

# Future Ethicist Shield: Case Set 2025

## 1. Digital IDs

In September 2025 the UK Government announced plans to introduce a new digital ID system for all citizens and legal residents seeking to work in the country.<sup>1</sup> Unlike national ID card systems found in other countries- such as Germany and Uruguay- the proposed ID would be entirely digital and non-mandatory for those who do not need to prove their right to work, such as children and the elderly.

The main aim of the digital ID system, according to the Government, is to cut down on the number of illegal workers in the UK. While National Insurance numbers are currently required for employment, it is believed that some workers steal or borrow others' numbers when applying for jobs.

The backlash against the proposals has been significant. In the first few weeks after the scheme was announced, over 2.4 million people signed an online petition calling for it to be scrapped. One concern is that it could threaten civil rights, with some worried it may lead to a 'slippery slope' where the government monitors extensive personal data for surveillance or interference in private lives. Additionally, there are worries about the security of the systems used to store and protect personal information, especially given the recent increase in cyber-attacks. Migrants' rights groups have also voiced fears that the system may push vulnerable workers further underground, where they risk even greater exploitation than under the current setup.

### Study Questions:

- Does the digital ID system potentially threaten the civil rights and liberties of individuals?
- Does the government have the right to expect individuals to prove their identity before they take on work?
- Do individuals have the right to complete control over the personal data?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyl3lzzed2o>

## 2. Grammar Schools

According to the latest figures, around 42% of children in Northern Ireland will attend a selective grammar school for their post-primary education, with the remainder attending a non-selective school. This contrasts sharply with other parts of the UK. Both Scotland and Wales have abolished the grammar school system, and only 5% of English schools are classified as grammars.

The continuation of the grammar system in NI remains controversial for some. Supporters argue that academic selection enables talented pupils to receive a specialised, rigorous education tailored to their abilities. They contend that selection allows grammar schools to maintain strong academic records while respecting parental choice and educational diversity. Furthermore, some defenders assert that non-selection could ‘slow down’ the pace of learning, and that streaming at school level ensures each pupil is taught in a way best suited to their stage of development.

Critics, however, believe that the entrance exam is a poor indicator of academic ability and that the process is stressful and stigmatising, especially for pupils who do not achieve the result they expected.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the transfer test has been accused of favouring pupils from wealthier socio-economic backgrounds whose families can afford extra tutoring. It is also argued that pupils from newcomer backgrounds and those with disabilities are severely disadvantaged in passing the test. Others state that the grammar system perpetuates a ‘two-tier’ education system, providing additional resources to selective schools over non-selective ones, thereby widening attainment gaps throughout a pupil’s life.<sup>3</sup>

### Study Questions:

- Should school places be awarded on merit, or something else?
- Do parents have a right to choose selective education for their children, or does the state have a duty to prevent the perpetuation of school systems that produce inequality?
- Is it wrong to separate children into different educational tracks?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56491003>

<sup>3</sup> [https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/425932765/Is\\_academic\\_selection.pdf](https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/425932765/Is_academic_selection.pdf)

### 3. Working from Home

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many jobs and activities shifted online. Thanks to the expansion of platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, numerous white-collar workers could continue to perform their work tasks from the comfort of their homes.

Since 2021, however, most workplaces have reintroduced some in-person elements, either opting for a complete return to the office or adopting a ‘hybrid’ working policy that requires staff to be on-site for a minimum number of days per week.<sup>4</sup> Such calls for a ‘return to office’ have been criticised for not considering the personal preferences and circumstances of staff. Now that online meeting technology is widely accessible, critics argue that- for many- there is no good reason to attend in person. They say commuting not only consumes valuable private time but is also costly and unpredictable. Those with caring responsibilities claim that mandatory office attendance imposes significant burdens with little reward. They assert that their productivity is not negatively affected by home working and, in fact, is often improved.

Supporters of returning to the office, however, argue that productivity declines when working from home.<sup>5</sup> Crucially, they believe that in-person work helps staff build trust and community, making them more likely to seek help when stuck on a project, and that new employees in particular may find it difficult to settle in a completely online environment. Moreover, such critics of home working suggest that morale diminishes without face-to-face interaction, which can subsequently influence employee retention in the company.

#### Study Questions:

- Provided the technology exists to complete work tasks remotely, should workers have the right to hybrid or home working?
- How should workplaces balance communal belonging and workplace culture against individual convenience and well-being?
- Is there an ethical obligation for employees to maintain the social fabric of their workplace, even at personal cost?
- Does remote work increase worker autonomy in ways that employers have an ethical duty to preserve?

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/wh>

<sup>5</sup> <https://hbr.org/2025/07/hybrid-still-isnt-working>

## 4. Plastic Surgery Abroad

An increasing number of UK residents are travelling abroad for cosmetic surgery and dental treatment, attracted by significantly lower prices and the appeal of combining their treatment with holidays. When things go wrong, however, it is very often the NHS that picks up the tab. According to one study, dealing with complications typically costs the NHS around £9,327.90 per patient.<sup>6</sup> In total, the cost annually to the NHS runs into the tens of millions.

Some critics argue that patients who travel abroad for cosmetic procedures should not receive NHS-funded remedial support upon their return and should be billed if their procedure results in complications. They contend that patients who undergo treatment abroad have accepted the risks and should bear the consequences themselves, rather than burdening the rest of the country with expensive repairs.

In response, such patients argue that they are equally entitled to NHS treatment as anyone else. They claim that merely taking on a medical risk does not mean they should be denied support if complications arise. They suggest that there is no difference between accepting the risk of plastic surgery abroad and doing so at home. If remedial treatment is allowed in the latter case, then why not the former?

### Study Questions:

- Should the NHS treat complications from procedures patients chose to undergo privately abroad?
- If patients willingly accept the risk and initially benefited from cost savings, should they bear complete financial responsibility for complications?
- Is there anything different about the types of risks associated with having plastic surgery abroad compared to those involved in other activities, such as recreational cycling or drinking alcohol?

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1479666X24000441>

## 5. Reality TV

Jim Carrey's 1998 hit film *The Truman Show* explores a man who unknowingly lives inside a massive TV set, with his entire life broadcast for entertainment. Everyone around him is an actor, and producers construct his reality. While the film is science fiction, it raises real ethical questions relevant to modern reality TV and social media.

Shows like *Love Island* and *Big Brother* place real people in artificial, heavily manipulated environments for entertainment. Contestants face psychological pressure, manufactured conflicts, relationship breakdown, and public humiliation- all for viewing pleasure. Studies show participants in reality TV suffer long-term mental health consequences, yet audiences continue to consume this content.<sup>7</sup> More broadly, social media encourages people to perform their lives for audiences, creating similar dynamics: people curate reality for likes and engagement, mental health deteriorates, yet the system persists because it's profitable and entertaining.

### Study Questions:

- Does entertainment value justify treating people as objects for audience consumption? Where should the line be drawn?
- Can participants in reality TV shows truly consent to psychological harm if they underestimate its severity?
- Should regulators protect people from their own choices, or is this paternalistic?
- Do viewers bear moral responsibility for consuming content that harms real people, or does responsibility lie solely with producers?

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/mar/20/reality-tv-must-do-more-to-protect-mental-health-of-participants>

## 6. Accidental Racism

Someone makes a statement or action they don't intend as racist, but others perceive it as racist. The accused responds: "I didn't mean it that way; you're misinterpreting me." The accuser responds: "Intention doesn't matter; impact does." This raises questions about accidental racism, epistemic humility, and what we owe each other when accused of wrongdoing.

Some argue that impact matters more than intent: if someone causes racist harm, whether intentional or not, they should acknowledge it. Others argue that this standard is too harsh, that good-faith mistakes should be treated differently from intentional racism, and that people deserve opportunities to clarify misunderstandings before being condemned.

- If someone doesn't 'intend' to be racist, should they still be morally responsible for the outcome?
- Should we accept accusations of wrongdoing with humility, or does this risk injustice?
- Is dismissing an accuser's interpretation disrespectful and itself racist, or is defending against misinterpretation legitimate?

## 7. The Fair Ticket Revolution

It's 2026 and Taylor Swift announces a new tour. When tickets for her London shows go on sale, all 50,000 seats sell out within 90 seconds. Fans who waited in online queues for hours find only resale options at inflated prices- sometimes 10 times the original face value. Scalpers and bots have once again captured the majority of affordable tickets, leaving genuine fans priced out.

Amid rising frustration with the ticketing industry, the UK Culture Secretary proposes a FairTicket Scheme- a government-backed policy that would require promoters to use lottery or face-value resale systems for high-demand events. Under the scheme:

- 60% of tickets would be distributed through a randomised fan lottery verified by ID.
- 20% would go to registered fan-club members at fixed prices.
- 10% would be auctioned for premium prices, with proceeds funding free community concerts.
- The remaining 10% would be held back for accessibility needs and last-minute sales.

Ticketing companies protest, arguing that the policy interferes with market dynamics. They claim that dynamic pricing- adjusting prices automatically to match demand- maximises transparency and ensures tickets go to fans who value them most. Critics respond that it effectively rewards wealth, not fandom.

Artists and promoters are divided. Taylor Swift's management supports the FairTicket plan as a matter of "social fairness." But some industry insiders warn that capped resale markets could reduce profit margins for venues and limit touring activity, especially for smaller acts who rely on revenue from premium sales.

### Study Questions:

- Is it morally legitimate for artists or promoters to let ticket prices rise with demand, as happens in other markets?
- Do artists have a moral responsibility to design fairer ticketing systems for their own fans?
- Is a lottery-based sale or verified fan queue a fairer method, or does it simply introduce another form of exclusion?
- Does government intervention in concert ticketing promote justice or paternalism?

## 8. The Santa Lie

Every December, parents around the world perpetuate the story of Santa Claus: a magical figure who rewards good children and skips the naughty ones. For many, keeping the “Santa secret” is a cherished part of childhood, nurturing wonder, generosity, and joy. But some parents and philosophers worry that the tradition involves an intentional, repeated lie.

Critics argue that it’s unethical to deceive children about Santa because it undermines trust and manipulates their beliefs for parental convenience or control. Once children learn the truth, they may feel betrayed or embarrassed. As philosopher Peter Ellerton argues, the ‘Santa myth’ also perpetuates harmful ideas about value by implicitly telling children whose parents can’t afford a lot of presents that they are ‘bad’ in some way.<sup>8</sup>

Defenders of the tradition counter that this “lie” is a form of make-believe that fosters creativity, moral development, and shared cultural meaning- and that discovering the truth can itself be a valuable rite of passage.<sup>9</sup>

### Study Questions:

- Is it morally acceptable to lie if the falsehood promotes happiness or moral learning?
- Does the Santa lie erode children’s trust in adults, or model a positive form of cultural storytelling?
- Should truth-telling have special moral weight in a parent-child relationship?

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-25/should-we-lie-to-kids-about-santa-claus-being-real/101502594>

<sup>9</sup> <https://theconversation.com/the-case-for-lying-to-kids-about-santa-from-a-philosopher-245484>



## 9. The AI Clinician

A large urban hospital introduces an AI system, MediDecision, designed to provide ethically informed triage recommendations for emergency care. Using vast datasets, MediDecision ranks patients based on predicted survival and expected long-term quality of life. Early results show that it improves efficiency and reduces errors in allocating critical care resources.

During a winter outbreak, ICU beds are scarce. The AI consistently ranks elderly patients and those with congenital disabilities lower than younger, healthier patients with higher survival predictions. Dr. Campbell, a physician on duty, notices that her judgment would prioritize at least one low-ranked patient- an elderly woman with pneumonia who insists she wants “one more Christmas with her family.” The AI system, however, excludes her from ICU admission, allocating her ventilator to a younger man with similar symptoms but better recovery odds.

Hospital policy states that “AI recommendations are binding except where clear human error is demonstrated.” Dr. Campbell must decide whether to override the system or follow its ranking.

### Study Questions:

- Should life-and-death triage decisions ever be delegated to algorithms?
- Does prioritizing survival probability undermine the equal moral worth of patients?
- If human clinicians are overruled by algorithmic reasoning, who bears moral responsibility for harm?
- Can an AI truly act in accordance with principles like justice or compassion?