

Access courses



MSC Medical Schools Council
Selection Alliance

Did you know?

Access courses provide a route for mature learners wishing to study medicine who do not have formal qualifications such as A-levels in chemistry and biology, or equivalent.

Key information

Who are Access courses for?

Access courses are targeted at mature learners. This means that they are aimed at those who plan to attend college after an extended period out of full-time education. These courses are **not** suitable for applicants who have failed to meet the desired A-level or degree results for entry to medicine.

What are the academic requirements?

Medical schools expect students on Access courses to lack the necessary scientific qualifications for standard entry medical programmes. Access courses should be seen as an alternative to A-levels/Level 3 qualifications rather than compensation for recent poor academic performance. However, prior qualifications are still relevant. Many medical schools have GCSE/O Level requirements, such as minimal attainment requirements in maths and English language. Medical schools will also require admissions tests such as BMAT or UCAT.

What are the non-academic requirements?

Medical schools require applicants to demonstrate some understanding of what a career in medicine involves and their understanding of, and suitability for, a caring profession. You may prepare yourself for this by gaining paid or voluntary experience in health or other care, support or assistance related areas. More important than the experience itself is the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the relevant skills and attributes the profession requires by reflecting upon any experience you have.

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.

What you should know...

Before applying to an Access course, make sure to research the course content and delivery, the assessment methods used and what support is provided for medical school applications, as well as any links the course has to medical schools. Do note that most medical schools that accept Access diplomas will only accept certain medicine-specific ones.

Course content

The core content of acceptable access courses tends to contain elements of biology, chemistry, maths and other sciences. The level of these core modules should be the equivalent of A-level standard, although the breadth of coverage may differ. Units on health issues, other medicine related topics and professional behaviours are also desirable.

Assessment methods

To prepare you for medical school Access courses should assess your performance for every unit using a variety of methods. This may include exams, presentations, group work and written assignments. It is important that you demonstrate an ability to cope with the assessment of your knowledge in synoptic exams and only take re-sits if you have extenuating circumstances. Medical schools typically require all 45 graded Level-3 credits within an Access to Medicine diploma to be passed at distinction level.

Support for medicine applications and links to medical schools

The course should include advice on medical career pathways, the medical school application process and preparation for interview. It should be made explicit which medical schools accept the specific Access diploma, whether there is a guaranteed interview scheme or if there are linked place arrangements. You should ask how many students have gone on to further study and at which institutions.

Be aware that...

Medical schools have different rules for accepting applicants from Access courses and may differ in which Access diplomas they accept. Make sure to check which medical schools accept the diploma you are interested in before you apply, as well as what other qualifications, admissions tests or relevant experience will be needed when applying to medical school.

A national Access to Medicine subject descriptor is being piloted in 2020. It is intended that this subject descriptor will be implemented across the sector in 2021. Once this happens, a diploma that meets this specification is likely to be more widely accepted by medical schools than one that doesn't.

More help & advice

[Entry Requirements for UK Medical Schools](#)

[QAA Access to Higher Education](#)

[Access to Higher Education Diploma](#)

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