



**MODULE CODE:ECEW7011**

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**ASSIGNMENT TITLE:** *A reflective, academic response to the concept of leading and managing education professionals*

## Use of Generative AI in Assessment

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## AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT [<https://chatgpt.com/>] on [13.07] to suggest an essay structure. I used the prompt(s):

1. Give me a suggestion on how to break this essay into suitable sections, a structure that I can complete section by section.

I acknowledge the use of the spellchecker by Grammarly [<https://app.grammarly.com/>] to proofread and highlight any spelling mistakes in the text.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

## ***A reflective, academic response to the concept of leading and managing education professionals***

Educational leadership is an increasingly complex and context-dependent process, particularly within Welsh schools undergoing significant curriculum and policy reform (Bush *et al.*, 2019; Hallinger, 2018). This reflection is situated within School A, a 3-16 school where I currently work as a secondary sector science teacher. Alongside my teaching responsibilities, I have undertaken a number of leadership roles, beginning as Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Coordinator, followed by Head of Year 11 (HOY), and most recently, Head of Science and Technology (HOD). Since the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) in 2022, schools have experienced substantial curriculum reform, with the phased implementation of the new GCSEs and an increased focus on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b). Combined with rising accountability measures and expectations surrounding professional learning, these developments have reinforced the importance of effective leadership at all levels of the school and led me to reflect critically on the leadership approaches and practices within my own work (Welsh Government, 2024).

Leadership is defined as the process of influencing and enabling individuals or groups to work collaboratively towards achieving shared goals and improving outcomes (Bush *et al.*, 2019). However, leadership remains a contested concept due to the wide range of perspectives and approaches within the field, meaning that no single model is universally applicable across all schools. Hallinger (2018) emphasises that leadership is contextual, with effective leaders adapting their approaches to meet the specific needs of their schools, staff, and learners. Despite differing theoretical perspectives, there is broad agreement that leadership plays a crucial role in influencing teaching quality and pupil outcomes through its impact on school culture, professional learning, and organisational policies (Robinson, 2011; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2020). Prior to studying this module, I associated leadership primarily with individuals holding formal positions of authority. However, the literature has challenged this assumption by demonstrating that leadership is a broader process that can be exercised by individuals throughout a school, regardless of their job title (Harris, 2014).

At School A, leadership can be seen at multiple levels, with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) consisting of a headteacher, a deputy, and two assistant heads. Beyond formal roles, many teachers demonstrate leadership through leading whole-school initiatives or sharing good practice. This reflects elements of distributed leadership, whereby responsibility is shared across the school rather than solely relying on the SLT, although questions remain regarding its effectiveness (Harris, 2014).

Bush *et al.* (2019) identify a number of different leadership approaches which can be applied within educational settings. Of these, managerial, transformational and instructional leadership align closely with my context. Managerial leadership focuses on school structures, policies, defined roles, accountability and the implementation of objectives (Bush *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, transformational leadership places emphasis on motivation, shared vision and organisational change (Leithwood and Slegers, 2006; Leithwood and Sun, 2012). Instructional leadership focuses on teaching, learning and curriculum development (Hallinger, 2019). Across

these approaches, successful leadership requires practices including setting direction, developing and supporting staff, and effective organisational conditions (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2020)

School A demonstrates elements of all three through a multi-layered approach. The headteacher predominantly demonstrates a transformational approach, SLT a managerial approach, and middle leaders an instructional approach. One potential indicator of the effectiveness of these approaches is strong GCSE results. However, these data alone cannot demonstrate leadership effectiveness and ought to be considered alongside wider evidence, such as pupil and teacher voice.

I had previously perceived my own leadership as consistent; however, reflection has led me to recognise that I have utilised all three approaches according to the demands of my role. As DofE coordinator, I predominantly adopted a managerial approach, contributing to an increase from four pupils achieving the award in 2023 to thirty-three pupils in 2024 and thirty-seven in 2025. Conversely, my role as HOY required a more transformational approach. In seeking to improve the use of registration time, I needed staff buy-in and a shared commitment to increasing the focus on well-being. By giving teachers greater ownership over registration activities while providing support and regular check-ins, there was a reduction in pupils being present in corridors, an increase in Welsh spoken during registration and improved communication between tutors and pupils. Finally, as a HOD, I have increasingly adopted an instructional approach, leading substantial curriculum change and implementing lesson starters across all subjects. This involved drawing on expertise across the department and encouraging collaboration to ensure greater consistency and improved teaching and learning. Reflecting across these roles has therefore challenged my previous assumption that my leadership style remained largely unchanged. Instead, my practice appears to have adapted significantly according to context, and I recognise that approaching my HOY role in the same manner as DofE coordination may have been considerably less effective.

Despite their strengths, each approach has significant limitations. In practice, effective leadership is likely to use a combination of the three to provide a balanced approach to a given situation (Marks and Printy, 2003). Managerial leadership provides structure and consistency; however, without staff commitment can become procedural and lead to a culture of compliance rather than engagement (Hoyle and Wallace, 2007; Covey, 2004). Transformational leadership can generate motivation; however, it can become overly dependent on one individual's vision. If not shared, staff can feel undervalued and unheard. Additionally, an emphasis on continual change can contribute to increased workload and staff burnout if insufficiently supported with realistic expectations (Bush and Glover, 2014). Although aiming for a shared vision, research demonstrates that this can represent the vision of one imposed onto all, but not necessarily a shared one (Bush and Glover, 2014). Instructional leadership maintains a strong focus on learners and education; however, excessive emphasis on attainment and targets may increase pressures on staff, leading to staff burnout and a reduction in attention to well-being (Carroll et al., 2022; Jerrim and Sims, 2022). Hallinger's (2018) emphasis on the importance of context is relevant here, as the effectiveness of leadership must be linked to the personal context within the specific setting to which it is applied.

I have therefore learned that effective leadership does not involve the selection of a single approach; rather, recognition that the demands of a specific context require adaptation of practice accordingly. This aligns with Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2020), who suggest that a successful leader draws upon a range of practices that are responsive to the needs of the organisation and its members.

Distributed leadership is viewed as a collaborative approach, as opposed to being carried out solely by appointed senior leaders (Fullan, 2002). Harris (2008) argues that this approach encompasses informal and formal leaders, sharing expertise throughout the organisation. Distributed leadership can emerge through the combined independent actions of individuals within a team, rather than centred around a headteacher (Gronn, 2002). It is important to note that distributed leadership differs from delegation, and having a multitude of staff with additional responsibilities does not always equate to distributed leadership in practice (Harris, 2008). Collaborative leadership places similar emphasis on shared practices, dialogue, and collaborative participation rather than simply a show of authority (Hallinger and Heck, 2010)

School A demonstrates many aspects of distributed leadership, although it is not a consistent approach throughout. Although staff are seldom given final decision-making authority, there are times when they can influence decisions. There are many teachers who have led projects of change without any formal reward; for example, a Welsh teacher wanting to improve language use in registration led a project for using registration to develop Welsh-language skills. This idea was taken up by the HOYs and implemented across the school. Nonetheless, there remain a large number of staff who do not influence decisions, often due to not wanting to commit to sharing ideas, or take on the potential additional work. It remains unclear whether this is influenced by an already high workload, lack of confidence or a perception that ideas will not be taken on board.

Davies et al. (2020) argue that effective coaching supports professional learning through collaboration, reflection and dialogue, thus enabling the active development of practice rather than passive participation in learning. School A has established some opportunities for collaborative professional learning, with staff able to sign up for external training. Upon completion, they are required to summarise the biggest takeaways and share these during a 20-minute carousel session. This approach can support distributed leadership by enabling expertise to be shared beyond formal leadership roles. Although this model enables the sharing of good practice, its short duration limits meaningful opportunities for discussion and, with no dedicated time allocated to implementation, may reduce opportunities to apply new approaches collectively (Timperley *et al.*, 2007).

The benefits of this approach, when used effectively, include greater staff ownership, leadership development across the school rather than among a select few, and increased staff morale through feeling heard (Harris, 2013). However, the limitations can be significant if implemented poorly, such as increased workload leading to burnout, stress and low morale (Pathardikar *et al.*, 2023), as well as unclear accountability, which can result in poor execution (Lumby, 2013). Unequal participation can leave some feeling as if they do more than others yet receive no compensation, leading to a sense of frustration and disunity (Harris and Jones, 2018). A

significant risk is that distributed leadership becomes disguised delegation, with SLT instructing staff to complete tasks while presenting these as staff-led initiatives (Hatcher, 2005).

I have always believed that School A follows a distributed approach due to the many opportunities I have personally had to lead change without a formal role to do so. Despite this, the literature has highlighted many valid points, and upon reflection it is clear that although demonstrating many positive aspects, School A does not fully integrate this approach into its practice, and further work is required to improve effectiveness and implementation. There are some decisions which are not appropriate to distribute, such as suspension times or attendance targets. This raises the question of whether distributed leadership requires authority to be shared, or whether autonomy can coexist with certain decisions remaining appropriately with SLT (Crawford, 2019).

Effective leadership is determined first and foremost by practices used to influence and support staff rather than solely depending on formal roles or adherence to specific leadership approaches. Leadership practices encompass a range of approaches including setting direction, developing staff and creating effective conditions required for success (Leithwood and Sun, 2012). Leadership must involve a balance of clear expectations with suitable accountability; this applies in schools as there must be recognition of teachers' professional expertise and autonomy, especially within subject specialisms within GCSE and A-Level, in addition to non-teaching areas such as wellbeing and safeguarding (Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo and Hargreaves, 2015). This aligns with Brady's (2021) ideology of intelligent accountability, in which individuals hold themselves accountable rather than relying on continuous external accountability.

Effective communication is paramount in leadership, requiring clear expectations alongside opportunities for listening and feedback (Klein, 2017). In my role as HOY, I regularly implemented feedback sessions for both pupils and teachers. In the aforementioned registration time project, open dialogue with staff about change was used to reflect on and improve the use of registration time. Rather than directing staff, tutors were provided space to raise concerns, adapt the skills activities according to their classroom, and communicate issues regarding pupils. Over time, this supported greater ownership of registration time, and tutors took a greater role in other areas such as well-being, which in turn reduced the number of pupils over-reliant on HOYs. However, it is important to note that increasing the quantity of communication can be counterproductive due to confusion; where multiple messages and priorities overlap, communication may become unclear (Brinia *et al.*, 2022; Pathardikar *et al.*, 2023). Effective leadership requires clear, concise communication.

Trust and autonomy come hand in hand in effective leadership approaches in educational settings, as teachers require discretion to utilise their own expertise and professional judgement (Keddie, 2024). Inconsistencies may occur if complete autonomy is given, which may lead to dissatisfaction among pupils and parents due to the comparative nature of schools; furthermore, excessive control often reduces motivation and can create uninspiring or undifferentiated lessons due to rigid implementation of the curriculum (Estyn, 2018; OECD, 2026). In my role as HOY, tutors were given ownership of the registration activities provided while all working

towards the same goal, following the same expectations: prioritising well-being and Welsh language development. This strategy provided opportunities for staff to adapt the implementation of activities to suit their pupils, without removing the overall consistency. I use a similar balance as HOD, where I provide the lesson materials but do not dictate the exact order or style in which they are taught, yet the fundamental skills and knowledge development are still expected. Successful leadership models require approaches to respond to a given context, and not be uniformly implemented (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2020). It is always difficult to balance how much consistency a leader can require before unnecessarily restricting autonomy.

A key part of effective leadership relies on the development of staff and building the capacity of colleagues rather than focusing on individual performance (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2020). Coaching is a method utilised to create opportunities for open dialogue, reflection and personal development rather than passive instruction (Davies et al., 2020). Within my HOD role, this involves modelling effective practice and providing each member of the team the opportunity to share best practice across the department. For example, during a recent observation, a colleague utilised a specific strategy at the beginning of her lesson which was discussed as a department and implemented more widely. However, many examples of best practice are shared with no follow-through, due to the requirement for sufficient time to meaningfully influence practice (Timperley et al., 2007). This represents an important shift in my own understanding: I cannot expect effective change without providing sufficient time, feedback, and reflection to support meaningful advancements (EEF, 2021).

These practices are most effective when used in conjunction with one another, rather than independently. Autonomy without communication may create inconsistency; similarly, communication without trust risks encouraging compliance, not engagement. Professional development often lacks meaningful outcomes if staff lack ownership, or the time to apply and reflect on new strategies. Reflecting on my own approaches, I increasingly recognise that effective leadership is not merely about setting expectations, but about ensuring conditions support understanding, trust, and successful implementation of improvements.

International research demonstrates that effective middle leadership can positively influence change in practice across schools (Li et al., 2021). Middle leaders hold a significant position linking teachers and SLT, implementing school priorities within specialised departmental contexts (Bush, 2023). HODs are academic middle leaders, drawing upon subject specialism and pedagogical expertise, developing curriculum provisions, supporting colleagues, and monitoring and adapting teaching for continuous improvement (Bush et al., 2022). Furthermore, international studies by Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford and Lamanna (2023) demonstrate considerable variation in the responsibilities between middle leaders; this is a part in school A, where one middle leader may lead three members of staff, while another leads twenty-five.

Middle leaders sit in a position of leading and being led, creating a complex position between classroom practitioners and SLT (Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford and Lamanna, 2021; Harris and Jones, 2019). Teacher leadership often involves individuals or collectives influencing colleagues to improve teaching through collaboration and sharing good practice, ultimately aiming to improve teaching and learning outcomes (York-Barr and Duke, 2004). Evidence suggests that

sustained research is required on school leadership approaches due to the influences varying greatly depending on the context (Nguyen, Harris and Ng, 2019). Evidence increasingly describes middle leaders as translators of policy within schools (Skerritt et al., 2023). As HOD this requires me to implement expectations from SLT whilst also considering the expertise and needs of my department. For example, the needs of staff and the resources made available by SLT do not always align, leaving HOD in a position of negotiation. Tensions can arise easily between both levels, requiring trust to maintain confidence and accountability (Harris and Jones, 2019). A question that arises often is whether the primary responsibility of a HOD is to implement school priorities or to advocate for the staff within their department. The answer, I'm learning, is both.

Teacher leadership can be seen within School A when members without formal leadership responsibilities influence wider practices. This suggests that influence is not dependent solely on position, although the success and impact of implementation may depend on leadership support due to lack of accountability among peers (Wenner and Campbell, 2017).

Instructional leadership places teaching and learning at the heart of its practice, largely focusing on curriculum and pupil outcomes (Bush et al., 2019). This focus on learning, teaching and leadership reflects Sharratt's (2018) emphasis on ensuring learning is central to leadership decisions. An HOD role requires more than monitoring attainment; the curriculum must be progressive, and change must be implemented into classroom practice through planning, resource development and dialogue. This leads back to the argument that over-prescriptive HODs may restrict teachers' expertise, while excessive variation may lead to inconsistencies in learning. Effective leadership must balance clear expectations with teachers' ability to adapt to the class at hand. Leading professional learning is closely connected to this approach; in School A, this reinforces my view that curriculum leadership involves developing all rather than monitoring performance (Robinson and Timperley, 2007).

My experience as a HOY and HOD has been vastly different; as HOY, I was privy to confidential information regarding pupils' well-being, and therefore, when dealing with situations was often the most knowledgeable person in the room. Conversely, as HOD, my previous assumption that effective leaders should be the most knowledgeable has been challenged. Although I retain responsibility for the curriculum within my department, colleagues possess greater expertise within particular subject specialisms. My role has since moved toward facilitating expertise and utilising knowledgeable staff to write curriculum within their specialism. Allowing collaboration and contribution to curriculum planning strengthens provision across the department. This reflects aspects of distributed leadership, and effective curriculum leadership relies less on individual expertise and more on creating conditions in which expertise can be shared and used effectively. At the system level, leadership extends beyond individual schools through collaborative initiatives such as Clusters; although less visible within my immediate role, we all play a role contributing to the sharing of good practice across Wales (Welsh Government, 2025; Hopkins and Higham, 2007).

Since 2022, the Curriculum for Wales became statutory in schools, requiring curriculum upheaval to align with new national frameworks (Welsh Government, 2022). Curricula across

schools differ considerably because the national framework requires interpretation within individual schools (Welsh Government, 2020). Considerable pressure is therefore placed on SLT and middle leaders to translate national policy into meaningful curricula for teaching and learning (Skerritt *et al.*, 2023).

The Curriculum for Wales is implemented throughout School A, but its implementation may differ from other schools within the area. National policy is translated and interpreted at several levels before reaching the classroom. In School A, SLT identifies the priorities, HODs interpret and translate these into departmental planning, and specialist teachers develop the classroom resources. This reflects the concept of policy enactment theory proposed by Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012), whereby schools interpret policy according to individual contexts rather than implementing it unchanged.

Effective implementation of the Curriculum for Wales relies on a range of leadership approaches. Transformational leadership supports reformation; distributed and instructional leadership support converting policy to curriculum planning drawing on expertise, while managerial leadership supports implementation. No single approach would effectively implement the changes required, and the specific balance of these approaches must change depending on the given situation within a specific school.

To ensure relevance to their given context, schools are unable to implement a policy unchanged; they must interpret, translate and implement it individually; consequently, even two schools within proximity will interpret the curriculum differently (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012). Despite this, autonomy and variety can also be a limitation, as excessive variation may lead to inconsistencies (Estyn, 2025). Estyn provides external inspection and evaluation of a school's implementation of the Curriculum for Wales, highlighting good practice for all to see (Estyn, 2024). School A, having received exceptional feedback, has now been granted case study status, providing opportunities for leaders across the country to observe and consider similar implementation within their own school. Conversely, an over-prescription of leadership that focuses on direction yet offers little to no autonomy can lead to a reduction in creativity, enthusiasm and staff morale (Clement, 2014). Staff are more likely to engage effectively if they are able to understand why a policy exists (Clement, 2014). My experience within School A demonstrates that a highly motivated leader initially contributed to motivated staff; however, four years of continuous changes and alterations in the pursuit of improvements are beginning to reduce staff morale and contribute to dissatisfaction. Effective policy leadership must encompass all approaches and lead change for genuine improvement, and not for the sake of trying to improve on paper (Harris and Jones, 2020).

Literature has altered my understanding of policy leadership greatly, shifting my view from simply following national or whole-school expectations. As a HOD, I increasingly recognise the need to alter my approach and interpret policy within the context of Science and Technology; it has cautioned me against tick-box exercises on subjects I have no specialist expertise in, and has encouraged me to open more professional dialogues with clear expectations yet open autonomy within the subjects of my area of learning. External accountability can have a negative impact on staff morale, and often accountability is most effective between colleagues;

this highlights the importance of cohesion within a department focusing closely on trust and communication (Cranston, 2013). The quality of leadership may play a significant role in whether a department sees a policy as a genuine opportunity for improvement, or it may become an exercise in compliance.

In conclusion, I no longer view effective leadership as adopting one particular approach, but rather as recognising the need to know when and how to adapt and apply a range of approaches according to context. My original understanding was largely associated with formal roles and authority, yet the literature alongside reflection on my own experiences has led to a shift towards viewing leadership as adaptive, relational and distributed across the many layers within a school.

Effective leadership cannot rely solely on providing instruction; given that many individuals bring differing professional expertise, leadership within schools must involve communication, trust, appropriate autonomy and opportunities to contribute meaningfully. Effective leadership therefore requires a balance between providing direction and enabling autonomy.

Reflecting upon my own experience as a middle leader, I now see the important bridging role that HODs and HOYs play between SLT and classroom practitioners. My HOD role requires me to create conditions in which my department's expertise can be used to improve learning. I have moved firmly from focusing primarily on my own practice towards developing improvement across the team. I therefore must facilitate, mediate, and lead change within the curriculum, not merely monitor the staff.

With the new Curriculum for Wales now firmly in place, I can reflect that it is not simply implemented in schools, but rather interpreted at different levels. The autonomy provided within the national policy means that school leadership is of high importance. A balance between direction and autonomy is needed to prevent compliance and encourage engagement, while clear communication of expectations is needed to avoid inconsistencies. Ultimately, policy implementation must genuinely improve teaching and learning.

I leave this module questioning how I can provide sufficient direction to create a coherent department and maintain accountability, while retaining autonomy for staff to take ownership of the improvements required to strengthen teaching and learning.

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