

## **SAAS Quarterly Review Meeting – Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September at 2.30pm**

Attending: Mark Batho (Chair)  
Chris McCrone, ETLLED Finance  
David Stephen, SAAS  
Graham Gunn, SAAS  
Stephen Blyth, SAAS  
Audrey Heatlie, SAAS  
Ruth Ralph, SAAS (Secretary)

Apologies: Tracy Richardson, SAAS

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

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> May were agreed.
2. It was agreed to look into some points raised by Chris McCrone about the “user friendliness” of the online application process. A student on work placement was to be given this issue to work on as a project and Chris would have the opportunity of an interview.

**Action:** Graham Gunn

### **Matters Arising**

3. The following actions had been taken since the last meeting:-
  - Confirmation of attendance – some progress had been made at a recent meeting with Registrars facilitated by Universities Scotland. One issue to emerge was that institutions were understandably reluctant to have to supply attendance confirmation to both SAAS and SLC for slightly different purposes and in slightly different formats. SAAS would continue to engage with the sector and the offer of financial assistance to institutions who might require to undertake systems development to meet our requirements had been kept open.

**Action :** David Stephen to write to Mark Batho once the minute of the meeting is to hand.

- Loans – ASD had produced a paper showing projected levels of aggregate student debt up until 2019. Such projections had to be treated with caution due to the many factors that had to be taken into account (including for example, demographic and labour market trends) but were nonetheless useful as illustrations of possible scenarios. SAAS were continuing to work closely with ASD on ways of improving financial modelling.
- EU debt recovery – SAAS would keep in touch with SLC about the possibility of being able to share the franchise debt recovery arrangements that the Company intended to put in place in a number of EU countries. It was noted that Kath Robertson would be hosting international workshops on Student Support Portability next Thursday and Friday.

**Action :** Stephen Blyth to provide figures on EU Students liable to pay the Graduate Endowment and the number of EU cases passed to Harper McLeod.

- VAT- the SLC VAT bill discussed at the last meeting had now been reduced to £54,000.

## Quarterly Report

### CSU

4. Over 50,000 applications had been processed in the first quarter - 93% within 14 days. In July and August performance had dipped due mainly to the larger than usual number of new caseworkers whose work had to be quality checked. However, the position had now been recovered and production was only about three days behind last year's record levels.

5. It was noted that the increased turnover in staff had been largely due to two major recruiting exercises carried out elsewhere in the Executive which had seen a number of experienced SAAS staff moving on progression/promotion. Production had also as usual been affected by the fact that most staff take summer leave at the very point when applications are at their highest. The Agency was therefore of a mind to re-open talks with the centre about having HR arrangements that were more closely aligned to business needs. It was also intended to mount a "Lean" exercise later in the year which would amongst other things examine whether the present method of routing applications to caseworkers could be improved on.

6. There was a discussion on the merits of otherwise of having 100% targets and how performance might best be measured. It was felt that a combination of the present 14 day target with the new averaging method devised by SAAS's statistician might be more appropriate. Ewhan Barschtschick had been tasked with examining present methodology and was beginning to develop proposals along "balanced score card" lines.

7. ILAs – There were now nearly 42,000 open accounts.

8. Graduate Endowment Letters - CSU had taken over responsibility for producing the Graduate Endowment awareness letters. 19,000 first awareness letters had been sent in mid July to students liable to pay in April 2007 and a further 900 letters would issue to EU students shortly. The number of complaints about the scheme was still high but appeared to be less than last year.

9. Telephony - The service provided by BT for the Contact Central Telephony System had been unsatisfactory and had been raised as an issue with their top management. SAAS were demanding that if current operational and MI problems could not be fully resolved within an acceptable timescale, the system should be replaced free of charge. BT had yet to respond.

### Finance

10. Annex B showed a £39,000 overspend. However the table did not yet include funds for ILA which would bring spend back within budget.

11. Chris would make provision to cover write off of the Assets under Construction costs for the Pay Loans Project. The £41,000 fee quoted for support by BT related to the Monthly Payments Project.

12. Stephen said that Annex C had not been provided in the Quarterly Report as our statistician had not yet finalised the figures for Loans and YSB. A ballpark figure would be passed to Chris as soon as possible to allow ETLTD budgets to be confirmed. It was agreed that additional finance committee meetings could be held as necessary (Stephen would issue a timetable) but the arrangement whereby Graham Philp was working part of his time in Glasgow would also enable close communication as the year developed.

**Action** : Stephen Blyth to provide Chris McCrone with approximate estimates at as early a date as possible and reschedule Finance Committee meetings as necessary.

13. The recent downturn in the number of invoices paid on time by SAAS had been a "one off" due to a mistake by a junior member of staff. There were some difficulties around DSA payments where SEAS could apparently only process one payment to a vendor at a time. Stephen would pursue this with finance colleagues.

**Action:** Stephen Blyth

14. GE – It was agreed that SAAS would examine methods for reducing the time lapse between notification of liability and recovery action starting.

15. It was noted that a student had been given a 16 month jail sentence for using a false NINO. Two other cases were currently with the COPFS.

Personnel

16. The contents of the Personnel report were noted. 1 member of staff had been dismissed outside the reporting period for poor attendance. Solicitors had been consulted and were satisfied that proper procedures had been followed and that the dismissal had been fair. However, there was a slight possibility that the person concerned might try to claim discrimination.

17. David had presented an Imperial Service Medal to a member of Band A staff in June. The medal is awarded by the Queen for loyal and meritorious service over a minimum of 35 years.

IS & Policy

18. Loan payments/monthly payments – it was agreed that the quarterly report should have made clear that the decision to abort the 'SAAS Payloans' project had not been due to money not being available but to a judgement that the increased costs of implementation no longer represented VFM. The 'pay monthly' project would be formally initiated at a meeting which Mark would chair on 6<sup>th</sup> September.

19. The following abbreviations used in the quarterly report were clarified - CR (Changes Requests), RFC (Requests for Change) and SIRs (Site Incident Reports).

Chief Executive's Office

20. Responses from staff on the SHAW Scheme continued to be positive. The scheme was having beneficial effects and extra bike racks had had to be installed at the front of the building.

21. David had written to all Scottish institutions in July giving the Agency's response to points raised in the 2006 Institution Survey. Further dialogue with institutions would take place at seminars with university administrators and FE College staff later in the year.

**Date of Next Meeting**

22. To be arranged.

Chief Executive's Office  
6<sup>th</sup> September 2006