

CCEA

Minutes of a Special Council meeting held via MS Teams on Wednesday 3 June 2020 at 2.30 pm.

Present:

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

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 welcomed newly appointed Council member Mrs Marlene Kinghan to her first meeting. He outlined the protocols for participation.

Main Business

Chief Executive's COVID-19 Situation Report

Corporate

Buildings

The Chief Executive advised that preparation and health and safety checks have commenced on the 3 sites, Clarendon, William Ritchie and Mallusk. All buildings will be brought to a ready state before 30 June. He assured members that PHE guidance will be adhered to and, at this time, management continue to encourage remote working where possible.

Estates Strategy

The Chief Executive advised that the current Estates Strategy now requires significant amendment given the present circumstances. All 3 leases are synchronised to expire in 2021. The Director of Finance & Corporate Services is progressing this work and will report back as appropriate.

Finance – Fees

The Chief Executive advised that the proposal on examination fees has been issued to DE. No response has been received to date. He advised that a question had been raised at Westminster's Parliamentary Questions (PQs) in regards consideration of extension of furlough by HMRC to examiners, no response was noted at this time. An updated paper on CCEA's position in regards to payment of examiners is on the agenda for this meeting.

An options paper on proposals for payment to the senior examining teams will come forward to the Council on 10 June 2020 for consideration.

Awarding

The Chief Executive confirmed that development of the standardisation models were progressing well. The A Level model was currently with Regulation and has been approved in principal, and was now undergoing expert statistical checking. The proposals for AS and GCSE models will be finalised by mid-June, and following all appropriate checks will be released.

The process for the collection centre assessment grade entries for A Level subject closes on Friday 5 June, to date 94% of candidates have been completed. Good progress in regards to rank order submitted (28%) was also reported. GCSE closes on Friday 12 June with 67% centre assessment grade entries for candidates having been completed to date. Entry Level and Occupation Studies also have good closure.

The Chief Executive was pleased with the level of progress to date, and welcomed the co-operation from all schools. He noted that there has been a good response from SEN schools in regards to Entry Level data.

General

The Chief Executive advised that COVID-19 was an evolving situation, and there is uncertainty on how government will react to the restrictions. Initial projections are that a second wave is anticipated, and presentations to the Westminster Education Select Committee is clear that restrictions will likely remain in place in schools until November 2020. He confirmed that CCEA would work through the guidance and prepare draft proposals (in conjunction with EA and CCMS) to progress through the restart programme with the Permanent Secretary (DE). The CCEA draft proposals would be considered by Council.

Correspondence from F Graham (DE) : Commissioning of CCEA advice on General Qualifications Arrangements for 2020/21

The Chair drew attention to the correspondence received from DE and sought clarification on the timeframe for the submission of the packages of work commissioned.

The Chief Executive confirmed that these were significant pieces of work and would be completed in stages. No timeframe had been agreed, however work will commence as soon as possible and would be progressed in stages. He said a range of options would be kept open due to limited resources and timescales, however in the first instances adjustments to assessment instruments will be made in light of the restrictions, in particular those subjects who have contact requirements. Subject specialists would be consulted and stakeholder views sought. Any amendments to specifications will be by way of an addendum to explain clearly the necessary changes.

He advised that the work would range from rapid adjustments to longer term proposals. The November series would be the first assessments to require adjustment, however this would be smaller in scale than the January 2021 series as there are a higher number of candidates taking Mathematics and English.

The Chair confirmed that Council would have time to fully consider the contents of the letter to ensure a full understanding of the extent of the work required.

Members recognised the extent of the advice being requested, and the significant challenges this presented. It was agreed that further discussions were required. It was also important that CCEA provided proposals on its statutory responsibilities, and other items as appropriate within its remit. A Council member stressed the need for other ALBs to meet their obligations in the provision of information to DE.

It was further noted DE's desire to facilitate extensive consultation on the arrangements and engagement of colleagues from ETI at an early stage.

The Chief Executive said that a draft paper in response to the correspondence would be brought to Council for consideration at the next briefing. He advised that at present the focus would be on amendments, ensuring CCEA does not breach the H&S guidance, to deliver the examinations process taking account of the ongoing public health issues. He said the loss of teaching and learning was unquantifiable at this time, and stated that CCEA did not have the resource (expertise) to fulfil the request to quantify this.

The Chief Executive stated that clarity on the strategic approach to reopening in the Restart project was required in order for him and his officers to plan the best support and resources for schools.

Regulation

The Head of Regulation continues to monitor issues with other Awarding Bodies in regards to Vocational Qualifications (VQs). The Chief Executive advised DE have asked him to be in attendance at a meeting with FE college principals to discuss a range of VQ related issues.

Discussions on how to deal with assessment for VQs from September 2020 is also underway.

The Chief Executive advised that he had chaired a meeting between the 4 jurisdiction Chief Executives to put in place a regulatory level of principals for Restart. SQA will host the next meeting.

No issues of concern in regards to General Qualifications have been raised.

Curriculum & Assessment

Assessment : Statutory Assessment for 2020/21 is currently suspended, however discussions are required on what the arrangements will be for 2021/22. The Chief Executive advised that there could be a resource issue if new arrangements are required.

Curriculum : A further strand of resources to support learning for parents and young people in regards to hybrid learning has been launched.

The Chair said he was reassured that CCEA continued to provide support to schools and young people through this type of resource.

Communications

The Chief Executive said the volume of broader communications remains challenging. He report popular support for the videos released on technical guidance and was pleased with the level of understanding amongst the community on these matters.

In preparation for the next academic year, a communication has been drafted for centres to give assurances that work has commenced on guidance to allow schools to plan for 2021/22.

The helpline continues to field approximately 150 calls per day as clarification is required on new information issued.

The Chief Executive advised that lines to take had been drafted in advance of any media interest arising from the presentation to the NI Assembly Education Committee on 3 June. A request had been made for a radio interview, however it was declined.

A Council member commended the Chief Executive's approach in having quality and controlled communication on these issues. He asked if a phrase could be included in existing communication to

centres in regards to the mental health and well-being of the learners, in the context of the need for clarity on requirements for the next academic year.

Members agreed that the response to the letter from DE should be broken down into sections identified by the Chief Executive to ensure clarity and accessibility for schools. This would also be useful for DE in providing direction to CCEA so that plans can be considered and a communication strategy put in place for schools. It was also suggested that CCEA provide advice within its statutory powers.

Logistics and Closure

The Chief Executive confirmed there were no issues of concern to report.

REGULATION

Appeals Consultation : Feedback from NI Assembly : 3 June 2020

Members could avail of the Hansard transcript from the session once available.

Decisions Report on Appeals Consultation

Paper 1

The Head of Regulation stated that the paper presented is currently under legal review. In the event of any changes, Council will be informed. She drew attention to the component parts of the report, in particular, the decisions and reasons for each.

The Head of Regulation confirmed that the statistical model for A Level had not yet been finalised, however it had been agreed in principal, subject to review by the independent statistician. She assured members that this approvals process would be followed for the A2 and GCSE models.

A Council member suggested that once agreed, and adopted, the models should be explained clearly to all stakeholders. The Head of Regulation agreed that this would be communicated in Plain English to ensure public confidence. She also confirmed that all information would be explained as clearly as possible.

The Chair sought clarification on the timeframe for sign off on the model. The Head of Regulation confirmed that feedback from the independent statistician was due back w/c 8 June. She advised that the information had been checked from both policy and technical perspectives and the additional process had been introduced to ensure robust checking. The model has also been through due diligence by the Awarding Organisation.

Members sought and received clarification on a range of matters, particularly in regards to the statistical models and Teacher Professional Judgement. They were satisfied with the detailed explanations provided.

The Chair welcomed the clarity of the documentation, and sought confirmation on whether it would be appropriate for Council to wait and approve the document alongside the statistical models. The Chief Executive advised that it would be preferable to have Council approval as the appeals process would require finalisation before schools finish on 30 June 2020.

Members were content to approve the document. Formally proposed by Mrs Christine Harpur, and seconded by Dr Les Caul.

A Council member commended the quality of the document provided in such a short timeframe.

Statistical Models

A Council member urged caution in that Council needed to be 100% certain that should there be an appeal against the statistical model there would be no redress. The Head of Regulation stated that the statistical

standardisation model would be applied fairly and consistently across the cohort and it would be CCEA's responsibility to ensure the process put in place would stand up to scrutiny, be robust and above reproach.

The Head of Regulation assured members that the models presented to her have been rigorously scrutinised to ensure she was satisfied with what has been produced by the Awarding Organisation (AO). She wished to place on record the process had been conducted in a professional, robust and somewhat challenging manner, however her function was to provide challenge to the AO to ensure the model is of the highest standard and in the interests of all learners. The Chair appreciated this reassurance.

Curriculum

Supporting Learning : A Guide for Parents and Learners

The Chief Executive drew attention to the graphic outlining the Guide for Parents and Carers as part of the Support for learners with the Key Stage 3 Curriculum resources. He confirmed that a significant range of materials were available on the website. The information sheet has been developed jointly between EA, CCMS and CCEA and is proving popular.

A Council member welcomed the information, and suggested that it could be enhanced to provide more examples throughout. The Chief Executive confirmed the team was developing a range of exemplars to populate the graphic with links to useful information to make this a more interactive resource as part of the DE joint project with Education Authority.

Examinations

Correspondence : Commissioning of Advice from CCEA on 2021 Examination Series

The Chief Executive confirmed that this had been discussed earlier in the agenda and confirmed that a draft paper would be provided on how CCEA will respond (through a staged approach) to the requests from DE and will come forward to Council for discussion at the next briefing.

Any Other Business

None identified.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chair confirmed the next Council Briefing was scheduled for Wednesday 10 June 2020 at 2.30 pm via MS Teams.

He thanked officers and members for their contributions to the meeting.

