# University of Cumbria

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# Gender, race, faith and economics: Factors impacting on aspirant school leaders

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## Abstract

*This paper explores factors inhibiting or encouraging women and men from Black and Minority ethnic (BME) and also white backgrounds to pursue leadership positions in English schools. Data are drawn from a commissioned evaluation of three National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) funded courses which investigated the extent to which the 33 participants felt their course successfully prepared them to take on a leadership role.*

*Findings showed that while primary aspirant head teachers and most women into secondary headship gained confidence and felt more competent as their courses progressed their desire to become leaders, in some cases, reduced. The opposite was the case for the BME participants most of whom cited, along with increased confidence and perceived competence, an increased desire to become middle leaders, despite some accounts of prejudicial treatment. Factors cited by participants as impacting negatively on their desire to become leaders included work-life balance, accountability, faith, economic factors (size of school, travel costs) and issues concerning gender, particularly women participants, who saw themselves as leaders both at work and in the home. Findings provide an insight into the continuing structural inequalities experienced by a small sample of aspirant school leaders which have implications for future leadership preparation provision.*

***Key words: Leadership, Black and minority ethnic, gender, faith, leadership development***

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## 1. Background/Context

The primary aim of the National College for Teaching and Leadership funded programme was to nurture leadership capacity and confidence within teachers who aspire to become middle leaders and are from BME groups, women into headship or primary aspirant leaders. The NCTL provided funding for these programmes to help delegates unlock their leadership and management potential because BME groups and women are underrepresented in all levels of leadership in schools. The three courses, Future BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) Middle Leaders, Aspirant Primary Headteachers and Women into Secondary Headship were designed and facilitated by a Northern Consortium of serving school leaders. The Future BME middle leaders course and the Aspirant Primary Heads programme were open to both men and women. Each course provided a series of face to face sessions, coaching, work shadowing and a written mini case story.

This paper is based upon the data gathered for a commissioned evaluation designed to investigate the factors that inhibit or encourage women and men from Black and Minority ethnic and also white backgrounds to pursue leadership positions in teaching and the extent to which their respective course met their needs as aspirant leaders (xxxxx author 2016). The programmes were designed with the specific intention of providing a loose framework which could be adapted to meet the needs of participants throughout the course. Drawing on the voices of the participants this paper explores the barriers to leadership as articulated by respondents. Given the limited wordage here this paper is only able to offer a series of snap shots illustrating a range of factors impacting on their growing or diminishing confidence and competence to become leaders.

## 2.0 Literature

Recruitment and retention of future leaders is a pressing issue in England's schools with 19 000 headteachers and senior leaders due to retire by 2020 (BBC 2016). This could be a significant opportunity for building a more diverse workforce in leadership positions. Less than four per cent of head teachers in both primary and secondary schools are of BME origin, whilst twenty seven per cent of pupils are from a BME background (The Independent Friday 14th April 2017); and whilst twenty-seven per cent of pupils are recorded as BME only thirteen per cent of teachers are from a BME background (BBC July 2017). Furthermore, despite the increase in numbers of women in leadership positions in secondary schools, only a third of secondary headteachers are female (Fuller 2017). The literature makes a strong case for specialized leadership preparation courses for women and BME groups (Bush, Glover and Sood et. al 2006) even though leadership programmes are becoming more relational and consequently less 'masculine' in their approach (Carli and Eagly, 2011).

Preparation for the increasingly complex role of school leader within England's schools has been recognized in the literature. Bush (2009) suggests that this level of complexity means the provision of leadership preparation and development opportunities has become a moral obligation. Despite

this recognition of the need for development programmes little attention is given during most programmes to structural inequalities or how these interact with individual agency and impact upon the potential for leadership to emerge from individuals or groups. There is consequently little reference to unequal power distribution in most leadership development programmes (Lumby, 2006).   Addressing such issues requires adopting a 'social justice-oriented' approach to leadership development which Lumby (2006) argues has received only minor consideration due to the predominance of distributed and transformational leadership approaches.  Whilst providing a framework for leaders to conceptualise a more relational and thus less hierarchical approach to leadership, distributed leadership ignores the parallel mechanisms which include or exclude current and potential leaders from the distribution process (Lumby, 2016).  Diamond and Spillane (2013, p94) also agree that more attention needs to be paid to the issue of power with regard race, class and gender through consideration of 'implicit bias, expectations state theory [how expected competence forms the basis for status hierarchies in small groups], and critical race theory … which link macro-level prejudice to micro-level interactions'.

While a distributed perspective has focused on redefining power relationships, Beatty (2008) identifies emotional preparedness as an emerging feature of new leadership programmes.  She advocates that no matter which leadership model provides the foundation of a leadership programme, leadership comes from 'within here, from who we are as persons' (p151) and with the relationship one has with 'one's socially situated self' (p140).  Both critical consciousness and understanding the concept of moral purpose, where 'moral purpose speaks directly to who you are and what you stand for as an educator' (Beatty, 2008 p151) were noted as embedded features of the 'Investing in Diversity' leadership programme evaluated by Johnson and Campbell-Stephens, (2013).  Ogunbawo (2012 cited in Johnson and Campbell-Stephens 2013) also suggests that customized programmes for BME aspirant leaders need to encourage leaders to reflect on their identities and the additionality they bring to leadership as well as 'critically analyzing the structural changes necessary to enable them to move up the ranks to headship' (Johnson and Campbell-Stephens, 2013, p34).   Reflecting on identities in this manner is likely to be more psychologically demanding and thus potentially less popular with programme participants (Lopez 2003, in Lumby 2006).

Currently, most diversity research is 'barriers-oriented' rather than oriented toward consideration of unique gendered or cultural contexts. There is little in the published literature that explores how BME leaders respond to their unique cultural contexts, or how leadership preparation programs might help nurture self-defined perspectives on leadership (Johnson and Campbell-Stephens, 2013, p26).  The exception to this is Miller's (2015) work exploring perceived discriminatory practices in appointment or promotion to the role of principal.  Miller identified national religious affiliation, social connections, local political influence (ministry), school level politicking and national political affiliation as enablers and barriers to appointment and promotion in Jamaica.  Smith's (2011) research considered female, self-defined constructions of leadership and found aspirant female headteachers perceived leadership as a 'web' of relationships rather than the typically male 'hierarchical' construction of leadership and thus felt discouraged from considering headship.  Whilst Coleman's (2012) review of the literature on diversity and leadership identified two specific gendered issues, the 'femininity-competency bind' and domestic responsibilities in the home.   Given the contextual complexity of these issues it is no surprise that BME and female leaders have found the provision of mentoring and informal networks instrumental in their development.  And specifically for BME aspirant leaders, affirmation and the need for real-life opportunities to lead have

been important (Johnson and Campbell-Stephens, 2013).  Despite the support afforded by informal networks, Miller (2016), argues that in order for BME teachers to progress they need to go through a process of 'White Sanction' in which a BME teacher's skill and experience are acknowledged and then endorsed by a promoted, white colleague who can leverage opportunities, opening doors for them, thus bypassing the expectation-state held by others about ethnic minority leadership competence.

Taking into consideration the current recruitment and retention difficulties, programme providers may feel pressured to supply the leadership pipeline with programmes that are popular with participants, such as more practically oriented rather than psychologically challenging, social justice programme designs.   Blackmore (2006, p196) identifies two discourse frameworks that can implicitly underpin course design, the 'corporate' discourse and the 'transformative' discourse.   The corporate discourse focuses on leadership 'for' diversity; addressing the national shortfall of aspirant leaders by addressing gender and ethnicity ratios or quotas.  Whilst the transformative discourse is focussed on leadership 'with' diversity; preparing all leaders to lead with diversity embedded in systems and processes, ensuring that leadership is beneficial to everyone and the organisation.  Without explicit consideration of diversity and social justice issues, the choice of discourse framework remains hidden.   Consideration of diversity and social- justice within all leadership programmes can therefore be, 'one mechanism which can sustain inclusion or exclusion [of future potential leaders]' (Johnson and Campbell-Stephens, 2010, p7).  Consequently, the explicit inclusion of socially-transformative discourses, within leadership programmes, may support leaders to develop transformative discourses within their own schools that better address the structural barriers still experienced by women and BME.

## 3.0 Methodology

The overarching question driving the research project was to evaluate what factors inhibit or encourage women and men from Black and Minority ethnic and also white backgrounds to pursue leadership positions in teaching and the extent to which their respective course met their needs as aspirant leaders.

Working within an interpretivist paradigm and taking the three NCTL courses as an integrated case study the lead researcher, in consultation with course leaders developed three data generation tools - baseline ten-point scale questionnaires, mid-point focus groups and end course ten-point scale questionnaires (Flyvbjerg 2006, Robson and McCarten 2016).  All participants on all three courses volunteered to be involved, constituting a purposive sample, although the actual sample consisted of those who were in attendance when data collection took place.  The sample consisted of  ten females and one male BME aspirant middle leaders (from the all BME delegates), four women into secondary headship (all white) and three male and fifteen female aspirant primary headteachers (all white).  Ethical approval was gained from the lead researcher's institution and ethical procedures were adhered to throughout the project (Savin-Baden and Major 2013).  Data were analyzed using a grounded theory constant comparison approach to identify emerging themes (Robson and McCarten 2016).  Despite the small sample size, the case study findings were considered useful for future course design, ~~and also~~ provided a ~~an~~ snap shot insight into corporate and transformative leadership (Blackmore 2006) and highlight avenues for further research which could have ~~thus having wider~~ implications for future leadership preparation policy (Flyvbjerg 2006).

**4.0 Findings and Discussion**

Findings across the three courses suggested there was variation in terms of the impact of the programmes and the barriers to leadership, for example levels of confidence and desire to be a leader. Data from pre and post questionnaires together with the mid-point focus groups reveal that the all white primary aspirant head teachers and all white women into secondary headship gained confidence and felt more competent as the course progressed yet in many cases their desire to become leaders reduced. The opposite was the case for the all black and minority ethnic middle leaders most of whom cited, along with increased confidence and perceived competence, an increased desire to become middle leaders. Other factors cited by participants which impacted negatively on their desire to become leaders included work-life balance, issues concerning gender, particularly women participants, who saw themselves as leaders in the home. Further barriers included faith, and also economic factors such as size of school and travel costs.

**4.1 Self-Confidence**

Questionnaire data findings show that participants from each of the three courses cited lack of confidence as a factor inhibiting their desire to be a school leader. The data collected via a ten-point scale questionnaire indicates that confidence levels did improve throughout the courses for most participants as the graphs below illustrate, see tables 1 to 8.

Tables 1 to 4 show Primary aspirant headteachers baseline and end point results. Seventeen of the eighteen all white aspirant primary headteachers completed the baseline questionnaire but only nine of the eleven who attended the final session completed the end point questionnaire. Data is not provided for the all white Women into secondary headship given that only three of the four participants completed the baseline and only one of the four completed the end point ten-point questionnaire. Tables 5 to 8 show BME baseline and end point results and of the eleven delegates nine completed the baseline and nine of the eleven completed the end point questionnaires.

**Primary Aspirant Headteacher Results**

Table 1 Level of desire to become a Primary Headteacher at beginning point and end point of course
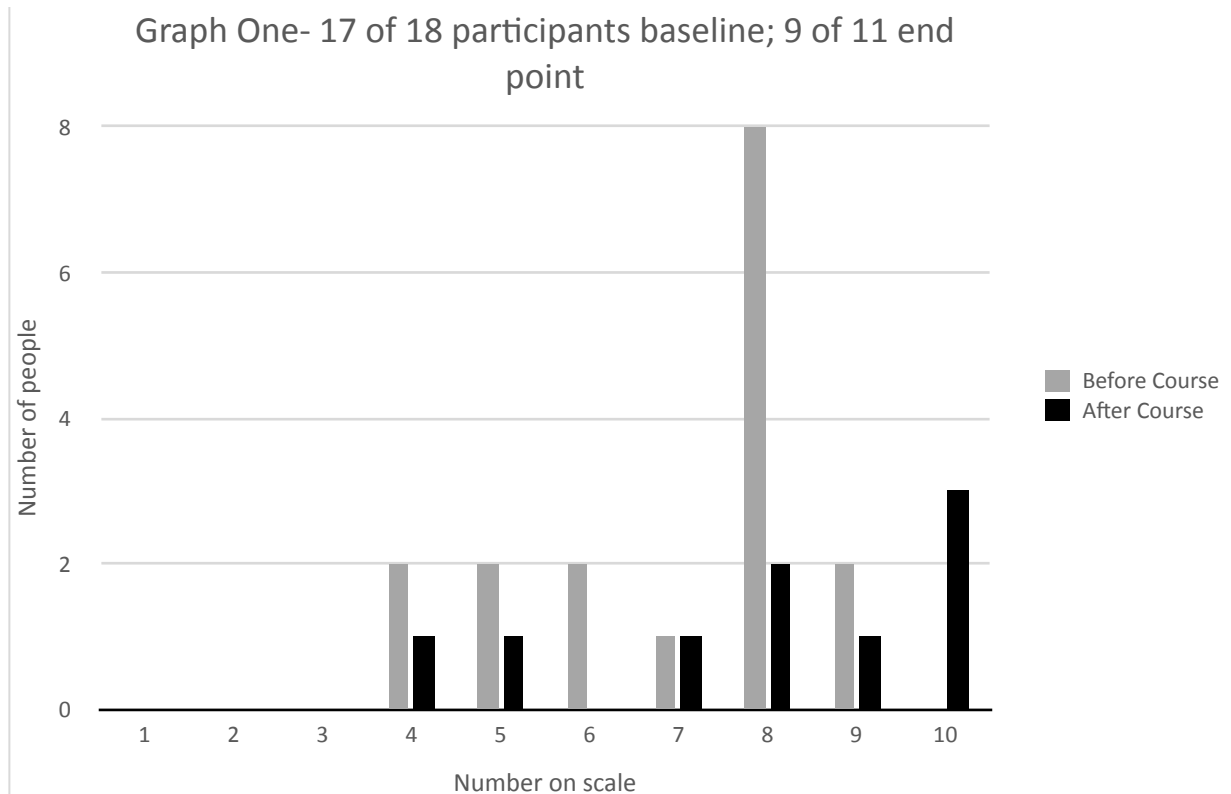
**Graph One- 17 of 18 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point**

Table 2 Level of confidence in taking on a leadership role at beginning point and end point of course
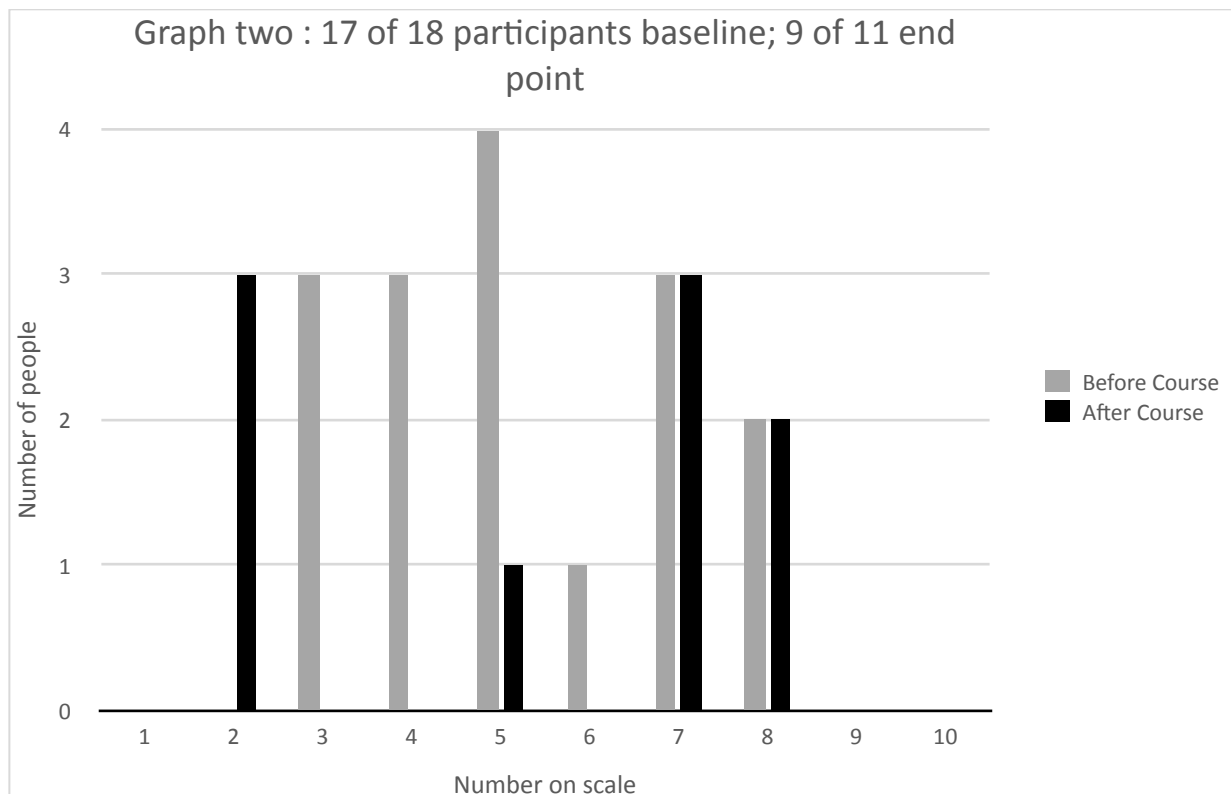


**Graph two : 17 of 18 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point**

Table 3

Level of confidence in being able to secure a primary leadership position at beginning point and end point of course



Graph three: 17 of 18 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point

It is to be noted that one participant did not complete this section because they said they had already secured a '*headteacher post after first interview*', suggesting an even higher positive impact of the course.

Table 4 Level of confidence in being able to lead the improvement of standards and teaching in a primary school at beginning point and end point of course

## Graph four: 17 of 18 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point



**BME Middle Leaders Results**

Table 5 Level of desire to become a middle leader at beginning point and end point of course

## Graph five: 9 of 11 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point
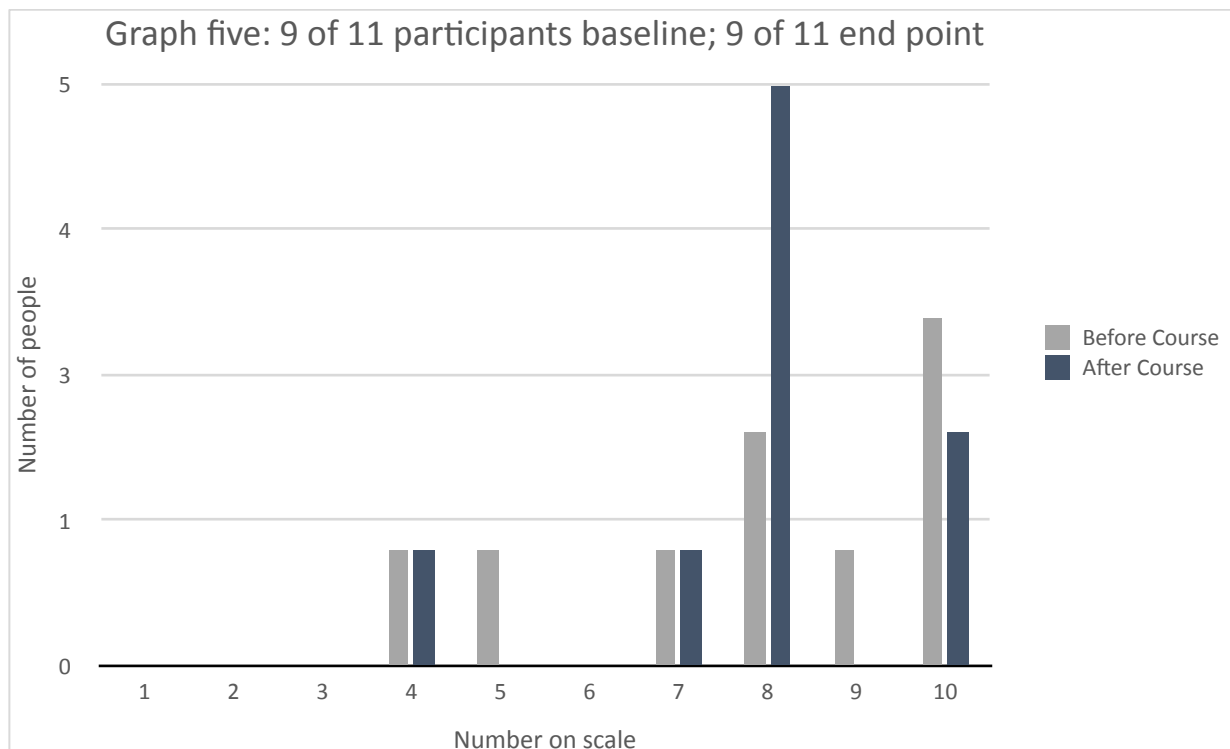
Table 6 Level of confidence in taking on a middle leadership role at beginning point and end point of course
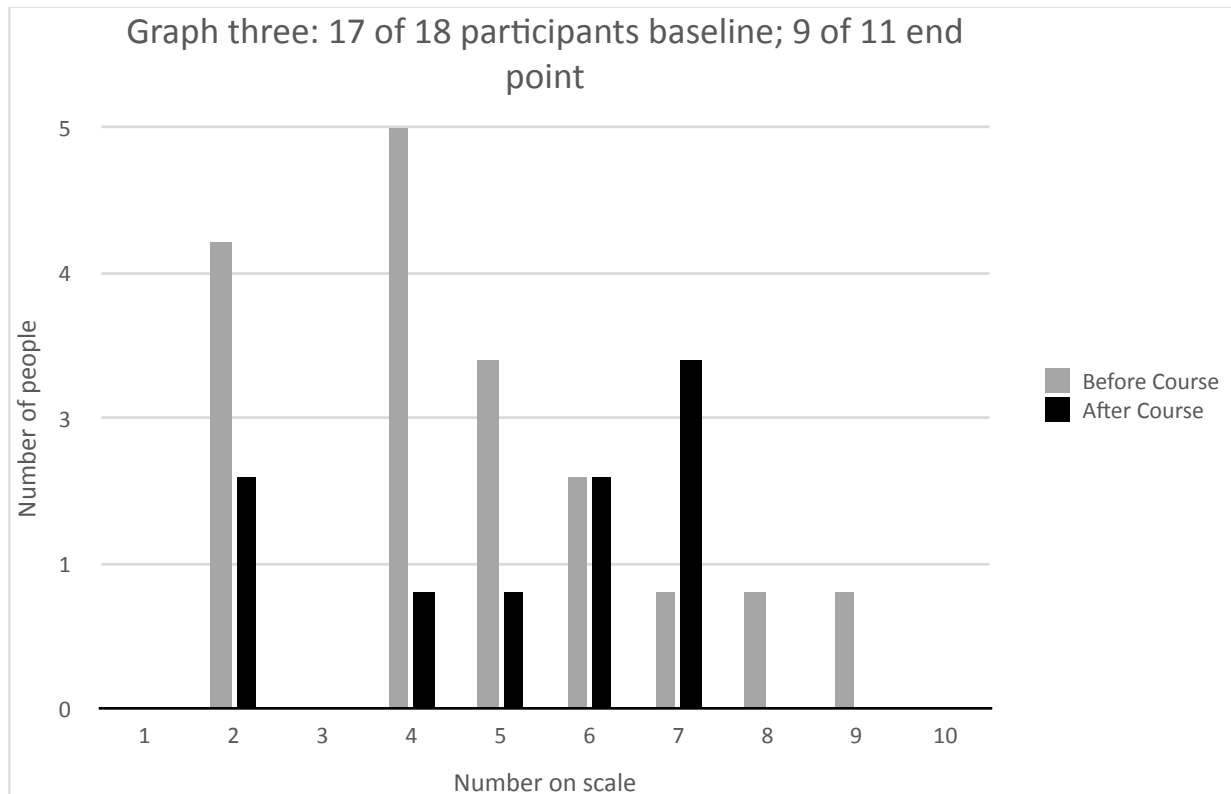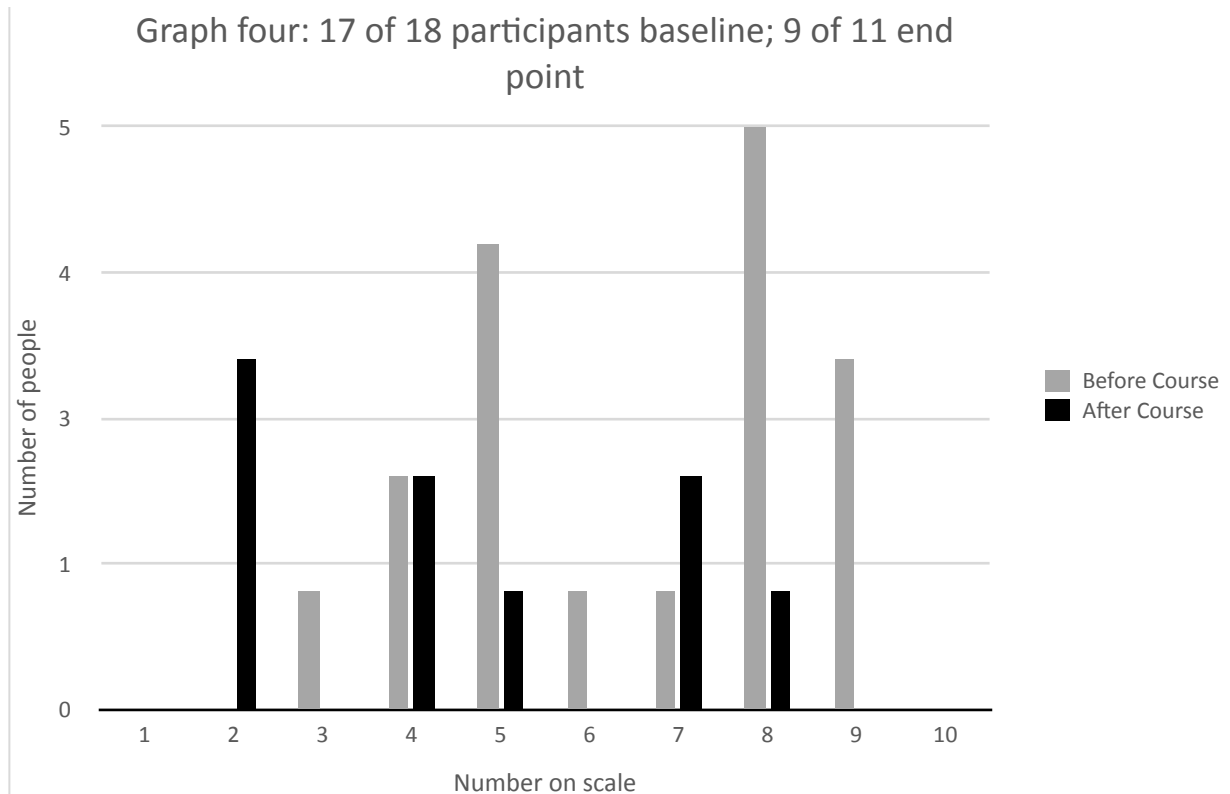


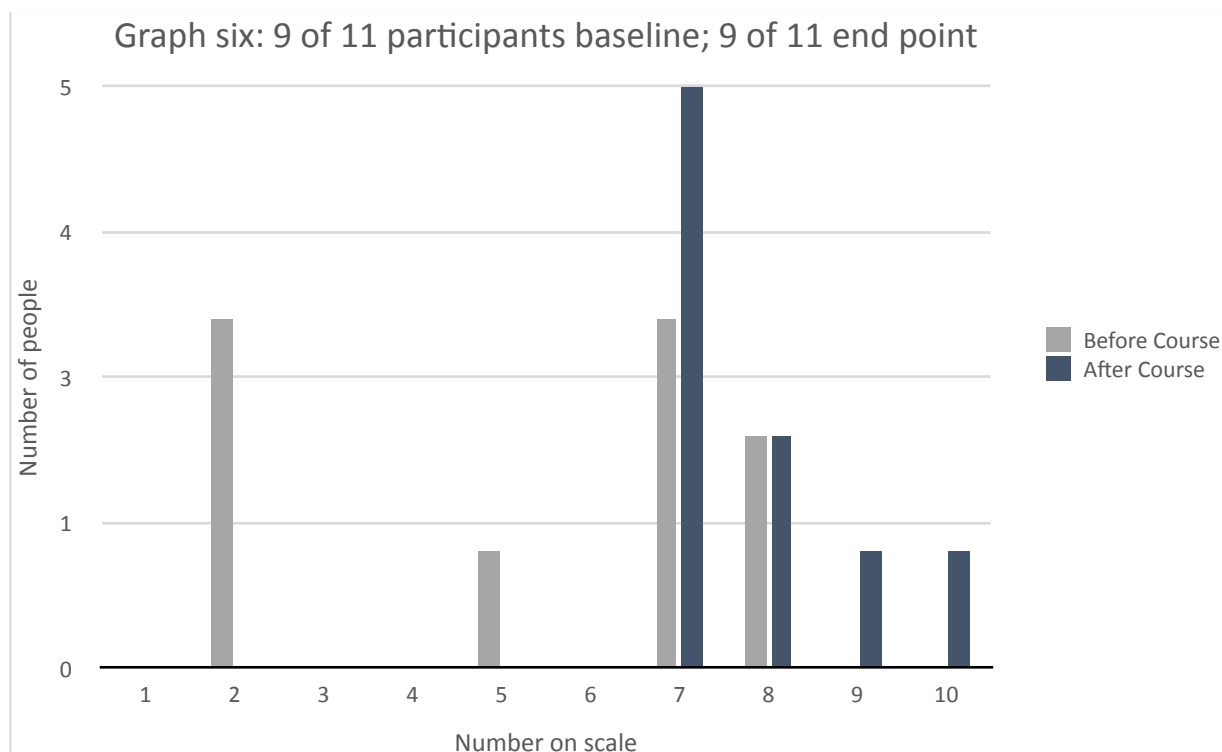Graph six: 9 of 11 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point

Table 7 Level of confidence in being able to secure a middle leadership position at beginning point and end point of course

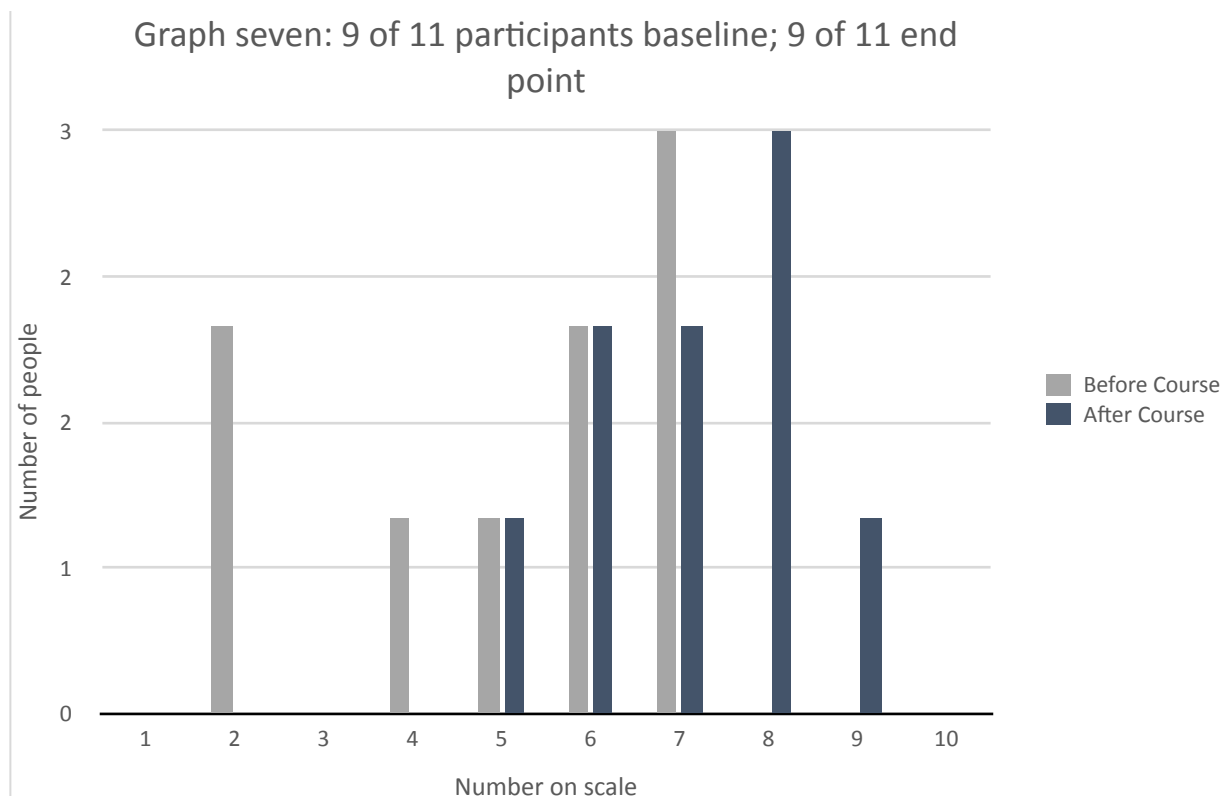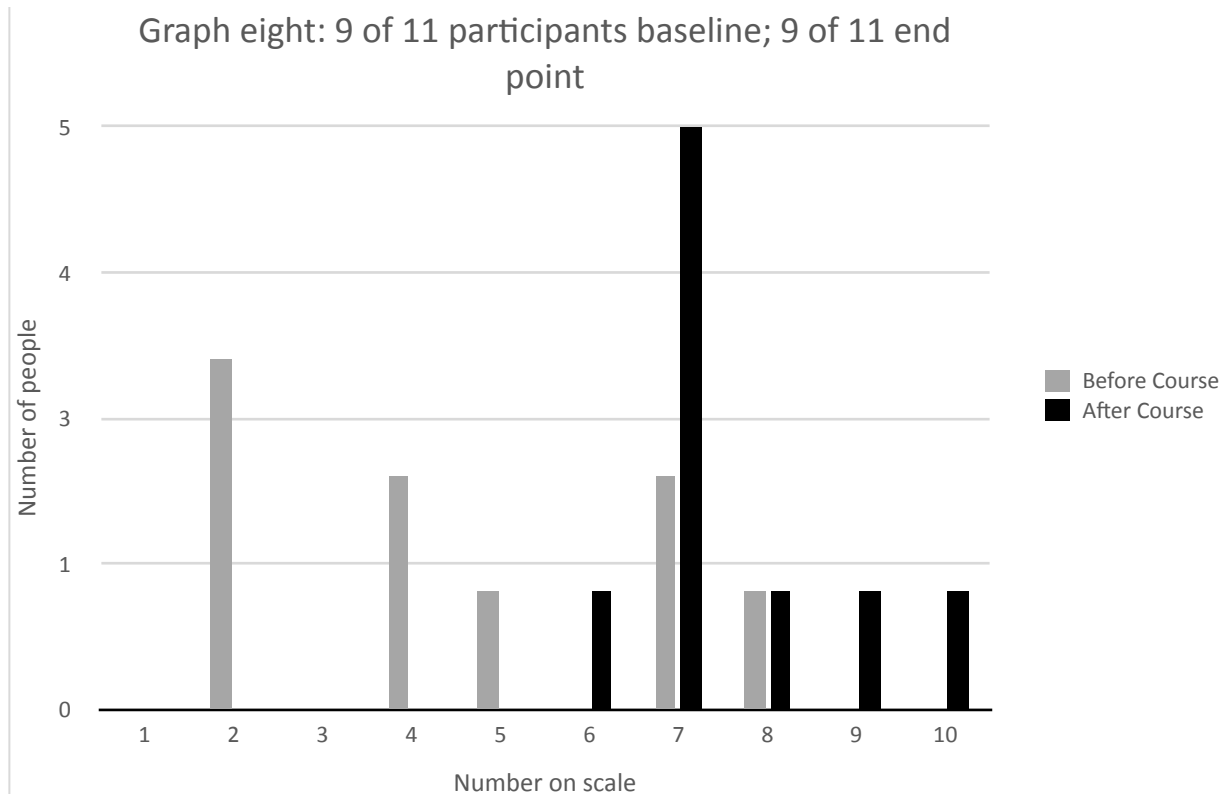Graph seven: 9 of 11 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point

Table 8 Level of confidence in being able to lead the improvement of standards and teaching in a school at beginning point and end point of course

Graph eight: 9 of 11 participants baseline; 9 of 11 end point

### 4.1.1 Confidence in ability

Mid-point focus group data findings reveal that several participants, more on the BME middle leaders course, lacked confidence in their ability to convince others to follow a particular course of action. A female primary aspirant headteacher stated she had 'a real passion' but lacked 'confidence to convince other people I can do it'. Yet a male aspirant primary headteacher stated he felt there were no barriers impeding his progression to headship, and he confidently described his track record of applying for senior positions, 'usually when I've applied I've got it'. A female aspirant primary headteacher, agreed there were no barriers, but the data suggests that a higher proportion of female participants voiced lower confidence in their competencies than the male participants on the primary aspirant headteachers course however the sample was small. Having the confidence to step forward to take up a leadership role according to Miller (2016) is influenced by an individuals by an individual's social capital. Where white aspirant leaders have access to white middle class leadership positions, many BME aspirant leaders have limited access without the 'white sanction' of a white colleague (Miller 2016:11).

### 4.1.2 BME levels of Confidence

BME participants' levels of confidence varied according to increased perceptions of their competence, tables 6 and 7. For example, some BME Middle leaders felt upskilled at the end of the course, while other female aspirant BME middle leaders still lacked confidence in '*talking in front of others in the group', 'assessing yourself against leadership standards'* and *'daunted by the volume of information a middle leader was expected to process'.* A male BME aspirant middle leader described his increased confidence:

> *'Getting bad habits out of myself - there isn't a right or wrong way of middle leadership.  The previous middle leader put everyone on report.  I look back and think that was a bad decision, but I copied it. Now I've started to do things my own way'.*

This participant's refusal to copy could be seen to demonstrate an implicit recognition that hierarchical ways of leadership are not necessarily appropriate, as Smith (2011, p528) notes becoming a leader does not necessarily mean having to 'renounce more equitable working relationships, which can discourage many teachers from considering headship'.

Several BME aspirant middle leaders articulated increased levels of confidence as a direct result of the course as these three female BME participants describe:

> *'leadership is about excellent coaching not telling people what to do.'*

> *'Because of the volume of stuff learnt and acquired I have an invisible bag with lots of things inside and I can pull something out.'*

> *'I am 'doing it' in my faculty meetings I have adopted the coaching approach; and you're aware when other people are doing it to you as well.'*

Competence in the area of monitoring and evaluating teaching quality and realising that leaders do not come fully formed appear to have been instrumental in increasing self-confidence and helping participants realise they could aspire to leadership as this future BME middle leader said,

> *'coming on this course made me realise leaders are not born they don't have to be good leaders right from the start, but leaders improve. '*

**4.2 Barriers to taking promoted roles: Gender, Race and Faith**
There were a number of barriers identified as factors that would dissuade the participants from applying for promoted leadership roles.

<u>**4.2.1 Leadership in the home - workload and work-life balance**</u>

The most significant barrier to pursuing a leadership role cited by participants on all three courses, was 'lack of time' - particularly owing to family commitments.   This was expressed in terms of maintaining a work-life balance and coping with being a leader at home and at work. Participants, both male and female, non BME and BME, felt that having a family impeded career progression and a number explained that they felt they could not take on an increased leadership role until their children were older or had left for university. The comments below concur with Smith's (2011, p524) research with serving female headteachers in which all participants referred to the 'support of husbands and partners as an important factor in helping them to progress up the career ladder.'

The following two female primary course participants' cited struggling with work-life balance because women were still viewed as the predominant leader at home, be that leading and supporting the family or carrying out the leadership roles within the home:

> *'women feel more attached to their family. Men don't feel same bond with their children. Kids live with their mum, [it] shouldn't be that way.'*

> *'As a mother you've always got to be there – It shouldn't be a barrier – you are that person but you have to juggle.'*

Having listened to these comments one primary aspirant headteacher re-joined that even though she did not have children nevertheless because she was a woman she took over the role of leader in the home:

> *'I am not a mother but I still have to focus on household responsibility. You have to have support; my partner is as useful as a chocolate teapot responsibility wise.'*

Following this interchange, a male in the primary aspirant head teacher focus group, and the youngest in the whole cohort, then stated that because he took on a leadership role which increased the family income his wife was able to assume the 'leader in the home' role more effectively because she had more time, having reduced her hours:

> '*Me becoming a deputy meant my wife could go part time'*.

Responding to the negative body language of the females in the focus group he emphasised his comment was not sexist, rather, he insisted that his wife preferred to take on the home responsibility.

Participants in the BME middle leader's course also felt acutely the tension of achieving an appropriate work life balance, as the following comments from two female participants demonstrate:

> *'workload [is an issue because] my husband is not happy because I have been in meeting after meeting.'*

> *'I want to spend more time with family.'*

These same issues were identified by Bush, Glover and Sod (2006, p290) who conclude that Muslim women's career development is affected by 'role conflict between home and career, not being geographically mobile, not enough time for career, guilt feelings about career and motherhood, lack of emotional/domestic support from husband, and need to take work home.'

However, the only male participant in the BME focus group also shared this the same tensions as his female colleagues stressing ~~given~~ his important role in his extended family some of whom lived abroad:

> *'workload can be stressful – I fly backwards and forwards to visit family'*

Middle leaders may be experiencing the tensions and pressures of the increased responsibilities of the role without the benefits of more senior positions. Smith, (2011, p532), drawing on the work of Fitzgerald, (2009) suggests that the increase in 'bureaucratic, curricular and people-management responsibilities ... [impact] the quality of life outside school without the benefits of autonomy implicit in more senior positions'.

Several BME aspirant middle leaders both male and female agreed that having a family and a career could be seen as mutually exclusive as these three female BME said:

> *'My priorities are elsewhere [at home]'*

> *'I have young children …..I struggle at the minute [having] a class and leadership role.'*

> *'I am thinking about starting a family but what would happen to my leadership role?'*

Data from the mid-point focus groups suggest that BME aspirant middle leaders felt lack of time was a significant barrier to fulfilling professional aspirations given their dedication to family responsibilities which they all intimated took precedence over work commitments. Coleman (2012, p601) suggests social expectations about the role of women remain such that it is, 'more common for a female leader than a male leader to take on the bulk of domestic responsibilities' and this social convention, 'take[s] its toll on family life for female leaders who ... are more likely to be separated or divorced than men and are less likely than male leaders to have children.' However, at the end of the BME middle leaders course some participants felt that middle leadership was not as onerous at they had anticipated at the outset and many felt achieving a work life balance was more achievable than they had originally thought. Thus the data from the BME participants showed a keener inclination to be a leader than the aspirant headteachers whose desire to become a leader remained the same or in some cases diminished throughout the course, see tables 5 to 8. It would seem that the nature of the leadership programme had provided sufficient support for BME participants to consider middle leadership as a career choice, as Smith (2011a in Coleman 2012 p602) suggests a

focus is needed on active agency, that looks beyond barriers, to the 'valid reasons for women's career choices'.

### 4.3 Structural inequalities: sexism, faith school leadership and economics of small school leadership

While the following important factors were raised by participants they are only given limited discussion here given space constraints.

### 4.3.1 Sexism

A number of issues were raised by female participants that linked to perceived gender issues that could be considered structural inequalities such as heightened feeling about juggling family life, lack of equality of access and opportunities linked to maternity. A number of female leaders felt that gender was not a specific barrier to them, however that they would have to prepare for a leadership role specifically linked to managing men and joining a male-dominated environment with issues described by one of the women into headship participants as "locker room behaviour" and the perception of male and female leaders having different leadership styles.

### 4.3.2 Economics of small school leadership

In the North West area, many of the senior leadership posts advertised, especially headships are for small schools and participants said this presented a number of dilemmas.  A deputy headteacher in a medium or large school is likely to be paid at a higher salary than many headteachers in small primary schools. Participants discussed whether it was feasible to apply to be a headteacher in a smaller school and take a pay cut in order to achieve this, especially when a headteacher in a small school often has to juggle the demands of being a headteacher with a not insignificant teaching load:

> *'I know some headteachers on 2 or 3 points less than me (as Senior Leadership Teacher in large school), so the school might be right for me to become a headteacher but I'd be losing lot of money'* (female aspirant primary headteacher)

### 4.3.3 Faith-School Leadership

A number of participants raised the issue of leading in a Church of England or Catholic school and having to be a practicing Anglican or Catholic respectively.  Some of the participants immediately stated that they would not consider applying to a faith school mainly because they do not meet the person specification and did not have a Catholic or Anglican referee who could demonstrate they are active within that faith community.  Following the programme, a number of primary participants were more flexible and positive about the possibility of leading in a faith school due to their raised

awareness about essential criteria. One participant had successfully secured a headteacher role within a church school by the end of the programme.

## 4.4 Faith and Favouritism

BME aspirant leaders identified three additional barriers for their cohort:  lack of encouragement, favouritism and preconceptions linked to their faith / culture.

> *"Because I wear a veil I feel people are judging me – but perhaps it's something I need to deal with – it may be that they are not judging me at all but I feel that they are; I am in a Church of England school – prayer is fine but faith led assemblies are a restriction because I am of a different faith" (female BME)*

Similar feelings of being judged were identified by Rahmath, Chambers and Wakewich (2016).  They found that professional Muslim women in Canadian society were actively choosing to wear the veil in order to erase stereotypes about Muslim women, even though they did 'get looks and stares and they had to get used to this' (p39).   In addition, Shah and Shaikh (2010, p27) found male, Muslim teachers described the 'visible' representations of their faith as a barrier to career progress: 'the more visible they were as Muslims, the more seriously they felt that discrimination was affecting their career prospects.'

Some of the BME participants felt that they did not always receive the same encouragement to apply for leadership posts as non-BME teachers because of their faith or culture.  Several female BME aspirant middle leaders voiced concerns about favouritism and these women doubted the integrity of the leadership appointment process as the following four quotations imply:

> *'I didn't get an interview, the person that got it – she was friends with the Head teacher.  The job has already gone.  I was told 'maybe I was a threat'. Perhaps I wasn't ready';*

> *'I wouldn't apply for leadership role in my own school because you have to be friendly with the Headteacher, I'd apply at another school and let the decision be based on me not the friendship I have with Headteacher.'*

> *'There was a TLR post due to start around the time I was coming back from maternity leave – and I wasn't made aware of it and some people said you were perfect for that job but there was someone else who was on maternity leave same time and she was rung up to apply for a SENCo job – I found that unfair';*

> *'I have found it a lot; the job is made with a person in mind – that job is you – well it was written for you'*

*'Schools create a post to keep someone from leaving – unfair.'*

As with other research on BME teachers the findings presented here are indicative of the internal exclusion, impacting upon internal promotions, identified by Bush, Glover and Sood (2006), and the conclusions of Shah and Shaik (2010), reiterated by Miller (2016) who found subtle acts of discrimination, such as potential applicants being told they 'weren't ready yet' despite years of experience and qualifications effectively creating a glass ceiling.

**4.5 Desire to be a leader**

Across the three programmes there was a general desire from the participants to secure the next level of leadership. This would be expected given that they had all actively applied for a place on the programme. However, a number of participants on the aspirant heads and women into headship programme were motivated to find out more about the role and were not convinced at the start of the programme whether they really wanted to be a headteacher see tables 1 to 4. They hoped the programme would give them a strong insight into the role of the headteacher in order to help them decide whether this was a career route for them. By contrast the BME aspirant middle leaders showed increased levels of confidence and desire to be a middle leader see tables 5 to 8.

**5.0 Conclusion**

This research initially arose from a commissioned evaluation designed to fulfil NCTL data returns. One of the purposes of these NCTL funded programmes was to increase the pool of potential leadership applicants by increasing the range of people attending leadership preparation and development courses thus creating a leadership pipeline that adopts a corporate leadership 'for' diversity discourse. However, the findings of the case study, in reiterating the structural inequalities still affecting women and BME teachers, point to the need for all leadership preparation and development programmes to adopt a socially-transformative discourse within which social justice, white privilege and processes of white sanction are explicitly embedded such that leadership preparation is undertaken 'with' diversity to ensure 'leadership is beneficial to everyone and the organisation' (Coleman 2012 p592).

Findings reveal that all the white women into headship participants wanted to become leaders and 'locker room culture' and work life balance concerns did not deter them. While some of the all white sample of aspirant primary headteachers still wanted to take up leadership positions several did not (see tables 1-4), for a variety of reasons including ~~salary cut~~, job insecurity, ~~and~~ their self-perception of competency and also economic reasons such as a salary cut but increased workload. However, while maintaining their desire to become a leader at the end of the course, nevertheless some BME participants felt that the choice was sometimes taken out of their hands because of a prejudiced system. The key messages in the literature have been reiterated in this study: in order to address issues of inequality and thus support development of leaders from all communities and genders there is a need to develop programmes that address leadership *with* rather than simply *for* diversity. Given the increasing autonomy of the school-led system it is pertinent to reflect on the extent to which school leaders will commission or design development programmes that adopt an evidence-informed, psychologically challenging, social justice approach.

This research gives voice to a small sample of aspirant leaders' perspectives on barriers to leadership thus contributing to the literature concerning the nurturing of potential leaders particularly women and those from BME backgrounds. The majority of participants cited moral purpose as their main motivation for wanting to secure a higher leadership role with a desire to make a difference to the lives of the young people in their schools. What this study has shown is that while many participants were still keen to pursue leadership opportunities at the end of the course, nevertheless, for some women and some BME aspirant leaders, the barriers remain unassailable. Given the limitation of space this paper can only highlight the range of barriers as articulated by the small sample of participants on three leadership courses, and obviously further research and detailed analysis is needed. However the paper has shown that entry to leadership positions by women and men, BME and non BME is a complex issue fraught with structural and personal barriers such as gender, race, faith and economic factors, and policy makers should heed these voices if a shortage or crisis of future leaders is to be averted.

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