



****EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01 AM WEDS 30th JULY 2008****

MORE INFORMATION AND MORE OVERSIGHT FOR NATIONAL DNA DATABASE, CONCLUDES HGC CITIZENS' INQUIRY

The police National DNA Database should be placed under the control of a independent statutory authority. And there should be a vigorous nationwide information campaign to explain why DNA samples are taken, how they are used and why they are retained.

These are two of the key recommendations in report published today (Tuesday) from an independent Citizens' Inquiry set up by the Human Genetics Commission (HGC) and the ESRC Genomics Policy and Research Forum at the University of Edinburgh. The project also involved the collaboration of the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre (PEALS) in Durham and Newcastle.

The Inquiry was conducted in Glasgow and Birmingham earlier this year with thirty people in two linked panels. They were able to call witnesses, take evidence and direct their own research over a six-week period.

Steve Yearley, Director of the Genomics Forum and member of the working group set up by the HGC to commission the Inquiry, said:

"We wanted to hear the public's views on the development of national forensic databases in Britain – currently the largest in the world – and, in particular, whether the practice in England and Wales of storing the DNA profiles of victims and suspects who are not charged or are subsequently acquitted is justified by the need to fight crime."

"We worked with groups in Scotland and England to draw comparisons between the two systems, and made a deliberate decision to recruit a diverse panel with a significant black and ethnic minority membership so that we could hear from a wide spectrum of people and especially those whose opinions are not often heard. They did not speak with one voice – but we did not expect that they would. Their report gives us a rich and valuable balance of views from which the HGC can proceed to a wider national consultation before we produce our own report to Government."

The Citizens' report concludes that there is a need for the National DNA Database -- now with more than four million people recorded on it – to be put on an independent statutory footing at one remove from Government and the Police. Most participants, although not all, felt that it would not be practical or desirable to have the whole population registered on the database, however.

Other majority recommendations included:

- People who are acquitted should have their names removed from the database.
- People providing DNA samples at police stations should have a clear explanation of why this is being done and what it means for them
- There should be special arrangements for situations where DNA samples have to be taken by force
- People providing samples should not have their ethnicity recorded.

The release of the Citizens' Inquiry's conclusions marks the beginning of a new phase of information gathering and broader consultation for the HGC, which will all contribute to the development of a final report, to be published in early 2009. Specific consultation questions, formulated in the light of the outcomes of the Citizens' Inquiry, can be viewed, and responses submitted, via the HGC website: www.hgc.gov.uk.

Notes to Editors

1. The Inquiry was commissioned and managed by the HGC and the ESRC Genomics Forum in partnership with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' Sciencewise programme, the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre (PEALS) and was also supported by funding from the Wellcome Trust. It was run by the Blackburn based research consultancy Vis-à-vis RC Ltd with a budget of £75,000.
2. The police in England and Wales have powers to take a DNA sample from anyone arrested or detained on suspicion of a wide variety of offences, from serious crimes like murder and rape to begging or poaching. The database has a preponderance of young men with a third of all black males currently on it.
3. The Sciencewise-ERC, funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) helps policy makers commission and use public dialogue to inform policy decisions in emerging areas of science and technology. It consists of a comprehensive online resource of information, advice and guidance together with a wide range of support services aimed at policy makers and all the different stakeholders involved in science and technology policy making, including the public. The Sciencewise-ERC also provides co-funding to Government departments and agencies to develop and commission public dialogue activities. For further information please log onto www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk
4. The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £500 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing. The Wellcome Trust's website is www.welcome.ac.uk .
5. The ESRC Genomics Policy and Research Forum, part of the ESRC Genomics Network, is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and based at the University of Edinburgh. The Genomics Forum website is www.genomicsnetwork.ac.uk/forum.

6. The Policy Ethics and Life Sciences (PEALS) Research Centre and the Beacon for Public Engagement initiative are both partnerships between Newcastle and Durham universities and the Centre for Life, Newcastle upon Tyne. The PEALS website is www.ncl.ac.uk/peals the Beacon for Public Engagement Website is beacon.ncl.ac.uk.
7. Vis-à-Vis RC Ltd has had considerable experience in facilitating participatory processes, including the BBC "Today" programme's "Jury on Respect" in 2005. Vis-à-Vis's website is www.vis-a-vis.org.uk.