

This workload survey of SLS members ran during March and April 2025. In the **first four** questions we gleaned the following information from our members:

We had responses from 323 members working in all 32 local authorities and the independent sector. Of the respondents, 59% were identified as female, 40% as Male, and 1% preferred not to say.

The mode age range was 45-54.

With regard to the roles members were currently pursuing:

- Head Teacher – 36%
- DHT – 44%
- PT/FH/CL - 14%
- BM – 5%
- Other - 1%

### **5 What do you like most about your job?**

The most valued aspect of the job of a secondary school leader is working with young people—looking for the good in them, supporting their growth, development, and success. Leaders say they like: *“seeing young people learn effectively and seeing everyone grow and develop.”* Another leader said, *“I love working with young people to build confidence and resilience.”*

Leaders find immense satisfaction in fostering confidence and resilience in young people and helping them express themselves creatively through music, art, and drama. As one respondent shared, *“Helping pupils to express themselves in creative ways. Supporting pupils (and staff) to engage in learning both for enjoyment and experience and when working towards qualifications.”* The opportunity to guide young people academically and personally is deeply fulfilling, with many emphasizing how rewarding it is to see young people flourish, with one quoting their *“pride in seeing staff and learners achieving success”*.

The variety of the role of school leader keeps it engaging and exciting. Every day is different and presents new challenges, and leaders appreciate the dynamic nature of their work. *“Never a dull moment!” “The buzz of working in a school where no two days are really the same,”* one leader noted, highlighting how unpredictability makes the job enjoyable. Another said, *“it is never boring. I have the chance to make a difference every day.”*

Beyond the classroom, extracurricular activities provide opportunities for deeper connections with young people and allow school leaders to play a crucial role in shaping their overall school experience. *"Being with kids and their banter"* made one leader proud.

Teamwork and collaboration are central to the profession. School leaders work closely with colleagues, pupils, and families to drive school improvement and support the success of their young people. Strong relationships with staff foster a sense of community and shared purpose. One leader highlighted *"the impactful changes you make to communities"*. Another said: *"working with pupils and staff to lead strategic change in a school community"* was crucial. This was underlined by the leader who enjoyed *"The ability to influence change at scale for a community I care deeply about."* *"Engaging in the improvement of learning and teaching"* – the bread and butter of education, was also emphasised.

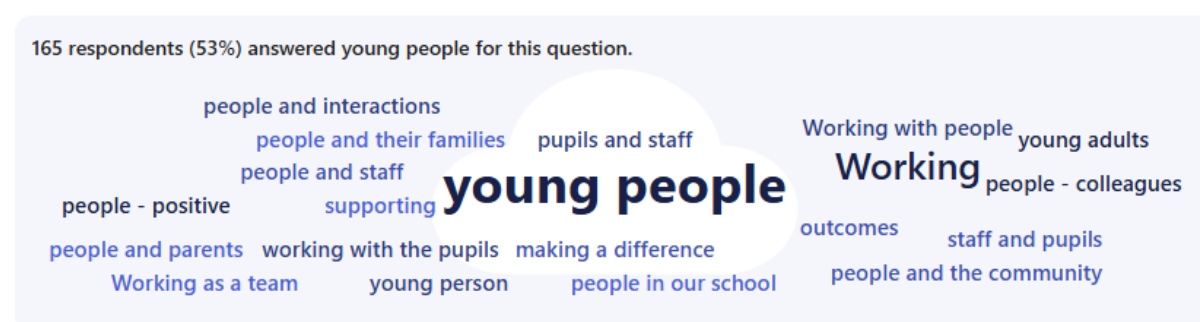
*"The support from good colleagues—it is invaluable,"* one response emphasised, highlighting the collective commitment to creating the best possible learning environment. One head teacher said: *"The collaboration – I have an exceptional team and they make coming to work a pleasure!"* Many enjoy mentoring, leading teams, and engaging in strategic planning to enact positive change. One leader shared, *"Leading and managing staff to improve outcomes for our young people,"* reinforcing the idea that the entire school community works together to ensure their young people thrive and are supported, as one leader stressed, *"working in teams to improve outcomes for young people, especially those who need it most."*

Leadership and advocacy also stand out as key aspects of the job. School leaders appreciate the ability to make strategic decisions that impact young people and the wider school community. *"I love the opportunity to effect change to improve the lives of both pupils and staff,"* one respondent expressed. Another said, *"it is a privilege to make changes that can make a difference."* Many leaders also feel strongly about shaping policy, building relationships with young people, and fostering an environment where all young people can achieve their best outcomes – *"working with the young people and seeing the difference positive relationships can make."*

Ultimately, the privilege of making a difference—through personal interactions, school-wide initiatives, and collective efforts—is what makes this profession so meaningful and fulfilling. *"The relationships and ethos we have is what keeps me going",* said one leader.

Whether supporting vulnerable young people (*"working with challenging pupils and seeing the progress they make over time"*), celebrating achievements, or guiding learners towards a successful future, leaders take immense pride in their impact. *"Making a positive difference to the life chances of young people,"* and *"engaging with young people to try and*

give them the best start in life after education” – summarises the passion and commitment that drives our Scottish school leaders forward. As one leader said, “It’s not about the results but the outcome of the young person!”



## 6. In a typical week, about how many hours do you work? (This question was for full-time working members.)

Based on the responses provided, school leaders who work full-time report a wide range of weekly working hours. The average amount of hours from participant school leaders was **53.31 hours per week**. The majority of respondents work between **45 and 60 hours per week**, with some reporting workloads exceeding **70 to 80 hours**. A significant number also indicated working beyond their contracted hours, often dedicating additional time during weekends or evenings. Some respondents mentioned on-call responsibilities, phased retirement, or roles that require flexibility. While a standard full-time week is often considered **35 to 40 hours**, these responses suggest that the vast majority of school leaders individuals consistently work well beyond this threshold.



## 7. In the most recent full pupil week, how many hours have you spent on 1:1 support for pupils removed from class.

On average senior leaders each spend **5.42 hours a week** on 1:1 support for pupils re removed from class.

## **8. In the most recent full pupil week, how many hours have you spent providing unplanned class cover?**

On average, each school leader covers **2.23 hours per week** of unplanned cover.

## **9. In the most recent full pupil week, how many days have you managed to take an uninterrupted break of at least 20 minutes?**

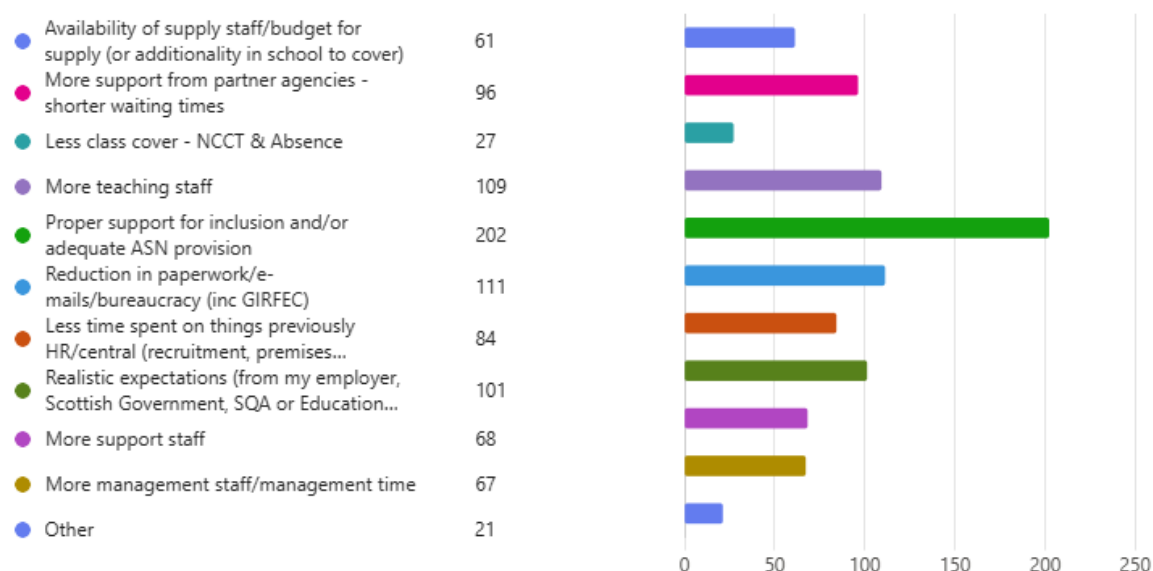
86.4% of members have had zero days when they managed to take an uninterrupted break of at least 20 minutes!

44 members (13.6%) did manage this break on at least one occasion and of that 41% were PTs, 23% DHTs, 25% Head Teachers, 11% Business Managers.

Of all respondents to the survey, 33% of BMs, 39% of FHs/PT but only 7% of DHTs and 8% of HTs managed an uninterrupted break on at least one occasion.

## **10. What would make your role more manageable?**

Members were asked to select **up to three** answers including specifying a different issue using the 'other' option. The 10 options listed are the most common responses from other surveys - shown in a random order to each member - and were added to make survey completion quicker.



We are not surprised at the one thing which members said would make their role much more manageable – proper support for inclusion and/or adequate ASN provision. This underlines the feelings and information we were getting from members prior to the workload survey. This feeling has led us to conduct

a further survey on ASN (through an FOI request to Local Authorities and a survey of members) which will be published in August.

**11. If members answered “other” to question 10, they made the following comments.**

Business Managers play a vital role in schools, yet the absence of dedicated business management support is placing undue pressure on Head Teachers and Senior Leadership Teams. There is a need for more management support, particularly in handling financial complexities. The fact that the Scottish Government allocated each Local Authority monies to establish the posts of Business Manager in all schools was welcomed then, but there are still some Local Authorities where these posts have yet to be established.

School leaders often take on admin and managerial duties that are typically handled by business support teams in some local authorities or were done by central teams which have now been cut, leading to much increased workloads in schools. Tasks such as organising supply cover, timetable management, funding applications, and data processing are consuming valuable time. Interruptions throughout the day further hinder productivity, making it difficult to complete crucial tasks. Protected time for this specific work is essential.

In some local authorities, financial tools are inadequate, and centralised recruitment processes challenge a school's ability to develop its desired culture. Managing parental expectations is increasingly difficult, with high (sometimes unreasonable) demands that often exceed available resources. Parental concerns, complaints, and requests (often unrealistic) take up considerable time, reducing the ability of school leaders to focus on their main responsibilities.

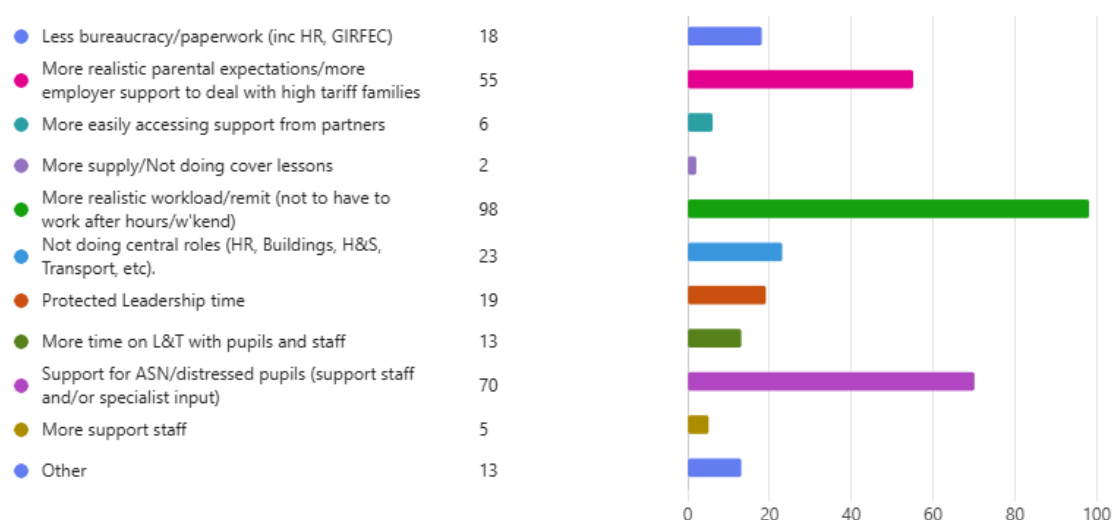
There is frustration over the relentless scrutiny of schools by local authorities and HMIE through data collection, with concerns that evaluations ignore current school challenges (especially post-Covid) and negatively impact staff well-being. Inspection processes are seen as overly rigid and in need of urgent reform. Additionally, schools struggle with disruptions caused by a small percentage of highly dysregulated students, with unrealistic expectations placed on reintegrating them into full-time education. Alternative, locality-based support models with specialised professionals are suggested.

Smaller faculties, reduced class sizes, and greater autonomy for Head Teachers could improve efficiency and reduce workload. The need for uninterrupted time, trained support staff, and structured reliable administrative processes which deliver for leaders, would ease the

managerial and leadership burdens. Some staff would even prefer more protected time over additional salary increases.

## **12. If you could change ONE thing about your job, what would it be?**

Again, members were asked to select only one answer or identify a different issue using the 'other' option. The 10 options listed are the most common responses from other surveys - shown in a random order to each member - and were added to make survey completion quicker.



Given that our survey was about workload, and the concerns all teachers have about that, it is no surprise that the one thing members would like to change about their jobs was a more realistic workload - not having to work many hours over the 35-hour week and at weekends. Having a remit which would fit the 35-hour week was also highlighted.

Having outlined more support for inclusion and ASN in question 10 as the one thing that would make their job more manageable, it is totally unsurprising that members felt that the second most important thing to improving their jobs would be more support for ASN / distressed pupils. This underlines the need for more “boots on the ground” in the form of support staff, individual help and specialist input, all of which are required to ensure our young people with ASN get a much better deal.

The third clear issue which school leaders would like to change is for there to be more realistic expectations from parents on what school leaders and schools can do to support them and their young person. This also covered support from employers in ensuring we have the resources, support and processes required to do likewise. The negative change in some parental expectations and a lack of collaboration has concerned school leaders since

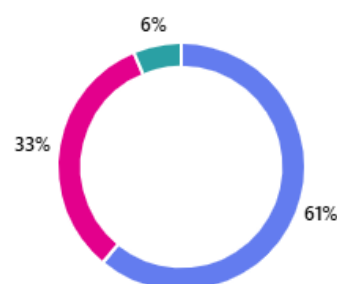
the pandemic. This is more a societal change but one which our schools are left to pick up, adding to the view that schools are funded and resourced for education, but their remit now extends to social work, health (especially mental health), housing, clothing, foodbanks, etc.

**13. If members answered “other” to question 12, they made the following comments.**

- **Budget Constraints** – Leaders face reduced funding for staff, resources, and this impacts greatly on attainment.
- **Staffing & Workload** – More teachers and support workers are needed; current workloads are unsustainable. There is too little management time and excessive teacher workload.
- **Leadership Time** – Constant crisis management prevents effective strategic planning and leadership.
- **Parental Demands** – Complaints and unrealistic expectations add to the pressure on schools.
- **Behaviour Management** – Concerns were raised about the growing challenges of pupil behaviour. Leaders called for a more realistic national perspective on behaviour management and the necessary autonomy and, above all, resources to address behavioural challenges effectively.
- **Support for ASN pupils** – More appropriate learning environments and interventions are essential.
- **Operational Efficiency** – A shift from reactive firefighting to structured strategies is needed, along with better use of technology, especially AI, which should be seen as a clear opportunity to improve the situation, rather than a threat.
- **Staffing** – Shortages persist, as well as the lack of supply staff, especially out with the central belt (see our recent report on this matter) [LINK?](#)
- **Sustainability Concerns** – Leaders are asked to do more with fewer resources, forcing difficult decisions.

**14. Over the last two years, have you considered leaving the profession/your role earlier than you had previously planned?**

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| ● Yes               | 195 |
| ● No                | 105 |
| ● Prefer not to say | 20  |



## **15. The reasons why members have considered leaving the profession/their role earlier than they had previously planned?**

This is, in our opinion, a depressing statistic, indicating how unhappy school leaders are in their posts. It is not unsurprising to learn that many school leaders are contemplating early retirement or leaving the profession due to unsustainable workload, reduced resources, and mounting stress. School leaders are clear why this is the case. The pressure of managing schools amid budget cuts, staffing shortages, and unrealistic expectations has made the role increasingly difficult. Work-life balance is severely impacted, with many struggling to maintain their health and family relationships while working excessive hours.

Local authority and national bureaucracy, administrative burdens, and a lack of effective support from many partner agencies and local authorities have undoubtedly exacerbated frustrations. Many school leaders feel trapped in a system that demands more while providing fewer resources, often leading to exhaustion and a feeling of helplessness and frustration. Pupil behaviour is increasingly difficult to manage, with rising absenteeism, a lack of resilience, and unrealistic parental expectations adding to the strain. This has worsened in the post-pandemic world. Schools are expected to fill gaps left by social services, with little guidance or support. Schools have become the “go to” service for so much more than just teaching and learning.

The emotional toll of the job is significant, with many leaders experiencing burnout and stress-related illnesses. Some report facing violence from pupils and parents, harassment from parents, and overwhelming accountability pressures. Others feel their roles have become more about crisis management than meaningful leadership. Additionally, the national education framework, curriculum structures, and attainment targets often fail to align with classroom realities, leaving our school leaders frustrated and disillusioned to a great extent. This has seeped into the national consciousness and does not encourage graduates to enter the profession.

Concerns over the sustainability of the profession are prominent, with many leaders actively exploring career changes, reducing their working hours, or checking pension options for early retirement. Some school and college leaders feel trapped—unable to afford early retirement yet struggling to continue under current conditions. Many members report sacrificing personal well-being and family time due to relentless professional demands.

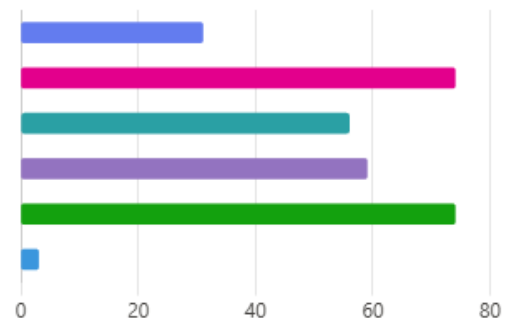
Despite a deep commitment to education, many school leaders are reluctantly planning early retirement or career shifts, driven by the need to protect their well-being and achieve a more sustainable work-life balance. Without systemic changes to address workload, support, and leadership structures, the profession risks losing experienced teachers and leaders who are unable any longer to withstand the unrelenting pressures of their roles.



The overwhelming expectation to "do more with less," combined with growing concerns about pupil behaviour and the lack of external support from local and national bodies, has left many questioning the future of education and their place within it. This is a very sad and unfortunate scenario, that clearly needs to be improved. The vision to do so seems to be lacking.

**16. Seeking Headship. In your role as stated in Q4 (HT, DHT, Faulty head/PT, how do you feel about this statement: I am keen to become a Head Teacher / I recommend Headship to others.**

|                            |    |       |
|----------------------------|----|-------|
| Strongly agree             | 31 | 10.4% |
| Agree                      | 74 | 24.9% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 56 | 18.9% |
| Disagree                   | 59 | 19.9% |
| Strongly disagree          | 74 | 24.9% |
| Prefer not to say          | 3  | 1%    |



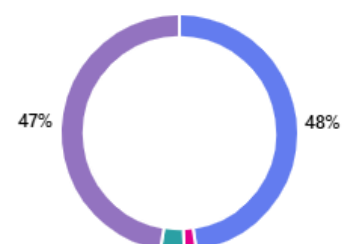
Only 35.35% of our respondents, were positive about wanting to become a Head Teacher or would recommend being a Head. Nearly 45% had a negative view and almost one quarter strongly disagreed with the statement.

Almost one in five of our respondents were indifferent about headship one way or another, in an area which one would have thought would have been far more positive.

This does not bode well when we are experiencing low numbers of applicants for headship posts and with also a concern about the quality of some applicants.

**17. Have you done 'Into Headship' / 'SQH'? (Please select 'No' if you completed any Headship qualification other than 'Into Headship' or 'SQH')**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Yes, completed                         | 147 |
| Yes, but dropped out before completion | 5   |
| Currently doing it                     | 10  |
| No                                     | 146 |
| Prefer not to say                      | 0   |



This question reflects again the divide in views about Headship as seen in Q.16.

**18. If you are on or have completed the 'Into Headship' qualification, please respond to the following statements:**

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree

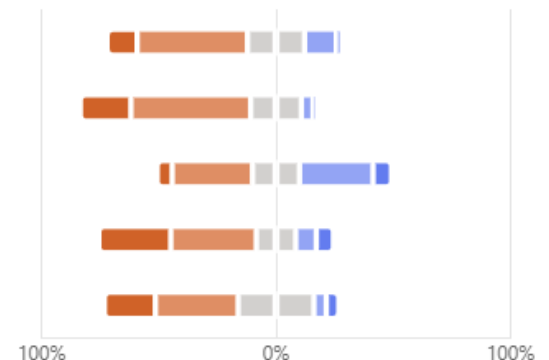
I feel it is/was a good preparation for headship

The content is/was relevant and useful

The workload is/was manageable

I still want to be a Head Teacher

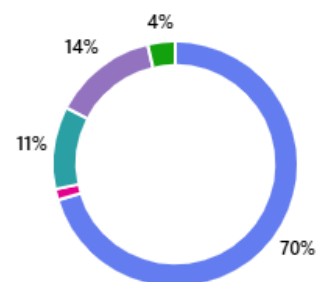
I am now more confident about applying for headships



Of those currently pursuing “into Headship” or having completed it, there is a far more positive view, although the concerns about the workload involved in the course are underlined.

**19. If eligible, have you engaged with the 'In Headship' programme? (For those in the first two years of their first Headship)**

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| ● Not engaged       | 97 |
| ● About to start    | 2  |
| ● Engaged           | 15 |
| ● Completed         | 19 |
| ● Prefer not to say | 5  |



We are not surprised by this statistic, as the “In Headship” course has long been the poor relation of the Education Scotland leadership courses, with traditionally a much lower number of participants than “Into Headship” or “Excellence in Headship”. The day-to-day pressures of being a new Head may well explain this reticence to participate in this course.

## Empowering Schools

### 20. Please respond to these statements about the Empowering Schools agenda.

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

I see movement in my local authority to support the Empowering Schools agenda

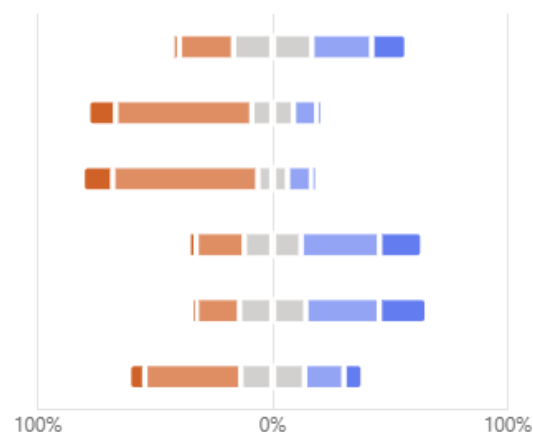
I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Curriculum

I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Improvement

I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Staffing

I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Funding (core)

I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Funding (PEF / SAC)



**I see movement in my local authority to support the Empowering Schools...**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 3.1%  |
| ● Agree             | 23.1% |
| ● Neutral           | 33.3% |
| ● Disagree          | 25.5% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 15%   |

**I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Curriculum**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 11.9% |
| ● Agree             | 58%   |
| ● Neutral           | 17.7% |
| ● Disagree          | 9.9%  |
| ● Strongly disagree | 2.4%  |

**I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Improvement**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 13%   |
| ● Agree             | 61.8% |
| ● Neutral           | 12.6% |
| ● Disagree          | 10.2% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 2.4%  |

**I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Staffing**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 3.4%  |
| ● Agree             | 20.5% |
| ● Neutral           | 24.2% |
| ● Disagree          | 33.4% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 18.4% |

**I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Funding...**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 1.7%  |
| ● Agree             | 18.4% |
| ● Neutral           | 28.2% |
| ● Disagree          | 31.3% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 20.4% |

**I have an appropriate degree of autonomy in relation to Funding (PE...**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 6.9%  |
| ● Agree             | 40.9% |
| ● Neutral           | 27.1% |
| ● Disagree          | 16.8% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 8.2%  |

There has not been much movement on the Empowerment Agenda, which seems to have sunk in priority since the pandemic. SLS was at the forefront of the Empowerment Agenda, and particularly in developing the Head Teacher Charter. Over a third of respondents feel neutral about their local authority's support for empowering schools with 40% saying they do not see any movement at all. Just over a quarter agree they see movement in their LA to empower schools, but only 3% agree strongly.

In the four areas, we see that two are seen as being very much areas where there is an appropriate degree of autonomy – curriculum and school improvement. This has always been the case and SLS members in our previous survey (in 2019) underlined this feeling of empowerment. Now in 2025, 70 % agree or strongly agree they have an appropriate degree of empowerment in curriculum and almost 75% in the case of school Improvement. This is heartening and is a slight improvement since 2019 when the positive figures were 66.7% and 69%. However, those taking a neutral stance on both areas have decreased with a resultant increase also in those who disagreed with the degree of autonomy they had, particularly in the case of school improvement (up from 3.45% to 10.2%).

With regard to PEF funding, almost 48% of our respondents agreed or agreed strongly that they had a suitable degree of autonomy with regard to PEF and SAC funding. This funding is meant to come directly to schools, although we are aware of the strategies of some local authorities to cream off a percentage of the PEF money to cover costs in central teams. Not a surprise then that one quarter of our respondents did not agree or strongly disagreed that they had an appropriate level of autonomy in the case of PEF/SAC.

The situation regarding staffing and funding (core) has also not changed much and reflects the position SLS members felt they were in before the pandemic in 2019 and through the first few years of the Empowerment Agenda taking off. Indeed it has actually become slightly worse. This however is not a surprise given the dire financial constraints under which local authorities and schools (including independent schools) operate currently.

Only 20.1% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed they had autonomy in core DSM Funding, but almost 52% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this. The corresponding figures from 2019 were 20.7% and 49.42%. These figures are reflected in the responses concerning staffing empowerment, with just 20.5% agreeing they had the appropriate amount of autonomy (plus an additional 3.4% strongly agreeing) but with 51.8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing they had autonomy. In 2019 the corresponding figures for staffing empowerment were 25.3% positive, and 47.12% negative.

Overall, the situation regarding Empowerment has become a little more negative in the last seven years. This was a very worthwhile initiative that

sadly and disappointingly, ran into the sand, one which would have really enabled schools to direct their resources appropriately and thus improve outcomes for the young people in their community.

## **21. Please respond to these statements about NSAs (National Standardised Assessments):**

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

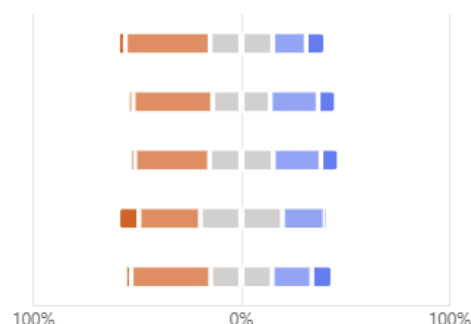
National Standardised Assessments are useful

National Standardised Assessments provide information we would not otherwise have

National Standardised Assessments help inform teacher judgement about pupil progress

National Standardised Assessments add significantly to workload

S3 National Standardised Assessments are useful



### **S3 National Standardised Assessments are useful**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 3%    |
| ● Agree             | 38.3% |
| ● Neutral           | 29.5% |
| ● Disagree          | 19.1% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 10.1% |

S3 National Standardised Assessments provide information we would not otherwise have

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 2.4%  |
| ● Agree             | 38.2% |
| ● Neutral           | 27.7% |
| ● Disagree          | 23%   |
| ● Strongly disagree | 8.8%  |

S3 National Standardised Assessments help inform teacher judgement about pupil progress

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 1.7%  |
| ● Agree             | 36%   |
| ● Neutral           | 30.6% |
| ● Disagree          | 22.9% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 8.8%  |

S3 National Standardised Assessments add significantly to workload

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 10.1% |
| ● Agree             | 29.6% |
| ● Neutral           | 39.4% |
| ● Disagree          | 20.5% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 0.3%  |

#### S3 National Standardised Assessments are useful

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| ● Strongly agree    | 3%    |
| ● Agree             | 38.3% |
| ● Neutral           | 29.5% |
| ● Disagree          | 19.1% |
| ● Strongly disagree | 10.1% |

Overall, 40% of correspondents feel NSA Assessments are useful with almost 30% remaining neutral. This neutrality figure of about 30% is also present in whether S3 NSAs provide information we would not otherwise have, and whether they inform teacher judgement about pupils' progress. In all three areas, the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statements is roughly about the 40% mark. This neutrality rises to almost 40% when asked about workload. Here however, 40% also agree or agree strongly that NSAs add significantly to workload. This again causes us concern, and begs the question, are the NSAs worth the amount of work involved?

## **22. Is there anything else on the subject of workload that you would like to mention?**

SLS members feel that the workload pressures on schools and on leaders have reached an unsustainable level, impacting on the quality of leadership, teaching and learning, and staff wellbeing. Unrealistic expectations local authorities, parents, from education agencies, such as HMIE, ES and SQA, have resulted in excessive admin and growing responsibilities, many well beyond the traditional concept of education. Staff shortages, budget cuts, and a lack of specialist provision—particularly in ASN support—are leaving school leaders overwhelmed and struggling to balance pupil needs with the demands from above, as noted elsewhere in this report. Many leaders feel forced to work far beyond contracted hours, often sacrificing personal time and wellbeing. Without significant systemic reform, we risk school leaders having declining morale, widespread burnout, which could lead to a diminishing workforce -who would wish to enter such a profession, if it continues in this vein? As one DHT said: *"I used to want to be a HT and now*

*sadly I am reconsidering as the job has become crazy - as a DHT I cannot work anymore than I do and have a young family to look after. I see other HTs who get no support working themselves into the ground. Who would put themselves forward to do this?? We are already seeing the impact in the lower numbers of graduates entering the profession.*

### **Concerns of Headteachers:**

Head Teachers are under immense pressure to manage staff shortages, excessive admin tasks (some thrust on them due to cuts in the centre of their local authority), and unrealistic expectations from external agencies. Many struggle to balance the operational demands with their strategic leadership role, often sacrificing long-term strategic planning to focus on immediate crises. As one Head Teacher put it: *"Always feel like I'm responding to situations and being reactive. Would like to have more time to be proactive and strategic."*

HMIE inspections, often perceived as punitive rather than supportive, push Head Teachers to work unsustainable hours in preparation. Budget constraints, rising disciplinary issues, and diminishing resources further complicate leadership. Additionally, the lack of autonomy in decision-making (see Q 20 above)—due to external pressures and rigid financial structures—limits Heads' ability to lead their schools effectively. *"The erosion of Head Teacher autonomy with a move from the Centre to micromanaging schools and having accountability of all the wrong things considerably adds to my workload"*. Many members report feeling isolated, working well beyond the 35 hours without proper support, and struggling to maintain morale among their leadership teams and their staff.

### **Concerns of Business Managers:**

Business managers play a crucial role in maintaining school operations, yet their workload continues to grow without corresponding recognition or support. They face increasing admin overload related to budgeting, procurement, HR, cover, often filling gaps left by reduced central support services. In one local authority, the lack of reliable, accurate systems in HR, Finance and IT has resulted in huge stress for both Business Managers and Head Teachers.

Many report feeling undervalued, with their roles not job-sized correctly or fairly relative to their responsibilities. A lack of modern digital systems contributes to inefficiencies, forcing them to spend excessive time on bureaucratic tasks that could be streamlined. With school budgets tightening, business managers must navigate complex financial constraints while ensuring essential resources are maintained. Their increasing responsibilities demand greater investment in staffing and technology to reduce unnecessary workload pressures. In some local authorities, the post of

business manager has yet to be created, thus adding to the burden of other SLT members. This needs to be rectified.

### **Concerns of Depute Head Teachers:**

Depute Head Teachers face ever increasing remits and overwhelming workloads, ranging from pupil behaviour management and attendance tracking to HR responsibilities and other admin tasks. Many work well beyond contracted hours just to keep up with expectations, sacrificing evenings and weekends to fulfil their roles. Since the mainstreaming of ASN pupils without sufficient specialist support, DHTs often find themselves taking on responsibility for managing complex pupil needs with limited resources. Additionally, budget cuts have reduced staffing levels, forcing DHTs to take on tasks that should be distributed across leadership teams. The growing expectation for schools to address social issues—including mental health, parental engagement, safeguarding, foodbanks, clothing banks, etc.—places further strain on their ability to focus on learning and teaching. To quote one member: *“More and more is expected of schools. Mental health, family support, policing etc etc are all becoming school responsibility. I am sick of reading comments in emails from parents and other agencies saying that the school hasn't done enough when we are not mental health trained and we are not social work. The majority of support from local organisations is either not available or inadequate so the expectations fall on the school.”*

With career progression to headship seen as increasingly unattractive due to unmanageable pressures, urgent changes are required to sustain leadership succession planning.

### **Concerns of Faculty Heads:**

Faculty Heads are increasingly burdened with bureaucracy and admin, including tracking pupil performance, moderation, verification, and parental communication, all while maintaining their teaching responsibilities. Many report excessive workloads without dedicated time to complete essential management duties. Middle leaders feel overwhelmed, often taking on additional responsibilities beyond their remit, leading to frustration and burnout. The role of Faculty Head varies widely across schools and authorities, with a lack of consistent management time and strategic support. Budget constraints and reductions in support staff mean Faculty Heads are stretched very thin, expected to balance teaching, leadership, and growing pastoral responsibilities. Many feel that their workload is disproportionate compared to their remuneration and recognition.



## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### **23. While we know senior leadership is a busy job, do you feel you are able to manage a good work/life balance?**



57% of our SLS respondents say they do not feel they are able to have a good work/life balance. This is almost 3/5 of leaders. One quarter of respondents said they maybe are able to achieve this balance, but only 17% were definite in their view they had achieved a good work/life balance. In other words, fewer than 1 in 5 school leaders feels they have a good work/life balance.

### **24. Do you have access to coaching, mentoring, professional supervision which supports your wellbeing as a senior leader?**



Over half of our respondents did not have access to coaching, mentoring or professional supervision which supports their wellbeing. This is something for SLS to consider seriously in our Professional Learning offer to members, and also for us to raise with local authorities and Education Scotland. Our partnership with Education Scotland is already moving in this direction and we hope to ensure that we support members better across a variety of measures with regard to mentoring and coaching.

## **25. Do you have access to other resources to support your wellbeing?**



This is an area which we need to consider within our Professional Learning offer to members.

## **26. Is there anything else on the subject of wellbeing that you would like to mention?**

School leaders in Scotland continue to struggle with wellbeing due to excessive workloads, long hours, and a clear lack of systemic support. Many of our respondents feel that local authorities rely on the goodwill of school leaders to sustain an increasingly untenable system. They also feel employers fail in their duty of care to them as “officers of the council” - a term often used by local authorities to bring school leaders into line. A common frustration is that wellbeing support feels tokenistic and does not address root causes such as staffing shortages, pupil behaviour, and the impact of working in disadvantaged areas.

### **Heavy workloads and systemic neglect**

Many senior leaders describe their roles as all-consuming, often working far beyond contracted hours without additional support. One leader lamented, *“It is ridiculous to talk about HT wellbeing. Until the demands and expectations change alongside greater levels of staffing, we will always be working 60 to 70-hour weeks because we care about the young people and our schools.”* Others express concern about the lack of flexibility, with some saying they struggle to work effectively due to health conditions but are not allowed adjustments: *“I could work from home or make up the time, but I am not allowed to do so because ‘there’s no precedent for it in this school.’”*

### **Workplace abuse and pupil behaviour**

A significant concern is the rise in aggressive and abusive behaviour—both from pupils and parents. One DHT shared, *“Parents believe they have the right to shout and swear at DHTs if they are unhappy about the message being delivered. We are not supported in these situations.”* Similarly, another school leader commented, *“The abusive and aggressive behaviour of a small but difficult core of young people, and the lack of available sanctions to use or support from the authority, makes the job seem not worthwhile at times.”*

### **Challenges in disadvantaged areas**

Leaders in schools serving less affluent communities face additional challenges, including handling child protection cases, managing pupil attendance, family support, and providing basic necessities. *"Schools in areas of disadvantage have many more hours of work due to CP cases, a lack of social work support, and additional work on attendance and family support such as food, school debts, and home visits."* However, these extra responsibilities are not reflected in any additional support.

### **Lack of meaningful wellbeing support**

While some school leaders have found informal peer networks helpful, official wellbeing support is often inaccessible or ineffective. *"Support is there but not in a meaningful way. We pay lip service to kidding ourselves on."* Another leader expressed deep frustration, stating, *"All I do for wellbeing is what I seek out for myself—my employer does not care."* Some feel that wellbeing measures focus too much on individual resilience rather than systemic change: *"Wellbeing activities seem to be focused on helping us find better ways of being resilient to our circumstances. There is never any sense that the circumstances themselves could be changed."*

### **Call for structural reform**

Many argue that true improvements in wellbeing require systemic change, not just token efforts. Leaders advocate for better staffing levels, clearer boundaries between education and social services, HR support for managing staff absences, and regular supervision sessions to help absorb the emotional toll of their work. *"There needs to be an honest discussion about working hours and protecting family life too... others add to our workload by sending things in the evenings or weekends and don't respect our personal time."*

### **Moments of positivity and resilience**

Despite the many challenges, some leaders report positive experiences of resilience and peer support. *"I know who my go-to people are, and I feel supported in this professionally and personally."* Others emphasise the importance of setting boundaries: *"Once I set a rule (after COVID) that I will not check my emails outside of my school building, this has greatly improved my wellbeing."* However, for many, these personal strategies remain insufficient given the magnitude of the problems they face

## **Conclusion**

School leaders overwhelmingly feel their wellbeing is overlooked, with unrealistic expectations and inadequate support systems in place. While individual resilience strategies and strong peer networks offer some relief, the profession remains fundamentally unsustainable without structural reform.

Leaders urgently call for realistic workloads, better wellbeing resources, and improved recognition of the challenges they face.

Graham Hutton

General Secretary SLS

25 July 2025