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## **LEADERSHIP APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM STRUCTURE AND STUDENT PATHWAYS: THE EXPERIENCE OF ST. IVO ACADEMY**

This paper is based on the experience of professional international cooperation between St. Ivo Academy (United Kingdom) and Ternopil Academic Lyceum “Ukrainian Gymnasium named after Ivan Franko” (Ukraine). The professional online dialogue with the Ukrainian school leadership took place in the context of piloting upper secondary profile education and in preparation for the nationwide reform of upper secondary schooling scheduled to be implemented in Ukraine from 2027.

The purpose of this professional exchange was to explore approaches to the organisation of upper secondary education, subject choice, career guidance, assessment practices, and educational management within a school that operates in a clearly structured system of educational stages and guided curriculum pathways. The focus of the discussion was on school-level decision-making and the alignment of curriculum design with student support mechanisms and professional practice.

The material presented in this paper reflects the leadership experience of St. Ivo Academy and makes it possible to trace the logic underlying key educational decisions at the level of a single institution. Rather than offering a general overview of the British education system, the paper systematises the experience of one secondary school from a school management perspective, creating a basis for professional reflection in the context of ongoing transformations of upper secondary education in Ukraine.

The *relevance* of the topic is determined by current changes in upper secondary education, which require school leaders to balance curriculum flexibility, expanded student choice, sustainable assessment practices, and professional autonomy within clearly defined institutional frameworks.

The *aim* of the paper is to present and analyse the leadership rationale behind curriculum organisation and educational management at St. Ivo Academy, highlighting school-level approaches that may inform international professional reflection during the implementation of profile education reforms.

At St. Ivo Academy, curriculum organisation follows a staged model across key stages, with student choice gradually expanding as learners progress through secondary education. This structure reflects a leadership approach that prioritises breadth, coherence, and informed decision-making over early specialisation.

At Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14), all students follow a broad and balanced curriculum that includes core academic subjects, humanities, arts, physical education, modern foreign languages, and personal development. Subject choice is

deliberately not introduced at this stage, ensuring wide academic exposure and allowing interests and strengths to emerge over time.

At Key Stage 4 (ages 14–16), students study a core set of compulsory subjects—English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, and Science—alongside optional subjects selected from defined option blocks. Science may be studied as Combined or Triple Science, depending on prior attainment and academic profile.

At Key Stage 5 (ages 16–18), students typically select three A Level subjects, choosing one subject from each option block. In addition, students may study the Extended Project Qualification alongside A Levels, which supports the development of independent research and academic skills. Overall, this curriculum structure demonstrates a leadership emphasis on guided choice within clearly defined academic frameworks.

While curriculum structure provides the foundation for student pathways, informed subject choice at St. Ivo Academy is supported through targeted guidance and professional oversight. Career guidance is primarily introduced during Key Stage 4, when students receive individual support from careers advisors to align subject choices with post-16 aspirations.

The Academy does not use subject-specific aptitude tests to restrict access to courses, and decisions are rarely based on assessment data alone. Limited restrictions apply only in specific cases, such as choices between Combined and Triple Science or between GCSE and BTEC Physical Education, where the academic or vocational nature of the programme requires alignment with prior learning.

Standardised assessments, including Cognitive Ability Tests and the New Group Reading Test, are used diagnostically to inform professional judgement rather than to determine subject eligibility. Subject changes are extremely rare once Key Stage 4 courses have begun and require senior leadership approval, ensuring curriculum stability. At Key Stage 5, students may revise their subject choices during the early part of the first year, allowing for informed adjustment within national accountability requirements.

Educational intentions at St. Ivo Academy are realised through daily teaching and assessment practices. Teaching is structured around teacher-led lessons characterised by clear instruction, guided practice, and systematic checking for understanding. Assessment is embedded within classroom practice and supported by defined formal assessment points.

At Key Stage 3, students complete regular in-class assessments alongside standardised tests. At Key Stage 4, assessment includes three cycles of mock examinations across the two-year programme, while students at Key Stage 5 complete two mock examination cycles in preparation for external qualifications.

A distinctive feature of the Academy's approach is its structured commitment to reading as a foundation for learning across subjects. All students in Years 7–10 participate in daily reading sessions lasting approximately 25 minutes, during which teachers read aloud and students follow the text. This practice supports vocabulary

development, reading fluency, and broader academic comprehension, positioning literacy as a whole-school responsibility rather than a subject-specific activity.

Assessment practices are further supported through the strategic use of digital tools. Online platforms are used to support homework, assessment, and feedback while managing teacher workload. Adaptive systems such as Sparx Maths and Sparx Reader are used in core subjects, while Carousel Learning supports online quizzing in other disciplines. At Key Stage 4, traditional exam-style assessments remain a central component of preparation for external examinations. A key leadership priority underpinning these practices is the provision of timely feedback through automated systems.

In response to assessment evidence and classroom practice, consistent teaching is sustained through a clearly defined professional culture. Curriculum delivery is guided by established schemes of work developed within departments and across the Multi-Academy Trust. Teachers collaborate on curriculum sequencing and shared resources, ensuring coherence while retaining professional autonomy.

Professional development is embedded into weekly practice through Intellectual Preparation and Deliberate Practice sessions, which focus on refining core instructional routines. Teacher development is not based on mandatory annual requalification, apart from statutory requirements.

Educational outcomes are shaped not only within the classroom but also through active parental involvement and systematic planning of students' future pathways. Parents are engaged in supporting learning through ongoing collaboration with the school, contributing to shared expectations and informed educational decisions. The Academy ensures continuity of student support beyond compulsory education by monitoring post-16 pathways in line with national requirements and principles of institutional accountability.

The experience of St. Ivo Academy illustrates a leadership approach grounded in gradual progression, guided choice, and professional judgement. Curriculum design, teaching practices, assessment, and student guidance are aligned within a coherent organisational framework. While these practices are shaped by the British educational context, the underlying leadership principles—structured choice, diagnostic assessment, professional collaboration, and sustainability—offer relevant reference points for professional reflection in the context of ongoing reforms in upper secondary education.