

## **AGENCY MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING**

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2005

Present: David Stephen (Chair)  
Professor Pauline Weetman  
Jaki Carnegie  
Martin Lowe  
Graham Gunn  
Donald Wood  
Audrey Heatlie  
Stephen Blyth  
Frances Donnelly (Secretary)

1. This would be Jaki Carnegie's last meeting as her appointment was due to end at the beginning of April. David thanked her for the useful and positive contribution she had made to the Management Board during her time as a member.

### **Minutes of previous meeting**

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November were agreed.

### **Matters Arising**

The Chief Executive updated the Board on action taken since the last meeting:-

3. Telephony - David reported that the equipment would be delivered this month and staff would receive training before the start of next session.
4. The Universities Scotland event had been a success and we had received extremely good feedback. Martin Lowe confirmed that the presentations delivered had been clear and effective. Universities Scotland had been grateful for the speed with which a number of questions had been followed up. Overall, the event had been very much appreciated and he had been told that universities were looking to re-institute the former practice of holding annual seminars involving SAAS and sector representatives.
5. Martin was concerned about some of the questions that had been raised in relation to our performance indicators whereby some institutions had claimed that applications had been taking from 6-10 weeks to be processed. David said that a number of such cases had been investigated and it had generally been found that late applications, incomplete applications and some students not applying at all had contributed to overly long processing times. Where there had been systems problems in the past, these had been reported to the Board. Some of the concerns raised at Dundee might have arisen from people recalling 2003/04 when there had been some delays at the start of the season although no-one who had applied correctly and on time had been paid late.
6. Martin commented also on the rise in DSA claims and in particular the apparent increase in Dyslexic students. David explained the assessment process that was being developed by the DSA Stakeholder Group. They would shortly be piloting a quality control 'toolkit' which would allow institutions to be recognised as capable of carrying out their own needs assessments and so reduce the logjams of cases at existing Assessment Centres. Jaki said this was a very good approach and would help widen the scope for assessments. She felt that much of the increase in Dyslexia cases was due to the condition not having been recognised sufficiently in the past and the greater availability nowadays of better diagnostic tools. It was noted that DSA assessment costs had been returned to programme expenditure thereby removing the distortion of running costs they had previously been causing.

7. David said that the IT contract had been awarded to BT and should be finalised shortly. BT had in-depth knowledge of SAAS operations and provided good VFM. This news was welcomed by the Board.
8. The new ILA scheme had begun late in December. Approximately 1700 applications had so far been received. David confirmed that SAAS's role was to maintain the Learner accounts and pay learning providers: Learndirect was responsible for guaranteeing the quality of Learning providers and for customer relationship management.
9. SAAS was still pursuing the loss from the flood. A loss adjuster had visited the Agency to inspect damage but had yet to report back.
10. Some staff had not attended work on the day Industrial Action was called for by their union but, as predicted, business had not been significantly affected.

### **Quarterly Report**

11. Audrey Heatlie updated the telephony stats in the report. Within the quarter, 68% of calls had been answered within 25 seconds and all calls answered within 3 minutes. The average delay in replying during the third quarter had been 13 secs. Processing had gone well throughout the session. Statistics showing the volume of documents being handled by EDM were being shown in the report for only the second time so it was still too early to discern any trends.

### **Finance**

12. Donald referred to Annex B which showed DSA assessment costs transferred back into programme costs as well as the Spring budget revisions.
13. The salaries of staff engaged on project work had been capitalised but since the projects themselves had now been completed, the cost of these staff would now transfer back into running costs. Between now and the end of the year, re-carpeting and other planned maintenance work would be carried out. Printers and other equipment would shortly be purchased to implement the decision that had been taken to bring a lot of the Agency's production of letters in-house.
14. Annex C - Stephen Blyth reported that programme spend should remain within budget. The next fees run would be crucial in determining how close to budget we would be.

### **Graduate Endowment (GE)**

15. Jaki asked if the numbers outstanding for this year included EU students. Donald confirmed they did but that EU students only accounted for a small proportion.

### **Debt Recovery**

16. Stephen reported that the debt recovery team had regularly been beating their target for the recovery of overpayments and other debts.

### **Fraud**

17. Stephen circulated copies of an article published in Aberdeen University's "Gaudie" newspaper. This was a full and frank confession by a student who had committed a travel expense fraud and been detected by the Agency. It was felt by Agency management that publication of the confession and the views it contained would act as more of a deterrent to other potential fraudsters than even a successful conviction.

## **Personnel**

18. Bonus Scheme - Donald said that a number of bonuses had been handed out in the quarter and the evaluation exercise would take place in March. Jaki asked who decided on the successful recipients. Donald confirmed that line managers put nominations forward and decisions were taken by the Chief Executive and Unit Heads. It was made clear to staff that any time awarded as a bonus could only be taken off with the prior agreement of line managers. The evaluation exercise would consider the views of both those who had been awarded bonuses and those who hadn't.
19. Recruitment - Donald said that three members of staff from other government departments had been considered but not assessed as suitable. A recruitment campaign for recurring seasonal appointments has just finished. Eight enquiry officers and seven EDM Assistants had been secured.

## **Information Systems & Operational Policy**

20. David said that the SLC would be approaching Scottish institutions to make all payments by BACS compulsory. This had been agreed by the Student Modernisation Board.
21. Graham said that the roll-out of SETV had caused problems with the printers. Plans were already in place to replace these. David confirmed that staff access had been restricted in the same way as applied to use of the Internet (ie out of working hours unless necessary for a work related purpose).
22. Graham reported that the student support literature for 2005-2006 was now at the printers.
23. The SMS project to communicate with students via their mobile 'phones was underway and the BSU would be writing out to ask for participation in a small pilot exercise. The project was being managed entirely in-house. Dummy tests had already been carried out successfully.

## **Chief Executive's Office**

24. Frances gave an update on progress to the Silver SHAW award. The team would be meeting with The Health Board next week for a progress meeting. Some of the criteria for Silver had already been covered whilst working to Bronze.
25. David reported that a team of staff had visited Hampshire County Council to begin a joint benchmarking exercise. The team will do a follow-up review from the trip and report to David. Hampshire County Council was also keen to visit SAAS. An update will be given at the next Management Board meeting.
26. David commented on the style of the new SAAS video and CD – ROM which was much more in tune with the target audience. The management board would get copies when it was finalised.

## **Committee Meetings**

27. The Finance committee was the only committee to have met in the quarter. Donald explained the committee was beginning to look more closely at programme costs and the identification of trends.

## **Complaints**

28. Audrey Heatlie commented on the three complaints not answered within 14 days. One complaint was part of a number of pieces of correspondence received from one gentleman within a very short timescale. Confusion over responding to the correct letter meant that one letter missed the target. The second reply was late by one day and the third complaint did not receive an interim reply in error. However, the correspondent had been contacted by telephone.

29. David confirmed that SAAS does review the nature of complaints and this is fed back into training or other measures to prevent recurrence. This procedure would be highlighted in the new complaints recording system being introduced during February. It was agreed that commendations should be recorded as well as complaints.

#### **Web Traffic**

30. Jaki commented that the web statistics on accessing the application progress area of the site were encouraging.

#### **Any Other Business**

31. David summarised initiatives being taken under the Efficient Government Programme.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

32. To be arranged.

Frances Donnelly  
9 February 2005