

APPLYING TO MEDICINE

– what a parent should be prepared for

“Mum, Dad – I’ve decided to apply for medicine!” My son announced one Sunday evening just two days before the end of his Year 12 summer term. Although he had casually mentioned being a doctor when he was younger, he appeared to disregard the idea after his GCSEs. He did not choose Biology A Level and did not join the Medics Academy at his sixth form college which promised to support Year 12 and 13 students through their medicine application.

I was shocked and I had a slight feeling of dread. He wasn’t prepared and I wasn’t prepared. Although his brother and sister were at university and so I was aware of the application process, I knew that applying for a medicine degree involved a lot of hard work, research, tests, and interviews and the cost too. To add to this, it was highly competitive and there was no guarantee of an offer at the end of it!

My son has a relaxed attitude towards his work and to life in general. **“Bright but could try much harder”** a common comment from his teachers throughout his schooling. He is fiercely independent and as my youngest child, wants to do everything for himself. When my three kids learnt to ride their bikes, the two eldest used to shout **“Don’t let go, don’t let go”** whereas he would shout **“Don’t hold on, I want to do it by myself”**

So I decided on my best plan – I had to do a lot of the research myself and then drip feed information to him as we went along. I went on the UCAS website (ucas.com) and got a list of the Universities that offered medicine. I then went through all the universities’ websites and looked at their entry requirements, looking at both A Level and GCSE requirements. Most of the Universities require a Biology A Level but there were plenty that would accept Chemistry and Maths.

So as he enrolled on the Medics Academy on the last day of the summer term (...not particularly useful), I started to have a good look through this very helpful website themedicportal.com. This is where you can have a good look at all of the universities and how they assess their applications.

1. How much value do they place on GCSEs? Some of them have very specific requirements and you really need to have a good look through.
2. How much value do they place on the UKCAT score? (more about this in a mo)
3. How much work/volunteering experience do you need?
4. The ratio of applicants per place
5. The type of interview that will take place

Spreadsheets are not really my thing but I made one (...in the background still) and put all the universities that he could apply to on it. So at a glance, he would be able to work out where he should apply to. Summer holidays began and he had three crucial things that he had to do. He had to complete a UKCAT test, try and get some relevant work experience, and start work on his personal statement.

He booked the UKCAT test (£55 in August, £80 in September) and we bought the book which has lots of practice questions in it (£25). There are bursaries available to cover this cost [ucat.ac.uk/ucat/bursary-scheme/](https://www.ucat.ac.uk/ucat/bursary-scheme/) and it is possible to either buy the book second hand or sell it afterwards. We chose the September test as he needed to become familiar with the type of questions he would be asked. All four universities he had chosen to apply to asked for a high score as crucial to get selected for interview. Quantitative reasoning, verbal reasoning, abstract reasoning, decision making and situational judgement.

The work experience became a pressing need, to ensure that he really wanted to pursue medicine and also to have something to reflect on in his personal statement for his UCAS application. Whilst he did have work experience in catering, surely dealing with customers could not be as valuable as patients? A lot of universities do state that they value any customer service experience when assessing the application. My husband and I don't have medical backgrounds and so I texted any medical friends/acquaintances to see if they might be able to help him. So he ended up with a morning in an out patients clinic with a Rheumatologist, a day in Radiography, a morning in a GP surgery and a morning in an operating theatre. The general expectation of two weeks experience ended up being two 2.5 days instead.

At this point, I think I finally accepted that this was really what he wanted to do. When he spoke about the people he met, the patients he heard talking about their lives and the procedures he witnessed, I could see that they had all had a profound impact. Maybe now, I could see him seeing this through.....you can make anything happen, if you really want to?

Early October, the application was submitted with four choices selected. He had achieved a good UKCAT score and so now we just waited to see if he was selected for interview or not. There is so much waiting with Medicine applications!

Edinburgh rejected him, Bristol, Manchester and Newcastle offered him an interview – two in December and one in January. This is where the costs started to add up, especially as we have to travel a long distance each time. We did not go to any of the open days though – what was the point if he didn't get an interview?

My advice would be to contact the medical admissions teams to see if any financial support can be given for interview costs. Book all tickets well ahead if you can. You are given choices of interview dates/times but do be aware, they book up really quickly. If your son or daughter are happy to travel alone to their interview, then let them and this may avoid an overnight stay.

As a parent, there is nothing you can do apart from getting them there – and keeping them fed and watered. I was so proud of him that he had got to this point and he still seemed relaxed – and he was wearing a suit too! I felt sick for him but excited too – what was he letting himself in for?

Three interviews over by mid-January and more waiting. Finally at the end of February, a decision from Newcastle. Rejected. Then more waiting. All of his friends had got their university offers and he was still waiting. In the last week of March, he finally got the news he wanted – two offers from Bristol and Manchester! I could have cried – in fact I think I did! I think he did too!

Corona Virus means that he will not sit his exams which is a shame but he is hoping to meet his offers with the grades awarded by his tutors. It is a really tough time for all of our kids who have made plans and want to move on to the next stage in their lives. I feel like this medicine application process has been such an experience of highs and lows - who would have thought it would end like this?