Feedback on the MRCGP Applied Knowledge Test (AKT)  
January 2020, AKT38

After each sitting of the exam, the AKT core group provides feedback on overall candidate performance via the RCGP website and direct to educators via Deaneries/LETBs. We also highlight areas of general interest related to the exam. We hope that this feedback is helpful to all those involved in education and training, particularly AiTs themselves, and we welcome comments on the feedback to the email address at the end of this report.

For important general information about how to prepare for the AKT exam, including a description of the exam format and content as well as ‘frequently asked questions’ please see the weblinks throughout the AKT page of the MRCGP site.

The AKT 38 exam was held on 29th January 2020 and taken by 1390 candidates.

Statistics

Scores in AKT 38 ranged from 80 to 188 out of 200 questions, with a mean overall score of 141.68 marks (70.84%).

The mean scores by subject area were:

- ‘Clinical medicine’ 70.56% (160 questions)
- ‘Evidence interpretation’ 72.50% (20 questions)
- ‘Organisational’ 71.47% (20 questions)

The pass mark for AKT 38 was set at 135.

Pass rates are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates (numbers)</th>
<th>Pass rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All candidates (1390)</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK first-time takers (712)</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
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Other key statistics from this test:

Reliability (Cronbach α coefficient) = 0.92  
Standard error of measurement = 5.84 (2.92%)
Performance in key clinical areas – AKT 38

Providing feedback which is educationally useful but which does not undermine the security of test questions is never easy. We have highlighted below general areas of good performance, as well as areas where there is room for improvement. Comments are referenced to the 2019 RCGP curriculum. Please note that the previous AKT Content Guide has now been subsumed into the Topic Guides of the new curriculum. Many topics appear in several places throughout the curriculum and we have not listed all of these.

We remind candidates again that the AKT tests for appropriate and cost-effective management, so sometimes the correct answer is not to investigate, prescribe or refer. Candidates find this option a difficult one to choose, as is sometimes the case in clinical practice.

Some questions may relate to clinical situations such as management of mildly abnormal blood test results. As described above, it may be that significant additional testing is not required and this may be the correct answer option.

We may ask about investigations commonly undertaken in secondary care after patients are referred, for example, for investigation of suspected cancer. We do not expect candidates to have detailed knowledge of these investigations, but we would expect that candidates have sufficient awareness to be able to respond to patient queries about possible further tests, when a referral is discussed and agreed.

We also remind candidates that drug choices should be those that reflect evidence-based, widespread and accepted practice in primary care, and not those that a secondary care doctor with specialist skills and experience might sometimes make.

The UK vaccination and immunisation schedule has become increasingly complex over the past few years. We expect candidates to have an understanding of the general principles involved and to take a broad overview of the guidance, but we do not expect detailed knowledge of the schedule, such as the ages at which children receive particular combinations of vaccines. This represents a minor change in the approach now taken to testing on this area in the AKT exam. Candidates can update their general understanding with reference to information at the link:


With regard to non-clinical areas of the exam, most candidates do well in questions on data interpretation and general practice administration. We use a range of resources to test data interpretation, including the types of graphs and tables regularly sent to practices from CCGs and local health boards. We would encourage all candidates, and in particular those who may feel they have gaps in their knowledge in this area, to use the following 2019 resource, recently produced by the AKT group:

https://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/mrcgp-exam-overview/-/media/B4406D5D2E9A492B86AD74BC3FEFD08B.
The GP curriculum gives further guidance with regard to administration topics, and GP trainers can provide useful help to candidates by sharing the content of their admin workload with trainees.

The vast majority of candidates answer every question in the AKT exam. We hope that candidates have a good level of knowledge and are able to apply this knowledge confidently when selecting answers. However, there is no negative marking in the AKT exam and marks are not deducted if the chosen answer option is wrong.

**Improvements**

In AKT 38 candidates performed better than previously in questions related to:

- Data protection and information sharing e.g Caldicott Principles (Curriculum Professional Topic, Leadership and Management). However, some confidentiality issues caused difficulty (see below).

- Awareness of some common statistical concepts (Curriculum Professional Topic, Evidence Based Practice, Research and Sharing Knowledge).

- Common ENT symptoms and diagnoses (Curriculum Clinical Topic, Ear, Nose and Throat, Speech and Hearing).

- Musculoskeletal health (Curriculum Clinical Topic), such as knowing which presentations require specialist referral to rheumatology, and with what degree of urgency.

**Areas causing difficulty for candidates**

**Improving Quality, Safety and Prescribing (Curriculum Professional Topic)**

We very commonly feedback on this area. Candidates are reminded to keep up to date with issues concerning safe prescribing, and MHRA alerts are an important source of information in this regard. In AKT 38 candidates were unaware of potentially serious interactions between common drugs, where alerts have been sent out.

In addition, candidates should have a clearer understanding of the legislation which specifies what is required for the prescription of certain classes of drugs.

**Leadership and Management (Curriculum Professional Topic)**

Candidates were unsure of regulations concerning deaths that should be notified to the Coroner or Procurator Fiscal. These regulations apply across all four nations and include a range of circumstances with which candidates should be familiar, over and above unexpected deaths.
Children and Young People (Curriculum Life Stages Topic)

Performance of candidates in child health topics varies from exam to exam and we commonly feed back on this area. In AKT 38 there were some difficulties with items concerning developmental assessment and screening in young children. Although this work may be undertaken by other clinical staff such as health visitors, it is important that candidates can advise parents and carers appropriately.

Candidates also had some difficulty with principles of consent and confidentiality as applied to all age groups, including children. There was lack of familiarity with circumstances where disclosure of information without consent is permissible or required by legislation.

Some questions about common childhood infectious diseases were not well answered.

Dermatology (Curriculum Clinical Topic)

Some questions caused difficulty, where photographs were used of significant skin conditions. Candidates might find it helpful to consider looking at photographs of common conditions as an aid in their revision.

Kidney and Urology (Curriculum Clinical Topic)

We regularly remind candidates that some questions will focus on symptoms, clinical findings or diagnoses that are normal or benign, where investigation or referral is not required. In AKT 38, candidates were uncertain about the significance of common urological symptoms, where no referral was required, and in particular when a suspected cancer referral was not indicated. We expect candidates to be very familiar with national guidance on suspected cancer referrals.

Respiratory health (Curriculum Clinical Topic)

There was some difficulty with interpretation of spirometry results. Spirometry is a very common investigation and candidates are advised to take note of all the data provided by the test in order to arrive at the most likely diagnosis.
Past 12 months (AKTs 36-38)

We have noted room for improvement in all of the past three sittings of the AKT exam in:

Leadership and Management

This is a broad area, some of which was previously encompassed in *The GP in the wider professional environment*. Issues on which we have fed back include health and safety, including the health of staff, ethical issues, and death certification requirements.

Children and Young People

Respiratory health

These include areas such as childhood infections, recognition of “normality” in childhood, asthma/COPD.

One area has featured twice in the last three feedback reports:

Improving quality, safety and prescribing

There is often room for improvement with regard to candidates’ knowledge of safe prescribing and medicines management. A recent review has highlighted that approximately 25% of questions within the AKT clearly require therapeutics knowledge. The BNF remains an essential revision aid for all candidates.

We hope that candidates will not overlook these and other important areas in their exam preparation, guided by the GP Curriculum, particularly the Knowledge and Skills sections within each Topic Guide.

Misconduct

Although misconduct in professional examinations is rare, we would warn candidates that it is taken very seriously and a full investigation of any allegation will be undertaken, including reviewing CCTV footage taken in the test centres.

The MRCGP examination regulations and the code of conduct for AKT and CSA assessments give detailed information about misconduct, including the possible penalties for misconduct, in the expectation that candidates will exercise an approach consistent with standards expected by the General Medical Council. See [Regulations for Doctors Training for a CCT in General Practice](https://www.rcgp.org.uk/doctor/doctor-development-and-training/careers-in-general-practice/career-development/programme-for-doctors-training-for-a-cct-in-general-practice/a-k-t-exam)

AKT Core Group February 2020
Comments or questions to [exams@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:exams@rcgp.org.uk)