

Strategic Research Agenda



2016-19

Queensland Corrective Services



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The Strategic Research Agenda 2016-2019

Introduction

The objective of the Strategic Research Agenda is to outline research priority areas for investigation by researchers external to Queensland Corrective Services (QCS).

The Strategic Research Agenda outlines four priority research areas and lists key research topics under these priority areas to guide research activity.

It is anticipated that this Agenda will assist external researchers to develop and implement research projects that will productively add to the knowledge base of Queensland correctional issues. Undertaking applied research in the areas identified in this Agenda will make a positive difference by directly enhancing QCS' ability to develop evidence-based policy and deliver effective and efficient offender management.

QCS supports forming research partnerships that will progress productive and timely research in the priority areas identified in the Agenda.

Research governance

Research involving QCS facilities, subjects and resources is overseen by the QCS Research Committee and supported by Operational Policy and Performance. External researchers must submit an *Application to Conduct Research* to the QCS Research Committee in order to gain approval to undertake research relating to QCS.

All external researchers must obtain approval from an accredited Human Research Ethics Committee. The QCS Research Committee is not an ethics committee.

External researchers interested in developing research partnerships and/or undertaking research in the priority areas identified in this document are encouraged to discuss their proposed research with representatives from the QCS Research Committee before submitting a research application.

More information about the QCS Research Committee and lodging a research application is contained in the *Research Committee Handbook*.

The *Research Committee Handbook* and *Application to Conduct Research* are available on the Department of Justice and Attorney-General website at: http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/About_Us/The_Department/Research/index.shtml

The Agenda

QCS has identified four priority research themes with corresponding topics for targeted investigation. They are:

1. Managing demand

- Understanding the growth in prisoner and offender numbers

2. Understanding and responding to the diversity of the offender population

- Domestic and family violence
- Women offenders and violent offending
- Youthful offenders (aged 17-25 years)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders
- Offenders with a disability or impaired functioning

3. Safe, secure and humane management of prisoners

- Safe and secure prisons
- Staff culture, training and development

4. Effective and efficient service delivery

- Transitions and successful reintegration
- Service delivery in remote and rural communities

These priority themes are not considered to be mutually exclusive. For example, understanding the offender population will assist in the provision of effective and efficient service delivery.

An overview of the priority topics is provided in table 1 and further discussion of the four priority themes and guiding research topics begins on page 7.

Queensland Corrective Services Strategic Research Priorities 2016-19

Managing Demand	Understanding and Responding to the Diversity of the Offender Population				Safe, Secure and Humane Management of Prisoners		Effective and Efficient Service Delivery	
Understanding the growth in prisoner and offender numbers	Domestic and family violence	Women offenders and violent offending	Youthful offenders (aged 17-25 years)	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders	Safe and secure prisons	Staff culture, training and development	Transitions and successful reintegration	Service delivery in remote and rural communities
Criminal justice responses and legislation and policy changes	International / national best practice models for the treatment and reduction of reoffending	'Best practice' in women's correctional programs	Elder abuse committed by youthful offenders	Community and cultural reintegration	Perpetrators and victims of prisoner-on-prisoner violence	Recruitment and retention of staff	Pre-release planning: factors that improve the likelihood of successful parole completion	Current models of service delivery that are proving effective
Innovative or 'best practice' approaches to manage growth	Strategies to improve self-esteem and self-efficacy for offenders who have been victims of DFV	Understanding violent offending in the women's prison population	Identification of social support mechanisms: impact on risk of reoffending	Pathways and approaches to support desistance from crime	Perpetrators and victims of prisoner-on-staff violence	Role of custodial and community corrections officers: have they changed? how have they changed? implications?	Increasing employment opportunities post-release	Strengthening program/service delivery
Identification of low risk prisoners and diversion strategies	Responding to DFV in regional / remote settings	Violence risk assessment	International / national 'best practice' models for reducing reoffending	Strategies to increase prosocial goals and a desire for a better life	When, where and why prisoner-on-prisoner violence is most likely to occur	Expectations of staff: have they changed? how have they changed? implications?	The role of family and community in offender rehabilitation	Strategies to engage communities and organisations to assist in the reintegration of offenders into the community
	Development of a typology of DFV offenders	Prison-based programs that support parenting and child contact: impact on reintegration and reoffending		Programs: what works? what doesn't? why? implications?	Risk assessment; violent and substance related offending	Strategies to best prepare staff for their role in QCS		Innovative and best practice models adopted by government agencies or other jurisdictions

Table 1: Overview of Strategic Research Priorities

1. Managing demand

1.1. Understanding the growth in prisoner and offender numbers

As at 30 June 2014, Queensland experienced the highest number of prisoners since 2004 and the largest increase in prisoner numbers across all states and territories since 30 June 2013 (ABS, 2014). Specifically, since January 2012 the number of prisoners in Queensland has grown by over 30 percent despite no significant reduction in crime rates.

This increase in prisoner numbers has been driven by a number of factors including general population growth, changing legislation and sentencing patterns and more effective policing practices.

The following information is sought to assist in the development of strategies that aim to limit prisoner growth and/or reduce the prisoner population:

- *the impact of various criminal justice responses such as sentencing and policing practices, and legislation and policy changes on the growth of the prison population*
- *jurisdictional scan of what innovative or 'best practice' approaches have been adopted to effectively manage the growth of prisoner numbers*
- *identification of groups of low risk prisoners who may be effectively diverted from the correctional system, including (but not limited to) the identification of diversion strategies suitable for these groups.*

2. Understanding and responding to the diversity of the offender population

2.1. Domestic and family violence

QCS is committed to strengthening the Agency's response to domestic and family violence through holding offenders to account and ensuring effective and efficient responses to the treatment of offenders and reduction of offences.

Queensland has seen a marked increase in the reported occurrences of domestic and family violence. In 2010-2011, there were 52,889 occurrences in comparison to 66,016 occurrences of domestic and family violence in 2013-14 (Queensland Government, 2015). This constitutes an increase of approximately 20% of reported occurrences. Specifically, in 2013-14, every day in Queensland an average of 181 incidents of domestic and family violence were reported to police. Further, 17 homicides as a result of such violence occurred in Queensland in 2012-13 and on average, nationwide, one woman is killed by her partner every week (Queensland Government, 2015).

QCS has implemented the Positive Futures program which takes a culturally safe and strengths based approach to running engaging and practical family violence programs. The program uses various practically based activities focusing on the main topics of identity, connection, motivation and change, anger and violence, alcohol and drug abuse, power and control, jealousy, trust and fear, family and community and parenting.

The following information is sought to assist in the development of strategies that aim to assist QCS' commitment to effective and efficient responses to domestic and family violence:

- *international/national 'best practice' models for the treatment and reduction of reoffending with domestic and family violence offenders*
- *strategies to improve self-esteem and self-efficacy (including addressing personal safety and domestic violence) for offenders who have been victims of domestic and family violence*
- *responding to domestic and family violence in regional and remote settings*
- *the development of a typology of domestic and family violence offenders, including (but not limited to) the implications for treatment and case management/supervision in the community*

2.2. Women offenders and violent offending

During the 2013-14 financial year, the female imprisonment rate in Queensland increased from 29.5 to 36.2 prisoners per 100,000 female adult population (ABS, 2014). Women are increasingly being imprisoned for violent offences, for example, assault, serious assault, unlawful wounding, manslaughter and murder.

Nationally, during the 2013-14 financial year, one in five female prisoners were in custody for a Most Serious Offence of 'acts intended to cause injury' (ABS, 2014). In Queensland specifically, as at 30 June 2015 approximately 45% of the total female custodial population were in prison for a Most Serious Offence involving violence.

By drawing on evidence of the causes of violent offending, QCS will be able to target interventions and tailor supervision to maximise the impact on reoffending. The identification of sub-groups of violent offenders will allow QCS to implement different approaches for prisoner management.

The following information is sought to maximise crime prevention outcomes for offenders, their families and the community:

- *best practice in women's correctional programs*
- *understanding violent offending in the women's prison population*

- *strategies to reduce the risk of violent offending in the women's prison population*
- *violence risk assessment specific to the unique needs of female offenders*
- *prison-based programs that support women's parenting and child contact and their impact on reintegration and reoffending*

2.3. Youthful offenders

As at 30 June 2014, Queensland recorded the highest proportion of adult prisoners (22%) aged 17-25 years of all states and territories (ABS, 2014). QCS has seen an increase in the number of youthful offenders who have committed offences against their parents. Whilst the problem of youthful violence committed against parents is not new, it has only recently begun to receive recognition in the public domain. As a result, minimal research has been conducted in Australia examining the causes and impact of such violence against parents.

A recent paper produced by QCS (2013), identified that offenders who enter custody at age 17 or 18, and to a lesser extent 19 to 21, are at high risk of having lengthy custodial careers with high recidivism. These offenders are likely to commit more serious offences (i.e. violent offences) and are also more likely to go on to be considered prolific offenders (with four or more custodial admissions and five or more years of aggregated incarceration time). Almost all of this group were categorised as violent offenders with 87.8% having a violent offence as their Most Serious Offence at some point during their criminal career (QCS, 2013).

These offenders present with a number of other needs such as drug problems and poor education that require attention. Therefore, the following information concerning youthful offenders is sought to inform early intervention strategies that can be implemented by QCS to encourage the desistance of such offending behaviour:

- *best practice models to understand and address elder abuse (e.g. offences against parents or guardians) committed by youthful offenders (aged 17-25 years) with specific consideration given to the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders*
- *best practice models to understand and address violent offending committed by youthful offenders with specific consideration given to the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders*
- *social support mechanisms to reduce the risk of reoffending in the youthful offender cohort (e.g. stable accommodation, employment, education, increasing pro-social modelling)*
- *international/national best practice models for reducing reoffending with youthful offenders*

2.4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have historically been, and continue to be, over-represented in the Australian criminal justice system. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014) noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent only 3% of the total population in Australia, yet 30% of Australia's prison population in 2014 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults.

More specifically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 3.5% of the Queensland population (ABS, 2014). However, they are significantly over-represented in Queensland prisons. As at 31 January 2015, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners represented 32% of the total prison population.

The following information is sought to identify strategies to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders and to examine approaches to increase program participation and prosocial goals:

- *strategies to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders, including (but not limited to):*
 - strategies to promote successful community and cultural reintegration
 - responses that focus on education and/or stable employment and accommodation in the community
 - pathways and approaches that have shown impact supporting and sustaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander desistance from crime (including unique gender considerations)
- *strategies to increase prosocial goals and a desire for a better life*
- *programs, including (but not limited to):*
 - the impact of programs on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders, or those at risk of offending, in comparison to other offender/at risk cohorts (e.g. what works? what doesn't? why? implications?)
 - the impact of program participation rates (and outcomes) on recidivism in comparison to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders (e.g. are there any differences? what are they? why are they occurring? implications? how can these be addressed?)
 - are there differences between how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders experience parole in comparison to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander offenders? What are they? Why are they occurring? What are the implications for case management/community supervision?

- *risk assessment, including (but not limited to) the development/validation of risk assessment tools for violent and substance related offending specific to the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders*

2.5. Offenders with a disability or impaired functioning

Offenders included in this priority group are those who have a disability or impaired functioning due to developmental and neurological conditions. For example, cognitive impairment; acquired brain injury; autism or autistic spectrum disorder; and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Such conditions may affect the behaviour of individuals while in prison and in the community.

A 2002 Queensland study based on IQ testing, found that 9.8% of prisoners scored in the Intellectual Disability range and 28.6% scored in the 'borderline' intellectual disability range. Whilst there is limited recent research available that identifies the prevalence and experiences of offenders with impaired functioning in Queensland, previous research has established that significantly higher rates of intellectual disability and impaired cognitive functioning exist in offending populations than in the general population.

These offenders often present with challenging behaviours and can be difficult to manage. Many require additional assistance and support to cope with the routine daily tasks both within custody and whilst living in the community. Improving offenders' functional capacity can be just as important as assisting them to gain sufficient numeracy and literacy skills.

The following information is sought to identify strategies to increase adaptive living and coping skills, accessing supported accommodation and specialised employment assistance. Unaddressed, these problems undermine offenders' ability to cope with challenges of everyday living, and greatly heighten the risk of reoffending.

- *identification of the prevalence of specific developmental and neurological conditions within the Queensland prisoner/offender population*
- *strategies to reduce the over-representation of offenders with developmental and neurological conditions, including (but not limited to):*
 - increasing emotional stability, developing adaptive coping and living skills, building resilience, and maintaining supportive relationships based on best-practice methods
- *strategies to reduce the risk of reoffending for offenders with developmental and neurological conditions, including (but not limited to):*

- improving access to supported accommodation, specialised employment assistance, and government and community-based specialists
- the identification of innovative strategies to address the high proportion of offenders with a developmental or neurological condition

3. Safe, secure and humane management of prisoners

3.1. Safe and secure prisons

Prison violence research regarding prisoner-on-prisoner violence suggests that many incidents are not reported to custodial officers. Current explanations for prison violence are increasingly focused on examining the interaction between prison environment and prisoners. This is evident in the interest in various aspects of prison culture, such as procedural routines, programs, staffing issues, management of offenders, compliance and discipline and organisational ethos.

However, the issue of violence in prison is complex. The mechanisms of prisoner-on-staff violence differ greatly from prisoner-on-prisoner violence, making it difficult to find a uniform explanation for prison violence. Further, it is apparent that there is an absence of Australian research and the experience of victimisation by female and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners is also overlooked in Australian criminological studies. A safe and secure prison requires that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that individual prisoners and staff members are protected from harm by others.

The following information is sought to strengthen the commitment of QCS to community safety and crime prevention through the humane containment, supervision and rehabilitation of offenders:

- *perpetrators of prisoner-on-prisoner violence*
- *victims of prisoner-on-prisoner violence*
- *when, where, and why prisoner-on-prisoner violence is most likely to occur*
- *strategies to reduce the likelihood of prisoner-on-prisoner violence, based on 'best practice' models*
- *perpetrators of prisoner-on-staff violence*
- *victims of prisoner-on-staff violence*
- *when, where and why prisoner-on-staff violence is most likely to occur*
- *strategies to reduce the likelihood of prisoner-on-staff violence, based on 'best practice' models*

3.2. Staff culture, training and development

Since its establishment at Wacol in 1986, the QCS Academy has provided education, training and development services to corrective services staff across Queensland. These services enable staff to carry out their primary roles of protecting the Queensland community with confidence, competence and safety.

The above services are carried out through the following:

- a) the Academy operating as the QCS Registered Training Organisation, developing and delivering recognised qualifications;
- b) the development and delivery of the Custodial Officer Entry Level Program for new Custodial Correctional Officers;
- c) the development and delivery of programs for Probation and Parole staff;
- d) management and leadership programs;
- e) development and delivery of dog squad training programs;
- f) development of QCS staff who undertake trainer and assessor roles within their workplaces; and
- g) training of instructors in specific areas such as cultural awareness, suicide prevention, staff safety, protecting vulnerable offenders, firearms and control and restraint.

The Academy, through the development and delivery of such activities, also recognises the important role it undertakes in demonstrating and promoting the QCS values of integrity, service, respect, opportunity and accountability.

The following information is sought to gain a greater understanding of staff culture within QCS and opportunities to strengthen current training and development strategies.

- *recruitment and retention, including (but not limited to):*
 - motivations of staff to commence employment and remain working with QCS
 - strategies for the effective recruitment and retention of suitable staff
- *culture of QCS, including (but not limited to):*
 - the roles of custodial and community corrections officers (e.g. have they changed, how have they changed? implications?)
 - expectations of custodial and community staff (e.g. have they changed? how have they changed? implications?)
 - strategies to best prepare staff for their role in corrective services

4. Effective and efficient service delivery

4.1. Transitions and successful reintegration

An underlying principle of current case-management strategies for offenders is throughcare. This approach aims to support an offender's continuing rehabilitation from their initial reception into custody, throughout their custodial sentence and during the critical transition into the community.

To increase the likelihood of an offender successfully reintegrating into the community, QCS provides the transitional programs. Transitional programs deliver release preparation providing offenders with an opportunity to address their practical resettlement needs prior to release through the provision of accurate information, planning assistance, emotional support and linkages with appropriate community agencies. Transitional programs are targeted at offenders assessed as having a higher likelihood of reoffending, in order to improve their chances of successful reintegration into the community.

To assist offenders in maintaining contact with their families, QCS has implemented the Family Support Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders. The aim of the program is to reduce the stress experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners by initiating more family contact during a time of incarceration. The initiatives include family days, NAIDOC Week celebrations, and escorting approved prisoners home for funerals.

Available evidence shows that effective throughcare strategies can reduce recidivism and produce better outcomes for offenders. A reduction in recidivism will strengthen the Agency's commitment to community safety while at the same time, assist in easing the growth of prisoner numbers being experienced in Queensland.

The following information is sought to strengthen the effective and efficient service delivery provided by QCS:

- *pre-release planning: factors that improve the likelihood of successful parole completion*
- *increasing employment opportunities for offenders post-release with consideration given to the unique needs of women offenders (e.g. what works? what doesn't?)*
- *the role of family and community in offender rehabilitation, including (but not limited to) an examination of what the literature suggests and how can this be operationalised to include families and communities as key participants in the case management of offenders*

4.2. Service delivery in rural and remote communities

Resource limitations and the large size of Queensland create challenges for the delivery of effective and appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders in rural and remote areas. QCS continually aims to improve its capacity to supervise and deliver rehabilitation programs to such offenders in the community in order to reduce recidivism and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the criminal justice system.

QCS has established permanent Probation and Parole reporting centres in a number of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These remote locations include Mornington Island, Doomadgee, Thursday Island (District Office), Weipa, Cooktown, Palm Island and Woorabinda.

For remote communities that do not have permanent reporting centres, two alternative service delivery methods are used by QCS staff to ensure appropriate offender supervision and management is delivered. These are drive in, drive out, or fly in, fly out.

A cultural liaison officer in the Far Northern Region also provides advice to staff on specific cultural issues and works with District Managers to further establish and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks and stakeholder relationships.

The following information is sought to improve and promote effective responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders in rural and remote areas:

- *current models of service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders in rural and remote communities that are proving effective*
- *strengthening program/service delivery in rural and remote communities*
- *strategies to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to assist in the reintegration of offenders into the community*
- *innovative and 'best practice' models adopted by other government agencies or jurisdictions to provide support and delivery of services in these areas*

5. QCS Research Committee Decision Making Process

5.1. Research concerning individual prisoners or offenders

Research that focuses on individual prisoners/offenders will not be approved by the QCS Research Committee irrespective of whether Human Research Ethics Approval has been obtained. All applications are considered against the purpose of corrective services outlined in Section 3(2) and Section 3(3) of the *Corrective Services Act 2006*. The Research Committee must also consider the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994* (Section 4) and Section 6.1 of the *Media Access and Public Engagements* procedure.

Specifically, the procedure states that interviews with (or about) individual prisoners/offenders are unlikely to be approved if:

- the offender is on remand for an offence/s and consequently an interview could impact upon the trial or appeal of the person;
- access to the offender may adversely affect the security or good order of a corrective services facility;
- the interview could adversely affect the safe custody and welfare of the offender or any other person or the supervision of the offender in the community;
- the interview could embarrass, injure or distress the victims of crime or their families;
- the person is being detained for immigration purposes on behalf of the Commonwealth; or
- the interview is likely to glorify the offending or add to the notoriety of the offender.

Therefore, research that identifies individual offenders could add to their notoriety and would not be in the public interest or benefit the community.

5.2. Application review

The QCS Research Committee gives careful consideration to all research applications submitted by external researchers. However, due to the staff assistance and resources required from QCS custodial centres and Probation and Parole Offices, research applications that examine the identified themes and topics will be considered favourably and prioritised.

The three broad criteria used to assess research submissions by the QCS Research Committee include:

1. Strategic benefit

- the value of the research to the agency;
- how the research will inform operational strategies for the agency;
- whether the research is consistent with legislation; and
- the cost effectiveness of the research.

2. Academic merit

- the likelihood of the research making an original contribution to criminological knowledge;
- whether similar research projects have been previously conducted;
- the suitability of the research methodology; and
- the competence of the applicant(s) or principal investigator(s) to undertake the research.

3. Effect on Agency operations

- any perceived risks associated with the research;
- research methodology is suitable for a custodial environment (where applicable);
- Agency resources required to extract data and the availability of data (where applicable);
- consideration of potential ethical issues that might arise when conducting research with an offender/prisoner population; and
- the amount of in-kind assistance required from QCS (e.g. recruiting participants).

All applications are individually reviewed by QCS Research Committee members before a final collective decision is made in relation to the above criteria.

5.3. Notification of outcome

Following the QCS Research Committee meeting, research applicants will be notified in writing of one of the following outcomes as determined by the Committee. Research applications will be:

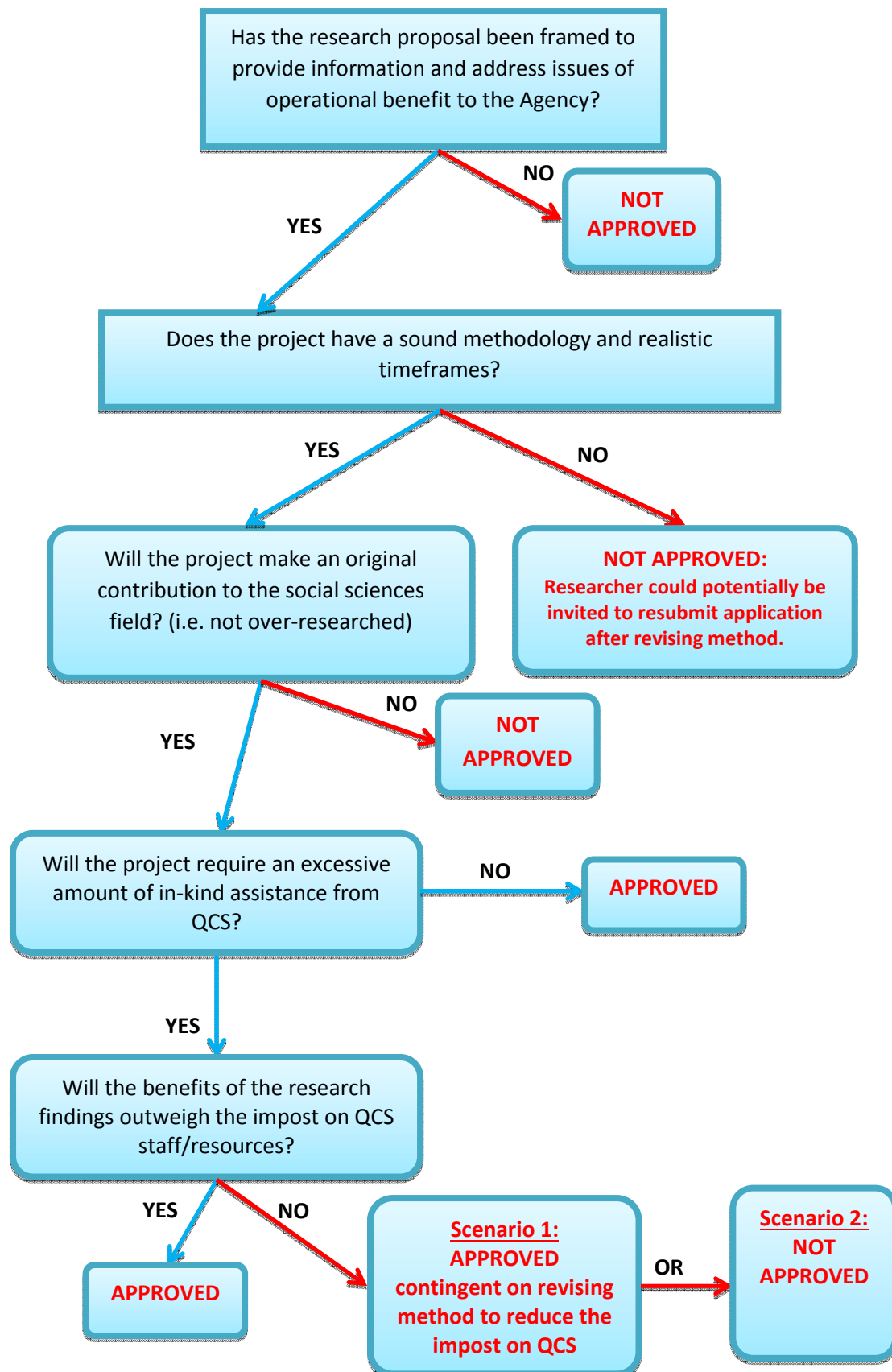
- a) approved;
- b) approved subject to conditions (e.g. full ethics approval, slight revisions to methodology);
- c) not approved; or
- d) deferred (pending clarification or further information).

The decision making process for research applications is outlined in Figures 1 and 2.

It is important to note that final approval for external researchers to access Custodial Centres and Probation and Parole offices, and the timing of the research, is at the discretion of individual General Managers (Custodial) and Regional Managers (Probation and Parole).

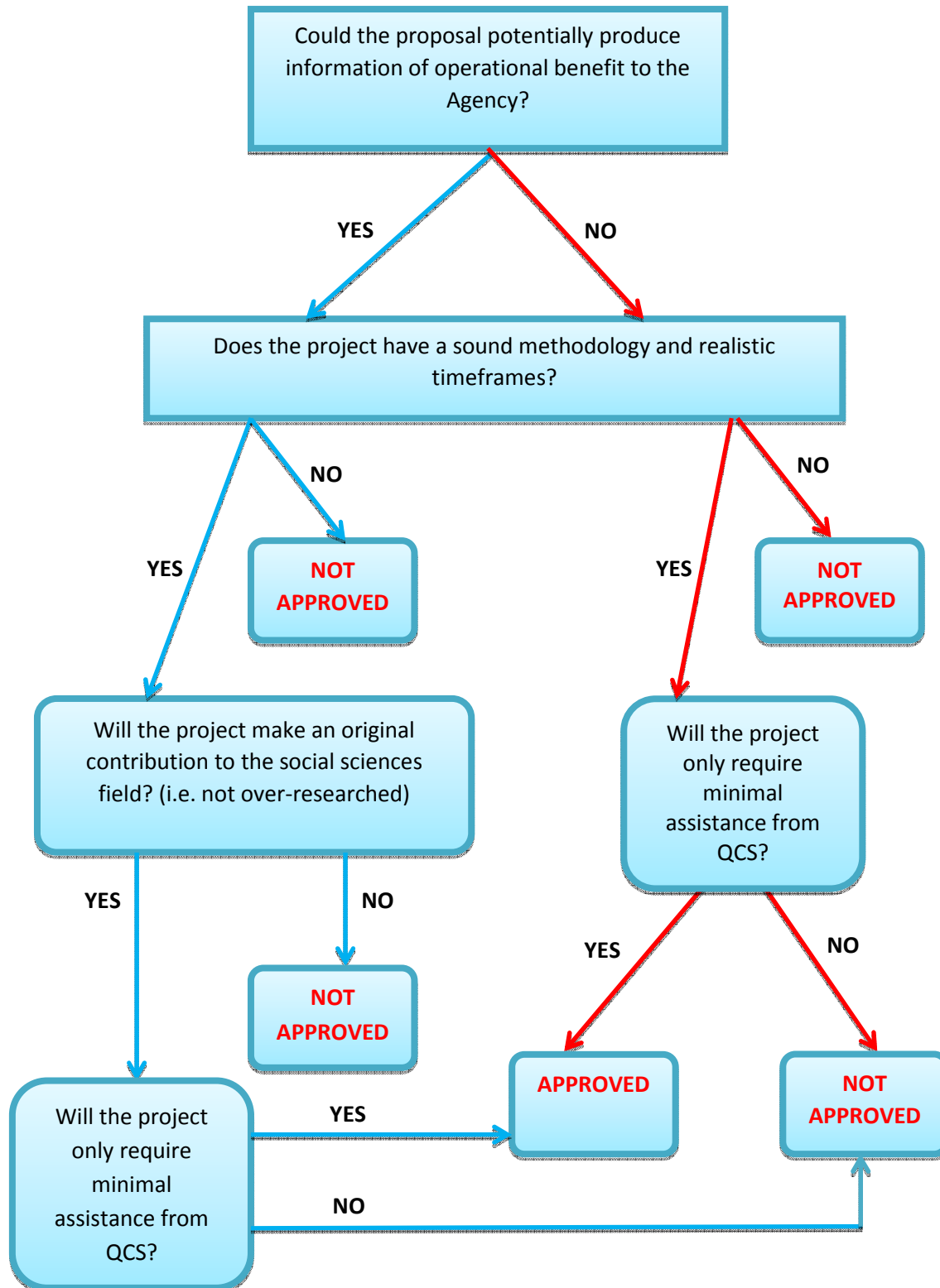
5.4. Decision Making Process: Priority Topics

Figure 1: QCS Research Committee decision making process for priority topics



5.5. Decision Making Process: Non-Priority Topics

Figure 2: QCS Research Committee decision making process for non-priority topics



If you require further information about the Queensland Corrective Services Strategic Research Agenda, please contact Operational Policy and Performance on telephone number (07) 3227 6594 or by email Research@dcs.qld.gov.au.

