CONSULTING AND/OR PHOTOGRAPHING ARCHIVAL MATERIAL (E.G. WITH RESTRICTED ACCESS)

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1. Who is this guidance for?

Researchers consulting material held in archives may want to view, and photograph, sensitive material that is ordinarily closed to public access. Archives should be able to provide information about the process involved in applying to view restricted material, and researchers should familiarise themselves with the archives’ rules and regulations, and the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.¹ It is important to note that archives are under no obligation to allow researchers to photograph restricted material. This guidance is designed for researchers who have obtained permission, from the relevant data controller, to view and/or photograph sensitive archival material.

2. Steps to take prior to visiting the archives

It is important to allow plenty of time for requests to view material with restricted access to be processed by archives (at least a month, sometimes longer). Please also allow 30 days for your CUREC 1A research ethics application (if applicable).

Depending on the material being requested, archives may need to approach external data depositors before granting access to restricted material. This can explain why researchers may find that certain restricted collections are made available for consultation more quickly than others. It is important to be aware that some archives require researchers to provide references as part of their application process.

If researchers wish to photograph restricted material it is important to disclose this as part of any section 33 application. Archives are likely to have their own policies about whether they permit photographing of restricted material. When applying to view and photograph restricted material it is important to detail how safely these photographs will be stored once they have been taken. If an archive has decided not to allow researchers

¹ Please also see our quick data protection checklist (accessed 18 June 2018)
to photograph restricted material it may be still be possible to view the material and take
notes.

3. How to handle the data when at the archives

For the purposes of your research ethics application (usually via a CUREC 1A
application), when photographing restricted material, it is important that no identifying
data is captured. Similarly, when taking written notes relating to restricted material it is
important not to make notes of any names or other personal identifiers.

Before taking photographs, it may be necessary to conceal certain parts of the
documents to ensure that personal details are not photographed. If this is necessary, it is
important to ensure that the process of concealing personal details does not damage the
documents. Researchers should consult the relevant archivists about the most
appropriate way of concealment.

4. How to handle the data once you have left the archive

Once restricted materials have been photographed, or associated notes have been
taken, researchers have a responsibility to ensure that photographs are stored, and
transferred between devices, as securely as possible. Photographs, and any
accompanying notes, must be kept confidential, and must not be shared with others.
Please only use encrypted devices, such as encrypted USB sticks, smartphones,
cameras and laptops. The number of devices on which such data is stored should be
kept to a minimum.

Although researchers may want to take photographs on their (encrypted and password-
protected) smart phones, it is important that the data is not uploaded to devices, such as
laptops and PCs, through third-party software such as iCloud or DropBox. This is
because the University of Oxford has no control over how third parties handle this data.

In order to minimize the risk of data being inadvertently shared with third parties,
researchers wishing to transfer photographs between devices – irrespective of whether
they were taken on a digital camera or a smart phone – will need to download the
photographs directly to the device. It is important that the device on which the
photographs are stored is encrypted.

Researchers using computers provided by the University of Oxford are encouraged to
contact their faculty IT Support Staff who can ensure that their machine is covered by
Whole Disk Encryption. For researchers using a private computer there are other
available solutions like Bitlocker (Windows), Filevault (OSX), or Truecrypt. For further
details, please see Research Data Oxford's advice on storage and backup and IT
Services's guidance on encryption.

Finally, it is important to ensure that any photographs taken of restricted archival material
are securely backed up using the University's HFS backup service. Backing up data can
protect researchers against the accidental loss of data, corruption, hardware and
operating system crashes. Backing up University work-related data on a regular basis
helps mitigate this issue by allowing researchers to restore a previous version if
necessary.
Further information

- Information on the CUREC application process
- Information Commissioner’s Office:
  - Guide to data protection
  - GDPR exemptions
- Oxford Information Security website
  - How to encrypt laptops and other devices
  - How to secure mobile devices
- Oxford IT Services: how to register for Oxford’s HFS backup service
- Oxford University research data website
- Social Research Association Guidelines