



Stronger School Leadership and Teaching

Information Brief

Improving School Quality through a School Leadership Programme



Introduction

The School Leadership Programme (SLP) was launched in 2024 by the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) in Sierra Leone. The SLP is a year-long course to improve the knowledge and skills of school leaders – including Principals, Vice Principals, Heads of Department and Senior Teachers – aligned with the School Leader Competency Framework for Sierra Leone.

The goal of the SLP 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.

From 2024-2026, the three cohorts of school leaders have completed the course:

- **Cohort 1:** 150 school leaders selected from schools in five districts (Bo, Bombali, Kailahun, Port Loko, Western Rural).
- **Cohort 2:** 350 school leaders from five districts.
- **Cohort 3:** 300 school leaders from all 16 districts.

In 2025, senior representatives from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), the Ministry of Tertiary and Higher Education (MTHE), the TSC and higher education institutions (HEIs) agreed on refinements to the course and proposed new mechanisms for delivering it as an accredited professional development course at Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs).

In 2026, the TSC and five TTIs agreed to work together to start offering the course to a fourth cohort of school leaders in September 2026. A Joint Working Agreement was developed and signed describing what would be done, when and by whom to begin the course for Cohort 4.

The five TTIs, spread across Sierra Leone include: Freetown Polytechnic, Ernest Bai Koroma University, University of Makeni, Njala University and Eastern Technical University.

“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



800

SLP graduates in the first three cohorts

32%

SLP participants in Cohort Three are female (up from 17% in Cohort One)

Course structure

To complete the SLP, school leaders participate in four modules:

- **Foundation Module: Introduction to the SLP**
- **Module 1: Leading School Safety and Inclusion**
- **Module 2: Leading Teaching and Learning**
- **Module 3: Leading School Improvement**

The Foundation Module is a two-day, face-to-face, district-level workshop led by Local Leaders of Learning (LLLs).

School leaders are introduced to the course content and approach – including preparation for self-study and use of the course materials known as Toolkits. This module also provides an opportunity for school leaders to meet other SLP participants and their LLL who will support them throughout.

School leaders go on to complete one substantive module per term through self-study, which is supported through visits from their LLL (twice each term) and remote support via phone calls and peer support within a WhatsApp group. Each module also requires completion of practical assignments that support school leaders to use the new knowledge and skills they have acquired to make real impact in their own schools.

School leaders meet together at the end of every module to reflect on learning and to prepare for the next module. In the final module, school leaders are supported to create a School Improvement Plan for their own school.

Distinctive elements of the SLP

- **School leaders are selected to participate in the SLP after a rigorous application process.**

Applications are reviewed and a final selection is made based on a set of criteria that are shared in the application guidelines.

- **Aspiring school leaders encouraged to participate.** The majority of applications to the SLP have come from men. This reflects the make-up of the secondary education workforce which comprises only around 20% women, and relatively few women in leadership positions. However, aspiring leaders are also encouraged to apply with a specific focus on women and persons with disabilities. The rationale is to create a future pipeline of competent school leaders, and to ensure school leadership is representative and inclusive.

- **School leaders participating in the SLP commit to self-study outside of school hours.** School leaders 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, and better quality schools in Sierra Leone.

- **Multi-media course materials and support are provided.** Self-study is facilitated through printed Toolkits, which contain reading material, video links, assignments and space for regular LLL feedback. School leaders are required to join group WhatsApp calls as part of their course work to discuss a topic or specific assignment. Digital versions of the Toolkits are also available to participants through the Sierra Leone Education Knowledge Platform.

- **The SLP is a blended professional development programme that allows school leaders to stay in school to practice what they are learning.** The course blends face-to-face and remote support from LLLs with self-study. School leaders are visited at their school twice per module. LLLs also schedule regular one-on-one phone calls and WhatsApp group calls.

- **Learning assessments.** In each toolkit, there are key ideas and competences that school leaders need to understand and master. These are assessed through a range of methods: written and practical assignments, participation in group WhatsApp calls and the application of new ideas and skills in their schools. This triangulation of marks from different sources is important as it ensures more than one perspective on performance is provided. The formal assessment is carried out by LLLs who meet at the end of each module to standardise and moderate the application of the marking scheme.
- **Equality and inclusion.** Women are under-represented in school leadership positions across Sierra Leone – as of 2025, only 8% of principals in JSS and SSS were female. This low representation is reflected in a lower proportion of women applying for, and participating in, the SLP. 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 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 SLP is open to aspiring leaders as well as Principals. They also mobilise women who have completed the course to encourage other women to apply.

What's next for the SLP?

Sustaining demand and supply

The need for professional development for school leaders will continue into the future as incumbent school leaders retire and/or leave the profession, meaning that there will be an ongoing demand for the SLP from aspiring school leaders. A next step is to understand what demand for the SLP will look like in the medium- and long-term, and to establish ways to sustain implementation.

In 2026, the Government of Sierra Leone will begin implementing a School Leadership Policy that requires completion of the SLP to be eligible for a position as a school leader, thus incentivising school leaders to apply for and complete the course.

Having a strong incentive to complete the course is increasingly important as TTIs will begin to charge fees from Cohort 4 onwards. The aim is to subsidise fees for this cohort and beyond, but school leaders will still be required to make a contribution.

“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



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 understand if LLLs are providing the quality of support required and where they themselves might need additional training. A Quality Assurance process has been designed to establish the frequency and type of support provided by LLLs and to track module completion, but more work is required to strengthen this aspect of the SLP.

Enhancing the capabilities of TTIs to offer the SLP

Almost all the LLLs who worked with school leaders in the first three cohorts are faculty at one of the five TTIs that offer the School Leadership Programme from the 2026/27 academic year. They know the SLP well and have developed competencies required for their role, but they require on-going support and mentorship to continue working effectively. In addition, TTIs may require operational support to plan and implement the SLP, and to monitor implementation.



**Watch this film about
the School Leadership
Programme in Sierra Leone**

<https://youtu.be/lq2lwpDUKyE>

SLP Toolkits are available on the Sierra Leone Education Knowledge Platform: <https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/material/school-leadership-programme/>

"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."

Idrissa Abou Fonna,
Principal, Bombali



"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



"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



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. The 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.

