

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
13 April 2021**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 13 April 2021.

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); Cian Ó Raghallaigh (COR) 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-022021)

The minutes were approved.

2. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interests were raised.

3. Matters arising from the minutes³

AC informed the Board of a meeting & training session attended by JC, PG and AC with An Coimisinéir Teanga on March 8th. The meeting was very positive and informative for the ERC and helped to set up a set of initial priorities. Following same, work on ERC templates and phone system upgrade will resume.

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 informed that the government guidelines and FAQs on working arrangements and temporary assignments for the civil and public service were updated on 8 March 2021 and staff informed of same.

Work continues mostly offsite with casual staff and their supervisor and admin staff only on site, and some adhoc presence when required.

The roll out of Office365 (which permits remote meetings via Teams and file sharing via OneDrive) continues.

The Board asked about the medium term-future in terms of remote work. AC confirmed that work on a longer-term remote working policy is under development and a remote working group had been established. A survey had been issued to staff at the beginning of

2021 gathering information about concerns and positive aspects of home working in order to establish a strategy.

The ERC aims to issue the long term remote working policy to coincide with the government guidelines planned for September.

6. Governance Matters

The Board was informed of the following:

- Dublin City University (DCU) Payroll is doing some data gathering on its old records and DCU will contact the ERC when complete to assess any gaps. The ERC may need to liaise with a pension service provider to assess gaps, and provider is not yet appointed. The ERC is looking at long-term pension services and will need to procure for services from 2022. The work in 2021 will be focused on data accuracy and finalising reports.
- An update on the funding for Pension was received from Central Policy Unit (CPU). The plan at this point is to issue cost estimates to the Finance section of the Department of Education (DoE) to allow for a reduction of the relevant HEA allocation; however, this is subject to agreement with the relevant parties. At this point there is no confirmation as to whether the ERC pensions are included in HEA allocation.
- Discussions continue with the DoE's Finance Section and other sections as necessary, with the aim of setting out an agreed procedure for the compilation of the annual pension total, for inclusion in the next estimates. This includes refunds owed to DCU and will require DPER agreement.
- The ERC has had no governance meetings with the DoE since June 2020. The Performance Delivery Agreement for 2021 or the Output statement for 2020 have not yet been signed off. No updates on staffing issues have been received.
- The ERC has been informed that Anne Murray may be replacing Neville Kenny, the Principal Officer (PO) in charge of CPU. No formal confirmation of same has been received as yet.
- The ERC has received no updates on the Status of the Board from July 2021 when the current membership is due to expire. The Board expressed its concerns at the possibility of no Board being in place by the summer if the current three members seeking reappointment do not receive official confirmation of same.
- The Chair of the Board noted that the lack of clarity on matters in general from the DoE was very significant and that the situation was a matter for concern. Although the Department is extremely busy, certain issues need urgent action.
- JC confirmed that a follow up had been received from the DoE on the review of the PO booklet just before the Board meeting. The Board noted that a clearer line of communication was required from the DoE to the ERC.
- Discussions ensued about the level of autonomy that the ERC has with respect to addressing staffing gaps at senior levels, and the potential need for the Board to intervene and seek clarification on this issue. The matter will be kept under review. The matter will be further reviewed as required.
- The Chair noted that the issue of recruitment could be discussed at a governance meeting between the ERC and CPU and that the related issue of communication between the Board and the department would also need to

be addressed. The Chair went on to say that these issues should be clarified with a new Board at the start of term.

7. Finance

The following updates were made to the Board:

- The Board approved the draft FS 2020 by email on 18 March 2021, which was subsequently sent to the DoE and C&AG.
- The opening meeting for the C&AG audit of the financial statement took place on 12 April 2021.
- The presentation of the 2019 external audit findings will be shared with the ARC at its meeting of the 29 June 2021. The 2020 findings will also be presented at the same meetings if the Financial Statement 2020 audit is finalised in time.
- The status of the Income and Expenditure to date was noted (B-2-21-1).
- The 2022 budget will need to be issued to the DoE soon and will also be shared with the Board and ARC. AC noted that a higher than usual level of funding would be required for next year largely due to the fact that TIMSS and PISA will be happening within the same financial year.
- The Test Department is starting to get very busy following confirmation from the DoE that standardised testing should go ahead as normal. The consequent income alleviates some concerns with the financing of a number of items (such as integration of test sales in DOTS platform, upgrade of sage, IT upgrades).
- The internal audit on internal financial controls mostly focussed on fraud prevention and although the final report is pending, the closing meeting confirmed that no major concerns were highlighted by the auditors, although some streamlining and requirements for policy updates should be expected.
- Correspondence from the ERC to the DoE in relation to 2020 reserves was shared with the Board.

8. Risk Management (Recurring item)

Updates to the strategic risk register are pending the appointment of the PO. The main risks at this point are the lack of PO and resulting contingency for the CEO, funding gaps for 2022 and staffing gaps for TIMSS as well as upcoming test development projects.

JC added that the retirement of one member of the Test Department staff in September represented a new risk and that the recruitment for this position would have to start soon.

8. Self-Assessment

AC confirmed that following a review of all scores it appeared that Board members had no real concerns and that all members scored highly.

The Chair confirmed that a full review of the work of the board over the last five years would be beneficial as the first term comes to an end and asked that this be put on the agenda for next meeting.

9. Staffing

The following updates were issued to the Board:

- The Remote working group is drafting on a longer term remote working strategy

[REDACTED]

JC withdrew from the meeting at this point.

- The ERC made a submission to the DoE in relation to staffing concerns (for TIMSS and Test Standardisation especially) and the Board supported it. The Board wrote to the Secretary General, expressing concern about the urgency of this (B-2-21-2A/B) [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Although acknowledgement of the correspondence was received, no responses have yet been issued.
- Correspondence from AHCPS (B-2-21-3A/B – for information) was reviewed
- A response to the PO booklet was received requiring minor updates. AC withdrew from the discussions on the PO booklet.

The Board was informed that work on a recruitment for a panel of Research Assistant would commence shortly to facilitate a quick turnaround if sanction for same is received from the DoE.

10. AOB

It was noted that members being reappointed will require a tax clearance certificate from Revenue which will need to be applied for promptly.

The Date of next meeting is the 29th June.

The members continued their discussions without members of the Executive.

Paul Jones

Appendix I

**EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting
13 April 2021
Agenda**

- 1. Minutes of meeting of 18 February 2021 (*B Min – 022021*)**
- 2. Conflict of Interest**
- 3. Matters arising from the minutes**
- 4. Report on developments since previous meeting**
- 5. Covid 19**
- 6. Governance Matters**
- 7. Finance**
 - *Profit & Loss year to date (B-2-21-1 – for review)*
- 8. Risk Management (Recurring item)**
- 9. Self-Assessment**
- 10. Staffing**
 - *Correspondence to Secretary General and CEO (B-2-21-2A/B – for information)*
 - *Correspondence from AHCPS (B-2-21-3A/B – for information)*
- 11. AOB**

Appendix II

Update to the Board (April 13, 2021)

Below is a list of key developments as they relate specifically to ERC's research projects and testing activities:

- Procurement for psychometric and technical expertise has now been successfully completed. This will provide an important means to build capacity in ERC's psychometric analyses and further development of its online assessment platform.
- DEIS – the second report using PISA 2018 data (context, wellbeing) is currently under review by the Department. Work on the monitoring and evaluation framework continues with next meeting planned for April 14.
- TPL – positive feedback received on the phase 2 (survey) report at the most recent steering group meeting (March 29). Survey of CPD providers is underway. CPD programme case study is delayed until Q4.
- TIMSS 2023 – two of four required staff identified with some issues for TIMSS 2019 and DLF envisaged; other staff requires discussion with the Department.
- GRS – fieldwork will be underway shortly but is at risk. The ERC has received sanction for a specified purpose contract for a second assistant to work on the study in order to achieve staffing stability on the study.
- PIRLS 2021 – testing is now scheduled in the autumn.
- NAMER 2021 – fieldwork will be underway shortly with a somewhat reduced NAMER design, but is at risk. A workshop designed to provide increased capacity and enhanced methods for scaling the data is planned for October of this year.
- PISA 2018 – analysis and reporting on digital technologies will take place during Q2 of this year. NEPS has expressed some interest in an analysis of the PISA 2018 wellbeing data.
- DOTS – about to go live with final testing and communication planning for schools underway. Unfortunately, the application to OPS 2021 for 60K funding for work planned over the summer has not been successful. Standardised testing - currently very busy – some risk associated with this work due to social distancing and capacity requirements at the Test Department. New test catalogues and websites have been produced and the Department's annual Circular includes updates and guidelines for schools on ERC's tests (along with NAMER, GRS and PIRLS). Further development work will take place over the summer and ideally this will be overseen by a PO. This comprises – paper-based test output, integration of paper-based scanning and scoring tools into the platform, and integration of paper based test ordering and tracking into the platform. It should also be noted that errors in the previously developed DOTS norms are in the process of being corrected and technical manuals are being drafted for existing tests. The errors and delays have occurred due to significant understaffing on test development and standardisation.
- NEPS PPADE – it has been agreed with NEPS that further norming work on the PPADE will not take place until autumn 2022. An updated and improved version of the tool has just been released to schools which registered prior to the end of 2020.

PPADE will be on sale via the Test Department from September and interest in the test is very high.

- DLF – the wave 1 report has just been submitted to the Department for review. Following this, planning for wave 2 will commence. Given the announcement on April 5 for a new digital strategy for schools it is currently unclear how DLF will progress, though a meeting is planned for April 13.
- Attendance reporting (Tusla) – data for 2018/2019 are due to arrive in April. In future however this may become a reporting function of the Statistics Section of the Department.

New projects

- The ERC is part of a consortium of three organisations (the other two being Prodigy and Microsoft Ireland, with Prodigy as the lead partner) which submitted a proposal to the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF). The submission has not been successful, but a proposal for a paper on the technologies vis a vis LC reform has been accepted and work will commence on this shortly.
- The ERC (J Cosgrove and G Shiel) have been asked to sit on the technical advisory group for LC2021. Quality assurance of the data is not envisaged as part of the ERC's role on this occasion.
- Three test development projects are still under review and to be approved by the Department. A meeting is due to take place to discuss these later this month. All projects involve development of Irish language materials, and are seen as particularly important given the previous investigation by an Coimisinéar Teanga and the out-datedness of the existing tests.

PT