



## HMC Pastoral Leadership Qualification (PLQ) 2026-27

### 1. Overview

This document provides an overview of the *HMC Pastoral Leadership Qualification* (PLQ). The PLQ is designed and delivered in partnership with the UCL/Institute of Education (IOE).

The PLQ is designed for pastoral middle leaders in HMC member schools e.g. Heads of Year, Heads of Section, Heads of House (Boarding and Day), Heads of Pupil Support teams etc.

Whilst aspiring pastoral leaders may also take part, the training sessions and portfolio activities are primarily intended for those already in post, and HMCPD's 'Preparing to be a Pastoral Leader' is likely to provide more appropriate content. Colleagues who are not currently pastoral leaders should discuss in school whether the PLQ is an appropriate course for them. They are also welcome to contact HMC at [pd@hmc.org.uk](mailto:pd@hmc.org.uk) to discuss.

Experienced colleagues beginning to think about promotion to deputy head positions may wish to consider HMCPD's 'Preparing for Senior Leadership' day course or our year-long Senior Leadership Programme for those seeking an SLT post.

### 2. Aims

The HMC Pastoral Leadership Qualification aims to:

- Improve standards and build expertise in pastoral care within schools by providing training for pastoral leaders in the key practical skills that they need to perform their job
- Build the capacity for pastoral middle leaders to make effective decisions themselves where appropriate – e.g. through the development of problem solving and analysis skills
- Encourage the on-going continuous professional development of Middle Leaders in pastoral roles

*'Such an engaging course. I really enjoyed the experience and the reflections'*  
(PLQ Participant 2025)

PLQ Overview: 2026-27

Please note that there may be further minor changes to programme content following completion of the annual review cycle each year

- Establish best practice and define sector-wide standards in relation to these skills, and
- Provide a qualification that is understood by schools and is portable between schools

### 3. Structure

The PLQ is a modular programme that operates at two levels, each taking a year to complete:

- **Level One**

1. Establishing standards in day-to-day pastoral care
2. Listening skills and managing difficult conversations with pupils, parents and staff
3. Leading a culture around nurturing care and mental health, part 1
4. Technology and pastoral care: Opportunities and challenges

- **Level Two**

5. Whole school pastoral practice and dealing with more serious and complex incidents
6. Managing the expectations of the pastoral care system, including regulatory and legal requirements
7. Leading a culture around nurturing care and mental health, part 2
8. Getting the best from your team and yourself

#### Pre-requisites:

- Participants must have completed safeguarding training to the appropriate level required by their Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership / Board prior to beginning the programme
- It is advised that PLQ Level 1 is usually completed before progressing to Level 2

### 4. Delivery

Each level of the PLQ programme comprises of training sessions relating to each module, completion of an electronic portfolio of activities undertaken during the school year, and support from an in-school mentor<sup>1</sup>.

*'I have learned a lot and appreciate the support and guidance provided throughout the process'*  
(PLQ Participant 2025)

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<sup>1</sup> An in-school mentor, who may be an experienced pastoral leader or the Deputy Head Pastoral, is an essential part of the delivery of this course. **Mentors must have the capacity to meet with their mentees at least twice per term and should review their portfolios and add a supporting statement before they are submitted at the end of the year.**

## Four Level 1 clusters will run in the 2026-27 academic year

- Two clusters will follow the “original” PLQ model with 2 face-to-face training days in the UK (autumn term and spring term)
- One “virtual cluster” will be delivered via online sessions in the autumn and spring terms
- One face-to-face cluster will run in London for the Infant and Junior age range with bespoke content

**Three Level 2 clusters are planned: one being face-to-face in London; one online and one face-to-face in London with bespoke content for Junior teachers.**

## 5. Portfolio Review

All portfolios which are submitted before the end of July 2027 deadline will be reviewed to ensure that certificates of completion are only awarded to those who have completed the programme to a satisfactory level. A sample of portfolios will be moderated by the UCL / IOE as part of this process.

## 6. Delegate Fees and How to Book Places

Delegates fees are £650 per level for schools in membership of HMC, and £675 for other delegates for face-to-face courses. For the online courses the fee is £499 for schools in membership of HMC and £525 for other delegates.

Fees include participant access to the training days / sessions for their cluster, an optional online training session for their mentor, online and distance-learning materials via Padlet, support for participants and mentors from HMC during the year, and review and moderation of the portfolio and certification.

Please visit the HMC website for information regarding cluster locations and to register online: [HMC - The Heads' Conference](#)

*"I would strongly recommend the PLQ levels one and two to those teachers who are looking to advance their careers. The PLQ is well designed with tasks which are both relevant and challenging. It encouraged me, as a middle leader, to engage with whole school issues which I would not otherwise have explored at this stage. I am beginning a senior leadership role this coming September. I am sure that this would not have been possible without the PLQ over the last two years." (PLQ L2 Participant)*

## HMC Pastoral Leadership Qualification – Programme Content and Activities

**Level 1:** Level 1 consists of four modules.

<b>Module 1: Establishing standards in day-to-day pastoral care</b>	
Module 1 training sessions are delivered by experienced HMC pastoral deputy heads	
<b>Content</b>	<b>Portfolio activities</b>
<p><b>Module 1 offers an opportunity to explore:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What the best pastoral care provides for pupils and how to ensure it makes a real difference to pupils’ experience of day-to-day school life</li> <li>• The extent to which current tutor practice has the wellbeing and holistic development of pupils at its heart</li> <li>• The role pupils can play in supporting their peers</li> </ul> <p><b>This module enables participants to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the role and responsibility of the pastoral leader and how this links to whole-school approaches and processes</li> <li>• Take away practical strategies and approaches for establishing expectations and building good relationships with parents, pupils and staff</li> <li>• Identify strengths and weaknesses in the pastoral team that contribute to, for example, effective and ineffective tutoring</li> <li>• Develop the skills to conduct effective observations of tutor periods and scrutiny of record keeping and give useful feedback, which reinforces and promotes best practice</li> </ul>	<p>1.1 Reflection on training session and looking after yourself</p> <p>1.2 ‘Communication with parents’ reflective case study</p> <p>1.3 Write/review a Tutor Charter/Calendar for your pastoral setting (alternative activities also available)</p> <p>1.4 ‘Knowing the pupils’ case study response</p> <p>1.5 Observation of tutorials and scrutiny of record keeping</p>

**Module 2: Listening skills and managing difficult conversations with pupils, parents and staff**

Module 2 training sessions are delivered by experienced facilitators from the UCL Institute of Education

Content	Portfolio activities
<p><b>How do I manage powerful dialogues that achieve the outcomes I want?</b></p> <p><b>Module 2 offers the opportunity for participants to explore:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The power of active listening and the role of trust</li> <li>• The tools that are needed for successful dialogue</li> <li>• Coaching</li> <li>• The leadership aspect to dialogue</li> </ul> <p><b>This module enables participants to explore how coaching approaches can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop their skills and capabilities as leaders to engage in successful and meaningful dialogue with colleagues, parents and pupils</li> <li>• Enable them to be proactive and confident in having ‘difficult’ conversations</li> </ul>	<p>2.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>2.2 ‘Stimulating Learning Conversations’ (L Stoll): Stimulus questions</p> <p>2.3 ‘Body Language and Non-verbal Communication’ (UCL Institute of Education): Stimulus questions and observation activity</p> <p>2.4 Planning for a difficult conversation and post-conversation reflection</p>

**Module 3: Leading a culture around nurturing care and mental health, part 1**

Module 3 training sessions are delivered by experienced HMC pastoral deputy heads

Content	Portfolio activities
<p><b>What is wellbeing?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does it mean for a pupil to be resilient?</li> <li>• How do I know when a pupil is/is becoming vulnerable?</li> <li>• How do we equip and support pupils?</li> </ul> <p><b>Module 3 offers the opportunity for participants to explore:</b></p>	<p>3.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>3.2 Profiling attendance (choice from two activities)</p> <p>3.3 Profiling attainment (choice from two activities)</p> <p>3.4 Response to Barnado’s online materials</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the culture and curriculum of the school can best promote the positive wellbeing and mental health of pupils and ways in which this can be delivered</li> <li>• Strategies for recognising when things are going wrong and ways to respond</li> </ul> <p><b>This module enables participants to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the importance of nurturing pupil wellbeing and developing the resilience of pupils</li> <li>• Identify the ways in which their own setting nurtures the wellbeing and mental health of its pupils</li> <li>• Recognise the early warning signs that a pupil may be vulnerable</li> <li>• Develop the skills to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Respond rapidly and appropriately to early warning indicators</li> <li>○ Know when to refer up</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>3.5 Online wellbeing and mental health resources research</p> <p>3.6 Structured case study reflection</p>
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<b>Module 4: Technology and pastoral care: Opportunities and challenges</b>	
Module 4 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMC member schools	
<b>Content</b>	<b>Portfolio activities</b>
<p><b>Module 4 enables participants to explore the challenges and opportunities presented by technology, including practical strategies for managing associated risks.</b></p> <p>Particular areas of focus include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact of technology on the day-to-day pastoral care of pupils and how to respond to the misuse of technology</li> <li>• Digital Wellbeing</li> <li>• Social media, sexting &amp; pornography</li> <li>• Academic and pastoral monitoring tools and systems</li> </ul>	<p>4.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>4.2 Managing the use and misuse of technology (choice of 3 activities)</p> <p>4.3 Academic and Pastoral Monitoring Tools – reflection on current practice</p> <p>4.4 Digital Wellbeing – Trialling the use of the Tech Control Digital Awareness UK lesson plan resources</p>

## Level 2

<b>Module 5: Whole school pastoral practice &amp; dealing with more serious and complex incidents</b>	
Module 5 training sessions are delivered by a HMC Member Head	
<b>Content</b>	<b>Portfolio activities</b>
<p><b>Module 5 offers the opportunity for participants to explore:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of pastoral leadership in whole school management of critical incidents</li> <li>• Ways to assess the effectiveness of pastoral care and its impact on the learning and development of pupils</li> </ul> <p><b>This module enables participants to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the role and responsibility of the pastoral leader in managing more serious and complex incidents and how this links to whole-school approaches and processes</li> <li>• Consider a range of scenarios and case studies to build an understanding of practical strategies and approaches for dealing with critical incidents</li> </ul>	<p>5.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>5.2 School-based research: Leadership and management structures in your school</p> <p>5.3 Linking theory to own experiences in school (choice from 2 activities)</p> <p>5.4 School-based research: Senior Leadership</p> <p>5.5 School-based research: The role of Pupil Voice in your school (optional)</p>

<b>Module 6: Managing the expectations of the pastoral care system, including regulatory and legal requirements</b>	
Module 6 training sessions are delivered by HMC colleagues and/or experienced professionals from the legal sector	
<b>Content</b>	<b>Portfolio activities</b>
<p><b>What are the issues we need to be prepared for?</b></p> <p>Module 6 offers the opportunity for candidates to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The key issues in regulatory and legal requirements pertaining to pastoral care</li> </ul>	<p>6.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>6.2 Familiarisation with school policies and processes</p> <p>6.3 Identification of key colleagues</p>

<p><b>This module enables participants to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build confidence and understanding of their role and responsibilities as a pastoral leader in relation to pupil welfare</li> <li>• Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the relationship of day to day pastoral practice with legal requirements and ISI inspection criteria</li> <li>○ school policies and procedures in relation to pastoral issues</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>6.4 Directed key readings from: Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014; ISI Inspection Framework for schools</p> <p>6.5 Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) research / comparison activity</p> <p>6.6 Structured case study review based on complex scenario</p>
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<b>Module 7: Leading a culture around nurturing care and mental health, part 2 (including working with external agencies)</b>	
Module 7 training sessions are delivered by an experienced consultant Educational Psychologist	
<b>Content</b>	<b>Portfolio activities</b>
<p><b>Module 7 enables participants to develop their understanding of common mental health issues faced by young people, contributing factors, identification and support strategies.</b></p> <p>Particular areas of focus include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-harm</li> <li>• Eating disorders</li> <li>• Building resilience</li> <li>• Making referrals to CAMHS</li> </ul>	<p>7.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>7.2 Reviewing and developing your self-harm policy</p> <p>7.3 Making referrals to CAMHS</p> <p>7.4 Choice of case study exercises (Eating disorder or transgender case studies)</p> <p>7.5 Building resilience: Reflection on readings</p>

<b>Module 8: Getting the best from your team and yourself</b>	
Module 8 training sessions are delivered by experienced facilitators from the UCL Institute of Education	
<b>Content</b>	<b>Portfolio activities</b>
<p><b>Module 8 offers the opportunity for candidates to explore:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific leadership skills that will make a difference to leading effective teams</li> <li>• How a coaching approach can make a difference to the culture around monitoring pastoral care and ensure improvements are sustained within the team</li> <li>• How to better organise and manage time and tasks to ensure a real difference is made to pupils</li> <li>• Strategies for responding to competing demands on their time and protecting their own wellbeing</li> </ul> <p><b>This module enables participants to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand how to manage relationships in school to achieve their aims</li> <li>• Develop coaching skills to enhance and support colleague development</li> <li>• Know how to focus their time and leadership skills for maximum impact on pupil outcomes</li> <li>• Identify and practise new/better approaches to personal welfare and time management</li> </ul>	<p>8.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>8.2 Further reflection on high-performing teams and leadership skills</p> <p>8.3 Complete your own Covey 'Management Matrix' and consider opportunities for delegation</p> <p>8.4 Discussion with your mentor</p> <p>8.5 Use The GROWTH Model along with active listening and carefully crafted questions to move a team member's practice on</p>

## REGISTRATION

To register for our PLQ courses, please click [HERE](#) to visit the PLQ webpage with the booking links for each cluster