

**The importance of experience  
of the world of work in  
admissions to health-based  
undergraduate courses at  
Russell Group universities:  
A desktop review**

**By Jordan Rehill**

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## Introduction

Over recent years, a number of UK policy and research papers have raised questions over equitable access to the healthcare professions. In their 2014 review of medical school admissions the Medical Schools Council found:

“[...] medicine applications being dominated by a small proportion of UK secondary schools and colleges, typically selective, and with applicants who are very likely to come from professional or managerial family backgrounds, and neighbourhoods with high participation rates in higher education and low indices of multiple deprivation.”

A recurring theme within these papers has been the importance of work-based opportunities within admissions processes and challenges preventing fair and impartial access to it. A 2012 report by the then Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty, Alan Milburn, into the subject stated:

“All students wishing to read medicine at university must demonstrate that they have undertaken some form of relevant work experience as part of their application. [...]Until recently, at least, it appears that work experience was unstructured and ad hoc, which favoured young people with connections – including many sons and daughters of doctors.”

A second Medical Schools Council’s review also found that prospective medical students faced difficulties finding the experiences necessary to apply to medical school depending on geographical location:

“Many applicants have stated that the current system in gaining work experience is unfair, inequitable and results in an unjust medical selection process. [...]There were perceived differences in the difficulty in obtaining work experience in different regions. Our survey data shows that the most difficult areas to find work experience were the North West, Wales and the West Midlands. Moreover, access to work experience, voluntary experience and support offered by hospital trusts is variable and inconsistent across the UK with inconsistencies in relation to eligibility, process and access to services.” (Medical Schools Council. 2014).

Similarly, Nielson et al. (2013) studied school leavers looking to Nursing as a career and noted:

“[...] the clear and significant finding that emerges from the data is the need expressed by the pupil voice for more authentic work experience in Nursing.”

This desktop study specifically builds on such perspectives to examine the relevance of experience of the world of work within the admissions processes of specific undergraduate courses at Russell Group universities.<sup>1</sup> Experience of the world of work is understood to refer to first-hand pupil experience of real-world employment environments, taking place in either workplaces (work experience, job shadowing, volunteering, part-time work) or within schools (mentoring, careers and enterprise activities). The study explores the admissions requirements of three healthcare related courses of study for their 2017/18 intake: Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing. It asks whether these Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) expect their undergraduate applicants to have undertaken work experience or secured related work-based experiences prior to application, investigating whether

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<sup>1</sup> “The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector” <http://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/> (accessed 21/11/2016).

such work experience is likely to strengthen their application. The study follows a 2011 review by the Education and Employers Taskforce of the admissions requirements of the Russell Group universities across six undergraduate subject areas including Medicine and Dentistry (Mann et al. 2011). Results from that study are included here for purposes of comparison. The sample size is slightly larger in the current review due to the addition of four new universities to the Russell Group since 2011; Durham, Exeter, Queen Mary University of London and York.

The report looks into the available web-based entry requirements and selection criteria set out for each subject on each university's website. Such online statements were reviewed, noting overt reference to whether experience of the world of work was described as an essential or a desired requirement of applicants, or not mentioned at all. The review also explores whether specific experience in a clinical or care based environment, rather than general work experience, is articulated as a desirable or essential element of any successful application.

## **Findings**

### **Medicine**

For young people looking to study Medicine, 29% of undergraduate admissions officers from Russell Group universities which offer degrees in Medicine describe experience of the working world as an essential part of any application, and a further 57% see it as a desirable element. In all, 86% of all HEIs offering Medicine ask for applicants to describe work-related experiences. Compared to 2011, more universities are making experience of the working environment a prerequisite for entry onto the Medicine undergraduate course (22% in 2011, compared to 29% in 2016). Moreover, 10% of all institutions offering Medicine as an undergraduate course indicate that experience in a care based setting was essential prior to application, whilst a further 38% stated that experience of working in a clinical or care-based setting was desirable.

### **Dentistry**

Prospective Dentistry students face perhaps the most rigorous extra-curricular entry requirements out of the three medical courses in this review. More than three-quarters of institutions offering Dentistry provision make some reference to work-related experiences within admissions statements. Fifty four per cent of Russell Group universities offering the course explicitly ask for evidence of work experience or work shadowing in any prospective application. A further 23% look favourably on such experience, though not explicitly requiring it. Additionally, the majority of universities offering Dentistry require this prior work experience to be in a clinical or care based setting. Forty six per cent of admissions policies clearly state it was an essential pre-requisite to any application, with 16% advising students that work experience in a specialised dental based setting will strengthen their application.

### **Nursing**

Thirty eight per cent of Russell Group universities offering Nursing stated it was an essential part of any application. A further 38% encouraged some sort of work experience to strengthen an application onto the undergraduate course, though not requiring it. In all, some three-quarters of all institutions offering the provision make mention of experience of the world of work within their admissions requirements. Further analysis of the entry requirements showed that 23% of these universities explicitly required evidence of clinical or care based experience in any application, with a

further 23% explicitly advising applicants that selectors would look favourably on clinical or care based work experience.

**Table 1. Universities requiring experience of the world of work by subject: comparison between 2011 and 2016 study.**

<b>Medicine</b>				
	<b>Number</b>		<b>% of universities offering course asking for experience</b>	
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Essential	4	6	22	29
Desirable	12	12	66	57
Not Mentioned	2	3	12	14
Not offered at UG level	2	3		
<b>Dentistry</b>				
	<b>Number</b>		<b>% of universities offering course asking for experience</b>	
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Essential	6	7	55	54
Desirable	4	3	36	23
Not Mentioned	1	3	9	23
Not offered at UG level	9	11		
<b>Nursing</b>				
	<b>Number</b>		<b>% of universities offering course asking for experience</b>	
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Essential	...	5	...	38
Desirable	...	5	...	38
Not Mentioned	...	3	...	24
Not offered at UG level	...	11	...	

**Table 2. Universities requiring clinical or care-based work experience by subject, 2016.**

<b>Medicine</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of universities offering subject</b>
Essential	2	10
Desirable	8	38
Not mentioned	11	52
Not offered at UG level	3	
<b>Dentistry</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of universities offering subject</b>
Essential	6	46
Desirable	2	16
Not mentioned	5	38
Not offered at UG level	11	
<b>Nursing</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of universities offering subject</b>
Essential	3	23
Desirable	3	23
Not mentioned	7	54
Not offered at UG level	11	

**Table 3. Universities requiring experience of the world of work where subject is offered.**

<i>University</i>	<i>Essential requirement (named courses)</i>	<i>Desirable requirement</i>	<i>No mention made</i>
<b>Birmingham</b>	Medicine Dentistry Nursing		
<b>Bristol</b>	Medicine	Dentistry	
<b>Cambridge</b>		Medicine	
<b>Cardiff</b>			Medicine Dentistry Nursing
<b>Durham</b>			
<b>Edinburgh</b>		Medicine Nursing	Dentistry
<b>Exeter</b>			Medicine
<b>Glasgow</b>	Dentistry Nursing	Medicine	
<b>Imperial College</b>		Medicine	
<b>King's College</b>		Medicine Dentistry Nursing	
<b>Leeds</b>		Medicine Dentistry Nursing	
<b>Liverpool</b>	Dentistry Nursing	Medicine	
<b>LSE</b>			
<b>Manchester</b>	Medicine Dentistry Nursing		

<b>University</b>	<b>Essential requirement (named courses)</b>	<b>Desirable requirement</b>	<b>No mention made</b>
<b>Newcastle</b>	Dentistry		Medicine
<b>Nottingham</b>	Medicine	Nursing	
<b>Oxford</b>		Medicine	
<b>Queen Mary</b>	Dentistry	Medicine	
<b>Queen's Belfast</b>		Medicine	Dentistry Nursing
<b>Sheffield</b>	Medicine Dentistry Nursing		
<b>Southampton</b>		Medicine Nursing	
<b>UCL</b>		Medicine	
<b>Warwick</b>	Medicine		
<b>York</b>			Nursing



## Statements from Admissions Pages

The final part of this study collates relevant web-based admissions statements considered within the review, which have been extracted from the websites of Russell Group universities and are listed in alphabetical order.

### University of Birmingham

**Medicine:** *“It is essential that you provide evidence of an understanding of working in a healthcare environment and an on-going commitment to medicine. For UK nationals and for international applicants living or studying in the UK for more than one year this evidence will relate to the National Health Service (NHS). The types of experience that we value include voluntary work in a nursing home, care home, hospice or hospital volunteer.”*

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/med/medicine.aspx> (accessed 09/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *“Work experience (minimum 10 working days) in a general NHS dental practice is required before completing the UCAS form. You will be required to declare your commitment, involvement and understanding of the need to be working for the benefit of others (e.g. work in society, charity work).”*

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/med/dental-surgery.aspx> (accessed 09/11/2016).

**Nursing:** *Both within your personal statement and at interview, we are looking for evidence of the following:[...] Skills and knowledge gained when undertaking relevant work experience or voluntary work. Experience of working in a healthcare setting or experience of being a carer or a service user.”*

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/med/nursing.aspx> (accessed 09/11/2016).

### University of Bristol

**Medicine:** *“Additional Information: You are expected to have a minimum of two weeks work experience in a care setting.”*

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/2017/medicine/mb-medicine/> (accessed 09/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *“We look for:[...] amount and variety of dental work experience, paid or unpaid (where possible this should be within various fields of dentistry).”*

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/media/undergraduate/admissions-statements/2017/dentistry.pdf> (accessed 09/11/2016).

### University of Cambridge

**Medicine:** *“To develop understanding of what a career in Medicine involves and your suitability for your intended profession, you’re strongly advised (though not required) to undertake some relevant work experience (either paid or voluntary) in a health or related area.”*

<http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses/medicine> (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **University of Cardiff**

**Medicine:** *“The University recognises that opportunities for certain types of work experience and participation in some non-academic activities will vary according to individual circumstances, including an applicant's cultural or socio-economic background, or the activities available in their local area. Selectors are, therefore, not prescriptive about the ways in which the non-academic selection criteria may be demonstrated.”*

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying/admissions-criteria/medicine> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *“The School recognises that opportunities for certain types of work experience and participation in some non-academic activities will vary according to individual circumstances, including an applicant's cultural or socio-economic background, or the activities available in their local area. Therefore, selectors are not prescriptive about the ways in which the non-academic selection criteria may be demonstrated but, where asked for, it is expected to be shown and documented as necessary.”*

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying/admissions-criteria/dentistry> (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **University of Edinburgh**

**Medicine:** *“Demonstration of a clear understanding of the nature of a career of medicine will be expected. This can be achieved by:*

- *Appropriate work experience or work shadowing, as evidence of an informed decision to apply for a medical programme.*
- *Talking with medical doctors and medical students.*
- *Attending a University Open Day and medical conferences/lectures.*
- *Reading medical literature.*

*The Admissions Committee recognises that not all applicants have equal opportunities to gain such experience.”*

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/undergraduate/medicine/applying/how-to-apply/requirements/non-academic> (accessed 21/11/2016).

**Nursing:** *“Some prior experience of working with people is advisable.”*

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/degrees/index.php?action=programme&code=B700> (accessed 21/11/2016).

### **University of Glasgow**

**Medicine:** *“Although specific work experience in a hospital or general practice is not essential, it is important for all applicants to find out about the realities of a career in medicine.”*

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/medicine/> (accessed 21/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *“Work Shadowing Experience All applicants must have work shadowing experience, preferably within a General Dental Practice setting.”*

[http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_205414\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_205414_en.pdf) (accessed 21/11/2016).

**Nursing:** *“Applicants must provide evidence that they have experience of working in a caring environment. Work may be paid or voluntary and should last a minimum of eight days over a one-year period and must be confirmed in your personal statement.”*

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/nursing/> (accessed 21/11/2016).

### **Imperial College**

**Medicine:** Individuals must show *“Motivation and realistic approach to medicine as a career”*

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/study/ug/courses/school-of-medicine/medicine/> (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **King’s College London**

**Medicine:** *“Work shadowing/observation (Very Desirable): We would normally expect that applicants will have undertaken some voluntary work experience in a caring/health environment and/or observation in a medical clinical setting. It is important for applicants to have a realistic appreciation of what a career as a health professional involves.”*

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/medicine-mbbs.aspx> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *“We would normally expect that you will have undertaken some work experience in a caring environment and/or observation in a dental clinical setting.”*

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/dentistry-bds.aspx> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Nursing:** *“Appropriate healthcare experience either or voluntary or paid is encouraged.”*

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/nursing-with-registration-as-an-adult-nurse-bsc.aspx> (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **University of Leeds**

**Medicine:** *“The MSC state that applicants are advised to read the statement carefully and to reflect on how they might demonstrate the values and attributes during the selection process. Examples can be drawn from a wide range of experiences including: Work experience placements, Experience of paid employment, Volunteer work.”*

[http://medhealth.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/202/applying\\_for\\_the\\_mbchb/](http://medhealth.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/202/applying_for_the_mbchb/) (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *“At the School of Dentistry we understand that sometimes gaining dental work experience can be tricky, so although it is desirable there are many ways to show your motivation and insight, passion and commitment.”*

[http://medhealth.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/1211/dental\\_surgery/](http://medhealth.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/1211/dental_surgery/) (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Nursing:** “What transferable skills do you have – for example; work experience, positions of responsibility through paid employment or School/College activities?”

[http://courses.leeds.ac.uk/24599/BSc\\_Nursing\\_\(Adult\)#section3](http://courses.leeds.ac.uk/24599/BSc_Nursing_(Adult)#section3) (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **University of Liverpool**

**Medicine:** “No formal work experience is specified but applicants will need to address our non-academic criteria and include the demonstration of healthcare career awareness/insight, a caring contribution to the community, a critical, coherent and informative approach to communication and the values that embody and underpin good healthcare practice.”

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/medicine-and-surgery-mbchb/entry-requirements/> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** “Candidates are expected to show a range of skills and it is desirable on all dental programmes that candidates have completed a period of work experience/shadowing in a local dental practice or hospital and preferably in more than one establishment.”

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/study/downloads/ugciss/A200-Bachelor-of-Dental-Surgery-2017-entry-PDF.pdf> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Nursing:** “As well as a strong academic background, we also look for frontline caring experience in accordance with the values and behaviours of the NHS constitution.”

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/nursing-bn-hons/entry-requirements/> (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **University of Manchester**

**Medicine:** “We require voluntary caring work experience that does not need to be in a clinical setting. Shadowing doctors in a hospital/GP setting is not essential or considered to be a substitute for voluntary caring work experience.”

<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/2017/01428/mbchb-medicine/> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** “A minimum of 2 weeks shadowing a General Dental Practitioner is required prior to application. UK applicants must complete this in the UK in either NHS or Private practices and must have taken place within the last two years.”

<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/2017/00398/bds-dentistry-first-year-entry/> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Nursing:** “To help us consider your application and recommend you for an interview, your personal statement must make reference to the following areas. A statement about work-related skills (gained through either paid employment or voluntary work) demonstrating the experiences you have had that could be transferable to a career in your chosen field of nursing (for example, dealing with the public, customer service etc).”

<https://www.bmh.manchester.ac.uk/nursing/study/undergraduate/apply/nursing/> (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **University of Newcastle**

**Dentistry:** *“All applicants are required to have undertaken a minimum of two weeks' dental work experience prior to submitting their UCAS application. This should be carried out in a General Dental Practice, but other types of dental work experience may be considered.”*

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/a206/> (accessed 23/11/2016).

### **University of Nottingham**

**Medicine:** *“We expect you to have undergone some form of medical work or voluntary experience to enable you to understand the profession you are entering.”*

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/medicine/study/medicine/faq/a100faq.aspx> (accessed 23/11/2016).

**Nursing:** *“When applying for nursing courses at The University of Nottingham, we are looking for you to demonstrate: the skills gained from relevant work, voluntary and other experiences”*

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/healthsciences/undergraduate/nursing-courses/selection-process.aspx> (accessed 23/11/2016).

### **University of Oxford**

**Medicine:** *While some work experience is theoretically desirable, we do appreciate that it can be very difficult to arrange and we therefore have no requirement for it.*

<https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/study/medicine/pre-clinical/faqs/do-i-need-work-or-volunteering-experience> (accessed 23/11/2016).

### **Queen Mary University**

**Medicine:** *“Selectors strongly recommend that candidates have explored what a career in medicine entails and that this is reinforced by work experience. The interview will explore your understanding of the realities of a career in medicine. We recognise the challenge of obtaining work experience and a period of volunteering in a caring role can be equally as valuable.”*

<http://www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/coursefinder/courses/80040.html> (accessed 22/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *“At the interview stage, selectors will determine whether or not applicants have gained experience and understanding from an appropriate amount and type of work experience. It is recognised that direct observation of healthcare may be difficult to arrange but applicants should have some experience at working with the public in a caring or service role.”*

<http://www.smd.qmul.ac.uk/assets/courses/admissions-policy-2016.pdf> (accessed 22/11/2016).

### **Queen's University Belfast**

**Medicine:** *"This should include evidence of what the candidate has done to find out about Medicine as a career. This can be demonstrated in a number of ways including: opportunities for observational experience in a clinical setting, attending medical careers conferences, or undertaking voluntary work in a care setting. Participation in activities within or outside School demonstrating transferable skills such as leadership, empathy, teamwork and communication skills is also considered."*

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/Study/Course-Finder/FileStore/UG16/Filetoupload,691254,en.pdf>

(accessed 21/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *"Work experience in a dental clinical setting is not a requirement for admission. Participation in activities within or outside School demonstrating transferable skills such as leadership, empathy, teamwork and communication skills is also considered."*

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/Study/Course-Finder/FileStore/UG16/Filetoupload,691254,en.pdf>

(accessed 21/11/2016).

### **University of Sheffield**

**Medicine:** *"Candidates are expected to be able to discuss their volunteering activities and work experience in detail. This is an opportunity for you to impress our selectors and tell us why you should be chosen to enter our course."*

[https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.586633!/file/MBChBMedical2016.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.586633!/file/MBChBMedical2016.pdf) (accessed

23/11/2016).

**Dentistry:** *"Applicants should have work experience in health care environments, including a placement within a general dental practice."*

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/dentalschool/undergraduate/bds/selection> (accessed 23/11/2016).

**Nursing:** *"Experience of delivering care or support in either a paid or voluntary capacity. This can also include work experience gained on placements or caring for a family member with long term needs."*

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/snm/undergraduate-courses/ugnursing/apply> (accessed 23/11/2016).

### **University of Southampton**

**Medicine:** *"Applicants must be able to show they: Have reflected on and learnt from life experiences (this may include, work experience, paid employment and personal experiences both in and outside health and social care settings)"*

[http://www.southampton.ac.uk/medicine/undergraduate/courses/bm5\\_a100.page#entry\\_requirements](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/medicine/undergraduate/courses/bm5_a100.page#entry_requirements) (accessed 23/11/2016).

**Nursing:** *"To further strengthen your application, it is important that you demonstrate a clear insight into your chosen profession and scope of the role. This should hopefully be achieved by reflecting on relevant work experience, volunteering or shadowing you may have undertaken."*

[http://www.southampton.ac.uk/healthsciences/undergraduate/courses/bsc\\_nursing\\_adult.page](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/healthsciences/undergraduate/courses/bsc_nursing_adult.page)

(accessed 23/11/2016).

### **University College London**

**Medicine:** *“The following factors are taken into account when deciding which candidates to interview[...] Previous experience (both personal and through work experience or volunteering), particularly if it has involved contact with the healthcare profession or laboratory work, or if the candidate has been involved with the sick, disabled, very young or elderly, and, importantly, is able to reflect on their experiences.”*

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/medicalschoo/undergraduate/mbbs-admissions/entry-requirements>

(accessed 09/11/2016).

### **University of Warwick**

**Medicine:** *“The types of experience that we value include voluntary work in a nursing home, care home, hospice or hospital volunteer as well as employment in professional healthcare roles.[...]The minimum amount of work relevant experience we expect to see is the equivalent of two weeks full-time (70 hours) across the last two years, completed by the time of your application.”*

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/study/ugr/applying/entryreqs> (accessed 23/11/2016).

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