



## **Family Rights**

### ***A list of UK government & other infringements of family rights***

#### **The Compulsory Connexions Scheme**

Not since Germany's Third Riche has the state systematically gathered information about parents by using their children - it is truly reminiscent of "1984" - hysteria? - read on!

Connexions is a government scheme which aims to track children and young adults aged 13-19 using a database derived from information provided by LA's, the Child Benefits agency, criminal records social services and the connexions agency from interviews with the young person. The stated aim is to identify young people who are at risk of offending later on and to target resources at them so that they can be kept on the straight and narrow.

Connexions will be fully implemented sometime in 2003. It will enable the connexions agency (which has taken over the careers advice service) to be aware of the situation in which all young persons of that age find themselves facilitating what is known as joined up government.

How it works: A young person registers with their local connexions office usually through their school or college and has an interview with a "Personal Advisor" at which a whole plethora of questions are asked. The young person is then given a smart ID card containing this information. They are offered rewards in terms of shop discounts as an incentive for possessing and using the card.

However certain issues have arisen regarding this:

- To date there have been no assurances that the data will be deleted when the young person reaches the age of 19.
- The database is to be held and created in the main by private recruitment agencies - and there have been no assurances made that the data will not enter the public domain.
- There have been no assurances made that parents and children can access the data to ensure its accuracy.
- While possession of the card is "said" to be voluntary it seems that a number of services will no longer be available without it. So schools are using the card as part of their attendance registration procedures with card readers at the school's entrances. Registration with colleges of further and higher learning requires the card. Even libraries will require the cards, enabling records of a young persons reading habits. Some schools are going as far as to record children's eating habits using the card. So registration for education and access to benefits and services and even reading material will be dependent upon the cards. In theory children may have alternative cards not registered with connexions but in practice, as schools are being paid to collect this data they are omitting to tell parents and children of this right and in some cases telling them that the these cards are compulsory thus obstructing parents and children's free choice.



- Access to social benefits, in particular the new child Tax credits - the main benefit for low income families in the UK for children over 16 requires that the child is registered with connexions.
- During the interview the PA may ask questions of a personal and sensitive nature relating to: eating disorders, drug abuse, sexual activity and sexual abuse. Personal Advisors are not highly qualified councillors, able to handle the emotional fallout of asking such questions but rather people often with no more than NVQ level 3 qualifications. Indeed trained councillors report that interrogating a child who has had (for example) eating disorders in the past, could trigger those problems again - especially when dealt with clumsily. This is why experienced councillors tend not to broach such issues with clients, waiting rather for the client to raise them with the councillor. It is expected that a number of children will suffer recurrences of a variety of disorders such as eating disorders as a result of this scheme - bluntly, it will cause deaths.
- Additionally questions are not limited to those relating to the young person themselves but extend to questions about family members including parents. So children as young as 13 are to be asked questions regarding their parents sexual activity and whether their parents take drugs and levels of family debt. This information is then made available to the police.
- When collecting data for the card the connexions agency relies upon implied consent. Additionally the parents are not notified that data is being held on them so no consent is obtained by them at all. Indeed the parents may even be unaware that their child has been interviewed and possesses a card at all.

Finally the cards are believed to be a "softening up" of the next generation for ID cards - something that the British people have resisted for decades. More here

The Guardian newspaper (22:10:02 key word "connexions") confirmed that:

*"Ministers are facing intense pressure for a radical overhaul of a support service for teenagers amid fears that it violates the privacy of vulnerable youngsters and their families. Parents groups and opposition MPs are concerned that the new Connexions service is gathering deeply intrusive information from children as young as 13 and sharing it with a wide range of public and voluntary agencies - often without parental consent.*

*The files, which may be accessed by agencies including police and social services, may include detailed questions about the youngsters' personal lives such as sexual activity or drug use as well as about the personal lives of their family and friends.*

*Critics have also voiced doubts about the expertise of Connexions personal advisers responsible for assessing the needs of youngsters. Although advisers receive only basic counselling training, they are expected to cover a range of sensitive and potentially damaging issues, including mental health, physical or sexual abuse and substance use."*



### **LA's exceed their Powers.**

Local Education Authorities have been instructed by the Audit commission to track children moving between schools. This has resulted from research which has discovered that a large number of young people who deregister from one school fail to register at another.

However despite the audit commission explicitly saying that home educators are not the target of the exercise LA's are using the opportunity to harass home educators who refrain from passing on details of a house move.

Some LA's are even going as far as to visiting the new occupants of the old house and telling them that a child is missing and at risk and that they should let the LA know where the old family have gone. Besides any other problems should this be true, since the LA are not a designated investigating authority under the terms of the Children's act, they could be damaging the trail of evidence and thereby destroying any chance of a subsequent successful prosecution.

Families it seems are no longer to be trusted with their own children - unless they are being monitored by big brother. The cry of "child welfare" is being used to sweep away opposition to unwarranted monitoring.

### **DfES advocate that LA's exceed their powers.**

Rumours regarding the existence of a draft guideline for LA's and parents regarding home education which have been circulating since July 2002 and which were confirmed by this site in November when a Civil Servant at the DfES slipped in a reference to it in November have finally come to light when they were sent (apparently by mistake) to a home educator this January (2003).

These draft guidelines reveal that the DfES wish for LA's to take actions beyond their legal powers by recommending that LA's "should" perform home visits and that the LA gain sight of the children's work. It also erroneously states that any family with more than 5 children should register themselves as a school and misinterprets the education act WRT SEN provision.

It seems that the DfES either don't understand their own legislation, want to take on more powers than it currently has or hopes that the LA's will do for them what they themselves know they cannot do.

There have been a number of requests from this site and other activists in the home Ed community for improved consultation - or indeed any consultation - which have all been ignored to date. The only responses we have received are demands that the draft guidelines are removed from the public domain.



## **Is your child Finger-printed at school?**

Schools are using fingerprinting technology to identify them for things like computer access and library book borrowing. I have been unable to find any reference to parental permission being sought.

## **Home Education and Connexions**

The connexions organisation at DfES has now put up a planning guide for the implementation of the Connexions programme which includes an item in para 10 part 2:

*"The Government respects the right of parents and students to home education, and to a degree of privacy from educational agencies. Partnerships should therefore make careful arrangements to ensure that they do not seek details of home educated young people without consent or directly contact individuals on the basis of information from other local agencies.*

*This group, however, should also be able to benefit from Connexions where they wish to. Connexions Partnerships should use their LA(s) as an initial channel of communication to enable young people educated by parents to hear of the service and to access information, guidance and support if needed.*

*A letter is being sent by DfES/CSNU to LAs and Connexions Partnerships which elaborates this guidance and cautions LAs not to pass lists of home educated young people to Connexions without consent."*

This (particularly the last sentence) has major implications for us and is certainly the result of campaigning by the Home Education Community. Let us hope that it is followed up.

## **Sure Start**

The sure start programme is run jointly by the DfES and DTI. It's intention is to efficiently target government and local services to young families, particularly disadvantaged families.

However they provide these services under compulsion. Couples are denied access to various forms of statutory benefits unless they attend government run parenting classes and a certificate of attendance is signed by their GP.

Additionally health care workers must pass on personal information to sure Start officials regarding any child under 5. NHS personnel it appears are showing some reluctance to do this as evidenced by the Sure Start website:

*"We are aware that some of you have been experiencing difficulties in obtaining basic personal information from your NHS partners that will enable you to contact families with babies and young children living in your sure start area...."*

*"the above means that NHS bodies can and should share basic personal information with sure start partnerships..." (on the grounds that it is to 'secure and advance the health and welfare of the people of England and Wales'.)"*



Thus personal information, freely given by families to access necessary health care during pregnancy and birth, are being routinely passed on to officials operating in the department of education and the department of trade and industry.

Indeed info sharing does not stop here it extends to the probation services, police and no doubt other agencies also. It appears that sure start, offers services to families with young children which mirrors, and extends the work of connexions which works with families of 13 to 19 year olds.

It's all for your own good.

### **School's Census**

Schools are also being asked to gather information on the children in their care and of course their families. Nothing new here - this has been done for years - except that now the DfES are asking for children's post codes - Thus enabling them to identify individual children from the census.

### **Parental rights & the 2002 Mental Health bill**

*(reform of the mental health act 1983)*

#### **Success**

**This proposed bill has been abandoned due to pressure from various interested parties**

Not content with monitoring Parents and their children the Government also wants to drug them - whether we as parents approve or not.

The 2002 mental health bill - currently in its consultation phase (Oct. 2002) contains a number of things of interest to parents. Of primary concern however is the power to extend the right to allow the treatment of children against the wishes of their parents should the "experts" deem it necessary.

Concern has been voiced that the compulsory drugging of children suffering from ADD and ADHD with Ritalin is not far away. It's already common practice in parts of the USA for teachers to recommend drugging for "difficult" pupils and it seems likely that it will happen here. Armed with the measures contained in this bill a Doctor could decide to put a child on Ritalin regardless of the wishes of the child or Parents. A parent that refuses to co-operate could be jailed. If the child refuses then that child could be removed from the home on the grounds of the parents failure of care.

The Royal Collage of Psychiatrists in the UK is:

*"gravely concerned about the deleterious effects of the Bill upon patients' civil rights"*  
and

*"public perception of the social role of psychiatry,"*

that they believe that

*"The Bill is likely, therefore, to be self-defeating."*



They have, therefore, requested that the consultation process be extended and that the bill is completely rewritten.

It is also thought that the bill will have a significant prejudicial effect upon ethnic minorities.

### **ODD Behaviour a Syndrome.**

OK - not a government initiative but in the light of the 2002 mental health bill it seriously impinges upon government policy.

There is now a category of behaviour which is labelled ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) and its sister syndrome OCD (Oppositional Conduct Disorder). It seems that if a child objects defiantly enough to what is being done to him or her then it is legitimate to have the child categorised as having a mental disorder.

### **Pre-crime & the under 10's - My minority report**

Crime prevention panels will for the first time target disruptive children under 10 who are too young to face criminal charges.

Under the new strategy, plain clothes police officers will visit the homes of children as young as 8 identified as potential offenders and offer parenting advice to families. The controversial plan is aimed at children who have been accused of having committed petty crimes but are too young to be prosecuted. Next week (end of Oct. 2002), the Youth Justice Board, the body responsible for reducing juvenile offending, will announce that the special pre-crime risk panels will be rolled out across the country in youth crime hotspots.

There are as yet no details on what parenting training or counselling skills training the plain clothes police officers are themselves to receive!

In a "successful" pilot scheme in Nottingham, panel members, including police officers and social workers, shared information on problem children for the first time. The Government has already introduced measures to tackle youth crime, including special orders requiring mothers and fathers to attend parenting classes. Next week ministers are expected to announce an extension of these parenting orders allowing councils to fine the parents of persistent teenage offenders.

*The Independent on Sunday 20th Oct 2002*