

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
2 November 2021**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 2 November 2021.

Board Members Present:

Denise Burns (DB), Deputy Chairperson; Edward Murtagh (EM); Michael Martin (MM)

In Attendance:

Jude Cosgrove (JC), Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Damian Downes (DD), Principal Officer (PO), Anne Comey (AC), Assistant Principal Officer (AP) who took the minutes, Ray Mooney (RM) as a member of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC).

Absent: N/A

Counsel Present: N/A

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I) with the following notes:

- ✓ Item 11 – HR Matter was added to the agenda at the request of the members.
- ✓ The document for Item 6 on the Agenda circulated was coded incorrectly and should read B-6-21-3 (IEA Conference for 2025).

1. Minutes (Bmin-092021)

The previous minutes were approved.

2. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were raised.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Following confirmation of the nomination of DD as Board and ARC Secretary and following a short handover period this change will take effect from 14 December 2021 for both the ARC and the Board.

AC acknowledged receipt of correspondence from the Board re same and conveyed her thanks to the members for their kind words and for their support as Board Secretary over the last five years. She conveyed her best wishes to the Board and ARC going forward.

Following the reappointment of the Board, the members were asked to check their profile on the ERC website and confirm any updates required.

Some responses to the Board survey are still pending.

January 5th 2022 was earmarked as a possible date for the Board and ARC dinner. AC will reach out to Paucic Travers to confirm availability.

4. Report on developments since previous meeting (B-6-2021-1)

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

5. Covid 19

The Board was informed that the ERC continues its phased approach to return to work on site. With the recent updates to Government guidelines the majority of ERC staff will remain

working from home to allow on site presence of staff who must be on site due to ongoing project commitments.

Due to the PIRLS coding taking place on site for the first three weeks in November, the current protocol is to remain in place. A revised protocol will be issued to staff by 26/11/21 depending on changes to current Government guidelines.

6. Governance matters

The Board considered the following matters:

- Pensions
 - ✓ The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) Databank ERC data updates for year 2020 have been issued.
 - ✓ The Public Authority Pension Services Limited (PAPS) is in the process of reviewing historic data for College of education (COE) pensions issued by Dublin City University (DCU) to ensure it is sufficient to build up pension history. With the data already held by ERC it is expected that we will be in a position to issue statements to the College of Education pension members on a “one by one” process, to facilitate the identification of any missing data. However due to the pending transfer of service from St Patrick’s College (SPD) to the ERC, statements, at this point, will only reflect pension entitlements from 01/10/2015.
 - ✓ The Request for Tender (RFT) for a pension administrator has received no responses. The ERC is now proceeding to get quotes from providers. As the ERC has highlighted some issues with payroll calculations it is seeking consolidated payroll services (to include guidance and advice) and will include same in the request for quotes.
 - ✓ The ERC has received no further updates from the DoE on the funding of its pensions. One member of staff will be retiring at the end January 2022 and no funding is in place for same as yet.
 - ✓ DD and AC met with legal counsel on 5 October 2021 to discuss the pension situation in the ERC and are awaiting a position paper which is expected to be presented at the next Board and ARC meetings.
 - There are no updates from DCU on the lease or payroll/pension data, despite several requests for a meeting.
 - The July pay restoration and October salary review have not been implemented yet as the ERC is awaiting confirmation of pay rates from the DoE.
 - Some concerns have arisen in relation to our payroll provider and the ERC is looking to get an external review of the 2021 payroll carried out before year end.
 - Work on the SAGE software integration of the Test Department accounts continues.
 - The next Governance meeting date with Central Policy Unit (CPU) is yet to be confirmed.
 - The ERC’s Critical review is unlikely to take place in 2022 following an update from the Department of Education (DoE) at the CEO meeting. A DoE Committee is likely to be created to deal with these reviews and older organisations will be prioritised.
 - The recruitment for a new Chair of the Board is underway and the specifications for the post were circulated and reviewed by some of the Board members and ERC executive. The post is not yet advertised. The

appointment to the vacant ordinary member post is pending Ministerial approval.

- Terms of Reference of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) (**B-6-2021-2**) were reviewed and the following changes were agreed:
 - ✓ 1.1 The ARC shall comprise no more than *four* of the non-executive Board members nominated by the Board.
 - ✓ 1.4 The Board may appoint *external members* to the ARC to ensure that it contains the requisite range of skills.
- The IEA Conference for 2025 was discussed and the Board approved ERC's proposal to host it (**B-6-21-4**) pending DoE approval and provided that ERC executive look at possibilities for sponsorship and on confirmation that most of the logistics for same will be managed by Board Failte. The ERC will look at setting up a reserve from potential future underspend to fund same. The Members see this event as an excellent strategic opportunity for the ERC.
- RFT for tech support and laptops published last week.

7. Finance

The Board discussed the following items:

- Profit & Loss year to date (**B-6-21-4**) – the most significant variations expected by year end will relate to the fees for the NAMER training, the additional development of the DOTS platform, the international fees for 2022, the maintenance fees from DCU (to include circa 35K for the replacement of the door) and the fees for the HR matters.
- The final drawdown and reserves for 2021 will need to be agreed during the next Governance meeting with the DoE.
- The Board reviewed and approved the proposed changes to the accounting policies (**B-6-21-5**) and the inclusion of DD on the bank mandate. The mandate will be circulated to the Deputy Chair for signature.
- The ARC and Board approved the proposed responses from the ERC to the C&AG Management letter (**B-6-21-6**) by emails by 29/10/2021 and the responses were issued to the C&AG on 01/11/21. The signed Final Version of the Management letter inclusive of these responses were issued by the C&AG on 01/11/2021.
- The ERC is looking to acquire an ERC credit card to facilitate online payments and payments of items requiring payment upfront before delivery. The accounting policy will need to be updated to reflect same when processes and controls for same have been agreed.
- The Board advised AC that it had sought legal advice on a HR matter and that an invoice from the provider would follow.

8. Strategic Plan

DD provided an update to the members.

The plan will include a strategy for the ERC buildings, its IT and its communication plans. The strategic plan (SP) overview document will be discussed with the SMT for consultation on 04/11/2021 to develop the approach for internal and external stakeholder consultations. It is expected that a draft SP will be issued to the Board members in February 2021 for finalisation by end Q1 2022. The ERC will seek derogation from the DoE, as required, for the delay in the publication of its SP at the next Governance meeting. The DoE has already been informed of the delays.

The members approved the high level strategy and noted the importance of involving parents and students in the stakeholder consultations.

9. Risk Management and internal audits (Recurring item)

DD provided a brief update on Risk Management and the following documents will be updated and finalised for presentation at the next ARC and Board meetings:

- ✓ Final draft of the Risk policy for approval
- ✓ Updated Corporate Risk Register
- ✓ Updates to the current project risk registers to allow for a better fit with the revised Risk register.

The Board noted that the Chief Risk Officer is to be appointed at the next ARC meeting. A meeting with a risk management software provider is due on 04/11/2021. As well as a risk management tool, the software includes modules for Business planning and Board/ARC document management.

AC provided an update on internal audits:

In relation to the Data protection audit, the report from the auditors is due on 05/11/21 and a meeting between the auditors and the ERC on 08/11/2021 to discuss the findings. The final report is expected to be presented to the ARC on its next meeting on 14/12/2021.

In relation to the other two pending audits (implementation of the SP and Internal controls for 2021 accounts), the ERC was notified by the provider of potential delays due to the unexpected long term absence of the lead auditor. The ERC is working with the provider to see how completion of both audits before year end can be secured.

10. Staffing

The following items were discussed:

- The current issues with appointments to vacant posts and the impact of same on projects was discussed. The Board reaffirmed its views that recruitment matters require a more systematic response from the DoE as the current process particularly impacts new projects. It is the view of the Board that the Pay Budget of the ERC should allow for more flexibility, having regard to the type of work carried out by the ERC and its workforce plan. The Board also noted the increase use of specified purpose contracts which does not fit with the long term, cyclical nature of most of the ERC project work.
- The HEO post for the Test Department is still not sanctioned and this is causing concerns for a potential handover period on foot of a retirement.
- The GSRS study urgently needs Irish Language staff and a recruitment for same is likely to proceed in December.

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

11. HR Matter

At this point AC and DD withdrew from the meeting and the following minutes were taken by JC.

The Board and the CEO discussed a Letter of Concern submitted to the Chair by the CEO on Oct 22. It noted that:

- [REDACTED]
- The DoE had received a copy of this letter and a meeting with DoE was scheduled on Nov 5 to examine the ERC's staffing issues more generally in order to alleviate the situation, at which the CEO and the Chair would attend.
- Building on the Workforce Plan 2021-2024, achieving a more agile approach to staffing, that fit with ERC's multi-project work programme, was a priority.

The Board recommended that:

- The CEO avail of one weeks' leave.

12. AOB

DB noted that the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) journal submissions and downloads had increased significantly in 2020/2021 showing signs of a renewed interest in Educational Research which should impact the Irish Journal of Education positively.

Meeting dates for 2022 meetings were discussed.

The following dates were agreed with the remainder of 2022 meetings to be agreed at the next Board meeting following discussions on the feasibility of ARC and Board meetings taken place at different dates:

- ✓ 15 February 3.30 pm (after ARC meeting)
- ✓ 30 March 2 pm

As there were no other matters the Board concluded.

Denise Burns

Denise Burns (Dec 23, 2021 11:35 GMT)

Appendix 1

**EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting Agenda
2 November 2021**

- 1. Minutes of meeting of 13 September 2021 (BMin – 092021)**
- 2. Conflict of Interest**
- 3. Matters arising from the minutes**
- 4. Report on developments since previous meeting**
Documents:
 - *Update document circulated by CEO (B-6-2021-1 – For information)*
- 5. Covid 19**
- 6. Governance and Internal Matters**
Documents:
 - *Terms of Reference Audit and Risk Committee (B-6-2021-2 – For review)*
 - *IEA Conference 2025 (B-6-21-4 – For discussion and approval)*
- 7. Finance**
Documents:
 - *Profit and loss year to date (B-6-21-4 – for review)*
 - *Accounting policy updates (B-6-21-5 for approval)*
 - *Management letter (B-6-21-6 – for information)*
- 8. Strategic Plan**
- 9. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)**
- 10. Staffing**
- 11. AOB**

Appendix 2

Update to the Board (Nov 2, 2021): Key developments since the previous meeting of Sept 13, 2021

Corporate projects/issues:

- Payroll services will be reviewed with a possibility of moving to a new supplier in 2022.
- The fitting of a new front door is expected for the end of Nov 2021. Previously this had been planned for Oct 2021 but has been postponed due to a number of casual staff undertaking project support work on site during the first three weeks of Nov.
- Work on migrating the Test Department accounting system, and the set-up of the new HR management system, continues.
- A plan and timeline for the 2022-2024 strategic plan (in line with that reviewed by the Board at its previous meeting) will be presented to CPU at the next governance meeting later in November.
- Work on the ERC staff handbook and a range of HR policies continues with a third party supplier. Similarly, a range of IT policies are also under development and early planning on an IT strategy is underway.
- Further office re-organisation to allow for more shared occupancy offices continues into the last quarter of 2021.

NAMER: The first set of workshops, over about 15 afternoons during Nov-Dec, commences the week of Nov 8.

DOTS: There was a meeting with DOTS supplier on Sept 15 and a further meeting is planned for Nov 4 to examine one of the development strands. Annual governance meeting takes place later in Nov. The SMT is reviewing the roles and timelines of the various members of staff and third-party project management and technical advice may be sought following this initial review.

PPADE: This diagnostic reading assessment, a collaboration between NEPS and ERC, has been nominated for a civil service excellence award (category: excellence in collaboration). The awards ceremony will be on Nov 25.

PIRLS: On-site coding starts this week. Data need to be submitted mid-Dec.

TIMSS 2023: This project is entering the field trial preparation phase with laptop procurement, sampling and other planning activities underway. There is a staffing issue with data management on the study.

PISA 2022: The OECD has formally approved autumn testing in Ireland for PISA 2022.

PISA 2018: ERC gave a presentation on a detailed report on PISA reading literacy which makes recommendations for the new literacy and numeracy strategy. It is hoped to publish this report in December.

DEIS: The DEIS team will participate in the NAMER workshops to support planning for reporting of DEIS-specific outcomes on NAMER. The ERC has also been asked to work on an updated model for DEIS schools and this will be due early next year.

TPL study: The final phase of the project is now underway with a data sharing agreement required for its implementation. The ERC and the Department have had some useful exchanges over October to clarify the priorities and directions for the final framework document. The TPL team is short one assistant following a resignation, so the team is under some pressure until this can be addressed.

DLF evaluation: the phase 2 surveys, infographic and invitation letter to schools are now agreed with the Department. Following translation, these materials will go to schools during the third or fourth week in November. The final report is due at the end of 2022.

GSRS evaluation: survey analysis is underway with an omnibus survey report to be submitted in Q1 2022, and an omnibus achievement report to be submitted at the end of 2022. Maynooth is currently administering the TEG assessment on behalf of the ERC. Online assessment of all GSRS second years is planned for next spring. Oral language testing will take place in a small number of schools in the spring, if feasible. Discussions are underway with the Department to plan the final

phase of the evaluation covering 2023-2024. The project has lost one of its two assistants due to a resignation and staffing remains a priority on this project.

Publications: The TPL survey phase 2 report was published on October 6th. The fourth article in IJE Vol 44 was published on October 29. Three more reports are expected later in 2021 or early 2022: PISA 2018 reading literacy report (Dec); PIRLS 2016 reading attitudes and home environment report (Jan); and, PISA 2018 ICT report (including comparisons with 2012 and 2015; Jan).

TALIS starting strong: No decisions on the ERC's participation have been made, though the Department have met with the DCEDIY to discuss. DCEDIY and ERC will work on a budget plan to assess feasibility of ERC coming on board in autumn 2022.

The **PIAAC board of participating countries** met on 18 Oct to review operational outcomes of the field trial which went extremely well despite the pandemic, with very few technical problems and sufficient data to conduct scaling and analysis. In Ireland's case, a simulation of the field trial was completed. Next meeting of this group is on Dec 7 to review preliminary questionnaire timing data, and then on Jan 26-27 to finalise main study instruments and procedures.

The **IEA general assembly** met on Oct 25-27. Highlights included the re-election of Thierry Rocher as Chair for a further three years; the forthcoming publication on the REDS study (teacher panel study on COVID-19) on Jan 24 2022; a review of recent IEA publications which indicates a substantial reach and interest in them; planned updates to the IEA IDB Analyzer software; and an early proposal to extend the impact of the IEA work through IEA ambassadors and sub-committees. The discussions on the ICILS study also suggest that there is merit in Ireland revisiting its own participation in this study, though it is likely to be too late to join in time for 2023.