



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

Friday 14 August 2020

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings,
Belfast

Present:

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Apologies:

Mr William Humphrey MLA

In Attendance:

Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Elaine Farrell (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 9:51AM in open session



Northern Ireland Assembly

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Covid-19 and Schools Restart – Minister for Education– Oral Evidence Session

The Minister and officials joined the meeting at 9:52am.

Mr Peter Weir MLA, Minister for Education

Ms Faustina Graham, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards, Department of Education;

Ms Karen McCullough, Head of School Improvement Team, Department of Education; and

Mr Bill Stevenson, Head of Area Planning East, Department of Education.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the briefing on restart for schools until a future date and to focus today's briefing on the issues surrounding the recent AS and A-level grades.

The Minister and his officials briefed the Committee on the AS and A Level grades awarded on 13 August 2020 and the GCSE grade awarding methodology.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Robin Newton joined the meeting at 10.26am.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister recording its considerable concerns in respect of the adverse impact of the uncertainty relating to the awarding of GCSE, AS and A-level grades on the mental health and well-being of children, young people, parents and school staff.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Minister restating its support for the use of teacher assessments as the basis for the awarding of grades and seeking:

- sight of the details of the GCSE, AS and A-Level grade awarding model which CCEA had employed including a clear explanation of all of the relevant weightings;



Northern Ireland
Assembly

- sight of the relevant CCEA explanatory webinar slides;
- clarity on the timeline for the adoption of the GCSE, AS and A-Level grade awarding model;
- sight of the findings from the CCEA 2019 dry run using the GCSE, AS and A-Level grade awarding model; and
- a breakdown on a school-by-school basis over the last 3 years of how grade predictions compared with grade outcomes.

The Chairperson proposed that the Committee should recommend to the Minister that pupils should be awarded the highest A-level grade based on a comparison of their teacher's assessment, their AS result and their CCEA assessed grade and that the Minister should seek to agree such an approach with the examination authorities in the other jurisdictions of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The Committee divided.

Ayes

Chris Lyttle

Karen Martin

Robbie Butler

Catherine Kelly

Daniel McCrossan

Justin McNulty

Noes

Robin Newton

Abstained

Maurice Bradley

The motion was passed.

6. Covid-19 Awarding of A-Level Grades - Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) - Oral Evidence Session

Officials joined the meeting at 11:46am.

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

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

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Officials briefed the Committee on the awarding of A-Level grades and the GCSE grade awarding methodology.



Northern Ireland Assembly

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 1:10pm.

The Chairperson thanked officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA expressing concerns in respect of its failure to resolve anomalies in A/AS results in a timely manner and its failure to adequately explain its grade awarding model to pupils, parents and schools. The Committee further agreed to write to CCEA seeking explanations and examples of: the use of the pupil ranking system and the methodology by which pupils securing e.g. C grades at AS can attain U grades at A-Level.

Agreed: Further to the above, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking clarity as to what consideration has been given to the provision of resits for pupils who have not attained their expected grade and have not secured a satisfactory resolution using the appeals process.

Agreed: Further to the above, the Committee also agreed to write to the Minister indicating its concerns in respect of the grade awarding model for GCSEs which takes into account prior school performance and which may consequently lead to disadvantage for pupils attending schools with poor achievement records.

Agreed: The Committee agreed, subject to Ministerial availability, to meet twice during the week commencing 17 August 2020, in order to consider Restart issues and the awarding of GCSE grades.

8. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meetings will be held, subject to confirmation, on Tuesday 18 August and Friday 21 August 2020 in Parliament Buildings and by video conference.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:51pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
18 August 2020