APPLYING FOR MEDICAL DEGREES IN AUSTRALIA

There are two pathways to becoming a medical practitioner in Australia.

1. **Directly after Year 12**: Students need to take the UMAT (Undergraduate Medical Admissions Test). Applicants for dental and medical schools (including Bond and Otago (NZ)) and optometry, must sit this test. A list of courses which require the test is in the information booklet on the below website.

2. **Post Graduate**: after you have completed another degree, often needing certain subjects and also completing the GAMSAT (Graduate Australian Medical Schools Admissions Test). Whenever you go, you will need to be very determined and flexible about where you study, as places are so limited. You need to start doing your homework NOW in order to understand the system.

**STRAIGHT FROM YEAR 12 or FOR THOSE WITHOUT ANY UNIVERSITY STUDY**

One pathway is to commence a medical degree or degrees straight after Year 12. These are called undergraduate or Bachelor degrees. These courses are of five years duration. In Victoria, there is only one undergraduate pathway available, at Monash University. There are still a number of courses of this type in other states. They are commonly called a Bachelor of Medicine and a Bachelor of Surgery (your doctor will often have M.B.B.S after their name).

To get into undergraduate medicine you have to apply through the application system in each state, which opens in late July (in Victoria, VTAC, NSW UAC, South Australia SATAC etc), as well as sitting the Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admissions Test (UMAT). Details of the UMAT follow. Sometimes these degrees are not available to those who have completed any university study. There are rarely “mature age” entries to this qualification. Also, it is VERY DIFFICULT to pass the UMAT without studying Year 12 Chemistry and Math Methods.

International students may have to sit the International Student Admission Test (ISAT) instead of the UMAT.

Usually universities insist that applicants for this level of training must not have undertaken any post Year 12 study – these applicants must apply for the postgraduate level training.

**AFTER COMPLETING ANOTHER DEGREE**

The other way has two steps. Students do an undergraduate degree (in US terms you might be familiar with what is called “pre-med”) such as a Bachelor of Biomedicine (three years duration) and then do a post graduate degree in medicine (another four years duration), seven years in total. You may see these courses called Graduate Entry Medicine.

Many universities offer an undergraduate degree which might be called “Biomedicine” or “Medical Science”. Not all of these provide the academic preparation for entry to post graduate medicine, and students need to check with the post graduate provider to ascertain the suitability of their chosen biomedicine or other degree. Some providers do not require a particular degree or set of subjects.

Students applying for Biomedicine only do not have to sit the UMAT. As this article is primarily designed for senior secondary students, applications for graduate entry medicine is detailed later in this document.

**SELECTION INTO UNDERGRADUATE MEDICINE (STRAIGHT FROM YEAR 12) at MONASH and some interstate Universities IS USUALLY BASED ON A COMBINATION OF THREE FACTORS:**

1. **THE UMAT**
2. **THE ATAR**
3. **MULTIPLE MINI INTERVIEWS (MMI)**

**UMAT 2015 - MEDICINE SELECTION**

Year 12 students should diarise that the Undergraduate Medicine & Health Sciences Test (UMAT) will be held on Wednesday 29th July 2015, as well as the closing dates for applying, Friday 5th of June.

Local applicants for (some) dental and medical and optometry schools (including Bond and Otago (NZ)), must sit this test. A list of courses which require the test is in the information booklet on the below website.

Students must apply online through the online site at http://umat.acer.edu.au, open now. The closing date for applications is Friday 5th June 2015.

International student applicants must sit the International Students Admissions Test (ISAT) if applying for Monash Clayton or Monash Malaysia Medicine courses. Details are at http://isat.acer.edu.au. For Monash, this is instead of the UMAT. International students will need to check with other institutions as to whether they need to sit both the UMAT and ISAT, or only one of these.

**UMAT Preparation Programs**

There are commercially available UMAT preparation programs. These *claim* to help students to do better on the UMAT. The UMAT test designers, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) have done significant research and have resolved that they are of no benefit to applicants. Basically *"don’t waste your money"* is the message! UMAT provides Sample Questions and Practice Tests when you apply – *use these* to become very familiar with the types of questions you will need to answer.

Some of the claims made by organisations providing them may be and have been *misleading*. Feedback from past students about these programs has been mixed; some positive, others negative. Secondary school career counsellors have searched widely and asked for feedback from those who have been involved extensively in the UMAT and these programmes. This has included universities with medical faculties, the designers of the UMAT, and secondary schools who have had extensive numbers of students sit the UMAT or do preparation programmes.

Some of the *recommendations* that have come from this consultation are:

- **A speed reading course** has a positive effect, particularly on Section 1, which is the most verbal section (this might have other benefits throughout the year)
- **Buy or gain access to the UMAT materials available through ACER** (see website above) There are practice tests which are closest to the real thing
- **Do any other timed times tests of a similar nature** in conditions closest to test conditions (again, see your Careers Counsellor)
- **Get some interview skills training**. The Careers Counsellor at your school can help with this.

The general opinion of careers counsellors with extensive experience is that, if you follow these recommendations, this will achieve as much as the UMAT preparation programmes do. Your **ENGLISH SKILLS** are the best predictor of success in UMAT and at University. Improve these and you are on your way!

That said, the more comprehensive UMAT preparation programmes attempt to do this in a nice organised way, so can have at least a convenience factor. We cannot recommend one over another, but if you were looking at doing one read their literature carefully, and perhaps check with your career counsellor before doing any, as some providers have been convicted of *fraudulent claims*.

**Multiple Mini Interview (MMIs)**

Monash uses the Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) for selection of students. (This is copied from the Monash University selection site.) MMI Stations comprise a series of scenarios and associated questions focusing on an applicant’s:

- **Motivation**;
- **Communication skills**
- **Critical thinking and**
- **Ethical/empathic reasoning**.

The MMI consists of eight sequential interview ‘stations’. At each station the applicant will be interviewed for eight minutes followed by two minutes for scoring and changeover (i.e. ten minutes per station) with a ‘circuit’ taking 90-100 minutes to complete.

Applicants will be invited (via email) to attend the MMI which will be held at Clayton campus. Selection for interview is based on a combination of both UMAT and ATAR scores.

The Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences sets the dates for interview and applicants must appear during the dates specified. Applicants *cannot request a late interview*, except under extenuating circumstances supported by documented evidence. See the important dates page for more information.

Only those applicants who attend an interview will remain in the final ranked list to be eligible for a place.
Remember that Monash University is the only university in Victoria which has a medical degree straight from Year 12. As competition for Monash is high (About 120-150 places), potential students must think about applying nationally, even internationally (e.g. Otago in NZ) for medicine. Deakin and Melbourne Universities are only offering post-graduate medical training (Deakin takes about 130, Melbourne about 150, Monash 75). Remember, post-graduate medical training will take 7 years to complete; undergraduate 5 years, although the extra study and maturity are really a positive aspect!

Potential medicine students often apply in more than one state, and we would recommend this. If you are concerned about the financial implications of this, you should talk to your career counsellor who can explain costs for you and compare the costs of study away from home vs study while living at home. There is financial support available to students who have to live away from home to study – but it is means-tested on parental income.

When people compare away from home costs ($12,000pa, assuming $300 times a 40 week academic year)) they often forget that it costs to keep students at home, and make the mistake of only calculating the costs of living interstate wholly as additional costs, rather than to offset it against the costs of living at home. Even if financial support is not available, this still should be taken into consideration.

Remember: Post-graduate medicine will cost you $20,000 more in HECS fees and you will lose two years in the workforce. and its income ($70,000pa average starting point for doctors according to the Graduate Careers Council of Australia’s most recent graduate destination survey - $140,000, so costing a total of $160,000 ($140,000+$20,000) more (than an undergraduate degree) at the beginning of a working life - so going interstate and bearing accommodation cost (say $16,000 per year for four years (see earlier discussion about costs and offset) may be cheap by comparison.

There is an old saying “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” Lack of willingness to go interstate may be a very expensive exercise.

**SELECTION INTO GRADUATE MEDICINE IS USUALLY BASED ON A COMBINATION OF THREE FACTORS:**

1. The Graduate Australian Medical Schools Admissions Test (GAMSAT)
2. The student’s Grade Point Average (GPA) during undergraduate course
3. Interviews, most likely the MMI system

Deakin University, Monash University and the University of Melbourne all offer graduate degrees in medicine. Applications close in the first half of a student’s final undergraduate year, to commence the following year. A centralised application process, called the Graduate Medical Schools Admissions System (GEMSAS) is used by most graduate medical schools. It allows students to apply for six graduate degrees in Australia.

Selection into graduate medicine (you must have a certain type of degree or subjects before being eligible) courses is based on the GAMSAT (a test like the UMAT but for graduates) the student’s Grade Point Average (GPA) and MMIs mentioned previously.

Extensive information is available on the GEMSAS website at www.gemsas.edu.au. This information might not seem directly applicable to Year 12 students, but the following does have an impact on selection of courses directly from Year 12, so you should research it now.

**Graduate Entry MBBS at Monash – special rule for Monash only**

**2017 entry and beyond (so, this applies to current Year 12 students)**

From 2017, at least 50 of the 75 domestic places available into the Graduate Entry MBBS will be reserved for students who have completed Monash University’s Bachelor of Biomedical Science. The remaining 25 places in this program will be open to students who have completed the following Monash University degrees:

- Bachelor of Biomedical Science (including double degrees)
- Bachelor of Pharmacy
- Bachelor of Physiotherapy
- *Bachelor of Science (dependent on the completion of designated units. See list below)
- *Bachelor of Science (dependent on the completion of designated units. See list below)

A minimum of 5 of the following units must be completed within the Bachelor of Science degree to be eligible for Graduate Entry MBBS: BCH2022: Metabolic basis of human diseases, DEV2011: Early human development from cells

(*at this stage (3rd Feb 2015) both the University of Melbourne and Deakin University have made no restrictions on where the student has studied at an undergraduate level. We will follow this carefully. This puts Year 12s following this path in a dilemma. They should discuss the impact of this with your career counsellor.

Current year 12 students looking at the Graduate Entry MBBS as an option should include Monash University’s Bachelor of Biomedical Science in their preferences.

From this point, second year students in the Bachelor of Biomedical Science at Monash who maintain a Weighted Average Mark (WAM) (i.e. 70 or above) at the end of second year will be offered the opportunity to undertake a select entry interview for the Graduate entry MBBS. 

They will not be required to undertake the GAMSAT.

A conditional offer may be made based on academic performance and interview prior to the commencement of third year. Students given a conditional offer will still be required to maintain their WAM during third year of the Biomedical Science program.


Thanks for this article to Warwick Slade, Billanook College, Mooroolbark