

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
13 February 2019**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held on 13 February 2019 at the offices of the organisation.

Board Members Present:

Pauric Travers (PT), Chairperson; Denise Burns (DB), Deputy Chairperson; Michael Martin (MM) (Via Skype Link); Edward Murtagh (EM)

In Attendance:

Jude Cosgrove (JC), Anne Comey (AC) who took the minutes

Absent: N/A

Counsel Present: N/A

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2.00 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I).

1. Minutes BMin (Bmin-1118)

The minutes of the last meeting were adopted and signed.

2. Matters arising from previous minutes

CPU still to clarify procedure to deal with underspend.

No updates on Charity status.

Board will review draft response to letter issued by EE at its next meeting on 6 March 2019.

3. Report on developments since previous meeting (See Appendix II)

JC presented the Board with all updates relevant to projects, and all other matters were dealt with under other headings in this agenda.

The Board discussed the need for the development and implementation of a protocol for publication and external independent review.

4. Governance matters (B-1-19-1, B1-19-2, B-1-19-3)

The date for the meeting between DCU (Dublin City University), DES (Department of Education and Skills) and ERC (Educational Research Centre) to discuss payroll, pension, lease etc. has not been confirmed.

The ERC is now included in the Ethics return regulations. Returns for ERC were completed for the period November-December 2018. Returns for 2019 will cover 12 months.

The Board approved the proposed responses to the C&AG (Comptroller & Auditor General) Management Letter 2017.

The Board reviewed and approved the proposed Statement on Internal Controls to be included in the 2018 Financial Statement.

Review of the Annual reports 2016 and 2017 are still pending with the DES.

The Board was advised that the bequest made to the ERC in 2018 would be included in the 2018 Financial Statement. Following advice from the C&AG, the ERC will review the various options offered by FR102 standards in relation to heritage assets and re-evaluation.

The Board reviewed the 2018 outputs and the work programme for 2019 as detailed in the draft Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA) issued to the DES.

The Board approved the increase of the online banking daily limit to €200K per day to facilitate payment of salaries at month end.

The Board approved the PO (Purchase Order) for the printing of the new tests. The Board was advised that the Protected disclosures return for 2018 was Níl.

The Board was advised that the report from the review of internal financial controls conducted by Mazars in November 2018 has been received and will be reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee at the meeting of 6 March 2019.

The Board agreed that non-payment of sick leave for ERC staff working for less than 12 months be removed from ERC employees' contracts as this was causing health and safety concerns.

5. Board Self Assessment (B-1-19-4)

The Board reviewed the self-assessment summary. It concluded that the main issue remains the lack of Financial expertise (pending appointment of new Board/ARC member). No training requirements was identified by the Board.

6. Accounting Policy (B-1-19-5)

The Board approved the accounting policies noting that the payroll policy will need to be updated once the DES, DCU and ERC come to an agreement.

7. Procurement Plan (B-1-19-6)

The Board approved the procurement plan, noting that the staff member in charge of the implementation of the plan has recently resigned and that this will cause delays in its implementation for Q1 2019.

8. Risk Management (Recurring item) (B-1-19-7)

The Board reviewed the strategic risk register and noted the number of high risk items. It was noted that a number of them are in the process of being addressed. It suggested that the risk register might benefit from a more stringent criterion for high risk and possible re-grouping or collapsing of some of the risk categories.

9. Staffing (B-5-18-4)

Several positions have become vacant (1 Research Fellow following a retirement, 1 Research Associate following the commencement of a two-year career break, and 1 project officer (EO) resignation).

Sanctions have been provided for the replacement of all of these posts (on a permanent or specified purpose basis as relevant), as well as a fifth Research Fellow post (methodologies), the replacement of Research Associates posts resulting from the internal appointments on both permanent and acting-up basis at Research Fellow level and sanction to make five temporary assistant posts permanent (subject to interview).

The Board was advised that the recruitment is working efficiently through the staffing framework and organisational chart established by CPU and ERC. It was also advised that ERC was consulting with external experts on recruitment and panel processes.

Interviews took place for the Research Fellow (methodologies) and an informal job offer has been made. The recruitment process for the various Research Assistants posts was complex due to multiple panels and posts. The ERC is in the process of finalising panels. The EO applicants are in the process of being shortlisted with interviews planned later this month.

The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is conducting a review of staffing and organisational structure on behalf of the ERC and this will inform strategic development of the ERC's staffing, training and organisational structure. The IPA report may not be completed in time for inclusion in strategic plan but will be completed by end March. A full HR audit is planned for Q3 2019.

Issues outstanding: ERC still waiting sanction from CPU to recruit three additional staff on specified purpose contracts for three new DES studies commencing 2019, ending 2021.

The Deputy CEO position will require sanction from DPER. Additional staffing needs as identified under IPA review (e.g. IT manager) will be addressed strategically via business cases to DPER.

10. Strategic Plan (SP) (B-1-19-8)

Staff consultations (group session and online survey) and a meeting with CPU took place in early December. The version of the Plan reviewed by the Board reflected the feedback received from IPA, CPU and staff.

The IPA staffing review will not be included as appendix in the strategic plan, but the plan will still cross-reference the staffing review. A second draft will be circulated in the first half of March.

11. Appointment and replacement of Board and ARC Member (B-1-19-9)

CPU is advancing the Board vacancy and needs to submit a note to Minister's office regarding Ministerial discretion: CPU is aware that this is urgent, that the Board member should be female, and that financial expertise should be a priority. The appointment for the Board and the ARC member will be dealt with conjointly provided financial expertise is sought.

12. AOB

There being no further business, the meeting concluded.

Board members continued discussions without the presence of representatives from the executive team.

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting 13th February 2019 Agenda

1. Minutes of meeting of 13th November 2018 (Bmin-1118)
2. Matters arising from the minutes
3. Report on developments since previous meeting
4. Governance matters (B-1-19-1, B-1-19-2 and B-1-19-3)
5. Board Self Assessment (B-1-19-4)
6. Accounting Policy (B-1-19-5)
7. Procurement Plan (B-1-19-6)
8. Risk Management (Recurring item) (B-1-19-7)
9. Staffing
10. Strategic Plan (Recurring item) (B-1-19-8)
11. Appointment and replacement of Board and ARC Member (B-1-19-9)
12. AOB

Appendix 2

ERC Governing Board meeting

Feb 13, 2018

Progress and activity report since previous meetings of Nov 12, 2018

Developments since previous meeting not elsewhere described (under item 3)

- General note on project planning: ERC has drafted proposal for planning for new projects with two suggested deadlines – March for projects involving fieldwork and June for desk-based studies. Submitted to CPU in Jan.
- Following a PIAAC GB meeting Nov 26-27 and discussions with PISA team, OECD is beginning to show an indication of willingness to work with EU countries to put standard contract in place. ERC will continue to pursue this issue.
- Brexit planning meeting took place on Nov 30 – common travel area is reassuring and ERC has one major NI supplier (the paper based scoring system). Other suppliers are journals and books. Risks assessed as low for the moment.
- Two projects about to go into the field – TIMSS 2019 and NAMER 2020 field trial. Space very tight but on target.
- DEIS – as part of a three year evaluation plan ERC is working with DES (Social Inclusion) to incorporate evaluation of Traveller support programme. Monitoring and Evaluation Group which is related to DEIS is due to re-convene Q1 or Q2 following some staff changes in DES.
- RASG (Resource Allocation Support Group) – meeting Jan 18, all going to plan, entering review phase. Extensive discussion of circular which documents changes to the allocations since first administration in 2017.
- Standardised testing –
 - The transition period (old-new tests, paper-online) represents a risk in the sense that the sales of tests are impossible to predict. Discussions with Vidappt and previous experience indicate that unless online testing is incentivised, the system is not financially viable. JC in discussions with DES to see if there may be a way to address this.
 - Overall, ERC is on target for rollout of new tests to schools at the end of February 2019. Ongoing drop-in sessions organised by the DOTS team have indicated a high level of interest.
 - SEN teacher resource allocation circular includes a statement that up to date tests should be used and that use of new tests whether paper or online will not have a negative impact on resource allocation. ERC's brochure for new primary tests will accompany this month's mailshot from DES.
 - The ERC has submitted a proposal for the development of an effective assessment programme and has submitted it to CAP for review by a MAC sub-committee on Feb 8 (curriculum and assessment). It is hoped that this will initiate a more strategic approach to test development that is cognisant of the complex challenges, especially with transition to online assessment.
- CPD wellbeing – meeting of advisory group Feb 15. JC and RC to attend.
- DLF evaluation – longitudinal sample needs to be drawn in March and input from DES sought on questionnaire content.
- Gaeltacht recognition evaluation – GS is leading the work on this and it is proceeding according to plan. Question mark over feasibility of administering 2nd year Irish language tests – dependent on timeline for finalising the assessment.

- Logfile symposium – initial meeting in Washington DC Dec 10-11 was very valuable. Draft conference programme and provisional speaker list established. May 16-17 in the Davenport Hotel.
- The ERC website has been restructured slightly and content is all now up to date – Board is asked to review and comment if they wish.
- Performance appraisals are completed and appear to have been received positively.
- Reports/Publications
 - ERC Research Series 5 – secondary analysis of ICT at home and school –Board to advise on final decision regarding this publication.
 - Two DEIS related ERC reports Dec 2018, Jan 2019 – on HSCL and trends in achievement and attendance at post-primary.
 - Additional articles on TYP published late 2018 – early 2019 – on ERC website
 - Irish Journal of Education, Vol. 43 (2018) should be ready to go to print in March
 - Other reports noted at previous meeting proceeding as planned.