

GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH DATA STORAGE

The responsibility of collecting and storing data lies with the investigators/researchers in accordance with relevant legislation. The guidelines given below highlight specific areas in which the University has identified best practice in terms of data collection and storage.

1. Purpose for Compliance with these guidelines:

- Protect the rights of participants in terms of data storage.
- Protect researchers/investigators and enable them to meet their legal and ethical requirements.
- Protect researchers/investigators from accusations of research misconduct in relation to the collection and storage of data.
- Ensure University compliance with relevant legislation.

2. Management of Research Data and Records

The Durban University of Technology is committed to openness in research and in sharing information. The data on which published research is based must be available for evaluation by the broader research community. Agreements, under which data is kept confidential for a period in order to protect intellectual property rights, must conform with this code.

3. Research Data storage and maintenance

- a. It is the responsibility of the researcher to arrange for safe storage of all data and specimens on which research is based. Costs of such storage should be included in the budgets of research programmes.
- b. Electronic data sets should have adequate arrangements for back up. Ensuring this is the responsibility of the researcher.
- c. The primary data should be stored in the department/programme in which the project is based. The intention of this is to ensure safety and integrity of the data set. The overall responsibility for this rests with the Head of Department/Programme.
- d. Data on which any publication is based should be retained in the department/programme for at least five years after publication.

- e. If a researcher leaves the University, the University and the researcher are jointly responsible for ensuring that satisfactory arrangements are made for maintenance of the data set. If there is no contractual arrangement to determine what is to be done with the data, then possible arrangements are:
 - The data set is retained in the University. The researcher has access to the original data set and may keep copies.
 - The data set is transferred to the research institution to which the researcher is moving, provided that adequate facilities are available for conservation and storage.
 - If no publications have appeared on the data set in the last five years it may be destroyed.

4. Confidentiality of Data

- a. Researchers are entitled to keep data sets confidential before publication.
- b. After publication, when the research is in the public domain, the data should, upon request, be available to other researchers by the Principal Investigator. Despite any technical or cost problems that may prevent it being made available the principle is that there should be an opportunity for checking any data on which material in the public domain is based.
- c. Confidentiality of data collected during any research project is essential. All personal information should be encoded or anonymised as much as possible and be consistent with the needs of the study. Participants should be assigned a reference number or code as early as possible and data should be stored against this number/code rather than against the names of the participants. Investigators may wish to maintain separate lists of people who have taken part in their research, but steps should be taken to ensure that it is not possible to relate a particular set of data back to any given participant.
- d. The requirement for data availability does not override the right to confidentiality and privacy of individuals or organizations who are subjects of research.

5. Guidelines for storage of different types of data sets

a. Numerical and statistical data

Numerical or statistical data should be stored in raw data format for five years from completion of the project. After this time the data should be destroyed unless it is to be used in a longitudinal study.

b. Interview/Notes/Questionnaire Responses/Transcribed Interviews

Wherever possible interview notes/questionnaire responses/transcribed interviews should be stored in their original form for five years from the completion of the project. Unless data is to be used in later longitudinal studies it may be destroyed after this time.

Note: Work that informs national policy making should be archived after 10 years.

c. Images/Audio and Video Recordings

Images/Audio and Video Recordings should be retained in their original form. This is particularly important where they are subsequently enhanced. Wherever possible, both original and enhanced images/audio and video recordings should be kept for five years from completion of the project. Unless data is to be used in longitudinal studies it may be destroyed after this period.

d. Blood Samples

The University suggests that blood and plasma samples should be anonymised, stored for 3-6 months whilst analysis is conducted, then disposed of in an appropriate manner (in accordance with the code of conduct for people of practice for persons having contact with Human Body Fluids).

e. Longitudinal Studies

Data gathered as part of a known longitudinal study should be kept for the duration of the study and retained for ten years after the completion of the study. Participants should be kept informed of how long the study is likely to last. If the study is extended, all participants should be contacted and informed that their data is still being stored and may be used. It is important that participants are given the opportunity to withdraw their data at any point during the study.

Note: The importance of maintaining data in its original form is a necessary precaution, particularly if published results are challenged by others.

6. Recording Methods of Data Collection

Researchers/Investigators should keep clear and accurate records of all procedures followed (including approvals granted and interim results) during research projects. This is necessary to demonstrate that proper research practice has been followed, but also in case questions are subsequently raised about either the conduct of the researcher(s) or the results obtained.

7. Withdrawal of Data

All participants should be given the opportunity to request that their data be destroyed/withdrawn from a research project. In all cases, researchers should aim to comply with such a request, but compliance may not always be possible, for example, where

- Final results have already been published.
- An individual's data is no longer identifiable (because of encoding/anonymity etc)
- An individual's data cannot be extracted from cohort analysis.

8. Obtaining Consent from Participants

Participants taking part in a study should be provided with full information on the following:

- Who will own the data created in the course of the research.
- The format in which the data will be stored.
- Who will have access to the data
- The length of time for which data will be stored.
- What the data will be used for.
- Who will own the final results of the research.

Ideally consent should be obtained from all participants and, wherever possible, copies of consent forms should be kept with the raw data, normally for the same period of time.

9. Further Information

These guidelines are not intended to be an exhaustive list of considerations in terms of data storage and collection. It is expected that these will assist researchers/investigators to follow best practice and familiarize themselves with the relevant legislation in their chosen field of study.

The following sites might be useful for further information:

- (i) DUT Archives Policy. <http://library.dut.ac.za/publications.htm>
- (ii) DUT Institutional Repository. <http://ir.dut.ac.za>

10. Sources of Information for these guidelines

1. Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees>
2. University of KwaZulu –Natal. <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/ResearchEthics.aspx>