds of sentiments expressed to the Commission include the following:

- *A belief that government in all its manifestations needs to be more accountable,*
- *Under-representation of significant sub-groups on government institutions and quangos. Such bodies are "made up of middle-class people who get to make the resource allocation decisions". "Democratic bodies need to be much more reflective of the people, women ethnic minorities, young, old etc". Proposal that there should be some form of open competition and transparency in the selection procedure,*
- *Dail Committee system useful but poorly understood outside the Dail,*
- *Role of the Dail has been undermined by the one-party dominance. Backbenchers, especially independents, are sidelined,*
- *Civil service has become more politicised. "Little difference between what the civil service say and what the Minister says",*
- *Adversarial nature of politics seen to be a reason for disengagement,*
- *The collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly has had a hugely negative impact on commitment and interest in politics in Northern Ireland. Now there is a sense of a vacuum with no forward momentum.*

2.13 Accountability of Government is vital to satisfying the basic democratic principle of popular control of government. It means that citizens and their representatives are in a position to judge not only how well Government has performed, but also its honesty and other qualities. It is also important as an assurance of effectiveness. Transparency is key to good policy-making and decision-taking and needs to be subject to the checks and balances of the Dail/Assembly, the media, interest groups, and the public. The experience of the impact of the contested freedom of information legislation and legislation governing the funding of organizations engaged in advocacy and campaigning work is relevant here.

2.14 The soundings taken by the Commission on this issue suggest a number of further questions to address. These include:
   • What is the scope to develop our representative democracy in a more participatory manner?
   • Is there a need for more developed channels of consultation and clearer lines of accountability, and if so, what form should these take?
   • Is the manner in which elected representatives now communicate with their constituents optimal and, if not, how could that process be improved to make it more effective and egalitarian?
   • What are the levels of public confidence in the effectiveness of government and its political leadership? If low, what are the necessary measures which need to be taken to redress this?
   • Are the powers of the legislature to initiate, scrutinize and amend legislation adequate?
   • Are the powers of the legislature to scrutinise the executive and hold it to account adequate?

ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

2.15 Tensions about the role of political parties are common in all mature democracies and are reflected in many of the contributions made to the Commission to date. These are summarized as follows:
   • *The impermeability of existing party structures and hierarchies to new ideas and new influences. Politically engaged individuals spoke of the difficulty of finding a place within political parties,*
   • *Particular reference was made to the difficulties experienced by women in making their voices heard,*
   • *Party system encourages an emphasis on political 'careerism' rather than a commitment to representation of constituent or wider national interests,*
   • *The problem of consensus politics – the perception of drift towards the middle so that it is hard for people newly interested in politics to find a party that best suits their interests,*
   • *Changing work structures and attitudes are reflected in less time and interest in political or other forms of voluntary activity. This issue of time is particularly true for women who are now represented in greater proportions in the work force,*
   • *Lag between increasing number of independents and the structures of government/parliament to reflect this,*
   • *The question of financing of political parties is also relevant. Political party subordination of public concerns to the interests of wealthy donors is currently being played out in a number of tribunals and is widely blamed for much of the current dissatisfaction and distrust of the State and of political parties.*

2.16 Political parties and their elected members are often unpopular. A recent UK Electoral Commission report on young people and politics concluded that political parties are trying to engage young voters, but failing. "Partly these plans may have been poorly conceived but partly they suffer from a strategic weakness – being tarred with the same brush as the 'party politics' that seemingly repress some young voters in the first place". The recent opinion poll conducted by the National Youth Federation of the views of a representative sample of young people support this. Young people are not impressed with the quality of elected representatives at present, with a majority expressing the sentiment that 'politicians are in it for themselves'.

2.17 These soundings, particularly when considered in the context of wider research findings, need serious attention. Political parties are an essential element of representative democracy and the closest direct link between the citizen and the state.

2.18 As part of its review of institutional processes and their reform the Commission believes it will be important to consider the following:
   • What changes should political parties usefully make in their own internal structures to promote and encourage party activism?
   • What is the potential of political parties to recruit members across all sections of society and to engage with the public? In particular this will involve an examination of any structural rigidities currently present in the political parties and how these should be addressed.
   • What are the positive characteristics of alternative forms of political participation used by some political parties and other forms of social movement, which are appealing to those who otherwise would not engage with the political system?

WEAK LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2.19 'We don't have local government in Ireland, we just have local administration'; this sentiment was echoed throughout the submissions, where the issues that came to the fore were:
   • *The centralisation of decision making and increasing powers of county and city managers. This system is strongly criticised, as many believe that it undermines the legitimacy of local democracy and militates against local participation in civil society bodies such as residents' associations,*
   • *Lack of accountability. Power in certain cases is devolved to directors of services rather than local representatives. Often the unavailability of a local councillor means decisions are taken by unelected officials. Access to information from these officials is complained of as poor,*
   • *Petty restrictions on public access to Council meetings. Examples included the need to get a ticket from a councillor or ring in advance to secure a place,*
   • *Lack of advance knowledge of Council meeting agendas. The fact that Council meeting agendas, in some areas, are not published in advance was highlighted as a barrier to public participation in local democracy,*
   • *The way in which the abolition of the dual mandate was handled by some post holders at local level. Those who raised the issue were angry that the electorate were, in the short term, represented locally by people they did not elect and often did not know,*
   • *Powers are taken from local representatives because they don't want to make difficult decisions.*

2.20 Research indicates that taking part in political processes increases people's knowledge and commitment. It will also impact on the development of an active citizenry, upon which a healthy democracy depends. The findings of research suggest that strong local government favours participation and has been effective in helping citizens overcome a sense of powerlessness. In Ireland the opposite is true; the weak powers of local government reinforce disempowerment and disillusionment. The apparent contradictions in public policy, which have witnessed the centralisation of local government decisions and health service delivery but the geographical 'decentralisation' of public services, adds to confusion in the system of governance.

2.21 Inadequacies of local government raise questions concerning the Irish Government's commitment to the principle of subsidiarity, which states that decisions should be made at the level closest to the people. With regard to local democracy in Northern Ireland, the Commission will be looking to the current review of public administration in Northern Ireland, launched by Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Ian Pearson MP in 2003, and the possibility of transferring functions currently administrated by quangos to a democratically accountable framework.

2.22 In its exploration of participatory democracy and active citizenship the Commission will conduct further analysis on the impact of local government on democracy in Ireland. In particular, it will focus on:
• Local government's independence from the centre and the powers and resources it has to hand to carry out its responsibilities,
• The accountability and responsiveness of local government,
• The level of co-operation between local government and partners associations and communities in the formation and implementation of policy and service provision.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

2.23 Tension between representatives of civil society and the organs of government is to be expected within a functioning democracy. There is certainly evidence of strain in the relationship between the community and voluntary sector and political representatives.

2.24 It is important to note that to date the Commission's focus has been on the Community and Voluntary sector. The Commission is aware that civil society is comprised of a much broader grouping of 'voluntary relationships and interactions' and looks forward to engaging with other civil society organisations in the near future.

2.25 According to the submissions received, features of the relationship between civil society, in particular the community and voluntary sector, and representative democracy include:
• *A heavier reliance on the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland than in the Republic, since the collapse of the assembly,*
• *A common perception in the community and voluntary sector that politicians are bound by the party whip and are incapable of independent action,*
• *A counterview that social partnership has sidelined democratically elected representatives such as opposition and government backbench TDs,*
• *A belief that local politicians feel threatened by representatives from the community and voluntary sector,*

- *A lack of coherent policies on the part of the government concerning relationships with civil society organisations,*
- *Amongst those community and voluntary groups that claimed a negative experience of social partnership there is a view that:*
  - 'social partnership has built up layers that have alienated people at the local level'.
  - Social partnership is an attempt by the State to regulate and co-ordinate the community and voluntary sector.
  - 'the community and voluntary sector's independence has been eroded due to the way in which funding is delivered and the conditions attached to it'.
  - The perception that 'governments co-operate with benign community and voluntary groups while those organisations that follow a more confrontational path risk losing funding.',
- *Those groups that claimed a positive experience of social partnership had a counterview and referred to,*
  - the dialogue created between different players within the community and voluntary sector.
  - the increased access to the institutions of government
  - the inclusion of the sectors' issues on agendas.

2.26 This complex set of perspectives on the relationship between the community and voluntary sector and representative democracy, in particular executive government, mirrors tensions between ideas of representative and participatory democracy.

2.27 Participatory democracy relates to how citizens engage and influence their social and political destiny. It is concerned with how the unequal distribution of power and resources affects peoples' daily lives. It argues that the power to make decisions should not be left to a small number of people, as is the case with representative democracy, but that power should be more equally shared among all citizens. It should be noted, however, that participatory democracy does not intend to replace representative democracy but to make it more accountable.

2.28 An important aspect of the relationship between civil society and representative government is the global trend toward multi-level governance. The increasing emphasis on governance as distinct from the traditional practice of government has rendered policy and decision making processes more opaque. While government refers to the traditional institutions of central and local government, governance is 'a broader concept describing forms of governing which are not necessarily in the hands of the formal government' (Hughes, 2003). In other words 'governance' refers to partnerships and networks between a broad range of public and private agencies.

2.29 The move from government to governance, from a hierarchical structure to networks has complicated the relationship between civil society and organs of the state as they continuously negotiate the operation of society as a whole. This picture is rendered more layered and complex due to the need for multilevel governance systems in an increasingly globalised decision-making environment.

2.30 Multi-level governance (MLG) refers to 'the complexity of policy making, implementation and accountability relationships between a variety of state and societal actors at the levels of supranational activity (EU), central government, devolved administration, local authorities and quasi-government' (Carmichael,

2002). It has become more relevant as the daily life of every EU citizen is affected at the global, European, national, regional and local level.

2.31 With a view to redefining democracy in Ireland, the Commission intends to examine representative and participatory democracy in Ireland as well as tease out the impact of multilevel governance on the relationship between civil society and institutions of government. This will involve addressing the following:
- the range of voluntary associations, citizen groups, social movements in Ireland and their independence from government,
- the extent of citizen participation in voluntary associations and self-management organisations, and in other voluntary public activity,
- the impact of the EU on governance and government in Ireland,
- the extent to which civil society actors are representative and accountable.

VOTING ISSUES – VOTER REGISTRATION

2.32 Popular control is central to democracy. Voting is the key mechanism through which the people exercise this control. Decreasing levels of turnout for European, national, regional, and local elections is a feature of modern representative democracies, the exception being those states in which voting is compulsory.

2.32 The Commission recognises that distinctions must be drawn between facilitating and mobilising turnout, particularly amongst the under 25s and those living in deprived socioeconomic areas. Government, political party and civil society efforts to mobilise voters require these actors to address underlying attitudes to politics. Voters must be offered meaningful choices between parties and candidates.

2.33 The failure to do so was highlighted in consultations:
- *'why should I vote? It won't make any difference to my life',*
- *'…politicians are all the same, middle aged men in suits…',*
- *calls for the provision of an 'abstain/none of the above' option on the ballot paper, due to a belief that there were few, if any, differences across the parties,*
- *the failure of the government to honour the commitment made under Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness for voter education programmes to target young people and disadvantaged communities.*

2.34 Yet lack of mobilisation is not solely responsible for the fall in electoral turnout. Administrative obstacles to voting have also had an adverse affect as summarised by some of the contributions received:
- *mid week voting excludes students and young people working away from home but who wish to keep their vote at home,*
- *Voter registration procedures and difficulties with the supplementary register are of particular concern,*
- *'current voting mechanism is not independently accessible to users who are blind or who have a visual impairment … (and that) the new system will not facilitate voters with visual impairments to mark their ballot papers without assistance',*
- *Accessibility of the polling station,*
- *Extending the franchise to 16 year olds.*

2.35 Voter participation is intrinsic to representative democracy. A prerequisite is that every citizen who is entitled to vote is registered to do so.

2.36 Research conducted by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) in conjunction with the CSO suggests that approximately 20% of 18–25 years may not be registered to vote. It also showed that non-registration rather than voter apathy was the most frequently cited reason why young people do not vote. Not being registered to vote was cited by 22% of the nonvoters in the May 2002 general election in the Republic, according to figures from the CSO.

2.37 With these findings in mind the Democracy Commission undertook a survey of voter registration in the Republic of Ireland. The Northern Ireland branch of the UK Electoral Commission had investigated the matter for the November 2003 Assembly election. Its findings are also addressed in this section.

2.38 The most significant finding of this survey was the relatively poor impact of the supplementary register. Overall the percentage of voters added through the supplementary register[2] since its introduction lies between 2 and 4% for all the respondents. This complements research on the part of the Vincentian partnership for justice which outlines a number of obstacles to joining the supplementary register. Its survey of community leaders/ workers in 12 centres throughout Ireland found:
- a reluctance amongst many people living in socially disadvantaged areas to go to the Garda station due to negative perceptions and experiences of the Gardai. Others do not wish to be seen entering a Garda station by their neighbours. Those who did visit their local Garda station found that some of the Guards were not familiar with the registration process and the correct forms,
- the low level of literacy of many people in disadvantaged areas meant they were embarrassed to admit they could not fill in the registration form,
- Identification problems for asylum seekers and refugees, who have the right to vote in local elections.

Asylum seekers and refugees have had significant difficulties registering as they tend not to possess the standard forms of identification. Often the registration card they receive from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is the only ID they have. Yet until the recent changes, these cards were not accepted at some Garda Stations as ID, even though they include photographs of the bearer, because on the reverse the card states that 'this is not an ID card'. Pressure from advocacy groups resulted in the recognition of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform card as formal ID for voter registration purposes. While this was a favourable move on the part of the Government, some within the community and voluntary sector fear that it has come too late and has left a bitter taste in the mouths of those who tried to register before the rule change.

2.39 Voter registration in Northern Ireland differs from practices in the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the UK. The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 brought about significant change replacing the household registration with an individual registration system.[3]

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[2] The supplementary register is available to those who are qualified to vote, but have missed the deadline to include their name on the electoral register. Inclusion on the supplementary register involves completing a form, bringing it to the local Garda Station or Council offices with ID for stamping and returning it to the relevant local authority.

[3] To register under the new rules the individual must provide date of birth, national insurance number and signature. Also on the day of polling photographic identification is required.

2.40 The first publication of the new register in December 2002 generated considerable controversy. It showed that the numbers registered had been reduced by 10% (120,000 potential voters). In its investigation into this reduction the NI branch of the Electoral Commission (UK) discovered that:
  • the 95.5% registration rate of the last household (old system) register was likely to have been an overestimate,
  • the number on the December 2002 register (first register under the new system) as a proportion of the 18+ population was approximately 86%, i.e. 14% of the population were unregistered,
  • the December 2002 register indicated a 'clear correlation between deprivation and percentage decline on the register',
  • the new system of registration had an adverse impact on young people, people with disabilities, and those living in areas of high social deprivation.

2.41 International research has shown that 'habit', in other words voting in one election increases a person's likelihood of voting in future elections, is a factor in mobilising voters. The act of voting not only increases interest, knowledge and self-confidence but is usually rewarded by increased attention from politicians in a way which is self reinforcing. Thus the focus is on getting the person out to vote in the first instance. Voter education programmes, particularly in disadvantaged areas, have been successful in this regard.

2.42 The Commission's preliminary examination of voting mobilisation and facilitation suggests the need for an independent Electoral Commission for the Republic of Ireland, a view that is in keeping with the recommendation of the Referendum Commission. The Democracy Commission has started reviewing the workings of Electoral Commissions elsewhere to determine international best practice for promoting public awareness of electoral matters, modernising electoral processes and regulating political parties.

MEDIA FAILS AS AN ORGAN OF DEMOCRACY

2.43 As Lincoln said 'let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe'. This quote encapsulates the integral role played by the media in a democratic society. Yet in the various discussions with the Commissioners the perceived shortcomings of the media were highlighted repeatedly as follows:
  • *Failure to give adequate coverage to Dail debates and the activities of Dail committees,*
  • *Lack of impartiality,*
  • *Tendency to undermine politics by underlining trivia, sensation and personalities at the expense of policies and practices,*
  • *Unfair reporting. Journalists 'pander to populism' rather than report the facts.*

2.44 By disseminating information on the actions of government into the public domain, the press not only reports on matters of public interest but acts as a watchdog over government. The media is an essential source of political information. It forms part of the 'rich, varied forms of political communication', which has been identified as one of the key features of participatory democracy. (Baker, forthcoming 2004).

2.45 In the 21st Century the explosion of communications media coupled with the expansion of the internet provide a varied and diverse range of information sources. The internet has opened the gateway to information on legislation, policies and other official documentation. In terms of democratic accountability

and transparency this has been a significantly positive development. However, the Commission is aware that infrastructural defects, as well as generational and socioeconomic issues, may prevent sectors of Irish society from getting access to the internet.

2.46 If 'rich, varied forms of political communication' lie at the heart of democracy, then media independence from government and multi-national companies is necessary. Diverse ownership and control of the media to provide varied messages are also imperative.

2.47 It has been observed that 'broadcasting and news have become so fragmented that they no longer provided a common frame of issues for public debate' (Honohan, 2002). Political broadcasters need to be encouraged to widen their focus from day to day reporting to fundamental political choices and values. They also need to expand their focus and perceptions from traditional forms of political participation to more alternative forms, eg demonstrations, rallies etc.

2.48 In a fully functioning democracy, citizens should have access to a diversity of information and perspectives as well as the right to have their voices heard. Analysts have argued for 'greater media and cultural democracy and for the media to be more responsive to citizens and civil society'. (Kelly & O' Connor, 1997). An impartial and accessible public broadcasting service is imperative in this regard.

2.49 The Commission believes there is a need to explore further the relationship between citizenship and the media, particularly in terms of ensuring diversity and equality of access. An inclusive and participatory media system is important to educate and empower citizens, local communities etc, thereby enhancing democracy.

2.50 The extent to which these conditions exist in Ireland needs to be addressed. To date the Commission has not met with representatives of the media in Ireland. It intends to do so in the near future. The issues which need to be raised on the role of the media include:
 • Its effectiveness in investigating the government and big business,
 • The diversity of media ownership,
 • The extent of journalistic freedom in Ireland,
 • The degree to which private citizens are free of media intimidation and harassment,
 • Examine the need for a Press Council,
 • Examine policies to bridge the 'digital divide' and ensure public availability of the internet.

CITIZENSHIP & CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

2.51 Recent research in the UK shows that 60% of young people lack confidence about their knowledge and understanding of British politics. Similar research into levels of political engagement in the UK found that 42% of the public can correctly name their local MP. There are numerous recent indications that the position in Ireland is no different. This is where citizenship and political education could make a difference.

2.52 Submissions on the issue stressed:
- *'we need to instil a sense of citizenship which carries rights and responsibilities.',*
- *Our failure to offer social and political subjects on the senior cycle, even as an option, places us 'seriously out of line' with most of our European neighbours,*
- *'how can we expect students to be interested in participation and democracy when schools themselves are not democratic?',*
- *'Education for citizenship is a personal, parental, school, community and society responsibility'.*

2.53 Citizenship education is imperative in any healthy democracy. Democracy, particularly participatory democracy, requires 'public spirited' citizens, who are committed to the common good and engage on the basis of mutual respect and concern. Political education is required to understand the functions and processes of political systems.

2.54 Yet implicit in any evaluation of citizen education in Ireland is a definition and understanding of citizenship. The issue of defining Irish citizenship has been brought to the fore by the planned Referendum on Irish Citizenship. While agreeing with the Human Rights' Commission's assertion that 'the issue of citizenship must be viewed in the context of Irish immigration and asylum policy, which at present is not adequately grounded on human rights principles promoting the protection of all persons', the Democracy Commission wishes to focus not so much on the question of who qualifies for citizenship but on the quality of citizenship.

2.55 Active citizens lie at the heart of successful democracy. Yet in modern democracies citizenship lacks depth as people feel alienated from politics and disconnected from society. The challenge lies in the promotion of active citizenry; citizenship education is one method through which this can be achieved.

2.56 At present, citizenship education in Ireland is delivered through CSPE (civic, social and political education) to junior certificate. Yet this subject is only a relatively recent introduction at the junior cycle examination level. While the continuation of CSPE to senior cycle would be integral to consolidating citizenship studies in formal education, it alone cannot shoulder the burden of citizenship education. Research confirms that participation and competence are mutually reinforcing, that taking part in political processes increases peoples' knowledge, commitment and understanding. 'Learning by doing' can be achieved through democratic and effective student councils. Active citizenship, particularly for young people, requires opportunities to be involved in democratic decision making processes.

2.57 In Northern Ireland, political education is available as an option for examination at GCSE (junior) and A level (senior). Citizenship is currently taught at GCSE level through Citizenship studies, although this is due to change in the near future. The Commission will follow developments in the GCSE curriculum with interest as it believes it provides an opportunity for North-South lesson learning. The Commission also acknowledges Co-operation Ireland's joint North-South citizenship programme (Civic Link) and will examine it further as part of its research into citizenship and political education on the island of Ireland.

2.58 In its desire to promote discussion on citizenship, the Commission will:
- look at how inclusive the political nation and state citizenship is of all who live within the territory,
- examine and engage in debates on citizen's rights and duties to one another and to the community,
- explore what is meant by the 'active citizen' and the 'common good' with a view to recommendations for the promotion of both.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

2.59 Economic and social rights can be summarized as the right to food, housing, health, work and education and are central to achievement of political equality. The absence of economic and social well-being through poverty and other forms of social exclusion reduces people's opportunities to be active citizens.

2.60 These rights and the sensitive political question of whether they should be enforceable, through national and international legal instruments, has not as yet emerged explicitly in the Commission's consultations. Nonetheless the debate around economic and social rights was one of the critical issues which the Commission was asked to consider in its terms of reference. The Commission intends to debate the matter by asking the following questions:
- How far is access to work or social security available to all without discrimination?,
- How effectively are the basic necessities of life guaranteed, including adequate food, shelter and clean water?,
- To what extent is the health of the population protected in all spheres and stages of life?,
- How extensive and inclusive is the right to education, including education in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?.

2.61 Related to these questions is the ability of civil society groups and individuals to engage in advocacy and campaigning activity to promote awareness of and remedies for publicly identified problems in this field. On this issue the Commission will consider:
- How free are individuals and groups working to improve human rights?,
- How effective and equal is the protection of the freedoms of movement, expression, association and assembly?.

3.   Agenda going forward

3.1   The issues raised with the Commission reflect on and expand the core themes identified in its terms of reference. The Commission now has a richer body of data from which to work and more importantly a clear agenda for going forward.

3.2   In summary, the Commission will concentrate its future consultations around four broad themes:
- Citizenship,
- Representative and accountable government,
- Civil society and popular participation,
- Issues of multilevel governance.

3.3   In considering each of these themes, for reasons made clear in this report, particular attention will be paid to identify measures which will counter the poor levels of political participation of those living in socially deprived areas and of younger people in general.

TASC: think tank for action on social change

TASC is an independent think tank committed to progressive social change in Ireland. It aims to provide a space for fresh and innovative thinking where dialogue between citizens, researchers and politicians is facilitated. It is dedicated to seeking out new evidence based ideas and policy solutions which will inform strategies and campaigns for change as it works towards a society where equality is a human right. Tasc is funded through independent consultancy work, donations and trusts. For more information on TASC visit www.tascnet.ie

Democratic Dialogue

Democratic Dialogue is a think tank based in Belfast but with links across Ireland, Britain and beyond. Its twin focus is: the continuing change of political accommodation in Northern Ireland, and the social and economic issues neglected during the region's 'troubles'. Its vision is of an egalitarian society, at ease with itself and its evolving context. Democratic Dialogue organises its work around projects, for which it welcomes commissions. It facilitates dialogue to generate publications, with a view to concrete policy outcomes. Further information on Democratic Dialogue can be found at www.democraticdialogue.org

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SECTION A (Compulsory)

1

- **Requirement for question 1**

(a)   The Democracy Commission report of May 2004 considers the issue of a 'democratic deficit' in Ireland. What is meant by this and what are the principal symptoms of such a condition?   *10*

(b)   Why is Dáil Éireann viewed as a key institution in tackling the democratic deficit?   *5*

(c)   What do you understand by the terms *representative government and liberal democracy?*   *5*

(d)   (i)   What is judicial review and what are the two ways in which it can be sought within the context of the Irish Constitution?   *5*

  (ii)   How does Judicial Review protect individual social and economic rights in Ireland?   *5*

(e)   In recent years, Irish political parties have been accused of 'racing to the centre'. What does this mean and what are the effects of this on voter choice and participation rates?   *10*

(f)   Why is it often argued that Irish local government is better described as a system of local administration? In your view, have recent reforms under *Better Local Government* changed this?   *10*

(50)

SECTION B (Compulsory)

2

It is frequently argued that many public policy decisions in Ireland are strongly influenced by organised interest groups.   However, this raises key questions concerning the nature of representative government.

- **Requirement for question 2**

(a)   Identify and briefly describe the various types of interest group in Ireland and how we might distinguish between them.   *10*

(b)   Identify two policy areas where well-organised interest groups have managed to force government to change its mind on an issue. What are the negative sides to this form of political activism?   *6*

(c)   Describe why social partnership in Ireland is often regarded as usurping traditional parliamentary forms of government.   *4*

(20)

SECTION C (Answer two questions from this section)

3

The development of parliamentary committees is a comparatively recent development in Irish politics, when compared to other European jurisdictions. In part this is due to the dominance of parliament by the political parties, but also the institutional logic of our parliamentary system of government.

- **Requirement for question 3**

(a)   Identify the different types of parliamentary committee and what roles do they perform?   Why are governments reluctant to grant them too much independence?   *7*

(b)   Using examples, identify recent examples of a committee's inquiry that was viewed as a success, and another that failed? What were the principal factors that determined the different outcomes in each case?   *8*

(15)

4

Ireland has in the past been a significant beneficiary of EU structural and cohesion funds but is now moving to a position where it will be a net contributor to the EU.

- **Requirement for question 4**

(a)   How have structural and cohesion funds been managed in Ireland and what will the likely consequences be of Ireland's conversion to net contributor status within the EU?   *9*

(b)   What are the roles of the European Central Bank (ECB)?   What are the arguments against ceding control of interest rates and monetary policy to the ECB?   *6*

(15)

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5 Increased accountability has become one of the principal reasons for recent public sector reform programmes, as governments attempt to make the public-policy process more transparent. However, there are many different interpretations of what accountability actually is and how it can be promoted.

- **Requirement for question 5**

(a)   What are the various definitions of accountability and why is it viewed as central to 'good governance'?   *7*

(b)   It has been argued that there are now too many oversight institutions in the public sector. Do you agree? Give examples in your answer.   *8*

(15)