

Good practice guide: Professionalism in action

November 2023

Introduction

Professionalism is the behaviour expected of a professional person. It describes the qualities required of those who are trained and skilled to carry out particular roles, not just within those specific roles, but in society as a whole.

When you became a practitioner in education in Wales, you committed to being professional in all that you do and by doing so, contributing to upholding public trust and confidence in your profession.

This guide aims to help raise your awareness and understanding of key areas related to professionalism in both your professional and personal life.

This is not regulatory or mandatory guidance. Scenarios have been included to help you think about and explore some of the issues which might arise, and how our advice might apply. We have also included examples of unacceptable practices where professional boundaries have clearly been crossed.

The Code

All Education Workforce Council (EWC) registrants are subject to the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice (the Code), which sets out the key principles of good conduct and practice for registrants. This guide should be read in conjunction with the Code.

The principles and expectations in the Code are all relevant to professionalism in practice. In this guide, however, we particularly highlight:

1. Personal and Professional Responsibility

Registrants:

- 1.1 recognise their personal responsibility as a role model and public figure, to uphold public trust and confidence in the education professions, both in and out of the workplace
- 1.2 conduct relationships with learners and young people professionally
- 1.3 engage with learners and young people to encourage confidence, empowerment, educational and personal development
- 1.4 have a duty of care for the safety, physical, social, moral, and educational wellbeing of learners and young people
- 1.5 are mindful of their professional responsibility for the health, safety, and wellbeing of colleagues and themselves
- 1.6 demonstrate a commitment to equality and diversity

2. Professional Integrity

Registrants:

- 2.1 are accountable for their conduct and professional competence
- 2.2 behave honestly, and with integrity

3. Collaborative Working

Registrants:

- 3.1 respect, support, and collaborate with colleagues, learners, young people, and others to achieve the best learning outcomes
- 3.2 share experience and knowledge to help themselves and other practitioners develop and maintain best practice
- 3.4 communicate appropriately and effectively with all involved in the education of learners and young people

4. Professional Knowledge and Understanding

Registrants:

- 4.4 where necessary, seek support, advice, and guidance, and are open to feedback, responding to it positively and constructively

5. Professional Learning

Registrants:

- 5.1 demonstrate a shared commitment to their continuing professional learning by reflecting upon, and evaluating, their practice, keeping their professional knowledge and skills up to date, and taking steps to improve their practice where necessary

The Code is an important point of reference. Think about the five key principles and the expectations they place upon you. The Code will help you make the right decisions when faced with the challenges covered in this guide.

[The Code is available on our website.](#)

What is professionalism in practice?

Professionalism in your practice is about reflecting on your personal and professional values, morals, ethics, and having the confidence to make sound judgements, informed decisions, and behave appropriately as a professional, sometimes in challenging circumstances.

You are responsible for upholding your own professional conduct and practice and ongoing self-reflection is central to maintaining your professionalism.

There are many important characteristics that contribute to professionalism in practice. These include the following, which are not mutually exclusive:

Being honest and having integrity means:

- keeping your word as a professional, you are trusted implicitly
- not compromising your values
- doing the right thing, even if it means taking a more difficult road
- being accountable
- being humble, admitting when you might have made a mistake, or need help and being willing to learn from others
- representing yourself honestly and accurately when you are, for example, applying for jobs or interacting with your regulator

- understanding that the public place a lot of trust in you as an educational professional, and recognising that in return, the public expects you to act with high levels of integrity, both in and out of work

Being a good role model means:

- living up to expectations by demonstrating clearly what professionalism looks like in practice and leading by example
- having a clear moral and ethical code
- understanding that what you say and do in your private life shapes the way that people think about you and your profession
- demonstrating positive behaviours and attitudes towards equality, diversity, and inclusion
- supporting colleagues, learners, and young people
- celebrating personal success and that of others, and treating others with respect
- providing meaningful and constructive feedback to others
- having humility and a willingness to admit mistakes
- developing others and supporting those in senior roles
- reporting concerns in a professional manner if you think that things are not right
- being understanding and patient with those who are new to your profession or those who are learning new skills

Being a reflective practitioner means:

- having a personal commitment to develop and improve your skills as a practitioner and the specialised knowledge needed to succeed in your role
- keeping your knowledge and training up-to-date, so that you can continue to deliver the best possible learning experiences
- sharing and disseminating evidence-informed practice
- your professionalism is your personal responsibility and you should never stop:
 - ◊ learning
 - ◊ reflecting
 - ◊ trying to improve

Being confident and competent in your professionalism means:

- despite there being tough times in all professions, and times when your confidence might waver, remembering that you are part of a trusted profession that supports you
- being reliable and delivering what is expected of you
- managing expectations, not making excuses, and focusing on finding solutions if things go wrong

Breaches of the Code

The examples below are illustrative of cases where registrants (from all the registrant categories), have significantly failed to demonstrate professionalism in practice when required, and were subject to EWC disciplinary proceedings as a result.

In all cases, there has been a clear breach of the Code and the registrants received a range of disciplinary sanctions including, in some cases, being prohibited from practising in the education workforce in the future.

A registrant:

- bullied and harassed a colleague by making sexualised comments in front of other colleagues and learners, justified as “only banter”
- behaved in an unprofessional way towards colleagues which included losing their temper, shouting, and swearing at staff, making derogatory and sexist remarks
- bullied and intimidated staff in relation to the school’s performance against the national literacy and numeracy tests
- committed fraudulent acts with learners’ work and sought to blame and implicate other colleagues
- failed to follow management instructions, sought to mislead colleagues, and provided inaccurate information about learners. They also failed to participate in planning, record keeping, learner progress and acted dishonestly with regards to learners’ work
- bombarded a learner with personal texts, calls and picture messages which included sexualised and inappropriate comments
- acted as a confidant to a learner aged under 16 and, once emotional dependency was established, they began a sexual relationship
- sent an abusive email to a prospective employer after they were unsuccessful at a job interview
- shared personal information with a learner and discussed other learners as well as colleagues whilst conducting a sexual relationship, often in the registrant’s own home
- purchased alcohol for learners and exchanged a large number of inappropriate messages with them via a range of social media applications, telling them always to delete them
- visited a learner and their parents at their home on a number of occasions without any legitimate reason or authority. This was in order to gain their trust and a way of being able to develop a relationship with the learner
- socialised with learners (in a learner’s bedroom), and drank alcohol with them during an educational trip

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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