Feedback on the January 2018 MRCGP Applied Knowledge Test (AKT 32)

After each sitting of the exam, the AKT core group provides feedback on overall candidate performance via the College website and direct to educators via Deaneries. 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 GP trainees 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 32 exam was held on 31st January 2018 and taken by 1251 candidates.

Statistics

Scores in AKT 32 ranged from 76 to 190 out of 200 questions with a mean overall score of 145.5 (72.8%).

The mean scores by subject area were:
- ‘Clinical medicine’ 73.5% (160 questions)
- ‘Evidence interpretation’ 71.6% (20 questions)
- ‘Organisational’ 67.5% (20 questions)

The pass mark for AKT 32 was set at 137 with pass rates as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates (numbers)</th>
<th>Pass rate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All candidates (1251)</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST2 first-time takers (748)</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST3 first-time takers (223)</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
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Other key statistics from this test:

Reliability (Cronbach α coefficient) = 0.91
Standard error of measurement = 5.70

Performance in key clinical areas- AKT 32

Providing feedback which is educationally useful but which does not undermine the security of test items is never easy. We have highlighted below general areas of good performance, as well as areas where there is room for improvement. Both Curriculum and Content Guide references are given.

Candidates are reminded that the AKT tests for appropriate and cost-effective management, so sometimes the correct answer is not to investigate or not to 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.

**Improvements**  
In AKT 32 candidates performed better than previously in –

- a number of areas concerning child health, including behavioural problems, joint pain, and safeguarding (3.04 Care of children and young people, p.45 Content guide)  
- neurological problems such as motor neurone disease, and also pain management (3.18 Care of people with neurological problems, p.30 Content guide)  
- contraceptive problems, including being aware of when pregnancy might be the underlying cause of symptoms (3.06 Women's health, p.40 Content guide)  
- diagnosis of acute, serious, but rare problems such as meningitis (3.03 Care of acutely ill people, Content guide section 1, clinical medicine)

**Areas causing difficulty for candidates**

2.02 Patient safety and quality of care (p.33 Content guide, Pharmaco-therapeutics)

Examiners were disappointed to note that on yet a further occasion candidates struggled significantly with simple drug dose calculations, in this case concerning end of life medication. We have previously commented that there will always be a question concerning drug dose calculations. These will be basic calculations and a calculator is available. Candidates must check the answers more carefully and perform a reality check e.g. an answer of a very large volume of medication is unlikely to be correct.

2.03 The GP in the wider professional environment (p.51 Content guide, Administration, ethical and regulatory frameworks)

Candidates should have an awareness of common ethical concepts and understand how these are relevant in a range of clinical scenarios, including for example end of life care.

Some administration questions were not answered well, including those concerning access to medical records.

3.01-3.21 Clinical modules of curriculum, Content guide, Clinical medicine

Candidates should have a high level of awareness of symptoms and signs which might indicate that cancer is a possible underlying diagnosis. Question scenarios may concern less common presentations, and will cover a range of different body systems and anatomical locations.
Equally, as with day-to-day clinical practice, descriptions of physical symptoms may not have a physical diagnosis but perhaps be of psychological origin.

**Overall feedback for past 12 months (AKT 30-32)**
We have noted room for improvement in two of the past three sittings of the AKT exam in:

2.02 *Patient safety and quality of care*
This relates to prescribing, in particular drug dose calculations.

3.01 *Healthy people, promoting health and preventing disease*
This concerns in particular vaccination schedules and recommendations.

3.19 *Respiratory health*
The main topic concerned here is asthma, which is complicated by nationally conflicting guidance. The examiners are aware of this issue and in terms of preparation advise candidates to compare and contrast such guideline conflicts, looking for areas of concordance, as these are the areas which will be tested.

We hope that candidates will not overlook these and other common and important areas in their exam preparation, guided by the curriculum and the content 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.

*Regulations for Doctors Training for a CCT in General Practice*

**AKT Core group January 2018**
Comments or questions can be sent to: exams@rcgp.org.uk