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Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

Summary

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is a non-departmental public body reporting to the Department of Education (the Department). Established in 1994, it replaced the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council and the Northern Ireland Schools Examinations and Assessment Council. CCEA's statutory duties today are broadly similar to those at its inception in 1994.

CCEA's functions relate to the three areas of curriculum; examinations and assessment; and monitoring standards (regulatory role). In Wales, the Department for Education and Skills also has responsibility for these three areas. In the other jurisdictions, two, three or four different bodies carry out these functions.

England has recently undergone reform in this area with the establishment of the independent regulator Ofqual. It was set up to avoid what was viewed as an '*inherent conflict of interests*' between QCA's functions in terms of having responsibility for developing tests, delivering tests and regulating the tests.

The following table provides an overview of the organisations responsible for CCEA's functions in the other jurisdictions.

Table 1: Organisations carrying out CCEA's functions in other jurisdictions

Function	England	Scotland	Wales	Ireland
Curriculum	Department of Education	Education Scotland	DfES	NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment)
Examinations and Assessment	Teaching Agency <i>and</i> Standards and Testing Agency	SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority)	DfES	State Examinations Commission <i>and</i> NCCA
Monitoring standards	Ofqual	SQA	DfES	The Inspectorate

In recent years there have been a number of errors in CCEA's examinations. These have included errors in paper production, marking, grading and certification, and in some cases, have resulted in candidates being awarded incorrect grades. Investigations into these errors highlighted a range of issues including procedures not being followed, insufficient checks and controls and a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities.

In light of these findings, consideration could be given to a number of areas, including the range of functions undertaken by CCEA, for example the implications of having responsibility for curriculum, exams and assessment, as well as a regulatory role. Consideration could also be given to how CCEA is addressing the findings of recent investigations into examination errors, for example whether controls have been reviewed to support improved quality assurance in the development process, and whether clarification has been sought on the roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved in the process.

1 Introduction

CCEA is a non-departmental public body reporting to the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. This Briefing Paper provides an overview of CCEA's functions, comparable organisations in other jurisdictions and an overview of recent examination errors.

2 Background

CCEA was established on 1st April 1994 under the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 (later amended by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998). It was formed to replace the Northern Ireland Schools Examinations and Assessment Council and the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council, whose functions transferred to CCEA.¹ These functions included:

- Keeping the curriculum under review and advising the Department on it;
- Publishing and distributing information on the curriculum;
- Carrying out consultation and providing a report to the Department;
- Conducting relevant examinations and assessments and awarding appropriate certificates;
- Moderating or arranging for the moderation of examinations/ assessments;
- Seeking to ensure that standards are recognised as equivalent to standards of examinations and assessments conducted by other bodies or authorities exercising similar functions in the UK.

3 CCEA's functions

CCEA's key responsibilities relate to the statutory curriculum, delivering examinations and assessments and monitoring standards. Part 8 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 sets out the statutory duties of CCEA. These are outlined in the following table.

Table 2: CCEA's main statutory duties

Duty	Overview
Conduct examinations and assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct relevant examinations and assessments • Powers to publish rules, syllabuses and specimen papers • Moderate or arrange for the moderation of examinations and assessments • Award appropriate certificates
Accreditation and approval of certain external qualifications ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications

¹ CCEA (2007) *Annual report and accounts 2005-2006* London: The Stationery Office

² Any academic or vocational qualification authenticated or awarded by an outside person

Duty	Overview
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accredit qualifications submitted for accreditation
Other functions in relation to the curriculum, examinations and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep under review all aspects of the curriculum for grant-aided schools and institutions of further education and all aspects of examinations and assessments • Advise the Department on matters concerned with the curriculum (for schools and FE institutions) • Publish and disseminate information relating to the curriculum, examinations and assessment • Produce guidance and teaching materials for children between the age of two and compulsory school age
Monitoring standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCEA must seek to ensure that standards are recognised as equivalent to standards of examinations and assessments conducted by other bodies or authorities exercising similar functions in the UK
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where a proposal is referred to the Council to set in place or revise any programme of study, attainment target or objectives it must consult relevant stakeholders and provide a report to the Department

Source: Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998

This table highlights that CCEA's statutory duties are broadly similar to those at its inception in 1994.

4 Comparable organisations in other jurisdictions

CCEA brings together curriculum, examinations and assessment, as well as a regulatory role.

CCEA is most similar to the Department for Education and Skills in Wales, which also has responsibility for these areas. In Scotland, Education Scotland has responsibility for developing the curriculum while the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has responsibility for examinations and assessment and for monitoring standards.³

³ Welsh Government: *Curriculum and assessment* [online]; SQA: *What we do* [online]

In Ireland, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is responsible for the curriculum and for examinations and assessment, which is also a duty of the State Examinations Commission. The Inspectorate plays a role in monitoring standards.⁴

Recent reform: separation of regulatory function in England

Qualifications in England have undergone reform from 2007. Previously, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) had a range of responsibilities including developing the content of qualifications and tests, delivering the tests and regulating the tests.

The Government identified two barriers to ensuring high levels of confidence in the standards of tests and qualifications:⁵

- An 'inherent conflict of interest' between QCA's functions; and
- The fact that QCA reported directly to Ministers '*can make it harder to demonstrate that in carrying out its regulatory function it is acting wholly independently*'.

In particular, the then Department of Children, Schools and Families stated that while Ministers can legitimately influence the content of a qualification, '*they should not be able to determine those parts of a qualification which are central to the maintenance of standards*'. For example, the Department stated that Ministers should not have influence in the areas of grading, assessment or ensuring standards, noting that these should be the '*sole domain of the independent regulator*'.⁶

The regulatory powers of QCA were transferred to Ofqual, a newly established independent regulator, in April 2008. Ofqual is a non-ministerial government department and reports directly to Parliament (and to the Northern Ireland Assembly on vocational qualifications) rather than to ministers.⁷

As part of the Coalition Government's reforms, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency closed in March 2012 with the exams administration function transferred to the Teaching Agency and the National Curriculum assessments function transferred to the Standards and Testing Agency.⁸

5 Examination errors

The following table provides an overview of errors in recent CCEA examination papers.

⁴ NCCA: *About NCCA* [online]; State Examinations Commission: *Role and functions* [online]; Irish Statute Book: *Education Act, 1998*

⁵ DCSF Press Notice cited in House of Commons Library (2008) Reform of qualifications regulation

⁶ DCSF Briefing note: *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill Clause 138*

⁷ Parliament: *Chief Regulator of Qualifications and Examinations* [online] Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmeduc/1764/176404.htm>

⁸ Department for Education: *Qualifications and Development Agency* [online]

Table 3: Overview of recent errors in CCEA examinations

Year	Error	Details of error and candidates affected
2011	Examination paper error ⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCE Further Maths: an equation in a question contained an error 'Human error' was evident, however the root cause was: <i>'failure to ensure that the documented procedure was followed'</i> and <i>'controls employed were not adequate to identify these errors'</i> 122 candidates affected
	Examination paper error ¹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE Business Studies: cash flow forecast table contained an error but all questions could still be answered correctly Investigation found that the root cause was 'human error'¹¹ 2,891 candidates affected in NI
2010	Grading error ¹²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A level Chemistry paper (incorrect mark scheme used in one section and no manual check of processed papers carried out) 935 pupils received incorrect marks and 151 pupils were awarded lower grades than they achieved
	Marking error ¹³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A level English paper: marking of one examiner was inaccurate 41 candidates received lower marks than they achieved, including 15 pupils who received a lower grade
	Marking error ¹⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AS Geography paper: examiners did not consistently apply the procedures for marking candidates' scripts 17 pupils were awarded incorrect marks
2008-09	Certification error ¹⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AS Further Maths: in some cases a similar number of units than required were used to certify A level Maths and AS Further Maths Some students received a more favourable grade in their AS Further Maths (A level Maths grades not affected)

⁹ Ofqual (2011) *Inquiry into Examination Errors Summer 2011 Final Report Coventry and Belfast: Ofqual*

¹⁰ As above

¹¹ Ofqual (2011) *Investigation into Examination Paper Errors Summer 2011*

¹² Ofqual (2010) *Investigation into the marking of CCEA A level Chemistry Summer 2010 Stage 2 Report Coventry and Belfast: Ofqual*

¹³ As above

¹⁴ Ofqual (2010) *Investigation into the marking of CCEA A level Chemistry Summer 2010 Stage 2 Report Coventry and Belfast: Ofqual*

¹⁵ As above

Investigation findings

2011 examination paper errors

A 2011 investigation into errors in the two examination papers identified 'human error' in both cases and in one of the papers, found that the documented procedure for Question Paper Production was not followed, and that the controls employed were not sufficient to identify errors during the development process.¹⁶

The Ofqual Inquiry into Examination Errors Summer 2011 highlighted a number of issues relating to the Question Paper Production process, including:

- **A lack of clarity about the exact role and accountability of some individuals involved in the process:** for example, CCEA's procedures state that the overall process is managed by a technical manager, however, the technical manager's role is only to provide training and guidance;
- **No record of the two papers being reviewed at three of the five stages of development** (as required by CCEA's procedures);
- **Variations in the expectations of the role of the scrutineer** and in the quality and detail of reports provided by the scrutineer (the scrutineer is responsible for checking the final drafts of all question papers).

2010 Grading error

An Ofqual investigation into the marking of a CCEA A level Chemistry paper highlighted a number of issues, including:

- Governance arrangements were not '*as good as they could be:*' due to CCEA's structure and remit the organisation does not have a governance committee solely for the awarding body function of the organisation;
- Evidence that a number of procedures had not been reviewed for some time;
- The level of detail regarding particular processes varied, particularly in regard to defining the roles and responsibilities of particular posts within a process.

¹⁶ CCEA (2011) *Investigation into Examination Paper Errors Summer 2011*