



Work and voluntary experience

Did you know?

The most important things about work experience are what you have learnt about yourself, what you have demonstrated about your commitment to caring for other people, and what understanding you have gained of how effective care is delivered to patients.

Useful stuff

WHAT DO MEDICAL SCHOOLS WANT TO SEE?

Medical schools want to see how your work experience has given you:

- Experience of care, support or help to other people so you understand the realities of working in a caring profession
- Some of the attitudes and behaviours essential to being a doctor, such as conscientiousness, good communication skills, and the ability to interact with a wide variety of people
- A realistic understanding of medicine and in particular the physical, organisational and emotional demands of a medical career

What you should do...

Your work experience can be working with other people in a caring or service role, and in particular with people who are ill, disabled or disadvantaged.

You can gain care experience in care homes for the elderly, hospitals, hospices, nurseries, special schools, community-based settings or by volunteering to provide first aid or other support services.

Paid employment or voluntary work in areas outside of healthcare can help you demonstrate the attributes and behaviours required for medicine, such as working with people, team work and communication skills.

Reflect on your experiences and make sure you can express what you have learnt about yourself and medicine. Complete a diary during work experience where you can reflect on your experiences and observations.

Key dates

Do your work experience by the 1st September.

Top facts

- Most medical schools do not set a minimum number of hours of work experience, but do want you to reflect on what you have learnt.
- Many medical schools will expect work experience to have taken place during the two years prior to an application.

Be aware

Medical schools do not generally support or encourage overseas clinical work experience. They want you to have an understanding of the UK health service, either by undertaking clinical work experience or by talking to UK doctors or other health professionals.

What they say...

“Work experience matters but it’s not necessary to have shadowed doctors in every specialty, or even to have shadowed a doctor at all. What matters most is that you can explain how the experiences have informed you about what medicine is truly like and how you have developed as an individual, both personally and professionally.”

Frederick Farrow, Phase 2b (Year 3) medical student, University of Sheffield Medical School.

“When applying for medical school the most important thing about the experiences you have had is not the experiences themselves (that is, the type, nature, or length of experience)- the thing of greatest importance is what you have learned from your experiences. Whether your experiences are healthcare related or not, by applying what you have learnt to a career in healthcare, you are able to demonstrate an awareness of what the future holds, and that you have taken the time to prepare yourself for such a future.”

Zachary Thomas, fourth year medical student, Lancaster Medical School.

More help & advice

Medical Schools Council’s work experience guidelines.
www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/applications

Voluntary opportunities
www.gov.uk/volunteering

Test yourself

Think about your work experience ...

- What skills, values and attributes (for example, empathy or teamwork) am I able to demonstrate?
- How did my work experience help me to demonstrate the values and attributes for being a good doctor?
- What was the most interesting aspect of the work experience?

This information is endorsed by all undergraduate medical schools in the UK who are members of the Medical Schools Council. The information relates to UK medical schools only. It is correct and accurate at the time of publication (May 2020), and relates to the 2021 admissions process. It will be updated annually but we advise you to check individual medical school websites.