

UNIVERSITY GUIDELINES ON KEEPING OF RESEARCH RECORDS

1 INTRODUCTION

The University of Aberdeen Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice requires that all researchers keep clear and accurate records of the procedures followed, and approvals granted during a research process, including records of the interim results obtained as well as of the final research outcomes. This is necessary not only as a means of demonstrating proper research practices, but also in case questions are asked subsequently about either the conduct or output of the research. (See also *Code of Practice for Research Students, Supervisors, Heads of School, Heads of Graduate School and College Postgraduate Officers*). The maintenance of accurate records is also important for potential subsequent commercialisation of research.

Guidance on periods for which records should be retained can be found in the University Retention Schedules, and in guidelines published by scientific and learned societies, and professional bodies. While examples are provided below, the most appropriate method of record-keeping will be dependent on the type of research being undertaken. However records are kept, it is the individual researcher's responsibility to ensure that the record will be able to demonstrate proper research practice and conduct, and evidence for results obtained.

2 RESEARCH RECORDS

2.1 Keeping Formal Written or Electronic Records

Researchers should keep a formal record of their work in a notebook, or where appropriate, an electronic record, used specifically for this purpose. Where practicable, one central master record should be maintained for each research project. However, in some instances several records may be required, for example, for interdepartmental or multiple site projects. Such records remain the property of the University of Aberdeen and not the holder, and should include information relating to procedures, apparatus, conditions and references etc. sufficient to allow the project to be understood and audited or replicated. They should also include appropriate reference to any relevant secondary records.

Records entries should be made as the work is done, and be clear, legible, in ink, and dated and signed. Electronic records should be similarly managed. Where appropriate, information can be printed and affixed but reference to clearly signposted original documents will often be sufficient. Any amendments should be clearly noted as such, with the previous entry remaining legible. The records should be kept in a secure location in the relevant school/department, and be archived for an appropriate time period at the conclusion of the project.

2.2 Laboratory Based Research – Lab-Books

For research in the laboratory sciences the primary record will be a *lab book*. The University has produced a notebook to assist laboratory-based students in the keeping of a valid record of their work. This provides a framework for the systematic recording of information in a way that is compatible with formal accreditation. Similar books are available for some other research areas. Graduate Schools, College Offices or relevant schools/departments will be able to advise students.

2.3 Data Generated

Data generated in the course of research should be kept securely in paper or electronic format as appropriate, and in accordance with good practice in the storage of primary data, record-keeping, ethical issues, and the Data Protection Act. Back-up records should always be kept for data stored on a computer, or preferably, electronic records should be stored on shared drives, which are backed-up daily. This will also assist with long term storage as there are fewer digital preservation issues with networked drives than with hard drives or removable storage systems such as CD or USB drives. Consideration should also be given to whether back-up copies of research samples in other formats (e.g. biological specimens) should be kept.

3 ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED IN A RESEARCH RECORD

The following is general guidance on maintaining a record and the type of information to be included. It is not exhaustive, as the information to be recorded will be determined to a large extent by the research area and the circumstances of an individual project.

There is no requirement to duplicate all paperwork associated with a project, or to record all minor activities, nor to affix copies of substantial documentation (e.g. questionnaires or consent forms). Instead, the record should cross-reference the location of such documents. Record books should include a table of contents. If a record book is lost, damaged or stolen, this should be reported immediately to a supervisor.

Types of information that may be recorded and/or cross-referenced

- Project protocol or design
- Evidence of peer review
- Protocol/design amendments and relevant dates
- Deviations from protocol/design and reasons
- Evidence of ethical and other approval, as required
- Details of the research team
- Information about PhD or Training supervision
- Funding
- Relevant study documentation (e.g. consent forms, questionnaires, clinical record forms etc.)
- Details of where and how study documentation is stored
- Data collection procedures
- Key data collection dates (e.g. biological samples, research clinic attendance, postage of questionnaires, interview dates, focus group dates)
- Data and sample storage procedures and dates of backup of data
- Data entry procedures including name of current data file, and if/when renamed/updated
- Description of the Quality Assurance procedures (e.g. backup, data entry quality checks etc.)
- Data analysis
- Who has overseen the analysis
- List of outputs agreed and authorship
- Note of any conditions on publication
- Notes and minutes of any project meetings in particular outcomes and action points
- Periodic updates on project progress
- Changes in data format (e.g. changes in coding)

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