

Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Council

Minutes of the seventy-seventh meeting of Council held on Wednesday 17 December 2008 at 10.00 hours in the Boardroom, 3rd Floor, CCEA, Clarendon Road, Belfast.

Present :

Mr D McKee (Chairman)	Mr D Thompson
Ms M Watson	Mrs D Black
Mrs H McClenaghan	Mr J Clarke
Mr J Wilkinson	Ms C McKinney
Ms M Crilly	Ms P O'Farrell
Mr J Collins	

Mr N Anderson (Acting Chief Executive)
Mr R Hanna (Director, Education Strategy)
Mr M Quinn (Director, Corporate Services)
Mr M Fegan (Chief Finance Officer)
Ms AM Duffy (Director, Operations)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr M Bowen, Mr N Downing and Dr M Brown.

2 Chairman's Business

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting. He advised that the implementation date for ESA had now been confirmed as 1 January 2010 and as a result of this planning would be required for additional Council and Committee meetings for the remainder of 2009.

Appointments

The Acting Chief Executive reported that two Business Managers had been appointed. Ms Ruth Kennedy, Education Strategy Directorate and Mr JJ Cavanagh, Qualifications Directorate. The internal candidate, Ms Kennedy, has already taken up her position and it was hoped that Mr Cavanagh would be in post by 1 February 2009.

The Chairman wished them well in their new posts.

Joint Council Conference : 29 and 30 January 2009

The Joint Conference dates have been confirmed. The Council meeting will take place on the morning of Thursday 29 January. Further information will be issued in due course.

Early Years 6th Year Report

The Director of Education Strategy reported that a significant amount of work had been undertaken since the last meeting in October. A substantial amount of contextual information has now been gathered and this will be included in the final report.

A broad structure of the report has been agreed and a work plan together with dates has been put in place. To ensure the report is as accessible as possible it will be broken down into a number of smaller reports and published as a compendium.

It is hoped that the first draft will be available for the next meeting of the Curriculum & Assessment Committee in February 2009.

Transfer arrangements

The Director of Education Strategy reported that the development of the contingency test was on schedule. The specification has been agreed with DE and the questions are currently being written.

Occupational Studies

The Acting Chief Executive advised that DE had asked CCEA to take forward the grouping of the different occupational studies units. The Double Award option was to be removed as DE had asked for this to be brought into the Entitlement Framework the modification of the qualification will result in restrictions being imposed on how schools can use the qualification. Feedback from the consultation events held by CCEA at the beginning of December highlighted that centres were unhappy with these proposed changes.

The Chairman of the Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning Committee said that he was content that this issue was now under control and progress would be reported back through the committee. He advised that the teachers and lecturers were concerned about the impact the restructuring and realignment of the units would have on motivating young people. He asked that these issues be raised with DE.

The Chairman of Council expressed concern regarding the original consultation method used and commended the Acting Chief Executive for putting a more rigorous process in place in December. 100 centres were represented at these events.

It was agreed that further discussions were required regarding CCEA's consultation methods and that this would be taken forward early in the New Year. The Chairperson of the Curriculum & Assessment Committee suggested that corporate guidelines be drafted to ensure clarity going forward.

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that the issues raised by stakeholders at the recent consultation events would be discussed with DE in the hope that a positive way forward can be achieved.

ESA

The Chairman advised that further clarification would be sought on the position of the Council after 1 January 2010 at the accountability review meeting with DE in January 2009.

3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 22 October 2008

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 October were proposed by Mr John Wilkinson and seconded by Mr David Thompson as a true and accurate record of the meeting. A copy was signed by the Chairman.

Action points

The Acting Chief Executive reported on the following :

Item 4 :

- CCEA is restricted from offering one free re-sit per subject for modular examinations because of its status as an NDPB. Regulators are currently reviewing fees and charges and this will be discussed as part of this review.

- As a result of vacancy control projects have been re-prioritised. This was agreed with DE and ESA have been made aware of the situation.

Item 5

- The Corporate Governance paper was presented to the Senior Management Team and is now Council practice.

Item 6

- The Acting Chief Executive met with DEL to discuss the issues which arose out of the DEL consultation on revised regulatory arrangements. It was confirmed that new arrangements would be in place by September 2009. These will present implications for CCEA staff which will have to be addressed.

4 Corporate

Business Committee Report : 20 November 2008

The Chairman of the Business Committee advised that this one item agenda meeting was to discuss and approve the operational plan and budget for 2009/10.

He drew attention to the minutes which outlined in detail discussions on the main issues, ie:

- rationalisation of projects within curriculum & assessment;
- the impact of vacancy control; and
- rising costs due to the current economic climate, particular the increase in printing costs.

Projects will continue to be reviewed to ensure that any underspend which may arise as a result of vacancy control will be highlighted to DE at the earliest opportunity.

Expected pressures during 2009/10 were : vacancy control; falling demographics and pension fund changes.

Members approved the draft plan and budget to go forward to DE by 28 November.

The Chairman advised that members were happy that a more detailed narrative had accompanied the papers to ensure accessibility to those members who did not have a financial background.

He thanked Mr Wilkinson for joining the committee.

- ***Approval of Operational Plan and Budget 2009/10*** ***C/77/1***

The Chairman sought confirmation that members were happy with the information provided on the Operational Plan and Budget 2009/10.

Members approved the Operational Plan and Budget for 2009/10.

- ***Revised Management Statement*** ***C/77/2***

The Chairman confirmed that the revised management statement and financial memorandum had been drawn up by the Department of Education and the official copy signed by the Acting Chief Executive and Permanent Secretary.

Clarification was sought regarding co-opting members onto Council and Committees. The Chairman confirmed that co-option was permitted for the Committees but not Council. He advised that this issue has been raised at Accountability Review meetings with DE and agreed to revisit this at the January 2009 meeting in light of CCEA being in existence until 1 January 2010.

5 Education Strategy

Learning for Life and Work Sub-Committee Report : 15 October 2008

The Chairperson of the LLW Sub-Committee reported that :

- The remit of the sub-committee had been broadened to include the 4 strands of LLW to ensure a more cohesive approach to the programme. Representatives from careers, citizenship, citizenship and health had accepted membership.
- Mr Cecil Holmes continues in his capacity as Professional Associate and is working on case studies which will be produced as guidance materials.
- The committee received two presentations. Mr Andy McMorran, Principal Ashfield Boys School; and Ms Liz Beech, Bangor Academy.

Both gave comprehensive overviews of the way in which LLW has been received and embedded within their schools. The training provided by CCEA was commended by the practitioners as appropriate and useful.

Members welcomed the approach taken and asked for a mechanism to share good practice between schools and employers to be debated.

Members also asked that the Director of ES take forward discussions with the Director of Qualifications on the possibility of a fit-for-purpose LLW Short Course.

The Chairman of Council advised that at this point the remainder of the Education Strategy items would be taken at the end of the meeting.

6 Qualifications

Regulation, Qualifications & Lifelong Learning Committee Report : 3 December 2008

The Chairman of the Regulation, Qualifications & Lifelong Learning Committee reported on the following :

Essential Skills Pilot : Executive Summary

C/77/3

A one-year pilot was undertaken to look at the feasibility of offering essential skills qualifications in Communication and Application of Number. The R&QF Committee discussed the full report and recommended that the Executive Summary (including recommendations) be provided to Council for discussion.

The Chairman of the Committee drew attention to the recommendations which have been submitted to DE. To date no policy statement has been issued by DE.

Clarification was sought on whether this could become a Key Stage 3 Test. It was confirmed that this was an issue that required further discussion. The Chairperson of the Curriculum & Assessment Committee asked that this also come forward through this Committee.

It was noted that formal guidance and training had been put forward as a recommendation under curriculum support.

Unitisation : a list of unitised specifications were clearly signposted on the CCEA website and would be provided to the committee in due course.

Applied and Vocational Courses : the committee were content that CCEA had put in a bid for funding to DE to grow the number of Applied GCSEs in order to fulfil the Entitlement Framework.

Standards Project : The Director of Qualifications advised that as a result of perceptions in the system that it is easier to obtain an A at AS level and more difficult to obtain an A* at GCSE with CCEA than any other awarding body research has begun to establish if CCEA's standards are equivalent to those set by other awarding bodies operating in Northern Ireland.

The Acting Chief Executive welcomed this approach and advised that it was preferable to have an evidenced based statement when commenting on the exceptional examination performance of Northern Ireland students.

This is a standing item on the R&QF Committee agenda and regular updates will be provided to Council as appropriate.

The Chairman of Council sought clarification on the recent Revision of Specifications launch events. The Director of Qualifications advised that feedback to date was favourable, with a considerable amount of work being put into the 'winning them back' strategy. She confirmed that a detailed presentation on Market Share would be given at Business Committee on 14 January 2009

The Chairman of the Committee reported that members had received a detailed presentation on the Vocational Qualifications area (ACETS – Awards & Certificates in Education, Training and Skills). This would also be presented to Business Committee at its January meeting.

5 Education Strategy (continued)

Curriculum & Assessment Committee Report : 5 November 2008

The Chairperson of the Committee advised that this meeting focused on the draft advice on Moderation and Reporting. She confirmed that full and detailed discussions took place on the recommendations and proposals for moderation, a separate system check, reporting and timescales for implementation.

She advised that the alternative mechanism was used to approve the draft advice outside of the Council meeting. The document was amended and signed off by the Chairperson and the Chairman of Council at a meeting with the Acting Chief Executive and Director of Education Strategy and subsequently forwarded to DE to meet the deadline of 26 November 2008.

Press Release : DE Consultation on Annual Report to Parents

The Director of Education Strategy advised that a statement had been released by DE regarding consultation on the draft regulations to specify requirements relating to the reporting of pupil information to parents.

The consultation will run until 20 March 2009.

Members sought clarification on what this change of direction would mean for the work already undertaken by CCEA. The Director of Education Strategy confirmed that he would

seek a meeting with DE officials as soon as possible to discuss implications for future work in these areas.

The Chairman stated that he was unhappy that CCEA had not been notified prior to this announcement. Members agreed that CCEA officers needed to be 'kept in the loop' regarding issues pertaining to the work they are asked to undertake and asked that this be made clear to DE.

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that to date PR relationships between CCEA and DE have been excellent and agreed that a mechanism needed to be put in place to ensure this situation did not arise again.

The Chairman agreed to raise this issue with the Permanent Secretary at the first available opportunity.

LLW Focus Group Report

It was agreed that this report be deferred to the next meeting of Council.

7 Any Other Business

None identified by the Secretariat.

8 Date of next meeting

The next meeting would take place on Thursday **29 January 2009** at 10.00 hours in the Radisson SAS Hotel, Farnham Estate, Cavan. Members were asked to note that this meeting would replace the one scheduled for **4 February 2009**.

The Chairman wished members and officers a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.