

ID – or no ID

While the UK considers whether or not to introduce compulsory ID (identity) cards, Belgium is piloting the new EID (electronic identification) card, an electronic smart card which could become the ID of the future.

1 Should citizens be required by law to have an ID card? Mark your opinion on the line below and compare your answer with a partner.

should have an ID card ←————→ need not have an ID card

2 Belgium introduced an EID card earlier this year. Which of the following uses would you expect the card to have?

tax returns	obtaining credit in shops	online banking	buying cinema tickets
age verification	as a passport	voting	workplace identification

3 Read the article and check which of the above are mentioned.

Belgium leads the way in EID

The UK Government is currently considering whether to proceed with the introduction of a compulsory ID (identity) card. Meanwhile, earlier this year, Belgium introduced the country's first EID (electronic identification) card. It has an embedded digital signature allowing citizens to do online banking as well as carry out a variety of official transactions, including completing tax returns and e-voting. One of the people who started the project says it provides a cost-effective, multi-functional and secure national identity programme. The goal is to distribute ID cards nationwide within three to five years. It may also lead to commercial applications such as payment systems for cinema tickets, and so on.

The arguments for and against introducing ID cards continue in the UK. Those in favour of the idea point

out that citizens from 11 of the 15 nations of the European Union carry such cards as part of everyday life. In France, where the ID card is not compulsory, 90% of the population carries it all the time, because it is so convenient. A single method of identification could help authorities reduce the number of illegal workers and help prevent money laundering.

Other countries such as Japan feel no need to use ID cards, while Australia and New Zealand both chose not to introduce them after strong public protests. Similar opposition exists in the US. The main fear is an infringement of personal liberty – a fear of 'big brother' – since a system like this requires the construction of a database to store personal information about citizens. While the arguments in the UK continue, Belgium remains committed to digital technologies.

4 Join up the words in A with those in B to make six collocations from the article e.g. *electronic identification*.

A	B
electronic	protests
digital	identification
money	brother
public	laundering
personal	signature
big	liberty

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- a Do you think that the smart card will be introduced elsewhere? Can you add more uses to those in the article?
- b Do you think that countries without ID cards, such as the UK, will introduce them?
- c Are you afraid that personal information could be misused in some way? If so, how?