



CampusEngage

Network for the Promotion
of Civic Engagement
in Irish Higher Education

Engaged Research Case Study Template

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| Project Title (8 words max) | Including citizens in discussions over constitutional reform |
| Project synopsis (100 words max) Please give a very short description of the societal challenge, the action taken, and the intended/ achieved result. | <p>This project, “We the Citizens”, involved taking a citizens’ assembly approach to including citizens in discussions over constitutional reform in order to renew citizens’ trust in politics during a time of social and economic crisis in Ireland. The objective of this project was to help to renew democracy and to contribute towards the restoration of trust in public life, at a time of social and economic crisis in Ireland. Using a citizens’ assembly approach to facilitate deliberate forums, the project was designed to explore whether or not citizens could benefit from coming together in new ways of public decision-making. The initiative provided clear evidence that, given access to balanced expert information and sufficient time, a randomly selected group of people could make reasoned decisions on important social and political issues. The project was based on the hypothesis that, by taking part in facilitated citizens’ assemblies, a randomly selected group of participants could increase their interest and enthusiasm for political engagement. The project demonstrated that after the Citizens’ Assembly, participants showed greater interest in politics and also more willingness to discuss and become more involved in politics. Participants felt more positive about the ability of ordinary people to influence politics.</p> |
| University: | University College Dublin |
| Engaged Research Partners (civic, civil society organisations, Social enterprises, public or professional service or product users, policy makers, members of the public). | <p>Public Citizens of Ireland Taoiseach and Tánaiste, and the leaders of each political party in Ireland</p> |
| Engagement (research method or activity) (100 words max) | <p>The project, which operated throughout 2011, consisted of the establishment of a new entity “We the Citizens” with a fully staffed HQ in Dawson Street. A series of seven public events were organised across the country, designed to give ordinary citizens an opportunity to discuss their vision of a citizen-centred Ireland. The topics discussed informed the agenda of Ireland’s first national citizens’ assembly (CA). Underlying this was a survey-experiment to measure the impact on the citizens. The results were presented to the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and other party leaders to persuade them of the merits of this approach to citizen engagement. The</p> |



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Project outputs and outcomes: (600 words max)

Please describe briefly the target audience and activities that occurred and short terms results.

This information could include:

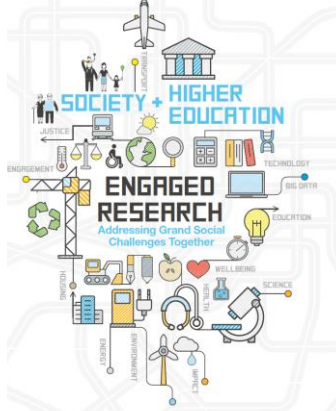
- who you worked with;
- issue to be addressed
- what actions you took;
- the geographical location;
- any shorter-term outcomes or changes in local situation and circumstances, knowledge and skills attitudes or behaviour, policy, practice, organisational development etc, decision-making.

The outputs are as follows:

- The successful establishment of Ireland’s first ever citizens’ assembly in 2011, a deliberative mini-public.
- The adoption of the same method by the state in the creation of the Irish Constitutional Convention (2012-14), which went on to make over 40 recommendations for institutional and constitutional reform, many of which were accepted by the state (notably the successful marriage equality referendum, and most recently the blasphemy referendum))
- The adoption of the same method again in 2016 with the creation of the Irish Citizens’ Assembly (which operated till early 2018), which again resulted in a series of recommendations, one of which -- repeal of the 8th amendment (on abortion) – also resulted in a successful referendum in June 2018.
- Prof Farrell was appointed as the Research Director of the Irish Constitutional Convention and the Research Leader of Irish Citizens’ Assembly
- Subsequent funding received from the Department of Taoiseach (to support Prof Farrell’s work with the Convention) and the Irish Research Council (to support Prof Farrell’s work with the Assembly)
- Academic outputs included 11 jointly authored publications to date (two other papers under considerations; and four other papers being prepared for submission).

The outcomes are as follows:

- Large scale Dáil reform in 2016 (as recommended by the Convention)
- Four referendums (marriage equality, presidential age, abortion, blasphemy), three of which were successful
- Other referendums promised within the next year (on the role of women, voting age, votes for citizens’ abroad)
- Analysis of survey data gathered after the marriage equality referendum vote in 2015 indicated that knowledge of the Constitutional Convention was a factor in influencing the Yes vote.
- A similar analysis of survey data gathered after the abortion referendum vote in 2018 also found that knowledge of the CA was a factor in influencing the Yes vote.



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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are fresh calls for a third citizens’ assembly. • Ireland is seen as a beacon internationally in its use of deliberative citizens’ assemblies in this way. |
| <p>Longer term anticipated areas for Impact (Choose from below):</p> <p>Economic Policy & Public Service Societal Engagement Health & Wellbeing Professional services Environmental New knowledge Human Capacity</p> | <p>Social & Cultural Policy and/or Product Development Capacity Building</p> |
| <p>Funding source:</p> | <p>Atlantic Philanthropies</p> |
| <p>For more information contact:</p> <p> </p> | <p>Professor David Farrell (UCD) UCD Impact Case study available at: http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/CASE_STUDY8_David%20Farrell.pdf www.wethecitizens.ie</p> |