

NHSnet Connections to HM Prison Service health care centres

There is an agreed policy of securing NHSnet connections for all prison health care centres, for both e-mail and browser services. Progress has been slower than expected due to a number of technical and security issues. At present, work is underway to determine options for securing a single NHSnet connection through the Prison Service's own "Quantum" IM&T infrastructure, building on the Quantum Internet Browser Pilot project and GSI rollout through out the Prison Service. GSI is now implemented across the majority of the Prison Service and allows e-mail with NHS e-mail addressees utilising an internal mail gateway negating any requirement for mail to transit the internet

In the meantime, some prisons and PCTs have decided to pursue the implementation of standalone NHSnet connections as a stop-gap measure. A number of PCTs have already organised direct ISDN connection to prisons where they are contracted to provide the healthcare to prisoners, and some have installed – or have plans to install – standalone clinical information systems that require an NHSnet connection for full functionality.

At present, prison health care centres are permitted to connect to NHSnet on a par with a number of other agencies including Local Authority Social Services Departments.

NHSnet connections to prisons cannot be construed as connections to a 'branch surgery', and are not covered by the provisions that apply for General Practice connections. This is consistent with the wider policy position and legal advice on the present statutory status of prison health care centres.

PCTs or other NHS organisations may purchase NHSnet connections from prison sites using the framework contract. In such cases the security aspects must have been properly vetted and approved as compliant with NHSnet security requirements and those of the HMPS Quantum programme. The preference is for all prison connections to be covered by the NHS Access Agreement and Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) already in place in the HMPS sites that have standalone NHSnet connections by virtue of their involvement in the HMPS clinical information systems pilot. Alternatively, a separate AUP and Access Agreement will be required for each site. PCTs should not use their existing Access Agreements to purchase NHSnet connections for prison sites.

Organisations wishing to procure NHSnet connections for prison sites should contact their local NHSnet Security Manager to obtain the necessary NHSnet security advice and agreement prior to connection. Those that have already such NHSnet connections must contact their local NHSnet Security Manager so that the connection can be regularised. Service providers have been advised not to connect prison sites to NHSnet without the correct sign off from the NHSIA. They have also been asked to provide details of any prison sites already connected outside the HMPS clinical information systems pilot.

It is anticipated that a timetable for the rollout of NHSnet connectivity to prisons, via the HMPS Quantum infrastructure, will be agreed during the summer 2003. In the short term, this is likely to provide for NHSnet browser and mail connections but not direct links to standalone clinical information systems that may have been implemented locally.

For further information please see:

<http://www.nhsia.nhs.uk/nhsnet/pages/security>

For details of local NHSnet Security Managers see

<http://www.nhsia.nhs.uk/nhsnet/pages/contacts/security>