

Biometric ID Cards

Driver – Technology

Related Drivers – Collection and Storage of Personal Information, Border Security & Immigration, 2012 Olympics, Migration, Information Sharing

Background

The UK Borders Act 2007¹ gave the Government powers to issue identity cards to foreign nationals subject to immigration controls. The card has a chip which holds a digitised photograph and fingerprints alongside biographical information. The card also indicates whether the individual is allowed to work, access benefits and how long their visas allow them to stay. By 2015 it was planned that 90% of foreign nationals will have the cards, with the roll-out starting towards the end of 2008.² However, in June 2009 Home Secretary Alan Johnson said the government was going ahead with the introduction of the cards but ruled out making them compulsory.³ A pilot scheme to roll out the cards to 20,000 airside workers at Manchester and London City airports, planned for the autumn of 2009, has now been abandoned too.

However, ID cards will continue to be compulsory for foreign nationals wanting to stay in the country long term. A scheme allowing Britons to buy one of the £30 ID cards is already running in Greater Manchester but only 3,500 people have so far expressed interest.⁴ A similar option will now be offered to residents in the whole of the North West of England from early next year, Mr Johnson said.

The Home Secretary has asked the UK Border Agency to review its successful roll-out of compulsory ID cards to foreign nationals to see how it can be sped up. The agency has already issued 50,000 ID cards to people who are legally living and working in the UK.⁵ Under current plans, within three years all non-EEA foreign nationals coming to the UK for more than six months, or extending their stay here, will have a card.

Potential Skills Needs

Technical skills – in the use of ID cards

¹ [UK Borders Act 2007](#)

² [UK Borders Agency \(2008\) *Introducing compulsory ID cards for foreign nationals*. London: Home Office.](#)

³ [Reuters UK Press Release, 1 July 2009, '*Plans dropped for compulsory ID cards*'.](#)

⁴ [The Telegraph Online, 1 July 2009, '*Home Secretary abandons compulsory ID cards*'.](#)

⁵ [Home Office Press Release, 30 June 2009, '*ID card roll-out to be accelerated*'.](#)