Independent Schools' Qualification in Academic Management for Junior Colleagues (ISQAMJ) 2026-27

1. Overview

This guidance document provides an overview of the *Independent Schools' Qualification in Management* (ISQAMJ) for Heads of Academic Departments (HoDs), Junior/ Prep Subject Coordinators, Subject Leads and aspiring HoDs or Junior/Prep Subject Coordinators, Subject Leads, in schools of The Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) and The Girls' School Association (GSA). The ISQAMJ is designed and delivered in partnership with the UCL/Institute of Education (IOE).

2. The Aim

The aim of the ISQAMJ is to:

- Improve standards in teaching and learning by providing training for Heads of Department/ Subject Leads, aspiring Heads of Department, Subject Leads and other managers in the key practical skills that they need to perform their job
- Encourage the on-going continuous professional development of Middle Leaders
- 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. The Structure

The ISQAMJ is a modular programme that operates at two levels:

- **Level One:** An introduction to some of the key skills required by HoDs/ Subject Leads/ Coordinators:
    1. Improving learning through effective lesson observation and post-lesson dialogue
    2. Coaching approaches and challenging conversations

'I have very much enjoyed completing the course, consolidating knowledge and gaining insight into other issues'

'a stimulating and useful course'

'Course tutors were interesting, entertaining and knowledgeable'

3. Establishing and developing standards in student assessment, marking and feedback
4. Employment issues and employment law

- **Level Two:** Development of the key skills required by HoDs/ Subject Leads/ Coordinators:
    5. Academic managers as leaders of learning. Making a difference to teacher practice and pupil outcomes
    6. Practicalities and innovation in curriculum planning and reform
    7. The use of data to improve pupil and subject performance
    8. Strategic Planning as a Head/ Lead of Department/ Subject

Levels 1 and 2 are each standalone, though it is usually advisable for participants to complete them sequentially over a two-year period.

Pre-requisites:

- It is a not a pre-requisite of the qualification to complete Level 1 before progressing to Level 2, although this is desirable
- It is a pre-requisite of commencing Level 2 that the participant has sufficient ICT skills, competence and experience in basic software packages and the use of the school management information system

4. Delivery

Each level of the ISQAMJ programme comprises of training sessions relating to each module (with two in person training days in London), completion of an electronic portfolio of activities undertaken during the school year, and support from an in-school mentor[1].

5. Portfolio Review

All portfolios which are submitted before the end of July 2027 deadline will be reviewed to ensure that certificates 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.

[1] An in-school mentor, who may be an experienced HoD or the Deputy Head Academic/Director of Studies, 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**.

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

Please visit the HMCPD website for information and to register online: Independent Schools' Qualification in Academic Management ('ISQAM') - HMC (The Heads' Conference)

Independent Schools Qualification in Academic Management – Programme Content and Portfolio Activities

Level 1: Level 1 consists of four modules.

Module 1: Improving learning through effective lesson observation and post-lesson dialogue	
Module 1 training sessions are delivered by the UCL Institute of Education	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
Module 1 offers an opportunity to: **Explore and clarify:** • The extent to which lesson observation, evidence triangulation and post lesson dialogue enhance the learning and development of teachers and subsequently enhance pupils' classroom experience • How to ensure that the monitoring of effective learning and teaching makes a difference to teacher practice and pupil achievement • How using a coaching approach can have an impact on the culture around lesson observation and ensure a focus on teacher development **Further develop skills in:** • Evaluating learning and teaching and triangulating evidence, and (with reference to Module 2) • Using a coaching approach to enhance post lesson dialogue **This module enables participants to develop a sound knowledge and understanding of:** • The purposes of lesson observation • The value of triangulating evidence to monitor the quality of teaching • The purpose of everyone's role in relation to it • What we are observing • How a coaching approach can enhance and support colleague development	1.1 Structured reflection on the training session 1.2 Online lesson observation practice exercise 1.3 Undertake a minimum of 5 lesson observations 1.4 Structured response to reading: Stoll, L., 'Stimulating Learning Conversations' 1.5 The triangulation of evidence regarding learning and teaching - reflection

Module 2: Coaching approaches and challenging conversations	
Module 2 training sessions are delivered by the UCL Institute of Education	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
This module is designed to introduce the process and practice of coaching and provides an opportunity to explore how a coaching approach can: • Support you as a leader and a manager to make a difference to staff performance • Enable you to be proactive and confident in having 'challenging' conversations	2.1 Structured reflection on the training session 2.2 Lead three coaching conversations during the year, including at least one in which you have to address a difficult issue. (Alternative available for aspiring HoDs/ Subject Leads/ Subject Coordinators) 2.3 Reflection on reading: 'Systems Thinkers' (Brown & Isaacs)

Module 3: Establishing and developing standards in student assessment, marking and feedback	
Module 3 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMCJ schools	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
Module 3 enables participants to: • Understand what is meant by work scrutiny, the role and responsibility of the HoD/ Subject Lead, and how this links to whole-school approaches and processes • Develop the skills to conduct effective work scrutiny and give effective feedback, making it a positive process for the staff involved • Identify anomalies and trends across the department/ subject area, that contribute to, for example, under and over achievement • Understand what activities should follow a work scrutiny exercise, including feedback, accountability/self-accountability and development • Take away practical strategies and approaches to work scrutiny to use in their own school	3.1 Structured reflection on the training session 3.2 Planning a departmental/ subject area work scrutiny 3.3 Work scrutiny of at least one year group and creation of an action plan as a result

Module 4: Employment issues and employment law	
Module 4 training sessions are delivered by an experienced senior legal practitioner	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
Module 4 enables participants to: • Have an awareness of the key issues in employment law, including equal opportunities • Have confidence and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the HoD/ Subject Lead, and their school policies and procedures in relation to employment issues	4.1 Structured reflection on the training session 4.2 Locating key school policies, processes and colleagues 4.3 Responses to questions relating to recruitment and capability 4.4 Reflection on training session case studies 4.5 Discussion with key colleagues on employment issues and safeguarding

Level 2: Level 2 consists of four modules:

Module 5: Academic managers as leaders of learning. Making a difference to teacher practice and pupil outcomes	
Module 5 training sessions are delivered by the UCL Institute of Education	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
Module 5 offers an opportunity for participants to explore and clarify: • their role as the leader of learning in their team/ subject and the impact effective leadership has on teacher practice and pupil outcomes • the role of an academic manager in agreeing developmental objectives for members of their team and in holding individuals to account • the role of professional development in supporting individuals to reach objectives set • the importance of trust in leading teams effectively **And to further develop skills in:** • setting developmental, challenging SMART objectives • identifying professional learning opportunities to support agreed objectives	5.1 Structured reflection on the training session 5.2 Applying learning from the module to lead an objective setting meeting with at least one member of staff/ your team 5.3 Reflection on readings: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's motivator factors and McClelland's needs based motivational model 5.4 Optional activity: Critical analysis of further readings

Module 6: Practicalities and innovation in curriculum planning and reform	
Module 6 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMCJ schools	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
Module 6 provides an opportunity for colleagues to: • Differentiate good and excellent features of current department/ subject schemes of work and department/ subject curriculum plans • Be in a confident position to plan and execute effective department/subject curriculum reform	6.1 Structured reflection on the training session 6.2 Either: Modify at least two department/subject schemes of work lasting one term or more in one year group, or lead a department/subject curriculum reform exercise in one year group

• Apply the balance between curriculum needs and curriculum innovation in the above **During the face-to-face session, colleagues can expect to:** • Apply the "Golden Circle" leadership theory of why? how? what? (in that order) to all collaborative discussion • Identify some definite "do's and don'ts" in terms of department/subject schemes of work, curriculum plans and reform, based on collective cross-curricular experience • Discuss relevance, timescales, ownership and impact success criteria in the department/subject curriculum reform process	

Module 7: The use of data to improve pupil and departmental/subject performance	
Module 7 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMCJ schools with significant experience in independent school performance data	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
Module 7 offers an opportunity for participants to: • Understand a variety of statistical data that may be used to inform target setting and self-evaluation discussions • Appreciate how the statistical data is generated • Understand what the data means and does not mean • Identify key aspects and patterns of data • Become confident in interpreting and using data appropriately, and • Explore the issues raised in a case study of a department's assessment results/ standardised data results **This module enables participants to understand and use data to inform:** • Professional judgement when undertaking effective target-setting and tracking, and • Benchmarking discussions involving the interpretation of year-on-year data	7.1 Structured reflection on the training session 7.2 Evaluation of the effectiveness of current department/subject target-setting and monitoring procedures 7.3 Write a report on a recent set of results/ standardised assessment results, identifying strengths and areas for development 7.4 Conduct a department/subject meeting review of the report, incorporating it into the department/subject's development plan 7.5 Identify and document further personal training needs, liaising with your school's CPD co-ordinator 7.6 Optional activity: Reflection on further key reading

Module 8: Strategic Planning as a Head of Department/ Subject Lead/ Coordinator	
Module 8 training sessions are delivered by experienced senior colleagues from HMCJ schools	
Content	**Portfolio activities**
Module 8 enables participants to: • Understand the differences and relationship between strategic planning and development planning • Understand the strategic and development planning processes • Understand the relationship between departmental/subject planning and whole-school planning • Understand the link between Heads of Department/ subjects and whole-school planning • Develop the skills to write, review, and modify a departmental development/ subject plan • Reflect and formulate the underlying values and aims of the department/subject • Understand general principles and approaches to department/subject budget planning • Develop the skills to produce an annual departmental/ subject budget submission	8.1 Structured reflection on the training session 8.2 Consideration of the values and aims of the department/subject, and of you as a Head of Department or subject lead/ coordinator 8.3 Familiarisation with the different formats used for planning in own school 8.4 Exploring ways in which the department/subject might contribute to the school's Strategic Development / Management Plan 8.5 Produce a departmental/ subject development plan or review and, if necessary, update an existing plan 8.6 Produce a departmental/ subject budget submission for the next academic year and document the process 8.7 Optional activity: Reflection on further key reading

REGISTRATION

To register for the ISQAM Level 1 and Level 2 Junior cluster, please click here.