

## **Quarterly Review Meeting – Wed 24 November at 2.00pm**

Attending: Mark Batho (Chair)  
David Stephen  
Graham Gunn  
Audrey Heatlie  
Stephen Blyth  
Chris McCrone  
Tracy Richardson  
Frances Donnelly (Secretary)

Apologies: Donald Wood

### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> August were agreed.

### **Matters Arising**

The following items were updated:-

- Capital funding for new telephony equipment had been secured, equipment was on order and the new system would be available for the start of next session.
- David asked for confirmation of the new RAB charge as he had seen it quoted as 29% in a recent submission to Ministers. Chris McCrone confirmed that the RAB charge was approx 38% for 2004-2005 and 31% for 2005-2006.
- Martin Lowe had attended his first meeting of the Management Board as a Non-Executive member.

### **Quarterly Report**

#### CSU

1. Audrey reported that the session had gone well and the CSU had continued to achieve good results. Approximately 128,000 applications had been received and processed so far. The Unit would now be concentrating on applications for travel expenses and the January intake of Nursing and Midwifery students. Other work would include improvement groups and staff training.
2. Mark Batho commented that this had been a significant achievement by the CSU over the year. David said that the new ways of working dictated by EDM had now been firmly implanted and more training had helped staff appreciate the benefits the system had to offer. Anecdotally, SAAS results were considerably better than in the rest of the UK and we were trying to arrange a benchmarking exercise with a Local Education Authority in England or Wales in order to confirm this.

3. Mark asked if the current performance targets SAAS was working to were adequate. David felt that they were not and that he would prefer to develop outcome based targets that could be measured in terms of satisfaction ratings established by customer surveys. Numeric and time targets would still be retained for internal management purposes but 100% targets could probably be dropped since they tended to be demotivating. It was agreed that SAAS should develop target proposals on these lines and seek Ministerial agreement to them following consultation within the Department.
4. There had continued to be problems with the printing services at Saughton House and alternative options were being considered, including an in-house printing facility. Problems with the telephony system meant statistics were not available for a short time and the flood on 1<sup>st</sup> September had affected the business for one week.
5. Mark asked if SAAS had recovery procedures in place in the event of a more serious incident. David confirmed SAAS had off-site back-up facilities and the immediate response systems had been revised as a result of lessons learned from the flood. A claim was being pursued with the contractor's insurers for loss of production and damaged facilities.
6. David reported that the shortened application for continuing students claiming only fees and/or a non-means tested loan had been a success. 20,000 forms had been issued and 14,000 returned. Use of the form would be extended next session to a further 20,000 or so students who were exempt from a parental contribution.

### Finance

7. Annex B showed a £530,000 overspend in running costs due to an increase in DSA assessments. Stephen Blyth said this should be transferred to programme expenditure in the Winter supplementaries. The projected end of year position currently showed a saving on staff costs. This needed to be adjusted for staff costs on capitalised project work that had now come to an end but it seemed likely that some of the saving could be surrendered.
8. Stephen tabled a revised Annex C based on the latest projected student numbers from our economists and statisticians. The former RAB charge of 38.3% had been used.
9. Previous trends were showing a decrease in the number of students applying for travel expenses. This would be monitored as there had been no changes in policy that would explain this. The amount projected for YSB was growing. This was due to students in all course years being eligible to claim this bursary from next session.
10. It was noted that the Debt Recovery Unit was still performing well.

## Personnel

11. Tracy reported on the recent recruitment campaign for Band A staff. Mainstream SE had had a lot of interest from other government departments from staff seeking inter-departmental transfer. Tracy would assess whether any of them might be suitable for SAAS.
12. Personnel would proceed with the campaign for recurring appointments. The advert would be in the press next week with interviews held in January.
13. Mark noted that the sick absence rates in SAAS were quite high. David said that this was due to the long term absence of three members of staff.

## IS Systems

14. A small pilot study would look at text messaging next year. Examples of texting might include acknowledging applications or sending and receiving messages from students.
15. Costs provided by Astron for printing services for the Executive suggested that it would be cheaper for SAAS to print its own letters. However, Frances Donnelly and Donald Crease would first visit the SLC's plant at Hillington to get comparative costs and the options would then be evaluated.
16. Graham said that four tenderers had been invited to bid for the ICT contract but only three bids had been received. The second evaluation meeting was due to be held on the 25<sup>th</sup> November and it was hoped the successful bidder would be identified at that meeting.
17. The ILAS scheme would begin on the 13 December 2004.
18. Mark asked if the increase in online applications had been as expected. Graham said he would have expected more of an increase had it not been for shortened applications, but the increase from 12 to 15% was nonetheless welcome. David said that the online service would not really take off until we were able to accept electronic signatures.

## CE Office

19. Mark undertook to chase DFM for agreement to publish the SAAS Annual report, accounts and Corporate Plan. (Approval has been received since the meeting and the report will be published in December).
20. The Disability Discrimination Act audit had made some recommendations for changes to the building which would be considered. Some of the alterations seemed needless – for example, to replace the front doors which had posed no problems for disabled staff working in the Agency.

**Personnel Report**

21. It was noted that the SPPA was being used as a comparator for personnel statistics as they were in some ways similar to SAAS.

**SE Staff Survey 2004**

22. This report had been tabled for information and was duly noted.

**Any other Business**

23. No other business.

**Date of next meeting**

24. The date of the next meeting would be arranged in due course.

Chief Executive's Office  
1 December 2004