

HMCJ Pastoral Leadership Qualification (PLQJ) 2026-27

1. Overview

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

The PLQJ is designed for pastoral middle leaders in HMC junior/ prep schools e.g. Heads of Year, Key Stage Leads, and Assistant Heads, Heads of Section, Heads of House (Boarding and Day) etc. A parallel programme for Middle Leaders in HMC Senior schools is also available. Whilst aspiring pastoral leaders may also take part following discussion with their Head, the training sessions and portfolio activities are primarily intended for those already in post. They are also welcome to contact HMC at pd@hmc.org.uk to discuss.

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 analytical skills
- Encourage the on-going continuous professional development of Middle Leaders in pastoral roles
- 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

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

3. Structure

The PLQJ 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. Nurturing pupil wellbeing 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. Nurturing pupil wellbeing 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 PLQJ Level 1 is usually completed before progressing to Level 2

4. Delivery

Each level of the PLQJ 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 mentor¹.

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

¹ 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.**

5. Portfolio Review

All portfolios which are submitted before the end of July 2026 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.

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 and to register online: [HMC Pastoral Leadership Qualification - HMC \(The Heads' Conference\)](#)

"I would strongly recommend the PLQJ levels one and two to those teachers who are looking to advance their careers. The PLQJ 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 PLQJ over the last two years." (PLQJ L2 Participant)

HMC Pastoral Leadership Qualification – Programme Content and Activities

Level 1: Level 1 consists of four modules.

Module 1: Establishing standards in day-to-day pastoral care	
Module 1 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMCJ schools	
Content	Portfolio activities
<p>Module 1 offers an opportunity to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • The extent to which current tutor/ form taker practice has the wellbeing and holistic development of pupils at its heart • The role pupils can play in supporting their peers <p>This module enables participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the role and responsibility of the pastoral leader and how this links to whole-school approaches and processes • Take away practical strategies and approaches for establishing expectations and building good relationships with parents, pupils and staff • Identify strengths and weaknesses in the pastoral team that contribute to, for example, effective and ineffective tutoring/ pastoral care from form takers • Develop the skills to conduct effective observations of tutor/ form taker periods and scrutiny of record keeping and to give useful feedback, which reinforces and promotes best practice 	<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/ form taker 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/ form time 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>How do I manage powerful dialogues that achieve the outcomes I want?</p> <p>Module 2 offers the opportunity for participants to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The power of active listening and the role of trust • The tools that are needed for successful dialogue • Coaching • The leadership aspect to dialogue <p>This module enables participants to explore how coaching approaches can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop their skills and capabilities as leaders to engage in successful and meaningful dialogue with colleagues, parents and pupils • Enable them to be proactive and confident in having 'difficult' conversations 	<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: Nurturing pupil wellbeing and mental health, part 1	
Module 3 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMCJ schools	
Content	Portfolio activities
<p>What is wellbeing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean for a pupil to be resilient? • How do I know when a pupil is/is becoming vulnerable? • How do we equip and support pupils? <p>Module 3 offers the opportunity for participants to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<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 Mental Health Foundation/Barnardo's online materials</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for recognising when things are going wrong and ways to respond <p>This module enables participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the importance of nurturing pupil wellbeing and developing the resilience of pupils • Identify the ways in which their own setting nurtures the wellbeing and mental health of its pupils • Recognise the early warning signs that a pupil may be vulnerable • Develop the skills to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Respond rapidly and appropriately to early warning indicators ○ Know when to refer up 	<p>3.5 Online wellbeing and mental health resources research</p> <p>3.6 Structured case study reflection</p>
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Module 4: Technology and pastoral care: Opportunities and challenges	
Module 4 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMCJ schools	
Content	Portfolio activities
<p>Module 4 enables participants to explore the challenges and opportunities presented by technology, including practical strategies for managing associated risks.</p> <p>Particular areas of focus include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of technology on the day-to-day pastoral care of pupils and how to respond to the misuse of technology • Digital Wellbeing • Social media, sexting & pornography • Academic and pastoral monitoring tools and systems 	<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 CEOPS Think You Know Resources: CEOPS or Internet Matters resources</p>

Level 2

Module 5: Whole school pastoral practice & dealing with more serious and complex incidents	
Module 5 training sessions are delivered by experienced HMCJ senior colleagues/ Heads from HMCJ schools	
Content	Portfolio activities
<p>Module 5 offers the opportunity for participants to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of pastoral leadership in whole school management of critical incidents • Ways to assess the effectiveness of pastoral care and its impact on the learning and development of pupils <p>This module enables participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Consider a range of scenarios and case studies to build an understanding of practical strategies and approaches for dealing with critical incidents 	<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>
Module 6: Managing the expectations of the pastoral care system, including regulatory and legal requirements	
Module 6 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues/ Heads from HMCJ schools	
Content	Portfolio activities
<p>What are the issues we need to be prepared for?</p> <p>Module 6 offers the opportunity for candidates to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key issues in regulatory and legal requirements pertaining to pastoral care <p>This module enables participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build confidence and understanding of their role and responsibilities as a pastoral leader in relation to pupil welfare 	<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>6.4 Directed key readings from: Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014; ISI Inspection Framework for schools</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the relationship of day to day pastoral practice with legal requirements and ISI inspection criteria ○ school policies and procedures in relation to pastoral issues 	<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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Module 7: Nurturing Pupil Wellbeing and Mental Health, part 2 (including working with external agencies)	
Module 7 training sessions are delivered by an experienced consultant Educational Psychologist	
Content	Portfolio activities
<p>Module 7 enables participants to develop their understanding of issues facing children in relation to mental health and wellbeing. It considers contributing factors, identification and support strategies.</p> <p>Particular areas of focus include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Development & Regulation • Anxiety & Worry • Resilience & Coping • Self-Esteem & Identity • Relationships & Social Skills • Trauma & Adverse Experiences • Attention, Focus & Engagement • Sleep, Routine & Basic Needs • Behaviour as Communication • Neurodiversity & Difference • Loss, Grief & Significant Life Events • Perfectionism & Achievement Pressure 	<p>7.1 Structured reflection on training session</p> <p>7.2 Reviewing and developing your school’s current mental health and wellbeing policy (or relevant welfare section of an existing school policy)</p> <p>7.3 Reflections on your school’s processes on making referrals to CAMHS</p> <p>7.4 Choice of case study exercise</p> <p>7.5 Building resilience: Reflection on readings</p>

Module 8: Getting the best from your team and yourself

Module 8 training sessions are delivered by experienced facilitators from the UCL Institute of Education

Content	Portfolio activities
<p>Module 8 offers the opportunity for candidates to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific leadership skills that will make a difference to leading effective teams • How a coaching approach can make a difference to the culture around monitoring pastoral care and ensuring improvements are sustained within the team • How to better organise and manage time and tasks to ensure a real difference is made to pupils • Strategies for responding to competing demands on their time and protecting their own wellbeing <p>This module enables participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how to manage relationships in school to achieve their aims • Develop coaching skills to enhance and support colleague development • Know how to focus their time and leadership skills for maximum impact on pupil outcomes • Identify and practise new/better approaches to personal welfare and time management 	<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 the PLQJ courses, please click [here](#) to visit the PLQJ webpage with booking links

PLQJ Overview: 2026-27

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