# UK’s digital ID plans face scrutiny over privacy and efficacy amid government defence



The UK government has announced plans to roll out a mandatory digital ID system aimed primarily at combating illegal working and streamlining access to government services. According to Technology Secretary Liz Kendall, the scheme is designed to give people greater agency over their lives, offering a more secure and private way to prove identity. For example, users could demonstrate their age without revealing their exact birthday, reflecting privacy considerations built into the system from the outset. Ms Kendall framed the digital ID as a tool that would promote greater fairness by accurately identifying those entitled to work in the UK.

However, the proposal has faced strong criticism from various political figures and civil rights advocates. Viscount Camrose, Conservative shadow science minister, described the government’s plan as "frankly creepy," raising significant concerns about privacy and the expansion of state power. He questioned the evidence supporting the efficacy of digital IDs in tackling illegal working, pointing out that criminal gangs and illegal workers already bypass current systems such as national insurance requirements. He argued that the scheme is "untested" and its objectives overly ambitious, cautioning peers that it poses a substantial threat to personal freedoms and carries significant costs for taxpayers.

Liberal Democrat science spokesman Lord Clement-Jones echoed these privacy concerns, describing the early stages of the plan as a "fundamental error" by the government and emphasising that the debate should centre on freedom rather than technology.

Defending the government’s stance, Lord Patrick Vallance, science minister and former chief government scientific adviser, specified that the digital ID would initially be mandatory only for right-to-work checks—a narrowly defined application. He highlighted the wider benefits observed in countries with established digital ID systems, such as faster and more secure access to services including open banking, housing rentals, and mortgages. Lord Vallance expressed optimism about the transformative potential of digital identity in improving overall digital participation and agency.

The government intends for all UK citizens and legal residents to have access to the digital ID, stored conveniently on mobile phones. Beyond right-to-work verification, the scheme aims to facilitate applications for driving licences, childcare, welfare, taxation, and other public services, forming part of a broader strategy to strengthen border controls and reduce illegal employment.

Despite these intentions, opposition remains robust. Critics highlight existing right-to-work checks and systems like the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) as already fulfilling many verification needs, suggesting the digital ID may add unnecessary complexity and cost. Employment law experts have also expressed doubts about whether the digital ID will effectively deter illegal work, arguing that those intent on circumventing the law are unlikely to be hindered by new identity requirements.

The controversy extends to civil liberties concerns, with debates focusing on the balance between enhancing security and preserving individual freedom. Some caution that mandatory digital ID risks increased surveillance and the marginalisation of vulnerable groups, as well as forcing people to relinquish personal data for routine activities.

In parliamentary discussions, Technology Secretary Kendall acknowledged the importance of balancing security with digital inclusion but remains committed to advancing digital identity as a secure and convenient solution for the future. Nevertheless, scepticism lingers over whether the proposed digital ID will deliver on its promises or instead erode privacy and individual freedoms without effectively addressing illegal working.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/argument-for-rolling-out-creepy-digital-id-too-optimistic-to-be-convincing-Q5JD5U6OX5MUDFJ35RVAM3BUIY/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-id-scheme-to-be-rolled-out-across-uk), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/argument-for-rolling-out-creepy-digital-id-too-optimistic-to-be-convincing-Q5JD5U6OX5MUDFJ35RVAM3BUIY/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/liz-kendall-technology-government-science-secretary-of-state-b1252937.html), [[5]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/29/why-is-the-uk-introducing-digital-ids-and-why-are-they-so-controversial), [[6]](https://www.theemploymentlawsolicitors.co.uk/news/2025/09/27/digital-id/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/argument-for-rolling-out-creepy-digital-id-too-optimistic-to-be-convincing-Q5JD5U6OX5MUDFJ35RVAM3BUIY/), [[5]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/29/why-is-the-uk-introducing-digital-ids-and-why-are-they-so-controversial)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-id-scheme-to-be-rolled-out-across-uk), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/), [[7]](https://www.hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-10-13/debates/37D3137B-302E-4E1B-A6E4-0676456F26D0/DigitalID)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/argument-for-rolling-out-creepy-digital-id-too-optimistic-to-be-convincing-Q5JD5U6OX5MUDFJ35RVAM3BUIY/), [[6]](https://www.theemploymentlawsolicitors.co.uk/news/2025/09/27/digital-id/), [[7]](https://www.hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-10-13/debates/37D3137B-302E-4E1B-A6E4-0676456F26D0/DigitalID)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/29/why-is-the-uk-introducing-digital-ids-and-why-are-they-so-controversial), [[6]](https://www.theemploymentlawsolicitors.co.uk/news/2025/09/27/digital-id/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/argument-for-rolling-out-creepy-digital-id-too-optimistic-to-be-convincing-Q5JD5U6OX5MUDFJ35RVAM3BUIY/), [[7]](https://www.hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-10-13/debates/37D3137B-302E-4E1B-A6E4-0676456F26D0/DigitalID), [[5]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/29/why-is-the-uk-introducing-digital-ids-and-why-are-they-so-controversial)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/argument-for-rolling-out-creepy-digital-id-too-optimistic-to-be-convincing-Q5JD5U6OX5MUDFJ35RVAM3BUIY/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/liz-kendall-technology-government-science-secretary-of-state-b1252937.html> - Viscount Camrose, a Conservative shadow minister, has criticised the UK government's proposal for a digital ID system, describing it as 'frankly creepy' and questioning its effectiveness in combating illegal working. He called for evidence that the system would meet the government's objectives, expressing concerns about its potential to infringe on personal freedoms and privacy. Technology Secretary Liz Kendall defended the plan, stating it aims to provide individuals with greater agency over their lives and deliver fairness by clearly identifying those with the right to work in the UK.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-id-scheme-to-be-rolled-out-across-uk> - The UK government has announced plans to introduce a new digital ID scheme aimed at combating illegal working and simplifying access to government services. The digital ID will be mandatory for right-to-work checks by the end of the current Parliament. The scheme will be available to all UK citizens and legal residents, stored on mobile phones, and will also facilitate applications for services like driving licences, childcare, and welfare. The initiative is part of the government's broader strategy to control borders and reduce illegal working.
4. <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.
5. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/29/why-is-the-uk-introducing-digital-ids-and-why-are-they-so-controversial> - The UK government's proposal to introduce mandatory digital IDs has sparked significant controversy. Critics, including civil rights groups and political leaders, argue that the scheme could infringe on personal freedoms and privacy. Concerns have been raised about the potential for increased surveillance and the marginalisation of vulnerable groups. The Liberal Democrats have also expressed opposition, stating that the plan would force individuals to surrender private data for daily activities. The debate continues over the balance between security measures and individual rights.
6. <https://www.theemploymentlawsolicitors.co.uk/news/2025/09/27/digital-id/> - The UK government's proposed digital ID scheme has been met with criticism from employment law experts. Concerns have been raised about its effectiveness in reducing illegal migration, as existing right-to-work checks are already in place. The introduction of an additional digital ID layer may only burden law-abiding employers without deterring those intent on circumventing the law. The proposal has been described as unlikely to have a meaningful impact on illegal migration and could lead to unnecessary costs and administrative burdens.
7. <https://www.hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-10-13/debates/37D3137B-302E-4E1B-A6E4-0676456F26D0/DigitalID> - In a parliamentary debate on the proposed digital ID scheme, MPs discussed its potential impact on security and digital inclusion. Dr Caroline Johnson questioned the necessity of the ID card, highlighting existing mandatory work checks. Technology Secretary Liz Kendall acknowledged the need to get security and digital inclusion right but expressed confidence in the shift towards digital identity solutions. The debate underscored differing views on the balance between enhancing security and protecting individual freedoms.