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Selection Alliance

A journey to medicine: **The admissions process**

April 2020

Start



A journey to medicine: The admissions process

How to use this booklet

This is the fourth of five booklets developed for teachers and advisers in secondary schools and colleges. This booklet provides a guide to helping your students manage the admissions process. The suggestions in this booklet are aimed at students aged 16 upwards.

As part of the student's application to medicine they are likely to need to complete an admissions test, and attend interview. This booklet outlines the approaches that medical schools use and how best to prepare your students.

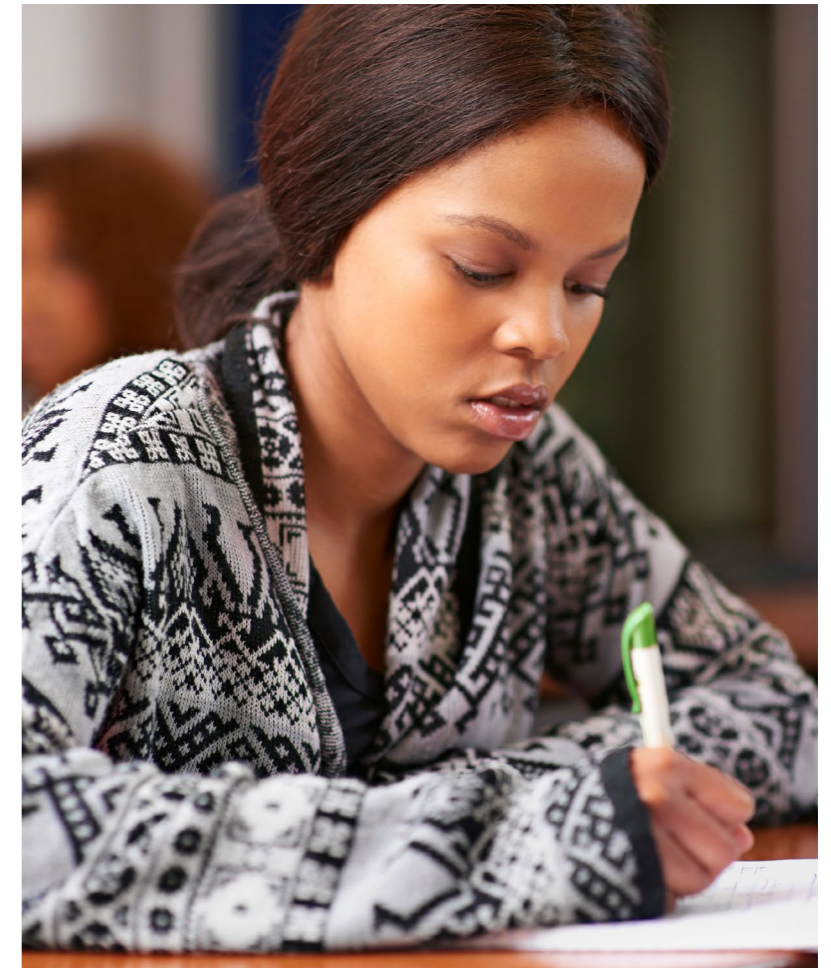
A large proportion of medical schools use contextual information to help them assess the student in terms of their social and educational background. This booklet explains how medical schools use contextual information.

After a student has heard back from the medical schools there are often further decisions for them to take, like where to attend or what to do if they receive no offers. This booklet will guide you through the options available to your students.

This booklet is particularly aimed at those schools and colleges which have limited experience of supporting students in their application to medicine. It has been produced by the Medical Schools Council and is endorsed by all member undergraduate medical schools in the UK.

The information relates to UK medical schools only. It is correct and accurate at the time of publication (May 2018). It will be updated annually but we advise you to check individual medical school websites.

The Medical Schools Council's resources for students and teachers or advisers is available online. Visit www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/applications/resources-for-students-and-teachers for more information.



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Admissions tests

All medical schools use an admissions test to help them assess a student's aptitude for medicine and a future career as a doctor. The tests have been designed to help medical schools determine whether applicants have the best combination of cognitive abilities, attitudes and professional behaviour appropriate for an aspiring doctor.

They can be used to:

- Decide whether to invite a student to interview
- Inform whether an offer should be made
- Decide between two equally ranked applicants

Many medical schools use thresholds and require that a candidate's score be over a particular threshold. These thresholds change year on year and can be influenced by other factors, such as socio-economic and educational context.

Every medical school will detail on their website how the tests will be used within the admissions process.

The tests used by medicine in the UK are the University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) and the Biomedical Aptitude Test (BMAT). There is also the Graduate Australian Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT), which can be used for graduate entry.

Medical schools will require all applicants to sit an aptitude test.

The deadlines for registration and completing the test can be early in the year, so encourage your students to register early.

Most test results are only valid in the year that the test is taken and cannot be carried over to a re-application. Likewise, a candidate's score from one year will not affect their chances if re-applying in later years, as each application is considered afresh.

Both tests have a fee associated with them but do have bursaries to support those students from low-income households.

It is essential that students practise the tests and become familiar with the type of questions, format and time constraints. Some parts of the tests will be weighted differently, so ensure your students know the weightings so they can focus their time accordingly. The best preparation is to encourage your students to complete the practice papers under examination conditions. UCAT reports that the most successful candidates spend around 21 to 30 hours preparing for the test.

Both the UCAT and BMAT have guidance notes and free practice papers available on their websites. Many medical schools can also offer support to your students. Anyone offering a paid service to help your students prepare for the tests will have no more knowledge than someone who has read the information on the website and studied past papers. So while a student's performance at any test will improve with some familiarisation or practice, advice from the medical schools is that you do not need to pay anyone for such help.



Admissions tests

BMAT

The Biomedical Admissions Test is a paper-based two-hour test for students. The BMAT assesses mathematical and scientific knowledge alongside thinking skills and written communication. It has separate papers that test:

- Generic skills in problem solving and critical thinking
- The ability to apply the scientific knowledge typically covered in school science and mathematics by the age of 16
- The ability to select, develop and organise ideas, and to communicate them in writing, concisely and effectively

Tests are undertaken in school (if it is an authorised test centre) or at one of the centres located across the UK.

There are two registration deadlines. You need to register in August to sit the test in September or register in October to sit the test in November. Students sit the test on the same day in September or late October/early November. Results are sent directly to the medical schools that students have indicated they are applying to. Check the current dates on the website.

UCAT

The UK Clinical Aptitude Test is designed to test the mental abilities, attitudes and the professional behaviour required of new doctors. It is a two-hour computer-based test which can be taken at centres across the UK and worldwide. It includes subtests involving verbal reasoning, decision-making, quantitative reasoning, abstract reasoning and situational judgement.

Registration opens in May and closes by mid-September. Students can take the test from July until the beginning of October. Check the current dates on the website.

GAMSAT

This test is used only for a number of the Graduate Entry Medicine courses, and not for Standard Entry Medicine. As such it is not a test that school leavers need to know about. Seven medical schools use the GAMSAT.

GAMSAT evaluates the nature and extent of abilities and skills gained through prior experience and learning, including the mastery and use of concepts in basic science as well as the acquisition of more general skills in problem solving, critical thinking and writing.

Admissions tests

“The most useful preparation you can do for an admissions test is practice. You need to be willing to put in a significant amount of work. However, you don’t need to pay for specialist courses and support; the test providers have lots of advice and other materials on their websites, including practice exam papers. Reading example questions and completing practice exam papers allows you to become familiar with the format of the questions, and trains you to recognise quickly what questions are actually asking you to do. It is particularly helpful to carry out practice exam papers under the same time constraints that you will face in the real exam, to get you used to the pace at which you need to answer questions in order to complete on time.”

Professor Kevin Murphy, Admissions Tutor for Widening Participation in Medicine, Imperial College London



For more information

To find out more about the BMAT:
www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat

To find out more about UCAT:
www.ucatofficial.com

To find out more about GAMSAT:
<https://gamsat.acer.org>

Student activity

50 minutes

Ask your students to work in three groups. Using the BMAT or UCAT website, ask a group to look at one of the following elements of the preparation guidance:

- The guidebook
- Practice questions
- Video information

Ask the students to write down

- Their top five tips for other students from looking at the resources
- The most surprising thing they learned about the test
- What their next steps will be to prepare for the test

Interviews

Interviews allow medical schools to further assess the applicants.

Following the initial sift of applications, the applicants in whom the medical school is interested will be invited to interview. All medical schools (apart from the University of Edinburgh Medical School) interview school leavers. If an applicant is invited to interview but does not attend, they cannot be offered a place. Most interviews will take place in January or February, but some can start as early as December.

On the day of interview, applicants will often have the opportunity to look around the school of medicine and meet some of the current medical students. The interview will be a formal, though friendly, process. The interviewers could be practising clinicians, academic staff, medical students or patients. The interview is not a test of academic knowledge but more on the suitability and aptitude to study medicine and become a doctor.

Medical schools appreciate that some candidates will be nervous and will, of course, make allowances for this.

If a student is unwell on the day of the interview then do let the medical school know. They will often be able to reschedule it.

At interview medical schools are looking for an applicant's:

- **Ability to communicate**
Applicants should be able to express their ideas clearly and coherently and to be able to follow a reasoned argument. Applicants who give spontaneous yet well thought-out answers to questions are more likely to impress the interviewers than those who give obviously rehearsed and 'coached' responses.
- **Attitude**
Medical schools look to see if applicants have the right attitudes to study medicine and be a doctor. This includes flexibility, integrity and conscientiousness.
- **Motivation to be a doctor**
Medical schools will want to see evidence of the experiences that have influenced an applicant's decision to study medicine. They will want to know that an applicant has an understanding of what a career in medicine entails.
- **Previous caring experience**
This can be from an applicant's work, home or voluntary experience. Medical schools will not only want to hear about the type of experience but also what an applicant has learned and their emotional response.
- **Knowledge of what is happening within medicine**
Applicants will not be expected to have a detailed knowledge but have an intelligent layperson's view on areas of medicine that are currently within the media or in the spotlight. It is important that applicants demonstrate an awareness of scientific and medical issues. Medical schools will want to see the applicant's intellectual potential.

The setting for the interview may vary. Some medical schools will interview in a boardroom or office, others will use a large room with several interviews taking place at the same time, others may use lounge areas.

Before any interview encourage your students to:

- Research the type of interview used by the medical school
- Learn about the medical school, the university and its location, including what makes them different from others
- Be self-reflective and think about their skills, abilities and interests
- Re-read their personal statement

Medical schools know that interviews can be daunting. Encourage your students at interview to:

- Be confident. Just being invited to interview is a huge achievement. Encourage your students to see this as an opportunity to demonstrate their interest and enthusiasm about studying medicine.
- Address all interviewers, and not focus on one
- Be themselves. Coached or overly rehearsed answers will not come across as well as more spontaneous but well-considered answers.

Types of interviews

There are many different types of interview. Medical schools may use different types of interviews during the day. The approach used by the medical school will be detailed on its website. Encourage your students to check the medical schools' websites, many provide guidance to help your students prepare.

The types used by medical schools are detailed below.

Multiple mini-interviews

The most common type of interview format used by medical schools is the multiple mini-interview. Its questions and tasks have been designed to gain further insight into the applicant's personal qualities and their cognitive skills.

Applicants are interviewed in a number of stations (usually seven or eight). Each station will last only a few minutes (often less than 10 minutes).

The stations may seek to understand further the applicant's:

- Motivation to study medicine as a career
- Communication skills
- Problem solving ability
- Capacity for self-reflection
- Capacity for logical thinking
- Understanding of professional responsibility
- Capacity for team working
- Ability to discuss issues of a wider nature in the field of medicine

Panel interviews

Applicants will be interviewed by at least two interviewers.

Applicants may have more than one panel interview in a day. Panel interviews may consist of questions about an applicant's abilities or skills, or they may be presented with different scenarios that they will be encouraged to discuss.

“ We are looking for sound all-round talent. Applicants come across best when genuine, able to engage in discussions effectively and not highly groomed or rehearsed. It is the quality of the discussion, not any 'correct' answer that is scored. Though a student who has not thought about or cannot convincingly expand upon aspects of their UCAS statement will not come across well. Hence, prior consideration of what the candidate wants to convey as their strengths and some practice formulating their responses, for instance with friends and family, should be strongly encouraged. Similarly, questions exploring their reasons for choosing a medical career etc. can be predicted, so some preparation helpful. Note this should be their reasons, there is no ideal response.”

Professor Jon Dowell,
Previous Admissions Convener, Dundee Medical School



How to prepare

Many students get nervous ahead of their interview. Some preparation can help allay your students' nerves.

It is also helpful if you can support your students by:

- Providing interview tips
- Setting up mock interviews. This can be with friends, family and other staff. The most important thing is that students get used to talking about themselves and expressing their views.
- Encouraging students who are at medical school to speak to your students. Many medical schools can help to arrange this.
- Encouraging students to feedback and reflect on areas for improvement after every interview

A month to two weeks before the interview, encourage your students to:

- Research the medical course, its structure, the type of teaching and assessment, and any additional opportunities it provides
- Follow any medical developments making the news or within dedicated journals (such as the British Medical Journal)

A week before the interview, encourage your students to:

- Make sure they know where the interview is and how to get there
- Re-read their personal statement. They may get asked questions about it.
- Read up about the university and its location.
- Think of some questions they may wish to ask at interview

On the day, encourage your students to:

- Be confident in their own abilities – they have done well to get this far
- Have a copy of the interview invitation to hand as this will often include directions and a contact number in case of emergencies
- Arrive in plenty of time
- Wear smart, clean clothes. No jeans or ripped clothing. Ask them to imagine how they would expect a doctor to dress.
- Take some water and snacks
- Listen to any briefing and read any instructions carefully
- Breathe and stay calm

After the interview, encourage your students to reflect on the interview on the journey home, to help them prepare for future interviews. Ask them to consider what they felt they did well in and what they could improve on.

Some medical schools may ask the applicants attending interview not to disclose the questions or the details of the stations. This is to ensure that all applicants are treated equally and some do not have an unfair advantage.

For more information

Most medical schools will have information about the types of interview they have and how best to prepare for them. For more general information visit the UCAS website: www.ucas.com/interview-tips.

Student activity

50 minutes

Ask your students to work in groups of three or four. Ask them to consider their answers to the following questions. Encourage them to think about how their responses demonstrate their understanding of medicine as a career, and their skills and aptitude for the subject and profession.

- During work experience what was the most important thing you learned about yourself?
- Why did you choose this medical school and university?
- What elements of medicine particularly interest you?

Ask them to give their top five tips for banishing nerves before the interview.

Contextual information

Many medical schools use contextual information in order to understand a student's social or education background. It enables them to gauge an applicant's academic potential.

There are many contextual factors that may be used by the medical school. The two main factors used by medical schools are consideration of the:

- **Education background of the student**

There are a range of factors that can be used such as school achievement data (for example, the average GCSE (or equivalent) performance of students at the school or the number of students progressing to higher education) or the composition of the school (for example, the percentage receiving free school meals).

- **Socio-economic background of the student**

This may include an assessment of the level of disadvantage a student may have faced (using the index of multiple deprivation) or their family background (using income or social class assessments).

The majority of the contextual factors used by the medical schools will be identified automatically, using publicly available information provided by the Department for Education (or others) about the school, or information based on where the student lives.

Some medical schools may ask for additional information, for example, if the student has been in care. This should be included in the UCAS application form. Check websites to see what information individual medical schools consider.

Medical schools may use contextual information in different ways. It may help to inform whether to:

- Invite a student to interview
- Consider the test or interview scores within the student's education or social context
- Provide an offer for an access route or alternative pathway to medicine
- Give further consideration to the application if the student just misses the grades they were predicted

Medical schools list the contextual information they take into account on their websites.

“Contextual admissions looks at an applicant's academic achievements in the context of their educational and social environments. Certain medical schools use one or more of a variety of factors such as the area an applicant lives in or the school they attended to assess context. Much of this information is available from UCAS forms but some medical schools require additional information directly from the applicants. Additional consideration may be given to particular factors such as the region the applicant comes from or attendance at particular outreach events. It is important when applying to a course that uses contextual admissions to check whether the factors are relevant to your students.”

Dr Sally Curtis, BM6 Programme Lead,
Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton

When your students hear back

Students applying for undergraduate medical school programmes will apply through UCAS. UCAS Track will enable them to follow the progress of their application online.

At interview, most medical schools will let students know when they will hear about the outcome of their application.

Medical schools are allocated a specific number of places by the Department of Health. The number of offers each medical school makes will be calculated in reference to previous years' intake statistics and conversion rates.

Receiving an offer

The offer will outline the entry requirements including the grades needed.

Most of your students will receive a conditional offer. The conditional offer will outline the grades and subjects required. For medicine there are likely to be other conditions such as a Disclosure and Barring Service check that is deemed satisfactory by the medical school and health checks.

For students who have received an offer, they will then need to decide what course to make their firm choice and what to have as their insurance choice. It may be difficult for students to decide between different offers for medicine, as they may be very similar. However, encourage your students to consider the entire offer as there may be differences.

Receiving no offers

This can be very disappointing for students. There are 2.5 applicants for every place at medical school so many students will not get the news they want. Of those who receive a positive response, many will only have been called for one or two interviews.

If your student received no interviews, it may be that their application was not competitive in either their predicted or achieved academic grades, or their performance in the aptitude test was not high enough for competitive selection.

If unsuccessful at the interview stage, encourage your student to request feedback. Most medical schools will explain how to seek feedback on their website. The feedback may not be very detailed but can help to provide an indication as to why the student did not receive an offer for interview.

Your student can enter UCAS Extra or Clearing. The places available in UCAS Extra or Clearing will be extremely limited (if there are any at all). There are likely to be vacancies in other health courses.

If a student still wishes to study medicine they should consider what they would need for the best chance of a successful application next year. It will be important that their A level (or equivalent) grades meet the entry requirements. **Encourage them to focus on their examinations.** Following their examinations they can focus on gaining additional experience and building their skills. This should include practising the aptitude test and carefully considering the selection process of each medical school. If they are reapplying to the same medical school they should check whether reapplications are allowed.



When your students hear back

“I would always encourage students who do not receive an offer of a place the first time around to try and try again. Students taking two or three attempts to gain a place are not uncommon. Remember you are a doctor for a lifetime, so it is definitely worth it. Through perseverance, students develop many important qualities, such as resilience and the ability to reflect when unsuccessful which are considered essential qualities by both medical schools and in the medical profession. Below is a quote from Michael a year three student at Peninsula Medical School, who gained a place on the third attempt; he was from a school in special measures.

‘My journey into medicine contained much uncertainty. After facing a number of unsuccessful applications, it led to a developed resilience. This resilience led me to not give up, and to overcome the obstacles faced.’”

Dr Louise Alldridge, Associate Professor Biomedical Sciences and Widening Participation Lead, Plymouth University - Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry



For more information

UCAS Clearing: www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/confirmation-clearing-and-adjustment-toolkit-advisers.

UCAS Extra: www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/apply-and-track/track-your-application/extra-choices.

UCAS Track: www.ucas.com/adviser-track-and-reporting.

Student activity

50 minutes

For those students who have not received an offer for medicine it can be a very difficult time. Encourage your students to consider their options.

Ask your students to spend some time reflecting on whether they still wish to study medicine. There are many other courses available, in healthcare, science, engineering or other areas. Ask your students to reconsider their reasons for studying medicine and ask themselves:

- Are they interested in any other courses?
- Why did they apply to medicine?

If they still wish to consider medicine, ask your students to consider their application and any feedback they have received:

- What are the areas they need to improve on?
- How could they improve on their application, interview or test performance?

At the end of the session if students are still keen to study medicine, encourage them to focus on their examinations. They can build up their experiences after their examinations.



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The Medical Schools Council represents the interests and ambitions of UK medical schools

www.medschools.ac.uk

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