

Strengthening the role of SAS Tutor

The Academy calls for strengthening the role of SAS Tutors (or equivalents in devolved nations) to better support the development of the SAS workforce

Introduction

SAS doctors/dentists form a diverse group, ranging from clinicians with 4 years' postgraduate experience (trainee-like but with no access to educational supervisors) to senior clinicians practising independently (consultant-like but without access to mentors). SAS career development and progression are predominantly self-guided. The [GMC SAS and locally employed doctor \(LED\) survey \(2020\)](#) showed 41% of SAS doctors had difficulty accessing continuing professional development opportunities.

Creation of SAS Tutor role

The SAS Tutor role was introduced in England in 2008 to support the professional development of SAS grades and manage the SAS development fund made available by the Department of Health as part of the SAS 2008 contract deal. The initial amount was £12 million which approximated to £800 per SAS grade doctor and dentist in England based on the 2006 National Hospital and Community Health Service (HCHS) census.

The recurrent funding stream was only designed for SAS, not LEDs, and was intended to be additional to, not a replacement for, the Trust study leave allowance to which all permanent Trust medical staff are entitled. The purpose of the funding was to enable SAS doctors/dentists to advance their careers through clinical skills acquisition or consolidation, and through taking on additional responsibilities in education, management and leadership.

Rhetoric and reality

The Academy, the British Medical Association (BMA), Health Education England (HEE) and NHS Employers have produced the [SAS Charter](#), [SAS Development Guide](#) and [Maximising the Potential](#). The devolved nations have their own SAS Charters.

The SAS Charter (2014) sets out what SAS doctors/dentists can expect from their employers and what employers can expect of them. It states, '*Organisations should ensure doctors have access to a SAS Tutor (where available), clinical lead and a mentor for professional and personal development needs as well as appropriate support and time to learn new skills*'.

The SAS Development Guide (published 2017; updated 2020) describes actions that can be taken to ensure that best practice is applied in the development of all SAS doctors/dentists and how different groups can work together to ensure it is applied consistently. The Guide states, '*Medical directors should encourage the appointment of a SAS Tutor who acts as a voice for SAS doctors and promotes their professional development*'.

Maximising the Potential (2019) describes what the NHS should be doing now to support SAS doctors/dentists. It states, '*HEE will ensure consistency of funding for SAS doctors, in terms of geography and in activities funded through SAS Tutors, associate deans and/or a nominated individual with responsibility for SAS doctors*'.

April / 2021



The GMC survey showed that 23.9% of SAS doctors do not have access to a SAS Tutor (or equivalent) where they work; the figures for England, Scotland, Wales and NI were 21.6%, 25.6%, 26.9% and 58.1% respectively. The [NHS Employers SAS survey](#) (2020) showed that the majority (69%) of organisations had appointed a SAS Tutor, but this was not the case across the board. Worryingly, 20% of Trusts did not know if they had a SAS Tutor in place.

SAS Tutors in the four nations

The National Association of Clinical Tutors (NACT) published a [job description for SAS Tutors](#) in June 2020. This describes the purpose, responsibilities, working relationships, measurable outcomes and person specification. The document has extended the role of the SAS Tutor, but remains an aspiration and its uptake has been limited.

SAS Tutor in England

This role is open to SAS doctors/dentists or consultants, and is appointed and supported by the Director of Medical Education (DME) of the Trust. The role is either funded by the HEE SAS development fund or by the Trust. In some cases, an individual takes it up as an unpaid role.

HEE, an arm's length body of the NHS, has seven regions. SAS Tutors form part of their regional SAS Tutor group, chaired by the regional Associate/Deputy Dean. The SAS development fund in each region is managed by the Associate/Deputy Dean for SAS doctors/dentists. The fund is either managed centrally by them or allocated to SAS Tutors who manage it along with their DME. In some regions it can be a combination of both.

The SAS Tutor role has evolved over the years. Consequently, there are variations in the way that it is undertaken in different hospitals and regions of England. Responsibilities include:

- Providing support and guidance to SAS doctors/dentists
- Championing the needs of SAS doctors/dentists within their organisation in collaboration with the DME
- Taking a leadership role in both the professional and career development of SAS doctors/dentists and their contribution to education, training, research and leadership in relevant specialties
- Identifying and providing advice for SAS doctors/dentists who are in difficulty
- Providing pastoral support for SAS doctors/dentists
- Organising local/regional generic SAS development days/sessions.

There are several challenges for SAS Tutors in England:

- There is no national standardised job role, duties, responsibilities, support and tariff
- There are differences in the amount of SAS development fund allocated to each SAS grade from region to region, based on how the money is divided nationally
- The money (although initially ringfenced) has become part of the general educational budget in many NHS Trusts
- They do not always have access to up-to-date and reliable data to help them identify and contact SAS doctors/dentists in their individual Trust. This adds to the challenge of engaging with the SAS cohort.

SAS Education Adviser in Scotland

SAS Education Advisers [EAs] – the SAS Tutor equivalent in Scotland – were introduced in 2012 by the [SAS Development Programme](#) which was established in the same year by the Scottish Government. The SAS Development Programme aims to direct national funding to those SAS doctors/dentists whose clinical teams are seeking to develop new or improved clinical services, or to enhance their role within the clinical team, and where funding is not otherwise provided by the employing Health Board. SAS Development Programme funding



was initially on a three-year project basis but has now been added to NHS Education for Scotland's (NES) baseline funding.

The funding stream is divided into territorial health boards according to geographic areas. There are 11 such boards and the biggest has four SAS EAs. Funding is held centrally – this gives SAS doctors/dentists in smaller boards equal opportunity for development. SAS EAs support individual SAS doctors/dentists to apply for funding to develop new skills or update existing skills. Applicants may be able to be supported for training costs or salary backfill. Feedback is obtained from the individual SAS and their Clinical Director to evaluate the benefit of the learning.

The SAS EA role, funded by NES, is only open to SAS doctors/dentists and reports to the Associate Postgraduate Dean, who is also a SAS doctor/dentist. The EA liaises with the DME but does not directly report to them.

The SAS EAs meet on a three-monthly basis as an Education Adviser network to progress national work, including planning training opportunities and delivering webinars. In addition, SAS EAs meet with the Associate Postgraduate Deans to discuss their Personal Development Plan (PDP) and local aims.

SAS EA responsibilities include:

- Raising the local profile of training and education for SAS doctors/dentists
- Advocating for, and supporting access to, national development funding and providing support for SAS doctors/dentists within a Health Board area
- Helping SAS to identify opportunities for top-up training which could be potentially funded by SAS funding to enable them to make a successful CESR application
- Organising annual local educational meetings and assisting and facilitating courses and meetings which are organised centrally by the SAS Development Programme
- Helping to develop the programme for the annual national Scottish SAS conference, which provides delegates with an opportunity to network with other SAS, to hear how the SAS Programme is supporting SAS in Scotland, including potential opportunities available to them, and to explore pertinent topics relevant to the NHS.

The challenges for SAS EAs in Scotland:

- They are not local and hospital-based but cover a larger geographic area. They usually cover more than one hospital in their Health Board, which can result in some logistical obstacles. However, now that online support and learning is much more easily accessible, this is less of a challenge.

SAS Tutor in Wales

The SAS Tutor role is only open to SAS doctors/dentists, is funded by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) and reports to the Associate Postgraduate Dean, who is also a SAS doctor/dentist. There are seven Health Boards in Wales and each one has a SAS Tutor.

SAS funding is held centrally by the Deanery. SAS Tutors have a small budget to organise local courses and need to make a business case if a larger fund is required depending on the needs of the local area. Two funding rounds are administered for bursaries to further support SAS doctors/dentists' professional development.

Each SAS Tutor has a PDP outlining how the funding can be utilised, and what courses or meetings will be undertaken. SAS Tutors meet with the Associate Dean every three months to review the PDP. SAS doctors/dentists submit an evaluation form to HEIW after their



training. This indicates if their CPD needs are being addressed. Feedback is presented to the Associate Dean and SAS Tutors for review and future planning.

The main responsibilities of the SAS Tutor are to:

- Develop the local infrastructure to support SAS doctors within each Health Board
- Provide access to additional training opportunities to help support SAS doctors/dentists’ personal development
- Explore and pilot opportunities to introduce a quality assurance framework that will assist them in seeking revalidation.

A programme of regular generic training courses for SAS doctors in both North and South Wales is also undertaken. Each year, two SAS Doctors/Dentists conferences are held, typically one in North Wales and one in South Wales. These provide an opportunity for SAS clinicians to network, to understand the work that HEIW is doing to support them, and to receive vital information on any changes taking place within the NHS.

There are a few challenges for SAS Tutors in Wales:

- They are responsible for more than one hospital which poses logistical challenges
- They have taken on management and contractual responsibilities for SAS doctors/dentists in addition to their normal responsibilities.

SAS Lead in Northern Ireland

The SAS Lead role was introduced in Northern Ireland (NI) in 2019 following the recommendations from the NI Staff, Associate Specialist, and Specialty Doctors Committee’s (NISASC) ‘Career Development Proposal’.

NI has five Health and Social Care Trusts; each one has a SAS Lead. The role is only open to SAS doctors/dentists and reports to the Trust Medical Director and Department of Health.

SAS Lead responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that the training and development needs of SAS doctors/dentists are appropriately identified
- Ensuring available resources are used effectively to meet these needs
- Organising generic courses (the Southern Trust organises a regional SAS conference)
- Representing the Trust at a regional level to network with the other SAS Leads

The SAS Leads group meets quarterly with the Department of Health. Currently, there is no Associate Dean for SAS doctors/dentists in NI.

Comparison of SAS Tutor role across the four nations, with SAS Lead/Advocate and College Tutor

The table below compares SAS Tutor roles across the four nations:

	England	Scotland	Wales	NI
Title	SAS Tutor	SAS Education Adviser	SAS Tutor	SAS Lead
Role created in	2008	2012	2012	2019
Person specification	SAS or Consultant	SAS	SAS	SAS
Appointed by	DME	Associate Dean	Associate Dean	MD



Role funded by	HEE or Trust	NES	HEIW	Dept of Health
Responsibilities	Education, training and professional development	Education, training and professional development	Education, training and professional development but some have had to deal with wider issues such as job planning	Education, training and professional development
Process for allocating SAS funding	Centrally/ Locally	Centrally	Centrally	Locally

Some Trusts in England have appointed a SAS Lead/Advocate in addition to the SAS Tutor. The table below compares these roles:

	SAS Tutor	SAS Lead/Advocate
Person specification	SAS or Consultant	SAS
Accountable to	DME	MD
Role funded by	HEE or Trust	Trust
Responsibilities	Education, training and professional development of SAS doctors/dentists	Workforce and wellbeing of SAS doctors/dentists

The table below compares the SAS Tutor and College Tutor role:

	SAS Tutor	College Tutor
Established	2008	More than 3 decades ago
Tenure	Variable	Fixed term
Tariff	Variable	Well defined
Responsibilities	Varies regionally and nationally	Well defined and uniform nationally
Induction to the role	Variable	Good
Administrative support	Variable, usually poor	Good support
Educational appraisal	No	Almost norm
Collaboration	Acts as a link between SAS and HEE (and its equivalent)	Usually acts as a link among trainees, College/Faculty, and HEE (and its equivalent)

Recommendations

SAS Tutor (and its equivalents):

1. The focus of the SAS Tutor role should be on education, training and professional development of SAS doctors/dentists; the SAS Advocate/Lead role on workforce and wellbeing; and the Joint Local Negotiating Committee (JLNC) SAS representative on contractual issues. All these roles should work collaboratively with each other and the Trust to implement best practice as defined by national SAS papers and actions needed to address issues identified in national/local SAS surveys.
2. SAS Tutors, like College Tutors, are an essential component of the educational system – it is important that they are acknowledged and valued in their educational leadership role. The SAS Tutor role should be funded appropriately, have a fixed-term tenure (typically three years), a job plan stating duties and responsibilities, induction and mentorship, administrative support and annual appraisal.



3. The SAS Tutor role should be promoted to SAS doctors/dentists in England (this already happens in other devolved nations). It is desirable that the SAS Tutor be a SAS doctor/dentist as SAS have fewer opportunities to develop in leadership roles than consultant colleagues and have better insights into the development requirements of the SAS group.
4. The SAS Tutor's expected time commitment will depend on the workload and breadth of the role. The PA tariff in the NACT SAS Tutor job description should be appropriately used.
5. The SAS Tutor should help SAS doctors/dentists achieve generic capabilities and, by working along with the College Tutors, facilitate the achievement of specialty specific capabilities so that SAS doctors/dentists can maximise their potential and (if desired) achieve eligibility for the new Specialist doctor/dentist posts, develop in extended roles in education/research/leadership, and/or achieve CESR.
6. The SAS Tutor should work with:
 - College Tutors to involve SAS doctors/dentists in education and training of trainees and LEDs, to facilitate their development as educational and clinical supervisors and to encourage their engagement with the relevant College/Faculty
 - Local Director of Undergraduate Medical Education (or equivalent) to involve SAS in education and training of medical students and allied health professionals.

Individual NHS Trust (or Health Boards):

7. SAS development fund should be ringfenced, not part of a Trust's general education budget and only be used for SAS development. In England, the Trusts should complete an annual report of fund use for regional HEE to document appropriate use of the funds allocated to them for SAS doctor/dentist development.
8. LEDs have differing needs to the SAS group. There should be a separate Trust LED Tutor. If SAS Tutors are expected to take on this role, additional appropriate time and funding (for the role and for LEDs) should be allocated for it.

Statutory education bodies (HEE and its equivalents):

9. Funding for SAS development should be equitable, and its use transparent throughout all the four nations. SAS doctors/dentists should not be disadvantaged by their geography.
10. Close relationships between SAS Tutors and College SAS representatives should be developed and supported via regional/national forums.

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