

Using the Researcher Access Service: A guide for applicants

Updated 8 July 2024

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
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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 (i.e., 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). Costs are also based on the complexity of the project and the amount of support required.

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.

Cost estimates

If your project is suitable for either the RAS or PBPP Approval Pathways, the eDRIS team will also email you a cost estimate to confirm the total cost of your project. This cost will be updated as necessary through discussions with the eDRIS team so that you know exactly how much funding you will need to cover your project.

Setting RDS up as a supplier

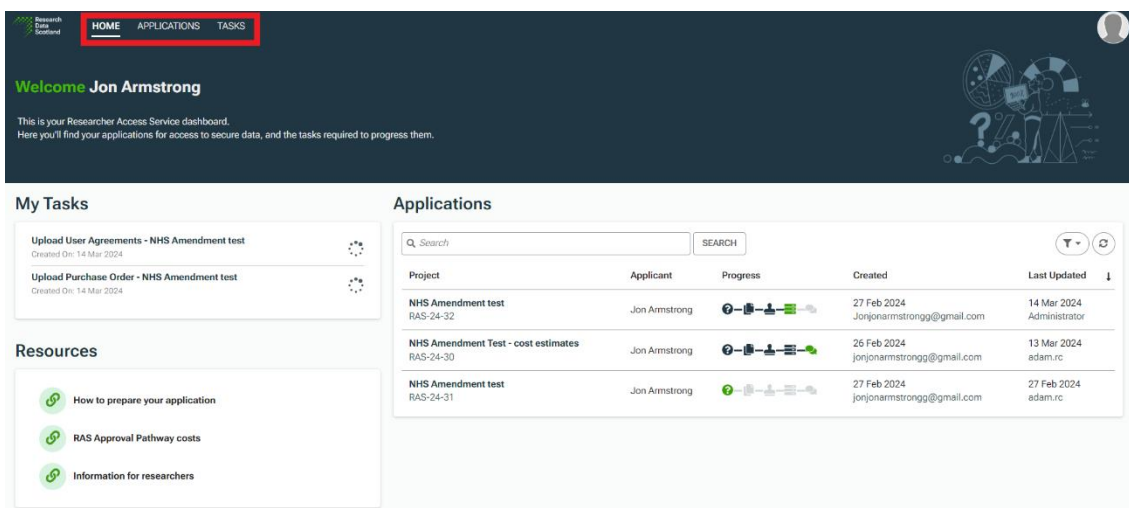
Where RDS has not been previously set up as a supplier at your institution, RDS Finance will send you a document with the necessary financial details once your project is triaged into the RAS Approval Pathway. You will need to liaise with your institution's finance department to get RDS set up as a supplier 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.

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

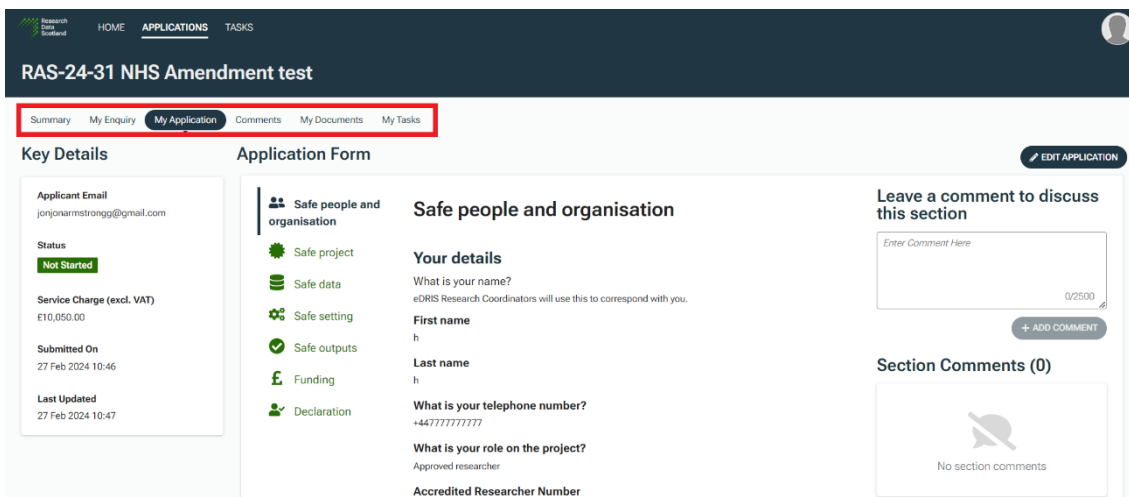
Your dashboard also displays the following sections:

- **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 and messages 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 researcher training certification for you and your research team, along with supporting documents you are required to provide during the application evidencing peer review, ethics approval and a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA).

My Tasks

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

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

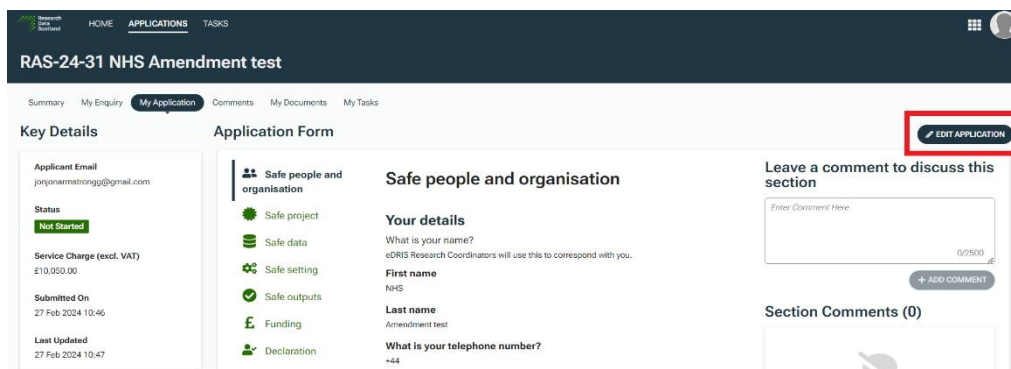
Enquiry	Application in progress	In review	Data assembly	Data access
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Editing your application

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.
- You can 'Save and Exit' the form at any time and return later.



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

Your research team

Research team – Project roles

- We require documented certification of Approved Researcher Training, as well as details about the training type and expiry date for all researchers on your project.

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. Only one PI can be added per project.

Evidencing ethical approval

As part of your application, you are required to submit **one** document to show that your project has received ethical approval. Approval can be granted by your own institution's ethics committee. If you are unsure what evidence to submit, please discuss this with a member of the eDRIS team.

Evidencing peer review

As part of your application, you are required to submit **one** document to show that your project has been peer reviewed. Peer review can be undertaken by several bodies, including your own institution or your funder. If you are unsure what evidence to submit, please discuss this with a member of the eDRIS team.

Evidencing Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)

As part of your application, you are required to submit **one** document to show that you have completed a DPIA for your project. As a DPIA will sometimes require email sign-off from your own institution's Data Protection Office, please combine all documents

relating to your DPIA into one, as only one document can be uploaded to the RAS. If you are unsure what to submit, please discuss this with a member of the eDRIS team.

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 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.

In review

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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."

After reviewing your application, the eDRIS team will schedule, as a minimum, one joint consultation with a Research Coordinator (RC) and Data Analyst (DA). Meeting times will be suggested through Comments on your application.

This consultation is designed 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 has met 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 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

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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 PO, 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.

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 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 or 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 PO 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 note that SAS and SPSS are not available in the National Safe Haven 2.0. While we expect SAS to be available in the future, the new environment no longer supports SPSS.

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

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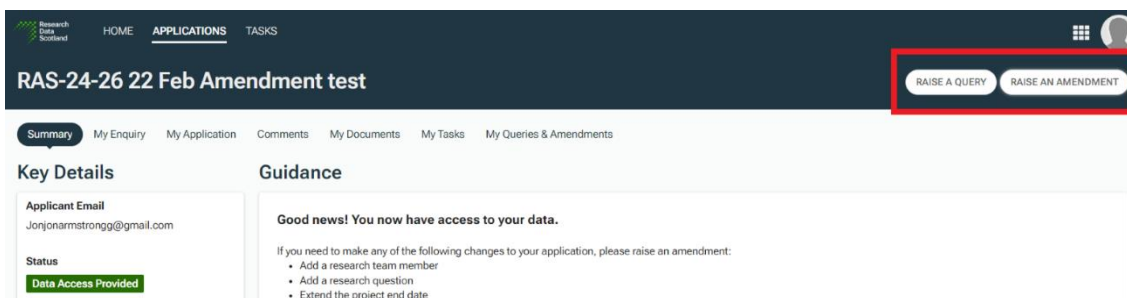
Confirming data suitability

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



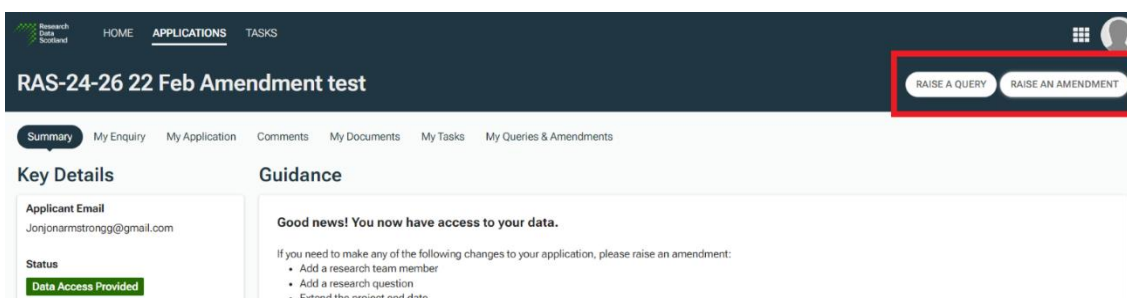
Applicant dashboard view displaying how to 'Raise a query' or 'Raise an amendment'

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.

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.



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.

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/>