



SAMDA'S GUIDE FOR **APPLYING TO MEDICINE AND** **DENTISTRY**

2020 LOCKDOWN EDITION



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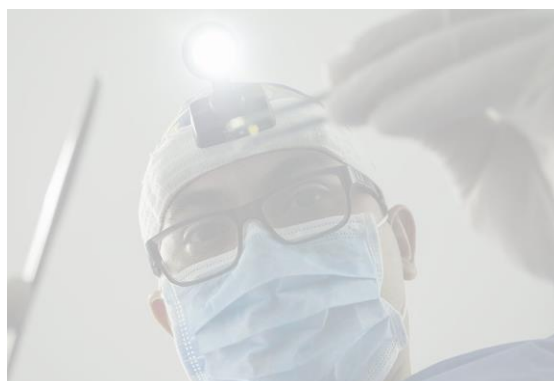
SAMDA



SAMDA

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ALL ABOUT SAMDA

Hello, aspiring medical and dental applicants!

We understand with the current situation going on around the world, you may be facing obstacles in terms of creating an application for medicine or dentistry. Therefore, we have produced this booklet with **specific guidance** on how to **tackle the application process during lockdown**. It may seem difficult gaining relevant experience during these times, but we have compiled some ideas which may help you overcome these hurdles.

Remember, part of medicine and dentistry requires you to be adaptable to situations. **So be creative and think outside of the box!**

WHO ARE WE?

SAMDA (Student Assisted Medical and Dental Applications) was formed in 2003 by a medical student and our staff president, Professor Dame Parveen Kumar. We are a student-run society based at **Barts and The London, Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Dentistry**. Our society is dedicated to supporting sixth form students in local state schools as they take their **first steps** towards a career in medicine or dentistry. We help **highly motivated** students who have the **academic potential** to achieve the grades for medical and dental school.

SAMDA was formed on the founding principle **"to help potential medical and dental applicants concentrate on their preparation for the fulfilment of non-academic university entry requirements"**.

WHAT IS OUR AIM?

Our aim is to **widen participation** in medicine and dentistry by providing continuous support through events that give sixth form students an **insight** into what it's like to study the degree at university. We also provide prospective students with guidance on writing the **perfect personal statement** as well as **preparation for their interviews**. Our skills day is another chance for sixth form students to boost their application through active participation in **clinical skills** as well as obtaining **UCAT and/or BMAT preparation**.





Figures 1 and 2. SAMDA (Student Assisted Medical and Dental Applications).

Our objectives are:

1. *To promote medicine and dentistry as a potential career for A-level students.*
2. *To help under-privileged sixth-form students apply to study medicine/dentistry to a level like that received by students from more privileged educational institutions.*
3. *To create opportunities to discuss the future of students in higher education and medical/dental careers, in an open and non-judgmental manner.*

IS MEDICINE OR DENTISTRY RIGHT FOR ME?

Studying medicine or dentistry at university is a huge commitment. Not only are you dedicating yourself to at least five years of undergraduate study, but you are also deciding about your **future lifestyle**.

In order to make an **informed decision** about whether or not you want to study medicine or dentistry at university, you need to understand what it's like to study the degree as well as what your life will be like as a future doctor or dentist.

In this next section, we will help you **decide** whether medicine or dentistry is the right career for you!

MEDICINE

Becoming a doctor is highly **rewarding** whereby each day is **unique**. As a doctor you must make a commitment to lifelong learning and continuous education. Which includes exams!

Doctors are always keeping themselves up to date with the latest developments to act not only as **healthcare professionals**, but also **teachers** and **scientists**.

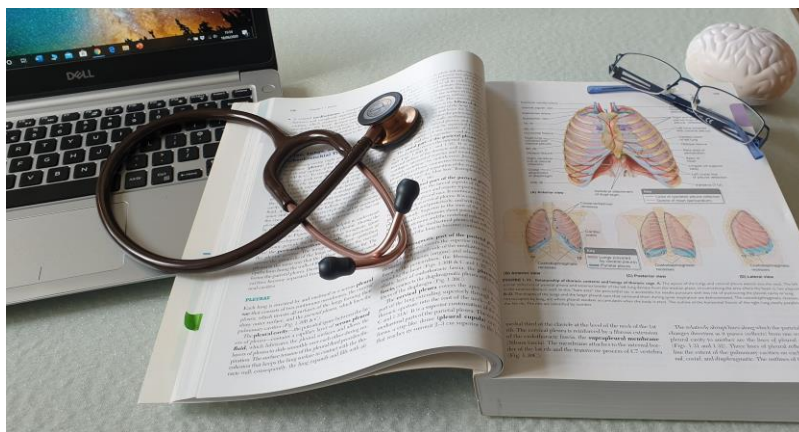


Figure 3. Studying medicine.

1. ASK YOURSELF, WHY DO I LIKE MEDICINE?

Make a list of all the reasons **why you are interested in studying medicine** at university. It could be because of your passion for the **sciences**, your desire to **help** those in need or your **inspiration** from a current doctor either in your family or on television.

This list will help you gather how much information you already have on what it's like to be a doctor. It will also highlight any unknown facts of the career that you discover upon conducting your own research or attending open days.

2. DO SOME BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Search the internet, watch videos, read blogs, and speak to family members, friends and teachers about medicine. Collect **valid** and **insightful** information about what it's truly like to study the degree at university and practice as a clinician in the National Health Service (NHS).

Additionally, you can visit university open days and school careers fairs to speak to existing medical students and doctors to learn of their experiences. During these events you can also obtain **invaluable guidance** on how to **strengthen** your **UCAS application** from students that were in your shoes only a few years ago!

3. AM I SUITED TO THE CAREER?

Getting into medical school is **competitive**, most universities ask for A-Level grades of AAA with top universities asking for A*AA or A*A*A! Additionally, all medical schools require you to sit an **entrance exam**, either the UCAT or the BMAT, both of which have their own challenges. Therefore, you must have the **academic ability** to apply to medical school.

However, academic ability on its own is not enough. You must also be a **well-rounded person** that has good communication skills, can work well in a team and is empathetic. These skills are known as **soft skills** and are key to helping you become a **successful doctor**. **Reflect** within yourself and ask family members, friends and teachers around you for feedback about your **personal attributes**. **Find examples** of when you have demonstrated teamwork, leadership, time management, good organisation, empathy and good communication. **Think about the different sports or instruments you play, voluntary work you do and your**



hobbies!

4. GET SOME WORK EXPERIENCE

Organise work experience in **any medical setting**, including hospitals, general practice, or care homes. Spending time in the environment in which doctors work day in, day out will help you witness first-hand what it's like to be a doctor. You will be able to see how they **interact** with their team of nurses and other healthcare professionals. You can also take note of how they **engage** with their patients, focusing on their ability to listen, show empathy and consideration. Owing to COVID-19, gaining work experience is difficult. However, many organisations have created **virtual platforms** whereby you can get a greater insight into what goes on in a clinical setting!

Check out the **Work Experience and Volunteering** section to find out more and get directed to important resources.

5. WEIGH OUT THE PROS AND CONS OF BECOMING A DOCTOR BASED ON YOUR PRIORITIES

After collecting all the relevant information, **gather your thoughts** on a piece of paper by creating a table of pros and cons. Based on what is important and matters the most to you, make a **decision** as to whether the benefits of becoming a doctor outweigh the potential downsides.

Key Points:

- *Working as a doctor is physically and emotionally tiring. You will be working long hours, sometimes overnight and on weekends.*
- *However, as a doctor you will be helping others in an incredible way.*
- *There are many opportunities within medicine that allow you to pick from a multitude of different specialties.*
- *You can also conduct research and get involved with teaching as a medical student and doctor!*

- *Being part of the medical profession is highly respectable and a huge honour where you can be sure to always make an impact.*

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

1. <https://www.themedicportal.com/application-guide/deciding-on-medicine/>

DENTISTRY

With dentistry being a very **niche** area of healthcare, the decision to pursue a career in this field involves significant **knowledge and awareness** of what it entails. As in medicine, dentistry necessitates **lifelong learning and education**, especially with constantly **evolving research** into materials and techniques.

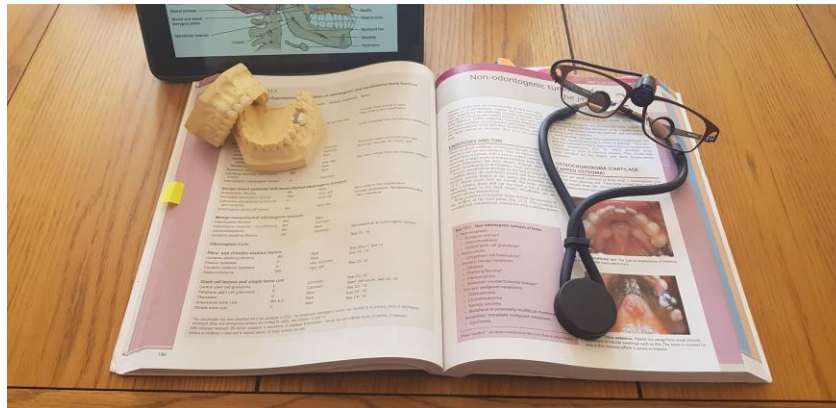


Figure 4. Studying dentistry.

Whilst **academic drive** is important; **professionalism, time management, leadership, teamworking, resilience in developing manual skills, and communication skills** are all key characteristics that one must develop to become a successful dentist.

For example, knowing what treatment to provide and delivering it to a high standard would not be as well recognised if you are **unable to communicate this** to your patient in a way **suited to them specifically**. For this reason, it is important to carry out a **self-evaluation** of the skills you have and whether you

would be able to fulfil the requirements expected of you, but also to consider what you enjoy and what you want from the career. You must be able to **balance** this rewarding but demanding career with hobbies and activities outside the profession.

One method to discover if dentistry is right for you is to do some **thorough research**. Get a general idea of the degree and career through online browsing, reading blogs and watching YouTube videos. Then you can try to **direct more detailed and specific questions** to dentists or dental students you may know – many are also easy to contact on social media and often willing to help! Collate this information and consider what you determine to be pros and cons. Ultimately, it is important **not to have a misconstrued idea** of what daily life as a dentist is like, and so the best way to find out is through **work experience**. Of course, due to the current restrictions placed by COVID-19, gaining work experience is difficult – more information on alternatives and other important resources are in our **Work Experience and Volunteering** section.

Overall, you want to have a good idea of what life is like as a dental student and dentist, as well as all the **potential avenues** available to you in this profession.

Key Points:

- *Whilst dentistry is highly rewarding, it is just as physically and emotionally demanding.*
- *Dentistry is a niche area of healthcare with the option to further specialise, go into research, teaching or even managing your own business.*
- *Considered to be quite a stable career, with the ability to work flexibly to a timetable that suits you.*
- *It is ideal for individuals who enjoy helping others, working with their hands, and love being challenged to critically think and apply scientific knowledge.*

WORK EXPERIENCE AND VOLUNTEERING

Gaining work experience prior to applying for medicine or dentistry is **crucial**. Not only does it help you decide whether your chosen course is right for you, but it also shows that you are **committed and dedicated** to your chosen field of study.

Medical and dental work experience is the **best way** to truly discover what life is like as a doctor or dentist. It will also give you **heaps to talk about** in your personal statement and interviews!

MEDICINE

The purpose of work experience and volunteering is for you to get an **insight** into the life of a doctor, see the **challenges** they face and get a **realistic view** of the job. Dedicating 5/6 years of your life to a medical degree is a big commitment and hence medical schools are often adamant for students to get some sort of experience.



Figures 5 and 6. Medical work experience in a hospital and general practice (GP) setting.

The usual advice would be to get work experience in hospitals, general practices or pharmacies. Volunteering in care homes or special needs schools are also brilliant opportunities to make yourself stand out. But, owing to the current situation regarding COVID-19, these places may not yet be safe for students.

During lockdown, getting clinical exposure is something you may be struggling with. However, **don't despair!** There are many students across the country in the same position as you and universities are understanding of the situation.

1. YOUR OWN PERSONAL INTERACTION AS A PATIENT WITH YOUR DOCTOR IS INVALUABLE

Seeing your own doctor being empathetic and maintaining patient confidentiality should be points of reflection. Think about the qualities of the doctor that made you trust them. All these aspects are plausible evaluations you can make based on your own visits to the GP as a patient.

2. THINK BACK TO THE WORK EXPERIENCE YOU DID IN YEAR 10/11, WHETHER IT WAS IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL, IN RETAIL OR A CARE HOME

All experiences count! Always try to reflect on your experiences. For example, if you did your work experience in a primary school, that could act as a **steppingstone** to your interest in paediatrics. You can **reflect** on the interaction you had with the children and their parents, the enjoyment of seeing the children develop and learn etc.

There is certainly a lot to reflect on within each experience so don't let the fact that you don't have any hospital-based experience demotivate you from applying!

3. IF YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY UNDERTAKEN THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH (DOFE) OR NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE (NCS), YOU WOULD'VE INTERACTED WITH YOUR COMMUNITY IN SOME WAY

For example, in DofE, there is a **volunteering** section that must be undertaken for a couple of months, either in a local youth club, food bank or service for helping children with special needs. This can be included in your personal statement to show **long-term commitment and dedication**.

Don't forget to mention the **skills or qualities** you notice about the doctor/care



worker/teacher in your personal statement and interviews as many of these skills are transferable. **Reflect on them to make your application strong.**

Key Points:

- *Don't get demotivated if you don't have any clinical experience.*
- *Reflect on your own experience as a patient – your relationship with your doctor, the qualities that make them a good healthcare professional.*
- *Think back on all your experiences from previous years and make appropriate links to medicine.*
- *Any community related work counts as volunteering – giving care packs to the elderly for example.*
- *Mention skills and qualities you noticed in an individual that made them good at their job.*
- *REFLECT on your experiences.*

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

Brighton and Sussex Medical School have created a virtual work experience course that is free to enrol and the Medical Schools Council have produced guidance on gaining relevant experience to study medicine during this pandemic.

Follow the links below for more information on online resources related to gaining work experience during this period of lockdown!

1. <https://bsmsoutreach.thinkific.com/courses/VWE>
2. <https://www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2635/guidance-on-gaining-relevant-experience-for-studying-medicine-in-the-time-of-covid-19.pdf>
3. <https://www.themedicportal.com/blog/covid-19-the-best-work-experience-alternatives/>
4. <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/discover-general->



- [practice/aspiring-medics-new/gp-work-experience.aspx](https://www.theaspiringmedics.co.uk/practice/aspiring-medics-new/gp-work-experience.aspx)
5. <https://www.theaspiringmedics.co.uk/online-work-experience>
 6. <https://lifeofamedic.com/2020/04/30/work-experience-opportunities-during-covid-19-lockdown-for-aspiring-medical-students/>

DENTISTRY

Undoubtedly, one of the most **important** factors to help you make the decision about whether or not dentistry is suited to you, and to provide a holistic insight into what life is truly like as a dentist, is **work experience**. Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, advice regarding where to gain this experience would have involved shadowing in general and private dental practices, dental hospitals, orthodontic practices, and perhaps even dental laboratories. In fact, most universities have had a specific requirement in terms of the amount of time spent doing work experience, purely because this indicates to them that you are **aware** of the realities of the career and know what you are committing to. Furthermore, volunteering in care homes and/or with young children is rewarding and also demonstrates many **interpersonal skills**, such as empathy and an ability to communicate with a wide demographic, all of which would be useful to **reflect** on in your **personal statement and interviews**.

Whilst finding shadowing placements was previously notoriously difficult, restrictions placed by COVID-19 have made this **near impossible**. Universities are **aware** of the inability of prospective students to gain work experience and voluntary placements, so **do not fear** that your application is at a disadvantage, as all other applicants are in the same position!

Here are some ideas on how to use this time effectively to gather as much experience as possible.

1. USE YOUR EXISTING EXPERIENCE WITH THE DENTIST TO DRAW UPON AND REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN AND LEARNED

Consider how the dentist made you **feel**, how they **worked in a team** with the nurse to provide your care, and the types of **questions they asked**. Also deliberate on their general style of interacting that may have instilled confidence in you to



trust them. Similarly, you can use other experiences in **non-clinical settings**, for example working in retail, interacting with community members or tutoring, that would have provided similar interactions you would expect at the dental practice (e.g. empathy, working with people of different ages, working in a team, explaining something to someone in lay terms etc.).

2. TRY TO CONTACT CURRENT STUDENTS AND DENTISTS

Although you are unable to speak to dentists face-to-face and shadow them physically, you can try to **contact current dental students and dentists** to ask any questions and get a **greater understanding** of dentistry through their experiences. **Social media** provides an excellent platform to reach out, and most dental students and dentists would be willing to help!

3. HELPLINES AND OTHER VOLUNTARY SERVICES

Whilst many volunteering avenues are no longer available due to issues with infection control, there are others that allow you to work remotely or more safely. Due to lockdown restrictions, many elderly people who live alone have become isolated as a result of minimal interaction with society – there are **helplines** open to the general public that offer a “**buddy system**” or phone call service whereby you take a few hours out of your week to contact and speak to those who need it. Equally, there are many other non-clinical opportunities to volunteer set up by ‘**NHS Volunteers**’ and other well-known services that you could participate in. Generally, it is important to note that you must always work within your competence.

4. CHECK OUT UNIVERSITY WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Universities and other bodies are currently providing a range of **reading material** and **webinars** that could be very beneficial. Take the opportunity to **read around** dentistry and **current affairs**, especially the changes imposed on the profession due to infection control and contamination risks.



5. KEEP UP TO DATE

Keep **up to date** with the **Dental Schools Council guidance** on gaining relevant experience to study dentistry (an update is due soon). It may be that you are able to schedule experience for **later** in the year, before the majority of interviews take place. Individual universities may also be adjusting **their selection processes and requirements** to remove any disadvantage due to curtailment of normal activities.

Key Points:

- *Do not underestimate your existing experience, even if it is non-clinical.*
- *Draw more from opportunities you have already had, and that are currently available, to make appropriate links to dentistry.*
- *Show evidence of working in a setting where you have interacted with the general public, especially beyond your immediate environment.*
- *Try to use available resources to demonstrate that you have investigated and understood the realities of being a dentist.*

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

- <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/colleges/mds/outreach-widening-participation/Work-experience/Being-a-dentist.aspx>
- <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/discover-dentistry>
- MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) e.g. <https://www.mooc-list.com/tags/dentistry>
- <https://www.dentalschoolscouncil.ac.uk/studying-dentistry/making-an-application/>

HOW DO I IMPROVE MY MANUAL DEXTERITY AT HOME?

Manual dexterity is a skill that is **essential** to develop for both dental and medical students as you will need to be able to **perform procedures** that require **precise and controlled movements of the hands**. Manual dexterity is especially important for dental students as success in dentistry heavily revolves around the ability to perform procedures on a **small surface in a confined space**. Therefore, **multiple-mini interviews** (MMIs) might have **stations** requiring you to **demonstrate** this skill.

Manual dexterity is mostly developed during **childhood** but, the good news is manual dexterity is a skill which can be **worked upon and improved!**

The exact definition of manual dexterity could be summarised as: **the ability to make coordinated hand and finger movements to grasp and manipulate objects**. And hence the skill may be developed by practicing activities that require coordination of precise hand and finger movements with the eye.

There are many ways to develop this skill such as:

- ★ ***PLAYING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT***
- ★ ***PAINTING, SKETCHING, COLLAGING, CALLIGRAPHY, ORIGAMI (IN GENERAL: ARTWORK)***
- ★ ***STITCHING, KNITTING, EMBROIDERY ETC.***
- ★ ***BUILDING COMPUTER CIRCUIT BOARDS***
- ★ ***WOOD ART: WOOD MOSAIC ART, WOOD INLAY ART AND MARQUETRY***
- ★ ***CAKE DECORATING***



These are only a few ideas, there are many more activities that could be useful for developing manual dexterity. In addition to having manual dexterity, applicants (especially dental) must know **which procedures require manual dexterity** as they could be asked about them in interviews e.g. **filling cavities, removing calculus, local anaesthetic injections, making dentures etc.** It would be wise to be able to **briefly explain** some of these procedures.

So if you haven't yet taken up an activity to develop manual dexterity, pick something you enjoy and have a go, you will **reap the benefits** once you start dental school and embark on your career!

Key Points:

- *Manual dexterity is essential for both medical and dental students*
- *Dentistry is heavily dependent upon ability to demonstrate this skill*
- *Interviews may require candidates to demonstrate or to talk about manual dexterity*
- *Although the skill is mostly developed during early childhood, it can be improved by practicing certain activities*
- *Playing an instrument, artwork and DT projects are among the many different activities which could be used to develop this skill*
- *It's never too early to practice manual dexterity, so start now!*

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

If you would like to read more about manual dexterity, it would be helpful to look at this medic portal article:

- <https://www.themedicportal.com/blog/how-to-show-manual-dexterity/>



HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT MEDICAL OR DENTAL SCHOOL?

Choosing which medical or dental school to apply to can be difficult. This next section will explain how to make this all-important decision!

COMPETITION RATIOS: PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

The first and **most important** step in choosing a medical or dental school is to **check the entry requirements**.

Check the eligibility criteria to make sure you have a good shot at securing an interview.

Check the grade requirements – If you are predicted AAA, don't apply to a course that only wants A*AA or above, your application may not be considered. This also goes for GCSEs and alternative qualifications. Some universities have grade calculators, whereby they look at your GCSEs and calculate a score based on your grades (e.g 2 points for A*, 1 for A etc.). If your GCSEs are not that strong, pick a university that ranks another element of the application process instead.

UCAT/BMAT – These tests have score **cut offs** that vary every year for each university. Check the website for previous year cut offs or contact the university directly, requesting a **Freedom of Information** for past data on candidate cut offs for interview. Avoid applying to a university that requires the >700 average UCAT, if your score is 670.

Personal Statement – Some universities will **rank** your personal statement against the other candidates. This can be very subjective, so it's worth writing the **best** possible personal statement you can.

FOUNDATION YEARS

There are a number of foundation programmes available for students from **disadvantaged backgrounds**. Again, the best step to deciding on this is to do some research. These courses either offer **reduced grade requirements** OR a **foundation year** to complete before continuing with your degree.



Some courses will look for **non-science A Level subjects**, others will look at what type of school you attend or the area you live in.

WHAT'S THE COURSE STRUCTURE LIKE?

Here is a list of the main types of course structures available:

★ **Traditional**

Mainly science focused in the first few years. Heavy focus on lectures, and less so on individual case scenarios.

★ **Problem Based Learning (PBL)**

This type of course would focus on discussing individual case scenarios. You and your group brainstorm ideas in a session facilitated by a tutor.

★ **Integrated**

A mix of traditional lectures and clinical learning. Some universities may also include PBL alongside it too. This is great if you like a bit of both.

Note: Some universities offer **dissection** whilst others offer **prosection** when studying anatomy, so make sure to contact them to find out. Even if a university is not offering dissection to all students, it may offer it as a selected study module as we have here at Barts!

INTERCALATED DEGREES

Intercalated degrees may form a compulsory or optional part of your degree.

If you are **unsure** whether you would like to undertake an intercalated degree or would prefer **flexibility** in deciding which year you would like to do one, it's probably best to pick a 5 year programme that does not offer it as a compulsory measure.

Remember: intercalated degrees can be an extra expense and cause your undergraduate training to be longer but they have a number of **benefits** – it boosts your CV, gives you Foundation and Training application points and a chance to follow a subject of interest for a year!



LOCATION: CAMPUS V CITY BASED

If you meet the entry requirements for several schools, have a think about where you would like to live for the next 5/6 years. Would you prefer a smaller community that is more campus based? Or a city-based lifestyle? Think about what **opportunities** are available to you whilst you are there. Are any of the hospitals part of the university trust? How **far** will you have to **travel** to attend clinical placements in your latter years?

Societies form a huge part of university life, regardless of what degree you are studying. Most university societies will be available at **all universities**, and even if there's something you like that's not on offer, you could always just start it yourself!



Figures 7-9. Queen Mary University of London campuses; West Smithfield (top left), Mile End (top right) and Whitechapel (bottom).

APPLYING TO DENTAL SCHOOL:

Be sure to **check the facilities** available to you at each dental school, for example, a prosthodontics lab in which you can learn **AND** do your own pros work. Such a facility is not available in all dental schools.

Also, find out the **tutor to student ratio** in the clinic, and how your practical skills are monitored (and how often).

Outreach: research the areas in which the outreach clinics are - ideally you want to go where you are able to treat a **range of demographics and treatment needs** (e.g. dentures, fillings, paediatric patients etc).



Figure 10. Dentistry at Barts and The London.

Key Points:

Does it matter where I go?

- *At the end of day, it doesn't matter where you go for Medical or Dental School.*
- *No one will ask you when you graduate, and it won't affect you getting a job in any way.*
- *However, make sure you are comfortable there for the next 5/6 years!*

HOW DO I WRITE THE PERFECT PERSONAL STATEMENT?

The **ideal time** to start thinking about your personal statement is around **July of Year 12**. This is when you will have completed most of your work experience and will have lots of interesting points to write about!

Here is a breakdown of one way you could format your personal statement. It is important to include all the following points, but you can be **flexible** with the order in which you include them, as long as it is logical and reads well. Moreover, **stick to the word count**, writing over the limit would cut your statement off and make it look incomplete!

1. INTRODUCTION (MAXIMUM 1 PARAGRAPH)

Keep it **short**, no longer than a paragraph. The main thing to address here is **why** you have chosen to study medicine or dentistry. It could be a **personal experience** or even something you learnt that **sparked your interest**.

2. WORK EXPERIENCE (2-3 PARAGRAPHS)

Each paragraph should ideally refer to **each work experience** you have done. Briefly mention where and in what setting the experience was in e.g. General Practice, hospital, pharmacy, dental practice etc.

The key thing here is to ensure that you are **not just describing** what you did during your work experience but are **reflecting on what you learnt**. Mention the **specific skills you developed**, or **saw being demonstrated** by the healthcare professionals you shadowed e.g. communication skills, teamwork skills, working as a multidisciplinary team etc. **Explain what each skill demonstrates and why these counts as a good quality for a doctor. Think about the impact it would have on the patient.**

Try not to get carried away with explaining in too much detail, you can expand on your points during the interview!



3. VOLUNTEERING, EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (MAX 1 PARAGRAPH)

This paragraph will show that you are an **all-rounded candidate**. **Reflect** on the **skills** you have been able to **develop** through your **hobbies and extracurricular activities** and what it says about you as a person.

For example, volunteering for a long period of time shows a great level of **commitment and dedication**. Teamwork and communication skills are evident in activities you partake as a group and so on. Roles and responsibilities can include taking a leadership role during sixth form, being a **mentor** or even having a position outside of school!

Discuss your **hobbies** in a sentence or so. You could mention football, baking, singing, dancing, cycling; the list is endless! Including these activities also show that you can **manage stress** - a skill that you will undoubtedly need when studying a medical or dental degree!

4. CONCLUSION (SHOULD BE A FEW SENTENCES APPROX. 3 SENTENCES)

The conclusion is the last thing that will be read. Therefore, try to keep this **short and impactful**. It should reiterate why you are a **suitable candidate** and make you **stand out** amongst the rest of the candidates.

Key Points:

- *The first draft you write will not be perfect!*
- *To improve your statement, ask as many people as possible to read your draft and provide feedback. These could be healthcare professionals at your work experiences, teachers (your English teacher can check spelling, punctuation and grammar), medical or dental students you know of, your friends, family and anyone you can get a hold of!*

- *However, do remember that everyone will have different opinions and it's okay if you cannot incorporate all their feedback into your work.*

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE UCAT?

The UCAT is an **aptitude test** used by **most** UK medical and dental schools for their admissions process. Each university has its own policy about how much the UCAT affects a candidate's application. For example, at **Barts**, your score carries a **50:50 weighting** with your **interview performance**. To understand how each university uses this test, use the **Medic Portal 'medical school comparison tool'** as well as emailing the university admissions team directly.

Since universities are quite open about how they use the UCAT, we would recommend doing the test **earlier** to allow you to **strategically choose** which universities to apply to. However, owing to COVID-19, the normal UCAT process and UCAS itself, is subject to change. We recommend **keeping up to date** with test dates and testing methods using their official website: <https://www.ucat.ac.uk/ucat/ucat-2020-update/> and following at least one of their social media accounts. See our summarised updates at the end of this section!

In the meantime, try and familiarise yourself with the test.

The UCAT consists of:

- Section 1: Verbal Reasoning (44 Qs, 21 mins)
- Section 2: Decision Making (29 Qs, 31 mins)
- Section 3: Quantitative Reasoning (36 Qs, 24 mins)
- Section 4: Abstract Reasoning (55 Qs, 13 mins)
- Section 5: Situational Judgement - N.B. some universities take this into account more than others (69 qs, 26 mins)

The test structure and tips from previous successful candidates are detailed in the **official handbook** - the UCAT is designed to be as transparent as possible, they aren't trying to blindside you!



TOP TIPS:

Follow these tips to achieve a good score!

1. TIMING, TIMING, TIMING

The entire test is 2 hours long, but each section has a timer. This **time pressure** is not to be underestimated and so we strongly suggest dedicating a period before the test to do **timed practise questions**.

2. FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE TEST

The official website has a very useful '**question tutorial**'. Not only will this give you a sense of timing but also allow you to practice using the flagging feature and the onscreen calculator. Familiarising yourself with these functions will help you be more efficient on test day.

3. IDENTIFY AND TARGET WEAK AREAS

Allow plenty of time to work on your **weaknesses** which can be identified using question banks. Work on the **official practice papers** after tackling these areas to get the most benefit from these resources.

4. MOST IMPORTANTLY- PRACTISE!

Remember, practice makes perfect! So, make the most of the time you have at home and familiarise yourself with different question types. Answer as many questions as you can so that you can be increasingly confident on exam day.

Key Points:

- *Keep up to date with test dates and testing methods using UCAT's official website: <https://www.ucat.ac.uk/ucat/ucat-2020-update/> during this uncertain period.*
- *Familiarise yourself with the test as much as possible during lockdown*

- *Practice, practice, practice!*

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

- ISC's 1250 UKCAT questions.
- Use UCAT's official app for extra practise questions.
- GMC's "Tomorrow's Doctors" document is helpful for SJT preparation.
- <https://www.ucat.ac.uk/ucat/ucat-2020/>

Important UCAT Updates:

- *Registration opens: 1 July 2020*
- *Testing: 3 August - 1 October 2020*
- *Venue: Pearson VUE Test Centre or at home (UCAT Online)*
- *UCAT Online - Further details on UCAT website*
 - *Check computer functions with Official UCAT System check.*
 - *Under 18's require a parent/ guardian to be present at the beginning of the test for consent of recording.*
 - *UCAT Online uses artificial intelligence combined with live monitoring, to safeguard test security. (Use of real time photographs and face-matching, restriction of windows, microphone, and webcam access). PC requires a webcam, microphone, and stable internet connection.*
 - *Recommended not to use if you do not possess IT equipment or require certain access arrangements.*
 - *Can use whiteboard during test (NOT paper, pencils, pen, tissues etc.)*
 - *Items on the wall with writing on them will be inspected by the Greeter. If your workspace does not pass a room scan, you*

will not be permitted to proceed with taking the test.

- Greeter will inspect the room and you e.g. turn out insides of pockets.*
- No talking during the test.*
- The proctor (invigilator) can reset/resume your test if your internet cuts out.*
- *UCAT Test Centre - further details on UCAT website*
 - Cannot go if have COVID symptoms.*
 - Health and safety measures to be taken at all centres (hand sanitizers, face coverings etc.)*
 - Valid ID must be presented.*
 - All rules from previous years still will be upheld.*

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE BMAT?

All medical and dental schools require their prospective students to have taken an entrance exam. Although the UCAT is the chosen aptitude test for most medical and dental schools, the BMAT is the required exam to be taken if you are interested in studying **medicine** at **Oxbridge, Leeds, University College London, Lancaster, Imperial College London and Brighton and Sussex** or **dentistry** at **Leeds**.

In this section, we will discuss what each section entails and provide some **tips** on how you can make the most of the next few months to prepare for the BMAT.

1. TIME-PRESSURE

The BMAT is very **time pressured**, so it's really important to practise questions under timed conditions. Make sure you are familiar with **GCSE science content** for



section 2, including GCSE physics. It is worth going over the symbols of a circuit.

2. TOP TIPS FOR THE ESSAY

In section 3 you must give a **balanced argument**. The format of the essay should have a small introduction explaining the title, followed by **two arguments for and two arguments against** the question. Finally, write a conclusion discussing **your** opinion. Avoid remaining indecisive in your conclusion; formulate an opinion and give your reasoning. Avoid using big words that you are unsure of as it poses a risk of lowering your score rather than improving it!

In many BMAT papers they may show **pictures of a dice**. A suggestion is to take a **cube eraser** with you into the exam and draw on the sides of the cube to help you visualize a dice!

3. WHEN TO SIT THE EXAM

There are **two sittings** for the BMAT (September and November). Doing the exam in the earlier sitting may be better as you won't be applying to BMAT universities blindly. Moreover, you can spend the time saved to revise for your A-Levels! However, do bear in mind that universities such as **Oxford** will only accept the **November sitting**.

Remember, you can only sit the BMAT and UCAT **once per academic year**.

Key Points:

The BMAT is a two-hour long aptitude test consisting of three sections.

- 1. Aptitude and skills (35 multiple choice questions (MCQs) in 60 minutes).*
 - 2. Scientific knowledge and applications (27 MCQs in 30 minutes).*
 - 3. Written communication (essay-style answer to one out of a choice of three questions in 30 minutes).*
- Medical and dental schools will use either the BMAT or UKCAT as their entrance exam.*
 - Have a look at university websites or The Medic Portal to find out*



which medical and dental schools ask for which exam!

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

- All previous BMAT past papers are accessible online to give you a feel for the real exam. <https://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat/preparing-for-bmat/practice-papers/>

WHAT IF I DON'T GET ACCEPTED?

After all your hard work and dedication to securing that place at medical school, you may find yourself in an **unexpected situation** where you have just missed your offer or have not achieved the required grades. Here is what you can do if you find yourself in such a situation.

DO YOU STILL WANT TO STUDY MEDICINE/DENTISTRY?

Firstly, reassess whether you still want to apply for medicine/dentistry and whether it is the right course for you? If the answer is **no**, consider **alternative career paths** best suited to you and your abilities. If the answer is **yes**, then there are many options still available to you to achieve your final goal of being a doctor/dentist!

ASSESS YOUR SITUATION:

There are two possible scenarios:

1. You have **NOT** achieved the grades required.
2. You **HAVE** achieved the required grades but failed to secure a place.

SCENARIO 1: YOU HAVE NOT ACHIEVED THE GRADES REQUIRED

1. Do another degree, then re-apply for medicine/dentistry



There is the option to go through **clearing** or take up your **5th choice**. Do your research and do a degree that you will **enjoy**. This can then lead to **post-graduate entry medicine/dentistry** or being a graduate on an **undergraduate course**. This normally requires achieving **at least a 2.1 in your choice of degree**. Different medical schools have different entry requirements when it comes to graduates, it is imperative you do your research on this closer to the time. Most medical schools would **prefer a science-based degree** and you may have to sit **additional entrance exams** such as the GAMSAT.

2. Resits

You can retake the necessary A-levels and **reapply** with your new grades, although the downside to this is **most medical schools do not accept resit grades**. We recommend you research into this option, as often it may be better to do **another degree**. It is essential that if you are resitting, you apply only to the schools that consider students with resit A-Level exams.

3. Applying abroad

It may be worth applying **abroad**, as often the grade requirements are **lower**. However, you will have to check whether European medical degrees are **recognised** here in the UK and allow you to **practice** as a doctor once you return.

SCENARIO 2: YOU HAVE ACHIEVED THE GRADES

In this scenario, you have all the available options as above **plus one more**.

1. Gap year and reapply

You can take a **gap year**, work on your personal statement and interview skills. This can be done by getting **more work experience** or a **part-time job** where you are dealing with people. It is important that you **continue your extracurricular activities** in your gap year, as you will be asked about your endeavours at your interview. It may also be worth **evaluating your strengths and weaknesses** during this time. By working on your weaknesses and focusing on your strengths you can optimise your application!



Key Points:

- *Applying for medicine or dentistry is challenging!*
- *You are required to excel in more than one thing, from academic grades to extra-curricular activities and soft skills.*
- *Do not be disheartened if things don't quite go to plan, there are plenty of alternatives worth considering!*

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

1. <https://www.themedicportal.com/blog/5-options-if-you-dont-meet-your-med-school-offer/>
2. <https://www.themedicportal.com/blog/not-made-it-to-med-school-your-next-steps/>
3. <https://www.themedicportal.com/blog/what-to-do-if-you-dont-get-the-a-level-grades-for-medicine/>

