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Political Forum

From Ghana to Kiskeam: Political programme works for Ekow



Peter Horgan

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An internship programme in dublin saw one Cork TD take on a new intern over the past six months.



Ekow Agyemon-Prempeh, far left, with other migrant interns in the Opening Power to Diversity scheme

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"I have the belief that at the centre of all of us, we are all political animals."

That seems to sum up Ekow Agyemon-Prempeh's view of his time working with Fianna Fáil Cork North West TD, Michael Moynihan.

Mr Agyemon-Prempeh has spent the last six months working in the opposition spokesperson for communications' office in Leinster House as part of the Crosscare Migrant Project 'opening power to diversity' scheme.

"Whether we like it or not, we are all involved in the political process," said Mr Agyemon-Prempeh, originally from Ghana, but living in Dublin for the past decade.

"Ireland is becoming more and more multicultural yet there is no representation of immigrants at a political level at the moment. There are no immigrants in the Dáil. I believe that everybody should have a voice, and I guess you could say I am somewhat of a trailblazer.

"For me to be able to walk through the corridors of power, perhaps in the next few years Ireland will have its first black Taoiseach."

Crosscare Migrant Project provides an information and advocacy service to over 3,000 migrants every year from its Dublin city. Between January 2005 and June 2012 some 42,000 people became Irish citizens through naturalisation. Irish citizens of migrant background are a growing group and part of Irish society. Levels of political representation and participation need to increase accordingly.

The 2011 General Election saw a handful of new Irish citizens run for the Dáil – approximately 3 of the 564 people who ran for the 166 seats were naturalised Irish citizens.

Through the OPD scheme participants get direct experience of the work of TDs. Participants are matched with a particular TD for two days a week over a six month period. The intern attends

committee meetings and Dáil sessions. The participants will also be a part of the TDs' office and will contribute actively to the work of the TD. Participants will also assist with constituency work.

Change

"It is about time the system changed to reflect the difference that is there in the country", said Mr Agyemon-Prempah, who is also a member of the main opposition party in Ghana, the New Patriotic Party.

Mr Agyemon-Prempah's experience varied from attending and speaking at the annual Sean Moylan commemoration in Kiskeam, meeting with party leaders and being present on the night when the Government secured a deal on the promissory notes and Anglo-Irish bank.

"I also had a chance to talk with the publicity gurus, or journalists, involved in the Dáil. I hope that I have proved beyond doubt that if you work hard and aim for something, that the colour of your skin should not be a barrier."

That drive and determination was praised highly by Mr Agyemon-Prempah's mentor, Michael Moynihan.

"It has been a fantastic experience over the past six months," said Mr Moynihan.

"I can only hope that he has benefitted from the work that my office is doing. It is certainly vitally important that everybody is integrated into society, and politics is one way of that integration. We have held long discussions on the philosophy of politics, Irish politics, Ghanaian politics and hopefully he has learned something from the programme.

"Never say never," said Mr Moynihan on the possibility of a black Taoiseach.

"Before Obama was elected there were people saying that America was not ready but look at the job he has done there. What counts is leadership, that's the number one priority, not the colour of someone's skin."

And as for Mr Agyemon-Prempah's Irish political party views six months on?

"I would say I am quite fluid."

Spoken like a true politician.

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