

CCEA

Minutes of the one hundred and thirty-fifth meeting of Council, held on Wednesday 11 December 2019, at 10.00 am in Room 115, 1st Floor, 29 Clarendon Road, Belfast.

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

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

Mr P Burke, Chair, State Examinations Commission - Visitor's Address
Dr A Farrell, Chief Executive, State Examinations Commission – Visitor's Address

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

1 Apologies

None received.

2 Conflict of Interests

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

3 Chair's Business

Digitisation of Council Papers

The Chair thanked members for their commitment in transitioning from paper to digital Council papers, and for their feedback on the product. He advised that he would review the comments with ICT staff and provider to make the system more user friendly. He asked members to continue to use the Decision Time product.

Chair's Report to Council

The Chair gave an overview of the range activities undertaken since the last Council meeting. This included:

- Completion of the Chief Executive's Performance Review for 2018/19 and submission to the Permanent Secretary (DE) for consideration.
- Attendance at a number of events to include, NI Skills Breakfast and Careers Exhibition, BBC Education Board, Young Enterprise Big Christmas Market, and Breakfast Meeting, Chair's Forum,

with the NIAO Auditor General. The focus of this was on high level aspects of NIAO work over the next 3 years. The document would be made available to members electronically.

He commended the Young Enterprise Big Christmas Market as a first class event.

- Meetings with members of the Executive Team to discuss various matters across the Education, Finance & Corporate Service and Regulation functions.
- A meeting with a Professional Services Company to discuss Board Effectiveness; and DE Governance Official to discuss governance in relation to Council appointments, and succession planning for the Chair of Council.
- GAR Meeting 20 November : confirmed that Council's concerns in regards to the challenging budgetary arrangements had been raised. Senior Officials (DE) have taken due cognisance of the concerns and are aware of the issues, however no direction was forthcoming on efficiency savings.

The Chief Executive advised that he had been asked to prepare and deliver a presentation on pressures CCEA is facing over the next 4 years to DE and the Department of Finance. This will include the reduction of staff and associate pressure, which have already been highlighted in the 3-year spending review.

He stated that the seriousness of a CCEA failure in services would have a significant impact on the learners.

Meetings with the Chief Executive: The Chair confirmed that the regular 1-1 meetings with the Chief Executive continued and had been scheduled throughout 2020. These meetings monitored the effectiveness and provided an assurance on the management of operations within CCEA. He advised that regular updates were also provided by the Chief Executive which required discussion outside the scheduled meetings.

He confirmed that a meeting had been organised for February 2020, with a representative from the PSNI to discuss the internal audit solution. Attendees will include the Chairs of the ARAC and Council, the Chief Executive, and Director of Finance and Corporate Services.

Partnership arrangements between Department and Arms-Length Bodies: the Chair welcomed this development, and advised that he would seek volunteers from Council with the Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Corporate Services to discuss how this can be taken forward.

A Council member raised the possibility of CCEA generating income to alleviate the budget pressures. She sought clarification on whether any reasons had been given for the push back from DE on the suggestions put forward for efficiency savings. The Chair confirmed no reasons had been provided.

She suggested that it would be useful for Council to have a record of the potential solutions that had been put forward on paper. The Chief Executive confirmed that all of the suggestions for efficiency savings had been outlined in CCEA's response to the 3-Year Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), which contained a number of measures in order to address long term issues, for example, increasing examination fees in line with inflation. He confirmed that this had been discussed and communication from DE had been received instructing CCEA not to increase the fees. A further issue is the pay uplift for staff constrained by NJC conditions. This has been recognised.

The Chief Executive expressed serious concern in regards to the limited opportunities available for addressing the gap.

He confirmed that the CSR submission had been discussed by the Finance Committee and Council at their September and October meetings respectively.

Following detailed discussion it was suggested that Council should write to DE signalling the 2021/22 pressures. The Chief Executive confirmed that all CCEA comments have been forwarded to the Department of Finance, however representations would continue to be made.

A Council member stressed the importance of CCEA as an organisation within Education, and the need to reinforce this with decision makers in Government.

In regards to an external review of Effectiveness of Governance, he suggested that in assessing its own effectiveness the Council should look for creative and imaginative ways of doing so. The Chair accepted the suggestion, however said there may be a requirement for external input. He confirmed that once the information became available he would discuss the way forward with Council.

This concluded the Chair's report to Council.

Chief Executive's Report to Council

The Chief Executive drew attention to the detail of the report provided and updated members on activity since the last meeting.

Curriculum & Assessment

CAT (Computer Adaptive Tests). The pilot has been available to Key Stage 3. To date, 11,000 pupils in 57 schools have completed the assessments. This work is supported by Cambridge University, and they are providing information on how CAT may be taken forward in future assessment arrangements.

Launch of 'Celebrating Our Sports' resource took place in October. The resource will increase pupil's awareness on a range of important themes including cultural identity, heritage and equality.

CCEA have been invited to speak at the UK BETT Conference on the Viking Minecraft resource. During November & December 10K usage reported on the C2K, which indicates schools are engaging with the resource.

GCE English Languages & English Literature : further discussion has taken place with some stakeholders in regards to how these qualifications may be taken forward. .

Irish Medium : first meeting of the Irish Medium Programme Board was held on 27 November. The Board will provide advice and oversight to ensure the effective delivery of CCEA Irish Medium projects.

Curriculum Monitoring : first phase of the exercise has been completed. The report has been submitted to the Department of Education. The Chief Executive advised that it was his intention to publish the report in January 2020, and will inform CCEA's Business Plan for 2020/2021.

DE's Transformation Programme : CCEA continues to be involved in this programme and is creating purposeful collaborative working relationships with the EA and schools in line with DE policies. The work will be brought through the relevant committees as appropriate.

Examinations

Moving Image Arts Showcase : an excellent event with very positive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. The Chief Executive invited members to view the materials.

Modern Languages Review : the Terms of Reference for the Regulatory Review have been received. The Awarding Body is working on a large data request for submission to Regulation in January to allow the review to commence.

Malpractice : Following the publication of the Sir John Dunford report, a significant amount of work has been carried out to support and inform Principals, Board of Governors, Examination officers, Invigilators, SENCOs, parents and candidates. CCEA has also met with DE and GTCNI officials and representatives from the main employing authorities in NI to discuss the Dunford review.

A Council member suggested that, in regards to the support and guidance materials for Malpractice, it could be beneficial if there was one available for each Head of Department.

Regulation

Vocational Qualifications Programme. First Phase is Complete with The Future of Qualifications Report being submitted to DE and DfE. The second phase has begun and a Project Board has been established to oversee the project. The first meeting took place on 5 December 2019, and Dr Caul is representative on this board. The report will be presented to Council in due course.

Review of Modern Languages : work has commenced. The Chief Executive confirmed that engagement with key stakeholders would form part of the review.

Review of GCSE Mathematics is on course for completion of the draft by 31 December 2019.

Revision of General Conditions of Recognition : will come forward to Council for ratification and will be published in January 2020, simultaneously with OfQual and Qualifications Wales.

Corporate

The Chief Executive confirmed that:

- ICT services had been fully reaccredited to the ISO20000 standard. No compliance issues were raised.
- Pay negotiations for 2019/20 have concluded and staff have migrated to the new NJC pay scales.
- The Beta version of the new CCEA website has been launched. The full CCEA website will be launched in January 2020 (subject to feedback and adjustments). A demonstration will be given to Council at its meeting on 28 January 2020.
- Modernisation Agenda and SRBI Funding : CCEA has successfully bid for Phase 3 funding to develop a software solution for 'Intelligent crowdsourcing of question items'. It is hoped that this will improve efficiency in question paper production.
- Estates : SIB have completed the field work on the estates study, and space utilisation. A short list of options are being developed to inform the full business case. Timescales continue to be a challenge.

Clarification was sought and received on a number of matters. Members were satisfied with the explanations provided.

This concluded the Chief Executive's report to Council.

FOI Requests

Members noted the most recent FOI requests.

4 Minutes of previous meeting held on 9 October 2019

Subject to the following amendments,

Confirmation of Vice-Chair

'it was agreed that Council needed to discuss the mechanisms used for appoint Chairs and co-opting members to ensure its sub-committees are able to effectively support the work of the organisation.

It was agreed that the Standing Orders should be reviewed'.

The Chair agreed that there would be a discussion on these matters at the next meeting on 28 January 2020.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 October 2019, were proposed by Dr Les Caul, and seconded by Dr Neill Morton. A copy was available for the Chair to sign.

Action Points

Members noted the status of the action points.

Correspondence

The Chief Executive drew attention to the following correspondence:

- Review of Grading in Modern Languages (and CE response)
- CCEA Active Citizenship Resources : Additional resource allocation for 2019/20
- Notification of Surrender of CCEA Recognition by Qualifications Wales as an Awarding Body
- Curriculum Monitoring Report and Annex.
- Outcome of September Monitoring Exercise 2019/20
- Partnership Agreement Template.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the outcome of the Grading in Modern Languages Review would be brought to Council once completed by Regulation.

He drew attention to the correspondence received from the Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards (DE), in regards to the Curriculum Monitoring Report and confirmed that all of the points raised were taken on board. He was pleased to report that the Permanent Secretary (DE) has issued an instruction to release the report in January 2020.

Clarification was sought on whether it would be necessary to seek a formal response from DE, to ensure CCEA can support the findings in its reports following feedback and amendments from DE. The Director of Education confirmed that a positive discussion had taken place with DE and senior officers to state clearly that it was not a 'revision of the curriculum' but putting forward monitoring proposals, as required under statute.

The Chief Executive outlined the process followed for preparing and submitting advice to DE, and suggested this be raised at the GAR meeting in March 2020.

5 Governance and Accountability

GAR Meeting : 20 November 2019

The Chief Executive drew attention to the agenda provided for members' information. He confirmed that an updated had been provided under Chair's Report to Council (Item 3).

6 Regulation

Regulation Committee

The Chair thanked members for their expressions of interest to sit on this committee. He confirmed that Dr Neill Morton had agreed to act as Chair. Members would be notified of the date of the first meeting in due course.

The Director of Education declared an interest on the items for discussion and left the meeting at this point.

For Information

Review of GCE and GCSE Languages

C/135/1

The Head of Regulation drew attention to paper C/135/1 (and the Terms of Reference outlined in Item 5 : Correspondence), and confirmed that Regulation was undertaking a review of CCEA's GCE and GCSE Languages. She advised that the lead officer would be one with modern languages expertise. A statistician from Ofqual has been asked to join the review team.

Clarification was sought on whether centres had been made aware of this. The Head of Regulation confirmed that this was the case and a communication to centres would be release in January 2020. The languages under review are French, Spanish, German and Irish.

A Council member welcomed the possibility of future engagement with the young people and said it would be interesting to see this feedback.

The Chief Executive advised that interest in Modern Languages arose in 2015 in the UK.

A Council Member said it would be essential to include subject content as an important mitigating factor in terms of comparability. It would also be useful to establish whether there is continuity across CCEA languages in terms of examination questions and the terminology used.

General

A Council member observed that some colleagues, in attending CCEA marking conferences have advised that they are now aware of what is required by examiners. He suggested that the information from these conference could be beneficial to teachers with a view to providing best possible teaching and advice to young people in preparation for their examinations. The Chair asked the Executive to raise awareness of this issue, as appropriate.

Vocational Qualifications Provision : Phase 2 DfE Project Update

C/135/2

The Head of Regulation drew attention to the update provided. She confirmed that the Project Board had been established, comprising of a range of practitioners and including Dr Les Caul, Council Member.

She advised that a draft report would come forward for consideration by the end of the financial year. A period of consultation should follow.

Member sought and received clarification on a number of matters, and were content with the information provided. The Chief Executive assured members there were many interfaces and connectivity, with major input coming from the DE/DfE 14-19 Project Board.

Members recognised the challenging timescale for the completion of this work.

Proposal for 'old style' BTEC Qualifications

C/135/3

The Head of Regulation drew attention to the detail provided in paper C/135/3. She gave an overview of the main issues for discussion, in particular the proposal outlined on page 2.

The Chief Executive expressed concern about the way in which the communication had been received and he asked the Head of Regulation to progress the matter.

Members discussed the matter in detail, sought and received clarification on a range of matters.

The Chief Executive stated that this matter was in regards to the 'old style' BTEC L3 VRQ qualifications, not the withdrawal of the new BTEC VRQ Qualifications.

Members were content with the explanations received and were content to approve the proposal for:

'CCEA Regulation to advise DE and DfE to consider their funding policy for these qualification types'.

The Director of Education re-joined the meeting at this point.

7 Audit

Corporate Risk Register : Summary of Risks November 2019

C/135/4

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services drew attention to the information provided in paper C/135/4, and update members on the current status of the Corporate Risks 1-6. The Chief Executive drew attention to CR3 and confirmed that this was an escalating risk which continued to be managed.

He confirmed that a workshop on Risk Management had been held with Senior Managers.

Members noted the information provided.

BREXIT Update

The Chief Executive advised that the BREXIT Contingency Management Group and that of the Department of Education had both been stood down. These may be convened when the outcome of the UK and European Union is finalised.

He confirmed that the primary risks remained as previously notified, however significant unknowns remained.

Members noted the information provided.

8 Education

Education Committee Report : 14 November 2019

The Chair of the Committee drew attention to the detail of the minutes. He reported on the following:

- Members were advised of the Review of Modern Languages. The matter was discussed at Council on 9 October, and the draft report will go through the appropriate governance process.
- Summer Examinations Series & Presentation : members received a detailed presentation on the overall performance for GCSE and GCE Summer 2019; and were advised of the successful awarding of the new GCSE Grading.
- GCSE Science : Review of Assessment & Administrative Arrangements : members considered and were satisfied with the content of the questionnaire, prior to the launch of the survey. The outcomes will be brought back to the committee at its February 2020 meeting.
- Curriculum Monitoring Report : members received a comprehensive overview of the main areas of the report and welcomed the findings and plans for future work.

A Council member suggested that should work continue in curriculum monitoring a small management board (of Council members) could be established to provide advice and relevant expertise to officers.

The Chief Executive stated that there would be lessons learned from this phase of the programme which would shape the way in which the next phase would be handled. He said that future work would form part of discussions in the operational plan, which would come forward to the Education Committee and subsequently Council for consideration.

- CCEA Support for Schools 2019/20 & Learning Leaders : members received a summary of DE's Learning Leaders Strategy and welcomed CCEA's involvement in the initiative.
- Malpractice Update & Presentation : members received a presentation on the main findings and recommendations arising from the Report of the Independent Commission on Examination Malpractice (The Dunford Report). Members welcomed the clarity provided and recognised that further work was required to raise awareness in centres.

This concluded the Education Committee report to Council.

9 Planning

2020-2025 Corporate Planning Update

C/135/5

The Chief Executive drew attention to the information provided in C/135/5, in particular the actions detailed on pages 2 and 3 of the paper.

He advised that a public consultation will be required on the draft plan, however this could not occur during Purdah.

Members considered the following actions :

Action 1 : The Draft Corporate Plan 2020-2025 as Final Draft, for public consultation.

Following discussion, it was suggested that members should put forward any comments directly to the Chief Executive outside of the meeting. It was agreed that, subject to amendments, the draft should be prepared for public consultation.

Action 2 : An 8 week public consultation on the Final Draft Corporate Plan 2020-2025, and to complete the public consultation directly after the period of Purdah.

Members' preference was to adhere to the normal 12 week consultation period, and agreed to the consultation directly after the period of Purdah.

Action 3 : After the closure of the public consultation, the submission of the Final Draft corporate Plan 2020-2025 to the Department of Education (noting the correspondence outlined in the paper).

Members were content. The Chief Executive confirmed that he would also highlight the lack of a 3-year budget and other significant issues previously discussed by the Council in relation to the challenging financial environment and impact of VES, when engaging with Department of Education on the Draft Corporate Plan.

The Chair confirmed that following feedback from the public consultation a revised Final Draft would be presented to Council for approval.

10 Finance

Finance Committee Report : 27 November 2019

The Chair of the Committee confirmed that members had fulfilled their scrutiny and challenge function on all of the agenda items. She drew attention to the minutes provided, and reported on the following:

- Finance Report as at 31 October 2019 and Statement of Financial Position as at 31 October 2019 : Members discussed the information in detail and recognised the extent of the constraints and challenges facing the organisation.
- Draft Budget 2020/21 : The budget has not yet been confirmed.
- Operational Plan 2019/20 : Quarter 2 Monitoring Report: Members were content with the information provided.
- BREXIT Update : Members noted the latest position in regards to risk associated with BREXIT.
- VES 2019/20 : Members recommended that the proposal come forward to Council for ratification.

The Chair confirmed that the above items were also on the agenda for this meeting.

- Procurement and Business Case Update: Members noted the procurement and business case activity since the last meeting (detail provided on pages 4 and 5 of the minutes). The Chair drew attention to the Internal Audit addendum (page 5) and asked members to note the action in regards to seeking assurance that future arrangements for this function would be conducted independently and robustly.

Members also received an update on progress with the Estates Strategy, and approved the PRP Policies for 2018/19, and 2019/20.

Human Resources Report

Members received update on the Performance Review; Sickness Absence Quarter 2; and progress on the review of HR policies.

In regards to the overall level of scrutiny by the committee on HR issues, it was suggested that this be retained and reviewed. The Chair sought advice from the Council, and referred to the following :

'In 2014, this Council received and considered an independent report, by the internal auditors, into matters regarding Human Resources (HR) operational management. At this time Council felt there was a need for increased scrutiny of HR operations and delegated this function to the Finance Committee. Since that time the Finance Committee has carried out this function.

At the most recent Finance Committee, which included scrutiny of HR operational matters, members felt that the level of scrutiny currently applied to operational matters may not be required to the same degree. However, members were clear that there was a need to scrutinise implementation of strategy and resourcing performance indicators.

It is recommended that an appropriate level of scrutiny be retained by the Finance Committee, but that the HR operational matters are scrutinised in a more proportionate matter. Should any future audit, or other information cause Council concerns, this position could be revisited, and the level of scrutiny increased.

The Chair advised that this was an important matter, and required discussion. He suggested that this be deferred to the next appropriate meeting.

He wished to place on record, on behalf of Council to Ms Byrne for her significant contribution to the and for chairing the committee over the last 3 years.

This concluded the Finance Report to Council.

Finance Report as at 31 October 2019

C/135/6

The DoFCS drew attention to the detail of the paper and reported an underspend of £13K (0.1%) with no significant issues to report. Capital spend remained on target at this time. She advised on a number of projects which would be taken forwards by using various underspends in other areas of the business.

Members were content with the information provided.

Statement of Financial Report as at 31 October 2019

C/135/7

Members noted that this information was presented to Council as part of best practice.

Draft Budget 2020/21 Update

The DoFCS advised that work continues across Directorates towards managing the pressures and constraints the organisation is currently facing, given no direction has been provided following CCEA's submission to the CSR review. She expressed concern at the difficult financial situation, and advised that an updated paper would be brought forward to the Finance Committee in February 2020.

Members noted that the budget allocation for 2020/21 had not yet been received.

The Chief Executive provided a summary of the information provided, and drew attention to the recommendation :

'To notify the Department of Education of the return of funding for Voluntary Exit Scheme of 3275K and consult with Business Managers to make savings through suppressed vacancies without further exits through redundancy for 2020/2021'.

He advised that Finance Committee had suggested that Management promote this decision positively across the organisation, with a view to alleviating pressures and increasing staff morale.

He advised that the risks outlined were low and mitigated as appropriate.

Members were content to approve the proposal to return the funding to the Department of Education.

Performance

Operational Plan 2019/20 : Quarter 2 Monitoring Report (by exception)

C/135/9

The DoFCS drew attention to the information provided, and reported on Quarter 2 for 2019/2020.

Members noted the information provided.

11 Any Other Business

None identified.

12 Date of Next Meeting

The Chair confirmed the dates of future meetings as follows :

Tuesday 28 January 2020 : 9.30 am – 3.30 pm

Wednesday 1 April 2020 : 10 am – 1pm

Visitors' Address : Mr Pat Burke, Chair, and Dr Aidan Farrell, Chief Executive : State Examinations Commission, Ireland

The Chair welcomed and introduced Mr Pat Burke, Chair, and Dr Aidan Farrell, Chief Executive, of the State Examinations Commission, Ireland, to the Council meeting.

Dr Farrell took the opportunity to thank the Chair, and Chief Executive for the opportunity to sit on the Regulatory Advisory Committee which had proved very beneficial in his understanding of regulation matters across the 3 jurisdictions.

He provided an insight into and briefed members on :

- Reforms in qualifications, in particular the Leaving Cert;
- Maintaining public confidence in Examinations;
- Innovations in Examinations and Assessment, such as onscreen examinations and new curriculum areas;
- The relationship between the Curriculum and Examinations.

Members sought and received clarification on a range of matters.

Mr Burke said good governance in regards to the running of the Board, and good relationships between board members was essential. He advised that the challenge function provided by the board, in regards to asking difficult questions of the executive was an important part of running an effective organisation.

The Chair, on behalf of Council and the Executive, thanked Mr Burke and Dr Farrell for addressing the Council, and looked forward to continued contact in the future.

Members had an opportunity for informal discussions with Mr Burke and Dr Farrell on matters of mutual interest during lunch.

CHAIR

DATE

