

**Professor David Farrell and Professor Jane Suiter – written evidence  
(FGU0012)**

**House of Lords Constitution Committee  
Inquiry into the Future governance of the UK**

1. We (individually or collectively) would be happy to offer oral evidence online.
2. Ireland has been a trailblazer in the use of citizens' assemblies. The genesis of this was the fallout from the economic crash of 2008 that impacted particularly badly in Ireland. This was as much a political crisis as an economic crisis. There was a clamour for political and institutional reforms. We were part of a group of political scientists who promoted the idea of a citizens' assembly: our key rationale was that, rather than having angry citizens at the gates of the parliament, it was better to have the citizens 'in the room' at the heart of discussions about reform. The government bought into the idea and in 2012 established the Convention of the Constitution (this was a citizens' assembly in all but name), which discussed a number of key reform issues, the most prominent of which was marriage equality. Its recommendation for a referendum to introduce marriage equality was accepted by government and in 2015 Ireland became the first country in the world to introduce gay marriage by a referendum: it also became the first country in the world to have a citizens' assembly result in a successful policy outcome. Other referendums followed from processes like this, including the successful abortion referendum in 2018 following the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly of 2016-18.
3. To date, Ireland has had three of these processes (which have, so far resulted in a number of referendums and significant policy changes): the current citizens' assembly on gender equality is due to complete its work in May. The use of citizens' assemblies has grown significantly over the past few years. In the UK alone in the past two years there has been the Climate Assembly (established by six select committees of the House of Commons) and two citizens' assemblies in Scotland. There have also been a large number of citizens' assemblies and citizens' juries at local council level in the UK.
4. A citizens' assembly involves three main features: (1) its members (usually about 100 in total) consist of a representative sample of citizens selected at random; (2) it follows the principles of deliberation -- respectful, informed dialogue facilitated by professional moderators; and (3) to ensure that the deliberation is informed there is a key role for experts to inform the members and bring them up to speed on the subject matter being discussed.
5. For more on the Irish story, see here: David Farrell & Jane Suiter, Reimagining Democracy (2019) [Lessons in Deliberative Democracy from the Irish Front Line](https://cornellopen.org/9781501749339/reimagining-democracy/). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press  
<https://cornellopen.org/9781501749339/reimagining-democracy/>
6. For some examples of how the Irish citizens' assembly operates, see here:  
<https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/>
7. Meetings on the Gender Equality Citizens' Assembly  
<https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/what-we-do/meetings/>

8. Meetings on The Eight Amendment to the Constitution

<https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/>

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