

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

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

Board Members Present:

Mr. Edward Murtagh (EM), Chairperson; 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) and Secretary, who took the minutes. Mr. Pat McInerney from Holmes Solicitors joined the meeting online for the discussion on the review of the Statutory Instrument and the pros and cons of charitable status.

A Comey (ACo) joined the meeting for item 11.

Absent: Dr. Denise Burns (DB)

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 10 November 2022 (BMin – 112022)

The minutes as presented in the board pack were approved without amendment.

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

At the November meeting it was suggested that the C&AG may have a guidance note on the use of credit cards. The C&AG Audit Manager confirmed that no such guidance existed.

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

Update document circulated by CEO (**B-6-22-1**) – the CEO presented his report on the developments since the last meeting.

5. Governance and Internal Matters

- The minutes of the CPU Governance meeting on 29th September (**B-6-22-2**) were circulated and noted. The minutes from November meeting were not yet finalised by CPU.

Note: The CEO requested the following changes to be made to the September Minutes:

ERC requested clarity from CPU on the status of payment and pensions in cases where ERC is asked to take on work by other departments. Ongoing ambiguity on this point proved an obstacle to ERC's potential involvement in two international studies sponsored by DCEDIY and DFHERIS. CPU to investigate and confirm.

- Databank (Single Pension Scheme Return) completed. This was submitted slightly late (one week) after the deadline.
- Ethics in Public Office Declarations (SIPO) – The Secretary advised that the annual Ethics in Public Office Declarations for the calendar year 2022 are to be completed by the end of January 2023.
- Test pricing review – the review is ongoing. A meeting with Mazars on 1st December has given management better clarity on how to progress this matter. The aim is still to have this review completed in time for the annual budget submission.
- Building Momentum Pay Review – under the agreement an increase was due in October 2022. The ERC was not in a position to make the payroll changes in time and communicated with staff that this would take place in the November payroll. That payment was duly made.
- IEA Conference Budget – The quote we received for audio-visual equipment required for the conference is more expensive than anticipated coming in at €22,500 (incl VAT). This is approximately €8,000 more than we had in the budget and could lead to a potential overspend. It was noted that this quote is, nonetheless, less than the fees charged to another similar conference that was recently held in the same venue and that other quotes had been sought but had come in at significantly higher rates. There is a contingency in place and a possibility that we may not have as many delegates as first thought which could lead to savings. Management have given a commitment to continue to monitor the budget and work towards finding costs savings where possible.
- Data sharing/open data updates (also in risk) – the Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019 (DSGA) imposes an obligation on a public body sharing data with another public body to have a Data Sharing Agreement in place before personal data can be shared between the two. For TIMSS 2023, the ERC will require a DSA with the ETB's. There are 16 different ETB's representing approximately 50 schools in the TIMSS samples, mostly at post-primary level, and an agreement will need to be in place for them all. Without an agreement, there is a risk that we will not be able to include any data relating to ETB schools, which would entail the loss of roughly one third of the study sample. ERC management will continue to work with the Department, ETBI and the individual ETB's to find a satisfactory resolution to this matter. A DSA between the ERC and the ETB's is also necessary for those schools to access DOTS and PPADE online tools. Note, the PISA data gathering was completed before the DSGA deadline so there are no such concerns for this study.
- Disability awareness training update – as at the close of business on 12th December 28% of staff had completed the training. The deadline for completion is mid-January and a reminder email will go out in early January.
- Test Dept. building update (**B-6-22-3**) – the update document was noted.

- Art Collection – It is expected that Whyte’s Auctioneers will carry out the revaluation of the art collection before the year end. These works are securely stored and insured against all risks. Works valued at €20,000+ are stored in Whyte’s Molesworth Street premises; works of less value are stored in Nesta, Deansgrange. The additional works on display at the ERC building will be valued early in the new year.
- Charitable Status (**B-6-22-3**) – Pat McInerney set out the pros and cons of the ERC seeking charitable status as presented in the circulated document. Once operating as a charity it would be difficult to remove ourselves from the register of charities so any such move should be considered a long-term one. There are significant additional layers of governance and compliance required of charities and, given that resources are already stretched at the ERC, this additional workload would be problematic. The board unanimously agreed that a move to charitable status was not something that would benefit the ERC.
- Review of Statutory Instrument (**B-6-22-4**) – the Board noted the paper as prepared by the Secretary. It was agreed that following a further discussion on the matter at the next board meeting, an approach would be made by the Board to the DoE to consider changes to the SI.
- Library updates – the CEO informed the Board that a potential alternative supplier of library services had been identified in the form of a procurement framework based out of UL. However, further investigation was needed to determine how (or if) this differed from the service provided by IReL.
- CEO appraisal by Chair- confirmed as done – included in CEO’s report to the Board.

6. Finance

The Board discussed the following items:

- Approval of Management Letter by ARC/Board (**B-6-22-5**) – approved.
- Appointment of Accountants for Financial Statements 2022 and appointment of Pension actuarial valuers – approved at the earlier ARC meeting.
- Budget 2022 update & Income and expenditure reports (**B-6-22-6**) – approved.
- A memo making the case for a new HEO post in the Finance Department is almost complete and will be sent to CPU in the coming days.
- Financial Statements 2021 and 2022 updates –
 - ✓ Dates for the commencement of the 2022 audit to be agreed with C&AG. Note: The C&AG has been notified of need for an earlier audit process in 2023 due to the retirement of the accounts assistant Ms Imelda Pluck at the 30th April.
 - ✓ The signed 2021 Financial Statements with the Irish translation were sent to CPU for filing.

7. Policies

- Revised Independent Work policy (**B-6-22-7**) – SF made some recommendations and emailed same to the Secretary following the meeting. These to be taken into consideration and the policy re-presented to the board for approval.
- Updated accounting policy (**B-5-22-8**) – approved.

8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- Internal Audit tender update – the process for the appointment of a new internal audit is almost complete. The Secretary will discuss the appointment in the coming days with the Chairperson.
- IT Audit update – the IT audit is underway but was delayed due to the IT Manager's availability, which was limited due to his necessary support for the PISA 2022 main study.
- Financial Internal Control Audit – this audit is due to commence before the year end.
- Risk Register update:
 - Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019 – discussed in detail under Governance and Internal Matters, above
 - TIMSS 2023 – discussed concerns regarding the capacity of the technical support contractor to provide the level of support for the study throughout the country. Meeting planned with the contractor for early in the new year to determine what is achievable and whether or not we need to bring in additional contractor support.

9. Staffing & HR

- Recruitment of Irish speakers – an offer was made to the preferred candidate from the Research Assistant panel following a recruitment process but, given the circumstances of the appointment, DPER sanction is required. We are currently awaiting that feedback. There is a risk that if approval is not granted soon that we will lose the candidate, which would have serious negative repercussions for the planned suite of test development work.
- Blended Working Policy update – training for staff took place on 21 November.
- Workforce Plan (B-6-22-9) – a brief update on progress was circulated.

10. AOB

- Dates for 2023 meetings
Suggested for board dates for 2023 (subject to approval by the Chairman) are as follows:
 - ✓ February 14 (and ARC)
 - ✓ April 4
 - ✓ June 6 (and ARC)
 - ✓ September 12 (and ARC)
 - ✓ October 24
 - ✓ December 12 (and ARC)
- Internal financial controls audit responses to be agreed verbally by email during January for inclusion in the Statement on internal Controls for the FS 2023.

AC and DD left the meeting at this point– ACo joined the meeting

11. CEO appointment

EM provided the members with an update on the recruitment process.


Edward Murtagh (Oct 11, 2023 12:58 GMT+1)

**EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting Agenda
13 December 2022**

- 1. Minutes of meeting of 10 November 2022 (BMin – 112022)**
- 2. Conflict of Interest**
- 3. Matters arising from previous minutes**
- 4. Report on developments since previous meeting**
Shared documents:
 - ✓ Update document circulated by CEO (**B6-22-1 – for discussion**)
- 5. Governance and Internal Matters**
Shared documents:
 - ✓ CPU Minutes (**B-6-22-2 – for information**)
 - ✓ Notes from HOMs Re Charity Status (**B-6-22-3 - for discussion**)
 - ✓ Notes to the Board on changes to SI (**B-6-22-4 – for discussion**)
- 6. Finance**
Shared documents:
 - ✓ Management letter responses from ERC (**B-6-22-5 – for information**)
 - ✓ I&E Expenditure Q3 2022 (**B-6-22-6 – for discussion**)
- 7. Policies**
Shared documents:
 - ✓ Revised Independent Work policy (**B-6-22-7– for approval**)
 - ✓ Accounting policy (**B-6-22-8 – for approval**)
- 8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)**
- 9. Staffing & HR**
 - ✓ Work Force Planning update (**B-6-22-9 – for information**)
- 10. AOB**
- 11. CEO appointment**




BM 1222022 - Final

Final Audit Report

2023-10-11

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