

## CCEA

## COUNCIL

Minutes of the one hundred and forty-second meeting of Council held on Wednesday 11 November 2020, via MS Teams.

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

Mr J Edwards (Chief Executive)  
Mrs L Scott (Director of Finance and Corporate Services)  
Mrs S King (Head of Regulation)  
Mr J Daly (Financial Services Manager)  
Mrs E Martin (Business Manager, Curriculum & Assessment)  
Ms A Swann (Business Manager, Qualifications)  
Mr M Crossan (Business Manager, Examinations Administration & Assessment)  
Mr D Wilson (Business Assurance Manager)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

### Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting and confirmed the protocols for participation. He confirmed there would be a 5-minute break before 11 am to allow members to observe the Act of Remembrance and the 2-minute silence.

A Council member asked if there would be an opportunity to discuss how Council business could be expedited more efficiently moving forwards given the significant volume of papers provided for this meeting. The Chair confirmed he would refer to this under Any Other Business.

### 1 Apologies

An apology was received from Miss Margaret Farragher.

### 2 Conflict of Interests

Members advised there were no conflicts of interests on any of the agenda items.

### 3 Chair's Business

#### *Bereavement*

The Chair, on behalf of Council, expressed deepest condolences to Margaret Farragher on her recent bereavement. He said he had left a personal message of support for Margaret and acknowledged that other members may have also made contact.

## *External Review – Summer 2020*

The Chair advised the External Review – Summer 2020, had commenced and he would speak to the Review Team on Thursday 12 November 2020. He confirmed the Chief Executive had met with the team on 2 occasions and would update members on discussions as appropriate.

### *Officer Attendance*

The Chair advised that Mrs Esther Martin (Business Manager, Curriculum & Assessment) and Ms Amanda Swann (Business Manager, Qualifications Development) would speak to papers under Item 7 Education.

Mr John Daly (Financial Services Manager), and Mr David Wilson (Business Assurance Manager), would clarify any matters under Item 10 Finance, Planning and Performance.

### *Minutes of Committee Meetings*

The Chair advised that minutes of the Finance Committee (21 October), and Regulation Committee (27 October) had not yet been finalised and would be available in due course.

### *Chair's Report to Council*

#### *Meeting with Chairs Ofqual; SQA and OfQual*

The Chair confirmed he had met with his counterparts in Ofqual, SQA and Qualifications Wales to discuss matters of mutual interest. This included updates on the Independent/External Reviews being carried out, across jurisdictions on Summer 2020.

#### *Quals Wales*

The Review in Wales has been completed. The Welsh Minister has appointed an Independent Body to oversee Awarding of Grades for 2021.

#### *SQA (Scotland)*

The Review in Scotland has been completed. National Fives have been cancelled and discussions continued about the format of Highers and Advanced Highers.

#### *OfQual (England)*

It was confirmed that examinations in England would proceed for summer 2021, however the Chair of Ofqual acknowledged that a range of contingencies had been drafted should the position change.

Members sought and received clarification on a range of matters, including the contingencies that would be required should examinations not proceed in 2021.

Concern was expressed at the impact differing decisions would have on maintenance of standards across the jurisdictions. The Chair concurred that the four Chairs were extremely concerned at the maintenance of standards.

The Chair also expressed significant concern about the open qualifications market in Northern Ireland which would continue to cause ongoing challenges over the next 2-3 years. He asked the Chief Executive to take forward discussions with DE and DfE officials to raise awareness of the challenges schools were facing in this regard.

Clarification was sought on the number of NI candidates sitting WJEC examinations. The Chief Executive reported the AS/A2 entries for WJEC (excluding EDUCAS) was 3401 in the previous year. He confirmed that the Head of Regulation (HoR) was considering the implications for WJEC qualifications and this would be a matter for the Regulation Committee once clarity from WJEC had been provided on possible implications for NI candidates.

A Council member suggested it would be important for CCEA to have contingencies in place should instruction change in England, and the likelihood of a revised direction from the Minister of Education (NI). The Chair confirmed that CCEA had prepared overarching contingencies for use in the event of a change in Ministerial direction.

## ***Chief Executive's Report***

### *Independent Review*

The Chief Executive confirmed the Terms of Reference had been issued to Council, and updated members on the constitution of the panel. He advised there would be an interface with officials in the Department of Education, and the Review Team would submit its report to the Minister of Education.

He gave an overview of the following areas of engagement :

- Governance Arrangements
- The Awarding Process
- Technical aspects
- Data processing
- Communications and Engagement
- Corporate Risk Register and Operational Log Risks

The MSFM was also being explored and challenged for its fitness for purposes and challenges in the legislation this would be separate from the main review.

The Chief Executive said the panel had given no indication of recommendations or notes of concern. The approach taken was based on the provision of evidence (from CCEA), and in his view, engagement had been fair, reasonable and considerate, as well as thorough and robust.

Members sought and received clarification on a range of matters, in particular the timeline for the completion and submission of the report; governance arrangements unique to CCEA, and also whether there would be engagement with CCEA stakeholders as part of the review. The Chief Executive confirmed that the final report was due for submission mid-December 2020. He advised that the focus was predominantly on Northern Ireland and may look at the 3 jurisdiction inter-dependencies. He stated that the stakeholder engagement was in confidence, however suggested that the panel may engage with a range of educational stakeholders through various forums, and possibly the NI Assembly Education Committee and the Regulators from other jurisdictions.

### *Welsh Position*

The Chief Executive advised on the interim report arising out of the Welsh Independent review. He confirmed that Quals Wales had issued advice to the Welsh Minister on contingencies for the 2020/21 academic year. Following this an announcement was made on 10 November that Wales had cancelled all examinations for 2021, however the detail of the alternative approach was, at present unclear. The Chief Executive has sought clarity from both WJEC and Quals Wales.

He reported that Qualifications Wales would engage with an Independent Group (to be established) to define and develop the alternative mechanism for Summer 2021 arrangements and possibly for Quals Wales to instruct WJEC on the approach, development and delivery of an agreed assessment instrument.

Clarity had been provided that an external assessment would be provided and marked by WJEC.

The Chief Executive stated that a decision had not been made on Vocational Qualifications in Wales. He expressed concern that a policy shift in Wales would cause challenges in regards to the 3-country relationship, and the standardisation of the brand (GCSE and A Level) across the 3 jurisdictions would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to maintain.

The Chief Executive referred to the NI WJEC candidature (over 3000 entries) and the need for a decision to be made on the arrangements, and for CCEA to fully understand the implications before advice could be developed and considered by the Regulation Committee and Council.

He stated that WJEC offered examination-based approaches globally and would have to consider a broader cohort taking account of policy decisions in those jurisdictions.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of matters and were content with the explanations provided.

#### *Contingency Arrangements*

The Chief Executive referred to the 8 Options previously agreed by the Council and confirmed work continued on operational detail for Options 2, 4 and 7. All options remained open in the event of a change in policy direction. He stated that CCEA continued to work to the Minister's instruction as per 9 October 2020, on alleviation of burden on assessment and drew attention to the position on the remaining 5 GCSEs (on agenda at paper C/142/5) to be closed out as per Minister's request. The PHA adjustments to A Level have been implemented.

The Chief Executive updated members on the range of information prepared for consideration by DE and JCQ and advised that should examinations continue, and further alleviation of burden required, Option 4 would be preferred. Detailed work was being developed on what was possible on a subject to subject basis.

Should the Minister decide to cancel examinations, the Chief Executive referred to the Option 7 (previously considered by Council) and stated this was being developed taking on board Scottish, Welsh and Irish positions in regards to a moderated controlled version of centre-based judgements. He confirmed engagement had taken place with teacher unions and representative bodies, in particular head teachers, to ascertain the acceptance of the approach. CCEA officers continued to work very closely with DE to obtain feedback around the detail of this Option.

The Chief Executive recognised the challenges around communication on alternative options to examinations, however wished to avoid creating anxiety and uncertainty amongst learners. He said it was essential that an assurance was given that CCEA was developing a range of contingencies and options that would be ready to enact should the Minister's position change. He assured members that detail was being developed and, should it be required, more refined models would come forward to Council as appropriate.

A Council member expressed concern at the complexity and breadth of the work being undertaken by CCEA and the reference point for Council members who were not closely engaged with the operational detail. He asked for a clear statement on the Council's strategy setting out CCEA's position for

examinations in Summer 2021. He asked the Chief Executive to provide Council the confidence to know that officers were working towards the provision of examinations unless directed otherwise. The Chief Executive stated that CCEA's position was on the basis of examinations if at all possible, but that CCEA would also plan for the scenarios where the Minister or the Northern Ireland Executive decide that examinations are no longer possible.

The Council member suggested that the Council may wish to give consideration to the future of examinations and that in CCEA's professional judgement they may not be examination hall based. He suggested that a dedicated resource begin to develop an alternative in the medium term (to ensure CCEA had a fall-back position for operations), and to begin thinking on longer term future solutions. He stated that a mechanism was required for providing concise information to Council within an agreed framework, broad structure and direction to ensure clarity for all. The Chief Executive highlighted that one of the principles of the current work related to the sustainability of the examinations system.

Clarification was sought on how the contingency plans CCEA had developed and put forward to DE could be communicated clearly across the sector and stakeholders, looking at assessment and attainment (in place of examinations) for the future. The Council member stressed the importance of making the public aware of the detailed work underway on contingency planning CCEA on alternative arrangements for 2021.

The Chair thanked members for their input.

#### *Observation of Act of Remembrance*

At this point in the meeting the Chair proposed a 5-minute break at 11 am for those of those who wished to observe the Act of Remembrance.

#### *Reconvening of Meeting*

The meeting re-convened at 11.05 am.

A Council member whilst supportive of the points raised previously, agreed that clear communication was required. She sought clarification on whether CCEA could issue the contingency plans should examinations not proceed to the public and referenced the communication from DE which articulated CCEA was not at liberty to share.

The Chief Executive responded to the points raised by members. He highlighted the position that CCEA would proceed with examinations if at all possible, but that other contingencies would be considered in the event that the Minister or the Northern Ireland Executive cancel examinations.

He stated that, following the Welsh decision (10 November 2020) that there was a possible need for a full strategic review of qualifications in Northern Ireland, to include specifications, reviewing the strategic context of what the content of assessment arrangements would look like.

He suggested there were fundamental strategic choices for the Minister in this work which would rely on the principle of open market provision, 14-19 agenda and issues around the 'brands' (GCSE and A Level). If these issues were progressed in an appropriate format this would provide clarity to teachers and young people about the future context rather than trying to change the process children are already engaged with.

In addressing the point on raising awareness of outlining the contingency approach, the Chief Executive confirmed that CCEA continued to engage and keep communications active with stakeholders. He stated that care needed to be not to undermine the Minister's policy position. He assured members that he would

continue to meet with teacher unions' and Children's commissioner to provide technical understanding of the options and how they would work. He recognised the need to continue to brief political representatives on the range of options to provide confidence on available options without undermining the confidence of young people.

The Chair asked that consideration be given to the provision of a general statement outlining the current circumstances on contingency arrangements and for this to be placed on the website when possible.

#### *Independent Review of Education – New Decade, New Approach*

The Chair referred to Minister's Review of Education and concurred with members' that there was a need for consideration on the future of qualifications/examinations in Northern Ireland to ensure Council has an established view (taking account of consultation with teachers and principals as part of future discussions). He suggested that time be dedicated to initial discussions at the Council briefing session on 4 December 2020. Members concurred with this suggestion.

#### **Minutes of Council Meetings**

The Chair asked that in this instance the minutes be taken as composite and asked for a proposer and seconder for the following :

- Minutes of the Council business meeting held on 24 September 2020
- Minutes of Council Briefing Meetings held on 15 September 2020; 5 October 2020; and 9 October 2020.

The minutes of the above meetings were proposed by Mr Robert Thompson and seconded by Dr Les Caul as a true and accurate record. A copy would be made available for the Chair to sign once normal business resumed.

#### *Action Points*

The Chair asked members to note the status of the action points.

A Council member asked for follow up on the Engage Programme and discussion by Council on the attitude of the NI Assembly Education Committee towards the role of CCEA. The Chair confirmed these would be progressed outside of the meeting.

A Council member raised the enormous burden placed on the Manager of the Council Secretariat in the production of the minutes and thanked her for continuing to provide support to Council. The Chair endorsed this, however, emphasised that the majority of papers for this meeting had been issued in advance, but recognised papers had also been issued late. He wished to add his thanks, and asked members to bear in mind the exceptional circumstances under which officers were operating under.

#### **Correspondence**

The Chief Executive drew attention to the following correspondence:

- CCEA Support for Scheme to Provide Free Period Products in Schools, and J Edwards response.

Members suggested that representations should continue for schools to avail of these and DE should write to the companies who provide the products free of charge.

- COVID-19 Reshape Phase – Assessment and Awarding of Vocational Qualifications and Essential Skills in 2020/21 Academic Year - Policy Recommendations
- Appeals Mechanism for 2020/21 Academic Year.

- Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Curricular Resources and Support.

The Chief Executive advised that CCEA would take the opportunity engage with other faiths. This was welcomed.

## **Governance and Accountability**

### *Report of GAR Meeting held on Monday 28 September 2020*

The Chair advised the minutes of the GAR meeting held on 28 September 2020 were not yet available.

He drew attention to the agenda of the meeting and advised on the main issues discussed, and confirmed he had expressed concern to the Permanent Secretary about the pace at which DE responded to queries from CCEA in critical areas of work.

He also expressed concern at the lack of support CCEA was receiving in some areas from DE officials and suggested this would be a matter for the incoming Chair to raise with the new Permanent Secretary (DE), to build on and create better working relationships with newly appointed/promoted personnel.

The Chief Executive said there had been a number of changes within the Department of Education, in particular :

- Mr Derek Baker would retire at the end of November 2020
- Mrs Faustina Graham had been appointed as Chief Inspector (ETI)
- Ms Karen McCullough had been appointed as Interim Director Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards
- Dr Suzanne Kingon had been promoted the Head of Standards.

He confirmed that good working relationships continued with Mrs Fiona Hepper who continued in her post as Deputy Permanent Secretary.

The Chair asked for the relevant changes to be notified to Council outside of the meeting.

## **Education**

### *Minutes of the Education Committee Held on 7 October 2020*

The Chair of the Education Committee drew attention to the minutes provided and gave a summary of the main items discussed at the meeting. These included:

- An invitation would be extended to The Chief Executive and Director of Education to address the Belfast Met Conference in March 2021.
- Council Members to be invited to Primary and Post-Primary Focus Groups (as appropriate) as observers to keep members informed of live issues in regards to CCEA's core responsibilities.
- CCEA should not be asked to audit schools given ETI's refusal to conduct school inspections for the 2020/21 academic year.
- Risks in relation to the provision of sound alternative assessment arrangements should the need arise for summer 2021 (this risk has been articulated to ARAC).
- Vocational Qualifications and repurposing of six qualifications (on agenda for this meeting).

Members were also concerned about the absence of and need for a 14-19 strategy. Updates were provided on developments in regards to SEN and Irish Medium.

### ***Update on Contingency Arrangements***

The Chair confirmed this item had been dealt with earlier in the agenda.

### ***Vocational Qualifications : Future Plans***

***C/142/1***

The Chair welcomed the Business Manager, Curriculum & Assessment (C&A) to the meeting.

The Business Manager, (C&A) drew attention to the proposal outlined in paper C/142/1 and confirmed it had been considered by the Education Committee at its meeting on 7 October 2020. She gave an overview of CCEA's provision for Vocational Qualifications, and the need for continuous review in the context of sustainability and need, as well as financial viability.

Whilst it was not appropriate to withdraw the qualifications completely, the intention was to :

- Repurpose GCSE Agriculture & Land Use, Hospitality & Leisure & Tourism as Level 2 Vocational Qualifications.
- Repurpose GCE Performing Arts, Environmental Technology & Sports Science in the Active Leisure Industry as Level 3 Vocational Qualifications.
- Monitor Life & Health Science Single and Double Award qualifications for an additional cohort and complete an additional cost benefit analysis at the end of 2020/21.

The proposal would enhance CCEA's vocational qualifications portfolio and provide an alternative provision in these areas.

The suggestion of a more flexible approach (ie 100% internally assessed), together with the size of the qualifications remaining the same as GCSE/GCE would be attractive to meet the needs of young people in Northern Ireland, and attract similar points for university entry as appropriate.

It was confirmed that given the range of challenges schools currently faced on various unknowns and the impact of Covid-19, these qualifications (subject to adequate resource), would not be available until 2021 with first teaching September 2022.

Members welcomed the proposal to repurpose the qualifications and expressed the need for all learners to be catered for, as well as enhancing CCEA's Vocational Qualifications portfolio.

Members were content to agree the proposal, formally proposed by Mr Robert Thompson, and seconded by Ms Patricia Slevin.

The Chair recognised the significant amount of work completed and asked for Council's thanks to be extended to the team.

### ***Statutory Curriculum Response to the Covid-19 Emergency***

***C/142/2***

The paper was considered at the Education Committee at its meeting on 7 October 2020 and was presented to Council for information.

The Business Manager, Curriculum and Assessment referred to paper C/142/2 and outlined the proposals to support schools in their curriculum recovery during the 2020/21 academic year (following school closures from March 2020) and the need to support home learning, blended learnings whilst meeting the legislative requirements.



She highlighted the range of priority mitigations in progress to ensure CCEA was in a position to provide sufficient curriculum support given the disruption schools continue to face. A summary was provided on :

- Curriculum Recovery – given no areas should be stood down and arrangements made to continue with curriculum requirements to include design and planning support for schools. (this was welcomed by school principals and will be available on the CCEA website).
- Activities to date – continue to support the Continuity of Learning Project and various Restart Strands. The creation of a Home Learning Hub, updated existing resources and launch of a Wellbeing Hub.

She assured members that the resources would be signposted prominently on the CCEA website.

- Next steps – to prioritise plans and mitigations to support schools to deliver the curriculum in next 12 months, in context of challenges were considered to include New School Day, Public Health Advice (PHA) and available research (albeit it limited) on the impact of lost teaching and learning.
- Guiding Principles and Projects (outlined in paper)
- Day 1 Communication (should schools close) to ensure a state of readiness with resources to be made available to schools should this be required.

The Chair thanks the Business Manager (C&A) for the ongoing work to support the delivery of learning and was reassured by the excellent content of provision of resources for schools.

Clarification was sought and received that resources would be developed and made available through the CCEA for those families who did not have access to the internet.

A Council member wished to place on record her congratulations to all staff involved on the excellent work being produced. She suggested the following:

- Continuation with short videos to engage and connect with parents and use of audio as much as possible.
- Working with third party organisations (community organisations) to build up a resource useful for children.
- Promotion of materials through a 'magazine drop' to raise awareness with the general public and parents of CCEA's resources.

This would be explored with the Marketing and Communications team to ascertain what was available and how this could be taken forward.

A Council Member wished to place on record her thanks for collaborating with Young Enterprise (YE) as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party organisation on a new Mathematics textbook and supporting Irish translation. She endorsed this as effective and supported the work YE was delivering on behalf of the Department of Education.

A Council member suggested that the work CCEA was doing to support learning in Northern Ireland be promoted as a positive new story to raise awareness across the sector and with the general public. The Chair asked for this to be taken on board.

### **Statutory Assessment Arrangements 2020/21**

**C/142/3**

The Chief Executive confirmed that as CCEA was required to undertake statutory assessment, and no direction had been provided from DE on how to proceed for 2020/21 arrangements this was now a statutory compliance risk to the organisation. He confirmed he would discuss this matter with the DE and continue to seek direction.

The Chair suggested that the Chief Executive write to DE on behalf of Council expressing concern at the risk now posed to this statutory area of responsibility, and disappointment at the lack of response/direction.

The Chief Executive said he would include this matter in his welcoming letter to the new Interim Director Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards.

Members noted the information provided in paper C/142/3.

### ***Outstanding Five GCSE Qualifications***

***C/142/4***

The Chair welcomed the Business Manager, Qualifications to the meeting.

The Business Manager, Qualifications drew attention to the detail of paper C/142/4 and gave a detailed overview of the proposals for each of the five subjects identified by the Minister where alternative approaches to achieve a reduction in assessment should be explored. These subjects were : GCSE Religious Studies, Health and Social Care, Food and Nutrition, Government and Politics; and Statistics.

Members noted the information provided and were pleased with the positive responses received from centres on the proposed alternative approaches.

Ms Patricia Slevin left the meeting at this point.

### ***Summer 2021 Timetable Consultation***

The Chief Executive advised that the consultation on the summer 2021 timetable had been extended by one week. He provided an overview on the main issues arising and suggested that the paper be issued to members via e-mail for Council consideration and clarification.

Member agreed with this suggestion.

## **Regulation**

### ***Minutes of Regulation Committee held on 27 October 2020***

The Chair advised that the minutes of the Regulation Committee held on 27 October 2020 would be made available once finalised.

### ***Update on Other Jurisdictions – General Qualifications***

#### ***Wales***

The Head of Regulation (HoR) referred to the announcement from Wales and advised that this would impact on the NI learners who were taking AS/A Level qualifications with WJEC. She confirmed she had written to WJEC seeking clarification on the options available to NI (agreed with DE). She referred to the impact on maintenance of standards and suggested that it was increasingly likely that the 2020 standard would be used. However, confirmed that discussions would continue with other Regulators through the Maintenance of Standards Group on the most appropriate standard to be followed across the 3 countries.

## *England*

The HoR confirmed that the position was that examinations would proceed in England in summer 2021, however advised that a range of contingencies were being developed. She provided an overview of the type of contingencies under consideration by Ofqual should examinations not take place.

Members noted the information provided.

### ***For Approval***

#### ***Report on GCSE Mathematics Awarding***

***C/142/6***

The HoR drew attention to the information provided. She confirmed the Awarding Organisation (AO) had accepted the findings of the report and would proceed with its own investigation and take appropriate remedial action. She wished to place on record her thanks to the AO for the provision of data to enable the review.

The HoR confirmed the draft had been considered by the Regulation Committee at its meeting on 27 October 2020 and following amendments the final report was being presented for ratification.

Members were content to adopt the report. Formally proposed by Dr Les Caul and seconded by Dr Ana Kerr.

#### ***Examination Procedures Review Service (EPRS) – Revised Terms of Reference***

***C/142/7***

The Head of Regulation explained the background and function of the Examinations Procedures Review Service (EPRS) administered by Regulation. She confirmed that the ToR had been reviewed and had been aligned with those of Ofqual and Qualifications Wales. The revised ToR was available at Appendix 1.

Members were content with the information provided and ratified the ToR for adoption. The document was formally proposed by Dr Les Caul and seconded by Mrs Sam Kirk.

### **Audit**

The Chair of Audit & Risk Assurance Committee confirmed he would meet the Internal Auditors on 11 November 2020 to agree the Internal Audit Plan for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

#### ***Verbal Update – Corporate Risk Register 2020/21***

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services (DoFCS) advised the CRR was presented to the ARAC at its September meeting at which it was agreed an additional 7<sup>th</sup> Corporate Risk be included to specifically deal with issues in relation to the Covid-19 disruption. She confirmed that the Register was being updated to reflect the change and would go forward to the ARAC at its meeting on 26 November 2020.

Members were assured that the CCEA CRR was aligned with the DE Risk Register.

The Chair thanked the DoFCS for the update.

### **Finance**

#### ***Minutes of Finance Committee held on 21 October 2020***

The Chair advised that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2020 would be made available once finalised.

He confirmed that the Committee had fulfilled its scrutiny and challenge functions on all aspects of finance and planning.

### ***For Information***

#### ***Finance Report as at 30 September 2020***

***C/142/8***

The DoFCS drew attention to the detail provided in paper C/142/8 and reported an underspend of £467K (4%) outside DE's 1% target at this time. She asked members to bear in mind the various uncertainties impacting on the ability to spend for the remainder of 2020/21.

She was pleased to report that clarity had been provided in relation to payment for contractors and this would allow other matters to be progressed. She referred to the considerable amount of un-apportioned cost budget of £5.7m (detail provided on page 1 of the paper).

She assured members that the finance team updated DE on a daily basis on CCEA's financial position and continued to put in place acceptable mitigations as situations emerged.

The Chair recognised the considerable challenges the organisation faced and commended the amount of work carried out to date in monitoring and reviewing the financial position. He expressed concern that the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter was approaching and the pressures towards meeting the 1% target at year end.

A Council member commended the significant repurposing undertaken by the Finance team which has contributed to an already heavy workload and suggested that the term 'essential remit of CCEA' be used as the organisation had not been operating under normal circumstances during the 2020/21 financial year. The Chair recognised the continued challenging circumstances.

Members noted the information provided.

#### ***Statement of Financial Position as at 30 September 2020***

***C/142/9***

The DoFCS advised that the information was provided in line with best practice, with no issues to report.

Members noted the information provided.

The Chair sought and received an assurance that officers continued to work closely with the Department of Finance to ensure update information is provided and received.

### ***For Approval***

#### ***Business Case – Summer 2020 Charging Proposal***

***C/142/10***

The DoFCS introduced this item and advised on the considerable amount of consideration given in significant detail to the range of options for charging of examination fees to centres.

She wished to place on record that the paper had not been shared with DE officials and any decision would be subject to Departmental approval.

She drew attention to the range of options outlined in paper C/142/10 and advised that the preferred option was to offer discount of 70% (Option 4) giving a net position of £185K which may have to be surrendered back to DE at the end of the financial year.

The Financial Services Manager (FM) confirmed that DE was anticipating receipt of the Business Case. He provided an overview of the main points outlined in the paper and assured members that a significant amount of due diligence had occurred in developing the proposals. He outlined the approach taken

including a range of contributory factors (ie income, Covid-19 pressures and other operational activity), having worked with budget holders to establish the basis and content of the information for the business case.

The FM confirmed that Option 4 (70%) discount would be preferred to realise as close to a balanced budget for year-end as possible.

He assured members that once approvals had been provided it would be intended to communicate this to schools as a 'good news story'.

A Council member welcomed the clarification on the 70% reduction for examination. He suggested that the terminology could be reworked to make this more amenable to schools. The FM explained that it would be important to ensure schools were aware that CCEA was significantly subsidised by DE to run the examinations, and CCEA would not benefit from the discount. The Council member suggested that in communicating this to schools CCEA should aim to achieve maximum benefit ensuring as much as possible a positive situation is reported.

The DoFCS welcomed the comments, however stated each school has their own policy and recognised the variations on how resits would be handled. She referred to the word 'discount' and suggested a different term would be considered to ensure the general public were aware that CCEA was not a profit making organisation.

Members were content to approve Option 4 – to offer a 70% discount to centres. Formally proposed by Dr Les Caul and Dr Ana Kerr. The business case would be submitted to DE for consideration and response.

## **Planning and Performance**

### ***For Retrospective Approval***

#### ***2020/21 CCEA Business Plan***

***C/142/11***

The Chair confirmed that the draft Business Plan 2020/21 had been circulated to members via the e-mail mechanism for comment and subsequent approval. Members' comments had been taken on board and included in the final draft.

Members retrospectively approved the 2020/21 CCEA Business Plan for formal recording purposes.

### ***For Information***

#### ***CCEA Operational Plan 2020/21 : Quarters 1&2 Monitoring Report (by exception) C/142/12***

The DoFCS drew attention to the information provided in paper C/142/12 and advised that no measures were not likely to be achieved or not achieved, with 12 measures likely to be achieved with some delay. She reported a satisfactory position under the current circumstances.

The Chair recognised the challenging times, however welcomed the clarity of the information provided.

## **Any Other Business**

### *Conducting CCEA Council Business*

The Chair shared the concern expressed by a member on the conduct of business in a virtual environment. He proposed that he meet with the member and the Chief Executive to discuss more effective ways of expediting business with a view to bringing a proposal to the next business meeting of Council.

A Council member suggested that consideration be given to the length of meetings. The Chair said that to ensure Council fulfilled its responsibilities adequate time would be factored in for full Council business meetings with focused agenda items.

### **Date of Future Meetings**

The Chair confirmed that an additional Council briefing was scheduled for Friday 4 December 2020 at 1.30 pm. Papers for the briefing would be issued in advance.

The next Council business meeting was scheduled for Thursday 17 December 2022 at 1.30 pm

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