

## Audio file

[Education Matters Ziaad Absar.mp3](#)

### Transcript

Hello and welcome to education matters with your host Sajda and Elliot in our show, we aim to open education to everyone. We do this through conversations with inspiring. And guests and experts who share their educational journeys we aspire to raise awareness of a variety of educational opportunities that will enhance your skill set and support you to pursue life longer missions and career goals. If you want.

To be in a position where you can influence society, think about empowering yourself through education. Education is important to every stage of life as it supports communities and leads to positive changes in the words of the great legend, Nelson Mandela, education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change.

World stay tuned as we demystify education jargon so that learners from all backgrounds can continue to thrive and achieve personal success. Education is a lifelong journey where all students, each episode we are both sharing our knowledge and learning from our guests, so Tune in to education matters because education. Really does matter.

Also, if you want to be involved or share your thoughts on the topics discussed. Leave a comment we'd love. To hear from you.

We're joined by Thiad today and to guess about studying medicine and his education journey. So thank you so much for joining us. I'm going to kick us off with, can you tell us a bit about your educational journey?

OK. So thank you for having me on. First of all, I've never done anything like this before, so very interesting. So yeah, I just finished my second year of medical school at Bristol University. And I'm currently enjoying the holiday off right now. And I suppose most of my life I've grown up in Lancaster, so I've gone to school there and for my secondary education, I've. I've gone to the grammar school and I did. Like 5 years there just for up to GCS. And then I did another two years for the sixth form so. That's basically kind of my educational background.

What did you study at the sixth form?

So I picked 3A level subjects and those were maths, biology and chemistry.

Oh wow. OK, see. And you're now at Bristol University.

I'm at Bristol Medical School, yeah.

So welcome the ad. What did you enjoy most about being at Lancaster Royal Grammar School?

It'd be hard to pick one thing that I enjoyed most about that school, I think. Especially about the sixth form in particular, I really enjoyed the freedom that I was. Given I think it's a different dynamic when you have GC's compared to sixth form. I think between the student and the teacher because. I think although it's subtle, they do treat you kind of differently. They do give you a bit more respect and. They did. You kind of treat you like an adult and. I think that's something that I really appreciated in sixth form was having. You know, there's there's practical things like having free periods as well,

where you know it's your choice, what you want to do in that time and. Yet it's a lot more independent, which is what. I think really helped me do well in my levels.

And I know studying to your A levels and those A levels to go on to do medicine can be quite challenging in itself and there's a lot of pressure. But what was the most challenging or the most difficult thing you found about 6/4?

The most challenging thing. I think I'm quite well. My year group is kind of in a unique position because I mean, I could talk about this all day, but when COVID first hit I mean that was just chaos because. School just completely shut down and, you know, sometimes we'd come in for a few days and then be off for like next couple of months, so. I think as the uncertainty as well of not knowing. Like what kind of the future hold for your education in terms of? Not just getting the grades and things, but like interactions with your friends and things like that and your teachers. I think one of the main things that. That struck me was like trying to do online learning and that was. That was just a nightmare because teachers like they weren't. They weren't really prepared for it, and neither were the students. So. It is hard to get anything productive done in my opinion and I think. I was quite in a privileged position because I think I still. I had support at home as well to do my idols and things, but. I can understand that someone else who might necessarily need more help with face to face teaching as well. I can understand that they'd probably struggle a lot more but. Yeah. Although I didn't suffer as much as you know, speaking to my friends and seeing how they did. I think COVID was probably the biggest challenge.

And we're hearing it from lots of students that, you know, the impact is not just in both for that academic year, but also in the later years as well. And even though we're so-called out of COVID it, the impact is still there in terms of how it's affected. Students mentally as well as their, you know, their academic studies, but you've done, you've done really well. They had you. So you did your A levels which weren't easy A levels or maths, chemistry and biology. And so at that time when you made those choices, did you have medicine in mind?

When I think back, I think I think medicine was always an option for me, but it was not necessarily concrete. I think I really struggled to just think about what I wanted to do. After you know my GCSE and A levels like, I wasn't really sure what I was going into. I was just kind of going through the motions so. And you know, I was told by people, you know, around me that. OCD. You know you're in such a privileged position. You're doing really well at school. You could pick anything like, really, like the world is your oyster kind of so.

Yeah. And I guess that made it difficult in a way because you put, you know, thinking you could do anything and you have A levels, which could, you know, take you into different career paths. So that decision is a 17 year old to decide on which degree course to do at university is huge. Huge decision to make at any age, but at 17 I can. And that's, you know, quite daunting decision to make.

Yeah, I think and paradoxically, having more choices just made it a lot more stressful. And one thing I really liked about GCSE was I did a whole range of subjects in lots of different disciplines like. And you can have your STEM subjects and then doing bits in the liberal arts as well. I really enjoyed you seekers. If for someone who doesn't know exactly what they want to do when they're older, I think doing a bit of everything is so much more fun. So it was it was a difficult thing to adjust to when doing A levels.

So how did you then decide after doing all the liberal arts subjects and exploring what else was out there? How did you make that decision? That medicine was for you. Did you speak to any people that helped you to make that decision?

Deciding on medicine. I don't think it was in like a single day like a Eureka moment. And I think it is a bit difficult as well because no one in my family does medicine as well. So I kind of had to look externally and I kind of had to look to. Try and find people who are, you know, similar background from me and kind of went through the same experiences as I. I think one of the main things that help me decide to do medicine was kind of like a practical hands on kind of a subject that I wanted to do and. Something that was rigorous and medicine itself is very open. Like there's so many different specialties out there, and you know, as I already said earlier, I like to do lots of different things instead of kind of focus on one thing. Yeah. Doctors, they're also, you know, you get to be in a privileged position in society as well, like, especially when I speak to patients now like they tell you things that they wouldn't. They would never really say to anyone outside of their, like, closest friends or family as well. So. I think speaking to some doctors as well, during my work experience I, you know, I've heard a realistic view of what it's like to be a doctor as well because it's not. You know, it's not all just easy going and. Lots of money or whatever. So.

And how it's maybe portrayed in the in the soaps and the films and?

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And you know, I'm not gonna deny that. Obviously, culturally is medicine is something that's very highly regarded as well. So I guess that does take into account, but. It's not something I wouldn't encourage you to just pick something just because of. How respected you think you're going to be or how you know people will look at you. So just think about what what you want to do.

Clearly a lot of thought went into this as a 17 year old, you know, you spoke to people, you looked at what other options there were out there. So if you didn't do medicine, what else could you do? But then also, you know, doing a lot of your own research into what what actually is medicine and and understanding that there's a wealth of different. Roles within that field, and I guess that was something that helped you to progress.

So after you've done all this thinking and made the decision, what did you do to prepare to actually apply for medicine?

So I think the thing that helped me the most was try and learn the application process inside out so. It's kind of like jumping through hoops. You just have to think, and there's so many different things that go into it, there's. Grades are one thing and I think most applicants they'll have the good enough grades to get and there's so many talented people who can get into medicine with the grades. But. Medical schools are looking for people who are very well-rounded. Very well-rounded individuals so. I guess doing grades one thing, but also to prepare learning about what medical schools want to see in an individual, that's extracurriculars also doing extra exams like the UK and BIMA are specific to medical schools as well. And then interviews and things like that. So. I think kind of doing like a timeline and just saying OK, point A to point B, Point C and then. Organising it, I think that helped me the most to try and prepare for it.

Was there anywhere that you went to get that information? Any free resources you'd recommend?

Free resources. I mean you have to be careful, but I did go online and you know, try and just look up on the universities web page itself to just try and find you know how to prepare. But just be careful when you do online, there's there can be a lot of misinformation as well. Yeah, I think I came across quite a bit of that, but also. I said I think I had a really good education, a lot of people, a lot of teachers in my school. They're very familiar with the application cycle for medical school. They have a lot of students who. Want to do that? And so speaking to them was really helpful as well because they have a lot of information.

And I know your time at six. One obviously was during the lockdowns in COVID time, but did you get to do any work experience or shadowing to help you make that decision and also to help with your application?

Yeah. So work experience, I did shadow a couple of doctors in Liverpool and we were going around the hospital and kind of well, this is radiology, so. You know, kind of seeing what they get up to in a normal day and also. It was something that I just speak out in my personal statement. When I went to Bangladesh, I did see a few doctors there and went around their hospitals as well, and I found that was very helpful. Not just so it's something you can write down on your personal statement, but it's very eye opening as well. Like the contrast between. How medicine, how medical care is delivered in like Western society versus somewhere in like an Asian country that's impoverished as well. So I think that not only was good for the personal thing, but helped me decide even more that medicine was. What I wanted to do?

And you mentioned the work experience in Liverpool. So how does a 1617 year old go about securing A placement like that?

See. Yeah, I'm going to say it's getting experience. One of the hardest things to do and a lot of universities recognise that as well. Like, they won't say, well, some of them might do. But nowadays a lot less say it's mandatory to have. Work experience because they just they appreciate that, especially because doctors are so busy and not just doctors, but anyone in the healthcare sector really is really hard to get work experience. It's kind of like cold calling. What I did basically is kind of spamming emails to as many different people as I can, so I will. I will say it was kind of blind luck that I did manage to get it and I appreciate that I was very.

And I'm sure your credentials on your application form, you would have sent that off as well. That would have. That would have helped as well, but that's only just one element of the application, isn't it? Because you have you send off your emails, you send off your application, your CV, but then they also may want to see you and interview you as well.

Yeah, absolutely. They do want to see what kind of person you are. Like. Sometimes they'll say, oh, are you have you just been told to do this is that. Why? You know. But if you can portray that you're really interested in it, you really just want to get to know and you don't want anything to be sugar coated. You just want a realistic insight into what it's like to be a doctor. You know, hopefully they can. They can understand where you're coming from. And also I notice that when you know as a medical student, someone placement on on the wards and things like the doctors as busy as they are, they're willing to teach you. If you can show that you know. You're really interested.

That's really good to hear. So you applied to Bristol, you told us earlier that you're at Bristol and you're you've just completed your second year, which is great. So where else did you apply?

So I applied to Manchester and Liverpool were the mainlands that I applied to. You might notice is basically to do with proximity to Lancaster. So that was something that. I had to really consider was kind of the practicality of where. I was applying for.

But they're great medical schools there.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think Manchester is one of the biggest medical schools as well in the country, so. It just happened to be. Like very convenient for me to go.

But you decided on Bristol.

Yeah, I thought I also had family in Bristol as well, so. Yeah, I thought everything worked perfectly.

So you mentioned proximity and yeah, Manchester and Liverpool are in North West in the north. So how far away is Bristol University to Lancashire?

It's a Bristol. It's it's quite a track. Like, I think if you're going by car, it's like 4 hours, something like that. So yeah, really crazy if you're. I'm trying to just get from from Lancaster to Bristol, but yeah, that's it's quite for.

How how do you manage your travel so?

I guess when I first moved in, I think my dad drove. I didn't have a licence at the time. I still don't know, fortunately, but yeah, my dad drove, so it's four hours there, 4 hours back, so it's quite intense and. I kind of feel bad for him looking for that, but yeah, also I take the train as well. I guess speaking a bit more on the practicality of that, it's kind of. Yeah, the train tickets around like 60 quid, something like that and. Couple of changeovers as well and. You have a lot of time to think on those journeys because it's quite long. So I just generally just try to read something, whatever book I'm interested in at the moment, you know, whatever, or I'll just I might do a bit of studying, something like that or I could just try and get some sleep. Well, yeah, there's some. That's just how I manage.

All very good uses of your time. And yeah, as someone who also travels a lot by train. And so you mentioned that you know the actual time commitment of travelling is quite a lot even by train and the expense. So how often do you manage to come back to Lancashire?

So I only come back to Lancaster during term time. So you know when I have holiday like three times during the academic year. So it's not that often. And and also just the current situation as it is, you know, there's been a lot of train strikes as well that's kind of delayed it as well. So yeah, I guess. Not going home as much as I'd like to. But I kind of just try and manage it when I have like a decent amount of time off where. I think it'd be worth going home.

So how would you describe Bristol to somebody who's never been to Bristol?

OK. So Bristol, I'd say it's a very it's a very vibrant city, it's very busy. It has a lot of. It's a very diverse place with a. Lot of diverse you know. Yeah, demographic of people.

So similar to Manchester, Leeds, the big cities that we have in the Northwest.

Yeah, yeah, I'd say so. But I think Bristol, although it is fairly big it, it feels kind of small as well. It feels like it's a very walkable city, I'd say so everything feels within walking distance. It's not, nothing is out of your reach. I'd say that's what. Yeah.

It's bigger than Lancaster, yeah, but smaller than Manchester, yeah.

And not needing a driving licence because as you said, and do people cycle a lot in Bristol.

Yeah, I've seen. I've seen a few cyclists here and there. I mean, there's also boys like those little scooter things that you would do. I refuse to get on them. They like. Death traps where? That's what people that's an option that people could.

Is that like you, you put a?

Token in you can you can you just like scan a barcode I think on your phone and then you can hire it for. An hour or two.

I'd love for them to have for us to have that up here in.

I would. I would always say, never get.

Lancashire on one. One where they do have them.

Don't think I've got the balance.

Maybe they have them in Liverpool, possibly. I would. I would. I would try out anyway.

Traffic for like when the weather is really nice and hot and what are the main sort of like attractions in Bristol?

So Bristol, I'd say it has it has a very it's a culture of like creativity as well. I would say there's a lot of art things like galleries, museums, that kind of thing. There's Bristol Zoo, the aquarium. I mean. If you're going to places to visit, I guess there's a Cabot circus. Kind of like a big shopping mall there. There's also lots of green spaces like Brandon Hill and Clifton Downs. And yeah, you should definitely. There's a Clifton suspension bridge as well. You should give a visit if you're there. It's. Yeah, there's a few. Today and I'm told he has a very good nightlife. But that's not for me personally.

Too busy studying? Yeah, but yeah, you've so you've been there two years and it seems you've got to know the city very well. And I this is all new to me, I did not know there's a zoo and there's an aquarium in Bristol. So yeah. Get yourselves there and have a look especially. If somebody's interested in Bristol as a potential university that they want to do a degree in, there will be open days. I'm sure coming up that you can find out about and and and take as a Family Day out. Not only will you get to know the university, but also it's surroundings as well. But yeah, like you said, it is a four hour car journey to get there as well. But great, I feel like I've been to Bristol now even though I've not been to Bristol.

Yeah, I really want to.

Visit now, hopefully I've done it justice, yeah.

Sounds very nice, green and lots of creativity and culture.

So being 4 hours away from your family, from somebody who you know you have a family in Lancaster, you have siblings and you're all very close. And and you know very supported by your mum and dad and and you know Dad, you know, the fact that he drops you off and picks you up sometimes at university. That's like an 8-9. Our car journey. That's a huge commitment and it says a lot about him as a father as well that he wants the best for you. What was it like for you moving away from that family unit and then all of a sudden having to be independent? So the cooking the whole, you know, going to your lectures on time and you know, not having your your dad or your mum show for you around. How did that. How did you find that?

Yeah, it's really it's a really strange experience. I didn't quite expect it to be like how I thought it would be, I mean. Talking about independence. I mean, usually if when I don't want to do something, I have, my parents are just kind of breathing down my neck. So for convert to university like no one's there to you know, egg. You know, egg me on. Tell me what to do. And it's having a lot more freedom. It's it sounds like a blessing. But, you know, it's kind of two sided coin as well. Like you have to motivate yourself and and you can't rely on other people. I mean, I'm sure. You know, you mentioned cooking as well, things like that. I'm sure the people listening, there's probably a spectrum of people. Some people are really independent at home anyway, and they probably do a lot. Of things by themselves and probably a lot of people. Who? You know, just rely on their parents for everything. So. Yeah. I mean, for me personally, it was. Uhm, it took me some time to adjust and I think the difficult thing is to build good habits. I think try and do that as early as possible. I know it's easier said than done, but. Yeah, and also student life has been living with flatmates. It's like a

different a whole different dynamic to kind of. Navigate as well. Something I haven't really had to do before.

So did you in terms of do you live on campus in Bristol University, do they do they have? Do you know commendation?

Yeah. So they they provide student accommodation. So my my accommodation is kind of like a 1020 minute walk to the main university buildings. Yeah, if you can. There's the hills and bristle are unforgiving. So. Just be prepared to get in.

Shape. So how many are there in?

Your flat. So in my flat there were six.

OK.

And yeah, there's like a shared kitchen, basically.

And now they all from the UK.

Uh, no, actually I had a few from the UK, one, my flatmates from Singapore, another one from, you know Pakistan, so.

And are they all studying medicine or is it a mixture of different subjects?

It's a mixture of lots of different people and some people are doing languages. Some people are doing like. Biochemistry, that kind of stuff. So yeah, I think that's good because. One advice I would give is try to make friends with people who don't do medicine because you just you don't want to stick around with people who are just doing the thing that you're doing all the time. Like you should definitely try and broaden your horizons.

Because I I can imagine very interesting conversations happening in that kitchen when you've got people. All around the world, you know, you mentioned Singapore, Pakistan and and that sharing of culture as well over food, maybe even have you managed to cook for the others in the flat?

There was an attempt at some point I think, but I learned that cooking is not my, not my strong.

Seed, being Bangladeshi heritage? Yeah, but now looking back and knowing how challenging it is to to live on your own. And all those things that you mentioned before? Is there any advice that you'd give to somebody who is in high school in college to help them prepare for that?

To prepare, I guess. Just going with an open mind and try and just try and be independent for a bit. You know by yourself at home.

So spending more time in the kitchen with. Parents and siblings.

Yeah, yeah, kind of. I don't know. You might already do this for, you know, just kind of. Help them out a lot more than you normally would. You know, do them a favour anyway, you know. Yeah, that's my advice. And also don't bring too much luggage. That's something else.

It's really good advice and very practical as well. So you talked a little bit about sort of what it's like in your flat, but also how, how do you relax outside of studying and and have those friends that aren't aren't medics? Yeah, so.

Definitely do an extracurricular or you know one or two. Just try and find a club or something that you enjoy. You know, I play rugby as I played that through high school as well. Just yeah, try and be

active, you know, try and be and also have like a an interest that isn't medicine but is, you know, slightly academic if you want. For example, I've been reading and doing a bit of philosophy as well in my spare time. I know that probably doesn't sound appealing to a lot of people, but just trying to be interested in something that isn't your. And you know, I do a bit of reading as well. But yeah, definitely go outside is my advice. It's easy. You know, when you get through the motion to just stay inside all day and just focus on your work. But. It's it's really important just for your mental well-being as.

Well, I think that's good advice to have both at sixth form and and at university. I think that that's very applicable to to whenever you study really and really whenever you're studying really is to have other interests outside of just focusing on your on your studies.

And it's nice that you're able to continue that interest that you had in rugby from high school all the way up until you know through university now, but also universities are opportunity for you to pick up a new interest as well. So Bristol University, do they have a? Lot of societies.

Oh yeah, they have tonnes. They did have a kind of open day thing. I was walking around like it could have been for hours. I could have just been there. There's some really weird things I've seen like a A. Quidditch Society of. I've seen some kind of like cheese eating society as well. Like you get all kinds of people, people and.

I think we've. Got that in. Lancaster as well.

I I would definitely join a cheese eating society, unless you're about quidditch, but definitely cheesy so.

We have a Disney decided only here, but there's I mean there's people who who share different interests. And if there's enough of you, you can come together and form a club or a society.

Disney society, yeah.

Yeah, I've. I've seen some really bizarre things.

Anything that's interested you apart from rugby.

Let's see. I mean, I know this is kind of magical, which is kind of the opposite of what I said, but they do have galenic calls, which is like, I think it's one of the biggest. Kind of medicine related societies in the UK for universities as well, so. There's lots of different specialties within that as well. And I mean, there are so many that even there's like a special medics rugby team like is very is very broad. Yeah, I mean, things like chess, that kind of stuff as well.

So for the medicine society, is that so? It's people who are studying medicine. How? How does that differ to lectures? What? What? We do in a a medicine society.

It doesn't always have to be about like learning things for and trying to answer exam questions correctly like some, you know, people pick medicine are actually interested in it, you know, so they might talk about some that they found interesting, that they've seen on placement or. Whatever. And sometimes it's just like a social event. Like, you know, they might. Or go out to eat or something like that. So it's not just medicine, it's just for people who happen to do medicine but also are interested in other things.

And that brings us really nicely on to our last question, which is because you've mentioned this earlier about different specialities within the field of medicine. So her as, as and others is asking you a big question at the end of your second year of your medical degree. But have you thought about



what will be next for you in terms of is there a speciality or as a field that you're? Feel that you're gravitating to?

I mean I that's why I I I couldn't possibly answer that question. I think I've seen so many things I've interested like even general practise as well. There's a lot better than what I thought it would appear to be. I've spoken to, you know, neurosurgeons, cardiologists, respiratory doctors. I mean, the whole lot, I mean.

And your work experience was in radiography.

Yeah. Radiology. Yeah. So, I mean, I spoken to all kinds of doctors. I've seen just tiny bits of medicine here and there, and you know it's not. Just going into and just picking your specialty straight away. There's like specialised programmes as well where? Perhaps you wanted might do research, so there's kind of like enough academic medicine kind of thing you can do after you graduate as well, so. I don't know, perhaps. I've given it a bit of thought maybe to go into kind of research public health, but. I think I don't have the experience enough to say what I want to do, and I think if you ask me this in a few years time, I'll probably give you a completely different answer.

And you've got plenty of time to to to discover those things because you have it's a five year degree, right. So you have.

But you'll be surprised. It goes by quite quickly.

It does go back quickly quite quickly to you, I mean, Can you believe yourself that you are now going to be starting the third year of your medical school?

I don't feel like I'm too 5th as a way to be a doctor, but.

I'm sure your your family and your friends have noticed that personal personal growth in you and and and all the other skills that you've you know you've learned along the way apart from the technical knowledge from the medical degree. But you know you're coming across as a. Very articulate, very professional. And I think that's. Partly shaped by the degree that you're on, it's equipping you with your skills.

I can imagine if yeah, can imagine you have a very good bedside manner. Yeah, very calm.

Yes. So thank you so much Ziad, for coming on and giving up your holiday time, which is essentially this is your time for, for you to relax and enjoy yourself and you've you know you've offered to come on the show education matters and to share your journey with our listeners and it's been fantastic. Hearing about your journey and and all the best for the rest of your studies.

Thank you. It's been a.

Pleasure. Thank you.