



BMA

Cymru Wales

Why haven't you thought about studying medicine yet?

A guide for pupils in schools across Wales to becoming a doctor – from GCSEs to medical school



British Medical Association
bma.org.uk

With special thanks to those who contributed to this booklet.

Students

- Mr Paul McNulty, 5th Year Cardiff University School of Medicine student and chair of the Welsh Medical Students Committee
- Miss Rhiannon Murphy Jones, 4th Year Cardiff University School of Medicine student
- Miss Jennifer Pitt, 2nd Year Cardiff University School of Medicine student
- Mr Damien Drury, 2nd Year Swansea University Medical School student
- Miss India Corrin, 4th Year Cardiff University School of Medicine student

Doctors

- Dr Phil Banfield, consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology and chair of BMA Cymru Wales Welsh Council
- Dr Melanie Jones, retired anaesthetist
- Dr Sara Hunt, consultant anaesthetist
- Dr Bethan Roberts, GP and chair of the Welsh Junior Doctors Committee
- Dr Zoe Morris-Williams, GP
- Dr Dai Samuel, gastroenterology trainee
- Dr Lloyd Evans, junior doctor
- Dr Emily Lawrence, junior doctor
- Dr Andrew Dearden, GP
- Dr Jonathan Jones, GP
- Dr Phil White, GP

BMA Cymru Wales

- Ms Rachel Podolak, national director, BMA Cymru Wales
- Mr John Jenkins, former head of media and public affairs, BMA Cymru Wales
- Mrs Carla Murphy, head of media and public affairs, BMA Cymru Wales
- Mrs Stacey Snow, media officer, BMA Cymru Wales

Institutions

- Cardiff University School of Medicine
- Swansea University Medical School
- University of South Wales

Published by BMA Cymru Wales

5th floor, 2 Caspian Point, Caspian Way, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CF10 4DQ

Telephone: 02920 474646

Email: bmawales@bma.org.uk

Twitter: [@BMACymru](https://twitter.com/BMACymru)

Flickr: [flicker.com/bmacymruwales](https://www.flickr.com/photos/bmacymruwales/)

FOREWORD

Over the years, BMA Cymru Wales has received many enquiries about what it takes to get into medical school.



As an organisation concerned about the shortage of doctors working in Wales, we are especially keen that all students in Welsh schools who wish to become doctors – and are properly qualified to do so, get a fair chance to try and gain a place at a medical school.

Maybe you haven't thought about becoming a doctor before? Maybe you have but dismissed the idea as 'not being for someone' like you? My message to you is that if you want to become a doctor and are willing to put the hard work in, your circumstances needn't be a barrier. Medicine is not just for the privileged few!

It's worth thinking about at an early age – even before you start your GCSEs. This booklet has been put together to give you an idea of what you need to consider to get into medicine and to hear from medical students and doctors themselves about why being a doctor is so rewarding. I hope you find it useful.

Good luck. I look forward to welcoming you into the profession.

Ms Rachel Podolak
National Director
BMA Cymru Wales

August 2017



There are different routes for everyone

Just as there isn't one type of person who can be a doctor, there's not just one route into medicine. Whilst many choose to take the traditional route into medicine, it can also be rewarding taking an alternative route, whether this is taking some time out before studying or completing an alternative degree. The most obvious is a medical science degree, but any science degree is a natural fit. With the right drive and motivation though, some arts and other non-science degree students find their way onto a medical degree.

There really isn't a one route fits all approach, as you'll hear from the medical students throughout this booklet.

I did it my way ●●●●●●

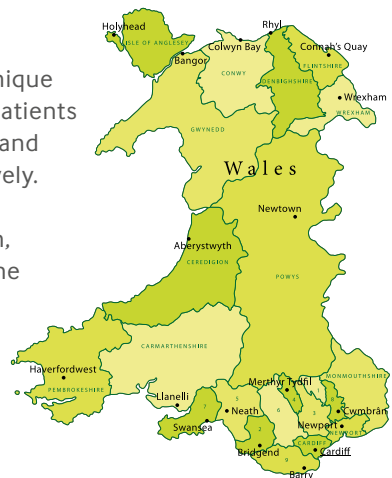
The challenge of student debt was a constant fear

Hailing from Merthyr Tydfil, a traditional industrial town, it is not the norm to want or to actually become a doctor. Having been born with a congenital deformity of my right leg, I always wanted to be a doctor. I had only ever wanted to be a doctor. My family gave me the utmost support to achieve my ambition.

I was the first in my school to go to medical school and amongst my peers, many opted not to go to University due to costs and entered into the job market. The challenge of student debt was a constant fear but having now qualified and started my career, I can confirm that the hard work and risks were more than justified. I have now returned to my home town and have worked in my local hospital, serving my local community.

I am often seen as a “role model” and am held in high regard within the community as a doctor. But to me, it is me that is the lucky one for having gone to medical school and achieved high grades.

To me, your social status should never be a barrier to achieving your ambition and hailing from Merthyr gives me a unique insight into the challenges facing my patients and hopefully allows me to empathise and communicate with them more effectively. It is crucial that society has a medical workforce that reflects that population, and not merely a factory production line of public school leavers.



A GLIMPSE INTO THE WORLD OF MEDICINE



School pupils getting 'hands on' at a BMA event



Practising on a human mannequin



Checking x-rays

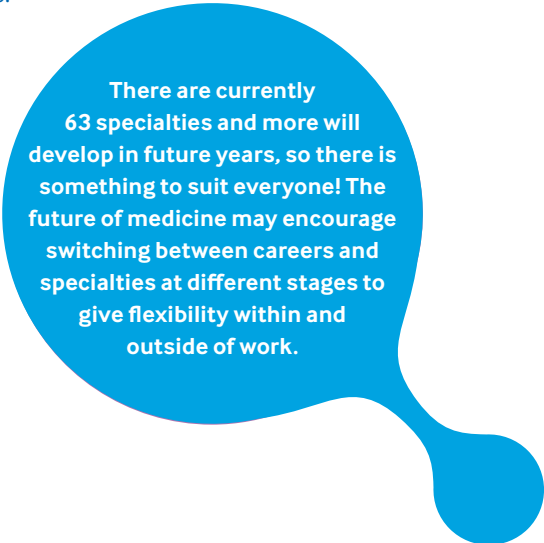
SO, WHY HAVEN'T YOU THOUGHT ABOUT BECOMING A DOCTOR YET?

When you think of a doctor, you may imagine treating patients but there are lots of roles a doctor undertakes that you may not be aware of. These include:

- diagnosing illness;
- solving problems;
- leading multi professional teams;
- practical skills – such as surgery or delivering babies;
- communicating good (and bad) news to patients and families;
- working with other health professionals;
- public health responsibilities;
- legal responsibilities;
- protection of vulnerable children and adults;
- being an advocate for patients and health services;
- being an employer;
- researching;
- teaching;
- social work; and
- counselling.

Within medicine, there are lots of exciting career possibilities. These include:

- general practice;
- hospital physician;
- hospital surgeon;
- anaesthetist;
- laboratory based speciality;
- forensics;
- psychiatry;
- community based specialist;
- sports medicine;
- teaching;
- research;
- politics; and
- union/committee role.



There are currently 63 specialties and more will develop in future years, so there is something to suit everyone! The future of medicine may encourage switching between careers and specialties at different stages to give flexibility within and outside of work.

MYTHBUSTERS

So before we get into the nitty gritty of how to become a doctor, we need to clear a few things up! You may have already heard people saying things along the lines of: 'You have to be rich to study medicine' or 'it's only for the A* students.'

Here, medical students clear up the confusion.

The myth: You have to be loaded to study medicine.

The truth: Whilst it does cost more to study medicine (mainly because the course is longer than most), there are organisations out there, such as the Student Loans Company, who can help you figure it all out. Take a look at page 8, where we chat about the money side of studying medicine.



The myth: You need to know that you want to study medicine and start preparing whilst you're at school and college.

The truth: You can do medicine at any point in your life. I didn't know what I wanted to do when I was younger. Apart from biology, I didn't even do any of the required medical A-levels.

I did a law degree and then spent four years working in business for IBM – a large technology company. The graduate entry route to medicine provides an alternative access point for anyone with a previous degree who has enough passion and drive to pursue it.

Damien Drury, 2nd Year Medical Student at Swansea University Medical School

The myth: Only A* students go on to be doctors.

The truth: This just isn't true! There are so many routes into medicine these days. Medical schools look for lots more than just high grades. They want students who are dedicated and can relate to their patients. There are so many different areas of medicine you can go into, all requiring different skills. Take a look at page 25, where our inside interviewer shares what medical schools want from their students.



I was told at the end of year 11/beginning of sixth form that I should do further maths as an A level. I started it but realised by the time I came to do my UCAS application in early year 13 that it wouldn't be accepted as a separate A level to maths.

Fortunately, I was continuing with 3 others anyway but had it been my 3rd A-level, I don't think I would have been accepted anywhere. Make sure you look into the medical school you want to go to and check out their requirements!

Jennifer Pitt, 2nd Year medical student at Cardiff University's School of Medicine

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 – including local work experience schemes that your schools may know about. Some people actually have more experience through personal circumstances – by helping a relative or close friend or through illness or disability, but volunteering in the health, social care or voluntary sector is equally valuable in showing commitment, determination, 'staying power' and an ability to do things outside of school work.



Finding work experience was really hard for me, as I do not have any family who are doctors and I was at school seven days a week, with little opportunity to get off campus to pursue work experience opportunities. From this, I found I had to be extremely resourceful with the opportunities I did have and reflect upon how the work I had done – for example, a few sessions spent with children with learning disabilities – to see how I could mould these experiences into a personal statement-friendly format.

India Corrin, 4th year medical student at Cardiff University's School of Medicine

MONEY SHOULDN'T BE A BARRIER TO GOING INTO MEDICINE

Paul is a 5th year medical student at Cardiff University School of Medicine and chair of the BMA's Welsh medical students committee.



You have already read a little about why you might want to become a doctor. The big question still hanging around might be 'how will I afford to go to medical school?'

Whilst it may all sound a little serious, it's worth thinking about. Being a doctor is not all about money, and being a student is not all about high tuition fees and being poor! That said, without money, we would all struggle to live. There's no arguing that. In this little section, I hope to point you in the right direction in getting advice on money, if and when the time comes, and to convince you that **money shouldn't be a barrier to you going into medicine.**

So, the big question...

How can I afford medicine?

I'm not promising that it's always easy, but it is possible. By the time any of you become medical students, it is highly likely that the arrangements for tuition fees and student loans will have changed. In fact, the Welsh Government is changing the student finance system and planning to introduce new arrangements for students starting university in September 2018.

So the best advice I can give is for you to check the information on these websites.

1. www.studentfinancewales.co.uk

This is a really useful website and gives details of what support you can apply for, how much financial support is available and how and when you'll repay your student loan.

2. www.slc.co.uk

The Student Loans Company is the organisation that pays loans and grants to students.

3. www.money4medstudents.org

The Money4MedStudents site is pretty good, and gives specific information on finance for medical students.

4. www.bma.org.uk

BMA Cymru Wales periodically publishes a Finance Guide for Welsh Domiciled Students. It gives quite detailed financial guidance for Welsh students studying medicine, and links to further information. It's well worth a look.

5. www.nwsspstudentfinance.wales.nhs.uk

Medical degrees are usually longer than degrees undertaken by other students and because of this, the funding arrangements normally change after the first three years. You will need to apply for an NHS Bursary. You'll find more information on this on the website.

Will I get a job?

The other question you might be asking yourself is 'After studying medicine, will I definitely get a job at the end?' Yes. At the moment you are very likely to get a job as a doctor if you complete your medical degree.

Being a doctor is a very highly regarded qualification, which is in demand not just in Wales, but also in the rest of the UK and beyond. Don't forget, there are over 60 specialties to choose from, so it's an exciting and challenging career path! As you can see, there's a lot of support and advice out there and if there was one message to give you, it'd be that it's all designed to help you.

Good luck!



Photo of a Swansea University Medical School student practising taking blood in the skills lab

“

I never really knew medicine was what I wanted to do. I wasn't even sure what medicine involved, as neither of my parents are doctors. I remember one of my teachers telling the class that medical/dentistry schools were beginning to look as far back as GCSE grades, but it was really my parents who encouraged me to excel in school. I know that not everyone had the opportunities that I had but that needn't be a barrier. Hard work wins out. When I did get into medicine, I knew it was for me, learning about things that actually affect people's lives and really matter.

[Paul McNulty, 5th year medical student at Cardiff University School of Medicine and chair of the Welsh medical students committee](#)

”

“

I was hopeless at physics so the school suggested medicine instead of engineering (my first choice!).

[Dr Melanie Jones, retired anaesthetist](#)

”

“

I thought that it would be an intellectual challenge, balanced with hands on practicality, that would require me to listen to patients to ultimately be of real help to them.

[Dr Jonathan Jones, GP](#)

”

I did it my way ●●●●●



I DIDN'T DO WELL IN MY A LEVELS AND THOUGHT I'D BLOWN IT

Emily Lawrence

Admittedly, I took the long way round in terms of going to medical school. After not working nearly as hard as I should have done towards my A-Levels, I took two 'gap years' trying to decide what I wanted to do with my life. I thought this would involve months of agonising and tough decisions but for me the answer was easy; medicine was what I had always wanted to do. All I needed to do was find a way in!

By chance, I saw the BSc Medical Science degree course that was being offered at the University of South Wales and for me, personally, it met all the criteria of a pre-medicine degree. Not only did it provide me with a sound grounding in areas such as pharmacology, genetics and medical microbiology but it also gave me the opportunity to gain some clinical work experience and undertake a cadaveric dissection (dissecting a human body) with the first year medics at Cardiff University. This was the 'make or break' moment and without doubt it reaffirmed to me that medicine was the right choice.

Although I give the students who enter medicine at 18 a great deal of credit; for me I know that at that stage in my life, I would not have been prepared to meet the demands that studying medicine requires. I personally was a little naïve at 18. I definitely feel that spending three years studying prior to commencing medicine has not only honed my academic and study skills, but has also taught me how to communicate effectively, and has allowed me to develop as an individual.

Taking this route into medicine does add another three years on to an already lengthy degree but for me it was invaluable and it goes to show that perhaps those who work in medical school admissions are not simply looking for academic excellence but moreover, a



candidate who has experienced life, developed as an individual and has a wider sense of the world around them.

It may not be the ideal choice for some students but after my less than successful performance at A-Level, I was convinced that I had blown any opportunity of ever becoming a doctor.

I also feel that my experiences can be a source of encouragement to those who have found themselves working in an entirely different field because, like me, they didn't think there was any other route of entry into medicine. Or perhaps even to those who think that becoming a doctor depends entirely on academic excellence at A-Level or coming from a privileged background. Entering medicine as a graduate has certainly opened my eyes and it is refreshing to see that there are alternatives out there and that if you work hard enough, medical school is not out of reach.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE APPLYING FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL

Medical school places are very sought after and the application process is competitive. It's not just about grades but showing that you are an interesting individual who offers something to the medical school and the profession in the future. In particular, you will need to demonstrate that you have the foundations of the skills required to be a good doctor.

You'll have your UCAS form, interview and A-levels, and some medical schools also have their own entrance exams. These can be academic or verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests. You need to check with your universities of choice or look at the website 'medschool' online at www.medschoolsonline.co.uk



Skills required of a good doctor:

good listener	honest
good communicator	trustworthy
well organised	reliable
disciplined	team player
punctual	



Cut me out and pin me on your wall

TEN TIPS ON APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

1. **Plan** – think about what you need to do to be an attractive applicant.
2. **Target** work experience.
Lots of people try to get into nursing homes but it's important to stand out from the crowd. Perhaps you've worked in a café managing difficult customers? Think outside of the box.
3. **Get involved** – sports, voluntary work, clubs and projects at school or in your local community.
4. **Look at different courses** – not all medical courses are the same. Some have no patient contact for the first two to three years (traditional course), whilst others include early contact (integrated course). Some universities offer an integrated Bachelor of Science degree.
5. **Take advice** from others who have been to medical school or look at online forums and student satisfaction surveys. You can also talk to someone from your school or ask a teacher to contact local hospitals.
6. Think about where you might like to **live**. You may want to be close to or far from home. Some universities have a campus on the outside of a town, others are central. There may be financial considerations – cost of rent, transport etc.
7. Have an **insurance choice** as your 5th option, e.g. Bachelor of Medical Sciences, or a science degree.
8. Consider **taster courses**, such as medsix or medism. Most universities run taster courses for medicine, so have a look online.
9. **Attend open days** – get a feel for the university and the type of students that go there.
10. **Look at requirements** and work towards them.

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

This is an important part of the UCAS form and needs special attention. Its purpose is to sell yourself to the universities. It needs planning and lots of re-writing!

Key points to consider:

- Why have you chosen medicine?
- What do you offer them and what do they offer you?

Firstly (using page 17), make a list of all school-based and extra-curricular activities you have done since starting secondary school in chronological order.



Make a second list of the skills that are necessary to be a doctor. (again, you can use page 17 to do this!)

Now compare your two lists. What activities do you do/have you done that show you have these skills?

Now look again at your list of activities. Is there anything left that is unique or unusual? These are the activities that should take priority on your personal statement.

Being a ballroom champion may show more dedication and drive than just turning up to play sports occasionally.

Again, think outside of the box. They'll be reading lots of applications and it's the ones that stand out that will stick in their minds.

You will also need a one sentence statement on why you have chosen medicine and why you want to be a doctor. Write this from the heart to begin with, then hone it later as you redraft your personal statement. Medical schools want to know **you** and not a stereotype of what you think needs to be said.

Now write your statement as a rough draft baring in mind the 'key points'.



Activities I've taken part in

e.g. Football or netball captain

Skills needed to be a doctor

e.g. Our team lost the league because we were younger than the other teams. As captain, I had to motivate and keep the team together when morale was low. This required leadership skills and persistence.





TEN TIPS ON WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

1. Look at your strengths and play to them.

2. Be selective on your application form and get it proof read by someone who will be critical but helpful (not your parents!)

3. Structure your personal statement. A strong opening and closing statement can make a big difference. You're more likely to be remembered if these have an impact.

4. Stick to the word limit.

5. Why medicine?

6. What do these universities have to offer me?

7. What do I offer them?

8. Make lists.

9. You need to demonstrate your skills – be clear about what you learned, not just what you did.

10. Don't forget the little things you do and what they say about you. For example, a part-time job, babysitting, cutting neighbours' lawns, showing that you care and can do more than just study. Sticking to and developing something over time counts more in general than one off events.

And finally, let your passion for becoming a doctor shine through. Only the passionate will succeed.

I did it my way ●●●●●

I signed a contract with Cardiff City FC at 16 and doubted the possibility of studying medicine in the future.

Despite appearing as a regular medical student, my route into medicine at Cardiff University was far from normal. After spending two years as a footballer with Cardiff City FC on a full time basis, I only managed to gain two A-Levels in maths and biology whilst studying in my own time when possible. Despite my initial experience of a professional career, I still had aspirations to progress to medical school, when a run of injuries and bad luck meant I had to leave the game. It was due to a strong partnership between Cardiff City FC and the University of South Wales that I was able to take the first step in the process of joining medical school.

The University of South Wales was hugely supportive of my extraordinary circumstances and allowed me to enrol on the three year BSc (Hons) Medical Sciences degree programme. This course appealed immediately due to its similarities to a medical degree, however it also covered a few aspects that were not given as much coverage in medical school. The degree struck a fine balance between scientific understanding, social awareness and clinical experience, and crucially also allowed me automatic entry into Cardiff Medical School after meeting certain criteria. On completion of this degree to a First Class classification standard and satisfactory interview performance, I was fortunate enough to gain a place at Cardiff Medical School as a graduate entrant into the second year of the course.

Being unable to achieve the traditional four A-Levels due to signing with Cardiff City FC at 16, I originally doubted the possibility of studying medicine in the future, as I thought my educational qualifications would not be of a sufficient standard. However, on reflection I see the route I have taken as a huge benefit to me.



Spending two years of my teenage life in full time employment, and spending a further three years in an academic environment, gaining both scientific and clinical experience at the University of South Wales, has allowed me to mature as a person and enter a route into medicine that is not generally taken.



With my father being a police officer and my mother a housewife, I had very little knowledge of the medical career.



However, studying at the University of South Wales gave me a relaxed yet true experience of a clinical environment from a non-biased point of view.

Having already spoken to many senior consultants in a clinical setting, I am extremely confident that the route I have taken thus far has been an excellent one to take. Many of these consultants are intrigued by the prior experience of a scientific degree, along with the taste of clinical experience I have had and believe it is something that should be developed further to offer extra opportunities to potential medical students.

THE INTERVIEW

So you've decided you want to become a doctor (congratulations! It can be a daunting time trying to plan your future career) and you've been asked to attend an interview at a Welsh medical school (congratulations again!).

Don't panic! 'Interview' can be a scary word but if you've ever had a part time job, it's likely you've experienced this in some shape or form already.

Most, but not all, medical schools interview prospective candidates. Approximately 10% of all applicants are interviewed, with one in two, or perhaps three, then being offered a conditional place. Therefore, getting an interview offers a great opportunity to get a place! Interviews vary between medical schools but many are panel interviews; usually a mix of academics, clinicians, patient and student reps.



What are they looking for?

Interviews are a university's opportunity to see how you perform under pressure and whether you display the skills required to succeed at medical school, and ultimately practice as a doctor.

These could include communication skills, honesty, empathy, problem solving, reasoning and listening skills. They are also an opportunity for the panel to gauge your knowledge about medicine as a career, topical issues and what motivates you to want to become a doctor in the first place.

Finally, an interview is also a chance to ask about what you might bring to university life, your hobbies and interests.

As with an exam, an interview needs to be prepared for and all possible questions considered.

Questions to consider

- Who are you and what you are doing now? (Don't assume they have your UCAS form in front of them. Sometimes they don't. Assume they know nothing but your name).
- Why do you want to be a doctor/how did you come to your decision to be a doctor?
- 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 the 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/university life?
- Do you have good communication/interpersonal skills and enjoy working with people?
- Can you demonstrate an active interest in health and medical news stories and talk about what you have read/heard/seen recently?

You may also be asked about when things haven't gone so well, so think about and be prepared to answer these types of questions too. These can include:

- Can you give an example of a time when you performed a task poorly?
- Give an example of poor healthcare you have observed and why you felt it was poor.
- What would your friends and family say are your biggest weaknesses and do you agree with them?



What are Multiple Mini Interviews?

Often referred to as MMI, this is a technique some medical schools use to interview candidates. For example, Cardiff University School of Medicine requires applicants to attend a 10 station multiple mini interview, where applicants rotate and each station lasts around six minutes. The interviews focus on exploring the personal qualities and attributes important in developing good doctors in the future.



What's the UKCAT?

It's an admissions test that's used by some universities for their medical programmes. It's a computer-based test that helps universities to choose applicants with the most appropriate mental abilities, attitudes and professional behaviours required for new doctors to be successful in their clinical careers.

You'll be able to see example questions and tips on the UKCAT Facebook or Twitter pages.



TEN INTERVIEW TIPS

1. **Prepare.** Think about possible questions, read about topical medical stories, and talk to other people who have had interviews or look at internet forums.
2. **Read about the course and university.** Have an idea what they might be looking for.
3. **Do not learn answers parrot fashion.** You need to sound natural and sincere.
4. **Dress appropriately.** Look smart and professional.
5. **Do not be late.** This isn't a good first impression to make.
6. **Arrange a mock interview.** Panel members don't need to be doctors but people who have experience of interviews and employing people, i.e. a teacher.
7. **Ask a few questions at the end.** Show an interest in the university/course.
8. **Think about body language.** Appear interested and engaged.
9. **Think before you speak.** It's better to take time to answer than waffle.
10. **Be honest.** Know what you wrote on your personal statement and be prepared to talk about it.

Other questions to think about

- Why do you want to be a doctor? Why not a dentist, nurse, pharmacist or physiotherapist?
- What part do you think information technology plays in the daily life of a doctor?
- How do you react to stressful situations? Can you give an example?
- What are the main ethical questions facing the modern medical profession?
- Do you think teamwork is important in medicine?
- How is the work of a GP likely to change in the next decade?
- Have your opinions of medicine changed as a result of your work experience?
- Which of your A-Level subjects is most useful for studying a medical degree?
- What attributes do you possess which make you suited to a career in medicine?



Dr Banfield with a group of students

INSIDE INTERVIEWER: AN UNOFFICIAL GUIDE

Dr Phil Banfield, a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist in Glan Clwyd Hospital, north Wales, interviews prospective medical students. Here, he gives the low down on what interviewers are really looking for.

It might sound obvious but medical schools want to select students who they believe will make good doctors. It is almost a given, because so many more people apply to medical school than there are places, that the academic standards will be met if you have got as far as an interview. These vary between medical schools. For some medical schools, the entrance requirement includes an additional aptitude test.

In general, we are interested in the qualities that are considered to be sought after in prospective medical students and the doctors that they become. It's our role as interviewers to get to know you, to see beneath the surface and to get the best from you. We will expect everyone to be very nervous and we are trained to allow for this.

We will verify and develop the relevant claims made on your UCAS form. It is our role to probe the quality of your various experiences, skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to our published selection criteria.

The whole interview is also designed to test your ability to communicate – we have seen your written words, but the majority

of communication in medicine is verbal and how you use your hands and face (non-verbal) is also hugely important to us. This not only says much about you, but also how you are likely to be with patients.

We want you to add and develop ideas in your personal statement rather than just repeating what we have already before us.

1

Motivation and interest to study medicine/ demands of medical training

At some stage you will be asked why you want to study medicine at the particular medical school you are being interviewed for.

Some people will have direct knowledge of how tough the course is, but some will not – there are loads of different ways of expressing yourself. If you can use examples that demonstrate you have been organised and able to cope with too much to do at once, then so much the better. We like asking you about challenges and how you have, or would, overcome them.

2

Caring ethos, sense of social awareness, understanding of medical practice and difficult decisions facing doctors

We are sometimes more interested in what you learned, how you feel and how something has changed you than in the actual activity itself. Most people will have done some form of caring or observation of health and/or social care. We want to know what was good, what you found challenging, and how you responded to difficult situations.

It is important that you are able to connect with the diverse range of patients you will meet. Having experience and knowledge of the full range of society also helps – it can be a rich source of discussion. Strangely, this is the section where we learn about YOU as an individual, because it reveals your attitudes to life and other people.

In this section, it is fair game to ask your views on the challenges to the NHS and anything topical in the current news. It is not about giving just facts, but reasons why and your opinion about

what could be done. These do not need to be right or wrong, just well-reasoned. If an interviewer starts arguing with you, you are either doing very well (you are sparring with them successfully) or they are an untrained and lousy interviewer!

3

Sense of responsibility

It goes without saying that being a doctor carries immense responsibility. In some ways, nothing really prepares you for this until you are being trained for it, but we can get a reasonable idea of whether you are the sort of person who can cope with this by how willing and able you have been to take on responsibility so far in life. This has as many ways of being expressed as there are applicants! This may be at school, outside school or even at home. Telling us about how you approach this responsibility tells us a lot about you.

4

Evidence of a balanced approach to life

You should get a chance to tell us about things we haven't asked you about. Pick wisely! We want to know what else you do that makes you an individual and different from everyone else. This is your opportunity to point the panel in your direction!

5

Ability to communicate effectively: interpersonal skills

The interviewers will have been able to assess this without direct questioning!

This is just an outline of what you can expect. An interesting answer or candidate may take the panel away from this structure – our overall feeling about you as a person correlates reasonably well with how you will do at medical school. We write quite detailed notes at the interview to allow for any possible challenge to our decision, but also in case you just miss a grade at A-Level, all may not be lost!

My best tip – be YOU. Be honest, smile and tell us why we should give you a place at medical school without asking us to do so directly!



OTHER OPTIONS IF YOU'RE NOT ACCEPTED THE FIRST TIME

Dr Zoe Morris-Williams

You didn't get an interview

If you didn't have any interviews, this doesn't mean your dream of becoming a doctor is over. Remain focused on your A-levels but get someone with experience to look at your UCAS form to see where it could be improved.

Once you have attained your A-level grades, it is worth approaching the universities you applied to, for example through clearing. If this fails then you could take a year out and reapply.

Another option would be to apply for another degree course at a university which has a medical school and allows transfer from other degree programmes to medicine.

Cardiff University, Bangor University and the University of South Wales offer three year medical sciences/medical pharmacology degrees. High achieving graduates of these courses can be considered for entry into Year 2 of Cardiff University's five year undergraduate course.

Finally, you could do an undergraduate degree and then apply to medicine as a postgraduate. Some universities have specific postgraduate courses.

You didn't get an offer

Your main focus initially should be to get the highest grades possible in your A-levels. It may also be worth contacting any of the universities where you had interviews to ask for feedback.

Your options are much the same as above.



The Institute of Life Sciences building at Swansea University Medical School

You didn't get the grades

It is still worth contacting any university where you had an offer. They may be prepared to overlook small shortfalls in grades, depending on their uptake that year.

Failing this, discuss the possibility of resits with your school. Check if your first choice university will let you defer your place for a year or whether you will need to reapply.

You should always have an insurance choice on your UCAS form; a fifth non-medicine choice, for example an alternative course at a university that may allow you to transfer after one or two years to medicine. If you did not, then try this through clearing.

Some universities may consider allowing you to do a pre-medical year and then join medicine at first year afterwards.

Top tips if you don't get accepted:

- Before applying, look at courses at universities that allow inter-degree transfers and always apply to one of these as an insurance choice.
- Ask each medical school you applied to for the 'rejection code' which applied to your application. This should tell you what area you need to improve.

“

My parents tell me one day when I was 10 years old, I walked into the front room and told them I was going to be a doctor. They cannot work out why and I cannot remember; never considered anything else.

Dr Andrew Dearden, GP

”

“

Having always been interested in the sciences, I felt that medicine would be a great challenge. I have no regrets that I chose such an interesting career so full of variety.

Dr Phil White, GP

”

I did it my way ●●●●●

I DIDN'T GET THE GRADES



Rhiannon Murphy Jones,
4th year medical student at
Cardiff University School
of Medicine

'I didn't initially get the grades to get into medical school, so decided to study Medical Sciences as an undergraduate degree, with the end goal of entering Medicine in Cardiff as a postgraduate.

'It was hard work and required dedication but I am now thankful I took the unconventional route.

'The extra time allowed me to be really sure that medicine was the vocation for me and I entered second year feeling better prepared than I would have been at eighteen.'



THE LOW DOWN ON MEDICAL SCHOOL: WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE

Bethan is a GP and chair of the BMA's Welsh junior doctors committee.



I am writing this as the chair of the BMA's Welsh junior doctors committee and on the verge of qualifying as a general practitioner. My 17-year old self wouldn't have quite believed it!

I decided at the age of 11 that I wanted to be a doctor. I made sure I chose the right GCSEs and A-levels, did the extra-curricular work that was needed for medical school applications but didn't get a place. I made sure that I worked hard enough to get the required grades; I was then able to take a gap year to try again the next year and, after a few more rejections, I ended up with an unconditional offer from Guy's and St Thomas' the second time around.

My time at medical school was one of the best experiences of my life – it was hard work but also a lot of fun! Medical students start working hard from day one and I often had more lectures in a day than other students have all week, but this is all preparation for the reality of being a junior doctor. My course was split into 'pre-clinical' and 'clinical' years, and the latter were even more enjoyable because we hit the wards and met with patients regularly, getting a sense of what it was really like to be a junior doctor (but without all the responsibility at that stage). In the final year, we shadowed the

junior doctors, doing all the jobs we would be doing the following year as newly qualified doctors, although nothing can fully prepare you for the reality of what it's really like on day one on the ward as a fully qualified doctor.

As well as work, a social life is also important at university and I joined the university rowing club with the opportunity to meet new friends, learn a new sport and stay fit – fresh air and exercise were a good balance to the standard stresses of numerous coursework deadlines and, of course, written and practical exams to sit.

Choosing the right university for you and then getting a place is difficult – the grades are high because of the immense competition for places, rather than an indication of how clever you have to be to be a doctor – but what follows is also hard. A medical degree is hard work from day one, with a much higher workload than most other courses. It is not an easy ride and being a junior doctor is tough at times but it's worth it.

It doesn't matter if you don't know what you want to do for the rest of your life from day one – I trained in psychiatry then general medicine before realising that I wanted to be a GP, but every experience you have goes into building the doctor you eventually become.

If you do decide to become a doctor and believe it's the right path for you, then stick to it and don't let anyone put you off. I wish you the best of luck!



A TASTE OF BEING A DOCTOR



Students getting involved at Swansea University Medical School



Cardiff University's Cochrane Building, which houses medical education



The Institute of Life Science at Swansea University Medical School

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN THE BMA WHEN YOU BECOME A MEDICAL STUDENT

So that's it. The low down on how to become a doctor. We've tried to be as honest as possible about the process, so if and when the time comes for you to apply to medical school in Wales, there won't be any surprises! We've offered our expertise, and if you haven't already done a quick internet search, you may be asking yourself, 'so, who exactly are the BMA?'

We're BMA Cymru Wales, the British Medical Association's Welsh arm, and we're the trade union for doctors. That means we speak for doctors and represent them. Here's a bit more info...

An association both friendly and scientific to promote the medical and allied sciences and to maintain the honour and interests of the medical profession.

The BMA is...

- a voluntary professional association of doctors
 - speaking for doctors at home and abroad, and
 - providing services for its members
- an independent trade union
- a scientific and educational body
- a publisher
- a limited company funded largely by its members.

It does not...

- register doctors: that is the responsibility of the General Medical Council (GMC)
- discipline doctors: that is the area of the employer/health board or the GMC

Check us out

www.bma.org.uk



@BMACymru

[flickr flickr.com/bmacymruwales](https://www.flickr.com/photos/bmacymruwales/)

USEFUL WEBSITES

We hope this booklet has shown you that it doesn't matter what background you're from, as long as you work hard and have the drive to succeed, you can go into a career in medicine.

Whether you're about to choose your subjects for GCSE or A-Level or if you've just got around to considering your future prospects, it's an exciting time in your life and there's lots of useful information out there to help you make your decision.

You may find these websites interesting...

- www.thestudentroom.co.uk
- www.medschools.ac.uk
- www.medicalcareers.nhs.uk
- www.ucas.com
- www.medschoolsonline.co.uk
- www.southwales.ac.uk/study/subjects/medical-sciences
- www.cardiff.ac.uk/medicine
- www.cardiff.ac.uk/about/our-profile/who-we-are/university-for-all/raising-aspirations/step-up-programme
- www.cardiffstudents.com/activities/society/clwbymynyddbychan
- www.swansea.ac.uk/medicine
- www.swansea.ac.uk/reaching-wider
- www.facebook.com/UKClinicalAptitudeTest
- www.bma.org.uk
- www.facebook.com/BMAWalesStudents



AT THE HEART OF MEDICINE

As a medical student, you are entitled to become a member of the BMA. If you are fortunate enough to be awarded a place at medical school, visit the BMA stand at your Fresher's fair and learn about the benefits of membership

www.bma.org.uk/join
or call **0300 123 1233**

Career path for doctors in Wales

Working in medicine is an exciting, challenging and dynamic career path, with over 60 specialties to choose from. Roles range from a GP based in the community, a hospital doctor, a geneticist in a lab, locum doctors, public health consultants, a lecturer teaching students and research posts, to working in the armed forces or police force.

There are a number of different routes to becoming a doctor in Wales:

Study

Undergraduate medical degree, at least 5 years

This course at Cardiff University allows students to go into hospitals and general practices across Wales to learn. Students learn basic medical sciences, along with hands on tasks and also have contact with patients. Cardiff University School of Medicine also offers a 6 year course for high achieving students who haven't studied Chemistry and Biology at A Level.

Graduate Entry Programme, 4 years

This course at Swansea University is open to those who already have a degree and wish to go into medicine. Criteria does exist.

Alternative route, 7 Years

This involves doing a medical sciences degree for 3 years at Cardiff, Bangor or The University of South Wales, followed by going into year 2 of the undergraduate medical degree at Cardiff University, if you meet the criteria.



Foundation Training, 2 years

In these two years, newly qualified doctors can gain experience in different areas to build on the skills they gained at medical school.



Specialty training, 3-8 years

After finishing their foundation training, doctors can train in an area they choose and become a specialist in this area.



Consultant

13 years minimum length of training

GP

10 years minimum length of training

SAS doctors

Training length varies due to the length and breadth of the role

Llwybr gyrfaol i feddygon yng Nghymru

Mae gweithio mewn meddygaeth yn llwybr gyrfaol cyffrous, heriol a deinamig a gallwch ddewis o blith 60 arbenigedd. Mae'r rolau'n amrywio o feddyg teulu yn y gymuned, meddyg ysbyty, genetegydd mewn lab, meddygon locwm, ymgynghorwyr iechyd cyhoeddus, darlithydd yn addysgu myfyrwyr a swyddi ymchwil, i weithio yn y lluoedd arfog neu'r heddlu.

Mae nifer o lwybrau gwahanol at ddod yn feddyg yng Nghymru:

Astudio

Gradd feddygol israddedig, o leiaf 5 mlynedd

Mae'r cwrs hwn ym Mhrifysgol Caerdydd yn caniatáu i fyfyrwyr fynd i mewn i ysbytai a meddygfeydd teulu ledled Cymru i ddysgu. Mae myfyrwyr yn dysgu gwyddorau meddygol sylfaenol, ynghyd â thasgau ymarferol ac maent hefyd yn cael cysylltiad â chleifion. Mae Ysgol Feddygaeth Prifysgol Caerdydd hefyd yn cynnig cwrs 6 blynedd ar gyfer myfyrwyr uchel eu cyflawniad nad ydynt wedi astudio Cemeg a Bioleg ar gyfer Lefel A.

Rhaglen Mynediad i Raddedigion, 4 blynedd

Mae'r cwrs hwn ym Mhrifysgol Abertawe yn agored i'r sawl sydd wedi graddio'n barod ac sy'n dymuno mynd i mewn i feddygaeth. Rhaid bodloni meini prawf.

Llwybr amgen, 7 mlynedd

Mae hwn yn golygu gwneud gradd gwyddorau meddygol am 3 blynedd yng Nghaerdydd, Bangor neu Brifysgol De Cymru, ac yna mynd i mewn i Flwyddyn 2 y radd feddygaeth israddedig ym Mhrifysgol Caerdydd, os ydych yn bodloni'r meini prawf.



Hyfforddiant sylfaen, 2 flynedd

Yn y ddwy flynedd yma, gall meddygon newydd gymhwyso gael profiad mewn meysydd gwahanol er mwyn adeiladu ar y sgiliau a gawsant yn yr ysgol feddygaeth.



Hyfforddiant arbenigol, 3-8 mlynedd

Ar ôl gorffen eu hyfforddiant Sylfaen, gall meddygon hyfforddi mewn unrhyw faes o'u dewis a dod yn arbenigwyr yn y maes hwnnw.



Ymgynghorydd

Isafswm o 13 mlynedd o hyfforddiant

Meddyg teulu

Isafswm o 10 mlynedd o hyfforddiant

Meddygon SAS

Mae'r cyfnod hyfforddiant yn amrywio yn ôl hyd a lled y rôl