

Hearings

A. Inter partes hearings

Once the evidence rounds have been completed, the matter is considered “ready” for hearing and shall be entered on the “pending hearing” list. Hearings will, in normal circumstances, be fixed in the order that they are entered onto the pending hearing list.

The Registrar will, on his own initiative (rule 74(4) and (6)) fix the date, time and place for the hearing and send a notice of this to the parties. The Registrar will endeavour to give the parties 2 months’ notice of a formal fixture.

Any party who intends to appear at the hearing shall file notice of his intention to appear on Form T12 together with the specified fee within 14 days after the date of the notice sent pursuant to rule 74(3) or (4). This period is extendable (rule 94). Any party seeking an extension must however send a copy of the request to every other party to the proceedings (rule 94(2)). If Form T12 and the accompanying fee is not received at the Registry within the 14 days specified or any agreed period of extension, that party may be treated as not desiring to appear at the hearing.

The Registrar may direct the parties who have filed Form T12 and paid the specified fee, to attend a pre-hearing review pursuant to rule 87. No less than 7 days’ notice will be given of the date, place and time of the pre-hearing review in accordance with rule 87(2).

If neither party files Form T12 the provisions of rule 75 will come into play and the matter decided on the evidence filed, and on consideration of the written submissions filed (if any) but without a hearing.

Filing and service of copies of authorities etc.

The Registrar would give such directions as appropriate regarding the filing of copies of authorities, skeleton arguments or written submissions (collectively “supporting materials”) which parties wish to rely on at the hearing, having regard to the circumstances of the case. To illustrate, such directions may, amongst others, respectively require the Opponent to file the supporting materials with the Registry and serve a copy on the opposite party at least 5 business days before the hearing, and the Applicant to do the same at least 3 business days before the hearing.

Any supporting materials may be filed with the Registry by electronic means via IPD’s E-Filing System, or in paper form.

Any supporting materials may be served on the opposite party in paper form or, subject to mutual agreement between parties, via USB mass storage device(s) or portable hard disk(s) with USB interface.

Filing of hearing bundles with the Registry is optional. Should a party opt to do so, a hearing bundle should preferably be filed by electronic means via IPD’s E-Filing System, and a copy of which should be served on the opposite party in paper form or, subject to mutual agreement between parties, via USB mass storage device(s) or portable hard disk(s) with USB interface.

The manner and format of an electronic record of a document to be sent by electronic means or stored in a portable storage device should be in accordance with the requirements set out in Annex C of the Terms of Use of IPD’s E-Filing Service, and should also satisfy as far as practicable the requirements in the Annex of this chapter.

Who may attend

Any party who has complied with rule 74(5) or his representative may attend the hearing in person or by such other means as the Registrar allows (rule 76(1)). The Registrar will generally permit representation by counsel, an agent currently on the record for the matter; a duly authorised officer where the party is a company, or a partner where the party is a partnership. The hearing is open to the public (rule 77).

Order of addresses

Under the repealed Cap. 43, the ultimate burden of proving that the mark applied for should be accepted laid with the applicant for registration, and accordingly he had the opening and closing speech. Under Cap. 559 there is no such presumption, and in fact, the opposite may be the case.

“The burden of proof in an opposition such as this lies on the opponent. It is for the opponent to show that the relevant likelihood of confusion exists” – *REACT Trade Mark* [2000] RPC 285 at 287.

In *AUDI-MED Trade Mark* [1998] RPC 863 at 868 the Registrar had this to say :

“In the *EUROLAMB Trade Mark* [1997] RPC 279 Geoffrey Hobbs QC, sitting as the Appointed Person on appeal from the registrar, decided that [section 40 of the Ordinance] was neutral as concerns the relationship between the registrar and an applicant. If that is right it is difficult to see why there should be a greater onus on an applicant if there is a subsequent opposition... It is therefore difficult to identify any specific provision in the [Ordinance] which could have the effect of placing an overall onus on an applicant in an opposition... I conclude that the onus under [section 12(4) of the Ordinance] is on an opponent to show that the use of the mark applied for will take unfair advantage of and/or be detrimental to the opponent’s earlier mark or its reputation. If he succeeds in doing so the applicant must, in order to avoid the refusal of his application, show that he nevertheless has “due cause” to use the mark applied for.”

The order of addresses for an opposition, following the ultimate burden of proof, shall accordingly be: opponent – applicant – opponent.

The order of addresses for an application for revocation on grounds other than non-use, invalidity and variation by someone other than the registered owner shall be: applicant – registered owner – applicant.

The order of addresses for an application for revocation on the ground of non-use shall be: registered owner – applicant – registered owner.

For inter partes interlocutory applications, the applicant for extension of time or the applicant for leave to amend pleadings, to file further evidence, etc., has the burden of proof. The order of addresses shall accordingly be: applicant for extension/leave – the other party – applicant for extension/leave.

In cross-applications when it is not obvious which party should have the right to open and reply, the order of addresses shall be: either by agreement or by the Registrar's direction.

Language of the hearing

Where a party in a hearing before the Registrar or any witness called to give evidence by such party, wishes to give evidence in a language other than the language of the proceedings, the Registrar and the other party must be given at least 10 days prior written notice of his intention. The power to allow this course of action is discretionary. The Registrar, if he allows it, may require the party giving such notice to make provision for interpretation into the language of the proceedings and may give directions as to who should bear these costs (rule 78).

Oral evidence and cross-examination

See chapter on Evidence.

Decisions

When the Registrar has made his decision, he shall send a notice to all parties informing them of the decision (rule 91(1)).

Where a statement of the reasons for the decision is not included in the notice, any party wishing to have a statement of the reasons for the decision must file a request on Form T12 together with the specified fee. This must be received at the Registry within one month after the date of the notice. This period is extendable (rule 94). At the same time as filing a request for a statement of the reasons for the decision, the party so requesting shall send a copy to each other party to the proceedings (rule 91(3)). Once prepared, the statement of reasons for decision will be sent to each party to the proceedings (rule 91(2)).

Uploading of decisions

Statement of reasons of decision issued after a hearing will be uploaded onto our website. Where a matter proceeds by way of a hearing on the papers, statement of reasons issued will also be uploaded onto our website.

Appeal

For the purposes of an appeal against the Registrar's decision, time runs from the date when the "letter" decision is sent out, unless a request is filed for a statement of reasons for decision, in which latter case, time will run from the date on which the statement is sent (rule 91(4)). Although the effect of section 85 is that an appeal is a hearing *de novo*, it would assist the appellant court to have full reasons for the Registrar's decision available to it, and accordingly the existing practice to call for written reasons when an appeal is being considered should continue.

If no notice of appeal is received by the Registrar within 28 days from the date of the decision of a successful opposition, declaration of invalidity or revocation (calculated in accordance with rule 91(4) and O.55 r.4(2) of the Rules of the High Court), as the

case may be, the status of the trade mark application or registration on the register of trade marks will be changed to “Application Refused”, “Registration Invalid” or “Registration Revoked” accordingly.

B. Ex-parte hearings – registrability

The statutory frame work for the examination of an application to register a trade mark is set out in section 42 and rules 13 – 14. See chapter on Examination of applications.

Provision is made in rule 13(5) for an applicant whose application does not, in the opinion of the Registrar, meet the requirements for registration, to file a request for a hearing. Pursuant to rule 13(5), the time limit for doing so is within 3 months after the date of the report under rule 13(4). This period is not extendable (rule 95(1)(c)) except in accordance with rule 13(6).

There is no specified form to be used for requesting a hearing and no fee payable.

Processing a request for a hearing

Upon receipt of a request for a hearing on the registrability of a trade mark, the Registrar will:

- check whether the request was received within 3 months after the date of the notice given under rule 13(4) (or as extended under rule 13(6)); and if yes,
- upon appointing a hearing date, write to the applicant advising him of the appointed date, time and place for the hearing (rule 74(3)). The applicant must be given not less than 14 days’ notice of the hearing date (section 70(2)). In practice, the period will be longer to give the applicant time to comply with rule 74(5).

Options available to the applicant

If the applicant intends to appear at the hearing, he must, within 14 days after the date of the notice advising the date, time and place fixed for the hearing, file notice of his intention to appear on Form T12 together with the specified fee (rule 74(5)).

Form T12 is the form for notifying the Registrar of a party's intention to appear at a hearing or for requesting statement of reasons. It is not for adjourning a hearing. If a party has no intention to appear at a hearing or to request statement of reasons, Form T12 should not be filed. If extension of time is required, request should be made on Form T13 and in accordance with rule 13(6).

Although the applicant can apply for an extension of time for filing notice of his intention to appear at the hearing under rule 94, an applicant must give good reasons for an extension request. Reasons like 'The applicant is considering how to proceed', 'We are considering whether to file evidence', 'We are considering to file further evidence' or 'We are awaiting instructions from the applicant' are not reasons for allowing an extension of time. Additionally, as rule 74(5) states that the applicant should file notice of his intention within 14 days, any extension that the Registrar allows is likely to be short.

On filing notice of his intention to appear, an applicant may ask for the hearing to be postponed if he, or counsel cannot attend on the appointed hearing date, or for other good reason. If the Registrar considers the request to be reasonable, he would appoint a new date for the hearing and give notice to the applicant. The Registrar will not normally postpone a hearing for more than once. Where the application is faced with relative grounds objections, and proceedings for the invalidation or revocation of a relevant earlier trade mark have been instituted and are pending, the Registrar may postpone the hearing. The applicant would have to keep the Registrar informed of developments.

If the applicant fails to file notice of his intention to appear at the hearing, or is content to file written submissions (which must be received on or before the day appointed for

the hearing), the Registrar shall treat the applicant as not wishing to appear and shall reach a determination on the materials available to him.

Any material as proof of facts which the applicant wishes to place before the Registrar for consideration must be exhibited to a statutory declaration or affidavit (rule 79).

Copies of authorities, skeleton arguments or written submissions (collectively “supporting materials”) which an applicant wishes to rely on should be filed with the Registry at least 3 days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays) before the hearing.

Any supporting materials may be filed with the Registry by electronic means via IPD’s E-Filing System, or in paper form.

Filing of hearing bundles with the Registry is optional. Should an applicant opt to do so, a hearing bundle should preferably be filed by electronic means via IPD’s E-Filing System.

The manner and format of an electronic record of a document to be filed with the Registry should be in accordance with the requirements set out in Annex C of the Terms of Use of IPD’s E-Filing Service, and should also satisfy as far as practicable the requirements in the Annex of this chapter.

Who may attend

See the corresponding section under “A. *Inter partes* hearings” above.

Procedure after a determination is made

The Registrar shall, pursuant to section 42(6) and rule 91(1), notify the applicant in writing whether the mark is accepted for registration pursuant to section 42(5) (at which point the hearing process ceases) or refused pursuant to section 42(4).

Where a statement of reasons for the decision is not included in the notice, the applicant may make a request for a statement of the reasons for the decision by filing Form T12 with the specified fee. This must be received at the Registry within one month after the date on which the notice of the decision was sent to him. This period is extendable (rule 94).

If no notice of appeal is received by the Registrar within 28 days from the date of the decision refusing registration of a mark (calculated in accordance with rule 91(4) and O.55, r.4(2) of the Rules of the High Court), the status of the trade mark application on the register of trade marks will be changed to “Application Refused”.

Uploading of decisions

Where a statement of reasons is requested and issued, it will be uploaded onto our website. Whenever a Form T12 is filed indicating intention to appear at a hearing, any statement of reasons issued will be uploaded onto our website. This includes cases where no oral hearing took place and the matter proceeded by way of a hearing on the papers.

Appeal

See the corresponding section under “A. *Inter partes* hearings” above.

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MANNER AND FORMAT FOR ELECTRONIC RECORDS OF DOCUMENTS

Electronic records of documents shall satisfy *as far as practicable* the following requirements:-

1. Electronic records of documents should be text searchable. If not, the documents should be processed by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to make the text searchable and for ease of annotation.
2. Electronic records of documents should contain bookmarks in places such as table of contents, descriptions of exhibits or list of authorities navigating to another section of the record, an exhibit or a case authority.
3. The file name should refer to (1) the type of document filed and (2) the filing party (in the case of inter partes proceedings). For example, in an inter partes proceeding, the skeleton arguments filed by an opponent may contain the file name, “[*Skeleton arguments*] (*Opponent*)”. In an ex-parte proceeding, written submissions filed by an applicant may contain the file name “[*Written submissions*]” without the need to mention the filing party.
4. An electronic record which is split into separate parts for submission should be identified as to which part of the document is contained in the submission. For example, part one of the hearing bundle filed by an applicant in an inter partes proceeding may contain the file name, “[*Hearing bundle*] (*Applicant*)(*Part 1*)”.
5. Electronic records should contain page numbers in ascending order. If a record contains index pages before starting on page 1, the index pages can be given page numbers starting with the prefix “0-”. For example, a two-page index may contain the page numbers “0-1” and “0-2”. The page numbers in the electronic record must correspond with the page numbers imprinted on the documents, so that, for instance, when the user types “17” in the electronic record, the page imprinted with “17” will appear on the screen.