

NHS Central Register (NHSCR) Governance Board Meeting 31st July 2012
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Unique Citizen ID

Background

In Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland, published in March 2011, the Scottish Government set out ambitions for digital connectivity, a digital economy, digital participation and digital public services. The public increasingly expects to be able to access services quickly and conveniently at times and in ways that suit them. In order to deliver Digital Public Services, providers, in many cases, need to be sure of users' identity. An example of this is consideration that is being given at present to developing a unique tax payer ID number for Revenue Scotland.

There are a number of potential reference numbers in existence with varying levels of coverage and developed for different purposes. An evaluation of potential referencing systems has been carried out for previous projects, such as the Citizen's Account. The lessons from these are relevant to the current consideration of a unique tax payer ID referencing system.

Development of Unique Citizens' Reference Number (UCRN)

In response to a need to identify uniquely users of public services Local Government carried out an options appraisal exercise. In 2004/05 after lengthy National Infrastructure Pilots and evaluations the NHS Central Register was identified as the database that met the criteria to create the Citizen Account System and to provide the UCRN using the NHS number. There were legal considerations regarding the legitimacy of using the NHS number which is the Birth Registrations Number for 84% of the UK population. The remaining 16% were allocated a unique number that met the IT validation checks.

Permissions were given to use the NHS numbers on NHSCR as they were considered already to be in the Public Domain. Further legal work took place to allow NHSCR to formalise the sharing processes which had formed part of NHSCR's function since 1952. NHSCR Regulations were included in Section 57 of the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006 (LEARS).

With the permissions in place the UCRN was created from the NHS number held on the NHS Central Register (NHSCR) system. The format of the number was derived by the Improvement Service as a nineteen digit number – 16 digits plus 3 check digits. From an administration perspective the NHS number on NHSCR and the UCRN number are one and the same thing. The NHSCR use the NHS number as its main number and when the Citizen Account Systems feeds information with the UCRN to CR, NHSCR systems then report the relevant NHS number back for use.

NHSCR holds as primary identifiers NHS, UCRN, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Central Health Index Numbers. There is also provision to hold National Insurance, Passport, Driving License and other relevant identifiers which may be available In the future.

Recommendation

The Governance Board's view are sought on the opportunity to promote the UCRN as a unique citizen's ID for the purposes of Revenue Scotland.