

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

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

Board Members Present:

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

In Attendance:

Jude Cosgrove J(C), Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Damian Downes (DD), Principal Officer (PO) and Anne Comey (AC), Assistant Principal Officer (AP) 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) noting that item 10 is for review and discussions.

DD, recently appointed PO, was introduced to the Board.

1. Minutes (Bmin-062021)

The previous minutes were approved before the expiry of the 1st board in July 2021.

2. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were raised.

AC and DD will remove themselves from the discussions on item 10.

JC will remove herself from the discussions on item 11.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Board members confirmed they had received their letters of reappointment.

AC confirmed that reappointment letters had been issued to the relevant ARC members. Following the retirement of the ERC Chair – DB, as Deputy Chairperson, will carry out the duty of the role until a new Chair is appointed (appointment currently with the Department of Education (DoE) who are working with Public Appointment Service). The Members conveyed their thanks to DB for assuming the role.

AC mentioned that some responses were missing from the Board questionnaire and would be grateful if those could be issued.

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

JC provided an update on various developments and activities (see Appendix II) and mentioned the possibility of Ireland hosting the IEA conference in 2025.

5. Covid 19

The Board noted that the ERC is taking a phased approach to long term working arrangements in line with national policy and guidelines as follows – Phase 1 (Sept-Oct – initial phased return to partial on-site work); Phase 2 (Nov-Dec – review of phase 1 and continued partial on-site work); Phase 3 (Jan 2022 and onwards – full implementation of ERC's long-term remote working arrangements).

6. Governance matters

The Board considered the following matters:

- Pensions
- ✓ Statements for Single Scheme Pension Members were issued on 30/06/21.
- ✓ The DPER Databank ERC data updates have been issued up to and including 2019. The 2020 data is due with DPER in November 2021.
- ✓ PAPS is in the process of reviewing historic data issued by DCU to ensure it is sufficient to build up pension history.
- ✓ An RFT based on the OGP framework is in place for a pension administrator. It is hoped that a contract can be in place by January 2022. The supplier will take over calculations, managements and payment of all ERC pensions.
- ✓ The ERC has received no further updates from the DoE on the funding of its pensions.
- Payroll: Post 2015 ERC payroll/pension data is still with DCU and the ERC cannot move forward on the 2019 payroll review until this data is accessible. The ERC is also hoping, when the data is accessible, to organise a tender for the supply of consolidated managed payroll services.
- Work on the SAGE integration of the Test Department accounts has commenced.
- A meeting with Central Policy Unit (CPU) was held in the offices of the ERC on 10/09/21 with PO in CPU and Assistant Secretary (Head of Section). During this meeting, a memo on the staffing issues arising from the Workforce Plan 2021-2024 were discussed in some detail and the Department undertook to revert to the ERC on this in October. This memo (B-4-21-2) was shared with the Board.
- The ERC has received confirmation that Anne Murray is to remain as PO in CPU and key contact for the ERC.
- The 2020 Annual report is now available on the ERC website in both Irish and English.
- There have been no updates from the DoE on the Critical review.
- The Board was informed of updates on the nomination of two other members of the Board (Including the Chair).
- The Board will review the Terms of Reference of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) at its next meeting.

7. Finance

The DoE spotted a minor transposition error of 2019 reported figures on the Financial Statement (FS) 2020 and reported this to the ERC, which followed up accordingly internally and with C&AG. Rectification of same was discussed with the C&AG and the documents updated accordingly.

The DoE also noted the possibility of streamlining coding of expenditure and this item will be discussed with CPU going forward.

The Board discussed the following items:

- Profit & Loss year to date (B-4-21-3)
- Pay budget 2022/2023 update
- Test Department sales updates

The Board noted that the Audit and Risk Committee approved HSM for the drafting of the 2021 accounts.

The Board noted that to date, no progress had been made on receiving advice on bank's negative interest rates due to the lack of response from consultants that the ERC had sent queries to.

8. Strategic Plan

DD informed the Board of the status of the next Strategic Plan to cover the period 2022 to 2024. Due to delays in the appointment of the PO post it will not be possible to carry out the stakeholders consultation in time to have the SP in place for January 2022; instead, it is proposed to publish the Plan at the end of Q1 2022. The DoE has been informed of same and discussions are ongoing but a derogation may be required. The Board approved this three-month delay.

9. Risk Management and internal audits (Recurring item)

The Board noted that the formal appointment of the Chief Risk Officer by the ARC will take place at the December ARC meeting.

The Board noted the following new risks:

- ✓ Staffing,
- ✓ DOTS developments,
- ✓ Test Dept. retirement,
- ✓ Pensions liability transfer,
- ✓ [REDACTED]
- ✓ PPADE,
- ✓ Response rates PIRLS.

The Board noted that in relation to Internal audits, the Data Protection audit had started but was delayed due to ERC and auditor staff annual leave and was reminded that the audit scope was a review of projects only. A detailed questionnaire was put together by PG with the help of PK and AC and the ERC was awaiting sampling requests from the auditors.

Audits of the Strategic Plan implementation and financial controls 2021 are due in Q4.

The Board was informed that the ARC is working on the 2022-2024 audit plan.

10. Board Secretary

At this point in the discussions, AC and DD left the meeting and returned after the item discussions were completed.

The Board discussed the proposal from the CEO for Board Secretary (B-4-21-4) and approved the transfer of Board Secretary duties from AC to DD. The Board expressed its thanks and appreciation for AC's work in this role to date and wished the Executive well in managing the transition.

As a gesture of its appreciation, the Board will send a letter of appreciation to AC as her industry and efficiency have been a source of assurance to the Board since its inception in 2016.

11. Staffing

The following items were discussed:

- TIMSS/Test Dev & R Assistant recruitment update
- HR matter
- Remote working post Covid
- Staff mid-year review
- [REDACTED] Deputy Chair to issue a letter to the DoE seeking clarification on its latest correspondence.

12. AOB

A dinner with all the members of the previous Board and ARC will be organised in January 2022 is possible within current government health guidelines.

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
13 September 2021**

- 1. Minutes of meeting of 29 June 2021 (B Min – 062021)**
- 2. Conflict of Interest**
- 3. Matters arising from the minutes**
- 4. Report on developments since previous meeting (B-4-2021-1 – For information)**
- 5. Covid 19**
- 6. Governance and Internal Matters (B-4-21-2 – For information)**
- 7. Finance (B-4-21-3 – For review)**
- 8. Strategic Plan**
- 9. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)**
- 10. Board Secretary (B-4-21-4 – For discussion)**
- 11. Staffing (B-4-21-5A & B – For information)**
- 12. AOB**

Appendix 2

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

Corporate projects:

- The fitting of a new front door is planned for around Oct 2021. This will enhance both the accessibility and security of the building. Off-site work will be required of most staff during this time.
- Work on migrating the Test Department accounting system into the main ERC accounting system is underway, and is due to be completed in time for the new financial year 2022.
- A HRMS supplier has been confirmed and initial set-up work is proceeding. It is hoped that this system will be fully operational in Jan 2022. It will operate in a complementary way to the ERC staff intranet which will contain a complete set of ERC HR policies and other resources with an aim to have this also completed in Jan 2022.
- A range of IT policies are also under development and early planning on an IT strategy is underway.
- Some of the office re-organisation, to allow for more shared occupancy offices, has been completed, with a second set of moves planned for the autumn. The ERC is operating a temporary on-site monitoring system to support a gradual return to work which will then be replaced by the HRMS.

NAMER: Planning for the workshop progresses. The modular tool to be developed to support the workshop is expected to have relevance to a broad range of ERC's analysis, scaling and reporting activities. Broader scope has resulted in an increase in budget. Two workshops are planned – Nov/Dec 2021 and Jan/Feb 2022.

DOTS: Planning for the next phases of development work will take place at a Prodigy/ERC meeting on Sept 15. Considerable development work is planned and until specifications and project plan are established the development work carries some risk.

PIRLS: The team is busy preparing for the autumn fieldwork. School engagement has been excellent. Subsequent checkback and data processing will need to be carefully managed in terms of public health guidelines.

TIMSS 2023: Sanction has been provided for one associate and one assistant to manage grade 8 (grade 4 is already staffed by one associate and one assistant). This includes the appointment of a new member of staff, Vasiliki Pitsia, who will join the ERC on Oct 1.

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

DEIS: work has progressed on the revised DEIS identification model and Lorraine Gilleece presented a paper at the ECER conference on Sept 7; this was positively received. The team also submitted draft reports on the P-TECH evaluation which are currently being reviewed by the Department.

TPL study: planning for phase 3 (an examination of the draft framework in the context of PDST restorative practice) is underway.

DLF evaluation: the phase 2 surveys are almost ready for review by the Department with a planning meeting for phase 2 scheduled for early October. Online surveys will be administered during the second half of November with focus groups and qualitative data collection in a sub-set of schools planned for next March. 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 administering the TEG assessment next month in seven post-primary schools 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 is a priority on this project.

Publications: Four are due in the last quarter of 2021 – the TPL survey (phase 2) report Sept 29; PISA 2018 reading literacy report (second half of Nov); PIRLS 2016 reading attitudes and home environment report (early Dec); and if possible, PISA 2018 ICT report (including comparisons with 2012 and 2015). It is hoped to present the results of the two reading themed reports (PISA 2018 and PIRLS 2016) to the Department later in the year as this may help inform the new Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

IJE: The online-only Irish Journal of Education (Volume 44 and onwards) was launched on July 13. Two or three articles are due to be published by the end of 2021. The ERC has been invited to present on the new IJE at a Teaching Council event on Sept 29. Further awareness-raising and invitations for submissions are planned with the publication of the next article.

TALIS starting strong: the DCEDIY has been in discussion with the ERC about an OECD comparative survey study of ECCE. Following a review of timeline and staffing, and informal discussions with the Department, the ERC has communicated its position to both DCEDIY and the Department, i.e. that the ERC is very interested in supporting the study and overseeing the fieldwork and analysis but does not currently have senior researcher capacity, and proposes coming on board to support it in time for the field trial (autumn 2022). The field trial is in spring 2023 and the main study is in spring 2024. The ERC has been invited to attend a **conference** (Resetting education and training for the digital age) in Slovenia on Nov 8 and 9 being held as part of the EU presidency along with one policymaker and one teacher/practitioner representative. A report on the conference can be provided at the next Board meeting.