



Ethical principles for research activities

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Overview

The overarching aim of research activities conducted by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) is to inform the prevention of ill-treatment of people in detention who are particularly vulnerable. This document sets out the specific ethical principles for research activities conducted as part of announced, unannounced and thematic inspections and internal evaluation/review exercises.

Such research activities may include: surveys, interviews, Custody Record Analysis (CRA), secondary analysis of inspection data, desk-based research, evaluation and the internal collection and analysis of management information. These research activities may be conducted by researchers from the Research, Development and Thematic (RDT) team, but may also be conducted by other HMI Prisons staff (including fee paid associates working on behalf of HMI Prisons) or staff from other inspectorates.

All staff conducting research activities are required to adhere to the ethical principles set out in this document.¹ This document reinforces the high ethical standards expected of all staff carrying out Inspectorate duties.

Informed consent

Full informed consent will be obtained from individuals approached to take part in research activities. Individuals will be provided with information about:

- the nature and purpose of the research activity
- how they have been selected
- what is involved
- how much time is required
- confidentiality, anonymity and how the information they provide will be used.

Any exceptions to the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity will be explained (see below). Advice from a third party will be sought where individuals do not appear to have the capacity to provide consent. Where there is no direct contact with individuals and it is not possible to obtain informed consent (e.g. where custody records are being accessed), no named information will be shared.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Information obtained from research activities will remain confidential and will be protected from loss or theft and unauthorised access, use, disclosure or modification by others. Individuals will remain anonymous and the information they provide will not be used in a way that leads to their identification. However, the Inspectorate has a duty to pass on safeguarding and child protection concerns. All staff are trained in child protection procedures and adhere to child protection legislation and guidance.²

Additionally, HMI Prisons has a duty to pass on information about risks to safety where names are known. Information will be passed on at the first possible opportunity where an immediate risk has been identified.

¹ This document is intended to compliment professional guidance from the Government Social Research Unit, recognising the specific context in which HMI Prisons' research activities take place (see 'Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government' – http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/ethics_guidance_tcm6-5782.pdf).

² See HMI Prisons' Child Protection Policy and Protocol: <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/about-our-inspections/>.

Voluntary participation

Participation in research activities is voluntary. Individuals have the right to withdraw at any time until a report has been published and can choose not to answer questions without repercussions.

Enabling participation

Every effort will be made to respect and accommodate the needs of individuals in terms of language, accessibility, availability and any other equality and diversity considerations, to ensure that they are included in HMI Prisons's research activities.

Well-being of participants

The well-being (physical, social and psychological), rights, privacy and dignity of individuals will be anticipated and protected in all research activities we conduct. Every effort will be made to ensure that individuals are not harmed or adversely affected during, or as a result of, participation in a research activity. HMI Prisons will do everything possible to prevent reprisals for individuals who take part in a research activity.³ HMI Prisons has a responsibility to ensure that methodology is robust and conclusions drawn using data collected are valid. This is to protect individuals from any adverse effects of policy/practice changes based on incorrect findings.

Professional conduct

All staff are expected to work in accordance with the values of HMI Prisons and maintain a high standard of professional conduct at all times. HMI Prisons has a transparent and robust mechanism for responding to staff misconduct and complaints about its staff.⁴

Researcher safety, well-being and security

The well-being of staff is imperative and support will be available for staff when needed. The personal safety of staff conducting research activities will be anticipated and protected by HMI Prisons. All staff obtain security clearance and complete training on safety, security and personal protection. Staff adhere to the specific security requirements of inspected settings.

Data protection/retention

HMI Prisons adheres to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.⁵ A clear and consistent practice for data protection, information security, protective markings, loss of personal or sensitive information, data retention, data storage and the use of data is in place.

Ethical governance

The RDT team will develop research activities that are designed to generate data that will inform the development of policy and practice. The RDT team is responsible for developing research activities in line with current developments in social research and in consultation with external advisors where necessary. An ethics checklist will be completed and signed off by the head of the RDT team in advance of any projects involving research activities and for new research activities developed.

³ See HMI Prisons' Sanctions Policy: *Protocol for working arrangements to prevent sanctions with Independent Monitoring Boards and the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman*, <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/about-hmi-prison/working-with-partners/#.VWg4vKPliw>.

⁴ See *Guide for inspectors*, <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/about-our-inspections/> and <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/about-hmi-prison/frequently-asked-questions/complaints/>

⁵ See <https://ico.org.uk/>