

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
7 June 2022**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 7 June 2022

Board Members Present:

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

In Attendance:

Aidan Clerkin (AC), Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Damian Downes (DD), Principal Officer (PO), 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 1).

1. Minutes of meeting of 5 April 2022 (BMin – 042022)

The previous minutes of the meeting of 5th April 2022 were approved.

2. Conflict of Interest

The Interim CEO declared a potential conflict of Interest for each of the following:

- Graphic Design – The Interim CEO's wife has an independent working relationship with the ERC as a supplier of graphic design services. This has been the case since 2020. It was noted that the Interim CEO has absented himself from previous discussions at SMT level when design services were being discussed or quotes sought. Given that this arrangement has been in place for some time the board did not consider this to be a conflict of interest.
- CEO Competition – as the Interim CEO may wish to apply for the upcoming CEO recruitment competition it was agreed he would remove himself from the meeting when this matter was being discussed.
- PO Head of Research and Operations Competition – as the Interim CEO may wish to apply for the upcoming PO Head of Research and Operations competition it was agreed he would remove himself from the meeting when this matter was being discussed.
- No other conflicts were noted.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

- Aidan Clerkin was appointed as Interim CEO following an internal competition.
- Due to a change in HR staff a delay in processing the findings of the 2021 payroll review by Mazars has occurred.

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

- AC provided an update on various developments and activities (Appendix 2)
- The Board noted the slow progress with signing off the DCU lease. It was further noted that should it be required DCU may have other spaces such as on the All Hallows Campus that may be of use to the ERC in due course
 - AC provided an update on efforts to expand ERC research staff's access to electronic journals, including discussions held with DCEDIY and DCU. The Board suggested another possible provider, IReL, which AC noted for follow-up.
 - AC provided an update on the TALIS Starting Strong and OECD VET studies which ERC has received approaches about from DCEDIY and DFHERIS. A decision of these studies has been stalled due to a lack of clarity regarding payment and pensions for work done on behalf of other departments rather than DoE. This has been raised with CPU who are to seek resolution to the issue within DoE.

5. Covid 19

- In line with changes to public health advice, it has been agreed that masks can now be removed and changes have been made to the number of staff using the staff room and meeting rooms.
- It was proposed and agreed to remove Covid 19 as a recurring agenda item.

6. Governance and Internal Matters

- The ERC had a governance meeting with the CPU on 28 April 2022. Responsibility for keeping minutes rotates and it is for the DoE to keep the minutes on this occasion. We are currently awaiting the minutes. The agenda for the meetings was as follows:
 - Review of the minutes
 - CEO: Departure, Interim and recruitment process
 - Board Chair recruitment
 - Strategic Plan 2022-2024
 - Staff
 - Recent acting-ups; expectations for the year, Head of Research role
 - Resource options for staff required in 2022
 - Digital Library access
 - Disability Act
 - Buildings updates: Library, Test department building, DCU agreements
 - International studies: impact of war in Ukraine
- A delegation of the Board met with the DoE on 11/05/22 – (B-3-22-3 – For discussion). There was no further discussion on the meeting.
- Both the executive and the Board continue to press for the appointment of the Chairperson. It was noted that three Board memberships will expire in just over two years. Given that the latest replacement appointment for an ordinary member of the Board took more than three years, the issue will continue to be raised with the DoE at governance meetings. It was further noted that it was over 12 months since the last Chairperson announced they would be standing down and that this poses a risk to the organisation.
- An update on the DCU lease was discussed.
- The Board members were informed that a procurement process for procurement consultants and workforce plan consultancy were underway and appointments would be made soon.

- An Choimisinéara Teanga proposed feedback (due June 15th) (**B-3-22-4** – For discussion). This matter was noted by the Board.
- IEA Conference (**B-3-22-5A/B** - for approval) – the Board agreed conditionally to the conference to go ahead and requested that the management continue to monitor the budget for the event and report progress to the Board. The Board asked whether DCU had been asked to quote as a potential conference venue.

7. Policies

- Policy Tracker (**B-2-22- 5**– for discussion) – the Board welcomed the Policy Tracker as a good initiative. The Board acknowledged the correct format of policy separating policy and procedures, with the latter in an appendix. The Board requested that all policies be in this format. It was noted that 8 of the policies were overdue for review. These will be brought to the September meeting for approval in the new policy format.
- It was agreed that an Incorporeal meeting may be needed to approve the Blended work in July.
- The Draft policy on ERC gifts and gratuities was circulated (**B-3-22-6**– for approval). The Board agreed that there should be no gifts to either staff or Board.
- The Draft update to the code of Conduct to include work of Board/Committee members was circulated (**B-2-22-7** – For approval). The Board approved the policy.
- The Draft policy on Adhoc research requests was circulated (**B-3-22-8** – for approval). The Board approved the policy
- The Draft policy on Independent Paid work outside of the ERC was circulated (**B-3-22-9** – for approval). The Board noted some concerns about the use of ERC resources when independent/non-ERC approved work is being carried out. It was further noted that any approvals must be fully documented and signed off by both parties. The issue of Professional Indemnity Insurance was raised and a clarification that ERC's insurance does not extend to independent work is to be added to the application form.

8. Finance

The Board discussed the following items:

- Q1 Income and expenditure reports (**B-3-22-10** – for review)
- Position on use of reserves for Pay purposes

9. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- The ARC December meeting minutes were circulated (**B-3-22-11** – for information) and noted by the Board.
- Following approval at the earlier ARC meeting, the scope of the three audits of 2022 issued by auditors, reviewed and approved was agreed by the Board.
- Update on current risks (**B-3-22-12**– for review)
 - DD provided an update on the Decision Time software which is intended to be introduced to ERC to assist with risk management.

10. Staffing & HR

The following staffing matters were noted:

- The Interim CEO took up the position on 1st May.
- Two staff members left since the last meeting. They are the CEO, Jude Cosgrove and Executive Officer for HR, Marie Jones.
- Two new staff members joined the ERC; the new EO for HR, Hertes DaSilva, commenced on 28th April, and; Research Associate, Jessica Surdey, on 1st June
- An update on Short Term Fellow recruitment was provided.
- After the withdrawal of the Interim CEO (AC), the Board discussed the recruitment of the Head of Research and Operations.
- As noted above, the Workforce plan review will commence on the appointment of consultants.

11. CEO long term appointment

- After the withdrawal of the PO Governance (DD), the Board discussed the recruitment of the CEO on a five year contract.

12. AOB

- At the request of the Board it was agreed to send Board papers as an email attachment rather than via the meeting invitation as some members had difficulty opening the documents.

Denise Burns
 Denise Burns (Dec 20, 2022 12:25 GMT)

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting Agenda 7 June 2022

1. Minutes of meeting of 5 April 2022 (BMin – 042022)

2. Conflict of Interest

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

Shared document

- *Update document circulated by CEO (B-3-22-1 – For discussion)*

5. Covid 19

6. Governance and Internal Matters

Shared documents:

- ✓ *CPU Governance meeting 28 April 2022 (B-3-22-2 – For information)*
- ✓ *Meeting of the Board with DoE on 11/05/22 – (B-3-22-3 – For discussion)*
- ✓ *CT proposed feedback (due June 15th) (B-3-22-4 – For discussion)*
- ✓ *IEA Conference (B-3-22-5 - for approval)*

7. Policies

Shared documents:

- ✓ *Policy Tracker (B-2-22-6 – for information)*
- ✓ *Policy on ERC gifts and gratuities (B-2-22-7 – for approval)*
- ✓ *Proposed updates to code of conduct to include Board and Committee members work with the ERC (B-2-22-8 – For approval)*
- ✓ *Policy*

8. Finance

Shared documents:

- ✓ *Q1 Income and expenditure reports (B-2-22-9 – for review)*

9. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- ✓ *ARC Minutes December meeting (B-3-22-11 – for information)*
- ✓ *Update on current risks (B-2-22-10 – for review)*

10. Staffing & HR

11. CEO long term appointment

12. AOB

Appendix 2

Update to the Board (June 7, 2022) Key Developments Since the Previous Meeting of April 5, 2022

Corporate projects/issues:

- **Lease agreement with DCU:** Aidan, Damian and Anne met with Eamonn Cuggy to clarify some points on latest draft of agreement. This process was due to move to direct solicitor-to-solicitor engagement in early May but HOMS have not yet received contact from DCU's solicitors.
- A procurement process is underway to appoint a consultant to conduct a detailed **review of ERC workforce** and comparison with similar bodies in Ireland and abroad.
- **Library access:** Aidan and Anne met with DCEDIY to explore options for restoring full access to academic journals to ERC. A number of helpful suggestions were made but it seems unlikely that any of them would fulfil ERC's needs. Library access appears to be fragmented across the public service; many government bodies have some level of library access but only universities appear to have the level of journal access that would be needed. Subsequently, a suggestion was made to Eamonn Cuggy that ERC would be interested in exploring any options for 'affiliate' links for staff members with DCU as a mechanism for gaining access to DCU libraries. Eamonn is to investigate and we will follow up at a later point.
- **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 with Polymetrika have been completed. The scaling and analysis application (designed initially for use with NAMER but which could be used across a range of test development and large scale assessment projects) is being used to scale the NAMER 2021 data.
- **DOTS:** There have been significant delays to the implementation of the new scanning and scoring tools that were planned to be rolled out by April 2022. An initial version of the scanning tool has been undergoing UAT for several weeks and it is proving difficult to resolve outstanding issues. Because of the delay with the scanning tool and the busy testing period of April-June, the scoring tool has been postponed until a quieter time. The integration of the PPADE tool to DOTS is also planned to occur during Summer 2022 but is at risk of delay. The ongoing functioning of DOTS is generally working well, although three staff have been kept very busy providing phone/email support to schools. In the current testing season, approximately 245 schools (199 in previous school year) and 35781 tests (29,797 in previous school year) were delivered on DOTS, as well as busy uptake on the new DOTS-based ordering form for paper tests. DOTS is nominated for two awards (Best Summative Assessment Project and Best Transformative Project) in the eAssessment Awards; winners will be announced at the eAssessment conference in London in June 2022.
- **PPADE:** The draft memorandum of agreement is still awaiting final agreement and signature from NEPS. 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 cleaning and processing has been completed and focus is now turning to preparatory work for the initial PIRLS 2021 report and completing the PIRLS 2016 contextual report for publication. Work on the 2016 report has been repeatedly delayed due to staffing constraints and we are keen for it to be published before the 2021 report.
- **TIMSS 2023:** The field trial was completed successfully with response rates of approximately 87% at Fourth Class and 78% at Second Year. Submission of data was delayed by a few days from the original target date due to a delay in release of the international scoring software, but this was acknowledged as being outside ERC's control. A review of the operations and procedures of the FT is underway, including post-FT meetings with laptop and technical support providers, to ensure that any necessary adjustments can be made for the main study. There are significant concerns over the ability of the technical support company to provide adequate support but we will continue to engage with them to reiterate the required timelines and level of staffing.
- **TIMSS 2019:** As with PIRLS 2016, reporting on TIMSS 2019 has been significantly delayed and remains at risk of further delay due to limited and disrupted availability of staff. There are two contextual reports (Fourth Class and Second Year) in progress and a short report providing in-depth item analysis that will be aimed at teachers and curriculum specialists. The DoE and National Advisory Committee also expressed interest (in 2020 and 2021) in a multilevel model of achievement using recent TIMSS data, which has been planned but is on hold until basic contextual reporting is completed.
- **PISA 2022:** Ireland is testing in Autumn 2022 for the first time. The PISA NPM is engaging with the laptop and technical support providers to agree availability of resources over the summer for the planned testing schedule.
- **DEIS:** The DEIS team within ERC provided support to the DoE on a very tight timeframe in reviewing appeals made by approx. 200 schools to the revised DEIS resource model, including providing detailed documentation on quality assurance. ERC staff have also met with SIU to discuss the DoE's priorities for future strands of the DEIS evaluation work within the overall Monitoring and Evaluation framework; some possibilities have been offered to the DoE but further discussion is needed. Analysis of NAMER 2021 data will soon begin with a view to reporting in late 2022/early 2023.
- **TPL study:** Staffing changes expected to occur in Q3 2022 will need to be handled carefully to minimise any disruption to reporting work that is planned during the same period.
- **DLF evaluation:** This is an at-risk project due to resourcing and oversight issues. The final rounds of data collection (student surveys, teacher surveys, PDST survey) are in progress and due to close by early June 2022, after which focus turns to analysis and final reporting.
- **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 have been administered to some Second Year students in April/May, but some schools have postponed until September. A meeting with the DoE is planned for June 2022 to achieve clarity on next steps; the ERC has previously recommended that the scope be significantly tightened. Additional staffing, in particular at Associate level, is needed to keep the study moving forward and to provide adequate support to the current GSRS team who are currently under severe and unsustainable pressure.
- **Test Department:** The Test Department staff, including new Head of Department and new Clerical Officer, having been working exceptionally hard through the busy testing period during a very difficult time. The online order form has, in general, helped to streamline their work, despite some teething problems that can be improved on for next year.

- The **Irish Journal of Education** (IJE) published its first paper of the 2022 volume, on educational disadvantage in Ireland, at end of April 2022. Several other papers are in various stages of review, including some close to finalisation.
- **Publications and Media:**
 - A report on **PISA 2018**, examining factors associated with reading literacy, was published at the end of April 2022. Another report examining digital technologies drawing on PISA 2012-2018 is under final review.
 - Two reports on Phase 3 of the **TPL evaluation** (reporting on consultation findings) are under final review and scheduled for publication in early September.
 - A chapter on **Transition Year** and a corresponding programme in South Korean schools was published in an edited European-wide volume on *Wellbeing in Schools*.
- **Research request tracker:** Two requests for ERC support with large-scale projects (TALIS Starting Strong and OECD VET study) are undecided and require clarification from DoE regarding interdepartmental governance issues and staff/resourcing.
- **PIAAC:** Aidan has replaced Jude on the PIAAC Governing Board.
- **ERC-organised conferences:**
 - The European Conference on Literacy is to be held in DCU in July 2022. Gerry Shiel is an organiser and several members of staff are planning to present at it.
 - The EARA conference will be held in TCD in August 2022, with Aidan Clerkin on the organising committee. A number of staff members have made submissions.
 - The AEA-Europe conference will be held in Dun Laoghaire in November 2022, with Gerry Shiel on the organising committee. Several staff members have made submissions to the conference. Some ERC staff are also involved in reviewing submissions.
 - The IEA IRC conference is pencilled in to be held in Dublin in June 2023, pending final confirmation of ERC support and funding. Rachel Perkins is leading the organisation of the IRC within ERC.

June Board minutes

Final Audit Report

2022-12-20

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