



# Good practice guidance: Virtual Advisory Appointment Committees (AACs)

**September 2020**

The use of video conferencing has been successfully implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic by employing bodies, allowing them to hold Advisory Appointment Committees (AACs/interview panels) remotely. This has enabled interviews to continue during a time of lockdown.

The Royal College of Pathologists recommends that all employing bodies continue to use video conferencing facilities for interviews in the future. This has timesaving benefits for the College representative (rep) and provides financial savings for the employing body, as well as supporting the College's strategy for a sustainable future. This guidance is provided to ensure that good practice is observed for virtual AACs for the benefit of all concerned.

## Key benefits to College representatives

The College has found that reps are more willing to agree to attend virtual interviews as there is:

- no travel time, i.e. less time away from clinics and other work
- more opportunity for the rep to channel time and energy into the interview
- a greater source of reps available as geographical distance is not an issue
- almost no risk of being exposed to COVID-19 during the virtual process.

## Key benefits to employing bodies

The employing bodies benefit from virtual interviews as they:

- attract little or no expenses, i.e. travel, accommodation, sundries, etc.
- attract a greater pool of potential College reps due to the lack of restrictions imposed by distance and the requirement to travel
- automatically enforce social distancing
- provide a consistent and sustainable interview process in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic worsening.

## Good practice

The College expects the virtual platforms used for interviews to be secure and appropriate for interviews. The use of apps specific to handheld devices, e.g. Whatsapp or FaceTime, are not recommended.

Virtual platforms such as MS Teams or Skype are recommended, in order to allow the sharing of presentations, documents and images on screen. The NHS does not routinely or consistently use Zoom, however this guidance can be applied to any suitable secure virtual platform as determined appropriate for use by the employing bodies. The use of laptops, PCs or similar is also recommended to ensure that maximum use can be made of the functionality provided by the virtual platforms.

The human resources (HR) staff of the host employing body should administer the interview and securely provide all details for logging into the interview via a link for a web browser prior to the interview. The employing body controls the interview process and meeting.

## For HR

Appropriate notice should be given in advance of the interview by HR to ensure that each participant has an appropriate device and is able to access and use the virtual platform with a working webcam/camera and microphone. If a handheld device is being used, it should be fixed in place and not distract any other participant.

## For panel members

It is important for panel members to be in a private space, as required in a physical interview, to ensure that they are not disturbed or overheard during the interview, to ensure confidentiality. If working from home, it is understandable that interruptions by children, pets, etc. are possible, however disruptions should be avoided.

Panel members should maintain focus on the interview at all times and should not be doing other things, e.g. working or emailing, etc. Other devices should be switched off to avoid distractions or disruptions.

Panel members should ensure that they have a webcam or device with a camera and microphone available. The camera must be switched on during the interview process.

## In advance of the interview

At least one week before, the Chair and HR should discuss how they want to organise the interview, including whether the Chair wants to show any documents via screen sharing as the candidates talk, how to manage muting during presentations, how to use waiting rooms and any other in-meeting features.

It is highly recommended to test equipment prior to the interview. HR should offer this for panel members, if required. During the test, it is an opportunity to check functionality, e.g. use of virtual waiting rooms, muting, etc., and to ensure that participants know how to use the system. Where issues arise, HR or the relevant panel member(s) can deal with them before the interview takes place.

If there are specific requirements for candidates, HR should advise candidates in advance of the interview, e.g. if a presentation is needed (so that they can practice (including sharing online),

microscope, etc. A separate test with each candidate should be offered by HR to test candidates' equipment, etc.

HR should ensure they have full contact details of all participants in the event of loss of connectivity.

Before the interview, HR should check if anyone, whether panel member or candidate, has any additional needs e.g. visual or hearing impairment, etc. that need to be accommodated during the interview.

If the interview is being recorded, HR should ensure that it is in line with the employing body's GDPR requirements and that everyone is in agreement with this.

## **On the day**

### **Starting the interview**

It is useful for panel members to join the call 15 minutes before the scheduled start time. The Chair should not start the interview unless the expected people are there to avoid having to repeat things.

It is useful to request all panel members commence the interview with their device on mute to avoid excessive disturbance.

If not arranged prior to the interview, the Chair should ensure that each member of the interview panel is aware of the questions they are to ask the candidates.

It is important that HR has a robust process in place to reassure the panel members of each candidate's identity.

Panel members should agree the method to communicate if they wish to comment. Use of a 'chat' facility should be limited to where a panel member is experiencing difficulties with connectivity. It should not be used to make comments on candidates.

The Chair should ask all attendees to speak audibly and clearly, and check that everyone can hear, suggesting they ask for clarification if anything is not clear.

Time should be taken for everyone to make introductions so that everyone knows who is in the interview. The Chair or HR should ensure that each individual introduces themselves in turn.

As a courtesy, the Chair should check how panel members and candidates wish to be addressed, e.g. using their title and last name or first name.

The Chair should advise participants not to interrupt or speak over people, and it may be sensible for participants in larger interviews to use their name when wishing to speak (i.e. instead of 'me' or 'I').

The Chair or HR should turn off an entry bell if many people are joining the interview, to avoid interruptions.

If a panel member is suddenly unavailable due to connectivity, the Chair should direct another panel member to ask questions. If a candidate has an issue with connectivity, HR would need to allow a few minutes for them to reconnect but, if they fail to do so, would need to contact them urgently to discuss options.

## **Conducting the interview**

The Chair should ensure that individuals are addressed by their name when asking questions, so that people know who needs to answer.

The Chair should ensure that the interview process is fair, open and transparent within current legislation on employment practice and that candidates are informed of how the interview will be conducted.

The panel members will wish to reassure themselves that a candidate interviewed in a virtual setting is not given an unfair advantage or disadvantage over a candidate interviewed face to face.

When not speaking, panel members should mute their microphone, especially if they are in a place where background noise is present or possible. The interview 'host', typically HR, can control this in agreement with the Chair.

## **Ending the interview**

It should be confirmed by HR that the candidate has left the virtual interview before any discussions commence. Once reassured that the candidate has left, the Chair should encourage deliberation by all members of the AAC panel.

If there are other candidates, HR should keep them in a virtual waiting room until the panel members are ready for the next interview, to avoid the next candidate coming in unexpectedly and overhearing any confidential discussions. The Chair should then welcome the next candidate into the interview and commence 'Conducting the interview'.

## **Final interview**

Once HR has confirmed that the final candidate has left the interview and all members have deliberated, the Chair then provides a recap at the end of the interview.

If panel members make notes during the interview, these should be sent to HR afterwards or deleted/securely destroyed in confidential waste.

The Chair then confirms that panel members are in agreement with the outcome and outlines the next steps, e.g. HR will collect references, etc.