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Dear Editor,

Many have rightly pointed out how the inclusion in the first Senate of Unionists - not just Protestants - eased that community’s transition from the UK to the Irish Free State. Such a generous allocation was vital given the leaching of Protestants whose flight was being hastened by events like the Dunmanway massacre of April 1922.

In later generations, and after the 1937 constitution, the existence of the three Trinity College seats, in particular, enabled the election of differing minorities, not just Protestants but secular liberals, a prime example being Owen Sheehy Skeffington. These were voices very rarely heard in the Dail, it being the chamber elected through party and by popular vote. They were probably unelectable, yet vital.

The university senators perform a similar role to this day, outwith the discipline of the whips. Maybe they are and were an elite, but then without elites we would have very little art or architecture.

Those university senators were joined over more recent years by a series of Northern Ireland people amongst the Taoiseach’s nominees like John Robb, Gordon Wilson and Maurice Hayes (and in one instance by Sam McAughtry, the Belfast writer and journalist who was elected off a panel). The non-nationalists appointed were Ulster voices from the partitioned part of Ireland. Their presence was proper, indeed necessary given the Articles 2 and 3 claim on the six counties.

As the Constitution now states, “It is the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions”, such a presence remains necessary.

I have or had an interest being an unsuccessful candidate for a Dublin University seat in 2011. Other dissenting voices need a platform in the Oireachtas, be they from declining or unfashionable groups like Roman Catholics; or non-statists, conservatives, iconoclasts whose opinion is still beyond the pale or those with ideas as yet unheard of. The continuation of Seanad Eireann will give Ireland a chance to hear what it may not want to hear.

Yours sincerely

Jeffrey Dudgeon