

Statement by the Board of AQE Ltd 5/1/21

The Board of AQE remains acutely aware of the pressure on pupils, parents and teachers as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic and the decisions which the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive have had to take in light of public health requirements.

In view of the temporary cessation of face-to-face teaching announced on 4 January, the Board considers that a postponement of the Common Entrance Assessment (CEA) is now necessary. Following a meeting with the schools which use the CEA, produced by AQE Limited, it has been agreed that to enable the assessment to take place in the current circumstances, the assessment will be reduced to a single paper to be held on Saturday 27 February, provided it can take place in public health circumstances then prevailing.

Inevitably, the question will be asked why the assessment has been rescheduled rather than scrapped, and in response the following considerations are relevant:

- in the absence of academic criteria, many schools would be likely to be even more oversubscribed than in a normal year and academic performance in an assessment would be replaced by other more random criteria, such as family ties, geographical proximity to a school or some form of lottery for places. It is the view of the member schools that academic selection represents the fairest way of allocating grammar school places;
- the schools who use the assessment are encouraged by communications from parents who have stated that their children are ready and willing to sit the assessment and they want the opportunity to do so;
- the education provided by our variety of post-primary schools offers the best choice for parents and meets the needs of pupils of all ability levels much better than the postcode comprehensive system which operates elsewhere; and
- while information was available from post-primary schools to provide grades in GCSEs, A levels and BTEC qualifications in 2020, AQE does not have access to alternative information from primary schools which could be used to match pupils to schools.