

CCEA

COUNCIL

Minutes of the one hundred and fifty-eighth meeting of Council held on Thursday 30 March 2023 at 10.00 am via Hybrid Arrangements.

Present : Mr T O'Reilly Mr H McCarthy
Mrs P Leitch Mrs K O'Hare
Mr B Wilson Mrs A Kingsley

Mr G Campbell (Chief Executive)
Mrs L Scott (Director of Finance & Corporate Services)
Ms A Swann (Temporary Director, Examinations)
Mrs C Latham (Temporary Director, Curriculum & Assessment)
Mr J Daly (Business Manager, Financial Services)
Mr D Wilson (Business Assurance Manager)
Ms R Hobson (MarComms) – Paper C/158/4 only

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

Mr R Caldwell (DE Assessor)
Mr C Coffey (NV)
Mr A Stevens (NV)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs Carol Fitzsimons, Dr Les Caul, Ms Patricia Slevin, Mrs Donna O'Connor and Mr Rob Smyth.

Conflict of Interests

Members confirmed there were no conflicts of interest on any of the agenda items.

Chair's Business

Officer Attendance

The Chair confirmed that Mr John Daly (Business Manager, Financial Services) and Mr David Wilson (Business Assurance Manager) were available to clarify any matters members may wish to raise in relation to the Finance and Corporate items. Ms Ruth Hobson (Portfolio Manager) would attend for the Communications Strategy item at paper C/158/4.

Council Appointments

C/158/1

The Chair reminded members that a call for expressions of interests had been made for Vice-Chair of Council and the Whistleblowing contact. He confirmed the following :

Council Vice-Chair : Mrs Kathleen O'Hare
Whistleblowing contact : Mr Brian Wilson

Members were content to approve the above appointments. Formally proposed by Mrs Paula Leitch and seconded by Mr Hugh McCarthy.

Chief Executive's Report to Council

The Chief Executive gave an overview of his background in various positions across the education sector before joining CCEA. He has had a very warm welcome from members and staff and has met all the teams across the organisation. He was impressed with the calibre of work that is being taken forward, the skills, experience and dedication of staff. He recognised the challenges CCEA faced through the pandemic and the capability of staff as the organisation moves into the Summer 2023 examinations series.

He thanked his senior team and all staff across the organisation for the significant amount of work undertaken, despite the challenges ahead in particular the specific finance items which will be considered on the agenda.

The Chief Executive advised he had attended committee meetings during March and confirmed that he would, for future Council meetings, provide a written Chief Executive's Report.

Condolences

The Chief Executive, on behalf of the organisation, extended his condolences to Andrew Douglas (CCEA Officer) on his recent bereavement.

Council Member Resignation

The Chair confirmed that Mr Rob Smyth resigned from Council with immediate effect.

He confirmed that he would move forward with the recruitment campaign for new members as soon as possible.

Activities since the last meeting

The Chair gave a summary on the range of activities since the last meeting, including the matters discussed at the recent GAR meeting, in particular :

- the financial position for 2023/24 and the potential impact across the sector;
- development of business plans in light of potential budget cuts;
- Summer 2023 awarding – completion of technical work and provision of advice to the Minister; and
- the reformatting and development of CCEA's Corporate Risk Register.

He confirmed that these items would come forward to Council for consideration once finalised.

ICO Decision

The Chair updated Council on the ICO decision received on 7 March which stated that the ICO was content with the decisions taken by the senior management team and information provided. However, the ICO did comment on the failure to achieve the 20-day timelines.

The Chair thanked David Wilson and the Business Assurance team for taking the work forward and John Daly and Leah Scott for their support over the last 12 months.

Correspondence

The Chair drew attention to the range of correspondence received since the last meeting, in particular the following from the Department of Education (DE):

- 2 February 2023 : 2023 Awarding
- 28 February 2023 : 2024 Advice
- 8 March 2023 : 14 to 19 Strategy

He confirmed that the Chief Executive and his senior team would take forward discussions in relation to the issues raised in the above correspondence with the relevant DE officials.

The Chair welcomed Mrs Anne Kingsley and Mrs Kathleen O'Hare to the meeting at this point.

Ratification of Council Minutes

26 January 2023

Subject to the inclusion of an update on Regulatory and Education matters provided at the meeting, the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 were proposed by Professor Phil Hanna and seconded by Mrs Paula Leitch, as a true and accurate record. A copy would be made available for the Chair to sign.

Action Points

The Chair updated members on the status of the actions and advised that the outstanding items were either on the agenda for discussion or would be brought back to the next Council meeting.

31 March 2022

The Chair confirmed that the minutes from 31 March 2022 were being brought forward to ensure Council minutes were up to date.

The minutes were proposed by Mrs Kathleen O'Hare and seconded by Professor Phil Hanna as a true and accurate record. A copy would be made available for the Chair to sign.

6 AUDIT

Draft Annual Governance Statement 2022/23

C/158/2

The Chief Executive introduced this item and advised that the Statement would form part of the Annual Report & Accounts for 2022/23.. The draft follows a standard format, developed in line with guidance from the Department of Education (DE) and other relevant guidance. Feedback has been received from DE and amendments will be incorporated into next draft.

He confirmed that the final draft would go to the next ARAC committee for consideration and recommendation to Council as part of the Annual Report & Accounts 2022/23 for sign-off by the Chair and Chief Executive at the Council meeting in June (in line with DE deadlines).

The Business Assurance Manager advised that this is a Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) directive on the content to be provided in Governance Statements. He confirmed that CCEA were compelled to provide the information.

7 FINANCE

Finance Committee Report : was deferred until the Chair of the Committee was in attendance.

Finance Update

The DoFCS introduced the item advised that the finance update would be provided in two parts. She confirmed that DE required CCEA to conduct its business within a 1% financial tolerance limit.

Budget Position as at 30 March 2023

The year end position for 2022/23 was currently being closed out. An underspend of £552K had been identified in relation to advanced information contingency papers. This was in addition to the £450K underspend which was impacted by late allocation of funds (1 February 2023) and other factors.

The DoFCS stated that the complexities of 2022/23 should not be underestimated, in particular the return to full public examinations, together with the need for resources to support mitigation arrangements including the provision of a reserve series.

The Chief Executive stated that it was essential that a 'smarter' way of working was necessary in terms of timing of accepting funding and the feasibility of spending within the financial year. He confirmed that flexibility where spending was required would be explored further. He wished to place on record his support for his colleagues and commended the significant amount of work undertaken to date.

2023/24 Budget

The DoFCS advised that whilst the 2023/24 budget allocation had not yet been received, exercises had been carried out to identify potential savings should the budget be cut by 3%, 5% or 10%. She advised that costs associated with returning to the full examinations series had been included as well estimate for the cost of living pay increase based on the NJC pay offer.

The Chair advised that the timing for the budget allocation was discussed at the GAR meeting, but the Permanent Secretary was unable to clarify when budget allocations would be made.

A Council member sought an assurance that in view of the potential budget, CCEA staff be protected. The DoFCS confirmed that contractual responsibilities for existing (permanent) staff would be a priority, however there could be a moratorium on recruitment to mitigate financial pressures.

8 CORPORATE

Draft Business Plan 2023/24

C/158/3

The Chief Executive advised that the plan had been prepared in the absence of a budget and provided an overview on the work carried out on the draft plan to date which has been based around DE's 5 strategic priorities. He advised that a review will be undertaken on the priorities in terms of statutory responsibilities and reminded members this was in draft, and approval was required from DE and Council on the final business plan.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance & Corporate Services and her teams for the work carried out to date.

The DoFCS introduced Ms Ruth Hobson, Portfolio Manager within Marketing and Communications.

The Portfolio Manager drew attention to the detail provide in paper C/158/4 in particular the 6 phases to the strategy over the year and highlighted the main measures put in place to support schools as they return to full examinations in 2023.

She gave an overview of the component parts of the strategy and communications plan for Summer 2023 and outlined the methodology used for compiling the strategy including the extensive engagement with stakeholder groups to reinforce the key messages including schools, teachers, parents and student groups.

The Chair thanked members for their input and advised that a further update would be given at the May meeting.

The Chair welcomed Mr Brian Wilson to the meeting at this point.

9 REGULATION

Regulation Committee : 2 March 2023

The Chair of the Regulation Committee confirmed the meeting had been productive and outlined the main items discussed and debated that were not on the agenda for this meeting.

She advised on a number of resignations from the Regulation Committee and confirmed that replacements were currently being sought.

Occupational Studies Evaluation : Terms of Reference

C/158/5

The Chair advised that this had been discussed in detail at the Regulation Committee.

The Head of Regulation recognised that this was a significant piece of work and confirmed that the terms of reference had been agreed with the Department.

The Chair of the Regulation Committee confirmed that members recognised the need for additional funding and resource for this piece of work. The DoFCS confirmed that the Finance Committee had taken the decision that no additional projects would be financed and that should additional funding be required representations would need to be made to the Department..

The Chair asked members to note the information provided.

Annual Qualifications Insights Report 2022

C/158/6

The Chair confirmed the Regulation Committee welcomed the report and recommended it go forward to Council for approval. Members formally approved the report for publication, proposed by Mrs Anne Kingsley and seconded by Mrs Kathleen O'Hare.

Regulation/Education Proposals/Advice on Awarding 2023

The Chair advised that Papers C/158/7 and C/158/8 would be taken together as substantive items as Council decisions were required.

The Head of Regulation provided some background in particularly the regulatory approach to maintaining standards for Summer 2023. She drew attention to the recommendations and gave an overview of the various types of intervention for Council consideration.

She drew attention to recommendation 2 and advised that this should be applied in principle, to all subjects regardless of entries. The smaller subjects should be reviewed when they arise.

Members were satisfied with the approach outlined to maintaining agreed standards and relation to the recommendations outlined in paper C/158/7, the Chair sought and received approval from Council members on the following :

- 1 Formally proposed by Mrs Paula Leitch and seconded by Mrs Kathleen O’Hare.
- 2 Formally proposed by Mr Brian Wilson and seconded by Mr Hugh McCarthy.
- 3 Formally proposed by Mrs Kathleen O’Hare and seconded by Professor Phil Hanna.

Draft Technical Advice Awarding GCSE, A Level in Summer 2023

The temporary Director of Examinations in paper C/158/8 provided a detailed explanation on the various processes for awarding summer 2023.

The temporary DoE confirmed that officers would continue to work closely together to ensure the approach and processes are consistently and appropriately applied.

The Chair reminded members that the purpose of the discussion was on how the agreed advice provided to the Minister on the approach to maintaining standards would be implemented. He sought and received confirmation from members that they were content with general approach outlined for A Level, AS and GCSEs.

A Council member welcomed the sensible approach and asked for re-assurance that the criteria and policy being adopted is clearly documented in the rules that are being applied so that there is no ambiguity in the system and reasons for doing so are clear (should there be a challenge) and robust.

Draft Technical Advice Awarding GCSE, A Levels in Summer 2023

The Chair sought and received members approval on the proposed method for Awarding 2023 detailed in paper C/158/8 to implement the recommendations outlined in paper C/158/7.

This was formally proposed by Mrs Kathleen O’Hare and seconded by Mr Hugh McCarthy.

Council asked for their thanks to be formally extended to all members of staff involved in the significant amount of work in preparing the papers and the thinking behind the proposals and methodology for Awarding. The Chair asked that this be recorded in the minutes.

10 EDUCATION

Education Committee Report : Meeting held on 21 March 2023

The Chair of the Education Committee gave an overview of the items discussed at the meeting held on 21 March 2023, in particular :

- The suggestion of provision of a call-off list of Professional Associates

- Operational readiness for summer 2023
- Student Inequalities
- Chatting and Cheating – use of AI in coursework and all areas of life
- Draft Business Plan and response on Vocational Qualifications consultation

She suggested that given recent experience the Malpractice process required review given the dual roles of many staff within CCEA.

The Chair of Council added that there was a need for Council to have time set aside for members to reflect on relationships with FE, DfE and the digital agenda.

He thanked Mrs O'Hare for putting her name forward for Vice-Chair and confirmed that her appointment had been approved.

11 Any Other Business

A Council member asked for a timeline in relation to recruiting new members. The Chair gave an assurance that representation had been made to DE who are seeking agreement in adding CCEA's name to the list of organisations where public appointments can be made in the absence of a Minister.

12 Date of Next Meeting

The Chair confirmed that the next meeting was confirmed for Thursday 25 May 2023 at 1.30 pm.

The schedule of meetings for 2023/24 was currently being drafted and would be made available to members and officers.