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# Literature Alliance Scotland

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## Membership skills survey

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### Analysis paper

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## **Executive Summary**

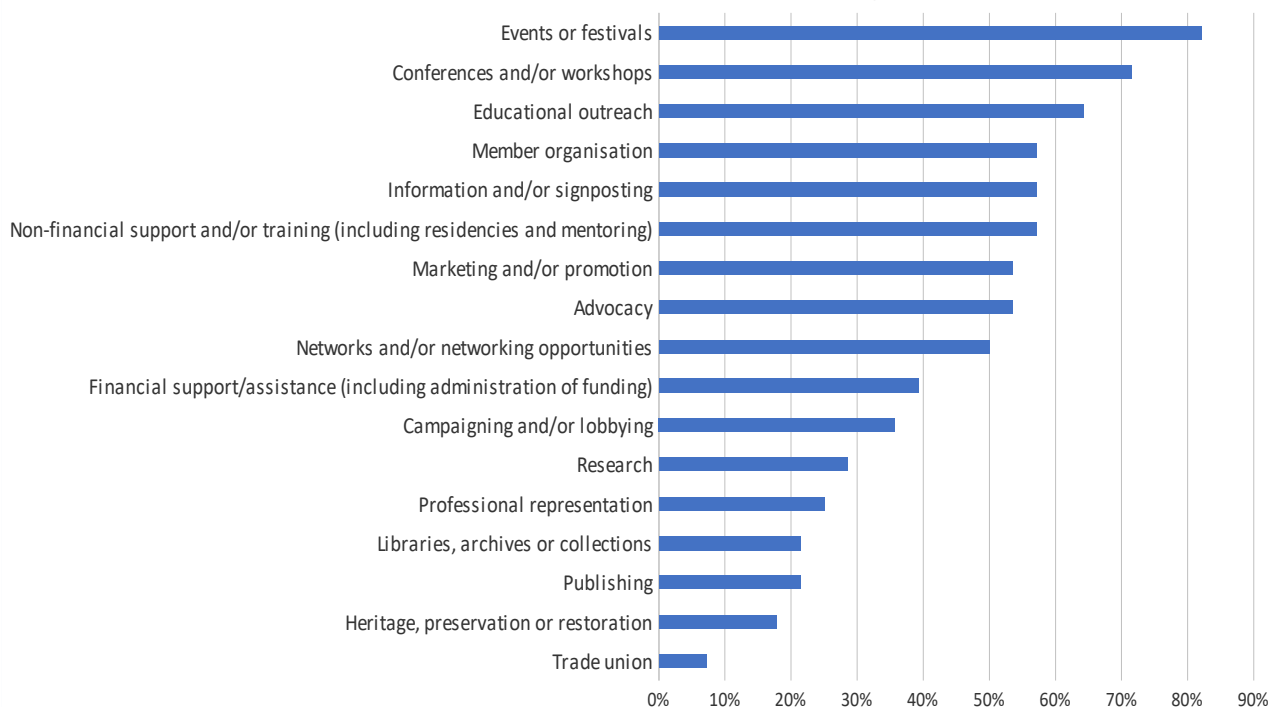
### **i. Background to the survey**

- i.i Literature Alliance Scotland (LAS) commissioned the skills survey of all 25 members and three network associates in order to determine individual organisations' strengths, good practice and capacity to mentor.
- i.ii The main objectives were to provide LAS with evidence and examples of high-level skills that exist within the membership; to identify those able and willing to become 'lead organisations' in delivering these skills to the wider sector; to identify possible partnerships; and to identify skills gaps and specific development needs within the LAS group.
- i.iii The survey was divided into three sections:
  - Literature Alliance Scotland organisations today
  - Literature Alliance Scotland organisations in the past and up to the present
  - Literature Alliance Scotland organisations in the future
- i.iv It is anticipated that the results of the survey will be used to help LAS prioritise a programme of professional development for or led by LAS members.
- i.v The survey was distributed to all 25 member and three network associate member organisations. All of the organisations responded to the survey in full.
- i.vi The information and data was gathered and analysed by Fraser White on behalf of Literature Alliance Scotland. The report follows the same structure as the survey, summarising responses about LAS organisations today, LAS organisations in the past and up to the present, and LAS organisations in the future.

### **ii. Literature Alliance Scotland organisations today**

- ii.i Respondents were asked to detail the core purpose of the organisations they represent and in doing so they identified the clear, distinct and important roles all LAS members play in the Scottish literary sector.
- ii.ii Respondents also used tick-boxes to identify categories of work they currently undertake. This revealed that in spite of the obvious distinctions there are areas of synergy and similarity between many Literature Alliance Scotland organisations. Some categories of activity are undertaken by a majority of member organisations (for example, 82% put on events or festivals and 71% conferences and/or workshops), while others forms of activity are clearly more specialised (for example, just two LAS member organisations are trade unions and only five undertake heritage, preservation or restoration work).

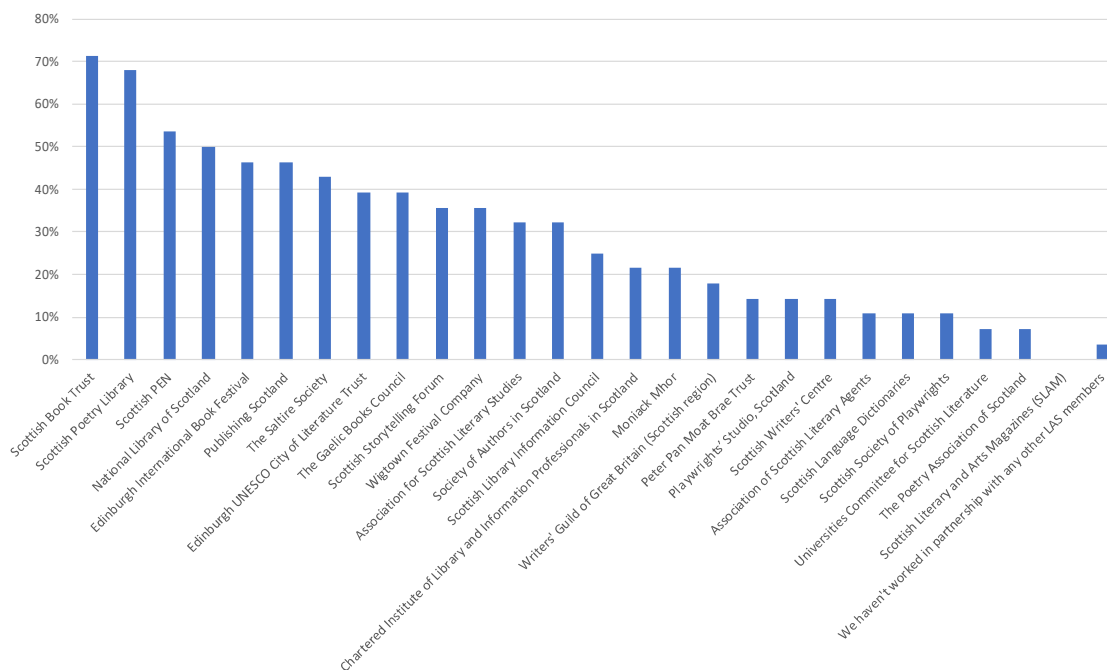
### What Literature Alliance Scotland organisations do or offer



### iii. Literature Alliance Scotland organisations in the past and up to the present

iii.i There is a significant level of existing partnership working and interaction between LAS organisations. The Scottish Book Trust and Scottish Poetry Library appear to be the most 'connected' to other LAS members in terms of the sheer numbers who identified existing or recent partnership working with them (71% and 68% of respondent organisations respectively).

LAS organisations that other member and network associate organisations have worked in partnership with

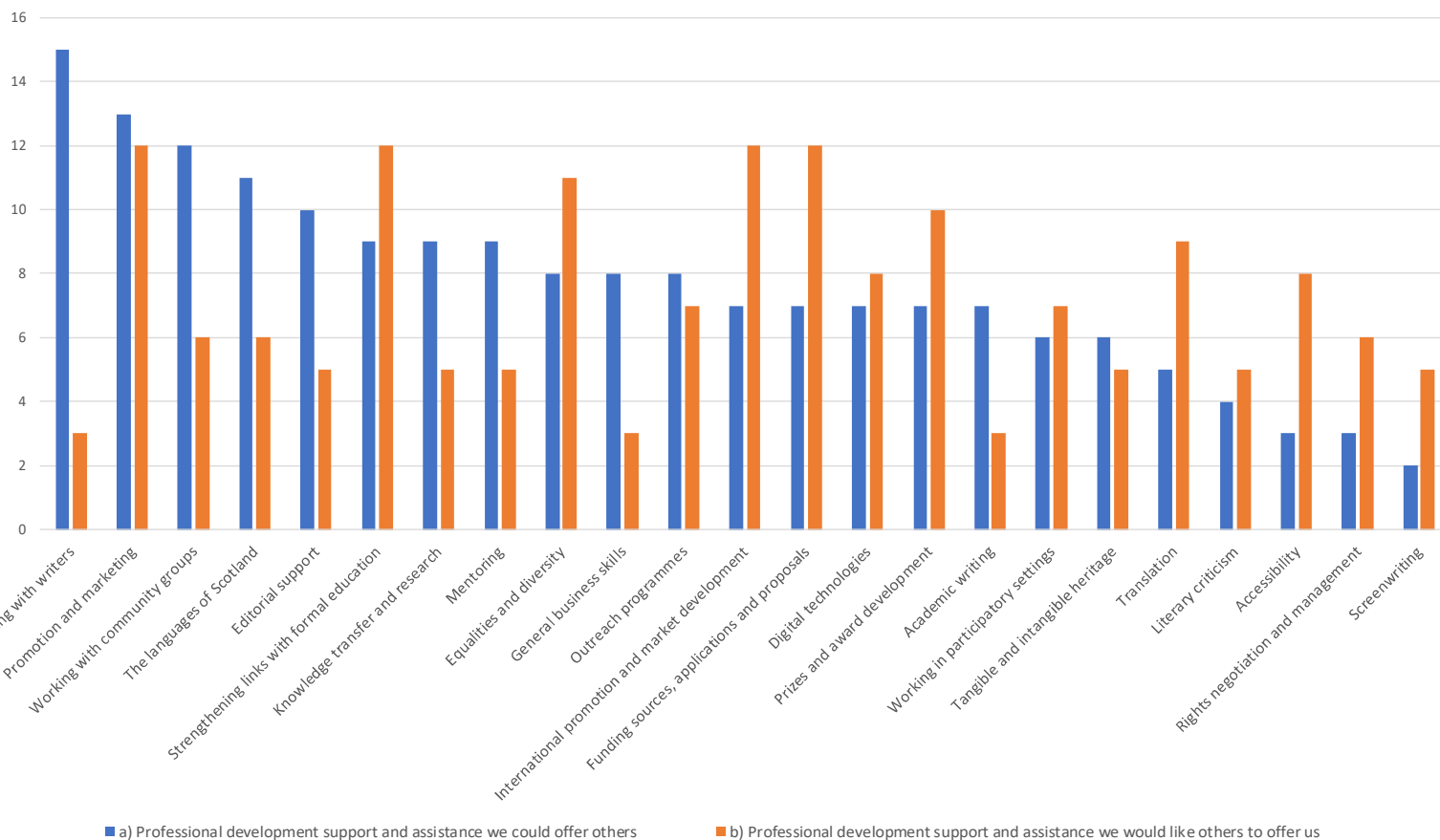


- iii.ii Survey comments show that, on the whole, working in partnership with other LAS organisations is desirable and beneficial in the eyes of respondents. Highlighted benefits include broadening the scope of an organisation's activities, widening reach, increasing impacts, raising profile, sharing expertise, generating ideas and fostering enthusiasm. The most commonly cited challenge is time pressure, while other challenges include overcoming different organisational cultures, ensuring all partners contribute towards partnerships equally and resolving capacity issues.
- iii.iii Three quarters of respondent organisations said they have experience working internationally or with international partners. There is considerable willingness among those with experience of working internationally to share knowledge and experiences with fellow LAS organisations.
- iii.iv Staff or members of 71% of the 28 LAS organisations have attended courses to develop skills.
- iii.v 43% of LAS organisations have used grants or bursaries to fund professional development.
- iii.vi 36% of LAS organisations have delivered training or support schemes for volunteers. Many organisations appear to view volunteer training as something that is quite organisation-specific and difficult to share with others.
- iii.vii 89% of the 28 LAS organisations said their staff or members had participated in one form of mentoring scheme or another. Mentoring is most commonly provided within LAS organisations, with 50% offering formal schemes and 68% informal schemes internally.
- iii.viii 79% of LAS organisations said they had supported new writers and 79% also said they had supported mid-career writers. There is considerable experience within the membership in writer support provision and willingness to share experiences.

#### **iv. Literature Alliance Scotland organisations in the future**

- iv.i Respondents were asked to select from a list types of professional development support and assistance they could offer to others, as well as types they would like others to offer them. There is much to be encouraged by: the responses show total support and assistance offers outnumber requests by 176 to 165.
- iv.ii The chart below illustrates the potential demand for and supply of professional development support and assistance within the membership. The table that follows gives details about those professional development areas most in demand and those for which there is the greatest supply amongst LAS organisations. It also highlights those areas where demand most significantly outstrips supply (i.e. where the difference between the numbers of organisations that would like to receive support and the numbers that can offer it are most pronounced).

### Professional development support and assistance partnership potential



Professional development area		
Most in demand (% of 28 LAS organisations that would like to receive support)	Most in supply (% of 28 LAS organisations that can offer support)	Where demand most significantly outstrips supply (% demand to % supply)
1= Promotion and marketing (43%)	1 Working with writers (54%)	1= International promotion and market development (43% demand to 25% supply)
1= Strengthening links with formal education (43%)	2 Promotion and marketing (46%)	1= Funding sources, applications and proposals (43% demand to 25% supply)
1= International promotion and market development (43%)	3 Working with community groups (43%)	3 Accessibility (29% demand to 11% supply)
1= Funding sources, applications and proposals (43%)	4 The languages of Scotland (39%)	4 Translation (32% demand to 18% supply)

iv.iii More investigation should be carried out at future networking events to identify specific capacities to share professional development assistance opportunities among LAS

organisations. The survey evidence suggests there is considerable potential for greater collaboration of this kind.

- iv.iv From the perspective of the LAS objectives of identifying existing skills and partnership working, and future information sharing opportunities, there are broad and significant areas of overlap in the types of work membership organisations do. There may well therefore be potential opportunities for LAS members to come together and share information and expertise across a range of activities that they already undertake.
- iv.v Equally, there could well be circumstances in which member organisations would like to deliver new activities or carry out work they haven't been equipped to before by using support from other LAS member organisations with appropriate complementary specialist skills or expertise.
- iv.vi 71% of respondent organisations said they would be interested in sharing case studies or taking part in showcase sessions to share interesting practice now or in the near future. Examples given include one organisation's development of a new digital product for the schools market, details of a successful online literary festival, and showcasing methods of innovative marketing and promotion.
- iv.vii 71% of respondent organisations also said they would be interested in learning about 'how-to' guides for professional development and in sharing professional development templates for staff.

v. **Key objective findings**

**Objective 1: Provide LAS with evidence and examples of high-level skills that exist within the membership**

**Findings**

The survey gathered a wealth of information about the work LAS organisations do. Some skills are to be found in many of the member organisations while others are clearly more niche, specialised and organisation-specific. LAS should examine individual responses to the survey to gain a fully informed understanding of the range of skills identified in the consultation.

**Objective 2: Identify those able and willing to become 'lead organisations' in delivering these skills to the wider sector**

**Findings**

The survey has identified remarkable levels of interest and enthusiasm for not only acquiring knowledge and skills from contemporaries within the LAS membership, but in delivering these to others. Indeed, there were more offers to assist other organisations with professional development than there were requests for assistance, which is both surprising and encouraging. Armed with the survey data provided by its membership – specifically in areas of professional development expertise that respondents identified as ones they could assist others with – LAS should act quickly to capitalise on the evidenced enthusiasm to develop skills. By bringing LAS organisations together with the specific aim of working together for the benefit of all, there is a significant opportunity to enable lead organisations to cascade the wide range of knowledge and skills they possess to others within the membership.

**Objective 3: Identify possible partnerships**

**Findings**

The survey established broad consensus within the membership that partnership working is good and that LAS organisations are keen to work together for mutual benefit. Moreover, it found that there are a number of existing partnerships already functioning within LAS.

As already highlighted, there were more offers to assist other organisations with professional development than there were requests for assistance, so there is a rich seam of potential for LAS organisations to work together even more in partnership, at least to develop skills. But the potential for partnership working extends beyond skills development: organisational responses to the question of detailing partnership working experiences revealed that most had positive stories and experiences to share and, notwithstanding the challenges of time and resources, considerable enthusiasm for working together in future.

The nature of an online survey completed by organisations in isolation makes it difficult to identify the specifics of potential partnerships, but LAS is now informed about the appetite that exists for working together and the opportunity is there to capitalise on this enthusiasm at events bringing the membership together in the near future.



#### **Objective 4: Identify skills gaps and specific development needs within the LAS group**

##### **Findings**

Respondents were asked what they would like to be able to do better as organisations, and the responses give clear and specific information about skills gaps and development needs across the LAS membership (see section 4.1 of the detailed report for the details).

Each organisation had the opportunity to identify areas where it would like to develop its skills as well as where it could support others to develop theirs. By examining individual responses to the survey, LAS is in a position to view precise details of each organisation's areas of strength in terms of the skills it possesses as well as where skills gaps exist.

More generally, the survey identified the skills areas where support and assistance is most needed and where the membership is most likely to be able to offer skills support to others. It also highlights the skills areas for which demand most significantly outstrips supply within the alliance, and which are therefore more likely to require external support and assistance to equip LAS members with the skills they need (see section 4.2 of the detailed report).

LAS should use future networking events to discuss the survey evidence around skills gaps and consider how best to plug them, whether through collaboration and partnership working – if capacity exists – or by prioritising efforts towards securing opportunities to attend courses and/or bring in external assistance as appropriate.