

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
29 June 2021**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 29 June 2021.

Board Members Present:

Pauric Travers (PT), Chairperson;, Deputy Chairperson; Michael Martin (MM); Edward Murtagh (EM)

In Attendance:

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

Absent: Denise Burns (DB)

Counsel Present: N/A

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3.30 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I).

1. Minutes (Bmin-122020)

The minutes were approved after AC confirmed a minor change to the previous version as reviewed by the Chair.

The Board passed a vote of sympathy to Denise and her family on her sister's passing.

2. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interests were raised.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Following recommendation that it be approved, the Board approved the draft Financial Statement 2020 by email on 18 March 2021.

4. Report on developments since previous meeting (B-3-21-1)

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

JC noted that ERC would shortly make a submission to the Department regarding Action Plan for Education Q4 2021 & 2022.

5. Covid 19

The Board was provided with a summary of the government's recent Covid guidelines update.

The Board was informed of work taking place to facilitate a return to on site work, including some restructuring to accommodate for additional staff within space constraints. The Board noted that until vaccination is completed it would not be possible to get everyone back in the office as many offices are shared.

Remote working arrangements post Covid are also being developed and a staff survey was issued to look at staff preferences which will then be reviewed for inclusion in the remote working policy as relevant. The remote working policy will not be finalised until the Government guidelines on same are issued (expected in September 2021).

The Board noted the Data Protection Commissioner's confirmation that, at this point, the processing of employee vaccination status by employers represents unnecessary and excessive data collection for which there is no clear legal basis. The ERC will therefore not be processing vaccination data until further notice.

6. Governance matters

The Board considered the following matters:

- Pensions:
 - ✓ Single Scheme statements will be issued to members on 30 June 2021.
 - ✓ The upload to the Department of Expenditure and Reform (DPER) databank for the Single Scheme is ongoing. So far data from 2015 to 2018 has been uploaded with 2019 data due by end July and 2020 data by October.
 - ✓ A review of the pension data received from DCU will need to take place with the assistance of a third party provider to ensure completeness and suitability for the drafting of statements for College of Education (COE), pension members.
 - ✓ No further updates on the funding of ERC pensions were received.
- Office 365: a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for Office365 is now finalised. Office365 will represent a significant move for the ERC towards more streamlined work processes. It will also help alleviate network congestion resulting from remote working.
 - Annual report: the draft Annual report is close to completion and will be issued to the Members by email for review before the terms of the first Board expires.
 - Critical review: Central Policy Unit(CPU) confirmed that the matter is with Sectoral Governance section. No timeline for completion has yet been received.
 - Board membership: No further updates were received on the reappointment of existing Board members / appointment of new Board members. The Board noted the ARC's concern about this matter.
 - A Governance meeting was held with CPU, CAP and y Dalton Tatton on 6 May 2021.It was confirmed that the ERC is to temporarily report to a difference PO in CPU due to the other PO working on Leaving Certificate 2021. The matter of TIMSS staffing, Test Development work for the ERC going forward (and resulting staffing requirement) and the expiry of the term of the current Board were further discussed.
 - Access to Environment information is now available on the ERC Website.

7. Finance

The Board reviewed the following documents:

- Revised Financial Statement (FS) 2020 (**B-3-21-2**) – The final version of the 2020 FS was approved. The Board noted that the C&AG presented the 2019 and 2020 FS audit findings to the ARC.
- Profit & Loss year to date (**B-3-21-3**): the Board noted an increase in IT costs compared to previous years, following the appointment of an IT manager in January 2021 and the ongoing work to review IT logistics and infrastructures. The Board also noted that the Test Department income was on track so far with current estimates indicating good levels of sales following spring standardised testing by schools.
- The Board noted that the first full go-live of the online testing platform (DOTS) had gone very well, resulting in test sales in line with predictions.

- The Board also noted Budget 2022 (B-3-21-4) as issued to the Department of Education and that Pay budget estimates for 2021 to 2024 (B-3-21-5) –indicated that the current pay budget would be insufficient to cover current pay levels from 2022.
- The Board discussed the matter of negative interest on bank accounts following notification by its bank that ERC would be charged same. The ERC will seek financial advice on the matter.

8. Review of Board first term

To allow for a review of the work of the Board, following completion of its first term, and to inform the oncoming Board, AC will distribute a survey questionnaire to the members.

9. Strategic Plan

The Board reviewed the Strategic articulation of the ERC's contribution to the 2020 Programme for Government (B-3-21-6), as issued by JC, as a starting point to the Strategic Plan 2022-2024. A discussion on the future strategy of the organisation followed and the role of the ERC in the overall education strategy.

JC proposed to include the document as an item of discussion for the next governance meeting with CPU and confirmed that the strategic plan should be considered alongside the workforce plan, noting Board suggestions and confirming that these would be implemented.

10. Risk Management (Recurring item)

The Board was provided with an update on the appointment of the Principal Officer/Chief Risk Officer.

The Board noted the following as new Risks for the register:

- ✓ Test Department upgrade
- ✓ Test Department staffing
- ✓ Return to on site work (and issue with processing vaccination data)
- ✓ Board membership expiry without appointment of subsequent Board
- ✓ Resulting impact of the Board expiry on the membership of the ARC (the majority of memberships expire on 05/09/2021).

11. Staffing

At this point in the discussions, COR left the meeting and AC took notes.

The Board was provided with an update on current recruitments (Research Assistants and Principal Officer).

[REDACTED]

The Board also received confirmation that mid-year reviews are about to commence.

At this point in the discussions, JC left the meeting.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

12.

AOB

The Executive and the Board thanked PT for his work as work chair and a small presentation was made to PT. PT in turn conveyed his thanks to the Board members for their commitment and regretted that the Board could not meet in person for its last session.

The minutes will be sent to the Chair for signing.

As there were no other matters the Board concluded.



Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting Agenda 29 June 2021

1. Minutes of meeting of 13 April 2021 (B Min – 042021)
2. Conflict of Interest
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. Report on developments since previous meeting (B-3-2021-1 – For information)
5. Covid 19
 - Government guidelines update
 - On site working update
6. Governance and Internal Matters
 - Pensions (statements/databank/data from DCU)
 - DPIA office 365
 - Annual report
 - Critical review
 - Board membership
7. Finance
 - Final Financial Statement FS 2020 (B-3-21-2 – For review and approval)
 - Profit & Loss year to date (B-3-21-3 – For information)
 - Budget 2022 (B-3-21-4 – For information)
 - Pay budget 2022/2023 (B-3-21-5 – For information)
 - Test Dept. update
 - Negative Interest bank
8. Review of Board first term
9. Strategic Plan (B-3-21-6 – for discussion)
10. Risk Management and Audits (Recurring item)
 - C&AG Presentation to ARC on findings of 2019 and 2020 Financial Statements
 - Update on internal audits for 2021
 - Appointment Risk Officer update
 - New risks identified by ARC
11. Staffing
 - Recruitment PO / R Assistant
 - HR matters
 - Remote working post Covid

12. AOB

Appendix 2

Update to the Board (June 29, 2021): Key developments since the previous meeting of April 13, 2021

- The ERC is working to improve data processing, analysis and reporting with two documents. The first is a data processing guide which references an example dataset and sets out best practice and examples for data cleaning and data processing steps. The ERC's publication guidelines have also been reviewed and updated to provide clarity on the steps prior to publication and guidance on the development of infographics. The publication guidelines also references the National Policy on Research Integrity to promote best practice in all research and reporting activities.
- A second activity aimed at improving data management and governance is the review and enhancement of the schools' databases which are used for sampling and analysis.
- A data sharing agreement covering all large scale studies up until end 2023 has now been signed by the ERC and DoE.
- The re-launch of Volume 44 of the Irish Journal of Education (IJE) as an online-only publication is planned for early July. The IJE has been re-designed and the online format will allow more rapid publication of articles in batches about twice a year. Submission guidelines and review guidelines have been developed. Awareness raising of the IJE via an email distribution list, web updates and Twitter account is planned.
- The Digital Learning Framework (DLF) wave 1 evaluation report was published in mid-June. A presentation on the results was given to the Digital Strategy for Schools advisory group of the DoE. A new Digital Strategy is due for publication by the end of the year. Preparations for DLF Wave 2 are underway.
- The second of two DEIS reports using PISA data, which looks at home environments and wellbeing, is due for publication at the very end of June.
- Five further reports are planned for before the end of 2021 (a report on phase 2 of the TPL wellbeing study, a report on PIRLS 2016, and additional thematic reporting on TIMSS 2019 and PISA 2018).
- A preferred HRMS has now been identified following an in-depth review of four such systems and it is planned to get this set up in time for a gradual return to on-site work patterns in September. This will coincide, hopefully, with ERC's first draft of a long-term remote working policy. All staff are asked to complete a short form on their on-site working preferences and concerns as part of mid-year appraisals which will take place next month. The system will allow for more efficient management of leave, casual staff and expenses and it will also provide oversight of who is on- and off-site.
- The ERC has now been approved to join HEAnet which opens up options for infrastructural support such as internet connectivity as well as access to technical advice amongst other services. This will support the further upgrades planned for ERC's IT and security systems.
- The ERC's IT systems have been checked with security patching and upgrades where required and all staff have participated in a cybersecurity training following the recent HSE cyberattack. The disaster recovery systems are also being enhanced.
- NAMER fieldwork is now complete and data processing and coding is underway. Despite the significant challenges, participation rates of schools and pupils was extremely high and data quality also appears high. The next phase of NAMER will entail workshops and the building of a tool to enable scaling and analysis of the NAMER data. This will be provided by Polymetrika, our psychometric and technical consultant. A first planning meeting on the workshops took place in mid-June where strategic links with other aspects of ERC's work was explored.

- The first go live of the new DOTS platform or phase 3 of the DOTS work programme has now come to an end. Following a couple of technical glitches at the beginning of testing (due to the very limited UAT which was possible with the school closures) the use of the platform has been extremely smooth. Work on the next development phase of DOTS will commence over the summer with a view to its completion by the end of Q1 2022.
- The test department has coped very well with an extremely busy period. Data on test sales and income will be available at the next meeting.
- The PPAD-E test formally went 'on sale' this month. The ERC is taking 'early bird' orders to offset a bottleneck of orders in the autumn. The ordering and processing of these tests will transfer to the test department in the autumn.
- Work is also underway in migrating the test department accounts from TAS books to Sage 50. A migration strategy has been identified and will be implemented in a sequence over the autumn with full transfer to a single streamlined workflow by the end of the year. This work will result in considerable administrative efficiency gains and will tie in with the development of the schools' online test ordering system.
- All projects are generally progressing very well. Preparations are underway with PIRLS for autumn testing. The GSRS lost one of its team due to a resignation and recruitment for more research assistants is underway. PISA 2022 preparations are going well. TIMSS 2023 is critically at risk due to short-staffing but it is hoped to have addressed these shortages by early September.
- Work on the development of ERC's second strategic plan (2022-2024) will commence in the early autumn. The strategic development of assessment is likely to feature prominently in the second Plan.

New projects

- The NCCA has issued an RFT for a two-year project on assessment at primary level as part of the primary curriculum review. The SMT is reviewing the RFT to assess the feasibility of submitting a response. Deadline for responses is mid-September.
- The ERC is participating as one of three organisations in a five-country EU study on AI for teachers. The study, led by a French team and also involving Italy, Luxembourg and Slovenia, involves the development and evaluation of AI-related CPD in post-primary schools. Piloting is due to begin in September.
- The ERC's involvement in the interim technical advisory group for the LC2021 comes to an end in early July with the transfer of functions from DoE to SEC. Significant progress has been made in the accredited grades system in the interim.
- The ERC hopes to implement the first of three test development projects this autumn, contingent on staffing and resources. This is the development of reading and mathematics screening and diagnostic tests in both English and Irish. The two other projects are due to commence next autumn: an Irish reading test for first to sixth class with online tests for third to sixth class, and standardisation of PPADE to cover second and third year. The ERC will also play an advisory role in the development of the Irish language version of the PPADE and will oversee its standardisation most likely in 2023.

PT