

Educational Research Centre
MEETING OF THE BOARD
23 JUNE 2023

A meeting of the Board of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) was held online on 23rd June 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), Assistant Principal 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 pm.

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix 1).

1. Minutes of meeting of 4 April 2023 (BMin – 042023)

The minutes as circulated were approved.

2. Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest declared. Although the interim CEO and PO are no longer conflicted in the CEO recruitment campaign it was agreed that the board would continue to run the process with ACo.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

DD informed the meeting that he had a conversation with the Head of ICT of another public body about a board management system called Admin Control. This person also had experience of another system called Decision Time and reported that both systems are very similar but the former was a marginally cheaper product. DD will look into both as a possible solution to the management of board papers.

4. Report on developments since previous meeting

The CEO presented his report on the developments since the last meeting and highlighted:

- The successful launch of the NAMER 2021, NAMER-DEIS, and PIRLS 2021 reports at the National Gallery, attended by the Minister for Education. The Board offered its congratulations to the staff who worked hard on these reports and noted the quality and clarity of both the reports and the presentations at the launch event. AC noted that the findings of all three reports received good media coverage in the days following the launch.

- The main study data collection for TIMSS 2023 concluded successfully with 100% participation from schools at both primary and post-primary levels, despite the challenges previously noted regarding data sharing and provision of laptops/technical support.
- The PISA 2022 Non-Response Bias Analysis report was completed and submitted to the OECD. Draft data for Ireland are due to be received in July.
- The final (Phase 4) report on the Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) evaluation framework was published and received widespread engagement on Twitter.
- Final plans are now in place for the IEA conference, which takes place next week at the end of June. At present, it looks likely that the conference will come in within the budget agreed with the Board last year.
- A number of recent issues on the DOTS platform were noted.
- Staffing on the Gaeltacht Schools Recognition Scheme was flagged as a major risk, with the imminent loss of the only full-time staff member currently working on the project and recurring difficulties recruiting staff with research experience and proficiency in Irish.
- A delegation of nine researchers and school leaders from Singapore visited the ERC to discuss research on Transition Year.

5. Governance and Internal Matters

- Arts bequest and valuation update – On the eve of the meeting, Whyte's submitted their report on the art collection in the Centre, valuing it at between [REDACTED]. Management have previously discussed this collection with DCU who say they have no claim over it in principle. Management will ask DCU to formally agree that the collection rightfully belongs to the ERC. It was agreed that labels should be made and placed beside each painting identifying the artist and its title and year. The collection will need to be added to the fixed asset register. With regard to the Kellaghan collection, it is likely that it will be put up for auction in October or November. Two more quotes will be required before the sale can be progressed.
- Board appointments/recruitment update – the Department confirmed the appointments will be advertised next week. A last minute request was made by the PAS to add the following line in the desirable criteria section, which the Secretary agreed to: *Leadership in preparing for and implementing change and reform.*
- IEA conference – update provided in the CEO report. With most of the costs now finalised it is expected that costs will be close to the budgeted figure.
- Procurement updates
 - Data entry tender – this is now at the review stage.
 - Print tender – we have just received the draft Print tender and expect to advertise next month.
 - Legal – the Board was informed of the departure from Holmes Solicitors of two partners and one solicitor. Management will monitor service levels between now and the end of the contract in December 2023. The option exists to extend this contract for one year.
 - Architect – Management did a market consultation with an architect on 16th June to determine how to proceed with the procurement for architect services. It was agreed to explore two options, based on a 10

year and a 25/30 year lease. SF noted the importance of consulting all staff at an early stage in developing the Building Strategy.

- Public relations consultant – the Board agreed that the ERC should get quotes for PR consultant services.
- Test pricing review – Management notified the DoE of an increase in test pricing to reflect the rise in inflation and the costs of providing tests online, and requested the DoE to consider the level of funding provided to schools for purchasing tests. The Department sought, and were provided with, clarification on a number of queries as part of the budget process 2024.
- DCU lease update – The Board were informed of DCU's decision to offer a lease for 10 years only and were given an update on the impact of this decision on our building improvement plans. It was agreed that management would approach the Chief Operating Officer at DCU to make the case for a longer term contract as had previously been discussed and verbally agreed.
- Carbon emissions – management met with DCU Buildings Office to explore options to reduce carbon emissions. As ERC's electricity usage is accounted for on DCU's carbon reporting, we explored the possibility of DCU also reporting our gas usage.
- Statutory Instrument – the Board approved the draft letter to the Minister seeking changes to the Statutory Instrument.
- Irish Language – a Gaelcultúr survey has been prepared to identify the level of Irish among staff members and to determine their interest in training programmes to improve the level of Irish within the Centre. This survey will issue to all staff soon.

6. Finance

The Board discussed the following items:

- Financial Statements Audit 2022 – the Board was informed that the audit is almost completed. One last minute adjustment to the pension liability was sought by the auditors. The changes have been made and we await the signed audit report in the coming days.
- Quarterly I&E – the Q2 report will be brought before the ARC at its July meeting.
- Draft budget 2024 – this was sent to the Department. Further discussion will take place at the July ARC meeting.

7. Policies

- Disaster Recovery/Business Continuity Policy – this was approved by the Board.

8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)

- Internal Audit
 - Code of Practice gap analysis – the draft report is with management for comment. The final report will be circulated at the next ARC meeting.
 - DOTS system audit – following a number of recent incidents involving the DOTS system, management have requested an additional audit to be carried out over the summer. This was discussed with the Board and ARC chairpersons and formed part of our submission to the Data Protection Commission. As the audit will be technical in nature, a

third party IT company will be brought in to work with our internal auditors Pinnacle Consulting. Management expect to complete this exercise in Q3.

- Board and ARC effectiveness review – this was due to commence in September but may be slightly delayed due to the added DOTS system audit. Management are currently scoping this audit with Pinnacle Consulting.
- Audit Schedule – the ARC will decide on 2024 and 2025 audit schedule at its next meeting.
- *Risk Management*
 - DD briefed the Board on the recent incidents involving the DOTS system. Management took immediate action to ensure that the unauthorised access given to a parent can never happen again. Procedures were reviewed and staff at our call centre can no longer add users to the system. In our recently submitted workforce plan, we requested a new post at Assistant Principal level to work exclusively on Data Management. It is felt that this dedicated role will help to keep fully compliant with GDPR and other data management related legislation and best practice.
- Staff wellbeing – working on procuring consultant support on staff wellbeing is ongoing and a staff survey will issue shortly
- Data Management – the Board was given an update on the ongoing work to complete our Records of Processing (ROPA) documentation, Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) and Data Sharing Agreements (DSA) for the GSRS scheme, PISA 2025 and our agreement with the Department of Education itself.

9. Staffing & HR

- Research Associate with Irish – the Board was updated with the positive news that we have finally received permission to make this appointment. That person will commence work in September.
- Recruitment Irish speakers at Assistant level x2 for GSRS and for test development.
- Current Assistant with Irish (working on GSRS) has tendered resignation.
- New Post of HEO in Accounts – Interviews took place on the 19th June and the successful candidate is due to commence work at the end of July.
- Workforce Plan – this was sent to the Department of Education and management have sought a governance meeting to discuss.

10. AOB

11. CEO appointment

The Chair of the Board updated the members on the CEO recruitment process.


Edward Murtagh (06/11/2023 12:46 GMT+1)

Appendix 1

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE Board Meeting Agenda 23 June 2023

1. Minutes of meeting of 4 April 2023 (BMin – 042023)
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-3-23-1 – for discussion*)
5. Governance and Internal Matters
Shared documents:
 - ✓ Review of Statutory Instrument – draft letter to CPU (*B-3-23-2 – for discussions*)
6. Finance
Shared documents:
 - ✓ Draft budget for 2024 sent to DoE (*B-3-23-3 – for approval*)
7. Policies
Shared documents:
 - ✓ Disaster Recovery policy (*B-3-23-4 – for approval*)
8. Risk Management and Internal Audits (Recurring item)
9. Staffing & HR
10. AOB
11. CEO appointment