

**Educational Research Centre  
MEETING OF THE BOARD  
18 February 2021**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 18 February 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) who took the minutes

**Absent:** N/A

**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.

**2. Conflict of Interest**

No conflicts of interests were raised.

The Board was informed that the spouse of a staff member was awarded graphic design work following a procurement exercise. The staff member was not involved in the procurement process.

**3. Matters arising from previous minutes**

The Department of Education (DoE) was informed of the Coimisiún Teanga (CT) findings and confirmation of same will shortly be issued to the CT.

**4. Report on developments since previous meeting**

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

**5. Covid 19**

No changes required to the Covid guidelines.

Work continues predominantly off site although some packing and administrative work is carried out on site as required.

Following the appointment of an IT Manager, some IT upgrades have been implemented which will facilitate remote working (e.g. VPN access, installation of softphones and set up of MS Teams).

Following the school closures in January, testing on NAMER has been reduced to reading only at second-class level and maths only at sixth-class level.

The Department is looking at postponing PIRLS to the autumn.

The Board especially noted the great work of the project managers and their teams on PIRLS and NAMER in very difficult circumstances.

## **6. Governance matters**

The Board reviewed documents for the following items:

- A high level summary of discussions between DCU and ERC on 9 February 2021 (**B-1-21-1**) in relation to the ERC lease with DCU
- The Board and ARC Terms of Reference (**B-1-21-2 & B-1-21-3**) – The Board noted that no changes were required at this stage
- The Perform Delivery agreement agreed with the DoE for 2021 (**B-1-21-4**)
- The output statement issued to the DoE for the year 2020 (**B-1-21-5**)

The Board was also issued with updates on the following items:

- Pensions – work continues on data transfer and procuring for a third party pension administrator. From February 2021, all ERC retirees will be paid by the ERC
- Ethics report for 2020 – returns for 2020 have been completed and emailed to Standard in Office Commission (hard copies to follow)
- Protected Disclosure for 2020 – Nil return for 2020
- FOI report for 2020 – Statistics returns sent for 2020
- AIE report for 2020 – Nil return for 2020
- Board appointments – Reminder sent to the DoE
- Critical review of the ERC due in 2021 – Reminder sent to the DoE
- Annual Report 2019 (translation and publication)
- Library – Extension of our Ebsco contract to allow for digital library access.

## **7. Finance**

The Board was informed that due to the delay in the finalisation of the Financial Statement 2019, the C&AG presentation to the ARC would take place at the next ARC meeting in May. Updates on the status of the Financial Statement 2020 was provided to the Board with draft to be issued for approval by email to the ARC and the Board.

The Board reviewed the following documents:

- Profit & Loss year 2020 (**B-1-21-6**)
- Correspondence to Central Policy Unit re end of year underspend (**B-1-21-7**)
- FS 2019 Management letter (**B-1-21-8**) – the proposed responses were approved by the Board
- Draft Statement on internal control (SIC - **B-1-21-9**) and Draft Governance Report (**B-1-20-10**) – Both documents were approved by the Board.

## **8. Policies and procedures (**B-1-21-11**)**

The Board was informed that work on the staff manual is due to resume in Q2 2021. The Board approved the revised version of the Career Break policy (**B-1-21-11**).

## 9. Risk Management (Recurring item)

The Board reviewed the Strategic Risk Register (**B-1-21-12**), noting that the revised format of the Register will issued once the Principal Officer (Chief Risk Officer) is appointed.

The Board also reviewed the Audit and Risk Committee report to the Board for 2020 (B-1-21-13).

The Board noted the recommendations from the ARC regarding the internal risk audit reports findings. The Board was also informed of the planned internal audits for 2021 as agreed by the Audit and Risk Committee.

## 10. Self-assessment

Results and summary of findings were shared with the Board. AC is to summarise queries from Members at the next meeting.

## 11. Staffing

*At this point in the discussions, Judge Cosgrove left the meeting.*

An update on current staffing issues and ongoing recruitments was issued to the Board.

The Board also reviewed and discussed the following items:

- Workforce Plan (**B-1-21-16**) for 2021 to 2024 as shared with the DoE – The Board noted the complexity of the project, the work demand going forward and the importance of the workforce plan for long term planning.
- Principal Officer (PO) post business case and response (**B-1-21-15 A/B**) including the confirmation by the DoE that IT Manager post is to be made permanent following the initial contract.

Although the Board is pleased with the sanction for the PO post, it reiterated the urgency in filling the post to alleviate current work pressures and governance gaps (such as a Chief Risk Officer). Delays in the approval for the post booklet are causing concerns, as the current unsustainable position cannot change until the PO is appointed. It was agreed that the Board's concern about the delay should be conveyed to the Department and PT will raise the matter in his discussions with the DoE.

12. AOB

Next meeting will be 13/04/2021 at 2pm.

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## Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE  
Board Meeting  
18 February 2021  
Agenda

- 1. Minutes of meeting of 2 December 2020**
- 2. Conflict of Interest**
- 3. Matters arising from the minutes**
- 4. Report on developments since previous meeting**
- 5. Covid 19**
- 6. Governance Matters**
  - High Level DCU lease discussions (**B-1-21-1 – for information**)
  - Board and ARC Terms of Reference (**B-1-21-2 & B-1-21-3 – For discussions**)
  - Performance Delivery Agreement 2021 A (**B-1-21-4 – For information**)
  - Output statement for 2020 (**B-1-21-5 – For information**)
- 7. Finance**
  - *Profit & Loss year 2020 (B-1-21-6 – For information)*
  - *Correspondence to CPU Re end of year underspend (B-1-21-7 – For information)*
  - *FS 2019 Management report (B-1-21-8 – For information)*
  - *Draft Statement on internal control (B-1-21-9 – For approval)*
  - *Draft Minister's report (B-1-21-10 – For approval)*
- 8. Policies and procedures**
  - *Career Break (B-1-21-11 – For approval)*
- 9. Risk Management (Recurring item)**
  - *Strategic Risk Register (B-1-21-12 – For review)*
  - *ARC Report (B-1-21-13 – For review)*
- 10. Self-Assessment**
- 11. Staffing**
  - *External reviewer report (B-1-21-14 – for review)*
  - *PO post (business case and response)/(B-1-21-15 A/B – for discussion)*
  - *Workforce plan (B1-21-16 – for discussion)*
- 12. AOB**

## Appendix 2

### Update to the Board (Feb 18, 2021)

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

- DEIS – significant progress in planning the overall work programme for the ERC has been achieved through meetings with the Department involving a range of strands. A very welcome development is the plan to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework which will provide structure and clarity to all concerned, including data available, gaps present, and so on. A logic model will underpin the framework. The PISA / DEIS report on wellbeing and engagement is under review by the Department.
- TPL – adjustments to aspects of phase 3 have been necessary for the strand which takes a CPD programme as a case study – the previous plan to focus on Restorative Practice is delayed until Q4. This has been agreed with the Department. The other part of the strand, a survey of CPD providers, is at an advanced stage, with a draft of the survey submitted to the Department for review. The phase 2 survey report is progressing well and will be published in Q2.
- PISA 2022 – proceeding as planned with testing in autumn 2022.
- TIMSS 2019 – the December launch was extremely successful and the webinar included input from the Minister for Education, and the CEOs of the ERC and NCCA. The 2021 reporting is proceeding as planned with further reporting for this year including multilevel models and item-level analysis. The ERC presented the findings to NCCA Council in early February – the level of engagement of the NCCA Council was high and its feedback will be very helpful in informing the ERC's secondary reporting on TIMSS 2019 this year.
- GRS – the study is in transition due to a retirement but is progressing well. However it remains a high risk study due to COVID 19 risking disruptions to fieldwork. The ERC submitted a request to the Department for a specified purpose contract for a second assistant to work on the study in order to achieve staffing stability on the study.
- PIRLS and NAMER – are both high risk as they are about to enter the fieldwork phase. However to mitigate these risks the ERC has adjusted the NAMER design to allow a reduced administration, and internal reviews of NAMER, PIRLS and GRS in terms of fieldwork operations are ongoing. These studies will remain at a high risk until fieldwork is well underway, though engagement of schools is generally high. In the case of PIRLS, there may be a possibility to move testing to the autumn but this is not a preferred option.
- PISA 2018 – analysis and reporting on digital technologies will take place during Q2 of this year. The previously planned report on wellbeing is cancelled due to capacity issues. The PISA 2018 / DEIS context report includes some analyses of the wellbeing outcomes of students.
- DOTS – currently undergoing UAT using a contingency design due to school closures. The project remains at high risk until well into its go live stage (around May). Further development work will take place over the summer. 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, since any norms developed this year risk to be unreliable

due to Covid 19 disruptions. In the short term the PPADE tool will be integrated into the DOTS platform, and NEPS and ERC will continue to implement capacity building and awareness regarding PPPADE among schools. Feedback on the training materials and particularly the training videos for schools to date has been very positive.

- DLF – the wave 1 report is due for submission to the Department in mid-March. Following this, planning for wave 2 will commence. It will be important to see how best to integrate Covid 19 impacts into the wave 2 survey and case studies.
- SET / SNA allocation model – subject to final confirmation from the Department, work on this is completed.
- 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 has been asked to review an RFT for review of literacy and numeracy strategy as it does not have the capacity to carry out this work currently.
  - The ERC has been asked to advise on an evaluation of three university courses for upskilling teachers. It does not have the capacity to lead the evaluation but is providing guidance to the Department on the study design and will hopefully be able to assist in the analysis.
  - The ERC has been asked to evaluate a pilot for Travellers' education and engagement. This project was inherited by SIU with amalgamations involving DCYA. It has been agreed that the ERC will support the Department with drafting an RFT to procure for this work rather than conduct the evaluation itself as it does not have the capacity to do so.
  - The ERC is part of a consortium of three organisations (the other two being H2 and PDST) working on an ERASMUS+ programme whose aim is to design, implement and evaluate AI tools for teachers to use. The ERC's role in the project has had to be reduced due to capacity issues but it will play an advisory and analysis role on the project.
  - 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). Outcomes of the submission are pending.
  - The ERC has been approached to have some involvement again in LC2021 but is scope of involvement is not yet established. The ERC has suggested some ways in which to manage the data workflows for 2021 that would result in efficiencies this year.

PT