Report

Qualitative insights concerning the UK Digital Identity scheme

December 2025

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This summary gives insight into a wider report on the National Digital Identity scheme. To see the full report and discuss this further with us, please get in touch.

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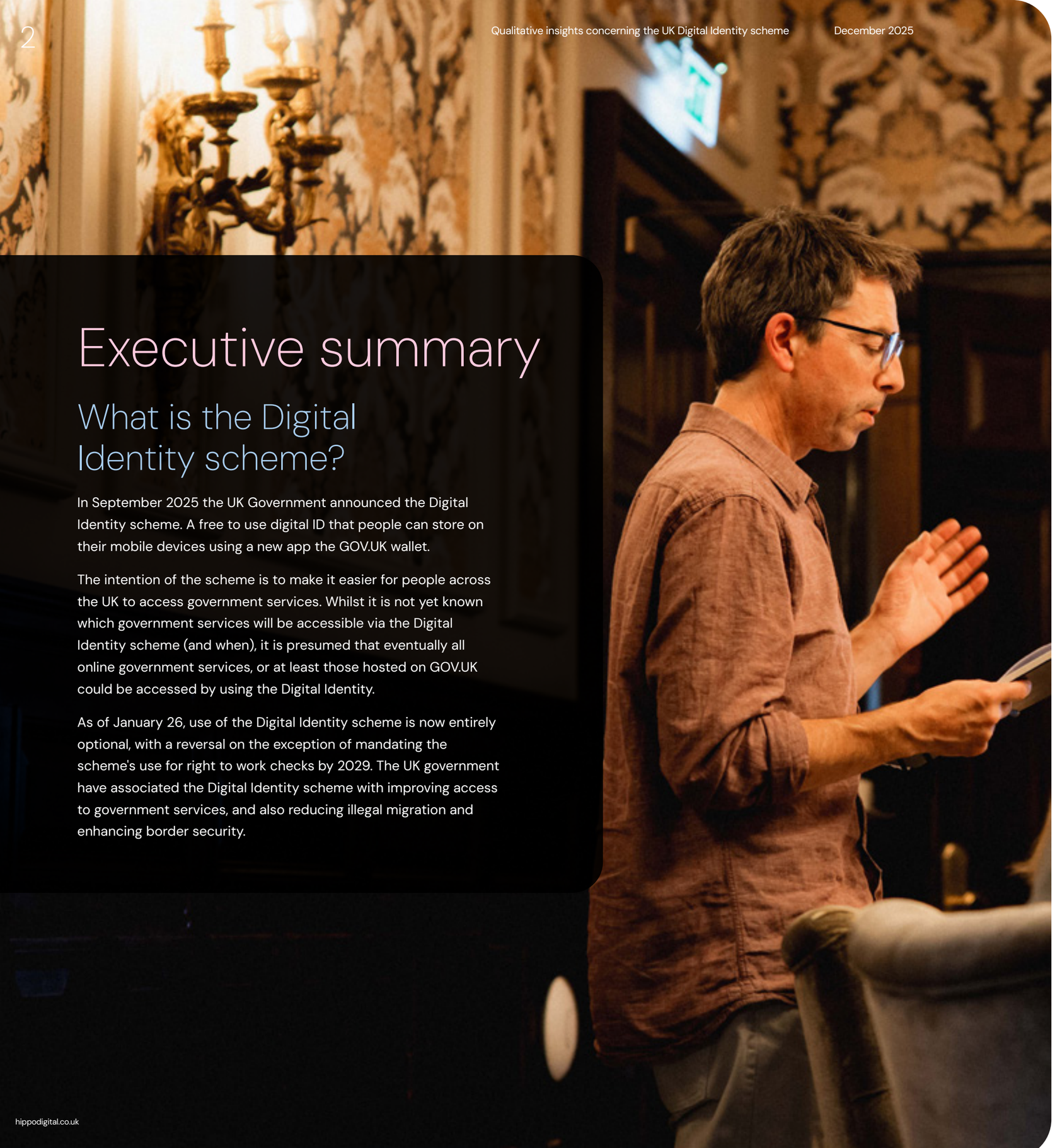

Executive summary

What is the Digital Identity scheme?

In September 2025 the UK Government announced the Digital Identity scheme. A free to use digital ID that people can store on their mobile devices using a new app the GOV.UK wallet.

The intention of the scheme is to make it easier for people across the UK to access government services. Whilst it is not yet known which government services will be accessible via the Digital Identity scheme (and when), it is presumed that eventually all online government services, or at least those hosted on GOV.UK could be accessed by using the Digital Identity.

As of January 26, use of the Digital Identity scheme is now entirely optional, with a reversal on the exception of mandating the scheme's use for right to work checks by 2029. The UK government have associated the Digital Identity scheme with improving access to government services, and also reducing illegal migration and enhancing border security.

Existing quantitative research concerning Digital Identity

Several surveys have been conducted to build a picture of public support or opposition towards Digital Identity.

Most existing research is predominantly concerned with what proportion of the UK population supports or opposes the introduction of the Digital Identity scheme. Many of these surveys also explore if trends or patterns in responses exist on the basis of certain demographics, i.e. voting preference, age range or ethnicity.

However, at the time of writing this report, several of the existing surveys were conducted before or immediately after the Government's announcement of the scheme. It's unclear what 'Digital Identity' meant to these respondents, how closely this aligned with what the government has since announced or the degree of similarity between participant interpretations.

Responses may therefore be based on misconceptions about the Digital Identity scheme or potentially widely varied understandings between respondents of what a 'Digital Identity' would entail.

This is not a criticism of existing research, but an unavoidable limitation caused by timing and methodology. Whilst quantitative methods such as surveys capture large sample sizes that are representative and statistically significant enough to allow for the identification of trends, they do not allow for a detailed exploration of why people hold the views and opinions they may express in their responses.

Since the announcement of the Digital Identity scheme, the YouGov Digital Identity Tracker has captured a gradual decline in support for, and increase in, strong opposition against the Digital Identity scheme. Though a qualitative in-depth understanding of this remains underrepresented in publicly available research.

About this research

Conducted in December 2025, this work was intended as an initial, exploratory round of qualitative research. Numerous quantitative studies, surveys and trackers have been published, with a focus towards public support or opposition to the scheme. But little qualitative research has been made publicly available to explore the 'why' and provide a deeper context, including what people actually understand the Digital Identity scheme to be, variations on this, and how closely this aligns to Government intentions.

Methodology

One-to-one, semi-structured interviews conducted remotely (virtual or telephone calls) for one hour with 19 participants.

The first half of sessions focussed on participant's existing awareness and understanding of the scheme. Part way through sessions, we shared with participants verbatim from the Government's announcement of the scheme and discussed how closely this aligned with their expectations. Confident that participants at this stage had a factually accurate understanding of the scheme, we then explored participants views - whether positive or negative - and why they had these attitudes and beliefs towards the concept of a UK Digital Identity.

Research aims

- Explore participant familiarity of the Digital Identity scheme
- Understand participant belief concerning the need of the Digital Identity scheme
- Discover what pros and cons participants associate with the Digital Identity scheme
- Understand participant's level of comfort towards the Digital Identity scheme
- Including, if participants had to create a digital identity, would they prefer the GOV.UK wallet or a 'private sector wallet'?

What this research does not do

Whilst we had a significant participant sample for qualitative research, which we tried to diversify, the themes identified within this research are not totally comprehensive of the different thoughts and feelings that individuals may have towards the Digital Identity scheme, and are not representative of the entire UK population. Further rounds of qualitative research are advised and should continue to be presented alongside future quantitative research.

Executive summary

Participants generally had low familiarity of the Digital Identity scheme. Understanding was influenced more so by discussions of the scheme's potential future applications, rather than the specific details of the scheme currently.

As a result, many believed the scheme had implications beyond the Government's stated goals. Common misconceptions included that the Digital Identity would replace passports and driver's licences, create a centralised store of citizen data pulled from various existing sources and enable citizen tracking. This suspicion was fueled by participants struggling to see a clear need for a UK Digital Identity and questioning whether the benefits of the scheme aligned more to the state than the individual.

Low awareness and misconceptions were also exacerbated by broader cultural shifts, including an avoidance of negative news and social media, increased distrust in the Government post-COVID and a perceived rightward shift in the political landscape.

Skepticism was particularly strong regarding the stated benefit of reducing illegal migration, which was widely dismissed as "political pandering". While the potential to improve access to government services was acknowledged, the sincerity of this benefit and overall trust in the Digital Identity scheme was reduced by the linking of the scheme to illegal migration. This sentiment was the same for participants regardless of their personal beliefs as to how importantly they viewed the need to reduce illegal migration.

The main perceived advantage of the scheme was the convenience offered by a mobile app for quick and easy access. However, security concerns - specifically relating to mobile device loss, hacking or data leaks - typically outweighed this convenience, with some participants citing security issues as a deal-breaker for adoption of the GOV.UK wallet. Several participants also raised concerns over mandating the use of the Digital Identity for any purpose, especially without a clear alternative for the digitally excluded.

However, despite almost all participants regularly using private sector digital wallets, if participants had to create a 'UK Digital Identity', the majority still expressed a preference for a government-issued wallet. This preference was rooted in a greater mistrust of 'big tech' regarding the storage and use of user data. With the Government being perceived as ultimately more accountable to UK citizens for data security.

By the end of research sessions, participants were divided in regards to their level of comfort towards the scheme. But after discussing the potential impacts Digital Identity may have on them personally, and not just in regards to high level concepts like civil liberties, many participants expressed an increased interest in the topic of Digital Identity and desire to follow its progression.

Research findings

Familiarity with the Digital Identity scheme

Typically low familiarity and beliefs of far reaching implications

Participants were asked to explain their understanding of the scheme at the start of sessions, after which the government's formal announcement was shared with them to gauge how their expectations aligned with the official communication.

A consistent finding was low familiarity with the details of the Digital Identity scheme. Understandings offered by participants often broadened the scope and impact of the scheme beyond the UK Government's formal announcements - which no participants had previously seen.

> "It might become the one-stop shop for identity, replace other things that exist out there at the moment."
>
> **DI008**

> "I imagine it would be usable by the authorities, police and so on, to find out who you are."
>
> **DI010**

Misconceptions around the scheme were common

- Participants reported low familiarity with the scheme and typically their understanding did not align with government messaging; most presumed a broader, more far-reaching scope
- Cultural impacts contributed to participants' lack of awareness or misconceptions, such as the avoidance of negative news and social media, increased mistrust towards politicians, and a perceived shift in politics towards the right
- Common misconceptions included the replacement of current paper ID, the types of data the ID would collect and fears that the ID would enable tracking of citizens via the creation of a centralised data store
- That using the Digital ID would make it possible to access local council and health services as well as central government services
- The data that a Digital Identity would hold about an individual would include biometric data, criminal record and employment status
- That it would create a centralised store of citizen data, bringing together the data the Government already has on individuals but stores across multiple systems and services

Misconceptions around data storage and citizen information of the ID would have led to negative perceptions of the scheme

Identity security, the assumption that citizen data would be centralised in one place as a result of Digital Identity emerged again, with participants divided but mostly leaning towards the negative.

Storing data in one place would improve data security

"If anything with them having everything potentially in one place makes it easier to protect than having 10 government agencies having bits of information about me. All eyes will be on one central source rather than trying to look all over at many sources."

DI008

“Centralising a lot of records I guess makes it more secure.”

DI012

Storing data in one place would reduce data security

"Obviously if they're storing everything, everyone's stuff in the same place, someone's going to be really keen to get all that information if they are sort of undertaking illegal activities that they could then assume your identity and pin on you or something."

DI001

“It increases the amount of information, reduces the security because once you get one, it will probably be easy to get into the others.”

DI010

“Well, I don't lie in bed at night sleeplessly bothering about it. But the fact that it would be there in one place would enable someone to know things that they wouldn't otherwise know, that they don't need to know. Knowing very little about it, but suspecting a lot, the mere fact that it exists in one place will make them curious and want to hack into it. And who's to stop them? It seems a matter of national security that we should leave things alone and have information scattered and not easily accessible.”

DI014

Broader factors which potentially impacted familiarity

As a result of asking participants about their understanding of the scheme, discussion came about naturally of additional factors that impacted participant familiarity or understanding of the Digital Identity scheme.

Some participants associated the Digital Identity scheme with the 2006 Identity Cards Act, referencing its controversial reception and an uncertainty as to how or why public views would differ almost 20 years later. Several participants also discussed broader cultural factors that impacted either their familiarity with the scheme or potentially fuelled misconceptions.

An enduring legacy of controversy

A minority of participants recalled controversy around the Identity Cards Act 2006 (which was repealed in 2011) which had left a lingering impression for these individuals. They expected that the new Digital Identity scheme was a follow-on to the previous physical national identity cards and was being ‘reopened’ by the current government as digital advancements may have now made the scheme easier to implement from a technology perspective. Beyond now being a digital ID rather than a physical card, these participants were uncertain if and how the two schemes differed any further.

"Going back probably more than a decade now, there was the potential to have ID cards in the UK and there was like massive uproar about it. People think it was infringing on their civil liberties and that there was some kind of you know nanny state and everyone was going to be turned into some kind of government droid and so it all kind of died off... I guess it's a similar scheme that's being suggested now because I guess there are benefits to it. So I mean as far as what's changed compared to last time I don't know."

DI012

Use of private sector wallets

Only one of our participants did not use a private sector wallet. All other participants had experience using Apple, Google or other wallets.

Participants used their wallets mostly for payment features and loyalty cards, though train tickets, event tickets and previous use for COVID passes was also referenced.

Most participants used their wallets on a daily basis or several times a week. Though some used them less frequently, especially if only using their wallets to store event tickets.

"You're asking who do I least mistrust?"

On understanding the scheme further, participants felt that overall the Government had more accountability to keep their data safe and use it appropriately. Whereas there was concern as to the potential motives of a private sector company in storing an individual's identity and subsequent data.

Concern was routed in difficulties in accountability where private sector companies were not UK based, but also having more of a responsibility to their shareholders and maximising profits, rather than the wellbeing or privacy of their users.

"Not on my phone. You can't. And I'm not keen about that because there's some uh if I can use some colloquial expression, there's some clever little buggers around who will fiddle it and misuse it."
DI014

"I use Google Pay daily, all the time for everything. I'd much rather carry my phone and unlock my debit card with a fingerprint than carry a wallet that I'm going to lose because I will lose it at some point."
DI016

"So at a point of it being introduced when it's fairly innocuous, not used very often, I don't need it to be in my line of vision if you like. But maybe in time when it becomes a more regular thing, then maybe having a more prominent location for it might be better. But yeah, to have to have the choice, I guess you can do either or both or whatever."
DI008

"That opens up a whole host of other things. Apple are not a UK company, and you would expect the government to be more accountable, for having your sort of interests or the country's interests, whereas the likes of Apple and Google, I wouldn't imagine they care so much. I think I'd be concerned about why they wanted an ID app or an ID card, whatever. What's the benefit to them? If it came to it, I'd feel safer using a government wallet."
DI001

The need for a Digital Identity

An uncertainty contributing to mistrust

Many participants struggled to identify a clear or strong need for the Digital Identity scheme

Participants struggled to understand the need for a digital identity or provide practical examples for when they might use and benefit from having a Digital Identity.

Key areas of challenge or confusion included:

- **Perceived limited need:** While acknowledging it might streamline access to government services, overall participants felt that their infrequent use of such services, or general need to prove their identity, did not demonstrate a strong need for the scheme.
- **Confusion over existing ID:** Significant confusion arose regarding the Digital Identity's relationship with current forms of identification. Participants questioned whether it would be a replacement for these existing documents or change the use / meaning of existing ID.
- **Why introduce a new form of ID?:** If the Digital Identity was not intended to become the new standardised method of identification, participants questioned why it was being introduced rather than digitising existing documents like passports and driving licenses.

Consequently, participants were cynical, believing the Digital Identity scheme predominantly benefited the Government rather than citizens

"I've obviously got my driving license and I rarely need that to prove who I am. So then I can't imagine aside from applying to jobs, I can't imagine why anyone would need to know who I am just on my sort of day-to-day life... Maybe they [the Government] have loads of reasons I don't know about."
DI001

"It could be it could be good, but I don't know if it's really needed. I don't feel like there's much benefit apart from it being easily accessible, I guess. Yeah, that's probably why I'm not too keen. Like, it sounds fine, but I don't know if it's necessary."
DI003

"Well, I'm not I'm not entirely certain if I'm honest. Why does DI012 the individual need this? What will I be able to do that I can't currently do? Because I can't think of a single thing. I can't."
DI012

"I think for the Government for them it might sort of streamline things a bit, make things um make information that they need for whatever purpose more easily accessible for them. But I don't necessarily know if the general public needs to have that."
DI012

Research findings

The perceived pros and cons of Digital Identity

A debate of convenience and security

“Making it easier for citizens to prove their identity to access key services swiftly – rather than hunting around for an old utility bill”

Whilst the majority of participants did agree that a Digital Identity would make it easier to access key services swiftly, others debated how much of an impact it would have.

Most participants agreed that a digital identity could streamline access to government services. Several participants expressed that this was the ‘big win’ of the Digital Identity scheme and the ‘logical’ driver behind it. In particular, the reference to utility bills resonated with participants and prompted examples of personal experiences.

Despite most participants agreeing with the benefit of improved access to government services, there was still some confusion evident in participant responses as to exactly how having a ‘digital identity’ would achieve this.

The inclusion of the illegal migration reference prompted some to question the sincerity of this benefit, thereby risking a reduction in overall trust in digital identity. Participant responses to this inclusion could be grouped into three response types:

1. That a scheme like Digital Identity in a right to work context could only have a limited impact in reducing illegal migration.
2. A broader difficulty in understanding how a digital identity at all related to illegal migration.
3. That the connection between Digital Identity and illegal migration was disingenuous and an attempt to ‘tell the public what they think we want to hear’.

“I'm glad that they said that because yeah, that I think that is probably the key benefit for me anyway. It sounds like that's probably the key benefit to the whole thing.”
DI012

"So, I would definitely agree with that. We're buying a house at the moment and it's a case of upload this, upload that, find three months of this... It's really useful that everything is now stored online because it's not as difficult as going back through a file, an actual physical file and finding documents that you used to have to do. But this [digital identity] should make it simpler. So I would have thought that would have been one of the benefits.”
DI018

“It's not going to stop people who are specifically setting out to employ people illegally because they obviously don't care in the first place that they don't have, you know, ID or whatever. They're not paying them with like PAYE.”
DI012

"Are they trying to say then because this digital identity thing will stop people working illegally then that will mean that people won't be coming coming through the border illegally? No, I still can't understand how just having the digital ID would do that kind of thing.”
DI009

Participants had more concerns than positives, and needed security reassurances

The digital nature of the ID caused reservations amongst participants routed in cyber security, the consequences of losing a mobile phone and digital exclusion. Several participants acknowledged that there was a need to ‘balance’ these concerns against both the inevitability and convenience of having a form of ID on their phones.

Few participants outright rejected using the Digital Identity based on security concerns, but many wanted reassurances before they’d consider adopting it in an optional context.

The convenience of using a mobile app for ID, a perceived positive of Digital Identity	Several participants referenced the convenience of the ID being on their mobile phones, both in terms of portability and the presumed speed of accessing and using an app.	“I didn't realise it was going to be an app. I just thought it was, I imagined it was just, a website you could access to show, but an app sounds much better. [How so?] It's just like a couple of clicks and then you go. There's my ID. I always have my phone on me so unless I've left it somewhere, which is also a possibility, but not often these days. It's usually within reach.” **DI005**
Identity security, for some, a perceived positive impact of the Digital Identity scheme	Some participants believed the Digital Identity would enhance identity security, primarily because they felt current paper documents were more at risk of forgery and loss. There was also an expectation amongst a small number of participants that the Government, or financial industry, would have future plans to utilise the Digital Identity as a tool to prevent identity theft and online fraud.	“There's all sorts of fraud and scams. Maybe this can help with that and that would be a positive thing. I think it's a good idea. The only problem is all the fraud that goes on but you'd think it would be less likely to forge a little hand held bus pass type of thing.” **DI006**
Identity security, for most, a perceived negative impact of the Digital Identity scheme	The majority of participants believed that the Digital Identity scheme would introduce new security vulnerabilities, having an overall more negative impact towards identity security. They worried about losing the mobile device their identity was stored on, or the potential for a data leak or hack.	“It's the portability and the hackability for want of a better thing, that it's just going to make it even easier for the criminals than it currently is. What's in here, my head, can be got out by torture and dementia and old age and market research and you know all sorts of things but unless you're sitting with me in the room or listening to me you can't get that information. When it's all digital, it's out there, I know how insecure it can all be so I do worry from a fraud point yes.” **DI002**
Digital exclusion, several participants raised concerns over the digital nature of the scheme and smartphone requirement	Mostly concerns of digital exclusion were rooted in worries of isolating or alienating older people from being able to access the scheme. Participants also raised concerns around the accessibility of the service, the impact on the ‘technology adverse’ and other vulnerable groups.	“Also the thing of, that it's on your phone because not everyone has a smartphone, not everyone wants to have a smartphone so yeah I don't think it's a good idea at the moment. Technology is good as a tool and that's it. It shouldn't be the only option.” **DI004**

Research findings

Participant's final sentiments

Divided over levels of comfort, but unified in intrigue

Overall participants emphasised the importance of balance and most did not outright dismiss use of the Digital Identity scheme based solely on security concerns

The perceived convenience of the Digital Identity scheme being a mobile app was not significant enough to win over most participants, who prioritised security. However, very few participants indicated that their security concerns would completely prevent them from considering the use of the Digital Identity.

Instead the majority of participants needed assurances from the Government that as much as possible had been done to protect their data before they would feel encouraged to use the app in an optional capacity.

"I have some concerns that it needs to be secure and that there's a chance for a data breach the more things are held electronically. Whilst anything digital is useful and technology is useful because it makes life easier and it's all accessible, etc., there's the potential to be accessible by people that you don't want to see it."
DI008

[At this point do you see the benefits outweighing the concerns you have?]

"No. Because you get back to maybe the world's getting a little bit too convenient. Why, have so many cons just to make that pro a little bit more easier?"
DI004

On the following scale how would you rate your comfort with the UK Digital Identity scheme?

On a 5 point likert scale participants gave very divided scores for comfort, with neutral the most commonly selected score.

Very uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Neutral	Comfortable	Very comfortable
Perception Digi ID will pool existing data in one central place, creating a risk to data security		Would be able to use themselves but worried about digital exclusion for others	Benefit of accessing government services more easily, but need to know more re why & future use cases	Does not believe will impact personal freedoms
	Mandatory element for right to work and potentially other future use cases	Not enough from the Government information regarding why to make a decision		Benefit fighting crime and preventing fraud
	Perceived waste of money & resources	Apathy, cannot change something the Government has already decided		
	Lack of accountability or legal recourse in data leak scenario	Indifferent perception that the data that will be stored in a Digi ID is already available to the Government		
	Fear of tracking			

Key takeaways

Participant levels of interest in the topic of Digital Identity had increased by the end of research sessions, as they could now see more personal implications of the scheme

> "Before today, given what I knew, I'd say I'd be slightly interested to learn more, a two. I'm a four now because it's made me think about it in more detail. In this conversation with yourself, I've thought about the implications it would have on me as an individual. So that's made me curious."
> **DIO13**

Discussing the specific details of the scheme and in particular being asked to consider the benefits and impacts to themselves on a personal level (with real-world examples) their level of interest in the topic of Digital Identity had increased - whether out of concern or hope for its future applications.

Recommendations

- Further publicly available qualitative research is needed and should continue to be repeated to provide context to surveys and quantitative tracking of public sentiment. This includes with cohorts our research was unable to better reach (18-24 age range and more ethnically diverse participants)
- Review and clarification concerning the need for and associated benefits of a UK Digital Identity, especially associations to illegal migration and border security
- Improved transparency and communication concerning long term goals of the Digital Identity scheme, especially in any further mandated contexts
- Improved transparency and communication from the Government concerning data that will not be stored and assurances concerning data security
- Clarification of what routes, if any, will exist for those unable to use the Digital Identity

Thank you

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