

SAS Tutor:

a personal experience of this new role

In 2008 £12m was provided for the provision of career development funding for SAS grade staff in England.

It is to be hoped that a similar system of funding will be made available in the devolved nations in the future.

The funding went from Department of Health to Deaneries and each Deanery has decided how the money was to be allocated. Most seem to have appointed an Associate Dean for SAS grade staff, though there are still some areas without such a role. Many Deaneries have sent the money to Trusts often on a per capita basis, but some (e.g. London) kept it centrally.

My Deanery (East Midlands) has encouraged all Trusts to appoint an SAS Tutor but to date not all have done so, though the numbers are increasing. My Trust (ULHT) appointed me as their SAS Tutor in June 2009 in open competition. The interview included a presentation, and applications were only accepted from the SAS grade. We are a large Trust in the East Midlands and I cover nearly 160 SAS grade staff.

Initially, I carried out a learning needs analysis of all staff, and got about a 30% return rate. This has increased to more than a 50% return rate and is still rising, but there are some SAS grades who do not seem to wish to engage. Whilst still trying to get their input, I now also use my time to organise using the funding for those who have engaged with the process. In the needs analysis I asked what generic training they would like (such as topics that would not be covered by usual study leave), and also what individual needs they had.

The needs analysis produced results very similar to that of other Deaneries in that the requests are for generic courses on communication skills, teaching, leadership, revalidation, mentoring etc.

The individual needs vary from fees to undertake post graduate qualifications such as Diplomas, to short term clinical secondments either for PMETB, or for personal development.

Once the needs analysis was carried out, I was able to allocate funding to book courses for generic skills. Due to venue sizes we did have a limit on numbers of places, which was helpful to focus minds on whether they wanted to attend, but also meant I could assess popularity of the courses without wasting money on empty delegate places. So far all are fully booked with a waiting list, and so some are to be repeated for those who could not get a place.

I then proceeded with a round of applications for individual funding. There were 13 requests which is what would be expected from the experience of other Deaneries. The bids were assessed by a small panel. Some bids were very unrealistic and would have taken the whole budget, but after discussion we have made an acceptable plan even for these. All bids have been successful though not all are fully funded, as some applications were for large amounts, so fees for postgraduate qualifications were covered but not travel expenses, though this can be claimed using the study leave that will be needed to allow the time to complete the courses. Some funding was used to cover locum backfill costs to allow relevant short-term clinical

secondments. Other applicants wished to undertake some formal leadership and management training. It is likely there will be a second round of individual applications, especially as the generic days enabled a realisation that the funding is available, and that SAS grades can benefit from it. Successful applicants are expected to give regular updates on their progress, and to do a presentation to the Trust once the development has been completed.

One of the more unexpected aspects was obtaining authorisation to access the funding, due to the need for financial training before authorisation was permissible. The Trust therefore arranged for me to undertake a training module and assessment, and the successful completion of this allowed my name to be added as an authorised signatory.

The generic courses run so far have proved to be popular, and have created a positive sense of enthusiasm amongst the SAS grade staff. I have even had comments from consultants who wish they had access to the range of opportunities we have been able to organise. The SAS tutors within the Deanery are liaising with each other to share experiences and good practice, which is very helpful as we are all new to this role. The funding is a great resource and it is exciting to be so involved with this opportunity for career development for SAS grades.

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