

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
5 April 2022**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 5 April 2022.

Board Members Present:

Dr. Denise Burns (DB), Deputy/Acting Chairperson; Mr. Edward Murtagh (EM); Prof. Michael Martin (MM), Dr. 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 2.00 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix I).

1. Minutes (Bmin-022022)

The following updates to the minutes were requested:

- The reference to IT policies to be changed to reference to IT processes (Item 7).
- DB issued a note to the Secretary General (not Assistant Secretary) (Item 9).

The minutes will be recirculated at the next meeting for approval.

The issue of policies vs procedures was raised again and this will be further discussed at the June meeting with the back up of a list of policies. It was noted that if the separation of policies and procedures is not established, then the risk is that the Board will be involved in executive decisions. It was further noted that if the separation of the two is to be worked through quickly some other work will need to be postponed due to capacity issues. The Board agreed that the work should be at advances stage by end Q4 2022.

2. Conflict of Interest

- The Board noted that the conflict of interest from DD Re the Interim CEO post no longer remains. However, as there is no panel for the Interim CEO, it was decided that DD will continue to remove himself from all discussions related to the CEO recruitment.
- EM raised the fact that there is a strong possibility that he will be involved in some work with the ERC in relation to the GSRS study.
- Following a query from the DoE in their review of the draft Financial Statement 2021, a discussion took place on the requirement for a policy Re Board members' remuneration for work carried out outside of their Board work. A draft policy will be presented at the next Board meeting.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

The following updates were provided to the Board.

- Test Department building update – title deeds were received by the other party's legal counsel who have prepared the transfer of deeds and sent them for client review. There will be no update on the covenant issue until the deeds are received by ERC solicitors. SF asked that the impact of the transfer of the building to ERC be considered in relation to ERC insurance cover.
- The contract is now signed for the pricing review of DOTS and blended work review Terms of Reference is about to be finalised.
- The notion of ERC-DoE working groups for Research and Assessment has not gained traction for the other sections of the DoE. It is hoped that the New Secretary General may see value in these.
- The Board noted that the level of Investment in Research is relatively low in Ireland and JC will share a copy of a recent Government report on this to the Board following the meeting.
- DB confirmed that she received a letter from the Secretary General's office on 29 March asking for a meeting with ERC Board members on 11/05/22.

4. Report on developments since previous meeting (B-2-2022-1)

- JC provided an update on various developments and activities (see Appendix II).
- MM noted that he had met with the Minister of Education and Secretary General on their visit to Boston and had a positive discussion on the work of the ERC.

5. Covid 19

The members were informed on progress on return to work on site.

The government guidelines for blended work are about to be released and the first workshop with the consultants on the blended working review will take place with the Senior Management Team on April 12th 2022.

6. Governance and internal matters

The Board considered the following matters:

- Review of the CPU Governance meeting minutes (B-2-22-2)
- Chairperson appointment update – DB wrote to CPU on 30/03/22 to request urgent update.
- 3 Board memberships will expire in 2 years and 3 months. The need for the recruitment of a new Chair was shared with the DoE over 15 months ago and the advertising for the post is still pending. This raises concerns for the future of the ERC Board and the Board believe that recruitment should be commenced very soon to avoid any situation where ERC would be left without a Board.
- Pension / payroll update – Some pension data has been received from DCU and needs to be reviewed but the vacancy in the HR post means this will be delayed. The Payroll Quantum data from 2020 is in the process of being uploaded to the ERC network but will need to be checked. The Payroll move to the new providers is completed with positive feedback. Some of the findings of the 2021 payroll review remain to be actioned and the process is ongoing.
- No updates to the DCU lease – DCU solicitor due to make contact with our own legal advisors.
- Right to disconnect policy is at advanced stage and the IT processes are finalised except for the cyber and business continuity documents which are to be issued by end Q4 2022.

- Following receipt of a Parliamentary Question, the ERC has identified a requirement to provide staff with Disability awareness – it is hoped this can be implemented by end Q4 2022.
- A procurement exercise for procurement consultants is ongoing and will, as well as other items, allow the sourcing of workforce plan consultancy work and building strategy related consultancy.
- The update to An Coimisinéir Teanga is due in June 2022.
- The possibility of holding the IEA Conference in Dublin in 2023 instead of 2025, funding of which was previously approved by the Board, was discussed. This follows cancellation of the conference in Russia in 2023. The Board approved the move but requested a commitment from the IEA that only the items already agreed will be payable by the ERC.
- The members were informed that work is ongoing on trying to identify the impact of the 2019 Data Governance legislation on the ERC. Experience on this issue is proving difficult to source and other agencies are experiencing difficulties in sourcing information on this. The Board will be kept informed of updates.

7. Finance

The Board discussed the following items:

- The ARC and Board approved the draft FS 2021 on 31/03/2022 and the draft was shared with the DoE and the C&AG. As a result in the delays in finalising the draft FS2021 a derogation was organised by the DoE.
- The need for a derogation raised a discussion on the potential need for reciprocity in such matters between the ERC and the DoE where delays arise with the DoE.
- The Costs of the replacement of the Maths Irish Tests were approved by the DoE.
- The Board confirmed that in their view, the ERC reserves cannot be used to cover pay expenditure as this would impact the planned use for the reserves and create risks in the ERC's ability to cover pay expenditure in the future.
- The current pay budget will allow for current planned expenditure but there is little to no contingency and will not cover staffing for test development work.

8. Strategic Plan (SP)

The final version of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024 **(B-2-22-4)** was formally approved following approval by email. The SP was shared with the DoE and will be published following some graphic work.

9. Risk Management and internal audits (Recurring item)

The scope for the three audits of 2022 has been issued by the auditors and will be reviewed by the ARC at its next meeting.

There may be potential delays in the Board / ARC effectiveness review and Code of Practice 2016 gap analysis due to capacity issue from the auditors. It was noted that the risk register needs to be restructured and the main strategic risks **(B-2-22-5)** were shared with the members in memo format. The issue of the number of external work requests addressed to the ERC (15 so far) and the limited capacity to involve the ERC in these projects was discussed in light of how this reduced capacity for external work impact the independence of the Centre. There is a need to map these requests for research projects to the SP and to check they align with the Establishment Order. A structured document detailing the record of ad hoc research requests and a draft policy to cover the management of these will be shared with the Board at its next meeting.

10. Staffing

The following items were discussed:

- Starters and leavers.
- The need to recruit for Research Assistants and a Research Associate.
- The issue of the vacancy created by the appointment of the interim CEO and the potential resulting internal movements of staff putting some projects at risk.

DD left the meeting at this point

- The sequencing of the recruitment and dependencies between interim CEO, Head of Research and long term CEO positions were finalised. This was discussed as part of the next item.

11. CEO and Transition

The Board confirmed its approval of the appointment of the preferred candidate for the post of interim CEO. The contract is signed and this will allow the resulting vacancy to be dealt with. The remaining Research Fellow on the panel will be contacted but if the offer is refused there may be a need to readjust projects, commence recruitment or appoint an Acting Up.

The Board will communicate the appointment of the Interim CEO to ERC staff and the external communication will be managed by the SMT.

JC briefed the Board on the handover plan which had the full support of the Board.

The Board agreed to meet the newly appointed Interim CEO on May 4th in a getting to know you exercise.

AC will inform the DoE of the details of the appointment.

The interests of the newly appointed Interim CEO for the PO Research post was noted and the Board confirmed that the recruitment should proceed. JC will send the job specifications to the Board for review and the item will be further discussed at the June meeting. This will then be shared with the DoE, then the PO Governance and then with HR. The Board will discuss the CEO salary issue with the interim CEO at the time of recruitment of the long term CEO.

12. AOB

- Next meeting 07/06/22
- DB, on behalf of the Board, thanked JC for her outstanding work with the ERC, her commitment to the organisation and the progress made by the organisation during her tenure. The Board although regretting JC's departure congratulated her on her new appointment and wished her well in her new position. JC thanked the Board and ERC staff for their support over the last 3 years.

Denise Burns

Denise Burns (Dec 20, 2022 12:22 GMT)

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting Agenda 5 April 2022

- 1. Minutes of meeting of 18 February 2022 (BMin – 022022)**
- 2. Conflict of Interest (Recurring item)**
- 3. Matters arising from the minutes**
- 4. Report on developments since previous meeting (B-2-22-1 – for discussion)**
- 5. Covid 19**
- 6. Governance and Internal Matters (B-2-22-2 - for information)**
- 7. Finance (B-2-22-3A/B – for minutes)**
- 8. Strategic Plan (B-2-22-4 – for minutes)**
- 9. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item) (B-2-22-5 – for review)**
- 10. Staffing**
- 11. CEO and Transition**
- 12. AOB**

Appendix 2

Update to the Board (April 5, 2022): Key developments since the previous meeting of Feb 18 2022

Corporate projects/issues:

- New supplier issued payroll for the first time this month and initial experiences confirm that the service is much improved from the previous supplier. Will continue to monitor over the next couple of months.
- Lease agreement with DCU has now moved to solicitor-to-solicitor engagement stage.
- The lease agreement with DCU will be supplemented in due course with a licence for works. The licence for works is to include the specifications for a number of building works for the main ERC building, to be established on the basis of an architect-led supplier. Procurement for this will be required.
- Testing for the new out-sourcing of the Test Department scanning service is completed.
- A review of pricing for the ERC tests is underway. Outcomes will result in pricing changes for 2022-2023 and these will need to be communicated to the Department.
- There is no update on the transfer/regularisation of ownership of the Test Department building.

Research projects:

- **NAMER:** Workshops continue and are going well. The workshops are accompanied by a tailor made data processing and analysis application for the ERC which can be used across a range of test development and large scale assessment analysis and reporting activities.
- **DOTS:** User acceptance testing of the new online ordering system is completed. Going well despite some delays; current work is focused on effective information and communication to schools. Remaining development projects (scanning and scoring) were also reviewed with Prodigy Learning at an annual governance meeting in mid-March.
- **PPADE:** A draft memorandum of agreement needs to be signed by NEPS and ERC. 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. The PPADE test was nominated for (but did not win) a Civil Service Excellence Award in 2021. Ceremony took place earlier in March.
- **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, although there is a risk that Ireland may not reach the target school and student participation rates.
- **PISA 2022:** Ireland is testing in Autumn 2022 for the first time. Country submissions regarding the frequency of future cycles of PISA closed last month with outcomes on this consultation to be communicated to the PISA governing board at the end of April. 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:** The Department announced the refined DEIS resource model on March 9. The DEIS team has worked hard to support the Department with the required model runs and documentation. We need to clarify ERC's role in the review and appeals process with the Department. Significant progress has been made with a data mapping exercise for the overarching M&E framework.
- **TPL study:** A three month extension to end Q1 2023 has been agreed with the Department. All is going well on the study with the first draft of the evaluation framework to issue to the steering group in early March. The draft report on consultation with young people was very

well received by the steering committee and draft report on consultation with TPL providers was sent out for committee review on April 1.

- **DLF evaluation:** Response rates for the Phase 2 (second and final longitudinal data collection wave) surveys remain low. Planning for the qualitative components of this wave is proceeding well. The Department has been briefed on outcomes and next steps and a meeting has been requested late April. This is an at-risk project due to resourcing and oversight issues.
- **GSRS evaluation:** The project is high risk owing to shortage of Irish language research assigned and the existing and knock on effects of COVID on the outputs. Current work is focused on the analysis of survey data. Online assessments to be administered to second years in April, and reporting on all cognitive assessments due later in 2022. Next steps on the GSRS study are not yet agreed with the Department but the ERC has recommended that the scope be significantly tightened at a meeting with the Department on March 28.
- **Test Department:** A new Head of Test Department commenced in Feb and a new clerical officer started on March 21. 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 very busy, and the work remains flagged as high risk due to the amount of change occurring.
- **Publications and Media:** A report on PISA 2018 reading literacy, which is relevant to the new literacy and numeracy strategy, is expected for publication end April-early May. Progress has been made on a short report that examines digital technologies drawing on PISA 2012, 2015 and 2018 and this can be expected in May-June. The **Irish Journal of Education (IJE)** team is preparing for a themed issue of SCOTENS funded research for 2023 (Vol 46). First article for Vol 45 (policy on educational disadvantage review) to be published in April-May and a further two articles are at an advanced stage of review. Call for submissions for Vol 46 to issued to coincide with the first Vol 45 article publication. Number of article submissions has increased.
- We have compiled the various **research requests received since September 2020**. These are ad-hoc requests and invitations to collaborate that are not part of ERC's established programme of work. Of 15 such requests received from 10 organisations (four from the Department of Education), 7 consist of major projects (2 of these international), 5 consist of project support requests and the remaining 3 comprise data support requests. To date, 5 of the 7 major project requests have been refused, largely for capacity reasons (1 of these was not of strong strategic relevance) and two (TALIS starting strong and a two year evaluation of a mathematics initiative) remain to have a decision made. Two of the 3 data support requests were processed (1 was refused as the data are available publicly). Three of the five project support requests were processed. The remaining two project support requests are undecided and will require discussion with the SMT.
- **PIAAC** is now under the remit of DFHERIS. It has been confirmed that the ERC will continue to represent Ireland on the PIAAC board of participating countries. A replacement will be notified to DoE, DFHERIS, CSO and OECD when known. Concerns about Ireland's participation rates remain, though the recruitment for fieldworkers for the main study by the CSO has gone very well which partly offsets this concern.


April Board minutes

Final Audit Report

2022-12-20

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