

# Applied Knowledge Test (AKT)

## Guidance for the exam

The Applied Knowledge Test (AKT) is a summative assessment of the knowledge base that underpins independent General Practice in the United Kingdom within the context of the National Health Service.

*'Candidates who pass this assessment will have demonstrated their competence in applying knowledge at a level which is sufficiently high for independent practice'* Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) 2020

The AKT forms part of the overall MRCGP certification and is a computer-based, multiple-choice assessment which consists of 200 questions and is sat over 3 hours 10 minutes. These questions are broken down into three main groups comprising:

- Clinical Medicine - 80% or 160 questions;
- Evidence Based Medicine (statistics) - 10% or 20 questions;
- Health Informatics (practice administration) - 10% or 20 questions.

It is important that you don't underestimate just how much revision will be required to pass and we would advise you to talk to other trainees who have taken the exam; about how much work they did and perhaps how much work they should have done in order to pass. Most trainees feel you need about three to four months of revision time and this can increase if you are not used to doing multiple choice type exams.

You apply and pay for the AKT via the RCGP website which costs £450 per sitting. All the dates for the exam are on the RCGP AKT web pages and this includes the dates for the narrow booking window as you can only apply to sit the exam at certain times of the year. It is well worth thinking about when you might want to sit the exam and most trainees now do this in their ST2 year as it reduces the number of assessments you must do in your ST3 year.

The knowledge gained through the AKT can be drawn on in the Clinical Skills Assessment (CSA) so having achieved the standard is likely to help you as you prepare for the CSA.

If you take the exam your ST2 year, it may be better to plan around your hospital rotations as some may be busier than others and revision may be more difficult. It is a good idea to discuss this with your Educational Supervisor (ES) or Training Programme Director (TPD) as to which sitting might be the best for you. Look ahead, find out the date of the exam, when you can book the exam and then work backwards to when you should be starting to revise. It is advisable to have done a post in General Practice before taking the exam as some of the administration questions could then be easier.

The exam itself occurs three times per year at Pearson Vue driving test centres located in most town and city centres. You will be given the chance to book the test centre soon after you have applied and paid to sit the exam. Some test centres get more booked up more quickly than others, so if you are keen to sit in a particular location, then don't forget to do this as soon as you are

notified. If you do end up going somewhere else, make sure you know where you are going and don't be late.

### How to revise

This will depend hugely on your preferred way of working. Some of you will be much happier working on your own, making your own notes and practising questions by yourself. Others will find it easier to work in groups where you can break up the curriculum areas into manageable chunks and then share resources. There isn't a right or wrong way for revising but if your preferred style is group working then this will need to be organised several months in advance of the exam.

There are lots of resources for the AKT exam and it is easy to feel overwhelmed by all the information suggested.

As a starting point you need to have a look at the [GP Curriculum on the RCGP website](#). It is a very long document but don't be put off by this as it has had to cover a lot of curriculum areas.

**Make yourself a revision list of the topics in the curriculum guide.** The colleges' suggestion is that you look at the lists of symptoms and topics first to try and identify which areas need more attention and this is good advice.

CURRICULUM TOPICS	<i>Professional Topics</i>	<i>Life Stages</i>	<i>Clinical Topics</i>
	Consulting in general practice Equality, diversity and inclusion Evidence based practice Improving quality & safety Leadership & management Urgent and unscheduled care	Children and young people People with long-term conditions Maternity & reproductive health Older adults End-of-life care	Allergy & Immunology Cardiovascular health Dermatology Ear, nose & throat, Speech & hearing Eyes & vision Gastroenterology Genomic medicine Gynaecology & Breast Haematology Infection Disease & Travel Health Kidney & Urology Mental health Metabolic problems & Endocrinology Musculoskeletal health Neurodevelopmental disorders Neurology Population health Respiratory health Sexual health Smoking, alcohol & substance misuse

Areas which often cause anxiety are those on research statistics and epidemiology and those on administration, ethical and regulatory frameworks. These sections are certainly no more difficult than the clinical areas, but trainees are often unsure what these areas include and the course content guide breaks these down into specific details.

A point to remember though is that the **vast bulk of the exam is the 160 questions on clinical medicine topics**. There are only 20 questions for each of statistics and practice administration, so planning the amount of time for each section needs to be thought through. Remember that these latter two sections still need to be passed, so you may have to spend more time than you expect ensuring you understand these areas - classically they tend to be the topics that are left until last which perhaps they shouldn't be.

Read **ALL** the sections of the AKT pages on the website and don't forget to go through the Pearson Vue [tutorial and practice exam](#). There are lots of reasons for doing this, as it includes all the different question styles and format, so you won't be thrown on the day. It will also show the screen shots of how the questions are laid out, how to mark them and how to come back and review them (or 'flag' them). If nothing else, it should reduce some of the stress on the day of the exam.

### Resources

There are also lots of resources available where you can complete AKT style questions and check your marks. Most trainees will register with one of the commercial websites offering this package. These sites will break down the questions into specific areas so it can highlight your knowledge gaps, and these should then be addressed. Often gaps in knowledge tend to be on areas that you thought you knew lots about so make sure you cover all the curriculum areas. Practising lots and lots of questions also gives you an indication of your speed at answering questions and whether you will need to go faster in the exam.

It is also well worth looking and completing the [Essential Knowledge Updates and Challenges pages on the RCGP website](#). These are written by doctors who lead on the AKT, they include up to date questions and ensure you are up to speed with new information. As an Associate-in-Training (AiT) you will have access to these sites for free and you should also have access to InnovAiT – the trainee magazine which includes some great articles and AKT style questions as well.

If you are someone who struggles to make a decision on two options on an MCQ then use 'the cover test' technique, where you cover up all the answers, read the stem and decide what the answer is. If the answer is in the list of options, then chances are you are right.

Make use of the [British National Formulary \(BNF\)](#) – don't underestimate all the useful things that are in the BNF, particularly the treatment summaries at the beginning of each chapter. We are not suggesting you read it from cover to cover but being familiar with the first sections of the BNF, as well as having a good working knowledge of drug interactions, contraindications and side effects will all be time well spent.

Other great resources include:

- NICE guidelines
- [NICE Clinical Knowledge Summaries](#) (NICE guidance specific to primary care covering 100s of topics)
- [RCGP Learning](#) (superb website which has lots of e-learning, clinical updates and courses and is used by AKT question setters)
- [RCGP e-Library](#) (lots of free e-books to download and revise from – you'll need an Athens Account which you can get for free via the weblink)

- [SIGN](#) (Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network) – Similar to NICE with excellent treatment summaries
- [DVLA Fitness to Drive guidance](#)
- [GMC Good Medical Practice guidelines](#)
- [First Practice Management](#) (a database of topics relating to the administration of General Practice)

The college will publish feedback on trainee's performances after every exam – see the AKT pages. This is again on the website, but one of the areas mentioned this year was that trainees weren't up to date with the latest NICE guidance. Don't presume just because the exam has been going for years that the questions aren't regularly updated!

### The exam

Make sure you have had some sleep – a three hour multiple choice exam is tiring, and you need to be properly awake. Make sure you know where you are going and plan to get there earlier than you need to be. You won't be allowed in if busy roads and delayed trains mean you miss the start time.

Don't forget your **two forms of identification** and make sure these haven't expired. An out of date passport or driving license will mean you can't sit the exam, even if it looks like you.

Ensure you are adequately hydrated and have been to the toilet. Although toilet breaks are allowed during the exam, you will not be permitted to take any water or sweets into the exam room. You will be provided with a locker for all your personal belongings outside.

The room is set up in a series of booths with computers. You will be provided with some ear plugs/noise cancelling ear phones and a whiteboard and pen.

There will be a short demo of the exam format at the beginning – don't worry, your time proper won't start until you click on the start exam button, once you have completed this.

You only have **54 seconds per question**. This is normally long enough if you know the answer, but if you don't make an educated guess you should flag the question as one you will return to later if you have time. You will have had some chance of getting it right but will have had no chance if you leave it blank, so answer everything. You will be given warnings of time remaining, usually at 2 hours, 1 hour and 30 minutes.

If you sit the exam in the morning, you may be required to remain in the room until everyone has finished – this is so you don't encounter other candidates sitting the exam in the afternoon. Results will be published on the e-Portfolio around three to four weeks after you've sat the exam; this is so the exam can be validated afterwards.

### Top tips

1. **Attitude** - get yourself in the right frame of mind before you consider sitting it. The AKT is a difficult exam and requires significant prep but trainees often given less priority than the CSA exam. Even though you've been practicing as a Doctor for years, you won't know all the answers through your work experience alone.

2. **Choose the right time to sit the exam** - don't pick an exam date just because everyone else appears to be sitting it. If you've got a rotation in paediatrics followed by A&E, and you're getting married next month, you may want to choose an exam sitting clear of these!
3. **Preparation time** - give yourself at least three to four months of revision time before the exam. Clear your diary, get a revision list together and be prepared for some long hard study time.
4. **Revise well** - remember how you passed your exams in medical school? Use the same revision techniques you used to become a doctor – they worked then and will work this time. Set yourself some time each day in a quiet place for revision.
5. **Exam technique** - don't look for the answer before you've fully read the question, look for subtle clues and remember that questions often ask for the 'single most likely' answer. This is an exam about Primary Care, so if someone has a sprained finger, the first investigation you will order won't be an MRI (even if you'd like to!).
6. **Don't flag too many questions** - the RCGP looked at how candidates answered questions in their AKT, specifically how candidates flagged questions for review. Those candidates that flagged more than 20 questions ended up changing more of their answers from right to wrong. Trust your gut!
7. **Beware** - question banks are a great way to learn facts, but they can give you a false sense of awareness. How many times will you get a question right by chance and not look at the detailed answer because you think you know it? How many times will you get a question wrong in succession and demotivate yourself? Revise a topic before doing questions – don't do the reverse!
8. **Course tourism** - there are loads of AKT courses you could join and many of them are useful and worthwhile. However, don't lull yourself into a false sense of security that these courses will make you more prepared, especially because you've paid for them!
9. **Struggling?** - if you think you would find it difficult to finish the exam in the allotted time - perhaps for linguistic reasons – consider a dyslexia assessment with the [Professional Support Unit \(PSU\)](#). Ask your supervisor or Training Programme Director (TPD) about this. If you fail your AKT, don't despair – many people pass after a failed attempt. Stay focused; try to think why you failed (inadequate prep time? Bad attitude?) and make use of the support of your colleagues and supervisors.
10. **Good Luck!** 98% of candidates pass the AKT in the end. You will get through this; it will all be worth it and you'll be a great GP!