

AGENCY MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING TUESDAY 27TH FEBRUARY 2007

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

Apologies: Tracy Richardson, SAAS

David welcomed Bruce Nelson to his first Board meeting.

Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2006 were agreed.

Matters Arising

- A meeting with University Scotland administrators had taken place facilitated by Universities Scotland and hosted by Edinburgh University. A note of the meeting had been produced by SAAS and would be circulated to Board members. SAAS responses to issues raised would also be placed on the administrators' area on our website.
Action Linda
- A similar meeting had been held with college staff and a note of that meeting would also be circulated to members. Some difficult points had been raised but the Agency would try to respond to them – resources permitting. **Action:** Linda
- Logica Consultancy study – The Agency had still to receive the final report but work had already started on some recommendations that would be made in it including segmentation of incoming e-mails and the provision of dedicated training facilities that would allow new staff to learn in a secure environment and be brought up to operational effectiveness in a shorter timescale.
- Management Information – A new C1 had recently been appointed to strengthen the Finance Team and review key performance indicators to move the Agency to a balance scorecard by the end of 2007. Bruce Nelson said that he would be happy to meet with the new C1 to discuss Edinburgh University's experience of introducing the balance scorecard.

Quarterly Report

2. The report covered the period from October to the end of December. CSU had been very busy and received a large number of last minute applications and e-mails. Performance against targets was shown at Annex A of the report and it was noted that average performance had improved against the same quarter last year.

3. The work on the telephony upgrade had begun. New staff had been recruited and would be in place early enough to have received training prior to the start of next session.
4. As mentioned earlier, e-mail management was currently being reviewed as volumes had increased dramatically. CSU had received a large number of late applications in the last session and it was hoped that the new SMS service might help reduce the numbers in future.

Finance

5. Annex A - An estimated underspend of £107k on DRCs was mostly due to savings on pay due to staffing vacancies. The Agency would redeploy as much of this sum as could sensibly be spent on accommodation and equipment. A mailshot to all continuing students notifying them of the move to monthly payments as from 2007/08 would further reduce the underspend by about £15,000 – £20,000. There was also an estimated underspend on capital expenditure for the ILA project as some work had been delayed but this would be funded by SE next year.

Fraud

6. The Agency had again taken part in the National Fraud Initiative which matched data on student funding, loan parents, and housing benefit etc to identify fraudulent claimants. This information had also been shared for the first time with the Foreign Office who had raised some queries on residency which would need to be reviewed.
7. Loan parent funding – SAAS pay grants to loan parents only for **registered** childcare providers. However, it had come to our attention that some students, may have claimed the grant on this basis but subsequently changed to less expensive, unregistered providers. The Agency would ask for funding to be repaid in such cases since it would be difficult to prove fraudulent intent.

Personnel

8. The Agency's internal recruitment campaign had been successful and staff were due to take up post in March. It was noted that around 10 new A3s were required at the start of each session and that most vacancies were due to internal promotions within SAAS and the SE. In-house training was required at the start of each session and was arranged by the Agency's Training Officer.
9. The SE's new e-HR system had been delayed. It was hoped that this system would provide better management information for senior managers and allow more personnel issues to be delegated to line managers.
10. SHAW scheme – The team were due to meet the SHAW co-ordinator on 7 March to discuss new criteria for healthy working lives and the SHAW gold award.

Information systems and Operational Policy

11. Dental bursary Scheme – The new scheme had been very successful and the Agency had now been asked to work with Health Department colleagues on a further two bursary schemes.

12. It was noted that there had been a large increase in on-line applications(55%) which compared well with online services available in England(around 20 - 25%).

13. Website – A review of the website had been carried out by a placement student who had contacted institutions and set up focus groups for students to suggest improvements. She was now working to redesign the site taking this feedback into account and bringing the site up to modern standards.

14. SMS – bulk messaging would target particular student groups (e.g. loan parents, continuing students). To begin with, messages would only go one way since there difficulties about managing texted responses.

Chief Executive's Office

15. Staff awaydays would be held on 22nd and 23rd March. NEBMs agreed to attend if available.

Committee Minutes

16. Audit Committee – Internal audit delays had been due to staffing shortages but the Team would cover all the intended program later this year. A revised audit programme had been agreed at the meeting. The timetable for annual accounts had been shortened yet again but the timescale was thought to be achievable.

17. Audit Scotland report on GRASS/ IT Security – The Agency had recently received this report and would challenge one of the findings about a lack of management information available from GRASS. **Action:** David

18. Finance Committee – no issues to highlight.

19. Health & Safety Committee – The Agency continued to focus on improving environmental management and were using 100% renewable energy for electricity. A “switch off” campaign for office and IT equipment had been successful, reconditioned windows had been installed as had new energy efficient boilers.

Complaints Report

20. A report and list of complaints received over the last quarter had been circulated for information. Many of the complaints received were due to delays in responding to telephone calls or responding to e-mails or other correspondence. It had been agreed to increase GEU staff by 4 or 5 to help deal with the large number of calls received during the busy periods. Work was continuing to segment correspondence to help CSU and other areas deal with large volume of mail received at peak periods. The Agency also continued to receive complaints and appeals about policy issues - particularly the GE.

21. Late responses had been issued to two complaints but the 14 day (10 working day) target for responding to complaints was the same target as used by the SE.

Risk Register

22. It was noted during the discussion that the Agency Chief Executives' meetings were to be formalised to help develop relationship management with key stakeholders and that

the Agency's framework document would be reviewed after the May election and circulated to Board Members in due course.

Customer Survey Results

23. Customer survey results had been circulated for information. It had been agreed to publish a response on our website to the main issues raised and highlight improvements to be made to our services for the next session. Results had been circulated to staff for discussion within their teams.

24. The survey included a question about where the Agency was based (we receive around 3,000 visitors a year). It was agreed that this question might have lost its relevance due to the increased use of on-line services and it was agreed to consider whether to drop it from next year's survey. **Action:** Linda

25. The Agency were considering options for home working as it offered potential benefits in terms of reduced sick leave and less commuting for staff although there were issues around H&S and IT security that would need to be addressed. The Chief Executive would be having an initial discussion about home working with the TUS in March.

AOB

EU student numbers

26. A table showing numbers of EU students from 2003 onwards was circulated for information. It was agreed to produce an updated table every 6 months. It was noted that these students would only have their fees paid but some might also receive living cost support following the Bidar judgement. Increased EU numbers would have an impact on GE collection and we were working with SLC and the other three UK administrations to develop systems for pursuing debt abroad. **Action:** Linda

Date of Next Meeting

27. The next meeting had been arranged for Tuesday 22 May 2007 at 10am.

Chief Executive's Office
28 February 2007