Is my Project Research, Evaluation or Audit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
<td>Designed and conducted with the intention to produce generalisable new knowledge about treatments, services or conditions. Research includes studies that aim to generate hypotheses as well as studies that aim to test them or explore themes. Can involve a change/intervention to care or treatment, and randomisation to a treatment arm.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Service Evaluation/Survey</strong></td>
<td>Designed and conducted solely to define or judge current care within a single service - no measure against a predetermined standard. No change/intervention to care. No hypothesis.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Audit</strong></td>
<td>Designed and conducted to produce information to inform delivery of best care - measured against predetermined standards. No change/intervention. No hypothesis. Clinical Audit does not measure effectiveness of different 'treatments'; this would constitute research. Work that describes practice rather than measures compliance against agreed standards is a service evaluation.</td>
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The differences between projects can be slight, so for example, a clinician wishing to evaluate the effectiveness of a wellbeing service could ask:

- "Which therapeutic factors determine improved outcomes and quality of life in people using a Wellbeing service?" – which would be research, as the question is deriving larger themes and outcomes which could be applied beyond the specific service being examined. ‘Generalisability’ in this context means that findings from the study can be reliably extrapolated from the subjects who participated in the study to a broader patient population and a broader range of clinical settings.

- If the clinician asks "Do service users feel that the Wellbeing service is helpful?" this could be a service evaluation, as the intention is purely to look at the current standard of care of a specific service.

- If the clinician asks "Does the Wellbeing service meet referral and treatment targets?" then this could be a clinical audit, as the intention is to determine the compliance of the current practice against agreed standards with the aim to improve the quality of care / practice if required; re-audit is used to monitor change and make adjustments accordingly. Clinical audits commonly collect data from health records using an audit tool, but can also include survey work measuring against the same agreed standards.
Some projects are a mixture of one of more types of classification, and if this is the case, your project will need to be broken down into research, evaluation or audit, and the relevant approvals gained for each phase of the study.

**Q: I am not sure which type of project I am developing, can you help?**

NSFT Research can review your project and determine which classification it is, and then advise on the next steps. If you have a project summary/brief written down already, then send this to RDOfficemailbox@nsft.nhs.uk for review. If you do not have a summary written, then complete the NSFT Project Brief Template and email this to the address provided above.

**Q: How does the type of project I am doing affect the approvals I will need?**

If your project is classified as research, then you will need to obtain approval from the NSFT Research Governance Committee. If you are planning to involve service users or identifiable data from service users, then an additional NHS Ethics Committee approval will also be required. If you are planning to do a complex study, then more approvals may also be required. Speak to NSFT Research about the application process and support/training that is offered.

If you are undertaking a service evaluation, then you will need to complete a Service Evaluation form and submit this to NSFT Research. As a service evaluation, NHS Ethics approval is not required but as part of good practice, participants should still receive information sheets and the option to consent to be involved in the evaluation. Template forms are available for this purpose.

If you are undertaking a clinical audit, then you will need to register the audit and gain authorisation from the NSFT Clinical Audit team. Helpful guidance and forms are available on the NSFT Clinical Audit intranet site.

**Q: I am a student registered with a university on an educational course, do I need to do anything differently?**

Your university will also want to give an approval for your project, regardless of whether it is research, evaluation or audit. Universities will ask you to complete their own documentation and submit your project for approval in one of their faculty ethics committees. Please be aware that these approvals are in addition to any approvals that are received through the NHS.

**Documents / Links to use**

- NSFT Project Brief Template
- Classification: NRES/HRA guidance documentation
- Research Permissions required