

NRS-GUI-006: Guidance for Research in Prisons

This guidance sets out the steps required for the approval of research work in Scottish prisons which must be obtained before any study can start.

When a researcher wishes to undertake a study involving prisoners or staff in Scottish prisons, they must first obtain clearance from the Scottish Prison Service Research Access and Ethics Committee (RAEC), located at SPS HQ, Calton House, Edinburgh. As the RAEC is best placed to consider the welfare of prisoners, it is proposed that when a researcher wants to conduct a study in a Scottish prison, the permissions process should start by requesting access to the intended prison population under investigation. By obtaining approval for access from RAEC at this stage, excess and unnecessary effort can be avoided in making applications to other bodies should the RAEC not approve access. Should the request for access for the proposal be rejected by the RAEC, an appeal option is available to RAEC via a re-submission supported by fresh and supplementary evidence.

Following RAEC Approval, researchers must get approval from an NHS Ethics Committee (REC) and their host NHS Board R&D department(s). A Site-Specific Information (SSI) form must be submitted to each NHS site as part of the R&D permission process [for non-NHS sites, the REC receives the SSI form]. The researcher makes the application for these approvals on the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS: www.myresearchproject.org.uk) and they run in parallel. For studies involving prisons in more than one health board, applications should be made through the NRS Permissions Coordinating Centre (NRS Permissions CC).

The process for obtaining approvals, for either single or multiple Board involvement is shown in Figure 1.

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Figure 1

