

Fit to sit policy – Applied Knowledge Test (AKT)

The Medical Schools Council (MSC) is responsible for the development and delivery of the AKT which forms part of the mandatory Medical Licensing Assessment introduced by the General Medical Council (GMC) for students graduating in 2025. From 2025 onwards, medical students will not be able to provisionally register as doctors with the GMC unless they have passed the AKT.

As part of this process MSC has put in place a Policy Framework to support the fair delivery of the assessment. Whilst medical school and university regulations will ultimately always apply, the intention of the Policy Framework is to encourage consistency between medical schools and to give students sitting this national exam reassurance that it is being delivered fairly across the UK. The MSC has made a commitment to the GMC to improve consistency across medical schools

As MSC has worked with medical schools to implement the Policy Framework it has become apparent that a wide variety of approaches are taken to the provision of mitigating circumstances requests from students. There are clear differences in the number of requests made by students, the number that are ultimately upheld across schools and the timeframe within which they dealt with.

No more than 4 valid attempts of the AKT, over 2 years of study with no more than 2 attempts per year, are permitted. Variation in mitigating circumstances processes and approvals could lead to significant variation between medical schools in the number of valid attempts at the AKT a student could take. With this in mind, and to improve consistency, MSC has decided to put in place a policy on mitigating circumstances that is based around the principle of 'fit to sit'. It is acknowledged that Universities may need to approve specific regulations to permit the application of a 'fit to sit' policy for the AKT.

Key Principles

- A fit to sit policy means the decision on whether to attempt the AKT and the consequences of that decision, shall remain the sole responsibility of each student.
- It is the responsibility of every student to ensure that they undertake the assessment only if they are fit to do so.
- By attempting the AKT:
 - The default assumption is that the student declares they are fit to do so.
 - The result will stand, and the attempt will count as a valid sit.
 - The student is confirming that there is no reason why their performance would be adversely affected or why they may subsequently bring forward a request for mitigating circumstances.

- Where a student believes that they are not 'Fit to Sit', they should advise the University prior to the start of the AKT. Details around this process (including ways of notification, deadlines, evidence required and grounds for approval) will be determined by the University.
- A student who experiences significant disruption during the AKT (for example, taking ill unexpectedly, or technical issues during an online exam) must immediately report this to the invigilator for this to be recorded. The student may submit a mitigating circumstances application or an appeal to have this taken into consideration depending on the most appropriate route within their university.
- It is recognised that there are extraordinary circumstances where a student has been severely impacted by a situation which prevents them from engaging in an appropriate manner, and it may not be possible to advise the University prior to the start of the exam. This can include extreme events on the day and some examples of situations this might include are available in Annex A. Universities should have processes in place to consider such exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis. The key things universities should consider in these circumstances are whether the issue was reasonably foreseeable and the impact the situation had on the student's capacity to make decisions in their best interests.

Rationale for the fit to sit policy

MSC believes this would be the best approach to introducing consistency to mitigating circumstances processes to AKT as it is easy to understand and implement; a number of schools across the UK already have such a policy in place and it works well for them.

Such a policy also links to the requirements set out in *Outcomes for graduates* by the GMC, this is document that sets out the competency standards for medical school graduates. Outcome 3 describes GMC's expectations around how students must be able to manage their own health;

Newly qualified doctors must demonstrate awareness of the importance of their personal physical and mental wellbeing and incorporate compassionate self-care into their personal and professional life.

They must demonstrate awareness of the need to:

- a. self-monitor, self-care and seek appropriate advice and support, including by being registered with a GP and engaging with them to maintain their own physical and mental health
- b. manage the personal and emotional challenges of coping with work and workload, uncertainty and change

This clearly shows that students that they have a professional responsibility to have insight into their own health and how it might impact on their ability to perform at work. This message is reinforced in Achieving good medical practice the GMC and MSC's guidance on professional behaviour for medical students which states;

You should think about the impact your health might have on your ability to study or sit an assessment. Just as doctors in practice need to be able to determine whether they are well enough to care for their patients, so as a medical student you would be expected to determine if you are well enough to fully engage with the course including assessments, raise this with your medical school and seek independent medical advice if appropriate. Your medical school will support you to develop this awareness.

Students taking the AKT are judged by their medical schools to be ready to sit a final assessment for graduation. It is not unreasonable to expect students at this stage of their medical training to demonstrate they are able to exercise insight into the impact that their health might have on their performance.

MSC also believes that the introduction of this policy will be beneficial to students as it supports and empowers them to make informed decisions about whether they are well enough to attempt the exam. It also allows students to focus on their health and ensure they only attempt an exam under the best possible conditions.

Rules around what constitutes an attempted (or 'valid') sit for AKT

For the purposes of the AKT an attempt occurs when a student enters the exam environment and commences taking the test. All AKT attempts are valid and count towards the maximum number of four permitted attempts, unless an attempt is nullified by the school as a consequence of:

- a student's mitigating circumstances in advance of the AKT (i.e. they declare themselves not 'fit to sit' and request to defer).
- a successful AKT appeal

The AKT is made up of two papers which the MSC recommends should be sat on two different days. Where a student sits the first paper and is unable to sit the second paper, for any reason, the student will be deemed to have failed that attempt of the AKT. However, that attempt *could* be voided *if* the reason they did not sit the second paper was permitted by their medical schools' mitigating circumstances policy which, going forward, should include a fit to sit provision.

If a student is found by their medical school to have committed exam misconduct then their result for that sitting will be nullified; the attempt would still count towards the maximum number permissible in that school.

Unauthorised non-attendance at the AKT is considered a valid attempt and the attempt will count towards the maximum number permissible. Students should be told the process for informing their medical school that they are not fit to sit so their absence is not listed as unauthorised non-attendance. Some medical schools allow students up to two days after the date of the exam to submit this information.

The recommendation from MSC is that UK medical students will normally be entitled to no more than four valid attempts at the AKT, with no more than two attempts in an academic year. Ultimately the rules that apply to the number of attempts will be the rules set by a student's university as they have the final responsibility for ensuring that every student has met the outcomes required for graduation.

Annex A

Below is a list of circumstances that a medical school might consider extraordinary for the purposes of this fit to sit policy. In these circumstances a medical school might consider accepting an application for mitigating circumstances from the student. Medical Schools would normally require submission of contemporaneous evidence to support such an application.

This list is not exhaustive.

- If a student received a notification about a significant bereavement on their way to the exam it could reasonably be considered to result in a temporary lack of capacity to determine if they should take the exam or not.
- If a student experienced a mental health crisis such as a psychotic episode that led to them lacking the capacity to make decisions in their best interest.
- A student witnesses or is involved in a serious or fatal accident on the way to the exam which seriously impacts on their capacity to make decisions.
- The student takes a new type of medication on the morning of the exam and they do not immediately recognise that the side effects have had an impact on their cognitive function.
- The student is a victim of a crime, such as theft and assault, on the way to the exam and this has a severe impact on their mental state.

The key questions a university should ask in determining whether a circumstance is extraordinary are whether the situation could reasonably be foreseen and what impact the situation had on the student's ability to make decisions in their best interests.

