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GOVERNMENT DATA POLICIES CONTINUE TO FAIL BRITONS

Erroneous data plagues 'several million' public records

Major Government departments have failed to put in place basic data protection and error correction policies, despite a deluge of public data breaches over the last 12 months.

Garlik, the online identity experts, submitted 30 Freedom of Information (Fol) requests between September and November this year to all major Government departments and offices. The results reveal the Government's dangerous complacency regarding the accuracy of databases containing the personal information of British citizens.

The Data Protection Act (DPA)¹ requires that an organisation must act if someone tells it the information it holds on them is inaccurate, yet only three out of the 30 Government departments contacted confirmed they had written correction policies and procedures in place. Furthermore, only the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and Department for Transport have had independent audits to demonstrate DPA compliance.

The biggest culprits of data breaches in recent times - HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Department of Health (DoH), and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) - all reported a lack of basic systems for managing personal data effectively.

The lack of Government action is astounding given the Information Commissioner's Office recently reported 176 incidences of public data losses² in the last year. Of the 29 Government departments that responded to the Fol requests, all continue to admit to one or more of the following:

¹ The fourth principle of The Data Protection Act 1998 states "Personal data shall be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date"

² The Information Commissioner reported on 29 October 2008 that a total of 176 public sector data breaches had occurred including 26 within local government, 28 within central government, 75 within the NHS/healthcare sector, and 47 within other public sector bodies (including police and schools.)

- no written data correction policy or protocol in place;
- no allocated funds to the effort to correct erroneous data;
- no statistical data regarding erroneous data correction;
- never having been subject to an independent audit in order to prove compliance with the Data Protection Act.

Tom Ilube, CEO of Garlik, said, “The Government’s complacent attitude towards managing and correcting our personal data is all the more shocking in light of the 176 public data losses that have occurred this year alone.

“What people really care about is that if the Government holds your personal data, it is accurate and well looked after. A typical public database can have error rates approaching ten per cent, meaning that a single large Government database could possess erroneous data on several million individuals – information that is used everyday to make critical decisions about our lives, taxes, healthcare, and could even influence potential miscarriages of justice. As we head towards ever larger Government databases it is crucial that Government deals more effectively with error rates and handles data in a way that maximises accuracy and prevents future breaches.”

By undertaking the FoI requests, Garlik remains committed to calling on Government to implement a robust system of accountability around data protection and correction including:

- all Government departments that control large databases, to appoint a Chief Privacy Officer (or equivalent) at senior executive level to take direct accountability for personal information within that department.
- all Government departments to put in place written procedures to manage, monitor and report on the accuracy of the personal information that it holds.
- all Government departments to be subject to periodic independent audits in order to prove compliance with the Data Protection Act and to publish the results of these audits.

The FoI responses were:

Government Agency	Written data correction policy or protocol?	Conduct independent audits demonstrating DPA compliance?	Have funds specifically allocated/record of funds re. correction of erroneous data?	Hold statistical data regarding erroneous data corrections?
Attorney General	NO	NO	NO	NO
Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform	NO	NO	NO	NO
Cabinet Office (& No 10)	NO	NO	NO	NO
Children, Schools & Families	NO	NO	NO	NO
Communities & Local Government	NO	NO	NO	NO
Crown Prosecution Service	NO	NO	NO	NO
Culture, Media & Sport	NO	NO	NO	NO
Department of Health	NO	NO	NO	NO
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	NO	YES	NO	NO
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	NO	NO	NO	NO
Foreign & Commonwealth Office	NO	NO	NO	NO
Home Office & associated departments	Delayed response due to public interest concerns	Delayed response due to public interest concerns	Delayed response due to public interest concerns	Delayed response due to public interest concerns
HMRC	NO	NO	NO	NO
Innovation, Universities & Skills	NO	NO	NO	NO
International Development	NO	NO	NO	NO
Independent Police Complaints Commission	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ministry of Justice	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ministry of Defence	NO	NO	NO	NO
National Audit Office	NO	NO	NO	NO
NHS Connecting for Health	NO	NO	NO	NO
Northern Ireland Office	NO	NO	NO	NO
Office of Public Sector Information	YES	NO	NO	NO
OFSTED	YES	YES	NO	NO
Scotland Office <i>Stated they fall under the Ministry of Justice</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO
Serious Fraud Office	NO	NO	NO	NO
Transport	NO	YES	NO	NO
Treasury	NO	NO	NO	NO
Treasury Solicitors	NO	NO	NO	NO

Wales Office	NO	NO	NO	NO
Work & Pensions	NO	NO	NO	NO

- Ends -

Please visit www.garlik.com

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About the Freedom of Information requests:

Garlik issued a series of Freedom of Information (Fol) requests to 30 government departments and offices between September and November 2008. Each Fol request asked:

- 1) Has the Department a written data correction policy and protocol? If so when was it written? By whom? Where and when was it published? Please supply an electronic copy of any such policy and protocol.
- 2) How many times since 1998 has the Department been independently audited by a specialist company to demonstrate DPA 1998 compliance at all levels of its operational activity? If so, what dates? Who was the company and please supply those independent reports.
- 3) How much has been specifically allocated to the correction of erroneous data year upon year since 1998 by the Department?
- 4) What, if any, statistical data does the Department have regarding erroneous data corrections?

About Garlik:

Garlik, the online identity expert, was founded by Mike Harris, founding CEO of Egg plc, former Egg CIO Tom Ilube and former British Computer Society president Professor Nigel Shadbolt. As the first company to develop a web-scale commercial application of semantic technology, Garlik enables consumers to find and understand what personal information is in the public domain about them and manage how their identities appear online.

Garlik has appointed a panel of world-class ID protection and technology experts to advise the business including Professor Wendy Hall CBE from the University of Southampton, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the Web, Simon Davies, director of Privacy International and Daniel Cooper, renowned privacy lawyer with Covington & Burling. In January 2008, Garlik was selected as a World Economic Forum, Davos, Technology Pioneer and in December 2008 it won the British Computer Society BT Flagship for Innovation Award.

Garlik is backed by three of the UK's leading blue chip investment firms, 3i, Doughty Hanson and Noble Venture Finance.

For more information, visit www.garlik.com