

COUNCIL

Minutes of an additional meeting of Council held via Dial In facilities on Wednesday 1 April 2020 at 12 noon.

Present: Mr T Carson (Chair) Dr L Caul
Dr A Kerr Mrs K O'Hare
Mrs C Fitzsimons Mrs C Harpur
Dr N Morton Mr B Wilson
Ms R Byrne Mr R Thompson
Mr C McKinney Ms P Slevin
Mrs P Leitch Mrs S Kirk

Mr J Edwards (Chief Executive)
Mrs L Scott (Director Finance & Corporate Services)
Miss M Farragher (Director of Education)
Mrs S King (Head of Regulation)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

Introduction

The Chair thanked members and officers for their participation in the meeting.

Apologies

None received.

Main Business

The Chair advised that the one item agenda meeting was to discuss the range of options put forward by the Chief Executive on alternative awarding arrangements. He sought and received confirmation that all members had reviewed the detail of the paper in advance of today's discussion.

It was agreed that members would provide feedback following the overview of options for each qualification type.

Draft Options Assessment for Alternative Awarding Arrangements

C/Special/1

The Chief Executive advised that following the Minister's decision to close schools and cancel the examinations timetable, DE asked for formal advice on alternative grading approaches in the absence of a summer 2020 examinations timetable.

Background

The Chief Executive advised that significant work had been undertaken by the Regulatory Team and Examination Team to develop options.

The Head of Regulation has been in contact with other Regulators to keep abreast of developments.

The Chief Executive confirmed he was also in regular contact with the Chief Regulators across the UK to discuss issues as they arise.

He advised that the paper was written on the best knowledge received as of 31 March 2020, however recognised that movement continues.

The Chief Executive confirmed that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to our range of qualifications. Rather there are approaches that are suitable for A Level, AS Level, GCSE Cash-in and GCSE Unit Entry. He advised that Wales and England have some differences in approach. CCEA has, therefore, tried to maintain similarity with one or both of them. It is a requirement of CCEA to maintain qualifications so that they are similar to other qualifications in the UK.

The Chief Executive stated that in conjunction with other examination regulators, a set of principles (detailed on page 2 of the paper) have been developed under which to assess alternative arrangements.

He assured members that in considering options, CCEA awarding and regulatory colleagues have worked closely.

The Chief Executive outlined the recommendations detailed on page 1 of the paper, and confirmed that CCEA would seek Ministerial direction on the option chosen for implementation on each of the qualifications. He stated that whatever options are chosen all will require further work.

The Chief Executive advised that the main types of qualification under consideration in the paper were :

- A2: A Level cash-in qualifications being used mainly for progress to Higher Education in University or FE College setting;
- GCSE Terminal: GCSE Cash-in qualifications, mainly being used for progression to post-16 study or Further Education;
- AS: AS Level qualifications, being used in a small minority of cases for progression, but mainly used as a component of overall A Level qualification; and
- GCSE Modular: Mainly used as a modular component by Year 11 (NI) students before completion of full GCSE Cash-in.

1 A2 – A LEVEL CASH-IN / TERMINAL QUALIFICATION

The Chief Executive gave a detailed overview of each of the 5 options presented for the A2 – A Level Qualification. He advised that based on the A Level options assessment, A Level Option 3 was the least worst option. This was detailed below :

OPTION 3 – Z SCORE WITH RESIT ALLOWANCE, USING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT IN COMBINATION

Calculate marks and associated grades for A level based on AS performance using z score methodology whilst also making a statistical allowance for the added value of AS resits. Collect teacher-ranking estimations, to validate model accuracy on large-scale centre cohorts and use with other centre modelling data.

The Director of Education advised that Option 3 would be the least burdensome for schools and more manageable.

Members discussed the options in detail, sought and received clarification on a wide range of matters. These included :

- Use of teacher professional judgement
- Taking account of prior school performance data
- Use of Mock examination data
- Consistency of approach
- Building on models already in existence and adapting to a further extent
- Clear and consistent communications strategy

The Chief Executive confirmed that there was still work to be carried out in refining Option 3, this included taking account of the points raised, together with finalising the resit component and centre validation which is an important aspect of the Multi Modal approach.

The Chair confirmed that it was essential to have a clear communications strategy following the Minister's decision.

The Chair sought and received endorsement from Council on Option 3 for A2 – A Level Cash-In / Terminal Qualification.

2 AS LEVEL

The Chief Executive gave a detailed overview of each of the 4 options presented for the AS Level qualification. He advised that based on the options assessment Option 2 would be the least worst option, and would give strong reliable opinion with less risk of challenge.

Option 2 DELAY TO AN AUTUMN SERIES

CCEA will delay grading and offer learners an Autumn Series (Oct-Jan considered) for all AS Level candidates. This will require centres working with CCEA for this limited series. CCEA will most likely synchronise the additional AS Level series with any additional series offered in England, as to avoid additional burden on centres. The additional series will be subject to an assessment of COVID-19 restrictions.

The Chief Executive drew attention to **Option 4, Teacher Professional Judgement and GCSE Mean score, followed by Z-Score retrospective grading or examination sit in 2021 summer series.**

This option requires Teacher Professional Judgement informed grading with centre validation and GCSE mean score prediction. Followed by opportunity to have Z-Score retrospectively applied from A Level components, should candidates take A Level component or sitting opportunity of AS examination in summer 2021.

He advised that Option 4 was possible, however would be statistically challenging in 2021, and there could be insufficient technical resource available to address all issues by the Issue of Results date in 2021.

Concern was expressed in regards to delaying AS examinations to the Autumn series could have a negative impact on students and challenging for teachers in terms of timetabling issues and workload.

The Chair stated that this was a fast moving situation, and whilst it would be preferable to consult with centres, it was not possible given the current situation. He recognised the significant amount of time officers had spent investigating the possibilities and working through the range of options presented for consideration.

Following a wide ranging discussion, and clarification on a significant number of matters, there was disparity of Council opinion in regards to Options 2 and 4.

The Chief Executive stated that the paper recommends both Options 2 and 4 to DE. He said both were viable, however Option 4 was complex and further work would be required to provide a workable solution. In the provision of advice to the Minister, it would clearly state that there would be pressure on timetabling; schools; candidates and the awarding. This would reduce teacher impact limitations, with challenging choices and decisions having to be made.

The Chair, taking account of Councils' views on the Options for AS, recommended that consideration be given to the organisation's capability in regards to Option 4.

A Council member said a strong argument had been put forward by members in preference of Option 4, and stated that direct advice on preferred options should be provided to the Minister. He suggested that following the comments and advice provided by members, the Chief Executive and his team consider the points and investigate Option 4 further.

The Chair asked the Chief Executive to consider the points raised by members, including logistical issues, and workforce planning in regards to the need for technical solutions and requirement for additional staff. The Chief Executive agreed to consider all of the points raised and provided an assurance that all would be articulated clearly to the Minister.

The Chair sought and received endorsement from Council for Option 2 for AS Level Qualifications, but that the Chief Executive could consider other information as it arose in the fluid situation and if that information became relevant could, based on discussion at Council, lead to the advice of Option 4.

3 GCSE TERMINAL (Cash-in)

The Chief Executive gave a detailed overview of each of the 3 options presented for the GCSE Terminal (Cash-In) Qualifications. He advised that based on the options assessment Option 3 would be the least worst option.

OPTION 3 – PREDICT GRADE BASED ON A COMBINATION OF TEACHER / CENTRE JUDGEMENT (RANK ORDERING) AND AVERAGE CENTRE PERFORMANCE MODELS

Prediction based on teacher / centre rank order and provide a revised estimated overall grade at subject level. Multi-layer with average centre performance at subject level over past three summer series and control to similar proportions in current series.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of matters and were content with the explanations received.

The Chair sought and received endorsement from Council for Option 3 for GCSE Terminal (Cash-in) Qualifications

4 MODULAR EXAMINATIONS (MAINLY YEAR 11)

The Chief Executive gave a detailed overview of each of the 4 options presented for the GCSE Modular Examinations. He advised that based on the options assessment **Option 4** would be the least worst option, and would provide the best progression to learners and reduces burden.

OPTION 4 – NO GRADES ISSUED FOR 2020 - UNIT ENTRY CANDIDATES; CANDIDATES ARE RETROSPECTIVELY AWARDED ON Z SCORE FROM TERMINAL UNITS TAKEN 2021.

In this option no grades are awarded for year 11 / modular entry candidates in summer 2021. Learners will participate in the summer 2021 series and take outstanding components and these components will be used to estimate marks for missed components (using Z score calculation).

Members were content with the information provided.

The Chair sought and received endorsement from Council for Option 4 for GCSE Modular Examinations.

Any Other Business

The Chair thanked members for their contributions and advised that the Chief Executive would provide weekly updates throughout April on contingencies in regards to Covid-19.

He wished to place on record Council's support to the Chief Executive, and his team, in taking the work forward in regards to the provision of advice to the Minister.

The meeting concluded at 2.45 pm.