



Virtual Hearings Guidance - Observers

Introduction

Due to the unprecedented circumstances of Covid-19, GTCS took the decision to close its office (Clerwood House, Edinburgh) in March 2020 and required all its employees to work from home. All scheduled fitness to teach hearings were postponed and no new hearings were to be arranged.

The GTCS office remains closed and it is unknown when it will reopen taking account of current Scottish Government Covid 19 guidance.

In seeking to ensure that cases do not experience further delay, where appropriate and, upon approval by a Fitness to Teach Panel, Full Fitness to Teach hearings will proceed virtually. This document explains to members of the public and press how to join a Fitness to Teach hearing in order to observe proceedings.

Technical requirements

Microsoft Teams is the platform GTCS will be using for virtual hearings going forward (for instructions on downloading and using Microsoft Teams, please see the section below titled 'Accessing the hearing'). In order to observe a virtual hearing, you will need a computer, laptop or other device which has a reliable internet connection, suitable memory and processing speed. Most modern computers and devices will have no issue running Microsoft Teams. However, if you wish to find out more about the hardware requirements for Teams, you can find further information [here](#). Microsoft Teams can be downloaded from all app stores, or from the Microsoft website. The application is free to download.

Before the Hearing

Booking a place

A notice of hearing will be published on our website 7 days prior to the hearing taking place. Members of the public (including press) must inform GTCS if they wish to attend.

If you wish to observe a virtual hearing, please email us at regulation@gtcs.org.uk to book a place. Booking will close 48 working hours before the hearing is due to start.

You will need to provide the following information when booking:

- Your full name
- Details of the hearing that you wish to observe
- Email address to which we can send the Microsoft Teams link
- Contact number we can reach you on if there are technical issues during the hearing
- Reason for wishing to observe (for example, press).

Testing

We strongly suggest you test your Microsoft Teams link before the hearing starts and get familiar with the software to limit possible problems when you try and join on the day.

Adjustments for disabilities

If you have a disability and you think adjustments may need to be made to assist you to observe the hearing, please contact us as soon as possible to discuss this if you have not done so already.

During the Hearing

Rules

Although the hearing is being held virtually, it remains a formal hearing and we expect observers to behave as you would if you were in a physical hearing.

Observers must not speak (unless the Panel asks you a direct question), interrupt or ask questions during the hearing.

Whilst the hearing is ongoing, observers must ensure that your microphone is on mute and camera is turned off. Please ensure you are familiar with these functions on Microsoft Teams.

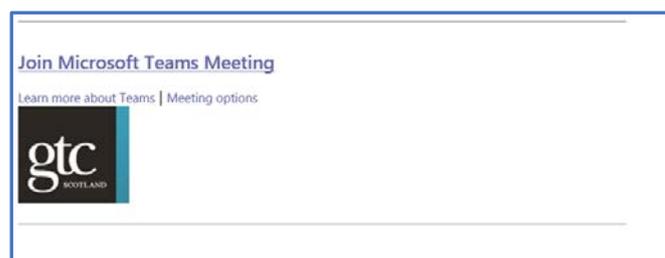
We record our hearings; however **it is strictly prohibited for any other person to audio or video record, screen shot, photograph, copy or share our hearing proceedings.**

Any observer who causes disruption will be warned by the Convener to desist. If the disruption continues, they may be removed from the hearing upon direction by the Panel.

Accessing the hearing on the day

You should ensure that your device is fully charged and that all other devices are switched to silent mode for the duration of the hearing. You should also ensure that you have a private area where you are alone and are unlikely to be disturbed or interrupted.

When you have booked a place at a virtual Fitness to Teach hearing, you will be sent an email, which will contain a link that looks like this:

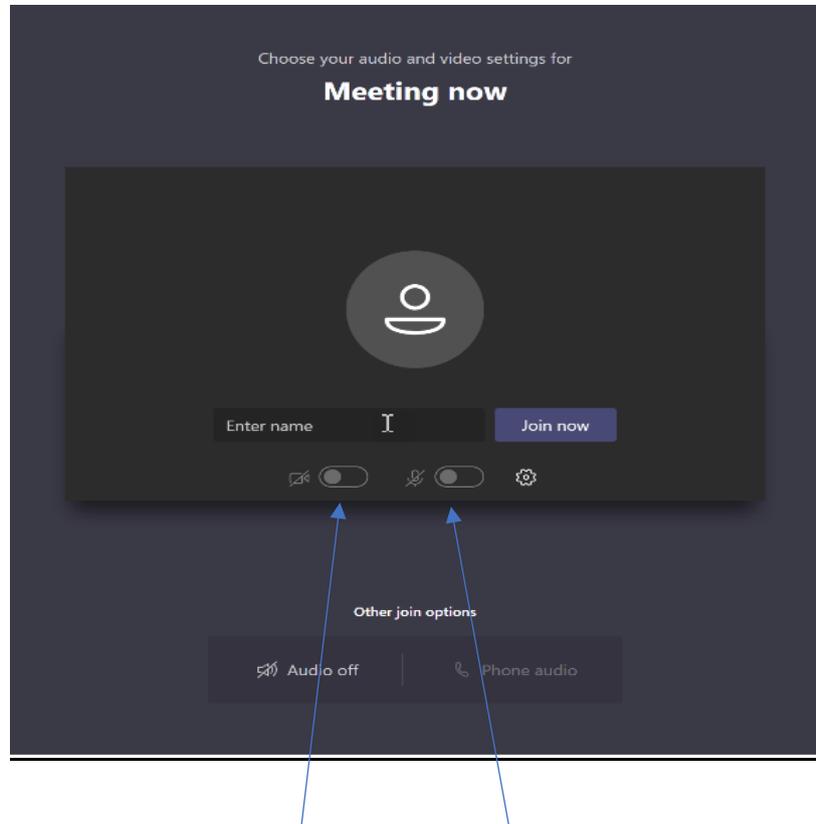


Please do not share this link with anyone else.

If you have the Microsoft Teams application (app), when you click on the link, the hearing will open automatically within the app. You are not required to have the desktop app to join a call.

If you do not have the app, you will be given the option to download it or join on the web. If you do intend to download the app, you should do so in advance of the hearing in order to avoid delay on the day.

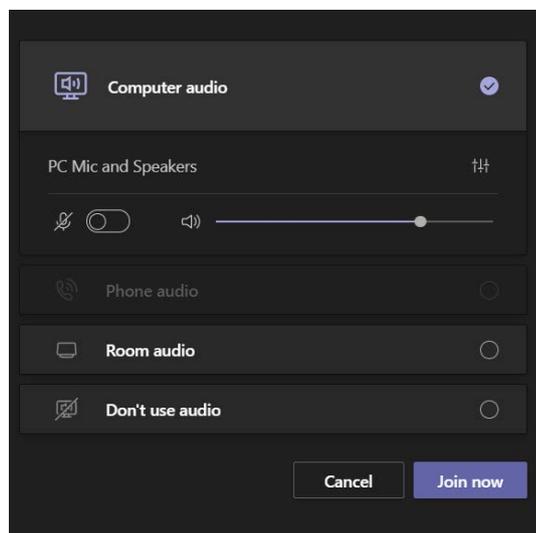
When you click the meeting link, you will see a screen similar to that below:



You should ensure that both your camera and microphone are switched **off** (as they appear in the image above) before you join the hearing. When you are ready to join the hearing, click 'join now'.

You will then be held in a lobby until admitted into the hearing by the Servicing Officer.

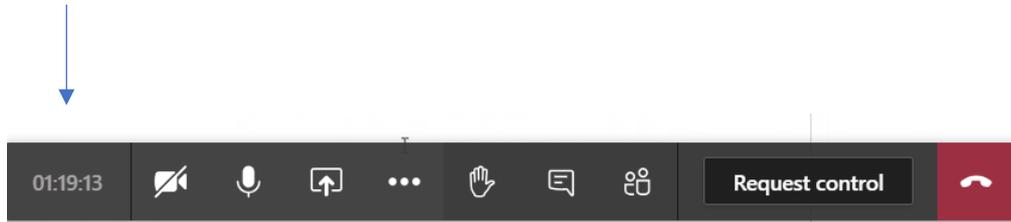
Depending on the version of Teams you are using, you may see the below menu alongside the above before you enter a hearing. You should either select 'Computer audio' and ensure your microphone is muted, or 'Don't use audio' before selecting 'Join now'.



The Teams taskbar

During the hearing, you will see this task bar on your screen. It may differ very slightly in appearance depending on the version of Teams being used (i.e. how up to date the app is). The most relevant functions are detailed below:

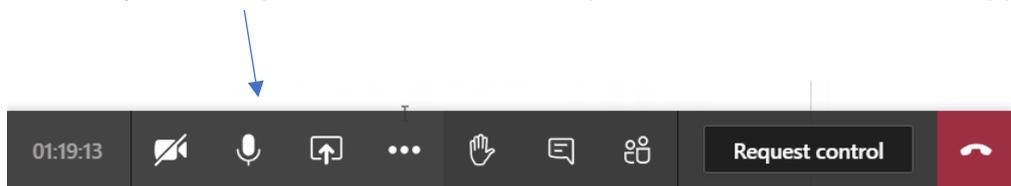
This indicates the length of time that the hearing has been running.



This is the camera icon. If there is a line through it, this means your camera is turned off.



This is the microphone icon. If there is a line through it, this means your microphone is muted. To mute your microphone, click on the microphone icon and a line should appear through it.



Technical Difficulties

If you experience technical difficulties during the hearing or you disconnect from the hearing, please try to re-join as soon as possible and you will be re-admitted by the Servicing Officer.

If you continue to experience technical difficulties, please call our office on 0131 314 6000 and ask to speak to a member of the Regulation Team who will be able to assist you.

Private sessions

At various points during the hearing, the Panel may require to retire into private session. At these times, the relevant participants (the Panel Members, Servicing Officer and Legal Assessor) will enter into a separate call, and all other participants and observers, will leave the hearing.

Breaks during the hearing

There will be regular breaks during the hearing to allow all participants the opportunity to move away from the screen. When there is to be a break, you will be advised of a time to return to

the hearing. You should simply disconnect from the call and then reconnect through the email link at the time specified by the Convener. When the hearing has concluded, you should simply disconnect from the call.