

Additional support for learning: AHDS Written submission, 19 September 2025



Introduction

AHDS is a trade union for promoted teachers from Scotland’s nursery, primary and ASN schools. We have around 2800 members, including 80% of primary HTs in membership.

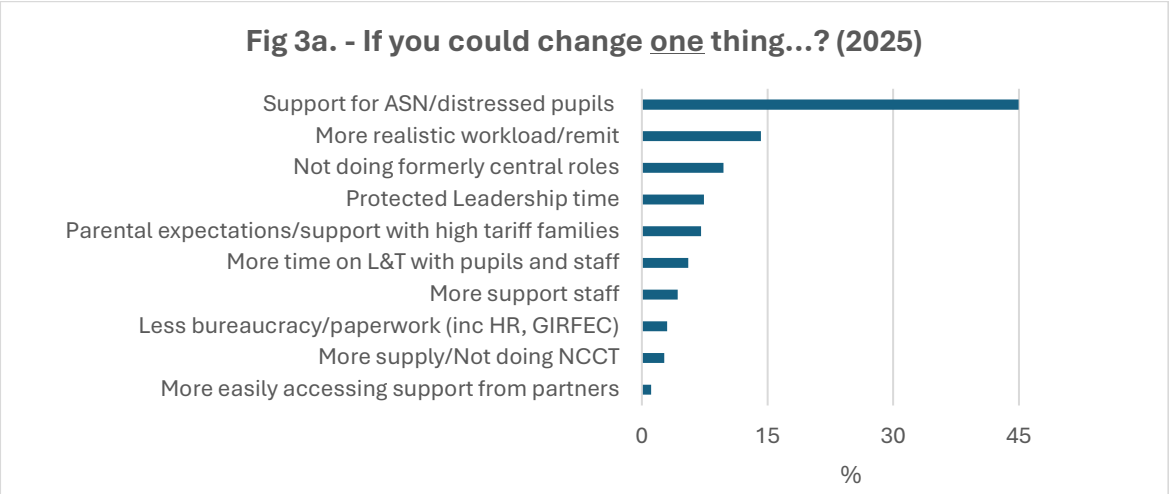
AHDS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the issues raised in the Public Audit Committee’s consideration of the recent Audit Scotland report on Additional Support for Learning.

Background

It is worth highlighting at the outset that AHDS members very much recognise the picture presented in the Audit Scotland briefing paper. Indeed, it aligns with the key recommendation flowing from the AHDS Annual Workload survey 2025 which found that ‘proper support for inclusion’ was the number one issue for AHDS members up and down Scotland. This resulted in one of four recommendations flowing from our workload survey report:

“Recommendation 1: Following the gaps in funding highlighted by the Audit Scotland report on this theme, urgent and significant investment is required to enable schools to effectively support pupils with additional needs. A consistent national funding formula should be adopted to address the current variability of provision.”

Our full workload survey report has been provided to the Committee but we wanted to share, here, a chart which highlights the degree to which members see the need for increased investment in ASN as their number one priority – when asked to select their top priority, 45% of members who responded selected “support for ASN/distressed pupils”, a vastly higher proportion than for any of the other options:



Data and funding

It was clear from the committee's discussion with the Accounts Commission and Auditor General on 19 March that there was a keenness for more robust, consistent and comparable data to be gathered regarding ASL. While the Scottish Government and CoSLA also recognised the value of data to inform policy they, CoSLA in particular, introduced a note of caution about focussing on efforts to record ASL consistently rather than focussing on the activity being undertaken to address need. This was a nuanced argument, but two points are at the core of the CoSLA position. The first is that collating data consumes time and money. The second is that capturing data on identified needs is not the same as capturing data on the work done to support those needs. Both these points are entirely sound.

AHDS members, in common with many others directly involved with delivery, have identified a need for significant increases in expenditure on ASN in an effort to meet the needs that they are presented with in school each day.

While we understand that there is a policy need for better data recording of need/support delivered, we would argue that expenditure in time and resource on improving data should only ever be a small part of increased resource applied to this area. If restricted resources are available, then the focus should be on passing that resource to the system enabling local authorities and school leaders to determine how it is best spent. Only if there was to be a substantial increase in resourcing should there be a movement from filling a known resource gap to designing and implementing changes (or increased detail) to data collection and scrutiny measures. In any resource situation, data gathering should be highly streamlined, efficient and meaningful to gain only the necessary data and to do so with the least absorption of resources which could be applied to delivery.

Diagnosis and provision of support

In both evidence sessions, the discussion returned to the point that there need not be a diagnosis in place to access additional support. AHDS highlights two themes in response to this discussion.

Theme 1: Confusion

The discussion in Committee both recognised that the needs covered by the ASL Act were very wide, but discussion went on to focus on the narrower point of diagnosis – which would only ever apply to a sub-set of those who were designed to be supported through the inclusive way in which the ASL Act was drafted. The implication being on one hand that the definition was too wide to defy accurate recording, while it was also inferred that there was a barrier to accessing support without a specific diagnosis.

Theme 2: Resources

Discussion considered the acceleration in demand/need identified and queried this. In part, the discussion edged towards an argument that definitions needed to be refined but it also returned repeatedly to the fact that no diagnosis is required to access support.

For AHDS, the issues of diagnosis and resources are interlinked.

Member experience reported to us could not be clearer. The current level of resource available is inadequate to address the needs presenting in schools around Scotland.

The intentionally broad nature of the legislation and the variety of appropriate supports for different situations and individuals means that the diagnosis point is sometimes a red herring. By that we mean that, for example, while a child who has suffered a bereavement, and is deemed under the legislation to have an additional need, will get support without a diagnosis (as there is no diagnosis to give) while a child without an ADHD diagnosis may not. This is because, while the legislation is inclusive, finances are finite. As a result, where a need is diagnosable, those with a diagnosis will be first in the queue.

To free teachers up for their core role and for the intention of the policy and legislation to be recognised, a considerable increase in funding for ASN is required. This relates to the need for increased support assistants in classrooms, additional ASN teachers, additional places in specialist provision and increased capacity in the range of services outside the school which are essential to enabling children with additional support needs to thrive.

Greg Dempster
AHDS General Secretary
19th September 2025



Workload Survey 2016-2025

Contents:

Page 1: Executive Summary & Recommendations

Page 3: Background

Page 4: Average working hours

Page 7: Challenges in school leadership

Page 10: Inclusion/ASN

Page 12: Recommending or seeking headship

Page 19: Into Headship experience

Page 22: Views on SNSAs (Scottish National Standardised Assessments)

Page 24: Empowering Schools Agenda

Executive summary & Recommendations

This report summarises the responses of AHDS members to an annual workload survey conducted in late February/early March each year between 2016 and 2025. The report focusses on the 2025 data and compares it to the data gathered in previous years. The survey was completed by between 1,000 and 1,470 members each year with 1,252 in responses in 2025.

Average typical **working hours** reported in 2025 was 52.7hrs/week (53.4hrs/wk in 2024, 52.6hrs/wk in 2023). This is 17.7hrs above the contracted working week of 35hrs. So more than 22,000 hours per week in excess of contracted hours worked by survey respondents alone.

276 members reported working 60 hours or more a week or more. The highest average for HTs in any local authority was 57.6hrs/wk. The lowest was 49hrs/wk, still 14hrs/week above contracted working hours.

Workload issues once again highlighted a mismatch between resources available and expectations. (This section of the survey was adapted in 2024. Rather than simply presenting open text questions, members were asked to select from the top 10 issues highlighted in 2023, they could also offer a free text response.) In common with previous years, the most commonly highlighted issue was the need for additional resources and support for pupils with additional needs. In 2024 & 2025, the need for 'proper support for inclusion' was highlighted by a much higher proportion of members than in previous years and vastly more than any other issue.

Recommendation 1:

Following the gaps in funding highlighted by the Audit Scotland report on this theme, urgent and significant investment is required to enable schools to effectively support pupils with additional needs. A consistent national funding formula should be adopted to address the current variability of provision.

While there was little movement over the years to 2020 in the proportion of HTs who would **recommend headship**, 2021 saw a step change in positivity on this issue with a notably larger proportion of HTs saying they would recommend headship to others. However, this has worsened every year since with **only 27% of HTs in 2025 saying they would recommend headship to others**.

Interest in headship amongst Deputes and Principal Teachers has also declined considerably over the survey period, particularly in recent years. When this survey started in 2016, 36% of Deputes and 39% of PTs who responded indicated that they were keen to become a HT. **In 2025 those saying they were keen to become a HT stood at only 16% of DHTs and 11% of PTs.**

Even those HTs recommending headship (and many DHTs and PTs keen to pursue headship) often added significant caveats to their positive stance. They noted that candidates needed to be aware not just of the positives but of the demands of the role and the significant impacts this may have on health and family life. Responses focussed on unreasonable expectations, as demands on school leaders increase

while leadership capacity is reduced, and on the pressures associated with seeking to deliver effective support for pupils with ASN with insufficient resources.

Recommendation 2:

To address the excessive working hours of school leaders and the continual decline in desirability of headship, the Scottish Government and local authorities must increase and protect management capacity in schools. This must include action to ensure that any extension to class teacher non-contact time is not delivered at the expense of management time nor in ways which offer pupils lower quality learning time.

The **Into Headship** programme continues to be seen as valuable by a majority of those who have completed it, though less so than in previous years. The workload associated with the programme alongside busy day jobs remains a common concern. This is true for most who commented but especially so for those who are undertaking the programme while in acting headships.

Recommendation 3:

Candidates undertaking Into Headship should be released from school 1 day per week for the duration of the programme.

In relation to **SNSAs**, the overall response continued on the positive trajectory seen in previous years – except in relation to the workload created by assessments and usefulness of P1 SNSAs. Members are positive about the value of P4 and P7 SNSAs but are very negative about the value/usefulness of, and workload associated with, P1 SNSAs. While there was an increase in positivity about P1 SNSAs, they remain of far less perceived value than the P4 & 7 assessments with many comments highlighting their inappropriateness, low value and the high workload associated with them.

Recommendation 4:

P1 SNSAs should be discontinued or, at least, the decision whether or not to administer them should be at the discretion of school leaders.

Greg Dempster
May 2025

Note: 2020-2022 was a unique period in Scottish Education, dominated by working methods dictated by the Covid response (which started after our 2020 survey). This means that the output of the 2021 & 2022 workload surveys need to be seen in that context and interpreted carefully.

Background

AHDS is a union for school leaders from Scotland's primary, nursery and ASN schools. This paper draws together the views expressed by over 1200 AHDS members in 2025 about: their working hours; workload challenges; key issues for change; desirability of headship; experience of the Into Headship programme and views on SNSAs and empowerment. It compares responses to previous years and forms the foundation for reports prepared on returns from each local authority area. This is the tenth consecutive annual survey.

The survey was conducted on SurveyMonkey at the end of February/start of March each year. Full responses can be broken down as follows (partially completed questionnaires are not included in this count):

Table 1: Responses by role

Role	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
HT¹	674	703	668	742	739	753	855	751	878	698
Multi school HT	-	-	56	64	61	51	63	68	78	66
DHT	228	244	242	313	331	329	354	345	429	441
PT	53	68	91	89	87	81	99	103	144	113
All	955	1015	1001	1144	1157	1163	1307	1262	1451	1252

¹ Values in this row include those in multi school headships.

Most questions have remained the same throughout the decade this survey has been presented to members.

Given the focus on a lack of 'proper support for inclusion' being a key theme in previous surveys, the 2025 edition included additional questions about ASN in an effort to get a fuller picture of the supports and pressures through the eyes of school leaders.

To ensure the survey length was not increased by the inclusion of additional questions, the number of questions asked about SNSAs was reduced in 2025.

Average working hours

We asked respondents “In a typical week, about how many hours do you work? (please only answer this question if you work full-time)”. Average reported hours have reduced a little for all roles since a peak in 2018. In 2025, there has been a slight drop in average working hours for all roles when compared against 2024, but it is far from a significant shift. **All roles reported working vastly longer than contracted hours, 17.7 additional hours on average. HTs, DHTs and PTs respectively reported working 18.8hrs, 16.6hrs and 13.8hrs more than the contracted working week of 35hrs.**

To put into perspective the additional hours worked only by those who responded to this year's survey, this equates to over 22,000 hours of unpaid overtime each week. Over a year, for this sample alone, we would need the equivalent of an additional 629 school leaders if all worked only their contracted hours.

While it is an arbitrary marker of excessive hours, in the 2025 survey 276 members reported working 60hrs or more in a typical working week. This is almost a quarter of respondents (23%).

Table 2: Average weekly hours

Role	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
HT	55.1	55.6	56.1	55.3	54.6	53.5	53.6	53.6	54.9	53.8
DHT	53	53	53.2	53	51.7	50.6	52	51.7	51.7	51.6
PT	51.2	51.6	52.0	51.2	50.6	49.7	48.8	49.7	49.3	48.8
All roles	54.5	54.6	54.9	54.4	53.4	52.5	52.9	52.6	53.4	52.7

In an effort to understand the effect of two specific, often referenced, drains on management time, and to understand how often school leaders are able to take breaks, we asked the following:

In the past week, how many:

- Hours have you spent on 1:1 support for pupils removed from class
- Hours have you spent providing unplanned class cover
- Days have you managed to take an uninterrupted break of at least 20 minutes

Table 3: Average time spent on specific activities

Role	Hours 1-to-1 with pupils out of class					
Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
HT	6.1hrs	3.5hrs	5.5hrs	6.0hrs	6.3hrs	6.1hrs
HT multi	3.9hrs	2.8hrs	3.6hrs	4.7hrs	3.2hrs	4.7hrs
All HT	5.9hrs	3.4hrs	5.3hrs	5.8hrs	6.0hrs	5.9hrs
DHT	7.0hrs	4.2hrs	6.1hrs	7.0hrs	7.4hrs	7.3hrs
PT	4.6hrs	3.3hrs	4.5hrs	4.2hrs	3.8hrs	3.8hrs
	Hours unplanned cover					
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
HT	3.4hrs	2hrs	4.8hrs	2.7hrs	3.4hrs	2.9hrs
HT multi	3.8hrs	2.4hrs	5.3hrs	3.4hrs	2.8hrs	3.6hrs

Average working hours						
All HT	3.4hrs	2hrs	4.9hrs	2.8hrs	3.4hrs	3hrs
DHT	4.5hrs	2.8hrs	6.6hrs	3.8hrs	4.3hrs	4.1hrs
PT	3.7hrs	2.4hrs	5.6hrs	4.2hrs	3.0hrs	3.8hrs
Days with break of 20 minutes						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
HT	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4
HT multi	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.6
All HT	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4
DHT	0.3	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4
PT	1	1.8	1.3	0.9	0.9	1.1

NOTE: In 2021 only P1-3 were in school at the time of the survey. This means that the 2021 returns are not directly comparable to other years.

“Hours providing 1-to-1 support” has remained at a similarly high point for HTs & DHTs when compared with last year (though there has been a notable increase for those in multi-school headships) and has returned to higher levels for PTs. Reported hours spent on this task have increased each year since 2021 and are now in excess of 2020 totals for HTs and DHTs (though they have reduced for PTs). Hours spent providing **“Unplanned cover”** have increased for those in multi-school headships and for PTs while reducing for other respondents.

The average amount of time spent on these two duties by HTs in 2025 was 8.9hrs in the survey week. This accounts for almost two full pupil days on average in that week. This is a substantial draw on school leaders time and links to the key issues raised in response to questions about the key challenges faced by members and about desirability of headship. The time spent on these tasks is lower for those in multi-school headships but it has increased notably since last year – this group spent an average of 8.3hrs in the 2025 survey week on these tasks (as against 6hrs in 2024).

These averages mask a wide variation from local authority to local authority with the average hours providing 1:1 support (for all roles) varying by local authority from 1.2hrs/wk to 8.1hrs/wk. For unplanned class cover, the range is 0.8hrs/wk to 7.2hrs/wk. Combining the two, the average time spent on these tasks (all roles) by local authority ranges from 3.6hrs/wk to 13.3hrs/wk.

School to school comparisons relating to providing 1:1 support and unplanned class cover also show wide variance. Some members in each role reporting providing no such cover while, for others, it accounted for the whole pupil day including breaks and lunches.

In relation to “Days [in the last week] you have managed to take an uninterrupted break of at least 20 minutes”, the averages remain at a fraction of a day for all roles. This means that, on average, members reported being able to take an uninterrupted break of 20 minutes or more remains at 0.4 days out of 5 – **this equates to school leaders, on average, having such a break during working hours once every 2½ weeks.** This is unchanged since 2023.

By local authority

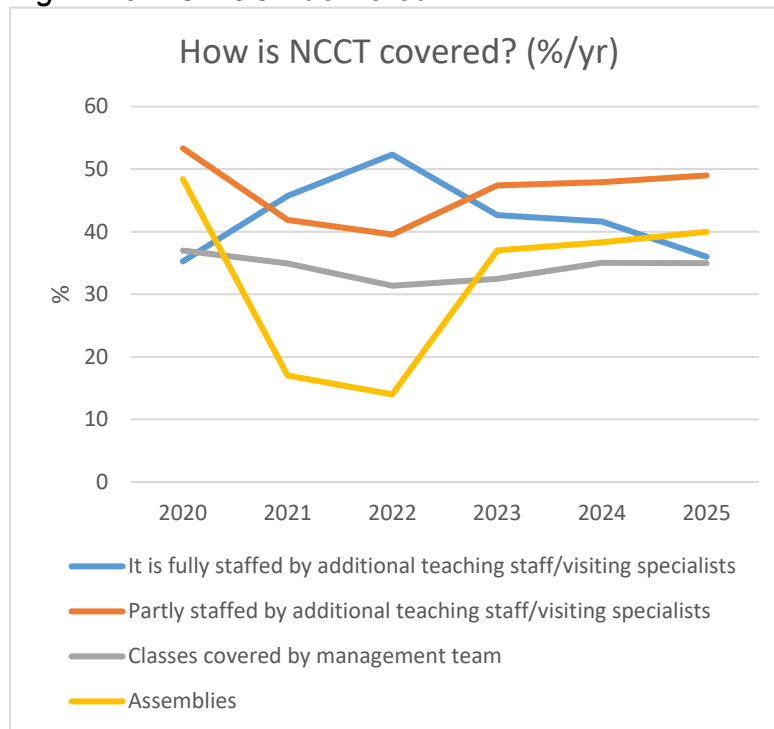
Average working hours

It is clear that there is a huge variation in the number of hours worked by members who are undertaking the same roles. Further, it is clear that even those areas with the shortest average working hours are vastly beyond contracted working hours. The lowest average working hours (all roles) was 49.5hrs/wk in 2025 (49.1hrs/wk in 2024 and 47.1hrs/wk in 2023) while the longest average reported was 56.1hrs/wk (56.3hrs/wk in 2024 and 55.4hrs/wk in 2023).

Non-contact time

For the past six years, we asked how members were delivering teachers' non-contact time in their schools.

Fig 1: How is NCCT delivered?



It is clear from Fig 1 that the proportion of members indicating that NCCT was delivered via assemblies declined hugely during covid restrictions and that it was, instead, delivered by being fully staffed with additional teaching staff or visiting specialists.

However, the reliance on mechanisms for delivery which absorb the time of school leaders has increased year on year since restrictions were lifted. This is a considerable absorption of school leadership time in a period

where the amount of management time available in schools has been reduced in many areas.

All of these changes put more pressure on SMT time and will often result in sub-optimal provision to pupils during these periods as school leaders rarely have sufficient time to prepare for covering a class or are undertaking assemblies with many classes together – which does not offer learning of the same level as would be expected in class.

Further, members have expressed considerable concern about plans to further reduce teacher contact time. This does not relate to any resistance to address class teacher workload concerns. Rather, it is as a result of the fear that NCCT will not be properly resourced resulting in further pressure on school leader time and working hours.

(Note: Respondees could select more than one response so percentages in Fig 1 do not add up to 100%)

Challenges in school leadership

Introduction

We asked two questions to try to get under the skin of what existing post holders would see as being crucial to making their role more appealing to them and to others. These questions were:

“What would make your role more manageable?”

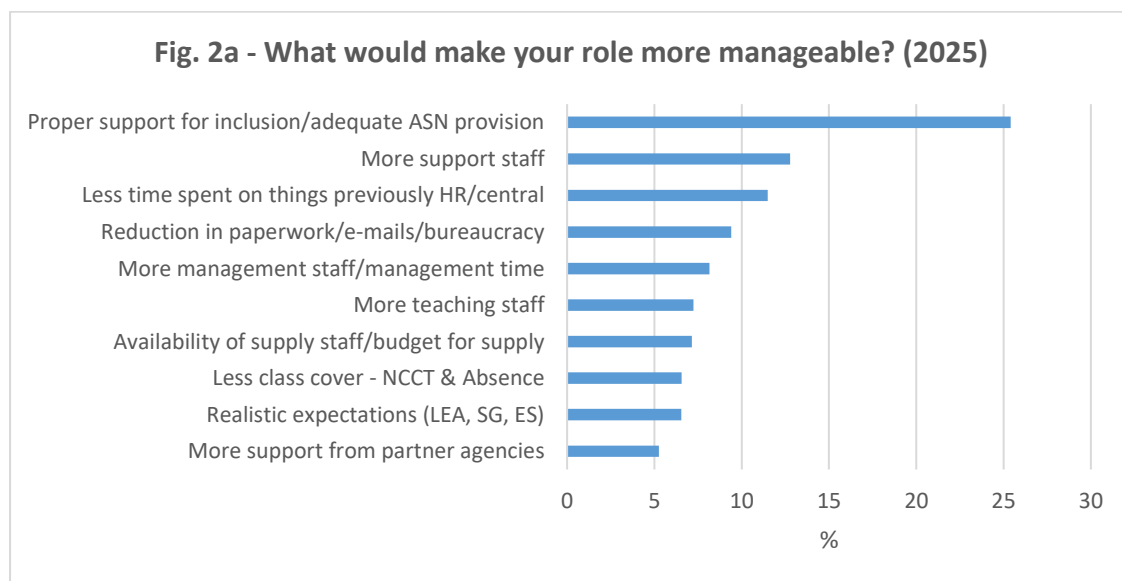
“If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?”

These were free-text responses until 2024. In 2024 and 2025 members were offered a randomly ordered list of the top ten issues identified in 2023 and were invited to select up to three in response to the first question and to select one in response to the second question. Members were also able to leave free text comments in addition to their answers (but most offered comment expanding on an item selected rather than introducing a new theme).

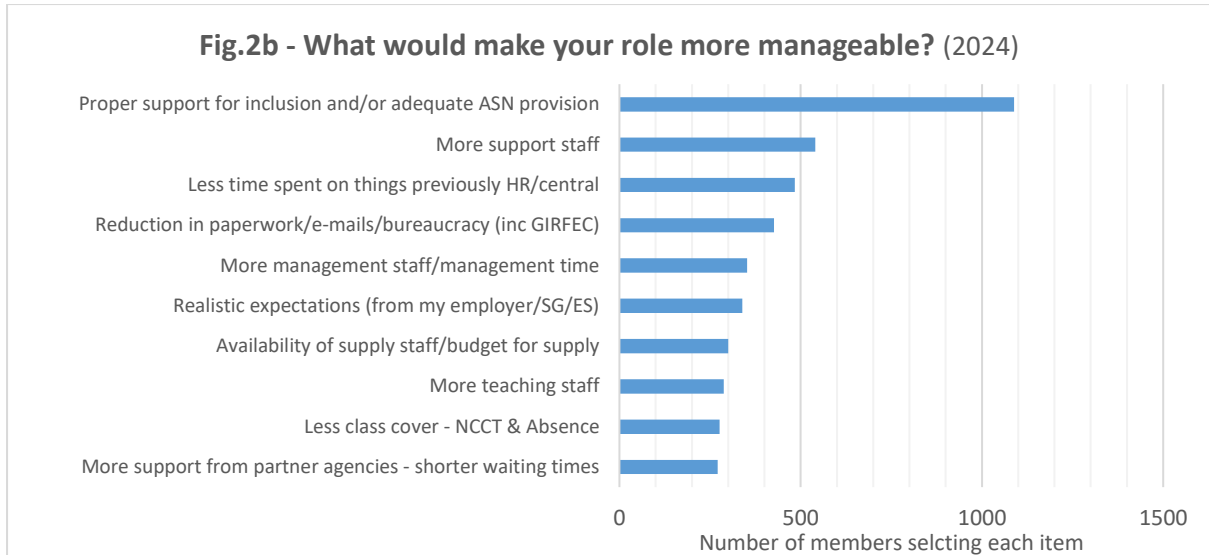
Member responses and comments tend to approach the same issues from different directions (i.e. Some call for less bureaucracy while others called for more management or admin time. Some call for being enabled to spend more time on learning and teaching while others seek more management time or for formerly central roles to be returned to HQ). Most responses highlight a mismatch between resources available and expectations.

“What would make your role more manageable?”

The 2025 response highlights continued high levels of concern about the support available for pupils with additional needs. The degree to which it stands out as a common theme from members is identical to 2024. Indeed, the only notable change from 2024 is that a call for ‘More Teaching Staff’ jumped from the 8th most commonly highlighted response to being 6th. It appears that this relates to cuts to teacher numbers in some local authorities over the past twelve months.

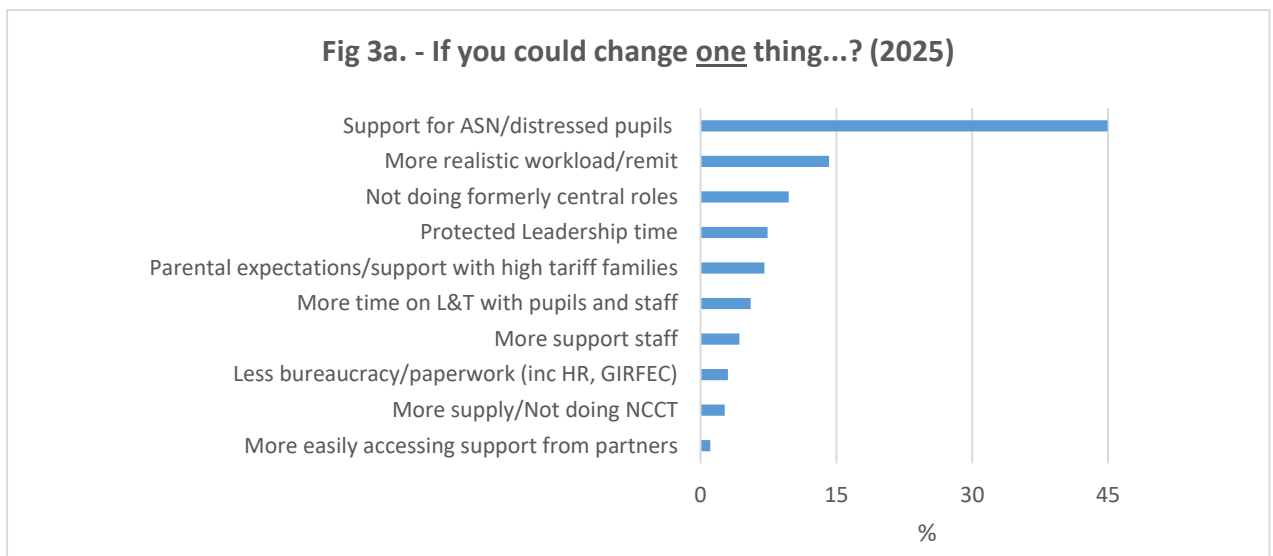


Challenges in school leadership

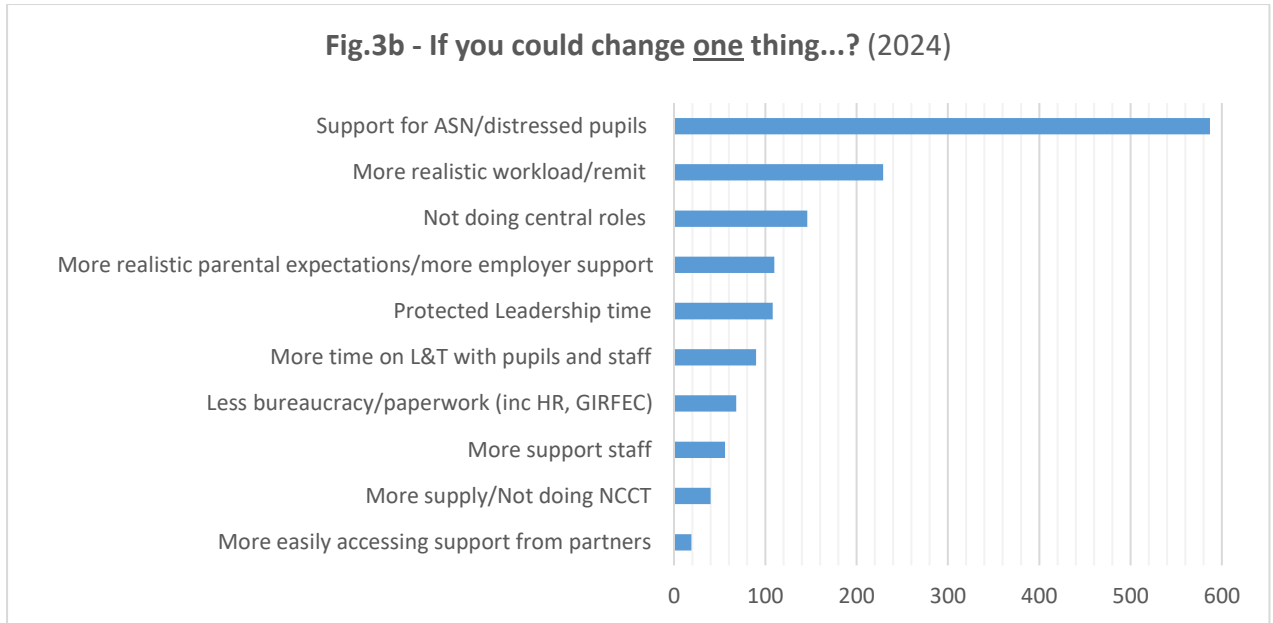


“If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?”

Again, this question changed in 2024 so that rather than seeking a free text response, members were asked to select one issue from a randomly presented list of the ten most common responses from 2023 (they could also offer additional free-text comments). The 2025 response was as follows:



Challenges in school leadership

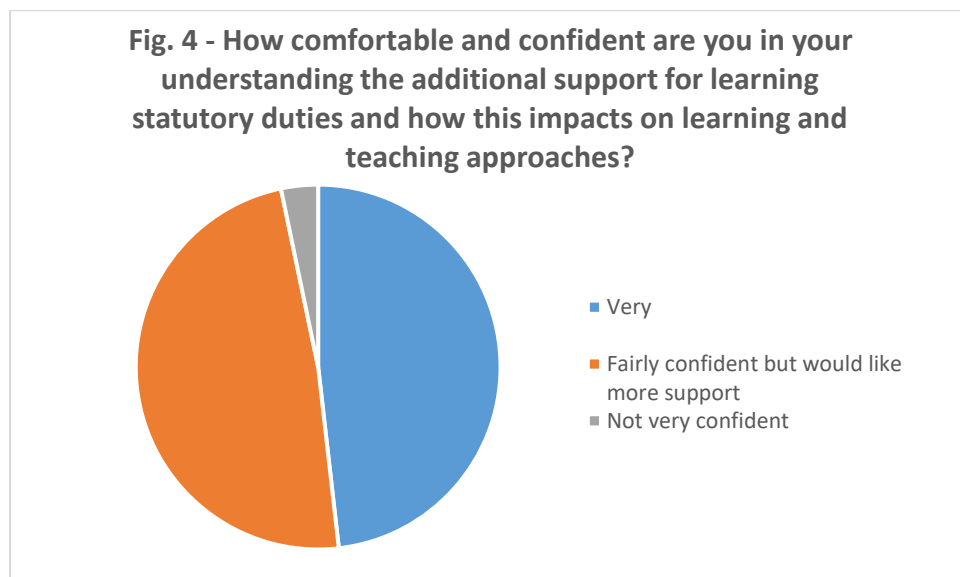


Support for ASN pupils was the 5th most common response in 2022, 3rd most common in 2023 and then, by far the most common response in 2024 and 2025 – selected by around 2.5 times as many members as the next most common response in each year. The 2025 response confirms that the jump in 2024 was not a blip and that AHDS members have a very clear view that support for ASN and distressed pupils is insufficient and is having an increasing impact on management teams and schools’ abilities to deliver effectively for all of their pupils.

Inclusion/ASN

As inclusion has been a recurring theme in response to successive workload surveys, 2025 saw the introduction of additional questions on this topic.

As can be seen from Fig 4, members are clear about their duties in relation to ASN but almost half indicated that they would like more support.



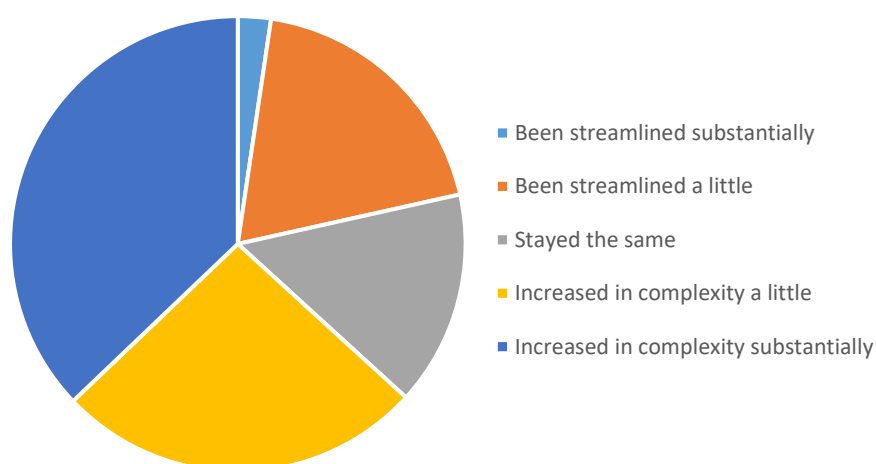
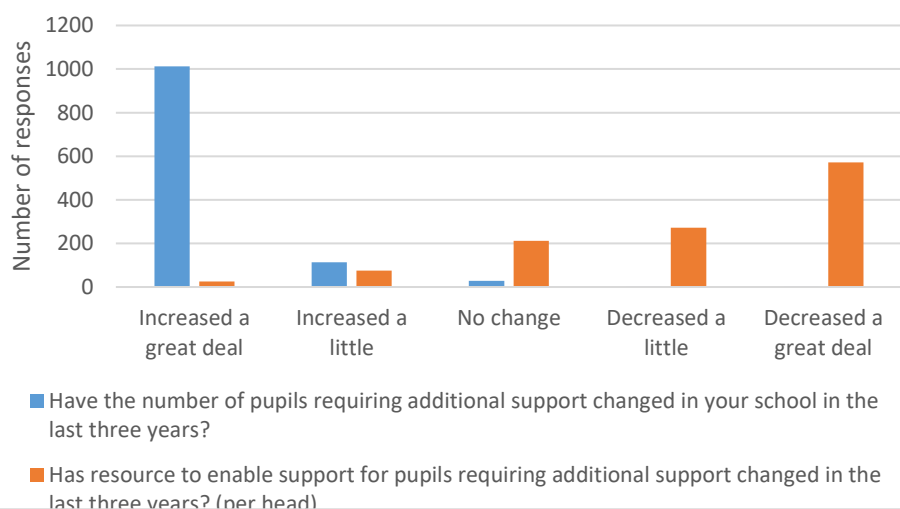
Members were then asked “Do you use and triangulate SEEMiS (or equivalent) ASN data to support curriculum design, planning, moderation and tracking?”

857 responded ‘yes’ while 300 responded ‘no’. This indicates that the majority of members use the data available to them to shape how their school responds to pupils with additional needs. The 300 members who responded ‘no’ comprised 167 HTs, 98 DHTs and 35 PTs and were not focused on any specific geographical areas.

Table 4: Does your Local Authority provide ASN training around any of the following for your staff? (Please tick all that apply)	
Legislation and related duties	33.5%
Inclusive practice within Universal and Targeted support	59.1%
Additional support needs e.g. dyslexia, literacy difficulties, autism, complexity of need	72.3%
Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Planning	34.3%
GIRFEC approach	52.2%
UNCRC	47.0%
Health and Safety / Moving and Handling (specific to pupil care)	58.1%
Trauma Informed Practices (including Nurture)	80.9%
Relational Approaches (e.g. Restorative approaches, Self and Co-regulation)	59.1%
Complaint Handling in relation to ASL/UNCRC	14.5%

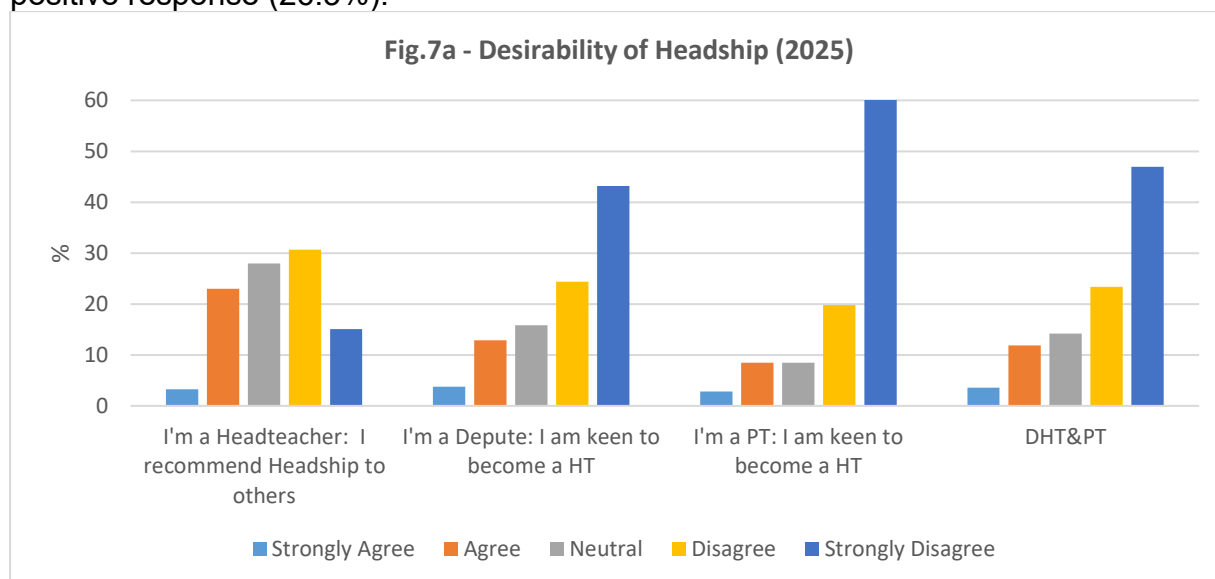
Table 5: How is your local authority ASN training facilitated to your staff? (Please tick all that apply)

Have a dedicated team/person to contact with the questions you need answers to in relation to ASN	40.8%
Have a webpage/dedicated intranet space / manual to refer to	39.7%
LA wide mandatory training	33.3%
Induction training (differentiated for different roles)	16.0%
LA Training Framework (menu for personal learning development)	26.6%
Network or role specific training sessions at planned meetings	22.2%
Online Training/ drop in sessions	52.7%
Self-directed training materials	46.6%
Signposting to National networks	24.5%
On Inset days	52.2%
Through Working Time agreements	10.0%
Budget to use to buy in training	5.6%

Fig. 5 - In recent years, ASN paperwork has:**Fig 6 - Changes in demand and resourcing for ASN**

Recommending or seeking headship

We asked about the desirability of headship and the Into Headship' qualification. Those completing the survey were asked to respond to the statement that was relevant to their role. The 2025 response, shown in Fig.7a makes clear the very low proportion of DHTs and PTs (15.4%) who respond positively when asked if they are keen to become a HT. It also shows that considerably more HTs disagree or strongly disagree (45.7%) with "I recommend Headship to others" than offer a positive response (26.3%).

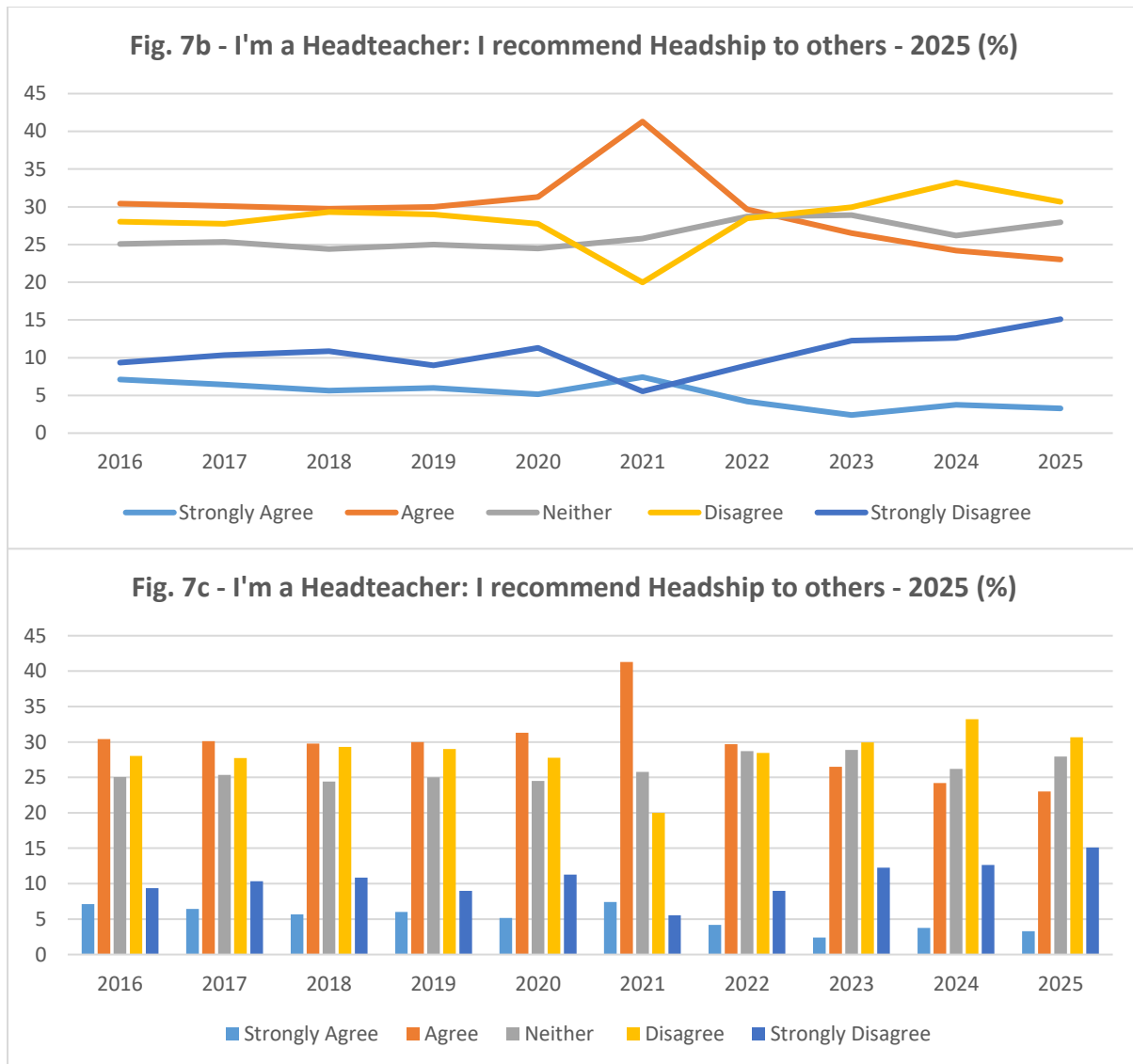


The HT response

The degree to which HTs recommend Headship to others was virtually unchanged for the first five years of this survey while the DHT and PT responses saw a steadily more negative response (see below). After a jump in positivity from HTs in 2021, during Covid, the response has become progressively less positive and is now notably worse than the previously stable picture. **In 2025, only 27% of HTs recommend headship to others. This is the lowest proportion offering a positive response in any year of our survey** and is around a third more negative than the stable 2016-2020 period. There is a very clear negative trend since the high of 2021 with 2022 less positive than the previous years and each successive year less positive than the last. Similarly, it is clear that the proportion offering the most negative response has seen a steady increase over the same period.

Fig. 7a and 7b below show the HT response over the ten years of this survey - displayed in different formats to aid understanding.

Desirability of Headship



While some HTs who recommend headship to others left unqualified positive comments, even amongst those who 'strongly agreed' that they recommend headship to others there was a tendency to qualify their recommendation in some way:

"If you can find a way to manage the workload, there is a huge sense of satisfaction to be gained from this role." (Strongly agree)

"It is a privilege and on a good day, it is the best job in the world. However, HTs need support as sometimes it can feel like an impossible job." (Agree)

"It remains an extremely rewarding job but one that requires so much energy and drive which is harder to sustain year after year. I feel that more and more headteachers will not stay in the profession right up to their retirement age." (Agree)

Those HTs who did not recommend headship to others were mostly damning:

"There are so many brilliant aspects to being a head teacher, it is a privilege. However, it's a very stressful and lonely job with huge amounts of pressure relating to attainment." (Disagree)

"The actual role/job description is endless - buck stops with HT. Impossible to deliver what is being asked with the resources currently available." (Disagree)

"With the current budget pressures, tightness of staffing, reduction in management time and pressures of increasing additional support needs and violence/aggression, this is not a job I would recommend to anyone, for their own well being." (Disagree)

"For the most part, the job is just too much. It seems you either need to be the type of person who can manage to put the guilt (of not getting done what you want to get done) aside, or make peace with working ridiculous hours." (Disagree)

"I would have recommended this five years ago, however becoming a HT in 2019, I have seen this role change significantly. The pressures of the system are now tipping into outweighing capacity and it is clear the system is at breaking point." (Disagree)

The workload of a HT is currently unmanageable and leading to severe stress. I feel constantly stretched to breaking point/burnout. (Disagree)

"The role, which I initially loved, had changed so much and whilst this is inevitable, the impact on aspects of my life - and that of my family and colleagues - is too much." (Disagree)

"Over the last 3 years my management time has been completely eroded due to the staff absence and ASN now evident in our school. Most weeks I am covering 2 additional posts as well as trying to run the school. My morale and that of my staff has never been lower. The expectation for HTs to keep their school open at all costs remains and to keep improving standards- I don't believe it is now possible to do this job and remain healthy mentally or physically." (Strongly disagree)

There is no work life balance Stress levels are incredibly high over sustained periods Feels like the pressure and workload are having a massive detrimental impact on my health" (Strongly disagree)

"My colleagues are dropping like flies. The daily onslaught of parents, ASN and lack of support from above make this a very lonely and unfulfilling job now." (Strongly disagree)

"I've seen colleagues put their heart and soul doing Into Headship only to give up the role of HT within 2 years as the reality of being a HT today has chewed them up and spat them out with minimal support from their Local Authority - so depressing to see." (Strongly disagree)

"The role is hard, not rewarding and negatively affects mental health." (Strongly disagree)

HT recommendation and working hours

Those who were most positive about recommending headship to others worked the fewest hours while those least positive worked the longest.

Strongly agree = average 52.5hrs/week

Agree = average 52.7hrs/week
Disagree = average 53.5hrs/week
Strongly disagree = average 55 hrs/week

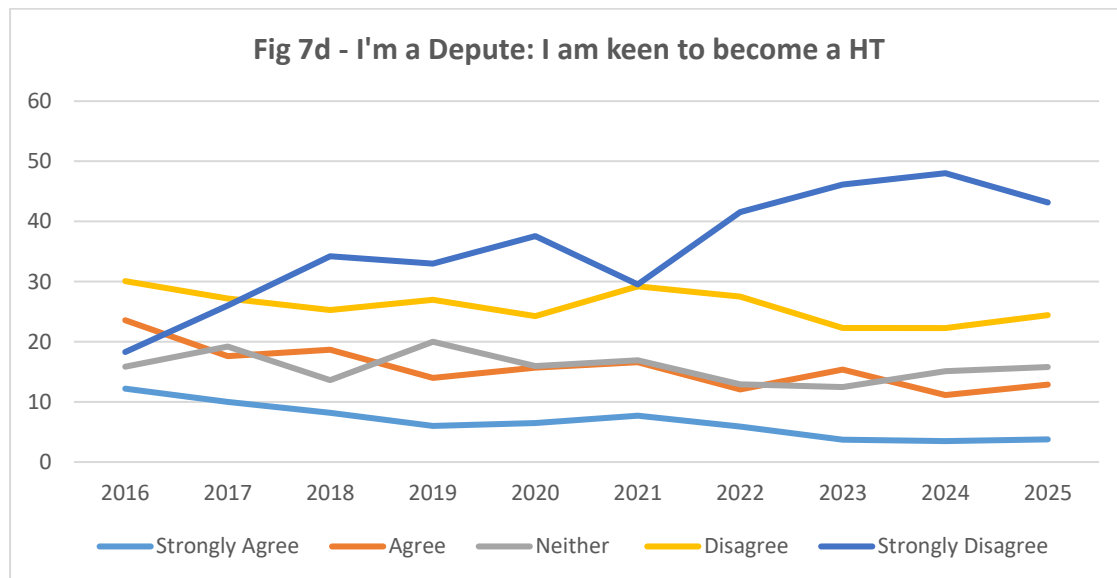
DHT and PT responses

Deputes and PTs continue to be extremely negative in their responses to the statement “I am keen to become a HT”.

While there has been a slight increase in positivity amongst DHTs (and decrease in the most negative response) in the 2025 when compared to 2024, it remains less positive than the 2023 return. **In 2025, only 18.1% of DHTs who responded offered a positive response.**

The PT response has taken another notable negative shift. **In 2025, only 11.5% of PTs who responded offered a positive response.** This continues the negative trend and coincides with a significant hardening of negative responses. In 2025, 80.2% of PTs offered a negative response, including 60.4% who ‘strongly disagreed’ with the statement. **This is, by far, the most negative response since our surveys began.**

Figs 7d-i and tables 6 & 7 on the following pages show the progression of DHT and PT responses over time.



Desirability of Headship

Fig. 7e - I'm a Depute: I am keen to become a HT

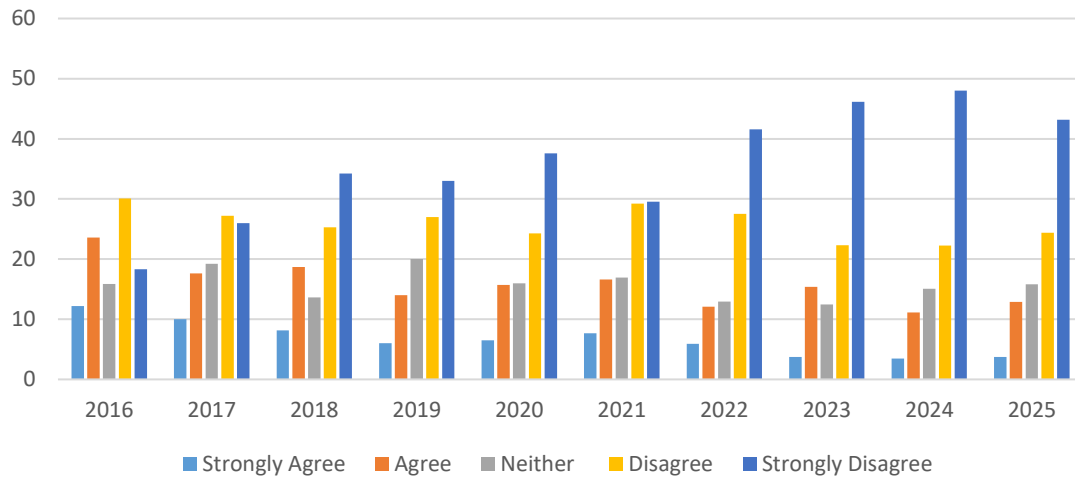


Fig 7f - I'm a PT: I am keen to become a HT

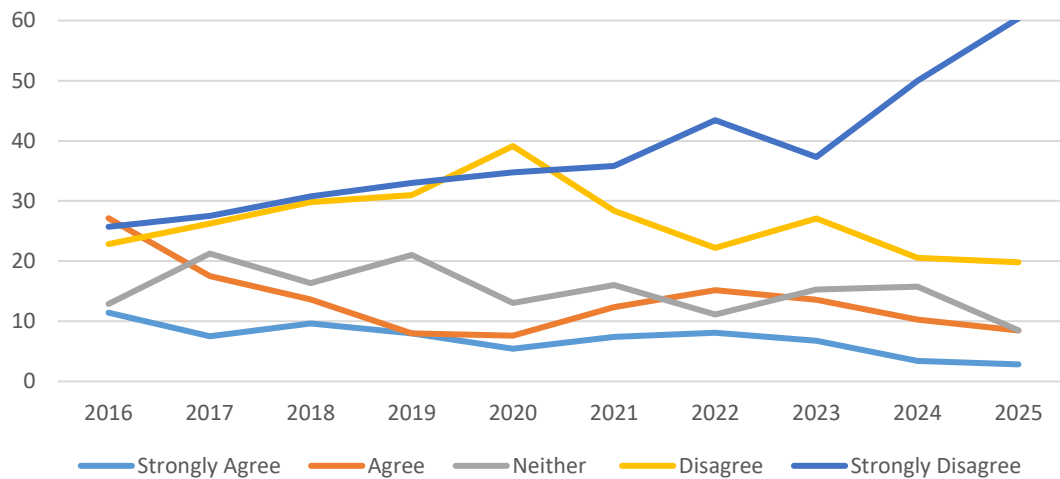


Fig 7g - I'm a PT: I am keen to become a HT

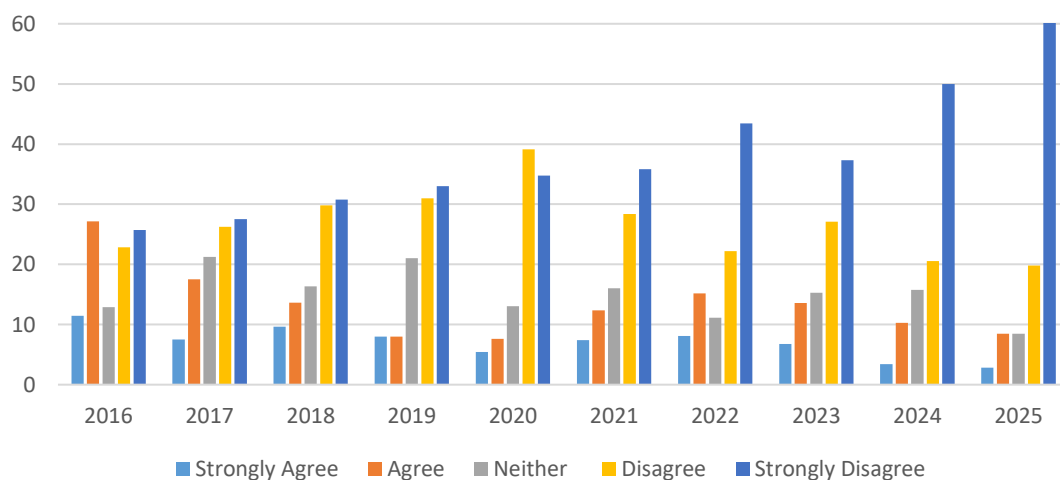
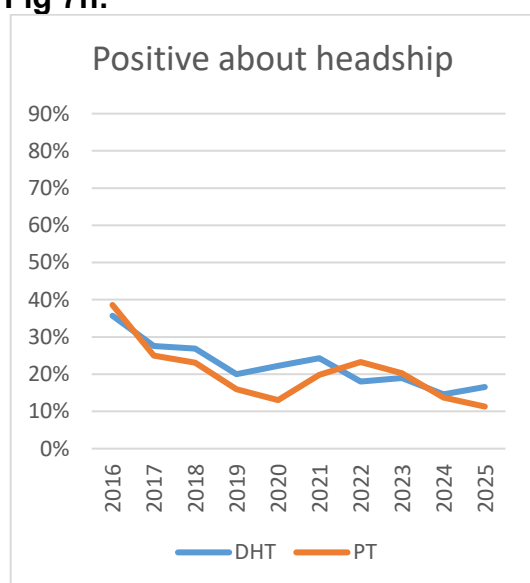
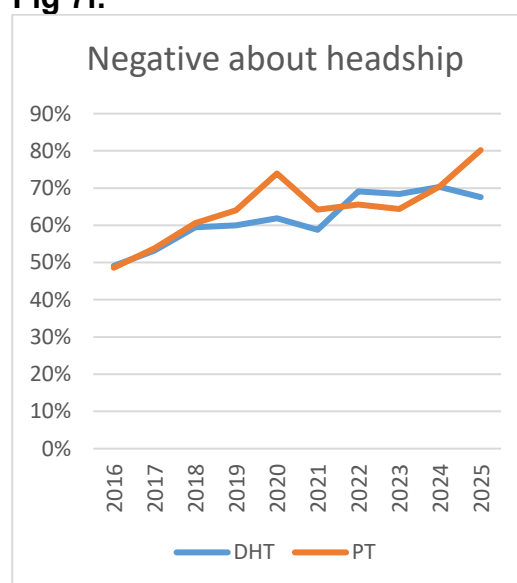


Table 6: %positive about Headship

	DHT	PT
2016	35.7%	38.6%
2017	27.6%	25.0%
2018	26.9%	23.1%
2019	20.0%	16.0%
2020	22.2%	13.0%
2021	24.3%	19.8%
2022	18.0%	23.3%
2023	19.0%	20.3%
2024	14.6%	13.7%
2025	16.6%	11.3%

Table 7: %negative about Headship

	DHT	PT
2016	49.1%	48.6%
2017	53.2%	53.8%
2018	59.5%	60.6%
2019	60.0%	64.0%
2020	61.9%	73.9%
2021	58.8%	64.2%
2022	69.1%	65.6%
2023	68.4%	64.4%
2024	70.3%	70.5%
2025	67.6%	80.2%

Fig 7h:**Fig 7i:**

Reasons given for response

Deputes and Principal Teachers are normally the only people who become HTs. This means that the declining interest in the role of HT amongst this group is the key point of interest in this section of the report. We encouraged members to offer comments as to why they responded the way they did to *“I am keen to become a HT”*.

The 2025 response included comments from 208 Deputes and 66 PTs who responded “strongly disagree” or “disagree”. Key themes emerging were similar for both groups:

- 33 PTs and 117 Deputes left comments which related to the pressures faced in the role of HT.

“The role of HT is no longer a sustainable role within education.”

“Never would I consider becoming a HT. School needs to be your life in that role - not willing to sacrifice my health, my wellbeing and any more of my family life than I do already.”

“I have seen the pressure that my previous 3 HTs have been under from both parents and authority and have had very little support from head quarters.”

- 6 PTs and 36 DHTs commented that the lack of support for HTs from their employers put them off headship.
"I have recently spent 6 months as Acting Headteacher. My QIO did not visit the school to support once. During this time we had multiple high tariff pastoral and educational situations."
"I have recently acted up as HT for a period of two months and found the job over bureaucratic. I also found a lack of support from senior education management and a blame culture from above to push accountability in many areas solely on HT despite influencing factors that are clearly related to budget/staffing decisions taken at authority level."
- 7 PTs and 34 DHTs reported that they had been a HT previously, or had performed an Acting HT role, and had resolved never to return to headship.
"I became acting ht for a short time and found the pressure to be huge and I can also see the pressure and impact the role has on my current HT."
- 15 PTs and 19 DHTs indicated that they were happy in their role and had no interest in headship or were too close to retirement to consider it. These comments tended to focus on their current role having the right balance for them (still having pupil contact, not having administrative pressures of headship).
"I love my role as a DHT where I have full involvement and implementation of the strategic plan but still have time to teach classes where my passion lies."
- 2 PTs and 17 DHTs were clear that the requirement to undertake Into Headship was the factor that put them off headship as they did not have the time or energy to undertake the study alongside their current role.
"The time commitment required to complete Into Headship is not manageable on top of my current workload. I have no more time to carve out of my personal life to commit to further study. Having seen colleagues undertake this, I would need to be able to protect some time in the week."
- 1 PT and 17 DHTs commented that the increase in salary on offer for becoming a HT was not commensurate with the additional workload and pressure.
"For the increase in pay, it really is not worth the expectation, stress and reduction in quality of life. Why put yourself through a Masters level course for so little in return?"

‘Into Headship’ experience

From 2019, response statements on ‘Into Headship’ were added in an effort to understand the experience of those who had undertaken or were undertaking the course. Members were asked to respond to the following statements and to offer any other comments. Responses have been grouped into three categories – on Into Headship, Completed into Headship, Dropped out of Into Headship.

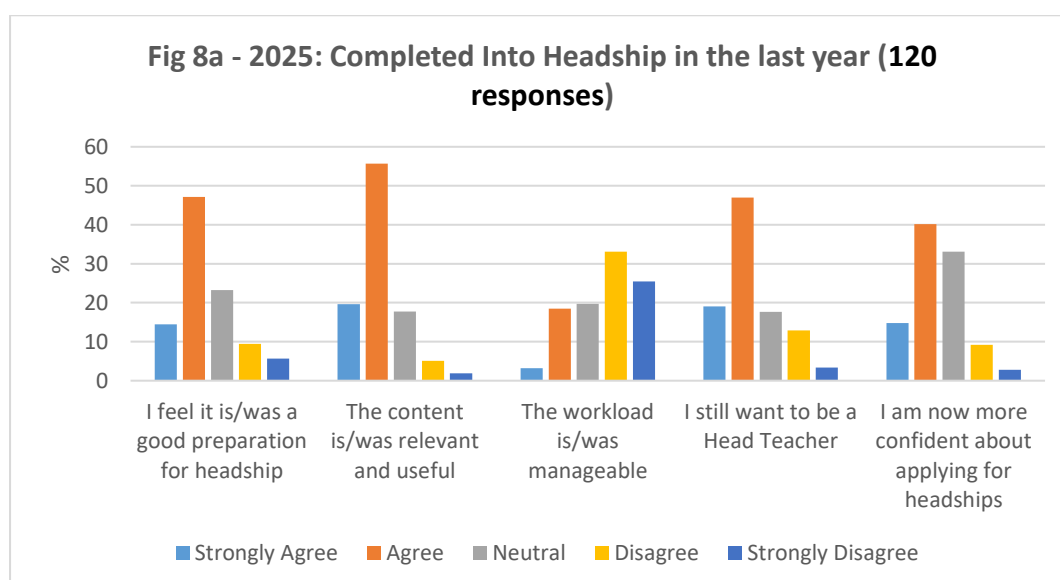
Response statements:

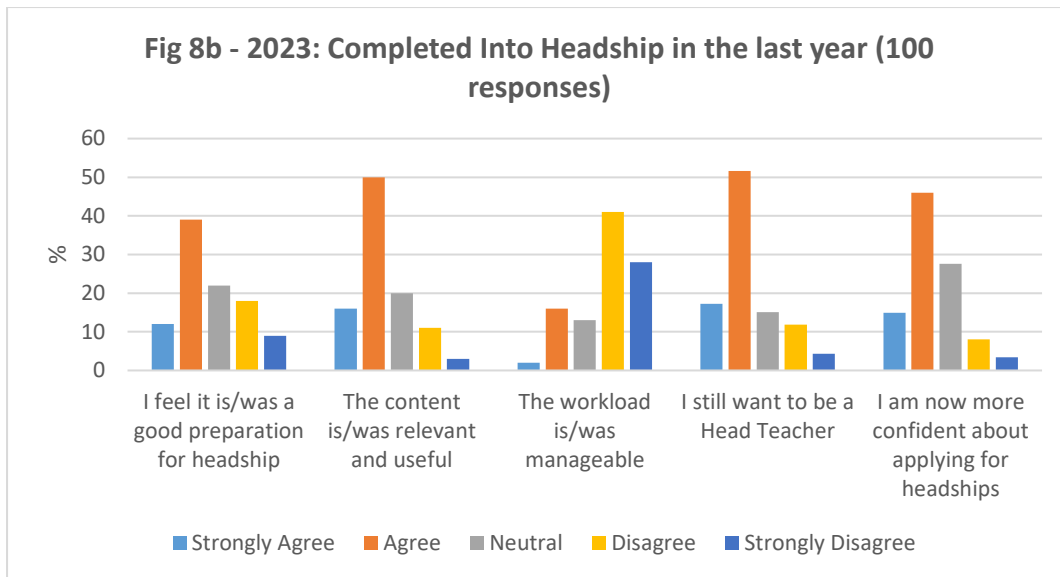
- “I feel it was a good preparation for headship”
- “The content was relevant and useful”
- “The workload was manageable”
- “I still want to be a Head Teacher”
- “I am now more confident about applying for headships”

Completed Into Headship

In 2025, 120 members indicated they had completed into headship within the last year and responded to all statements. The comparable figure in 2023 was 100. The responses from each year are shown below in Figs 8a-b (2024 is not shown as an error in the questionnaire meant that all members, rather than just those who completed it in the past year, responded).

The graphs below make clear that the response in 2025 is materially more positive when it comes to views on “I feel it was a good preparation for headship” and “The content was relevant and useful”. Members were also nearly ten percentage points less likely to offer a negative response to “The workload was manageable”. While this remains a majority negative indicator, it is positive change which is perhaps a result of the recent determination that participants should be given more study time.



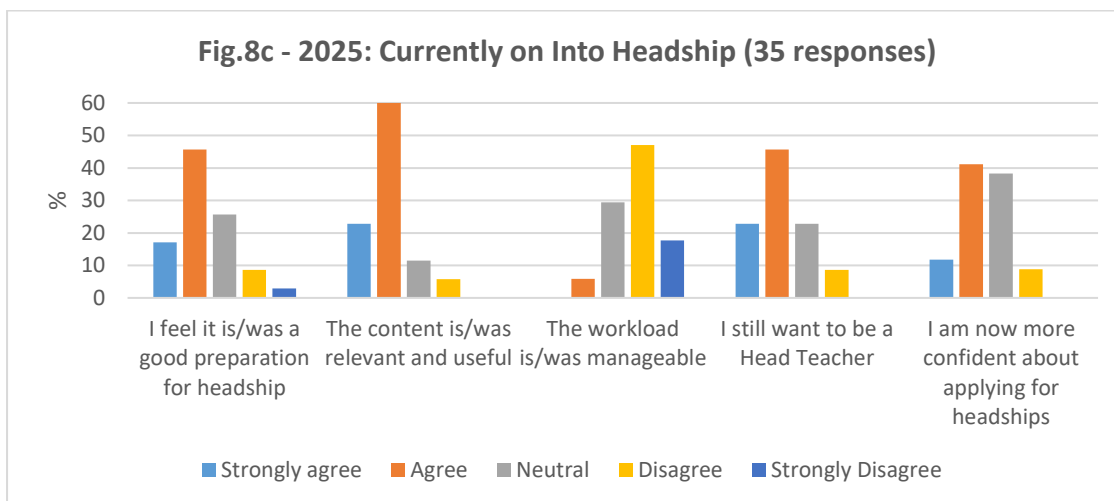


Undertaking Into Headship

Those currently undertaking their studies were much less likely to be positive about workload (fig 8c) – with only two out of thirty-five in this position in 2025 offering a positive response. Almost all in this group who offered a comment referenced excessive workload and expectations associated with the programme. This is a considerably less positive response than in 2024 but more aligned with previous years.

In common with those who completed the programme in the last year, those currently on the programme in 2025 were materially more positive about the value and relevance of Into Headship than was the case in previous survey responses.

It is worth noting that within this group of 35 members, 10 reported being in acting HT roles when they started Into Headship and 6 have moved into acting roles during their studies. This equates to 46% of the group which is similar to last year (47%). In 2025, of those who indicated that they had completed the programme in the last year, 37% had been in an acting headship either at the start of the programme or during their studies.



Into Headship

Fig.8d - 2024: Currently on Into Headship (50 responses)

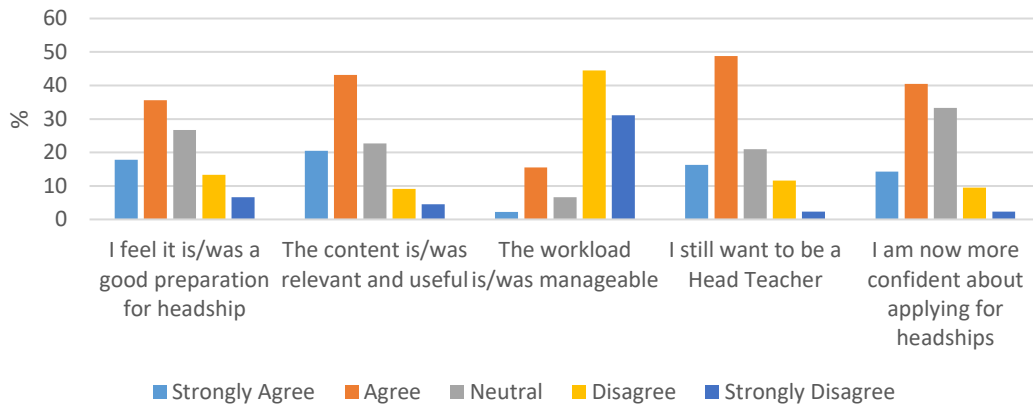


Fig.8e - 2023: Currently on Into Headship (41 responses)

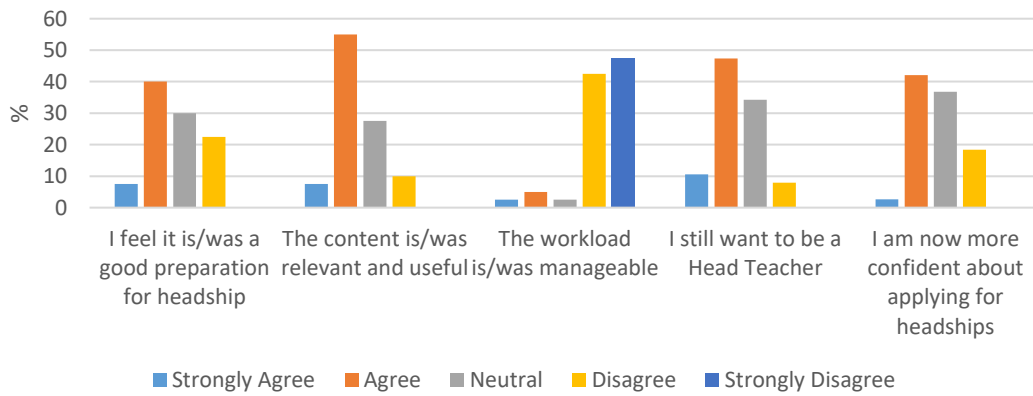
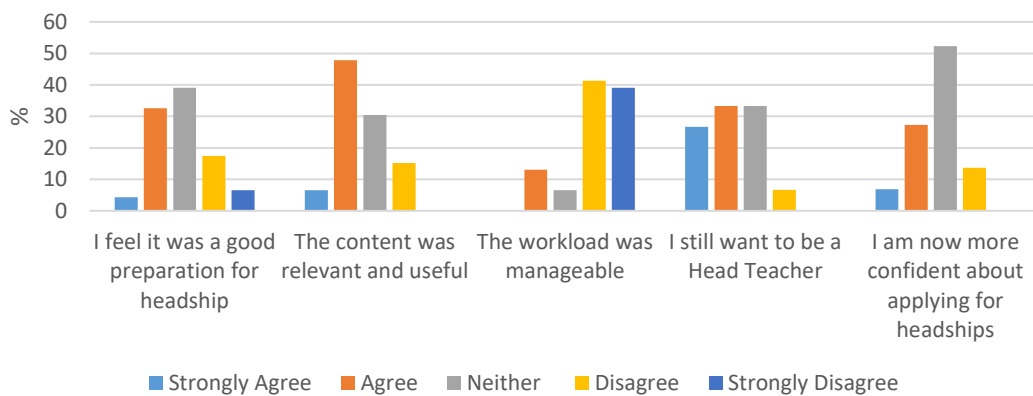


Fig. 8f - 2022: Currently on Into Headship (46 responses)



Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs)

Questions about SNSAs have been included in our survey since 2019. The following response statements were included until last year (2024):

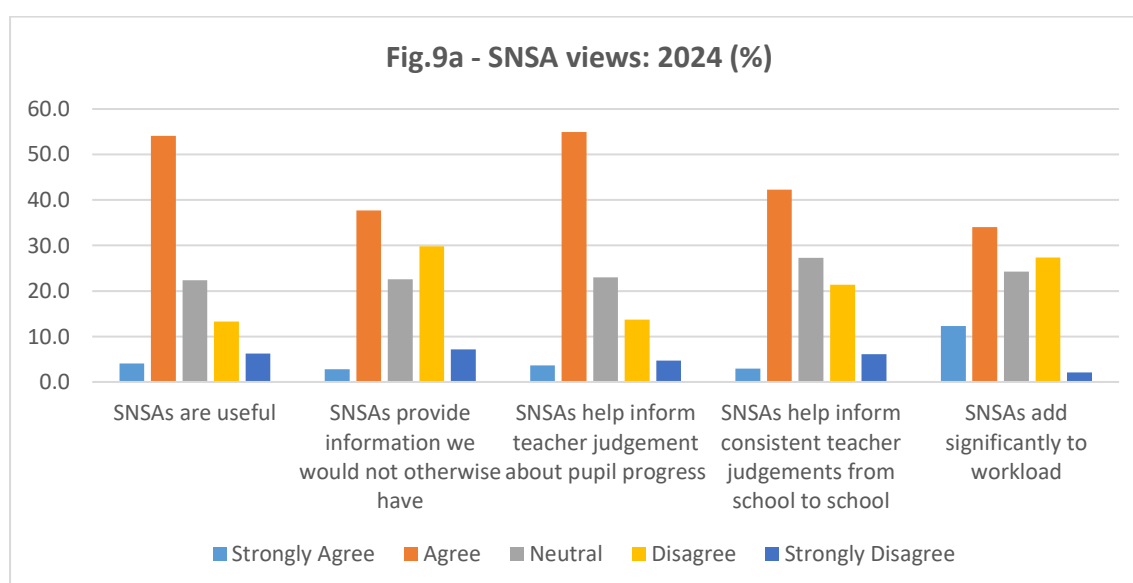
- “SNSAs are useful”
- “SNSAs provide information we would not otherwise have”
- “SNSAs help inform teacher judgement about pupil progress”
- “SNSAs help inform consistent teacher judgements from school to school”
- “SNSAs add significantly to workload”

Each of these indicators had seen a marginal year-on-year increase in positivity. As responses were fairly stable (and improving steadily), these questions were not asked in 2025 to make way for questions related to ASN.

The 2024 response is shown below for information. An overall majority of responses indicated the view that SNSA’s were useful and that they helped to inform teacher judgement about pupil progress – this had seen slight improvements every year. Views about the degree to which SNSAs could support consistent judgements across the system were positive, with an increase in positivity in 2024 falling slightly short of getting a majority positive response.

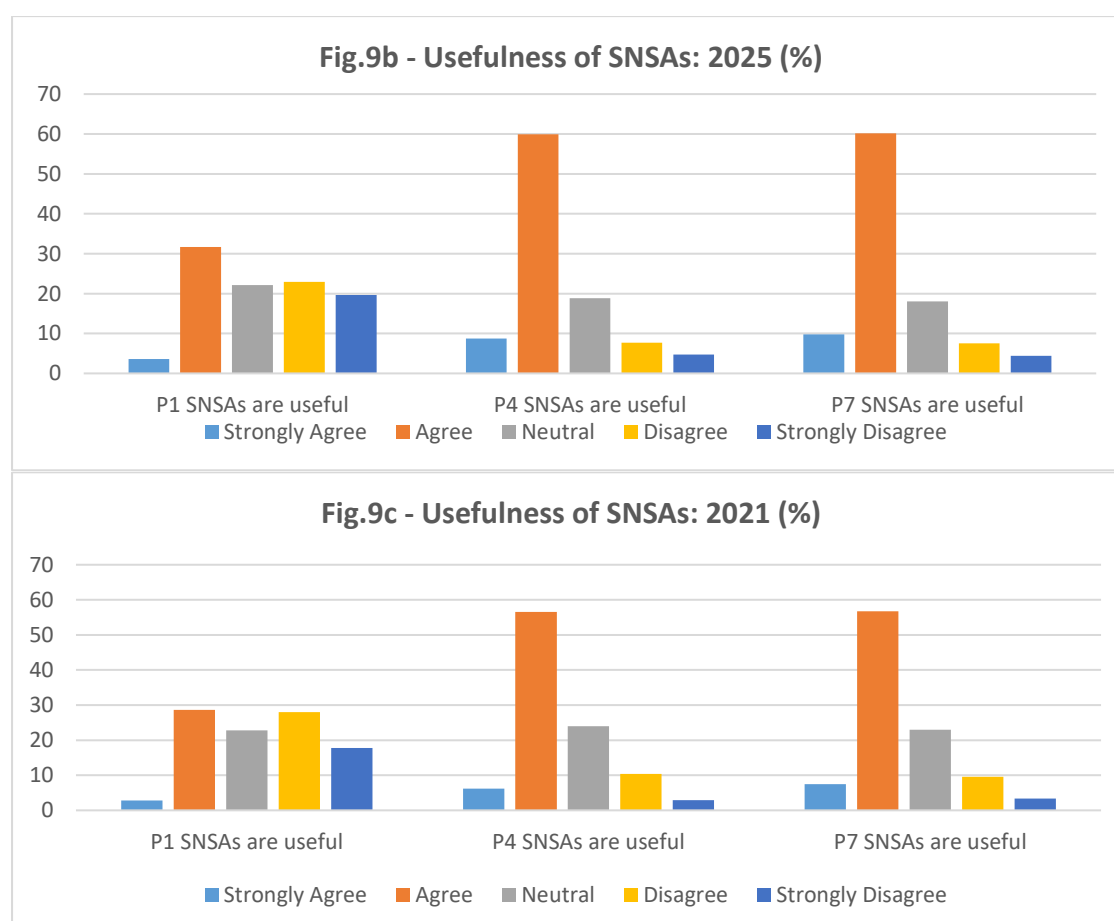
Views have been finely balanced about whether SNSAs provided information that the school would not otherwise have. With an increase in positivity in 2024, there are now notably more positive responses than negative in relation to this point.

Finally, “SNSAs add significantly to workload” was a majority negative indicator until 2023. This was no longer the case in 2023 and, while slightly less positive, remained so in 2024.



A new question was added in 2021 asking for members to distinguish between the three standardised assessment points in primary. This was in response to comments in earlier surveys which were very negative about P1 assessments in particular. Members were asked to reflect on the usefulness of SNSAs separately for P1, P4 and P7. This remained part of the 2025 survey. Figs 9b & 9c show the response in 2025 and 2021 respectively. It is clear that there remains a stark difference in views about P1 SNSAs compared to the assessments for P4 and P7 – which had a strong majority positive response in 2021 which has improved notably. The response in relation to P1 assessments has improved in positivity too, though only 35% offered a positive response to ‘P1 SNSAs are useful’.

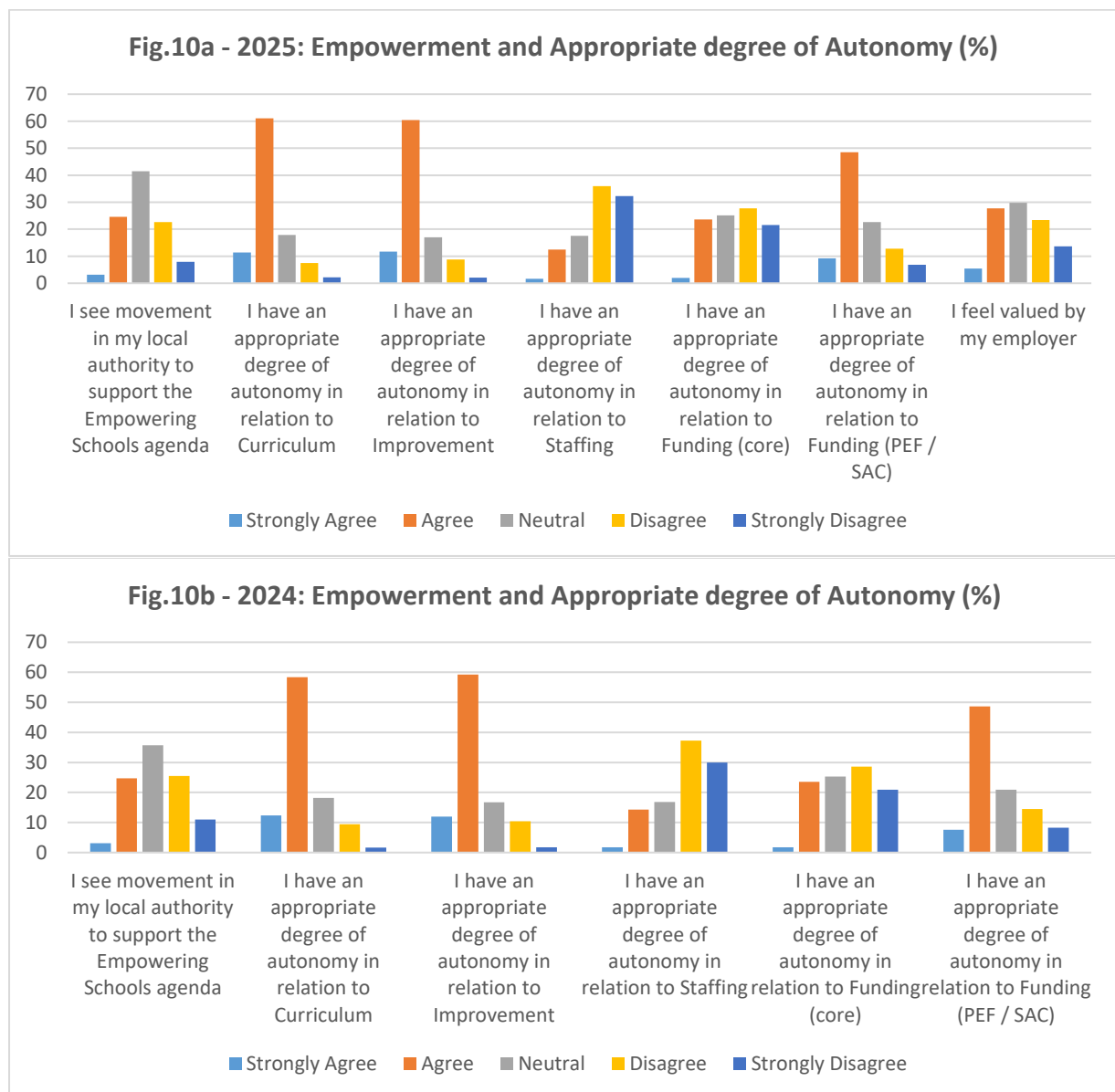
Comments offered by members continue to highlight the widely held view that P1 assessments are time consuming and unreliable. Others felt that the P1 assessments were inappropriate in the context of play based learning and some noted that IT provision was not suitable in some areas. A wide range of other views were also expressed, with some suggesting that more frequent assessments should be undertaken through to those who felt that the assessments were not at all useful in their current format.



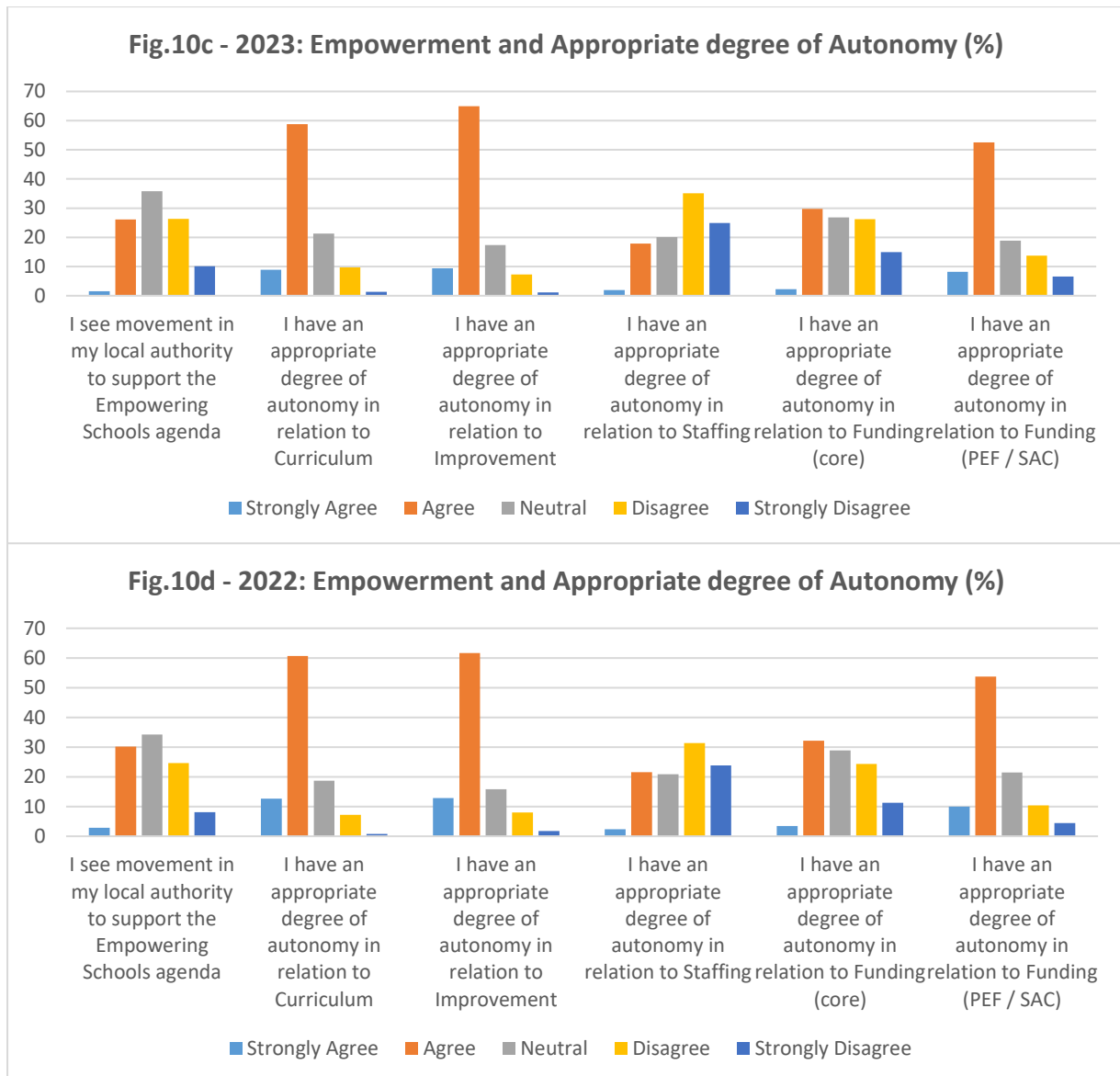
Empowering Schools agenda

The information provided in response to the 2019 survey suggested that many members were starting to see some positive change in their employer's response to the empowering schools agenda. This showed signs of improvement in 2020 but dropped away in 2021 and then took a bigger step for the worse in 2022. This worsened again slightly in 2023. While negative responses have reduced in 2025, 'neutral' responses have increased by seven percentage points. This appears to indicate that members are unclear about the current status of the empowerment agenda. That said, responses regarding autonomy with curriculum and improvement are amongst the most positive for all years of the survey.

In 2024, there was a notable negative shift in perceived autonomy in relation to staffing and funding – this was sustained in 2025. Responses in relation to autonomy with PEF also became slightly more negative in 2025.



Empowering schools



END.