**Educational Research Centre**

# Strategic Plan 2019-2021

**Educational Research Centre**
*Foras Taighde ar Oideachas*

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

This strategic plan represents a collaborative effort among staff of the Educational Research Centre (ERC), working with the Department of Education and Skills' (DES') Central Policy Unit (CPU). We would like to acknowledge the input from Neville Kenny and Robert Kelly (CPU) as well as helpful discussions with the Secretary General of the DES, Seán Ó Foghlú, Harold Hislop (Chief Inspector) and Evelyn O'Connor (Curriculum and Assessment Unit, CAP) during the development and refinement of the plan.

Our sincere thanks to the members of our Governing Board, Dr Pauric Travers (Chair), Éamonn Murtagh, Dr Denise Burns and Dr Michael Martin for their input into the drafting and finalising of the strategic plan.

We acknowledge and thank the agencies and organisations that provided feedback on an advanced draft of the plan. The agencies consulted on the plan are listed in the Appendix.

Finally, our thanks to Dr Nicolas Marcoux of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) who provided expert guidance on the structure and format of the strategic plan.

# Foreword

The publication of the ERC's first strategic plan is an important landmark. While the Centre has been in existence for more than fifty years, it was not established as an independent statutory body until September 2015, under section 54 of the Education Act, 1998. Since then it has been undergoing a process of transition in terms of governance and structures. This strategic plan attempts to capture the dual elements of transition and tradition while at the same time building on what has been achieved in order to respond to an evolving educational, social and digital landscape.

The Educational Research Centre is an important part of our national educational infrastructure. This plan aims to ensure that it continues to be so. The central challenge of any educational system is to achieve the best outcomes for individual students and the wider society within the resources available. Well-conceived educational research and evaluation can and should influence policy and practice in relation to a myriad of issues including educational disadvantage, special education needs, gender equality, assessment, the Irish language and student attainment.

Stakeholder consultation forms an important part of the plan and reflects the desire of the ERC to build increasingly collaborative and responsive relationships with its multiple stakeholders.

I look forward to the implementation of the plan over its life cycle (2019-2021) and to working with ERC staff, partners and collaborators to ensure its success.

*Pauric Travers*

**Dr Pauric Travers**
Chair of Board

# List of acronyms and abbreviations

**CAP**     Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, DES

**CPU**     Central Policy Unit, DES

**DCU**     Dublin City University

**DEIS**     Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools

**DES**     Department of Education and Skills

**ERC**     Educational Research Centre

**IEA**     International association for the evaluation of Educational Achievement

**IJE**     Irish Journal of Education (ERC's journal)

**IoE**     Institute of Education, DCU

**IPA**     Institute of Public Administration

**NAMER**  National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading

**NCCA**    National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

**NCSE**    National Council for Special Education

**OECD**    Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**PIAAC**   Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies

**PIRLS**    Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

**PISA**    Programme for International Student Assessment

**TIMSS**   Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

# Summary of the Educational Research Centre's (ERC's) Strategic Plan

## Strategic vision

Excellence in conducting and supporting educational research, evaluation and assessment.

## Mission

1. To conduct and disseminate commissioned and independently-initiated national and international research, assessment and evaluation studies that are timely, accessible and relevant, on all aspects of education, and at all levels of the education system

2. To develop high quality assessments and provide strong assessment support services to schools and centres of education

3. To collaborate with national and international bodies to share learning and to develop capacity and expertise in all of the aforementioned areas.

## Values

1. We place a high value on the quality, relevance, accessibility and impact of our work

2. We value the public trust and confidence placed in us and are committed to living up to that trust

3. We value and respect learners, parents, educators and stakeholders, as well as each other

4. We value investment in staff expertise, support and wellbeing

5. We view teamwork, relationships and working collaboratively as essential

6. We are committed to public service values[1].

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1   As described, for example, in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

## Guiding principles

**1.** Quality, relevance and impact

**2.** Balance between sustainability and development

**3.** Alignment with national priorities, informed by national and international developments

**4.** Collaborative spirit in leadership and teamwork

**5.** Inclusiveness and respect.

## Phases of the strategy

**2019:**
Transition

**2020:**
Consolidation

**2021:**
Development

## Goals and outcomes 2019–2021

Our goals stem from three high-level objectives:

**1.** Stabilise and enhance our staffing base and physical environment

**2.** Achieve a sustainable and strategic approach to test development, analysis and both commissioned and independently-initiated research

**3.** Continue to build and enhance strong and transparent governance structures.

## Goals

1. Building on an independent review of our staffing and organisational structure, to stabilise and enhance our staffing base
2. To attain a sustainable overarching structure for planning the programme of work
3. To build further capacity and expertise among staff
4. To achieve a better balance between commissioned and independently-generated research
5. To establish a strategy for analytic and methodological activities
6. Working with DES and other partners, to establish a strategy for the development and revision of ERC's tests and assessments
7. To identify and make improvements to our outputs (reports, website, tests and their supporting materials)
8. Working with DES and DCU, to establish a long-term service-level agreement between ERC and DCU
9. To begin to make necessary improvements to ERC's physical and IT infrastructure
10. To strengthen our governance structures.

## Outcomes

1. An improved level of staffing with high levels of wellbeing, engagement and efficiency
2. A well-planned, structured programme of work that delivers on targets to a consistently high quality
3. A staff that works collaboratively to continually improve levels of expertise
4. A growing body of independently-generated research and analysis that builds on evolving methodologies and conceptual advances which in turn feed into improvements to commissioned research
5. A clearly defined set of priorities to guide coherent progress and development in analysis and other methodological aspects of our work
6. A regularly updated suite of high-quality and relevant assessments that reflects best international practice and serves the needs of the system, as well as those of schools, teachers, parents and learners
7. Excellent, accessible reports and other outputs (e.g. tests and their supporting materials) that are meaningful and impactful
8. A service-level agreement with DCU that provides structure and stability to payroll, pension, library and other essential services
9. A centre that is significantly improved in its physical and digital technology infrastructural environments to enable staff to deliver excellent work in an efficient manner
10. An organisation that demonstrates full compliance with the 2016 Code of Practice and adheres to the requirements of its parent organisation, the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

# Introduction

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) was founded in 1966 and became an independent statutory agency of the Department of Education and Skills in September, 2015. As such, the ERC has to comply with a range of requirements, including the development of a strategic plan. A Governing Board for the ERC was established 12 months after it became a statutory body. This coincided with the establishment of the Institute of Education (IoE) in Dublin City University (DCU) which incorporated St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Mater Dei Institute of Education, Church of Ireland College of Education and the DCU School of Education Studies[2].

Despite the existence of the ERC as a statutory body for a little over three years, it has to date not published a strategic plan. This may be attributed to a complex and ongoing transition (mainly involving the establishment the ERC as an independent and compliant statutory body, and secondarily dealing with changing arrangements between the ERC and DCU). The ERC Governing Board identified the development of a strategic plan as a key component of the new organisation's transition and consolidation into an independent statutory body.

The work of the ERC is guided by the mission and functions set out in its Statutory Instrument[3]. The Establishment Order (SI 392 of 2015) draws a distinction between two objects of the Centre:

- Providing an assessment support service to schools and centres for education

- Conducting independent research, both commissioned and initiated by the Centre itself, on all aspects of education and at all levels of the education system.

Although the Irish language is not explicitly mentioned in the Establishment Order (SI 392 of 2015), the programme of work and strategic planning of the ERC assumes a commitment to Irish language research, evaluation and assessment.

The Establishment Order (Articles 8 and 9) specifies a non-exhaustive list of activities consistent with the furtherance of the objects of the function of the ERC. The breadth of the list is indicative of multiple strands of work and collaboration that need to exist between ERC and various layers of the education system. It includes enabling schools to assess attainment levels and academic standards of students and to report systematically on these; assisting schools to identify individual student's special educational needs; carrying out national and international assessments of educational achievement and securely storing and reporting on these data; engaging in programme evaluations; conducting independently (self-) initiated research; building capacity; serving on national and international advisory bodies; providing consultancy services; and co-operating with other bodies as appropriate.

A detailed Programme of Work of the ERC is described elsewhere (see http://www.erc.ie/programme-of-work/). The ERC is not presently conducting any research, evaluation or assessment at pre-primary or post-secondary levels, although it has done so in the past. However, it currently has

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2   In order to maintain continuity in services and relationships between the ERC and DCU including the newly-established Institute of Education, a two-year Transition Agreement (subsequently extended by one year) was drawn up. To protect the interests of ERC staff, a Staffing Agreement was drawn up and agreed by the DES, ERC, (then) St Patrick's College, and Irish Federation of University Teachers.

3   See SI 392/2015 Educational Research Centre (Establishment) Order 2015 , and subsequent amendments in SI 309/2017 Educational Research Centre (Establishment)  (Amendment) Order 2017 .

a role in the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) as the Irish representative on its International Governing Board.

Activities and work of the ERC can be grouped into seven strands:

**1.** Oversight, delivery and national reporting of large-scale international assessments[4]

**2.** Management, oversight and reporting of large-scale national assessments[5]

**3.** Contributing to policy on, and evaluation relating to, educational disadvantage

**4.** Test development, standardisation and support (in both paper and online formats)

**5.** Programme evaluation

**6.** Data analytic support[6]

**7.** Independently-initiated research.

At present, the ERC has sanction for 38.5 staff (35.55 whole-time equivalents) and is governed by a Governing Board and Audit and Risk Committee (Board members are listed in the Acknowledgements). Our staffing chart (as at the end of Quarter 1, 2019) is shown in Figure 1. Research is conducted in small teams working collaboratively and led by Research Fellows, with essential systems and administrative support provided by our administrative team, systems administrator and assistant librarian. For more information on the staff of the ERC, see http://www.erc.ie/about/staff/.

## Figure 1. Staffing structure of the ERC at Q1 2019



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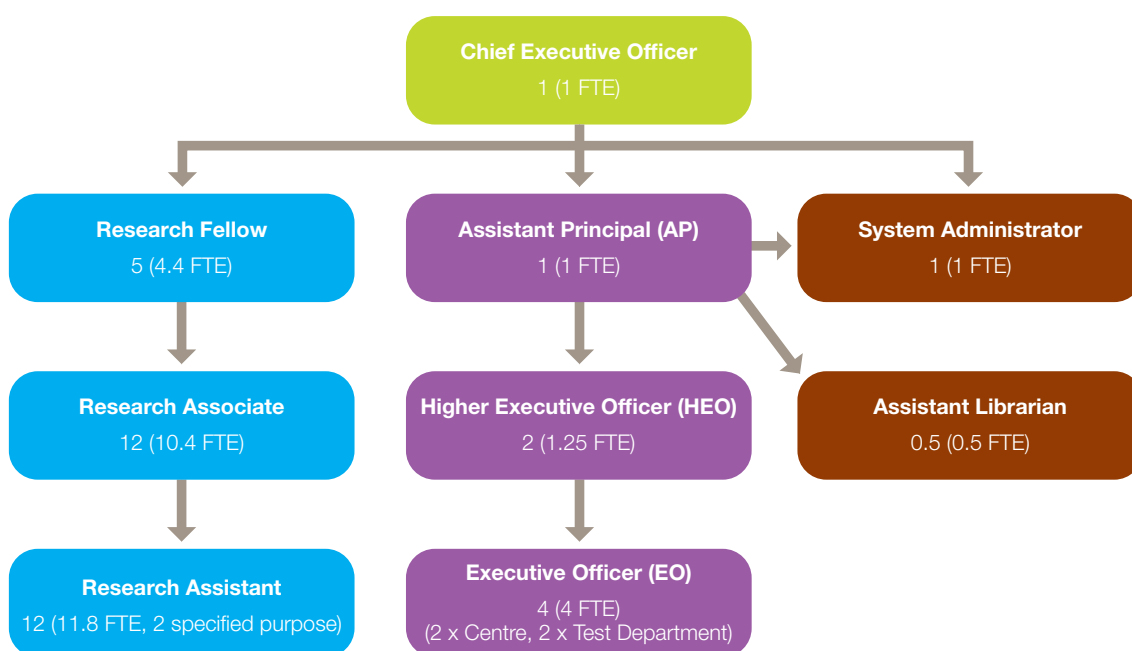
4  Currently: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

5  Chiefly, National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER).

6  For example, ongoing analysis of TUSLA's attendance data and analytic input into the DES' resource allocation model for special educational needs.

## External context

As with any organisation, the external context that impacts on the work of the ERC is ever-changing and evolving. Some recent developments include:

- A new Department of Education and Skills Statement of Strategy 2019-2021 following appointment of a new Minister for Education. The Department's Action Plan 2019 is a continuation of the existing Action Plan 2016-2019.[7]

- An evolving statutory framework and changes in governance arrangements.[8]

- Potential direct and indirect impacts of Brexit.

- Demographic changes as they relate to the population of learners at all levels of the education system.

- The transition from paper-based to online testing in both national standardised testing and international large-scale assessment programmes which give rise to implications for digital technology infrastructure, user competence and confidence, adaptive testing and test scaling and analysis methodologies.

- The increasing range of technologies and methodologies available for quantitative and qualitative data analysis both in general and specifically in the area of educational research.

- The increasing recognition of the central role of the learner in developing and implementing educational policies and initiatives.

- An increasing emphasis on the role of teacher as researcher, and of the fact that research is inextricably bound to teaching, learning and assessment.

In our view, these external contexts require not only a broad awareness of the issues and their interdependencies, but also a collaborative approach to understanding them and responding with research and other outputs that have meaningful policy impact.

## Internal context

The internal context of the ERC interacts with its external context, creating an exciting yet challenging environment. The current challenges identified as high priority within this Strategy are:

- Defining the relationship between the ERC and DCU through a negotiation process with DCU

- Finding solutions to space limitations in the main ERC building (located at DCU St Patrick's College Campus) and to the leasehold arrangements for ERC's Test Department (located on Richmond Road, Drumcondra)

- A structured and strategic approach to the ERC's work in the area of testing/assessment

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7   The Action Plan for Education is underpinned by a range of national strategies and initiatives, including: a new whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families 2019-2028, the National Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020, the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, DEIS Action Plan 2017, curriculum development and reform at primary and both lower and upper post-primary levels, Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022, the STEM Education Policy 2017-2026, and the Further Education and Training Policy and Framework 2018-2021.

8   These changes are both specific to the ERC's context, i.e. a change in governance arrangements between ERC and its parent department (Department of Education and Skills, DES), from the Curriculum, Assessment and Policy Unit (CAP) to the Central Policy Unit (CPU), as well as more general, i.e. the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, May 2018) which harmonises privacy laws across the EU and affords greater protection for the data rights and privacy of individuals.

- An improvement in the balance between commissioned and independently initiated research (with a greater emphasis on the latter)[9]

- Enhancements to the quality, relevance and impact of the outputs of the ERC

- Improvements to the ERC's IT infrastructure and IT governance

- A review and strategic remediation of staffing capacity and organisational structural issues in the ERC.

With respect to the final point above, it may be noted that an independent review of staffing and organisational structure has been conducted by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) during Q4 2018 and Q1 2019. The Review will be used to guide implementation of some of the aspects of the Strategy.

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9   At present, it is estimated that 5-10% of all research staff's working time is spent on independently-initiated research.

# Development of the Strategic Plan

The development of the Strategic Plan was fundamentally collaborative, consisting of several stages of consultation and review, prior to its publication in March 2019. The ERC's Establishment Order was used to guide the overall structure of the Strategic Plan. In November 2018, the ERC's Governing Board approved the outline of the Plan. In December 2018, initial consultations with ERC staff and with the DES (CPU) were held. The draft Plan was reviewed internally before being presented for consideration to the ERC's Governing Board and DES (CPU) in January 2019. During February, the Plan was revised in consultation with the IPA. A final review was conducted in March by the ERC Governing Board, senior ERC staff and partner agencies (see Appendix for list) prior to publication.

# Strategic vision

> **Excellence in conducting and supporting educational research, evaluation and assessment.**

The ERC will maintain and enhance its work in the areas of national and international educational research and evaluation, development of assessments, and supporting schools and other centres of education in the use of these assessments.

# Mission

Our mission has three parts. The first two are drawn from the Establishment Order while the third is included as an essential means by which our functions are enhanced and informed by collaboration with national and international bodies.

1. *To conduct and disseminate commissioned and independently-initiated national and international research, assessment and evaluation studies that are timely, accessible and relevant, on all aspects of education, and at all levels of the education system*

2. *To develop high quality assessments and provide strong assessment support services to schools and centres of education*

3. *To collaborate with national and international bodies to share learning and to develop capacity and expertise in all of the aforementioned areas.*

# Values

**1.** We place a high value on the quality, relevance, accessibility and impact of our work

**2.** We value the public trust and confidence placed in us and are committed to living up to that trust

**3.** We value and respect learners, parents, educators and stakeholders, as well as each other

**4.** We value investment in staff expertise, support and wellbeing

**5.** We view teamwork, relationships and working collaboratively as essential

**6.** We are committed to public service values[10].

# Guiding principles

The ethos and staff of the Centre are as important as the work and outputs of the Centre. Our work in all areas and at all levels is guided by the following principles:

## 1. Quality, relevance and impact

Whether our work is commissioned by the DES (or other agencies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA] or National Council for Special Education [NCSE]), or initiated by the ERC itself, we place a high value on the technical quality of the work we undertake.

Quality should also be paired with relevance and accessibility to users and stakeholders in the education system and our research, evaluation and assessment should provide tangible value to the intended target groups.

We also recognise that impact can be bi-directional and that we should look to adjust both our processes and our outputs in response to feedback from partners and stakeholders.

## 2. Balance between sustainability and development

In the context of our core work programme, we must manage our activities in a manner that prioritises sustainability whilst promoting development in the areas of research, assessment and evaluation, as well as in the practices and processes underpinning them. We recognise that development activities cannot reasonably occur unless there is a minimum level of stability in staffing and a structured, planned approach to our work that takes a multi-year view.

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10 As described, for example, in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

## 3. Alignment with national priorities, informed by national and international developments

As an independent statutory agency of the Department of Education and Skills and in line with our mandate as prescribed in the Establishment Order, we will continue to carry out activities on behalf of the Department. Our first Strategic Plan is thus informed by the Department's *Statement of Strategy 2019-2021* and by the strategies and policies which in turn inform it, notably *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020, Wellbeing Policy Statement, DEIS Plan 2017, Policy on Gaeltacht Education,* and *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020*. A number of actions set out in the Department's *2019 Action Plan* inform elements of the ERC's work programme in the next 2-3 years, for example:

- (DES AP 2019 Action 1) Oversee the roll-out of the implementation of the DES Wellbeing Policy: *The ERC has been commissioned by the DES to oversee the development of a framework for teachers' professional learning in the area of wellbeing.*

- (DES AP 2019 Action 10) Implement the "Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 -2020" to enhance teaching, learning & assessment: *The ERC has been commissioned by the DES to oversee a longitudinal study of the Digital Learning Framework and its implementation in schools.*

- (DES AP 2019 Action 14) Evaluate the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme: *The ERC and DES will jointly conduct/oversee this evaluation.*

- (DES AP 2019 Action 16) Implement the DEIS Plan in order to close the gap in performance between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, increase retention rates of DEIS students, and increase the progression rates of DEIS students into Higher Education and Further Education and Training: *The ERC will continue to work closely with DES on ongoing evaluation and measurement activities associated with DEIS. Notably, for the first time in 2020, the National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER) in primary schools will include over-sampling of DEIS schools, allowing detailed comparisons to be made.*

- (DES AP 2019 Action 17; 18) Progress the implementation of a School Inclusion Model to deliver the right supports at the right time to students with additional care needs; Embed the Special Education Teacher model which provides a unified allocation model for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on the school's educational profile, to ensure support is available for all pupils who require it: *The ERC will continue to provide the DES with analytic support to deliver the Special Education Teacher model and to inform the SNA Scheme.*

We will also develop and progress our independent function by maintaining close engagement at both national and international levels so that we can enhance our ability to lead on and support research, evaluation and assessment practices in Ireland. Some of this will come from our participation in international large-scale assessments, ranging from primary school to adult levels, as well as through participation in/contributions to international conferences and workshops and international journals, and from collaboration with colleagues in other organisations, nationally and internationally.

Some of the key developments that the ERC may be well-positioned to examine in a forward-looking manner are:

- Computer-based assessment design and analysis

- Analysis and conceptual advances that permit further use of existing national and international datasets

- Links between educational and other outcomes (e.g. wellbeing).

## 4. Collaborative spirit in leadership and teamwork

We view collaboration as fundamental to all aspects of our work. We learn from each other as well as from external agencies and stakeholders, and view shared learning as a driver to improvement. We encourage and facilitate senior staff to guide, mentor and support junior staff and show leadership as well as good management. We value working in teams due to the complexity of the issues facing education and the complexity of the methods used in educational research.

## 5. Inclusiveness and respect

Inclusivity and respect underpin all aspects of our work and are related to the principle of collaborative spirit. In addition, we place a high value on being aware of and sensitive to the range of needs and interests of the diverse groups within and connected to the education system.

We aim to improve the accessibility and relevance of our reports and other outputs (e.g. website, standardised tests and supporting documentation) in order to be more fully inclusive and respectful of our various audiences.

# Phases of the strategy

We have designed our Strategic Plan along three phases which coincide broadly with calendar years:

**2019: Transition** – our priority and focus will be on managing the various transitions that are occurring both within the ERC and between the ERC and other agencies and stakeholders. These include:

- the transition of primary schools to updated versions of paper tests and the transition of primary schools to online versions of our tests, as well as the possibility of increased uptake of our tests by learners at post-primary level

- the transition of governance arrangements between the ERC and DES from CAP to CPU

- the progression of the working arrangements between the ERC and DCU from a transitional to a more long-term status

- recent changes in staffing at the ERC and resulting transitions required by existing and new staff.

**2020: Consolidation** – our priority and focus will be on consolidating the activities listed above under 2019, thereby paving the way for development in 2021. 2020 will also be a phase for consolidating our governance arrangements, for example as they relate to auditing, risk management and external communication.

**2021: Further development** – following stakeholder consultation, we will seek to identify and implement strategic improvements in research, evaluation and assessment. By this stage, we aim to have an enhanced analysis/methodology strand as well as a structured, strategic approach to testing/assessment that will be linked to both the commissioned and the independently-initiated work of the ERC.

# Goals and outcomes 2019-2021

The goals in this section stem from three high-level objectives:

**1.** Stabilise and enhance our staffing base and physical environment and infrastructure

**2.** Achieve a sustainable and strategic approach to test development, analysis and both commissioned and independently-initiated research

**3.** Continue to build and enhance strong and transparent governance structures.

Our ten high-level goals and intended outcomes are set out below.

## Goals

**1.** Building on an independent review of our staffing and organisational structure, to stabilise and enhance our staffing base

**2.** To attain a sustainable overarching structure for planning the programme of work

**3.** To build further capacity and expertise among staff

**4.** To achieve a better balance between commissioned and independently-generated research

**5.** To establish a strategy for analytic and methodological activities

**6.** Working with DES and other partners, to establish a strategy for the development and revision of ERC's tests and assessments

**7.** To identify and make improvements to our outputs (reports, website, tests and their supporting materials)

**8.** Working with DES and DCU, to establish a long-term service-level agreement between ERC and DCU

**9.** To begin to make necessary improvements to ERC's physical and IT infrastructure

**10.** To strengthen our governance structures.

## Outcomes

1. An improved level of staffing with high levels of wellbeing, engagement and efficiency

2. A well-planned, structured programme of work that delivers on targets to a consistently high quality

3. A staff that works collaboratively to continually improve levels of expertise

4. A growing body of independently-generated research and analysis that builds on evolving methodologies and conceptual advances which in turn feed into improvements to commissioned research

5. A clearly defined set of priorities to guide coherent progress and development in analysis and other methodological aspects of our work

6. A regularly updated suite of high-quality and relevant assessments that reflects best international practice and serves the needs of the system, as well as those of schools, teachers, parents and learners

7. Excellent, accessible reports and other outputs (e.g. tests and their supporting materials) that are meaningful and impactful

8. A service-level agreement with DCU that provides structure and stability to payroll, pension, library and other essential services

9. A centre that is significantly improved in its physical and digital technology infrastructural environments to enable staff to deliver excellent work in an efficient manner

10. An organisation that demonstrates full compliance with the 2016 Code of Practice and adheres to the requirements of its parent organisation, the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

# Actions 2019–2021

Below is a set of actions under each of nine key areas. Areas 1-7 cover our seven strands of work, while area 8 describes stakeholder consultation and area 9 describes our strategic governance-related priorities. We have not explicitly linked the 10 goals and outcomes to the actions in this section since there is, in many cases, a one-to-many relationship between goals and actions.

## 1.  International assessment programme

- **1a:** Maintain high standards in development, fieldwork, analysis and reporting[11]
- **1b:** Successfully implement TIMSS 2019, PIRLS 2021 and PISA 2021
- **1c:** Initiate work on TIMSS 2023 and PISA 2024
- **1d:** Enhance reporting to better meet stakeholders' needs
- **1e:** Establish the feasibility and value of participation in new international assessment programmes such as the International Computer Information Literacy Study (ICILS 2023).

## 2.  National assessment programme

- **2a:** Maintain high standards in development, fieldwork, analysis and reporting[12]
- **2b:** Successfully manage the integration of aspects of the DEIS evaluation into NAMER 2020
- **2c:** Enhance reporting to better meet stakeholders' needs.

## 3  Test development, standardisation and support

- **3a:** Successfully manage the transitions from old to new paper tests and from paper to online tests[13]
- **3b:** Review and update our online testing platform, as required
- **3c:** Undertake new test development work
- **3d:** Enhance engagement with test users (teachers, learners, principals, parents) (see Action 8a-c, below)
- **3e:** Maintain and improve on test support provided to schools and other centres of education
- **3f:** Establish rolling/ongoing test development and assessment strategy in consultation with stakeholders, including regular updating of existing tests, as needed.

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11 'High standards' refers to adherence to stringent international technical standards which apply to all phases of study implementation. Publication of PISA 2018 results is planned for Q4 2019 with reporting for TIMSS 2019 in Q4 2020.

12 Similar to 1a, this requires adherence to national technical standards on various aspects of national assessments, including sampling and response rates.

13 The achievement of this refers to the successful implementation of complex logistics involved in the distribution, scoring and support for three testing systems running in parallel (old paper tests, new paper tests, and online tests).

## 4. Educational disadvantage

- **4a:** Establish overall programme of work for 2019-2021 with reference to 2017 DEIS plan and targets and in consultation with relevant partners and agencies

- **4b:** Report on the achievements of DEIS learners drawing on DEIS/NAMER 2020

- **4c:** Implement and report on the educational disadvantage programme of work.

## 5. Programme evaluation (new projects 2019-2021)

- **5a:** Agree terms of reference for new programme evaluation studies with relevant sections of DES[14]

- **5b:** Successfully complete programme evaluation studies according to their respective terms of reference

- **5c:** Identify links and common themes across evaluation studies to inform future work.

## 6. Analysis, capacity building and skills development

- **6a:** Building on the IPA staffing and organisational structure review and other sources (e.g. performance appraisals, staff consultation), establish a structured plan for capacity building and skills development (see also 9c)

- **6b:** Maintain high standards in existing projects that provide analytic support (e.g. analysis of TUSLA's attendance data, analysis to support the allocation of resources for special educational needs)

- **6c:** Maintain support for existing PhD studies and existing strands of independently-initiated research[15]

- **6d:** Identify strategic opportunities for extending analytic support to other agencies

- **6e:** Review ERC's analytic needs and priorities

- **6f:** Establish ERC's analytic strategy, to include exploration of potential new data sources.

## 7. Independent functions

- **7a:** Identify ways to develop and support independently-initiated research particularly through secondary analysis (via ERC's analytic strategy, 6f)

- **7b:** Actively seek/respond to opportunities for new strands of independently-initiated work in consultation and collaboration with national and international agencies

- **7c:** Re-launch the Irish Journal of Education (IJE)

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14 For 2019, these comprise the Digital Learning Framework evaluation, Continuing Professional Development framework (wellbeing), and Gaeltacht Recognition Scheme evaluation.

15 As at Q1, 2019, three members of staff are engaged in PhD studies: see http://www.erc.ie/programme-of-work/independent-research/.

- **7d:** Increase publication and reach of independently-initiated work of ERC staff (e.g. via conferences, national and international journal articles)

- **7e:** Build independently-initiated research more explicitly into programme of work through structured, timely planning of work commissioned by the DES and other agencies.

## 8.   Stakeholder engagement

- **8a:** Through consultation with groups and agencies, obtain and collate views on the ERC's outputs (reports, presentations, etc.) and assessments

- **8b:** In response to the consultations, build strategic priorities into strategic planning on assessment and outputs

- **8c:** Develop triennial stakeholder consultation strategy.

## 9.   Governance and corporate services

- **9a:** Establish long-term service agreement with DCU through tri-party agreement between DCU, ERC and the DES, taking into account the future development needs of the ERC

- **9b:** Secure longer-term status of Test Department (located on Richmond Road, Drumcondra)

- **9c:** Respond strategically to IPA's staffing review in the context of changes and developments in ERC's internal and external contexts (see also 6a)

- **9d:** Enhance HR functions and conduct and respond to a full review of current processes to ensure alignment with best practice

- **9e:** Raise awareness of the work of the ERC

- **9f:** Continue to monitor compliance function in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016

- **9g:** Improve risk registration and management through the development of the internal audit function and the oversight role of the Audit and Risk Committee.

- **9h:** Continue to ensure regular review of financial activities in line with best practice.

# Achieving actions

This section takes the actions as outlined in the previous section and links each to phases of the strategy (transition, consolidation, development, ongoing). Some of the actions cut across more than one strategic phase and there is a one-to-many mapping between the actions and high-level goals. Because of this one-to-many mapping, we have not explicitly linked goals and actions. To facilitate review and monitoring, each is worded in such a way as to be capable of being described as achieved/not achieved (or in certain circumstances, e.g. unforeseen constraints, deferred or cancelled).

| Strand and action | Timeframe | Phase | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1: International assessment programme** | | | |
| **1a:** Maintain high standards in development, fieldwork, analysis and reporting | Ongoing | Ongoing | Evaluated against international technical standards |
| **1b:** Successfully implement TIMSS 2019, PIRLS 2021 and PISA 2021 | Ongoing | Ongoing | Evaluated against international technical standards |
| **1c:** Initiate work on TIMSS 2023 and PISA 2024 | Q1-Q2 2021 | Further development | TIMSS 2023 likely to transition to computer-based assessment |
| **1d:** Enhance reporting to better meet stakeholders' needs | Initial national reporting scheduled for Q4 2020 (TIMSS) and Q4 2022 (PIRLS and PISA) | Consolidation; Further development | See 8, below |
| **1e:** Establish the feasibility and value of participation in new international assessment programmes such as the International Computer Information Literacy Study (ICILS 2023) | 2021 | Further development | Dependent on extent to which TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 can be integrated |
| **2: National assessment programme** | | | |
| **2a:** Maintain high standards in development, fieldwork, analysis and reporting | Ongoing | Ongoing | Evaluated against national technical standards |
| **2b:** Successfully manage the integration of aspects of the DEIS evaluation into NAMER 2020 | Ongoing | Ongoing | Evaluated against national technical standards |
| **2c:** Enhance reporting to better meet stakeholders' needs | Initial reporting scheduled for Q2 2021 | Consolidation; Further development | See 8, below |

| Strand and action | Timeframe | Phase | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **3: Test development, standardisation and support** | | | |
| **3a:** Successfully manage the transitions from old to new paper tests and from paper to online tests, including regular updating of existing tests, as needed | 2019-2020 | Transition | Old paper tests to be phased out by Q2 2020 |
| **3b:** Review and update our online testing platform, as required | Q2 2019-Q1 2020 | Transition | |
| **3c:** Undertake new test development work | 2021 | Further development | Existing test development of primary reading and mathematics, and of post-primary spatial reasoning, reading, mathematics, Irish language mathematics and reading (for Gaelcholáistí) tests to be completed Q1-Q2 2019. New test development work to emerge in 2021 following 8, below |
| **3d:** Enhance engagement with test users (teachers, learners, principals, parents) | 2021 | Further development | See 8, below |
| **3e:** Maintain and improve on test support to schools and other centres of education | 2019-2020 | Consolidation | ERC website to be enhanced and drop-in sessions for schools to be continued; phone support to be enhanced |
| **3f:** Establish rolling/ongoing test development and assessment strategy in consultation with stakeholders | Q1 2021 | Further development | On foot of 8, below, and in consultation with DES |
| **4: Educational disadvantage** | | | |
| **4a:** Establish overall programme of work for 2019-2021 with reference to 2017 DEIS plan and targets and in consultation with relevant partners and agencies | Q1-2 2019 | Transition | |
| **4b:** Report on the achievements of DEIS learners drawing on DEIS/NAMER 2020 | Initial reporting scheduled for Q2 2021 | Further development | |
| **4c:** Implement and report on the educational disadvantage programme of work | 2020-2021 | Consolidation; Further development | To be monitored and evaluated against 2019-2021 programme of work |

| Strand and action | Timeframe | Phase | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **5: Programme evaluation (new projects 2019–2021)** | | | |
| **5a:** Agree terms of reference for new programme evaluation studies | Q1 2019 | Transition | Three new projects envisaged: national evaluation of Digital Learning Framework; evaluation of CPD in wellbeing; evaluation of Gaeltacht Recognition Scheme (each running for approximately three years) |
| **5b:** Successfully complete programme evaluation studies according to their respective terms of reference | 2019-2021 | Consolidation; Further development | To be monitored and evaluated against terms of reference |
| **5c:** Identify links and common themes across evaluation studies to inform future work | 2021 | Further development | Strategic linkages and common themes across evaluations to be identified |
| **6: Analysis, capacity building and skills development** | | | |
| **6a:** Building on the IPA staffing and organisational structure review and other sources (e.g. performance appraisals, staff consultation), establish a structured plan for capacity building and skills development | 2019 | Transition | See also 9c |
| **6b:** Maintain high standards in existing projects that provide analytic support | Ongoing | Ongoing | |
| **6c:** Maintain support for existing PhD studies and existing strands of independently-initiated research | Ongoing | Ongoing | Currently, three ERC staff are undertaking PhD studies (http://www.erc.ie/programme-of-work/independent-research/) |
| **6d:** Identify strategic opportunities for extending analytic support to other agencies | 2020-2021 | Further development | This may entail new work at levels of the system other than primary or post-primary |
| **6e:** Review ERC's analytic needs and priorities | Q3-4 2019 | Transition | This will include a consideration of performance appraisals, skills matrices, staff consultations and IPA staffing and organisational structure review |
| **6f:** Establish ERC's analytic strategy, to include exploration of potential new data sources | Q2 2020 | Further development | Strategy to include capacity building, analytic and reporting priorities, possible new strands of analytic work; see also 8b, below |

| Strand and action | Timeframe | Phase | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **7: Independent functions** | | | |
| **7a:** Identify ways to develop and support independently-initiated research particularly through secondary analysis (via ERC's analytic strategy, 6f) | 2020-2021 | Further development | See 6f, above |
| **7b:** Actively seek/respond to opportunities for new strands of independently-initiated work in consultation and collaboration with national and international agencies | 2020-2021 | Further development | See 6d-f, above |
| **7c:** Re-launch the Irish Journal of Education (IJE) | Q4 2020 | Further development | To include enhanced submission guidelines and call for articles as well as extended editorial board |
| **7d:** Increase publication and reach of independently-initiated work of ERC staff (e.g. via conferences, national and international journal articles) | 2020-2021 | Consolidation; Further development | See 6d, above |
| **7e:** Build independently-initiated research more explicitly into programme of work through structured, timely planning of work commissioned by the DES and other agencies | Ongoing | Consolidation; Further development | Enhanced planning process between ERC and CPU to be agreed from Q1 2019 |
| **8: Stakeholder consultation** | | | |
| **8a:** Through consultation with groups and agencies, obtain and collate views on the ERC' outputs (reports, presentations, etc.) and assessments | 2019- 2020 | Consolidation | |
| **8b:** In response to the consultations, build strategic priorities into planning on assessment and outputs. | 2020 | Further development | See also 6d, above |
| **8c:** Develop triennial stakeholder consultation strategy | 2020 | Further development | |

| Strand and action | Timeframe | Phase | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **9: Governance** | | | |
| **9a:** Establish long-term service agreement with DCU through tri-party agreement between DCU, ERC and the DES, taking into account the future development needs of the ERC | 2019 | Transition | Short-term agreements for some aspects of service required for Q1-2 2019 |
| **9b:** Secure longer-term status of Test Department | 2019 | Transition | As part of 9a |
| **9c:** Respond strategically to IPA's staffing review in the context of changes and developments in ERC's internal and external contexts | From Q1 2019 | Transition; Consolidation | This is likely to take the form of a phased set of priorities over 2019 and 2020 |
| **9d:** Enhance HR functions and conduct and respond to a full review of current processes to ensure alignment with best practice | 2019 | Transition | |
| **9e:** Raise awareness of the work of the ERC | Ongoing | Ongoing | As part of 8, 6d, and enhancements to ERC's website and social media channels |
| **9f:** Continue to monitor compliance function in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 | Ongoing | Ongoing | For quarterly review by ERC governing board and audit & risk committee |
| **9g:** Improve risk registration and management through internal audit function | Ongoing | Consolidation | For quarterly review by ERC governing board and audit & risk committee |
| **9h:** Continue to ensure regular review of financial activities in line with best practice | Ongoing | Ongoing | For quarterly review by ERC governing board and audit & risk committee |

# Review and monitoring

As noted in the previous section, actions are worded so as to facilitate evaluation as being achieved/not achieved/deferred. An ongoing review and monitoring of the goals and actions of the Strategy will be conducted at three levels:

- Internal ERC project management meetings every 6 weeks.

- Regular internal meetings between senior researchers, senior administrator and CEO.

- (At least) quarterly review of progress on the Strategy at ERC Governing Board meetings.

A central working document will be used to record and monitor progress against an agreed set of key performance indicators, time lines and other relevant metrics.

The review and monitoring of strategic actions will also occur with reference to strategic and planning documentation that is to be developed within the three-year timeframe, i.e.

- Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreements with the DES.

- ERC test development strategy.

- ERC's DEIS programme of work 2019-2021.

- Terms of reference for programme evaluations (new projects 2019-2021).

- ERC analytic strategy.

- ERC strategic priorities for assessment and outputs following stakeholder consultations.

# Appendix: List of bodies and agencies invited to review the plan

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|---|---|
| COGG (An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta) | www.cogg.ie |
| HEA (Higher Education Authority) | www.hea.ie |
| IRC (Irish Research Council) | www.research.ie |
| Leargas | www.leargas.ie |
| NCGE (National Centre for Guidance in Education) | www.ncge.ie |
| NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) | www.ncca.ie |
| NCSE (National Council for Special Education) | www.ncse.ie |
| QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) | www.qqi.ie |
| Skillnet | www.skillnetireland.ie |
| Solas | www.solas.ie |
| SEC (State Examinations Commission) | www.examinations.ie |
| ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland) | www.asti.ie |
| TUI (Teachers' Union of Ireland) | www.tui.ie |
| INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organisation) | www.into.ie |
| IoE (Institute of Education, DCU) | www.dcu.ie/institute_of_education/index.shtml |
| CARPE (Centre for Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education, DCU) | www.dcu.ie |
| NPC P (National Parents' Council, Primary) | www.npc.ie |
| NPC PP (National Parents' Council, Post-Primary) | http://www.npcpp.ie/ |
| NAPD (National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals) | www.napd.ie |
| JMB (Joint Managerial Body) | www.jmb.ie |
| IPPN (Irish Primary Principals' Network) | www.ippn.ie |
| Teaching Council | www.teachingcouncil.ie |

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