

## **CCEA**

Minutes of a Special Council meeting held via Dial-In Facilities on Wednesday 15 April 2020, at 4.00 pm.

**Present:**

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

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)

### **Apologies**

None received.

### **Chair's Business**

The Chair thanked everyone for joining the meeting and reminded members of the protocols for participation.

#### *Update since last meeting*

The Chair advised, that following the meeting on 8 April, he had spoken with the Permanent Secretary (PS) (DE) to stress Councils' concerns about the delay in announcing the Northern Ireland arrangements in regards to the awarding of grades for Summer 2020, and the potential for reputational damage towards CCEA. He confirmed that the PS had commended the Chief Executive and his team for the excellent work being carried out in the current circumstances.

The Chair wished to place on record his dissatisfaction at the pace at which decisions were being made, and was disappointed that a stakeholder consultation was conducted by DE, despite CCEA being the statutory body tasked with providing advice from a Ministerial appointed Council.

### **Main Business**

#### **Chief Executive's Update – COVID-19 Contingencies**

##### ***General Qualifications***

The Chief Executive advised that since the last meeting, there had been significant engagement between himself and DE officials in finalising the advice (Options on Assessment for Alternative Awarding Arrangements). The submission was presented to the Minister on Friday 10 April 2020, and subsequently the Chief Executive met with the Minister to answer questions (many of which had also been raised by Council members) on the options presented.

The Minister advised that he was content with the clarifications and wished to proceed with the preferred options presented in regards to A2, AS, GCSE (Full Certification) and GCSE Unit(s) were the best on which to proceed. The Minister also accepted the need for a suitable appeals process to be

developed. Private candidates should also be accommodated as far as possible within the arrangements, however it was recognised that in some circumstances this may not be possible.

Members noted there would be no opportunities for an additional examination series in the Autumn and that learners wishing to sit examinations would need to do so through the normal timetable.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Director of Education and her teams, together with IT continued to progress the implementation work to reduce the likelihood of delay.

#### *Communication*

The Chief Executive confirmed that a media package has been compiled, and legal opinion sought around data protection issues.

He assured members that background media and guidance information is ready for issue and a help desk has been set up to field all enquiries.

#### *Ministerial Direction to CCEA*

The Chief Executive confirmed that a Ministerial Direction would be issued to the Chief Executive, most likely in advance of an announcement being made.

He confirmed that the Minister presented a high-level report to the Education Committee (NI Assembly) on 15 April and it was currently understood that he will present the options to a meeting of the Northern Ireland Executive on 16 April. Following this, it was hoped that an announcement would be made by Minister Weir.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for the update.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of matters, this included:

- Contact with Universities and Further Education Institutions.

The Chief Executive advised he had updated the Admissions Officers from QUB and UU; and that he had been in contact with senior staff in Belfast Met (largest stakeholder in FE). He confirmed that there was a general understanding of the approach that may be taken.

The main area of interest was on the balance of teacher assessment versus statistical modelling. The Chief Executive confirmed that this would not be available until all necessary data had been captured and analysed.

The Chair sought clarification on whether the government departments recognised the extent of the pressure the organisation was under in terms of delivery.

The Chief Executive advised that DE were aware of the high level of risk the organisation was facing in terms of resources (staff) and funding to ensure the awards are made and results issued. He expressed concern at the resourcing and financial implications for CCEA during 2020 and into 2021.

The COVID-19 bid for additional funding was initially rejected, however there has been broad discussions around minimum and full requirements, with support forthcoming from DE officials for adequate funding.

The Chair also confirmed that the Director of Finance (DE) had advised that CCEA's bid was still live, and support had been provided by the Permanent Secretary that if necessary, funding would be made available due to the critical nature of the work required.

The Chief Executive said the Minister had indicated that, if necessary, items of work would be stopped to ensure CCEA was fully financially supported in fulfilling these requirements.

Members, whilst welcoming the support from DE on funding, raised the issue of reputational damage. The Chair reiterated he had made clear his concerns to the Permanent Secretary, particularly in light of the delays around the announcement.

#### *Issue of Results*

It would be CCEA's preference to issue results in line with England, and further discussions are required on this.

#### **Vocational Qualifications (VQs)**

The Chief Executive advised that the Department for the Economy (DfE) has established a 'Task and Finish' group to progress the work around VQs. He confirmed that,

- CCEA had provided advice to DfE on Essential Skills (following on from the Secretary of State's (SoS) announcement on Functional Skills), and that the SoS had advised Ofqual to proceed on calculated grades where possible.
- The Head of Regulation has suggested to DfE that it would be wise for CCEA to consider a similar move. DE is urgently considering this advice.
- Draft advice on Occupational Skills is currently being considered by DE.

The Chief Executive advised that he and the Head of Regulation continued to discuss a wide range of issues with the DfE to ensure decisions are similar with other UK regulatory positions.

He highlighted the need to consider legislation to allow the DfE Minister to provide direction to CCEA.

Members were aware of the complexities of this work and recognised the need for rapid decisions on VQs in order for CCEA to move forward.

Clarification was sought on the issues around how BTECs would be progressed. The Chief Executive confirmed that the issues around the BTEC awards were under discussion as they were one of a range of non-General qualification brands within the wider vocational project. However, he would continue to seek direction and agreement from DfE in regards to final arrangements.

He outlined that there were differences between jurisdictions that needed to be considered. For example, that under CCEA Regulation's GCOR a requirement is placed on awarding organisations that should a candidate wish to take a qualification in Irish then the awarding organisation should provide it in that language.

A Council member expressed concern at amount of tension/anxiety children were experience due to delay in the provision of statements from different government departments. The Chief Executive said that the work would be completed as soon as possible to ensure decisions minimised uncertainty.

The Chief Executive confirmed that CCEA would endeavour to keep messages as consistent as possible across the jurisdictions.

#### **Statutory Assessment**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the NITC and Employer authority had reached a proposed agreement on the teachers' pay award. He advised that should this be agreed, the statutory assessment arrangements would remain in status quo until new arrangements were agreed.

He confirmed that he had written to DE seeking direction in regards to statutory assessment arrangements during COVID-19 restrictions.

### ***Curriculum***

The Chief Executive confirmed that the campaign for home learning resources and support materials would be launched from Monday 20 April 2020.

### ***Corporate***

The Chief Executive confirmed that work continues on furlough and other HR issues. These are being kept under review as clarity on schemes becomes available.

Members discussed the range of issues, and challenges in regards to accessibility of home learning support, on-line resources and accessing internet to provide young people with as good a learning experience as possible.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Minister had agreed to include in his statement the need for young people to continue their programmes of study as best they can in the current circumstances.

He confirmed that CCEA uses a range of platforms and the online resources could be accessed on different devices. The most recent content is mobile ready, however older materials may only be available on laptop or tablet devices.

The Chair recognised the importance of the points raised in regards to the new ways of learning, however, stated that CCEA's focus at this time is to ensure the examinations process is fully supported. This is a very high-risk situation and not without its challenges. He said there would be lessons learned from September which would be worked through.

He thanked members for their participation and confirmed arrangements for the Council business meeting on Thursday 23 April 2020 at 1.30 pm.

The meeting concluded at 4.40 pm.