

# IRELAND NEEDS #MOREWOMEN IN POLITICS!

If a woman is elected to politics, politics can change her. If enough women are elected, they will change politics, and we need that change, according to Ciairín de Buis, CEO of Women for Election. The organisation has spent the past year training and working with women across the political spectrum in Ireland with a view to getting more women elected in the 2019 Local Elections in May.

In politics, as in life, very little is certain. Recent political developments across the world – including Brexit and the subsequent fallout – have shown us that many of the old political certainties are no more. But there is one definite on the 2019 political calendar: on 24 May we will be going to the polls to vote in the Local and European Elections.

Women, in all our diversity, need to be at the table when decisions are taken that affect our lives. We need to be in Council Chambers, the Dáil, Seanad and the European Parliament. Women represent (just) over half of the population but we are (just) over one fifth of our local politicians (women make up slightly less than 21% of councillors).

That is not because men are better councillors, or men are more electable. It's because a lot more men run for election. That needs to change. More women need to have their faces on posters and their names on the ballot paper. That's where 'Women for Election' comes in.

## TRAINING & SUPPORT SERVICES

I am the CEO of Women for Election – a not-for-profit organisation that is working to get more women elected. We train and support women right across the political spectrum, who are interested in running for election. We work with women from all parties and none, to provide training and expertise in communications, campaigning and confidence.

We are non-partisan and politically neutral; our sole aim is to see more women elected. Our training works – half the number of women councillors who were elected last time round (2014) had trained with our organisation.

We have spent the past year training and working with women across the country and from across the political spectrum with a view to more women getting elected in the 2019 Local Elections.

We've worked with women inspired by recent referendum campaigns, women who are active in their local communities, women who are on the boards of their local school, tidy towns' committee or residents' association; women who want to take the next step and serve their community on their local council.



*May's local elections could be a game-changer in terms of gender balance in Irish politics, according to Ciairín de Buis, CEO of Women for Election.*

## WOMEN IN POLITICS

They have come to our training sessions, learned new skills and built their confidence. They have networked and have been inspired as well as inspiring. I have met women who will be your local councillor.

### DEVELOPING VITAL LINKS

Since Women for Election was founded in 2012, women have trained with us, improved their confidence and much, much more. They've had the chance to meet with other politically-engaged women and develop links and connections across party and other boundaries.

Last year we went to Galway, Cork, Longford and Dublin with our trainers and experts. Along the way we worked with around 500 women – from all the political parties and many who were not in a party – and will be working with more this year.

We want to see more women in politics, we want to see more women in council chambers up and down the country, which means more women must run in the May elections. To do our part in making that happen, we will keep working with women from across the political spectrum helping and supporting them on their political journey.

After the local elections we will continue to work with those women, and will be running events for elected councillors. In the meantime, we will be doing whatever we can to see more women running for election in May.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kerry woman Ciairín de Buis is the CEO of Women for Election – a not-for-profit non-partisan organisation whose mission is to inspire, support and equip women to succeed in politics at both local and national level. And, in her own words, she is “a political nerd”!

She joined Women for Election in early 2018, having worked for 20 years in the NGO sector in Ireland. She previously worked in the children's rights area, and headed up 'Start Strong' for nine years.

Ciairín is a former member of the Parole Board, and a board member of Sonas – Freedom from Domestic Violence. In her spare time, she can be found walking the beach.



### FACTS AND FIGURES – DID YOU KNOW THAT....

- Since 2012 Women for Election has trained more than 1,000 women to run for election, from all around Ireland and 18 EU member states.
- 196 women were elected in 2014, 50% were trained by Women for Election.
- 30% increase in the number of women who ran in the local elections in 2014 compared to 2009, with a 21% increase in the number of women elected.
- In the 2016 General Election 30% of the candidates were female – a 100% increase compared to 2011.
- The General Election in February 2016 was an important step towards achieving gender equality in Dáil Éireann; 35 women were elected as members of the 32nd Dáil (16 of these were incumbents, and 19 were first time victors).
- There was a significant increase on the 2011 General Election when just 25 women were elected to the 31st Dáil.
- Almost 40% of elected TDs in the 2016 General Election took part in Women for Election training.
- Women now make up 22% of the current Dáil.

(Source: <https://womenforelection.ie/about-us/>)



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### 'POLITICS NEEDS WOMEN' CONFERENCE

To mark the centenary of women exercising their right to vote in 1918, a large gathering of politicians attended the 'Politics Needs Women' conference in the Convention Centre in Dublin on 14 December 2018.

The conference outlined what women have achieved over the past 100 years and what needs to be done to encourage more women into politics in the future, especially with the Local and European Elections taking place on 24 May next.

Councillors Sinead Guckian, Mary Hanna Hourigan and Gobnait Moynihan from the Association of Irish Local Government joined TDs Bríd Smith, Maria Bailey and Kathleen Funchion and Senator Alice-Mary Higgins for a panel discussion on 'From Local to National: Reflections from Council and the Oireachtas'.

The one-day conference also featured current female ministers, three former female Tánaistí, former President Mary McAleese and Mairead McGuinness MEP, among others.



*Pictured at the 'Politics Needs Women' conference at the Convention Centre (l-r): Cllr Sinead Guckian, AILG Diversity Committee; Alison O'Connor, Broadcaster and MC for the event; Liam Kenny, AILG Director; Cllr Mary Hanna Hourigan, AILG Vice President; and Cllr Gobnait Moynihan, AILG Executive Committee.*

### INSTIL CONFIDENCE TO RUN

A core element of the training provided by Women for Election is hearing from women who have been elected; and a common thread is that they were asked to run. They didn't have the confidence to put themselves forward, or sometimes to even consider themselves as a candidate, without being asked. And usually asked more than once!

We've heard from women who have been elected to and worked inside Council Chambers, the Dáil, Seanad Éireann and even the Cabinet; and they were asked to run. We've heard from one woman who had been elected first to the council, then the Dáil and now serves in Cabinet. When she was asked to run she assumed the question was for someone else!

Another politician told us how she was asked, and then asked again, and then asked to 'just think about it for a while'. She is now a county councillor and will be running in the local elections on 24 May to keep her seat.

Many of those running for election have already been selected or have declared. However, there are still some candidates who haven't yet been selected – those of you who will be running in the election, and haven't yet got a running mate, ask a woman to



**"I never should have told him who I voted for."**

run with you.

Those of you who are retiring and will not be running, ask a woman to run. Those of us interested in our local community, ask a woman to run. Just ask a woman to run.

For more information visit <http://www.womenforelection.ie/>