# PeerSphere
**Professionally Hosted Peer Learning Communities**

**Session 1 Summaries**

# Boarding / Residential Leadership

**Date: 25 February 2025**
**Hosts: Simon Johnston & Mindi Dryer**

## Supporting and Valuing Boarding Staff

The session emphasized the importance of fostering a positive, supportive environment for boarding staff to ensure their well-being and retention. Key strategies included regular check-ins, professional development opportunities, and staff appreciation initiatives like personalized thank-you notes or recognition events. Leaders discussed the challenges of managing diverse staff (local vs. international, educators vs. non-educators) and how to create a sense of belonging through mentorship, clear role definitions, and communication.

## Effective Communication and Staff Development

Clear communication was highlighted as essential for smooth boarding operations. Schools shared approaches such as weekly agenda updates, structured senior staff meetings, and transparent policies. The discussion covered the importance of ongoing professional development, including safeguarding training, mental health workshops, and leveraging external organizations (e.g., ABSA, BSA) for specialized boarding leadership training. Encouraging collaboration with day school faculty was also noted as a way to bridge gaps between academic and residential life.

## Workload Management and Retention Strategies

The session addressed balancing workloads in a 24/7 boarding environment by using shift rotations, clear schedules, and prioritizing staff well-being. Leaders discussed strategies for preventing burnout, such as implementing team-building activities, providing mental health resources, and creating structured onboarding programs for new staff. Retention efforts included celebrating small wins, fostering engagement through student interactions, and recognizing contributions to maintain motivation and job satisfaction.
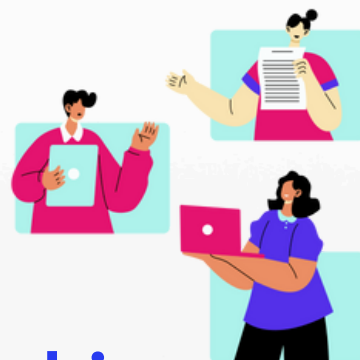
## Additional Resources
* Session 1 Recording
* Session 1 Slide Deck

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**Session 2 Summaries**

# Boarding / Residential Leadership

**Date: 11 March 2025**
**Hosts: Simon Johnston & Mindi Dryer**

## Integrating Well-Being into Daily Boarding Life

Student well-being should be embedded into daily boarding routines rather than treated as an add-on. Key strategies include regular check-ins, building trust, and prioritizing staff well-being, as supported staff create positive environments.

## Adapting Maslow's Model for Boarding

Student needs fluctuate and overlap, requiring individualized support. Boarding leaders must foster stability, confidence, and resilience while ensuring structured routines and emotional safety. Self-actualization should be encouraged through student agency and leadership opportunities.

## Workload Management and Retention Strategies

The session provided actionable strategies for enhancing student well-being in boarding schools, such as:

- Engaging external experts like counselors in evening sessions to support emotional health.
- Leveraging student leadership teams to promote peer support and create a culture of care.
- Using digital tracking tools like Pulse and Mario to monitor student well-being trends.
- Introducing structured "well-being time" (e.g., Dragon Soaring Time) to encourage mindfulness, reflection, and open discussions.
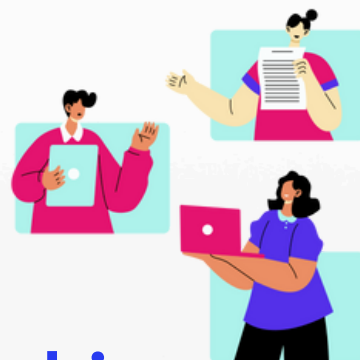
### Additional Resources
- ✳ Session 2 Recording
- ✳ Session 2 Slide Deck

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# Boarding / Residential Leadership

**Date: 25 March 2025**
**Hosts: Simon Johnston & Mindi Dryer**

## Building Synergy Between Boarding and Academics

The session emphasized the importance of aligning boarding and academic goals to provide a seamless learning experience for students. Leaders discussed strategies like coordinated study times, cross-department collaboration, and using academic data to track student progress. Sharing data and regular joint meetings between academic and boarding staff are critical to bridge any gaps and improve student outcomes, with the goal of ensuring both academic and emotional support are integrated into the boarding environment.

## Addressing Barriers and Challenges

A common barrier to the synergy between boarding and academics is the lack of academic staff involvement in boarding duties. The session highlighted practical solutions to overcome this, such as using student planners to track homework, study progress, and academic performance. Other approaches include rotating academic staff involvement in boarding duties, ensuring regular feedback between departments, and fostering a culture of shared responsibility for student success.

## Leveraging Student Voice and Data for Success

The final takeaway focused on the value of student feedback in improving academic support within the boarding environment. Examples like the creation of a student voice video to advocate for more academic staff involvement showed how empowering students can drive change. Leaders shared how collecting and utilizing academic data allowed them to highlight success stories, track student progress, and advocate for boarding as an essential part of academic growth.

## Additional Resources

* [Session 3 Recording](#)
* [Session 3 Slide Deck](#)

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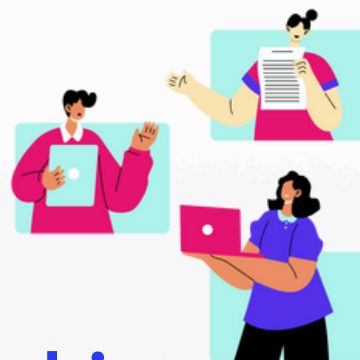
**Session 4 Summaries**

# Boarding / Residential Leadership

**Date: 22 April 2025**
**Hosts: Simon Johnston & Mindi Dryer**

## Orientation That Builds Belonging

The session highlighted the crucial role of well-structured orientation programs in setting the tone for the boarding experience. Schools shared different models—from two-day setups to extensive 10-day programs—tailored to local constraints and student demographics. Successful programs balanced formal information with interactive, student-led activities such as scavenger hunts and peer-led sessions. The shared goal was to help new students feel safe, seen, and supported from day one. For mid-year arrivals, targeted attention and continuous onboarding helped ensure no student felt overlooked.

## Cultivating Culture Through Community Events

Creating a vibrant boarding culture goes beyond logistics—it's about fostering shared identity and joy. Schools showcased activities like MasterChef competitions using regional cuisines, themed house events (e.g., Harry Potter-style dinners), and cultural showcases initiated by students. These traditions not only offered students a chance to connect but also gave them ownership over the boarding experience. Several schools emphasized that even small, sustainable events—like gratitude dinners or cooking nights —contribute meaningfully to the sense of belonging.

## Collaboration with Parents and Staff

Participants underscored the importance of involving parents and staff in building a holistic boarding environment. Initiatives included pre-arrival Zoom briefings for parents, weekend "bring your parents to boarding" events, and cross-functional collaboration with academic and administrative staff. Schools that aligned their messaging early—especially around values, expectations, and routines—reported better engagement and fewer transitional issues. Regular staff involvement in after-school life and traditions also strengthened relationships and set the tone for community care.

## Additional Resources

* [Session 3 Recording](#)
* [Session 3 Slide Deck](#)
* [Boarding School Association: Pastoral Care Toolkit](#)
* [Let's Talk About Boarding - Australian Boarding Schools Association](#)
* [Podcast: 'In the House' – Real Talk with Residential Leaders](#)
* [Fostering Belonging in Residential Education: Strategies for Inclusive Boarding Communities](#)