



Information for Referees



I have been asked to be a referee for an applicant to the children's panel

Do you have a friend or colleague who wishes to join the children's panel and has asked that you provide a reference to support his/her application? This leaflet sets out what is involved in children's panel membership and what we are looking for from referees.

What is the children's panel?

Since 1971 children's hearings have been making decisions about children at risk or in trouble. These decisions are made by lay members of the community – children's panel members – who are aged 18 or over and come from a wide range of backgrounds. They give their services voluntarily and are unpaid.

Children may be referred to a children's hearing for different reasons. For example they may be experiencing, or be at risk of, abuse or neglect. They may be in moral danger or be out of parental control. They may be having trouble at school or committing offences. Children's hearings make decisions that are in the best interests of the child, taking all the circumstances into account. They must decide

whether compulsory measures of supervision are required to ensure that the child's needs are met, and what these measures should be.

Scotland's children's hearings put children first. Panel members have to deal with cases that are often complex, difficult and emotionally challenging. They are carefully selected and highly trained for their role.

What kind of people join the children's panel?

The children's panel promotes equal opportunity. Anyone over 18 who cares about the welfare of children may apply. Each local authority area has a children's panel and the aim is for the panel to be representative of the local community as a whole. Applications are therefore welcome from people from all walks of life, irrespective of their experience, age, ethnicity, gender and background. Previous knowledge of the children's hearings system is not necessary as full training is given.

Applicants do not have to have English as their first language but they must have the right to work in the UK and be able to understand and communicate effectively in English.

What time commitment does the panel member have to make?

New panel members must commit to around 45 hours of pre-service training. This mostly takes place at weekends and evenings. If appointed there will be an expectation of continued attendance at in-service training a few times a year.

Children's hearings normally take place during the day and panel members usually sit on 1 or 2 half-day sessions per month. Each session usually hears three or four cases. As members of statutory tribunals, children's panel members are entitled to reasonable time off work to carry out their duties (Section 50, Employment Rights Act 1996) but should discuss this with their employers – a separate leaflet on time off work is available on request.

What do panel members gain?

Children's panel members are trained in skills that can be of use in other areas of life. The highly rated panel training is funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by four Scottish Universities. It develops skills which include:

- leadership
- teamwork

- effective communication
- analytical thinking
- decision making
- influencing/negotiating.

Panel members learn to absorb, consider and critically analyse large quantities of detailed information from the professional reports produced for hearings. These skills can help the panel member to be more confident and effective in almost any personal or professional situation.

What do you need from me as a referee?

We would like you to give your honest view of whether you think the applicant would be suited to this type of work. Firstly, it would be helpful that you can confirm that you know the applicant well. We would normally expect you to have known him/her well for two years or more in a personal or professional capacity.

You will be asked to comment on the applicant's reliability, honesty, team working and communication abilities. You can draw on your knowledge of the applicant in any setting. Similarly it is helpful to know if, in your view, the applicant will be able to deal with written

documents and respect confidentiality. Finally you will be asked to give your opinion on the skills and qualities that the candidate would bring to panel membership. Please answer each of these questions as honestly and fully as possible on the form provided.

I want to know more about the children's hearings system

To find out more visit our website www.chscotland.gov.uk or phone your local council and ask for the Clerk to the CPAC. The clerks' details can also be found on our website.

