

Appendix 2 – Operations Caseworker Support and Assurance Structure

This document explains the overall structure relating to the Trustees and Chief Executive's delegation of various decisions and judgements to the Operations Caseworkers who are the first-line contact with Users and new applicants.

Policy and Guidance

User Administration Policies are produced and maintained by the Strategic Policy Directorate. The Strategic Policy Director ensures that policies are put to the Board of Trustees for approval.

New policies are added to the ILF Policy system "CETIS" (software which was purchased for this purpose) which is accessible via the ILF Intranet. Staff are advised by email or intranet message when policies are added or revised. They use the CETIS system to review and "accept" the policy. CETIS can be set up so that a brief knowledge questionnaire has to be answered before a policy can be accepted. The Strategic Policy team tracks acceptance.

There are Control Checks on Offers, Awards and Payees which relate to these policies. As well as checking for financial accuracy, the Checker will look at whether policies have been correctly applied. Individual errors are returned to the individual via their line manager for correction. Line managers use the control check information in "one-to-one" meetings with staff throughout the year, and may also discuss any error trends in team meetings. The Senior Operations Manager collates control check information and will also raise any trends at Operations Managers' meetings.

The Strategic Policy team receives feedback from Operations so that policy reviews, additional guidance and targeted training sessions can be provided.

Working Practices

There is a Best Working Practices guide in the Operations shared folder which is used by Operations Caseworkers as a standard approach to good customer service. This is supported by detailed process maps using "Triaster" (software which was purchased for this purpose). The process maps are available as links from the guide, or directly via the ILF Intranet.

The guide is maintained by one of the Regional Team Managers, and Triaster process maps are maintained by two Operations Managers who also ensure that Operations Business Continuity arrangements are up to date. Managers reinforce use of the guidance in one-to-one and team meetings.

Limits of authority

Limits of authority may be set in policy documents, procedural guidance or in separate documents (eg Overpayment writeoff limits – see Appendix 3).

The guidance will state the appropriate escalation route – eg to line manager, senior operations manager, specialist team (Compliance, Overpayments, etc).

Some Control Checks require the Checker to examine compliance with limits.

Management and assurance processes

Line Managers can obtain various case lists from the QUASAR/ICI system to check on work in progress. This provides opportunity for review of casework to date and checks on compliance with policies, processes and limits.

The weekly User payment process includes “exception” reports produced by Finance which are referred to Operations Managers for action (high payments, payments with no authorised payees).

Where the Compliance and Fraud Team are involved in a case, they carry out a casework review prior to any visit, and may raise issues.

Complaints and requests for Decision Review are dealt with by a specialist team and this also provides an independent casework review.

Advice and Support

Operations Caseworkers may refer cases through the line management chain if they need advice on how to deal with a particular case. The final level is via the Operations Director to the User Personal Cases Committee, either where Trustees have reserved decisions to the Committee or where existing policy does not cover the particular case.

The User Personal Cases Committee has Terms of Reference agreed by the main Board of Trustees

Referrals may be made internally to the Compliance Team if issues relating to payment assurance (User’s use and management of ILF money) arise.

The Social Work Coordinators have both a reactive and a proactive advisory role. Operations Caseworkers may refer files for advice on a specific issue relating to ILFA reports and intended packages. The Coordinators also raise issues with Operations that arise in discussion with ILFAs or from Control Checks on completed ILFA visits.

Organisational Structure

The organisation of Operations staff and the physical working environment provides an additional assurance for the Operations Director on compliance with policies, procedures and authority limits.

Operations staff are recruited through appropriate HR procedures and a full induction training is included before live casework is given to new staff. The team manager monitors casework more closely and there are three formal probation reports, which include an assessment of performance, before the appointment is confirmed as an ongoing contract.

Staff are organised into regional teams in open plan areas, with managers and staff using the same blocks of desks. User files are passed from caseworker to manager in connection with various QUASAR authorisation procedures.

The Operations structure includes reserves and deputies for all teams, so that the individual dealing with a User file may vary from time to time. There is also a Support Section that may deal with casework from any team. Together with the normal changeover of staff and periodic reorganisation, this reduces the likelihood that any particular caseworker will deal exclusively with a User file over an extended period of time.