



Call for Inputs
Strategy 2025-2030

July 2024

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Background

The Educational Research Centre ('ERC') is a statutory body under the aegis of the Department of Education. The ERC was established in 1966 in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. In September 2015, it was designated as a statutory body in accordance with the Education Act (1998) under SI No. 392 (2015). This legislation set out the purpose of the ERC, as follows:

- a) Provide an assessment support service to schools and centres for education that will enable them to fulfil their obligations under Section 9 of the Education Act 1988; and
- b) Conduct independent research on all aspects of education and at all levels of the education system, including educational research, that will inform policy making and the improvement of educational standards.

The work of the ERC can be grouped into a number of strands:

- The conduct and reporting of large-scale assessments, such as PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS and the National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading.
- Contributing to policy on, and evaluation relating to, educational disadvantage.
- The development and supply of standardised tests to schools in paper and online formats.
- Undertaking various reviews and programme evaluations to support the Department of Education, including the Evaluation of the Gaeltacht Schools Recognition Scheme and the longitudinal evaluation of the Digital Learning Framework (DLF).
- Providing quantitative and analytical support to the Department.
- Producing independent research, including through the Irish Journal of Education.

In exercising our functions, we regularly prepare a strategic plan for the organisation, setting out a series of statements on our priorities and goals to be delivered over the medium term in pursuit of our purpose and mission.

The aim of this Call for Inputs is to gather the views of stakeholders on how the role of the ERC may evolve over the coming period and what strategic priorities should be included in our forthcoming Strategy.

Summary of the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan

The ERC's current [Strategic Plan](#) covers the period 2022-2024. The Plan sets out the organisation's vision, mission and values over the period and includes a series of goals to be delivered.

Strategic vision 2022-2024

The strategic vision of the ERC is *excellence in conducting and supporting educational research, evaluation and assessment*.

Mission

Our mission over the period 2022-2024 had three parts:

- To conduct and disseminate commissioned and independently-initiated national and international research, assessment and evaluation studies that are timely, accessible and relevant, on all aspects of education, and at all levels of the education system;
- To develop high-quality assessments and provide strong assessment support services to schools and centres of education; and
- To collaborate with national and international bodies to share learning and to develop capacity and expertise in all of the aforementioned areas.

Goals over the period 2022-2024

The following goals were set out in the 2022-2024 ERC Strategy:

1. Working with the Department, establish a sustainable, multi-year structure and resourcing plan for the programme of work
2. Working with the Department, strengthen the ERC's test development and standardisation programme of work in order to implement test development studies that are mutually identified as being of high priority
3. Establish a sustainable and stable response to COVID-19 that incorporates ongoing monitoring and risk management and a long-term blended working policy
4. Establish an IT strategy that is closely linked to governance and compliance as well as ERC's strategic priorities
5. Establish a comprehensive research and assessment strategy that cuts across large-scale assessments, evaluations, and test development and test services to schools activities; and which includes a strand covering analytic methodologies with links to the CPD strategy
6. Establish a CPD strategy that covers CPD along a continuum, promotes collaboration, and incorporates engagement, retention and wellbeing

7. Establish a communications strategy that prioritises audience awareness, reach, Irish language, SEN and EAL groups
8. Achieve enhanced efficiencies in the administration of research and evaluation studies
9. Build on the Agreement with DCU and progress made on the regularisation of the Test Department building ownership in order to make urgent enhancements to ERC's physical infrastructure
10. Further strengthen governance structures, prioritising finance, risk and audit, data governance, and HR.

Key Achievements from the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan

Over the period 2022-2024 the ERC and wider sector continued to face various challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on our staff and ability to undertake key research projects. During that period the ERC continued to operate, making the necessary adjustments and arrangements necessary to ensure our work could continue.

Over that period, we delivered a number of key projects and workstreams:

Large Scale Assessments

- Published a number of commissioned reports on literacy and numeracy attainment and achievement, trends in digital technologies, pupil experiences of reading, and social inclusion. These reports can be found [here](#).
- Reported on PIRLS 2021 and NAMER 2021
- Administered and reported on PISA 2022
- Administered and reported on TIMSS 2023

Development and Supply of Standardised Tests

- Rolled out a new online ordering system for Standardised Tests
- Standardisation of the Post-Primary Assessment & Diagnosis – English (PPAD-E), in collaboration with NEPS
- Commence the redevelopment of screening and diagnostic tests of early literacy (DTEL) and early numeracy (DTEN)

Other research workstreams

- Developed an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning in Ireland
- Completed the evaluation of the Digital Learning Framework (DLF)
- Published the Irish Journal of Education – Volumes 45, 46, 47 (Special Issue on SCoTENS research) and 48

- Published independent research in a number of academic journals.
- Hosted the 10th IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) International Research Conference 2023 in Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin.
- Supported the Department with data analysis and modelling of data for specific programmes (e.g. SET Allocation)
- Undertaking the evaluation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme arising from the Department of Education's *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* (DES, 2016)

**Governance &
Corporate
Affairs**

- Progressed compliance with requirements in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016
- Reviewed and updated various internal policies.
- Developed various policies and action plans to comply with Government strategies and legislation (e.g. climate action, Irish language etc)
- Delivered a medium-term organisational review and workforce plan.

Call for Inputs

The aim of this Call for Inputs is to gather the views of stakeholders on how the role of the ERC may evolve over the coming period and what strategic priorities should be included in our forthcoming Strategy. For example, how will the education and research sectors adapt to a changing context, or similarly, how might these sectors be impacted by significant trends and developments in areas such as digital adoption, the literacy and numeracy attainment of students, the challenges presented by climate change and more generally, changing behaviours and attitudes of schools, parents and students.

The ERC's forthcoming Strategy will cover the five years from 2025 to 2030 and will contain the following key components:

- Statement of ERC's Mission
- Statement of ERC's Strategic Priorities over the period 2025-2030
- An assessment of the context and external environment
- An assessment of the key trends that the ERC expects will shape our role and work over the period
- A series of Objectives and Goals, setting out how the ERC expects to fulfil its Strategy over the period

Next Steps

Questions and Feedback

This Call for Inputs will allow the ERC to gather the views of stakeholders on the ERC's research, priorities and objectives over the next five years. We will use this Call for Inputs to shape key elements of our Strategy, prior to publication in late 2024.

We would welcome evidence and views of interested parties and encourage all stakeholders to respond. In the section below we have set out a number of questions to help shape and guide your response. Where appropriate, please supply evidence in support of your view.

Questions for Stakeholders

1. How would you describe the ERC's role in the Irish education system?
2. What are the most important trends in the education sector and research sector the ERC should consider as part of its strategy formation process?

3. What are the most critical goals or objectives the ERC should aim to achieve in the next 3-5 years? What short-term goals should we prioritise in 2025?
4. What do you see as the ERC's key strengths? What weaknesses or challenges do you think we need to address?
5. How aware is your organisation of the ERC's research outputs and data? What actions could the ERC undertake to support the wider use of our research and data?
6. Do you experience challenges in engaging with the ERC? How could we resolve these challenges over the coming period?
7. Is there anything else you consider relevant to the ERC's strategy formation process?

How to respond to this Call for Inputs

You can submit your response to this Call for Inputs in a number of ways:

- **Online Form** - <https://forms.office.com/e/7xnMUZ3QEC>
- **By email**: please email your response to john.regan@erc.ie
- **By post**: please send your response to:
Dr John Regan
Educational Research Centre
DCU St Patrick's College Campus,
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Dublin 9,
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We welcome written responses from stakeholders by 5pm on **Friday 30th August 2024**.