Applied Knowledge Test (AKT)
Frequently asked questions

Last Updated: 9 October 2020
MRCGP

I cannot find an answer on the RCGP website to my specific questions about the AKT, CSA or WPBA

You can find the latest information on the AKT within this document. Find more on the current replacement to the CSA – the Recorded Consultation Assessment (RCA) and the Workplace Based Assessment (WPBA).

If you are not able to find the answer to your query in the links above, you can email the exams team at exams@rcgp.org.uk and we will endeavour to reply as soon as we can.

Please bear in mind that, although we would usually try to get back to you within five working days, the unprecedented number of queries coming through may mean some delays. We will continue to update the MRCGP website as the situation changes.

My GP specialty training ends by 28 February 2021. How will I be able to obtain a CCT if I haven’t been able to take the AKT and/or RCA?

Firstly, we would like to reassure you that important cross-party discussions took place to ensure that similarly affected AiTs in the summer of 2020 could successfully complete their CCT.

The ongoing challenge and uncertainty due to COVID-19 is clear and we will continue to involve AiT Representatives, the RCGP, COGPED, GMC and government as well as many other relevant stakeholders. We will update this document when new information emerges.

Please also read our RCA FAQs as we trust that these will answer some of your questions.

We are clear that trainees who would have expected to gain a CCT in normal circumstances by 28 February 2021 are the next cohort that require careful planning in order to transition into post-CCT working.

We are conscious that there may be difficulties around travel to take an assessment due to local lockdowns and restrictions. Although trainees would like flexible assessment choices, the GMC, as the regulatory body, confirmed early on in the pandemic that a statutory assessment is still required in order to maintain the appropriate standards of safe patient care.
Applied Knowledge Test (AKT)

How did the Exams Team manage the cancellation of the AKT in April 2020?

There was a reduced capacity AKT in July 2020 and an additional, near-normal capacity AKT in August 2020.

Test centres were not permitted to run at maximum capacity for everyone’s safety, however, AiTs needing their CCT were recognised as being in the highest priority, essential keyworker category. The vast majority of test centres successfully opened and we accommodated all those that needed to sit the AKT in order to gain their CCT.

A priority booking system was coordinated by local Deanery and LETB GP Education teams as follows:

1. ST3s due to CCT by 04 August 2020
2. ST3s due to CCT by December 2020 and who only need the AKT component
3. Other ST3s
4. ST2s

I am eligible to sit the October 2020 AKT. Where will I be able to sit the October AKT?

Pearson VUE have worked with the RCGP and continue to retain special permission to open test centres across the four home nations for medical keyworkers such as qualifying GP trainees.

The current guidelines in place for the COVID-19 pandemic may mean fewer test centres will be able to run the exam and may mean some additional travel for some candidates. This will be confirmed on an individual basis, dependent on local lockdown requirements.

Do the current government guidelines permit travel to a test centre to sit the AKT?

Keyworkers are permitted to travel to their place of work and for essential travel such as sitting a national postgraduate medical exit exam. The following has been agreed by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, along with the Statutory Education Bodies in all
four nations and the GMC.

“Essential professional examinations or compulsory training events set by registered professional bodies are a requisite part of the professional education and development to enable clinicians to improve and develop the quality of care they give to patients. These required activities therefore need to be prioritised alongside direct clinical care.

All Royal Colleges strongly support the requirements of national and local lockdown advice regarding COVID-19 and reiterate the need for all healthcare professionals to take the necessary precautions and social distancing in line with national guidance. Nonetheless, attendance at and necessary travel to essential educational events should be treated in the same way as undertaking direct clinical care in terms of the requirements of COVID-19 guidance”.

Please print off the letter that accompanies your booking confirmation that will act as evidence for your essential travel.

I live in a local lockdown or local restriction area, or have booked a test centre that is within a local lockdown or local restriction area. How can I sit the AKT safely?

The RCGP and Pearson VUE test centres are closely monitoring national government advice about local lockdown and restricted areas. We are aware that individual test centres, staff and candidates may be affected. Throughout the pandemic Pearson VUE have implemented COVID-19 secure guidance.

Provided it remains safe to do so, essential key workers such as GP trainees, will be permitted to sit a strictly socially distanced AKT.

If an area is in local lockdown or deemed a restriction area, and test centres within that area are safe to open, those candidates living within the area are permitted to attend. Such candidates should try and avoid travel to test centres outside of the lockdown area and will need to contact Pearson VUE customer support in order to be re-allocated to a permitted venue.

Candidates living outside the geographic boundaries of a local lockdown or restriction area should avoid travel to a test centre within the affected area and will need to contact Pearson VUE customer support in order to be re-allocated to a permitted venue.

All candidates and staff must follow COVID-19 test centre guidance.
For any queries about local test centre availability in your area and throughout the four home nations, please contact Pearson VUE customer support rather than the MRCGP exams team.

For further specific government national information please refer to:
Wales  https://gov.wales/coronavirus

I might have COVID-19 symptoms or I have been recently in close contact with someone who is COVID-19 positive while I was not wearing PPE. What should I do?

Please check the latest government health guidance.

You are not permitted to enter a Pearson VUE test centre if you have:

- any current symptoms of COVID-19
- had any symptoms of COVID-19 within the past 10 days
- have been in close contact in the past 14 days with someone who is COVID-19 positive (while not wearing appropriate PPE)

You need to read the latest updated Pearson VUE test centre health and safety guidance for more details.

I am due to CCT in February 2021 but still need to pass the AKT. How long will it take after the 27 January AKT to get my results and start post-CCT work?

We will continue to monitor the situation and results are currently scheduled to be published on 18 February 2021.

I am regarded as being at high risk (clinically extremely vulnerable) from coronavirus (‘shielded status’). How can I sit the AKT safely?

We hope you are keeping safe during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and we fully recognise that this is difficult for you.
As you are regarded as a person who needs shielding for medical reasons it was clearly unsafe for you to leave home and travel to a test centre during July 2020. However, the national government guidance changed significantly in early August 2020 and you can go to work as long as the workplace is COVID-secure. Postgraduate medical exit exams are regarded as essential education and therefore part of your work.

We looked very closely at the practicalities of delivering the AKT as a remote assessment for candidates providing evidence of their ‘shielded status’, but this was not an option we could deliver securely enough for a national licensing assessment.

I am regarded as being at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) from coronavirus (i.e. warranting an annual influenza vaccination such as for pregnant women, people with asthma or other long term medical condition). How can I sit the AKT safely?

We hope you are keeping safe during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and we fully recognise that this is also difficult for you.

Since the national government guidance changed in early August 2020, you can go to work as long as the workplace is COVID-secure. Postgraduate medical exit exams are regarded as essential education and therefore part of your work.

I am not in a risk group but am anxious about travelling to a test centre during the COVID-19 pandemic. How can I sit the AKT safely?

Essential keyworkers are being asked to work and we trust that a socially distanced AKT at a carefully run Pearson VUE test centre is acceptable to you.

If you drive or can be driven, you could wait nearby in your car until check-in time. You can bring your own gloves if you wish (sanitiser is provided). You must wear a face covering, but please note that that you will still need to briefly show your face at ID checking. Please see the Pearson VUE website for more information.

Please do allow adequate time for the check-in process which will be carried out in accordance with strict social distancing requirements. In addition, please take note of the extra challenges for staff at test centres keeping you and themselves safe. The 'quarantine' period between morning and afternoon exam sessions will need to be socially distanced and this will vary in test centres due to different venue layout.
I am concerned about the risk of contamination at a test centre. What measures are in place to ensure the safety of candidates while sitting the AKT?

Pearson VUE have worked with the RCGP and have been granted permission to open test centres for medical keyworkers such as qualifying GP trainees. In the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic this continues to mean reduced test centre occupancy to 50% or less, adherence to strict social distancing rules and more time needed to check candidates in.

Pearson VUE have had significant international experience of this issue. Enhanced cleaning of workstations and keyboards is in place and hand sanitiser is available, but you will need to bring your own gloves if you wish to wear them.

You must wear a face covering, but please note that that you will still need to briefly show your face at ID checking. For further information, please also refer to Pearson VUE’s Coronavirus update page.

Pearson VUE advertise remote testing. Why can’t I take a remote AKT from my own home during this time of a national pandemic?

The RCGP have explored this option in detail with Pearson VUE and other parties. Remote testing is currently not fit for purpose in a high stakes national postgraduate medical exit exam. We will continue work with other Royal medical Colleges and to review the variety of IT platforms currently available.

If I sit the AKT during the COVID-19 pandemic and am unsuccessful does this attempt count towards the total number of permitted attempts at the AKT exam?

Due to the exceptional circumstances and stresses of sitting an assessment during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a single unsuccessful attempt at either the July or August AKT did not count towards the total number of permitted attempts at the AKT exam.

As we all work in the 'new normal' of the NHS with protected educational time being permitted for AiTs to prepare for assessments, an attempt in October 2020 does count towards the total number of permitted attempts at the AKT exam.
If I sit the AKT during the COVID-19 pandemic and am unsuccessful, does that equate to an automatic extension of my training?

The decision to award additional training time due to lack of exam success will be made by your ARCP Panel and will be based on your overall progress in the training programme.

I have not had the opportunity to sit the AKT, and now my 7 year exam currency runs out. What do I do?

All trainees (which includes TGPT, LTFT and those on maternity leave) who have had their CCT date impacted by COVID-19 will now have the currency of their AKT assessment extended from 7 years to 7 years and 6 months. The RCGP consider the group of candidates that have been impacted by COVID-19 to be those due to CCT between 18 March 2020 and 1 September 2020.