

“

Without the targeted training and development experiences, made possible by the SAS development fund, I would not be where I am today. It is a remarkable development opportunity and I marvel at how supportive and smooth the process was.

”

Backfill for Portfolio Pathway training secondments in neurosurgical, paediatric, and cardiothoracic intensive care

Richard's SAS Journey

In 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I joined NHS Fife as a Specialty Doctor in Intensive Care Medicine (ICM). I had worked there as an ad hoc locum for some time, and prior to that, as a trainee in ICM. The pandemic occurred at a time when I had already decided to return to full time ICM practice, and NHS Fife offered an environment of supported development and engagement that allowed me to decide on how I wanted to develop as an SAS doctor.

SAS careers can be as diverse as the individual wishes them to be. But, for me, the right way to develop was to aim for a CESR application. My consultant colleagues and supervisor in NHS Fife were supportive of this, and I began to accumulate the vast amount of evidence required for a successful application. Locally, this also meant identifying a specialist interest that would satisfy the curriculum requirements. I chose echocardiography, which the NHS Fife echocardiography team actively supported.

SAS Fund Application

However, the biggest challenge that needed to be overcome to complete a successful application was the need to complete training in sub-specialty ICM. The curriculum requires time within Neuroscience, Paediatric, and Cardiac ICUs. The ICM specialty specific guidance reinforced that a recurring issue with applications was a failure to adequately evidence this area of the curriculum. The SAS Development Fund in Scotland provided an avenue for top-up training that would be key to completing this section of the curriculum.

I discussed my needs with the ICM Regional Advisor, and together we identified what curriculum areas I would need financial support with, and a realistic time frame for each placement. I then had a meeting with NHS Fife's SAS education representative who helped guide me through the process.

It took a lot of organising, including having the placements agreed in principle with NHS Lothian, paperwork from NHS Fife payroll, and sign offs from my Clinical Lead, DME and SAS representative. However, overall, the process was remarkably smooth. My application went to the next available development fund board and my top-up training was authorised. From there, I needed to organise honorary contracts with NHS Lothian, but the vast majority of liaising with NHS Fife HR was handled by the excellent staff working for the fund.

Training and Development

I completed the top-up training, whilst also completing the ICM Fellowship exams. I later completed a Leadership and Management Programme (LaMP) course using SAS Development Fund monies. This helped to further my application, and my later consultant applications.

During my application preparation, the CESR process changed to the Portfolio Pathway. With the ICM curriculum this was very advantageous, as the changes within the ICM Specialty Specific Guidance (SSG) about age of evidence and prior stages of training meant that my burden of evidence reduced. I'm aware that this is not true for every specialty.

Outcome

My application was delayed by an evidence verifier in a prior hospital. This was a significant roadblock to my application that eventually required me finding an alternate. I applied in May 2024, and the application was authorised in January 2025. Since then, I have been appointed as a Consultant in ICM at the University Hospital Monklands, NHS Lanarkshire. Feedback from my application was incredibly positive, and I have since been invited to be a member of the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine Portfolio Pathway sub-committee and advisor to future applicants.

Impact of the SAS Development Fund

The targeted training and development experiences, made possible by the SAS development fund, were pivotal in completing my Portfolio Pathway application. Without them, I would not be where I am today. It is a remarkable development opportunity and I marvel at how supportive and smooth the process was.

Top tips for a successful Portfolio Pathway application:

- 1.** Support from your local team is absolutely necessary. From a local supervisor who is willing to act as your evidence verifier, through to your SAS education representative. A Portfolio Pathway application is a team effort, and you will not succeed without their support. Having support from the Deanery TPD and college/faculty Regional Advisor will also go far with your application.
- 2.** Read the specialty specific guidance (SSG) carefully for your specialty, and make sure that you are accessing the up-to-date version directly from the GMC website as it does change.
- 3.** Identify what may require top-up training early and discuss with your SAS Education Adviser. They can advise on the process, but also what is possible with each application.
- 4.** Prepare yourself psychologically for a drawn-out process. A Portfolio Pathway application is hard. The long periods of waiting with minimal communication, and requests for additional or re-written evidence can be daunting.