

The DoFCS advised that the information would be issued to Senior Council as soon as possible.

A Council Member referred to the matter being raised at the NI Assembly Education Committee and welcomed the involvement of the Permanent Secretary in taking this forward. She sought clarification on whether the Education Committee were aware of the steps being taken to resolve the matter to avoid a negative viewpoint in such a public forum. The Chief Executive had stated that the matter was under legal consideration (on the Hansard record), and therefore no further comment could be made until Senior Council had provided opinion.

The Chair added the Education Committee would be communicating with the Minister of Education, and that they were aware of the legal issues. He stated that the Chief Executive had, on several occasions, pointed out the difficulties in this area, including the need to seek DE approvals in regards to finances.

Members welcomed the clarification.

Examinations – Close out of Summer 2020 series

The Chief Executive drew attention to the copy of the letter issued to the Minister following the Council meeting held on Sunday 16 August provided for members' information. He confirmed that the Minister had agreed to Council's advice in regards to the awarding of GCSE grades, and confirmed CCEA had enacted this on Monday 17 August at 7.30 am. He reiterated that the Minister's decision to change his position on the awarding of A Level grades was of a political nature. CCEA worked to issue the had amended grades to UCAS by 19 August; centres by 20 August; and A Level students on Friday 21 August.

Appeals Procedure

The Chief Executive advised that as soon as the Minister's decision on the awarding of AS and A level grades was made public CCEA sought legal opinion in regards to its Appeals procedure, without amending the consideration of the consultation. He confirmed that subsequent amendments were made to the appeals framework in order to address the situation.

Appeals

To date 800 letters have been issued to close out appeals. 163 were closed out on 25 August, with 132 live appeals. He confirmed that the number of appeals were decreasing, however there could be a second wave based on new awards.

Calls to the help desk have also decreased since the announcement, however there continued to be a range of challenging enquiries in regards to the Centre Assessed Grades (CAG). The Chief Executive advised that consideration would be given where due process has not been followed by the centre in regards to CAG and, appropriate action taken as necessary. He was pleased to report that following the decision a considerable amount of appeals have been withdrawn. The team was confident that the remaining appeals would be closed out by Friday 28 August.

The Chief Executive advised that once the grade outcomes of JCQ for NI are known following the Minister's decision on AS and A Levels these will be compared to 2019 figures.

4 Regulation

The Chief Executive reported on Pearson. Following the GCSE 3 country decision, Pearson changed their position in regards to the awarding position for Level 2 and 3 BTEC qualifications to Centre Assessed Grades, this led to a delay in the issue of results due for release on Thursday 20 August. CCEA were informed of this decision late on Wednesday 19 August and, following discussions felt there

would be a potential conflict and likelihood of challenge in Level 2 VQs and GCSE. Similarly, OCR/Cambridge results for technical qualifications will be issued following adjustments. As a result, tariff points for NVQs will increase and impact on University entries.

The Chair expressed disappointment at the late notification from Pearson stating that it would have been pertinent for CCEA Head of Regulation to receive a courtesy call on the matter prior to the decision being taken by the awarding body.

The Chief Executive explained the sequence of events and consideration of risk on the General Qualifications given there was no change in VQs. He confirmed he had highlighted the risk to the Chief Executive of Ofqual, and that the Head of Pearson had made contact with him to notify him of the decision. The information was immediately included in CCEA's communications strategy in regards to NI candidates and advise Pearson.

The Chair sought clarification on whether it would be appropriate for the Chief Executive or Head of Regulation to write to Pearson expressing dissatisfaction at the way in which the situation had been handled. The Head of Regulation said it was regrettable and Pearson should have advised CCEA on their position as soon as possible. She referred to the parity of Vocational Qualifications and to allow this to drift was unacceptable, and whilst disappointing she assured members that she had kept DfE officials informed as the situation evolved.

The Chief Executive advised that in terms of notification, CCEA issued a statement on the Pearson situation and would continue to follow up with the Awarding Organisations' in regards to their role in Northern Ireland.

CCEA Consultation - Proposed Changes to CCEA GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications for Summer 2021

The Chief Executive confirmed that following the Minister's decision on the awarding of Grades for GCSE and A Level, minor amendments had been made to the consultation document. He advised the consultation was launched on Monday 24 August, and has been picked up by the media. Stakeholders are being actively encouraged to participate in the consultation, which will close on 7 September, after which the analysis of responses will be carried out and outcomes reported to Council on 10 September 2020.

The Chief Executive briefly outlined the component parts of the consultation document and raised the matter of optionality in that the Department were keen to include this as a question. In discussions with the Head of Regulation and Director of Education the risks of CCEA delivering optionality were highlighted, these included challenging complexity and capacity issues. On reflection, and to avoid Ministerial instruction, the Chief Executive decided to include the question on optionality in the consultation. He confirmed he had written to DE outlining the position, and brought the matter formally to Council's attention.

A Council member stated that it would have been preferable for Council to have had a view on the consultation prior to issue, he emphasised the importance of, such a debate taking place at Council. He felt the consultation itself was potentially controversial and should have been a matter for Council discussion. A Council member added that there had been no discussion on the content of the consultation in regards to the types of assessment to be continued, whether there would be a reduction in syllabus, course content and expressed regret at the suggestion of unit omissions. She suggested striving for parity across subjects areas to some degree.

The Chief Executive clarified the reduction in specifications to 40% was part of the options proposed to Council in July and advised that there was a range of PHA guidance in regards to subjects that require contact within the assessment. He confirmed he had received communication from the NI Assembly

Education Committee wishing to have its views represented on the Consultation, however it was important for CCEA to adhere to its governance framework in the first instance.

A Council member said it would be helpful that, prior to discussion on 10 September, for members to have sight of the consultation document and proposals to enable full discussion. The Chief Executive agreed to provide all documentation to Council as soon as it was available. Following Council discussion/ratification, advice would be prepared, and forwarded to the Minister for his consideration.

The Chair concurred with the need for Council to discuss the feedback fully in the first instance. A Council member expressed a desire for more detailed discussion on important issues and felt that the most significant discussions have been short circuited due to time pressures. He stated that the advice had to issue with the approval of Council.

Clarification was sought on whether it was possible to hold face to face Council meetings. The Chief Executive confirmed that the building was prepared, however advice could be provided to Council members to ensure they adhere to the PHA guidance, and the meetings can be conducted through hybrid arrangements (online and physical presence combined).

The Chair confirmed that the Council meeting on 10 September would be conducted via Hybrid arrangements as crucial decisions were required. The content of the outcomes of the consultation document for Council consideration was important and the view of Council would take primacy. He confirmed that whatever issues arise from the analysis of feedback Council would make recommendations based on the best interests of the learners, and to the work of CCEA.

The Chair referred to the statements made at the NI Assembly Education Committee and stated that it had been made clear that schools require decisions and direction as quickly as possible.

A Council member referred to the Chair of the Education Committee's question in regards to what teaching would look like in 2021, and reminded members that she had raised the importance of Council considering a 'new start' as a result of the circumstances arising from the pandemic. She sought clarification on whether there would be discussion on the long-term view, and what Council needed to discuss for the curriculum and examinations for 2021, given that teaching cannot resume as it was before Covid-19.

The Chair agreed that it was timely for Council to have a view on the nature of future teaching and assessments arrangements 2021 and beyond. He stated that CCEA has a duty of care to ensure that the examinations and assessment systems are fair and fit for purpose, and discussions should commence.

The Chief Executive thanked the Council member for raising the item. He confirmed that : Priority 1 was to run the Consultation; as well as this Priority 2 was progressing work on further contingencies. Priority 3 will look at significant issues and take a longer term view of qualifications, in regards to the operation of an open qualifications market; conflict between General and Vocational Qualifications; and issues around 14-19 which still have not been addressed.

He confirmed support had been received for the guidance on Foundation Stage to KS3 however, the majority of discussion in the public domain continued to focus on qualifications. He referred to the challenges in regards to planning scenarios for 2021; the pandemic and full regional lockdown; and longer term planning. He was of the view that both the Department of Education, and Department for the Economy should take cognisance of these issues and provide direction as appropriate.

A Council member concurred that there was a need for longer term planning and thought leadership for the 14-19 agenda. This will be a key consideration and whilst recognising a short-term fix was required for 2021, further deliberations to provide clear and coherent direction to schools was crucial.

A Council member asked for the record to show that Council were considering the priorities as outlined by the Chief Executive, and were concerned about the extent of the work required. The Chair concurred with this and suggested that it may be pertinent to schedule a longer session of Council to consider the main issues and work required for future arrangements for curriculum, assessment and qualifications. This should be concluded well in advance of 31 January 2021.

A Council member stated it was important for the outcomes of the consultation to be presented and direction provided to schools as a matter of urgency. She welcomed the suggestion of the longer meeting in the appropriate format.

The Chair agreed to progress this with the Chief Executive.

5 Review of Summer 2020

CB/2508/01

The Chief Executive outlined the approaches taken by England, Scotland and Wales in regards to conducting reviews of the Summer 2020. He referred to the discussion Assembly Committee and confirmed that the committee did not ask for an external review, however they did ask the Department of Education, and CCEA to consider a review of the Summer 2020.

He drew attention to the correspondence from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and advised that officers were in the process of drawing together the documentation in response to the request.

He thanked the Council member for drawing attention to press articles, and said that no formal notification had been received in regards to a statistical review and suggested it would be advisable to wait until a decision has been made by DE on how they wish to proceed. Members would be informed upon receipt of any instruction.

As per any large item of work a Post Project Evaluation will be carried out, and any area that Council may wish to be reviewed can be accommodated.

The Chair concurred with the suggestions made by the Chief Executive, and reminded members of the extensive pressures staff were experiencing in terms of workload and hours worked.

Clarification was sought on whether there was any regulatory guidance provided for CCEA Awarding Organisation, and if an impact assessment exercise had been conducted. The Chief Executive advised that in terms of the model of application legal advice was being sought and he would not wish to comment any further on the model at present. The ICO letter was generic across the 4 jurisdictions and the context of CCEA would be clearly set out as an Arms' Length Body operating under direction.

A Council member stated that in regards to a review it would be important to carry out a significant review of what happened, identify how it happened and this should be done as quickly as possible. He suggested that a Regulatory committee should be convened as a matter of urgency to look at issues raised in regards to Regulation. The Chief Executive agreed to convene a meeting of the committee as soon as possible.

The Chair said it would be his preference for the Minister to call for an independent rather than external review.

Clarification was sought on the impact of an independent versus external review. The Chief Executive confirmed that an external review is a body appointed by the Minister reporting into DE, external of CCEA. An independent review was one carried out within by appointees independent of the body. An external review would be independent of Council. Members agreed there was a need for transparency as any such review would be open to scrutiny, and that the review should be unbiased and independent.

A Council member raised the issue of high standard communications to ensure complete understanding. The Chair confirmed that in discussions with his counterparts there was strong agreement that a clear, high level communications strategy across the jurisdictions was required to explain and clarify the issues that have arisen in regards to Summer 2020.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he would take the views of Council and share the Terms of Reference should an internal review be required, however he awaited the decision of the Minister as to whether an external review would take place

6 Any Other Business

The Chair wished to place on record his thanks to members and officers for their contributions and extraordinarily commitment throughout the summer months.

The Vice-Chair wished to place on record her thanks to all staff who have continued to work through these challenging times, in particular the Chief Executive and his team.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The Chair confirmed the date of the next Council Briefing would take place on Thursday 10 September 2020 at 10 am via hybrid arrangements.

Subsequently, the date of the meeting was re-arranged to Tuesday 15 September 2020 at 9.30 am.