

Coleg Gwent AHE Learners to Begin Ambitious Futures in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, and More

(Please note that quotations have been edited for clarity.)

Coleg Gwent's Access to Higher Education - Medicine (Access) learners are proving just how transformative the right support and structure can be for those wanting to pursue a new career path. Whether returning to education after time away or pursuing a route into university better aligned with their previous experience, the Access programme is helping students pursue ambitious futures in a variety of medical science pathways.

Why AHE?

The Access course at Coleg Gwent attracts learners from a range of backgrounds, all seeking a purposeful and structured route into competitive university degrees. For some, it's about realigning their academic journey with their current experience; for others, it's a deliberate choice to pursue a more supportive and flexible pathway to their goals. We sat down with some learners from Coleg Gwent, who are all on track to complete their Access to Medicine course this summer, with the hope of pursuing various medical routes.

Liv, for example, had taken a year out after completing her studies and initially considered veterinary nursing. After researching her options, she discovered that the Access course was not only a viable pathway but the most suitable one for her ambitions.

"It looked really difficult at first, but after emailing universities to get their opinion, I found that the Access pathway was actually the best route for me."

Morgan faced a different challenge; he had completed his A-Levels but couldn't pursue medicine because he hadn't studied Chemistry, so his subject mix didn't align with the traditional entry criteria for medicine. He also felt his previous school lacked the resources to support him in pursuing that pathway, so he felt the Access course offered a structured and supportive alternative. "It gave me exactly what I needed to do, even though I hadn't studied Chemistry at A-Level," he said.

Ethan had left his A-Levels unsure about what he wanted to do next. With some previous work experience under his belt, the Access course seemed like the ideal way to explore his options and open doors. "I thought it would help me decide, and it really did!"

For others like Anastasius, it was about changing direction entirely. Having already earned a degree in law, he was drawn to healthcare after working within the care sector. The Access course allowed him to explore this new direction with confidence.

A Course Built Around the Learner

Unlike the traditional academic pathways that often require multiple years of regimented study culminating in a set of examinations or other assessments, the Access to Medicine programme provides learners with continuous assessment and regular feedback without the pressure of high-stakes exams at the end of the year. Learners across this year's cohort consistently praised the manageable structure of the course, which allowed them to balance study with work and other life commitments.

“I loved that the assessments were spread out over the year and weren’t just a series of exams at the end,” said Liv, who is progressing to study Veterinary Science at the University of Bristol this September. “It gave me the time to learn, to improve, and to still have a life outside of college.”

Ethan, who will be heading to Bournemouth University to study Chiropractic Medicine, echoed these sentiments: “The structure of the course allowed the assessments to be better spread out, so we were able to build on our knowledge at a good pace.”

The smaller size of the class offered the learners individual support and fostered open, discussion-based learning. The learners described this environment as more collaborative and supportive than their previous academic settings, allowing them to engage more confidently and deeply with the material.

Subjects That Prepare You for the Real World

A standout feature of the Access to Medicine programme is its subject depth and relevance to further study. With a curriculum designed to mirror the academic demands of university-level medical science, the Access course includes subjects like Biochemistry, Anatomy and Physiology, DNA Technology, Chemistry, Maths, and Physics.

Interestingly, several learners rediscovered subjects that they previously struggled with - particularly Chemistry.

“At school, I found Chemistry really hard,” said Liv. “But here, I really enjoyed it! The way it’s taught and the resources available made it much better than at A-Level.”

The biology-themed subjects were a firm favourite for many, especially for their focus on anatomy and its real-world applications. Learners had access to additional resources, including practical experiences like dissection.

Morgan, who is set to study Medicine at the University of Bristol in September, noted that the teaching approach helped bring everyone up to the same level: “The staff made a conscious effort to support every student. No one got left behind.”

Facing and Overcoming Challenges

While the Access course opened doors, it wasn’t without its challenges. The Maths component stood as particularly demanding, often pitched at a level above the traditional A-Level expectations - something even the tutors acknowledged.

Learners also had to overcome personal and logistical hurdles; Morgan had to juggle part-time work, while Anastasius faced a difficult daily commute using public transport. Still, they all agreed the effort was worth it.

Bright Futures: Where Are They Headed?

The outcomes for this cohort speak volumes about the programme’s success:

- **Liv:** Veterinary Science at the University of Bristol, with long-term plans to potentially work in New Zealand and open her own practice.

- **Morgan:** Medicine at the University of Bristol, with interests in cardiology or a medical career in the Armed Forces.
- **Emily:** Dentistry at the University of Bristol, aiming to specialise in orthodontics.
- **Ethan:** Chiropractic at Bournemouth University, following some work experience within a chiropractic clinic.
- **Anastasius:** Still deciding between medical sciences and a potential return to law but credits the AHE course with broadening his options and perspective.

Throughout the university application process, learners were supported with interview practice and personal guidance. Dr. Paul Edwards, Consultant Surgeon in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, worked closely with students to prepare them for the often-challenging interview formats - Emily had to make a pasta sculpture of an animal that she felt best represented her personal character!

100% Retention, 100% Determination

Every learner who started the Access to Medicine course at Coleg Gwent in September 2024 successfully completed it, an impressive 100% retention and successful completion rate. The final requirement, a Professional Behaviours unit, is the only assessment left to complete - and it's ungraded.

Learners strongly recommend the course to others considering a career change or seeking an alternative route into higher education. "You get out what you put in," said Morgan. "But the support is there, and the environment helps you succeed."

A Gateway to the Future

Coleg Gwent's Access programme is more than just a stepping stone - it's a launchpad. With strong academic preparation, personalised support, and a course structure designed around the learners, it's opening doors to degrees and careers that once felt out of reach.

Whether it's veterinary science, medicine, dentistry, chiropractic care, or something still unfolding, these learners are proving that different pathways can lead to equally bright futures - and for many, this is just the beginning.