

## Research paper

# Succession planning: developing management potential in a social services department

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes a best-practice initiative designed to develop management potential in a local authority social services department. Entitled 'the aspiring managers' programme', it aimed to assist the department with its succession planning using positive action approaches to develop the management potential of staff from minority and traditionally disadvantaged groups within the existing workforce. Nineteen staff were sponsored onto a specially commissioned in-house Certificate in Management Studies in Health and Social Care. A scheme of work-based learning and management mentoring provided practical support to develop participants' management experiences and skills. At the end of the programme an exploratory evaluation using questionnaires and one-to-one interviews within a qualitative paradigm documented participants' experiences of the scheme and the advantages

or problems of such an approach to developing diversity in the social care workforce. Within six months of completing the 'aspiring managers' programme', eight participants succeeded in gaining first-line management posts. The use of mentoring and the direct involvement of participants' line managers in delivering specialist areas of the curriculum contributed to quality of support, success and ownership of this particular positive action initiative. This paper aims to contribute to understanding of management development practices in social care organisations, and highlights the need for future research into securing a more representative workforce within care organisations.

**Keywords:** management development, mentoring, positive action, social care, succession planning

## Introduction

This paper describes an initiative designed to develop management potential in a local authority (LA) social services department (SSD). Following an exploratory evaluation of this 'aspiring managers' initiative, we discuss our findings in the context of the literature on succession planning and diversity management. The 'aspiring managers' programme, was a strategic equality and positive action initiative primarily instigated in response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The programme sought to assist the department with its succession planning, by developing the management potential of staff from minority and traditionally

disadvantaged groups within the existing workforce. We should note, however, that it is one thing to develop management staff in an organisation, and quite another to develop those with potential to be managers.

Equal opportunities and diversity in workforce development have been issues of long-standing concern within the health and social care sector (King's Fund, 1990; McDougall, 1996; Department of Health, 2001a, 2005b; Stephens, 2001). Using positive action provides an opportunity to align management development with the organisation's strategic objectives for diversity in management (DiTomaso and Hooijberg,

1996), and has the potential to maximise equality approaches to service delivery (Law, 1996; Kandola and Fullerton, 1998; Dreachslin *et al*, 2000; Association of Directors of Social Services, 2004). According to Friday and Friday (2003), managing diversity is an active phenomenon, which involves directing what individuals bring to the organisation to ensure its strategic goals are being fully and effectively met (p. 865). Redressing the balance of women, minority ethnic and minority group representation at all levels of employment in the sector has been linked to social inclusion strategies (Davidson, 1997; Association of Directors of Social Services, 2004). Bridging any gulf between espoused commitments of the organisation and an agenda for action can contribute to the delivery of accessible high-quality services.

We will begin by providing an overview of relevant literature on management development relating to diversity and its relevance to health and social care. We then outline features of our 'aspiring managers programme', describing the process of implementation and evaluation. We conclude with a discussion of the outcomes and learning arising from our experiences, and the pros and cons of such an approach to developing diversity in the workforce. This study relates specifically to social care within a statutory setting, but it is hoped that readers will identify with transferable themes across the health and social care sector.

## Literature review

There has been an enormous focus on developing a workforce 'fit for purpose' in health and social care at both national and local level (Department of Health, 2000, 2001b). This is a formidable and complex task due to poor intelligence on the size, complexity and accuracy of workforce data (Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate, 2000; Skills for Care, 2005). National organisations such as the Commission for Social Care Inspection, the General Social Care Council, the NHS Workforce Confederations, Skills for Care, and the Department for Education and Skills are developing methods of collecting data which support workforce planning. This process involves combining policy objectives with action-based initiatives to establish an evidence base and strategic plan to meet current and future workforce requirements. While some gains have been made, the social care workforce faces problems of recruitment and retention, and skills improvement in modernising its workforce (Ward, 2004; Skills for Care, 2005).

Modernisation of public services requires assessment of the future impact of changes in service delivery, skill mix and technology in order to improve planning to meet workforce requirements (Department for

Education and Skills, 1998; Department of Health, 2000). Likewise, data on the demographic characteristics of the UK population are of vital importance for monitoring equal opportunities and policy implementation (Owen, 2003). Strategies to meet the health and social care needs of the population and tackle inequality are inextricably linked with workforce developments (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000; Department of Health, 2001a; Drennan *et al*, 2004). Within social care, ensuring the workforce reflects the diverse nature of communities it serves is reinforced by legislation and government policy guidance (Dimond, 2004; Department of Health, 2005b), and continuous monitoring and assessment of the health and social care needs of growing minority communities (Dreachslin *et al*, 2000). According to Friday and Friday (2003), a culture within which diversity is systematically acknowledged, valued and effectively managed is likely to increase access to quality services at an operational level. Therefore, the development of any policies and initiatives that focus the mind on these crucial issues could benefit the sector and go some way to improving the quality of services experienced by service users via a more qualified, representative and skilled workforce.

SSDs operate in highly turbulent environments within which performance assessment and the role of management are emphasised (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate, 2000). Simultaneously, discourse on the rise of managerialism within public services since the introduction of the market economy during the 1980s has raised questions about the relevance of management techniques imported from the business sector (Dominelli, 2002; Healey, 2002; Tsui, 2004). The launch of specific management and leadership standards for social care in 2005 has gone some way to addressing these issues by specifying the attributes, desirable knowledge, skills and qualities required (Skills for Care, 2004), and there are now specific leadership and management pathways in the post-qualifying framework for social work. These recognise the positive relationship between management development and organisational performance in the unique environment of social care (Skills for Care, 2005; General Social Care Council, 2005).

Research into diversity management demonstrates under- and over-representation of some groups at different levels in local government management structures and the nature of the discrimination experience (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994; Carter, 2000; Kater, 2001). Findings suggest that black and minority ethnic managers received less supervisory support, training and development opportunities, and high-quality feedback than other managers (Holmes and Robinson, 1999; Improvement and Development Agency, 2004), and are more likely to miss important developmental opportunities to aid their career

progression. While these findings relate to senior managers, it is clear that management development structures are required at all levels in an organisation, in a way that is transparent, fair and consistent. Criticisms that black perspectives do not always inform developments in leadership and management are equally valid (Davidson, 1997; Holmes and Robinson, 1999; Butt, 2005). Studies done by the Commission for Racial Equality indicate clear distinctions between general intentions towards equality at work and specific actions to address these (Commission for Racial Equality, 2000; Department of Health, 2005a). The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires public bodies to improve racial equality in employment and public services (Dimond, 2004). Further, the Employment Act of 2002 outlines the UK government's focus on inclusiveness and justice in the workplace. From the individual perspective of employees themselves, benefits through better employment experiences and prospects are obvious, but some studies have also highlighted the competitive advantages of managing diversity where there is an active celebration of differences (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994; Kater, 2001; Audit Commission, 2002).

Below the proverbial 'glass ceiling', various determinants, particularly institutional barriers, continue to affect disadvantaged groups' access to career progression (Liff and Dale, 1994; Harlow, 2004). Organisational culture is one important element in determining the success of diversity management programmes requiring change through sustained effort and achievement (Kirkton and Greene, 2000; Annelies *et al*, 2002). The 2001 Census shows that some gains have been made for women, who now hold 33% of managerial jobs in the UK, although more in the public than the private sector (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2002). Where women outnumber men, this happens in only three of 11 management occupational subgroups, namely finance, office, health and social care management (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003). Work-home-life conflict can be one barrier for women seeking promotion to management positions at senior levels (Annelies *et al*, 2002; Harlow, 2004) and can affect not only their first steps into management, but also progression to senior management levels. Unresponsive cultures or lack of robust organisational work-life balance policies often mean sacrificing one's private life in order to fulfil the demands of a career (Annelies *et al*, 2002; Bryans and Mavin, 2003; Harlow, 2004).

## Succession planning: traditional approaches

Maintaining the present and future strategic fit between workforce and fitness for purpose in highly

turbulent social care organisations means continuously developing, renewing and nurturing the skills and capabilities of the workforce by adapting a development framework at various levels (Taylor, 1998). In the particular LA SSD of this study, information systems to identify shortfalls or gaps in management development were evolving but were insufficiently robust. Closer examination of organisational practices associated with promotion and recruitment identified the potential for worse promotion chances because of institutional preferences for external selection. Such approaches can easily become embedded in organisational practices and culture (Law, 1996; Carter 2003). Based on local anecdotal evidence, applications to first-line management posts from internal candidates were unsuccessful. Speculating on the potential of those candidates turned our attention to what barriers might hinder career progression. A review of the staff development and performance appraisal framework provided us with an opportunity to assess and evaluate the specific learning and development needs of these individuals. In addition, an earlier attempt to map the organisational workforce profile, combined with feedback from a staff development survey, gave us enough information to consider that the experiences of our own staff might echo research findings within the domains outlined above.

Discrimination in promotion can highlight needs for training to enhance promotion prospects (Singh, 2002; Carter 2003; Improvement and Development Agency, 2004) and lead to active consideration of staff learning and development needs (Iganski *et al*, 2001; Improvement and Development Agency, 2004; Johns, 2005). Senior managers have a specific role in encouraging managers to commit to developing their own staff. In social care organisations, managers often arrive at management levels as a result of their professionalism, and not necessarily through management competence, resulting in competent professionals but not necessarily competent managers. Early management learning could potentially assist with this (Tamkin *et al*, 2002; Loo, 2003). Policy developments have shifted the role of some staff in SSDs towards greater responsibilities for management functions (Healey, 2002; Skills for Care, 2005). Understanding the importance of management roles to providing quality and mobilising the potential of experienced staff, by ensuring they are prepared for taking up supervisory or management positions, is vital to any 'learning organisation' (Gould, 2000; Tamkin *et al*, 2002). These factors informed the design of the 'aspiring managers' programme'.

## Common approaches to management development

Standard approaches to management development programmes emphasise training as quickly and as efficiently as possible, leaving senior managers to get on with other priorities. This relatively safe and non-threatening approach can prevent attention to issues around diversity, flexibility and the development of organisational learning cultures. Qualifications do not necessarily reflect the level of management skills or ensure the application of what has been gained (Tamkin *et al*, 2002). Succession planning takes a longer-term approach by auditing the 'talent pool' of the organisation, engineering the range of work experiences needed (Hirsh, 2000), and resourcing a development strategy. This can be a risky in turbulent SSD environments where 'value for money' and short-term thinking dominate. True 'learning organisations' benefit from a more motivated workforce where employees experience the psychological rewards of feeling valued, and are able to undertake more interesting and challenging work (Clarke, 2001; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2004).

Gould (2000) highlights two fundamental premises which underpin the concept of 'learning organisations': first, that individual learning is a necessary but not sufficient condition for organisational learning; and second, that the learning experience is pervasive and takes place across multiple levels within an organisation, thus giving attention to the process by which learning takes place. A shared understanding about the skills and competencies necessary and desirable from managers can make staff equal partners in the management development strategy, and increase capacity for change (Skinner *et al*, 2004).

## The Aspiring Managers' Programme: design and implementation

Emerging opportunities in our SSD were used to support investment in future resource building within our existing management development programme:

- the implementation of a staff development strategy and performance review system which emphasised the motivation of individuals towards self-development
- shifting roles for staff in the department towards greater responsibilities for management-type functions
- a clear strategic equality programme. National research combined with local knowledge confirmed the potential exclusion of certain staff groups from management posts. Positive action enabled the department to set targets for increasing the representation of black and minority groups, women, and other disadvantaged groups in its first-line management
- the drive to support staff in achieving qualifications in social care (Training Organisation for Personal Social Services, 2000)
- the beginning of a more sophisticated approach to workforce planning. Feedback from a recent 'joint review' emphasised our need to achieve and maintain a more strategic fit of employees with local service developments.

A multifaceted experimental approach was developed. As succession planning is a top-down process, the senior management team (SMT) had to communicate and champion this initiative throughout the organisation. A discussion paper based on the above principles was used to gain SMT commitment and a three-pronged approach agreed in order to develop a model.

### Programme model

*Firstly*, using existing workforce data, under-represented groups in first-line management were identified at a strategic level, namely black and minority staff and women. Managers were asked to nominate appropriate staff to the existing in-house Certificate in Management Studies in Health and Social Care. This module-based programme was based on the Management Charter Initiative standards using the Management Education Scheme by Open Learning (MESOL). It used criteria for developing and assessing the skills required by managers, contextualised to health and social care, and led to a 'Management Certificate in Health and Social Care' (MCHSC). Delivered in partnership with a local university, the MCHSC involved formal teaching led by university staff, and continuous assessment through a series of work-based tutor-marked assignments. Participants received academic credits for their professional and managerial experiences.

*Secondly*, all participants were allocated an in-house management mentor. Mentoring aimed to promote reflective models of management development, building on our prior expertise in this area (Hafford-Letchfield and Chick, 2006). Participants were encouraged consciously to examine their own preconceptions and perceptions of management roles, using experiential and reflective methods (Kolb, 1984). Mentors had the opportunity to submit a portfolio for an NVQ qualification in mentoring. Mentoring partnerships between experienced managers and aspiring managers were instrumental in developing individual learning

agreements for the duration of the programme in the following areas:

- identifying and maximising learning opportunities for the aspiring manager within the organisation
- regularly reviewing the aspiring manager's progress through self-assessment and evaluation of learning achieved
- promoting anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory management practice
- clarifying the role of mentoring in supporting learners with academic work
- transfer of knowledge to practice.

The *third* aspect developed local agreements between each participant and their line managers to delegate practical management work-based learning activities. Induction to management roles, the development of structured learning activities based on management tasks, project learning, shadowing and observation were essential to ensure adequate transfer of theory to practice (Eraut, 1994; Tanner and Le Riche, 2000), as well as developing employability skills in novice managers.

All three aspects were based on an analysis of pre-identified internal skills gaps, potentially preventing successful applications to first-line management posts. Besides the opportunity to gain a relevant management qualification, participants could develop personal attributes such as accountability, and the ability to use initiative and to form active working partnerships in the organisation. This can contribute to stability of employment in organisations, and diversity in employment at the right levels (Singh, 2002).

The programme was implemented over 12 months. Significant investment was made in the recruitment stage, through a series of workshops for interested participants, their line managers and potential mentors as a means of engaging their contribution to the development of the programme, especially work-based learning aspects. Potential participants attended an assessment centre, where their understanding, commitment and suitability were assessed, and individual action plans were formulated as a future reference point. Nineteen 'aspiring managers' started the programme and 10 management mentors were recruited. A profile of the background of participants is shown in Table 1.

### Exploratory evaluation of the programme

This sought to explore how far the initial aims and objectives had been met. Specifically, these were:

- 1 staff to achieve core management competencies and qualifications in preparation for key management roles

**Table 1** Profile of programme participants (aspiring managers and mentors)

Characteristics	Aspiring managers ( <i>n</i> = 19)	Mentors ( <i>n</i> = 10)
<b>Sex</b>		
male	7	6
female	12	4
<b>Ethnic origin</b>		
black Caribbean	3	
black African	5	
other ethnic groups	2	
white British	4	7
white Irish		
no response		3
Disability	2	
<b>Sexual identity</b>		
heterosexual	3	9
homosexual	1	1
no response	15	

- 2 positive action, in line with the department's strategic equality initiatives
- 3 to assist the department with succession planning
- 4 influence on learning cultures within teams and services
- 5 qualifications for staff as mentors and increased work-based learning support.

In addition, the evaluation considered:

- 1 how many aspiring managers completed, and reasons for drop out
- 2 how many progressed to management posts within a year of completion
- 3 feedback on commissioning, planning, funding, organisational and administrative aspects of the programme
- 4 outcomes of mentoring support
- 5 reflection on organisational issues related to positive action initiatives.

No formal resources were available to evaluate the programme. Ethical consideration was given to the process by minimising the involvement of those involved in the design and delivery of the programme, and efforts to ensure that any processes and outcomes were seen as transparent and objective. Power dynamics were acknowledged from the outset, as aspiring managers were an easily identifiable group, and unlikely to share negative experiences for fear of retribution or consequences on future career prospects.

Fortunately we had a black female student working towards a human resource qualification, on placement with our staff learning and development unit shortly after the programme was completed. The evaluation provided her with a valuable work-based project, and gave us the opportunity to achieve a degree of independence in the collection of data. While directly supervised by one of the authors, all data collected were anonymised before any sharing took place. Participation in the evaluation was voluntary. Programme participants were not involved in the design of the evaluation due to resource constraints, but initial findings of the evaluation were presented via a half-day facilitated workshop with learners, mentors and learning providers. Aspiring managers requested that their managers did not attend this workshop, as consensus was that this could inhibit their discussion, so managers were not included in this stage of the evaluation. Reflections and responses from this workshop were then documented and included in the overall evaluation report, presented to the department's senior management team approximately eight months after the programme completed.

## Methods used

The evaluation aimed to survey and capture outcomes of the programme using a mixed range of methods to collect both quantitative data and qualitative data within a qualitative paradigm and to maximise the contributions from those participating. The methods are summarised in Table 2.

The questionnaire asked a combination of *four* direct questions about completion, timescales, and awards obtained, and *eight* open questions intended to capture qualitative data in areas concerning the quality of the learning provided, feedback on academic aspects of the programme and the value of mentoring and issues around the quality of work-based learning. Questionnaires were used to recruit aspiring managers and mentors for one-to-one interviews so that more in-depth discussion of their experiences could be explored (Robson, 1993). Interview questions to aspiring managers explored:

- the extent and usefulness of information given about the programme before it started

**Table 2** Summary of evaluation design

Phase	Data collection	Qualitative or quantitative	Sample characteristics
1: preliminary overview of programme	Postal questionnaire, 12 statements	Both	13 aspiring managers 6 mentors 10 managers (including line managers and service managers)
2: investigating issues in depth	Semi-structured interviews, face to face with aspiring managers and telephone with others	Qualitative	13 aspiring managers 3 mentors 1 programme co-ordinator 1 programme provider 1 staff development administrator
3: sharing and clarifying findings from phases 1 and 2	Half-day facilitated workshop	Qualitative	6 aspiring managers 5 mentors 1 programme co-ordinator 1 programme provider

- the quality of learning provided and feedback on formal provision
- experiences of the mentoring provided
- experiences of the work-based learning aspects
- the impact of programme on career progression
- reflection on overall experiences and what helped or hindered each individual's progress.

Interview questions explored with mentors:

- feedback on preparation, support and matching for mentors
- types of issues that arose during the mentoring process
- what mentors learnt about themselves/the organisation
- feedback on strengths and weaknesses of this approach to developing management potential
- what mentors enjoyed most/least in their mentoring role.

The interviewer prompted and encouraged respondents to expand on the above lines of enquiry where appropriate, making hand-written notes both during and after interviews. Notes were typed and given to respondents for clarification. Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed through comparing responses for similarities, and then categorising them under particular headings or themes (May, 1997). Qualitative data from questionnaires were analysed, summarising the responses to open questions by grouping together significant themes. Both sources of data were checked by the supervisor and the overall themes agreed.

## Findings from the evaluation

This was an exploratory evaluation with small convenience samples. Findings are summarised below, drawing on the different sources outlined above, and discussed under headings in keeping with the aims of the evaluation.

### Outcomes for aspiring managers

Fourteen participants ( $n = 19$ ) completed within the planned timescales, and were awarded the 'Postgraduate Certificate of Management in Health and Social Care'. Out of these, eight succeeded in gaining management posts within six months of completing the programme, of whom seven were from black and minority ethnic groups. One person did not complete, and the remaining four completed within the subsequent year.

### Preparation for the programme and quality of the learning provided

The shock of returning to learning, and managing this effectively, was a common theme reported by 10 aspiring managers. The problems that arose in relation to study skills support were unanticipated, and we now know can be partly responsible for disabling learners from non-traditional backgrounds (Lillis, 2001), requiring pedagogical intervention to harness potential (Burns and Sinfield, 2004). In relation to programme design, nearly all participants reported that this provided them with the right tools to focus on progression towards management. Emphasis on the equitable contribution of formal knowledge and direct experience supported by opportunities to develop practical skills under the guidance of experienced managers and mentors was scored as 'highly valuable' by 10 aspiring managers. All mentors and aspiring managers interviewed observed that their learning partnership provided an empowering, mutually respectful and formative approach. Participants were able to link their personal and organisational aspirations through the development of a personal action plan at the pre-programme assessment centre stage, followed by a formal learning agreement with mentors that helped them to focus on pre-identified goals and capitalise on any potential to plan and secure learning opportunities around these. More than half of the participants valued the opportunity to build closer relationships with significant people in their teams. This led to ongoing refinement of empowering learning partnerships (McWilliam *et al*, 2003). As stated earlier, the main cause of delay of the five participants who did not progress within the original timescale related to issues around formal study skills, and one dropped out very early on. According to these and two other aspiring managers, what made a difference in these circumstances was the time and effort given by mentors and staff development personnel in decoding what was going wrong, and actively providing support in these areas. The interpersonal support to engage in positive thinking and receive active encouragement was frequently cited by virtually all aspiring managers interviewed. The lack of diversity in mentor support, as well as the need to give more attention to facilitating the aspiring manager's own group identity, was cited by three aspiring managers and two mentors as a weaknesses in the overall design of the programme. A structure to facilitate representation of their specific needs as they arose during the programme may have helped in this respect and prevented delay in getting the appropriate support to participants.

## How far did the programme prepare participants for management roles?

Nearly all aspiring managers reported an increase in personal and professional confidence linked to being given increased responsibility. The opportunity to transfer academic learning to their workplace was tested out through action-orientated behaviour. Eight respondents spoke highly of opportunities to share experiences with management colleagues and how this enriched their relationships with line managers, peer groups and service users. Overall, respondents expressed new appreciation and respect for the work that managers did and how each element of the model enabled them to develop employability skills. 'Sharing stories' within their own group was mentioned specifically by three aspiring managers as helpful in making narrative sense of the situations they found themselves in (Fulop and Rifkin, 1999). Five aspiring managers in this evaluation spoke of how they had to engage in the process of discovering who they were as individuals and potential managers in the organisation, trying to find a 'comfortable place' while they were waiting to 'be managers', but straddling the two roles. Without exception, all reported this as stressful and demanding. They also encountered contradictions between formally taught knowledge and management theory and actual practice experiences. However, the development of tacit knowledge was greatly assisted by mentoring and supervisor/management input. Major angst arose during the programme for six aspiring managers, around contradictions in their personal beliefs, values and perspectives when playing the management role. This feature of public sector organisations is frequently debated in the literature, and highlights undesirable managerialist practices (Dominelli, 2002; Tsui and Cheung, 2004). General feedback from both aspiring managers and mentors was that time with mentors was used to unpick issues around the complex content of health and social care, for example by examining opposing forms of consumerism and economic constraint, or demands on services in the context of limited resources. Manager and mentor involvement in delivering specialist areas of the curriculum and contributing the organisation's internal knowledge and culture was reported as particularly successful in this respect.

## Reflection on positive action as a prerequisite to succession planning

Four aspiring managers commented on a lack of clarity in what the organisation was trying to do with their management talent. Succession planning is a process of multiple dialogues, and should be a transparent process. The evaluation was useful in documenting

affective factors and the subjective experiences of participants, to ensure that these were fed back to senior and first-line managers. There were occasions where the rhetoric of the department's equality strategy fell short in the actual experiences of aspiring managers, for example, in the shortage of mentors, and the lack of real tangible support from one or two line managers leaving staff development personnel to pick up the pieces and become the 'police' of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the department's positive action and equalities initiatives in an unsupported way. Mechanisms to facilitate ongoing knowledge and involvement of supervisors and managers of the staff on the programme in the curriculum are all areas for future attention. Verbal commitment alone can fail to engender the level of support required to ensure that positive action initiatives are successful.

The importance of ensuring that similar initiatives are publicised and made accessible to those targeted was highlighted in this evaluation. Preparation should begin with consistent approaches to documenting training needs and planning career progression that identify and acknowledge any potential barriers. A careful, planned approach to the process of nomination, access and selection to positive action initiatives such as this one is important to avoid tokenism. Selections of the 'right' candidates at the 'right' time are important preconditions to success, as is acknowledgement of power and politics in organisations that may interfere with these decisions (Bryans and Mavin, 2003).

Positive action emerges from the liberal notion of equality of opportunity, and accepts that some unequal treatment is required to level the playing field, using additional training in recognition that wider social processes lead to inequality of opportunity (Forbes, 1991; Johns, 2005). Both Johns (2005) and Lumby *et al* (2005) look at the use of goals and targets in public services for managing the recruitment, retention and promotion of minority ethnic individuals, or in responding to the need to reflect the profile of their community. Representation and proportionality are argued to be inherently arbitrary aims of positive action policies, and as a consequence, it is argued, lead to a focus on diversity rather than inclusion (Johns, 2005, p. 148) or can be used to justify the absence of any further action (Lumby *et al*, 2005) This highlights the complex reality that diversity is restricted by various factors such as choice or educational achievement. Likewise, integrationist approaches have been criticised for failing to take account of the structural process of institutional discrimination, power and identity in relation to those who are expected to integrate (Bird, 1996). Some of these aspects were echoed in our experiences of running a positive action scheme, as within any initiative equal attention needs to be given to challenging systems that devalue and



disregard difference, for example in stereotypes, and personal and institutional barriers that prevent marginalised individuals from making career progression (Davidson, 1997; Kater, 2001; Singh, 2002).

One area not examined in this study is what might be learned from the positive contributions of the unique experience of those entering management from different backgrounds. We did not explore issues with participants coming from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds in relation to how they *learned* to be managers, assuming that management and organisations are neutral concepts (Bryans and Mavin, 2003). These ideas underpin the need for systemic rather than episodic action to achieve equality in public services. Further research in this area could explore the experiences of those learning to be managers in social care organisations, to examine whether they have to learn to fit into the dominant paradigm of management, or 'do management differently' (Bryans and Mavin, 2003, p. 112).

The 'aspiring managers' programme' led to this organisation succeeding in securing eight new managers from diverse backgrounds within a short timescale, with an appropriate qualification and relevant experience. However, our evaluation highlighted a need to develop mechanisms to also monitor career progression of successful participants. Ongoing personal and professional training opportunities to equip new managers with specialist skills required for specific posts are recommended as well as regular review of future programmes to facilitate comparative approaches to difference in feedback and the value of the recommendations made.

## Conclusions

A number of pointers have emerged from this limited study: firstly, how the development needs of individuals and organisations should be linked, giving attention to the quality of learning experiences offered. Active participation of existing managers in 'growing their own' through provision of mentoring, coaching and experiential learning was valuable (Storey, 1989). Secondly, clear policies are needed on how management development is resourced, made accessible and appropriately targeted to ensure continuity and consistency. Thirdly, employers should evaluate what they do within the context of their equal opportunities policies. Evaluation before and after such initiatives can enable stock to be taken of subjective and affective factors arising from the experience, so that wider discriminatory issues are identified and responded to.

The question of how to develop human capabilities to meet current and future needs of organisations delivering social care has become an important issue

alongside the enduring nature of organisational power structures and the inequalities they perpetuate in our society (Macalpine and Marsh, 2005). Insufficient studies have been done to explore the extent and nature of the skills and development needs of current and future employees (Skinner *et al*, 2004). Competing demands and differences in expectation and attainment, particularly in relation to prospective employees, can potentially result in dissatisfaction and disappointment for all concerned. Work done by Macalpine and Marsh (2005) has focused on finding ways to both integrate and make explicit issues of power, identity, equality and diversity in workforce development, and to understand more about organisational 'stuckness' within a highly contested political and social field. Succession planning offers just one method of tackling these issues. Furthermore, debate about managerialism in public services means that there are tensions and dilemmas for staff who aspire to be managers and there are tensions and dilemmas for staff who aspire to be managers and who wish to maintain their value base when practising as a manager (Dominelli, 2002; Association of Directors of Social Services, 2004; Harlow, 2004). The launch of the leadership and management standards in social care provides a clear framework to develop the capabilities of staff embedded in the post-qualifying framework for social workers (General Social Care Council, 2005). It is up to organisations to make this accessible to all groups of staff. Finally, baseline measures for public services will inevitably be judged through the experiences of service users, employees and other stakeholders. These include measures of satisfaction, fairness, loyalty, commitment and retention, which should be visible in terms of comparative pay, promotion experiences and the incidence and duration of employment for all.

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#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

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