

AGENCY MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING

Thursday 5th May 2005

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

Carole Finnigan attended in place of Graham Gunn.

Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February were agreed.

Matters Arising

The Chief Executive updated the board on developments since the last meeting:-

2. Interviews would take place in the next two weeks for a replacement board member for Jaki Carnegie. Four FE candidates had been nominated.

3. Telephony – the go-live date for the new system would now be 11 July.

4. The Agency had written to Universities Scotland and the Association of Scottish Colleges suggesting further events on the lines of the Dundee seminar. Responses had been muted partly, it was felt, because of the associated administrative burden. SAAS would now consider holding an event in Gyleview House some time around August. This would be part plenary (to let us update institution staff on policy and operational changes) and partly designed to let university/college administrators see our operation at first hand and speak to the people here that they deal with. Pauline Weetman commented that frontline staff at the institutions valued visits where they had the chance to meet staff at SAAS.

5. David had asked for some research to be done regarding the increase in the number of Dyslexic students claiming DSA. Initial findings suggested that there were differences between institutions that might require further investigation. Some analysis at course level might also be attempted. Martin Lowe commented that the findings would be of interest and potential assistance to Disability Advisers.

6. The IT contract with BT was now up and running. The ILAS scheme was working well but there had been a lower, initial level of uptake than expected. Further work would be done to see which courses were being taken and by whom. The scheme was sound in terms of fraud prevention but it was much too early to ascertain if it was delivering VFM.

7. David had not heard any further news from colleagues in Transport about the potential scheme to help Scottish young people with travel expenses.

8. The loss claim in respect of the flood had been successful and SAAS had secured £17,000 to complete repairs.

9. The SE had introduced new guidance on recruitment which could cause problems for SAAS. When filling posts the first option would be managed moves within Departments, then interdepartmental moves, internal advertising and finally External Advertising if the internal market could not supply. The main SAAS concern was that moves between the Agency and the Department would seldom be feasible given that most staff were in Glasgow. A West of Edinburgh consortium was being considered as an alternative.

10. The new video had gone down well and Glasgow University had requested a supply of 3000 CD's to send to prospective students. CD ROMs could conceivably be used to supplant forms and guidance booklets for all students next session and, by making paper less immediately accessible, might encourage greater take up of online applications.

Quarterly Report

11. Customer Services Unit - Audrey Heatlie reported results for the last quarter and the year as a whole. Processes were now being reviewed for the session ahead. The two larger case processing teams had been merged to allow different ways of managing the workload and transfer skills. Work continued with the BSU and the test team to prepare for the start of the new session.

12. 2004-2005 had been the first full year of EDM. The session had gone well and this had been helped by changes implemented throughout the year. Only part telephony statistics were available at points during the year due to problems with the current system. These should be resolved when the new system was introduced.

13. Audrey commented that there had been some concerns among staff over revised targets. Pauline asked how these had been set. Audrey confirmed they were based on what we need to achieve and advice from Auditors on levels of output that could reasonably be expected. Audrey said that after some initial general unrest the staff seem to be more secure in what they were being asked to achieve. Looking forward, Audrey said there had been some difficulties in filling vacancies and they would need to look at temporary staff and work placements. Refresher training would continue. David asked Audrey how the start of the session had been progressing. Audrey said that approximately 300 – 400 applications were being received daily (c.18,000 to date) and around 98% of these had already been processed.

14. Finance, Fraud and Personnel - Donald Wood highlighted an underspend in running costs of £337,000 which had been due to the late start of the ILA scheme. An underspend of £350,000 had been reported to ETLTD finance. Adjustments for prepayments and accruals would make up the difference. Capital spend was on target. Stephen Blyth commented that difficulties in recruitment this year could result in an underspend next year. Pauline commented that the amount spent on job related training was quite low. Stephen said that much of this underspend was ILA related. Pauline highlighted the need to make sure the training budget was not cut next year.

15. The number of non-responses to the Graduate Endowment had reduced to 877. Debt recovery action would now be initiated on these cases. Letters would also be issued to those students who had agreed to pay. Stephen Blyth commented that the amount of outstanding debt had been reduced. Pauline asked how much was due to recovery as opposed to write off. This information was not immediately available but would be reported separately in future.

16. Donald Wood confirmed that the pilot for the Special Bonus Scheme was now complete. Questionnaires had been issued and one to one interviews had been arranged. Donald said that

the response rate had been poor. David commented that time rather than cash bonuses worked better when large numbers of staff were involved.

17. Donald said that SAAS had worked hard to recruit staff in advance of the deadline for the new resourcing policy. David commented that EDM was carrying 11 vacancies which could be quite serious if the posts were left vacant. Audrey Heatlie confirmed that the staffing position in the report was as at March. Audrey had started to fill a number of vacancies in EDM and GEU and a number of staff had been identified to start in the near future.

18. Information Systems and Operational Policy - Carole Finnigan gave an update on the SMS Texting pilot. A questionnaire had been devised and would shortly be issued to the customers who took part in the pilot. Carole also confirmed that instructions to institutions for BACS 1st were being reviewed.

19. IT development for phase 2 of the ILA scheme was now complete and testing between SAAS and SUfl had begun. Operational testing would take place in June. The Universal scheme was expected to go live in July. Carole mentioned there were some problems with the testing which they hoped to resolve soon. David highlighted the need to go live before course registration began in August.

20. SAAS had recently met with the Nursing Directorate who agreed that the Shortened Application could be extended to Nursing students and that they should now also have the facility to apply online. The Shortened Application would go out at the beginning of June aiming at the September intake of students.

21. More generally, the policy team would continue to work closely with FfL, and teams in SAAS with regard to future changes and advice. David Stephen commented that the changes for session 2006-2007 should be largely clerical rather than system changes.

22. Pauline Weetman asked if management reactions to the views given as part of the syndicate exercise at the Awaydays were fed back to staff. David confirmed that feedback would be given at mid year reviews after the three year forward plan had been agreed. Pauline commented it was important that staff see that their views are properly considered. She had been impressed by the depth of discussion of work issues at the Awaydays.

23. Finance Committee – Donald reported that the Committee was focusing more closely on programme spend. This was a difficult area in which SAAS CE has responsibility for programme but the Head of ETLTD is the accountable officer. An exercise was being conducted by the Executive's Accountancy Services Unit to look at the financial responsibilities between SAAS, FfL and Analytical services to see if there were better ways of allocating financial responsibility.

24. Fraud Committee – Donald Wood reported that SE Internal Audit Service had commented favourably on the ways in which fraud prevention and detection are handled by the Agency.

25. Audit Committee – Donald Wood said that the annual accounts had been late last year. The senior accountant will be preparing the accounts this year for the end of May. A replacement junior accountant, Graham Philp, was due to start in the Agency in the near future. Martin Lowe said that he had met with Alan Smith and Angus Hepburn from Audit Services. They supported proposals in the last Audit Committee minutes to review the Committee's terms of reference, the Audit Strategy and the service level agreements in time for agreement at the next meeting. Martin Lowe also confirmed he would take the chair of the Audit Committee.

26. Health and Safety Committee – Frances would take forward training for the Health and Safety Officer on accident recording and Data protection issues.
27. ISSC – No comments on the minutes.
28. Complaints – It was noted that the number of complaints received in the quarter was relatively small.
29. David said that the commitment to table audit reports to the Management Board had begun to be fulfilled. The latest Audit report had been the EDM Audit. There had been no criticisms of substance in the report and Angus Hepburn had attended a meeting at SAAS to agree some minor recommendations. It was noted that Audit Service's forward plans were normally agreed in advance with SAAS.
30. Date of Next Meeting
To be arranged.

Frances Donnelly
16 May 2005