

# Preparing for Interviews at Medical or Dental School

## Introduction

If you have received the offer of an interview at medical or dental school, admissions tutors can obviously see your potential. You now need to make sure your interview technique is just as impressive.

Different dental and medical schools will have different formats for their interviews. For example, **panel interviews** might last around 20-30 minutes with a panel of 3 or 4 people including a senior academic, a clinician and a current medical student asking questions to determine your commitment and suitability for the course and profession. This could include competency-based questions, motivational questions and others to test your knowledge of the profession and NHS. Others, including the University of Sheffield Medical School, use '**multiple mini interviews**' or objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) style interview. Here, candidates face a series of 'stations' where an individual interviewer will ask a question(s) on a given topic. Interviewers may be drawn from medical educationalists, medically qualified senior members of staff, biomedical scientists, junior hospital doctors, senior nurses, senior medical students and patients. Some stations will ask competency-based questions to judge your suitability for the course and profession, others will give a scenario or moral dilemma and ask you to comment on what you would do in that hypothetical situation. Some schools might include role play or games / puzzles at the different stations. So, you might find yourself with an actor playing your next-door-neighbour and have to break some bad news to them. Equally, you might face a puzzle where you have to use your logic to come up with an answer or prioritise information. Other schools include a written exercise. Interviewers often ask for your opinion on latest developments in the profession or the NHS as well as checking your motivation for the course and institution you've applied to. Check with the admissions team so you know what to expect on the day and ask them if there is anything that you need to do to prepare.

## Basic preparation for interviews

Interview preparation for medicine or dentistry is no different from other types of interview in terms of being able to discuss and provide evidence of:

- your career motivation and knowledge of the profession
- your understanding of the course and why you have chosen that particular dental / medical school
- your work experience, personal qualities and degree studies and how these relate to your application
- your understanding of what is happening in the profession eg, recent medical/dental breakthroughs, topical controversies, ethical issues and NHS politics

You should have considered the above when writing your application, so refresh your memory about what you wrote and think about examples in more detail. Don't forget that interviewers will want you to exhibit your personal qualities at interview as well as being able to talk about them. In addition, the selectors will be very interested in your opinions on matters of clinical interest and how you articulate these, including how well you can form a logical argument.

Check the medical or dental school's website to see if it provides any guidance on how to prepare for your interview. Also check out resources at the Careers Service which relate to interviews in general:

- General advice and tips on interviews and assessment centre activities from the Careers Service: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob)
- 'Interview Simulator' interactive software package allows you to practice your response to interview questions [www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/interview](http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/interview).

We also run talks and workshops on interviews (see [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/events](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/events)) and you can talk to a Careers Adviser for more help (tel 0114 222 0910 to book an appointment).



## Ask yourself these questions

Asking yourself the following questions can help you prepare for the areas likely to be explored at interview:

### Knowledge of, and interest in, studying at the medical / dental school

- Why this medical / dental school? What do you think about the town / city? Interviewers will expect you to be able to clearly express your opinion on many topics, clinical or otherwise.
- What do you like about the course? What do you dislike? Be constructive in your response!

### Motivation and enthusiasm (for dentistry / medicine)

Interviewers want to see your commitment to becoming a dentist / doctor and how you develop a reasoned argument.

- Can you demonstrate that you are a “people person” and that you have strong concern for the welfare and care of others (if not, you are pursuing the wrong career!).
- Why do you want to be a dentist / doctor? What steps have you taken to determine why it’s right for you?
- Have you considered a career in one of the other healthcare professions, eg nursing? Why don’t these appeal as much as medicine / dentistry?
- What will you do if you are rejected for dentistry / medicine?

### Personal qualities

Consider what personal qualities the interviewers are looking for, including: communication skills; teamwork; leadership and sense of responsibility; perseverance; and the ability to handle stress, recognise your own limitations and see things from the point of view of other people.

- What would you bring to that particular medical /dental school?
- Why would you be a good doctor / dentist?
- What qualities would you look for when choosing a doctor / dentist? How can you demonstrate these?
- How well do you know yourself? (admissions teams are looking for individuals with good self-insight)
- Prepare for questions which test your ability to discuss your personality, whether you can describe significant achievements and challenging experiences in your life, cope with set-backs etc.
- Prepare for questions which may be scenario-based and test how you would handle a situation, eg, “Imagine you are on a ward and a patient of another doctor is in great pain - what would you do?” or “If you had to organise a campaign to improve dental health, how would you go about it?”
- Prepare for questions that require proof of your academic ability or more technical skills, eg, Dentistry requires a high level of manual dexterity - do you possess this?

### Depth of interests (achievement in specific fields)

- What do you do in your spare time? This can also be a way of checking how you might cope with stress.
- Expect questions which probe you about extra-curricular activities and what you have gained from them. Use this opportunity to demonstrate personal qualities and your concern for the welfare of others, if possible.

### Work experience

- What did you enjoy most about your work experience? What did you learn about yourself and others?
- What went wrong? How did you feel? What would you do differently next time?
- Be prepared to demonstrate your personal qualities and what you have learnt about dentistry / medicine.

### Understanding the nature of medical / dental science, inc. awareness of career structure

- Can you outline the career structure of a doctor / dentist?
- What have you read about healthcare in the news recently? What is your opinion on this matter?
- What are the latest advances in medical / dental science? What do you know about these?

### Useful resources available from the Career Service:

- ‘Medical School Interviews’
- ‘Getting into Medical School’ and ‘Getting into Dental School’
- ‘Succeeding in Your Medical School Interview’
- ‘So you want to be a brain surgeon?’
- [www.theguardian.com/education/2013/oct/07/interview-for-medical-school](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/oct/07/interview-for-medical-school)