

MENSA FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Mensa?

Mensa is 'the' high IQ society.

What does 'Mensa' mean?

It is not an acronym - it is Latin for 'table'. It denotes a round table where all members are equal.

Is Mensa a charity?

No. It is a not-for-profit membership organisation

What is its purpose?

Mensa is a society for like-minded people. Its aims are:

- to identify and foster human intelligence for the benefit of humanity
- to encourage research in the nature, characteristics, and uses of intelligence
- to provide a stimulating intellectual and social environment for its members.

When was Mensa formed?

Mensa was formed in Oxford in 1946 by Roland Berrill, an Australian barrister and Dr Lance Ware, scientist and lawyer. The organisation later spread around the world.

How many members are there?

Currently British Mensa has around 24,000 members in the British Isles and Ireland. There are more than 105,000 world-wide.

Mensa is rather elitist, isn't it?

No. Although membership is restricted to the top two per cent of the population by IQ, this means members come from all walks of life and backgrounds. They can be young or old, married, single, divorced, separated or widowed, and any race, creed, colour, social or educational background.

What are the benefits of membership of Mensa?

Networking and social activities
 Special Interest Groups – currently more than 100 hobby and interest groups
 Monthly magazine and regional newsletters
 Local meetings
 Online social networking community with chat forums
 Weekend gatherings and conferences
 Lectures and seminars
 Mensa-branded products

How old is your youngest member?

In British Mensa, our current youngest member is two and a half years old.

How old is your oldest member?

We've had a member of 103 - and the lady in question only joined when she was in her 90s. It just goes to show it's never too late to join.

Are all Mensans eggheads?

No. While a few members may fit the popular image, the majority of members are ordinary people. What they do generally have in common is enquiring minds and a potential to learn.

Have you got any famous members?

Sir Clive Sinclair was Chairman for 15 years and is now Honorary President of British Mensa. His inventions changed people's lives. Former Mensa Chairman Sylvia Herbert is also well known after taking part in the BBC Test the Nation shows in 2002 and 2003 as one of the panel of experts.

Other celebrities reported to have qualified for membership include TV presenters Carol Vorderman, Bill Buckley, Debbie Flint and Rev Lionel Fanthorpe; author Zoe Barnes; model and former Miss Rochdale Laura Shields; biologist Dr Jack Cohen; Sir Jimmy Savile; journalist Garry Bushell; the late sci-fi writer Isaac Asimov; economist and broadcaster Madsen Pirie of the Adam Smith Institute; US actress Geena Davis; footballers Andy Harris (Leyton Orient) and Joey Beauchamp (Oxford United); Guinness World Record crossword compiler Roger Squires; Who Wants to be a Millionaire winner David Edwards; boxer Nicky Piper and swimmer Adrian Moorhouse.

[PLEASE NOTE: This list has been compiled from various sources including information received through press and media reports. It is not Mensa policy to confirm or deny the current membership status of any individual without that person's prior consent.]

What is IQ?

IQ or Intelligence Quotient is an attempt to measure intelligence. This means many things to many people but generally the attribute of intelligence refers to quickness of mental apprehension (or mental agility).

It is often confused with knowledge, wisdom, memory, or a myriad of other attributes and in general has a variety of meanings depending on the context in which it is used.

IQ invariably refers to the attempt to quantify the attribute in its meaning of mental comprehension.

There are several scales with which IQ may be measured depending upon which testing mechanism is used. For this reason the most reliable and consistent value to be placed on IQ is that of the percentile. An IQ of 150 is a meaningless claim unless the testing mechanism is also cited, but an IQ in the 98th percentile (i.e. higher than 98 per cent of the population) has consistent meaning.

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What is measured in tests?

Standardised IQ tests look for competence in a range of areas - e.g. verbal, numerical, etc. Mensa Supervised test sessions currently comprise two tests. One is diagrammatical while the other measures largely verbal reasoning ability. A top 2% score on either would result in an invitation to join Mensa.

How do you become a member?

You need to prove your IQ is in the top two per cent of the population. For most people, this means taking a Mensa Supervised IQ Test.

Mensa Home Test – not a true IQ test (as it is self-administered) rather an indicator or practice test and therefore results do not qualify an individual for membership of Mensa. Returned to office and results within 21 days.

Mensa Supervised Test – full invigilated test (held regionally). Marked and results within 14 days. Anyone achieving a score in the top two per cent will be invited to join Mensa. Testing sessions are held all around the country on a regular basis.

Other methods of entry – accreditation of previous IQ test done by qualified psychologist (e.g. school, military)

Mensa tests are not appropriate for children under 10½, who would need to be assessed by an educational psychologist. Any report from this can then be submitted as 'prior evidence'.

What is the pass score for Mensa?

You cannot pass or fail an IQ test – it is a measurement. Putting a number on IQ is not really helpful, as it depends on which particular test you took. There are many IQ tests available and their scoring scales vary – rather like comparing imperial and metric measurements.

On the Culture Fair test used by British Mensa, a score of 132 places a candidate in the top two per cent of the population (the average IQ is taken as 100). On the Cattell B III, also commonly used by Mensa, a score of 148 or above would be required.

All Mensans are in the top two per cent by IQ whichever scale their intelligence was measured by.

Does your IQ change as you get older?

Not generally. IQ tests are age adjusted, basically to take account of youth and inexperience (under 16-19) or age and diminishing speed. The reason is that, as we get older, diminishing speed and spatial awareness are balanced by having more knowledge and experience to draw on to solve problems. Keeping your mind active as you grow older will help maintain your cognitive faculties, although of course degenerative brain conditions can affect this.

Does Mensa have an approved schools list for bright children?

No

How can my school recognise my child's intelligence?

If a school or parent thinks a child has exceptional ability they can contact their local education authority, health visitor or health authority.

The Mensa Office also has a brief leaflet about gifted and talented children which can be sent to enquirers – 01902 772771 to request a copy.

Does Mensa do anything to support gifted children?

In addition to the normal membership benefits, young members may choose to join the Junior M special interest group (SIG).

The society has supported G&T programmes throughout the UK with resource packs, and the board of directors appointed a Gifted Child Consultant to look at further ways to improve Mensa for its younger members. In March 2005 the society launched a G&T Support Programme for school teachers which takes the form of cross-curriculum modules of ready-to-use extension and enrichment lessons for gifted children.

'Living and Working with Gifted Children' is a Mensa-sponsored one-day seminar which is offered at various locations. Aimed at parents or teachers, the day includes workshops and advice, with a separate programme of activities for children aged 5-16.

E-mail gtprogrammes@mensa.org.uk for more information.

How much does a Mensa test cost?

Mensa charges £9.95 to mark and administer the results for the Home Test.

A place at a Mensa Supervised IQ Test session costs £15.

Membership is currently just £45 per annum (£40 for Direct Debit) with concessions and family membership packages available.

Do I have to take the test again if I leave and want to re-join?

No – just call the office and we can arrange to reinstate lapsed members. We welcome back more than 1,000 members each year.

How do people find out more about Mensa or apply for a test?

They can access our web site on www.mensa.org.uk or telephone 01902 772771