Anxiety and Action

A handbook on political organising for systems change

#TrinitySustainability
#HealthyTrinity
#HealthyPlanetHealthyPeople

SUPPORTING A **Healthy Trinity**

Anxiety and Action – About This Handbook

Many sources of anxiety arise as a result of systemic factors that feel beyond our control e.g. climate change, housing, biosphere collapse, inequality. If we take the "system" to mean the political system, we find ourselves with some power. In a democracy, we can change the system by engaging in political action.

Pic. 1 shows a Trinity celebration of Ireland's free contraception scheme. The free condoms, coils, Pill and LARCs on campus[1] today are available as a result of political activism by others, including the women on Ireland's famous Contraception Train in Pic. 2.

This handbook is aimed at people who feel sufficiently mentally well to take on the challenge of systemic change. It's informed by four psychological theories - goal-setting[2], the Health Belief Model[3], motivational interviewing[4,5,6] and the stages of change[7] model. It describes an Irish case-study on contraception and a Trinity case-study on Tobacco-Free-Trinity that we hope might inspire you to:

- Set an upstream goal related to a topic that's important to you - you choose;
- Build alliances to achieve that goal;
- Resolve grey area to move forward with that goal;
- Engage with government structures and if necessary, work with government officials to achieve political change.
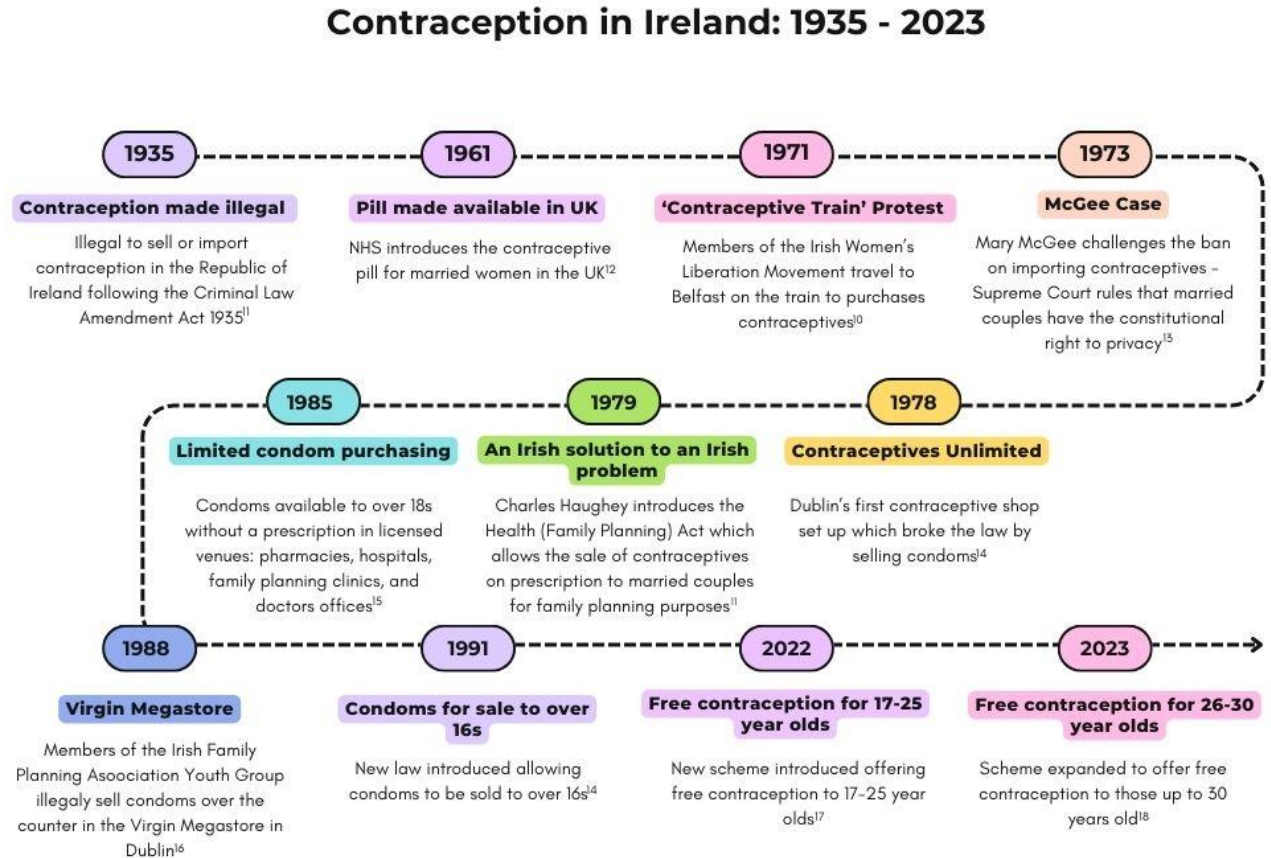
This training was developed by the Healthy Trinity Mental Health[8] group based on workshops delivered in Trinity's Schools of Psychology as part of a Psychology of the Climate Crisis TEP module co-ordinated by Clare Kelly, Associate Professor in School of Psychology, and a Politics in Irish Society module co-ordinated by Eman Abboud, Assistant Professor in Trinity's School of Sociology.

Pic 1: In 2023, Trinity celebrated[9] the launch of Ireland's free contraception scheme (top) by re-enacting the famous 1971 Contraception Train protest[10] (bottom). Systemic change is possible, but it takes time and perseverance.

Case study: Contraception in Ireland

In Trinity, you can get free contraception all over campus and in College Health.[1] Do you ever wonder how the Irish government came to fund all those free condoms, LARCs and coils? We have a lot of incredible activists to thank for it. Fig. 1 shows some of the activism that led to Ireland moving from a strict ban on contraception in 1935 to free access to contraceptives for young people in 2022. We hope that by highlighting this case study, you'll see that change is possible, with perseverance.

Contraception in Ireland: 1935 - 2023

1935 — Contraception made illegal
Illegal to sell or import contraception in the Republic of Ireland following the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1935[11]

1961 — Pill made available in UK
NHS introduces the contraceptive pill for married women in the UK[12]

1971 — 'Contraceptive Train' Protest
Members of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement travel to Belfast on the train to purchases contraceptives[10]

1973 — McGee Case
Mary McGee challenges the ban on importing contraceptives – Supreme Court rules that married couples have the constitutional right to privacy[13]

1985 — Limited condom purchasing
Condoms available to over 18s without a prescription in licensed venues: pharmacies, hospitals, family planning clinics, and doctors offices[15]

1979 — An Irish solution to an Irish problem
Charles Haughey introduces the Health (Family Planning) Act which allows the sale of contraceptives on prescription to married couples for family planning purposes[11]

1978 — Contraceptives Unlimited
Dublin's first contraceptive shop set up which broke the law by selling condoms[14]

1988 — Virgin Megastore
Members of the Irish Family Planning Asoociation Youth Group illegaly sell condoms over the counter in the Virgin Megastore in Dublin[16]

1991 — Condoms for sale to over 16s
New law introduced allowing condoms to be sold to over 16s[14]

2022 — Free contraception for 17-25 year olds
New scheme introduced offering free contraception to 17-25 year olds[17]

2023 — Free contraception for 26-30 year olds
Scheme expanded to offer free contraception to those up to 30 years old[18]

Fig 1. shows the long, arduous process from activists calling for free contraception in the 1970s, to it being made available in 2022. We don't have time for such slow change given the climate, biodiversity and health crises we face.

Case Study: Tobacco in Trinity

Did you ever wonder how Trinity became a tobacco-free campus that is imperfect but has [79% less observed smoking than baseline[20]](#)? In April 2013, a small group of academics, professional staff and students came together to discuss the emergence of tobacco-free campuses in the USA.

They set a goal, to explore if Trinity could become a tobacco free campus.

It wasn't clear if Trinity students and staff would support becoming a tobacco free campus, so they applied to Board to explore the idea formally. The Tobacco Free Trinity group became an alliance of student and staff from across Trinity who ran a [consultation[19]](#) that resulted in >10,000 engagements. That consultation resolved some ambivalence and created some. Most importantly students and staff supported becoming tobacco free, but TCDSU did not.

To resolve this ambivalence, Tobacco Free Trinity and TCDSU worked together to pilot Tobacco Free Zones in areas where smoking was most problematic. That pilot affected an 83% reduction in observed smoking. TCDSU ran another vote and in December 2018, Trinity became a tobacco free campus with three small exceptions.
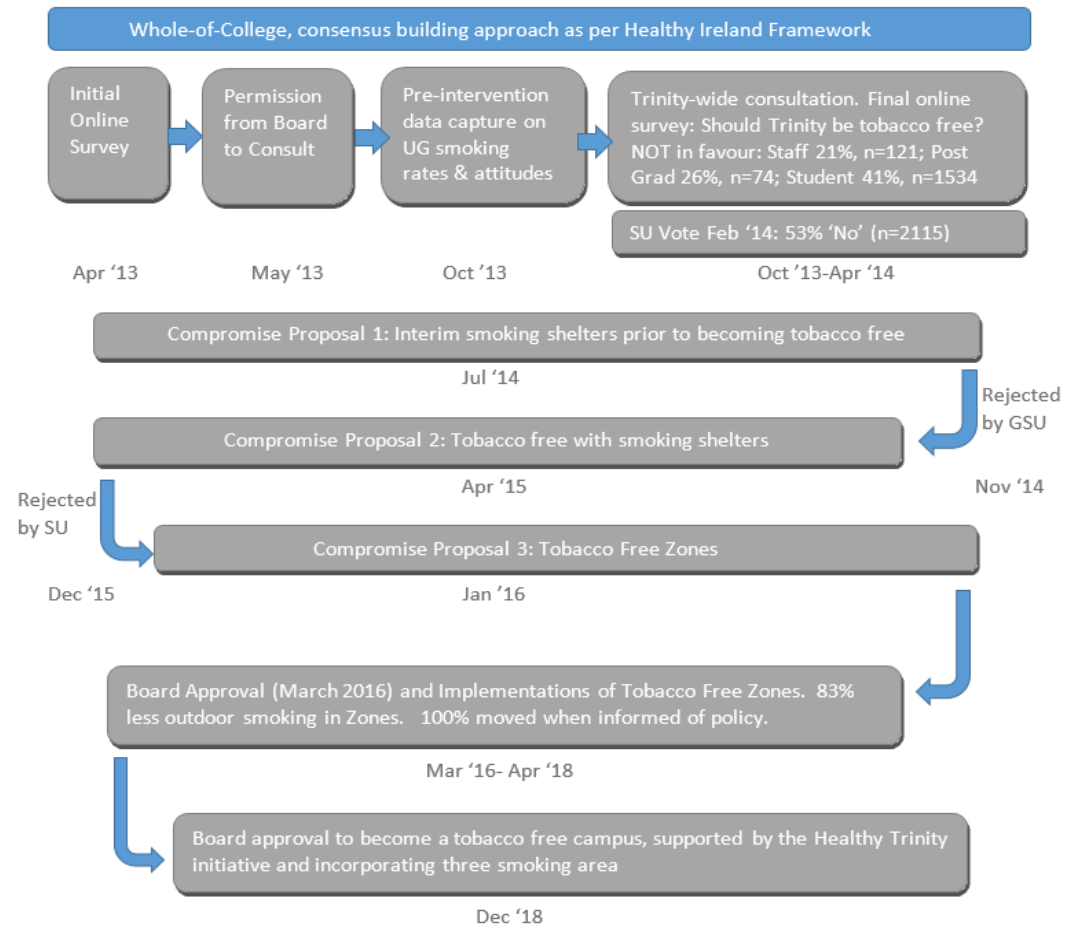
Fig 2. The process of Trinity becoming [tobacco free[21]](#) was fraught with ambivalence and setbacks and is still imperfect, but working as an alliance on a clear goal means we're closer now to Tobacco Free Ireland than we were.

Chapter 1: Setting a goal

Goal setting is an old, but proven tool for achieving change. Is there something you feel strongly about that you'd be willing to work on through thick and thin?

How to set a SMART Goal

As you have probably been told, goals should be SMART:[2]

Specific: Does your goal identify a particular thing you want to change / impact?

Measurable: Will you be able to determine if you've made progress?

Achievable: Is your goal something you can realistically hope to achieve? You're looking for something ambitious but achievable.

Realistic: Are you willing / able to work towards your goal? Can you get support?

Time-bound: Do you have a timeframe for accomplishing your goal?

Upstream is defined in this handbook as political change[53, 54, 55]. Upstream change is hard and not everything is in your control. We'll talk about that later. In the meantime, be ambitious and specific but not outlandish. It's tricky!

Pic 2: A student celebrates Trinity being a tobacco free campus by striking the winning blow on a cigarette-shaped pinata to win a Trinity Ball ticket. Although Tobacco Free Trinity is imperfect (looking at you Arts Building), it has affected a 79% reduction in observed smoking on campus.[20] Getting to this picture took 7 years. The Tobacco Free Trinity initiative's SMART goal aimed for 1.5 years.

Examples of good SMART goals

Contraception: I will work with allies to get the government to legislate to fund free, legal contraception for all women of child-bearing age. Note, it's likely that when activists in the 1970s set out their timeframe, they aimed for sooner than 2022.

Tobacco: I will work with allies to make Trinity a tobacco-free campus by September 2014. As you can see in Fig. 2, achieving this goal took 4 years longer than planned and involved many setbacks.

Mental Health: I will work with allies to get the HSE to implement 16 specialist care teams for eating disorders in Ireland by 2028. In 2018, the HSE planned to achieve this by 2023 but the deadline has not been met.[22]

Chapter 2: Data and ambivalence

What evidence will support your goal and clear up grey area around what you want? For example, in our tobacco case study, lots of arguments against becoming a tobacco free campus emerged as shown in Pic. 3. People asked, how would we support quitters? What about personal freedom? Is it even a university's role to intervene? Before advancing the goal to become a tobacco free campus, Tobacco Free Trinity had to define the grey area and come up with a response to each question in order to resolve ambivalence. We focussed on barriers, because we know from the Health Belief Model that you're more likely to be successful if you can reduce barriers to progress rather than trying to motivate people to overcome them[3].

Is there a national or international law or policy to support your goal?

Having a national or international law or policy to support your goal makes it easier to advance your goal with politicians. Pic. 3 shows Mary McGee who used the law to move forward with her goal of getting contraception.

Examples of laws or policies that support change

Contraception Case Study: The Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023[23] was launched by the Minister for Health and stated that free contraception would be available to women aged 17-25 years.

Tobacco Case Study: Tobacco Free Trinity came from Tobacco Free Ireland[24] and the Healthy Ireland framework[25] which were important tools for affecting change in Trinity.

Fig 3. Tobacco Free Trinity had to resolve the questions shown to become tobacco free by finding solutions to real problems and clarifying misconceptions.

Mental Health Example: In January 2018, the HSE published a five-year Model of Care for community eating disorder care[26], with a plan to have 16 specialist teams in place in by 2023.[22]

Is there peer-reviewed literature to support your goal?

Sometimes, a policy related to your goal won't exist. Or sometimes policies contradict each other. For example, Ireland's national healthy eating guidelines[27] recommend eating less meat than the EAT Lancet commission on food, planet, health.[28] So how much meat should we eat? To resolve the ambivalence related to this scenario, you can refer to peer-reviewed journals, with high quality studies (this is why Trinity teaches research methods) to support your goal.

Do you need to gather data to resolve ambivalence related to your goal?

If data to support your goal are not available in peer-reviewed journals, you may need to work with researchers to gather it. For example, Tobacco Free Trinity was resolved using surveys, town hall meetings and focus groups.[20]

Pic 3: Mary McGee[29] (left) took the Irish State to the High Court in 1973 using right to privacy law in order to resolve ambivalence about her right to use contraception.

Task 2: Resolve Ambivalence related to your Goal

Find law, policy, or data to support your goal, anticipate arguments against what you want, focus on barriers to progress, define counter arguments and/or solutions. Having done that, review your goal. Is it SMART or should it be changed?

Chapter 3: Organising to reach your goal

Grant Ennis highlights how important organising has been in the past to achieve political change.[30] He cites the example of suffragettes where women who didn't have the vote organised to get the vote. He suggests that their actions demonstrate that meaningful engagement in democracy requires more than voting.

Organising means mobilizing individuals or groups to work together towards a common goal. This involves coordinating activities, building networks, and implementing strategies to influence decision-makers.

Contraception Case study: To protest against the contraception ban in the Republic of Ireland, members of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement organised to travel by train to Belfast in 1971 and purchase contraceptives to bring back to the Republic.[10]

Tobacco Case Study: In 2013, a Tobacco Policy Committee was established to organise the Tobacco Free Trinity initiative. This committee had representation from the university Health Service, School of Medicine, Communications, Registrar, College Secretary, Chair of the Group of Unions, Human Resources, Students' Union, Graduate Students' Union, School of Dental Science, Safety Office, and Student Ambassadors.[20]

Pic 4: An example of organised activists[10] from the Irish Women's Liberation Movement on the platform of Connolly Station, Dublin in 1971 prior to boarding the Belfast Train to buy contraceptives which were illegal at the time.

What Democracy Is Not

Corporations promote the idea that individuals can change the structures of society by 'just voting,'[31] 'just protesting,'[32] and making 'good' consumer or investor choices.[33] Grant Ennis proposes that modern democracy is presented in three ways:[30]

Electoralism – "just voting"

- We are told that voting is enough
- Voting at polls is important – but citizen association & political action are also necessary.

Mobilisationism – "just protesting"

- We are told that protesting is enough
- Effective change is organised by groups, not individuals[30]
- 'Assembly without association' – protests lacking organisation don't succeed
- Politics-oriented media campaigns & in-person meetings with policymakers are also powerful tools

Consumerism – "ethically consuming"

- We are told to 'vote with our wallet', that making 'ethical purchases' is enough
- Citizens are encouraged to exercise their consumer 'rights' rather than demand change from policymakers
- 'The real source of power to make a difference is through changing policies and structures…we do that through civic engagement, not better shopping'[34]

Pic 5: Trinity students have a long history of protesting. Recognise anyone in this picture from 1978? You can get a closer look here[35]. (Answer: it's TCDSU)

Pic 6: In 2004, British Petroleum invented the term carbon footprint to put the focus of climate change on individuals, not industry. One of many examples[36].

How to organise

Ennis (2023)[30] makes a number of recommendations when organising for change?

- Focusing on false targets, such as corporations, politicians, and CEOs is a misdirection of efforts to achieve political change. Regardless of which false target we pursue (see Fig. 4), we lose when we fail to focus on structural change.[30]
- Political change must be the target of citizen association and action to achieve systems change.

Forming alliances

Ennis[30] suggest that change is organised by groups, not individuals. Can you form alliances with individuals who share a common goal with you? By aligning yourself with these allies, you can amplify your message, gain support for your initiatives, and increase the likelihood of success in advancing your goal.

Grant Ennis proposes the 'Spokes-Council' model for coordinating mass action to achieve political change (see Fig. 5).[30] This model allows for both large group participation and small group discussion to work together with consensus to achieve a goal.
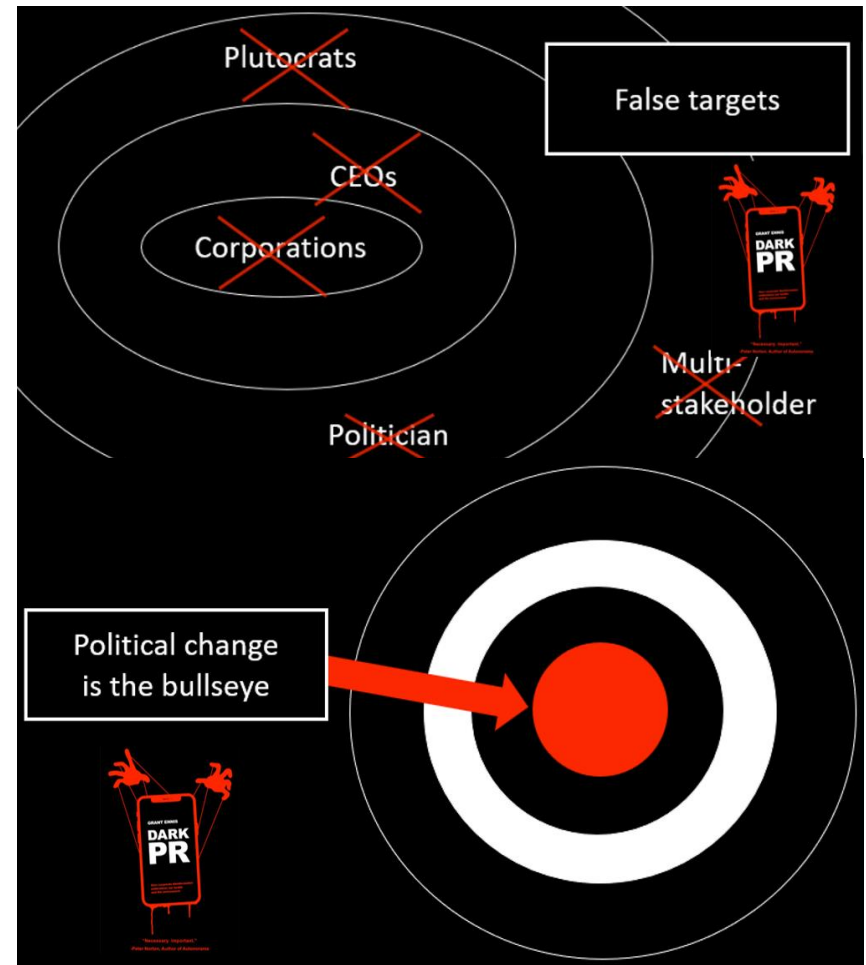
Fig 4. Grant Ennis highlights that although it's interesting to read about corporate disinformation, the focus of organising is political change.[30]

Elements of successful, organised movements that lead to political change:[30]

1. **Trust:** citizens gain trust in one another through regular interaction.
2. **Groups:** citizens who trust one another form independent, member-led, self-funded groups
3. **Coalitions:** groups join with other groups to form coalitions
4. **Alliances:** coalitions join with other coalitions to form alliances
5. **Movements:** alliances join with other alliances to form movements
6. **Targeted political change:** movements demand specific political change
7. **Political will:** movements create enough political will to achieve meaningful change

Community, voluntary and charity sector

Ireland's community, voluntary and charity sector has almost 10,000 registered charities and there are a further 20,000+ organisations in Ireland's wider nonprofit sector. Will you work with organisations like the Irish Heart Foundation, Irish Cancer Society or others to achieve your goal? What about statutory bodies like the HSE or Trinity?

Spokes-Council Organizing Model for Global Movements
(Grant Ennis, 2021)

The larger organising structure of the movement

Affinity group or 'cluster'
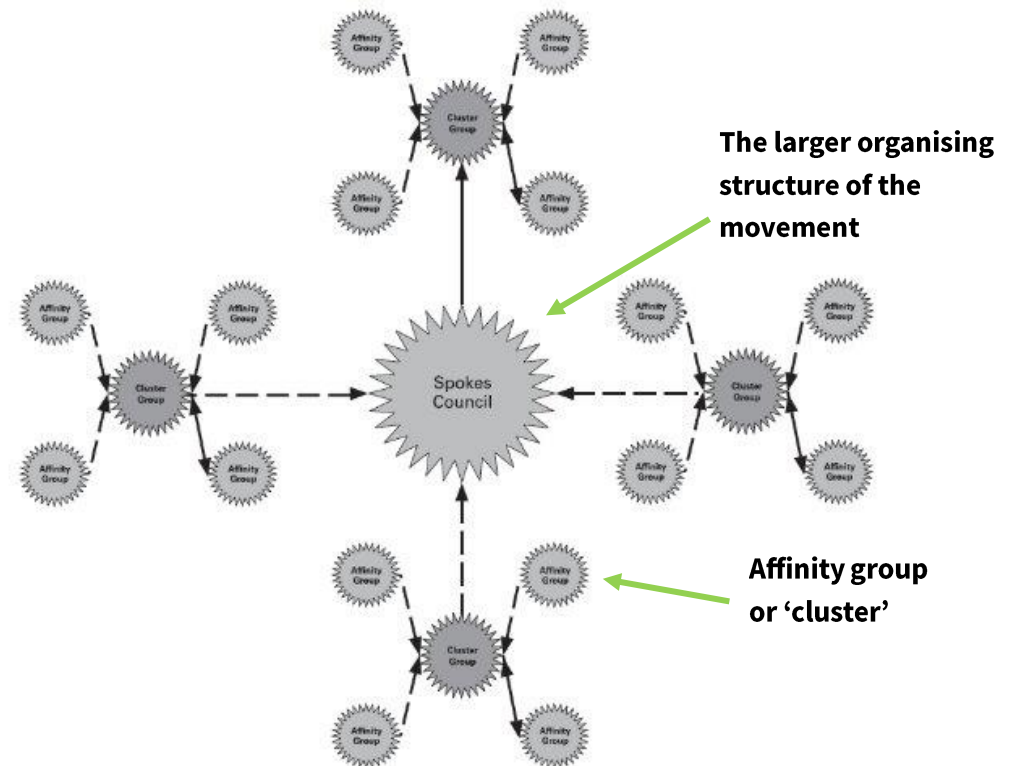
Fig 5. Individuals form clusters and empower a representative or 'spoke' to attend a Spokes Council meeting with other spokes.[30] Will you take this approach?

Task 3: Find People to Organise With

Identify non-profit organisations in your area with whom you might engage to achieve your goal. For a list of some non-profits in Ireland, click here[37].

Chapter 4: Upstream action

When trying to achieve political change, you can focus on top-down or bottom up approaches. Top-down refers to approaches that are regulated, planned, and enabled by government (or some other institutionalised agency), while bottom-up approaches are led by non-governmental actors such as grassroots initiatives, civil society, and local business or administrations.[38] Fig. 6 shows some of the tools available for bottom-up and top-down action. This training focuses on the top-down tools circled in purple.

What is an Oireachtas committee?

Many people don't realise that after you've voted in an election, the new government forms many structures, including Oireachtas Committees. An Oireachtas committee is a group of members of the Oireachtas that advises the Houses of the Oireachtas on a range of subjects.[39] Members include TDs, Senators, or both. As you can see in Fig. 7, examples of Oireachtas Committees include the Committee on Health, Committee on Disability Matters, Committee on Justice, and Sub-Committee on Mental Health (2023). How much budget does your Committee of interest manage?
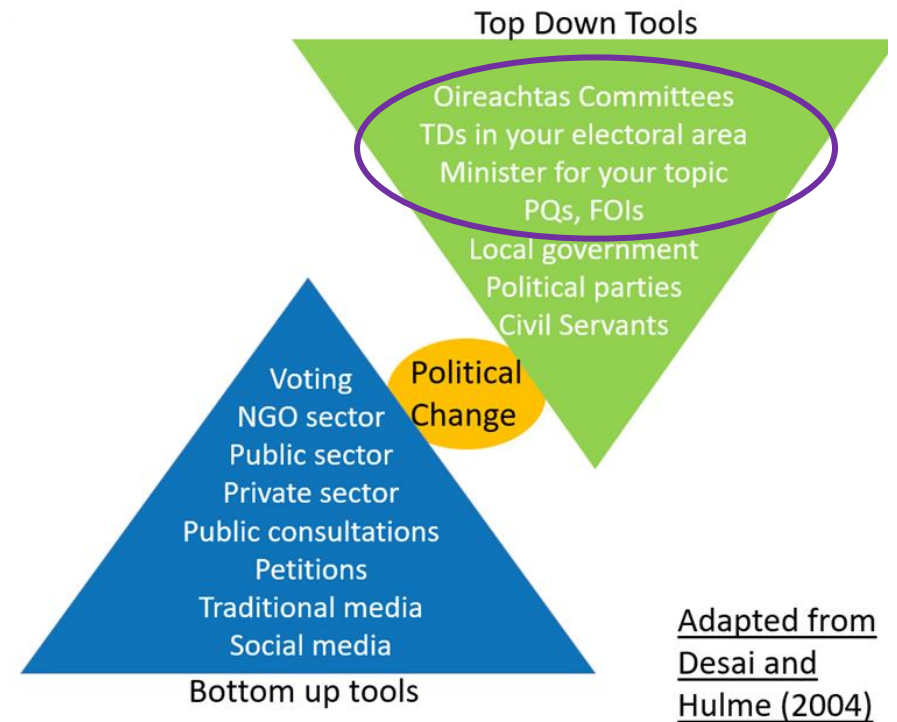
Fig 6. Top-down vs. Bottom-up tools[40] – this handbook focuses on the tools in the purple circle for achieving your goal.
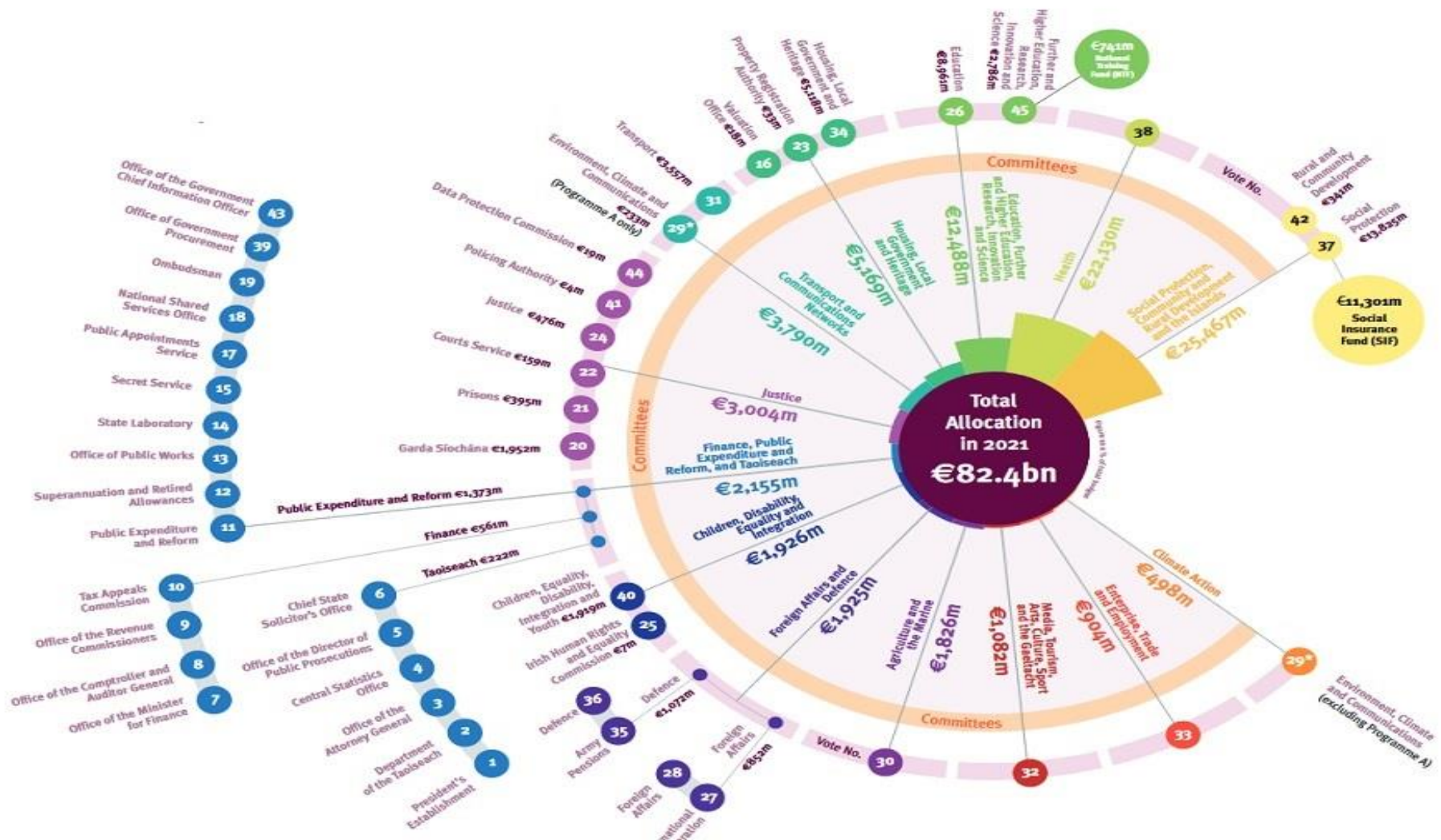
Fig 7. Current Oireachtas structures.[41] Which Committees are relevant to your goal?

What do Oireachtas Committees do?

Oireachtas Committees receive submissions and presentations from members of the public, interest groups, and government departments.

The key functions of Oireachtas Committees include[39]:

1. **Legislation** – scrutiny of draft legislation before publication.
2. **Scrutinising the work of government departments** – Ministers appear before Oireachtas committees to answers questions regarding policy, expenditure, and governance matters in their department.
3. **Advising on policy matters** – drafting reports outlining committee findings and recommendations to influence policy and legislation
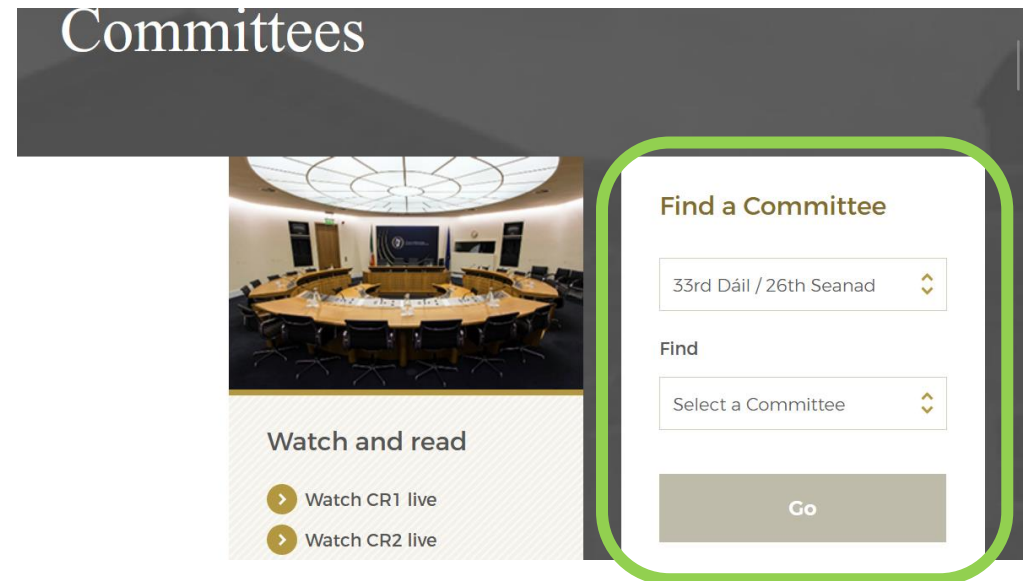
Pic 7: You can search for Oireachtas Committees relevant to your goal here.[41]

Why are Oireachtas Committees important for your goal?

Would it be useful to target the Oireachtas committee(s) relevant to your goal to influence policy and/or legislation? For example, if your goal was to improve mental health services for eating disorders in Ireland, you could aim to target TDs or Senators on the Committee on Health and the Sub-committee on Mental Health.

Task 4: Identify the Oireachtas committee(s) relevant to your goal

Can you identify the Oireachtas committee relevant to your goal? The list is here.[41] Decide, would it be worth contacting members of the Committee to ask them to support your goal? Would you contact one member or multiple?

Chapter 5: Engaging with Politicians

Politicians have the power to create, amend, and implement policies and laws that can directly impact your goal. They may also have access to resources, including funding and information, which can be crucial for achieving your goal.

When engaging with politicians to achieve your goal, you might identify:

- The Government Minister relevant to your goal using this list[42]
- The TD/Senator relevant to your goal using this list[43]

If you're working at this level, what is you strategy? It's good to be politic. Will a Government Minister have the time and resources to engage fully with your goal? Would you be better working with a back bencher? Do you live and vote in the constituency of any of the politicians who have influence over your goal?

Writing to politicians

The government welcomes submissions from members of the public. If you're making a government submission, you might find this Guidance Note[44] published in by the Irish government in 2023 useful or this guidance from Transparency Ireland on Responsible Lobbying in Europe.[45]

Find a TD by constituency

> Dublin
> Leinster
> Munster
> Ulster-Connacht

Pic 8: Oireachtas.ie pictured, provides search facilities where you can find public representatives who might support you in achieving your goal. Search for Government Ministers using this list[42] or TDs and senators using this list.[43]

Task 5: Will you engage with politicians to achieve your goal?

Use this list[42] to identify potential Government Minister partners, this list[43] to identify potential TD/Senator partners. If you're writing them, you might consult this guidance note[44] or these[45] on how to lobby responsibly.

Chapter 6: How do you know who to work with in the Dail?

All politicians agree that we need world peace and puppies but the day-to-day life of a politician requires pragmatic policy decisions that might not always tally with the aspirations in their manifestoes. Two tools that can give you a sense of what's really going on in the Dail and where you might get support for your goal, are Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests.

What is a Parliamentary Question?

- A PQ refers to a Parliamentary Question.
- PQs are asked by members of Dail Eireann and answered by Ministers.[46]
- Ministers provide a public response to matters for which they are responsible.
- Ministers provide both oral & written answers in the Dáil.
- You can ask a PQ by emailing your question to a TD.
- If a TD accepts it, it will be sent to the Questions Office of Dail Eireann for answer by the Department or Organisation responsible.
- Your response will be emailed to you by the TD.

Pic 9: Click here[47] to search for Parliamentary Questions currently being discussed in Dáil Eireann – do any relate to your goal?

Pic 10. Shows how you can search for PQs related to your goal. Would searching for PQs be helpful in identifying political allies?

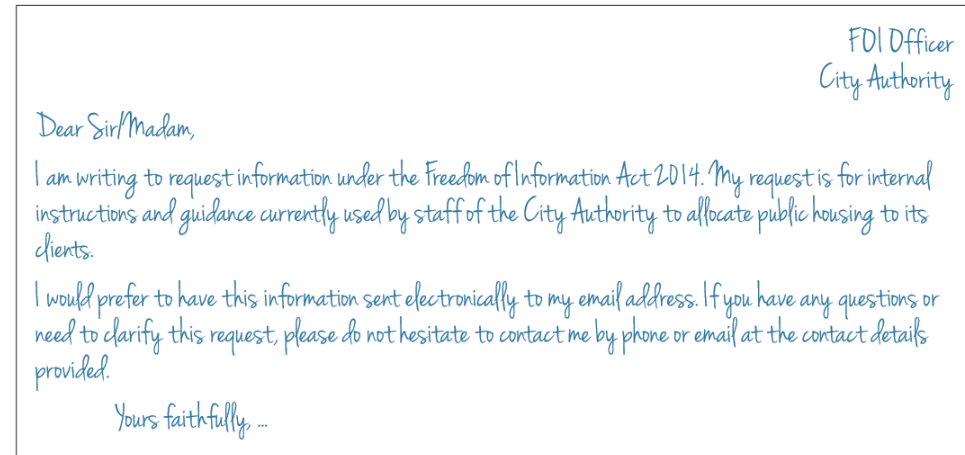## What is FOI?

- FOI refers to Freedom of Information.
- Anyone, anywhere is entitled to ask for information using their right to know under FOI. Information held by public bodies can be sought.[48]
- If requesting information under FOI, you send the request to the body that holds the records you are looking for.[48] For example, if you are seeking records about a policy matter at the Department of Health, you must apply to that department.
- You can send a written request or email to the department.[48]
- Some organisations may ask you to fill in a form to obtain information under FOI but there is no legal requirement for you to do that.

For guidance, here's a sample FOI request letter:

> FOI Officer
> City Authority
>
> Dear Sir/Madam,
>
> I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. My request is for internal instructions and guidance currently used by staff of the City Authority to allocate public housing to its clients.
>
> I would prefer to have this information sent electronically to my email address. If you have any questions or need to clarify this request, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email at the contact details provided.
>
> Yours faithfully, …

Pic 10: Use this guide[49] to get the most out of FOI. The sample FOI request on page 11 may be particularly useful.

Task 6: Is your goal being discussed in Parliamentary Questions, do you need FOI?

Search for your goal here[47]. If you can't find information related to your goal in the public domain, would FOI be useful? Where would you send it?

Chapter 7: Inevitable Failure & Active Hope

Setbacks and challenges are inevitable when trying to achieve upstream change. Both the Stages of Change Model[7] (see Fig. 8) and Motivational Interviewing suggest it is a good idea to expect and prepare for relapse or failure (not a word we use in behaviour change but it grabs attention). Did you ever see this formula?

Happiness = Expectations – Reality

Managing your expectations can make Relapse more tolerable.

Fig. 8 explains the Stages of Change Model in relations to healthy habits like stopping smoking. Importantly, Relapse is seen as an opportunity to learn, rather than failure. Motivational Interviewing[4, 5, 6] suggests that it can be useful at the beginning of a process to anticipate where setbacks and challenges are likely to occur and strategise before they happen, how you might overcome them or how you might recover and get back to action on your goal after a setback. Active Hope[50] is a climate action book about resilience and creative power in the face of intractable problems. Would it help you to learn more about Active Hope to prepare you for the challenges of change? Or have you any other strategies?

Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross (1992)
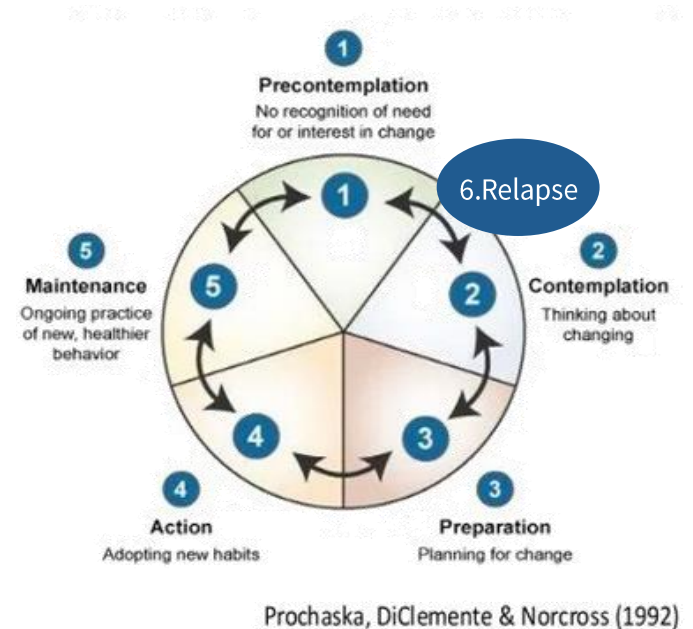
Fig 8. The Stages of Change model suggests that relapse is to be expected when trying to change and suggests you use relapse as an opportunity to learn. Can you anticipate where relapse or setbacks might occur in pursuit of your goal? Can you prepare now, while you feel motivated, to overcome them when they do?

Task 7: What are the potential challenges/setbacks you may encounter in pursuit of your goal.

Once you've identified them, can you think of strategies to overcome them or ways to recover from them? Would learning more about Active Hope help?

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Appendix – How Law is made in Ireland

Understanding how a Bill moves through the Dáil, the legislative body of Ireland, is essential for strategic and effective advocacy. However, the legislative process can be complex. So, let's simplify it:

What is a Bill?

- A Bill is a draft of a proposed new law.[51]
- Once a Bill is signed into law by the President, it becomes an Act.[51]
- Making new laws is one of the main duties of the Oireachtas.

How can I influence a Bill?

- **Fig. 8** shows that you can directly influence a Bill related to your goal by lobbying and giving feedback on Draft Bills.
- As part of the 'pre-legislative scrutiny' process, an Oireachtas Committee may put out a public call for submissions on a draft bill from interested individuals.[52]
- Furthermore, government departments generally hold consultations with interested groups, organisations, and members of the public when a new law is being drafted.[52] This provides an opportunity for you to give your input on the content of draft laws related to your goal.
- Lobbying allows citizens and organisations to express their views on public policy and services to politicians and public servants.
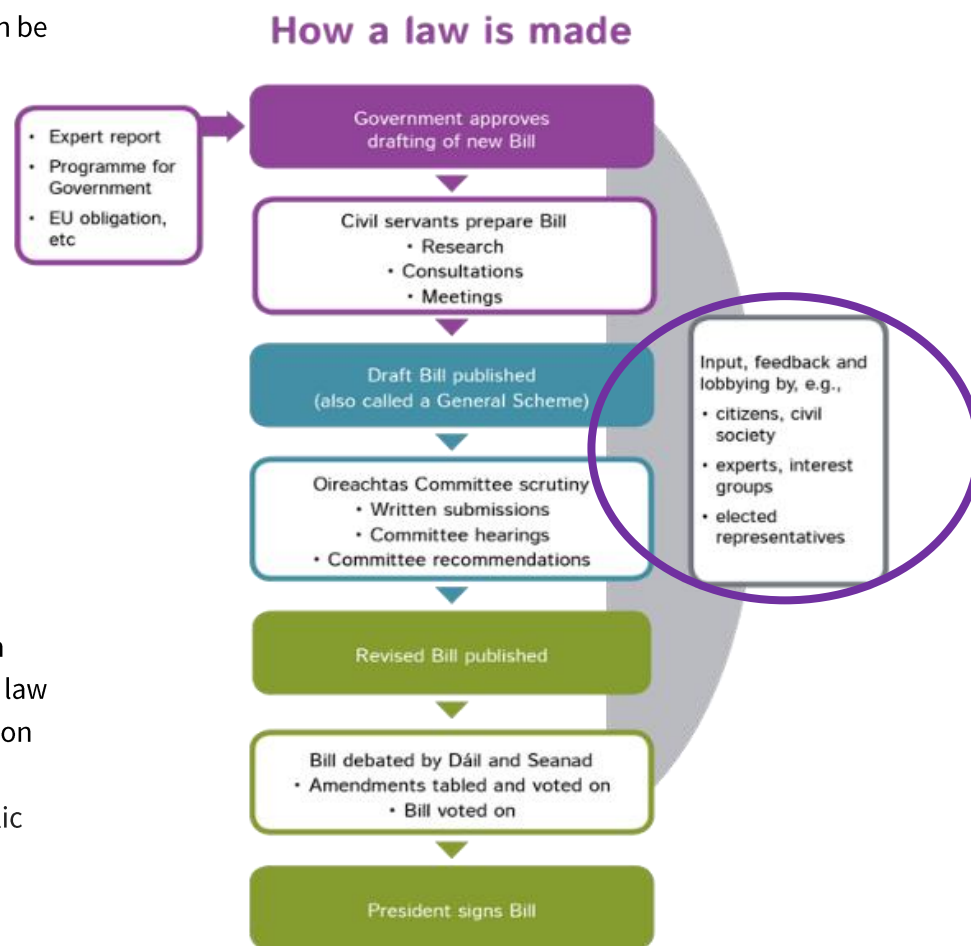
Fig 9. The process of a Bill becoming Law in Ireland[52] – the purple circle demonstrates how you can directly influence bills, e.g., through lobbying and giving input at public consultations.

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