

SAAS Quarterly Review Meeting – Thursday 28th February 2008

Attending: Mark Batho (Chair)
Chris McCrone, ELL, Finance
David Stephen, SAAS
Graham Gunn, SAAS
Audrey Heatlie, SAAS
Audrey Shimmons, SAAS
Maureen Shevas, SAAS
Linda Pender, SAAS (Secretary)

Apologies: Stephen Kerr, HELS

Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2007 were agreed.

Update since the last meeting

2. David updated the meeting on the following:-
 - Maureen Shevas had replaced Tracy Richardson as SAAS Personnel Officer.
 - On-line applications – David had written to institutions about the proposal to reduce the number of printed application forms issued by SAAS and increase online take up further. All 18 institutions who had replied were in favour. The issue had also been discussed without dissent at a recent meeting between Policy branch and HE staff. David would write to Cabinet Secretary in the next two to three weeks seeking agreement to introducing the new system as from 2009. This would allow training to be offered to student advisers and others in 2008. (**Action:** David Stephen)
 - ILAS - Logica were carrying out a cost benefit analysis of future ILA delivery options. The information gathering phase had started this week.
 - David would shortly meet with Laura Barjonas and Donald Henderson to discuss future relationships with Skills Development Scotland. The new body was expected to be operational by summer and it would be important for SAAS to keep in touch with its development.
 - Gill Lambert from the Welsh Assembly had visited the agency as part of a fact finding exercise she was carrying for a full scale review of student support delivery in Wales.
 - Quality Scotland – David had today written to Andrew Cubie to say that SAAS would not be continuing its association with Quality Scotland's "recognised for excellence" scheme.

Quarterly Report

Customer Services Unit

3. October had been a busy month with more than 6,000 applications received and overtime required to keep mail manageable. By mid November 99.5% of applications had been processed (Annex A showed statistics for the quarter). On average it had taken 7.27 days to process an application in this quarter which was much lower than for the same quarter in the previous year. CSU were now working mostly on travel expenses and finalising awards.

4. Telephony statistics – The tables in the annex provided an overview of the system and showed calls offered/answered and average waiting times. These statistics would be considered in more detail as part of the current review of targets. It was noted that it was difficult for the agency to find suitable benchmarking information. It was agreed that trend information for telephony would be very helpful.

5. SLC were moving to an advanced IVR system which would replace the use of call menus (i.e. pressing buttons to select options) with what would effectively seem to the caller to be a conversation. The costs of such systems were currently high but SAAS would be investigating the market. (**Action:** Graham Gunn)

Finance

6. DRC - 3-400k savings had been identified on running costs and £4k on capital.

7. Programme – The Team were now getting better information to assist them estimate expenditure more accurately.

8. Economists had not produced updated figures on student numbers this year. However their 'upper forecasts' had been more in line with the actual number of applications received and seemed to be as good a basis as any for future estimates. Mark undertook to discuss uprating the forecasting model with John Ireland. (**Action:** Mark Batho)

9. The numbers of students applying for support on HNC and HND courses were increasing. However, student numbers for these courses were falling overall. It was noted that there was an increasing number of EU students (mostly from Poland, Southern Ireland and France) who only received payment of fees from SAAS.

10. Chris reported that any budget saving over £250,000 had now to be reported to the Permanent Secretary and the Head of Finance since no EYF would be available this year. Any savings identified would be re-allocated by the centre in response to bids. Chris would speak to Audrey Shimmons outwith the meeting to identify a final income figure for GE after today's vote.

11. Fraud – The Fraud Team had established a link with SLC's recently enlarged fraud team. Information sharing would be useful given the SLC's UK contacts.

12. SAAS would only be able to make manual payments between 1-7 April as the SEAS ledger would be unavailable. However this should not cause too many problems as student payments were not made through SEAS.

Personnel

13. Recruitment – 25 A3 posts were vacant, 64 applications had been received and 29 people would be invited to interview following sifting. 5 A2 posts were vacant, 21 applications had been received and 11 people had been invited to interview. Finance also had 2 A2 posts to fill.

14. It was agreed that the current recruitment market was depressed. It was also noted that the new HR resourcing policy had reintroduced what would effectively be old style promotion boards. A B Band Board was likely to be held in the summer which could have an impact on Agency staffing levels since we had a large number of well trained A band staff who should have good prospects of success.

15. Homeworking – The project had been suspended until later in the year as lack of business broadband access had been found to cause difficulties in accessing GRASS. The cost of business broadband had also not originally been allowed for in project estimates and might affect the overall business case.

16. Data security – David had attended a meeting of SG's Security Committee to discuss the findings of the recent data security survey that had had to be mounted following HMRC's loss of records. Some of the results had indicated a need to review security at SUFI with whom SAAS had links for ILAS. (**Action:** Graham Gunn to keep in touch with ISIS on the review).

17. E-HR – the new system still had to be implemented in full. A basic set of tables could now be produced and SAAS would be asked to comment on them.

Information Systems & Operational Policy

18. StEPS – At the last Project Board meeting the project status had been reported as “amber” due to time slippages. Original time estimates provided by Webmethods had been significantly understated but the company had since provided more support to help bring things back on track. However, the situation remained finely balanced and the Project Board would have to decide by no later than mid – March whether to move to StEPS in April/May or retain GRASS for one last season. (**Action:** David to inform Mark of the Board's decision as soon as known).

19. Events – The policy team had taken part in an EU working Group in the Baltic states to promote higher education in Scotland.

Chief Executive's Office

20. The Annual Report and Corporate Plan had been issued on 7 February. As the Accounts had been published after 31 December, David expected to receive a letter from the Auditor General. However, Audit Scotland was already aware of the cause for the delay.

21. Healthy Working Lives – free health screening for staff had been carried out by Napier University nursing students last week. Work towards the HWL Gold Standard was continuing.

SAAS Balanced Scorecard

22. Audrey Shimmons had produced a first draft of a proposed balanced scorecard which, when finalised, would link directly to the corporate plan. It was agreed that there was a need to consider new targets carefully, including customer satisfaction ratings, efficiency and effectiveness targets and a small number of key indicators that could tell us how we were performing. It was agreed that stakeholders would be involved in taking the draft forward. (**Action:** Audrey S to provide an update at the next meeting).

Date of the Next Meeting

23. A date for the next meeting would be arranged for May/June.

SAAS
Chief Executive's Office
29 February 2008