



# Home Office

## HOME SECRETARY

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Rt Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP  
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Your reference: 01083567

Thank you for your letter of 16 October on behalf of your constituent about the National Identity Scheme.

As you will be aware, the National Identity Scheme is currently being introduced following a manifesto commitment by the Government. The Identity Cards Act 2006 acts as the statutory basis for the scheme, whilst the "National Identity Scheme Delivery Plan 2008", published in March 2008, details the Government's plans for its implementation. Both documents can be obtained on the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) website at: [www.ips.gov.uk](http://www.ips.gov.uk)

Reliable means to prove and protect identity is a fundamental requirement in modern society, whether in applying for a job, traveling across borders, opening a bank account or applying for state benefits. However, rapidly-moving technology and greatly increased mobility of people are driving new requirements for identity documents to fit in with how we live our lives and do business today. They must be more flexible so that transactions can be more convenient and less time consuming, for example, to allow access to services via the internet. Equally, identity documents must incorporate additional protections to safeguard us against those who would seek to exploit new advances to help them steal our identities or create false ones for use in illegal activity.

The UK's current systems for establishing identity are not well suited to meet these challenges. Levels of identity theft and fraud have increased substantially. The most recent estimate of the cost to the UK economy, published in February 2006, was over £1.7 billion per annum. Multiple or false identities are used in more than a third of terrorist related activity and in organised crime and money laundering. Lack of clarity over someone's identity also presents risks to the public and private sectors when providing services.

The Government is introducing the National Identity Scheme with the purpose of providing UK residents, aged 16 and over, with an identity card as a secure and reliable method of proving identity information. We are introducing the Scheme in a way that will deliver the most benefit to all of us as quickly as possible. That means a twin track approach which prioritises both increasing public protection in sensitive areas and making life easier for people whose daily lives will benefit the most from having or using an identity card.

The Government recognises that some people are concerned about the National Identity Scheme infringing their civil liberties. We are of course aware of our obligations under human rights legislation and we are confident that our proposals strike the right balance between the rights of the individual and the good of society.

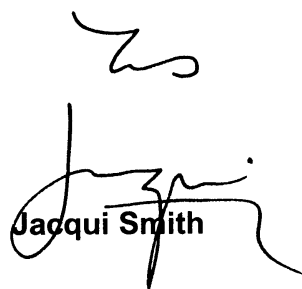
We want individuals to have as much control and ownership of their own data as possible. The National Identity Register (NIR) will hold the minimum amount of information necessary to identify an individual and meet the Scheme's statutory purposes.

The information that may be held on the NIR is strictly limited by the Identity Cards Act 2006. It consists of basic biographical data (such as name, address, date and place of birth, gender), biometric data (such as facial image and fingerprints), and administrative data (related to the secure operation of the register and identity cards). Only Parliament would be able to change the information which could be held by the National Identity Scheme. There is, however, absolutely no question of an identity card holding sensitive personal information such as medical records, racial or ethnic origin, occupation, political opinions or religious beliefs.

I can assure you that individuals will always have subject access rights under the DPA to see the information in their record on the NIR and we will make it convenient for any changes to be made or any inaccuracies to be corrected. The IPS has included specific business and technical requirements to make data subject access requests as easy as possible for the individual while still ensuring that such access does not compromise the security of information held on the NIR.

The Government has also introduced several safeguards to ensure that the scheme is run appropriately. The Identity Cards Act 2006 establishes stringent safeguards regarding the use of the identity cards; what information they contain and how checks against the NIR are made. There will also be an independent National Identity Scheme Commissioner whose task will be to keep both the use of identity cards and the NIR under review. We will also work closely with the Information Commissioner about the amount of data we hold and how it is managed.

More information about identity cards is available at the aforementioned IPS website.



**Jacqui Smith**