

Summary Note of Research Advisory Group meeting

14:00 – 16:00, Wednesday 15th April 2026

Present:

Prof. Emerita Caroline Fennell (Chair), Doireann Crosson, Prof. Pauline Cullen, Prof. David Farrell, Prof. David Kenny, Adam Lambe, Jane-Anne O'Connell, Dr. Brigid Quilligan.

Secretariat

Dr. Mary-Clare O'Sullivan, Dr. Catherine Lynch, Dr. Adam Whittle, James Clarke, Anthony Trindle, Denise Boland, Conor Brennan

Apologies:

Teresa Buczkowska, Prof. Kate Dommett, Dr. Patricia McCarthy, Dr. Paul Redmond, Niklas Wilhelmsson

1. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The Chair welcomed the members of the Group and provided an update on matters arising.

The minutes of the meeting on Wednesday 10th September 2025, were agreed without amendment. The Chair welcomed Doireann Crosson (DC) of the National Women's Council of Ireland to her first meeting of the Group, filling the vacancy arising from Orla O'Connor's departure.

2. Chair's Business & 3. Conflicts of interest

No items were raised.

4. Research Programme 2024-2026 Update

Dr Mary-Clare O'Sullivan (MCOS) delivered an update on the progress of the Research Programme 2024-2026 based on a paper circulated before the meeting including:

- the newly launched NEDS website and the publication of datasets and codebooks for the 2025 Presidential Election NEDS
- research on political postering at an advanced stage
- research on the ballot paper address published 20 November 2025.
- the Post Electoral Event Review (PEER) for the Presidential Election 2025 to be shortly published.

Other research underway and at various stages includes on postal and advance voting, on reducing the voting age, on underreached groups, and on mapping turnout.

International IDEA had been commissioned to conduct research on postal and advance voting and intend to visit Ireland for stakeholder consultation in the coming months. RAG members will be invited to meet International IDEA and were also invited to suggest others who they considered should be consulted.

Members welcomed the progress outlined. In response to feedback An Coimisiún agreed to look again at timelines and process involved in awarding funding to make them as streamlined as possible and aligned with common practises among equivalent research bodies where possible. It also agreed to schedule a meeting with some of the Group and the researchers conducting the reducing the voting age research to update on their planned approach.

5(i). Political Participation and Inclusion Discussion and Implementation.

Two documents were circulated relating to the draft research paper ‘Review of political participation and inclusivity’ discussed at the previous meeting of the Group in September 2025. These summarised some of the key points in the paper planned next steps. The full paper would be circulated to the Group after the meeting for any final feedback.

Dr. Catherine Lynch (CL) provided a summary of the circulated documents noting the objective of the paper to inform future research and to inform initiatives to promote inclusion. The Group welcomed the documents and progress made since the last meeting and provided the following feedback:

- Jane-Ann O’Connell (JAOC) commented that IHREC welcomed the emphasis on inclusivity including the PEER case studies mentioned previously.
- Professor Pauline Cullen (PC) commented that the cited literature and linguistic framing were predominantly political-scientific in nature noting the need for consideration to be given as to how the paper would ultimately be framed and disseminated when published. It was agreed that members would consider this in providing any further comments or feedback on the paper.
- Adam Lambe (AL) commented that research into intersecting barriers to participation and the identification of relevant intersectional groups would be an important facet of the follow up research. In this context Adam Whittle (AW) mentioned the forthcoming open research call which offered an opportunity for applications reflecting intersectional themes.

5(ii). Proposed Research Project on Traveller Participation

CL introduced the scoping document “Travellers’ participation and engagement with elections and democracy.” The purpose is to help address the gap identified through the electoral participation research paper regarding electoral participation of the Traveller community. The intention is to take a two-phase approach, beginning with a

consultation process involving representative organisations. CL invited feedback from the group regarding the best way to approach this.

- Dr. Brigid Quilligan (BQ) welcomed the research, commenting that such research was critical to identifying barriers to electoral participation facing the Traveller community. She expressed agreement with the proposed phased approach and stressed the importance of stakeholder engagement at the initial stage. BQ emphasised the wide range individuals and organisations currently involved in voter education and engagement and the importance of leveraging their knowledge and expertise with respect to the proposed research. She also raised a number of additional practical questions relevant to the work, including the costs of participating in and contributing to research for community representatives and individuals. BQ expressed interest in being closely involved with the research and suggested others who should also be consulted at an early stage.
- PC commented on the importance of avoiding objectifying language with respect to the research and research participants. A feedback and engagement process should be in place to ensure that research participants had the opportunity to take an active role. Anti traveller racism was not mentioned in the scoping document and should be included in future iterations.
- DC commented that the experience of the IWC was that a peer-led research model tended to work best and that adequate funding of peer researchers was highly important. From a methodological standpoint, DC highlighted the relevance of structural determinants such as housing, health, and discrimination to electoral participation within the Traveller community.
- Professor David Farrell (DF) suggested it might be useful to engage other electoral commissions with experience of research into the electoral participation of minority groups, highlighting the example of the New Zealand Electoral Commission.
- JAOC echoed previous comments in relation to the benefits of a peer-led codesign research model. In particular, she emphasised benefits in relation to data collection and pointed to previous work on the part of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in relation to minority communities.

CL thanked the group for their feedback, noting that the team would welcome any further academic materials suggested by the group including scholarship from the Traveller community and individuals or groups who should be consulted.

6(a). Strategic Review: a) Next Research Programme & role of the RAG

A paper had been circulated setting out some questions for discussion regarding the preparation of the next Research Programme with the current one due to expire at the end of 2026.

- DF commended the work under the Research Programme to date and in particular the NEDS which will support the emergence of a range of academic research. He suggested considering a ringfenced budget for cooperative comparative research as part of the programme.
- Professor David Kenny (DK) expressed broad agreement with the retention of the strand structure but said that consideration would need to be given to Strand C given the non-commencement of parts of the Electoral Act 2022. DK further noted that there may be challenges for the next programme in terms of the capacity of the research community to support a significant volume of research and that this might need to be considered when determining the timing and resource intensity of larger research projects.
- PC agreed that existing timescales can be challenging for the research community and highlighted some technical issues that had arisen for some in accessing the research call documentation. PC advised that institutional resources differ between academic institutions which has implications for inclusivity. She advised that any funding differentials between projects should reflect the need for inclusiveness. Horizon Europe's research call on democracy was a potential exemplar for future projects in terms of framing and resourcing.
- AL commended the work completed during the first research programme and commented that stakeholders should be consistently included in consultation on research. He suggested that work could be done in terms of outreach to young researchers and support for their research- in particular regarding engagement with students and the accessibility of datasets to student researchers. In response MCOS advised that the team were keen to engage young people, highlighting An Coimisiún's ongoing internship collaboration with University College Cork, specific provision for early career stage researchers as part of the New Directions research call and sponsorship of a research prize at the recent Stripe Young Scientist Exhibition. She advised that the team would consider further initiatives in this regard and are open to feedback on this.

It was agreed that there would be a detailed discussion on the next Research Programme as part of the next RAG meeting.

A short note had been circulated in advance regarding the operation and experience of the RAG. The Chair invited comments from the Group on their experience of RAG membership and the functioning of the RAG thus far.

DF said that the experience of RAG membership had been positive and the composition of the Group has lent itself to diversity of perspective and expertise. He suggested information about the RAG should be more visible on An Coimisiún's website. PC agreed and suggested also the RAG could have been given more prominence at the previous public NEDS event.

MCOS welcomed this feedback and said that work would be done on the website as suggested and to ensure appropriate profile of the RAG in future at relevant events. The potential for increased linkages between the NEDS Board and the RAG would also be explored.

6(b). National Elections and Democracy Study – 2026 and beyond

A paper had been circulated setting out some matters for discussion and deliberation regarding future iterations of the NEDS. AW opened the discussion providing an overview of progress to date and presented a number of questions for consideration related to themes, methodology and the potential for development of NEDS as a longitudinal study.

- DK commented that it would be interesting for future iterations of the NEDS to capture differences in public attitudes and behaviour between types of electoral events and trend on this over time.
- DF noted the importance of budget stability if a longitudinal component was introduced. AW agreed noting also substantial governance and infrastructure implications of a longitudinal project. DF also suggested there was scope for learning from other small European democracies with respect to the types of questions relevant to non-election years. With respect to methodology, DF noted that probabilistic sampling is important in relation to CSES modules but not necessarily as crucial in other contexts.
- PC agreed that there was merit in considering collaborating with other surveys as suggested in the discussion paper but that the objectives and consistency over time of these other surveys would be important in this regard.

7. AOB

The Chair advised that the next in-person meeting will take place in September and that the research update for the Oireachtas would be circulated to members in advance of that with the option of an online meeting before September if this was considered necessary.