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National identity scheme is about reducing crime

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Letters to the Editor (p. 10 – printed version)

From Mr Andrew Hooke.

Sir, Following the recent release of personal information from the UK's Revenue and Customs, some have speculated that the National Identity Scheme should be abandoned. They fear a similar release from the database supporting the scheme - the National Identity Register (NIR). This ignores the role that biometric technology plays in the scheme.

The biographic information recorded on the NIR is limited by law to basic identity information such as name, address, gender and date of birth. However, crucially, any attempt to steal an identity would need to be backed up by a matching identity card with associated biometric information (eg, fingerprints).

Here is the fraudster's problem – they may have obtained personal information about an individual but the identity already exists in the NIR, preventing them from obtaining a false identity card by this route. Any identity card obtained would be associated with a fundamentally different identity because the biometric record would be different. The two identities - that of the fraudster and their target - would have diverged, with different NIR numbers, and the attempted fraud would have failed.

Biometric data need to be supported by a valid card and therefore are of little value to a fraudster. Any stolen card can be revoked.

Far from being a potential source of identity theft, the National Identity Scheme is a valuable tool for its prevention. It will go a long way towards reducing identity fraud and it will greatly simplify many transactions. The scheme never was about storing sensitive information on UK citizens. It is about reducing crime and making life simpler for everyone.

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