

Protection fears over student register

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PERSONAL academic details of Victorian students will be stored on a state register in a move that has angered civil libertarians.

Under legislation to be debated in parliament this week, students aged under 25 will be issued a Victorian student number and their details kept on a government database.

The student register will include all primary, secondary and TAFE students and contain their name, date of birth, sex and enrolment details.

University students will be exempt.

The information will be used by government administrators and agencies, including the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority.

The Victorian government says the register will provide statistical information, including retention rates, to help direct resources.

It will also monitor attendances and identify students who have dropped out of school.

Liberty Victoria has slammed the register, saying it is open to abuse and threatens student privacy.

Vice-president Professor Spencer Zifcak said there were no protections to prevent unauthorised people from accessing student numbers and public servants would not be penalised for misusing information.

Prof Zifcak said TAFEs and schools would inevitably adopt the state student numbers as their own and they would be printed on student cards.

Everyone from hotel bouncers to transport police would then have access to the numbers when they demanded student identification, he said.

"There's nothing in the legislation to prevent any person outside the education system from demanding the number ... that it seems to me is a significant flaw in the legislation."

Prof Zifcak also fears personal student information will be added to the register ad hoc and cross-referenced against other government agency databases.

"It does represent a danger to students' privacy.

"When you weigh the privacy implications against the statistical value it's not a fair balance."

A spokeswoman for Education Minister Bronwyn Pike said the government was satisfied with the privacy protections in the bill.

"Our office has been meeting with Liberty Victoria regarding their concerns and has offered to continue to work with them around their concerns."

The Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill will be debated in the upper house this week.

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