

This response was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on the Forensic use of bioinformation: ethical issues between November 2006 and January 2007. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Anthony Jackson

Dear all,

Firstly you must be congratulated on actually bothering to consult the general public on this important issue. Something our Government (except in Scotland) couldn't itself be bothered to do.

I do wonder what the situation would be in England and Wales now, if the Government had consulted instead of slipping its latest measures in on the eve of the Iraq war. An inauspicious time.

Secondly, I noted that as this consultation was launched, the Prime Minister was appearing at the Database HQ, giving over his DNA, and calling for all UK citizens to be added to his database. I sincerely hope that there was no choreography, and that your report will be independent of Government and other vested interests. It is "our" DNA as citizens of this country, and it should be up to "us" not governments or corporations, or think tanks, what happens to it, and who has access to it.

My overall position is that the Police, Government and their cronies in various corporations should not have access to peoples DNA.

I do however understand that DNA can be helpful in solving crimes, and hence in certain circumstance the Police (and only the Police) should have temporary access to peoples DNA to help them in that respect. Following completion of a case, all DNA samples must be destroyed.

If a person is convicted their DNA profiles could be kept on the Database for the equivalent time of their prison sentence, control order, or monitoring programme. If none of these are applicable, I seriously question the validity, necessity and efficacy of keeping any other DNA profiles.

At no time must anybody else be allowed access to DNA samples or profiles. No DNA samples or profiles of innocent people should ever be retained on the database.

I notice in your consultation paper that you draw attention to the difference between Matches and Detections, IF only the Government was so careful when throwing around statistics on rapes and murders when trying to justify its present draconian policy. Furthermore, it is really about time we had figures for crimes SOLVED by DNA, then we can truly see the worth of any comparable systems.

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Similarly, the Government is very enthusiastic about solved "cold cases" and their association with the database, always of course failing to point out that these have nothing to do with permanent retention, but rather the uploading of crime scene DNA (if this had been the priority rather than "stamp collecting" DNA from any Joe Public, we would already have solved far more "cold cases"). Successes in this area will also depend on people volunteering their DNA. However, who is going to do this in the knowledge that it will be kept for ever on a Government database, which is accessible to profit motivated corporations!?

My final point concerns costs. There does not seem to be a proper accounting of how much it actually costs to store all these DNA samples of innocent people in perpetuity! This seems quite extraordinary, and until this is available it will be very difficult to calculate whether this system is an efficient use of very limited Criminal Justice resources and finances.

More targeted resource use may be far more effective!?

Thank you for your time,

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Jackson