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Section 1: Overview of NRC Process

Role of the NRC

Anybody undertaking research (specifically the application of research methods) involving staff and/or offenders in prison establishments, the Probation Service or within His Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS) Headquarters are required to formally apply for approval to the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC).

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

What 'counts' as research?

Projects and evaluations which:
- apply social research methods, including for example, observations, surveys, interviews, focus groups
- generate quantitative and/or qualitative information
- address specific and clearly defined research questions

Does not include:
- monitoring or the auditing of adherence to standards
- the production of management information reports or statistical bulletins
- requests for routine or one-off data collections which do not form part of a research project

NRC Application Process

NRC applications must be made using the online application form. The form can be accessed <u>here</u> or via the NRC webpage.
<u>*The online form includes a function to 'save and return', however please note that applications started but not modified within six-months will be deleted and a new application will be required.*</u>

A Word version of the application form is also available to download from the NRC webpage for drafting purposes. Once finalised, information must be transferred into the online form for submission.

Applications will be reviewed by the central NRC team if the research meets one or more of the following criteria:
- covers more than one Prison/Probation Service region
- was commissioned by HMPPS HQ
- relates to extremism

All other applications will be considered locally as a single site application.

Research undertaken by MoJ Data & Analysis teams is excluded from the NRC process – this research is approved via the MoJ governance and approval process.

Once submitted, NRC applications will be moved to 'review' status. Any change in status will be updated on the application portal and an automated email sent to the lead researcher listed on the application. When an initial decision has been agreed, the application portal will be updated with the outcome and a decision letter sent out via email. Instructions for how to respond to requests for further information are outlined in the decision letter.

Student Applications

Undergraduate Students:
Due to the potential volume of applications, the NRC is unable to accept research proposals from undergraduate students. This applies even when MoJ/HMPPS business support is provided.

Postgraduate (Masters) Students:
We are unable to accept Masters applications without written evidence of HMPPS/MoJ business support. Business support should be from Prison Group Director (PGD) for custody, Regional Probation Director (RPD) for community or Deputy Director level for HQ requests. A letter/email of support must be uploaded with the NRC application. We are unable to process applications without this confirmation.

Postgraduate (Doctoral) Students:
The Committee **does** accept student applications at doctoral level. Business support is beneficial but not required.

Timescales

For applications reviewed by the central NRC team:
Applications are reviewed by MoJ Government Social Researchers (GSR) on a monthly cycle.

Applications and supporting documentation must be submitted by 17:00 on the last working day of the month; they will then be processed and reviewed by the end of the following month.

A decision letter including any feedback will be sent out via email approximately two weeks following the review meeting. Timescales may vary depending on the complexity of the project under review and NRC workload.

The NRC caps the number of centrally reviewed applications at 14 per month. Applications received once the cap has been reached will be reviewed in the following month.

For applications reviewed locally:
Single site applications are reviewed by the region where the proposed research is to be conducted.

Applications are processed by the central NRC team and sent to the regional prison or probation research lead throughout the month, with the applicant included in these communications.

The turnaround time to receive a decision from the local lead will be dependent on local resource, workload and other frontline pressures. The local research lead should be able to provide an approximate timeframe to receive feedback and a decision.

As with multi-site applications, applicants will be notified of the NRC decision via the application portal (applicants will receive an automated change in status email notification). A decision letter outlining feedback and rationale will then be sent out via email.

Integrated Research Application System (IRAS)

For projects also requiring approval from health and social care bodies, please apply once through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS), (https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/).

At question 4 of the project filter in IRAS, you should select the option for application to HMPPS.

When you click the 'Proceed to Submission' button, you will generate a final version of your application form for submission, which is recorded in the Submission History area at the bottom of the tab. In this area you will have XML and PDF versions of the form.

The PDF and XML versions of the form must be submitted via email to: National.Research@justice.gov.uk
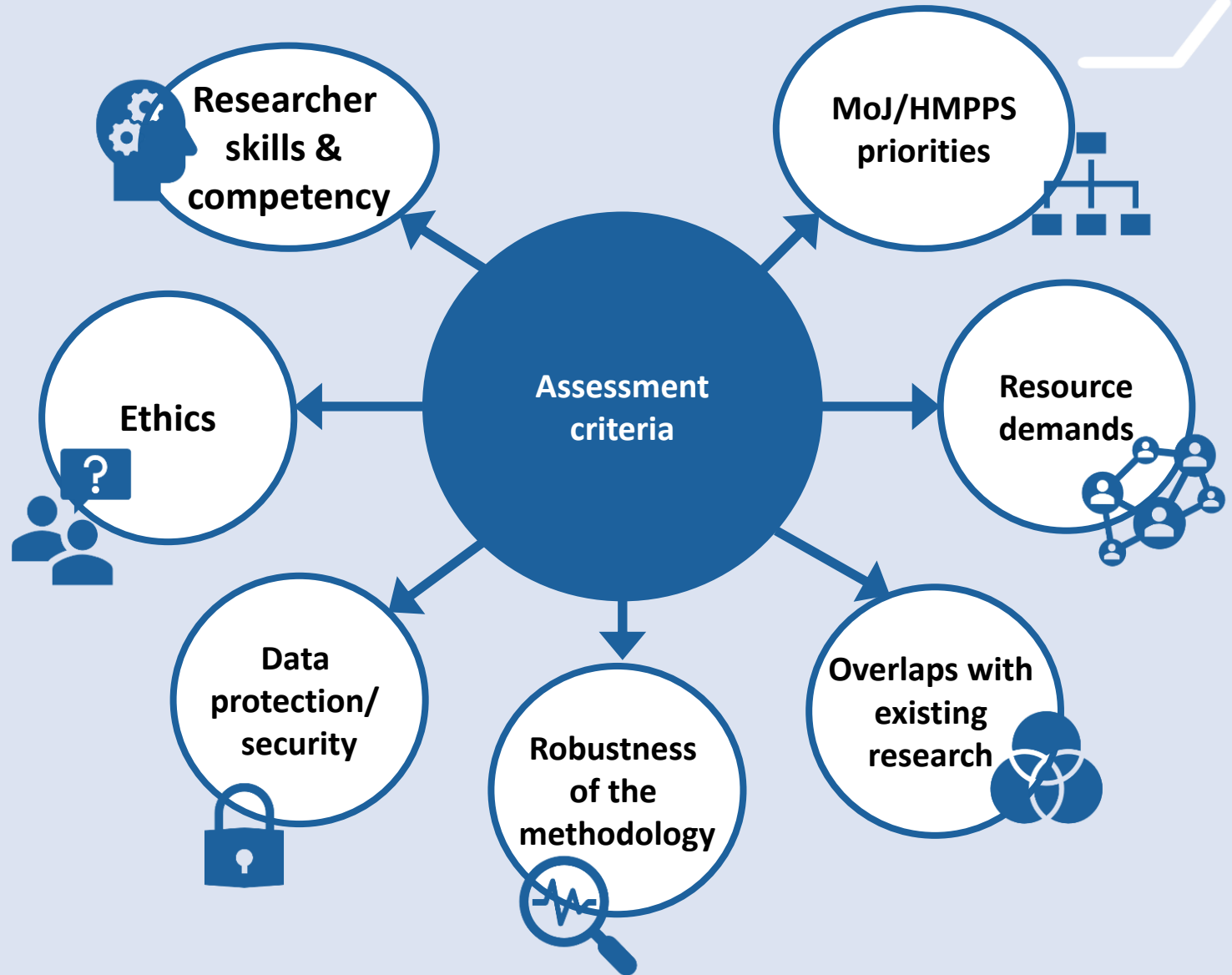
To check if you require an IRAS form please use the following tool:

Do I need NHS Ethics approval? (hra-decisiontools.org.uk)

NRC Review Criteria

The NRC reviews all applications against these 7 areas.

Further information on these review criteria is included in section 2 of this guidance document.

Decision Outcomes

<u>Final Approval</u>: Application is approved based on the information provided. The researcher can only approach the prisons and/or probation regions to request access to commence the research after they have sent email confirmation to the NRC that they agree to the terms and conditions outlined in the decision letter.

<u>Approved Subject to Modifications (AWM)</u>: Application is approved in principle. Minor amendments are outlined in a decision letter to the applicant. The researcher can only approach the prisons and/or probation regions to request access to commence the research after they have sent email confirmation to the NRC that they agree to all the modifications plus the terms and conditions outlined in the decision letter.

<u>Request for Further Information (RFI)</u>: Further information is required before a decision can be made. Applicants have 8 weeks to respond and provide the information requested otherwise their application will be treated as withdrawn. Responses are shared with the lead reviewer and a decision is made to approve (or AWM) or decline.

<u>Reject</u>: Reasons will be provided when research is not approved. However, the NRC reserves the right not to explain the reasons for refusing a research proposal when there are sensitivity and/or security issues. **Consideration will be given to one resubmission**. When resubmitting an application, the reasons for the previous rejection must be addressed in full.

Top Tips for completing the application form

- The application should be written in plain, accessible language, avoiding acronyms.

- Include sufficient detail and context about the project - the reviewers may not have previous knowledge of the specific theory, intervention or policy area.

- Allow time to consult with your academic supervisor, manager and/or colleagues to ensure they can provide feedback on the draft application before submission.

- Build in enough time (at least 8 weeks is recommended) to allow for the NRC review cycle and the potential for further information to be requested.

- All sections of the application form must be complete otherwise you will be asked to submit further information.

- Ensure the rationale for the research is explained in full and how the findings could be operationalised to provide benefits to HMPPS and/or MoJ.

- Ensure that throughout the application, there are clear links back to the research aims and questions.

- All relevant supporting documentation should be submitted at the same time as the application form. A list of what is essential and desirable is included on slide 30 of this guidance document. Failure to submit all relevant supporting documentation may lead to a delay in the processing and/or reviewing of your application.

Common Reasons for Rejection

Applications are rejected when there are concerns about the appropriateness or value of the research, the suitability and robustness of the methodology to address the research aims, or when there is a substantial amount of missing information to allow reviewers to make an informed decision. Reasons are tailored to each application but can include:

- The potential benefits to MoJ/HMPPS (including how the findings could be operationalised or to inform policymaking) were insufficiently explained and did not justify the resource demands.

- Lack of clarity of how the proposed study addresses an evidence gap or added value to existing research.

- Significant concerns about the robustness and feasibility of the proposed methods to address the research aims and/or within the timescales.

- Uncertainties around the identification and sampling of research participants (including the need for any inclusion/exclusion criteria and stratification) or the research limitations and risks and how these would be mitigated.

- Lack of clarity on how the research data would be transported, stored and destroyed and whether the data security measures were sufficient.

- Lack of consideration to ethical issues, including informed consent, confidentiality issues, participant/researcher safety and the disclosure of certain information obtained during the research.

- Applicants' research skills and/or experience were not set out, it was unclear how objectivity would be maintained and conflicts of interest avoided.

Section 2: Completing your NRC Application

The following pages align to the different sections in the online NRC Application form

Project Details

This section should contain:

- The full project title
- Previous application ID for a resubmission
- Links to strategic outcomes and ARI
- Keywords
- Date of application
- Anticipated completion date

All research must be of benefit to the MoJ/HMPPS. The links below provide further information on MoJ and HMPPS priority outcomes:
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/research

From the drop-down lists in the application form, please select the most relevant strategic outcome and MoJ Area of Research Interest theme.

The detailed keywords associated with the research project should be added into the keywords box, separated by a comma.

Student Status

If you are applying as a student, please select the level of study you are working towards. This includes HMPPS Chartered Forensic Psychologists undertaking a doctoral level qualification.

Undergraduate level

Due to the potential volume of applications, the NRC **does not** accept student applications at undergraduate level.

This applies even when MoJ / HMPPS business support is provided.

Masters level

Postgraduate Masters applications cannot be accepted without written evidence of HMPPS/MoJ business support from Prison Group Director (PGD) for custody, Regional Probation Director (RPD) for community or Deputy Director (DD) level for HQ requests.

A letter/email of support from the PG, RPD or DD must be uploaded with the NRC application stating they believe the research is going to be of benefit to HMPPS and will have minimal resource demands.

Written evidence of this support **must** be submitted with the application, otherwise the application will not be processed.

Doctoral level

The Committee **does** accept student applications at doctoral level.

Business support is beneficial but not required.

Postgraduate researchers and HMPPS trainee forensic psychologists must provide details of their project supervisor(s).

Research Team, Skills & Experience

The following information is required for the lead researcher:

- Name
- Occupation
- Employer
- Email address

All correspondence from the NRC will be sent to the lead researcher via the email address provided in this section.

Please also provide the details of all additional researchers.

Key considerations:

- For student or HMPPS trainee forensic psychologist applications, the lead researcher is the student or trainee (not their supervisor).
- Researchers should have the skills, competencies and experience needed to conduct the research and analysis proposed.
- Less experienced researchers will need to provide evidence that their supervisor or manager has the skills and experience to provide the necessary support and oversight to protect both the integrity of the research and the wellbeing of the researcher.
- Skills, competencies and experience should be demonstrated by the CVs which must be attached to the research application (maximum length two pages).
- Potential conflicts of interest should be declared.
- Where necessary and relevant, professional registrations should be declared for assurance.

MoJ / HMPPS Business Support

This section asks for details of any business support and funding your project may have from MoJ/HMPPS teams and/or other government departments or external organisations.

The NRC review team may follow up with internal contacts for assurance that the project meets their requirements, addresses a business need or evidence gap.

We ask for details of relationships with other organisations so we can take into consideration the wider context surrounding the project.

This can also identify any potential conflicts of interest.

Funding information is requested to allow reviewers to consider the feasibility of undertaking the proposed research within the allocated research budget. **Providing this information is optional.**

For HMPPS Chartered and trainee forensic psychologists – a copy of the approved commissioning document must be uploaded with the application.

Aims & Objectives

An overview of the research rationale is required. This should include the background to the project, clearly defined research questions, information on relevant existing research, evidence gaps, and how the research will add value to the evidence base.

Benefits to MoJ and HMPPS:
- The research should explicitly link to the <u>HMPPS Business Priorities</u> and/or the MoJ <u>Areas of Research interest</u>, identified in the Project Details section.
- It should be made clear how the findings could be operationalised or could inform policy or practice.

Benefits to academia:
- There should be minimal overlap or duplication with existing research.
- Show a good understanding of previous research in the area and existing evidence gaps highlighting how your research adds value.

Limitations of the research:
- Limitations of the research study should be properly understood, explained and mitigated where possible.

Research aims and questions must be clearly defined.

The research aims should be clearly linked to the proposed methodology and analysis technique.

Proposed Methodology

The research proposed must be methodologically sound with a clear and logical research design to address the stated research questions, including a full description of the data collection and analysis approach. Below are some questions to be considered:

Data collection considerations:
Quantitative or qualitative? What data will be collected and how?
Why is this method most appropriate to address the research questions and outcome measure(s)?
What other methods were considered and decided against, and why?
What project materials (information sheets, consent forms, interview schedules, surveys) are required?
Will the interview/questionnaire be piloted to check ease of use, coverage and overall length (monitoring respondent fatigue)?
Have the proposed assessment tools/scales been validated?
How long will data collection take?
What is the likely response rate? Is this sufficient? How will the response rate be monitored/increased?
What are the data collection logistics (e.g., distribution of questionnaires, location and length of interviews)?
What are the limitations of this methodology?

Data analysis considerations:
How will your data be analysed? Why is this the most appropriate approach?
For evaluations: what matching technique and variables will be considered?
For evaluations: what is the proposed time lapse between pre and post measures?

Will any HMPPS-held data be required? Has the completeness and/or quality of the existing data been assessed?

> Don't forget to outline what questions/topics will be asked of participants and why. Attach all research material as supporting documentation (see slide 30).

> Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of considerations.

> List all datasets (local and national) to be accessed.

Proposed Methodology - Sampling & Recruitment

The sampling technique and recruitment strategy should be outlined in full. They should include the practicalities of identifying individuals, how they will be invited to participate and how informed consent will be secured.

Key sampling considerations

- Who is in the sample? What is the inclusion and exclusion criteria?
- How will individuals be identified, contacted and recruited?
- How many participants are required and why?
- Have power calculations been undertaken if required?
- Is the sample size likely to be sufficient for any statistical analysis?
- How will you ensure that the sample is representative?
- How will the risk of sampling bias be considered?
- Is there any need to distinguish between any sub-groups?
- How will attrition or low response rates be managed and mitigated?

Proposed Methodology – Data Analysis

The data analysis section must explain why your chosen method is appropriate to address your research aims.

This section should outline your approach in sufficient detail for reviewers to fully understand the steps you will take to analyse the data collected for your project.

For evaluations using mixed methods, each element should be covered plus how data will be triangulated.

Key considerations for data analysis:

- What data analysis technique(s) will be used?
- Why was this data analysis technique(s) chosen? (e.g. why interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) rather than thematic analysis?)
- Why is your chosen method(s) appropriate to address your research aims?
- Are any specific statistical packages or materials required?
- Will the analysis be split by sub-groups?
- If interviews have been conducted, is transcription required? Who will undertake the transcription? Is a data sharing agreement required/in place?

Proposed Methodology – Demand on Resources

The anticipated demand on HMPPS resource should be outlined in full.

Demands should be proportionate to the project. As part of the review process, proposed research sites will be asked to consider the feasibility of accommodating the demand on local resource.

Key considerations:

Demand on MoJ/HMPPS resources should be as minimal as possible.

Applicants must outline what HMPPS resource is required to facilitate the research. This might include:
- Demands on staff time to facilitate the study on behalf of or with the researcher (e.g., assisting with recruitment, sourcing and securing interview/focus group space, access to data).
- Demand on physical space in HMPPS research sites (i.e., interview rooms, video conference facilities).
- Demands on staff as research participants.

How will the resource demands be monitored, mitigated and/or managed?

Proposed Methodology – Limitations and Risks

The anticipated limitations and risks to the project should be outlined in full.

In the application form, a separate record should be entered for each individual risk.

All limitations should be detailed in research outputs.

Key considerations:

What are the limitations and risks throughout the project?
How will they be monitored, mitigated and/or managed?

Limitations could include (but not limited to):
- samples may not be fully representative;
- short term outcomes only;
- assessment tools require further validation;
- analysis of impact limited to perceptions and causality cannot be established.

Risks could include (but not limited to):
- Recruiting a sufficient (and/or representative) sample;
- Access to research sites and/or data;
- Public health considerations

Proposed Methodology – Assessing Risks

In the application form, a separate record should be entered for each individual risk.

This section will help reviewers understand the risks associated with the project, how they will be managed and the likely impact they may have on the findings.

Key considerations:

For each risk please provide the following information:
- What is the risk? Please provide a brief summary.
- How do you plan to mitigate it (i.e. what steps can you take to reduce the likelihood and impact of the risk)?
- Once you have put this/these mitigation(s) in place, what is the potential **impact** of this risk?
- Once you have put this/these mitigation(s) in place, what is the potential **likelihood** of this risk?

Please note, the impact and likelihood of each risk is based on the researchers' subjective assessment.

Accessing Prisons, Probation Regions and HMPPS HQ

The rationale for choosing the selected prison establishments and/or probation regions must be clearly explained.

The NRC advises against selecting all sites on the application form unless there is a very compelling rationale so that the resource demands for specific areas can be more accurately assessed.

Key considerations:
Contact should **not** be made with potential research participants until formal approval has been granted by the NRC and other relevant approving bodies.

Upon NRC approval, the decision to grant access to prison establishments or Probation Service regions lies with the Prison Governor/Director or the Regional Probation Director of the Probation Region concerned. When contacting sites to facilitate access, a copy of the NRC approval letter must be provided.

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 to prisons or probation regions on behalf of researchers.

When selecting the probation region(s) to access, this includes remote access to staff or participants who are based in the region.

Data Protection & Security – Use of Personal Data

Researchers must adhere to data protection and security protocols in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act (2018).

Researchers should outline:
- What personal data will be collected, why, the lawful basis, will this include special category data? Please see ICO - A-guide-to-lawful-basis
- How will participants be informed about how their data will be processed?
- How will recorded information be kept safe/confidential? How will participants be anonymised?
- How all data will be securely transported and stored after collection?
- For how long data will be stored after the completion of the final report/publication date (noting that personal data should be kept no longer than necessary).
- How will data be securely disposed of?
- Is access to MoJ/HMPPS data required? Has it been requested? If so, what stage are you at with this?

HMPPS classifies audio recordings, consent forms, recorded notes and participant contact details as personal data so this section should be completed if the proposed methodology includes these.

Further information on data security and processing can be found in the Information Commissioners Office guidelines on data protection and GDPR.

All data must be processed on a system that meets the requirements on MoJ's ICT Security policy. All students and supervisors should ensure they are familiar with this policy: https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/security/it-computer-security/ict-security-policy-framework/ict-security-policy/

Consent forms and participant information sheets should be supplied alongside the application.

Informed consent - Participants should fully understand the nature of the research and agree to take p[art] must be made clear that they can refuse to answer individual questions, withdraw from the research and have their data remove[d] up to a specified date (usually linked to the data analysis), and that this will not compromise them in any way.

Right to privacy/confidentiality - When appropriate, researchers must inform participants that they have a duty to divulge information that relates to illegal activity or harm. Otherwise, the research should protect the confidentiality of information about participant's identities and the information they provide.

Research on sensitive subjects and/or with vulnerable participants - When the research concerns sensitive subjects, researchers must ensure that there is suitable support available, and that the participants are aware of this. Researchers must put in place special precautions to ensure that the participants understand the scope of the research and how their role is contributing. When research is undertaken with vulnerable supervised individuals – e.g. young offenders, those with learning difficulties or those who are vulnerable due to psychological, mental disorder or medical circumstances – researchers must put in place measures to ensure that the participants understand the scope of the research and the role that they are being asked to undertake.

Equality & Diversity – Consideration must be given to equality and diversity. This embedded document sets out some key questions:

Microsoft Word Document

Conflicts of interest and biases – The researcher must consider their own position in relation to the research (e.g. dual researcher-practitioner role) and outline how personal biases will be actively monitored, managed and mitigated during fieldwork and analysis.

Participation in research – Participation should not automatically lead to any financial benefits or losses for participants, nor should they feel that they will incur social benefits or losses due to their participation or non-participation. For example, timing of prison-based interviews may result in a loss of earnings from spending time in an interview when participants would normally be in work or education. Researchers should address this issue in their research application.

Incentives - Offering incentives to supervised individuals for participation in research will **only be considered in very exceptional circumstances** where there is strong evidence that response rates have become problematic. Separate approval via the NRC must be sought prior to any payments.

Safety of participants & researchers – consideration must be given to ensuring the safety of both participants and researchers. Risks should be identified and mitigations in place to minimise any risk. A distress protocol should cover risks present both during and after the research activity.

Children – Parents or legal guardians must be approached for consent for children aged under 16 to participate in research. There must be reasonable efforts to inform children under 16 about the purpose of the research and seek their consent to participate. Children under 16 should be accompanied during interviews. Children who are 16 or over will usually be able to give their own consent but researchers should consider whether it is also appropriate for parents, guardians or other appropriate gatekeepers to be informed when their child has been invited to participate in research.

The NRC considers ethical issues, but it is not an Ethics Committee.

Researchers should refer their research proposal to the appropriate local research ethics committee (e.g. university, NHS, or research body) for approval. A statement of approval from the local ethics committee should be included with the research application or provided once secured.

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/MoJ decision-makers. It must be submitted to the National Research mailbox within one month of the project's end date, **prior** to any output or papers being released or submitted for publication. The summary should also clearly outline a dissemination plan. The research summary template will be sent alongside the approval decision letter.

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 MoJ and HMPPS HQ, prison establishments and the Probation Service. Research summaries will be uploaded to the MoJ internal Evidence Library which may include the lead researcher's name and email address.

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. Any plans for video dissemination needs to be agreed with the relevant data owners and prisons or probation regions if applicable.

The NRC **must** be sent an electronic copy of any output or papers submitted for release or publication based on the research at the time of submission, at least one month in advance of the publication. The date (when known) and location of publication should be clearly outlined.

Supporting Documentation

A decision on the application may be delayed if supporting documents are not provided. If it is not possible to provide these at the point of submitting the application (e.g. interview schedule/questionnaires), then providing these materials at a later date will be a condition of approval.

Essential supporting documentation to be submitted with the NRC application:
- CVs for all members of the research team
- For HMPPS Chartered and trainee forensic psychologists – a copy of the approved commissioning document
- For MSc students – a letter/email of support from a PGD or RPD (see slide 15 for further detail)
- Qualitative research:
    - Participant information sheet
    - Consent form
    - Debrief sheet

Supporting documentation to be provided once available (if not available at time of application)
- Questionnaire
- Interview/focus group schedule
- Data sharing agreement/Data Privacy Policy
- Local ethics committee approval (e.g. University, NHS, research body)

Please note – a maximum of 10 documents can be uploaded with the application form. If you need to submit more than 10 documents, please email national.research@justice.gov.uk

Useful Links

NRC Guidance:
For further information on the research application process:
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/her-majestys-prison-and-probation-service/about/research

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

Related Links:
- Further guidance on good evaluation can be found within the Magenta Book and accompanying HM Treasury guides: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book.
- Data protection guidance can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website: http://ico.org.uk
- GSR Ethical Assurance Guidance: 2021-GSR_Ethics_Guidance_v3.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)
- Accessing HMCTS data - Get access to HMCTS data - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Research involving the judiciary - Judicial participation in research projects - Courts and Tribunals Judiciary
- Statistics at MoJ - Statistics at MOJ - Ministry of Justice - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Accessing the Justice Data Lab - Accessing the Justice Data Lab service - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Research through Data First - MOJ: Data First, application form for secure access to data - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- MoJ Publications - Research and statistics - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- MoJ Areas of Research Interest - Ministry of Justice: areas of research interest 2020 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Research with MoJ's agencies and Arms-Length Bodies - Research within MOJ's agencies and arm's length bodies - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)