

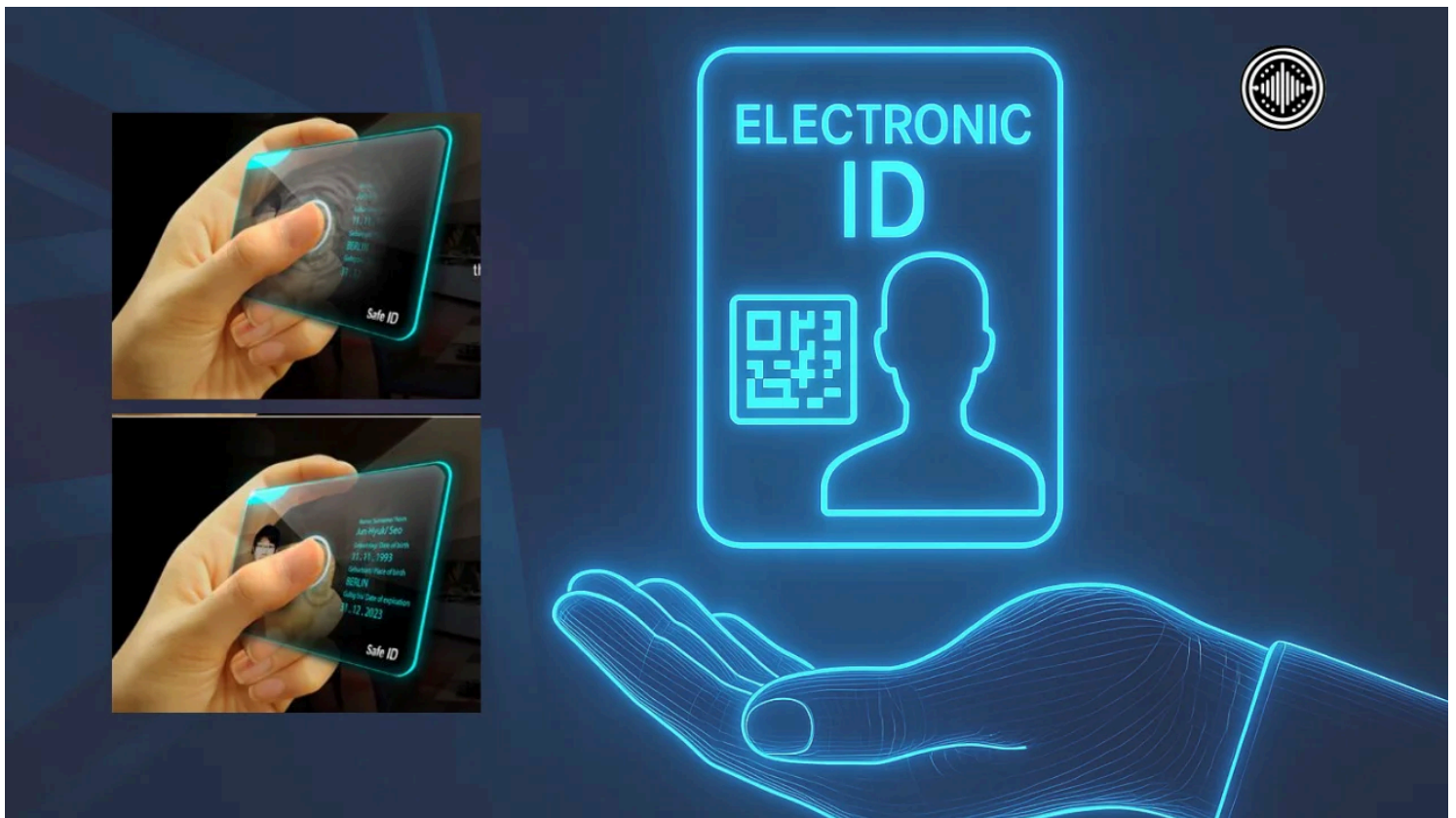
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eID Potential for the UK: A Path Forward

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The concept of electronic IDs (eIDs) has gained traction across Europe, yet the UK lags behind its continental counterparts. A recent push by 42 MPs for a comprehensive eID programme highlights the potential for economic growth, public service efficiency, and enhanced border security. However, the proposed “Britcard,” narrowly focused on tackling illegal migration, falls short of the transformative vision needed. To truly

harness the potential of eID, the UK must adopt a broader, more strategic approach. Here's how.

The UK does not need to start from scratch. Countries like Estonia, with its interoperable government-backed eID, and Sweden, with its bank-led solution, offer proven models. Poland stands out, with 80% of its population using digital IDs. Its mObywatel app, adopted by a quarter of Poles, serves as a mobile driving licence, verifies educational credentials, and even checks air quality. As Jan Kowalski, a Polish digital policy expert, noted in a recent interview with *Tech Europa*, “mObywatel’s success lies in its versatility; it’s a tool for daily life, not just bureaucracy.” The UK can emulate these features, adapting them to British needs without having to reinvent the framework.

A successful eID system must transcend niche applications like curbing illegal immigration. While preventing off-the-books employment is valuable, eIDs should integrate seamlessly into banking, healthcare, and e-commerce. For instance, enabling secure online transactions or streamlining NHS patient records could drive widespread adoption. A 2024 survey by Digital Identity UK found 67% of Brits would use eIDs for everyday tasks if they were intuitive and reliable. Focusing on practical, daily utility will build trust and ensure long-term engagement.

User experience (UX) is the linchpin of eID adoption. A clunky interface or complex onboarding will deter users, no matter how secure the system. European trials show that simplicity, speed, and interoperability are non-negotiable. eIDs must work effortlessly with bank accounts, digital wallets, and even cross-border systems. A 2023 report by the European Digital Identity Forum emphasised that “interoperable eIDs reduce

friction for businesses and consumers alike.” A seamless UX will make eIDs indispensable, not optional.

Europe’s most effective eID rollouts stem from robust public-private partnerships. The UK should follow suit, building on early steps like the May 2025 meeting between digital ID trade groups and government officials, including the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. These partnerships are vital for creating clear technical and regulatory roadmaps. Industries like online gambling and banking, which stand to gain from eID integration, could become vocal advocates, but only if supported with clear guidance. Without sustained collaboration, businesses will struggle to adopt and promote eIDs effectively.

In an era of AI-driven deepfakes and escalating cyber threats, eIDs are more than a convenience; they’re a bulwark for national security. From protecting digital infrastructure to preventing fraud, eIDs can mitigate risks to border security, road safety, and personal data. A 2025 cybersecurity report by the National Cyber Security Centre warned that “AI-enabled fraud is a growing threat to public and private sectors.” A robust eID system could counter these risks, ensuring secure digital interactions for millions.

The UK stands at a crossroads. A narrow, migration-focused “Britcard” risks squandering the broader potential of eIDs. By learning from Europe, prioritising everyday utility, perfecting UX, fostering partnerships, and treating eIDs as critical infrastructure, the UK can catch up and lead. The window for action is narrow, but the rewards, economic, social, and security-related, are immense. The government must act decisively to seize this opportunity.