



BMAT helps Brighton and Sussex Medical School broaden its outlook



Diversity and equality

Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) is committed to widening participation on its medical degree courses. It has set itself a challenging target of offering an extra 50 places to disadvantaged students and those from groups not traditionally represented in universities in 2019.



'Widening participation' – also known as WP – is a philosophy based on notions of equality. It aims to offer opportunities to groups within society that are under-represented in higher education, notably people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those with disabilities, and those from specific ethnic minorities.

WP was introduced by the UK government, which wants the country's universities to think about their intake of students and ensure it is as diverse as possible.

To help towards this goal, BSMS no longer uses personal statements as part of its admissions process, but instead uses Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing's BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) to differentiate between the large number of applications it receives every year.

Head of Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Participation Darren Beaney says: 'We were looking for a selection tool that tested applicants' knowledge – their scientific understanding – and, in particular, we wanted something that would show they were able to construct and clearly demonstrate a good argument.'

“ If you do well in BMAT and get a good overall grade, we will see that – and then we will be inviting you for interview. ”

Contact us

Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing
The Triangle Building
Shaftesbury Road
Cambridge
CB2 8EA
United Kingdom

admissiontesting@
cambridgeassessment.org.uk

About Brighton and Sussex Medical School

Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) is an equal partnership between the Universities of Sussex and Brighton together with NHS organisations throughout the South East region. Students are awarded joint Bachelor of Medicine Bachelor of Surgery (BM BS) degrees of both universities. Approximately 150 students are admitted annually to the BM BS degree course.

About BMAT

The BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) identifies applicants who will thrive on Medicine, Biomedicine and Dentistry degree courses. BMAT has been used by world-leading universities since 2003, helping admissions tutors to make objective selection decisions and allowing students to show their full potential.

About Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing

We are part of the University of Cambridge and have been working with UK and worldwide universities, governments and employers for more than 15 years. Our admissions assessments are a global mark of excellence that set the quality standard. Backed by extensive research, our admissions tests give your applicants the opportunity to prove they have what it takes, and help enhance your selection process. We have a global network of centres that spans 150 countries, making it easy to assess applicants wherever they may be.

'Problem solving is fundamental to medicine. In many respects, it is a detective game: it's about looking for clues; looking at what's in front of you and thinking it through. It's also about not taking things on face value, but actually asking questions.'

Students need a minimum of a GCSE grade B/6 (grade C/5 for widening participation applicants) for Mathematics and English, and three A Levels at grade A (AAB for widening participation applicants) to include chemistry and biology, while 36 points (35 for widening participation applicants) or more are needed for an International Baccalaureate (IB).

For 2019 entry, applications to BSMS increased by 13%, with 750 interviews conducted and 396 offers made. More than a quarter (28%) of the intake came from areas of the country with, traditionally, the lowest higher education participation rates.

'We want independent thinkers at BSMS,' says Beaney. 'We want people who have enquiring and inquisitive minds. We also want people to recognise there are two sides to an argument – to listen to other people's points of view.'

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Time to shine

With this in mind, BSMS also uses Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI) in its admissions process, at which candidates are asked to discuss a variety of topics, such as the values of the National Health Service (NHS) or real clinical practice within the Brighton and Hove region.

BSMS medical student Joel Chilaka believes BMAT aids the selection of candidates. 'You do have to prepare for it,' he says, 'but if you have those skills, it will come out through you doing the paper.'

Students Raj Dhokia and Rebecca Tweddell, meanwhile, agree that BMAT is good for measuring a person's reasoning. 'It tests a more logical thinking,' says Dhokia, 'and that is quite a differential between people who would otherwise have similar grades from A Level, for example.'

BMAT does test an applicant's scientific knowledge, adds Tweddell, but it also looks at 'how they put together thought processes, use scientific knowledge, and integrate that to practising looking at things and identifying clues or trends'.

BSMS students need to be able to write essays from week one, so anyone who gets a D or E in the written element of BMAT is rejected.

Beaney believes the test allows people to shine. 'If you do well and get a good overall grade, we will see that – and then we will be inviting you for interview.'

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