

SAAS Quarterly Review Meeting – Thursday 8th September 2005 at 11.00am

Attending: Mark Batho (Chair)
David Stephen
Graham Gunn
Audrey Heatlie
Stephen Blyth
Tracy Richardson
Chris McCrone, ETLLD Finance
Linda Pender (Secretary)

Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May were agreed although Chris felt that paragraphs 9 - 11 were overly detailed. Mark, on the other hand, found such detail useful as an aide memoir given the time that elapsed between meetings.

Matters Arising

1. The following items were discussed:-

- Sharon Treit's revision of the finance "concordat had recently been received. Subject to some detailed points (eg regarding verification of the RAB charge), the general feeling seemed to be that the revised arrangements proposed by Sharon should be workable. That, plus the agreement that had now been reached for Graham Philp (SAAS Finance Team) to work part time in Glasgow with Chris's team, should greatly improve overall finance liaison arrangements.
- 17,000 letters had been issued to students due to pay GE in 2006. From experience with the 2005 cohort, we could expect around 5,000 of these to be going on to a fourth year so deferring their liability until 2007. Around 6,000 had not so far responded at all and only 2,000 had indicated a willingness to pay. This pointed to a potentially massive increase in debt recovery action.
- ILA numbers had increased following the most recent Learndirect advertising campaign around 400-500 applications per day were currently being received the total to date to around 15,000. Evaluation arrangements for the scheme made provision for comparison of the actual numbers received against the estimates contained in the original business case.
- Work on SAAS payment of loans was progressing smoothly at the SAAS end. However changes in SLC project management methods and personnel had caused delays at their end and an estimate of their exit costs was not now expected until 7th October. FfL had indicated they could live with this in terms of the timing of a Ministerial announcement.
- A meeting had been held with DfES and SLC senior managers to discuss the Scottish proportion of the Company's running costs. It had been agreed that this question would be pursued by the Team undertaking the end – to – end review of SLC that was due to report in November. David would minute the Team's leader in the next week or so to ensure that the issue was not lost sight of.
- The Agency had sent proposals to AiB for the provision of scanning and printing services. Their Chief Executive seemed disposed to agree these and a response was expected within the next two weeks.
- Following SAAS's initiative to promote online applications in institutions with low take up rates, the overall proportion of applications received over the Internet had gone up from 18% to 23%.
- A meeting had been arranged with solicitors and auditors to discuss dispensing with the need for online applicants to download and sign a precis of their application to send by post to SAAS. This requirement was the single biggest obstacle to obtaining the full benefits of the investment that had been made in online services.

Quarterly Report

2. Audrey said that there had been an improvement in processing figures due to the new shortened applications for continuing students. CSU were now 3 weeks ahead of processing figures for previous years

and over 100,000 applications had gone through EDM. The Agency's decision to discontinue acknowledgement letters this year had not had any impact on customer service. The shortened application forms had been extended to nursing students in June and the EDM scanning process had been streamlined so that applications were normally on the GRASS system within 3 days of receipt. CSU now accepted photocopies of documents so no longer had to photocopy and send back originals.

3. CSU were running below full staffing complement as it had been difficult to recruit seasonal staff and there had also been a decrease in Pertemps staff availability. Mid term reviews had taken place in August. Feedback had been very positive and staff could now see the full benefits of EDM.

4. David said that the team reviewing the SLC had benchmarked SAAS performance against that of Hampshire (one of the larger English LEAs). Their most striking comparison had been between the rate at which the two organisations process applications (SAAS c 95% in 12 days or less; Hampshire 6 weeks or more).

Finance

5. Annex B showed the Agency's delegated budgets for 2005-06. Chris said that GE funding would be increased at the autumn budget revision and that any additional ILA funding would need to be agreed with Laura Barjonas in FfL. The new Finance B2 would work for part of each month with ETLLED Finance colleagues in Glasgow to learn more about finance issues and how the ETLLED Team work.

6. The Agency had reduced the frequency of Finance Committee meetings to 4 per year but it was noted that this might not fit with Finance's new timetables. It would, for example, be necessary to have an estimate of outturn on fees by end September – not October as had originally been proposed. It was agreed that Stephen Blyth would work with the Agency's statistician to produce an outturn figure based on actual applications for tuition fees up to the end of September plus an estimate for October based on previous trends.

7. The Agency had transferred 910 records to SLC for students due to pay the GE in 2005 but 300 of these students had subsequently gone on to a fourth year and so had not been liable to pay until 2006. SLC could not apparently cancel these students from their system and had not responded to a suggestion that they should wipe all 910 records following which SAAS could resend details for the 610 due to pay in 2005. David undertook to hasten progress by contacting SLC's ICT Director.

8. The Debt Recovery Team's workload had increased due to GE. Stephen agreed to keep Mark closely informed of developments.

9. The recent breakdown of SEAS had affected mostly monthly paid student nurses. It was agreed that there was a serious reputational risk to SAAS when payments were delayed and that this could be mitigated by the Agency having control of the end to end process.

Personnel

10. The Agency had been covering a number of vacancies with Pertemps staff but most of these were now departing and not being replaced due to a general dearth of contract staff as student workers returned to their courses.

11. Work was in hand to improve the statistics provided in the Personnel report and place less reliance on obtaining data from SE HR systems.

IS & Operational Policy

12. Graham said that the SMS pilot project had been a success and he would be discussing with David how best to implement a messaging service next year.

13. The Agency's new in-house printing service had also proved successful and we were now looking at the possibility of printing our forms and guidance booklets in-house.

14. The new telephony system had not been ready to go live when expected and BT had now made a report on the problems which had led to this. It had now been decided to delay implementation until the

system was working fully. This would give staff more time to become familiar with it before the start of next session. David had also negotiated reduced costs due to the delay.

15. The Agency had received very positive feedback on the recent HE and FE open days held at Gyleview House and also from Agency staff attending events held at institutions.

Chief Executive's Office

16. A feasibility study on the cost of installing a back up generator had been completed and it had been decided that the cost could not be justified. This had been only the 2nd power cut in memory and the proximity of major banks and insurance companies tended to ensure that such problems were fixed quickly. It was agreed that the risk of future cuts would be tolerated.

Date of Next Meeting

17. To be arranged.

Chief Executive's Office
8 September 2005