

Volunteer School Appeals Panel Member

- Are you interested in Primary and Secondary School Education and want to be involved?
- Do you have excellent listening skills?
- Are you able to put people at ease?
- Are you able to make balanced decisions?
- Would you be interested in being part of an important, impartial service provided to parents and schools?

If you have answered yes to any of the above, please consider applying to be become a Volunteer School Appeals Panel Member

Why be a panel member?

For some people the work is helpful for their career, providing them with relevant work experience.

For others, it is rewarding in itself to give people the chance to state their case. Appellants often become clearer about the options open to them during a hearing and the reasons why a place was not offered at a preferred school.

What is the role?

All parents or carers have the right to make an appeal to an independent appeal panel if their child is not offered a place at their preferred school.

The role of the panel is to decide whether a child who has been refused a place by an admission authority, should be given a place. All parties involved must be afforded an appeal hearing that is transparent, accessible, independent and impartial.

The appeal panel is independent of the local authority and their decisions are binding on all parties, unless overturned by the courts.

An Appeals Panel is made up of 3 trained panel members:

- Lay members – those without personal experience in the management of a school or provision of education in any school (except as a school governor);
- Education experienced members – those who have experience in education, are acquainted with educational conditions or who are parents of registered pupils at school.

The Panel is supported by an independent Legal Clerk who advises the Panel on points of law and procedure and takes notes during the Hearing.

What will I be doing?

- You will be sitting on independent admission appeal panels
- Ensuring that parents feel they have had a fair and independent hearing, have been given every opportunity to put their case and have been taken seriously
- Volunteers must be able to listen to two sides of a case and weigh up evidence objectively and impartially.

To ensure impartiality, panel members must not be elected Members or employees of the County Council who work in education, or on the governing body of the school concerned with the appeal. However, they can be on the governing body of an unconnected school. They must also not be involved in the management or provision of education in any school.

What skills or experience do I need?

The following qualities will help you to undertake the work of the Panel:

- Ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of people
- Ability to read and assess information and identify key points
- Ability to listen to key information
- Ability to ask questions to obtain information and clarify points being made
- Ability to analyse information and use it to form opinions and conclusions
- Ability to obtain and weigh up evidence to reach a reasoned and evidence based decision
- Willingness to work as part of a team
- Willingness to take advice
- Willingness to develop your own skills

Equal Opportunities

- Ability to demonstrate awareness/understanding of equal opportunities
- Ability to consider people's behaviour, physical, social and welfare needs

Panel members will be expected to develop an understanding of:

- The admissions process and the guidance /legislation
- The role of the Legal Clerk

Will I receive training?

All volunteer Panel Members receive initial and annual refresher training. You will also be fully supported by the Appeals Service.

How much time do I need to give?

This can vary depending on the level of commitment you wish to give. While appeals are held throughout the year, the peak months are between April and July. The appeals are arranged for half a day or a full day.

Location of Hearings

Hearings will be held either virtually using Microsoft TEAMS or face-to-face at various locations around Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Do I get paid?

The role of a panel member is voluntary so is unpaid.

We do however offer to reimburse out of pocket expenses such as travel, lunch (max £3.50) or car parking.

At the current time all hearings are being heard virtually. To cover your time and electricity costs, we are offering a financial contribution of £15 per full day or £7.50 per half day of appeals that you sit on.

More information

If you require further information or would like an informal to chat to discuss the above, please contact samantha.bacon@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or zoe.shanahan@cambridgeshire.gov.uk