Ruth Geraghty
National University of Ireland, Maynooth

ATTITUDES TO QUALITATIVE ARCHIVING IN IRELAND: FINDINGS FROM A CONSULTATION WITH THE IRISH SOCIAL SCIENCE COMMUNITY.

Although there is no specific requirement to archive social science data in Ireland, interest in and the practice of data archiving has been growing significantly in recent years. This growth is somewhat facilitated by the establishment of the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) in 2008. Between 2009 and 2010, the IQDA consulted with social science researchers from leading academic institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland for their opinions on archiving qualitative research and contextual data. Interview findings indicate that, while researchers recognised many of the benefits of archiving, their concerns centre primarily around two areas; namely legal and ethical concerns with archiving, and epistemological concerns, thus reflecting the dominant debates about archiving in the literature as identified by Heaton (2008). The paper concludes by presenting some of the solutions that have been implemented by IQDA, which have since been incorporated into our cornerstone document, Best Practice in Archiving Qualitative Data (2010).

Key words: qualitative; archiving; ethics; best practice.

Introduction[1]

In Ireland, although there is no specific requirement to archive social science data, interest in and the practice of data archiving has been growing significantly in recent years. Qualitative researchers have become increasingly au fait with building archiving strategy into their research design and with securing consent from participants to archive their data. National research policies on data accessibility are doubtlessly encouraging this growing practice, as increasingly applicants for state funding are asked to "specify the means by which that data will be made available as a public good for use by other researchers" (Irish Research Council 2013, pg. 15). From a practical point of view, the capacity for social science data to be "discoverable, openly accessible and re-usable" (Irish Research Council 2013, pg. 15) is facilitated by the recent establishment of data repositories in Ireland, including the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA). Founded in 2008 at the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis at National University of Ireland, Maynooth, the IQDA is the national repository for qualitative data generated in or about Ireland, and provides both access to collections of non-numerical data and advice for researchers on how to engage with this service. We have seen a substantial growth in the latter

National University of Ireland, Maynooth, e-mail: ruth.geraghty@nuim.ie

role in recent years, as the IQDA is increasingly called upon by members of Irish research community to advise on best practice when both depositing and re-using qualitative data. Our consultative role is a key element in promoting a culture of data sharing and re-use and is greatly strengthened by the publication of freely available resources, including our cornerstone publication, Best Practice in Archiving Qualitative Data (2010).

This guide for researchers and data curators contains step-by-step procedures for the design, collection and preparation of qualitative data for posterity, and was the direct output of research undertaken by the IQDA, entitled "Re-use and Archiving of Complex Community Based Evaluation Research" (RACcER). This research was commissioned by Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) and the Irish Research Council[2]. Between 2009 and 2010, the IQDA consulted with social science researchers from leading academic institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland for their opinions on archiving qualitative research and contextual data. This was an innovative study in that it both explored the ethical and practical challenges of archiving qualitative data as the Irish research community saw them, and then implemented new processes to meet these challenges. The added value of the study for the IQDA was that it enabled us to determine Irish researchers' attitudes to archiving and reusing qualitative social science data at an early stage in the foundation of our archive. In this paper we present a number of the advantages and challenges that were identified by respondents, and conclude with some of the solutions implemented by IQDA in response to these challenges, which are now enshrined in the document Best Practice in Archiving Qualitative Data.

Development of social science archiving in Ireland

The introduction of data archiving in Ireland is a progressive step in the relatively short history of social science research in the island. Although studies on Irish social life and culture date from the late Eighteenth Century (Byrne et al. 2001, Conway 2006), these were primarily anthropological studies by visitors to the island that came to observe the unique economic and social character of the poverty-stricken Irish countryside. Most famous amongst these is Arensberg and Kimball's Family and Community in Ireland (1940); the oft cited, ethnographic portrait of social and economic relationships in the rural west of Ireland in the 1930s. Social enquiry that derived from within the island commenced in earnest in the post-World War Two

---

[2] The full report on the findings from the RACcER study is currently in press [insert reference when available]. The study came about following a consultation between the IQDA and the Childhood Development Initiative regarding the development of an archiving strategy for qualitative data derived from CDI service evaluations. The CDI is an initiative that seeks to improve the education and well being outcomes for children and young people in a historically disadvantaged area of Dublin. The organisation is committed to the the dissemination, application and utilisation of evidence, that has been generated by the delivery and evaluation of their services, to inform future policy and practice. Archiving this data was identified as one possible strategy to ensure both a greater level of transparency, and the maximum dissemination of CDI data.

era and was the domain of the Catholic Church. Examples of such can be seen in Christus Rex, the oldest journal of sociology in Ireland, and the only available outlet for the discipline within the island during this period. Edited at St. Patrick's College Maynooth (also the site of the national seminary for Catholic priests), articles were concerned with the Church's doctrine on social issues such as "[s]trikes, unemployment, housing, credit reform, socialisation, state control – all the ills of a suffering world" (Browne 1947, pg. 3), and tended to be less empirically based and more a social commentary with strong undertones of Catholic morality.

An empirical turn in Irish sociology occurred from the mid-1960s, and overlapped with the growing secularisation of the discipline in Ireland, alongside a growing appreciation for 'scientific' knowledge in the public domain. Pioneering studies such as Jeremiah Newman's Limerick Rural Survey (1964) and Liam Ryan's Social Dynamite (1966) marked a turning point in the way that social science academics were engaging with their field of study[3]. The push for further empiricism within sociology coincided with the establishment of the first publically funded social research institute in Ireland in 1960, the Economic Research Institute (ERI). The ERI was founded, with grant aid from the Ford Foundation, as an aspect of the industrial and economic development of Ireland from the late 1950s (Murray 2009), and later transformed into the present day Economic and Social Research Institute. Its current-day remit encompasses research on demography, education, energy, environment, equality, health, labour market, taxation, infrastructure and more (see: www.esri.ie).

Throughout the development of empirical social enquiry in Ireland, research has been dominated by quantitative methods (Conway 2006). However, qualitative methods experienced a growth in popularity from the late 1980s which was aided by their inclusion in undergraduate and postgraduate social science education (Gray and O'Carroll 2011). One of the first steps that the IQDA took after it's foundation was to map the extent of qualitative research activity in Ireland, by creating an online catalogue of academic qualitative research. The catalogue continues to be updated as new studies emerge, and as of Spring 2014 had close to 500 entries (see: www.iqda.ie).

Until recently, decisions on the handling of such data were the responsibility of the researcher, and it was left to their discretion to ensure that data, including personal data on respondents, were both used and stored with due regard for respondent confidentiality. In the wake of university-based research ethics committees for the social sciences, circa 2002, researchers were obliged to conform to the standards set by their institutional committees, including the destruction of research data after a defined period of time as a means of preserving respondent confidentiality. Initially, many ethics committees for the social sciences and humanities derived their ethical standards from a medical model for research with human subjects, which were designed for handling highly sensitive, personal health data. From the outset this

---

[3] It is worth noting that the push for greater empiricism within Sociology derived from within the established Roman Catholic governance of the discipline; both Newman and Ryan were Catholic priests and were teaching at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth; Newman became chair of Sociology at Maynooth in 1953 and was succeeded by Ryan in 1969.

model has been a difficult fit for the social sciences, and over the last decade there has been a conflict between the recommendation of research ethics committees to destroy data once the approved period of data storage has expired, and the desire of researchers themselves to retain it as a valuable record of the nation's social, cultural and historical development. In addition there's widespread recognition of the value of preserving legacy data from the classic empirical studies, many of which are not held in a digital format. In addition, the destruction of social science data undermines it's capacity to build critical mass, to encourage collaboration and to develop knowledge of the social world longitudinally. Such attributes are especially valuable in qualitative research, which is often accused of being a limited as a research paradigm, as individual studies tend to be non-generalising, context bound and small scale. Others factors, which apply to both qualitative and quantitative methods, include the expense of field work and data preparation, the impact of repeat data collection on jaded communities, and the inadvertent duplication of research. For all of these reasons, it is preferable for researchers to incorporate archiving and sharing strategies from the earliest stages of their research design, where possible, with the support of ethics committees that consider prescribed archiving to be the ideal final step in a research project.

In recent years, the rapid growth of digital technology and communications has resulted in an exponential increase in the volume of data produced by social researchers. Doorn and Tjalsma (2007) suggest that the increased use of digital technology has had a positive effect on data archiving, as the increased production of digital outputs calls for more refined data management procedures and systems to ensure their integrity and proper stewardship (National Academy of Sciences 2009). Moreover researchers are increasingly using digital tools for data analysis, and there has been a growing recognition of the value of preserving digital outputs, including systems of data coding and annotation. However, by the late 2000s, only a small number of qualitative archives were in existence in Ireland and were typically attached to a single project. A number of reports were published by the end of the decade which raised concerns about the weakened position of the Irish social sciences due to the lack of archival infrastructure[4]. Against this backdrop, in 2008, the IQDA was founded at the faculty of social sciences at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, under the stewardship of a number of academic staff from the departments of Sociology and Geography, with start-up funding from the Higher Education Authority[5].

---

[4] For a discussion on these reports, see Gray and O'Carroll, 2010. The Irish Social Science Data Archive, was established at University College Dublin in 2002 to exclusively disseminate medium to large quantitative datasets, for example the national census, and national health and education surveys. Six years later the IQDA was established to provide a national infrastructure for qualitative data arising from research in the social sciences.

[5] The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory body with responsibility for Higher Education in Ireland. The IQDA was established through funding from the HEA under the fourth cycle of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI4).

As identified by Gray and O'Carroll in 2011, the longevity of the IQDA is dependent on the engagement by the Irish research community with the archive, both as depositors and users of the data, and this can only be achieved "though a process of training, publicity and the development of networks of researchers" (pg. 20). In the six years since it's foundation, the IQDA has pursued these three strategies for longevity; (1) by providing the research community with face-to-face training in methods for re-use of qualitative data, software tools and best practice in qualitative archiving; (2) by publicising the contents and potential for re-use of our archived collections through a series of thematic research projects[6]; and (3) by facilitating networks of researchers that are linked through their use of specific collections, specific research themes or specific methods of data collection[7]. However, the IQDA is not in receipt of core funding, and currently relies on cyclical funding to nurture a budding culture of archiving and re-use amongst the Irish research community. As a result, any lack of engagement with the archive is fundamentally a sustainability problem; we have found that the collections that receive the highest volume of access requests are those where the original research project received widespread coverage and promotion during data collection, while equally valuable collections that did not receive such publicity tend to remain hidden in the archive. In an effort to bring to light the full extent and potential of our data, the IQDA is currently working with the Digital Repository of Ireland to develop innovative digital processing and delivery tools for qualitative social science data[8].

Background to study

The aim of the RACcER study was to enhance the ethos and practice of qualitative data archiving in Ireland by examining the practical and ethical challenges that face Irish researchers when deciding whether to archive their research data. In her overview of the literature on qualitative archiving and re-use, Heaton (2008) identifies two areas of concern in the literature which are salient to the concerns found amongst the Irish research community, namely;

(1) Whether the re-use of qualitative data is in keeping with some of the fundamental principles of qualitative research. Such concerns stem from a discomfort with the "assumption that qualitative data are similar to, and can therefore be subject to the same treatment as, quantitative data" (Parry and Mauthner 2004, pg. 139).

---

[6] Most recently, the Family Rhythms project explored family change in modern Ireland in light of recent theoretical developments and was conducted between 2012 and 2013 using in-depth analysis of newly available qualitative data resources held in the IQDA. This project was funded by a Government of Ireland Senior Research Fellowship from the Irish Research Council, See: http://www.iqda.ie/content/iqda-projects

[7] For example, the IQDA provides a dedicated page on our website for the collection „Growing Up in Ireland" (the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland) where researchers and academics across numerous organisations can share information about their research and experiences of using the qualitative data from this collection. See: http://www.iqda.ie/content/gui-community-page

[8] For more on this see http://www.dri.ie/demonstrator-projects/irish-lifetimes

(2) Ethical and legal issues with archiving qualitative data, particularly with recent developments in the legal frameworks that apply to the handling of personal data. At a national level in Ireland, this is driven by the Data Protection Act 1988 and by the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003, and at the European level it is driven by the EU Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC. The fast pace of change in the area of data protection legislation is reflected in the mounting uncertainty felt by both social science researchers and repositories regarding their obligation to adhere to such legislation. For example, the proposed replacement of the current EU Data Protection Directive with the new European General Data Protection Regulation has recently generated much debate amongst the research community in Europe about the potential affect on data repositories across the EU.

Findings from our interviews are therefore presented here under headings which have been adapted from Heaton (2008). Before presenting these findings, the method of data collection is briefly described.

Method

In 2009 interviews were conducted with individuals from the research community in Ireland, including applied policy researchers, academic researchers, research managers, commissioners, members of the CDI evaluation research team, and other potential users of archived social science data. In total thirty individuals were interviewed (see Table 1) about their understandings, experiences and views of archiving social research data, with the focus of interviews primarily on qualitative data.

Table 1. Description of interview respondents

Type of respondent	Number in respondents
CDI evaluation team members	10
CDI expert advisory committee and core staff	7
Senior academics from wider research community	6
Policy and practice community	7
Total	30

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically to identify respondents' opinions on the advantages and risks when archiving qualitative data, and a selection of the predominant findings are presented here[9].

---

[9] As before, the full report is currently in press. A project description is available at: http://www.iqda.ie/content/raccer-re-use-and-archiving-complex-community-based-evaluation-research

Findings

Perceived advantages to archiving

The majority of respondents in this study were experienced in using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, while the minority worked exclusively with one or the other. Respondents that used methods from both paradigms, or were comfortable with mixed-methods research, were more receptive to the idea of an archive for qualitative data than those who specialised in a single research paradigm, whether quantitative or qualitative. These respondents identified a number of advantages to archiving qualitative data, for example, several respondents spoke of the potential of archiving to facilitate longitudinal research, and to facilitate data sharing amongst colleagues. Respondents expected that archiving could contribute to the improved standing and quality of qualitative research, would avoid duplication of research, and could facilitate research collaborations across institutions. Many respondents acknowledged they were often reluctant to destroy 'good data' in the hope of re-visiting it at a later stage, as most research is conducted with a relatively short turnaround time, particularly commissioned research. Holding on to data allowed for a more thorough analysis beyond the limited period of funding. Some of the respondents were involved in the commissioning of research, and they were of the opinion that the association of a commissioning body with a corporate memory bank would be highly valued. Respondents also noted that archival material would be useful as empirical data for teaching students about qualitative methods.

Epistemological concerns

The first set of concerns that were raised by interview respondents relate to whether the re-use of qualitative data is in keeping with a number of the fundamental principles of qualitative research (Heaton, 2008). This area of debate refers to epistemological questions of whether qualitative data can be genuinely re-used, re-interpreted and evaluated outside of the original conditions of their production.

Under the theme of epistemological concerns, the first problem is that of "data fit". Heaton (2008, pg. 40) defines the problem of data fit as "whether data collected for one (primary) purpose can be re-used for another (secondary) purpose". Qualitative methods generally entail flexible research design, and unstructured or semi-structured forms of data collection, and this raises questions of whether it's possible to use such data to answer new or different research questions. Amongst respondents there was some recognition that archiving qualitative data could facilitate longitudinal research on a single field of study, or comparative research between two fields, or could provide useful case study data for policy planning and future interventions. However the respondents that were involved in evaluation research queried the added value of conserving raw data when the end product of a report is "probably going to summarise it quite well". There was a strong view amongst this group that policy makers would be unlikely to access raw data from a study as, "they don't have time to read what comes across their desk, never mind go searching for stuff". There was also some concern that archiving data would amount to an

admission by the researcher that they had failed to analyse the dataset sufficiently. One respondent wondered what would be left to analyse in an archived collection if a researcher had been "very diligent about wringing every millilitre of analytical juice out of [their] datasets". However, another respondent acknowledged that data sometimes is under-used because "another contract [for research] comes on board", leaving little time for exhaustive analysis.

The second problem, of not having 'been there', arises "where analysts try to interpret data that were collected by other researchers" (Heaton 2008, pg. 40). On the whole, respondents felt that the lack of a direct relationship between a secondary user and respondent group could hinder qualitative analysis, as the secondary user would lack contextual understanding of the minutiae of circumstances and the nuances of the environment in which the research had been conducted. One respondent pointed out that when data is archived, there is always a chance that some of the respondents will refuse consent for archiving of their data, or will request that certain aspects are redacted from the archived version, therefore further interpretations would be based on partial information. There was some concern that a secondary user might feel less of an obligation to sympathetically reflect the views of a participant. This opinion is derived from the idea that the immersion of the original researcher into the participant's world during the field work stages of the research gives this researcher a more sympathetic insight into the participant's position and the particular experiences that had brought about their point of view. Fears about misinterpretation and biased interpretation emerged strongly across all of the interviews, and for some, this fear was based on personal experiences where published work had been reported in the press in a negative and destructive manner. Fears around journalists or pressure groups gaining access to archived materials emerged a number of times across the interviews, whereby, "any kind of advocacy group from the left or the right, a defender of the poor and marginalised, or a persecutor of them, could look to that data to back up their position". Evaluation team members, in particular, had a strong sense of their duty of care to their research communities in this regard, as they worked predominantly with marginalised populations and in areas of disadvantage.

A third problem is that of using archived qualitative data as a means of verifying or testing the trustworthiness of the research, and is heavily contested in the literature. Those who rebuke this argument point to the epistemological differences between qualitative and quantitative data. As Heaton (2008, pg. 40) has observed, "methods of verification derived from positivist-based approaches, which underpin the data sharing imperative in quantitative research, are anathema to many qualitative researchers, for whom alternative methods have been developed to help establish the 'trustworthiness' and authenticity of their work". The majority of respondents felt the researcher should be open to having their work examined by others. Some felt very strongly that this type of debate was central to the academic endeavour, and contributed to the standing of qualitative research, as the researcher who is operating with integrity should be confident about defending their analysis, and where mistakes had occurred, to be willing to discuss them. However, one respondent felt that the validity of an original piece of work could be entirely undone if further analysis re-

sulted in alternative findings, and this raises question over whether conflicting inter-pretations of a qualitative dataset can sit comfortably with one another and whether certain groups can claim to have stronger interpretive power of archived data. While some respondents argued that researchers should welcome the opportunity to engage with detractors, the younger respondents were particularly fearful that archiving their data would leave them open to attacks on the integrity of their work. One respondent alluded to the personal courage required when depositing your research data with a public archive, whereby one had to be confident enough to "let that go" into the research community and to be "ready for" the debate, if contradictory findings were to emerge. The problem of verification acquires particular gravity in the context of commissioned research, which has the potential to be "fiendishly complicated", as the researcher navigates through "a complex set of negotiations with the participants, community groups and interest groups". Respondents that had been involved in com-missioned evaluation research suggested that archiving such material could be useful for checking back on a research team's work, to determine whether they had been fair and balanced in their interpretations and standpoints, particularly if team members were unhappy or aggrieved at the outcome of the original analysis. However, due to the political context of evaluation data, for many respondents the use of archived evaluation data to verify findings was either problematic or entirely unacceptable.

Ethical and legal concerns

The second set of concerns that were raised by interview respondents relate to the ethical and legal issues of archiving qualitative data. This theme raises questions about whether the sharing and re-use of qualitative data presents a risk to the privacy of the research participant, and raises questions about data protection legislation and the ownership of data.

The first issue here relates to consent, and "whether and how best to obtain in-formed consent from research participants for retaining data, sharing data with others, and re-using it for purposes other than those for which it was originally collected" (Heaton 2008, pg. 40). Amongst respondents, a major barrier to archiving was the duty of care they felt to respondents, and this was of particular concern to research-ers that worked with marginalised populations and had build very close, trust-based relationship with them. At the time of interview archiving was a very new concept for most of the respondents and many felt that they, "wouldn't even be comfortable ask-ing someone to agree to archive the information" because they, "don't know enough about what implications [archiving] would have for [participants]". The success of the archive would therefore depend on its capacity to build a relationship of trust with the researcher, by giving "guarantees [that the data] would be well looked after", which the researcher could then extend to their respondent.

This relationship of trust, between the archive, researcher and respondent, hing-es on the assurances that the archive can make about who can access data once it has been deposited. There were extensive discussions on the issue of who should or should not be granted access to archived data and who should make this decision, for example, respondents sought clarification on the definition of a 'bona fide researcher',

and queried whether this would exclude groups outside of academic or publicly fund-ed research. Some felt strongly that overly restrictive access protocols would prevent data use by the researched community, and would therefore contravene trends towards more participatory research. Multiple respondents suggested that journalists should be denied access, yet others recognised that many journalist would have very legitimate interests in archived material and could be trusted to use it appropriately. For example a journalist writing a feature on educational disadvantage would find the community evaluation data in the CDI collection an invaluable resource. Another respondent sug-gested a blanket restriction on any commercial use of the data.

Consent was one of the most significant issues to emerge from the interviews, and respondents felt strongly that data should only be archived when express consent had been given by the research participant to do so. However, some questioned whether it would be possible to secure totally informed consent, given the researcher could not anticipate how the data could be used in the future and by whom. During the interviews, an idea emerged that that consent could be a process rather than a one off occurrence, so that participants could proactively engage at every stage of the research, would be made aware of what would happen to their data and would be given multiple opportunities withhold consent for re-use. In regard to older empirical studies, most of the respondents felt that securing retrospective consent for archiving would be an impossible task, although international evidence shows that researchers tend to overestimate the difficulties in this regard.

The second issue refers to the process of anonymisation of qualitative data. Dur-ing interviews, anonymisation was discussed as a potential means for protecting participant confidentiality and there was extensive debate over what would be appro-priate to leave in and what should be disguised or removed completely. A lot of this debate centred on the issue of judgment; namely who would be in the best position to assess the sensitivity of information and the degree of anonymisation that should be applied. It was acknowledge that the removal of contextual information could make interpretation difficult, if not impossible. For example, in the CDI evaluation data, the roles held by some individuals made them fully identifiable, however their role determined their point of view and their relationship to other participants in the study. In addition, anonymisation is an expensive and time consuming process, and is usually completed by the research team at the end of a project, when there is little money and little time remaining. Some of the respondents doubted the return to investment of anonymisation, whereby there is a risk that data is rendered so bare by anonymisation that it is no longer useful and is, "essentially akin to what was in a report". Some of the respondents felt that a guaranteed level of anonymity would be impossible for qualitative research on small communities, as a person's unique turn of phrase, their particular experiences, or their particular bugbears and issues could easily give away their identity.

A third issue is how to act in accordance with laws on data protection. A num-ber of the respondents were frustrated by the expectation that they should destroy research material by a certain date, particularly as the date varied across institutions, with some allowing research data to be held for up to ten years and others as little as

two. In some institutions these time periods were derived from professional associations, while in others they seemed to have been "made up" spontaneously so that researchers could easily maneuver around them. Many of the respondents admitted to holding on to data far beyond the time period specified by their institutional ethics committees, and, as a result, were likely to have large volumes of personal data stored as electronic files on local computers or in a printed format in local filing cabinets. Most did not have access to an archive within their institution, nor institutional policies and guidelines on storing qualitative research material. As a result, the facility of a national archive for qualitative data was welcomed "from a burden point of view" as it would relieve them of their responsibilities around storing and managing personal data generated by research activities.

A fourth issue is how to act in accordance with laws on copyright. During the interviews copyright emerged as a controversial area, particularly for those involved in commissioned research. Many of the respondents felt that data ownership by the commissioner was increasingly becoming the norm in Irish research, particularly in the instance of state funded research. Views and experiences in relation to data ownership in commissioned research varied greatly across respondents and depended on their position, for example, amongst the group that commissioned research, their overall opinion was that a commissioner would support the greatest use possible of the data that they had funded, and would therefore support archiving such data, where appropriate. They felt that although the commissioner holds the rights to research data, in practice these rights would rarely be pursued. However, amongst the group that were involved in evaluation research, ownership of the data by the commissioner was especially problematic as it could serve to disenfranchise and overlook the peer-researchers that had initially collected the data. In such instances, any agreements on access that were made between the archive and the commissioner would exclude the original researcher, and might therefore violate the confidentiality agreements that had been made between the researcher and the participant. This issue also relates to consent, and how well informed the participant can be when consenting to be interviewed and to have their transcript archived, if the original researcher is not involved in the archiving process.

Proposed solutions to researchers' concerns with qualitative archiving

During the interviews respondents had the opportunity to discuss and debate potential solutions to some of the concerns with archiving that had been raised. Taking their suggestions into account, a number of these solutions have been incorporated into the IQDA Best Practice guide, which we freely distribute in print and through our website (www.iqda.ie). Some of the solutions that are presented in this document are discussed below.

Assessing the sensitivity level of qualitative data

A number of respondents felt that before handing their data over to an archive, it would be appropriate for the data depositor to conduct a risk assessment of their

data using two measures; firstly the likelihood of a risk being realised as a result of deposition, and secondly, the degree of negative consequence that would arise from this. As part of the Data Management Plan in our Best Practice guide (2010 pg. 6) we propose a strategy for assessing the sensitivity level of data within a collection, across two parameters, namely; (1) whether there is a risk of identification of the participant, and (2) as a result of identification whether there is a risk of harm to the participant. From this, the sensitivity level of the data can be derived (see Table 2), and an appropriate archiving strategy can be perused.

Table 2. Assessing Sensitivity Level of Data (adapted from IQDA Best Practice in Archiving Qualitative Data 2010, pg. 6)

Risk of Identification	Risk of Harm	Sensitivity Level
Little	Low	Low
Some	Low	Medium
Any	High	High

Anonymisation of the data

During the interviews respondents debated whether it would be more beneficial to seek consent from participants to identify them in an archived collection, or whether processes for anonymity should be pursued. On the whole, respondents were in favour of anonymisation, as a guarantee of anonymity was more likely to achieve full co-operation and openness from a participant during the data collection phase, while conversely, the advantages to be gained from making people identifiable were very slight. In our Best Practice guide, during the data preparation phase of archiving, we propose that identifying data (names) and identifying details (descriptive information that might identify a participant) are replaced with "descriptions that reflect the significance of the original text within the context of the transcript" (pg. 9). In this way, significant information such as ethnic, cultural or socio-economic markers can be retained, whilst the personal identity of the respondent remains hidden. We also suggest that the depositor prepare a user guide of contextual information to enable future re-uses, and if possible to apply a long-term embargo on the original version of the data so that, as the sensitivity level of a dataset reduces over time, future researchers may access this original, non-anonymised version.

Licensing arrangements for depositors

Respondents were greatly reassured by the option for licensing arrangements that are specific to each dataset, as this would grant the original research team greater capacity to control archival access to their dataset. One of the strongest mechanisms that can be used to protect archived data to is to impose a time delay on data access, and a number of the respondents agreed that this would be an effective approach to minimising the potential for harm from a disclosure. Our Best Practice guide con-

tains a sample depositor license, recommending three options for archival distribution as follows; (1) from the moment of deposition, distribution is managed entirely by the archive, (2) distribution is managed by the archive after a specified date, (3) the archive must obtain permission from the depositor each time a request for access is received and the depositor must approve every distribution. The third option here is the most restrictive and "should be selected only in exceptional circumstances" (pg. 14).

Licensing arrangements for end-users

Respondents also discussed the importance of the archival validation procedures in mitigating risk of data misuse. One suggestion was that the end-user must be attached to a credible institution in order to gain access, and that any request for access is supported by the ethical approval of the end-user's home institution. The issue of granting access to non-academic users was also discussed, and one suggestion, arising from the interviews, is to create two levels of access to files; a highly anonymised, sanitised version with less restricted access, and a more detailed file for which there would be stringent access requirements. Our Best Practice guide recommends that the data curator establishes a validation procedure before distributing any data. We have also made our end-user license available for reference on our website[10]. This document ensures that (1) data is used for the sole purpose of the research objectives as outlined in the application for access; (2) the end-user has a comprehensive data security arrangement in place before receiving the data; (3) the end-user is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of the individuals described by the data; (4) the original researcher is cited in all publications arising from the re-use; (5) copyright of the data is retained by the depositor or archive; and (6) postgraduate students can apply for access, under the application of their supervisor as 'Lead Researcher'.

Conclusion

The archiving and sharing of qualitative social science data is at an embryonic stage of development in Ireland, and the infrastructure that is provided by the IQDA is fundamental to encouraging this growing culture. While our Best Practice guide does not claim to solve the ethical and epistemological concerns that are briefly described here, it's merit is in providing some practical guidelines for researchers and for archive curators. In the six years since our foundation we have successfully secured data from a number of studies, including high profile national studies, all of which have been guided by our documentation and through consultation with IQDA staff.

Although these collections have been helpful in drawing attention to the archive, the incidence of data re-use remains relatively low in Irish qualitative research at present. Our current challenge is to attract greater researcher engagement with the archive by raising the profile of our collections, and by demonstrating, as widely as

---

[10] The IQDA 'Data Access Request Form and Agreement on Conditions of Use' can be downloaded from on our website, www.iqda.ie

possible, the potential for re-use of our data. Therefore the IQDA is currently in-volved in the creation of innovative digital tools that enhance the user-experience of our archive. As a participant in the DRI, we are building a cross-searchable, thematic digital search tool, entitled 'Irish Lifetimes', which will enable users to easily browse, search and compare qualitative datasets across our collections. This tool is the first of its kind for qualitative social science data in Ireland.

In addition, Irish Lifetimes has a community orientation, and it is our ambition to take the data beyond academic uses, and into new spheres including government research, not-for-profit commercial use, and public engagement initiatives such as local history groups and commemorative events. This endeavour is timely as Ireland is currently celebrating a centenary of political, economic and social development. The digital tool will offer structured browsing of our open source materials, so that the public user may explore one hundred years of Irish life through the stories, mem-ories and images of everyday life in Ireland, from the foundation of the modern Irish State to the present day. Data depositors will benefit from the increased exposure of their research far beyond the traditional routes of academic publications. But more importantly, our digital tool will provide a powerful demonstration of the unique character and value of qualitative data, in terms of telling the story of the Irish nation through the words of its citizens.

References

Browne, Michael J. Most Rev., Lord Bishop of Galway. 1947. Why Catholic Priests should Concern Themselves with Social and Economic Questions. *Christus Rex An Irish Quarterly Journal of Sociology* 1: 3–9.

Byrne, Anne, Ricca Edmonson and Tony Varley. 2001. Introduction to the Third Edition, in: C. Arensberg and S.T. Kimball.*Family and Community in Ireland* (3rd ed.). Clare: Clasp Press.

Conway, Brian. 2011. A Brief History of Sociology at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth: The Legacy of Fr. Peter McKevitt. *Sociological Origins* 7: 41–47.

Doorn, Peter and Heiko Tjalsma. 2007. Introduction: archiving research data. *Archival Science* 7, 1: 1–20.

Gray, Jane and O'Carroll, Aileen. 2011. Qualitative Research In Ireland: Archiving Strategies and Development. *IASSIST Quarterly* 34/35 (3, 4/1, 2): 18–22.

Heaton, Janet. 2008. Secondary analysis of qualitative data: an overview. *Historical Social Research* 33, 3: 33–45.

Irish Qualitative Data Archive and Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative: Best Prac-tice in Archiving Qualitative Data. 2010. URL: http://www.iqda.ie/sites/default/files/IQDA_Best_Practice_Handbook.pdf. Accessed on 27 March 2014.

Irish Research Council. 2013. Government of Ireland Research Project Grants Scheme 2013 Terms and Conditions. URL: http://research.ie/sites/default/files/irc_rpg_2013_terms__conditions_final_-_converted_online_fixed_link.pdf. Accessed on 7 April 2014.

National Academy of Sciences. 2009. *Ensuring the integrity, accessibility, and stewardship of research data in the digital age*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

Murray, Peter. 2009. Shaping Social Science Research, in: P. Murray. *Facilitating the Future. US Aid, European Integration and Irish Industrial Viability 1943–73*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Parry, Odette and Natasha S. Mauthner. 2004. Whose Data are They Anyway?: Practical, Legal and Ethical Issues in Archiving Qualitative Research Data. *Sociology* 2004 38, 139: 139–152.