



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2020

Room 29 and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video Conference:

Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)
Dr Robert Barry (Senior Statistician, Research and Information Service) – Item 1 only

The meeting commenced at 9:34am in closed session

1. Assembly Research – CCEA Grade Awarding Model 2020 – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Assembly Research.

Dr Robert Barry briefed the Committee on his paper entitled 'The use of Statistical Modelling by CCEA to Award GCE and GCSE Grades in 2020'

Mr Newton joined the meeting at 9:41am.

Mr McNulty joined the meeting at 9:43am.

Mr Butler joined the meeting at 10:16am.

This was followed by a question and answer session

The Chairperson thanked Dr Barry for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) seeking an oral and written briefing on standardisation and moderation particularly at A-Level.

Proceedings continued in public session from 10:23am.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 9 September 2020.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. CCEA - Oral Briefing – Consultation on Curriculum and Assessment 2021

The Committee noted the CCEA consultation document and correspondence from a concerned parent on A-Level entries with the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) by Northern Ireland students.

The following witnesses joined the meeting in person at 10:24am.

Mr Justin Edwards, Chief Executive, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Trevor Carson, Chairperson, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 10:29am:

Ms Margaret Farragher, Director of Education, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Officials briefed the Committee on the CCEA consultation on curriculum and assessment 2021.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr McCrossan joined the meeting at 11:17am

Karen Mullan declared an interest as a family member is undertaking Year 12 studies.

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 12:21pm.

The Chairperson thanked officials for the briefing.

The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 12:44pm.

Mr Newton left the meeting at 1:00pm.

The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA relating to the 2020 grading model.

Agreed: The Committee noted that despite the failure of CCEA to provide a written summary of the feedback to the consultation, it was of critical importance to provide timely and useful guidance to schools on the delivery of the curriculum and revised approaches to assessment. The Committee therefore agreed that it would make a formal response to the consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was vitally important to ensure that there is clarity and certainty in respect of important examinations and that fairness and transparency should be the key features of any related processes while also maintaining the portability of qualifications undertaken by students in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Further to the consultation, the Committee agreed to write to CCEA indicating its concerns in respect of:

- the levels of inconsistency and varying mitigations between the proposed curricular reductions in GCSE and A-level;
- the absence of any mitigations in respect of GCSE English and Mathematics;
- the apparently illogical and differing treatments of the assessment of practical examinations; drama and music performances; and some sporting qualifications;
- the possibility of further disruption to learning in the current school year and the absence of clarity on the scenarios that CCEA has considered in order to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged;
- the significant importance of mitigating measures in respect of disrupted learning which might include the provision of a specification order for the delivery of curricula;
- the absence of clarity around the contingency arrangements under which Year 11 and AS work might be taken into account in order to determine final year GCSE and A-level grades; and
- the possibility of disadvantage to certain sectors and the apparent absence of a full Equality Impact Assessment for the consultation proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also write to CCEA indicating its disappointment that it had apparently failed to engage meaningfully with teaching unions and school leaders before the consultation in order to manage the development of a revised and deliverable curriculum and assessment process for 2020-21.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed that it remained concerned about the delivery of the curriculum and the management of examinations and grade awards during an academic year where there may be further disruption to learning. Consequently, the Committee agreed to return to the issue of curricular and assessment delivery in the

immediate future and to seek further oral and written evidence from CCEA soon and preferably at the Committee meeting on 23 September 2020.

The Committee agreed to move to public session at 1:05pm.

7. Correspondence

7.1. The Committee noted an index of incoming general correspondence.

7.2. The Committee considered correspondence from the National Autistic Society (NAS) NI on the UK-wide report entitled “Left Stranded” outlining the experiences of autistic people and their families and carers during covid-19.

7.3. The Committee considered correspondence from the Evangelical Alliance about the effect of the Executive’s covid-19 measures on individuals who live with an intellectual disability.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a joint briefing with NAS NI and the Evangelical Alliance on the “Left Stranded” report and related issues.

7.4. The Committee considered correspondence from a concerned parent regarding the curriculum for children with Special Educational Needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA seeking its comments on the issues raised in the correspondence including recommendations from the Dunford Report on examination malpractice relating to the requirement for and impact of Access Arrangements and Special Consideration.

7.5. The Committee noted a briefing paper entitled 'Equality proofing the return to school' from the Equality Coalition.

7.6. The Committee considered correspondence from Belfast Special Schools principals seeking a meeting with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the principals to an informal meeting in order to discuss their concerns and prior to the scheduled Education Authority Special Schools Area Planning briefing in November 2020.

7.7. The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent about the inclusion of AS results in the calculation of A-Level grades.

Agreed: The Committee to write to the Department of Education seeking sight of the detailed report setting out a series of grade awarding options, which CCEA reportedly provided to the Minister in April 2020.

7.8. The Committee noted correspondence from the Transferor Representatives’ Council in respect of an Ulster University report on school governance.

7.9. The Committee noted a report ‘Priorities for recovery - a briefing paper for the Northern Ireland Executive's return from recess’ from Pivotal.

7.10. The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent about the post-primary transfer tests.

7.11. The Committee considered correspondence from Heatboss about single use plastics in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and Education Authority seeking their views on the use of environmentally friendly plastics in schools.

7.12. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing information on funding allocations.

7.13. The Committee noted a response from Translink in respect of supporting improved school transport hygiene as part of the restart process in schools.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a revised forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive an oral update from the Minister on Restart issues on 7 October 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive an oral Departmental briefing on the revised Children and Young People's Strategy on 14 October 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive oral briefings on Physical Education and the role of sport in resilience and mental well-being on 11 November 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive oral briefings on integrated education on 18 November 2020

10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 23 September 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
23 September 2020