

SAPC Heads of Department (HoDs) report: June 2025

Overview

The group comprises the heads of departments of general practice and primary care in medical schools in the UK and Ireland. The HoDs group aims to support the development of general practice and primary care via university centres of excellence in research and education. The HoDs groups work closely with other Executive groups within SAPC.

Meetings of SAPC HoDs follow the tradition of the Scientific Meetings of University Departments of General Practice, which were first held in Cardiff in 1972 and continue as the Annual Scientific Meetings (ASMs). However, HoDs can be traced back to the period just before the first ASM. The importance of the HoDs group has evolved, and there is a current need to reassess its scope and function to provide leadership and influence at a time when primary care faces multiple workforce-related pressures.

The group has the ambition to influence national policies concerning academic medicine and academic general practice and primary care, integrate university centres within broader networks for education, research and service development in general practice and promote multidisciplinary university centres of excellence in research and education for general practice and primary care and promote the developing of the sustainable highly-qualified academic and clinical workforce able to meet national health challenges and provide an international example of excellence.

Changes to HoDs

- Dr Euan Lawson (Lancaster University) stepped down from the role of Chair, and Dr Eduard Shantsila (University of Liverpool) stepped into the role.
- Professor Joanne Reeve (University of Hull) announced her retirement this year.

We will shortly be adding an updated list of all current Heads of Department. Currently, there are 73 colleagues on HoDs email lists.

Meetings

HoDs meetings are held three times a year.

- July in person meeting during the ASM
- November virtual meeting
- Spring virtual meeting

The latest HoD meeting took place on 20th May 2025. We discussed important issues around the workforce and academic careers in General Practice. This is a common area where we can collaborate more to reverse the decline in the academic clinical workforce, generally and specifically among academic GPs.

Regular topics discussed in meetings in the past 12 months included:

- Sharing departmental challenges, successes, and ideas for solving emerging challenges.
- Liaison between RCGP and SAPC and ways HoDs can contribute.

- Updates on the Academic Workforce Project led by Judith Ibison.
- Promoting the representation of primary care clinicians and clinical academics towards Clinical Excellence Awards. Tony Avery provided education and practical advice.
- Liaison with contracts for academic GPs and NCIAs, which involve liaison with NHS England and the BMA on an ad hoc basis as needed.

Challenges and plans

- Profile and impact: raising the profile of the group through outreach to policymakers and a broader audience of primary care clinicians and academics, improving links with RCGP.
- Workforce development: working with SAPC executive bodies, RCGP, and all levels of the NHS to promote world-class medical school and specialist GP training, supporting the development of leaders and academic excellence, and promoting shared leadership within the evolving and expanding primary care roles.
- Engagement: strengthening the voice of academic primary care through working with NIHR Regional Research Delivery Networks, NIHR Academy, and RCGP. Primary care academics must be equal partners in primary care-focused government-funded research projects.
- Sharing experiences: continue the internal departmental update process to informally share news, successes, and challenges within our community.
- Impact: We are a large group. To improve awareness of who we are and what we do, we considered inviting external individuals of influence and policymakers to present their views at our meeting, with opportunities for us to share ours.

HoDs will remain a valuable forum for sharing questions and answers about the issues that regularly challenge HoDs, as well as for scoping issues that are on the horizon.

Eduard Shantsila
June 2025