



Ministry
of Justice

Research in Prison Guidance

Preparation for Fieldwork Within Prisons

Security

Check the level of security clearance that is required with the establishment and the documents you are required to bring. Generally, unless you have specifically got agreement from the Governor, access to Long Term and High Security Prisons requires CTC level vetting. It is a good idea to bring your MoJ staff ID badge and you may be required to bring an additional form of photo ID.

If you have externally commissioned research and contractors are carrying out the fieldwork, they will need to be security cleared well in advance of the fieldwork beginning. If they are conducting research in one prison it may be more straightforward to process their security clearance through the prison directly rather than going through the central MoJ process. If you need to do this you should contact the People Hub manager at the specific establishment you need access to.

If the research is going to be ongoing over a period of months it may be useful for the researchers to become authorised to carry keys (this may reduce the burden on the prison staff having to escort researchers). Carrying keys requires training over several days with the prison security team and therefore carries additional cost. You should contact the establishment(s) where you are carrying out the research for advice on whether this is necessary and the process required. Access to keys is at the Governor's discretion, so early contact from the Research Lead with the Governor can be helpful in this process.

Access/Permission

All MoJ research project should have approved via the AQA process. If the research project has been signed off through the formal MoJ AQA processes then you can approach the prison Governor directly to conduct the fieldwork. It is good practice to inform the NRC so they are aware of research occurring in the prison estate as this may impact their consideration of bids to the NRC. However, if the project has not been through the

AQA process then it will need to go through the NRC process before any work can commence. Once the research is approved a letter will be issued that the project lead can show the prison governor when discussing access. It is good practice to always cite the NRC reference number in any correspondence you have i.e. NRC111-2019.

For guidance on the NRC process, go to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/her-majestys-prison-and-probation-service/about/research#guidance-on-applications>

Ethical Issues

As with all research projects, 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, including ensuring where possible, all materials should be in an Easy Read format.
- Avoids personal and social harm.
- Minimises any conflicts of interest.
- Protects the confidentiality of information about research participants and their identities.
- Promotes and acknowledges the autonomy, privacy and dignity of participants.

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. You should also be clear with participants what will happen with the data provided, e.g. will be anonymised, who it will be shared with and whether it will be published.
- 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 via the same approval process the research went through originally, either the NRC or Head of Profession, for payments to be made. This will usually need formal support from the HMPPS Executive Director's office for the site(s).
- 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 (i.e. this should be included in an information sheet about the research):

- 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.
 - You should consider the IICSA guidelines in relation to disclosure of new incidents/information.
 - You may want to use different wording on duty to disclose if you are interviewing staff members rather than prisoners.
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- 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 contact with prisoners/probationers is being sought, researchers must ensure that appropriate measures are in place to safeguard researchers as well as participants. Prison managers must be made aware of support offers which are agreed to ensure that availability is properly managed.
 - Research on sensitive topics: 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.

Principles of Conduct and Security & Safety

Prohibited Items

Do not take any unnecessary items into an establishment with you.

Only carry items needed for the interviews with you on wings. Leave all other items, e.g. bag, house keys, money etc. at the base the liaison officer has arranged for you. Be aware that most establishments provide lockers for non-essential and prohibited items to be stored but may need tokens (provided at the establishment) or pound coins to use. Some sites do not have lockers at all and it is good practice to call and ask what is available in advance, and then plan accordingly.

Although not exhaustive, the following is a list of items prohibited within prisons:

- Mobile phones – you will need to hand these in at the gate.
- iPods

- Kindles
- Laptops, USB sticks
- Fitbits/ activity trackers
- Chargers of any sort
- Chewing gum
- Metal cutlery
- Tin foil
- Perfume/deodorant
- Tweezers, nail files/clippers, scissors
- Large umbrellas
- Large amounts of money (in excess of £50)
- Substantial amounts of medication
- Metal tins
- Cigarettes, any smoking-related paraphernalia, matches and lighters (including electronic cigarettes/vapes)
- Blutac
- Glass items

Please note that some prisons do not allow food or open containers of water to be taken into the establishment. You should check with the prison(s) you are visiting and plan accordingly.

Arrival and Entry

It is good practice to arrive with the name and contact details of your contact point in the establishment. Gate staff are often very busy so this can save everyone's time.

Establishments may permit bringing in prohibited devices such as audio recorders but this must be arranged and agreed in advance and is subject to authorisation documents being completed. You should contact the prison you are entering for advice.

If you have been granted permission to take in a device you must still declare this at the gate. Be prepared to show serial or identification numbers of any prohibited items that have been permitted entry (such as audio recording devices) so these can be matched to authorisation documents.

Be aware that many sites (particularly High Secure) require photographs and fingerprints to be taken at the gate.

During Visits

- Dress smartly. Remember, you are representing MOJ. It is good practice to check with the individual prison whether they have a dress code (for example to avoid wearing colours associated with local gangs or the same colour as inmates). Revealing clothing or clothing with sports/football logos should not be worn. You may feel more

comfortable in trousers than a skirt/dress as this is less likely to draw attention from inmates.

- Always wear your ID badge. Some prisons may also ask you to wear an additional visitor's badge.
- Treat everyone with respect and work to the values of MOJ.
- Remain politically neutral and adhere to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) rules governing the political activities that civil servants can be involved in. Band A and above, including senior civil servants, are a politically restricted group and there are rules relating to political activities where views are expressed in public.
- Refuse 'gifts' from any place of detention. However, in some situations providing lunch/taxis can make it easier for the prison to host you, and in these situations you can accept them
- Keep the base room tidy.

Security

- Both in and outside places of detention, do not share any personal information about prisoners (often referred to at prisons as 'residents') (unless required in a professional capacity) with anyone outside the research team.
- Do not discuss responses in the open plan office and **particularly ensure you are careful when travelling**. You can of course discuss how you found interviewing, generally what went well and what you found difficult etc. with your line manager.
- Do not let prisoners enter restricted areas or pass through locked doors or gates unless they are accompanied by a uniformed member of staff or a member of staff clearly gives permission. You should not be expected to escort or supervise prisoners yourself.
- If a prisoner asks you to do something for them, explain politely that you cannot help as you do not work in that establishment and direct them to a member of staff.
- As above, do not take any unnecessary items into a place of detention, such as overnight bags.
- Do not carry any unnecessary items around a place of detention, such as house keys or money.
- Do not take mobile phones or SIM cards or any other electronic equipment, unless specifically allowed, into a prison – it is illegal. Always check at the gate for lists of prohibited items.
- Check with colleagues, particularly those who are new or are unfamiliar with a custodial environment, that they do not have prohibited items with them.
- Immediately inform the relevant person if you have been responsible for any sort of security breach.

Personal Safety

- When conducting an interview/visit make sure you know where the nearest member of staff will be (as well as alarms etc.)

- In the event of an emergency there are emergency alarms on the walls (usually a silver button mounted on a share green panel) – ask for the location of the one in the meeting room.
- Always alert custodial staff upon your arrival on a wing or accommodation unit.
- NEVER enter a cell, even if the bolt is ‘shot’ or the cell is empty.
- If you are speaking to a prisoner in a separate room or office make sure you are aware of the location of the alarm. Always seat yourself rather than the prisoner closest to the door.
- If interviewing a prisoner who you might find challenging in private, take the advice of custodial staff. If staff believe the prisoner presents a specific risk, you may wish to consider a different approach. If you go ahead with the interview, ensure you can be seen by staff and give them an idea of when the interview is likely to end (see INTERVIEWING).
- If you are sent something from an identifiable detainee after a visit, report it to your manager.
- In some prisons, wing staff may ask you to wear an additional personal alarm (which clips on to a belt) that they will provide. Please adhere to their request.
- You should arrange to contact someone at MoJ to let them know when you have safely exited the prison. If you haven’t been in touch by the agreed time they should then try to contact you and the prison.

Working with Prisoners

- Address prisoners by their family or preferred name, with the relevant prefix (Mr, Ms, Mrs etc.)
- Do not share any personal details with prisoners, such as your address, and be aware that your conversations with staff in the prison or wing/unit can often be overheard by prisoners.
- Do not provide prisoners with your contact details (even work details). There is a general email address provided on the consent form which they can ask staff to email if they wish to withdraw from the project at a later date – this email is only for this purpose.
- Do not accept gifts from prisoners, their families or friends. NEVER take something out of an establishment on a prisoner’s behalf.
- If a prisoner asks you to do something for them, politely explain that you do not work in the establishment and direct them to a member of staff at the site.
- If you recognise a prisoner you know personally during a visit, try to leave without drawing attention to the encounter and alert the liaison officer immediately. Declaring an association in front of others can put both you and the prisoner at risk.
- Do not directly challenge criticism or aggression from a prisoner – always acknowledge their feelings and repeat what they’ve said to you to show understanding, but do not commit to sorting out problems for them.
- Remember that a high proportion of prisoners have communication difficulties so keep your descriptions and questions short and simple.

- If you are ever unhappy about the way a conversation is going, or feel threatened by a prisoner, extricate yourself from the conversation; your personal safety is paramount.
- You may also be approached by prisoners on the wings who want to know who you are and what you are doing. Be polite and explain briefly. If they want to be interviewed, explain that these have already been arranged and unfortunately you are not able to offer any additional interviews. If they have any concerns with the parole process, recommend that they speak to staff or their Offender Supervisor/Manager. If necessary, you can jot down a few notes to pass back to the review team.

Conduct Outside of Work

- Be careful when discussing your work in public. Do not talk about individuals or the details of a place of detention.
- Be aware of who may be listening to any conversation while you are travelling/in public places.
- Ensure hard copies of materials (e.g. consent forms) and audio recording devices are stored securely while travelling.

Interviewing

Prior to the Interview

- Always ensure you tell staff with whom you will be speaking. Ask staff to recommend a suitable venue for the interview to take place. Please be patient if a space is not immediately available; some establishments have little available extra space and other activities may be already underway in those areas.
- If staff tell you not to speak to the prisoner, ask what risks are involved and how recently this behaviour has been displayed. Your safety is paramount so you must take the advice of staff if it appears their concerns are real. If you are in doubt, err on the side of caution
- If interviewing a prisoner who you might find challenging or where the physical location/circumstances are not ideal (e.g. in a segregation unit), take the advice of staff. If staff believe the prisoner presents a specific risk to you, you may wish to consider a different approach.
- If you go ahead with the interview, ensure you can be seen by staff and give staff an idea of when the interview is likely to end.
- Check with staff if the interviewee may be struggling with additional vulnerabilities before starting an interview (e.g. be on an open ACCT or recently received bad news), and reconsider the interview in light of this.

During the Interview

- Ensure that you know the location of the alarm before an interview begins.
- Always seat yourself, rather than the prisoner, closest to the door – if you need to choose between being closest to the door or the alarm, choose the door.

- When you are conducting interviews in an office, make sure there is no personal or confidential information left where prisoners can see it. Make sure your list of prisoner names is hidden.
- Always begin the interview by informing the prisoner of the disclosure policy (as in the interview script). If an individual goes on to say something of concern during the interview, reiterate that you will need to pass on what they have said to a member of staff.
- Remember that a high proportion of prisoners may have communication problems so keep your descriptions and questions short and simple.
- During interviews have a clock in view behind the prisoner (or your watch turned towards you) and set some expectations for the length of the interview e.g. 'I have 45 minutes but then I will need to leave to conduct another interview'.
- Warn individuals five minutes before the end of the interview so they can finish up. This will be particularly helpful when conducting interviews in the high security estate or with difficult prisoners.
- Don't directly challenge criticism/ aggression from a prisoner – always acknowledge their feelings and repeat what they've said to you to show understanding, but do not commit to sorting out their problems for them. Researchers should remain as impartial as possible during the interview.
- If you are ever unhappy about the way a conversation is going, or feel threatened by a prisoner, extricate yourself from the conversation; your personal safety is paramount.
- If the interview causes the interviewee to feel very emotional, or you are concerned about their welfare, make sure you fully debrief them at the end of the meeting and signpost them to additional support that is available (such as the Listeners scheme, Samaritans). Make sure you alert staff if an interviewee leaves in an emotional state, so they are aware of this in their subsequent interactions and can keep an eye on the interviewees' welfare.

Dealing with Sensitive Information

If an interviewee says something that falls within the disclosure policy, then notify them that this needs to be passed on (as explained at the start of the interview) and pass this information on to the liaison officer. It is important that you explain the disclosure policy at the start of every interview, and again if you are intending to pass on any disclosure, so that the process is fully transparent.

Make sure you let your line manager know if you have needed to pass anything on.

Support

If anything upsets you during a visit, make sure you talk to your line manager and/or colleagues about what happened if you feel you need guidance or support. There is also guidance on where to find support on the intranet

<https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/documents/2015/11/wellbeing-strategy-annex-where-to-go-for-support.pdf>