

**News release**

**30 March 2011**

**Being anonymous 'an ever increasing challenge' in 2011,  
says Information Commissioner**

Advances in the internet, the scale of personal information that is collected by public bodies and businesses, and the pressure to share data in the name of efficiency, make being anonymous in 2011 'an ever increasing challenge' Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham, will say today at a seminar the ICO is hosting on anonymisation.

Leading academics and experts from the public sector and business will gather at the Wellcome Trust in London today to consider different perspectives and approaches to anonymisation – the process of removing personal identifiers from information. Speaking alongside the Information Commissioner are Paul Ohm from the University of Colorado, Mark Elliot from the University of Manchester as well as representatives from the Cabinet Office and the Office of National Statistics.

The ICO will publish a report in the coming weeks that will summarise the seminar's key discussion points as well as setting out next steps.

Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham, said:

"Data sharing is the key to delivering services efficiently. But ensuring important personal information remains anonymous is an ever increasing challenge. Just by going about our everyday lives, our movements,

browsing habits and personal information are constantly being captured. The information that can identify someone is no longer simply their name and address. It's their number plate scanned by a traffic camera, or the digital fingerprint that they leave behind when they file their tax return or renew their local authority parking permit online. How can we make sense of the big picture without compromising privacy?

"The government's transparency agenda is driving the publication of large volumes of data. The positive benefits of greater transparency are not in question; there is more accountability and better informed research, which can only help improve public services. But what is up for debate is how best we can assess the privacy risks. Data sets are derived from masses of bits of personal information. But when can a statistic lead to someone being identified? And should we withhold publishing data where there is a small risk that privacy could be threatened? This seminar will examine how – in an age where more information is being collected about us than ever before – people's privacy rights can be respected."

Paul Ohm, Associate Professor at the University of Colorado Law School, and one of the seminar's key speakers, said:

"The way we protect privacy today - both through our laws and in the way we design computer systems - seems stuck in the last century. We need to realise the entirely new classes of threats to privacy that have recently arisen. In light of these threats, we must debate how we should regulate privacy in the twenty-first century, and I applaud the Information Commissioner's Office for hosting this seminar - a fine example of the kind of discussion that is needed."

**ENDS**

If you need more information, please contact the ICO press office on

0303 123 9070 or visit the website at: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).

### **Notes to Editors**

1. The Information Commissioner's Office upholds information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals.
2. The ICO has specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.
3. The ICO is on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#), and produces a monthly [e-newsletter](#). Our [For the media](#) page provides more information for journalists.