

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
16 September 2020**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 16 September 2020.

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 3.20 pm.
The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I).

1. Minutes (Bmin-0620)

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

2. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interests were raised.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

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

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

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

5. Covid 19

The Board was provided with an overview of the situation since the last Board meeting in June:

- Office officially reopened since mid-July for tasks which cannot be performed remotely but ERC staff continue to work predominantly remotely.
- Induction to COVID 19 policy and response plan has been completed by all but one working ERC staff.
- Limited on site work planned in Q4 with trend likely to continue except for packing work due in October/November where casual staff and a limited number of core staff will be on site as required.
- Update to remote working will be issued in Q4 as needed depending on how the situation evolves.

6. Governance matters (B-4-20-1)

The Board was informed that:

- Work on the annual report has been delayed and is due to start shortly.
- There has been further delays on the payroll audit.
- Following discussions at the last Board meeting, a submission was made by the members to An Coimisinéir Teanga in relation to standardised testing and the Irish Language Act (B-4-20-1) - (The Board expressed its thanks to all involved for the rapid turnaround on this item).
- Following receipt of a letter from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht dated 18 August 2020, the Board members were informed that, further to the enactment of the "Official Languages Act 2003 (Public Bodies) Regulations 2019 (S.I. No. 230 of 2020), the ERC is now one of the bodies coming under the scope of the Act with effect from 25 June 2020. Following preliminary contacts to discuss same, the ERC will liaise with the An Coimisinéir Teanga in mid-October to discuss the practicalities and resulting requirements for the ERC.
- No updates have been received on pension matter. The Board members approved the ARC request for a Board letter seeking clarification to be issued to the Minister for Education if no updates were received by 20 October 2020.

7. Reviewing Organisation of Board meetings and Agenda

The Board assessed the structure of its meetings to streamline information sharing, prioritise strategy over organisational matters and categorise decision matters. Discussions will resume at the next meeting.

8. Finance (B-4-20-2)

The Board reviewed the Income & Expenditure year to date (B-4-20-2) and the information provided to Central Policy Unit (CPU) in relation to the shortfall resulting from the cancellation of standardised testing in spring 2020.

An update was provided to the members on the pending completion of the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) audit of the Financial Statement 2019.

Expenditure for legal fees were agreed and the updated purchase order will be posted to the Chair for signing.

Following signature of the contract with Prodigy a purchase order for 2020 fees will be issued at the next Board meeting.

The Board considered the difficulties of marketing the standardised tests with schools for spring 2021 (paper and online) in light of the pandemic.

9. Policies and procedures (B-4-20-3)

The Board was informed that updates to the accounting policies will be required to take into account the changes to the processes which were made necessary to manage the ERC's day to day business within the need for remote working.

The members was issued with a copy of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies: Annex on Gender Balance, Diversity and Inclusion (B-4-20-3).

10. Risk Management (Recurring item) (B-4-20-4/5/6)

The Board was informed of delays in the procurement for legal services and the need for a review of the printing procurement. The Board noted that procurement is particularly challenging in view of current ERC capacity issues.

The Board noted that ERC's obligations resulting from the Irish Language Act represented a new risk.

The Board reviewed the following documents:

- Risk Register (B-4-20-4)
- Risk appetite Matrix (B-4-20-5)
- Risk Appetite information and guidelines (B-4-20-6)

And approved the recommendations from the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) in relation to the ERC's risk appetite.

The members were provided with an update on Data protection and informed of delays in the work program for 2020 due to other work priorities (e.g. COVID19).

The Board was informed of the decision of the ARC to postpone the Data Protection internal audit to 2021 in light of the ERC's capacity issues.

The Board was informed that, further to a notification from the Data Protection Commissioner, the ERC registered its Data Protection Officer as required.

11. Staffing (B-4-20-7)

The Board was informed that the recruitments for an IT Manager, an HR Executive Officer and a Clerical Officer were underway. The unprecedented volume of applications for the CO post will result in significant delays in the appointment. It is expected that the other two recruitments will be finalised by mid-October with staff in post by the end of year.

Some changes in staffing will be required due to verbal notifications of departures.

The Board was informed that no update was received on the appointment of a HEO to the Test Department.

Jude Cosgrove recused herself from the meeting at this point.

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

12. AOB

There being no further business AC left the meeting. The members continued their discussions without members of the ERC executive.



Appendix 1

**EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting
16 September 2020
Agenda**

1. Minutes of meeting of 30 June 2020 (**Bmin-3-0620**)
2. Conflict of Interest
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. Report on developments since previous meeting
5. Covid 19
6. Governance matters
 - *Submission to An Coimisinéir Teanga (B-4-20-1 – For information)*
7. Reviewing Organisation of Board meetings and Agenda
8. Finance
 - *Profit & Loss year to date (B-4-20-2 – For review and discussion)*
9. Policies and procedures
 - *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies: Annex on Gender Balance, Diversity and Inclusion (B-4-20-3 - For information)*
10. Risk Management (Recurring item)
 - *Risk Register (B-4-20-4 – for information)*
 - *Risk appetite Matrix (B-4-20-5 - for information)*
 - *Risk Appetite information and guidelines (B-4-20-6 – For information)*
11. Staffing
 - *Note for consideration by the ERC Governing Board on CEO pay (B-4-20-7 – For review and Discussion)*
12. AOB

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Appendix 2

Developments since previous meeting of June 30, 2020

Projects

- Performance Delivery Agreement was updated and submitted to DES as requested due to unprecedented nature of Covid 19.
- PISA 2018: work is continuing on three themed areas – wellbeing, ICT and reading literacy. Work on wellbeing delayed until early 2021.
- TIMSS 2015: two reports are at design stage – one on home background, the other on attitudes/engagement.
- TIMSS 2019: reporting proceeding as planned; release of international results Dec 2020.
- PIAAC: Next governing board meeting Sept 21. Census 2021 now postponed; impact on PIAAC unclear (the PIAAC field trial is due to commence in spring 2021).
- PISA 2021: Postponement of main study to 2022 was confirmed; it is also confirmed that there will be no further field trialling in 2021 in Ireland.
- PIRLS 2021: Decision to proceed with paper-based PIRLS now confirmed.
- NAMER 2020: Now postponed to 2021 as previously indicated; work proceeding as planned; a workshop on new scaling and analysis methods is scheduled for October. Advisory group meeting on Sept 22.
- DLF: Wave 1 report draft progressing well.
- TPL Wellbeing: Final draft of full literature review to be submitted on Sept 18 following steering group meeting. Analysis commencing on the survey data, with low response rates flagged and discussed with DES. Phase 3 has been re-adjusted to focus on restorative practice TPL provided by PDST.
- NEPS: Assessment materials now print-ready and scoring/reporting tool is under development. To be issued to schools following registration process in mid-October.
- SET model: Revised SET model first run almost finalised; following SET steering group meeting on Sept 18, model will be finalised and SNA model established.
- DEIS: Report on DEIS and PISA 2018 achievement has now completed its second review by DES, now at design stage. Work on PISA 2018 context report commenced.
- GRS: A final decision on testing in the autumn is yet to be taken; otherwise, progressing well.
- Standardised testing: Work with the new supplier is progressing well and SQL database of legacy system and data deletion log from old supplier received. Escrow agreement almost finalised. Recent communication from DES will require planning for revision / development of Irish language tests and possibility of further development of post-primary tests. Detailed proposal with costing and operational considerations to be submitted to CAP in the next fortnight or so.
- LC 2020: ERC has completed data verification and participated in the NSG meetings of the CGEO, and submitted its report to DES on Sept 5.

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