

Herefordshire Schools' Independent Appeal Panel

Information for panel members

Education (Admission) Appeals and Independent Review (Exclusion) Panels

When a parent is refused a place for their child at their preferred school, they have a right of appeal. The hearing takes place before an Independent Appeals Panel. The panel hears the case for the admissions authority and for the parent (known as the appellant) and decides whether to uphold or dismiss the appeal.

The statutory basis for the appeals process is the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 are available online:

- [The School Admissions code](#)
- [The Schools Admissions Appeals Code](#)
- [Exclusions Statutory Guidance](#)

Admission Appeals Panels

An Appeals Panel is made up of at least 3 trained members:

- a person with experience of education (non-lay),
- a lay person (without experience of the provision of education)
- and a trained Chair (who can be either lay or non-lay).

Education experts, or non-lay panellists, are people who:

- are not members of the local authority (i.e. Herefordshire) but who have experience in education;
- are acquainted with the educational conditions in Herefordshire; or
- are parents of registered pupils at a school, but
- are not employees of the local education authority - unless they are a teacher.

Lay panellists are people who:

- do not have any personal experience in the management of a school or the provision of education in any school; unless they
- have experience such as a Governor or have any other voluntary role; and
- have not at any time had any connection with the local education authority or any person employed by it.

In accordance with the Department for Education School Admission Appeals Code, a person may be disqualified if, through any connections such as those outlined above, there is doubt about his or her ability to act impartially.

The make-up of **independent review panels for exclusion appeals** are slightly more specific than admission appeals as they require a formula of panellists who have recent (last 5 years) school governor and head teacher experience, plus a lay person to chair the panel.

The panels are supported by a clerk who advises the panel on points of law and procedure, takes notes during the hearing and provides the decision in writing to the parties.

What is required of a panellist?

The key skills and attributes required for panellists are:

- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- Good literacy skills and ability to ask questions to parties relevant to the appeal
- Ability to remain firm and calm
- Integrity
- Fairness and a non-judgmental approach
- Ability to work with other panel members

Panel members follow a process, extracting and weighing up relevant information from all parties to make a decision. Panel members deal with a variety of people from diverse backgrounds, negotiating situations where appellants may express anxiety or anger. Excellent communication skills and the ability to interpret the relevant DfE codes and guidance documents is essential. The ability to reach clear, methodical decisions which may be scrutinised and challenged is integral to the role, and impartiality to both the schools and parents is also necessary, as is confidentiality. In coming to a decision, it is important that the panel keeps in mind the requirements of the School Admission Appeals Code.

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.

What is the time commitment?

Individual appeals may be heard at any point during the school year for what are known as in-year transfer appeals i.e., where a parent chooses to move a child from one school to another during the academic year. Individual appeals can usually be heard and concluded within a couple of hours.

During the main appeals period between March and July, admission appeals can be heard throughout the day and are often heard in groups, for each school concerned. It is aimed to keep these to a manageable quantity per day and panels may sit for a morning and an afternoon session. For bulk appeals for the same school, it may be necessary for the same panel to sit for more than one day. On other occasions, there may, however, be only one or two appeals on a particular day.

A panellist can decide on each occasion whether or not to accept a request to serve on a particular panel and must decline a panel if they have any conflict of interest in connection with a particular school. Some panellists only want to do one or two appeals a year, others hear them more often. There is no obligation to accept a particular hearing, but we do ask that if it is necessary to stand down from an accepted panel, that as much notice as possible is given to the clerk so that a replacement panellist can be sought.

Panels can be carried out virtually or in person. If necessary travel expenses can be reimbursed.

Panellists are required to attend training that is provided upon appointment and for regular refresher training.

How are panellists selected?

Panellists are selected initially from the information provided on the application form. An interview may be required, which will provide opportunity for volunteers to find out more about the role as well as allowing for further exploration of their application. We ask applicants to provide details of two people who may be contacted for references.

Downloads

[The Schools Admission Appeals Code](#)
[The guidance for exclusions](#)

For an informal enquiry, please email schoolappeals@herefordshire.gov.uk