



## MBChB Admissions

### The Personal Statement

Applicants use the opportunity to demonstrate their enthusiasm and aptitude for the academic subject. Accurate spelling and grammar are of paramount importance. Be especially aware to avoid plagiarism i.e. the words must be your own; keep in mind that UCAS and the University may use automated software to check your statement for similarity to others, and to content on the web.

There are many sources of information to help you to write your personal statement, these include:  
UCAS: [www.ucas.com/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement/](http://www.ucas.com/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement/)  
Widening Access to Medical School: [www.wanttobeadoctor.co.uk/main.php?page=6](http://www.wanttobeadoctor.co.uk/main.php?page=6)

It is essential that you make the statement as personal as possible and try and back up any statement with a link to you. We wish to hear about:

#### Insight into a career in medicine

The Medical Schools Council has agreed that candidates should have obtained some experience of what a career in medicine involves. Applicants should demonstrate that they have questioned their reasons for choosing medicine and have taken steps to investigate what a medical degree and career hold in store for them.

Avoid statements like:

*I have had a lifelong interest in studying medicine.*

This is a common statement and we would advise (i) avoid clichés and (ii) be realistic and honest. The Admissions Panel are likely to be sceptical of what is, in almost all cases, exaggerated. It is not required, nor realistic, that you have always had the desire to study medicine. Instead, we want to know the reasons behind your wish to pursue a medical career. What has motivated you to apply and what attracts you to a career in medicine? For example, the following statement says a lot more about an individual:

*I first became interested in medicine as a career when I had to decide on my A level subjects. Before then, I had not really thought a great deal about what I wanted to do later in life. I read more on medicine as a career using the web and some books on medical careers from my local library before making the decision to apply.*

This statement shows that the applicants is **intellectually curious** about the subject of medicine and is **honest** that their interest developed slowly. It also shows that the applicant can use resources other than the web.

#### Your Academic Record and Achievements

Medicine is an academic subject and we want individuals that are academically inclined, driven to learn themselves where possible, and interested in medicine as an academic subject. This is a good chance to mention any other academic achievements you may have that fall outside traditional GCSE/A levels e.g. awards, prizes and additional academic achievements such as Open University modules. It is also a chance to mention anything that may have affected your level of achievement.

Avoid statements like:

*I have 10 GCSEs and am predicted 3As at A level.*

Instead, consider the following example:

*My main focus has always been science and this is reflected in the GCSE subjects I have taken, which included physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. I have always had an interest in learning a foreign language so pursued French at GCSE level also. I have worked hard during both my GCSE and A levels. With my good study skills and ability to understand concepts easily I was able to gain 10 GCSEs, at A or B. As a result of my outstanding achievements in Physics, my school nominated me for the county's Sixth Form Physicists of the Year Award.*

This statement conveys your **enthusiasm** for science and medicine through your choice of academic subjects. It also attributes your achievements to an aspect of your **personality**.

### Relevant Life/Work Experiences

The School recognises that personal experience in a health and social care setting can make individuals more confident about choosing a career in medicine. Consequently, the School would like to know of any such experiences, what you learned and why it has helped make you more confident about your decision to study medicine. The School recognises that experience in such a setting is increasingly difficult to obtain. If attempts to gain relevant work experience have been unsuccessful, make reference to this within the statement. With the recent expansion in literature and courses aimed at prospective medical students, applicants should have some factual knowledge about their careers and be realistic about the future. Give some indication of how you informed yourself. Overall, the type of experience is much less important than what you have learned from it and how it has helped shape you.

Contact details of supervisors/managers are required for all relevant work experience placements. Note that as a condition of any offer, relevant work experience may be verified and deception in amount or type of work experience could result in an offer being withdrawn.

### Responsibility

Doctors carry a huge responsibility for their patients and applicants should be able to demonstrate that they have begun to develop this aspect of their character. Demonstration of responsibility through paid employment, within school, and through family or leisure activities are desirable.

Avoid statements like:

*I spent one day a week over the summer working in a local animal shelter.*

Instead try to link any experience with personal qualities and skills/experiences that you need to succeed in a career in medicine. For example:

*I made applications to our local hospital and several care homes for voluntary work experience but due to the large number of applications and requirements for previous experience I was unable to gain a position. Instead, I used the web and attended Open Days for several University medical courses to inform myself of the daily life of a doctor. I worked one day a week working in a local animal shelter. Although this was not the same as dealing with patients in a medical setting, it did give me some insights into medically related practices. For example, I was often involved in talking to potential visitors and assessing their needs in relation to a pet. I was able to observe the local veterinarian who attended to deal with some of the sick and injured animals that were brought in. I was allowed to observe the vet during minor veterinary procedures that were performed on site as well as assist in the daily treatment of some of the animals. Through this I gained an insight into the importance of observation in assessing medical conditions and some of the common drugs that are used for local anaesthetic and pain relief.*

This statement shows that the applicant has shown commitment to obtaining experience of the subject of medicine, despite the difficulties in getting related experience. They also suggest that they have the qualities of **responsibility**, **empathy** and the ability to **communicate** with individuals.

### Social and Cultural Awareness

Before embarking on a career so dependent on interacting with all members of society, usually under difficult situations, it is useful for applicants to have some experience on a regular basis of society beyond their immediate environment. Preferably this experience should have been gained over a period of several months, and it is not necessarily required to be directly related to medicine. This may help applicants to reflect on health and healthcare in the wider community. Many applicants gain this insight through work experience, voluntary work, part-time employment and organised community schemes. Activities connected to, and independent of school, are given equal merit.

### Interests, Activities and Achievements

Most of your Personal Statement should be academically related. However, the School believes that people who have developed interests outside their career and who try to lead a balanced life are more likely to be effective medical practitioners. Also, we encourage students to contribute to the sporting, artistic, cultural and community aspects of the University. Successful applicants will have found time to pursue non-academic interests whilst still meeting the necessary academic requirements. The nature of these outside interests is a very personal matter, but successful applicants will describe potentially verifiable evidence of such achievements in more than one area, for example through sports, performing arts or community service.

Avoid statements like:

*I enjoy playing guitar in my spare time.*

This does not say a lot about you. Instead, try and link your outside activities or interest to skills and abilities that would be useful for a career in medicine. For example:

*I enjoy playing guitar and have recently passed Grade 6 of the ABSRM syllabus. This has involved a disciplined approach to practising daily and learning the set pieces of music. I have had to develop a strong self-critical ability to allow me to achieve my maximum potential. I have also had to be well organized to fit in all lessons and practice schedules while still doing my A levels. Music helps me relax and helps lower my stress levels. I also have joined a small music ensemble that has performed on various occasions in my local school.*

This statement emphasizes several skills that would be valuable for a career in medicine:

**discipline**, the ability to **self learn**, a capacity for **hard, sustained work**, and that this person can work as **part of a team**. We can also see that the applicant understands the importance of being able to take time to relax.

UCAS also publishes suggestions on how to formulate your personal statement. See: <http://www.ucas.com/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement/whattoinclude>

## 2. Obtaining Work Experience

### Why gain work experience?

First-hand experience and observation of healthcare work is essential if you are thinking of a career in medicine. You need to develop your insight into what the work involves and use the experience you gain to question yourself about whether this type of work is right for you. There is much that is rewarding about a career in medicine but it does involve exposure to a lot of illness, sadness and death. Questions you should ask yourself include:

- Can you relate with respect and empathy to other people including those whose beliefs, attitudes and background differ from yours?
- Do you recognise your own limitations?

Work experience is a means of deepening your understanding of the work of healthcare professionals and, just as importantly, your insight into yourself. You will learn more from the experience if you make efforts to articulate (in conversation or in writing) your impressions of the experience and the impact it had on you.

Don't worry if you are unable to shadow respected clinicians. You can learn just as much from shadowing other members of a healthcare team. What matters is that you make the most of any experience. You can do this by finding out as much as you can before, during and after the experience and reflecting on it as well as by discussing it with others. What did the experience show you about others and about yourself and your reactions, attitudes and beliefs? How have you changed or developed as a person as a result of this experience?

### Tip: Write about your work experience

Keeping a journal where you write about your work experience not only helps you consider your experience more deeply but also is a useful resource to prepare you for a medical school interview. Note memorable moments, describe the patients you meet, report what was said in conversations, and explore the emotions you experienced.

### Where can you gain relevant experience?

A useful web site that advises on how to obtain experience is:

- A Taste of Medicine. Includes videos and advice on obtaining work experience. URL: <http://www.tasteofmedicine.co.uk/experiencingit/V1.html>.

There are three main settings where you can gain experience that increases your insight into healthcare and the work of doctors and other healthcare professionals:

- Primary Care: GP practices, local medical centres, community-based health services.
- Secondary Care: Hospitals, Polyclinics, Centralised, specialist healthcare services.
- Charities and Social Services associated with vulnerable groups.

Seek out volunteering opportunities for example:

- In residential, nursing homes or hospices
- providing respite support for carers
- Assisting with holidays for disabled or sick people
- Helping in youth clubs, soup kitchens, charity shops or community centres
- Organising events at local centres of worship, sports clubs or your school
- Fundraising for a charity
- Supporting a charity such as Phab (Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied) etc.
- Mentoring, tutoring or coaching; volunteer counselling
- Befriending services to the disadvantaged or elderly people

Long term volunteering for an organisation suggests you have qualities such as **commitment**, **perseverance** and **empathy**.

### **Tips on gaining health related experience**

- Apply early for hospital work experience schemes (see the contact sheet provided).
- Write letters, phone and ask around, persistence is important.
- Ask for suggestions at your local GP surgery (they may be able to put you in touch with another GP. Often there is a confidentiality issue about letting you observe in the practice where you or your family are on the practice list).
- Ask your GP if he/she would talk to you about your wish to become a doctor.
- Ask everyone you know who works in a healthcare setting ('grass roots' experience of caring and communicating is as valuable as witnessing clinical procedures).
- Use any contacts you have (family or friends) who may be able to help you.

Don't forget to maximise and reflect on any caring experience you can gain within your family.