



HOW CAN MANAGEMENT FURTHER SUPPORT THE ROLE OF THE TLO?

Delegation without abandonment

Practical support for the Teacher Liaison Officer — especially where the TLO is a Post Level 1 educator

2026 National Strategic Symposium on Building Identity, Agency and Connectedness through the Representative Council of Learners (RCLs)

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15 MINUTES

The practical problem: a PL1 educator carrying a governance function



The pressure is not the title. It is the collision between classroom work and a school-wide liaison role.

What a Post Level 1 educator already carries

- Class teaching and lesson preparation
- Assessment, recording and reporting
- Learner welfare and discipline support
- Administrative responsibilities
- Extra- and co-curricular work
- Communication with parents and colleagues

What the TLO function adds

- RCL establishment and elections
- Handover of records and finances
- Capacity-building of learner leaders
- Mentoring and facilitation
- Regular RCL functioning
- Securing SMT and SGB support

AHA: Management can delegate the TLO work. It cannot delegate its responsibility to create the conditions in which that work succeeds.

A practical Management–TLO Support Compact

Six guarantees that can be put in place without creating a new post.



1

NAMED SPONSOR

A Deputy Principal or SMT member who owns the management side of the relationship.

2

PROTECTED TIME

RCL work appears on the school calendar/ School year plan and is planned around teaching and assessment.

3

DIRECT ACCESS

A regular route into SMT decisions — not informal chasing in corridors.

4

CLEAR MANDATE

Written boundaries: what the TLO facilitates, what SMT decides, what must be escalated.

5

PRACTICAL RESOURCES

Venue, printing, records, communication tools, training and an approved operating allocation.

6

DEVELOPMENT & COVER

Coaching, respectful backing, an alternate contact and proper handover for continuity.

Support must be designed before a crisis — not improvised after one.

Practical solution 1: put an SMT sponsor beside the TLO

Do not make the TLO search for authority every time a learner matter needs management attention.



Management action

1. Principal names a Deputy Principal or SMT member as TLO sponsor.
2. Hold a 15-minute check-in every two weeks.
3. Put a standing TLO/RCL item on the SMT agenda.
4. Sponsor routes matters that need an SMT or SGB decision.

What changes for the TLO

- i. One recognised escalation point
- ii. Less time chasing different managers
- iii. Faster guidance on sensitive matters
- iv. Confidence that the TLO is not carrying decisions outside the role
- v. Greater trust when speaking to the RCL

What changes for the school

- i. Learner concerns reach the right level earlier
- ii. Management gets an early-warning view of school climate
- iii. Fewer unresolved issues grow into conflict
- iv. RCL activity aligns with the school's priorities and governance processes

The TLO needs access to management — not a management title.

Practical solution 2: protect the work in the school calendar

A PL1 TLO cannot serve learners well if the role only happens in leftover time.



JANUARY

Place elections, induction, RCL meetings and reporting dates on the annual school programme.

FORTNIGHTLY

Reserve the 15-minute TLO–SMT sponsor check-in in advance.

DISTRICT EVENTS

Where training or official RCL activity affects teaching time, plan learner work and internal cover before the date.

ASSESSMENT PEAKS

Avoid routine RCL activity during heavy marking and examination windows unless the matter is urgent.

Benefit for the TLO

The role stops competing unpredictably with teaching, marking and deadlines. Preparation improves and pressure drops.

Benefit for the school

Teaching time is protected through planning, RCL work becomes predictable, and learner leadership is treated as part of the school programme — not an interruption to it.

Practical solution 3: give the TLO a clear lane

A simple decision map prevents the TLO from carrying matters that belong to management.



TLO / RCL FACILITATES

- Meeting arrangements and minutes
- RCL action plan and handover
- Gathering learner views
- Returning approved feedback
- Capacity-building and mentoring

SMT / SGB DECIDES

- Budget requests
- Staffing or timetable changes
- Policy amendments
- Infrastructure priorities
- Formal disciplinary or governance decisions

REFER IMMEDIATELY

- Abuse or safeguarding concerns
- Serious violence or threats
- Criminal allegations
- Matters requiring mandatory reporting
- Any issue beyond the TLO's competence or authority

FOR THE TLO

Clear limits reduce anxiety, overreach and the risk of carrying matters beyond the role.

FOR THE SCHOOL

Decisions reach the correct authority sooner; serious matters are referred without delay and accountability is clearer.

The TLO is a liaison and mentor — not a substitute for formal school authority.

Practical solution 4: resource the role and preserve its memory



Do not make the TLO run learner governance from a personal phone, personal money and personal memory.

TLO / RCL working pack

- Current RCL Handbook
- RCL constitution and Code of Conduct
- Provincial regulations
- Annual action plan
- Meeting and decision templates
- Issue register
- District contact list

Practical school support

- Suitable meeting venue
- Printing and stationery
- School communication channel
- Secure record storage
- SGB-approved operating allocation where required
- Access to approved training

Continuity

- Formal year-end handover
- Financial records transferred
- Decisions still outstanding recorded
- Alternate management contact during absence
- New TLO or RCL never starts from zero

FOR THE TLO

Less personal expense, fewer missing documents and a clear starting point for every cycle.

FOR THE SCHOOL

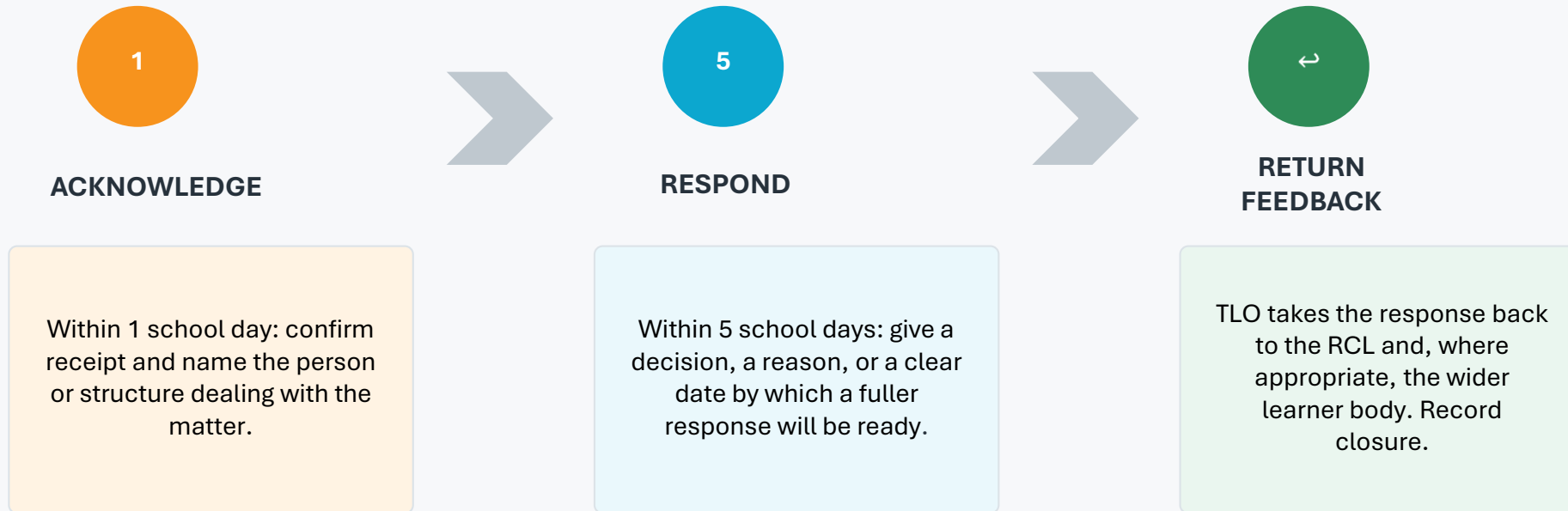
Records survive staff changes, governance is traceable and the next RCL can build on work already done.

Institutional memory is a form of support.

DBE RCL Handbook 2025 requires formal handover of documentation and financial records and supports capacity-building and material resources.

Practical solution 5: close the loop — the 1–5–Feedback practice

A SAPA practical proposal for formal RCL submissions; it is not presented as a national statutory time limit.



FOR THE TLO

No longer left waiting with no answer; credibility with learners is protected.

FOR THE SCHOOL

A clear trail of issues, decisions and feedback reduces rumours, repeated complaints and avoidable tension.

Management silence eventually becomes the TLO's credibility problem.

Practical solution 6: support the person behind the function

Competence, confidence and a safe professional relationship matter as much as forms and meetings.



DEVELOP

- TLO-specific induction — not only RCL training
- Governance and SGB interface
- Conflict facilitation
- Safeguarding and referral routes
- Short quarterly coaching conversation with the SMT sponsor

BACK THE TLO

- Do not treat the messenger as the problem
- Back the TLO when legitimate learner concerns are raised respectfully
- Correct privately; never undermine the role publicly
- Debrief after difficult or traumatic learner matters

KEEP IT GOING

- Identify an alternate contact for absence
- Keep the management sponsor constant where possible
- Recognise the work in professional conversations
- Build a local TLO peer network for sharing practice and support

FOR THE TLO

Confidence to raise legitimate learner concerns, ask for guidance and grow in the role.

FOR THE SCHOOL

Stronger trust in the RCL channel, better handling of difficult issues and a healthier culture of responsible learner voice.

A TLO who is afraid to raise difficult learner concerns cannot perform the liaison role honestly.

South African research: Yu & Shay (2022) identify token participation and barriers to genuine learner participation in school governance.

A 90-day management action plan

Start with routines that make the TLO feel supported every week — not only when there is a problem.



FIRST 30 DAYS

- Name the SMT sponsor
- Confirm the written TLO mandate
- Put RCL dates on the school programme
- Agree the three-lane escalation map

BY 60 DAYS

- Start the 1–5–Feedback practice
- Issue the TLO/RCL working pack
- Confirm basic resources
- Complete TLO and RCL induction

BY 90 DAYS

- Review what is still stuck
- Check whether feedback reaches learners
- Check continuity of records
- Ask the TLO one direct question: **“Do you feel backed by management?”**

THE CLOSING THOUGHT

The TLO may be PL1 on the establishment. The function sits at the heart of learner governance.

A strong TLO is not the educator who carries the most alone. It is the educator who never has to carry the mandate alone.

Selected evidence base



Department of Basic Education — Representative Council of Learners Handbook (2025)

TLO responsibilities; role of the principal, SMT and SGB; handover; capacity-building; learner participation.

South African Government — Personnel Administrative Measures, Government Gazette 46879 (9 September 2022)

Annexure A.2 sets out the core duties of the Post Level 1 teacher.

Department of Basic Education — RCL Hub / RCL elections guidance

RCL as a democratic learner structure working with the SGB and SMT.

Yu, K. (2022), South African Journal of Education, 42(4)

Study on tokenism and barriers to genuine learner participation, including training and governance challenges.

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