1) Generic Overview of Respondents (All SLS Members)

What is your role?

Role	Count
Headteacher	63
Deputy Headteacher	81
Middle Leader	21
Business Manager / Bursar	15
Other	1

Where are you located?
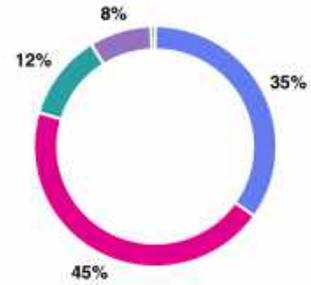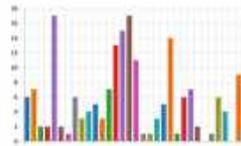
Location	Count	Location	Count
Aberdeen	6	Highlands	11
Aberdeenshire	7	Inverclyde	1
Angus	2	Midlothian	1
Argyll and Bute	2	Moray	3
City of Edinburgh	17	North Ayrshire	5
Clackmannanshire	2	North Lanarkshire	14
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	1	Orkney Islands	1
Dumfries and Galloway	6	Perth and Kinross	6
Dundee	3	Renfrewshire	7
East Ayrshire	4	Scottish Borders	2
East Dunbartonshire	5	Shetland Islands	0
East Lothian	3	South Ayrshire	1
East Renfrewshire	7	South Lanarkshire	6
Falkirk	13	Stirling	4
Fife	15	West Dunbartonshire	0
Glasgow	17	West Lothian	9

2) Overview of Headteacher Responses

There were **63 Headteacher respondents**, (21% of our SLS HT membership) working across local authority and independent schools in Scotland and representing a wide geographical spread.

Length of service:

🔵 0 - 2 years	8
🟠 3 - 6 years	27
🟢 7 - 12 years	17
🔴 More than 12 years	11

Respondents were asked to evaluate a range of **professional learning priorities**, rating each as:

- **"Essential"**
- **"Valuable"**
- **"Interesting"**
- **"Not a current PL priority"**

Open-text comments were also provided.

3) Overall Patterns in Professional Learning Priorities

Across the responses, there was strong consensus that the majority of professional learning areas presented are either "Essential" or "Valuable". When responses across all professional learning domains are aggregated:

- Approximately **70–80%** of all responses fall into **"Essential" or "Valuable"**
- Around **10–15%** of responses indicate **"Not a current PL priority"**

Professional Learning deemed *essential* by over 50% of HT respondents:

- Curriculum Design/Reform (73%)
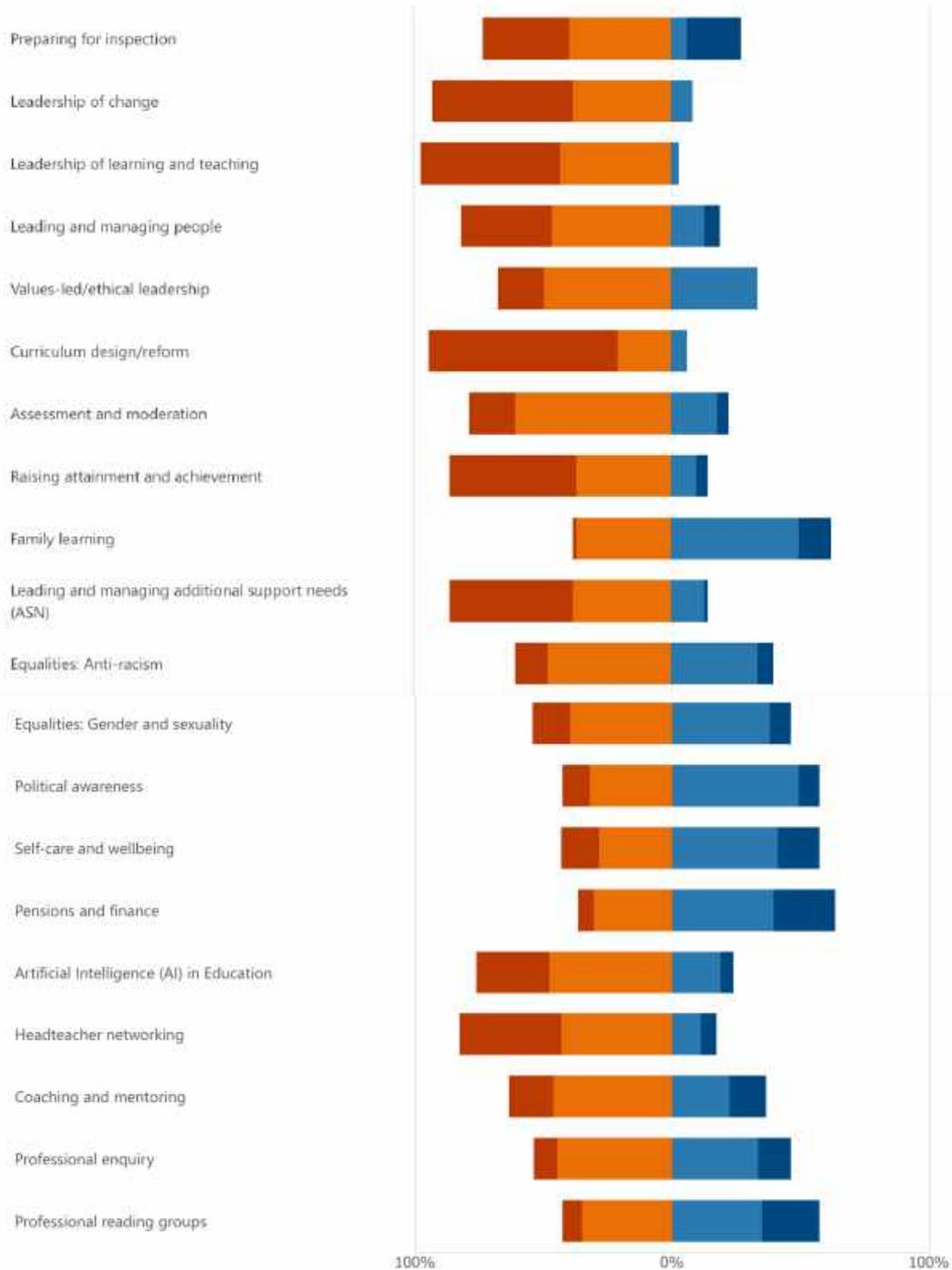- Leadership of Change (54%)
- Leadership of Learning and Teaching (54%)

Professional Learning deemed *essential* or *valuable* by over 50% of HT respondents:

- Preparing for Inspection (33.3%; 39.7%)
- Leading and Managing People (34.9%; 46%)
- Values led / ethical leadership (17.5%; 49.2%)
- Assessment and Moderation (17.5%; 60.3%)
- Raising Attainment and Achievement (49.2%; 36.5%)
- Leading and Managing ASN (47.6%; 31.8%)
- Equalities: Anti-Racism (12.7%; 47.6%)
- Equalities: Gender and Sexuality (14.3%; 39.7%)
- AI in Education (28.6%; 47.6%)
- Headteacher Networking (39.7%; 42.9%)
- Coaching and Mentoring (17.5%; 46%)
- Professional Enquiry (9.5%; 44.4%)

List of ratings from HT respondents

Please consider the current challenges and opportunities in your role and context, and indicate whether the following suggested areas of professional learning are: Essential, Valuable, Interesting, or not a current Professional Learning priority.

Legend: ■ Essential ■ Valuable ■ Interesting ■ Not a current PL priority

Categories:
- Preparing for inspection
- Leadership of change
- Leadership of learning and teaching
- Leading and managing people
- Values-led/ethical leadership
- Curriculum design/reform
- Assessment and moderation
- Raising attainment and achievement
- Family learning
- Leading and managing additional support needs (ASN)
- Equalities: Anti-racism
- Equalities: Gender and sexuality
- Political awareness
- Self-care and wellbeing
- Pensions and finance
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education
- Headteacher networking
- Coaching and mentoring
- Professional enquiry
- Professional reading groups

4) Variation in responses from HTs with different experience profiles

- HTs with 0 – 2 years' experience more likely to rate a broader range of areas as essential
- HTs with 3 – 6 years' experience strongest focus on PL related to *leading people* and *leading change*.
- HTs with 7+ years' experience more likely to rate valuable or interesting and less likely to select essential.

5) Implications for Professional Learning for HTs

- Design PL with HTs, drawing on their expressed needs and their expertise.
- Consider differing PL needs at different career stages, from early/new headship to experienced/ long-serving HTs: staged PL pathways?
- Consider PL that is sustainable, contextually relevant, aligned with current priorities/challenges and enquiry based.
- Ensure flexibility and choice within national and local PL offers.
- Ensure PL for HTs anticipates and responds to national policy direction.
- How might we embed opportunities for HT networking and mentoring?

6) Focus Group Volunteers

Fifteen Headteachers representing ten local authorities indicated they would like to meet in focus groups to discuss the results of the questionnaire and implications for the Professional Learning programme for 2026- 2027.

Appendix: Comments from Headteachers

Networking
- *In some form, they are all essential. The most helpful things I have learned to support my role as HT have been from networking with other HT's, whether at the SLS Conference or at SLS-related CLPL events or through things like Education Scotland's 'Leading the How of Change'.*
- *Additionally, I feel that hearing from others and learning about the approaches they are taking would be highly beneficial. Having space to collaborate, exchange practical strategies, and discuss what is working well in different contexts could support improved practice across the board and help us feel more connected in our professional roles.*
- *For me, in my context, networking and coaching are things I am looking for and would find valuable.*
- *Networking and learning from others is essential. Have you considered offering professional learning sets? Would be great for networking & learning.*
- *Professional learning sets. Coaching triads, meeting new people across various LAs and sharing practice. Themed events with time for talk e.g. BGE curriculum linked to attainment and T & M, moderation*

School Inspections

- *We remain in the dark and uncertain as what school inspections will look like in the future. At the heart of the inspection process MUST lie the wellbeing and welfare of all school staff going through the process. GRADES MUST be removed - they mislead and misinform the outcomes and in my opinion are certainly not an equal playing field. GREATER appreciation of school context alongside local authority policy and priorities must be key in how a school is supported and how outcomes for the school are determined.*
- *Inspection continues to be a source of interest and area where greater clarity and demystification around the process and outcomes would be useful. I also think linking this with networking is incredibly useful. Experiences shared and discussed to support improvement, from peers, is of great interest.*
- *Previous sessions with HMIE and schools sharing practice were excellent and would be good to hear from schools recently inspected as the focus changes through time.*

ASN

- *Managing ASN is now proving to be a significant challenge with very limited resources. Having the opportunity to learn effective practice/strategies from schools managing with limited resources, rather than those with significant PEF or other funding, would be beneficial.*
- *The challenge is that we could deem all of these to be a priority. The only thing I have labelled as essential is around ASN but I am genuinely at a loss as to how professional learning can move this forward. It's not really a lack of ideas/ knowledge and understanding. I am very confident in terms of the legislation and what is expected but simply cannot deliver it with current resources.*
- *There is considerable tension in the system at present: ASN % increasing whilst budgets resources and staffing are being squeezed, with the 21-hour debate unresolved and the Curriculum update BOTH adding further uncertainty to our planning.*
- *How to signpost learners and families to the correct supports (financial, mental health other than CAMHS, groups, respite, housing, asylum, visas, health): who, what, where and how.*

Curriculum Reform

- *The national curricular change and timelines given are concerning. The more opportunity to discuss and unpick the better. I consider this the foremost priority at the moment.*
- *I believe that having opportunities for curriculum input would be extremely valuable. Being able to contribute ideas and share viewpoints on curriculum development would help ensure that the learning experiences we provide are relevant, consistent, and reflective of the needs of our learners.*
- *Curriculum reform is essential so that we are not all reinventing the wheel and duplicating work across our schools.*

AI

- *AI - preparing ourselves and our learners for a radically different economy.*
- *AI - using AI to assist in our own productivity as school leaders*
- *AI is moving so quickly that it feels essential to develop both useful tools and processes to utilise it best.*

Budget

- *In times of incredibly challenged funding and resources, managing budgets effectively might be of some support, including accessing grant funding.*

Community Engagement

- *Potentially something around quality work with feeder primary schools - how to have a stronger relationship with them, especially when they are many and geographically diverse.*
- *Project based learning and community links*

Criticality, people and performance

- *The importance of criticality. Improving performance - looking through lens of competency and FTC. Job sizing.*
- *Education research*
- *Critical incidents*
- *Employment law; legal entitlements*

Leadership of Change

- *It is linked with Leadership of Change. Usually, this is related to changes schools have made. A session on Leadership of Change aligned to an improvement science would be good e.g. Agile Leadership.*