

PRESS NOTICE FROM ACTION ON RIGHTS FOR
CHILDREN
29TH OCTOBER 2004

'THE BIG BROTHER OF ALL DATABASE SYSTEMS'

While attention has been focussed on plans for the universal database of children proposed in the Children Bill, work on a second, far more intrusive system has reached an advanced stage.

The 'Integrated Children's System' (ICS) is creating a network centring around a database that will hold the entire record of every child in contact with social services for any reason. This, in turn, will be interoperable with several other databases including Connexions, Sure-Start, Ryogens and the NHS Information System.

It is envisaged that the Child Protection Register will be abolished by December 2005, with social care staff instead reliant on the ICS machinery to identify children at risk of abuse from amongst the 4 million said to be in need of services.

Children's rights campaigners have joined the Shadow Minister for Children, Tim Loughton, in expressing incredulity that no mention of the ICS database was made by Children's Minister Margaret Hodge during committee stage of the Children Bill.

"This is the most complete surveillance system that we have ever encountered," says Terri Dowty of Action on Rights for Children. "It is the Big Brother of all database systems, allowing a huge range of agencies to share information about a third of the children in England and Wales, potentially stripping them of any human right to a private life whatsoever. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights has already expressed serious concerns about the Information Sharing and Assessment (ISA) system proposed in the Children Bill; the ICS system goes far beyond that, and if the Children Bill becomes law it can all be done without the knowledge or consent of families.

"We do not even know that this system is safe, or that it will fare any better than other government IT projects. Less than a fortnight ago, the new Head of e-Government told the BBC that "Plans for how we share information is in the early days." (sic) So why is the Government practising on children - potentially the most vulnerable group in our society?

"We want to see the Children Bill halted, and details of the full range of government information-sharing plans for children made public. Parliament is being asked to approve broad legislation that does not reveal the full extent of the Government's intentions. The Children Bill is only the tip of a very large iceberg; it's time we were allowed to see just what's under the water."

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Interview with Ian Watmore, Head of e-Government, is
at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3739684.stm>

ARCH - Action on Rights for Children - is an Internet-based UK-wide network of families committed to the rights of children. Through its network, ARCH disseminates information to families, and gathers opinions on issues affecting children in order to represent them to policy-makers at both local and national level. For more information see: www.arch-ed.org