



Department  
for Education

# **Star Chamber Scrutiny Board**

**Annual report: November 2015 – October  
2016**

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# Star Chamber Scrutiny Board eighth annual report

The following is a summary of the activity of the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board (SCSB) during its eighth year of operation, covering the period November 2015 to October 2016.

## Purpose

This report is written to provide an annual update on the work of the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board for a range of stakeholders both in the Department and local authorities, and representative bodies across the education sector. It is also shared with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), who manage the relationship between Central Government and local authorities, so they are informed how the Department's data needs are changing and how this is being managed with the sector.

No specific actions are required of the recipients of this report, but comments on any area are welcome and should be sent to the secretariat ([StarChamber.MAILBOX@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:StarChamber.MAILBOX@education.gsi.gov.uk)).

## History

The Star Chamber was established in 1999 in the then DfES, to review and control data collection proposals emerging from the Department. It was initially an internal body, but was strengthened in 2006 by the addition of an External Scrutiny Group of local authority and school representatives. With the Department publicly committing to reducing its data collections, the External Scrutiny Group was given the power to make decisions on collections. It was re-launched as the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board on 1 November 2008. Annual reports have been published on the first six years of its operation: this is the seventh.

The Star Chamber Scrutiny Board meets monthly, primarily to consider data collection business cases put forward by policy areas across DfE and its Executive Agencies. The meetings also discuss relevant data developments and look at how new collections are progressing, acting as a consultation forum where required. The Board's operations are seen as an excellent example of joint working on the wider education and children's services agenda, something that was highlighted by HM Treasury in their 2011 report. The Board's service has been recognised by other bodies including the National Audit Office who have previously consulted the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board for advice about their proposed collections.

As part of the overall drive to manage data burdens that Central Government place on local authorities, DCLG operates a scrutiny process for mandatory data collection proposals impacting on local government. However, after reviewing the terms of reference and operation of the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board, it was agreed by the two

departments that it would continue to lead on scrutiny of proposals around schools and children's services.

## Cases Scrutinised

In this eighth year, 24 business cases were submitted to the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board regarding data collection from schools and local authorities. This is a reduction of three compared to the number of business cases submitted in 2014-15 and is a continuation of the trend of reducing number of business cases for consideration. Reasons for this include the maturity of the main data collections and efforts not to add to the burden placed on schools and local authorities.

The majority of business cases were for modest adjustments to existing collections. Of these:

- 15 were fully approved
- 3 were approved with conditions
- 1 was approved following amendment
- 4 were rejected in their entirety
- 1 further business case was considered: whilst it was not possible for the Star Chamber to approve the business case it was thought that it could be re-submitted at a future meeting following further work and further engagement with Star Chamber and other stakeholders – this will be covered in the report for the next reporting year.

Further information on the cases considered can be found in Annex 2.

As well as scrutinising changes to data collections, over the year the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board has also provided very useful advice about the proposed method for collecting the data, which has been most beneficial. This advice has led to data sponsors changing their data collection proposals, adjusting their timings or sampling methods, or re-designing their methodology, thereby ensuring better quality data was received from the front-line and with fewer burdens on supplying LAs, schools and academies.

The Star Chamber Scrutiny Board has also considered a number of proposals at an early stage of development and in a discussion format prior to a formal business case being developed. This enabled members to contribute to the development of proposals and ensured that the burden and the practicalities of a collection were considered early. This has in part contributed towards an increase in the number of business cases approved at the first instance of consideration and a reduction of those business cases requiring amendment. Consultation with Star Chamber and early scrutiny of policy thinking goes in part to help explain the ongoing reduction in formal business cases that are considered. Early scrutiny enables the Department to increase priority to those proposals with sector support or to investigate other methods of supporting for policy making.

## Appeals

An appeals process exists for policy teams who believe that they have strong grounds for exemption or a relaxation to Star Chamber guidance, or have good reason to believe that the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board has not acted reasonably in carrying out its functions.

No appeals were heard during this reporting year.

Where required, a further level of appeal exists to a designated Minister but this was not necessary during 2015-16.

## Other work

The examination of business cases is the main area of the Board's work. Board members frequently take questions back to their home authorities to consult with local experts in the particular areas under discussion, pooling the comments they have received on the morning of the regular meetings. Where discussions take place with a policy area prior to the submission of a business case, this can be very beneficial in reducing burdens.

Individual members have also volunteered to support and provide guidance to DfE policy colleagues who are considering new policy initiatives. This has been undertaken outside of the normal activity of the Board and continues to provide a valuable resource of expertise and local knowledge to enable early and meaningful consultation.

The Board has a secondary role discussing and monitoring developments in education and children's services data. For instance, in this reporting year the Board have provided ongoing support to the department's Data Modernisation Unit who are looking to introduce increased automation in the return of school and LA data.

## Membership

The Board is chaired by the Head of Education Data Division which forms part of the Department for Education. During the reporting year, Caroline Kempner became Chair of the Board.

The Board operates on a basis of membership remaining open-ended and based on the ongoing commitment provided by members to attend meetings and to take an active role in its operation. Natural change in the group ensures that the turnover of membership happens seamlessly. Local authority representatives are nominated via the Association of Directors of Children's Services, and head teacher / principal members via the National Association of Head Teachers and the Association of School and College Lecturers.

Over the course of the reporting year, Bruce Farajian (South Gloucestershire LA) left the Board. The department and the fellow members acknowledge his positive contributions over a significant period. No new members were appointed in the reporting year.

## **Issues**

The Board continue to be pleased with the positive attitude taken by policy areas whose business cases come to them for scrutiny. The increasing number of discussions taking place prior to the submission of a business case has also appeared to improve the quality of business cases. Discussions have invariably been productive and beneficial to both DfE representatives, Star Chamber Scrutiny Board members and, consequently, to those working on data in schools and authorities.

Nonetheless, the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board have identified potential areas for improvement and increase the effectiveness of the Board, including:

### **Increasing links with the Children's Services National Performance and Information Management Group (CS NPIMG)**

The CS NPIMG is a working group made up of the Chairs of the Regional Performance Information groups and Data Networks for Children's Services. It exists to share and co-ordinate experience, intelligence and learning to inform the themes of children's services, health, education and social care and it provides expert advice and assistance to the ADCS Standards, Performance and Inspection (ADCS SPI) Committee upon these areas. Links between the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board and the CS NPIMG have been strengthened over the reporting year. The Board continues to share details of business cases (subject to confidentiality issues) in an effort to seek further feedback and stakeholder engagement in the decision making process. This has supported members with additional insight in to issues affecting the wider LA sector and therefore supports the Department in the development of data collection.

### **Principle of one-in-one-out**

The Board have requested that policy representatives consider the principle of one-in-one-out when developing business cases. This is particularly important where the proposed increased burden is significant and there are opportunities to off-set that burden with the removal of data that no longer holds as much value.

Members will continue to undertake reviews of data collections (agenda dependent) but this type of consideration will join-up these processes.

## Footnote

The board wish to record thanks to the secretariat for the smooth support of its work during the year.

## Annex 1

List of Star Chamber Scrutiny Board members for the reporting year.

### Chair

The DfE Head of Education Data Division chairs the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board:

Jude Hillary (November 2015 – March 2016)

Caroline Kempner (April 2016 – October 2016)

### Secretariat

Paul Hirst, Education Data Division, DfE

### Members

One member takes a lead each month in feeding back the comments of the Board to attending policy representatives.

Penny Arcatinis	Birmingham LA
Philip Brocklehurst	formerly Kensington & Chelsea LA
Stephen Clark	formerly Lancashire LA
Chris Hill	Hounslow School, Hounslow (representing NAHT)
Rashid Jussa	Waltham Forest LA
Damien Kearns	Nishkam High School, Birmingham
Adam King	Ofsted
Jeanette Miller	Southampton LA
Mike Parkin	Worcestershire LA
Cathy Piotrowski	formerly Central Bedfordshire LA
Gavin Sandmann	Milton Keynes LA
Simon Utting	Hackney Learning Trust
Rowena Ward	London Tri-Borough Partnership
Max Winters	Bromley LA

The following members resigned during the reporting year:

Bruce Farajian, South Gloucestershire LA

Ofsted continued to work closely with the SCSB and they maintain a permanent seat.

One member takes a lead each month in feeding back the comments of the Board to attending policy representatives.



## Annex 2

Annex 2 – List of cases considered November 2015 - October 2016

The Board met on ten occasions in the reporting year.

Business Case No	Consideration date	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
<b>Cases fully approved</b>				
795a	Nov-15	School Census / AP Census / EY Census – collection of nationality, country of birth and proficiency in English	The Board approved this business case	M
796	Nov-15	School Census – Pupil Address Module	The Board approved this business case	M
797	Nov-15	Spring School Census – Admissions Appeals Module	The Board approved this business case	M
798	Dec-15	Spring School Census – Admissions Appeals Module	The Board approved this business case	M
799	Dec-15	Changes to the SCAP collection	The Board approved this business case	M
800	Jan-16	Free Early Education Places	The Board approved this business case	V
801	Jan-16	Condition Spend Data Collection	The Board approved this business case	V
804	Feb-16	DSG baselining exercise	The Board approved this business case	M
805	Mar-16	Evaluation of the Youth Contract Programme	The Board approved this business case	V
807	Apr-16	Children’s Social Work Workforce data collection 2016-17	The Board approved this business case	M
810	Jul-16	Changes to the SEN2 data collection	The Board approved this business case	M
812b	01/07/2016 By correspondence	Assessing LA implementation of SEN reforms	The Board approved this business case via correspondence	V
813	Sep-16	Collection of school unique reference number (URN)	The Board approved this business case	M
814	Sep-16	School Census – addition of new option within the learning aim withdrawal reason codeset	The Board approved this business case	M
817	Oct-16	Changes to the SEN2 data collection	The Board approved this business case	M
<b>Cases conditionally approved</b>				
808	Jun-16	PRMA data collection	Approved on condition that the additional questions are made voluntary for the first year only due to the timing of the proposal.	M
809	Jul-16	Condition data collection	Approved subject to guidance notes and final question set being shared with members	V

Business Case No	Consideration date	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
812	Sep-16	Free Early Education for two-year-olds	Approved subject to the collection being clearly marked as voluntary and no more than one follow up where data is not returned	V
<b>Cases approved following amendments</b>				
816	Oct-16	School Strike	the business case was agreed when amended to cover the current academic year only. If the data collection is to continue it should be re-presented.	V
<b>Cases Rejected</b>				
802	Feb-16	Provider contact information in the EYC	Rejected as it would be difficult for LA systems to record this information and was not the best way to solve the problem noted.	M
803	Feb-16	Recording qualifications in the EYC	The Board were concerned that the change to this collection was being driven by anecdotal evidence and suggested some further research be undertaken before changes are made	M
806	Apr-16	Children's Social Work Workforce data collection 2015- 16	The Board considered that this proposal was a retrospective change to the current collection which is half way through the collection period. It will place an unreasonable and unrealistic burden on local authorities and is not consistent with the required six month advance notice.	M
811	Jul-16	School Census – Collection of Parental Information	The Board signalled that due to the issues of practicality/quality of the data and crucially that the proposal is disproportionate to the benefits it would deliver, the business case was rejected in its current form.	M
<b>Other cases discussed</b>				
815	Sep-16	School Census – addition of a new programme aim	The Board indicated that they were broadly supportive of the aims of this proposal but did not fully understand from the business case how it would be implemented. Business case was re-considered and presented again in the next reporting year.	M
<b>Cases referred to appeal</b>				
		No appeals were heard in the reporting year		



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