



Ireland focuses on health data

As well as evaluating the current Data Protection Act in the context of the EU Data Protection Directive's provisions, the Data Protection Commissioner, Fergus Glavey, has been occupied on a health project which has nation-wide data protection implications.

The Department of Health's cervical cancer screening programme raised the question of whether there was an over-riding public interest that would make the release of personal data lawful, even if it would not normally be permissible under the Data Protection Act. For a comprehensive screening to be made, the Department wanted to obtain records from several different agencies in order to put together a population register for the purpose of the screening programme.

The Commissioner first considered requesting consent from the persons involved for any disclosures, but then concluded that a legislative change should be made.

The Health (Provision of Information) Act 1997 permits the national Cancer Registry Board and other bodies involved in any cancer screening programmes, to request from any person, information held by that person. The purpose is defined as compiling and maintaining a record of the names, addresses and dates of birth of persons who, for public health reasons, may be invited to participate in a screening programme.

1996 annual report says registrations up

Registrations in Ireland were up by 13% last year compared to 1995. The Irish Data Protection

Commissioner's Annual Report of 1996 explains the trend of increasing registrations.

Most new registrations were received from the health sector, where the biggest growth area was pharmacists (42%). The main cause for this huge increase was the inclusion of a data protection compliance clause in pharmacists' contracts with the General Medical Service. However, this was backed by an earlier information campaign targeted at the health sector.

Another area where new registrations increased was among non-commercial and regulatory public bodies. The total number of registrations in Ireland is, however, only 2,353 as the Act provides for selective registration.

The Irish office normally receives more requests for information on the Act than it is able to handle in detail. Last year was no exception in this respect. The office responded by distributing over one hundred thousand information leaflets, some of which were circulated as inserts in local newspapers. In all, educational and promotional activities took a major share, 28%, of the office's non-pay related spending. The office received 1,700 enquiries last year, of which almost a third dealt with registration issues. The overall number of complaints has remained at ninety five. However, formal complaints which involve a systematic contravention of the Act have diminished from thirty seven in 1995 to eighteen in 1996.

**Contact details are: Data Protection Commissioner, Block 4, Irish Life Centre, Talbot Street, Dublin 1, Ireland.
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New UK Data Protection Act Information and Compliance Programme

Privacy Laws & Business is launching a new UK service to help you prepare for the new Data Protection Act which will enter into force by October 1998.

The service will comprehensively cover what you need to know to implement your compliance programme. You will learn of the new law's requirements by way of workshops, compliance guides, and a helpline, which may be bought together as a package or separately. The workshops will feature expertise from *Privacy Laws & Business* and also the latest advice from the Office of the Data Protection Registrar.

The four guides will include: 1. the Data Protection bill compared with the current law; 2. Reports on sectoral meetings and resulting proposals for amendments; 3. Commentary on the new Data Protection Act, as adopted by Parliament; 4. Interviews and checklists to help you prepare your implementation programme based on shared experience.

You may also wish to receive help by way of consultancy and/or an in-house presentation. For more information and our new UK brochure, contact the PL&B office.