
A Set of Core Principles

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Introduction

The role demanded of educational improvement professionals requires:

- A high level of refined personal skills and qualities to enable them to exert professional leadership in promoting and influencing educational improvement delivery to all stakeholders
- Balances to be found in their individual and collective performance, giving due credence to the recognition of common values and moral purpose while working collaboratively with stakeholders.

These represent real challenges – but ones that have to be met. The Association of Professionals in Education and Children’s Trusts (Aspect) believes it is important to establish core principles which should underpin practice within this specialist area.

The six principles

Educational improvement professionals, in promoting educational improvement should:

- 1.** Encourage success and enrichment for all learners
- 2.** Exert professional leadership through vision, strategy and initiative
- 3.** Advocate equality of opportunity in all respects
- 4.** Recognise and build upon interdependence between individuals and within and between organisations
- 5.** Demonstrate integrity and display sound personal behaviour, approaches and relationships
- 6.** Value professional and systematic approaches to learning and promote self and organisational development.

The endorsement of these principles provides a moral basis for defining the nature of service delivery, and signifies a commitment to the highest professional standards and moral leadership.

1. The six principles in context

1.1 Encourage success and enrichment for all learners

Educational improvement professionals should nurture and display a real and apparent enthusiasm for effective learning and teaching as an entitlement for all learners, reflecting a clear commitment to success for all.

High expectations appropriate to each individual should be maintained and approaches which make learning an enjoyable, challenging and stimulating experience within a range of enriched opportunities should be supported.

Educational improvement professionals need to set and support high standards, optimising opportunities to maximise their own potential, as well as that of others.

They should recognise the central importance of learning, achievement and personal development to individuals of all ages. Expertise should be applied in helping others analyse and acknowledge their strengths and achievements.

Weaknesses in practice has to be identified through clear monitoring and evaluation processes and then challenged and addressed constructively with a continuous embedded focus on raising achievement for all.

The focus should remain on educational improvement and ensuring that barriers to achieving this goal are minimised. Learning should be regarded holistically, facilitating individual learners' capacity to learn, enjoy high levels of self-esteem and to deal with a complex and changing world.

1.2 Exert professional leadership through vision, strategy and initiative

Educational improvement professionals should exert professional leadership in influencing educational processes and delivery. They need to convey a coherent long-term vision and be able to adapt to changing circumstances and new ideas.

Vision, strategy and initiative should initiate research and debate around effective learning and teaching, with balanced judgement in risk-taking as part of promoting 'best' developments. Such developments demand that educational improvement professionals foster and maintain a supportive culture which promotes confidence, minimises blame, and supports a persistent and assured approach to the pursuit of improvement.

The current climate seeks creative approaches, which recognise multiple learning styles within a range of complex interactions. It is important to accept that success is not always assured and to learn from less successful experiences as well as those which work admirably.

"You must learn to fail intelligently. Failing is one of the greatest arts in the world. One fails forward towards success."

Thomas Edison

Promulgating vision and strategy and promoting initiative require a principled approach. Establishing and maintaining credibility is crucial for organisations, teams and individuals engaged with educational improvement. A detailed up-to-date knowledge and understanding of key educational developments and issues is demanded together with the appropriate experience and suitable

personal qualities and temperament to carry out the tasks in hand.

Delivery should be underpinned by a transparent shared vision and a set of values presented through a viable operational plan which engages stakeholders effectively within the process and is based on objective analysis.

Specifically, professional leadership demands the capacity to hypothesise and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data and other indicators, within specific contexts. The purpose is to identify trends, progress and comparators and the ability to moderate and validate qualitative information based on knowledge of good practice.

1.3 Advocate equality of opportunity in all respects

Educational improvement professionals should foster equity, access and entitlement to learning by engendering management and organisational bases to decision-making and provision that promote equality of opportunity for all learners. Advocating and upholding all aspects of equal opportunities – including disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, social class – is a well-established key principle.

Within this context of promoting equality of opportunity, it is important to value:

- Cultural diversity
- Learner empowerment
- Social and educational inclusion
- Parity of esteem
- A commitment to lifelong learning
- The concept of care for all individuals
- The entitlement of all to fair and equitable treatment within a supportive culture.

It is therefore essential that the particular circumstances of all learners is taken into account when determining the nature of provision. Approaches should promote self-development and stimulate reciprocal respect between all individuals. Key aspects of personal behaviour such as compassion and tolerance are reflected through broad-based equal opportunities.

1.4 Recognise and build upon interdependence between individuals and within and between organisations

Educational improvement professionals should take every opportunity to cultivate collaboration and cooperation across learning communities and recognise the interdependence inherent in learning and teaching.

In doing so, it is necessary to:

- Identify successful practice
- Analyse why that practice is successful
- Disseminate successful practice
- Celebrate successful practice
- Build on successful practice
- Develop sustainable networks.

Many recent and envisaged developments rely upon cooperative approaches, with increasing prominence being given to partnerships. In such situations, sound values and principled ways of working are crucial to effective collaborative service delivery. Trust and openness are necessary as underpinning qualities with delivery carried out within a framework of professional learning communities.

Working constructively with, and valuing the contribution of, others affords synergy to outcomes. Through the identification and dissemination of successful practice, solutions to problems can be found. Capacity building and self-reliance develop from acknowledgment of

the intrinsic interdependence that runs through the education system.

If all the needs of an individual are to be met, holistic support is important. This requires that multi-agency partnership approaches are championed.

Additionally, openness to learning from others should extend not only within the education community but also beyond it. Generic good practice can be gleaned from other professions and it is always important that, in promoting education, the scope of relevant considerations is not restricted.

1.5 Demonstrate integrity and display sound personal behaviour, approaches and relationships

Educational improvement professionals, individually and in teams, should demonstrate appropriate modes of behaviour based on high ideals through their approach and relationships.

Characteristics of personal behaviour in dealing with every person encountered in the workplace demand a high level of reciprocity such as mutual respect, courtesy, consideration and evenhandedness. Fairness, justice, integrity and respect are key elements which should permeate working practices.

Objectivity, impartiality and independence in making and delivering judgements are fundamental features of fair and equitable professional support and need to be overtly displayed in all day-to-day working practices. Non-professional connections between individuals may form an obstacle to perceived (or real) objectivity and impartiality in relation to management and reporting systems, as much as in inappropriate personal contact.

Objectivity needs to be exemplified in the formation of judgements from validated, unbiased and unprejudiced data and information, in

checking assumptions and understandings and through fair and honest feedback. Consistency, clear communications and active listening add force to sound working practice.

Fairness must be manifest in systems and procedures, which are known to all stakeholders and developed through participative and consultative processes.

Individuals and teams need to enjoy relationships with each other and with client groups based on openness, sincerity, empathy and integrity together with compassion and tolerance permeated by a strong moral purpose.

1.6 Value professional and systematic approaches to learning and promote self and organisational development

Educational improvement professionals should embrace strategies which recognise that all engaged with educational delivery are learners themselves so encouraging the development of active professional learning communities. A consequence is that there should be open approaches to educational research embracing the notion that improvement is affected by many factors and that it is important to incorporate good working practice prevalent in other professions.

Thus, the ongoing development of personal and professional potential applies to individuals, individuals within teams and in the support of others. This includes the need to be mindful of ways to promote the involvement of stakeholders such as parents and carers in the process of learner development.

Associated requirements include widespread familiarity with and access to available resources for learners as well as each individual being actively engaged with their own processes and programmes of learning.

2. Practical applications

There are a number of detailed practical considerations involved in the expression of principled working. These include:

- Avoidance of conflicts of interest between different areas of work
- Always inform employers/clients of any potential conflicts arising out of work commitments
- Work outside normal employment does not adversely affect normal employment, nor hinder or conflict with the interests of the employer/client or colleagues
- Facilities and services only being used with the agreement of the employer/client.

3. In conclusion

- Seeking to agree a job description or work definition with the employer/client outlining fixed commitments
- Prioritising contracted commitments and seeking alternative arrangements to provide cover where necessary
- Having knowledge of statutory obligations
- Complying with reasonable rules and requirements of employers and clients.

Defined principles are an essential element of strong service provision which increasingly feature in contemporary leadership and management ideals. The cultural ethos and effective functioning of organisations of all sizes is integral to credible and acceptable delivery. Quality is concerned with more than just achieving ends, and customer satisfaction – as a minimum – is an established concept.

In the educational improvement field, there are many customers whose interests and priorities may conflict. Consequently, clarity of professional principles becomes even more

apposite. Within organisations, unambiguous and well-founded principles pertain to both internal and external relationships. Organisations need a fundamental moral purpose in promoting coherent knowledge creation and sharing. The capacity to understand change is also vital to sound delivery.

Aspect expects educational improvement professionals to hold common ideals regarding the central importance of learning, achievement and personal development in relation to all individuals of ages. Appropriate behaviour is based on a belief that standards and quality in education can, and should, be improved through the influence of intervention by means of advice, inspection, challenge, support and professional development. Consistent high professional standards make a positive contribution to better educational practice.

Educational improvement professionals have to meet a very high benchmark in terms of principled working practice. This becomes ever more complex with developments in service delivery models. Discernible, independent and autonomous management and provision of all forms of support for educational improvement are a prerequisite in protecting integrity. At the same time, delivery is being carried out within genuine collaborative partnerships with stakeholders, despite potentially conflicting pressures.

Indeed, within current educational developments promoting individualised learning pathways, sensitive to personal need, delivery must embrace highly collaborative frameworks. Partnerships and institutional mutual support provide the modern basis for service delivery and incorporate accountability as well as provider frameworks.

Within contemporary approaches to the management of education, an emphasis on

principles and moral purpose to create a bond of clear, known and acceptable frameworks is a matter of paramount importance. Equally, it is important to challenge all internal and external blockages and promote mutual understanding. Decision-makers within education can be separated from delivery processes, creating tensions that can undermine principled approaches. For principles to be fully pertinent, greater sympathy and commonality needs to be promoted across all educational interests.

In its published code of conduct Aspect stipulates a set of personal characteristics required of members in terms of the roles and responsibilities they fulfil. The membership is required to observe the contents of this code.

Similarly, key principles are reflected in a variety of the Association's publications such as the *National Framework of Competencies* and the *National Standards for Educational Improvement Professionals*. Values and principles frameworks can also be found in other relevant documentation such as the Office for Standards in Education's (Ofsted) *Strategic Plan* and the *National Standards for Headteachers*.

The key issue is how principles are manifested in working practices, not only for each individual, but also collectively for the teams and organisations to which they belong. It is always practical applications which reinforce or undermine the significance of principles. Essentially, the systems and practice informing educational improvement professionals' varied operations should be focused on learning and founded on the coherent principles described earlier.

Code of conduct

Values of the Association

Members of the Association share common ideals about the importance of education to

individuals of all ages and to society at large and believe that:

- Standards and quality in education can be improved through the intervention of inspection, advice, support and training
- Consistently high professional standards among its members can make a positive contribution to better educational practice.

Purpose of the code

The Association requires its members to accept and abide by its code of practice as a condition of membership. The code sets out the standards of personal and professional conduct required both for members who are employed by local authorities and similar organisations and for those who are self-employed. The code is intended to give members clear guidance about how to conduct themselves. It also demonstrates to employers and the public at large the standards which are expected of Association members.

Personal conduct

- (a) Members should perform their duties diligently, conscientiously and without favour and at all times have regard to the interests of their employers, professional colleagues, clients and other associates.
- (b) Members must at all times work within the law.
- (c) Members should ensure that their private, personal, political and financial interests do not conflict with their professional duties. They should disclose to their employer or relevant clients, any direct or indirect interest which might affect or appear to affect decisions made by their employers and clients and in such cases

they must not influence or appear to influence such decisions.

commission it is the duty of the member to carry out the necessary checks to ensure that no conflict of interest exists.

- (d) The Association is committed to the furtherance of equal opportunities. By their words and actions, members should not give support to activities or policies which encourage discrimination against any individual or group.
- (e) Members should not disclose to a third party any confidential or privileged information entrusted to them by their employers or clients.
- (f) Advertising by members should be legal, honest and truthful and must not mislead or cause public offence.
- (g) Members should not allow their professional judgement or conduct to be influenced or compromised by commercial considerations.
- (h) Members should not accept any hospitality or inducements that could influence their professional judgement in favour of the donor.
- (i) Members should not directly or indirectly exert influence or pressure on any person for the purpose of securing work or contracts.
- (j) Self-employed members should have particular regard to the need for adequate professional indemnity insurance to enable them to meet any claims for breach of their professional duty.
- (k) Self-employed members should not act for any client if there is a conflict of interest between their own professional duty or professional interests and the interests of the client. Before accepting a

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