



Ministry
of Justice



HM Prison &
Probation Service

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National Research Committee
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12/12/2025

NATIONAL RESEARCH COMMITTEE DECISION

Ref: 2025-2038

Title: An Experiment in Upside Down Management for Probation practitioners

Dear Mr. Bridges,

Further to your resubmission to undertake research across HMPPS, the National Research Committee (NRC) has considered the information provided and is unable to support your project at the current time. The primary reasons for this are two-fold:

1. The digital app 'How'm I Doing' is still in the design phase. Further information is required on its planned development and use before HMPPS can support its implementation.
2. The research aims of the project were not clear. Specifically, whether the aim is to understand the use of the app, or to explore the principles of the 'modern probation theory.'

Further information is given below.

Aims and objectives

- As part of the NRC review process, HMPPS consultees raised concerns that the proposal did not consider the impact of the research on other relevant and significant organisational initiatives that probation practitioners are currently required to engage with. These include Skills for Effective Engagement Development and Supervision 2 (SEEDS) implementation, professional registration, and the roll out of Assess Risk Needs Strengths (ARNS) sentence planning.
- In particular, the ARNS project is a HMPPS strategic priority, aiming to deliver a modern, digitally enabled assessment service. ARNS has been developed based on established research into desistance and risk. HMPPS consultees expressed concern that adding another model or tool during a period of significant operational change may increase stress and cognitive overload for probation practitioners.



- HMPPS consultees advised that they would need to understand how the tool interacts with or advises practitioners, and who would be using it. This would provide more information to understand how the tool might affect impact assessment work, specifically in relation to ARNS.
- Concerns were also raised that introducing the proposed 'How'm I Doing?' app alongside ARNS could confound results, making it unclear which, if any, intervention drives change.
- Consultees were unclear how management oversight of the tool would take place and whether this aligns with current policy and guidance.

Methodology

- The following feedback from the original decision letter had not been addressed:
 - Sampling – a clearer, more systematic method for recruiting participants to test the tool is essential to maintain research objectivity. No mitigations were outlined if the recruitment process meant that only a small number of probation practitioners volunteered.
 - Data collection – no information was provided on the specific questions to be asked of the probation practitioners in relation to the use of the tool.
 - Informed consent – ethical safeguards, such as informed consent and handling of data if participants withdraw, were not adequately addressed.
 - Data analysis – more detailed information as to how the qualitative interview data would be analysed was required.
- The demands on staff time and workload were not quantified. There was no detail on interview requirements or how participation would be managed within working hours.

Research materials

- Research materials, such as interview schedules, were not submitted in line with NRC guidance.
- The use of leading language in the information sheet could bias participant responses and compromise the objectivity of the study.

Data security

- Detailed information was needed in relation to how research data would be transported, stored and destroyed and whether the data security measures were sufficient.
- There was no plan for the safe pseudonymisation of the cases included in the proposed tool. The risk of inadvertent inclusion of personal information was not addressed.
- It is understood that information collected on the app would be stored outside MoJ secure systems. This would require a fuller security assessment, and more detail was needed on the level of information collected.
- Personal devices, (e.g. a MacBook) should not be used to store any collected data.

We appreciate that this will be disappointing for you and that this is not the response you would have hoped for. Please be aware that this was your final submission for this research and the NRC decision is final.

Yours sincerely,
Amy Summerfield
Chair of the National Research Committee