



Department
for Education

Star Chamber Scrutiny Board

**Annual report: November 2013 to
October 2014**

September 2015

Contents

Purpose	3
History	3
Cases scrutinised	4
Appeals	4
Other work	5
Membership	5
Issues	5
Increased contact for voluntary collections	6
Undertaking reviews of existing collections	6
Footnote	6
Annex 1	7
Annex 2	8
Cases fully approved	8
Cases conditionally approved	9
Cases approved following amendments	11
Cases rejected outright	12
Cases subject to successful appeal	13

Star Chamber Scrutiny Board sixth annual report

The following is a summary of the activity of the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board (SCSB) during its sixth year of operation, covering the period November 2013 to October 2014.

Purpose

This report is written to provide an annual update on the work of the SCSB 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).

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 SCSB on 1 November 2008. Annual reports have been published on the first five years of its operation: this is the sixth.

The SCSB 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 SCSB 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 SCSB, 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 sixth year, 30 business cases were submitted to the SCSB regarding data collection from schools and local authorities. This is an increase of one compared to the number of business cases submitted in 2012 to 2013. The majority of new cases were for modest adjustments to existing collections. Of these:

- 17 were fully approved
- 6 were approved with conditions
- 4 were approved following amendment
- 3 were rejected - 1 of which was overturned following amendment to the business case.

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

As well as scrutinising changes to data collections, over the year the SCSB 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 local authorities, schools and academies.

The SCSB 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.

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 SCSB has not acted reasonably in carrying out its functions.

Only one appeal was heard in 2013 to 2014. This resulted from a business case which was rejected on the grounds of insufficient preparation time for local authorities. This decision to reject was overturned at appeal following a number of amendments to the original proposal.

Where required, a further level of appeal exists to a designated Minister but this was not necessary during 2013 to 2014.

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 monthly 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 has provided 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. Particular areas discussed this year have included the Child Protection Data Sharing Project (a Health and Social Care information Centre initiative) and support to the DfE Data Modernisation Unit.

Membership

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, Nigel Nicholds (Norfolk local authority), Anna Janes (formerly of Brent local authority) and Keith Sorrell (Headteacher, Windsor School, Dudley) have left the board. The department and their fellow members acknowledge their positive contributions over a significant period. The following new members have been welcomed during the year: Louise Nock (Barnsley local authority), Gavin Sandmann (Milton Keynes local authority), Simon Utting (Hackney Learning Trust) and Damien Kearns (Nishkam High School, Birmingham).

Issues

The board continue to be pleased by the positive attitude taken by policy areas whose business cases come to them for scrutiny. Discussions have invariably been productive and beneficial to both DfE representatives, SCSB members and, consequently, to those working on data in schools and authorities.

Nonetheless, there are issues that the SCSB think may improve the effectiveness of the board, including:

Increased contact for voluntary collections

Members have been concerned over the frequency of local authority and school contact from the department to request the return of voluntary collections. It is agreed that a single request is acceptable and should be sufficient but that undue pressure should not be applied to those requested to return information. The board will continue to monitor this and highlight this as an issue in future requests for voluntary collections.

Undertaking reviews of existing collections

The board recognise that they are unable to rescind approval of ongoing, agreed collections but would like to undertake some oversight of such collections. When time allows during meetings it is suggested that reviews are scheduled with the appropriate colleagues to look at the data items and methods of collection to continue to reduce the burden and increase the quality of data returned.

Footnote

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

Paul Hirst

Star Chamber Secretariat, DfE

Annex 1

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

Chair

Jude Hillary, Head of Education Data Division, DfE

NB. Karen Hall has deputised as chair on two occasions during the year

Members

Philip Brocklehurst	formerly Kensington & Chelsea local authority
Stephen Clark	formerly Lancashire local authority
Bruce Farajian	South Gloucestershire local authority
Chris Hill	Hounslow School, Hounslow
Anna Janes	Brent local authority
Rashid Jussa	Surrey local authority
Adam King	Ofsted
Jeanette Miller	Southampton local authority
Nigel Nicholds	Norfolk local authority
Louise Nock	Barnsley local authority
Cathy Piotrowski	formerly Central Bedfordshire local authority
Gavin Sandmann	Milton Keynes local authority
Keith Sorrell	Windsor School, Dudley
Simon Utting	Hackney Learning Trust
Max Winters	Bromley local authority
Debbie Wright	Kent local authority
Damien Kearns	Nishkam High School, Birmingham

Andrew Roberts, Wirral local authority, was available to advise on any business cases that require specialist financial input.

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

List of cases considered from November 2013 to October 2014

Cases fully approved

Business Case No	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
738	Change to QTS Route collection in School Workforce Census		M
739	Extn of Voluntary Adoption survey to incorporate children considered fostering for adoption		V
745	Sub-contracting info via school census for young people 16-19		M
746	SEN2_2015		M
749	Changes to how data for childminders is collected in the Early Years Census (EYC).		M
751	Adoption Flag in AP Census		M
752	Future Capacity (part of the Capital Spend Data Collection)		M
753	S251 outturn 2013/14 collection		M
754	Changes to the SSDA903 to incorporate reasons for placement changes	The business case was approved in June 2014 following submission of a discussion paper	M
756	Collection of Ofsted's placement URNs in the SSDA903		M
757	Changes to care leaver information collected in SSDA903		M
761	School Workforce Census – Changes to leadership pay data		M

Business Case No	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
762	Infant Free School Meals	Considered via correspondence	V
764	Assessing LA readiness to implement SEN reforms		V
766	Maths & English prior attainment		M
767	Maths & English prior attainment exemption in School Census		M
768	School Teachers Pay Review	Considered via correspondence	M

Cases conditionally approved

Business Case No	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
748	Local authority survey – schools’ preparedness to deliver universal infant free school meals	<p>The survey was approved via correspondence with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is run for two instances only, not three. This is specifically to avoid the burden of it being run on two consecutive months. We also recommend the second survey is run in early June rather than May. • The covering letter does not include the sentence beginning “David Laws...” because this gives the impression that it is not a voluntary collection. • The sentence in the covering letter “We have attached a short 	V

Business Case No	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
		questionnaire to this email, with just two questions.” should not include the phrase “...with just two questions.” This is because the survey contains more than two questions.	
750	SCAP2014	This business case was approved subject to the guidance and questions being shared with the Board prior to undertaking the collection.	M
755	Introduce School Census data item on withdrawal reason for post-16 learning aims	Approved subject to the Board being provided with the guidance that will accompany the collection	M
760	Social workforce collection	Some small changes and explanations are suggested along with sight of the guidance and final approval can be agreed via correspondence. The Board did confirm that they would not support a mandatory collection of age data for starters and leavers for 2014/15 as the lead in time is insufficient and they requested that this is made voluntary for the first year.	M
763	Changes to Childrens Homes Regulatory Framework		V
765	Maths & English prior attainment in School Census	The business case was approved with a request that where possible, pre-populated fields be used to minimise the burden.	M

Cases approved following amendments

Business Case No	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
732	S251 data collection of information from local authorities about spending on their education and children and young people's services and data to identify high needs places funded by a local authority.	Whilst approved the Board were able to provide a number of additional suggestions that may help with the collection. Note: this was originally submitted to a meeting in the previous reporting year where it was not approved until changes were made.	M
736	Collecting school meal take up data	Whilst approved the Board raised a number of ongoing concerns around the policy rather than the actual collection	M
740	Changes to pay data following School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document 2013	Noted changes based on SCSB feedback, therefore approved.	M
742	School childcare offer in school census	Approved for annual collection for statistical purposes only - should not be published at a school or LA level	V

Cases rejected outright

Business Case No	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
747	Social-workers 2013-14	<p>As six months notice of an intended collection is required the business case has been submitted too late for 2013/14 and for 2014/15. On this basis the business case would not be approved.</p> <p>However, The Board would be prepared to consider a business case for a voluntary questionnaire</p>	M
759	SSDA903 - Reasons for placement out of LA area	<p>The Board supported the aims of this business case but they were concerned that this was the third attempt in recent months to amend the SSDA903 collection. It was suggested that there should be more joined up thinking in this area in order to develop a more coherent collection.</p> <p>In terms of a way forward it was suggested using the CLA CiN meeting as a sounding board along with members of the Star Chamber to get this right. This business case should remain stand-alone but a review of the codeset as a whole would be beneficial.</p>	M

Cases subject to successful appeal

Business Case No	Business Case Name	SCSB Comments	Mandatory (M) or Voluntary (V)
737	CLA - SSDA903 - changes to collect care leavers aged 17 and 18	<p>The business case was rejected by the Board as insufficient time was available and no notice had been provided. It was also felt that the information would not be easily obtained.</p> <p>At appeal further information was requested at which time amendments were made to the business case which led to agreement of the proposal by the Appeal Panel.</p>	M



Department
for Education

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