



BMAT makes admissions easier for Lancaster University



A useful selection tool

When Lancaster University Medical School received more than 900 applications for 54 undergraduate places, they knew they had to find a better way of differentiating between very similar candidates.



Lancaster University
Medical School

'That number was unmanageable and not really fair on applicants, because a lot of really strong candidates were not being successful,' says Dr Karen Grant, Director of Admissions and Deputy Director of Medical Studies at the university.

So, in 2016, Lancaster decided to introduce Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing's BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT).

BMAT has three sections, designed to test a student's problem-solving skills, application of scientific knowledge and ability to construct an argument.

After screening applicants academically, Lancaster ranks them according to their total BMAT score and then decides which of the top 300 students, approximately, should attend for interview. Personal statements are taken into consideration, but Dr Grant says a person's BMAT score is now the primary tool for deciding if they get called for interview.

'When you look at applicants' academic grades, they are very similar – they are all doing really well, otherwise they wouldn't be contemplating coming to medical school,' she says.

“ The better the BMAT score, the more likely a candidate is to get the three As to get them onto the course – so that, for us, is a useful piece of information. ”

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About Lancaster University

Lancaster University is in the top 10 universities in three main league tables, with a TEF Gold rating for teaching and highly ranked in international league tables such as the QS World Rankings. It was named International University of the Year by *The Times* and *The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2020*.

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.

'BMAT is a way in which applicants can show some of the cognitive and academic skills that are going to help them succeed at medical school. And, generally, the better the BMAT score, the more likely a candidate is to get the three As to get them onto the course – so that, for us, is a useful piece of information.'

Dr Grant also believes BMAT is a more objective and transparent assessment of a student's potential. 'You can say to someone "your BMAT score wasn't quite as high as those who were considered" – and that's easier to understand than "your personal statement wasn't quite as good as somebody else's". So, it has face validity for applicants as well as for admissions tutors.'

Working with widening participation

In addition to helping create a less onerous pre-interview process, Dr Grant was pleased to discover that BMAT did not adversely affect Lancaster's widening participation (WP) agenda.

'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.

Using WP markers such as whether a candidate lives in a neighbourhood with low university participation levels, or attended a 'below average' school, Lancaster initially tried ranking WP and non-WP students separately, allocating interviews on a pro rata basis.

But even when the university ranked all applicants together, it found that BMAT did not disadvantage WP students – 'which was reassuring for us,' says Dr Grant.

'We have a very close working relationship with Admissions Testing,' says Dr Grant. 'Working with them has always been collaborative and cooperative – they are very good at responding whenever you have concerns or something you want to discuss.'

'You also get the results exactly when they say you're going to get them – in the format you are expecting – so it's easy to use and it gives us an independent way of assessing applicants.'

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