Professional Learning Survey: Middle Leader Responses (December 2025)

1) Generic Overview of Respondents (All SLS Members)

What is your role?

• Headteacher	63
• Deputy Headteacher	81
• Middle Leader	21
• Business Manager / Bursar	15
• Other	1
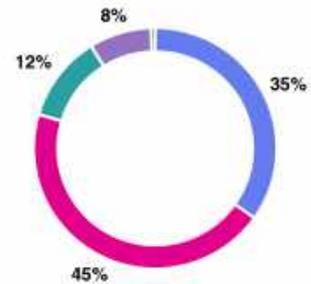
Where are you located?
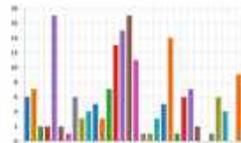
● Aberdeen	6	● Highlands	11
● Aberdeenshire	7	● Inverclyde	1
● Angus	2	● Midlothian	1
● Argyll and Bute	2	● Moray	3
● City of Edinburgh	17	● North Ayrshire	5
● Clackmannanshire	2	● North Lanarkshire	14
● Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	1	● Orkney Islands	1
● Dumfries and Galloway	6	● Perth and Kinross	6
● 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 Middle Leader Responses

There were **21 Middle Leader respondents**, (8% of our ML membership) working across local authority and independent schools in Scotland, and representing a geographical spread.

Length of service of ML respondents:

🔵 0 - 2 years	0	
🟠 3 - 6 years	5	
🟢 7 - 12 years	7	
🔴 More than 12 years	9	
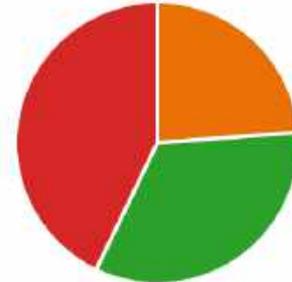
Respondents were asked to evaluate a range of **professional learning priorities**, rating each as:

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

Open-text comments were also provided.

3) Overall Patterns in Professional Learning Priorities

Professional Learning deemed *essential* by over 50% of Middle Leaders

- Leading and Managing People (52.4%)

**Professional Learning deemed *essential* or *valuable* by over 50% of Middle Leaders**

- Preparing for Inspection (38.1%; 28.6%)
- Leadership of Change (33.3%; 61.9%)
- Leadership of Learning and Teaching (38.1%; 57.1%)
- Values led / ethical leadership (23.8%; 28.6%)
- Curriculum Design / Reform (38.1%; 42.9%)
- Assessment and Moderation (33.3%; 42.9%)
- Raising Attainment and Achievement (33.3%; 61.9%)
- Leading and Managing ASN (19%; 42.9%)
- Preparing for Senior Leadership (38.1%; 23.8%)
- AI in Education (14.3%; 57.1%)
- Middle Leader Networking (23.8%; 52.4%)
- Coaching and Mentoring (18.5%; 42%)

List of ratings from ML 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.

■ Essential ■ Valuable ■ Interesting ■ Not a current PL priority
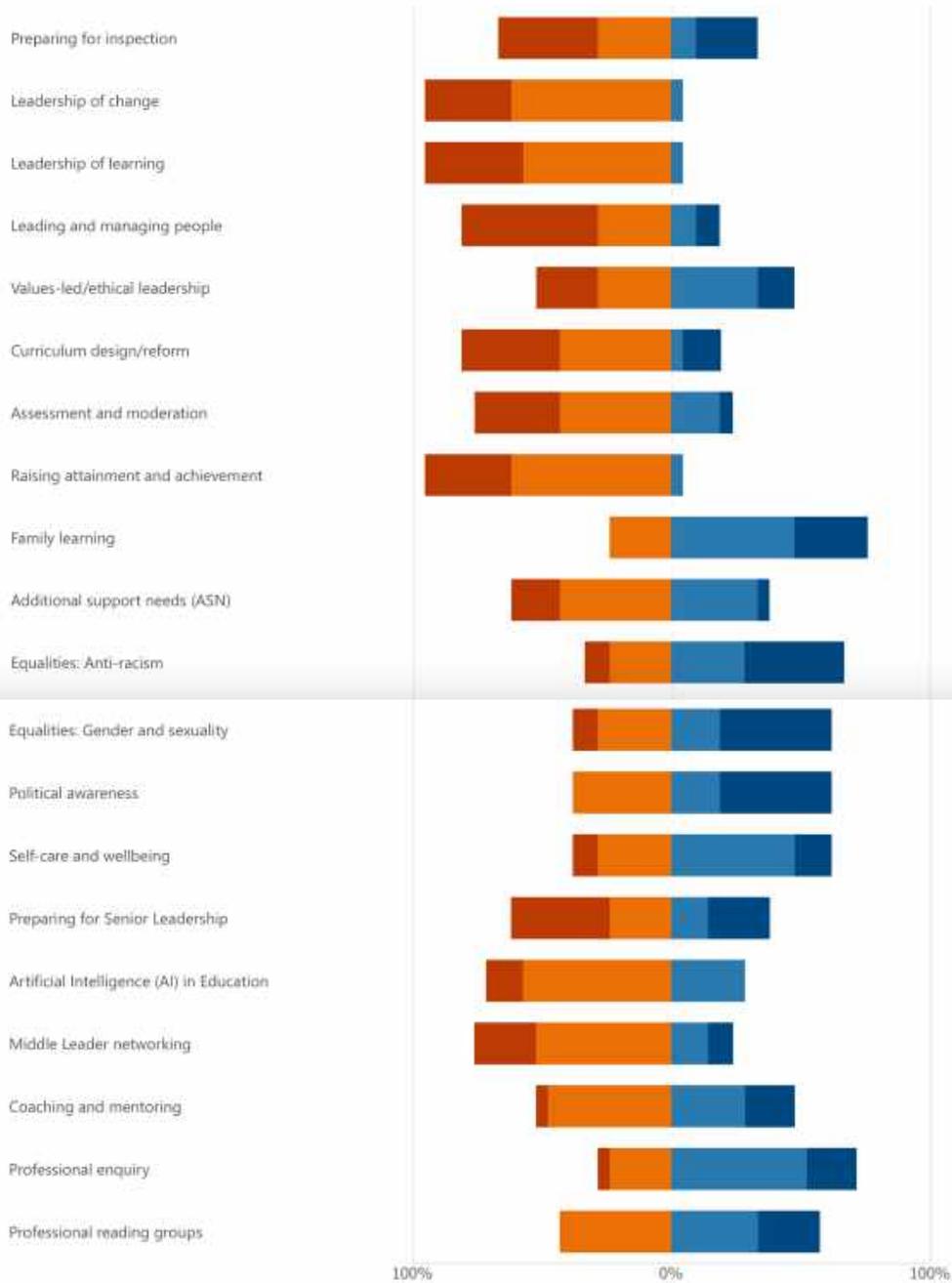
4) Implications for Professional Learning for Middle Leaders

- Design PL with Middle Leaders drawing on their expressed needs and expertise.
- Support aspiration and pathways to Senior Leadership while recognising excellence in the ML role as a valid and valuable PL aspiration.
- PL that recognises the diverse ML roles within secondary schools in Scotland (e.g. pastoral / curricular)
- Consider PL that is sustainable, contextually relevant, and explicitly designed around the unique strategic and operational responsibilities and tensions of the ML role.
- Ensure flexibility and choice within national and local PL offers.
- How might we embed opportunities for networking and mentoring for MLs?

5) Focus Group Volunteers

Five Middle Leaders representing four 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. They will be invited to join one of two online engagement sessions planned for middle leaders on Tuesday 20th and Thursday 22nd January 2026, from 4pm - 5.30pm, focussing on:

1. Middle Leaders' feedback from the PL survey.
2. Plans for professional learning for Middle Leaders.
3. Creating an SLS Middle Leaders' forum.

Link to sign up is here.

Appendix: Comments from Middle Leaders

Professional Enquiry / Bureaucracy

- I am concerned about professional enquiry and query whether we really need to be investigating and then reporting on something every single year. I think it is fair to say we are learning new skills and developing / updating materials, do we need the bureaucracy or writing reports for professional enquiry.

Preparing for Senior Leadership

- Training to develop leadership skills as a Middle Leader and preparing for Senior Leadership would be really helpful. Also leading and managing people as this is something new for Middle Leaders.
- I am interested in a senior leadership role so CLPL on preparing for that would be great.
- An insight into SLT financial management and processes would be interesting and useful.

Preparing for Inspection

- We are due an inspection anytime now. I also feel with all the change that is happening and will happen, leadership of learning and change are an important area for CLPL just now.
- I put Preparation for Inspection as Valuable as if everything else is done right, then we should always be prepared for inspection, and that's often a message that middle leaders are repeating to class teachers as they have so many priorities that it's hard to remember what the important things really are.

Networking

- I would welcome any opportunity to network with other middle leaders (especially from other authorities to my own)

Leading People: challenging conversations

- Partly covered by leading people, but to ensure it's explicit - something around having challenging conversations with staff.

Time Management

- Time management. There is never enough time to complete all the tasks /duties of a Faculty PT.
- Dealing with the huge number of conflicting priorities with no time

Data

- How to create usable data, evaluate data and write reports based on this.