

AGENCY MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING WEDNESDAY 24 AUGUST 2006

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

Apologies: Tracy Richardson, SAAS

Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 11 May were agreed.

Matters Arising

2. David updated the Board on developments since the last meeting:
 - "SAAS payloans" project – it had been established that the project was technically feasible but Departmental management had had to conclude that the cost of delivery at the SLC end was unaffordable.
 - "Pay monthly" project – SLC, despite a growing programme of work to cater for developments in RUK, had given assurances that they could move to paying loans monthly in time for 2007- 08 at an affordable cost. Colleagues in ETLLD had accepted this and the project would move forward on that basis with SAAS gearing up for monthly payment of YSB etc. The risk register would need to be updated since any failure to deliver by SLC would have potentially serious knock on effects for SAAS. This held true also for the payment of fee loans from 2007 onwards. **Action: Michael Jackson**
 - Agency staff had met with Universities Scotland's Secretary's Committee to discuss sharing attendance information and the setting up of a further liaison meeting later in the year for exchanges of information with administrators. Martin Lowe offered to facilitate progress by speaking to his contacts in US.

Quarterly Report

Customer Services Unit

3. CSU performance to the end of June was shown at Annex A. The Agency was unable to provide telephone statistics for the full quarter but could now provide more information about call levels etc.
4. The processing session had had a slow start largely because about a third of CSU staff were new. The new staff were now gaining more experience but 3 CSU staff had resigned and there had also been a higher than usual level of sick absence. CSU had

made changes to work streams and staff would be working overtime to improve on the 80% of cases that had so far been processed.

5. 40,000 ILA accounts were currently open. The ILA scheme was due to be reviewed and the Agency would be informed of the outcome later in the year.

Finance

6. Annex B showed the running cost position to 30 June. The £9k overspend shown was due to ILA staff costs for which the Agency had still to receive budgetary cover. Otherwise there were no areas of concern. It was noted that the Agency would have to write off some of the spend on the SAAS payloans project but that this would be met by the Department.

Graduate Endowment

7. Administration of GE scheme had now passed to CSU who had now issued letters to students who will become liable on 01/04/07 (approx 23,500 to UK students and 900 to EU students).

Personnel

8. The Agency had carried out an evaluation of the pilot special bonus scheme which allowed time off as well as payments (which were limited by Treasury rules). Results suggested that there was still a need to improve staff knowledge of the scheme. However feedback had generally been positive and management wished the scheme to continue. Tracy Richardson would consult SEHR about communicating this decision to our trade union representatives. **Action: Tracy.**

9. One member of staff had received an Imperial Service Medal in June for long and meritorious service and another had recently been nominated.

Information systems and Operational Policy

10. Online applications – signatures were no longer required on-line and numbers had increased to around 55%.

11. It was noted that the policy team were working with HELS and solicitors on minor changes for residency status.

12. The Scotsman newspaper had contacted the Agency for help to produce an article on student finance and the article was likely to be published shortly. It was agreed to send NEBMs copies when available. **Action: Linda**

13. GRASS/ SEAS interface – The Agency would in future make BACS payments and testing would start in September. This would reduce the risk of late payments and cut the time taken for payments to be made to students. Payable orders will continue to be paid by SEAS.

14. EDM was working well and most of the mail had been cleared within 1 day apart from during the period immediately following the issue of Highers results.

Chief Executive's Office

15. The Agency was continuing to work on SHAW and a positive living day had been arranged for 25 October. The Agency's environmental policy and procedures had been sent to the Minister to be considered by a cabinet sub-committee and it was hoped that useful feedback would be received.

Committee Minutes

16. Audit Committee – Audit had provided substantial assurances on the Agency's procedures and no weaknesses had been recorded in SAAS's final accounts. The Accounts had yet to be signed (due to Audit Scotland's report not yet having been formally completed) and copies would be sent to NEBMs once this had been done.

Action: Stephen

17. Audit Scotland had intimated that the timetable for accounts to be completed would again be shortened next year.

18. Finance Committee - The minutes were noted.

19. Health and Safety Committee - The minutes were noted.

Complaints

20. Several complaints had been received about GE and the GE team were working to reduce errors, although most of the complaints had been due to timing issues. One graduate had appealed (unsuccessfully) to the SPSO. Another student had made a "constitutional" appeal which had now escalated to a complaint. However, this appeared to be based on a wholly erroneous and irrational assumption that people were not subject to laws that they had not agreed to.

Staff Survey

21. SAAS staff survey results had been tabled for information. It was noted that the results again showed a distinction between CSU processing staff and other parts of the Agency. It had been agreed that individual units would feed the results back to staff in their own way using mid year reviews or team meetings as appropriate.

Institution Survey

22. Members also received a copy of the institution survey results and a letter the Agency had sent to institutions responding to some of the points to come out of the survey. It was agreed that hardship funding responses would be fed back to HELS. **Action: Linda/Stephen**

Corporate Year Planner

23. An updated year planner was circulated for information. It was noted that the Finance committee meetings would be held in October to discuss mid - year DRC expenditure and in November to consider programme expenditure.

Any other business

24. New NEBM – David had written to the Minister again in June but had had no response to date. David agreed to inform NEBMs as soon as a decision had been made.

Action: David

Date of Next Meeting

25. The next meeting would be held on 22 November at 2.00pm

Chief Executive's Office
28 August 2006