

## Specialist, associate specialist and specialty doctors committee (SASC)

### Written report to the ARM 2023

#### Introduction

SAS doctors across the UK have faced various challenges over the past 12 months and the BMA's specialist, associate specialist and specialty doctors committee (SASC UK) has continued to support SAS doctor members in all aspects of their working lives. The following report from 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.

#### SASC pay campaign

Similarly, to other branches of practice, this session, SASC UK have been focused on pay restoration. SAS doctors have gone above and beyond to reduce record waiting lists when workload is at an all-time high, working flat out in an under-staffed and under-funded health service. Despite this, since 2008/09, SAS doctors in England have seen a 25.4% fall in real terms pay.

#### SAS doctors pay survey

In November 2022, SASC UK launched a survey to establish how SAS doctors felt about their pay and their future intentions. The survey was open to SAS doctor BMA members primarily employed in England in the NHS, public health or academic medicine. The results showed that 82% of SAS doctors felt the 2021-22 pay award was "inadequate" or "completely unacceptable. The survey also found that 39% of respondents intended to leave in some capacity "as a response to real terms pay cuts."

#### BMA SAS rate card

Following the results of the pay survey, SASC UK published a rate card as a first step to improve SAS doctor pay. The rate card is for extra-contractual work undertaken by SAS doctors in England and Northern Ireland to ensure that those who choose to do this work are paid fairly and that their expertise is properly valued. We have seen success with the rate card which was particularly important during the junior doctor's industrial action. The rate card has been reviewed and updated at quarterly intervals to account for rising inflation.

#### Launch of the SAS pay campaign

The [SAS pay campaign webpage](#) focused on restoring pay for SAS doctors in England was launched in May. The page explains what has happened to SAS doctors pay since 2008/09 and details the steps SASC UK have taken to restore pay for SAS doctors. The webpage has been useful to educate and engage our SAS members on the pay campaign objectives and actions.

During this year's SAS conference, delegates participated in an open debate session where a motion that called for SAS doctors to be balloted in England was discussed at length. The motion passed overwhelmingly which has given SASC UK the mandate to progress the pay campaign.

#### Letter to Department of Health and Social Care

In early June, SASC UK wrote to the secretary of state for health and social care requesting a meeting to discuss the issue of SAS doctors pay. The [letter](#) detailed how the unique challenges faced by SAS doctors had degraded their morale and the most common issue highlighted by Trusts affecting the motivation and morale of SAS doctors was the lack of recognition, followed closely by pay. Also highlighted in the letter was the unhappiness of

members about the Government's decision, for the second time in a row, to exclude SAS doctors in England on the new 2021 contract from the uplifts awarded to the rest of the profession. SASC UK is currently awaiting a response to the letter from Government.

## **SAS doctors pay in England webinars**

In June, SASC UK hosted two webinars for LNC chairs and SAS doctors explaining what has happened to SAS doctors pay and what the committee plans to do next to address pay erosion. The webinars provided the opportunity for members to ask questions and for the committee to find out how SAS doctors felt about their pay and the possibility of taking further actions.

## **DDRB submission 2023/24**

SASC UK's written evidence for the DDRB was prepared and submitted in January 2023. The submission provided evidence of the ways in which either the DDRB had failed to appropriately recognise and reward the doctors and dentists under its remit. Also highlighted was the dissatisfaction at the divisive decision to once again exclude SAS doctors in England on the new 2021 contracts from receiving the sub-inflationary 4.5% awarded to the wider profession.

Following the written evidence submission, at the January meeting of BMA UK Council, a decision was made to implement policy made by ARM in 2020 to withdraw from the DDRB process, until it is reformed and fit for purpose. Therefore, SASC UK did not provide any further evidence to the DDRB.

## **JNC SAS**

SASC UK have continued to meet quarterly with NHS Employers and the Department of Health and Social Care through JNC(SAS), with meetings focusing primarily on issues arising from the new 2021 contracts in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. There has been an increase in the number of doctors moving to the 2021 contracts and as of February 2023, there are 769 specialists in post, with anaesthetics being the specialty creating the most Specialist posts, with 113.

The Joint negotiating committee for SAS has worked closely with NHS Employers to ensure SAS development funding, as agreed during the 2021 negotiations, is accessed and utilised by Trusts. Clarification has been provided to Trusts about how this resource is reflected in NHS funding flows and joint guidance has been produced to aid their calculations.

This year we have continued to lobby for the expansion of SAS Advocate posts across the NHS in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The role was created to promote and improve support for SAS doctor's health and wellbeing, in both a proactive and reactive way. We are currently working with NHS Employers to produce joint guidance on the differences between the SAS Advocate and SAS Tutor roles to ensure responsibilities are clear to employers, those in post and SAS doctors.

## **SAS week 2022**

In Autumn 2022, we held our first successful SAS week, covering the themes of the SAS charter and SAS as a career choice, the Specialist grade, SAS in extended roles and development, SAS advocates and SAS wellbeing and equalities. SAS week was held to promote SAS as a positive career choice, help employers understand the benefits of the SAS grades and in particular those associated with the 2021 contracts and encourage leaders and managers from across the NHS to support their SAS doctors with recognition and development.

We also hosted a successful joint webinar as part of SAS week with NHS Employers on the specialist grade, the value of it to organisations and how to support SAS doctors for SAS doctors and employers.

## **SAS doctors in primary care**

In Autumn 2022, a GMC workforce report called for a regulatory change to allow SAS doctors to work in general practice under the supervision of GPs. SASC UK and GPC UK have since worked closely together to consider how this idea could work in practice.

SASC UK does not believe that it is viable to create a separate role for a SAS doctor in primary care as it could lead to a category of lesser GP potentially resulting in these doctors being exploited as a group, lacking opportunities for career progression and for developing experience. We believe that the Accreditation of Transferable Capabilities could be improved to allow for 12 months rather than 6 months of experience to be counted –meaning 2-year GP training with no secondary care rotations for eligible applicants.

SAS doctors should be able to work in primary care within their own specialty, seeing differentiated patients. The number of SAS doctors providing specialist care could be expanded to support general practice with additional funding attached to this, although the move of SAS doctors in secondary care to providing specialist

care in primary care would need to be addressed, as this could lead to SAS doctor staffing issues in secondary care. We are aligned with GPC UK on this issue and are continuing to engage with NHS England and DHSC on this issue and will ensure members are kept updated.

### **Other key areas of work**

We continue to work to ensure that SAS doctors are not impacted negatively by pensions taxation, contributing to the BMA pensions committee work from the SASC perspective. We also continue to support locally employed doctors to move onto SAS national contracts with protections where they have the appropriate experience to do so. We are also working with stakeholders to refresh the SAS charter in England to ensure that it is reflective of the 2021 SAS contracts and the new roles of the Specialist and the Advocate.

### **SAS conference 2023**

This year's SAS conference was held in May at BMA House, with the theme of 'Valuing the SAS workforce'. The conference was chaired by Dr Vaishali Parulekar, in her second term as SAS conference chair. The conference hosted a breakfast meeting where Aishnine Benjamin, BMA head of equality and inclusion spoke on sexism in the workplace and the BMA pledge. The keynote speech was delivered by Professor Dame Carrie MacEwen, General Medical Council chair and focused on embracing the changing workforce and developing SAS. The conference also welcomed Dr Vish Sharma, BMA pensions committee chair who presented on pensions for SAS doctors.

Members of conference debated and voted on an array of issues concerning education and development for SAS doctors, pay and contractual issues and SAS doctor wellbeing; all of which will be considered by SASC UK in the 2023-24 session. For the first time, an open debate session was held focusing on two motions related to recognition of long service and taking action to restore SAS doctor pay. The debated motion which called for SAS doctors to be balloted in England passed overwhelmingly.

### **Looking ahead**

SASC UK will be focused on taking forward our pay campaign and working towards pay restoration for SAS doctors. We will be connecting with LNC's, working closely together to educate our members on what has happened to SAS doctor pay, what needs to be done to address the issues and ensure members details are accurate, in preparation for any further actions.

Following on from the success of last year's SAS week, we will once again be collaborating with NHS Employers to celebrate and promote SAS as a positive career choice. SAS week will run from 9 – 13 October 2023, with a different theme of focus each day of the week. Written and interactive resources will be shared on topics such as equalities, the SAS Advocate role, SAS as a career choice, SAS in management and extended roles and the specialist grade.

**Dr Ujjwala Mohite**

**Chair, SASC UK**

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