LESSON PLAN

Changing society

Learning Outcome 3.10
Investigate how individuals or groups have used the law to bring about change in society

Students will learn

- About six women who have used the law to change society in Ireland
- To look at both sides of the debate on gender quotas
- To debate the issue of gender quotas

Materials

- Slide show
- Case study factsheets – one factsheet for each group, six in total
- Worksheet: Gender quotas – one for each pair of students
- Tá/Níl cards – one card for each student

Assessment for learning/Key skills

- Managing information and thinking
- Working with others
- Group work
- Debating
1 Recap – gender equality

SLIDE 3
Outline the issues of gender equality in government in Ireland. Although a disproportionately small number of women have been elected in Ireland, many women have made, and continue to make, a contribution to shaping Irish society. Ask students to consider some examples.

2 Case studies

SLIDES 4-9
Introduce the six women the class will focus on. Divide the class into six groups and give each group one of the six factsheets (see pages 4-9). Ask the groups to study the person detailed in their factsheet and prepare to act as the person’s public relations team and answer questions from the class about them.

Note: You could allow more time for groups to do their own research on the six people.

SLIDE 10
Hold a mock press conference during which each group represents the person on their factsheet while the rest of the class ask them questions about that person. The slide gives some ideas for questions.

Ask the first group to sit at the front of the class as a panel or PR representatives and answer questions. Alternatively, one member of the group can take on the role of the person on the factsheet while the rest of the group act as PR advisers.

When the time for questioning this group is up, swap around until each group has answered questions.

3 Gender quotas

SLIDE 11
Remind the class what gender quotas are in the Irish context.

From the 2016 general election, political parties lose half their State funding if they do not have at least 30% women and 30% men candidates. In the general election of 2020 all parties met the 30% threshold and a record number of women TDs were elected. The required proportion of women and men will increase to 40% from February 2023.

No gender quotas apply to the Cabinet.

Give each pair of students a copy of the Gender quotas worksheet (see page 10). Ask students to write a response to each statement.
SLIDES 12-15
Give each student a Tá/Níl card (see page 11).

Hold a discussion or debate on gender quotas.

Take a vote on whether students agree with the statements on each slide. Note the responses on the slides.

Invite students to summarise their opinions on the issue of gender equality among politicians in a short statement.

Extension activities
Do further research about one of the people featured in this lesson.

SLIDE 16
Watch a four-minute section of the video on the slide, 38-42 minutes, in which three politicians discuss gender quotas. Discuss the points they make.

“I was very sceptical about the quota idea. I didn’t really get it. I thought it was a little bit ... patronising, but I actually think something has helped and very definitely getting to that certain level of greater female representation has changed the agenda.”

Clare Daly

“The quota thing is very interesting. It’s what I would describe as a necessary evil. It can’t just apply to women because if the purpose of it is to make the Parliament more diverse we need to make sure the Parliament is more diverse.”

Louise O’Reilly

“The quotas aren’t a thing to help women. The quotas are a thing to help society and a thing to help the system fix itself.”

Alice-Mary Higgins
Mary Robinson

Born in Mayo in 1944, Mary Robinson is best known as the first woman President of Ireland.

She studied law and became Professor of Law at Trinity College Dublin. She was a member of Seanad Éireann from 1969 to 1989. As a Senator, she championed women’s issues, such as having women on juries, the right to remain in the Civil Service after marriage and the right to access contraception.

In 1990, she was elected seventh President of Ireland. As President, she reached out to the diaspora, Irish people living abroad, and was the first Irish head of state to make official visits to Britain.

In 1997, she was appointed United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In 2007, she joined with Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu in a group called The Elders, an independent group of global leaders working together for peace, justice and human rights. She has travelled to the Middle East several times with The Elders to support Israelis and Palestinians working for peaceful coexistence. She has also campaigned to end child marriage and to promote climate justice.

“I was elected by the women of Ireland, who instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system.”

Notes:
Countess Markievicz was born Constance Gore-Booth in London in 1868 but grew up in Lissadell House, Sligo. She was presented to Queen Victoria as a debutante, but then chose a more unconventional path. She campaigned for votes for women in Ireland and persuaded her parents to allow her to train as a painter in London and Paris. She met and married a fellow artist, Casimir Markievicz.

Later, while living in Dublin, Constance became a passionate supporter of socialism and Irish republicanism. In 1911 she was arrested for protesting against the visit to Dublin of King George V. During the 1913 lock-out, she organised soup kitchens to feed the families of striking workers. She fought in the Easter Rising of 1916 as second-in-command of a troop of Irish Citizen Army combatants at St. Stephen’s Green.

In the 1918 general election, Constance Markievicz was the only woman elected to the House of Commons. As a member of Sinn Féin, she refused to take her seat in Westminster, and instead joined the newly founded Dáil Éireann. She was appointed Minister for Labour, making her the first female TD and Minister.

“Fix your minds on the ideal of Ireland free, with her women enjoying the full rights of citizenship in their own nation.”

Notes:
Hanna Sheehy was born in Cork in 1877. She studied modern languages and worked as a German teacher. She married Francis Skeffington and the couple took each other’s surnames as a symbol of the equality of their relationship.

Hanna joined the Irishwomen’s Suffrage and Local Government Association, which campaigned for voting rights for women in 1902. However, in 1908 she left that organisation and founded the Irish Women’s Franchise League. With her fellow IWFL members, she set out to confront the Government organisations that deprived women of the vote. She smashed windows in Dublin Castle, was imprisoned and went on hunger strike, demanding the status of political prisoners. She was sacked from her job as a result. The IWFL also published a feminist newspaper called The Irish Citizen, to carry the news that other publications would not.

Hanna took part in the 1916 Rising delivering messages and food to the GPO. Her husband was shot without trial by a British officer and later that year Hanna began a tour of the USA, where she spoke at over 250 meetings, winning support for Irish independence.

In 1919 she was elected Sinn Féin councillor on Dublin Corporation. She remained a committed feminist and campaigned against the gendered provisions of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland.

“Until the women of Ireland are free, the men will not achieve emancipation.”
Catherine Martin

Catherine Martin was born in Monaghan in 1972. A teacher of English and music, she joined the Green Party, along with her husband, when their first child was born in 2007. She wanted to do what she could to deliver a safer, fairer and more equal and inclusive Ireland. Catherine was elected to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council in May 2014 and was elected to the Dáil in 2016.

She is deputy leader of the Green Party and is their spokesperson on education. In 2017 she co-founded the Irish Women’s Parliamentary Caucus, a cross-party forum for Irish women parliamentarians to discuss and campaign on issues predominantly affecting women. In 2018 the group hosted the first International Congress of Parliamentary Women’s Caucuses, bringing women parliamentarians from more than 40 different countries together.

“The Ireland of tomorrow will be shaped by the women of today, by our children and by our grandchildren. We will continue to speak and we will be heard.”

Notes:
Joan Burton was born in Dublin in 1949. She won a scholarship to UCD and qualified as one of Ireland’s first female chartered accountants. She campaigned against Apartheid and lectured at the University in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Joan joined the Labour Party and was first elected to Dublin County Council in 1991. She became a TD in 1992. She has served as a junior Minister in several Government Departments and held the position of Minister for Social Protection for five years. In this role, she was responsible for social welfare.

In 2014, she became the first female leader of the Labour Party. She later became Tánaiste - deputy to the Taoiseach - in the 31st Dáil, the third woman to have held this position. She has fought to secure equal rights for women and to promote an open society that respects diversity and tolerance. She has also been a campaigner for quality planning that offers affordable homes and reliable public transport.

“We need women in significant numbers in every role of life, particularly in the Dáil and the Seanad, and in holding all of the Cabinet and Government offices.”

Notes:
Máire Geoghegan-Quinn

Maire Geoghegan-Quinn was born in Galway in 1950 and first worked as a primary teacher. Her father was a TD and when he died in 1975 Máire stood in the by-election and won the seat. Her election brought the total number of women in the Dáil to five. She was appointed Minister for the Gaeltacht in 1979, becoming the first female Cabinet Minister since Countess Markievicz in 1919. She went on to serve in several different Government Departments. When she was Minister for Justice she brought forward substantial law reform legislation, including the decriminalisation of homosexuality which was passed in 1993.

In 2009, she became Ireland’s European Commissioner* and worked for five years in Brussels as Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation. As Commissioner she delivered the largest ever research framework programme, Horizon 2020, an €80 billion programme to support science, research and innovation. She believes that there has been a lack of recognition of women scientists. In 2018, she became a member of the board of Science Foundation Ireland.

“If you want to change the world, if you want to change Ireland, you want to change policy, then get involved in politics.”

Notes:

* Each member state nominates one European Commissioner. They are members of the European Commission and each one is responsible for a specific portfolio, such as energy, transport and justice, government ministers in national governments.
Write your response to each opinion on gender quotas.

Síle de Valera, former Fianna Fáil TD and Minister
"I think maybe to give things a kick-start, maybe quotas are necessary. I was hopeful things would change. But they have changed so slowly, maybe we do need a kick-start."

Response

Nora Owen, former Fine Gael TD and Minister
A quota system for Cabinet positions "would mean that some very good men would be passed over, and that’s not fair either."

Response

Mary O'Rourke, former Fianna Fáil TD, Minister and Senator
"I always believe women should be supported and put forward and I would be out for more women in politics, but not the gender quota. That is so wrong ... It’s not fair to a man or a woman. You should go on your merit."

Response

Heather Humphreys, Fine Gael TD And Minister
"I always believed that you get a job because you are the best person for the job, regardless of whether you are a man or a woman. But I do think that the quotas served a useful purpose. Because it got more women on the ticket and now we have more women than ever before elected to this [the 32nd] Dáil."

Response

All quotes taken from: Fitzgerald, M: Madam Politician Gill Books: 2018
# Tá/Níl cards

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