



# Star Chamber Scrutiny Board (SCSB) Formerly External Scrutiny Group (ESG)

*Rashid Jussa from Surrey reports that it has been a challenging and absorbing year for the group, involving changes to the way that we work and a change of title and status...*

We have been fortunate to have been in the right place at the right time; as the importance of working collaboratively with Local Authorities has been recognised at ministerial level we have been put forward as an example of how this can happen and the value it can bring to the various government initiatives and their unrequited thirst for knowledge!

As a consequence the new year saw us operating in our new guise as the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board and receiving a visit from the new Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools and Learners Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP.

In the January meeting we discussed proposals for surveys, baseline questionnaires and research on such subjects as School Workforce pilots, Trust Schools, Extended Services and Home Education. Our aim as always is to challenge the need for any collections, to examine the methods being proposed and ensure that the impact on schools and LA is properly understood and recognised.

In a free-ranging discussion with Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP, it was reassuring to hear that the minister's views on data collections were that there needs to be a balance between data being collected and the burden its collection places on LA; if there is a need for more data then something else has to stop being collected.

Amongst the issues discussed were how she may be able to use her influence to help smooth data sharing with the NHS, the principle of 'collect data once and use many times' and dealing with FoI requests when data already exists nationally.

Work with the 'Reducing the Burdens' Project continued, with an item by item look at some data collections including the SEN2 (Special Education Need) and PF1 (Private Fostering) data collections, both of these emerging largely unscathed.

One of the main benefits of the group has been that we are now seen as a consultative group and have been able to influence positively and sometimes mitigate data collections.

### Examples include;

**Tellus 4** – the transfer to the DCSF of this survey in itself lead to many benefits, the main one being a desire to consult extensively on the format for the survey. We have been fortunate that the DCSF lead Alison Thompson has joined us on several occasions to discuss ideas and take on board suggestions, with the result that the next survey due in the Autumn of 2009 can be of benefit to all parties involved.

**Young Runaways** – the recent data collection on Young Runaways, whilst being insisted on by ministers,

benefited from some input from the group on the best way to collect data that has some meaning. The result was a self-assessment with well-defined criteria and clear guidance on what should be in place for each individual score.

Details about the SCSB are due to be posted on the DCSF website in the near future, in the meantime the News and Communications section on the Local Authorities section of the DCSF website - <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/localauthorities/index.cfm?action=home> – is a good place to find out about the latest collections coming your way.

*Happy New Year! - Rashid Jussa, Performance Manager, Surrey CC*

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