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UK Medical School Applied Knowledge Test

Applicant Handbook

2023/24

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Governance
3. About the Medical School Applied Knowledge Test
4. Policies
5. Intercalation
6. Data collection
7. FAQs
8. Resources
9. Contact

1. Introduction

1.1 The Medical Licensing Assessment (MLA)

The Medical Licensing Assessment (MLA) is a two-part assessment made up of an applied knowledge test (AKT) and a clinical and professional skills assessment (CPSA) which students graduating in the academic year 2024–25 and onwards will need to pass as part of their degree. For medical schools with written finals in the penultimate year of study, the AKT element will be sat from the academic year 2023/24.

The MLA will test the core knowledge, skills and behaviours of doctors who want to practise in the UK. For students at UK medical schools, the assessment will be led and delivered by UK medical schools and regulated by the General Medical Council (GMC).

The MLA will provide assurance that anyone who obtains a UK medical degree has shown that they can meet a common and consistent threshold for safe practice before they are licensed to work in the UK. All medical students graduating from UK universities from the academic year 2024–25 onwards will need to pass the MLA as part of their degree before they can join the medical register.

International medical graduates who want to join the UK medical register and who would currently take the GMC's [PLAB](#) test will continue to do so, though in 2024 the PLAB test will become compliant with the requirements of the MLA.

1.2 About the Medical School Applied Knowledge Test (MS AKT)

The Medical School Applied Knowledge Test (MS AKT, named in order to differentiate it from the AKT that will be sat by PLAB candidates) is a

university-created assessment that is quality assured by the GMC. The MS AKT is designed to assess your ability to apply medical knowledge to different scenarios. It is made up of single best answer (SBA) questions and is delivered as an on-screen exam under strictly invigilated conditions using lockdown software to prevent access to outside information.

1.3 The Clinical and Professional Skills Assessment (CPSA)

This is a practical assessment of your clinical skills and professionalism. Each medical school may call the CPSA something different – for example, an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) or Objective Structured Long Examination Record (OSLER). The CPSA that you sit will be determined by your medical school and will be different to other institutions however each medical school has to meet the criteria for the CPSA set out by the GMC. Your medical school will be able to provide you with more information on the CPSA.

1.4 Who is this guide for?

This handbook is designed for UK medical students who will be sitting the Medical School Applied Knowledge Test. The guide is designed to provide a general overview of the processes relating to the MS AKT, however as the assessment is delivered by your university, you will be able to find out more detailed information about the local delivery of the MS AKT from your medical school.

This guide is updated yearly, and UK medical students sitting the MS AKT in 2024/25 should ensure they read the updated handbook when it becomes available (September 2024). For doctors with overseas qualifications, please see the General Medical Council's information on [PLAB and the MLA](#).

2. Governance

2.1 The role of the Medical Schools Council

The Medical Schools Council (MSC) is the representative body for UK medical schools. UK medical schools, supported by the MSC, have developed an applied knowledge test that is constructed centrally, delivered locally and approved and quality assured by the GMC.

2.2 The role of your medical school

Medical schools are responsible for delivering the MS AKT and setting local policies using a nationally agreed framework. The MS AKT is university-led and will be embedded within your schools' finals exams. Your medical school will support you throughout the MLA.

2.3 Governance

There are several groups that support the development and delivery of the MS AKT. The MS AKT Board acts as the main oversight and governance group responsible for all elements of the MS AKT taken by UK medical students. Its membership includes:

- Chair of MSC
- Chair of MSC Assessment
- Heads of all UK Medical Schools – or their nominees
- MSC CEO
- GMC representative
- UKFPO representative

In addition, the assessment is supported by five operational groups with membership from assessment experts from across UK medical schools.

- MS AKT Exam Board - responsible for developing and reviewing all processes of MS AKT exams and oversight of MS AKT operational groups.
- Item Development Group - responsible for the development of new, high-quality question items and development and maintenance of core resources.
- Exam Construction Group - responsible for the development and oversight of the AKT sampling grid and exam construction.
- Standard Setting Group - responsible for determining the passing standard for the MS AKT.
- Policy Group - responsible for updating the MS AKT framework, oversight of its ED&I action plan and equality analysis and development of user guides and best practice events.

3. About the Medical School Applied Knowledge Test

3.1 Piloting

Since 2021, robust testing and piloting of the assessment has taken place with medical schools (excluding newer medical schools with students yet to reach final years of study before implementation). This is to ensure that the MS AKT is acceptable to medical students and their medical schools both in terms of the content of the exam and how it is delivered.

3.2 Assessment structure

The aim of the MS AKT is to be a test of applied knowledge rather than factual recall. All content is aligned to the GMC's [MLA content map](#), which sets out the core knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for safe medical practice in the UK. The MS AKT is comprised of two 100-item papers which will be sat on sequential days (e.g. Tuesday and Wednesday). The questions are all written in the Single Best Answer (SBA) question format with five answer options. The MS AKT is not negatively marked.

The standard time for each paper is two hours but if you have reasonable adjustments, these will be taken into account with the timings you have as an individual.

Further detail can be found in the [MS AKT Sampling Grid](#).

The AKT papers will test the following Areas of Clinical Practice from the content map:

Areas of Clinical Practice	
Paper 1: 100 items over 2 hours	Paper 2: 100 items over 2 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiovascular • Respiratory • Gastrointestinal • Medicine of older adult • Neurosciences • Ophthalmology • Endocrine & metabolic • Renal & urology • Infection • Dermatology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancer • Breast • Haematology • Palliative & End of Life care • Peri-op medicine and anaesthesia • Musculoskeletal • Emergency medicine & intensive care • Ear, nose & throat • Child health • Mental health • Obstetrics & gynaecology • Sexual health • Social/population health & research methods • Medical ethics & law
Acute Medicine, Primary Care, Surgery & Clinical Imaging will be covered across both papers	

3.3 MS AKT question writing

Questions for the MS AKT are drafted by assessment experts from across UK medical schools. They undergo a quality assurance process overseen by the Item Development Group. Questions used in the MS AKT will not appear in other medical school exams. Students will have opportunities to become familiar with the question format and style through the official practice papers.

MS AKT item writers receive training in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and this aspect is monitored during quality assurance.

3.4 Standard setting

The standard of the questions has been set by assessment experts as part of the MS AKT standard setting panels and group. The individuals involved come from a wide range of UK medical schools and medical specialties. They have extensive experience of working with medical students so they understand

the level of knowledge required for graduation.

3.5 Results

The MLA is a pass/fail assessment. Scores will be provided for the MS AKT. The MLA is not used for national ranking. Your medical school may choose to use the scores of its students to award prizes and honours.

The MS AKT is designed to be part of the GMC's registration process and may therefore differ from some of the other medical school exams you have sat, meaning the type of feedback received may be different to what you are used to.

The maximum time of waiting for results will be around four weeks.

3.6 Exam-Write®

The MS AKT is an online exam and is delivered on the Medical Schools Council's assessment platform, Exam-Write®. Many medical schools already use this platform for other assessments. A separate guide on how to use Exam-Write® is available from your medical school.

Note: Exam-Write® has previously been called the MSCAA exam platform, or MSC Assessment Alliance exam platform.

3.7 Registration, device type, venue location and security

The MS AKT is a university-led exam which means your medical school is responsible for the majority of local decisions relating to how the exam is delivered. For example, your medical school is responsible for registering student accounts, choosing the venue used to host the exam and ensuring medical students follow local university exam conditions. Your medical school will inform you of the type of device you will use to take the MS AKT exam i.e. a desktop PC in an IT Lab, or a tablet device provided by the

University.

The following applies to all UK medical schools:

- Invigilation – the MS AKT is an in-person invigilated exam organised by your university.
- Lockdown software – The use of lockdown software is mandatory. Medical schools can determine the type of lockdown software used.
- Materials - No other electronic devices should be used at any time during the exam.

A basic calculator is provided within the platform.

3.8 Preparation and practice materials

Your medical education and training are the best preparation for the MLA including the MS AKT (the team leading the assessment is made up of academics who deliver undergraduate medical education in medical schools). You do not need to pay for private paid-for courses or textbooks – MS AKT resources will always be free and comprehensive. No members of staff involved in the MS AKT are contributing to private courses or materials so the quality of these products will not be the same as the materials that have been provided through the MSC, which have been quality-assured by those setting the assessments. You will not need to learn anything beyond what is already covered in your medical school's curriculum.

Medical schools can use 50-item practice materials created by MSC over the last few years to familiarise their students with the Exam-Write® platform. These assessments are organised by your medical school, if you would like to know more please speak to the assessment office at your

medical school. A 200-item practice exam in the form of two papers and available as pdf documents with and without the correct answer keys can be found on the MSC website to help students prepare for the AKT.

- [Practice exam for the MS AKT](#)

4. Policies

4.1 Overview

The MS AKT is a university-led and delivered assessment. The majority of policy decisions will be made locally and dependent on your university, however these decisions will be guided by a nationally agreed policy framework. All of the policies relating to the AKT have been put in place to facilitate this national assessment, while acknowledging there will inevitably be slight variations between medical schools to accommodate the MS AKT alongside existing exams.

4.2 MS AKT dates

Individual medical schools will choose when to sit the MS AKT, selecting from assessment dates that fit with local school schedules. Some medical schools will choose to deliver the MS AKT in the final year while others will choose to sit in the penultimate year. Your school will keep you updated on which year group and date you will sit (including resit if needed).

4.3 Reasonable adjustments

Your medical school will be responsible for reviewing any applications for reasonable adjustments for the MS AKT in line with their internal policies and procedures. MSC will accept the decisions made by medical schools as long as they can be accommodated within the assessment structure.

The Exam-Write® platform is designed to accommodate a broad range of reasonable adjustments (including commonly requested adjustments such as additional time and/or rest breaks and different font sizes or coloured backgrounds). If you have any questions or concerns about reasonable adjustments, please speak to your medical school at the earliest opportunity.

4.4 Resits and number of attempts

The MLA will be part of the requirements for your degree. If you fail it, just as if you fail any other degree requirement, you will not be able to graduate.

Your medical school will be able to confirm when resit opportunities are available. The rules that apply to the number of attempts will be set by your university. The recommendation from the MSC is that UK medical students will normally be entitled to no more than a total of four valid attempts at the MS AKT with most schools not allowing more than two sits in any academic year.

For more detail on the local policy at your university, please speak to your medical school.

4.5 Mitigating/extenuating circumstances

Medical schools are working together to align their approaches to mitigating circumstances.

However, it is important to note that the rules which apply to mitigating circumstances and therefore decisions on individual students will ultimately be made locally, by your university. If mitigating circumstances are supported, then that attempt will not count towards a student's permitted number of attempts.

4.6 Appeals

MS AKT appeals by UK medical students will be dealt with through your medical school. The medical school should follow the parent university's procedure for dealing with appeals against decisions on academic progression.

Where the material irregularity arises from the performance of the exam delivery platform or the technical process used to construct the exam paper medical students should appeal to their medical school who will consult with the MSC to determine whether the issue was a local or a national issue.

MSC will investigate the irregularity in partnership with individual medical schools. The MS AKT Exam Board will consider the evidence and make a report to the student's medical school which will then make a final decision as to whether the appeal is upheld and what action will be taken in light of that decision.

5. Intercalation

5.1 Overview

Intercalation offers the chance for medical students to pursue topics from a broad range of fields. Medical schools and the MSC do not want to discourage medical students from these opportunities and will ensure that intercalating students will not be negatively impacted by the MLA.

If you are considering or returning from intercalation, speak to your medical school to determine arrangements, including when the timing of your assessment will be.

6. Data collection

6.1 AKT scores

AKT score data from across all schools will be collated by the MSC Team. All data will be anonymised, and analysts appointed for the MS AKT will check the data are complete and correct. They will then use the data to produce a series of analysis reports that will help review the performance of the test.

6.2 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Candidates will be invited to complete an Equality Diversity Inclusion (EDI) monitoring form. While the completion of the form is mandatory the provision of personal information is not. Candidates will have the option to mark the 'prefer not to say' option if they wish to not share information. However, we hope students will provide these data as they will be important evidence that can be used to ensure medical education and assessment is fair to all students including those who share protected characteristics. These data will be kept anonymous and only ever reported as aggregate reports.

The MSC Assessment Alliance has obtained approval for this research from the Faculty of Health Science Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bristol (approval code 9458). If you do not want your data to be included in the research, please contact the Assessment Lead at your medical school.

7. FAQs

7.1 How does the MLA relate to the Foundation Programme?

The MLA is a pass/ fail exam and is not used for national ranking. Your school may choose to use the scores of its students to award prizes and honours.

You will need to pass the MLA as part of your medical degree before the GMC will grant your provisional registration, but your MLA scores will not form part of your application to the Foundation Programme, nor will they impact application or allocations to the Foundation Programme. The purpose of the MLA is to provide a common threshold for safe practice of individual graduating students.

7.2 Does every medical student in the country get the same paper?

No. There are a number of AKT papers in use for each academic year. These will be assigned across medical schools but will all conform to the content map and areas of clinical practice described above, and will be constructed so that they are balanced across the content map. Each question within a paper will have a standard set according to best assessment practice.

Balancing the content and setting individual standards for exam papers should help ensure that a candidate should have the same likelihood of passing the assessment regardless of the paper sat.

7.3 How long will your AKT result be valid for?

An AKT pass is normally valid for two years while still at medical school. This applies to breaks in-programme only, for example if you need to take time off during your degree. University progression and resit policies still apply. As

the MLA forms part of the degree, taking a break after graduation has no impact on the validity of your AKT and will not affect applications to the Foundation Programme.

7.4 Will international students need to take the MLA?

The MS AKT that is taken by students at UK medical schools is designed specifically for that group. This may include students who are based in the international branch campuses of UK medical schools. All students at UK medical schools, regardless of fee status, will sit the MLA.

International medical graduates (IMGs) who want to practise in the UK – and who must currently take the GMC’s PLAB test – will continue to do so, though the PLAB test will be made compliant with the MLA requirements in 2024. Nonetheless, this will be a separate assessment designed and delivered by the GMC rather than UK medical schools.

8. Resources

MS AKT practice papers

The MS AKT Exam Board has put together a 200 item [practice exam](#) to help students prepare for the MS AKT. Blueprinted to the MLA Content Map this exam has been designed to reflect the style and type of question that students will encounter in the assessment. The practice exam is in pdf form and comes with and without the answer options.

We would like to recognise the contribution of medical schools, and members of the AKT Exam Board in particular, in producing this exam which we hope students will find a valuable resource. Should you have any questions about the clinical content of the practice exam please speak to the Assessment Lead in your school in the first instance.

Your medical school can also offer practice assessments via Exam-Write®.

Additional resources

Further resources such as [FAQs and recording of student webinars](#) can be viewed on the MSC website.

GMC resources

- [MLA content map](#)

The MLA content map sets out the core knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for UK practice. All applied knowledge test (AKT) and clinical and professional skills assessment (CPSA) content must derive from the content map.

- [UK students' guide to the MLA](#)

9. Contact

Medical students should contact their medical school assessment office for queries on the MS AKT or MLA. If you have a query or feedback for the MSC, your medical school will also be able to pass this on.

The Medical Schools Council is the
representative body for UK medical schools.

www.medschools.ac.uk
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