

## SAAS Quarterly Review Meeting – Thursday 18 June 2009

Attending: Andrew Scott, Director LL  
 David Stephen, SAAS  
 Stephen Kerr, HELS  
 Chris McCrone, ELL, Finance  
 Graham Gunn, SAAS  
 Audrey Heatlie, SAAS  
 Audrey Shimmons, SAAS  
 Maureen Shevas, SAAS  
 Linda Pender, SAAS (Secretary)

### Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2009 were agreed.

### Update since the last meeting

2. David updated the meeting on the following issues:-
  - Forecasting model – SAAS and HELS had met with John Ireland to discuss replacing the current forecasting model which was effectively redundant. Audrey Shimmons would have ongoing discussions with David Ritchie in ASD to see what could be done to improve forecasts of student numbers.
  - Gaelic language – it was estimated that only around 1,000 of the 130,000 students dealt with by SAAS each year could speak Gaelic. Of these, only around 10% were likely to be able to read Gaelic. In the light of these figures, there was no urgent or compelling need for SAAS to develop a language plan.

### Quarterly Report

#### Customer Services Unit

3. Processing for last session had been better than in previous years. However there had been backlogs of mail (and especially e-mail) at some points during the year.
4. In the present session, we had so far received 2,000 fewer applications than at the same point in the previous two years. To try to avoid a late rush, SAAS had issued text messages to students encouraging them to apply at as early a date as possible. Institutions would also be asking students to apply early once exams were out of the way. CSU were currently processing applications within two days of receipt.
5. CSU had a higher than usual number of new staff and training was under way. Quality assurance checking of their work would be set at a high level until they had gained experience.
6. 98 applications (0.3% of the total) received had been made on paper forms. Reasons being given for needing to apply on paper included not having an NI number or not having internet access. Only one paper application form had been requested as a result of disability. EU postgraduate students currently could not apply online. On the basis of numbers to date, we expected to receive around 98% of all applications online

for the year as a whole. Like SLC, we would consider the pros and cons of introducing a charge for paper applications in future.

### Finance

7. The Finance Team were finalising the agency's accounts and preparing financial information for programme expenditure accounts. £900,000 for dilapidation costs had been included in our 2008/09 accounts. The programme expenditure audit had still to take place. The team had finalised the agency's budget for 2009/10.

8. Kenny Shields, the auditor who had produced the internal audit report on fraud, was working with the Agency for 6 months on a project to strengthen fraud prevention systems. A 2<sup>nd</sup> report (detailing 88 cases) had gone to the procurator fiscal but we had still had no response to the 1<sup>st</sup> report sent in January. Fraudulent applications were still coming in but being blocked.

9. It was agreed that SAAS should contact the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Universities Scotland to discuss attendance confirmation further. There was a need to ensure so far as practicable that neither SFC nor SAAS were making public funding available in respect of students who were not attending courses. Feedback from the Agency's NEBMs suggested that universities' systems for recording student attendance were variable in their coverage and quality. It was noted that FE colleges in England were required to keep attendance registers as a condition of their funding. Something similar might have to be introduced for Scottish HEIs. NEBMs had also advised that Universities were developing systems based on course work returns so that they could satisfy Home Office demands for attendance information on students from outside the EU. However, to extend such systems to cover all students could be very costly.

10. Audrey Shimmons had carried out an exercise to assemble information from institutions on fees they had received for students who had not been in attendance. Response rates had been poor but results from those who had responded were of concern. It appeared that there could be substantial sums of money that SAAS should seek to recover.

11. SAAS were currently paying students on application rather than matriculation information. The system SAAS had put in place to confirm matriculation was not being observed since universities found it inconvenient. Some larger institutions were allowing students to matriculate online and so could not verify their physical existence and attendance. Solutions to this problem had the potential to be controversial since, for example, if SAAS simply stopped paying fees and student support in cases where attendance had not been properly confirmed, there could be widespread complaints and adverse publicity. Ministerial endorsement of operational decisions would therefore have to be sought.

**Action:** Andrew Scott said the report back to the ELL committee must explore these issues, supply any further details obtained from Universities Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, give details of proposed solutions and highlight possible repercussions.

## Human Resources

12. Recruitment – HR had now filled all 22 vacancies and these staff should be in post by mid July.
13. Homeworking – There had been no response from TUS or solicitors on homeworking proposals. **Action:** Maureen Shevas to issue reminders and follow up.

## Information Systems & Operational Policy

14. Upgrade to web services – work had been delayed as BT's attempted fix had been unsuccessful. Graham Gunn was negotiating to bring in a third party to manage the upgrade and at no cost to SAAS.
15. ILA500 – This was now in a live environment and processing would start on 1 July.
16. StEPs – Parts of the system were moving to the live environment. The StEPs project board had commissioned 2 reports on work involved in the project – recommendations made in the feedback included using a dedicated project manager and an enterprise architect (who had now been identified). The BSU were now confident the new system would work and it was expected to go live in October.
17. SAAS were meeting with the passport office with a view to using their identity checking system. This could be a useful additional check if affordable.
18. SAAS Saltire notice – The Agency had received a “recognised for excellence” award from Quality Scotland. Details of this award along with our Healthy Working Lives gold award and our ISO 14001 accreditation had been published on Saltire.

## Balanced Scorecard

19. A final draft of the Scorecard was circulated. This had been agreed at the last meeting of the Management Board. The Scorecard would become the main tool used to measure SAAS performance against its key performance indicators and would be tabled at all future Board and Quarterly Review meetings. Work was also in hand to link the Risk Register directly to KPIs and to transfer “catastrophic” risks to the Business Continuity Plan.
20. Andrew Scott said the Strategic Board had discussed the Swine Flu outbreak. Indications were that the speed at which infection was spreading had increased and managers were being asked to plan for scenarios with up to 50% staff absences between July and the beginning of 2010. This was a risk already covered in the BCP but it would be revisited.
21. Possible mitigating actions we could take might include paying provisional amounts to students which could be reviewed and finalised once normality had returned. We would also examine the extent to which staff could be moved around the agency to cover for absent colleagues.

Date of Next Meeting

22. To be arranged

SAAS  
Chief Executive's Office  
25 June 2009