

IMPLEMENTATION ADVISORY GROUP

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD IN EUROPA BUILDING, GLASGOW 30TH SEPTEMBER 2004

In attendance:

Gill Troup (Chair)
Riona Bell (SHEFC/SFEFC)
David Caldwell (US)
Steve Cockburn (Edinburgh University Students' Association)
David Coyle (Strathclyde)
Chris Graham (SE)
Alastair Hunter (AUTS)
John Martin (AMOSSHE)
Lorraine McSheaffrey (SAAS)
Ann McVie (SE)
Paul Smith (SLC)
Melanie Ward (NUS)
Susan Whittaker (SE)

Apologies:

Neil Cuthbert (ASC)
Peter Lloyd (SE)
Forbes McCallum (EIS)

Agenda Item 1 : Welcome and Introductions

1. Gill Troup welcomed everybody as new Chair of the group. Group members introduced themselves.

Agenda Item 2 : Minutes of Last Meeting

2. Group members were asked if there were factual errors in paper IAG/04/008.

3. A question was raised in relation to 5(a) about whether it should also refer to the position of HND students not granted entry to the 3rd year of a degree. The ref has been amended as follows:

'The position of HNC/D students who are not granted entry to the second year of a degree, who therefore have to pay for the first year of degree level study, and Scottish students who already have a first degree and therefore don't qualify for support, needed careful attention'.

Agenda Item 3: Matters Arising

4. Gill Troup gave an update on some of the action points from the last minutes.

(a) SE has confirmed with DfES that loans for tuition fees from 2006 will be paid directly to HEIs.

(b) There is still work for SE to do in relation to FE issues.

5. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) A question was raised about whether the consultation letter with regard to medical fees had been received by all relevant parties. SE confirmed that they are following up on this.

(b) Clarification was sought about whether following the consultation on medical fees, the issue would be brought back to the group. SE confirmed that it would be.

Agenda Item 4: System Description

6. Ann McVie introduced paper IAG/04/010, which provided a high level description of the system following implementation of the changes.

7. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) It was agreed that under 'Principles', the fourth bullet point should be altered to read 'The flat rate fee level assumption for part-time students will be held'.

(b) It was commented that the OU is disputing the decision to charge a flat rate fee in England. It was agreed that this issue should be kept under review.

(c) Clarification was sought on the definition of 'Scottish students'. It was confirmed that 'Scottish' was used to refer to 'Scottish-domiciled students' and the latter should be uniformly used.

(d) Clarification was sought on the definition of 'fees-only' students. It was explained that there is a difference between self-funding students and fees-only students, and agreed it should be made clear which one is being referred to.

(e) SHEFC offered to assist in checking the basis for calculations in the paper.

(f) It was stated that SE would model the impact of the changes over a longer period.

(g) It was stated that a formal sign off of the calculation process would be required.

(h) Clarification was sought on whether decisions had been taken on the use of the surplus income. SE confirmed that there has been no ministerial direction on this yet.

(i) It was suggested that it might be necessary to use the surplus for fees-only students.

It was agreed that:

- **SHEFC and SE will work together to check the basis for calculations in paper IAG/04/010.**
- **Group members should give comments on whether the paper presents a reasonable basis for calculation.**

Agenda Item 5: Transitional Arrangements

8. Riona Bell and Lorraine McSheaffrey introduced paper IAG/04/011. They made the following points in introduction:

(a) The paper was focused on administrative arrangements.

(b) The new system would undo some of the simplification introduced when changes were made to tuition fees in 1998-1999.

(c) If anomalies are identified, such as before the current system, the fee anomalies approach could be used again.

(d) With their current system, SAAS can charge differing fees at course level, but cannot alter fee levels for different categories of students.

(e) Two options for transitional students were set out:

(i) The fee level could be kept the same for continuing students who had started their course before 2006, requiring a transfer of funds between SHEFC and SAAS.

(ii) The fee level for continuing students could be brought into line with the fee level for new students starting after 2006, with the difference in the SAAS/LEA element being met through public funds, either through SHEFC or SAAS.

9. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) It was stated that in relation to option (ii), although students would not be affected, the headline rise in fees might cause concern. It was commented that the same dilemma would apply to self-funded students.

(b) It was suggested that a permanent solution would be to separate bands of fees: this might allow systems to accommodate part-time students.

(c) Some concern was raised about option (i), as it would be difficult to explain to students that students on the exact same course would be charged two different fee levels. It was stated that a mechanism was required that meant all students on the same course pay the same fee, and the issue should be about how the fee was paid.

(d) It was commented that it would be important to guard against the perception that some students' fees, such as those of HNC/D students, were going up because of something that was happening in England.

(e) It was stated that student support arrangements need to be made as simple as possible from the students' point of view.

(f) There was discussion about whether it should be for HEIs to determine who would be required to pay the fee. It was pointed out that this would be similar to the way the fee anomalies system worked. Concern was expressed about the administrative burden this would put on HEIs.

(g) It was noted that if the fee anomaly system were to be used, this would have cash implications for HEIs as the system is retrospective.

(h) It was suggested that it should be up to SAAS to make the distinction as to who would be eligible to have the fee paid. However, the SAAS system cannot do this. It was suggested that it might be worth exploring the cost of changing the SAAS system to accommodate different fees for different categories of students, ie part-time students.

(i) It was agreed that SHEFC/SAAS should prepare an options paper for the next meeting. It was requested by group members that this paper consider not only the financial, administrative and technical implications of options (i) and (ii), but should also consider implications for HEIs and what each option will look like to students.

(j) It was asked whether SE was satisfied that there would be no illegal discrimination issues associated with charging different sets of students different fees for doing exactly the same course.

(k) It was asked whether SE had considered applying the graduate endowment to self-funded students. It was agreed that SE would produce a paper for the next meeting giving a view on whether there would be mileage in expanding the endowment option.

(l) It was stated that Professions Allied to Medicine (PAMs) courses should be added to paragraph 21 of paper IAG/04/011.

It was agreed that:

- **SHEFC/SAAS will prepare an options paper for the next meeting.**
- **SE will check whether there are any discrimination issues in applying different fees for students on the same course.**
- **SE will prepare a paper on the possibility of applying the graduate endowment to self-funded students for next meeting.**

Agenda Item 6: SHEFC Controls on Student Numbers

10. Riona Bell introduced paper IAG/04/012. She described how student numbers are controlled and how fees-only students arise. She explained that the number of fees-only students differs by HEI and subject group. This was considered to be an issue for SHEFC rather than the group, but should be reflected in advice to Ministers.

11. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) Clarification was sought on the position of students from the rest of the UK. It was explained that they are counted as FTE students eligible for a funded place. The fee is currently paid by the student's LEA to the institution, and SHEFC deducts it in calculating the net grant.

(b) It was agreed that the current arrangements for controlling student numbers would continue, but would be kept under review.

(b) It was suggested that using part of the surplus (generated by the increased fee) to provide funds to SAAS to cover the shortfall to HEIs for fees-only students would be a good use of money. There was general agreement with this view.

It was agreed that:

- **The current arrangements for controlling student numbers would continue.**
- **The surplus could be used in part to meet the additional costs to SAAS of funding fee-only students.**

Agenda Item 7: Defining Students That Start Before 2006

12. Chris Graham introduced paper IAG/04/013, explaining the definition of a programme of continuous higher education for the purposes of Graduate Endowment Liability, and the groups of students to whom that applies. He explained the historical exclusion of students on access courses from the definition when new student support arrangements were introduced.

13. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) Disagreement was expressed regarding the exclusion of students on access courses. SE stated that to include them would require a specific definition of an access course. It was agreed that SE would provide a suggested definition of an access course.

(b) It was stated that if the principle that fees for Scottish-domiciled self-funding students will not rise by more than inflation can be maintained, then the issue of who is included in the definition of continuing students becomes less crucial.

(c) It was stated that SE had had difficulty in getting data on the number of gap year students in Scotland, and SE asked whether institutional data could answer this.

It was agreed that:

- **The definition provided in paper IAG/04/013 is acceptable, subject to the issue of access courses being resolved.**
- **SE will provide a suggested definition of an access course for the next meeting.**
- **SE will get a view from institutions on whether they could provide data on gap year students, and SE to check UCAS data.**

Agenda Item 8: Student Matrix

14. Chris Graham presented paper IAG/04/014, highlighting the four main issues which can affect fee levels and support, and the different routes through to a degree level qualification in terms of student support. He made the following points:

(a) Changing course, one of the issues listed, would not generally lead to students becoming self-funding.

(b) It is general practice for HND support to be available from 2nd year of a degree.

(c) The only slight anomaly is in the false start provision.

(d) The same entitlement applies to PGCE courses as to undergraduate courses, except if the undergraduate degree provides the student with a professional qualification. However, if the PGCE is in a shortage subject, this rule does not apply.

15. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) There was some discussion about the principle of HND students being allowed to enter 3rd year of a degree, and the concern that some institutions required them to start in 1st year, thereby requiring them to be self-funded for that year. There were two aspects to this discussion:

(i) There is a tension between improving articulation opportunities for students and maintaining institutional autonomy in relation to entry criteria. This is a wider issue than can be addressed by the group, but one that continues to require consideration in other contexts.

(ii) In relation to the work of this group, it was suggested that if the principle of keeping the fee burden of self-funded Scottish-domiciled students at the same level is met, then such students would not be additionally affected by the changes. It was agreed that this is an issue that needs to be considered in relation to the group's work on information, advice and guidance, and thereby lead to more detailed information on costs being provided to this group of students.

(b) It was stated that there would need to be an explanation of how the 'red arrows' on the flow chart (the instances where students have no entitlement to tuition fee support) would be handled. This was agreed by SE.

It was agreed that:

- **The group will consider the issue of HND students entering 1st year of a degree in the context of the group's work on information, advice and guidance.**
- **SE will provide information on how groups currently ineligible for student support will be handled.**

Agenda Item 9: Part-time Issue from 2006 Onwards

16. Riona Bell presented paper IAG/04/015. She made the following points:

(a) SHEFC and SAAS currently have different definitions of a part-time student, and they would need to align these definitions.

(b) The two options in relation to part-time students are to either have a separate calculation for part-time students, or average it by institution. Either way, as the calculation would be based on historical data, it will not be sensitive to fluctuations in the number of part-time students.

(c) SHEFC has no information on what part-time students are being charged.

17. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) It was suggested that part-time students would need to be treated as a separate category. SHEFC stated that it would be necessary to check the specific implications for systems of such a change. However, this suggestion was agreed in principle by the group.

(b) It was asked whether there will be any changes in support to part-time students. SE informed the group that research was being commissioned on the motivations of part-time students. There will be no change to support in this academic year.

(c) It was suggested that the definition of part-time students might need changing given the new circumstances of students (eg increasingly working part-time).

(d) It was suggested that SCQF credit points could be applied to the definition of part-time students. SHEFC stated that this was the first year that credit points were being used, and it might take a year or two for this information to settle down.

It was agreed that:

- **SHEFC and SAAS will consider how to align definitions of part-time students.**
- **In principle, part-time students should be treated as a separate group by SHEFC.**
- **SHEFC and SAAS will reflect further on the issue of part-time students.**

Agenda Item 10: Update on DfES Arrangements

18. Ann McVie introduced paper IAG/04/016.

19. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) There was some discussion about the fee charges being proposed by English institutions. It was stated that institutions may be proposing a £3,000 fee across the board to include in their access agreement. When their access agreement is accepted they would be in a position to lower the fee, but not raise it. It was also suggested that provisional fees might reduce subject to take-up. It was commented that bursaries will make the effective fee level difficult to ascertain.

(b) The Student Loans Company stated that DfES has asked them to fully cost the first option for the initial collection of fee data provided in paper IAG/04/016 - ie using an enhanced database which includes the fee information.

Agenda Item 11: Review of Action Plan

20. Gill Troup introduced paper IAG/04/017. Views were sought on whether any actions had been completed, whether any new ones should be added, and whether any other changes should be made. Agreement on priority topics for the next meeting was also sought.

(a) In relation to the work strand 'Fee only students', it was reiterated that there was an assumption that the £4m of the presumed surplus could be used to meet the additional costs of SAAS. Agreement on this would be subject to confirming the fee calculations in paper IAG/04/010.

(b) In relation to the work strand 'Definition of student starting before 2006', there was agreement on the definition provided, subject to clarifying the issue of access courses.

(c) In relation to the work strand 'Mapping types of students', it was agreed that there is a need to describe what will happen to those not currently eligible for student support.

(d) In relation to the work strand 'Information to students', it was agreed that this should also address 'Information to applicants and those advising applicants'. It was agreed that it was crucial that school teachers and careers advisers have comprehensive information. It was also stated that this work would be linked in to the work of SE's Information, Advice and Guidance group; and that there should be discussion with SAAS on this matter.

(e) In relation to the work strand 'Transparency of transfer of funding', it was stated that there would need to be a formal sign off of the figures.

(f) In relation to the work strand 'Quigley', it was agreed that the group would come back to this at the next meeting when discussing fees for medical students.

(g) In relation to the work strand 'System description', it was agreed that SHEFC/SAAS would check the calculations.

(h) It was proposed that a work strand 'Graduate endowment' should be added.

(i) It was agreed that the issue of HND students entering 1st year of a degree would be covered in the refinement to the flow chart (IAG/04/014).

(j) It was agreed that FE issues would remain off-line.

(k) It was agreed that a timeline should be made for the action plan.

(l) The following were agreed as priority topics for the next meeting:

- (i) Transitional arrangements
- (ii) Exemptions
- (iii) Fee levels
- (iv) Fees for medical students and Quigley
- (v) Information for students, applicants and advisers

It was agreed that:

- **SE will prepare a paper for the next meeting on the approach that should be taken to informing students, applicants and advisers, and who should be responsible for which aspects of the approach.**
- **SE will apply a timeline to the action plan.**

Agenda Item 12: AOB and Date of Next Meeting

21. It was asked whether the medical fee announcement would be at the same time as the fee level announcement. SE stated that this was not known at this time.

22. The next meeting is scheduled for 25 November. The group was asked whether an additional meeting would be required before Christmas. It was agreed to provisionally schedule a meeting in December, and decide whether it is required at the end of the next meeting.

It was agreed that:

- **SE will trawl for dates for provisional December meeting.**

**IAG Secretariat
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