



msc Medical
Schools
Council
Selection Alliance

Guidance on Access to Medicine courses

2020 update



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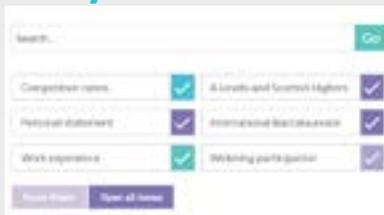
Training and advice

Introduction

This guidance sets out the minimum acceptability criteria for Access to Medicine courses. This is not an exhaustive list; individual medical schools may also stipulate their own requirements for Access courses.

The criteria outlined in this guidance cover entry requirements, course content and required outcomes and standards for Access courses. While Access courses may vary in their approaches, all courses must provide the information indicated in this guidance to their prospective students and medical schools, so that students and schools alike can make informed decisions.

Did you know?



The screenshot shows a search interface with a search bar at the top right. Below it are several filter categories with checkboxes: 'Competitive entry' (checked), 'A Levels and Scottish Highers' (checked), 'Personal statement' (checked), 'International qualifications' (checked), 'Work experience' (checked), and 'Widening participation' (checked). At the bottom, there are two buttons: 'Reset filters' and 'View all courses'.

The entry requirements for UK medical schools are available as [an interactive webpage](#) so you can search by your chosen criteria and make easy comparisons.

Diversity and widening participation

This guide will be useful to Access course providers, medical schools and prospective medical students. It was, however, created with particular focus on widening participation. This term refers to initiatives that provide opportunities for those who would make excellent doctors but who have faced barriers due to their educational and/or socioeconomic circumstances.

The Medical Schools Council believes that an applicant's chance of entering a medical degree programme should be dictated by factors such as academic ability, motivation and conscientiousness. Factors like wealth or cultural background should not present any barrier to studying medicine. Removing barriers will help to build a medical profession which is diverse, highly capable and represents the communities it serves.

Part of the effort to widen participation in medicine involves presenting information on Access courses in the clearest way possible. This is of benefit to Access course providers, medical schools and students. Collating and publishing

this information is part of the medical schools' response to the demand for clear and accessible information on Access courses for medicine made in the 2014 [Selecting for Excellence](#) report.

Did you know?

Subject Descriptor for Medicine

Pilot: September 2020

Full implementation: September 2021

The aim of [QAA's Subject Descriptor for Medicine](#) is to bring greater standardisation to Diplomas titled Access to HE Diploma (Medicine). This will allow the medical schools currently accepting Access to HE students for direct entry to have greater confidence that an unfamiliar diploma will be similar in selection, content and assessment to those they currently accept.

What are Access courses?

Access courses provide a route into medicine for mature learners who do not possess the usual formal qualifications, such as A Level Biology and Chemistry, or equivalent. They are delivered in further education colleges and are targeted at those who plan to attend college after an extended period out of full-time education. Access courses can help to widen participation in medicine by providing a route for applicants with different experiences and backgrounds to study medicine.

Medical schools recognise the important role Access courses play in widening participation in medicine. However, for these courses to serve their purpose, it is vital that they are aligned with the expectations of medical schools. To this end, the criteria outlined in this guidance cover the entry requirements, course content and required outcomes and standards for Access courses.

The guidance provided has been mapped to the Quality Assurance Agency's [subject descriptor](#) for the Access to Higher Education Diploma in Medicine. The new framework will allow for a level of local flexibility, so Access to HE course providers can shape their courses to meet the specific skills in medicine required in their area. However, the framework is also intended to be national in scope, guaranteeing greater consistency across Access diplomas in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. While local flexibility is one of the strengths of Access to HE courses, the new framework addresses what medical schools look

for and embeds those needs nationally across the diplomas meeting the requirements of the subject descriptor.

Acceptability criteria

Entry requirements

Access to Medicine courses should provide as much information as possible about who should apply to their programmes. Entry requirements should be freely available and regularly updated in course guides, on websites and in other accessible formats. They should take account of eligibility criteria specified by medical schools to avoid recruitment of students who will be unable to make successful medicine applications even if they complete the diploma.

Target demographic

Access courses should be targeted at mature learners. The term 'mature learners' is used here to refer to anyone attending college following an extended period out of full-time education. As such, these programmes are not suitable for applicants who have recently failed to meet the desired A Level or degree results for entry to medicine. Ideally, Access course applicants will have had a gap in their formal education, often gaining work and/or life experience during this time.

Academic criteria

Medical schools expect students on Access courses to lack the necessary scientific qualifications for standard entry to medical programmes. Access courses should be seen as an alternative to A Levels/Level 3 qualifications

rather than a supplement to poor academic performance. However, prior qualifications are still relevant. Many medical schools have GCSE requirements, such as minimal attainment requirements in maths and English language. Applicants should be advised to check that they are eligible to progress to their chosen medical school based on their previous qualifications. Medical schools may also require admissions tests such as the BMAT and UCAT which applicants should be made fully aware of.

Demonstration of academic potential is essential due to the rigorous demands of the medical degree. Interviews or pre-admission tests will assist the assessment of academic potential and communication skills as part of the selection process for the Access course.

Non-academic criteria

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. It is appropriate for Access courses to request this too, so that students do not find themselves unable to make a strong medical school application. Applicants may draw on relevant experience – either paid or voluntary, in health, caring or related areas – to demonstrate this understanding. Practical experience in hospices and residential homes, domestic caring responsibilities or employment in support roles are as appropriate as work in a conventional healthcare setting.

More important than the experience itself is the ability to demonstrate an understanding of how students have demonstrated the relevant skills and attributes the profession requires by reflecting upon and drawing upon any experience they may have. Where this experience is limited, Access course applicants should be advised appropriately on the usefulness of gaining further experience before applying to medical school.

Course content and assessment

Course content

The core content of acceptable Access courses tends to contain elements of biology, chemistry, maths and other science units. The level of these core units should be the equivalent of A Level standard, although the breadth of coverage may differ. Modules on health issues and other medicine specific topics are also desirable and the core science content may be tailored to reflect this. Development of study skills and professional behaviours is also important. The content of courses should require significant commitment, as this will help to prepare applicants for a medical degree course.

Assessment

Assessment of performance in Access courses should be available for every unit and should be based on a variety of methods. Aligning types of assessment for Access courses with those used in medical schools is essential, since students need to be confident that they will be able to cope with the assessment burden once they reach medical school. A mixture of assessment types including exams, presentations, group work and written assignments should be used in Access courses.

It is important that students demonstrate an ability to cope with assessment of their knowledge in synoptic exams with a strict limit on the number of re-sit attempts. Access courses should have a clear policy on acceptable evidence of extenuating circumstances that allow a re-sit.

Required outcomes and standards

Level of qualification

The Access to HE diploma specification requires completion of 60 credits, of which 45 must be graded Level-3 credits. The remaining 15 credits are ungraded and may be at Level 2 or 3, although there is an expectation for Access to Medicine that the great majority of these will be at Level 3. It should be made clear to applicants that Distinction in all graded units is generally the expected outcome for those who go on to medical school.

Links to medical schools

It should be made explicit which medical schools are known to accept the specific Access diploma, whether there is a guaranteed interview scheme or if there are linked place arrangements (for example, after acceptance onto an Access course some medical schools interview applicants and potentially make an early offer subject to satisfactory completion of the diploma) and ideally details of how many students on the course have gone on to further study and at which institutions.

Training and advice

To fully prepare students who have not been involved in competitive application processes before, Access courses should provide advice and/or coaching on careers, university applications and interview techniques. Where possible, input should be provided by a medical school that accepts the diploma.

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