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Data on 25 million Britons 'lost in post'

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23rd November, 2007

THE ARTICLE

The UK's Prime Minister Gordon Brown is doing his best to hide his government's blushes after the biggest security breach in British history. Two computer disks containing banking and personal details of 25 million Britons got 'lost in the post'. The disks went missing while being transferred between government departments. They contained highly confidential data on nearly half the country's population, including names, addresses, birth dates and national insurance numbers. There were also details of 10 million bank accounts. The loss leaves most Britons now worried about identity theft and bank fraud. People have been advised that the disks have probably not fallen into bad hands. However, the government announced that people need to keep an eye on their bank accounts for anything suspicious, just in case.

Mr Brown apologized to the British public: "I profoundly regret and apologize for the inconvenience and worries that have been caused to millions of families that receive child benefits," he told politicians. "We have a duty to do everything that we can to protect the public," he added. Britain's finance secretary Alistair Darling tried to reassure people, saying: "The police tell me there is no evidence that there has been any criminal or unusual activity." Meanwhile, British Information Commissioner Richard Thomas, who is responsible for data protection, said the security lapse was "a shocking case". In a BBC interview, he explained: "I am at a loss how to find out what happened in this situation. It is not just about the law. It is about retaining the trust and confidence of the population, who entrust so much information to government."

WARM-UPS

1. DATA PROTECTION: Walk around the class and talk to other students about your personal information and how to protect it. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your original partner(s) and share what you found out.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

doing one's best / blushes / security breaches / confidential data / bank fraud / regrets / apologies / criminal activity / being at a loss / confidence / trust

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. TWO-MINUTE INFORMATION DEBATES: Have the following fun 2-minute debates. Students A strongly believe in the first argument, students B the second. Change pairs often.

- Storing personal info on computers is OK. Vs. It's too risky.
- Paper records are better than computer records. Vs. Don't be silly.
- Internet shopping is dangerous. Vs. Normal shopping is more dangerous.
- Life in prison for identity theft thieves. Vs. A year is OK.
- It's too risky to keep money in banks. Vs. Bank computers are super-secure
- Everyone's identity will be stolen in the future. Vs. Totally impossible.

4. PERSONAL INFORMATION: With your partner(s), talk about whether you would give the personal info on the left to the people / things on the right. Say why you would (not) do so in each case.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • full name | a parent |
| • date of birth | your best friend |
| • credit card number | Amazon.com |
| • telephone number | your English teacher |
| • e-mail address | me |
| • house address | a first date |
| • marital status | a social networking site |
| • banking cash card PIN number | a market researcher |

5. DATA: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'data'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. QUICK ROLE PLAY: Student A is a government worker who has just lost highly confidential information on half the population; Student B is Student A's friend who wants to help, offer advice and give suggestions. Role play their conversation. Change partners often. Change partners again and talk about your roles and conversations.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Britain's post office has lost 25 million letters to its customers. | T / F |
| b. Highly confidential information on 25% of Britons was lost. | T / F |
| c. The government thinks the information is not in criminal hands. | T / F |
| d. Britons must check their bank accounts regularly for fraud. | T / F |
| e. The British prime minister offered a full apology to his people. | T / F |
| f. The PM said his finance secretary was being a real darling. | T / F |
| g. A data protection chief said the case was a minor lapse in security. | T / F |
| h. British people trust their government with their personal info. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. blushes | a. to be on the safe side |
| 2. breach | b. private |
| 3. confidential | c. put people's mind at rest |
| 4. keep an eye on | d. deeply |
| 5. just in case | e. keeping |
| 6. profoundly | f. check |
| 7. duty | g. breakdown |
| 8. reassure | h. failure |
| 9. lapse | i. embarrassment |
| 10. retaining | j. obligation |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. doing his best to hide | a. on their bank accounts |
| 2. the biggest security | b. a loss |
| 3. highly confidential data on nearly | c. breach in British history |
| 4. worried about identity theft | d. for the inconvenience |
| 5. people need to keep an eye | e. confidence of the population |
| 6. I profoundly regret and apologize | f. and bank fraud |
| 7. finance secretary Alistair Darling | g. his government's blushes |
| 8. the security lapse | h. tried to reassure people |
| 9. I am at | i. half the country's population |
| 10. retaining the trust and | j. was "a shocking case" |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

The UK's Prime Minister Gordon Brown is doing his best to _____ his government's blushes after the biggest security _____ in British history. Two computer disks containing banking and personal details of 25 million Britons got 'lost in the post'. The disks went missing _____ being transferred between government departments. They contained _____ confidential data on nearly half the country's population, including names, addresses, birth dates and national insurance numbers. There were also _____ of 10 million bank accounts. The _____ leaves most Britons now worried about identity theft and bank fraud. People have been advised that the disks have probably not _____ into bad hands. However, the government announced that people need to keep an eye on their bank accounts for anything _____, just in case.

highly
suspicious
breach
while
loss
hide
fallen
details

Mr Brown apologized to the British public: "I profoundly _____ and apologize for the inconvenience and worries that have been _____ to millions of families that receive child benefits," he told politicians. "We have a _____ to do everything that we can to protect the public," he added. Britain's finance secretary Alistair Darling tried to reassure people, saying: "The police tell me there is no _____ that there has been any criminal or unusual activity." Meanwhile, British Information Commissioner Richard Thomas, who is responsible for data protection, said the security _____ was "a shocking case". In a BBC interview, he explained: "I am at a _____ how to find out what happened in this situation. It is not just about the law. It is about _____ the trust and confidence of the population, who _____ so much information to government."

lapse
retaining
caused
evidence
regret
loss
entrust
duty

LISTENING: Listen and fill in the spaces.

The UK's Prime Minister Gordon Brown _____ hide his government's blunders _____ in British history. Two computer disks containing banking and personal details of 25 million Britons _____. The disks went missing while being transferred between government departments. They contained highly _____ the country's population, including names, addresses, birth dates and national insurance numbers. There were also details of 10 million bank accounts. The loss leaves most Britons now worried _____ fraud. People have been advised that the disks have probably _____. However, the government announced that people _____ their bank accounts for anything suspicious, just in case.

Mr Brown apologized to the British public: "_____ apologize for the inconvenience and worries that have been caused to millions of families _____," he told politicians. "We have a duty to do everything that we can to protect the public," he added. Britain's finance secretary Alistair Darling _____, saying: "The police tell me there is no evidence that there has been any _____." Meanwhile, British Information Commissioner Richard Thomas, who is responsible for data protection, said the _____ case". In a BBC interview, he explained: "I am at a loss how to find out what happened in this situation. It is not just about the law. It _____ and confidence of the population, who entrust so much information to government."

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'personal' and 'detail'.

personal	detail

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hide • post • half • fraud • fallen • case 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regret • duty • unusual • shocking • loss • trust
---	--

STUDENT PRIVATE DATA SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about private data in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
 - b) Do you ever worry about the safety of your personal information on computers?
 - c) Do you think there should be a limit to what your government knows about you?
 - d) What bad things could happen to you if someone stole your identity?
 - e) If the British government sends computer disks containing highly confidential info on half the population in the post, how secure do you think your confidential information is in your country?
 - f) Do you think Gordon Brown should resign for this security breach?
 - g) Would you change banks if this happened to you?
 - h) How worried do you think Britons are by this security lapse?
 - i) Are you always very careful about who you give information to?
-

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Do you think the British government failed in its duty to keep confidential information secure?
- c) Do you think the disks will fall into the wrong hands?
- d) Do you think Gordon Brown should fire people for this mistake?
- e) Do you think we'll be more or less safe from cyber criminals in the future?
- f) What can you do from now to keep your private information more secure?
- g) What would you do if you found the computer disks?
- h) What questions would you like to ask Gordon Brown?
- i) Did you like this discussion?

LANGUAGE

CORRECT WORD: Put the correct words from a–d below in the article.

The UK's Prime Minister Gordon Brown is doing his best to hide his government's (1) ____ after the biggest security breach in British history. Two computer disks containing banking and personal details of 25 million Britons got 'lost in the post'. The disks went missing (2) ____ being transferred between government departments. They contained (3) ____ confidential data on nearly half the country's population, including names, addresses, birth dates and national insurance numbers. There were also details of 10 million bank accounts. The loss (4) ____ most Britons now worried about identity theft and bank fraud. People have been advised that the disks have probably not (5) ____ into bad (6) _____. However, the government announced that people need to keep an eye on their bank accounts for anything suspicious, just in case.

Mr Brown apologized to the British public: "I profoundly (7) ____ and apologize for the inconvenience and worries that have been caused to millions of families that receive child benefits," he told politicians. "We have a (8) ____ to do everything that we can to protect the public," he added. Britain's finance secretary Alistair Darling tried to (9) ____ people, saying: "The police tell me there is no evidence that there has been any criminal or unusual activity." Meanwhile, British Information Commissioner Richard Thomas, who is responsible (10) ____ data protection, said the security lapse was "a shocking case". In a BBC interview, he explained: "I am (11) ____ a loss how to find out what happened in this situation. It is not just about the law. It is about retaining the trust and confidence of the population, who entrust so (12) ____ information to government."

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. | (a) blubbering | (b) blunders | (c) brushes | (d) blushes |
| 2. | (a) while | (b) where | (c) wherever | (d) while |
| 3. | (a) high | (b) highly | (c) highest | (d) higher |
| 4. | (a) left | (b) leafs | (c) leaving | (d) leaves |
| 5. | (a) falling | (b) felled | (c) fallen | (d) falls |
| 6. | (a) hands | (b) fingers | (c) arms | (d) palms |
| 7. | (a) rejoice | (b) regress | (c) regroup | (d) regret |
| 8. | (a) regretful | (b) regret | (c) regretfully | (d) regrets |
| 9. | (a) reassure | (b) reassemble | (c) reassess | (d) reassign |
| 10. | (a) with | (b) by | (c) from | (d) for |
| 11. | (a) at | (b) with | (c) in | (d) by |
| 12. | (a) many | (b) lot of | (c) much | (d) lots |

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about how different companies and countries protect people's data. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. DATA SECURITY: Make a poster about how to keep your confidential information confidential. Include do's and don'ts for websites, chat rooms, discussion boards, social networking sites, e-mails, etc. Show your poster to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all include similar things?

4. MAGAZINE ARTICLE: Write a magazine article about the identity theft of a world leader (perhaps the leader of your country). Include imaginary interviews with the leader and the thief.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down new words and expressions.

5. LETTER: Write a letter to the British Prime Minister. Ask him three questions about his views on data protection. Give him three pieces of advice on what to do to restore the people's trust. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F b. T c. T d. T e. T f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. blushes | a. embarrassment |
| 2. breach | b. breakdown / failure |
| 3. confidential | c. private |
| 4. keep an eye on | d. check |
| 5. just in case | e. to be on the safe side |
| 6. profoundly | f. deeply |
| 7. duty | g. obligation |
| 8. reassure | h. put people's mind at rest |
| 9. lapse | i. breakdown / failure |
| 10. retaining | j. keeping |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. doing his best to hide | a. his government's blushes |
| 2. the biggest security | b. breach in British history |
| 3. highly confidential data on nearly | c. half the country's population |
| 4. worried about identity theft | d. and bank fraud |
| 5. people need to keep an eye | e. on their bank accounts |
| 6. I profoundly regret and apologize | f. for the inconvenience |
| 7. finance secretary Alistair Darling | g. tried to reassure people |
| 8. the security lapse | h. was "a shocking case" |
| 9. I am at | i. a loss |
| 10. retaining the trust and | j. confidence of the population |

GAP FILL:

Data on 25 million Britons 'lost in post'

The UK's Prime Minister Gordon Brown is doing his best to **hide** his government's blushes after the biggest security **breach** in British history. Two computer disks containing banking and personal details of 25 million Britons got 'lost in the post'. The disks went missing **while** being transferred between government departments. They contained **highly** confidential data on nearly half the country's population, including names, addresses, birth dates and national insurance numbers. There were also **details** of 10 million bank accounts. The **loss** leaves most Britons now worried about identity theft and bank fraud. People have been advised that the disks have probably not **fallen** into bad hands. However, the government announced that people need to keep an eye on their bank accounts for anything **suspicious**, just in case.

Mr Brown apologized to the British public: "I profoundly **regret** and apologize for the inconvenience and worries that have been **caused** to millions of families that receive child benefits," he told politicians. "We have a **duty** to do everything that we can to protect the public," he added. Britain's finance secretary Alistair Darling tried to reassure people, saying: "The police tell me there is no **evidence** that there has been any criminal or unusual activity." Meanwhile, British Information Commissioner Richard Thomas, who is responsible for data protection, said the security **lapse** was "a shocking case". In a BBC interview, he explained: "I am at a **loss** how to find out what happened in this situation. It is not just about the law. It is about **retaining** the trust and confidence of the population, who **entrust** so much information to government."

LANGUAGE WORK

1 - d 2 - a 3 - b 4 - c 5 - c 6 - a 7 - d 8 - b 9 - a 10 - d 11 - b 12 - c