

Note of Research Advisory Group meeting

11:00 – 13:00, Monday 30th September 2024

Present:

Prof. Emerita Caroline Fennell (Chair), Dr. Pauline Cullen, Prof. Kate Dommett (Online), Prof. David Farrell (Online), Prof. David Kenny, Brian Killoran, Adam Lambe (Online), Dr. Patricia McCarthy, Orla O'Connor (Online), Dr. Paul Redmond, Niklas Wilhelmsson (Online).

Secretariat

Dr. Mary-Clare O'Sullivan, Tim Carey (Online), Dr. Adam Whittle, Dr. Catherine Lynch, Hugh Burgess, Anthony Trindle, Sean O'Cadhla (Online), Grainne Reilly (Online).

Apologies:

Dr. Nuala Connolly, Dr. Brigid Quilligan

1. Welcome

- The Chair welcomed the Group noting the publication of the Research Programme 2024-2026 on 10th July 2024 as a significant milestone and welcoming the attendance of a number of RAG members at the launch.
- The Chair notified the Group that Dr. Nuala Connolly has withdrawn from the RAG as she has moved to a new position and IHREC will be invited to nominate a replacement member.

2. Standing Item – Minutes of the Group

- The Chair advised members that for the purposes of transparency An Coimisiún will publish the minutes of Group meetings held to date on 5 March 2024 and 25 March 2024.
- A motion confirming the accuracy of these minutes of the Group was proposed by Dr. Adam Whittle and seconded by Prof. David Kenny.

3. Standing Item – Conflict of Interest

- The Chair invited members to disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest that they might have associated with an agenda item. [3 members mentioned that they had

publicly expressed a position or had conducted research on topics due for discussion at the meeting. This was noted by the Group and it was agreed no recusal was needed.]

4. Standing Item – Code of Conduct

- At the previous meeting it was agreed that whilst the Group has no statutory powers and is an Advisory Group, would be best practice to agree a Code of Conduct for the Group and a draft Code was circulated in hard copy. A revised draft had been circulated before the meeting based on comments received and members signalled agreement as Group to the revised Draft.
- Members were asked to individually confirm their commitment to abiding by the Code via email to the Secretariat.

5. (a) Standing Item – Research Programme 2024-2026

- Mary-Clare O’Sullivan updated on the Research Programme for 2024-2026. On the National Election & Democracy Study (NEDS), studies were conducted for the referendums in March and for the Local, European and Mayoral elections in June. Data for both studies are publicly available on www.neds.ie with the raw data and codebooks for the March data also publicly available and the June codebooks close to finalisation for dissemination. Preparation is also well advanced for a General Election Study in case of an election being called before year end.
- The Group was updated on the other research priorities for 2024 which will be progressed through a mix of internal research, procurement and research calls with suitable expertise to be commissioned where required.
- Members noted the progress made and in particular welcomed the progress on the NEDS project emphasising its value in providing additional, open source data on Ireland’s democracy and elections.
- As regards commissioned research, members highlighted the importance of developing an ethics policy and it was agreed that a draft would be circulated for discussion at the next meeting.
- Members noted the provisions for An Coimisiún to make recommendations to Government arising from the research and that the form and approach taken to this might

vary depending on the topic in question and how it fitted within An Coimisiún's statutory remit as an independent body.

6. (a.) – Scoping Discussion Document: Postering

- A scoping discussion document related to Postering (Strand B) had been circulated for discussion and members made a number of suggestions to enhance the document to reflect the specific characteristics of the Irish electoral and democratic system, incorporate best practice and to further clarify the scope of the research.

6. (b.) – Scoping Discussion Document: Voting Age

- A scoping discussion document was circulated related to the research to reduce the Voting Age (Strand D) and members made a number of comments including suggesting that the scope could be refined to take account of already existing literature and research in the area and to make the research more focussed.
- It was noted that consultation with a range of stakeholders should be included as part of the research and that should extending the franchise be considered, this would require parallel work on voter education.

6. (c.) – Scoping Discussion Document: Meta-analysis/ Systematic Review

- A scoping discussion document was circulated regarding the proposed meta-analysis of research regarding under-reached and under-represented groups (Strand D). Members agreed that in framing the research, the identification of under-reached and under-represented groups should form a component of the research rather than be accepted as established and that voter turnout and candidacy should be a key focus for the meta-analysis.
- Members further suggested that as work under this strand develops it is important that it considers structural barriers to participation. The relevance of political parties as gatekeepers in the process was referenced here.

7. Next steps & AOB

- Tim Carey briefly updated the Group on the work being done separately by An Coimisiún in the areas of voter engagement and education noting that this would feed into the research programme and vice versa.
- It was agreed that the Group would meet again online before the end of the year.