**Guidance on Supporting Professional Activities (SPA) time and Study Leave for Yorkshire and the Humber Anaesthetic Trainees**

**Background:**

Junior doctors are entitled to 30 days study leave per year.1 Anaesthetic trainees are eligible to apply for Supporting Professional Activities (SPA) time as supported by the RCoA.2 This document aims to provide some guidance about how SPA time should be used, and how potential pitfalls can be avoided.

The rationale for introducing SPA time includes:

* Recognition that trainees undertake a wide range of non-clinical activities required by the curriculum as outlined below
* Recognition that these activities often take place in personal time
* Encourage trainee involvement in non-clinical activities as outlined below

The following are examples of what SPA time may be used for. There are likely other activities which would be appropriate. Approval is at the discretion of the college tutor.

* Quality improvement project and audit
* Guideline development
* Research (inc Good Clinical Practice (GCP) course)
* Publications
* Preparation for regional / national presentations
* Management activity e.g. training meeting, board meeting
* Teaching session e.g. simulation sessions, local teaching session
* Working towards MSc/PgDip/PgCert

SPA time should not be used for private study leave (e.g. exam prep), nor should it be used for attending clinical situations outside of training time. Both of the situations can often be accommodated by discussion with the College Tutors but do not fall under the remit of SPA.

The guidance provides a summary of the core content as a list of bullet points. These are expanded in greater detail under sub-headings later on.

**Basic rules**:

* Any SPA time taken will be deducted from the study leave entitlement.
* SPA time should ideally be evenly distributed over the year to avoid impacting upon the requirements for Unit of Training (UoT).
* A total of 6 days of Study leave can be used for SPA time per annum
* The allocation for Less Than Full Time (LTFT) trainees will be calculated on a pro-rata basis.
* SPA time is optional, trainees who do not wish or need to use SPA time will not be disadvantaged in any way.
* There is no financial budget associated with SPA time and it will have no impact on annual leave entitlement.
* SPA time should be applied for using the existing study leave process, including rules relating to booking in advance
* SPA time is not restricted to a particular training year but it is anticipated that it will be more useful during the latter training years when exams are complete and core competencies more easily achieved.
* SPA time that is claimed retrospectively i.e. was not approved in advance will be refused and lieu days will not be allocated.
* It is recognized that some opportunities may arise at very short notice and these will be accommodated where possible. The trainee should discuss it with the College Tutor.
* Ideally SPA sessions should be planned with an educational supervisor at the initial supervisor meeting.
* The request may be refused if it is deemed unreasonable, if it is felt that it will negatively impact on core learning UoT outcomes or if there are too many trainees away from the department at that particular time.
* Trainees will be expected to provide supporting evidence of the planned activity.
* Trainees will be expected to upload information about the SPA activity on their e-portfolio for every SPA session taken.

**SPA and Study Leave**

This guidance was written to try and help trainees achieve additional educational opportunities without impacting on their work/life balance, and to recognise the extra commitment that trainees put in. However, the system has potential for unintended impact on a trainee’s overall progress, and could be open to abuse. Therefore, the Specialist Training Committee (STC) and the Trainee Reps have agreed that the SPA time should meet normal Study Leave requirements, as dictated by HEE, and local Study Leave policy.

However, SPA opportunities will sometimes occur at shorter notice than the Study Leave policy dictates. These can be accommodated if discussed with, and approved by the College Tutor, but agreement should not be assumed in advance. If discrepancies occur then the Study Leave policy will be followed.

**Guidance on SPA time on Zero Days**

The BMA and HEE both state that study leave is counted as working time. SPA time should be taken during training time if possible, but SPA opportunities e.g. management meeting, sub-speciality list may occur on zero days, weekends, bank holidays or time when a trainee would not otherwise be working. These can be claimed back as time in lieu 3,4. However, the application process will remain the same with the SPA time being applied for in the usual way. In these circumstances it is at the discretion of the college tutor if time in lieu will be offered. A trainee who has undertaken an SPA event during weekends, bank holidays etc without application for study leave will not be eligible for a lieu day.

The time taken back in lieu should be taken whilst at the same Trust / rotation in which the study leave or SPA time was taken. In some circumstances this may not be possible i.e. SPA time taken at the end of a rotation. In this situation the college tutor in the hospital in the following rotation should be contacted to ask whether lieu time will be given.

Working on days when a trainee would not otherwise be working, including SPA time is exceeding your hours and cannot be mandated and is therefore the choice of the individual trainee. Trainees have a professional responsibility to protect their own health and that of their patients by ensure they gain adequate rest. Employers cannot be held responsible for trainees exceeding hours out of their own choice.

**Guidance on Study Leave and LTFT Training**

If a LTFT trainee applies for study leave on a non-working day, the above guidance will similarly apply. Non-working days for LTFT trainees should be considered in the same way as zero days.

**SPA and rotas**

SPA must also meet usual Trust restrictions regarding rota obligations. Some Trusts allow study leave during 08:00-18:00 on Long Day shifts (LD), others do not. The rota is at the local Trust’s discretion (within National restrictions) and a policy that is active in one Trust cannot be assumed to be present in another.

If SPA is requested according to local study leave policy (6-8 weeks varying between Trusts) and in advance of a non-rolling rota being written then it will be treated as per normal study leave in terms of lieu days etc.

If SPA is requested later that the local Study leave policy or after a non-rolling rota has been written then the allocation of lieu days will be at the discretion of the College Tutor, even if the leave is approved.

**SPA and training / ARCP**

The achievement of the Core Competencies for Anaesthetic training towards a CCT is the benchmark by which training is measured. Trainers understand that trainees want to pursue additional educational opportunities, and want to support trainees in doing this. However, the achievement of the CCT must take priority in situations of conflict. Therefore, the trainee must ensure that any SPA activity planned for, and undertaken, does not compromise training time such that core competencies are not achieved.

Essential exams (e.g. FRCA, FICM) must also take priority over SPA opportunities.

It is impossible for College Tutors to keep track on all trainees’ clinical and non-clinical activity, therefore the responsibility for keeping track of the SPA, and ensuring that this balance is achieved must lie with the trainee.

If a trainee fails to meet Core Competencies and the ARCP panel feels that SPA time was contributory to this then SPA time may be restricted in the future, and the policy reviewed.

**References**

1. NHS Employers. Schedule 9 Section 34 Terms and Conditions of Service for NHS Doctors and Dentists in Training (England) 2016 Version 2. 30th March 2017. P50
2. RCoA. Recommendation 2b. *A report on the welfare, morale and experiences of anaesthetists in training: the need to listen* December 2017. P21.
3. BMA and NHSE. Good Rostering Guide. 2018. P13
4. HEE. Study Leave Policy. Updated 2018. P7