

## Specialist Leaders of Education – Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. What do specialist leaders of education (SLEs) do?**

SLEs act as system leaders, supporting individual leaders and teams in other schools by using a high level coaching or facilitation approach that draws on their knowledge and expertise in their specialist area. This may involve a wide variety of support approaches, including diagnostic models, observations or one-to-one or facilitated group support. Regardless of the type of support model delivered, the ultimate aim of SLEs is always to contribute significantly to improving the outcomes for children through developing the capacity of peer leaders in other schools. SLEs support high quality professional development of leaders. They also play a key role in the development of the self-improving, school led system through school-to-school support and by identifying outstanding future leaders.

### **2. How does someone become an SLE?**

Before beginning an application, individuals must find their nearest or most appropriate teaching school that has the responsibility for recruiting and designating SLEs. Teaching schools will have identified their priorities based on local intelligence and the needs of their alliance and area, and will recruit SLEs according to them. Individuals will be required to complete a two-part application through the College website which will then be passed onto the identified teaching school. Applications are reviewed against the agreed SLE designation criteria. It is strongly recommended that application guidance is read before applying.

Following an initial sift, applicants with appropriate leadership responsibility and experience will be invited to undertake some form of face-to-face assessment, where they will be expected to demonstrate their interpersonal skills, including communication, collaboration and coaching.

### **3. Can a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) become an SLE?**

Currently HLTAs are not able to become SLEs.

### **4. Can an SLE be a specialist in more than one area?**

Yes. However, the SLE approach is about focusing on key strengths.

### **5. Can applicants apply to schools currently applying to be a teaching school alliance?**

Applicants must apply to existing teaching school alliances who are recruiting in each application round. These schools will be indicated by those listed in part one of the application for, and also in the teaching school alliance SLE priorities list published on this website during each application round. It is possible to change teaching school alliances at a later date however, in line with the guidance provided to teaching schools.

### **6. Does an SLE have to be part of a teaching school alliance?**

No, SLEs can come from any school. More information can be found on [Who can become an SLE?](#)

## **7. What is the difference between SLEs and Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs)?**

As with national leaders of education (NLEs) and local leaders of education (LLEs), the SLE concept is about recognising leaders who are excellent at what they do and are able to support leaders in other schools by helping them to develop their leadership skills through coaching and facilitation. In the main ASTs support the professional development of other teachers through raising standards in teaching and learning.

## **8. What training will be offered to SLEs?**

The training model offers one core day of mandatory induction training plus a menu of optional enrichment sessions. The SLE training will be delivered by selected teaching schools around the country. We expect SLEs to have existing facilitation skills, as this requirement is part of the designation criteria, but we hope to further enhance these skills through initial training, ongoing continuing professional development and the role itself.

## **9. How will SLEs be deployed?**

Teaching schools are responsible for brokering support from the SLEs within their alliance or area – ie each teaching school has an SLE ‘pool’. Working with the schools and other partners in their alliance, they identify where SLE support is needed, which could be in any school in the alliance but is likely to be in those schools that are facing particular challenges (and are prioritised accordingly). They will match SLEs in their pool with a leader or leaders in another school, liaising with the SLE and his/her own school to negotiate capacity and availability to be deployed. Multiple teaching school alliances may choose to join their SLE pools together to enable schools needing support to access an even wider range of expertise. Local Authorities and other brokers may also engage SLEs through teaching school alliances.

## **10. What time commitment is expected of SLEs?**

There is no pre-defined time commitment for a deployment, as models and types of deployments will vary. For example, one deployment might be a two day diagnostic exercise, whilst another might require a three month full time support role. If an applicant, or headteacher of an applicant, has concerns or queries regarding capacity to be an SLE they should contact their teaching school alliance to discuss the situation before applying.

## **11. Can an SLE be deployed within their own school, if no deployments are available externally?**

No, SLEs should be deployed beyond their own schools in response to local needs. The main objective of the SLE programme is for SLEs to support the developmental needs of peers, through outreach work. Many SLEs will no doubt continue to use their skills and experience to help support the development of colleagues in their own schools, as a part of their role as a middle or senior leader, but this does not count as a deployment as an SLE.

## **12. Are SLEs funded and if so, where does the funding come from?**

There may be payment for specific SLE deployments, either from schools receiving support or from other sources or commissioning bodies, to help the SLE’s school towards reimbursement for ‘backfill’ or supply cover. However any such payment will be agreed and managed by the headteachers and

governors of the schools concerned, in line with statutory guidance. Different models and approaches have been developed over time; for example, some schools have agreed to 'swap' SLEs on a cost-neutral exchange basis, or schools within a teaching school alliance have jointly agreed a day rate for SLE time within their group.

There are no plans to have an SLE pay spine or to provide formal financial reward for individual SLEs. We do recognise that some other teacher designations currently have a formal financial reward, however the SLE approach is in line with that for NLEs and LLEs, where any individual remuneration is agreed by the parties involved.

### **13. What is the length of designation and is there a reassessment at the end of this period?**

SLEs are normally designated for four years, after which time designations should be reviewed against the criteria as well as against local needs and priorities, taking into account 'supply and demand'. Designations should be reviewed at an earlier stage if there is a change in the SLE's circumstances, an SLE has not been deployed for 12 months, or if a potential issue arises which would be likely to lead to de-designation. The review of the designation process is available.

### **14. What happens if an SLE changes role or school?**

If an SLE changes role or school, the SLE's designation should be reviewed by the appropriate teaching school. If the SLE is moving to a new location, they will also need to identify a new teaching school. The review will determine whether the SLE can retain their designation and will take into account whether:

- the SLE continues to meet the criteria within their new role
- they will still have capacity to undertake the role, and their new school is able to release them for outreach work
- the SLE meets the priorities of the new teaching school (if appropriate) and will contribute to achieving their KPIs

### **15. Can an SLE change teaching school alliances even if they haven't changed role or school?**

Yes they can, but it must be with the agreement between the SLE's school, their existing alliance and their new one. Teaching schools have been provided with guidance on this process to ensure considerations are made to deployments, backfill and capacity.

### **16. Is there an SLE appeals process?**

Yes there is an agreed process for both designation and de-designation appeals. Initially we will expect individuals to have an informal discussion with their teaching school. However, if they then wish to proceed to a formal appeal, there will be a process in place involving the College, a national appeals panel and, where necessary, the College's adjudicator.

### **17. What happens if the SLE's teaching school is de-designated?**

As teaching schools designate SLEs, each SLE is therefore 'attached' to a teaching school alliance. If the teaching school is de-designated, we will support them through this process and will consider whether the SLEs can be attached to another teaching school.

### **18. How do SLEs fit in with teaching schools, National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and Local Leaders of Education (LLEs)?**

The SLE designation builds on the success of the NLE and LLE designations, by delivering system leadership support to peers in other schools – the difference being that SLEs work at middle or senior leadership level rather than headship level. As with the NLE and LLE approaches, the SLE concept is about recognising leaders who are excellent at what they do and are able to help leaders in others schools to improve. (It is possible that a school could be supported by an NLE/LLE and an SLE at the same time – in which case both designated professionals should ensure they work together, on shared priorities.) The National College is responsible for the designation and quality assurance of teaching schools, NLEs and LLEs. Teaching Schools, in turn, are responsible for the designation, de-designation, brokering and quality assurance of SLEs.

### **19. How do SLEs fit with local authorities (LAs)?**

LAs may want to commission and fund SLE support for schools within the authority, particularly those in challenging circumstances. We envisage that many teaching schools will liaise with their LAs to help identify the needs of schools in their alliance or area, to identify potential new SLEs and to broker support. In some cases, teaching schools may even choose to engage an LA as a strategic partner within an alliance. In these instances the alliance may agree that the LA has a role in brokering SLE deployments.