

Student Leadership Accreditation

A schools' introduction

The Student Leadership Accreditation (SLA) is an innovative way of recognising students' leadership skills and the impact that they have in the classroom, across the school, and in the wider community

Across SSAT's networks, students of all ages are engaged in exciting, radical and challenging activities. Whilst many of these carry recognition in their own right, the SLA the skills of leadership, encompassing all activities students are engaged in. SSAT knows that when student voice and leadership has a real impact, individual students learn more effectively, classroom relationships are strengthened, and school-wide transformation is made possible. For this reason, the SLA is completely free for every student in SSAT member schools: whether secondary, primary or special.

The SLA was developed by students, for students, in partnership with teachers, HE and FE institutions, and employers. Together they identified ten key skills that young people need to be successful leaders, and grouped into three core themes: developing myself, contributing to my community, and working with others.

These skills and themes are grouped into a self-assessment framework, which can be adapted to reflect the schools' context and ethos. Students assess themselves against this framework and then actively seek opportunities to advance themselves and gather evidence to showcase their new skills in a portfolio. Students can work towards the SLA at three levels: bronze, silver, and gold. Unlike other awards, the SLA is moderated by students' peers as well as by SSAT, ensuring the process both reinforces and rewards meaningful student leadership.

What are the benefits of the SLA?

For students

The SLA was developed 'by students, for students', and it is this focus on the individual that makes the award so popular across SSAT schools. As well as the prestige of accreditation, the process that students go through in becoming accredited is of great benefit. This process encourages students to:

- Critically self-reflect on their own skills as leaders,
- Work collaboratively to plan how they will meet the criteria and evidence it,
- Organise and structure their evidence,
- Peer assess others' work against criteria,
- Aspire to take on increasingly challenging leadership responsibilities.

Many of the skills students use in this process reinforce key learning competencies in the classroom, building on work by Dylan William, Guy Claxton and David Hargreaves. The award itself provides valuable evidence of students' all round achievements when applying for colleges, universities or jobs. George Whittingham, a student from Ringwood School who helped develop the award, saw the benefits when he went for an interview for a summer job. He took his CV, references and his smart leather SLA portfolio, 'but the person interviewing me wasn't interested in my CV and references,' said George. 'He wanted me to talk him through the portfolio. And yes, I got the job!'

For the school

What sets the SLA apart from other awards is its flexibility, allowing schools to adapt it to their needs. Schools can either use the pre-designed criteria, or develop their own school-specific criteria – with guidance from SSAT.

In either case, schools use the SLA to

- Engage more students – SSAT knows that engagement is the first step in the co-constructive cycle, allowing students to become autonomous learners
- Celebrate achievements beyond results – SSAT believes that students' outcomes should not be limited to levels and grades
- Provide recognition for students' leadership abilities – SSAT's research shows that recognition of non-academic achievement is a 'hook' for underperforming students
- Give structure to the school's student voice, leadership or impact activities - SSAT champions student voice and leadership that has a real impact on learning.

The road to accreditation

1. Apply for a starter kit

Contact studentleadership@ssatuk.co.uk to request an electronic starter kit which contains all you need to begin the process of accreditation. The starter kit is completely free for all SSAT members.

The kit contains:

- Student Leadership Accreditation Starter Kit – Student Pack
- Student Leadership Accreditation Starter Kit – Teacher Pack

2. Cohort Launch

When you are ready to launch please return the Student Leadership Cohort Start form to the SSAT's Student Leadership team. This can be found in Teacher Pack. We require your school details, the number of students undertaking the SLA and expected completion date of the cohort for accreditation. To start a new or an additional cohort, please let SSAT know as soon as possible by submitting an additional Cohort Start form.

3. Self-Reflection

Students should assess themselves against the ten strands of the criteria grid. The levels are either bronze, silver or gold. After reflection students record the levels that they are at on their portfolio cover sheets and use this as a vehicle to plan their next steps. This stage should be facilitated by you but the degree of intervention necessary is at your discretion. The SLA Portfolio Cover Sheet, which is available in the SLA Student Pack provides a structure for students to follow in their self-assessment.

4. Self-assessment and evidence gathering

Using either the pre-designed criteria, or criteria designed by your school (based on the underlying principles of the SLA), students assess themselves as either bronze, silver or gold in each of the ten skills. Students then gather evidence in a portfolio to support this, writing a statement explaining how their evidence proves they've met the criteria.

5. Peer-moderation

When students have completed their portfolio, it is moderated by another student – making the award itself truly student-led and directed. Schools then submit the names of successful candidates to SSAT, who take a sample of portfolios for moderation.

6. External moderation and accreditation

Once the in-school moderation process has been completed please schools can submit a SSAT SLA Candidate Form, which asks for the candidate names, and the level being awarded to studentleadership@ssatuk.co.uk. This form is available as part of your starter kit.

Once the SLA Candidate Form is received SSAT will ask for a random sample of portfolios. If moderation is successful then all of your students will be accredited. Once moderated, schools will be sent certification for their students, signed by the chief executive of SSAT.

What activities can be accredited?

SSAT does not prescribe which leadership activities are worthy of accreditation: providing students meet the criteria, as assessed by their peers, bronze, silver and gold awards can be achieved.

There are a number of student impact programmes on offer from SSAT, as well as by other educational bodies. The SLA is not an alternative to these, but rather provides formal acknowledgement of the student impact activities students are already engaged in. Examples of possible activities which could be accredited include:

- School council
- Students as learning partners
- Students as researchers
- Mentoring
- Student curriculum designers / department reps
- Sports and games
- Charity / voluntary work
- Journalism
- Digital leaders
- Duke of Edinburgh Award
- Sports Leadership Award
- International Baccalaureate
- Asdan
- Prince's Trust

How can I help my students gain SLA?

The SLA is part of SSAT's membership offer and is therefore completely free for member schools.

Contact the student leadership team by email on studentleadership@ssatuk.co.uk or by phone on 0207 802 2300 for all enquiries or to request a starter kit.