



RGS CAREERS
GUIDE TO MEDICINE
2016-2017



REIGATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

RGS GUIDE TO MEDICINE

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All of the information in this guide is based on our experience over the last 10 years, during which we have had a very successful record of getting students into medical schools. Indeed, in the last four years, all RGS applicants for Medicine have received at least one offer. Individual universities, however, have very different requirements. The best way to be absolutely certain of making the right choices is to research individual universities and refer to their web-sites.

A LEVEL CHOICES

- You must do Chemistry. At RGS it is usual for students applying for Medicine to also take A level Biology
- You are dramatically reducing your chances of getting in if you do not do Biology; some universities ask for Chemistry and 'another practical science', which could include Physics, but a great many specify Biology
- Subjects where there is overlap of content are very rarely acceptable for the three required A2 subjects. Therefore, medical schools, almost invariably, will not accept both Maths and Further Maths as two of the three required A2 subjects. Also taking both Sports Studies and Biology as two of your three A2 subjects will dramatically reduce your chances of getting into medical school (because of the perceived over-lap)
- It is important that those who do Maths and Further Maths do not take Maths A2 at the end of year 12; some universities will then not count it as a part of their offer

Most medical schools require three A2 subjects to be taken together at the end of a two year A Level course. I recently rang around the Admissions Departments of all UK medical schools. The vast majority stated that there was no advantage at all in doing four subjects at A Level. Indeed, some said that they could not give any advantage to those who studied four because it was not an option at a lot of schools. One or two medical schools stated that there could be some minor advantage because it would show an ability to juggle a number of commitments, but this could be shown in other ways such as taking on a project or EPQ, regular work experience, extra-curricular commitments or, for example, completing MOOCs. Edinburgh, KCL and Queen's Belfast are currently still asking for four subjects though. Thus it would seem that you will retain lots of options for applying to medical school without doing four A Levels.

You must take notice of the advice above, but ensure, above all, that you pick the subjects that are most likely to ensure that you get A/A* grades. If you do not actually want to take Chemistry and Biology, it is probable that Medicine is not actually the right career for you.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

What characteristics do you need to be a good doctor?

- You certainly need to be hard-working, resilient, and have the capacity to absorb large amounts of technical information
- You need excellent communication and listening skills
- Manual dexterity is important
- You need empathy. You will be dealing with a wide range of people. You need to be tolerant of their weaknesses, and you need to be able to help them to cope with pain and with fear
- You need to be emotionally strong. Sometimes you need to make objective and rational decisions in very distressing situations
- Others need to be able to trust you
- You need to be able to stay calm in a crisis

YOUR APPLICATION ADVICE FROM UNIVERSITIES

You can only make four choices for Medicine; your fifth choice must be for another subject (it is preferable if this subject is related e.g. Biomedical Science). All universities have different requirements in terms of what they expect academically, how much weight they put on UKCAT or BMAT, and how much work experience they require. It is very important to refer to individual university web-sites. However, some general advice would be that the universities are looking for students to show the following, alongside academic excellence:

- Evidence of your understanding of the role of the doctor
- Examples of a regular commitment to caring through work experience/volunteer placements (i.e. that the student has worked in the same place regularly rather than simply done the odd week here and there)
- That you have done a range of work experience and shadowing e.g. Hospital/GP/caring
- The ability to reflect on what you have learnt from your experiences
- Initiative
- Communication skills
- Team-working skills

You demonstrate all of this through your Personal Statement, which is a part of your university (UCAS) application. This is limited to 4000 characters including spaces, and it goes to all of your chosen universities.

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

You need to provide evidence that you possess the characteristics to be a successful trainee doctor. It is no good to simply tell the university what you believe yourself to be good at, or what characteristics you believe that you have; everything **MUST** be backed up with evidence.

Space is limited, so it is advisable to focus on the following:

EVIDENCE OF YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF A DOCTOR

In your opening paragraph you should clearly state what you have done to help you to understand the role of a doctor e.g. what have you learnt from shadowing or talking to doctors or from your own or relatives' experiences as patients? Use these experiences to explain why you want to be a doctor.

The rest of the personal statement should provide evidence that you possess the attributes to be a successful doctor, and should cover:

WORK AND VOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE

Universities like to see that you have undertaken long-term, hands-on experience in a caring role. This could include, for example, regular care for the elderly, helping in a hospice or working with disadvantaged children. Shadowing does not always count as 'work experience' so the more hands on experience that you can get, the better.

It is important to state how long you have been involved in the activity, why you chose to undertake it, what your responsibilities were and, crucially, what you have learned from it. It is very important to reflect upon your experiences. It is important to be positive, but at the same time to show that you recognise that the role of a doctor is a challenging one.

If you can demonstrate that your contribution to the organisation or individual was positive, that is excellent e.g. you might be able to talk about the progress that a child made with his reading under your care.

Tip: If you regularly attend a Medical Discussion Group, you should be able to chat to students in the Upper Sixth and find out how they went about finding enough work experience.

INTERESTS AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Check individual web-sites, but, on the whole, medical schools are interested to see that you have a healthy work-life balance. They want to see that students can cope with multiple, and often conflicting, demands on their time.

It is helpful if you can demonstrate that you have gained/shown skills from your activities, such as communication skills, leadership, teamwork, responsibility and initiative.

It is particularly useful if you can talk about a club that you have set up or fund-raising that you have organised or any community activities that you have had a role in. Evidence of success is important e.g. have you won prizes or can you say that the club that you set up is now thriving?

Don't simply list activities. Tell the universities how much time and effort you spend on them and what skills you have gained.

COMMUNICATION AND TEAM-WORK

Evidence of communicating with a range of groups of people is useful; it is particularly useful to show ability to communicate with those with significant communication barriers, e.g. English not being their first language or those with significant learning difficulties. It is crucial to give examples. Try to provide evidence that your communication was effective, such as feedback received or an outcome that resulted from your communication.

Evidence of teamwork is also very important. Examples must be given and it is a good idea to stress what effect your contribution to the team had.

OTHER PARTS OF THE APPLICATION

I. UKCAT:

If you apply for Medicine (or Dentistry) at any of the following universities, you currently have to do the UKCAT Test:

- Aberdeen
- Birmingham
- Bristol
- Cardiff
- Dundee
- East Anglia (UEA)
- Edinburgh
- Exeter
- Glasgow
- Hull York Medical School
- Keele
- Central Lancashire
- King's College London (KCL)
- Leicester
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Nottingham
- Plymouth
- Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL)
- Queen's University Belfast
- Sheffield
- Southampton
- St. Andrews
- St. George's, University of London
- Warwick

i.e. pretty much everywhere!

The test is in five sections and takes 2 hours:

Verbal Reasoning – to assess the candidate's ability to critically evaluate information that is presented in a written form

Quantitative Reasoning - to assess ability to critically evaluate numerical information

Abstract Reasoning - assesses the use of convergent and divergent thinking to infer relationships from information

Decision Analysis - assesses the ability to make sound decisions using complex information



Situational Judgement Tests - measures the candidate's capacity to understand real world situations and to behave appropriately in dealing with them.

UKCAT is a computer-based test, and it is up to the candidate to book themselves onto it via the UKCAT web-site (www.ukcat.ac.uk). This year registration for UKCAT opened on May 3, testing began on July 1 and the registration deadline was September 21. It costs £65 to take UKCAT before August 31 and £80 if taken in September. There is no requirement to book yourself onto UKCAT on May 3rd; the only issue is that the test centres can get booked up, so if you leave it too late, you may need to travel a long way to take the test.

Details for 2017 are not available at the time of writing, but do look on www.ukcat.ac.uk for information.

Can you practise for UKCAT?

YES

The test is designed so that you cannot revise for it; however, you can familiarise yourself with the style of questions. In addition, the test is very time pressured, so you need to get used to dealing with this.

The UKCAT web-site has over 600 practice questions on it including two fully timed tests. There is also a Practice App for iPhone and Android, as well as an official guide, all available from the UKCAT web-site. There are also practice materials available in the Careers Library and from Mrs Bull. Previous students have also had good experiences using some of the online UKCAT practice tests with companies such as Medify. If you want to know more, please talk to those students. There is also a range of courses that you can attend if you wish; however, some of the students who obtain the best marks have achieved them by simply working hard and practising as much as possible.

You can only take the UKCAT test once in each application cycle so take the preparation very seriously!

Tip: Pay no attention to UKCAT until after your Lower Sixth summer examinations are completed (except, perhaps, booking it) because these will be a critical factor in your application. Book your test to be taken in the summer holiday, so that you have plenty of time to practise for it. Book a date when you have two or three weeks beforehand free to dedicate to practice papers. A member of the Careers Department will run practice sessions for UKCAT at the end of the Summer Term, and Mrs Bull will conduct a full practice test, so make full use of this.

2. Biomedical Admissions Test (BMAT)

You are only required to take BMAT if you intend to study Medicine at the following universities:

- Cambridge
- Oxford
- Imperial
- University College London (UCL)
- Brighton and Sussex Medical School
- Leeds
- Lancaster

BMAT is a two hour pen and paper, science-based test. The Test is in three sections:

Section 1: Aptitude and Skills: This tests your skills in problem-solving, understanding arguments and data analysis.

60 minutes

35 questions, multiple choice or short answer

Section 2: Scientific Knowledge and Applications: This tests your ability to apply your scientific knowledge and mathematical skills.

30 minutes

27 questions, multiple choice or short answer

Section 3: Written task.

30 minutes

1 essay from a choice of four questions

The school will enter you for BMAT and it takes place in school in early November and the results are released three weeks later. It costs £45.

Details for 2017 are not yet available, but do look on www.admissionstesting-service.org for further information.

Can you practise for BMAT?

YES

There are practice papers on the website: www.admissionstesting-service.org

There are also practice materials in the Careers Library and Mrs Bull has books that you can borrow.

You will need to know all of your GCSE Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Maths really well, as although the material is meant to only be of around GCSE standard the manipulation of that material is advanced and there are a lot of questions to answer in the time allowed. Those students who are not taking Physics or Maths at A Level, will need to make sure that they have done a lot of revision in those subjects. It is especially important that you do plenty of practice papers.

In our experience, BMAT does require extra work, and it is hard, so it is not for the faint-hearted. However, it does put a lot of people off applying to BMAT universities, so it can greatly increase your odds of getting into those universities if you can do well in BMAT.

Advice: Apply for an absolute maximum of 2 BMAT universities, because if you do poorly in BMAT, you don't want to be ruled out of too many of your options.

Mrs Bull, the school's Medicine contact, will go over past paper questions with you, and members of the Science Department are also available to answer any specific science questions that you are unsure about.

We will also run a full practice test shortly before the official test.

THE INTERVIEW

If you get to interview you are doing well. A great proportion of the candidates will have already been rejected by this point, so feel proud of yourself and go in with confidence

Interviews take various different formats e.g. one-to-one, group interviews, or some that are rather more like speed dating; these are called "MMIs" or Multiple Mini Interviews where you move quickly from one post to another undertaking short tasks or answering questions. Make sure that you are aware of what kind of interview to expect

Tip: If you regularly attend Medical Discussion Group, you should be able to liaise with candidates from the Upper Sixth and get feedback on their interviews

TIPS AND ADVICE FROM RGS

- Only around a quarter of medical applications are successful, and you only get four choices. In terms of your progression onto your F1 and F2 Foundation Training (2 further years after your five year degree), it actually makes little difference which university you have gone to for your degree as, once again, you will have to enter a UK wide competitive selection for F1 and F2 jobs. So, actually, your main consideration should be 'Which universities am I most likely to get into?'
- Of course, you do need to make sure that you feel that you would be happy to live in the town/city that you choose for 5 years. It is also worth noting that it is very common to do the F1 and F2 years in the same town/city as you did your degree
- It is also important to consider how the course is taught, and whether it is likely to suit you. For example, do you want to study at a university that uses Problem Based Learning in all/some/none of its course (PBL is where students learn about a subject through the experience of problem-solving). Many medical schools now offer more integrated courses with early patient contact combined with lectures and some PBL sessions
- Attend Medical Discussion Group as often as you can, and make sure that you learn from the Upper Sixth about their experiences and tips
- Liaise with Mrs Bull as she has years of experience at considering what universities you are most likely to get into based upon e.g. your UKCAT score, your GCSE results, your A2 predictions and the amount of work experience that you have done. Take note of what she says
- Make sure that you are well aware of what the individual university web-sites say in terms of what qualifications you need to get in, and take note of any advice that they offer to prospective candidates. Get prospectuses and alternative prospectuses (written by the students) and attend Open Days. Ask questions and contact previous students from RGS who are currently training at medical schools
- It is a good idea to go on at least one course. Many are very cheap or even free, so don't feel that you need to spend a lot of money on them. Look on www.rgsinfo.net and click on the 'Taster Courses' link for information on any courses that we have details of. Some courses/lectures that we have had good experiences of in the past include The Royal Society of Medicine careers conference 'So you want to be a doctor?', which is held in Spring, Ace Medicine interview courses, which are usually held in London in November and UEA taster days
- Do consider other options. There are a great many careers allied to Medicine. For example, you could train as a radiographer; dietician, nurse, speech therapist, audiologist or optometrist; these are just a few of many. Some of them even have free or heavily subsidised degree courses. Look at the NHS web-site for some of the options (www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)

WHAT IS RGS DOING TO HELP?

- Mrs Bull is our contact for Medicine. Please talk to her or to Mr Buzzacott regarding your medical application. Mrs Bull will provide one-to-one help and advice for you
- Mrs Bull scans every medical web-site every year for all information that could help you with your applications. This enables her to know where you have the best chance of getting in and how to construct your application

Mrs Bull runs the RGS Medical Discussion Group

RGS Medical Discussion Group has been meeting every Thursday at 1.30pm in the Chemistry Department since 2006 and continues to be very popular. There is a varied mix of stimulating ethical discussions, interesting and informative talks by participants and visitors, but it can also be simply a time to meet and talk to other students interested in a career in Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Science.

Medical Discussion Group is a great place to gain an insight into the application procedure for Medicine, including the UKCAT and BMAT exams, and obtain useful help with personal statements. New students joining the group are helped and encouraged by the Upper Sixth students who are going through the daunting experience of applying to medical or vet school. They hear interview feedback first hand and get important tips regarding good time management and academic work, the best courses and how to get work experience, volunteering and shadowing.



Every week is different; some of the Upper Sixth medics give talks on topics such as the "Ethics of IVF", "The right to die" and "The career pathways to becoming a doctor". The last one proved particularly useful as several medical school interviews this year included specific questions for candidates regarding their knowledge of medical training and the various specialist options available. The group also has some lively debates about current medical topics in the news.

Several doctors and past students visit us every year and show us the reality of a career in Medicine. Previous RGS Discussion Group members visit every year giving insights into applications, their courses and life at university. Also importantly, they can give insight into how hard you have to work to succeed!

The members of Medical Discussion Group are dedicated, enthusiastic and hardworking young people with an impressive range of volunteer activities between them including St Catherine's Hospice, the Live at Home Scheme, Eversfield Care Home, Brooklands School, the YMCA, East Surrey Hospital, the Orpheus Centre, First Aid, and many more. They have to be extremely self-motivated and arrange shadowing experiences themselves, some with the kind help of RGS alumni and current parents. Over the last year this has included placements at East Surrey, Guildford Hospital, King's College, The John Innes Biological Research Centre, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital, Barts, St George's and local GPs.

We look forward every year to new members joining the group and welcome anyone interested in finding out more about careers in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science or Nursing.

- We have a variety of lunchtime speakers. In 2016/17, we have arranged for Steve Brooks to speak on 'Life as a vet' on 12/09 and Jonny Lavington (OR) on 27/9 on 'Dentistry' for those interested in allied careers. On 4/11 we have Dr. Sandeep Cliff, who has regularly been on the Interview panel for Brighton and Sussex Medical School, in to share his thoughts about Medical interviews. On 6/3 Dr. Rawson is coming in to present on 'The Life of a GP'. There will be other speakers through Medical Discussion Group.
- Medicine Evening will be held on 29/11 in the PMH. This is for students in 2nd-Upper Sixth Form and their parents. It will be an opportunity to hear from, and talk to, current medical students, recent graduates, career medics and many delegates from allied careers. Speakers will be Daniel Beasley (OR- student at Imperial), Aman Jain (OR- junior doctor) and Lucy Rawson (GP).
- The Higher Education Convention will be held on 6/2 in CH/SH from 7:00 until 9:00p.m. This will provide an opportunity to talk 1-1 with representatives from a very wide range of universities.
- We have a group of parents of current students and former students who offer interview practice for our students. We can also provide in-house interview practice, and medics are invited to the Interviews Evening on 22/11. Dr. Lawson also provides interview practice.
- Through Network R we can put you in touch with former students so that you can find out about their Medicine courses.
- The Careers Department and Mrs Bull provide help with preparing for the UKCAT and BMAT Tests. As part of this, Mrs Bull runs a full practice test for UKCAT and there will be a full BMAT practice test run in school.

USEFUL WEB-SITES

- www.ucas.ac.uk for details on all Medical courses and links to individual university web-sites
- www.unistats.com to help you to compare courses based on data such as student satisfaction, cost of living, contact time and employability prospects
- www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide for league tables and comparisons between courses
- www.bma.org.uk The British Medical Association web-site. Read "Becoming a Doctor"
- www.gmc-uk.org The General Medical Council web-site. Read "Tomorrow's Doctors"
- www.rcgp.org.uk The Royal College of General Practitioners web-site
- www.nhscareers.nhs.uk for information about Careers that are allied to Medicine, which you may wish to consider:
- www.admissionstestingservice.org for information about BMAT including past paper questions
- www.ukcat.ac.uk for information about UKCAT including practice papers
- www.rgsinfo.net Use the Taster Course link to find courses to help you to find out more about Medicine
- <http://medlink-uk.net/> for information about Med-link courses. These are quite expensive, but generally considered to be useful.





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