



What YOU need to know about the....



GAMSAT (UK)

Examination

A guide for prospective students written by current
Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry Students

Basic Information

The GAMSAT (UK) Examination is an examination designed to test individuals aptitude to study Medicine or Dentistry. The examination is specifically used to assess non-school leaver (mature student) applicants.

It is currently used by several Medical Schools in the UK for entry into the 4-year Graduate Entry Programme (GEP) medical degree¹:

- St. George's, University of London
- University of Nottingham at Derby
- University of Wales, Swansea
- Keele University

Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry (PCMD) uses the examination to assess 2 different types of potential applicants:

- 5-year Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (BM,BS)
(UCAS Course Code A100): non-direct school leavers (it is more than 2 years since you completed GCE A levels or equivalent qualifications, you are a graduate or you have enrolled onto the second year of an existing degree programme).
- 4-year Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS)
(UCAS Course Code A201): health care professionals without a degree but with evidence of past higher education experience, e.g. to diploma level, in addition to relevant work experience in a health care setting.

The examination takes place once a year, usually in **mid-September**, with registration usually occurring between **June and Mid-August** before the exam.¹ (Please ensure you check this information regularly, as it is always liable to change)

The Format of the Examination

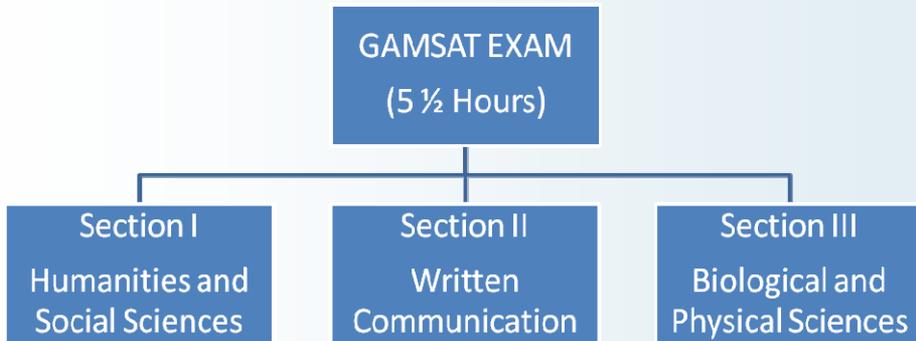


Figure 1— Outline of GAMSAT UK structure, Adapted from GAMSAT (UK) Website²

“The GAMSAT exam is a very long and drawn out day. Don’t be phased by the background of other candidates e.g. PhD etc. Bring some lunch with you to GAMSAT exam as they run out of food”

- 4th year Medical Student

The GAMSAT UK exam takes 5 ½ hours to complete and is divided into 3 sections, taking the following lengths of time.

- Reasoning in Humanities and Social Sciences - 100mins
- Written Communication - 60mins
- Reasoning in Biological and Physical Sciences - 170mins

During the course of the exam there is an hour break for you to have lunch and relax between the written communication and science sections of the exam.²

“[The GAMSAT exam] is a test of endurance. So, no matter how badly you think it’s going, finish the exam”

- Postgraduate student due to start Medicine in 2009

Reasoning in Humanities and Social Sciences

This section comprises of 75 multiple choice questions and you have 100 minutes in which to complete them, which equates to 1 minute and 20 seconds per question, therefore you have to think quickly!

The exam is designed to test “skills in the interpretation and understanding of ideas in social and cultural contexts”.² This is achieved by giving you written or pictorial stimulus and then asking you questions about that stimulus.

“Most of the information [you] need to answer the questions is in the text, so it is more about developing a good technique”

- 2nd year Dentistry Student

Stimuli commonly used in the GAMSAT Exam include³:

- Non-Fiction Texts
- Fiction Texts
- Poetry
- Proverbs & Quotes
- Cartoons
- Diagrams
- Tables

While there is not room to include any example questions in this booklet it would be wise to get hold of some practice papers and go through them so you know what to expect!

“Allocate time wisely for the exam; for Part 1, allocate a set number of seconds per question, as a guideline.”

- 1st Year Medical Student

Written Communication

In this section you will be expected to complete 2 essay questions in 60 minutes. The questions are described as having a ‘general theme’, with the first question having a socio-cultural slant to it.

Unlike the rest of the exam, this section is not multiple choice and so therefore the examiners will be looking at your use of language and grammar as well as your essay content and structure.²

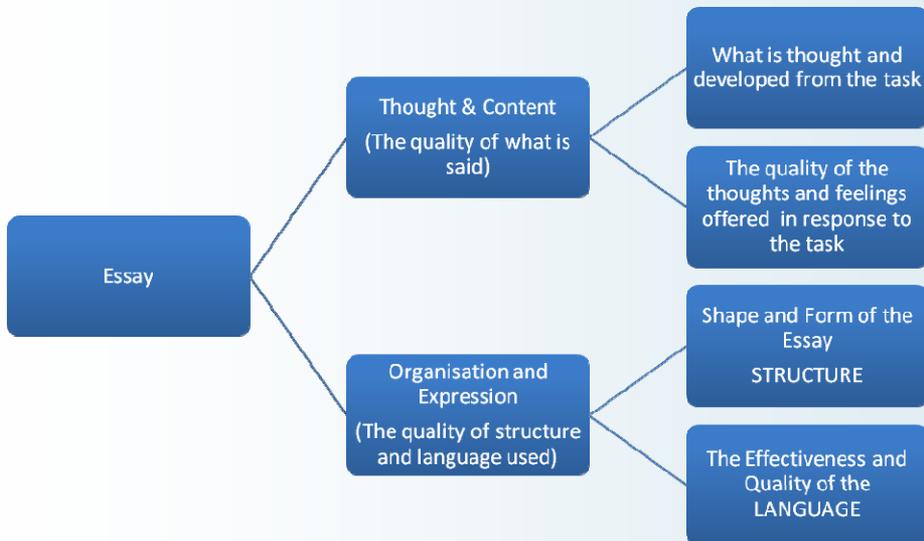


Figure 2— Outline of Written Communication Section, Areas of Assessment, Adapted from GAMSAT (UK) Website²

“For the essay section - do lots of reading of critical writing - e.g. Newspaper editorials (broadsheet) and comment

- 4th Year Medical Student

“Do timed essays - boring but essay writing technique was improved loads!”

- 5th Year Medical Student

Typically, the written communication section will ask you to consider and write a response to one or more quotations from a pool of around five or six.

An example may be:

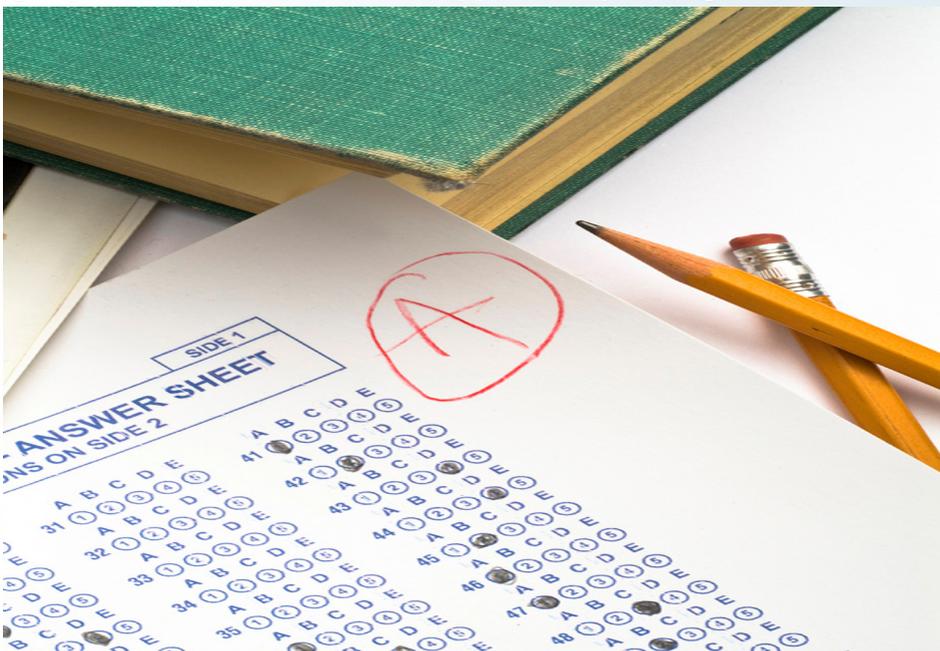
“There is no avoiding war, it can only be postponed to the advantage of others” - Niccolo Machiavelli

It will be up to you to then consider such a quotation and then draw upon your own knowledge and understanding to construct a coherent essay in response to this.^{2,3}

“Structure the essay rather than focus on content as this is where the marks are placed”

- 2nd Year Dentistry Student

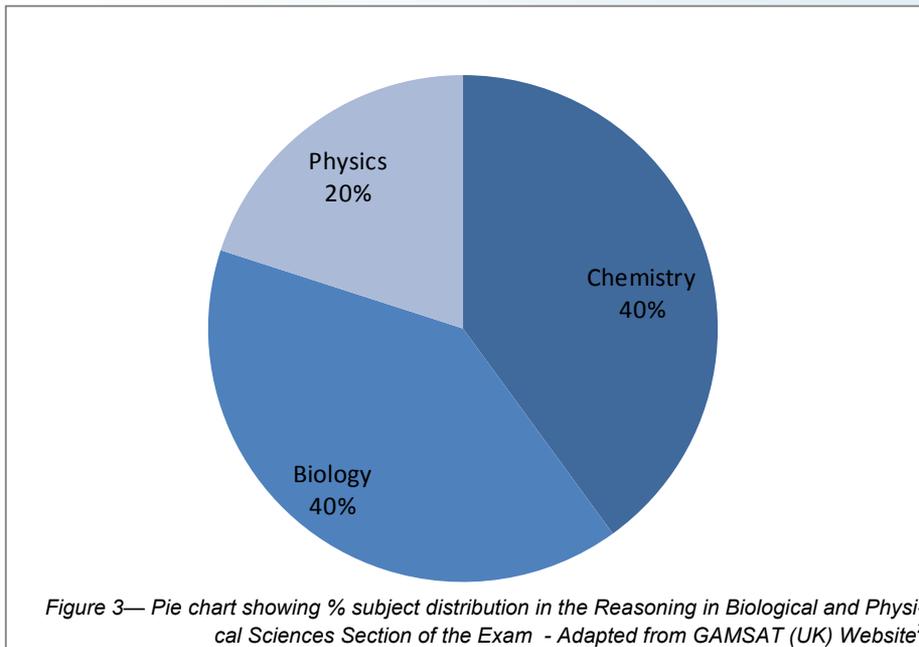
This may not necessarily be true, but remember that it is important to clearly structure your argument and to employ good language and grammar skills to supplement your argument.



Reasoning in Biological and Physical Sciences

This is the longest paper of the examination at 170 minutes, with the most number of questions with 110 and undoubtedly, this is the section that raises the most anxieties!

This section is designed to test your knowledge of the core principles of the sciences, as well as testing your problem solving skills. Questions are divided between the three core sciences as shown below²:



The exam is said to be set at 1st year undergraduate level in both Biology and Chemistry and at A-level standard in Physics.

“For the Science section - be rigidly disciplined in your timing and remember that every question has the same marks”

- 4th Year Medical Student

*“Part 3 is designed so most people will not finish it -
Do not panic!”*

- 1st Year Medical Student

Like section 1, section 3 is a multiple choice section, which is very limited on time (You should have around 1 minute and 30 seconds per question). Therefore, it is very important that you get used to practising under exam conditions, so you have a better understanding of how to pace yourself in the exam.³

If you do not know the answer to the question, or indeed you run out of time during the exam, there is no harm in guessing! You cannot lose marks in the GAMSAT if you get a question wrong!

“Answer the questions you know first - leave the hardest until the end - you will NOT have time to finish so leave the guesses to those you understand”

- 3rd Year Medical Student

If you do not have a scientific background don't panic! A lot of people who pass the exam are not from a science background, but it may be worth-while swatting up on some A-level standard sciences at least so that you have a good understanding of the core sciences.

Some students have also noticed an organic chemistry focus.

*“If you are **not** from a science background be very confident on at least A-level Chemistry and Biology*

- 4th Year Medical Student

“Go through the practice questions to find areas of weakness - most emphasis should go to chemistry, especially organic chemistry”

- 1st Year Medical Student

Getting Your Results

Your results should be available online approximately 7 weeks after the test date and the universities to which you have applied will be notified automatically of your score.

Your marks are calculated using the following equation²:

Overall Score =

$$(1 \times \text{Section I} + 1 \times \text{Section II} + 2 \times \text{Section III}) \div 4$$

Therefore, this means more emphasis is placed on section 3, but it also means you can bolster your score by performing well on the other sections, if you find one section challenging.

However, some medical schools insist that you attain a minimal standard in one or more of the sections and it is best to check this with the individual schools.

“Do not neglect any aspect of GAMSAT revision, even if it seems very tedious and boring - Do not just concentrate on the science subjects”

- 2nd Year Dentistry Student

Your overall score will be released in the form of a number (for example 62), and you will also receive a breakdown of your scores in the individual sections.²

It is important to note that this is not a percentage score, and therefore you are judged against other candidates depending on how well you do relative to the cohort that year.

Therefore, if you receive a score of 62 and most other people score in the high 50's, you will be in one of the higher centiles relative to that cohort. However if everyone else scores in the high 60's you will be in one of the lower centiles.

Getting An Interview

Each medical school will set its own GAMSAT score threshold for interview and this will vary dependent upon the number of applicants to its programme and how well each of those applicants has performed in the GAMSAT relative to their peers.

This 'cut-off score' is always the subject of great speculation and debate on online web forums. However, it is important to remember that it changes annually and nobody really knows who will be invited for interview and who will not be invited until the medical schools themselves notify you of their decision.

"Forums just made me nervous, everybody whipping themselves up into a panic!"

- 1st Year Medical Student

A good score however would generally be regarded as being in the mid-sixties and such a score would stand you in good stead as regards getting an interview.

If you only just miss out one year however (either as a result of your GAMSAT score or at interview), remember that scores fluctuate from year to year and that your score is valid for two years. Therefore, the following year you may use your score again and may this time be successful in gaining an interview/place.²

Remember however, GAMSAT forms just one aspect of selection; satisfactory interview, occupational health screen and criminal records bureau check will also be required before an offer.

Also bear in mind that while PCMD (for medicine. See p2) chooses to use GAMSAT as its main criteria for selecting suitable candidates for interview, other medical schools may expect additional qualifications (such as a 2:1 honours degree).⁴

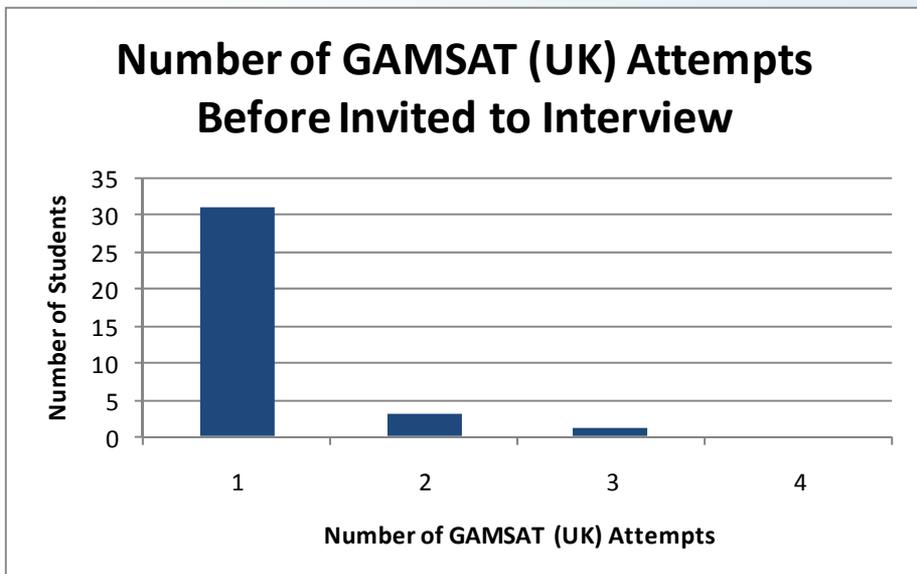
How many times can I take the GAMSAT?

There is no limit to the number of times which you may sit the exam.²

“GAMSAT provides a effective means of selection based initially on the amount of money in your pocket!”

- 2nd Year Dentistry Student

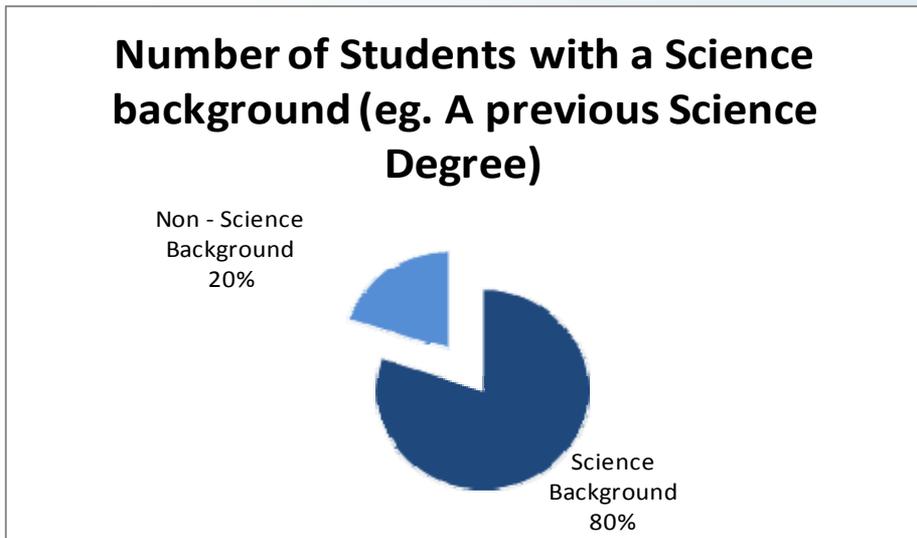
At nearly £200 an attempt (plus costs of preparatory materials) the major limiting factor in your decision to take the GAMSAT may be financial. However, if you are able to afford to take the exam there is no reason why you cannot.



Whilst the majority of current PCMD student questionnaire respondents said they had achieved the minimum score for interview in the GAMSAT exam at the first attempt. There are a number of students at PCMD who sat the exam more than once before securing the required score.

Do I have to have a Science Background?

For the BMBS programme you do not need a background (e.g. a first degree) in the sciences, and there is a broad range of people from different backgrounds currently studying at the college.⁴



Of the students surveyed, 20% said they did not have a science background. Of those 20% many have backgrounds in education, administration or the armed forces to name but a few.

For the BDS programme, you do need to have a good first degree in a biomedically-related or health care related subject.

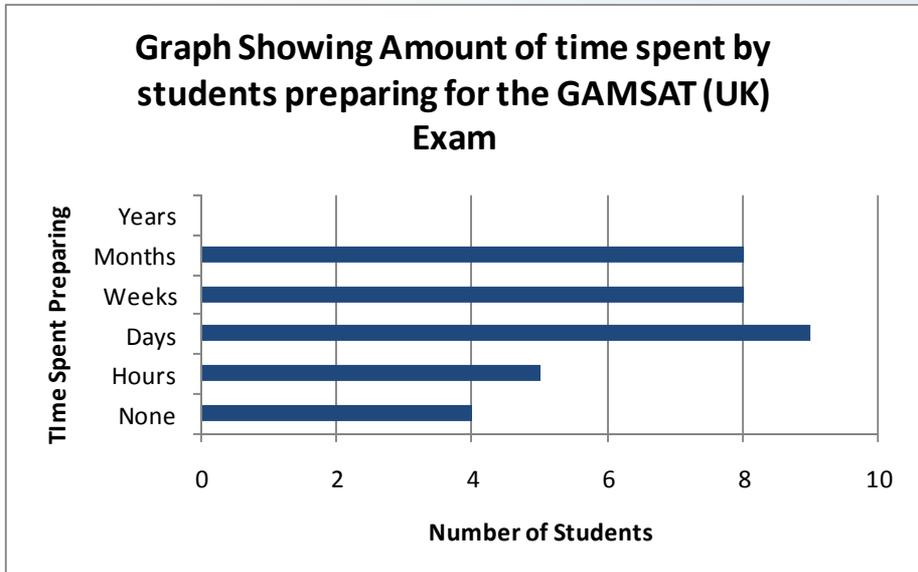
Obviously, those from a non-science background may consider themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to the GAMSAT exam, and may therefore need to invest more time and money

“Because I did not have a science background, I found evening classes in Biology very helpful, and got me into the ‘science zone’ and used to exams again”

- 4th Year Medical Student

How much time do I need to take preparing?

This is a very good question, and the answer is that it probably depends on the individual.



Of the students surveyed, preparation time ranged from months to none at all.

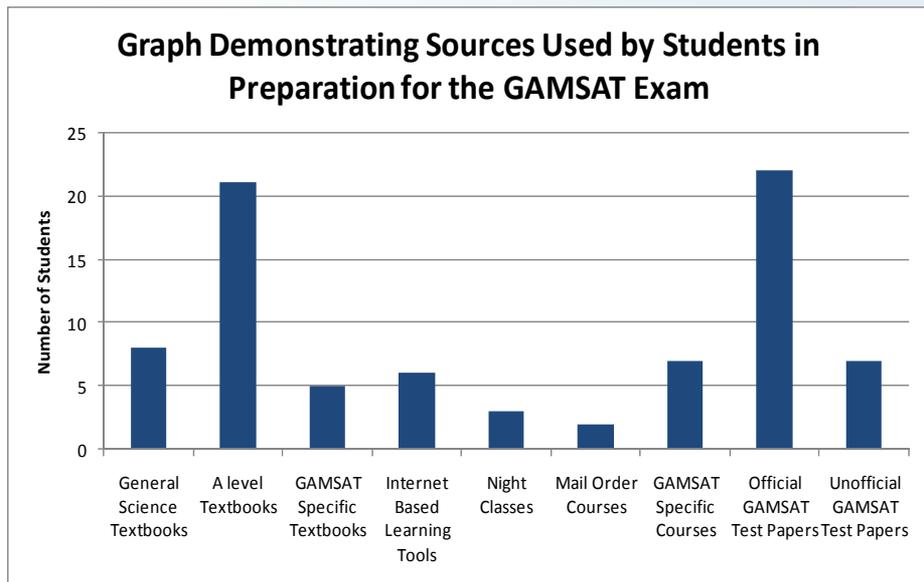
The students who spent the most time preparing for the exam appeared to be those from a non-science background. However this is not always the case and you should tailor your revision schedule depending on your individual ability and knowledge, as well as tailoring the resources you use to those which suit you best.

“Buy the 3 official GAMSAT papers, do one of them under exam conditions to get a baseline for your performance. Use this mark to determine the amount of preparation required for the actual exam”

- 4th Year Medical Student

What Resources Do I Use When Preparing For The GAMSAT?

The vast majority of students surveyed said that the main resources they used while preparing for the exam were the practice papers available from the GAMSAT (UK) website and A-level text books. However, a number of resources are also available and are briefly discussed.



Official GAMSAT Test Papers

There are 3 books available from the GAMSAT (UK) website (www.gamsatuk.org), two priced at £15.00 entitled GAMSAT Practice Questions & GAMSAT Sample questions. A further book is entitled GAMSAT Practice Test and is available for £25.00.²

"I found the practice papers the most helpful of all as they were a true indication of the exam itself"

- 4th Year Medical Student

Many students commented that they liked the practice papers as it gave them the opportunity to practise under exam conditions, that they were able to identify weaknesses in their technique and knowledge and that they benefitted from doing a 5½ hour GAMSAT 'run through'.

The disadvantages of the papers however, are that you are not learning any new information, that you have to be very disciplined with yourself to stick to exam conditions and that there are no external markers to judge the quality of your essays in section 2.

"I bought a practice paper and did it a few days before, to get an idea of the question style"

- 2nd Year Dentistry Student

General Science & A-level Text-books

While officially the GAMSAT (UK) exam is set at first year degree level Chemistry and Biology, and A-level standard Physics, many of the students questioned believed that having a good knowledge of A-level standards was sufficient.

There are many A-level text books and revision guides available from your local bookshop or online. However, below are some of the book titles current students listed as useful in their preparation:

- 'Letts revise' - A-level Chemistry/Biology/Physics
- Organic Chemistry for Dummies
- Edexcel A-level text books - Chemistry/Biology/Physics
- Chemistry for Biologists - Fisher J et al.
- Biology, A functional Approach - Roberts

This is not an exhaustive list and there are many other texts available, but try to find one YOU are comfortable with.

GAMSAT specific Textbooks

There are a large number of books available about getting into medical school and a large number recently published about the UKCAT. Remember that these are not applicable to the GAMSAT.

Comparatively books specifically about the GAMSAT are relatively few and far between and of the students questioned, those that had purchased such books said they found GAMSAT specific text books to be unhelpful.

“I bought a text book off the internet - Gave me confidence at the time but did not really help”

- 3rd Year Medical Student

One GAMSAT specific text that some students did find useful was ‘Griffith’s GAMSAT review’ an ‘e-book’ publication written by a current 4th year medical student at St. George’s. It is 171 pages long and contains information and tips on the GAMSAT, as well as a number of practice questions and answers and a handy set of equations to remember for the Science sections. It costs £24.95 and is available to download from www.gamsatreview.com.³

“After I had sat the GAMSAT I realised that in preparation for the test I had done an incredible amount of research and work which could be of benefit to other candidates”

- Peter Griffith, 4th year medical student, St. George’s & author of ‘Griffith’s GAMSAT Review’

“[Useful resources?] Peter Griffiths e-book on GAMSAT”

- 2nd Year Dentistry Student

Another source of GAMSAT specific literature is through Des O'Neill's FREE mail out which contains information about the GAMSAT exam.

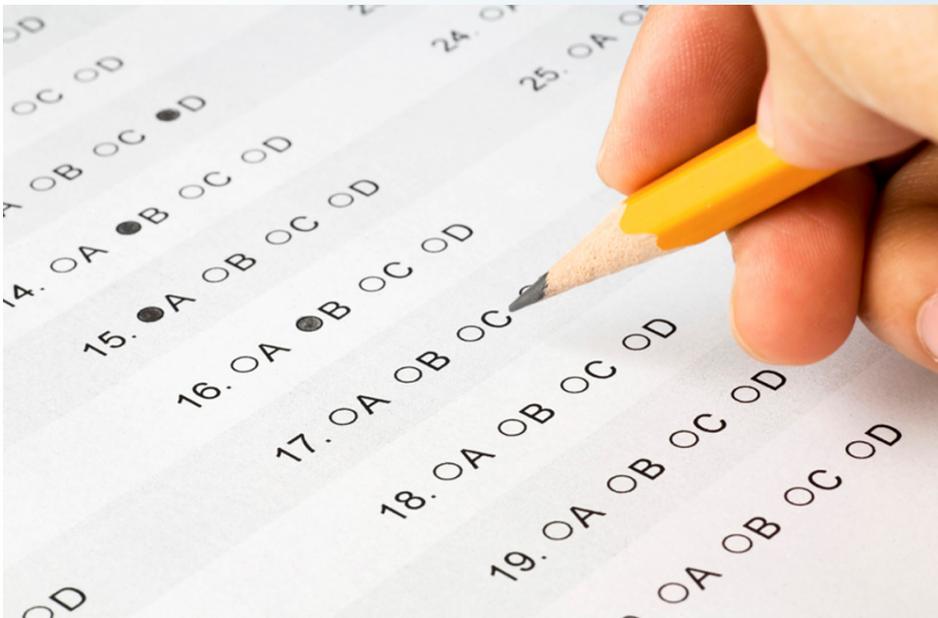
Furthermore, they offer distance learning courses in Writing Better Essays (In which your essays are marked and returned to you), Science Revision Course, and Practicing MCQs course. However, these courses are expensive (costing £360 for all three, and £225 for the essay writing course alone).⁵

More information can be found at www.comptext.com.au.

Please also be aware that the taught courses available from this company (ie. Where you attend lectures etc.) are currently only available in Australia.

"I had a look at the Des O'Neill notes before the exam but didn't think they were very useful"

- 2nd Year Medical Student



GAMSAT specific Courses

There are several courses on offer, but they are undoubtedly expensive.

GRADMED (www.gradmed.co.uk), offers two types of courses: Weekend full-course (based at Imperial College, London) and a 3-weekend long intensive revision course.

They claim that overall 72% of their students are offered an interview. But there are mixed opinions of such courses from within the PCMD community of students surveyed.⁶

“GRADMED is a fantastic course for both scientists and people with a more artsy background”

- 4th year Medical student

“GRADMED course was very helpful (Intensive Version)”

- 2nd year Dentistry student

*“My friend did the GAMSAT twice. First time with me, she just did the practice questions with me in the evening, but her score was not quite good enough to get an interview with PMS. Second time she attended one of those preparatory GAMSAT courses in London & spent over £1,000 and ended up with a **worse** GAMSAT score, never got into medical school & has emigrated to Australia as an ITU nurse instead!”*

- 4th year Medical student

Unfortunately, details about the current prices of the GRADMED courses are not available online, but they are likely to be very expensive. You can order a prospectus by visiting the above website. Also while you are there, you can practise your examination technique on some free sample questions on their website.

Another GAMSAT specific preparatory course is OZIMED. They offer 10 full-length practice exams which you do at home for £146.00, or you can order just one exam for £21.00. To find out more information on this visit www.ozimed.com.⁷

'DR. PREP' (www.drprep.net) offer weekend courses on GAMSAT Science (lasting 2 days) at Charing Cross Hospital in London, costing £290. A single day Humanities, Social Science and Written communication course is also available for £165.⁸ (2008 prices)

'DR. PREP' also offer abbreviated mock exams and essay marking service costing £10 per exam and £35 per marking.⁸ (2008 Prices)

These courses are by no means an exhaustive list and other courses may be found online, including www.GuruMethod.co.uk/GAMSAT and www.GAMSATPreparation.org.^{9,10}

Online Communities and Forums

A link may be found via the PCMD website (www.pcmd.ac.uk) to an online forum where you can chat and ask questions to current students and other applicants.⁴

Also there are other general medical forums available such as www.newmediamedicine.com. However, be cautious when using such sites as many people have found them unnerving.¹¹

"Many people provide 'scaremongering' saying to score the best marks, you must start 3-months before the test in revision. This is not the case, if you believe you have the common sense necessary to be a doctor [or dentist].....Don't believe everything you are told.....just believe in your own ability"

- 1st year Medical student

References and Further Information

1. <http://www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/admissions/gamsat>
- UCAS website detailing information for applicants about the GAMSAT exam
2. www.gamsatuk.org - Official ACER website providing information about GAMSAT (UK) exam, including orders for official practice papers
3. Peter Griffiths GAMSAT Review 2008 - www.gamsatreview.co.uk
- Downloadable e-book, with prep materials and practice exams
4. www.pcmd.ac.uk - College Website
5. www.comptext.com.au - Home to Des O'Neills prep course and materials
6. www.gradmed.co.uk - Website for GRADMED courses, run in London annually
7. www.ozimed.com - Website for the mail-order prep courses and practice papers
8. www.drprep.net - Offering weekend courses in London and mailed preparation materials
9. www.GuruMethod.co.uk/GAMSAT - Web-based preparatory course
10. www.GAMSATPreparation.org - Another Web-based preparatory Course

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This booklet was produced as part of a fourth year 'Doctors as Teachers' SSU project. Any views or thoughts expressed in this booklet are those of the individual and not the authors. The contents of this booklet do not constitute Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry policy in the context of selections & admissions. Permission has been sought from ACER for this booklet to be produced but the contents and detail are in no way associated with ACER, UCAS or GAMSAT.