

AGENCY MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING MONDAY 29TH AUGUST 2005

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

Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2005 were agreed.

Introduction

2. David Stephen welcomed the Agency's two new Non-Executive Board Members Margaret Munckton, Assistant Principal, Lauder College and Eileen Marshall, Finance Director, Glasgow College of Nautical Studies.

Matters Arising

3. David updated the board on developments since the last meeting:-
 - Staffing - Linda Pender had returned to SAAS and would act as secretary to the board. Donald Wood had left the Agency. Stephen Blyth and Tracy Richardson would now report directly to David on finance and personnel issues respectively. The Chief Executive's post had recently been regraded to SCS and David would remain on temporary promotion until his retirement in 2007.
 - Open days - the Agency had held an open day for FE Institutions on 19 August. A second event for HE administrators was due to be held on 2 September. Main features included demonstrations of the EDM and online systems and how caseworkers process applications.
 - DSA – work was on-going on research into the increase in the number of students claiming DSA.
 - ILAs – 13,500 applications had been received to date and 600 under the universal scheme launched at the end of July.
 - Graduate Endowment – David agreed to keep board members informed of developments and, if necessary, would report to NEBMs outwith board meetings.
 - SAAS recruitment – this continued to be a problem. A meeting of Agency Chief Executive's was due to be held late in September. This would give an opportunity to explore whether there might be consortium arrangements that could facilitate staff movement.
 - CD-ROMs – As feedback had been positive, David had written to heads of all HE institutions suggesting that the Agency should issue CD-ROM's instead of printed forms and guidance documents for them to give out to intending students. Most institutions had agreed to the suggestion but preferred continuation of a reduced paper supply for at least the medium term. SAAS would act accordingly.

- Efficient Government – a feasibility study on scanning services had been sent to AiB and we were awaiting a response.
- SAAS pay loans – the project was on track. SLC were having project management difficulties but had now agreed to produce costs by end September.

Quarterly Report

CSU

4. Audrey updated the board on work within CSU. More applications had been received by end June 2005 than ever before and processing was about 2 weeks ahead of normal for this time of year. This was mostly due to the introduction of the new shortened application forms which had now been extended to cover nursing bursaries. Processes had been streamlined within EDM control and most data capture and transfer was completed within 3 days.

5. The General Enquiry Unit now had information available on the GRASS system to help them deal with enquiries. The introduction of the new telephony project had run into problems and, as we had now missed our busiest period, it had been decided to delay implementation until the end of the session.

6. CSU did not have a full staff complement. The shortfall was due mostly to difficulties filling recurring appointments. A new recruitment campaign to fill these posts would start towards the end of the session. Meantime, temporary agency staff were being employed to cover some of the vacancies.

Finance

7. Delegated budgets for 2005/06 were shown at Annex B of the report. Prints were not as yet available for programme expenditure but the Finance Team were working with finance colleagues to improve the quality of information provided. For example, future prints would include spend on DSA, travel etc. The Finance Team Manager would be working with ETLLD Finance colleagues in Glasgow to improve our knowledge of programme expenditure. It was noted that 100% of invoices had been paid on time putting SAAS at the top of the Departmental league table.

8. From the responses to letters sent out regarding GE due in April 2005, 217 students had agreed to pay in one lump sum, 490 wanted to take out a loan but no response had been received from 609. It was thought that some of these students would have failed their exams so would not be liable for GE. A further 17,000 letters had been issued since June 2005 for GE due in April 2006 but response rates were not yet available.

9. Pauline Weetman asked how we would follow up GE cases if students resit exams but do not reapply for fees, or drop out in 4th year and graduate with an ordinary degree. It was agreed that there could be many reasons for dropping out and that we should check to ensure that our systems pick all of these up. Pauline Weetman suggested the Agency could consult with institutions to find out if there might be problems which we were unaware of. This issue would be added to our risk register.

Fraud

10. Three fraud cases were currently being considered by the Crown Office.

Debt Recovery

11. It was explained that most debt recovery was due to early withdrawal from courses or changes in parental incomes.

Personnel

12. The Personnel Team were working to fill vacancies using the new SE arrangements. Most vacancies had had to be filled temporarily by Pertemps casual staff and student work placements. Managers had been asked to inform personnel of staff looking for a new post or a move. It was hoped that a forthcoming change in the civil service retirement age might encourage people over 60 to apply for recurring appointments in the Agency.

13. It was agreed that future reports should include comparative information on recipients of special bonus payments by Quarter.

IS & Operational Policy

14. In the past the Agency's printing had been carried out centrally but this had caused problems every year by being outwith our control. Our new in-house printing facilities had been a great success and we were now looking at the possibility of printing our own forms.

15. A group had been set up to look at the risk of accepting electronic signatures for on-line applications. This would include solicitors, auditors and FfL colleagues. The first meeting would be held in September. Margaret Munckton congratulated the Agency on its on-line services which she felt were user friendly.

16. The Agency had carried out a pilot exercise to look at the possibility of using Short Message Services (SMS) to contact students and this had been successful. Consideration was now being given to how SMS could best be used to improve communications.

17. Stirling University was the only institution not using BACS 1st payments as they were currently developing an internal IT system.

Chief Executive's Office

18. The SHAW Team were currently finalising the Agency's portfolio for the silver award.

19. The Agency had signed up for a new Quality Scotland investors in excellence scheme. Under the scheme, organisations can have their progress towards excellence assessed and accredited. This was in contrast to the scheme of recognition that had operated up until now which relied largely on an annual excellence awards competition in which the number of winners was severely limited.

20. The Agency had recently been subject to a power cut for 2½ hours. This had not affected production by all that much but did point to a need for some re-examination of the arrangements that would swing into force if a cut of longer duration were to be experienced (eg guaranteeing the availability of hot desks and standby servers). Given

that there had been only one previous power failure in the last six years, the costs of installing a back up generator could not be justified.

Finance Committee meeting

21. The committee had discussed the Quigley scheme whereby the Executive meets the fourth year fees of certain English students studying in Scotland. SAAS was acting only as a post box for the scheme and could not be held responsible if under or overspends occurred. It was decided that if Finance colleagues could not accept this situation, SAAS should withdraw its postbox facility.

Health and Safety Committee

22. New vending machines would be delivered next week to improve facilities for staff and new procedures were now in place for accident reporting forms to comply with Data Protection requirements.

Complaints Report

23. It was agreed to add an explanatory note on RAG 80 to the next complaints report and to review the report headings to clarify reasons for complaints.

Risk Register – Management Board responsibilities

24. The board considered the extract from the main risk register which showed high level/high impact risks and the following amendments were agreed:-

- System failure within SLC –close next session when SAAS take over loan payments.
- Staff stress and health - add SHAW under action required.
- Power shortage or failures – review action required.
- Non availability of SCOTS - Change to low impact and not for MB responsibility.
- ILAs - Agreed to close as a high level risk.
- Guru dependency - change impact from high to medium risk.
- EDM Phase 2 - Delete these as no longer project and same risk as other staffing areas.
- Finance - Add new risk of reliance on SEAS systems SEAS (H/H)
- Debt Recovery workload - Take GE out and add as a new separate risk.

25. It was agreed there was a need to consider link with risk register and other existing documents such as the internal audit control report, project plans and the business continuity plan. Graham Gunn undertook to produce a grid analysis showing how risks requiring review by the Board should be identified.

SAAS Annual Report /Accounts/Corporate Plan

26. Board members considered the draft and the following amendments were suggested:-

Accounts

- Page 1 – quantify 8% (5.5% pay awards and 2.5% depreciation)
- Page 11 – expand note 6 to explain creditors position.

- Page 6 – review text
- Page 14 – revised formatting

Annual Report

- Page 7 – review graph showing number of applications received.
- Page 10 – add footnote to explain 64% customer satisfaction rate for e-mail enquiries was due to volume growth.
- Page 9 - Redraft FOI paragraph to make more positive.

Corporate Plan

- Aims – it was agreed to move SAAS pay loans to higher level

27. It was agreed that board members could contact David outwith the meeting if they had any more detailed comments. Once the accounts had been signed they would be sent along with the Annual report and Corporate Plan to the minister for agreement before being printed and laid before the Scottish Parliament.

Audit Reports

28. Martin Lowe summarised the discussions from the Audit Committee meeting and informed the board that the Audit Committee's remit would be amended to say "to support the Chief Executive and Management Board". Audit Reports and action plans would go to Audit Committee before they were copied to the management board although any major problems would be brought to the board's attention as soon as possible.

Date of Next Meeting

29. A schedule of meetings would be arranged for 2006 and circulated to the board with the corporate governance schedule.

Chief Executive's Office
31 August 2005