

**Feedback from Roundtable Brainstorming Session at the First weekend of the
Citizens' Assembly on 28th November 2016**
on topics/issues to be covered in subsequent weekends at the Assembly

Background

In the last session of the first weekend of the Assembly, the members considered and brainstormed in private session on the topics and issues that they would like to hear about in subsequent weekends.

The purpose of this exercise was to ensure that the Work Programme that is put before the Assembly addresses the topics and hears from the people that members identify as being important.

Feedback was then provided from each table in plenary session and footage from this is available on the Assembly's YouTube Channel.

This document is an edited transcript of that feedback session and includes a summary at the beginning of the key points raised across the room.

This feedback has formed the basis of the draft work programme for the Assembly, which is available as a separate document.

Summary of the key points raised

Structure of Programme

- Greater gender balance in presenters. Hear from younger women in particular.
- Hear from the medical side first and then the legal side but if the Q&A could be together
- Like to have medical and legal experts available on the panel at the same time at prevent questions being ruled out as being misdirected
- Clarification on how the Assembly will arrive at its conclusions
- Longer Q&A sessions
- Fact checkers in future, particular for presentations from advocacy groups
- Get the papers early
- Helpful if the question-and-answer sessions were longer.
- Summary of the submissions

Medical Issues

- Fatal Foetal Abnormalities and genetic screening
- Concrete Examples of Medical experience
- Aftercare and before care for women experiencing abortion
- Abortion Pills and the dangers associated with them
- Hear from doctors who want to change the legislative framework
- Abortion in other jurisdictions, how it all works
- What training would doctors need to undertake if abortion was to become more widespread.
- When can a foetus feel pain. At what point is a miscarriage considered a baby.
- IVF

Legal Issues

- The consequences of repealing the Eighth Amendment- the legislative and constitutional
- European court of human rights cases
- Future proposals, should we use the Constitution or legislate. How long would it take.
- More focus on the rights of the unborn child

Ethical Issues

- Conscientious objections/ regulations
- The conflict between ethics and the legal system
- The right to live and the right to die
- The views of the father
- Arguments from both sides of the debate

Social Issues

- Adoption and fostering

- Issues arising for vulnerable groups; disadvantaged areas, drug addiction problems, the travelling community
- Sociological effects of abortion
- Views from multicultural groups and the gay community
- The Irish social context of any situation and the ramifications for change
- Children who become pregnant.

Who to hear from

- Hear from Advocacy Groups. Request for information about who funds these groups.
- Mixed religious groups including the Catholic Church
- Personal experiences
- Rape Crisis Centre
- Politicians to give political party view points
- The Oireachtas to explain what they are expecting

Detailed Comments made at each table

Compiled from transcript of proceedings and notes taken at tables

Table 14

- A lot of yesterday quite abstract so looking for more concrete examples.
- Certainly hearing from pressure groups on both sides would be helpful.
- Perhaps hearing more about alternative solutions as well to broaden the discussion and in terms of the safety or not of so-called abortion pills- more clarification on those would be helpful.
- Also what came up was the idea of the fallout in terms of women who don't go through abortions and in particular situations where foster care comes into it perhaps from social workers might be helpful.
- Conscientious objections from GPS and medical professionals and regulatory guidelines for these people and clarification on that would definitely be welcome.
- Like to hear from not so much the medical professionals that are happy enough with the legislative framework but from those doctors that perhaps want more in terms of legal framework- those doctors who are asking for that framework they would like to hear from them as well.

Table 13

- Multicultural groups.
- Also people who have personal experience.
- Get the papers a little bit earlier.
- Hear more from female GPS and maybe from disadvantage areas.
- Abortion experts from other jurisdictions, but in particular the UK to understand how it would all work.
- From adoption agencies.
- More information on the law/ future proposals: should we use the constitution or legislate
- Rape Crisis Centre, family planning centre

- Fatal foetal abnormalities- testing- how reliable
- Mixed religious groups, including no religion
- Gay community view
- Sociological effects of abortion

Table 12

- Like to hear from people who have had first-hand experiences of this of abortion from both sides
- The topic is unbalanced- not enough discussion about the unborn child. Hear from someone who can talk on behalf of the child. The rights of a child, or the child's perspective and with regards to another. There seems to be a lot of focus on the mother. Should we treat mother and unborn differently? Is it fair to treat them differently?
- First-hand experience of professionals who work with aftercare/ before care for abortions and professionals who have operated with direct experience of abortion; ideally people who weren't professional spokespeople board had direct experience themselves.
- The consequences of repealing the Eighth Amendment- the legislative and constitutional effects of doing that.
- Representations from the weakest members of society people who would less likely speak for themselves- people with drug addiction problems, a disability, the travelling community, charity groups.
- An international perspective in relation to European court of human rights cases and UN and from the UN.
- Hear from someone who provides counselling post-abortion
- Hear from someone in the medical profession who has dealt with drug addicts who are pregnant/ have delivered a child born with a drug addiction

Table 11

- The conflict between ethics and the legal system
- Anonymous submissions from women who have gone through this and have travelled

- Counselling Groups/ Doctors and General Practitioners who have experience of women who have been through the process of travelling who followed up with counselling and support when they came back and the effect that had on them. Provide examples in the way that Prof Higgins did.
- A balanced view from advocacy groups
- Medical ethics and the right to live and the right to die and we like to hear
- IVF- if it's in vitro why not consider a termination but in utero it is
- More about cases of fatal foetal abnormalities
- Someone from the Rape Crisis Centre and we'd like to know more about circumstances around rape
- Someone from a UK clinic who deals with abortion and has experience of dealing with Irish women travelling over
- Understand what the options are for changes to the Constitution to the Eighth Amendment and the timeframe- how long would it take
- Hear from the medical side first and then the legal side but if the Q&A could be together

Table 10

- Clarification of the process for the journey from the presentations through to the roundtable discussion the question-and-answer session and then find a final report what happens in that intervening space that translates the citizens voice into the recommendations and the final report
- Revisit of the topic of ethics and ideally in the same weekend as fatal fetal abnormality issue (ideally that that would happen at the next weekend)
- Hear from some woman who's been through an abortion
- Hear from non-denominational pro-life ever representation and it would also have pro-choice representation
- Frontline social worker who deals with the most vulnerable groups in our society in this topic area such as people in direct provision, refugees, sex workers.
- On the legal issues, useful to have a look at the regimes prevailing in other jurisdictions.
- Helpful if the question-and-answer sessions were longer.

Table 9

- Table was unanimous in its praise of the format of the experts and then the group discussion and then the Q&A. so nobody has any suggestions to improve
- Table would like guidance from the Oireachtas committee that's to receive the recommendations as to what type of thing that they want to receive.
- Get strong personal views on the topic out of the way in the first week.
- Hear from people from those partisan view points who aren't lawyers because the feeling is that in general this debate seems very legalistic and they would prefer non-lawyers to contribute.
- This table would like to hear specifically about a younger women; the experiences of young women school age and college-age so we'll be talking probably from teens to age about 23.
- This table agrees that they want to hear and about comparative regimes in other countries and the experience of other countries.
- This table would like an ethics expert to be brought back into give a view on the issues that are raised about the issue of terminations following inutero diagnoses of genetic conditions such as downs syndrome.
- Like to have medical and legal experts available on the panel at the same time at prevent questions being ruled out as being misdirected.
- View of the father important
- Gender imbalance amongst the speakers
- Information about when the foetus can feel pain
- What would happen if Gardaí received a call telling them that someone has possession of/ intended to use hormonal abortion pills?
- Would like to hear more from the Irish Council for General Practitioners (ICGP).

Table 8

- Would like to have representatives from youth organizations & welfare officers from student unions, give their views
- Representative group again from the ICGP to get their opinion on the way forward regarding contraception

- Also asked for religious groups represented in Ireland to give their opinions
- Community groups as well from disadvantaged areas around country. Rape Crisis Centre
- Representatives from medical or scientific groups to discuss medical advances regarding the possibility of full term test tube births
- Termination clinics in the UK or Holland.
- Representatives of the suppliers of the abortion pill.
- With regards to the 'for and against' groups; could we have fact checkers (medical and legal representatives) present?

Table 7

- There's a lot of overlap with topics that have been raised by other tables
- A constitutional expert who could be free to talk about the ramifications of change in the Irish legal system
- An overview of the system in such countries as the UK or Netherlands both from legal and medical perspective and the status quo how that works
- Irish doctors or medical practitioners who could talk about what would be needed as regards training to allow for a broader abortion from medical training perspective
- Pro-life and pro-choice
- A sociologist who could talk about the particular Irish social context of any and the present situation how it got there and ramifications for change
- Some form of men's group as to whether or not males should have a voice in the decision-making process.
- Whether it would be possible to have a broad overview of the submissions that you have received.

Table 6

- We had a lot of overlap as well.
- Interested in having speakers from interest groups for pro-life and pro-choice as well informed opinions but not necessarily as professionals.

- We wanted to hear from a medical representative in the UK.
- We wanted to hear something on fathers' rights in this equation.
- We wanted to get statistics on fatal abnormalities
- A representative from equal rights groups
- We wanted to hear about physicians who are not satisfied with the process and we wanted to hear about the options and consequences of those options available to facilitate change.
- What funding is behind each lobby group on both sides?

Table 5

- Again there is a lot of overlap
- A policymaker in the educational system for example to see what the view is in respect of sex education with minors.
- Also a representative from and for the voice of people in direct provision.
- A representative from an Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that would specialize in children's rights
- Children who may become pregnant and was having to make a decision.
- Medical and legal professionals on the panel at the same time.

Table 4

- Fatal Foetal abnormality
- Human rights perspective
- What happens internationally
- Hear from people who are critical of the Eighth Amendment
- A theological perspective
- Personal experiences of those who had an abortion
- Clarification on the protection for the unborn
- Timelines for viability and definition
- The political perspective (from politicians and political parties)

- What happens if the Eighth Amendment is repealed; the constitutional and legislative impact
- More gender balance; the female perspective to be presented from a female law expert or female doctor and also human rights experts
- Representatives from the pro-life and pro-choice groups- would like to hear both sides to avoid polarization
- Those who had an abortion and their experiences and a presentation from abortion clinics and experts elsewhere and some names were
- Legal and medical experts are at the same time for Question and Answer

Table 3

- There's a great deal of similarity between the aspects that we seem to be discussing as well.
- The legal and medical experts which we all agree should be sitting at the table at answer these questions at the same time to avoid any confusion
- Genetic screening of embryos that are fairly early stage- an expert who is a genetic individual who can obviously talk about that and foetal abnormalities
- Pre and post abortion counselling

Table 2

- Someone from the rape crisis centre- the issue of crisis abortions that arise due to the issue of rape deserve special consideration
- Someone who could speak further on the types of information available to women with crisis pregnancies and the legitimacy of the information available and or the need for regulation.
- Also felt very important we spoke also about the types of groups that we would like to hear from on and the pro-life and pro-choice sides. It was felt that the Catholic Church have a very large representation and it would be helpful to hear from them, and other right to life groups including and the Iona Institute perhaps and for the pro-choice side.
- Women's rights groups would be particularly welcome
- Also it was felt that the repeal the eighth side have made a lot of noise and we'd like to hear from them too.

- Someone to address the assembly from the clinics in England on the types of abortions that they're seeing and the specific issues, like why people are getting abortions, incidence of Down Syndrome, counselling and what kind of day today issues they are seeing.
- Have the ability to have legal advice after we hear from the various interest groups and at other stages of the assembly so that and that the issues discussed can be considered and the implications of any proposals we may have and can also be fully considered.

Table 1

- Anxious that all views be represented. So rather than the essentially the entire spectrum of views, rather than the more extreme speakers
- Like the format to date.
- We'd also like another opportunity for feedback at some point much like this session so that when we've heard more information then again it could be redirected
- More about the development of the foetus exactly how that happens as it goes along, for instance when it first feels pain, essentially step-by-step how foetus was developed over time.
- We'd also similarly like to hear expert evidence on the precise mechanisms of abortion, as in the different ways of doing it, what time this different treatments become preferable.
- In terms of law we have two things we'd like to know; one has been mentioned already; father's rights the legal position the father's rights to perhaps object.
- At what stage under the law does a miscarriage become a dead child, so say the issue of birth certificates, death certificates coroner's investigations. Essentially where in Irish law is a child considered an unborn versus a baby at different points along the pregnancy spectrum. What is the rationale for that and perhaps the difference and points in law at which a pregnancy is treated differently?