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Advice and Guidance on the Admissions Process to UK Dental Schools

Abstract: Students looking to read dentistry can be overwhelmed by the information and requirements presented to them by dental schools, career advisors and the printed literature. In the UK, there are currently 16 dental schools which provide a dentistry degree. While there are variations in the specific aspects of the dental courses at each school, there are common principles and generic application requirements that apply. This paper provides a guide to facilitate applications and inform potential students, career advisors and dentists. The information presented has been gathered from UK dental school websites and university prospectuses and corroborated through contact with university admissions offices.

Clinical Relevance: This paper is relevant to dental practitioners who are often asked to provide advice on applications to dental schools by potential students.

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Dentistry can be very rewarding; it provides an opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of patients, both in the community and as a whole. As a career it involves teamwork, caters for flexibility in working practice, offers a myriad of clinical opportunities and (if desired) the freedom to work for oneself. However, it does not come without its down sides and these need to be realized by anyone wishing to pursue a dental career; patient demands and practice management issues being regarded as negative aspects by some. Reading dentistry at university is something that should not be taken lightly.

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Most courses last at least 5 years, after which there is a lifetime of practising dentistry and engagement in lifelong learning. It is, therefore, important that applicants are sure of their choice to enter the profession and they should visit the many excellent UK dental school websites as a matter of course (Figure 1 and Table 1). Once it is believed that dentistry is the right career choice, application is the next step. It must be noted that dentistry consistently attracts more applications than places available and that competition is significant. This paper has been written to help both applicants when applying and dental professionals and careers advisors to give sound and practical advice. It should be viewed as a summary of the advice available from both books^{1,2} and websites.

Applying to dental school

Entry requirements for dentistry are higher than the minimum level set by many universities and applicants are advised to consult school websites carefully; entry requirements are usually prominently displayed alongside course descriptions and any specific requirements should be noted as there is little

point in applying when an application fails to meet the minimum standard required. In the United Kingdom, applications are made online through the Universities and Colleges Admission Services (UCAS) (www.ucas.ac.uk). The application form is divided into sections including personal details, academic performance (both attained and predicted), a personal statement and a supporting statement. The closing date for submission of the UCAS application is normally in the middle of October and applicants are able to specify up to four dental courses in one application cycle; the order of choice is not freely disclosed to the universities applied to. There is a fee associated with UCAS applications. In 2012, the fee for one course at one university was £11 and for more than one course or university was £22. The UCAS forms contain most of the information required by dental schools in order to select who to invite for interview. All dental schools in the UK interview potential students, either by traditional interviews or the multiple mini-interview process. Some schools base their offers solely on the outcome and grading of interviews, while others aggregate pre-interview and interview scores to inform their decision.

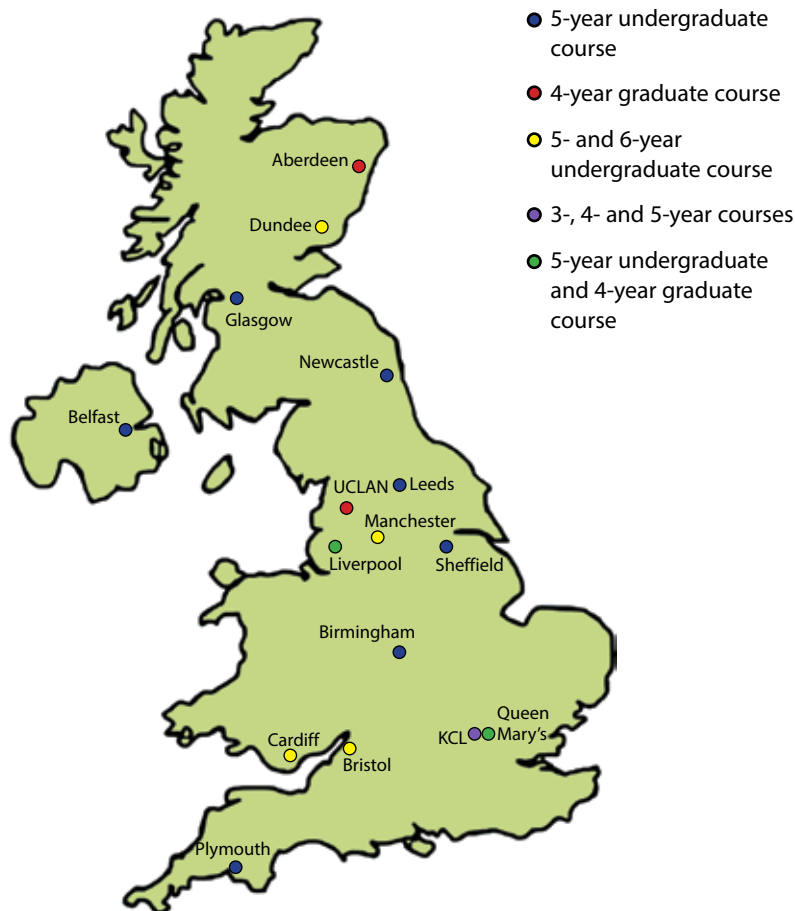


Figure 1. Map of UK dental schools indicating type of course.

As competition and the popularity to read dentistry increases, the demands imposed by dental schools continue to be raised in order for some stratification and limitation regarding applications; many schools receive at least 800 applications per year, with some schools receiving considerably more. It should be stressed that ALL dental schools strive to engage in Widening Participation Programmes and provide opportunity for non standard entry; specific requirements and availability are usually outlined in a Schools Admissions Policy Documentation on their website.

Whilst most courses are for 5 years (Figure 1 and see listings in the text) there are 3-, 4- and 6-year courses available (Figure 1 and see listings in the text). Most students take into account location when choosing Universities, although other reasons to be considered might include course structure, position in league tables (www.thetimes.co.uk, www.guardian.co.uk).

www.thetimes.co.uk/education), the results of student satisfaction surveys and student fees.

For convenience and ease of reference further explanation of the application process is split into sections which correspond to the various sections of the UCAS form and application process.

A-level/GCSE entry requirements for 5-year programmes

Belfast

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry, A in either Biology, Physics or Mathematics

AS requirements

- If Biology is not offered at A-level, it is required at AS-level, minimum Grade B (if taken as a fifth AS-level subject, otherwise Grade A)

4th AS

- A grade needed

GCSE requirements

- Mathematics and Physics (or Double Award Science) are required if not offered at AS/A-level

Re-sits considered

- In specific circumstances. AAB at A-level must have been achieved at the first attempt. In addition, applicants must have included Queen's as one of their original UCAS choices first time around and, if made an offer, held it as their CF choice. All AS and A2 modules of the subject being repeated, must be retaken

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- MMI

Work experience requirements

- Not essential

Able to defer

- Yes but should say what is planned in the personal statement

Birmingham

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

AS requirements

- AS-levels at grade B/A

GCSE requirements

- Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Mathematics and English Language or English Literature at grade A. Integrated Science (double certificate at grade A is acceptable as an alternative to Physics, Biology and Chemistry)

Re-sits considered

- No

UKCAT needed

- No

Interview style

- Traditional Interview

Work experience requirements

- Approximately 2 weeks in general practice

Able to defer

- Yes

Bristol

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in one other lab-based science, although Biology is the preferred second A-level subject

AS requirements

- A in Biology if not taken at A-level

4th AS

- A grade needed

GCSE requirements

- Minimum of 5 GCSEs at A*/A to include English Language, Mathematics and two science subjects

Re-sits considered

- Applications may be considered in exceptional circumstances. Retake offer is AAA in same subjects within one year of the first sitting

UKCAT needed

- No

Interview style

- MMI

Work experience requirements

- At least 20 working days, in various fields of Dentistry where possible

Able to defer

- Yes

Cardiff

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

GCSE requirements

- Minimum of B grades which must include either Single Science (Biology or Chemistry) or Science, English Language, Mathematics

Re-sits considered

- No

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- MMI

Able to defer

- Yes providing the intervening year is spent in a positive and worthwhile way

Dundee

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Biology and A in a science (Chemistry, Mathematics or Physics)

AS requirements

- None specific

4th AS

- No

GCSE requirements

- A pass in Combined or Dual Science at GCSE may be acceptable instead of a single GCSE pass in Physics. A pass at Standard grade or GCSE Mathematics is also normally required

Re-sits considered

- No

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- MMI

Work experience requirements

- Some work shadowing required

Able to defer

- Yes provided year will benefit candidate educationally or socially. Information about intentions should be on personal statement

Glasgow

A-levels

- AAB

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

AS requirements

- None specific

GCSE requirements

- Minimum of 7 GCSEs at grade B or above, including English Language, English Literature, Physics and/or Mathematics

Re-sits considered

- No

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- MMI

Work experience requirements

- Minimum 3 days, up to 14 days

Able to defer

- No

King's College London

A-levels

- AAA (but see prospectus)

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology, at least one must be at A-level, the other must be at AS-level. If A-level Mathematics is offered, Further Mathematics is acceptable at AS-level

AS requirements

- Required, see prospectus

GCSE requirements

- Minimum grade B in English language and Mathematics, if not offered at A/AS-level

Re-sits considered

- Applications may be considered, in exceptional circumstances

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- MMI

Able to defer

- Yes

Leeds

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

4th AS

- No advantage over those with 3

GCSE requirements

- Minimum of 6 GCSEs including Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology (or dual Science). Minimum grade C in both English and Mathematics

UKCAT needed

- No

Interview style

- MMI

Able to defer

- Yes

Liverpool

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

GCSE requirements

- Minimum 7 GCSEs at grade A, Mathematics and English language are required at grade B or above

Re-sits considered

- No

Interview style

- Traditional Interview

Manchester

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

4th AS

- B or above

GCSE requirements

- 6 GCSEs at minimum grade A (including Integrated Double Award Science or Physics, Chemistry and Biology) and grade B in English Language and Mathematics

Re-sits considered

- Applications may be considered, in exceptional circumstances. Must have achieved a minimum of grade C in each subject at the first sitting. Retake offer A*AA in subjects specified

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- Group discussion followed by three 1-to-1 interviews

Work experience requirements

- 2 weeks minimum in General Dental Practice

Able to defer

- Yes

Newcastle

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

GCSE requirements

- AAAAA at GCSE including Biology and Chemistry or AA in Dual Award Science also required

Re-sits considered

- Applications may be considered in exceptional circumstances

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- Traditional Interview

Work experience requirements

- 2 weeks minimum in General Dental Practice

Able to defer

- Yes provided gap-year is spent constructively

Plymouth Peninsula

A levels

- AAA

Specific A level requirements

- Must include Chemistry and Biology

AS requirements

- 4 subjects must be achieved at a minimum of a C grade

4th AS

- Yes, at least a C grade

GCSE requirements

- A minimum of seven GCSE passes at A-C grade which must include English Language, Mathematics and either GCSE single and additional science or GCSE Biology and Chemistry

Re-sits considered

- Not specified

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- Structured and formal exploring a number of essential qualities

Work experience

- Not stated

Able to defer

- Yes but must be indicated at the time of application and only permitted for one academic year

Queen Mary's

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

4th AS

- B or above

GCSE requirements

- Grades AAABBB or above (in any order) to include Biology (or Human Biology), Chemistry, English Language and Mathematics. The Dual Award Science may substitute all sciences at GCSE

Re-sits considered

- No

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- Traditional Interview

Work experience requirements

- Desired but amount or type unspecified

Able to defer

- Yes but should say what is planned in the personal statement

Sheffield

A-levels

- AAA

Specific A-level requirements

- A in Chemistry and A in Biology

AS requirements

- None specific

4th AS

- No advantage over those with 3

GCSE requirements

- Minimum of 6 A grades including Mathematics, English Language and Science subjects.

Re-sits considered

- Minimum requirement for applicants who are retaking is AAA, priority is given to those who applied to Sheffield the previous year

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- Traditional Interview

Work experience requirements

- Up to individual applicant

Able to defer

- Yes

Some alternative entry requirements for 5-year programmes

Belfast

International Baccalaureate

- 36 points with 6, 6, 6 at Higher Level including Higher Level Chemistry and Biology. Mathematics and Physics (or Dual Award Science) or equivalent are required if not offered as part of the IB

Access courses

- No

Graduate entry

- Minimum 2:1 honours degree and an average of ABB at A-level at the first attempt. In the case of candidates with a First Class Honours degree or a PhD, a minimum of BBB at A-level may be accepted. Candidates must have a relevant science background, this must include Chemistry and one other Science at A-level and Biology to at least AS-level (or acceptable equivalent)

	Admissions email address	Website address
School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Aberdeen	dentistry@abdn.ac.uk	www.abdn.ac.uk/dentistry-prospective
Centre for Dental Education, Queen's University Belfast	admissions@qub.ac.uk	www.qub.ac.uk/schools/mdbs/dentistry
The School of Dentistry, University of Birmingham	dentadmissions@contacts.bham.ac.uk	www.dentistry.bham.ac.uk/home
School of Oral and Dental Sciences, University of Bristol	dent-ug-admissions@bristol.ac.uk	www.bristol.ac.uk/dental
School of Dentistry, Cardiff University	DentalAdmissions@cardiff.ac.uk	www.cardiff.ac.uk/dentl
School of Dentistry, University of Dundee	dentaladmin@dundee.ac.uk	www.dundee.ac.uk/dentalschool
Dental School, University of Glasgow	Med-sch-dental-ug@glasgow.ac.uk	www.gla.ac.uk/schools/dental
School of Dentistry, University of Central Lancashire	dinfo@uclan.ac.uk	www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/dentistry
Leeds Dental Institute, University of Leeds	dentistry@leeds.ac.uk	www.leeds.ac.uk/dental
School of Dental Sciences, University of Liverpool	dectenq@liverpool.ac.uk	www.liv.ac.uk/dentistry
Dental Institute, King's College London	ug-healthadmissions@kcl.ac.uk	www.kcl.ac.uk/dentistry
School of Dentistry, University of Manchester	ug.dentistry@manchester.ac.uk	www.dentistry.manchester.ac.uk
School of Dental Sciences, Newcastle University	dental.ugadmin@ncl.ac.uk	www.ncl.ac.uk/dental
Peninsula Dental School, Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry	pcmd-admissions@pcmd.ac.uk	www.pcmd.ac.uk/dentistry
Institute of Dentistry, Barts and the London, Queen Mary School of Medicine and Dentistry	smdadmissions@qmul.ac.uk	www.smd.qmul.ac.uk
The School of Clinical Dentistry, University of Sheffield	dental.admissions@sheffield.ac.uk	www.sheffield.ac.uk/dentalschool

Table 1. Dental schools, web addresses and admissions email addresses.

Birmingham

Graduate entry

■ May consider graduates, A-level requirements: A Biology, A Chemistry (third at least grade A). First Class Honours in medically related degree

Bristol

International Baccalaureate

■ 37 points with 6, 6, 6 at Higher Level to include Chemistry and Biology

Access courses

■ Pass Access to HE Diploma (Medicine) with at least 21 credits at Distinction to include Chemistry and Biology and 18 credits at merit

Graduate entry

■ Minimum 2:1 in a science subject plus BBB at A-level

Cardiff

International Baccalaureate

■ 36 points, with a minimum score of 6 at Higher Level in both Chemistry and Biology. In addition to the GCSE requirements above (or equivalent)

Access courses

■ No

Graduate entry

- <http://www.practiceaptitudetests.com/>
- <http://www.kaptest.co.uk/courses/uk-university/ukcat/practicequestions>
- <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/psychotests.htm>
- <http://www.psychometricinstitute.co.uk/Free-Aptitude-Tests.asp>
- <http://www.assessmentday.co.uk/> (a few free samples on verbal, quantitative and abstract reasoning)

Table 2. Free UKCAT resources.

■ Minimum 2:1 honours degree in a science discipline. In addition to the GCSE requirements above (or equivalent). Preference given to a graduate with a minimum of three B grades at A-Level

Dundee

International Baccalaureate

■ 37 points (including 6, 6, 6 at Higher Level), subjects at Higher Level to include Biology and another science

Access courses

■ No

Graduate entry

■ May consider graduates with First Class Honours degree, preferably in a Life Science subject

Glasgow

International Baccalaureate

■ 36 to include 6 in Chemistry and Biology at Higher Level and one from Mathematics or Physics at Higher level

Access courses

■ Yes, for any further advice, please contact the Admissions Office

Graduate entry

■ May consider graduates, minimum 2:1 Honours Degree in a relevant subject. Chemistry and Biology (equivalent to Grade A Higher, Grade A A-level – Physics and/or Mathematics (equivalent to grade B Higher or grade B GCSE or better)

King's College London

International Baccalaureate

■ 38 including 6, 6, 6 at Higher Level including Chemistry and Biology, at least one at Higher Level. Please note GCSE requirements. If no GCSE (or equivalent), passes are required at Standard Level in English and Mathematics if not offered at Higher Level

Access courses

■ Will only consider if applicants have been

out of full-time education for at least 5 years prior to enrolling on the Access course. Specific one-year (full-time) 'Access to Medicine/Dentistry' programmes offered by a UK Further Education Institution, or one-year (full-time) science foundation programmes offered by a UK Higher Education Institution

Graduate entry

■ Minimum 2:1 honours degree, 2:2 honours degree is acceptable combined with a Master's degree (with at least a merit). Minimum pass at A/AS-level Chemistry and Biology

Leeds

International Baccalaureate

■ 37 points including a minimum of grade 6 in Higher Level Chemistry and Biology, plus a further Higher at grade 6. English must be offered at Higher or Standard Level (with a minimum grade of 5 if not offered at GCSE)

Access courses

■ Access to Leeds is an alternative admissions scheme that allows us to identify applicants who have the potential to succeed at the University of Leeds but who may not be able to demonstrate their talents through grades alone

Graduate entry

■ Minimum 2:1 degree pass or higher in a Science or healthcare-related subject is required. Applicants who offer academic qualifications completed more than 5 years prior to the year of application may be asked to complete an essay as part of the application process.

Liverpool

International Baccalaureate

■ 36 points with 6 in Chemistry and Biology

Access courses

■ Access to HE Diploma in a relevant

subject including Distinctions in units in Chemistry and Biology

Manchester

International Baccalaureate

■ 37 points overall: 7, 6, 6 in the Higher Level subjects, which must include Biology and Chemistry with 7 and 6, 5, 5, 5 in the Standard Level subjects

Access courses

■ Access courses are accepted for students who have not previously studied at University and have usually had a minimum of 2 years out of education gaining work experience. An Access Course must be science based. 60 credits overall with 45 credits at Level 3 and a minimum of 6 credits in Physics to at least Level 2. Distinctions in all components are required.

Graduate entry

■ Minimum 2:1 degree. If applicants do not hold a degree, they should have an appropriate Access qualification

Newcastle

International Baccalaureate

■ 35 points with 6 in Chemistry and Biology at Higher Level

Access course

■ Must have undertaken a minimum 2 years' full-time employment after undertaking school-leaving examinations before commencing course. Access to HE Diploma course must include at least 15 Level 3 credits in Biology and Chemistry, together with further academic subjects at Level 3. Must complete Diploma with 45 Level 3 credits achieved at Distinction grade

Graduate entry

■ 2:1 degree is required in an appropriate subject which should contain sufficient Biology and Chemistry in line with school leaver and other mature student requirements

Plymouth Peninsula

international Baccalaureate

■ 36–38 points including 6 in Chemistry and Biology

Access courses

■ Consideration given on an individual basis

Graduate entry

■ Minimum 2:1 honours degree in biomedically related or professional healthcare subject.

Queen Mary's**International Baccalaureate**

■ 38 points with 6 in Higher Level Chemistry or Biology and 6 in third Higher Level subject. Three subjects at Standard Level including Chemistry or Biology if not offered at the Higher Level. If English is not offered as part of the diploma, must have GCSE grade B or equivalent

Access courses

■ No

Graduate entry

■ Only first undergraduate degree will be considered for entry. Can only apply in the final year of degree and must be predicted or have achieved at least a 2:1 honours degree in a science/health-related subject

Sheffield**International Baccalaureate**

■ 37 points with 6 in Chemistry and Biology at Higher Level

Access courses

■ A science access diploma with 60 credits overall with 45 credits in Chemistry and Biology at Level 3

Graduate entry

■ 2:1 in a core science degree

A-level/GCSE entry requirements for 6-year programmes**Cardiff****A-levels**

■ AAA

Specific A-level requirements

■ None or no more than one Science. The science subject offered, if any, should not be Biology

4th AS

■ No

GCSE requirements

■ Minimum of B grades which must include either Single Science (Biology or Chemistry) or Science, English Language, Mathematics

Re-sits considered

■ No

UKCAT needed

■ Yes

Interview style

■ MMI

Able to defer

■ Yes

Dundee**A-levels**

■ AAA

Specific A-level requirements

■ None or no more than one Science. The science subject offered, if any, should not be Biology

AS requirements

■ None specific

4th AS

■ No

GCSE requirements

■ None specific

Re-sits considered

■ No

UKCAT needed

■ Yes

Interview style

■ MMI

Work experience requirements

■ Some work shadowing required

Able to defer

■ Yes

Manchester**A-levels**

■ AAA

Specific A-level requirements

■ None or no more than one Science subject at A-Level.

AS requirements

■ If Biology or Chemistry is offered at A-Level the fourth AS subject cannot be Biology or Chemistry

4th AS

■ B or above if taken

GCSE requirements

■ Minimum of 7 subjects including Chemistry, Biology, Physics (or Dual Award Science), Mathematics and English Language. 5 subjects must be minimum grade A with English Language at a minimum B.

Re-sits considered

■ Applications may be considered, in exceptional circumstances. Must have achieved minimum of Grade C in each subject at the first sitting. Retake

offer A*AA in subjects specified.

UKCAT needed

■ Yes

Interview style

■ Group discussion followed by three 1-to-1 interviews

Work experience requirements

■ 2 weeks minimum in General Dental Practice

Able to defer

■ Yes

Some alternative entry requirements for 6-year programmes**Bristol****International Baccalaureate**

■ 37 points with 6, 6, 6 at Higher Level

Access courses

■ Pass an Access to HE Diploma (Science) with at least 33 credits at Merit and/or Distinction

Graduate entry

■ 2:1 degree or above

Cardiff**International Baccalaureate**

■ 36 points with a minimum score of 6 in the one Higher Level science subject. Only one science subject permitted

Access courses

■ Yes, applicants who have taken, or are taking, an accredited Access to Science course can be considered. All credits must be at Level 3, and must include both Biology and Chemistry components. Equivalent of a score of 80% is expected to be achieved overall

Graduate entry

■ Minimum 2:1 degree in a non-science discipline. In addition to the GCSE requirements above (or equivalent). Preference given to a graduate with a minimum of 3 B grades at A-Level

Dundee**International Baccalaureate**

■ 37 points with 6, 6, 6 at Higher level

Access courses

■ No

Manchester**International Baccalaureate**

■ 36 points overall with 6, 6, 6 at Higher Level and 5, 5, 5 in the Standard Level subjects. Only

one science subject permitted

Access courses

- No

Graduate entry

■ 2:1 degree or above. If applicants do not hold a degree, they should have an appropriate Access qualification

Entry requirements for 4-year programmes

Aberdeen

Degree requirements

■ Minimum 2:1 honours degree in a medical science or a health-related degree. Candidates with a first degree in Medicine will also be considered

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- MMI

King's College London (Maxillofacial)

Degree requirements

■ Must be a qualified doctor (registered with the GMC) wishing to pursue a career in either Oral and Maxillofacial surgery or Oral Medicine/Pathology

UKCAT needed

- No

King's College London (Dentistry)

Degree requirements

■ Minimum 2:1 honours degree in a biomedical-related or health professional subject OR a 2:2 in a biomedical-related or health professional subject PLUS a postgraduate degree (with at least a merit)

A-level requirements

■ Graduate applicants do not normally have to satisfy the normal A/AS entry requirements

UKCAT needed

- Yes

Interview style

- MMI

UCLAN

Degree requirements

■ Minimum 2:1 honours degree in a biomedical discipline

A-level requirements

■ Minimum 3 A-levels at grade C or above (at least 2 of which must be from Biology, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics)

GCSE requirements

■ GCSE Mathematics and English Language grade B

UKCAT needed

- No

Interview style

- MMI

Work experience

■ Minimum 2 weeks in General Dental practice

Able to defer

■ Yes, post application, and these are considered on an individual basis

Liverpool

Degree requirements

■ Minimum 2:1 in a biomedical sciences degree or an MBChB from an approved institution. A-level and GCSE requirements are currently under review – please check the School's website

A-level requirements

■ Minimum 3 A-levels at grade C (at least 2 of which must be Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics or Psychology). One of the sciences must be Biology or Chemistry, and if either Biology or Chemistry is not offered at A-level, it must be offered at AS-level with grade B or above

GCSE requirements

■ GCSE Mathematics and English Language grade C

UKCAT needed

- No

Interview style

- Traditional Interview

Courses available and academic requirements

School leavers with the necessary A levels (or equivalent in Scotland and Ireland) usually apply for the 5-year programmes, along with a small number of graduate students (holding an honours science degree at 2:1 or above, see listings in text). The

5-year programmes generally have preferred A-level requirements, eg As in both Chemistry and Biology and another A grade A-level qualification. Some A-level subjects, such as General Studies and Critical Thinking, are not recognized as contributory in the admissions process and if Mathematics is one of the A levels, Further Maths is not generally recognized, nor is an A level in a foreign language which is the applicant's first language. Some preferences in GCSE subjects are detailed by some schools and, if this is the case, then these must also be taken into account, eg English Language and Science. It should also be noted that not all schools accept re-takes for A-level examinations. The academic requirements for the dental schools in 2012 are listed in the text and care should be taken when interpreting or extrapolating requirements for following years as they can change. However, the majority of dental schools clearly display their requirements for study well before the academic application cycle begins.

A-levels are not the only route of entry and there are other recognized academic qualifications, eg International Baccalaureate or ACCESS courses (for those who have never previously studied A levels). Acceptable alternative qualifications are generally detailed in a dental school's admissions documentation, although listings in the text provide some basic information. As mentioned, graduate entry is an acceptable entry route for most schools, although numbers are often capped and there are usually other academic requirements to meet, eg minimum A level or GCSE grades. Few dental schools accept transfers from other degree courses and only rarely, and only with exceptional circumstances, are inter-dental school transfers accepted.

There are schools that offer preliminary dental or pre-dental programmes to those who have not studied science subjects at A-level or who have completed a non science or non health-related honours degree, although the number of places available is limited.

There are some 4-year dental courses available to graduates who hold a suitable degree and there are courses designed specifically for medical graduates and applicants who are qualified doctors wishing to pursue a career in either Oral and Maxillofacial surgery or Oral Medicine/Pathology.

Other requirements

Academic achievement is not the only consideration for interview shortlisting and

the UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT), which measures mental aptitude and ability rather than academic knowledge, is an entrance requirement desired by 10 of the 16 dental schools. The UKCAT does not contain science content or facts that can be learnt in advance and, in theory, it cannot be studied for ahead. Pearson-Vue (the company who facilitate the delivery of the UKCAT) does not endorse any commercially-available preparation material claiming to help students and the website states that 'coaching is not necessary, desirable or advantageous'. However, it is suggested that candidates should familiarize themselves with the question styles and the onscreen test format by downloading their practice tests. There are resources available in the form of books or paid online preparation material and Table 2 details some free resources. It is important to be aware of the time constraints for each section and not spend too long on one question. The test consists of five separately timed multiple-choice format sections and takes just over 2 hours to complete:

Verbal reasoning (22 minutes) – assesses ability to think logically about written information and to arrive at a reasoned conclusion.

Quantitative reasoning (23 minutes) – assesses ability to solve numerical problems.

Abstract reasoning (16 minutes) – assesses ability to infer relationships from information by convergent and divergent thinking.

Decision analysis (32 minutes) – assesses ability to deal with various forms of information, to infer relationships, to make informed judgements, and to decide on an appropriate response, in situations of complexity and ambiguity.

Situational judgement (27 minutes) – assesses judgement related to healthcare-related scenarios, testing interpersonal skills and ethical values.

Each subtest is scored between 300 and 900, the average candidate will usually score 600 and results are available immediately after the test. The situational judgement subtest is in the 'piloting' phase of development and a candidate's results are not made known to schools, nor are they currently used during admissions processes. Dental schools use the results in different ways; to differentiate between similar candidates, as a ranking tool, as a score in the overall ranking process, after interview to assist decision making. UKCAT scores are year specific and candidates need to register for and sit the test in the same year as

their application to university; applicants who are unsuccessful in securing an interview will generally need to re-sit the UKCAT the following year if re-applying. Registration and test dates can be found on the UKCAT website (www.ukcat.ac.uk). It costs £65 for EU citizens and £100 for Non EU citizens to sit the test between 5 July and 31 August 2012 and £80 for EU citizens and £100 for Non EU citizens between 1 September and 7 October 2012. There are bursaries available to some applicants to cover the cost of the test and information on this can be found on the UKCAT website.

Healthcare professionals without a degree-level qualification must sit the Graduate Australian Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT) if applying to the Peninsula graduate programme. The GAMSAT is divided into three sections:

- Reasoning in Humanities and Social Sciences;
- Written Communication; and
- Reasoning in Biological and Physical Sciences.

It takes 5½ hours to complete and evaluates general skills such as writing and problem solving but, unlike the UKCAT, it requires some basic science knowledge. GAMSAT suggests that knowledge should be at A-level 'equivalent to first year university level Chemistry and Biology, and A-level Physics'. Like the UKCAT, there are no recommended preparatory courses, however, practice sample questions are available (www.gamsatuk.org). GAMSAT registration opens in early June and the test will be held in September. The test is generally valid for 2 years; it cost £195 to sit in 2012.

Personal statement (including work experience)

The personal statement is a chance for applicants to show that they have a genuine interest in dentistry, are aware of the realities of a career in dentistry, and that they have the necessary motivation and personal qualities. A badly written or poorly conceived personal statement can affect interview chances significantly. It is called a personal statement for obvious reasons but is expected to contain information that can be gleaned from school websites and prospectuses; in general it should include:

- Relevant work experience with a degree of reflective commentary, rather than a list of procedures observed, is viewed preferentially by most dental schools.
- Voluntary work/part-time employment to

show the candidate has a caring and committed attitude towards people, or to demonstrate his/her ability to hold positions of responsibility.

- Evidence of team work and how this translates to dentistry.

- Non-dental related interests that show a well-rounded individual and that demonstrate attributes that make the applicant a good candidate for university life and a career in dentistry.

- Evidence of good written and interpersonal skills.

It is important to ensure that the personal statement is relevant and demonstrates why the candidate wants to be a dentist and his/her understanding of what the profession involves. UCAS allow up to 4,000 characters (including spaces) or 47 lines of text (including blank lines); it goes without saying that grammar and spelling need to be perfect.

Work experience is generally viewed as having a vital role in providing an insight into dentistry; most but not all dental schools will not consider candidates if there is no evidence of work experience in their personal statement. Ideally, work experience should be undertaken in a variety of dental settings and areas: general dental practice, independent dental practice, dental school, community hospitals and district general hospitals should be considered. Keeping a diary of activity will help candidates remember what has been seen and questions should be asked (when appropriate), for example, procedures carried out, the NHS, dentistry as a whole, or even the dentist's own experiences in the profession. Everything observed and learnt can, with a modicum of skill and effort, be used to demonstrate that an applicant has a serious interest in dentistry.

Supporting statement

Candidates are also required to provide a reference and this should be written by somebody who knows them well, such as a teacher or a tutor (some schools will only accept an academic reference and not an employer's reference). The supporting statement should be about the candidate and comment on his/her ability to do the course. Again, the UCAS website is another useful resource regarding this.

After the application process

After receiving and vetting ALL applications, universities decide which candidates they will invite to interview. Despite the variation in style of interviews, interviewers

will generally want to know if a candidate is interested in dentistry and has the personal attributes and attitudes of a caring health professional. There are attributes that some regard as desirable for a dental professional, eg communication with patients and staff, sensitivity to others, ethical behaviour, honesty and empathy, judgement and analysis, management of people, conscientiousness, professionalism and life-long learning.³ A school's prospectus will explain what is expected at interview but also inform applicants on much of the information required at interview; such information will demonstrate that the candidate has done his/her research and is keen on attending that particular dental school. It can be useful to practise before interviews to help build confidence; however, it is strongly believed by many interviewers that answers should not be over-rehearsed. Knowledge on current dental-related issues can suggest further eagerness to study dentistry and current news can be found on many dental websites, eg the British Dental Association, the General Dental Council, the Faculty of General Dental Practitioners, etc, or from information gathered from the media.

'Traditional' style interviews generally employ a small panel of interviewers asking applicants fairly well known and generally routine questions, such as the student's motivation to study dentistry, why he/she wants to be a dentist, why he/she wants to come to venue X, etc. Candidates can prepare for such interviews and there are resources available which can be found on the internet, eg www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/Dentistry_at_University.

A number of schools have diverted from traditional interview processes to a different style called Multiple Mini-Interviews (MMI). Although MMIs have been around for many years and while fairly common in medicine, they have only recently been used in dentistry.⁴ The collection and collation of assessments made at stations help admission staff to assess the desired qualities that may not be revealed during a traditional interview. MMIs are delivered as a series of short, timed stations covering skills that are expected from dental health professionals, eg communication skills, critical thinking, empathy and professionalism. Stations vary widely and candidates may be required to evaluate data or a situation, answer questions, or take part in a physical task; most stations do not need detailed or specific prior knowledge. MMIs give candidates a chance to

recover after a particular poorly performed station by moving on to a new interviewer.⁵ Stations may last 5 minutes or more and are generally preceded by pre-stations where instructions or preparation material is read before seeing the interviewer. Although dental schools that employ MMIs do not give detailed knowledge of the stations, they do provide some indication of what is required of the applicants on the day. Perceived benefits of the MMIs include a reduced chance of interviewer bias and the ability to tailor stations to qualities required of prospective dental students. Preparing for these interviews is significantly different from a traditional interview and, as candidates may not have come across this interview style, practise under timed circumstances may be important.

Before admission to dental school

Before being admitted to dental school there are non-academic requirements that need to be satisfied. Most dental schools will ask applicants to obtain a disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) at the Enhanced Level and International applicants will be required to obtain a 'Certificate of Good Conduct' from relevant authorities. Applicants are required to declare any criminal offences, cautions, warnings or reprimands, regardless of how minor they may be. Some dental schools require other forms of criminal disclaimers and applicants are advised to refer to the respective university prospectus for more information. There are health checks and offers are only made if the health criteria are met, and all students must complete a full course of immunization against the Hepatitis B virus before commencing any clinical activity. Students usually undertake a health screening soon after enrolment via the university's Occupational Health Department and screening for infectivity of blood-borne viruses, such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV occurs. All must be negative before final acceptance on to the course. Evidence of other vaccinations, such as tetanus, BCG, etc may also be requested by the dental schools before admission is formalized.

Conclusions

Entry into dentistry is very competitive and it is imperative that applicants give themselves every opportunity to

succeed in their application. Half-hearted or poorly conceived applications which do not pay detailed attention to the Admissions requirements of the associated schools are unlikely to reach an interview stage. Applicants are strongly advised to ensure that they research their favoured schools and courses thoroughly and make informed and well educated decisions on where they wish to study. School websites, in general, are of excellent quality and contain all the information needed. Owing to competition, systems of applicant selection are gradually changing and so it is important that candidates make themselves stand out from the crowd by being prepared and are familiar with the application process and the range of resources available to help facilitate such selection.

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