

MS AKT paper copies policy

Introduction

The policy outlines the Medical Schools Council's (MSC) approach to providing paper copies of the Applied Knowledge Test (AKT). The MSC is committed to ensuring that the use of a computer-based exam does not disadvantage any student, while maintaining the integrity and security of the examination process.

In summary, MSC's policy is that paper copies will not normally be provided for the MS AKT for the reasons outlined below. This is the case even where paper copies are sought by disabled students on the basis that the provision of a paper copy would amount to a reasonable adjustment. MSC has set out below the adjustments to the AKT that are available to support students' diverse needs, and the limited circumstances in which paper copies of the AKT may be provided.

MSC's Commitment to Equity

MSC is committed to promoting equity, diversity and inclusion throughout its work. The MSC EDI Alliance was established in 2022 to implement the recommendations set out in the [Active Inclusion, challenging exclusions in medical education](#) guidance.

In terms of the development of the AKT delivery platform, great care was taken to make it as accessible as possible. As is explained further below, the layout of the platform is simple, and functionality has been added to ensure that it is easy to navigate for users. Students can easily see how far they have progressed through the assessment as they take it, which helps them to manage their time. MSC has received feedback on the accessibility of the platform from users, including those with disabilities, who report that they feel the platform is easy to use and has appropriate functionality to facilitate adjustments.

Why is the provision of paper copies not normally reasonable in the context of AKT?

The provision of a paper copy will only amount to a reasonable adjustment in circumstances where no other adjustment would avoid the disadvantage caused to a disabled student by undertaking a computer-based exam. MSC anticipates that such a situation will arise very rarely.

MSC's policy, as summarised above, is for the following key reasons:

Security

MSC's key concern is the security of the assessment. This is a high stakes national exam and therefore the security of papers is paramount to avoid any risk that the questions will leak. The AKT process is designed so that the papers stay on the secure platform at all times. The printing of papers presents an unacceptable risk to the security of the exam.

Further, the security implications of questions leaking also has very significant financial consequences for MSC. It has been estimated that it costs approximately £2,000 to develop a single question once medical school staff time and the practicalities of running item writing events are taken into account.

Timeliness

Online delivery was chosen as the method of delivery for the AKT because it enables the instantaneous provision of data to the teams overseeing the assessment. This means that AKT psychometricians can immediately start to analyse data from each sitting of the assessment, and standard setting panels can assess in a timely manner whether the assessment has performed as expected. This is important as it allows MSC to provide results to medical schools just over two calendar weeks after the assessment.

The AKT is a high stakes exam and students sitting the AKT expect to receive results in a timely manner. Medical schools also need the results promptly to make decisions about progression, and provide timely feedback to their students. It is not possible to stretch these agreed deadlines, and the provision of paper copies would slow down the provision of results as individual responses have to be added to the system and additional checks performed to check for accuracy of data inputting before any analysis can take place.

Other steps taken

The MSC has taken a number of steps, including implementing a range of technological solutions, to ensure that the use of a computer-based exam will not disadvantage disabled students. These include:

- Visual aids such as the ability to change the colour of the background on the screen and text to reduce visual strain and improve readability
- Functionality to adjust the text size
- Ability to magnify clinical images
- Ability to strike through/eliminate distractors when working through the answers
- Screen reader software can be used with the platform providing acceptable invigilation is in place
- Adjustable screen brightness.

Other adjustments available

Further adjustments are available to users of the MSC's platform or are available for this exam with the approval of and provision by the student's medical school:

- Use of ergonomic equipment (e.g., special keyboards or mice).
- Flexibility of the device used for delivery, to enable touchscreen functionality
- Rest breaks of any duration and frequency
- Extra time of any duration
- Readers and/or scribes
- Quiet rooms
- Ability to move around and stretch during rest breaks
- Medications available during exam period
- Noise cancelling ear plugs
- Provision of water and food during exam period
- Pencil and paper to note down thoughts during the exam. Invigilators must confirm that they have destroyed notes at the end of the exam.

However, MSC accepts that for a small minority of students these adjustments may not address the disadvantage they face and providing a paper copy may be necessary. These students might, for example, have a number of different health conditions that interact in a way that makes visual processing difficult on a computer and therefore lead to an unacceptable risk that the student will incorrectly enter their answers onto the system.

The Process for Requesting paper copies

Medical schools are asked to contact MSC as soon as possible, and ideally no later than 12 months before they plan to deliver the AKT to their students if they have a student who requires paper copies of online assessments as a reasonable adjustment. The reason for this advance notice is to allow MSC to work with the medical school, the student and the disability service within the medical school or university to determine if alternative adjustments could be put in place to avoid any disadvantage caused to that particular student by undertaking a computer-based exam.

Responsibilities of medical schools

MSC's expectation is that medical schools will only seek the provision of a paper copy of the AKT for a disabled student as a reasonable adjustment in circumstances where the available evidence supports the view that no other adjustment would avoid the disadvantage caused to a disabled student by undertaking a computer-based exam. MSC anticipates that such a situation will arise very rarely. MSC's expectation is that the evidence in question would come from a registered doctor who treats the student on an ongoing basis. Senior medical school staff should verify that this process has taken place.

MSC will provide medical schools with an SOP for the delivery of paper copies within their institution and schools will have to agree to abide by the provisions within the SOP. Students will be required to log-on to the Exam-Write system at the end of the assessment in order that their answers can be transcribed onto the Exam-Write platform by medical school staff before 5pm on each of the two delivery days.

Contact

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