

# IFJ COVID-19 Ongoing Updates

09/04/20-011/04/20

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Last week a survey was sent to IFJ members, approximately 50 people took part although not everyone replied to every question.

Summary of survey findings.

Over 80% of respondents (51 in total) had received a request to work since March 23<sup>rd</sup> during time of social isolation, nearly 45% said yes to the request, approximately a quarter refused and the remainder unsure. When asked the nature of the service they would be providing just over a third reported an assessment with social distancing, ten percent as per normal and fifteen percent via remote means.

Responders were asked about their experiences of remote working

Replies included a wide variety of responses from as yet nothing has been set up, that all appointments have subsequently been cancelled by the police. A successful meeting had taken place with a 13-year-old over Zoom- he was comfortable and competent with the format.

The intermediary noted the disadvantages:

- 1) Difficult to observe of body language/facial expressions.
- 2) Pauses in a Zoom meeting are very different from face to face meeting where they allow time for reflection/thinking. Much harder to manage in online conversations.
- 3) Not able to make contemporaneous notes and still look at witness on the screen.

Successful assessment meeting over Skype with a teenager mild ASD , he, again comfortable with technology and supported by his care worker and was able to confirm his communication skills were typical .The same intermediary was planning an update assessment for a five year old.

Other examples described issues with sound, not being able to directly communicate with the VP (during a hearing) and significant issues for deaf intermediary and client who had to watch a very unclear interpreter which made communications very difficult.

Asked about how working at a social distance (SD) went the following issues arose : OIC not concerned about SD whilst intermediary used hand sanitiser, gloves (showered and changed clothes when home) , issues of reminding everyone especially when leaving room to enter another room, difficult to maintain with young children, undertaking assessment and ABE in one day to avoid repeat contact. Over 50% described working under these conditions as effective and 11% not possible.

Replies as to outcomes of remote working only 30% were effective and 30% VP unable to engage remotely.

Intermediaries raised their concerns about working during a pandemic being a risk themselves and to their family. Intermediaries discussed a variety of proposals they have made to minimise the risk of infection, not having enough guidance/information to function remotely, wishing to wait until safe protocols in place,

Using large rooms, text link between parties, cleaning of rooms/equipment prior to hearings, use of white boards as a means of communicating between parties, use of more frequent breaks during remote hearings.

Issues of police not seemingly concerned about risks not altering their working practices has been raised several times. Other members are concerned that their family members are too vulnerable to be put a risk of infection. One responder noted that police raised issue that technology was not recommended, as insecure.

Intermediaries have noted struggling to find relevant and specific guidance. others felt that staying at home policy should be the priority. Some feel strongly that remote working practice will not work primarily as the VP cannot participate effectively in these situations. (some cite nature of vulnerabilities precluding this form of working).

Issues raised between 09/04/20 and 11/04/20 outside of survey and Zoom meeting.

Intermediaries have been discussing inputting into TAG re new remote working practices.

It has been noted that health care workers working in full PPE have begun pinning a picture of themselves on their fronts, so their patients are able to see who they are. It may be something to consider should intermediaries be required to wear a mask.

RCSLT have issues a statement on the use of PPE.

Intermediaries continue to raise the issue that they are the professionals that are driving discussions around process to minimise risks.

A point was made that the potential risk may increase over a period of time in certain enclosed environments regardless of distancing. Air conditioning in building potentially can circulate CV. ( see link to BBC sounds below) There have been discussions raised by the Judge in the Transparency Project (see link below).

It was noted that for SEN tribunals the remote working has resulted in hearing going ahead unlike previously where they were repeatedly vacated. Success has resulted from personnel being more available due to other tribunal/work being cancelled. It is felt that remote hearings have allowed for all parties to be more focused in these types of hearing.

A variety of links to potentially useful documents have been shared over the last week. Although not specifically focused on the intermediary role but are a useful source of information relevant to the role.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

<https://www.policestationrepuk.com/national-protocol>

<https://www.caseratio.co.uk/security/complaintform>

<http://www.transparencyproject.org.uk/remote-justice-a-judges-perspective/>

<https://www.lccsa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/KH-National-Protocol-02.04.20.pdf>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000h0gw>

On Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April a Zoom meeting took place with over 30 members taking part. Notes of the meeting are being sent out with this update.