

Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

COUNCIL

Minutes of the eighty-ninth meeting of Council held on Tuesday 22 June 2010 at 1300 hours in Room 226, CCEA Headquarters, Clarendon Road, Belfast.

Present : Mr D McKee (Chairman) Mr D Thompson
 Ms P O'Farrell Mr J Wilkinson

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

Mrs K Godfrey (DE Observer)
Mr G Boyd (DE Observer)

Mr J Daly (Financial Controller) Item 6 only

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

Introduction

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting, in particular Mr Gavin Boyd in his capacity as incoming Interim Chief Executive of CCEA. He emphasised that Mr Boyd was taking up this position on a part-time basis **in addition** to his Chief Executive Designate (ESA) role.

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms M Crilly; Mrs H McClenaghan; Ms M Watson; Mrs D Black and Mr J Collins.

2 Chairman's Business

General

The Chairman confirmed he would write to Ms Watson to thank her for her services to the Council during her time in office.

He, on behalf of the Council, extended his condolences to Mr John Wilkinson on the recent death of his mother and thanked him for attending this meeting. Mr Wilkinson thanked those members and officers who had attended the funeral and expressed their sympathy.

Mr John Daly would be present for Item 6 only.

The Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10 would be signed off at the end of the meeting.

Tabled papers

The Chairman apologised for the number of papers tabled for this meeting and asked officers to make every effort to meet the set deadlines going forward.

Interim arrangements

The Chairman confirmed the agreed handover date for the Interim Chief Executive as Friday 25 June 2010. He thanked Mr Anderson for his contribution to the organisation during his time as Acting Chief Executive.

A staff communication setting out the new arrangements would be issued week commencing 28 June 2010.

A Council member sought clarification on who would address key media issues during the summer examinations season. In the first instance this would be the Director of Qualifications. However should a serious issue arise this would be taken forward by Mr Boyd.

Mr Boyd stated that he would not be available on a full-time basis. He would be meeting the TMT to discuss the day to day running and routine business of the organisation and advised that his senior colleagues would be carrying out additional duties on his behalf.

Correspondence

(Information has been redacted under s. 40 – Personal information – of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.)

He advised that the Permanent Secretary had asked the Acting Chief Executive to respond to the letter on external events and associated corporate hospitality before his departure at the end of June. This would be approved by the Chairman and DE Observer in advance.

Members noted the information provided.

Interim Report to DE on the Review of GCE/GCSE Examinations System and Processes

The Chairman advised that this had been tabled for members' information.

The DE Observer drew attention to the summary of findings. Whilst he recognised CCEA was in good shape for the exams series, the team pointed out some areas for improvement, particularly in the application of systems and identification of new risks.

The DoQ advised that some of the risks had already been identified and progressed. The DE Observer stressed the importance of appropriate checks being carried out on a regular basis.

Accountability Review Meeting : 16 June 2010

The Acting Chief Executive said the Accountability meeting reflected all of the issues Council had been discussing in recent months, in particular governance and performance.

The Chairman advised that this was the first meeting with the new Permanent Secretary. He felt that the agenda was clearly driven and issues dealt with efficiently. Accountability Review meetings would take place every quarter going forward with the focus remaining on corporate governance.

He commended the recent training on governance and accountability provided for Council members.

Council meetings

The Chairman advised that members had expressed concern that educational issues were not being given adequate consideration and suggested that mechanisms be reviewed to accommodate this.

The DE Observer said that the Permanent Secretary had stated the primary responsibilities of Council were in relation to governance and accountability and must be effectively discharged. However, he also recognised the importance of ensuring education issues are debated and agreed that the structure would be reviewed as soon as possible.

It was also agreed that the skills set of Council would be addressed.

Revised Terms of Reference (ToR) : Remuneration Committee

A revised version of the ToR for Remuneration Committee was tabled. The DoCS advised that this version had incorporated the changes suggested by the Department of Education and took into consideration the views of Council. The main changes were:

- The inclusion in para 1.3 : 'DE to exercise its scrutiny function'.
- The Manager of the Council Secretariat would service the committee.
- All issues discussed by the committee must either be notified to or have been approved by the Department of Education (ie the committee must operate within guidance from DE).

The Chairman asked members if they were content with the revised version. The DE Observer advised that she would check that the wording was in line with DE rules and regulations.

The ToR was adopted subject to DE approval.

This was proposed by Mr John Wilkinson and seconded by Mr David Thompson.

3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 26 May 2010

The DE observer drew attention to page 2 of the minutes (NIPSA section) and asked for the following change to be made to paragraph 7 :

'she advised that discussions were ongoing with DfP and DE had been asked to revisit the decision making and approvals process'.

to be replaced with :

'she advised that discussions were ongoing with DfP and **CCEA** had been asked to revisit the decision making and approvals process'.

Subject to this change the minutes were proposed by Mr David Thompson and seconded by Mr Jim Clarke as a true and accurate record of the meeting. A copy was signed by the Chairman.

Action points

The Acting Chief Executive advised that the majority of the action points were either completed or were on the agenda for this meeting.

The draft Corporate Plan would be presented for discussion at the next meeting of the Finance Committee.

4 Revised Standing Orders

C/89/1

A Council member sought clarification on whether the para 12.1 had been practiced in the past. The Chief Executive said it would be more appropriate for the Chairman to present proposed membership of Committees to Council for discussion and ratification. He stated the importance of a sensible approach being taken to ensure that appropriate processes and mechanisms are followed and recommendations are recorded as being signed off.

Subject to this caveat members agreed and adopted the revised Standing Orders.

5 Education

Assessment

- *Assessment Arrangements : Draft Advice on Timescales for Implementation* C/89/2

The Director of Education Strategy (DoES) advised that DE had asked for advice regarding timescales for implementing the new assessment arrangements by 4 June. DE has received draft advice subject to Council consideration and approval.

The two main aspects of the paper were :

- The process of implementation itself; and
- Ongoing support for embedding professional practice.

With reference to paragraph 5, the DoES stated that this was critical to the process and also for school improvement. He confirmed that engagement with schools and the unions took place at the earliest opportunity and consultative groups would be put in place as the plans are developed to ensure as much practitioner input as possible.

Clarification was sought on engagement with the teacher unions. It was confirmed that an initial meeting had taken place and monthly meetings had been set up from September to December 2010 to keep them informed of developments and seek input where appropriate.

In general, members were supportive of the paper and welcomed the timescales which would provide schools with time to consider how best the assessment regime would be implemented. However, clarification was sought on how schools would tackle assessment across Key Stages 1,2 and 3.

The DoES stated that the project was in its initial stages and the assessment arrangements and processes had not yet been designed. However it is important, in taking this work forward, that there is a consistent and coherent approach across the education sector, including all support services.

Members were content with the approach taken and agreed the advice to go forward to DE.

Qualifications

Meeting the Entitlement Framework

C/89/3

Members noted the information provided in paper C/89/3. The Director of Qualifications drew attention to the progress to date in particular, initial consultation, the school questionnaire and communication with stakeholders.

The Chairman sought clarification on progress to date in developing the range of qualifications to support the Entitlement Framework. The DoQ confirmed that CCEA was using BTECs from

England to increase its offering of qualifications and is currently developing applied GCEs to meet the needs of the young people in Northern Ireland.

The DE Observer confirmed that Phase 1 involved discussion and partnership building across the Province. Phase 2 had just started and would focus on funding to develop an innovative Entitlement Framework.

CCEA has been asked to provide formal advice on the Entitlement Framework. DE has asked for gaps in provision to be identified and has also stated that there should be no replication of general qualifications or duplication of vocational qualifications. She advised that FE was better equipped to provide the vocational qualifications.

This advice would come forward for consideration at the next Council meeting.

The Chairman asked what routes schools were taking. The DoQ advised that she was currently meeting with Principals to discuss their preferences.

The DE Observer confirmed that DE would issue a circular to schools to provide clarity and guidance in response to some issues recently received. It was hoped that this would be in schools by September.

Summer Examinations Series

The DoQ advised that the GCE and GCSE examinations would end at the end of June. To date there were no issues of concern to report.

Geography Issue

The DoQ assured members that all actions have been completed.

Results – Online

To date 140 centres (out of 160/170), and 11000 candidates have registered to receive results on line.

The Acting Chief Executive advised that from June 2011 the JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) has agreed that all results will be provided in electronic form and forwarded to centres. There will be no hard copy provided.

CCEA will discuss the needs of particular candidates with centres to ensure all candidates are comfortable receiving their results through this medium.

A Council Member asked if it were possible for the paper copy of results to be issued to schools 24 hours in advance. The Acting Chief Executive said this was a matter for discussion outside of this meeting. He did recognise that this has always been a contentious issue and stated that the JCQ was looking at more sensible release dates from 2012 onwards. Members would be kept fully informed on developments.

(Information has been redacted under s.22(c) – Information intended for future publication and s.43(2) – Commercial interests – of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.)

6 Finance and Corporate

The Chairman welcomed the Financial Controller to the meeting.

Finance Committee Report : 3 June 2010

In the absence of the Chairman of the Finance Committee the Acting Chief Executive gave the following overview.

- *Finance Report* : in cash terms the organisation was overspent at year end by £44K. Going forward DE's expectation is that each category is managed within budget with no overspend. There will be no flexibility to move funds across categories and excess income will not be used to offset other expenditure. This instruction applies to all other public bodies across the education sector.

Delegated Authority Limits : following detailed discussions the revised document was agreed subject to one change on the grid : 'Nominated Authoriser only' to replace Budget Holder. This was to ensure the tightest possible controls.

CoPE Services and Outstanding Contracts : These issues are still ongoing and CCEA will write formally to DE notifying current status of contracts still requiring extension or renegotiation.

A Council Member drew attention to the minutes and sought clarification on 'the transferral of risks to CCEA'. It was confirmed that BELB had asked CCEA to take responsibility for the risks associated to each contract. The Committee were unhappy with this and asked for further clarification.

Vacancy Control : fixed term contracts have been extended to 31 August 2011 and all relevant staff informed.

Members noted the information provided.

Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10

The Financial Controller reported that CCEA was on schedule to lay the Accounts before the Assembly before the summer recess. It was hoped that they would be signed off at the end of the Council meeting and go forward for Ministerial approval.

He advised that two minor (IT related) points were raised by the external auditors which required further consideration :

- Three user accounts for leavers were still found to be active.

This point has been accepted and appropriate action taken.

- Access to the AS400 administrator log on is shared between specified individuals within the ICT team.

The management of the log on have been accepted and will be actioned by August 2010, however there is a need for specified individuals due to the nature of the systems architecture.

The DE Observer sought clarification on whether the accounts shown had been reconciled with the Management Accounts. He queried the expenditure account and income information in relation to Note 18. To ensure accuracy he asked to view the accounts as soon as possible outside of the meeting.

Other amendments

- War on Want : figure to be amended to £20K;
- Jim Clark : to Jim Clarke

Statement of Internal Control

The DoQ drew attention to the 'significant internal control problems', in particular, the AS Further Mathematics and A2 Geography issues. Whilst she recognised that it was important to declare these issues openly it was also important that they were referenced accurately. To reflect this accuracy she asked that the following sentence be added at the end of the A2 Geography issue :

'All centres identified have been contacted'.

Subject to these amendments, members approved the Annual Report and Accounts for 2009/10.

Budget Allocation 2010/11

C/89/6

The Chairman advised that the allocation letter from DE had been received on 10 June 2010 and required significant efficiency savings.

The Financial Controller reported that the initial budget submission involved a headcount reduction. He cautioned that if CCEA did not reduce staff numbers the budget would be overspent. £242K savings have been factored in on top of the headcount savings of £276k. Members were advised that CCEA would be facing significant challenges to meet this requirement.

The Capital budget has been reduced by £44K and 3 projects were not approved.

The DoCS said that the impact of the reduction to the capital budget had not yet been analysed. He advised that while there was still a need to use external venues for the marking the examinations, this had been built into the funding requirements.

There are also Health, Safety and Disability requirements which must be respected and a review of security in line with that of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Once a full analysis had been carried out this would be reported to Finance Committee.

The DE Observer drew attention to the investment in ICT and cautioned that CCEA would be under potential pressure should other awarding bodies make advances to communicate with candidates on-line. It is essential that CCEA keep up to date with developments in this area. Failure to do so could lead to significant loss in market share.

A Council member sought an assurance that all the contents of the DE letter had been noted and any concerns raised and dealt with accordingly. It was confirmed that this was the case.

The Chairman thanked the Financial Controller for his input in to the meeting.

The DoCS reported that the action plan had been drawn up at the request of Council at its last meeting.

A Council Member sought clarification on whether the action plan should progress until CCEA has received notification of DE's priorities. The DE Observer agreed that this was an important point and stated that there was no point in carrying out nugatory work over the summer months.

Internal Audit : Annual Review of Risk Management and Governance

In respect of the above internal audit report, Members noted the status of the following actions :

- The Standing Orders have been revised and adopted subject to minor adjustments.
- Revised Draft Terms of Reference have been drawn up for all Committees and are with the Chairs – these will be signed off by the Chairman of Council and the DE Observer and members notified accordingly.
- A job description for a Chief Finance Officer has been completed.
- Further information is required from DE to allow for a skills audit on Council members to be conducted.
- The requirement for the Audit & Risk Committee to produce an annual report for Council has been accepted. The first report will come forward at the end of the 2010/11 financial year.
- The Chairman did not accept the proposal for a self-evaluation exercise to be carried out in January 2010 due to the status of the Council. It was suggested that this now be revisited with a view to conducting the exercise.
- Training for Council members. It was confirmed that the majority of members had attended the training. Mop up sessions will be organised for those who could not attend the June sessions.

It was agreed that further discussions would take place outside of this meeting to take forward some of the issues raised above.

The DE Observer advised that all letters and circulars received from the Audit Office should be sent to the Chief Executive's Office where they will be recorded, logged, distributed and signed off.

The DoCS reported that of the 12 priorities picked up by the Internal Auditors 50% had been completed with the majority of the others being at an advanced stage of completion. A further progress report would be given as required.

((Information has been redacted under s.41 (b) -, Information provided in confidence – of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 if disclosure would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that or any other person.))

The DoCS informed members that new Auditors, ASM Horwarth had been appointed.

The Chairman asked the DoCS to take an account of the meeting on 25 June 2010.

7 Any Other Business

NIPSA

A Council member sought clarification on whether there had been any further developments in relation to the union representation at the last meeting. The Chairman confirmed that an offer

of a meeting was made and to date no approach had been made by NIPSA to take up this offer.

The DE Observer reported that the issues were being considered and discussions continue between CCEA and DfP with everything possible being done to progress these issues, including vacancy control, the impact of budget cuts and the appointment of a CFO.

Staffing/Vacancy Control

The DE Observer stated that the regulators were asked to ascertain whether there were any staffing problems in relation to the summer examinations. It was confirmed that there were no significant problems.

The CFO post is still under consideration and he will be discussing with his TMT colleagues how responsibilities are allocated in the meantime.

He re-iterated that the overall context of CCEA's business would be what the organisation could afford to do rather than what it would like to do. In stating this he reminded members that the forthcoming budget cuts would be challenging

With regard to Vacancy Control he suggested that this was no longer applicable as it was possible that there would be a moratorium on recruitment due to the public sector having to reduce jobs in the coming years either in management or administration. He cautioned that there were lean times ahead and suggested that every effort was made to continue to check that CCEA's work was in line with the priorities set by DE at all times.

Communication

A Council member said it would be helpful if there was a mechanism where members could receive a summary of recent and ongoing departmental legislation, assembly information and statements from the Ministers which affect its sponsor bodies. It was agreed that this would be looked into.

The DE Observer agreed that this would be helpful. In relation to Audit Office letters, it was agreed that any letters containing crucial information would be circulated to all Council members to keep them up to date.

8 Dates of future meetings

The Chairman asked the Manager of the Council Secretariat to draw up a schedule of Council and Committees from September 2010 to June 2011.

This would be agreed between the Chairman and DE Observer and circulated to members during the summer months.

The Chairman wished to place on record his thanks to Neil Anderson during his term as Acting Chief Executive and wished him every success in his new post.

The Chairman thanked officers and members for their input into the meeting.

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