

## **CCEA**

### **COUNCIL COVID-19 BRIEFING**

Minutes of a Council Covid-19 Briefing Meeting held on Friday 16 October 2020 at 1.30 pm via MS Teams.

**Present:** Mr T Carson (Chair) Dr L Caul  
Dr A Kerr Mrs P Leitch  
Mrs C Fitzsimons Mr RJ Thompson  
Mrs C Harpur Ms R Byrne  
Mr B Wilson Ms P Slevin  
Mrs S Kirk

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

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

#### **Introduction**

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

#### **1 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mrs Kathleen O'Hare and Mr Cormac McKinney.

#### **Conflict of Interests**

#### **2 Conflict of Interests**

Members confirmed there were no conflict of interests on the any of the agenda items.

#### **3 Education Correspondence**

The Chief Executive drew attention to the following correspondence :

12 October 2020 – Chief Executive's response to F Graham re Contingency Plans

He confirmed that the letter was issued following Council's discussion on Friday 9 October, outlining the various scenarios under consideration. He advised that CCEA officers met with DE on 15 October to discuss the contingencies.

14 October 2020 – Circular from Minister Weir to Schools and Education Settings

He referred to the content of the letter re school closure from 19 October to 2 November 2020, and advised that CCEA had proposed delaying the November timetable by 12 days. Options were currently with the Minister for consideration, and it was hoped a response was imminent to allow CCEA to issue communication to schools to alleviate pressures and play accordingly.

## **Chief Executive's Covid-19 Situation Report**

### ***Corporate***

The Chief Executive advised that following the Minister's decision on how CCEA should proceed with examinations for 2021, a considerable amount of work has been going on in the Awarding Organisation. One of the factors was that we need to consider bringing staff back into the building, where necessary. He confirmed that CCEA continued to follow the HPA Guidance and staff continued to work from home where possible. He confirmed that meetings continued with the Unions and Health and Safety committee to ensure teams returning to the building would do so safely.

In terms of contingency arrangements, business cases are being developed. Business cases are also being developed in regards to fees and charges for summer 2021 series, and can only take place upon receipt of the decision on payment for Contract for Services.

### ***Reviews***

Members have been advised on the various reviews underway.

Information Commissioners' Review (ICO) 4 Jurisdiction Review of Data Processing associated with the Summer 2020 Series. They are grateful for the engagement and were satisfied with the information received to date and have asked for clarification on a number of matters which is currently being provided.

Correspondence has been received from Statistical Regulation Office (part of the Office for National Statistics), who have commenced a 4 Jurisdiction Statistical Good Practice Review. Responses are being provided to their questions in regards to Summer 2020.

External Review (DE) – No information has been received from DE on the external review or its Terms of Reference, however we have been informed that the process is currently out for procurement. There has been no indication of the timeline for the review.

A Council member sought clarification whether there was an opportunity for CCEA to set out its context as an organisation to clarify the difference between CCEA and other Awarding Bodies. The Chief Executive, in response, advised that clarification on CCEA's role, where instruction to CCEA arises from and the different roles within CCEA has been provided to the ICO, and will be issued to others as required.

### ***Awarding***

The Chief Executive advised that teams within the Education Directorate continued to work at pace, following the Minister's decisions, to issue the information that can be made available on qualifications. These have been made available and are on the CCEA website. Work is underway on the five GCSEs where CCEA was asked to explore alternative approaches to achieve a reduction in assessment. We continue to work through contingencies. He acknowledged the significant workload for staff in this area.

### ***Statutory Assessment***

No advice has been received from DE on how to proceed. He assured members that he would follow up on this request.

### ***Curriculum***

Following discussion at the Education Committee on 7 October, the paper has been issued to DE for briefing and follow up. An update will be provided to main Council from the Education Committee.

## *Communication*

The Chief Executive confirmed that lines to take had been drafted should the November series be delayed. The situation is being monitored. He advised that there were some challenges as England has also runs a November series with a slightly different timetable which causes confusion amongst local press. We will work with the press to ensure we do not disrupt the Northern Ireland messages.

## **Education**

### *For Consideration*

#### ***Regulation Considerations of CCEA Awarding Organisation Proposals for 2020/2021 General Qualifications Contingency Arrangements*** **CB/16Oct/01**

The Chief Executive reminded members that the proposals had been presented to Council at the briefing on 9 October. The Regulatory considerations are now being presented to Council. He confirmed that engagement continued with DE and would continue to do so on these factors before returning to Council, Council for final ratification on the approach to take.

He stated that the purpose of bringing the information forward to this meeting was to provide members with the opportunity to seek further clarification from the Director of Education on the paper presented on 9 October 2020, or to provide input in terms of the contingencies to allow engagement to continue on these factors.

#### *Summary of Contingency Planning 2021 : Centre Assessment Grades Based Approach for Summer 2021)*

A Council member sought clarification on the specific contingencies under consideration. The Director of Education drew attention to the detail provided in Appendix 1 (*Contingency Planning 2021 : Centre Assessment Grades Based Approach for Summer 2021*), and provided a detailed overview of the 3 Levels of disruption, and associated proposals (1 to 8) provided under each Level.

The Chair thanked the DoE for the summary of the proposals and welcomed the clarity provided on the range of contingencies under consideration. He sought and received confirmation that members were content that all potential options had been considered.

The Chief Executive stated that this was by way of briefing members on the options, and to continue to work with DE on the options, following which proposals would come to Council for consideration and ratification.

A Council member referred to the paper and recognised that a number of pointed needed to be addressed. He wished to make the point that Council need to begin to enable Regulation and Awarding to work as a single unit, both being informed as each other as opposed to one being the tester and one being tested.

He wished to place on record his difficulty in Council considering CAGs in regards to publicity, professional and other concerning issues, given the need to rebuild confidence in the organisation.

He thanked the DoE for the detail of the paper, however, stated that there was a need for a moderation system to be developed to ensure the trend of level set by the marker is visible (ie submission of work at high, medium and low level) and to enable a CCEA standard. He expressed concern that without moderation the system will be exposed, and wished to place on record his strength of feeling in regards to the process of moderation.

There was also a need for one mark per examination and appropriate quality assurance measures put in place. Further information and advice is required for teachers.

A Council member supported the idea of moderation, however this could be the moderation of the teacher, in that their standards could be checked. She also said that there was a strong possibility of CAGs being the used for 2021, and should this be the case, then it was crucial that CCEA provide the best option for children.

A Council member welcomed the clarity of the information provided and sought and received clarification from the DoE that engagement with the Higher Education sector. She advised that the Russell Group (universities) Qualifications Network, who were preparing for CAGs, as their view was teaching and learning was more important than preparing for examinations and having complete faith in teacher judgements. Their priority is the well being of students.

A Council member expressed concern at Option 8 and would not wish to recommend. She also raised concern in regards to the lack of uniformity across the whole NI cohort should some grades be awarded on examination, and some awarded without examination. This could create more difficulties for CCEA.

The DoE recognised the radical nature of Option 8, and clarified that this would only be considered should the year be so significantly disrupted with substantial loss of teaching and learning time, and where this was a last opportunity for student learning at 2<sup>nd</sup> year GCSE or A2. She also recognised the challenges presented should there be a mixture of schools using CAGs and examinations, however suggested that this would have to be for a very small number of schools. She stated that the aspiration was for examinations to proceed in 2021.

A Council shared the concerns expressed in regards to Option 8 – repeating a year, and sought clarification on whether this would be the student's choice. The DoE suggested that this would be a matter for DE/EA and CCMS to decide.

The Chief Executive referred to the DoE point on Option 8, this would be a substantial policy decision for DE, however suggested that all options, including the radicals as there were a range of unknowns at present. He stated that if we discount most advanced options this could provide CCEA with difficulties.

The DoE referred to moderation and advised that should there be a necessity to sample and moderate work, clarity would be required for schools early January 2021, however expressed the need for a swift decision from DE. She also called for clarity on the requirement of moderation and stated that the systems would require significant development for moderation. She wished to place on record that she was uncomfortable proceeding into a second year of awarding where there is insufficient data on a learner on which CCEA would downgrade a grade.

The Chief Executive referred to the points raised by members in regards to local moderation and explained the Scottish system which differed from NI moderation. He referred to the DoE point on how to resource broad moderation system to ensure scrutiny and confidence in the agency being in the assessment of learner, and comparing this with Scotland where criticism had been levied at the level of the moderation process. He confirmed he had raised this with DE in the context of how it would be possible to achieve this in the scope of resources. This is in the context of should examinations not take place, however recognised the challenge of the broader educational infrastructure and how we reach the point of achieving a secure moderation at individual level. Taking on board the Council member's point of having this in place.

He reinforced with DE working through contingencies urgently in order for them to be effective should they be required, however, expressed concern at the resistance from other parts of the education system.

## *Regulatory Considerations*

The Chief Executive drew attention to the regulatory considerations and stated that these are matters that we need to bear these in mind. He advised that the paper was for briefing purposes.

He took on board the point made that Regulation and AO need to work together with DE and continue to refine and develop all areas together. He referred to the scenarios developed by the DoE and her team, and said it would be his preference for DE to provide the scenarios, to support schools and the wish for the educational bodies to work together, with Departmental leadership on when the scenarios would happen and when they would require escalation.

The Chair urged caution in defining the roles of Regulation and Awarding. He stated that there was a need to be cognisance on the issues, however, there needed to be clear definition between the roles and it would be to the detriment of the Regulation role if it was a case of working together. The challenge provided through Regulation has to have a clear separation.

The Head of Regulation provided an assurance that she reviewed information in the context of ensuring fairness of the full cohort of all learners in Northern Ireland and the potential impact the proposals will have.

She supported the points made by the Council member in terms of setting standards and standardisation and that CCEA should continue to have a role in this area.

The Chair wished to add the caveat that we are operating in exceptional circumstances. Taking cognisance of one year of CAGs was challenging, however having a second year of disruption – albeit the Minister’s desire to have examinations proceed, recognised the need to continue with maintaining standards. He recognised the substantial work undertaken on the development of contingencies and CCEA would await the Minister’s decision and act accordingly.

A Council member asked for further consideration to be given to the concern in regards to the term CAGs and the interest in the process of arriving at a mark and considering how this mark would be justified. He suggested that this be part of the discussion and reflected in the minute. Discussion was required on where CCEA goes in terms of direction, as Council has a direction they wish to be considered.

The Chair referred to the comments by the Chief Executive and Director of Education in that they have noted the comments by members which will be reflected in the revised papers to go forward to DE. The DoE confirmed that the ideas presented will require further refinement. She suggested that a follow up paper be prepared to take the Regulation Paper further to support the process and to gain a better understanding. She assured members that further work was required and would welcome the additional thinking and support.

A Council member referred to a point raised by the Chief Executive in regards to a closed mindset in DE to the possibility that they may not be examinations and this could be obstructive in terms of the work CCEA is trying to achieve, given that early decisions are required so that planning can begin. She expressed concern at whether any work was being carried out to monitor the disruption in schools.

The Chief Executive advised that feedback has been taken onboard on points raised on moderation and CAGs. He confirmed that engagement continued with DE on these matters and will take forward the views of Council to DE as a stakeholder. He confirmed that CCEA had a close working relationship with DE on this work and preferred to have early engagement with Council on this rather than provide final proposals/options.

He advised that the only data available was attendance data, however nothing was available on effectiveness of school teaching. He expressed concern at the lack of data in order to make informed

assessments for future arrangements, and stated that for good contingency planning, it was essential to set out the scenarios or points at which contingencies should be enacted. He stated that it was not CCEA's role to monitor this and would welcome the provision of clarity from government on this issue.

The Head of Regulation stated that there was a recognition in DE that contingencies were required in the event that examinations will not proceed. She advised that there is a more robust challenge on the contingencies to ensure that the process will withstand scrutiny and there is no repeat of Summer 2020.

The Chief Executive advised that the minute will reflect the points members have raised in regards to concerns on the contingencies and where further work is required. This will be taken forward with DE and key stakeholders and will return to Council with more developed proposals. He thanked Council for their input and for taking the opportunity to shape the proposals to date.

***Consultation on Proposed Changes to CCEA Entry Level, Vocationally Related and Occupational Studies Qualifications for January and Summer 2021*** ***CB/16Oct/02***

The DoE drew attention to the detail of the paper and confirmed that a consultation had been conducted on changes and adaptations that could be made to CCEA Occupational Studies, Vocational Qualifications and Entry Level Qualifications. She referred to the questions asked of the sector seeking their views on whether these were practical and sensible.

The DoE confirmed that the proposals put forward were deemed to be acceptable by the sector and that the public health adaptations have been considered suitable and proposals around accessibility of the qualifications have been deemed acceptable. She advised that following Council's support, the final proposals could be submitted to DE and subsequently share information with the sector on the basis of the adaptations.

Members were content to support the changes and ratified the proposals to go forward to DE. Formally proposed by Dr Les Caul and seconded by Mrs Christine Harpur.

**Any Other Business**

*Notification to appoint Chair CCEA Council*

The Chair confirmed that he had received notification from DE that the advertisement to appoint a Chair of CCEA. Clarification is required on whether Council members will also be sought. This will be placed on the CCEA website as requested by DE. He asked members to consider this.

*Frequency of Briefings*

He referred to the frequency of Council briefings and recognised the considerable amount of time, effort and work required on reviewing the papers to allow for discussion. He in the hope that nothing else major would arise that had not already been considered, he proposed that the briefings be moved to a monthly basis and asked the Chief Executive to provide a summary Covid-19 situation report for members on a weekly basis.

He would continue to discuss with the Chief Executive issues as they arise and the need to bring to Council's attention should this be required.

A Council member sought clarity on how the Council would operate in regards to the role of Council. The Chair recognised this and confirmed the work would continue to be discussed in the Committees and will come forward to Council as required, for reasonable consideration and ratification at Council level.

He recognised the unusual exceptional circumstances that we have been operating under and is working in the best intentions and within the existing governance frameworks including the advice from the NIAO. With this caveat he sought confirmation that members were confirmed to move to monthly briefings to go alongside the schedule of meetings which has been made available to members. He confirmed that should urgent issues arise we will put in place additional meetings as required. Members were content with this approach.

He thanked members for their support, expertise and experience together with the significant amount of time on assisting the Executive Team in taking forward this work.

A Council member sought clarification on responses to the CCEA 2020/21 Business Plan. The Chair asked that the deadline be extended to Tuesday 12 October 2020.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The Chair confirmed the date of the next Council Business Meeting as **Wednesday 11 November 2020 at 10 am.**