



Information Commissioner's Office
Promoting public access to official information
and protecting your personal information

Press Release

For immediate release

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UK privacy watchdog spearheads debate on the future of European privacy law

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is leading an international debate about the future direction of data protection law in Europe. The ICO – the UK's privacy watchdog – has announced that RAND Europe has been commissioned to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of European Data Protection law and to identify promising avenues for reform.

The ICO has commissioned the research amid growing fears that the current European Directive is no longer fit for purpose. The UK watchdog believes that European Data Protection law needs to be modernised to meet the technological and social challenges of the 21st century. The research will consider how consumers' rights can be enhanced in a rapidly evolving information society and will provide EU bodies, national governments and the data protection community with proposals for improving regulatory approaches to protecting privacy and personal information.

Speaking at Privacy Laws and Business annual conference in Cambridge, Richard Thomas, UK Information Commissioner, said: "We want to generate new thinking. European data protection law is increasingly seen as out of date, bureaucratic and excessively prescriptive. It is showing its age and is failing to meet new challenges to privacy, such as the transfer of personal details across international borders and the huge growth in personal information online. It is high time the law is reviewed and updated for the modern world. This research will help identify ways we can make the law more straightforward and more effective in practice, but less burdensome for

organisations. We are pleased that the European Commission has recently announced a study of its own and we expect our research to complement and strengthen the overall impetus for reform. I also very much hope that the UK government will demonstrate leadership by engaging constructively in these reviews and supporting better regulation and practical approaches to international data protection.'

RAND Europe, with its partners time.lex and GNKS-Consult, won the ICO's competitive tender to carry out this comprehensive analysis against 19 other bids. The study will be made publicly available in Spring 2009.

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If you need more information, please contact the ICO press office on 020 7025 7580 or visit the website at: www.ico.gov.uk

Notes to Editors:

1. The Information Commissioner promotes public access to official information and protects personal information. The ICO is an independent body with specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.
2. For more information about the Information Commissioner's Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk
3. RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit research organisation whose mission is to help improve policy and decision making through research and analysis. They undertake objective, relevant research and analysis to create solutions that are both effective and enduring. Their research is carried out on behalf of public and private clients, foundations and international organisations. RAND Europe is part of the global RAND Corporation (the name is derived from a contraction of the term 'research and development').

For more information see www.rand.org/randeuropa or contact Lynne Saylor on +44(0)1223 353329

4. Anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that personal information is:
 - Fairly and lawfully processed
 - Processed for limited purposes
 - Adequate, relevant and not excessive
 - Accurate and up to date
 - Not kept for longer than is necessary
 - Processed in line with your rights
 - Secure
 - Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection

