

SAAS MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING THURSDAY 6TH NOVEMBER 2008

Present: David Stephen, Chief Executive
Bruce Nelson, NEBM
Eileen Marshall, NEBM
Allan Forsyth, NEBM
Dugald Mackie, NEBM
Graham Gunn, SAAS
Audrey Shimmons, SAAS
Audrey Heatlie, SAAS
Maureen Shevas, SAAS
Ewhan Barschtschyk, SAAS (for Balanced Scorecard item only)
Linda Pender, SAAS (Secretary)

1. David Stephen welcomed the new NEBMs Dugald Mackie and Allan Forsyth to their first meeting.

Minutes of the previous meeting

2. The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 August 2008 were agreed.

Matters Arising

3. David updated the Board on the following issues:-

- ILA500 fee grant for part time students - There was an underspend on the scheme due to the over estimate of demand.
- Quality Scotland – SAAS and QS had had a productive meeting on 23 October. As a consequence of Andrew Cubie's personal intervention, the Agency had been given extra time to develop our QS application and the fee had been waived. An application for the excellence awards would be put forward by April.
- Balanced Scorecard - The Quarterly Report was continuing in its present format pending further development of the Balanced Scorecard.
- Fraud - SAAS staff would be attending a meeting with Universities Scotland on 27 November to discuss confirmation of attendance data.

On this last issue, it was noted that the Borders Agency were pressing universities to use new software they had developed to monitor the attendance of students outwith the EU. Universities were suggesting instead that attendance could be monitored on the basis that failure to complete course work or attend tutorials could be the prime indicator that someone had dropped out of a course. SAAS currently had 30,000 records without proper confirmation details although we were reasonably confident that 25,000 or more of these were due to glitches with SLC data transfers. SAAS would speak to SLC in advance of meeting Universities Scotland on the 27th. **Action:** David to keep the Board posted.

- GE Abolition –The Internal Audit report on the Abolition of GE had reported no signs of systemic failure on the part of SAAS.

- Means Testing - The regulations had not been annulled at the SP Committee meeting on 2 September but the Agency had been asked to provide statistics later in the year on students whose support had been affected by the changes. The Agency had recently issued a questionnaire to FE bursary officers to provide information on the resource consequences of checking income figures in more detail.
- Edinburgh University student record system - Michael Jackson was due to meet Jimmy Thin from Edinburgh University next week to discuss IT systems development issues that Edinburgh had successfully resolved.
- Framework Document – The Agency had just received new guidance from the centre and David would be attending a seminar on 7 November to discuss the move to an outcome based approach. **Action:** It was hoped to be able to share a draft with NEBMs shortly.

Quarterly Report

4. The Report covered the period July to end September. CSU had completed the processing session by end October 3 weeks earlier than last year - our best ever performance. This had been due in part to the increase of online applications (now 81%).

5. GE – Outstanding cases would be passed to the debt recovery team by next month. A number of complaints had been received from students who still had to pay the GE despite its abolition.

6. The Agency had received some correspondence on delays in answering 'phone calls. We are unable to provide adequate phone cover for a short period of time each year (2-3 weeks) and, at peak times, some students have to queue to get through to our GEU.

7. The Agency did not at present have the facility to tell students where they were in a queue but the BSU were looking at software which might possibly be used to do this during the busiest times of the year. The Agency would be looking at our automated services again in view of feedback received and an Improvement Team would analyse incoming calls to see if they could be automated depending on the type of enquiry.

8. E-mails – only 18% were being dealt with within the 5 day target. However this target was due to be changed shortly since the volume of e-mails now being received meant that they should be treated in the same way as any other correspondence.

Finance

9. To end September there had been a £60k underspend on running costs and an underspend on depreciation charges due to GRASS write off. Although the Agency had carried a number of permanent staff vacancies, some of these posts had been filled by Pertemps staff. The staff budget was less than required for the full complement of staff for the year.

10. Programme budget - revised forecasts had identified small savings in proportion to the budget. The Finance Team would be looking at forecasts again as most of the information used in forecasting was taken from student applications which had now been processed.

11. The Fraud Team were about to start a review of DSA procedures and payments.
12. A fraud case was currently pending with Procurator Fiscal about claims for Lone Parent benefits. Eileen Marshall said she was aware that no childcare provider would take children for only 38 weeks of the year. SFC were looking at this and other difficulties students have arranging childcare. **Action:** It was agreed to examine the possibility of paying LPCG to childcare providers rather than students.

Human Resources

13. A recruitment exercise for caseworkers and an HR assistant had started. To date 50 applications for caseworkers and 35 for the HR assistant had been received. The Agency also had vacancies for enquiry officers. SAAS would shortly be involved in a recruitment fair at the Gyle and our vacancies would be advertised on radio and other media in addition to the usual newspapers.
14. Home working Project – This project had been restarted although a number of outstanding issues had still to be resolved (e.g. costs for set up and speed of broadband). The next stage would be to identify an individual to test systems from home.

Information Systems and Operational Policy

15. Upgrade to web services – BSU had received BT proposals to provide support for a more robust platform for session 2008/09 and to make enhancements for the system to cope with the near 100% online applications expected next session.
16. ILA500 was in test and due to go live next month. The StEPs project was on schedule to go into test before Christmas.
17. Availability of online application systems – these systems were available for almost 100% of the time. The Agency had backup systems off site and alarmed UPS systems at Gyleview House. This was a very robust system which had only gone down a couple of times in the last few years.

Policy

18. Events programme – The number of events held were increasing year on year and the policy team were also holding workshops for institution staff at Gyleview House. The aim was to try to target new students to encourage them to apply online.

Chief Executive's Office

19. HWLs gold award assessment would take place on 12 November.

Complaints Report

20. The Chief Executive's Office were currently reviewing the complaints/appeals procedure **Action:** The new procedure would be tabled for the next Board meeting. We would send the revised procedure to the SPSO for comment before it was finalised.

Environmental Report

21. The Environmental Report for 2007/08 was tabled for information. It was agreed that the Agency's performance was good, especially for water savings.

Audit Committee Remit

22. All NEMBs agreed that they would be happy to serve on the SAAS Audit Committee and Dugald Mackie agreed to take the role of chairman. In future, the Audit Committee would take over the work of the Fraud Committee. The Committee's remit was agreed. Initially, 4 meetings would be held each year. It was agreed to try to arrange meetings on the same day as Management Board meetings whenever possible.

Balanced Scorecard

23. Ewhan Barschtschyk explained the Agency's move to a Balanced Scorecard approach. Bruce Nelson suggested it might be helpful if the Board could constructively challenge the basis on which KPIs were being determined. This was agreed. It was also agreed that textual narratives would continue to be produced for Board meetings.

Action: Linda to arrange an event to consider Balanced Scorecard KPIs in early December.

Any Other Business

24. No other business was raised.

Date of next meeting

25. A date for the next Board meeting would be arranged shortly.

Chief Executive's Office
10 November 2008