

CCEA

COUNCIL

Minutes of the one hundredth and forty-fourth meeting of Council held on Thursday 25 March 2021 at 1.30 pm via MS Teams.

Present :

Mr T O'Reilly (Chair)	Mr R Smyth
Dr L Caul	Mrs K O'Hare
Mrs C Fitzsimons	Professor P Hanna
Mrs P Leitch	Ms P Slevin
Mr B Wilson	Mrs A Kingsley
Mrs D O'Connor	Mr H McCarthy
Miss M Corrigan	Mrs S Sellars

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)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the first meeting of the newly constituted Council.

Introductions

Members introduced themselves and provided some brief background on their experience and areas of expertise.

The Chair thanked members for their input.

1 Apologies

None received.

2 Declaration of Interests

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

3 Chair's Business

New Council Arrangements

The Chair formally welcomed members to its inaugural meeting. He was pleased to be appointed Chair and welcomed the opportunity to lead the Council over the next 4 years. He outlined the key priorities and challenges for the Council over the coming months, in particular the implementation of the Minister's direction on the Summer 2021 and the delivery of alternative awarding arrangements. He acknowledged the quality of the work and outputs that the Executive Team had delivered to date on these matters.

He outlined the range of initiatives, policy issues and activities Council would be involved in as the strategic environment for education in Northern Ireland began to evolve as the sector responded to the pandemic, namely :

- How to address the shortfall in children's learning created by their absence from the classroom
- Underachievement
- Fundamental Review of Education in Northern Ireland
- Programme for Government
- Children and Young Person's Strategy

Examples of policy issues which Council will address and contribute to in the coming years included:

- The content of the Northern Ireland Curriculum
- Future role of high stakes examinations
- Vocational Education in Northern Ireland
- How to gauge the progress of children as they move through their life in primary and post-primary education

The Chair confirmed that CCEA would advise Ministers on these items and participate in the working groups as required.

He referred to the wide range of talent and expertise amongst Council members and looked forward to their contributions and working closely with CCEA officers to fulfil the governance responsibilities and provide high level advice on Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Council Meetings

The Chair proposed 6 Council meetings per year (on the last Thursday of each month): May; August; September; November; January and March. A single item agenda meeting to approve the Annual Report and Accounts will be scheduled for June to meet the timescales for laying the documents before the Assembly.

Informal Council sessions would be convened in the alternating months to discuss priority issues with single item agendas. The future role of the Chief Executive would be discussed at the April meeting.

The Chair proposed to alternate the start times of Council meetings between 1pm and 3pm to accommodate members' commitments.

A schedule of Council and Committee dates for 2021/22 would be issued to members as soon as possible.

The Chair advised when appropriate to do so, two 'away' days would be organised later in the year for members to take forward the strategic agenda.

Format of Meetings

The Chair confirmed that the full range of governance responsibilities would be fulfilled however agendas would be formulated to accommodate discussions on policy matters as they arose, particularly the role of the Education Committee to ensure Council has the opportunity to fully contribute to thinking on these important issues.

A 'Below the Line' section would also be introduced into the agenda which will be for 'information only' however, there will be an opportunity for clarification if required.

Ratified Committee minutes will be taken under 'below the line' with Committee Chairs having the opportunity to report issues to Council not covered on the agenda.

Standing Orders

The Chair agreed to review the Standing Orders. Any changes required would be presented to Council for consideration.

Members were content with the new arrangements.

Proposal for Committee Membership and Committee Chairs

C/144/1

The Chair thanked members for indicating their committee preferences. He drew attention to the information provided and advised on the broad principles to allow members to have as wide a range of experience as possible during the 4 years.

He outlined the proposed schedule and advised that a member could sit on the Regulation or Education Committee but not both, and on the Finance or Audit & Risk Assurance Committee but not both. Membership would be for 2 years with a view to rotating as appropriate.

Appeals

The Chair asked members to indicate their willingness to volunteer for the Appeals Panel to the Manager of the Council Secretariat outside of the meeting.

Membership of the Committees

The Chair drew attention to Appendix 1 of the paper, setting out the membership of the Committees and confirmation of Chairs, and confirmed Mr Brian Wilson had agreed to continue as Chair of the Finance Committee.

A member welcomed the proposed approach and referred to the matter raised in relation to conflict of interest to avoid silos arising between Regulation and Committee. He asked for consideration be given to co-opting members onto the Education Committee and Regulation Committee (as per the Terms of Reference), to fill significant gaps, particularly with an expertise in statistics. He asked that the position of the Regulation Committee also be considered.

The Chair welcomed the comments and advised that these will be addressed through the work of the committees once established and would work with the committees to identify external members.

A Council member concurred with the need for co-optees to be brought onto the Regulation and Education Committees.

Members agreed the membership and chairs of the committees. Formally proposed by Mrs Kathleen O'Hare and seconded by Mrs Paula Leitch.

Whistleblowing Contact

The Chair referred to the Whistleblowing Policy and asked members for expressions of interest (for the contact) to be submitted to the Manager of the Secretariat outside of the meeting. He confirmed that members would be notified and appropriate arrangements put in place.

Officer Attendance

The Chair advised that Mr Andrew McAfee (Business Manager, Multimedia & Communications) would be in attendance for Paper **C/144/8** on Communications Strategy.

4 Ratification of Council Minutes held on 28 January 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 January 2021 were proposed by Ms Patricia Slevin and seconded by Mrs Paula Leitch as a true and accurate record. A copy would be available for the Chair to sign once normal business arrangements resumed.

Action Points

The Chief Executive updated members on the status of the action points.

Ratification of Council Briefing Meetings

Council Briefing : 4 February 2021

The minutes of the Council briefing meeting held on 4 February 2021 were proposed by Dr Les Caul and seconded by Mrs Carol Fitzsimons.

Council Briefing : 10 February 2021

The minutes of the Council briefing meeting held on 10 February 2021 were proposed by Mrs Paula Leitch and seconded by Dr Les Caul.

Council Briefing : 17 February 2021

The minutes of the Council briefing meeting held on 17 February 2021 were proposed by Ms Patricia Slevin and seconded by Mr Brian Wilson.

Council Briefing : 3 March 2021

The minutes of the Council briefing meeting held on 3 March 2021 were proposed by Mrs Paula Leitch and seconded by Mrs Carol Fitzsimons.

Copies would be made available for the Chair to sign once normal business arrangements resumed.

5 Correspondence

Members noted the following correspondence:

- CCEA 2021/22 Business Plan
- CCEA Business Plan 3rd Quarter Evaluation
- Alternative Awarding Arrangements 2021
- Deloitte Action Plan
- January Monitoring Exercise 2020/21
- CCEA Support for Pilot Scheme to address Period Poverty in Schools – funding for 2021/22
- Confirmation of Minister's decision on Alternative Awarding Arrangements for CCEA Qualifications 2021
- Commissioning of Advice on Adaptations to CCEA Qualifications for delivery in 2021/22

- CCEA Revised Financial Plan 2020/21
- Approval of Business Case : CCEA Confidential Typesetting Services 2021-2023

6 Governance and Accountability

Report on DE/CCEA GAR Meeting held on 9 March 2021

The Chair gave a high level summary of the main issues discussed, in particular :

- November and January examinations series
- The Deloitte Report : it was agreed that the action plan would be submitted to DE and this will be closed out as recommendations have been implemented.
- Financial management and the challenges CCEA had faced given the impact of the Minister's decision not to proceed with examinations in Summer 2021 and the difficulties created with the cancellation of the 2021 examinations series.
- Head of Centre Guidance – clarification was sought and received on feedback since the launch of the guidance, and importance of continued communication making use of all channels to issue updates to full range of stakeholders.

Other matters discussed were Risk Management; Appeals Process for 2021 and Regulation.

The Permanent Secretary acknowledged the significant amount of work undertaken by CCEA officers and the importance of CCEA and DE continuing to work together in developing solutions to implement the Minister's policy for 2021.

The Chair concluded that the discussions were helpful in that pressures and future challenges were recognised.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the risks around Vocational Qualifications provision for Irish Medium (following the withdrawal of a private provider) had been raised with DE and provided an update on alternative providers for other subjects.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of issues and were content that alternative provision for the Irish medium would continue to be sought and representations made to DE as required.

The Chair confirmed that given CCEA's statutory responsibility on Assessment at KS1-3 was included in the GAR report and raised at the meeting. He advised that discussions would continue with the Permanent Secretary on what direction DE will give to ensure CCEA fulfils its responsibility in this area.

A Council member suggested that an alternative programme of available tests and aspects be put in place for schools to use as an interim measure until direction is provided. The need for a meaningful system wide assessment (easily accessible by all) accompanied by early intervention to address underachievement was also raised by members.

The Director of Education (DoE) re-assured members that a number of workshops were held with DE colleagues (pre-Covid-19) to explore options on the purpose of assessment. DE did commit to establishing an Assessment Review at that time, however it has not yet been taken forward. DE is keen that new arrangements are fit for purpose, support teaching and learning and address underachievement. She undertook to progress this with DE and suggested that representations continue through the GAR.

The Chief Executive confirmed that as part of the 2020 pay settlement one of the items would be Statutory Assessment and this would be taken forward appropriately.

The Chair concluded that this would be an item for both Education Committee and Council – what does CCEA believe should happen with statutory assessment to ensure we are prepared to move with proposals in taking forward discussions with DE and Teaching Unions.

The Chair thanked members and officers for their input into the item.

7 Education

For Information

Update on Alternative Assessment Arrangements – Summer 2021

Paper C/144/2

The DoE referred to the information provided in paper C/144/2 and provided an update on feedback received from the sector following the release of the Head of Centre Guidance – Summer 2021. She advised that based on the feedback the guidance had been updated to address some concerns raised by teachers and clarity provided in other areas as requested. She confirmed that work continued with the Principals' Group to maintain communications and keep abreast of emerging issues.

CCEA Assessment Resources would go live on 29 March 2021 together with mark schemes, all materials would be made available to support teachers in preparation for the submission of grades.

The DoE outlined the process for managing the release of information into schools as quickly as possible and confirmed that teachers were aware of the staggered timeline, however recognised the timing (given the school holidays). She assured members that communications would be tailored accordingly.

The Chair recognised the challenging circumstances and acknowledged the work ongoing work with the sector to ensure the delivery of awarding arrangements for summer 2021.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of issues. These included: risk assessment carried out on the range of options presented and the need for clear communications strategy on the moderation system within and across schools. The DoE confirmed that a significant amount of risk assessment had been carried out on the assessment arrangements for 2021 and confirmed that in terms of moderation she was confident that there was a balance in achieving the quality assurance checks on the moderation approach to grades.

The Chief Executive stated that there would be no perfect solution that would satisfy everyone, however assured members that all risks, including over moderation and increased workload had been highlighted to DE and mitigating action taken where possible. Where it was not possible DE has been made aware. Council would be kept informed of any emerging issues.

Members welcomed the update and clarity of the information provided.

For retrospective approval

Draft Advice to DE : Adaptations to GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications 2021/22 C/144/3

The DoE drew attention to the detail provided at paper C/144/3 and gave a high level overview in respect of the advice to DE in relation to adaptations required to GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications. Specific advice has been provided on AS.

Ms Slevin and Mrs O'Connor left the meeting at this point.

The Chief Executive referred to the perception of Conflict of Interests and asked members to be mindful of managing (and declaring) any conflicts in the event of children taking examinations, in particular when ratifying advice.

He referred to the AS not contributing to A2 to negate the significant risk on appeals that this may be a matter to signal this back to the Department under the letter of Direction. A Council member supported this way forward. The Chair sought and received confirmation on behalf of Council, that the Chief Executive write to the Deputy Secretary (DE) indicating concerns in relation to the Minister's decision not to include AS contributing to A2.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of matters and were content with the explanations received.

The need for a clear concise communications strategy for the full range of stakeholders including children and parents was required on all aspects of the adaptations, including an understanding of the AS not contributing to A2 qualification.

Members retrospectively approved the draft advice for submission to DE.

8 Regulation

For Approval

Regulatory Principles for Awarding – Summer 2021 C/144/4

The Chief Executive confirmed that the draft Principles for Awarding had been considered by the Regulation Committee at its meeting on 10 March. They reflected the Ministerial direction received on 2 March 2021 and were designed to ensure that processes and actions put in place by the Awarding Organisation meet this direction.

Members were content to ratify the Principles for Awarding. Formally proposed by Dr Les Caul and seconded by Professor Philip Hanna.

9 Audit

For Consideration

Corporate Risk Register – February 2021 C/144/5

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DoFS) confirmed the CRR was considered at the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meeting on 18 March 2021 and summarised the risk environment as at February however it continued to evolve with the rapid changing environment CCEA has been operating under over the last 12 months.

She drew attention to and provided an overview of each of the 8 Corporate Risks and advised on those amended following direction from the ARAC in particular CR1 in relation to Covid-19 and CR8 – Failure to effectively manage Governance Arrangements in respect of CCEA, and corresponding mitigations.

Clarification was sought on the level of risk attributed to Vocational Qualifications. The Chief Executive confirmed this was a Regulatory matter and advised that CR3 would be amended to reflect the causal effect of failure of Vocational Qualification providers to adapt to the current circumstances in a timely manner.

The Chair suggested that the risk around vocational education be monitored with a view to this becoming a separate risk rather than being encompassed within the broad risk of meeting the needs of the NI curriculum. The Chief Executive proposed that this be reviewed and presented to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee for discussion.

Members were content with the information provided.

10 Finance and Planning

Finance Update

C/144/6

The DOFCS confirmed that the Finance Committee fulfilled their scrutiny and challenge function on all aspects of finance.

She drew attention to the detail provided and reminded members of the challenging environment the organisation had operated under during the 2020/21 financial year with core functions being severely disrupted.

She outlined the range of issues and confirmed that CCEA continued to work with DE to mitigate the financial risks and advised that the Minister's Direction cancelling examinations for January, March and Summer 2021, had resulted in £1.85M (9.6%) being surrendered. This has been accepted by DE for redistribution back into the education sector. Also accepted by DE was the surrender of £50K of Capital funding due to the impact of Covid-19.

Funding allocation for 2021/22 has not yet been confirmed, however plans continue to be developed based on a 0% basis.

Statement of Financial Position as at 28 February 2021

Members noted the statement of financial position as at 28 February 2021.

Draft CCEA Business Plan 2021/22

C/144/7

The DoFCS confirmed that the draft Business Plan had been submitted for consideration and feedback. As the process progresses CCEA would continue to consult and negotiate with DE on refinement of measures and targets for 2021/22.

A revised draft will be presented to Finance Committee at its next meeting for consideration.

Clarification was sought and received on a number of matters. Members were content with the information provided.

Professor P Hanna and Mr R Smyth left the meeting at this point.

11 Communications

The Chair welcomed Mr Andrew McAfee, Multimedia and Communications Business Manager to the meeting.

Communications Strategy – Alternative Awarding Arrangements 2021

C/144/8

The Business Manager Multimedia & Communications referred to the draft communications and provided an overview on the proposed approach to communications for raising awareness and understanding for the full range of CCEA stakeholders on the arrangements for all CCEA qualifications for summer 2021.

He gave a detailed presentation on the main aspects of the strategy, these included :

- The overall Communications Aim;
- CCEA's approach to communications;
- Range of engagement with Stakeholders (including young people and parents) to ensure: Awareness, Understanding, Confidence, Engagement and Advocacy;
- Planned activities and touch points using range of technology to deliver the information;
- Metrics and measurements which measure the sentiment and tone;
- Next steps and key issues.

He confirmed that a timeline was in place for communications to be updated and issued up until the issue of results. Lines to take and activity around messaging will also be adapted as appropriate and as matters develop.

He advised that work continued on building relationships with parents and a range of parenting groups, ie. Parenting NI to ensure that the full range of messages are issued and available to parents and children so that they gain an understanding of the responsibility of the school in its use of information and also CCEA's role in the Appeals Process. Further work was required in this area.

Members commended the high quality of the information; the range of communications and mechanisms for putting messages into the system.

A member particularly welcomed the short key facts which have addressed a significant amount of perceptions. The need for continued proactivity rather than reactivity was crucial in delivering the key messages.

A Council member asked for a clear message to be issued setting out that CCEA will ensure that individuals' work will be considered, assessed and marked accordingly. The Director of Education said she and the team would be reflected on the clarity of messages to students to ensure they are informed on how the grades will be issued in terms of the final review stage.

The Chair agreed to progress Council members' attendance at stakeholder events outside of the meeting.

He commended the quality of the presentation and communications being issued throughout the system. He advised that the work was ongoing on the Appeals Process for 2021 and Council would have time to consider this. He asked that clear communications in relation to AS and A2 continue to be developed to ensure CCEA was prepared should any issues arise from this.

12 Any Other Business

Below the Line Business

The Chair drew attention to the link below which was provided for members' information.

Conflict of Interests

The Chair referred to the point raised in relation to Council members with children sitting examinations this year and next year and asked them to submit a note to the Manager of the Secretariat so these have been officially registered.

13 Date of Next Meeting

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 29 April 2021 at 3pm.

Full Council would meet on Thursday 27 May 2021 at 1.30 pm.

Vote of Thanks

The Chair, on behalf of Council wished to place on record his thanks to the outgoing Chief Executive for his leadership of the organisation over the last 6 years. He wished him ever success in his new career.

The Chief Executive thanked members.