

## INTRODUCTION

One of the central objectives of Timescapes was to build a specialist resource of Qualitative Longitudinal (QL) data for secondary use, both in research and teaching. Comprising rich, multi-media data drawn from the core empirical and archiving projects, the Archive was developed in collaboration with the UK Data Archive and follows procedures and guidelines established there (Van den Eynden, 2011), as well as relevant international archiving standards. In this guide we provide a brief overview of the Timescapes Archive, focusing first on explaining its stakeholder model. We present a summary of the contents of the Archive, including the scope for extending the holdings through our affiliation scheme, and explain how to register to use the Archive, and search, browse and download data from it. Timescapes has been dedicated to advancing ethical data sharing: we adopted a stakeholder approach to ethical archiving, which enabled us to take the needs of primary and secondary researchers and research participants into account in the development of the resource. The theme of ethical archiving is threaded through this guide, and is explored in some detail in methods guide no. 18.

## BACKGROUND

Over the past two decades significant advances have occurred in the archiving and re-use of qualitative data in the UK (Bishop and Neale, 2010; Irwin and Winterton, 2011). Despite these advances, in 2007 qualitative datasets held nationally were under-utilised, while very few QL datasets were available for re-use. A discernible gap was identified between the ethos of re-use and the actual practices of qualitative researchers, while discussions around archiving tended to be polarised around the differing priorities of archivists and researchers. The UK National Data Strategy identified the need to co-ordinate and make better use of research resources, and to embed secondary data use more effectively within social science methodology (ESRC, 2009).

## KEY POINTS

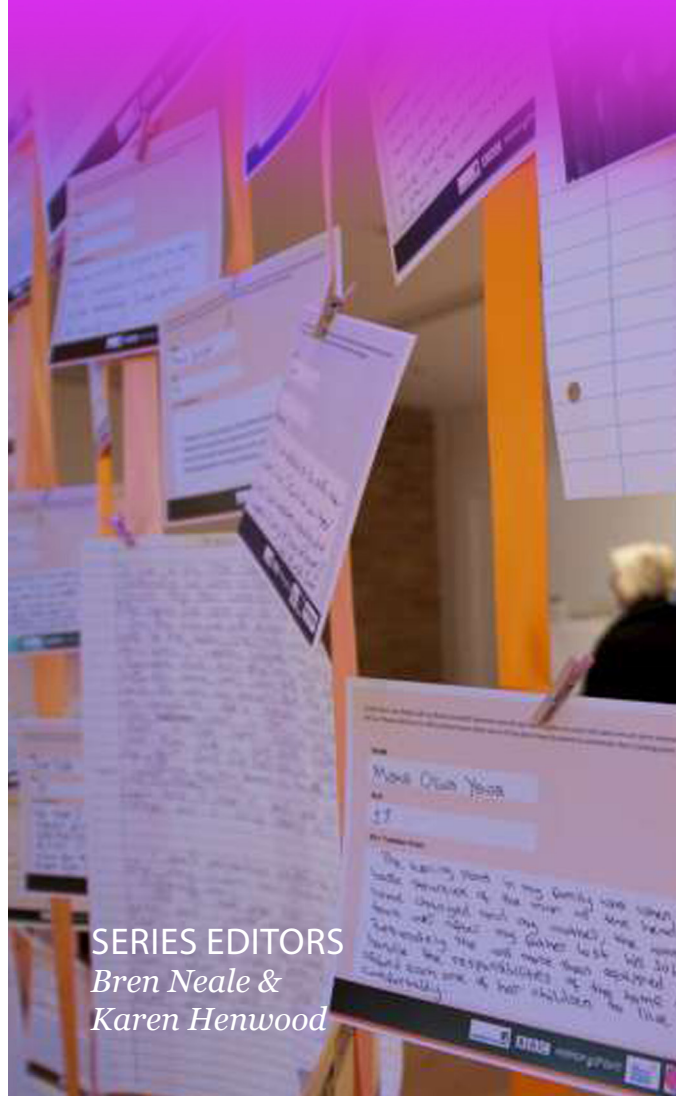
- The stakeholder model brought research and archiving, and primary and secondary longitudinal research into closer alignment
- As an autonomous satellite, the Archive bridged specialist research communities and generic national data facilities
- Distinctive features of QL data—including its provisionality—required bespoke curation practices
- Early attention to data management resulted in a very high rate of success of archiving data, overcoming major challenges of format, ethics, and sensitive content
- The desire of affiliated projects to create thematically related datasets was an effective incentive to share data, irrespective of funders' policies.

ISSN 2049-9248 (Online)

# TIMESCAPES METHODS GUIDES SERIES 2012 Guide No. 16

## The Timescapes Archive: An Introduction

*Libby Bishop &  
Bren Neale*



SERIES EDITORS  
*Bren Neale &  
Karen Henwood*

Timescapes developed out of this strategy. Our remit was to create a specialist resource of QL data for research and teaching purposes, and to explore ways of sharing and re-using the resource across and beyond our network of projects.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND PRACTICE

### Strategic Development

At the outset it was clear that specialist modes of curation would be needed if we were to build a resource of QL data during the lifetime of the Timescapes Initiative. The reasons for this relate to the distinctive nature of QL data and metadata (documentation about the dataset), and the complex processes through which QL data is generated, used and re-used by primary researchers (see Neale and Bishop, (2010) for a more detailed discussion). Key among these factors is that QL projects are often the product of individual or small team scholarship that can last over many years, sometimes decades. The originating teams control and have exclusive access to the sample populations that make up a study, and determine how and when they are followed up over time. The ethical challenges of protecting participant confidentiality are often heightened in QL research, since the risk of disclosure may increase over time (see methods guide no. 18). The elongated time frames mean that projects may have a provisional feel; they are never quite finished, both in terms of the potential for further data generation, and the endless possibilities for complex primary analysis and 'reworking' data to produce new insights. QL researchers, then, have long term commitments to their projects, which may run over considerable periods of time and with no clear end point at which archiving might traditionally occur. All of these factors may militate against the archiving and sharing of the data.

Of equal significance, QL data are gathered by researchers to address particular research questions; they are engaged in primary analysis and endeavouring to contribute new knowledge. The push to archive for the common good – particularly for the benefit of secondary users – may, therefore, be at odds with the primary researchers' obligation to produce new knowledge from their data. This was a particular challenge in Timescapes, where creating, archiving and re-using data resources in a short time frame were all requirements of our funding, and yet the teams were engaged in the open ended timeframes of QL enquiry. Whatever the ethos surrounding qualitative data re-use, these issues have important implications for the timing and nature of archiving, the resources needed by primary teams for data preparation tasks, and the nature of the interface between primary and secondary research.

### The Stakeholder Model

In order to address these challenges we developed an innovative stakeholder model of archiving, with the aim

of bringing research and archiving, and primary and secondary longitudinal research into closer and more productive alignment. Based on collaborative curation and dissemination with researchers, the model involves taking into account and working across the sometimes conflicting needs of research participants, primary and secondary researchers, archivists and funders.

Given the long term commitment of QL researchers to their projects, it was essential to encourage data deposit and sharing during the life time of a prospective study. In this way, archiving can become an integral part of the research process, built in at the design stage, rather than an administrative task that is 'tacked on' to the end of a project (Neale and Bishop, 2012).

Data were generated and organised for archiving as well as for primary use, including consent for archiving. Crucially, Timescapes provided support for researchers in developing this work. Similar procedures for data deposit are now being formalised through the recommendation for data management plans for all projects funded by UK Research Councils (RCUK, 2012). But the benefits of a collaborative model go well beyond compliance with policies. Firstly, researchers were in the best position to provide rich and descriptive documentation that provides important context and is aligned to the requirements of temporal analysis (Hadfield, 2010). Secondly, Timescapes depositors were encouraged to re-use data they have generated and link these to related data as their research progresses, thus researchers had a further stake in how the data in the Archive is used and by whom. Thirdly, the Archive and research teams consulted in key areas. For example, the Archive offers restricted levels of access for data that are highly sensitive or un-anonymised; their use depends on permission from the originating team. In this way, the Archive enabled the curation of data that might otherwise have remained hidden and encouraged a consultative process between primary and secondary users. In essence the Archive builds on a collaborative and personalised mode of data sharing, which is one of the main ways that qualitative researchers choose to share their data in practice (Bishop and Neale, 2010).

### Scope and Holdings of the Archive

The Timescapes Archive was developed over a three-year period and opened to users in mid 2010. It is a satellite of the UK Data Archive, comprising rich digital, multi-media holdings of QL data. The resource forms part of an institutional repository (LUDOS) at the University of Leeds, and conforms to international archiving standards (OAIS, 2010). It was designed and developed in collaboration with the UK Data Archive and the Timescapes Archiving project (Making the Long View). In order to fashion a resource and service that was in tune with the analytical needs of researchers, our project teams were consulted on technical design, data discovery and data access functions and the templates and protocols for deposit and re-use (Bishop, 2009b). Currently some functionality is limited by the

propriety software (DigiTool) that was used for the technical platform; subject to further funding, refinements to the user interface and improved functionality will be achieved through migration to a new software platform.

The broad definition of QL enquiry - research conducted through or in relation to time - allows for the inclusion of retrospectively gathered life history data, as well as data that is prospectively gathered to track lives as they unfold. To date, the resource contains data from eight core Timescapes projects that span the life course: three projects on young people (one of these is the core Archive project, Making the Long View), three on aspects of parenting and working lives, and two on later life. These projects have produced a series of interlinked datasets that track individuals and family groups over time, exploring the dynamics of personal relationships and identities as they unfold. Heritage data from earlier phases of several projects form a valuable core within the Archive holdings and extend its historical reach.

Currently the Archive has ingested data from approximately 225 participants across the core projects, with data from a further 80 participants in preparation – a total of nearly 1500 data files, including transcripts, visual and audio data, drawings, timelines, diaries and field notes. The majority of the data are textual, encompassing interviews, focus groups, observational notes, and so on. However, there is also much visual data, such as timelines, collages, network diagrams, relationship maps, photographs, and video, much of it generated by participants. Audio recordings are also available.

The data are complemented by extensive documentation, ranging from concise but comprehensive catalogue records, participant profiles, research design and methodology, anonymisation procedures, and socio-economic base data on the study participants. In some cases, detailed fieldwork notes are available, as is information about the broader socio-demographic, economic and social policy contexts in which the research was conducted

From its inception, the Archive was designed to expand its holdings by collating datasets from a wider range of QL projects. By strategically building collections of thematically related QL datasets, the aim was to enrich the inter-disciplinary scope of the resource and create the potential for new forms of analysis and knowledge production. The mechanism for this was an affiliation scheme for externally funded projects and studentships. The scheme has proved very successful. It has doubled the number of projects linked to the programme and diversified the subjects addressed. It has also enabled us to work with projects at the planning and development stages to build QL methods effectively into research design, and ensure data management and secondary analysis plans are effectively specified and resourced. The affiliated projects span the social sciences. These include public sector, non-ESRC funded studies that are not subject to Research

Council archiving requirements and thus have volunteered to share their data, sometimes even at additional cost. A major QL dataset on the dynamics of care in chronic or life threatening illness, funded by the Department of Health, has been deposited and will be available for re-use by late spring 2012. Two more affiliated datasets will be ready for deposit over the next 12 months (a Scottish Government funded study tracking third sector organisations, and the EPSRC funded Dynamics of Transport study).

### Using the Archive

It is necessary to register before using the Archive, even for the publicly available materials. This is so we can monitor use levels and support users when necessary. Registration requires the completion of a short form requesting basic contact information and a statement of intended use. Importantly, all users are required to read and agree to terms and conditions for using Timescapes data. The 'User Terms and Conditions' require users of the data collection to respect confidentiality and not to disseminate any identifying information, and it has contractual force in law. This is one of the several layers of protection we have established to make it possible to share sometimes sensitive data. (Details are available at : <http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/about/register.php>). Archived material is organised under different levels of access: public use, which is open for browsing by all; registered use, for the use of researchers attached to authorised institutions; or restricted use, where sensitive or unanonymised data is available only with permission of the originating team. Some data is deposited but its use embargoed until well into the future. This system of access control is a central plank in our stakeholder approach to ethical archiving.

### Data Discovery and Scope for Analysis

We have built refined browse and search tools into the facility to enable the linking and analysis of thematically comparable data and to aid temporal analysis of biographical, generational or historical data. Data files can be searched for thematic content, using conceptual and descriptive key word searching at case level. Such refined search and retrieval can facilitate a more complex and nuanced discovery of temporal data than is usually the case in generic data facilities. Bringing the core datasets into a common frame enhances the potential for analysis. There is scope, for example, to explore the dynamic intersection of home and schooling, family and employment, kinship and friendship, formal and informal care, and biography and history, drawing on comparable data from across the projects. There is ample scope, also, for life course analysis: data on fatherhood, for example, spans the life course, enabling analyses on the perspectives of young people, those entering fatherhood and on the nature of fatherhood or being fathered in older life.

The search tools support both targeted search and more exploratory browsing. Initially, data are presented by collections that correspond to the core projects. In addition,



typical groupings (such as by age and gender) are also available. The data can be viewed in diverse ways, by detailed item (e.g. an interview) or by groups of related cases. Advanced search supports multiple facets such as key words, file formats or media types. All digital textual content is also indexed, meaning that searching on a word will return all files in which that word appears. Once files have been located, they can be viewed using either local software (Word will open .doc files) or the DigiTool Viewer will present other file formats.

## CONCLUSION

The Timescapes Archive has developed as a unique resource for sharing QL data. The embedding of archiving in a methodologically driven programme has enabled us to offer both methods and archiving support for QL researchers, through which the possibilities for combining primary and secondary analysis have emerged. These multiple functions are part of the appeal for QL researchers. The resource is a repository for huge volumes of QL data as they are being generated, designed to aid ongoing primary analysis as well as facilitating secondary use across comparable datasets. The stakeholder model enables the Archive to serve as a valuable bridge between specialist QL research communities and generic national facilities, bringing research and archiving, and primary and secondary research, into closer alignment and enabling these to be seen as iterative and reciprocal processes.

Currently, the Archive is a fledgling resource with much untested potential for growth. Its future is uncertain in a climate of reduced funding for data infrastructures in the UK. While the preservation of Timescapes data at both institutional and national levels is secure, ongoing resources would be needed to continue to build the resource and encourage re-use through the stakeholder approach. Certainly the idea of new forms of archiving that bridge the traditional research/archiving divide has generated a great deal of interest, both nationally and internationally; the idea of archiving in step with the research process, and the commitment to enabling archiving within the parameters of the collegial culture of research is an exciting and potentially important one, deserving of recognition in the shift to new cultures of research practice.

## REFERENCES

- Bishop, L. (2009a). 'Ethical Sharing and Re-use of Qualitative Data'. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. 44(3). pp 255-272.
- Bishop, L. (2009b). 'Moving data into and out of an institutional repository: Off the map and into the territory' *IASSIST Quarterly IQ*, 31(3&4). [Online]. Available at: <http://iassistdata.org/downloads/iqvol313bishop.pdf>.
- Bishop, L. and Neale, B. (2010). 'Sharing Qualitative and Qualitative Longitudinal Data in the UK: Archiving Strategies and Development'. *IASSIST Quarterly (IQ)*. 34(3-4) and 35(1-2). pp 23-29.
- ESRC. (2009). *UK Strategy for Data Resources for Social and Economic Research 2009-2012*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/tools-and-resources/research-resources/data-services/NDS/index.aspx>
- Irwin, S. and Winterton, M. (2012-Forthcoming). 'Qualitative Secondary Analysis and Social Explanation'. *Sociological Research Online*.
- Hadfield, L. (2010). 'Balancing on the edge of the archive: the researcher's role in collecting and preparing data for deposit'. In: Shirani, F and Weller, S. (eds). *Conducting Qualitative Longitudinal Research: Fieldwork Experiences*. Timescapes Working Papers Series 2. 60-73. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/WP2\\_final\\_Jan%202010.pdf](http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/WP2_final_Jan%202010.pdf)
- Neale, B. and Bishop, L. (2012). 'The Timescapes Archive: a stakeholder approach to archiving qualitative longitudinal data'. *Qualitative Research*. 12 (1). pp 53-65.
- OAIS. (2010). 'Open Archival Information System'. [Online]. Available at: [http://archivematica.org/wiki/index.php?title=Independently\\_Understandable](http://archivematica.org/wiki/index.php?title=Independently_Understandable)
- RCUK. (2012). *Common Principles on Data Policy*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/Pages/DataPolicy.aspx>
- Van den Eynden, V., Corti, L., Woollard, M., Bishop, L, and Horton, L. (2011) "Managing and Sharing Data: Best practice for researchers" Wivenhoe Park: *UK Data Archive*. ISBN: 1-904059-78-3.

## RESEARCH TEAM

The Timescapes Archive was devised and built by Libby Bishop, Bren Neale, Ben Ryan, Brenda Phillips and Esmee Hanna, with support from Laura Davies and David Grainger.

Contact Details: Libby Bishop [ebishop@essex.ac.uk](mailto:ebishop@essex.ac.uk); Bren Neale [b.neale@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:b.neale@leeds.ac.uk); Brenda Phillips [b.phillips@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:b.phillips@leeds.ac.uk); Esmee Hanna [E.S.Hanna@Leeds.ac.uk](mailto:E.S.Hanna@Leeds.ac.uk)