Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
3.30pm, 7th May 2024
Online

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was online 7th February 2024.

Board Members Present:
Mr. Edward Murtagh (EM), Chairperson, Prof. Michael Martin (MM), Dr. Eilish Broderick (EB) and Paula Fyans (PF).

In Attendance:
John Regan (JR), Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Damian Downes (DD), Principal Officer (PO) and Secretary, who took the minutes.

Absent: Dr. Sharon Feeney (SF), Deputy Chairperson,

Others Present: N/A

Call to Order
The Chair called the meeting to order at 3.30 pm. Board members were reminded of the need for confidentiality of board matters.

The agenda was adopted (Appendix 1).

1. **Minutes of meeting of 22nd February 2024**
   The minutes as circulated were approved. No redactions required.

2. **Conflict of Interest**
   There were no conflicts of interest declared either before or during the course of the meeting.

3. **Matters arising from previous minutes**
   There were no matters arising.

4. **Report on developments since previous meeting**
   The CEO Report was circulated in advance of the meeting. The Board's attention was drawn to the following:
   - Strategy Day at the Department of Education on 17th June. Board members are invited to attend along with senior ERC staff and DoE colleagues.
   - Early indications suggest that Test Sales had a positive year. With DoE funding to schools now increased, the ERC is in a position to raise the prices of its paper tests as had previously been discussed with the DoE. The Department confirmed it is a matter for the ERC.
   - The DoE are keen for Irish tests to be developed. This is a resourcing issue which has been addressed in the Workforce Plan. The additional resources sought under the workforce plan won't address all of the backlog, but will support development of the TGD-r or TGD-G.

5. **Governance and Internal Matters**
   - **Board Recruitment** – CPU has confirmed the last person on the panel has been contacted and is still interested in joining the board.
   - **Test Department** – the internal audit of the Test Department will commence in June and will include a review of the suitability of the current premises on Richmond Road. If, as seems likely, the building is deemed not fit for purpose we will consider relocating before the end of the year and before the next busy phase. The Department of Education advised that schools have received additional resources to cover the purchase of tests. The ERC had informed CPU of its intention to raise its prices in line with inflation and will now proceed to do this.
   - **DCU Lease/Building Plans** - ERC management met with DCU on 30th April. The 10-year lease was agreed and their solicitors will be instructed to move this forward. For matters related to the upgrading of the building, we have been provided with a contact in the DCU Building's Office who will act as liaison on the project. DCU intends to address its climate action targets using a district heating system which will feed clean electricity into our building. This will be part of DCU's SEAI return. The ERC will remain responsible for the reporting of its gas consumption. Surveyors were on site late April to complete a full building survey.
   - **Sale of Art Collection** – the total of the two auctions in March raised €193,376.47 after commission, entry fees and insurance. We are awaiting confirmation from our solicitors on any tax implications.
   - **Wellbeing** – there was a wellbeing day on 26th April with nutrition and health and wellbeing seminars.
   - **Strategic Plan** – The second consultation day with staff took place on 26th April.
   - **Irish Language Scheme** – this is in draft form and will be issued at the next meeting.
   - **Irish Language and Test Development** – Future workstreams document was circulated for discussion. Next steps depend on approval of the RA Consulting workplan and revised pricing for paper based tests.
   - **Climate Action** – a climate action roadmap will be issued at the next Board meeting.

6. **Finance**
   The Board discussed the following items:
   - **C&AG Audit 2023**– the field work has been completed and, so far, no major items of concerns have been identified. The closing meeting has been scheduled for the week of 20th May with a view to having the Financial Statements signed off before the 30th June deadline.
   - **Income and Expenditure Report 2023** – this document, the basis of the financial statements, was circulated for information.
   - **Quarterly Accounts Report Q1 2024** – this document was circulated for information.

7. **Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)**
   - **ARC minutes December 2023** – circulated for information.
   - **Board and ARC effectiveness Review** – meeting with Internal Audit scheduled for 9th May to discuss findings.

- **Early Warning Report Q1 2024** – circulated for information.
- **Risks** – the recruitment of research staff with fluency in Irish is emerging as a key risk for the ERC. Management are due to meet research staff with fluent Irish to discuss how we might overcome this challenge. Management are due to have two one day sessions on developing a comprehensive corporate risk register over the coming week.

8. **Policies**
   - **Domestic Violence Leave Policy** – approved. Management confirmed that the ERC has an Employee Assistance Programme in place.
   - **Board & ARC Terms of Reference** – both documents are due to be updated following on from the findings of the recent internal audit on the Code of Practice. It is hoped both will be presented at the June meeting.

9. **Staffing & HR**
   - **Workforce Plan** – the document is with the Department for review. We can expect a formal response in the coming weeks.
   - **Recruitment Update** -
     - 4 Assistants started in April, 1 due on May 13th, 1 one at end June. Also 1 SPC with Irish Language appointed for GSRS (start date TBC)
     - HEO (Procurement) recruitment finalised, start date mid-June
     - 1 Data Manager appointed from the Research Associate panel. A new process is underway to recruit for the second DM post. We expect to make an appointment at the end of May.
     - The Research Associate panel has expired, and we are starting a new process brought about by the recent appointment of a Fellow who had been an Associate.
     - PO Head of Research – we are reviewing the job description and hope to readvertise this post over the summer.
   - **Annual Leave Policy** – Management discussed the policy with CPU and received a letter from the Department noting the new policy. Closure days apply to all research staff in the ERC, including the Head of Research. The policy as circulated was approved by the Board.
   - **Gaelchultur Irish Language Training** – this is continuing with most staff who started out in September last opting to continue with the training. We have issued a survey to participants to assess how effective the training is and will review the responses and our future commitment in the coming weeks.
   - **Remote Working Policy** – this policy is due for review before the end of the summer. This will come to the Board at its September meeting.

10. **AOB**

The CEO and PO/Secretary left the meeting to allow the Board to discuss the plan for the development of the five year strategy.

11. **Strategy Formation – Board members only**

The note of the meeting is attached in appendix 2

Edward Murtagh (Dec 20, 2024 22:52 GMT)

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting Agenda
3.30pm, 7 May 2024
ONLINE

1. **Minutes of meeting of 15 February 2024 (BMin – 022024)**

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-2-24-1**– for discussion)*

5. **Governance and Internal Matters**
   Shared documents:
   - Irish Language and Test Development – Future Workstreams (***B-2-24-2*** *– for discussion)*

6. **Finance**
   Shared documents:
   - *2023 Income and Expenditure Report – Q4 (**B-2-24-3** - for information)*
   - *Quarterly Accounts Report 2024 – Q1 – Income and Expenditure (**B-2-24-4** –* for information)

7. **Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)**
   Shared documents:
   - ARC Minutes December Meeting (***B-2-24-5*** *– for information*)
   - Early Warning Report Q1 2024 (***B-2-24-6 –*** *for information*)

8. **Policies**
   Shared documents:
   - *Domestic Violence Leave Policy (**B-2-24-7** – for approval)*

9. **Staffing & HR**

10. **AOB**

11. **Strategy Formation – Board members only**

Shared documents:
- *Strategy Formation (**B-2-24-8** – for discussion)*

<u>Appendix 2</u>

ERC Board Draft Strategy 2025-2030

As set out in SI No. 392 of 2015, the purpose of the ERC is to
a) Provide <u>an assessment support service to schools and centres for education</u> that will enable them to fulfil their obligations under Section 9 of the Education Act 1988 and
b) <u>Conduct independent research on all aspects of education</u> and at all levels of the education system, including educational research, <u>that will inform policy making and the improvement of educational standards</u>.

With an overall vision to benefit and optimise the educational system, the strategic priorities of the ERC for 2025-2030 are:
1. To measure standards of attainment of students in numeracy and literacy in Irish schools at primary and secondary level;
2. To benchmark standards of numeracy and literacy among Irish students at primary and secondary level internationally;
3. To monitor numeracy and literacy attainment of individual students (in primary and secondary schools) over time and communicate the results clearly to teachers and parents in a way that facilitates timely intervention supports as needed;
4. To identify, prioritise and facilitate meaningful research that informs policy within the Dept of Education and other relevant education bodies, in order to inform policies that improve educational standards at primary and secondary level.

This strategy shall be executed in line with the following contexts:

Stakeholders
The ERC aims to meet the needs of the following key stakeholders by delivering timely, relevant assessments and research, communicated clearly in a way that informs and facilitates action to improve the education of children. The ERC therefore will actively engage with these stakeholders to understand their evolving educational needs and challenges and aim to respond to them:
- Schools and other centres for education, in particular teachers and all involved in implementing the curriculum
- Students and parents
- All those involved in creating and shaping educational policy at primary and secondary school level in Ireland

Research context
In order to deliver high-quality impactful results and to communicate these results clearly and on schedule to all relevant stakeholders, it is essential that

- Decisions about research focus are made in line with an agreed set of priority research needs, consistent with the ERC's core purposes, and designed to respond to the evolving external educational, social and technological environment
- Given the enormous potential of the data gathered by the ERC annually and the finite nature of its research capacity, the ERC collaborate with national and international external research partners to pursue research goals in line with the ERC's priority objectives.
- Research conducted by the ERC, or in collaboration with national and international partners, is robust, independent, high-calibre, and communicated effectively in line with the nature and needs of its stakeholders (academics, Govt. policy makers or lay individuals). ERC staff will continue to maintain the highest standards of research quality, professional ethics and integrity.
- All research projects are managed by accountable teams that are properly resourced with the necessary skillsets, based on achievable workloads which are optimally co-ordinated and executed. To this end, it is vital that the ERC offers a supportive environment of ongoing learning where skills can be developed on an ongoing basis.
- The ERC provides a positive environment where researchers have the autonomy to explore topics consistent with the ERC's priorities, while engaging in diverse methodologies and approaches. It also actively encourages and facilitates its research staff to stay up to date with global developments in the field of educational research.

Environmental and regulatory context
The ERC recognises its obligation to operate in compliance with all of the following guidelines and rules, and seek to optimise its performance annually:
- Climate action and sustainability
- Data protection
- Child safeguarding
- Governance

Evolving technological context
The ERC is mindful of, and at the forefront of, technological changes relevant to how it carries out its assessments and research, as well as how technology continually changes how children receive information in school and from the world outside, and impacts their learning/knowledge.

One key aspect in which the ERC will advance its engagement in technology over this period is in continuing to make the transition from paper-based testing to online testing across all schools in Ireland. This will require a strong communications campaign and significant initial support, combined with a financial incentive to schools to make the switch but will result in an improved offering to schools in terms of time, cost and efficiency, as well as more transparent and actionable results for the Dept at a national level.

BM 070524 - FINAL

Final Audit Report

2024-12-20

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