

Supporting a client going to Lunar House for their substantive interview

Before the interview day

- 1) When the client receives the letter giving the appointment date, make sure that a train ticket will be provided for them by Home Office / Red Cross. It might be arranged by the solicitor. Ensure that you say exactly which station the client wants to depart from, otherwise the Home Office may send a ticket for their nearest station e.g. Woolston, when they may want to go from Southampton main station.

- 2) If an interpreter would be needed, or might be helpful, ask the solicitor to request this or contact the Home Office case owner yourself. You may need to ensure that you know exactly which dialect of their language your client speaks.

- 3) Make a request to CK or EPD for finance to be approved to cover the cost of your train ticket if you are accompanying your client.

- 4) If you are going to accompany your client into Lunar House you will need to take a letter from CK or EPD saying who you are and why you are there. In the past they haven't always let in escorts who do not have a letter of authority.

- 5) Other people are not usually allowed in to the interview with the asylum seeker. If, in exceptional circumstances, it is felt by SWVG that it would be appropriate for the Visitor to support their client all through this process, you will need a letter of authority from CK or EPD and also from the solicitor. The solicitor will probably need to write to the Home Office to request that you are allowed in.

- 6) Check the train times and discuss the timings for the day so there is plenty of time. Appointments are often made for 1.00pm to allow time for travelling. Arrange to meet your client in good time if you are going too.

- 7) If accompanying your client from Southampton make sure that your client knows where to meet you and how to get there.

- 8) The client will need to take the letter of appointment and any identification documents they have.

- 9) Expect to be out all day on the day of the interview, and possibly into the evening, depending on the time of the interview - and trains!

10) Bear in mind that appointments can be cancelled by the Home Office at very short notice.

On the day

1) Even if you consider your client to be reliable, it may be wise to ring them on the morning.

2) It's a good idea to take food and drink, for yourself and your client as well - bearing in mind any dietary requirements. It will be a very long day and it soon becomes expensive to buy it all.

3) Check that your client has documents and train ticket before going into the station.

4) The quickest train route involves one change at Clapham Junction. When you arrive at East Croydon station it is only a gentle 15 minute walk to Lunar House. You pass a number of coffee shops near the station

Arriving at Lunar House

1) You will be met inside the door by a member of security staff and you/your client will need to say why you have come. You may need to show letters then.

2) You then go through security (like airport).

3) You will be directed to the appropriate floor and you will need to show letters and documents to the receptionist there.

4) The interview will probably start at about 1.30pm (i.e. about half an hour after the time stated in the letter).

5) There is a coffee shop and waiting area available in the building. If the Visitor is not going into the interview you may have to wait here. I doubt if you can leave the building and then get back in again later. You may not be able to use a mobile phone in the building.

The Interview

1) The interview takes place in a small room. The only people there will be the interviewer, and the interpreter, if that has been requested.

2) The interview can last 3-4 hours with a break in the middle.

3) If the asylum seeker feels distressed/ unwell / needs to go to the toilet, they can ask for a break at any time

4) Before starting the interview, the interviewer explains in a lot of detail about how the interview will be conducted. The asylum seeker will be asked if they feel well enough to be interviewed. I think it is important to be honest and say if they feel unwell.

5) During the interview, the interviewer will be constantly typing into their computer the questions asked, and the answers given.

6) If the Visitor is in the room to support the client, you are not allowed to say anything except to the client if she/he is distressed/unwell.

7) In the interview I witnessed, I found the interviewer to be fair but firm, patient, considerate and clear in her explanations of the proceedings.

After the interview

1) The asylum seeker will be given a paper copy of the interview record. This should be shown to the solicitor as soon as possible to check for factual mistakes or errors in interpretation.

2) If any documents belonging to the asylum seeker have been taken for photocopying by the interviewer it is important to reclaim originals before leaving.

Travelling home

Trains back to Southampton from East Croydon do not always connect well. I returned via Clapham Junction and Woking - very slow. There is also a train that goes via Gatwick and the south coast - very long and slow but no changes. It might be quicker to return via Clapham Junction and Waterloo. It might be worth checking at East Croydon station, or finding out before the day, the best route back to Southampton.

Good luck!

Linda Huggett October 2014