

Guidance for parties in virtual hearings

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Virtual hearings at MPTS

Where we are required to hold a hearing virtually, rather than at the hearing centre, this will be done using Skype for Business. This technical guide is for parties to a MPTS hearing, that is taking place virtually using Skype for Business.

Virtual hearings will involve MPTS staff, the tribunal members, parties and witnesses all participating in a hearing by Skype for Business. MPTS staff will include a tribunal clerk and a hearing host (typically a tribunal assistant). There may also be a supporting tribunal clerk (known as TC2). The number of staff supporting each virtual hearing may change depending on the hearing.

What is Skype for Business?

Skype for Business is a communication software tool that allows us to generate online appointments for external attendees to attend remotely. There is no charge for you to join using Skype for Business.

What to do prior to the hearing

This section of the guide explains what steps you need to take before the hearing starts.

You are responsible for ensuring you have the appropriate equipment, internet connection and environment to participate. You should ensure that there are no external factors that are going to impact on your ability to participate in the hearing.

Technical requirements

In order to take part in the hearing by Skype for Business you need access to a suitable computer or device that has a camera, microphone and speakers so that the live video and audio is available. Mobile phones are not an acceptable device.

Internet connection

You need an internet connection with a minimum download speed of 8mb and upload speed of 512kps. Variables that could impact the connection speed are others using the same internet connection for streaming services, online gaming etc, while you are connected to the Skype for Business appointment. You must ensure that you have charging facilities for your device close by.

Test call

A test call may be carried out if you are participating in a hearing for the first time or you are using a different device. The virtual hearing host will schedule a test call the day before the hearing to confirm that you have the correct software and that your equipment works correctly. Any potential technical problems can be dealt with during the test call pre-hearing to avoid significant delays to the hearing itself. Please ensure that the device on which the test call is made is the same device you intend to use in the hearing. You will be asked to provide the following information prior to the hearing to enable a test call to take place:

- ▶ Your name
- ▶ Email address where the link should be sent
- ▶ Your contact telephone/mobile number
- ▶ Name of the hearing

Test calls can be scheduled to take place between 9.00am and 4.00pm. We would recommend that a separate test call for each person participating in the hearing is carried out.

The hearing host will send you an invite for the test call to your email address – please click ‘Join Skype Meeting’ at the time of the appointment.

→ [Join Skype Meeting](#)
Trouble Joining? [Try Skype Web App](#)

Please ensure MPTS emails are marked as ‘not spam’. If you have not received an expected appointment, please check your ‘spam’ folder first and if you have still not received it contact the hearing host who sent you the invite.

It is the responsibility of the parties to ensure that any witnesses giving evidence know how to use Skype for Business to avoid delays during the hearing.

Downloading the Skype for Business application

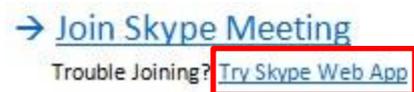
If you do not have Skype for Business installed, depending on what device you are using, you may be prompted to download the application (app) when you click on the hyperlink. This app is free of charge to download and use but we would

recommend that the download is completed while connected to Wi-Fi to avoid any data charges.

You may be automatically directed to your app store (such as Google Play for Android or App Store for Apple) or through a web browser to download the Skype for Business app. If this happens please download the app. Once downloaded, you should close the app and go back to the invite and click on the 'Join Skype Meeting' hyperlink again.

Using the Skype for Business Web app

If you are unable to download the Skype for Business app, you should click 'Try Skype Web App' in the appointment invite:



Please follow your browser's instructions for installing the Skype for Business Web App plug-in as this is required for audio and video.

If you have an older device or will be using a work laptop with more extensive firewalls this may cause difficulty using Skype for Business. It is suggested that an alternative device is used if you encounter this problem.

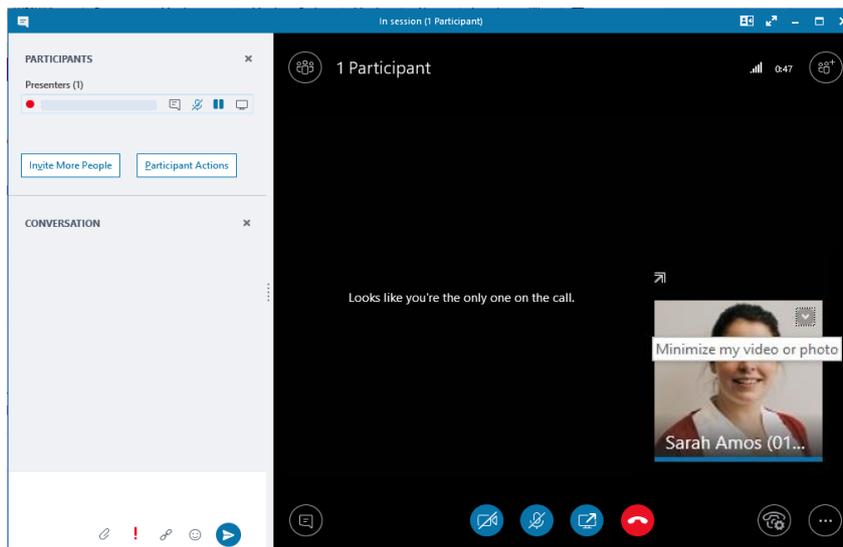
Signing in to Skype for Business

When asked to sign in, please select 'sign in as a guest' and enter your name and whether you are appearing for the GMC or the doctor, eg Joe Bloggs (Doctor).

Skype for Business controls

The participants pane shows who is connected to the session

The comments box should only be used to ask for a break or if you are having technical difficulties.



You can minimise your own video by clicking the downward arrow in the top right-hand corner of your video. Your video will still appear to the other participants.



You should turn your video on by clicking once on the video camera and then clicking on 'Start My Video'.



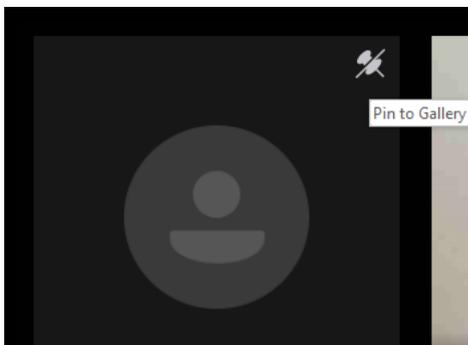
Turn your microphone on when speaking but remember to mute it again when you have finished to reduce feedback.

If you are using an Apple device and are having difficulty with the audio you should go to the settings on your device, select the privacy option, then select microphone and ensure that the toggle next to Skype for Business shows green.



Ends your participation in the appointment.

The Pin to Gallery function keeps a participant visible in the gallery view. Click the top right-hand corner on a participant's video to bring up the pin:



The hearing environment

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in a suitable environment to participate from. The room should be quiet, private and secure. You should ensure your background is neutral with nothing that causes offence to or distracts other participants during the hearing. You should also ensure you have good lighting.

Your attendance by video link still requires the same attendance as that if you are attending the hearing centre in person.

Oaths/Affirmation

When giving evidence, you will be required to give an affirmation. If you wish to give an oath, it is your responsibility to ensure the appropriate arrangements have been made for the correct holy book to be available.

Witnesses

It is your responsibility to assess the suitability of the witness to give evidence during a virtual hearing. Witnesses that could be deemed as vulnerable or in need of support may require additional support if they give evidence virtually. It is for you to provide the appropriate support needed and determine what this support may involve. You should ensure that such support takes into consideration any needs the witness may have where there are breaks during giving evidence or once the giving of evidence has concluded.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the witness has a suitable/compatible device and connection speed to ensure that Skype for Business will work. The same [internet connection requirements as above](#) will apply to witnesses.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the witness has a suitable environment to participate from. The same hearing environment requirements [as above](#) will apply to witnesses.

Where the witness wishes to give an oath, it is your responsibility to ensure the appropriate arrangements have been made for the correct holy book to be available.

Virtual hearing appointments

The hearing host will send you the 'in session' hearing appointment through Skype for Business, which will be attended by MPTS staff, tribunal members, parties and witnesses for the virtual hearing.

You should accept the invite from the MPTS. The appointment invite will include a specific Skype for Business hyperlink. When you click on the hyperlink, you will be automatically connected to the 'in session' hearing.

If you have not received the invite by 4pm the day before the hearing, please check your spam or junk inboxes before contacting the hearing host who set up the test call with you.

MPTS support

During the virtual hearing there will be several MPTS staff present through audio use only:

- ▶ Hearing host – responsible for monitoring the hearing to ensure the correct participants are connected to each appointment and they have their video and microphone (when speaking) turned on.
- ▶ One or two tribunal clerks – responsible for drafting determinations and managing administration.

During some appointments, IS support may also be present.

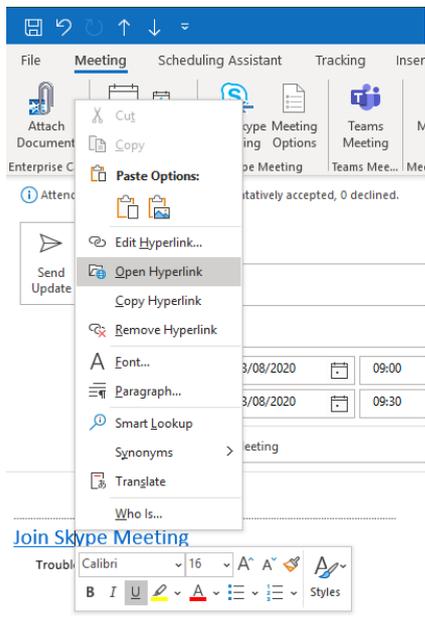
Joining the virtual hearing

This section explains how to join the hearing.

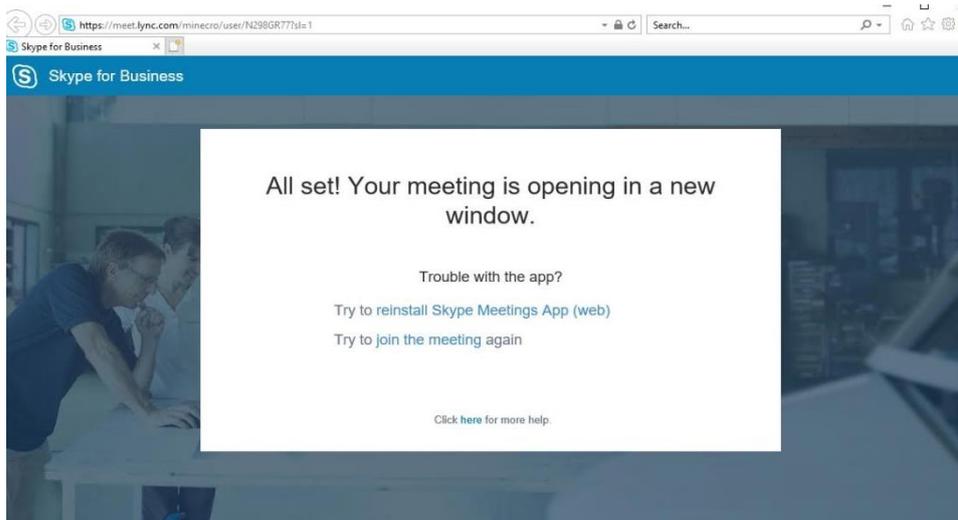
5 minutes before your hearing is due to start, you should click on the hyperlink in the invite you have been sent:



If the Skype for Business hyperlink doesn't work, you can try right clicking the link and select 'Open Hyperlink' or 'Copy Hyperlink' and paste it into a web browser:



Depending on the device you are using, Skype for Business may issue a notification that you are about to enter the hearing by advising that the meeting is opening in a new window, as shown below:



The new window should automatically open, although in some instances you may have to wait for a couple of minutes.

For security reasons you will be required to wait in the virtual lobby (the waiting area in Skype for Business). This message will appear:

Skype for Business

Hello. You're in our virtual lobby, so make yourself comfortable. The organizer will let you in soon.

This window may time out if you have clicked the hyperlink before the hearing host is ready to join you to the hearing. If this happens a message showing “You were not admitted into this meeting” will appear and you will then be required to close the window and repeat the process by clicking on the “Join Skype Meeting” hyperlink in the appointment invite.

The tribunal will then join you to the hearing when they are ready.

During the virtual hearing

Once you have joined the hearing you will be able to see the tribunal. MPTS staff will have their cameras switched off but you will be able to hear them when they speak.

Remember to turn your video on and mute your microphone when you are not speaking. Remember to say your name before you speak.

The hearing host will confirm who is present.

Breaks and discussions with your representative

If you need a break or to discuss a matter with your representative at any point you should write *‘Please can we take a short break’* in the comments box. Note that this

is visible to all participants. The hearing host will monitor the comments box and, if necessary, draw it to the attention of the Chair.

If you need to have a private conversation with your representative, you should organise this yourself.

Once the tribunal has confirmed that a break is occurring or the tribunal is ready to move into private discussions, the Chair will indicate the time for you to re-join the appointment.

If you are required to re-join the hearing to answer further questions from the tribunal, you will be able to click on the hyperlink in the original invite which was sent to you.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I have not received an invite for the hearing?

If you have not received an invite for the hearing you should check your spam or junk inbox as it may be there. If you still have not received it, please contact the hearing host who set up the test call with you.

I have still not been joined to the hearing, what has happened?

If there is any significant delay to the scheduled time that you were supposed to be admitted to the hearing from the lobby, you should be kept informed by the hearing host.

As hearing timings may adjust subject to matters that arise it may be that you are joined slightly later to the hearing. If you have not been joined to the hearing more than 10 minutes after the expected time, please contact the hearing host.

I cannot hear/see the tribunal - what can I do?

Please check that your microphone, speakers and camera are switched on - if they are switched off, the microphone or camera icon may display with a line through it or may not be highlighted. Click on the icon once and it should turn on the microphone/camera.

If you still cannot hear or see the tribunal you may also wish to ensure that your device has video capability, that the camera is not covered and that your speakers for your device are plugged in and switched on. If this still doesn't work, please contact the hearing host.

Can I have anyone with me while I am attending via video link?

You should ensure that the room you are giving evidence from is private and without interruption. No-one should be present during the hearing. If you need a supporter with you, please raise this with the hearing host at the earliest stage.

I already have Skype installed; can I use that to attend the hearing?

When you have Skype rather than Skype for Business installed you will automatically be directed to download the Skype for Business app when you click on the hyperlink in the appointment invite. You can only attend the hearing through the Skype for Business app or Web app. Further information can be found on the Microsoft

website [What's the difference between Skype, Skype Meetings, and Skype for Business?](#)

I am not sure if my personal circumstances will enable me to participate in the hearing using Skype for Business. Can you help?

We can provide support before and during the hearing to help parties access Skype for Business (a free app) so they can participate effectively. The tribunal will make sure appropriate support is provided to ensure a fair hearing. If you have a disability, we may be able to make adjustments to the way we approach a virtual hearing at the request of anyone participating in a hearing. We consider these requests on a case by case basis in the same way we do for all hearings.

If specific reasonable adjustments are required please contact us before the hearing, following the instructions in the notice of hearing letter you receive from us. Further information on [our commitment to equality and diversity can be found here](#) and information about the built-in [accessibility support features of Skype for Business can be found here](#).

Annex A: Virtual Hearings - What you need to know

Some helpful pointers to assist the smooth running of virtual hearings.

Virtual Hearing etiquette

- ▶ The same professional standards are expected as those you would follow at the hearing centre.
- ▶ Remain on mute if you are not speaking.
- ▶ Try to avoid speaking at the same time as others.
- ▶ Remember to say your name/role before you speak.

The 'hearing room' at home

- ▶ Ensure your home 'hearing room' environment is private, be aware that the room you are using will be visible to the tribunal and others participating in the hearing.
- ▶ Ensure you are free from interruptions including phones, doorbells etc.
- ▶ Log into the 'in session' appointment **at least 5 minutes** before your hearing time to allow time for set up.
- ▶ Remember that if you need a comfort break/to speak with your representative please 'ask for a break' in the comments box.

Internet connections, suitable devices and all things technical

- ▶ Internet connection: minimum download speed of 8mb and upload speed of 512kps.
- ▶ Suitable laptop/PC/iPad. We advise you to contact us if using a Mac as you may need to adjust your settings. Mobile phones are not an acceptable device.
- ▶ Ensure you are able to view any documents you may need to during the hearing - this may mean printing them off, having a second device or reducing the viewing sizes to fit documents and the hearing on one screen.
- ▶ We will schedule a test call with you prior to attending the hearing.