# Background

The Airwave Health Research Tissue Bank (“Airwave” or “Study”) is operated by the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at Imperial College London. The Principal Investigator is Professor Paul Elliott and it has the support of the Police Federation.

Airwave is an occupational long-term prospective cohort study in the Police forces in UK. The Study has consent from the participants (employees of the police forces in UK) for long-term storage of their biological samples and data and for its use in the future by this study and other researchers either from academia or industry.

Biological samples from the participants are stored at premises operated under an HTA research license. All personal data are stored on a Trusted Research Environment (TRE) operated by Imperial College London, which is also the Data Controller. A TRE is a secure computing environment that allows authorised researchers to access, store, and analyse sensitive data in a managed environment and to externally verified governance standards.

Identifiers have been delinked from research data and only a limited number of data managers have access to participants identifiable data. Approved researchers have access to the pseudonymised datasets, from which it is intended that no individual will be identifiable; moreover, researchers are contractually bound not to attempt reidentification. If a researcher suspected that the identity of a research subject is at risk, they must report their suspicions to their line manager, who will advise a member of the Access Committee. Any samples and data released to external researchers for future studies will be undertaken in the light of a recommendation and advice given by the Access Committee, which includes a lay member nominated by the Police Federation.

# Role of the Committee

The role of DAC is to consider Access Requests from researchers, both internal and external, for access to the Airwave research asset. Applications are of four types, and any given Access Request may include features one or more of these:

* Use of participants’ biological samples.
* Access to pseudonymised, record-level research data previously collected by the Study and/or their collaborators.
* Access to aggregated research data.
* Invite participants to join a research study separate from Airwave.

Additionally, the Airwave team itself may consult DAC with proposals to use the identifiable data for purposes not previously agreed.

DAC will assess the merit of each application to form an opinion on whether to approve, suspend or decline an application. Decisions will be transmitted to the applicant and other relevant third parties by the Secretary.

DAC may review progress on previously approved studies and consider applications for an extension of their approval periods.

DAC has power to review and, if appropriate, amend these Terms of Reference.

## Membership

DAC shall consist of the following roles:

* Principal Investigator (PI) of the Study.
* A representative of Police Federation or similar professional organisation (lay member)
* An epidemiologist from Imperial College
* An academic partner from an external university
* A Secretary
* The Study’s Information Asset Administrator (IAA)
* Ethical advisor (consulted as required)

## Meetings

DAC expects to meet every 4-6 weeks throughout the year (August excepted) where there is business to address. Meetings will normally be online. The Secretary will organise the meeting, prepare an agenda and circulate Access Requests and other papers. The PI will normally chair the meetings. The PI (or alternate), lay member (or alternate) and either the epidemiologist or external academic and the IAA should be present for the meeting to be quorate.

When clarifications or additional information is required to assess an application, the committee will delegate responsibility to one of its members to contact the relevant applicant(s).

The Secretary is responsible for informing DPUK of the Committee’s decisions.

The IAA will arrange for sharing data, samples and organising invitations as resolved by DAC.

## Review

The committee will review its terms of reference and membership at least once every two years.

## Accountability

The DAC will be accountable to the Airwave Scientific Advisory Group (ASAG) and its minutes made available to members of ASAG.

## Chair’s Action to Approve Applications

Where it is impractical for a meeting to be held or for an essential member to attend then a response to an Access Request may be made by the Chair after consulting with relevant members of DAC. Decisions so made will be set out for approval by the next meeting.

DAC may approve a class of applications where access is limited to aggregated data. For example, genetic replication studies where processing is carried out at Imperial College to support third-party research. Responsibility for deciding on specific instances of these Access Requests then lies with the PI.

The Chair will normally approve extension requests made by previously approved access requests without direct reference to the DAC. The DAC will be advised on any such approvals at its next meeting.

## Committee Decisions

DAC’s decisions will normally be by unanimous agreement amongst members. Should consensus not be reached, the PI and lay member each has a veto on any approval, including changes to the Terms of Reference or committee membership.

# Application Process

Access Requests will normally be initiated through the managed process accessible at [Dementias Platform UK (DPUK)](https://portal.dementiasplatform.uk/Apply/ApplicationProcess). Direct requests to DAC via its Secretary are also permissible but discouraged for administrative reasons.

## Assessment of Access Requests

DAC will consider any or all the following when assessing an application:

* Whether the proposal is intending to contribute positively to research into diseases affecting human health and is in the public interest.
* Whether the applicant has sufficient funding and resources to support their application.
* Whether the proposed use of any depletable biological samples is an effective use of that material given alternative uses that may be available.
* Whether the proposal lies within the reasonable expectations of the participants’ who have consented to the use of their data and samples.
* Any conditions that may have been placed upon us by the terms of our ethical approval.
* Any risk that disclosure of data or samples may have on participants’ data confidentiality.
* Whether the applicant is willing to make available to us and other researchers using our data any additional data it collects or derives. Applicants are expected to share their data with the wider research community unless there are compelling reasons for not doing so. Reasonable embargo terms will be respected.
* The applicant’s adherence with DAC requirements during earlier Access Requests.

Access Requests considered acceptable will be approved by DAC, which will authorise the release of data and / or samples for a specified duration. No data or samples will be shared with any applicant unless and until their Access Request has been approved.

Requests may instead be approved subject to changes to be made / agreed by the applicant. Alternatively, the Request may be placed on hold pending resolution of questions raised by the committee. Finally, a Request may be declined or withdrawn by the applicant.

## Internal and External Researchers

Internal researchers are applicants who are employees of Imperial College London. Internal Researchers may work either at a DAC-approved TRE or at Imperial College’s own TRE.

External researchers are defined as applicants employed by a substantive academic, commercial or other bona fide institution other than Imperial College London who wish to access the data and samples held by the Study. External researchers will normally work at an external TRE, unless they make separate application for an honorary contract at Imperial College.

Other than the location where they work and process Study data, Access Requests from Internal and External researchers will be treated equally.

## Processing Locations When Accessing Data

External researchers must access the Study’s data at a third-party DAC-approved TRE, the one exception being basic demographic or temporal data relating to a sample (such as gender and age of the donating participant). Research data generated by the substudy may be processed using the Applicant’s computing resources subject to agreement by DAC that these are sufficiently secure given the nature of the data being processed.

The approved TREs are [Dementias Platform UK (DPUK)](https://portal.dementiasplatform.uk/) and [UK LLC](https://ukllc.ac.uk/).

## Externally Supplied Data

Access to datasets provided by third parties will be subject to rules of the relevant Data Sharing Agreements. For examples, NHS data may be accessed within the Imperial TRE when the proposed research is compatible with the general aims of the Airwave Study, as agreed with the relevant NHS agency.

## Costs

Applicants may be asked to make a financial contribution towards the running of the cohort as part of their application. Applicants will always be expected to refund directly incurred costs of their application such as sample retrieval, postage and staff time required in preparing application-specific datasets.