# Gatekeeper Expectations: Guidance

This guidance is aimed at researchers working with third parties who represent research participants. Gatekeepers have a variety of roles and responsibilities:

1. a gatekeeper could be a person who is willing to help with recruitment of research participants where the researcher has no direct access to potential participants. They might be willing, for example, to pass on recruitment material within their organisations. Some might be willing to pass on contact details of potential participants having gained consent to do so.
2. gatekeepers can also include the leaders of organisations; for example, a headteacher, whose permission would be required in order to conduct research in a school. A comparable situation applies in universities where permission and support of the research governance department will be required. The gatekeeper’s permission is quite distinct from the consent of participants.
3. in some cases, a gatekeeper’s permission is required as part of the ethics review of a study. Examples include the [HRA](https://www.hra.nhs.uk/) for any studies aiming to recruit NHS patients or their carers and people (and their carers) in receipt of state funded social care. A further example includes research aimed at prisoners and the prison service; an application has to be made to [His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-prison-and-probation-service) in order to access its National Research Committee. These applications are made via [Integrated Research Application System](https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/) (IRAS).
4. a gatekeeper could also be a webmaster or a leader of a social media group even if it’s possible to access members of that group directly.[[1]](#footnote-1)

To the greatest possible extent, gatekeepers should maintain whistleblower anonymity and confidentiality. Individuals can give their name but request confidentiality - the person or body they tell should make every effort to protect their identity. The law does not compel an organisation to protect the confidentiality of a whistleblower. However, it is considered best practice to maintain that confidentiality, unless required by law to disclose it. It is though acknowledged that gatekeepers have a duty of care to prevent harm to the researcher's participants, or anyone who could be impacted by the research project.

The following list is not exhaustive but sets out the researcher's expectations of the gatekeeper and their practices. Think through and explore the potential ramifications of the points below with the gatekeeper (where appropriate and dependent on the project):

**Communications** –It is expected that the gatekeeper and/ or the gatekeeper’s organisation are in agreement regarding any form of external communications (communications with any individual, company or network not connected to the research project), prior to the commencement of the research project. This may be revisited during or after the research project but with the expectation that all parties agree with any changes, prior to any external communications being circulated.

**Confidentiality -** It is expected that the gatekeeper and/ or the gatekeeper’s organisation protect and keep private the personal information of the research participants and the researchers, from access to disclosure. It is expected that they may have access to identifiable information about the research participants and the researchers (name, email address, telephone number for example) but that they will endeavor to protect their confidentiality at all times by not disclosing any of this information to a third party (the media for example) without consent.

**Consent** –It is expected that should a participant withdraw consent and/or the gatekeeper and/ or the gatekeeper’s organisation withdraws consent, that they inform the researcher as soon as possible.

**Dissemination** – It is expected that the gatekeeper and/ or the gatekeeper’s organisation are in agreement as to how the research will be disseminated, prior to the commencement of the research project. This may be revisited during or after the research project but with the expectation that both parties agree with any changes, prior to dissemination.

**Record keeping and data storage** –It is expected that the gatekeeper and/ or the gatekeeper’s organisation are GDPR compliant.

1. Definition taken from UK Research Integrity Office <https://ukrio.org/our-work/get-advice-from-ukrio/answers-to-common-enquiries/advice-on-research-ethics-and-gatekeeper-permissions-for-international-researchers/> accessed 25/07/2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)