

AGENCY MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2006

Present: David Stephen, Chief Executive
Martin Lowe, NEBM
Margaret Munckton, NEBM
Graham Gunn, SAAS
Audrey Heatlie, SAAS
Stephen Blyth, SAAS
Linda Pender, SAAS (Secretary)

Apologies: Eileen Marshall, NEBM
Tracy Richardson, SAAS

Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 24 August were agreed.

Matters Arising

- It was noted that Margaret would change post shortly and move from Lauder College to Perth College as Director of strategy and financial planning.
- Martin Lowe had contacted Universities Scotland on the Agency's behalf to facilitate progress in restoring the annual meeting with institutions. As a consequence, the University of Edinburgh have agreed to host a meeting in the Spring.
- There was nothing further to report on the appointment of a new member to replace Professor Weetman. David would write to the Minister again seeking instruction.
Action: David

Quarterly Report

Customer Services Unit

2. There had been a higher than usual surge in the number of late applications received (up about 20% from two years ago). However, 99.8% of applications received had now been processed.
3. The Agency had commissioned a study to review CSU business processes and staff deployment. The consultant's report was expected in the next week or two. Early indications were that the Unit is operating to very high levels of performance but that there were some areas where quick and relatively painless gains might be achievable by, for example, segmenting e-mail and correspondence to allow prioritisation.
4. It was noted that the number of students applying for support was partially due to demographics (fewer school pupils). SAAS would continue to work with economists to improve the forecasting model.
5. Each year, the Agency receives a surge of last minute applications but numbers had increased this year. It was suggested that this may be due to students feeling that they can apply later on-line and information about timescales for applications may have to be stronger in our literature and on the website. The importance of applying early was always

stressed at visits to institutions. The new text messaging system to be introduced in 2007 could also be used to remind students that they should apply early.

6. It was agreed that it would be useful to benchmark performance measures against the same quarter of the previous year. **Action:** Linda to update table for future meetings

Finance

7. Part of the DRC underspend was due to the 6-8 week period required to fill staff vacancies.

8. Graduate Endowment – it was noted that 94% of students liable in April 2005 had now indicated how they would pay the GE. A table detailing the GE position would be included as an annex to future quarterly reports.

9. Fraud – fraud was currently not a major problem in Scotland. However, there had been some recent problems due to identity fraud in SE England. The Agency participate in a DfES group concerned with fraud issues generally and the SLC and SAAS keep each other informed of any fraud issues which arise.

10. Debt recovery – The Team now had a new target of £2 million p.a. for debt recovery.

Personnel

11. Special Bonus scheme –It was noted that Cabinet Office were currently reviewing special bonus scheme rules (currently 0.2% of pay bill).

12. Resignations – It was confirmed that the Personnel Team carry out exit interviews when staff are leaving the Agency. For the most part, the reason for leaving was career progression in other parts of the SE and there was nothing to suggest we might be losing staff due to dissatisfaction with working in SAAS.

Information systems and Operational Policy

13. MS project – The Senior Management Team had approved a plan to pilot SMS text services for the next session initially using outgoing messages only. The pilot would be reviewed after its first year of operation with a view to expanding use if possible.

14. Telephony –A project team was in place and working to upgrade the system by February 2007.

15. BACS payments – monthly payments would be introduced for 3rd instalments in January and fully rolled out for next session. This should obviate any delays in making payments through SEAS.

16. Policy Team – the introduction of the new NHS Dental Bursary scheme had been very successful and uptake had been good. The scheme had involved partnership working with colleagues in the Health Department. The joint policy team had been put forward for an SE Excellence award.

17. Monthly payments project – SLC had requested more workshops but the project was still on-line for delivery.

Chief Executive's Office

18. The SHAW team was due to meet the NHS trust in charge of SHAW to be told about the criteria for their new healthy working lives scheme.

19. New recycling points had been installed throughout Gyleview House and waste to landfill had been reduced from 23% to 13% over the last 6 months.

Committee Minutes

20. Health & Safety Committee – feedback received from SE Sustainable Development Team to date on the Agency's EMS had been excellent. The SE were arranging an environmental forum meeting in December/January to discuss environmental targets including reporting and publication issues.

21. IS Steering Committee – no additional points were raised.

22. Fraud Committee – The Fraud Officer was seeking training to allow him to take witness statements. It was noted that the Agency raised awareness of fraud issues by holding seminars and issuing notes to remind staff to contact our Fraud Officer in the event of any problems. All new staff attend a fraud presentation as part of their induction. Internal fraud issues would be dealt with by SEHR staff.

Annual Report, Accounts and Corporate Plan

23. The format of the annual report had changed slightly due to Audit Scotland directions but the contents remained essentially the same. Audit Scotland had approved the Agency's accounts and a copy of their report would be issued to NEBMs. **Action:** Linda

24. It was noted that the Agency's relationship with the SLC may change over the next few years partly as a result of the Company progressively becoming the prime delivery agent of student support in England but also because its corporate governance and legal status might change. David said we should know more about the SLC position by next summer.

Complaints Report

25. The Agency had received complaints about difficulties experienced by the public with the new telephony system and it was hoped that the planned upgrade would resolve these problems. Complaints had also been received about delays in responding to e-mails which had been due to staff dealing with the last minute surge in late applications.

Risk Register

26. The high level risk register was reviewed. An updated version would be provided at the next Board meeting.

27. Framework Document – This document was due to be reviewed in 2007. Members would be asked to comment on a draft before any proposals for change were made to our parent Department and Ministers. **Action** : David/ Linda

28. It was agreed that NEBMs would be provided with a diagram showing the Agency's key stakeholders. They would also be sent a copy of our entry for a Quality Scotland excellence award which was currently in preparation. **Action** : Linda

Any other business

29. It was noted that the policy team were currently working to expand the use of shortened applications forms which might conceivably extend to as many as 68,000 students. More information would be provided at the next meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

30. Linda would canvass dates for next year's meetings as soon as possible.

Chief Executive's Office
28 November 2006