

NCSE Council Meeting 11th & 12th December, 2019
116th Meeting of the Council

Trim Castle Hotel, Trim

Attendance:

Council Members
Joe Hayes (Chairperson)
Don Mahon (Deputy Chairperson)
Anne Tansey
Antoinette Nic Gearailt (present items 1- 6)
Clodagh Ní Mhaolchiaráin
Peter Archer
Deirbhile Nic Craith
Pat Goff
Eileen Daly
Dharragh Hunt
Eamon Clavin
Carol Cuffe (present items 1- 6)
Áine Lynch

Also in Attendance:

Teresa Griffin, Chief Executive
Mary Byrne, PO
Jennifer Doran, PO & Board Secretary
Mary McGrath, PO
Tadgh O'Leary, PO
Lisa Campbell, Chair of the ARC (item 7)

1. Council private session

The Council noted the outcome of the review of the performance of the CEO in relation to the organisational business plan. The CEO Performance Committee are satisfied with the work of the CEO as per the business plan.

The draft report on the self-assessment of performance by five Council Committees was discussed. The Committees are: Audit and Risk, Research, Policy & Strategy, CEO Performance and Finance. The Committees reported that they were meeting their objectives and expressed general satisfaction with their performances. Arising from the review, the Committees recommended a number of revisions to Committee terms of reference and letters of appointment for members. These recommendations were accepted by Council.

A decision on the establishment of a sixth Committee was postponed pending further discussion with the executive.

2. Student presentations

Three students with a variety of disabilities who have recently left school and in third level education, came to speak to Council about their educational experiences and journey.

Council reflected on the experiences shared and noted that the student experiences and needs were very diverse. It was evidence from the accounts that getting the right support at the right time was important and that different supports at different times and stages in their education journeys were required.

It was noted that staff in the institutes can act as either enablers to support engagement and in some instances, can act as barriers to student engagement. The training and professional development needs of educators is a key component to quality provision.

The importance of good guidance and advice about options, pathways and supports for students is very important.

3. Reminder – Declaration of interests (standing governance item)

The Chairperson reminded members about declaring interests, as per the Code of Conduct for Council members. There were no items to declare.

4. Draft minutes of the meeting on 30th October and matters arising

The draft minutes were approved. It was noted that all actions had been completed. In relation to action 3, a date early in the new year will be set to commence the engagement process with the management bodies.

5. Chief Executive Report

There were a number of further updates to the report added at the meeting.

- ***Information under this item/point relates to an ongoing deliberative process and is thus not being published at this time.***
- A letter was issued to the Minister regarding the shortage of places in south Dublin and we await a response.
- A letter of response from the Minister in relation to the progress report on the policy advice was circulated to Council members. The report was favourably received.
- Since the publication of the progress report, the NCSE has decided to visit a number of countries that have chosen not to introduce a fully inclusive system so that the final advice can reflect difference experiences and trajectories.
- ***Information under this item/point relates to an ongoing deliberative process and is thus not being published at this time.***
- The process for the formal complaints was outlined in response to the one case noted in the CEO report. In this case, the process was not resolved at local level and now has gone to the next step.
- The Ombudsman's office organised a meeting with the NCSE to understand how the NCSE supports schools; how the various support schemes work; and how assessment of need and/or diagnosis of disability inform these schemes. Issues relating to soft barriers to the admission of students with SEN, as previously highlighted by the NCSE were also discussed.
- The DES and DOH have put a series of legal questions to the Attorney General's office in relation to our potential respective responsibilities following the commencement of Part 2 of the Disability Act for children turning eighteen years in June 2020. The NCSE won't have access to this advice, so engagement with the DES will be important.
- Members asked about the NCSE's Departmental Council which was referenced in the CEO report. This is the standard civil servant industrial relations structure but the first meeting in its current guise under the NCSE. There will be quarterly meetings in the future.

6. Publication of the progress report

Information under this item/point relates to an ongoing deliberative process and is thus not being published at this time.

7. Audit & Risk Committee report

The Chair of the ARC was in attendance to outline the business and performance of the ARC throughout the year as per a report circulated. The Chair is very satisfied with the work of the Committee to date and the support provided by the executive.

It was noted that Mazars have been our internal audit provider for a long time. Members queried if this was appropriate. The Chair indicated this is not a problem once the appropriate procurement processes are followed at re- procurement stage. Mazars are considered to be a good fit for the organisation given their known public service experience and background.

At the recommendation of the ARC, the executive met with Mazars to discuss some of the internal audit recommendations that were considered more appropriate for larger organisations or are considered best practice for such large entities rather than required practice in smaller organisations like the NCSE. The feedback was well received and the NCSE was recommended to continue to engage with Mazars on similar audit recommendations should they arise.

Council noted the report from the Chair and the recent minutes from the ARC meeting.

8. 2020 Risk register and update on top risks

A revised 2020 risk register was circulated with some amendments following feedback at the last Council meeting and discussions at the ARC meeting. Council approved the 2020 Risk Register.

An update was provided, as a standard item, on the top four risks in the register. Council noted the update.

A large cohort of the permanent management structure will be recruited by early 2020. It was suggested that stakeholders should be engaged with around the services and structures in place to ensure an understanding of the regional structure and roles. This communication is already being planned.

9. Strategy and Policy Committee report & policy advice paper update

Information under this item/point relates to an ongoing deliberative process and is thus not being published at this time.

10. Operations update on activities

A presentation was provided on the NCSE teacher professional learning supports, training and seminars. Statistics on the level of provision and those that receive the training was provided. The way in which participants apply for training was also outlined as was the CPD design and development process.

It was noted that courses/sessions on autism, followed by behavioural were most common, making up 80% of the requests. The demand for advisor support is extensive- more than 1,800 requests. All training has a feedback and evaluation process built in to inform changes and improvement in programmes.

In relation to Middletown Centre, the NCSE meet with staff to ensure there is no duplication of services and that some programmes are co-delivered.

There is still a demand for support from the NCSE on implementing the SET model. The requests are usually once off and mostly for assessment and planning issues. The NCSE didn't receive the additional 25 advisors due to be allocated for this work which has meant that engagement with schools to support the implementation was slower than expected.

It was noted that with over 19,000 teachers attending courses in 2019, there is an opportunity to use the sessions to outline what the NCSE does more broadly and communicate the major issues for the

organisation. The infographic with key statistics on NCSE activity included in the Annual Report could be made more freely available at events and published separately on our website.

It was also suggested that with over 300 new principals at primary level, there may be an opportunity to link in with the work of the PDST with new principals to communicate important inclusion and special education matters.

Action Point 1: MMcG to consider communication opportunities with stakeholders as above, including dissemination of the NCSE infographic on activities.

11. Research Committee report

The minutes from the latest meeting were circulated. The items covered at the meeting were outlined by the Chair.

Council reflected on the recent Research Conference. The evaluation report providing the feedback from those attending on the day was circulated and the response was very positive.

Council suggested that for future conferences, the NCSE should look at alternative ways to enable greater engagement from delegates on the day such as discussion sessions or technological mechanism to seek questions and engagement from attendees. It was also suggested that the evaluation forms could be sent out after the event to increase the response rate.

Action Point 2: JD to consider methods to enhance delegate engagement for the 2020 conference.

12. Finance Committee report

12.1 Expenditure to date

The Finance Committee met in advance of the Council meeting and the Chair took members through the finance report, which was circulated with the papers.

Council noted the expenditure to date outlined in the report. There are a number of areas of underspend which were itemised and it is proposed to declare these savings to the DES. Council approved the areas of declared savings.

12.2 Procurement compliance report

The third quarter procurement compliance report was circulated. Some additional areas of non-compliance were reported, though the values were small.

12.3 Draft 2020 budget

A draft budget for 2020 was circulated. The budget is mostly similar to the previous year with some small exceptions and there is an increase in the pay budget request to cover the cost of the additional staff in 2020.

Council approved the draft budget and the submission of the budget request to the DES.

13. Work plan 2020

An end of year review of the 2019 Work Plan was circulated with the papers. It was noted that all actions have been achieved with three exceptions:

- In relation to the action on assisted decision making for students aged 18 in schools, the NCSE still needs to determine what sort of supports should be provided or would be required by students. This work will continue in 2020.
- The NCSE continues to engage with the DES and DoH regarding the potential implications that may arise when Part 2 of the Disability Act is commenced for children turning 18 years in June 2020.
- The practice guidelines for NCSE support staff working with schools continue to be developed with a first draft due by end of December 2019.

A draft 2020 work plan was circulated with the papers. It was noted that there are no new major areas of work as the NCSE will be continuing to manage the change process and bedding down our structures for the year.

Council approved the draft 2020 work plan.

Action Point 3: JD notify the DES of 2019 savings and seek the draft 2020 budget as outlined.

14. Annual report for 2019- initial views

Council views were sought on the format for our Annual Report for 2019. It was noted that the current layout follows our strategic objectives and work plan and appears to work well. It was suggested that the infographic could be extended over 2 pages with some additional information included.

Members were asked to submit any further views in advance of the next Council meeting.

15. AOB

The dates for the 2020 meetings, which were previously agreed at the last meeting, were outlined again as follows:

- 26th February
- 29th April
- 24th June
- 9th September
- 28th October
- 9th & 10th December

Joseph Hayes
Chairperson
26th February, 2020

Teresa Griffin
Chief Executive
26th February, 2020