

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.

Clive Gross, Principal Spokesperson, Eastbourne Green Party

Dear Sirs,

I am deeply concerned about the way the National DNA database has expanded in what appears to be an unregulated and unaccountable way to now include over 1 million people who have been neither convicted nor cautioned for any offence. Although I am not one of those people, I strongly disagree with such information being kept on a computer database or elsewhere for an indefinite period of time or without a specific reason for doing so.

Rather, I believe that there should be strict time limits on how long people are kept on the Database, depending on the seriousness of their offence. Such time limits would provide a vital safeguard to prevent excessive surveillance by future governments, without noticeably reducing the chance of solving a serious crime. Britain currently has the biggest DNA Database in the world, but making it bigger does not appear to be helping to solve more crimes. Collecting more DNA from crime scenes has made a big difference to the number of crimes solved, but keeping DNA from more and more people who have been arrested - many of whom are innocent - has not.

I would be prepared to see a smaller DNA Database, with DNA samples kept only temporarily and people's DNA profiles and other information removed after fixed time periods introduced, which would not reduce the role of the Database in tackling crime, as well as costing considerably less than the current system.

Furthermore, I understand that the National DNA Database has been used for controversial genetic research without consent from those individuals whose information is held, and that one of the companies involved in this research has also kept copies of people's genetic information. Before the law was changed to allow such permanent retention, many people's DNA was not removed when it clearly should have been.

Therefore, the case for an independent regulator to make sure the Database is not misused and that new safeguards are implemented is beyond question. Such a regulator could also check that the police and courts understand the limitations of DNA evidence and ensure that people are fully consulted about new uses of the Database, which clearly has not been the case to date.

I look forward to reading the results of your current consultation in the near future.