Using the Researcher Access Service: A guide for applicants

Updated October 2025

Before you start

- The following information is arranged based on the statuses you will see on your Researcher Access Service (RAS) dashboard as you move through the application process: Enquiry, Application in progress, In review, Data assembly and Data access. Guidance is also provided for Queries and Amendments.

- Please note that the RAS platform is best experienced on a desktop computer. At present, some screens have not been optimised for mobile/tablet.

Enquiry

Enquiry	Application in progress	In review	Data assembly	Data access

Submitting your enquiry

Applicants should submit an enquiry using the form: https://rds-ras.researchdata.scot/enquiry-form

To complete your enquiry, you will need to provide an overview of:

- Your details

- Your project

- The datasets you'd like to access for research

- The secure environment in which you intend to access the data

- Any secured funding for your research project

A read-only version of the enquiry form is available to help Researchers prepare their submission.

Triage

On submission of your enquiry, you will receive an email to confirm receipt. We will then review your enquiry and advise you of next steps.

Please note:

- Researchers must have funding in place to receive research coordination support from eDRIS (that is, to begin a full application).

- The cost to use this service covers assistance through the data access process, including information governance support and data linkage services.

- The Researcher Access Service operates a tiered pricing structure based on the type of organisation you are applying from (e.g., academic institution, charity, public sector organisation, private sector organisation), the number of researchers who require access and the number of years access is required. Costs are also based on the complexity of the project and the amount of support required. Find out more about RAS pathway pricing on the RDS website.

What happens next?

Depending on the nature of your enquiry, you will receive an email to notify you of one of the following next steps:

- If your project is deemed suitable for the **Researcher Access Service (RAS) Approval Pathway**, you will be invited to create an account and begin your application online.

- If your project is deemed suitable for the **Public Benefit and Privacy Panel (PBPP) Approval Pathway**, you will be contacted by the eDRIS team to begin an application.

- If your project is not suitable for either pathway, the eDRIS team will contact you to discuss your options.

Automated cost estimates

Cost estimates will be automatically generated and emailed to researchers in PDF format upon submission of an enquiry using RAS datasets. Automated cost estimates will use the current financial year's pricing model by default and will be generated regardless of whether an applicant has indicated that they already have funding in place.

Cost estimates are intended to help gauge funding requirements and are subject to confirmation by the eDRIS team. eDRIS team members will manually adjust cost estimates when new information is supplied to them that affects project costs. Updated cost estimates will be automatically generated and emailed to you as a PDF.

Setting RDS up as a supplier

We will also send a document outlining the details required to set up Research Data Scotland as a new supplier with your institution. This is sent as an attachment along with the cost estimate. You will need to liaise with your institution's finance department to get RDS set up as a supplier to pay the invoice for your data provisioning costs.

The Researcher Access Service (RAS)

We will assess your enquiry against the RAS Approval Pathway criteria to ensure only projects that meet the criteria for this pathway are progressed through the Researcher Access Service**.**

If your enquiry is deemed suitable, you will be sent an invitation to create an account with the institutional email address provided in your enquiry form. You can then log into the platform to begin a full application.

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Researcher Access Service Dashboard
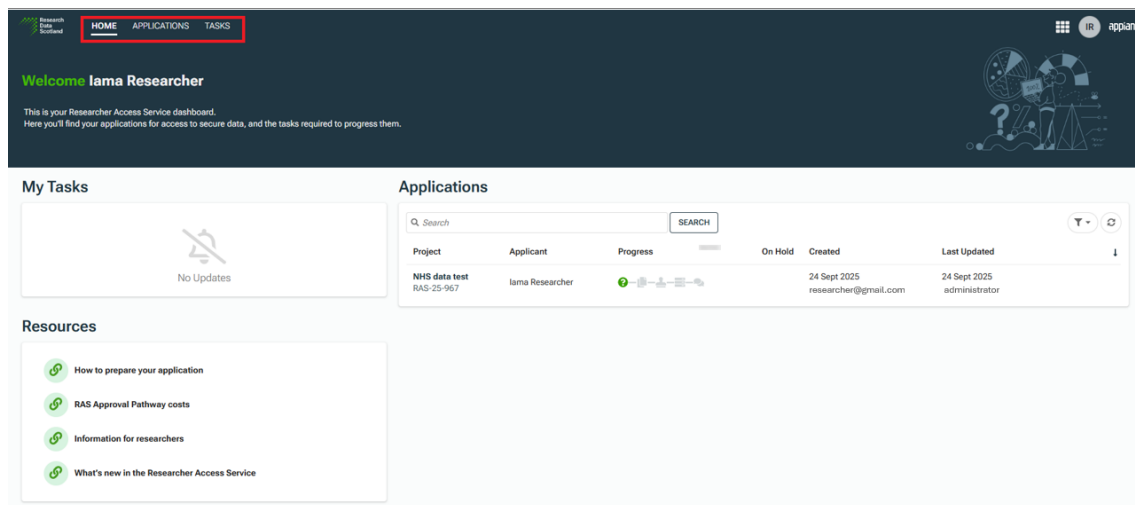
This is an example of the Researcher Access Service dashboard

When you log into the RAS, you will find a dashboard with the following navigation options in the header:

- Home

- Applications

- Tasks

Your dashboard also displays the following sections:

- **My Assigned Tasks** – This is a summary of the tasks you must complete. It will populate with tasks as you move through the data access process

- **Applications** – A list of your applications and their statuses

- **Resources** – Links to useful documents and resources

"My Application" view

When you select your application from the Applications list, you are taken to the *My Application* section, where you can view or edit your application.

Your application is pre-populated with information provided in your enquiry.
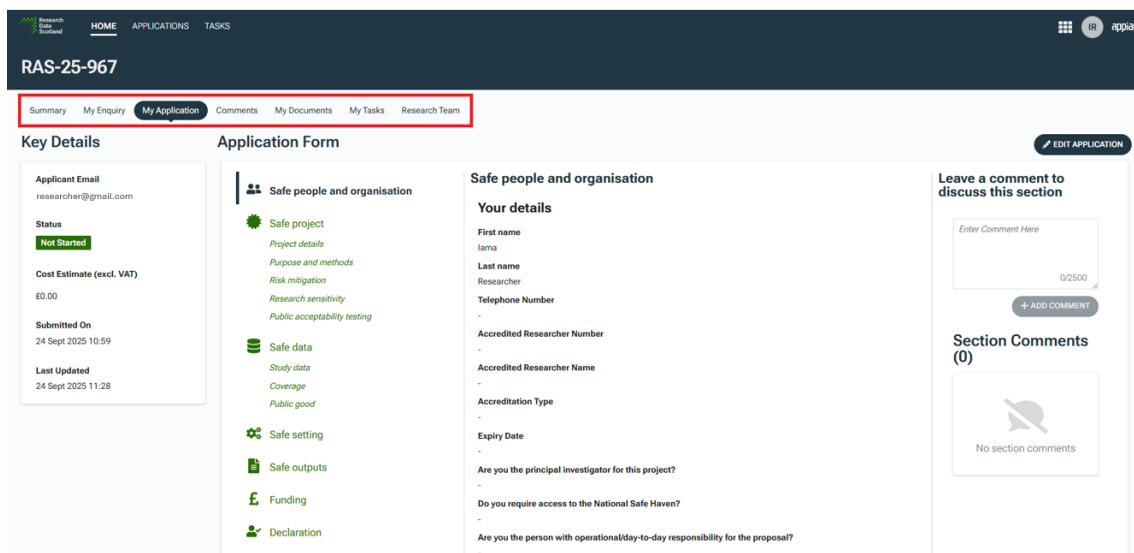
A screenshot of an application showing the sub-navigation options highlighted

Sub-navigation

The sub-navigation items (highlighted above) provide the following functions:

Summary

Here you'll find an overview of your project, including applicant information, datasets and research team members.

My Enquiry

This is a record of your original enquiry, submitted at the start of the data access process.

My Application

This section provides a read-only view of your application, along with the 'Edit application' function to begin/continue editing your application.

Comments

The Comments section provides an overview of all comments between you and the eDRIS team throughout the application process. Use this function to send messages to the eDRIS team with any questions about your application. You can also view responses to questions and comments throughout the process.

My Documents

 This section provides an overview of the documentation uploaded throughout your application, including any supporting documentation, user agreements and purchase orders.

My Tasks

Under My Tasks, you will see the current actions required for you to progress your application.

Research Team

Under Research Team you will see a dashboard showing each person who has been added to the application. Details of research team members can either be added, removed or updated here or within the Safe People and Organisation section of the application form.

If any required team members or specific details are missing, it will be highlighted above the dashboard under 'Issues that require your attention.' For example, you must include a Principle Investigator (PI) within your research team.

A screenshot of the 'Research Team' tab. Missing details are highlighted under 'Issues that require your attention'.

Key details

The Key Details section provides an at-a-glance overview of your project details, including current status and date your application was last updated.

Application in progress

Enquiry	Application in progress	In review	Data assembly	Data access

Editing your application

Once you have been notified that your enquiry is suitable for the RAS Approval Pathway, you will be sent an email with login details for your new RAS account.

- When you log in for the first time, you will be asked to re-set your password.

- Please refer to the read-only application form for guidance on what information is required for the application.

- To begin editing your application, select the 'Edit application' button (see screenshot below). This will open the application in edit mode.

- The form will autosave anything you've added when you move between sections of the form. If you need to leave the form and return to it later, you can 'Save and Exit' at any time.

A screenshot of an application showing the 'Edit application' button highlighted

Accredited researcher details

From 30 October 2025, you must have accredited researcher status before data access can be provided.

Applications for researcher accreditation are processed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The process takes around three to five weeks. RAS applications can continue to be worked on while your accreditation is being processed.

There are two types of researcher accreditation: full and provisional. Eligibility depends on your qualifications and research experience. If you have provisional accreditation, we require a fully accredited member of your research team to act as your supervisor for the duration of the project.

- The RDS website has more information on how to apply for researcher accreditation

How to add your accredited researcher details

As the lead applicant, you must input your five-digit accreditation number in the 'Your details' section. Your accreditation will be automatically confirmed if you are already listed on the [UK Statistics Authority Public Register](#) (see below screenshot). The same process must be done for each new research team member.

Accredited Researcher Number

12345 ✕

What is an Accredited Researcher?

Accreditation Type

Full

Accredited Researcher Name

Jane Researcher

Expiry Date

03/06/2029 📅

A screenshot of the 'accredited researcher number' section of the application showing the details that are returned once a valid number is entered.

Please note: Your details may not be validated if your accreditation was completed within the last 14 days. In this case, please wait until 14 days has passed and resubmit.

Your research team

Managing your research team

Prior to submitting your full application for review, you can update your research team by selecting the Manage Research Team option. Through this function, you can view your research team, update a researcher's details, and add or remove researchers to/from your team.

Please note that, if you enter a different number of researchers requiring access to the National Safe Haven than initially requested, the online application system will prompt you to correct this before proceeding with the rest of your application. For example, if your initial application requested access for two researchers but you have added three researchers requiring safe haven access to your application, a new cost estimate will be automatically generated and emailed to you.

Please check the research team tab under 'my application' to ensure you have entered the correct research team details. This will alert you to anything that's missing under 'issues that require your attention' above the table of team members.

Mobile telephone numbers

Please note that a UK mobile number is required for each member of your research team requiring access to the National Safe Haven as this number will be used for two-

factor authentication. To ensure that only UK mobile numbers are entered, the numbers "07" will be automatically populated. Please enter the nine digits following "07" for each member of your team requiring safe haven access.

Principal Investigator

- We require applicants to provide the details of a Principal Investigator (PI) for their project. A PI is required as they hold overall legal responsibility for data access, and this information would be required in the event of a data breach.
- The addition of a PI is a mandatory requirement for each application.
- It is possible to create multiple PIs if an additional researcher is ticked as PI first. You can then go back to tick the Applicant as PI after.

Providing a statement of public good

This question is in the 'Public interest' section of the application form, under 'Safe project':

"Please explain how your research will achieve each of the types of public interest you have selected above. We will use this as your 'statement of public good.'"

A screenshot of the 'public interest' section of the application form

Statements of public good for all projects are added to RDS's Data Use Register, where they can be read by members of the public. To avoid delays to project approval, it is crucial to provide an accurate and detailed public good statement that explains how your project will benefit the public.

Please consult the public good statements from approved projects as exemplars and think carefully when crafting your own statement, using as much of the 3000 character-limit as necessary. More guidance on statements of public good can be found on the RDS website: Research for public good. This page should be treated as compulsory reading for those seeking data access through the RAS Approval Pathway.

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Safe data selection

When completing your application, you will be asked to select all the variables you require from your selected datasets for both your cohort and your linked data. For each dataset you request, you will need to provide a reason for access.

Please think carefully about the specific data you require for your project, ensuring you request only the variables you **need** to carry out your study. This is to ensure that you have applied **data minimisation:** the principle within data protection law such that data are **sufficient**, **relevant** and **limited to what is necessary** in relation to the purposes for which they are processed. Please consult an eDRIS Data Analyst if you are unsure about the specific data you will require.

Funding

Before you can submit your application, you must have secured funding to cover the entire cost of your data provisioning. After submitting your enquiry, you should have received a cost estimate letter advising you of the anticipated total cost of your project. As you discuss your requirements with the eDRIS team, they will ensure this cost estimate is updated as necessary. By submitting your application, you confirm that you are happy with the cost estimate and have secured funding to cover all costs quoted.

Requesting a consultation

If you would like to request a consultation with the eDRIS team to advise on any aspect of your application, you can do so by leaving a Comment. The Comment function is there for you to ask questions about the application form and clarify anything that is unclear. The eDRIS team will respond to your comments to help complete your application.

Public Impact Advisory Group (PIAG) pilot

From October 2025 to March 2026, there will be a pilot of a new Public Impact Advisory Group (PIAG), that will provide early feedback on Researcher Access Service applications. The PIAG will have a particular focus on reviewing public good statements and public engagement plans.

During the six-month pilot, the PIAG will review all applications made through the Researcher Access Service (RAS) before the applications go to the RAS panel for final approval.

The PIAG will meet monthly to discuss new RAS applications. The group won't review any technical information about statistical analysis plans, but will consider the following information from each application form:

- o Summary of research
- o Background to research (for example, is it part of a larger programme?)
- o Public good statement
- o Datasets requested

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- o Public acceptability statement
- o Public engagement plans
- o Dissemination
- o Risks and risk mitigation

The advisory group will provide feedback on these sections of the form, including any concerns they have or clarifications they would like to see made. The PIAG cannot approve or reject this project. It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to consider what changes to make ahead of RAS Approval panel review, based on the feedback provided.

See more about the PIAG pilot on the RDS website

Applicant feedback

You will be invited to provide feedback on your experience with the RAS platform in the form of a star rating from 1-5 and an optional text entry box. The feedback provided will help inform service improvements moving forward. This feedback is invited at three points during the application journey:

- Submission of Enquiry
- Submission of Application to RAS Approval Panel
- Completion of the "Confirm Data Suitability" task once data has been accessed in the Safe Haven

In review

Enquiry	Application in progress	In review	Data assembly	Data access

Application submitted for eDRIS review

Once you have submitted your application, you will receive email confirmation that the eDRIS team has received it for review. This will move the status of your application to "In review."

As part of your application, the eDRIS team are available for consultation. Meeting times will be suggested through Comments on your application.

This consultation is intended to minimise the amount of back-and-forth between you and the eDRIS team and to clarify any outstanding questions. If necessary, your application will then be returned to you for edits before it is sent to the RAS Approval Panel for a decision.

Limiting edits to your application

It is your responsibility to ensure that changes are only made to your application where they are requested. If you make additional changes to your application without noting or discussing these with the eDRIS team, this may result in delays.

If you have made significant changes to your application without consulting or notifying the eDRIS team, your application may be delayed. If any changes you have made have taken your project out of scope for the RAS Approval Pathway, **you will be asked to submit a new application through the PBPP Approval Pathway.**

Second eDRIS review

If edits were required to your application, the eDRIS team will review these changes when you resubmit your application. The eDRIS team will check if your edits are appropriate and that no other changes have been made that would take your project out of scope for the RAS Approval Pathway. Once they are confident that your application is ready to be reviewed by the RAS Approval Panel, they will send it onto the Panel.

RAS Approval Panel decision

RAS Approval Panel

The RAS Approval panel is made up of representatives from Research Data Scotland and Public Health Scotland. The panel is responsible for confirming that your application meets all criteria for RAS Pathway eligibility and that the proposed research is in the public good.

The RAS Approval Panel will make one of the following decisions:

- **Approve** – The panel is satisfied that the project meets all necessary criteria for data access. Data assembly can begin once all required agreements are in place.

- **Reject** – The panel has determined that the project does not meet the necessary criteria for data access and cannot meet these criteria through revisions.

- **Revisions** – The panel believes the application may be able to be approved if revisions are made. These revisions will be set out in Comments on the application.

- **Not suitable for RAS Approval Pathway** – The panel has determined that the project should be evaluated by a Public Benefit and Privacy Panel (PBPP). In this case, the applicant will be advised to begin a new application outwith the Researcher Access Service.

Revising your application

If the RAS Approval Panel has requested revisions to your application before a decision can be made, your application will be returned to you. It is then your responsibility to make only the requested changes to your application before resubmitting it for panel

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review. Please note, your revisions will be checked by a member of the eDRIS team before being sent back to the RAS Approval Panel.

Application approved

Once your application has been approved by the RAS Approval Panel, you will receive email confirmation of this decision. This will move your application to the next stage: Data assembly.

Data assembly

Enquiry	Application in progress	In review	Data assembly	Data access

Requirements for eDRIS to begin data assembly

Once your application has been approved by the RAS Approval Panel, the eDRIS team will begin to assemble your data. All data will be delivered to the National Safe Haven.

At this point in the process, you will receive email notifications asking you to upload the following documents to your application on the Researcher Access Service:

- A Purchase Order (PO) to cover the cost of data provision
- User agreements for each member of your research team requiring access to the Scottish National Safe Haven (NSH) – please note each user agreement will need to be countersigned by the eDRIS team

Purchase orders and invoicing

Once you have uploaded your Purchase Order, the RDS Finance team will notify eDRIS that this has been received.

It is assumed that you will be billed the entire cost for your project upfront. In rare circumstances, such as the end of the financial year or if a department needs to spend money within a specific timeframe, you may request to split the invoice.

Invoicing will take place directly between the RDS Finance team and your institution's finance office. You can request a copy of the invoice by emailing the RDS Finance team at finance@researchdata.scot.

User agreements

Once your application is approved, all members of your research team who will require access to data in the National Safe Haven will need to sign user agreements for you to upload.

An eDRIS Project Support Officer will issue your user agreements by email. You can submit individual agreements at any time and return to the task later to finish uploading the remaining agreements. Only one user agreement needs to be returned and countersigned by an eDRIS Senior Manager to begin data assembly.

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Countersigning user agreements (eDRIS)

Once you have uploaded your user agreements, a Senior Manager at eDRIS will review and countersign each user agreement. Please note user agreements may be returned to you if information is missing.

Data assembly

Once the Panel has approved your application, a Data Analyst (DA) will begin data assembly. Data assembly and quality assurance will involve the following steps:

1. Cohort created and data linked by analyst based on predefined job plan (Project Specification Document, otherwise known as the PSD)
2. Quality Assurance checks and changes carried out (Peer Review of Data Assembly)

Data release

Once the data assembly has been completed and an internal peer review has been performed by another Data Analyst, an eDRIS Senior Manager will review the data assembly. The Senior Manager will also check that you have uploaded a Purchase Order for the project before signing off on data release.

National Safe Haven accounts and project areas

After countersigned user agreements have been uploaded to the RAS, an eDRIS Project Support Officer will set up National Safe Haven (NSH) accounts and a study area for all researchers on your team requiring data access.

Please be aware that the National Safe Haven analytical environment runs on a Linux Operating System (OS) and offers the following analytical and office software packages:

- Libre Office
- R/ R Studio Desktop
- STATA
- Python
- MATLAB (provided a researcher's institution has a license)

Logging into the National Safe Haven

Once your NSH accounts and the study area have been set up, an eDRIS Project Support Officer will share NSH logins with you and your research team by email. Each member of the research team will be provided with their own account to access the National Safe Haven

If you or a member of your team has any trouble logging into your National Safe Haven account, please raise a query (instructions below).

Data access

| Enquiry	Application in progress	In review	Data assembly	Data access

Confirming data suitability

Once data access has been provided to at least one researcher on your team, a task will be created for the lead applicant to confirm the suitability of your data. You will receive an email notification prompting you to confirm data suitability.

Please confirm data suitability **within 30 days** of your data being delivered to the National Safe Haven to avoid additional costs.

If there are any problems with the data, you will be prompted to raise a query.

Post data access: Raising a Query
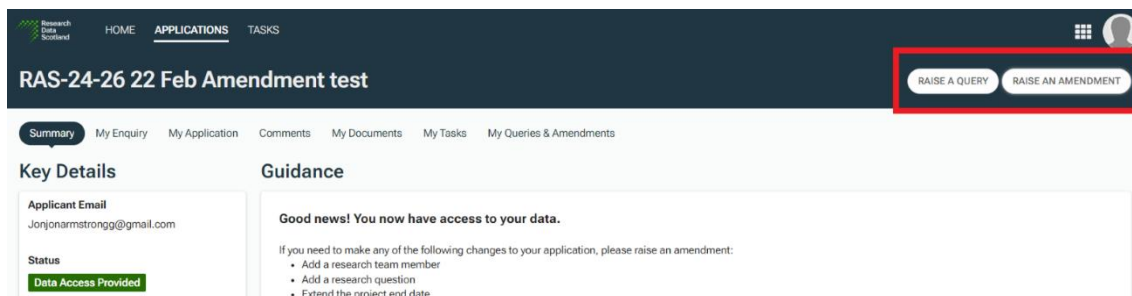
Applicant dashboard view displaying how to 'Raise a query' or 'Raise an amendment'

If you require additional support after data access has been provided, you can raise a query using the button in the Summary tab. Queries will be resolved through Comments between the lead applicant and a member of the eDRIS team and progress can be monitored through the 'My Queries & Amendments' tab.

For example, if you would like to request an output from the research project such as a data visualisation, you will need to raise a query as outlined above. Outputs must undergo Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC) checks.

Post data access: Raising an Amendment

There are four main types of amendments you can make to your application after data access has been provided. Multiple amendment types can be raised together as part of the same submission but only one amendment may be submitted at a time.

Please note: if you request an amendment that takes your application out of the scope of the RAS Approval Pathway, this amendment will either be rejected, or you might be asked to submit a new application through the PBPP Approval Pathway, which will incur additional cost.

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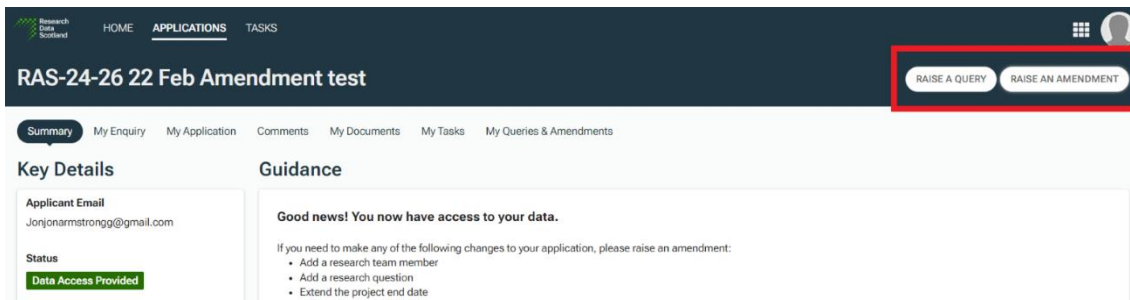
Dashboard view displaying the buttons to 'Raise a query' or 'Raise an amendment'

Adding researchers

If you would like to add a new researcher to your project team, this can be requested by raising an amendment. This type of amendment will result in additional costs and must follow the process below:

1. If the applicant is happy to meet the additional fixed cost per researcher, they can raise an amendment stating their reasoning for this change.

2. Once the applicant has submitted their amendment request, it will be reviewed by the eDRIS team before being raised with the RAS Approval Panel.

3. The Panel can decide whether to accept or reject the amendment and can also request additional information before making a decision.

4. Once the amendment is approved, a new Purchase Order will be requested from the applicant to cover the costs.

5. Once the new Purchase Order is received, the eDRIS team will arrange for user agreements to be completed for the added team members, following the same process outlined under User agreements (see page 9).

6. The eDRIS team will then request National Safe Haven user accounts and share the login information with the newly added researchers.

Extending project end date

If you would like to extend your project end date, this can be requested by raising an amendment. This type of amendment will result in additional costs and must follow the process below:

1. If the applicant is happy to meet the fixed cost per additional year added to their project, they will raise an amendment to update their project end date.

2. Once the applicant has submitted their amendment request, it will be reviewed by the eDRIS team before being raised with the RAS Approval Panel.

3. The Panel can decide whether to accept or reject the amendment and can also request additional information before making a decision.

4. Once the amendment is approved, a new Purchase Order will be requested from the applicant to cover the costs.

5. Once the new Purchase Order is received, the eDRIS team will arrange an extension of the National Safe Haven access duration.

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Requesting additional data (from the RAS Approval Pathway)

If you would like to request additional data available through the RAS Approval Pathway, this can be requested by raising an amendment. This type of amendment will result in additional costs and must follow the process below:

1. If the applicant is happy to meet the fixed cost per additional data request, they will raise an amendment indicating which additional datasets and variables they would like to access.

2. An eDRIS Data Analyst will then complete a review and schedule a consultation.

3. The amendment request is then sent to the Panel for review.

4. The Panel can decide whether to accept or reject the amendment and can also request additional information before making a decision.

5. Once the amendment is approved, a new Purchase Order will be requested.

6. The eDRIS Data Analysts will perform data assembly.

7. Following data assembly, an eDRIS senior manager will sign off on the data.

8. The new data will be made available to the applicant once a new Purchase Order is received.

Things to note:

- For each dataset/variable requested via an amendment please indicate the date range for each dataset / variable as part of your submission.

- If you request datasets/variables that are not within the scope of the RAS, your amendment will either be rejected, or you will be asked to start a new application through the PBPP Approval Pathway.

Adding research questions

If you would like to add new research questions to your project, these can be submitted as an amendment request. This type of amendment will not result in any additional cost. The process is as follows:

1. The applicant raises an amendment to add new research questions to their project and submits the amendment to eDRIS for review.

2. The eDRIS team will then complete a review and schedule a consultation (if required).

3. The amendment request is then sent to the Panel for review.

4. The Panel can decide whether to accept or reject the amendment and can also request additional information before making a decision.

RAS resources

Suitability checker: https://www.researchdata.scot/accessing-data/begin-an-enquiry/

Enquiry form: https://rds-ras.researchdata.scot/enquiry-form

Researcher Access Service login: https://rds-my.researchdata.scot/

Researcher Access Service User Agreement (pdf): https://publichealthscotland.scot/services/data-research-and-innovation-services/electronic-data-research-and-innovation-service-edris/keeping-personal-data-safe/

Researcher Access Service Accessibility Statement: https://www.researchdata.scot/accessibility/researcher-access-service/

Researcher Access Service Cookie Policy: https://www.researchdata.scot/cookies/researcher-access-service/

RDS Terms of Use: https://www.researchdata.scot/terms-of-use/

RDS Privacy Policy: https://www.researchdata.scot/privacy-policy/

Researcher approvals and accreditation: https://www.researchdata.scot/accessing-data/information-for-researchers/researcher-approvals-and-training/

About the Public Impact Advisory Group (PIAG) pilot: https://www.researchdata.scot/accessing-data/information-for-researchers/public-impact-advisory-group/