

Guidance Note for Visitors in face-to-face Hearings in WRC offices.

Introduction

This Guidance Note is to assist parties when visiting the WRC premises while COVID-19 measures are in place and parties should familiarise themselves with this Note in addition to any specific additional guidance on the WRC website or on-site signage.

The WRC is committed to doing all it can to protect the health of its staff, the parties, their representatives and witnesses during face-to-face hearings. In this regard, all attendees should co-operate with the WRC in respect of this guidance.

General

The WRC is following Department of Health guidelines to ensure the health and safety of all parties in a controlled environment. In addition, the WRC encourages all persons attending a hearing to download the HSE *Contact Tracing App* which may prove useful in the event of a person attending a Hearing testing positive for COVID-19. However, this is not mandatory in order to attend a hearing.

Starting times are staggered to reduce the possibility of congestion at the venue on any hearing day.

Hearing rooms will be rotated and all hearing rooms, once used, will be sanitised, cleaned and ventilated for an extended period before a further hearing will be held in that room. The rooms will not contain more than 80% of persons permitted under HSA/HSE Social Distancing Guidelines.

Hand sanitisers are provided throughout the building for both visitors and staff. Hearing Rooms and contact points throughout the building, (such as lift buttons and door handles), are cleaned and sanitised regularly throughout the day.

All persons attending at any WRC office for a hearing should comply with current public health advice, regarding social distancing, frequent hand washing and respiratory etiquette.

In addition, visitors are expected to always maintain social distancing, in accordance with public health advice.

COVID-19

Parties/representatives should **not** attend the WRC hearing venue where the hearing is taking place if persons:

- Have a temperature more than 38 degrees Celsius - in this regard it is each individual's responsibility to check their own temperature on the day to ensure it meets the criterion
- Are showing signs of illness consistent with COVID-19 symptoms, for example a cough

(any kind not just dry), shortness of breath or breathing difficulties, loss or change to your sense of smell or taste etc.

- Are feeling unwell
- Have had close contact with a suspected, probable, or confirmed case of Covid-19
- Are not able to comply with these guidelines.

Parties may be asked to declare that they are complying with the above conditions at the hearing location on the day. A failure to do so may result in the hearing being postponed.

Before the Hearing

Parties and representatives **must** provide any submission/documentation immediately upon request and in good time before the hearing date. These are requested when the acknowledgement letter issues giving parties 21 days from the date of that letter to send in the submission, or where parties have engaged in mediation then within 10 days of the conclusion of the mediation process. Parties should copy all documentation to the other side at the same time, when sending it to the WRC.

On the Day of the Hearing

Numbers Attending

As the WRC needs to limit the number of visitors on the premises to ensure that social distancing can be fully observed, your party should not consist of more than **three persons**, to include the named party, representative(s) and/or witnesses. Parties who arrive with more than three persons will not be permitted to enter the Hearing Room and, in the absence of such co-operation, the hearing may be postponed at the discretion of the Adjudication Officer.

Where additional witnesses are required, they should remain in the immediate vicinity outside the building until called. The lead representative on each side must have the means to communicate with that witness to enter the WRC hearing room at the appropriate time.

Getting to the Hearing Room

Parties should be in the hearing room 10 minutes before the commencement of the hearing (but no earlier). In Lansdowne House parties should report to Reception via Northumberland Road entrance only. Parties will not be permitted to access the building through the Lansdowne Road entrance.

Full Reception facilities may not be available in other WRC locations and parties should go directly to the WRC hearing room following the signage in place.

Attendees should proceed promptly and directly to the hearing room by following the signs to the meeting/hearing room. Under no circumstances are parties to congregate in the lobbies, corridors, or any other area in the building.

Getting Around the Building

Social distancing markers and signage will be in place in and around the entrance area and inside the building. Attendees should follow the notices in the reception area and throughout

the building, and the appropriate instructions of any WRC staff member.

Attendees should move to the exit promptly on the conclusion of the hearing and should follow the instructions of the Adjudication Officer.

The WRC is operating a one-way system in Lansdowne House. Visitors should walk on the left-hand side of the corridors.

As a general rule, where visitors are travelling between floors, lifts should only be used by those going up and the stairs, where possible, by those going down. Visitors should observe the signage guidance in this regard.

The Hearing

In accordance with standard practice, the Adjudication Officer will retain a list of those in attendance and these will be retained on the WRC electronic case file.

Face Coverings

Visitors attending the WRC are required to wear a face covering upon entering the building, getting to the hearing room, and in public areas, (for example reception/lobby, lifts, stairwell), and when exiting the building. We recommend that visitors continue to wear a face covering during a hearing/meeting/conference, but if giving evidence or communicating, including answering questions from the Adjudication Officer/person chairing the meeting, these may be removed.

Drinking water is provided on site with single use cups but attendees should bring their own pens, stationery, etc.

No consultation/break-out rooms will be available in any WRC hearing venue for the foreseeable future.