



Stronger school leadership and teaching

Information brief

Improving education through the School Leadership Programme



Introduction

The School Leadership Programme (SLP) was launched in 2024 by the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) in Sierra Leone. It is a free, year-long course designed to improve the knowledge and skills of school leaders – including headteachers and senior teachers – to achieve the competencies in the School Leader Competency Framework for Sierra Leone described in the Design Report for the National School Leadership (2023). The programme's goal is to ensure that all Junior Secondary (JSS) and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) have qualified, capable and professional leaders who can lead safe, inclusive, quality learning for all pupils.

The first cohort was selected in April 2024 and comprised 150 school leaders from schools in five districts (Bo, Bombali, Kailahun, Port Loko, Western Rural). A second cohort of 350 school leaders joined the programme in October 2024.

"The highlight for me has been learning about inclusion... I hope every teacher takes this course to learn how to support all children."

Alphonso Kargbo, Principal,
Western Rural



500
SLP participants in Year One

97%
report they learned something new from the SLP

49%
SLP participants are aspiring leaders

17%
SLP participants are female

Course structure

The SLP covers a Core Course that consists of a foundational module followed by three substantive modules: **Leading School Safety and Inclusion; Leading Teaching and Learning; Leading School Improvements.**

The foundational module is a three-day, face-to-face, district-level workshop led by a small team of Local Leaders of Learning (LLLs). Attendees are introduced to the content and approach of the programmes – including preparation for self-study and use of the course materials (or toolkits). This module also provides an opportunity for leaders to meet other SLP participants and their LLL who will be their main contact point throughout.

School leaders go on to complete one substantive module per term though self-study that is supported through visits from their LLL (twice each term) and remote support via phone calls and WhatsApp conversations. Each module also requires completion of practical assignments that support participants to use the new knowledge and skills they have acquired to make real impact in their own schools. School leaders are also encouraged to support each other in WhatsApp groups. Participants meet together at the end of every module to reflect on learning and to prepare for the next module.

Distinctive elements of the SLP

- **School leaders are selected to participate in the SLP after a rigorous application process.** The TSC reviews applications and makes a final selection based on a set of criteria that are shared in the application guidelines. There were 350 applications to join the first cohort in April 2024, with 150 school leaders selected to participate in the course (23% female). For cohort two, there were 700 applications from which 350 participants were selected (15% female).
- **Participants include vice-principals, Heads of Department and teachers who aspire to become school leaders.** Although the majority of participants across both cohorts are principals (62% for cohort one and 44% for cohort two) aspiring leaders are also encouraged to apply. The rationale behind this approach is two-fold: i) effectively leading a secondary school requires a school leadership team; ii) Sierra Leone needs a pipeline of competent school leaders for building quality, safe and inclusive education environments.
- **Participants commit to self-study outside of school hours.** Most course participants report spending between two and four hours on coursework every week – a considerable time commitment and a show of dedication for creating safer, more inclusive, better quality schools in Sierra Leone.
- **Multi-media course materials and support are provided throughout the Core Course.** Participants' self-study is facilitated through toolkits and WhatsApp discussion prompts and video clips that are linked to assignments (the toolkits and video clips are also available online). In a survey conducted in October 2024 with cohort one, 53% said they complete tasks and assignments by writing directly into the toolkit, while 41% said they view the workbook on a screen and type in their responses – indicating the importance of providing both options to maximise participant inclusion. Some also report that they have gained a lot of value from the digital facilitation and engagement, including improving their digital literacy.
- **Participants' feedback on the SLP is very positive.** Nearly all cohort one participants (97%) report that they have learned something new from the course and that it is important to their work as a school leader. Meanwhile 94% say that LLLs are extremely supportive.

What's next for the SLP?

The first roll out of the SLP has largely been a success, but there remain opportunities for improvements in terms of competency assessments, female teachers' inclusion, quality assurance, scalability and sustainability. The TSC is developing responses to each of these points.

Learning assessment

Coursework completed by SLP participants is assessed to determine understanding, but it is vital to establish their competencies and how these are being applied to create safe and inclusive schools where all children are learning effectively. The TSC has developed a proposal for course assessment, which can be rolled out for the first two cohorts and future cohorts.

Equity and inclusion

Women are under-represented in school leadership positions across Sierra Leone with only 8% of principals in JSS and SSS principals being female in 2025. This low representation was in part responsible for the proportion of women applying for the SLP and subsequently participating in the programme. The TSC is committed to ensuring that more women apply for and complete the SLP, ensuring Sierra Leone has more female teachers who are eligible for school leadership positions. They will encourage female teachers to apply during each round of application through advertising materials and school visits by TSC Deputy Directors and other education officials, making it clear that the programme is open to aspiring leaders as well as Principals.

Quality assurance

Managing the effective implementation of the SLP requires monitoring the extent to which it is being delivered to a high standard, therefore implementing quality assurance measures. For example, it is important to determine whether LLLs are making two visits to school leaders every term, report on what they do when they visit, and assess whether all participants have received printed copies of their toolkit. The TSC has designed an initial Quality Assurance process to establish the frequency and type of support provided by LLLs and tracking module completion for roll out for the first two cohorts starting in April 2025.

Scalability

The initial design and implementation of the SLP was developed in 2024/25 through the Leh Wi Lan programme, which is funded by UK International Development. In the 2025/26 academic year, the TSC will scale up the SLP for implementation in all 16 districts of Sierra Leone with the aim of reaching around 3,000 participants before the Leh Wi Lan programme ends in 2028. To achieve this target – and to support effective assessment and quality assurance of the SLP – it is likely that the programme will need to be transferred to an online Learning Management System (LMS) such as those used in Higher Education Institutions to offer courses remotely.

The need for competent school leaders will remain beyond the lifetime of Leh Wi Lan and funding from UK International Development. Incumbent school leaders will retire and/or leave the profession and there will be an ongoing demand for the SLP from aspiring school leaders. A next step for the TSC is to understand what demand for the SLP will look like in the medium- and long-term, and to establish ways to sustain implementation.

"The course is an inspiration... It gives us insights on how to administer our schools, how to better coordinate, collaborate and communicate with others."

Alhaji Salim Swaray, Port Loko



"I've learned that children from priority groups, who have long suffered neglect, are the reason the government has been working tirelessly to promote the inclusion policy."

Kadijatu Valerie Kamara,
Head of Department, Port Loko



Sustainability

Sustaining the SLP is perhaps the biggest challenge in terms of maintaining demand and funding. Currently, the SLP is in demand by established and aspiring school leaders, but the system will need to establish an incentive(s) to sustain this. The TSC is already planning to introduce a School Leadership Policy which will require completion of the SLP in order to be eligible for a position as a school leader.

Although the course is currently free, there is also a question around who will pay for the SLP in the medium- and long-term. One option is for participants to pay programme fees, but it is unlikely that the additional salary for promotion to school leadership positions will be sufficient to support an up-front payment for the course and would exclude aspiring leaders. If other funding sources can be identified and an LMS is introduced to host the SLP, the fees could be reduced to a more manageable level. TSC and its partners continue to explore options around sustainability.

"As a young female teacher striving for the betterment to help improve our educational system that's the reason, I applied for the school leadership programme"

Jenteh Yeatorma Kappia,
Teacher, Ahmadiyya
Agriculture secondary
school, Newton



"I applied to gain more insights and knowledge... I'm now able to source materials online for my training and to better manage my school."

Gibrilla Kamara, Principal,
Bombali



The second phase of the Leh Wi Lan programme is part of the Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme II (SSEIP II), which is funded by UK International Development. This five-year programme supports Sierra Leone's Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to deliver improved education outcomes at secondary level, with a focus on schoolgirls and learners with disabilities. Leh Wi Lan is implemented by a consortium of national and international organisations led by Cambridge Education.

