



CARDINAL NEWMAN COLLEGE

AIMING HIGH 2021 EARLY APPLICANTS



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE?

How do you choose between the two universities?

The decision of whether to apply to Oxford or Cambridge is, for many applicants, a difficult one. It is much easier to list their similarities than their differences. Both are world class educational institutions with reputations for excellence. Both universities boast beautiful colleges with outstanding facilities, a tutorial / supervision teaching style and cutting-edge research centres. They can also both name some of the most exalted political, business and academic figures in history amongst their alumni. But of course you can't apply to both...

Possibly the most important factor you should take into account is the courses each university has on offer. In some cases the decision may be made for you straight away, e.g. Architecture is offered at Cambridge but not at Oxford. For other subjects there may be an opportunity to study a combination of subjects at one university, although Philosophy, Economics and HSPS (Humanities, Social and Political Science) exist as full, distinct degree subjects at Cambridge, you can study elements of all three together at Oxford with its Philosophy, Politics and Economics course. All are excellent courses but some applicants will prefer a greater degree of early specialisation whereas others will prefer to keep their options open.

Even when your favoured subject is offered in its entirety at both universities, there are often still important distinctions to be made. For example, at Oxford you can study History with a number of other subjects (Economics, Politics, English, Modern Languages etc.), whereas at

Cambridge, although there are no joint courses as such, you have the different kind of flexibility of being able to switch to Law or History of Art after your first year. Another important factor is, of course, the actual course content.

It is also worth bearing in mind that Oxford is a larger city than Cambridge. This means that there is more on offer outside the university in Oxford than there is in Cambridge, e.g. night life and shopping (although Cambridge has improved on this front in recent years). On the other hand, the tranquillity of Cambridge suits some people better.

There are geographical considerations too. Although almost equidistant from London, Oxford students find the trip to the capital considerably easier and cheaper with the excellent coach services. Cambridge is more isolated over in the East of the country. Both, however, have easy access to beautiful countryside which it is worth making use of if and when you have a car.

You may also be swayed one way by family or friends who have been undergraduates at one of the two universities. Although their advice is certainly interesting, we suggest that it should not be the only or even the chief reason for making your decision. The following outlines when applicants should aim to complete the main elements of the Oxbridge application process in 2021/22:

Element of Application Process	Date
Finalise Course and College Choice	June 2021
Attend General Open Days	Late June and early July 2021
Complete draft of UCAS personal statement	By late June 2021
Practice for admissions tests (in addition to help provided by Cardinal Newman teachers it is expected that students will undertake their own careful preparation for the admissions tests by practicing previous test papers available from Oxford and Cambridge and other relevant websites)	June – October 2021
Submit application to UCAS for Oxford or Cambridge	Late September 2021
Register for admission test / submit Cambridge Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ)	By 15 th September 2021 for Oxford Law. By 15 th October 2021 for other courses
Admissions tests for various subjects at Oxford and Cambridge	3 rd November 2021
Submission of written work if required	November 2021
Interviews	Early – mid December 2021
Applicants notified of outcome by letter	January 2022

For further details on the exact procedures for each university, we recommend that you consult the Universities' admissions websites: [Cambridge](#) or [Oxford](#).

CONSIDERING OXBRIDGE...?

Some good reasons for applying to Oxbridge are:

- You have started to read around the various prospectuses and have decided that the course you want to do is well catered for by Oxford/Cambridge.
- You have researched and like the idea of the collegiate system.
- You have discovered that students at Oxbridge learn fast, are taught in small groups, have a very low dropout rate, and enjoy conditions which are very conducive to good performance.
- You are likely to achieve at least 3 grade As at A level (A*AA for most Cambridge courses) and already have excellent GCSE results, although this does not mean a solid set of GCSE grade A*s (8-9s) by any means. If you have uneven GCSEs but are now on target for A*/A at A level, then prepare a brief explanation in your personal statement and go ahead.
- **You realise that entrance to Oxbridge is very competitive and that every year excellent candidates fail to get in. You have faced up to this and already know that should you not get an offer there are other first-class universities where you would be very happy to study.**

What should I do first?

Start early; be organised

One of the reasons that certain schools and colleges get so many students in to Oxbridge is that they **expect** their students to aim high, and they start to prepare them well before the end of year 12. Many centres will expect students to have the university applications procedure well under way before the end of the summer term in year 12, so that the UCAS form is already completed in draft form. This means that the forms may be finished and sent to UCAS within the first few weeks of year 13. If you are reading this in year 12, there is no reason why you should not do the same. You do not need to have a tutor to hold your hand; make a start independently.

Individual Research

If you have not already got your own copies of the university prospectuses, order them from the universities' admissions office. Also get the alternative prospectuses. Look at the content of the courses carefully: there are considerable differences of content and approach between Oxford, Cambridge and other good universities. Look at the various league tables, both for universities and for departments within the universities, but remember that there is much discussion about the value of these tables, and there are flaws in all of them. Use them along with other course guides and H.E. handbooks and then once you have done the research, trust your own judgement.

Choices, Visits and Courses

You should also research the individual colleges within the universities. Investigate them on the web or in the library and then order your own prospectuses for the ones you like. On the web, a full list with links to the Oxford and Cambridge Colleges can be found here:

Oxford College list: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/college-listing?wssl=1>

Cambridge College list: <http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/colleges/list.html>

Remember that if you cannot get to an open day, you can arrange an informal visit on a different occasion: phone the college admissions office and ask. This is another important point: don't be afraid to ask for advice from the admissions office of any college in which you are interested. It is in the college's interest to help you to be as well informed as possible: if you find a college to be unhelpful, ring another!

Some colleges are more famous than others, but remember that all of them follow the same courses, teach according to the same system and their students will attend the same departmental lectures. Select a number of colleges and look at the statistics to see how heavy the demand has been for places on your chosen course. Start to get a feel for the differences between the colleges, but do **not** choose a college just because it has a famous name. Try to go to at least two different colleges on open days : that will give you a better understanding of how individual they are in character. You may find that while one college seems remote, another has an immediate appeal.

Every year we receive many enquiries from parents about how best to support their son or daughter's application to Oxbridge.

The information below details the stages of the application process when applicants are most likely to need your assistance and support.

1. [Deciding whether to apply to Oxbridge](#)
2. [Course and University Research](#)
3. [College Choice](#)
4. [Extra-curricular Activities](#)
 - a. [Work Experience](#)
 - b. [Further Reading](#)
5. [Interview Preparation](#)
6. [Outcome of the Application](#)

1. Deciding whether to apply to Oxbridge

Applying to Oxbridge requires thorough research, outside reading and additional preparation, so the decision should not be taken lightly! Although the initial impetus often comes from the College or the parents, it must eventually be the applicant's own decision to apply, since this encourages him or her to take ownership of the process.

2. Course and University Research

Admissions tutors look for applicants who have researched their chosen course in great detail, and who they are therefore confident will enjoy studying it and will remain committed for the duration of their degree. We advise you to encourage your son or daughter to contact the faculty of the subject(s) in which s/he is interested to request additional information on the courses, and to compare this to other prospectuses to establish exactly how the courses differ.

When choosing which course to apply for, genuine interest in and enthusiasm for the subject will be essential if the application is to be successful, so your son or daughter may not necessarily want to study the subject(s) in which s/he has excelled at College if his/her interest in these is waning. It is often useful to consider new subjects, so an open mind is vital at this stage!

3. College Choice

Having decided to apply to Oxbridge and chosen a course, applicants must select a college. There really is no substitute for visiting the colleges in person, ideally at one of the official Open Days and with an independent visit as well. During the latter, it is usually possible to visit a college and ask the porters if you may look around by yourselves, or even to arrange an appointment by contacting the college in advance.

Parents are often able to contact friends and relations to enable applicants to get in touch with current or past students of particular colleges, which can be a useful way to gain more information. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that applicants whose parents, siblings or other relatives who have attended their chosen college will have a higher chance of gaining an offer!

Finally, if applicants are struggling to decide between colleges, they can consider making an Open Application, where the application is automatically allocated to a college by the Admissions Office. This is a good option for those who genuinely have no preference about the size, location or facilities of their college.

4. Extra-curricular Activities

Whilst it is true that academic potential and enthusiasm are more important to admissions tutors than extra-curricular activities, there are many activities which help support the academic application whilst showing evidence of other talents and skills.

Work Experience - Evidence of the practical implementation of an applicant's chosen subject is becoming increasingly important in the admissions process. For vocational subjects, work experience shows admissions tutors that applicants know exactly what their chosen career entails; while for others, it can be a useful way to explore different areas of the subject. Parents are often able to assist in the organisation of this through friends, relatives and colleagues, and you should encourage your son or daughter to be as proactive

as possible during each placement so that s/he can meet different employees and understand what their roles entail.

Further Reading - Reading beyond the A-level syllabus is compelling evidence of a genuine interest in the chosen subject, and you should therefore encourage your son or daughter to read newspapers, journals and texts which help to develop knowledge and understanding of the subject. This is not easy to fit in around College work and other commitments, so 'little and often' is usually the best method! Parents can help by buying broadsheet newspapers regularly and by subscribing to popular editions: *New Scientist* is useful for Scientists and Medics; *The Week* gives a comprehensive overview of the last week's current affairs and their press coverage, and is therefore useful for all subjects.

Essay competitions – each year Oxford and Cambridge universities run a number of essay competitions and students should consider applying for these as evidence of extra-curricular interest in their subject. Even if they did not win a prize the universities will still be impressed by their enthusiasm and motivation to enter.

5. Interview and Test Preparation

Once applicants have submitted their UCAS forms – by the end of September - they will start to prepare for the interview. This is usually when applicants are under most pressure: they are juggling College work and commitments with additional Oxbridge preparation, and nerves often increase as the

interview approaches. Parents can offer support here by encouraging applicants to maintain a balance between interview and test preparation and other activities, and they can help to alleviate the pressure by emphasising that it is not the end of the world if the application is unsuccessful!

6. Outcome of the Application

Applicants to Oxford and Cambridge applicants usually receive a letter early in the New Year notifying them whether their application has successfully resulted in an offer or not.

THINKING OF APPLYING?*THE PROCESS*

As with other universities, there are no set "grade requirements" for applying to Oxbridge. However, the fact that Oxford and Cambridge are considered Britain's "elite" universities would suggest that high grades and academic prowess, as well as commitment to your chosen course, is essential. Each year, thousands of students apply for a place at these universities (a total of over 38,000 in 2018) so competition is understandably intense. However, please be aware that you cannot be offered a place if you do not apply. Every year thousands of students who are very able and would have had a serious chance miss out because they perceive Oxbridge to be "out of their reach". The universities' access schemes work very hard to undo the impression that it's not worth applying if you aren't from the 'right' background.

Stage One - Decisions

To those wishing to apply to Oxbridge as an undergraduate, your journey will start with a decision. Rules dictate that you may only apply to **one** of the two universities, and therefore, you need to decide which. You could choose based on the place or even the course, but try to decide at which you would be happiest - a degree takes a long time. Oxford and Cambridge are in some ways very different places to study. Each is equally fulfilling and rewarding academically. Be aware that there are subtle differences in what courses each university offers (e.g. Cambridge offers Natural Science in place of Physics, Chemistry or Biology, Oxford offers Politics, Philosophy and Economics or

Economics and Management whereas Cambridge offers Economics on its own).

It is definitely worth visiting your chosen university, as the next stage is to choose a college. As Oxbridge operate on a collegiate system, students belong to a college within the university. Your college is the centre of your academic and social life. Many students will find that they have no particular college preference; however, almost every student, regardless of college, believes their college is the only place for them, feels that they belong and will succeed there. Visiting- for example, through the universities' regular open days- can sometimes help. If you cannot decide, it is always possible to make an open application, where the university will place you at a college which is undersubscribed that year. In no way does this disadvantage your application.

Stage Two - UCAS

So you've decided to apply... fantastic. However, the next stage is arguably the hardest. You need to start your UCAS application pretty much as soon as possible, as the closing date for all Oxbridge applications is **the end of September 2020**. By this time, you will need to have completed stages one and two. You should also check whether there are special Oxbridge deadlines for any external tests you are taking, for example the BMAT, ELAT, HAT, TSA or LNAT.

Everyone needs a reference for their UCAS form, but you should inform your personal tutor of your decision to apply to Oxbridge as soon as possible as

they will take great care in preparing the references for Oxbridge applicants. The [Extenuating Circumstances Form](#), for Cambridge gives teachers the opportunity to provide contextual information about applicants so they can be fairly assessed.

Oxford encourages teachers to include details of any special circumstances or other relevant information in the main UCAS application. Oxford also uses publicly-available information to indicate those applicants who may have experienced educational or socio-economic disadvantages. Where applicants demonstrate the necessary academic aptitude for Oxford, they are likely to be considered for interview.

Stage Three - Extra Forms

In addition to early deadlines, UCAS and interviews, Cambridge ask students to complete an additional application form called the Supplementary Application Questionnaire. This is e-mailed to applicants on receipt of their UCAS application.

Stage Four - Application received

After the deadline, most colleges will send acknowledgements that they have received your application. Cambridge will do this as they send you the SAQ form. If you made an open application, you will be sent confirmation as to which college you have been allocated.

Stage Five - Oxbridge tests

If your course or College require you to do a test you should prepare for this as soon as you have completed your personal statement in the summer. Do not leave it until you have submitted your UCAS form as you will not have enough time. Most **Oxford** courses and colleges require that you pass an admissions test as well as standard A level qualifications. The details for a majority of these university admissions tests are provided below, although it is not an exhaustive list.

Please check whether you have to pass an admissions test when deciding which courses you are going to apply for, as there may be admissions tests that are not included in the list on this page.

[BioMedical Admissions Test \(BMAT\)](#)

For entry to medicine, veterinary medicine and biomedical science courses.

[Classics Admissions Tests \(CATS\)](#)

For entry to any course including Classics at the University of Oxford.

[English Literature Admissions Test \(ELAT\)](#)

For entry to English courses at the University of Oxford.

[History Aptitude Test \(HAT\)](#)

For entry to all degrees involving history at the University of Oxford.

[The National Admissions Test for Law \(LNAT\)](#)

For entry to law. ***Students need to apply for the LNAT test by September 15th 2021 if they are applying for Law at Oxford.***

[Mathematics Aptitude Test \(MAT\)](#)

For entry to mathematics or computer science, or a joint honours degree involving mathematics at the University of Oxford.

[Modern Languages and Linguistics Aptitude Tests \(MLLAT\)](#)

For entry to any course including a modern language at the University of Oxford.

[Physics Aptitude Test \(PAT\)](#)

For entry to physics, or a joint degree involving physics at the University of Oxford.

[Thinking Skills Assessment \(TSA Oxford\)](#)

For entry to philosophy, politics and economics (PPE), economics and management (E&M), experimental psychology (EP) or psychology and

philosophy at the University of Oxford.

Cambridge state that, depending on the course and College you apply to, an interview may be the only additional assessment you undertake. However, as a result of A level reform, more and more Cambridge degree subjects require students to do a pre-interview test. A list of relevant subjects is shown on this [link](#) word.

All Cambridge Mathematics (and possibly Economics and Computer Science) applicants sit the STEP (Sixth Term Entry Paper) after their A levels in the summer of 2021. The College will advise you if you need to send any work in or sit a test and the arrangements for this.

Stage Six - Interviews

Interviews are an integral part of the Oxbridge admissions procedure, and are the part that most applicants fear most. This is an unfounded fear. Interviews are not designed to "catch you out" or "trip you up". Ultimately, the person who is interviewing you is a *tutor* at the college to which you have been allocated. Since this person is most likely going to be personally involved in your tuition throughout your time at Oxford/Cambridge, your interviewer is merely trying to decide the following: "Does this person show outstanding ability?" "Would this person gain academically from my tuition?" "Is this a person I would enjoy teaching?" "Would this person enjoy life at Oxford/Cambridge?"

Oxford asks applicants for most of its courses to take a test as part of their application. Tutors then shortlist applicants based on students' applications and performance in the test. Where applications are around three per place, over 90% of applicants are shortlisted. For the most competitive degrees, this may fall to 30% to allow those who most closely meet the selection criteria to have multiple interviews.

Cambridge makes less use of pre-interview tests and interviews around 80% of their undergraduate applicants. AS-level grades and UMS scores are considered, alongside all the other information available to selectors, both in deciding which applicants will be invited to interview and which will be offered a place. Only applicants for medicine and veterinary medicine are required to take a test before interview.

Your interviews will take place at your chosen college, and possibly at additional colleges: ***You can find more information on doing well at interview [here](#).***

Stage Seven - The Letters

Both Oxford and Cambridge candidates will hear whether their application was successful or not in January 2022. The exact date will vary according to colleges and courses. If successful a candidate will receive a conditional offer. Oxford's conditional offers are nearly always **A*AA** and Cambridge is nearly always **A*AA** (unless you have applied through the Cambridge Extenuating Circumstances Form because you have been subject to a particular

disadvantage). Applicants to Natural Sciences at Cambridge are required to gain **A*A*A**. This may become a requirement for other Cambridge courses.

For Mathematics applicants at Cambridge, almost all conditional offers will include grades in two STEP Papers - three-hour maths exams taken at the end of the A Level exam period, which test advanced problem solving and mathematical ingenuity rather than basic knowledge and technique.

Some Oxbridge applicants will not get a straight rejection/acceptance. Some will be **pooled**. Pooled applicants have been deemed a strong applicant by their chosen college, but have not been selected for study there, and have been placed in a college-wide pool. About 20% of pooled applicants are subsequently awarded a place at. Applicants are pooled for a variety of reasons. For example, pooled candidates at Cambridge are categorised by the pooling college as **A** (strongly recommended), **B** (probably worth an offer), **P** (outstanding on paper but less impressive at interview), or **S** (applicant in need of reassessment).

That's the end of the Oxbridge admissions procedure - it seems long and arduous, but don't let that put you off. Thousands of students each year go through it, and many are offered places. Good Luck!

SOME 'MYTHS AND LEGENDS' ABOUT OXBRIDGE

There are a ridiculous number of myths surrounding Oxbridge applications.

Here are a few examples:

You cannot apply without perfect grades. Incorrect - a wide range of factors are considered and a strong interview performance can result in an offer being made to an applicant who looks relatively poor on paper. However, strong achievement at GCSE and end of year mock exams will strengthen your application, and may reduce the level of interview/test performance needed to secure an offer. Being realistic, it is unlikely that an offer would be made to an applicant not expecting or offering AAA at A Level or equivalent but beyond this starting point, excellent grades are an advantage but not a requirement.

Interviews are the only important part. Not exactly - whilst Oxbridge places a great deal of emphasis on the interview process, due to the large number of people attaining at least AAA at A Level, it is not the be all and end all. Your chances do not depend entirely on interview performance. All information is carefully considered: personal statements, references, exam results, tests (where taken) and written work (where submitted). A good performance at interview will not necessarily get you a place, and a bad performance will not necessarily get you rejected if there is another factor present (e.g. admissions tests, written work) which allows you to stand out against the competition.

Being realistic, though, it is unlikely that you would receive an offer in the case of poor interview performance where the interview was the only additional assessment on top of the application form.

Applying to a less popular college or course will give better chances of acceptance. Many believe that by applying to a smaller college or one which is out of the way (such as Girton at Cambridge) or has few applicants per place offered (such as St. Hilda's at Oxford) will give them a higher chance of a place. Despite the fact that St. Hilda's often receives less than one applicant per place offered (check the Oxford admissions website), it does not mean that every direct applicant is offered a place, merely that many of their successful applicants come from the pooling system. Both Oxford and Cambridge put a lot of effort into inter-college 'moderation' to ensure that your chances do not depend on which college you applied to. You might be the only applicant to your chosen college for your chosen course and still not be offered a place. Choose your first preference based on where you think you might be happy, rather than where you think you have the 'best' chance.

Private school applicants have a far greater chance of getting a place. Oxford and Cambridge both accept a very substantial minority of privately-educated candidates. Compared to national proportions they accept significantly more privately educated applicants (about 40% of Oxbridge offers typically go to privately educated applicants, compared to less than 9% of students privately educated across the country). However, this is unlikely to be because of favouritism; overwhelmingly it is merely that privately educated students are more likely to apply to Oxbridge in the first place (much more than 9% of

applications are from privately educated students) and that privately educated students are more likely to get better grades compared to the national average. Once you have applied, you are statistically almost just as likely to receive a place and have almost exactly the same odds as a privately educated student. Oxbridge has endeavoured to widen access and participation in the selection.

APPLYING FOR MEDICINE, DENTISTRY OR VET SCIENCE: AN INTRODUCTION

Key Points: All subjects

- Early application process
- Relevant, self-organised, work experience is essential*
- The highest A level grades needed - typically AAA
- A Level Chemistry and (usually) Biology essential
- Excellent people skills and sound motivation are essential.
- Selection interviews are important.
- Lots of people apply – between 1 in 5 and 1 in 15 of applicants are successful (depending upon university).
- It takes 5 or 6 years to qualify.
- Foundation year courses are available. These are intended for conversion from other disciplines rather than to supplement poor A level grades.

Medicine

- 29 medical schools to choose from for Standard Entry Medicine.
- A Level Sciences essential – details vary, but typically chemistry + biology + 1.

- Typically grades AAA are required.
- An additional entry examination is required: either BMAT or UCAT.
- Substantial work experience in a care/ clinical setting is essential pre-application (e.g. care home, hospital, St John ambulance, hospice etc.).
- Clinical work experience/ shadowing can be very useful.
- Evidence of being up to date with medical and scientific issues as well as a good knowledge of the news relevant to the NHS is needed.
- Evidence of understanding of the role and career development pathways of a doctor is essential.
- Good health essential (declare anything serious).
- Medical training normally takes 5 years to complete.
- Training patterns and teaching styles vary by university: more universities are now integrating clinical experience at an early stage. Problem based approaches are also becoming more common.
- Possible elective year (maybe abroad).
- Possible intercalated degree (you get an extra science degree by doing extra year).

Specific information relating to the application process for each medical school in the UK is given at:

<https://www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2701/msc-entry-requirements-for-uk-medical-schools-2021.pdf>

*work experience requirements are temporarily modified due to Covid related restrictions.

Dentistry

- 18 UK dental schools to choose from
- A Level sciences are essential – check details at site below.
- Typically, grades AAA are required at A level.
- Good health essential (declare anything serious).
- Will need to do BMAT or UCAT test.
- Pre- application work experience in a clinical/ care setting is essential (e.g. care home, assisting nurses, dental practice, hospice) *
- Normally takes 5 years plus a year of foundation (practical/ vocational) training
- First 2 years of study are often preclinical – theory, case studies, relating to patients.
- Then 3 years of clinical training.
- Assessment by exams, coursework and observation of clinical examination
- Possible Intercalated degree

<http://www.dentalschoolscouncil.ac.uk/dental-schools/applications/>

Veterinary Science

- 8 veterinary schools to choose from
- A Level sciences essential – check details with individual vet schools.
- Typically, grades AAA are required at A level.
- Good health essential (declare anything serious)

- Might need to take an aptitude test depending upon university
- Relevant work experience (**with animals**) is essential – see requirements of individual universities*.
- Training normally takes 5 years to complete.
- First 2 year are preclinical – theory etc.
- The 3 years of clinical (medical tasks)
- Possible Intercalated degree (you get an extra science degree by doing extra year)

<http://www.rcvs.org.uk/education/>

<http://www.avsukireland.co.uk/getting-into-vet-school/>

Resources

- “Getting into Medical School” (ISBN: 1-84455-030-3)
- CRAC degree course Guide (ISBN: 0-85660-936-6)
- Health Care Courses (ISBN: 1-84455-048-6)
- Also, websites – www.ucat.ac.uk, www.bmat.or

*work experience requirements are temporarily modified due to Covid related restrictions.

IS MEDICINE RIGHT FOR YOU (AND ARE YOU RIGHT FOR MEDICINE?)

All medical schools look for those with a strong **understanding of, and commitment** to Medicine as a career, and for those who have skills with people, such as the ability to listen, and to understand the situations of others. As medicine is a vocation it is not just about having the right level of intelligence but also being the right sort of character. Key attributes sought by medical schools are:

- Motivation to study medicine and genuine interest in the medical profession
- Insight into your own strengths and weaknesses
- The ability to reflect on your own work
- Personal organisation
- Academic ability
- Problem solving
- Dealing with uncertainty
- Manage risk and deal effectively with problems
- Ability to take responsibility for your own actions

- Conscientiousness
- Insight into your own health
- Effective communication, including reading, writing, listening and speaking
- Teamwork
- Ability to treat people with respect
- Resilience and the ability to deal with difficult situations
- Empathy and the ability to care for others
- Honesty

(from **Statement on the core values and attributes needed to study medicine, Medical Schools Council, 2014**)

- Do you feel you have **researched** medical training and careers sufficiently to be convinced Medicine is the right career for you? Have you researched the recent changes to training and careers once you have completed your medical degree? Do you know why it is difficult for some doctors to get training posts?
- Have you had **experience** in a hospital or a doctor's surgery? What did you learn from that experience and did anything surprise you? What advice have you been given by doctors or at medicine conferences you have attended?

- **Voluntary work experience.** Medical schools consider relevant voluntary work experience essential. Long-term experience e.g. 4-6 months volunteering at nursing home for elderly people would be better than short-term e.g. 3 days in a GP surgery. It is far better if the work experience is organised by the student (and mentioned in the UCAS reference) than if it was organised by the college as this shows self-motivation and initiative – valuable characteristics for a medical applicant. Varied experience in health/care sector is the target. As important as the work itself, is the ability to intelligently reflect upon what has been seen and experienced*.
- **Is your concept of being a doctor, dentist or vet grounded in reality?** Do you really understand the day to day role of being a clinician with all its pressures and challenges as well as rewards?

** Work experience requirements for MDV subjects have temporarily changed during the pandemic. More detail on this is given in the presentation.*

Which Courses?

There are significant differences between courses in Medicine.

A number of courses teach through **problem-based learning**, e.g. Liverpool and Manchester. Have you thoroughly researched what is involved in a problem-based learning course, and how they differ from

other courses? Other courses still have lectures but **integrate science with case-based** study. Some courses introduce clinical work very early, some later. Would you be able to talk about course differences and explain why you had chosen that particular course, if you were asked about it in interviews?

What is the Competition for Entry?

- Students applying will need to have a range of GCSEs with very good grades, especially in science-based subjects. For most Medical Schools this means that you will need grade 7-9 in Maths, and dual or single science subjects. A minimum of 6 in English Language is also required by most.
- Chemistry is always required and you must offer it at A Level. Biology is also required by most medical schools. Some offer Biology, Maths and Physics as alternative second subjects. Almost all students accepted to study medicine have both Chemistry and Biology and many also have Maths. Some, but not all, Universities will accept two A Level sciences with a choice of non-science subjects for the third A level. Most places require A grades in the sciences and at least a B in any other acceptable subject you are taking. However, as competition for places has increased, Medical Schools are increasingly asking for A

grades in all subjects and some ask for one or more A* passes. Make sure you look carefully at the entrance requirements for each university because you may also need specific subjects and grades at GCSE Level (or its equivalent). It is rare that an A level retake student is offered a place, unless there are compelling and exceptional circumstances.

- Most medical schools require applicants to sit a pre-application **test**, for which students register at www.ucat.ac.uk. This is about 'exploring cognitive powers of candidates' so that universities can choose those with the 'most appropriate mental abilities, attitudes and appropriate behaviours required for new doctors.' It includes a non-cognitive section 'to identify the attributes of robustness, empathy and integrity'. It is done on-line from May to early October at various centres at a time of the student's choosing. Universities can use marks as they choose, so it will be important to check how universities you might apply to use the test.
- Cambridge, Imperial, Oxford, Leeds and UCL use the BMAT test, which is explained at www.bmat.org.uk.
- If you have a good A Level results profile, but have not taken science subjects, you might consider taking a Foundation course. These take six years to complete and Universities that offer Foundation courses

include Manchester, Sheffield, University College, London, Bristol and Cardiff.

What is your Application Strategy?

- How are you going to write your **Personal Statement**? Most Personal Statements are marked by the Higher Education Institution though practice does vary. Have you thought about what to write to make sure you obtain high marks? What is the best way of describing your medical and community related experience? How will you describe your other skills, activities and experience?
- Institutions only make an offer after an **interview**. How would you prepare for an interview? Some ask questions based on applicants' UCAS forms, and some deliberately do not. Most use multiple mini-interviews, and some use problem-based group sessions. All Medical Schools interview the candidates to whom they might offer a place. As a student it is your opportunity to convince the selectors that you are a suitable candidate. For their part, the selectors will want to discover whether you are really committed to a career in Medicine and are aware of the demands of the course. You need to have clear reasons for wanting to study Medicine as well as knowing about recent

developments and issues in the subject. You also need to show enthusiasm and confidence when speaking to the interviewers.

- There is no doubt that an interview at a Medical School is demanding and it requires you to think quickly. You will need to defend your point of view, however, if it seems appropriate, you must be prepared to admit that you do not know the answer to a question. At the end of the interview do not be surprised if you have no idea how well you have performed. It can be very difficult to know what the questioner is expecting to hear, and questions will rarely have a right or wrong answer. It is also unlikely you will be able to know whether or not you will be offered a place.

What are the Alternatives?

You are restricted to four medical school choices on your UCAS form. In view of the competition for places it might be worth using your other space for another choice. It is important for all applicants to have an alternative plan. This could be:

- Applying for another health professional course, either alongside your original four choices, or in clearing. The most common alternative to Medicine is Pharmacy, but it is worth finding out more about Audiology, Radiography and Dietetics, to name just a few of the other

professions. Dentistry or Physiotherapy courses would not consider an applicant who had also applied for Medicine.

- Graduate Entry Medicine This is open to application from those who already have a bachelor's degree. Many universities accept a degree in any subject, but some require the previous degree to be science- or health related. It is a four-year accelerated degree in most cases, but in some universities, it is a five-year course. It is also known as the Graduate Entry Programme.
- If you obtained AAA at A level, you could apply again the following year. You are allowed also to re-sit UCAT once each academic year.
- Apply for one of the courses like Clinical Sciences at Bradford, from which it is possible for a few students to transfer to Medicine at Leeds after the first year.
- Medicine with a Preliminary Year: This course takes the form of either a five-year Standard Entry Medicine with an additional year at the start, making a six-year course, or sometimes the preliminary year is taken as a standalone one-year course. It is also known as Medicine with a Foundation Year, or similar. This course is designed for those who achieved highly at A level, or equivalent, but who did not take the required science subjects. This extra year gives students the necessary science training to catch up. **It is not a means of boosting the grades**

of those who do not meet the entry requirements of Standard Entry Medicine.

- Apply for a non-science degree which might lead to an alternative professional career e.g. Law, Economics or Psychology.
- Train abroad? This is possible and some overseas medical schools do not require the grades needed for entry to a UK medical school. There can be significant disadvantages if you then wish to practise in the UK

Medical Science Society at Cardinal Newman

The Medical Science Society exists to support students through the application process for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science. We deliver a programme of lectures, visits and other activities through the Spring and Summer terms of year 1. In year 2, the focus is on preparation of personal statements and getting ready for interview.

In the first term of year 1 there is a process of application for MedSoc. In deciding who would be a suitable candidate for the programme, we look primarily at GCSE results and progress in Chemistry and Biology in the first term. The aim is to connect with students who have a realistic chance of being successful in an application to study the very competitive subjects of medicine, dentistry or veterinary science.

The year 2 programme is open to anyone who intends to apply for medicine dentistry or veterinary science who has achieved at least B grades at the end of year 1. Lower grades are unlikely to result in predictions of A grades which is one of the key criteria used by universities in their selection processes.