

Have you thought
about studying
medicine?

BMA

Scotland



British Medical Association
bma.org.uk

Introduction

Medicine is a challenging, exciting and dynamic career path with over sixty specialties and countless more subspecialties to choose from. You could be a GP based in a community, a hospital doctor working on a ward, a surgeon operating in a theatre or an academic teaching and doing research at a university, to give just a few examples.

In the past, getting into medical school to get qualified and start a career in medicine was often very difficult if you didn't come from a well-off or middle-class background, or didn't have well-connected family members. Pupils from state schools were less likely to get offers from universities than those from private schools.¹ Those who did get in from less affluent backgrounds would struggle to support themselves financially.

It didn't even matter if you were a high achiever – the support, the resources and the opportunities simply weren't there for many state school pupils.

In this booklet we go through the basics of how to apply to study medicine – what you need to do and what you need to know if you're thinking of applying. You'll hear from current medical students about what it was like applying and get hints and tips from them. You'll hear about the support that's available for financing your medical degree as well as some of the common myths that exist around studying medicine.

There are many different ways to get into medical school, and not everyone takes the same route. Being a good doctor has nothing to do with where you were brought up or how much money your family has. No matter who you are, where you live or what your background is, anyone who has the ability, the right personal attributes and motivation to become a doctor can, and should, apply to study medicine.

All the best and good luck! Maybe I'll see you on the wards.

Callum George

BMA SMSC deputy chair (2020-2021)

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Why medicine should be for all

For many years studying medicine was only an option for the privileged members of society, typically those with a private education, high earning parents and/or having a doctor in the family. Although like any stereotype, this wasn't always true, there was definitely a thing about medical students being more likely to come from a family with money or at the very least from a family with at least one or two doctors in it somewhere. While it might seem to many that medicine is a lofty, inaccessible career, difficult to get into and requiring a certain type of person, medical schools today are not unreachable. You don't have to be from a particular background or be among the absolute top of your school to have a chance of getting a place.

It is important to realise why so much work goes into trying to ensure medical schools don't just cater to that stereotype of the privileged private school pupil. To study and work as a doctor, you do need to have, or be able to develop, certain qualities. However, these aren't necessarily having a wide vocabulary, good public speaking skills, self-assuredness, and an air of confidence. Those are qualities that an expensive education often brings, and they may well come in handy during medical training and practice, but what is far more important is empathy, kindness, and a genuine desire to make people feel better. An inquisitive, curious mind. An openness and approachability that allows people to confide in you and tell you things they may not tell their own friends and family. The self-awareness to know what your limits are, and the ability and willingness to continually reflect and evaluate your own work. A drive to always learn more. These are qualities that anyone can have, no matter their background, the school they went to, or what grade they got in their last exam.



If you feel you have these qualities, or are willing to develop them, then don't ever let anyone tell you that you're not good enough for medicine.

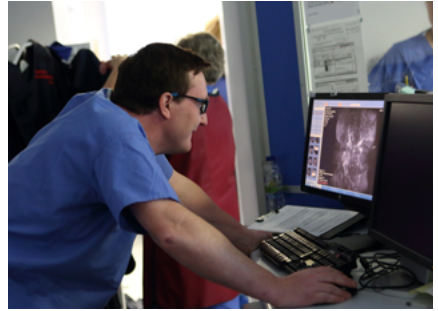
In the average doctor's career, they'll encounter countless people from every walk of life. Many people they meet will be in difficult social and financial situations. Doctors' careers often allow them a comfortable lifestyle, but to communicate with their patients, they have to be able to relate to the position that they may find themselves in and understand the wider world that contributes to their illness. The broader and more diverse the perspectives of clinicians we have contributing to our health service in Scotland, the better it will serve the people who rely on it.



Is medicine for you?

Medicine is a profession like no other. A lot of people spend years at school, college or university learning about things that interest them and then find a job to start at the end of their education – ideally something that relates in some way to what they've studied. Others leave education as early as they can to find work that doesn't ask for a university degree.

Medicine is one of a few special careers where the education never really ends. In order to provide the best care for their patients, doctors must be constantly learning about the latest advances and changes to their practice, and this lifelong learning must be something that you are not only comfortable with but would relish in your career. The vast complexity of the field with all its varied specialties and subspecialties means that even after you've graduated from medical school, there are often many years of postgraduate training to come before you are considered a fully-trained, senior doctor (as a consultant or general practitioner). In 2019, there were over 80% as many doctors in training at any given time as there were fully trained consultants across all specialties,



and nearly two thousand more doctors in training overall than there were fully trained GPs.² You can find out more about the different pathways after graduation later in the booklet, on [page 47](#).

An interest in people is essential. There are many careers where you can do great things to help people and can apply science to problems

of human illness and suffering, from the laboratory bench or the office desk. A doctor needs to be able to make direct connections with people and learn about them. They need to be advocates for the people who come to them for help.

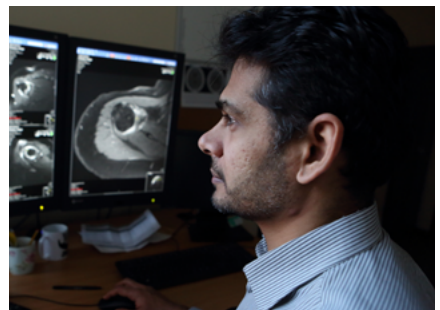


Of course, if you are interested in helping people and want to work with people directly, you may consider nursing or another allied health profession. Medicine stands out with a level of responsibility and expectation that goes beyond other careers in healthcare.

As a doctor at any stage in your career, you are relied upon to make critical and complex decisions. You are expected to lead and to advise, but at the same time you never have to do these things alone. Doctors must always be adept team-players, working as part of close-knit, multi-disciplinary teams no matter which department of a hospital you work in, or no matter where your GP practice is.

Doctors must have inquisitive, enquiring minds, part-scientist and part-detective, drawing from the great wealth of knowledge they accumulate over an entire career. They must apply it in the context of experience, recognising the patterns of illness from what they have dealt with in the past while always remaining vigilant and ever aware that the patient in front of you is a unique, distinct person and may not fit neatly into the diagnosis which might seem the obvious answer to colleagues.

Being a doctor is not the ever-glamorous vision depicted in TV and films. As a profession, medicine is demanding, it is relentless, it can be emotionally and physically draining and is frequently personally challenging. With the amount of time and effort needed to train and work as a doctor, it is closer to being a way of life than simply a career – but despite all of this, it is undoubtedly one of the richest, most privileged and most rewarding endeavours to which anyone could dedicate their working life.




A current widening participation perspective

Cameron MacCorquodale, 3rd year medical student, University of Glasgow

I come from a relatively poor area and a school ranking in the bottom thirty in Scotland for attainment. My case might be a little bit different from most applicants to medicine because I decided relatively late on in school that I wanted to apply – only at the start of fifth year. This meant that I needed to crash Higher Chemistry in my sixth year, and this is something that I found out I needed by looking at university websites and phoning or emailing admissions departments by myself.

When it comes to support that I got from my school, it was little to none. My school rarely had people applying to medicine or being successful in getting offers, so it was pretty much on me to get things done by myself. I started by looking at university websites for all the entry requirements and criteria I would need to meet – things like work experience, entrance exams (such as the University Clinical Aptitude Test), subjects and extracurricular stuff.

I found work experience to be one of the hardest aspects of the application process, especially with the lack of support from my school. I would suggest starting by looking for any work experience schemes run by your local NHS health board and applying for them. I did this, however had to phone them twice for my application to finally be progressed and to be given a one-day placement. One day didn't seem enough to me so I then managed to find online a list of GP practices in my area that are attached to Scottish medical schools. I emailed these practices explaining my circumstances and luckily enough for me, I managed to get a one-day GP placement!




One thing I will stress about work experience and something I wish I had known at the time is that you don't need to overdo it – two days did me just fine! Its more about having at least some (even if it isn't much) clinical experience and the reflection that you bring from that experience.

I also signed up for the REACH Edinburgh programme online as my school fell into its catchment area. They would send regular emails about medical-related events that were happening, and these were opportunities to gain more knowledge about medicine and valuable experience for applying. Although I didn't go to lots of events from REACH, the ones I did go to such as their Anatomy workshop were really great experiences to see what life as a medical student would be like, and something different that I could add to my personal statement and talk about in interviews.

One thing I wish that I did know about before applying was Medic Insight – a programme run by medical students specifically for widening participation students. Unfortunately, I didn't know about this before applying, however it is helpful in getting valuable clinical experience and makes gaining work experience a whole lot easier.

It is also useful to volunteer at a local charity – I volunteered once a week for a few months helping disabled children and adults, and this is something which is valued on personal statements and acts as a form of work experience. It is also relatively easy to sign up for volunteering at local charities and will help you develop skills that you will need in medical school.

I can say that all the hard work in applying is worth it. It's scary at first, however everyone here is in the exact same boat and no one is at a disadvantage – everyone is taught the same things to the same standards. There's so many support networks and several opportunities to do amazing things. I've made many friends for life here and really feel a sense of pride in studying medicine and hope that you will too!



MYTHBUSTERS

Before we get into the 'how' of applying to medical school, you might be wondering what it's like. You may already have heard stories and rumours, some encouraging, others not so much. Many people assume that you have to be rich to study medicine, or you might have been told that you've got no chance if you don't have bucketloads of 'A' grades. Let's clear some things up...

The myth: You have to have lots of money to study medicine.

The truth: Whilst it does cost more to study medicine than other subjects (mainly because the course is longer than most), there are plenty of organisations out there that offer generous financial support, like Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS). Take a look at [page 40](#), where we chat about the money side of studying medicine.

The myth: Only students with 5 'A' grades go on to be doctors.

The truth: This isn't true! There are many routes into medicine these days, and medical schools look for lots more than just high grades. They want students who are enthusiastic, curious and can relate to their patients. There is often some grade flexibility for students from a widening participation background too.

The myth: You must have loads of work experience in hospitals or doctors' surgeries.

The truth: There are many ways to show interest in medicine – some people actually have more experience through personal circumstances – by helping a relative or close friend or through illness or disability. Volunteering in the health or social sector as well as part-time jobs are equally valuable in showing commitment, determination and an ability to do things outside of schoolwork.

The myth: You spend all your time studying in medical school.

The truth: Whilst medicine does require quite a lot of hours in the library or on placement, it's definitely possible (and encouraged!) to keep up with your hobbies, part-time work and your social life. Having a balanced life will help you become the best doctor you can be.

The myth: You have to focus only on science subjects to apply to medicine.

The truth: While most medical schools ask for subjects like Biology and Chemistry, they also like to see applicants who have varied interests. The best doctors are well-rounded, so it is totally possible to get into medical school with subjects you might not think are relevant to medicine. Problem-solving, communication, and creative skills can be just as useful as science!

The myth: I won't fit in at medical school.

The truth: Every medical student gets a bit of imposter syndrome from time-to-time, I promise. You might have a certain image of what a medical student looks like, but we all have different personalities, interests and skills, and all come from a diverse range of backgrounds. The quality we all have in common is that we're passionate about becoming good doctors – if this sounds like you, you'll fit in perfectly!





What is medical school like?

Muz Ahmad, 3rd Year, University of Edinburgh

I found that although there aren't many WP (widening participation) students at university, it doesn't have to mean that you feel excluded or isolated. At times there have definitely been periods where I've felt I am perhaps not as worthy of being here as others, or I feel insecure about my capabilities during the academic year. But then it's always helpful to remind yourself that you wouldn't be at university if you weren't capable! We need doctors from diverse backgrounds to represent different groups and understand our future patients, so it's important to understand you are just as important as your peers.

Getting involved with the WP programmes at Edinburgh has been really helpful in finding a purpose and using my experiences to help others. People from WP backgrounds are underrepresented in higher education, so to be able to guide younger people from similar environments to my own has been very rewarding!

Jakub Sikora, 3rd Year, University of St Andrews

I found my widening participation experience at St Andrews to be extremely supportive, and it provided a nurturing environment. I felt that I had a plethora of avenues that I could reach out to throughout the year. This was an incredible help with bridging the gap from high school to university, and for developing my skills in preparation for my journey into Medicine.

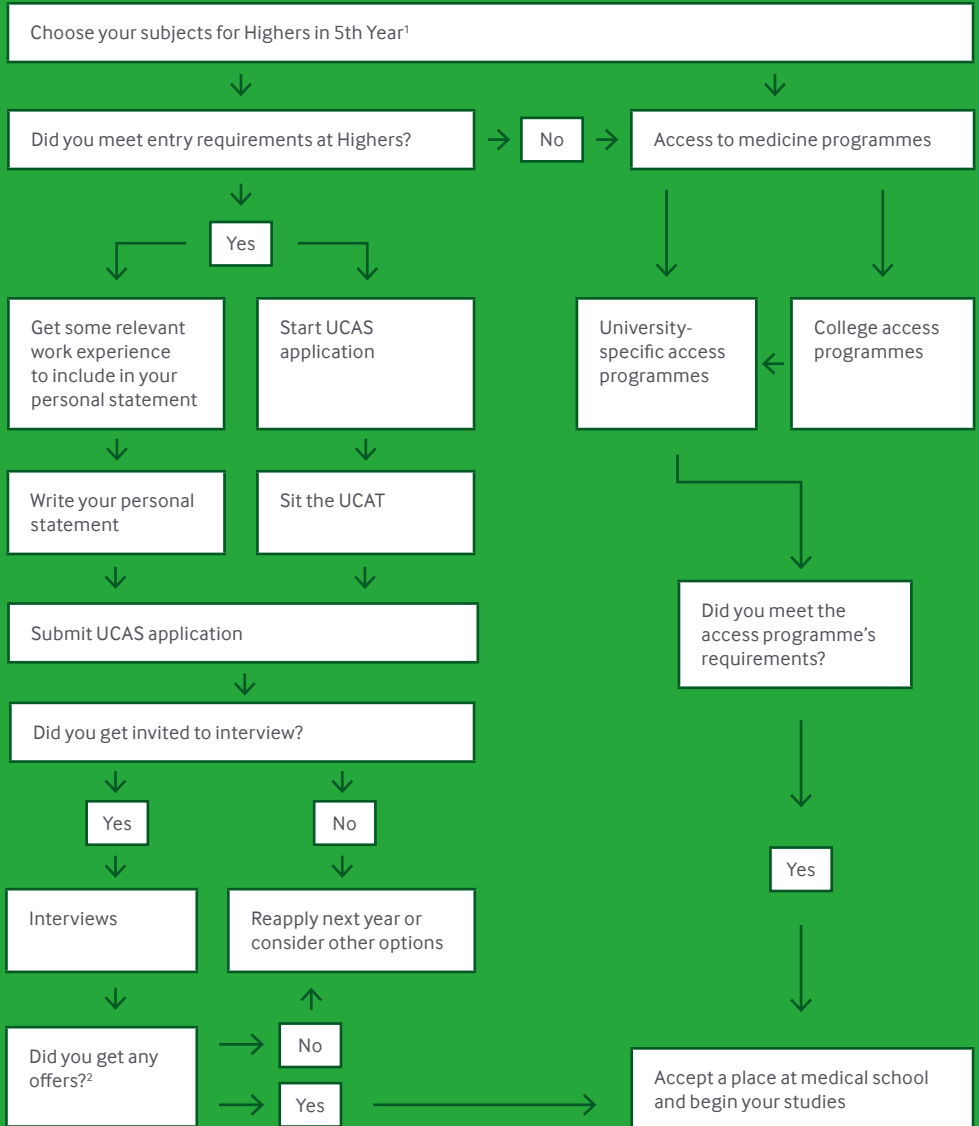
The programme offers a wide range of exposure to a number of academic fields including Biology and Chemistry, and a student selected component. This was great as it allowed me to pursue and explore my interests and prepare a solid foundation of knowledge that could be built upon in my later years. I would offer this course to anyone that is exploring widening participation routes into Medicine, as it allows for integration here at St Andrews, and for development of the necessary skills for studying Medicine. You can find out more about universities' widening participation programmes in our REACH section ([page 22](#))

Margaret Jack, 1st Year, University of St Andrews

Beginning to study medicine during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown is undoubtedly interesting! All lectures have been online, but we have been very lucky because sessions such as anatomy, clinical skills and some lab practicals have been conducted in person albeit under appropriate restrictions. I'm lucky, as studying mostly online seems to work quite well for me personally and studying Medicine even in this unpredictable way has been incredible and such a journey! It's impressive how much information we have learnt even in a single year, I feel I've developed a lot even personally and professionally.

That being said, there's certainly a lot to adjust to and I would say be eager to find out what works best for you for studying as it will most likely be different to what you have done previously. But crucially, be easy on yourself as you settle into medical school – and long after! You will be working hard with your studies and having time to relax and doing non-Medicine related things are arguably just as important to fend off burnout. Looking after yourself first is vital to looking after others. Happy studies!

Structure of applying

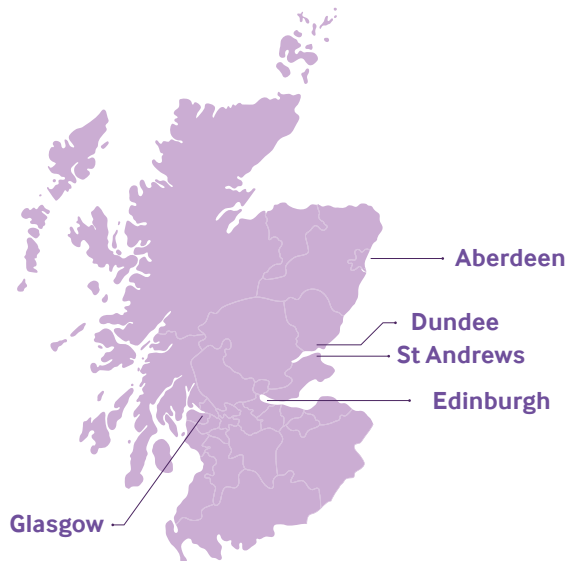


1 Entry requirements for Scotland's medical schools can be found on [page 16](#).

2 These are often conditional on further requirements to achieve in 6th Year.

Where can I study medicine?

- **Aberdeen** – The five-year MBChB programme here offers senior students the opportunity to study in the Highlands and Islands as well as at the city's major hospitals.
- **Dundee** – Teaching at this renowned school is based within the main teaching hospital campus itself with students also sent to Perth and around Tayside, offers a five-year MBChB course.
- **Edinburgh** – The UK's oldest medical school and one of the oldest in the English-speaking world, offers a six-year MBChB course with an integrated BMedSci degree.
- **Glasgow** – One of the largest medical schools in Europe that has students at over twenty hospitals, has a mix of lecture-based, problem-based and case-based teaching on its five-year MBChB programme.
- **St Andrews** – Students here complete three years locally and are awarded a BSc before completing a further three years at a partner medical school elsewhere in Scotland or at one of a few in England.
- **ScotGEM** – The only graduate-entry course in Scotland offers a four-year MBChB and is jointly run by St Andrews and Dundee medical schools, with extensive and long-term placements in remote and rural areas across the country.



Entry requirements

Each medical school has different entry requirements, so it's important to check these individually and ensure you will meet them before applying. Medical schools will typically give out Conditional offers that will give you a place as long as you meet certain grades in your S6 exams.

Generally, they ask for all A and B grades, but this can vary depending on your background.

Check with the individual medical schools to be sure of the entry requirements you should be aiming to meet. Most of the time you can get the info you need from the course pages on the university websites, but if you need more clarity, don't hesitate to contact their admissions teams!

All of the medical programmes in Scotland are listed here. Note that these are all medical schools, except ScotGEM, which is a graduate-entry programme jointly led by St Andrews and Dundee.

Aberdeen	Dundee	Edinburgh
Glasgow	St Andrews	ScotGEM



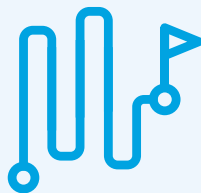
Contextual admissions

Usually, you will qualify for lowered grade requirements if you meet some of the following criteria:

- Have engaged with a [REACH](#) project
- Reside in an area of socio-economic disadvantage
 - You can find out more about this by looking at your area within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation documents on the [Scottish Government website](#)
- Are being looked after (or have been looked after) by the local authority
- Are a registered carer
- Attend a school where low numbers of pupils go on to university
- Attend a school where pupils generally have low attainment in Highers and Advanced Highers (ask your school office or guidance teacher about these last two)

Some medical schools, such as St Andrews, pledge to make an offer to students who have been in care, or reside in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.

You can check the webpages of the individual medical schools to find more information about contextual offers, and the criteria that must be met to receive one.





Didn't get the grades?

It is an awful feeling to have missed out on the grades you need. There is of course always the option of resitting Highers and reapplying during next year's application cycle, but this is by no means the only path you can take. Many doctors started out doing a first degree (or even sometimes more than one degree) in another subject before entering medical training as a graduate. This route isn't for everyone, however, and there are other options.

Every medical school in Scotland runs a one-year 'access to medicine' course that leads directly onto their undergraduate medical programme if the access student meets the requirements and passes the course. Many folks get into medical school by this route. These courses assist you in getting into medical school at the same time as helping you adapt to life at university.

Access to medicine courses

All of these access courses differ slightly in structure and delivery, as well as in eligibility requirements. Check the universities' own websites below for the most up-to-date information.

Aberdeen Gateway 2 Medicine (G2M):

www.abdn.ac.uk/smmsn/undergraduate/g2m

Dundee Gateway to Medicine:

www.dundee.ac.uk/study/ug/gateway-to-medicine

Edinburgh Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP):

www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/edinburgh-medical-school/medicine/applying/how-to-apply/requirements/access

Glasgow Access Programme (GAP):

www.gla.ac.uk/schools/medicine/mus/admissions/glasgowaccessprogrammegap

St Andrews Gateway to Medicine:

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/medicine/gateway-to-medicine

If you are missing some required qualifications from school, you can still apply to some of these access courses. Otherwise, local colleges will offer the necessary medical science access modules that can allow you to apply for one of the university-specific access courses listed above.

Schools for Higher Education Programme

There are also some non-medicine specific outreach courses intended to help bridge the gap between school and university, which could count toward contextual admission requirements in some cases. These are collectively referred to as the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) and are run at regional level with a few differences between the individual programmes.

ASPIRENorth (Aberdeenshire, Highlands, Moray, Orkney and Shetland): www.aspirenorth.co.uk

FOCUS West (Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Glasgow, Lanarkshire, the West): www.focuswest.org.uk

LEAPS (Borders, Edinburgh, Forth Valley, the Lothians): www.leapsonline.org

LIFT OFF (Dundee and Angus, Fife, Perthshire): lift-off.org.uk

Some of the activities included in these programmes are:

- Introductory sessions that explain higher education
- Workshops on choosing your subjects
- Workshops on managing your finances as a university student
- Information evenings for parents and carers
- One-to-one pre-application advice

Something else worth looking at is the **Sutton Trust Summer Schools** programme which lets you spend a week during school summer holidays studying one or more chosen subjects at a partner university, with all travel and accommodation expenses covered: summerschools.suttontrust.com

Applications open to S5 non-fee-paying school pupils in early January and close in early March. Applications are favoured from pupils who:

- Would be the first generation of their family to attend university
- Are eligible for free school meals
- Are attending a school or college with below average results or low rate of progression to higher education
- Live in a neighbourhood with a low rate of progression to higher education and/or a high level of socio-economic deprivation
- Have at least five A or B passes at National 5 or equivalent, with some specific subjects required depending on the course that's being applied for

Some universities will give preference or reduced offers to students who have attended summer schools!



REACH programme

The national REACH programme runs at every medical school in Scotland and aims to support students who are thinking of applying to Medicine as well as other high-demand professions like Law, Veterinary Medicine and Dentistry depending on the university. Students are supported from S4 through to S6, with a week-long summer school programme running at each university before they apply. Students who complete the REACH programme can use it towards their application for medical school and are supported through the application process as part of the programme.

Dr Giancarlo Bell, FY2 (Foundation Year 2) doctor

When I first applied to medical school, after months of frantic email refreshing, I received a string of rejections without an invitation for a single interview. I was devastated, but I was not surprised. My school had not seen a successful applicant to Medicine for many years. After picking up the pieces, I took the difficult decision to reject my Anatomy offer and to try again another year. Twelve months later, I was delighted to see two unconditional offers to study Medicine sitting on my UCAS page. I credit this dramatic shift to the fact that I was invited to attend the University of Glasgow's widening participation REACH programme shortly after my initial rejection. I attended a week of lectures and workshops and was made to feel comfortable in the initially intimidating surroundings of medical school. The programme made allowances for grades or University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) score, and greatly bolstered my CV. I finally felt prepared for what was coming next. REACH levelled the playing field; it gave me an opportunity that too many working-class applicants never receive. I graduated in June 2019 and I'm now in the middle of FY2. I couldn't be more grateful to have been offered a second chance!



As well as being a great way to meet and get to know fellow hopeful medical students, various services and activities are provided by each REACH programme which vary locally. Here are a few examples:

- Advice and workshops for UCAT, personal statements and interviews
- Mock multiple mini-interview (MMI) sessions
- Organised work experience with doctors in general practice or hospitals
- Surgical skills, emergency care and anatomy workshops
- Shadowing of medical student events including medical career events
- Mentoring schemes
- Loan of textbooks and UCAT or interview preparation books

To qualify for REACH, your secondary school must be on the list of target schools for your closest medical school and you need to meet that programme's specific eligibility criteria. To check this, take a look at the REACH programme pages for each medical school below. If you think you are eligible but have not been informed about the programme by your secondary school, contact the programme administrators at your nearest relevant university.

Aberdeen:

www.abdn.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/reach-1576.php

Dundee:

www.dundee.ac.uk/study/widening-access/in-demand/reach

Edinburgh:

www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/access-edinburgh/high-school-students/reach-edinburgh

Glasgow:

www.gla.ac.uk/study/wp/reach

St Andrews:

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/access/projects/reach

Work experience

Many students think that you can only apply for medical school if you have loads of work experience in a hospital or GP surgery but this isn't the case! Medical schools don't see this type of work experience as a requirement – whilst it can give you a lot to talk about in a personal statement or interview, a volunteering position or part-time job is more relevant to medicine than you might think.

Relevant work experience can be difficult to get if you don't personally know any doctors, so this gives an obvious advantage to people who have doctors in the family. Here are some tips if you don't have a connection already:

- Try and think of anyone you might know that works in a hospital or GP surgery who could contact a doctor on your behalf.
- Get in contact with a local GP practice; they may have experience with taking students in, and practices tend to have different policies with taking students or prospective students so it's worth asking around a few different places.

Non-clinical experience and part-time work can be just as valuable in demonstrating some of the qualities needed to become a doctor.

For example:

- Volunteering in a care home
 - Shows interest in providing care for people
- Working part-time in a shop
 - Working as part of a team and communicating with people
- Caring for a relative or neighbour
 - Shows an interest in providing care, taking interest in their medical condition and providing continuity of care

A programme that has been popular in recent years with those applying to medicine is **Medic Insight**, operated by student-run societies at the Universities of Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh. These societies run events for school pupils to introduce them to what it is like to study medicine and work as a doctor and offer a good alternative to directly organising your own work experience in a medical setting.

Example events include talks given by doctors and medical students about medicine as a career and various workshops, such as ethics in medicine, aimed at S4 pupils. Week-long shadowing visits to hospitals for S5 pupils is another example from the Dundee branch of Medic Insight, although these are open to all Scottish school pupils and therefore competitive. There's also a requirement for particular subject to have been taken at Higher level to be eligible to attend this. The societies also run tours of medical schools, workshops on UCAS applications, personal statements and UCAT.

Dundee:

www.facebook.com/MedicInsightDundee

Edinburgh:

medicinsightedinburgh.wordpress.com

Glasgow:

www.facebook.com/MedicInsightGlasgow

For state school pupils and those from low-income backgrounds interested in research, which can of course be a big part of some (but not all) medical careers, the **Nuffield Foundation** offers an expenses-paid research project opportunity in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) field (which doesn't have to be medicine). As well as being something great to write about in your personal statement and talk about at interviews, you can get the opportunity to put yourself forward for various schemes for young people getting involved in research such as the **Gold CREST Award** or the **Big Bang Competition**.

www.crestawards.org/crest-gold

www.thebigbang.org.uk/the-big-bang-competition

There are minimum academic requirements for this opportunity, which takes place over four to six weeks during the summer after S5. Some bursaries are available to those offered a place who are in need of financial assistance.

See the relevant website for more information:

www.stem.org.uk/nuffield-research-placements.

Personal statement

This is an important part of the UCAS form that needs special attention. Its purpose is to sell yourself to the universities, to give them an idea of the person beyond the grades, and to show them why you are suited to the subject you've applied for. It can only be four thousand characters and forty-seven lines long, so needs planning and lots of re-writing!

Start by making a list of all the school-based and extra-curricular activities you have done since starting secondary school in chronological order to help organise things in your head.

Next, make a second list of the skills and qualities needed by a doctor. This can be things such as the ability to work in a multi-disciplinary team, the ability to listen to others, or the ability to show dedication, for example. Now compare your two lists and match them up. What activities do you do, or have you done in the past, that show you have these skills?

There is very useful and comprehensive guidance about what is expected and required of doctors and medical students available from the GMC (General Medical Council), the doctors' regulator. In particular, look at the GMC's *Outcomes for Graduates and Good Medical Practice* to give you an idea of what kind of qualities and skills to link to in your personal statement. These are available on the GMC website: www.gmc-uk.org.

Medical schools are generally less interested in knowing the exact details of what you've done than what your activities teach you about the skills and qualities needed to train and practice as a doctor.



For example:

'I am part of my local football team that trains every week. Through this I've learned that it's essential to work as part of a team in order to win a match. We can only win through communicating clearly and effectively with each other and supporting each other if any member of the team is struggling.'

shows a lot more than:

'I am captain of the hockey team and we have won ten national trophies; we've also been featured on the national news.'

Whilst the second example might seem more impressive, medical schools are far more interested in what you gain from your activities than the activities themselves. It's important to include your achievements in your personal statement (and if you are captain of a sports team then good for you) but even just being part of a team is valuable and gives you loads to talk about in terms of skills learned and qualities needed.

Some of the skills and qualities commonly looked for are as follows, but this isn't an exhaustive list!

Motivation to constantly learn

Insight into your own strengths and weaknesses

The ability to reflect on your own work

Personal organisation

Working in a multi-disciplinary team

Taking responsibility for your actions

Dealing with difficult or pressured situations



Able to deal with uncertainty

Problem solving

Resilience

Empathy

Of course, it doesn't have to be a sport, hobby or extra-curricular activity that has given you these skills or helped you learn about these qualities. Part-time work, being a carer for a member of your family, volunteering, or helping friends or neighbours are all examples that are equally relevant. Just remember that whatever experiences you choose to write about, make sure to demonstrate what skills you got out of them and how they relate to the qualities needed of a doctor.

An important thing to note is that at least part of any interviews you may be invited to after submitting your application will be based on what you've said in your personal statement. It goes without saying that everything in the statement should be truthful and something you are able to talk about in more detail later!

You should also mention in your statement any medically relevant work experience you may have been able to do, as well as any related programmes such as Medic Insight (Medic Insight (which are described in more detail on pages [25](#) and [26](#) in this booklet) but as with everything else, make sure to write about what you learned from it and be prepared to be asked about it at interview.

More general advice about how to write a strong personal statement, including the 'Do's and Don'ts', is available from UCAS on their website: www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/how-write-ucas-undergraduate-personal-statement.

Personal statement example structure

Personal statements should be as unique as possible but should be written in a natural style, should be concise and should avoid being overly unusual or making excessive use of humour or quotations. You're free to structure it whatever way you like, but we provide a simple example structure for a statement for an application to medicine here to give you an idea of where to begin.

Your personal reason

- This doesn't have to be original, just make sure your reasoning is genuine and well written. Although you don't need to answer the following questions in your statement, bear them in mind when you're writing:
 - If it's medical science that interests you, why not study that instead of medicine?
 - If helping others interests you, why not study nursing or an allied health profession instead of medicine?

Your suitability for the course

- Link any experiences, attributes or skills you have identified in yourself to those required to study and practice medicine and discuss the most relevant first.
- Write about experiences you've had which illustrate those attributes and skills.
- Include any achievements or awards and show how they're relevant to medicine.

Your relevant work experience

- Write about any medically relevant work experience you've had eg shadowing doctors and what you learned from your experience.
- Include any other programmes or events you benefited from that gave you an insight into what it is like working as a doctor.

Extra-curricular interests and hobbies

- As we've said, quality over quantity is best! Demonstrate how the things you do outside school link to the qualities of being a doctor.

Conclusion



Aptitude tests

UCAT

The University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) is an entrance exam that applicants must sit when applying to medical school. Your UCAT score will form a part of your UCAS application and will be between 1200 to 3600, made up of four different scoring areas, along with the Situational Judgement Test, which gives you a level from one to four based on your answers.

The UCAT is a test of aptitude not academic knowledge, so won't be based on any of your school subjects but test you based on some qualities required to become doctors like decision making, problem solving, literacy and numerical skills.

You should allow time to prepare for this test as it will be in a new format you might not be used to. It is delivered under controlled conditions, by computer, in a professional testing centre. Your timings for each section and the overall test are recorded along with your answers.



We recommend the free resources available on the UCAT website (www.ucat.ac.uk/prepare) with more than one thousand example questions and example practice tests. Another great place to find advice on the test and different techniques for tackling it is YouTube, where people who have done the test have shared their wisdom and tips.

It's worth practicing your timing with tests; mental maths; speed reading. Timing is key with the UCAT – it is much better to complete the exam fully than to leave any blanks.

Most people sit the UCAT in the summer, with the last opportunities to register usually in late May or early June, though this can change year to year so it is important to check. Results will be available to you immediately after the test. Before you submit your final UCAS application it is important to check how medical schools use your UCAT score as it may be useful to apply tactically in this way.

It costs a fee to sit the UCAT, however a bursary scheme is offered for students with certain circumstances. Please find more info to see if you qualify for this bursary at: www.ucat.ac.uk/ucat/bursary-scheme. Applicants with disabilities may also be entitled to special arrangements such as extra time – use the information online to work out if you're entitled to these, and if you are, double check that they have been applied before you enter the testing room!



Interviews

So, you've decided to become a doctor and have been invited for an interview at a Scottish medical school – congratulations!

Don't Panic!

The thought of an interview might be scary, but remember that everyone else applying is in the same boat! Even though you might be feeling nervous, preparing and thinking of answers to some of the questions you may be asked can help settle your nerves.

Interviews often assess communication skills, critical and ethical reasoning, and your understanding of a medical career. Your personal statement may also be discussed.

Questions to consider:

Why do you want to be a doctor? Why not nursing/ pharmacy/physiotherapy/science?

What you have done to find out if medicine is the right career for you?

What did you learn during your work experience?

What aspects of this particular course/university particularly appeal to you?

Do you have a realistic understanding of what a career in medicine involves?

What are your other interests/are you an active participant in school life?

Do you have good communication/interpersonal skills and enjoy working with people? Can you give an example?

How do you react to stressful situations? Can you give an example?

Can you demonstrate an active interest in health and medical news stories and talk about what you have read/ heard/seen recently?

What are multiple mini interviews?

Often referred to as MMI, this is a technique some medical schools use to interview candidates. Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and St Andrews medical schools use this method.

Aberdeen and Dundee applicants are invited to rotate through 10 mini-interviews each lasting around seven minutes.

Edinburgh applicants are invited to attend a half-day assessment, during which they will undergo 3 mini-interviews, each lasting 12 minutes, but will also be asked to do a group presentation.

St Andrews applicants are invited to rotate through 6 mini-interviews each lasting around six minutes.

The stations can be a mix of traditional interview format stations to interactive task and roleplaying scenarios.

What is the traditional interview?

Glasgow applicants will be offered two traditional panel interviews each lasting 30 minutes. There are two interviewers on each panel and are usually a combination of medical school staff, consultants and honorary members of the university.

One panel's questions are based on one of two ethical scenarios, which the applicant chooses. Reading time is provided prior to meeting the panel. The other panel focuses on your understanding of what being a doctor means, using questions like those given above, and may explore your personal statement.

You can find more information about how each medical school conducts interviews on the relevant universities' websites.



Interview with an interviewer

Hear from an interviewer at a medical school about the kind of things an interviewer is looking for in an applicant. We talked to Dr Alun Hughes, the Director of Teaching and a Senior Lecturer at the School of Medicine of the University of St Andrews.

So, to start us off, what qualities are you looking for in interviewees?

Like most schools, we make a clear statement of what qualities we're looking for on our admissions website, which are based on criteria identified by the Medical Schools Council. At St Andrews, we're looking for personal qualities such as empathy, good communication and listening skills, leadership skills and the ability to work in a team. We need students to have a well-informed understanding of what a career in medicine involves and to demonstrate commitment to medicine by organising work experience or shadowing, or to have experience of working with ill or disabled people, preferably in health care settings. Given the need for career-long learning, we're looking for applicants that can demonstrate a clear commitment to academic study, staying power, perseverance and intellectual potential.

Are there any topics you would like applicants to show insight or awareness of?

I'd recommend students have an awareness of some of the recent ethical and moral dilemmas facing healthcare, as being able to discuss such issues confidently is a great way to prepare.

Tips for preparing?

Personally, I feel there's a danger in over-preparing what you feel you need to say in interviews as I've encountered students that have launched in to rehearsed speeches that have missed the actual point of what we've actually asked.

That said, there are ways to prepare and feel confident without becoming too rigid: Reflect on your work experience and the lessons you've learned from this, think of examples that illustrate both the strengths and the weaknesses. Read the news for articles about ethical issues in medicine and then discuss them with a friend, family member or just talk to your pet(s): Formulating your ideas out loud will keep them conversational and natural in tone whilst letting you express your opinions.

Ensure you read all the information sent to you by all schools you have interviews with and be aware that many schools will have different approaches to how they interview students. The Medical Schools Council has some excellent information and resources on all stages of the application process on their website:

www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine

What are your top tips for the day?

I think I give the same advice to students at all stages of their careers: Make sure you understand the question or what's being asked of you before answering! If you're unsure, ask. If the interviewer can't give you any more information, then state what you interpret the question to be so they can understand your logic when you answer.

It's also important to remember that some MMI stations will set tasks and completing the task may be less important than how you proceed towards that goal. Always take a moment to check you're proceeding in an appropriate way, which might not necessarily be the fastest way.

Remember each station in an MMI-style interview is an independent interview, so if you feel you haven't done well in one station then don't let yourself carry that feeling into the next station. Refocus yourself on something positive, remembering that you wouldn't be there if the school and everyone who's supported you didn't think you had the qualities to succeed.



It may also help to remember that interviews are often also your opportunity to assess which of the schools you've applied for that you may wish to accept an offer for. Thinking of the whole experience as being a two-way decision process might help you feel more in control during the day.

Why are interviews important to medical schools?

We want students who join us to progress through the course, and interviews are an important opportunity for us to ensure students are prepared and understand what their choice of career means. In the same way, it should be an important opportunity for students to make sure they're making an informed decision to study medicine and that they've reflected on what it means to them.

Is there anything that you wouldn't recommend interviewees do?

Don't give up! Even if you feel out of your depth in a station, or you're struggling to convey what you want to say in a station, the worst thing you can do is stop trying. No amount of preparation will stop you from feeling uncertain during an interview, so don't be afraid to take a pause, collect your thoughts and continue.

Also, don't dress for your interview in a way that isn't professional. You also want to reflect your understanding of the profession in your choice of clothing. It might be worth googling some NHS dress codes for doctors to get an idea of what smart, but casual, choices might be appropriate. A new wardrobe isn't always required – for example, some candidates interview in their school uniform which is completely appropriate.

How important is clinical work experience?

Whilst requirements will vary between schools, for us and many others we're looking for experience that allows students insight to what being a doctor means. It's possible to gain those insights in an area that's not clinical, eg experience gained in a nursing home observing the interactions between healthcare staff and patients is just as acceptable for us. Always check the admission requirements for the schools you intend to apply to, as they can vary.

How do you feel about virtual work experience, and non-clinical types of experience?

As a school, we're very much aware that many students lack the opportunities to get some types of clinical work experience and are pragmatic about what experience we accept as a result. For example, we accept work or shadowing experience in nursing homes or local hospices, or from working with people who have ill health or disability. At the time of writing, we also accept some virtual work experience, specifically the **RCGP (Royal College of General Practitioners)** '[Observe GP](#)' platform, because COVID-19 has severely limited what students can realistically obtain. We don't want students to be disadvantaged because they lack connections with health care professionals or are in a geographic region that limits their opportunities.

What is important in talking and reflecting about experience?

It's very easy to talk enthusiastically about what you've observed during your work experience, but we're looking for you to relate them to your chosen career and show a depth of understanding about what you've observed. Examples that demonstrate team-working between healthcare professionals are always valuable, as are examples that allow you to reflect on professional behaviour or the use communication skills. When you're reflecting, put yourself in the shoes of the patient and the healthcare professionals you've observed. How did they feel? What did you learn from the situation?



Finance

The costs of studying medicine can seem like a major barrier to many who hope to train as a doctor, and it is true that students sometimes struggle to make ends meet. In this section we have gathered some key information that you might find useful about how medical students normally finance their studies and living costs.

SAAS

As a Scottish domiciled student, otherwise known as a 'Home (Scotland) tuition fee status' student, you will apply to the SAAS (Student Awards Agency for Scotland), no matter where in the UK you are studying. SAAS is a government agency that pays grants, loans and bursaries to Scottish domiciled students in higher education. You can apply to SAAS for your support online from April of the year that you will be studying.

- **Tuition fees:** Scottish domiciled students studying in Scotland do not need to pay tuition fees for their first degree, these are paid by SAAS. You must apply to SAAS for payment of fees and these will be sent directly to your University. Students who do not have Home (Scotland) fee status such as those from abroad or elsewhere in the UK may have to pay substantial annual tuition fees to the university. These differ depending on the student's origin and the university they are attending.
- **Bursary:** You may be eligible for a bursary from SAAS that you do not have to pay back. This bursary is determined by the income of whoever you are living with. More information can be found on the SAAS website: www.saas.gov.uk.



- **Student loan:** You do not have to take out a student loan however they tend to make up the majority of students' funding for accommodation and living costs. Student loans are cheaper than other types of finance such as bank loans, overdrafts, credit cards and so on. To access this funding, you need to apply to SAAS annually. The size of student loan you can get varies depending on your circumstances.

SAAS will look at how much you and/or your parents or partner earn and will decide based on this how much your parents or partner are expected to support you and what size of loan they will give you.

Other options from SAAS include:

- Lone Parent Grant
- Disabled Student Allowance
- Vacation Grant for Care Leavers
- Care Experienced Students' Bursary
 - If you have been looked after by a UK local authority and you are under the age of 26 on the first day of the first academic year of your course, you will be eligible to claim a bursary of £7,625.

Up-to-date information and advice about all of these finance options can be found at the SAAS website (www.saas.gov.uk).

If you begin your medical studies at St Andrews, the first three years are based in Scotland and the subsequent three can be based outside Scotland, in which case the arrangements for your tuition fees and loan are slightly different. In the first three years of study, you will receive the normal full support-package available. If you transfer to an institution in England for your clinical years, you will have to pay tuition fees of up to £9,250 in your first year, which will be year four of your studies. You can apply to SAAS for a loan to pay all or some of this fee amount. In all other years, which will be your fifth and sixth year of study, you can apply for the same support package as you got in the first three years of your course; this includes payment of tuition fees, which will be paid for by the NHS. You may also be eligible to apply for a means-tested NHS bursary or supplementary grant, or a non-means-tested loan as applicable.

ScotGEM

Students of the Scottish Graduate Entry Medicine (ScotGEM) programme do not pay any tuition fees if they have Home (Scotland) tuition fee status. This is not available to students from the rest of the UK, who have to partially pay their own fees in year one and apply for student finance and NHS grants to pay the remainder. All ScotGEM students can also apply for the NHS Scotland Return of Service Bursary, which is unique to ScotGEM. This is worth up to £16,000 over the course of the four-year programme, paid in £2,000 instalments each semester. Students are invited to apply for this bursary each year, and don't need to pay the money back – instead, they agree to work one year as a doctor within the NHS in Scotland for each year of the bursary they receive, starting from foundation year one after graduation. There is an option to pay back the bursary, however, if students decide later that they would prefer to work outside Scotland.

ScotGEM students are also eligible for SAAS student loans and for the various financial support and scholarships offered to all undergraduates by the University of St Andrews.

Institutional support

If you have applied for all the support you are entitled to from SAAS but are still finding it difficult to meet your costs, you can apply to your university for help. Each university will have its own finance office, usually run by the local student union, who will be able to provide you with support and further help. You should apply to your university for the following support:

- **Discretionary Fund:** Universities in Scotland have funds from the Scottish Government to assist students who may be in financial difficulty during their studies. These funds are based on your personal circumstances and can usually be accessed through the university's Finance Office.
- **Local Bursaries/Scholarships:** Many universities offer a number of these of varying sizes. You should visit your university website for further information.

Bursaries and grants

Several other organisations offer bursaries and grants.

Here are a few examples:

- The **BMA Charities Trust Fund** offers one-off grants to medical students who may be facing financial hardship throughout their studies. You do not need to be a BMA member to apply to these. Find out more info at: www.bmacharities.org.uk.
- The **Carnegie Trust** offers funding (fee assistance, vacation scholarships and undergraduate expeditions) for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Applicants must be attending a Scottish university and be Scottish by birth, descent or residence. www.carnegie-trust.org
- **Futures for Women** offers interest free loans of up to £1000 for female students. www.futuresforwomen.org.uk
- **Gilchrist Educational Trust** will help those carrying out elective study as well as those facing financial difficulties and struggling to complete their degree. www.gilchristgrants.org.uk
- **Medical Women's Federation** awards a variety of modest awards and prizes throughout the year to female medical students. www.medicalwomensfederation.org.uk
- **Professionals Aid Guild** awards modest grants or loans to students during clinical years only. www.pcac.org.uk
- **Royal Medical Benevolent Fund** offers interest-free loans to students facing financial hardship, and their dependants. www.rmbf.org
- **Sidney Perry Foundation** primarily helps first-degree students, offering grants of up to £1000. www.the-sidney-perry-foundation.co.uk

This is not an exhaustive list, and SAAS maintains a register of educational endowments containing information on a range of educational trusts that provide support. This is available on their website: www.saas.gov.uk.

The **Armed Forces** also provide funding for students considering a military career after graduation from medical school. Find out more about these on the websites of the Army: apply.army.mod.uk/how-to-join/entryoptions/professionally-qualified-officer/, Royal Navy: www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/roles-and-specialisations/services/surface-fleet/medical-officer-cadet and Royal Air Force: www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment.

The BMA provides more detail about student funding in our comprehensive finance guide that is updated every year by the Scottish Medical Students Committee. This can be found online here under the section for Scotland: bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/studying-medicine/becoming-a-doctor/medical-student-finance

Alongside the core costs of studying medicine such as tuition fees, rent and bills for accommodation and living costs, there exists several additional, 'hidden' costs which often aren't apparent to students until after they have started their studies, but in some cases create more barriers for students who are already finding it difficult to cover their costs.

These 'hidden' costs differ depending on where you study, and can include:

- The **aptitude tests** required by universities as part of the admissions process, namely UCAT (for all Scottish medical schools) or GAMSAT (Graduate Medical School Admissions Test, relevant to ScotGEM only), which have an associated cost. The UCAT Consortium does offer a bursary to applicants in financial hardship to cover this cost, but there is no such scheme for GAMSAT.
- **Costly equipment** (eg stethoscope or lab coat) or expensive textbooks that are considered essential for students to own.
- Transport costs for getting between accommodation, medical school and placement locations such as GP practices or hospitals.
 - This could be public transport or a student's own vehicle.
 - Some medical schools provide basic expenses for student travel, but this is not consistent across the country.

- The **fees for criminal record checks** by Disclosure Scotland or the Disclosure and Barring Service which are typically mandatory. Some new medical students partially avoid this cost by having volunteered at certain organisations before university which arrange and pay for these checks for their volunteers. In this case an update or rechecking fee is usually needed but this can be less than starting a disclosure application from scratch.
- The **cost of attending important events and conferences** related to your medical studies, research or career interests and extracurricular interests.
- **Fees for examinations or resits**, which differ depending on the examining body or between medical schools.
- **Elective costs**: medical degree programmes in Scotland include an elective in the final year where a student observes or works in healthcare in an unfamiliar setting, often abroad. These are typically entirely self-funded and can cost thousands of pounds, even if arranged within the UK to save money.
- **Revision services, question banks, medical information databases and medical journals** which often charge a subscription for access. Although these are not considered mandatory, they are widely used and often highly valued by medical students.
- **Membership to student societies** at your university, including those that may be medical-related or for extracurricular or sports interests.
- **Membership to various organisations** including the BMA, Royal Colleges and medical defence organisations, although in many cases a cost applies only after first year. Again, these are optional while a student, but can bring many advantages to students that go beyond your time at medical school.



Despite the obvious challenges of balancing part-time work with an intensive course and heavy university workload, some medical students need to do this in order to cover their costs. How possible this is dependent on the nature of the job, and individual students' own ability to fit it around their studies.

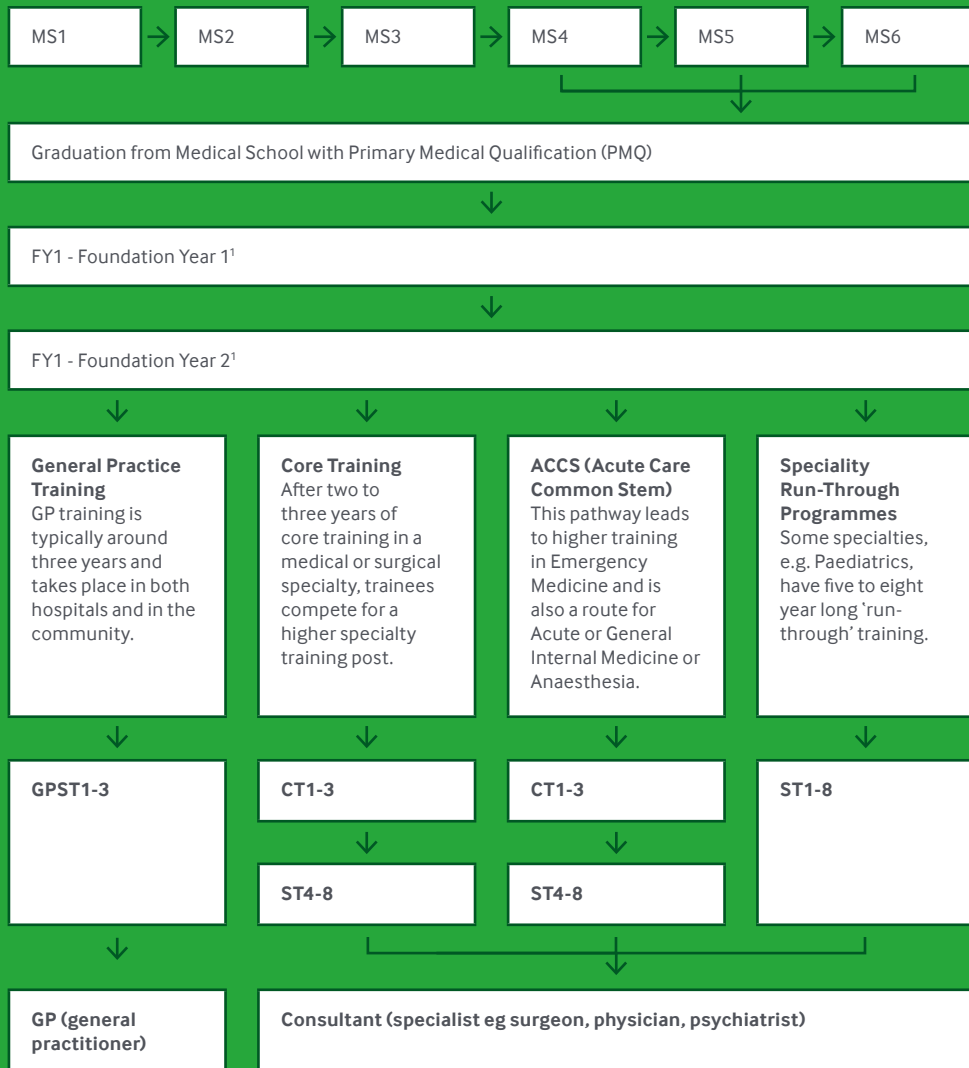
Clara Reeves, 2nd Year, University of St Andrews

Studying medicine can be intense, but many people do find it possible to fit in some part-time paid work alongside uni work. There are a few ways you can do this, with lots of universities having a variety of flexible work opportunities for students during term time, plus there's the option of working during university holidays, which is what I've been doing for the past couple of years. I wish I'd known just how beneficial part-time work could be before I started medical school. It can be a great opportunity to gain valuable healthcare experience, for example by working as an HCA (health care assistant), which is a popular choice with medical students due to its flexibility. However, even working in other industries can help you develop useful skills. I've worked in a cafe and at a local supermarket... not the most glamorous of jobs and definitely a lot of hard work, but I know the skills I've developed such as patience, responsibility and a strong work ethic will serve me well as a doctor. Sometimes I just need to remind myself of this after a long shift of stacking shelves! When applying for part-time work during medical school it's important to remember how many skills you already possess and have developed on your course so far, particularly interpersonal and communication skills. Make sure your CV highlights these to stand out to employers!



Training pathways in medicine

Here are some of the most common training pathways in medicine, to give you an idea of the range of options available. The length of postgraduate training pathway depends on the speciality a junior doctor chooses to pursue after FY1-2.



¹ Usually during FY1 and FY2, new doctors work in general medicine and general surgery, followed by rotations through various speciality hospital jobs and general practice in the community.

Why you should join the BMA

We're BMA Scotland, the Scottish division of the British Medical Association. We are the official trade union for doctors and medical students, which means we speak up for our members and represent them when something isn't right.

The BMA is...	It does not...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a voluntary professional association of doctors – speaking for doctors at home and abroad – providing services for its members – an independent trade union – a scientific and educational body – a publisher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – register and regulate doctors – this is the responsibility of the GMC (General Medical Council) – discipline doctors – this is done by the doctor's employer, or the GMC

You can join the BMA when you become a medical student. Further details are available on our website: bma.org.uk/join-us.

Get involved

If you are interested in representing your medical school on a national level, you can be elected as a representative. This means you can become a voice for students at your medical school alongside others from across the UK, and be directly involved in improving the lives of your peers.





You can also attend the BMA's annual medical students conference. Each year, students from every UK medical school are invited to attend the medical students conference at BMA headquarters in London. This is a chance to debate issues affecting medical students on a national level, and meet other students from across the UK. The expenses of attending are completely covered by the BMA, so anyone who wants to attend has the opportunity to!

Check us out at bma.org.uk and follow us on social media:



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Find out more about the Scottish medical students committee at:
bma.org.uk/what-we-do/committees/medical-students-committee/scottish-medical-students-committee

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Abbreviations

BMA – British Medical Association

CT – Core Training

FY – Foundation Year

GAMSAT – Graduate Medical School Admissions Test

GMC – General Medical Council

GP – General Practitioner

GPST – General Practice Specialty Training

MBChB – Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery
(in Latin, Medicinae Baccalaureus Baccalaureus Chirurgiae)

MMI – Multiple Mini Interview

MS – Medical School

RCGP – Royal College of General Practitioners

SAAS – Student Awards Agency Scotland

ScotGEM – Scottish Graduate Entry Medicine

SMSC – Scottish medical students committee

ST – Specialty Training

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

UCAT – University Clinical Aptitude Test

WP – Widening Participation

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