

Strategy Statement

2024-2026

1 Chairperson's Foreword

I was appointed as Chairperson of An Coimisiún Toghcháin, Ireland's new Electoral Commission, on its establishment on 9 February 2023 and it is my honour to now present its first statutory strategy statement as required by law, in which is set out its key aims, objectives, outputs and strategies in respect of the first three years of its operation.

The establishment of an independent electoral commission in Ireland has been part of public debate for several decades. The establishment of An Coimisiún Toghcháin as a statutory, independent body signals a recognition that Ireland's democracy needs to be fostered, enhanced and supported in the context of a rapidly changing society and the emergence of new challenges to democracy. An Coimisiún has a broad remit in the oversight of electoral events, the support of democratic structures generally and the enhancement of public participation, confidence and knowledge. In some cases it has taken over existing functions, but it is also vested with new powers and duties to safeguard and strengthen democracy in Ireland in the areas of voter education, research, promoting democratic participation and ensuring electoral integrity.

It is my pleasure to present to the Houses of the Oireachtas, and to the Irish people, our key strategic aims, objectives, outputs and priorities and our strategy for achieving these. These include a significant research programme, most especially a longitudinal study of electoral events which is to continue for several decades. This research will provide us with valuable and previously not collected information that will enable An Coimisiún to fulfil another key priority, the design of education programmes that will enhance and promote more active participation by instilling an appreciation of the importance of democratic engagement in our young people. For the purpose of its statutory obligation to engage oversight of electoral events An Coimisiún will conduct far reaching nationwide campaigns to provide information



on upcoming electoral events, and will conduct post electoral event reviews. The role of An Coimisiún in the oversight of the electoral register will provide information to enable the effective assessment and monitoring of the accuracy and completeness of the register as its modernisation programme progresses. Another key priority is the development and implementation of plans and structures to deliver on the as yet not commenced regulatory powers. Finally, the recruitment of a workforce and building an agile and flexible culture within An Coimisiún and the establishment of the necessary infrastructure to carry out this crucial work is of importance in the coming months.

By this strategy statement we acknowledge our ambition that Ireland be a global leader in electoral integrity, participation and trust. Ultimately, An Coimisiún hopes that through its work it will provide a valuable contribution to society by improving the total levels of democratic engagement, confidence and knowledge. I look forward to working with all of my dedicated and enthusiastic colleagues in delivering on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Ms Justice Marie Baker
Chairperson
An Coimisiún Toghcháin

2 Chief Executive Introduction

In a representative democracy, the source of legitimacy is the people and for this democracy to remain strong and alive, it is important that the citizens have confidence in our elections and referendums and in those entrusted with managing, protecting and defending the integrity of the electoral process.

As one of the longest continuous democracies in the world, Irish people have always had great trust in our system of voting and in the integrity of elections in this country.

However, we should not be complacent. A significant feature of the much-discussed global weakening of democracy is the fragmented information systems and complex processes that leave people less informed and more distrusting of state and other institutions and even their fellow citizens. In particular, trust in political systems has been declining and misinformation and disinformation have the potential to diminish our cohesiveness as a society.

The new Electoral Commission, An Coimisiún Toghcháin, provides the State with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance public understanding and participation in the democratic process and to deal with any new challenges which may arise. As a small organisation, many of our objectives will be best achieved by collaboration with many and varied stakeholders, all of whom play a key part in the enhancement of our democracy.

Aside from the assignment of responsibility for a number of existing electoral functions – information on referendums, review of constituency boundaries, the registration of political parties – I am also very excited at the prospect of the new research, education and public engagement programmes, oversight of the electoral register to improve its accuracy and completeness, and the opportunity to tackle the problem of misinformation and disinformation in an electoral context.



One of the main initial deliverables for the fledgling Coimisiún will be to establish its reputation as an expert and trusted source of information and advice, and for the delivery of the highest-quality services. Proactive strategies to build understanding about electoral processes, particularly for traditionally under-reached groups, will be a critical focus for the Commission well into the future.

Our fundamental ambition should be eye-watering – to build an organisation that will sustain and flourish for the next century – and I am certain that we can deliver on this commitment through our core values of independence, innovation, excellence and collaboration. It is a great privilege to lead this organisation in the early years following its establishment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Art O'Leary'.

Art O'Leary
Chief Executive
An Coimisiún Toghcháin

3 Strategy Statement

2024-2026

An Coimisiún Toghcháin is a statutory, independent body, established on 9 February 2023 with responsibility for a broad range of electoral functions set out in the Electoral Reform Act 2022.

Our work is focused on ensuring inclusivity, participation and engagement with Ireland's electoral and democratic system so that people across Ireland can continue to have trust in our elections and their outcomes.

Our Functions

Under the Electoral Reform Act 2022, An Coimisiún is responsible for a range of existing electoral functions including:

- Explaining the subject matter of referendum proposals, the promotion of public awareness of referendums and encouragement of the electorate to vote at referendum polls.
- The conducting of reviews and making

reports in relation to the constituencies for the election of members to the Dáil and the European Parliament.

- Making reports for the Minister in relation to local electoral boundaries; and
- The registration of political parties.

An Coimisiún is also tasked with several new electoral roles including:

- Preparing research programmes and conducting research on electoral policy and procedure, and providing advice, as required, to the Minister and Government.
- Promoting public awareness of and working to increase public participation in the State's electoral and democratic processes through education and information programmes.
- Oversight of the Electoral Register, making recommendations and setting standards in relation to its maintenance and updating.
- The preparation of ex-post reports on the administration of electoral events.



An Coimisiún Toghcháin - from left to right back row: Mr. Peter Finnegan, Mr. John Curran, Mr. Ger Deering. From left to right front row: Mr. Alex Attwood, Ms. Justice Marie Baker (Chair), Ms. Maura Quinn, Professor Emerita Caroline Fennell.

The Electoral Reform Act 2022 also sets out the following regulation functions which will be undertaken on commencement of the relevant parts of the Act.

- The regulation of online paid for political advertising, ensuring transparency in respect of online political advertisements.
- Powers in relation to online disinformation, online misinformation and manipulative or inauthentic behaviour online.

It is anticipated that the initial set of functions assigned to An Coimisiún will be expanded upon as it builds capacity and expertise.

In accordance with Section 28 of the Electoral Reform Act 2022 this Statement of Strategy shall be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.



4 Our Strategy

Strategy is the intelligent allocation of limited resources through a system of activities to achieve our purpose.

1. Our Purpose

Our purpose is to safeguard and strengthen democracy in Ireland by building public understanding, participation and trust in the electoral system.

2. Our Ambition

Ireland is a global leader in electoral integrity, participation and trust. The people of Ireland have the highest levels of participation in electoral events, which they recognise and value as fair, free and impartial.

3. Our Vision

Ireland's electoral process is trusted and valued as being fair, free and impartial. The people are informed, engaged and empowered, leading to the highest turnouts in electoral events. Through enhancing understanding and active participation in democracy An Coimisiún Toghcháin counteracts potentially negative impacts of misinformation and disinformation on the electoral and democratic process.

Through its innovative programmes, An Coimisiún Toghcháin has fostered democratic oversight in Ireland, for the public good.

4. Our Values

Particular values and behaviours are required to support the achievement of our ambition, in pursuit of our purpose.

Our values define how we approach our work, how we work as a Commission and how we engage with people. We believe that our values are key to our culture, and critical to our performance as an organisation.

The Civil Service has a strong public service ethos epitomised in its core values of, integrity, impartiality, equality, transparency, fairness and respect which guides and influences how it does business. These values underpin our approach to our purpose.

In particular, we will ensure we are accountable in our work. This means we will be answerable and transparent in fulfilling our commitments. Accountability is a key factor in building trust in what we do, fostering a sense of reliability and strengthening our independence.

We also see the following values as core to delivering our mandate.

Independence

We will always act in the public interest. We are honourable, impartial and independent. We take the hard decisions, without fear or favour.

Excellence

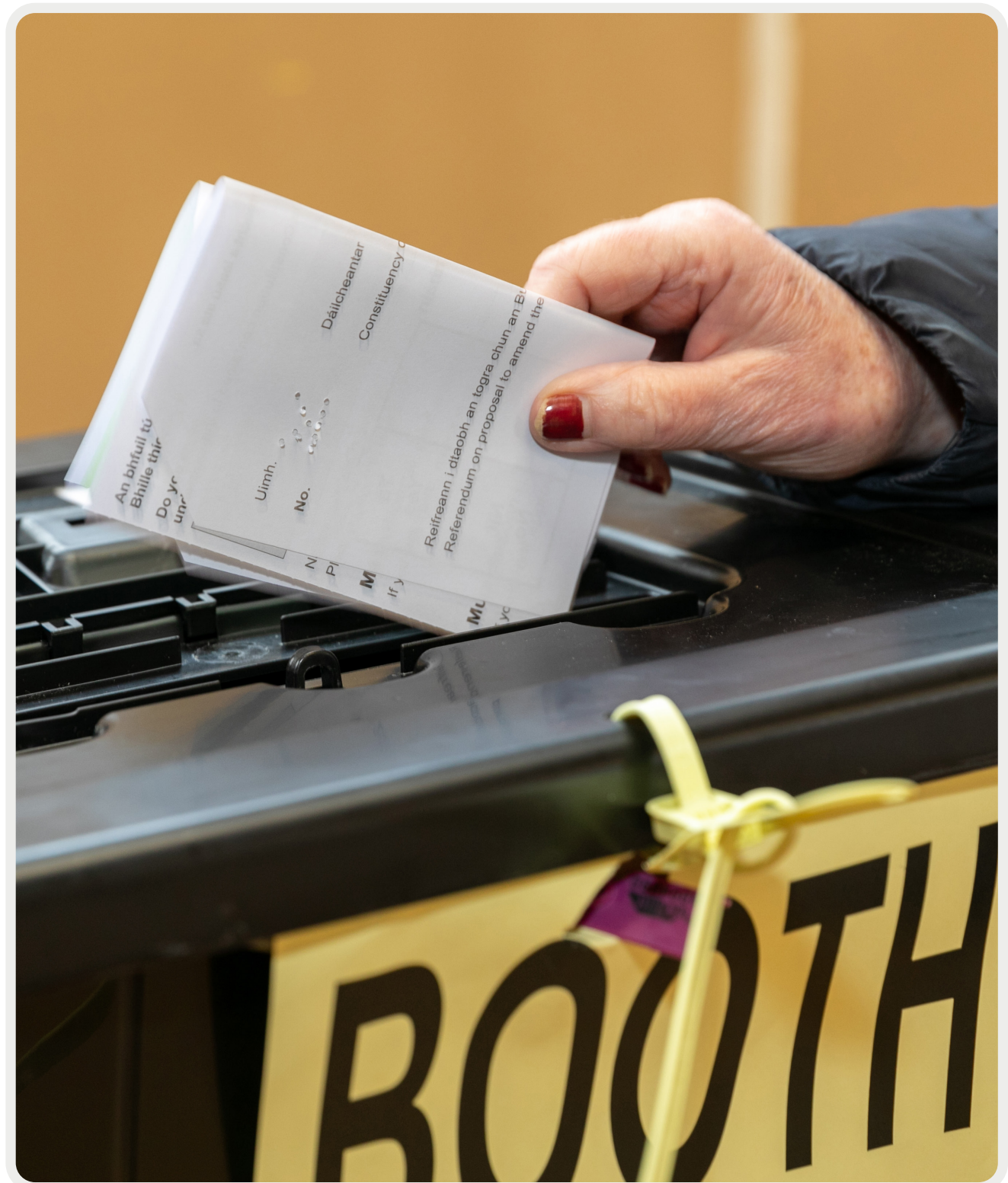
We will make every effort to operate to the highest professional standards in what we do and in how we do things. We measure our personal and organisational effectiveness and impact and accept accountability for our actions. We will base our decisions on robust, reliable and valid data and evidence.

Innovation

We are a forward-looking organisation, embracing innovation to achieve our ambitions. We learn continuously and seek to make things better. We are agile and dynamic, proactively responding to the world around us.

Collaboration

We value collegiality and collaboration, recognising that the best outcomes are most often achieved in partnership with others.



5 Our Strategic Priorities

A strategic priority is an objective that must be successfully accomplished within a specific period of time.

	Strategic Priority	Ambition
1	Electoral Events	Rigorous and transparent oversight of all elections and referendums to be conducted assuring the highest levels of integrity, transparency, and fairness to maintain and enhance trust in the electoral process.
2	Capability and Capacity Building	Right people in the right place at the right time who are valued, supported and developed in an inclusive workplace supported by the necessary enabling infrastructure.
3	Education and Active Participation	Development and implementation of strategy that is tailored to educate and raise awareness among all to inform and engage in electoral events with measurable impacts.
4	Research and Data	Developing high quality impactful research that sparks informed debate and leads to/informs transformative recommendations to improve our democratic system.
5	Oversight of Electoral Register	Robust reporting mechanism in place that gives the Houses of the Oireachtas and the public clear understanding of the operation of the Register, confidence in its accuracy and improved completeness.

Strategic Priority 1: Electoral Events

Rigorous and transparent oversight of all elections and referendums to be conducted assuring the highest levels of integrity, transparency, and fairness to maintain and enhance trust in the electoral process.

A key assumption in the achievement of this strategic priority is that we will have all the legislative powers to do our job.

We will achieve this objective by:

- Design and delivery of a nationwide referendum information campaign strategy, across multiple media channels that provides information on upcoming referendums to the public.
- Conducting rigorous, inclusive and influential post electoral event reviews to be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and provided to the Minister.
- Developing and implementing a strategic plan to effectively implement domestic and EU legislation to ensure the transparency of online political advertising during electoral periods.
- Developing and implementing a strategic plan of action to deliver our regulatory powers under Parts 4 and 5 of the Act once commenced.
- Create and deploy education, communication, media literacy and other best practise tools to combat the impact of malign online activity on Irish electoral events.
- Strategic selection and delivery of research projects to maximise their impact on Ireland's democracy and to make an expert and independent contribution to the debate on further electoral reform and innovation in this country.

Key Outcomes:

- A widespread referendum campaign that introduces An Coimisiún Toghcháin as the state body responsible for providing trustworthy information on the referendum questions.
- Fair, transparent and effective regulatory enforcement and outcomes.
- Enhanced electoral events informed by the post electoral event reviews.



Strategic Priority 2: Capability and Capacity Building

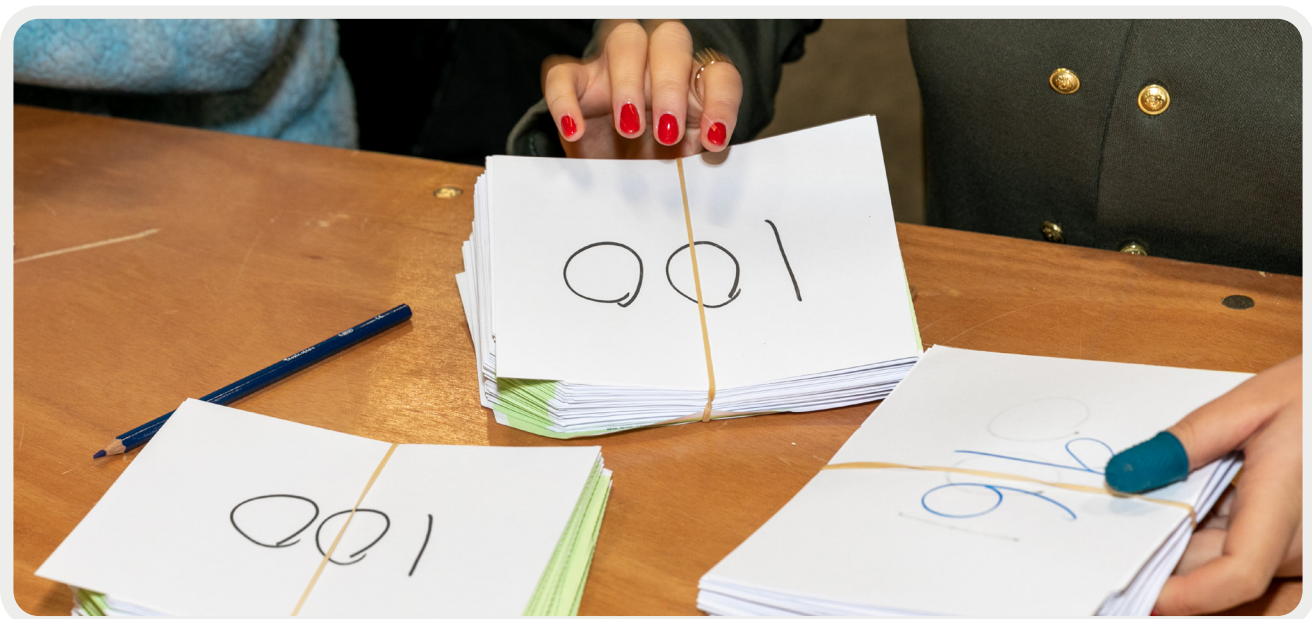
Our objective: Right people in the right place at the right time who are valued, supported and developed in an inclusive workplace supported by the necessary enabling infrastructure.

We will achieve this objective by:

- The recruitment and retention of skilled, diverse and committed people to ensure that An Coimisiún delivers on its functions and strategic objectives.
- Through an effective Learning and Development system, we will ensure our people are trained to maximise their potential, to deliver in a high performing role and to adapt to an ever changing environment.
- Ensuring An Coimisiún has robust financial and procurement procedures and comply with all relevant statutory obligations and circulars, while achieving value for money for all purchases.
- Ensuring An Coimisiún has a fit for purpose, digitally enhanced, safe office space enabling operational excellence and delivery on its strategic objectives.

Key Outcomes:

- Be an Employer of Choice – by focusing on retention policies and building an innovative, creative and inclusive workplace.
- Ensure early identification of vacancies, skills gaps and the timely recruitment of staff.
- An established practice of Continuing Professional Development and learning.
- The establishment of key secure IT infrastructure to facilitate the operational and administrative work of An Coimisiún.
- The implementation of an appropriate governance framework.



Strategic Priority 3: Education and Active Participation

Our objective: Development and implementation of strategy that is tailored to educate and raise awareness among all to inform and engage in electoral events with measurable impacts.

We will achieve this objective by:

- Engaging with the education system to develop effective and impactful educational content.
- Continued engagement with the current voting citizens to support and develop voter projects.
- Identification of under-served communities together with partnerships and alliances to ensure awareness of the impact and importance of participation in electoral and democratic events.
- Establishing and implement a Communications Strategy that encompasses our approach across all media platforms and ensures relationships with political and sectoral correspondents are effective in delivering key timely messages.

Key Outcomes:

- Develop and implement a multi-year education campaign proposal.
- Develop a suite of resources to increase participation.
- Developing partnerships to engage with adult education groups, literacy groups, young people, disability groups and immigrants among others.
- Formal protocols and procedures for An Coimisiún communications, website, e-newsletter and social media in an inclusive and accessible manner.
- High levels of participation and engagement in all our consultation and engagement processes.
- A network of representative groups and effective engagement channels to inform all our work.
- High and consistent levels of awareness and trust in An Coimisiún across Ireland's population.



Strategic Priority 4: Research and Data

Our objective: Developing high quality impactful research that sparks informed debate and leads to/informs transformative recommendations to improve our democratic system.

We will achieve this objective by:

- Ensuring our research is transparent, rigorous, evidence-based and inclusive supported by robust, reliable and valid data.
- Consulting regularly on our Research Programme and ensuring the Programme is adaptive and reflective of the latest democratic developments and international research.
- Supporting the development of Ireland as a centre of excellence for electoral research and data through capacity building and the development of cutting edge knowledge management and data infrastructure.
- Actively participate in international networks and initiatives to exchange best practice and contribute to the promotion of democracy and electoral integrity globally including through election monitoring.

Key Outcomes:

- Providing substantive, rigorous, valid and reliable data and research across a broad spectrum of democratic and electoral systems and behaviour.
- Impactful research which informs and leads to substantial electoral reforms in Ireland.
- Developing and enhancing scholarship and research with a view to creating a world-class research infrastructure to inform the work of An Coimisiún and support well-informed and data driven public debates about democracy and our electoral system.



Strategic Priority 5: Oversight of Electoral Register

Our objective: Robust reporting mechanism in place that gives the Houses of the Oireachtas and the public clear understanding of the operation of the Register, confidence in its accuracy and improved completeness.

We will achieve this objective by:

- Providing oversight in relation to the electoral register modernisation project, through active engagement with registration authorities.
- Assessing the registration authorities' activities in relation to the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register.
- Developing a template for annual reporting.
- Ensure a consistent approach to the project across the registration authorities.

Key Outcomes:

- One national database which is accurate and maintained by each registration authority.
- An annual report to the Oireachtas setting out:
 - › research carried out by the An Coimisiún.
 - › An Coimisiún's assessment of the status and functioning of the electoral register maintained by registration authorities and any recommendations An Coimisiún considers necessary to maintain or enhance the integrity of the electoral register and the registration process.
- Recommendations to a registration authority in relation to the performance of its functions.
- Standards for registration authorities in relation to the electoral register.
- Recommendations to the Minister in relation to legislative changes regarding the electoral register and registration process.



6 Strategic Performance Management

The strategic priorities will be reviewed as part of a continual process to identify if actions being taken are facilitating the achievement of the strategic goals.



1. Map the Strategic Goals – Identify the plans and actions required to achieve the goals. Set measurements and targets.
2. Collect Data & Metrics – Review current actions and pose key performance questions, e.g. how well are we doing / to what extent are the goals being achieved. Gather data to support the answer.
3. Analyse the data to provide insights into the success of the achievements of the strategic goals.
- 4 & 5. Report the insights in order to make decisions and take timely actions.

Published by An Coimisiún Toghcháin,
August 2024
ISBN - 978-1-911722-08-3

**An Coimisiún Toghcháin,
The Electoral Commission,
Dublin Castle, Dublin 2,
D02 X8X8.**

       @ElecCommIRL

 **An Coimisiún Toghcháin**
The Electoral Commission