

**DCSF Star Chamber Scrutiny Board and
the information authority for Further
Education (IA)**

Memorandum of Understanding

Issue: 0.4

Date: 03 September 2009

Document Control

Key personnel

Title	Memorandum of Understanding: DCSF Star Chamber Scrutiny Board and <i>the information authority</i>
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Status	DRAFT (v0.4)
Document Reference	

Summary

Version history

Version	Date	Summary of changes	Changes marked
0.1	03/08/09	N/A	
0.2	10/08/09	Una Bennett comments	N
0.3	21/08/09	SCSB comments	N

Distribution

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References

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1 Purpose of this Document

- 1.1 This document has been prepared jointly by the DCSF Star Chamber Scrutiny Board and *the information authority* for Further Education. It defines the scope, processes and benefits of joint co-operation between the two bodies in respect of data standards, collection and transfer.

2 The Partners

2.1 The DCSF Star Chamber

- 2.1.1 The Star Chamber gateway assesses proposals for new data and research collections relating to children and young people. It aims to ensure that all new collections are feasible, necessary, provide value for money and are timed to add as small a burden to the front line as possible.

2.1.2 Remit of the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board (SCSB):

The SCSB will review all DCSF data collection proposals relating to services for children, schools and families.

The group will consider issues relating to:

- technical feasibility of the information collected. For example, does the proposal fit with existing sources or would something new have to be developed?
- relevance and 'fit for purpose' of the information collected (in particular to the front line in driving performance);
- timing of the collection – whether it might be of greater effectiveness if it were collected at a different time;
- the method of collection;
- Value for Money - whether benefits of data collection are likely to outweigh the costs

2.1.3 The primary objectives of the SCSB are:

- to review proposed data collections, including those from DCSF (and, where such arrangements are agreed, other partner organisations) and, where necessary, seek revisions to ensure the proposal is fit for purpose (with support from internal colleagues and the Secretariat);
- once discussions with the relevant policy areas are complete, to decide whether a collection proposal should be approved in full, approved conditionally, or rejected.

In addition, the group has the following secondary objectives:

- to discuss developments in education and children's services data, making recommendations where appropriate, for example about changes to

definitions, or about collections, or parts of collections, that might be ripe for discontinuing;

- to monitor the progress and implementation of new collections, taking a view on their operation and usefulness and feeding back any concerns to the Department;
- to act as a consultation forum regarding other relevant developments with a link to children's, schools or family services data.

2.1.4 Membership

- The group is formed from front-line local authority representatives who are involved in children's services data including education, social care and early years, plus serving head teachers from primary and secondary education. Ofsted has a standing place on the SCSB.

2.1.5 The Star Chamber Scrutiny Board's powers come from:

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families' public commitments to minimise the burdens of data collections on schools and local authorities.
- The target to reduce front-line data collection activity, set out in the Department's Simplification Plan. This can be viewed at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/betterregulation/simplification.shtml>
- A protocol signed by the Department and a number of closely-linked bodies, aimed at reducing data burdens, increasing the efficient use of information collected, and regulating new collection requests. This can be viewed at: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/ims/newsinfo/protocol/>

2.2 ***The information authority***

2.2.1 *The information authority* was established in October 2006 to set and regulate data and collection standards for further education (FE) and training providers in England (including learner responsive, employer responsive provision and Adult Safeguarded Learning). Working alongside the Data Service the authority reviews data requests made to learning providers with a view to improving the quality of data collected and reducing the time spent on administration. This data is used by organisations in the FE system to ensure that public money is being spent in line with government targets for quality and value for money – for future planning and to make the case for the sector in seeking further funding.

2.2.2 The board oversees key data and information reforms across the FE system by directing the overall strategy for data collection and reporting, and determining data definitions and standards.

2.2.3 *The information authority's* powers come from:

- The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) ministers asking the sector to work together to reform further education data.
- The ministerial appointment of an independent chair to *the information authority* board and the cross-system membership of the board.

- A protocol agreement signed by stakeholder organisations, committing to work together to deliver the authority's objectives to reform further education data.
- You can view the Protocol on *the information authority's* website at: <http://www.theia.org.uk/about/Protocol/>

2.2.3 Relationships

- *The information authority* works alongside other standards bodies to facilitate the establishment of data standards that will benefit the whole of the education sector where possible and where appropriate.
- These include Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Information Standards Board (ISB), the Managing Information Across Partners Programme (MIAP) (notably the Common Data Definitions component) and the DCSF Star Chamber.
- *The information authority* also recognises the reciprocal arrangements governing FE in Higher Education (HE) and HE in FE.

2.2.4 Range of decisions

The board takes decisions on:

- The data standards that will be used in collection and reporting.
- The data items to be collected.
- What information will be made available and disseminated and the rules for its use, e.g. the use of 'early findings' reports; the purpose of data sharing; and how data might be shared.
- How frequently data will be collected and reported.
- Data quality: The cycle, timetable and processes for changes to collection and reporting – including receiving, assessing and ruling on proposals for new data collections and fields within the individualised learner record (ILR).

In making those decisions, the board takes account of:

- The principles of *the information authority* that use of data is maximised and burden is minimised.
- The wider interests of the FE system as a whole – and not just the interests of their own organisations.
- Representations from the system, through the secretariat, so that data user and data provider stakeholders can influence board decisions.

- The need for stability and appropriate notice of change to FE data standards.

2.2.5 Scope of decisions

The main scope of the board's decisions are:

- Post-16 learning across the English FE system – including FE colleges, FE learning through other institutions, work-based learning, sixth form colleges, Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) – but not including HE.
- Data about learners and their learning and other types of data e.g. data on staff, awarding data as it affects providers, data collected and shared with Job Centre Plus on integrated skills and employment, and data covered by the Framework for Excellence, will be in scope.
- The board will have an interest in (and influence on) data standards, collections and reporting about and in school sixth forms, HE and in other UK countries. However, while working to ensure that the data needed from those systems is available to the FE system, the board will not have primary responsibility, but will work alongside other standards bodies to facilitate the establishment of data standards that will benefit the whole of the education sector where possible and where appropriate.

2.2.6 Membership

2.2.7 The membership of *the information authority* board spans a wide range of organisations with an interest in FE and training data. This includes: the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF); Association of Colleges (AoC); Association of Learning Providers (ALP); the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS); Ofsted; the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Local Government Authority (LGA).

3 Benefits of Co-operation

- 3.1 The SCSB and *the information authority* have a common interest in promoting the use of data standards and in controlling data collections and in ensuring comparability of data across 14 -19 provision.
- 3.2 Both organisations have responsibility for England alone, but look at the implications UK-wide and internationally.
- 3.3 SCSB and *information authority* co-operation will ensure:
- The development of a common or comparable data collection timetable.
 - Avoidance of duplication when assessing data collection requests.
 - Sharing and access to knowledge.

- Broadening and deepening of the skill base to each organisation through joint working.
- Supporting interoperability between the FE and training system and school sixth forms.
- That a consistent message and advice is provided to developers and sponsors of information standards.
- That comparable data is collected from schools, FE and training where possible and appropriate.

4 The Functions and Relationship of the SCSB and *the information authority*

	SCSB	<i>The information authority</i>
4.1.1	The SCSB will continue to act as the gatekeeper for data collection requests aimed at children’s services i.e. schools (0-16 provision) and school sixth forms - including those that are returned via the School Census – developing a list of ‘endorsed’ data collections.	The IA will continue to act as the gatekeeper for learning providers (FE colleges, independent training providers and sixth form colleges) that submit their data returns via the individualised learner record (ILR) – developing a list of ‘endorsed’ collections; and for setting data standards across FE and training in England.
4.1.2	The SCSB and the IA will agree a joined-up approach to planning and to data collections where possible; particularly on issues where there is a common interest, such as 14-19 reforms, Framework for Excellence and 14-19 Diplomas.	The IA and the SCSB will agree a joined-up approach to planning and to data collections where possible; particularly on issues where there is a common interest, such as 14-19 reforms, Framework for Excellence and 14-19 Diplomas.
4.1.3	Through joint working and referrals to the IA where appropriate the SCSB will strive not to duplicate assessment of proposed data collections.	Through joint working and referrals to the SCSB where appropriate the IA will strive not to duplicate assessment of proposed data collections.
4.1.4	The SCSB will support the development of a common data collections timetable across school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, FE colleges and FE training providers.	The IA will support the development of a common data collections timetable across school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, FE colleges and FE training providers.

	SCSB	<i>The information authority</i>
4.1.5	The SCSB will support a common approach to FfE , 0-16 and 16-19 data standards and collection to enhance interoperability across the system – in particular those agreed by the Information Standards Board (ISB).	The IA will support a common approach to FfE and 16-19 data standards and collection to enhance interoperability across the system – in particular those agreed by the Information Standards Board (ISB).
4.1.6	The SCSB will inform the IA in advance of any decisions that may have an impact on the work of the SCSB.	The IA will inform the SCSB in advance of any decisions that may have an impact on the work of the SCSB.
4.1.7	The SCSB and the IA will undertake joint work or share resources where appropriate to achieve greater impact, acceptance and a timely result.	The IA and the SCSB will undertake joint work or share resources where appropriate to achieve greater impact, acceptance and a timely result.
4.1.8	The partners will share communication and marketing plans and activities and take every opportunity to seek joint participation and collaboration in other areas as appropriate.	The partners will share communication and marketing plans and activities and take every opportunity to seek joint participation and collaboration in other areas as appropriate.
4.1.9	The SCSB will refer accurately and positively to the IA's activities in its communications. The SCSB will correct any statements at the request of the IA.	The IA will refer accurately and positively to the SCSB's activities in its communications. The IA will correct any statements at the request of the SCSB.
4.1.10	SCSB members are committed to ensuring fair and responsive application of the principles of due process, transparency, openness, impartiality and the voluntary nature of standardisation.	IA Board members are committed to ensuring fair and responsive application of the principles of due process, transparency, openness, impartiality and the voluntary nature of standardisation and for supporting change for the benefit of the whole sector – not just their organisations' own interest.
4.1.11	The SCSB Secretariat will invite	The Chair of the SCSB will

	SCSB	<i>The information authority</i>
	<i>the information authority</i> representatives to its meetings when appropriate matters are raised and will continue to copy the IA secretariat in on notes and minutes from its meetings.	continue to attend IA Board meetings in his capacity as Head of Profession for Statistics at the DCSF to raise and comment on issues as appropriate. The IA Secretariat will continue to copy the SCSB secretariat in on notes and minutes from its meetings.

5 Review and Disputes

5.1 The MoU shall be reviewed annually

5.2 Conflicts of interest and other disputes between the two bodies will be resolved via discussions between the two bodies' secretariats. If agreement cannot be reached the issue will be escalated to the Chairs of the SCSB and the IA board for resolution. If agreement still cannot be reached, then the dispute can be further escalated via appropriate ministerial correspondence.

6 Termination

6.2 The joint co-operation can be terminated by either party giving three months' notice of its intentions subject to the agreement of the Chairs of the IA Board and the SCSB.

6.3 The consequences of termination are recognised as:

- Negative impact on learners, the front-line, businesses and stakeholders
- High probability of lack of interoperability
- Lack of access to and exchange of relevant skill sets
- High probability of increased costs and resources
- Possibility of different decisions being taken by each party.