

**Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
22 February 2024**

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held in-person at the St Patrick's Campus on 22nd February 2024 with some members dialling in.

Board Members Present:

Mr. Edward Murtagh (EM), Chairperson, Dr. Sharon Feeney (SF), Deputy 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: N/A

Others 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 12 December 2023 (BMin – 122023)

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

- **CEO Update** – circulated with Board papers. The following items were discussed in more detail.
 - **Strategy** – the CEO gave an update on plans/timeline for the new strategy.
 - **Management Board** – the CEO set out his plans to replace the existing Senior Management Team and, on the basis of clarifications provided and the renaming of the group to Management Team, the proposal was approved.
 - **Research Oversight Group** – the CEO set out his plans to create a new Research Oversight Group consisting of the Fellows, the Head of Research and the CEO, similar to those of other public bodies in the research space. The proposal was discussed and approved by the Board.

- **New Posts** – the CEO provided details of the 12 new posts (including the previously approved PO Head of Research) approved by the Department in December/January. All but one of these posts were in research.

5. Governance and Internal Matters

- **Board Recruitment** – The Board Chair announced that he has informed the Department that he will step down from the Board at the end of 2024 but is willing to stay on into Quarter 1 2025 if necessary. The Chair and CEO will discuss the matter with the Assistant Secretary. MM will complete his second term as board member in July 2024 and his retirement will create a vacancy. There is one candidate still on the panel from the 2023 campaign and DD has contacted CPU to see if that person is still available. He also noted that he has brought to CPU's attention that should this individual be appointed, the gender balance on the board would be 1 male to 4 females. It was agreed that, despite the imbalance, it would be preferable to proceed on this basis and maintain the full board membership at five persons.

The ARC is proposing that its meetings be held two weeks before the Board meeting. The principal benefit to this approach is for matters dealt with at ARC can be reported on to the Board by way of a report without the need to revisit each item in depth at the Board meeting. This will free the Board up to focus on other matters. Note, up to now, all three members of the Board were also members of the ARC but, with the full complement of five board members, there are currently two members who are not on the ARC. DD will discuss membership of the ARC with its Chair with Mick's and Eddie's upcoming retirements.

- **Board Self-Assessment** – the 2016 Code of Practice requires Board members to complete a self-assessment document. The template was circulated to members for completion with the February board papers.
- **Procurement** – following a procurement process for the recruitment for an Architect and PR Consultant Services, the Board approved ODKM Architects and Murray PR. Later in the year we will go out to the market for legal and internal audit services.
- **DCU Lease/Building Plans** - two letters, one from the CEO to the DCU President and one from the ERC Chair to the DCU Governing Authority Chair, were sent on 31st January stressing the urgent need for a lease to be signed. The letter from the CEO has been acknowledged but no further progress has been made. It was noted that with the growing staff numbers and the appointment of the architect, the lease will need to be signed off before any works can commence. Management will continue to work with DCU to resolve the matter.
- **Sale of Art Collection** – Whyte's Auctioneers will auction the collection in two lots on 11th March (higher valued works) and 25th March (lower value items). The ARC approved the opening of a new ringfenced bank account to be used exclusively for the scholarship (to be agreed by the Board at the May meeting).
- **Wellbeing** – there is no update on this item. Management hope to resume work with the consultant in March.
- **Test Sale Pricing** – there has been no communication from the Department on our request for an increase in test sale prices and we can only assume that this will not be applied in 2024.

- **Strategy 2025** – we will commence with a staff consultation session on 1st March. The Board would like to dedicate an hour to this at its May meeting.
- **Workforce Plan** – management are continuing to work with RA Consulting on the workforce plan. There is a lot of work involved in Business Cases for each post but it is progressing well and we are still aiming to have the report completed by the end of April. It was agreed that the Board Chairperson would meet the consultant and that the draft report will be circulated to the Board for feedback.
- **Protected Disclosure Report 2023** – this was circulated and noted by the Board that there were no protected disclosures during 2023.

6. Finance

- **Actuarial Pension Report** – the report was circulated and its findings will be included in the Financial Statements.
- **Draft Financial Statements** – the document, including the Governance Statement and Statement of Internal Control, was circulated to the Board and approved by the ARC at its earlier meeting. Board and ARC members who spotted typing errors in the document agreed to share them with the Secretary. The Report to the Minister will be circulated following the result of the C&AG audit.
- **C&AG 2023 Audit** – the auditors have confirmed that field work will commence on 8th April. The letter of engagement has been received.
- **Budget 2024**: the budget figures allocated to the ERC for 2024 have been confirmed by the Department as follows: pay €4,085,000, non-pay €1,421,000 and pension €157,000.

7. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- **ARC Minutes** – minutes of the October 2023 meeting were circulated for information.
- **DOTS Audit** – at the earlier ARC meeting, the Internal Auditor outlined the background behind the audit and set out the findings. The results of the penetration testing were broadly positive. The report, as circulated, was approved by the ARC.
- **Board and ARC Effectiveness Review** – this work was delayed due to the focus on the DOTS Audit and will resume shortly. The Internal Auditor will contact the Chair of the Board and the Chair of ARC in early March to arrange follow up meetings to discuss the results of the questionnaires issued. It was agreed by the ARC that there is no requirement to conduct meetings with the other members of the Board and ARC.
- **ARC Annual Report to the Board** – Subject to one update to the draft report in relation to bank reconciliations, the report was approved by the Committee.
- **Data Protection Report** – circulated to the Board for information and noted.
- **Risk Appetite** – the ARC approved the Risk Appetite document at the December meeting subject to it working from a scale of 1 to 5 and not the 1 to 10 previously used. This was brought to the Board for information.
- **Risk Management** – DD updated the Committee on the three important risks which have previously been discussed
 - Resourcing and the impact of staff morale/stress

- The urgent need to sign the lease with DCU in the context of the growth in staffing numbers and the employment of the architect and
- Issues on compliance with the Official Languages Acts and the difficulties in hiring and retaining suitably qualified staff with Irish.

8. Policies

The Board requested that policies circulated for approval should not include related procedures which are a matter for the executive.

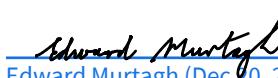
- **Travel and Subsistence Policy** – noted and approved by the Board
- **Recruitment and Selection Policy** – noted and approved by the Board
- **Management Board Terms of Reference** – it was agreed to rename the group as the Management Team and this was approved by the Board. An Organisation Structure should be sent to the Board at its May meeting. The Management Team will replace the SMT once the post of Head of Research is filled.
- **Research Oversight Group Terms of Reference** – the Board expressed a view that externals be brought into this group, and approved the proposal on this basis. The ROG will commence its work once the post of Head of Research is filled.
- **Annual Leave Policy** – the Board asked the CEO to write to the Department to clarify that our understanding of the 2015 transition agreement is correct.
- **Board and ARC Terms of Reference** – following on from the Internal Audit gap analysis carried out last year, the revised documents will be circulated for approval at the next meeting.

9. Staffing & HR

- **Workforce Plan** – this was dealt with under item 5
- **Post Approvals** – the Department sanctioned the PO Research (job description – the post had been previously approved), 1 x Fellow, 2 x Data Managers, 2 x Research Associates, 4 x Research Assistants and 1 x HEO (procurement). We are still awaiting a decision on our request for 2 x EO's (Governance and Communications).
- **Recruitment** – we are currently recruiting for 1 x Research Assistant, 1 x Research Assistant with Irish, 1 x Research Associate with Irish, 1 x Fellow, 1 x PO Research, 1 x HEO procurement and 2 x Data Managers. A panel is in place for Research Associates which we are working through.

10. AOB

- **Interim CEO** – Letter of thanks to the interim CEO was approved by the Board


Edward Murtagh (Dec 20, 2024 22:56 GMT)

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
Board Meeting Agenda
3.30pm, 22 February 2024

1. Minutes of meeting of 12 December 2023 (BMin – 122023)

2. Conflict of Interest

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Shared documents:

- ✓ Letter to Interim CEO (**ACL022024**)

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

Shared documents:

- ✓ *Update document circulated by CEO (B-1-24-1 – for discussion)*

5. Governance and Internal Matters

Shared documents:

- ✓ *Board Self Assessment (B-1-24-2 – for completion and return)*
- ✓ *TK Memorial (B-1-24-3 – for discussion)*
- ✓ *Strategy 2024 (B-1-24-4 – for information)*
- ✓ *Protected Disclosure Report 2023 (B-1-24-5 –for information)*

6. Finance

- ✓ *Actuarial pension report (B 1-24-6 - for approval)*
- ✓ *Draft Financial statement (B 1-24-7 - for approval)*

7. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

Shared documents:

- ✓ *ARC Minutes October Meeting (B-1-24-8 – for information)*
- ✓ *ARC Report 2023 (B-1-24-9 – for information)*
- ✓ *Data Protection report (B-1-24-10 – for information)*

8. Policies

- ✓ *Travel and Subsistence Policy (B-1-24-11 – for approval)*
- ✓ *Recruitment and Selection policy (B-1-24-12 – for approval)*
- ✓ *Senior Management Team ToR (B-1-24-13 – for approval)*
- ✓ *Research Oversight Group ToR (B-1-24-14 – for approval)*
- ✓ *Annual Leave Policy (B-1-24-15 – for approval)*

9. Staffing & HR

10. AOB

BM 220224 -Minutes

Final Audit Report

2024-12-20

Created:	2024-12-20
By:	Anne Comey (anne.comey@erc.ie)
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