Feedback on the MRCGP Applied Knowledge Test (AKT)
August 2020, AKT39

After each sitting of the exam, the AKT core group provides feedback on overall candidate performance via the RCGP website and direct to educators via Deaneries/LETBs. 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 AiTs 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 39 exam was held on 19th August 2020 and taken by 1207 candidates.

Statistics

Scores in AKT 39 ranged from 65 to 189 out of 200 questions, with a mean overall score of 143.42 marks (71.71%).

The mean scores by subject area were:

- ‘Clinical knowledge’ 72.34% (160 questions)
- ‘Evidence-based practice’ 67.25% (20 questions)
- ‘Organisation and management’ 71.20% (20 questions)

The pass mark for AKT 39 was set at 135.

Pass rates are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates (numbers)</th>
<th>Pass rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>All candidates (1207)</td>
<td>66.80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK first-time takers (423)</td>
<td>89.30%</td>
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Other key statistics from this test:

Reliability (Cronbach α coefficient) = 0.93
Standard error of measurement = 5.76 (2.88%)
Performance in key clinical areas – AKT 39

Providing feedback which is educationally useful but which does not undermine the security of test questions is never easy. We have highlighted below general areas of good performance, as well as areas where there is room for improvement. Comments are referenced to the 2019 RCGP curriculum. Please note that the previous AKT Content Guide has now been subsumed into the Topic Guides of the new curriculum. Many topics appear in several places throughout the curriculum and we have not listed all of these.

We remind candidates that the AKT tests for appropriate and cost-effective management, so sometimes the correct answer is not to investigate, 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.

We will ask about abnormal examination findings. This includes significant retinal examination findings and this question format will generally be photographs.

We may ask about investigations commonly undertaken in secondary care after patients are referred, for example, for investigation of suspected cancer. We do not expect candidates to have detailed knowledge of these investigations, but we would expect that candidates have sufficient awareness to be able to respond to patient queries about possible further tests, when a referral is discussed and agreed.

We also remind candidates that drug choices should be those that reflect evidence-based, widespread and accepted practice in primary care, and not those that a secondary care doctor with specialist skills and experience might sometimes make. There may be questions involving drug dose and volume calculations, where the maths will not be complicated. Please reality-check your answer, especially with regard to the volume to be administered.

With regard to non-clinical areas of the exam, most candidates do well in questions on data interpretation and general practice administration. We use a range of resources to test data interpretation, including the types of graphs and tables regularly sent to practices from CCGs and local health boards. We would encourage all candidates, and in particular those who may feel they have gaps in their knowledge in this area, or whose training has not included data interpretation, to use the following 2019 resource, recently produced by the AKT group:

https://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/mrcgp-exam-overview/-/media/B4406D5D2E9A492B86AD74BC3FEFD08B.

Training requirements for child and adult safeguarding are detailed elsewhere (https://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/training/mrcgp-workplace-based-
assessment-wpba/cpr-aed-and-child-safeguarding/child-and-adult-safeguarding.aspx). Safeguarding issues will be tested in the AKT exam and candidates are reminded to regularly engage in participatory and non-participatory learning activities.

The GP curriculum gives further guidance with regard to professional and administration topics, and GP trainers can provide useful help to candidates by sharing the content of their administrative workload with trainees, many of whom may be unfamiliar with the range of administrative tasks with which GPs engage.

We will continue to test on new and emerging knowledge relevant to primary care, and that includes areas such as COVID-19.

The vast majority of candidates answer every question in the AKT exam. We hope that candidates have a good level of knowledge and are able to apply this knowledge confidently when selecting answers. However, there is no negative marking in the AKT exam and marks are not deducted if the chosen answer option is wrong.

**Improvements**

In AKT 39 candidates performed better than previously in questions related to:

- Emergency medicine (Curriculum Professional Topic, Urgent and Unscheduled Care). This included questions on areas such as anaphylaxis and loss of consciousness.

- Transgender issues (Curriculum Professional Topic, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Clinical Topic Guide, Sexual Health).

**Areas causing difficulty for candidates**

**Dermatology (Clinical Topic)**

Dermatology caused difficulty for some candidates in AKT 38, and we fed back on this. In AKT 39, some candidates were unfamiliar with genital skin conditions. These are common presentations in general practice where familiarity with treatment and differential diagnosis is important, including being able to identify potentially malignant conditions. As mentioned in our last feedback, candidates might find it helpful to consider looking at photographs of common conditions as an aid to their revision.

**Maternity and reproductive health (Life Stages Topic)**

This is a clearly a large area. However, candidates are reminded that common conditions (e.g., pregnancy) should be considered in the differential diagnosis of a wide range of presentations, before rarer explanations are selected.
Metabolic problems and endocrinology (Clinical Topic)

Candidates sometimes have difficulty with items concerning management of diabetes. In AKT 39, candidates did not perform well with regard to insulin regimes. While we do not expect specialist knowledge in this area we do expect candidates to have a general understanding of the safe and appropriate adjustment of insulin.

People at the End-of-Life (Life Stages Topic)

Making decisions with a patient and their family at the end of life requires sensitive application of core competences, as outlined in the curriculum, and these competences extend well beyond clinical management alone. In AKT 39 candidates had difficulty understanding some ethical concepts that are particularly relevant at the end of life.

Past 12 months (AKTs 37-39)

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

Improving quality, safety and prescribing

There is often room for improvement with regard to candidates’ knowledge of safe prescribing and medicines management. A recent review has highlighted that approximately 25% of questions within the AKT clearly require therapeutics knowledge. The BNF remains an essential revision aid for all candidates.

Leadership and Management

This is a broad area. Issues on which we have fed back include health and safety, such as the health of staff, ethical issues, and death certification requirements.

Children and Young People, Dermatology and Respiratory Health

For each of the three topics above, we have fed back on a range of areas such as infections, COPD/asthma, and common dermatological presentations.

We hope that candidates will not overlook these and other important areas in their exam preparation, guided by the GP Curriculum, particularly the Knowledge and Skills sections within each Topic 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 August 2020
Comments or questions to exams@rcgp.org.uk