

UNSW

Records and Archives Office

Retention periods for records relating to research

Introduction

This document details the retention requirements for records related to research.

It should be read in conjunction with the [UNSW Research Code of Conduct](#), the [UNSW Procedure for Handling Research Material and Data](#) and UNSW [guidance on records disposal](#).

The document outlines retention periods required for the various classes of:

1. research data
2. ethics committee records
3. records relating to the ownership of intellectual property
4. records relating to research reporting
5. other records related to the administration of research

It compares where appropriate the retention periods required under the [State Records Act 1998](#) through the State Records Authority's [General Retention and Disposal Authority - University Records \(GDA23\)](#) and the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#). Where there is conflict between retention periods from these authorities the longer retention period (as shown in the tables by bold type) is the retention period that should be applied.

Determining when to dispose of research records

There is a significant cost to the University in storing records, particularly paper records, for periods longer than those for which it is legally obliged to retain the records. Records should therefore be destroyed once their retention period has expired.

Retention periods detailed in retention and disposal authorities or in other authorities that mandate retention periods, are however minimum periods. If there is a demonstrated business need for continued retention of records they should be retained beyond these minimum periods for as long as they are still required. Continuing business need is generally demonstrated by a record of access to the record during the period after the action it documents has been completed or by a need for the business unit to retain the record in its work area for ready access. Records should not be retained beyond the date at which they can be legally destroyed 'just in case' they might be required at some time in the future.

Records which are required for known, or reasonably anticipated, litigation, inquiries or investigations, or records that may be relevant to allegations of research misconduct must not be destroyed or otherwise disposed of until the litigation or investigation has been concluded. They should not be retained 'just in case' litigation or inquiries may arise at some time in the future.

Sources consulted in the construction of these tables

The primary sources for retention periods reflected in these tables are:

- *State Records Act 1998*
- *General Retention and Disposal Authority - University Records (GDA23)*
- *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*

Other authorities consulted were:

- The [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) which requires records to be created and maintained in their original form but does not mandate any retention periods for records.
- The [Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes](#) which requires records to be created and maintained but does not mandate any retention periods for records.
- The NHMRC [Guidelines Under Section 95 of the Privacy Act 1988](#) which outline requirements in relation to the collection, handling and use of personal information and health information but do not include any details about retention periods for records.
- The NHMRC [Guidelines Approved Under Section 95A of the Privacy Act 1988](#) which refer to requirements relating to the collection, maintenance and use of records but do not include any requirements for retention periods for records.
- The AIATSIS [Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies](#) which refer to issues relating to records but do not include any requirements for retention periods

1. Retention periods for research data

<i>Type of research data</i>	<i>State Records Act - General Retention and Disposal Authority – University Records (GDA 23) (2005)</i>		<i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)</i>	
	<i>Description of data</i>	<i>Retention period</i>	<i>Description of data</i>	<i>Retention period</i>
1. Data for research of major significance, interest or controversy	Research data: Projects of major national or international significance, interest or controversy or where the principal investigator has a widely acknowledged influence on the area of scholarship and where the data is crucial to the substantiation of the research findings and cannot be readily or practically duplicated. [State Records Act reference: GDA 23, 23.6.1]	Required as State Archives (ie transfer to University Archives for permanent retention)	[Data relating to] gene therapy (eg patient records)	retain permanently
		Required as State Archives (ie transfer to University Archives for permanent retention)	[Data relating to] work [which]has community or heritage value	retain permanently (preferably within a national collection)
		Required as State Archives (ie transfer to University Archives for permanent retention)	[Data relating to] most clinical trials	Retain for minimum of 15 years
		Required as State Archives (ie transfer to University Archives for permanent retention)	General research data	5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research

Type of research data	State Records Act - General Retention and Disposal Authority – University Records (GDA 23) (2005)		Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)	
	Description of data	Retention period	Description of data	Retention period
2. Data for research with human subjects and potential long term effects	Research data: Projects which are not of major significance – where the project has human subjects and potential long term effects including animal testing for human products. Includes clinical or psychological research. <i>For example:</i> intervention or invasive testing, drug and complementary medicine trials, scanning and radioactivity, clinical studies, genetic manipulation, human tissue studies, trials of devices, some psychological research. [State Records Act reference: GDA 23, 23.6.2]	Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	[Data relating to] gene therapy (eg patient records)	Retain permanently [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research reference: 2.1.1]
		Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	[Data relating to] work [which]has community or heritage value	Retain permanently (preferably within a national collection) [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research reference: 2.1.1]
		Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	[Data relating to] most clinical trials	Retain for minimum of 15 years
		Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	General research data	Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research

Note:

GDA 23 disposal class 23.6.2 (Data for research with human subjects and potential long term effects) notes that ‘although the minimum retention period is 20 years (or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer) other considerations affecting retention may need to be taken into account. For example, workers compensation regulations allow for a claimant to reopen a case at any time during the lifetime of the claimant, which may necessitate records to be retained for up to approximately 70 years after the research project is completed’. This needs to be determined on a case by case basis.

Type of research data	State Records Act - General Retention and Disposal Authority – University Records (GDA 23) (2005)		Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)	
	Description of data	Retention period	Description of data	Retention period
3. Data for research with potential long term environmental effects	<p>Research data: Projects which are not of major significance – where the research has potential long term environmental effect. For example: genetic trials, disease and pest management, changes to ecosystems; use of environmentally hazardous materials.</p> <p>[State Records Act reference: GDA 23, 23.6.3]</p>	<p>Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, then destroy.</p> <p>Retention periods for these records may need to also take into account other legislative or regulatory requirements such as the <i>Environmentally Hazardous Chemicals Act (1985)</i> and the <i>Contaminated Land Management Act (1997)</i></p>	General research data	Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research
4. Data for research without potential long term effects	<p>Research data: Projects which are not of major significance – where the research does not have potential long term affects, including research on animals.</p> <p>[State Records Act reference: GDA 23, 23.6.4]</p>	<p>Retain for minimum of 5 years after project completed, then destroy.</p>	General research data	Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research
		<p>Retain for minimum of 5 years after project completed, then destroy.</p>	short-term research projects that are for assessment purposes only, such as research projects completed by students	Retain for 12 months

<i>Type of research data</i>	<i>State Records Act - General Retention and Disposal Authority – University Records (GDA 23) (2005)</i>		<i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)</i>	
	<i>Description of data</i>	<i>Retention period</i>	<i>Description of data</i>	<i>Retention period</i>
5. Data which have been copied	<p>Research data: Paper records which have been converted to electronic format (eg through data entry or imaging).</p> <p>[State Records Act reference: GDA 23, 23.6.5]</p>	Retain until no longer required for reference or administrative purpose, then destroy.	General research data	<p>Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research</p> <p>[Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research reference: 2.1.1]</p>

2. Retention periods for records of ethics committees

<i>Description of Records</i>	<i>Retention Period</i>	<i>State Records Act reference</i>
Human Ethics records of assessment and approval of research.	Retain for minimum of 20 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 23.1.1
Radiation Ethics records of assessment and approval of research.	Retain for minimum of 20 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 23.1.2
Animal Ethics records of assessment and approval of research.	Retain for minimum of 7 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 23.1.3
Bio-safety Ethics records of assessment and approval of research, includes GM (genetically modified plants and organisms) research.	Retain for minimum of 20 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 23.1.4
Records relating to breaches of ethical practice as approved by the ethics committee(s).	Retain as per relevant ethics approval disposal above	GDA 23 23.1.5
Records of complaints and resulting investigations in relation to research.	Retain as per relevant ethics approval disposal above	GDA 23 23.1.6

3. Retention periods for records relating to the ownership of intellectual property

<i>Description of Records</i>	<i>Retention Period</i>	<i>State Records Act Authority</i>
Records of intellectual property in products/works created as a result of grants and where the university holds all or part ownership	Required as State Archives (ie transfer to University Archives for permanent retention)	GDA 23 4.2.4
Records relating to use of intellectual property of the university (e.g. contracts, licensing agreements and other formal arrangements)	Retain for minimum of 7 years after conditions of contract or agreement have been met, then destroy	GDA 23 23.2.1
Records relating to the registration of patents, copyright and ownership of intellectual property where owned in part or completely by the university	Required as State Archives (ie transfer to University Archives for permanent retention)	GDA 23 23.2.2

4. Retention periods for records relating to research reporting

<i>Description of Records</i>	<i>Retention Period</i>	<i>State Records Act Authority</i>
Final reports on individual research projects that include outcomes of the research project.	Required as State Archives (ie transfer to University Archives for permanent retention)	GDA 23 23.4.1
All other reports on individual research projects – for example progress reports, inspection reports and reports on expenditure	Retain for minimum of 7 years after conditions of contract or agreement have been met, then destroy	GDA 23 23.4.2
Grant administration – Monitoring – Records relating to the monitoring of progress reports against the approved purpose of the project	Retain for minimum of 7 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 4.4.1

5. Retention periods for records relating to research administration

<i>Description of Records</i>	<i>Retention Period</i>	<i>State Records Act Authority</i>
Grant administration – Applications – Summary records of applications for grants assistance (e.g. registers of applications and recipients)	Retain for minimum of 7 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 4.2.1
Grant administration – Applications – Records relating to successful applications (e.g. application form, agreement, acquittals, report)	Retain for minimum of 7 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 4.2.2
Grant administration – Applications – Records relating to unsuccessful applications	Retain for minimum of 2 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 4.2.3
Grant administration – Records relating to non-competitive and/or discretionary funds allocation	Retain for minimum of 7 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 4.2.5
Grant administration – Establishment – Records relating to the establishment of the grant	Retain for minimum of 7 years after all conditions in relation to the grant are satisfied, then destroy.	GDA 23 4.3.1
Grant administration – Establishment – Established conditions under which the grant operates (ie the standard conditions of the grant which establish the expectations, boundaries and protocols in relation to the grant)	Retain for minimum of 7 years after grant conditions superseded,, then destroy.	GDA 23 4.3.2
Research administration – Records relating to the formulation of or deliberations leading to application for funding/approval or commencement of research	Retain until no longer required for reference or administrative purpose, then destroy	GDA 23 23.3.1
Research administration – Records relating to the administration of research projects that are approved	Retain for minimum of 7 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 23.5.1
Research administration – Records relating to the administration of research projects that are not approved	Retain for minimum of 2 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 23.5.2
Research administration – Records of accreditation from external bodies to conduct research and testing, such as accreditation for laboratories	Retain for minimum of 7 years after expiry of accreditation, or as otherwise specified in accreditation arrangements, then destroy.	GDA 23 23.5.3

<i>Description of Records</i>	<i>Retention Period</i>	<i>State Records Act reference</i>
Research administration – Records of inspections of research facilities. Includes inspection reports and correspondence	Retain for minimum of 7 years after action completed, then destroy	GDA 23 23.5.4
Research administration – Records of registration of the university as a premise to manage, possess and sell radioactive materials and devices	Retain for minimum of 99 years after action completed, then destroy. [Note these records should be transferred to University Archives when current use is concluded]	GDA 23 23.5.5