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**From:** John Sheridan <[REDACTED]>  
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**To:** ELC Research  
**Subject:** Feedback on research topics

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A Chara,

I complement An Coimisiún Toghcháin (ACT) on their work to date. I do feel that the next two years are critical for the future and credibility of An Coimisiún given it is anticipated that every type of electoral event possible will take place in the next 21 months. I think the work of An Coimisiún in how it conducts those electoral events will in itself set the bar about trust and confidence in an independent electoral commission.

### **Section 3**

Specifically on this consultation, with regard to section 3 - The five thematic strands:

Strands B, C and D are fundamentally going to be proven by the successful management of electoral events. I don't necessarily see a need for ACT to reinvent the wheel in these strands in the short term, but rather bringing a consistent and professional nationwide approach with clear communication will validate ACT's credibility in these strands. Long term, of course they're reasonable thematic strands for research.

Strand E on blue sky curiosity is a noble thought, but I do feel in the current climate, it is arguably better for a statutory agency in its infancy to focus on strands B C and D and ensure the credibility and independence of the organisation in itself. See point below on the threshold criteria for research topics.

### **Section 4**

With regard to section 4 - Potential Research Projects, my views are:

In Strand A - this section should include an aim of consolidating historical election results and historical boundary maps online. This is an important piece of research and archival retrieval work. Currently the only electoral information readily available is on voluntary websites.

In Strand B - I do have a slight concern as to the official process or threshold for a topic to be taken into consideration by ACT and this should be in place to protect the integrity of An Coimisiún itself. I did suggest in the Constituency Review report that there ought to be an appendix of ancillary matters included for future research. Perhaps an annual consultation period would give a clear window for such matters to be raised and mean ACT didn't get drawn into day-to-day political commentary if and when a political storm happens. The reality is that every issue in Section 4 - strand B can be "spun" as being advantageous one way or another depending on a political party's views. I would have a concern for the reputation of ACT as the body overseeing electoral events that research could be mis-used to undermine the credibility or validity of electoral events. (E.g. in 2020, there was a clear online disinformation campaign that persons elected on later counts had less of a mandate than those elected on first counts...)

Another example: Arising from the Constituency review, the report confirmed research into six-seat constituencies. Having read quite a number of the submissions, I personally didn't see where the outcome of researching six seat constituencies was a major research request. Just for example as opposed to researching

the impact of the county boundary term of reference. From what I saw the largest individual quantities of submissions focussed on Limerick/Clare and Drogheda which showed varying views on how the commission should deal with urban areas straddling county boundaries. Arguably, flexibility on the county boundary rule would be far more beneficial to the work of ACT than six seat constituencies. I don't disagree with ACT researching either topic, my point is around a threshold or validation of why one topic is more deserving of research over another is important for the credibility of An Coimisiún.

In terms of research suggestions for Strand B, as I suggested in my previous submission: the current Electoral Divisions are totally outdated and not in sync with current settlements. While this caused some issues in the Dáil report in August beyond the control of ACT e.g. Bettystown in Meath being split between Louth and Meath East. I expect for the next review of Local election boundaries it will be a significant issue if not resolved (e.g. the inadequacy of the boundary of Drogheda Urban and Drogheda Rural LEAs is well documented). This was also referenced during the recent Dáil debate on the new boundaries and the outdated nature of electoral divisions and its consequence for local boundaries given there are 63 electoral divisions in the state with population over 10,000 persons in the 2022 census.

A final research suggestion in tandem with the research on postal voting would be for a set period of once-off early voting e.g. seven days before polling day for those who can't vote in person on election day. You might have a small number of locations in a constituency where voters could genuinely vote a week early if they had proof e.g. a flight abroad etc. This would give enough time for their names to be marked on the register so they couldn't vote again on polling day.

In Strand C - in terms of reporting on electoral events, I believe this is a major positive step and hopefully will focus on efficiency of counts which can sometimes be very long and drawn out. I might suggest it could include analysis from the marked register of % turnout based on category of voter: P, D, E & L as this would be valuable for future engagement on turnout in migrant communities. While I also have anecdotal evidence from the marked register of lower % turnout depending on distance from the polling station.

In Strand D - I would be hoping ACT is planning a major PR campaign around the consequences of the Kiely judgement ahead of the 2024 European and Local Elections. It would be scandalous if we had to go through another election, as happened in 2019, of scores of ballots ruled out of order in each LEA when a PR campaign can solve this problem. In fact a PR campaign is the only solution. And it will save some hours of count staff having to discuss disputed ballots!

I have also suggested an education piece is around a citizen being able to search their electoral area and public representatives by inputting their eircode (as can be done in the UK). Its not acceptable that voters only able to find out public representatives is downloading pdf maps (if they can find them) and working it out for themselves.

My good wishes to the Commission on its work to date and in the future.

Is mise,

Cllr John Sheridan  
Ardee Local Electoral Area  
Louth County Council  
[REDACTED]

Le do thoil cuimhnigh ar an imshaol roimh prioritáil an ríomhphost seo. Tá an ríomhphost seo (agus aon iatán a ghabhann leis) príobháideach agus rúnda agus d'fhéadfadh go mbeadh eolas inti atá faoi phribhléid dlíthúil. Ní ceadmhach úsáid an ríomhphoist seo d'éinne ach don té ar seoladh chuige é. Munar duit an ríomhphost seo nó an té atá freagrach as é a sheoladh, tá cosc ar chóipeáil agus ar sheachadadh an ríomhphoist seo agus aon iatán a ghabhann leis chuig éinne nó

úsáid a bhaint as a bhfuil ann; ní ceart an ríomhphost seo nó aon iatán a léamh. D'fhéadfadh do mbeadh cosc iomlán dlíthiúil ar sceitheadh nó comhfhreagras nó aon úsáid eile gan chead ar a bhfuil sa ríomhphost seo agus d'fhéadadh sé a bheith ina chion coiriúil.

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