

Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment

COUNCIL

Minutes of the seventy-ninth meeting of Council held on Wednesday 25 March 2009 at 10.00 hours in the Boardroom, 3rd Floor, CCEA, Clarendon Road, Belfast.

Present : Mr M Bowen (Vice-Chairman) Mr J Collins
Mr D Thompson Dr M Brown
Ms M Crilly Mrs D Black
Mrs P O'Farrell Mr J Clarke

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

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

Introduction

The Vice-Chairman welcomed members and advised that in the absence of the Chairman, Mr McKee, he would chair this meeting.

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr N Downing; Ms C McKinney; Mrs H McClenaghan; Ms M Watson, Mr J Wilkinson and Mr D McKee.

2 Chairman's Business

Corporate Governance

The Vice-Chairman advised that an additional clause had been added to the Corporate Governance Paper to provide clarity for officer attendance at meetings. This has been circulated to Council and TMT.

14-19

Members were advised that DE officials would attend the next meeting of Council to discuss the 14-19 agenda. In preparation for this the Chairs of Regulation, Qualification and Lifelong Learning and Curriculum and Assessment Committees would meet with the Senior Servicing Officers to discuss common issues for Committee and Council consideration.

ESA Consultations

ESA has conducted consultations on the 2nd Tier Director Structures and the Recruitment, Redeployment and Voluntary Severance (RRVS) Guidance. CCEA has responded to both by letter from the Chairman and copies will be made available to members on request.

Committee Reports

The Vice-Chairman advised that:

- Ms Patricia O'Farrell would give the Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning report in the absence of Mr John Wilkinson; and
- Mr Jim Clarke would give the Curriculum and Assessment report in the absence of Ms Mae Watson.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 29 January 2009

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 January 2009 were proposed by Ms Patricia O'Farrell and seconded by Mrs Dorothy Black as a true and accurate record. A copy was signed by the Vice-Chairman.

Action points

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that all of the actions had either been completed or were on the agenda for discussion at this meeting.

4 Corporate

- *Business Committee Report : 10 March 2009*

The Chairman of the Business Committee drew members' attention to the minutes provided. The committee discussed the following :

Finance report as at 31 January 2009 : the CFO reported that the budget would come in on target at year end with no major issues of concern.

Operational Plan Update : The initial budget submission was rejected by DE on the basis of a 7% (£2M) saving having to be made. As a result of this adjustments have been made in the following areas :

- Vacancy control – budget has been reduced to reflect the current CCEA headcount;
- VAT adjustment;
- Contingency Test – has been removed from the budget as work has ceased in this area;
- Key Stage Assessment and Deferred Assessment Arrangements - budget has been reduced to reflect deferment of planned work on the new assessment arrangements; and
- IFRS : a one-off adjustment to CCEA's fixed assets has been made in relation to the treatment of software licences.

The committee was assured that CCEA would be able to operate within the revised budget for 09/10.

Balance Sheet : was provided for information and no issues of concern were reported.

Change in Accounting Policies : The CFO advised that the ESA Implementation Team had asked DE that all education bodies from 1 April 2009 take on ESA's accounting policies to ensure smooth transition on 1 January 2010. He confirmed that CCEA would be able to accommodate this. An accounts direction will be issued by DE asking CCEA to implement these changes.

Market Share and Customer Focus - the committee received a detailed presentation on developments in these areas, the detail of which is provided in the committee minutes.

Attendance Management - Staff absence is currently sitting at 7.6 days per employee.

The committee noted that staff absence was 5.5 days per employee some years ago. They noted the reasons for the increase and were content with the interventions PSE had put in place to address stress related illnesses.

The Vice-Chairman was happy with the information provided and commended PSE on the work in this area.

It was agreed that a copy of the presentation would be forwarded to Council members for information.

Accommodation – the paper was discussed and approved to come forward to Council at this meeting.

General

The Chairman of the Committee advised that he had expressed concern that the research work to support various projects across the organization had stopped and asked that this be discussed further.

A Council member sought clarification on when the meeting with the Chief Executive Designate (ESA) would take place regarding the impact on CCEA should some staff be successful in being appointed to the ESA 2nd Tier. It was confirmed that this meeting would take place on 8 April 2009.

The Vice-Chairman asked members that if they had any issues they wished to have raised at that meeting they should provide these to the Manager of the Council Secretariat outside of this meeting.

The Acting Chief Executive advised that the issues surrounding the budget would be discussed on 8 April.

• ***CCEA Accommodation Requirements 2009/10***

C/79/1

The Vice-Chairman reminded members that this issue had been discussed at previous meetings of Council and Business Committee and all were aware of the concerns regarding lack of meeting space to run successfully the summer 2009 examinations series.

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief overview of the proposal presented to Business Committee. He advised that the risks had been incorporated into C/79/1. He reported that :

- Two areas of the Clarendon building would be reconfigured to accommodate the additional meeting space (business managers and directors offices will be used as a contingency during peak periods);
- Stranmillis College will be used for standardising meetings;
- Minor adjustments will be made to the William Ritchie Building to accommodate staff relocation. There will no longer be meeting space available on this site.
- Additional meetings during May and June 09 (ie Council and Committees) will be held at outside venues and sufficient funding has been allocated for this.

He acknowledged that given the time constraints there was insufficient time to conduct a consultation with the staff involved, however a communication would be issued to all staff from TMT.

He drew attention to the risks outlined in the paper and advised that the highest risks were staff morale and no space available for additional, new staff. He advised that he was not in a position to give an assurance that this proposal would be entirely successful but would give a full progress report at the next Council meeting.

Council members expressed concern that staff morale had been cited as a high risk. They confirmed that the moves were necessary to ensure the priorities of the organisation were met and sought an assurance that a clear communication would be issued to staff with a full explanation.

A Council member sought clarification on how many people were involved. It was confirmed that 25 staff would be involved in the move.

The Vice-Chairman said it was important that TMT managed this message carefully.

Mr David Thompson proposed and Mr Jim Collins seconded this proposal on behalf of the Council.

- *Audit and Risk Committee Report : 12 March 2009*

The Chairman of the Committee (Vice-Chair of Council) drew members' attention to the detail of the minutes. He reported on the following :

Item 5 : Non-compliance : 1 invoice over £1,500 was drawn to the attention of the committee. This was for rented accommodation where no invoice had been produced.

In terms of instances with purchase orders below £1,500 - 7 were reported to the committee. The Chairman of the committee asked for an indication of whether there was a rise or fall in the total number of these incidents to be given at each future meeting.

Item 6 : National Fraud Initiative : a data matching exercise had been completed in CCEA with only once match being found. This was a very small issue of a duplicate national insurance number which had been entered incorrectly. This had now been amended.

This was the first time CCEA has been involved in such an exercise and the committee was content that there was no fraudulent activity within CCEA.

Item 7 : Stewardship Reports : the committee received a detailed report outlining the key risks going forward. The main risk was the movement of key staff from CCEA.

Item 8 : Accommodation requirements : the Chairman of the Committee confirmed that the risks associated with the management of the new accommodation would remain with CCEA until it becomes part of ESA. Until that time the Director of Corporate Services would own these risks.

Item 9 : Audit Activity : the committee received a detailed report from Deloitte on audit activity during the period January – February 2009.

The committee noted that the review of examinations moderating had now been completed and a follow-up on this area would be undertaken to ensure items deferred until the summer series had been completed.

Item 10 : NIAO Update : the representative from the NIAO reported that CCEA's system of control was considered to be strong.

DE had agreed that the annual accounts would be laid before government by the summer recess.

- ***Harmonisation with ESA Risk Register***

C/79/2

The Vice-Chairman drew members' attention to the revised risk register. This included more detail and the identification of strategic issues, in particular Curriculum and Assessment. He advised that this would be a living document and updated as appropriate. A mitigating action plan would be drawn up in order to take these issues forward.

A Council member drew attention to the first risk and sought clarification on whether the CCEA Council could be asked to remain in some form beyond 1 January 2010. The Acting Chief Executive acknowledged that this was an important point and agreed to raise this at the meeting with the Chief Executive Designate of ESA.

Members noted the information provided.

5 Education Strategy

- *Curriculum and Assessment Committee report : 18 February 2009*

The Vice-Chairman of the Committee reported that this was a one-item agenda meeting to discuss CCEA's draft response to the draft regulations.

- ***Draft response to the draft regulations on the reporting of information to parents***
C/79/3

He advised that the committee felt that the layout of the response booklet was not appropriate and suggested that the YES/NO options not be responded to.

The revised document took into consideration all of the points raised by the committee and was issued to the sub-group for comment before the deadline. Only one member of the sub-group responded.

A Council member stated that it was important that the formative record of achievement was not included as part of the annual reporting process.

The Director of Education Strategy (ES) clarified that the way in which the document had been written was due to the technical nature of the responses required.

He advised that an action arising out of the Curriculum & Assessment Committee was that a 'lay person's guide' should be produced by CCEA, to explain, in accessible language, what the regulations mean. The document is currently in draft form and has been issued to the members of the sub-group for comment.

He confirmed that he had set up monthly meetings with DE officials and intended to discuss this document once it has been finalised.

The response was proposed by Mr Jim Clarke and seconded by Dr Martin Brown on behalf of the Council.

The Vice-Chairman confirmed that the draft evidence had been agreed by the Chairman and Acting Chief Executive and submitted to the Northern Ireland Assembly by the deadline.

The Director of ES reported that CCEA supported the establishment of the single authority. CCEA believes that this is positive and will improve co-ordination and clarity within and across the system. However, it is still the Council's view that one government body rather than two should have overall responsibility for Education within Northern Ireland. He said that it was important to include this in the written evidence as more clarity was required between the two Departments (DE) and (DEL).

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that this was a high level summary of comments previously endorsed by Council, however, we may be asked to elaborate on some of the points at the Education Committee.

The final evidence was proposed by Mr Jim Collins and seconded by Mrs Dorothy Black on behalf of the Council.

6 Qualifications

- *Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning Committee Report : 4 March 2009*

The Vice-Chairperson of the Committee drew members' attention to the tabled minutes and reported on the following :

Update on QCF : the committee received two reports : one on regulatory developments and the other on the awarding body perspective.

The QFC is now in implementation phase and is being jointly managed by the Learning and Skills Council, the Regulators and Awarding Organisations.

The current and proposed qualifications are being developed to meet the requirements of the framework.

GCSE Scrutiny on PE : the committee received a report on the recent scrutiny which resulted in a partial level of compliance. Members noted the paper and approved the action plan.

Controlled assessment for Science : this is a standing item on the agenda. A sub-group has been established consisting of 12 science professional. It has met 5 times and their first report was due for completion on 13 March. The committee and Council will receive regular updates as work progresses.

Dr Brown (a member of the sub-group) confirmed that the final meeting would take place on 25 March and it was hoped to issue the report thereafter. He reported that the main difficulty was trying to fit Northern Ireland science into the English structure. He confirmed that the group was unhappy with what has been achieved given the constraints imposed.

The Director of Qualifications confirmed that a more creative and open-ended response would be preferred and the group would reconvene to look at approaches going forward based on the revision of the specification and on good practice in Northern Ireland.

A Council member referred to the recent STEM review and the fact that the uptake on the science assessment had decreased. There had been strong support from the committee that if there was an external constraint then Science education should be reconfigured to meet the needs of Northern Ireland children and be available for all schools.

The Director of Qualifications confirmed that exploratory work had been carried out in grammar schools, and it was intended that this be rolled out as a pilot available to all schools.

The Director of ES advised that CCEA has been asked to focus operational plans on STEM issues. He stressed the importance of recognising the broader context of the 14-16 agenda and take into consideration the differences between the Revised Curriculum (Northern Ireland) and the National Curriculum (England) which drives QCA's thinking in this area.

The Acting Chief Executive reported on the following :

Occupational Studies : the committee discussed the draft consultation paper. This would be used as the basis of further consultation with centres following feedback received in the autumn 2008 that schools were not ready for the changes.

Following discussions DE have confirmed that they are willing to delay the changes for a further year to allow CCEA to engage more meaningfully with centres. Three consultation events have been planned for April and once this feedback has been obtained CCEA will be in a position to develop recommendations for the Committee and Council at their next meetings to consider and their next meetings so that advice can be provided to DE.

The Vice-Chairman welcomed the fact that the original seminars had been repurposed into consultation events and advised that feedback on learner motivation and the vocational groupings and allocation of units within each of these areas would be essential in drawing up meaningful recommendations.

A Council member stressed the need for consideration to be given to how occupational studies can be delivered successfully given responsibilities of the two departments (ie DE and DEL).

The Vice-Chairman noted the concerns raised and asked officers to take these into consideration as part of the consultation.

Functionality in GCSE English and Mathematics : the committee noted the paper setting out the relationship between the revised GCSE subject criteria for English Language and Mathematics and the functional/essential skills requirement. This is largely driven from England. Wales are including the functional essential skills element within the specification but not as a separate assessment and Northern Ireland are maintaining a watching brief. DE will be looking to CCEA for further advice as this develops.

A Council member confirmed that the view of the committee was more towards the Welsh model but the needs of Northern Ireland needed to be included.

The Director of ES asked that account be taken of the communication and using mathematics and how this is reflected into Key Stage 4 in further discussions in this area.

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that Council will be kept informed.

7 Any other business

The Vice-Chairman reminded members that the Manager of the Council Secretariat would issue a reminder asking for issues to come forward for the forthcoming meeting with the Chief Executive Designate on 8 April.

PMB

A Council member reported that he had seen the draft copy of DE/ETI Assessment of the PMB. The Director of ES confirmed that the joint chairmanship of PMB had not lapsed. He advised that he had met with the co-chair and a senior DE official on 20 March to discuss PMB. He confirmed that the points made by the previous CCEA Chair in May 2006 where the Council had expressed concern about PMB as a functional board were discussed. It was also confirmed at this meeting that PMB was not an equal partner and that accountability lay with CCEA, its' Council and the ELBs.

It had been agreed that DE would write to the co-chairs of PMB to provide more clarity and set out DE's expectations of PMB from now until 31 December 2009.

War on Want

The Acting Chief Executive advised that to date CCEA have raised over £15,000 for the War on Want Charity. The Vice-Chairman wished to place on record his thanks to the Director of Qualifications and staff responsible for this and asked her to prepare an overview of all of the events which have taken place over the last 12 months. This would be circulated to Council members by the Manager of the Council Secretariat.

The Director of Operations sought permission to write to Council and Committee members outlining the achievements to date. This was agreed.

Customer Excellence Standard

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that CCEA were the first organisation to achieve this holistic award. Members congratulated the organisation on this achievement.

8 Date of next meeting

It was confirmed that the next meeting would take place on **Wednesday 17 June 2009** at 10.00 hours.