

**Educational Research Centre  
MEETING OF THE BOARD  
29 April 2020**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held remotely on 29 April.

**Board Members Present:**

Pauric Travers (PT), Chairperson; Denise Burns (DB), Deputy Chairperson; Michael Martin (MM); 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 pm.

The Board noted the unusual circumstances of the meeting arising due to Covid-19.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I).

**1. Minutes BMin (Bmin-0220)**

A minor change to the minutes of the last meeting was requested. The amended minutes will be reviewed at the subsequent meeting.

**2. Conflict of Interest**

No conflict of interests were raised.

**3. Matters arising from previous minutes**

- There has been no feedback from the DES on the gap analysis provided in Q4 2019.
- The meeting arranged with DCU to discuss the next stages of the transition agreement was cancelled due to the sudden closure of all offices (due to Covid-19).
- Correspondence was issued to the Pensions Authority on 6 March 2020 with an update on the outstanding pension matters. No feedback has been received to date.
- The original copies of the Ethics Report were not sent to the Standards in Public Office Commission due to the closure of sudden closure of the ERC offices.
- Concerning the ERC's online assessment platform, the data transfer and deletion is pending and the issue of the early termination of the contract by the supplier is being reviewed.

There were no other matters arising not discussed under subsequent headings.

**4. Report on developments since previous meeting**

JC provided an update on various developments and activities (See Appendix II).

The Board expressed its thanks to the ERC staff for their commitment during the pandemic situation.

#### **5. Covid 19 (B-2-20-1)**

JC provided the Board with updates on the actions taken by ERC to ensure continuity of business following the temporary closure of the Centre and the Test Department, some of which were discussed under item 4. Discussions followed on the difficulties and impact of the current situation on staff and projects.

The ERC's Covid-19 guidelines issued to staff were reviewed by the Board who requested that the notion of policy be removed and "College" replaced by "Campus". The guidelines were approved pending these changes.

#### **6. Governance matters (B-2-20-2)**

Updates were provided by JC and AC on the following items:

- The payroll internal audit has commenced but it is expected it will take longer than originally planned due to the difficulty in accessing the data during the closure of both ERC and DCU offices.
- The delay due to the office closure in meeting with DCU was noted.
- The C&AG audit started on April 19 2020 and is to be conducted mostly remotely. Items which cannot be audited remotely will be reviewed when access to the office can resume. The Board noted that this was likely to delay the publication of the Annual Report.
- Following discussions with the C&AG on procurement, it was noted that a slight overspend would require an update to the Statement on Internal Control.
- The ERC had a meeting on 5 March 2020 with its overseeing section, the Central Policy Unit (CPU), and minutes of same were provided to the Board.

#### **7. Finance (B-2-20-3)**

Expenditure reporting to 01/04/20 was issued to the Board. The following points were raised:

- Following cancellation of standardised tests for 2020 due to Covid-19, the much lower income from the Test Department together with a large printing cost (tests currently in storage will be invoiced before year end) represents a financial risk.
- It was also noted that the Test Department income also covers a large portion of general ERC running costs and in particular, the costs of the current procurement and development of the new online platform.
- Some savings expected from the pay budget.
- The ERC's budget and finances, along with other items, will be discussed with CPU in early June.

#### **8. Policies and procedures**

The Board was informed that, due to the emergency situation and the additional work required to maintain continuity on projects and work programme, work on the staff

handbook had been halted. It was noted that this is a concern as it needs to be a priority. It was agreed that work should resume as early as possible.

#### **9. Risk Management (Recurring item)**

The Board was informed that the risk register was not yet updated with the Covid-19 risks as the pandemic impacts and response planning had taken priority over all other tasks. The main risks highlighted and discussed were: finance, reopening of the office and work going forward, procurement, online assessment platform, and the impact of Covid-19 on staff and projects.

#### **10. Self-Assessment**

AC asked that any pending assessments be sent to her for review.

#### **11. Staffing**

JC provided a recruitment update on the assessment and interview outcomes and on the finalisation of panels for the Research Assistant posts.

The business cases for IT manager, EO, CO was submitted and positively received by DES. Pending formal DES approval, recruitment is planned for June.

#### **12. AOB**

There being no further business the meeting concluded.



## Appendix 1

**EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE  
Board Meeting  
29 April 2020  
Agenda**

1. Minutes of meeting of 20 February 2020 (Bmin-1-0220)
2. Conflict of Interest
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. Report on developments since previous meeting
5. Covid 19 (B-2-20-1)
6. Governance matters (B-2-20-2)
7. Finance (B-2-20-3)
8. Policies and procedures
9. Risk Management (Recurring item)
10. Self-Assessment
11. Staffing
12. AOB

## Developments since previous meeting of Feb 20, 2020

### *Response to COVID 19 pandemic*

- ERC has operated remote working since March 13 with further restrictions applied on March 30.
- Guidelines issued to all staff with regular updates as appropriate.
- Updated guidelines on remote working, focusing on health and safety, to be issued this week.
- All projects reviewed and adjusted as needed following appropriate discussion with DES. Projects most affected are NAMER, PISA and PIRLS.
- Plans are currently underway to consider steps required for a re-opening of the ERC.

### *Projects*

- PISA 2018: work is commencing on three themed areas – wellbeing, ICT and reading literacy. Outputs expected Q4 2020.
- PISA feasibility study: report submitted to DES first week in April. DES to discuss with ERC on May 6.
- PISA 2021: half of field trial schools took part prior to the pandemic, after which field activities were suspended. Currently in coding and data processing phase and on track. OECD has put options to countries for adjusting PISA 2021 in response to the pandemic and discussions between ERC and DES have taken place. Further updates expected from OECD around May 5.
- PIRLS 2021: one quarter of field trial schools took part prior to the pandemic, resulting in a suspension of field trial activities. Study at end of coding and data processing phase and on track. Currently envisaged to proceed as planned with main study in 2021.
- NAMER 2020: following discussion with DES, it is planned to implement NAMER in 2021 (in the same school sample). Budget and revised plan approved by DES. Some adjustments to test administration to allow more flexibility to schools; reprint of questionnaires required; no reprint of tests needed.
- DLF: Wave 1 longitudinal survey data are now weighted and all initial processing checks completed. Scaling and analysis is about to begin. Reporting on Wave 1 is delayed due to long survey window and pandemic; reporting in Q4 is envisaged. Response rates of teachers are low.
- TPL Wellbeing: Committee meeting in March has been postponed, though work on the literature review continues with feedback on a majority of the draft received; remaining sections to be submitted for review in May. Online teacher and school survey is in the field and response rates are lower than desired but DES and ERC are liaising to encourage participation.
- NEPS: Meeting with NEPS on May 6 to discuss draft school results reports and guidelines. IRT analysis yet to be undertaken. Next steps yet to be agreed.
- TUSLA: Contract signed and data received; data currently being checked; on track.
- DEIS: Presentation on the new model March 12 went well and feedback from partners received. Secondary analyses relating to PISA 2018 are proceeding and regular meeting schedule established with SIU.
- GRS: Some adjustments agreed with DES in response to pandemic – one instance of testing to be delayed or eliminated. Case study reporting going well and survey fieldwork underway. Recruitment completed and new staff likely to start in May/June.

- PIAAC: Similar to PISA, fieldwork has been suspended and discussions at international level seem likely to result in a one year delay in PIAAC. From Ireland's perspective the coinciding of PIAAC and the Census present challenges.
- Standardised testing: Procurement of new system is now at final stages with notification of preferred bidder expected on May 8. Pending recruitment of IT manager and further discussions with DES on overall assessment strategy, a workplan for 2021 is envisaged in three broad strands (i) modernising of test department ordering, processing and tracking functions (ii) enhancements to supports and information to schools and parents (iii) establishment of high priority assessment areas for future development.
- Other and independent work: Informal approval granted for inclusion of ERC in new Erasmus+ study on AI for teachers. Five countries participating. Confirmation of study being selected for implementation is expected in September 2020. Due to cancellation of some events, three conference papers previously submitted and accepted will not proceed as planned.

*Páircín Inghinn*

## Appendix 2 Report on developments since previous meeting

### Developments since previous meeting

#### Projects

- PISA 2018: following the launch in Dec, secondary analyses in three themed areas are envisaged over the course of 2020 – reading literacy, wellbeing and IT. Where relevant, cross-linkages with other ERC studies will be made.
- PISA feasibility study: in write-up phase. Due for submission to DES next month. Going well.
- TIMSS 2019: is now entering main study analysis phase.
- NAMER 2020, PIRLS 2021 FT, PISA 2021 FT: all largely on track as these three studies enter the field trial phase. Storage/space difficulties being dealt with as well as possible.
  - Also on NAMER: In the process of establishing two workshops to bring data processing, weighting and scaling including plausible values and conditioning into a single unified software environment (Autumn 2020, Jan 2021).
- DLF: Baseline report published in Jan. Difficulties in response rates are in the process of being address with support from DES.
- TPL Wellbeing: Largely on track. Seven-part lit review is delayed by 6 weeks to accommodate survey development and implementation; survey to teachers and schools underway early March; next committee meeting Mar 18.
- NEPS: Initial CTT analyses of the five sub-tests promising. (Coding was completed just before Christmas.) Shortly to commence IRT analyses and will meet with NEPS to review results early March. Next steps (e.g. further norming) yet to be agreed.
- TUSLA: Initial meeting was helpful. Subject to contract, report on 2017/18 attendance data to be completed end of May. Now allows for individual level analysis and distinction between explained and unexplained absences. Follow up meeting early Mar.
- DEIS: Technical reviews of the new identification model due for publication in March. ERC to present to partners on the new model March 12. Otherwise, secondary analyses relating to PISA 2018 are proceeding well.
- GRS: All on track with first reporting expected Q2 with further reporting in Q4. Loss of two staff poses significant risks, however.
- PIAAC: BPC meeting in Jan to finalise analysis plans and field trial plans. All largely on track. Meeting with DES, CSO and ERC Feb 25.
- Standardised testing: Presentation to PDST on Feb 13 on request. Some work on technical manuals and paper-based scoring planned but the main focus of the work this year is on the procurement (DM 2 this week and contract signing end May) and managing the large volume of test sales. We also need to initiate a project to bring the ordering and invoicing systems into a single online system to ease the burden on the test dept. Depending on business cases, to commence as soon as possible.
- Other and independent work: Presentation early Feb to NCCA council – received with interest. Panel/symposium on PISA in ESAI April. Other conference presentations planned for later in the year (ECER, EARA). Three PhDs progressing.

