

Sent: 02 February 2006 23:08
To: IT Strategy Project Team
Subject: Transformational Government consultation

My name is Glyn Moody. I have a PhD in Mathematics from Cambridge University, and for the last 25 years I have written about IT and related issues for publications such as The Economist, The Financial Times, The Telegraph, The Guardian, New Scientist, Wired magazine and many others. I am also the author of several books in the field.

I am writing to urge against the convergence "towards biometric identity cards and the National Identity Register" mentioned in the consultation document. This is for a number of reasons, based on my detailed experience with a very wide range of computing systems and approaches.

The biggest problem with a National Identity Register is that to be successful, it must contain large amounts of information about the whole UK population. This concentration will make it the single most attractive target for criminal elements in the country, if not the world. Ironically, the sheer wealth of detail it will contain about all of us will make it so valuable to the people the system is designed to protect us against - those engaged in identity fraud, terrorists etc. - that it will certainly be broken into, probably as soon as it is created.

Arguments about computer security are moot. Even if it were possible to create a perfectly secure system - which experience has shown time and again is not possible - there is always the human element. For the sake of the data held in such a database, criminal elements would be prepared to expend considerable resources either to corrupt the officials that had authorised access, or to blackmail them. The use that common bank robbers make of these techniques to gain access to otherwise secure premises is an indication of the approach that will be taken.

Creating a central database is therefore unwise in the extreme: it will weaken the current system, not strengthen it. Experience shows that the best way of combating crime and terrorism is to decentralise and to rely on the human element - the individual law enforcement agents. The more reliance that is placed on technology, the less the latter will rely on their instinct, and the easier it will be to subvert the system.

Electronic identity certainly needs to be addressed for future IT government solutions, but not in this centralised way. It is well-known that the more complex the solution, the more likely its implementation will encounter problems. The scale of the proposed National Identity Register, and the kind of multiple, distributed access that is envisaged, has simply never been done before. It is highly unlikely that it will be done in the future, because it is the wrong solution to the problem, based on an outdated computing model. If the Internet has taught us anything, it is that decentralised, distributed solutions are far more efficient, and far more robust than centralised ones.

For all these reasons, I urge the Government not to pursue this approach.

I am happy to be contacted about any of the above if it would aid in

avoiding a costly and potentially disastrous mistake being made in this matter.

Yours faithfully

Glyn Moody