

Pathways to Medicine

Claire Churchill – Deputy Head of Outreach, University of Birmingham

Claire Forsman – Head of Undergraduate Recruitment and Outreach, University of Edinburgh



What we will cover

- **Addressing misconceptions**
- **Pre-application support**
 - Entry requirements
 - WP programmes
 - Work experience
- **Application support**
 - UCAS application
 - Personal statements
 - Interview preparation
- **Teacher and adviser support**
- **Additional resources**
- **Questions?**



True or false?

1

You need perfect GCSEs and A-level grades to have a chance of getting into Medicine

2

Most students who apply for Medicine come from independent schools

3

If a student doesn't get into Medicine on their first application, they have no realistic chance of becoming a doctor

4

Students must apply for four Medicine courses only and not any other programme

5

Work experience in a hospital is essential if a student is going to have a realistic chance of being made an offer

6

Widening participation programmes can significantly improve a student's chance of getting into Medicine

7

Fewer than 50% of medicine applicants each year receive an offer

8

A student with a low UCAT score has no chance of securing a place to study Medicine

9

Some universities will consider students who achieve ABB or lower to study Medicine

Answers

False

Strong grades are important, but not necessarily perfect ones. Many successful applicants have some grade variation

True

54% of entrants to UK medical schools come from non-selective state schools, while 24% are from independent schools. However students from private schools are 1.5x more likely to receive an offer even accounting for

False

It may make it more challenging, but many successful doctors either reapply, enter graduate entry Medicine, or study related degrees first.

False

Students can apply for up to four Medicine courses, but the fifth UCAS choice can (and often should) be a related non-Medicine course for a backup plan

False

Clinical work experience is helpful, but universities recognise not all students have the same access. Other forms of caring or volunteering experience are equally valuable

True

Widening participation programmes can lower entry requirements, provide mentoring, and improve access to interviews

True

Medicine is highly competitive; success rates are generally under 50% each year for students applying

False

While a high UCAT score helps at competitive medical schools, students with lower scores can still get offers from universities that place less emphasis on UCAT, or that consider applications more holistically.

True

A number of universities support under-represented student with lower grades through WP programmes or contextual admissions, some even taking students with BBB at A-level (or lower)

Pre-application support



Things to consider before applying

Why do you want to be a doctor?

Love of science

Family support (or pressure...?)

Suitable personal
qualities – resilience,
hard-working etc

Committed to a challenging
work-life balance

Want to make an
impact in healthcare

Passion for helping
other people

Did work experience
and enjoyed it

Excited by range of
career pathways

Good at science and not
sure what else to do

Predicted high grades



**Students need to have a
strong personal motivation
and commitment to studying
Medicine and becoming a
doctor in the NHS**

RG entry requirements

University	Typical A-level requirements	Minimum GCSE requirements	Contextual entry requirements
University of Birmingham	A*AA (incl. chem & bio)	Minimum of 7 GCSEs at grade 7 (A) or above, including Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys) at grade 6 (B).	AAB - ABB
University of Bristol	AAA (incl. chem & either bio, phys, maths/further maths)	At least a 7 (A) in Maths and a 4 in Eng Lang	ABB
University of Cambridge	A*A*A (incl. chem & one/two of bio, phys, maths/further maths)	No specific GCSE requirements; however, high academic performance is expected.	No formal contextual offers
Cardiff University	AAA (incl. chem & bio)	Minimum of GCSEs at grade 6 (B) or above, including Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (Bio, Chem or double science).	AAB - ABB
University of Edinburgh	A*AA (incl. chem & bio, maths/FM, phys)	Minimum of grade 7(A) or above, including Eng, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys).	AAA
University of Exeter	A*AA (incl. chem & bio)	At least a 6 (B) in Eng Lang	AAB
University of Glasgow	AAA (incl. chem & either bio, phys, maths)	No specific GCSE requirements; however, high academic performance is expected.	For Scottish students only
Imperial College London	A*AA (incl. chem & bio)	No specific GCSE requirements; however, high academic performance is expected.	AAA
King's College London	A*AA (incl. chem & bio)	At least a 6 (B) in Maths and Eng Lang	Need to apply for Extended Medical Degree Programme MBBS (A101)
University of Leeds	AAA (incl. chem & bio)	Minimum of 6 GCSEs at grade 6 (B) or above, including Eng lang, maths, bio, chem/double science.	ABB

RG entry requirements

University	Typical A-level requirements	Minimum GCSE requirements	Contextual entry requirements
University of Liverpool	AAA/A*AB(incl. chem & either bio, phys, maths – A*A)	Minimum of 9 GCSEs at grade 6 (B) or above, including Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys).	AAB - ABB
University of Manchester	AAA (incl. chem or bio and one from chem, bio, phys, maths, FM or psychology)	Minimum of 7 GCSEs at grade 7 (A) or above, including Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys) at grade 6 (B).	AAB - ABB
Newcastle University	AAA	The best 8 GCSEs will be scored and candidates ranked.	ABB - BBB
University of Nottingham	AAA (incl. chem & bio)	Minimum of 6 GCSEs at grade 7 (A) or above, including Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys).	AAB
University of Oxford	A*AA (incl. chem & at least one of bio/phys/Maths)	No specific GCSE requirements; however, high academic performance is expected.	No formal contextual offers
Queen Mary University of London	A*AA (incl. chem & bio)	Minimum of maths grade 4 (C) and Physics grade 4 (C) if not offered at A-level	AAA - AAB
Queen's University Belfast	A*AA - AAAA (incl. chem & bio)	Minimum of 6 GCSEs at grade 6 (B) or above, including Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys).	Exact details not stipulated
University of Sheffield	AAA (incl. chem or bio and a second science)	Minimum of 5 GCSEs at grade 7 (A) or above, with at least a 6 (B) in Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys).	AAB
University of Southampton	AAA (incl. bio and one other science subject)	Minimum of 7 GCSEs at grade 6 (B) or above, including Eng lang, maths, and at least two science subjects (bio, chem, or phys).	BBB
University College London (UCL)	A*AA (incl. chem & bio)	Minimum of grade 6 (B) or above in Eng lang and maths	AAB
University of York (Hull York Medical School)	AAA (incl. chem & bio)	6 GCSEs at Grade 9/A* - 4/C or equivalent, including Eng lang and Maths at Grade 6/B or above.	AAB - ABB

Widening Access Programmes

- **What?**

- Programmes to support students from backgrounds under-represented within higher education/in Medicine

- **Who?**

- Students will need to meet specific (university-dependent) eligibility criteria including postcode measures, school performance measures, first in family, care experienced, young carer, household income etc

- **Benefits?**

- Access to academic taster sessions, work experience, mentoring, UCAT support etc
- Alternative offers, enhanced funding, on-course support

- **How?**

- Look for programmes at universities students are interested in applying for
- Most will run in Year 12
- Applications will generally need to be made directly to the university
- There may be specific requirements for students to receive the benefits e.g. attendance at on-campus events



Work experience

Examples

- Shadowing GPs or other healthcare professionals
- Working in a care home
- Volunteering with vulnerable members of society e.g. adults with learning difficulties, children with SEN
- Working with charities focused on medical issues e.g. mental health or chronic illnesses
- University research projects or clinical trials
- Public health volunteering
- Customer service roles, leadership roles
- Online experiences

Tips

- Do you like it?! – doing work experience is a great way to decide if medicine is the correct career path
- Start early – it's never too early to get experience to inform decision making
- Be proactive – reach out to charities, clinics etc
- Keep a reflective diary – record what has been learnt and how it has deepened interest in medicine and developed skills
- Don't just list it – use the experiences to talk in depth in the personal statement or interview, and to develop skills and qualities that will be useful in the profession

Application support



Breakdown of Application Process

- **(Predicted) Exam Results** ✓
- **Universities Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT)**
- **Personal Statement**
- **References**
- **Interviews**

Encourage pupils to break the process down into smaller, manageable chunks to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

UCAT (Universities Clinical Aptitude Test)

- Admissions test used in selection process by all UK medical schools
- Assesses range of key mental abilities identified by medical schools
- Sit the test in same year that student applies through UCAS
 - (i.e. Summer between Y12 and Y13 this year to start in 2026)
 - Can sit before or after exam results – no advantage sitting before vs. after results
- Can only sit the test once per test cycle (no resits)
- Sat at nearest Pearson VUE test centre

UCAT (Universities Clinical Aptitude Test)

- Approx. 2 hour, multiple-choice, computer-based test
- No curriculum content (not similar to any other exam they'll have prepared for)
- £70 to sit test, but [bursaries available to cover cost of test](#)
- Alternative test formats available for those eligible for special arrangements
- Lots of FREE preparation resources on UCAT website and elsewhere
 - DON'T need to fork out for expensive preparation courses

Format is changing for 2026 entry – framed around 3 questions, not free text:

1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?

- Motivation for choosing this course / knowledge of subject area

2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

- How are your current and previous studies relevant to your chosen course?
- What transferable/core skills do you have?

3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

- Work experience/volunteering/ employment plus personal experiences/achievements

Medicine Personal Statements

What are medical schools looking to see in a personal statement?

Personal Qualities/Attributes

- Informed & motivated
- Empathetic
- Organised
- Interested in others
- Communication skills
- Team work
- Leadership

Examples to demonstrate:

- Motivation for Medicine
- Key qualities/attributes
- Career exploration
- Extra curricular achievements
- Understanding of career

Reflection:

- **WHY** attributes/qualities are important
- **HOW** skills/qualities have been developed
- **WHAT** did they gain from experiences?

Quality over Quantity: Less examples but more in depth reflection of what they've taken from experiences and why they'll help them as a medical student and/or doctor

Personal Statement vs. Reference

- Applicants' Personal Statements should be purely focussed on applying for medicine
- Any extenuating circumstances should be outlined in supporting reference to avoid using unnecessary characters in personal statement
- In some cases, applicants may want to draw upon extenuating circumstances in their personal statement. For Example:
 - Applicant spent periods of time in hospital setting which has motivated them to pursue a career in medicine
 - Applicant has significant caring responsibilities at home and has been able to effectively manage their time to do study on top of these responsibilities

References are used to help admissions teams:

- Understand the context of students' attainment and qualifications – systematic, and individual
- Understand applicants' attributes and readiness for university study
- Understand how applicants have demonstrated their interest in a subject, or their chosen profession
- Understand an applicant's achievements beyond the academic

Predicted grades really important – if it is not possible to add these in the “predicted grades” section, they **MUST** be included in the reference.

Extenuating Circumstances

Provide as much information as possible about the circumstance/situation to allow admissions teams to review and apply flexibility/levers where they can

For example:

- **Caring responsibilities** - Who they are caring for? What type of responsibilities they have for this/these person(s)? The frequency of their responsibilities? The impact this has on them and their daily life
- **Illness or disability** - impact on attendance, the number of subjects taken in a sitting, amount of time able to study outside of school

Extenuating Circumstances

Example 1:

'Joshua helps to care for his younger siblings as his Mum suffers from a long term health condition'

Example 2:

'Joshua helps to care for his younger siblings. His Mum, who is a single parent, has a long term health condition which means she often struggles to do basic things like getting out of bed, dressing, cooking and cleaning. Joshua therefore often has to help get his younger siblings up and organised each morning and fix their breakfast. He also helps with their homework and often either cooks a meal for everyone himself or helps his Mum with this. This means he has limited time to dedicate to his studies outside of school time. He shows incredible resilience and a maturity beyond his years.'

Interview Types

Multiple-Mini Interview (MMI)

- Number of short stations with different examiners
- Anywhere between 5-12 mins per station
- Focused encounters
- Different topics at each
- Minimises effect of chance and bias
- Number of stations varies

Panel Interview

- Similar to a traditional job interview
- 2-3 interviewers on panel
- Could be 2 different panel interview
- Will cover multiple topics
- May also include a task or scenario to discuss

Assessment Day

- Mixture of group task and MMI-style stations
- Assessing ability to work as part of a team
- Individual stations assessing different topics
- Different examiners at each station and group task



Interview Topics

Interviews may include, but are not limited to:

- Role play scenarios
 - Not necessarily medical related
 - Assess communication and interpersonal skills
- Motivation for studying medicine
- Completing a task individually or as a group
- Ethical Scenarios/Medical Ethics
 - Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-Maleficence, Justice
- Current affairs in medicine
- Discussing examples of specific skills

Autonomy

Beneficence

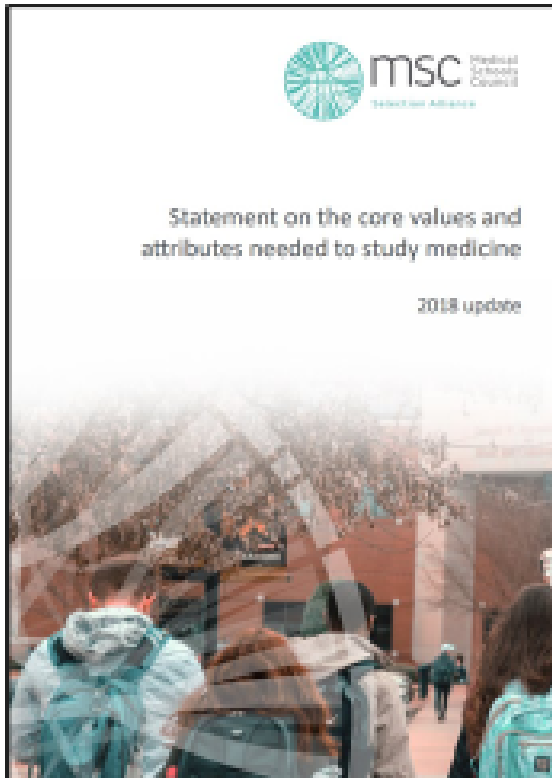
Non-Maleficence

Justice

4 Pillars of Medical Ethics: Useful for pupils to research before interviews

What are interviewers looking for?

- MSC Statement on the core values and attributes needed to study medicine
- General Medical Council (GMC) Good Medical Practice



Links above to resources that outline key skills and attributes needed to study medicine.

For example (not exhaustive list!):

- Insight into your own strengths and weaknesses
- Problem solving
- Dealing with uncertainty
- Ability to take responsibility for your own actions
- Effective communication, including reading, writing, listening and speaking
- Teamwork
- Ability to treat people with respect
- Resilience and the ability to deal with difficult situations
- Empathy and the ability to care for others

How can teachers and advisers support?



What can you do?



Discussion

How can teachers and advisers best support students interested in pursuing medicine?

What works well in your school or college?

What would you like to learn from others?



5 minutes



Things to think about

- **Identify** potential early deadline applicants before summer (including Dentistry, Vet and Oxbridge!)
- **Leave enough time** before 15th October deadline to check personal statements and prepare references
- **Be mindful of added pressures** of applying for medicine: UCAT, early deadline and interviews on top of coursework/exams
- Encourage students to **focus on one aspect of the process at a time** (i.e. UCAT then Personal Statement then Interviews)
- Can you or colleagues help with **interview prep** (i.e. mock interviews)?
- Students can reapply if unsuccessful first time (depending on feedback). Some students apply 2-3 times before getting in!



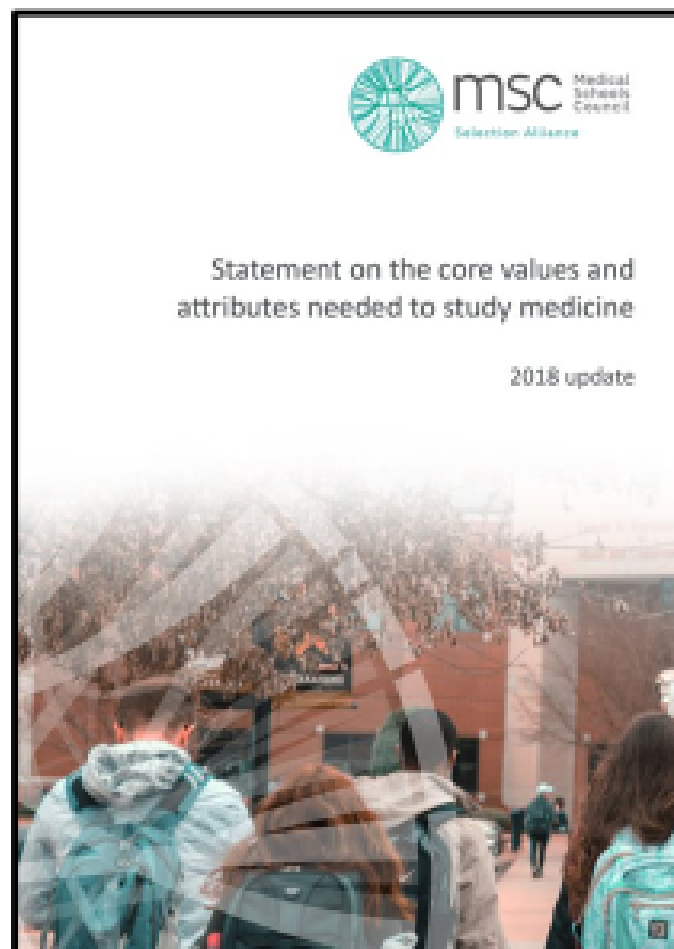
Checklist

- ☐ Callout to new Y13 group to identify early applicants
 - ☐ Sense check if they're aware of application process and what's needed
 - ☐ Encourage them to sign up with any local programmes or summer schools that can support them
- Before Summer Break
- ☐ Have they sat UCAT or will they be sitting it before testing closes?
 - ☐ Checking drafts of personal statement
 - ☐ Have they checked all the entry requirements (including UCAT requirements) for choices of university?
- Before 15th October deadline
- ☐ Encourage to take a bit of a break after deadline before preparing for any interviews
 - ☐ Support with interview preparation, if possible
 - ☐ Encourage to attend offer holder information days before making Firm/Insurance choice
- After 15th October Deadline

Additional resources



Key Values and Attributes for Medicine



- Medical Schools Council **Statement on Core Values and Attributes Needed to Study Medicine**
- Good starting point for applicants to identify key skills that medical schools are looking for
- Also useful when preparing for interviews



Interview Resources



[Medical Schools Council Interview Preparation](#)



[The Medic Portal – Free Interview Questions](#)



[Medify – Free Interview Questions](#)

Questions?

Email: c.s.churchill@bham.ac.uk / claire.forsman@ed.ac.uk

