

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 to January 2007. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Dave Cook

To whom it may concern,

I strongly oppose the state's surreptitious aim of creating a DNA database on all UK citizens. As a law-abiding citizen my DNA does not belong to the state - or to anyone else for that matter - it belongs to me. The government has no right to retain a person's DNA data unless that person has been found guilty of a crime such as terrorism, murder, rape, burglary and assault.

The police or the Home Office should be able to acquire a DNA profile only if that person has volunteered it or has been accused of a serious crime. If someone accused of such a crime is later found innocent in a court of law - and once the prosecution fails on appeal - then the DNA data held on that person should be removed from the database unless the person requests otherwise. In any case, volunteers who agree to provide a DNA sample to the database should have the right to remove it whenever they wish. I believe the SGM Plus system is suitably reliable for ascertaining the identity of suspects in criminal investigations. However, the use of DNA records alone must never be allowed as evidence at trial.

At the moment, the retention of bioinformation from those who are not convicted of an offence is not proportionate to the needs of law enforcement. The database as it stands now should be adjusted accordingly. Potentially, it is too easy to abuse the present database. Therefore, an independent ombudsman should be put in place to oversee and manage the database with the utmost urgency.

The idea of collecting everyone's DNA at birth is offensive. Indeed, the present system in which the government is allowed to create a DNA database of children and adults who have not even committed a crime is morally wrong. It is simply not acceptable for bioinformation to be taken from minors and for their DNA profiles to be put on the NDNAD unless the minor has been found guilty of a serious (see above) crime, or for persistent lesser crimes. Familial searching is in my opinion an unwarranted invasion of family privacy. Another concern is that if the database continues to grow at the present rate then the risk of innocent DNA matches being contaminated at crime scenes will become even greater.

Along with Professor Sir Bob Hepple, I believe a DNA database that contains everyone in the UK would turn a nation of citizens into a nation of suspects. This country is already the most spied upon nation in the so-called free world, and storing a universal DNA database would be the final nail in the coffin to our fast-disappearing civil liberties.

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We have already reached the stage when more votes are cast on TV reality shows compared to ballot papers received in the last election. A dwindling electorate no longer seems to trust its politicians and a universal DNA database would reduce trust still further.

The government and the police are often quoted as saying, "If you've nothing to fear then you've nothing to hide." But our present DNA database has become the size it is now almost entirely without public consultation. It must therefore be assumed that it is the government which has something to hide. But what can our government be afraid of - the electorate, perhaps?

Kind regards,
Dave Cook.