



Good practice guide: Leaders in education

November 2023

Introduction

Leaders in education have a wide range of responsibilities, and play a pivotal role in ensuring that learners and young people are educated, nurtured, and encouraged. We know our leaders in Wales are hugely committed professionals.

The Code of Professional Conduct and Practice (the Code) sets out the key principles a registrant is expected to uphold in their day to day conduct and practice. To complement the Code, the Education Workforce Council (EWC) has published a number of guides that are intended to support all registrants, including leaders, in understanding and applying the Code. Both the Code and the guides are on our website.

This guide, however, has been developed specifically for education leaders, and will be of use for those in both senior and middle, leadership roles.

The Code

As a leader, you will be familiar with all parts of the Code, using it as an important point of reference. Learners, young people, colleagues, and the public will look to you as a role model, someone who is expected to uphold the Code and its five key principles:

1. Personal and Professional Responsibility
2. Professional Integrity
3. Collaborative Working
4. Professional Knowledge and Understanding
5. Professional Learning

However, as a professional, inappropriate behaviour in your personal or professional life could ultimately affect your position as a leader, your registration with the EWC, and possibly your eligibility to continue to practise.

Raising your awareness

In your position as a leader, you will use a range of skills and resources to be in the best position possible to discharge your daily responsibilities.

Nevertheless, on occasion, no matter how skilled and self-aware a leader may be, they can still make a mistake, an error of judgment, or poor decision, which ultimately results in their conduct being called into question.

Using our experience of the types of conduct seen in our fitness to practise casework, we have highlighted some common themes which have resulted in education leaders being referred to us.

The examples we use below to illustrate important principles are not mutually exclusive and the behaviours described may span a number of types.

Financial mismanagement

- breaches of financial procedures/regulations resulting in mismanagement
- using funds, or property, for personal or professional gain
- not acting with probity or being accountable

Governance and accountability

- breaches relating to governance and accountability
- disregarding policies and procedures
- not establishing and sustaining a professional working relationship with the relevant governing body or directorate
- being dishonest with the governing body or directorate, not keeping them fully informed
- breaching statutory laws, such as those relating to equality and data protection

Breach of professional boundaries

- misuse of power and position
- bullying, harassing or intimidating staff
- inequitable approach to dealing with learners, young people, and/or staff
- not maintaining professional boundaries with a colleague, learner, or young person
- not using social media responsibly

Risking the health, safety and welfare of learners, young people and/or staff (including safeguarding)

- not taking reasonable steps to ensure that the health and safety of learners, young people, and/or staff are adequately maintained
- not undertaking, or recording, risk assessments
- not making sure appropriate procedures are followed on external trips
- not recording, reporting, or maintaining accurate records of incidents

Dishonesty

- falsification of documents
- assessment and/or examination malpractice
- providing untruthful information either verbally and/or in writing
- theft of funds, financial mismanagement

Criminal offences

- criminal offences which undermine professional reputation

Breaches of the Code

With the above in mind, the below are illustrative of cases where registrants in leadership positions (from all registrant categories), have been subject to EWC disciplinary proceedings.

We do recognise that the vast majority of leaders act with the utmost professionalism. However, in all these cases, there has been a clear breach of the Code. Registrants received a range of disciplinary sanctions including, in some cases, being prohibited from practising in the education workforce in the future.

Financial mismanagement

A registrant in a leadership position did not record money received from learners, kept the money at home, failed to bank it, and amended the original dates on cheques received

Governance and accountability/risk to health, safety, and welfare

A registrant in a leadership position:

- failed to report a sexual relationship between a member of staff and a child at another school
- put learners at risk by ignoring health and safety regulations and avoiding ratification by the governing body for playground development
- failed, on several occasions, to follow child safeguarding procedures which contributed to serious harm to the young people concerned
- committed serious data breaches by sharing confidential information about learners with outside parties
- failed to follow procedures for educational visits and trips, putting learners and young people at risk
- persistent, unauthorised absence from duty, in breach of the absence policy
- failed to follow the recruitment policy and procedures by appointing a family member without the vacancy being advertised

Breach of professional boundaries

A registrant in a leadership position:

- abused their position by bullying and victimising members of staff
- openly discriminated against members of staff because of their gender and ethnic origin
- behaved inappropriately with a learner on school premises after school hours
- behaved inappropriately with a colleague on work premises which was covertly recorded and shared on social media

Dishonesty

A registrant in a leadership position:

- falsified the counter-signatory signature on school cheques before cashing them for personal use

- ignored malpractice taking place with assessments, it being an 'accepted' way of working in the organization
- signed National Numeracy and Literacy Examinations declaration forms to confirm all exam body guidance was followed appropriately, when they knew this was not the case
- was implicated in forging signatures on assessment forms, which led to the contractor losing Welsh Government funding

Criminal offences

A registrant in a leadership position:

- was convicted for sexual offences against a member of staff following a period of persistent harassment in the workplace
- was convicted for the cultivation and supply of drugs
- was convicted for theft after gambling online using school funds

Our advice

Ask yourself, if you adopt a specific course of action, either in your private or professional life, will your behaviour fall within the expectations of the Code, or be in breach of it?

If things do go wrong, inaction may put you in breach of the Code. Do not ignore it and act early.

Be honest

Being truthful about what has happened is a faster route to a positive outcome. Take responsibility where you need to. Avoid blaming others, and be accountable for your own actions.

Ask for advice or professional help

You may be unable to deal with this on your own. Ask for advice and support (from a trade union, professional network, mentor, other senior leader). It may help you decide the best approach to take professionally.

Reflect on any advice you have been given, and consider how best to move forward to resolve the situation

Remind yourself again of the expectations placed upon you to uphold the Code, especially given your position of responsibility.

View this as an opportunity to preserve, or restore, your professional integrity.

It may be appropriate to self-refer to the EWC.

Commit to a resolution, learn from it, and move forward.

Further support

We offer presentations which focus on fitness to practise and the Code. If you or your employer would like to arrange one in the workplace, please contact us.

The [Code, and information about the EWC's fitness to practise work](#) are on our website.

If you require any of our publications in an alternative format, please contact us.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English.

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