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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

Uber Eats facial recognition checks on couriers

IMPLEMENTED 2020–2024 · TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS · UK · BAND F · PARTLY PROVED

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An Uber Eats courier lost access to his work app in 2021 after identity checks that use facial recognition. Backed by Britain's equality regulator and a union, he claimed race discrimination; Uber settled in 2024 for an undisclosed sum and said automated facial verification was not the reason he lost access.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

What went wrong: Weak oversight or controls.

AI and automation used: AI and automation: facial recognition identity checks (Real Time ID Check) based on Microsoft facial recognition technology, combined with human reviewers and automated flags on account activity.

Implemented: 2020–2024. Grade: band F, Failure, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: Undisclosed settlement in March 2024 after a courier claimed Uber Eats' facial recognition checks were racially discriminatory; Uber said automated facial verification was not the cause of his loss of access

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 4 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Uber Eats UK Ltd (Uber). Uber's UK food delivery business. Couriers get work through the Uber Eats app; whether the claimant was an employee was a disputed issue the tribunal did not decide. Number of UK couriers: Not reported. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 5. People and skills, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. By Uber's account to the tribunal, the check ensures the correct person is using the app, or that a substitute's details are provided. Uber says it is designed to help keep everyone who uses the app safe.

How it was addressed. Uber's Real Time ID Check asks couriers for a live selfie, which is compared with the photo on their account; the tribunal record and TechCrunch say it uses Microsoft facial recognition technology. Uber told the tribunal its hybrid process, rolled out in August 2020, let couriers choose computer or human review; a failed computer review went to three human reviewers, and a second verification failure led to deactivation subject to appeal. On 30 April 2021 Pa Edrissa Manjang, a courier since November 2019, was told he was permanently suspended for sharing his account, and later that night that he had failed a facial recognition check. He replied that the algorithm was racially biased and asked for a human to review his photos. Uber later told the tribunal the deactivation followed unusual log-in activity on top of an earlier failed human review in December 2020, under a rule by which four such log-in events plus a past failed identity check lead to deactivation; Uber said the rule is not fully automated because one element is human verification. His account was restored on 16 September 2021. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Who implemented it

Microsoft (Software vendor): Supplied the facial recognition technology, per the tribunal record and TechCrunch; it declined to comment on the case..
In-house (In-house): Ran the check process, its human reviewers and its courier support teams..

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T3 API integrations. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Microsoft, Uber Real Time ID Check, Microsoft facial recognition technology.

Where it was built in: Built into the Uber Eats courier app: a live selfie is compared with the courier's account profile photo, and access to the app is needed to get work.

What changed

Before: identity checks combining facial recognition, human reviewers and automated account flags, with deactivation after repeated failures, by Uber's description. After: the courier was reinstated and the claim settled. Changes to Uber's checks or review process after the case: Not reported. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Cost of failure

Settlement paid to the courier: amount not disclosed. The courier was without access to the app for about four and a half months in 2021, per Uber's pleading. Legal costs and the cost of the checks: Not reported.

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3] [4]

Governance and control

Uber says its checks include robust human review and that automated facial verification was not the reason for the courier's loss of access. In its pleadings Uber accepted inconsistencies in handling: the complaint went to a support team without access to the verification records and never reached the independent review team, which Uber put down to human error, and the courier was not told when his account was reactivated. The equality regulator's chair said he was given no clear and effective route to challenge the technology.

S2 · Accountable owner · Not reported
No named owner of the check process is reported; three Uber companies were respondents and the tribunal kept Uber London Ltd in the case. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
Uber says the check is designed to help keep everyone who uses its app safe; no written policy was before the tribunal. [1] [4]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
Uber says the checks include robust human review, but accepted that this courier's complaint never reached its independent review team and that he received only standard responses. [1] [4]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Not reported
No testing of the software's error rates across ethnic groups is reported; the courier alleged that facial recognition gives more false results for ethnic minority groups. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
The check used Microsoft facial recognition technology; how Uber assessed it before use is not reported, and Microsoft declined to comment. [1] [4]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
The Equality and Human Rights Commission funded the claim under its legal powers, and the employment tribunal refused Uber's application to strike it out before the case settled. [1] [2] [3]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Not reported

DID NOT

– Review and appeal: by Uber's own account, the courier's complaint never reached its independent review team and he received only standard responses.

– Explanation: the tribunal recorded that the parties accepted the correct reasons for the deactivation were not given to the courier at the time.

– Evidence: the courier obtained his selfies through a data access request, and Worker Info Exchange said they were all photos of him, per TechCrunch.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the facial recognition disadvantaged Black or non-white couriers: alleged by the courier, denied by Uber, never tested at trial.

– Which steps of the deactivation were automated and which were human: the tribunal said this needed to be fully determined at trial, which did not take place.

– Whether Uber changed its process after the case: Not reported.

Timeline

Apr 2020 Uber introduces its Real Time ID Check in the UK, per TechCrunch [4]

Apr 2021 Courier's account deactivated; he is told he failed a facial recognition check [1]

Sept 2021 Account reactivated after Uber's review [1]

Oct 2021 Race discrimination claim brought, funded by the EHRC and the App Drivers and Couriers Union [3]

Jul 2022 Tribunal refuses Uber's application to strike out the claim [1]

Oct 2023 Tribunal confirms most of that decision on reconsideration [2]

Mar 2024 Claim settled before the final hearing; amount not disclosed [3]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: F, Failure. Proof: Partly proved. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band F, a worker's loss of access to paid work through an identity-check process, ending in a settlement. Discrimination was alleged and denied, and never decided.

Band F because a worker lost access to paid work through an identity-check process that Uber accepts was mishandled in his case, and the case ended in a payment. Marker Partly proved: the deactivation, the handling failures Uber admitted in its pleadings and the settlement are on record; the claim that the facial recognition was biased was never tested.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The record shows a hybrid process in which software, human reviewers, support staff and automated account flags each played a part, and the two sides gave different accounts of which step caused the deactivation. Uber denies the AI was the cause and the case settled, so the AI's part cannot be separated from the handling failures Uber admitted. Before copying the approach, a leadership team should ask whether it can reconstruct, for any single worker, which step made a decision, and whether workers can reach a person who can reverse it.

1. Record which step, automated or human, made each decision about a worker's access to work.
2. Tell workers the real reason for a block and how to challenge it.
3. Check facial recognition error rates across different groups before using it to control access to work.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Independent documents, untested allegations: tribunal judgments record both sides' cases and refuse a strike-out; the claim settled before any findings of fact.

Evaluation method. Tribunal judgments on preliminary issues in Manjang v Uber Eats UK Ltd and others (case 3206212/2021), plus the regulator's release and press reporting of the settlement.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/uber-eats-courier-facial-recognition-checks

[1] Employment Tribunals: Mr P E Manjang v Uber Eats UK Ltd and others, 3206212/2021, Preliminary Judgment (9 July 2022)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62dab66b8fa8f5649dbef494/Mr_P_E_Manjang_-v-_Uber_Eats_UK_Ltd___Others_-_3206212_2021_-_Preliminary_Judgment.pdf

[2] Employment Tribunals: Mr P A Edrissa Manjang v Uber Eats UK Ltd and others, 3206212/2021, Reconsideration Judgment (16 October 2023)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6548f8eb59b9f5001385a2db/Mr_P_A_Edrissa_Manjang_-v-_Uber_Eats_UK_Ltd___Others_-_3206212_2021_-_Recon_Judgment.pdf

[3] Equality and Human Rights Commission (official press release via WiredGov): Uber Eats courier wins payout with help of equality watchdog, after facing problematic AI checks (March 2024)
https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/Uber+Eats+courier+wins+payout+with+help+of+equality+watchdog+after+facing+problematic+AI+checks+27032024091000?open

[4] TechCrunch: Uber Eats courier's fight against AI bias shows justice under UK law is hard won (28 March 2024)
https://techcrunch.com/2024/03/28/uber-eats-ai-bias-settlement/

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