**Feedback on the October 2015 MRCGP Applied Knowledge Test (AKT 25)**

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.

The AKT 25 exam was held on 28th October 2015, and taken by 1332 candidates.

**Statistics**

Scores in AKT 25 ranged from 91 to 194 out of 200 questions with a mean overall score of 76.9%.

The mean scores by subject area were:
- ‘Clinical medicine’ 76.9% (160 questions)
- ‘Evidence interpretation’ 77.1% (20 questions)
- ‘Organisational’ 77.3% (20 questions)

The pass mark for AKT 25 was set at 143 with pass rates as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates (numbers)</th>
<th>Pass rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All candidates (1332)</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST2 first-time takers (515)</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST3 first-time takers (449)</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other key statistics from this test:

- Reliability (Cronbach α coefficient) = 0.89
- Standard error of measurement = 5.44

**Learning resources**

1. **MRCGP AKT website**
   
   **A. Content Guide**
   As referred to in previous exam reports, the [AKT content guide](https://www.mrcgp.org.uk/) 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 following the [January 2013 AKT Feedback Report](https://www.mrcgp.org.uk/).
B. Exam tutorial
The tutorial which begins each AKT in the exam centre, is now available on the AKT website. We strongly recommend that candidates work through this tutorial on the website to maximise their familiarity on the day with the exam format, question types, and how to complete answers on the screen. It also shows how to mark questions for review and practising this will save time on the day. However, it is still important to view the tutorial on the day to ensure that candidates are familiar with the exam functionality.

SINGLE MOST likely
Candidates will note from the online tutorial and also 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 diagnosis.

Option lists
When looking at a list of options from which to select a correct answer (or if instructed, more than one correct answer), candidates may be aware that other options might be equally correct but are not listed e.g. there might be other drugs or investigations which are appropriate and correct responses to the scenario. Candidates should always 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 Countries; 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 25

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

Improvements

In AKT 25, candidates performed better than previously in

- management of heart failure and CKD (Curriculum statement 3.12 Cardiovascular health, p.9 Content guide, and p.35 renal problems)
- interpretation of charts and statistical concepts such as risk reduction (Curriculum statement 2.04 Enhancing professional knowledge, p. 47 Content guide, Research, statistics and epidemiology)
- some prescribing areas, such as drug interactions and adverse effects (Curriculum statement 2.02 Patient safety and quality of care, p.33 Content guide, Pharmaco-therapeutics). However, performance on some of the statutory and legal requirements concerned with prescribing was weak and we would recommend that candidates particularly focus on these, and prescribing for children- see below.
- some behavioural aspects of child development, as the diagnoses become more common (Curriculum statement 3.04 Care of children and young people, p.45 Content guide). However, we have again noted that candidates have difficulty in recognising and managing presentations which may be normal variations.

Areas causing difficulty for candidates

Curriculum statement 2.02 Patient safety and quality of care (p.51 Content guide, Administration, ethical and regulatory frameworks)

We regularly feed back on issues concerning safe prescribing. In AKT 25, candidates appeared unaware of regulations concerning prescription of controlled drugs. This may be because of a lack of awareness of which drugs fall into this
category, and also because most scripts are computer-printed in a format automatically compliant with requirements. Nevertheless, there are important safety and legal reasons why candidates should be familiar with the regulations.

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

We commonly feed back on difficulties with paediatric questions. Again there seemed to be a lack of knowledge around normal childhood findings (as mentioned above). There is also ongoing uncertainty around management of acute and serious illness, and associated prescribing. Candidates should continue to give particular attention to this curriculum area in their exam preparation.

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

Several areas of men’s health caused difficulty, including management of erectile dysfunction and effects of treatment for prostate conditions. It may that some candidates do not have much contact with men’s health issues in their routine work and need to actively seek out the necessary knowledge and skills in this area (as others might have to do perhaps with contraception).

Curriculum statement 3.12 Cardiovascular health (p.9 Content guide)

Some candidates found interpretation of ECGs difficult. This is an area in which we will continue to test regularly. ECGs are increasingly performed routinely in practice (eg in relation to blood pressure management or QT interval issues). They are also performed in acute situations. Candidates should have sufficient knowledge to decide whether the automatic reporting commonly provided is reliable, and whether management change is required on the basis of an ECG result.

Curriculum statement 3.16 Care of people with eye problems (p.16 Content guide)

Trainees often find diagnosis and management of eye conditions difficult in practice, and this was also the case in AKT 25. Candidates should be able to recognise serious eye conditions where prompt management action is required in primary care.

Overall feedback for 2015 (AKT 23-25)

We have noted room for improvement after each sitting of the AKT over the past year with regard to the following:

3.04 Care of children and young people
Questions which candidates have found difficult include child development, starting with normality, as well as diagnosis of acute and serious illness, and prescribing for children. We have begun to notice signs of possible improvement in the child development area.

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

2.02 Patient safety and quality of care
This generally concerns medicines management issues and safe prescribing.

3.01 Healthy people: promoting health and preventing disease
Topics under this heading including vaccinations and screening.

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 November 2015**

Comments or questions can be sent to: [exams@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:exams@rcgp.org.uk)