AKT General FAQs

For more information please refer to the various sections on the MRCGP AKT exam website http://www.rcgp.org.uk

1. How are AKT questions selected to ensure RCGP Curriculum coverage?

Each AKT includes 200 questions testing a broad range of topics blueprinted across the breadth of the 2019 GP Curriculum. Each Curriculum Topic Guide has a subsection entitled ‘Knowledge and Skills guide’ where you will find the updated equivalent sections from our previously published AKT Content Guide. Each Knowledge and Skills guide is not an exhaustive list and should be used in conjunction with the rest of the GP Curriculum.

Careful exam construction ensures wide coverage of the curriculum. Questions are chosen based on validity, fairness and reliability as well as the relevance to general practice, disease prevalence and importance of rare conditions. The content of each AKT is always in the following proportions with a balance of question formats:

- 80% Clinical Medicine (disease factors, symptoms, investigations, management)
- 10% Evidence interpretation (critical appraisal, evidence-based practice, research)
- 10% Organisational (GP administration, legal + ethical issues, health informatics)

The AKT exam for October 2019 is based on the 2014 AKT Content Guide, but from January 2020 the exam will also reflect any differences within the new GP Curriculum.

Please note that if more recent evidence-based guidance becomes mainstream practice since the last update of the GP Curriculum, then this will be tested in the AKT exam.

2. How will the RCGP respond if an AKT question is deemed to be ambiguous or unfair?

The RCGP welcomes feedback after each AKT, but will not comment on individual questions for test security reasons. The overall content of the AKT and the performance of every question is statistically analysed post-test by an independent psychometric team. All the question performance statistics are scrutinised in great detail and the results subsequently reviewed, within days of any AKT, by a group of trained examiners.

Any feedback is taken into consideration during the post-examination process. If any ambiguities are identified these will be dealt with during the standard setting process and marks adjusted accordingly to ensure fairness to all candidates.

The exam team publish general feedback after every AKT to help all prospective candidates.
3. Which commercial revision questions does the RCGP recommend for AKT preparation?

The RCGP does not provide material to any of the commercial question banks. These may be of a completely different content and question style to those that feature in AKTs. We do not endorse or accredit any commercial revision material.

Please refer to our ‘How to Prepare for the AKT’ guide and other information on our AKT exam website. Whichever revision material is accessed may be useful as part of a learning needs assessment.

4. How does the RCGP ensure that the AKT questions are based on the very latest evidence?

All AKT questions are checked and referenced to national guidance that is current at the time of the exam and this applies across the UK.

This would apply to all topics that may be tested in all the categories of the AKT; clinical medicine, evidence interpretation and general practice administrative issues.

5. How does the AKT test on topics where national guidelines conflict?

All AKT questions are derived from, and referenced to, the most recent clinical and medico-legal UK guidance. We also take into account potential variation of guidance across the UK.

The AKT examiners are all working GPs and are very aware of the challenges clinicians face when trying to implement guideline-based decisions in the workplace. We know that GPs will be following different guidelines across the UK, such as, death certification regulations and the management of asthma. Guidelines from one national organisation do not automatically supersede the contrasting guidance of another.

We recommend that candidates are aware of the areas of consensus and the areas of discrepancy between major guidelines.

6. Does the AKT take account of differences across the UK?

The MCRGP licenses a doctor to work as a GP anywhere in the UK, so questions cannot be country-specific and can only include content that would apply across the UK.

7. What reference ranges does the AKT use/provide/expect candidates to know?

Recognising significantly abnormal results is a core GP skill. Understanding and being aware of normal reference ranges for very common results, such as a full blood count, renal and liver function is no different from being aware of target ranges for BP or HbA_1c. The AKT is designed to test working knowledge and so we expect that candidates can deal with results without immediate access to reference materials.
Reference ranges will be given for results that are less frequently seen or may vary between laboratories, such as a troponin level.

8. What happens about incorrect spelling of an answer to a free text question?

The exam team cannot comment on individual questions for test security reasons, but the performance of every question, including varied spellings contained within free text answers, is statistically analysed. All candidates’ answers are checked carefully, including the free text questions.

Please note that any incorrect spelling of drug names will not be awarded a mark.

9. It would surely help AiTs if the RCGP would release exam answers after any AKT?

For reasons of test security, the answers are never released.

For feedback on areas that many candidates find difficult, we would suggest that you look at the AKT Summary Reports, as found on the MRCGP AKT website.

10. Why is the AKT score sometimes given out of 198 or 199, rather than 200?

After the exam all the individual question performance statistics are checked to ensure reliability and fairness. Very occasionally current guidance may have changed since the paper has been set, or a new question may not have performed as expected, and in those circumstances the question may be suppressed.

This has occasionally happened due to the suppression of one or occasionally two of the 200 items. The standard remains the same by scaling the score out of, for example, 199 rather than 200.

11. What quality control procedures do you have?

Before questions are used in the AKT, they are scrutinised for accuracy and checked for ambiguities, but sometimes guidelines and evidence change shortly before questions are used. The quality control check ensures that these rare occurrences are identified and dealt with.

After each session of the AKT the performance of each question is reviewed by an independent psychometric team who ask the examiners to review any questions which fall outside agreed parameters. Those questions are discussed by the examiners under "examination conditions"; that is to say they do so without being privy to the intended correct answer. Depending on their decision, questions which do not pass the quality control checks may be suppressed.
An alternative to suppressing a question might be to accept two different answers as correct rather than accepting a given single correct answer key.

Any questions which are regarded as having suboptimal performance data are automatically either edited and updated or made obsolete.

The AKT examiners are all working GPs from across the UK. They have to demonstrate high quality question writing, in line with international best practice for single best answer question construction.

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We welcome feedback on this document via exams@rcgp.org.uk