

Self-Administered Interviews (SAIs)

An SAI is a standardised set of instructions and questions that helps witnesses to record their recollection of an incident or crime to inform the formal taking of an evidential statement later. They are usually used to obtain initial accounts following incidents involving high numbers of witnesses, allowing officers to triage and identify key witnesses.

SAIs can be sent to witnesses via email. This should include instructions for saving and returning the completed SAI for version control. Any changes or additions should be saved as a new version.

For further information, see **Hope and Gabbert (2020) Self-administered interview (SAI) – Briefing Note**.

Evidence base

Evidence suggests that the use of an SAI immediately after participants have witnessed an event can increase the overall amount of information recalled, with no effect on accuracy. Evidence also suggests using an SAI can improve the quality of information recalled when a witness is questioned again a week later.

Research indicates the benefits of using an SAI are only realised if used immediately or very soon after the event. It is not recommended to use an SAI if substantial time has passed since the event.

For further information, see **Initial accounts guidelines**.

Opportunities

Contact with witnesses during the current COVID-19 crisis may make it difficult for officers to take a statement from a witness who is self-isolating.

The use of an SAI may allow the witness to make a written initial account, allowing the formal interview to be delayed. The evidence suggests an SAI will support later recall when/if an evidential statement is required.

Where an interview cannot be delayed it should be carefully planned so that it is as short as possible. See also NPCC (2019) **Guidance for forces on operational duties and PPE in relation to Covid-19, version 1.3, paragraph 8.6** (login required).

Risks

An SAI is not an evidential statement, and will not be appropriate for all witnesses or in all circumstances. Consider:

- is the victim vulnerable or intimidated?
- is the witness likely to be traumatised?
- do they need additional support with communication?
- does the witness have access to email?
- do they have the literacy skills to complete an SAI?
- who may be with the witness when they complete an SAI?
- where there are multiple witnesses in the same household, is there a risk of collusion?

Where an SAI is not appropriate, consider a telephone interview using the **Structured Interview Protocol (SIP)**. For further advice on whether an SAI would be appropriate, contact the National Vulnerable Witness Adviser at the NCA Major Crime Investigative Support team.