

NIHR PenARC Search & Review Advice Sessions: Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who can help with my query?

When you book an appointment, you will need to tell us whether you want to speak to an Information Specialist or a Systematic Reviewer. In order to help you make that decision, here are some general areas that we can help with:

Information Specialist: informing search strategies, using Endnote as your reference library, managing your references, searching databases effectively, using local resources.

Systematic Reviewer: developing your protocol, describing the systematic review process, guidance on screening, data extraction and quality assessment (critical appraisal) and synthesis.

2. I haven't really got a clear idea of my research question or what I'm planning to do yet – may I still book an appointment?

We'd advise that you discuss this in detail with your supervisor in the first instance, so that you come to us with at least a draft research question and workplan, which we can then help you refine if necessary.

The more information you can provide us with in the booking form about your progress with your project and what you are struggling with, the more tailored the advice we can give on the day. Simply saying "I need help with my search" may result in most of the appointment being taken up with giving you generic searching advice that you could find fairly easily elsewhere, rather than focusing on a search strategy for your specific question. Please do make use of the general searching resources suggested under question 3 below.

3. I'd like some advice on searching, but I'm not doing a systematic review. May I book an appointment?

These advice sessions are specifically aimed at addressing systematic review-related queries. If you're not planning or considering a systematic review then waiting for an available appointment is unlikely to be the best use of your time. Here are some alternative resources that it may be helpful to explore first:

- General searching advice from the University libraries ([Plymouth](#), [Exeter](#))
- [Literature Searching Primer](#)
- The Universities' Systematic Review pages ([Plymouth](#), [Exeter](#))
- University of Exeter Evidence Synthesis & Modelling for Health Improvement's [Information Specialist Team](#) page
- There are answers to many of the common questions we help with in the advice sessions on our [blog](#), together with links to other useful resources such as the [Cochrane Handbook](#) (chapters 5-12) and [Centre for Reviews and Dissemination](#).
- University of Exeter staff and students can book an appointment with their Subject Area Academic Liaison Librarian [here](#); University of Plymouth staff and students can contact their Subject Area Information Specialist [here](#) (please search for the relevant person by subject on both sites).

4. Can I book more than one appointment at a time?

Yes, you may book a maximum of 2 appointments per advice session date, but please only book a double appointment if you think you will need to speak to both an Information Specialist and a Systematic Reviewer at the same time. This allows our team to address the many advice requests they receive as promptly as possible. More than two appointments booked by, or on behalf of, the same person on any one day will be declined. If you have a double appointment booked and we think we can address your enquiry in half an hour, we may reduce this to a single appointment.

You can book follow-up appointments at future sessions as you progress with your systematic review: please check with the member of staff you see at your initial appointment whether they would advise this. Please note that the team works on a rota, and you may not always see the same person at the next session you attend.

5. The dates displayed on the website are not convenient for me. Can I book an appointment outside these times?

Unfortunately not. The sessions give protected time for team members to handle advice requests alongside their many other commitments. Depending on the nature of your enquiry, a member of staff may be able to provide you with advice by email during the time allocated for an advice session, although this will not be a suitable solution in every case: please email penarc@exeter.ac.uk to ask about this.

An interactive appointment is always recommended where possible. Please note also that all appointments are offered online via MS Teams, so you can join from your usual location.

6. Why isn't there a Teams link on the Eventbrite booking page?

We will send you a separate Calendar appointment for your booked time with an individual Teams link, usually 1-2 days prior to the event date. If you have not received a Calendar invitation by 15:00 on the afternoon before the advice session is due to take place, please [contact us](#).

7. The time of the Calendar appointment I've been sent doesn't match the advertised advice session time.

The time displayed on Eventbrite and on the PenARC web page is for the overall advice session. Your booking will be for either one or two half-hour appointments within that time. The timeslot(s) you have booked for will be shown on your booking confirmation from Eventbrite under the Order Summary section (example below):

Order Summary

Order #11515799713 - 18 January 2025

Free order

1 x Timeslot 2: 12:00 – 12:30

£0.00

[View and manage your order online](#)

[Contact the organiser](#) for any questions related to this purchase.

This order is subject to Eventbrite [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), and [Cookie Policy](#).

Eventbrite will often send you automated reminders about your appointment showing the start and finish times of the whole advice session, which can be misleading! We recommend that you diarise your appointment time as soon as you receive your booking confirmation.

8. I've made an appointment that I can't now attend. What do I do?

We understand that conflicting emergencies and diary errors happen to everyone! If you make an appointment and subsequently find you can't attend, it would be helpful if you could let us know in advance if at all possible, in order to free up the space for others or allow the time to be used for other purposes. There are a few ways to do this:

- Send an email to penarc@exeter.ac.uk, stating your name and the date and time of the appointment you want to cancel.
- If you have an [Eventbrite](#) account, you can cancel your appointment yourself by logging in, clicking on the order you want to cancel on the Tickets page, and then clicking "Cancel Order". This will send us an automated email notification that you have cancelled your appointment. Please note that this option is not always available on a mobile device.
- If you have already been sent a calendar invite with a meeting link, please click on "reply all" from the calendar appointment and send us a message. This will let the colleagues who are running the session know directly that you can't attend, in case a member of the admin team is not available to pick up the cancellation.

If you're unable to let us know you can't attend before your appointment time, we would be grateful to receive a brief explanation afterwards, when circumstances allow.

We do keep a record of no-shows, and colleagues who fail to attend on three separate occasions with no contact **either before or after** the missed appointment will, regrettably, be barred from booking on to future advice sessions.

9. Can I record my appointment for future reference?

Sorry, we don't permit appointments to be recorded. However, short pre-recorded teaching videos can be made available to you on request following your appointment.

10. I'm not based in the South West Peninsula of England. May I book an appointment anyway?

Due to limited staffing resource, we can currently only accept bookings from people based within the [PenARC's geographical catchment area](#) who work in and around health and social care services or in related research areas. We are happy to accept bookings relating to multi-site collaborative projects, but the appointment must be made and attended by a member of the project team who is based at an organisation within the South West Peninsula. This is to ensure you are able to gain access to the resources our team members may signpost you to.

If you are based in another area of England and your project has no links with the South West, we would recommend that you contact either the [Applied Research Collaboration for your region](#), or the relevant [NIHR Research Support Service Hub or Specialist Centre](#).

11. Why has my booking been declined/cancelled?

As mentioned above, this could be for a number of reasons: if you have booked more than 2 appointments for the same advice session; if you have made several previous appointments and not attended; or if you are booking from outside the South West Peninsula. On very rare occasions, we may need to cancel an appointment due to staff illness or other priority commitments. Where possible, we will always try to find another member of the team who can take the session. If we need to cancel, we will rebook your appointment for the next available advice session which suits you.

12. I'm looking for someone with systematic review expertise to collaborate on my project. Should I start by booking an appointment?

The advice sessions are intended to support researchers to carry out their own systematic review activities, so they are not the right forum to ask about collaboration on a project where you don't already have staffing resource identified for this. If you would like to approach the PenARC Evidence Synthesis Team about working with you on a project, you can either email penarc@exeter.ac.uk, or [contact individual team members directly](#). Please be aware that our capacity to collaborate on projects is limited and depends on the needs of our existing work programme.

13. Who can I contact with any other questions about the advice sessions?

Please email [PenARC](#) in the first instance.