

Access matters: Partial re-creation of facial images from imaging files

As you will be aware, UK Biobank does not permit researchers to try to identify individual participants: this is one of the key tenets on which the 500,000 UK Biobank participants were recruited. In addition to the express provisions on this subject, which are set out in the Access Procedures and the Material Transfer Agreement <http://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Material-Transfer-Agreement.pdf> (specifically, the prohibitions in clauses 4.4 to 4.6) , UK Biobank has also issued some further guidance which is published on its website <http://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ukbiobank-summary-de-identification-protocol.pdf>.

In this context, it is apparent that certain files (DICOM T1 structural brain images, DICOM T2 flair structural brain images and T2/PD brain images) released to researchers as part of an application for imaging data, can be used to create an image, akin to that of a mannequin, of a particular participant. These images do not of themselves enable a participant to be re-identified. However, UK Biobank is conscious of technological advances in this area, including those in facial-recognition software, and UK Biobank would like to take this opportunity to:

- re-iterate its approach on re-identification; and
- request that researchers use their reasonable judgement if they elect to include such pictures for publication.

As with all our guidance notes, this guidance is kept under regular review and will be updated as necessary.

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