

BMA

Scotland

BMA Scotland evidence on behalf of Scottish SAS doctors to the DDRB 2025/26 pay round

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British Medical Association
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Introduction

This evidence submission covers SAS doctors working in Scotland. It supplements [evidence submitted by the BMA on a UK basis](#) and adds to our earlier evidence on consultants and GPs in Scotland.

BMA Scotland wrote to the DDRB on 20 November 2024 setting out our position on evidence for the 2025/26 pay round. At the time of submitting our evidence, SAS doctors had not received a pay offer for 2024/25 from the Scottish Government and we considered it inappropriate to submit evidence for Scottish SAS doctors until pay was settled for 2024/25.

SAS doctors in Scotland were clear in their response to the BMA Scotland pay survey in 2023 that they found the recent DDRB recommendations unacceptable and had lost confidence in the process. On that basis we pursued direct pay negotiations with Scottish Government for 2024/25.

In late November 2024, SAS doctors received a [pay offer from Scottish Government](#). The offer did not meet all our negotiating aims but as it was the best we were able to achieve with Scottish Government, we decided to put it neutrally to the profession for a consultative vote in January 2025. On a turnout of 58.9%, members voted 58.4% to accept. From feedback provided to us, we know that there is dissatisfaction with the level of pay uplift. However, some members were persuaded that the promise of a policy on progression to the Specialist grade was an incentive to voting yes. This means that parties must work to develop the policy and introduce it as soon as possible. The offer from the Scottish Government did not provide any further details beyond the policy being complimentary to those introduced in England and Wales.

BMA Scotland wants to highlight that direct pay negotiations with Scottish Government have proved a viable path towards our aims of pay restoration for doctors in Scotland. While SAS pay negotiations were not as successful as for other employed doctors in Scotland – it did deliver a higher pay uplift for Specialists than the DDRB recommendation and other benefits (mentioned above).

The pay offer also included a requirement for the BMA Scottish SAS Committee to participate in the DDRB process for the 2025/26 pay round. We have indicated to Scottish Government that we will do so as fully as possible in the time remaining in this year's DDRB process. This submission is for that purpose and the Chair of the Committee is scheduled to be involved in the oral evidence session. However, we have reserved our right to seek direct pay negotiations with Scottish Government and withdraw from the DDRB process in future should the committee decide that the DDRB recommendations are not acceptable.

We are hopeful that a reformed DDRB will fundamentally address BMA's longstanding concerns and deliver pay recommendations to establish a credible path to pay restoration. The 53rd DDRB report and recommendations on doctors' pay will be heavily scrutinised by our members in Scotland and determine our approach to engagement in future years.

The BMA UK submission calls **for a significantly above inflation pay uplift, in RPI terms, to restore doctor pay to 2008/09 levels**. BMA Scotland previously did not intend to make a separate ask of the DDRB this year. However, because Scottish Government offered a less favourable pay uplift to SAS doctors for 2024/25 compared to other employed doctors, **we are**

calling for a greater uplift for SAS doctors, as many now have the highest levels of pay erosion amongst all doctors in Scotland.

SAS doctors' pay and pay erosion

In 2022, Scottish Government and BMA agreed new contracts for Specialty Doctors and the new Specialist grade in Scotland. These new contracts included the highest salaries for Specialty Doctors and Specialists in the UK. **This was established deliberately to aid recruitment and retention of SAS doctors in Scotland and formed part of the joint communications to the profession.**ⁱ

Specialty doctor pay in 2023/24 comparison (new contracts)

Pay point	Scotland 2023/24	England 2023/24	% difference (Scotland v England)	Wales 2023/24	% difference (Scotland v Wales)	Northern Ireland 2023/24	% difference (Scotland v NI)
0	£58,198	£52,530	9.74%	£52,542	9.72%	£52,530	9.74%
1							
2							
3	£69,427	£60,519	12.83%	£60,532	12.81%	£60,519	12.83%
4							
5							
6	£73,678	£67,465	8.43%	£67,480	8.41%	£67,465	8.43%
7							
8							
9	£82,184	£74,675	9.14%	£74,691	9.12%	£74,675	9.14%
10							
11							
12	£90,688	£82,400	9.14%	£82,418	9.12%	£82,400	9.14%

The pay differential for Specialists in 2023/24 between Scotland and the other UK nations was 4.72% at all pay points.

In 2024/25 pay negotiations with Scottish Government the BMA position was that SAS doctors in Scotland should continue with a positive pay differential compared to the rest of the UK, since this was an agreed joint principle established in negotiations leading to the new contracts. However, Scottish Government chose to undermine this principle and make a pay offer that eroded the pay differential.

ⁱ <https://www.msg.scot.nhs.uk/pay/medical/specialist-doctors-associate-specialists/sas-contract-summary-2022>

Specialty doctor pay in 2024/25 comparison (new contracts)

Pay point	Scotland 2024/25	England 2024/25	% difference (Scotland v England)	Wales 2024/25	% difference (Scotland v Wales)	Northern Ireland 2024/25	% difference (Scotland v NI)
0	£61,690	£59,175	4.08%	£59,727	3.18%	£59,175	4.08%
1							
2							
3	£73,593	£68,174	7.36%	£68,810	6.50%	£68,174	7.36%
4							
5							
6	£78,099	£75,998	2.69%	£76,708	1.78%	£75,998	2.69%
7							
8							
9	£87,115	£84,121	3.44%	£84,905	2.54%	£84,121	3.44%
10							
11							
12	£96,129	£95,400	0.76%	£95,400	0.76%	£95,400	0.76%

Gains made in 2022 towards pay restoration for Specialty Doctors have been significantly eroded. Additionally, there is now no pay differential for Specialists between Scotland and the other UK nations.

Pay erosion

SAS doctors in Scotland have suffered considerable pay erosion since 2008/09. The table below provides a comparison of pay erosion across the various contracts (and transfer of contracts) that has occurred in Scotland.

SAS doctor contract	2008/09 pay	2024/25 pay	Pay erosion %
Specialty doctor (2008 contract then 2022 contract) Bottom of pay scale	£35,904	£61,690	-7.5%
Specialty doctor (2008 then 2022) Top of pay scale	£66,954	£96,129	-22.7%
Specialty doctor (2008) All pay points	£35,904	£50,780	-23.9%
Associate Specialist (2008) Bottom of pay scale	£50,339	£71,193	-23.9%
Associate Specialist (2008) Top of pay scale	£82,863	£115,815	-24.8%

We have not included pay erosion information for Specialists, as this grade was only established in 2022 and the number of doctors on this contract is very small.

Specialist contract

The creation of the new Specialist grade as part of the 2022 contract negotiations was welcome but it remains a significant disappointment that progress in creating and appointing to these roles in Scotland is glacially slow. The latest update provided to us by NHS Scotland employers is that, as at September 2024, only 33 Specialists are in post. At that date, a further 30 posts were being advertised, and an additional 5 posts were planned. One positive note was that of these posts, where information was available, 86% had previously been in Specialty Doctor posts and 9% had been Associate Specialists.

At the time of negotiating the contract, employers repeatedly assured us that they were very keen to create and recruit to Specialist posts. The reality has proved different, but we understand that a major stumbling block for employers is the requirement to have open recruitment. They seem to be nervous that although they think they may have a suitable internal candidate, in open recruitment it is always possible that the best candidate is external, and that this would mean increasing the headcount and therefore additional salary costs. We would therefore welcome, in the development of a recruitment policy, an option to begin with internal advertisement before progressing to open recruitment. We would also encourage the option of senior specialty doctors, who can demonstrate that they are already working at a high level and equivalent to the requirements of a Specialist, that they can be re-graded to Specialist.

A further important element of the pay deal was a commitment to include SAS representatives in the negotiations with consultants on a national rate for internal short-term cover. Dates have been identified for these discussions, and we will be aiming to conclude in a reasonable timeframe. Whilst rates for the first 72 hours of cover are included in the 2022 Specialty Doctor contract, agreeing rates for other short-term cover could potentially encourage SAS doctors to undertake more extra-contractual work and reduce the heavy reliance of external locums for employers.

Workforce

In late 2024 we submitted a request to all NHS Boards asking for a breakdown of their consultant and SAS vacancy figures as at 30 September 2024. The FOI showed a vacancy rate of 24.98% for SAS doctors.

Number of SAS doctor posts (including NHS and honorary) by WTE as follows:		Scotland
(i)	posts occupied by a permanent specialty doctor	987.07
(ii)	newly-created posts which have not yet been advertised	2
(iii)	vacant posts according to the ISD definition	74
(iv)	vacant posts which are awaiting approval	2

(v)	posts which although currently unfilled are not under active recruitment	19.3
(vi)	all posts occupied by a locum SAS	68
(vii)	posts that have been recruited to but applicant not yet in post	46
viii	The number of SAS doctors that are on fixed term contracts	117.43
(ix)	Other	0
	Establishment (=i-viii)	1315.8
	Vacancies as a WTE number	328.73
	Vacancies as a %	24.98

As concerning as the number of vacancies is the high number of fixed term contracts (117.43 WTE). Whilst acknowledging that the use of fixed term contracts can be for a wide variety of reasons, it would be interesting to know the reasons for these as they make up 35% of the overall vacancies.