**Seminar 3: Case Study - Privacy**

Ricardo works for the records department of his local government as a computer records clerk, where he has access to files of property tax records. For a scientific study, a researcher, Beth, has been granted access to the numerical portion “but not the corresponding names” of some records.

Beth finds some information that she would like to use, but she needs the names and addresses corresponding with certain properties. Beth asks Ricardo to retrieve these names and addresses, so she can contact these people for more information and for permission to do further study.

Now consider, what are the ethical issues involved in deciding which of these options to pursue?

* **If Ricardo is not responsible for determining allowable access, should he release the names and addresses?**

No, because he does not have the authority to and it is illegal to give out names without consent in some jurisdiction, for example under GDPR.

* **Suppose Ricardo were responsible for determining allowable access to the files. What ethical issues would be involved in his deciding whether to grant access to Beth?**

He would need consent from the owners and reasonable ground for sharing the data.

* **Should Beth be allowed to contact the individuals involved? That is, should the Records department release individuals' names to a researcher? What are the ethical issues for the Records department to consider?**

This would likely be flagged in an ethical review if it went to a research or university board. In that sense, Beth may not get value from getting the names anyway. From the perspective of the Records department, Beth may have unknown ulterior motives for requesting the data, for example locating an ex-partner.

* **Suppose Beth contacts the individuals to ask their permission, and one-third of them respond giving permission, one-third respond denying permission, and one-third do not respond. Beth claims that at least one-half of the individuals are needed to make a valid study. What options are available to Beth?**

She will need to find an alternative dataset, generalise based on the findings of the smaller dataset or risk re-contacting those who did not respond.