



# 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



A word cloud of terms related to science contexts, including: governments, politics, law, health, protest, industry, campaigns, international, media, society, commerce, people, disease, and ethics. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping cluster with varying orientations and colors (green, orange, purple, brown).

- ▶ 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- ▶ Career-sensitive (grant applications, unpublished research/data, referee reports) - can depend on age/status of individual, nature of research, content of record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				
3	Home addresses in sensitive context - eg scientists involved with research involving animals/human embryos (potentially activist or burglary target)	30-84	Judge by age of record/scientist, if known - otherwise blanket close for 84	
4	Home addresses in sensitive context - eg members of public in intended private correspondence with scientist, eg asking for medical advice/including sensitive personal info, often about children	84-100	Judge by content of letter/blanket close for 100 if files contain sensitive personal info concerning children and infants	
5	Home addresses provided in non-sensitive context, with few other personal details	Consider open with DP form		
6	Academic CVs of scientists provided in professional context, eg grant application, with few personal details	Open with DP form		
7	CVs of students/scientists in context of job applications/containing personal details	40 years		
8	CVs containing sensitive personal info - eg NI number, religion, etc	84		
9	Grant applications containing confidential references/statements of opinion concerning individuals	60	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 have completed their career by the time the closure period expires.'	As per Wellcome Trust guidance
10	Grant applications with no confidential references/statements of opinion concerning individuals	30		As per Wellcome Trust guidance
11	Grant applications containing top-level details - eg just names of PIs but no details of named postdocs/staff	Open with DP form		
12	Correspondence with (negative) opinions on staff and reseach, references, confidential evaluations (inc referee reports)	60	Potentially longer if comments address matters which could damage academic career (eg accusations of plagiarism), or on matters of health etc	As per Wellcome Trust guidance: 'career sensitive'. Referee reports: Royal Society close theirs for 50 years
13	Staff appointments, employment, redundancies etc	30		
14	Staff salary, grades, pension details	40		
15	Job applications with personal details/comments on individuals	60	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 have completed their career by the time the closure period expires.'	As per Wellcome Trust guidance
16	Nominations for prizes/honours/medals/fellowships/chairs	40	More sensitive if about other people; consider open if nomination successful and no other nominees named	I close for 60 if contains personal (negative) comments on individuals
17	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	1998	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 outstanding court cases brought by Cattle Blood Typing Service,		



- Basic Information >
- Dates 1 >
- Extents 1 >
- Agent Links >
- Subjects >**
- Notes >
- External Documents >
- Rights Statements >
- Instances >

Save Archival Object

## Notes

Add Note

Apply Standard Note Order



Note Type \*

Conditions Governing Access



### Multipart Note

Persistent ID

Label

Type \*

Conditions Governing Access

Publish?

Restriction  
Begin



Restriction End



### Local Access Restriction Type

- 1 - Donor/university imposed access restriction
- 2 - Repository imposed access restriction
- 3 - Restricted fragile
- 4 - Restricted in-process
- 5 - Other

Hold down CTRL (Windows) / Command (Mac) to select multiple options or deselect an option

### Sub Notes

Add Sub Note

### Text

Content \*

Mixed Content Enabled -- Type '<' for elements or highlight text to wrap

Publish?



# 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?