

Fighting for our rights, fighting for our future

Staff, associate specialist and specialty doctors committee to ARM

Introduction

SAS doctors across the UK have faced various challenges over the past 12 months and SASC UK has continued to support SAS doctor members through the pandemic. The following report from the BMA's staff, associate specialist and specialty doctors committee (SASC UK) provides an overview of the policy work undertaken to support and lobby on behalf of SAS doctors to address the issues affecting them.

Implementation of the new SAS 2021 contracts

Last year, SAS doctors voted overwhelmingly in favour of two new national contracts for SAS doctors in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. SASC UK successfully negotiated these contracts with DHSC, NHS Employers and NHS England and Improvement, which introduced a raft of new safeguards, flatter payscales and greater recognition of on-call work. We also successfully secured the creation of a new specialist post, thereby introducing a senior SAS grade post at the national level for the first time since the closure of the Associate Specialist grade in 2008. We know however that implementation did not go smoothly, as differential pay uplifts in 2021 meant the new payscales became less favourable for many doctors that year. After many months of lobbying at JNC(SAS), we successfully secured the removal of employer discretion in the new specialty doctor contract, meaning doctors can now choose to transfer onto this contract when it becomes financially beneficial for them to do so. Their new contract pay will also be based on their salary when their new job plan comes into effect, rather than the 31 March 2021 date which was the case previously. This means employers cannot 'claw back' overpayments arising as a result of the differential uplifts.

Data from March 2022 shows that the numbers of those moving over to the new contracts has improved, although only a minority of those who were on the old 2008 specialty doctor contract have opted to transfer onto the new one. We have agreed to work with NHS Employers to work together to promote the SAS grade and produce content relating to the new contracts, including the importance of appointing an Advocate. We now know that almost two and a half thousand Specialty doctors were on the new contract by March 2022 and almost 280 new Specialist posts had been created. We intend to focus more closely on producing joint communications and guidance with NHS Employers surrounding the SAS advocate, the specialist role, SAS wellbeing, new contract working patterns and other key areas in the Autumn.

It is for these reasons that SASC will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the new contracts to ensure that these processes take place smoothly and efficiently, and to establish accurately how many doctors are upgrading to these terms.

SAS Advocate role

This year has also seen the introduction of the new SAS Advocate role which aims to provide support for SAS doctor's health and wellbeing. SAS Advocates will be a visible contact for SAS doctors in each organisation and will work collaboratively with the employer boards and local negotiating committees to assist SAS colleagues, using a consistent approach. We hope the increasing uptake of the new role will reflect across our organisations in the coming months. As a committee we will continue to monitor and promote the Advocate roles to SAS doctors.

DDRB report 2022/23

In January 2022, the BMA submitted its [memorandum of evidence to the DDRB](#), calling for a pay award of RPI + 2% as an initial step towards closing the real terms pay erosion that doctors have faced over the past decade and for the DDRB to recognise and reward all groups of doctors, including those working under contracts that are subject to multiple-year pay deals, such as SAS doctors on the new 2021 contracts.

Our submission also specifically highlighted the detrimental impact of the 2021 pay award on the number of SAS doctors transferring to the new contracts and called for any recommendations for a pay award to be applied to both closed national SAS grade contracts and the 2021 SAS contracts.

The submission also highlighted ongoing issues relating to long-term erosion of pay, the pandemic response, its impact on staff wellbeing and morale and wider impacts on recruitment, retention and motivation.

SAS survey

This year, the committee conducted a survey for all SAS doctors across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to understand how our colleagues are feeling in regard to a number of areas including morale, post pandemic recovery work and the new contract implementation. An initial review of the results showed over 60% of respondents reported decreased morale due to the lack of pay uplift in 21/22 and almost half are currently suffering from a mental health condition relating to or made worse by work. The survey received a high number of responses and has already been used to inform

the oral evidence provided to the DDRB. The findings will be used when advocating for SAS doctors with NHS Employers on issues of contract implementation and will inform the work of the committee in the coming session.

SAS Charters

Work continues by the committee on the promotion of the use of the [SAS Charters](#) across the UK to prioritise the wellbeing of SAS doctors and optimise their working conditions. The SAS Charters are undoubtedly one of the achievements of the past decade for our branch of practice. Nearly 10 years on from their introduction however, it is vital that the contents of these Charters remain relevant to the demands and challenges of the modern workplace.

SASC UK is committed to re-examining the Charter in England to update it to better reflect the protections negotiated in the new SAS contracts and enhance provisions concerning coding and autonomous working, and we understand that our colleagues across the rest of the UK will undertake similar exercises with their national Charters. We will also strive to gain further understanding of the barriers that continue to prevent implementation of the Charter within workplaces.

Engagement with the GMC

Another aspect of career development that is long overdue for review is the Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration. Results in our national survey revealed that the single most significant barrier to SAS doctors considering applying for their CESR is the level of bureaucracy associated with the application process, with lack of workplace support and access to training also key factors. We are working with the GMC to look at what can be done to improve the experiences and outcomes for doctors who choose to take the CESR career route, and to lay the groundwork for legislative reform to effect this change. The BMA has also been liaising with the GMC on its work to review pathways to specialist and GP registration. SASC UK members have fed in their perspectives on initial GMC proposals on this issue.

Support for locally employed doctors (LEDs)

SASC UK have sponsored BMA work to support LEDs at the local level. Support achieved includes establishing LED representatives on BMA local negotiating committees, gaining access to exception reporting for LEDs, preventing the use of detrimental contract variations and facilitating LEDs to move to SAS doctor contracts where they were working unrecognised at that level. SASC UK will now be working with the BMA junior doctors committee to consider next steps and the BMA's national approach to supporting this group of doctors.

SAS conference 2022

The first face to face SAS conference since 2019 was held in May at BMA House. This was chaired by SAS conference chair for 2022, Dr Vaishali Parulekar and the theme of this year's conference was 'Building the future: together'. The conference hosted a women's breakfast meeting on celebrating the success of women SAS doctors. Lucy Kerr, BMA senior policy advisor, presented on the BMA's sexism in medicine project and Dr Gaurie Sankhe, recently appointed SAS advocate at University Hospitals of

Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust spoke on celebrating success as a SAS doctor and the SAS Advocate role. SAS doctor delegates heard inspiring speeches from Professor Geeta Menon, Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon, on her journey which began as an SAS doctor and from Professor Dame Clare Gerada on how doctors' health can be protected through the NHS practitioner's health programme. Workshops were also hosted by Dr Amit Kochhar, SASC UK deputy co-chair for negotiations and Richard Griffiths, BMA industrial relations officer on how to become a Specialist and Dr Vish Sharma, BMA pensions committee chair on pensions for SAS doctors.

Members of conference debated and voted on an array of issues concerning education and development for SAS doctors, contractual issues including the implementation of the new SAS contracts, working in the post-pandemic era and issues affecting the wider NHS, such as safe staffing. SASC UK will be addressing these issues in the 2022-23 session.

Looking ahead

The BMA will be collaborating with NHS Employers on a SAS week beginning 19 September to celebrate and promote SAS as a positive career choice. The week will aim to promote the benefits of the SAS grades and in particular those associated with the 2021 contracts, encourage leaders and managers from across the NHS to support their SAS doctors with recognition and development and promote resources such as guidance, blogs, case studies, on SAS topics which link to the five themes of the week.

Dr Rajesh Kumar

SASC UK chair

[Staff, associate specialist and specialty doctors committee](#)