

SAAS Quarterly Review Meeting – Thursday 23rd May 2007 at 10.00am

Attending: Mark Batho (Chair)
Stephen Kerr, HELS
Chris McCrone, ETLLED Finance
David Stephen, SAAS
Graham Gunn, SAAS
Audrey Heatlie, SAAS
Audrey Shimmons, SAAS
Tracy Richardson, SAAS
Linda Pender, SAAS (Secretary)

David introduced Stephen Kerr, the new Head of HELS to the meeting.

Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2007 were agreed.

Matters Arising/Updates

- Monthly payments system - BT were still working to reconcile payments made on GRASS with SEAS.
- The Agency's new statistician, Ann-Marie Meikle, was now in post.
- Charging for hardcopies of application forms – Chris raised a potential difficulty with information on parental contribution if a student was completing the application form online outwith the family home. This issue would be considered before any paper was put forward to Ministers.

Quarterly Report

Customer Services Unit

2. Annex A – overall performance for the year was just behind our best ever performance last year. 88% of correspondence had been dealt with within 21 days for 2006/07 and 76% of e-mails replied to within 5 days of receipt. This dip in performance was likely due to the increased number of e-mails received. The separate target for dealing with e-mails would be removed and e-mails would be dealt with in the same way as other general correspondence. The Agency were looking at ways to streamline correspondence received by e-mail by introducing a new on-line proforma which would allow customers to choose a field for subject matter.
3. There had been a slow start to the season and approximately 17,000 applications had been received (98.6% of which had been processed). The Agency had issued SMS messages to students encouraging them to apply as soon as possible.
4. Telephony project – The new system was now in place and would - all things remaining equal - be signed off, by the end of next week. Telephony statistics should be available for the next quarterly report. A wash up meeting would be arranged shortly with BT to discuss some difficulties that had arisen with the quality of their service.
5. The Agency were considering arrangements that would allow students to apply earlier in the year which might help reduce workload in August/ September.
6. Targets – Audrey Shimmons would be reviewing the Agency's targets over the next few months with a view to producing more widely based measures of Agency performance that would be more informative. These would have to be agreed with Ministers. **Action:** David would aim to put a paper to Ministers by September/October.

Finance

7. GE - It was noted that GE figures differ between SAAS and SLC records and this would be discussed outwith the meeting. **Action:** Audrey Shimmons/Chris.

Personnel

8. Staff turnover figures were lower than SE and vacancies in CSU had all been filled. Tracy Richardson had become a member of a Cabinet Office forum to help fill staff vacancies with surplus staff from other Government departments. Communities Scotland had surplus staff due to their relocation to Glasgow and SAAS had been able to consider them for vacant posts. B1 vacancies in the BSU had been advertised as a promotion opportunity.

9. The Team were now designing and carrying out assessment centres in-house (thus saving the cost of using the central contract). Tracy was working with SE procurement to choose a new Occupational Health Service supplier.

10. TUS meeting – homeworking had been discussed at a recent meeting with the TUS and Len Morris had been invited to sit on the Project Group. A pilot exercise would take place in October and there had been 47 expressions of interest from staff. Wherever possible, existing equipment would be used but there were bound to be some additional costs (eg for broadband connections). However, organisations that had already moved substantial numbers of staff on to homeworking had found that costs were far outweighed by rises in productivity resulting from lower sick absence.

11. Mystery shopping exercise –the CSEU had opposed this pointing out amongst other things that other Agencies using the technique operated for the most part on a dispersed basis. SAAS had recognised the validity of the union's view and had in any case other methods of gauging customer satisfaction. David had therefore written to Joy Dunn confirming that we would not be pursuing this initiative.

IS & Operational Policy

12. Telephony – A further release would be made to the system on Monday and the Agency was now past the stage where it might have been necessary to roll back to use the old system. Customer calls could now be recorded.

13. New IT system – Invitations to tender for the supply of business process modelling software had been issued and it was hoped to let a contract by end - June. The new IT system would be more flexible than GRASS and cost much less to adapt when policies change.

14. 58% of all applications received so far this session had been completed on-line compared with 24% in 2005/06 and 55% in 2006/07.

15. The policy team had increased the number of visits they make to institutions and other European Countries and feedback had been excellent.

Chief Executive Office

16. It was noted the Agency had been successful in meeting the standard for the Cycle Friendly Employer award.

Personnel Report

17. The report was noted.

Any Other Business

18. No other business was reported.

Date of the Next Meeting

19. The next meeting would be held on Thursday 6th September @ 10.00am

SAAS
Chief Executive's Office
24 May 2007