

What can research evidence tell us about:

What is the Best Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct for Uganda?

Key messages

- A code of conduct should be a living document, updated regularly to address sectoral emerging trends
- The development of the code requires high participation from all stakeholders; teachers, parents, students, and the responsible government ministries and departments, with the output reflecting accepted values
- There have to be deliberate implementation strategies inbuilt within the code and within the institutions to ensure success
- The code must have penalties linked to specific violations to remove ambiguity in rewarding those who violate it
- There are different roles for the sector leadership, institutions e.g schools and teachers to play, for the successful implementation of a teachers' professional code of conduct.
- The code of conduct is only as effective as the willingness of staff to report violations. Therefore, deliberate steps have to be taken to encourage the staff members to report code violations amongst their peers.

Where did this Rapid Response come from?

This document was created in response to a specific question from a policy maker in Uganda in 2019.

It was prepared by the Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES), at the Uganda country node of the Regional East African Community Health (REACH) Policy Initiative.

Included:

- **Key findings** from research
- **Considerations about the relevance** of this research for health system decisions in Uganda

Not included:

- Recommendations
- Detailed descriptions



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES



Regional East African Community
Health Policy Initiative

Summary

Background:

The current Teacher's Professional Code of Conduct in Uganda was published in 2012 which is a revision of that published in 1996. Its aim at the time was to provide teachers with a guide towards ethical conduct in the execution of their day-to-day activities.

However, despite this guidance, there are still gross ethical violations among the teachers, many of which go unreported. This has prompted the Education Service Commission to ask pertinent questions about the development of an up to date professional code of conduct for the teaching profession, and its effective implementation.

Rapid Response Question:

What is the best teachers' professional code of conduct for Uganda?

Findings:

A code of conduct can be defined as a formal document that establishes behavioral expectations for a company or profession and the people in that profession. The following are proposed steps in developing the code of conduct, and its suggested key parts;

Developing the code of conduct

- Identify core values of teaching profession
- Engage all stake holders
- Address a wide range of issues likely to face teachers
- Ensure consistency with ethical principals
- Authenticity in leadership

Parts of the code of conduct

- Introduction
- Definitions
- Purpose
- Values
- Ethical principles
- Enforcement

The sector leadership, school leadership and teachers have major roles to play in developing and implementing the code of conduct, and these are;

Sector leadership

- Develop the code
- Communicate the code
- Incorporate ethics in employee appraisals
- Develop a whistle blower policy
- Appoint leaders committed to ethics
- Periodic revision of the code

School leadership

- Disciplinary procedure within the school
- Incorporating code of conduct into organization's everyday practice
- Enforce the whistle blower policy
- Leading by example
- Creating a rewards system

Teachers

- Accepting the code
- Collective responsibility
- Individual values realigned to values of the code of conduct
- Behave ethically to influence others

It should be noted that the code of conduct is necessary but not sufficient to ensure ethical conduct among teachers. Furthermore, **the code of conduct is only as effective as the willingness of the staff members to report its violations**. The reasons as to why staff are not willing to report the violations can broadly be categorized as shown below, together with ways of addressing them;

Factual non-responsibility


- Circulate the written code of conduct to staff
- Train staff on the code of conduct
- Establish an ethics office and/or a telephone line
- Establish a means to report misconduct anonymously

Moral non-responsibility

- Train staff in ethics and code of conduct to bring them to a higher level of moral development or reasoning. People at a higher level of moral development or reasoning are more likely to report misconduct.

 ***Consequential non-responsibility***

- Remove barriers to reporting
- Remove concerns about retribution, for example using anonymous telephone lines
- Provide incentives to report

 ***Functional non-responsibility***

- Develop an enforcement system within the schools and at the sector level
- Develop credibility in the system that has been set up

Conclusions:

The code of conduct is necessary but not sufficient to ensure ethical conduct among teachers. Its development must encompass key stakeholders, and for it to be effective, deliberate implementation measures must be built within the code.

Background

The Education Service Commission Act, 2002 of Uganda, gives the Education Service Commission (ESC) the mandate to appoint persons to hold or act in any office in the education service, confirm such appointments, and exercise disciplinary control over such persons [1]. Among these persons, professionals suggest a code of conduct as a tool of exercising disciplinary control and inculcating a culture of ethical practice and conduct [2-4].

In line with this, the ESC in Uganda published the current Teacher's Professional Code of Conduct (CoC) in 2012, revising the one that came before it in 1996. However, despite this publication and its incorporation into the curriculum in teachers' training institutions, there are still gross ethical violations within the profession. While some of these violations have been brought to the attention of the ESC, many others go unreported.

This has prompted the ESC to ask: *'What is the best teachers' professional code of conduct for Uganda?'*

In Uganda, the development of the teachers CoC falls with the ESC - it has the mandate to develop and formulate national standards for the education service [1]. With this question, the ESC seeks to understand the role or importance of the code of conduct; how it can best be developed and implemented; what different sections need to be included; what have to be included within the code of conduct; and issues about violations of the code.

This rapid response brief endeavors to answer these questions and to summarize the evidence to support the revision of the current CoC in line with the developing trends.

Summary of findings

How this Rapid Response was prepared

After clarifying the question being asked, we searched for systematic reviews, local or national evidence from Uganda, and other relevant research. The methods used by the SURE Rapid Response Service to find, select and assess research evidence are described here:

www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/methods

Why have a code of conduct

Commonly cited reasons for the development and adoption of a CoC include;

- To clarify values and principles of the sector or organization [3-5] - that is, values and principles against which the sector is established, thereby guiding sector members to conduct themselves accordingly.
- To define acceptable conduct or behavior [3, 4] – that is, what is acceptable (or not) conduct in the profession, thus providing a guide for deciding on a given set of actions.
- To promote high standards of practice [2-4] - the CoC provides a given set of principles which should be followed in practice, which is meant to promote the standards of practice in the sector.
- To measure performance [5] – the content of the CoC provides a bench mark against which staff members performance can be measured, not only addressing the teachers' performance in the classroom but also their general conduct which impacts on their overall performance.

- To support decision making [4, 5] - the CoC acts as a central guide to members to support decision making in the execution of day-to-day activities, without which professional members would base on their individual values, society norms and peer advise to make decisions.
- As an indication of what the sector stands for [5] – the Coc provides a public statement of what the sector and its institutions stand for. In addition, it is a tool to provide commitment to the public that the sector advocates for the highest standards of practice as well as upholds the right conduct in the execution of their roles.
- To serve as a vehicle for professional statement and identity [3, 4] - the CoC serves to express a profession’s commitment to a specific set of moral standards that define it.
- To provide a point of reference when enforcing corrective action [6] - the CoC serves as a reference for corrective action in the event that there is a violation of expected conduct or failure to meet the required targets, removing any uncertainties about penalties.
- To impact ethical behavior [2] - the CoC is ultimately meant to affect professionals’ behavior by establishing behavioral expectations. It prescribes what is acceptable behavior and what isn’t, hence impacting on the ethical behavior of members who follow it.

Developing a code of conduct

According to Messikomer and Cirka (2010), the process of developing the code of conduct is in itself as important as the code itself. It should not be rushed, and should be as comprehensive as possible since this affects the codes effectiveness [7].

The following factors are crucial for an extensive and comprehensive process:

- **Identifying core objectives of the CoC for the education service and sector:** The CoC can either be a **values-based** code or a **compliance-based** one.

A values-based code is developed and built around values the profession identifies with, while a compliance-based code is built on dos and don’ts that are not necessarily based on the values the profession holds.

The values-based programs have yielded stronger positive results as compared to the compliance-based programs. However, it should be noted that we cannot do away with the compliance based as some aspects have to be included in the code of conduct even when not rooted in values that the profession holds. An amalgamation of both the values base and compliance based should be considered as it has been shown to yield better results than either used independent of each other [8].

- **Participatory in nature:** The process should be highly participatory, drawing participation from all stakeholders in the education industry [4, 7, 9].

The key stakeholders include the teachers, parents or guardians, civic leaders, different government ministries and departments and the learners themselves. For a comprehensive code, these should be consulted throughout the entire process, and it helps in improving accountability of the teachers to the community. Teacher participation in the development of the code enables them to raise all the issues in their practice, without which, the code is less useful as a guide for behavior ultimately making it irrelevant [7].

- **Address a wide range of issues likely to face staff members:** The CoC should be able to address a wide range of issues, both within and outside the school environment.

It should be able to give direction on all issues that affect the teachers' work and working environment and leave no grey areas as these can be exploited [9].

- **Consistency with the ethical principles:** The final product must be consistent with the ethical principles, that not only govern the profession, but considered so in a broader sense in the country [8].

This is despite the fact that, a lot of input is sought from several stakeholders, and a means and way of analyzing in incorporating this input is devised. This is important in developing trust from the community about the teaching profession and what they hold as values and ethics principals driving the profession.

- **Authenticity in leadership:** The individuals who are leading the development of the CoC must be authentic ethical managers, who are dedicated to supporting the process, ensuring that it is done right, and are committed to doing what is right [7, 10, 11].

These individuals must be both morally upright persons and moral managers, and should be perceived as so by the other individuals who are participating in the development of the CoC [7] as this helps to instill trust into the system and generate a more open and friendly participation from all stakeholders.

With the above, the resulting code content is deemed valid [7], and acceptable to the different stakeholders. This makes its implementation relatively easier and enforceable.

Parts that make up a code of conduct [3, 4, 9]

There is a variety of designs of CoCs, with different parts serving different roles:

- i. **Purpose of the code:** This section is key in explaining why the code was developed, and why it should be adhered to. It gives the user clear and precise reasons as to why they need to know the CoC and adhere to it as they practice the teaching profession.
- ii. **Section on values based on to develop the code:** This section lists the values that the profession holds and these should be consistent with what the community at large expect from the profession. These values, in and of themselves should be sufficient to provide a moral campus for the profession to follow in the execution of their work.
- iii. **Definitions:** Here different words used in the code are defined to provide contextualized and standardized meaning, which provides clarity in using the code and helps to avoid misinterpretations.
- iv. **The ethical principles:** This section gives the different ethical principles that are expected to be followed by teachers and it should be based on the values of the teaching profession, but in line with the laws of the land, and conforming with what the society expects from teachers.
- v. **Disciplinary actions/enforcement:** The policy needs to spell out in a clear and precise manner what happens if an employee is found in violation of a particular clause of the CoC. The different penalties spelt out should also be attached to particular violations. Furthermore, the code needs to provide the procedures through which members can report misconduct to the responsible persons. Here it would also spell out which violations can be addressed within the school and those that need referral to higher institutions of government. Penalties ought to be imposed on institutions that ignore disciplinary measures as well.

Implementing the code of conduct

To improve the implementation of the the provisions of the CoC, it is important to understand the role of the major stakeholders, reasons why the code violations may go unreported and any extraneous factors that may affect the implementation despite the best intentions and good strategies influences [12].

Roles of the stakeholders

The sector leadership:

The sector leadership has the primary role to develop, implement and enforce the CoC. Primarily enforcement of the code of conduct is usually under the professional bodies of the different professions, however the case of education in Uganda is unique. The Teachers have no professional body, and thus the mandate falls to the Education Service Commission as the sector leadership.

- **Develop the code:** There is need to develop a code of conduct that will be owned by the individuals it is meant for. This should include all the sections given above and follow the suggested steps above as well. Crucially, there is a need to link given violations to specific penalties within the code of conduct. Having penalties linked to specific violations of the code helps to soften the work of the leaders in enforcing the code. It also informs the staff members of the likely penalties they are to receive upon the violation of a specific element of the code of conduct. This helps eliminate any bias in enforcing of the code of conduct, but also protects the individual who has violated the code from a penalty that is too harsh bearing to the particular violation.
- **Communicating the code of conduct:** There are several formal ways through which the code of conduct can be communicated. This shouldn't be limited to modules while teachers are still being trained, but extended to trainings during and after registering as teachers. Theses methods include online trainings, one on one or induction trainings, issuing out the code of conduct handbooks or incorporating the code of conduct within the annual performance standards evaluation. It is not sufficient to communicate the code, as there is a need to evaluate if the teachers have understood the code through getting feedback from them [4, 7, 9, 13]. The perceived usefulness of the code of conduct is positively related to the extent to which the staff are familiar with it. It is therefore crucial to communicate the code and ensure that it is understood [2]. It is however important to guard against teaching about ethical conduct and pay more attention to teaching ethical conduct [14].
- **Incorporate ethics in employee appraisals:** Employee appraisals are used to evaluate the performance of the employees as well as identifying aspects of employees' performances that need improvement. The inclusion of ethics into the appraisal of employees would go a long way in ensuring that employees will abide by the code, as it would form part of their annual evaluations [4, 13, 15].
- **Whistle blower policy:** The extent to which the code of conduct is enforced is directly affected by the extent to which code violations are reported. There is a need to incorporate a whistle blower policy which not only ensures the anonymity of the whistle blower but also encourages the reporting of the code violators. If members do not report violations, then the codes cannot be effectively implemented and lose much of their potential for fostering behavioral change [12].
- **Need of a leadership committed to ethics:** Leading by example has been cited as among the factors that shape the behavior of staff members [15, 16]. It is thus crucial to ensure that the individuals chosen as leaders in schools by the education service commission are of high moral standing and can be looked at by other teachers for example in moral conduct.
- **The code should be a living document:** The code of conduct should address all the emerging trends in the sector if it is to be relevant and valid. Codes typically fail to meet content validity when they do not address the issues that arise in the sector [4, 7]. The education sector currently has new trends such as home schooling, the use of individuals to teach but are not trained as teachers, holiday classes, coaching sessions, and use of teaching materials that do not meet the standard among others. For a code to be valid, these emerging trends

need to be addressed and there should be procedures for regularly reviewing the code of conduct to assess its content validity [17].

The school leadership:

Much as the code is developed from elsewhere, though with the full participation of individuals within the education sector, its implementation is at the schools. The schools have a major role to play in ensuring the successful implementation of the code of conduct, and these are;

- A disciplinary procedure within schools: A well designed code of conduct should spell out a clear disciplinary procedure that can be followed to penalize those who violate the code within the schools, and the schools should set up the necessary structures to enforce this. This will enable faster disciplinary proceedings and ones that are more responsive within the school environment. This can entail a committee, provisions for investigations into the matter arising, an opportunity for the accused to defend themselves, and where need be, the appropriate set of penalties that can be taken as it is in the code of conduct for teachers in Ghana [18].
- Incorporating code of conduct into the school's everyday practices: [7]. It is not sufficient to design the code of the code of conduct, but it is necessary to incorporate it into the school's everyday operations. This helps increase familiarity of the staff with the code, and once it becomes part of their everyday activities, their behavior gets shaped according to the code.
- Whistle blower policy: There needs to be an effective support network to encourage whistle-blowers. This network should maintain the secrecy of the whistle blowers, and also not place an unreasonable burden upon staff to report unprofessional conduct [19].
- Leading by example: The managers have to be ethical persons who lead by example. This is regarded as the informal method of inculcating the culture of ethical practice into teachers. The leaders should enthuse the social norms of the profession and this would eventually translate into other staff members being ethical. This should however be used in combination with the more formal ways of communicating the code of conduct [4, 15, 16].
- Creating a rewards system: The rewarding system should not only be for those who have violated the code of ethics, but also for those who have upheld it. Rewarding those who abide by the code can act as a motivator for others to do the same as well. The teachers and supervisors must be empowered enough to recognize performances that are in sync with the code of ethics so as to reward them accordingly. This could be based on peer and supervisor nominations [10, 13].

On the other hand, there is a need to reward those who are not abiding by the code of conduct. Violations of the code of conduct have to be punished, failure of which, the code would be perceived as meaningless, and it would lose any potential it may have had to change the way the staff members behave [12]. One of the determinants of effectiveness of a code of conduct is the degree to which code violations can be appropriately sanctioned [4, 12].

The teachers:

The successful implementation of the code of conduct requires full cooperation and participation by the teachers. This can be through the following;

- Accepting the code: In order to guard against the excuse of not knowing the code of conduct or not having interfaced with it, it is crucial that after the formal ways of communicating the code and availing an individual copy of it to the staff members, the members should sign a document stating that they have been trained and have received a copy of the code of conduct, and agree to abide by it. The new appointees into the profession must read and sign a formal acceptance of the CoC. This helps remove liability from the leaders and shift it to the staff members who would have no excuse of ignorance of the code [4, 9].
- Collective responsibility: It is important for all staff members to know that reporting of code violations is not only limited to managers only, but applies to all staff members as well. When code violation reporting is a collective responsibility, then enforcement of the code is more achievable [12]. Staff members to report violations of the code to the responsible persons. This can be done either voluntarily or involuntarily by inclusion of the responsibility of staff to report violations in the code of conduct. Staff members have to have the responsibility to report violations of the code. It should be explicitly stated that any staff member who

had knowledge of a violation and did not report it to the responsible authorities is also in violation of the code of conduct, and is also liable to being penalized. Instituting such a measure can improve reporting of violations especially after some incidences of non-reporting have been penalized [12].

- Individual values: An individual's values have a play a big role in shaping ones ethical behaviors and commitment to ethical conduct [16, 20]. In order for one to conduct themselves in an ethical manner, it is crucial for one to align his values along with those upon which the code of conduct was developed.
- Ethical behavior of peers: One's peers have a great role they play in shaping one's behavior [21]. In order for a teacher to behave in an ethical way, there is need to have a community of teachers in the school that abide by the code of conduct. Therefore, it is crucial for one teacher to act ethically and influence the behavior of others.

Why code violations may go unreported

A key determinant of the effectiveness of the code of conduct is the extent to which the violations can be appropriately sanctioned and punished. The violations have to be reported to the responsible offices for proceedings to start. Without reporting of violations, the effectiveness of the CoC is reduced [12]. This is because with little to no reporting of code violations, members would have little to no motivation to abide by the code since the violations go unpunished. The several reasons given for not reporting can be largely categorised into four major categories below [12];

Reasons for not reporting	Measures to motivate reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Factual non-responsibility</i> The observer of the violations does not have sufficient facts to draw a conclusion about whether what he or she has observed is a violation or not. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Circulating the written code of conduct to staff ○ Training staff on the code of conduct ○ Establishing an ethics office and or a telephone line ○ Establish a means to report misconduct anonymously
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Moral non-responsibility</i> The individual who is observing the violations knows that they are violations of the code of conduct, but believes the responsibility of reporting does not fall on him or her. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Training staff into ethics and code of conduct to bring them to a higher level of moral development or reasoning. People at a higher level of moral development or reasoning are more likely to report misconduct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Consequential non-responsibility</i> The individual observing the violation knows it's a violation and knows he or she has a duty to report, but fears that the harm likely to come to him or her caused by reporting is not worth the good that might arise from reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remove barriers to reporting ○ Remove concerns about retribution, for example using anonymous telephone lines ○ Provide incentives to report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Functional non-responsibility</i> The individual observing the violation knows it's a violation and has the duty to report the violation, however the existing enforcement system cannot be trusted to bring about appropriate resolution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Development of an enforcement system within the schools and at the sector level ○ Develop credibility in the system that has been set up

Other considerations

No matter how well designed it is, and how crucial it is in guiding the conduct of staff, a written CoC is not in and on itself sufficient to ensure ethical behavior [7]. There are other factors that impact on the ethical conduct of individuals within an organization and these are;

- **Individual factors** [22, 23]
These factors are the staff member's values, moral code, attitude, desires and beliefs. These will determine the way one views an ethical dilemma and thus the decision that one would finally take.
- **Social factors**[23]
These include cultural norms and friends and families that impact ones behavior. An individual may make decision basing on pressure form friends and families or basing on what is culturally considered right.
- **Organistional factors** [22]
These are basically the organization's corporate culture and its formal structure. The culture is the informal side of the organization consisting of shared and espoused values and beliefs of the organisation's members, norms, myths and language. The formal structure includes; 1) the rewards system, 2) the performance evaluation, monitoring and control processes and 3) the systems of partitioning and assigning decision-making rights and responsibilities.

Conclusion

The code of conduct is necessary but not sufficient in ensuring ethical behavior. It plays a big role in building trust among the public about the teachers' roles and also acts as an accountability tool for the teachers. Its development must encompass key stakeholders, and for it to be effective, deliberate implementation measures must be inbuilt within the code. The code of conduct should be a living document so as to capture new advances with in the profession such as home schooling, online classes and as well the individuals who teach but are not qualified as teachers. It should reflect service to the public and their needs, responsiveness to the government, accountability, fairness, integrity, efficiency and effectiveness.

What is a Rapid Response?

Rapid Responses address the needs of policymakers and managers for research evidence that has been appraised and contextualised in a matter of hours or days, if it is going to be of value to them. The Responses address questions about arrangements for organising, financing and governing health systems, and strategies for implementing changes.

What is ACRES?

ACRES – The Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) is a center of excellence at Makerere University- in delivering timely evidence, building capacity and improving the understanding the effective, efficient and sustainable use of the rapid evidence syntheses for policy making in Africa. ACRES builds on and supports the Evidence-Informed Policy Network (**EVIPNet**) in Africa and the Regional East African Community Health (**REACH**) Policy Initiative (see back page). ACRES is funded by the Hewlett and Flora foundation. <http://bit.do/eNQG6>

SURE collaborators:



Regional East African Community Health Policy Initiative

www.eac.int/health



EVIPnet

www.evipnet.org

Glossary

of terms used in this report:

www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/glossary

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This summary was prepared by;

Edward Kayongo, Ismael Kawooya, and Rhona Mijumbi-Deve, The Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES), Regional East African Health (REACH) Policy initiative node Uganda, College of Health Sciences, Makerere University, New Mulago Hospital Complex, Administration Building, 2nd Floor, P.O Box 7072, Kampala, Uganda

Conflicts of interest

None known.

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For more information contact

Edward Kayongo

Email address: kaydfirst@gmail.com