

On Monday 4 December 2017, immediately after the third and final assessment, a number of parents brought to our attention an apparent problem with the AQE papers, concerning pages which had stuck together, preventing candidates from completing the test or, when discovered, forcing them to rush the last uncompleted pages. Parents argued that this was a problem which had appeared in all three assessments and had the potential to affect their children's performance.

AQE immediately instituted an investigation. This involved

- a careful examination by the markers of every single Paper 3 script;
- a sampled review of unused papers across tests 1 and 2;
- a review of the every single room and centre report returned by our member school assessment centres after each assessment; a further request was made to our centres to check again with their invigilators and to return any concerns which might not have been recorded in the reports
- discussions with our printers.

Our findings were as follows:

- On Paper 3, approximately twenty scripts, out of 8,000, contained a page on which no item had been attempted. None of these scripts came from candidates whose parents had registered a concern. Every script of a candidate whose parents had raised a concern, had been completed, although it was impossible to determine whether the candidate in question had been under unusual time pressure to finish.
- No unused paper sampled showed evidence of sticking papers.
- There was not a single reference in any of the room or centre reports to pages sticking and the follow-up request solicited no unrecorded concerns.
- Our printers could offer no explanation in principle for pages sticking together.

It is worth pointing out that part of our routine administrative process requires every invigilator to open the test papers beforehand and to flick through every individual paper to ensure that there are no blank pages or printing errors before distributing them to the pupils. If time permits, pupils are invited to check that all the pages are in place. All items are numbered. Every page is numbered in bold and at the foot of every page is the instruction, 'Go straight to page (number)'. The outline of the following page can be discerned through the paper. The papers have, in other words, been designed to reduce the risk of children inadvertently skipping pages.

If there were to be any systemic fault in any part of the assessment process, it would be a matter of grave concern. On the basis of our investigation so far, we have found no evidence of any such systemic error. That said, we shall institute in the next cycle a requirement that each candidate should have the opportunity, under guidance from the invigilator, to turn over each page before the assessment proper begins and be clear about the number of pages on the paper.

Stephen Connolly
Joint CEO