



Workload Survey 2016-2024

(v.1.1)

Overview:

AHDS is a union for school leaders from Scotland's primary, nursery and ASN schools. This paper draws together the views expressed by over 1470 AHDS members in 2024 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.

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Executive summary

This report summarises the responses of AHDS members to an annual workload survey conducted in late February/early March each year between 2016 and 2024. The report focusses on the 2024 data and compares it to the data gathered in previous years. The survey was completed by between 1000 and 1470 members each year.

Average typical **working hours** reported in 2024 increased by 0.8hrs per week to 53.4hrs/wk (52.6hrs/wk in 2023). This is 18.4hrs above the contracted working week of 35hrs. If members worked contracted hours each week, they would have needed an additional 21 working weeks in the year to accommodate this unpaid overtime!

399 members reported working 60 hours or more a week or more. The lowest average for HTs in any local authority was 48.4hrs/wk, the highest was 65hrs/wk. These figures have both increased notably since last year's survey.

Workload issues once again highlighted a mismatch between resources available and expectations. (This section of the survey was adapted in 2024. Rather than imply 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, 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.

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 more than fallen away in 2022 and worsened by a further 5 percentage points in 2023, reaching an all-time low at that point. **The 2024 returns worsened further with only 28% of HTs recommending headship to others (while 46% do not recommend headship to others).**

Interest in headship amongst Deputes and Principal Teachers has also declined considerably over the survey period and 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 2024 those saying they were keen to become a HT had dropped to 15% of DHTs and 14% 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 impacts this may have on health and family life.

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. It is notable that 47% of those who indicated they were currently undertaking the programme were in acting or substantive headships and that, in addition 28% across all those who had undertaken the programme reported having moved into an acting headship role while doing the course. This is not how the programme was designed and adds considerable workload pressure for these candidates.

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.

Greg Dempster
April 2024

Note: 2020-2022 was a unique period in Scottish Education, dominated by the wholly unusual circumstances and 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, especially when looking at trend information.

Introduction

2024 is the ninth year that AHDS has run this workload 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
HT	674	703	668 ¹	742 ²	739 ³	753 ⁴	855 ⁵	751 ⁶	878 ⁷
DHT	228	244	242	313	331	329	354	345	429
PT	53	68	91	89	87	81	99	103	144
Other	13	16	7	20	15	21	9	13	22
All responses	968	1031	1008	1164	1172	1184	1316	1275	1473

¹ Including 56 leading more than one school.

² Including 64 leading more than one school.

³ Including 61 leading more than one school.

⁴ Including 51 leading more than one school.

⁵ Including 63 leading more than one school.

⁶ Including 68 including more than one school.

⁷ Including 78 including more than one school.

This paper seeks to bring together those responses and to interrogate the information by role, gender and local authority area as well as to compare year on year. This paper does not aim to interpret responses nor to translate them into 'next steps'. The information will be used by AHDS National Executive and Council to support efforts to speak out on issues that matter to the AHDS membership.

Most questions have remained the same throughout apart from:

- Removal of questions about RICs in 2024 due to their planned cessation.
- Additional question in 2022 about whether members had considered leaving their role earlier than previously planned.
- Additional questions from 2020 about working hours, feeling valued and positive aspects of the role.
- An additional question from 2019 asking about RICs and Empowering Schools agenda. Expanded in 2020. Removed for 2024 survey.
- An additional question from 2019 asking about SNSAs. Expanded in 2020.
- Change to 'Into Headship' question to reflect the fact that candidates were no longer required to pay a share of course costs.
- An additional question from 2019 about the experience of Into Headship candidates.

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. However reported hours have increased in 2024 for HTs. **HTs reported working 19.9hrs over the contracted working week of 35hrs with Deputes and PTs not far behind.**

While it is an arbitrary marker of excessive hours, in the 2024 survey there were 399 members who reported working 60hrs or more in a typical working week. In 2023 22.6% of members who responded reported working 60 hours or more. This had increased to 27.1% in 2024.

Table 2: Average weekly hours

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

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
HT	6.1hrs	3.5hrs	5.5hrs	6.0hrs	6.3hrs
HT multi	3.9hrs	2.8hrs	3.6hrs	4.7hrs	3.2hrs
All HT	5.9hrs	3.4hrs	5.3hrs	5.8hrs	6.0hrs
DHT	7.0hrs	4.2hrs	6.1hrs	7.0hrs	7.4hrs
PT	4.6hrs	3.3hrs	4.5hrs	4.2hrs	3.8hrs
	Hours unplanned cover				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
HT	3.4hrs	2hrs	4.8hrs	2.7hrs	3.4hrs
HT multi	3.8hrs	2.4hrs	5.3hrs	3.4hrs	2.8hrs
All HT	3.4hrs	2hrs	4.9hrs	2.8hrs	3.4hrs
DHT	4.5hrs	2.8hrs	6.6hrs	3.8hrs	4.3hrs
PT	3.7hrs	2.4hrs	5.6hrs	4.2hrs	3.0hrs
	Days with break of 20 minutes				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
HT	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.3
HT multi	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.6

Average working hours

All HT	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.4
DHT	0.3	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.3
PT	1	1.8	1.3	0.9	0.9

NOTE: This question asks members to comment on the previous week. For some, this included strike days in 2023 (so members were asked to recall the most recent full pupil week) and 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 increased since last year for HTs and DHTs. 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). Time spent providing **“Hours unplanned cover”** have increased in 2024 for HTs and DHTs after a dip in 2023. They have decreased for PTs.

The average amount of time spent on these two duties by HTs in 2024 was 9.7hrs 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.

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 1.9hrs/wk to 8.8hrs/wk (this is an increase since 2023 when the range was 1.6hrs/wk to 7.9hrs/wk). There is a wide range of time committed to this within local authorities too but the trend is an increasing one.

School to school comparisons relating to providing 1:1 support also show wide variance with some in each role reporting providing no 1:1 support while in others it related to the whole pupil day including breaks and lunches. The average (for all roles) by local authority area ranged from 1.5hrs/wk to 6.6hrs/wk.

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 on 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 the same as in 2023.

By local authority

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 49.1hrs/wk (47.1hrs/wk in 2023) while the longest average reported was 56.3hrs/wk (55.4hrs/wk in 2023).

Non-contact time

For the past five years, we asked how members were delivering teachers’ non-contact time in their schools. It is interesting to note that there was a very significant change in responses to this question from 2020 to 2021 which appears to align with Covid restrictions (i.e. a very much reduced reliance on assemblies). Despite

assemblies being an available option to schools at the time of the 2022 survey, the returns suggest that the same practices as 2021 seemed still to have been in place.

Table 4: Delivery of Teacher non-contact time 2020-24

Method of delivering NCCT	2020 No. of members	2021 No of members	2022 No of members	2023 No of members	2024 No of members
It is fully staffed by additional teaching staff/visiting specialists	408	532	684	538	604
Partly staffed by additional teaching staff/visiting specialists	617	487	517	598	695
Classes covered by management team	428	406	410	410	508
Assemblies	560	198	183	467	556

In 2023, there was a return to mechanisms for delivering NCCT which relied more heavily on school leaders (which remained proportionally similar in 2024). Most notable is the return to common use of assemblies. SMT covering classes remained a solution in a high number of cases and there was a meaningful shift from NCCT being fully covered by additional staff/specialists to only partly being covered in this way.

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 often have little time to prepare for covering a class or are undertaking assemblies with many classes together – which is rarely going to offer learning of the same level as would be expected in class.

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?”

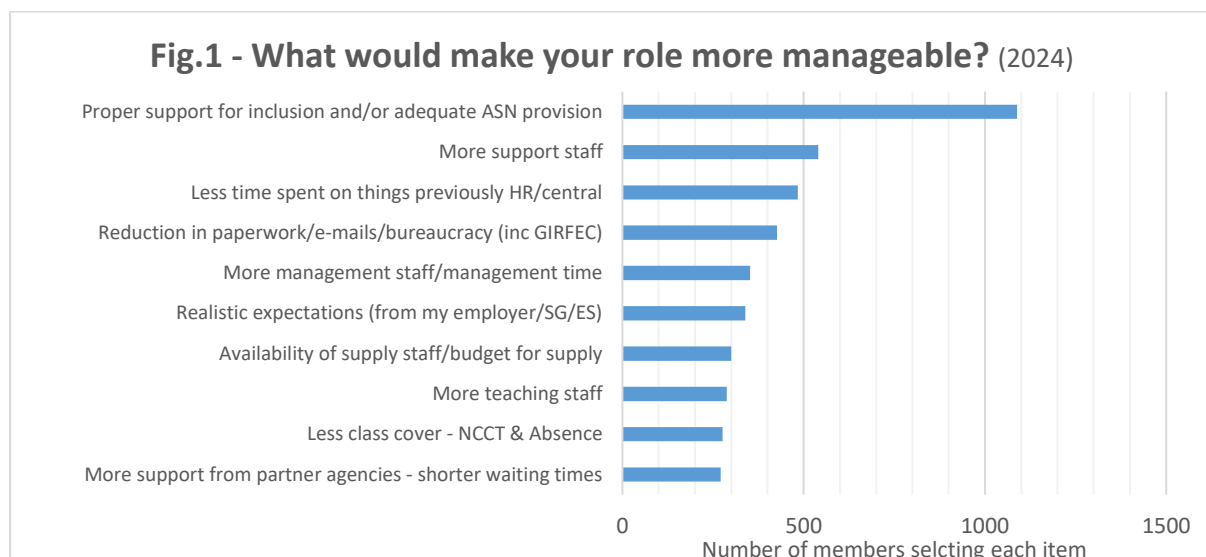
“If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?”

These were free-text responses until 2024. This year 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).

Until this year, comments were categorised under headings and member comments tended to approach the same issues from different directions (i.e. Some called for less bureaucracy while others called for more management or admin time. Some called for being enabled to spend more time on learning and teaching while others sought to have more management time or form formerly central roles to be returned to HQ). Most of these responses highlight a mismatch between resources available and expectations.

“What would make your role more manageable?”

In the first eight years of this survey, the grouped member responses to this highlighted a small number of issues which came up time and again. The top ten issues raised in 2023 formed the basis for responses this year:



This appears to highlight an increased level of concern about the support available for pupils with additional needs than in previous years as it was selected as a key issue by more than twice as many members than the second most commonly highlighted point. While this may be related to the different approach to presenting this question, the scale of the change from the 2023 return can't be ignored.

Table 5: 2023, 'What would make your role more manageable?'

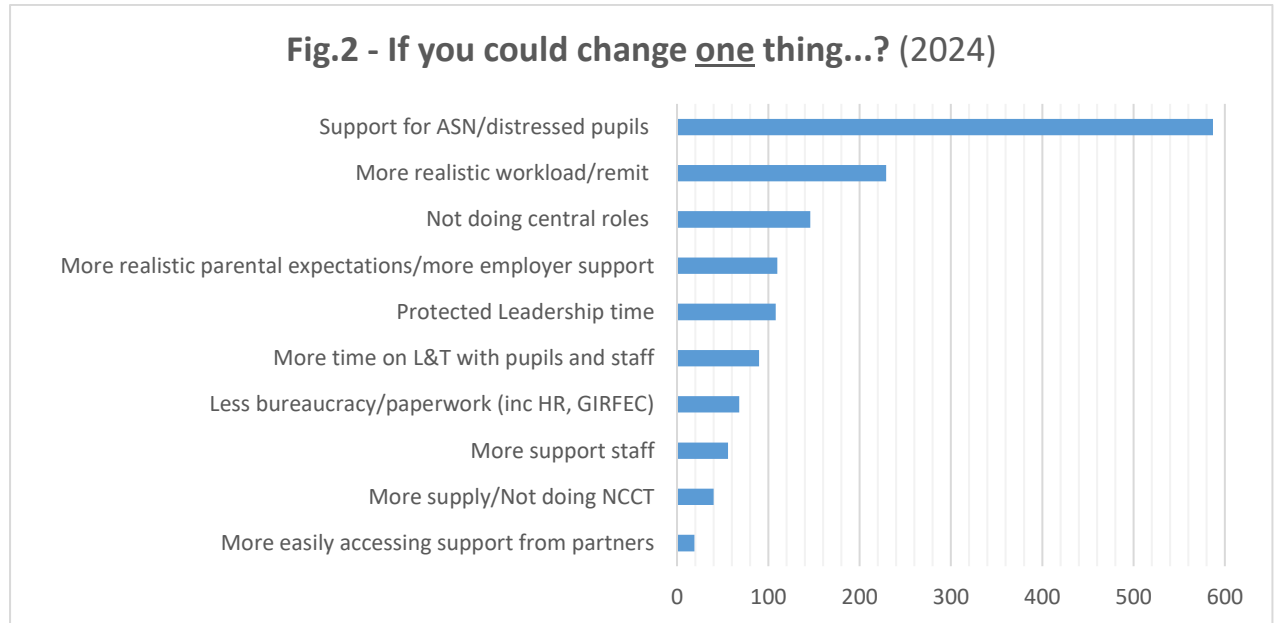
Rank	Issues in 2023	Number of responses	Rank in 2022
1	Proper support for inclusion/adequate support for ASN pupils	470	3
2	More management time/protected management time/more management staff	440	1
3	More support staff	319	5
4	Reduction in paperwork/e-mails/bureaucracy (inc GIRFEC)	270	4
5	Less time spent on previously central roles (HR, premises, etc)	172	9
6	Availability of supply staff/budget to pay for them	142	2
7	More teaching staff	128	6
8	Realistic expectations in this climate	95	8
9	Reduction/removal of class cover (NCCT & Absence)	89	7
10	More support from Partner agencies	88	-

Lack of management time, bureaucracy and providing class cover were the top three from 2016-2019. These all remain frequently quoted issues but no longer lock out the top three spots. In 2020, 'Proper support for inclusion' became the most commonly stated issue, having become increasingly mentioned over each year of the survey. It topped the list again in 2023 and is once again the main concern of school leaders when thinking about the manageability of their roles – followed by the related call for more support staff. It is clear when moving on to questions about desirability of headship that the lack of resources combined with what are described as unrealistic expectations, is a considerable factor – making the link between the issue raised in this section and HT recruitment very clear.

The third to fifth most commonly selected items all relate to the administrative burdens faced by school leaders which prevent them from getting to what they see as the core purpose of the job – teaching, learning and improvement.

“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 response was as follows:



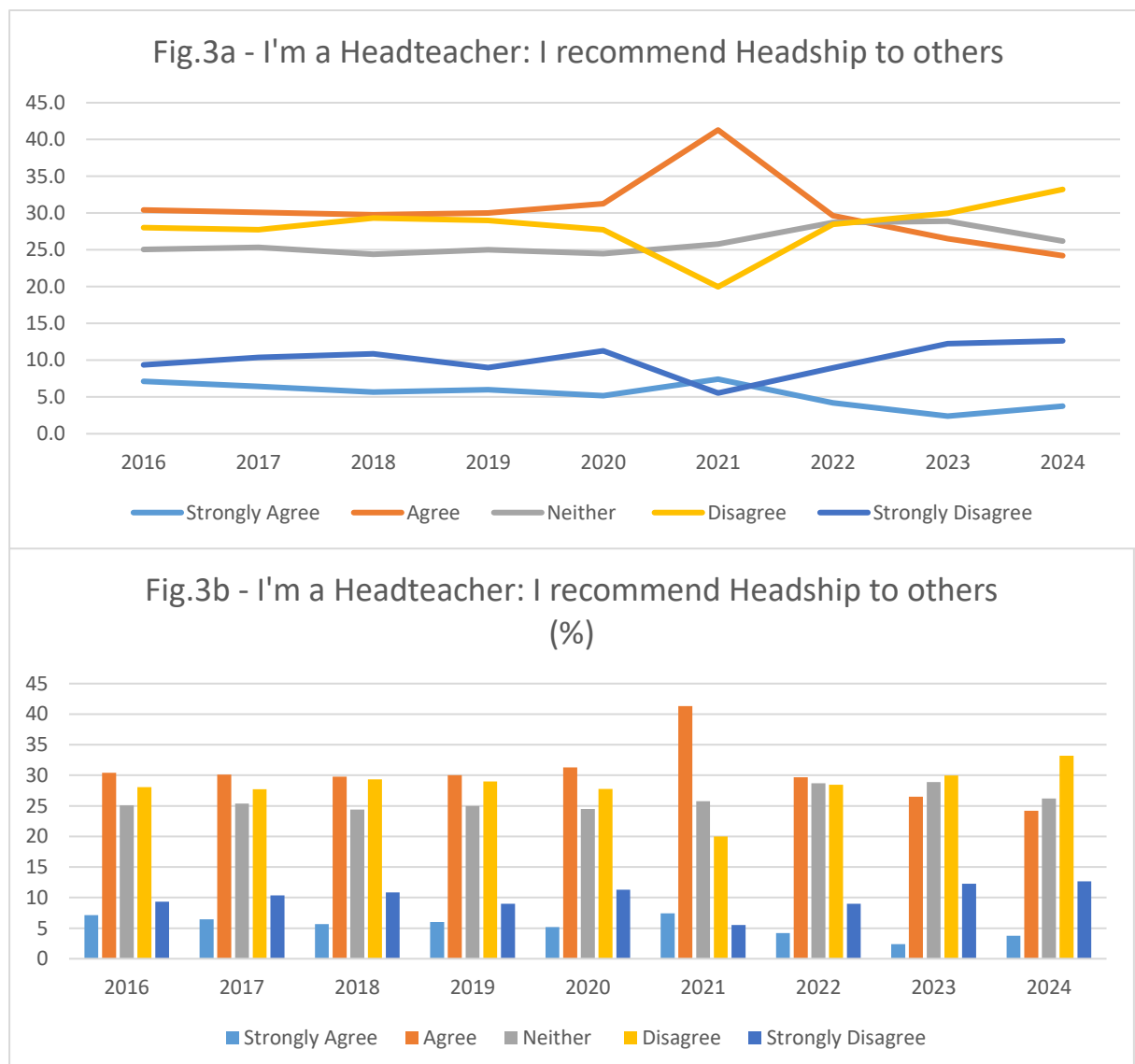
Support for ASN pupils was the 5th most common response in 2022, 3rd most common in 2023 and, as can be seen from the graph above, is by far the most common response in 2024 – selected by around 2.5 times as many members as the next most common response. While the methodology for this question has changed, it appears to confirm an emerging pattern of members feeling that support for ASN and distressed pupils is insufficient and is having an increasing impact on management teams (as well as pupils).

Table 6: 2023 ‘If you could change one thing...’

Rank	Issues in 2023	Number of responses	Rank in 2022
1	Protected leadership time/larger management team	236	1
2	Support for ASN Pupils	217	5
3	Less Bureaucracy/paperwork/email (inc GIRFEC)	203	2
4	More realistic workload/remit	157	3
5	Remove formerly central roles (mainly HR and buildings management)	132	8
6	More time on L&T with pupils and staff	118	6
7	More supply/not doing NCCT	62	4

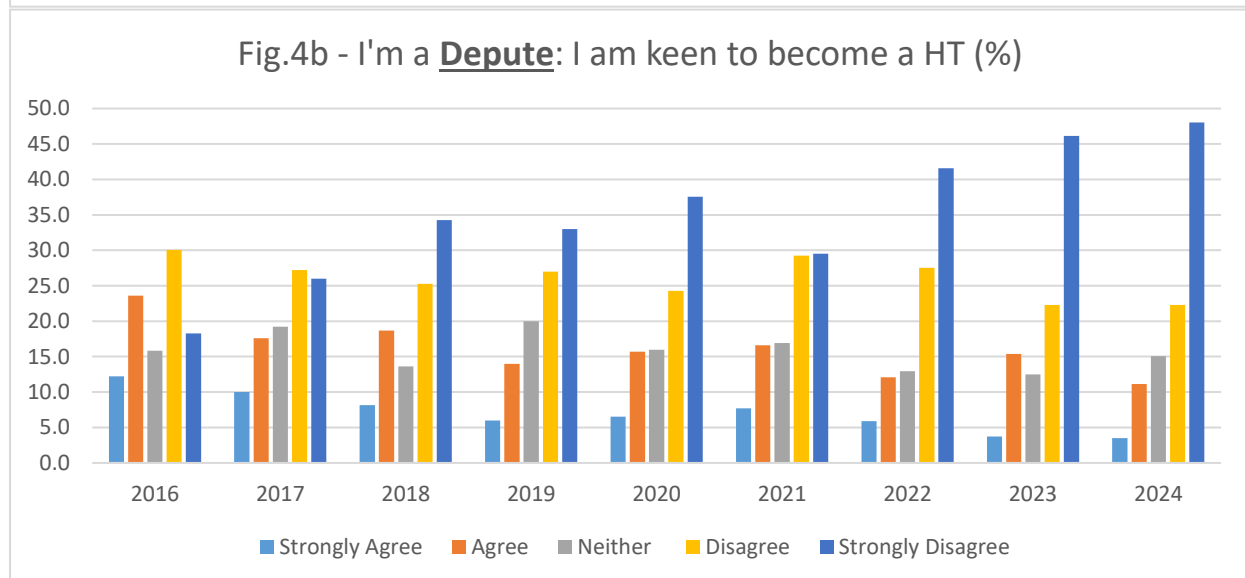
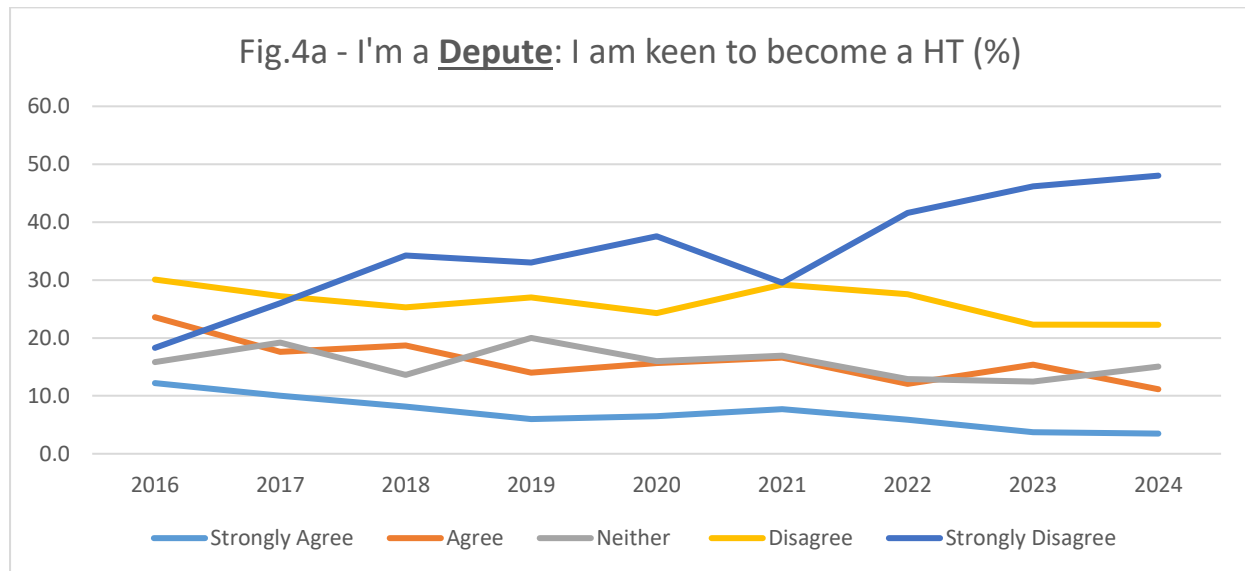
Recommending or seeking headship

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. Fig. 3a and 3b below show the HT response over the nine years of this survey - displayed in different formats to aid understanding.



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. After a jump in positivity from HTs in 2021, the response has become progressively less positive and is now notably worse than the relatively stable picture previously presented by HT responses. **In 2024, only 28% 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.

Deputes and PTs continue to be extremely negative in their responses to the statement “I am keen to become a HT”. Overall, this has been a worsening position. The proportion of DHTs strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement appeared to have stabilised at around one in five but in 2024 it has taken another significant negative turn to 14.6% positivity for DHTs and 13.7% positivity for PTs. This is a huge shift from positivity levels when our survey began in 2016 (35.7% for DHTs and 38.6% for PTs). Figs 4a-7 and tables 7 & 8 on the following pages show the progression over time.



Recommending or seeking headship

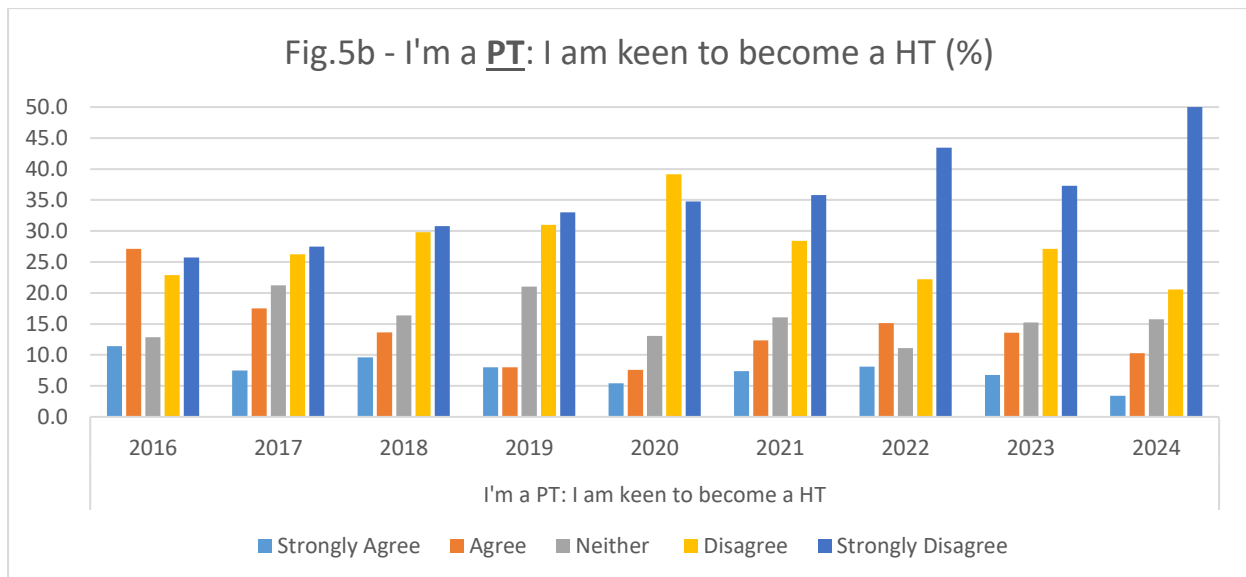
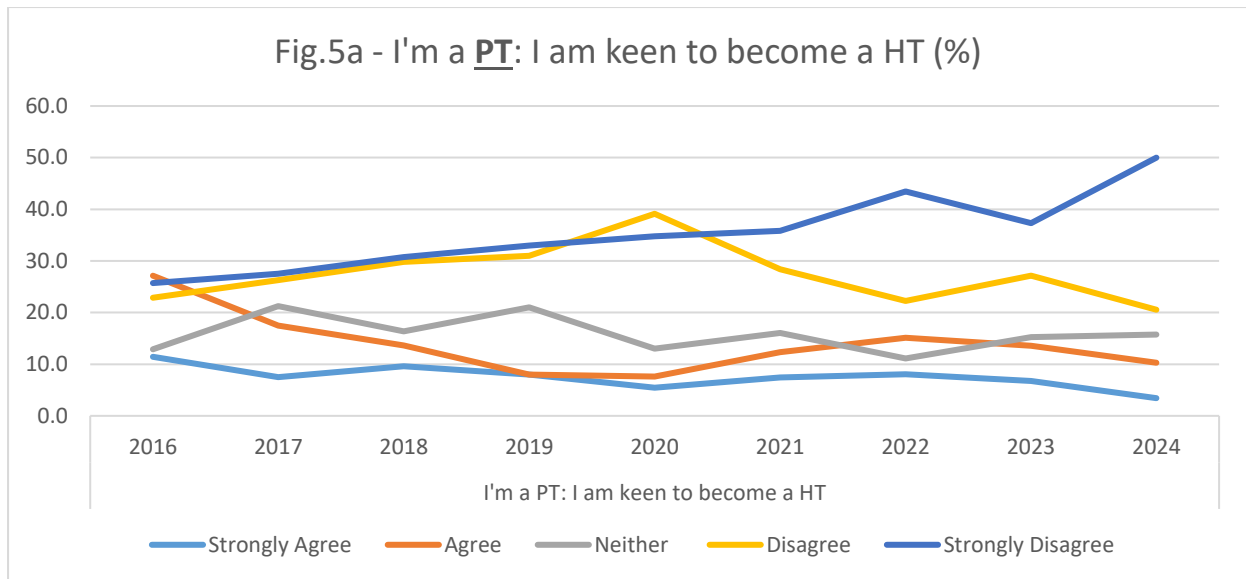


Table 7: %positive about Headship

	DHT	PT
2016	35.7%	38.6%
2017	27.6%	25%
2018	26.9%	23.1%
2019	20%	16%
2020	22.2%	13%
2021	24.3%	19.8%
2022	18%	23.3%
2023	19%	20.3%
2024	14.6%	13.7%

Table 8: %negative about Headship

	DHT	PT
2016	49.1%	48.6%
2017	53.2%	53.8%
2018	59.5%	60.6%
2019	60%	64%
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%

Fig 6:

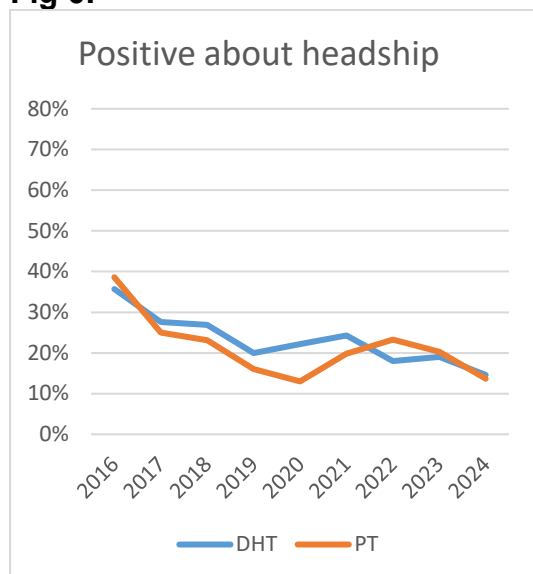
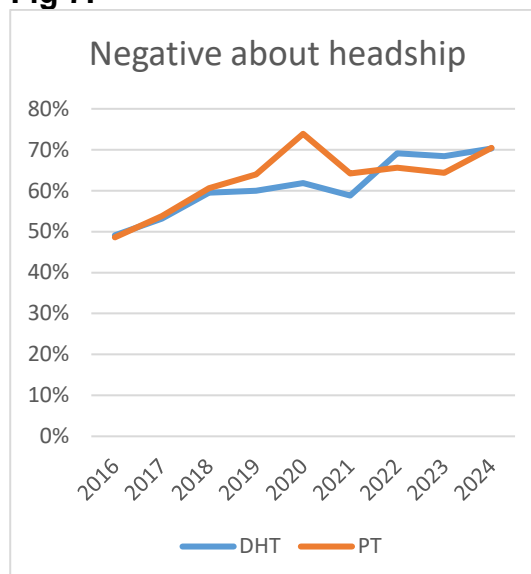


Fig 7:



Comments: Recommending headship/keenness to pursue headship

From 2019 we asked ‘Would you like to tell us why you chose that response’. In common with previous years, the 2024 return resulted in lots of comments from members. While some HTs were very positive about the role, those offering unqualified positive comments were few and far between. Most reflected some of the key points given by colleagues who did not recommend headship with the difference being that they appeared to see the opportunity to ‘make a difference’ as a sufficiently balancing factor.

As the data shown in the figures and tables above presents such negative – and worsening – picture about the desirability of headship, this year’s report includes an extended section looking at the comments made about why members responded in a particular way.

HTs who recommend headship to others often talked about the challenges as well as the opportunities that the role offered. Many acknowledged the demanding nature of the job, emphasising its stressful and challenging aspects. Issues such as workload, lack of support, and increasing responsibilities were repeatedly highlighted. Despite these challenges, the reason that many gave for recommending headship was the scope to make a difference for pupils, families and staff and the fulfilment that can bring.

Some express concerns about the sustainability of the role, citing issues such as budget cuts, increased demands, and the need for better support systems.

Overall, although positive, these comments underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of headship, combining the difficulties associated with the role (and the sacrifices that these require) with a deep sense of purpose derived from serving the school community.

“I don’t sugar coat the role, it is very stressful at times and is hard work although rewarding and fulfilling also.”

Heads who “disagreed” with the statement (“I recommend headship to others”) expressed significant dissatisfaction and frustration with the role of headteacher. They cited various reasons for their discontent, including:

1. **Unmanageable Workload:** Many headteachers mentioned an overwhelming workload, with demands that often extended beyond what could reasonably be achieved in a typical working week. They expressed concerns about the lack of work-life balance and the toll it takes on their health and personal life.
2. **Lack of Support:** Several headteachers felt unsupported by local authorities and other agencies. They mentioned a lack of resources (including timely and appropriate external support), reduced budgets, and decreased staffing levels, which exacerbate the challenges they face.
3. **Increased Expectations:** Headteachers mentioned feeling burdened by ever-expanding responsibilities, including administrative tasks, financial management, HR duties, and dealing with behaviour issues. They express frustration that these tasks take precedence over their core role of leading teaching and learning.
4. **Impact on Well-being:** Many headteachers expressed concerns about the negative impact of their role on their mental and physical health, as well as their overall well-being. They mentioned feeling constantly stressed, exhausted, and underappreciated.
5. **Changes in Education Landscape:** Some headteachers mention changes in the education system, such as shifts in policy, curriculum demands, and the under-resourced inclusion agenda, which add to their workload and stress levels.

Overall, the comments reflect a sense of disillusionment and burnout among headteachers, with many expressing doubts about recommending the role to others due to its current challenges and demands.

“I am now permanently exhausted from the amount of time I spend supporting inclusion and covering classes due to having no budget for supply cover. PSA time keeps being reduced and the amount of ASN children are on the increase! We have no physical space to provide nurture rooms or calm areas so these distressed children are on full view in the corridors for all to see and that is not right!”

Heads who “strongly disagreed” with the statement (“I recommend headship to others”) focussed on the same points but more strongly expressed why they recommended against taking up headship. These quotes from 2024 returns highlight the overwhelming workload, lack of support, impact on personal well-being, and changing nature of the Headteacher role as expressed by the individual members:

1. Workload and Stress:

“The job has become untenable.”

“It’s not what it was, spend all my time dealing with ASN, paperwork and the stress of false allegations.”

“The job is now impossible.”

“This job has affected my health, my wellbeing, my work life balance and my family.”

"The stress of the job is impacting on my health and my family!"

"This job affects your mental health."

2. Lack of Support:

"Very little job satisfaction."

"I don't feel anyone looks after HT's well-being."

"The job is becoming unmanageable and younger HTs with families will struggle to maintain a healthy work life balance."

"Pressure too much. Not enough cover for absent staff."

"There is no support from those above me."

3. Changing Nature of the Role:

"The role of HT is becoming increasingly stressful and less well supported."

"The job is not what it was."

"The job role and responsibilities have grown significantly."

"The demands upon the role of a Headteacher are not aligned to educating young people."

4. Impact on Personal Life:

"I often wished I remained [as a Deputy Headteacher]."

"I regularly work in excess of 60 hours each week, with no breaks during the school day."

"Year on year the situation is worse, with less support and an increase in blame culture coming from below as well as above."

HTs who were 'neutral' about recommending headship talked about many of the same points as those who do not recommend headship. They focussed on the following:

1. **Workload:** Headteachers expressed concerns about the immense workload, focussing on dealing with abusive comments, supporting children with additional support needs (ASN) without adequate resources, and managing staff amidst these challenges.

2. **Job Satisfaction and Stress:** While some found the role rewarding, others express doubts and stress about whether they were in the right role due to the demanding nature of the job and how it has changes over time. Many emphasised the importance of understanding the realities of the job before taking it on.

3. **Individual Suitability:** Many set out that not everyone is cut out for headship, and suitability depends on an individual's ability to manage stress, workload, and work-life balance.

4. **Changing Landscape:** Headteachers noted that the role had changed significantly over the years, becoming more challenging due to increasing demands, budget cuts, and changes in expectations.

5. **Support and Resources:** Concerns were raised about the lack of support and resources available to headteachers, making it difficult to manage the workload effectively.

Overall, while some express love for their job and a willingness to support future leaders, they also caution about the challenges and stress involved, suggesting that potential headteachers should be fully informed and adequately prepared before taking on the role.

DHTs who were keen to become HTs (14.6%). Due to the small numbers, this section looks at comments added by those DHTs who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement "I am keen to become a HT". This group shared the following:

A DHT with 10 years of experience expressed a desire to lead a school, feeling increasingly prepared for the next step. Despite completing Into Headship, they have some reservations as they observe the impact of their current role on their wellbeing and similar impacts on colleagues.

Another DHT shared that their role was being cut after 3 1/2 years, leaving them in the position that they felt their only option was to apply for headships. They see headship as an opportunity to lead a school community toward shared vision and improved outcomes for children, despite acknowledging the personal investment and challenges involved.

A DHT with approximately 5/6 years until retirement, who completed Into Headship during Covid, responded positively but is now questioning their aspiration to become a headteacher due to the workload and stress they see HTs facing.

Overall, these comments depict a mix of ambition but these were often tempered by doubts and workload/health considerations regarding stepping into headship.

The small number of DHTs who strongly agreed (3%) that they wished to pursue headship, and left a comment, were very positive about the prospect of headship.

DHTs who were "neither" positive nor negative about seeking headship (15%) shared comments which covered a wide range of themes to explain why they selected "neither". These included:

1. Uncertainty about the alignment of recent changes in education with personal morals and values.
2. Satisfaction with the DHT role and a lack of immediate plans to become a headteacher.
3. Recognition of appealing aspects of the headteacher role but hesitation about pursuing headship due to concern about demands, pressures, and work-life balance.
4. Observations of the heavy workload, lack of support (and recognition) from local authorities, and unrealistic expectations placed on headteachers that they work with every day.
5. Mixed feelings about completing training for headship and uncertainty about whether it's the right path.

"I don't think the role of HT is a role where job satisfaction can be felt at the moment - staffing issues, parental expectations and lack of resources is ridiculous!"

DHTs who "disagreed" (22.3%) when asked if they were keen to pursue headship offered the following insights:

1. Concerns about workload, including HR, finance, and unrealistic expectations.

2. Health considerations and witnessing the stress and workload of headteacher colleagues.
3. Perceptions of unattractive aspects of the headteacher role, such as bureaucratic demands, diminished resources, and reduced focus on teaching and learning.
4. Lack of support, both in terms of career advancement and in managing workload and work-life balance.
5. Family considerations, with concerns about balancing the demands of headship with personal life, especially with regards to parenting.
6. Negative experiences or perceptions of the headteacher role, including past interviews, periods of acting headship, and observations of headteacher responsibilities.
7. Concerns additional study requirements, and lack of perceived benefits not being adequately rewarded by HT salaries.
8. Overall, this group seem to see the headteacher role as increasingly unmanageable and unappealing.

DHTs who “strongly disagreed” (48%) with the statement “I am a DHT, I am keen to become a HT” covered the following key points in their comments:

1. Experiencing extreme stress and burnout during acting headship roles, leading to extended absences or health issues.
2. Some, through acting roles observation of their HTs, considered the HT role lonely, lacking job satisfaction, and overwhelming in terms of workload and stress.
3. Concerns about the current (DHT) workload, stress levels, and lack of support, making them reluctant to consider a HT position.
4. Several noted that the HT role has become increasingly bureaucratic and less focused on teaching and learning, with unrealistic expectations and little appreciation for the challenges faced.
5. Some expressed doubts about the adequacy of training programs like "Into Headship" and the support provided for new HTs.
6. Many cited personal reasons such as family commitments, lack of desire for additional stress, or disillusionment with the profession as reasons for not wanting to pursue headship.

PTs who are keen to pursue headship (13.5% of PT responses) offered the following comments:

1. **Desire for Leadership and Impact:** Some expressed the view that they were capable leaders with broad experience who were ready to step up and have a positive impact on staff development, pupil attainment and the school community.

"I have been working in education for 16 years and feel that my experience and knowledge could benefit others if I was leading a school's journey to excellence."

2. **Career Progression and Development:** Some acknowledge the challenges but are eager to gain experience to prepare themselves for leadership roles.

"I would like to work towards becoming HT, I feel that doing Into Headship would be beneficial regardless."

It is clear that this group, while small, is motivated by belief in their ability to lead effectively, desire for career progression and to take the opportunity to make a meaningful impact on education.

PTs who were not keen to pursue headship (70.5%) offered a range of comments expressing reasons similar to those expressed by DHTs:

1. **Workload and Stress:** Principal Teachers express concerns about the overwhelming workload, stress, and impact on their health and personal life associated with Head Teacher positions. They mention the bureaucratic nature of the role, constant meetings, and the burden of responding to numerous emails daily.

"Absolutely no way I would want the stress of being a HT in the current climate."

2. **Lack of Support and Resources:** Another common theme is the lack of support and resources provided to Head Teachers. They feel that the demands from various stakeholders, including government bodies, exceed what can be reasonably managed without adequate support.

"Many HT's are leaving posts due to pressures on them. I am see the impact first hand and do not want to go down that line."

3. **Focus on Administrative Tasks:** Principal Teachers express dissatisfaction with the shift in focus of Head Teacher roles towards administrative tasks rather than student-centric responsibilities. They feel disconnected from the core purpose of education.

"Being a HT is less about education and more about bureaucracy, HR at present. I am not interested in that."

Overall, the reluctance amongst PTs to pursue Head Teacher roles stems from concerns about excessive workload, high stress levels, lack of support, and a perception that administrative tasks have overshadowed the educational aspects of the role.

‘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

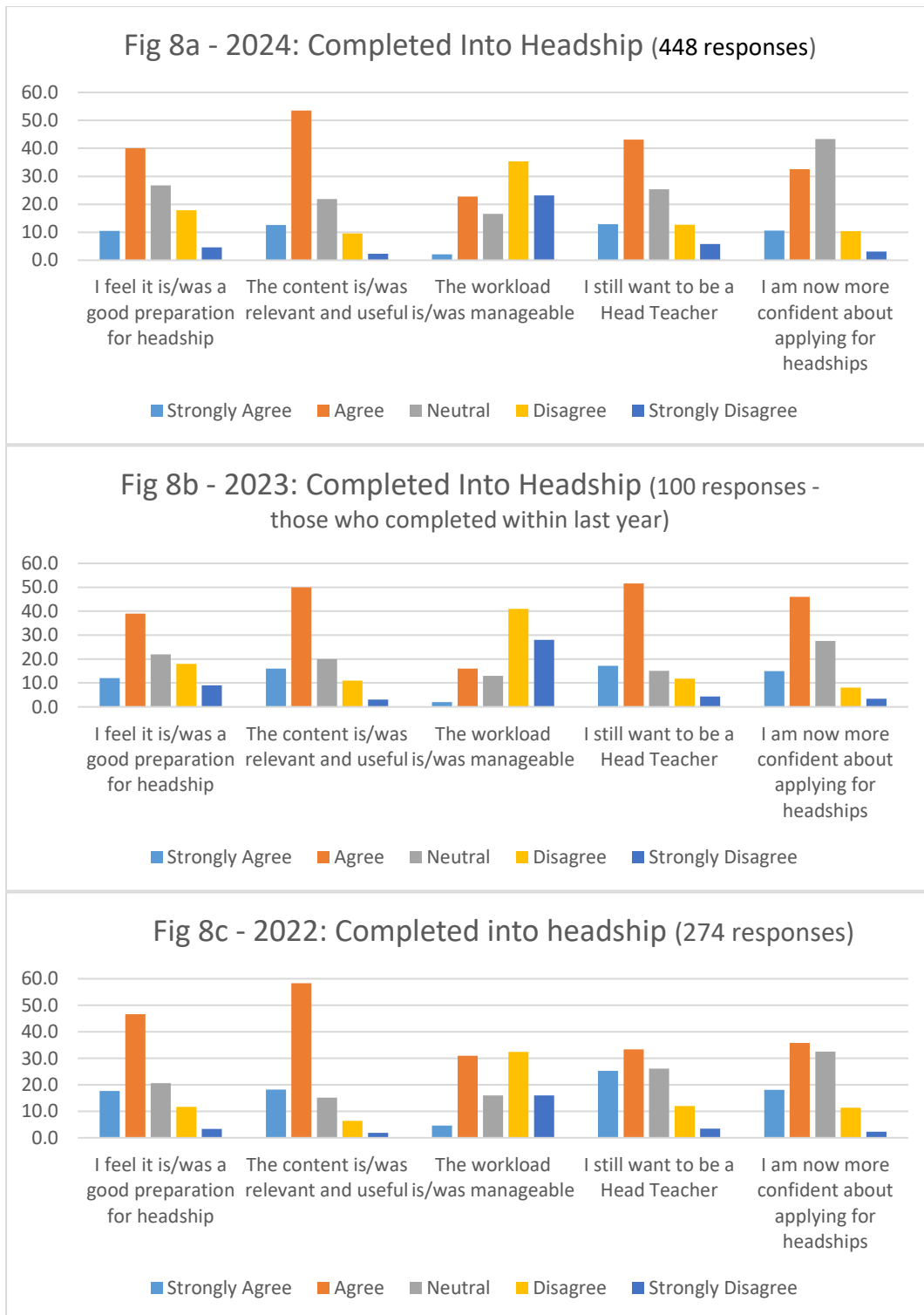
In 2024, 448 members indicated they had completed Into Headship and responded to all statements. In 2023, 331 members indicated they had completed Into Headship but only 100 responded to all response statements as we asked only those who had completed within the last year to respond (this instruction was inadvertently omitted in 2024 but will be reinstated in coming years). Unfortunately, this means that we cannot reliably compare the responses from those who completed Into Headship within the last year with the same group from last year’s survey.

Of the 448 members who responded to this question in 2024, 372 are currently in headships (including 31 in multi-school headships), 66 are in DHT roles, 4 are PTs and 6 are in local authority HQ roles.

While members who had completed Into Headship were still positive overall about Into Headship as a *‘preparation for headship’* and that *‘the content was relevant and useful’*, positivity for each of these indicators had slipped considerably since 2022 (when all who had completed Into Headship responded to these questions).

Between 2022 and 2023, nearly 16% more responses to ‘The workload was manageable’ were negative, with 69% of those responding in 2023 indicating that the workload was unmanageable. 2024 responses are around 10% more negative than the 2022 response (but are more positive than the 2023 response).

Into Headship



Currently undertaking Into Headship

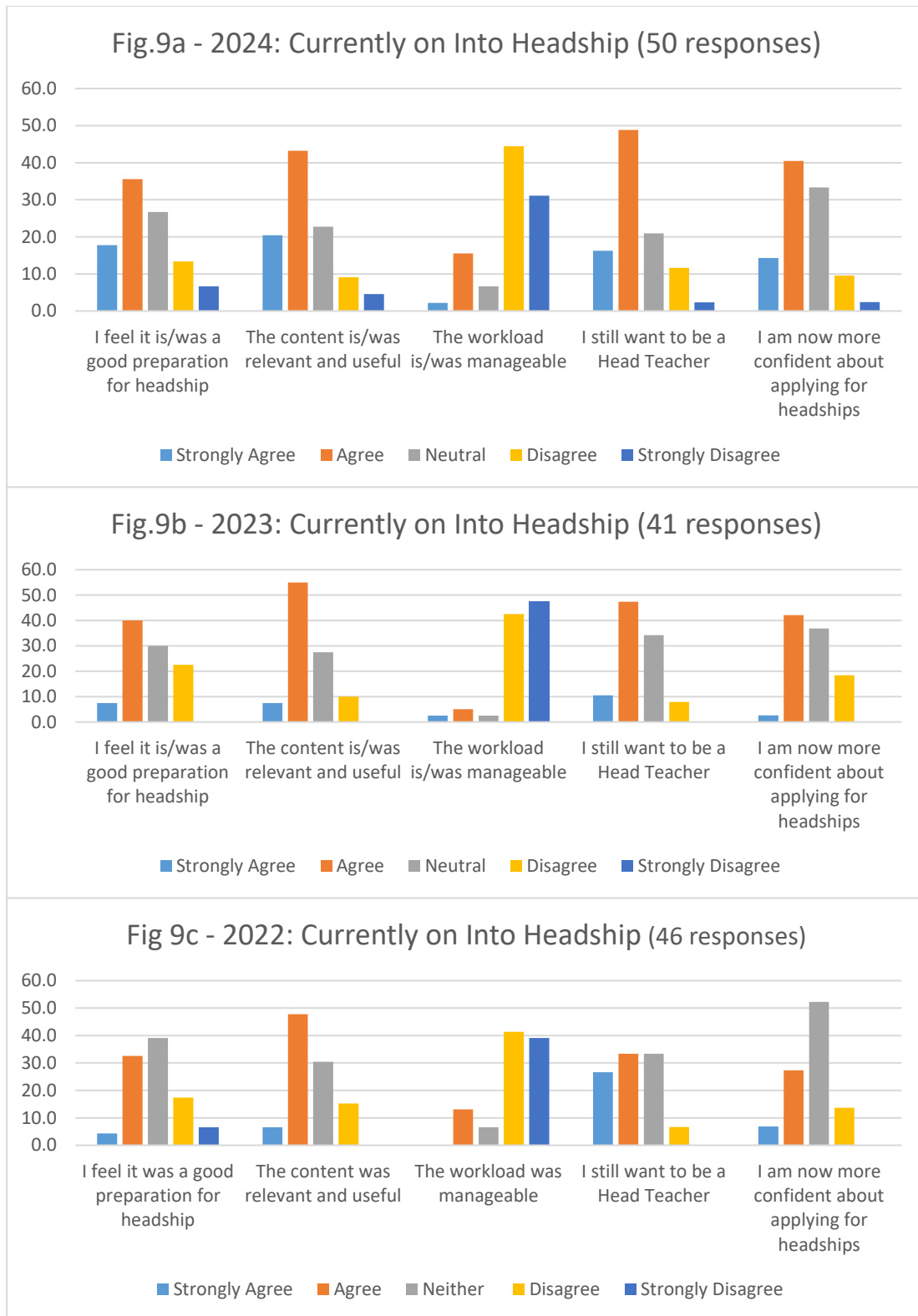
In 2024, 28 out of the 51 responses from people currently undertaking Into Headship added comments. These comments highlight several common themes regarding their experiences and challenges:

- 1. Workload and Time Management:** Participants express significant challenges in managing the workload of the Into Headship course alongside their demanding roles in school, particularly for those in headship roles. Many felt overwhelmed by the workload and struggle to balance course requirements with their professional and personal responsibilities.
- 2. Practical Relevance and Structure:** There were mixed opinions regarding the practical relevance and structure of the course. While some appreciated the development of strategic leadership skills and confidence in leading change, others found the course lacking in practical application to the realities of headship roles. There were calls for a more practice-based approach and alignment with core job responsibilities.
- 3. Support and Recognition:** Participants emphasised the need for better recognition of the challenges they face in balancing the course with their professional roles. They highlight the importance of support from employers and universities in managing the workload.
- 4. Impact on Well-being:** Several participants express concerns about the negative impact of the course on their mental health and work-life balance. The intense workload and stress associated with the course (in addition to the day job) have led to feelings of stress, burnout, and struggles to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- 5. Variability in Course Delivery:** Members observed differences in course content and assessment demands across different providers and were concerned that this suggested a lack of consistency.

Overall, participants highlight the need for greater recognition of the challenges they face, improvements in course structure to align with practical aspects of headship roles, and better support mechanisms to manage workload and maintain well-being while undertaking Into Headship.

It is worth noting that within this group of 51 members, 2 were PTs, 25 were in DHT roles and 24 were in acting or substantive HT roles (including 3 in multi-school headships). **This equates to 47% of those on Into Headship (who responded to our survey) being in HT roles in 2024.** This appears to be an increase on previous cohorts as all those who undertook Into Headship were asked the same question and out of the 450 responses 33% said they had been in an acting or substantive headship when they started the course and a further 28% reported moving into such a role while undertaking the programme. This suggests a trend towards candidates being in headship while undertaking the programme – which adds considerable workload pressure for those candidates.

Into Headship



Started Into Headship but dropped out

It is worth noting that in the 2024 response, 45 members indicated that they had started Into Headship but had dropped out (we didn't ask which cohort they were in). 21 of these are now in headships (including 2 multi-school headships), 20 are DHTs and 4 are PTs. Only two from this group agreed that "The workload was manageable."

Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs)

This question has been included since the 2019 survey. Members were asked to respond to five statements and were then invited to offer any other comments on their SNSA experience. The response statements and the invitation were intentionally broad to allow members to express all and any views.

The response statements:

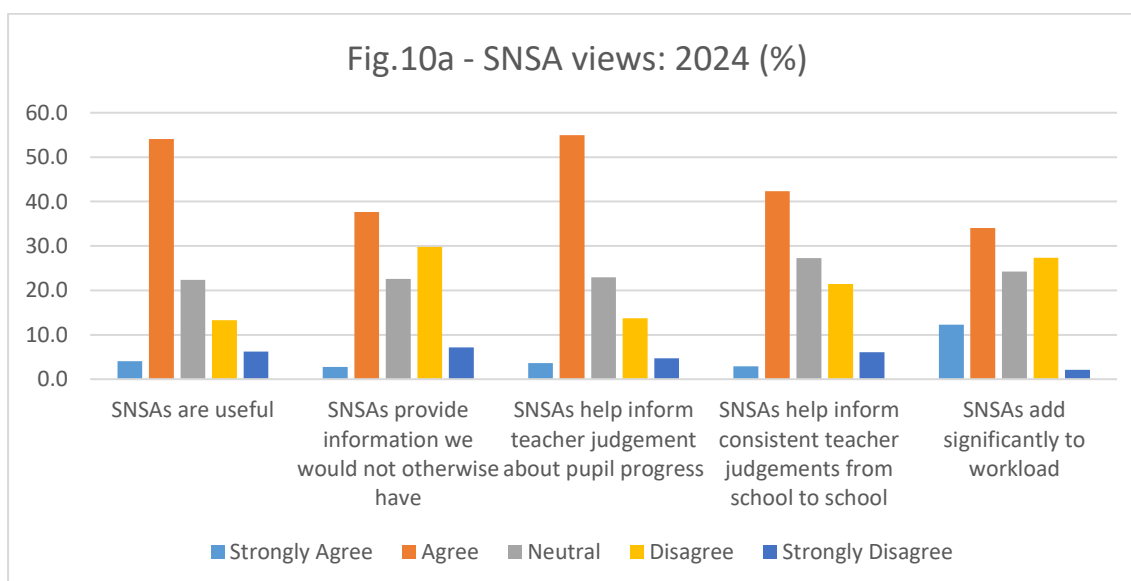
- “SNSAs are useful”
- “SNSAs provide information we would not otherwise have”
- “SNSAs help inform teacher judgement about pupil progress”
- “SNSAs help inform consistent teacher judgements from school to school”
- “SNSAs add significantly to workload”

All indicators have seen improvements in positivity and reductions in negativity year on year (in most years for most of these indicators).

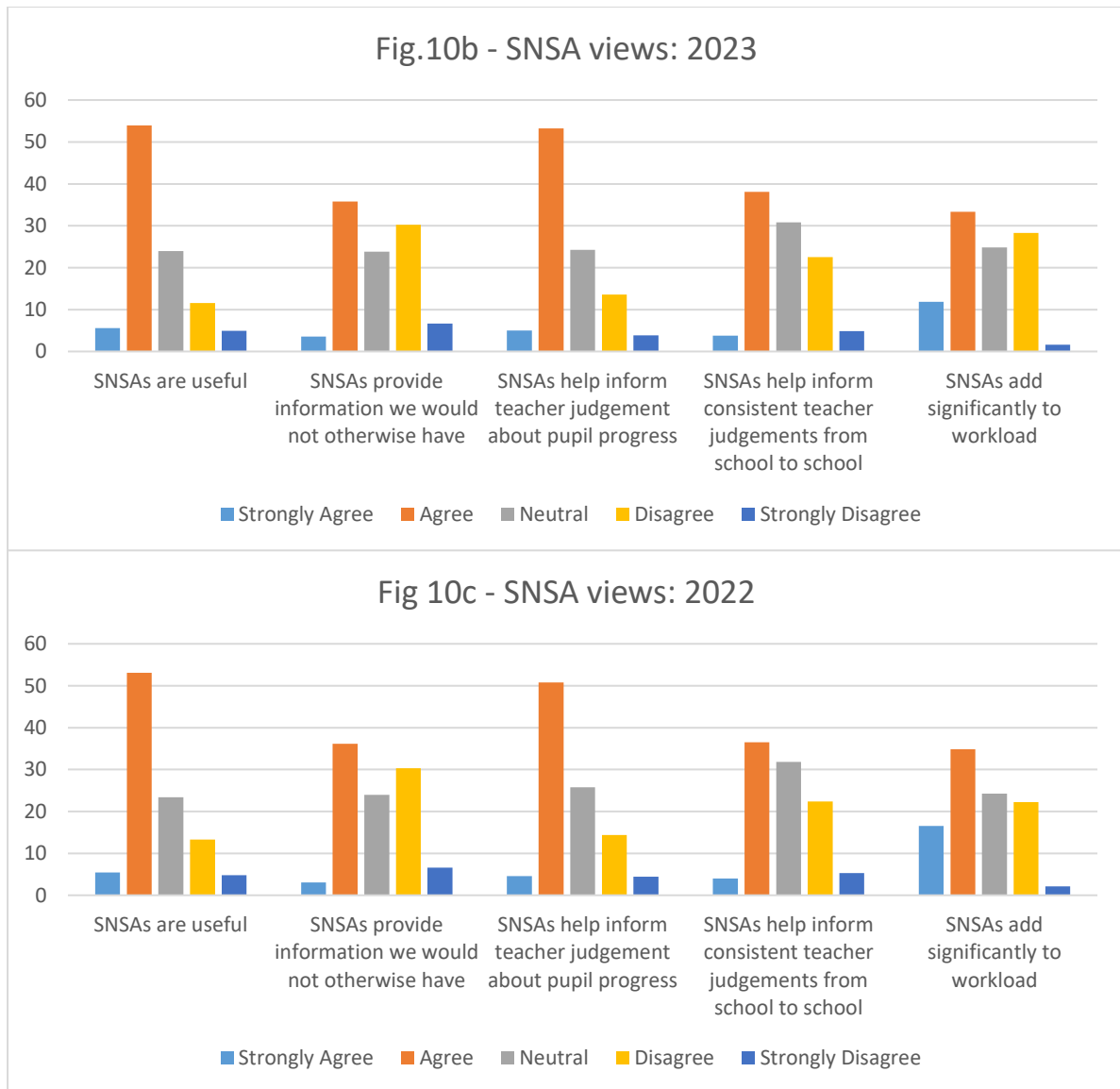
An overall majority of responses indicate the view that SNSA’s are useful and that they helped to inform teacher judgement about pupil progress – this has seen slight improvements every year. Views about the degree to which SNSAs can support consistent judgements across the system is positive, with an increase in positivity in 2024, but falls 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, until 2023, the majority of responses expressed agreement with the negative statement “SNSAs add significantly to workload”. It was no longer a majority negative indicator in 2023. The 2024 return showed more negativity than the previous year and while it is far from being considered a positive indicator, it remains as no longer being a majority negative indicator..



SNSAs



A new question was added in 2020 asking for members to distinguish between the three standardised assessment points in primary. This was in response to comments in 2019 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. Fig 10 shows the results. The response was almost identical in all three years. It is clear that the vast majority of those who responded felt that P4 and P7 SNSAs were useful while the view about the value of P1 assessments leans strongly to the negative (and worsened in the 2022 response before becoming a majority negative indicator in 2023). This remains the position in 2024 with AHDS members remaining clear about the value of P4 & P7 assessments but highlighting P1 assessments as being time consuming and not useful.

SNSAs

Fig.11a - Usefulness of SNSAs: 2024 (%)

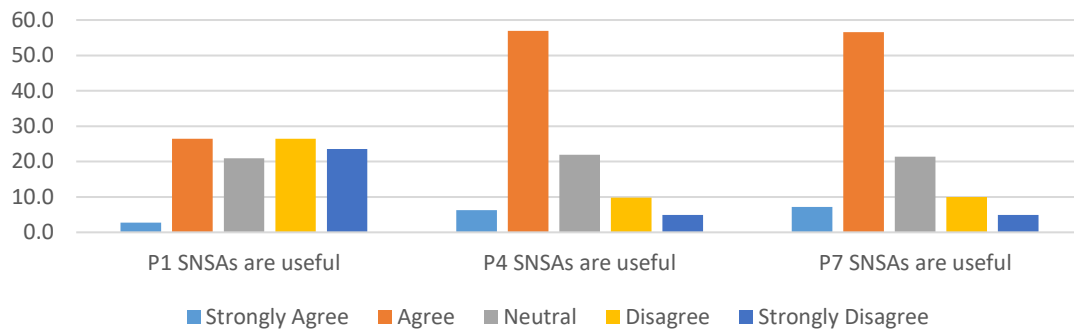


Fig.11b - Usefulness of SNSAs: 2023

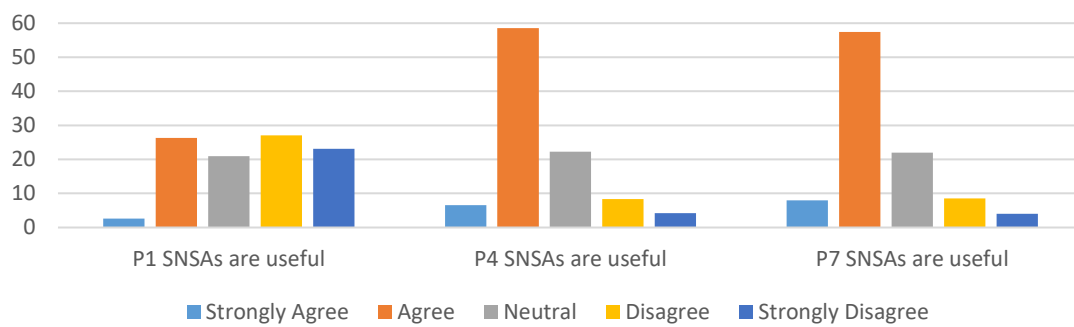


Fig.11c- Usefulness of SNSAs: 2022

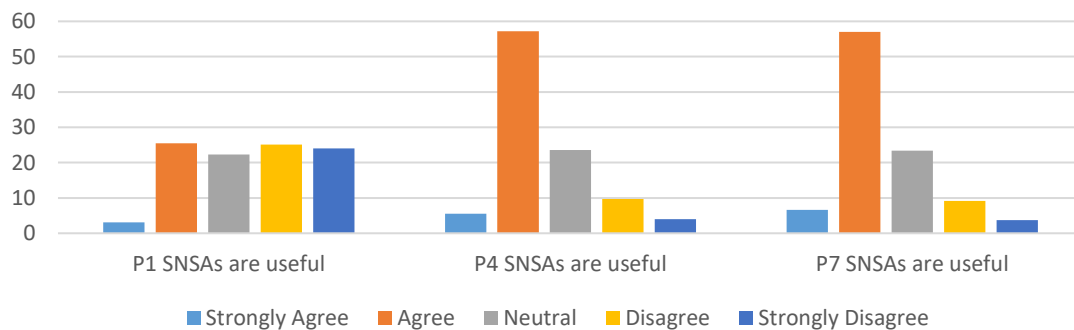
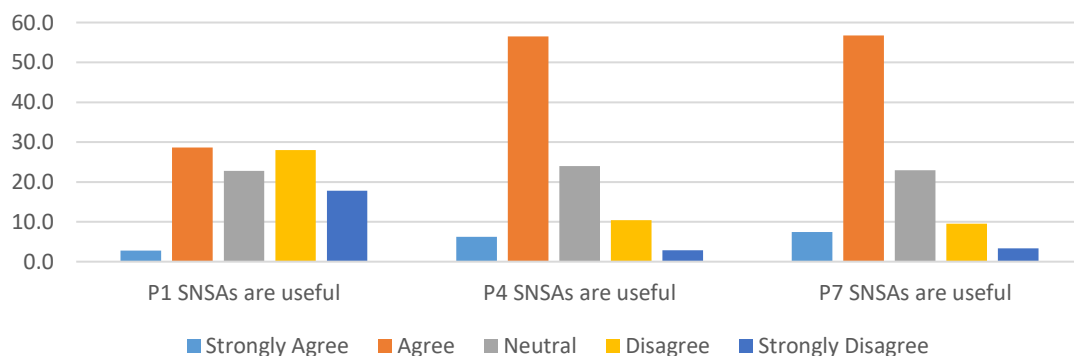


Fig.11d - Usefulness of SNSAs: 2021



Latest changes to SNSAs

With the changes to SNSAs in the 2022-23 session, members were asked if they felt the changes were an improvement. Almost a quarter agreed or strongly agreed with that statement in our 2023 survey and this increased to 32% in 2024 (with negative responses remaining unchanged at around 15%).

Fig.12a - The latest evolution of SNSAs (2022) is an improvement (2024 data)

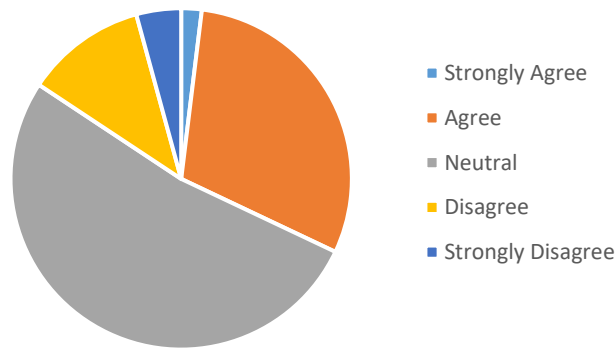
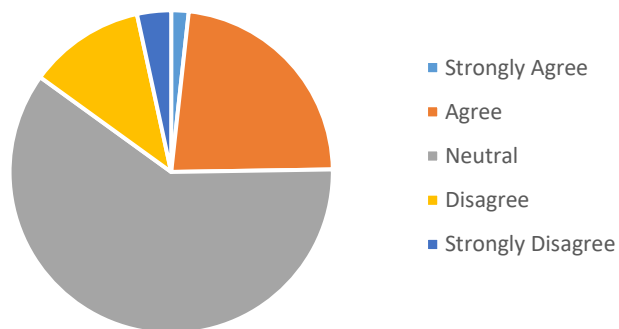
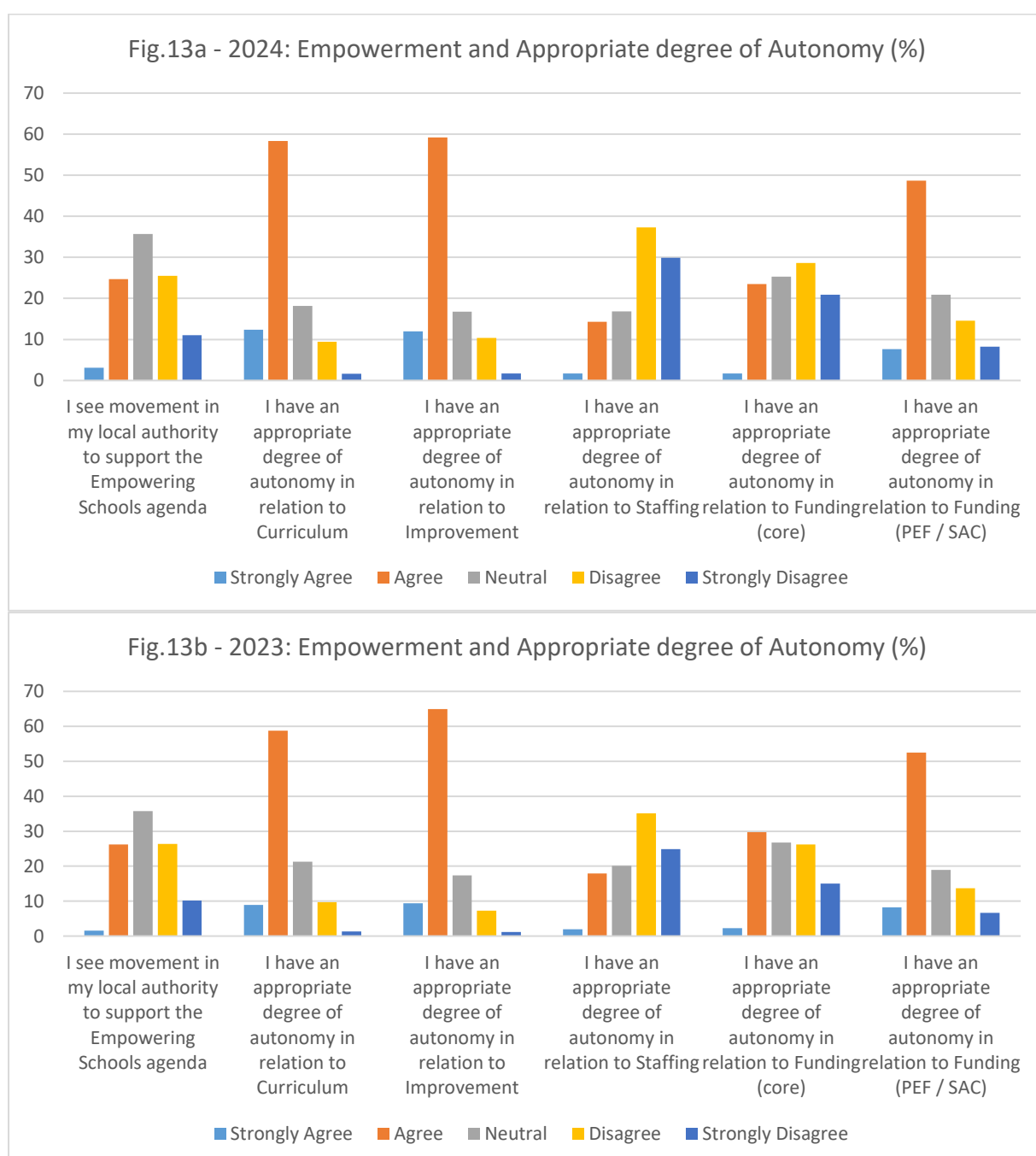


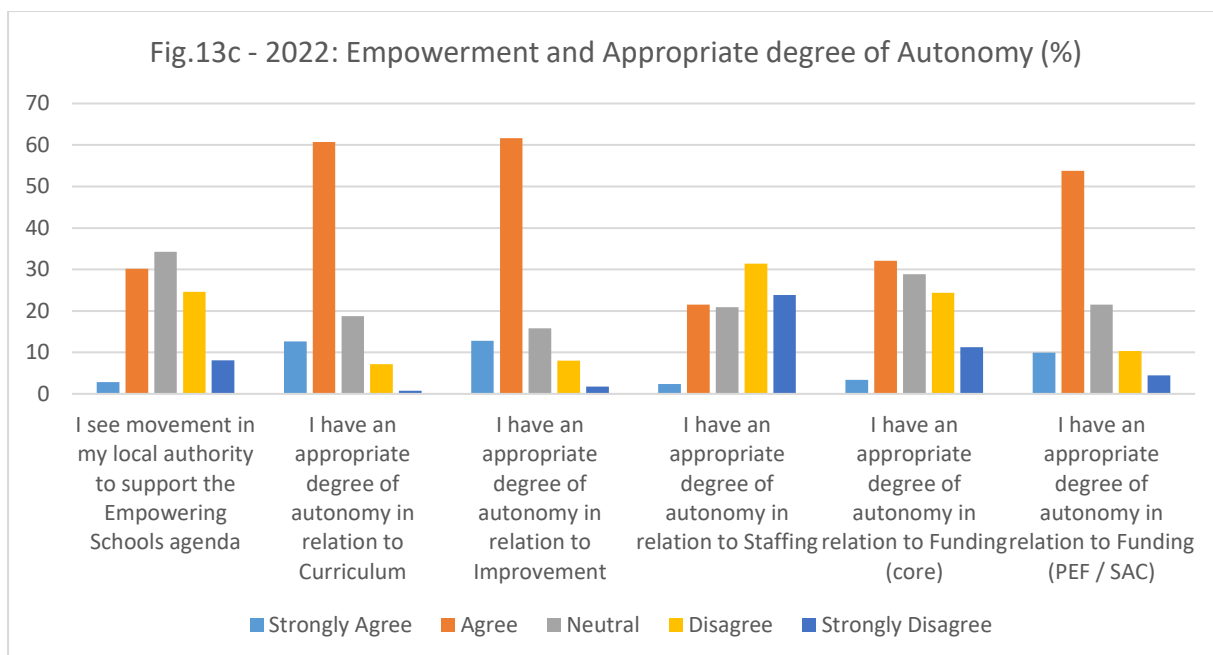
Fig.12b - The latest evolution of SNSAs (2022) is an improvement (2023 data)



Empowering Schools agenda

The information provided in response to the 2019 survey suggested that many members were starting to see some change in their authority in 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. **In 2024 there has been a notable negative shift in perceived autonomy in relation to staffing and funding.**





END.