

## A Chief Education Officer?

### Key questions to consider during St. George's House consultation:

1. How would such an appointment help build more trust in education policy?
2. Appointments such as the Head of OFSTED are subject to a pre-appointment hearing in front of the Education Select Committee. What kind of process should there be to appoint to this position?
3. What kind of term might a Chief Education officer serve?
4. What kind of roles might the support team/ office of a CEO need to make it effective?
5. How might a national post such as this take proper account of regional needs and variations?
6. How might the role interact with organisations such as OFSTED and also external organisations like the Chartered College of Teaching and the unions?
7. What would success look like in 3, 5 and 10 years time?

### Why a Chief Education Officer?

Most government departments have some kind of independent expert to offer advice on policy. Moreover, most also have a Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) to provide scientific advice, and these Departmental CSAs work together under the leadership of the [Government Chief Scientific Adviser](#) to support each other and to resolve cross departmental problems.

The Chief Scientific Adviser's role is to *provide advice to ministers...including the use of scientific advice in policy making and facilitate communication on particular high-profile STEM-related issues and those posing new challenges for government.*

Unsurprisingly, all these Scientific Advisers are academics with strong professional backgrounds. The CSA for the Department for Education is Professor Russell Viner, a paediatrician and professor at the University College London (UCL) Great Ormond St. Institute of Child Health and who works clinically at University College London Hospitals (UCLH). His work focuses on public health and policy for children and young people, particularly at the overlap of physical and mental health and the connections between education and health. His research ranges from trials in schools to improve mental health to data science work with very large, linked datasets in health and education.

It is not, however, clear how education academics or professionals are advising or challenging the Department for Education on the setting of vision, strategy and policy. The closest to this is probably the Children's Commissioner, whose responsibility is to *promote the rights, views and interests of children in policies or decisions affecting their lives. They particularly represent children who are vulnerable or who find it hard to make their views known.* The Office of the Children's Commissioner is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the [Department for Education](#). There are 18 of these bodies, ranging from regulatory bodies - Ofqual and OFSTED to delivery bodies like Oak National Academy, to those that do offer more of an advisory role e.g. on teacher pay, and those that the government asks to help implement policy e.g. Construction Industry Training Board. Even though required to consult at times with this process does not always happen. You can find a list here <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations#department-for-education>

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Interestingly, the Department for Business and Trade do have a specific education sector advisory group, whose role is to *co-ordinate efforts to boost UK education exports and sets the strategic direction for the Department for Business and Trade's (DBT) education team*'. The DBT minister responsible for the education sector and the DfE universities minister co-chair this Education Sector Advisory Group. It brings together industry, government and relevant partners through inclusion of *important representative bodies from the sector*.

So, **the argument for a Chief Education Officer** is that such a role could bring expert advice from the profession, with discussions and decisions made fully and freely available to the public, and thereby restoring trust that a professional voice is available to ministers and civil servants. Assuming a longer-term plan, such a role would also ensure that government policy decisions were in line with the plan or at least assessed against it.

The appointment of a Chief Education Officer could guarantee that education policies and plans are given the attention and priority they deserve. This role could bring a deep understanding of the education system and the challenges it faces that politicians do not have. In bringing this view, and in sharing their expertise with those mandated with setting policy, they could not only play a key role in making education planning a top priority and that the necessary resources are allocated to support it, they could also help ensure that education planning is consistently evidence-based and fit-for-purpose.

A Chief Education Officer could help provide continuity and stability in the education system. A dedicated, consistent appointee who provides guidance and oversight to education planning and policy development would ensure that long-term plans are not derailed by political shifts. This could help build trust with the public, who would have greater confidence that plans are being developed and implemented in a thoughtful, consistent manner.

### **The argument against**

**Three main arguments against have been raised in discussions so far.**

1. The recent COVID enquiry has highlighted how even the most senior advisers do not ensure that advice is always heeded.
2. If this is a political appointment, could there ever really be objective advice?
3. How can one person really represent such a wide sector? Wouldn't a small group of advisors therefore be better idea?