

Guidance on the process for verification of testimonials

Why is the GMC offering to verify testimonials?

Paragraph 34 of the Sanctions Guidance states:

‘Doctors may present references and testimonials to support their good standing in the community or profession. The tribunal should consider what weight, if any, to give to these documents.

During preparation for the hearing, doctors are notified that any testimonials they intend to present to the tribunal during the hearing must be sent to the GMC eight weeks before the hearing so the testimonials can be verified. This is to assure the tribunal that the testimonials are authentic and that the authors are aware of the fitness to practise proceedings and the allegations that the doctor faces.’

What is the GMC verification process?

GMC Legal will attempt to verify any testimonials received at least eight weeks before the hearing date. We ask for eight weeks because authors may not be immediately contactable and we want to build in time for us to speak to the testimonial author over the telephone. This will allow us to make multiple attempts to contact the author (including requesting a telephone number if one has not been provided).

To meet the aims of the Sanctions Guidance we will:

- verify the identity of GMC registered doctors by asking them security questions based on their GMC record - for others, we are limited to asking them to confirm their identity
- ask the testimonial author to confirm the purpose of the testimonial
- ask the testimonial author to confirm the nature of the allegations that the doctor faces.

We do not disclose any information but follow a standard script to elicit a response.

Can defence representatives verify testimonials?

The GMC will regard a testimonial as verified if:

- the defence representative submits the testimonial with a cover letter which confirms they have verified the identity of the testimonial author; and that the author is aware of the allegations and that the testimonial will be placed before the tribunal
- or
- the defence representative provides the GMC with their letter to the testimonial author, and that letter states the reason the testimonial is required and the nature of the allegations.

As the GMC will not need to verify those testimonials, no time limits apply.

What submissions will the GMC make in relation to testimonials?

GMC Counsel will be provided with a schedule detailing all testimonials received and the efforts made to verify each testimonial. The schedule will confirm if the testimonial has been verified. GMC Counsel will confirm the position verbally to the tribunal.

GMC Counsel will remind the tribunal of the purpose of the verification process and outline its scope:

For GMC registered doctors, the GMC will verify:

- the identity of the testimonial author
- the author's knowledge of the fitness to practise proceedings
- the author's knowledge of the allegations that the doctor faces.

For all other individuals, the process is limited to verifying the author's knowledge.

It is a matter for the tribunal to decide the weight it should attach to any testimonial. The GMC will not verify the content of any testimonial and will not make any submissions in relation to the weight to be attached.

However, if during the verification process the GMC receives information which undermines the authenticity of the testimonial, GMC Counsel may bring this to the attention of the tribunal and doctor.

If a testimonial has not been verified (by the GMC or a defence representative), the GMC will not make any representations in respect of that testimonial other than to confirm that it has not been verified in accordance with this guidance.

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