Plan for ID cards announced

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The Home Secretary has announced details of the plan for a system of national ID cards.

Plans for a system of national identity cards gathered momentum today, as the Home Secretary revealed the schedule for release of the cards.

Foreign residents first

The first people to get ID cards will be non-EEA foreign nationals living in the UK. They will begin carrying cards in November of this year.

The roll-out will start with people historically most likely to abuse the system - including people living here on student visas or marriage visas.

Those issued with cards will be fingerprinted, and the card will contain details of their immigration status. The card will also indicate whether they are allowed to work or access benefits, and how long their visa allows them to stay in the country.

Within three years all foreign nationals applying to enter or extend their stay in the UK will be issued a card. The plan calls for 90% of foreign nationals to have the cards by 2015.

Some UK citizens will be issued cards in 2009

Next year ID cards will also be issued to some UK citizens. The first cards will go to people with sensitive jobs where verification of identity is needed to ensure public protection. The first group likely to receive cards will be those working in airports.

From 2010, young people will be able to volunteer to have ID cards to help them prove their identity as they open their first bank account, take out a student loan or start employment. Later that year the scheme will be opened to voluntary applicants of any age.

From 2011, all passport applicants will also be automatically registered for ID cards when they apply for new biometric passports containing fingerprints. They will be able to choose whether to have a passport, an ID card or both. This will speed the roll-out, and could result in savings of around £1bn.

Secure and verified

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said the cards will ensure that, 'for the first time, UK residents will have a single way to secure and verify their identity.

'We will be able to better protect ourselves and our families against identity fraud, as well as protecting our communities against crime, illegal immigration and terrorism. And it will help us to prove our identity in the course of our daily lives - when travelling, for example, or opening a bank account, applying for a new job, or accessing government services.'

She added, 'I want as many people as possible to enjoy the two key benefits of the National Identity Scheme – improved protection and greater convenience. And I want them to be able to choose how they participate in the Scheme as well – whether to have a passport or an ID card or both - so that they can enjoy its benefits as quickly as possible.'

Small amount of data to be held

The National Identity Register will hold a small amount of personal biographic details separately from biometric fingerprints and photographs, making it incredibly difficult for anyone to steal or exploit another's identity.

The government has already proved its ability to build a sound foundation for the National Identity Scheme. Fingerprinting is already required for visa applicants to the UK, and over ten million British e-passports have been issued since the end of 2006, containing an encrypted digital version of the holder's personal details and a photograph on a secure chip.