Laboratories, lawyers and love letters: diverse sensitivities in scientific collections

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Background to projects



- 2012-2016: 'Towards Dolly: Edinburgh, Roslin and the Birth of Modern Genetics': 23 collections relating to animal genetics in Edinburgh (funded by the Wellcome Trust)
- 2017: 'Cataloguing the papers of Sir Kenneth and Lady Noreen Murray' (funded by the Darwin Trust of Edinburgh)
- Animal genetics and molecular biology research in Edinburgh, covering 1890s-2010s
- Personal papers of scientists, institutional records, research data, oral histories

Science collections: diverse contexts

campaigns international

- Science intersects with a variety of spheres: public/private, national/international
- It's about people (health, careers, reputation, personal lives) as well as research
- Wide-ranging considerations which go beyond DP

Different record types, different sensitivities

- Legal disputes, international hearings, range of documents, legal privilege and client confidentiality
- Commercial patents, heads of agreement, contracts, intellectual property, commercial confidentiality
- Personal:
- Individuals within institutions employment/personnel records, recruitment and disputes
- Nature of scientific networks personal opinions and relationships, referee reports, nominations for awards
- Overlap of professional and personal material diaries and love letters
- Public (inc. minors) writing to scientists in sensitive contexts

Context-based sensitivities

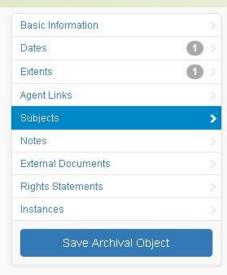
- Career-sensitive (grant applications, unpublished research/data, referee reports) - can depend on age/status of individual, nature of research, content of record
- Documents such as CVs: academics often publish CVs online, though may be made sensitive by job/grant applications and personal details (eg potential animal rights activity)
- Nature of research data, ideas, methodologies etc can remain privileged
- Personal info subject may be deceased, but still sensitive for family members/colleagues

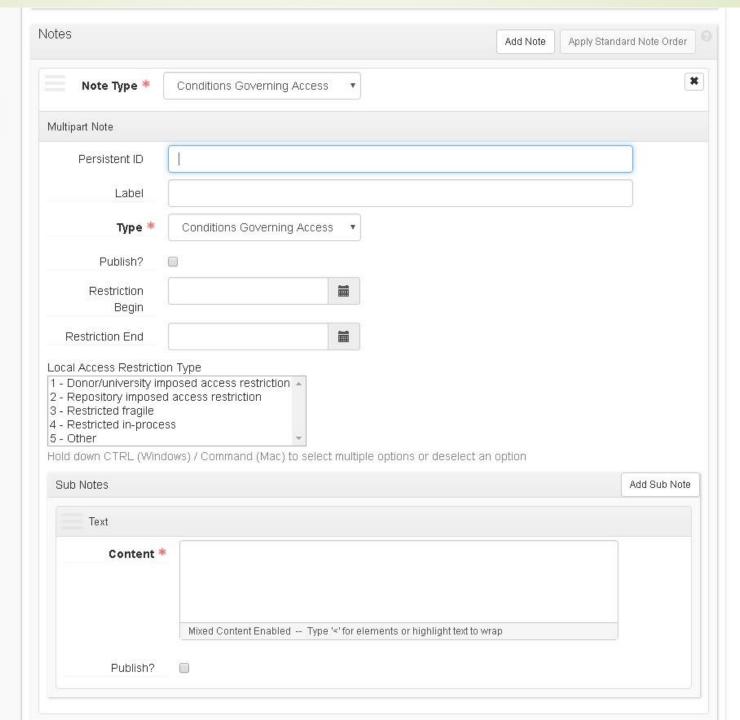
Methodology

- Using/adapting existing frameworks (eg. Scottish Information Commissioner and Wellcome Trust guidance)
- Examples of best practice/methodologies from elsewhere (eg. Walter Bodmer project)
- In-house rules and practices
- Decision to create spreadsheet recording closure and restriction decisions;
 including standardised rules and text for catalogue
- Screening carried out on file by file basis (time- and resource-dependent)
- ArchivesSpace allows recording of access/closure decision and review/open date
- Oral histories redacting for access copies

1	Record/information type	Closure period (in years)	Notes	Best practice
2				
	Home addresses in sensitive context - eg scientists involved with			
	research involving animals/human embryos (potentially activist or		Judge by age of record/scientist, if known - otherwise blanket close for	
3	burglary target)	30-84	84	
	Home addresses in sensitive context - eg members of public in intended			
	private correspondence with scientist, eg asking for medical		Judge by content of letter/blanket close for 100 if files contain sensitive	
4	advice/including sensitive personal info, often about children	84-100	personal info concerning children and infants	
	Home addresses provided in non-sensitive context, with few other	Consider open with DP		
5	personal details	form		
	Academic CVs of scientists provided in professional context, eg grant			
6	application, with few personal details	Open with DP form		
	CVs of students/scientists in context of job applications/containing			
7	personal details	40 years		
8	CVs containing sensitive personal info - eg NI number, religion, etc	84		
			A 60 year closure is used on the basis that an individual is likely to be at	
	Grant applications containing confidential references/statements of		least 20 years old when making a grant or job application, and thus will	
9	opinion concerning individuals	60	have completed their career by the time the closure period expires.'	As per Wellcome Trust guidance
	Grant applications with no confidential references/statements of			
10	opinion concerning individuals	30		As per Wellcome Trust guidance
	Grant applications containing top-level details - eg just names of PIs but			
11	no details of named postdocs/staff	Open with DP form		
			Potentially longer if comments address matters which could damage	As per Wellcome Trust guidance: 'career
	Correspondence with (negative) opinions on staff and reseach,		academic career (eg accusations of plagiarism), or on matters of health	sensitive'. Referee reports: Royal Society
12	references, confidential evaluations (inc referee reports)	60	etc	close theirs for 50 years
13	Staff appointments, employment, redundancies etc	30		
14	Staff salary, grades, pension details	40		
	· -			
			A 60 year closure is used on the basis that an individual is likely to be at	
			least 20 years old when making a grant or job application, and thus will	
15	Job applications with personal details/comments on individuals	60	have completed their career by the time the closure period expires.'	As per Wellcome Trust guidance
	•			
			More sensitive if about other people; consider open if nomination	I close for 60 if contains personal
16	Nominations for prizes/honours/medals/fellowships/chairs	40	successful and no other nominees named	(negative) comments on individuals
	Licenses, eg Home Office to work with animals	50	Names of scientists working with animals, human embryos	
			-	

EUA IN23/4/3/6/4	Files re: capital equipment bids	1994-2000	Partial restrict	Staff lists with grades and employment details, job acceptance letter with salary stated (1995-1998)	40 years	01/01/2039
EUA IN23/4/3/7	Files relating to Rewards for Invention and royalty payments	1994-2004	Close	Lists with scientists' home addresses, information on individuals' royalty payments, bank and financial information, comments on individuals	Suggest blanket close for 84 years	01/01/2089
EUA IN23/4/3/8	Files re: various financial matters	1994-2004	Partial restrict	Bank card application forms with scientists' home addresses, details and comments re: individuals' expenses, details of a fraud case at BBRSC (individual not named but background details given)	84 years	01/01/2089
EUA IN23/4/4/1/4	Files relating to intellectual property and insurance matters		Partial restrict	Details of consultancy and redundancy fees paid to staff members, some home addresses and bank account numbers	40 years	01/01/2039
EUA IN23/4/4/2/7	Files relating to nuclear transfer patents in relation to Geron	2001-2003	Partial restrict	CV of graduate student employee	40 years	01/01/2044
EUA IN23/4/4/3	Correspondence with solicitors Wright, Johnston and Mackenzie	1994-2004	Partial restrict and DP form for rest	Details of employment tribunals and other cases; details of employment of WJM employee at Roslin inc details of fees; negative comments on individuals' performance	60 years	01/01/2065
EUA IN23/4/4/4/2	Files relating to consultancy agreements (4 files)	1995-1999	Close	Details of individuals' personal consultancies including fees received	40 years	01/01/2045
	Agreements relating to Roslin			Document containing details of oustanding court cases brought by Cattle Blood Typing Service,		





Concluding thoughts

- In-house practice depends on how risk-averse/comfortable the repository is
- How to implement record review dates eg. prompts built into catalogue?
- Managing restrictions within an integrated digital repository and cataloguing system
- Managing access in a flexible but controlled way
- 'Archival privilege', or responsibility for managing sensitivity shared between creator, donor/depositor and repository?