

MRCGP Applied Knowledge Test (AKT) Feedback Report AKT 54, January 2025

The AKT core group provides feedback on overall candidate performance after each exam sitting, via the RCGP website and direct to Deanery/LETB Educators. We also highlight areas of general interest related to the exam. This feedback is intended to be helpful to all those involved in education and training, particularly AiTs themselves. 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 resources for candidates and trainers, descriptions 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 feedback consists of a report on the current sitting of the exam, followed by a section of general advice and feedback to candidates.

The AKT 54 exam was held on 29th January 2025 and was taken by 1543 candidates.

Statistics AKT 54

Range of scores 64 to 192 out of 200 questions

Mean overall score 148.45 marks (74.23%)

Mean scores by subject area:

- 'Clinical knowledge' 120.40 (75.25%) (160 questions)
- 'Evidence-based practice' 13.04 (65.19%) (20 questions)
- 'Organisation and management' 15.01 (75.06%) (20 questions)

PASS MARK 139

PASS RATES

Candidates (numbers)	Pass rate
All candidates (1543)	71.42%
UKG first-time takers (546)	86.08%

Other key statistics:

Reliability (Cronbach α coefficient) = 0.91

Standard error of measurement = 5.64 (2.82%)

Performance in key clinical areas – AKT 54

Providing feedback which is educationally useful, but which does not undermine the security of test questions is not 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 current RCGP curriculum. Many topics appear in several places throughout the curriculum, and we have not listed all of these.

Improvements

In AKT 54, candidates performed better than previously in questions relating to:

- Knowledge around prescribing and therapeutics (Improving quality, safety and prescribing)
- Substance misuse (Smoking, alcohol and substance misuse)
- Management of emergency presentations (Urgent and unscheduled care)

Areas causing difficulty for candidates

As well as providing feedback after each AKT exam, we produce a summary of areas which have caused more difficulty for candidates over the last five years. This is updated after every AKT exam and published on the AKT website. The summary allows candidates an “at a glance” overview of areas where there is room for improvement, without the need to go back over 15 separate, archived AKT reports. Please note that some themes often recur, including, once again, in the feedback provided below. We encourage use of this summary resource which can be found in the reports section at:

<https://www.rcgp.org.uk/mrcgp-exams/applied-knowledge-test/further-help-support#AKT-feedback-reports>

Before commenting on specific difficulties noted in AKT 54, we would like to remind candidates and others to review the “General advice” section of this report (p.6-8). In particular, the first paragraph about different experiences that doctors have had in their training remains very relevant.

A prospective candidate’s understanding of, for example, data interpretation may require specific, individualised GP Educator review. See the links on this page <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/mrcgp-exams/applied-knowledge-test/akt-preparing#Resources-for-trainees-and-trainers> , and in our “General advice” section, for very useful resources in this regard.

In addition, candidates may have less experience in some areas because the condition or type of care is commonly managed by non-GP members of the primary care team, such as practice nurses. We test across a wide range of clinical and non-clinical topics, as detailed in the curriculum, and expect candidates to be familiar with, for example, long-term condition management, common vaccination issues, and other areas where care is often not delivered by doctors.

Summary of areas causing difficulty in AKT 54

Data interpretation

Drug monitoring

Access to medical records

Early pregnancy complications

Management of common dermatological conditions

Eye signs

Intellectual disability and genetic causes

Evidence based practice, research and sharing knowledge (Professional topic)

Interpretation of data in a variety of formats is an area which candidates frequently struggle with. Awareness of the different ways that data can be presented and being able to interpret different charts is an important part of general practice. There are some excellent resources on the RCGP website including several video tutorials which can be found here:

[Preparing for the Applied Knowledge Test \(AKT\)](#)

Improving quality, safety and prescribing (Professional topic)

Whilst there were some improvements in this area, candidates found difficulty in knowledge around monitoring requirements for long-term medications. The BNF is an excellent revision source. Candidates should familiarise themselves with monitoring requirements for commonly prescribed medications in general practice. Clinical pharmacists in practice may be an excellent resource; consider a tutorial with them or observing a session.

Leadership and management (Professional topic)

Knowledge around access to medical records caused difficulty in this area. Administrative staff and practice managers can be excellent resources when revising this topic.

Maternity and reproductive health (Life stage topic)

Candidates found some difficulty in answering questions around early pregnancy-related issues and complications. We will continue to test in topics around pregnancy relating to general practice, which may include different presentations and symptoms of pregnancy.

Dermatology (Clinical topic)

Treatment of common dermatological conditions caused difficulty for candidates in AKT 54. Candidates are reminded to revise a variety of presenting symptoms and their treatment.

Eyes and vision (Clinical topic)

Ophthalmology caused some difficulties in AKT 54. Candidates are reminded that whilst these presentations may be less commonly seen in general practice, it is important to be able to recognise a variety of both normal and abnormal eye signs.

Neurodevelopmental disorders, intellectual and social disability (Clinical topic)

This area is included in feedback from AKT 54 as candidates struggled with identifying presentations of genetic conditions associated with intellectual disability. This is a rare, but important area, and the AKT will continue to test on conditions which may first present to general practice. Recognising the signs and symptoms of a range of genetic conditions is therefore important revision.

Past 12 months (AKTs 51-54)

Since 2024, there are four annual sittings of the AKT exam.

After three of the last four sittings of the AKT exam, we have highlighted a need for improvement regarding:

- Improving quality, safety and prescribing

Drug side effects, prescribing in older adults, interpretation of results, drug monitoring

- Leadership and management

The feedback concerned death certificate legislation, capacity, access to medical records

- Neurology

Interpretation of symptoms and signs including acute presentations, migraine

After two of the last four sittings of the AKT exam, we have highlighted a need for improvement regarding:

- Children and young people

Neonatal illnesses, safeguarding, recognising normal, minor illness

- Dermatology

Management of common symptoms and conditions

- Musculoskeletal health

Very broad- includes diagnosis, investigation and management of common and long term MSK conditions

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 and the [super-condensed GP Curriculum Guides](#).

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.

Please be mindful to respectfully and carefully follow the instructions outlined by Pearson VUE test centre staff. We do not expect to hear reports of test centre instructions being ignored or rudeness to test centre staff. We will act if it is reported to us.

The MRCGP examination regulations and the code of conduct for both the AKT and SCA 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.

See [MRCGP Examination Misconduct Policy and Procedure for AKT and SCA](#) for more details.

AKT Core Group January 2025
Comments or questions to:
exams@rcgp.org.uk

***Please see the following pages for more general advice
and feedback points about the AKT***

General advice and feedback points

- We realise that there are areas throughout the curriculum with which some candidates are less familiar or experienced than others. This may be due to differences in undergraduate or postgraduate training both within and outside of the UK, and the many varieties of clinical experience. We encourage candidates who are in this position, for example, around women's health issues, data interpretation, the application of basic medical statistics, evidence-based practice, general practice organisation and management, or any other topic, to identify these early in their training as learning needs where specific training or updating may be required.
- 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.
- We commonly ask candidates to select the appropriate answer to a question "according to current national guidance". CKS covers a wider range of primary care situations than NICE. If any differences occur between the two, where we stipulate current national guidance, we are referring to NICE/SIGN.
- 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.
- In clinical practice, multiple 'screening' blood tests are sometimes requested in a non-discriminatory way without considering specific, likely possibilities. In the AKT, some questions will ask candidates to choose only **one** option from a list of investigations, to confirm the most likely diagnosis from the scenario given. The question stem will make clear that what is being asked for is the **most** appropriate investigation to confirm the diagnosis, rather than asking for all the possible (but lower yield) screening tests.
- We may also ask for the **next** management step/investigation from a list. This requires candidates to select what is important **next** and choose this over other alternatives which may be indicated at some point in the future, but which are **not** the **next** key priority.
- We will ask about abnormal examination findings, which may include significant retinal examination findings. This question format will generally be photographs. We may also ask about normal findings, and some of these will be illustrated by photographs without any abnormality. Photographs of skin problems will be from a range of different ethnic backgrounds.
- 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. The knowledge which informs this discussion can have a significant impact on the patient's decision to move forward with investigation for what might be a serious underlying problem.

- 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. Ensure that any decimal points are in the correct place - this advice applies whether or not you choose to use the available calculator. Please reality-check your answer, especially about the volume to be administered. We receive answers to these calculations which are quite clearly wrong and by dangerously large amounts.
- More generally, with items that contain numerical data, make sure you consider the real world. Does your answer fit with what you routinely discuss with patients about, say, the risks related to a particular medication?
- Be aware of important drug side effects and severe interactions (such as those marked as red in the BNF). Nearly one third of questions can have a significant therapeutic component.
- Our approach to testing around immunisations has moved away from expecting detailed knowledge of infant immunisation schedules, as these have become more complex over recent years, and because in some parts of the UK immunisation provision is no longer primary care led. However, candidates are expected to be familiar with any recent general developments in immunisation programmes. We will test knowledge of important indications, contraindications and side-effects of vaccines for all age groups. Knowledge of occupational vaccine requirements, as they apply to GP settings, is also expected, as well as of issues related more broadly to immunisation such as consent and patient group directions.

Regarding non-clinical areas of the exam, overall, 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 local health service organisations and health boards.

'Risk' understanding is important in many daily clinical interactions, such as: talking about medications, cancer and long-term conditions. The AKT will continue to test the concept of clinical risk, including how to interpret patient decision aids and share risk information with patients.

- We would encourage all candidates to use the following 2024 resources produced by the AKT group. These might be of particular relevance for those who feel they have knowledge gaps in this area, especially whose training has not included data interpretation in a UK setting, or has not included undergraduate and postgraduate teaching on this subject:

1. [Interpreting diagnostic test statistics](#)- Professor Michael Harris discusses concepts such as sensitivity/specificity/predictive values.
 2. [Interpreting risk](#) – Professor Michael Harris discussing how to interpret risk and present the effectiveness of a treatment.
 3. [How to interpret the results of a randomised control trial](#) - tutorial with Professor Michael Harris discussing data interpretation.
 4. [Systematic review and meta-analysis](#) - Professor Michael Harris discusses the use of systematic review, meta-analysis and the use of forest and funnel plots
 5. [Qualitative research](#) - Professor Michael Harris discusses the use of qualitative research in general practice
 6. [Data interpretation in the AKT \(PDF file, 1.1 MB\)](#) - for candidates and GP educators to use in tutorials and peer group learning. Aims to kick-start conversations about the importance of interpreting data we encounter in primary care.
- The GP curriculum and [super-condensed topic guides](#) give further guidance about professional, evidence-based and administration topics. GP trainers can help trainees prioritise areas across the GP curriculum and 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.
 - Safeguarding issues continue to be tested in the AKT exam and candidates are reminded to regularly engage in learning activities. The RCGP has recently published safeguarding standards for general practice. <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/learning-resources/safeguarding-standards>
Training requirements for child and adult safeguarding are detailed elsewhere: <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/mrcgp-exams/wpba/cpr-aed-safeguarding#childadultsafeguarding>
 - We will continue to test on new and emerging knowledge relevant to primary care.
 - Almost all candidates answer every question in the AKT exam. We hope that candidates have a good level of knowledge and can 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.