



25 June 2025

Dear colleague,

Re: Strengthening the NHS workforce: supporting and recruiting SAS doctors

We are writing to you today from the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) to highlight the contribution made by specialist, associate specialist and specialty (SAS) doctors to the NHS, and to encourage you to create specialist posts where there is a workforce need.

You may be aware that many dedicated specialty and locally employed doctors (LEDs) are working across the NHS at a senior level of responsibility and competence without appropriate recognition and remuneration. As you may also know, the [specialist contract](#) was introduced in 2021 as a new national grade for senior and experienced SAS doctors, and the BMA and NHS Employers have since [published joint guidance](#) to encourage NHS organisations to create specialist roles. Where specialty or LEDs are working autonomously, the RCP strongly recommends that you invest in creating [specialist posts](#) for these doctors.

The creation of new specialist posts was factored into the overall cost modelling for contract reform during the 2020/21 SAS contract negotiations, and we believe that it is time to recognise the expertise and skillset of SAS and LEDs who now make up nearly a quarter of the UK medical workforce. Many have over a decade of clinical experience, run autonomous clinics, and contribute significantly to patient care and service delivery. Yet, too often, they face systemic barriers to education, progression, and leadership opportunities.

The RCP believes that every doctor should have equitable access to professional development. Our recent guidance for SAS doctors and NHS employers, [Educational and career support for SAS doctors](#) (June 2024), provides practical steps employers can take – from appointing SAS tutors and advocates, to ensuring job plans include protected time for continuing professional development (CPD) and clinical leadership. We encourage trusts and health boards to implement the [SAS charter](#) and provide meaningful access to educational, research, and appraisal roles, as well as the portfolio pathway (formerly known as Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration, or CESR) for those aspiring to consultant posts.

Joining a royal college also brings significant benefits to your employees: it supports them with professional development, recognises their achievements, and offers them a place to belong. The RCP is the voice of medicine, a global community of around 40,000 doctors who are passionate about improving health and care through advocacy, education and research.

RCP associate membership offers SAS doctors access to vital tools such as the CPD diary, ePortfolio, clinical webinars, and networking opportunities. This supports revalidation, encourages engagement with college life, and affirms SAS doctors' contribution to our shared mission of high-quality patient care.

We also offer a wide range of [courses, webinars and e-learning](#): our popular [SAS Leadership Programme](#) is tailored specifically to SAS doctors seeking to enhance their career development and leadership skills.

We ask for your support in:

- actively funding the creation of specialist posts, where there is a workforce need
- creating specialist posts where specialty or LEDs are already working autonomously
- appointing SAS advocates and tutors, with appropriate time in their job plans
- encouraging RCP membership and supporting applications for fellowship and committee roles
- championing SAS doctors for leadership, appraisal, and educational positions.

Recognising and investing in this talented group not only promotes workforce retention and morale – it delivers better outcomes for patients and stronger clinical teams.

For further information, or to share your organisation's work in this area as part of our awareness raising campaign, please contact Naeem.Aziz@rcp.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,



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