

Admission Appeals Panel

Pack for Applicants

Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of Catalyst Academies Trust Admission Appeals Panel.

This pack provides information on the operation of the Panel and the appeal process. If you need any further information, please contact Mrs S Lilley, Governance Manager on 01708 852128 (option 5) or via email at contactus@catalystacademiestrust.org.uk

Admission Appeals Panels must work in line with; School Standards and Framework Act, School Admission Appeals Code, Education Act 2002, ensuring that all requirements are met. All Panel Members will receive training.

Admission Appeals can be heard throughout the year, with the majority being heard in September, June and July.

Role of the Panel

The Appeal Panel is independent of the Trust and its decisions are binding unless overturned by the courts.

Admission Appeals Panel perform a judicial function and need to be transparent, independent and impartial. Although the Panel acts independently of the Trust, they must consider very carefully any legal or procedural advice given by the Clerk.

Panel Membership

Each Admission Appeal Panels for Catalyst Academies Trust consists of 3 people, and there are strict legal rules about who can be a Panel Member. Panels must include:

- Lay Members – these are people who have not worked in a school in any paid capacity, although they may be (or have been) a school Governor or work (or have worked) in a school as a Volunteer.
- People who have experience in education or are acquainted with educational conditions in the area, such as Teachers or Teaching Assistants or parents of school pupils.

Each Admission Appeal Panel must consist of at least 1 member from each of these categories, with the third member being drawn from either. One of the Clerk's responsibilities is to ensure that every Panel is properly constituted.

There may be appeals for certain schools that you will not be able to hear, for example because you have, or have had a connection with an interested party which might raise doubts over your ability to act impartially, for example you may be a Governor at the school in question.

Unfortunately you cannot be appointed to the Catalyst Academies Trust Admission Appeals Panel if:

- You are a Member of Catalyst Academies Trust, or a Governor or Director within Catalyst Academies Trust, or;

- You are employed by Catalyst Academies Trust, or one of its academies.

Panel Members

There are no specific qualifications or experience that you need to become a Panel Member and almost anyone can take on the role. We welcome people with all types of knowledge, background and experience.

Panel members are expected to read all of the papers that are sent to them and play an active part in questioning all parties at the Hearing, showing favour to neither party, avoiding expressing personal opinions during the course of a Hearing or making the case for either party and being conscious at all times of acting, and being seen to act, independently of the Local Authority.

Panel Members need the ability to carefully consider the cases of all parties and then make a balanced and reasoned decision based on what they have read and heard.

Everyone involved in Appeal Hearings needs to be familiar with the Schools Admission Code and the Schools Admission Appeals Code.

Panel Members are expected to attend training and briefing sessions.

The role is voluntary although expenses are paid for attending Panel Hearings and briefing /training sessions.

Availability of Panel Members

The amount of time Panel Members spend at Appeal Hearings will vary depending on the amount of time that they have available. Those who act as Chair person can be expected to sit more often.

Due to work or other commitments you might find it difficult to sit on appeals on a frequent basis or for consecutive dates. Please let us know this when you complete your application. We keep a database of Panel Members and will contact you when organising an Appeal.

Skills

All Panel Members will receive training, support and technical expertise. The following qualities will help you to undertake the work of the Panel:

- Ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of people
- Ability to read and assess information and identify key points
- Ability to listen to key information
- Ability to ask questions to obtain information and clarify points being made
- Ability to analyse information and use it to form opinions and conclusions
- Ability to obtain and weigh up evidence to reach reasoned evidence based decisions
- Willingness to work as part of a team
- Willingness to take advice
- Willingness to develop your own skills

Panel members will be expected to develop an understanding of:

- The admissions process and the guidance / legislation
- The role of the Clerk

Training

Panel Members will receive full training, you will not be able to take part in Hearings until you have been properly training which will include the provision of the statutory guidance.

The Trust provides an Independent Clerk who will advise on procedure for all parties.

Regular training will be provided where required to ensure Panel Members are kept up to date with changes to legislation.

Hearings

Hearings take place during the school day, these will be term time where possible. It usually takes about 30 minutes to hear each Appeal and it is normal for multiple Appeals to be heard by the same Panel on the same day. Refreshments are provided, including lunch if there are several Appeals scheduled for one day.

The majority of Appeals are heard during May, June and July for September admissions, but appeals are scheduled each month.

Where there are two or more Appeals for a particular year group at the same school, the same Panel should hear all the Appeals. This is most likely to occur during the main admissions round and it is possible that a Panel will need to sit for more than one day depending on the number of Appeals.

There are generally two parties present at Appeal Hearings:

- The presenting officer from the school
- The parents, who may be represented or accompanied by a friend or advisor.

Each party has the opportunity to present a case to the Panel. The Panel Members listen to the presentations and question the parties to ensure that they have enough information to reach a decision. Once the parties have stated their case and all questions have been asked, the parties leave the room and the Panel makes a decision in private. This is recorded by the Clerk.

Once the Panel has made its decision it is binding on all parties, that is the parents, the School Governing Body, the Headteacher and the Admission Authority. The Panel cannot revisit its decision once made.

Venue

Hearings will be held at either of the Trust Training Suites, in South Ockendon or Grays, Essex. There may be instances where these are held at an alternative location.

