

## CCEA

### COUNCIL BRIEFING

**Minutes of the 150th Council meeting held on Thursday 26 May 2022 at 13:30 at CCEA Headquarters, 29 Clarendon Road, Belfast and also via MS Teams.**

**Present :**

Mr Tommy O'Reilly (Chair)  
Mrs Sarah Sellars (Vice Chair)  
Dr Les Caul  
Mr Hugh McCarthy  
Professor P Hanna  
Mr Rob Smyth

Mrs Paula Leitch  
Mrs Kathleen O Hare  
Mr Brian Wilson  
Dr Anne Kingsley  
Mrs Donna O'Connor

Ms Margaret Farragher (Interim Chief Executive Officer)  
Mrs Leah Scott (Director of Finance & Corporate Services)  
Ms Amanda Swann (Director of Education)  
Mrs Sharon King ( Head of Regulation)  
Mr Neill Morton (Presented then exited meeting)

*Mr Ray Caldwell, Department of Education (observer)*

### **MINUTES**

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

#### **1. Apologies :**

No Apologies were received for this meeting. Mr Rob Smyth indicated he needed to leave the meeting at 2pm.

#### **2. Conflict of Interests**

There were no conflicts of interest declared in relation to any of the agenda items to be discussed at the meeting.

#### **3. Chair's Business**

The Chair introduced the Interim Chief Executive Margaret Farragher and asked she provide her update to the Council. Margaret advised on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022 she had an oversight meeting with the Department of Education. At this meeting Governance and Corporate Finance issues were discussed including the financing of COVID posts until the end of September 2022. The Interim Chief Executive advised not all posts were funded and CCEA had to absorb the additional challenges this has presented. CCEA were now also being asked to bid to the Department for increased energy increase prices

At the meeting CCEA officers also highlighted the need for an additional £3 million to manage next year's examination series based on advance information being required along with a set of back up papers.

She reported that progress was slow on developing the partnership agreement and DE was still working with CCMS and EA on their partnership agreements.

The ICEO indicated that she would be proposing to Council that there should be an independent review of governance in CCEA. This would look at governance processes, record keeping, terms of reference and standing orders. An update would be provided to the next ARAC meeting. The draft updated corporate plan has been sent to DE and if comments are received in time, an updated version may be brought to June council briefing meeting.

It was reported that the Summer 2022 examinations are going well although there are some operational issues including issues with the recruitment of examiners over the summer. The number of requests for Reserve Series papers is currently low.

It was confirmed that the Jubilee resources were being launched at a primary school by the Minster and that some prominent experts working in this area of education have expressed interest in working with CCEA on the next round in monitoring the curriculum.

It was also confirmed that the Independent Review of Education team have asked to receive a presentation on Computer Adaptive Testing in June and before the next Council meeting.

Council members made several comments including welcoming the potential governance review, commending the CEF training that had taken place that morning, asking for clarification on the recruitment issues and stressing the importance of ensuring proper attention and resources are given to the early years and foundation stages curriculum.

#### **4. Correspondence**

No issues raised on this matter.

#### **5. Education**

The ICEO confirmed that the draft advice had been sent to DE officials on the proposed approach for the 2023 Examinations. DE colleagues asked that the advice be updated to take account of recent developments in the other jurisdictions.

DE officials have also asked that CCEA commit in the advice to being able to provide advance information as the preferred option for the 2023 Examinations. They indicated that the Minister wished to be in a position to make an announcement on the 2023 adaptations before end of term.

The ICEO highlighted that CCEA would need additional human and financial resources to prepare the advance information. These challenges led to the recommendation that advance information was a potential future option pending funding.

It was confirmed by the temporary Director of Examinations that the position was still fluid and there was no certainty as the final position across all the jurisdictions.

The Chair asked that Council confirm their decision on each of the individual recommendations in the draft advice and this would be based on current available information. The Council's decisions were as follows.

First recommendation on the exclusion of Unit Omissions for 2023 was approved;

Second recommendation on the advance information was deferred for further discussion.

The Council agreed the third recommendation on standards in principle but asked it to be kept under review to take account of what happens in other jurisdictions.

Council agreed that the public health adjustments be removed for the 2023 Examination series.

On contingency arrangements to support examinations if they go ahead in 2023, Council agreed the 5<sup>th</sup> recommendation that the Missed Component Eligibility be retained at the 25% level.

After a discussion around the challenges and potential risks of excluding the option, Council agreed that a Reserve Exam series should not be available next year.

Council agreed the alternative arrangements detailed in the 7<sup>th</sup> recommendation should examinations not proceed in 2023.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> recommendation Council agreed that 2023 CCEA VTQ students should be required to meet the same assessment arrangements as far as possible for VTQ qualifications as those in place for 2022. It was explained that these exams are primarily coursework based and advance information is not appropriate for this type of assessment as it is portfolio based.

Council then considered the Department's request that advance information should be considered as the preferred option in how best to support students in the 2023 examinations.

After an informed discussion, Council agreed that the advice provided in the paper should be redrafted to support the provision of advance information, but the letter to the Department should refer to the risks highlighted in the paper and how both parties needed to work together to ensure these could be mitigated. This was to include the early availability and level of financial resources required to implement this approach.

Council members were particularly concerned about the risks of an advance information option given the modularity of exams in Northern Ireland. They were also aware that the situation in England might change in the coming months. The advice sent to the Department would come back to the next Council meeting to assure members that the risks and mitigations had been highlighted to the Department

## **6. Audit**

In the absence of the Chair of the Audit Risk & Assurance committee the item was deferred until next meeting.

## **7. Finance & Corporate**

The Chair of the Committee gave an update on the items discussed at the meeting which included the end of year financial position, pay remit and the 2022/23 budget position. The Committee also received updates on the Estate Strategy and the end of year position on the business plan where all targets were likely to be achieved or fully achieved with only two delayed. The Committee also discussed the return-to-work policy and the proposed hybrid pilot.

## **8. Regulation**

The Chair gave an update on the items discussed at the 10 May meeting. These included a discussion following a presentation on regulation priorities for this year. The Committee also discussed the emerging challenges of how to ensure maintenance of standards as OFQUAL increasingly become more focused on the AOs it regulates and less on ensuring comparability between jurisdictions. The Committee also considered the report into the funding arrangement between CCEA and DfE. The Chair confirmed that one of the co-optees on the Committee had to resign due to a change in roles. A new member is being sought.

## **9. DFE Report, Neil Morton**

The Chair welcomed Neil Morton to the meeting and informed him that Council members had read and discussed the report at various Committee meetings during the past two months. He then invited Neil to address the Council.

Neil outlined his methodology for carrying out his study including taking account of HM Treasury and DoF guidance and he specifically commended the work of the small CCEA regulation team. He confirmed that DfE were keen to positively engage with CCEA in how they can be supported in the future.

He highlighted that in 2021 DfE had remunerated CCEA Regulation for advice and support on vocational qualifications and core regulation, to the extent of around £900 thousand for both core regulation and project work.

Regulatory input for DfE has increased over the past years and it was his view, based on interviews with key staff, that there is potential for an enhanced relationship under certain circumstances. The key issue for DfE is the positioning of regulation within CCEA as it is not headed by a director, but a Business Manager (Tier 1) who reports the CEO and is not a member of CCEA's Executive team.

There are also concerns around the mix of part-time and full-time employees and the need for a potential review of staffing in CCEA Regulation. This might include the need for a complement of employees to engage with DfE in an outcomes-based model. In his research he looked at the Welsh model although he did not include it in his report.

He highlighted that the Qualification Wales Act which became statute in 2015- the same time as OFQUAL withdrew as regulator in Northern Ireland, and when DfE asked CCEA to take over, and how this could become a potential blueprint for future.

DFE's position is that they will consider options, in conjunction with DE, and while the work on the Independent Review is pending, DfE are not in the position to consider any changes to the current funding model until a review has taken place.

The final report was submitted to DfE at the end of March. It was sent to the primary DfE contact for CCEA and they are now seeking CCEA's view on the report's findings. DE have been asked or their views on how best to move forward in particular the implications for the sponsorship.

In summary the Chair stated that the report did appear to have two main components.

The first relates to the operation of the letter of offer process and the problems with how that works in terms of delivery and when invoices are getting paid. The issue is both a DfE and CCEA issue because when DfE issues late letters of offer this creates financial and staffing

pressures and leads to delays in meeting their needs . CCEA currently have a 3-year letter of offer and there are things need to happen to improve that process.

There is also a need for a conversation with DFE on funding over the next three years as the current letter of offer is only for core regulation activities.

It was noted that DFE are not in a position to commit to additional funding because of lack of clarity on their own financial position but they clearly understand that all their areas dealing with skills and further education have regulatory needs.

The second part of the report highlights the need for a strategic discussion and agreement between CCEA and DFE on the longer-term direction. This should also involve DE.

Council agreed there was a need to strengthen the Regulation function but this required agreement between the different parties before additional investment could be made.

At that point the Chair thanked Neil for his report and his contribution to the meeting.

The Council then discussed the longer-term relationship with DFE and it was agreed the issue to be discussed included ideas around funding, services to be provided and potential organisational structure.

It was agreed that it would be helpful for CCEA to develop a model for discussion with DfE using a potential partnership model. Kathleen O Hare highlighted the need to start a conversation with senior officials at the Department of Economy including the Director of Tertiary Education Reform and others.

Council members agreed this is an opportunity for the CCEA organisation to become more fully engaged with vocational qualifications including alternatives to GCSE and A levels, recognising that to do so also presents challenges in terms of financial and human resources.

A business case has been put to DE to develop applied general qualifications, but it has not been agreed.

It was agreed the Council consider the way forward on CCEA role in Vocational and Technical Qualifications, Curriculum and Regulation.

## **10. Any Other Business**

All CCEA staff and the Chair left the meeting.

Discussion of Council, chaired by Vice Chair, around working relationship between Chair of Council and Interim Chief Executive. DE observer (RC) remained in attendance.

A separate note of the closed session is available for record purposes.

**Date of Next Meeting:** Council Briefing: Thursday 23 June 2022 at 1.30 pm

