# UK digital ID plans face backlash over inclusion of teenagers and privacy concerns



The UK government's recent announcement of a mandatory national digital ID system has sparked an unexpected wave of controversy, especially due to its implications for teenagers. Prime Minister Keir Starmer unveiled plans to make possessing a digital ID a prerequisite for all employment in the country, citing the need to deter illegal immigration. The mandate, intended to apply initially to UK citizens and legal residents aged 16 and over, is now under review to possibly include those as young as 13, which has ignited significant public and political debate.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) clarified that while the digital ID credential is primarily aimed at individuals 16 years and older, consultations are ongoing about lowering the age threshold to 13. Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper has publicly defended this extension, noting in a BBC interview that many 13-year-olds already possess some form of digital identification. She described the move as a reasonable progression, emphasizing a standardised system as the "right way forward." However, critics remain unconvinced, with Liberal Democrat spokesperson Victoria Collins describing the scheme as a dangerous example of government overreach, calling it “sinister" and unnecessary.

Public reaction to the digital ID proposal appears to be souring. Polling by More in Common reveals that support for a national digital ID in the UK has shifted from a net positive 35 percent several months ago to a net negative 14 percent. Starmer, recognising the need for broader acceptance, has called for a national debate to highlight the "huge benefits" the government believes the scheme will deliver. His endorsement of India’s Aadhaar system during a recent visit to India underscores his aspiration for the UK's digital ID to emulate successful models abroad.

Industry experts suggest that the rollout of the digital ID should be staggered and begin with low-risk applications, such as verifying the right to work, to build trust incrementally. Sumsub’s Head of Government Relations, Kat Cloud, remarked that digital IDs seem inevitable but stress the importance of regulatory clarity, particularly in aligning digital ID usage with anti-money laundering requirements—an area where the UK’s Financial Conduct Authority has yet to provide guidance. Cloud pointed to the example of Estonia’s state-backed ID cards, which now facilitate a multitude of e-services and enjoy widespread public trust, partly due to strong privacy controls and transparency measures.

IBM Consulting’s Government Center of Excellence Partner, Stewart Jeacocke, similarly highlighted Estonia’s success, advocating for the adoption of open standards like verifiable credentials and the integration of familiar platforms such as GOV.UK One Login. He emphasised features that promote user control, like allowing individuals to see who has accessed their data and why, as fundamental to overcoming the "privacy paradox"—a well-known tension where citizens desire efficient identity management but remain wary of privacy infringements.

The government's plan envisions the digital ID being stored on mobile phones and linked to employer verification systems by 2029, eventually extending to access various public services such as childcare, welfare, and tax records. However, the initiative has sparked a backlash, with opponents warning about risks to civil liberties and questioning the effectiveness of such a system in curbing illegal employment.

This resurgence of identity card debates—evoking controversies from two decades ago—places the Labour Party in a challenging position. As the party faces political pressure with populist rivals gaining ground, digital ID implementation is seen as a strategy to display a tougher stance on immigration while aiming to modernise public service access.

As discussions continue, it remains to be seen how the government will reconcile privacy concerns, public trust, and regulatory frameworks to ensure the digital ID system is accepted and effective, particularly given the contentious prospect of including younger teenagers within its ambit.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again), [[2]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-10/digital-id-cards-for-children-as-young-as-13-government-suggests)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/digital-id-cards-starmer-cooper-b2843132.html), [[6]](https://www.gbnews.com/politics/yvette-cooper-defends-plans-digital-ids-children)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/digital-id-cards-starmer-cooper-b2843132.html), [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/why-is-britain-talking-about-id-cards-again-2025-09-30/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/), [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/why-is-britain-talking-about-id-cards-again-2025-09-30/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202510/uk-digital-id-proposal-implies-issuance-to-teens-govt-botches-the-message-again> - The UK government has proposed a national digital ID system, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer announcing plans to require all employment in the UK to be conditional on possessing this ID, aiming to deter illegal immigration. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) stated that the credential is intended for UK citizens and legal residents aged 16 and over, though they are considering extending this to include those aged 13 and over. Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper defended the inclusion of 13-year-olds, noting that many already possess forms of digital ID. Critics, including Liberal Democrat spokesperson Victoria Collins, have expressed concerns about the potential for state overreach and the necessity of such measures.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-10/digital-id-cards-for-children-as-young-as-13-government-suggests> - The UK government has suggested that digital ID cards could be issued to children as young as 13. This proposal is part of a broader plan to require all individuals seeking employment in the UK to possess a digital ID, aiming to combat illegal immigration. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) indicated that while the system is intended for those aged 16 and over, they are considering extending it to include those aged 13 and over. This consideration has sparked debate, with concerns about the implications for privacy and the necessity of such measures for younger individuals.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/digital-id-cards-starmer-cooper-b2843132.html> - Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper has defended the controversial expansion of digital ID plans to include children as young as 13, arguing that many teenagers already utilise similar forms of identification. The government is consulting on whether the digital ID system should be extended to those aged 13 and over, with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) stating that the credential is intended for UK citizens and legal residents aged 16 and over. Critics have raised concerns about the potential for state overreach and the necessity of such measures for younger individuals.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/> - Britain has announced plans to introduce a mandatory digital ID scheme for all citizens and residents beginning new employment, aiming to combat illegal immigration. Prime Minister Keir Starmer emphasized that the initiative will strengthen border security and hinder illegal work. The digital ID, to be stored on mobile phones, will be integrated into employers' hiring checks by 2029 and eventually used for accessing other government services like childcare, welfare, and tax records. The move has provoked political backlash, with critics arguing the measure won't stop illegal employment and poses a threat to civil liberties.
6. <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/yvette-cooper-defends-plans-digital-ids-children> - Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper has defended the use of digital ID for children as young as 13, asserting that the 'standardised' system is 'the right way forward'. The government's proposal to include 13-year-olds in the mandatory digital ID scheme has sparked controversy, with concerns about privacy and the necessity of such measures for younger individuals. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) is consulting on whether the system should be extended to those aged 13 and over, with the credential intended for UK citizens and legal residents aged 16 and over.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/why-is-britain-talking-about-id-cards-again-2025-09-30/> - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has proposed compulsory digital identity cards for workers as a measure to curb illegal immigration. This move rekindles debates about privacy and state control that date back two decades. The Labour Party, currently lagging behind the populist Reform UK party in polls, is under pressure to be seen as taking firm action on immigration. Digital IDs, which would be mandatory for employer right-to-work checks, are seen as a tool to restrict undocumented migrants' access to jobs and potentially streamline access to public services.