

Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

COUNCIL

Minutes of the seventy-second meeting held on Wednesday 6 February 2008 at 1000 hours in the Boardroom, CCEA, Clarendon Road, BELFAST.

Present : Mr D McKee (Chairman) Mr M Bowen
Mr D Thompson Ms P O'Farrell
Mr J Wilkinson Ms C McKinney
Mrs D Black Mr J Clarke

Mr N Anderson (Acting Chief Executive)
Mr M Fegan (Finance Manager)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr M Brown; Mr N Downing; Mrs H McClenaghan; Mr J Collins; Professor P Roebuck; Ms M Watson; Dr I McMorris and Mrs M Cree.

2 Chairman's business

Accountability Review

The Acting Chief Executive informed members that he and the Chairman had met with the Permanent Secretary, the Deputy Secretary and the Chief Executive Designate (ESA) on 23 January 2008 for the first accountability review of this year. A detailed paper was prepared from submissions from all of the Business Unit Managers and submitted in advance of this meeting.

The main issues discussed were Learning for Life and Work; the new financial environment which would result in cuts in project funding; and clarification was sought on InCAS.

The issue of the falling numbers of Council members was raised in light of the fact that no appointments can be made other than by public appointment. DE has agreed to look into this and report back.

The meeting was positive and there were no issues of concern raised.

Meeting between Chairman and Permanent Secretary

The Chairman reported that he had met with the Permanent Secretary on 29 January 2008 to discuss the issue of the DE Assessor and his position as Chairman until 31 March 2009.

He confirmed that due to corporate governance reasons there would not be a DE assessor present at future Council or Committee meetings, however, it was agreed that an alternative mechanism would be put in place to ensure issues are brought to DE. The Permanent Secretary did agree that he or an appropriate official would attend Council meetings as requested.

The Chairman pointed out that as the Council meetings had now been devised to deal with Corporate and Education issues alternately it could be possible to have a DE official present for education issues.

It was agreed that the revised schedule of meetings would be forwarded to the Permanent Secretary.

The Chairman advised that he would be staying on until 31 March 2009.

Members expressed concern at the lack of visibility DE currently had of the Council and Committee procedures and welcomed the decision to seek an alternative mechanism for sharing information and obtaining direction.

The Chairman of Learning for Life and Work Committee asked that Council be informed of this mechanism once it had been drawn up.

Curriculum & Assessment

The Acting Chief Executive informed members that a detailed letter had been received from DE seeking clarification and advice on revised assessment arrangements. This would be discussed at the next Curriculum & Assessment Committee on 14 February 2008 and the outcomes presented to Council for further discussion at its next meeting.

He reported that he had had several discussions with the Head of School Improvement regarding the detail of the letter and advised that this would require further debate in the light of the significant budget restraints which would shortly be confirmed.

Recruitment Process

Members were advised the recruitment process for 2nd tier Directors was underway and the outcomes would be confirmed before the end of February 2008.

NCCA/CCEA Standing Committee

The first meeting will take place in CCEA on Friday 22 February 2008. An update on progress made will be given at the next Council meeting.

Business Committee

The Chairman advised that the majority of today's agenda had been discussed in detail by Business Committee at its meeting on 31 January 2008. The following papers :

- **C/72/4** : Qualifications & Assessment Modernisation Strategy; and
- **C/72/5** : Electronic Script Management Service 2009

which were on the agenda for today's meeting were deferred back to the Business Committee (23 April) to allow for a greater range of discussion and for the new Director of Operations to lead this item.

NI Global Quality Award 2008

The Chairman congratulated the Acting Chief Executive and staff on winning the Northern Ireland Global Quality Award 2008. The Acting Chief Executive thanked members for their support.

Other issues

Ms O'Farrell reported that she had recently attended a seminar on behalf of CCEA and would be discussing an appropriate mechanism for dealing with cross-border educational issues of mutual issues with the Chairman and Acting Chief Executive. The Chairman asked that there be a cohesive approach to this initiative.

3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 5 December 2007

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 December 2007 were proposed by Mr J Clarke and seconded by Mr M Bowen as a true and accurate record of the meeting. A copy was signed by the Chairman.

Action points

The Acting Chief Executive reported on the following.

Item 3 : Minutes of previous meeting :

- *List of projects* was provided to the Council and will be issued to Committees on request.
- *Timescales of alternative mechanism for responses to DEL* : CCEA have registered concerns regarding the length of timescales with DEL.

Members agreed that this be discussed at the next Ad Hoc Committee with a view to finding an alternative, appropriate mechanism whereby the normal processes are not by-passed. It was suggested that the appropriate Senior Officer draft a response for discussion by the relevant Committee Chair and Acting Chief Executive. This would then be issued to either DE or DEL with a covering letter advising that this is a draft response and has not been ratified by Committee or Council.

It was agreed that this would be discussed further at the next meeting.

The Acting Chief Executive advised that it was possible that there would be a number of consultations within the next 12 months and that a more critical approach would be required as to what the organisation responds to and perhaps only those which lie within CCEA's remit.

The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that the remainder of the actions had been dealt with.

4 Finance & Planning

The Chairman welcomed the Finance Manager to the meeting and reminded members that the finance papers had been discussed in detail at the Business Committee meeting held on 31 January 2008.

- ***Finance report as at 31 December 2007***

C/72/1

The Finance Manager reported on the following :

Income : currently £337K behind budget. It is anticipated that there will be a shortfall of £400K by year end which will be as a result of the reduction in volume of sales for GCE and GCSE and the lack of growth of ACETs.

Projects : currently £1M behind budget. Part of this has been declared to the Department of Education (DE) due to the fact that sub-cover was not claimed for the Pupil Profile training events. The remainder of the underspend related to timing issues with DEL projects.

It was confirmed that no funding would be handed back to DE at the end of this financial year and that the projects would come in largely on target.

The Vice-Chairman expressed concern at the inflexibility of DE regarding the allocation of budgets for substitute cover and asked that consideration be given to devolving this to schools to use more effectively.

The Finance Manager advised that the issue of sub-cover has been discussed regularly with DE and it is hoped that as convergence with ESA becomes more apparent that this issue will be dealt with more effectively. He confirmed that the situation would be closely monitored going forward.

A Council Member sought clarification on whether all teachers had been trained on the Pupil Profile. It was confirmed that this was the case.

Baseline : currently £400K underspent

Progress File remains slightly underspent however work is planned to bring this back in line with the budget at year end.

Pressures have been identified in relation to :

- the proposed rent increase by NILGOS;
- the substantial rise in pension contributions; and
- printing and courier costs – these will be offset by savings in producing examination papers.

Permission has been sought from DE to offset the shortfall in baseline against the lower than expected examinations sales. Subject to this approval the budget would come in on target.

Clarification was sought on whether DE had provided the resources to address the pension contributions. The Finance Manager confirmed that whilst DE had recognised the pressure the responsibility lies with CCEA to address the issue.

The Chairman sought clarification on the proposed rent increase. The Finance Manager confirmed that this currently stood at 25% with discussions still to take place.

The Chairman of the Learning for Life and Work Committee sought clarification on the arrangements relating to the Progress File under baseline. It was confirmed that two progress files were being developed for DE and DEL. This would now be brought into line with the Pupil Profile and it was hoped that funding would continue to be available from DEL for the FE Progress File. Clarification on this issue was welcomed.

Capital: an additional £230K has been provided through in-year bids. This will be used to enhance the IT infrastructure and office and building furniture. It was confirmed that this additional funding would be spent effectively by year end.

The Chairman sought clarification whether the IT infrastructure was being enhanced in line with developments at ESA. It was confirmed that this was being progressed through the ICT Programme Manager, ESAIT.

- **Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2008**

C/72/2

The Finance Manager advised that there were no issues of concern to report.

Members were happy with the information provided.

- **Operational Plan 2008/09 (for approval)**

C/72/3

The Finance Manager advised members that the Business Committee discussed the plan in detail at its meeting on 31 January 2008 and was now being presented to the Council for final discussion and approval.

He confirmed that the total amount of funding requested was just under £34M - an increase of 19%.

The following pressures were raised:

- Examinations Income would decrease by 1%;
- Market share is holding firm at 70% however this is almost at saturation point;
- The expected fall of GCE sales and for GCSE to remain static;
- Impact of vacancy control;
- Pension fund changes; and the cost of living increases.

Clarification was sought on whether schools had incurred any additional expense. The Finance Manager assured members that we would continue to offer examinations at market rates. CCEA's rates are slightly lower than its competitors and this would continue to be the case.

Capital : the bid has been reduced compared to previous years as we focus on operational rather than strategic and investment issues going into ESA.

Projects : there has been a significant increase in this year's bid due to Review of Specifications – taking into account the overlap of GCE and GCSE; Pupil Profile and Curriculum Development.

Members asked for clarification on :

- The impact of the significant decrease in funding soon to be notified.

The Finance Manager said that there would be a decrease in the Employability Programme. The 2-year pilot is in its last year and there would be a reduction of £89K as a result of the departure of one member of staff in October 2007 and the retirement of the Project Manager at the end of March 2008.

Funding for Accreditation from DEL has not yet been confirmed.

- The significant increase in project work on Curriculum Development (almost 50% more than 2007/08) and what impact this additional work would have on schools;
- Who funds the Partnership Management Board (PMB) and what is their role?

PMB was funded through CCEA, however, this was for administration costs only.

- Whether there was a correlation between the project work and the expenditure.

The Chairman sensed some confusion amongst Council members regarding the curriculum development projects and the role of PMB. He asked that some clarification be added to these areas to ensure greater understanding and clarity.

Subject to these amendments the Operational Plan 2008/09 was agreed.

The Chairman thanked the Finance Manager and Business Committee for their input into this process.

Meeting with DE re Budget Allocation 2008/09

The Acting Chief Executive reported on a meeting with DE on 5 February 2008 regarding the funding outlined for projects and baseline in the Operational Plan 2008/09.

The outcome of the meeting was that DE has cut the proposed project bid from £9.3M to £5.5M, resulting in a substantial decrease of £3.8 - £4.5M. Project plans will now have to be discussed and revised accordingly.

The Chairman sought clarification on what work would now cease. The Acting Chief Executive assured members that the core business would continue, with the emphasis remaining on:

- Statutory assessment arrangements;
- Pupil profile;
- Curriculum implementation; and
- Revision of specifications.

A detailed plan will now be drawn up to ensure the main business is paramount and where projects are cut, this could mean that seconded staff will return to school. Where this is the case, staff will be notified as soon as possible.

The plan will be discussed with DE and brought back to Business Committee at the earliest opportunity.

Members expressed the following concerns:

- The projects associated with the revised curriculum. It is crucial that this does not impact on the delivery of the revised curriculum and sought an assurance that this would be funded.
- The work of PMB is largely replacing much of what was done through CASS. Clarification is required on what the CASS budgets are and whether ESA will devolve this to schools.
- Further clarification required on the proposed cuts in the Employability Programme.
- What the knock-on effect of these budget cuts will be for schools.
- The need to be mindful of convergence in to ESA and to sustain the good quality training around pupil profile and curriculum and retain regional support.

The Chairman asked for the following points to be progressed:

- The need for the substantive core areas to continue and schools must be protected from whatever impact there might be.
- DE must be made aware of these concerns and strong representations made.
- The Acting Chief Executive and Finance Manager to seek an informal meeting with DE in the first instance to discuss the budget cuts in detail and register the concerns raised by the Council.
- The need to seek a meeting with the Chief Executive Designate, ESA to discuss these issues.

The Chairman stressed the importance of dealing with these issues as soon as possible and they be treated as a priority.

5 Modernisation

- **Qualifications & Assessment Modernisation Strategy** **C/72/4**
- **Electronic Script Management Service 2009** **C/72/5**

As previously mentioned under Chairman's business, the Chairman advised that these papers would not be discussed at today's meeting but would be referred back to Business Committee for further consideration.

6 Convergence of CCEA with ESA **C/72/6**

The Acting Chief Executive reported that this item had been raised by the Audit & Risk Committee in the context of financial implications and risks. The paper had been provided to members for information and to advise on any further action required.

A Council member advised that a committee had already been set up, chaired by one of the Assistant Secretaries in DE to take this forward and as yet no advice on convergence had been issued. He suggested that as DE is in control of this process CCEA should consult with them on this matter.

The Chairman agreed with the comments and suggestion. He pointed out that regular meetings take place between government officials, the Permanent Secretary (DE), the Chief Executive (Designate) ESA and the Chairs of the affected RPA organisations where updates are given on the convergence programme.

He advised that he would make informal contact, in the first instance, with the Chief Executive (Designate), ESA to discuss the committee and its remit to ensure the appropriate action is taken.

Following this he agreed to write to the Permanent Secretary (DE) and the Chief Executive (Designate) ESA regarding the convergence programme with a view to ensuring a consistent approach is taken for all organisations involved.

The Chairman of the Learning for Life and Work Committee sought clarification on the position of the CCEA Brand, given that August 2008 would be the final year of issuing CCEA certificates. The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that it not the intention to give up the CCEA Brand for Examinations and agreed to seek an assurance on this.

7 Any other business

Embedding Strands of the KS3 Curriculum into Learning for Life and Work **C/72/7**

The Chairman of the Learning for Life and Work drew attention to the paper and advised that initial discussions had taken place at the Committee on 30 January on this proposal which aims to :

- Clarify the balance in Key Stage 3 of the four separate subjects, Home Economics, Citizenship, Personal, Social and Health Education and Employability;
- Ensure even developmental support across the five Education and Library boards;
- Give confidence to teachers in these areas of Learning for Life and Work; and
- Ensure convergence with the curriculum directorate within ESA.

The proposal attempts to address the following :

- The four strands in Key Stage 3;
- Progression into Key Stage 4;
- Beyond 16;
- Schools Networking with End users;
- Links with the Partnership Management Board (PMB);
- Convergence with ESA; and
- The role of the Learning for Life and Work Committee.

He reported that the PMB has formed a Learning for Life and Work Sub-Group and asked that it liaise more closely on a regular basis with the Employability Team to ensure joined up thinking going forward. The Acting Chief Executive confirmed that this sub-group had met once and was currently considering its remit.

He stressed that the paper was an attempt to give some direction and draw together the four strands in a much more co-ordinated and motivated way. It was hoped that this would alleviate the confusion and address any overlaps which would become apparent.

Members discussed the content of the paper and asked that the following points be taken into consideration:

- The need for a balance between all of the strands in the LFLW programme;
- The paper still appears to be employability driven;
- The disconnect between Key Stages 3 and 4 to be addressed;
- Learning Communities and the concern that these will get caught up in Area Based Planning – the needs of the children have to be met;
- Weighting of the strands at Key Stage 3 needs to be given;
- What is the con-activity post 16; and
- CPD for teachers.

The Chairman of the Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning Committee said that he could accept the recommendations as good practice apart from Recommendation 4 and asked that this be redrafted to exclude Learning Communities and Career Hubs.

The recommendation on Initial Teacher Training (ITT) be redrafted to ensure the need for this training is emphasised.

It was agreed that all of these points would be addressed and the paper amended. The Acting Chief Executive would then present this to the Department of Education for consideration and response.

Issue of Results at GCSE

The Acting Chief Executive reported that at the last Regulation, Qualifications and Lifelong Learning Committee he advised on the outcomes of a recent survey conducted on changing the date of the Issue of Results at GCSE to the same day as the English results.

This had proved quite significant in that out of over 200 centres responding 81% preferred the dates to be harmonised.

Discussion will now take place with centres to advise them of the change of date this summer.

Members were assured that the practice of delivering the results to schools a day prior to the issue of results would continue.

Members welcomed this development.

8 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as **Thursday 20 March 2008 at 1000 hours.**

The majority of the meeting would deal with Educational issues, however, the Revised Budget and Projects 2008/09 would also come forward for discussion.