

**ARCHIVING QUALITATIVE DATA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF DATA
PRESERVATION AND SHARING AMONG AUSTRALIAN QUALITATIVE RESEARCHERS**

**Discussion Paper
The Australian Qualitative Archive (AQuA)**

**Lynda Cheshire
Institute for Social Science Research
The University of Queensland**

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Background	9
Acknowledgments	9
The nature of qualitative research	10
The distinctiveness of qualitative data	10
How AQuA articulates with other ASSDA nodes	12
The national consultation process	13
Focus groups	13
Extending the consultation process	13
The need for a qualitative data archive	15
Broader imperatives for archiving	17
Existing digital qualitative archive services	18
International archives	18
Australian archives	19
How AQuA will work	20
What can be deposited?	20
Establishing a collections policy	21
Preparing data for deposition	22
Sharing data and setting conditions for access	23
Accessing data	23
Intellectual property and copyright	24
Data security	24
Data management plans.....	25
Issues to consider in archiving qualitative data	27
Ethical considerations	27
Requirements to destroy data	27
Informed consent	28
Confidentiality	32
The epistemological challenges of data sharing	35
The constructed nature of qualitative data	35
The importance of context: the need to be there	36
The role of the researcher in qualitative research	37
A culture of not sharing data?	38
The consultation process: how to respond	39
References	40
Attachment A. List of members of the Qualitative Reference Group	42

Executive Summary

Background

The Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA) is the leading social science data archive in Australia, providing a long-term data storage facility for researchers, while also making existing data sets available for re-use. In recent years, ASSDA has been extending its holdings to include qualitative data. While the archiving and sharing of data are now relatively common among quantitative researchers, the process is viewed as much more contentious among qualitative researchers because of the distinct nature of qualitative data. The purpose of this report is to identify the principal concerns expressed by qualitative researchers in relation to data archiving, and to propose possible ways forward in overcoming these challenges.

The nature of qualitative research

The apprehension that qualitative researchers express towards the idea of archiving their data stems from the nature of qualitative research itself, which is based on particular methodological assumptions and practices. Qualitative research derives from an interpretivist paradigm in social science, which emphasises human subjectivity and the meanings people attach to the world in attempting to make sense of it in particular social and historical contexts.

Where quantitative research generates data that can be subject to statistical testing, qualitative researchers elicit people's stories, meanings and experiences using a range of methods including face-to-face individual and group interviews; written or telephone interviews; participant-observation and recording of naturally occurring interactions.

The consultation process

It is important for the social science qualitative research community to have input into the design and operation of AQuA so that their needs, concerns and methodological approaches are taken into account. To obtain their input, a series of focus group interviews have been held with qualitative social science researchers at various higher education institutions around the country. The release of this Discussion Paper represents the next stage of this process.

The rationale for a qualitative archive

There are a number of reasons for establishing a qualitative archive. These include the provision of a safe storage facility to prevent data from being lost, enhanced opportunities for data sharing and for comparative research, and the provision of teaching resources for qualitative methods. Archiving allows for maximum utilisation of data, which enhances the value of investment made by researchers and participants. Researchers who deposit their data also benefit because the potential impact of that data, via citation, is greatly enhanced. AQuA is also being developed in line with new innovations in digital archiving in Australia and overseas.

How AQuA will work

Data can be deposited in virtually any format, including document, audio and video files, as well as files using NVivo or other software packages. A single dataset may include audio-recordings of interviews, written transcripts of those interviews and, in some cases, annotations or codings already undertaken. Differential access conditions may mean that availability is limited to some researchers and subject to an application process. Some additional data will also need to be submitted, such as project proposals, interview schedules etc. to assist with indexing, searching and browsing while also providing subsequent

researchers with important contextual details that enable a more informed analysis of the data. A collections policy will also need to be developed to establish criteria for selecting suitable datasets for inclusion into AQuA.

Before archiving a dataset, some additional preparatory work may be required by the researcher, such as preparing metadata, removing identifying details and converting pre-digital files to digital format. AQuA will not be able to provide funding for researchers to deposit data although the increasing use of data 'born digital' will reduce the burden of this task.

Aside from preserving datasets for historical posterity, one of the consequences of archiving data is that data can be made available to other researchers who may wish to analyse them. This occurs only under strict conditions, however, which will be determined by the researcher. ASSDA has an established set of access conditions, which can usefully be applied. Any researcher wishing to access data will need to register with AQuA and seek permission, where necessary. Deposition and use of data will also need to occur in line with laws regarding copyright and intellectual property.

Issues to consider in archiving qualitative data

Qualitative researchers have identified a range of challenges that need to be resolved in the development of AQuA. In some cases, these concerns can be addressed by setting access conditions but others are more complex and need to be worked through in close collaboration with the qualitative research community.

Ethical considerations

Current debates around the feasibility of sharing qualitative data indicate that researchers are often reluctant to archive their data because of ethical concerns regarding participants' confidentiality and informed consent. Researchers have also noted that the practice of archiving data appears to run counter to present university ethical requirements for data to be destroyed on completion of the project. While this contradicts the advice given by the NHMRC in its 2007 *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research*, further consultation needs to take place with institutional ethical review boards to ensure archiving is not inhibited by ethical guidelines.

There are several issues relating to informed consent that need to be addressed as well. First, the potential for data archiving and sharing will be undermined if researchers do not obtain prior informed consent from research participants specifically for archiving. Researchers have expressed concern that this may be difficult since they will be unable to specify the future use or users of archived data. They also noted that some groups or populations would be less likely to agree to participate in research if they knew their data would be accessible by others.

These concerns need to be worked through to develop guidelines on how informed consent might be obtained by researchers for data to be archived and shared. These guidelines will apply to new research projects where archiving is planned from the start although the issues for existing datasets, where informed consent may need to be obtained retrospectively, are even more complex.

Data archiving compounds many of the issues around participant confidentiality too given that participants are potentially identifiable and may be linked to statements that can cause harm or embarrassment. Existing strategies for de-identifying data (such as using pseudonyms in the final written account) may be unsuitable for archived data, not only because it involves de-identifying *all* data

(and not just published material) which is time-consuming for the depositor, but also because the removal of potentially-identifying contextual factors may inhibit full analysis of that data.

The epistemological challenges of data sharing

Researchers argue that the data derived from interpretive approaches typically involve subjectivities and epistemological standpoints that do not lend themselves to data archiving. There are three key elements to this argument.

1. First, that to deposit data in an archive, ready for others to pick up and use, is to deny the constructed nature of research data by stripping it of any prior meaning or interpretation.
2. Second, that archiving data disembeds it from important contextual clues that allow for correct interpretation. Without this broader contextual knowledge, subsequent researchers are again said to run the risk of 'misinterpreting' the data.
3. Third, in qualitative research, the subjectivities of the researcher are often foregrounded and become integral to the data. Treating them as private and unsuitable for sharing creates problems for interpretation, while including them can cause harm or embarrassment to the researcher and/or research participants. Data sharing may also breach the relations of trust commonly established between the researcher and research participants, especially if subsequent interpretations run counter to participants' interests.

It is noted that epistemological debates of this kind are neither new, nor restricted to so-called secondary users of primary data, although they are intensified by the prospect of data archiving and secondary analysis. Such debates are also beginning to stimulate broader dialogue about the nature and direction of qualitative research among researchers themselves, which we view as a positive outcome.

A culture of not sharing data?

It has been suggested that the reluctance of qualitative researchers to archive data derives as much from the absence of any culture of data sharing within the qualitative research community as it is from any concerns over research ethics and epistemology. While contestable on numerous levels, it must be acknowledged that some researchers do associate the development of AQuA with an emerging audit culture that is said to be pervading higher education institutions. There is also an unarticulated fear that data archiving exposes the very personal dimensions of qualitative research (such as conduct in the field) to scrutiny by others.

Background

The Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA) was established at the ANU in 1981 to provide a long-term site for data storage, while also making existing data sets available to other researchers to use. As well as providing researchers with a safe and easily accessible data storage facility, ASSDA plays an important role in enhancing the potential impact of research data by managing the process of data retrieval for subsequent analysis or for using existing research questions, methods and data to guide new, original, research.

To date, ASSDA has been limited to quantitative datasets only and there has been no equivalent archive for qualitative researchers. Since 2007, however, ASSDA has been working to develop such an archive – the Australian Qualitative Archive (AQuA) – which will be based at The University of Queensland (UQ). The initiative is funded through the Federal Government’s National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Scheme and is managed by a team of researchers working at UQ and The University of Sydney, with a broader reference panel from The University of Melbourne, The University of Technology Sydney, The University of Western Australia and the Australian National University. Members of the reference group are listed in Attachment A. The development of AQuA will occur alongside the establishment of other archival services all operating as part of a distributed ASSDA network. These include an Australian Government and Politics database and an Electoral and Media node located at the University of Western Australia; an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Archive (ATSIDA) at the University of Technology Sydney; an Economics, Business and Finance data capacity at The University of Melbourne; and a Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS) archive at The University of Queensland. The purpose of AQuA is to provide qualitative researchers with a similar digital data storage facility as those currently offered to quantitative researchers, and to facilitate data sharing among qualitative researchers under rigorous access and use policies determined by depositors.

It is important for the social science qualitative research community to have input into the design and operation of the archive so that their particular needs, concerns and methodological approaches are taken into account. This will enable us to develop an archive that is uniquely responsive to the particular characteristics of qualitative data, and which is owned and utilised by Australian qualitative researchers. The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to identify the principal concerns expressed by qualitative researchers in relation to data archiving, and to propose possible ways forward in overcoming these challenges.

Acknowledgments

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The Nature of Qualitative Research

The absence of qualitative data from the ASSDA collection reflects a broader preference among international data archives to deal predominantly with machine-readable statistical data. In the UK, for example, the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Data Archive was established in 1967 to preserve quantitative datasets but it was not until 1994, with the development of Qualidata, that plans were made for qualitative data to be included. In the US, the data archives operated by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) still has no facility for archiving qualitative data.

As Qualidata observed in its 1996 mid-term review (1996), there has been no intellectual reason for this state of affairs, suggesting that the omission of qualitative data has been an oversight rather than a deliberate policy. In addition, the impetus for data archiving has tended to come from the research community, with quantitative social scientists taking the lead in the development of ASSDA. As outlined later in this report, this level of commitment to data sharing and re-use is not as strong among the qualitative research community and so there have been far fewer demands from qualitative researchers for such a facility to be established. Part of the reason also stems from the nature of qualitative research itself, which is based on particular methodological assumptions and practices that, for many qualitative researchers, render their data unsuitable for archiving. Hence, there is a certain degree of ambivalence, or even opposition, to qualitative data archiving that needs to be addressed if AQuA is to succeed. A national consultation process is an important step in facilitating this change.

The distinctiveness of qualitative data

It is worth spending time outlining what is meant by qualitative research and qualitative data since successful development of the archive is contingent on awareness of, and sensitivity to, the distinct characteristics of this method. This explanation is not as straightforward as one might expect because the underlying features of qualitative data, and the way they differ from quantitative data, are philosophical rather than practical, and based on particular methodologies rather than data collection techniques per se. Qualitative researchers are therefore rightly insisting that qualitative data cannot be subject to the same treatment in archiving as quantitative data, and that new principles and practices will need to be established (Parry and Mauthner, 2004).

In philosophical terms, qualitative research is generally linked to an interpretive social science while quantitative research is generally associated with a foundationalist or positivist paradigm. Crotty distinguishes between these two approaches as follows:

A positivist approach would follow the methods of the natural sciences and, by way of allegedly value-free, detached observation, seek to identify universal features of humanhood, society and history that offer explanation and hence control and predictability. The interpretivist approach, to the contrary, *looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world* (1998: 67 emphasis in original).

While there are many different branches of interpretive inquiry, it is possible to identify a number of general features that characterise this approach. Briefly, these are as follows.

First, interpretivism emphasises human subjectivity and the meanings people attach to the world in attempting to make sense of it. These meanings are not objectively derived but are socially constructed through interactions with others in particular historical and cultural contexts. The aim of research for interpretivists, therefore, is to understand this process of meaning construction and to examine 'the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (Schwandt, 1994: 118). However, interpretivist researchers also acknowledge that it is impossible to truly see the world through another's eyes and thus our understanding of the world is always partial and contingent.

Second, interpretivists see research as embedded in, rather than separate from, this process of meaning construction. They argue that researchers have no transcendental ground from which to view social life in a disengaged, objective manner, but they interpret the world in exactly the same way as do those under study. This has implications for the kind of knowledge that can be generated by qualitative research whereby assertions of truth and objective knowledge are avoided in favour of generating data that are rich and authentic, and explanations that reflect the complexity and situated-ness of social life. Qualitative researchers do not claim to have uncovered the 'truth' of social life but offer an interpretation of participants' interpretations that is methodologically sound, theoretically informed and empirically defensible.

Further, if research is a human activity, it is also inherently a social activity where knowledge is co-constructed through the interactions between the researcher and the research participants. In qualitative research, the researcher is often viewed as an integral part of the process, bringing personal values, biases and subjectivities which cannot be put aside and which are therefore to be acknowledged in a reflexive manner.

Where quantitative research generates data through large-scale surveys or experimental design that can be subject to statistical testing, qualitative researchers elicit people's stories, meanings and experiences. These forms of data are generated using a number of methods, including, but not exclusively:

- By talking interactively with people to gain access to their accounts, in their own voices, through the use of interviews. These interviews are different from an administered questionnaire for they have a fluid and flexible structure that allows unexpected themes to develop, and enables interviewees to describe particular experiences in rich detail. These interviews may take the form of individual and focus group interviews conducted face-to-face, as well as those conducted via telephone or online.
- By examining interactions, conversations and behaviour through ethnographic methods such as participant-observation where the researcher is immersed in the natural or real life setting of others to experience that world 'first hand'.
- By recording conversations and interactions as they occur naturally without any intervention by the researcher. This may involve videoing or audio-recording activities such as classroom interactions, doctor-patient interviews and telephone helplines, as well as on-line interactions such as Internet chat rooms, blogs and other such fora.
- By asking research participants to make accounts of their lives through documentary or visual means such as keeping diaries or taking photographs.

The kind of data generated by qualitative researchers, and likely to be deposited in AQuA include:

- Audio- or video-recordings of interviews (including those conducted by a researcher but also those between, say, a doctor and a patient where no researcher is present).
- Typed transcripts of those interviews (including written interviews conducted online with no audio recording)
- Written notes and observations from fieldwork
- Photographs
- Audio or video recordings of events, songs, conversations etc.
- Other documents such as diary entries, maps and diagrams

How AQuA articulates with other ASSDA nodes

One of the key strengths of ASSDA relative to other data archives is that it is operated by social scientists who are expert in working with data as well as being skilled in archiving and record management. This is evident in the quantitative holdings of ASSDA where archivists are trained in the software and statistical analytical techniques commonly used by quantitative researchers. The methodological differences between quantitative and qualitative data necessitate the creation of a distinct facility for qualitative data archiving that not only takes into account the particularities of these forms of data, but which is also operated by researchers who have been trained as interpretivist social scientists. This will also ensure AQuA is well-respected and used by qualitative researchers and that their particular concerns about archiving are addressed.

Along with the establishment of a distinct holding for qualitative data, ASSDA is also in the process of setting up an additional facility for data derived from research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures (ATSIDA). This sub-archive will include both quantitative and qualitative data and is therefore distinct from both AQuA and the general ASSDA holdings in a substantive, rather than a methodological, sense. Initial consultation with researchers working in this area has indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies is a specialized area of research, requiring specialized archival services, because of the social, cultural and ethical sensitivities required in working with Indigenous people. The staff at the ATSIDA facility have this training and are supported by well-respected academics working in this field.

The National Consultation Process

In order to engage with qualitative researchers, AQuA embarked on a national consultation program, beginning in 2007. Initially, focus groups provided the principal means of engaging with qualitative social science researchers although these are now being supplemented with other techniques, including circulation of this Discussion Paper.

Focus groups

In 2007-2009, seven focus groups were held at four universities in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, involving 46 qualitative researchers. Focus group participants were sampled using a combined theoretical and volunteer sampling framework with the aim of recruiting researchers from a broad social science background who are, or have been, actively involved in qualitative research of some kind. To provide rigor and comparability to the study, the sample was confined to academic staff members working within a social science, or related, faculty. These generally involved schools or disciplines in the fields of education, sociology, anthropology, social work, and public health, although a limited number of participants had backgrounds in psychology, journalism and politics.

Once ethical clearance had been obtained, researchers were invited to participate via an email which was sent on behalf of the research team by locally-based staff members who agreed to facilitate the recruitment process by circulating the invitation through their School or Faculty staff email list. A 'background briefing', which provided information on the workings of the archive and the kinds of topics to be covered in the focus group, was attached to the invitation. Those willing to participate were asked to contact the research team directly and reminder emails were sent out at various intervals. While this kind of volunteer sampling may be less fruitful in securing responses than a more targeted approach, one advantage of this strategy is that researchers were invited to self-identify as qualitative researchers rather than having such definitions imposed by others. Moreover, it was found that those who did volunteer to participate appeared to do so because they were interested in qualitative research rather than because they had any strong feelings about the merits or otherwise of data archiving. Indeed, most had very little prior experience of the concept of data archiving.

Each focus group ran for approximately 1-1.5 hours and was loosely structured around four themes:

1. The character of contemporary qualitative practice.
2. The perceived advantages and disadvantages of qualitative data archiving and sharing.
3. Barriers to, and appropriate conditions for, depositing qualitative data into an archive.
4. Attitudes towards using qualitative data from secondary sources.

The advantages of working within a focus group context were that the questions stimulated considerable debate, with participants reflecting upon, and responding to, one another's comments rather than directly answering questions posed by the facilitator. Preliminary analysis of focus group data revealed a range of different views and responses to the deposition and sharing of qualitative data via a digital archive. These are discussed at length in later sections of this document to highlight some of the debates and issues presented by the concept of a qualitative data archive.

Extending the consultation process

While it was not possible to visit every university in Australia, it was anticipated that focus groups would be held in at least one higher education institution with a designated social science faculty or school in every State and Territory. However, these plans were revised in light of difficulties encountered in

attracting researchers to participate in the focus groups. Three focus group sessions were cancelled in early 2009, because of low number of participants. At this point, it was decided that focus groups were merely one way of implementing a national consultation strategy and that researchers could learn about, and engage with, the proposed archive in other ways. These include:

- Release of a discussion paper inviting written responses from individual researchers, research teams, institutions, disciplinary associations, funding agencies and human research ethics' committees.
- Conference presentations, workshops and keynote addresses
- Academic publications
- Development of an AQuA website along with other informational services, such as brochures and information packs.

The release of this Discussion Paper is the next step in this consultation process. Details of how to respond are provided at the back.

The Need for a Qualitative Data Archive

The rationale for establishing a qualitative data is compelling and there are a number of reasons why data should be deposited in and shared through an archive. First, qualitative data are typically stored on computers, in filing cabinets or even in the homes of researchers, which increases the risk of data loss. A national archive will store data indefinitely in a safe place, long after the original study has been completed. This is especially important for datasets that have national or historical significance, and which need to be preserved for the future.

Second, preserving data will be of considerable benefit to researchers undertaking historical research in the future. It also opens up the possibility for data sharing and for comparative cross national, historical or case study research.

Third, archived material is an excellent resource for teaching qualitative research methods across a range of disciplines. Teaching staff will be able to access various qualitative datasets to provide examples of how different researchers approach their research; the sorts of questions they ask of the world around them; and the way they operationalise their research through their choice of methods. Students learn a great deal about qualitative research when they are given the opportunity to handle data and to practice writing it up. A national qualitative archive will provide such resources, complete with important related data, such as research questions, sampling frameworks, interview schedules etc. It also provides an opportunity for students to engage with the latest innovations in qualitative research – including an electronic data archive – and to reflect on the ways these innovations inform and change the practice of qualitative research. In a similar manner, deposited data could also be made available to Honours and/or undergraduate students for research projects, especially in cases when time, resources and ethical considerations prohibit students from generating their own material.

Fourth, qualitative data are expensive to collect and the principal investigator(s) often do not have the time or money to analyse all aspects of the data they have obtained. When data are made available through a data archive, maximum utilisation of the data is possible as researchers are able to access deposited datasets rather than continually generating new ones. As well as avoiding duplication of research efforts, this increases the value and accountability of publicly funded research: something funding agencies are becoming increasingly aware of. Many UK research councils, for example, have data sharing policies in place, which require researchers funded through those councils to make their data available for use by other researchers as part of their contractual obligations. Here, in Australia, the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the General Practitioners Evaluation Program have similar requirements for lodgment of data into an archive in their funding agreements. While this is not mandated at present, the requirements are explicitly stated in Sections 20.2b and 20.3 of the ARC's Funding Agreements for Discovery Projects (2009):

- 20.2. For any Material produced under this Agreement, the Administering Organisation shall ensure that all Specified Personnel (Chief Investigators, Partner Investigators and Fellows):
 - a) take reasonable care of, and safely store, any data or specimens or samples collected during, or resulting from, the conduct of their Project;
 - b) make arrangements acceptable to the ARC for lodgement with an appropriate museum or archive in Australia of data or specimens or samples collected during, or resulting from, their Project; and
 - c) include details of the lodgement or reasons for non-lodgement in the Progress Reports and the Final Report for the Project.

- 20.3 The Administering Organisation shall consider the benefits of depositing the data and any publications arising from each Project in an appropriate subject and/or institutional repository wherever such a repository is available. If the Administering Organisation is not intending to deposit the data from a Project in a repository either before, or within six months after, the completion of the Project the reasons for not doing so must be detailed in the Project's Final Report.

Similarly, the Australian Urban and Housing Research Institute (AHURI) has recently added to its 2009 research project funding guidelines, the following requirement:

- 8.3 Researchers should note that all primary data, including both qualitative and quantitative data collected as part of AHURI research must be deposited in the Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA). This is to ensure long-term security of the data, replicability of research, and access for use by other researchers. This requirement must be taken into account when seeking ethics committee approval. The secure storage and future accessibility of data sets, as well as the privacy of research participants is assured through the storage of primary data with the ASSDA. From 2010 all research contracts will include the implementation of a data management plan. The final 10% of funds will be withheld until all data are deposited with the ASSDA and AHURI has received confirmation that this has occurred.

Data sharing also demonstrates the value of research if it is made available to, and used by, other researchers. This may encourage funding agencies to provide further investment into research if they can see the extent of its utilisation and impact.

Fifth, data archiving enhances the value of investment made by research participants into the research process. It is widely accepted, for example, that researchers have an ethical obligation to treat participants' stories with due care and respect. While most researchers would certainly agree with this principle, the conventional approach in qualitative research is to de-identify data and destroy them after analysis (Taylor, 2008). Such practices are often underpinned by a medical model of research ethics that continues to guide many university ethical review processes. An alternative approach would argue that safeguarding people's stories via an archive and allowing others to access them, albeit under restricted conditions, is a more appropriate way of taking care of them. This is particularly, although not exclusively, the case for Indigenous populations who remain owners of knowledge, rendering the researcher a guardian of that knowledge for current and future generations.

In addition, research is often intrusive for participants, especially in cases where the research covers sensitive or personal issues. Some researchers are beginning to report difficulty in accessing certain populations, such as indigenous people and schools, who feel they have been 'over-researched' and are becoming less willing to tolerate further scrutiny for research activities, especially if they discern a duplication of topics and questions. Sharing data means the need to intrude into people's lives to collect more data is reduced and will help ensure full use is made of data already generated.

It is also important to the scientific method that social science data generated from research projects, along with the methods and analytical processes adopted, are open to scrutiny by others. Many qualitative researchers working from an interpretivist paradigm reject the idea that the quality of qualitative research can be assessed by traditional criteria, such as reliability and validity, because they are based on an assumption that the social world can be readily captured, measured and recorded as objective truth by an independent observer (Guba and Lincoln, 1991). This is not to say, of course, that quality and analytic rigor are of no concern to qualitative research; simply that other criteria are required. These may require audiences to judge the success of qualitative research according to its

methodological awareness (Seale, 1999), its transparency in the research process (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) and the consistency and credibility of its arguments (Guba and Lincoln, 1991). Archiving data for others to use will enhance this process. Access to an existing bank of data also means that researchers may be able to examine a larger number of cases in their research than would typically be feasible if relying on the generation of new data (Hammersley, 1997).

Finally, through its different access conditions, an archive will help promote research and facilitate collaboration among researchers with similar interests. As outlined later, researchers depositing data will be able to specify that they wish to be informed by the archive when others apply to access their data in order to comment on how that data will be used and to make contact with those researchers.

Researchers who agree to deposit their data also benefit in a number of ways. First, their data will be stored indefinitely in a safe place where they are easily accessible, and in a form that can be understood long after the original study has been completed. This is useful if researchers are obliged to store the data for several years following the publication of results. It also means that any future analyses of the data will not rely on information stored in the memory of the people who did the original analysis, or remain in a format that will become technically obsolete, as in the case of audio or video cassette. These factors may lead to a dataset being safely stored, but unusable. A national archive, such as ASSDA, will be able to use the latest technology, as well as the older technology. Moreover, all files, both paper and machine-readable, will be stored in at least four different places that are regularly backed up, with staff monitoring the data and documentation full time so that problems can be remedied quickly.

Second, the potential impact of a particular dataset is greatly increased. Other researchers will be able to use that data (subject to specific conditions) to investigate issues that the original researcher may not have the desire or resources to pursue. Anyone who publishes results from deposited data will be obliged to cite the data file in the publication, so the name of the original researcher will appear in the reference list and therefore in citation indices such as the Social Science Citation Index.

Third, an archive has facilities for distributing the data and documentation without any expense to the person who originally conducted the research. If other people become interested in the data, the original researcher will not need to be concerned with the cost and inconvenience of providing a copy for them since control of data is managed by the archive on behalf of the researchers. Finally, data will be publicised on the AQuA web page, thereby increasing the profile of, and potential interest in, a researcher's work.

Broader imperatives for archiving

The proposed development of AQuA also forms part of a broader initiative among the disciplines of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) to establish a national e-research infrastructure under a new NCRIS (National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy) capability. NCRIS is administered by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and is providing \$542 million over 2005-2011 to provide researchers with major research facilities, supporting infrastructure and networks necessary for world-class research. HASS research has been generally absent from existing capabilities funded through NCRIS (which include biotechnology products and optical and radio astronomy) although a new HASS capability on *Transforming Humanities, Arts and Social Science Research* was announced in September 2008 by Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Kim Carr. While funding is yet to be channelled into this capability through a new round of NCRIS, it is expected that e-research infrastructure, such as national platforms for digitised data archiving, curation and dissemination, will be identified as key priorities for the HASS sector.

Existing Digital Qualitative Archive Services

International archives

Qualidata

The UK's ESDS Qualidata, established in the early 1990s, is perhaps the best example of such an archive and provides access to some of the classic post-war studies of British society, including Stan Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), John Goldthorpe et al.'s *The Affluent Worker* (1969) and the Peter Townsend collection of studies on poverty such as *Poverty in the UK* (1979). Data supported by the archive include in-depth and semi-structured interviews; focus groups; field notes and observations; personal documents and photographs. Other data, such as project aims and rationale, interview schedules, outlines of methodological procedures and sampling techniques, and published articles are also deposited to add the contextual detail required for qualitative analysis. The staff at Qualidata have been extremely helpful in the development of AQuA, particularly in terms of policies and protocols for overcoming the barriers to qualitative archiving as identified by the research community.

Qualidata is different from AQuA in that it is not an archive as such; rather it identifies existing academic and public repositories willing and suitable to accept qualitative data for archiving. These include digital repositories, such as the Data Archive at The University of Essex; the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge; the British Universities Film and Video Council; and the British Library. These act as host repositories, with Qualidata working with both archival staff and qualitative researchers, as well as software developers, to provide guidelines in how to prepare data for archival purposes. See website at <http://www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/about/introduction.asp>

The Mass Observation Archive

The Mass-Observation Archive commenced in the UK in 1937 and continued to the early 1950s, documenting the everyday lives of ordinary British people. After moving to the University of Sussex in the early 1970s, the project was revived in 1981 and collects data from a team of observers and a panel of volunteer writers on topics of contemporary interest such as divorce or election outcomes. The collection contains data in a variety of formats including diary entries, survey responses, written responses to open-ended questions, life-story documents and observational records of conversations and behaviour of everyday interactions. See website at <http://www.massobs.org.uk/index.htm>

The Danish Data Archive (DDA)

The Danish Data Archive (DDA) is a national data bank, operating as an independent unit within the group of Danish National Archives. While the DDA was established in the 1970s, it began to admit qualitative data during the late 1990s, primarily in the form of interview transcripts rather than audio or video recordings. As part of the process of incorporating qualitative data into the archives, interviews were conducted in 2000 with a number of qualitative Danish researchers to discover which barriers to archiving were seen as most important. Some of this material is published in Fink (2000).

Qualitative data archives are also being established/explored at:

- The Sociological Data Archive (SDA) at the University of Prague in the Czech Republic
- The Finnish Social Science Data Archive at Tampere University
- The Steinmetz Archive (DANS) in the Netherlands.
- The Swiss Information and Data Archive Service for the Social Sciences (SIDOS)
- The Social Science Data Archives in Slovenia.

Australian archives

PARADISEC

The Pacific And Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC) is a consortium of four universities: the Universities of Sydney, Melbourne, New England and the Australian National University, and offers a facility for digital conservation and access for endangered materials from the Pacific region. It conforms with emerging international standards for digital archiving and has a well-established framework for accessioning, cataloguing and digitising audio, text and visual material in order to preserve languages from the Pacific region that are likely to be lost in coming decades. These data include field recordings from the 1950s and 1960s, as well as audio-visual recordings of songs, languages, dance and cultural rituals. A primary motivation for the project is not only to preserve unique and irreplaceable recordings, but to make them available to those recorded and their descendants. See website: <http://www.paradisec.org.au/home.html>

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

The AIATSIS is one of Australia's leading institutions for information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As well as undertaking scholarly and community-based research, the Institute also contains an extensive library of print materials, including manuscripts, language materials, books, art catalogues, newspapers and newspaper clippings, maps, posters and kits, microforms and CD ROMS. In addition, its audio-visual archive holds a large collection of moving image, recorded sound and photographic materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. The majority of items are the result of primary research funded by the AIATSIS Research Grants Program as well as items deposited by individuals, family members and organisations for safe-keeping and appropriate access. See website: <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/home>

How AQuA will Work

The aim is to offer a digital archive that is developed to international standards and compatible with existing platforms. ASSDA has been working with quantitative datasets for many decades and has well-established practices and policies in place. Given the nature of qualitative data and the ethical and interpretive challenges arising from qualitative data sharing, additional protocols will need to be established, as outlined later in this document.

What can be deposited?

The main function of AQuA is that it will archive qualitative data generated through social science research, broadly defined. What makes it distinct from other digitized, document-based holdings, such as those already established for Arts and Humanities scholars, is that it will specialize in primary data generated through the research process (i.e. through interviews or focus groups) rather than existing written texts or historical records. Some of these existing texts may end up in AQuA but usually as part of a larger data set based on primary data collection.

Data can be deposited in virtually any format, including document, audio and video files, as well as files using NVivo or other analytical software packages. A single dataset, for example, may include audio-recordings of interviews, written transcripts of those interviews and, in some cases, annotations or codings already undertaken. As outlined below, the researcher will be able to determine who can access these data, and under what conditions, and can set different access restriction on different forms of data. For example, access to written transcripts may be permitted, but original audio or video recordings could remain confidential and off limits. The integration of AQuA into the ASSDA network more broadly also means researchers using mixed methods combining quantitative and qualitative data will be able to keep their data together in the one archive.

In consulting with researchers, the question of what is seen to constitute data has been raised, especially by those working within an ethnographic tradition who often create fieldnotes from participant observation. On the one hand, written field notes often comprise a large and significant component of the data and would invariably need to be archived for the data to be useable. On the other hand, as various researchers have pointed out, they may also contain the personal recollections of researchers working in the field, who may prefer that they were not made public. One possible solution is to remove extracts from the data that make reference to the personal thoughts or feelings of the researcher, or to private observations that could cause offence or harm. The problem with this strategy, as researchers have argued, is that within this tradition of research, personal recollections are a core part of the data such that removing them will render the overall dataset meaningless. Where possible, such data will be archived in its entirety – including hand written field notes – although it may be subject to various access restrictions where some of the more personal material is available only to specially approved researchers.

Some additional data will also need to be submitted when data is deposited into an archive. This material performs two key functions. First, it offers an overview of the dataset for archiving purposes to assist with indexing, searching and browsing – what some refer to as ‘metadata’. In addition, it provides subsequent researchers with important contextual details that enable a more informed analysis of the data. One of the virtues of qualitative research is that it acknowledges the complexity and contingency

of social life by emphasising the importance of context in how people make meaning of their lives (Schwandt, 1994). Where possible, the details of this context need to be available to subsequent researchers undertaking their own analysis for the data. While there is debate among qualitative researchers about whether the provision of this additional data fully compensates for the loss of context often encountered in archived data, datasets need to be as complete as possible in order to render them meaningful to others. This additional data may include grant applications; a background to the study; research aims, objectives and hypotheses; information about data collection techniques and sampling strategies; copies of ethical clearance applications and guidelines (including confidentiality, consent and anonymity arrangements); copies of interview schedules; published reports and journal articles which outline research findings; and history of data ownership/copyright. At present, if highly detailed documentation is not available, ASSDA sends the depositor a list of questions asking for the most basic information, which researchers can answer in their own time. For qualitative data, however, where context is so important, these minimal requirements may need to be extended even though it is recognised that doing so will increase the work involved in preparing data for deposition.

Establishing a collections policy

In addition to the kinds of data incorporated in a single archived dataset, there is also the broader question of which projects, or which datasets, warrant inclusion in a national data archive. It is both unfeasible and undesirable for all projects to be archived and so there is a need for AQuA to develop a collections policy which sets out the criteria for selecting those that are suitable. In the UK, researchers with projects funded by the ESRC are required to offer their data for archiving although Qualidata may refuse if the data do not comply with the following criteria (see Corti and Backhouse, 2005). These offer a starting point for debates around the establishment of a similar set of criteria for AQuA.

- A high potential for re-analysis or comparative use.
- Accompanying information is sufficient to enable informed re-use.
- The research should be high quality and influential in its field.
- The life's work of a significant researcher.
- Complementary existing archived datasets, such as around particular topics of health, crime or social policy, which help enhance the collection.
- Datasets that are freely available for immediate re-use are more acceptable than ones with restrictions.
- Copyright, data protection and confidentiality issues have been addressed and should comply with existing laws.
- Data should be in a suitable format for archiving and dissemination. The UK data archive, for example, accepts only machine readable material and not audio cassettes or video tapes.
- The material should be in good physical condition and legible or audible. Hand written notes can be scanned but this is expensive and time consuming.
- Where possible, the dataset needs to be complete since missing data will undermine its integrity.
- Qualidata has also added additional criteria: the data should be based on national samples, and the dataset should involve mixed methods data.
- The Murray Research Centre in the US also adds that there should be a possibility, where practicable, of re-contact of participants for further follow-up of the sample.
- Longitudinal studies are also seen to have obvious value.

For ESRC datasets that are not formally archived, UKDA has recently established a self-archiving facility – known as UKDA-store – into which researchers can deposit their data for long-term preservation and storage. Registered researchers can upload a range of digital objects into the archive, including word documents, audio-visual materials and statistical data, and assign permissions to individuals and/or groups to access the data in the repository. This facility is not yet available through ASSDA but maybe developed some time in the future.

Preparing data for deposition

As well as compiling a complete dataset, including accompanying documentation, some additional preparatory work is often required before data are deposited. For example, it may be necessary for data to be made non-identifiable by having names and other identifying features removed from the text (see the discussion on research ethics for more detail on this). In some cases, pre-digital data may need to be converted to digital format, such that audio cassettes are converted to digital sound files, or video-recordings onto DVD, while handwritten fieldnotes or photographs need to be scanned. Unfortunately, AQuA will not be able to provide funding for researchers to deposit data with the archive, which may act as a deterrent for some. Increasingly, however, data exists in digital format in one way or another, so that even if an original audio-recording is not converted to digital format, a copy of the written transcript of that recording may be available electronically. With the increased use of digital recording devices by researchers, some data are now born digital and can be archived with little preparatory work. Table 1 below indicates the preferred formats for archived data as outlined by the Economic and Social Data Service in the UK.

Type of data	Preferred format for management back-ups and submission to data centres [archives]	Usual format for long-term preservation by data centres
Textual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain text • RTF or HTML • Software specific formats such as NUD*IST, NVivo and ATLAS.ti may be acceptable, but offer less long-term security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XML marked-up text according to an appropriate DTD or schema • RTF
Digital audio data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Waveform • MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3 (MP3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Waveform • Audio Interchange File Format (.aiff)
Digital video data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPEG-2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPEG
Digital image data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIFF 	
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PDF, RTF or HTML 	

Table 1. Preferred formats for archiving qualitative data (source, RELU, undated)

Although well-documented studies will be given a higher profile, AQuA will also try to cut down on the amount of time required by researchers, by sorting out the data and documentation for them, and providing a list of any information still needed. It will also advise on the state of the data, and how much work would be required to get it to an archival level. Further, the granting conditions of research funders, such as the ARC, that researchers deposit their data in an archive may not be mandated yet but

researchers are encouraged to factor in the cost of depositing into their grant proposal. AQuA can assist with this and, in future, provide training to researchers in preparing their data for deposition.

Sharing data and setting conditions for access

Aside from preserving datasets for historical posterity, one of the consequences of depositing data into AQuA is that the data can be made available to other researchers who may wish to analyse them. This occurs only under strict conditions, however, which will be determined by the researcher. Researchers may decide, for example, that they are only willing to share their data with other university researchers, or only if they approve of the purpose for which the data will be used.

At present, access conditions come in a series of standard forms already established by ASSDA, which researchers can select from. These are:

- a) There are no restrictions on access to the data or publication of results, and the depositor does not wish to be informed of the use being made of the data.
- b) The depositor wishes to be informed by the archive of use being made of the data, in order to comment on that use and make contact with colleagues of similar interests.
- c) The user is required to obtain the permission in writing of the original depositor of the data, or an authorised representative, before publishing any interpretation of such materials.
- d) The depositor wishes to be informed by the archive of each request to use the data in order to give or withhold permission.
- e) There are special access conditions to the data set in question.

In addition, an embargo period may be imposed. No access to the data would be permitted until after the date specified by the depositor. At the end of the embargo period, the data may be released under access conditions, which the depositor determines.

Depositors will be able to create access conditions to suit their particular concerns about how the data should be used in the future. For example, if respondents were informed that the data would be used for academic purposes only, researchers could stipulate that the data may only be made available to university employees. If they wish to ensure that other researchers cannot pre-empt their findings, they could stipulate that the data be made available only after they have had time to publish their results. Some researchers may require a written proposal from the potential secondary analyst so they can check for overlapping research questions, while others may ask to see any documents prior to publication. Some researchers, particularly those working closely with Indigenous and other such populations, or with industry partners, may wish to consult with participants or gatekeepers before granting approval. These conditions can be negotiated as required. Researchers will also be able to specify whether the archive contacts them directly for access permissions, or whether it acts on their behalf according to agreed guidelines. The benefit of the latter approach is that applications to access data can still be processed even if the original researcher goes out of contact, retires or dies.

Accessing data

Researchers wishing to access archived data will be able to browse a catalogue that conforms to international data documentation standards. Some data, such as background to the study, related

journal articles and other such material will also be downloadable to provide further information. Anyone wishing to go beyond this will need to register with AQuA and log on. Unrestricted datasets can be analysed online although researchers will need to complete relevant documentation if they wish to download a dataset.

The Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Inc (ACSPRI) has negotiated free access to ASSDA holdings (including AQuA) for all its members. These include researchers from all Australian Universities, as well as various government/other research organisations such as the Australian Institute for Family Studies, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and the Smith Family. A full listing of ACSPRI members can be found at www.acspri.org.au. Researchers from non-member organisations will be required to pay a \$1,000 administrative fee for each dataset.

If a dataset has restricted access conditions, users will need to make an application to AQuA which will be sent to the depositor for approval.

Intellectual property and copyright

The role of AQuA will be to facilitate the sharing of data through a safe and regulated facility. In doing so, ownership of data will not be transferred to AQuA but will remain with the original owner who grants AQuA permission to distribute data on his or her behalf (possibly subject to certain conditions and restrictions). It is important, therefore, that intellectual property of the data is fully identified so that permission to distribute that data is granted and to ensure copyright agreements are not breached.

Each institution may have its own statute on intellectual property but, usually, scholarly works such as books and journal articles are the property of the author although universities often have a license to use that material for education, research and teaching purposes. Research data generated by employees (such as academic staff) are generally seen as the intellectual property of the University, including those generated with a third party such as an industry partner, but students often retain intellectual property of any data they create unless alternative arrangements have been negotiated.

When archiving data, researchers will need to demonstrate that permission has been granted by the owner or creator of the data. In some cases, this may be achieved through the depositor signing an agreement on behalf of his or her institution. Frequently, however, the process may be more complex, particularly if the data are owned by a number of researchers from different institutions, or if the dataset contains material generated by third parties, such as industry partners. Research participants may also be in a position to exercise rights over their words and may ultimately refuse to agree to transfer copyright to the researcher. To assist researchers in negotiating these issues, AQuA will need to provide general guidelines on copyright and intellectual property in conjunction with research and research contracts agencies.

Data security

One of the principal advantages to researchers of depositing their data in AQuA is that it offers a long-term storage facility that will keep data secure. This security arises in two ways. First, in that data stored in AQuA will not become inaccessible through technological change or obsolescence, but will continue to be upgraded so they remain compatible with new technology. Second, data will be ingested from UQ

into a world class data storage system located in the Supercomputing facility at the ANU (ANUSF), which provides specialised technical expertise in data ingest, management and researcher access.

Data management plans

Alongside the move towards data archiving, funding agencies, institutions and research organisations are also requiring researchers to produce data management plans which provide details on what data is likely to be generated from a project and how that data will be managed. This includes questions about the ownership of research materials and data, their storage, their retention beyond the life of the project, and appropriate access to them by the research community (see NHMRC and ARC, 2007).

Data management is thus much broader than digital preservation and institutions such as universities are expected to have policies in place on the retention of materials and research data that are consistent with relevant legislation, ethical codes and disciplinary procedures. According to the NHMRC's Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, individual researchers are also required to manage their research data and primary materials in accordance with the policy of the institution, as follows (1997: Section 2.2):

- 2.6.1 Keep clear and accurate records of the research methods and data sources, including any approvals granted, during and after the research process.
- 2.6.2 Ensure that research data and primary materials are kept in safe and secure storage provided, even when not in current use.
- 2.6.3 Provide the same level of care and protection to primary research records, such as laboratory notebooks, as to the analysed research data.
- 2.6.3 Retain research data, including electronic data, in a durable, indexed and retrievable form.
- 2.6.5 Maintain a catalogue of research data in an accessible form
- 2.6.6 Manage research data and primary materials according to ethical protocols and relevant legislation.

While these guidelines merely provide a set of best practice principles for researchers to refer to, there is a growing expectation, not only that researchers will be able to identify, at the beginning of a research project, what plans they have in place for managing their data, but also that such plans should be submitted to funding agencies prior to the commencement of the project. Increasingly, such plans also include strategies for the preservation and sharing of data, via digital repositories, such as AQuA, Qualidata and other data archives. In the UK, for example, the Digital Curation Centre at the University of Edinburgh has provided a Data Management Plan Content Checklist based on its review of the data management requirements of leading UK research funders. In its draft template, it summarises the main issues that most research funders expect researchers to address at the application stage (Donnelly and Jones, 2009). These include:

1. Introduction and context: basic information such as title, summary and partners, plus the aims and purpose of the research.
2. Legal rights and ethical issues: who owns the intellectual property and copyright? What are the ethical and privacy issues and how will they be resolved?
3. Access, data sharing and re-use: how will the data be made available? What is the process for gaining access? Are there embargo periods?

4. Data collection methods: what does data comprise for the research? Has existing data been surveyed? Why does new data need to be created? How will it be generated?
5. Data standards: Explain the type of data (i.e. qualitative, textual, video). Which file format and platform will be used, and why.
6. Short-term storage and data management: where will the data be stored? How will data security be managed? How will access arrangements, permissions and embargos be applied?
7. Deposit and long-term preservation: what is the strategy for maintaining, curating and archiving the data? Where and how will it be archived? What related information will be deposited?

In the event that data management plans are required for Australian researchers, AQUA will work with both researchers and funding agencies to provide guidelines and best practice models as they relate to data archiving.

Issues to Consider in Archiving Qualitative Data

For many quantitative researchers, data archiving is now commonplace yet its application to qualitative data is not unproblematic and has stimulated much debate internationally about the feasibility and desirability of archiving and sharing qualitative data. Broadly, these concerns revolve around issues of research ethics, specifically informed consent and participant confidentiality; data security and access; intellectual property; and the enhanced insight into meaning that is gained from being involved in the data collection enterprise and which is subsequently lost in any secondary analysis. In some cases, these concerns can be addressed through the application of strict access conditions in which data are available to certain researchers, for certain purposes, on the approval of the depositor. Nevertheless, it is recognised that there are challenges to archiving qualitative data, which need to be worked through, and that this must be done in close collaboration with the qualitative research community. As we have discussed elsewhere (see Broom, Cheshire and Emmison, 2009), archiving is also beginning to stimulate broader debates about the nature and direction of qualitative research among researchers themselves, which we view as a positive outcome.

Ethical considerations

Most social science data are subject to confidentiality clauses and it is important that archiving does not compromise assurances made to research participants. Data should only be made available for access if certain conditions, such as obtaining informed consent, and protecting anonymity and confidentiality are met. Current debates around the feasibility and desirability of sharing qualitative data indicate that researchers are often reluctant to archive their data primarily because of ethical concerns regarding participants' confidentiality and informed consent (Corti, Day and Backhouse, 2000). These ethical dilemmas are present in all qualitative research with human participants but are seen to be compounded when data are made available to other researchers for unspecified, and presently unknown, purposes. In the section below, we outline the ethical challenges of archiving data for secondary analysis and identify ways in which these challenges might be addressed.

Requirements to destroy data

In most Australian research institutions, research with human participants is undertaken with reference to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research*, jointly developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. This statement provides guidelines to researchers and university ethical review boards for the ethical conduct of research with human subjects and the appropriate use of the data generated. While the National Statement is continuously revised to reflect advancements in research practices and ethical debates, including the deposition of data into an archive, feedback from researchers indicates that there is some discrepancy between the guidelines provided by the NHMRC and the decisions implemented at the university level.

As an example of this, researchers consistently argue that their university ethics committees are reluctant to approve ethical clearance applications unless assurances are made that data will be destroyed after a certain period of time. This appears to have emerged in response to earlier requirements that researchers keep their data for at least five years, which some have interpreted as a requirement that data be destroyed after five years. Such requirements are likely to inhibit acceptance of data archiving among the research community. More importantly, however, they also run counter to the

actual guidelines laid out in the revised 2007 edition of the National Statement which state that permission may be sought for participants to 'bank' their data for possible use in future research projects (see Chapter 3.2). According to the NHMRC, banked data may be deposited in a warehouse, similar to an archive or library (including ASSDA) and may be available for secondary analysis unless access is constrained by restrictions imposed by the depositor. Indeed, rather than recommend the destruction of research data, the NHMRC actively encourages the use of databanks and provides guidelines for the ethical use of banked data. Sections of these guidelines that are relevant to qualitative data archiving are copied below.

- 3.2.1 When planning a databank, researchers should clearly describe how their research data will be collected, stored, used and disclosed, and outline how that process conforms to this National Statement, particularly for the requirements for consent set out in paragraphs 2.2.14 to 2.2.18.
- 3.2.2 To promote access to the benefits of research, such data should be collected, stored and accessible in such a way that they can be used in future research projects.
- 3.2.3 Researchers' use of data from databanks must comply with the conditions specified by the providers of the data; in particular, any conditions on the identifiability of the data.
- 3.2.4 Where research involved linkage of data sets, approval may be given to the use of identifiable data to ensure that the linkage is accurate, even if consent has not been given for the use of identifiable data in research. Once linkage has been completed, identifiers should be removed from the data to be used in the research unless consent has been given for its identifiable use.
- 3.2.5 It is the duty of the custodian to ensure that the data are used responsibly and respectfully, and that the privacy of participants is safeguarded.
- 3.2.6 Whenever research using re-identifiable data reveals information that bears on the well-being of participants, researchers have an obligation to consider how to make that information available to the participants. Where individual notification is warranted, the custodian of the data will need to take all reasonable steps to re-identify those data.
- 3.2.7 In most situations, the custodian of data will be the individual researcher or agency who collected the information, or an intermediary such as a data warehouse [or archive] that manages data coming from a number of sources. In some cases, an independent custodian may be necessary....

In other words, the NRMRC supports the use of a data archive providing certain conditions relating to the ethical conduct of research are met, particularly imperatives for obtaining informed consent and maintaining participant confidentiality.

Informed consent

According to the NHMRC's National Statement, respect for human beings in the research context requires participation to be the result of choice made by participants. This means, not only that the choice to provide consent should be a voluntary one but, importantly, that it should be based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of both the proposed research and the implications of participation in it. This is the essence of *informed* consent. In addition to the usual requirements for informed consent involving human subjects, the deposition of data into an archive for possible future use by other researchers is an additional element of the research process for which consent is required.

There are several issues relating to informed consent that need to be addressed when considering archiving qualitative data.

First, that the potential for data archiving and sharing will be undermined if researchers do not obtain prior informed consent from research participants specifically for this purpose. In order to facilitate this, it is necessary for AQuA, along with national and university ethical review bodies, to provide clear guidelines on how informed consent from participants should be obtained for data to be archived for future unspecified, but carefully regulated, use. Researchers often argue that university ethical review committees are reluctant to approve ethical clearance applications unless they contain an explicit outline of how that data will be used, and for what purpose. In the recent 2007 version of the National Statement, however, the NHMRC clarifies its own position on this issue by adding a series of statements on consent to future use of data in research, including permission for data to be deposited in an archive. Traditionally, consent has been viewed as 'specific': limited to use within the specific project under consideration. Yet, the NHMRC recognises that consent can also be:

- Extended: given for the use of data in future research projects that are (a) an extension of, or closely related to the original research project; or (b) in the same general area of research (such as ethnographical or epidemiological research); or
- Unspecified: given for the use of data in any future research.

In terms of extended or unspecified consent, the NHMRC makes the following statements:

2.2.14 The necessarily limited information and understanding about research for which extended or unspecified consent is given can still be adequate for the purpose of consent.

2.2.15 Extended or unspecified consent may sometimes need to include permission to enter the original data or tissue into a databank or tissuebank.

2.2.16 When unspecified consent is sought, its terms and wide-ranging implications should be clearly explained to potential participants. When such consent is given, its terms should be clearly recorded.

2.2.17 Subsequent reliance, in a research proposal [i.e. by future researchers], on existing unspecified consent should describe the terms of that unspecified content.

These statements provide a way forward for researchers to obtain clearance from university ethics committees for research projects that include data archiving, even when they are seeking extended or unspecified consent from participants. As paragraph 2.2.16 points out, however, this means that researchers need to explain clearly to participants the possibility of future use of the data by approved researchers for approved, but nevertheless unspecified, purposes, as well as the possible implications for participants arising from this. This includes explaining the application of access conditions to restrict the use of data to approved researchers only, the possible use of that data by those researchers, and strategies for securing participant confidentiality, both by the original researcher and subsequent users. It would also involve extending the Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Forms to include a section on data archiving and future use, such as the form illustrated in Figure 1. Other means will also need to be developed, particularly in cases where the use of verbal, rather than written, informed consent is considered more appropriate.

A second issue arising from our discussions with researchers was the suggestion that some groups or populations would be less likely to agree to participate in research if they knew their data would be

accessible by others. These included vulnerable groups; those engaging in illegal or anti-social activities such as drug taking; those participating in research on particularly sensitive or personal topics; elite groups, such as politicians, for whom confidentiality may be an issue; and organisations such as schools and hospitals where researcher access is already becoming difficult and subject to complex negotiations with gatekeepers. Co-funders of research – such as industry partners in projects funded through ARC Linkage Grants – were also viewed as likely to experience discomfort or reluctance over the concept of data archiving, particularly if access was granted to the original research team on the basis of a pre-existing relationship of trust that would be absent with any subsequent researcher (see also Corti, Day and Backhouse, 2000). Researchers also pointed out that some vulnerable groups already have difficulty in conceptualising the consequences of what they are consenting to when they agree to participate in a research project, and that this problem would be compounded when faced with the added complexities associated with extended and unspecified consent.

These concerns are all significant and need to be worked through fully in order to build up trust and confidence in the research community with respect to qualitative archiving. As part of this process, AQuA needs to work with researchers and ethics committees to develop further guidelines on how extended or unspecified informed consent might be obtained by researchers for data to be archived and shared with other approved researchers in the future. It also needs to generate information on the purposes of data archiving in a way that can be explained to research participants and funders, and to outline the mechanisms in place to regulate data access and uphold research ethics. At the same time, researchers need to discuss issues of data preservation with their research participants, not only to ensure they are kept fully informed of how their data could be used, but also to ensure they have a voice in making those decisions. It is also important to note that data can never be accepted into an archive unless the depositor explicitly states whether informed consent for data deposition is required, and is able to demonstrate that it has been obtained. While it is certainly possible that such permission will be more difficult to obtain for research using sensitive or confidential data, we concur with the UKDA position that it should not be dismissed as being impossible (UKDA, 2009: 18).

Sample extensive consent form for interviews

- I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
- I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and audio recorded *[other forms of participation can be listed]*.
- I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part.
- Select only one of the next two options:*
- I would like my name used where what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.
- I do not want my name used in this project.
- I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.
- I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs but my name will not be used unless I requested it above.
- I agree for the data I provided to be archived at *[More detail can be provided here so that decisions can be made separately about audio, transcripts, etc.]*
- I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of that data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.
- I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs according to the terms I have specified in this form.
- I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to [name of researcher].

Name of Participant Signature Date

Researcher Signature Date

Contact details for further information: Names, phone, email addresses, etc.

Figure 1. Sample consent forms for interviews (Source, UKDA, 2009).

Obtaining informed consent retrospectively

The issues described above generally apply to new research projects only where informed consent to archive and re-use data is obtained at the beginning of the research process. However, since the purpose of AQuA is to preserve nationally important datasets, and to make them available to other scholars for teaching or research purposes, it is desirable that existing or completed projects are also archived. One of the difficulties with this task is the likely absence of prior informed consent from participants for data to be archived for extended or unspecified use. While this does not prevent AQuA playing an important role as a data storage and protection facility, it does preclude other researchers from accessing the data. As a result, it is important for AQuA to work with individual researchers to identify the best ways of managing this problem, using a range of possible strategies. These may include:

- Attempting to re-contact participants to obtain retrospective informed consent for data archiving. In the UK, researchers have generally found such attempts to be successful (see Corti, Day and Backhouse, 2000). Similarly the Finnish Social Science Data Archive has recently encountered considerable success in re-contacting research participants to secure informed consent for archiving where such consent was not sought at the time of study. Indeed, of the 169 interviewees re-contacted, only four declined to have their data archived for other researchers to access, with the majority granting consent because they wished to contribute to the advancement of knowledge (Kuula, 2009). Nevertheless, such an approach is not always possible, especially if contact has been lost over time. Moreover, the task of re-contacting participants may be fairly time-consuming and researchers may, quite justifiably, consider it too onerous to be worthwhile.
- Setting a period of closure or embargo on the data so that it can immediately be preserved but will not become accessible to other researchers in the short to medium term.

Some of the earlier classical studies may have been completed before informed consent forms were considered standard practice. In such cases, data archiving does not constitute any breach of prior agreements between the researcher and the research participants and may be approved by the researcher following careful consideration.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality involves protecting and safeguarding the privacy and identity of research participants. This generally involves two related elements. First, providing assurances to participants that any information provided is confidential and will not be used without agreement; and second, providing anonymity (where required) by concealing people's identities so that they are not exposed to any harm or embarrassment through being linked to anything deemed confidential or controversial.

The standard procedure for maintaining confidentiality in qualitative research involves rendering data non-identifiable by removing all identifying information from the final research account. This is often achieved by substituting pseudonyms for real names of people and places, and/or by removing other contextual features that may reveal their identity. However, researchers already acknowledge that such techniques are imperfect. For example, while anonymisation may prevent participants from being identified by the general reader, it is much more difficult to maintain 'internal confidentiality' (Tolich, 2004) which prevents research participants from being able to identify one another. This is also true for participants who are easily identifiable by the positions they hold, especially if those positions are specialised or publicly recognisable. Moreover, the emphasis that qualitative research places on understanding the context in which human action and interpretation take place means that participants can often be identified through their narratives, even when names have been changed.

Data archiving complicates these issues around confidentiality further. While researchers may be comfortable with anonymisation in the research outputs (such as reports and articles), they tend to analyse data in its original form in order to achieve a full appreciation of the life world. Making this data available to others means that participants will be readily identifiable to them unless the depositor attempts to render data non-identifiable before it is archived. This could occur in a number of ways:

- Substituting real names for pseudonyms in written transcripts. An unedited version of transcripts, along with a log file of all substitutions, would also be provided to the archive but stored separately and restricted from general access. Where possible, the same pseudonyms should be applied as those already used in existing publications.
- Removing reference to other identifying information such as place names, addresses, occupations, workplaces etc. Where possible, these should be replaced with generic terms such as 'regional city', 'health worker' etc.
- Restricting access to anonymised written transcripts only, so that audio or video-files are not available, which are much more difficult to make non-identifiable.
- Digital manipulation of audio and image files (such as image blurring) can be used to remove identifying information although the procedure is expensive for large quantities of data and may undermine the integrity of the data, rendering it useless for detailed analysis.

Tampering with audio or video files to disguise voices and faces and whiting-out or deleting sections of hard copy text that are potentially identifiable are not recommended. Even then, amendments would only be made to a copy of the file and not the master, which would be maintained in original form under closed access.

In focus groups, researchers expressed concern about some of these techniques, suggesting they do little to address the problem of confidentiality for several reasons. One was the simple fact of the additional work this would create for the depositor who would need to make all data non-identifiable and not simply those parts that appeared in published form. While AQuA will not have the resources to undertake this task on behalf of researchers, it can assist them in factoring these costs into original grant applications so that anonymisation can be planned from the outset and occur as the study progresses rather than being delayed to the completion of the project.

A second concern relates to the loss of context that is likely to arise from attempts to make data non-identifiable. As we outline later, one of the main criticisms of data sharing expressed by qualitative researchers is that archived data are removed from the context in which they were generated, which increases the likelihood of misinterpretation by subsequent researchers. While AQuA will discourage excessive editing or deletion of data, even careful attempts at anonymisation may diminish the completeness and utility of the data further. It has also been pointed out that concealing the identities of people or places for archiving purposes will be pointless if they have already been identified in work published by the original researcher (Parry and Mauthner, 2004).

What these debates suggest is that data anonymisation is not a straightforward solution to confidentiality issues and may need to be used in combination with a range of other strategies (see Corti, Day and Backhouse, 2000), including a re-examination of the use of confidentiality clauses in qualitative research. Indeed, there is no single way to manage the confidentiality challenges of archiving

data although a combination of the following strategies could be applied in cases where concerns over confidentiality arise:

- Obtaining informed consent from participants for data archiving and sharing.
- Re-contacting participants, where possible, to obtain consent for data archiving and re-use.
- Anonymising data, where possible, by removing or changing names of people, places etc.
- Setting access conditions that restrict access to the data to approved researchers only.
- In some cases, an embargo period may be imposed although closing access to data should be used sparingly.

An alternative option is that researchers deposit data in their original format with most identifying features included (apart from obvious identifiers such as name and address) but provide a set of guidelines for data users to follow in anonymising the data for research outputs such as publications or presentations. Researchers wanting to access this data would be required to agree to various terms and conditions, which have legal status. The advantage of this approach is that the data are kept intact, thereby allowing users to analyse the data with all contextual features present. It also overcomes the problem of researchers investing considerable time and energy into de-identifying the data prior to deposition. Nevertheless, many depositors would be uncomfortable with this solution because it places a great deal of faith in data users that they will follow these guidelines and not deliberately or inadvertently reveal identifying details of the participants. Strict access policies may partly help overcome this concern.

The Epistemological Challenges of Data Sharing

While few researchers would be uncomfortable with an archive for data preservation purposes, the suggestion that data can be picked up and re-used by different researchers not involved in the original data collection process is rather more contentious, even when ethical and other such issues are addressed. Such concerns stem from the philosophical roots of qualitative research and the suggestion that research data derived from interpretive approaches typically involve subjectivities and epistemologies that do not lend themselves to data archiving (Hammersley, 1997; Parry and Mauthner, 2004). There are three key elements to this argument.

The constructed nature of qualitative data

The first relates to the constructed nature of social reality for qualitative research, including the data generated through the research process. Researchers argue that to deposit data in an archive, ready for others to pick up and use, is to deny the constructed nature of research data by stripping it of any prior meaning or interpretation. Hammersley (1997), for example, argues that the idea of a databank reverts to foundationalist assumptions that knowledge and facts are pre-existing and lying around as 'common currency' ready to be collected, rather than being co-created and value-driven.

The significance of this construction process is that subsequent analyses of archived data may differ from those undertaken by the original researcher, partly because an alternative theoretical or conceptual framework is used, or because subsequent researchers have only partial access to the whole range of data on which an original interpretation was based. For example, access to a typed interview transcript may give researchers a sense of what was said during an interview, but if access to the audio- or video-recording of that interview is restricted, they cannot know *how* it was said. This, as researchers point out, raises the possibility of subsequent analyses being mis-placed or indefensible or, worse, that their own initial analyses are regarded as wrong.

In methodological terms, debates of this nature create a distinction in qualitative research between analysis of qualitative data (by the original researcher) and secondary analysis (by a subsequent researcher), such that the original analysis is deemed authentic and true and the *re*-analysis of that data, via an archive, is partial and false. As Hammersley (1997) points out, this will ultimately set limits on the usability of archives if the data are not viewed as valid.

As a consequence, Moore (2007: para 2.1) challenges this distinction between primary and secondary data analysis by asking: 'do multiple turns to, and returns to, qualitative data constitute something 'new' to be termed reuse of data, or secondary analysis of data'? Her answer is that they do not (see also Fielding, 2004). Claims to epistemic transcendence by the original researcher as one who 'knows best' are difficult to justify within an interpretivist paradigm given that primary data are also contingent, partial and incomplete, and frequently create interpretive problems even for the original researcher (Fielding 2004). Some researchers acknowledged this point during focus groups and expressed discomfort at claims that 'no one else can understand my data', recognising that the reputation of qualitative research is likely to be undermined if it is seen to generate data that are so idiosyncratic and particularistic that no one else is capable of making sense of them (Broom, Cheshire and Emmison, 2009).

Moreover, even during re-use, data are continuously recontextualised and reconstructed when incorporated into a new project, which prompts Moore to suggest that secondary analysis should more usefully be viewed as *primary analysis of a different order of data*. Nevertheless, this perspective is seen as problematic by Mauthner and Parry (2010 forthcoming) who argue that while it is useful to draw attention to the contemporary context of archived data, and to the relationship of the secondary analyst with that data, the effect is that the 'primary' context of data, as understood by the original researcher, is no longer considered. Thus, secondary data analysts are encouraged to treat data as ontologically separate from the original researchers and contexts that generated them. As a result, Parry and Mauthner raise serious questions, not about data archiving per se, but on the philosophical or scientific terms on which qualitative researchers are being asked to participate in these practices (2010 forthcoming).

The importance of context: the need to be there

Leading on from this, a second, related, issue is the claim by interpretivist social scientists that that our knowledge of the world is partial and situationally constrained and that if we are to understand how people make sense of their lives, we need to understand the specific contexts in which they do so. Archiving data disembods them from the broader context and separates them from important contextual clues that allow for correct interpretation. Without this broader contextual knowledge, subsequent researchers are again said to run the risk of 'misinterpreting' the data. During focus groups, researchers spoke of the need to 'be there'; referring to the importance of witnessing, first hand, the broader contextual clues, such as facial gestures, body language, silent-exchanges and other forms of non-verbal communication, in order to make sense of what occurred.

In an attempt to resolve this problem in the UK, Qualidata has sought to encourage researchers to deposit additional contextual material alongside the data to ensure subsequent attempts at interpretation are contextually derived. Such materials form part of the 'metadata' described earlier, which may include copies of interview schedules, ethical clearance applications or sampling frameworks. Nevertheless, this has prompted further criticism from British researchers (see Mauthner, Parry and Backett-Milburne, 1998) who argue that the inclusion of contextual background material (metadata) does little to overcome the epistemological problems of re-using data. Instead, they suggest that background documentation to the research should not be treated merely as 'background data' but rather as data in their own right (p.742) and that the differentiation of this background data from interview or observation data is a false distinction.

There are no easy answers to this issue although three further points need to be made. The first is that Mauthner et al (1998) may be correct to reject any distinction in data archiving between field data and background data since it reverts back to unhelpful dualisms between constructed or interpretive data (field data) on the one hand and objective, value free data (background data) on the other. Instead, it is more useful to treat all archived material as forms of data which are open to (re)interpretation by all potential users.

A further observation is that epistemological debates of this kind are neither new, nor restricted to so-called secondary users of primary data, although they are intensified by the prospect of data archiving. Some researchers reflected on this point during focus groups, noting that the increased use of team-based research, or of relying upon research assistants or postgraduate students to undertake data collection, creates similar problems of 'not having been there' for researchers interpreting data they did

not produce themselves. However, the existing relationship between members of a research team was seen to reduce the disconnect between fieldwork and meaning-making, whereas in the context of archiving this relationship between data producer and sense-maker is viewed as entirely absent.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that not all forms of qualitative data are generated by 'being there' in the way that occurs with interviewing or participant observation. Thus, for some kinds of data or particular modes of analysis, claims to additional insights from being there, and concerns over the inability of subsequent researchers to access those insights, are neither necessary nor valid. For example, conversation analysis, derived from an ethnomethodological tradition, analyses 'naturally occurring' data which have not been generated by the researcher and do not, therefore, invest the role of the researcher with the same significance as more conventional approaches to qualitative research tend to attract (see Broom, Cheshire and Emmison, 2009 forthcoming).

The role of the researcher in qualitative research

A final issue in the epistemological challenges of archiving qualitative data is the acknowledgement that qualitative data are *co-constructed* through the interactions of the researcher and research participants so that the researcher becomes integral to the research process. In this sense, the subjectivities of the researcher are often foregrounded rather than eliminated, for they are understood to have influenced the data collection and analysis. This is not the case with all forms of interpretive social science, as argued above, but, where it does arise, it creates additional challenges for archiving. One is the question of what actually constitutes data, described earlier, when the personal thoughts and recollections of the researcher find their way into the fieldnotes. Treating them as private and unsuitable for sharing may run counter to the epistemological positioning of the researcher as intricately embedded in the data collection process and create further problems for interpretation, while including them can cause harm or embarrassment to the researcher and/or research participants.

Researchers also described how the co-construction of qualitative data occurs through the establishment of relations of trust with research participants that are built up during the course of the project. In many cases, the richness of data is due to the rapport developed with research participants and gatekeepers, particularly in research of a sensitive or highly personal nature. While focus group members felt that participants would be less likely to consent to the research if the data were to be used by others they did not know or trust, they were also concerned that even if consent was granted, the potential for others to use this data for unspecified reasons may breach this trust, particularly if subsequent analyses portrayed participants in a negative light. Imposing conditions of access onto data may reduce this concern for researchers but there may also be cases where decisions over access need to be made collaboratively between the researcher and research participants.

A Culture of not Sharing Data?

It has been suggested that the reluctance of qualitative researchers to archive data for access by others is derived as much from the absence of any culture of data sharing in the qualitative research community as it is from any concerns over research ethics and epistemology. The image of the solitary researcher collecting and analysing his or her own data did appear to underpin much of the opposition to qualitative data archiving articulated in the focus groups, even though some researchers reflected on this ideal as neither desirable or realistic in every case.

When attempting to tease out this general reluctance to data sharing, we identified two main concerns which are likely to persist even if the ethical, practical and methodological barriers to archiving can be overcome. As Travers (2010 forthcoming) points out, these concerns are often more difficult to articulate but may be fundamental in understanding why researchers are generally unwilling to deposit data. The first is that archiving is seen to be associated with a managerialist and audit culture that has begun to pervade higher education in recent decades, and that it will place an additional administrative burden on researchers unless a commensurate level of resources is provided to assist with this process. Such complaints have been targeted at Qualidata in the UK, which some researchers suggest was set up by the Economic Social and Research Council as part of its drive for cost-effectiveness, value for money and increased accountability of 'public money' (see Moore, 2007)¹. While researchers must, and do, accept this need for public accountability of research funding, there is also a sense that archiving must be driven by intellectual and methodological imperatives. There is a risk that AQuA may come to attract similar criticisms of managerialism although it is expected that the active involvement and leadership of social science researchers in AQuA and ASSDA more broadly will help dismiss them.

The second unarticulated concern among qualitative researchers is the possibility that depositing their data for others to access will open up their research practices to surveillance and criticism. Since intellectual critique and debate are a core feature of the advancement of knowledge, this hesitation among qualitative researchers is not a sign of any general unwillingness to submit their ideas or methods to external validation. Instead, it derives from their view of qualitative research as a personal endeavour – largely due to the significant personal and emotional involvement of the researcher in the construction of data (including interactions with research participants and general conduct in the field) – and a corresponding fear that others may scrutinise something so personal and declare it inferior.

¹ According to UKDA, Qualidata was set up with two purposes in mind. The first was a salvage operation: to rescue the most significant material created by research from previous years, while the second was to work with ESRC and the ESRC Data Archive to ensure that data from current and future projects would be preserved in the future (Corti and Backhouse, 2005).

The Consultation Process: How to Respond

It has already been noted that the development of AQuA, and the move towards data archiving and sharing more broadly, needs to be underpinned by full, open consultation with the research community. To this end, the AQuA team welcomes written submissions from individual researchers; research teams, centres and institutes; disciplinary associations; higher education institutions; funding agencies and other relevant parties responding to the issues and debates raised in this paper. Submissions may cover a range of topics although please also consider the following questions:

1. Do you have any prior experience of data archiving, either through accessing archived data or depositing material of your own?
2. What are the perceived barriers to qualitative data archiving in terms of your own area of work?
3. What conditions would need to be in place for you to feel comfortable depositing your data into an electronic archive?
4. What kind of preparation would your data need before it was ready for data archiving?
5. Would digital data archiving change the way you conduct your research (in terms of project design, methods, ethical clearance etc)? If so, in what way?
6. Would you consider accessing data through the archive?
7. Are there any classical qualitative studies that you would like to see preserved through an archive such as AQuA. If so, please identify them.
8. Would you be willing to participate in further consultation with AQuA, such as by joining an expert advisory panel? If so, please provide your details separately.

Submissions should be emailed to:

The Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA – AQuA)
assda.admin@anu.edu.au

The deadline for submissions is 26th February 2010

Please note that all submissions will be published on the ASSDA website at <http://www.assda.edu.au>

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Attachment A. List of Members of the Qualitative Reference Group

Dr Lynda Cheshire	Director of AQuA
Stuart Hungerford	VO Services Project Manager
Karen Dennison	ASSDA National Manager
Dr Alex Broom	AQuA, The University of Sydney (academic support)
A/Prof Michael Emmison	AQuA, The University of Queensland (academic support)
Melanie Spallek	UQ Archivist
Gavan McCarthy	Director, UoM Node
A/ Prof Julie McLeod	UoM Node (academic support)
Rachel Tropea	UoM Archivist
Dr Alex Byrne	Director, UTS Node (ATSIDA)
Gabrielle Gardiner	UTS Node
Dr Toby Burrows	UWA Node
Dr Len Smith	ANU (ATSIDA academic support)