

EVIDENTIAL STANDARDS

Introduction

The remit and terms of reference for the Citizens' Assembly anticipates the submission of high quality and accessible evidence to support the Citizens' Assembly process. This note summarises the arrangements for the provision of that evidence.

Evidence can take a number of forms. It is anticipated that much of the information provided to the members will be by way of evidence commissioned by the Secretariat. It may include the outputs of general or targeted consultation or calls for submissions and include background data and information prepared by the Secretariat.

The arrangements described in this paper apply to the evidence commissioned or provided by the Secretariat. Where necessary that evidence (and any evidence provided by way outputs from consultation or submissions) will be accompanied by summaries and factsheets prepared by the Secretariat to ensure that Assembly members can confidently contextualise original material.

In addition to this paper, consideration is being given to the training support to be provided to members to enable them to confidently engage with evidence.

What is witness evidence?

The term "witness" refers to a person considered to be particularly knowledgeable or skilled in a certain field. There are three different types of witness that might inform the decision making of the members:

1. **Knowledge experts:** individuals with specialist knowledge on an issue or topic
2. **Stakeholders:** representatives from interested parties who usually advocate a certain perspective
3. **Experiential witnesses:** members of the public who have knowledge about an issue as a result of direct experience, and so can share their personal insights

Witnesses contribute to the information phase, in which members are supported to learn more about the topic at hand, to inform their deliberations and recommendations. The witnesses share their knowledge or perspective with members; their evidence may be factual or lived experience and may be 'neutral' or represent a particular argument.

Witnesses will often provide information via presentations followed by a Q&A from members. They may also prepare resources (written materials, video, and infographics) to be provided to members before or during the assembly meeting. The Stewarding Group will play a key role in considering and quality assuring evidence presented, including that the evidence presented is based on robust and credible sources.

How will the evidence be identified?

Underpinning the approach to the provision of evidence are the principles determined by the Government which underpin all aspects of the establishment and operations of the Assembly:

- **Independence from government:** including through the appointment of impartial and respected Conveners, an arms-length secretariat, and expert advisory groups.
- **Transparency:** at all levels of the operation of the Assembly, from the framing of the questions, to the selection of members and witnesses, through to proactive publication (including evidence presented at weekends) and live-streaming of deliberative sessions and clarity about what the outputs will be used for.
- **Inclusion:** extending not just to those invited to take part as members, but also to the operations of the Assembly itself.
- **Access:** the wider public must be able to see and comment upon the work of the Assembly, and stakeholders must feel that they and their interests have a route into the Assembly.
- **Balance:** the information used to build members' (and the wider public's) learning must be balanced, credible and easily understood.
- **Cumulative learning:** embedded into the design of the Assembly, to ensure members develop a rich understanding of the issues considered and have time to do so.
- **Open-mindedness:** the Assembly will be a forum for open-minded deliberation between participants, ensuring the public see it as a genuine process of enquiry, and to help ensure that it receives an open-minded response from the parliament and government.

How will the evidence for the Assembly be collated?

The Secretariat will collate the evidence for each weekend, guided by the decisions of members and Conveners. Matters relating to witness selection, the format of evidence provision, the evidence itself and how the witnesses are supported will be considered.

As part of this exercise the Secretariat will ensure that:

- the evidence requirements of the members have been fully understood and are used to tailor the information accordingly
- the evidence, including the selection of witnesses, fully and accurately represents the diversity of views on a topic
- evidence is provided as appropriate by different types of witnesses with different types of "expertise"
- whilst the form of the evidence may vary, it must be communicated in an accessible and understandable way. This does not mean that it should be over simplified
- members are supported to make sense of the evidence. Any uncertainty in the evidence or conflicting evidence should be explained carefully and honestly to members

- evidence will be relevant, focussed and balanced, if there is bias in the presentation of evidence this will be countered with oversight and moderation
- witnesses are supported in their roles to manage their expectations, to facilitate preparation and to ensure the process is fair

As well as supporting the Secretariat more broadly in the collation of evidence, the Stewarding Group has an essential role in undertaking quality assurance checks to ensure that the evidence meets the criteria and standards outlined in this paper.

The design of the Assembly will take into account the requirement that members be provided with sufficient time at meetings to assess, discuss and ask questions about the evidence presented to them. This includes discussion amongst members to enable them to share reflections and feelings as well as open Q&A with the witnesses providing evidence to clarify particular points, test understanding and to probe issues further, including to offer new information which may be particularly valuable. Where it is not possible to answer all questions on the day, further evidence will be provided after the weekend session.

The design of the Assembly will ensure that members steer the direction of the Assembly. This includes considering the evidence required.

Careful consideration will be given to the different requirements of Assembly members in accessing evidence. As a general principle, evidence central to the deliberations of the Assembly will be presented at a weekend and will be supplemented with short documents summarising the content of a presentation. Where evidence consists of submissions, as noted above, short summary documents sign-posting the key issues will be prepared, as well as the original submissions for those members who wish to consider these. Routinely all evidence will be presented in plain English, with a glossary of terms as necessary.

All evidence, together with a short explanatory report, including sources, will be published on the website, as far as practicable in advance of the relevant discussion.

ENDS