**Frequently Asked Questions**

* **How is the period of church closure to be determined?**

On Tuesday 17 March, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote to all dioceses and clergy, requiring the suspension of public worship, although there was some variation in how that was interpreted. The formal announcement under the Coronavirus Act and its associated regulations that churches were required to close with immediate effect was made by the Prime Minister on Monday 23 March. **We advise that 17 March is the appropriate date to use**, although we are aware that some churches closed before 17 March because of local circumstances due to the pandemic, and may use that earlier date of closure if it can be evidenced.

* **Our church is now reopening for public worship. What date should we use in dealing with admissions matters relating to church attendance?**

This will vary from one church to another, depending on the circumstances, since will need significantly longer to be able to safely reopen for public worship. We suggest it is the date of the first public act of worship that the congregation would normally attend, which will often be on a Sunday.

* **What counts as public worship?**

For this specific purpose, we mean the ordinary services taking part in church which members of the congregation would be able to attend, typically morning or evening prayer and celebrations of the Eucharist, or their regular pattern of public worship whether on weekdays or Sundays. We are aware that churches may use a variety of titles for these services.

* **Our oversubscription criterion provides for those who attend other Christian churches and those of other faiths. Is this still possible/**

Yes – the standard text has a phrase [marked in square brackets for ease of reference] to precisely cover this point. If your current criterion does not include this, you can simply delete that phrase.

* **When churches are open for private prayer, will that meet the attendance criterion?**

No, because this is, by definition, not an act of public worship, although it is something we value tremendously and are delighted to see has become possible once more.

* **We have been streaming our regular services, initially from the church and subsequently from our homes. Does that meet the definition of public worship?**

We know that people have been amazingly creative in finding new ways to worship but this approach does not meet the criterion, mainly because attendance is difficult to confirm.

* **The church of which I am incumbent is accessed directly from the vicarage and I have been able to celebrate the Eucharist and say my daily Office in church, these services being streamed. Does that meet the criterion?**

As with the previous answer, this does not meet the criterion because the congregation are not physically present, although of course the act of worship is the corporate prayer of the church and emphatically not a form of purely private prayer. As the relevant national and diocesan guidance made clear, during the closure period, the church must not be open for public worship.

* **Our admissions policy requires attendance at church at least twice a month for a year before the application is made. Does that mean people cannot meet the requirement due to the closure?**

No, they can still meet the requirement – during the closure period they could not have attended church even if they had wished to do so, so the requirement cannot apply. It would apply to any period before closure and would come into force again when churches do reopen for public worship. One way of expressing it is that if the attendance requirement was met when the church was open, it is fulfilled.

* **Our admissions policy requires attendance over two years, for a specific number of attendances per month. How will people meet that requirement?**

As noted in the previous answer, if people were attending when the church was open for public worship, they meet the criterion.

* **When my church reopens for public worship, people who are clinically vulnerable or shielding may judge that it is to high a risk to attend public worship. How can they meet the requirement to do so?**

In other situations, people may qualify if they have a significant and well-evidenced reason for being unable to meet a criterion in specified circumstances. Colleagues will doubtless have come across comparable instances where, for example, a parent has a life-limiting illness. If the circumstances warrant, and sufficient evidence is available for that purpose (for example, confirmation from the person’s GP or consultant), the condition can be fulfilled. This is of course more straightforward where there was a previous pattern of regular church attendance, which should normally be the case.

* **When churches reopen, they will do so at different times, as their layout, size and other factors may make this advisable. It may be that the church I attend may therefore have to change. Can I still meet the criterion?**

Yes, since the requirement is attendance at public worship and many applicants for a specific church school may attend a church that is not the one to which the school is linked. However, do look carefully at the admissions criteria to see whether attendance at one specific church is given higher priority than other churches and discuss this with the Headteacher and parish priest.

* **Must we amend our admissions arrangements and other material on our website or in paper form, such as our Supplementary Information Form?**

Yes, because this is a variation to your admissions arrangements, which means that parents and prospective pupils **must** be able to clearly see what those requirements are and how they can be met. They **must** also be able to see that those arrangements are lawful and that admissions decisions will be fair, open, and transparent. It is a statutory requirement that admissions arrangements must be publicly available, normally on the school website or otherwise if the school does not have a website. It is also essential that a concise but clear explanation of the variation is added to the SIF, although we know that the precise format of individual school’s SIFs does legitimately vary, for example in the way the information is laid out on the page.

* **Will we have to repeat this process if the pandemic lasts into the next admissions cycle?**

At present, that depends on the nature and the severity of the pandemic and its consequences for opening churches for public worship. In addition, during the autumn 2020, schools will be considering any variations they wish to request for the following admissions cycle, with the usual appropriate consultation process. That will be the opportunity to revisit this particular issue. In the meantime, we will be in discussion with the OSA as the situation evolves.

* **Governors are considering a number of possible in-year variations to our admissions arrangements – can we include them on this occasion?**

Not as part of this process, which is specifically designed to meet a unique situation in as fair and streamlined a way as possible.