What are the best subjects to study at GCSE and A-level to gain entry to medical school and what are the typical grades needed?

Admission requirements differ hugely between medical schools, almost all require A-level Chemistry and most like to see another lab-based science subject (Biology or Physics) at A-level as well. Some require a third science, at least to AS-level. Others prefer breadth and reward candidates taking non-science, at least to AS-level.

Science subjects include chemistry, biology, physics and maths and on average grades required: AAA or A*AA

What else do you need to do to support your application to medical school?

- Work experience
- Volunteering
- Employment
- Research experience
- Hobbies
- Positions

Don’t write a list of things you have done, but say what you have learned from it and how these skills will help you become a better doctor.

What can you expect at your interview for medical school?

- An interview is an opportunity to test the student’s awareness of what they are getting themselves in for, both at medical school and as a doctor.
- This is also an opportunity for interviewers to explore whether applicants can communicate efficiently and solve problems through logic and reasoning.
- Questions are to test your motivation and insights on current affairs, research, and medical politics.
- Many schools have introduced multiple mini interviews whereby you have separate stations where a number of different skills (data handling, moral reasoning, communication skills, etc.) are examined.
- Ethical dilemmas to test your thinking and your ability to construct arguments and balance differing or conflicting perspectives are often included.
- The Guardian newspaper on Wednesdays has a health section – worth reading. The BBC website also has a good section.
- Question you are definitely going to get will include “Why medicine?”, “Why this university?”, and “What have you learnt from work experience and how has this shaped your decision?”

How to select the most relevant medical school to meet your needs?

A. Type of course

1. Problem Based Learning

- Students meet weekly learning objectives by working in teams to solve clinical scenarios, i.e. chronic pain. Each student’s findings are presented to the facilitator and the rest of the group at the end of the week.

Pros

- Teamwork and problem-solving skills, both required daily by doctors
- Self-directed learning, a skill required for life long practice
- 100% clinically relevant from the first day
- Early clinical exposure

Cons

- Large gaps in scientific understanding, if you don’t go out of your way to find out
- Less standardised teaching
- Largely dependent on group dynamics and the facilitator’s experience

2. Integrated

- Lectures on basic science and systems and clinical attachment on relevant field

Pros

- Good relevant scientific understanding delivered at appropriate stage
- Early clinical exposure

Cons

- You have to go to lectures even as final year student

3. Traditional

- Pure science thought in the first half, followed by hospital/GP attachments (only Oxbridge and St Andrews)

Pros

- Best understanding of the theoretical science underpinning medicine

Cons

- Out of touch with real medicine in first 2/3 years
- Less clinical exposure in total (hence less clinical skills)
B. Types of university

1. Campus
   • The students live and work in a fairly self-contained area, separate from the local town/city

2. City
   • The university buildings are dispersed throughout a city

3. Collegiate
   • Independent colleges that are dispersed throughout the city providing catering, accommodation, social, and welfare services

What qualifications should you consider taking?

Do MBBS first or go for a science degree and then study medicine as a postgraduate – pros and cons?

Do what you enjoy. If you feel ready to commit for a 5-6 year medical course do apply for MBBS. However if you’re not sure about medicine do a degree you will enjoy, it does not have to be biomedical sciences.

1. Undergraduate

Pros
   • Quickest and most direct
   • Cheapest

Cons
   • MANY students are unprepared, not only for medicine, but for university studies in general - a considerable number of students are not sure if medicine is really right for them
   • Leading on from the previous con, undergraduates are not as mature as postgraduate students (lacking an obvious 3 years minimum of life and possibly work experience)
   • No room to explore other options

2. Postgraduate

Pros
   • More mature and rounded, postgraduate students are more prepared for the work required in medical school because they have experience with the university system, making it easier for them to commit
   • They have had more time to consider their options, therefore less likely to think “this is not for me”
   • More life and work experience, which can be brought into medical practice
   • The extra degree can really help in terms of experience in dealing with problems

Cons
   • Longer
   • More expensive
   • Becoming increasingly competitive

What is life like at medical school? An overview of the 5 years

Medical school is a place in which you will grow as a person and as a professional. You will be challenged to study more than you thought possible and pick yourself up when you fall down. The massive amounts of knowledge you need to learn in a short period of time makes medical school one of the most challenging professional schools out there. On the other hand, you meet the most awesome people and make lifelong friends.

What happens once you qualify as a doctor?

Study never ends, you will have membership exams and fellowship exams for your chosen specialty and you have to keep reading journals to keep up to date with current practice. Some doctors may decide to do research, teach or undertake a PhD, others decide to work in a different setting.

Post medical school, you will undertake foundation training for a period of 2 years. Then you decide if you want to do medicine, surgery or general practice and specialise in that field.

Information on typical costs of course, books and accommodation

• £9,000 fees per year (2015) until you have been studying for 4 years (including any initial Foundation Year or Intercalated Degree), then NHS bursary for remaining year(s)
• Accommodation in London is £500-650 per month, however you can get much cheaper, larger, and often nicer rooms outside London
• You can rent in university accommodation, which might be a cheap/safe option and is fun in first year. Renting a house with few friends can be a very nice experience but a lot of responsibilities (cleaning, bills…)
• Books: you can always borrow from the library (RSM has all the books you would require), or buy them second hand on Amazon or from senior students
• RSM student membership - a worthwhile investment (perhaps get a parent to fund as a present). 2014/15 just £40