

HMC Aspiring Heads' Programme (AHP) 2025-26

Overview

This document provides an overview of the HMC Aspiring Heads' Programme (AHP).

The year-long AHP is designed for senior leaders in HMC schools (in the UK and internationally) who are aspiring to headship, with a view to ideally securing their first headship within the next 18 months. The training sessions and portfolio activities are primarily intended for those who intend imminently to apply for headship, or who are already actively applying.

The programme complements other HMC Professional Development provision, including the freestanding 'Preparing for Headship' days, other courses such as those focusing on employment law and school finances, and, for those who succeed in the headship application process, the New Members' Induction courses parts one, two and three and heads' mentoring programme. These take place during the lead-in period between appointment and formal assumption of the role, and in the early years of headship.

Aims

The HMC Aspiring Heads' Programme aims to:

- Build participants' confidence with respect to finding their fit and successfully applying for their first headship in an appropriate HMC school, whether in the UK or around the world, including practical consideration of the importance of careful research; using this research to craft a compelling written application; and preparing for and performing confidently at interview. The perspective of the internal applicant for headship will also be considered.
- Develop participants' understanding of the nature of headship, including an appreciation of its joys and satisfactions, and a clear-sighted awareness of its pressures and challenges. The focus of the programme will be on how new heads can make the most of the opportunities headship offers, while also developing strategies which enable them to address the challenges and make the most positive impact on the school they join.
- Support participants as they prepare to navigate the transition from senior leadership to first headship as positively as possible, including the thoughtful and constructive use of the lead-in period prior to officially stepping into the role, and careful consideration of how best to establish themselves as the incoming head in the early weeks and months.
- Prepare participants to be successful in the role, leading with humanity, judgement and skill to the benefit of the schools they join. This will include exploration of how to achieve a reasonable, healthy and sustainable balance between their personal

and professional lives so that they attain success while safeguarding their well-being, and ensuring that they model rewarding and sustainable school leadership to future generations.

- Encourage and support diversity and inclusion – both in terms of the diversity of the next generation of school leaders, and also in the culture of the schools that those heads will go on to lead.

Structure

The AHP is a modular programme that takes a year to complete.

Module 1: The opportunities and challenges of headship; the application process

Initial diagnostic/self-review, the appeal and realities of headship and the participant's readiness to step-up, the application process, the importance of context and researching a school and role, preparing a strong written application and performing well at interview, what the governors are looking for, the role of professional search firms.

Module 2: Leading strategically

The external context, including political and economic challenges, school governance, working with the Chair and governing body, developing clarity of vision, understanding strategic planning and finances, communicating and influencing.

Module 3: Leading the organisation

School finances and working with the bursar/CFO, inspection, leading and developing the senior team and school, staff - including staff wellbeing - HR and employment law, dealing with crises and complaints, EDI and leading a diverse and inclusive school.

Module 4: Leading education

Leading education - within and beyond the classroom - including promoting the highest standards of teaching and learning, the importance of a vibrant wider curriculum, strong pastoral care and secure safeguarding, having and meeting high aspirations in all areas.

Module 5: Leading within the wider community

Relationships with current and prospective parents, building partnerships with other schools and organisations and contributing to the world of education beyond the school, working with other stakeholders such as local politicians and the press, development and fundraising.

Module 6: Final reflections, consolidating learning and preparing for the future.

Delivery

The AHP provides a high-quality practical programme at a low cost to schools and includes a strong element of active learning with support and mentoring from fellow professionals.

The "tuition" component is provided in three ways:

Face-to-face training sessions: Delegates will take part in two face-to-face training days in the autumn and spring terms: the first covers modules 1 and 2 and an introduction to the key principles underpinning all the modules. The second relates to modules 3 and 4 and includes an introduction to the course content of module 5 which is a self-study module.

Online and distance-learning resources: Module 6 will be delivered as an online session at the end of the course in June 2026. Participants will be asked to produce an electronic portfolio of evidence of work completed in response to set readings and tasks, activities delivered through webinars/distance learning resources, and reflections on all elements of the programme. The portfolio is submitted by 31 July 2026.

Mentoring and shadowing: The AHP provides a structure and support for mentoring from an experienced head, and the opportunity to shadow a serving head in another school. Structured reflection based on both the mentoring and the shadowing will encourage the participants to process their learning and include their observations in the portfolio. It is a requirement of the programme that participants have a mentor (normally their current head) and regular mentoring sessions throughout the year. Participants need to discuss the course with their Head before booking a place and must have secured the endorsement and support of their Head. Because places are limited, we are not likely to offer more than one place per school during the pilot year.

Reflection and response

All portfolios should be submitted by the end of July 2026. These will be reviewed by an experienced former head, and feedback offered which supports each participant to make further progress in their learning, and to take appropriate next steps in order to secure a headship; manage the transition positively; develop into the school leader they hope to be, achieving all they can to build on the school's current strengths and to go on to accomplish even more in the future. A certificate of completion will be sent to the participant, who should ensure that they make full use of the experience of the programme to strengthen future headship applications, and eventual performance in the role.

Comments from previous participants include:

'A hugely engaging and helpful learning experience'

'A great learning experience; the mix of live sessions, mentor discussions, shadow visits and written reflection has been brilliant'

'Immensely stimulating and thought provoking. The chance to listen/interact with so many HMC Heads has been fascinating'

Registration information

To register for the AHP, please click [HERE](#)