

Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Minutes of the sixth-third meeting of Council held on Thursday 28 September 2006 at 1000 hours in the Boardroom, 3rd Floor, CCEA, Clarendon Road, BELFAST.

Present :

Mr D McKee (Acting Chairman)	Ms M Watson
Miss M Crilly	Mr M Bowen
Mr M Lowe	Mr J Clarke
Mr J Collins	Mr D Thompson

Ms S McKee, DE Assessor

Mr G Boyd, Chief Executive
Mr N Anderson, Director of Examination Operations
Mr R Hanna, Business Manager, CEO
Mr M Quinn, Examinations Processing Manager
Mrs AM Duffy, Examinations Manager
Mrs K Gribbon, Marketing/Communications Manager
Miss J Bill, Marketing/Communications Officer (For Item 4 only)

Miss N Kennedy, Manager, Council Secretariat

Introduction

Mr McKee welcomed members to the meeting. The Chief Executive reported that the Chairman had had a heart attack in mid-August and was now making a good recovery. It was hoped that Dr Lennon would be back at work within the next month. Mr McKee would continue to act as Chair.

It was agreed that a letter wishing Dr Lennon a speedy recovery would be sent on behalf of the Council.

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Professor P Roebuck; Dr I McMorris; Mrs C McKinney; Mrs H McClenaghan; Mrs D Black; Mr N Downing; Mr J Wilkinson; Mrs M Cree, Ms P O'Farrell and Mr M Brown.

2 Chairman's business

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting, in particular Mrs Lorraine Finlay who was representing the Department of Education in place of David Woods.

The focus of this meeting was on this year's summer examinations performance (2006) and a series of presentations would be given throughout the course of the morning.

The following officers attended the meeting from Item 4:

- Mr Richard Hanna
- Mrs Anne Marie Duffy
- Mrs Karen Gribbon; and
- Mr Martin Quinn

Miss Jennifer Bill attended the meeting for the presentation on CRM.

The Chairman reported that:

- RPA work continues with a number of CCEA staff involved in various work-streams with DE.

The Chief Executive clarified that CCEA officers continue to be involved in work with DE as they prepare for the new structures of the ESA.

- The position of Chief Executive designate for the new ESA has been advertised. This will be a very important job and will require good leadership.
- The Annual Accounts 2005/2006 would come forward to the next meeting of Council in October for final approval.

The Chief Executive reported that the annual audit had been completed. The accounts would show a small surplus for the year and will record the fact that funds had been returned to DE due to examinations income being higher than the budgeted.

- Management Structures

The Chief Executive reported that the candidate who had been offered the Director of Corporate Services post did not accept. This post would not be filled. He assured members that he was satisfied with the management strength and capabilities of the corporate services managers and Mr Anderson had taken on additional corporate services responsibilities in the interim.

The Director of Education Policy recruitment process has been stopped. An internal candidate raised an appeal and this was dealt with through the grievance procedure. Whilst the independent panel (Mr J Collins and Ms M Watson) had found in favour of CCEA in five of the six issues referred to it, it did note that the selection panel was not constituted in line with CCEA's written procedures. The independent panel advised that it would be unsafe to proceed with the process. A further personnel issue had arisen as part of this exercise and it was hoped that this would be resolved early in October.

As a result of these circumstances it would be necessary to re-organise responsibilities amongst the Senior Management Team to ensure work continues and deadlines are met. Members would be updated as soon as possible.

He assured members that he was confident that there was enough strength and capability throughout the senior managers to continue with responsibilities.

The Chairman said he was satisfied that this was progressing to a mutual benefit.

3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 21 June 2006

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 21 June 2006 were proposed as a true and accurate record by Mr Martin Bowen and seconded by Mr Jim Collins.

A copy was signed by the Chairman.

Action points

The Chief Executive updated members on the following:

Item 3 : use of technology in review of specifications : work continues in this area through various sub-groups and Regulation, Qualifications & Lifelong Learning Committee. Council will sign off the revised specifications before they go out into centres.

Item 4 : Curriculum & Assessment

- Early Years Enriched Curriculum Evaluation Report will be discussed at the Council meeting in December. A copy was sent to the Chairman.
- Letters from the Chairman to the Minister re Advice on the Implementation of the Foundation Stage of the Revised Curriculum (3 May 2005) and from Marion Matchett, Chief Inspector, ETI, to Robert McCartney (16 June 2006), were tabled for members' information.
- Pupil profile board (including representatives from DE) continues to meet fortnightly. Training for teachers and availability and manageability of hardware have been raised constantly. The business case for Lot 6 refresh is with DE for approval.

Ms McKee reported that DE had passed the business case to Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) who are aware that this needs to be approved as soon as possible. A further business case has been presented for consideration for lap tops for teachers.

Mrs Watson reminded members of the need to take teachers' views into account to ensure the manageability and training issues are dealt with.

In response to the Chairman, Ms McKee assured members that all the concerns raised by teachers regarding training and manageability issues were being dealt with now. The whole picture is being looked at to ensure the needs of all teachers are met.

Mr Bowen welcomed this development and asked DE to issue a communication to schools informing them that the issues are being addressed and to restore confidence amongst teachers. Ms McKee agreed to raise this with DE.

- DE is fully aware of the situation regarding additional work CCEA may be required to do should selection be retained and will advise in due course.

Mr Lowe sought clarification on what contingency plans had been put in place should devolution be restored. The Chief Executive confirmed that CCEA operates under Ministerial direction and would continue to do so going forward.

Item 7 : 14-19 Stretch and Challenge

The Chief Executive drew members' attention to the action points and reported that although CCEA had expressed reservations in this area, discussions continued with colleagues in England and Wales. The following issues have been progressed:

- GCE subject criteria have been agreed and specifications development is underway.

- It has been agreed that A* Grades (by statistical means) will be awarded at GCE, this will give Universities the information they require for high demand courses.
- The regulators are in the process of agreeing the advice to go to Ministers in October in relation to stretch and challenge.
- In line with Council's views (June 2006) it has been agreed that stretch and challenge be achieved within A2 assessments but there should not be additional papers or sections within papers.

Further work is required to make the A2 assessments more challenging and to strike a balance between this increased challenge and the maintenance of overall standards.

Mrs Watson welcomed developments in this area.

Coursework

The Chief Executive reported that there would be no coursework in Maths and History as there was no added value. It has been agreed that coursework would continue where it adds value to specific subjects. He confirmed that this approach would be taken across all awarding bodies.

We are currently investigating the possibility of doing coursework within a controlled environment with sufficient dedicated time set aside for completion. This is an attempt to address the concerns raised regarding the amount of time candidates spend on this at present.

4 Report on Examinations

The Chairman welcomed Mr Hanna; Mrs Gribbon; Mrs Duffy and Mr Quinn to the meeting and informed members that a series of presentations would follow. (Members were provided with a full set of presentations).

Performance

Ms Duffy gave a presentation on overall performance including the awarding and standardising processes. A short demonstration and examples of the computer aided awarding system were also viewed. This development had proved very successful in making transparent and robust decisions and picking up discrepancies around 'rogue marking' at the earliest possible stage.

Mr Collins sought clarification on whether the marker received feedback on their performance. Ms Duffy confirmed that markers do receive feedback and in some cases have been penalised for consistent severity. She commended this system as a good example of CCEA using technology to improve this process.

The Chairman wished to place on record his thanks to the officers who provided the appeals training and thanked Ms Duffy for her input.

GCE and GCSE Awards

Ms Duffy presented an overview of awards for GCE and GCSE and drew attention to the increases from 2004 to 2006.

Mr Lowe sought clarification on the difference in the success rate of the England and Northern Ireland. The Chief Executive confirmed that teachers had started to prepare pupils from the week 1 in lower 6th.

Moving Image Arts: although a small number of candidates entered, this was successfully conducted on-line.

Learning for Life and Work: over 4000 entries received for the first year of the pilot. This has proved very successful and it is hoped that entries will be sustained for the 2007 examination. The Chairman asked that the term 'non-grammar' be addressed.

Two-tier mathematics: over 5000 entries - successful in this first year with positive comments coming from the centres. The Chief Executive commended the subject officers for their work in getting this up and running.

e-moderation pilot

Ms Duffy reported that this had been developed in-house. 3 centres and 100 candidates took part in this pilot where coursework was submitted electronically. This enabled storage capacity to be reduced and has the capacity to discontinue agreement trials and free up storage. She commended the pilot and hoped that this would be increased in 2007.

The Chairman commended the use of technology and welcomed the anticipated savings in this area. He sought clarification on the whether splitting up papers for each school can be justified. Ms Duffy confirmed that this affords better protection to candidates, but agreed that a more robust method would need to be developed further.

The Chairman thanked Ms Duffy for her presentation and congratulated officers who were involved in the development work, in particular, Mr Hanna, for driving this initiative forward.

Entries

Mr Quinn gave an overview on the following processes and services:

- Examination entries;
- Examiners and moderators
- Transfer test
- Enquiries upon results
- Enhancements to examinations administration
- Future modernization
- Budgets and resources

Mr Clarke sought clarification on the situation regarding remarks for the Transfer Test. Mr Quinn confirmed that parents were entitled to ask for a clerical remark (to be marked a 5th time). Ambiguous questions could be challenged.

Ms Watson congratulated Mr Quinn and his team for a quick turn around in providing remarks. She drew attention to the administration handbook which is now on-line and asked if making the form available on-line could be considered.

Mr Thompson sought clarification on whether resources would be reallocated to other areas should key stage assessment tests no longer be required. The Chief Executive said that schools would continue to offer Key Stage assessments and tests although it would not be statutory.

Mr Bowen asked if the training of teachers could take place outside the working day. Ms Duffy confirmed that every effort was being made to conduct teacher-related activities and training through evening and weekend working. Different methods of training would continue to be explored through the use of technology.

Modernisation

Mr Quinn gave a presentation on the developments around examinations modernisation and convergence (Project Minerva). Project Minerva was put in place to bring commonality for all awarding bodies to improve the way they provide administration services and interact with centres.

We have asked DE to provide funding to increase the capability of the AS400 to allow us to support all of the developments in this area.

Mr Bowen sought clarification on what qualifications would be on offer to lower ability students and what the currency would be for employers. The Chief Executive confirmed that work had begun on a series of qualifications for students who would not access GCSE. This would be dealt with through the Curriculum & Assessment Committee.

Members welcomed developments in the area of transfer of information between schools, colleges and awarding bodies. It was hoped that this would allow for more creative decisions for qualifications going forward.

The Chairman thanked Mr Quinn for his input.

Business Development

Mrs Gribbon gave a presentation on business development area, in particular:

- Total entries
- Market share
- Centre analysis
- ACETS entries
- Going forward

She reported that CCEA were the provider of choice in Northern Ireland, however, AQA remained CCEA's major competitor.

Revision of specifications programme

In 2000 the revision of specifications took place and due to CCEA being late in the market place there was a 10% fall in market share. On this occasion a detailed programme of work has been put in place and a co-ordinated approach taken to ensure our revised GCE specifications are ready to go out into centres on time. Consultations and focus group meetings have taken place with stakeholders to ensure we get the best possible products for 2007.

The following comments were made:

- Strategies to be put in place to find out why centres leave CCEA and mechanism put in place to prevent this.
- More attention is required to small changes in the market.
- The need to make CCEA specifications challenging, relevant and worthwhile. If this can be done teachers will want to teach them and candidates will engage.
- Care of and supporting customer/stakeholder needs is important.

Mrs Gribbon reported that centres were more positive and receptive to CCEA products but there was more work to be done. Work will continue with Research and Statistics to gain more qualitative feedback and build upon this going forward.

Members welcomed this change in attitude and asked that those centres who still remained negative towards CCEA be targeted during the review of specifications and other events.

Media Management

Mrs Gribbon gave a brief update on the Issue of Results 2006 and reported that the Evaluation would take place early in October.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The Chairman welcomed Jennifer Bill, project officer for CRM, to the meeting.

Mrs Gribbon gave an outline of the CRM project, its achievements to date and future plans. The aim is for CRM to strengthen what CCEA does already to increase customer satisfaction and customer care.

Work continues with 3 teams, made of up staff across the organisation, concentrating on 3 different aspects :

Team A – Attitude – all staff will participate in a Customer Care Training Programme which will commence in January 2007.

Team B – Buildings – key areas which are being addressed : exterior of the 3 sites; staff restaurant; meeting rooms and the general appearance of the interior of the buildings.

Team C – Customer System – this will concentrate on the development of the IT system which CCEA Multimedia has agreed to design.

Miss Bill welcomed the engagement from staff across the organisation to date and said that work was on target across the three project teams with a view to begin training in January 2007.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Gribbon and Miss Bill for their contributions and welcomed this initiative, he said it was important that this would continue to raise staff morale at a time of uncertainty and change.

5 Any other business

The Chief Executive informed members that Martin Quinn had been called up to act as a Reserve Officer and would be on active service for a period of 5-6 weeks.

He confirmed that CCEA would be supporting the Institute of Educational Assessors and a meeting had been organised its Director, Kathleen Tattersall, for mid-October.

6 Date of next meeting

The next meeting was agreed as **Wednesday 18 October 2006**. Members were informed that it was likely that this meeting would continue on after lunchtime and further details would be issued.

