

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
10 November 2022**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 10 November 2022

Board Members Present:

Mr. Edward Murtagh (EM), Chairperson; 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 3.00 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix 1).

1. Minutes of meeting of 13 September 2022 (BMin – 092022)

Under policies in item 7, continuing professional development, the minute should include a line that it was noted that staff should do any required study on their own time.

2. Conflict of Interest

For the duration of the CEO Recruitment Process both the CEO and PO will leave the meeting for any discussions related to this process.

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)

Library Access – while the board was supportive of the IReL network proposal management were reminded of the need for compliance with the rules on public procurement. DD agreed to consult with the Centre's Procurement Consultant to ensure full compliance in relation to this transaction.

5. Governance and Internal Matters

- DD acknowledged the receipt of the formal letter of appointment of Chairperson by the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. He also confirmed that a letter had issued to Ray Mooney appointing him as Chair of ARC.

- The board were informed that the management will meet with the CPU for a governance meeting on 17 November 2022.
- Disability awareness survey issued – the results confirm that the ERC are already over 6% to be reached by public bodies before the end of 2024. Disability awareness training has been identified and will be rolled out between the end of November and Jan 13th 2023. The board also expressed an interest in taking the training and it was agreed that DD would circulate the details.
- Test Department building update – limited progress since the last meeting. The solicitor is still awaiting response from Revenue.
- Arts bequest– DD informed the meeting that artworks not on the 2017 valuation have now been catalogued which will allow us to seek an updated valuation. The board sought clarification on the adequacy of the insurance cover for the artworks and that they are stored in a secure and appropriate (from a conservation perspective) location.
- Review of Statutory Instrument – at the CPU governance meeting in September officials said they were looking at the SI with a view to making some changes, in particular the size of the board. It was suggested that the management and the board should review the SI to consider any other changes which may be beneficial to make. This will be on the agenda for the December meeting for a fuller discussion. Management have discussed the matter with our solicitor who is available to attend the December meeting.
- Databank (Single Pension Scheme Return) – the return was slightly late due to a delay on data calculations for 3 ex staff members. Approval for delay was sought in advance and granted. The return is expected to be issued in the next few days.
- Ethics return – DD reminded the board that SIPO returns for 2022 will be circulated next month and due to be completed and returned between 1st and 31st January.
- Test pricing review – the review is ongoing. This is a complex matter which will require time to complete. DD, AC and Anne Comey are currently working on various scenarios to help inform the discussion. The timeline for completion of the report is still 31st December in order to give management sufficient time to discuss the implications of any price increases with the DoE and well in advance of the annual budgetary process in early summer.
- Data sharing/open data updates - discussed under risk below.
- October 2022 pay increases – a table showing the new salary scales has issued to the DoE for approval (DoE currently liaising with DPER to confirm CEO salary). Payments are expected to be made in the November payroll.
- CEO appraisal – it was agreed that this should be carried out by the Chairperson.
- Review of the performance of ARC Chair – it was agreed that, as the Chairperson was until recently the Chair of the ARC and that the new ARC Chair has yet to chair a meeting, this review would not be carried out until Ray has chaired a number of meetings.

6. Finance

The Board discussed the following items:

- Financial Statements 2021 updates – the Financial Statements have been signed off by both the C&AG and the Chair/CEO. The management letter was

received on the 9th September and has yet to be reviewed by management. A draft response will be circulated to the ARC and Board before final submission.

- Work is underway on the consolidation of the English and Irish certified version for filing with the Oireachtas by the DoE within the set 2 month time frame.
- Income and expenditure reports (**B-5-22-3**) – DD presented the highlights of the I&E report noting that both income and expenditure remain on target for the final quarter of the year. DD noted an error in at least one of the formulae and will review and re-send to the board.

7. Policies

- Revised Board Terms of Reference (**B-5-22-4**) – approved by the board subject to the removal of “including with regard to gender” in section 8.9. The board noted that the ToR may need to change further following the review of the Statutory Instrument, specifically the length of board terms and the description of board members as “members of the centre”.
- Revised ARC Terms of Reference (**B-5-22-5**) – approved by the board subject to an amendment to section 1.4 allowing for up to three external members.
- The board expressed the view that finding external members of the ARC without paying fees may be a challenge. Management agreed to raise the issue with the DoE in its forthcoming governance meeting with CPU.
- Credit Card Policy (**B-5-22-6**) – approved by the board subject to strengthening of the principles section of the document to include staff endeavouring to use the card with honesty and integrity. The board approved a limit of €5,000 and the PO be the name on the credit card and the CEO to sign-off on expenditure monthly.
- Revised Customer Charter (**B-5-22-7**) – approved by the board.
- Revised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy (**B-5-22-8**) – approved by the board subject to the policy applying to individual board members.

8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- Internal Audit – the board was given an update on the procurement arrangements regarding Internal Audit. RSM won a limited tender to complete the 2022 audits and that a procurement process is underway to appoint internal auditors on a longer term basis.
- Procurement audit – the report has just been received but management have yet to provide responses. This will be brought to the ARC for its 13th December meeting.
- IT audit – this audit is underway with some delays due to IT Manager work on PISA study. It is expected to be completed before the end of the year.
- Financial Internal Control audit – this is due to start in December with an early 2023 completion.
- Minutes from ARC meeting of June (**B-5-22-9 – for information**) – this was noted by the board.
- Risk Management – DD highlighted high risks to the board:
 - Technical support on the PISA and TIMSS studies which were previously brought to the board. While things are going reasonably well in this regard on the PISA study, notwithstanding

challenges previously noted, management remain concerned that with the larger TIMSS study (and the need for a greater number of casual staff) the risk remains high for the foreseeable future.

Management are actively considering other medium term options.

- Data Sharing and Governance Act – management had been unaware of the Act until a number of months ago. This delay placed considerable pressure on staff to fast track its implementation in relation to ERC data sharing with both the DoE and ETB's. Following meetings with DoE, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and email exchanges with colleagues at the ETB much progress has been made. The agreement with 16 ETBs is of greatest risk with respect to school participation in PISA 2022 and TIMSS 2023.

9. Staffing & HR

- Leavers: TPL staffing changes noted.
- Sanction was received from DoE for three permanent Test Development staff (1x Research Associate and 2x Research Assistants).
- New starters – Keishia Taylor has accepted an offer to join the ERC as Research Assistant.
- Recruitment of Irish speakers in progress – the board was alerted to the challenges of finding suitably qualified candidates with Irish. An offer has been made to a preferred candidate for the vacancy of Research Assistant with Irish, but the offer is dependent on receiving sanction from DPER/DoE for the candidate to start at the top of the Assistant salary scale, recognising her experience as a teacher.
- Blended Working Policy –The board was informed that training for line managers will commence on 21st September.
- Workforce Plan – the board was informed that Mazars have spoken with a number of comparable Irish and international research bodies which will inform the upcoming plan. It is expected that an initial draft of the plan will be ready for the next board meeting.

10. AOB

- Leaving certificate research – it was suggested that the ERC should be involved, if feasible, in the research requested by NCCA and SEC.
- Dates for 2023 meeting – DD to discuss suggested dates with the Chairperson in advance of the next meeting

11. CEO long term appointment

The CEO and PO left the meeting in advance of this item

The Board members discussed the next step of the recruitment process and potential timelines. A consultant was present for part of the discussions.


Edward Murtagh (Dec 20, 2022 20:33 GMT)

Appendix 1

**EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting Agenda
10 November 2022**

1. Minutes of meeting of 13 September 2022 (BMin – 092022)

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-5-22-1 – for discussion**)

5. Governance and Internal Matters

Shared documents:

- ✓ Art listing (**B-5-22-2 – for information**)

6. Finance

Shared documents:

- ✓ I&E Expenditure Q1/Q2 2022 (**B-5-22-3 – for discussion**)

7. Policies

Shared documents:

- ✓ Revised Board Terms of Reference (**B-5-22-4 – for approval**)
- ✓ Revised ARC Terms of Reference (**B-5-22-5 – for approval**)
- ✓ Credit Card Policy (**B-5-22-6 – for approval**)
- ✓ Revised Customer Charter (**B-5-22-7 – for approval**)
- ✓ Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy (**B-5-22-8 – for approval**)

8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- ✓ ARC February meeting minutes (**B-5-22-9 – for information**)

9. Staffing & HR

10. CEO appointment

- ✓ Confidential documents (**B-5-22-10A/B**)

11. AOB

Appendix 2

Update to the Board (November 10, 2022): Key developments since the previous meeting of September 13, 2022

Corporate projects/issues:

- There is no update on the **lease agreement with DCU** since September.
- The **review of ERC workforce** is continuing and expected to report soon. Meetings have been held with 3x comparator organisations in Ireland (ESRI, NCCA, SEC) and comparators in France, Finland, Australia, and (2x) New Zealand. A detailed review of staff time allocated to specific research and admin activities and gap analysis of under-allocation of time have been completed as part of this work.
- **Library access:** An indicative quote in the region of €65,000-€75,000 per year has been received from the IReL network for provision of library services (electronic journal access) based on an analysis of priority resources for ERC. This indicative quote will form the basis for further discussion and refinement, with a view to establishing access to a wider range of journals than are currently available in 2023.
- There is no change since September with regard to **ownership of the Test Department building**.

Research projects:

- **NAMER:** Work is continuing on the initial report for NAMER 2021, which is planned for review in Q4 2022 and publication in Q1 2023. A separate DEIS report using NAMER data will follow shortly thereafter. Follow-up reporting on NAMER in 2023 is likely to be slowed by movement of staff to other projects (e.g., appointment of PISA 2025 NPM; involvement of NAMER Fellow in DLF reporting).
- **DOTS:** Test Dept staff have taken over ERC's phone/email support of DOTS. A solution for providing support during the Spring 2023 period needs to be identified and put in place. 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, albeit at a slower pace than planned. The Annual Governance Meeting with Prodigy Learning is scheduled for December 12th.
- **PPADE:** Communication between ERC and NEPS has resumed following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding. There are two strands of development that NEPS would like ERC involvement in: development and standardisation of PPAD-Gaeilge, and standardisation of PPADE from Second Year through to Sixth Year. ERC has planned for the former as part of urgent Irish-language test development activities, but further discussion is needed with CPU and NEPS regarding the latter. A meeting is planned for November.
- **PIRLS:** The PIRLS 2016 contextual report is currently under review and schedule for publication in Q4 2022. Although this is a significant delay from its original planned schedule, this report can now serve as a point of reference for upcoming PIRLS 2021 reporting. Work is continuing on the initial PIRLS 2021 report. However, the release of the PIRLS 2021 international report (with which the national report will align), which was scheduled for release on December 13th, has now been postponed by IEA to Q1/Q2 2023.
- **TIMSS 2023:** This is an at-risk study as there are significant concerns over the ability of the technical support company to provide adequate support (see PISA 2022 update below). In addition, the absence of an explicit Data Sharing Agreement with ETB schools poses a significant risk in light of legislation to be implemented in December. The school samples for both grade levels (including a bridge study) have been received and schools have been

contacted. Initial contact with schools has generally been positive. Work on preparing and reviewing test and questionnaire materials in English and Irish, for both paper and online delivery, is ongoing.

- **TIMSS 2019:** Reporting on TIMSS 2019 has been significantly delayed and is largely on hold due to limited and disrupted availability of staff. One component, the item analysis report, has progressed relatively well in recent months and initial findings for Second year maths were presented at the *MathsMeet* conference in Maynooth in October 2022.
- **PISA 2022:** The testing window runs from October to November, with follow-up in December. There is ongoing communication with the laptop and Technical Support providers to ensure a reliable supply of service through the main study, but significant difficulties are recurring with the TS provider in particular, posing a risk to the project. In addition, the absence of an explicit Data Sharing Agreement with ETB schools poses a significant risk in light of legislation to be implemented in December. Latest response rate figures suggest that Ireland will struggle to meet the international targets for participation, largely due to substantial increases in the percentage of parental refusals and exclusions due to SEN in 202 compared to previous cycles.
- **DEIS:** Analysis of NAMER 2021 data focusing on DEIS schools and trends since 2014 is ongoing with a report scheduled for Q1 2023. There is ongoing communication with the DoE regarding priorities for future strands of DEIS evaluation work. However, due to knock-on effects of the loss of staff from TL (see below), it now seems likely that the DEIS programme of work for 2023 will have to be revised and scaled back – this is to be discussed further with SIU and CPU.
- **TÚSLA:** TÚSLA are currently reviewing a report that was provided by ERC on non-attendance data. From next year, this work is expected to be taken over by the DoE Statistics section.
- **TPL study:** Two TPL reports (Phase 3a and 3b) were published in September. A final (Phase 4) report is due to be published in Q2 2023. The Research Associate on TPL changed in September as a result of maternity leave. However, in October, the new Associate gave notice of their intention to resign from ERC's short-term contract to take up a longer-term position elsewhere. Because of the current stage of the project, the only viable option is for the Fellow overseeing TPL to take on more of the burden of closing out the project in early 2023, which will have knock-on effects for work on DEIS.
- **DLF evaluation:** This is an at-risk project due to lack of stable resourcing and senior oversight availability. The original target date for publication of the final report (Q4 2022) will not be met. The DoE have been notified of this and an extension to Q4 2023 proposed, subject to further negotiation with DoE. It may be possible to shorten the delay to Q2 2023 if additional capacity can be borrowed from NAMER to expedite reporting. Work is continuing to the extent possible in the meantime.
- **GSRS evaluation:** The project is high risk owing to shortage of Irish language research staff 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. Unfortunately, despite a recruitment campaign for research assistants with proficiency in Irish, only one suitable candidate was identified and they have been appointed to a permanent position on test development. This means that the expected assistant for GSRS has not materialised and alternative solutions will have to be found for GSRS through to the end of the project in 2024.
- **Test Department:** The Test Department staff are fulfilling new orders from schools since their return in September, and are exploring options for promotion of ERC tests and DOTS. Day-to-day support of DOTS has moved to Test Department 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 strategic behaviours of leaders (in agencies and/or in school settings) in September 2022. Several other papers are in various stages of review and revision, with an expectation of two more papers to be published in the current (2022) volume. Several submissions have been received for a special issue of the IJE focusing on SCoTENS research (North and South), with the deadline for submissions closing on November 7th.
- **Publications and Media:**
 - Two reports on **Phase 3 of the TPL evaluation** (reporting on consultation findings with students and TPL providers) were published on September 13th.
 - A report using data from **PISA 2012, 2015, and 2018**, examining **use of digital technology in schools** in Ireland, was published on September 29th.
 - A paper by Dr Vasiliki Pitsia, examining factors associated with **high performance in maths and science in Ireland**, was published in *Large-Scale Assessments in Education* in September.
 - A paper by Dr Sonja Nonte (former visiting researcher at ERC), Dr Aidan Clerkin and Dr Rachel Perkins, examining **science achievement and school compositional effects** in Ireland using TIMSS 2015 data, was published in the *European Journal of Educational Research* on October 15th.
 - A paper by Dr Gerry Shiel, with colleagues from DCU (PhD student supervision) and TCD, examining **teachers' perceptions of barriers to mental health promotion in schools**, was published in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* on October 27th.
- **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 request for clarification for future reference has been renewed with CPU at the most recent governance meeting.
 - The ERC was invited to tender for two pieces of research commissioned by the NCCA and the SEC in September. One of these RFTs was explored; however, it was not feasible to prepare a viable response within the timeline available. Arising from this, discussions have been held with colleagues in CARPE (DCU) about an ERC-CARPE collaboration on a paper and a 'fireside chat' series of discussions on the topic of senior cycle reform and assessment.
 - DoE contacted ERC to request any information relating to the effects of Covid on educational outcomes in Ireland.
- **PIAAC** : The PIAAC Board of Participating Countries (Governing Board) meeting took place in Paris and remotely (blended format) on October 20th-21st 2022. Aidan Clerkin attended as BPC representative for Ireland.
- **ERC-organised conferences:**
 - The AEA-Europe conference will be held in Dun Laoghaire on 9-11 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. Aidan Clerkin will provide a welcome address on behalf of the ERC.
 - Preparations continue for the IEA's 10th International Research Conference in June 2023. Submissions for the conference opened on September 14th and will run until December. Several staff members are working on submissions.
- **Visiting delegations:**

- Montserrat Tortosa Moreno, a researcher at the recently-established Education Research Unit in the Catalonia Ministry of Education, spent two days on an Erasmus+ study visit to the ERC on September 22nd and 23rd. Dr Tortosa requested the visit to learn about ERC's structures and work. She and colleagues in Barcelona provided a seminar to staff on her Unit and their work, including the Digital Education Plan of Catalonia.
- An 18-strong parliamentary delegation from Flanders, Belgium visited the ERC on October 6th. The delegation wanted to learn about Ireland's performance in PISA and TIMSS in recent years and requested a visit to ERC via the Irish Department of Education.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs have requested that ERC host a delegation (c. 7 people) from the Ministry of Education in Palestine for one week from November 28th-December 2nd. This is a capacity-building study visit which has been requested by the Palestinian Ministry as they see ERC as a centre of excellence and are interested in seeing the work of the Centre (e.g., TPL, DLF, TIMSS, PISA, DOTS, NAMER). Aidan is liaising with DFA to organise the visit. A schedule of meetings with ERC staff has been prepared for the delegation, as well as meetings with representatives from the DoE, NCCA, PDST, and CARPE (DCU). Visits to Irish universities may also be organised during one day of the visit. In addition, the delegation have been invited to give a seminar to ERC staff during their stay.

20221110 - Minutes of the Board

Final Audit Report

2022-12-21

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