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**UNIVERSITY OF
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Getting into Medical School & Becoming a Doctor – Key Questions

1. What are the demands on a doctor?

There are definite pros and cons to becoming a doctor and you need to think them all through carefully. It can sound very glamorous and is portrayed that way on TV and in Films, but have you considered the more challenging side? We don't want to put you off in any way, but it is important to consider all factors so here are some pros and cons:

Pros:

- prestigious career
- job security (doctors are always in demand)
- huge choice of areas to specialise
- lifelong learning
- ever evolving – new procedures, new technology, new developments
- personally and financially rewarding
- well respected role
- get to save lives

Cons:

- demanding training pipeline
- longer university course /student finance & debt
- long and unsociable hours
- fatigue and burn out
- psychologically demanding
- high pressure and stressful situations
- accountability for patient outcomes

2. Do you have the empathy to become a doctor?

This will be assessed through the application process, in your personal statement, UCAT and interview. For a doctor it is not all about the technical diagnosis, but the overall health and well-being of the patients.

5 steps for showing empathy:

- Take someone else's perspective – visualise the world as they see it
- Do not judge – listen mindfully and actively (body language is important)
- Recognise emotions – try to understand through emotions you've felt yourself
- Let them know – make sure you tell the person that you know what they are going through
- Avoid saying 'I' – using too many personal pronouns can lead you to think in a more self-centred way

It will be a tricky balance as your time will be in great demand as a doctor and you may be emotionally drained from dealing with other challenging situations, but a positive interaction can often improve a patient's wellbeing more than a medical intervention. It doesn't matter how short that interaction may be, but it may be what makes all the difference to that particular patient.

Don't confuse Empathy with Sympathy – they are very different.

Actively listen – give the patient your entire focus, really listen to what is being said, and be aware of their body language as well as your own. This can often conflict with what they are telling you, indicating something may not be quite right and if you are not giving that patient your full attention, this could be missed. These skills can be learnt and developed through work experience, extracurricular activities, and general life experience. Any examples you can give of times you have showed empathy may be important for your personal statement and interview.

3. How hard is it to get into medical school?

It is hard and you will need to be dedicated. You will generally need AAA grades at A-Level (although there are concessions that can be made to this depending on your individual circumstances, so don't be put off!), write a good personal statement, pass a series of aptitude tests (UCAT/BMAT/GAMSAT), complete an interview, and dedicate yourself to a much longer and more intense period of study than most. However, for those who are worried about this there is a wealth of help and advice out there on the individual university websites, UCAS website, Medical Schools Council website and many more.

There are also a number of schemes you can apply for and/or charities that provide mentoring, work experience, medical masterclasses, and support through the application process – and most of it for free! Here at Nottingham and Lincoln, we are partnered with The Sutton Trust to deliver *Pathways to Medicine*. We also run residential summer schools where you will be introduced to life at university and life as a medical student, plus sessions with various medical experts on their areas of expertise.

4. How long is medical training?

Depending on the course you do, it could be 4, 5 or 6 years.

4 years for graduate entry, 5 years for standard entry and 6 years for the foundation course.

It can then take up to 15 years to become a fully trained specialist – depending on your speciality.

The University of Nottingham and The University of Lincoln offer you the opportunity to study for 2 degrees – BmedSci & BMBS.

(You will only study for the BMBS on the Graduate entry course)

5. How much does medical school cost in the UK?

The annual tuition fee is £9,250. There are numerous loans, bursaries, and scholarships from both the government and the individual universities to help you to afford it and depending on how much you are earning when you get your first job, depends how much you will need to pay back.

Universities have dedicated financial teams who can give you information and expert advice on every aspect of student finance, including:

- Tuition fees
- Student loans
- University scholarships and bursaries
- Short-term financial concerns
- General money worries
- Questions about any aspect of government or University financial support

6. How many medical schools are there in the UK?

44

There is a list of current medical schools along with a map of their locations on the Medical Schools Council (MSC) Website. You can use this information to help you determine where you would most like to study and would suit you the best.

7. Are all medical schools the same?

They are not all the same, but they are all working towards the same goal – to produce competent and well-rounded doctors with the right skills, values, and attributes to look after their patients.

Medical schools can differ in the following areas:

- Course structure – separate pre-clinical followed by intensive clinical vs a more blended approach
- Teaching styles – traditional/integrated/problem-based learning
- Location

Think carefully about:

- Personal factors – what is best for you, how well does each school's teaching suit your personal learning style, levels of personal and financial support, distance from family support system etc

It is a good idea to attend the universities' open days to get a feel for each campus and see what life will be like for you there. Sometimes things seem great on paper, but you get a totally different impression in real life.

Do your research and find what's best for you.

8. How many should I apply to?

You can apply for up to 4 medical schools on your UCAS application. Your 5th choice could be used as a back-up option for a related course e.g., Medical Physiology and Therapeutics, Cancer Sciences or Bio-medical science, or any other degree you are interested in, would enjoy studying and would want to do as a career if you did not get into medical school. Equally you could leave this option blank if you do not wish to study anything but medicine.

9. What are the academic entry requirements?

They can vary quite a lot from university to university, so make sure you check each university's website for your chosen course and make yourself aware of any differences between the establishments you wish to apply to e.g., A-Level specific subject requirements, A-Level grades, GCSE requirements etc.

Using Nottingham and Lincoln as an example, you will need AAA at A-Level (including biology and chemistry) for the 5-year medicine course.

You could be considered for a contextual offer of AAB (with at least one A in biology or chemistry) if you meet the criteria, or you may decide to choose a foundation course where you would need BBC (with Bs in both biology and chemistry).

Your GCSEs will also be taken into consideration, and you will need a minimum of 6 at level 7 including chemistry and biology or double science. If maths and English language are not included in these 6, you will need a minimum of grade 6 in both subjects. If you are applying with a degree, you would only need a 4 for both maths and English.

For the foundation course you would need a minimum of 5 GCSEs at level 6 – these must include maths, English language, chemistry and biology or double science.

10. What entrance tests do universities use?

There are 3 different tests that are used. University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) and BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) for undergraduate entry and Graduate Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT) for the graduate entry courses. Again, this will be something else to check when you are looking at the entry requirements for your chosen medical schools.

UCAT – registration between May and late September

Composed of 5 categories:

- **Verbal Reasoning** – tests your ability to sift through information quickly and logically. You will get a series of passages and then be quizzed on their contents.
- **Decision Making** – tests how well you apply logic to arrive at accurate conclusions. You will be given charts, data and written/visual information and then asked to interpret that data.
- **Quantitative Reasoning** – tests if you can arrive at logical conclusions drawn from numerical data.
- **Abstract Reasoning** – tests your ability to determine patterns from shapes and graphical information.

- **Situational Judgement** – assesses how good you are at noticing important factors in practical real-life situations. It tests how your personal values and working ethics align with GMC guidelines.

BMAT – 2 test dates per year, registration early August for early September, and registration by the end of September for late October/early November

Determines your critical and logical thinking skills alongside knowledge you should have retained from school. There are 3 areas you will be tested on:

- **Aptitude and Skills** – tests critical thinking and problem solving.
- **Scientific Knowledge** – tests current knowledge of biology, chemistry, physics, and maths.
- **Writing Task** – you will need to produce a written essay based on one of three questions.

GAMSAT (Graduate Entry) – Applicant must register and sit before making UCAS application, held twice a year in March and September

Designed to assess the capacity to undertake high-level intellectual studies in the medical and health professional programmes. Much like the BMAT, it evaluates your prior skills and knowledge, testing both science and more general skills in problem solving, critical thinking and writing.

The key to these tests is practice. You can access practice tests on the respective websites that will give you a good idea of what to expect.

There are costs involved in taking these tests, however, if you meet the relevant criteria, you may be offered a bursary to cover those costs. The exception being GAMSAT.

You can only make one application per year for UCAT and BMAT.

11. How do I prepare for my interview?

Be aware that not all medical schools use the same interview format, so do your research beforehand. Some might opt for a more structured format using a panel of interviewers, others will use the multiple-mini interview (MMI) format where you move around a number of stations being given questions on different scenarios, or it could be a mixture of both. You should also be prepared for the possibility the interview will be in an online format – the university will provide guidance if this is the case. There is a wealth of information on the Medical Schools Council (MSC) website to help you prepare for your interview, with examples of the types of questions you could be asked, there is also a booklet on how to run your own mock-MMIs.

The most important factor is preparation. Do read through previous interview questions to get a feel for the sorts of things you might be asked, but don't memorise answers. The questions you get for your actual interview may be similar, but not the same, so make sure you listen carefully to the wording of the questions you are asked. When looking at previous interview questions, try to think of your own examples and start to make notes on the things you have achieved so they are fresh in your mind. Be aware of what's happening currently in the field of medicine – what have been the recent headlines, innovations or things that have really interested and inspired you on a personal level.

Make sure you are familiar with your personal statement and are prepared to discuss and expand on the information it contains.

Finally, just be yourself and let your personality shine through – there is no fixed set of criteria to make the perfect doctor, it is our individual differences and life experiences that make us equally valuable. The wider the variety of people we have, the more relatable we can be as a profession

12. How do you get medical work experience?

You need to be aware of what a career in medicine involves, so work experience in this area is important – either through working with others in caring or service-related roles, or through direct observation of healthcare (which can take many forms). Don't worry if you aren't able to get experience in a medical setting, the most important factor is working with people, it is equally valuable to gain experience through hobbies & interests, volunteering, and other activities where you can engage with a wide variety of people: young and old, different backgrounds, different religious beliefs etc. This will help you learn the value of adapting your approach to suit different people and their situational needs. Since the onset of the Covid pandemic medical work experience has been much harder to gain, however, medical schools have been making allowances for this. Again, make sure you look at the specific guidance that will be provided by each university. On the positive side Covid has really pushed us all to work in newer and more practical ways and there are lots of useful online resources you can now access:

Online work experience options you could consider (links on MSC website):

- Brighton and Sussex Medical School's [free](#) online work experience course
- The Royal College of General Practitioners' *Observe GP* platform
- The General Medical Council and NHS England's [free](#) virtual reality app

Or:

- Watch medical reality TV shows – GP's Behind Closed doors, Emergency, 24 hours in A&E, Inside the Ambulance. These will give you a real insight into the various roles within the NHS. Take notes, think about how you would react to the same situations, think about examples of when you have come under similar kinds of pressure and how you dealt with it.
- Are there any Summer Schools you could attend? – Nottingham run residential summer schools for medicine and medical sciences where you would get the opportunity to hear from and talk to NHS clinicians, teaching staff, medical students, and admissions staff. There may be other similar programmes available to you.
- Look at volunteering websites and see where you can make a difference – Do It & Nextdoor
- Do you already have caring responsibilities for members of your family? This is very valuable experience you may not even think about as you do it so automatically.

- Help the people in your community – are there any elderly or isolated people that would just love someone to talk to, someone to take them to the shops or just to do a few odd jobs for them?

All experiences are valuable, so have a think about what you may have already achieved, what you would like to achieve and how you could make those things happen. If you are struggling there is always help available. The universities can help you arrange a chat with a specialist or put you in touch with medical students that would be happy to talk to you about their experiences – don't be afraid to ask.

13. Which speciality should I choose?

The NHS states there are over 60 specialities, so as a doctor you are really spoilt for choice. You will have plenty of time through your studies and as part of your training to experience a number of these, so you can see what might suit you as you go along. There is no pressure to make the decision immediately, so the world is your oyster. You never know what might spark your interest. In reality many students still don't know what career direction they want to go in by the time they finish medical school.

14. How do I write my personal Statement?

The personal statement is your chance to sell yourself to the university. You will have a 4000-character (500 word) limit to do this so take plenty of time and think carefully about what you would like to include. 500 words may seem a lot, but once you get started you will find that it isn't, so you will need to be concise. Be clear in what you write, show you know your strengths and be enthusiastic, but don't exaggerate. Make sure you have someone that can proofread it, check for grammar/spelling issues, and give you constructive feedback. Don't be tempted to copy any online examples or share your statement online, they are all checked for similarity so it may affect your chances of being offered a place.

You will only be writing one personal statement that will be seen by all the universities you have chosen to apply to, so don't mention any university by name.

Things to include:

- why you are applying
- what makes you suitable
- your relevant skills and experience
- your extracurricular activities, any relevant work experience, or volunteering etc

There are lots of useful tips on the UCAS website to help you with this, so do have a look.

15. Why is a reference important?

It supports what you have said in your personal statement and helps build a picture of your suitability for a career in medicine. It is also an opportunity for someone else to explain any circumstances that have maybe held you back. It can also contribute towards your application score as some universities use it to help filter out applicants prior to interview.

16. Who can write my reference?

- A school teacher - form tutor, head teacher, subject-specific teacher
- Work experience referee
- Extra-curricular supervisor – Coach, trainer, volunteer organiser
- Someone who knows you well and can back up what you have written in your personal statement

Be proactive. Make sure you request it early and then collaborate with your referee. Once they have written it, ask to see the reference and go through it together to make sure it is correct.

17. What if I don't get into medicine straight away?

Don't be disheartened, there are several options you can consider:

- think about taking a year out and developing any skills you may have been lacking initially – turn those negatives into positives
- consider graduate entry following another degree
- think about the option to study overseas
- consider other healthcare roles – nursing, physiotherapist, psychologist, midwife etc.

Becoming a doctor takes a great deal of perseverance, so sticking with it and making a second attempt demonstrates your commitment and dedication to your goals and can show you in a positive light for your next application. If you have used the extra time wisely, you will have lots more examples and experiences you can draw on to demonstrate how you have developed in those areas where you weren't quite as competitive previously.