

Stephen Hammond
Member of Parliament
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

2 July 2012

Dear Mr Hammond

RE: Mobile Fingerprinting Equipment

Thank you for your letter of 8 June 2012 about concerns raised by your constituent Mr D Moss with regards to mobile fingerprinting equipment. Your letter has been passed to me to answer as the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) is the policy lead on the MobileID service.

I believe the 20% figure quoted in the letter from Mr Moss relates to the ATOS Origin report on the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) biometric enrolment trial. This report has been a source of much discussion and some confusion since it was published in 2005.

In the context of this particular enquiry it is important to point out that the IPS trial focussed on the business processes around capturing biometric data from large numbers of people, for enrolment onto a database. It was not designed to be a test of the specific biometric technologies.

I believe the relevant passage in the report with respect to the specific question raised by Mr Moss is:

"The majority of participants achieved successful verification on fingerprint, with rates of 81% for Quota participants and 80% for Disabled participants. One of the factors influencing failure was that the single fingerprint device used for verification occasionally did not record sufficient detail from the fingers."

The last sentence of this quote is particularly important, in that the fingerprint verification device in the trial used a small single finger reader. The size of the sensor is known to have a major impact on performance.

NPIA (headquarters)
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

From the Office of the Chief Executive
Chief Constable Nick Gargan QPM

National Policing Improvement Agency

Whilst it is true that the 'Bluecheck' device being used for MobileID also uses a small sensor, the technology has improved significantly since 2004-5 when the IPS trial was performed.

In recent years there has also been much more attention paid to 'usability' aspects of biometric systems as this has a considerable impact on the quality of the data captured. It should be noted that the fingerprint capture on MobileID is supervised by police officers, who are trained in the use of the devices and can provide feedback to the subject to ensure the best quality image is obtained. This was not the case with the IPS trial where volunteers only had one (unsupervised) attempt at verifying their identity.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, we must not lose sight of the fact that MobileID is primarily intended to be an 'aid to identification'. If it is not possible for a police officer to obtain fingerprints from an individual using a MobileID device, or if they have reason to doubt the result coming back from the system, then they have the option to take the subject to a police station where their identity can then be confirmed using more traditional processes.

With respect to academic statistics and fingerprinting technology there are many publicly available reports regarding the 'typical' search accuracy that can be achieved using such technology and for more information on this I would refer Mr Moss to the National Institute of Standards and Technology website at www.nist.gov.

Yours sincerely



Nick Gargan
Chief Constable
Chief Executive