

Electives at medical school

Find out what an [elective](#) [1] is and get tips on choosing what to do. You'll also find resources to help you on your way.

What is an [elective](#) [1]?

An [elective](#) [1] is a period spent away from your medical school, often abroad. Many students say it's one of their most memorable experiences. The timing of the [elective](#) [1] and how long it lasts depends on your medical school, but they are normally for 6-12 weeks.

Choosing what to do

Making decisions is an important part of being a doctor so choosing your [elective](#) [1] is a good opportunity to test yourself. Your [elective](#) [1] gives you the chance to find out more about yourself and what you want to do in the future. It allows you to explore a particular area of medicine or something different, such as research or teaching.

You can choose from a wide range of experiences. You may want to:

- stay in the UK, perhaps to learn about working in different healthcare settings
- do some hands-on relief work in a developing country
- go somewhere – in the UK or abroad – where you can learn about the most advanced procedures and equipment

It's up to you to organise your [elective](#) [1]. Explore a range of options and start your research as soon as possible. Certain opportunities, such as working in top US hospitals, are very popular, so you may need to make contact up to two years in advance.

- **Ask yourself searching questions**

- what are your motivations? Do you want to make a difference? Are you keen to be at the cutting edge? Do you want to experience a different culture? Are you thinking about working abroad in the future? Do you already have contacts overseas?
- will you be able to raise the necessary finances to fund your elective ^[1]?
- what are your commitments in the UK?
- will you have the necessary language skills for the country you want to visit?
- does your medical school have strong links for certain electives? If so, how might this help you?
- do you have a back-up plan in case you can't organise your first choice of elective ^[1]?

• Getting advice

Your medical school can discuss what past students have done. They will also give you advice about:

- grants and bursaries to help finance your elective ^[1]
- travel arrangements, including vaccination and visa requirements
- insurance

• Resources

Resources to help you choose and arrange your elective ^[1] include those listed below.

- The British Medical Association (BMA) has a guide on ethics for electives ^[2] for student members
- Student members of Medical Protection ^[3] can access The Electives Network (TEN) ^[4]
- The website Money4MedStudents ^[5] gives advice on funding your elective ^[1], including the grants and bursaries available from organisations such as the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal Society of Medicine
- Foreign travel advice is available at GOV.UK ^[6]
- Organisations, such as Work the World ^[7], organise healthcare electives overseas

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/medical-school/electives-medical-school>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Elective> [2] <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/medical-students/ethics-toolkit-for-medical-students/medical-electives-in-resource-poor-settings> [3] <https://www.medicalprotection.org/uk/benefits-renewal/medical-student/electives> [4] <https://www.electives.net/> [5] <http://www.money4medstudents.org/sources-of-funding> [6] <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice> [7] <http://www.worktheworld.co.uk/>