

**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 2022

Board Members Present:

Dr. Denise Burns (DB), Deputy Chairperson; Mr. Edward Murtagh (EM); Prof. Michael Martin (MM), Ms. Sharon Feeney (SF)

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.

Absent: N/A

Counsel Present: N/A

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3.45 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I).

1. Welcome to Sharon Feeney

The Board welcomed Sharon Feeney to the Board and confirmed that her induction had taken place.

2. Minutes (Bmin-122021)

The previous minutes were approved.

3. Conflict of Interest

- The Board noted and agreed with the ARC which noted that DD would not be included in any discussions on transition planning and the recruitment for an interim CEO.
- The Board asked if Sharon Feeney would consider joining the ARC. SF agreed and appointment was confirmed by the Board. The Board noted that this may require another Board member to resign from the ARC should the new Chair also wish become ARC member on appointment.
- A review of the ARC's Terms of Reference will be required once the Board Chair is appointed.
- No other conflicts were noted.

4. Matters arising from previous minutes

The following updates were provided to the Board.

- The issue of July and October pay rates confirmation by DoE was resolved with revised pay rates applied to salaries (with arrears) in January 2022. However the revised pay rates for February 2022 have not yet been confirmed by the DoE. The Board also noted that the historical issues with some pay grades remain unresolved (e.g. EO scales).

- The members were informed that the integration of the Test Department accounting software from TAS into SAGE is finished.
- In relation to the ERC Lease with DCU, the initial draft documents have been shared with respective solicitors but no further updates were issued by DCU. JC to make contact with DCU.
- The new front door for the Centre is now in place with increased security for the IT and archive rooms, which mitigate findings from the GDPR audit.

5. Report on developments since previous meeting (B-1-2022-1)

- JC provided an update on various developments and activities (see Appendix II).
- The Board noted the need for ERC to remove itself from the European AI4T project for capacity reasons. The Board viewed this as unfortunate given the need for Ireland to develop its involvement in Artificial Intelligence.
- The Board was informed of the appointments of Bernie McNally as Secretary General and Tomás Ó Ruairc (TO'R) as Assistant Secretary General.

6. Covid 19

- The Board noted the updated COVID Response Plan and Protocol (B-1-22-2) which has incorporated updated risk assessments of both buildings and a review of the documentation by the external provider in Q4-2021. The ERC COVID Implementation Team is reviewing documentation, signage, PPE (protective equipment) supplies, induction modules and work processes , in preparation for a phased return of employees to the office in the coming weeks.
- Constructive communication was received from IFUT following communication to staff on transitional arrangements to return to work on site.
- The Board noted the proposal for consultancy work on a review for future blended work (Ref Item 12) and further consultation with staff.

7. Governance matters

The Board considered the following matters:

- The Governance meeting with CPU has been set for 24/02/2022.
- The Pension opinion piece from solicitor (B-1-22-3) was discussed. The Board noted that the College of Education pension funds is more of a concern and that the Single Scheme is less risky. The question of long term funding from the DoE remains an issue especially in relation to the transfer of liability from DCU and the Board agreed that the matter should remain a as an item at Board and Governance meetings. The question of how to budget for pensions, year on year, should also be discussed with the DoE.
- Updates to all the IT processes have been carried out and the final drafts documents reviewed by JC and DD (except Cyber Security and Business Continuity policies which are to be finalised by Q4 2022). The Board confirmed that the IT processes did not require Board approval.
- Going forward the ERC will propose a list of policies to the Board at its June meeting to clarify which of those require review and/or approval from the Board and/or ARC. It was agreed that the policies would be assigned a review date and a policy owner.
- It was also noted that documentation to Board members is to be shared via the intranet by year end to increase information security.

- Transfer of Test Dept. – a valuation of the building was carried out to allow, where relevant, an estimation of the potential tax liability linked to the transfer of the property. A covenant which appears to be requested by the other party may limit the options for the use of the Test Department going forward and the ERC will need to protect itself from any obligations to keep a building that is ill suited for its purpose.
- It was noted that going forward ARC minutes will be shared with the Board once approved by the ARC.
- JC, DD and AC met with ERC solicitors to discuss the upcoming DCU lease document and following this, a revised draft of the lease agreement has been issued to DCU for final review.
- The SMT revised terms of reference (**B-1-22-4**) was approved noting that once the Research PO is appointed, that the number of Senior Members may need to be reviewed. However given the pivotal roles of the HEOs, the Board agreed that, at this time, they should continue to be part of the SMT and the policy reviewed in Q4 2022.

8. Finance

The Board discussed the following items:

- FS 2021, SIC and Governance report update – The Board noted the delay to the drafting of the FS given competing priorities. The Board confirmed that it would approve the FS 2021 final draft by email.
- C&AG Financial Statement 2021 audit is to start May 9th with a presentation of findings to the ARC at its June 2022 meeting.
- Budget confirmation was received from the DoE for 2022 (and includes some funding for pensions)
- Going forward, it was agreed that the accounts will be presented quarterly.

9. Strategic Plan (SP)

- DD provided an update to the members on progress with the drafting of the SP.
- The Board noted the ARC's concerns about staffing in relation to the implementation of the SP. The possibility of creating two working groups to enhance communication, planning etc. between the ERC and the DoE was felt by the Board to be worth pursuing, and is to be explored with the DoE.
- The Board noted that the ARC raised the issue of the CEO transition period as likely to delay the implementation of the SP.
- The Board will write to the DoE to raise concerns about the fact that the independence of the ERC and the resulting resourcing requirements was not properly assessed.
- The Board will invite the Secretary General to meet and discuss the vision for the ERC and the systematic lack of resourcing. The Board noted that the current staffing changes in the DOE would likely result in delays in obtaining a meeting with the DoE.
- DB will issue a note to the Secretary General seeking a single item agenda meeting.
- The ERC will issue the next version of the SP to the Board after incorporation of the comments from the meeting and feedback from the DOE.
- The possibility was raised, in light of the need to re-develop Irish language tests, as to the necessity of withdrawing participating from an existing large-scale study to divert funds to Irish language test development.

MM left meeting at 17.25pm

10. Risk Management and internal audits (Recurring item)

- The Board noted the ARC request for two updates to the ARC draft meetings and has approved adoption of the report conditional on these changes.
- The ARC plans for 2022 internal audits were confirmed as IT, Procurement and Financial Internal Controls
- Work on risk continues.

11. Self-Assessments

Board members were asked to send back their self-assessments for 2021.

12. Staffing

The following items were discussed:

- One Research Associate on career break has resigned creating a vacancy for a permanent position. This closes the Fellow panel. This will create a series of knock on effects internally with current staff on Associate panels.
- New HEO started in Test Department. Clerical Officer for Test Department to start in March 2022.
- Recruitment from the panel for Research Assistants for one Assistant to cover DOTS/Test Development is ongoing.
- The Board approved the costs for the Blended work consultancy work.

The Board approved the appointment sequencing for the for the position of Principal Officer – Research and specifications for the Prinicpal Offier post are being worked on.

13. CEO and Transition

At this point DD withdrew from the meeting.

- The Board agreed that all members of the SMT reporting directly to the CEO should be eligible to apply for the Interim CEO post.
- The job specification will be shared with the Board on 23/02/22.
- It was agreed that the sequencing of the CEO and PO posts should be as follows:
 - Interim CEO
 - Research PO
 - CEO
- The Board confirmed that it reserves the right to review the competency and skills required before advertising for the CEO post once the interim CEO is appointed.
- The Board discussed the contingency plan agreed with the DoE and the plan was approved.
- The Board noted that the contract duration for the interim post will need to be reviewed by the ERC solicitors.
- In relation to the Interview Board, it was agreed that four members will form the panel with 2 Board members, 1 external HR person and 1 external person.
- The Board will check if the Department wishes to nominate a person to sit on the Interview Board.

- It was agreed that the competency framework for the Interim CEO should be based on the role of Principal Officer with some references to Assistant Secretary (given the current grading of PO-Higher).
- The Board noted that internal candidates would need to be informed of the delay in the recruitment process.

14. AOB

- Going forward there will be a standing order for members to remain online after the executive have left for a private meeting of the Board. Minutes for same to be kept by the Chairperson of the Board/ Acting Chairperson.
- As there were no other matters the Board concluded.

Denise Burns

Denise Burns (Dec 20, 2022 12:18 GMT)

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting Agenda 18 February 2022

- 1. Welcome to Sharon Feeney**
- 2. Minutes of meeting of 14 December 2021 (BMin – 122021)**
- 3. Conflict of Interest**
- 4. Matters arising from the minutes**
- 5. Report on developments since previous meeting**
Documents
 - *Update document circulated by CEO (B-1-22-1 – For information)*
- 6. Covid 19**
Documents
 - *Revised protocol (B-1-22-2 – for information)*
- 7. Governance and Internal Matters**
Documents
 - *Pension opinion piece from solicitor (B-1-22-3 – For discussion)*
 - *SMT revised policy (B-1-22-4)*
- 8. Finance**
- 9. Strategic Plan**
- 10. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)**
Documents
 - *Annual report from ARC to Board (B-1-22-5 – for review)*
- 11. Self-Assessments**
- 12. Staffing**
Documents
 - *Blended work review (B-1-22-6 – for information)*
- 13. CEO and Transition**
- 14. AOB**

Appendix 2

Update to the Board (Feb 18, 2022): Key developments since the previous meeting of Dec 14, 2021

Corporate projects/issues:

- Payroll services have now been transferred to a new supplier.
- The fitting of a new front door has now been completed. Swipe cards and guidelines are being issued to staff.
- The Lease agreement with DCU is progressing well and it is hoped to have this signed by end of Q1 2022. The Lease agreement will be accompanied by Licence for Works which will follow later this year, once an architect has specified the various works.
- Work on migrating the Test Department accounting system, and the set- up of the new HR management system, has been completed, and training implemented.
- Out-sourcing of the Test Department scanning service is now in its testing phase and going well.
- Large multi-year procurements for laptop hire and technical support for large-scale assessments were completed in January.
- Update to the transfer of the Test Department building.

Research projects:

- **NAMER:** The first set of workshops went well, and the second set of workshops are scheduled over Feb-Mar.
- **DOTS:** User acceptance testing of the new online ordering system is shortly to commence. Work has begun on integrating the scanning database and scoring tool into the DOTS platform.
- **PPADE:** A draft memorandum of agreement is close to completion. NEPS is seeking ERC input for pilot/fieldwork for its new Irish language version and ERC is currently unable to provide this support. NEPS and CPU are aware of this resourcing issue.
- **PIRLS:** Data were successfully submitted before Christmas and data cleaning and processing is now underway.
- **TIMSS 2023:** Currently an at-risk project due to first time doing computer-based assessment and ongoing uncertainty with COVID-19. All going as well as possible to date, with good engagement from schools. Field trial commences early March.
- **PISA 2022:** Ireland is testing in Autumn 2022 for the first time. Coding training took place in Jan 2022. Country submissions regarding the frequency of future cycles of PISA close on Feb 2022. It could be that PISA moves to a four year cycle after 2025. Ireland has flagged sample size increase as an item of potential concern in its submission.
- **DEIS:** Significant progress has been made with a data mapping exercise for the overarching M&E framework – collaboration between ERC and DoE. ERC is also engaging with the Department on the finalisation and quality assurance for the revised DEIS identification model. A new assistant to be assigned to the DEIS programme following a career break.
- **TPL study:** The TPL team is shortly to have an assistant assigned for its final phase (following a resignation). Delays with phase 4 (due to temporary suspension of CPD) have resulted in negotiations with the Department, and a three month extension to end Q1 2022 has been agreed.
- **DLF evaluation:** Response rates for the Phase 2 surveys are low and the survey window will be extended to end March 2022. Planning is underway for the case-study part of phase 2 with students and PDST Technology in Education team. This is an at-risk project due to resourcing/oversight issues.

- **GSRS evaluation:** The project is flagged as high risk owing to shortage of Irish language research assigned. To be discussed with CPU at its next governance meeting. Work is focused on the analysis of survey data. Online assessments to be administered to second years, and reporting on all cognitive assessments due later in 2022. Next steps on the GSRS study are not yet agreed with the Department.
- **Test Department:** A new Head of Test Department commenced on Feb 7 and a new clerical officer will shortly commence. The out-sourcing of the scanning service to a third party and the various adjustments required in response to online ordering, etc. have the Test Department quite busy, and the work remains flagged as high risk due to the amount of change occurring.
- **Publications and Media:** Unfortunately, the PISA 2018 reading literacy report, the PISA 2018 ICT report, the PIRLS 2016 thematic report and TIMSS 2019 secondary reporting plans are all delayed due to capacity issues. It is planned to publish all of these bar the TIMSS 2019 secondary analyses in Q1-2 2022. Meanwhile, submissions to the IJE continue, and the IJE team is preparing for a themed issue of SCOTENS funded research for 2023.
- **TALIS starting strong:** No decisions on the ERC's participation have been made.
- The **PIAAC board of participating countries** met on Jan 24-26 2022. The main study instruments have been approved. There are considerable concerns in Ireland about response rates and these will be discussed further at national project manager meeting. A decision will need to be made about ERC's continued participation in the Board of Participating Countries. PIAAC is now under the remit of DFHERIS.
- ERC has formally withdrawn from EU funded **AI4T** due to lack of capacity.

Board minutes Feb 2022

Final Audit Report

2022-12-20

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