

Step2Med Application Guide 2020



*...providing your stepping stone
into Medicine and Dentistry*

Applying to Medical School

SO, YOU WANT TO BE A DOCTOR?

Studying medicine will lead you to an amazing life-long flexible career that is enjoyable, versatile and hands on. Whilst you may just be studying to be a doctor, on the way, you will be able to get involved with research, teaching and may even have the opportunity to get involved with the development of resources and technology that can be used in the diagnosis and management of disease!

A career in medicine will allow you to engage and communicate with all types of patients. Though a career in medicine is extremely rewarding, medicine has its drawbacks and for this reason, it is not for everyone. Medicine is notorious for its long, unsociable hours and is often associated with high levels of stress (although this varies amongst specialties and doctors' perceptions). Before you decide to apply, it is important that you **get sufficient work experience, read into medicine and seek out advice** from healthcare professionals, so that you have a better understanding of the career before you apply

HOW DO I KNOW IF MEDICINE IS THE CAREER FOR ME?

Work experience! Try and get as much experience in all types of field – not just in medicine. Have some experience in a hospital (in specialty wards, theatre, outpatient clinics and at a GP), accountancy, pharmacy, dental practice, at a bank and whatever else you can think of. Your actual experience doesn't have to be long! A few days somewhere will give a great insight in that environment. Once you like something the most (of course it will be medicine,) ask for more shadowing or volunteering opportunities so that you have a better idea about what it's like. Have you watched our **YouTube video on Work Experience and Making the Most of it?** If not, watch it now and we cover Virtual Work Experience too!

If you are still unsure, it may be a good idea to reflect- make sure that you do this independently, but don't be afraid to ask for advice from the people you value most as well! Think about the roles of a doctor- is this something that you could see yourself doing tomorrow? For the next 5 years at university? What about when you're in your 50s? Make a list of the qualities you possess and try to see if they are compatible with a career in medicine. The qualities that make a good medical student/doctor include (but are not limited to): Academic excellence; excellent communication skills and an ability to be empathetic; resilience, commitment and tenacity; an ability to both be a team player as well as a leader, willingness to learn and to teach, good organisational skills and an ability to deal with stress. To find out more about the qualities of a good doctor, have a read of **General Medical Council's report: Tomorrow's Doctors** or **watch our YouTube Video: An Overview of the Medicine Application Process** which highlights all the key steps!

Don't worry if you don't feel like you are all of these qualities (and more) yet! I spent years believing that I was not suited to a career in medicine because I thought my personality was too different from a 'typical medic.' After getting to university, I've realised that there is no such thing as a 'typical medic!' Everyone is different, and medicine is SO diverse that there will always be something for you, if you decide to pursue becoming a doctor.

When you have a better idea whether medicine might be for you, take time to go through the entry requirements required to study medicine, as well as other healthcare professions, and make sure that you are on track to achieve all of these requirements. Take the time to **attend university open days** as well as more general 'Insight into Medicine' days (and try to go prepared with any questions you may have about the course). I attended some fantastic talks held by the University of Leicester before applying- many of these talks happen every year, so it may be worth signing up to them to learn more!

GATHERING EVIDENCE FOR A CV/ PERSONAL STATEMENT

If you are applying to university, the majority of universities will expect you to submit a personal statement alongside your application. A personal statement is a 4000-character long piece of work that helps tell admission tutors why you are suitable for their course. This is your chance to show potential tutors your personality, as well as convincing them that you have the enthusiasm and the competency to pursue a career in medicine. Your personal statement may be considered at any point of the application process- it may be used when deciding whether to call you for an interview, it may form a part of your actual interview (this is common in panel interviews!), or it may be used to distinguish between two otherwise similar candidates when allocating final offers.

To help write a personal statement, it's a good idea to **collect all of the evidence** onto a word document (perhaps make a CV for this) to show that you have that shows tutors that you are capable as a medical student. On a word document, I decided to display evidence for the following:

- Why I am applying for medical school
- Grades- both at GCSE and A Level (predictions are fine)
- Any other awards such as a diploma in a language, winning an essay competition or completing the Duke of Edinburgh award
- Make a note of your UCAT/ BMAT score in case it's necessary.

- Work experience opportunities. This includes
 - **Any paid jobs**
 - Volunteering opportunities- these can be local, national or international!
 - Shadowing/observership activities
- Any extra-curricular activities or any other interests, as well as any awards you may have in them
 - Sports
 - Music and Performing Arts
 - Debating/writing competitions that you may have won
 - Baking or Photography? These can be absolutely anything!
- Examples of you working in a team
- Leadership roles, such as a school prefect, a sports captain etc.

This is really the opportunity for you to show how you are a well-rounded, talented individual who can really engage with the course. Although the process of writing a CV may be overwhelming, do not panic! **Visit our blog on www.step2med.com**, to give you more of an idea about how to write a statement as well as our **YouTube video all about Personal Statement Writing**.

WORK EXPERIENCE

As mentioned above, work experience can involve paid work, volunteering opportunities or shadowing/observership opportunities. Other than being an entry requirement for all UK medical schools, good work experience will help you to decide if medicine is right for you. Whilst different universities vary with their requirements; **a minimum of two weeks of experience in a healthcare setting is usually advised**. After you've undertaken your work experience, take time to reflect on what you have learnt, as this will really help you during your application, especially at the interview stage. Did you see any examples of excellent leadership and teamwork? Have you learnt any new vocabulary or anything about a specific condition? Have you got a better idea about the role of a doctor? Keep questions like these at the back of your mind during your shadowing and jot down the answers for future reference!

Managing to get work experience can be really hard. It's worth emailing local GPs asking them if you can sit in for a clinic on a couple of days- if you're struggling to word your request, **have a look at our free template to ask for work experience opportunities!** Alternatively, approach your school for advice, someone you know who works in a hospital, or the education department at your local NHS Trust. Additionally, it's also worth looking at some of the virtual work experience opportunities that you can complete on your computer, such as the Observe GP programme (by the Royal College of GPs), as well as the Brighton and Sussex Medical School virtual work experience (which comes with certification). Both of these platforms were

introduced during the COVID-19 outbreak (whilst the UK was under lockdown and it was impossible to undergo work experience), so use these resources as a last resort, or to supplement any experience you do in real life.

Even if you have not spent a lot of time shadowing people, do not worry! It is far more valuable getting involved and volunteering, rather than just observing a doctor go about their day. You can volunteer anywhere- if you choose to volunteer at a care home or at a hospice, you would also be able to tick off the requirement that you have to gain experience in a healthcare setting! Volunteering and paid work over a long time period display commitment and hint to interviewers that you can handle responsibility, can build relationships with others and can be trusted. Whether you're volunteering at an old peoples' home or working as a waitress, medical schools will be able to appreciate the transferrable skills you would have picked up along the way- a time you dealt with an angry customer may be the perfect experience to talk about at a medical school interview when you're being asked about handling pressure, so make sure you **take time to learn and reflect from ALL of your work experience!**

SCHOOL GRADES, THE UCAT AND THE BMAT

One of the things stopping a lot of people from applying to medical school is the belief that you need excellent grades in order to be considered. Whilst this is largely true, different medical schools have different requirements- some universities place more emphasis on your UCAT average, whereas others ask for exceptional grades at GCSEs (and so are more lenient with UCAT or BMAT scores). If you choose to apply to medical school, it's important to play to your strengths. If you did well at GCSE, have reasonable predicted A level grades but didn't do as well as you hoped on the UCAT, consider applying to universities that have a lower minimum UCAT score requirement, or consider sitting the BMAT if it's not too late in the year! **We have compiled a table listing all the universities and their requirements.** You can download it by clicking on the 'choosing a medical school' tab on our website; please also refer to the specific university's website for the most up-to-date information.

The University Clinical Aptitude Test, better known as the UCAT, is an admissions test used in the medical school selection process by several universities across the country. You usually sit the test between July and October of the year you are applying to medical school, so that by the time your UCAS application is sent (by mid-October); you should have gotten your score. The test lasts two hours, including a total of five minutes of instruction time; you are given up to one minute to rest and read the instructions before each subtest. The UCAT is completed on a computer at a local test center. The questions in the UCAT are in a multiple-choice format

and assess a variety of mental abilities identified by universities as important to practicing medicine or dentistry. The sections are: Verbal reasoning, Decision Making, Quantitative Reasoning, Abstract reasoning and a Situational Judgement test. For specific information about how to tackle the UCAT, [visit our blog, where we've listed our top tips about how to prepare for the UCAT.](#)

Fewer students take the BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) because fewer universities require students to sit the exam. The BMAT is a 2-hour pen-and-paper test, which consists of three sections: Sections 1 and 2 are multiple-choice, and Section 3 is a writing task. Section 1 examines your generic skills in problem solving and critical thinking, section 2 focuses on your scientific knowledge and your ability to apply the knowledge and section 3 is an essay writing task. It is important that you only sit the BMAT after a lot of preparation; take your time to go over the GCSE content for all three sciences and mathematics so that you are better prepared for the questions you might be faced with in section 2, and have a go at writing ethical debate essays under time pressure. Unlike the UCAT, you do not receive your BMAT score on completion of the test- rather you have to wait for a results day, which may occur after you submit your UCAS application (depending on your test date). Therefore, if you do not do as well in the BMAT, you do not have the opportunity to change the BMAT requiring university choices that you had initially applied to.

INTERVIEWS

Unlike most other courses, your application isn't over once you hit submit on your UCAS application! Currently, you can apply to four medical schools at a time through UCAS, as well as apply privately to certain universities who offer this. If you meet the initial entry requirements and are successful, you will be invited to sit an interview, after which, the university admission's team will decide whether to give you an offer. Your interviews can happen anytime between November to (typically) the end of March, so do not worry if you haven't got an interview whilst others have, as interview allocation may not be over!

There are two kinds of interviews that you may need to prepare for: Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs) and the Panel interview. Make sure you prepare for all of your interviews and practice saying your answers out loud (and perhaps even in front of a mirror! [You can go through our mock MMI station flashcards \(check these out online\)](#) and access more questions online as well!

WHAT IF I DON'T GET AN OFFER TO STUDY MEDICINE?

Applying to medical school is competitive and unfortunately, not everyone who applies to university will get an offer in the same year. If you do not get any offers to study medicine, do not lose hope! You are never too old to study medicine and there are plenty of paths into medical school. You may consider taking a gap year, during which you could gain more experience in order to strengthen your application should you choose to re-apply. Alternatively, you may decide to apply for post-graduate medicine after completing a different course. Although missing out on an offer can be frustrating, **having the determination to re-apply shows great resilience and dedication**; this is also something that you can talk about at future interviews and is something that interviewers acknowledge and massively appreciate.

Missing out on your offer gives you a chance to reflect on your application and strengthen it (should you apply again). Ring up the medical school and explain that you missed out on an offer and be sure to ask why. Some universities are good at offering personalized feedback based on your interview performance and should be willing to explain where you may have struggled. Be sure to also explore your options regarding UCAS Extra and make an extra effort to do the best you can in your A-Level examinations. Even if you do not have an offer, these grades are incredibly important and can help you get to medical school via clearing (which happens on results day), or they can help you re-apply in following years.

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