


Student Profile - Christopher Jones

MBChB student

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Why did you originally apply to do your chosen course at Birmingham?

I did a considerable amount of work experience prior to applying to medical schools and numerous doctors mentioned that Birmingham had a strong reputation for producing high quality doctors. I read into the school's course and was impressed by both the lecture-based approach and the early clinical exposure, so decided to visit on an open day. It was then that I decided to apply to Birmingham, not least because of the beautiful campus and the great facilities in the medical school building. I also liked the city and was impressed that students could travel to the vast majority of their placements, rather than having to live away from the main campus like in a number of other medical schools I visited.

What do you think are the best points of the course and the University?

There are too many positive points to mention them all! I've thoroughly enjoyed my time at Birmingham and being a student here has helped me to develop into a confident and able doctor.

I think the most defining positive aspect of the course for me has been the varied clinical exposure. The West Midlands has a broad and very mixed population, meaning that no hospital or any two patients are the same. It is an environment that has created a number of invaluable opportunities for me over the years that I have been here, as well as dramatically enhancing my ability to talk to people from all walks of life.

I have also enjoyed, and taken advantage of, the huge range of opportunities there are to get involved in the life of the University and the Medical School. Many of these are run by students themselves through the large MedSoc (Medical Society), and I've been able to do everything from recruit new patients to be bone marrow donors to teach first year students how to do CPR.

Furthermore, the pastoral support in the medical school is very strong, with a mentor system ensuring that each medical student has someone to check on their welfare throughout their time at University. Medicine is a stressful course and I know a good number of my friends have benefitted a great deal from advice and support they've received through this system.

Finally - and although I hadn't considered the importance of it before starting at University - being at Birmingham, which is highly regarded for the quality of its medical research, means that you are taught by academics at the very top of their field. I have not only learnt a huge amount from the Professors who have taught me, but have been genuinely inspired by their knowledge and dedication.

What are your views on the teaching on this programme, what do you think are particularly strong teaching methods or sessions?

The early years of the course are predominantly lecture based, but anatomy and physiology tutorials are used to good effect to consolidate on more complicated aspects. The early exposure to clinical practice is useful too, with a hospital orientation day providing an early insight into life as a clinical student, as well as regular structured visits to general practice which allow students to see patients with the conditions they are studying.

The University is also lucky enough to boast a plethora of very high quality teaching hospitals and I have received excellent bedside teaching throughout my clinical years. There is, in addition, a strong emphasis on ensuring students are technically skilled before they start work as doctors, with many hospital trusts employing specialist staff to teach Birmingham students skills ranging from taking blood to suturing, prior to them honing their skills on patients.

What are your views on the teaching and support facilities on the Medical School?

We are spoilt in terms of facilities. We have our own medical school building which contains its own common room, cafeteria, two large computer clusters and a large library just for medical students, in addition to access to a substantial number of journals online. We're also fortunate enough to receive free printing, which makes a huge difference when trying to keep up with the many lectures you have as a medical student. The medical school's close location to the brand new University hospital next door is also fantastic, not least for providing a shorter walk to placement!

The medical school also shares its site with the Institute of Biomedical Research and the Cancer Studies labs, amongst others, which have together provided me with a number of invaluable opportunities to combine my medical studies with time spent research in world-leading laboratories.

What advice would you give to students thinking about studying on the course?

Choosing which University to study at is difficult for most students, but the length of the course perhaps makes it a little harder for prospective medics. Think carefully about what you'd like to achieve whilst at University, what else you would like to do outside of your studies whilst at University, and where you want to be in five or six years time.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at Birmingham and genuinely believe that the best choice I have ever made is to come here to study. It is an inspiring, as well as aspiring, institution and - most importantly - the professors and doctors here have always allowed me to expand on my own interests and conduct work I find stimulating. This freedom and flexibility has been invaluable to shaping the person I am now, and will no doubt define the career I will soon embark on. I think this is certainly a positive part of being a part of the Birmingham community and not all Universities permit their students to thrive in the same manner. This is certainly something to think about.

More pertinently, though, I think it's important to weigh up what will be important to you in six years as well as what's important now. You may feel strongly about dissection as opposed to prosection, for example, but it's worth keeping in mind that this will only really feature for the first two years of your time at medical school. Similarly, whilst you might prefer the nightlife at one University, it's important to keep in mind that you might need to stay outside of that city for your placements from the third year onwards.

Is there anything extra students thinking about studying on the course should know?

An outstanding part of studying in Birmingham is the unrivalled support and opportunities that will be offered to you by the Careers Network. I have been interested in research throughout my time here and have received substantial financial support from the Careers Network - in the form of three scholarships - to travel to a number of world-leading laboratories to complete projects and publish papers. These have led to a number of other awards, enabled me to secure my dream job and considerably enhanced my time here. I have also been paired up with a Mentor, Professor Sir Charles George, who I first met at a University drinks reception in the House of Lords!

Whilst supporting those who want to do research, the University also runs a number of opportunities for you to gain experience as a teacher. This is an essential skill for a doctor, and one of the most notable activities running in Birmingham is the Basic Life Support (BLS) course. All first year undergraduate and graduate medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy and pharmacy students take this course in their first year and learn how to perform CPR, use a defibrillator and deal with someone who is choking, bleeding or unconscious. Uniquely, all of the teachers are second years, the examiners are third, fourth and fifth year students and the course itself is run by eight medical students; so there are great opportunities for you to get involved in teaching, examining and running an important course as a student here, providing you with essential skills for future employment.

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