



Code of Ethical Practice in Leadership



Education leaders and managers feel strongly about the importance of shared core beliefs and values and believe that all students and staff in their schools and colleges deserve the very best experience and educational outcomes. Staff and students will only experience support and care if school leaders are ethically motivated and well-prepared for their roles.

At a challenging time of excessive workload, compromised staff wellbeing and the loss of teachers from the system, leaders deserve support and guidance on what good leadership looks like. The seven Nolan Principles for Public Life provide a good starting point for ethical conduct by leaders: **accountability, honesty, integrity, leadership, objectivity, openness, and selflessness.**

The National Education Union believes ethical leadership should be at the heart of everything we do. We have devised this framework to help you, as a leader, ensure your staff and students benefit from effective leadership that is driven by positive values from both heart and mind. The framework illustrates the kind of behaviours expected from leaders in education, even in challenging times.

It also provides a useful basis for conversations between yourself as a leader, your staff and trade union representatives to help ensure that leadership is effective and driven by positive values.

Encourage staff to review your school/college practice against each of the dimensions, ie against each of the letters that make up the "LEADERSHIP" approach. Ask them to rate each one as red, amber or green. Do the same yourself, and then compare notes. The goal is for you and your staff to reach agreement that leadership is typified as green and good practice, rather than red and bad practice (see the audit tool over the page).

Having an "open-to-learning" conversation (see the appendix) will help you apply the Code of Ethical Practice in Leadership. Any areas rated red or amber can then be used as an indicator of actions needed to move to good practice.

Repeating the exercise regularly (eg annually) can help ensure that effective, ethical leadership stays embedded in the organisation. It can also be used for aspiring leaders to reflect on their own practice at all levels in the organisation.

Leadership in your school or college is, of course, only one element of your leadership role. You are a leader within the wider community as well, able to help influence the understanding, views and aspirations of that community. As an organisation committed to extending educational opportunity and promoting social justice, the National Education Union will work alongside you and support you in that role as well.

L	=	Learning
E	=	Ethical
A	=	Aspiration
D	=	Diversity
E	=	Evidence
R	=	Responsibility
S	=	Support
H	=	Holistic
I	=	Integrity
P	=	Purpose

Examples of POOR practice include:	Examples of GOOD practice include:	Is the organisation red, amber or green?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is defined narrowly and confined to prescribed student achievements. • There is insufficient CPD to support individual learning for staff. • There is a lack of attention to collective learning across the organisation. • There is an inability to learn from mistakes. • There is a focus on teaching to the test and an over reliance on academic results. • There is poor student behaviour and evidence of increasing mental health issues among students and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders ensure many forms of learning and achievement are identified and celebrated. • Leaders ensure learning is at the heart of practice for all staff, as well as students, ensuring appropriate CPD/mentoring/coaching is in place. • A learning culture is fostered to ensure collective lessons are learned when plans fail. • The overall aim is to improve professional competence and ensure future success. • Leaders ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that has lasting value and engenders good mental health and wellbeing. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an over reliance on directive leadership – telling staff what needs to be done or control and command - and non-questioning of power. • There is no open-door policy. Some staff find themselves excluded and/or misled by dishonest practice. • There are over hierarchical structures and practices, with expectation of privileged treatment or social isolation depending on rank or position. • There is 'ends justify the means' behaviour, unfair treatment of some staff and unfair practices. • Rank terminology is used to demonstrate power or to block empowerment of those led or managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders show empathy and, wherever possible, lead collectively and collaboratively. • Leaders demonstrate that they actively listen to staff and students by providing appropriate support. • Leaders build trust in their teams through an honest and inclusive approach by proactively listening to concerns. • Leaders welcome and facilitate dialogue with staff representatives. • The 3 Rs are paramount: 'relationships, responsibility and resources', and a belief that these will get results. • Leaders know that they are not the leader in every situation and trust others to lead at times. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green

L=Learning

E=Ethical

Examples of POOR practice include:	Examples of GOOD practice include:	Is the organisation red, amber or green?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a gulf between espoused and actual values within the workplace. • There is a limited and limiting vision for both students and staff, and a focus on only certain types of aspiration (e.g. academic goals) being worthy. • Fixed mindsets are accepted in staff and students. • A 'can't do' culture is evident which discourages innovation and suggestions for change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders ensure they and their staff align internal values and beliefs with external actions and behaviours. • Leaders promote and demonstrate high aspirations for themselves and others. • Leaders support a culture of ambition based on growth mindsets to develop all students and staff. • Leaders allow and encourage innovation in the pursuit of positive learning outcomes as part of a 'can do' culture. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a tangible lack of diversity, with some staff and learners feeling unwelcome. • Offensive language or behaviours are tolerated or not challenged. • Diversity impact assessment is not evident in policy content and parameters of operations. • Leaders are inflexible to requests for adjustments on the grounds of protected characteristic or social disadvantage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A culture exists in which all staff and learners feel welcome and valued and in which inappropriate behaviours are challenged. • Staff reflect the diversity of the local population at every level of the organisation. • Leaders respect others' views and boundaries, have an open-door policy, and are seen to communicate with all members of the community. • Leaders take positive action to ensure equality of opportunity and address issues of diversity and social disadvantage. • Equality, diversity and inclusion are real factors in staff recruitment, retention, training and development. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green

A = Aspiration

D = Diversity

Examples of POOR practice include:	Examples of GOOD practice include:	Is the organisation red, amber or green?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions appear to be made without due regard to evidence, or without a clear understanding of what a task involves. • Opportunities to participate in reviewing the success of strategies are limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders ensure their decision-making rests on firm, substantiated evidence and is sufficiently transparent for others to recognise a clear rationale. • Leaders consult on, and invite challenge on, their strategies with staff and union representatives. • Leaders seek evidence and feedback on the impact of strategies and initiatives. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge is often met with an overly defensive or even vindictive response. • There is risk aversion to trying new ways of working and thinking. • Leaders are frightened to challenge those devising education policy and systems of measurement e.g. Government and Ofsted. • There are problem practices such as favouritism, covert or overt bullying, or delegation without knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders accept responsibility to do their best for students and staff and actively invite challenge. • Leaders are strong enough to deliver appropriate challenge to others where practice and behaviour is not acceptable. • Leaders are prepared to be brave and challenge national policy where it is clearly damaging to students and staff. • Leaders are aware of their own core beliefs, social positioning and biases and how these things can influence the workplace and learning environments. • Leaders are receptive to challenge from others, including staff and governors, in seeking to improve their practice. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green

D = Diversity

E = Evidence

Examples of POOR practice include:	Examples of GOOD practice include:	Is the organisation red, amber or green?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge is often met with an overly defensive or even vindictive response. There is risk aversion to trying new ways of working and thinking. Leaders are frightened to challenge those devising education policy and systems of measurement e.g. Government and Ofsted. There are problem practices such as favouritism, covert or overt bullying, or delegation without knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders accept responsibility to do their best for students and staff and actively invite challenge. Leaders are strong enough to deliver appropriate challenge to others where practice and behaviour is not acceptable. Leaders are prepared to be brave and challenge national policy where it is clearly damaging to students and staff. Leaders are aware of their own core beliefs, social positioning and biases and how these things can influence the workplace and learning environments. Leaders are receptive to challenge from others, including staff and governors, in seeking to improve their practice. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is little ongoing support for staff or little demonstration that leaders care. Wellbeing is addressed in a tokenistic way, if at all, with few policies identifying or addressing wellbeing issues or monitoring or reviewing matters such as sickness absence levels. Policies addressing issues of workload, working time or access to flexible working are inadequate, and/or there is little evidence of implementation of policies which do exist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders understand staff are their most precious asset and maintain a duty of care for them. Leaders take action to encourage a healthy work/life balance through adoption and implementation of wellbeing policies and practices. Leaders engage with staff and union representatives on matters of workload, adopting and implementing policies which seek to limit workload and working time and promote flexible working. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green

R = Responsibility

S = Support

Examples of POOR practice include:	Examples of GOOD practice include:	Is the organisation red, amber or green?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is insufficient demonstration of duty of care for staff (eg student success is pursued at the expense of staff wellbeing). • There is micro-management, a distinct lack of trust, and a perception of covert agendas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders take responsibility for doing the right things to deliver a good, well-rounded education. • Leaders trust and empower staff to take the right decisions. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders and staff have very different ideas of what is happening. • There is a culture of blame when things go wrong, with leaders refusing to take responsibility while accepting any praise for success. • Gossip and hearsay are tolerated and never called out as being damaging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders make an effort to ensure that they and everyone else understand what all roles in the organisation encompass. • Leaders accept their responsibility for mistakes and congratulate those who have performed well, always acknowledging the contributions of others. • Leaders keep confidences and don't engage in gossip or hearsay. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green

H = Holistic
I = Integrity

Examples of POOR practice include:	Examples of GOOD practice include:	Is the organisation red, amber or green?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school/college feels like a business, rather than an educational setting, in which finance drives decision making. • Staff feel generally unappreciated and praise is rarely given if at all. • Demands on staff feel arbitrary and unclear and do not further the learning of students. • Staff and their representatives are not consulted or involved in decision making. • Often staff are looking for alternative opportunities in other schools/colleges or considering leaving education altogether. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders never lose sight of the purpose of education and can distinguish between good financial management and the needs of the community. • Leaders make their staff and students feel appreciated and valued – praising and acknowledging their contributions regularly. • Leaders ensure the purposes of tasks are well understood and agreed. • Leaders actively engage with staff and their representatives, ensuring reps are supported to carry out their role, recognising the benefits to the organisation. • The climate and culture are set by leaders and creating a positive working environment is paramount. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Red <input type="checkbox"/> Amber <input type="checkbox"/> Green

P = Purpose

We are here to support you to practice the highest ethical standards throughout your leadership career. For a full range of resources for NEU Leadership members, including courses and publications on ethical leadership, please go to neu.org.uk/leadership. Other support sources of reference on ethical leadership can be found at nga.org.uk/ethicalleadership.aspx

Open-to-learning conversations

The concept of open-to-learning conversations, developed by Professor Viviane Robinson, is a model for helping people prepare for difficult conversations. It is a very useful and complementary tool, which you can apply alongside the Code of Ethical Leadership Practice.

Open-to-learning conversations help leaders become more attuned to their perceptions of situations. They tell us how our perceptions influence our assessment of a situation and the way in which we approach difficult conversations.

Most importantly, practising open-to-learning conversations helps build a culture and environment of professional and relational trust in educational settings, which can lead to improvement in teaching and learning, and to

students' social and academic progress, without staff burnout in the process.

At the heart of open-to-learning conversations is the value of learning from one another. It is an openness to learning about the quality of the thinking and information that we use when making judgements about what is happening, why it is happening and what to do about it.

The guiding values of an open-to-learning conversation are:

- **Increase the validity of information (whether the information be thoughts, opinions, reasoning, inferences and feelings)**

Identifying the reasoning behind your views, giving examples and illustrations of your views; challenging assumptions of self and others; treating your views as hypotheses rather than taken for granted truths; seeking feedback.

- **Increase respect for self and others**

Listening deeply especially when views differ from yours; expecting high standards and constantly checking how you are helping others to reach them; sharing control of the conversation.

- **Increase commitment to decisions**

Sharing the problems and the problem-solving process; requiring accountability for collective decisions; fostering public monitoring and review of decisions.

There are no rules about how you might have an open-to-learning conversation; it is entirely dependent on context. However, there are some steps you can take to put these values into practice:

1. describe your concern as your point of view
2. describe what your concern is based on
3. invite the other's point of view
4. paraphrase their point of view and check
5. detect and check important assumptions
6. establish common ground
7. make a plan to get what you both want to achieve.

A positive result of an open-to-learning conversation is that the teacher or staff member feels a sense of challenge but also respect from the conversation. An equally important, and at times critical, positive result is where members of staff are engaged in such a way that you feel challenged but able to handle this in a way that seeks to help align the perspectives of you and your staff, taking you to practical actions that lead to a better, more sustainable work environment.

As an educational leader, adopting these values and strategies when having conversations with colleagues can support the development of relational trust in your school or college, significantly improving teaching and learning and student progress while at the same time tackling the challenges of our time: excessive workload, compromised staff well-being and the loss of staff.

On a journey of educational improvement, leaders are often confronted and even captured by interpersonal dilemmas. Increasingly these arise simply in looking to meet day-to-day expectations during these challenging times. The need to maintain and protect relationships within the organisation is too often compromised by the need to show improvement or accommodate new expectations. Challenging conversations about performance can be uncomfortable and do not always lead to positive change. Being challenged by staff or governors can be equally uncomfortable for those in leadership positions. Yet without such challenge it is all too easy for leaders to assume that the school/college is in better shape than it actually is. Reality may only start to emerge when staff sickness rises or leaving rates can no longer be ignored, for example.

What often leads to these challenging conversations are the assumptions and inferences that we make about a situation, and the conclusions we draw as a result. This puts us in a bind as to how we approach difficult conversations about the effectiveness of working practices, both your own and those of the staff around you. It is therefore worthwhile using the code of practice framework as a mirror with useful reflections provided by the open-to-learning conversation approach.