

Note of Research Advisory Group meeting

11:00 – 13:00, Monday 9th December 2024 (online)

Present:

Prof. Emerita Caroline Fennell (Chair), Dr. Pauline Cullen, Prof. Kate Domett, Prof. David Kenny, Adam Lambe, Dr. Patricia McCarthy, Orla O'Connor, Dr. Paul Redmond.

Secretariat

Dr. Mary-Clare O'Sullivan, Dr. Adam Whittle, Dr. Catherine Lynch, Hugh Burgess, Anthony Trindle.

Apologies:

Prof. David Farrell, Brian Killoran (*each provided written comments in advance of the meeting which were conveyed to the group as appropriate during the discussion*).

1. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting on 30 September 2024 were agreed without amendment.

2. Conflict of interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. Research Integrity and Ethics Policy

- Members discussed a draft Research Integrity and Ethics Policy for An Coimisiún which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.
- Generally, members agreed that the document provided a suitable basis for ensuring An Coimisiún's research operates according to a high standard of research integrity and ethics. Some additions/ edits to the document were suggested including:
 - text acknowledging that some projects may be particularly sensitive and require a bespoke approach and ethical safeguards;
 - additional text in relation to compliance with data protection laws and policies, in particular around data retention and the right to deletion of personal data;
 - recognition that there may be instances where it is appropriate to consider supports for research participants, including potential reimbursement of associated costs or expenses taking account of research integrity and the right to dignity and independence of research participants;
 - the need to ensure data will be publicly accessible and open source where possible including published in established research and data archives. The approach to

publication of data and results should be agreed between the researcher and An Coimisiún in advance of the commencement of the project, particularly where the researcher may wish to independently publish research referencing the data;

- Reference that the policy will also apply to research conducted by or in partnership with bodies who are not eligible higher education institutions (HEIs) or research-performing organisations (RPOs) such as civil society organisations or NGO's.
- It was agreed that the Secretariat would revise the document to reflect the points made and recirculate it for final agreement.

4(i) – Meta-analysis

- Catherine Lynch summarised the progress update paper circulated before the meeting and proposing that the research would be brought forward through two separate papers: the first on registration and voting and the second on candidacy and representation.
- Members welcomed the progress to since the previous meeting. A number of suggestions were made in relation to potential research areas and issues which might be useful in advancing both papers including:
 - useful ethnographic research exploring political participation, particularly in the US and Canada and the Gender Inequality Lab at the University of Pittsburgh;
 - the role of political parties and mechanisms they could implement to support increased candidate diversity. However, it was mentioned that specifically in relation to the impacts of party quotas that there were a higher proportion of female independent candidates than ran for political parties in the General Election;
 - other structural elements of the political system;
 - a review of international best practice in political systems that promote candidate diversity;
 - the impact of political violence and intimidation on candidacy;
 - the relevance of political ambition.
- It was suggested that a pipeline model of political candidacy can be of limited use in evaluating reasons for low-levels of candidate diversity because it often attributes low-levels of candidate diversity to candidate deficiency.
- It was also suggested that it would be important to incorporate an intersectional approach within the papers. The Research Unit said they would particularly welcome suggestions as to how such an approach could be operationalised in the paper.

- It had been decided at the previous meeting to focus the research on electoral participation in line with the remit of the Electoral Commission. However, it was acknowledged that younger people may tend to engage in political participation which falls outside this scope and this may need to be reflected in future research.
- In terms of next steps, members agreed with the two-phased approach proposed and that the first paper should be prioritised with the second paper to follow later in 2025. It was agreed that Catherine Lynch might contact certain members directly regarding specific follow-up in advance of the next meeting.

4(ii) – Blue Skies Research

- Adam Whittle summarised the paper pre-circulated which had set out a number of questions to prompt discussion regarding the approach to advancing the blue skies research call.
- Members agreed with the proposal to invite proposals on particular themes relevant to the work of An Coimisiún noting that the first suggested theme could in fact suffice as capturing the desired areas of focus.
- It was suggested that it would be useful to provide information on research topics already being conducted or commissioned by An Coimisiún to avoid duplication.
- Members agreed that a tiered approach to funding made sense but the consensus amongst members generally was that the proposed funding levels were relatively modest and that there would be merit in reviewing the proposed funding ceilings.
- However, the importance of encouraging lower value projects from a cost efficiency perspective was also noted and that funding should be released at intervals subject to evidence of project progression. It was also suggested it might be useful to include a proof-of-concept level of funding, frequently used in European Union research projects.
- Regarding whether to incorporate an early-career research opportunity, it was noted that this can be expensive, that including reference to a project led by or including early-career researchers' on the research call would be adequate and that dedicating a particular level of funding purely for early-career research was not necessary.
- In terms of a peer review or oversight mechanism for blue skies projects it was agreed there need to be a balance between ensuring appropriate governance and not being overly prescriptive or directive in terms of the research content.

- Some members suggested there would be merit in extending the blue skies calls beyond research performing organisations and researchers from academic institutions, noting that there was a precedent for this amongst some other public bodies. The Secretariat agreed to explore options in this regard.

5 – Research Progress Report

- Mary-Clare O’Sullivan summarised the progress report on the Research Programme which had been pre-circulating noting that under the Electoral Reform Act 2022, An Coimisiún was required to update the Oireachtas Committee on progress by 10 January.
- Research Advisory Group members welcomed the progress made and commended the team on the work done to date. Given the extent and scale of the ambition of the Research programme, the Research Advisory Group agreed that they wished to recommend to the members of An Coimisiún the importance of expanding the capacity and staffing of An Coimisiún’s research unit to support delivery of the Programme.

6. A.O.B

- Two members mentioned recent research they had authored relevant to the remit of An Coimisiún: Professor David Kenny- a recently published paper in relation to the Family and Care referendums and Dr. Pauline Cullen- a forthcoming book on the issue of minority women’s access to local politics.
- The Chair advised members of the Group that An Coimisiún is considering its approach to research topics where constitutional issues might arise and would update the Group on this once there was further clarity.
- It was agreed that the Group would meet again in late February 2025.