

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2030

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Foras Taighde ar
Oideachas
Educational
Research Centre

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Foreword

The Educational Research Centre ('ERC') holds a distinguished heritage as Ireland's trusted provider of research-driven educational assessments, serving generations of children for nearly 60 years. Over its first five decades, the ERC pioneered the measurement of educational standards in schools, developing standardised tests and implementing national and international surveys of student achievement. Since becoming a statutory body in 2015, the ERC has focused on transitioning from an independent institution to a government body, a process that is now largely complete. This strategic plan will guide the ERC through its next ambitious phase of growth from 2025 to 2030.

Our vision is to enhance educational outcomes for the next generation of learners by supporting schools, teachers, parents, and policymakers in better understanding how to guide children's learning journeys. By working with key national and international partners, we aim to contribute significantly to educational planning for individual students, inform national education policy, and add to the global body of knowledge in education. This plan outlines our vision and priorities for the next five years, focusing on addressing two core challenges: improving educational outcomes and promoting equity, both of which will be underpinned by rigorous, evidence-based research and test development.

A key part of our mission is to provide schools with reliable standardised assessments that empower teachers and school leaders. Our redeveloped range of tests will be designed to help teachers plan learning programs more effectively, fostering both the social and academic development of students. These tools will enable schools to tailor learning activities to individual learners' needs and improve the overall quality of learning outcomes. Our goal is to continuously enhance the information our assessments provide, making them more actionable for educators through a range of standardised screening and diagnostic assessments.

We believe that effective assessment is crucial for advancing both equity and quality in education—equity so that all learners can reach their full potential, and quality so that their learning outcomes are the best they can be. This strategic plan commits to providing assessments that meet the needs of students, regardless of socio-economic or cultural background, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive. It also advocates for the consistent use of standardised tests across Ireland to provide schools with a reliable and objective baseline which they can build from.

At the ERC, we are dedicated to fostering a workplace that attracts and nurtures top talent in educational research and measurement. By prioritising the wellbeing and professional development of our team, we aim to be the employer of choice for those passionate about contributing to cutting-edge research that makes a meaningful impact on education. We seek to recruit individuals who are committed to continuous learning, whether through self-study, mentorship, or further education, and who share our dedication to improving understanding of how students learn.

Looking ahead, we recognise that technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence and data analytics, will present both opportunities and challenges in educational research and assessment. We are committed to ensuring that our researchers are equipped to embrace these emerging technologies. By maintaining strong partnerships with the Department of Education and other key educational stakeholders in Ireland and beyond, we aim to collaborate on developing enhanced assessment tools and approaches.

The ERC is devoted to driving transformative change in education through rigorous research and development. Our research activities will be prioritised in line with the goals of this strategic plan and co-ordinated to deliver outcomes efficiently and on time. This plan also aims to make our educational research more accessible to both the academic community and the public, while enhancing our communication platforms, including our website. Our goal is to ensure that assessment results help teachers and parents better understand students' achievements and learning needs.

Our vision is to be a leading force in shaping evidence-based educational practices, informing policy decisions, and supporting schools and educators both in Ireland and globally. Through the objectives of our 2025-2030 strategic plan, we are committed to making a lasting impact on education, improving outcomes for all learners.

Edward Murtagh

Mr Edward Murtagh, Chairperson

It is my privilege to present the ERC's Strategic Plan for 2025-2030, a blueprint that will guide us through the next phase of growth, innovation, and impact in the fields of education and research in Ireland. This plan builds on the ERC's almost 60-year history of producing evidence-based research insights and high-quality assessment support services that facilitate the improvement of educational practices and policies.

As we look to the future, we are committed to expanding our role as a recognised and trusted partner to all stakeholders in education – from policymakers in the Department of Education and educators to students and their families.

This strategic plan outlines a vision to not only sustain but to elevate the role of the ERC. We aim to do more, engage further, and strengthen the impact of our work. Our five-year goals are ambitious, and rightly so. They are designed to position the ERC as a leader in educational research, while comprehensively supporting Ireland's educational community with actionable insights and innovative assessment support services.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the dedication and expertise of the talented team at the ERC. I want to express my deep gratitude to our researchers and corporate/support staff, the ERC Board, colleagues in the Department of Education and our key stakeholders whose collaboration and commitment have been instrumental in shaping this strategic plan. It is through their collective efforts that we will meet the challenges ahead and make a lasting contribution to Ireland's education system.

As we look to the future, we do so with optimism and determination. The next five years will be a period of growth, innovation, and progress. Together, we will continue to ensure that the ERC serves as a cornerstone of excellence in educational research, and ultimately enhances the learning experiences of all students in Ireland.

I look forward to what we will achieve together.

John Regan

Dr John Regan, Chief Executive Officer

Overview



Our Values

Quality - We are committed to excellence. We ensure that our research is thorough, accurate, and reliable.

Impact - We aim to make a real difference with our research. We want our work to support policy makers and inform public debate.

Independence - We conduct research and report findings with integrity, impartiality, and without undue influence, ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of our work.

Respect - We value different perspectives, cultures and backgrounds, and treat everyone with dignity, kindness and consideration in an inclusive and respectful environment.

Teamwork - We collaborate with others, fostering a culture of open communication and mutual support in our work.

Introduction

The Educational Research Centre ('ERC') is a public research institution dedicated to advancing educational research and informing policy that enhances the quality and equity of education in Ireland.

The ERC was originally founded in 1966 in St Patrick's College (now part of Dublin City University), Drumcondra. In September 2015, the ERC was established as a designated statutory body of the Department of Education under Section 54 of the Education Act (1998). The ERC is funded through a grant from the Department of Education and through the supply of standardised tests to schools.

This strategic plan outlines the ERC's mission and goals for the next five years, as it aims to conduct rigorous educational research to develop reliable assessment supports for schools and provide high-quality, impactful insights that will help to inform and shape educational policy and practice.

This strategic plan is shaped by a wide range of government policies and plans, such as a Programme for Government, the Department of Education Statement of Strategy and *Forbairt* (the Department of Education's Annual Statement of Priorities), as well as evolving national priorities and policies for the reform and modernisation of the Public Service.

Our strategic plan and actions align with the various strategies and policy documents set down by the Department of Education, including the Statement of Strategy 2023-2025, the Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033, Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027, *Forbairt*, the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030, the OECD review of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme and various policies on Irish language education. In a number of these documents, the work of the ERC over the next 5 years is referenced.

Our role & structure

The establishing legislation of the ERC (SI 392/2015) sets out the purpose of the organisation, 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.

In accordance with section 12 of the Establishment Order SI no. 392 of 2015, five independent non-executive members are appointed to the Board of the ERC by the Minister for Education. The Board of the ERC is responsible for the strategic direction, oversight and governance of the ERC. As a public sector body, the governance arrangements for the ERC are set out in the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016)* and the ERC's establishing legislation.

The Board delegates operational responsibility for the day-to-day running of the ERC to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the ERC's staff of researchers, operations and corporate professionals. The Board receives regular reports from the CEO and keeps itself up to date about strategic issues and changes affecting the ERC and the environment in which it operates.

Our Mission, Vision and Values

Our mission

The Mission of the ERC is **to enhance learning outcomes for all students by conducting high-quality research and by developing effective assessment tools that will support better learning and inform policy.**

As a foundational statement, our mission seeks to reflect the ERC's commitment to conducting research, advancing knowledge, and contributing insights that facilitate the improvement of educational practices and policies.

Our vision

Our vision, working in partnership with the Department of Education and key national and international stakeholders, is **to optimise educational outcomes for the next generation by supporting schools, teachers, parents and all involved in policy/curriculum development to better understand and guide the learning journey.**

Our vision recognises the ERC as an authoritative voice on student achievement and educational research.

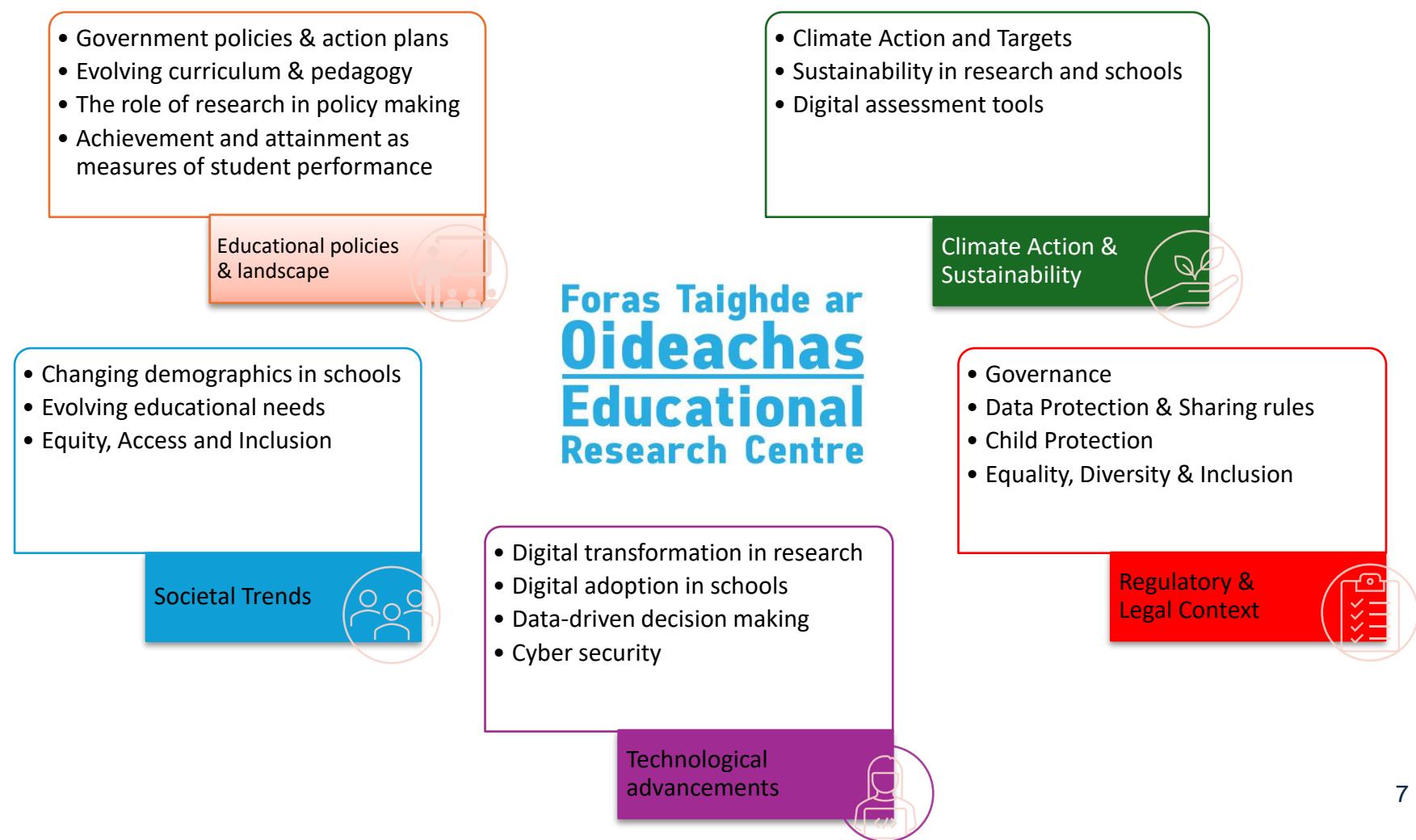
Our values

It is important that our funding Department and stakeholders have confidence in our ability to conduct our work while maintaining the highest levels of integrity and objectivity. Our values enable stakeholders to have this confidence. These values collectively guide the ERC in fulfilling its mission for the benefit of students, educators, and the broader education sector. We have identified the following values which will guide how we will work over the period of this strategy:

Quality - We are committed to excellence. We ensure that our research is thorough, accurate, and reliable.
Impact - We aim to make a real difference with our research. We want our work to support policy makers and inform public debate.
Independence - We conduct research and report findings with integrity, impartiality, and without undue influence, ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of our work.
Respect - We value different perspectives, cultures and backgrounds, and treat everyone with dignity, kindness and consideration in an inclusive and respectful environment.
Teamwork - We collaborate with others, fostering a culture of open communication and mutual support in our work.

Context

In crafting a strategic plan for the ERC, it is crucial to understand the context within which the Centre operates. The educational landscape is continually evolving, with new challenges and opportunities emerging from technological advancements, policy changes, and shifts in societal needs. To ensure the strategic direction of the ERC is responsive and forward looking, consideration has been given to the many factors and developments that are likely to shape the environment in which the ERC works in the coming years. By acknowledging these factors, the ERC can develop a strategy that is responsive, relevant, and forward-thinking.



Our Stakeholders

The ERC operates within a network of diverse stakeholders who contribute to, and benefit from, its research activities. Understanding and engaging with our stakeholders ensures that the research conducted is relevant, comprehensive, and beneficial to the broader educational community. The ERC aims to meet the needs of 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 and young people.

The ERC is a public body, under the aegis of the Department of Education. As the primary policy maker in the sector and funder of the ERC, the Minister for Education and her Department set the policy framework within which the ERC operates. The other aegis bodies of the Department (including the National Council for Special Education, the Teaching Council, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the State Examinations Commission) and those involved in creating and shaping educational policy and the curriculum are key partners in ERC research projects. In addition, those involved in teaching (e.g. educators, teachers and school leaders), those who are learning (e.g. students) and their parents/guardians, and those involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the education system (e.g. our staff and other researchers) are key stakeholders in delivering our research projects and assessment support services.

Over the period of this Strategy, we will actively engage with the Department of Education and our stakeholders to understand their evolving educational needs and challenges and aim to respond to them. Our stakeholders provide valuable insights, resources, and support that enhance the ERC's research capabilities and impact. We also recognise the importance of the ERC collaborating with national and international stakeholders in educational research and standardised test development. By fostering strong relationships, research collaborations and effective communication with all stakeholders, the ERC can ensure that its research is relevant, practical, and beneficial to the educational community at large.

Research Integrity

The integrity of our research and our researchers is essential to maintaining the highest levels of objectivity and quality. At all times, we use research methodologies and techniques that are best practice and evidence-based.

The ERC provides a supportive environment where researchers explore diverse topics, methodologies and approaches in addressing its priority research goals. We support our staff to stay up-to-date with developments in the field of educational research and related fields, and to pursue inquiries in a spirit of public interest and freedom of expression, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and rigorous inquiry is prioritised.

It is critical that our stakeholders trust that our findings, whether arising from commissioned or ERC-initiated research, are the result of credible and robust investigation by our researchers. Research projects in the ERC are at all times subject to stringent quality control and aim to conform to the highest standards of academic scholarship and integrity.

The ERC is committed to ensuring ethical conduct in its research and to safeguard the rights, dignity, confidentiality and welfare of research participants (students, parents/guardians and teachers). Staff in the ERC are at all times subject to the ERC Code of Conduct for Employees.

Our Strategy

Our Strategy has been informed by our legislative mandate, our understanding of the key trends and challenges facing the education and research sectors, and our engagement with key stakeholders in these sectors. We have adopted a five-year Strategy for the period 2025-2030.

Our Strategy reflects the two core objectives of the ERC – to produce impactful research and to provide assessment support services to schools in Ireland. Achieving those objectives requires our organisation to be fit for purpose and to proactively engage with our stakeholders. Our activities are underpinned by our values and context. These components are captured in our Strategic Framework, illustrated below.



Strategic Objective 1 – Impactful Research

Objective	To efficiently deliver high-quality, evidence-based research that impacts and informs policy, practice, and decision-making in education.
Goals	Research Strategy – develop and execute a targeted research programme that leads to significant advancements in knowledge and insight relevant to our stakeholders Research Operations – excel in delivering efficient and innovative research projects that drive impactful research Research Methodologies and Analysis – research methods, analytical approaches and use of data are in line with best practice.

Research Strategy and Work Plan

We recognise that to deliver high-quality impactful research relevant to the needs of our stakeholders, it is essential that areas of research investigation align with an agreed set of research objectives, consistent with the ERC's role, responsive to the evolving external environment, and aligned with education policy frameworks. It is the ERC's goal to **develop and execute a targeted research programme that leads to significant advancements in knowledge and insight relevant to our stakeholders**.

In Q4 2025 we will publish a medium-term research strategy covering the ERC's various research strands. The strategy will prioritise clear objectives for the ERC's research agenda, aligned with the ERC's skills and resources, ensuring a rigorous pursuit of knowledge and impactful insights through innovative research methodologies. The ERC will also hold regular meetings with the Department of Education Research Unit to ensure the ERC's research agenda aligns with the research needs and priorities of the Department's various sections, suitable research methodologies and available research capacity in the ERC.

The ERC also supports the Department of Education through participation in a number of committees and steering groups to support the integration of research, data and evidence into education policy. The ERC is a member of the Department's *Research, Policy and Practice Steering Group* (RPPSG), established in early 2023, with the aim to better integrate research, data and evidence into policy design, implementation and evaluation. The RPPSG is tasked with ensuring that educational policy development in Ireland is informed by a strong evidence base, is outcomes-focused, and cognisant of best international practices.

Over the next five years the ERC will be undertaking a number of key research projects on behalf of the Department of Education, including large-scale national and international assessments, the development of standardised tests¹, various programme evaluation studies and data modelling support for the Department of Education. In addition, subject to resources and within an agreed work plan with the Department of Education, the ERC may undertake research projects on behalf of other public bodies or on its own

¹ Our work on standardised testing is set out in Objective 2

initiative. The ERC will also publish the ERC's open-access peer-reviewed journal – the *Irish Journal of Education*.

Large Scale Assessments

Ireland participates in the IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Fourth Class), the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (15-year-olds), and the IEA's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Fourth Class and Second Year). In Ireland, the ERC is responsible for the oversight, administration, management and reporting of these studies, through acting as the National Study Centre and providing a governing board representative.

The ERC also manages the National Assessments of Mathematics and English reading (NAMER) to Second and Sixth Class pupils.

These large-scale assessments are typically held on cycles of 4-5 years. While studies vary in terms of their development and reporting timelines, a cycle of an assessment can usually take 5 years to complete, depending on the level of framework development, reporting or test item development required. Over the period of this strategy, the following large-scale assessments are expected to take place²:

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
PISA 2022	Thematic Reporting					
PISA 2025	Fieldwork	Analysis & Reporting	Thematic Reporting			
PISA 2029		Kick-off	Survey preparation	Pilot	Fieldwork	Analysis & Reporting
PIRLS 2026	Pilot	Fieldwork	Analysis & Reporting	Thematic Reporting		
TIMSS 2023	Thematic Reporting					
TIMSS 2027	Kick-off	Pilot	Fieldwork	Analysis & Reporting	Thematic Reporting	
NAMER 2028	Kick-off	Survey Design	Pilot	Fieldwork	Analysis & Reporting	Thematic Reporting

Programme Evaluations

At the core of the ERC's evaluation process is the application of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess programme outcomes and effectiveness, while gathering rich, contextual insights into the experiences of students, school staff and parents/guardians. These elements collectively enable ERC to provide thorough, insightful, and actionable evaluations that contribute significantly to the advancement of educational practices and outcomes.

² The Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 notes the Department of Education is also considering participation in the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) in 2028.

The ERC has a long history of work in educational disadvantage and social inclusion. The 2024 OECD review of DEIS (Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools) provides independent analysis to support the Department of Education in identifying ways to strengthen the resources and supports provided to students at risk of educational disadvantage. The review, which drew substantially on ERC's research outputs, highlighted that Ireland has a strong expertise in monitoring and evaluating the DEIS programme and the central role played by the ERC in this workstream. The ERC expects its role in evaluating and monitoring programmes such as DEIS will continue over the period of this strategy.

The ERC is working with the Department of Education to implement a multi-year evaluation of Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, which is expected to conclude in early 2025. Over the period of this strategy, the ERC will be supporting the Department of Education in a similar evaluation of policy interventions for Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht.

Data Modelling & Analytics

In addition to the above evaluations, the ERC provides support to the Department of Education in the analysis and modelling of data for specific programmes. This includes the computation of Special Education Teacher (SET) Allocation Model at primary and post-primary levels. A review of the SET Allocation Model has identified that a programme of continuous development is required to ensure that the model is delivering effectively. In line with Circulars [0002/2024](#) and [0003/2024](#), revised allocations to the model are made annually. The ERC expects its ongoing involvement, over the period of this Strategic Plan, will inform future updating and revisions to the SET Allocation Model.

Independently Initiated Research

In accordance with work plans agreed with the Department of Education, ERC researchers regularly submit research papers on a range of education topics to academic journals, conferences and professional development workshops. These papers typically explore topics covered by ongoing research projects. The ERC also supports its staff to undertake post-graduate research courses, including PhD studies.

Undertaking such research fosters our researchers' professional development and the ERC's profile as a centre of excellence in the field of educational research nationally and internationally. Such research can lead to opportunities to collaborate with other researchers, gain insights from critiques, network with other professionals, and engage in scholarly dialogue. These interactions can also inspire new research ideas and enhance the visibility and impact of the ERC's work.

Research Operations

ERC research projects are typically multi-annual, involving researchers, operations staff, advisory groups and collaborators. To deliver on its mission, it is the ERC's goal to **excel in delivering efficient and innovative research projects that drive impactful research** in line with stakeholder expectations.

Digital First

Adopting a Digital First approach to research involves prioritising digital tools, technologies, and methodologies throughout the research process to enhance efficiency, accessibility and collaboration, while

ensuring data integrity and security. Over the period of this strategy, the ERC will undertake a number of actions, including:

- **Project Collaboration** – we will expand our use of digital tools to enhance collaboration, digital workspaces and project management among ERC staff and external collaborators.
- **Digital Data Collection** - where possible, research projects will use computer-based assessments and questionnaires. We will provide supports to schools to allow participation in such projects.
- **Analytics and Insights** - We will use analytics tools and software for data analysis, visualisation, and interpretation, allowing for advanced statistical analysis, predictive analytics and model building.
- **Online Publishing of Research** – We will publish research findings on our website and in academic journals, with journals that provide an open-access publishing option preferred where possible.
- ***Irish Journal of Education (IJE)*** – we will publish the *IJE* as an open-access digital journal.

Adopting a digital-first approach to research will streamline the research process, enhance collaboration and improve data management processes in the ERC. By embracing this approach, the Centre aims to ensure that its research remains relevant and responsive in an increasingly digital world.

Digital Communications

In Q1 2025 we will launch an ERC newsletter to keep stakeholders updated on research publications, ongoing projects in schools and standardised testing. This biannual newsletter will initially be targeted at policymakers and collaborators and will seek to increase the visibility of the ERC and raise awareness of the organisation's work.

To support schools, parents and students to better understand our work, we will expand the ERC's use of social media to engage, share insights and convey complex research in an understandable and actionable format. We will ensure that within one month of publication, the results and insights from major ERC research projects will be conveyed in an accessible format.

Research Management, Operations and Logistics

To support our researchers in the administration and management of research projects, in 2025 the ERC will establish a dedicated Research Operations Unit. The Unit will be staffed with a team of logistics, data protection and operations staff. Working with the Head of Research, senior researchers and corporate staff, the Research Operations Unit will develop a strategic approach to the ERC's research operations, including cross-functional project planning, quarterly reviews against planned timelines, monitoring, adaptation and post-project reviews.

Open Data and Data Sharing

Over the period of this strategy, the ERC will implement robust data strategies to safeguard sensitive information and ensure the integrity, confidentiality, and proper management of data. In addition to regular data protection training for staff, all data policies and guidelines will be reviewed annually to ensure the ERC operates within the legal framework and safeguards against data breaches and cybersecurity threats.

The Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019 aims to promote efficient public services while ensuring the protection of personal data. The Act requires public bodies to enter into formal data sharing agreements

before sharing data. Integrating new data sharing practices into existing research projects has been a complex and resource-intensive process for the ERC. Continuous monitoring and auditing by the ERC are necessary to ensure ongoing compliance with the Act's provisions and to address any emerging data protection issues.

The ERC also has responsibilities under the Open Data Directive and the EU Data Governance Act 2022 (DGA). Over the period of this strategy the ERC will begin sharing data in accordance with the requirements of the Open Data Directive and DGA. The Centre will develop an ERC Open Data and Data Sharing policy setting out how the ERC will identify, share, publish and make accessible relevant datasets. Our website will be updated to include access to various research datasets.

Research Methodologies and Data Analysis

ERC uses a variety of research methodologies and approaches to analyse, investigate and report data relating to the education sector. By leveraging a variety of approaches, the ERC, Department of Education and stakeholders can gain comprehensive insights into outcomes, develop effective interventions, and contribute to the advancement of educational policy and practice. Over the period of this strategy, it is the ERC's goal that **research methods, analytical approaches and use of data are in line with best practice**.

Research Methodologies

In the evolving landscape of educational research, new methodologies are emerging that deepen our understanding of educational processes and outcomes. These methodologies are reshaping how researchers collect, analyse, and interpret data, enabling more nuanced insights and evidence-based policy interventions.

The ERC will develop a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Strategy that promotes a culture of continuous learning. We will invest in staff development to ensure the Centre remains a centre of excellence in educational research and explore how collaborative peer learning approaches can allow the Centre to leverage the knowledge, skills, and experiences of peers to enhance research conducted by the ERC.

Data Management and Analysis

The ERC will establish a Data Management Shared Services Unit to support researchers across multiple projects. The Unit will develop and roll out a series of data management protocols and supports for researchers surrounding, for example, the design and implementation of data management plans, data entry processes, verification and validation techniques, and statistical report generation. In addition, we will roll out training to research staff on the use of data visualisation and GIS tools, and how best to incorporate visual information into research findings. We will collaborate with other public bodies on best practice with regard to visual information and data visualisation.

Artificial Intelligence

AI is expected to play a transformative role in educational research. By leveraging AI, researchers can gain deeper insights and more timely research findings that will inform policy making and the improvement of

educational standards. However, we recognise that it is crucial to address ethical considerations, such as bias and equity, to ensure that AI contributes positively to the education system. Over the period of this strategy, the ERC will identify how AI tools can support its research activities, the development of standardised assessments and the education system overall. Some large-scale assessments are actively exploring the role of AI, however AI has yet to form a routine component of these assessments in the ERC.

Strategic Objective 2 – Assessment Support Services

Objective	Through exceptional quality and innovative solutions, to remain the leading authority in assessment support services for schools in Ireland
Goals	Test Development – develop standardised tests that provide reliable, valid and equitable measures of student learning and achievement for all schools in Ireland Research & Innovation – engage in rigorous research and innovative practices to support the enhancement of our tests Supply & Supports – be recognised as the leading authority of standardised tests to all schools in Ireland and provide support to those involved in the administration and interpretation of our tests

Backed by almost 60 years of research and experience in education, the ERC is Ireland's lead supplier of standardised tests and assessment supports in Ireland. Our digital and paper tests are developed by our expert team of educational researchers, in collaboration with teachers, subject experts, psychometricians, psychologists and others, as appropriate. It is our strategic objective that **through exceptional quality and innovative solutions, to remain the leading authority in assessment support services for schools in Ireland**. We aim to be a trusted and innovative provider of these services to all schools and a leader in the development and implementation of digital assessment services.

Test Development – a strategic & sustainable approach

The ERC's test development projects typically involve the development of a test framework, the development of items (test questions and assessment tasks), piloting, standardisation, and the development of norms and supporting materials for schools. By tailoring tests to the Irish curriculum, involving a broad range of experts and stakeholders, using a wide-ranging set of item types and topics, and ensuring that the diverse population of schools in Ireland is reflected in the test content, we aim to create standardised tests that reflect student learning and achievement in a fair and useful way. In this regard it is the ERC's goal to **develop standardised tests that provide reliable, valid and equitable measures of student learning and achievement for all schools in Ireland**.

The ERC's current range of tests for primary and post-primary schools are set out in the Appendix.

Over the period of this strategy, the ERC will develop and release a number of standardised tests for schools. In deciding what tests to develop, the ERC considers a number of principles for future projects. These principles ensure the ERC takes a strategic and sustainable approach to test development, meeting the needs of stakeholders and recognising the resources available to the Centre.

Principles for Test Development

1	Test development projects must be sustainable with tests reviewed regularly to ensure they accurately assess contemporary standards of achievement, reflect changes in curricula and the evolving needs of stakeholders.
2	Standardised tests are developed with a view to maximising validity and reliability
3	We will develop and release tests in both Irish and English, simultaneously
4	Where appropriate, we will develop tests for both online and paper formats
5	We will develop standardised tests that are culturally appropriate and tailored to the diverse lives and interests of the student population in Ireland.
6	We will engage with stakeholders and experts on test development priorities as well as the design and content of tests

In line with the above principles, the resources available to the Centre and the views expressed by the Department of Education and stakeholders, the ERC intends to develop the following standardised tests:

Test	Version for English medium schools	Version for Irish medium schools
Post Primary Assessment & Diagnostic Tests	PPAD-E Release – Q4 2026	MDLI-G Release – Q4 2025
Post Primary Spatial and Abstract Reasoning Test	Release – Q4 2025	Release – Q4 2025
Drumcondra Reasoning Test		Project will commence once resources are available
Post Primary Maths Test		Release – Q2 2025
Drumcondra Tests of Early Literacy	Release – Q1 2028	Release – Q1 2028
Drumcondra Tests of Early Numeracy	Release – Q1 2028	Release – Q1 2028
Drumcondra Primary Reading Test	Commence in Q3 2026	
Drumcondra Primary Maths Test	Commence in Q3 2027	Commence in Q3 2027
Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lán-Ghaeilge (TGD-G)	N/A	Project will commence once resources are available
Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach do Scoileanna Rialta (TGD-R)	Project will commence once resources are available	N/A

Online Test Development

The Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 refers to “*effective use of digital technology, integrated as a seamless part of the teaching, learning and assessment practice in every classroom*” as a key goal and sets out the significant actions and investment the State is making in digital technology and infrastructure.

The ERC introduced Ireland’s online system for standardised tests in schools in 2017. Over the period of this strategy we will commence the development of a number of standardised tests for our online platform, including the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test and Drumcondra Primary Maths Test. The ERC will evaluate each new test development project to determine whether online testing is a suitable platform for the target student population.

Irish language test development

The ERC has a number of Irish language tests available for English- and Irish- medium schools. We are committed to developing all of our tests in both languages, subject to fluent research staff resources being available. In 2025 we aim to open a dedicated Irish language test development unit, staffed by fluent test development researchers dedicated to expanding and refreshing the ERC’s suite of Irish language tests.

We recognise that it will not be possible to commence the redevelopment of a number of Irish language tests over the period of this strategy. The ERC considers that prioritising the standardised tests that are compulsory is the best way to support schools. The ERC will engage with the Department regarding the wider resourcing of Irish language test development projects to ensure equivalence for English and Irish medium schools.

Screening and Diagnostic tests

The ERC has a long history of working with the teachers, the Department of Education and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to develop screening and diagnostic tests that assess literacy and numeracy skills.

The Drumcondra Test for Early Literacy (DTEL) and Drumcondra Test for Early Numeracy (DTEN), released in 2008/9, are screening and diagnostic tests suitable for use with pupils at the end of Senior Infants and the beginning of First Class. The group-administered screening tests identify pupils who are experiencing difficulty in learning to read and in acquiring basic numeracy concepts, while the individually-administered diagnostic tests pinpoint specific aspects of literacy and numeracy with which these pupils are struggling. In early 2028 we will release updated versions of the DTEL and DTEN for both English and Irish medium schools.

The ERC’s Post Primary Assessment & Diagnostic Test (PPAD-E), developed in conjunction with NEPS, is a standardised test of literacy for use in post-primary schools as a screening and diagnostic tool for assessing literacy skills. The PPAD-E test will be extended to Irish medium schools in Q4 2025 (as MDLI-G) and made available to an additional grade level for English medium schools in Q4 2026. The ERC will continue to work with and support NEPS over the period of this Strategy.

Drumcondra Primary Reading and Maths Tests

The Drumcondra Primary Reading and Maths Tests (2018) meet the needs of English-medium primary schools undertaking standardised testing. Initial work to redevelop these tests will take place in 2026/27, with a review of relevant curricula and research, engagement with subject matter experts and stakeholders, and commencing the development of test items. The Centre expects these projects will be completed in 2030 or 2031, with new versions of the tests being available in online and paper formats.

A sustainable and cyclical approach to test development

Recognising that test development projects take a number of years to complete and require considerable staff resources, the ERC is exploring adopting a cyclical approach to test development where:

- revised tests become available every 3-4 years, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation to reflect changing standards, curricula and stakeholder needs.
- individual test items can be revised or removed (perhaps due to poor psychometric properties) while retaining the integrity of the overall test.
- new and innovative testing techniques can be rolled out when available.
- schools, parents/guardians and the Department of Education can have certainty about achievement levels, as tests are standardised and normed on a regular basis.
- schools can retain and reuse testing materials for a number of years.

The ERC will engage with the Department of Education regarding the rollout of a cyclic approach to test development, including the provision of additional resources to speed up the redevelopment of key standardised tests. This engagement will be completed by Q4 2025.

Research & Innovation

The ERC is committed to ensuring our tests are best in class and meet the needs of the Irish education system, teachers and students. It is our goal to **engage in rigorous research and innovative practices to support the enhancement of our tests.**

ERC Drumcondra Online Testing System (DOTS)

Over the period of this strategy, we intend to progressively increase the number of schools using DOTS to more than 1000 primary and post primary schools by 2030. As digital technology and infrastructure becomes more widely available in schools, we will support schools to migrate to our online test platform. The ERC will expand the number of tests offered on DOTS to include a Spatial and Abstract Reasoning test, a post-primary maths test in Irish and redeveloped primary reading and maths tests. We will also offer guidance sessions to schools to explain the DOTS platform, its benefits and the necessary technology requirements. We will continue to provide an economic incentive to schools to switch to DOTS-based tests.

Innovation in standardised testing

As part of our test development process, we examine recent research on the approaches to standardised testing, new methodologies and techniques for creating and formatting items, and recent developments in technology and innovation.

In 2019 the Centre joined FLIP+, a collaborative forum for researchers focused on advancing e-assessment in education. Over the period of this strategy, we will deepen and extend our involvement in FLIP+, seeking to learn from test development practices elsewhere and contributing to best and effective practices.

One of the key features of FLIP+ is its focus on adaptive testing, an innovative approach to standardised testing that tailors the difficulty of questions to the individual ability level of each student. This method contrasts with traditional standardised tests, where all students answer the same set of questions. The ERC will explore the role of adaptive testing in Ireland and its integration into test development projects.

In 2026 we will procure the next generation of DOTS. This platform will build on the ERC's experience with online testing and take advantage of new technologies and innovations such as adaptive testing.

Sustainability

Over the period of this strategy, the Centre will be taking a number of initiatives to improve the sustainability of the ERC's assessment supports to schools. These initiatives include:

- **Recycle & Reuse:** Ensuring that all paper materials are made from recycled materials and that relevant materials are reusable in schools, where appropriate.
- **Digital First Approach:** ensuring that new tests are released on ERC DOTS, where appropriate.
- **ERC DOTS engagement** – engage with schools to support a transition to digital assessments, highlighting the benefits of online testing and both understanding and overcoming barriers to take-up.

Supply & Support

Understanding the needs and experience of the schools, teachers and students using ERC tests, along with the needs of parents/guardians interpreting the results, is of paramount importance. Our goal is to **be recognised as the leading authority of standardised tests to all schools in Ireland and provide support to those involved in the administration and interpretation of our tests.**

In 2023/24 the ERC supplied standardised tests to 70% of primary and post-primary schools across Ireland. Over the period of this strategy, we intend to significantly grow the number of schools using ERC tests and ultimately aim to supply standardised tests to all schools in Ireland. We will also engage with the Department of Education and key stakeholders on the future of standardised testing and the recognition of a single designated provider of standardised tests for schools.

As a public body we are committed to ensuring all schools receive a high-quality service and experience. Our aim is to ensure schools consistently choose and trust the ERC because of the quality and consistency of our standardised tests, the quality of the evidence they provide on student achievement for schools, teachers and parents, our exceptional customer service, and our commitment to delivering new and innovative assessment support services.

Supplying tests to schools

Schools place orders for standardised tests using the DOTS platform. The ERC has a dedicated team in its Test Department to support schools, address queries and manage stock levels, amongst other things.

To date, the take-up of the DOTS has been restricted by the limited range of tests available on the platform and the capacity of schools to take up online testing. The ERC will take a number of actions to grow the use of the DOTS platform, including:

- Launch a communications and engagement campaign with schools to convey the benefits of online testing, such as the reduced workload and burden on schools, instant and secure access to class and individual reports, lower costs and increased flexibility.
- When procuring the next version of DOTS, select a platform with enhanced capabilities, a greater variety of question types and formats, wide device compatibility, secure data encryption and greater customisation.

Supporting schools

We recognise that standardised tests play a significant role in the school calendar each year and involve an administrative overhead for teachers and school leaders.

In 2024 we launched the DOTS Paper Scoring Tool to streamline the marking of paper tests for primary schools. With this free tool, teachers can mark their paper tests directly on the DOTS site and generate a comprehensive report for each individual test and a class report summarising performance of each pupil. Over the period of this strategy, we intend to expand the DOTS Paper Scoring Tool to include new ERC tests. In addition, we intend to launch an online assessment hub on our website, with articles, advice, FAQs, webinars and training sessions on the administration, scoring and interpretation of standardised tests.

Supporting students and parents/guardians

The ERC acknowledges that standardised testing can place a level of anxiety and worry on parents/guardians, students and teachers. Such stress can impact student concentration and ability to perform to their true ability on such tests. The ERC has a role in helping overcome stress and anxiety arising from standardised testing. Over the period of this strategy, we will expand our communications with parents/guardians and students, offering explanatory guides, informational webinars and materials in easy to understand language for children and young people. Our online assessment hub will hold resources to support students and parents/guardians to understand and interpret the results of ERC tests.

Engagement and Feedback

Over the period of this strategy, we will conduct a survey of teachers and parents/guardians across Ireland to gather feedback on the administration, reporting and interpretation of ERC standardised tests. In addition, we will engage with stakeholders to determine how best to gather the views of children and young people on standardised assessments. New rounds of test development will include consultation with teachers and students who participate in the pilot studies, to ensure that their views and experiences are reflected in the development of the final tests.

Strategic Objective 3 – Our Organisation

Objective	Ensure organisational excellence through a transformed physical and digital workplace that maximises inclusivity, effectiveness and international recognition
Goals	<p>People – to be an employer of choice, committed to the wellbeing, integrity and professional development of our staff.</p> <p>Processes – to have efficient and effective processes, policies and systems to support our work.</p> <p>Communications & Engagement – to strengthen our presence and engagement with key stakeholder groups to enhance the visibility and reputation of the ERC and our work.</p>

Our People

In 2024 we delivered the ERC 2024-2026 workforce plan to the Department of Education. This plan will see the organisation grow significantly over the period of this Strategy. Delivery of the objectives and actions set out in this strategy is predicated on the ERC having the necessary staff (and financial) resources to undertake our work. The ERC has worked positively with the Department of Education to increase staff resources available. It is important that as the organisation grows, we can integrate our new staff, provide stability and put in place an effective organisational structure that delivers on our mandate and role. Our goal is to **ensure organisational excellence through a transformed physical and digital workplace that maximises inclusivity, effectiveness and international recognition**.

Supporting our Staff

The wellbeing of our staff is crucial for the success and sustainability of the ERC. By prioritising staff wellbeing, the ERC can create a positive and supportive work environment where employees feel valued, motivated and empowered to do their best work. This, in turn, can help lead to improved staff retention, increased productivity, high career satisfaction, increased morale and better outcomes for the organisation as a whole.

Over the period of this Strategy, we will undertake a number of initiatives to support our staff, including:

- **Staff Supports** - we will develop a programme of HR supports including staff training, Irish language workshops & classes, development and succession planning, and a responsive work environment.
- **Wellbeing Programme** – In 2025 we will start to develop a wellness programme for staff to promote physical and mental health, healthy habits and work-life balance.
- **Mental health support** – we will continue to expand our employee assistance programme and mental health resources to support staff members facing stress, anxiety, or other mental health challenges.
- **Work-Life Balance** – our policies and practices will support a healthy work-life balance through managing staff workloads, periodic reviews of staffing levels, blended & flexible working arrangements, and annual leave. In 2026/27 we will review staffing levels in the ERC against the strategic needs of the ERC and our parent Department.

Professional Development and Skills Development

In 2025/26 the ERC will develop a Learning & Development Plan to identify future skill requirements, training needs, opportunities for knowledge sharing and mentoring amongst our staff.

- **Learning and Development (L&D)**— we will develop and implement a L&D Strategy that promotes a culture of learning, collaboration and inquiry. We will continue to invest in staff development through opportunities for skill-building, knowledge development and career development. We will continue to support further education and professional development courses for staff. We will introduce a training and support programme for our people managers to help them to effectively lead and support teams.
- **Mentoring Programme** –In 2026 we will develop a mentoring programme for staff to help facilitate the transfer of knowledge, expertise, and best practices from experienced staff to new and junior colleagues.
- **Performance and Dialogue** – In 2025 we will review our existing performance management and dialogue system to provide individual staff with regular feedback, annual objectives and performance reviews that highlight strengths, recognise achievements and highlight areas where additional support/guidance may be needed.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

At all times, the ERC seeks to foster a supportive, inclusive, and respectful environment where employees and stakeholders are treated with dignity and fairness. We have a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, harassment, bullying and disrespectful behaviour. In 2025 we will review our Equality, Respect and Dignity in the Workplace policy, setting out our commitment to being a more equitable, diverse and inclusive workspace.

Gender Pay Gap reporting

In line with the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021, the ERC will, in the near future, begin reporting on our gender pay gap across a range of metrics. We are committed to reporting on our gender pay gap annually and to hiring, supporting, developing, and retaining a diverse workforce.

Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 establishes a Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty, which requires public bodies, in the performance of their functions, to have regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination.
- Promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and those they provide services to.
- Protect the human rights of its members, staff and those they provide services to.

In developing our Strategy, we considered our role under the Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty (Public Sector Duty). As part of delivering our Strategy, we will continue to promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of our staff and those to whom we provide services. Over the period of this Strategy, we will undertake a number of actions:

- We will consider our obligations under the 2014 Act, when developing our policies and processes.

- We will carry out an assessment of the human rights and equality issues relevant to the functions and the purposes of the ERC and the policies, plans and corrective actions in place or proposed to be put in place to address those issues. We will conduct an annual review to assess progress with our obligations under the 2014 Act, with actions reported in our Annual Report.
- We will continue to promote and support the equality and human rights of our staff, ensuring we foster an inclusive environment in which our staff can succeed and thrive.
- We will carry out a review of the training needs of all staff on equality and other Public Sector Duty-related issues and commit to addressing any identified training needs promptly.

Our Processes

As an organisation, it is imperative that our work is supported and underpinned by effective processes, regulatory compliance and a physical and IT environment that supports our work. In this regard, our goal is that **we have efficient and effective processes, structures, policies and systems to support our work.**

IT and Data

Our IT strategy seeks to provide for the safeguarding of sensitive information, uninterrupted delivery of essential services for our staff and service users, and the preservation of public trust in the ERC and our services. In 2025 we will begin development of a new IT strategy to ensure the ERC takes advantage of innovative technology services that meet the changing technology and technology threat landscape. We will also prioritise the review and renewal of our IT policies and practices and business continuity / disaster recovery planning policies to ensure our IT policies protect our operations, staff and stakeholders.

Data and information are critical to our research and management of our operations. In 2026 we will establish a Data Management Shared Services Unit to support the development and rollout of policies around data capture, management, analysis and integrity. Further training and supports will also be provided to our staff around data management skills and techniques. We will also review our data related procedures, policies and processes to support research, governance and sharing of data, where appropriate.

Irish Language

In 2025 we will publish an Irish Language Scheme for the ERC setting out our commitment to the Irish language, bilingual services, staff development and our engagement with the public.

Recognising that the recruitment of staff with fluent Irish is a challenge for the ERC, we will explore new ways to advertise and promote open roles in the ERC to members of the Irish language community. This will include engaging with third-level institutions and the Irish language media, introducing a graduate programme for suitably qualified staff, social media campaigns and advertising in key publications.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 requires the ERC to perform its functions in a manner consistent with the government climate policies. We seek to be an organisation that values environmental sustainability, concerned with climate change mitigation and adaptation. In 2024 we

began publishing an annual Climate Action Roadmap, setting out our goals and actions to meet our obligations under the 2021 Act and Public Sector Climate Action Mandate.

Over the period of this strategy, we will seek to comply with obligations set out in the 2021 Act and Public Sector Climate Action Mandate, including implementing energy saving and sustainability initiatives in our offices and processes.

Corporate Governance and relevant legislation

As a public body we are accountable to the Minister for Education and the Oireachtas. It is ERC policy to comply with the *2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies*. In addition, we are subject to annual audits by the Comptroller & Auditor General. We also strive to ensure maximum transparency in how we work, and how we spend public funds.

There are a number of other pieces of legislation the ERC must comply with, including the Freedom of Information Act 2014, the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022, the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 and 2001, the Standards in Public Office Act 2001, the Official Secrets Act 1963, the Official Languages Acts 2003-2021 and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. We must also comply with legislation and guidance on procurement, GDPR, data protection and data sharing, as well as general employment, equality and disability legislation.

Recent increases in staff for key corporate functions (e.g. HR, procurement, governance and finance) allows the ERC to more effectively discharge its governance responsibilities and compliance with relevant legislation.

Building Redevelopment

The ERC operates across two buildings in Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Our main office is home to over 60 staff and needs some redevelopment works. In 2024 we appointed architects to undertake a thorough assessment of our future office space requirements. The outcome of this assessment will inform future office needs, the capacity of our current office space and our approach to blended working. Our aim is to ensure our workspaces foster and support the positive changes to work practices resulting from blended working.

As part of our building redevelopment strategy, we are also reviewing our future needs for our offices on Richmond Road. This work is expected to get underway in 2025.

Blended Working

The ERC has a flexible approach to how and where work is performed, combining remote and on-site working arrangements. By implementing an effective blended working policy, the ERC has been able to leverage the benefits of flexibility and remote working while maintaining collaboration, productivity, and employee engagement. Our approach to remote working has helped recruit and retain staff with key skills (in particular staff with fluent Irish language skills) and has enhanced our organisational resilience.

Communications & Engagement

In addition to our funding department, the Department of Education, we have a wide range of stakeholders ranging from teachers, school leaders, parents/guardians, students, representative groups, public bodies (e.g. NCCA, SEC, COGG, Teaching Council, NCSE), international bodies (such as the OECD and IEA), educational assessment cooperatives (e.g. through membership of FLIP+), research institutions and individual researchers in Ireland and abroad. We commit to regular engagement and collaboration with stakeholders to optimise knowledge sharing, informed policy decision-making and opportunities to explore best practice.

It is our goal to **strengthen our presence and engagement with key stakeholder groups to enhance the visibility and reputation of the ERC and our work**. We wish to enhance the visibility of the ERC, growing our reputation as a source of authoritative and informed insights about education. To this end we will build strong brand recognition across our research outputs, standardised tests and communications channels.

Communications and Engagement Strategy

In 2025 the ERC will develop a communications and engagement strategy to enhance the visibility of the ERC as a trusted and recognised source of authoritative and informed research and standardised tests.

Our engagement activity will be aligned with our vision and ambition to deliver high-quality research and standardised tests. We will use a variety of public consultations, publications, meetings, working groups, events, social media and webinars to engage our stakeholders and deliver our services. In Q1 2025 we will begin publishing a biannual online newsletter to keep stakeholders updated on research publications, ongoing projects in schools and standardised testing.

Staff at the ERC actively engage in collaborative research projects with other agencies, public bodies and researchers nationally and internationally. Collaboration allows our researchers to contribute to and learn from best practice internationally (e.g. through FLIP+, OECD Governing Board, the TIMSS Science and Mathematics Item Review Committee, and the PIRLS Reading Development Group). Over the period of this Strategy we will seek to grow our collaborations with external educational researchers.

Visibility & Recognition

The ERC aims to develop a strong visual presence and name recognition amongst key stakeholder groups. The ERC will adopt a new visual identity and branding strategy across all of its engagement channels and touchpoints, including a new logo and corporate style guide, which will be applied across our website, publications, standardised tests and social media accounts. From 2025, ERC publications and documents will adopt a standardised naming convention (where possible), branding and document numbering. In addition, in 2025, the ERC will develop a new dual-language website which will showcase research outputs and standardised test offerings.

ERC@60 - Research Lecture Series

In January 2026 the ERC will have been in existence for 60 years. The ERC will hold a conference event – **ERC@60** – to reflect on the contribution of the ERC and the evolution of educational research in Ireland

over the last 60 years. The ERC will also launch a Distinguished Lecture Series in honour of its founding director, Dr Thomas (Tom) Kellaghan. This annual lecture will serve as an outlet for researchers, educators and public policy professionals to share experiences and scholarly insights with ERC staff and policymakers.

Irish Journal of Education and Academic works

The *Irish Journal of Education (IJE)* is an open-access peer-reviewed journal published by the ERC. The Editorial Board of the *IJE* is made up of ERC staff and since 2021 the journal has been published exclusively online at www.erc.ie/ije. The *IJE* considers for publication articles on any aspect of education – philosophy, history, comparative education, curriculum studies, etc. Reports of experimental research and articles which have a particular relevance to education in Ireland are especially welcome.

The *IJE* is an important outlet for early career and established researchers in Ireland and internationally, including ERC's own researchers, to share findings and insights with the wider education and research sectors. Over the period of this strategy we will continue to publish the *IJE*, seeking to grow its readership and academic reach through promotion and wider engagement with researchers.

In addition to publishing in the *IJE*, the ERC will continue to support our staff to engage with the wider research community through participation and attendance at academic conferences, publication in peer-reviewed academic journals and contributing to the furthering of knowledge and the development of best practice in educational research and standardised assessment.

The ERC also recognises that too often the knowledge produced in academia remains beyond the reach of the public. It is important that all members of society have the opportunity to engage with ERC research, insights and publications. The ERC will do this using a variety of channels:

- Making the ERC website accessible to all
- Using social media platforms to highlight ERC research
- Using infographics to simplify complex concepts and research findings
- Making the *IJE* more visible and accessible
- Extending the use of Digital Object Identifiers ('DOI') for ERC publications.
- Attending and speaking at various stakeholder conferences, events and schools
- Establishing regular communications channels with stakeholders

Over the period of this strategy, the ERC will enhance its engagement and research dissemination efforts with a wider variety of stakeholders, including teachers, parents/guardians, children and young people.

Performance and Evaluation

This document sets out our Strategy for the five years from 2025 to 2030. The Board of the ERC has set the strategic direction of the organisation and is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this Strategy.

Achieving the outcomes of our Strategy will require us to continue to manage our resources, risks and priorities, as we navigate the evolving context in which we work.

We recognise that much of our work is shaped by the external context within which the ERC operates. The work of the ERC is shaped by a wide range of government policies and plans, such as a Programme for Government, the Department of Education Statement of Strategy and *Forbairt* (the Department of Education's Annual Statement of Priorities, as well as evolving national priorities. Over the five years to 2030 it is likely that new government priorities, policies, strategies and action plans will be published, requiring us to undertake new and unanticipated workstreams. To ensure our Strategy remains agile and adapts to our external environment and operating context, we will continue to review and adjust our goals and actions as appropriate, and will continue to take the views of our stakeholders into account over the lifecycle of the strategy. A mid-term evaluation of our strategy will be undertaken by the ERC Board, and if required, a revised document will be published.

This strategy is accompanied by an implementation plan, outlined below, which sets out actions to achieve objectives and goals within defined timelines. The plan forms part of the ERC's public Work Plan which is submitted to the Department of Education annually and reviewed regularly. Performance will be monitored by the ERC on an ongoing basis with details on progress published in each year's Annual Report. All stakeholders will be able to assess our progress in achieving our strategic objectives, goals and outcomes.

The implementation of this strategy is predicated on the timely availability of resources (both financial and staff resources) and the sustained support from the Department of Education and stakeholders.

Implementation Plan: 2025-2030

Objective	Number	Action	Timeline	Reporting Completion
Objective 1 - Impactful Research	1.1	Develop a research strategy, aligned with ERC's skills, resources, priorities of the Department of Education and the needs of stakeholders.	Q4 2025	
	1.2	Hold regular meetings with the Department of Education Research Unit and sections on the ERC research agenda, work plan and the research needs and priorities of the Department	Annually	
	1.3	Support the Department of Education through participation in the Research, Policy and Practice Steering Group (RPPSG)	Ongoing	
	1.4	Undertake research projects on behalf of other public bodies or on the initiative of the ERC, subject to resources and within an agreed work plan with the Department of Education	Ongoing	
	1.5	Undertake large-scale assessment projects on behalf of the Department of Education, including PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS and NAMER	Ongoing	
	1.5.1	<i>PISA 2022 Thematic Reporting</i>	2022	Q3 2025
	1.5.2	<i>PISA 2025 Fieldwork & Reporting</i>	2025	Q4 2027
	1.5.3	<i>PISA 2029 Fieldwork & Reporting</i>	2029	Q4 2031
	1.5.4	<i>PIRLS 2026 Fieldwork & Reporting</i>	2026	Q4 2028
	1.5.5	<i>TIMSS 2023 Fieldwork & Reporting</i>	2023	Q4 2025
	1.5.6	<i>TIMSS 2027 Fieldwork & Reporting</i>	2027	Q4 2029
	1.5.7	<i>NAMER 2028 Fieldwork & Reporting</i>	2028	Q4 2030
	1.6	Support the Department of Education to assess programme outcomes and effectiveness through quantitative and qualitative evaluation studies	Ongoing	
	1.7	Support the Department of Education in the analysis and modelling of data for the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model	Annually	
	1.8	Support our researchers to undertake academic research related to the work of the ERC	Ongoing	
	1.9	Adopt a Digital First approach to research projects and operations	Q4 2025	

Objective 1 - Research Operations	1.10	Publish a biannual newsletter targeted at policymakers and collaborators highlighting the ongoing research activities of the ERC	Q1 2025	
	1.11	Expand our use of social media to reach stakeholders, including teachers, parents and students.	Q1 2025	
	1.12	Within one month of publication, we will convey the results and insights from major ERC research projects to schools, parents and students in an accessible format	Q1 2025	
	1.13	Establish a dedicated Research Operations Unit to oversee data protection and logistics matters relating to ERC research projects	Q2 2025	
	1.14	Develop an ERC Open Data and Data Sharing policy	Q2 2026	
	1.15	Review data policies and guidelines to ensure the ERC operates within the legal framework and safeguards against data breaches and cybersecurity threats	Annually	
	1.16	Subject to resources, establish a Data Management Shared Services Unit	Q4 2026	
	1.17	Train staff on the use of data visualisation and GIS tools	Q2 2027	
	1.18	Develop a Continuing Professional Development Strategy and Learning and Development plan for ERC staff	Q2 2026	
	1.19	Identify how AI tools can support its research activities, the development of standardised assessments and the education system	Q2 2026	
Objective 2 - Assessment Support Services	2.1	Develop and release a range of standardised tests for primary and post-primary schools	Ongoing	
	2.1.1	<i>Release the Post Primary Assessment & Diagnostic Test - English (PPAD-E)</i>	Q4 2026	
	2.1.2	<i>Release the Post Primary Assessment & Diagnostic Test - Irish (MDLI-G)</i>	Q4 2025	
	2.1.3	<i>Release the Post Primary Spatial and Abstract Reasoning Test - English</i>	Q4 2025	
	2.1.4	<i>Release the Post Primary Spatial and Abstract Reasoning Test - Irish</i>	Q4 2025	
	2.1.5	<i>Release the Post Primary Maths Test - Irish (TMDI)</i>	Q2 2025	
	2.1.6	<i>Release Drumcondra Tests of Early Literacy (English and Irish)</i>	Q1 2028	
	2.1.7	<i>Release Drumcondra Tests of Early Numeracy (English and Irish)</i>	Q1 2028	
	2.1.8	<i>Commence development of the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test - English</i>	Q3 2026	
	2.1.9	<i>Commence development of the Drumcondra Primary Maths Test - English</i>	Q3 2027	

Objective 3 - Our Organisation	2.1.10	<i>Commence development of the Drumcondra Primary Maths Test - Irish</i>	Q3 2027	
	2.1.11	<i>Commence development of the Trial Ghaeilge Dhoim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lán-Ghaeilge (TGD-G)</i>	Commencement subject to resources	
	2.1.12	<i>Commence development of the Trial Ghaeilge Dhoim Conrach do Scoileanna Rialta (TGD-R)</i>	Commencement subject to resources	
	2.1.13	<i>Commence development of the Drumcondra Reasoning Test - Irish</i>	Commencement subject to resources	
	2.2	Engage with the Department of Education regarding the rollout and resourcing of a cyclic approach to test development	Q4 2025	
	2.3	Grow the number of schools using ERC DOTS to 1,000 schools	2030	
	2.4	Launch a communications and engagement campaign with schools to convey the benefits of online testing	Q1 2025	
	2.5	Grow the number of schools using ERC tests to at least 80% of schools	2030	
	2.6	Procure for the next version of DOTS	Q4 2026	
	2.7	Launch an online assessment hub on the administration, scoring and interpretation of standardised tests	Q4 2026	
	2.8	Expand our communications with parents/guardians and students to explain the role of the ERC and standardised testing	Q2 2026	
	2.9	Conduct a survey of teachers and parents/guardians to gather feedback on ERC standardised tests	Q2 2025, then annually	
	2.10	Develop and implement a process to gather the views of children and young people on standardised assessments	Q4 2026	

3.8	Review and enact policies in line with obligations under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014	Ongoing	
	3.9 Develop and implement a new medium-term IT strategy	Q4 2025	
	3.10 Review the ERC cybersecurity and business continuity strategy	Q4 2025	
	3.11 Publish an Irish Language Scheme for the ERC	Q2 2025	
	3.12 Implement energy saving and sustainability initiatives in line with the ERC Climate Action Roadmap	Annually	
	3.13 Redevelop ERC workspaces and offices	Q4 2028	
	3.14 Develop and implement a medium-term communications and engagement strategy	Q4 2025	
	3.15 Develop a new dual-language website	Q4 2025	
	3.16 Host an event – ERC@60 - to coincide with 60th anniversary of foundation of the ERC	Q1 2026	
	3.17 Launch the Tom Kellaghan Distinguished Lecture Series	Q4 2026	
	3.18 Publish the Irish Journal of Education	Ongoing	
	3.19 Support ERC researchers to engage with wider research community, collaborators and academic events.	Ongoing	
Evaluation	4.1 Complete a mid-term evaluation of our strategy and publish a revised document if required.	2028	

Acronyms & Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence	IFUT	Irish Federation of University Teachers
CAP24	The Climate Action Plan 2024	IJE	The Irish Journal of Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development	IT	Information Technology
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools	MDLI-G	Measúnú agus Diagnóisíc Litearthachta don Iarbhunscoil – Gaeilge
DES	Department of Education	NAMER	National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading
DGA	Data Governance Act	NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
DLF	Digital Learning Framework	NLP	Natural Language Processing
DOI	Digital Object Identifier	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DOTS	Drumcondra Online Testing System	PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
DPMT	Drumcondra Primary Mathematics Test	PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
DPRT	Drumcondra Primary Reading Test	PISA-VET	PISA - International Vocational Educational Education and Training Assessment
DSGA	Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019	PPAD-E	The Post-Primary Assessment and Diagnosis – English
DTEL	Diagnostic Tests of Early Literacy	REC	Research Ethics Committee
DTEN	Diagnostic Tests of Early Numeracy	RPPSG	Research Policy and Practice Steering Group
EAL	English as an Additional Language	SET	Special Education Teaching
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	SI	Statutory Instrument
EEA	The European Economic Area	SSP	School Support Programme
ERC	Educational Research Centre	TALIS	The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey
EU	European Union	TGD-G	Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lán-Ghaeilge
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions	TGD-R	Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna Rialta
FLIP	France-Luxembourg-Italy-Portugal	TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
GDPR	The EU general data protection regulation	TLGG	Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach don Léitheoiréacht Ghaeilge
GHG	Greenhouse Gas	TMDB	Triail Nua Mhatamaitice Dhroim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna
GIS	Geographic Information System	TPL	Teachers' Professional Learning
ICT	Information and Communications Technology	WAN	Wide Area Networking
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement		

Appendix

Tests currently available for Primary Schools

Test	Version available for English medium schools (Year of Standardisation)	Version available for Irish medium schools (Year of Standardisation)
Primary Irish Test	Yes – TGD-R (2010 – paper only)	Yes – TGD-G (2010 – paper only)
Primary English Reading Test	Yes - DPRT (2018 – paper & online)	Yes - DPRT (2018 – paper & online)
Primary Maths Test	Yes (2018 – paper & online)	Yes – TMDB (2018 – paper & online)
Drumcondra Spelling Test	Yes (2002 – paper only)	No
Drumcondra Tests of Early Literacy	Yes (2008 – paper only)	No
Drumcondra Tests of Early Numeracy	Yes (2009 – paper only)	No

Tests currently available for Post Primary Schools

Test	Version available for English medium schools (Year of Standardisation)	Version available for Irish medium schools (Year of Standardisation)
Post Primary Reading Test	Yes (2013 – paper & 2016 - online)	Yes - TLGG (2015 – online only)
Post Primary Maths Test	Yes (2013 – paper & 2016 - online)	No
PPAD-E / MDLI-G Post Primary Assessment & Diagnostic Tests	Yes (2019 – paper only)	No
Drumcondra Reasoning Test	Yes (2016 – paper and online)	No