



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# **Specialist leaders of education (SLE)**

## **Application guidance**

# Summary

**About this guidance** This is non-statutory advice from the National College for Teaching & Leadership. It has been produced to support potential applicants by explaining the application and reference requirements and the SLE assessment process.

**Who is this guidance for?** School leaders, staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies and early years settings; who meet the eligibility criteria

**Contact information** If you have any questions about the application process, contact us at [sle.enquiries@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sle.enquiries@education.gsi.gov.uk)

## Related documents

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/specialist-leaders-of-education-a-guide-for-potential-applicants>

The following documents are available on the web pages above:

- Example of the SLE application form
- Application guidance for referees
- Designation appeals procedure for applicants
- SLE de-designation policy and criteria
- Case studies on deployment

# Specialist leaders of education (SLEs)

## SLE application guidance

### What is an SLE?

SLEs are outstanding middle and senior leaders in positions below the headteacher, with at least two years' leadership experience. They have a particular area of expertise (such as a subject area, early years, behaviour or school business management) and a successful track record of school improvement.

SLEs support leaders in other schools. They have excellent interpersonal skills, are able to work sensitively and collaboratively with others and have a commitment to outreach work. They understand what outstanding leadership practice in their area of specialism looks like and can help other leaders to achieve it in their own context.

The SLE role is about developing other middle and senior leaders so that they have the skills to lead their own teams and improve practice in their own schools. This may be done through one-to-one peer coaching or facilitated group support and could involve a variety of activities, such as data analysis, coaching or joint action planning.

SLEs can come from any school or academy, including nursery, primary, secondary, special, pupil referral unit, independent or free school, or sixth form college. Whilst the individual must be outstanding, his or her school does not have to be.

The aim was to designate 5000 SLEs by March 2015. We exceeded this target and there are currently over 6000 SLEs.

### How it works

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. Time may be taken as a block of consecutive days or spread over a longer period. There is no defined time commitment for deployments; this should be agreed between all parties. However, SLEs and schools will need to think carefully about the likely commitment and capacity.

SLEs will meet the needs and demands of the system and are being actively deployed. We would like to see at least half of SLEs deployed within three months of designation. SLEs will be expected to show evidence that their work has had a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people by developing leadership capacity in other schools.

Teaching schools are responsible for the recruitment, designation, brokerage, deployment and quality assurance of SLEs. Each teaching school has a number of SLEs that it is responsible for. Teaching schools alliances may choose to network and join their SLEs together to offer an even wider range of expertise.

More information about the eligibility criteria, what's involved and who can become an SLE is available on the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.

### Headteacher support

Applicants who apply for the programme **must** have the support and agreement of their headteacher, who will confirm that the school has the capacity to release them. The headteacher will act as the applicant's referee and will complete a reference section in the application form. They will need to provide a supporting statement showing evidence of how the applicant meets the criteria and how he or she has supported a middle or senior leader from another school or academy.

## Funding and support

Your teaching school will ensure that there is support available for you where required. Our team will also be on hand to answer any questions you may have.

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 own school with reimbursement for backfill or supply cover. Any such payment will be agreed and managed at the local level by the teaching school and/or other schools involved.

## Before you begin your application

- **Check that you are eligible to become an SLE.** The current criteria and approved areas of expertise are available at <https://www.gov.uk/specialist-leaders-of-education-a-guide-for-potential-applicantse>. You will need to give evidence that you meet all areas of the SLE eligibility criteria and are outstanding in at least one of the approved SLE areas of expertise. You may find it useful to refer to the table on page six/seven of this document, which details how the application questions link to the eligibility criteria.
- **Choose a teaching school alliance.** Teaching school alliances have identified the priorities of their alliance or area and will be recruiting SLEs in accordance with their needs. You can apply to any teaching school alliance, but it is recommended that you apply to one that has identified your specialism as a priority for recruitment and that you are close enough geographically to undertake deployments that may be assigned to you.. **You will need to contact the school directly to obtain information regarding whether they are recruiting SLEs, their school's recruitment priorities and to obtain a copy of the application form.** Once the application and referee sections have been completed, the application will need to be returned directly to the teaching school you are applying to. The teaching school in question will provide return contact details at the bottom of the application form.
- **Talk to your referee.** Your application must be supported by your headteacher or principal. The reference is an essential part of your application and we **strongly recommend** that you discuss your application with your headteacher, before applying, to ensure that you have his or her support. Share the application guidance with your headteacher and be sure to allow sufficient time for him or her to complete your reference and return your application before the deadline.
- **Set sufficient time aside.** The SLE application process requires you to provide significant evidence about your eligibility for the role. You should set aside sufficient time to think about, discuss and complete the application form appropriately.
- **Have your personal and school information to hand.** When you complete the application form, you will need to enter or verify certain information about yourself, your school and your referee. Details can be found in the next section of this document.

## The application form

The SLE application form is a word document, and is to be obtained from the teaching school you wish to apply to. A PDF [example version](#) is available on the National College website prior to and during the application window.

- **All the questions are mandatory.** It is not possible for your application form to be considered unless all the questions are completed.
- Some parts of the application form have character limits (stated on the form) that will include spaces and bullet points.
- Once you have completed your application form, you will need to send it to your headteacher to complete the reference section. Once complete, your headteacher will need to return the document using the contact details provided by the teaching school at the bottom of the application form. Your application will not be considered until this has been completed.
- The document returned must be in Word format (.doc or .docx), not a PDF or any other format.

**It is your responsibility to ensure that your headteacher receives, completes and submits your application form before the application window closes.**

## Application questions

The table below details the application questions and shows how they link to the eligibility criteria. This will help applicants ensure that they provide the appropriate evidence in each response.

Application question	How the question links to the eligibility criteria
<b>Specialist area(s) of expertise</b>	
Please indicate your specialist area(s) and the length of time you have been a specialist within that field	You can list as many specialist areas as you feel are necessary. However, they must take into account the priorities of the teaching school and the areas of expertise.
<b>General</b>	
Do you hold a leadership role or responsibility within your school?	<b>Experience:</b> SLEs will have a minimum of two years' experience in a leadership role within a school or academy.
Please indicate how long you have been in this role. <i>If fewer than two years, please detail your previous leadership role or responsibility and the name of the school where you held this role.</i>	<b>Experience:</b> SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders with at least two years' experience and excellent knowledge in a particular field of expertise. SLEs will have a minimum of two years' experience in a leadership role within a school or academy.
<b>Leadership experience and capacity</b>	
Question 1: <i>What motivates you to participate in system leadership?</i>	<b>Capacity and commitment:</b> SLEs will have a commitment to outreach work, and the capacity to undertake such work. <b>Track record:</b> SLEs will have a successful track record, supported by substantial evidence of impact of working effectively within their own school and/or across a group of schools or working with a range of leaders within a single school.
Question 2: <i>Please outline the significant impact of your contribution as a leader to supporting leaders in other schools or to your own school's performance. Please detail the impact and demonstrate clear evidence of your outstanding practice within your area(s) of expertise or specialism.</i>	<b>Experience:</b> SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders with at least two years' experience and excellent knowledge in a particular field of expertise. <b>Track record:</b> SLEs will have a successful track record, supported by substantial evidence of impact of working effectively within their own school and/or across a group of schools, or working with a range of leaders within a single school. <b>Skills:</b> SLEs will have an understanding of what constitutes 'outstanding' in their field of expertise and the ability and confidence to articulate this. SLEs will have an appreciation of how their specialism and skills can contribute to the wider school improvement agenda.

<p>Question 3: <i>Please provide examples of where you have worked sensitively with peer colleagues using coaching or facilitation skills to grow leadership capacity in others leading to sustainable improvements.</i></p>	<p><b>Track record:</b> SLEs will have evidence of successfully using coaching and/or facilitation skills to bring about sustainable improvements. SLEs will have excellent communication and interpersonal skills. SLEs will have the ability to utilise high levels of emotional intelligence to work sensitively and collaboratively with peer colleagues.</p>
<p>Question 4: <i>Please provide a clear example of a time when you have significantly challenged, collaborated, motivated and/or inspired your colleagues to establish new, innovative working practices. What was the impact?</i></p>	<p><b>Skills:</b> SLEs will have excellent communication and interpersonal skills. SLEs will have an analytical approach in identifying needs and the ability to prioritise accordingly, including the ability to set and establish new and innovative working practices.</p>
<p>Question 5: <i>Please give excerpts from Ofsted reports if your practice has been cited there and/or performance results/outcomes you have been accountable for in your area of work have been commented on. Please reference clearly the Ofsted report(s) where these comments are made as these may be verified</i></p>	<p><b>Track record:</b> SLEs will have a successful track record, supported by substantial evidence of impact of working effectively within their own school and/or across a group of schools, or working with a range of leaders within a single school.</p>
<p><b>Additional information</b></p>	
<p><i>Please provide any other information that demonstrates your expert knowledge in your field of expertise in support of your application.</i></p>	<p><b>Experience, skills, track record, capacity and commitment:</b> SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders with at least two years' experience and excellent knowledge in a particular field of expertise.</p>

## General support

For general queries, please refer to the information on the National College website, including the FAQs at <https://www.gov.uk/specialist-leaders-of-education-a-guide-for-potential-applicants>. If this does not answer your query, please email the SLE team at [sle.enquiries@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sle.enquiries@education.gsi.gov.uk).

## Confidentiality and data protection

By submitting your online application form, you are giving your consent to the following conditions in relation to confidentiality and data protection:

### School to School Support Directory

Details of SLE specialisms via a teaching school alliance will be added to a [national register of system leaders](#). This will be available to the public and easily accessible by National College staff, the Department for Education, relevant local authority school improvement personnel, schools and other such trusted individuals or organisations who may wish to commission SLE services. Information on when and where an SLE is deployed may also be shared with individuals and organisations if agreed by the SLE and/or teaching school in order to:

- Help monitor supply and demand for SLE deployments

- Help to prepare case studies and good news stories
- Provide national and regional statistics on the number of types of deployment
- Help the National College to monitor the impact of the programme

## The assessment process

### **Assessment**

Teaching schools will be responsible for assessing applicants. This includes carrying out the initial sift, selection, assessment activities and final designation. Teaching schools are committed to ensuring that they manage a fair and open process.

### **Face-to-face activities**

Teaching schools will invite successful applicants to undertake some form of face-to-face assessment activities. Assessment activities may include an individual presentation and/or interview and/or an observed group discussion. The teaching school will provide details and requirements before your assessment.

A panel from the teaching school will assess applicants against the agreed SLE designation criteria. A headteacher from another teaching school, a national leader of education (NLE) or local leader of education (LLE) is required to form part of the panel and will have a formal role in ensuring consistency and moderation throughout the assessment process. They will be responsible for formally supporting and signing off the designation process.

Teaching schools will submit their designation recommendations to the National College for validation. We will confirm outcomes to the teaching school, which will then communicate designation outcomes to applicants in writing.