

Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

COUNCIL

Minutes of the ninetieth meeting of Council held on Tuesday 14 September 2010 at 1000 hours in Room 226, CCEA Headquarters, Clarendon Road, Belfast.

Present : Mr D McKee (Chairman) Mr J Clarke
 Ms P O'Farrell Mr J Wilkinson
 Mrs D Black Mrs H McClenaghan
 Mr J Collins

Mrs K Godfrey (DE Observer)

Mr G Boyd (Interim Chief Executive)
Mr R Hanna (Director, Education Strategy)
Mr M Quinn (Director, Corporate Services)
Ms AM Duffy (Director, Qualifications)
Mr J Daly (Financial Controller) for Item 5 only

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

Introduction

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms M Crilly and Mr D Thompson.

2 Chairman's Business

The Chairman drew members' attention to the revised tabled agenda.

Governance Handbook

Members received an individual copy of the Governance Handbook from the Department of Education.

In respect of the Governance and Accountability Training, it was confirmed two Council members had yet to complete the training. It was agreed that dates for the training would be sought from DE.

NIPSA Correspondence

Members were reminded that NIPSA made a presentation to the Council on 26 May regarding non-payment of Performance Related Pay.

The Interim Chief Executive said that despite ongoing discussions between CCEA, DE and DfP during the summer months, the issue is yet to be resolved. He outlined the main issues contained in the correspondence received from NIPSA on 3 September. These included:

- Concern at the apparent inaction of CCEA.
- Disappointment that CCEA does not appear to be making this a key priority with DE.
- Disappointment in the lack of communication with staff for some weeks.

NIPSA are now asking the Council to make urgent representations to DE and DfP to avoid legal action.

Following a detailed discussion, the Interim Chief Executive confirmed that urgent representations would be made to DE and DfP and that all possible steps to bring the matter to a conclusion will be taken.

The DE Observer confirmed that no action could be taken without DfP approval. However, every effort was being made by all relevant departments to bring this to a close.

It was confirmed that the PRP Frameworks had been approved and are now in place. Clear guidance on approvals has also been provided.

The Chairman wished to place on record that it was regrettable that this issue had not yet been resolved and sought an assurance that all necessary representations would be made as soon as possible.

An update would be provided at the next meeting.

General

The Chairman wished to place on record his best wishes to Mr Robson Davison (former Deputy Secretary, DE) on this retirement.

3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 22 June 2010

With the amendment of '*Interim Chief Executive*' to '*DE Observer*' the minutes of the previous meeting were proposed by Mr John Wilkinson and Ms P O'Farrell as a true and accurate record. A copy was signed by the Chairman.

Action Points

Members were updated on the following :

- *Letter to Mrs M Watson* : the Chairman advised that he would write to Ms Watson to thank her for her contribution to the CCEA, particularly her role as Chair of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee.
- *Revised Standing Orders* : have been amended to include the caveat suggested by Council.
- *Entitlement Framework* : A paper on the definitions of 'general' and 'applied' qualifications would come forward to the next Council meeting.
- *Capital Budget Analysis* : the DoCS will review the capital requirements for the organization, and if substantial, present to Finance Committee.
- *KPMG Audit : Risk Management and Governance* : the Interim Chief Executive and Chairman would meet to discuss the self evaluation exercise.

The Vice-Chair of Council expressed concern that a range of education experience has been lost given the fact that several Council members have resigned.

The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that this and the CCEA management issues would be discussed in the closed session at the end of the meeting.

Council Advice

It was agreed that DE would write to the Interim Chief Executive to clarify priorities and policy advice. Members and officers welcomed this clarification.

4 Governance and Accountability

- ***Accountability Meeting : 16 June 2010*** ***C/90/1***

The Interim Chief Executive reported on the Accountability Review meeting held on 16 June 2010. He advised that it had been a rigorous meeting with the emphasis on financial management, accountability and auditing. Safeguarding of public money was the main priority.

The next meeting will be held on 5 October with all members of TMT in attendance. The Chairman welcomed the approach taken by the Department and the direction given.

A Council member sought confirmation that all of the actions in relation to the 16 June meeting would be completed. The Interim Chief Executive advised they would be complete in advance of 5 October and pointed out that the Council would now be working to a revised accountability framework.

It was agreed that the minutes of the Accountability Review meetings would be included with Council papers going forward.

5 Finance

Report of a Special meeting of Finance Committee : 9 September 2010

The Chairman of the Finance Committee informed members that a special meeting of Finance Committee was held on Thursday 9 September to discuss the extension of four operational EU value contracts and letting of 2 new contracts.

Significant concerns over issues of contract renewals and the absence of a CoPE service had been repeatedly brought to the attention of the Committee and Council.

The DoCS confirmed that he had written to the Deputy Secretary advising him of the critical position regarding contracts and sought advice and guidance on how to proceed.

The Chairman of Council asked for a copy of the letter to be circulated to Council members.

Members were assured that the contracts were individually discussed and that the decisions made by the Committee took into consideration the range circumstances and many attempts made by officers to secure a CoPE service to take forward procurement issues.

The minutes of the meeting would be circulated to members once approved.

Finance Report as at 31 July 2010 ***C/90/2***

The Chairman welcomed Mr John Daly, Financial Controller (FC), to the meeting.

The FC reported that while as at 31 July 2010 the organization was underspent by £494K, this was broadly in line with required budget reductions.

Baseline (£252K) : the main underspend relates to salaries, affecting most teams across the organisation. This planned underspend is part of the reduction in headcount related to the convergence strategy.

Projects (£260K) : there are two main areas of underspend :

- Irish medium cross-curricular skills : has been addressed in a revised project plan;
- Process Development around Modernisation in ICT : due to the late budget allocation in June.

DE have been informed that some funding may have to be returned to DE in the December monitoring round.

Members noted the information provided.

Statement of Financial Control as at 31 July 2010

C/90/3

Members noted the information provided.

Final Budget Allocation 2010/11

C/90/4

The FC drew members' attention to the letter from DE which set out CCEA's recurrent expenditure revised budget allocation for 2010/11 and gave a presentation on how this allocation impacted on CCEA's operations. (A copy of the presentation was tabled for members' information).

A Council member sought an assurance that proper consideration was being given to the the forthcoming budget cuts. It was confirmed that the Finance Committee discussed all finance and budget matters in detail and that TMT would be completing an exercise on budget reductions.

Following a detailed discussion, clarification was sought on:

- £720K reductions in year

This was the reduction required to balance the budget. (ie the difference DE funding and planned expenditure).

The Interim Chief Executive said that CCEA was considering the implications of a 25% reduction over a 4 year period.

- Prioritisation of projects to support the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

The DE Observer confirmed that the key priorities are the new assessment arrangements; raising standards; STEM, Irish Medium and support for the Entitlement Framework.

The emphasis has now shifted from curriculum to assessment and it is essential that CCEA is engaged in activities which reflect ministerial priorities.

The Chairman asked for more detailed information regarding the re-prioritisation of projects in the Education Strategy Directorate. This would be provided by the Director of Education Strategy.

- Overview of the areas which will deliver savings

The Interim Chief Executive advised TMT would start work on streamlining management and administration within the organisation.

He stressed the importance of investing in technology to reduce costs and guarantee the security of the examinations system.

8 Audit

Update on Internal Audit

The DoCS advised that ASM Horwath had been appointed as internal auditors for 2010/11 with an option to extend for two years.

A draft audit plan will be available for discussion at the next Audit & Risk Committee and will come forward to Council at its next meeting.

The Chair of Audit had attended a workshop on 1 September for all Audit Chairs in the Education Sector.

NIAO 2009/10 Accounts

The Interim Chief Executive reported that the 2009/10 Accounts had not yet been laid before the Assembly. Work continues to try to gain the necessary approvals for pay remits.

Management Arrangements

Management arrangements were discussed in a closed session of Council.

6 Education Strategy

Project Re-prioritisation

The Director of Education Strategy (DoES) advised that projects were being rearranged in line with DE priorities and staff availability.

He confirmed that there had been difficulties in recruiting officers due to uncertainty within CCEA.

In response to a question it was confirmed that the new assessment arrangements specifically related to the cross curricular skills. Work is ongoing to provide guidance on assessing thinking skills and personal capabilities.

Draft Advice : ALTA

C/90/4

The DoES drew members' attention to the papers provided at **C/90/4**. Draft advice had been prepared in response to the letter from DE(Appendix 3).

The ALTA contract expires in 2012 and there is no provision for an extension.

Members discussed the recommendations in detail and agreed the draft recommendations.

The DE Observer asked that once the evaluation/study has been completed, then further advice would be provided on ALTA.

The DoES spoke to the detail of paper C/90/5, in particular paras 2.7 and 2.9: Purposes of Quality Assurance Moderation and The Quality Assurance process. The proposal is to build capacity within the system. A proposed two stage validation process to ensure consistency in applying assessment standards within and across schools would include (a) internal standardisation; and (b) external verification.

Members discussed the recommendations. The following points were raised:

- Care to be taken in the way the information is presented. The language should be teacher friendly and positive.
- The need for a clear distinction between the end of year and end of key stage assessment (in terms of this process).
- Further clarification required on the moderators.
- Training aspects to be built into the programme as a whole.

It was confirmed that regular meetings with the GTCNI and NITC had been scheduled from September to December 2010.

Subject to consideration of the points raised, members agreed the recommendation, with more detailed proposals to come back to Council.

7 Qualifications

Summer Examinations Series 2010

The Director of Qualifications (DoQ) gave a detailed presentation on the Summer Series. On balance, it had been a successful year, with the introduction of A* into A Level; unitized GCSE and the on-line access to results. 50,000 scripts had also been successfully marked on-line.

The presentation was tabled for members' information.

Members commented on possible changes in examinations in England. The Interim Chief Executive emphasized the importance of watching developments in England and Wales and advising DE what is best for young people in Northern Ireland.

A2 Chemistry

The Interim Chief Executive reported on the nature and extent of a problem when the incorrect marks awarded to candidates in the multiple choice section of an A2 Chemistry paper.

The Chairman commended the members of staff who gave up their time over a weekend to help rectify the situation and asked that relevant staff be informed.

DE requested that an external investigation be carried out by OfQual. Officers would provide information as required to assist OfQual with their investigations.

Internal Investigation

The DoCS advised that the internal investigation was complete. The report, together with recommendations was not yet finalized. This would be issued in due course.

Members expressed concern that this error had occurred by commended Management for the efficient way in which this had been handled and resolved within a very short timeframe.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Chief Executive and DoCS for the information provided to Council and asked to be kept informed on outcome of the recommendations.

GCE English

The Interim Chief Executive reported that an issue arose in GCE English. Although this was a small scale issue and the relevant steps were taken to rectify the matter as soon as possible, OfQual has been asked to include this in their investigation.

The Chairman again commended management and staff for the way in which the matter had been dealt with and for ensuring that all steps were taken to ensure candidates' university places were honoured.

9 Regulation

Members were informed that Regulation would become a standing item on the Council agenda going forward to ensure that Council is informed of the developments and changes in this area.

10 Any Other Business

ICAA

CCEA would not be pursuing a new agreement with ICAA. The focus would be on CCEA's and DE's costed work programme and priorities.

General

The DE Observer confirmed that DE had revised the way in which it manages its sponsorship with arms length bodies. Previously there had been one point of contact through Mrs Godfrey. A range of contacts have now been put in place for Finance, Procurement, Governance and Performance. Mrs Godfrey will retain responsibility for Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications.

The Chairman thanked the DE Observer for the information.

11 Date of next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 20 October 2010. Time to be confirmed.

