

## Star Chamber - External Scrutiny Group (Children's Services and Education)

*Held on September 7th, this was the inaugural meeting of the External Scrutiny Group (ESG), which has been formed from what was the Children's Working Group.*

The Children's Working Group (CWG) used to work with the DfES on changes to the statutory returns for Children's Services (particularly social care) and a sub-group of the Information on Children Education and schools (ICES) group - which among other things considered requests for information from schools by researchers and policy officers - and colleagues from DfES.

The meeting started with a round of introductions and a brief explanation of the role of each of us in our organisations, this took a little while because there were 29 of us wedged in two 'tiers' round the table!!

John Murphy gave a presentation of the work of his team the Information Management Group (IMG) of the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). This has a role that is similar to what is envisaged for the ESG. He described how the aim of the IMG is to ensure that there is no duplication, the burden is as little as possible, and there is a valid need for the information.

It has been a success because it turns requests round quickly (15 days is the aim) and it can provide

valuable insight (such as more effective research methods for finding out what the requestor wants) to 'knock the request' (my words!) into shape before it goes to the group.

The second part of the day was spent discussing the terms of reference of the ESG.

Among the items agreed were;

- a. Templates will be revised to have a section saying that there needs to be time for software suppliers to make changes. - Data Scrutiny Group (DSG) to provide amendments to Star Chamber Secretariat
- b. It was suggested that the terms of reference allow for the group to investigate other areas of interest that impinge on the work of the members of the group and make recommendations accordingly.
- c. It was also suggested that there be one 'Template' for all proposals whether Education or Social Care.
- d. It was suggested that DfES colleagues check (with CSCI and DfES) to see if there are any changes that are being planned for 07/08 as

they would need to be approved by the end of September to take effect in that year.

The business of the group will start from the 1st October, subject to the Star Chamber (the final approving body) agree the proposal for this group.

This will entail both regular meetings to discuss complex issues and email circulation of more straightforward items for consideration.

Nicky Schneider and Meena Kishinani will coordinate the responses from colleagues from 'ICES' and 'CWG' backgrounds respectively.

By the next meeting (30th October 2006) there will have been a chance for the group to consider if this is an effective way of working. Also a new chair will be in place.

The group gave their thanks to Ian Watson for chairing the meeting and for all his work with the ICES in all its previous incarnations over the years and wished him well with his new role.

*For any further information please contact Rashid Jussa - see back page for details.*