

Chris Lightfoot,
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Rt Hon David Blunkett MP,
The Home Office,
50 Queen Anne's Gate,
London,
SW1H 9AT

Dear David Blunkett,

Over the weekend it was widely reported that the Home Office intends to go ahead with a scheme for compulsory identity cards in the UK. I have a number of questions about the proposed scheme which I hope that you will answer in a straightforward fashion:

1. How much will the card cost?
2. What will happen to members of the public who cannot afford to buy the card?
3. Can you give an example of a recent terrorist incident in a country *without* compulsory identity cards which would likely have been averted if cards *had* been available there?
4. The use of biometric information for authentication is fraught with difficulties. In particular, it is impossible to revoke or issue new biometric information. How will the use of biometric information on the new cards address these problems?
5. Some physically disabled people will not be able to use the biometric features in the card. How will the Government ensure that such people do not suffer from additional discrimination as a result of the proposed scheme?
6. Recent Government IT projects such as the National Air Traffic System and the system Individual Learning Accounts system have overrun and suffered serious failures. In the latter case there was substantial fraud. How will the Government ensure that the identity card computer system does not suffer from either cost overruns or security problems?

7. One reason given for implementing an identity card system is that the United States would prefer us to have one for the convenience of their customs service. Will the data on the identity cards be available to governments outside the United Kingdom, and if so, how will those governments' use of it be governed by the relevant legislation on Data Protection?
8. Current practice in the United States shows that giving individuals an identifying number such as a 'Social Security Number' has made identity fraud extremely simple, since all that is needed to assume another person's identity in a transaction is knowledge of the identifying number. Any centralised identity card scheme must, obviously, incorporate such an identifying number. Will this number be visible on the outside of the card or be disclosed to third parties under any circumstances?
9. Will the scheme use 'smart cards' which incorporate a cryptographic key-pair? If so, will the Government have knowledge of each card's private key?

I hope that you will be able to answer these questions or to pass them to somebody else who can. Although there has been some coverage of identity card proposals in the news, no convincing answers to the above questions have been given.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Lightfoot