

**Educational Research Centre  
MEETING OF THE BOARD  
14 February 2023**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2023

**Board Members Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

Dr Aidan Clerkin (AC), Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Damian Downes (DD), Principal Officer (PO) and Secretary, who took the minutes. Anne Comey (ACo) joined the meeting for item 11.

**Absent:** N/A

**Counsel Present:** N/A

**Call to Order**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3.30 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix 1).

**1. Minutes of meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

The minutes were approved without edits.

The Secretary to send these and the minutes of this meeting to the Chairperson who will redact them.

**2. Matters arising from previous minutes**

Sharefile is active and board members can access documents this way. If members are having trouble accessing Sharefile they can contact the Secretary who will arrange for a Teams call with PK, Head of ICT.

**3. Conflict of Interest**

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

**4. Report on developments since previous meeting**

The CEO presented his report on the developments since the last meeting.

It was noted that since the previous meeting the ERC had received several requests for support from international institutions and several research requests, including a large (c. €2.7m, seven-year duration) longitudinal study on initial teacher education and teacher professional development. Although this work would have aligned well with ERC's remit and recent expertise developed through work on the Teachers' Professional Learning framework, it was declined due to insufficient availability of research staff and insufficient availability of administrative/compliance support. The Board noted that the

need to decline this and similar requests is a major missed opportunity for the ERC and for ERC staff development, but that it was the correct decision in the current context of concerns over staff wellbeing and burnout. The Board recommended that the Department be made aware of the cost to the ERC and the wider education system of these missed opportunities.

## 5. Governance and Internal Matters

- Board appointment – the Secretary will circulate the draft board information booklet to the members for comment.
- Performance Delivery Agreement 2023 – The Board agreed that the document should be presented to the DoE on the basis that sufficient resources are made available to the ERC to deliver on the agreement and that there would be no undue delay to the availability of those resources.
- 2022 Output Statement – presented for information
- Appointment of Deputy Chairperson – The ARC recommends the appointment of Dr Sharon Feeney as ARC Deputy Chairperson. Approved by the Board.
- The date for next CPU Governance Meeting was scheduled for 24/02/23. The ERC is awaiting the minutes to be drafted by the DoE.
- Ethics return – the Secretary reminded the Board that the deadline for the submission of Annual Return to SIPO was 31<sup>st</sup> January. Anyone who had yet to make the submission was advised to do so. The Secretary advised that, from 2019, new Board members would need to complete a Revenue Tax Clearance Certificate form. This applied to the Chair of the Board (a change from being Ordinary Member) and Dr Feeney who joined the Board in 2021.
- Data sharing/open data updates (also listed in risk) - TIMSS and DOTS/PPADE proving problematic however data sharing agreement have been drafted and shared with ETBs. There is a possible solution to this matter following discussions of the legal teams on both sides.
- Pay – the next pay increase of 2% will apply from 1<sup>st</sup> March.
- Procurement updates:
  - DOTS call centre – received just 4 responses. Scoring will take place on 17/02/2023
  - Print tender – work has commenced with a view to having a new supplier by the summer.
- Disability awareness training update – The Board noted that 95% of staff have now completed the training. The training is available to members of the ARC and Board.
- Test Department building update – we are still awaiting a response from Revenue Stamp Duty section on whether the transfer will trigger a tax liability.
- Arts evaluation update – it is hoped that Whyte's auctioneers will attend the next Board meeting to advice on ideas for the collection, storage, security etc.
- Review of Statutory Instrument – it was agreed that this matter be discussed at the April meeting and the Secretary was requested to prepare a note on possible changes to the SI.
- The ERC's Financial Statements 2021 were laid before the Oireachtas on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022, and accepted by the Oireachtas library. The annual report in both English and Irish is now published on the ERC website.

## 6. Finance

*The Board discussed the following items:*

- Replacement of Accounts EO – The recruitment advertisement closes on 21<sup>st</sup> February and we expect to have a replacement in time to overlap with the outgoing EO. A reminder was sent to the DoE for sanction for a new Accountant HEO post and this will be raised again at the upcoming Governance meeting.
- Pension actuarial valuation – Once received from consultants (expected 15/02) this will be sent by email to the ARC and Board for approval as forms part of the Financial Statements.
- Statement on internal control and Governance Statement – the ARC approved this document which will be inserted in the Financial Statement 2022.
- Finance Statement 2022 – these will be sent to for distribution by email once draft is finalised. Following approval by email from the ARC and Board it will issue to the DoE and the C&AG.
- Correspondence to the C&AG – a response was received to a letter from the ARC Chairperson requesting that the audit commence earlier than 1 May as has been proposed. The letter confirms the audit will now take place in April.
- Budget from DOE for 2023 (€,000) was confirmed as follows:
  - Pay 3,576
  - N/Pay 1,851
  - Pensions 90

The pension budget is much lower than was requested. The DoE indicated that we could make up any pension shortfall from the other budget line items however two this may create issues if this is the approach going forward. The ARC therefore requested that the DoE make adequate pension budget available to the ERC to cover all lump sums and pensions in the year.

## 7. Policies

- Revised Independent Work policy - this policy was approved subject to the following changes:
  - CEO approval required and that no conflict of interest exists.
  - Where the CEO is doing independent research the Chairperson should approve.
  - Add a tick box in the Independent Work form to confirm that adherence to the Working Time Act is employee's responsibility (similar to the existing line about their tax affairs).
- Once these changes were made it was not necessary to bring the policy back to the board.
- Advertising Policy – this policy was approved.

## 8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- Audit services contract update – a presentation by the newly appointed Internal Auditor, Ciara Lynch, took place at the earlier ARC meeting.
- ARC draft 2022 report to the Board – it was noted that, as the Internal financial controls audit is not yet finalised, inclusion of the findings in the ARC report will not be possible before the Board/ARC meetings. The Report will be re-circulated to both ARC and Board once finalised.
- Risk Updates:

- TIMSS and ICT hardware issues – the contractor contacted the ERC to say, due to staffing issues, it could only provide technical support in certain parts of the country. This has placed a burden of work on ERC staff to try to find replacements in those remaining parts of the country. With the commencement date for testing fast approaching this is a high risk item.
- Data Sharing and Governance Act – as previously reported, the new Act's impact on our work has caused huge difficulties for participation by ETBs in the TIMSS study and for ETBs access to the DOTS/PPADE system. Management are working hard to resolve the issues with the ETB's and the Department of Education. The Board noted their high degree of concern and noted the rights of children to access assessments, including those such as PPADE which are designed to identify children in need of additional supports. The shared view of the Board and management is that a resolution to this issue needs to be put in place as soon as possible. Risk level: Very high.
- Staff Fatigue – at the SMT meeting in December, the high level of staff fatigue and burnout was discussed. Management are working on the Workforce Plan which may bring additional staff into the organisation however the timing of any new resources is unsure. It is essential that the report be acted on by the DoE with urgency. There is now a huge reluctance within the ERC to take on any new work until the resourcing deficit is addressed. The Board noted their high degree of concern and will consider options to address this matter. Risk level: High

## 9. Staffing & HR

- Recruitment of Research Associate with Irish – we are still awaiting approval from DoE/DPER for this post. The competition was completed in late October. It continues to be raised as a matter for urgent resolution with the DoE in phone calls and meetings.
- Two Research Assistants have left the ERC since the last meeting. Both were working on the TIMSS 2023 study, necessitating urgent redeployment of staff from other areas given the imminent commencement of the TIMSS administration in schools.
- HEO Accounts business post and EO Accounts recruitment – as noted above, the recruitment advertisement for the new EO closes on 21<sup>st</sup> February and we expect to have a replacement in time to overlap with the outgoing EO. A reminder was sent to the DoE for Accountant HEO post and this will be raised at the upcoming Governance meeting.
- WFP update – the initial draft report had just been received on the day of the board meeting and management have not yet had a chance to read it. It is hoped to provide a more detailed update to the Board at the April meeting.

## 10. AOB

It was agreed that Board meetings should continue online while Dr Feeney is out of the country.

## 11. CEO appointment

The Board were updated on progress in the appointment of the new CEO and were awaiting final signoff by DPER.

## Appendix 1

### EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting Agenda 14 February 2023

#### 1. Minutes of meeting of 13 December 2022 (BMin – 122022)

#### 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-1-23-1 – for discussion**)

#### 5. Governance and Internal Matters

##### *Shared documents:*

- ✓ Performance Delivery Agreement 2023 (**B-1-23-2 – for information**)
- ✓ 2022 Output Statement (**B-1-23-3 – for information**)

#### 6. Finance

##### *Shared documents:*

- ✓ Pension actuarial valuation (**B-1-23-4 – for approval**)
- ✓ Draft Statement on Internal Control (**B-1-23-5 – for approval**)
- ✓ Draft Governance statement (**B-1-23-6 – for approval**)
- ✓ Correspondence to the C&AG (**B-1-23-7 – for information**)

#### 7. Policies

##### *Shared documents:*

- ✓ Revised independent research policy (**B-1-23-8 – for approval**)
- ✓ Advertising policy (**B-1-23-9 – for approval**)

#### 8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

##### *Shared documents:*

- ✓ ARC draft 2022 report to the Board (**B-1-23-10 – for information**)

#### 9. Staffing & HR

##### *Shared documents:*

- ✓ Work Force Plan Report (**B-1-23-11 – for discussion**)

#### 10. AOB

#### 11. CEO appointment

Update to the Board (February 14, 2023):  
Key developments since the previous meeting of November 10, 2022

Corporate projects/issues:

- Regarding the **lease agreement with DCU**, communication was re-established between ERC's solicitor and DCU's representatives in January after a period of no contact.
- A meeting between Mazars and the SMT was held in January to gather SMT's views in certain aspects of the **review of ERC workforce** (e.g., the possibility of establishing a 'logistics division' of administrative staff to assist in project fieldwork). Mazars and CPU are also scheduled to meet for the final external interview prior to finalising the report draft.
- **Library access:** No progress has been made on this since November due to other demands.
- With regard to **ownership of the Test Department building**, we are currently in discussions with Revenue to clarify any potential tax liabilities arising from the transfer and are seeking clarification from DCC regarding the ownership of the parking area at the front.

Research projects:

- **NAMER:** A complete first draft of the NAMER 2021 report was sent to DoE for review in December. Publication is planned for Q1 2023, with contextual reporting planned to commence soon afterwards. Follow-up reporting on NAMER in 2023 may be slowed by movement of staff to other projects (e.g., appointment of PISA 2025 NPM; involvement of NAMER Fellow in DLF reporting). Planning of options for the next round of NAMER should begin later in 2023.
- **PIRLS:** The PIRLS 2016 contextual report was published in December 2022. Work is continuing on the initial PIRLS 2021 report, for release alongside the PIRLS 2021 international report in May 2023. The 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the PIRLS 2026 cycle takes place in February 2023, requiring the appointment of a new NRC (project manager).
- **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. We are in regular communication with the provider to monitor updates and have already put in place contingency providers for some regions of the country. In addition, the absence of a Data Sharing Agreement with ETB schools poses a significant risk to their participation in the study. Preparations continue, although the lack of clarity around the participating sample is causing difficulties with planning.
- **TIMSS 2019:** Reporting on TIMSS 2019 has been significantly delayed and is currently on hold due to limited and disrupted availability of staff.
- **PISA:** The PISA 2022 main study data collection was completed with the submission of Ireland's data on January 27<sup>th</sup>, meeting the deadline agreed with OECD. Final participation rates were lower than expected and this may require some follow-on analysis as part of a data adjudication process with OECD, which is likely to add to the PISA team's workload to a significant degree. A PISA 2025 NPM (project manager) has been appointed and preparations for that cycle are underway.

- **DEIS:** A complete first draft of the DEIS report focusing on NAMER 2021 data was sent to DoE for review in December and should be published in Q1 2023. Work is ongoing on the survey of principals of ‘new’ DEIS schools.
- **TPL study:** The final (Phase 4) report on the TPL study has been sent to the steering committee for review in January and is due to be published in Q1 2023.
- **DLF evaluation:** This is an at-risk project due to lack of stable resourcing and senior oversight availability. Work is continuing on the final report with a view to finalising by end Q2 2023, although this requires borrowing capacity from NAMER.
- **GSRS evaluation:** The project is high risk owing to shortage of Irish language research staff available. Current work is focused on the analysis of survey data. A program of work for 2023 and 2024 has been agreed with the DOE. We are investigating the possibility of bringing a post-doctoral researcher with fluency in Irish on board for the final 1.5 years of the project.
- **Test Department:** The Test Department staff are fulfilling orders from schools and are exploring options for promotion of ERC tests and DOTS. The work of the Test Dept has been significantly affected by the current situation with ETB data sharing.
- **DOTS:** Procurement of a ‘call centre’ to assist with DOTS support in Spring 2023 is progressing. Development work is continuing on some enhancements, including integration of the scoring tool for primary tests which will be ready to go live in February 2023. The Annual Governance Meeting with Prodigy Learning took place on December 12<sup>th</sup>. Discussions with Prodigy over ongoing pricing for new functionality remain to be resolved. Access to DOTS has been restricted for ETB schools due to the current situation with ETB data sharing, causing regrettable and significant disruption for schools.
- **PPADE:** 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 with CPU and NEPS was planned for December but was postponed due to illness. Access to the PPADE tool has been restricted for ETB schools due to the current situation with ETB data sharing, causing regrettable and significant disruption for schools.
- The **Irish Journal of Education** (IJE) published two papers in December 2022: *Dealing with and Reporting Child Protection Concerns: A Snapshot of Irish Primary Schools* and *Bouncing Back Post COVID-19: Responding to Needs Arising From the Closure of Educational Settings Within the Irish Primary and Early Years’ Education Sector*. This brought the total number of papers published in 2022 to five, with approximately 3-4 times that number reviewed and rejected or in the process of revision. Eleven further submissions were received for a special issue of the IJE focusing on SCoTENS research (North and South). Review of submissions for the SCoTENS special issue and a ‘normal’ issue in 2023 are ongoing.
- **Publications and Media:**
  - A contextual report using **PIRLS 2016** data was published in December 2022.
  - A paper on *Boys’ underachievement in mathematics and science in Saudi Arabia* was published by an international team, including ERC’s Aidan Clerkin and Vasiliki Pitsia, in *Large-Scale Assessments in Education* in December 2022.

- **Research request tracker:**
  - Request received January 24<sup>th</sup> from Indecon (social and economic consultancy firm) to partner on a €2.3m RFT issued by DoE and Teaching Council for a seven-year longitudinal study of initial teacher education and teachers' experiences, running to 2030.
  - Request received January 25<sup>th</sup> from OECD for ERC to act as a peer learning partner for the Kenyan national centre, to support Kenyan colleagues in their first implementation of PISA. The Kenyan centre requested ERC's assistance. Colleagues working on PISA in ERC are supportive of the request.
  - Request received January 30<sup>th</sup> from the Saudi Arabian ambassador in Dublin to meet with ERC to discuss possible collaboration between ERC and the Saudi Education and Training Evaluation Commission.
  - Request received February 1<sup>st</sup> from Palestinian Ministry of Education (following delegation's visit in Q4 2022) for ongoing ERC support in an advisory capacity with a new longitudinal National Assessment study. More details on the proposed support and associated work demands have been requested.
  - 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. It is unlikely at this point that ERC will be able to be involved in the studies in a useful manner, but clarification on this point would still be useful for future reference in similar circumstances. Awaiting clarification from CPU.
- **PIAAC** : Aidan Clerkin attended a national update meeting as BPC representative for Ireland.
- **ERC-organised conferences:**
  - Preparations continue for the IEA's 10<sup>th</sup> International Research Conference in June 2023. Several staff members are contributing to reviews of submissions.

# BM 022023 - Final

Final Audit Report

2023-10-11

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