

## Summary note of Research Advisory Group meeting

11:00 – 12:30, Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### **Present:**

Prof. Emerita Caroline Fennell (Chair), Dr. Nuala Connolly, Dr. Pauline Cullen, Prof. Kate Dommett, Prof. David Farrell, Prof. David Kenny, Adam Lambe, Dr. Patricia McCarthy, Dr. Brigid Quilligan, Dr. Paul Redmond, Niklas Wilhelmsson.

### Secretariat

Dr. Mary-Clare O’Sullivan, Hugh Burgess, Anthony Trindle.

### **Apologies:**

Brian Killoran, Orla O’Connor.

- The Chair welcomed the members of the Group and gave a brief overview of the general remit of An Coimisiún Toghcháin (An Coimisiún), its research mandate and the role of the Research Advisory Group (RAG) in supporting this.
- As a first step a draft Research Programme had been prepared for consultation. This has been circulated to members in advance of the meeting along with the relevant extracts from the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*. It is intended that this and the submissions received might help inform the initial considerations of the RAG in advising on the approach and priorities for the first year of the Research Programme.
- Regarding the Group’s Terms of Reference, the Chair confirmed that the form of output from the RAG would be flexible and would depend on the requirements of An Coimisiún at any given time. RAG members will still be entitled to publish independent papers and research projects related to elections and democracy.
- The Chair confirmed that, where appropriate, An Coimisiún would request external peer reviews and would be open to input from the Group on when and how these are conducted.
- Mary-Clare O’Sullivan outlined plans for the National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) and its March pilot study as an early priority of the draft Research Programme. It was agreed that the surveys involved in the pilot would not necessarily

provide data in relation to under-reached groups and this would need to be considered in designing the full NEDS project. There is separate work being done in this area by An Coimisiún in respect of its voter engagement and education functions.

- In response to questions, Mary-Clare O’Sullivan provided further detail on An Coimisiún’s research budget and the structure of the NEDS.
- Members responded with a range of questions and feedback:
  - The Chair confirmed that RAG members would not be precluded from submitting research proposals. Protocols regarding this are being prepared for discussion at the next meeting.
  - In response to a question about existing research programmes and partnerships being run by other Departments/ Agencies and whether these would continue, it was noted that this is a matter for those bodies but a number of them still retain relevant policy functions including the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage which retains responsibility for electoral law and policy.
  - It was agreed that research could be conducted in the fields of online electoral interference and mis- and disinformation as preparatory work although An Coimisiún’s powers in this area have not yet been commenced.
  - It was suggested that high ethical standards be included as a foundational value and guiding principle of the RAG, particularly in relation to responsible publication.
  - The Chair suggested that in advancing the work that there could be scope for members to work in groups on particular issues that are of interest to them, should they have the capacity to do so.
- In relation to next steps, the Chair explained that the next meeting would be a more substantive in-person meeting where members would be invited to consider and discuss the content of the final Research Programme. Members would be provided with all the research submissions and a short paper to guide their discussion.

- It was agreed that members would be provided with options for the date of the next meeting and the date suiting most members would be selected. (*This proved to be Monday 25 March*). Those who cannot attend would be invited to provide contributions in writing so that their views could be reflected in the discussions.