

Libbi Burchnell – 2020 Alumni



University Park Campus on my walk back from the Medical School

Hi I'm Libbi and after completing 7 years at Spalding High School beginning in 2013, I left last year in 2020, although a few months earlier than we had all expected!

During my time at Sixth Form I studied Biology (A*), Chemistry (A*) and Maths (A*), and I now attend the University of Nottingham where I study Medicine (which still feels very surreal to say!).

Applying to University and choosing the right Medical School

Throughout school, I had always found the STEM subjects both fascinating and engaging, so in Year 10 I completed 2 weeks of work experience in a Hospital which really solidified for me that I wanted to pursue a career in Medicine. Continuing Biology, Chemistry and Maths into Sixth Form and with a career path in mind, it was then a case of deciding where I would like to study, which seemed like such an overwhelming task at the time! Unlike most other aspects of the medical school application, life was made slightly easier due to there only being 37 Medical Schools to choose from in the UK!!

Some of the aspects I had to consider when choosing a Medical School were;

- **Course Teaching Styles**
 - Medical Schools will usually fall under one of the following categories in terms of their teaching styles; Traditional, Problem-based, Case-based and Enquiry based.
 - Integrated teaching is a combination of teaching styles, meaning you'll learn scientific knowledge alongside clinical training – you'll learn the material by topic, rather than by discipline.
 - Most medical schools offer this approach (except Oxbridge who offer traditional courses), varying by which of the problem, case or enquiry based teaching they use.
 - I decided to apply to only Integrated courses, as this is what I thought would best suit my style of learning, and I have no regrets!! Nottingham uses the case based approach which makes use of real patient scenarios and focuses on key clinical points.
- **Course Elements**
 - Some of the elements you may want to look out for are; full body dissections, opportunity for intercalation, a research year, opportunities to study abroad, an additional BSc degree etc.
 - This is mainly down to personal preference, and each medical school offers something slightly different, so it's really about finding what is right for you.
- **Location**
 - For me, location was a small factor in my choice of Universities. Based purely on practicalities, (and my tendency to overpack in every scenario!!) I thought it best to stick to Medical Schools in England, which still gave me a wide range to explore.

- Entry requirements
 - Applying to Medicine isn't the easiest of tasks, and the admissions exams are no exception !!
 - Most Universities require you to sit the University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) exam, and some require the BMAT exam.
 - You don't need to take both of these exams, but I decided to take both as I knew I wanted to apply to Imperial College London, which requires the BMAT exam. It's also helpful to consider sitting both, if your UCAT exam doesn't quite go to plan.
 - Universities also vary in what they use to help them decide whether to offer you an interview and subsequently a place at the Medical School. Some focus on your GCSE grades, others on your personal statement etc. So, I tried to be as strategic as possible and apply to Universities based on the strengths and weaknesses of my application.

There is of course lots more to consider, and I found it was really helpful to do as much research as possible and go on open days to give you the best idea of the University you'd like to spend the next 5-6 years studying at.

After doing my research (and in hindsight not as much as I would recommend !!), I decided to apply to these 4 medical schools as they each offered elements which I was keen to explore during my studies;

- University of Birmingham (A,A,A) - UCAT
- University of East Anglia (A,A,A) - UCAT
- University of Nottingham (A,A,A) - UCAT
- Imperial College London (A*,A,A) - BMAT

Alongside choosing which Universities to apply to, I also needed to continue to gain a variety of work experience, volunteering and extra-curriculars to aid my application into Medical School. Some of these included volunteering at my local Rainbows Unit as a Young Leader, being a member of St. John's Ambulance, completing my Bronze and undertaking my Gold DofE, volunteering in a local Pharmacy, work experience in hospitals and GP's, working part time in a Café and being part of the school Prefect team.

Following what felt like a lifetimes wait and much to my surprise, I received interview offers from University of East Anglia (UEA), University of Nottingham and Imperial College London, and I was rejected pre-interview from the University of Birmingham.

I was excited and humbled to have received 3/4 interview offers and after 3 intense MMI's (Multiple Mini Interviews), I subsequently received offers post-interview from all three.

With Imperial College London and University of Nottingham being my top two choices, and both offering great courses, I eventually settled on putting Nottingham as my firm choice. This was due to the Full Body dissections, a BMedSci degree integrated into the 3rd year and if I'm honest the peaceful campus full of beautiful landscapes !!

Thankfully, despite the pandemic, the whirlwind of results day and the stress of opening my results live on the local radio whilst I was at work, I was lucky enough to get the grades I needed to get into University.



University Park Campus, Nottingham

Life at Medical School

Since moving to Nottingham in September, time has flown by as I now approach my final exams at the end of my 1st year.

Our first term consisted of mainly biochemistry with each week focussing on a different theme, some of which included; Metabolism, Cells, Infection and Inflammation, Embryology and Pharmacology. A typical week would consist of between 20-30 hours of live online lectures. This teaching gave us a good basis of the underlying biochemistry, which has set us up well as we moved into Term 2.

As Term 2 started, this is where what I would call the 'real medicine content' began ! Again, each week is themed differently eg. Atrial Fibrillation, Lung Cancer, Asthma, Pneumonia, and we have a Case Study based on a real life patient scenario, to go alongside the teaching for the week. Having an actual patient scenario to work through has really aided my understanding of the content, and how it relates to clinical medicine.

In addition to this, each week focuses on a different part of the Anatomy aspect of the course, so January began the start of our Full Body dissections. After ending up in A&E for 5 hours after my first dissection (although I'm sure not to the surprise of my Year 10 Biology class, who had the pleasure of watching me faint during a heart dissection !!), the subsequent fortnightly sessions quickly became the highlight of the course so far. Once you come to terms with the concept of the session, it is the most humbling experience to be able to learn from someone who has donated their body to science. We treat our cadavers with the upmost respect, and come away from each session feeling really grateful for the opportunity. We will continue these sessions, working our way through different regions of the body such as the thorax, limbs and the neck, until the end of December when we will have completed a year of dissection.

Pre COVID-19, we would have also had the opportunity to go into a GP or Hospital setting every Tuesday from the very beginning of term, to get us involved with different healthcare settings and develop our communication skills from day one. Unfortunately, this wasn't able to happen this year, so I am looking forward to seeing a real life patient very soon !!

Besides academics, most Medical Schools have a Med Soc, and the Nottingham Med Soc offers all their own societies to get involved with ! With all the restrictions of the past year, many societies unfortunately haven't been able to run any in person sessions, but I was still able to sign up and get involved online with all those that interested me, such as;

- Teddy Bear Hospital (a fun project for 3-7 year olds, which uses play to make young children more familiar with healthcare)
- SCRUBS (Nottingham's Surgical Society)
- Medics Badminton
- Veg Soc (Vegan and Vegetarian society)

Plans for the Future

Moving into 2nd year, I hope to continue really enjoying the course, getting involved with societies, and aiming for that work-life balance, which I have come to realise to be so important in staying positive when things can inevitably get overwhelming at Medical School.

My 3rd year will consist of completing a research project and 2 advanced medical science modules which will all go towards the BMedSci degree. The 4th and 5th years will form the Clinical Phase of the course, and I am hoping to complete my 6 week elective abroad at the end of final year before graduating as a qualified Doctor in 2025.

So, you want to study Medicine ?

Although I really am no expert on applying to Medicine, I definitely learned a few things on the way, so here are a few key pointers

- Remember, all you need is 1 offer !! From choosing a Medical School to sitting your entrance exams, applying to study Medicine is tough and can be a real challenge at times, but remember that it is possible and at the end of the day you only need one offer to get into Medical School.
- Don't worry if you are only just deciding Medicine might be the course for you – although some people know for years that this is the career path for them, deciding at the end of Year 11 or even at the start of Year 12 should definitely not put you off applying. As long as you do your research, and get involved with volunteering and work experience, you won't be at a disadvantage.
- Talk to each other ! If you have friends or know of other students applying to Medicine, it would be really great to share research you've done, any good places for work experience, and also to practice interview techniques with each other when the time comes.
- Start early. If you're anything like me, then starting something as big as applying to Medicine can feel daunting and overwhelming, and looking back now, I wish I had started researching earlier ! There's a lot to learn, and if you start doing a small amount each day, then it will really help you to feel on top of your application.
- It will be worth it in the end ! After having completed nearly a full year studying a course I thoroughly enjoy, and looking forward to a challenging but rewarding career as a Doctor, I can definitely say that it is worth every moment of the vigorous application process.

Finally, I would encourage anyone even slightly thinking about a career in Medicine or other Allied Health professions, to just go for it - it may well be exactly the career that suits you !

Resources that you may find useful ...

<https://www.themedicportal.com/application-guide/>

The Medic Portal was my go to website !! It is a great website for all things Medicine, and it even has a page for how to support your child in their application process.

<https://www.themedicportal.com/application-guide/choosing-a-medical-school/comparisontool/>

Medical School comparison tool

<https://themsag.com/blogs/applying-to-medical-school/which-medical-schools-do-full-body-dissection-2019-2020-update>

Universities which offer Full Body dissection

<https://www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/making-an-application/admissions-tests>

Medical Schools admissions exams

<https://www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2701/msc-entry-requirements-for-uk-medical-schools-2021.pdf>

Medical Schools 2021 entry