

Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Minutes of the seventy-eighth meeting of Council held on Thursday 29 January 2009 at 10.00 hours in the Radisson SAS Hotel, Farnham Estate, Cavan.

Present : Mr D McKee (Chairman) Mr M Bowen
Dr M Brown Ms M Watson
Mrs D Black Mr J Wilkinson
Mr J Clarke Mr N Downing
Ms P O'Farrell Mr D Thompson

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

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

Introduction

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and to Cavan. He advised that there would be a closed session of Council following the normal business and indicated that the formal meeting would conclude at 11.45 am.

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs H McClenaghan; Ms M Crilly; Mr J Collins and Ms C McKinney.

2 Chairman's business

Conference Arrangements

The Manager of the Council Secretariat informed members that conference would begin at 2.30 pm in the main conference suite. Conference packs would be circulated at registration.

Accountability Review

The Acting Chief Executive advised that this would be dealt with under the Action points at Item 3.

Meeting of Chairs of RPA Affected Organisations

The Chairman attended a meeting of the Chairs and DE officials on 26 January 2009. He reported that the meeting was positive and members welcomed the fact that the date of ESA had been set as 1 January 2010.

Concerns were raised regarding attendance at committees and it was suggested that lowering the quorum would be a possibility.

Transfer arrangements

The Director of ES reported that the schedule was on target. Questions were currently being written and would be trialled in the coming months.

He reported that a number of FOI requests had been lodged and were being dealt with.

Consultation on Draft Regulations

The Director of ES advised that as a result of the consultation on the draft regulations the training programme that had been put in place for schools had been postponed. Following a meeting with DE regarding the impact of this decision, he had recommended that DE communicate with schools at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Chairman of the Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning Committee said that the postponement of the training had caused confusion in the system.

The Director of ES confirmed that CCEA made the decision that schools needed to be informed of the postponement of the training as soon as possible and it was agreed with DE that letters should be issued. DE undertook to follow this up with a further communication to schools outlining the current position regarding the assessment arrangements.

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that it was originally intended for DE to issue a communication followed by CCEA, however, this was not possible. He recognised that this has caused some disquiet in the system.

Members expressed concern that CCEA was being damaged as a result of this and asked that officers do whatever was necessary to clarify CCEA's position.

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that confusion and annoyance was being expressed by teachers at meetings. He indicated that CCEA officers would liaise with DE to ensure that any confusion was minimised and that future plans were clear.

It was agreed that the Director of ES would circulate CCEA's letter to members.

True Colours

The Chairman commended the high standard of work he viewed at the Omagh True Colours Art Exhibition. The Belfast event would begin on Monday 2 February, in the Conference Hall at CCEA. He encouraged members to attend the launch or visit the exhibition which would run from 2 – 14 February.

Annual Staff Conference

The Annual Staff Conference will be held in the Europa Hotel, Belfast on Friday 18 September 2009. Further details will be issued in due course.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 December 2008

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 December 2008 were proposed by Mr John Wilkinson and seconded by Mr Jim Clarke as a true and accurate record. A copy was signed by the Chairman.

Action points

The Acting Chief Executive reported on the following :

Items 2 & 4 : At the accountability review on 26 January the issue of committee meetings being quorate arose. DE has confirmed that CCEA are expected to continue until the 31 December 2009 and that no additional members can be brought onto Council.

It is hoped that new structures will be put in place from 1 January 2010.

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that DE were aware of the impact vacancy control was having on the organisation.

He wished to place on record his thanks to David Thompson for attending the meeting.

Occupational Studies

The Vice-Chairman of Council sought clarification on the current status of occupational studies. The Acting Chief Executive reported that DE had signalled that an extension of the current arrangements will be granted for a further year. Formal notification of this would be required in writing from DE.

The Chairman of the Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning Committee stressed the importance of this issue as students would be considering their options for next year.

He advised that following consultation with schools it had been agreed that there would be a further period of consultation and the Acting Chief Executive would seek approval from DE to issue a statement to schools. The Vice-Chairman welcomed this development and asked that a communication be issued as soon as possible.

The Chairman advised that the consultation process for all aspects of CCEA's work would be looked at to ensure more openness and transparency.

4 Corporate

- ***Business Committee Report : 14 January 2009***

The Chairman of Council provided the Business Committee report in the absence of Jim Collins. He drew members' attention to the detail of the minutes provided.

He wished to place on record his thanks to Dr Sproule and Ms Duffy for their presentation to Business Committee and asked that Mrs Gribbon present the remainder of the Market Share at the next meeting in March.

Finance & Planning

The Finance Report and Balance Sheet were reported as being on the agenda for this meeting.

The committee discussed the reasons for the variances outlined in the report and noted the impact on project spend following the DE announcement of the Consultation on the Draft Regulations on Reporting of Information to Parents. DE has been made aware of this.

Accommodation

The Committee were informed about the proposed additional accommodation and asked that the Director of Corporate Services meet with the Chief Executive Designate of ESA to discuss and seek approval of this proposal given that it was to be for a period of 5 years.

The Director of CS confirmed that he had sent a draft business case to the CE Designate and met with him to discuss same on 27 January 2009. He advised that a special meeting of business committee would be arranged to discuss and agree a way forward.

A Council member referred to the figure mentioned and sought clarification on whether the proposal was still cost neutral. It was confirmed that this would cost in the region of £70K to £95K per annum over the three year period of the business need for additional accommodation.

Clarification was sought on when the main pressures would be. The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that this would be May to July and the month of February when the awarding meetings would be taking place.

The Chairman of the Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning Committee expressed concern at the fact no papers had been presented for consideration at the Business Committee and sought an assurance that papers would be provided to the next meeting before going forward to Council. This was confirmed.

The Chairperson of the Curriculum & Assessment Committee reported that this had been referred to at the Audit and Risk meeting. The Chairman of the Audit & Risk Committee confirmed that the Acting Chief Executive had raised the issue of additional accommodation and advised that there would be associated risks which would come forward to his committee for consideration.

The Director of CS confirmed that he had, at the request of the committee, met with the CE Designate ESA and discussed a draft business case informally. He confirmed that the CE Designate indicated he would respond by the end of this month.

A Council member stated that the Council is responsible for the actions of the organisation and stressed the importance of having an audit trail as evidence to support any commitment to additional expenditure.

The Chairman advised that all Directors had a clause in their job descriptions relating to convergence with ESA and stated that it was important that Directors deliver this through their own particular responsibilities.

It was also important to note that any expenditure committed beyond the 31 December 2009 would require prior approval of ESAIT.

Clarification was sought on what the other possible options were. The Director of CS confirmed that both Balmoral High School and a site at Clarendon had been considered but had fallen through due to the current economic climate. A third option could be to use port-a-cabins in the car park but this may not suit the profile of the organisation, meet the business need and would not be secure enough. He stated that officers servicing the meetings needed to be close to the Clarendon site as the computer assisted awarding had to take place in the main building.

The Chairman asked for a paper to be drawn up setting out achievable and realistic options for further consideration at a special meeting of the Committee. This meeting was to be organised as soon as possible.

- ***Finance Report as at 30 November 2008***

C/78/1

The Chief Finance Officer (CFO) reported that the budget reflected a 5% underspend as at 30 November 2008. There were no significant issues to report at this time.

Income : on budget at this time . It was anticipated that this would continue through to year end.

Baseline : no concerns at this time. Continues to operate within 1% of budget with the majority of spend coming in during the month of March. It was anticipated that the budget will come in on target.

Projects : at this time (30 November 2008) projects were £700K underspent. The main contributing factors were GOML; Revision of Specifications, Modernisation and Curriculum Development. A series of actions has been identified to bring these back in line with the budget.

Within Curriculum Development funding will be returned to DE due the impact of the decisions taken by DE to consult on the draft regulations for reporting information to parents, resulted in

the training programme scheduled to take place in this quarter being delayed and the lower than expected teacher release charges within Recording Progress and Reporting.

To offset some of this underspend the Director of ES suggested the offer of two additional teacher days for awareness raising sessions where sub-cover would be provided. DE accepted this proposal. £660K was returned to DE.

Capital : all tenders for major items of expenditure had begun and it was anticipated that the budget would be met at year end.

Change in Accounting Policies

The CFO advised that the ESA Implementation Team has asked DE for all education bodies from 1 April 2009 to take on ESA's accounting policies to ensure smooth transition on 1 January 2010.

A paper on this issue would be presented to Business Committee at its next meeting.

Members noted the information provided.

- ***Balance Sheet as at 30 November 2008***

BC/78/2

Members noted the information provided on the Balance Sheet.

Operational Plan – Update

The CFO advised that DE had asked for some adjustments to be made to the operational plan, in particular, vacancy control and the VAT adjustment.

As a result of the DE announcement to consult on draft regulations until 20 March 2009 a revision of projects was underway. Following this it was possible that a further adjustment would be made.

The Director of ES reported that he had met with DE and discussed the challenges ahead. DE had indicated that it was unlikely that decisions would be made for future work until the summer, therefore the impact on CCEA's projects and planning training programmes would be significant.

Members recognised the difficulties in this area and the Chairman asked to be kept informed of issues as appropriate.

- *Audit and Risk Committee Report : 15 January 2009*

The Chairman of the Audit & Risk Committee drew members' attention to the minutes provided. He advised that the Harmonisation with ESA Risk Register was on the agenda for discussion.

The committee discussed the following :

Item 5 : Non-compliance with CCEA's purchasing policy – members were pleased that for the period September to November 2008 there was only one instance of non-compliance of purchases over £1500.

Item 7 : Statement of Internal Control – the committee were notified of the timetable for the annual accounts. As a result of this the original schedule of Audit & Risk and Business Committee meetings for May and June 2009 has been altered to coincide with these dates.

Item 10 : New model publication scheme - a draft scheme was tabled for members' to review. TMT would also review the document after which it would be placed on the CCEA website.

Item : Audit Activity – the external audit plan from Deloitte would be presented at the next meeting for discussion.

- **Harmonisation with ESA Risk Register**

C/78/3

The Chairman of the Audit and Risk Committee drew members' attention to paper C/78/3 and advised that although the committee was happy with the direction taken, strategic issues needed to be taken into account.

A further detailed draft would go to the next meeting of the committee. It will be brought to Council as appropriate.

It was agreed that :

- the paper was a good starting point and once approved should be treated as living document and adapted as CCEA progresses towards ESA;
- Curriculum and Assessment be included in the register;
- the ESA implementation dates should be revised.

Members were happy with the information provided.

5 Any other business

The Vice-Chair raised the issue of area learning communities within the Foyle area (16 post-primary schools) and the accessibility of vocational education and qualifications. They suggested that if CCEA were developing the 14-19 vocational area the staff would be committed to piloting in this area.

The Chairman thanked the Vice-Chair for this offer. The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that a request had not yet come forward from either DE or DEL, however confirmed that CCEA would be looking at its own provision within 14-19.

The Director of Education Strategy asked when considering the 14-19 provision Curriculum and Assessment are included in any forthcoming discussions.

The Chairman agreed that this needed to be brought together coherently and not just within Examinations.

6 Dates of future meetings

Members noted the draft schedule from March to December 2009. It was agreed that the Manager of the Council Secretariat would circulate a revised draft following the meeting.

The next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 25 March 2009 at 10.00 am in the Boardroom, CCEA, Clarendon Road, Belfast.

The Chairman thanked members and officers for their input into the meeting.