

Title	'Puny' or influencers? Evaluating quantitative indicators of committee effectiveness in the Oireachtas committee system of the 33rd Dáil
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Publication date	2025-12-30
Original Citation	Lawlor, D. 2025. 'Puny' or influencers? Evaluating quantitative indicators of committee effectiveness in the Oireachtas committee system of the 33rd Dáil. MRes Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Masters thesis (Research)
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Download date	2026-10-31 03:48:49
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/19445



MRes Government and Public Policy

‘Puny’ or influencers? Evaluating quantitative indicators of committee effectiveness in the Oireachtas committee system of the 33rd Dáil

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The thesis is submitted to University College Cork in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Research (MRes) in Government and Public Policy in the Department of Government and Politics

30 December 2025

Abstract

Parliamentary committee effectiveness is a contested and difficult concept to define and measure. Various measurement strategies, frameworks, and models have been developed across different jurisdictions. Most focus on a narrow range of outputs and outcomes, particularly the extent to which Governments accept and implement committee report recommendations. However, all approaches are subject to varying degrees of subjectivity, imprecision, and comparability challenges. While quantitative analysis can identify relationships and patterns, establishing causation remains considerably more difficult. This study provides a quantitative assessment of Oireachtas committee activity during the 33rd Dáil. Adopting the view that committee effectiveness is multidimensional, it evaluates four sets of complementary input, output and outcome metrics relating to meeting utilisation, activity and reporting, member participation, and media visibility. The strengths, limitations and interrelationships of each metric set are examined using comparative empirical data. Combining these dimensions, the study develops a *Composite Performance Framework* to facilitate comparative assessment across the committee system. The findings demonstrate that committee rankings vary significantly depending on the metric selected and the assumptions applied. While no single measure provides a definitive assessment of effectiveness, the results show that combining multiple metrics can provide a structured and meaningful basis for evaluating committee performance, which may contribute to assessments of committee effectiveness. The study concludes that considerable caution should be exercised when interpreting individual metrics or rankings in isolation, particularly where they may inform significant structural, administrative, or operational decisions within parliamentary committee systems.

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Glossary

Names of committees of the 33rd Dáil (where acronyms or short form is used in the text)

AFM	Agriculture, Food, and the Marine
BOC	Budgetary Oversight
CEDIY	Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
CSODR	(Committee on) Standing Orders and Dáil Reform
DM	Disability Matters
ECA	Environment and Climate Action
EFHERIS	Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
ETE	Enterprise, Trade and Employment
EUA	EU Affairs
FAD	Foreign Affairs and Defence
FPERT	Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach
Gaeilge	Coiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge Irish Language, Gaeltacht, and the Irish-speaking Community
G. Equality	Gender Equality
HLGH	Housing, Local Government and Heritage
IFGA	Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement
PAC	(Committee on) Public Accounts
Petitions	Public Petitions and the Ombudsmen
SPCRDI	Social Protection, Community and Rural Development, and the Islands
Surrogacy	International Surrogacy
T&C	Transport and Communications
TCASM	Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media
Travellers	Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community

1. Introduction

As is common in anglophone parliaments in the Westminster tradition, the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) has faced a key institutional impediment to its operation since its establishment, namely a historically dominant executive branch with tight control over the conduct of plenary business. The long-established permanence of this hierarchical executive dominance over the “puny parliament” (Chubb, 1992) persisted, though the “long laments for the decline of parliament” (Hindmoor *et al.*, 2009) were not uniquely heard in Ireland. As with other parliaments in the tradition, the Oireachtas today has evolved to provide a more consensus-focused, visible, specialist, and transparent public forum within which parliamentarians can scrutinise government policy and contribute to parliament's oversight and accountability functions more independent of Government. This is, however, a relatively recent development.

The role of the committee system in this change is fundamental to understanding this evolution. The roots of the modern system date to the 27th Dáil (1992-1997) with the introduction in 1993 of a new network of select and joint committees shadowing Government departments described as “probably the single greatest change in the way that the Oireachtas conducted its business since the foundation of the State” (Kelly, 1998: v). Introducing the new system, the then Minister of State at the Department of An Taoiseach, Noel Dempsey T.D., purposefully highlighted the “potential it gave for each Deputy to influence departmental legislation and spending” (Oireachtas, 1993). Though the system was expanded and embedded further in the 28th Dáil (1997-2002), capacity to influence was curtailed by the continued dominance of the executive. The 2008-2010 economic crisis proved an inflection point for both Houses of the Oireachtas (Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann) to assert more control over the long-established institutional norms and recalibrate authority through a series of parliamentary reform (or ‘Dáil Reform’) measures in the 2010s (Lynch *et al.*, 2017). The scale and size of the committee system has also expanded significantly, evident by reviewing growth in the last 10 years.

TABLE i: STAFFING AND NUMBER OF COMMITTEES, A DECADE OF EXPANSION

	1 January 2015	9 November 2024	Change
No. of staff	57	98	+41 (+72%)
No. of committees	14	22	+8 (+57%)

Source: Author based on internal committee staff charts/lists, excluding vacancies. Refers only to those committees supported by the Committees’ Secretariat. Excludes the two Members’ Interest committees and expired / dissolved special and ad hoc committees.

1.1 Objective and scope of study

Since the mid-1990s, the number of committees and extent of committee activities has expanded significantly. At dissolution of the 33rd Dáil, the 22 committees (14 sectoral, 7 thematic and 1 special) engaged in the following:

- Legislative scrutiny of draft government legislation (PLS), detailed scrutiny of Private Members' Bills (PMBs) and taking of Committee Stage of government Bills.
- Budgetary scrutiny / consideration of government expenditure in the form of the Revised Estimates, the Public Service Performance Report, and Supplementary Estimates.
- Policy examination of elective topics to provide a public forum for discussion and influence government policymaking.
- Examination of and reporting on recommendations of Citizen's Assemblies.
- Oversight of government, Departments and Agencies to ensure public accountability and transparency of their governance.

Considering this expansion, ensuring that the parliamentary committee system can adapt to emerging challenges, including changing member expectations, political fragmentation, and disinformation, requires a better understanding of the factors that support or hinder committee performance. However, limited empirical research has examined Oireachtas committee performance using comparative data.

Developing a comparative framework for assessing parliamentary committee effectiveness would be beneficial to officials seeking to allocate limited resources more efficiently. Such a framework could support more consistent administrative practices and facilitate evidence-informed decision-making across the committee system. This study focuses on measurable indicators of committee activity and performance derived from extensive empirical committee data. It proceeds from the assumption that committee effectiveness is multidimensional and cannot be adequately captured or directly observed through a single metric or measure. Effectiveness, influence, impact, and performance are treated as distinct, though related, concepts. Evidence relevant to committee effectiveness is examined through a range of complementary input, output, and outcome metrics that collectively provide evidence of how committees have performed their legislative, scrutiny, oversight, and accountability functions over a given period. It focuses on *observable* indicators of committee activity, performance, and outcomes derived from committee proceedings and administrative data. It does not seek to assess party-political effectiveness, ideological influence, committee leadership quality, witness quality, private committee deliberations, or informal interactions between committees and

Ministers, or other stakeholder groups. While these factors may influence committee effectiveness, they are difficult to observe systematically and fall beyond the scope of the available quantitative evidence examined in this study. To bring the observable dimensions together, the study develops a *Composite Performance Framework*, which combines multiple metrics to provide a structured and comparative assessment of committee performance that may be used as evidence when assessing committee effectiveness.

1.2 Thesis design and structure

This section outlines the structure of the thesis. The chapters progress from a review of the literature and methodology to the analysis of quantitative evidence, culminating in the development of a *Composite Performance Framework* designed to support comparative assessment of committee effectiveness.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature, examining parliamentary committees in the Westminster tradition, existing reviews of the Oireachtas committee system, and competing approaches to defining and assessing committee effectiveness. The chapter establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundations for the study.

Chapter 3 builds on this literature by setting out the research methodology. It explains the study's research design, data sources, sampling strategy, and analytical approach, and outlines the rationale for selecting the four metric sets examined throughout the thesis.

Chapter 4 presents and analyses the quantitative evidence. It examines each metric set in turn, identifying patterns, correlations, areas of convergence, and points of divergence across the committee system.

Chapter 5 presents the principal findings and demonstrates that different quantitative indicators produce markedly different assessments of committee performance. These results reinforce the argument that committee effectiveness is multidimensional and cannot be adequately assessed through a single measure in isolation.

Chapter 6 considers the role of qualitative evidence and argues that any meaningful assessment of committee effectiveness should combine quantitative indicators of performance with qualitative insights capable of capturing context, influence, and institutional nuance.

Finally, Chapter 7 develops a *Composite Performance Framework* that integrates the various quantitative indicators examined throughout the study. The chapter demonstrates how these metrics can be combined to provide a structured, transparent, and replicable comparative assessment of committee performance, while acknowledging the limitations, assumptions, and potential sources of subjectivity that accompany any assessment of committee effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

‘Effective’ committees strengthen democratic governance, though their impact depends on many factors, including resourcing, engagement, and responsiveness of government. Assessment of these factors, though insightful metrics, is therefore essential to understand how committees fulfil (or have fulfilled) this role. However, to paraphrase Gaines *et al.* (2019), proving that parliamentary committees really matter is not simple. To establish a robust evidence-based foundation, this literature review examines the rationale for metric selection and evaluation, as well as broader approaches to assessing effectiveness, organised around two core themes informed by McKenna (2011). The first covers the theoretical background to parliamentary committees as an offspring institution of parliament, including their democratic importance, particularly vis-à-vis a strong executive, and their purpose. The second examines the issue of measuring effectiveness and challenges related to this. This study adopts a cautious approach to effectiveness claims. Where possible it distinguishes between activity, outputs, outcomes and impact, recognising that these concepts are not synonymous.

2.1 Irish-specific committee reviews

The sole review of the Oireachtas committee system is the so-called “Laver Report” from 1997, a comprehensive study completed by Professors Michael Laver, Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh of Trinity College, Dublin. It led directly to the select committee system being codified in standing orders in 1997. A separate review¹ of the impact of pre-legislative scrutiny (PLS), a key function of Joint Committees wherein they scrutinise draft government legislation, was published in December 2017 and was prepared for the Oireachtas Library and Research Service (Martin, 2017). A review of the impact of Private Members’ legislation also prepared for the Library and Research Service was published in June 2024 (Weeks, 2024) and further developed in 2026 (Weeks, 2026).

2.2 Parliamentary committees: Basis and functions

As Huntington (1996) observes, parliamentary institutions are a defining feature of modern representative democracy. Parliament, as the primary representative² institution of the State, occupies a central position within the political system, serving as the principal arena for political debate, law-making, and governmental accountability. As McKenna (2011) notes, it represents the “key locus for the operation of politics”, while new institutionalist scholars

¹ Martin (2017).

² Since a government is one step removed from the electorate, technically speaking. In Ireland, the Taoiseach is nominated by the Dáil who, if / when appointed by the President of Ireland, then nominates a cabinet of Ministers for appointment by the President.

emphasise its role in shaping the incentives, behaviour, and interactions of political actors (Steinmo, 2001). A fundamental characteristic of parliamentary democracy is the relationship between parliament and the executive. While government typically dominates legislative agendas and policy development, parliament is tasked with scrutinising executive action, authorising public expenditure, and holding Ministers to account. This inherent tension is not a weakness of parliamentary systems but one of their defining features, providing an important check on the concentration of political power. However, the existence of parliament alone does not resolve the imbalance that can emerge between the legislature and executive. Large memberships, procedural complexity, limited time, and competing priorities can constrain parliament's capacity to scrutinise government effectively. Consequently, modern parliaments frequently rely on committees as more specialised and flexible mechanisms through which detailed scrutiny, investigation, and accountability can be undertaken.

A strong committee system redresses this imbalance while also, or perhaps because of, resolving the problems faced by full plenary sessions of parliament for several often-cited reasons, including that a committee system encourages specialisation of member expertise and facilitates members in undertaking simultaneous tasks, detailed consideration of policy and legislation, and independent examinations with external stakeholder groups ('witnesses'). As described by Hawes (1993: 167) committees act as a "multi-dimensional instrument for evaluating and improving policy making". Committees also face a less formal and less adversarial environment with a focus on consensus reporting, and face fewer time constraints, while also presenting valuable opportunities for government 'backbenchers' to contribute on an equal parity with other members. Committees, therefore, may be described as the essential lubricant in parliamentary administration, representing sub-units of the parliament with delegated authority and fewer procedural restrictions. The necessity and usefulness of committees as more agile vehicles for the efficient undertaking of parliamentary work is therefore well established. As surmised by Martin (2011), referencing Strøm (1998), committees are not only the "most significant internal organisational feature of parliament" but also "a minimum requirement for parliaments to have influence in terms of executive-legislative relations".

Committee functions may be classified as either *decisional* i.e., functions associated with parliamentary decision-making and delegated to committees, e.g., consideration of expenditure, committee stage of legislation, etc., or *non-decisional* i.e., functions not associated with decision-making e.g., policy examinations, public accountability, etc. (Aldons 2000, Shaw 1979). Over

time, the committee role has evolved from a narrow information collection, screening³, and weak⁴ ‘policing’ stance aimed at fulfilling parliament’s fundamental oversight and accountability functions ensuring ministers and accountable persons are subject to close monitoring and public scrutiny, to a far broader ‘influencer’ or public legitimisation role with an increasingly standalone stance, proactively requesting independent research and analysis to inform members and input to / hold public debates, and publish detailed reports containing recommendations for ministerial action. Using Shaw’s (1997) and Aldons (2000) classification, this increasingly diverse and multifunctional role is based (mostly) on an expansion of non-decisional functions, notably policy analysis and development.

This evolution is unsurprising. Modern politics is tumultuous and increasingly fractious, impacted by declining trust in political institutions, disruption of traditional political parties and coalitions, dwindling levels of institutional deference, movement away from the mainstream to ideological and political fringes, growing levels of voter cynicism and disconnection, a widening public-State expectations gap, and the increasing heterogeneity of social groups. These factors have contributed to a legitimacy crisis for Governments, boosting demand for consensus and open forms of public participation, as well the need for increasingly fragmented and ideologically diverse coalition parties to ‘monitor’ each other within both Government and the parliamentary arenas (Strøm *et al.*, 2010). Thus, while the primary relationship remains that between the committee and the executive via the relevant Government Departments, or State bodies, increasingly committees are satisfying demand for more deliberative democracy, engaging directly and transparently with stakeholder representative groups in the public eye and reporting back to the parliament and Government. The evolution is supported by a series of parliamentary reform measures, with more technocratic, committee-led, solution-orientated design thinking being implemented to, in theory, enhance parliament’s resilience and effectiveness. Empirically, however, there is scant evidence that parliamentary committees are themselves performing ‘effectively’. As Gaines *et al.* (2019: 331) state “Committees are ubiquitous, so they must be important. But how important? And, when, where, and why do they shape policy outcomes substantially? The answers to these questions are not easily found”.

³ Among other roles, this may include public engagements with cathaoirleach designate / top-level appointments.

⁴ As reflected in a study by Zubek (2021), parliamentary committees in the Westminster tradition including Ireland are both historically (‘especially until the 1990s’) and currently weaker in terms of ‘policing strength’ relative to other Western and Eastern European counterparts.

2.2.1 Parliamentary committees in Westminster model parliaments

Articulated by Lijphart (1984, 1999), Sartori (2009) and others, the Westminster model refers principally to the parliamentary system of the United Kingdom and those systems heavily influenced by British constitutional traditions, including Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and several Caribbean states. However, the precise attributes of the model remain contested. Considerable institutional variation exists across these jurisdictions, and many exhibit hybrid characteristics that depart from traditional Westminster norms. In their review of 168 academic texts, Russell and Serban (2020) found a strong association between the Westminster model and parliamentarism but concluded that the concept has become increasingly fluid and difficult to define in the twenty-first century, describing it as a "moveable feast" (Russell and Serban, 2020: 13). Nonetheless, Westminster systems continue to share several common institutional characteristics, including strong executive Government, party discipline and a tendency to prioritise plenary activity over committee activity.

This latter characteristic is reflected in Aldons' (2000) description of Westminster legislatures as "arena parliaments", where parliamentary chambers rather than committees remain the focal point of legislative activity. Committees consequently operate within a broader parliamentary structure that continues to be centred on plenary proceedings. At the same time, committees may themselves function as smaller policy arenas, allowing members to specialise, undertake detailed scrutiny and engage more directly with stakeholders (Gaines et al., 2019). Saalfeld (2000) further argues that committee specialisation can help address information asymmetries between Governments and legislators by developing policy expertise within parliament. However, specialisation also creates new agency problems, including differences in knowledge and influence between committee members and non-members, and between parliamentary parties and individual legislators.

Importantly, the institutional characteristics of Westminster systems are not always conducive to strong committee influence. Certain shared features may, in practice, constrain committee activity. Most significant is the concentration of power within the executive branch at the expense of the legislature. Russell and Serban (2020: 7), for example, identify executive dominance as one of the defining attributes of the Westminster model. A related consequence may be a reduced willingness by Governments to engage with committee feedback mechanisms, including formal responses to committee reports and recommendations (White, 2015a; Aldons, 2001a). However, caution is required when drawing comparisons between Westminster systems. Shared institutional origins do not necessarily produce similar committee systems or identical outcomes. While comparative research demonstrates similarities in the historically limited scrutiny capacity of both the Irish and UK parliaments, particularly before the 1990s

(Zubek, 2020), important differences also exist. The development of effective parliamentary oversight depends not only on institutional design but also on political incentives, available resources and broader constitutional culture.

In the Irish case, fragmented opposition parties and long periods of strong majority Government reduced incentives to strengthen parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms. Meaningful committee reform did not occur until the establishment of the sectoral committee system in the early 1990s and was arguably not accelerated until the programme of Dáil reforms introduced following the financial crisis in the 2010s. This contrasts with the United Kingdom, where departmental select committees were established in 1979 (Kelly and Uberoi, 2023), providing a considerably longer period over which committee powers and practices could develop.

2.3 Measuring effectiveness of parliamentary committees: A fool's errand?

Assessing parliamentary committee effectiveness presents significant conceptual and methodological challenges. Although effectiveness is a highly subjective concept, it is generally associated with impactful, successful, consequential, or influential committee activity. Despite extensive academic attention, little evidence exists that any single measure of effectiveness is capable of providing a complete or definitive assessment. As a result, studies of committee effectiveness are frequently accompanied by warnings regarding the difficulty of the task. Aldons (2000) argues that measuring committee impact is "virtually impossible" given the large number of indirect and non-decisional functions performed by committees. Similarly, Sarangan (2020) describes measuring committee efficacy as a "mammoth" and often near-impossible undertaking.

One response to this challenge has been to narrow the definition of effectiveness to observable policy influence. This has led many studies to focus on the extent to which committee recommendations are accepted and implemented by Government. James (2009: 166) refers to this as the "Government response approach", which evaluates effectiveness through policy change, agenda-setting, or other identifiable outcomes resulting from committee reports. However, this approach does not fully capture the breadth of committee activity. Committees perform a wide range of legislative, scrutiny, accountability, consultative and administrative functions, many of which have indirect or non-decisional effects. A committee may therefore be regarded as operating effectively by successfully carrying out its assigned functions, even where it cannot demonstrate a clear influence on public policy.

As Shaw (1998) notes:

"An effective committee in a legislature is one that has a significant independent impact on public affairs."

Yet, as Giddings (1989) observes:

"No easy measure of their achievements or effectiveness ... is possible, given the imprecise nature of such objectives."

A second approach relies on qualitative evaluation. This typically involves gathering perceptions, experiences and feedback from stakeholders, including committee members, parliamentary officials, witnesses and external observers. Such approaches seek to address weaknesses associated with purely quantitative methods and provide a more comprehensive assessment of committee effectiveness. Hawes (1993: 167) argues that qualitative evidence can add "depth and leaven" to an evaluation that might otherwise rely excessively on numerical indicators. Nevertheless, substantial disagreement remains regarding both the definition of effectiveness and the most appropriate means of measuring it. Thomas (1993) famously argued that:

"The effectiveness of parliamentary committees is largely in the eye of the beholder."

Similarly, Lindell (2004) notes that assessments of effectiveness inevitably involve subjective judgments about the quality and significance of committee achievements, particularly where influence is indirect and difficult to observe. Consequently, few studies attempt to classify committees as simply effective or ineffective. Instead, most evaluate effectiveness along a spectrum, recognising the strengths and limitations of different methodological approaches. Quantitative and qualitative measures are commonly combined to provide a more balanced assessment, with findings typically presented as indicative rather than definitive.

Reviewing 32 published studies of committee effectiveness, Figure 1 illustrates the relative prevalence of the different measures employed. Tracking committee report recommendations remains the dominant approach, appearing in 77 per cent of studies and accounting for 48 per cent of all effectiveness measures identified. However, correlation analysis comparing use of this measure against year of publication produces a result of -0.65, suggesting that reliance on recommendation tracking has declined over time as researchers increasingly adopt broader and more multidimensional approaches to assessing committee effectiveness.

FIGURE 1: MEASURES OF COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS IN THE LITERATURE – THE DATA

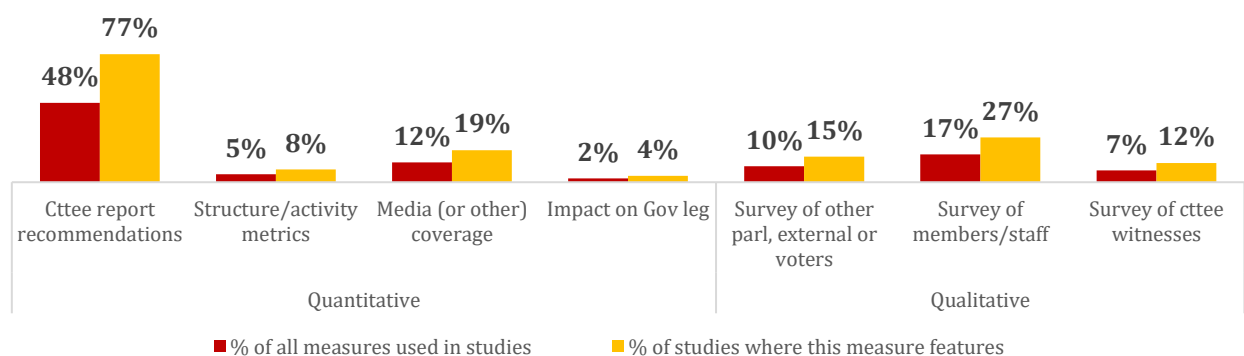


Table 1 provides an in-depth summary of the various measures referenced in a selection of the literature.

TABLE 1: MEASURES OF COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS IN THE LITERATURE – A SELECTION

Nature of study	Effectiveness measure	Qual., Quant. or Both	Author(s)
<i>Evaluation of committee effectiveness in influencing Government decisions</i>	Tracking rate of acceptance of report recommendations by Government	Quant.	Aldons (2000)
<i>Committee influence</i>	Quantitative: Tracking rate of acceptance of report recommendations by Government. Qualitative: Survey of committee members, civil servants, ministerial special advisors.	Mixed	Hindmoor <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<i>Determining (a) elements of committee effectiveness and (b) a framework of issues which determine effectiveness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparative review of committee structure and activities for a purposeful sample of four committees focusing on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Activity level measures e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of agenda subject slots. ▪ Number of individual items considered. ▪ Percentage of committee agenda subject slots. ▪ Duration of meetings. ▪ Number of agenda occurrences. ○ Reporting data ○ Powers (as included in Terms or Orders of Reference, and Standing Orders) ▪ Semi-structured interviews focused on benchmarking review information against practices in other parliaments. 	Mixed	McKenna (2011)
<i>Assessing the impact of committees on departmental policy</i>	Quantitative: Matrix of metrics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial categorisation issue type (administrative, technical / scientific, economic), mode of committee, and intervention point. ▪ Input score and citation (witnesses, supporting memoranda, technical appendices, and written submissions (published/unpublished) from (a) ministers/Gov Depts., (b) quangos/official agencies, (c) self-interest groups, (d) pressure groups, and (e) independent experts) ▪ Government responses to report recommendations (5-point scale from positive acceptance and action to outright rejection) Quantitative: Stakeholder surveys (committee members, backbenchers, advisers, independent experts, self-interested, pressure groups)	Mixed	Hawes (1993)
<i>Media visibility (public perception of committees)</i>	Quantitative: Press coverage measured by counting mentions of select committees, 2008-2012.	Quant.	Dunleavy <i>et al.</i> (2013)

<i>Measuring effectiveness</i>	Quantitative: Tracking rate of acceptance of report recommendations by Government. Qualitative: Survey of committee members, civil servants, ministerial special advisors.	Mixed	Tolley (2009)
<i>Impact of parliamentary committee inquiries on Government</i>	Qualitative: 40 interviews, roundtables, and informal meetings with internal (staff, members, cathaoirligh, witnesses) and external stakeholders.	Qual.	White (2015a)
<i>The Policy Impact of House of Commons Select Committees</i>	Quantitative: Tracking rate of acceptance of report recommendations by Government	Quant.	Russell <i>et al.</i> (2011)
<i>Performing procedural minimum or effective scrutiny (through 'substantial' amendments of Government Bills)</i>	Quantitative: Analysing 'substantial' committee amendments to Government bills (defined as amendments changing the 'impact', 'scope' and 'content of proposed policy') i.e. the extent to which committees utilise amendment powers and therefore directly exerting committee influence on Government bills.	Quant.	Bektaş (2023)
<i>The Impact of Bill Committees / Legislative scrutiny by committees</i>	Quantitative: Analysing the number, content and time spend scrutinising committee amendments and ministerial undertaking / responses over the period 2000-2010. Qualitative: Interviews with parliamentarians focused on general impressions of Bill committees.	Mixed	Thompson (2013)
<i>Effectiveness of parliamentary committees</i>	Quantitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of reports published. ▪ Number of meetings held. ▪ Attendance rates of committee members and overall. ▪ Tracking rate of acceptance of report recommendations by Government. Qualitative: Committee member perceptions of committee impact.	Mixed	Saranagan (2020)
<i>Government responses to parliamentary committee inquiries</i>	Quantitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tracking of committee report recommendations ▪ Public participation ▪ Effective exposure of issues ▪ initiation of long-term change 	Mixed	James (2009)

Source: Author.

What is quickly noticeable from this selection is the dominance of a mixed methods approach in the literature, with fewer examples of quantitative-only approaches, and fewer examples still of qualitative-only approaches. This review suggests a majority view exists in the literature that either (a) balanced, mixed-method approaches are preferred, or (b) fatal flaws exist in leveraging either quantitative or qualitative-only approaches to draw accurate, and actionable evaluation of committee effectiveness. Taken together, the literature suggests that quantitative metrics may contribute to assessments of effectiveness, but no individual measure can provide a definitive assessment of committee effectiveness in isolation.

2.4 Unquantifiable impediments to assessing committee effectiveness

At the highest level, committee systems vary considerably, even among legislatures operating within the Westminster tradition. While sharing many common structural features, committees differ in their powers, functions, resources and political environments, meaning that their operation is heavily influenced by the institutional and political context of each jurisdiction (Sarangan, 2020).

In their influential study of select committee influence in the UK Parliament, Russell et al. (2011) caution that reliance on quantitative evidence alone can provide an incomplete, and potentially misleading, account of committee influence. Quantitative indicators may both overstate and understate committee achievements depending on the measure selected and the context in which it is applied (Russell et al., 2011: 79).

Consequently, while quantitative analysis provides valuable comparative evidence, it cannot fully capture the institutional, political and behavioural factors that contribute to committee effectiveness. An exclusive focus on quantitative measures risks privileging activity over impact and outputs over context. For this reason, any assessment of committee effectiveness should recognise the limitations of numerical indicators and the importance of qualitative evidence.

Building on the work of White (2015) and Russell et al. (2011), six dimensions of committee effectiveness can be identified that are difficult to quantify but may nevertheless be important indicators of committee influence:

1. The ability to contribute meaningfully to policy debates.
2. The ability to influence Government policy priorities.
3. The ability to broker or facilitate policy compromise.
4. The ability to hold Government to account.
5. The ability to expose policy or administrative failure.
6. The ability to influence behaviour through the anticipation of scrutiny.

2.4.1 Factor 1: Ability (of a committee) to contribute well to policy debates

The ability of a committee to contribute meaningfully to policy debates is difficult to quantify and has at least two distinct dimensions. The first relates to participation within formal committee proceedings, while the second concerns the broader role of committees in shaping policy discussions outside the committee room. Within public meetings, contribution is most readily measured through attendance and participation in questioning. However, such measures are inherently limited. While it is possible to identify whether a member has engaged by asking at least one question, the quality and relevance of that contribution cannot easily be

quantified. Questions may be insightful and directly relevant to the subject under discussion, relevant but repetitive of points already made by other members, or tangential to the committee's objectives. Repetition may reflect poor coordination among members, but it may equally arise from the practical realities of parliamentary life, including competing committee schedules and plenary commitments.

Beyond formal meetings, committees frequently serve as vehicles for initiating, shaping, or sustaining wider policy debates. Although committees agree annual work programmes, they retain considerable discretion to amend their priorities as circumstances change. Topics may be added, deferred, or prioritised in response to emerging policy issues, significant public controversies, or political developments within a committee's remit. In practice, both committee members and the Cathaoirleach (committee chair) play an important role in ensuring that committees remain responsive to these developments and continue to contribute to broader policy discussions.

2.4.2 Factor 2: Ability to alter Government policy priorities

The ability of a committee to influence Government policy is among the more quantifiable dimensions of committee effectiveness. The most common measure in this regard is the tracking of committee report recommendations against ministerial responses and subsequent Government actions, including implementation. However, as Russell et al. (2011) demonstrate through qualitative analysis, the likelihood of a recommendation being accepted is influenced by a range of contextual factors beyond the committee's control. These include the stage of the policy process at which recommendations are made, the type of action proposed, the extent to which implementation would require a departure from existing Government policy, the political salience of the policy area, and the party affiliation of the committee Cathaoirleach.

Russell et al. (2011) found that recommendations are most likely to be accepted where they:

- Relate to policy areas that have received limited Government attention or are of relatively low political salience.
- Primarily seek additional information, disclosure, or clarification rather than major policy reform.
- Require only minor changes to existing policy or administrative practice.
- Are limited in scope or largely consistent with the Government's existing policy direction.

These findings suggest that assessments of committee influence based solely on the implementation of recommendations should be treated with caution. A recommendation may be accepted because it aligns with an existing Government preference rather than because the

committee itself influenced the outcome. Equally, recommendations proposing significant policy change may be rejected despite representing substantial and effective committee scrutiny. In the absence of a comprehensive and standardised Government response mechanism, it is often difficult to establish whether implementation occurred because of a committee's intervention or for reasons unrelated to it. Consequently, recommendation implementation should be viewed as an indicator of potential committee influence rather than definitive evidence of committee effectiveness.

2.4.3 Factor 3: Ability to broker in policy disputes and provide expert evidence

Committees act as useful conduits for identifying policy gaps and disputes in a transparent and open way, particularly relative to the 'closed shop' or backroom policymaking of Government Departments. Though Departments may engage in public consultations, this does not necessarily mean that the regulatory or policy impact of the proposals, even in draft or 'revised draft' form has been subject to sufficient public scrutiny. For example, a committee engaging in PLS of draft Government legislation may invite and hear from stakeholders, experts, and interest/advocacy groups the Department has already engaged with, but the highly public forum, usually a series of public meetings, may provide additional findings that were not evident at the other early consultative stages in the legislative drafting process. With the opening statements, transcript, and submissions available publicly on the committee webpage (within 1-3 weeks), it may also be the case that the Department does not see it as necessary to wait several additional weeks for the committee to formally report on the outcome i.e. for the PLS process to formally conclude, to begin acting upon the (likely) committee recommendations.⁵

2.4.4 Factor 4: Ability to hold Government to account

Scrutiny of Government policy, public expenditure, and the administration of the State is a core function of modern parliaments. Parliamentary committees play an important role in this regard by providing structured forums through which Ministers, public officials, and other stakeholders can be examined in public. Committees are empowered by the Houses to seek evidence, receive submissions, question witnesses, and report their findings to Parliament. In doing so, they contribute to transparency, accountability, and informed public debate, acting as an important institutional check on executive power.

⁵ In a March 2024 internal review of the PLS Protocol (agreed between government and the Houses of the Oireachtas) arising from changes to Dáil standing Order 174A, it was evident that in a minority of cases, Departments published a Bill before the PLS process concluded i.e. the committee report published.

However, the effectiveness of committees in performing this role cannot be considered in isolation from the wider political and administrative environment in which they operate. In parliamentary systems such as Ireland's, the executive and legislature are closely interconnected, creating both opportunities and constraints for committee scrutiny. Consequently, committees must balance robust oversight with the practical realities of maintaining constructive working relationships with Government Departments and public bodies.

From an administrative perspective, committee secretariats interact regularly with departmental officials to facilitate core committee functions, including legislative scrutiny, financial scrutiny, and policy examination. Effective committees must therefore maintain their independence from executive influence while simultaneously fostering the professional relationships necessary to undertake their work efficiently. The ability to achieve this balance is an important, though often overlooked, component of committee effectiveness.

2.4.5 Factor 5: Ability to expose failure

A closely related dimension of committee effectiveness is the ability to identify and expose wrongdoing, systemic weaknesses, poor governance, policy failures, or corruption through parliamentary scrutiny. Such examinations are intended to strengthen public accountability and transparency. In practice, this function is often reactive, as committees typically require a clear rationale for undertaking a detailed examination outside the priorities already identified in their annual work programme.

The capacity to expose failure varies across committees. Within the Westminster tradition, Public Accounts Committees are generally better resourced than other committees and often benefit from close engagement with national audit institutions, such as the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in Ireland. This provides them with significant advantages when undertaking detailed ex post scrutiny of Government expenditure and administration.

Other committees also possess substantial evidence-gathering powers and can conduct robust scrutiny exercises. While such examinations may occur less frequently, it is now well established that major policy failures, controversial decisions, or governance concerns are likely to be examined by the relevant parliamentary committee. Consequently, the prospect of committee scrutiny acts as an important accountability mechanism across Government and the wider public sector.

The impact of this scrutiny is not experienced equally by all stakeholders. Public bodies, regulators, representative organisations and private sector actors may vary considerably in their familiarity with parliamentary processes and committee procedures. For those less

accustomed to parliamentary scrutiny, the reputational risks associated with a committee appearance may be particularly significant.

The effectiveness of this form of scrutiny also depends on the contribution of individual members. Skilled questioning can reveal inconsistencies, expose weaknesses in decision-making and test the adequacy of explanations offered by witnesses. Members with specialist expertise, ministerial experience, committee leadership experience, or a strong command of the subject matter may be particularly effective in this regard.

However, the ability to expose failure should not be interpreted as proof of committee effectiveness. Rather, it represents one possible manifestation of committee influence and an example of how committees may contribute to public accountability.

2.4.6 Factor 6: Ability to influence behaviour through the anticipation of scrutiny.

The anticipatory effects of parliamentary scrutiny (Russell refers to 'fear') may represent one of the most significant, yet least quantifiable, dimensions of committee influence. Russell et al. (2011) identify this anticipatory effect as potentially the most important impact of committee activity. The prospect of appearing before a parliamentary committee may influence the behaviour of Ministers, senior civil servants, public bodies and other stakeholders long before any formal hearing takes place. This effect is particularly evident in watchdog committees such as the Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) and, to a lesser extent, the Committee on Budgetary Oversight (BOC).

Although accountable persons are generally familiar with parliamentary procedures and are often well prepared for committee engagement, public hearings inevitably involve a degree of uncertainty. While invitations typically define the scope of discussion, committee proceedings cannot be entirely controlled once a meeting begins. Witnesses may face unexpected lines of questioning, and the Cathaoirleach's role in maintaining relevance and procedural order becomes particularly important.

The appearance of Angela Kerins before the PAC in February 2014, and the subsequent Supreme Court litigation, illustrated the potential consequences of committee scrutiny extending beyond its intended scope. More recently, the RTÉ payments controversy demonstrated the sustained public and political attention that parliamentary committee hearings can generate. These examples underline the reputational and institutional risks that may accompany committee appearances. While the aftermath of the Kerins case led to concerns about a potential "chilling effect" on robust parliamentary scrutiny, subsequent guidance and legal clarification have reinforced the importance of committees operating within their Orders

of Reference and the terms of witness invitations. As a result, committees now possess greater clarity regarding the boundaries of legitimate scrutiny.

The principal significance of this factor lies not in what occurs during committee hearings, but in the influence that the prospect of scrutiny exerts on behaviour beforehand. Anticipation of parliamentary examination may encourage more careful decision-making, greater preparedness, enhanced accountability and a stronger focus on governance standards. However, as with the other factors considered in this chapter, the extent of this influence is difficult to observe directly and cannot be readily quantified.

2.4.7 The holistic view of constraints on committee activity and unquantifiable factors

Viewing committee effectiveness through the perspective of four principal stakeholder groups, namely committees themselves, the wider committee system, Ministers and Departments, and the advocacy and policy community, highlights several qualitative factors that are difficult to measure but may significantly influence committee performance. Two factors appear particularly important:

- A. The characteristics of the Cathaoirleach (committee chair); and
- B. The reputation and culture of the committee itself.

The latter is most clearly illustrated by the Committee of Public Accounts (PAC), which has often been described as the "first among equals" within the committee system (Staddon, 2015). More broadly, a committee's effectiveness may be influenced by the architecture of the committee system within which it operates. Parliamentary committee systems are often characterised by institutional stability and gradual change, punctuated by periods of more substantial reform.

The quality of a committee's relationship with relevant Ministers and Government Departments may also affect its ability to perform its functions effectively. Likewise, constructive engagement with stakeholders in the wider policy community, including advocacy groups, representative bodies, researchers and subject-matter experts, can influence a committee's reputation, access to expertise and ability to contribute to policy debates. Table 2 illustrates the relationship between these operational constraints and the broader qualitative dimensions of committee effectiveness. While these factors warrant consideration, they are difficult to measure consistently and are therefore excluded from the formal quantitative evaluation undertaken in this study.

TABLE 2: AN ANALYSIS OF UNQUANTIFIABLE FACTORS

Stakeholder	Conditions (constraints) impacting committee exertion of its functions	Unquantifiable factor					
		Ability to contribute well to policy debates	Ability to alter govt. policy priorities	Ability to broker in policy disputes	Ability to hold govt. to account	Ability to expose failure	Ability to instil fear
Committee (itself)	Background, approach, personality, and experience of the Cathaoirleach of the committee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reputation and culture of the committee itself as a single entity and its membership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Committee system	Ability of the committee system to adapt, learn and evolve	✓	✓		✓	✓	
External (Department / Minister)	Nature and receptiveness of the Department(s) that the committee is shadowing	✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Character of the senior minister(s) and other ministers within the Department	✓	✓				
External (Policy community)	Nature of the wider policy community	✓		✓			
	Nature of the policy agenda	✓		✓			

Source: Author, based on White (2015).

2.5 Distinguishing Performance, Influence, Impact and Effectiveness

The literature reviewed throughout this chapter demonstrates that terms such as effectiveness, impact, influence, and performance are often used interchangeably. However, these are distinct concepts. These concepts and their meaning in this study are as follows:

- **Performance:** Observable committee activity, behaviour, and outputs
- **Influence:** Ability to shape decisions, policy, legislation, or debate
- **Impact:** Observable outcomes resulting from committee activity
- **Effectiveness:** A broader assessment derived from multiple dimensions of performance, influence, and impact.

Building on these distinctions established in this section, this study focuses on observable indicators of committee performance as indicative evidence relevant to an assessment of committee effectiveness.

3. Research Methodology and Metric Selection

Measuring parliamentary committee effectiveness presents significant methodological challenges. This chapter describes how the research design was developed, why particular indicators were chosen while acknowledging the limitations of individual measures, and how the relevant data were collected and analysed. These decisions ultimately provide the empirical foundation for the *Composite Performance Framework* developed later. In doing so, it establishes a transparent and replicable methodological framework capable of supporting a broader assessment of committee effectiveness.

3.1 Research problem

A review of the literature included in Chapter 2 confirms that the effectiveness of parliamentary committees is a highly contested and methodologically challenging subject within legislative studies. No single methodology has emerged as universally accepted, and many suffer from subjectivity and bias problems. Any credible assessment of effectiveness must acknowledge, evaluate and address these problems to, as Hawes (1993) puts it “combine the strengths and correct some of the deficiencies of any one source of data, building in checks and balances and increasing the strength and vigour of our understanding of the impact of committees”. This challenge is particularly evident in the Irish context. Despite the significant expansion of the Oireachtas committee system since the mid-1990s and the growth in committee activity following parliamentary reforms in the 2010s, limited empirical research has sought to evaluate committee effectiveness using large-scale comparative data. Existing Irish studies have instead focused primarily on committee structures, parliamentary reforms, or specific committee functions rather than developing a comprehensive framework capable of comparing committee performance at a system-wide level. Rather than searching for a single definitive measure of effectiveness, the study proceeds from the assumption that committee effectiveness is inherently multidimensional. Consequently, effectiveness is examined through a range of complementary metrics reflecting committee inputs, outputs and outcomes.

The research questions will focus on evaluating potential metrics based on available data and building a standalone methodology for comparability and ranking purposes. The questions are as follows:

1. Which quantitative metrics offer the strongest foundation, based on available data, for evaluating how effectively parliamentary committees fulfil their legislative, oversight, and accountability functions?

2. How can these metrics be systematically integrated into a replicable composite framework (or ranking) of parliamentary committee effectiveness, and how can this framework be further validated and refined to enhance its reliability and robustness?

3.2 Research design

This study adopts a quantitative comparative research design focused on the Oireachtas committee system of the 33rd Dáil. The research is exploratory and evaluative in nature. Rather than testing a specific theory of committee effectiveness, it examines the utility of different empirical performance metrics and the extent to which they produce convergent or divergent assessments of committee effectiveness. The objective is not to compare the formal powers, structures, or remits of committees, but rather to evaluate how effectively committees perform within their existing institutional frameworks.

The research design is informed by two observations arising from the literature. First, no single quantitative measure adequately captures the multidimensional nature of committee effectiveness. Second, existing studies tend to rely on a narrow range of indicators, most commonly the extent to which Governments accept and implement committee recommendations. To address these limitations, the study examines committee effectiveness across four broad dimensions:

1. **Meeting Slot Utilisation:** the extent to which committees utilise the time and resources allocated to them.
2. **Activity, Reporting and Feedback:** committee outputs, including workload, reporting activity, and evidence of Government responsiveness.
3. **Membership, Attendance and Contribution:** member engagement through attendance and participation in committee proceedings.
4. **Media Attention and Visibility:** the public profile of committee activity, measured through media references and report downloads.

Collectively, these dimensions represent a combination of input, output and outcome metrics, providing a broader evidential basis for assessing committee effectiveness than any individual measure in isolation. The study employs descriptive statistical analysis, comparative ranking techniques, and correlation analysis to identify areas of convergence and divergence across the selected metrics. The final stage of the analysis explores whether these measures can be integrated into a *Composite Performance Framework* capable of supporting a structured comparative assessment of committee effectiveness. The selection of these metric sets is informed by the availability of robust multiannual data and constrained by the need to maintain analytical focus and comparability. The metrics, and the rationale for their inclusion, are set out

in Table 3. The study also examines the extent to which the selected metrics align, complement, or contradict one another, providing insight into the strengths and limitations of different approaches to assessing committee effectiveness.

TABLE 3: PERFORMANCE METRICS SETS TO EVALUATE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Metric set		Explanation	Considerations	Input, output or outcome
1	Meeting slot utilisation	Committee meets routinely at its allocated times, utilising its 'slot' time.	Efficient committees ≠ ineffective committees	Input
2	Activity, reporting and feedback	Committee deals with a high level of agenda items and a mix of proactive and reactive topics.	A committee dealing with a higher proportion of routine / reactive activities (e.g. select committee business, scrutiny of EU proposals, etc.) ≠ (necessarily) to an ineffective committee	Output
		Committee publishes substantive reports (with recommendations) on its activities.	A very high level of published reports ≠ (necessarily) effective committees	Output
		Committee reports are discussed in plenary session in either House	Reports must be submitted for selection and this practice is often not followed.	Outcome
		Committee reports are responded to by Government and recommendations are accepted and incorporated into Government policymaking.	There is no official convention or obligation, other than for the Committee on Public Accounts (PAC), for line Ministers/Departments to respond to committee reports, either generally or to each recommendation.	Output / Outcome
3	Membership, attendance, and contribution	Committee has an active membership with a good level of attendance (relative to the average) with low levels of substitutions, inactive members, and 'no quorum' events.	Non-member attendance (particularly good attendance) may complicate this factor.	Input
		Attending committee members contribute at each meeting with little duplication (unique, relevant, and informed / substantial questioning).	Definitively concluding that member contributions are relevant and informed is highly subjective. A proxy is required. It is possible to assess whether contributions are unique i.e. not duplicative.	Input
4	Media attention and visibility	Committee receives media attention on several platforms.	A committee may receive significant media attention for a particular meeting or series of meetings but may not have carried out its functions according to best practice(s).	Output

3.3 Data sources and sampling strategy

As committee effectiveness cannot be directly observed, this study relies upon a range of empirical indicators derived from committee activity data. The strength of any resulting assessment is therefore influenced by both the quality of the available data and the robustness of the sampling approach adopted. This section describes the principal data sources used and the methodology employed to construct representative samples for detailed analysis of each of the four metric sets. The analysis covers the period 30 June 2021 to 8 November 2024 and is based on data derived from the internally accessible Management Information Framework (MIF) datasets and Oireachtas SQL reporting system.

3.3.1 Meeting slot utilisation

To facilitate committee business, each committee is allocated a regular public meeting slot, typically on a weekly or fortnightly basis, in one of the four committee rooms located in Leinster House 2000 (LH2000). During the 33rd Dáil, most committees were allocated a single three-hour weekly slot. Private business is ordinarily conducted separately via Microsoft Teams, although it may occasionally take place immediately before or after a public meeting or elsewhere within the parliamentary complex. This metric set examines the extent to which committees utilise the meeting resources available to them. Two related measures are analysed:

1. **Slot utilisation:** the extent to which committees use the public meeting slots allocated to them, including any additional slots made available on request.
2. **Time utilisation:** the proportion of the available meeting time within those slots that is actually used.

The underlying premise of this metric set is that committees that make greater and more consistent use of their allocated meeting resources are more likely to have the capacity to fulfil their legislative, scrutiny, oversight and accountability functions. While slot and time utilisation cannot directly measure committee effectiveness, they provide useful indicators of committee activity, workload, engagement and resource use that may contribute to an assessment of effectiveness. Three assumptions underpin this analysis. It is anticipated that committees performing strongly under this metric will:

1. Make regular use of its allocated meeting slots and, where necessary, seek additional meeting opportunities.
2. Demonstrate effective planning and agenda management, reflected in sustained utilisation of available meeting resources.
3. Facilitate stakeholder engagement, scrutiny and accountability by making effective use of the public meeting time available to it.

Data are analysed at both committee and committee-category level. The relationship between slot utilisation and time utilisation is also examined, allowing committees to be grouped into three broad categories:

- **Category A: High / balanced utilisation** - High slot and high time utilisation.
- **Category B: Underutilisation** - Low slot and low time utilisation.
- **Category C: Mixed utilisation** - A combination of the above (High / Low or Low/High).

These categories provide a comparative framework for examining how committees use available meeting resources and the extent to which utilisation patterns may contribute to an assessment of committee effectiveness.

3.3.2 Activity, reporting and feedback

The productivity of a parliamentary committee is often measured quantitatively through the volume of activity it transacts, including the number of agenda items considered at public meetings and, more commonly in effectiveness studies, its reporting output. A committee report represents the formal output of a committee examination or scrutiny exercise and typically contains findings, conclusions, and recommendations for Government or other stakeholders.

As shown in Table 4, Government responsiveness to committee report recommendations is the most frequently used metric in the literature when assessing committee effectiveness. Russell et al. (2011) identify two principal advantages of this approach:

1. It facilitates direct comparison between committees regardless of their category or remit.
2. It reduces reliance on subjective assessments based on anecdotal evidence or individual case studies.

If committee effectiveness is understood as the ability to influence Government policy or legislative outcomes, then the extent to which Governments accept and implement committee recommendations provides a logical and observable indicator of effectiveness. As discussed in Chapter 2, this makes reporting metrics particularly attractive from an academic perspective, as they offer a quantifiable, albeit imperfect, measure of committee influence and impact.

Most studies evaluate a representative sample of committee reports and apply a coding, categorisation, or scorecard methodology to assess the level of Government acceptance or implementation of recommendations. As demonstrated in the literature review, this remains the most common quantitative approach to assessing committee effectiveness. Table 4 summarises a selection of such studies from both Westminster and non-Westminster parliamentary systems.

**TABLE 4: TRACKING ACCEPTANCE OF COMMITTEE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS
MEASURE – A SELECTIVE REVIEW**

Author	Sample	Conclusion re Impact	Conclusion(s) / Study Recommendations
Dawes (1993)	UK	[Focusing on numerical evaluation of material to assess committee impact] “inevitability lacks a certain qualitative dimension; much depends upon the nature of the recommendation and whether it is a generalised one of very specific. Second, it not always clear whether it was the committee’s influence of another unacknowledged source which led to acceptance”.	18 recommendations to parliament, committee members, and those external to parliament, including that committees should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on the early stages of the policy life cycle through examining all White and Green Papers. ▪ Formally follow-up on report recommendations accepted by Government. ▪ Focus on evaluation of Departmental performance metrics. ▪ Focus on structured evaluation of selected policies (in committee Work Plans). ▪ Be facilitated to call upon specialist research services and for the C&AG to service the ‘reasonable needs’ of sectoral/Departmental committees. ▪ Issue better designed reports that are more widely available, and that the work of the committee be better marketed.
Aldons (2000)	Senate and House of Representatives reports 1988-1995 Australia	Even with a strong conceptual framework, it is “virtually impossible to measure the impact of committees” due to the large amount of “non-decisional” functions of committees. Absence of qualitative considerations further means that a lot of the overall influence of committee work “cannot be proved” <u>but</u> “should not be discounted”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve report quality (drafting). ▪ Improve and standardise format of Government response(s). ▪ New procedures for committees (recommendation impact analysis, regular reporting of committee performance by committees).
Russell et al. (2011)	Commons’ s committees, 1997-2010 UK	“Mixed picture... the select committees are influential, but not all the time. Much of this influence can be seen by tracing committee recommendations, but much of it is far less visible and tangible. A lot of what committees do, and have achieved, is impressive. But there is also room for improvement.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve rates of follow-through by committees of earlier reports and recommendations. ▪ Commission original research. ▪ Address poor attendance. ▪ Other directions of research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More in-depth study of specific inquiries (examinations) ○ More focus on quality of questioning ○ Trace discussion of committee reports and recommendations in parliamentary debates ○ Greater study of the House of Lords/upper house committees

<p>Maer et al. (2004)</p>	<p>Four departmental committees (and different types of committee reports), 2003</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>“In order for select committees to monitor the Government’s response and their own effectiveness, committees must follow up the publication of their report.”</p> <p>...</p> <p>“Following up every single recommendation. could be a disproportionate drain on select committee resources.”</p>	<p>17 recommendations, including that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government gives an initial response to committee report recommendations after 60 days, and a more detailed response one year later allowing for serious discussion of recommendations. ▪ Committees agree a system of prioritising issues and recommendations and then tracking them over the Parliament i.e. scrutinise implementation of ‘main’ recommendations on an established regular basis.
<p>Hindmoor et al. (2009)</p>	<p>Education Committee reports 1997-2005</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>“Little evidence”</p> <p>“There are examples where the Education Committee appeared to have an impact on policy.”</p> <p>“Demonstrating broader patterns of influence on policy is difficult. In comparing committee reports with Government legislation there are certainly instances of correlation, but causation is much harder to establish.”</p>	<p>As well as giving ministers an opportunity to sell policies, committees can help opposition parties develop policy proposals and serve as a political early warning alarm system.</p> <p>Committees, like question time, provide an arena within which the credentials of a Secretary of State are publicly tested. A competent performance before a committee by a minister may not boost their standing but a poor performance can certainly damage it.</p>
<p>Monk (2009)</p>	<p>Select committee reports, 2001-2004</p> <p>Australia</p>	<p>“Even if the indicators proposed in this paper do not prove to be reliable indicators of committee effectiveness [author note: <i>left up to the reader to decide</i>], they are likely to provide some information about the behaviour of political agents and enhance our understanding of the political system. This in itself would be a valuable outcome.”</p>	<p>Committees are political bodies the framework seeks to consider the subjective responses to committee work of the four relevant political groups. This merits study of each of the relevant groups and construct a combined project on the same sample of committee reports and inquiries, allowing for a comparison across groups to see whether there are common patterns of committee effectiveness. This may also reveal more information about whether implementation of recommendations is an insightful metric.</p>
<p>James, (2009)</p>	<p>House of Representatives select, and standing committees concerned with the scrutiny of policy and administration</p> <p>Australia</p>	<p>“A Government response to a parliamentary committee inquiry is by no means the only factor determinative of the effectiveness of a committee, it remains an important measure” (others include qualitative factors including public participation, exposure of issues, and initiation of long-term change).</p>	<p><u>Ideas for improving Government responses to parliamentary committee reports</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve the content of Government responses is for the Government to provide responses in a standardised, highly structured and accessible format. ▪ Committee follow-up on report recommendations, including by inviting relevant Minister(s).

Source: Author.

Consistent with the literature, this metric set focuses on the most commonly used indicator of committee effectiveness: the extent to which Governments accept and respond to committee report recommendations. However, Government acceptance alone provides only a partial picture of committee influence and effectiveness. To examine reporting activity more comprehensively, this metric set assesses not only report production, but also evidence of Governmental engagement, implementation, and subsequent committee follow-up.

A four-level framework is therefore applied to evaluate the extent to which committee reports generate a discernible response and whether committees continue to scrutinise progress following publication:

- **Level 1:** Ministerial response to a committee report.
- **Level 2:** Evidence of implementation of individual recommendations.
- **Level 3:** Evidence of committee follow-up examination.
- **Level 4:** Evidence of committee follow-up reporting.

Between 30 June 2021 and 8 November 2024, a total of 573 reports ($n = 573$) were laid before the Houses by committees of all types. To facilitate objective analysis, a representative sample was drawn from the reporting outputs of all committee categories. Excluding travel reports, work programmes, annual reports, and EU scrutiny reports, the eligible population was reduced to 293 reports ($n = 293$). From this population, a representative sample of 30 reports, equivalent to approximately 10% of the eligible population, was selected across sectoral, thematic, and special committees, as set out in Table 7.

TABLE 7: SAMPLE SELECTION, BY REPORT CATEGORY

	Total reports		Representative sample (10%)
Public Policy	158	50%	15.8
Financial Scrutiny (PAC/BOC)	18	6%	1.8
Financial Scrutiny (Other Committees)	16	5%	1.6
Legislative Scrutiny (PLS or PMB)	119	38%	11.9
	311	100%	31.1

A stratified sample is then selected using committee type, with representation based on each category's share of overall reporting output.

TABLE 8: SAMPLE SELECTION, BY COMMITTEE TYPE

			Representative sample (10%)	Type of Report (10% sample)			
				Policy	Fin. Scrutiny (PAC/BOC)	Fin. Scrutiny (All other)	Leg. Scrutiny
Sectoral	248	80%	24.8	113 (11.3)	-	16 (1.6)	119 (11.9)
Thematic	53	17%	5.2	35 (3.5)	18 (1.8)	-	-
Special	10	3%	1	10 (1)	-	-	-
	311	100%	31.1	158 (16)	18 (2)	16 (2)	119 (12)

Due to rounding, a random sample of 32 reports will therefore be as follows:

TABLE 9: FINAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE SELECTION

	Policy	Fin. Scrutiny (PAC/BOC)	Fin. Scrutiny (All other)	Leg. Scrutiny	Total
Sectoral	11	-	2	12	25
Thematic	4	2	-	-	6
Special	1	-	-	-	1
	16	2	2	12	32

To maximise the likelihood that insights are meaningful and to ensure that sampling bias is reduced, an objective assessment requires further specificity of the sample.

TABLE 10a: FINAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE SELECTION, ADJUSTED FOR COMMITTEE OUTPUT

		Policy Reports			Fin. Scrutiny Reports			Legislative Scrutiny Reports		
		Reports Laid	Prop. of total	Rep. sample	Reports Laid	Prop. of total	Rep. sample	Reports Laid	Prop. of total	Rep. sample
Sectoral	AFM	7	0.061947	1	-	-	-	6	0.05042	1
	CEDIY	7	0.061947	1	1	0.0625	0.1	11	0.09243	1
	ECA	6	0.053097	1	1	0.0625	0.1	7	0.05882	1
	EFHERIS	8	0.070796	1	-	-	-0	5	0.04201	1
	ETE	5	0.044248	1	1	0.0625	0.1	15	0.12605	2
	FAD	4	0.035398	1	1	0.0625	0.1	1	0.00840	-
	FPERT	6	0.053097	1	4	0.2500	0.5	11	0.09243	1
	Gaeilge	17	0.150442	2	-	-	-	1	0.00840	-
	Health	2	0.017699	-	-	-	-	4	0.03361	-
	HLGH	5	0.044248	1	-	-	-	16	0.13445	2
	Justice	12	0.106195	2	2	0.1250	0.3	30	0.25210	3
	SPCRDI	19	0.168142	3	2	0.1250	0.3	6	0.05042	1
	T&C	3	0.026549	-	2	0.1250	0.3	4	0.03361	-
	TCASM	11	0.097345	2	2	0.1250	0.3	1	0.00840	-
		113	1.0	16	16	1.0	2	119	1.0	12

TABLE 10b: FINAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE SELECTION, ADJUSTED FOR COMMITTEE OUTPUT

		Policy Reports			Fin. Scrutiny Reports (PAC/BOC)		
		Reports Laid	Prop. of total	Rep. sample	Reports Laid	Prop. of total	Rep. sample
Thematic	Travellers	3	0.08571	-	-	-	-
	BOC	19	0.54286	1	1	0.0555	-
	Disability Matters (DM)	8	0.22857	1	-	-	-
	EU Affairs (EUA)	4	0.11429	-	-	-	-
	IGFA	1	0.02857	-	-	-	-
	PAC	-	-	-	17	0.9444	2
	Petitions	-	-	-	-	-	-
		35	1.0	2	18	1.0	2

TABLE 10c: FINAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE SELECTION, ADJUSTED FOR COMMITTEE OUTPUT

		Policy Reports		
		Reports Laid	Prop. of total	Rep. sample
Special	Assisted Dying	1	0.1	-
	Autism	3	0.3	1*
	Brexit (Seanad)	1	0.1	-
	Drugs Use	1	0.1	-
	Gender Equality	3	0.3	1*
	Int. Surrogacy	1	0.1	-
		10	1.0	1

Note: A tied result.

These calculations produce a representative sample of the report population. However, because a purely proportionate sample would exclude some committees, the sample is adjusted to ensure representation across the entire committee system. Table 11 (overleaf) shows the inclusion of one additional report from committees that would not otherwise feature within a 10 per cent representative sample, thereby ensuring that potentially important patterns are not overlooked.

TABLE 11: FINAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE SELECTION, ADJUSTED FOR COMMITTEE OUTPUT AND TO ENSURE ALL ELIGIBLE COMMITTEES ARE EXAMINED

Committee	Policy Report	Fin. Scrutiny Report	Leg. Scrutiny Report	Total (Adjusted)
AFM	1	-	1	2
CEDIY	1	-	1	2
ECA	1	-	1	2
EFHERIS	1	-	1	2
ETE	1	-	2	3
FAD	1	-	-	1
FPERT	1	-	1	2
Gaeilge	2	-	-	2
Health	1*	-	1*	2
HLGH	1	-	2	3
Justice	2	-	3	5
SPCRDI	3	-	1	4
T&C	1	-	-	1
TCASM	2	-	-	2
Travellers	1*	-	-	1
BOC	-	1*	-	1
Disability Matters (DM)	1*	-	-	1
EU Affairs (EUA)	1*	-	-	1
IGFA	1*	-	-	1
PAC	2	-	-	2
Assisted Dying	1*	-	-	1
Autism	1	-	-	1
Brexit (Seanad)	1	-	-	1
Gender Equality	1*	-	-	1
Int. Surrogacy	1*	-	-	1
Assisted Dying	1*	-	-	1
Autism	1*	-	-	1
	32	1	14	47

*Additions made to ensure that sample included at least 1 report from each committee to enable an illustrative ranking to be completed. The Drugs Use committee is excluded as the Interim Report was published in October 2024 and no action by Government is realistically expected until the Final Report is published in Q4 2025.

Applying this sampling approach, reports will be selected at random subject to the following criteria:

- At least one public meeting involving witnesses must have been held to inform the report and its recommendations.
- The report must contain measurable and actionable recommendations intended to influence Government policy.⁶

⁶ Recommendations that can be identified as ambiguous, duplicative, or overly broad as well as those that don't recommend any specific action, those not directed at government or those directed at another entity or jurisdiction will be discounted. Recommendations which are, in effect, conclusions will also be discounted.

- At least 12 months must have elapsed since publication. Accordingly, only reports published before September 2024 will be included to allow sufficient time for any Government response or implementation activity to emerge.

The evaluation will be conducted through desk-based research. Each recommendation will be compared against available evidence of subsequent Government action, including policy statements, strategic plans, legislative changes, amendments to Government Bills at Committee Stage, responses to committee report debates, replies to Parliamentary Questions, responses to committee follow-up requests and other relevant documentary evidence.

The analysis does not seek to establish causation. Rather, it assesses the extent to which observable Government actions align with committee recommendations and may therefore provide evidence of committee influence or policy impact. A complete list of reports included in the sample is provided in Appendix 1 (Table A1).

3.3.3 Membership and attendance

Attendance and participation measures are best understood as indicators of committee engagement rather than direct measures of committee effectiveness. It is generally expected that committee members fulfil their role by preparing for, attending, and substantively contributing to meetings of committees to which they are assigned, whether in public or private session and, where applicable, in select and joint committee configurations.

In practice, committee Cathaoirligh and committee staff frequently identify several issues that can hinder the effective operation of committees:

- The prevalence of infrequent, minimally active, or inactive members.
- Meetings failing to achieve a quorum and consequently being postponed or cancelled.
- A high, and in some cases increasing, number of committee assignments per member and parliamentary party.
- Scheduling conflicts that require members to choose between concurrent committee meetings or between committee and plenary business.
- The absence of routinely published attendance data, including explanations for legitimate and unavoidable absences.
- High levels of duplication in questioning during committee proceedings.
- A lack of substantive or relevant contributions from participating members.

These factors suggest that committee membership, attendance, and participation are closely interrelated and may collectively influence a committee's capacity to perform its scrutiny, oversight, legislative, and accountability functions.

In reviewing Senedd committees in the Welsh Parliament, Stirbu (2021) categorises attendance under the objective of organisational learning and improvement and identifies the monitoring of members' attendance at legislative scrutiny sessions as a potential indicator of committee influence and impact. Attendance is therefore a useful measure of member engagement and may provide insights into the capacity of committees to perform their functions effectively.

A longstanding challenge for parliamentary committees is member absenteeism and inconsistent attendance. As committee systems expand, concerns frequently emerge regarding the quality and continuity of member participation. In the Irish context, the growth of the Oireachtas committee system⁷ has contributed to a perception that members are increasingly burdened by committee assignments. Consequently, any analysis of attendance should consider the wider demands placed upon members across the parliamentary system.

Apart from the requirement to achieve a quorum⁸ before a public meeting may proceed, there is no minimum attendance requirement for committee meetings and no formal obligation on members to attend. While attendance information is publicly available through committee transcripts and official reports, it remains relatively inaccessible in practice. Unlike the UK House of Commons, no sessional attendance tables are routinely published by the Oireachtas. Similarly, no sanctions apply for non-attendance, despite reform proposals designed to address this issue as recently as 2011⁹ (McElroy, 2011).

Poor or inconsistent attendance may affect committee performance in several ways. Public meetings are typically preceded by a private session in which briefing documents are discussed and members receive support from committee staff, policy advisers, and parliamentary support services. These preparatory sessions are intended to ensure that members are familiar with the issues under consideration and are adequately prepared for scrutiny activities. As noted by Maer et al. (2004), however, the effectiveness of such preparation may be reduced where attendance is inconsistent.

⁷ Which has continued in the 34th Dáil, established in April 2025. This new system comprises 27 (political) committees, up 5 from the previous system. This is the largest committee system ever.

⁸ Achieving a quorum in Ireland to enable the meeting to proceed requires the presence of any members, not just those assigned to that committee.

⁹ The proposal in the McElroy paper was to penalise members whose attendance dropped below 60% in a given year (without adequate excuse) with automatic disqualification from membership. This recommendation was not adopted.

Attendance patterns may also influence committee decision-making. Where participation varies substantially from meeting to meeting, decisions may effectively be shaped by those members who attend most regularly rather than by the full committee membership. Russell et al. (2011: 97) similarly observe that attendance is difficult to improve given the competing demands on members' time. While the causes of poor attendance are varied, several factors have been identified in previous studies.

Drawing on their review of the Oireachtas committee system, Laver et al. (1997) identified four principal challenges:

1. Simultaneous scheduling of committee meetings, plenary sittings and other parliamentary engagements.
2. An excessive number of committee assignments resulting in unmanageable workloads for members.
3. Limited use of the powers of the Committee of Selection to discharge consistently absent members.
4. Weaknesses in the political convenor system.

McKenna's (2011) review of the committee system, together with a more recent statistical review undertaken by the Committees' Secretariat (Oireachtas, 2025), suggests that many of these challenges continue to affect committee participation. Delcamp (2018) further highlights the broader issue of coordination, both between committees and plenary business and between committees themselves. Scheduling conflicts with plenary sittings are not new, and various solutions, including dedicated "committee weeks", have been trialled during previous Dáileanna, although none has provided a permanent solution.

Figure 2 illustrates the committee timetable during the 33rd Dáil. Committee meeting slots were concentrated on the three principal sitting days (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning), when the largest number of members were present in Leinster House. In addition, a limited number of unallocated "free slots" were available for booking by committees, typically for Estimates scrutiny, PLS, private meetings, or other select business. A maximum of four such slots was available during any given timeslot.

FIGURE 2: COMMITTEE MEETING SLOTS AND PLENARY BUSINESS IN THE 33rd DÁIL

		Tuesdays	
		Committee	Plenary
11am-1.30pm	Sitting (pre-allocated slots)	No business	
3pm-5.30pm	Sitting (pre-allocated slots)	Dáil sitting from 2pm [Leaders Qs, Order of Business, PQs, Gov Business, Private Members Business, Topical Issues]	
6pm-8.30pm	4 free slots		

		Wednesdays		Thursdays	
		Committee	Plenary	Committee	Plenary
9.30am-12.30am	Sitting (pre-allocated slots)	Dáil sitting from 9.12am [Topical Issues, Private Members Business, Leaders Qs, Qs on Policy or Legislation, PQ (Taoiseach)]		Sitting (pre-allocated slots)	Dáil sitting from 9am [PQs, Leaders Qs, Qs on Policy or Legislation]
1.30pm - 4.30pm	Sitting (pre-allocated slots)	Gov Business (Dáil)		Sitting (pre-allocated slots) + 2 free slots	Gov Business, Topical Issues [Dáil adjourns c9pm, but members travel home from lunchtime]]
5.30pm-8.30pm	Sitting (pre-allocated slots) & 1 free slot	Dáil Voting Block (typically, 7pm start)		4 free slots	

Note: Seanad Éireann also meets Tuesday (from 2pm), Wednesday (from 10am) and Thursday (from 9.30am). Senators represent 5 of 14 members on Joint Committees, while Deputies (TDs) represent 9. Dáil business items usually last 1 hour. The above is indicative for a 'typical' week. The Wednesday 5.30pm slot presented challenges due to the disruption necessitated by committee members required to attend the Voting Block.

Figure 2 shows that, within the committee system of the 33rd Dáil, 25 of the 36 available weekly meeting slots were allocated to committees that generally met on a weekly basis, while the remaining 11 were retained as unallocated or "free" slots. Of the 25 allocated slots, only four (16 per cent) were entirely unaffected by concurrent plenary business, namely the Tuesday 11.00am to 1.30pm slot.

The second challenge concerns workload management. High workloads are most attributed to members holding multiple committee assignments simultaneously. Members may be required to cover several policy briefs, develop expertise across diverse subject areas, and participate in committees that meet concurrently, attract significant public attention, or carry substantial legislative workloads. The allocation of committee memberships is primarily a matter for party whips, group administrators and convenors. Similarly, decisions regarding the overall size of the committee system, including the creation or abolition of non-standing committees, are largely matters for Government. The resulting workload borne by members is therefore influenced by three interrelated factors:

1. **The size of the Houses**, determined by population growth recorded in the most recent Census and the constitutional requirements governing parliamentary representation.

2. **The size of Government**, as Ministers and Ministers of State are generally ineligible to serve on committees. Taken together with House membership, this determines the pool of eligible members available to fill committee positions.
3. **The number of committees and membership positions established** which is also largely determined by Government decisions.

Accordingly, if the pool of eligible members increases while the number of committee positions remains unchanged, the average number of committee assignments per member will fall. Conversely, where the number of committee positions expands at a faster rate than the eligible membership pool, the average number of assignments per member will increase. This appears to be the case in the 34th Dáil, where the growth in committee positions has exceeded the growth in the eligible membership pool. High workloads should not, however, be interpreted as evidence of committee effectiveness. Rather, workload provides important context for understanding committee participation patterns and the practical constraints that may influence attendance and engagement.

The third challenge concerns the discharge of members from committees. In practice, this mechanism is seldom used. Dáil members who are suspended from the House are automatically suspended from serving on committees, while other members typically leave committees by notifying the relevant party whip, who subsequently initiates the necessary administrative changes through the Committee of Selection and Journal Office. Responsibility for appointing and discharging committee members ultimately rests with the relevant Committees of Selection.

The fourth challenge relates to the convenor system, often described as committee "whips". While convenors continue to operate in many Westminster-style committee systems, the role effectively ceased within the Oireachtas committee system at, or shortly before, the conclusion of the 30th Dáil in February 2011, most likely as part of wider cost-reduction measures introduced following the financial crisis. The Laver Report (Laver et al., 1997: 31) had previously recommended the abolition of the existing convenor system, stating:

"It is clear that, on many committees, the conveners have long ceased to do what they are meant to do. It has been the [committee] clerks who have had to do the work of trying to round up sufficient Oireachtas members to make up a committee quorum.

This is clearly inappropriate, since it is the political parties that command the loyalty of their members, and that should be ensuring that these people do their job."

Rather than retaining the existing system, Laver recommended the creation of a formal, paid committee whip role linked directly to the relevant party whip. This recommendation was

never implemented. Consequently, it is not possible to empirically assess whether such a reform would have improved attendance, member engagement, or broader committee performance.

Attendance, while important, is ultimately a binary measure. As McKenna (2011) observes, committee attendance is recorded as a matter of "fact rather than duration". A member attending for only a short period is treated in the same way as a member present throughout a three-hour meeting. Consequently, attendance data alone provide only a limited insight into member engagement. Two additional measures may help assess the substantive contribution of members:

- Member speaking.
- Member substantially contributing through relevant and non-duplicative questioning.

Public questioning is a core function of parliamentary committees. The nature and quality of questioning vary considerably depending on the purpose of the engagement, the complexity of the issues under discussion, and the experience of individual members. Apart from the role of the Cathaoirleach in maintaining order and procedural compliance, committee member behaviour is largely unregulated. A number of factors may influence the quality of member contributions:

1. The clarity and scope of the committee's examination.
2. Parliamentary experience and institutional knowledge (Atkinson, 2017).
3. The diversity of committee membership.
4. Member training and development.
5. Subject expertise and policy specialisation (White, 2015a).
6. The role and intervention of the Cathaoirleach.
7. Access to independent research, analysis and policy advice.
8. The extent of media and public attention.

Committee engagements with policy experts, representative bodies and researchers are often discursive and exploratory in nature. By contrast, hearings involving Ministers, Secretaries General or other accountable officers tend to be more adversarial, as committees exercise their scrutiny and accountability functions. Questioning may range from broad and exploratory to highly forensic, reflecting differences in members' experience, preparation and subject knowledge. The House of Commons (2019: 48) notes that members do not always possess the experience necessary to pursue targeted and effective lines of questioning.

Questioning is rarely coordinated between members. Combined with the common practice of members attending only part of a meeting, this can result in repetitive or duplicative

questioning. Russell et al. (2011) observed this phenomenon during their study of UK select committees:

"Several witnesses recalled being asked the same question more than once during a hearing, because members did not listen to each other's questions, or in some cases were absent when they were asked."

Similarly, Donson et al. (2017), reflecting on the 2014-2016 Oireachtas Banking Inquiry, recommended limiting committee membership to avoid fragmented and repetitive questioning. Their findings highlight the relationship between committee size, attendance patterns and the coherence of scrutiny. White (2015b: 21) additionally suggests that the absence of coordinated or "pack" questioning may reduce the effectiveness of committee examinations.

In practice, many policy and financial scrutiny engagements are supported by briefing material and suggested thematic questions prepared by committee staff and policy advisers. Such supports may improve the quality and focus of questioning, although approaches differ across parliamentary systems. As the House of Commons (2019: 48) notes, practices relating to witness preparation and advance disclosure of questioning vary considerably.

The following datasets will be collated, coded, and analysed to test the assumptions derived from the literature review:

- A. **Committee membership assignments:** The number of committee memberships held by each member, analysed overall and by House membership. The objective is to examine the distribution of committee assignments and overall membership burdens.
- B. **Committee attendance:** Attendance rates analysed by year, committee category (sectoral, special, and thematic), committee type (Joint and Select), and participation by non-committee members.
- C. **Committee debate contributions:** Member contributions during public meetings, analysed overall, by committee category, committee type, and participation by non-committee members.

The relationships between these datasets will be examined as follows:

- **A and B** Membership assignments and attendance: To assess whether there is a relationship between the number of committee assignments held by a member and their attendance record. It is hypothesised that members with a higher number of committee assignments may exhibit lower attendance rates due to competing demands on their time.
- **A and C** Membership assignments and contributions: To assess whether there is a relationship between the number of committee assignments held by a member and their

level of participation in committee proceedings. It is hypothesised that members with a higher number of committee assignments may contribute less frequently or less substantively during public meetings.

- **B and C** - Attendance and contributions: To assess whether attendance is associated with higher levels of participation. It is hypothesised that members with stronger attendance records are more likely to make substantive contributions during committee proceedings.

Member contributions will be assessed using a simple measure based on the proportion of unique questions asked relative to the total volume of questioning. The sample of public meetings examined will comprise those meetings that generated the committee reports analysed in the relevant section. Collectively, these datasets provide insight into the relationship between committee membership, attendance, and participation, while also allowing for a limited assessment of the role of non-committee members in committee proceedings.

3.3.4 Media attention and visibility

Media attention can influence both public perceptions of committee activity and the incentives that shape member behaviour. The visibility of committee work within traditional media and wider public discourse may amplify committees' scrutiny, accountability, and oversight functions by increasing public awareness of their activities and findings. Media coverage may also stimulate Government responses, stakeholder engagement, and wider policy debate.

While parliamentary committees are only one mechanism through which Governments are held to account, they represent an established institutional forum for public scrutiny. The extent of media attention generated by a committee's work varies considerably depending on the issues under examination and the committee's mode of operation. Committees routinely seek to examine issues of public importance through their annual work programmes. However, anecdotal experience suggests that many committee reports and examinations attract only limited media coverage, often consisting of brief references to report publications or committee hearings.

Committees tend to receive the greatest media attention when examining high-profile controversies or issues of significant public concern. In such cases, the committee may become the principal public forum through which evidence is gathered, competing viewpoints are examined, and accountability is sought. These instances are often reactive in nature and reflect heightened public demand for information and scrutiny. In Hawes' classification, this aligns more closely with a committee's accountability and oversight functions than with its agenda-setting or policy-development roles.

Committees may also secure significant media attention by responding quickly to emerging issues of public concern. Consequently, measures of media visibility may provide useful evidence of a committee's prominence, relevance, and public profile. Although media attention should not be regarded as a direct measure of committee effectiveness, it may serve as an indicator of a committee's ability to engage public debate and contribute visibly to parliamentary scrutiny. As Dunleavy et al. (2013) note, counting media references provides one relatively straightforward method of comparing the public prominence of committees.

This metric set employs a quantitative frequency analysis of both the volume and content of published press articles appearing in Irish and Irish-focused international media sources using the Factiva/Dow Jones and G4A media monitoring tools. Each committee established during the 33rd Dáil is subject to an individual search, with the resulting number of media mentions compiled and compared to assess relative levels of media visibility during the study period. Where appropriate, searches also include commonly used committee abbreviations and alternative names (for example, "Environment Committee" and "PAC"). In addition to measuring visibility, media mentions are categorised qualitatively according to the extent to which they relate directly to committee activity:

1. **Direct evidence** of committee activity
 - Launch or publication of committee reports.
 - References to committee recommendations.
 - Committee hearings, debates, inquiries, or other identifiable outputs.
2. **Indirect or limited evidence** of committee activity
 - References primarily focused on individual committee members.

References to political controversies or wider issues where committee activity is incidental. General references to parliamentary committees without reference to a specific committee or committee output. Particular care is taken to account for exceptional media events that may disproportionately influence the results. Examples include the extensive coverage of the 2023 RTÉ payments controversy and the associated hearings of the Committee on Media and the Public Accounts Committee. Such cases are treated as significant outliers and are considered separately to minimise the risk of skewing the overall findings.

3.4 Methodological weaknesses and data limitations

A central premise of this study is that committee effectiveness cannot be directly observed and must instead be inferred from a range of empirical indicators. Consequently, the robustness of any assessment is dependent on both the quality and availability of data and the assumptions

underlying the selected metrics. The following section identifies the principal methodological weaknesses and data limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings and the *Composite Performance Framework* developed in this study.

3.4.1 Meeting slot utilisation

As indicators of committee effectiveness, slot utilisation and time utilisation are not definitive measures when considered in isolation. A common challenge in studies of organisational performance is the tendency to equate activity or performance with effectiveness. Under this logic, a committee that consistently uses all of its allocated meeting slots and exhausts the available meeting time might be considered highly effective. However, utilisation data alone provides little insight into the quality, substance, or outcomes of committee activity. Conversely, a committee that holds fewer meetings, uses less of its allocated time, but produces a higher volume of influential reports, secures greater Government responsiveness, or achieves stronger policy outcomes could equally be regarded as highly effective. High utilisation may therefore reflect workload and activity levels, but not necessarily effectiveness. This limitation reflects the broader challenge of defining and measuring committee effectiveness. While slot utilisation and time utilisation provide useful indicators of committee capacity, activity, and resource use, they should be interpreted as contributing to an assessment of effectiveness rather than constituting evidence of effectiveness in their own right. Nevertheless, these metrics provide an important foundation for the wider analysis and are considered alongside other indicators throughout the study.

3.4.2 Activity, reporting and feedback

As shown in Table 5, the tracking of Government responses to, or implementation of, committee report recommendations is not without limitations as a measure of committee performance and an indicator of committee effectiveness. Within the Westminster tradition, the absence of comprehensive feedback mechanisms is relatively unremarkable. Governments are generally not obliged to respond to committee recommendations, nor is there a standardised system for monitoring the implementation of committee reports (White, 2015a: 28; Aldons, 2001a: 55). Beyond these practical limitations, the methodological foundations of the approach have also attracted criticism. Russell et al. (2011: 69) note that recommendation tracking has been described as a "poor register of influence" (Baines, 1985: 50) and as being "bedevilled by problems of causality" (Drewry, 1985: 6). Even where a committee recommendation is subsequently reflected in Government policy, establishing a direct causal relationship remains difficult. As Arkins (1990) observes, while committee work may contribute to policy outcomes, "to suggest a direct causal relationship would be misleading".

TABLE 5: HOW COUNTING SUCCESSFUL RECOMMENDATIONS MAY FAIL TO CAPTURE INFLUENCE

May overestimate influence	May underestimate influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If recommendations accepted or implemented are relatively trivial. ▪ If committees tailor recommendations to those they believe the Government will accept. ▪ If the committee simply echoes concerns expressed by other influential groups. ▪ If successful recommendations are targeted at bodies beyond central Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If recommendations affect long-term Government thinking and are accepted years later. ▪ If the committee makes "probing" recommendations that it knows the Government cannot accept. ▪ If the committee's report acts as a catalyst for a broader shift in policy, political, or public opinion. ▪ If reports represent only part of a committee's influence, for example where evidence sessions are equally or more influential. ▪ If the Government changes policy in anticipation of, or during, an inquiry.

Source: Russell *et al.* (2011: 72)

Furthermore, it is rarely possible to isolate the specific effect of a committee from the wider policymaking process. Committee recommendations are not always novel and may simply reflect proposals already under consideration by Government, Departments, advocacy groups, or other stakeholders. As Rush (1984) observes, a committee may be "pushing at an open door" or, alternatively, Government may already have reached a decision while allowing the committee to believe it has exercised influence.

This causality problem has been explored empirically by studies such as Hindmoor *et al.* (2009). Using qualitative research, the authors identify two recurring criticisms of the recommendation-tracking approach. First, committee recommendations rarely provide Departments with information that is not already known. Second, the quality of committee analysis may be limited by resource constraints and a lack of specialist policy capacity, reducing the likelihood that recommendations will be influential. Consequently, caution is required when drawing prescriptive conclusions from recommendation acceptance rates alone. The usefulness of this measure is further constrained by the limited follow-up undertaken by committees. While Standing Orders may provide mechanisms for monitoring implementation, their use is often inconsistent. As James (2009: 117) notes, committees must themselves be interested in the eventual outcomes of their reports because "if they are not interested no one else will be".

Related to this is the absence of systematic monitoring of recommendation implementation. In Ireland, only limited analysis has been undertaken, most notably by the Library & Research Service in relation to PLS reports (Martin, 2018). There is no comprehensive system for tracking implementation across all committee reports, nor is there a general requirement for Government to respond formally to committee recommendations. As a result, overall

acceptance rates remain largely anecdotal and are rarely incorporated into future committee planning or report drafting. A further limitation concerns the quality and nature of recommendations themselves. Resource constraints, limited policy expertise, or weaknesses in report drafting may result in recommendations that are difficult to implement or evaluate. This issue is compounded by the wide variation in committee reports. PLS reports, Estimates reports, EU scrutiny reports, and Private Members' Bills reports are generally focused and outcome-oriented. By contrast, policy examination reports and broader scrutiny reports may contain large numbers of recommendations, observations and conclusions of varying specificity. This makes direct comparisons problematic and complicates any assessment of Government responsiveness.

The approach adopted by a committee may also influence the success of its reports. Hawes (1993: 57) argues that a committee's operating style, or "mode", has a profound effect on the extent to which its recommendations receive a positive Government response. A committee's mode is often shaped by the type of examination being undertaken. While some activities are largely determined by business referred by Dáil Éireann, such as legislative scrutiny and consideration of Estimates, others provide greater discretion in terms of topic selection and scope. Time constraints further shape committee behaviour. Hawes (1993: 42-49) describes this as a "black box" phenomenon, whereby committees must make choices about which issues to pursue given finite time and resources. As a result, priorities shift and much of the committee's substantive work takes place within a less visible environment involving committee staff, advisers and specialist support services.

Adapting Hawes' (1993: 56-57) framework to the Oireachtas context, Table 6 illustrates four broad committee modes that may result in the production of reports:

- **Mode 1: Advocate / Agenda Setter** - raising issues, promoting new policy approaches, or highlighting matters that have not received sufficient Government attention.
- **Mode 2: Analysis and Review** - assessing the effectiveness of existing policies, implementation arrangements and administrative performance.
- **Mode 3: Mediation and Prioritisation** - providing a forum in which competing interests can be explored, balanced and clarified.
- **Mode 4: Challenging and Monitoring** - exposing policy failures, identifying governance weaknesses and monitoring policy development.

Table 6 demonstrates that, in practice, the range of modes available to committees may be more constrained than their formal Orders of Reference suggest.

TABLE 6: DEFINING COMMITTEE REPORTING IN THE OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE SYSTEM

			Committee mode			
			1	2	3	4
			Advocating / Agenda setting	Analysis and review	Mediation and prioritisation	Challenging and monitoring
Reporting activity	Definition	Reason				
EU Scrutiny	Strongly Structured	A standardised reporting template and detailed procedural guidance are available. Reports typically contain observations and commentary, culminating in a single binary recommendation on whether a proposal complies with the principle of subsidiarity.		✓		
PLS	Strongly Structured	Pre-legislative scrutiny (PLS) was introduced in 2014 following the agreement of a formal protocol between the Oireachtas and Government, which has subsequently been revised. PLS is now an established element of committee work and is supported by comprehensive guidance and well-defined procedures.		✓	✓	
PMB Scrutiny	Moderately structured	PMB scrutiny emerged as a significant parliamentary activity during the 2016-2020 Dáil, reflecting the influence of minority Government. With the return of majority Governments, fewer PMBs now progress beyond Second Stage and become subject to committee scrutiny. Unlike PLS, the scrutiny process involves multiple Oireachtas services, including the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers, the Bills Office, and the Parliamentary Research Service.		✓	✓	✓
Travel	Moderately structured	Reporting on committee travel and study visits has become increasingly common. Such reports typically contain observations and findings rather than substantive recommendations and are primarily intended to inform future committee work programmes.	✓			
Financial Scrutiny	Loosely Structured	Committee consideration of Estimates and broader budgetary scrutiny remains comparatively underdeveloped. Reporting practices are less standardised than other committee activities, and a formal reporting framework has only recently begun to emerge (2023 onwards).		✓		
Policy Examinations	Loosely Structured	Policy examinations are highly diverse in scope, purpose and methodology. Given their varied nature, no single reporting model is feasible. Instead, committees rely on broad guidance and general principles when conducting examinations and preparing reports.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Author, based on Hawes (1993) and author knowledge.

As Hawes (1993) concludes, “committee influence is far more subtle a phenomenon than any quantitative count of recommendations would imply.” James (2009) is more critical, citing the view of a parliamentarian that:

“Government responses are not the be all and end all. It is not all purely us providing a report and then begging the Government to please accept it, but the Government’s lack of response is a key flaw, and I believe it is significantly diminishing the effectiveness of the committee report process.”

These observations highlight an important limitation of recommendation-tracking as a measure of effectiveness. While Government acceptance and implementation provide valuable and observable indicators of committee influence, they cannot capture the full range of ways in which committees may shape policy development, public debate, or administrative decision-making. Nevertheless, the value of this metric is widely recognised, and several studies have proposed mechanisms to address its shortcomings, including formal feedback processes, annual implementation reporting (Aldons, 2001a), and standardised Government response formats (James, 2009). Such reforms would improve transparency and strengthen the evidential basis upon which committee influence and effectiveness can be assessed.

3.4.3 Membership, attendance, and contribution

As explained in the previous section, while membership, attendance and contribution metrics provide useful indicators of committee engagement, they should not be interpreted as direct measures of committee effectiveness. Rather, they provide evidence of the extent to which committee members participate in committee work and contribute to committee proceedings. Effective committees are likely to require active and engaged members, but member engagement alone does not necessarily translate into effective committee outcomes.

Several limitations apply to the attendance data used in this study. First, attendance records capture presence rather than the duration or quality of participation. A member who attends for only a brief period is recorded in the same manner as a member who participates throughout an entire meeting. Attendance data also do not distinguish between avoidable and unavoidable absences. Members may be absent due to overlapping committee meetings, plenary business, constituency commitments, ministerial responsibilities, illness, or other legitimate reasons. Consequently, attendance rates should be interpreted with caution and not viewed as definitive indicators of a member's commitment to committee work.

Similarly, measures of committee membership and attendance do not account for variations in workload between individual members. Some members may have significantly higher

committee burdens, hold spokesperson or leadership positions, or serve on committees with unusually demanding legislative or scrutiny workloads. Attendance patterns may therefore reflect institutional pressures and scheduling constraints rather than levels of commitment or engagement.

Measures of contribution are also subject to important limitations. The number of occasions on which a member speaks or intervenes during a public meeting may capture activity, but not necessarily quality, significance, or influence. A small number of focused and well-informed interventions may contribute more to a committee's work than frequent but repetitive contributions. Equally, attempts to distinguish between substantive and non-substantive contributions inevitably involve an element of subjective judgement, notwithstanding efforts to apply consistent criteria throughout the analysis.

The analysis is further limited by its focus on public proceedings. Significant elements of committee work take place outside public meetings, including private business, preparatory briefings, engagement with stakeholders, interactions with committee staff, and informal political discussions. These activities may make important contributions to committee performance and influence but are not readily observable or quantifiable using available data. As a result, the metrics presented in this section capture only part of the broader committee process.

Lastly, the measures examined do not take account of wider political and institutional factors that may affect assessments of committee effectiveness. Variables such as committee leadership, party discipline, Government responsiveness, member expertise, political salience, and committee remit may all influence committee outcomes but fall beyond the scope of the available quantitative data. Accordingly, the findings should be regarded as indicators of member engagement and participation that may contribute to an assessment of committee effectiveness, rather than definitive measures of effectiveness in their own right.

3.4.4 Media attention and visibility

Though the media exerts significant influence on public and political discourse, it should not be regarded as a neutral participant in the parliamentary process. Nor should media attention be assumed to reflect either public approval of committee activity or committee effectiveness. As Monk (2010) argues, media coverage represents an "imperfect proxy" for public approval and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Unlike a formal Government response to a committee report, media coverage does not necessarily arise as a direct consequence of committee outputs or activities. Consequently, simple counts of media references may provide only a partial and potentially misleading measure of committee visibility and influence.

Media attention may be generated for a variety of reasons, many of which are unrelated to the effectiveness of a committee's scrutiny, oversight, or legislative work. For example:

- **Policy profile:** A committee may spend more time examining politically salient issues that naturally attract media attention than less visible, but equally important, activities such as legislative or financial scrutiny.
- **Public interest:** A committee may focus on topics of significant public concern that attract media coverage irrespective of the committee's contribution.
- **Public profile:** Committees chaired by, or containing, prominent political figures may receive greater media attention than others.
- **Watchdog stance:** Committees that adopt a more adversarial approach towards Ministers, public officials, or other witnesses may generate greater media interest due to heightened political conflict and public scrutiny.

These factors create a risk that media visibility becomes conflated with committee effectiveness. Committees operating in highly visible policy areas, or addressing contentious public controversies, may receive disproportionate media attention relative to their actual influence on policy outcomes. Conversely, committees performing detailed legislative, financial, or scrutiny work may have a substantial impact while attracting comparatively little media coverage. As such, media attention should be regarded as an indicator of committee prominence and visibility rather than a direct measure of committee effectiveness. The high-profile parliamentary scrutiny of issues such as the RTÉ payments controversy in 2023 and the governance of Section 39 organisations illustrate how public controversies can rapidly elevate committees to the centre of national debate, irrespective of their longer-term influence on policy development.

4. Operationalising Committee Effectiveness: Metric Construction and Analytical Framework

This chapter applies the *Framework* set out in Chapter 3 and evaluates committee performance across the four selected quantitative metric sets to provide empirical evidence relevant to comparative assessment. The analysis draws on administrative data generated through the Oireachtas Committees' Secretariat in-meeting system and extracted via the Oireachtas SQL reporting tool. As the system became operational in June 2021, the dataset does not span the full duration of the 33rd Dáil (February 2020 to November 2024). This limitation is not considered significant, as the period prior to June 2021 coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and exceptional public health restrictions, which substantially altered normal patterns of committee activity. Data from this period would therefore be unlikely to provide a representative baseline against which committee performance could be assessed.

4.1 Meeting slot utilisation

Table 12 below presents the number of pre-allocated public meeting slots (column 2) and the total number of overall slots used by the committee (column 3), including the use of additional or 'free' slots.

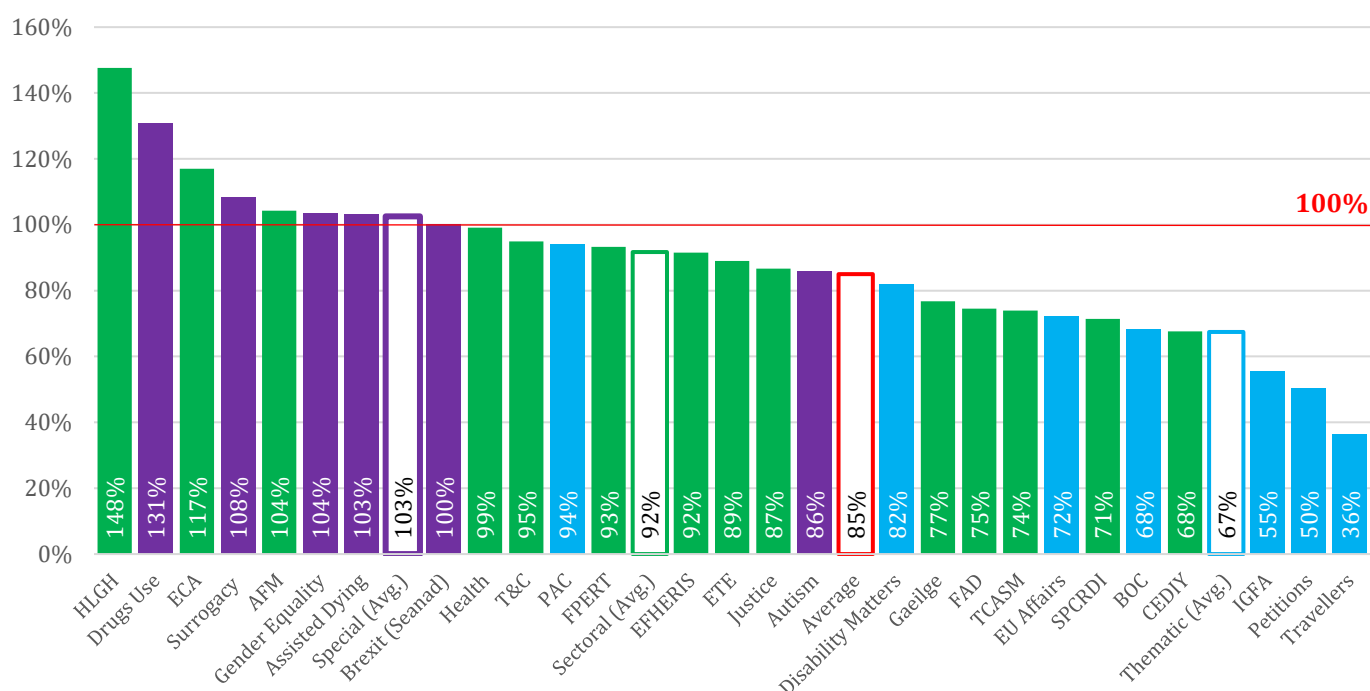
TABLE 12: COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING SLOT UTILISATION, BY COMMITTEE

Committee	Pre-allocated slots	Total slots used	Diff.	%	
HLGH	105	155	50	148%	
Drugs Use	13	17	4	131%	
ECA	106	124	18	117%	
Surrogacy	12	13	1	108%	
AFM	118	123	5	104%	
Gender Equality	28	29	1	104%	
Assisted Dying	33	34	1	103%	
Brexit (Seanad)	4	4	-	100%	
Health	119	118	-1	99%	
T&C	119	113	-6	95%	
PAC	119	112	-7	94%	
FPERT	119	111	-8	93%	
EFHERIS	106	97	-9	92%	
ETE	118	105	-13	89%	
Justice	105	91	-14	87%	
Autism	28	24	-4	86%	
Disability Matters	116	95	-21	82%	
Gaeilge	116	89	-27	77%	
FAD	106	79	-27	75%	
TCASM	119	88	-31	74%	
EU Affairs	119	86	-33	72%	
SPCRDI	119	85	-34	71%	
BOC	116	79	-37	68%	
CEDIY	105	71	-34	68%	
IGFA	119	66	-53	55%	
Petitions	119	60	-59	50%	
Travellers	66	24	-42	36%	

	Sectoral
	Thematic
	Special

Source: Author, based on MIF / in-meeting data.

Visualising the data another way produces Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING SLOT UTILISATION, BY COMMITTEE

Overall utilisation of pre-allocated meeting slots was 85%. Seven of the 27 committees exceeded their formal allocation by making use of additional "free" slots.¹⁰ Utilisation varied substantially between committees, ranging from 36% (Petitions) to 148% (Housing, Local Government and Heritage).¹¹ These results suggest significant differences in workload, demand and committee activity across the system.

TABLE 13: COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING SLOT UTILISATION, BY COMMITTEE CATEGORY

Committee category	No. of Committees	Pre-alloc. slots	Total slots used	Diff.	%
Special	6	118	121	3	103%
Sectoral	14	1,580	1,449	-131	92%
Thematic	7	774	522	-252	67%
Overall	27	2,472	2,092	-380	85%

Utilisation rates varied considerably by committee category. Special committees recorded the highest utilisation rate (103%), followed by sectoral committees (92%), both of which exceeded the rate observed for thematic committees (67%) by 36 and 25 percentage points respectively.

¹⁰ Committees may not use their pre-allocated slot for a plethora of reasons including, but not limited to, lack of a quorum meaning the meeting cannot commence and must be postponed or rescheduled.

¹¹ A significant proportion of this was due to the prolonged PLS and Committee Stage of the [Planning and Development Bill 2023](#). Committee Stage alone was conducted over 22 separate meetings of the (select) committee. Excluding the 'P&D' exceptional item, the sectoral figure drops to 87%, down 5 percentage points.

Actual meeting time utilisation presents a similar pattern. While the average public meeting slot was 2.98 hours in duration, committees used only 2.02 hours on average, equivalent to 66% of the time available. However, this figure masks significant variation between committees and committee categories.

TABLE 14: COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING TIME UTILISATION, BY COMMITTEE

Committee	Time allocated (HH:MM)	Time used (HH: MM)	%
Autism	69:50	62:35	90%
Int. Surrogacy	36:30	31:20	86%
Health	344:00	283:36	82%
T&C	310:45	246:14	79%
HLGH	532:15	416:44	78%
AFM	371:30	288:06	78%
Drugs Use	47:30	36:37	77%
TCASM	237:55	182:19	77%
ECA	327:30	239:38	73%
Gender Equality	89:45	63:35	71%
Assisted Dying	114:00	80:25	71%
IGFA	189:30	132:43	70%
Disability	266:15	177:42	67%
SPRCD	237:45	158:14	67%
FPERT	382:00	252:35	66%
CEDIY	198:15	128:22	65%
EFHERIS	263:35	164:26	62%
ETE	296:45	182:58	62%
Gaeilge	280:30	167:18	60%
EUA	387:10	224:21	58%
BOC	232:00	132:51	57%
Travellers	49:30	28:04	57%
PAC	736:15	415:12	56%
Brexit (Seanad)	9:00	4:53	54%
FAD	225:45	115:30	51%
Justice	254:30	129:08	51%
Petitions	181:30	82:35	46%

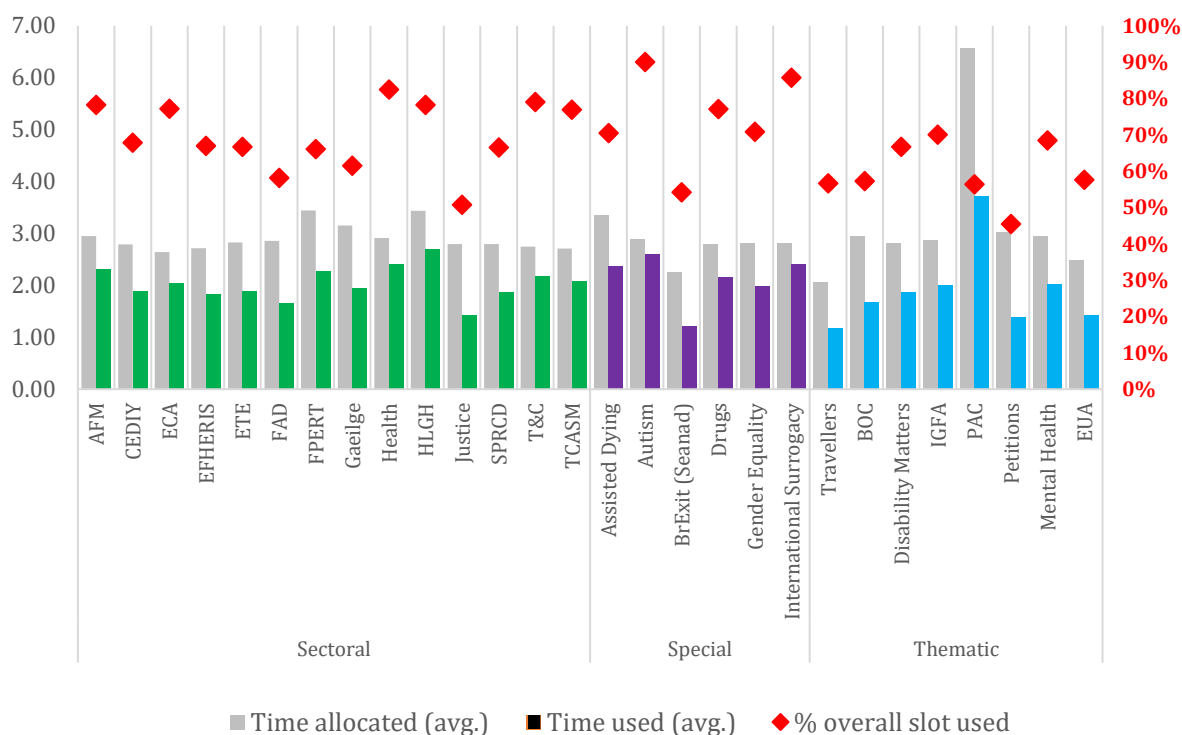
	Sectoral
	Thematic
	Special

Source: Author, based on MIF / in-meeting data.

Consistent with the findings on overall meeting slot utilisation, meeting time utilisation was highest among the Health, Transport, Housing, and Agriculture committees. At an aggregate level, special committees recorded the highest utilisation rate (76%), followed by sectoral committees (69%) and thematic committees (58%). Nevertheless, substantial variation remained evident within each category. Visualising the data together, there is no immediately

obvious pattern, though it appears, at a glance, better time utilisation is achieved by special, sectoral and thematic committees, in that order.

FIGURE 4: COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING TIME UTILISATION, BY COMMITTEE AND COMMITTEE TYPE



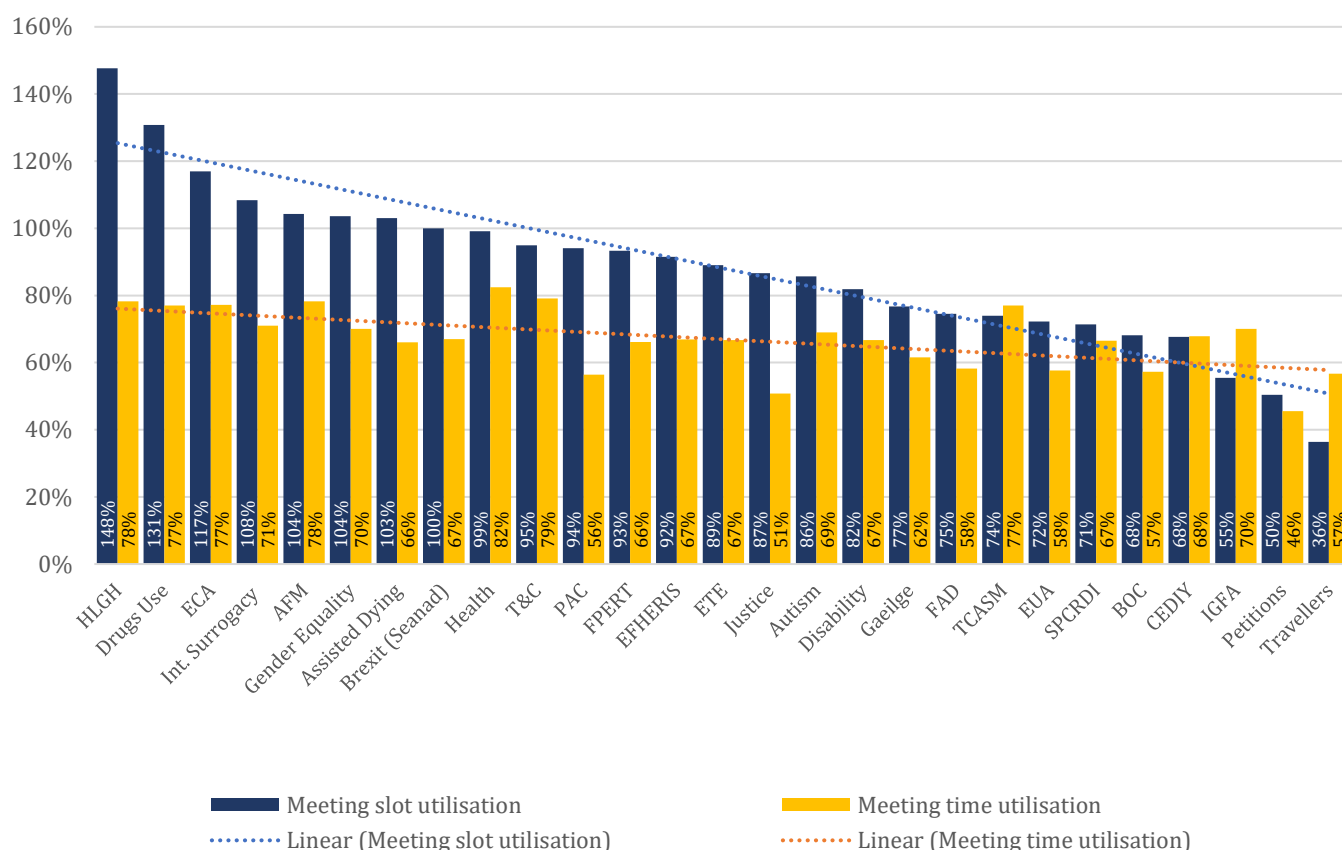
Collating the data confirms this pattern. Average meeting time utilisation across the committee system was 66%. Special committees recorded the highest utilisation rate (76%), followed by sectoral committees (69%) and thematic committees (58%). The differences of 7 and 18 percentage points respectively closely mirror the results observed for overall meeting slot utilisation.

TABLE 15: COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING TIME UTILISATION, BY COMMITTEE CATEGORY

Committee Category	No. of Committees	Time Allocated (Avg. in hours)	Time Used (Avg. in hours)	% of overall slot used
Special	6	2.82	2.12	76%
Sectoral	14	2.91	2.03	69%
Thematic	7	3.21	1.91	58%
Overall	27	2.98	2.02	66%

Comparing the two datasets produces the relationship illustrated in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEETING SLOT AND TIME UTILISATION



As illustrated by the linear trend in Figure 5, the two measures produce a correlation coefficient of 0.61, indicating a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between slot utilisation and time utilisation. Analysis of this metric set suggests the emergence of two broad groups of committees:

- **Committees with balanced utilisation:** These committees maintain a relatively consistent relationship between slot utilisation and time utilisation. Examples include the Health Committee (99% / 79%) and the Transport Committee (95% / 79%), suggesting intensive use of allocated meeting resources. Committees examining particularly salient policy areas, such as Housing (148% / 78%), Environment and Climate (117% / 78%), and Agriculture (104% / 78%), also demonstrate high levels of utilisation. In these cases, policy salience and periodic surges in activity appear to contribute to demand for additional meeting
- **Committees with underutilisation problems:** CEDIY (68% / 62%), BOC (55% / 46%), and Petitions (50% / 46%) all show comparably low figures in both slot and time utilisation, indicating member engagement issues.

The data indicate that committees with more specialised or less clearly defined remits, such as Travellers, Petitions and Budgetary Oversight, generally recorded lower levels of engagement.

This may be attributable to factors such as a narrower legislative focus, lower volumes of business referred by Dáil Éireann, or reduced levels of member participation. The relationship between these factors and committee activity is explored in subsequent sections.

Meeting slot utilisation: Appraisal of metric set/measures

Analysis of this metric set identifies a notional committee that performs strongly in terms of resource utilisation and operational activity. Such a committee would be characterised by the following:

- Consistent use of both allocated and additional meeting slots to conduct public meetings. This may indicate a propensity to meet regularly, maintain well-defined work programmes, pursue clear objectives, and demonstrate a commitment by members to fulfil their committee responsibilities. Across the committee system, 85 per cent of available meeting slots were utilised.
- Consistent use of available meeting time, thereby maximising the utilisation of committee rooms and the parliamentary resources that support committee activity, including broadcasting, reporting and administrative services. Across the committee system, 66 per cent of available meeting time was utilised.

Special committees performed particularly strongly on this metric set. Although they accounted for only six of the 27 committees established during the period, they represented five of the top ten committees for meeting slot utilisation and four of the top ten committees for meeting time utilisation. Among the sectoral committees, Housing, Environment, Agriculture, Health, and Transport Committees performed strongly across both measures. No thematic committee appeared within the top ten for either measure.¹²

TABLE 16: COMPARING UTILISATION – COMMITTEE RANKING

Rank	Meeting slot utilisation		Time utilisation		
1	HLGH	148%	Autism	90%	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #008000; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Sectoral </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800080; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Special </div>
2	Drugs Use	131%	Int. Surrogacy	86%	
3	ECA	117%	Health	82%	
4	Int. Surrogacy	108%	T&C	79%	
5	AFM	104%	HLGH	78%	
6	Gender Equality	104%	AFM	78%	
7	Assisted Dying	103%	Drugs Use	77%	
8	Brexit (Seanad)	100%	TCASM	77%	
9	Health	99%	ECA	73%	
10	T&C	95%	Gender Equality	71%	

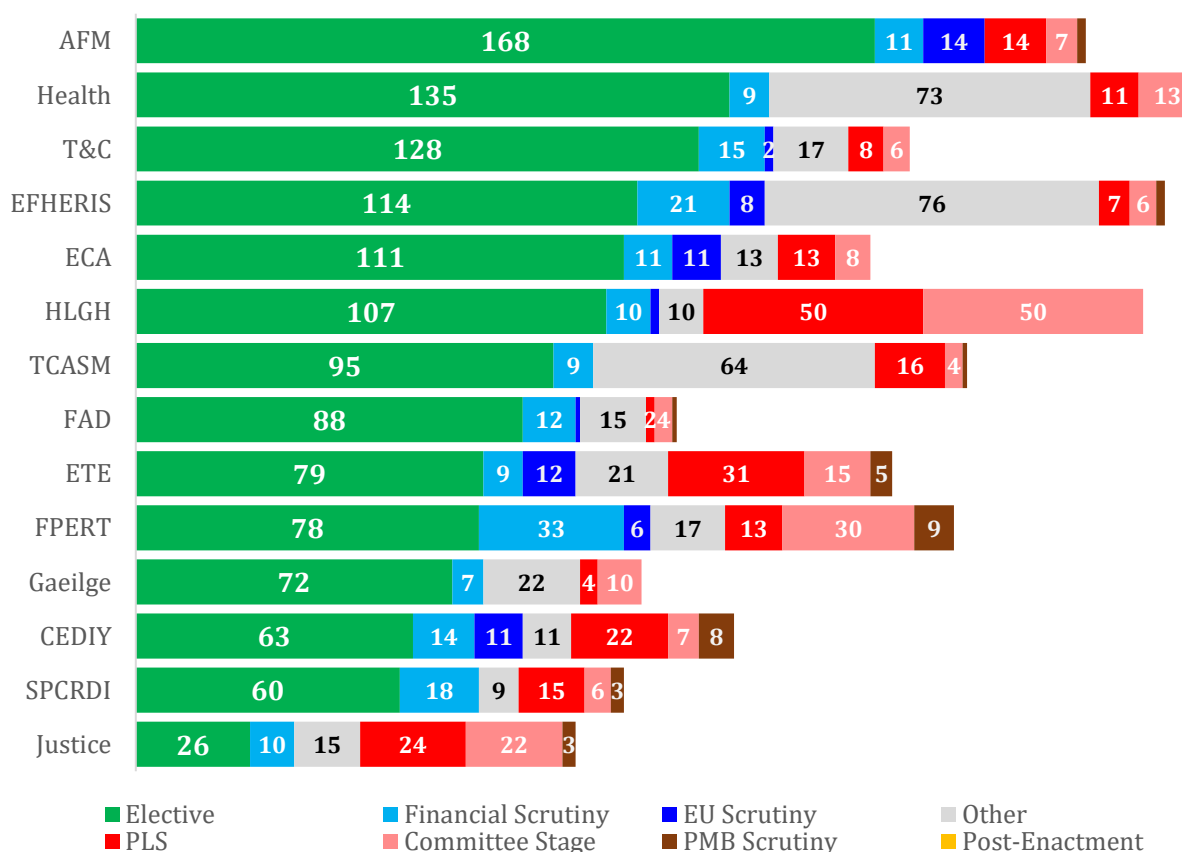
¹² PAC, as a major thematic committee, is allocated a double slot on Thursday mornings and afternoons, which it does not always fully utilise. In practice, committee members often regard this as a single meeting despite the requirement to change rooms between sessions. However, accounting for such localised factors is unlikely to materially alter the overall rankings.

4.2 Activity, reporting and feedback

4.2.1 Activity by agenda item

The 14 sectoral committees undertake the broadest range of activities within the committee system. These include elective policy examinations, financial scrutiny, EU scrutiny, and legislative scrutiny, encompassing PLS, examination of Government Bills at committee stage, scrutiny of Private Members' Bills (PMBs), and post-enactment scrutiny. Sectoral committees also conduct various administrative and procedural activities, such as considering minutes and meeting chair-designates. In contrast, thematic and special committees primarily undertake elective examinations and administrative business, including travel-related activity.

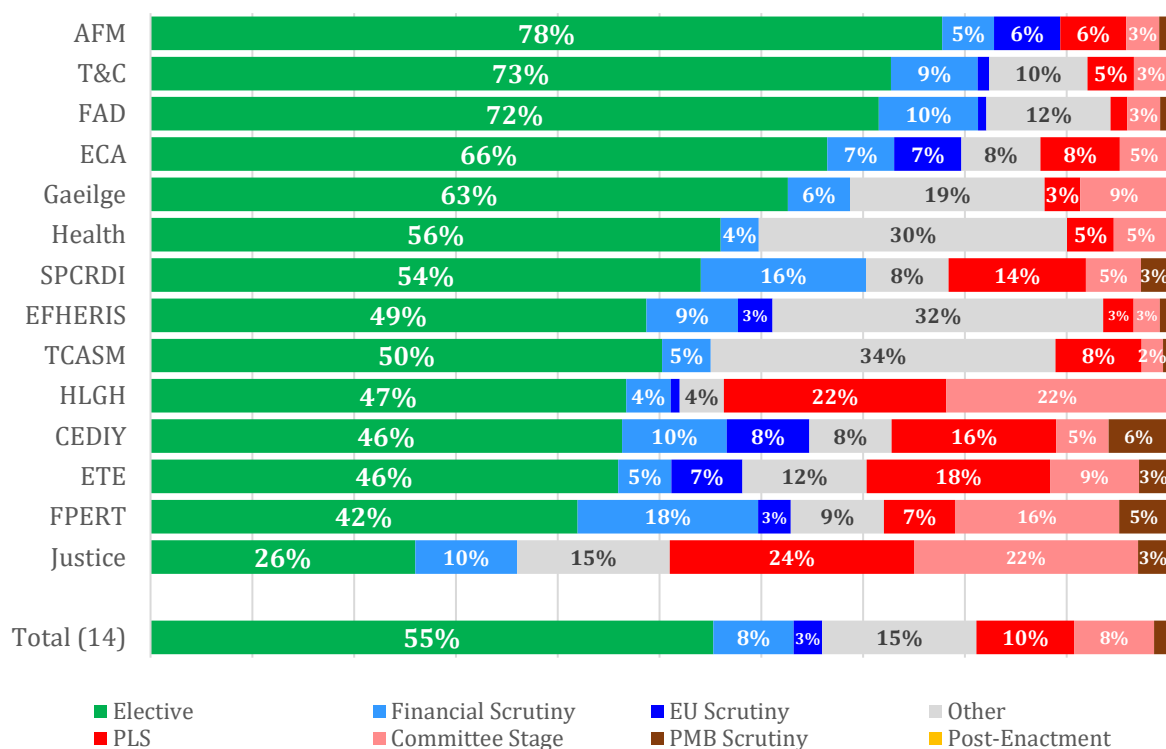
FIGURE 6: COMMITTEE ACTIVITY BY AGENDA ITEM CATEGORY (SECTORALS ONLY)



The data indicates that the Health Committee discussed the highest number of agenda items in public session (241), followed by Education / Further Education (234) and Housing (229). Elective policy examinations represented the largest category of agenda item for every committee, although not necessarily a majority of overall activity. While it may be tempting to conclude that committees with higher levels of activity are operating more efficiently or effectively, agenda volume alone provides only a partial picture of committee performance.

Committees vary considerably in the scope and complexity of their remits, the nature of the business referred to them, and the balance of activities they undertake.

FIGURE 7: COMMITTEE ACTIVITY BY AGENDA ITEM CATEGORY (SECTORALS ONLY) AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL AGENDA ITEMS DISCUSSED



Source: Author.

Committee activity, measured by the number and type of agenda items considered, differs substantially across committees. Policy examinations (or "elective" activity), for example, range from 26 per cent of agenda items in the Justice Committee to 78 per cent in the Agriculture Committee. Likewise, PLS accounts for between 3 per cent (Education / Further Education) and 24 per cent (Justice) of committee business. The findings indicate that sectoral committees can be further differentiated by the relative composition of their workload and the activities that dominate their agendas. For example:

TABLE 17: COMMITTEE CATEGORISATION BY PRIMARY ACTIVITY BASED ON AGENDA ITEMS TREATED AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Committee 'Activity' Categorisation	Number	Committee
'Policy / elective' committees	5	AFM (78%), T&C (73%), FAD (72%), ECA (66%), Gaeilge (63%)
'Financial scrutiny' committees	2	FPERT (18%), SPCRDI (16%)
'EU scrutiny' committees	2	CEDIY (8%), ETE (7%)
'Legislator' committees	2	Justice (24%), HLGH (22%)
'Other' committees	3	TCASM (34%), EFHERIS (32%), Health (30%)

14

4.2.2 Reporting and feedback

During the period examined, a total of 571 committee reports were laid before the Houses, reducing to 387 substantive reports when Annual Reports and Work Programmes are excluded. Reporting activity was concentrated among sectoral committees, which produced 431 reports (75%), while thematic committees produced 129 reports (23%) and special committees 11 reports (2%).

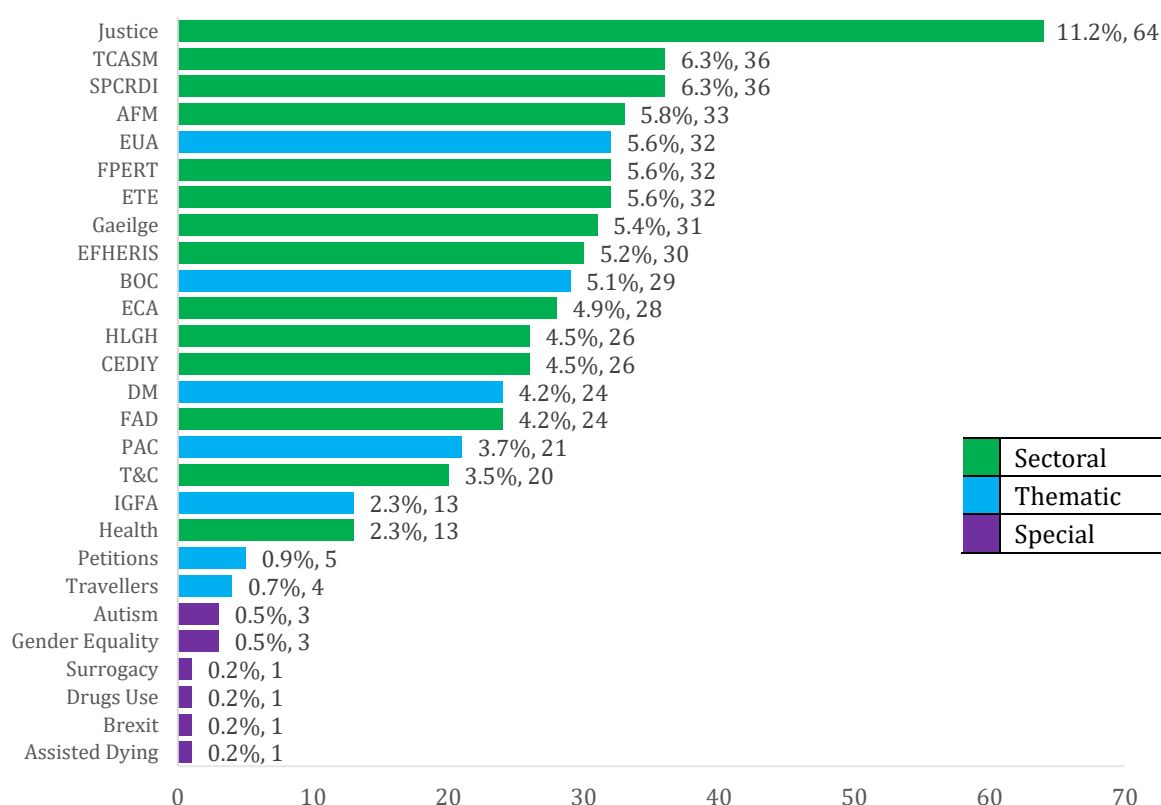
TABLE 18: COMMITTEE REPORTS LAID AND LAUNCHED

	Reports laid		Reports launched		Reports launched as a % of laid
Incl. Work Programmes					
Sectoral	431	75%	25	53%	6%
Thematic	129	23%	16	34%	12%
Special	11	2%	6	13%	55%
	571	100%	47	100%	8%
Excl. Work Programmes					
Sectoral	316	82%	25	53%	8%
Thematic	61	16%	16	34%	26%
Special	10	3%	6	13%	60%
	387	100%	47	100%	12%

Source: Author.

The Justice Committee was the most prolific, laying 64 reports (11% of the total).

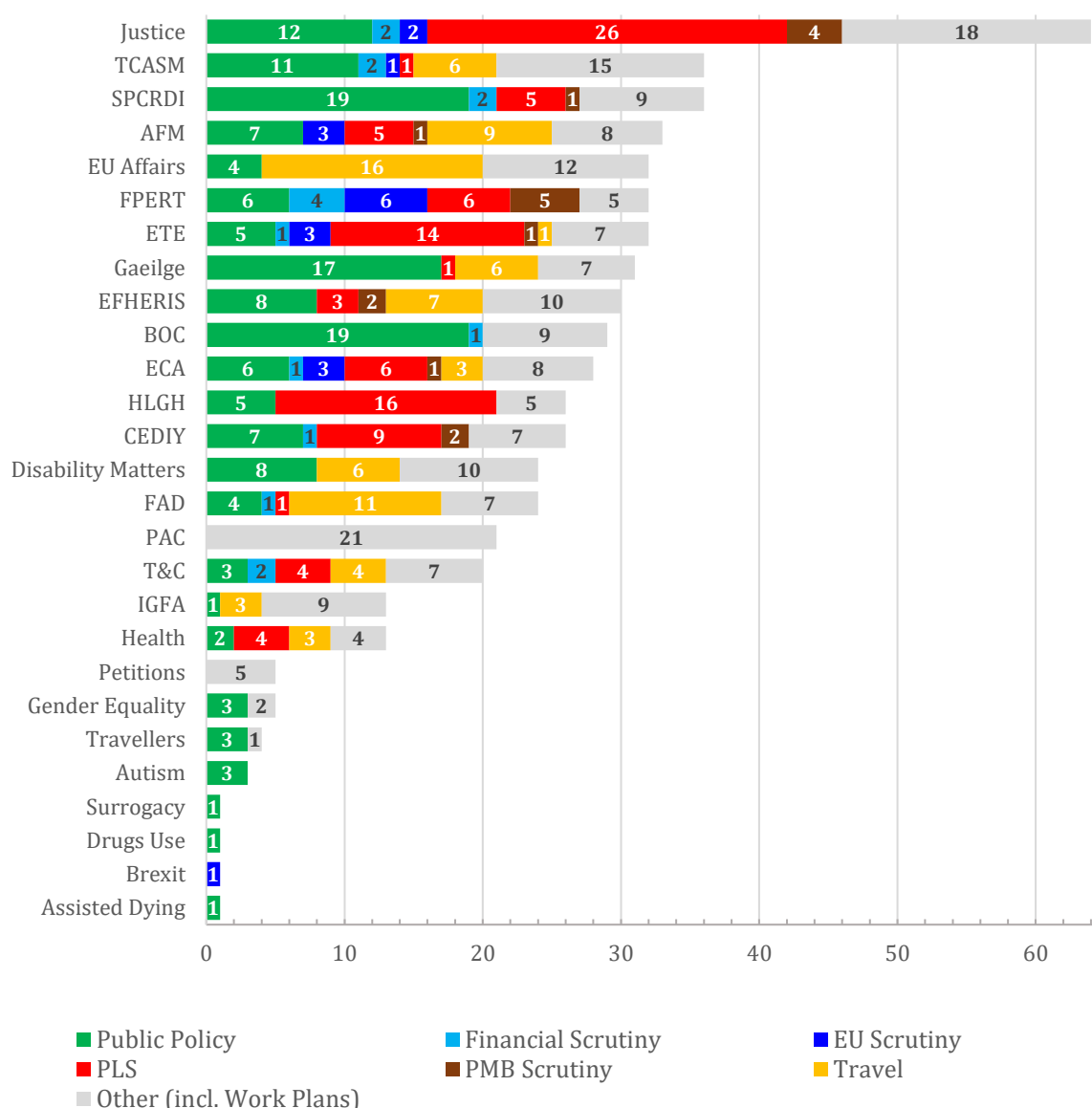
FIGURE 8: COMMITTEE REPORTS LAID, BY COMMITTEE (AND % OF TOTAL REPORTING)



Source: Author.

It may be tempting to view high levels of reporting activity as illustrated by Figures 8 and 9 as strong evidence of committee effectiveness. However, reporting volume alone provides an incomplete picture, as committees produce different types of reports with varying objectives, levels of complexity and potential impact.

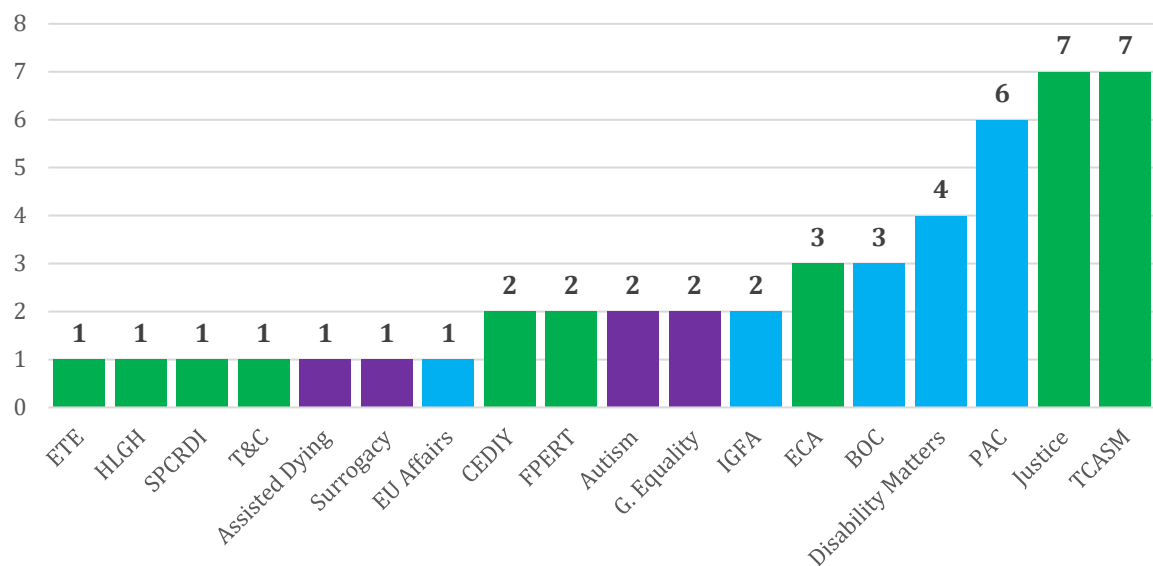
FIGURE 9: COMMITTEE REPORTS LAID, BY COMMITTEE AND REPORT TYPE



Source: Author.

While all reports must be laid before the Houses, formal report launches are relatively uncommon. Figure 10 shows that only 47 reports (8% of all reports, or 12% excluding Work Programmes and Annual Reports) were launched. Launches were far more common among special committees (60%) than sectoral committees (8%), a difference of 52 percentage points.

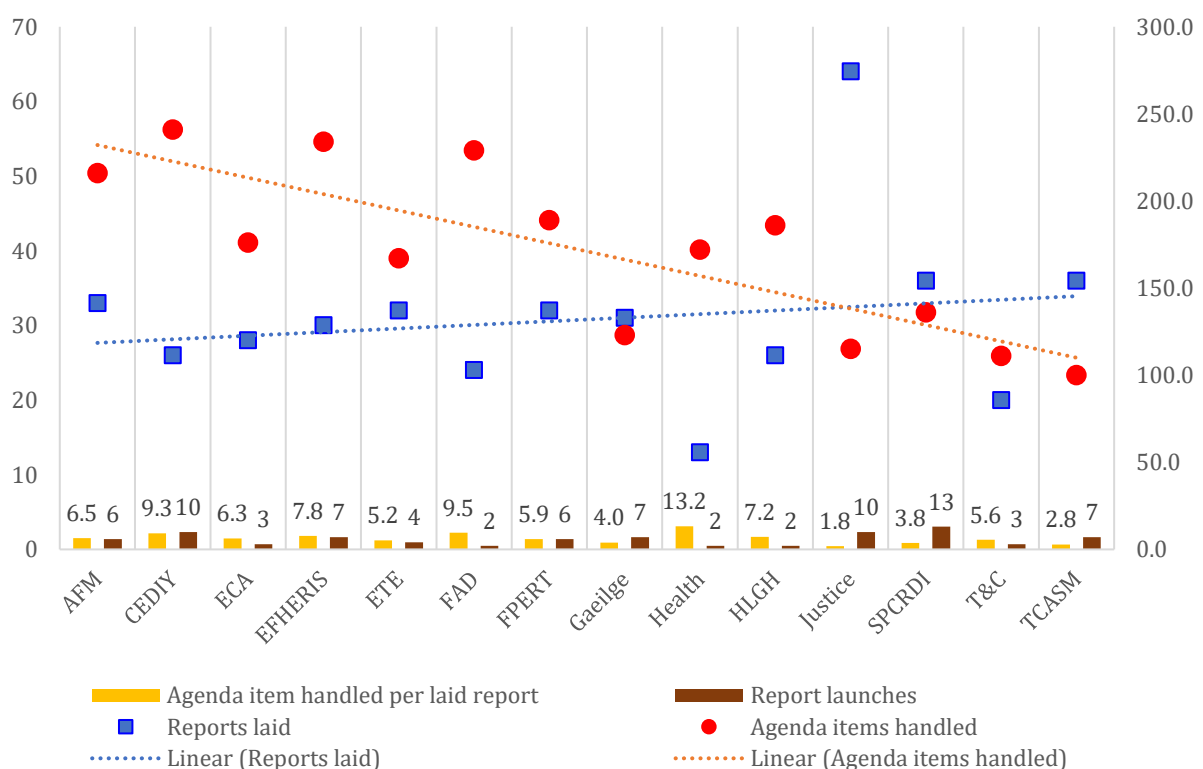
FIGURE 10: COMMITTEE REPORT LAUNCHES



Source: Author.

Figure 11 compares agenda items considered, reports laid, and report launch activity. Taken together, this result provides a more nuanced assessment of committee performance than any individual metric in isolation. The differing results further emphasise the limitations of relying on a single measure of committee effectiveness.

FIGURE 11: COMPARISON OF COMMITTEE ACTIVITY, REPORTING OUTPUT AND REPORT LAUNCHES



There is a moderate-to-strong positive correlation between the number of sectoral committee reports laid and the number of reports launched (0.61). However, a moderate negative correlation exists between the number of reports laid and the number of agenda items considered (-0.35). This suggests that the volume of agenda items handled by a committee is not a reliable indicator of its reporting output. The ratio of agenda items to reports laid varies considerably across committees, ranging from 1.8 for Justice to 13.2 for Health.

Government responsiveness to committee recommendations reveals a similarly varied picture. As shown in Table 19, acceptance rates differ substantially between committees. For the purposes of this study, a recommendation is regarded as accepted where evidence exists of either direct or tacit Government acceptance, or where Government has made a clear public commitment to take action.

TABLE 19: COMMITTEE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS – RATE OF ACCEPTANCE / ACTION BY GOVERNMENT

Committee	Total (Adjusted)	Recommendations made	Acceptance*	% with strong evidence of Government acceptance / action
AFM	2	24	11	46%
CEDIY	2	41	21	51%
ECA	2	28	11	39%
EFHERIS	2	17	8	47%
ETE	3	31	11	35%
FAD	1	14	6	43%
FPERT	2	23	11	48%
Gaeilge	2	18	8	44%
Health	2	20	8	40%
HLGH	3	32	11	34%
Justice	5	42	19	45%
SPCRDI	4	52	21	40%
T&C	2	9	4	44%
TCASM	2	24	11	46%
Sectoral	33	375	161	43%
Travellers	1	33	12	36%
BOC	1	8	3	38%
DM	2	34	5	15%
EUA	1	24	10	42%
IGFA	1	15	6	40%
PAC	2	27	15	56%
Thematic	7	141	51	36%
Autism	1	109	11	10%
Brexit (S)	1	62	12	19%
G. Equality	1	45	10	22%
Surrogacy	1	32	21	66%
Assisted Dying	1	38	2	5%
Special	5	286	56	20%
Total	47	802	268	33%

Source: Author.

The observed acceptance rate ranges from 5% to 66%. By this measure, sectoral committees perform most strongly, achieving an average acceptance rate of 43%, compared with 36% for thematic committees and 20% for special committees. These findings should not be interpreted as evidence that committees directly caused policy change. Rather, they indicate observable alignment between committee recommendations and subsequent Government actions. As demonstrated elsewhere in this study, this is one of the few measures on which special committees perform noticeably less strongly than the other committee categories, although the International Surrogacy Committee nevertheless ranks first overall. Sectoral committees perform comparatively well largely because of the relatively high acceptance rates associated with PLS reports. These recommendations are generally easier to track and evaluate than those contained in broader policy examination reports. Consequently, the greater the proportion of policy examination reports included within a committee's reporting output, the more likely it becomes that limited evidence of recommendation acceptance will be identified.

TABLE 20: COMMITTEE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS – RATE OF ACCEPTANCE / ACTION BY GOVERNMENT – TOP 10 COMMITTEES

Rank	Committees	Acceptance Rate
1	Surrogacy	66%
2	PAC	56%
3	CEDIY	51%
4	FPERT	48%
5	EFHERIS	47%
6	AFM	46%
7	TCASM	46%
8	Justice	45%
9	Gaeilge	44%
10	T&C	44%

Activity, reporting and feedback: Appraisal of metric set/measures

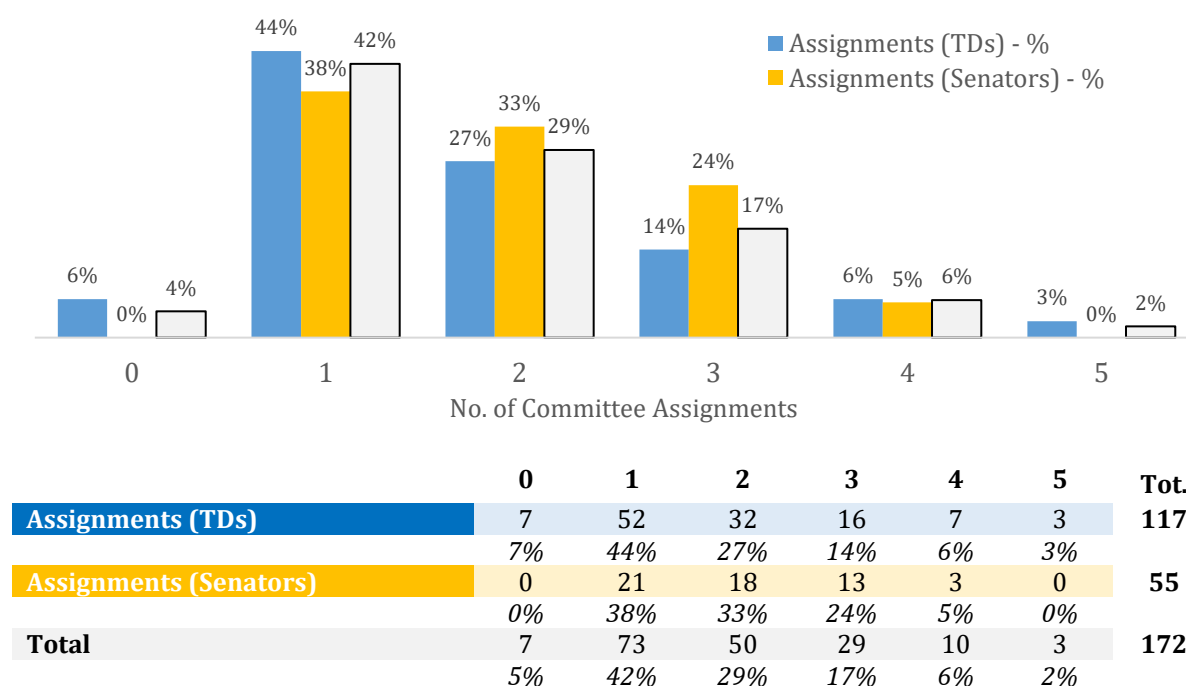
Analysis of this metric set highlights the diverse nature of committee activity and demonstrates that no two committees are identical, even within the same category. Considerable variation exists across the 14 sectoral committees in particular. Reporting output differs significantly between committees, although there is, perhaps predictably, a positive relationship between the number of reports published and formally launched. The findings also suggest that the number of agenda items considered at public meetings is not, by itself, a reliable indicator of reporting productivity. Consequently, different measures may produce markedly different assessments of committee performance. For example, committees that considered the largest volume of agenda items, such as Health and Housing, were not necessarily among the most prolific reporting committees. Similar caution applies to evaluations based on the traditional recommendation-

tracking approach. Viewed through this lens, sectoral committees perform most strongly, with an average recommendation acceptance rate of 43%. This result is driven largely by legislative and PLS reports, where recommendations are generally more specific, measurable and capable of being tracked than those arising from broader policy examinations.

4.3 Membership, attendance, and contribution

The number of committee assignments¹³ held by individual members ranged from zero to five. The overall distribution was broadly similar for members of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. Across the eligible membership, 42% of members were assigned to a single committee, while 71% served on either one or two committees. Of the 172 eligible members, 92 (53%) held more than the average number of committee assignments (1.8). Senators were somewhat more likely than Deputies to hold above-average committee workloads. Overall, 34 Senators (62%) and 58 Deputies (50%) served on more than 1.8 committees. At the upper end of the distribution, three members (2%), all Deputies, were assigned to five committees. At the opposite end, seven members (5%), all Deputies, held no committee assignments.¹⁴

FIGURE 12: COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS BY MEMBER



Source: Author, based on MIF / in-meeting data.

¹³ Assignments to internal committees e.g. Dáil Business Committee, Committee on Parliamentary Procedures and Privileges, etc. are excluded from this calculation.

¹⁴ A majority of these members had publicly announced their intention to retire from politics or not contest future elections prior to the dissolution of the Dáil, including Deputies Bríd Smith, Marc MacSharry, Imelda Munster and Joe Carey.

Attendance data is published as part of the Official Report of committee proceedings. Average attendance at public meetings held in the dedicated committee rooms¹⁵ was 60%, although attendance varied considerably by year, committee category, and committee type. These differences suggest that attendance patterns may be influenced by factors such as committee remit, workload, and membership composition.

TABLE 21: ATTENDANCE BY COMMITTEE, YEAR, COMMITTEE CATEGORY AND TYPE

Committee		Attendance (Permanent members only)			
	ECA	75%			
	PAC	72%			
	Assist. Dying	71%			
	Health	70%			
	HLGH	65%			
	Brexit (S)	64%			
	AFM	64%			
	T&C	61%			
	DM	60%			
	FPERT	60%			
	Drugs	59%			
	SPCRDI	59%			
	Gender Equality	59%			
	ETE	59%			
	Justice	58%			
	Surrogacy	57%			
	TCASM	57%			
	Autism	56%			
	EUA	56%			
	CEDIY	55%			
	IGFA	55%			
	FAD	54%			
	EFHERIS	51%			
	Gaeilge	50%			
	BOC	47%			
	Travellers	47%			
	Petitions	47%			
Overall		60%			

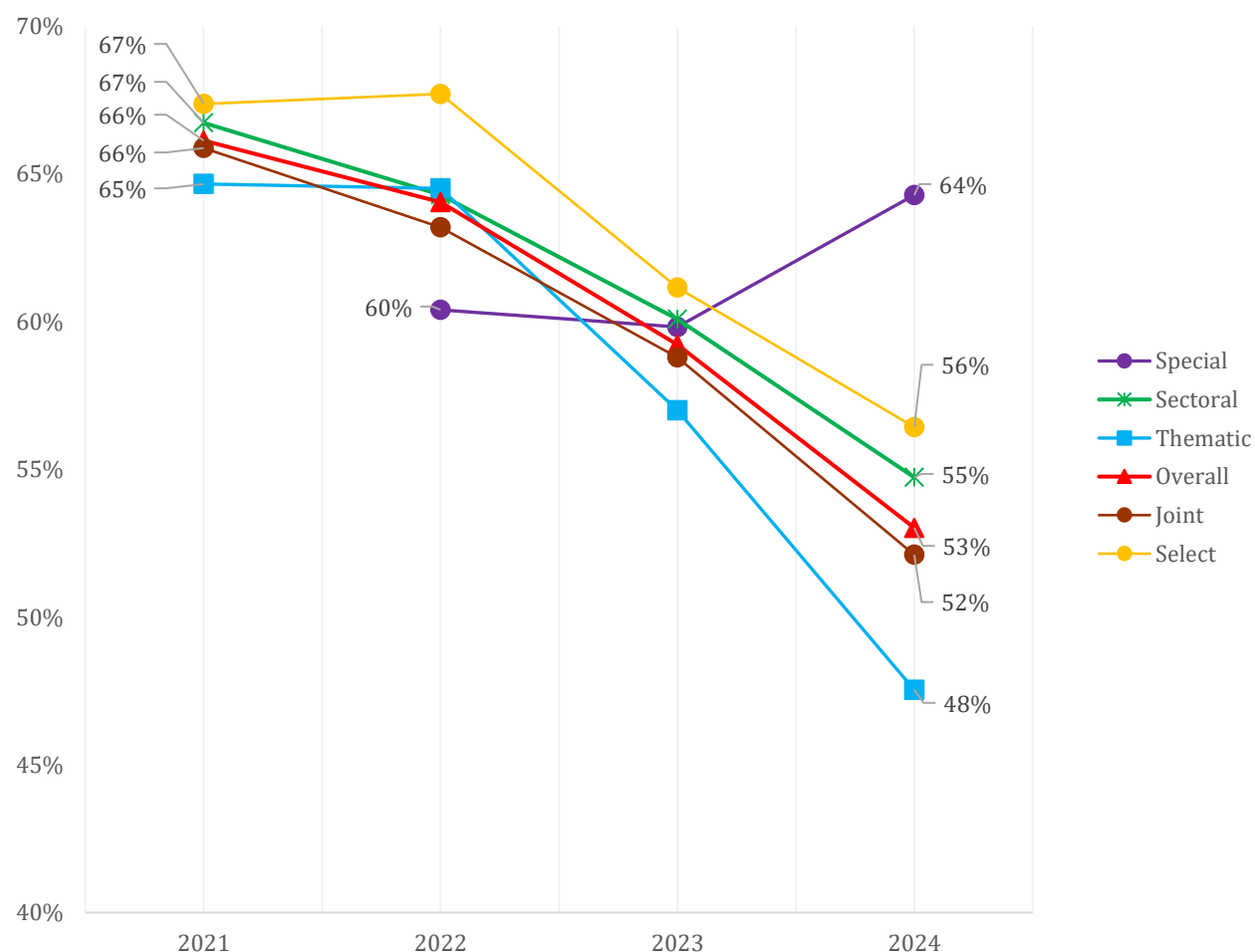
	2021	2022	2023	2024	Overall
	60%	60%	64%		61%
	67%	64%	60%	55%	61%
	65%	65%	57%	48%	57%
	66%	64%	59%	53%	60%
	66%	63%	59%	52%	59%
	67%	68%	61%	56%	62%
	66%	64%	59%	53%	60%

Source: Author, based on MIF / in-meeting data.

¹⁵ For comparability purposes, only CR1-CR4 located in LH2000 have been included in this analysis. Meetings conducted in other rooms or external locations have been excluded.

Overall attendance declined consistently between 2021 and 2024, although the extent of the decline varied across committee types. Thematic committees experienced the largest reduction in attendance, falling by 17 percentage points, while special committees recorded a modest increase of 4 percentage points. Attendance declined more sharply at joint committees (14 percentage points) than at select committees (11 percentage points).

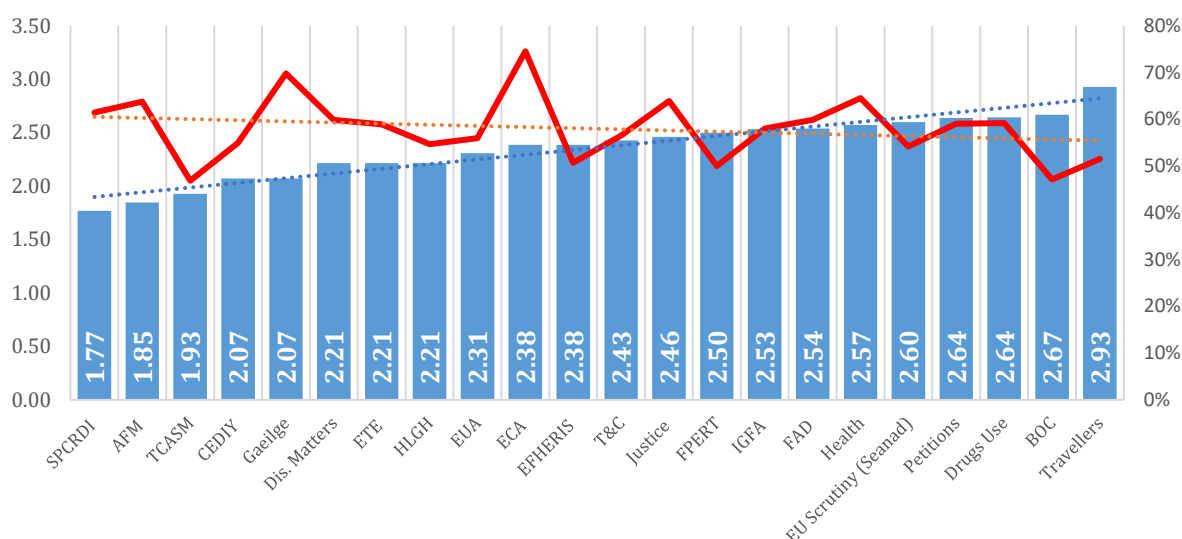
FIGURE 13: COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE RATES BY YEAR, COMMITTEE CATEGORY AND COMMITTEE TYPE



Source: Author, based on MIF / in-meeting data.

Looking only at committees in existence at the time of dissolution, it is evident that committee membership was characterised by multiple assignments per member. For example, members of the Social Protection Committee (SPCRDI) held an average of 1.77 committee assignments, compared with 2.93 assignments for members of the Traveller's Committee. Comparison of these datasets reveals a weak negative relationship (correlation coefficient = -0.27), suggesting that higher numbers of committee assignments may be associated with lower attendance rates. However, the relationship is weak and does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

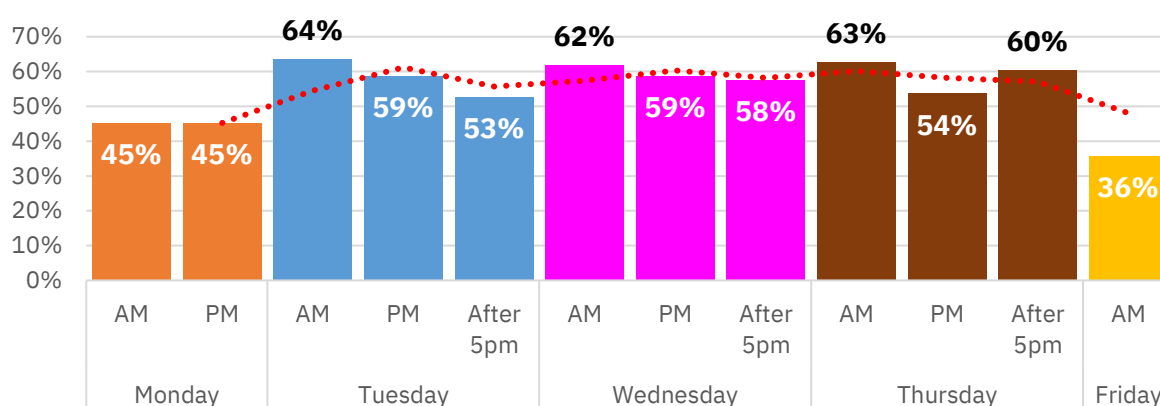
FIGURE 14: COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP WORKLOAD AND ATTENDANCE, BY COMMITTEE



Source: Author analysis.

An implicit assumption of this metric is that attendance is independent of meeting timing. However, public meetings are typically scheduled during standard committee slots on Dáil sitting days (Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays), when members are most likely to be present on the parliamentary campus. Exceptional meetings held on Mondays or Fridays generally attract lower attendance, suggesting that scheduling effects may influence attendance rates independently of member engagement.

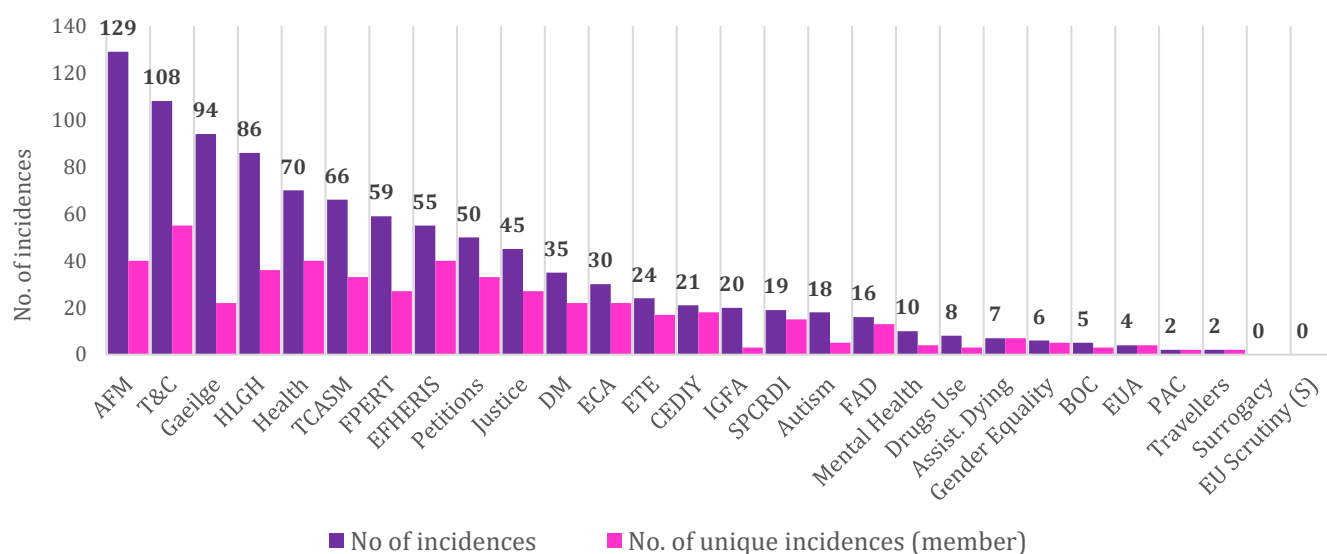
FIGURE 15: ATTENDANCE, BY PUBLIC MEETING START TIME / SLOT TIME



Note: The red dotted line shows the moving average.

For analytical consistency, only permanently assigned committee members are included in the attendance calculations. Nevertheless, the participation of non-permanent members represents an important feature of committee activity in certain committees and is examined separately in Figure 16 (overleaf).

FIGURE 16: ATTENDANCE OF NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS



A small number of members consistently attend and contribute to the public meetings of committees of which they are not permanent members, as shown in Table 22 below.

TABLE 22: ATTENDANCE OF NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee	No of incidences	No. of unique incidences (member)	Notes
AFM	129	40	
T&C	108	55	
Gaeilge	94	22	55 incidences by 1 member (alone)
HLGH	86	36	22 incidences by 1 member (alone)
Health	70	40	
TCASM	66	33	
FPERT	59	27	15 incidences by 1 member (alone)
EFHERIS	55	40	
Petitions	50	33	
Justice	45	27	
DM	35	22	
ECA	30	22	
ETE	24	17	
CEDIY	21	18	
IGFA	20	3	18 incidences by 1 member (alone)
SPCRDI	19	15	
Autism	18	5	14 incidences by 1 member (alone)
FAD	16	13	
Drugs Use	8	3	
Assist. Dying	7	7	
Gender Equality	6	5	
BOC	5	3	
EUA	4	4	
PAC	2	2	
Travellers	2	2	
Surrogacy	-	-	

The Agriculture Committee recorded the highest level of attendance by non-members, with 129 instances, followed by Transport with 108 instances, and An Coiste Gaeilge with 94 instances. In the case of An Coiste Gaeilge, a single non-member attended 55 public meetings. Overall,

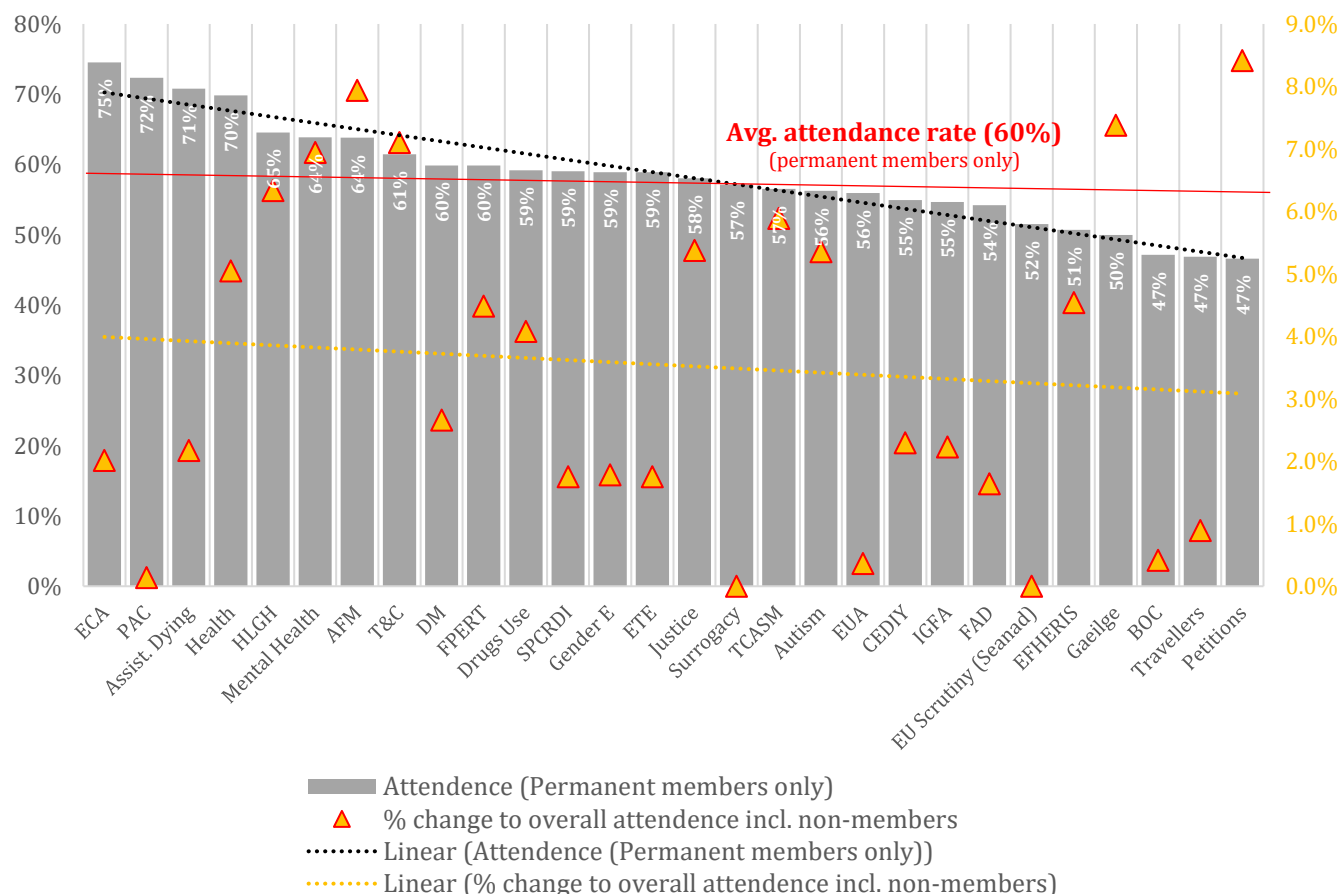
attendance by non-members was concentrated in sectoral committees, which accounted for 83% of all instances of non-member attendance, compared with 13% for thematic committees and 4% for special committees. Non-member attendance was similarly concentrated within joint committees, which accounted for 78% of all recorded instances.

TABLE 23: ATTENDANCE OF NON-MEMBERS, BY COMMITTEE CATEGORY AND TYPE

Committee type	No. of total incidences		No. of unique incidences		Average total incidences
Sectoral	822	83%	405	81%	59
Thematic	128	13%	73	15%	14
Special	39	4%	20	4%	8
	989	100%	465	100%	-
Joint	856	87%	156	78%	37
Select	133	13%	45	22%	7
	989	100%	201	100%	-

Comparing committee attendance rates with the effect of incorporating non-member participation yields only a weak correlation coefficient (0.20). This indicates that non-member attendance does not systematically compensate for low member attendance, with its impact varying considerably across committees.

FIGURE 17: IMPACT OF NON-MEMBER ATTENDANCE ON COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE



The impact of non-member attendance was as high as 8.4 percentage points in the case of the Petitions Committee, which otherwise recorded a relatively low attendance rate of 47%. Comparable effects were also evident in committees with above-average attendance rates, including Agriculture (+8.0 percentage points, 64% attendance) and Transport (+7.0 percentage points, 61% attendance). Member contributions also varied considerably across committees. For the purposes of this analysis, the number of meetings examined is limited to those that informed the reports evaluated in Section 3.3. A full list of the reports included in the sample is provided in Appendix 2.

TABLE 24: COMMITTEE MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS – PROPORTION OF UNIQUE QUESTIONS ASKED (REPORT SAMPLE)

Committee	No. of meetings required	Questions asked	Unique Q	%
AFM	1	43	29	67%
CEDIY	1	31	17	55%
ECA	1	32	12	38%
EFHERIS	1	30	16	53%
ETE	2	41	13	32%
FAD	1	16	9	56%
FPERT	1	66	39	59%
Gaeilge	2	23	11	48%
Health	1	53	25	47%
HLGH	1	43	21	49%
Justice	2	43	32	74%
SPCRDI	1	43	30	70%
T&C	1	22	9	41%
TCASM	1	21	9	43%
Sectorals	-	507	272	52%
Travellers	1	11	6	55%
BOC	1	9	4	44%
DM	1	25	15	60%
EUA	1	22	13	59%
IGFA	1	14	9	64%
PAC	2	27	20	74%
Thematic	-	108	67	59%
Autism	4	105	77	73%
Brexit (S)	4	132	68	52%
G. Equality	7	214	172	80%
Surrogacy	8	212	142	67%
Ass. Dying	8	214	179	84%
Special	-	877	638	71%
Overall		1,492	977	65%

Membership, attendance, and contribution: Appraisal of metric set/measures

Overall, the analysis provides only weak statistical evidence that a higher number of committee assignments is associated with lower attendance rates. This suggests that factors other than committee workload are likely to play a more significant role in determining attendance patterns. Non-member participation has little effect on attendance figures overall, although its impact is more pronounced in committees where attendance by permanent members is already comparatively low, such as the Petitions Committee. Conversely, non-member participation contributes more substantially to attendance levels in committees such as Agriculture, and Transport. In terms of contribution, special committees appear to be the most focused, with evidence consistent with greater coordination among members and higher levels of unique, non-duplicative questioning (71% of all contributions), compared with 59% for thematic committees and 52% for sectoral committees. These findings suggest that committee size, remit, and operating model may influence the quality and focus of member participation.

TABLE 25: COMMITTEE MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS – PROPORTION OF UNIQUE QUESTIONS ASKED (REPORT SAMPLE) – TOP 10

Rank	Committee	%
1	Assisted Dying	84%
2	Gender Equality	80%
3	Justice	74%
4	PAC	74%
5	Autism	73%
6	SPCRDI	70%
7	AFM	67%
8	Surrogacy	67%
9	IGFA	64%
10	DM	60%

4.4 Media attention and visibility

4.4.1. Direct evidence

To examine the extent to which committee reports achieve public visibility and engagement, two measures are analysed: downloads of committee reports from Oireachtas.ie using G4A analytics and references to committee reports in print and online media identified through an advanced Boolean search of Factiva. Rather than assessing the publicity generated by each of the 573 reports published during the 33rd Dáil individually, the analysis focuses on committees and the extent to which their reporting activity generates media attention and public interest. Tables 26a and 26b present the 20 most downloaded committee reports published and laid during the survey period.

TABLE 26a: COMMITTEE REPORT DOWNLOADS FROM OIREACHTAS.IE – TOP 20

Rank	Committee	Report description	Date published	Downloads
1	Assisted Dying	Final Report (at conclusion)	20 Mar '24	779
2	Autism	Final Report (at conclusion)	14 Jun '23	649
3	Travellers (2021)	Final Report (at conclusion)	1 Dec '21	605
4	Gender Equality	Final Report (at conclusion)	15 Dec '22	533
5	ECA	Policy examination report	14 Dec '23	371
6	Social Protection	Financial scrutiny report	19 Jul '24	336
7	IGFA	Policy examination report	16 Jul '24	332
8	PAC	Financial scrutiny report	5 Mar '24	299
9	Surrogacy	Final Report (at conclusion)	6 Jul '22	274
10	Social Protection	PLS report	3 May '23	255
11	HLGH	PLS report	4 May '23	250
12	Disability Matters	Policy examination report	23 Feb '23	203
13	IGFA	Policy examination report	13 Jul '22	201
14	Drugs Use	Interim Report (prior to Dáil dissolution)	22 Oct '24	189
15	PAC	Financial scrutiny report	31 Jan '23	176
16	CEDIY	Policy examination report	11 Jul '23	175
17	FPERT	Policy examination report	18 Jan '23	170
18	Disability Matters	Policy examination report	24 Jan '24	169
19	IGFA	Policy examination report	28 Mar '23	168
20	ETE	Policy examination report	26 Oct '23	166
				6,311

Source: G4A / Google Analytics. For the purposes of this analysis, the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community (2021) is categorised as a special committee, reflecting its status during the period examined. It subsequently became a permanent standing committee. Only reports published between June 2021 and November 2024 are included in the analysis above. However, download figures for reports from earlier Dáileanna are also captured within the dataset, most notably the Sláintecare Committee report, which would rank fifth overall if included.

TABLE 26b: COMMITTEE REPORT DOWNLOADS FROM OIREACHTAS.IE – TOP 20, BY COMMITTEE CATEGORY

Committee category	Total dl	%
Special	3,029	48%
Sectoral	1,723	27%
Thematic	1,559	25%
Total	6,311	100%

Table 27 presents a breakdown of downloaded committee reports by category.

TABLE 27: COMMITTEE REPORT DOWNLOADS FROM OIREACHTAS.IE BY COMMITTEE CATEGORY

	No. of committees	Reports published	%	Downloads	%	Diff.	Downloads per report
Sectoral	14	431	75%	11,501	62%	-13pp	27
Thematic	7	129	23%	3,940	21%	-2pp	31
Special	6	11	2%	3,120	17%	+15pp	284
	27	571	100%	18,561	100%		

Source: Author, using G4A / Google analytics. Not all published reports were downloaded.

Although sectoral committee reports accounted for 75% of all reports published during the period, they generated only 62% of downloads from Oireachtas.ie, a difference of 13 percentage points. By contrast, special committee reports accounted for just 2 per cent of all reports published, yet attracted 17% of downloads, representing a positive difference of 15 percentage points. On average, each special committee report was downloaded 284 times, compared with 31 downloads per thematic committee report and 27 downloads per sectoral committee report. As shown in Table 27, the 14 sectoral committees produced three-quarters of all reports laid during the period. However, reporting volume alone may provide a misleading impression of committee reach and engagement. Table 28 therefore presents the average number of downloads per report for the ten highest-performing committees. This measure suggests that sectoral committees generally perform less strongly than special committees and certain thematic committees, most notably the Public Accounts and Disability Matters committees.

TABLE 28: COMMITTEE REPORT DOWNLOADS FROM OIREACHTAS.IE, BY COMMITTEE-TOP 10

Rank	Committee	Downloads	Reports laid	Downloads per report laid
1	Assisted Dying	779	1	779.0
2	Surrogacy	274	1	274.0
3	Autism	649	3	216.3
4	Drugs Use	189	1	189.0
5	Travellers	676	4	169.0
6	Gender Equality	553	5	110.6
7	IGFA	827	13	63.6
8	Health	794	13	61.1
9	PAC	999	21	47.6
10	Disability Matters	1,093	24	45.5

Source: Author, using G4A / Google analytics.

TABLE 29: PRESS ARTICLES REFERRING TO COMMITTEES AND COMMITTEE REPORTS - TOP 10

Rank	Committee	Reference to committee (debates, meetings, Cathaoirigh, etc.)	%	Reference to committee Reports	%
1	PAC	1,254	29%	214	19%
2	TCASM	1,149	27%	123	27%
3	Assisted Dying	632	15%	72	8%
4	Disability Matters	265	6%	52	4%
5	Drugs Use	245	6%	121	15%
6	HLGH	215	5%	114	10%
7	Autism	188	4%	77	8%
8	FAD	173	4%	45	2%
9	FPERT	94	2%	72	3%
10	Health	86	2%	62	3%
		4,301	100%	952	100%

Source: Dow Jones Factiva media database/ monitoring tool. Some duplicates are included where media articles are syndicated to regional / local newspapers or websites.

TABLE 30: PRESS ARTICLES REFERRING TO COMMITTEES AND COMMITTEE REPORTS - ALL 27 COMMITTEES

	Reference to committees (debates, meetings, Cathaoirigh, etc.)		Reference to committee Reports	
Sectoral	1,420	30%	321	31%
Thematic	1,530	33%	310	30%
Special	1,723	37%	392	38%
	4,673	100%	1,023	100%

Source: Dow Jones Factiva media database/ monitoring tool.

4.4.2. Indirect evidence

References to the committee system as a whole are relatively rare. In practice, media coverage more commonly focuses on individual committees, often prompted by controversy or political salience rather than routine committee business.

TABLE 31: PRESS ARTICLES REFERRING TO THE 'COMMITTEE SYSTEM' - ALL 27 COMMITTEES

	Reference to committee system	Reference to committee members specifically
Committee system	75	12

Source: Dow Jones Factiva media database/ monitoring tool.

Media attention and visibility: Appraisal of metric set/measures

While not definitive, the media attention metrics suggest that reports produced by special committees attract substantially greater public engagement than those produced by sectoral and thematic committees. Although the six special committees generated only 2% of all reports published during the period, they accounted for 17% of all report downloads from Oireachtas.ie, a difference of 15 percentage points. By contrast, sectoral and thematic committees produced considerably larger volumes of reports but attracted proportionately lower download rates. This suggests that report volume alone may not be a reliable indicator of audience reach or public engagement. A more balanced picture emerges when media coverage is examined. Unlike report downloads, the distribution of published press and online articles is more evenly spread across the three committee categories, indicating that media attention may be driven by a broader range of factors than reporting activity alone.

5. Summary of findings

The findings reveal a fragmented picture. Across the four performance metric sets, a total of ten measures were evaluated. A committee ranking was derived for each measure and committees are further distinguished by committee type for illustrative purposes. As shown in Table 33, no two rankings are identical. This divergence is unsurprising, given that each measure captures a different dimension of committee activity and performance. Indeed, the variation between rankings reinforces the central argument of this study that committee effectiveness is inherently multidimensional and cannot be adequately assessed through a single measure in isolation. Divergent rankings should not necessarily be interpreted as contradictory findings. Rather, they reflect the fact that different metrics capture different dimensions of committee performance.

TABLE 33: A RANKING OF COMMITTEES ACROSS SELECTED QUANTITATIVE METRICS

Rank	Metric sets									
	1. Meeting slot utilisation		2. Activity, reporting & feedback			3. Membership, attendance & contribution			4. Media attention & visibility	
	Meeting slot use	Time use	Reports laid*	Agenda items discussed (Public)	Report recs accepted**	Member attend.	Non-committee member attending	Member contribs.	Downloads as % of report laid	Press articles
1	HLGH	Autism	Justice	PAC	Surrog.	ECA	AFM	A. Dying	A. Dying	PAC
2	Drugs	Surrog.	SPCRDI	Health	PAC	PAC	T&C	G. Equal.	Surrog.	TCASM
3	ECA	Health	TCASM	EFHERIS	CEDIY	A. Dying	Gaeilge	Justice	Autism	A. Dying
4	Surrog.	T&C	AFM	HLGH	FPERT	Health	HLGH	PAC	Drugs	DM
5	AFM	HLGH	ETE	AFM	EFHERIS	HLGH	TCASM	Autism	Travellers	Drugs
6	G. Equal.	AFM	FPERT	TCASM	AFM	AFM	FPERT	SPCRDI	G. Equal.	HLGH
7	A. Dying	Drugs	EUA	FPERT	TCASM	T&C	EFHERIS	AFM	IGFA	Autism
8	Brexit (S)	TCASM	Gaeilge	T&C	Justice	DM	Petitions	Surrog.	Health	FAD
9	Health	ECA	EFHERIS	ETE	Gaeilge	FPERT	Justice	IGFA	PAC	FPERT
10	T&C	G. Equal.	BOC	ECA	T&C	Drugs	DM	DM	DM	Health

*excl.
Specials

**sample
only

Source: Author. 'A. Dying' refers to Committee on Assisted Dying.

	Sectoral
	Thematic
	Special

Overall, Table 33 demonstrates that:

1. There is substantial variation across the rankings, reflecting the diverse activity patterns, operating environments, and performance profiles of committees.
2. No single metric provides a definitive assessment of committee performance or, by extension, committee effectiveness. Careful consideration is therefore required when selecting or prioritising one measure over another, and system-level conclusions should not be drawn from any individual metric in isolation.

3. When viewed collectively, the rankings reveal evidence of domain-specific strengths across a range of committees. However, no committee consistently ranks highly across all measures.
4. At a descriptive level, there appears to be limited evidence of clustering or strong relationships between the various metrics.

To explore point 4 further, a comparison of the different measures identifies several testable relationships, some of which challenge conventional assumptions about committee performance. The analysis provides evidence consistent with the following:

- Committees comprising members with higher-than-average numbers of committee assignments do not necessarily exhibit lower attendance rates.
- Committees dealing with larger volumes of agenda items are not necessarily more productive in terms of reporting output.
- Committees exhibiting higher levels of unique, non-duplicative member contributions tend to record higher rates of recommendation acceptance by Government.

Collectively, these findings reinforce that committee effectiveness cannot be captured adequately through a single indicator. They confirm that different metrics capture different aspects of committee performance. Consequently, a composite approach may provide a more balanced basis for assessment than reliance on any individual measure.

These findings underscore the conclusions arising from Table 33.

TABLE 34: DATA ANALYSIS OF STATISTICAL CORRELATIONS REFERRED TO IN THIS STUDY

	Relationship	Correlation coefficient	Interpretation
1	Use of committee report recommendation measures in academic studies over time	-0.65	Moderate-to-strong negative relationship. Reliance on recommendation-tracking measures has declined over time, with more recent studies increasingly combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.
2	Overall meeting slot utilisation and meeting time utilisation	0.61	Moderate-to-strong positive relationship. Committees making greater use of their allocated meeting slots also tend to make greater use of the available meeting time.
3	Number of committee assignments per member and overall attendance rate	-0.27	Weak negative relationship. There is limited evidence that attendance rates decline as the number of committee assignments increases, although the relationship is weak.
4	Committee attendance rate and percentage change in attendance when non-members are included	0.02	Very weak positive relationship. The impact of non-member attendance appears largely unrelated to a committee's overall attendance rate.
5	Committee reports laid and reports launched	0.61	Moderate-to-strong positive relationship. Committees producing more reports also tend to launch more reports publicly.
6	Committee reports laid and agenda items handled in public session	-0.35	Weak-to-moderate negative relationship. Committees dealing with larger numbers of agenda items are not necessarily the most productive in terms of reporting output.
7	Recommendation acceptance rate and unique member contributions	-0.23	Weak negative relationship. There is little evidence of a meaningful relationship between recommendation acceptance rates and the level of unique member contributions recorded during public meetings.

Source: Author.

Tables 33 and 34 demonstrate the importance of accounting for committee-specific factors when assessing performance. The variation observed, even among committees of the same type, reflects differences in political context, committee functions, policy salience, and issue-specific pressures, including factors beyond a committee's direct control. Committee effectiveness encompasses several distinct dimensions and cannot be directly observed through any single quantitative measure. Any composite framework or ranking must therefore recognise the diversity of committee performance profiles. Failure to do so risks introducing substantial subjectivity into the resulting assessment and obscuring important differences in how committees perform their functions.

6. Completing the Picture? The Qualitative Dimension

The quantitative measures examined in the preceding sections do not produce a single definitive assessment of committee effectiveness. Instead, they generate a range of possible interpretations, each dependent on the measures selected and the assumptions applied. While grounded in empirical evidence and informed by the practical operation of the committee system, these metrics provide only one perspective from which committee performance may be assessed. As Monk (2010:11) argues, quantitative findings should ideally be corroborated using experiential and stakeholder evidence.

Qualitative approaches may offer several advantages when assessing committee effectiveness:

- Depending on the methodology employed, including structured interviews, surveys, and stakeholder consultations, qualitative evidence can provide richer insight into committee influence, behaviour, and decision-making processes than may be captured through quantitative metrics alone.
- When combined with quantitative analysis, qualitative evidence can provide context, validate emerging findings, and identify dimensions of committee effectiveness that are difficult to observe through administrative data. In doing so, it may highlight both the strengths and limitations of quantitative measures and help explain why particular outcomes arise.

In this sense, quantitative measures provide an "inside-out" perspective based on observable outputs and activity, while qualitative approaches provide an "outside-in" perspective drawn from the experiences and perceptions of those who interact with the committee system.

Bringing these perspectives together has the potential to produce a more rounded assessment of committee effectiveness.

However, only limited qualitative evidence is available in the Irish case. One recent source is the survey of Dáil members conducted by Farrell et al. (2023). Respondents identified committee participation as the most important parliamentary activity, with 84.6% rating it as "very important", compared with speaking in Dáil debates (67.5%), tabling parliamentary questions (56.4%), and preparing legislation or amendments (51.3%). The same survey found that 73.2% of respondents viewed the d'Hondt process for allocating committee Cathaoirleach positions as effective.

While informative, these findings must be interpreted cautiously. Terms such as "important", "effective", "influential", and "impactful" are themselves subjective and may mean different things to different respondents. As discussed throughout this study, perceptions of effectiveness do not necessarily align with observable evidence of effectiveness.

Although Chapter 2 suggests that qualitative evidence could contribute to a more holistic assessment of committee effectiveness, there is currently insufficient Irish evidence to support comprehensive conclusions. Furthermore, undertaking interviews or surveys of committee members and stakeholders was beyond the scope of this study. Consequently, the analysis remains primarily quantitative. Future research combining empirical performance metrics with structured qualitative evidence may provide a more complete understanding of committee effectiveness than either approach in isolation.

7.1 Strengths of qualitative methods

Qualitative methods offer a valuable means of addressing many of the limitations inherent in quantitative evaluations of parliamentary committee effectiveness. As discussed throughout this study, several important dimensions of committee activity, including agenda-setting influence, policy brokerage, anticipatory effects arising from scrutiny, institutional reputation, and the quality of member contributions, are difficult to observe through numerical indicators alone. Qualitative approaches, such as interviews, surveys, stakeholder feedback, case studies, and documentary analysis, can provide insights into the causal mechanisms underlying committee activity and help explain why committees achieve different outcomes despite exhibiting similar quantitative performance. Qualitative evidence is particularly valuable in identifying instances of indirect influence, where committee activity contributes to policy development, administrative change, or shifts in public debate without resulting in immediately observable outputs. In this regard, qualitative methods can add context, nuance and explanatory depth to assessments of committee effectiveness and help capture dimensions of influence that would otherwise remain hidden.

The findings of this study illustrate several areas where qualitative evidence would provide valuable explanatory insight. For example, special committees consistently performed strongly across the meeting utilisation and visibility metrics, yet generally performed less strongly when assessed through recommendation acceptance rates. Similarly, committees with high levels of activity were not necessarily the most productive in terms of reporting output, nor were committees producing the highest number of reports necessarily those attracting the greatest public engagement. These divergences demonstrate the limitations of relying on quantitative data alone and suggest that factors such as committee leadership, stakeholder engagement, political salience, committee culture, and the strategic choices made by members may help explain differences in performance. Qualitative methods are particularly well suited to exploring these underlying factors.

7.2 Weaknesses of qualitative methods

While qualitative methods provide important contextual insights, they are themselves subject to significant limitations. Assessments based on interviews, perceptions, stakeholder surveys, or anecdotal evidence inevitably involve subjective judgments that may differ considerably depending on the perspective of the respondent. As mentioned previously, Thomas (1993) observed, committee effectiveness is frequently "in the eye of the beholder", with committees, Government officials, advocacy organisations and external observers often holding very different views regarding the impact of committee activity. Qualitative evidence can also be difficult to replicate, compare systematically, or aggregate across large numbers of committees and parliamentary terms. Access to participants may be uneven, recall bias may affect responses, and assessments may be influenced by contemporary political controversies rather than long-term committee performance. Consequently, while qualitative methods can provide valuable explanatory insights, they often lack the transparency, consistency and comparability offered by structured quantitative approaches.

Equally, the findings of this study demonstrate the value of quantitative evidence in challenging assumptions that may arise from qualitative assessments. For example, certain committees may enjoy a strong reputation among members, stakeholders, or parliamentary observers, yet perform less strongly across particular quantitative measures. Conversely, committees attracting limited public attention may exhibit comparatively strong levels of activity or member engagement. Qualitative assessments alone may therefore risk overstating the importance of reputation, individual committee personalities, or highly visible events at the expense of underlying patterns of activity and performance.

7.3 Potential mixed-methods future research

The findings of this study suggest that the most promising avenue for future research lies in the development of a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative evidence. This is consistent with the more recent literature on this topic. Several findings would benefit from further qualitative investigation. For example, research could explore why certain committees perform strongly on utilisation and visibility measures but less strongly on committee report recommendation acceptance. Similarly, qualitative research could be undertaken to examine key drivers behind the consistent decline in attendance between 2021 and 2024 and the variation between committee types. Additional qualitative analysis could also examine why some committees generate substantially higher report download rates and media attention than others, notwithstanding similar levels of activity or reporting output.

Future research could augment these measures through a combination of committee member surveys, stakeholder surveys, witness surveys and committee staff interviews. Surveys of committee members, if carefully structured, could provide insight into perceptions of committee influence, workload, scrutiny effectiveness, and overall committee performance. Surveys of external stakeholders, including representative bodies, advocacy organisations, researchers and policy specialists, could assess the extent to which committees are regarded as influential actors in policy development and public accountability. Notably absent from the current committee system is any formal mechanism for obtaining structured feedback from witnesses following committee engagements. Witness surveys, if introduced, could provide valuable evidence on the quality of committee scrutiny, the level of member preparation, the effectiveness of questioning, the fairness of proceedings, and the overall conduct of committee examinations.

Interviews with committee staff would provide an additional and potentially unique practitioner perspective. Staff possess detailed institutional knowledge regarding committee culture, leadership, Work Programme development, member engagement, and relationships with Government Departments and external stakeholders. Such interviews could provide additional explanatory context for quantitative findings and help identify factors associated with high or low committee performance that are not readily observable through administrative data alone.

Such an approach would allow researchers to test whether committees that perform strongly across the quantitative metrics are also perceived as influential by those who participate in, support and engage with the committee system. Overall, the extent to which those perceptions align with the *Composite Performance Framework* would provide an important test of the *Framework's* validity and may help identify dimensions of effectiveness that remain unobserved within the quantitative data.

7. Conclusion: Yielding a Composite Performance Framework

Evaluating parliamentary committee effectiveness through the quantitative metric sets and component measures examined in this study reinforces a central conclusion of the literature that assessing committee effectiveness is methodologically challenging and cannot be reduced to a single, universally accepted measure. The principal difficulty lies not only in addressing the many unquantifiable factors that shape committee activity, but also in accounting for the institutional, political and cultural dynamics that influence committee performance. While qualitative evidence may provide valuable context and explanatory depth, it cannot entirely eliminate the inherent subjectivity involved in assessing effectiveness.

1. Which quantitative metrics offer the strongest foundation, based on available data, for evaluating how effectively parliamentary committees fulfil their legislative, oversight, and accountability functions?

The ten measures contained within the four metric sets evaluated in this study capture different dimensions of committee activity, performance and engagement, including resource utilisation, reporting output, member participation, and visibility. Their evaluation and the resulting rankings demonstrate that committee performance varies significantly depending on the measure selected. This finding provides strong evidence that committee effectiveness is inherently multidimensional and cannot be adequately assessed through any single indicator in isolation. The measures selected for inclusion were not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, they were chosen because they collectively represent the broadest range of committee activities for which reliable and comparable data were available. Taken together, they constitute the most comprehensive quantitative assessment of Oireachtas committee performance undertaken to date. The findings suggest that these measures provide a useful empirical foundation for assessing committee effectiveness.

2. How can these metrics be systematically integrated into a replicable composite framework (or ranking) of parliamentary committee effectiveness, and how can this framework be further validated and refined to enhance its reliability and robustness?

As an illustrative and exploratory exercise, and subject to the limitations identified throughout this study, rankings across the ten selected indicators are combined using a simple frequency-based approach. Rather than applying weightings or aggregating scores, the *Framework* counts the number of occasions on which each committee appears within the top ten positions across the ten measures examined. This approach was chosen because it is transparent, replicable, and avoids the methodological challenges associated with assigning subjective weightings to

individual indicators. Each measure captures a different dimension of committee activity and performance, including resource utilisation, reporting output, member engagement, and public visibility. The resulting frequency score therefore reflects the extent to which a committee performs strongly across multiple dimensions rather than its performance on any single indicator.

7.1 Applying the Composite Performance Framework

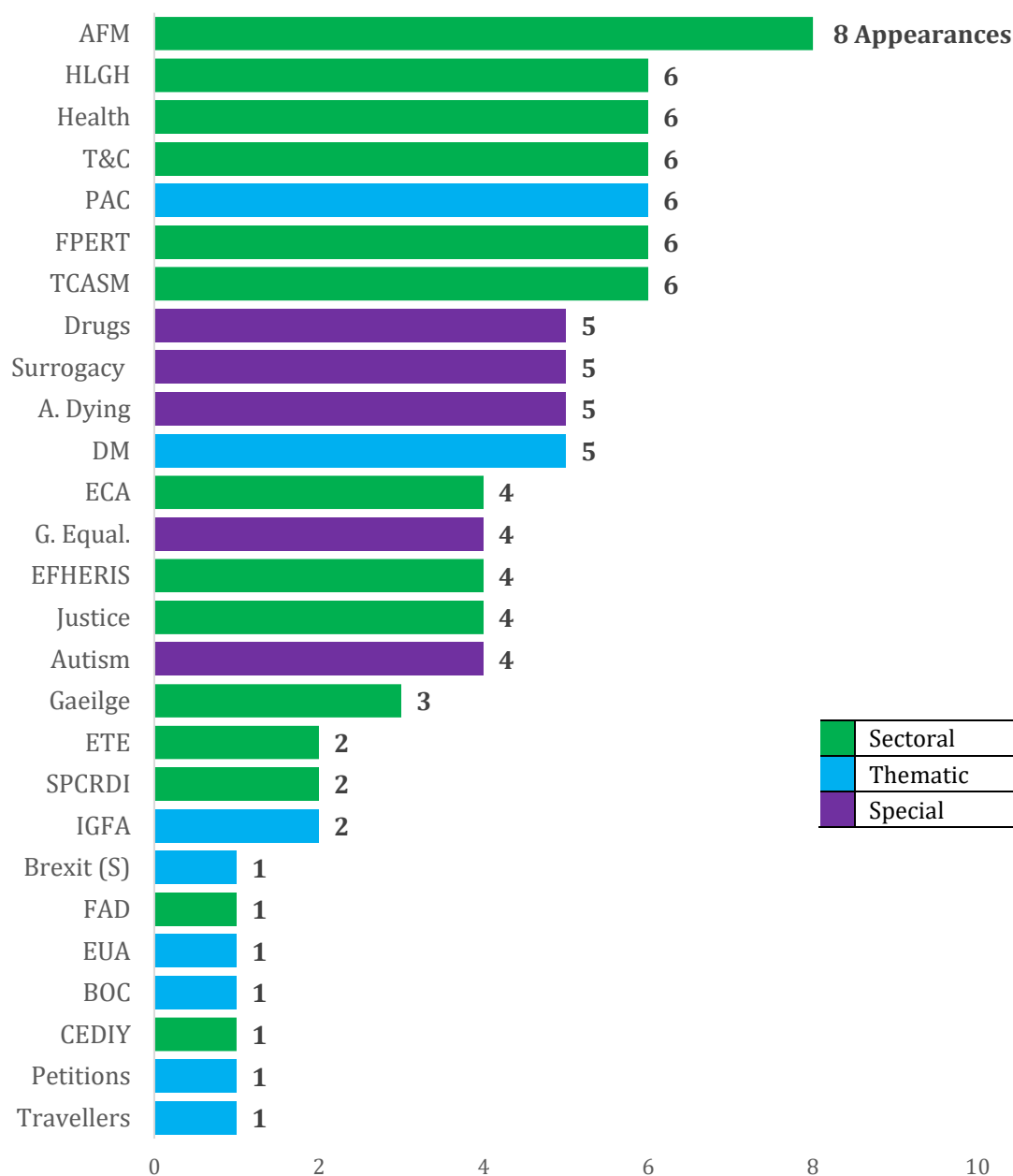
This *Composite Performance Framework* is not intended to identify the "best" committee or to provide a definitive measure of committee effectiveness. Rather, it should be interpreted as a benchmarking and diagnostic tool uniquely offering a structured and comparative means of bringing together a diverse range of quantitative evidence to inform broader assessments of committee effectiveness. Its principal contribution lies in demonstrating that meaningful comparative assessment is possible when multiple dimensions of committee impact, influence and performance (the three concepts) are considered simultaneously, while maintaining transparency regarding the assumptions upon which the assessment is based.

The *Framework* score is calculated by counting the number of occasions on which a committee appears within the top ten ranked committees across the ten selected indicators (see Chapter 5), as follows:

1. Meeting slot utilisation
2. Meeting time utilisation
3. Reports laid
4. Agenda items discussed
5. Report recommendation acceptance
6. Member attendance
7. Non-member attendance
8. Member contributions
9. Downloads per report
10. Press articles

Each Top 10 appearance contributes *one point* to a committee's overall score. The maximum possible score is therefore ten and the minimum is zero. For example, the Agriculture Committee appears in the Top 10 for all except metrics 9 and 10 above, yielding a *Framework* score of 8, or 8 'appearances' in the Top 10. Figure 18 (overleaf) summarises the results.

FIGURE 18: COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE USING THE COMPOSITE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK - FREQUENCY OF TOP 10 APPEARANCES ACROSS THE TEN METRICS



As Figure 18 demonstrates, committees associated with highly salient policy issues, legislative activity, or scrutiny functions, including Agriculture, Housing, Health, Transport, and Public Accounts, rank strongly within the framework. By contrast, committees such as Travellers, Petitions, Good Friday Agreement, Childrens, and Budgetary Oversight rank less strongly. While informative, these scores should be interpreted with caution and considered in the context of each committee's remit, workload, political environment, and institutional role.

Based on the frequency of Top 10 appearances across the ten indicators, committees may furthermore be grouped into four broad performance profiles. High-performing committees appeared six or more times within the Top 10 rankings, balanced committees appeared four to five times, mixed-profile committees appeared two to three times, and developing committees appeared once or not at all.

TABLE 35: PERFORMANCE PROFILES OF COMMITTEES BASED ON CPF SCORE

Profile	Committees (and CPF scores)	Possible interpretation
High Performing (Scores of 6 or 6+)	AFM (8), HLGH (6), Health (6), T&C (6), PAC (6), FPERT (6), TCASM (6)	Strong performance across several dimensions, including activity, participation, utilisation, visibility, or reporting. No single metric explains their position; rather, they perform consistently across multiple indicators.
Balanced (Scores of 4-5)	Drugs Use (5), Surrogacy (5), Assisted Dying (5), Disability Matters (4), ECA (4), Gender Equality (4), EFHERIS (4), Justice (4), Autism (4)	Strong performance in particular domains, but not with the same breadth or consistency as the high-performing group. They feature regularly across the <i>Framework</i> and demonstrate evidence of multidimensional performance.
Mixed (Scores of 2-3)	Gaeilge (3), ETE (2), SPCARDI (2), IGFA (2), Brexit (2)	Strong performance on selected indicators but committees do not rank consistently across the broader range of measures. Their results suggest more specialised strengths or a narrower performance profile.
Developing (Scores of 0-1)	FAD (1), EUA (1), BOC (1), CEDIY (1), Petitions (1), Travellers (1)	Limited representation across the ten indicators with few observable strengths. Factors such as remit, workload, committee type, political salience, and institutional role may help explain these results.

Figure 18 and Table 35 indicate that stronger results are most associated with sectoral committees, which account for six of the seven committees classified within the High Performing profile. The sole exception is the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), a thematic committee. Special committees are concentrated within the Balanced profile, with Assisted Dying, Surrogacy and Autism all recording strong results across several indicators, albeit with less consistency across the full range of measures. By contrast, committees within the Developing profile are predominantly thematic, although a small number of sectoral committees

are also represented. Overall, the distribution suggests that sectoral committees tend to score highly across a broader range of indicators than other committee types, although evidence of strong committee activity and engagement is evident across all three committee categories. The findings further reinforce the view that committee effectiveness comprises multiple and interrelated dimensions and is influenced by differences in remit, workload, policy salience and institutional role. These profiles provide a useful means of illustrating patterns of comparative committee performance and should be interpreted as descriptive classifications within the *Framework* rather than definitive assessments of committee effectiveness.

The *Framework* therefore identifies strengths and weaknesses rather than simply producing a league table or definitive ranking. Its production and application represent an important step towards the development of a transparent and replicable *Framework* through which committee performance, and by extension committee effectiveness, may be assessed. Its principal value lies in facilitating comparison across multiple indicators while maintaining transparency regarding the assumptions on which the assessment is based.

The findings of this study reinforce the conclusion that committee effectiveness cannot be reduced to a single metric set, index, or ranking. As demonstrated throughout the analysis, each indicator captures a different aspect of committee activity and performance, often producing markedly different results. While the study identifies several meaningful correlations, it also confirms the limitations of quantitative analysis in establishing causation. Future refinement of the *Framework*, particularly through the incorporation of qualitative evidence drawn from committee members, Cathaoirligh, committee staff, witnesses and other stakeholders, and additional performance indicators, may further strengthen its explanatory value, reliability, and overall robustness. In this respect, the *Framework* offers a practical foundation for evidence-informed evaluation of the committee system as it exists, while recognising the institutional, political and behavioural factors that quantitative measures alone cannot fully capture.

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Appendix 1: Reports selected for tracking of recommendation implementation / action by Government

A1: TRACKING OF COMMITTEE REPORTS RECOMMENDATIONS – CHOSEN SELECTION

Committee	No. of reports	Report title
AFM	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flooding Risks at Lough Funshinagh (December 2022) PLS Veterinary Medicinal Products, Medicated Feeds and Fertilisers Regulation Bill 2022 (November 2022)
CEDIY	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLS Childcare (Amendment) Bill 2023 (June 2023) Assessments of Need for Children (February 2023)
ECA	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity (November 2022) PLS Energy (Windfall Gains in the Energy Sector) Bill 2023 (May 2023)
EFHERIS	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Future of STEM in Irish Education (July 2023) PLS Higher Education Authority Bill 2021 (September 2021)
ETE	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLS Right to Request Remote Work Bill, 2022 (July 2022) PLS Personal Injuries Resolution Board Bill 2022 (July 2022) Representative Actions for the Protection of the Collective Interests of Consumers Bill, 2022 (December 2022)
FAD	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration of Revised Estimates (March 2023)
FPERT	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLS Central Bank (Individual Accountability Framework) Bill 2021 (April 2022) Banking (January 2023)
Gaeilge	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T1 agus T2 na hArdteistiméireachta don Ghaeilge agus Caighdeán Gaeilge na nÁbhar Oidí agus an Tacaíocht atá de dhíth orthu (Samhain 2021) Earnáil na Gaeilge i gCathair Bhéal Feirste – Eiseamláir ar Leith (Iúil 2023)
Health	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Health (Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill 2019 (July 2022) Independent Review of the Operation of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 (September 2023)
HLGH	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLS Tailte Éireann Bill 2020 (December 2021) Urban Regeneration (May 2022) Embodied Carbon in the Built Environment (October 2022)
Justice	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforcement of Court Orders relating to Child Maintenance, Access and Custody (July 2023) Examination of Enforcement of Road Traffic Offences (May 2023) PLS Sale of Alcohol Bill 2022 (March 2023) PLS Communications (Retention of Data) (Amendment) Bill 2022 (June 2022) PLS Garda Síochána (Powers) Bill 2022 (June 2022)
SPCRDI	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bogus Self Employment (June 2021) Examination of Employment Services (November 2021) Commission on Pensions (February 2022) PLS Social Welfare (Child Maintenance and Liable Relatives Provisions) Bill (October 2023)
T&C	1	Report on travel episodes relating to its consideration of national aviation policy 2022-23 (June 2023)
TCASM	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Outcomes Contracting in Irish Sport (April 2023) Working Conditions and Skills Shortages in Tourism and Hospitality Sector (November 2022)
Travellers	1	Final Report (November 2021)
BOC	1	Final Report on the Estimates Process (June 2024)*
DM	1	Aligning Disability Services with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (February 2023)
EUA	1	Cybersecurity & Resilience – Securing the Future (May 2022)
IGFA	1	Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement (March 2023)
PAC	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examination of the 2019 and 2020 Appropriation Accounts for Vote 31 (July 2023) Examination of the 2019 and 2020 Appropriation Accounts for Vote 29 and NBP (April 2022)
Autism	1	Final Report (June 2023)
Brexit (S)	1	Final Report (December 2021)
Gender E.	1	Final Report (December 2022)
Surrogacy	1	Final Report (July 2022)
A. Dying	1	Final Report (March 2024)*

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*These reports were outside the survey period but had verifiable responses from Government and were updates to interim reports published during the survey period.