

## CCEA

Minutes of the one hundred and forty-first meeting of Council held on Thursday 24 September 2020 at 10 am via MS Teams.

Present :        Mr T Carson (Chair)                      Mr RJ Thompson  
                    Dr L Caul                                      Mr C McKinney  
                    Dr A Kerr                                      Ms P Slevin  
                    Mr B Wilson                                 Ms R Byrne (from Item 7)

Mr J Edwards (Chief Executive)  
Miss M Farragher (Director of Education)  
Mrs L Scott (Director of Finance & Corporate Services)  
Mrs S King (Head of Regulation)  
Mr J Daly (Financial Services Manager)  
Mrs E Martin (Business Manager, Curriculum, & Assessment)  
Mr M Crossan (Business Manager, Examinations Administration & Assessment)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

### Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting and confirmed the protocols for participation.

The Chair advised that Mrs Harpur had made excellent progress following her recent illness.

### 1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs Christine Harpur; Ms Rose Byrne (for first part of meeting); Mrs Carol Fitzsimons; Mrs Kathleen O'Hare; Mrs Paula Leitch; and Mrs Sam Kirk.

### 2 Conflict of Interests

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

### 3 Chair's Business

#### *Officer Attendance*

The Chair advised that Mrs Esther Martin (Business Manager, Curriculum & Assessment); and Mr Michael Crossan (Business Manager, Examinations Assessment & Administration) would join the meeting for Item 7 – Education, to speak to the detail of papers **C/141/3** and **C/141/4** respectively.

#### *Co-option of members to CCEA Sub-Committees*

The Chair raised the matter of co-opting members to the Council sub-committees and said he would meet with Committee Chairs as a group to review the policy in regards to co-option. He would also consider what is required to sustain stakeholder engagement and the process for reputational recovery moving forward.

### *Chair's Report to Council*

Meetings with the Chief Executive : the Chair confirmed that the regular 1-1 meetings continued with the Chief Executive as scheduled. However, since the last meeting, daily updates have been provided by the Chief Executive to the Chair, and discussions held on high-risk issues and other important matters which required attention.

The Chair has also been in contact with members of the Executive Team, and senior DE officials to discuss a range of matters.

### *Meeting with Minister of Education*

The Chair confirmed he had met (virtually) with Minister Weir on 17 September 2020. The following issues were discussed :

*Maintaining Standards* : The concerns of Council were highlighted in regards to maintaining standards in Northern Ireland, and across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Minister recognised the challenges CCEA is facing, in particular the consistency of maintaining standards with other jurisdictions.

*2021 Examinations Series* : The Minister's priority was for examinations to proceed in Summer 2021. The Chair confirmed he had pointed out to the Minister CCEA's responsibilities and duty of care in regards to the provision of examinations, and asked the Executive Team to explore the number of contingencies that may be required to support this aspiration.

*Pace of decision making* : The Chair raised Council's concern at the slow pace of decision making and information flow from DE in regards to progressing important matters. He pointed out that delays were impacting negatively on CCEA given the current challenges.

*Payment for Contract for Services* : The Chair stated the concerns of Council at the significant delay in a decision from DE in regards to payment for Contract for Services. He stressed the importance of timely responses given the seriousness of the situation and raised it as a reputation risk to CCEA.

*Reputational Recovery* : The Minister understood the need for CCEA to act quickly, and put in place appropriate mechanisms to build relationships with stakeholders in order to restore public confidence and reputation.

*Support of Council* : The Chair highlighted the continued support provided by Council members throughout the summer months, and during these unprecedented times. The Minister recognised the substantial time commitment, advice and expertise provided to CCEA officers throughout the pandemic.

Members sought clarification on a number of matters, in particular :

- Whether any decisions had been made in regards to the proposals submitted to DE on examinations for 2021.

The Chief Executive referred to F Graham's letter of 19 September, and confirmed that these were live issues, and contingency arrangements were being developed. The Chair agreed to progress this at the Governance and Accountability Review (GAR) meeting scheduled for Monday 28 September 2020.

- Whether the Minister had made any decisions on what would be deemed acceptable in regards to proposals for minimum number of teaching days and expectation of requirements to ensure adequate learning time is provided for candidates sitting examinations for 2021.

The Chair confirmed he had raised the issue of loss of teaching and learning together with difficulties associated with forms of assessment. He also raised the consultation outcomes and proposals for reducing the assessment burden, however, was not in a position to comment on the Minister's mind in regards to interim arrangements. He agreed to raise this at the GAR meeting on 28 September 2020.

- Has any directive been given by the Minister to stand down non-essential items of work given the impact on examinations and the significant amount of work required to provide a workable solution.

The Chief Executive in response to the query, confirmed that:

- The Statutory Reporting Assessments were stood down for 2020, he confirmed he had written to DE seeking clarity on requirements for 2021.
- Appropriate resource has been reallocated to progress work for Curriculum support, and Examinations to cope with the additional pressures.

The Chief Executive confirmed that guided learning hours remain at 120 hours. He referred to an 'Engage Programme' which has been set up for catch up and out of hours learning particularly for those children on FSM (free school meals). He confirmed that CCEA had no prior knowledge of this programme, and the query from the NI Assembly Education Committee had been tricky to navigate. A Council member asked if the Chief Executive could write to DE expressing disappointment that CCEA was not informed or consulted on the Engage Programme. The Chief Executive said he would seek confirmation from other members of staff to ensure no other officer had knowledge of the programme before he taking any further action.

This concluded the Chair's report to Council.

#### *CCEA Whistleblowing Contact*

The Chair confirmed that Mrs Harpur would continue as CCEA's Whistleblowing contact until the end of her term – 31 January 2021.

#### *Election of Interim Vice-Chair*

The Chair confirmed the nominations for interim Vice-Chair: Mrs Kathleen O'Hare; Dr Ana Kerr and Mrs Paula Leitch. He recognised the unusual situation and suggested that only those members present were eligible to vote.

A Council member suggested that as Dr Kerr was the only nominee present, that it may be preferable, with her agreement, to seek votes from all Council members via the e-mail mechanism. Dr Kerr welcomed the openness and transparency, and was content with the proposed mechanism. The Chair thanked Dr Kerr for volunteering, and confirmed that all Council members would vote via e-mail. He asked the Manager of the Council Secretariat to progress this outside of the meeting.

The Chair reminded members of the level of concern expressed in regards to CCEA’s reputation as a result of decisions on GCSE and AS/A Level grade awards for summer 2020, and the need to rebuild relationships and restore public confidence.

A Council member asked the Chief Executive to address the issues in regards to Further Education.

The Chief Executive suggested that he combine paper C/141/1 with the Communications Strategy for 2021 Contingency Examination Options item, as this involved ongoing work of the Executive Team, and would relate to various issues, including those pertaining to the FE sector. The Chair was content with this suggestion.

He drew attention to the detail of paper C/141/1, and provided a comprehensive overview of the governance and operational structure put in place to implement Phase 4 – Recovery. These included the Gold, Silver and Bronze controls (detail provided on pages 6 – 13) devised by the Chief Executive which, through several strands of work, have effectively operated task and delivery arrangements in response to the wide range of issues arising from the health crisis. The Chief Executive confirmed that the situation was ever evolving, with the document being updated regularly given the fluidity on health restrictions and in response to other matters which have required re-assessment, following substantial government decisions.

The Silver Team has 6 work strands responsible for areas across the organisation, these are :

Silver One :	Safe Resourcing	Team Leader :	Director of Finance & Corporate Services
Silver Two :	Awarding Delivery	Team Leader :	Director of Education
Silver Three:	Standards	Team Leader :	Head of Regulation
Silver Four :	Curriculum & Assessment	Team Leader :	Business Manager, Curriculum & Assessment
Silver Five :	Safe Closure	Team Leader :	Business Manager, EAA
Silver Six:	Communication	Team Leader :	Director of Finance & Corporate Services

The Chief Executive advised that the Standards Group, led by the Head of Regulation was working to promote the understanding of Standards in General and Vocational Qualifications amongst stakeholders, and provide feedback to the 14-19 Engagement Group when it is reinstated. He confirmed that CCEA continued to engage with the Department for the Economy to ensure the views of the Further Education sector are taken on board. He recognised the need for direct engagement with all sectors through the avenues and teams already established, and said that feedback received by CCEA would be built into communications going forward.

The Curriculum & Statutory Assessment Group, led by the Business Manager for Curriculum & Assessment, is responsible for statutory assessment arrangements for 2020-21, and curriculum support materials. In regards to statutory assessment arrangements , CCEA continues to seek clarification from DE on requirements. Once clarity is provided, CCEA will develop a plan and begin to rebuild confidence in order to restore reputation.

The Chief Executive advised that each strand is responsible for developing individual communications strategies, however, the Communications Group, led by the Director of Finance & Corporate Services, maintains overall responsibility for developing the overall strategy to support rebuilding and recovery of the CCEA brand following Summer 2020 outcomes.

He recognised the wide range of challenges CCEA was facing in rebuilding relationships, and welcomed the early signs that steps taken to date in provision of clear information, engagement with sectors, was proving successful, however, further work was required.

## *Stakeholder Engagement*

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Director of Education had extensively engaged with the full range of stakeholders, to include Heads of Centres, FE and HE sector representatives, to explore options for 2021 in regards to forward planning and pre-consultation around contingency arrangements for next year. She has also been briefing individual representatives from the political parties (members of the NI Assembly Education Committee) on the challenges CCEA is facing and the complex nature of the work in order to provide an understanding, and build relationships moving forward.

## *Union engagement*

The Chief Executive advised that feedback from the consultation shows a broad differencing in opinions between the various unions. He confirmed that CCEA continued to engage with the unions in order to build confidence and take on board their views for inclusion, as appropriate, in the options.

## *CCEA Work Plan*

The Chief Executive confirmed that in the short term, the Director of Finance & Corporate Services was, in association with the Business Assurance Unit, developing a Milestone map which would review key activities and roles. A Stakeholder Map would also be developed as a mechanism for addressing the issues and challenges currently at the forefront. This will be used to provide feedback, influence change, inform Council, and provide evidence to DE as appropriate. He stated that a different mechanism will be used to obtain full stakeholder engagement and develop a communications plan on longer term matters.

Members were reassured by the significant amount of work being undertaken across the organisation on reputational recovery, communications and stakeholder engagement.

A Council member suggested that parents and youth groups be included in the stakeholder group to capitalise on their understanding ie the simpler the message the more successful and helpful it will be to all. She also sought clarification on whether there would be a role for Council members in taking forward engagement.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he maintained contacts with the NI Children's Commissioner for Young People (NICCY), and his engagement with the Youth Panel has proved useful, and would engage with them on feedback. He advised that Parent NI, representatives from Parent, Teacher Associations and other bodies had provided feedback and would be included in the stakeholder map.

A Council member welcomed the comprehensive and helpful nature of the report provided. He stated the importance of dealing with the way in which the examination process was conducted, and handled, in particular GCSE. He also stated that as final decisions are the responsibility of the Council, they have to be provided the opportunity to review the process in order to defend its position, and take responsibility for its actions. He asked that this fundamental issue be debated further and issues addressed.

The Chair welcomed the comments made and wished to place on record that at the recent NI Assembly Education Committee he stated that the advice provided to the Minister was Council advice, and the Chief Executive and his team reported to Council. He said that cognisance had not been taken of this, and the Council had not been as proactive in defending its processes and decisions. He agreed it would be useful to explore how we move forward in this regard, and suggested time be factored into the Council business agenda for the November meeting if possible.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services (DoFCS) agreed discussions were required on how to involve Council effectively, however said it would take time given the complexities, scrutiny and demand

for immediate action when issues arise such as those encountered during summer 2020, and the ongoing health crisis.

The Head of Regulation highlighted the significant role of Regulation within CCEA, and advised that the post was at Tier 1 Business Manager. She asked that the structure be reviewed going forward in comparison with the Director of Education. The Chair took this on board.

A Council member suggested that restoring confidence needed to focus on the outcomes for learners, methods by which they are going to have the curriculum delivered within the guidance provided by CCEA through DE. It was fundamentally important for information to be provided to schools as soon as possible.

He stated that confidence is restored through excellent communications to those who have knowledge on what is expected whether it be post primary, FE, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> year. Communications to these young people will restore confidence in CCEA. The Chair concurred with these statements and confirmed he had raised the urgency of the decision required from the Minister on the CCEA proposals. Representations have continued to be made.

A Council member, whilst recognising the significant amount of work ongoing at present and extraordinary pressures staff were under, sought clarification on whether the message that the broad range of stakeholder engagement activity has been cascaded down the system, rather than relying on transfer of information.

The Chief Executive in response to the points raised, drew attention to the letter received from Faustina Graham (DE) on Saturday 19 September 2020, in regards to Contingency Arrangements – Delivery of Qualifications 2020/21, and stated that the Director of Education was working on a communication to Principals to provide as much clarity as possible. He asked members to recognise the context within which officers were operating, in terms of the need for the provision of clarity in challenging circumstances.

The Director of Education was leading a series of online engagement sessions with school principals on the contingency arrangements, this will widen out to the full range of stakeholders, including Further Education. Good feedback was coming forward from the sessions, and also an understanding of CCEA's position in regards to the provision of information. He stated the sensitive nature of these arrangements which were being developed in an ever-evolving situation.

Taking cognisance of the comment on disrupted learning in schools, the Chief Executive stressed the need for a decision from DE as a matter of urgency. He assured members that clear and precise communication would be prepared and issued frequently to keep stakeholders informed as much as possible at this time.

### ***Chief Executive's Report to Council (including Correspondence)***

The Chief Executive drew attention to the following correspondence:

- Council's Advice on Operation of GCE and GCSE Qualifications 2020-2021.
- Proposals for Examination Processes in 2020-2021
- Minister's Statement on Awarding of Grades
- Notification of DE Appointments to CCEA Council (Chair and Members)
- Statutory Assessment Arrangements 2020-2021
- Contingency Arrangements – Delivery of Qualifications 2020-2021

He referred to the letter of 19 September, (Contingency Arrangements – Delivery of Qualifications 2020-2021), and confirmed that CCEA would continue to plan, explore and develop contingencies as per Council's request to ensure arrangements are in place should the need arise. He stated the challenge was

having sufficient resources to run parallel approaches. It would be necessary to build up capacity in order to switch to contingencies, and a business case would be required for additional support resources.

He outlined the range of correspondence received and issued to the NI Assembly Education Committee on a range of matters which had been active since 14 August 2020. This included the release of data on the Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs). The Committee had requested that the data be released with schools names, however following correspondence from the Chief Executive to the Committee Clerk outlining the risks and seriousness of the situation, the data was released to the Committee without school names.

A Council member expressed concern at this. He stated that taking all factors into consideration for the awarding of grades the use of CAGs, performance and rank order should be considered together with the performance of centres to provide a sound evidence which would withstand public scrutiny.

He asked for further discussions on the status of advice to teachers, and suggested that should standardisation be used, CCEA should standardise to compare, not standardise to award.

The Chair whilst recognising the exceptional circumstances, confirmed that CCEA is required to comply with the instruction from the Minister, CCEA has been instructed to hold examinations in 2021, and CAGs may be an option, however work will continue on the options and contingencies as requested.

The Chief Executive noted the points made, and stated that decisions on the proposals for examinations 2021 were required in order for the appropriate arrangements to be made as soon as possible. He wished to place on record his concerns in relation to the challenges encountered, in particular the significant resources required to put in place the arrangements to deliver the examinations for 2021 successfully, and the need to safeguard the wellbeing of staff currently involved, given the substantial ongoing pressures. He reiterated his concerns about the delays in decisions from DE which will impact upon building confidence within the system, the brand and CCEA's reputation.

### ***FOI Requests***

**C/141/2**

Members noted the most recent FOI and DPA requests.

## **4 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 August 2020**

### ***For ratification***

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 August 2020, were proposed by Mr Robert Thompson, and seconded by Ms Patricia Slevin, as a true and accurate record. A copy would be available for the Chair to sign once normal business arrangements resume.

### ***Action Points***

Members noted the status of the action points.

## **Minutes of additional Council Covid-19 Briefing Meetings**

### ***For ratification***

The Chair advised that the following meetings had been convened to appraise Council of the current situation in regards to arrangements and mitigations for Covid-19.

*16 August 2020*

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 August 2020, were proposed by Mr Robert Thompson, and seconded by Dr Les Caul, as a true and accurate record.

*25 August 2020*

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 August 2020, were proposed by Dr Les Caul, and seconded by Dr Ana Kerr, as a true and accurate record.

## **5 Correspondence**

The Chair confirmed that correspondence had been dealt with under the Chief Executive's Report.

## **6 Governance and Accountability**

*Notification of next meeting : Monday 28 September 2020*

The Chair confirmed the next Governance and Accountability Review meeting would take place on Monday 28 September 2020. A report of the meeting would be provided at the next Council meeting.

## **7 Education**

*For consideration*

***Contingency Planning 2021 : Centre Assessment Grades Based Approach Summer 2021***

***C/141/3***

The Director of Education (DoE) confirmed that the paper had been developed following Council discussion at its meeting on 15 September 2020, in regards to the need to consider a range of contingency planning options available due to the uncertainty around the Covid-19 situation and a variety of other unknowns including different levels of disruption to the examinations for summer 2021.

She drew attention to the detail, advised on the component parts and explained the purpose of the paper in terms of supporting the sector in the event of a lockdown situation. Cognisance has been taken of the disruption a significant number of schools are facing, and also concerns expressed in regards to this academic year.

She outlined the plans in terms of levels of disruption should the examinations proceed, and how the contingencies would be managed.

The DoE confirmed open letters have been received from Principals calling for Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) to be explored for summer 2021. She advised that both she and the Chief Executive were aware that Principals were meeting with local universities to ascertain if CAGs would be accepted.

It was important to note that England's contingency planning differed to that of Northern Ireland.

*2021 Contingency Planning – Draft Initial Ideas – presentation*

The Business Manager, Curriculum & Assessment gave a detailed presentation to support the paper. This included:

- Principles of qualifications delivery for 2020-21



- 2021 possible scenarios
- 2021 possible mitigations
- Contingency planning : Centre Assessment Grades Summer 2021; how CAGs could be supported from CCEA
- Contingency planning : Coursework/Controlled Assessment
- Contingency planning : Special Consideration
- Next Steps; and Further ideas from Principals Meetings.

The Business Manager (C&A) outlined proposals to support schools in their curriculum recovery during the next academic year, and to ensure CCEA was in a position to provide support for further disruption schools are facing.

The proposals followed up the initial CCEA curriculum response following the closure of schools and the need to support home learning.

The Chair thanked the DoE and Business Manager (C&A) for the comprehensive paper, and supporting presentation.

## **Discussion**

Members welcomed the clarity of the information provided, and the deep understanding of the officers responsible for the work in this area.

Members raised the following points for clarification and consideration:

- An understanding of the underpinning principles of assessments would be important, in particular asking how significant GCSE examinations are, if they are, then why and how.
- Consult on the principles before the process.
- How much resource can CCEA put into GCSE and how much will be returned.
- Specific committee to review special circumstances with principles to apply would also be important.
- Order of importance of content to be taught; and examples of assessment for schools should there be a requirement to formulate grades for 2021

The DoE in response, advised that the importance placed on assessment tasks by CCEA was discussed, however concern was expressed at the online assessments and item banks for school use. She confirmed that CCEA's priority was to provide the highest quality of information and, given the lack of clarity and decision from DE in regards to examinations for 2021, she said it would be preferable to do things right particularly in the current environment of zero tolerance.

A Council member welcomed the information provided and concurred with the suggestion that to understand principle over process would be useful in exploring all types of options on decisions that have been made. He asked for clear, effective communication to be issued to schools, and this should include arrangements in the event of further full lockdown and the inability to conduct formal assessments.

He agreed that CCEA was in a challenging position with public perception and asked for the principles of what is required to be set out clearly with a view to providing a better understanding for all. He recognised that all aspects of the arrangements and processes put in place for summer 2020 had been challenged and information disclosed which was not originally the case. He suggested that information is provided in

what is going to be achieved, followed by how this will be achieved in terms of assessments for 2021, as soon as possible.

A Council member in referring to children being absent from school due to the ongoing health crisis, sought clarification on whether any discussions had taken place in regards to what percentage of remote learning would be acceptable, and could the decision be made by the Minister?

The Chief Executive concurred that this was an important point given the indication of significant disruption to learning however the degree of disruption is unknown. He recognised that schools have contingencies however the threshold for the adequacy of remote learning is also unknown and suggested that as this situation emerges, this should be a matter for the Engage Programme to progress and address.

The Chief Executive placed on record the significant amount of pressure both the Director of Education (and her teams), and the Head of Regulation (and team) were experiencing, and stated that CCEA would deal with examination matters, and could not interfere in issues such as 'loss of teaching & learning' which should be dealt with by the appropriate organisation(s).

The Council member also sought clarification whether cross moderation between centres had been considered. The DoE advised that this had not been well received by teachers as they did not want to share work in the context of an increase in workload. Therefore a decision was made that schools would not review each other's coursework. The Chair concurred that if this had been discussed in the context of additional workload it would not be popular, and welcomed clarification on the matter.

The Chief Executive expressed concern at the decision taken by the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) not to conduct school inspections during 2020/21 school year. Therefore, in the absence of data to understand the impact on teaching and learning, it would be impossible to make judgement calls in this regard. He again stated that this issue was outside of CCEA's responsibilities.

The Head of Regulation provided an overview of the process followed for measuring performance in controlled assessment and the setting of grade boundaries at A Level in particular the judgemental grade boundaries AB and EF (together with associated grade descriptions for A and E). In referring to Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs), she said it would be important to have a clear understand of how the marks will be awarded, grade boundaries set to ensure it can be considered properly by Regulation and Accreditation.

A Council member recognised that proceeding with examinations in 2021 was the most beneficial solution for 2021, however agreed that having a range of contingencies to enact should examinations not be possible was necessary. She stated that a clear communications strategy was fundamentally important to ensure parents, teachers and young people are fully aware of the arrangements and the reasons for contingencies should the need arise.

She referred to the meeting held on Sunday 16 August whereby the decision was taken by Council to propose CAGs for GCSEs to the Minister and agreed that this was an easier solution to that of A Levels given the distinction of purpose, and it was worth reflecting on the purpose of GCSEs in the current circumstances and perhaps beyond. In terms of restoring confidence in CCEA, and in doing the 'right' thing for young people in these difficult and challenging times, she called for a robust message focussing on values, what matters and why this is happening for 2021, clearly concisely and accessible to the full range of stakeholders.

The DoE recognised the preference to run examinations in 2021, however as this was now the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a global pandemic disruption would be uneven across centres. She assured members that CCEA would continue to support learners throughout the challenges that would emerge throughout 2020/21.

## *Summary*

The DoE said CCEA would continue to work with school principals to build on ideas presented to provide as many workable solutions as possible.

Discussions will begin with the Chartered Institute of Examination Assessors and school principals on ethical principles and the key issues arising out of assessment to support learners to progress.

Consideration would be given to larger principles system-wide, in particular is there a need for GCSEs in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a global pandemic, or could NI focus on AS if GCSEs are stood down for 2021.

Communications : a roadmap setting out the arrangements, recommended by Principals, is being developed to reassure parents and children through simple and clear communications. This will require support and buy in from the Department of Education. The Chief Executive concurred and stated that buy in from DE was absolutely central to all presented. He confirmed that clarity was required on what was to be enacted, mitigated, as well as ensuring CCEA is safe whatever they are asked to do or may have to do in future.

The Chair thanked members and officers for their input and asked for work to commence on developing a high level set of principles with detail as appropriate. This would be discussed once further work had been completed.

### ***Analysis of Summer 2021 Timetable Options***

***C/141/4***

#### ***For consideration/ratification***

The Director of Education introduced this item and gave a brief overview of the range of challenges being considered in regards to the examinations timetable, and in the context of decisions being made in England, and the impact a compressed timetable may have on Northern Ireland candidates.

The Business Manager (EAA) spoke to the detail, advising that the paper was written before the consultation on 20-21, and asked members to disregard the references to Z scores.

He reported that the summer examination timetable was drafted by JCQ and common to all JCQ member awarding organisation's candidates taking GCE & GCSE examinations. (CCEA's Principals' Timetable Consultation Group (14 members) provided feedback in addition to that received from public consultation to develop the final JCQ Timetable).

He advised that CCEA's November 2020 timetable had already been delayed by one week in 2020, following earlier approval by Council. Examinations would commence on 11<sup>th</sup> November, and the January and March timetables would proceed as published.

The summer 2021 examination timetable was currently subject to debate in England. The changes under consideration would pose challenges in other jurisdictions due to variances in the school academic years, ie :

- English normal school term continues to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021. The Northern Ireland School term concludes on 30<sup>th</sup> June with the last examination taking place on 26<sup>th</sup> June.
- 31<sup>st</sup> May to 4<sup>th</sup> June is the English late half term and CCEA normally schedule CCEA specific subjects or subjects with significant entry variances to England during this week.

Feedback from Principals suggested the decision on the timetable centres around consideration of the benefit that a delay to the timetable brings to teaching & learning time versus the challenges the change presents.

He drew attention to the following operational considerations:

- Condensing any timetable will place greater assessment burden on candidates and operational burden on centres in terms of accommodation, managing public health adaptations, and would increase the potential of examination paper breaches.
- Extending the timetable is more suited to England but will impact teacher contracted days, school transport, planned leave, school openings, ability for CCEA to mark all examinations, results dates, university admissions, and the beginning of the new school year in Northern Ireland.

Members considered the following options together with the rationale, benefits and risks for each:

**Option 1** : Move every GCE and GCSE examination one week later and finish examinations by 30 June 2021.

**Option 2** : Move every GCE and GCSE examination two weeks later and finish examinations by 30 June 2021.

**Option 3** : move every GCE and GCSE examination two weeks later, finish examinations by 30 June 2021, utilising Saturdays to gain two additional examination slots each week.

**Option 4** : Move every GCE and GCSE examination two weeks later and finish examinations by Friday 9 July 2021.

**Option 5** : Align CCEA timetable with JCQ Common Timetable

The Chair thanked the Business Manager (EAA), for the clarity provided. He sought and received confirmation that members were content to formally adopt **Option 1 – A one week delay to the summer 2021 time table, commencing examinations on 12 May 2021.**

## 7 Regulation

### *For Information*

#### ***Minutes of Regulation Committee Meeting held on 10 September 2020***

The Chair apologised for the late provision of the minutes. He drew attention to the detail provided. He confirmed that Council discussed a number of Regulation matters at its meeting on 15 September 2020.

Members noted the information provided.

## 8 Audit

### *For Information*

#### ***Minutes of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee held on 17 September 2020***

The Chair drew attention to the detail of the minutes provided for members' information.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DoFCS) drew attention to the summary and advised that overall the risk environment remained very high. She confirmed that mitigations continued to be managed, and the CRR reviewed on a regular basis.

She advised that the CRR was considered at the ARAC on 17 September, with members asking for an additional COVID risk (CR7) to incorporate all the mitigations affecting the whole organisation to be added to the CRR. This would be included in the next draft and brought forward to Council following the ARAC November meeting.

The Chair acknowledged the level of risk facing the organisation at present, and was assured that the committee was carrying out its scrutiny and challenge function as appropriate.

Members were content with the information provided.

## **9 FINANCE**

### ***For Information***

#### ***Minutes of the Finance Committee held on 27 August 2020***

The Chair apologised for the late provision of the minutes. He drew attention to the detail provided

The Chair of the Committee confirmed that members and fulfilled their challenge and scrutiny functions on all agenda items.

Members noted the information provided.

### ***For Information***

#### ***Finance Report as at 31 July 2020***

**C/141/6**

The DoFCS drew attention to the detail provided, and reported an underspend of £111K (1.3%) at this time. A significant number of unknowns contribute to the challenges in realising the budget towards the latter part of 2020/21, however managers will continue to monitor and manage as effectively as possible under the current circumstances.

The DoFCS advised on the number of fundamental and material decisions that remained outstanding in regards to payments for contract for services, and confirmed that following the submission of the Business Case to DE, representations continued to be made seeking permission to proceed. Once clarity is provided the review of fees for summer 2020 and 2020/21 will proceed. She advised that a Business Case may be required to secure funding depending on resource requirements as a result of decisions on the contingency plans for delivery.

Members noted that a bid for Covid-19 activity and pressures had also been submitted - £1.6M earmarked funding, however no decisions has been made.

The DoFCS confirmed that there would continue to be challenges and pressures throughout the 2020/21 financial year, however assured members they would be managed as robustly as possible.

The Financial Services Manager (FM) said the main factors were in regards to professional fees in regards to the modelling (summer 2020); a significant increase in legal fees; and an underspend in August fees by approximately £300K.

He confirmed that areas were being identified where additional work was required to utilise the underspend if required. Budget holders also continued to provide monthly reports to the Executive Team.

Members were content with the information provided.

#### ***Statement of Financial Position as at 31 July 2020***

***C/141/7***

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

Members noted the information provided.

#### ***For ratification***

#### ***2021/24 Recurrent Funding and 2021/25 Capital Bids***

***C/141/8***

The DoFCS confirmed that DE had commissioned CCEA to produce multi-year pressure and savings estimates for both recurrent and capital funding. She advised the estimates contained in the detail of the paper have been provided in the context of significant uncertainty, including the summer 2021 examinations, future of the estates project, and policy decisions. A range of potential cost pressures linked to policy decisions were under active consideration.

Attention was drawn to the capital funding requirement to fulfil the Estates Strategy.

She advised that following initial discussions DE asked for amendments to be made to the information presented to Council.

However, following submission and further feedback from DE it would be highly likely that CCEA would be required to revisit the estimates as decisions are made and direction of travel becomes clearer.

The Chair sought clarification on whether the changes suggested by DE were achievable. The Chief Executive stated that he would be unable to advise due to the early stage of this exercise, however, he did confirm that CCEA had been asked to submit a budget plan based on assumptions, and on the basis, that in the future normal business arrangements will resume. He stated that significant additional resources would be required to resume operations and Covid-19 funding would be necessary. He wished to place on record his concerns that a 3-year budget plan was extremely challenging under the current circumstances.

Members were content to ratify the submission to go forward to DE for consideration. Formally proposed by Mr Robert Thompson, and seconded by Ms Patricia Slevin.

### **10 Any Other Business**

None identified by the Secretariat.

### **11 Date of Next Meeting**

The Chair confirmed that the next business meeting of Council was scheduled for Wednesday 11 November 2020 at 10 am.

*Council Briefings : October 2020 to January 2021*

The Chair advised that the need for Council briefings would be kept under review. He confirmed that weekly Council briefings (1 hour) had been scheduled from Friday 9 October 2020 to Friday 29 January 2021. If the briefings were not required members would be notified as appropriate.

The Chair wished to place on record his gratitude to Council for the enormous and exceptional commitment and support to the Executive Team under the prolonged and challenging circumstances.

A Council member wished to extend her thanks to the administration team for the long hours and hard work in providing the extensive amount of information to members in challenging timeframes. A Council member concurred and thanked the Manager of the Council Secretariat for her support to the Council.

*General*

Members expressed concern in regards to the decision of the ETI not to conduct school inspections during 2020/21 school year, and the absence of data would have significant impact on decision making. The Chair concurred, stating this was highly unsatisfactory.

The Chief Executive advised that ETI would evaluate the Engage Programme in its entirety but not individual items. He also expressed concern that in order to make policy decisions and form advice, evidence and information on which to make these decisions were required and this would be challenging without such evidence.

The Chair thanked members and officers for their input into the meeting. This concluded Council business.