

Becoming a Specialist Leader of Education (SLE)

Guidance for Applicants

Who can apply?

To become an SLE, you need to have been in a leadership role below the level of headteacher for at least 2 years. Your headteacher will be asked to confirm that you are in an appropriate role. Higher level teaching assistants are not eligible to apply.

You can be from any type or phase of school.

You don't need to be in an outstanding school or a school that is part of a [teaching school alliance](#), but your school will need to have the capacity to release you to work in other schools. You must have at least 1 specialism from our areas of expertise, which are based on the 4 areas of focus for Ofsted.

Ofsted focus	Areas of expertise
Leadership and management	Academies and academy transition; assessment; leadership of continuing professional development; school business management and financial management; leadership of curriculum
Pupil achievement	Art; closing the gap; drama; design and technology; early years; English; geography; history; information and communication technology; maths; modern foreign languages; music; phonics; physical education; personal, social and health education; religious education; science; special educational needs; support for the most able pupils
Quality of teaching	Initial teacher training and newly qualified teacher development
Behaviour and safety	Behaviour and discipline; attendance

To be successful in your application, you should have:

- a successful track record of working effectively within your own school and/or across a group of schools, or working with a range of leaders within a single school
- evidence of successfully using coaching and/or facilitation skills to bring about sustainable improvements
- excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- an understanding of what constitutes 'outstanding' in your field of expertise and the ability and confidence to communicate this
- an understanding of how your specialism and skills can contribute to wider school improvement goals
- an analytical approach to identifying and prioritising needs
- the ability to set and establish new and innovative working practices
- the ability to grow leadership capacity in others

SLE Application Process

Application windows:

The National College no longer has set application windows for SLEs. However, in the East Region Delivery Centres have agreed to application window deadlines of:

- May 31st
- October 31st

These dates are to allow Delivery Centres to set training at appropriate times during the academic year. They also ensure that a sufficiently large cohort has applied to make training viable. An prospective SLE can apply at any time but may not find a training session available until after the deadlines stated above.

If you are interested in becoming an SLE:

- Attend an information session – if offered by the TSA
- Download an application form from the website or contact the Teaching School you wish to work with
- Ask your Head Teacher to check that he/she is willing to support your work outside of school and pay for the compulsory Core Training
- Fill in the application form, contact your referees. request references and send back to the Teaching School

If you are successful at this stage you will be invited to an assessment day which will consist of:

- A presentation
- Formal interview questions
- There may also be a written exercise and/or a group exercise on this day

The final assessment stage is a Compulsory Core Training Day

- This is a standardised day for the Eastern Region
- A certificate designating you as an SLE will only be given on the successful completion of this day
- There will be pre-task activities that you will be asked to undertake by your SLE Coordinator before you attend this day

SLE Application Guidance

The SLE application form is accessible from the Teaching School to which you wish to apply to during the application round. This guidance document aims to support potential applicants by explaining the application and reference requirements and the assessment process.

Before you begin your application

- **Check that you are eligible to become a SLE:** SLE designation is open to individuals that hold middle or senior leadership roles in schools and who have particular area(s) of expertise. We do not plan to try to define precisely middle or senior leadership – we recognise that roles and responsibilities are different in different schools and that routes to leadership are not always straightforward. The headteacher of a potential SLE will be asked therefore to confirm that the individual holds a middle or senior leadership position. There are rigorous eligibility criteria. You will need to evidence that you meet all areas of the criteria and are outstanding in at least one of the agreed SLE areas of expertise. For the current criteria and agreed areas of expertise, please refer to the Teaching School website or ‘Who can apply’ document in this pack. Please note that although SLEs themselves must be outstanding at what they do, they do not have to come from outstanding schools - they can come from any school.
- **Read through the application questions:** To help you complete your application form, the application questions are shown in the table below. The table also shows how the evidence provided in your application will be assessed against the eligibility criteria.
- **Talk to your referees:** Your application must be supported by two references: one from your current headteacher/principal and a second from a middle or senior leader you have supported. The references are an essential part of your application, and we strongly recommend that you contact your referees to explain your application and to make them aware of the deadline. It is very important that referees complete and return their forms in a timely fashion since, otherwise, there is a chance that the Teaching School assessing your application will not consider it complete.
- **Set sufficient time aside:** Applying for SLE designation is a thorough and rigorous process, requiring you to provide evidence about your readiness for the role. You should set aside plenty of time to think about, discuss and complete the application form.
- **Print the guidance:** You are strongly advised to print a copy of this guidance document so that you can refer to it when completing your application.

- **Have your personal and school information to hand:** When you start the application form you will need to enter or verify certain information about yourself, your school and your referees. Details can be found in the application process section of this document.

The application form

The application form is completed and returned to the Teaching School to which you wish to apply. It is essential that you provide an accurate email address on the form. This email address will be used for all subsequent contact with you.

Key points to note about the form

- You can access the SLE application form from your teaching school.
- You are advised to inform your referees' as soon as possible after you start the application, to give them the maximum possible time to complete their references You must submit the final application form by the deadline.

How the application questions link to the eligibility criteria

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

	Application information requested	How the question links to the eligibility criteria
General	Leadership Role Please confirm you hold a leadership role or responsibility within your school.	Experience <input type="checkbox"/> SLEs will have a minimum of two years' experience in a leadership role within a school or academy.
	Please confirm you have at least two years' experience in your current role. If you have indicated 'no' to the question above, please detail your previous leadership role or responsibility and school name.	Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders, with at least two years' experience and a first-class 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.

Specialist area(s) of expertise	Your Specialism Please indicate your specialist area(s) and the length of time you have been a specialist within the selected field(s) of expertise.	Experience <input type="checkbox"/> SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders, with at least two years' experience and a first-class knowledge in a particular field of expertise.
	Question 1. What motivates you to engage in system leadership?	Capacity and commitment <input type="checkbox"/> SLEs will have a commitment to outreach work, and the capacity to undertake such work.
Leadership experience and capacity	Question 2a. As a leader, please outline the significant impact of your contribution to supporting leaders in other schools, or to your own school's performance, detailing the impact of this, and demonstrating clear evidence of your outstanding practice within your area/s of expertise/specialism.	Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders, with at least two years' experience and a first-class knowledge in a particular field of expertise. Track record <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLEs will have a successful track record, supported by substantial impact evidence, 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. Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
Ofsted/ results	Question 2b Please detail performance results/ outcomes you have been accountable for, in your area of work (please cite sources as these may be verified).	Track record <input type="checkbox"/> SLEs will have a successful track record, supported by substantial impact evidence, 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>Leadership experience and capacity</p>	<p>Question 3 Please provide examples of where you have worked sensitively and collaboratively with peer colleagues using coaching/facilitation skills to grow leadership capacity in other leaders leading to sustainable improvements.</p>	<p>Track record</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • SLEs will have the ability to grow leadership capacity in others. □
<p>Leadership experience and capacity</p>	<p>Question 4. Please provide an example of significance where you have challenged, collaborated, motivated and inspired your peer colleagues to set and establish new and innovative working practices. How did you approach this? What impact did this have?</p>	<p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLEs will have excellent communication and interpersonal skills. • SLEs will have an analytical approach in identifying the needs and ability to prioritise accordingly, including the ability to set and establish new and innovative working practices.
	<p>Questions 5 Please address each area, evidencing where you have utilised each skill and the positive impact you have brought about.</p>	<p>Skills and Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 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. □ SLEs will have an analytical approach in identifying the needs and ability to prioritise accordingly, including the ability to set and establish new and innovative working practices

	<p>Additional Information. Please detail any other qualifications which demonstrates your first-class knowledge in your field of expertise, which you feel is relevant to support your application</p>	<p>Experience</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders, with at least two years' experience and a first-class knowledge in a particular field of expertise.</p>
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References

As part of the application process you will be required to provide contact details for **two referees** to support your application. One must be the headteacher/principal of the school in which you are currently employed. The other referee must be a middle or senior leader you have supported in another school (or if you do not have experience in another school it is possible to include a referee from someone you have supported within your own school). Please refer to the **second referee document**. This should be sent to your second referee for completion. Each referee will be required to complete a supporting statement to provide evidence relating to how you meet the eligibility criteria for the role.

You are advised to contact your referees as soon as possible after you start the application, to give them the maximum possible time to complete their references.

How evidence provided by your referees will be assessed against the eligibility criteria

Referee	How the referee's evidence links to the eligibility criteria
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<p>Headteacher /principal</p>	<p>Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLEs will be outstanding middle or senior leaders, with at least two years' experience and a first-class knowledge in a particular field of expertise. <p>Track record</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLEs will have a successful track record, supported by substantial impact evidence, 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>Capacity and commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLEs will have a commitment to outreach work, and the capacity to undertake such work. SLEs will be supported in their application by their headteacher and chair of governors, and be able to be released from their school for a mutually agreed allocation of time. <p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. SLEs will have an analytical approach in identifying the needs and ability to prioritise accordingly, including the ability to set and establish new and innovative working practices.
<p>Middle or senior leader you have supported</p>	<p>Track record</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLEs will have a successful track record, supported by substantial impact evidence, 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. SLEs will have evidence of successfully using coaching and/or facilitation skills to bring about sustainable improvements. <p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. SLEs will have the ability the ability to grow leadership capacity in others (and how you as the recipient of the applicant's support have grown as a leader).

The Assessment Process

Initial sift

An initial sift will be undertaken by the Teaching School when the recruitment round closes. This sift will check that applications meet the following minimum criteria:

- The application form has been fully completed Two references have been completed.
- The applicant is a middle/senior leader, with a minimum of two years' experience in a particular field of expertise
- The applicant has at least two years' experience in a leadership role within a school or academy

Applications which do not meet the minimum criteria from the initial sift will be considered unsuccessful.

Assessment

The Teaching School will then invite applicants to undertake a face to face assessment, in the form of an individual presentation and a formal interview.

The individual presentation to the panel will be on the theme detailed by the individual Teaching School, with an opportunity for questions from the assessment panel at the end.

Each applicant will be notified in advance about the length of their individual presentation. On average this would usually not be more than 10 minutes.

The assessment panel will review all presentations, with this review forming part of the overall judgement against the criteria.

You may be asked to consider and talk about a given scenario, such as the one listed below:

Consider the following scenario and discuss what issues and challenges it raises for an SLE deployed in another school. What strategies might you use to resolve these issues?

You are asked as an SLE to support a leader in another school for which you have been given in advance some performance data relating to your field of expertise. Following introductions, you are given an informal tour of the school along with some short drop-in lesson observations. Through these observations it becomes apparent that some priorities are not consistently understood or may be misplaced; and some strategies for improvement seem unlikely to realise the desired outcomes. The leader you are supporting seems unaware of these issues.

SLEs will

- have excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- have an appreciation of how their specialism and skills can contribute to the wider school improvement agenda
- have an analytical approach in identifying the needs and ability to prioritise accordingly, including the ability to set and establish new and innovative working practices
- have the ability to grow leadership capacity in others

Additional Optional Assessment

In addition the Teaching School may also ask you to take part in a group exercise or a written task.

Following this final stage of the assessment process, the Teaching School will communicate decisions within 14 days.

Summary of key dates

The table below details the process.

Activity
Application round opens
Application round including references closes
Teaching schools review applications and references that have passed the initial sift, and invite applicants to attend the face-to-face assessment stage
Assessment day
Teaching schools communicate decisions to applicants
SLE core training begins

