

Evaluation Report of the Irish Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

2021

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Executive Summary

This report presents some of the core findings from a project designed to track the process of the Irish Citizens' Assembly, with particular focus on the quality of the deliberative process and the attitudes of the members towards the process.

The evaluation team observed all public sessions of the assembly, surveyed members each weekend and interviewed members as well as the organisation team.

Overall we found a very well run process, with high deliberative quality and good levels of knowledge gain and understanding by members. The transition to online was well thought through and carried out efficiently. Throughout this report we examine the emerging Irish practice for deliberation, widely recognised as a global leader, and make a number of suggestions that may be worth considering as the Irish practice continues to develop and evolve.

1. Introduction

The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality was established on the basis of an Oireachtas resolution in July 2019. This was Ireland's third such process, following the Convention on the Constitution of 2012-14 and the Citizens' Assembly of 2016-18. The inaugural meeting of this Citizens' Assembly was held in Dublin Castle on 25 January 2020 and it held its first full meeting, in the Grand Hotel, Malahide, one month later. Originally scheduled to be completed within six months, the work of the Assembly was suspended soon after its first full meeting due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its work resumed online in early July, with a pilot session; this was followed by seven online meetings from October 2020, concluding in April 2021. The Citizens' Assembly submitted its report to the Oireachtas in June 2021.

The Oireachtas Resolution establishing the Citizens' Assembly stated that it should 'engage independent researchers to monitor and record, amongst other things, the perceived deliberative quality of the Assembly' (Final resolution, 11 July 2019). After a competition, organised on behalf of the Citizens' Assembly Secretariat by the Irish Research Council, Prof Jane Suiter was awarded the contract to lead a team of researchers (Prof David Farrell, Prof Yvonne Galligan and Dr Kirsty Park) in producing this report.¹

The remainder of this report is set out as follows. We start in section 2 with an examination of the setup and organisation of the Citizens' Assembly. Section 3 sets out the recruitment strategy, and considers its strengths and weaknesses. Section 4 examines the deliberative quality of the Assembly, and the impact of the move to an online format, and assesses

¹ This project was funded by the Secretariat of the Irish Citizens' Assembly. We are grateful to Professor Simon Niemeyer, University of Canberra, for his considerable advice and hard work in helping develop this project. We also want to express our thanks to the Secretariat and Chair for their assistance throughout. Most of all we would like to thank the members of Assembly for volunteering their time and insights to contribute to the research process, and particularly, for their valuable contribution to advancing gender equality by participating in the Assembly.

whether citizens changed their minds as a result of their participation. We conclude, in section 5, with a list of recommendations.

2. The set up and organisation of the Citizens' Assembly

This section examines five areas in particular: the topic set for the Citizens' Assembly, how the Assembly was structured and organised, the question of openness and transparency, the conversion to an online process, and the evaluation of the Citizens' Assembly .

2.1. The Resolution and topic

This Assembly, similarly to previous mini-publics, was established by way of Oireachtas Resolution. Again similarly to the previous assemblies - and a key strength of the Irish process - is the commitment from the Oireachtas to refer the report for consideration to a relevant Committee of both Houses and that the Committee brings its conclusions to the Houses for debate. Further, and another important strength of the Irish process, is a commitment in the Resolution for the government to provide a response to each recommendation in the Houses of the Oireachtas, and for it to indicate the time frame it envisages for the holding of any related referendum. This link between government, parliament and Citizens' Assembly and the strength of the commitment to the process from all political parties and the government is a key feature of the Irish process and underpins much of its success to date.

In terms of the specific Resolution, this Citizens' Assembly differed from the previous two Irish mini-publics in being set just one topic to consider -- gender equality. This was consistent with one of the recommendations of the Chair of the previous Assembly; it also reflected common international practice with deliberative mini-publics, about two-thirds of which tend to be given just one topic (Paulis et al. 2020: 17).

Another point of difference between this Citizens' Assembly and its predecessors was that the topic was set out in some detail in the Oireachtas Resolution, which stated that the Assembly should 'make such recommendations as it sees fit ... to advance gender equality by bringing forward proposals that:

- challenge the remaining barriers and social norms and attitudes that facilitate gender discrimination towards girls and boys, women and men;
- identify and dismantle economic and salary norms that result in gender inequalities, and reassess the economic value placed on work traditionally held by women;
- in particular, seek to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics and public life;
- recognise the importance of early years parental care and seek to facilitate greater work-life balance;
- examine the social responsibility of care and women and men's co-responsibility for care, especially within the family; and

- scrutinise the structural pay inequalities that result in women being disproportionately represented in low pay sectors...'

There are two points to make here: first about the specifics of the Resolution that was adopted on this occasion and, second, about the use of resolutions generally. First, this was the most detailed resolution to date: it may have been just on one topic -- gender equality -- but the Resolution specified six separate proposals that the Citizens' Assembly needed to consider. As one senior official noted, this was 'both broad and specific at the same time ... [T]he last Assembly had a more abstract theme like how to make Ireland a leader in climate change ... and they had the opportunity ... to shape the programme a bit more than we did'.² According to the Chair, it was 'a bit of a shopping list'.³ A detailed resolution of this kind also has the consequence of inevitably increasing the numbers of recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly (in this instance, there were a total of 45 recommendations), with the attendant risk that the government has more scope to be selective in which recommendations it might agree with (something we return to below).

The Irish approach to setting up citizen's assemblies is relatively unusual though it must be noted that there is no consistent pattern to be found in the creation of deliberative mini-publics internationally. This diversity of practice is worth reflecting on in relation to the Irish case. As is presently the pattern, Irish assemblies are created by means of Oireachtas Resolution. There are positives and negatives associated with this process. On the positive side, an Oireachtas resolution is an indication of political interest in, and the relative significance of, the topic to be considered in a public deliberative format. The pattern to date indicates that the citizens' report has a degree of purchase on the political agenda, as the government provides a considered response to the assembly's recommendations. This direct link between the citizen's work and the political institutions reinforces democratic responsiveness, and is likely to enhance citizens' trust in politics. However, the Resolution mechanism also has its drawbacks: there is a tendency to ask 100 citizens to provide policy solutions to divergent and complex issues that would properly rest with a policy group. This has been a feature of each of the Irish processes terms of reference, to a greater or lesser extent. It is difficult to find the balance between asking citizens to provide their considered and informed advice and expecting them to produce policy solutions. Secondly, the terms of reference are shaped in the political sphere and without consultation or prior discussion with the potential chairperson or chairpersons. Yet, in other political spheres, it is quite common practice to discuss terms of reference with potential chairpersons before being finalised. This makes sense, as the chairperson must interpret, direct and guide the work to completion. We note that, in this instance, the organisers were able to add gender-based violence to the list of areas to consider, but as one senior official noted 'the scope of the work [set for us] was very demanding. ... [T]here was so much already to be covered that if we were going to keep it within a reasonable timeframe there was very limited capacity to take additional things on'.⁴

² Interview with senior official from the CA.

³ Interview with the Chair of the CA.

⁴ Interview with senior official from the CA.

Thus, the question arises as to whether the Resolution mechanism, as utilised at present, is the most effective mechanism to determine the topics and scope of citizens' assemblies. This question warrants further consideration, especially as there are a number of deliberative mini-publics planned. An important aspect is what lessons can be drawn from the experience of other countries in terms of setting the agenda for a citizens' assembly. This will require a detailed comparative study evaluating the positives and negatives of other approaches to establishing deliberative mini-publics. Thus, in the longer term, there is merit in at least building in scope for some more flexibility in the interpretation of the topic by the Citizens' Assembly organisers. A detailed analysis of international practices could inform this discussion and possibly contribute to either amendments to the Resolution mechanism or consideration of an alternative to the Resolution route.

Recommendation 1: Further consideration be given to process of setting the agenda for a citizens' assembly

2.2. The structure and organisation of the Citizens' Assembly

This Assembly followed its predecessors in how it was structured. At the core of the structure is a dual leadership model consisting of the Chairperson (a high profile person -- in this instance, the former Secretary-General of the European Commission, Dr Catherine Day) and the Secretary of the Citizens' Assembly (a senior civil servant seconded from other duties -- in this instance, Dr Mary Clare O'Sullivan, a senior civil servant from the Department of An Taoiseach). The Secretary was supported by a small team of five civil servants (also seconded) with additional operational support provided by officials from the Department during the weekends when the Assembly met). The Secretariat were responsible for managing the entire operational process, including running a procurement process to commission additional support for specific tasks (such as the use of a market research agency to recruit the members, and a facilitation firm to provide the table facilitators).

They were also supported by a small expert advisory group consisting of seven members, whose remit was to support the Chair and Secretariat in ensuring a 'balanced and comprehensive work programme', provide background advice, and advise on the selection of experts and advocates from civil society and advocacy groups (Citizens' Assembly 2021: 32-33). The seven members represented a range of specialisms relevant to the substantive policy areas being discussed; for instance, one of their number was a specialist on deliberative mini-publics. In addition the Assembly had access to a legal panel of five academic legal scholars for the meeting on the constitution. This was something of an innovation: previous mini-publics had relied on the advice of legal scholars from time to time, but this tended to be a somewhat more informal arrangement.

The final structural component -- again following the practice of the previous deliberative mini-publics -- was the use of a steering group consisting of six members of the Assembly, whose role was to provide feedback and make suggestions on procedures and arrangements. This is a good addition to the organisation of the Citizen's Assembly that is to be lauded and encouraged in other citizens' assemblies outside of Ireland (Curato et al.

2021). In future Irish citizens' assemblies there may be an opportunity to involve this group more in terms of feedback from members and in suggestions for policy options.

There is an argument that the Secretariat be given additional resources to deal with procurement, to commission learning platforms, or engage with specialist agencies which could aid the Secretary in the delivery of the process. In addition, as we write the Secretariat is being wound down and some of its officials already moved to other duties. If there is no continuity there will be yet another steep learning curve for a new team should another citizens' assembly be convened. There is an argument that a specialist unit could be established where such expertise could reside. In other jurisdictions, such as Belgium and Scotland, this is in the parliament which underpins the independence of the citizens' assembly. An alternative might be to locate this in the Department of An Taoiseach. Establishing such a unit would also be in line with good practice according to OECD open government principles.

Recommendation 2: Consideration be given to additional supports for coordinating citizens' assemblies to ensure continuity and encourage specialism as citizens' assemblies become a feature of Irish politics, as well as maximise the institutional capacity to deliver on the terms of reference.

Similarly to the previous Irish processes, there were issues over the numbers of members who turned up to meetings and the rate of turnover of members. Of the 99 members recruited (not including the Chair) 37 had to be replaced over the course of the eight meetings of the Assembly. This included 17 members who did not turn up for one meeting. In total just 38 members attended all the meetings. These numbers are comparable with the previous citizens' assembly of 2016-18 (Farrell et al. 2019) but markedly out of kilter with the practice in other countries, which tend to have higher levels of turnout and lower levels of turnover. It had been thought that the move to have just one agenda item and to provide members with an honorarium might mitigate the variability in commitment, but clearly this strategy did not fully work. The lengthy pause after the first full weekend in February 2020 due to COVID-19 will have been a contributory factor. Additionally, the move to online may have played a role, although only six members specifically cited this as their reason for not continuing, while five others left without responding to contact from the Secretariat. However, this trend of high turnover and low turnout is consistent with previous Irish processes, so it may be that the recruitment method of using a market research company to cold-call potential recruits is a significant factor in this trend. As we discuss below, a shift to a two-stage recruitment process, as recommended by the Sortition Foundation, could help in the recruitment of members with a stronger degree of commitment to seeing the process through.

2.3. Openness and transparency

Openness and transparency is a vital feature of mini-publics (Curato et al. 2021), and in this respect the Irish Citizens' Assembly followed good practice. Just like its predecessors, full details were provided on the key actors involved; all materials were uploaded onto its website; public sessions were live streamed; and space (physical to start with and then

virtual) was made available to allow members of the public to observe the proceedings. An additional feature was the process of encouraging members of the public (together with advocates and representatives from civil society) to submit to a public portal on the website their views and recommendations on the issues being discussed: a total of 246 submissions were received. This public consultation and link between it and the Assembly is a strength of the Irish processes that is not followed in a number of other assemblies overseas.

Following the recommendation of the Chair of the previous Assembly, the Secretariat contracted an academic from Maynooth University to be in charge of the process of gathering and analysing the public submissions. She presented her overall analysis to the members of the Citizens' Assembly on 4 July 2020 and at subsequent meetings she presented views from the public submissions on each theme. In addition, the Secretariat circulated a short document summarizing the recommendations that had been received from the public submissions. This is a key innovation that should be continued.

Recommendation 3: Continue with the practice of summarising input from the wider public for the advisory board and members to consider

2.4. Moving online

The Citizens' Assembly was originally scheduled to run from January 2020 to July 2020, through a series of two-day monthly meetings. Only the inaugural meeting in January and first weekend in February took place in person with the rest of the scheduled meetings cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions.

After it became apparent that in-person meetings were unlikely to resume in 2020 due to the pandemic, the Assembly resumed with an experimental online meeting on the 4th of July 2020, which focused on the impact that COVID-19 had on the Citizens' Assembly's mandate. The online seminar served as a test for continuing in an online format and it was followed by a series of seven monthly meetings which ran online from October 2020 to April 2021. All the remaining meetings took place over one day with the exception of the final meeting which ran for two days. The running time of these meetings was much shorter than originally planned face-to-face to account for screen fatigue and the additional concentration required in an online setting, and based on survey feedback from members.

A further implication of the move online was that it was not possible to run the voting in person as was the case for previous Irish assemblies. The Chair, Secretariat and members were concerned that the method used for e-voting should be secure, reliable and confidential. It also needed to be flexible to allow members' suggestions for ballot paper amendments to be taken on board in real time.

In light of this, while some other international assemblies opted to manage online voting through existing survey platforms such as SurveyMonkey, a decision was taken to procure a separate specialist e-voting system. They were also advised and supported by professional returning officers who acted as independent scrutineers for the entire voting process as had been the case for previous Irish assemblies.

The e-voting system was accessed by a randomly generated ten-digit voting code for each member. Members could vote using tablets, smartphones or laptops. Training was provided for members and a pilot vote was run in advance of the final voting meeting where members voted together during scheduled slots in the programme.

While there is an undoubted symbolism and ceremonial dimension to the in-person voting at ballot boxes that took place for previous Irish assemblies, there were also advantages to the online voting system. Members agreed over 35 amendments to the ballot paper over the final weekend and these adjustments could be made without the time and resources involved in reprinting hard copy ballot papers. In addition, results could be counted and verified quickly which was particularly useful where sequential votes were involved. While the move to online voting was enforced, we believe it worked well. There are pros and cons to online versus in person voting which would need to be considered in deciding on a voting methodology for future assemblies.

We discuss the implications of the move to online in section 4, but overall the sense was that the move online worked well.

3. The Recruitment Process

3.1 The representation debate

Recruitment is an essential component when considering the composition of mini-publics. The basic precondition is that participants are randomly selected, a process known as sortition. Random selection overcomes the problem of external exclusion by ensuring that a diverse and representative group of citizens have a seat at the table and an ability to input into policy. This allows people who would not normally participate in public forums or consultations to have their voice heard. It also ensures that the mini-public mirrors larger society (Farrell and Stone 2019). But within this there are a myriad of choices (for more, see Curato et al. 2021).

To date, the Irish process has engaged in a combination of random sampling with quotas or stratification methods. Indeed, the vast majority of mini-publics combine both with around 67% of European cases doing so (Paulis et al. 2020). In Ireland the stratification characteristics to ensure this representativeness are age, gender, social class and region. In other jurisdictions other characteristics such as education, occupation or family situation/composition are also included. Of course, with only 100 members the more characteristics required, the more difficult the process. More recently some mini-publics have begun including variables such as ethnicity or minority language skills. For example, the Welsh citizens' assembly in 2019 selected on age, gender, ethnicity, education, region of residence within Wales and Welsh language skills. It is important that this process is in line with the need for political equality, that is, that all people have an equal chance of being selected and of influencing the outcomes.

The issue is the difference between statistical representativeness, where the stratification ensures the sample represents the population according to a few defined criteria, and cross-sectional representativeness where all the characteristics of the general population are in the sample but not necessarily in the same proportions. In addition, diversity can mean

bringing in marginalised and/or minority groups and voices. Thus a hybrid recruitment strategy may be necessary with a focus on both statistical and cross-sectional representativeness where different questions will need to focus more on one than the other (OECD 2020).

This in turn leads to a question as to where the sample should be drawn from. By using the electoral register for presidential elections/referendums (the Irish practice), then almost all migrants are ineligible and many other groups -- notably the homeless -- are missed. In Ireland it is notable that Irish citizens who are visible ethnic minorities have yet to be members, along with members of the Traveller community. Given their minority status in the population this is perhaps unsurprising under the representativeness criteria. However, if we are to prioritise diversity and inclusiveness then cross-sectional representativeness may be required. The need to ensure more diversity in membership was raised by the Chair in her reflections in the Citizens' Assembly Report (pp. 91-92) and she also proposed consideration of a new approach to member selection in this context.

With only 100 members it is likely that statistical representativeness will not result in the recruitment of people from minority backgrounds. Thus, from a diversity point of view there may be reason to focus on cross-sectional representativeness allowing the participation of certain demographics who may be under- or unrepresented among the citizen members. This may extend in some cases to younger age groups. In Ireland only those over 18 years of age are permitted to be members. By comparison, in Scotland it is 16 years, reflecting the younger voting age applied in that jurisdiction. In addition, in the Scottish climate assembly it was decided to over represent the young on the basis that younger generations have a greater stake than the elderly in a very long-term issue such as climate change. For future Irish citizens' assemblies it should be recognised that they can be mixed and that there is justification for a hybrid recruitment strategy.

In all the recent citizens' assemblies across the United Kingdom, political attitudes and even prior vote were considered in the stratification process (e.g. Elstub et al. 2021). This hasn't happened in Ireland, which meant that the Secretariat did not know members' attitudes to gender equality before the process. This is something that future Irish assemblies could reflect on.

3.2 Face-to face or mail processes?

In Ireland the recruitment process is conducted by a market research agency (Amárach in 2020) who build a representative sample frame in accordance with the previous census data. The sampling points are representative in terms of geography with stratification quotas based on gender, age, and region. Interviewers call to each sample point and interview householders at every *n*th house to fill their recruitment quotas and to capture contact details for verification. A two-stage verification process ensures that those not eligible to be part of the Citizens' Assembly or who were not recruited via the proper procedure are not included in the final composition of the Assembly. Certain categories of citizens are excluded via the screening process, including:

- Certain categories of politicians and political party members

- Journalists and others working in the media
- Those campaigning on aspects of gender equality
- Those not eligible to vote in a referendum

As comparative research of deliberative mini-publics has shown, in most other jurisdictions a different two-stage recruitment method is used (OECD 2020; Paulis 2020). An invitation is sent out (by post or email) to several thousand randomly selected households. The invitation explains that the recipient is being asked to volunteer for a citizens' assembly and what the issue is that they will be considering. They are asked if they would like to volunteer for the role, in which case they respond to the invitation.

The volunteers are asked to provide basic demographic data and if they meet the basic eligibility criteria they are placed in the pool. The process draws random lots until all the quotas are filled. Thus, the process can be tailored to be random, representative, and appropriate for whatever sort of decision needs to be made in whichever community, for instance by considering Indigenous peoples, particular linguistic communities, or other traditional or cultural groups.

There are several advantages of this two-stage method. By inviting people to self-nominate it produces a greater prospect of commitment from the members (probably a key reason for the far lower levels of membership turnover in other jurisdictions). This method also makes it easier to reach a variety of people. Those living in apartments, gated communities or very rural parts of the country can be reached more easily by mail than in-person. There are also likely cost advantages.

Recommendation 4: Consideration be given to the recruitment process in order to a) minimise turnover of citizen participants; b) reflect demographic and attitudinal diversity.

4. The Deliberative Process

In this section we examine the deliberative process of the Assembly by assessing the deliberative quality, the success and suitability of the online format, necessitated by COVID-19 restrictions, and the level of opinion shift among Assembly members. The data examined in this section are largely based on a series of surveys, the first of which was conducted before members began their participation in the first weekend (labelled 0 in charts) and the remainder of which followed each weekend (labelled 1-9 in charts).⁵ We also rely on interviews conducted with a selection of members, a representative from the Secretariat, and the Chairperson.

⁵ All survey questions utilise a 5pt scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, unless noted otherwise.

After each meeting of the Assembly the research team provided the Secretariat with a report that summarised the deliberative quality, member satisfaction with the process, and any feedback from members. These reports did not identify any major issues and we noted that any minor issues (e.g. such as where members stated that someone dominated the conversation in their particular breakout group) were taken seriously and addressed to avoid a continuation of any problems.

4.1 Evaluation of deliberation

We have structured our evaluation of deliberation according to key evaluation criteria for representative deliberative processes including quality of facilitation; accessible and transparent use of online ; accessible and transparent use of online tools; breadth and diversity of the evidence and stakeholders; quality of judgement; knowledge gains by members; accessibility and equality of opportunity to speak; respect and mutual comprehension; free decision making and response; respect for members' privacy; and quality of facilitation.⁶

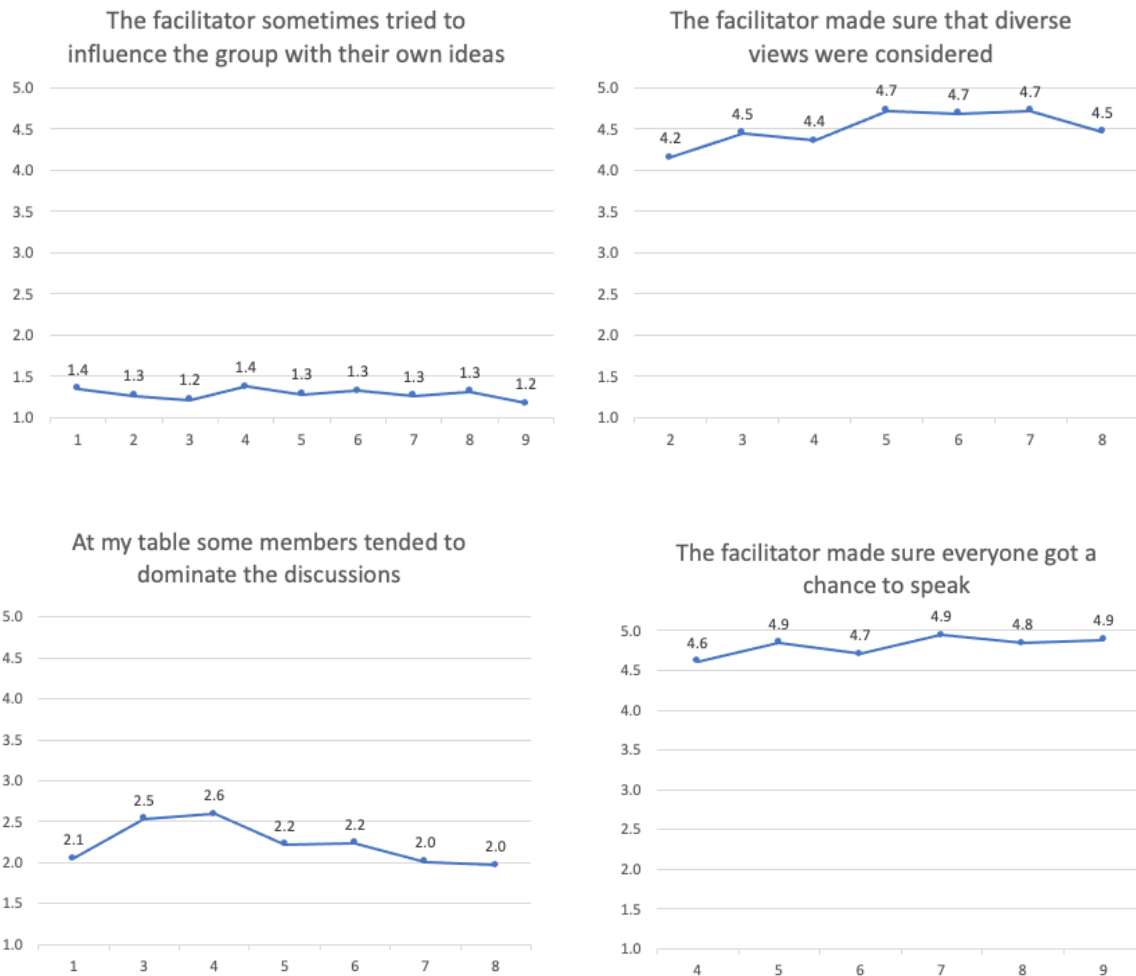
- Quality of facilitation

The survey responses were very positive regarding the quality of facilitation with members showing a high level of agreement that the facilitators maintained neutrality by not influencing the group with their own ideas, that they ensured everyone had the chance to speak, and that they made sure diverse views were considered (Figure 1).

When it came to the statement 'At my table some members tended to dominate the discussion', while most members disagreed, the research evaluation reports following each session had identified that early in the process, within some breakout groups, there were multiple members who felt that the discussion had been dominated by others. In response to this the Chair addressed members about the importance of 'equality of voice' as a key principle of the Assembly. Facilitators were instructed to call on members in turn to ensure all voices were heard and, if necessary, to interrupt a member if they had already made their point yet were taking excessive time which would limit the opportunity for others to speak. These changes were all addressed in an updated opening script used by each facilitator. This did lead to an improvement based on the average reported for each week as well as the individual responses when evaluated across each small group.

⁶ Our IRC submission had planned an evaluation of Reasoned Opinion Formation. However due to various constraints including around COVID-19 and the move to online this did not prove possible

Figure 1 Quality of facilitation charts



When it came to gender balance, there tended to be more male than female facilitators, particularly in the last few meetings where the balance was six men to three women. Additionally, throughout all meetings there were more female than male notetakers and extra question recorders -- as much as eight women to one man in some instances. It would be preferable to achieve a greater gender balance within these roles for future assemblies.

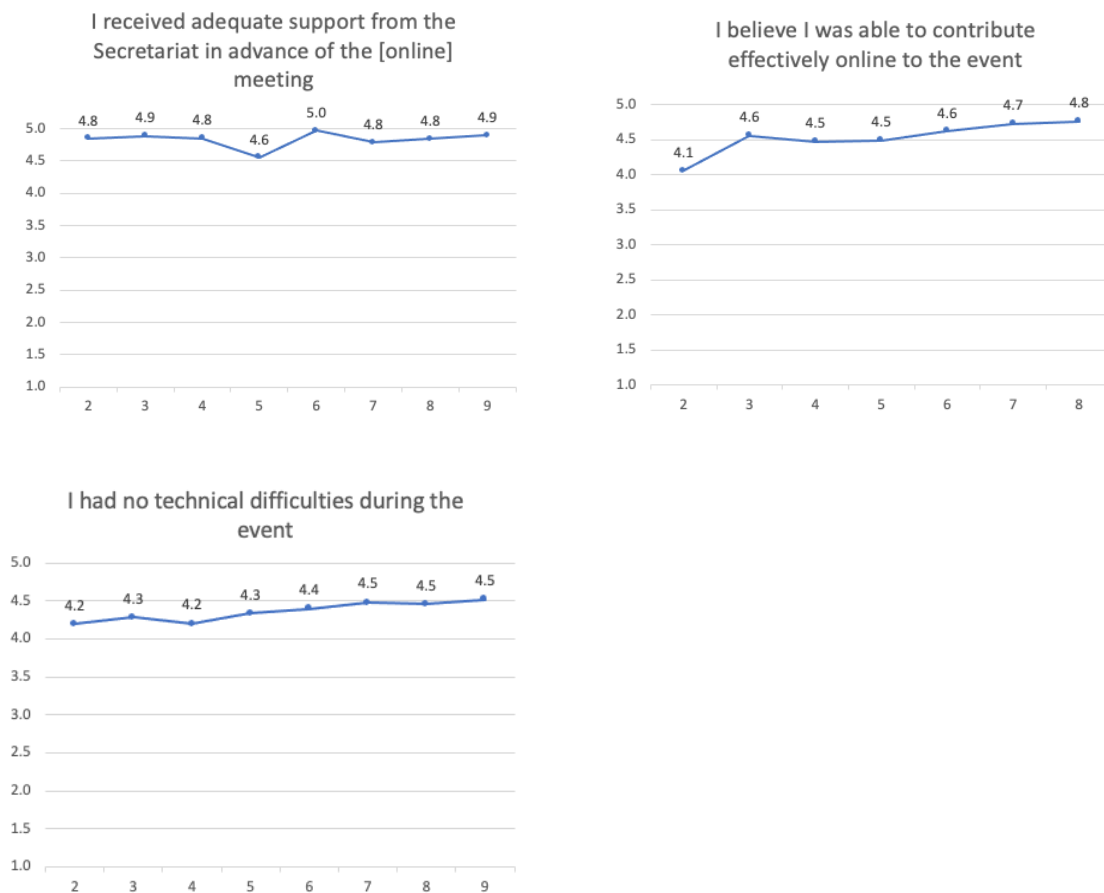
- Accessible and transparent use of online tools

As the Assembly had not been initially planned to take place online, the Secretariat approached the accessibility and transparent use of online tools with great care. Firstly, they sent out a survey to assess members' access to equipment, the adequacy of their internet access, their experience of using video conferencing systems and their willingness to continue online if necessary to avoid a delay, before proceeding with an optional pilot session and offering online training in advance of this session. These efforts can be seen in the high level of agreement among members that they received adequate support before the meetings and that they were able to contribute effectively online (Figure 2).

While there were always a small number of members reporting technical difficulties at each meeting overall most members strongly agreed that they experienced no technical difficulties. The Secretariat provided a technical support service during the online meetings to deal with any technical issues, and nearer the end of the process they provided training on the e-voting system. Of particular note is the introduction of a technology grant to aid in the online transition that allowed members to buy IT equipment or accessories, such as headphones or a tablet, and be reimbursed up to the value of €250.

When those who had attended the first meeting were asked how they found the transition to an online format, there was great praise for how the transition was managed and organised by Secretariat, although many also acknowledged some of the disadvantages to meeting online which they felt were inherent to the format. Some members also acknowledged that they found the transition easier due to previous experience with Zoom or remote work.

Figure 2 Accessible and transparent use of online tools charts

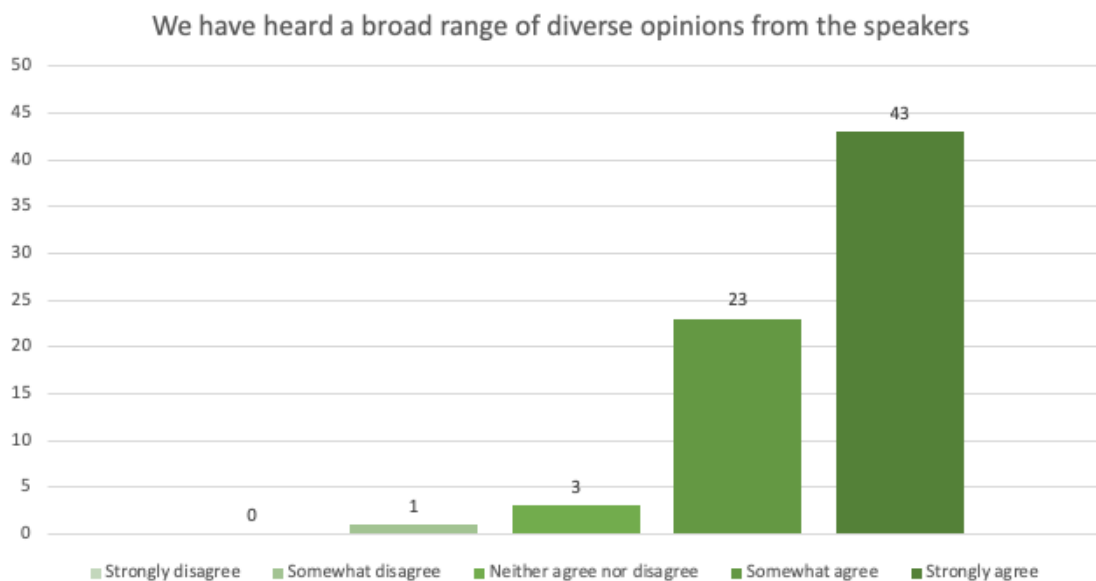


- Breadth and diversity of the evidence and stakeholders

In contrast to previous Irish citizens’ assemblies, the public submissions were analysed by a researcher, Dr Pauline Cullen, who then presented a summary of the problems and solutions found within the submissions during the relevant week for each topic. This was a useful way of ensuring that the voices of both organisations and individuals who had made contributions through the public consultation process were heard by the members and as we noted above it is a feature that would be a useful addition for future assemblies.

Throughout the Assembly the citizens received evidence from a variety of experts and advocacy groups as well as the Expert Advisory Group members, and a legal team was also present to provide clarification on legal matters when appropriate to the topic. When surveyed after the Assembly had ended, members showed a high level of agreement (94%) that they felt they had heard a broad range of diverse opinions (Figure 3). In other processes such as the Irish Platform for Patient Organisations, Science and Industry (IPPOSI) citizens’ jury a bias review group was part of the process and this could be a useful addition to some future assemblies.

Figure 3 Diversity of speakers



- Quality of judgement

When it came to the depth of understanding members had about the matters being discussed, we relied on interviews to gain insight into how members themselves perceived these discussions. We found that members had an awareness of the structural nature of gender inequality, and the challenges of developing appropriate responses to address this systemic problem. The deliberative dynamic also encouraged analysis of the information provided and discussion brought a diversity of views to the fore as individuals were prompted to examine their assumptions during breakout session discussions. For some citizens, the personal stories presented to the Assembly – either in material from the Secretariat, or in sharing of experience by citizens -- brought home the reality of inequality.

It increased understanding and empathy, and sparked curiosity that went beyond the Assembly and into citizens' personal lives. There was significant evidence of a diversity of viewpoints, and consideration of alternatives. Table 1 includes some quotes to illustrate these points.

Table 1 Interview quotes on quality of judgement

We were very focused on improving the structural situation, or the structures within Ireland to ensure that [...] women are not discriminated against even when it's not overt. - Interviewee A (male)

I did get the sense that everybody involved was prepared to see change, for the most part...and maybe see change in different ways, but they were keen to make a difference ... What is actually at the root of this issue here, where are we failing in society? - Interviewee D (female)

I went in thinking we automatically need to change that articles – is it 41.2 – the woman's place in the home. To me that just had to go. I didn't know until we got into the argument and how deeply we had to go, and not cosmetically make it equal. Make it that's within us that we are equal. - Interviewee H (female)

I'd always like somebody to make their opinion heard. That's why I really enjoyed doing the online, listening to people's opinions and to see some of the real far-out ones and then see some of them actually changing their mind even within an hour of a breakout room, or whatever. - Interviewee G (male)

You could actually see somebody, if you were talking, and they were generally surprised about the way you thought about it. And they had never thought about it that way. Once or twice that happened. You live in somebody else's shoes and you see where they are coming from. You understand the way they feel. That sense was there. - Interviewee E (male)

- **Knowledge gains by members**

We assessed members' self-perceived knowledge gain by asking them to rate (on a 10-points scale) how informed they felt on a range of issues before they began participating in the Assembly and after. Overall, 54 members completed these questions in both the pre and post waves. A minority of members (7-13) across each category reported they felt the same or less informed; however, there is the potential that this relates to overestimating one's level of knowledge beforehand, a drawback to self-perceived knowledge questions. When averaged overall, there was an increase in self-perceived knowledge gain in all categories, with feeling informed on the role of gender in the Irish Constitution, rated lowest beforehand, rising 3.2 scale points by the end of the Assembly (Table 2).

When asked in the post-survey about why they believed their thoughts around the topic had changed, a common theme among members was the importance of being better informed as a result of their participation, which led to a clarity of opinion, and feeling more confidence in their own understanding of gender equality (Table 3).

Table 2 Knowledge change

On a scale of 1 ('Not at all informed') to 10 ('Very well informed') how well informed do you think you are at the moment on the following issues:

Issue	Average Before	Average After	Point Increase
The role of gender in the Irish Constitution	4.9	8.1	+ 3.2
The impact of caring on gender equality	5.3	8.4	+ 3.1
The impact of work on gender equality	5.9	8.2	+ 2.3
Equal pay and opportunity	6.4	8.1	+ 1.7
Gender equality in politics	5.9	8.2	+ 2.3
Gender equality in other areas of public life	5.5	7.6	+ 2.1

Table 3 Sample of reasons thoughts have changed

Selection of survey responses when asked, “In what ways (if any) have your thoughts changed or developed on the topic? Why do you think this is the case?”

I knew before C.A. that Gender Inequality had an impact on a variety of areas in life, but having taken part in the C.A., I now can articulate and discuss what those impacts are. I have a lot more learning to do on this topic, but feel armed with a certain level of information that I didn't have before.

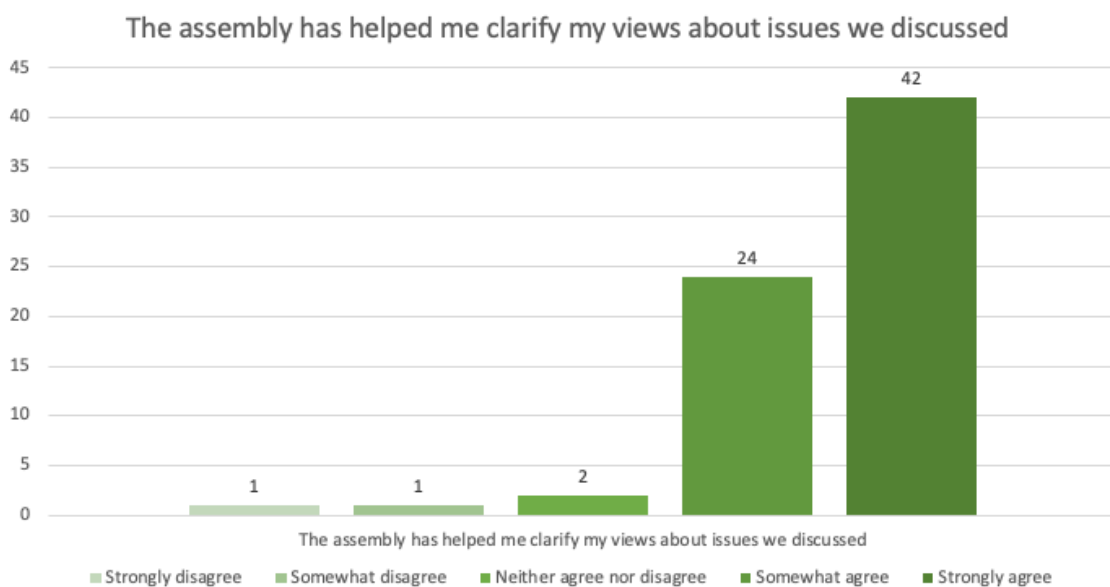
The Assembly has been a real eye opener on issues that I knew little about...listening to others helped educate me a bit better and also the videos and paperwork that was sent out.

I would have had a very uninformed opinion previously and a lot of assumptions. I think my opinions are much more informed and I have a better understanding of what leads to change and reform.

More informed from listening to the views of other members and the general discussions. It also heightened my awareness and understanding of issues discussed on radio and TV.

Additionally, in the final survey, almost all members agreed with the statement that ‘The Assembly has helped me clarify my views about the issues we discussed’ (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Assembly clarified views



- **Accessibility and equality of opportunity to speak**

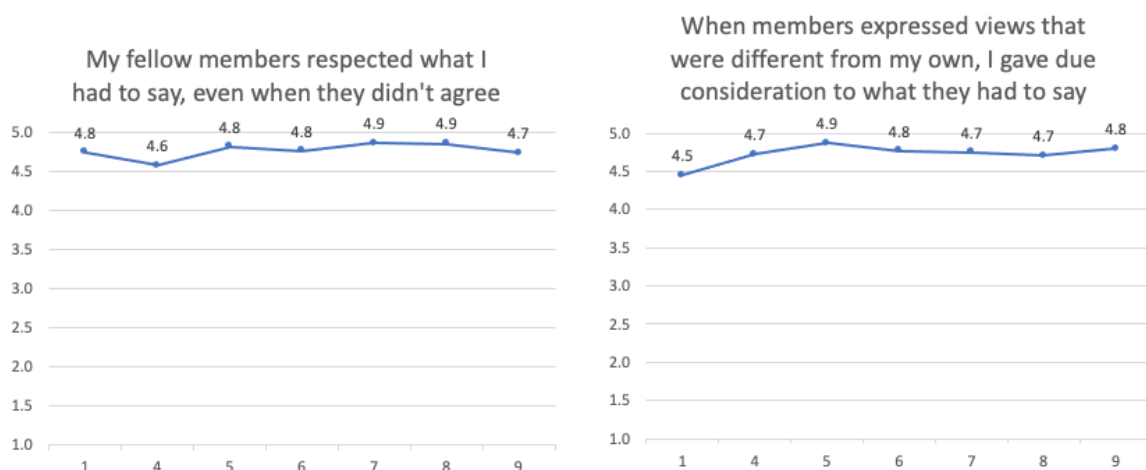
As part of their adaptations to the online format, the Secretariat held five optional evening meetings in which members could converse with the Chair, ask questions about the process and provide any feedback they wished to share. Additionally, the Secretariat and Chair used this opportunity to consult with members around future plans and scheduling, allowing all members the opportunity to have an active role in shaping the design of the process if they desired to. While these meetings are not typically a feature of a citizens' assembly, they were well received with 65% (44) expressing agreement that they were a useful addition to the process and only one member disagreeing. Additionally, in the surveys each week members were offered opportunities to provide any feedback they wanted as well as sharing their perspective on decisions relating to planning and scheduling such as the timings of the event, allowing such decisions to be made democratically.

When it came to the breakout groups for discussion, each week either a nominated rapporteur from the members or at the start of the process sometimes a facilitator for each group reported back the main points of discussion or conclusions reached for the 4 online meetings in the individual topics. When agreeing the ballot papers during the final 3 meetings the facilitators spoke for the group given the need for regular and rapid feedback. The authenticity of the process could be enhanced by actively encouraging a member rapporteur rather than a facilitator to feedback, although this may be uncomfortable at first for some members, many of whom may prefer a facilitator to feedback. These feedback sessions were both recorded and transcribed with outputs uploaded to the Assembly website. During these feedback sessions the level of agreement was sometimes noted with dissenting voices still having a say, and while this feedback was at a group rather than individual level, combined with the weekly surveys to identify individual issues within groups, it did help to ensure that members felt they had an equal voice within the process.

- **Respect and mutual comprehension**

When surveyed on the level of respect they received and the consideration they gave to others, members consistently reported high levels of satisfaction, with scores between 4.5 and 4.9 (Figure 5).

Figure 5 Respect and mutual comprehension charts

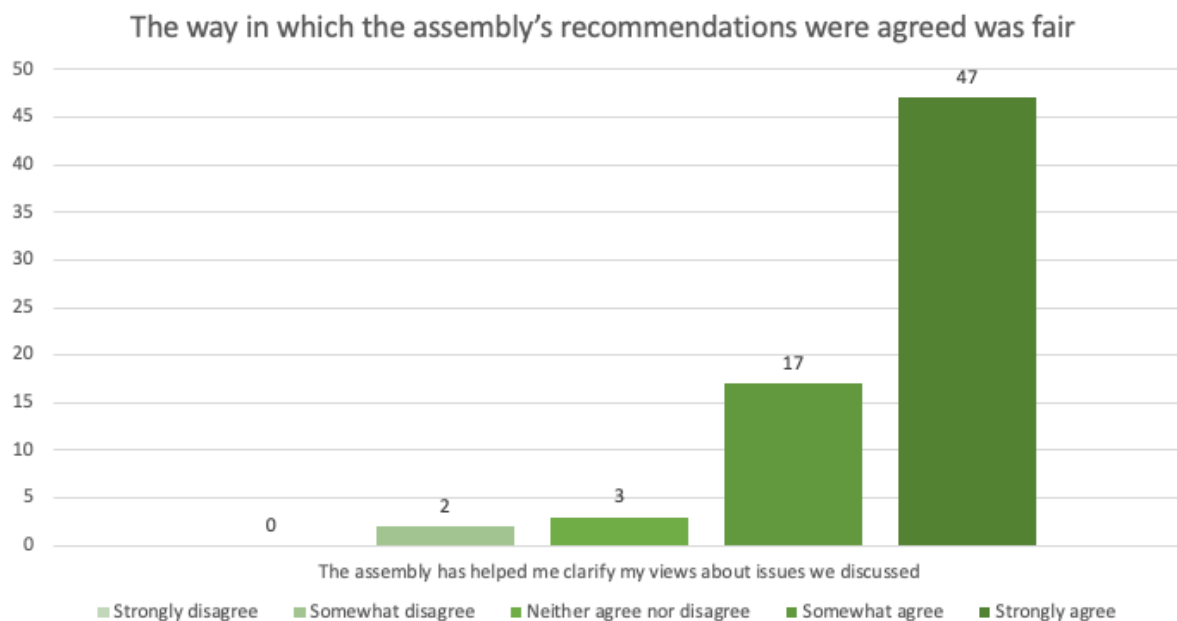


This may also reflect the nature of the topic for this Assembly as members were not deliberating on particularly polarising topics that may prove more contentious, but rather on the best ways to advance gender equality in Irish society.

- **Free decision making and response**

As mentioned above, the evening meetings and survey responses helped to shape the decisions around the structure and rules regarding the voting process. Breakout group recommendations, notes from breakout discussions and feedback in surveys were all used to develop a pool of over 500 recommendations. The most popular recommendations were then developed into draft ballot papers in collaboration with the expert advisory group. Before meetings to discuss the ballots, members were asked to rank recommendations by priority as well as to add any additional recommendations, and this feedback was used to revise a second draft of each ballot paper. Additionally, within the meetings themselves both breakout group discussions and zoom voting were utilised for amending and finalising the ballot papers. In the final survey, 93% of members agreed that ‘the way in which the assembly’s recommendations were agreed was fair’, with 4% stating they neither agreed nor disagreed and only 3% disagreeing (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Fairness of recommendation process



- **Respect for members’ privacy**

Members’ privacy was respected throughout the process by the Secretariat with the evaluation team only receiving anonymised survey data and any additional information asks, such as sharing a breakout video recording or volunteering to be interviewed, requiring clear consent. The Secretariat also established a panel of members who volunteered to engage with media and publicity, and this again involved clear consent before proceeding. Videos of member feedback or which featured members which were uploaded to the Assembly website via YouTube were edited so that the displaying of names

as typically seen in the Zoom interface was removed. There were no reported incidents or concerns surrounding interference by the media, stakeholders or other actors.

- **Summary**

In summary, we find this Assembly process featured a very high level of deliberative quality which meets the standards required of a deliberative mini-public (Curato et al. 2021; OECD 2021) and it should be recognised that the Secretariat and Chair were very careful in their planning and decision making to ensure this was the case. This included, in particular, assigning a researcher the task of presenting summaries of the public consultations each week and holding optional meetings to discuss planning and any concerns with the Secretariat and the Chair are both welcome additions to the Assembly which would be useful to continue in the future.

Recommendation 5: Some adaptations made to the process within this Assembly increased the deliberative quality and should be considered for future assemblies.

4.2 The Online Format

As previously mentioned, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality had been planned to take place entirely face-to face and it transitioned to an online format after the first weekend of deliberations and a lengthy delay in meeting due to COVID-19 restrictions and concerns. The online format was used within this Assembly due to necessity and it is clear from the previous section that the deliberative quality of the assembly was high, which raises the question; is this a suitable format for conducting an assembly and should it be used again in the future?

We surveyed members after the first two full online meetings (October and November 2020) following the decision to proceed online and asked about the advantages and disadvantages that they saw with the online format. We also asked some questions about the online format again at the end of the Assembly.

A number of themes emerged in terms of advantages (Table 4). For many the key advantage was that the Assembly could continue rather than being delayed or cancelled as a result of COVID-19. A number of members also noted time and cost savings due to the shorter meeting length and no commuting time as well as less time away from family, particularly for those who have further to travel in order to participate in Dublin-based meetings and for those with young children, or as one member pointed out, for lone parents or carers. It may be worth considering whether future assemblies could utilise occasional alternative venues across the country to reduce the time and travel commitment for those who live further away from Dublin. Some also noted the efficiency of the online meetings and felt the sessions were more focused as a result of the work done to ensure a shorter running time over Zoom.

Table 4 Sample of responses for advantages to the online format

Ensures the work of the assembly can continue despite the pandemic and restrictions on face-to face meetings

We get to complete the job of CA in 2021 and that change can be progressed sooner rather than later.

It is a lot easier in terms of time spent away from family, especially for those of us on the western seaboard.

Less time involved - no staying away from home, no travelling. I could hear the other speakers in the breakout rooms more clearly than when there were 100+ people in one room in Malahide. Much more business-like and efficient.

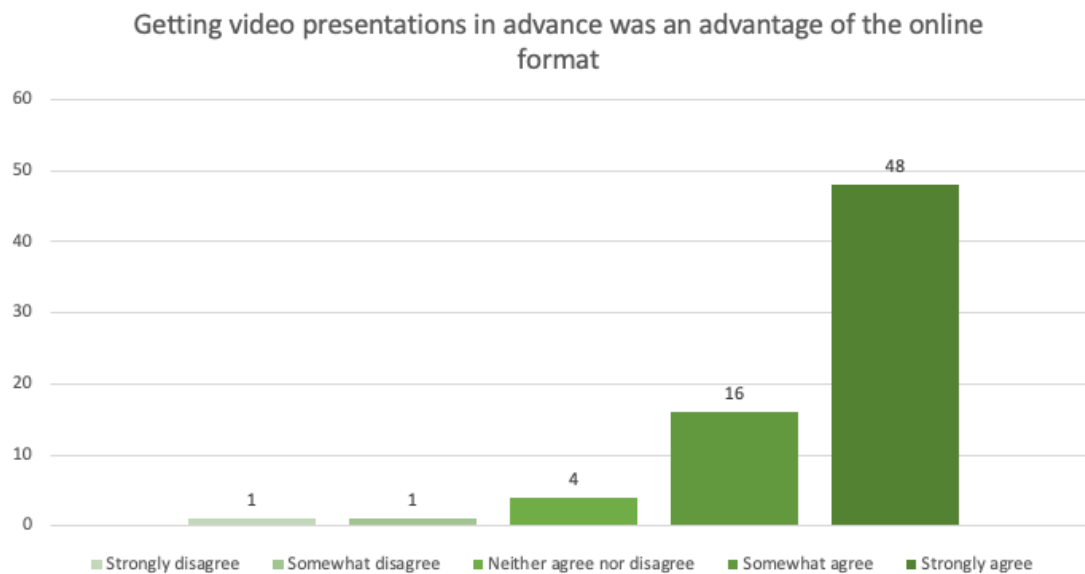
I think moving to online has enhanced the focus of the group. It's a pity that the social aspect of in-person meetings has been removed but it has ensured that there is no time wasting, and the topics are adequately addressed.

Time management is good and focus is sharper as time is limited

Easier to arrange childcare for a shorter period of time! I also like having the videos ahead of time. I find it easier to digest things in my own time.

Another advantage noted to the online format was that members received materials such as video presentations in advance of the meetings, offering members the chance to view and consider the information in their own time. It should be noted, though, that a small number of members did mention that they did not like that they had to find time to watch these videos in advance. After the Assembly 91% of those surveyed agreed that this advance content was an advantage of conducting the Assembly online (Figure 7). This should be continued whether an online, hybrid or face-to face model is being pursued.

Figure 7 Video presentations in advance



When it came to the disadvantages (Table 5) by far the most common theme was the lack of opportunity for discussion and relationship building outside of the small group discussions. Members contrasted this with the face-to face meetings which provided a more social environment and opportunities to informally chat throughout the weekend at coffee or lunch breaks. Some members felt that this less social environment online also impacted on the quality of deliberations as people were less relaxed and comfortable in the small group discussions. Some members also spoke of technical difficulties such as poor Wifi or trouble hearing members in breakout groups and of discomfort with the online environment, such as finding it tiring or feeling like the discussion was stilted or less intimate. There was also a sense from some members that they were missing out on a more immersive, rich assembly experience which would involve being away from home, spending time with other members and fully concentrating on the topic for a weekend. While the Zoom meetings could still achieve the function of deliberating on the topic, it led to what one member described as a lack of 'perks' compared to the face-to-face experience and ultimately a less rewarding experience.

Table 5 Sample of responses for disadvantages to the online format

Significantly less face-to-face discussions. Much less time to engage on topics with members offline e.g. coffee breaks, lunch, dinner etc. Not everyone is comfortable in the online Zoom environment. It requires total concentration and is a challenge for many.

No social aspect and as Irish people we are very sociable. It is good to be remote (from home, family, domesticity) to fully concentrate on the issues discussed.

This new way of meeting is very challenging for some members - WIFI and tech issues can impact the general meeting and breakout meeting.

Lack of organic debates within the informal meetings which the online structure does not/cannot allow for. I believe this is what ultimately enhances the facilitated breakout groups

It's harder to build up relationships of trust and 'solidarity' with participants, and I think this affected my participation in the earlier session - not sure how to gauge what I want to say within the group - harder to read people in a remote context.

My home life is very busy so reading up on the material beforehand was sporadic and only when I found some free time.....it would be much easier for me if I was out of the home for the full weekend in order to devote my time fully to the assembly.

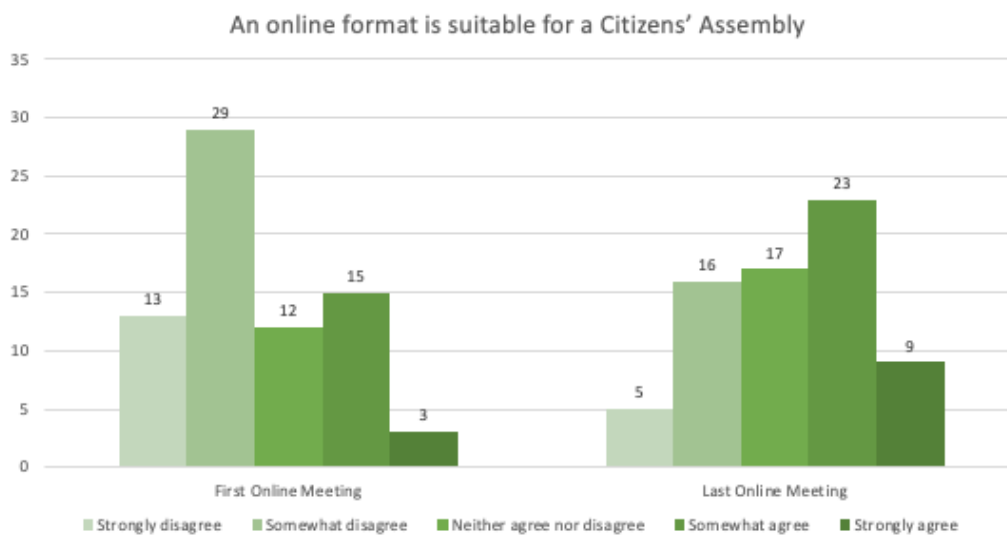
Lots. Lack of face-to-face contact and discussion . No real personal bonding with assembly colleagues . Loss of informal (tea breaks, dinner, a shared drink etc.) contact and development of gender discussion and ideas. Loss of broad contact and relationship with the Secretariat and Chair.

Missing out on the craic and the joy of participation in the whole process which was one of the reasons I agreed to become a member of the Citizens Assembly!

When asked if the online format is suitable for a citizens' assembly, there was a shift in opinion between the first online meeting and the final meeting, with more members agreeing with the statement later on. However, when averaged out this is a move from 2.5 to 3.2 which still does not translate to clear agreement. In previous surveys when asked about the online transition, we did note that some members felt much more comfortable with the online transition and attributed this to members already familiar with working remotely or being accustomed to Zoom meetings. Some members also expressed a higher level of comfort between the first and second online meeting. Taken together, this would suggest that there may have been an increase in comfort with an online format as members who initially felt intimidated or uncomfortable with the technology grew more used to it, although this still did not lead to an endorsement of an online format from members. As

one member stated, ‘While the necessary conversations took place, and the facilitators/Secretariat took every measure to ensure all bases were covered... a Zoom meeting cannot replace in person conversation’. A recent citizens’ jury run by the patient advocacy organisation IPPOSI utilised a website built on EngagementHQ, a community engagement platform. This website allowed jurors to interact with each other, post in discussion forums, ask questions, and review documents such as the jury mission and witness presentations. A future hybrid citizens’ assembly could look at similar platforms which are being developed rapidly in the post pandemic world.

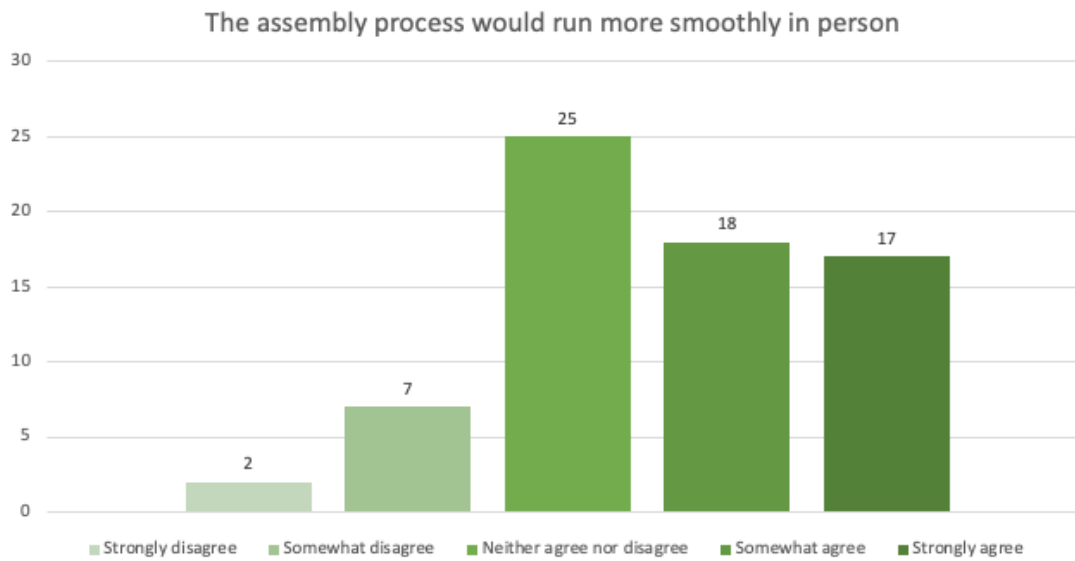
Figure 8 Comparison of suitability of online format



We also asked members in the final meeting if they believed that the Assembly process would have run more smoothly in person to which a slim majority agreed (63.3%) with only 9 members (6.4%) disagreeing (Figure 9)⁷. This is an interesting result as some members had identified a high level of efficiency and time management as advantages to the online format, yet it may be that technical difficulties and the limited informal access to both other members and the Secretariat that comes with the online format may have been perceived as more critical issues for the smooth running of the process.

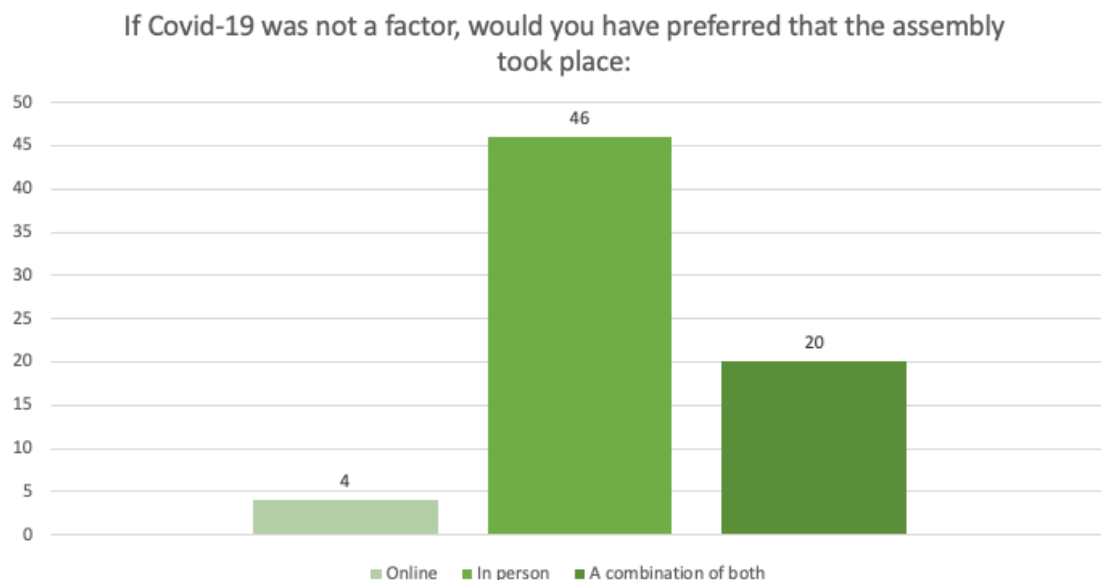
⁷ The statement wording in the first online meeting was: ‘An online format is not suitable for a Citizens’ Assembly. The answers provided have been reversed to account for this.

Figure 9 Belief about format and smooth running of Assembly



Many members spoke about the online format in relation to COVID-19, judging its merits and drawbacks in light of the wider context that it was the only option for continuing the Assembly in 2020. For this reason, in the final survey we asked members which format they would have preferred if COVID-19 was not a consideration (Figure 10). 66% said they would prefer an assembly fully in person, 29% said hybrid and only 6% said fully online, indicating the clear value placed on the role of face-to-face interaction as part of the deliberative process.

Figure 10 Preference of format



When asked for the reasons behind their answers (Table 6), those who selected only in person overwhelmingly emphasised the informal interactions, the quality of deliberation, and to a lesser extent, distractions at home and technical difficulties.

Table 6 Sample of reasons given for preferred format

Reasons given for preferred format	Preferred Format
<p>Working online definitely affected the quality of participation. It takes longer to get the 'feel' of the group and the discussion. Technical issues were also a problem, though not much. Working from home means it's easier to be distracted by other responsibilities.</p>	<p>In person</p>
<p>In person is a totally different dynamic than online. Then you would have greater opportunity to discuss the issues at breaks and over meals. Online has to be very streamlined. You are limited to discussion within the group you are assigned to whereas in person exchange of views across groups is possible.</p>	<p>In person</p>
<p>The corridor conversations, the discussions over coffee/meals is invaluable and more personal, in my view, to do justice to the issues under consideration.</p>	<p>In person</p>
<p>I only experienced the online format which I felt impeded the social aspect of the experience for me. I feel in person would create a more immersive experience which would be even more useful than the online only format.</p>	<p>In person</p>
<p>The blended approach gets the balance right. It reduces travel time, and allows the member to multi-task personal responsibilities and contribute at the same time.</p>	<p>Hybrid</p>
<p>Online was convenient because it saved me from having to travel across the country once a month, but it would have been nice to do that maybe every second month.</p>	<p>Hybrid</p>
<p>I liked having time to watch videos and read material in my own time. Online also allowed me to balance the work with family commitments more easily.</p>	<p>Hybrid</p>
<p>Less intrusive on life and more practical if living outside of Dublin</p>	<p>Online</p>
<p>It's a 6 hour journey each way for me. But also the online system was extremely focused on the business in hand. Time was utilised really well</p>	<p>Online</p>

For those who answered hybrid, there was the same value placed on in person interactions, but the most cited reasons for keeping an online aspect were reduced travel times and a better facilitation of family responsibilities. All four members who selected online only cited travel concerns as part of their answers.

Cost is another factor that may influence the choice of format. An allocation of approximately €1.85 million was provided for each year that this Citizens' Assembly was active. That allocation applied in 2019 when planning commenced, but there was an underspend as no meetings took place. In 2020, there was again an underspend due to COVID-19, however, four additional meetings did take place online, including the pilot session, which is only one session less than in the original plan. The status of the 2021 spend on the Citizens' Assembly will not be known until the end of the year but the financial data published on the Citizens' Assembly website for the year to date indicates that spend is likely to be under budget. Without seeing further details on the level of underspend, which will not be available in final form until year end we cannot make a judgement on the cost-effectiveness of the online format; however, if the online format did lead to a significant cost saving, this would be a reasonable argument for considering the introduction of more online elements to future assemblies.

Based on the experience of this Assembly, if considering a hybrid approach, we would recommend utilising the online format most heavily for knowledge focused aspects of the process, such as expert or advocacy presentations, summary papers, or other briefing material. While deliberation and question and answer sessions can occur online, there should also be some opportunities for more in-depth face-to-face deliberation and opportunities to engage with experts, as well as opportunities for citizens to engage in more informal conversations in person. Ideally, members would also meet face-to-face initially in order to build rapport and comfort before beginning online sessions. Online tools could also be useful for conducting optional evening meetings with the Secretariat and Chair or in doing pre-work to develop ballot proposals, both of which were successful online additions to this Assembly.

The evaluation of the online format also brought to light the added burden of commuting time in the traditional face-to-face format for those who live further away. The difference in time commitment between a 12-hour round trip as one member reported compared to an hour or less for those close to Dublin is vast when attendance is expected monthly for any length of time, and this may be a larger barrier to participation for lone parents or others who have family or care responsibilities. Future assemblies should consider the possibility of holding some meetings in alternative locations across the country and/or in utilising a hybrid format where appropriate.

Recommendation 6: An online format should be considered for a future assembly as part of a hybrid approach, but should not fully replace the face-to-face model.

4.3 Change of Mind

Traditionally, it has been hard to detect or measure shifts in opinion during a citizens' assembly (e.g. Suiter et al. 2014): members may already have well thought out views and the deliberation process may provide more certainty or clarity to those views without necessarily changing them. Within this Assembly we assessed members self-reported levels of change of mind. The citizens were also asked to state their level of agreement with a battery of opinion-based statements before beginning their participation in the Assembly and after each meeting. As the remit of the Oireachtas Resolution is very broad, the statements chosen were not focused on specific policies but rather were taken from international surveys about gender equality and were chosen based on being either a value or a belief that could reasonably shape an individual's opinion about the recommendation areas covered by the assembly.

When asked to reflect on the Assembly experience and the extent to which they changed their mind on a 1-10 scale (Figure 11), there was a wide variety of answers given by members ranging from no change (2 members) to a complete change (6 members). The average reported was 5.8.

The average score reported after the Assembly ended (5.8) is higher than the average reported over any individual week (Figure 12), suggesting that this represents a retrospective assessment of cumulative learning across the Assembly.

Figure 11 Change of mind scale post-Assembly

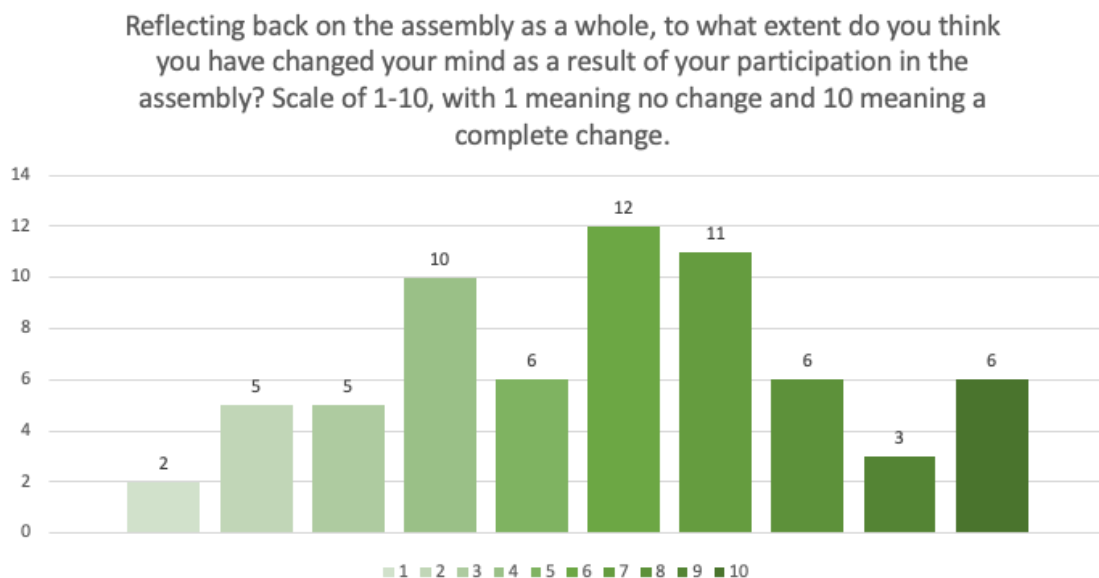
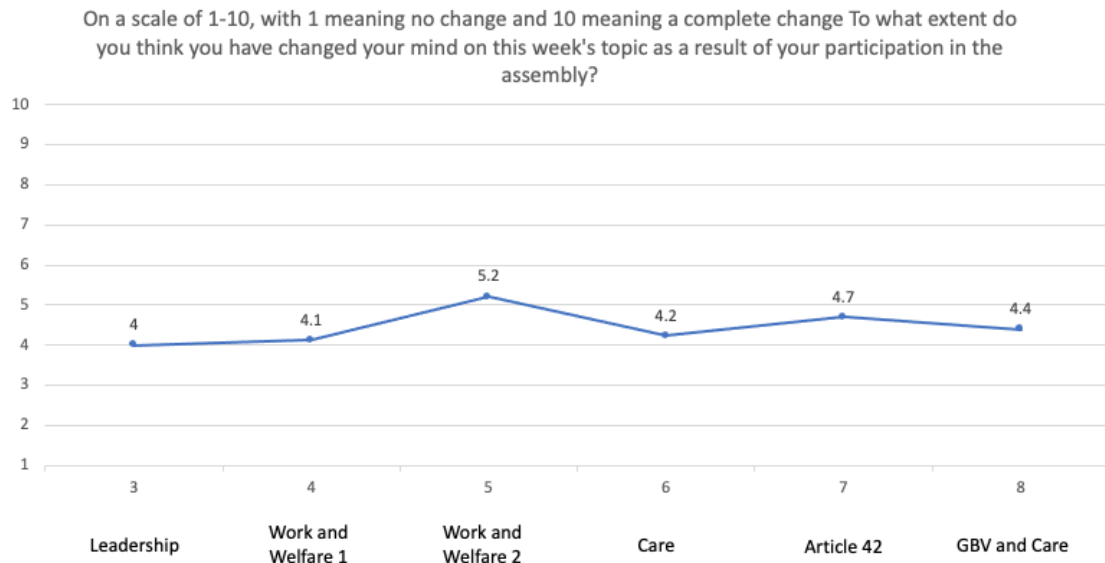


Figure 12 . Weekly change of mind scale



As outlined in the knowledge gains discussion above, most members explained that their change of mind was largely a process of becoming more informed which led to a greater understanding of the issues and more clarity about their own opinions. As one member commented: 'Rather than my mind being changed, the Assembly has provided me with more depth of knowledge which confirms my thoughts'.

Within the interviews, members expanded upon what change of mind looked like for them and how it occurred (Table 7). Many addressed the role that both deliberative small group discussions and personal stories played in helping them see the issues from other perspectives, leading to a more empathetic understanding of the topic.

Table 7 Interview quotes on change of mind

I was definitely more a person who made presumptions or assumptions. ...But it [the Assembly] definitely opened my mind. If I [saw] someone was pushing for, we'll say, gender quotas, I'd say 'och, here we go'. But after reading that and seeing there are certainly reasonable arguments, and it is something that needs to be reached, I totally agree. - Interviewee F (male)

I was exposed to information that I wouldn't have been encountering in my work or living situation. I heard stories from people that I have to say I realized I don't know enough about this. I have my own personal outlook that won't deviate very far left or right of my own core beliefs. But at the same time I hugely benefited from listening to the other citizens. - Interviewee A (male)

I guess the more I learned the more I felt it necessary to have change. ...through learning from different people in the groups and also from the videos, I became a lot more empathetic and I was going, 'No, I am absolutely willing to pay more taxes, and this would be good for everybody if this happened'. - Interviewee D (female)

People were against, say, extending care for people when they turn 18. But then when we'd either watch a video of a person who had to give up their job to take care of their disabled child after they turn 18 and then we'd hear from someone in the breakout group with a similar sort of story, your mind would be changed. ...when you're actually confronted with the issue in person, it makes you more inclined to act on it and make you more sympathetic towards it. - Interviewee F (male)

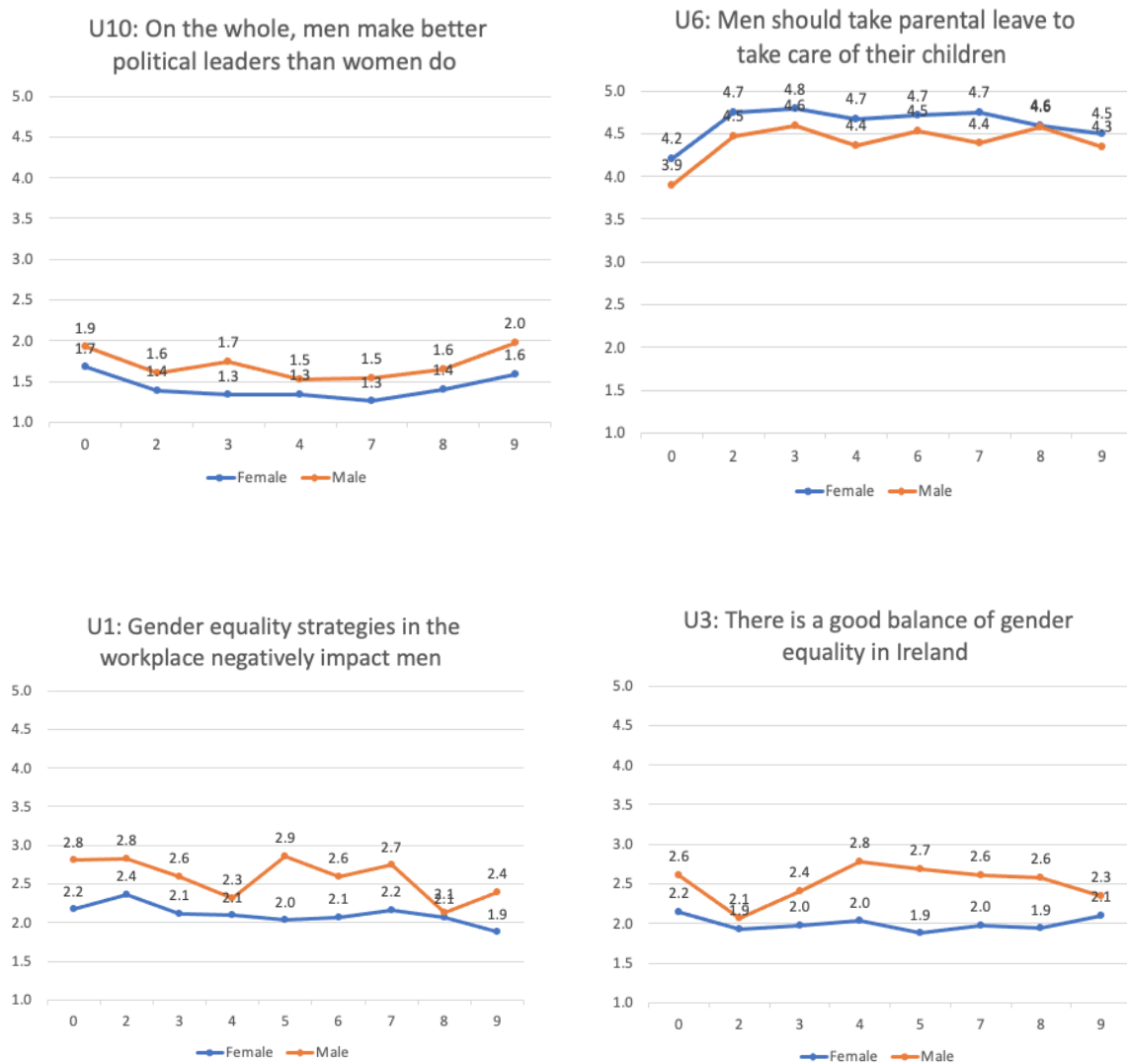
When it came to the opinion-based statements, most saw minor shifts in agreement week to week (Table 8), although there were some variations by gender and age which will be explored below. All opinion statements utilise a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Those where levels of agreement increased over the period are in bold type in Table 8. It is notable that the greatest change was in the statement 'I consider myself to be a feminist'.

Table 8 Average of opinion based statements across Assembly

	Pre-survey	Middle	End
Gender equality strategies in the workplace negatively impact men	2.5	2.5	2.1
Men and women have different skills and talents based on their gender	3.1	3.4	2.8
There is a good balance of gender equality in Ireland	2.4	2.3	2.2
There are no gender-based differences in skills and talents	2.8	3.3	3
I want there to be equal numbers of men and women who are leaders in work, politics, and life	3.9	4.5	4.2
Men should take parental leave to take care of their children	4.1	4.6	4.4
Employers should make it easier for men to combine childcare with work	4.5	4.8	4.7
Addressing gender inequality in Ireland is necessary to establish a fairer society.	4.6	4.9	4.7
I consider myself to be a feminist	3.1	3.7	3.8
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	1.8	1.4	1.8
There should be no pay gap between women's and men's earnings	4.4	4.7	4.8
If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems	2.2	2.2	2.0

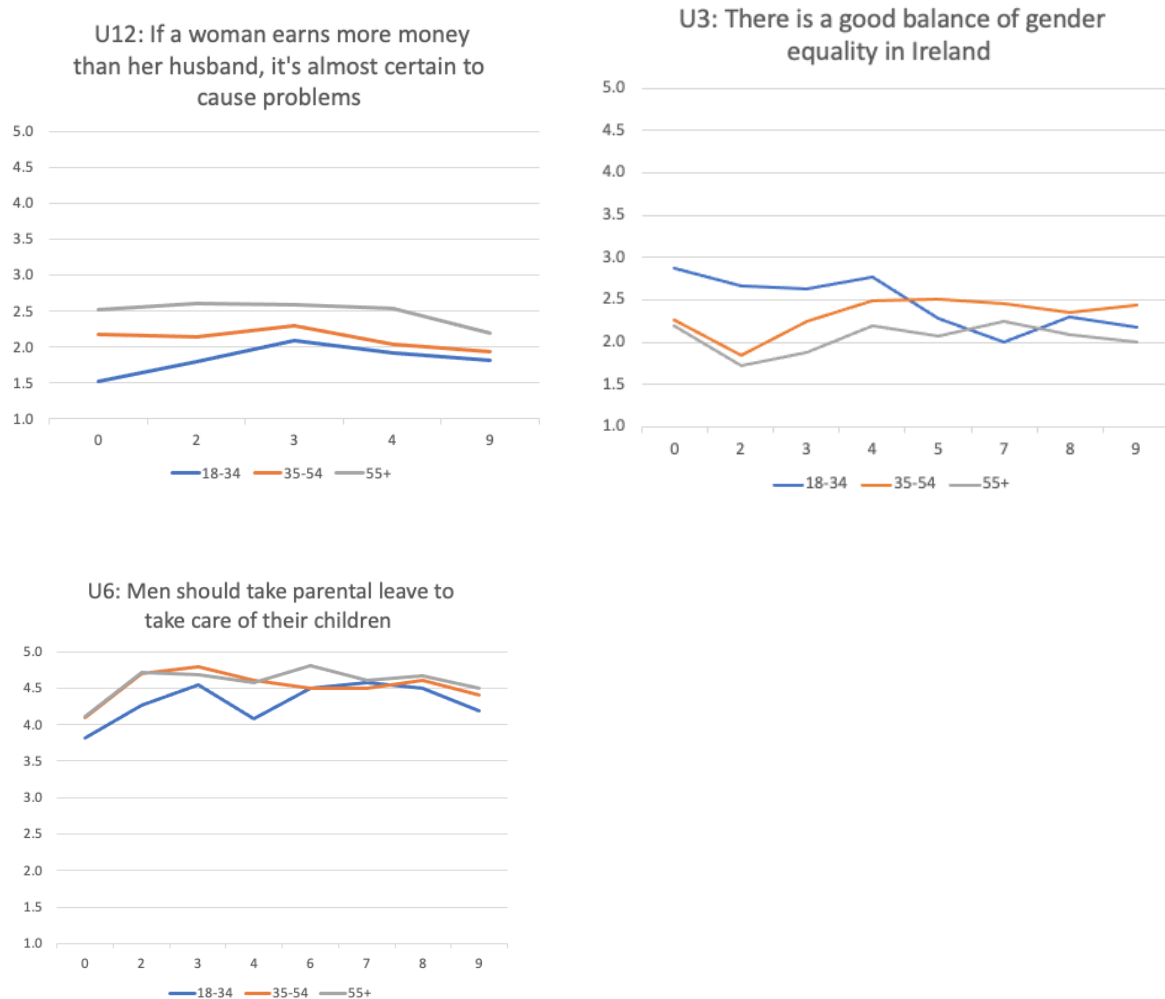
When segregated by gender (Figure 13), the female members typically showed a slightly higher level of agreement than males on ideas associated with a more liberal or progressive approach to gender equality, and overall they disagreed more strongly with the statement ‘There is a good balance of gender equality in Ireland’. While these differences were not large, they were noticeable and largely consistent throughout the statements.

Figure 13 Gender difference in opinion statements



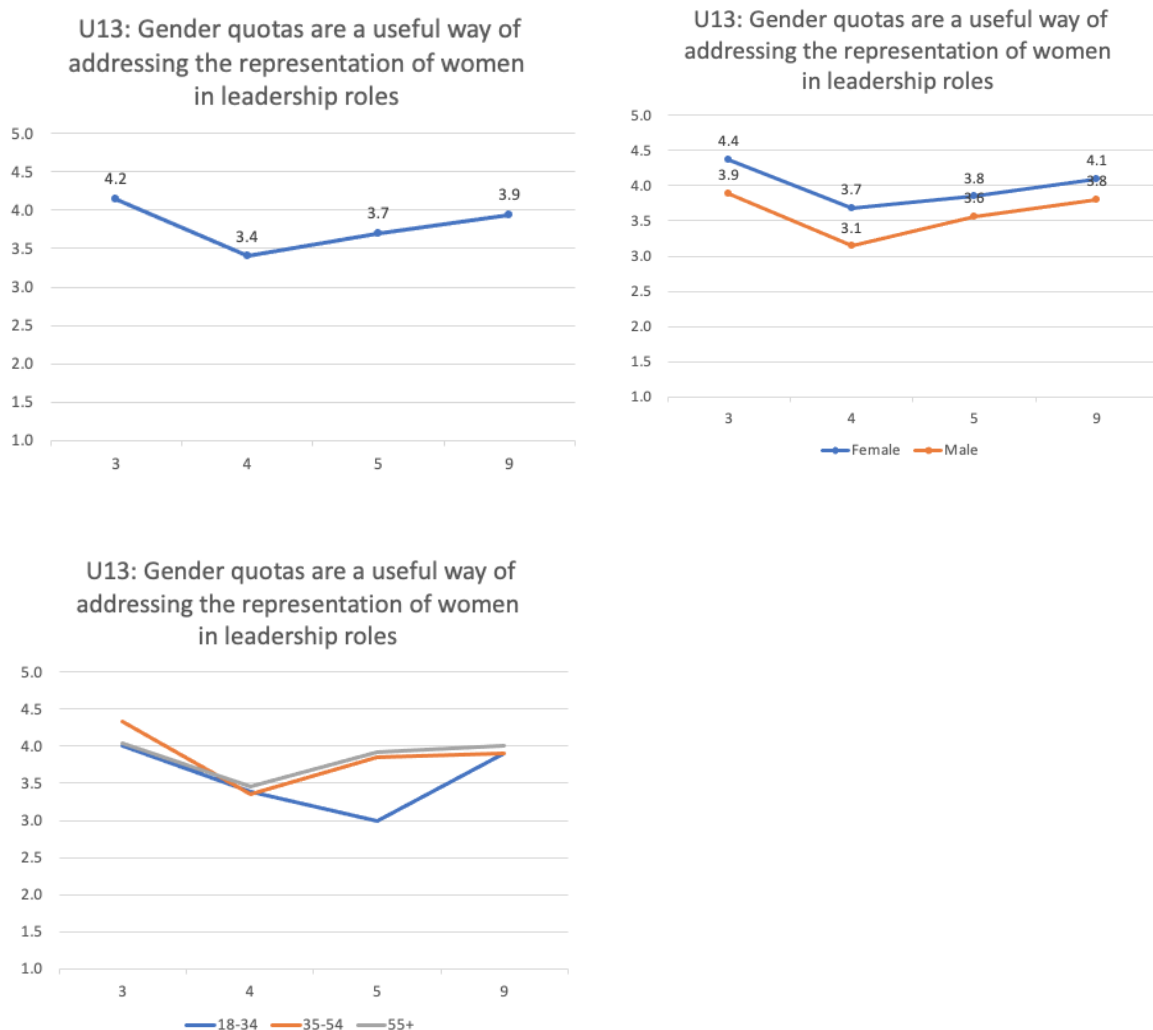
While less clearly defined, there were also some differences and weekly changes noticeable between age groups (Figure 14) for some statements, for instance with 18-34 year old members showed more agreement with the statement. There is a good balance of gender equality in Ireland' compared to older age groups for the first few weeks of the Assembly before moving to more similar levels in the remaining weeks.

Figure 14 Age group difference in opinion statements



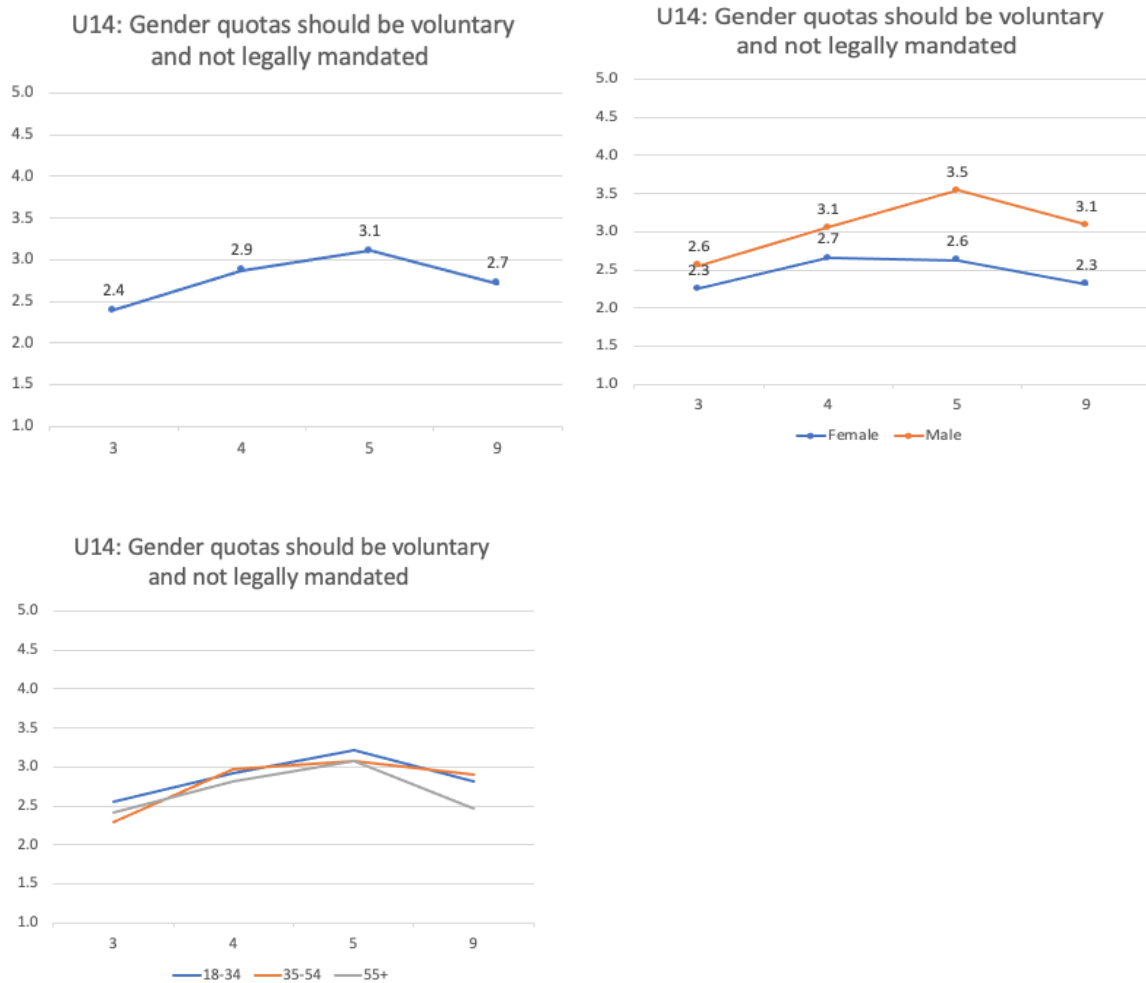
We also introduced statements on gender quotas, which were included in the post meeting survey after week 3 (Leadership) as well as in weeks 4 and 5 (Work and social protection 1 and 2). On these more specific policy driven questions we saw clear trends between the meetings across both gender and age lines, suggesting that the content and deliberation in each meeting did have an impact on how members were actively understanding and supporting a potential policy proposal. The use of gender quotas was more highly supported following the leadership meeting but that level of support dropped somewhat in the first work and social protection meeting, which addressed many structural issues regarding how pay and social protection supports act to limit the opportunities available to women, before rising again somewhat at the end of the process (Figure 15).

Figure 15 Opinion change on usefulness of gender quotas



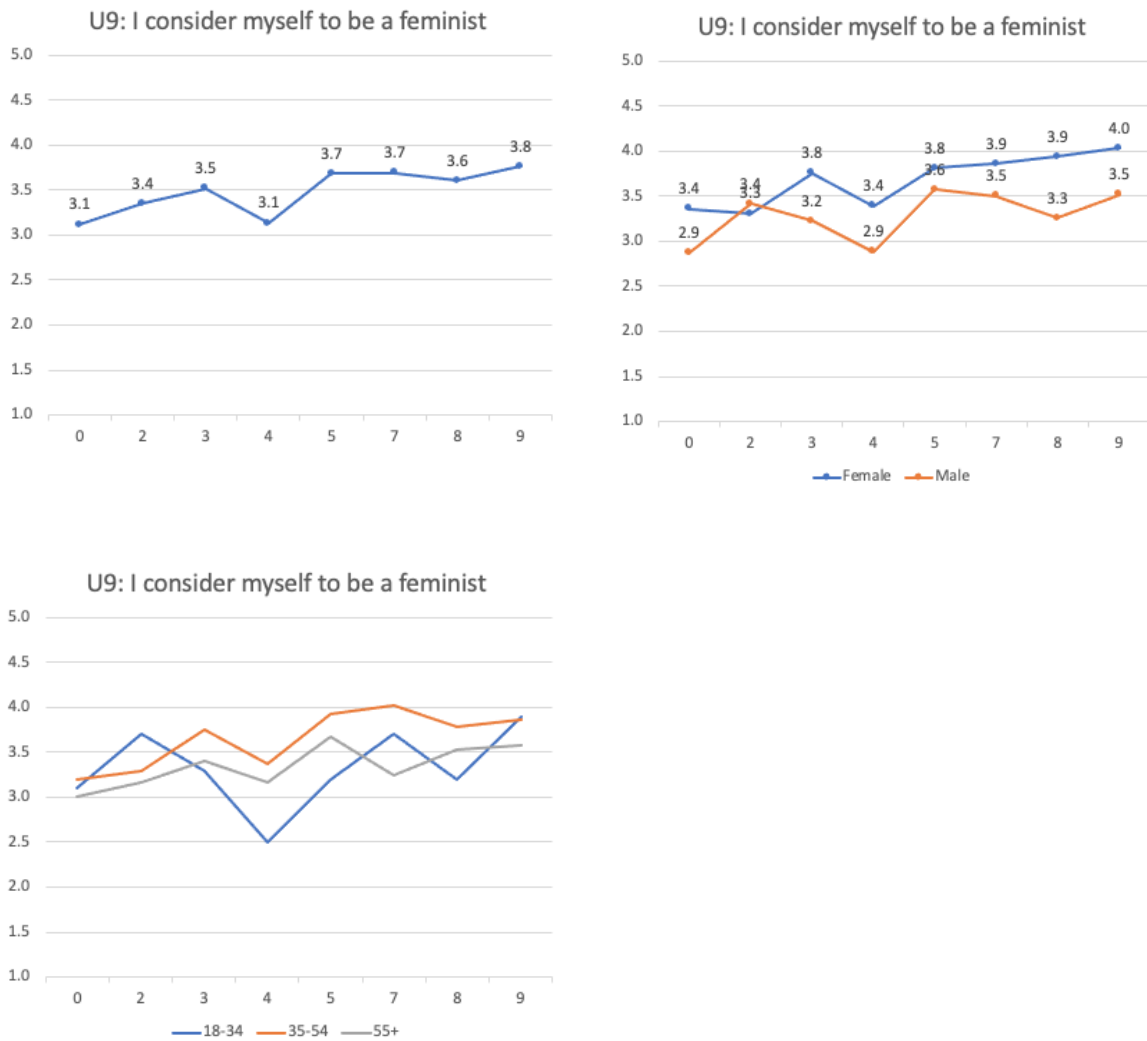
Similarly, we noted an increase across the same weeks in the belief that gender quotas should be voluntary (Figure 16). This was particularly among males; however, this attitude had softened across all the demographics by the end of the Assembly. The fact that the trends on these two related policy-based statements occurred across gender and age lines, suggests that the deliberative process and the information presented to members did serve to shape their opinions on this one potential, and at times more controversial, solution regarding gender equality.

Figure 16 Opinion change on mandatory use of gender quotas



Additionally, while there is a certain amount of noise across the weeks and a drop in week 4, we did note a trend on the statement 'I consider myself to be a feminist' (Figure 17). There was a gradual increase in agreement with this statement by gender and less clearly across age groups.

Figure 17 Opinion change on feminist self-identification



When asked about this question in interviews (Table 9), the understanding of what it means to be a feminist varied widely, with both positive and negative associations attached to the term. A common denominator across all responses was a belief in equality of opportunity, and fairness of treatment. For some members, the Assembly process led to a subtle questioning of what feminism might mean to them, and whether feminist was a suitable term to identify with, while for others the term still carried connotations that they were not comfortable with.

Table 9 Interview quotes on feminist statement

Selection of interview quotes on the 'I consider myself to be a feminist' statement

I had problems with that question because I was saying 'Am I a feminist? Am I not? What do you call a feminist? What makes you a feminist?' I suppose I would be all for equal opportunities for everybody. Is that making you a feminist? I certainly want that. I certainly want people to be paid the same rate of pay and have the same working conditions and not to be victimized when you take maternity leave, and get your old role back when you go back – which hasn't, I know, happened – all that stuff I would be very much with it. So, for me thinking of feminism... its giving people choice. - Interviewee B (female)

...one of the surveys asked 'are you a feminist'? I said 'no' because there are different types of feminism and I was thinking radical feminists at the time when I answered the question. When I thought about it afterwards I said 'well I believe in equality so, yeah'! I put it down wrong in the survey. - Interviewee C (male)

I slightly changed my view. I would always be for fairness and equality. - Interviewee G (male)

Am I a feminist? I understand feminism. I understand some of the arguments within feminism. I am very pro equality. At the same time, I am cautious ... of picking up a flag and saying yes, I'm a feminist because I'm aware that there's so much in that. - Interviewee A (male)

Well, the way I saw feminism, personally, was aggressive. Back a few years ago. And that still is with me, whereas I'd prefer to see equality rather than that way - Interviewee K (female)

As one member pointed out, in order to answer the question they had to ask themselves 'What makes you a feminist'. The trends shown in Figure 17 suggest that the answer to that question evolved for members as they engaged with issues relating to gender equality throughout the Assembly, even though feminism itself was not a topic under discussion.

Overall, it seems clear that this Assembly process did lead to a change of mind for members, whether that means clarifying existing positions, changing opinions on policy issues, becoming more empathetic in outlook, or feeling a stronger need for change. However, the challenge of how to measure that change remains, as in the absence of a more fully formed opinion mapping evaluation, we can see shifts in opinion, but it can be hard to identify how these relate to specific points in the Assembly process and indeed how they map to policy positions.

Recommendation 7: Evaluation for future citizens' assemblies could consider approaches that could better track policy positions, reasons and justifications across the time period.

Now that there have been three mini-publics in Ireland -- the Convention on the Constitution of 2012-14, the Citizens' Assembly of 2016-18, and the Citizens' Assembly of 2020-21 -- we can begin to see certain patterns in how these have been organised and how they have operated. In this evaluation we make several suggestions throughout that may be worth considering as the Irish practice continues to develop and evolve and reflect on some considerations that may merit further consideration in at least some future assemblies. An evaluation of the model could be useful perhaps including consultation with the OECD deliberative team, and Foundations For Innovation In Democracy – Europe (FIDE).

The discussion in this concluding section leads to our final, and overarching, recommendation.

Recommendation 8: Before the establishment of a future citizens' assembly, there should be a review of international good practice, notably on agenda setting, the recruitment process and the evaluation process.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Further consideration be given to process of setting the agenda for a citizens' assembly

- Only having one topic for consideration was a strength of this Assembly compared to its predecessors and this should become the norm for future citizens' assemblies.
- Ideally, the topic set for the assemblies should not be too detailed.
- For future citizens' assemblies there might be merit in either considering an alternative to the Resolution route, or at least to building in scope for some more flexibility in the interpretation of the topic by the assembly organisers.

Recommendation 2: Consideration be given to additional supports for coordinating citizens' assemblies to ensure continuity and encourage specialism as assemblies become a feature of Irish politics as well as maximise the institutional capacity to deliver on the terms of reference.

- There may be merit in considering whether to embed and institutionalise the expertise of the Secretariat perhaps within the Oireachtas in order to build on current learnings

Recommendation 3: Continue with the practice of summarising input from the wider public for the advisory board and members to consider.

Recommendation 4: Consideration be given to the recruitment process in order to a) minimise turnover of Citizen participants; b) reflect demographic and attitudinal diversity.

- Some consideration should be given to alternative methods of recruitment and in particular a two-stage process involving mail out invitations in the first instance
- Consideration on a case-by case basis should also be given to representation of vulnerable, hard to reach and minority groups to ensure their voices are heard in the deliberations

Recommendation 5: Some adaptations made to the process within this Assembly increased the deliberative quality and should be considered for future assemblies

- The practice of assigning a researcher to summarise public submissions and present a synthesis on the problems and solutions they contain is a useful addition to the process and would be a useful addition to future citizens' assemblies.
- Holding optional meetings to discuss planning and any concerns with the Secretariat and the Chair is a good way to ensure citizens have a voice and feel ownership of the process. This would be a welcome addition to future assemblies.

Recommendation 6: An online format should be considered for a future assembly as part of a hybrid approach, but should not fully replace the face-to-face model.

- If considering a hybrid approach, we would recommend utilising the online format for more knowledge focused aspects of the process. In the initial and final stages involving in-depth deliberation, face-to-face sessions should be prioritised.
- Online tools should be considered for enhancing aspects of the process such as conducting optional evening meetings with the Secretariat and Chair or in doing pre-work to develop ballot proposals.
- If a future assembly is held using in person meetings, consideration should be given to venues outside of Dublin in order to ensure a higher time and travel burden is not placed on members who live further away from the venue and to ensure accessibility for those with caring responsibilities. Alternatively, a hybrid format, where used appropriately, should be considered to alleviate this concern.
- Receiving video presentations and content in advance of the meetings was considered a positive addition to the process by members and should be considered for future citizens' assemblies.

Recommendation 7: Evaluation for future citizens' assemblies should consider approaches that could track policy positions, reasons and justifications across the time period.

Recommendation 8: Before the establishment of a future assembly, there should be a review of international good practices, notably on agenda setting, the recruitment process and the evaluation process.

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