

An Coimisiún Toghcháin
The Electoral Commission

Draft Research Programme 2024-2026

An Coimisiún Toghcháin
The Electoral Commission

Dréachtchlár Taighde 2024-2026

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Chairperson's Foreword

Benjamin Franklin once said that “investment in knowledge pays the best interest”.

An Coimisiún Toghcháin, as Ireland's independent electoral commission, has been entrusted with significant powers to safeguard and strengthen democracy in Ireland including in the areas of voter education, research, promoting democratic participation and ensuring electoral integrity. For us to deliver on this challenging mandate, building knowledge and developing a learning culture must be central to all that we do.

The Electoral Reform Act 2022 provides us with a new and significant research role on electoral policy and procedures and the ability to make recommendations to the Government arising from this research. It is our intention that our independent research, data collection and public debate will help us to become a trusted and respected source of information for all.

It is my pleasure to present to the Houses of the Oireachtas, and the Irish people, the first draft Research Programme of An Coimisiún Toghcháin for your views. The research work conducted by An Coimisiún over the coming years will have the potential to markedly influence the course of electoral reform in this country, at a time in which many great questions and challenges pertaining to elections and broader democracy are emerging. Our work is in service of the people of Ireland. The broader the range of perspectives we receive, the better our research priorities can be.

Inclusivity, transparency and diversity are all values that lie at the heart of An Coimisiún as an organisation and will be intrinsic to our research approach. Our discussion documents, research projects and data will be made widely available with a view to engaging and fostering active public discussion and debate around democracy and our electoral system.

It is our goal to include a broad and inclusive range of themes in our Research Programme in order to address issues that affect all the people of Ireland and their ability to engage with, and participate in, their democracy.

We will ensure that a diverse range of experts and stakeholders participate in the shaping of our Research Programme, as well as in the research process itself, as we adhere to international best practice. We will engage in collaborative and comparative research and look to incorporate peer review and innovative thinking as a core element of our research and data collection.

An Coimisiún will carefully consider submissions from the public on this Programme in coming to a decision on the topics we engage with, and which should be prioritised. The innovative research model set out in this Programme provides external organisations and individuals with the opportunity to conduct research with



or for us. This will help to ensure that we consider diverse aspects of our electoral system and society when choosing topics for investigation and are imaginative and creative in our research.

Research, data and evidence will be the beating heart and the guiding light of An Coimisiún's work. We aim to always be informed by evidence and research including the views of stakeholders and the public, and we will have a particular focus on those who feel they have had less opportunity to participate in our democracy.

An Coimisiún's research powers present

us with a unique ability to protect and enhance Ireland's democracy and electoral system; let us take full advantage of this opportunity.

Debate and education are the key to maintaining a strong electoral process. A democracy that remains stagnant and unwilling to evolve can over time become a weaker democracy.

We look forward to hearing and engaging with your views.

**Ms. Justice Marie Baker,
Chairperson,
An Coimisiún Toghcháin.**



1 Introduction

‘The particularities of the institutional context add to the complexity and fascination of the Irish electoral agenda... ..whether viewed from the perspective of practical interest in Irish politics or from that of comparative political analysis, Irish electoral behaviour presents an impelling research agenda.’ **Richard Sinnott, Irish Voters Decide¹**

The unique qualities of Ireland’s electoral system, the provision for high profile referendums and the long-standing local dimension of Ireland’s political culture create a fascinating laboratory for political researchers and political enthusiasts alike. The Irish public are notably positive about Ireland’s democracy with recent Eurobarometer data showing that Irish people (86%) are more satisfied with their democracy than most EU member states (56%).² However, there is no reason for complacency. The establishment of An

Coimisiún Toghcháin (An Coimisiún), Ireland’s independent Electoral Commission in February 2023 signals a recognition that Ireland’s democracy needs to be nurtured in the wake of a rapidly changing society and the emergence of new challenges to democracy. An Coimisiún can be considered a new ‘one stop shop’ for the oversight of electoral events, entrusted with a broad range of existing electoral functions, as well as a variety of new ones (see Text Box 1). We are now specifically seeking your views on one of these new functions — our research role.



Box 1: An Coimisiún’s 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.
- Overseeing the Electoral Register, making recommendations and setting standards in relation to its maintenance and updating.
- The regulation of online paid-for political advertising, ensuring transparency in respect of online political advertisements.
- Investigation and monitoring of online disinformation, online misinformation and manipulative or inauthentic behaviour online during election campaign periods, as well as functions to prevent manipulative or inauthentic behaviours online (these parts of the Act have not yet been commenced) and;
- The preparation of ex-post reports on the administration of electoral events.

“What is research if not a blind date with knowledge?”

Will Harvey,
Software Engineer



Specifically, with regard to its new research role, the Electoral Reform Act 2022 mandates An Coimisiún ‘to commission or conduct research on electoral policy and procedures including on matters relating to the discharge of its functions and may arising from that research, make such recommendations to the Minister and the Government as it considers appropriate.’

It provides that An Coimisiún shall:

- prepare, annually, programmes specifying: ‘the subjects in relation to which it proposes to conduct research... and the objectives of such research; the manner in which such research shall be carried out; and the estimated cost of such research.’
- consult with the Joint Oireachtas

Committee, the Minister and any other person, as the Commission considers appropriate in preparing its research programmes;

- arrange for these research programmes to be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and
- update on its research programme within six months of it being laid before the Houses and report on its research in its Annual Report.

An Coimisiún has now prepared its first draft research programme and is, through this document, seeking the views of the Oireachtas, the public and other interested parties on its research priorities. These are organised around thematic strands (see Section 3) reflecting An Coimisiún’s functions under the Electoral Reform Act. As this is our first draft research

programme, this document also outlines the strategy and values which will underpin An Coimisiún’s research role.

We have developed some questions to guide you in presenting your views (see section 5 below). We would particularly welcome contributions through the online form at www.electoralcommission.ie/researchsubmissions. You may also send responses to these questions or more general comments or suggestions by email to research@electoralcommission.ie or by post to An Coimisiún Toghcháin, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2, D02X8X8.

It should be noted that in keeping with

An Coimisiún’s ethos of transparency, all submissions will be published on An Coimisiún’s website. An Coimisiún may, at its discretion, redact certain parts of submissions prior to publication including where necessary to protect the privacy and personal rights of third parties. Should you wish for your submission, or parts thereof, to remain confidential please explicitly state this and the reasons in your submission.

We would strongly encourage you to send us your views. They will contribute to ensuring that An Coimisiún’s research has a real and positive impact on Ireland’s voters, the Irish electoral system and Ireland’s democracy.



2 Vision and Values

It is our vision at An Coimisiún to be world-class leaders in protecting and promoting democracy and be a trusted source for advice and expertise with regard to electoral events. We are committed to using our statutory powers to protect the democratic process and, through education and public engagement, enable and encourage people to participate more fully in democracy and electoral matters.

We recognise that some groups, citizens and individuals have had less opportunity to contribute to politics and democracy in Ireland. Therefore, one of our key priorities is to develop new channels for under-reached and under-served groups to participate more fully in Ireland's democratic process.

Our research programme will be central to achieving these goals.

An Coimisiún's research will be guided by the following principles, which are rooted in our core values:

- **Independence and Impartiality:** The Electoral Reform Act 2022 provides that An Coimisiún is independent in the performance of its functions. This is fundamental to ensuring trust and confidence that An Coimisiún is also impartial in all its activities and decisions and, in particular, will display political impartiality at all times. These values will underpin our approach to our research and any recommendations made arising from the research, which will be based on robust data and evidence.
- **Inclusivity and Fairness:** An Coimisiún will place inclusivity

at the heart of our research. It is important that An Coimisiún's research encompasses all sections of Irish society and the issues that face them in our electoral system and wider democracy. There will be a particular focus on groups who have in the past been under-reached or marginalised from political and democratic processes. Public consultation and public surveys will be incorporated strategically in our research and An Coimisiún will also ensure that there is diversity in the researchers employed and commissioned to conduct research. Any commissioning or procuring processes will be fair and equitable.

- **The Advancement of Scholarship and Debate:** Given the research functions set out in the Electoral Reform Act 2022, it is An Coimisiún's goal to carry out world-class, innovative research that benefits not only the Irish electoral system, but electoral, political and democratic research more broadly. In selecting and prioritising research topics, An Coimisiún will consider a variety of areas of relevance in Ireland and further afield, with a view to becoming a leading source of high-quality research regarding electoral systems and democracy including with a comparative focus. An Coimisiún will promote and disseminate its research widely including at all levels of the education system to promote discussion and debate on democracy and Ireland's electoral system.

- **Peer Review and Scrutiny:** It is important that An Coimisiún's research be of the highest possible standard, so as best to serve the Irish people and their democracy. Independent and international peer review and expertise will be incorporated into our research processes to ensure that our work is of high-quality, reliable and in keeping with academic best practices.

The delivery of our research functions will also be governed by the core public service principles of **transparency, accountability and value for money**.

We will be transparent about our research methodologies and how we conduct and commission research. Research projects will generally be published³ to allow the

public, experts and interest groups to read our research, form views on the findings and participate in open debates on potential reforms or changes to improve and enhance Irish democracy.

An Coimisiún will be publically accountable for its research and for ensuring it is conducted ethically and to the highest standards. We will ensure we carry out our research in a cost-effective manner at all times and focus on value for money in commissioning and procuring research, while ensuring that this is not at the expense of quality standards.

Background information on our proposed research methodologies and governance arrangements are set out in the Appendices to this document.

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”

Zora Neale Hurston,
Writer & Anthropologist



3 Thematic Research Strands

Given the breadth of its functions and the scope for further innovation and the modernisation of Ireland's democratic and electoral system, An Coimisiún will require substantive data and research across a broad spectrum of democratic and electoral systems and behaviour.

An Coimisiún's research priorities will be informed by the functions assigned to it by the Oireachtas in the Electoral Reform Act 2022, with a particular focus on encouraging and promoting electoral participation, enhancing the information available to the public, improving the electoral experience for all voters and increasing accessibility to our democratic processes for all. Reflecting this, An Coimisiún's research programme will be organised around the following five key thematic strands:

STRAND A: LONGITUDINAL SURVEY RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Ireland has historically lagged behind other countries in relation to the availability of reliable and comprehensive data about its elections and political behaviour. Through this Strand, An Coimisiún aims to rectify this deficit and build a democratic databank to measure over time the views, attitudes and experiences of the Irish public of electoral events and democracy and the factors that have influence. There will be a particular focus on factors increasing turnout and political participation, with a view to informing An Coimisiún's initiatives in these areas. This Strand will provide data to help inform research under all the other thematic strands set out here and so it is vital that work begins immediately.

STRAND B: ELECTORAL LAW, ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND ELECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE

As already referenced, the Electoral Reform Act 2022 provides for An Coimisiún Toghcháin to make recommendations to the Minister and the Government on electoral policy and procedures arising from its work. There are also provisions for An Coimisiún to commission or conduct research in relation to the electoral register to inform its oversight role. This Strand will focus on the constitutional, legal and institutional arrangements and infrastructure governing Ireland's electoral events, as well as identifying reforms which might be needed to enhance and promote Ireland's democracy.

STRAND C: INTEGRITY OF ELECTORAL EVENTS

It is vital that Ireland's electoral events continue to be considered free and fair and that there is trust in their integrity and security. Research under this Strand will support An Coimisiún in delivering comprehensive post electoral event reviews of the administration of Ireland's electoral events and inform its

“The way to do research is to attack the facts at the point of greatest astonishment.”

Celia Green,
Parapsychologist and Writer



strategy for delivering its legislative mandate (once commenced) to protect Ireland's democracy and electoral events from online electoral interference, disinformation, misinformation and cyber-attacks.

STRAND D: EDUCATION, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

An Coimisiún has a new and very significant role in increasing and enhancing electoral participation in Ireland and improving the inclusivity of Ireland's democratic System. Informed by data gathered under Strand A, this Strand will focus on researching and then delivering best practice with regard to democratic education and how our systems need to be improved to increase democratic participation and voter engagement across the population. There will also be a significant focus on research exploring how best to support and increase engagement by under-served and under-reached groups, such as members of the Travelling Community, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. It will also research the barriers to political participation of younger people, women and other underrepresented groups as successful candidates in elections.

STRAND E: BLUE SKY/CURIOSITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH

The President of the European Research

Council Maria Leptin recently said:

“If we look at history, we can see that a lot of fundamental, curiosity-driven research has yielded important results...solutions can come from unexpected places. New findings in one area can open up new opportunities in different areas... Putting all our resources into priority areas can therefore paradoxically lower our chances of achieving progress, even in those very areas.... To maintain a healthy research system, it is right to invest in long-term curiosity-driven research.”⁴

An Coimisiún is a learning organisation and recognises that there is a major role for curiosity driven ‘blue sky’ research to ensure it is positioned at the cutting edge of democratic innovation and does not miss out on exploring exciting and valuable research through an overly narrow thematic focus.

The members of An Coimisiún will therefore, in consultation with the Research Advisory Group (see Appendix 2), develop a mechanism for researchers to submit innovative or ‘blue sky’ research proposals outside its more targeted research strands. Therefore, researchers can submit proposals and be funded to conduct research in new and groundbreaking areas. There will also be scope for the public to suggest innovative areas of potential research for consideration.

4 Potential Research Projects



There is significant interest in An Coimisiún's research agenda and we have already received some suggestions for research projects, including from the Government,⁵ the Oireachtas and other stakeholders.

The need for early progress in researching specific areas has become apparent through the work and deliberations of An Coimisiún to date. In particular, there is a need to begin to build reliable and valid data under Strand A to inform research under the four other strands. It is also important to have baseline data regarding attitudes and behaviour related to political participation and democracy, so An Coimisiún can measure the impact of its programmes and activities.

STRAND A: LONGITUDINAL SURVEY RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Although Ireland has a substantial and well-regarded body of research on elections and electoral behaviour and many internationally respected electoral

experts, it is an outlier in not having had to date a track record of consistent and appropriately resourced National Election Studies.

Such studies have been in place in many other countries for well over 50 years. They are highly regarded studies of voter behaviour, attitudes and influences traditionally based on random, representative samples. To begin the development of robust data to inform delivery of the full range of its functions, An Coimisiún intends to develop a National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) for Ireland. This will incorporate elements of the traditional National Election Study model and, in particular, a rigorous sampling methodology, but with a broader focus reflecting An Coimisiún's mandate and functions. The NEDS data will be anonymised and open source. It can be used to both inform research across the other research strands, as well as provide stakeholders, the public, the media and the political system with high quality information

about the state of our democracy.

Given that An Coimisiún is a new body and wishes to track its progress and performance, it will also follow the practice of other Electoral Commissions and supplement the NEDS data with polling of the electorate on a rolling basis. This will take place between elections and not just during electoral periods. It will involve rigorous polling of representative samples of the public on their attitudes towards different aspects of elections and democracy. This will inform our work on an ongoing basis, in

both election and non-election periods.

Given the limited time frame between now and the next confirmed electoral events in June, preparatory work is beginning immediately to collect initial benchmarking data and advance the development of this National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) and the commencement of voter benchmarking polls.

STRAND B: ELECTORAL LAW, ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND ELECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Constituency Review

The recent Constituency Review was the first time that a Constituency Review was conducted by a standing body with the potential to learn from and carry its experience across to the next such Review. In carrying out this first Review, An Coimisiún identified three pieces of research which it considered should be conducted to inform future Reviews:

- **Representation:** An Coimisiún intends to carry out research into the issue of representation and the manner in which the overall number of TDs is determined in the context of the rising population and the current constitutional and legal provisions in this area.
- **Constituency magnitude:** A number of public submissions called for 6 seat constituencies or a change to provisions which currently preclude this. While some submissions called for more 3 seat constituencies, the majority of those referencing the issue proposed more 5 seat constituencies. However, given the continued rise in population, it may not be possible to retain the current 5 seat county constituencies in future reviews. Research on constituency magnitude, including the merits of constituencies of larger than 5 seats, will therefore be prioritised.



¹⁴ ⁵There are suggestions for electoral research in the current Programme for Government. <https://merlionstreet.ie/en/about/programme-for-government/>. In addition, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage who has Ministerial responsibility for electoral law and conducting elections and referendums wrote to An Coimisiún on 19 July with a number of suggestions for research for An Coimisiún's consideration.

- **Constituency Review methodology:**

As this was the first Constituency Review conducted by An Coimisiún as a permanent standing body, it is proposed to conduct a review of the process, whilst memories are fresh, to identify potential enhancements that could be made including to the consultation process and whether there is scope for increased use of technology and Artificial Intelligence.

These matters have been the subject of considerable public debate and attention arising from the recent Review, so it is timely to advance this research while the experience is still fresh.

Use of posters

The use of posters during election and referendum campaigns is a longstanding feature of the Irish political system, but in recent years growing concerns have emerged regarding the environmental impact of these posters, as well as their visual impact on our public spaces. The current Programme for Government suggested that An Coimisiún “examine the issue of the use of posters at elections and referendums and consult on placing limitations on the number of posters that can be used or fixing certain locations for their use.” The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage recently wrote to An Coimisiún suggesting that this research topic be prioritised. This has already triggered a lively and engaged public debate on the merits or otherwise of posters with a range of diverse views clearly apparent.

Election posterage is not purely an academic question for political scientists, but rather concerns also the balancing of broader societal goals.

Given the clear level of interest and engagement with this topic, An Coimisiún will commission a multi-disciplinary team

of experts to conduct research on this topic. This will incorporate significant public consultation and a review of best practice in other countries.

Electoral Act 1997

There have been calls for a review of the Electoral Act 1997, particularly from political groups and civil society organisations who have expressed concerns about the definition of political purposes in the Act impacting their fundraising activities. This definition is also used in Section 119 of the Electoral Reform Act, which deals with online political advertising. Further to this, there have been a number of calls for other portions of the Act to be clarified, or replaced altogether.

Reflecting these concerns, An Coimisiún will commission a review of the 1997 Act and this will include a public consultation process. This review will need to be timed to take account of ongoing related discussions at EU level in the context of its Defence of Democracy Package and the draft EU Proposal for a Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising.

The extension of postal voting

Postal voting is available to a very small



proportion of Ireland’s electorate, especially when compared to other Western political systems. At present, postal voting is only available to full-time members of the Defence Forces, diplomats and their partners who are posted abroad and select groups of voters who are unable to physically access their designated polling stations on the day of a polling event.

It has been suggested that research on expanding eligibility for postal voting would be worthwhile as it could enhance turnout, as well as the ease and convenience of voting.

Replacing by-elections

When a TD resigns, their position is generally filled by way of a by-election held in the constituency in which the vacancy has arisen. A different approach is taken to the filling of vacant European Parliament seats, where MEPs are replaced by way of an Alternate List system, without recourse to the electorate. When an MEP is running for election, they are required to produce a list of alternative candidates that will replace them in the event that they resign from their position ahead of the next set of European Parliament elections. The Programme for Government commits to examining the possibility of replacing the current by-election model to replace TDs with an Alternate List system, similar to the European Parliament system.

Residency and voting

The Electoral Act 1992 stipulates that those resident in Ireland forfeit their right to vote if they leave the State for a period of eighteen months, a right which can only be restored upon their return to ‘ordinary resident’ status in Ireland. This, when combined with Ireland’s aforementioned postal voting regulations, is seen by some as a restrictive approach when compared with international examples.

Electoral register

An Coimisiún will also conduct research and analysis to support its oversight role with regard to the electoral register.

STRAND C: INTEGRITY OF ELECTORAL EVENTS

Section 68.1 of the Electoral Reform Act 2022 sets out that An Coimisiún “*may, after each electoral event...prepare and publish...a report on the administration of the electoral event concerned.*” Post Electoral Event Reviews will allow An Coimisiún to identify any areas for improvement in the conducting of polling events, particularly with regard to accessibility and enhancing participation.

“Research means that you don’t know, but are willing to find out.”

Charles F. Kettering,
Engineer

Research into the conduct of Post Electoral Event Reviews will inform the delivery of such reviews and assist An Coimisiún to work towards the enhancement and safeguarding of Ireland’s electoral processes.

An Coimisiún is also assigned strong regulatory powers under Parts 4 and 5 of the Electoral Reform Act 2022 to combat online electoral interference and ensure transparency in relation to political advertising. These powers have not yet commenced. Once commenced, research into this complex and rapidly changing landscape will be essential to allow An



Coimisiún to oversee these key areas and ensure its approach is in line with international best practice and technological developments. In commissioning and conducting research in this area, we will also be advised by an Online Electoral Information Advisory Board to be established under section 146 of the Act.

STRAND D: EDUCATION, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

The voting age

The age of enfranchisement in Ireland has stood at 18 years of age since 1973. However, a number of countries have reduced the voting age – including Austria in 2007 and Scotland, where the voting age is 16 for all Scottish Parliament and local elections and young people aged 14 and 15 can pre-register to vote.

Ireland's Convention on the Constitution 2012-2014 recommended that Ireland lower its voting age to 16. More recently, the current Programme for Government proposed that

An Coimisiún might conduct an examination of the Scottish experience of reducing the voting age, a suggestion reiterated by the Minister in his recent letter.

Again, this triggered a lively public debate which indicates that it is a topic of keen public interest and of relevance to An Coimisiún's priority of increasing political participation.

Democratic and electoral participation

An Coimisiún will also conduct and commission research to inform its approach to its education and public engagement remit to encourage the electoral participation of under-reached groups including increasing representation of women, people with disabilities and from diverse ethnic backgrounds. It has also been suggested we might conduct research to measure the diversity of candidates for elections and consider ways to increase this, as well as consider the topic of increasing political participation and electoral turnout by people experiencing homelessness.

5 Your Feedback

Having considered this document, we would welcome your views on the following questions:

- 1. What is your view on the five proposed research strands? Are there amendments or additions you would suggest?**
- 2. Which of the research questions under section 4 would you consider most important and why?**
- 3. Are there additional research projects that you consider important to promote and enhance Ireland's democracy and electoral events? If yes, please specify.**
- 4. Are there any other comments or observations that you wish to make regarding An Coimisiún's research programme?**

Our preference is for responses to be submitted at this link:

www.electoralcommission.ie/researchsubmissions

Alternatively they can be sent by email to research@electoralcommission.ie or by post to An Coimisiún Toghcháin, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2, D02X8X8.

The closing date for submissions is: January 12, 2024.



6 Appendices

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGIES FOR DELIVERY

There are a number of existing models in place for conducting, commissioning and funding research both by Irish and international research funding bodies and State and Government agencies who fund research as part of their remit.⁶

These include:

- The development of internal organisational research capacity.
- Tendering and procurement.
- Open research calls.
- Research fellowships and internships.
- Funded PhDs.

A number of existing An Coimisiún staff have research qualifications and there will be a particular focus on building a strong research capacity within the organisation. Ongoing research of international best practice and data as well as practically focussed policy research will be required to inform An Coimisiún in delivering its functions. These internal projects may act as standalone pieces of research for the consideration of An Coimisiún, or may provide a foundation for larger, subsequent pieces of research. For example, an important function for An Coimisiún Toghcháin under the Act is to prepare and publish post electoral event reviews reporting on ‘the administration of the electoral event concerned’ with particular requirements to look at the accessibility of the voting process for individuals with disabilities, illnesses or literacy challenges. It is anticipated that much of the analysis and data gathering to support this review will be conducted internally by staff or members of An Coimisiún through election observation.

This and other projects are also likely to require

external expertise. It is vital that An Coimisiún has full recourse to leading experts and academics, not only from Ireland, but also overseas. Expertise will be drawn from across a broad range of disciplines including legal experts, educationalists, psychologists, environmentalists, and experts in technology amongst others.

Procurement and research calls will be used strategically to engage external expertise for specific projects and this may include partnerships with other Research Funding Bodies such as the Irish Research Council as part of the new amalgamated Research and Innovation Funding Agency.

An Coimisiún also has the broader goal of 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.

It will also therefore create opportunities and funding for early stage researchers to add to democratic scholarship and advance their career and expertise through internships, funded PhDs, fellowships and other programmes. These may either be structured around specific research questions or broader thematic areas of interest.

An Coimisiún will employ a mix of these approaches depending on the nature of the research objective and the method that best delivers according to An Coimisiún’s values. The ultimate aim will be to deliver and nurture research excellence within a robust governance and delivery framework.



APPENDIX 2: GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT

Like all An Coimisiún’s functions, our research will be underpinned by robust governance and oversight systems. As set out in Appendix 1, we will conduct and commission research in a number of different ways. Procurement or commissioning of research will follow best practise and comply with all relevant public service guidelines and rules. This will be overseen by ensuring adequate systems of internal controls, risk management and An Coimisiún’s audit and oversight structures.

An Coimisiún has also decided to further enhance the governance, oversight and inclusivity of its research strategy through the establishment of a Research Advisory Group. This Group will advise and support

An Coimisiún in ensuring that a broad range of stakeholders, perspectives and research disciplines are reflected both in the selection of our research topics and how they are conducted. Once established, this Group will be consulted and provide input on our research programmes, consider progress and suggest any changes that need to be made to ensure our research is timely, fit for purpose and of a high-quality. It will include representatives of under-reached groups, academic experts across a range of disciplines, practitioners and international expertise.

There will also be a need for An Coimisiún to develop in parallel appropriate and robust research, knowledge and data management infrastructure, which will take some time and the input of the Research Advisory Group will support this process.

⁶For example, the Irish Research Council & SFI (soon to be merged) IHREC, EPA, CCPC, Teagasc, SEI and various EU bodies

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