

CCEA

Council Briefing

Minutes of a Council Covid-19 Briefing Meeting held on Friday 9 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 Mrs K O'Hare
Mr C McKinney Mr B Wilson
Ms P Slevin

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 Ms Rose Byrne, and Mrs Samantha Kirk.

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 advised that a significant amount of correspondence had been received and responded to since the last meeting. In order to expedite routine correspondence scheduled for Council business meetings, he thought it would be beneficial to bring the information forward to this meeting. He outlined the following correspondence:

NI Assembly Correspondence

- Grade Standardisation and Moderation
- Curriculum for Children with ADHD
- Curriculum and Assessment 2021 Contingency Planning
- Grade Awarding Models

DE Correspondence

- Proposals for 2021 Examinations
- Proposals for Examinations Process 2020/21
- Options & Risk Assessment
- Minister's Decision : Delivery of GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications 2020/21 (7 October)
- Minister's Decision : Delivery of GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications 2020/ (9 October)

The Chief Executive drew attention to the amended letter from F Graham (received 9 October), in regards to the Delivery of GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications for 2020/21, outlining the decisions taken by the Minister of Education on examinations and how we are to proceed. The Chair stated that, following receipt of this recent correspondence, it would be his preference for the Chief Executive and his team to take adequate time to review and identify any issues regarding the implementation of the instruction from the Minister that differs from the advice CCEA has submitted, and asked for a with a further update on plans for implementation to come forward to the next Council briefing on Friday 16 October 2020.

A Council member made reference to the number of occasions he had asked for evidence on Council decisions and confirmation that these decisions had been agreed. He sought confirmation on whether CCEA had given consideration to the range of issues raised in the correspondence. The Chief Executive stated he was disappointed that the integrity of the officers and Council was being questioned, and confirmed that the minutes of the meetings held on the various issues had accurately documented Council discussions and decisions, including Regulatory issues.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he and the Chair had raised this at the recent GAR meeting and were assured by the Permanent Secretary that the integrity of the Council and officers was not being called into question.

He advised that he spoke to the Deputy Permanent Secretary and her officials to seek confirmation that at no point during the series of discussions was the integrity of the process in question. He confirmed the information that was presented to Council and subsequently DE was discussed, considered and forwarded as advice.

The Council member expressed concern at the inference Council did not consider the matters nor address the issues. The Chair shared these concerns and confirmed he had challenged the senior officials on this following receipt of the correspondence.

The Council member said it would be preferable to ensure that adequate discussion took place at the Council's sub-committees going forward.

A Council member raised the need to state that DE and CCEA were working in agreement when working through matters to produce and proposals and solutions, and the Minister's change of view in regards to a number of recommendations put forward.

The Chief Executive stated that the letter outlines the Minister's decisions, however public perception and view that the decisions would be CCEA's were out of CCEA's control. He advised that we have noted the Minister's desires and will begin implementation of same. He reminded members that CCEA was a delivery service and, whilst recognising the difficulties and challenges ahead, would continue to deliver as required.

A Council member referred to the correspondence from F Graham (DE) of 9 October and asked the Chief Executive to summarise and contextualise the issues raised.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the context for the advice was detailed in the presented the paper discussed at the Council meeting on 15 September (provided together with a range of supporting evidence to the letter setting out Council's advice). He stated that the proposals put forward were to alleviate burden on examinations, however significant changes and challenges have arisen between the time of submission of advice and receipt on Minister's decisions on how to proceed. He confirmed that further contingencies, should disruption continue, or in the event where examinations may be cancelled, are now being considered.

He drew attention to the detail of the letter of 9 October, in particular the Adaptations to Qualifications, and outlined the range of recommendations accepted by the Minister.

The five key areas where the Minister's view differed from CCEA's recommendations were as follows:

- CCEA should continue to explore optionality across all qualifications to reduce the assessment burden further.
- All assessment components should be retained for GCSE Mathematics.
- In GSE English the written components should be retained, however, the speaking and listening assessments should be omitted and an endorsement from schools similar to that required for Modern Languages will be required.
- Reductions in assessment for all CCEA GCSEs and GCEs should not exceed 40% of the total assessment of the qualification.
- For the five qualifications (ie GCSE Religious Studies, Health & Social Care, Food & Nutrition, Government & Politics; and Statistics) where omission of a GCSE module would exceed this limit, CCEA should explore alternative approaches to achieve a reduction in assessment.

The Chief Executive summarised the detail provided for each of the key areas, and referred to DE's request for optionality to be explored further. He reminded members of the concerns expressed by officers in regards to the significant technical, operational and educational challenges that will be encountered, however work will commence as per instruction.

A Council member confirmed he was in receipt of the Minister's letter to schools, he expressed disappointment at the lack of detail and recognition of the good work that CCEA had completed in developing and providing the options. The Chair concurred, and was disappointed that this had not been recognised by the Minister.

A Council member expressed disappointment at the delay in receiving the Minister's decisions, and dismay at the request for further consideration on the five key areas. She was also concerned at the potential negative impact this would have on CCEA's reputation amongst the education sectors, parents' and pupils.

The Director of Education (DoE) referred to the request for further work on the 5 key areas and wished to register her concern for the well-being of subject officers and teachers, particularly in the secondary sector, given the additional workload this will entail. She expressed disappointment at the way in which the message had been conveyed to schools, and also that the advice was not accepted in full.

A Council member sought clarification on whether Council should respond to the issues raised in the letter of 9 October. The Chair expressed disappointment at the way in which the letter was written, and assured members that all minutes would be made available to DE on the significant amount of briefing meetings that had been held to discuss these matters.

A Council member, whilst acknowledging the challenging position CCEA was in, recognised that the direction and been provided, signposted well and it was imperative that Council and management now turn its attention to managing the suite of examinations to run the 2021 series, including the range of contingencies required should examinations be cancelled.

4 Education

Contingency Planning 2021 : Centre Assessment Grades Based Approach for Summer 2021

CB/09Oct/01

The Director of Education (DoE) drew attention to the detail provided at paper CB/09Oct/01 outlining the range of options developed to address levels of disruption following DE's request for a range of contingency responses should the delivery of examinations for Summer 2021 be severely impacted.

In asking members to recognise the scenarios of disruption presented were speculative, she stated, for the record, that CCEA did not have access to the CMO, PHA and Executive considerations of health changes and the information was accessed through the Restart programme. CCEA believes that DE should specify how and when the level of disruption is deemed such that examinations cannot proceed to ensure clarity for examinations and the wider system. The scenarios outlined have been exemplified to assist in developing proposals. The DoE stated that it would be imperative for decisions on the best contingencies to respond to these exemplified scenarios should be made as early as possible to provide the best change of these operating successfully, and also allow for better resource management; communication, and better training and engagement for stakeholders in advance of decisions being taken.

Underpinning Principles

The DoE confirmed that, following Council's request further consideration had been given to reviewing the underpinning principles of the work in regards to Covid-19 contingencies. These were detailed on page 2 of the paper. All principles were discussed at Education Committee together with additional higher level principles, which were summarised into an introduction.

The DoE gave a detailed overview of the paper, outlining the approach and the proposals which include three levels of disruption under which different options were presented. She confirmed there were 9 proposals in total across the 3 Levels.

Level 1 Disruption : at this level include one of more absence, not exceeding 20 school days.

Three proposals together with benefits and disadvantages were summarised (detail provided on pages 3 & 4 of the paper).

Level 2 Disruption : if a school or number of schools report disruption beyond Level 1, or a defined range of disruption (eg 40 days absence).

Two proposals together with benefits and disadvantages were summarised (detail provided on pages 4 & 5 of the paper).

Level 3 Disruption : would involve significant disruption to several schools (eg 10% full closure) and the topping point being reached whereby it would be no longer physically feasible to continue with examinations in 2021.

Three proposals together with benefits and disadvantages were summarised (detail provided on pages 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the paper).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the DoE advised that principals have requested a clear road map be communicated as early as possible to explain the contingency planning process to assist them in supporting and reassuring staff, students and parents.

The proposals together with overall ratings were outlined in Table 1 provided on pages 10 and 11 of the paper.

The Chair thanked Margaret and her team for the paper and welcomed the clarity provided on the options. He stated that given the recent correspondence from DE and in light of the complexities it was his preference to return to the paper at its meeting on 16 October 2020.

A Council member thanked the DoE for the comprehensive nature of the paper. She drew attention to Proposal 7 and sought clarification on what steps would be taken to mitigate a paper being disclosed earlier than intended. The DoE confirmed that this would be positioned as an assessment task for schools and that there would be a move away from the word 'Mock' examination. The Council member suggested that a specimen paper could be used to inform judgements.

A Council member commended the paper, which would be welcomed with teachers. She said this concurred with her view of where CCEA needs to move to and stated that DE buy in was essential. She referred to the 'Transition Year' work which is undertaken in the South of Ireland, however recognised that this relied totally on external engagement. She would advocate this being explored in future years, however it would not be conducive in the context of current health restrictions.

The Chair thanked members for their initial comments and asked that a revised paper be presented at the next Council briefing on Friday 16 October 2020.

5 Any Other Business

Confirmation of Interim Vice-Chair

The Chair confirmed that Dr Ana Kerr had received the majority vote from Council members for the interim position of vice-chair from immediate effect until 31 January 2021. The Chair, on behalf of members congratulated Dr Kerr.

Meetings with Chairs of CCEA Sub-Committees

The Chair said he would seek a joint meeting with the Chairs of CCEA's sub-committees to progress co-opting members to ensure breadth and expertise as appropriate and to fulfil the Committees Terms of Reference.

General

The Chair wished to state on record his appreciation that the meetings over the 7 month period had been a significant commitment.

He referred to F Graham's letter of 9 October and instructed the Chief Executive and his team to take forward the instructions of the Minister and bring the out-workings back to Council for consideration as appropriate.

Council will also consider Regulation's views on the Contingency Proposals at the next Council briefing.

He asked for the meeting to be extended to a 2 hour slot to ensure Council had sufficient time to discuss and consider the papers presented on 16 October.

He wished to place on record his thanks to the Chief Executive and his team for the substantial work completed, given the significant increase in workload, and to all teams and staff involved in contributing to

the papers for Council. He asked the Executive Team to pass on Council's thanks to staff for the high quality work which is valued in increasingly challenging situations.

6 Date of Next Briefing Meeting

The Chair confirmed the next Council briefing would take place on Friday 16 October 2020 at 1.30 pm.

The Meeting concluded at 2.50 pm