British Police State: Rethink on UK identity card plans

The government has set out changes to its planned identity scheme – including allowing people to use passports or driving licences instead of ID cards.

Most people will not now have to give their fingerprints when getting a passport until 2011/12 – three years later than had previously been planned.

And plans to force passport applicants to get an ID card have been dropped.

The exception will be airport and other workers in security-sensitive jobs who will need an ID card from 2009.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said students would also be encouraged to get identity cards from 2010, as part of plans to let "consumer demand" drive take-up.

She confirmed that some non-EU migrants applying for leave to enter or remain in the UK, such as students or spouses, will need ID cards from November.

The aim is that by 2015, 90% of foreign nationals will have identity cards, she added.

The announcement was branded a "complete U-turn" by Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Chris Huhne – but the Tories said the government was trying to introduce the scheme by stealth.

The government had planned to take biometrics – including fingerprints and iris scans – of everyone applying for a new passport from 2008.

'Public acceptance'

The original proposal was that from January 2010 everyone getting a new passport would have to get an ID card in addition to a passport.

Ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair had said that a major plank of Labour's next election manifesto would be a bill to make it compulsory for everyone, irrespective of whether they get a passport or not, to get an ID card.

But those timetables have slipped, the proposed biometric data cut back to just fingerprints and no mention made of any foreseeable plans to make identity cards compulsory.

While there are big advantages to making ID cards as widespread as possible, we need to

be clear there is public acceptance," Ms Smith told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

She said that information on the national identity register would not be held on a single, central database for security reasons and she said the "full roll-out" of ID cards would happen by 2017.

Private firms will be encouraged to set-up "biometric enrolment centres" where passport and ID card applicants will be fingerprinted.
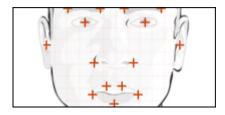
Recommendation rejected

In a speech in London, Ms Smith "endorsed" the findings of Sir James Crosby – whose report on working with the private sector on ID cards recommended a more consumer-driven approach.

But the home office rejected one of Sir James' key recommendations – that ID cards should be free of charge.

The government's plans for ID cards, linking personal data to a fingerprint, have been plagued by technical delays, budget overspend and political controversy.

Thw government claims identity cards will boost security, tackle identity fraud and prevent illegal immigration.

[Biometric technology guide](#)

Critics oppose the cards on cost, effectiveness and civil liberty grounds.

Shadow home secretary David Davis told BBC One's Question Time the government was trying to bring in compulsory ID cards "by stealth".

"They are trying to introduce this very slowly so that by the time they come to make it compulsory they will have more than half the population already on and the politics will have gone out of it," he said.

'Disastrous idea'

He was particularly concerned about the "lethally dangerous" National Identity Register because he said holding personal details of everyone in one place would be a target for criminals, hackers and terrorists.

"It's a disastrous idea, they should have the guts to actually cancel it," he said.

Lib Dem peer Shirley Williams told the same programme her party would fight ID cards "all the way" adding: "The terrifying thing about the ID card system, and it is unnecessary, is the sheer amount of information the government is trying to pick up on every single one of

you."

Phil Booth, of campaign group NO2ID dismissed Ms Smith's latest announcement as a "marketing exercise".

"Whether you volunteer or are coerced onto the ID database, there's no way back. You'll be monitored for life," he said.

The UK's main aviation trade union, Unite, has also criticised the plans, which it said could discriminate against some of its members who already have to undergo "vigorous pre-employment checks".

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