

# Association for Quality Education

## Background

AQE has been providing assessments for children in Northern Ireland since 2009. We have always put the interests and well-being of the child at the very heart of our practices and procedures.

We have excellent schools in Northern Ireland and they use various criteria for selection. AQE wants to ensure that those schools wishing to select, using academic ability have the best information on which to make that judgement. The scheme of assessment which we use maximises the reliability and validity of the result your child achieves.

As professional educators with decades of teaching experience, we understand that examinations and assessments of any nature can be a daunting experience. It is also true that children, like adults, can have 'off' days.

In recognition of this and to be as fair and supportive as possible, AQE offers three papers and will base the assessment on the two strongest papers.

To help with the preparations, we also provide past papers which means you and your child will know what type of questions will be asked.

Your child is used to doing certain types of questions in mathematics and English. AQE uses the same type of questions in its assessment to ensure that your child is familiar with the style of questions.

AQE Limited is a not-for-profit private company that uses its income to provide the Common Entrance Assessment ('the assessment') for registered candidates, the result of which ('AQE Standardised Score') can be used by the candidates for post primary transfer application to participating schools.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **About Us**

Q1. What is AQE?

A AQE Ltd was set up by a group of grammar schools as a Testing Agency to provide an AQE Standardised Score for children who want to transfer to the participating schools, rather than have each school formulate its own test.

Q2. What type of organisation is AQE Ltd?

A AQE Limited operates as a not-for profit private limited company, it is not under the control of any departmental or non-departmental public body.

Q3. Does AQE report to the Department of Education in NI?

A No, AQE Limited is not under the control of any departmental or non-departmental

public body, it operates as a not-for-profit private limited company. AQE reports to the 34 participating grammar schools that commission the assessment.

Q4. Who funds AQE?

A AQE is mainly funded by the registration fees paid by the parents of candidates taking the assessments, but also receives contributions from participating schools.

Q5. Who decides if an assessment is to proceed?

A The participating grammar schools decide if the assessment proceeds, subject to prevailing conditions. They have asked AQE Ltd to initiate preparations for the Common Entrance Assessment for the 2021/2022 academic year but, cognisant of public safety, they will be guided by the latest advice from the NI Executive in relation to public health concerns.

Q6. What role does AQE play in the post primary transfer process in September 2022?

A AQE's sole purpose is to provide the assessment which enables each candidate to receive an AQE Standardised Score. We have no role in deciding what criteria any secondary school uses to select pupils. The relevant school(s), the Department of Education (DE) and the Education Authority (EA) should be able to help you with the answer to this question. Please see the links below.

Q7. Why can't teacher-predicted scores be used for our children – much like they were used for GCSE and A Levels last year?

A AQE's role is to provide assessments which enable AQE to issue each child with an AQE Standardised Score. We have no role in deciding what criteria any secondary school uses to select pupils. The relevant school(s), DE and EA should be able to help you with the answer to this question. Please see the links below.

## Time and Place

Q8. Will the 2021/22 assessment be going ahead?

A AQE has been asked by its participating grammar schools to proceed with the Common Entrance Assessment for the next academic year. The dates are:

- Application for Registration Opens on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021
- Application for Registration Closes at 5.00pm on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021
- Assessment 1 Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021
- Assessment 2 Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021
- Assessment 3 Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Q9. Why doesn't AQE run the assessment in my child's primary school?

A. AQE does not run the assessment. The assessments are hosted in and by the participating schools. As a private company, AQE Ltd has no remit or authority over any schools, including primary schools. The choice of location for the assessments is a matter for the individual schools/venues concerns and the imposition of any relevant requirements as to venue would be a decision for the Minister for Education in terms of staffing and accommodation.

## Support

Q10. My child has missed a lot of face-to-face teaching during P5 and P6. What will AQE do about this?

A. AQE Limited is a small private company and our role is to provide assessments which provide each child with an AQE Standardised Score. The organisations which deal with the education of children in primary schools are the DE and the EA. As a private company, AQE Ltd has no remit or authority over primary schools. We are however cognisant of the disruption experienced by children since March 2020 and are confident that this year's assessments will be a fair test for all children. See question 11 below. We have provided free past papers on the website so that children can practise doing them. Please see the link below.

<https://aqe.org.uk/practice-material-spring-2020/>

Q11. What will happen if my child misses some (or all) of the assessment due to illness, self-isolation or other unforeseen circumstances?

A. If a candidate is unable to sit at least two of the papers, an application can be made to individual schools under Special Provision/Special Circumstances. Please check the Admissions Criteria of the relevant schools for details.

## Papers

Q12. How will AQE ensure fairness for all candidates?

A. AQE's role is to provide assessments which provide each child with an AQE Standardised Score. This means that we need to set a range of questions which will make it possible to produce a rank order of AQE Standardised Scores which the participating schools can use. However, AQE always has the child in mind in all our deliberations:

- **There are three papers with the best two out of three to count.** Children will continue to have the option of taking a third paper which allows them to have an off day. Moreover, unexpected events or illnesses can prevent a child from attending an assessment or preparing for it.

- **Extra time.** For 21/22 assessments we are allowing an extra 10 minutes to complete each paper. We hope this will reassure children that they will have this extra time to complete each paper.
- **Practice Papers.** AQE has made available an extensive selection of fifteen past papers free of charge on the website plus one new sample paper which will reflect the 2021/22 papers to assist children to prepare for the assessment.
- **Review of Papers.** We have reviewed the papers and some of the English passages have been shortened where appropriate. The mathematics and English questions have been revised in order to make them more accessible for this year's assessment in response to the educational circumstances since March 2020.<sup>1</sup>
- **Standardisation Process.** The standardisation process means that the distribution of the children's standard scores will be in line with that in all previous years.

The examining team has the best interests of the children at the centre of their thinking. The team is very aware of the conditions under which this year's P6 children have been learning.

Please see the link below.

<https://aqe.org.uk/practice-material-spring-2020/>

Q13. What mitigations has AQE put in place in response to the educational circumstances since March 2020?

- A. AQE's Common Entrance Assessment has been carefully designed to be as child-friendly as possible. This is why every child has three opportunities to sit the assessment papers with only two papers counting in the final score and why all of the assessment passages and assessment questions are designed by a local team of educational professionals who understand the challenges facing children in Northern Ireland. Our locally based revision team has reviewed all of the questions for the 2021-22 assessment and, where, necessary, revised English passages and mathematics and English questions in order to make them more accessible for this year's assessment.

AQE has listened to the concerns of parents and primary schools and has made the following changes for the 2021-22 year in response to the educational circumstances since March 2020<sup>2</sup>:

- AQE will provide detailed English and mathematics support documents for the 2021/22 CEA papers. These documents will be available on the website for parents and teachers to access.

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<sup>1</sup> The Irish language version of the assessment has been reviewed in the same way.

<sup>2</sup> The Irish language version of the assessment has been reviewed in the same way.

- Some mathematics topic areas which have been included in previous years will not be assessed in the 2021/22 assessment. Details of these topic areas will be available on the website for parents and teachers to access.
- Some of the English passages have been shortened where appropriate.
- The mathematics and English questions have been revised to make them more accessible for this year's assessment.
- Access has been provided free of charge to a large selection of past papers on the AQE website and others are available for purchase so that children can prepare thoroughly for the assessment (AQE will be providing a guide showing which individual questions will not be relevant for this year's assessment due to the revisions described above).
- A sample paper, which will reflect the 2020/21 papers, will be provided free of charge, on the AQE website.
- Candidates will have an additional ten minutes to complete each paper.

Q14. Will AQE be using the papers which were prepared for January 2021?

A AQE intends to revise the first paper and make it available, free of charge, to all candidates as a practice paper. This will be available on the website from September 2021. The other papers printed for January 2021 have been destroyed. Their content which has been extensively reviewed and, where necessary, re-written as described in Q12, will form the basis of two new papers for 2021/22.

Q15. Will AQE use verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests this year?

A We will not be using verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests. We will be using the same type of questions that we have been using for the past 11 years, which we consider to permit a more reliable assessment of the child's performance/ability. To help with the preparations, we also provide past papers which means you and your child will know what type of questions will be asked.

Q16. Why does the AQE assessment have three papers?

A Children, like adults, can have 'off' days. Moreover, unexpected events or illnesses can prevent a child from attending an assessment or preparing for it. In recognition of this and to be as fair and supportive as possible, AQE offers three papers and will base the assessment on the two strongest papers.

The scheme of assessment which we use maximises the reliability and validity of the result your child achieves.

## Health and Safety

Q17. What risk assessments will be in place when the Common Entrance Assessment takes place in November/December 2021?

A The first priorities for AQE limited are the health and wellbeing of the children and staff during the Common Entrance Assessment. AQE Limited has been engaging with the Department of Education and the Public Health Agency over the past months in relation to the pandemic and what the likely situation might be in late Autumn 2021. Whilst it is not possible to predict what the advice and guidance will be leading up to the dates of the assessment, all centres will have risk assessments (available on request) which will be compliant with the up-to-date guidance. We hope the risk assessments will provide reassurance to parents and candidates. AQE Limited will continue to seek advice and guidance from DE and the PHA over the next few months. If the guidance changes that could impact the assessments we will react promptly and accordingly.

## Communication

Q18. How can I get to speak to someone in AQE?

A AQE Ltd will endeavour to deal with queries as quickly as possible, however, as a small company with limited resources it may take some time to respond. We have set up this page of questions and answers in order to let you have as much information as possible on the topics which arise. Please see the links for AQE below.

### Links

AQE Limited

Tel: 028 90224002

Email: [info@aqe.org.uk](mailto:info@aqe.org.uk)

Website: [www.aqe.org.uk](http://www.aqe.org.uk)

Department of Education Telephone: 028 9127 9279

Email: [DE.DEWebMail@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:DE.DEWebMail@education-ni.gov.uk)

Balloo Road

Rathgill

Bangor

BT19 7PR

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>

Education Authority

Tel: 028 9056 4000

Contact Details for other EA Offices

Email: [info@eani.org.uk](mailto:info@eani.org.uk)

40 Academy Street,  
Belfast,  
BT1 2NQ

<https://www.eani.org.uk/>