

THE ASSOCIATION FOR SKEPTICAL ENQUIRY
(ASKE)

<http://www.aske-skeptics.org.uk/>

aske1@talktalk.net

THE ASKE PARANORMAL CHALLENGE

ASKE is offering an award of £10,000 to anyone who can successfully demonstrate ‘a paranormal ability’ which they claim to possess. The offer is open to anyone in the United Kingdom. The claimant and ASKE will jointly undertake a test designed in such a way that one outcome would unequivocally demonstrate that the claimant possesses the ability in question. If the test is successful, ASKE will give the claimant a cheque for £10,000. Successful claimants who are resident in the UK will then be eligible, if they wish, to apply for the €25,000 Sisyphus Prize offered by SKEPP, the Belgian Skeptical society (see the ASKE website).

A preliminary application form for the ASKE Paranormal Challenge is provided following ‘General Rules’.

General Rules (as of 27.8.16)

1. As claims will vary greatly in character and scope, specific rules will be devised for each applicant. However, all applicants must agree to the general rules set forth here before any formal agreement is entered into.
2. At the outset, ASKE must agree that the claim being made is of ‘a paranormal ability’. Examples are clairvoyance and telepathy, telekinesis, and dowsing. Whether a claim is for ‘a paranormal ability’ may occasionally be difficult to be clear about, and ASKE reserves the right to decline to test any claim if it does not wish to do so. Importantly, some paranormal abilities, such as spiritual healing, are too complex for ASKE to test.
3. The claim must be testable in a direct and unequivocal manner, usually in one single session, with a clearly specified outcome. For example, an applicant may state that they can detect, solely by means of dowsing rods, an underground pipe containing water, the location of which is otherwise unknown to them. Or an applicant may state that they are able to detect which of a series of pictures a person in another room is looking at. In some cases the test of the claim is ‘all or none’, as with metal bending (either the metal bends or it doesn’t); in others cases the criterion for success may be a test of statistical significance (i.e. the person’s level of accuracy cannot reasonably be held to arise from mere guesswork). Generally speaking, a successful outcome is one that cannot be explained by normal (‘non-paranormal’) means.
4. The exact details of how the test is to be conducted must be specified in advance and agreed on by both the applicant and ASKE. This may take some time to negotiate and will involve consultations with experts known to ASKE, including competent statisticians, who may or may not be ASKE members.
5. Before finalising the protocol and undertaking the formal test of the claim, ASKE will conduct a preliminary test with the applicant. One purpose of this is to assess the feasibility of the test protocol and to make suitable adjustments if any potential problems are identified. The preliminary test may, by agreement, be less rigorous than the final protocol (e.g. it does not have to be recorded, and independent witnesses need not be present). Several trials may be conducted to refine the protocol. However, the applicant will have to demonstrate the claimed paranormal ability at preliminary testing before the formal test goes ahead at the

agreed time and place. For this purpose, a criterion probability for success by chance alone that is less than that of the final test (e.g. 1 in 100) may be adopted.

6. If the applicant is not able to demonstrate the claimed ability on preliminary testing, his or her application will be rejected. The applicant may reapply for the award, but normally a period of 12 months should elapse before ASKE will consider a re-application

7. It is essential that the agreement for the formal test should specify exactly what constitutes success and failure. Often this will be in the form of, say, the number of successful 'hits'. To take a simple example, someone claiming that they can predict the throw of a dice would be required to predict, say, 20 throws and the agreement for a successful demonstration might be the correct prediction of, say, at least 16 throws. ASKE will decide on the criterion probability for success by chance only; this is likely to be of the order of less than 1 in a 10,000, which is less than the probability of correctly guessing 13 successive tosses of an unbiased coin.

8. It is also essential that the signed protocol for the agreed test should indicate unequivocally that both ASKE and the claimant consider that the procedure adopted is an absolutely fair test of the claimed paranormal ability.

9. Paper copies of the final details ('the agreement') will be available to both parties, and will include the signature of the applicant and the ASKE Secretary, indicating acceptance of the terms of the test by both sides. Only when the agreement has been signed by both parties is the applicant designated 'the claimant'.

10. No part of the agreed testing procedure may be changed in any way without the express agreement of all parties concerned.

11. Immediately prior to the test both parties must satisfy themselves that it is about to be conducted fairly and properly in the agreed manner. In particular the claimant should feel free to ask any questions in order to reassure himself or herself of this. If necessary, both parties will then sign a further declaration indicating that they are satisfied that the test is about to be conducted in the manner agreed, fairly and properly.

12. The formal test will be conducted in the presence of witnesses provided by ASKE and, if desired, the claimant. Any witnesses accompanying the claimant should not take part in the test. Each party should be informed of the witnesses who will attend and agree to their presence.

13. If the media are to be present this must be by agreement of *both* parties.

14. The formal test will be video-recorded by ASKE. The claimant may make their own recording providing ASKE is satisfied that it will not compromise the test conditions.

15. The test must be conducted strictly according to the agreed protocol. No variations or additional tests will be allowed. If during the test it becomes clear that the agreed protocol has not been adhered to by either party the test will be halted. The test may be restarted if the problem can be resolved, otherwise the test will be postponed and a new protocol will need to be agreed on.

16. All data (photographic, recorded, written, etc.) of any sort gathered as a result of the testing may be used freely by either party. However, the video recording made by ASKE will remain the property of ASKE.

17. All of a claimant's expenses such as transportation, accommodation, materials, and his or her own witnesses' expenses are the sole responsibility of the applicant. ASKE will not bear any of these costs.

18. On conclusion of the test both parties shall sign a statement summarising the claim, how the claim was tested, what were the results, and whether the results constitute pass or failure according to the agreed terms and conditions.

19. At the formal test, in advance, an independent person will be placed in charge of a cheque for £10,000. In the event that the claimant is successful under the agreed terms and conditions, that cheque shall be immediately surrendered to the claimant.

20. If the claimant fails the test it is understood by both sides that this does not necessarily mean that they do not possess the claimed ability; rather the conclusion is that, whether or not they do have this ability, on this occasion, under the conditions of the test, they were unable to demonstrate this.

21. Should the claimant fail the test, he or she may re-apply to be tested but normally a period of 12 months should elapse before ASKE will consider a re-application. There is no limit on the number of times an applicant may re-apply.

22. A successful claimant will be eligible to apply for the €25,000 Sisyphus Prize offered by SKEPP, the Belgian Skeptical society (see the ASKE website).

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**THE ASKE PARANORMAL CHALLENGE:
PRELIMINARY APPLICATION**

I wish to apply to enter the ASKE Paranormal Challenge. I claim to have a paranormal ability. My claim is as follows:

(Please provide a brief summary of your ability here.)

Please state below how you think ASKE may test your ability under scientific conditions. (There is no need at this stage to go into extensive details; these can be decided at a later stage):

I have read the General Rules (27.8.16) for entering the Challenge and agree to these conditions.

Name:

Contact details:

Signed _____ Date _____

Please return by post to:

Association for Skeptical Enquiry
10 Woodholm Road
Sheffield
S11 9HT