



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

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**BMA**

**Northern Ireland**

# **A NORTHERN IRELAND CHARTER FOR SPECIALTY AND ASSOCIATE SPECIALIST DOCTORS**

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# A Charter for SAS Doctors in Northern Ireland

## Context

Since the introduction of the new Specialty Doctors and Associate Specialist (SAS) contracts in 2008 a number of documents have been developed which were designed to encourage HSC Trusts to provide the requisite support framework for the continuing professional development and career management of SAS doctors:

- Employing and Supporting Specialty Doctors, A Good practice Guide, DHSSPSNI (June 2008)<sup>1</sup>
- Regional Guidance on Job Planning for Associate Specialists and Specialty Doctors in Northern Ireland, DHSSPSNI (June 2009)<sup>2</sup>
- A UK Guide for Job Planning for Specialty Doctors and Associate Specialists (Nov 2012)<sup>3</sup>
- Developing SAS Doctors (September 2010 )<sup>4</sup>

This Charter demonstrates a commitment to supporting and developing the role of SAS doctors as a valued and vital part of the medical workforce in Northern Ireland. SAS doctors are confident and competent healthcare professionals who deliver clinical services in partnership with Consultants and other healthcare professionals.

## Introduction

This Charter is in recognition of the pivotal role that SAS doctors hold in the delivery of high quality medical care for patients in the HSC in Northern Ireland. This important group of doctors and dentists are comprised of specialty doctors, associate specialists, staff grades, hospital practitioners, and senior clinical medical officers. The group of senior doctors are more commonly referred to as SAS Doctors and make up a significant proportion of the senior medical workforce. These doctors and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/employing-and-supporting-specialty-doctors-a-guide-to-good-practice.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/sas-job-planning-guidance.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/uk\\_guide\\_to\\_job\\_planning.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/uk_guide_to_job_planning.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Issued to HSC Trusts in September 2010

dentists make a significant contribution not only in patient care, but in leadership, education, research and governance. SAS doctors bring experiences and specialist care, possessing individual and often highly specialised skills. As they gain experience, they develop the ability to work independently and to also take broader roles through other activities such as teaching and audit.

The Charter sets out both the responsibilities of both SAS doctors and their employers, and provides a commitment to support and enable SAS doctors to realise their full potential to deliver the best patient care and contribute fully to health services more widely.

## **Benefits for Employers**

The benefits of a well developed SAS doctor for HSC Trusts would be:

- A more motivated and engaged SAS grade doctor workforce.
- To promote safer high-quality patient care by ensuring that SAS grade doctors maintain their competence and acquire new competences to meet their professional obligations and regulatory requirements.
- To enable SAS Doctors to better meet the needs of service delivery within the organisation, as well as equipping them to meet the changing demands of health care in Northern Ireland.

## **Recognition and Value**

SAS doctors as senior clinicians are often members of multidisciplinary teams involved in the management of clinical services and patients. They are leaders, managers, appraisers and educational supervisors.

- SAS doctors must be fully recognised, respected and valued by their employers and colleagues for their vital contribution to patient care and the wider HSC.
- It is recognised that whilst all patients remain under the overall responsibility of a consultant some senior SAS doctors may be granted

appropriate delegated responsibility for patient care; where this is the case this should be appropriately recorded under the SAS doctor's name. HSC Trusts should be aware of the need for appropriate and correct patient coding.

- SAS doctors should be given the opportunity to apply for roles in medical/dental management as appropriate to their knowledge, experience and expertise.
- SAS doctors should be represented on all LNCs to ensure that this group of staff is fully represented.
- SAS doctors must be provided with the following (to ensure fulfilment of contractual obligations and to meet regulatory requirements):
  - A contract of employment
  - A job description
  - A comprehensive induction programme
  - A mutually agreed job plan
  - An annual appraisal with a named trained appraiser
  - For those SAS doctors on pre-2008 contracts access to a fair and appropriate mechanism for the award of optional and discretionary points.

## **Professional and career development**

SAS doctors should be fully supported in their ongoing career and professional development.

- SAS doctors, and their employers must recognise and be committed to the requirement for ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) and career long education and development.<sup>5</sup> CPD time and activity should be built into the doctors' mutually agreed job plan.
- HSC Employers must recognise the range of educational requirements of SAS doctors and support flexible CPD to ensure recognition of the varying learning needs and special interests of SAS doctors.

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<sup>5</sup> The GMC has produced CPD guidance for all doctors, emphasising the importance of planning for career progression, patient safety and revalidation: [http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/continuing\\_professional\\_development/cpd\\_guidance.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/continuing_professional_development/cpd_guidance.asp)

- SAS doctors and their employers must recognise that service and educational needs must be balanced, and considered in parallel.
- There should be protected time for training and other professional activities for SAS doctors so that they can meet their individual professional, education and career development requirements; this should be built into the doctors' mutually agreed job plan.
- Professional or study leave will normally be granted in accordance with the recommended standards, these are outlined in the Terms and Conditions of Service as, 'within a maximum of 30 days (including off-duty days falling within the period of leave) in any period of three years for professional purposes within the United Kingdom.
- All SAS doctors and their employers must fully engage in the appraisal and revalidation processes in line with contractual obligations and to meet regulatory requirements.<sup>6</sup>
- HSC Trusts must ensure that those SAS doctors who have indicated their wish to apply for Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR) should have access to support and guidance relating to their application should they wish, as well as support to apply for additional funding for personal and professional development activities, where possible.
- HSC Trusts should ensure that SAS doctors, where identified through appraisal and the consequent personal development plan, have access to a clinical lead or a mentor for professional and professional development needs.
- HSC Trusts should ensure that SAS doctors have access to sufficient breadth and depth of clinical work and relevant professional activities, consistent with service needs, to enable SAS doctors to achieve and maintain relevant competencies and develop as clinicians.

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<sup>6</sup> More information is available on the GMC website: <http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/revalidation.asp>