Feedback on the October 2016 MRCGP Applied Knowledge Test (AKT 28)

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.

UK and devolved home nations
As a general point, we would like to reassure candidates that questions are carefully constructed and checked at each time of use, to ensure that they are applicable across the UK and encompass clinical and organisational guidance for all four home nations.

AKT 28 was held on 26 October 2016 and taken by 1247 candidates.

Statistics

Scores in AKT 28 ranged from 83 to 187 out of 200 questions with a mean overall score of 73.5%.

The mean scores by subject area were:

- ‘Clinical medicine’ 74.1% (160 questions)
- ‘Evidence interpretation’ 72.2% (20 questions)
- ‘Organisational’ 70.0% (20 questions)

The pass mark for AKT 28 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 (1247)</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST2 first-time takers (493)</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST3 first-time takers (365)</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
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Other key statistics from this test:

Reliability (Cronbach α coefficient) = 0.88
Standard error of measurement  = 5.64

Learning resources

1. MRCGP AKT website

   A. Content Guide

As referred to in previous exam reports, the AKT content guide is available on the College website (current version August 2014). We would recommend that candidates and trainers use this document in the ways we described in the January 2013 AKT Feedback Report. Candidates who have not had much exposure to research or statistics in their medical education are encouraged
not to overlook topics in section 2 of the guide. ST2s who have spent less time in GP may need to review administrative topics which also feature as a separate section in the Guide.

B. Exam tutorial
There is a generic tutorial on the Pearson VUE website to help candidates familiarise themselves with navigating the computer-based test format. On the day of the test, there is a specific AKT tutorial preceding the exam which shows the exam format, question types, and how to complete answers on the screen. It also shows how to mark questions for review.

SINGLE MOST likely
Candidates will note from the sample questions that the question stem frequently includes the phrase “Which is the SINGLE MOST likely ..?” referring to a list of options. When the question is about a single most likely diagnosis, candidates should consider the prevalence of a condition when identifying the correct answer. The most serious condition listed may not necessarily be the correct answer if this is less common as it will not be the MOST likely.

Option lists
All the AKT question formats, apart from the free text, require the candidate to identify the best answer(s) from a list of plausible alternatives, using all of the information in the question. There may be other answers which are not included in the option list, but the candidate should focus on the best available answer for the specific question asked; in other words, focus on the options given, and not what is absent.

C. AKT sample questions
Sample questions are available on the AKT section of the website and have recently been updated. Two versions are available, with and without answers, to allow candidates to test their knowledge. The format of questions is the same as that of the AKT, but the proportion of questions on individual topics is not representative of the test as there are only 50 questions.

D. Innovait AKT Podcast
This podcast features interviews with GP trainees who have recently taken the AKT, an examiner and the Deputy Lead for the AKT and provides useful tips on revision and preparation.

E. Preparing to take the AKT
This is a concise guide for trainees preparing to take the AKT and contains a clear overview of what is required.

2. Essential Knowledge resources
Candidates should consider looking at the Essential Knowledge Updates and Essential Knowledge Challenge sections of the RCGP website (RCGP Learning - Online learning) as part of their preparation for the AKT. This will familiarise them with updated guidance and emerging knowledge.
3. National guidance

National guidance such as NICE, SIGN and others are the established reference sources for many AKT questions. As stated earlier, all the questions are checked to ensure that they apply across the UK and would not disadvantage candidates from any of the four home nations; the MRCGP is the licensing qualification to work anywhere in the UK.

We would also highlight the use of the BNF for guidance on prescribing, including the more general information in the opening chapters. This may be more accessible and obvious in the printed version. The GMC publication “Good Medical Practice” with its supporting guidance is also an important reference for the AKT exam.

Performance in key clinical areas- AKT 28

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.

There are some areas which are tested regularly and candidate performance is generally good. Candidates should continue to be aware of the following test areas:

- Capacity and consent, confidentiality and end of life care. (See GMC “Good Medical Practice “and associated more detailed explanatory guidance)
- Guidance around death certification
- Interpretation of examination findings such as neurological abnormalities.

Improvements

In AKT 28, candidates performed better than previously in:

- knowledge of childhood immunisation schedules. (Curriculum statement 3.01 Healthy people, promoting health and preventing disease, p.21 Content guide Immunology). Candidates are reminded to update themselves regularly on the changes which frequently occur to these schedules
- some topics in contraception (Curriculum statement 3.06 Women’s health, p. 40 Content guide). This continues the improvement noted in AKT 27
- knowledge about STIs (Curriculum statement 3.08 Sexual health, p.37 Content guide Sexual health).

Areas causing difficulty for candidates

3.03 Care of acutely ill people (p. 21 Content guide Immunology, p.22 Infectious diseases, and across other sections)
Serious medical emergencies are relatively uncommon in general practice. However, when events do occur, immediate intervention with administration of emergency drugs may be required. Candidates should be familiar with the management, including drug treatment, of patients presenting with life-threatening conditions.

3.04 Care of children and young people (p.45 Content guide)

Candidates should have an awareness of rare conditions, and in this case there were difficulties around cancer diagnosis and investigation in children. The NICE 2015 “Suspected Cancer” guidance includes recommendations on children and young people. In addition, the feedback above in relation to acutely ill people, and below with regard to ENT, is relevant to the care of children.

3.07 Men’s health (p.39 Content guide)

There was a lack of knowledge about a relatively new drug treatment for a common condition. The BNF, NICE and the RCGP “Essential Knowledge Updates” are useful sources for information about new treatments.

3.10 Care of people with mental health problems (p.24 Content guide)

Candidates appeared unaware of monitoring requirements for commonly prescribed psychiatric drugs.

3.12 Cardiovascular health (p.35 Content guide, Renal problems)

This relates to CKD. There is extensive guidance, including from NICE, about this common condition. Candidates should be familiar with the care and treatment of people with CKD, including diagnosis, treatment and monitoring.

3.15 Care of people with ENT, oral and facial problems (p.14 Content guide)

Candidates had difficulty with several items related to common ENT problems. These included management of hearing loss and treatment of infections. As mentioned in previous AKT feedback, some questions will concern conditions where no active treatment is required, or the condition is a normal childhood variant.

3.21 Care of people with skin problems (p.22 Infectious diseases)

Several questions related to appropriate use of antibiotics. There is extensive national guidance around antibiotic stewardship and effective use of antimicrobials with which candidates should be familiar.

Overall feedback for past 12 months (AKT 26-28)

We have noted room for improvement in two out of the past three sittings of the AKT in:

3.04 Care of children and young people
This covers areas such as child development, starting with normality, as well as diagnosis of acute and serious illness, and prescribing for children.

3.21 Care of people with skin problems
This includes both diagnosis and management.
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.

AKT Core group October 2016

Comments or questions can be sent to: exams@rcgp.org.uk