

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
13 September 2022**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 13 September 2022

Board Members Present:

Mr. Edward Murtagh (EM), Chairperson Designate; Dr. Denise Burns (DB), Deputy Chairperson; 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 7 June 2022 (BMin – 062022)

The previous minutes of the meeting of 7th June 2022 were approved.

2. Conflict of Interest

There were no new conflicts of interest declared.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

AC provided an update on various developments and activities (Appendix 2)

5. Governance and Internal Matters

- Appointment of Chair of the Board

The ERC Board acknowledges the Government as having appointed Edward Murtagh as Chairperson designate with effect from 27 July, noting that the appointment is considered to be on a “designate” basis pending his attendance (if so invited) at the relevant Oireachtas Committee.

- Disability awareness survey issued - Noted

Test Department building update – Board discussed and agreed to proceed as per the legal advice from Cormac Brennan from O’Connell Brennan, on the basis of a two phase approach, first title to be transferred to the Diocese and followed by an immediate transfer to the ERC. DB informed the meeting that this is usual practice and driven by canon law. SF suggested it might be beneficial to the ERC to register as a charity in advance of the completion of this transaction resulting in a reduced/exemption from tax. Although previously explored in the past and refused by the DoE, Management agreed to explore this option further.

- Procurement for procurement consultants was completed. Keystone appointed to work with the ERC on all recruitment needs – Noted
- Work is ongoing on the workforce plan and benchmarking consultancy. AC provided a number of contacts of similar bodies internationally. Report expected in November - Noted
- The Internal auditor terminated contract due to capacity issues. A new procurement exercise has now commenced to source another supplier. However, a short term solution has been acquired on the basis of quotations to allow for 2022 internal audits to be carried out. Auditors identified as RSM. - Noted
- Issues with current Print supplier due to inflation and rising costs of materials was brought to the attention of the board. Management conducted a Request for Information (RFI), a process that revealed a more up-to-date level of pricing within the market. Following this process, it was decided to remain with Ricoh, despite them not providing the cheapest quote. It was felt that other factors including quality, prompt supply and good customer service were important during this time especially with large work on PISA and TIMSS studies. Work will commence in early 2023 on a new contract to be in place by June which will coincide with the end of Ricoh's two year contract.
- An Coimisinéir Teanga (CT) – response received 28/07/22 – Board considered the letter from CT to be positive and encouraged Management to continue to engage with CT on developments.
- DOTS pricing review delayed – issue with current price of tests and sale price for same. Management plan to complete this exercise before the end of the year in order to allow sufficient time to discuss with the DoE and agree new pricing for the 2023 budget.
- Annual report – approved subject to Management carrying out a thorough proof reading of the Annual Report in advance of publication. DD expects the Management Letter before the December board meeting.
- Art Collection – Management agreed to carry out an inventory of art work in the Centre which would include its status/title, valuation and what plans are for it.

6. Finance

- The FS 2021 was cleared by the Deputy Director of the C&AG but cannot be certified until a discrepancy noted with the reconciliation of the State Grants Note, in relation to the pension contributions by the DOE, is reconciled. This is an issue of presentation rather an issue related to the amounts disclosed. The sign off by Board of the final version to be circulated as soon as possible. The Board noted its thanks to the staff in getting to this point, in particular Anne Comey and Imelda Pluck. The Board agreed that the 2023 audit should commence earlier next year in order for the audit to be completed in a more timely manner and to avail of the knowledge of Imelda Pluck who is due to retire in April 2023. The Board also noted the excellent communication between the C&AG and ERC staff.
- Budget 2023 submitted for review to Members in July 2022 and approved.
- Q1 Income and expenditure reports circulated and noted.

- DD explained that the note to the Board on the financial summary does not include the budget for the Test Dept. This is an error. The General administration costs appear to be overspent however the actual budgets included these costs. Printing costs have so far been over spent by circa 32K – this is mostly due to Test Department increased demand. Test Department printing costs are balanced by sales profit therefore it is not a concern.

7. Policies

- Paternity Leave – discussed and approved
- Right to disconnect – discussed and approved
- Blended work Policy – discussed and approved
- Revised draft policy on ERC gifts and gratuities – discussed and approved
- Force majeure leave policy – discussed and approved
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy – changes required to include recoupment of fees in the event that an employee resigns during or within a period of less than 12 months after completion of their course of study – to be represented before the next meeting of the board. It was further noted that staff should do any required study on their own time.

8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- Procurement audit – fieldwork complete, awaiting report which will be shared with the ARC at next meeting. Noted
- IT and Financial Internal Control audits to follow - Noted
- Risk – DD highlighted two new risks relating to the rising cost of printing and the operational concerns surrounding the services for the provision of IT equipment and technical personnel to carry out PISA and TIMSS testing in schools. The impact on the ERC reputation is high should one of the studies fail to meet its sample numbers due to lack of personnel attending the schools. Management continue to work with both service providers in order iron out any problems in a timely manner.

9. Staffing & HR

- Leavers: CR going on Mat leave and contract to expire before her return.
- No new starters
- Other staffing issues including staffing for Test Dev were discussed
- Workforce plan review has commenced with report expected by mid-October 2022
- PO Research Recruitment – this process is on hold until after the recruitment of the CEO

10. AOB

For the next board meeting papers will be presented via SharePoint and, where possible, all documents will be saved into one master document.

11. CEO long term appointment

Both AC and DD left the meeting for this item and Anne Comey joined the meeting. The Chair of the Board shared a summary of updates on this item.


Edward Murtagh (Dec 21, 2022 20:27 GMT)

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting Agenda 13 September 2022

1. Minutes of meeting of 7 June 2022 (BMin – 062022)

2. Conflict of Interest

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

Shared documents:

- ✓ Update document circulated by CEO (**B-4-22-1 – for discussion**)

5. Governance and Internal Matters

Shared documents:

- ✓ CT response received 28/07/22 (**B-4-22-2A/B – for discussion**)
- ✓ Annual report (**B-4-22-3 – for approval**)

6. Finance

Shared documents:

- ✓ Budget 2023 (**B-4-22-4 – for information**)
- ✓ I&E Expenditure Q1/Q2 2022 (**B-4-22-5 – for discussion**)

7. Nomination of the Chair of the ARC

8. Policies

Shared documents:

- ✓ Paternity Leave (**B-4-22-6 – for approval**)
- ✓ Right to disconnect (**B-4-22-7 – for approval**)
- ✓ Blended work Policy (**B-4-22-8 – for approval**)
- ✓ Revised draft policy on ERC gifts and gratuities (**B-4-22-9 – for approval**)
- ✓ Force majeure leave policy (**B-4-22-10 – for approval**)
- ✓ Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy (**B-4-22-11 – for approval**)

9. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- ✓ ARC February meeting minutes (**B-4-22-12 – for information**)

10. Staffing & HR

11. CEO long term appointment

12. AOB

Appendix 2

Update to the Board (September 13, 2022): Key developments since the previous meeting of June 7, 2022

Corporate projects/issues:

- There is no update on the **lease agreement with DCU** since June.
- Following a procurement process, Mazars were appointed to conduct a detailed **review of ERC workforce** and comparison with similar bodies in Ireland and abroad. That work commenced in early August with a review by Mazars of relevant documentation. Initial contact has been made with several comparator organisations who have indicated willingness to speak with Mazars for the review.
- **Library access:** Aidan and Anne met with Jack Hyland of the IReL network to explore whether it would be possible for ERC to join the network. The initial meeting was positive in a general sense, although both sides agreed that further fleshing out of details would be needed. Following the meeting, Jack supplied a catalogue of IReL's resources and asked ERC to indicate priorities so that an indicative price for access could be calculated. The list of priority resources has been returned to IReL and we are now awaiting their feedback.
- Draft documentation for the **ownership of the Test Department building** has been agreed in principle and is drawn up. ERC's solicitors are currently making representations to Revenue to clarify issues relating to potential CAT and stamp duty liabilities.

Research projects:

- **NAMER:** Scaling of the NAMER 2021 data has been completed and initial analysis work is also complete. Work is now progressing on drafting the initial reporting. The plan for publication is that an initial report on NAMER 2021 focusing on achievement data will be available in conjunction with a separate report focusing on DEIS, using NAMER 2021 data, for end 2022. These reports will be followed in 2023 by a contextual report using NAMER 2021 questionnaire data.
- **DOTS:** DOTS was nominated for two awards (Best Summative Assessment Project and Best Transformative Project) in the eAssessment Awards which were held at the eAssessment conference in London in June 2022. Unfortunately, both categories were award to other projects on this occasion, but feedback at the conference was positive. ERC's phone/email support of DOTS is in the process of transferring to the Test Department rather than research staff, although research input will be maintained for future development work. Test Department staff will play a larger role in the oversight of DOTS moving forward. Development work is continuing on some enhancements, notably integration of the scoring tool for primary tests.
- **PPADE:** The memorandum of agreement was signed by NEPS and ERC in August 2022. The lead NEPS representative on the PPADE-Gaeilge project is due to go on maternity leave shortly, so ERC test development staff will be meeting with her in advance of that date to catch up and set out a plan for future work. However, the availability of ERC staff for fieldwork or technical support to future PPADE work is dependent on receipt of sufficient resourcing from DoE, which CPU are aware of.

- **PIRLS:** Work has begun on the initial PIRLS 2021 report (although a final dataset has not yet been received from IEA) and drafting of the PIRLS 2016 contextual report is continuing. The target is for both reports to be published by the end of 2022. Work on the 2016 report has been repeatedly delayed due to staffing constraints and PIRLS staff on reporting are currently facing similar administrative demands from other projects.
- **TIMSS 2023:** A review of the operations and procedures of the field trial was held with both the 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. Work is now underway on the main study, including finalising the school samples (to include main study and bridge study samples, at both Fourth Class and Second Year) and liaising with COGG to ensure a timely translation of all required materials to Irish.
- **TIMSS 2019:** 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 is aimed at teachers and curriculum specialists. Work on the latter report has progressed well over the summer, and initial findings will be presented at the MathsMeet conference in Maynooth in October 2022. 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, and is currently in an extremely busy phase. Testing will be taking place in schools in October. There is ongoing communication with the laptop and Technical Support providers to ensure a reliable supply of service through the main study.
- **DEIS:** Analysis of NAMER 2021 data focusing on DEIS schools and trends since 2014 is underway, with a view to reporting in late 2022. There is ongoing communication with the DoE regarding priorities for future strands of DEIS evaluation work.
- **TÚSLA:** A draft report on non-attendance data has been provided to TÚSLA, who are currently reviewing it. Some initial feedback has already been responded to by ERC. From next year, this work is expected to be taken over by the DoE Statistics section.
- **TPL study:** The Research Associate on TPL is due to begin maternity leave very shortly, which will reduce the staff resourcing available for the project. As the work of TPL is scheduled to conclude in Q1 2023, it is hoped that this change will have minimal disruption to final reporting as the reports are already in progress; however, this will need to be monitored closely. Two reports are scheduled for publication in September 2022, with two further reports in Q1 2023.
- **DLF evaluation:** This is an at-risk project due to resourcing and oversight issues. Data collection is complete and work on scaling and weighting the data is progressing. However, given current staffing – including oversight by the same staff member who is managing the implementation of the PISA 2022 main study during its busy phase, and a lack of full-time staff assigned to the project – it is considered highly unlikely that the original target date for publication of the final report (Q4 2022) can be met. The DoE have been notified of this and an extension to Q4 2023 proposed.
- **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. A program of work for 2023 and 2024 has been agreed in principle with the DOE, although formal agreement is not yet finalised. Additional staffing 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. A new panel

for research assistants with proficiency in Irish, to be established in September/October, will soon provide a basis from which to recruit additional staff with Irish fluency for GSRS and other projects as needed during the lifetime of the panel.

- **Test Department:** The Test Department staff are fulfilling new orders from schools as they return in September, and are exploring options for promotion of ERC tests and DOTS. Day-to-day support of DOTS is in the process of moving to Test Department staff from the current research staff, although another solution (i.e., outsourcing) will have to be established for provision of support in Spring 2023 when the Test Dept staff are busy with fulfilment of paper orders.
- The **Irish Journal of Education** (IJE) published a paper on the experiences of third-level international students in Ireland in July 2022. Several other papers are in various stages of review, including some close to finalisation.
- **Publications and Media:**
 - Two reports on Phase 3 of the **TPL evaluation** (reporting on consultation findings with students and TPL providers) are scheduled for publication today (September 13th).
 - A report using data from **PISA 2012, 2015, and 2018**, examining use of digital technology in schools in Ireland, is due for publication shortly.
 - A paper using **TIMSS 2015** data to examine science achievement in primary schools in Ireland, with a focus on educational disadvantage and school composition effects, has been accepted by the *European Journal of Educational Research* and may be included in their next (October 2022) issue. This paper is based on work begun during a one-month visit from a visiting German scholar, Dr Sonja Nonte, in 2018.
- **Research request tracker:**
 - Two long-standing requests for ERC support with large-scale projects (TALIS Starting Strong and OECD VET study) remain undecided in the absence of clarification from DoE regarding interdepartmental governance issues and staff/resourcing. However, given the severe delay in communication and lack of clarity over resourcing, it is unlikely that ERC will be able to be involved in the studies in a useful manner.
 - The NCCA have requested review by Aidan Clerkin of a revised Programme Statement for Transition Year in the context of reform to Senior Cycle. A meeting is planned for September.
- **PIAAC:** The next PIAAC Governing Board meeting is planned for October 20th-21st 2022.
- **ERC-organised conferences:**
 - The European Conference on Literacy was held in DCU in July 2022. Gerry Shiel was an organiser and several members of staff presented at it using PISA and PIRLS data to examine reading achievement and associated factors.
 - The European Association for Research on Adolescence conference was held in Trinity College Dublin in August 2022, with Aidan Clerkin representing ERC on the organising committee. Aidan (maturity in adolescence with reference to Transition Year) and Sarah McAteer (parental influences on students' occupational aspirations, using PISA 2018 data) made presentations.
 - The AEA-Europe conference will be held in Dun Laoghaire in November 2022, with Gerry Shiel on the organising committee. Several staff members are scheduled to present at the conference, using TIMSS (2011, 2015, 2019) and PISA data.
 - The IEA's 10th International Research Conference has been announced for Dún Laoghaire in June 2023, with the Royal Marine Hotel confirmed as the venue. IEA have confirmed that ERC's responsibility lies with organising venue and catering for the conference, and that other tasks fall to the IEA. Rachel Perkins is leading the organisation of the IRC within ERC, with the support of an organising committee. Aidan and Rachel joined representatives from IEA and Fáilte Ireland on a site visit at

the conference venue (Royal Marine Hotel) on September 9th. Gerry Shiel has been invited to be one of the keynote speakers for the conference. Submissions for the conference will open on September 14th.

- **Visiting delegations:**

- Naoki Furukawa, Japanese member of parliament, invited Aidan Clerkin to meet with him in Farmleigh House during a visit to Ireland on September 1st. Mr Furukawa is interested in Transition Year in the context of youth wellbeing and social integration, due to concerns in these regards in Japanese schools.
- Beatriz Barrado, researcher in Spain, paid a one-day visit to ERC on September 7th. Dr Barrado is on a two-week study visit to Ireland and requested a visit to ERC during her time here. Dr Barrado provided a seminar on her research to all staff, followed by one-on-one meetings to discuss ERC research with Aidan Clerkin and Lorraine Gilleece.
- Montserrat Tortosa Moreno, research in Spain, will pay a two-day visit to ERC on September 22nd and 23rd. Ms Tortosa is part of a new Educational Research Unit within the Department of Education in Catalonia, and is seeking to learn about ERC's structures and work. Ms Tortosa will provide a seminar to all staff on her work, including the Digital Education Plan of Catalonia, and will take part in a series of meetings with relevant ERC personnel to gain an overview of core research work and administrative and governance functions (e.g., data protection, IT).
- An 18-strong parliamentary delegation from Flanders, Belgium will visit the ERC on October 6th. The delegation are interested in learning about Ireland's performance in PISA and TIMSS in recent years and requested a visit to ERC via the Irish Department of Education.

Minutes Board meeting - September

Final Audit Report

2022-12-21

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