Implementation Review Unit
Reducing bureaucracy in schools:

Gatekeeping, impact assessments and data collection
Guidance for local authorities and partner organisations

Implementation Review Unit

IRU

Contents

1. Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is:

– to encourage local authorities and other organisations which work with schools to adopt and operate gatekeeping and impact assessment systems;

– to provide examples and ideas from local authorities where such systems are already in place.

Reducing the volume of unnecessary bureaucracy involving schools is an essential part of the process of freeing up time to enable headteachers, teachers and support staff to concentrate on their primary task of providing teaching and learning, and raising standards.

The question is, of course, what constitutes unnecessary bureaucracy? There is no single, easy answer to this question, but the proper use of gatekeeping systems will help identify material, information and surveys (including data requests) which do not need to be sent to schools.

Likewise, the development of impact assessments will enable organisations to gauge the extent to which their policies and initiatives will impact on schools and, ultimately, whether they are worth pursuing.

This booklet contains practical ideas and suggestions for operating gatekeeping and impact assessment systems. They are taken from local authorities where such systems are already in place or being piloted. We are grateful to those authorities that contributed to the development of this guidance.

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2. Reducing bureaucracy: principles

The Implementation Review Unit has developed a number of principles designed to help reduce bureaucracy in schools and which are commended to local authorities, other organisations working with schools and to schools themselves. The principles are shown below.

Principles for organisations working with schools

We expect the DfES, local authorities (including LEAs and Children's Services Authorities) and partner agencies to work with schools in accordance with the spirit and requirements of the New Relationship with Schools; in general, new initiatives and policies should be instead of, and not additional to, existing ones. These organisations are expected not only to assess their own potential impact on the workload of schools, but also:

1. When developing new policies and initiatives* to:

   – clearly demonstrate their direct or indirect benefit to children in schools and to teaching and learning;

   – undertake, and make available, impact assessments showing the implication for schools of individual policies and initiatives;

   – clearly indicate whether individual policies and initiatives are statutory, identifying relevant legislation as appropriate;

   – provide sufficient lead-in time for their introduction;

   – clearly identify resource implications, both in terms of potential savings and/or increases;

   – where appropriate ensure additional resources are made available, and easily identifiable; and/or,

- work with headteachers and governors to identify how existing resources can be released to support the new policies and initiatives;

- as part of the review of implemented policies and initiatives, evaluate their impact assessments and make available the results.

2. When producing guidance, clearly identify whether the guidance is:

- mandatory – if so, identify the covering directive legislation.

- non-mandatory – if so, indicate whether schools will be expected to follow it and why. (If not expected to follow the guidance, will schools feel obliged to do so, because of the judgements of others, eg Ofsted?)

3. When seeking data and other information from schools:

- ensure requests are made in accordance with the Protocol on Data Sharing and Rationalisation in the Schools Sector (see page 9 of this booklet);

- use electronic methods of data collection and transfer;

- avoid making duplicate requests.

4. Be prepared and willing to discuss new policies and initiatives with headteachers, governors and staff and/or their representatives, and take into account their views.

5. Develop gatekeeping systems to reduce the likelihood of unnecessary material being sent to schools or requests made of them.

Principles for Schools

Organisations working with schools should also take account of the principles we have suggested schools should adopt. These include:

Schools are expected to:

1. co-operate with the DfES, local authorities (including LEAs and Children's Services Authorities) and partner agencies in discussing new policies and initiatives, including assisting with the preparation of impact assessments and looking at resource implications;

2. determine themselves whether they will follow non-mandatory guidance;

3. question the need for non-statutory data and/or information, choosing themselves whether to provide it;

4. challenge requests to provide duplicate data and/or information.

*The term "new policies and initiatives" also embraces new strategies, schemes and directives, and changes to existing ones.

3. Gatekeeping in local authorities and partner organisations

Gatekeeping is more than getting information into schools quickly and efficiently; it is about asking whether the material should be going to schools in the first place, whether in paper or electronic format.

Gatekeeping tips

The following pointers will be helpful in both establishing effective gatekeeping systems and reviewing those already in place:

Responsibility – a senior officer (or officers) should be given responsibility for running a gatekeeping system. They should be given authority to question material being distributed to schools and, when necessary, prevent it from being sent;

Universal application – gatekeeping should apply across all departments of a local authority where they impact on schools, not just the LEA or Children's Services Authority;

Reporting mechanisms – should be in place to encourage headteachers to report when they receive unnecessary material and to advise on the effectiveness of the gatekeeping systems;

Regular reviews – senior management should review regularly the effectiveness of the gatekeeping system, seeking views from headteachers as appropriate;

Cross-media – gatekeeping should cover both electronic and paper communication with schools, including data requests;

Third parties – local authority contractors and agencies whose work impacts on schools should be required, as part of the contract, to have gatekeeping systems in place.

Gatekeeping best practice

Many authorities have provided examples of best practice which have developed from reviews of their communications with schools. These include:

Targets – setting targets for reducing the volume of material being sent to schools;

Forewarning – identifying peak periods of communications and forewarning schools;

Giving notice – advising schools termly in advance of the material they can expect to receive from the authority. Material not included within this advance notice is not normally then sent;

Data surveys – mapping different data collections, both to avoid duplication and to forewarn schools of forthcoming requirements and timescales;

Clarity – introducing front sheets to letters/documents briefly explaining the contents and for whom intended;

–making clear to schools whether documentation, advice or guidance is mandatory or voluntary;

Delivery – reviewing courier systems to ensure deliveries to schools are made at appropriate times;

IT – placing local policies on the intranet and providing facilities for schools to place their policies in shared folders;

– developing e-mail addresses and intranet pages targeted towards different functions within schools, e.g. administration, science, modern foreign languages;

– severely restricting the availability of "all schools" e-mail addresses;

Format – undertaking a cost/benefit analysis to determine at which point documents should be sent to schools in paper format, rather than electronically (with the expectation that schools will then print them out);

Holistic – routing communications to schools from other council departments via the LEA (or Children's Services Authority);

Consultation – involving headteachers directly in drawing up authority/school communication protocols;

Acting as agents – not distributing information from third parties, unless they are partner organisations;

Monitoring – creating a "virtual school" to monitor information sent to schools;

– establishing "watchdog schools" to monitor and provide feedback on the material they receive;

– Senior Management teams reviewing weekly the material sent to schools.

4. Impact assessments

Impact assessments are a key element in helping to reduce the bureaucratic burden on schools. They are part of a disciplined, routine approach to the creation and development of policies and initiatives which take account of the ability of schools to play their part in implementing them.

The use of impact assessments within the DfES has had a very positive effect on policy formation and has provided a means of managing down the number of initiatives, ensuring that those remaining are of good quality and useful to schools. There is no reason why this positive impact should not also be replicated at a local level.

An example of the impact assessment form developed by the DfES is provided in Annexe 1. This has formed the basis for the development of impact assessment systems in local authorities, such as those in Bristol City and Lincolnshire LEAs, and can be readily adapted for use elsewhere.
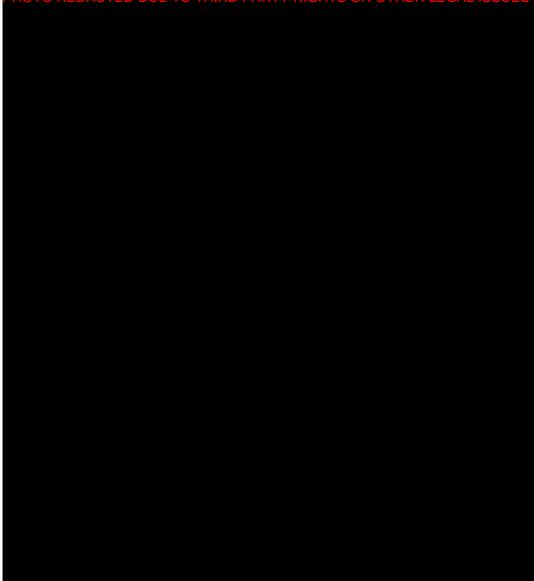
5. Data collection

The collection of data of various kinds from schools is of growing importance. This brings with it the need for systems to manage data collection and transfer, to avoid both gathering data unnecessarily and/or duplicating data requests.

The DfES and a number of national education partners have signed a Protocol on Data Sharing and Rationalisation in the Schools Sector, which commits them to a collective responsibility to minimise the burdens of data collection on schools and local authorities. Local authorities are signatories to this Protocol through the Local Government Association.

Each of the signatories is committed to the principles that:

– data should be collected once and used many times;

– collection and sharing of data should be fully automated;

– the value of any data collected should demonstrably outweigh the costs;

– personal data on individuals should be properly protected.

In addition to these overarching principles, there are steps local authorities can take to ensure data collection from schools is both restricted and well managed. Examples include:

– ensuring all data requests are centralised within the authority to avoid duplication;

– requiring a business case to be made (and approved by senior management) which demonstrates that the value of any proposed data collection justifies the burden of collection;

– notifying schools at least a term in advance of data collection requirements and collection dates;

– clearly identifying for schools which data requests are a statutory requirement and which are not.

Copies of the full Data Protocol
are available from Prologue,
the DfES publication distributors,
on 0845 602 2260.

6. Feedback

If you have any comments or
questions on the content of this
booklet, please contact:

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Copies of this booklet are also being
made available to schools.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES
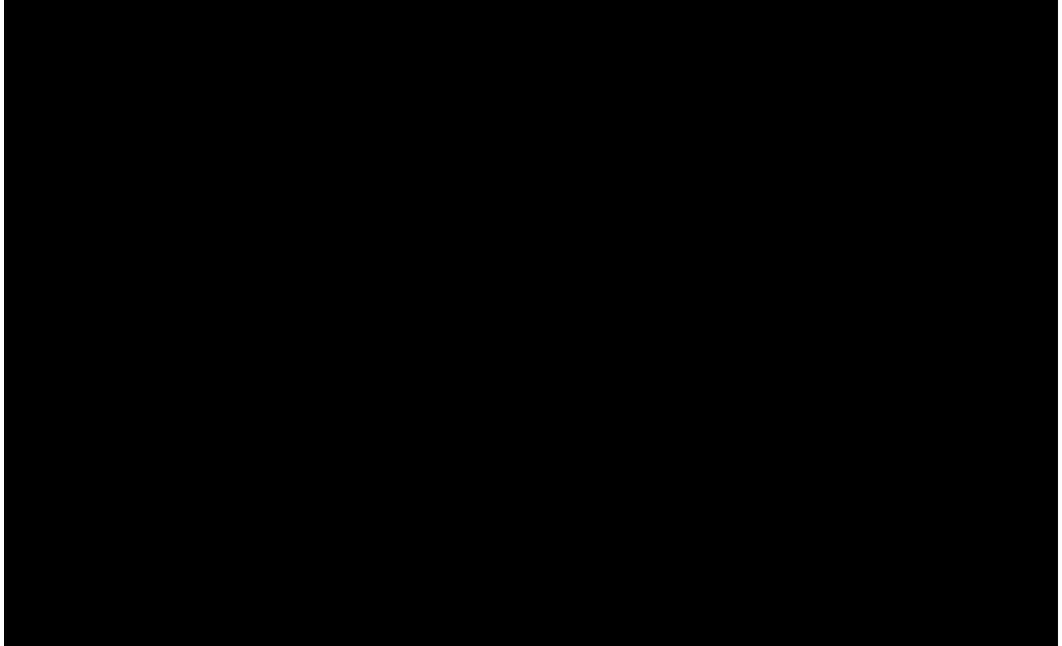
7. Annexe 1

Regulatory Impact Assessment
Public Services Threshold Test: Schools

Part 1: Basic details

Name of policy/initiative

Policy Manager

Divisional Manager

Policy/initiative description (maximum 50 words)

Is this a [ ] pilot? [ ] pathfinder? [ ] full roll out?

When will this have an impact on schools?

d d / m m / y y

Is the assessment in Part 2 being submitted at the same time as Part 1?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

If no, when will it be completed by?

d d / m m / y y

How many schools will be affected?

☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Special

Are schools:

☐ required

to participate in this policy/initiative?

☐ expected

or

☐ is this simply an offer to schools?

Has a communications plan for this policy/initiative been agreed with Communications Unit CYPF & S?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please state contact name in Communications UNIT CYPF & S

Part 2: Impact assessment

A – Benefits and strategic fit

What are the key benefits of this policy/ initiative, and how will it contribute to the delivery of the Primary and/or Secondary Strategy and, where appropriate, with wider Departmental strategies?
Please cross reference to specific strategic aims if possible.

What links have been made with other policies/initiatives?

How have you ensured that this policy/initiative is not duplicated work being carried out elsewhere?

What will schools be asked to do as a result of this policy/initiative?

Are schools being given anything (such as resources, staff) to be involved?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please give details

Is the policy/initiative going to involve:

☐ regulations?   ☐ communications?   ☐ bids?

☐ plans?   ☐ data collection?   ☐ face-to-face events?

☐ other?

Please give details

Based on your answers to the previous questions, estimate the amount of time that head teachers, teachers and support staff will have to spend on the policy/initiative, and then estimate the monetary cost to the sector. This might include:

– submitting information before implementing the policy initiative;
– preparing for the introduction of the policy/initiative;
– training;
– ordering materials;
– completing monitoring/evaluation information.

	Head teachers	Teachers	Support staff
a. Time impact per person (hours per year)			
b. Number of people affected			
c. Total time impact (a x b) (hours per year)			
d. Hourly cost per person (see 'ready reckoner')			
e. Total staff cost (c x d) (£ per year)			
f. Additional non-staff costs			
g. Total cost (e + f) for all staff groups			

How have these burdens on schools been assessed, for example, consultations, reference groups, pilots?

How is the schools' workforce likely to react to the new policy/initiative?

C – Timing, evaluation and presentation

Why are we doing this at the date planned?

What plans are in place to evaluate this policy/initiative?
Please refer to ASD guidance
http://ntweb1/AnalyticalServices/ASGeneral/evaluation/evalframes.htm
or go to 'E' for evaluation on Pathfinder

Please comment on presentational issues.

Any other comments

Impact Assessment endorsed

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Further information or public RIA required. Please specify timescale.

Comments/issues for further considerations.

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