

CCEA

COUNCIL

Minutes of the one hundred and forty-third meeting of Council held on Thursday 28 January 2021 at 1.30 pm via MS Teams.

Present : Mr T Carson (Chair) Dr L Caul
Mrs C Harpur Mrs C Fitzsimons
Dr A Kerr Mr RJ Thompson
Ms P Slevin Mr C McKinney
Mrs P Leitch Mr B Wilson
Ms R Byrne

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

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Miss M Farragher; Mrs S Kirk and Mrs K O'Hare.

2 Conflict of Interests

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

Format of Meeting

The Chair advised that the new format of Council agendas was under development and would be taken forward by the incoming Chair. He confirmed that he would state that members have asked for more discussion time to be built into the meetings on priority items and strategic thinking.

He confirmed the meeting would be conducted in two parts :

1. Discussion Item : Deloitte Review & Action Plan
2. Council Meeting

Discussion Item : Deloitte Report – DE Review of Exam Awarding – Summer 2020

The Chair introduced the item.

The Chief Executive referred to the Deloitte Report and subsequent Action Plan (previously circulated). He confirmed it had been drafted in collaboration with the Department of Education following receipt of the Deloitte Report. He referred to the detail of the action plan, in particular the key actions.

Members discussed the action plan in detail. Whilst the report, in general was positive, recognising the challenging circumstances CCEA had been operating under, also expressed concern about

various statements contained in the report, in particular the fact that no other member of Council was spoken to by the Panel other than the Chair of Council.

The Chair sought clarification on whether members wanted an official response to the report to be issued. The Chief Executive suggested that the focus should now be on taking forward the action plan to ensure lessons learned from summer 2020 are addressed and appropriate arrangements are put in place for summer 2021.

A Council member asked for the action plan to be made more accessible (in Plain English) to ensure all stakeholders (including parents) understand the detail of the recommendations and associated actions.

The Chair concluded that the Council acknowledged receipt of the report and thanked the Executive Team for their Management Response. He confirmed that the Report and Action Plan should be presented to the incoming Chair and reconstituted Council to take forward once appointed.

He thanked members and officers for their input into the item.

This concluded the Discussion Item.

3 Chair's Business

Officer Attendance

The Chair advised that Mrs Esther Martin (Business Manager, Curriculum & Assessment) would speak to items at Item 7 – Education.

Mr John Daly (Financial Services Manager), and Mr David Wilson (Business Assurance Manager), would clarify any matters under Item 10 Finance, Planning and Performance.

Minutes of Committee Meetings

The Chair confirmed the minutes of the Education Committee held on 19 January 2021, would be issued once available.

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 discussions with senior DE officials to discuss a range of matters.

Reconstitution of Council

The Chair advised that following discussion with senior DE officials, a number of suitable candidates has been put forward to the Minister of Education for consideration together with a number of reserve candidates for membership of Council. No confirmation has been received on the new Chair of Council.

He advised that he had stressed the importance (to DE) of these appointments being confirmed as soon as possible.

Joint Chair's Meeting, OfQual, SQA and Quals Wales

The Chair gave an overview of the issues discussed, in particular, maintenance of standards across the jurisdictions, impact of school closures, loss of teaching, appeals and issues of Regulation and Awarding.

He advised the format would continue on a quarterly basis and confirmed he would include this in his handover to the incoming Chair.

This concluded the Chair's Report to Council.

Chief Executive's Report to Council

The Chief Executive on a range of matters across the organisation, to include Advice to DE on Alternative Awarding Arrangements for Summer 2021 and was hoping for an early response to allow CCEA to progress with the work required to put these arrangements in place. Communications, Staffing and the Deloitte Report (already discussed).

Members sought and received clarification on a number of matters in relation to the Advice on Alternative Awarding Arrangements for Summer 2021, and the re-opening of schools from 8 March 2021, pending advice on restrictions. The Chief Executive advised that once clarity was provided members would be advised on any further contingencies that may be required for summer 2021.

This concluded the Chief Executive's report to Council.

FOI Requests

C/142/FOI

Members noted the most recent FOI requests.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 November 2020

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 November 2020 were proposed by Mrs Christine Harpur and seconded by Mrs Paula Leitch as a true and accurate record. A copy would be made available for the Chair to sign once normal business arrangements resumed.

Action Points

Members noted the status of the action points and were updated accordingly.

Minutes of Council Briefing Minutes

The minutes of the Council Briefing Minutes held on 16 October 2020; 25 November 2020; 4 December 2020; 17 December 2020 and 21 January 2021, were proposed by Mr Robert Thompson and seconded by Ms Patricia Slevin as true and accurate records. Copies would be made available for the Chair to sign once normal business arrangements resumed.

5 Correspondence

Members noted the following correspondence:

- Contingency Planning : Centre Professional Judgement Approach
- Adaptations to CCEA Entry Level and Occupational Studies Qualifications for January and Summer 2021
- Adaptations to Vocationally Related Qualifications for January and Summer 2021
- 2020-Mid-Year Governance Statement – acknowledgement of submission
- Retirement of Permanent Secretary and Interim Arrangements.
- Commissioning of 2020/21 Business Plan – 3rd Quarter Monitoring Report
- Further Changes to CCEA Qualifications for Awarding in 2021
- Corporate Risk Register 2021 – outcomes of alignment exercise with DE Register
- Education Continuity Direction Under Para 14 of Schedule 17 – of the Coronavirus Act 2020

The Chair thanked Mr McKinney (Council members) for drawing the Circular from DE on Availability of Qualifications from WJEC in Northern Ireland to the Council's attention. The Chief Executive clarified that this was DE a policy decision and confirmed that the Head of Regulation had raised the issue of schools requiring a lead in time and had taken forward decisions with DE in this regard.

Members expressed disappointment at this announcement, however recognised that that was a policy decision, made by the Minister of Education.

6 Governance and Accountability

Report of GAR Meeting held on 11 December 2020

The Chair advised the minutes of the GAR meeting held on 11 December 2020 were not yet available.

He drew attention to the agenda of the meeting and advised on the main issues discussed, confirmed that the meeting had been conducted in a positive and professional matter.

The Chair conveyed the thanks of the Permanent Secretary for the appreciation of the significant work undertaken by the Council during these challenging times.

Members noted the information provided.

7 Education

Minutes of Education Committee : 19 January 2021

As previously notified, the minutes of the Education Committee meeting held on 19 January 2021 would be made available once finalised.

Education Update

C/143/1

The Chair confirmed that individual papers had been presented to the Education Committee for consideration. This paper was by way of update to Council on Assessment; SEN Provision and Partnership Working; and Irish Medium Programme.

A Council member, in the absence of the meeting, confirmed the papers were discussed at the committee.

A Council member asked that SEN representation on Council be progressed. She referred to the Irish medium materials (and lack of visibility of CCEA) and asked for the link to CCEA's resources to be included on the relevant web-sites. The Business Manager (Curriculum & Assessment) advised that this would be taken forward through the Irish Medium Programme Board to ensure the link to CCEA's home learning and support section is made available. She advised that this would be taken forward as an agenda item on the IM Programme Board.

She confirmed that information would also be included on the Communications Plan and relevant materials were translated into Irish, this would be explored through the appropriate forums.

8 Regulation

Minutes of Regulation Committee meetings 27 October 2020; 23 November 2020 and 10 December 2020

Clarification was sought and received on a number of points, in particular the comments made by a Council member in regards to the Modern Languages Report, these were duly noted.

The minutes were proposed by Dr Les Caul and seconded by Mr Trevor Carson.

A Council member suggested that consideration be given to naming individuals in minutes moving forwards.

For information

Draft Advice to DfE : Vocational Qualifications

C/143/2

The Chief Executive introduced the item. He advised that in light of recent announcements there was a need to consider vocational qualifications taken in Northern Ireland also taken in England and Wales; and those NI only qualifications. Vocational and non-general qualifications have been cancelled for 2021.

The Head of Regulation (HoR) gave an overview of the recommendations outlined on pages 1 and 2). She explained the awarding process of the Essential Skills qualification for 2021 and assured members that discussions were ongoing to ensure as much alignment in approaches with the 3 awarding organisations offering NI Essential Skills, and a robust moderation is also put in place.

Members were content with the information provided.

Extension to DfE CCEA Letter of Offer

The Chief Executive explained the purpose of the Letter of Offer from (DfE) and was pleased to report that the request for an extension over a longer period of time had been considered and DfE have provided a 3-year letter of offer. Members welcomed this development.

The HoR recognised the strong relationships between DfE and CCEA colleagues.

Members were content to approve the Letter of Offer, formally proposed by Dr Les Caul and seconded by Dr Ana Kerr.

Vocational Qualifications Update

The Head of Regulation updated members on developments in regards to Vocational Qualifications. She confirmed that Regulation continued at pace with the production of guidance for Essential skills being issued to schools at end of February 2021.

Members noted the information provided.

9 Audit

Minutes of ARAC Meeting : 26 November 2020

The minutes were provided for members' information.

For Information

Corporate Risk Register 2020/21 – Summary

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DoFCS) confirmed that a considerable amount of work was ongoing on refocussing the CRR in light of the Minister's decision to cancel the examinations for summer 2021. This has presented a new risk environment which will be reviewed by the Executive Team, with an updated CRR being presented to the ARAC at its next meeting.

She confirmed that following a recent assessment, it was unlikely that any of the risks would decrease, however some may increase in terms of exposure for the foreseeable future.

The Chair asked that an additional risk be added in regards to Governance given the number of outcoming members in addition to the Chair on 31 January 2021. This will present a risk to the organisation in terms of governance arrangements in particular additional pressure on the remaining members and interim Chair. The DoFCS agreed to take this on board.

For Approval

Draft Internal Audit Plan 2020/21

C/143/4

The Chair confirmed he had met with the Internal Auditors and asked for an early meeting to be convened with the incoming Chair once appointed.

The Chief Executive confirmed the Draft Plan had been through the internal governance process and considered by the ARAC at its meeting on 26 November 2020.

Members were content to approve the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21, formally proposed by Mrs Christine Harpur and seconded by Dr Ana Kerr.

Draft Internal Audit Charter 2020/21

C/143/5

The Chair drew attention to the document and confirmed it had been considered by the ARAC at its meeting on 26 November 2020.

Members were content to approve the Internal Audit Charter 2020/21, formally proposed by Mrs Christine Harpur and seconded by Dr Ana Kerr.

10 Finance

Minutes of Finance Committee Meetings : 21 October 2020 and 7 October 2021

The Chair confirmed that members had fulfilled their scrutiny and challenge function on all aspects of Finance and Planning.

He wished to place on record his thanks to Mr Robert Thompson and Ms Rose Byrne for their commitment and support in chairing the Finance Committee during their terms on the Council.

Finance & Planning Update

C/144/6

The DoFCS drew attention to the detail provided and outlined the financial situation as at 31 December 2020. She reported an underspend of £944K (5.7%) significantly outside the tolerance limit of 1% set by DE. She advised this situation has been impacted by the late notification of cancellation of January series and implications for preparing for summer 2021.

She assured members that DE has been made aware of the situation and the likelihood of surrendering funds back into the sector through the monitoring rounds. Early indicators are that this is acceptable.

Members were assured that work continued with budget holders to utilise the budget as effectively as possible towards year end, however stated the significant amount of unknowns facing the organisations in regards to financial demands moving forward.

The Chair sought and received an assurance that representations continued, at the highest level (with the DE Finance Director) in regards to all aspects of CCEA's financials.

The FM wished to report the 'good news' story in that approval was provided for CCEA to utilise a portion of its underspend to offer a 75% discount to centres on charges which was significantly more than other Awarding Bodies.

The FM was commended on his professionalism and manner in which he has built up and continued to maintain excellent working relationships with the Department of Finance.

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 December 2020

Members noted the statement of financial position as at 31 December 2020.

Operational Monitoring Report – Quarter 3

The DoFCS drew attention to the information provided and wished to place on record that 85% of the targets were on track to be achieved, whilst continuing to operate under challenging circumstances.

Mr Thompson commended the achievement of 72 KSI's over the last 12 months and extended his congratulations to all staff involved.

11 Any Other Business

Children and Young People's Strategy

Members noted the strategy had been launched on 25 January 2021.

Virtual Event : Friday 29 January 2021

The Chief Executive confirmed that a virtual event has been scheduled for Friday 29 January 2021 at 2.15pm, for both staff and Council members.

Vote of Thanks

The Chief Executive, from both a personal and professional perspective as Chief Executive wished to formally record our thanks to the outgoing Chair and Council members over the last 8 years for their commitment. He recognised that it has not been without its challenges, and stated that it had been a pleasure and honour to work with the Council during this time.

On behalf of all officers he sincerely thanked the members for their contributions, service, expertise and continued support throughout their terms on Council.

He paid tribute to the Chair, and thanked him for this support and advice and for being the master of consensus in bringing together the range of views on Council. For his considerable interest on all aspects of the organisation and for his support to him as Chief Executive.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive. He wished to record his thanks to the Chief Executive and his team, and to the Council members and team from the beginning of his term 2013-14 for supporting him through the challenges through that period. He was grateful to those Council member who assisted him during that time.

He paid tribute to Dr Kerr; Ms Byrne; Mr McCormac; Mr Thompson for their professionalism, and immense work contribution on all aspects of Council business.

He paid particular tribute to Mrs Harpur in her capacity as Vice-Chair of Council for her support and advice to him over the years.

As Chair of Council he found the role challenging, fulfilling and at time tiring – but also energising. He paid tribute to the contributions of the Council members both remaining and outgoing.

He thanked all CCEA staff, he was proud to serve as Chair and recognised the commitment, value and work ethic across the organisation.

Finally he thanked Ms Noleen Kennedy for all of her support during his 8 years as Chair.

12 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 31 March 2021 at 1.30 pm.

Schedule of Meetings : March 2021

The Schedule of Meetings for March 2021 was provided for noting.

