

## How we will deal with hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic

This updated guidance note sets out how we will continue to deal with our hearings as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and our approach in light of legislation changes.

### Prioritisation Plan

Public protection and public safety is our overriding objective and with this in mind there are some hearings that are more critical than others. On that basis we have decided to continue to hold all Investigating Committee meetings and Fitness to Practise Committee interim order application, interim order review, principal review and restoration hearings remotely for the foreseeable future. Both interim order applications and interim order reviews can be considered on papers, by agreement, and therefore some of these cases will proceed in this way.

Principal hearings will be decided on a case by case basis whether they are appropriate for a remote hearing or need to be held in-person. **We will take into account our guidance** on this when making this decision. We are unable to hold in-person hearings until at least May 2021 and will review this decision on a monthly basis taking into account government guidance. When we are able to hold in person hearings we will also review the measures in place to ensure attendees' safety, for instance, declaration forms and social distancing in the building.

### Legislation changes coming into effect on 4 March 2021

In order to effectively regulate throughout the pandemic, the GPhC sought amendments to the Rules which come into force on 4 March 2021. Follow this link to [read the amendments to the rules](#).

The change in regard to service of Notices of Hearings is permanent. This means the Adjudications Team will, in compliance with the new rules, routinely serve notices via email where an email address has been provided by the registrant. If there is a need for something to be sent via post or a registrant requests this with good reason the team will do this where possible, in fairness to the registrant.

The rule changes also allow for hearings to be facilitated remotely, either via telephone or videoconference facilities, without agreement from all parties. However, we expect to only enforce this rule change rarely and the Adjudications team will continue to seek agreement from parties as stated in the guidance referenced above. We will facilitate hearings remotely without agreement only when all points in the guidance have been considered first.

Due to the importance of Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians work throughout the pandemic our Registrant panel members may have less availability to sit on hearings or may become unavailable last minute. The rule changes allow us to hold a hearing with only a Chair and Lay panel member present. However, we expect to only have to do this rarely and would only do so after we have gone through the full process of finding an available Registrant panel member. We have not yet held a hearing without a quorate panel throughout the pandemic.

This document will be updated when necessary to reflect any change in our approach as a result of updated government guidance or legislation.