

Information for witnesses participating in a hearing using Microsoft Teams

This factsheet is designed to give witnesses practical information to help prepare for participating in a hearing being held using Microsoft Teams.

We are committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity. We want our processes to be fair, transparent, and objective.

Please contact the person who sent you this factsheet if you need this document in a different format or to discuss how we can help you further.

We want to know if you are affected by illness, disability or any other factor which may fall into the category of protected characteristics and may impact on your ability to participate in a hearing as a witness in any way.

Protected characteristics can mean; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partner, pregnancy, race, religion, sexual orientation, according to the Equality Act 2010.

What types of hearing do we have?

There are four types of hearing.

- A Fitness to Practise Panel Application hearing is where the Panel consider the fitness to practise of a worker applying to be registered and decide whether to grant their application.
- A Fitness to Practise Panel Impairment hearing is where the Panel decide whether a registered worker's fitness to practise is impaired, and if so, what sanction should be imposed.
- A Fitness to Practise Panel Restoration hearing is where the Panel decide whether a former registered worker's application to be restored to our Register should be granted.
- A Fitness to Practise Panel Temporary Order hearing is where the Panel decide whether a Temporary Order should be imposed on a worker's registration while we carry out our investigation.

Who participates in our hearings?

The following parties are involved in our hearings:

- The registered worker/person applying to be registered/restored to the register, and their representative/supporter (if they have one).
- The presenter, a solicitor who will present the SSSC's case.
- A Hearings Officer who makes sure the hearing process runs smoothly.
- The Panel. This includes a legally qualified chair (LQC), a social services member and a lay member. The LQC is a qualified solicitor or advocate who will lead the hearing. The social services member will have experience of working in social services and is registered with us. The lay member is not and has not been involved in social services work in the past five years.

Other witnesses may also be involved in the hearing who may have been asked to participate by either the SSSC or the worker.

Members of the public and local and national media may attend if the hearing is held in public.

How are hearings held?

The majority of our hearings are now held remotely using Microsoft Teams. However, the hearing may take place in person in our offices in Dundee, or very occasionally at another location. The SSSC presenter will tell you how the hearing is going to take place when they contact you to ask you to give evidence at the hearing.

Useful information about Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is Microsoft's video conferencing tool. To use this, you need an internet-enabled device with a camera, such as a smart phone, tablet or computer. You join the web-based hearing through the internet. We recommend that you download the Microsoft Teams application for best results (there is no cost for this) if you can.

One of our Hearings Officers will be in touch one or two weeks before the hearing to arrange a test Microsoft Teams videocall with you. Please ensure that you have downloaded the app onto a device that supports videocalls and allows you to access your emails.

When participating in a hearing using Microsoft Teams, you should make sure you are in a quiet place, free from interruptions and distractions. This could be in your own home or in your workplace.

When do hearings take place?

The SSSC's presenter will write to you around 2 to 3 months before the hearing is scheduled to start to advise you of the hearing dates and when you are required to give evidence. Hearings usually take place between 10am and 5pm.

The SSSC's presenter will confirm when the hearing is taking place and the date and time you need to be available. Please note that this is only an estimation. Unexpected issues may arise which may result in a delay. In this event, one of our Hearings Officers will try and keep you updated as best they can. The Panel will be aware that you are waiting and will do their best to hear your evidence on time wherever possible.

It is important that you advise us as soon as possible of any dates that you are unable to be available for otherwise we will assume that you can participate on the dates suggested.

If at any time you think you are unable to participate in a hearing, or you have any concerns about participating, you should contact the SSSC presenter as soon as possible. We can then discuss your particular circumstances. We may ask you for paperwork to confirm certain details, for example if you are ill or on holiday. We can consider alternative arrangements if you tell us as soon as possible.

What should you wear?

You should wear clothes that you feel comfortable in when participating in the hearing. Our Fitness to Practise Panel hearings are a formal, legal process.

Can you have a supporter with you when you give your evidence?

Yes. You should tell the Hearings Officer that you have a supporter present with you, so that the Hearings Officer can inform the Panel and they can take any further steps they consider necessary.

What should you have with you?

You should not have a copy of your statement with you in the hearing. The SSSC presenter may refer you to documents which can include your written statement. These will be made available during the hearing. If you would like a copy of your statement before the hearing, please contact the SSSC presenter.

How long will the hearing last?

The length of a hearing varies from case to case. If the hearing is expected to last for several days, you are unlikely to be asked to participate every day. The SSSC presenter will confirm the exact date and time you are required to be available.

We do try to stagger the attendance of witnesses to reduce waiting times, but sometimes this is not possible. You can discuss your arrangements with the SSSC presenter.

What happens when you are giving evidence?

You will be invited into the hearing by the Hearings Officer when the Panel is ready to hear your evidence. The hearing will be recorded using recording software built into Microsoft Teams. The parties involved in the hearing will all appear on the screen in front of you. You should have your camera on when giving evidence.

The LQC of the Fitness to Practise Panel will explain to you what case is being heard and ask everyone to introduce themselves to you.

You will not be asked to take an oath, but you are expected to be honest when giving evidence. If you are a registered worker, you will also be reminded of your obligations under the SSSC Code of Practice for Social Service Workers to be honest and trustworthy.

You will be asked questions about what you saw and heard. You might be asked questions about your professional responsibilities. The SSSC presenter will ask you questions based on the statement you provided to us. You will be asked to give your name and you may be asked about your recent career history. If you have any concerns about the worker or members of the public hearing this information, please speak to the SSSC presenter about this before the hearing. The SSSC presenter may also show you documents, which can include your written statement and policies and procedures. They might ask you to comment on those too.

The worker or their representative will ask questions next. Their questions might suggest that you are mistaken about the circumstances or that your evidence is false. This is because they are entitled to cross examine (challenge) your evidence.

The Panel and LQC may also ask questions. They can ask questions about anything they think is important. They may also ask you questions about the worker's position if the worker is not present.

If you do not understand any of the questions, please ask for them to be repeated. We understand giving evidence may be difficult for you or that some

time may have passed since the circumstances you are giving evidence about, but you should take your time to answer the questions truthfully. The Panel is experienced at hearing evidence from witnesses and recognise that some questions may be more difficult to answer than others.

In some cases, you may be asked to leave the Microsoft Teams meeting during your evidence. If this happens, please do not worry, it is not because you have done anything wrong but because the Panel need to discuss a particular matter before going on. The Hearings Officer will contact you when the panel are ready again. It is important that you do not discuss your evidence with anyone else while you are waiting.

How long will it take to give evidence?

The time it takes to give your evidence will depend on how much information you have to tell the Panel and how many questions you are asked. We will try to make sure your evidence is completed on the day we have asked you to be available. Sometimes this is not possible, and we may ask you to be available on another day to complete your evidence.

After you have given evidence

Once you have finished giving evidence you are free to get on with your day.

If you would like to speak with the SSSC presenter after giving your evidence, you should tell the Hearings Officer who will be able to pass this message on.

When there is a break in the hearing, the SSSC presenter will speak to you. This may not happen immediately as the hearing may be continuing.

We cannot discuss the case or your role as a witness until the hearing has finished. If you wish to discuss the case, please contact the SSSC presenter after the hearing has finished.

Details of outcomes are on our website (where appropriate) under fitness to practise: www.sssc.uk.com.

If you wish, we can let you know when the decision is on our website so you can check the outcome.

Are hearings held in public?

We publish notice of impairment hearings on our website a week in advance and these hearings are usually held in public. This allows members of the public and the media, or any other person with an interest in the case to attend.

In certain circumstances, the Panel may decide to hear all or part of an impairment hearing in private, for example to protect a vulnerable witness or

when a worker's health is discussed.

We do not publish notice of our Application, Restoration or Temporary Order hearings. These hearings are usually held in private.

Our [Public Information Policy](#) explains why we publicise our hearings and decisions and is on our website.

Will your name be made public?

Impairment hearings involving registered workers are usually held in public. This means the media may attend. We cannot control or influence what the media say in any of their reports. They may use your name and quote something you have said during your evidence in a public hearing.

Following an Impairment hearing, a version of the Panel's Notice of Decision will be published on our website. This notice is redacted and names of witnesses are anonymised and personal details of witnesses will be redacted.

When you might need support

We know that being a witness to an incident can be upsetting. Speaking about what you have witnessed so you can help us with our investigation can be difficult.

All our Hearings Officers are trained Mental Health First Aiders. They will be your contact and provide support on the day of the hearing, including calling you after the hearing to discuss any concerns you might have.

Organisations providing support

The following independent organisations offer support for your wellbeing.

Breathing Space

A phone advice service offering emotional support.

Tel: 0800 83 85 87

Email: info@breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Web: www.breathingspace.scot

The Samaritans (Scotland)

A service offering listening and support to people in times of need.

www.samaritans.org/your-community/samaritans-work-scotland

Tel: 0131 116 123

Email: scotland@samaritans.org

NHS Inform

Get help with your mental wellbeing.

Web: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/get-help-with-your-mental-wellbeing>

NHS Education for Scotland resources

Three short videos with information on mental health, how to maintain it and the things that can lead to mental distress or mental ill-health: 'Mental health improvement, self-harm and suicide prevention'.

Web: <https://learning.publichealthscotland.scot/course/view.php?id=620>

Wellbeing Scotland

Trauma and wellbeing services.

Helpline: 0800 121 6027

Web: <https://www.wellbeingscotland.org/>

National Wellbeing Hub

The National Wellbeing Hub is a resource for people who work in health and social care.

Web: <https://wellbeinghub.scot/>

Helpline: 0800 111 4191

Workforce Specialist Service

Workforce Specialist Service is a confidential mental health service for health and social care workers in Scotland.

Access online: <https://wellbeinghub.scot/the-workforce-specialist-service-wss/>

Email prac.health@nhs.net

Tel: 0300 0303 300

Clear your Head Scotland

Clear your Head Scotland has lots of advice for looking after yourself.

Web: <https://clearyourhead.scot/>

Victim Support Scotland

Helpline: 0800 160 1985

Website: victimsupport.scot

Other Resources

Students

Most universities and colleges offer a student advice and counselling service. You may find information about this on your university or college website or by speaking to your course leader or lecturer.

'Side Effects' video

Animation on the importance of looking after yourself as well as others.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=wN5BqCKO9DY>

Sleepio app

Digital sleep programme.

Web: www.sleepio.com

Feeling Good app

Positive Mental Training audio programmes based on scientific research.

Web: www.feelinggood.app

You can find further information on our website: www.sssc.uk.com

If you would like a printed copy of any document, please contact the SSSC presenter.