

COVID-19 Guidance

Following Government advice to limit social interaction in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and to prevent an unnecessary burden on the prison and probation estate, the National Research Committee has made the decision to limit research within HMPPS until further notice.

No new applications for primary research will be accepted by the NRC. This includes applications relating to primary data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, workshops and surveys, regardless of whether they are face-to-face, over the telephone or online. Only applications involving secondary data analysis that do not pose a risk of potential harm to individuals and impact negatively on resources (e.g. analysis of centrally supplied data at HMPPS/MoJ HQ) will be considered.

For any research which is high priority or urgent please contact the NRC.

This decision will be kept under close review and amended as and when HMPPS consider it appropriate.

National Research Committee – Application Guidance

All researchers wanting to conduct research with staff and/or offenders in prison establishments, National Probation Service (NPS)/Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) regions or within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS) Headquarters are required to formally apply for research approval to the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC).

The National Research Committee (NRC)

The NRC exists to ensure:

- The research applicant and HMPPS attain best value from the research conducted.
- The resource implications and impact of the research on operational delivery is considered.
- The robustness and relevance of the research is adequately assessed.
- Matters of data protection/security and research ethics are dealt with in a consistent manner.

The NRC Process

The NRC process applies to all studies and evaluations which apply recognisable research methods to generate quantitative and/or qualitative information (through a range of techniques, e.g. monitoring returns, observations, surveys, interviews, focus groups) in order to address specific research questions. Types of research include but are not limited to literature reviews, rapid evidence assessments, systematic reviews, case studies, action research studies, process evaluations, impact evaluations and economic evaluations.

The NRC process applies to research projects requiring access to data, staff or offenders. However, they do not apply to the auditing of adherence to standards or the production of management information reports or statistical bulletins. Nor do they apply to requests for routine or one-off data collections which do not form part of the application. Such requests are regulated and monitored through the [NOMS Data Gateway](#).

The NRC process applies to research that has been commissioned and funded both internally and by external researchers/agencies. It applies to research across HMPPS (including headquarters) and all community-based/custodial providers in England and Wales, this includes research involving CRCs and their subcontractors, Contracted Prisons, Young Offenders' Institutions (YOIs) and, from October 2017, Secure Training Centres (STCs).

Application Process

All applications must be made using the standardised HMPPS research application form (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/605526/HMPPS_Research_Application_Template_March_2017_002_xlsm) or, for projects also requiring approval from health and social care bodies, through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS), (<https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/>).

All applications should be sent to the [National Research mailbox](#) for processing. The NRC runs on a monthly cycle, applications should be submitted by the last working day of the month at 17:00; they will then be processed and reviewed during the following month. Feedback on applications will normally be sent by the end of the month after they were submitted e.g. applications received between 1st and 31st January will be processed and reviewed in February, with feedback sent to the applicant by the 28th February.

Applications are either reviewed by the full NRC or locally by the relevant establishment/NPS division/CRC area. Applications will be reviewed by the full NRC, if the research:

- was commissioned by HMPPS HQ; or
- relates to extremism; or
- covers more than one establishment/NPS division/CRC area.

All other applications will be considered locally. The NRC will decide if an application is to be considered locally and will inform the applicant if this is the case. Irrespective of the approval route, all applications and decisions must be logged through the [National Research mailbox](#).

All student applications below doctoral level need to be supported by an MoJ/HMPPS business lead in order to be considered. This business support needs to come from a senior member of staff who is willing to state that they believe the research is going to be of benefit to HMPPS and will have minimal resource demands. Due to the potential volume of student applications, the NRC is not able to assist with student applications below doctoral level that do not have this business support.

The Application Form

All applications should be written in language a layperson could understand, avoiding acronyms where possible. As much detail as possible about the project should be included in the application form, bearing in mind that the reviewers may not have previous knowledge of the specific theory, intervention or project.

- *Aims and Objectives*

A detailed summary of the research is required in this section, including background to the project; clearly defined research questions, information on the existing/previous research in the area as well as any gaps in the evidence base. All research must be of benefit to HMPPS and the links to HMPPS priorities must be explicit.

- *Methodology*

Research applications must be methodologically sound with a clear and logical research design. Detailed explanations of the exact methodology are required in this section, including:

- how the proposed methods link to the research questions and aims.
- information on sampling strategy and required sample size, including power calculations, where necessary.

- logistics of data collection (i.e. distribution of questionnaires, location and length of interviews).
- validation of any tools/measures being used (where required).
- proposed methods of analysis, providing more detail than 'quantitative/qualitative analysis'.

The limitations of the methodology must be clearly acknowledged.

Research designs should be fit for purpose and, in particular should seek to minimise demands on custodial/community staff and other resources.

- *Access to frontline*

The establishments or community providers being accessed should be listed here. This information should be provided even if physical access is not required, for example, with projects only collecting existing datasets, so the NRC can see which sites are included in the research.

- *Data protection/security*

Researchers must make clear how data will be held securely, how data will be processed and managed, how it will be ensured that individuals cannot be identified and how and when data will be destroyed.

HMPPS classifies audio recordings as personal data and so this section should be completed if the proposed methodology includes interviews or focus groups.

- *Ethics*

Sufficient attention should be given to demonstrating that the research will be conducted in a manner that:

- Ensures valid, informed consent is obtained before individuals participate in research.
- Takes reasonable steps to identify and remove barriers to participation.
- Avoids personal and social harm.
- Minimises any conflicts of interest.
- Protects the confidentiality of information about research participants and their identities.

Further consideration should be given to:

- Informed consent: participants should fully understand the nature of the research and agree to take part without any coercion. It must be made clear to research participants that they can refuse to answer individual questions, withdraw from the research and have their data removed up to a specified date (usually linked to the data analysis), and that this will not compromise them in any way.
- Participation in research: Taking part in research should not automatically lead to any financial benefits or losses for research participants. Offering financial incentives to offenders for participation in research will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances. There will need to be strong evidence that response rates have become problematic in the approved study before seeking approval through the [National Research mailbox](#) for payments to be made.
- Right to privacy/ confidentiality: There are circumstances when a researcher is under a duty to disclose certain information. When appropriate, researchers must inform research participants that they have a duty to divulge the following such information:
 - Behaviour that is against prison rules and can be adjudicated against (please see rule 51 of the Prison Rules 1999).
 - Undisclosed illegal acts (previous and planned).
 - Behaviour that is harmful to the research participant (e.g. intention to self-harm or commit suicide) or others.
 - Information that raises concerns about terrorist, radicalisation or security issues.

- Research with vulnerable participants: When research is undertaken with vulnerable offenders – such as young offenders, offenders with learning difficulties or those who are vulnerable due to psychological, mental disorder or medical circumstances – researchers must put in place special precautions to ensure that the research participants understand the scope of their research and the role that they are being asked to undertake. When the research concerns subjects that are potentially disturbing (e.g. abuse, suicide, family history), researchers must also ensure that there is suitable support available for research participants, and that the participants are aware of these avenues of support. When contact with prisoners/probationers is being sought, researchers must ensure that appropriate measures are in place to safeguard researchers as well as participants.

The NRC will consider ethical issues but it is not specifically an Ethics Committee. Where there is any sensitivity, the research should be approved by an appropriate Ethics Committee (e.g. university, NHS, or research body).

- *Additional information*

The application form must be accompanied by the researchers' CVs, any ethical approvals, any questionnaires/interview schedules and consent forms/information sheets that have already been devised.

Reviewing Applications: Approval Criteria

The research **must not** commence until formal approval has been given.

The following criteria are considered when reviewing applications:

- *Links to HMPPS priorities:* research should be of significant benefit to HMPPS policy/business. Researchers must ensure that their research has a clear link to HMPPS business priorities or explain how their research could support potential future business priorities.
- *Resource demands:* The demands on staff and resources must be manageable, and proportionate to the profile of the subject area and the potential benefits from the research.
- *Overlap with existing research:* The project must avoid duplicating or conflicting with other current research studies.
- *Methodological robustness:* The project must be of sufficient quality (in terms of methodological rigour).
- *Data Protection/Security:* Data protection and security issues must have been considered and addressed.
- *Ethics:* Ethical issues must have been reviewed and approved. Researchers must make clear the ethical guidelines under which they will be operating.
- *Researcher skills/competencies:* Researchers must have the necessary skills and experience to undertake the proposed research

Applications can either be approved (with or without modifications), declined or a request for further information can be made.

A large proportion of applications are required to provide further information due to a lack of detail in the application form. This extra information is usually in relation to the methodology, in particular sampling, the benefits to HMPPS and data protection issues. Examples of a good qualitative and quantitative application can be found here.

Applications are usually declined due to insufficient links to HMPPS business priorities, concerns about the rigour of the proposed methodology or due to a lack of detail on the application form. When research is not approved, reasons will usually be given. However, HMPPS reserves the right

not to explain the reasons for refusing a research proposal when there are any sensitivity and/or security issues.

Consideration will be given to one resubmission per research topic. When resubmitting an application, the reasons for the previous rejection must be fully addressed.

HMPPS reserves the right to halt a research project at any time. Reasons will be given unless there are any overriding sensitivity and/or security issues.

Amendments to an approved research project (for example, additional sites, change to sample size, additional of further research instruments) must not be made without the prior agreement of the NRC. Details of planned amendments should be sent to the [National Research mailbox](#) for approval before they are implemented.

Accessing the Frontline

Contact should not be made with potential participants until formal approval has been granted by the NRC or other approving body. When contacting sites to facilitate access, copies of the approval should be provided.

The decision to grant access to prison establishments, NPS divisions or CRC areas (and the offenders and practitioners within these establishments/divisions/areas) ultimately lies with the Governing Governor/Director of the establishment or the Deputy Director/Chief Executive of the NPS division/CRC area concerned.

The decision to grant access to existing data lies with the Information Asset Owners (IAOs) for each data source. Data Sharing Agreements should be established where necessary.

The NRC cannot facilitate access on behalf of researchers.

Dissemination of research

Upon completion of the project, the researcher must prepare a research summary for HMPPS (approximately three pages; maximum of five pages) which (i) summarises the research aims and approach, (ii) highlights the key findings, and (iii) sets out the implications for HMPPS decision-makers. It must be submitted to the National Research mailbox ideally within one month of completion of the project.

Any future applications will NOT be processed while there are outstanding research summaries of completed projects.

HMPPS will disseminate the summary internally as is deemed most appropriate, ensuring that the findings are shared with key business leads across HMPPS HQ, prison establishments and the NPS.

The researcher must state in their research application how else their research will be used and disseminated. HMPPS encourages publication to ensure that findings are accessible and contribute to the evidence base. Research reports should thus be of a publishable standard. Copies of planned publications must be sent to the [National Research mailbox](#), along with the date (when known) and location of publication.

Useful Contacts

For any queries relating to the NRC process, please contact national.research@noms.gsi.gov.uk.

For further information on the research application process:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/her-majestys-prison-and-probation-service/about/research>

Further guidance on good evaluation can be found within the Magenta Book and accompanying HM Treasury guides: <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/magentabook>.

Data protection guidance can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website: <http://ico.org.uk>

GSR Ethical Assurance Guidance:
http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/ethics_guidance_tcm6-5782.pdf