

Aim

Scotland's SAS survey in 2022 identified that 12.6% of SAS were already on the Specialist Register; 20% intended to apply for Certificate of Eligibility of Specialist Registration (CESR), 23% were undecided. GMC processes changed on 30 November 2023 to Portfolio route to Specialist Registration (SR). Scotland's SAS Programme supports SAS wishing to progress to SR, providing guidance, peer support, funding key courses and focused training for gaps in competencies.

Our aim was to review the benefits of our current support; determine the potential need for future support; and identify the main barriers to achieve SR via Portfolio, as perceived by SAS in Scotland.

Method

We surveyed those SAS supported previously by the SAS Programme towards their CESR goals, as well as SAS currently considering an application via the new Portfolio pathway over a 10 week period (26th January to 5th April 2024).

Results

Of 78 respondents, 83% were currently in SAS grade posts (77% Specialty Doctor, 5% Associate Specialist, 1% Specialist), 6% Consultant posts, and 10% Locum Consultant. Most specialties were represented (see Fig 1).

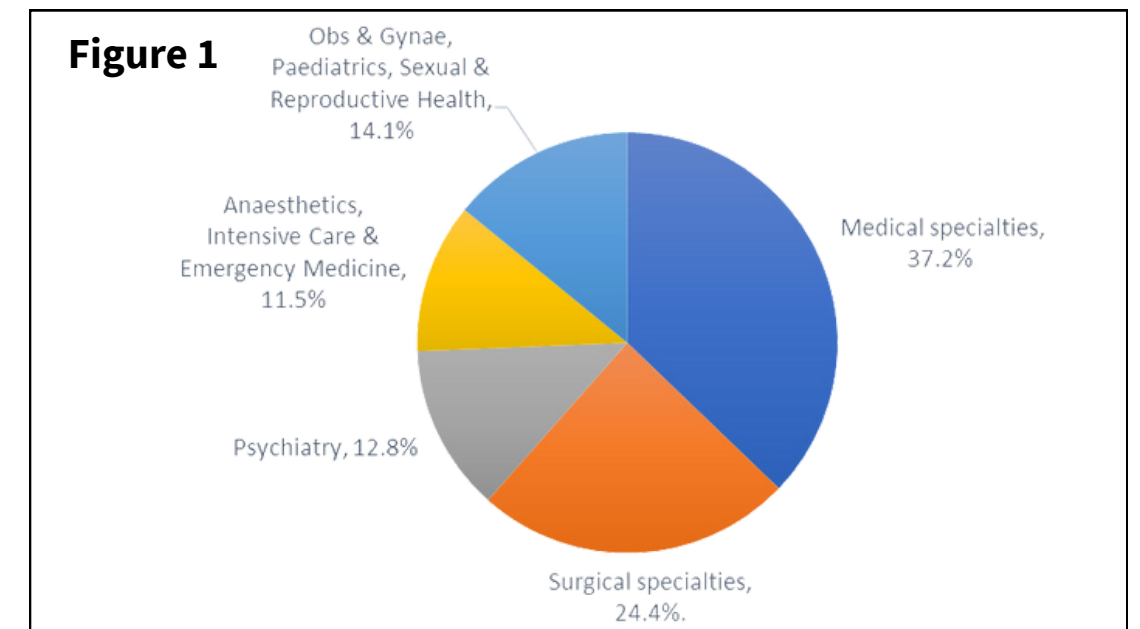


Figure 2: Which stage of the application process are you at?

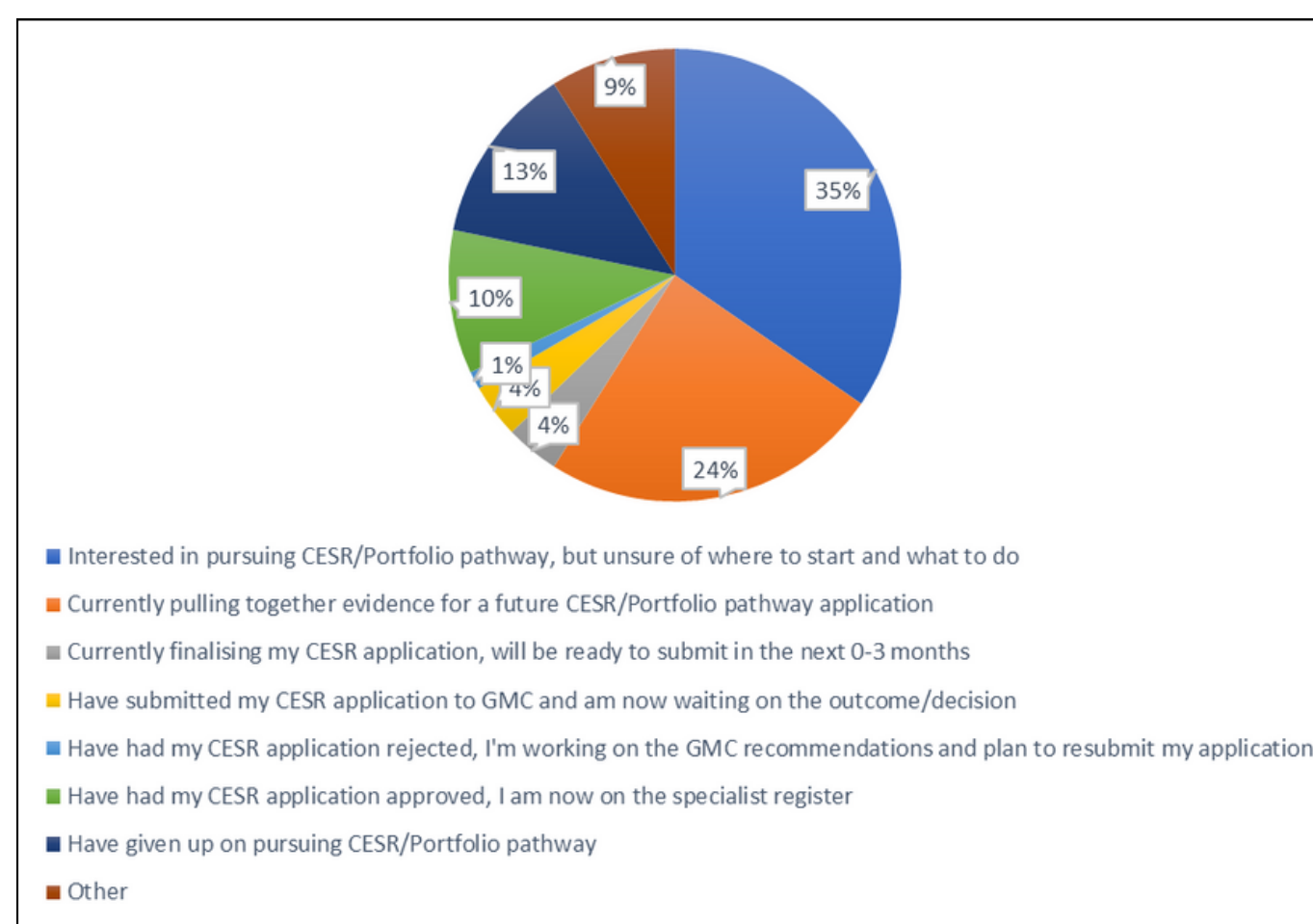
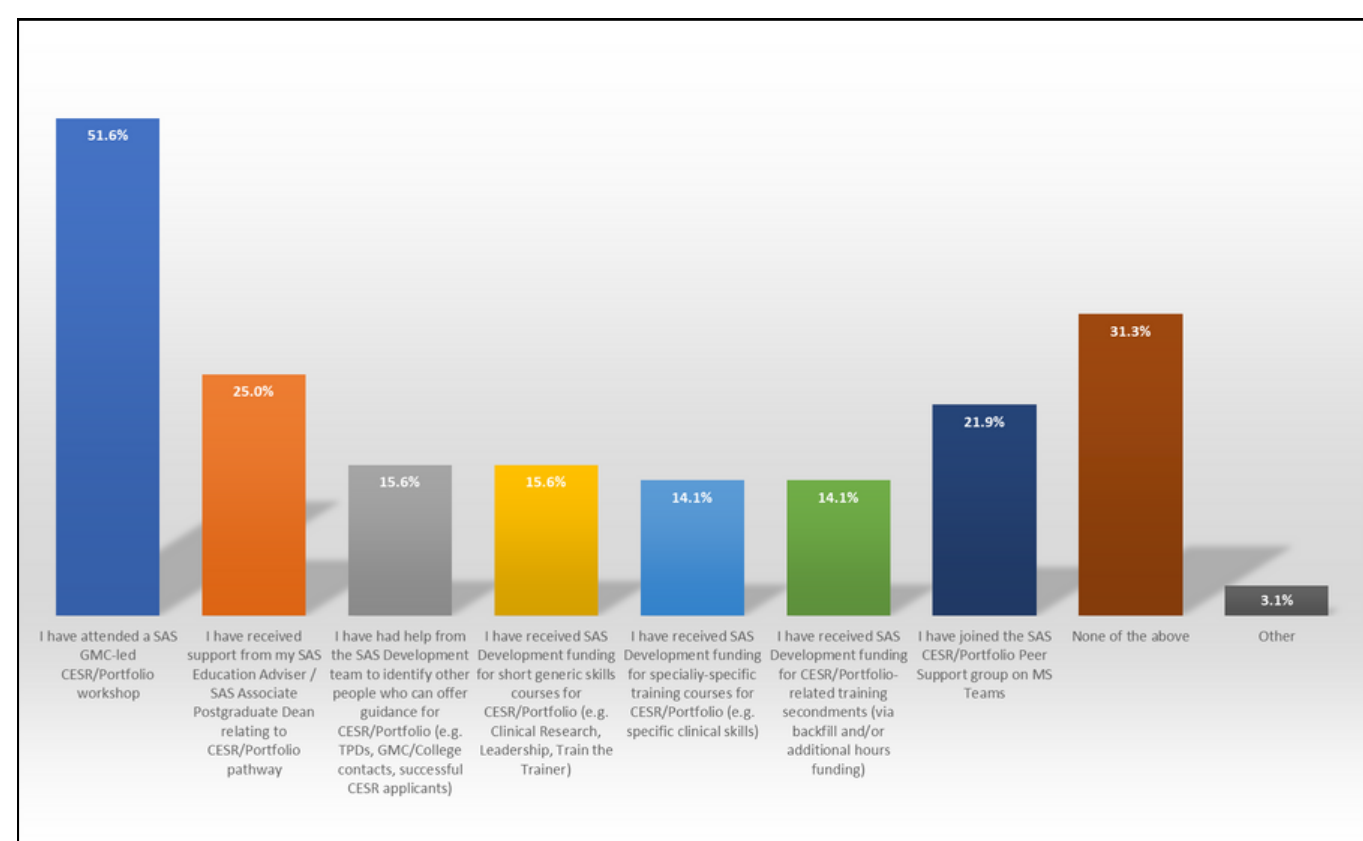


Figure 3: How survey respondents reported making use of the SAS Development Programme



29% are currently gathering evidence for a Portfolio application

28% are currently only at the research / early stages, considering Portfolio for when they have more experience (26%) or when they have passed relevant exams (24%).

13% of the survey group had given up completely: WHY?

“Unlikely to be able to get sufficient placements arranged to get sufficient clinical time for all assessments/evidence requisites.”

“Staffing crisis in workplace, no time or opportunity to pursue CESR process”

“Whole process is excessively bureaucratic, appears set up to dissuade people rather than support them. Life is too short!”

26% of the survey group are currently considering applying to the SAS Development fund for top-up training for gaps in competencies or funding of courses

How will the new changes to Portfolio potentially impact you?

“... fairer, more streamlined and more achievable. It has got me interested in pursuing it, whereas the previous system appeared unnecessarily complex.”

“The pathway still has a lot of things which is difficult to achieve in a SAS post”

“I really wish the guidance had been focused and specific to allow aspirants to have a clear idea of what and how much evidence needed to be collected. Ultimately the NHS needs consultants and it is in everyone's interests that the process is made as streamlined and hassle free as possible without compromising on quality.”

Curriculum changes: “The new dual curriculum for geriatric medicine means secondments and top up training much more likely”

SAS Programme support: “I found the presentations given by people who had achieved CESR to be of great benefit to me, gaining practical tips and identifying potential pitfalls. The knowledge from someone going through the process is invaluable”

“The SAS Development fund has been instrumental in providing me funding for extra sessions and mandatory courses required for gathering evidence/experience/skills for the portfolio pathway[...] All of these supports I hope to see continue to aid myself, and others, in the portfolio pathway. Without this, I feel it would be very difficult or even not possible to do the portfolio pathway.”

15.4% of respondents have submitted their application to GMC for Specialist Registration: of these, 64% are on the Specialist Register, 27% await GMC decision, 9% have had their applications rejected and are gathering further information before a resubmission.

Of those who have achieved CESR: 62.5% are in substantive Consultant posts, 37.5% Locum Consultants.

Conclusion

SAS in Scotland have been supported to achieve CESR supported by the SAS Development Programme. Many more SAS are currently considering or actively gathering evidence via the Portfolio route, utilising the variety of support available from the SAS Development Programme. SAS value clear, expert guidance, and advice from peers. Changes to curricula and the new Portfolio standards currently limit the opportunity to learn from others; the Portfolio route to SR is a desired aim but remains challenging for SAS.