

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
20 October 2020**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 20 October 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 2 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I).

1. Minutes (Bmin-0920)

A small change was requested in the proposed minutes. The final version will be issued at the next Board meeting.

Some items will be redacted on the published version for confidentiality reasons.

2. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interests were raised.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

An Coimisinéir Teanga has confirmed that no update on its review is to be expected until toward the end of the year.

The Board was informed that the parental leave notice period was cancelled until year-end (in response to Covid-19 and the need for flexibility) and will be reviewed at that stage.

Discussions on the Organisation of Board meetings and Agenda will resume at a later meeting when further work has been carried out on same.

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

No further updates have been made to staff guidelines. Work is continuing predominantly remotely.

Since the work of the ERC has been included in the list of essential services, and to facilitate access to the office where required, relevant staff members have been issued with employer letters confirming that they are required to travel for work.

The number of available ERC laptops is being reviewed and all staff are to be issued with work laptops before year-end as a number of staff are still working from their own devices. This will address the continued need to work from home and the longer-term ERC strategy for working from home after Covid 19.

6. Governance matters

The ERC's next governance meeting date is yet to be confirmed by CPU.

A pension meeting took place between AC and E Cuggy (DCU) on 6 October. Some decisions have been reached and DCU is looking to retrieve all pension information and issue transfers of service to ERC for pre 2015 staff. A decision on who administers the pensions is yet to be resolved and will need to involve the DES. Advice from the Attorney General is to be communicated to the ERC via the DES shortly. The Board noted the lack of visibility on the questions put forward to the AG and on its report but welcomed the confirmation by the DES that it will be available to support the calculation of pension entitlements. The process for same will require further discussions.

A Research Fellow has confirmed he will be retiring at year end and DCU is working on providing data to allow calculations and payment of pension entitlements.

Details of the early warning report Q3 issued to CPU was shared with the Board. Work has started on the annual report and the draft will be issued to Board at the next meeting. The finalisation of the report is dependent on the completion of the C&AG audit.

In relation to the ERC's new obligations resulting from its inclusion in the Irish Language Act, the Board was informed that the strategic plan (SP) and annual report would require translation going forward and the Board noted that an Irish version of SP is already available. Going forward the ERC will need to work with its staff and other stakeholders to establish a language plan with milestones to be agreed by the Board. The 1998 Education Act will also need to be considered.

AC shared an update from the DES in relation to Board and ARC membership renewal in view of most appointments coming to term in July 2021. Further communication on this to the members will be issued by the Board Secretary.

The Board welcomed the CEO's decision to appoint an internal group to commence work on a remote working policy.

7. Finance

The Board was provided with an update on the following items:

- Profit & Loss year to date (B-5-20-1)
- Correspondence with CPU relating to end of year finance estimates
- An update on the C&AG audit

The Board approved the PO for Prodigy Ltd for phase 1 of the work.

The Board was informed that the Comptroller & Auditor General would present its findings on the Financial Statement 2019 audit at the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) on 2 December 2020.

8. Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades (B-5-20-2)

The Board was provided with correspondence relating to information communicated by the DES to the media and clarification issued by the ERC on its role in the calculated grades. (B-5-20-2). Wording of further clarifications on the role of the ERC in the calculated grades process was agreed by the Board.

The Board noted that the DES has confirmed that it was satisfied that their understanding was that of the ERC and that it was "indebted" to the ERC for its involvement in the process.

JC noted that the ERC has been asked to provide input into the DES response to legal challenges to the calculated grades.

The Board acknowledge the risk of reputational damage and confirmed that it was happy at present to defer to the DES in relation to all communications relating to this matter but that ongoing monitoring of the situation should continue.

The Board agreed that the CEO will send a reminder to staff that they should refrain from comments on social media and to adhere to the Code of Conduct and the ERC's social media policy.

9. Risk Management (Recurring item)

The Board was provided with an update on the ongoing work of the ARC on the review of its risk assessment processes.

Following a query raised by the ERC to the C&AG, the Board confirmed that the risk audit should be an audit rather than a guidance exercise to fulfil the requirements on internal controls for 2020.

A discussion took place on data governance; specifically, the need for enhanced data management and quality assurance/verification. Related issues of capacity, time and funding for implementation were noted. The CEO proposed, and the Board noted, that a guideline document to staff will be issued in the first instance, with a review at a later stage where required.

10. Staffing (B-5-20-3A/B/C/D)

The Board was provided with:

- A recruitment update for the new posts of IT Manager, HR Executive Officer and Clerical Officer
- An update on the Research Fellow Recruitment following confirmation of one retirement.

At this point in the discussions, Jude Cosgrove left the meeting.

[REDACTED]

The Board also reviewed quotes and proposed work programme from independent consultants with the view of getting an independent review carried out on the matter. (B-5-20-3A/B/C/D)

The issue of the lack of deputy CEO was further discussed in light of varying situations in comparative organisations.

11. AOB

Dates for the 2021 Board meetings were agreed as follows:

- 18 February 2021 (Board and ARC)
- 13 April 2021
- 29 June 2021 (Board and ARC)
- 14 September 2021 (Board and ARC)
- 2 November 2021
- 14 December 2021 (Board and ARC)

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pauline Stewart".

Appendix 1

**EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting
20 October 2020
Agenda**

1. Minutes of meeting of 16 September 2020 (Bmin-0920)

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

Income and expenditure Year to date (B-4-20-1 – for Review and Discussion)

8. Leaving Certificate calculated grades

Correspondence (B-5-20-2 – For information)

9. Risk Management (Recurring item)

10. Staffing

Correspondence both internal and to DES (B-5-20-3A/B/C/D – For information)

11. AOB

PT

Appendix 2

ERC Governing Board Meeting Project updates October 20, 2020

DEIS

- The refined DEIS identification model has been updated following receipt of up to date data and the ERC will contribute to a second round of partner consultations (details TBC); ERC has also worked with DES to arrive at a method to combine the two criteria for inclusion in DEIS based on the HP index of disadvantage into a single measure and has suggested ways to categorise schools for resource allocation.
- The DEIS-PISA report is in print but planned publication date (early Nov) may be delayed due to other pending publications and need for DES sign-off.
- The P-Tech study which involves three Dublin inner city schools has been revived and ERC now sits on the P-Tech steering group and on the research sub-committee. It has been agreed that evaluation will take place largely within the parameters of the DEIS planning process with school-based work led by the Inspectorate. The ERC role is to develop, administer and analyse a student questionnaire for Q1 2021 and to conduct data gathering and analysis with industry partners/mentors. An unusual feature of the P-Tech work is the very long timescale involved as there will be occasional data collection with students from 2021 until up to 2027.

TPL

- The multi-strand literature review has been completed and is with the designer and on track for delivery.
- Planning for Phase 3 is underway, with the main body of work expected to commence in January 2021. This will involve a questionnaire directed at the TPL Steering Group members and collaborative work between the ERC and the PDST focused on CPD in Restorative Practice.
- The phase 2 (survey report) is underway, but two data errors have been identified and will delay progress somewhat. The errors are to be addressed by securing the support of an experienced member of ERC staff to support re-doing analyses which have already been done.

PISA 2022

- National field trial data is in the process of being examined. No further field trialling planned for 2021.
- Analysis on the nationally developed questionnaires is on-going; draft versions of the main study national questionnaires will be presented to the PISA National Advisory Committee at its next meeting in January.
- The PISA NPM is on maternity leave and her role will be covered on a temporary basis by the PISA PGB member.

TIMSS 2019

- Preparation of the national report is on-going. A first draft is almost complete and ready for internal review, before being sent to the DES.
- The DES has been briefed on the main findings for Ireland.
- The DES has indicated that the launch of the national report on December 8th is likely to be an online event.
- A small error was found in the TIMSS 2019 data for Ireland. Five students who were excluded from the TIMSS assessment were incorrectly coded as having left the school (i.e., the report indicates that 39 students were excluded at Eighth grade in Ireland when the correct number is 44). The error only has a marginal effect on exclusion rates and does not affect the remainder of the data for Ireland presented in the report. The international study centre has been notified, and a note of the error is included in the national report.

TIMSS 2015

- Two TIMSS 2015 reports were due to be published by the ERC in September/October 2020. The final versions of these reports and the accompanying press releases were sent to the DES in September. Publication has been delayed as the Minister has yet to be briefed on these reports.

GSRS

- ERC is working with NUI Maynooth to put in a contract in place to the TEG tests can be administered in 7 post-primary schools (via Zoom) in November, 2020.
- ERC is liaising with Statistics section in DES re. accessing student names required for testing/questionnaires.
- DES has requested updated budgets for 2020 and 2021.
- ERC is likely to need to request the extension of one research assistant's specified purpose contract for this study.
- Plans are being made to ensure continuity on the project into 2021 due to pending retirement of one staff member.

PIRLS and NAMER (both 2021)

- Progress is being made in preparing for main studies in spring 2021 with a meeting planned with the project teams to prepare for packing and dispatch of materials later this year.
- The planned course on scaling for the NAMER team due in October 2020 has been postponed until Q1 2021 (TBC).

PISA 2018

- The report on reading literacy is progressing well.
- The reports on digital technologies and wellbeing are delayed due to staff illness/leave but will be a priority early next year.

DOTS

- The contract of the DOTS research assistant is likely to require extension for a further three months until end Q2 2021.
- Overall the project is largely on track, with piloting of the new systems planned for Jan 2021.

- Work has also begun on a new website for the DOTS information, combining information for the online and paper based tests.
- A logo for the new ERC DOTS platform has been designed.
- There is an annual governance meeting with Prodigy in early November during which some proposals for development work will be discussed.

NEPS PPAD-E

- The PPAD-E test was launched on Oct 14 with 250 schools already expressing an interest via online registration.
- Work is ongoing on the scoring and reporting tool, with some revisions now required (e.g. age-based scoring).
- All materials bar the scoring manual are now finalised and training videos are in production.
- Some GDPR issues are in the process of being addressed – these also apply to ERC's paper-based tests (DPA).
- ERC is liaising with its supplier to finalise the secure web hosting requirements for PPAD-E.
- ERC and NEPS are in the process of reviewing communication from one of the unions expressing some concerns with the test.

DLF

- The wave 1 survey report is progressing but delayed slightly; publication unlikely prior to Q1 2021.

SET allocation model

- Some follow up work examining the 'churn' in the model is underway but all on track.

LC2020

- The ERC has provided information to the DES following two requests – (i) Affadavit addressing specific issues relating to the legal challenge concerning private/grinds schools; (ii) commentary on ERC role in LC2020 and previous ERC work with PII (the LC2020 modelling contractor).

OLA

- Work is in progress in three respects – signage, phone system and logo. Following progress in these three areas, ERC will engage with Coimisiún Teanga.

PT