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This Special Issue of *Management in Education* emanated from the new Research Interest Group launched in May 2015, which had arisen from a discussion at a BELMAS Symposium held at the University of Nottingham back in October 2014. The Leadership Preparation and Development Research Interest Group has held two or three very well attended events each year since, that have examined the fast moving changes in this area. England is the only country in the world that has introduced a mandatory qualification for headship, and then removed it again, and it was following this decision that this Research Interest Group was established to shed light on what preparation and development is taking place for school leaders within current systems. Early on the RIG convenors decided that a way forward for the group was to look at LPD from the angles of International, Macro, Meso and Micro levels. We have used this at all RIG sessions since sometimes having presentations on the Micro: so an in-depth look at what individual schools are doing to help prepare and develop their future leaders through to our last RIG meeting where a panel event was held in order to ascertain what strategies are currently being deployed to effectively prepare and develop our future school leaders both nationally and internationally. Information on all these events and our forthcoming RIG meeting are available on our RIG page: <https://www.belmas.org.uk/Rig-LD/Overview>.

For readers outside the English System it may be worth taking a moment to note that school leadership preparation and development is based on a System Leadership approach that aims to create a Self-Improving School System (SISS). This system has shifted in the last decade from the National College and Local Authorities to Teaching Schools and their Multi-Academy Trusts. Leaders of Education exist at various levels: National Leaders of Education (NLEs) are experienced head teachers, deployed to give school-to-school support (S2SS) to those who request it. Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) provide this S2SS for leadership teams, usually from a deputy head's perspective. Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) are the most numerous in the system, and can be specialists from a wide range of subjects: core skills, such as maths, English, and science, but also on other areas such as behaviour and assessment. These Leaders of Education, at all levels, are deployed as much as schools request them, but this requires the capacity for teacher release, which has been seen to be difficult in shortage subject areas. Similarly, although the release is paid for, it requires the schools requesting the visits to have the spare resourcing to be able to afford such visits, particularly now that the national funding for SLEs no longer exists, and budgets are getting increasingly tight. Leaders of Education also exist in the parallel areas of Governance and Coaching, which help to maintain a SISS, but again schools have to request this help, or to have an Ofsted inspection that enables them to prioritise such visits in light of competing budgets.

The focus of this Special Issue was to bring some of the research on both System Leadership and the SISS highlighted at these RIG meetings to a wider audience, it is regularly contended inside our RIG that leadership preparation is neglected, and teachers may become principals without any specialised training. The international theme is highlighted here by Tony Bush, whose paper on 'Preparation and Induction for School Principals: Global Perspectives' not only gives us an overview of what these perspectives are but suggests to us a model for leadership preparation and induction to effectively move forward with. As Bush argues here, it may be that the developments that were made back in the NCSL/NCTL era are potentially now viewed as a 'golden age' in the leadership preparation and development of school leaders in England. However, pluralist provision as discussed in this article, can now be witnessed throughout education systems worldwide and whether or not this is a good thing very much remains to be seen.

The Macro paper in this Special Edition comes from an analysis of the Scottish system and the establishment of the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) that was put forward at a RIG meeting by Gillian Hamilton and Joanna Holmes back in November 2016. This interesting paper on 'Developing a Coherent Strategy to Build Leadership Capacity in Scottish Education' by Forde, Hamilton and McMahon highlights what successful changes have been made in Scotland and what developments there are yet to come in the Scottish system, in light of the recent decision to amalgamate SCEL with the national agency for curriculum and quality assurance, Education Scotland, (Scottish Government, 2017), and the challenges that this leaves the Scottish Education system with.

Following on from the changes in the Scottish system, there is a paper from the RIG co-convenors on 'Developing System Leaders: a research engagement approach' that discusses how research with System Leaders can potentially be best addressed. Through looking at the different ways in which system leaders are deployed through the Research Interest Group, we have developed an approach based on consultancy practice with consultancy research to generate professional development activities. We argue that such an approach has much to offer HEIs and groups of schools wishing to collaborate on system leader development in the interest of generating principled, long-term helping relationships in a self-improving system.

Next there is the paper by Cliffe, Fuller and Moroosi which focuses on 'Secondary leadership preparation and development: Experiences and aspirations of members of senior leadership teams' discusses how the development of a more pluralist LPD system gives rise to difficulties for School Leadership Teams (SLTs) to offer inclusive and sustainable opportunities for succession planning. Examining the current LPD provision at the Meso level from individual perspectives inside both Local Authorities and Academy Chains and discusses the implications of this qualitative research for

aspiration to headship and what head teacher support is required. This paper offers us areas for development in coaching and mentoring; networking; and qualifications and training.

Our final paper in this Special Issue is on 'Leadership Preparation and Development within a Multiple Academy Trust: Self-improving or Self-serving?' and takes the Micro Level view on current LPD strategies being used in a case study of two schools inside a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Gibson's paper argues that whilst LPD appears welcomed in schools the provision can at best still be 'ad hoc', and whilst the creation of regional hubs currently on the agenda for England may go some way in helping develop regional strategies, even that will not re-create the 'golden triangle' (Abbott et al, 2013) which enabled government, LAs and teachers to develop national initiatives to be developed locally, with teachers being involved in their own CPD development, which gave rise to a consensus. As Bush's paper argued at the start of this Special Issue, such pluralism of LPD provision does give rise to different strategies evolving, but it remains to be seen if this will help teachers to effectively develop into head teachers in order to best help their students.

Thus, this Special Issue highlights the current complex position of leadership preparation and development at each level: Global; Macro; Meso and Micro. Highlighting areas of LPD good practice that we can learn from, but also recording the system leadership advances that were made in England under the National College which have now been replaced with more pluralist approaches.

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