



# The Church of Scotland

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## Church and Society Council

### **Surveillance and Social Justice – May 2017**

#### **Section 4. Surveillance from the Data-centre**

**4.1** Merely watching people does not generally imply surveillance; there must be some intentional effort to collect information. Surveillance can be defined as ‘the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction’.<sup>1</sup> Personal details are much more than birthdate, address, ethnicity or employment statuses which were easily available in earlier times. Today, however, personal information may include biometrics such as retina patterns, samples of DNA in saliva, and fingerprints. Our digital footprint can be extensive: alongside a list of actual purchases, data can be collected about the alternatives we explored before coming to a decision. A record of phone numbers we call can be enriched with not only information about when, and for how long we spoke, but the geographical location of that call.

**4.2** There are many times when consent to our personal details being “collected” is assumed. For example, the act of using an airport implies that our consent to surveillance has been given; if we do not wish this to happen then our only option is not to fly. When data is not available for the behaviour that interests an organisation, proxies or stand-in data can be substituted. For example, statistical correlations might be identified between someone’s postcode and age and their potential to repay a loan. The extent to which acting upon such proxies is discriminatory and/or illegal varies from country to country.

[See the full report](#)

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<sup>1</sup> David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 14.