

ID Cards - Who Benefits?

The government recently published its draft Identification Card [ID card] bill, and hopes to bring in legislation later this year to introduce the cards. They claim that polls show about 80% of people are in favour of ID cards. However, the same surveys show people don't want ID cards if they have to pay for them which we will, either directly when getting a new driving licence or passport, or through increased taxes. Currently the estimated cost is £35 and it's likely to be more.

On top of this, most people are not aware of the full proposals contained in the draft legislation, which include the creation of a National Identity Register, containing information about everyone over 16 who is in the UK for more than 3 months.

This information will include all names ever used, date and place of birth, all addresses ever lived at and the period when you lived there, physical characteristics which could be used to identify you (including biometric identifiers), nationality and immigration status. The Register will also include a list of other numbers allocated to you (i.e. National Insurance and NHS no's) and will be linked to a central national number. Meanwhile, separately, an NHS central database is already in the process of being set up and run by British Telecom, and within the next 18 months all your prescriptions and medical information will be entered into it.

Compulsion

The Government claims that the scheme would be voluntary initially. But look a little closer and it becomes clear this is false. Firstly if you renew or apply for a Driving Licence or Passport after 2007 there will only be an ID card version, so you will have to 'apply' to be entered on the Register - unless you want to give up travel and driving. You will have to pay extra for this (£35 at least) and attend an appointment for a biometric scan (fingerprints, iris scan etc.). Secondly the bill contains a provision for people to be added to the National Identity Register if information from other sources is available. So anyone could be added whether they like it or not.

Also the draft bill contains provision for registration to be made compulsory at a later date, and states clearly that this is the ultimate intention. When this happens the state can require you to attend to apply to be registered, and if you fail to do so you face a penalty of up to £2500. Not just once, but every time you are sent a notice to register.

Who can look at data?

A range of authorities including Police, Inland Revenue, Customs & Excise, Security Services, Immigration Service and Dept for Work Pensions will have the right to access your file. And the government will have the right to cross check your record with any records held on you by your bank, insurance companies and by credit checking agencies. It is likely there will be data sharing with other countries such as the USA too.

Both the private and public sector may have the right to look at cards and make checks on you. Whilst an entry must be made every time anyone checks your record, you have no right to see this 'audit trail'.

Big Brother

Even if you trust this government (and not many people do), can you be sure that you can trust all future governments. What if the BNP end up running your local council? Can you trust the private companies running the scheme; the data inputters with all your personal details; any hackers breaking into the system?

The loss of personal privacy fundamentally alters society. You may feel 'you've nothing to lose if you've nothing to hide', but do you really want others to be able to access your personal details such as who you previously lived with, what illnesses you've had in the past, whether you had a drink problem 10 years ago, your arrest for shoplifting or drugs as a teenager etc.

Penalties

Once registration becomes compulsory, as well as the penalty for failing to register, people face a range of penalties for failing to comply with the new regulations. including failure to