

## MASTERS PROGRAMME

<b>Student number: xxxxxxx</b>	Agreed Grade:
<b>Module: Making a Difference: Sustained School Improvement Project (IE9D4)</b>	A*
<b>Assignment Title: Dissertation: 'Leading Character: Perceptions of a Character Education Programme'</b>	Percentage: 86
<b>Overall Comment</b>	
<p>A most perceptive study with a clearly constructed, well argued, theoretical framework within which policy and leadership aspects of implementation are critically examined.</p> <p>The guiding questions provide a focus and are pursued throughout the study in a logical and consistent way. The design is straightforward and based on in-depth interviews with the approach justified in relation to key methodological issues.</p> <p>The ideological and indoctrinating nature of 'character education' policies seems clear from the data collected from interviews and confirms the critical points made in relation to the work of Tough, Duckworth and Seligman and others and based on an effective use of Suissa (dissertation page 18). The evidence does appear to support the point made on page 48:</p> <p><i>'...I would argue that the policy at Hope Works serviced a highly conservative view, which unquestioningly assumed the meritocracy of English society (page 48)</i></p> <p>And also on page 59:</p> <p><i>Character education is only a viable solution for educational inequality if you support the idea that the solutions are individual not structural. Leaving this unvoiced suppresses debate and leaves a neoliberal values system and model of society unchallenged by educational leaders and practitioners. (page 59).</i></p> <p>These debates are far from new, though they take different forms at different times. See for example, the Penguin Classics volume <i>'Self-Help'</i> (1859) by the nineteenth century writer Samuel Smiles in which he argues (essentially) for a 'pulling yourself up by your bootstraps' approach to one's own personal social mobility, as this is what counts rather than collective action and broad social reform. The implication is of course, that anyone who's 'made it' has done so by their own efforts and anyone who hasn't, has only their own idleness and lack of ambition to blame for it. Sound familiar 158 years on?</p>	

It may be worth noting that gross social inequality is an inevitable result of neo-liberalism as studies have repeatedly shown. Guy Standing has argued that this has led to the emergence of a significant 'precariat' which, if politicised, could become a significant threat to the realisation of the 'neo-liberal imaginary'. What better way to de-politicise it than to suggest, as you have pointed out, that it this is not systemic or structural failure, but simply the lack of motivation and drive to succeed, essentially a failure of 'character'.

### **Subject Knowledge**

A balanced consideration of the policy and practice literature on 'character' education.

Similarly, on 'neo-liberalism' from the educational writers such as Ball, Courtney, Gunter. The treatment of leadership is brief, but since the study is one of policy interpretation, this seems entirely appropriate.

A competent critique of the methodologies used in many of the US studies.

In terms of knowledge of methodology, these extracts demonstrate the point made in the overall comment box above with regard to the construction of the framework for the study:

*Like Hoskins and Barker (2007), Ball (2003) and Courtney and Gunter (2015), I use micro-scale research to collect rich and detailed qualitative data, in order to try and achieve 'erklärendes verstehen' - to understand the meaning and the motives given to character education by leaders at Hope Works (Cohen et al., 2003). As Hope Works' mission is focused on addressing educational inequality, I have also included aspects of critical theory in my analysis (Cohen et al., 2003). I take a Weberian approach to class, viewing it as a social structure which is shaped by individuals (Hammack, 1980). Like Bernstein, I argue that educational policy is inherently political and my analysis considers the political and ideological context of Hope Work's character education policy (Bernstein, 1977 p.85 cited in Whitty, 2002). (page 27)*

And in terms of data gathering:

*Using in-depth interviews – over an hour long – and a micro-scale enabled me to generate rich and detailed data for analysis within the time frame available to me as a part-time researcher (Cohen et al., 2003). My approach here was supported by Thornberg and Oğuz, (2013) See and Arthur (See and Arthur, 2011) and Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey who all used interviews with teachers as their sole method of data collection. Neither self-administered questionnaires or observation were suitable for this study, the latter because I wanted to explore the meanings and rationale behind the policy not just its impact. (page 29)*

It was good to read evidence of the influence of the literature review on the development of the questions:

*I used areas of interest identified in both critical theory and empirical research on character education to identify question topics (Coleman, 2012). (page 30)*

### **Analysis and Critique**

Strongly focused throughout. Wider context well understood and theorised. Methodology carefully considered. High level of ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. Detailed examination of issues with reasons for conclusions clearly indicated. Persuasively argued with main issues convincingly evaluated. Some originality of thought and creativity (see table below).

### **Presentation**

Well organised, presented and referenced. A high standard of scholarly work.

### **Advice for Future Work**

You may wish to look further into one of your key constructs, that of 'neo-liberalism'. It depends how thoroughly you wish to understand it.

The influences of neo-liberalism can be traced back to Hayek and the 'Freiburg school' of economics and to Milton Friedman and the 'Chicago' school. These ideas came to challenge Keynesian economics due to their adoption by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Friedman was an adviser to the Chilean fascist government of Augusto Pinochet following the 1973 coup and the complete privatisation of the public sector including schools, was the result of his advice.

The US Professor of the History of Economics, Mirowski and also the US Foucauldian sociologist, Wendy Brown, provide significant insights into how NL has transmuted itself and survives despite being tested to destruction with the financialisation crisis, otherwise known as the 'banking crisis'. This is largely thanks to weak understanding of NL generally, the take-over of university economics departments by Hayek/Friedman supporters (according to Mirowski) and the absence of credible alternatives. If you're interested in the forces shaping social policy, you might like to read Mirowski and also Brown because it is clear that the NL hand is not yet fully played out yet and continues to inspire the main players in government and the DfE largely through the 'Fat Four' consultancy firms.

I think the work shows potential for further academic development, so you might like to consider a doctorate.

**Signed (first marker):** xxxxxxxx

**Date:** xxxxxxxx

### **Moderator/ Second Marker's Comments (where applicable):**

An outstandingly lucid, well-ordered and critically focused piece of insider research. A wide-ranging and questioning review of the literature admirably supports this eclectic but always purposeful study, designed to illuminate what learning and other educational outcomes can arise from one school's attempt to implement such a programme of character education. The possibly inescapable conflict between value and efficacy driven approaches is well presented and made use of subsequently in the study.

A thorough knowledge and perceptive understanding of both the procedures required to conduct the study and the kinds of evidence that would maintain validity and reveal the dynamics arising from attempts to teach character were both well understood and effectively deployed.

Especially effective here were the author's efforts to stand outside her own value and heuristic postulates and, in a sense, demonstrate what the data revealed independently of those postulates. This gave the study and its findings added strength and conviction as grounded in the reality of participant experiences.

The writing throughout and its capacity to show clearly the purpose, method, substance and implications of the data gathered is clear, effectively organised and covertly used to reveal critically some significant factors and forces that were found to work, often in concert, to effect centrally driven changes in the content and form of what was taught. The conclusions presented on pp 56-9 are a tour de force of synthesis and summary argument, showing adeptly and convincingly, and yet in a manner that is strongly confirmed in the data collected, how national debates, local culture, school aims and interests work interactively to achieve results that are themselves predicated in and defined by the form of

the national policy narrative the school has 'bought into'.

This is an admirable piece of work and one that should encourage the writer to continue to look for aspects of current work and school experience that could, with systematic evidence collection and analysis be the basis of useful and empirically grounded contributions to national debate of important educational policy issues.

**Signed (Second Marker): xxxxxxxx**

**Date: xxxxxxxx**

**\* PLEASE NOTE ALL MARKS ARE PROVISIONAL AND SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION AT EXAMINATION BOARD.**

Congratulations on finishing the MA Educational Leadership (Teach First) with such an exemplary piece of work. I look forward to seeing you at Graduation.

Dr Madeleine Findon (Course Leader)

Grade	Subject Knowledge	Analysis and Critique	Presentation
<p>A*/A (Mark of 80 or above = A*; 70 -79 = A)</p>	<p>Demonstrates a highly developed understanding of relevant concepts, theories and/or research methodologies. A wide range of relevant sources, which are well understood, are deployed to support arguments.</p>	<p>Recognises the demands of the question providing a well-focused, relevant answer. Sets sources and viewpoints in a wide context and makes a comprehensive assessment of issues involved. Displays awareness of methodological and theoretical considerations. High levels of ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. Detailed examination of issues with reasons for conclusions clearly indicated. Persuasively argued with main issues convincingly evaluated. Some originality of thought and creativity.</p>	<p>Material is very well-organised and the structure complements the content. A high level of written communication with very few errors of spelling, grammar and syntax. Mastery of referencing conventions with very few errors or omissions. Appropriate length.</p>
<p>B (Mark of 60 - 69)</p>	<p>Sound and thorough grasp of relevant concepts, theories and/or research methodologies although lacking in depth at some points. The work is supported by references to a good range of relevant sources which are used in a relevant way.</p>	<p>Recognises the demands of the question providing a focused, relevant answer which brings out useful points and substantiates them. A good attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts. Appreciates main issues and able to make appropriate critical points. Perceptive commentary on evidence and materials used.</p>	<p>Well-structured work displaying attention to the logic and development of the piece. A clear written style. Spelling, grammar and syntax are generally good. Most features of the referencing system are used correctly. Appropriate length.</p>
<p>C (Mark of 50 - 59) Pass Mark 50</p>	<p>Understanding of main concepts, theories and/or research methodologies is fair but lacks depth and/or breadth. There may be some gaps or areas of confusion. An adequate range of relevant source materials is used.</p>	<p>Although the demands of the question have been recognised, only the basic requirements are covered and there may be some irrelevant material.  The attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts is competent but lacks depth and breadth. Sensible commentary on evidence and materials used though some points may be unsubstantiated.</p>	<p>A generally satisfactory overall structure although it may lack balance in parts or fail to integrate some material. An adequate written style which is not impaired by the occasional errors of spelling, grammar and/or syntax. The recommended referencing system is used but with some errors and omissions. Control of length may be less secure.</p>
<p>D (Mark of 40 – 49)</p>	<p>Some evidence of reading but understanding of the subject matter is limited. The work displays major gaps in knowledge, serious misconceptions and/or factual inaccuracies.</p>	<p>Introduction of basic concepts and effort made to relate them to the demands of the question which have been only partially understood. Mainly descriptive with much irrelevance and unsubstantiated conclusions. No sustained analysis and an inability to apply knowledge and synthesise material. Uncritical exegesis.</p>	<p>Weak structure. Expression of ideas is sometimes confused or unclear. Communication may also be impaired by errors of spelling, grammar and/or syntax. Referencing marred by frequent errors and omissions. May exceed or fail to meet length requirements.</p>
<p>E</p>	<p>Few relevant sources used. Serious gaps and/or errors in knowledge and understanding</p>	<p>The question may have been ignored or badly misunderstood. Few or none of the basic requirements of the study have been achieved. Superficial treatment of the</p>	<p>Unstructured presentation, lacking coherence. Expression of ideas is poor. Communication may also be impaired by frequent errors of spelling,</p>

(Mark below 40)	indicate that the student has failed to engage seriously with the subject matter.	topic much of which is descriptive, irrelevant and unsubstantiated. Lacks appropriate critical or theoretical framework.	grammar and/or syntax. The recommended referencing system has not been mastered. Length requirements not met.
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**80+ An outstanding piece of work**, showing total mastery of the subject-matter, with a highly developed ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. All objectives of the set work are covered, and there is evidence of critical reflection, originality of thought and creativity. The work is free of errors with a very high level of technical competence. Ideas are expressed with fluency.

**70-79 An excellent piece of work**, showing a high degree of mastery of the subject-matter, with a very well-developed ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. All major objectives of the set work are covered, and there is evidence of critical reflection. The work is free of all but very minor errors, with a high level of technical competence. Ideas are expressed with fluency.

**60-69 A good piece of work**, showing a sound and thorough grasp of the subject-matter, though lacking in the breadth and depth required for a first-class mark. A good attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts, but more limited in scope than that required for a mark of 70+. Most objectives of the work set are covered and there is some evidence of critical reflection. Work is generally technically competent. Ideas are expressed with clarity, with minor exceptions.

**50-59 A fair piece of work**, showing a grasp of major elements of the subject-matter but possibly with some gaps or areas of confusion. Only the basic requirements of the work set are covered. The attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts is superficial, with a heavy reliance on course materials. Work may contain some errors, and technical competence is at a routine level only. Little critical reflection. Some confusion in expression of ideas.

**40-49 Not of a passable level for a postgraduate programme.** A poor piece of work, showing some familiarity with the subject-matter, but with major gaps and serious misconceptions. Only some of the basic requirements of the work set are achieved. There is little or no attempt at analysis, synthesis or application of knowledge, and a low level of technical competence, with many errors. Inability to reflect critically on an argument or viewpoint. Ideas are poorly expressed and structured.

**Below 40 Work not of passable standard**, with serious gaps in knowledge of the subject-matter, and many areas of confusion. Few or none of the basic requirements of the work set are achieved, and there is an inability to apply knowledge. Technical competence is poor, with many serious errors. The level of expression and structure is very inadequate. The student has failed to engage seriously with any of the subject-matter involved

LEADING CHARACTER: PERCEPTIONS OF A CHARACTER  
EDUCATION PROGRAMME

A. STUDENT NO. XXXXXXXX

“Dissertation presented as a partial requirement for the award of MA  
Educational Leadership (Teach First) of the University of Warwick”

Affiliation: Centre for Education Studies

DATE

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## Acknowledgments

With thanks to the staff and volunteers at Hope Works for agreeing to participate in this research and to my supervisor, colleagues and family for all their support.

## Abstract

*In this case study, I explore how debates about character education are realised in practice by leaders at a small scale educational charity. Data was collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight educational leaders who were asked to talk about the organisation's mission, leadership and character education policy. I argue that the educational leaders' agency to decide the character education policy was limited by their position within a service market. Their approach to character was inherently conservative and supported a neoliberal conception of education policy.*

## Introduction

Character education is both an old and new phenomenon in British education. Old in that teaching 'good character' has been one of the aims of education since Aristotle (Hursthouse, 2013). New, because explicitly teaching character in schools fell out of fashion in the 1950's (Suissa, 2015; Arthur, 2005). However, in the last couple of years character education has again been promoted in the UK (Lovat et al., 2010) particularly by Nicky Morgan as head of the Department of Education (DfE) from 2013-16 (DfE, 2016a; DfE and Morgan, 2014).

What is meant by character and character education? Unfortunately, there is a distinct lack of consensus. Kristjánsson (2015) sees two schools of character education, the virtue and performance approaches. The former is supported by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. They define character education as helping "young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues" (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015,

p.2). The performance based approach avoids talking about morals and instead defines character as attributes which will help young people succeed (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Tough, 2013). Government policy in this area claims to welcome diversity of approach (DfE, 2014) so the approach taken to character is a policy decision for educational leaders. Consequently, I have not sought to define character education myself but instead explore how the leaders in my case study have chosen to interpret character within the context of the national policy discourse.

The increasing visibility of 'character education' seems at first glance to be contradictory with an educational landscape where standards and academic attainment are central (Ball, 2008; Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2008; Barker, 2007). A variety of reasons has been given for endorsing character education for young people including improving morals and wellbeing (Arthur, 2015; Pring, 2010); reducing educational disadvantage (DfE, 2016a; Goodman et al., 2015; Tough, 2013); creating a more rounded education policy (Kristjánsson, 2015; Pring, 2010); and increasing academic attainment (Orr, 2015; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005). The tension between these approaches raises a number of important questions about the purpose, politics and ideology of teaching character in the context of a neoliberal and marketised educational landscape (Ball, 2008; Barker, 2007). Character education's supporters are largely silent on its political or ideological underpinnings (Suissa, 2015). Critiques of character education include the argument that it is an inherently conservative policy, and concerns about its potential to act as an agent of social control (Suissa, 2015; Arthur, 2005). However, these are primarily based on philosophical rather than empirical arguments (Arthur, 2015; Suissa, 2015; Carr, 2011). Most empirical research on character is quantitative and does not examine the narratives and ideological approaches used in character education programmes (Was et al., 2006). My research thus seeks to examine how these debates are realised in the policies and praxis of educational leaders who are implementing character education.

The formulation and implementation of educational policy is a contested process, which cannot be viewed independently from the socio-political environment in which it operates (Bell and Stevenson, 2006). This case study is a piece of insider research (Mercer, 2007) examining the character education policy in operation at Hope Works (a pseudonym), a small scale charity seeking to address educational disadvantage. I use semi-structured interviews with staff and volunteers to examine the interplay between individual agency and structure in how the charity has formulated and implemented its character education policy. I examine the meanings and constructions given by educational leaders to character education and compare with the academic literature on the subject (Hoskins and Barker, 2014).

My research is based around three key questions:

1. In the perception of the educational leaders, what definitions of character and character education are used in the Hope Works policies?
2. In the perception of educational leaders at Hope Works, what is the rationale for character education, and what outcomes do they hope to achieve?
3. What leadership and policy processes have been used to formulate and implement the Hope Works' character education policy?

In particular, I explore how the macro-policy context and particular neoliberal ideas and the standards agenda (Ball, 2008; Seddon et al., 2007) have influenced the formulation and implementation of character education at Hope Works. I argue that, despite Hope Works aim to reduce educational inequality, its character policy supports a conservative view of society. My findings have implications for the teaching of character in the UK, and for educational leaders seeking to implement policies which address educational disadvantage.

The paper first describes the context of the case study organisation followed by a review of the literature and policy context for character education in the UK. This is followed by an evaluation of the research methodology. Finally, I analyse the data collected and discuss my findings and conclusions.

### Case study context:

Hope Works (a pseudonym) is a small educational charity, working with about 500 young people in two cities. It partners with schools in disadvantaged areas to deliver weekly after-school character education programmes, run by a project leader with volunteers. Hope Works has four key character strengths: self-control, fairness, staying-power and good judgment, that it aims to instil in young people. It argues that these enable students to 'achieve their full potential and go on to lead good, happy and successful lives' (Hope Works website). Hope Works employs around 15 permanent staff and 8 sessional staff and works with over 100 volunteers to deliver its programmes. When completing the data collection for this research I worked as a programme manager for Hope Works, overseeing the management and delivery of its secondary programme.

## Literature Review

In this section I discuss approaches to 'character education', policy and leadership used in my research. I give a critical analysis of character education policy in the UK, including the suggested benefits of character education and how far these are supported by academic research, and examine some of the criticisms of character education.

### What is character education?

Character education is a contested field, as the terms 'character' and 'character education' have been used to encompass a wide variety of policies, practices and philosophies in the UK and globally (Birdwell et al., 2015).

The British Jubilee Centre for Character Education uses Aristotelian virtue ethics as the basis for their definition of character (see above). Character education is defined as “explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues”. (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015, p.2). Their approach has been used by many UK-based academic researchers (Arthur, 2015; Birdwell et al., 2015; Kristjánsson, 2013; Carr, 2011; See and Arthur, 2011; Farmer, 2010; Wilson and Arthur, 2010) and shares many features with what international researchers term ‘values education’ (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; Berkowitz, 2011; Lovat et al., 2010, 2011). Thornberg and Oğuz define this as “activities in schools in which students learn or develop values and morality” including character and citizenship education (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013, p. 49). There exists considerable variance in the value systems and pedagogies and philosophies used in ‘values education’ programmes. In Sweden, values education aims to inculcate students with the values of democracy via the informal curriculum (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013). Whereas the Asia-Pacific Resilience Project promoted resilience in students (Lovat et al., 2010).

In contrast the performance or behaviourist approach avoids morals or ethics in favour of a more instrumentalist take on character education. Character is defined as attributes which will help young people to achieve material indicators of success (Kristjánsson, 2015; Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Arthur, 2005). For example, Gutman and Schoon include character under the umbrella term ‘non-cognitive skills’, which they define as “attitudes, behaviours and strategies which facilitate success in school and workplace” (Gutman and Schoon, 2013, p. 7). Here the focus is instrumentalist not moral.

Highly influential to this approach in both the UK and the USA has been the work of Paul Tough. In his book, *How Children Succeed*, Tough (2013) argues qualities such as persistence, self-control, and grit, not IQ, are the key to future success. Tough suggests that teaching character therefore has the potential to transform the life chances of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Tough, 2013, p. xxiv). His conclusions are not

based on original research but use a variety of pre-existing research from medicine, psychology and social sciences – including Angela Duckworth as evidence (Tough, 2013).

When analysing character education programmes Thornberg and Oğuz (2013) and Was et al. (2006) make a distinction between traditional and constructivist or progressive approaches. The former use direct instruction and didactic methods to teach young people how they ‘should behave’. The latter use a relativist approach which encourages young people to form and make their own decisions. A division can also be made between programmes which are explicit and implicit in their aims to develop character (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013).

Faced with what Berkowitz describes as a “semantic morass” of definitions for character (Berkowitz, 2011, p. 153), many researchers choose to cite references from both character and values education research, as well as research on ‘non-cognitive skills’ and other similar areas (Birdwell et al., 2015; Goodman et al., 2015; Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; Berkowitz, 2011; Lovat et al., 2010, 2011). This of course makes a considerable amount of sense as the findings from research under both headings can certainly be of relevance to each other. Nevertheless, the question of definitions becomes considerably less semantic when one considers that researchers discussing ‘character education’ frequently use very different underlying paradigms. In common with the majority of the research field, this essay incorporates research from a variety of approaches to character education. As disparate definitions of character education existed within Hope Works, I have not endeavoured to formulate a single definition of character. Instead take a critical approach to the definitions of character chosen by educational leaders, the philosophical and ideological assumptions behind them, and consider what has influenced their choices. I have included material which defines itself as researching character or values education (Birdwell et al., 2015; Tough, 2013; Lovat et al., 2011), and work which has been cited as evidence by proponents of character education (Goodman et al., 2015).

## Policy and leadership

Educational research can neglect the complexities of policy (Ball et. al, 2012; Bell and Stevenson, 2006) and leadership literature often conflates policy and praxis (Peter Guy Northouse, 2012, p. 42,72,211; Yukl, 2009, p. 43,48,134). However, I would argue that policies are not static but interpreted, enacted, disputed and implemented in a variety of ways by different groups (Lingard and Ozga, 2007; Bell and Stevenson, 2006). As Ball argues, policies are not necessarily implemented consistently, instead they can often be problematic, unstable and incomplete. It is therefore important to study policy discourses in the context in which they are created and implemented (Ball, 2006, p. 17). Taylor (Lingard and Ozga, 2007) also views policy as a contested process, as forming and implementing policy involves the prioritising and authorising of particular values and voices. He suggests approaching policies as context, text and consequences (Lingard and Ozga, 2007, p. 3), to which Bell and Stevenson (Bell and Stevenson, 2006) add the need to consider the social-political environment of the organisation and including its operational practices and principles. Ball discusses policy as a cyclical rather than linear process of influence, production and practice (Ball et al., 2012; Lingard and Ozga, 2007, p. 3). Bernstein also argues that it is important to view educational policy as political as “how society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates educational knowledge...reflects both the distribution of power and principles of social control” (Bernstein, 1977 p.85 cited in Whitty, 2002). As we will explore, the association of character education with social mobility and educational inequality makes this a highly relevant frame through which to analyse its implementation.

In this assignment I have viewed policy as a discourse or process which can be contested at all stages (Lingard and Ozga, 2007; Bell and Stevenson, 2006). In keeping with Ball's 'policy trajectory' approach, I also aim to capture the dynamics of policy across and between levels by comparing

macro level policy on character education to its implementation at a micro level within Hope Works (Ball et al., 2012).

### **Education policy and the neoliberal state**

Character education needs to be considered in the context of national educational policy. The educational policies of New Labour, the Coalition and the current Conservative governments have been shaped by the rise of the neoliberal state which aims to marketise aspects of state provision and views competition and individual responsibility as central to a productive society (Stevenson, 2011; Lingard and Ozga, 2007; Ball, 2006; Whitty, 2002). Ball (2008) and Stevenson (Stevenson, 2011) place the origins of neoliberal education policies with the 1980's Conservative government and particularly the 1988 Education Reform Act. Ball argues this Act led to a ratchet effect with incremental policy moves normalising markets and privatisation in the public sector (Ball, 2008). Key policies include the marketisation of school provision using the language of parental choice (Whitty, 2002); the introduction of private companies into education using academies and free schools (Birdwell et al., 2015, p. 40; Hoskins and Barker, 2014; Stevenson, 2011); the encouragement of competition through the 'standards agenda,' Ofsted and league tables (Stevenson, 2011; Ball, 2003). As Seddon et al. (2007) note, neoliberal restructuring of education is a global phenomenon, for instance similar principles have been applied to TAFE (Technical and Further Education) reform in Australia.

Proponents of neoliberal reforms argue that these policies are a way to improve education standards and even promote social mobility. However, they have been the subject of much criticism in academic literature (Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Hoskins and Barker, 2014; Ball, 2003, 2008; Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2008; Stevenson, 2007; Whitty, 2002). Stevenson argues that marketisation can force school leaders to choose between market performance and personal values such as equity and inclusivity (Stevenson, 2007). Teachers describe tension between interpreting policies in ways which will benefit pupil learning and ways which will meet the standards agenda (Bell and Stevenson, 2006, pp. 155–157). Ball sees English

education policy as creating a 'culture of performativity', where judgements and comparisons are used as a system of control. He argues this has led to a changed social identity for educational leaders (Ball, 2003, pp. 1–6). Although policies such as academisation are often presented as giving increased autonomy (DfE, 2016a; Birdwell et al., 2015), in fact the market comparison and competition systems such as Ofsted create new ethics for decision making (Stevenson, 2007; Ball, 2003). Whether educational leaders use this language sincerely or as cynical compliance, it becomes embedded in policy discourse and therefore in educational practice (Ball, 2003).

### **Social partnerships**

A further example of the rise of neoliberal values within education can be seen in social partnerships or public private partnerships. The definitions of these are variable (Ginsburg, 2012; Selsky, 2005) but generally involve sectors forming partnerships designed to “explicitly address social issues and causes” (Selsky, 2005, p. 850). These partnerships can often involve not-for-profits, NGOs, and local communities as well as business and social enterprises, for example the New Labour Education Action Zones (Ginsburg, 2012; Seddon et al., 2007).

Cross-sector partnerships in education are not new, but in their current form are strongly associated with the ideology of the neoliberal state (Seddon et al., 2007; Selsky, 2005, p. 63). They introduce multiple services into the education sector creating a contractual market where organisations compete to sell their services to schools and governments (Seddon et al., 2007). Hope Works is therefore an example of a social partnership; it aims to address educational disadvantage by selling its education services to schools with high numbers of pupil premium students.

These partnerships blur the boundaries between formal and informal education and have been seen by Selsky as a form of stealth privatisation (Seddon et al., 2007; Selsky, 2005). Accordingly, research on social partnership needs to look at issues of identity and power in the partnership

process, and the policy choices made by educational leaders. Private organisations (including NGOs) are not necessarily apolitical or ideologically neutral (Selsky, 2005). Seddon et al (2007) include three major sources of conflict in their framework for analysing social partnership: role conflict; interest conflict and regime conflict. Social partnerships mean that government policy is framed in the language of choosing provision, rather than governments providing for society, on the grounds of increased efficiency and responsiveness to local needs. Partnerships are therefore also likely to be responsive to changes in government policy, prioritising societal issues identified by governments and education policy (Seddon et al., 2007). The creation of a competitive market for education services inevitably leads to winners and losers, and as such can act to increase inequality (Seddon et al., 2007, pp. 244–246). The government uses the language of local issues to explain education inequality and partnership failure. However, Seddon argues that they in fact reflect the failures of the market system (Barker, 2007; Seddon et al., 2007, p. 244).

### Leadership

The language of leadership has become increasingly prominent in British education (Bush, 2010; Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2008), however it is not often studied in conjunction with analysis of educational policy (Bell and Stevenson, 2006). Leadership research is a disjointed field in which there is very little agreement on definitions of leaders (Yukl, 2009). These range from Grint's "having followers" (Grint, 2010, p. 2), to Yukl's "intentional influence" over a person, group or organisation (Yukl, 2009, p. 3).

Historically, leadership literature has focused on leaders as individuals, with leadership often conceived as a top-down process, for example with the model of a transformational leader (Grint, 2010; Barker, 2007; Avolio et al., 2003; Pearce and Conger, 2003). More recent approaches have instead looked at leadership as multi-directional process. Yukl suggests that leadership needs to be studied as a shared process within the context of the social systems and organisations it is embedded in (Yukl, 2009, p. 449). Examples of theories using this approach to leadership include shared

leadership (Pearce and Manz, 2005; Pearce and Conger, 2003) and distributed leadership (Harris, 2007; MacBeath, 2005), although the empirical evidence for the latter is contested (Leithwood et al., 2009; Youngs, 2009; Harris, 2007). Fitzgerald (2008) even argues that the ideal of distributed leadership has been used as a sop to convince teachers to accept neoliberal reform. The focus on educational leadership can be seen in the context of a policy framework promoting school 'autonomy' using academy chains and free schools. Individual educational leaders and school heads are increasingly responsible for student outcomes (Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Hoskins and Barker, 2014; Barker, 2007). However, Barker questions the empirical evidence for suggesting transformational school leadership can dramatically improve examination results (Barker, 2007). Barker's work here is mainly based on a single case study, so caution should be used in generalising his findings. However, it demonstrates how models of effective leadership are affected by educational policy discourse. Following Ball, I take a Bordieuan view of social agency (Ball, 2003, 2008). Educational policies are not accepted passively or uncritically by educational leaders, but they live and think within the structures created by policy and these can act to restrict agency (Ball et al., 2012). For example, developing a strong vision has been seen as a successful component of educational leadership (Bush, 2010, 2015; Murphy and Torre, 2015). However, studies of successful school leaders have suggested that their visions are often very similar and closely aligned to government policy (Bush, 2010, 2015) and that they can be potentially be used to ensure teacher conformity and suppress dissent (Courtney and Gunter, 2015).

In common with Yukl (2009) and Pearce et. al (2008) this assignment considers leadership as a multi-directional influence process and which should be viewed in the organisational contexts in which it operates. The subjects of my research are not teachers, but educators who work for a charity which forms social partnerships with schools. However they are educational leaders in the sense that they are influencing the education of young people (Bush, 2010).

## Character education policy

### Historical context

The idea that English schools should instil good 'character' or a moral personality in their pupils has roots going back to the Victorian era and beyond as seen in the work of John Locke and Durkheim (Birdwell et al., 2015; See and Arthur, 2011; Edmonson et al., 2009; Davis, 2003). In the UK Rab Butler, the architect of the 1944 Education Act, argued that universal education would develop "the character and competence of a great people" (Cited in Birdwell et al., 2015, p. 37). These character values were assumed to be Christian values, with religious education the only compulsory subject (Haydon, 2010). Character education in the UK has also traditionally been seen as a feature of private schooling (Birdwell et al., 2015; Kristjánsson, 2015; Lexmond et al., 2011). It fell out of fashion in the 1950s to the 1970s (Birdwell et al., 2015; Lexmond et al., 2011; Lovat et al., 2010; Arthur, 2005), something which Arthur (2005) and Suissa (2015) correlate with the growth of a more pluralistic society with social values no longer centred on Judeo-Christian morals. Instead, 'values clarification' and cognitive development based approaches (for example Kohlberg's discussion-based dilemma strategies) became more popular, particularly in America (Lovat et al., 2010; Arthur, 2005).

The 1980s and 1990s saw more interest in character and moral education, reflecting the Conservative government's commitment to family values (Hawkes, 2010; Arthur, 2005). The 1988 National Curriculum included a responsibility for schools to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (SMSC) (Birdwell et al., 2015, p. 38), but provided no particular practical guidance. In 1996 the Schools' Curriculum and Assessment Authority attempted to use a National Forum to establish a core set of values held by British society. The incoming Labour government incorporated these into their revised National Curriculum (Hawkes, 2010; Arthur, 2005). Policies such as 'every child matters' and SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) suggested some government interest in education improving pupil wellbeing (Birdwell et al., 2015; See and Arthur,

2011). Nevertheless, these policies had a limited impact on educational praxis. There was little or no training, policy guidance or impact measurement (Hawkes, 2010). Macro and micro-education policy has instead prioritised academic attainment and qualifications – particularly under Michael Gove and the coalition which ended the funding for SEAL (Birdwell et al., 2015; Lexmond et al., 2011; Hawkes, 2010; Arthur, 2005). Britain here stands in contrast to the USA where varieties of character education have been part of the policy discourse since the 1980s, with 80% of US states requiring schools to teach character (Lovat et al., 2010, p. v).

### Current policy context

In the last two to three years, character education has again risen in prominence in national and international educational policy discourse, with support from across the English political spectrum (Suissa, 2015; Lovat et al., 2010). In 2014 Tristram Hunt (then Shadow Minister for Education) called on schools to teach character and resilience in the wake of the Character and Resilience Manifesto. A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on social mobility (APPG) suggested character education could improve social mobility (Paterson et al., 2014). Hunt argued character education would also prepare young people for the workplace and give them a more rounded education, something which served to distance him from Michael Gove's focus on academic achievement (Harrison, 2016; BBC News, 2014; Garner, 2014; Paterson et al., 2014).

It was Gove's replacement, Nicky Morgan, who brought character education to prominence in English politics (Harrison, 2016; Birdwell et al., 2015). Her speeches in late 2014 set out her vision for England to become a "global leader in teaching character and resilience", arguing that "the expectations that we place on our schools can't simply be academic" (DfE, 2014; DfE and Morgan, 2014, p. unpagged). Her speeches were followed by the launch of the character education grant in January 2015 which allocated £3.5 million of funding (£6 million in 2016) for education providers engaged in character education (DfE and Timpson, 2016; DfE, 2015a). At a micro policy level multiple schools, academies and educational providers have character

education policies; examples include King's Leadership Academy and Yes Futures (Birdwell et al., 2015; DfE, 2015b).

Although the DfE under Morgan promoted character education through grants and speeches, the only requirement under Ofsted is for school leaders to provide SMSC, which dates from 1988 (Ofsted, 2016; Birdwell et al., 2015). The DfE does not give a precise definition of character education saying they welcome "diverse approaches to teaching character" and that they want to "liberate schools to innovate" (DfE, 2016a unpagged). However, character grant applications are assessed on the impact that "schemes will have on underpin[ing] success in school and work" (DfE and Timpson, 2016), which suggests a more performance, rather than virtues focused, approach to character. At a micro scale case study schools in Birdwell's report (2015) used both performance and values approaches to character.

### [Character education and social mobility](#)

One common argument made by proponents of character education is that it can reduce educational inequality and increase social mobility (Paterson et al., 2014; Tough, 2013). The context here is the widespread view that state education should promote social mobility, and Education Secretaries from David Blunkett to Justine Greening have viewed reducing educational inequality as part of their mission (Greening, 2016; May, 2016; DfE and Morgan, 2014; Hoskins and Barker, 2014, p. 20).

Think tanks such as Demos and the APPG have suggested that character and resilience are "major factors in social mobility" and a "good society" and that policies and interventions promoting character should be pursued by the State (Birdwell et al., 2015; Lexmond et al., 2011, p. 12; Paterson et al., 2014, p. 6). The American journalist Paul Tough (2013), who has been hugely influential in promoting character education (Kristjánsson, 2015), views it as key to improving the odds for poor children. He argues that traits such as grit are the missing ingredient in enabling students from poor backgrounds to succeed. Possessing performance based character traits such as grit has been linked with success in school and work (Gutman and

Schoon, 2013; Tough, 2013; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005). Gutman and Schoon's meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental studies of non-cognitive skills from 1995 – 2013 found a strong correlation between performance character traits or non-cognitive skills and outcomes in later life including academic achievement, reduced crime and financial stability. However it is important to note that their findings are correlations and that there is limited evidence of causation (Gutman and Schoon, 2013).

Goodman et al. (2015) used data from British cohort studies to argue that children from poorer backgrounds were more likely to display poor conduct and emotional problems than their wealthier peers. They argue that targeting non-professional families for interventions to promote social and emotional skills could potentially help 'level the playing field' in terms of access to top jobs (Goodman et al., 2015, p. 63). Goodman's conclusions were based only on parental reporting, in comparison to other studies which have used self and adult reporting to measure character. Lovat (2011), however, questions the utility of relying on parent reporting as in his research parents displayed less awareness of character than students and teachers. Bourdieu uses the concepts of habitus and cultural capital as part of his explanation for how social inequality is reproduced across generations. He argues that from childhood people are influenced by the beliefs, values, conduct, manners and speech of their social group (habitus), and that people from more prosperous social classes are more likely to acquire the social and cultural capital needed to succeed (Bourdieu cited in Hoskins and Barker, 2014, p. 13). For example Hoskins and Barker's (2014) qualitative interviews with 80 teenagers found that their aspirations and career goals were strongly influenced by their family and class background. Something supported by Goodman's analysis of the British Cohort study data (Goodman et al., 2015). Schools such as King's Leadership Academy are thus aiming to provide an alternative source of cultural capital through their character education policies. At King's goal setting, induction ceremonies and extra-curricular activities aim to develop students' aspirations and promote educational achievement (Birdwell et al., 2015; DfE, 2015b). However as Goodman (2015) notes, the link between aspirations and achievement is complex with aspirations not always matching up to students' attainment.

Proponents of character education like Duckworth and Tough assume that character traits such as grit are malleable and are influenced by family background (Rimfeld et al., 2016). However, Rimfeld uses data from 4,600 participants in the British Twins Early Development Study to argue that genetics have a stronger influence on traits. He compared self-reported scoring on personality traits such as grit and GCSE results with mono and dizygotic twin pairs. Rimfeld suggests that genetic differences account for around a third of the variability in grit (Rimfeld et al., 2016, pp. 6–8). Rimfeld's data is based only on self-reported data and focuses only on academic achievement up until age 16, limiting the generalisability of his conclusions. However, he raises an important point that we cannot assume the malleability of character traits, especially in older students. Additionally, there is almost no long term empirical evidence of effective outcomes for character education programmes (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Was et al., 2006). The failure of interventions such as the Changing Mindset Project to produce a statistically significant increase in academic outcomes for primary school students (Rienzo et al., 2015) highlights the need for caution on character's worth as a subject for educational policy.

Overall, the evidence that character education can improve aspirations or mitigate disadvantage is largely theoretical and indirect (Was et al., 2006). Furthermore, some have questioned whether it is even possible for education policy alone to improve social mobility, as the educational system more commonly reproduces rather than mitigates class inequalities (Hoskins and Barker, 2014; Barker, 2007; Whitty, 2002). Free school meals students at 'good' or 'outstanding' schools are still far less likely than their advantaged peers to do well, and the best performing schools are generally those with wealthier intakes (Barker, 2007; Whitty, 2002). In keeping with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Whitty notes that poor diet, housing and illness affect educational achievement (Whitty, 2002) and cannot be addressed by education policy alone. Conservative politicians like Nicky Morgan and Timpson argue 'good' character and academic achievement "prepare our young people for life in modern Britain, regardless of their background or

where they grew up” (DfE, 2016a, p. unpagged). However, a university degree is no longer necessarily associated with strongly improved earnings; 10 years after graduating the lowest quartile of graduates have median earnings of £20,000, which is below the UK average salary (DfE, 2016b). For some debt payment may wipe out any earnings premium (Kemp-King, 2016). Parental income retains a strong influence on graduates’ earnings, even when controlling for course and institution (Britton et al., 2016) and of the OECD countries, England has the second most overqualified workforce after Japan (Kemp-King, 2016). The ability of character education policies alone to improve social mobility and overcome parental disadvantage is therefore questionable.

Some theorists even suggest character education can be used to deliberately obscure the unequal nature of society. Suissa notes the conceptual underpinnings of character are not spelled out by politicians, schools or educational providers (Suissa, 2015), instead it is presented as a consensus policy (Suissa, 2015; Paterson et al., 2014; Lexmond et al., 2011). In failing to criticise or question the status quo, character education can be seen as an inherently conservative policy – young people’s failures are due to their lack of ‘good character’ – whether performative or virtue based (Suissa, 2015; Arthur, 2005). Character education policies implicitly blame individuals rather than structural constraints for social inequality. In particular the argument that resilience or grit is an important component in successful life outcomes (Tough, 2013; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005) can imply that those who do not succeed have done so because of their lack of effort (Suissa, 2015).

Kristjansson, argues it is more feasible in the short term to improve the lives of individual young people through character education than to attempt large-scale social reform (Kristjánsson, 2013). However, this argument ignores the potential impact of its use in policy discourse. As Suissa notes, there are some kinds of things we perhaps shouldn’t be resilient to (Suissa, 2015). The neoliberal introduction of markets into education inevitably means that there will be successes and failures. (Lingard and Ozga, 2007; Seddon et al.,

2007; Whitty, 2002). By linking educational inequality to character, the discourse becomes one of individual rather than the system failure. Character education thus creates a discourse that places the responsibility for inequality on individuals.

## Wellbeing and academic attainment

### Wellbeing

A second reason advanced for promoting character education in schools is to improve the long-term wellbeing and life outcomes of young people. Some have seen this as an antidote to policies focused on grades and academic achievement. Pring (2010) argues that teaching values is a vital counterpoint to the impoverished neoliberal take on education. He views developing pupil wellbeing, not academic achievement, as the central goal of education. Kristjánsson similarly positions virtues based character education as standing against the neoliberal “technicist and instrumentalist” view of education (Kristjánsson, 2013, p. 10). Both Kristjánsson and Pring use a value based definition of character and their arguments are theoretical not empirical.

Character education is also seen more widely as a way to move beyond the narrow focus on academics in education policy. Surveys by Ofsted of parents have suggested that they view current education policy as neglecting character (Ofsted, 2015) whilst the CBI’s 2012 report criticised the education system’s narrow focus on exam success and called for character education as a way to prepare young people better for the workplace (CBI, 2012). This language can also be seen in government policy for example when announcing the 2015 grants the DfE stated that character education was “equally important” as pupil outcomes and that the grants would help “place character education on a par with academic learning for pupils across the country” (DfE, 2014; DfE and Morgan, 2014).

There is some evidence to suggest that character is important for students’ long-term wellbeing however, as with the evidence for character improving social mobility, the evidence here is mostly correlational. Heckman argues

that non-cognitive skills are far stronger predictors of life success than cognitive scores (Heckman et al., 2014; Kautz et al., 2014). Using the American GED test (a test given to high school drop outs and promoted as an equivalent qualification to a high school graduation) he found that although high school graduates and GED recipients had similar cognitive scores, GEDs had less positive life outcomes. Only 3-4% of GED recipients gained degrees compared to 27% of high school graduates (Heckman et al., 2014, p. 28). Heckman concludes it is character rather than cognitive ability which enables high school graduates to have better life outcomes. However, Heckman does not consider other variables such as wealth or cultural capital, which may benefit high school graduates.

Other longitudinal studies have also found correlations between performance character traits and later life outcomes. Goodman (2015) using data from the British Cohort Study (discussed above) found a positive association between self-control in childhood and several measures of adult wellbeing including mental health, partnerships and life satisfaction. Gutman and Schoon's (2013) review of literature also found positive associations between non-cognitive traits such as self-control and improved finances in later life. However, they caution that character traits are not a 'magic bullet' that leads to success and note that there are significant gaps in research, especially with finding causal links. Conflicting definitions of character have hampered research, with different studies including different traits. For example, there is stronger longitudinal evidence on self-control's impact than grit (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005).

The majority of studies also take a performance rather than virtue based definition of character, with the more abstract nature of the latter increasing the difficulty of creating objective measures (Was et al., 2006) with many relying on self-reported data. A 2007 review of 93 character education programmes, undertaken by the What Works Clearing House for the US government, only found two interventions that had had a statistically significant impact and these were related to school behaviour and academic achievement rather than wellbeing (WWC and US Department of Education, 2007).

### Academic achievement

Despite the ideals of Pring and Lovat, performance character education has frequently been promoted as a way to boost students' academic performance. For example, Deborah Orr the head of Bedford academy specifically cites low student attainment as the motivation for her school to implement a character education scheme and credits it with improving academic outcomes (Orr, 2015). One of the criteria for the government character grant awards is whether interventions support academic attainment (Department of Education (DfE) and Timpson, 2016). Both Nicky Morgan and Timpson stressed that character education benefits academic performance as well as wellbeing: "One of the other myths I'm keen to dispel is that character education, and academic attainment are mutually exclusive. Far from it. For me, they are two sides of the same coin." (DfE, 2016a)

Lovat (2011) believes motivation and engagement have a strong effect on schoolwork as well as, or possibly even more than, cognition. A study of 316 schools taking part in the Australian values' education programme found positive outcomes in regards to classroom climate, behaviour and student achievement in participating schools. Lovat's findings here are based on primarily teacher reported data or subjective measures of classroom ambience, so need to be treated with caution as they are potentially liable to experience the Hawthorne affect (Was et al., 2006). Duckworth also claims that 'grit' or self-discipline is a stronger determiner of academic success than IQ (Duckworth and Seligman, 2005). She used self, parent and teacher reports of self-discipline as well as a behavioural gratification tests to measure grit and compared them with students' SATS scores. She found that self-discipline scores were the strongest predictors of final grades even when controlling for IQ and other assessment scores. Whilst Duckworth's findings held true when repeated on a different sample of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, they are based on a highly-limited sample of majority Caucasian students attending a selective school. Although Duckworth also found positive correlations between grit scores and grades for a sample of university students and military cadets (Gutman and Schoon, 2013) her research

findings are still based on selective, high-achieving populations and there generalisability is questionable (Rimfeld et al., 2016).

### Character and neoliberalism

Overall, although many studies have linked character to both improved life outcomes and educational attainment, the empirical evidence for character interventions is far from conclusive. Why then has the policy garnered support from across the political spectrum and from major think tanks (Birdwell et al., 2015; Garner, 2014; Paterson et al., 2014; CBI, 2012)?

The deliberately vague definitions of character used by the government and some of those promoting it (DfE, 2016a; Birdwell et al., 2015) has allowed character education to be all things to all people. Whether you are interested in students' moral character (Kristjánsson, 2015; See and Arthur, 2011), wellbeing, (Pring, 2010) social mobility (Paterson et al., 2014; Tough, 2013), or academic achievement (Orr, 2015; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005), character education has been presented as a solution (Tough, 2013). This has enabled it to garner support from a diverse group of school leaders, charities, think tanks and politicians from different parties.

It would be a mistake to see character as disruptive to mainstream neoliberal educational policies. Character education policy, as promoted by Nicky Morgan during her time at the DfE, fitted closely with her and her predecessor's policies of encouraging markets and competition in education, "our reforms over the last 6 years ... have been about liberating schools to innovate and have the freedom to deliver what really works" (DfE, 2016a). Morgan and Demos have used character education to promote academies and free schools: "The new autonomy afforded to schools means they can choose to instil these character traits in young people within and outside the curriculum, using innovative new methods" (DfE, 2016c; Birdwell et al., 2015). Character education is seen as the responsibility of academies and free schools with the support of social partnerships with charities such as the National Citizens Service or even businesses like Barclays (DfE, 2016c,

2016a; Birdwell et al., 2015). The role of the State in education or welfare thus is distanced except as a provider of a bidding process (DfE, 2015a).

Arthur (2005) warns that performance based character can lead to young people being viewed as products for consumption. Although the DfE has avoided giving a precise definition of character, the criteria on which the character grants are judged - academic attainment, promoting skills valued by employers, preparing children for life in British society – are indicative of the government’s vision. The focus here is strongly on performative not moral character and on achievement rather than wellbeing. With the support of business organisations such as the CBI (2012), character education aims to prepare young people for the workplace or as Morgan puts it “life in modern Britain” (DfE, 2016a, p. unpagged).

### Problems and criticisms

As noted previously, there is rivalry in the UK between those who view character education as having a moral or values component and those who take a performance approach (Kristjánsson, 2015). Supporters of the Jubilee Centre such as Kristjánsson have been very critical of what he sees as an “instrumentalist, performance driven, and amoral view of character” (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 1). He argues that teaching performance character strengths without moral restraint can be dangerous: “what we want to instil is not the grit of a repeat offender” (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 6). Arthur (2005) also views its lack of an underlying values structure as dangerous, risking it becoming a form of social engineering enabling governments to mould young people according to their own ideals. For example, the government has linked character education with its counter-extremism strategy of promoting British values (DfE, 2016c, 2016a).

Arthur and Kristjánsson (Kristjánsson, 2015; Arthur, 2005) argue that using Aristotelian virtues ethics as the basis for their character education schemes is the best way to prevent this as it provides a specific values system. Virtue ethics views morality as embedded within the whole person and that virtuous actions are based on rational thought or wisdom (phronesis). Therefore

character education aims to embed character strengths in young people, giving them the tools to live virtuous lives (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015; Hursthouse, 2013; Carr, 2011).

However, any list of character strengths or virtues will be relative to the culture in which it was created (Hursthouse, 2013). Calls for character education have been a feature in responses to moral panics. Worries about behaviour, violence and crime are frequently cited as a justification for compulsory character education in the US, and worries about youth behaviour have also led to calls for values or character education in the UK (See and Arthur, 2011; Thompson, 2002). This is despite reported crime in the UK being on a long term downward trend (Office of National Statistics, 2015). Teachers and educators implementing character education are also likely to see it as a way of influencing behavioural outcomes. Multiple interviews and surveys of teacher opinions from Australia to Turkey have shown that teachers tend to focus on the conformity and behaviour of students when evaluating the impact of character education schemes (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; Lovat et al., 2011; See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004). Thornberg and Oğuz for example, found that teachers of values education in Turkey and Sweden mainly focused on compliance with societal values and norms, and that teachers frequently used their personal values as guidance (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013). Deviance by young people from societal norms has been viewed by some sociologists as a response to structural constraints. Cohen argued that deviance by low-achieving, working class boys was a result of status frustration. They recognised that they had little chance of gaining high status according to the middle class norms and values promoted by school and instead created their own deviant subculture, which rejected values such as ambition in favour of immediate gratification (Cohen, 1971).

The agency of students themselves in internalising character strengths should also be considered (Halstead, 2010; Davis, 2003)(Davis, 2003). Berkowitz's (2011) review of best practice in character education advocates that educational leaders should act as role models for good character.

Studies have also shown that teachers in the UK and abroad also view role modelling as an important way to teach character (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; Lovat et al., 2011; See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004). However, See and Arthur's interviews with British pupils found that most did not see their teachers as role models (See and Arthur, 2011), although their small sample size limits the generalisability of these findings. Halstead (2010) and Davis (2003) also argue that students do not always respond to values education in the way that educational leaders want, and that obedience is not necessarily a sign that they have absorbed values.

The associations between behaviour and character education provide weight to Arthur and Suissa's (2015; 2005) worries that character education policies have the potential to be used as agents of social control (See and Arthur, 2011; Arthur, 2005). Arthur argues for a consensus based approach to counter this, pointing to surveys showing parental and young people's support for character education (Kristjánsson, 2013; See and Arthur, 2011; Arthur, 2005). Suissa (2015) suggests that character education should be explicit about its political and philosophical views and allow for young people to debate political questions. The Jubilee Centre has also argued that character education is an inevitable and positive part of a school's hidden curriculum. Therefore, it is better to make it explicit and use it to develop critical thinking (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015). In any case, character education cannot be seen as a neutral or value free approach.

Character education policies incite debate because, ultimately, we are debating the purpose and value that leaders ascribe to the role of education within society. It is contentious precisely because it gets to the heart of what education should be about (Pring, 2010). My research now aims to explore the practical implications and influence of these debates on the leadership of character education at Hope Works.

## Methodology

My research takes the form of a case study collecting data on Hope Works' character education policy, using semi-structured interviews with eight educational leaders. In this chapter I outline my methodological approaches and explain the rationale behind these choices. Subsequently, I outline the specific methodology used and evaluate my research design process, data collection and sampling.

### Part 1: Methodological approaches

At its heart, educational research is based on seeking knowledge. The philosophical underpinnings of this quest, in particular the researcher's approach to epistemology (theories of knowledge) and ontology (theories of existence) are thus the starting points for designing research (Briggs et al., 2012; Merriam, 1998). Researchers often align themselves with one of two broad paradigms: positivism or interpretivism.

Positivism argues that "reality is stable, observable and measurable" (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). It takes a scientific and objective approach with data collection based on observable and measurable phenomena. Positivist researchers collect quantitative data on a macro-scale in order to investigate causal links, test hypotheses and create generalisable conclusions or 'laws' (Briggs et al., 2012). By contrast interpretivism argues that reality is a social construct, created by individuals through their subjective interpretations. Consequently, interpretivists see multiple realities and interpretations as valid. Interpretivism has strong links with symbolic interactionism, which seeks to understand individual constructions of reality by exploring the negotiations of meaning and interpretations we give to the world around us through social interactions with others (Briggs et al., 2012; Merriam, 1998).

A large proportion of research on character education has attempted to take a positivist approach, (See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004) collecting quantitative data and using statistical analysis to try and record observable impacts of character. Examples of this approach include

Heckman (2014), Gutman and Schoon (2013), Goodman (2015) and Duckworth (2005). However, Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey (2004) argue convincingly that limiting analysis of character education to quantitative analysis misses out on a vital component of character education - student and teachers' experiences. Qualitative studies such as See and Arthur's (2011), offer important insights on the impact of character education, for example the fact that students may not see their teachers as role models for good behaviour. As character education asks students to internalise value, I argue that it is vital to examine the meanings and motivations held by leaders promoting it. This can only be done through qualitative research.

A third paradigm used in educational research is critical theory which seeks to examine how power is produced and reproduced in education. It examines policies and politics with the explicit aim of promoting a society based on equality and democracy (Cohen et al., 2003). As character education involves questions about the purpose and nature of education in society (Pring, 2010), it is vital to consider the political context of the policy. Much of the research criticising and evaluating the ideals of character education takes the viewpoint of critical theory (Suissa, 2015; Carr, 2011; Arthur, 2005; Davis, 2003). However, a lot of this is based on philosophical analysis rather than empirical evidence (See and Arthur, 2011). My research primarily makes use of the interpretative paradigm in that I seek to reconstruct the subjective meanings given to character education by educational leaders at Hope Works. Like Hoskins and Barker (2007), Ball (2003) and Courtney and Gunter (2015), I use micro-scale research to collect rich and detailed qualitative data, in order to try and achieve 'erklärendes verstehen' - to understand the meaning and the motives given to character education by leaders at Hope Works (Cohen et al., 2003). As Hope Works' mission is focused on addressing educational inequality, I have also included aspects of critical theory in my analysis (Cohen et al., 2003). I take a Weberian approach to class, viewing it as a social structure which is shaped by individuals (Hammack, 1980). Like Bernstein, I argue that educational policy is inherently political and my analysis considers the political and ideological context of Hope Work's character education policy (Bernstein,

1977 p.85 cited in Whitty, 2002). Schostak (2006) argues that it is not possible to be truly objective. The act of collecting, recording and interpreting data itself generates new meanings and is filtered through the researcher's perceptions. As an insider researcher (Mercer, 2007) at Hope Works, I supported its mission to challenge educational inequality – my analysis and interpretation of the data collected is viewed through this framework.

There are multiple approaches to collecting qualitative data including ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenology (Merriam, 1998). Here I chose to use a case study approach as they are particularly suited to understanding phenomena and policies in the context of real life situations (Bassegy, 2012; Merriam, 1998). A case study is defined by Bassegy (1999, 2012) as an empirical enquiry within a bounded system - one limited in time and space. My investigation focuses on a single policy in a single organisation at a single point of time. Bassegy (2012) identifies three different categories of case studies used in educational research: theory seeking, storytelling/picture-drawing and evaluative. I take a picture-drawing approach as my research primarily seeks to describe how and why leaders at Hope Works operationalised the concept of character education in their policy (Bassegy, 2012). I also seek to contribute to theoretical debates on the role of character education (Suissa, 2015; Kristjánsson, 2013; Arthur, 2005) and educational leaders in implementing education policy (Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Ball et al., 2012; Barker, 2007; Ball, 2003).

One limitation of case studies is that their lack of representativeness hinders their generalisability (Bassegy, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Bassegy (1999) argues that this can be overcome by using 'fuzzy' generalisations to suggest things which 'may work'. Merriam similarly argues that case studies make a vital contribution to theory by providing the descriptive material from which theories can be generated for further testing. Schostak also argues that case studies cannot be reduced simplistically to a single unit as individuals make decisions with reference to the whole. Consequently, the findings of a case study have "some generalisable relationship" to wider society (Schostak, 2006, p. 22). A further weakness of case study research is that an individual

researcher is usually responsible for the collection and analysis of qualitative data, raising issues of validity and reliability. I consider my attempts to mitigate this in the next section.

## Part 2: Research design

### **Methods:**

I chose to use interviews as my data collection instrument because this was the method most suited to gaining an in-depth understanding of thoughts and perceptions (Coleman, 2012); unlike questionnaires or experimental designs which are focused on outcomes (Arthur, 2015; Goodman et al., 2015; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005). Using in-depth interviews – over an hour long – and a micro-scale enabled me to generate rich and detailed data for analysis within the time frame available to me as a part-time researcher (Cohen et al., 2003). My approach here was supported by Thornberg and Oğuz, (2013) See and Arthur (See and Arthur, 2011) and Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey who all used interviews with teachers as their sole method of data collection. Neither self-administered questionnaires or observation were suitable for this study, the latter because I wanted to explore the meanings and rationale behind the policy not just its impact. Although questionnaires, as used by Goodman (2015), would have enabled a larger sample size they are also likely to have had a lower response rate, and the lack of an interviewer means that respondents cannot clarify the meanings of questions (Cohen et al., 2003). A limitation of my approach was that I did not use methodological triangulation, however this is common in educational research using interviews (Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Coleman, 2012). Weaknesses of interviews include interviewer bias affecting validity, small sample sizes and low reliability (Cohen et al., 2003). Interviews are valuable because they capture participants accounts and viewpoints in that place and time (Schostak, 2006).

### **Interview schedule**

The interview schedule aims to translate research objectives into specific questions (Cohen et al., 2003). Interviews range between structured and

unstructured, with the former using pre-set standardised questions (Coleman, 2012). Like Thornberg and Oğuz (2013) I used a semi-structured approach designing a set of standardised questions (Cohen et al., 2003) then using individual follow-ups as needed (Appendix A). Some researchers have argued that unstructured interviews allow for participants to express themselves more fully (Schostak, 2006; Kvale, 1996). However, as a novice interviewer I found that pre-written prompt questions helped avoid leading statements and ensured interviews were focused around my research questions. Furthermore, it enabled me to make direct comparisons between respondents' answers, increasing the reliability of my research (Briggs et al., 2012; Cohen et al., 2003). I primarily used open-ended questions and encouraged long unstructured answers – often several minutes - to give informants the space to express meanings in their own words (Brenner, 2012). Following Brenner I used a funnel shape to design interview questions, starting with general questions on Hope Works' mission, and ending with specifics of policy. I started with a 'grand tour' question asking respondents to describe their role at Hope Works (Brenner, 2012). This served to set up a mutually understood context for the interview. As an insider researcher, my interviewees knew that this was information I was already aware of so the questions served as a marker to set the interview apart from the day-to-day work environment (Mercer, 2007; Schostak, 2006). In subsequent questions interviewees, unprompted, described Hope Works policies as though I had no assumed knowledge. The interview had thus become a distinct space separate from ordinary conversation which provided a space for interviewees to share their views without judgement (Brenner, 2012; Schostak, 2006). Pre-existing research in this area has not published specific data collection instruments (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004), however I used areas of interest identified in both critical theory and empirical research on character education to identify question topics (Coleman, 2012). For example, I deliberately used a direct and partially challenging approach (Brenner, 2012) in one question. "Some people have criticised character education saying it imposes values on others – what do you think about that?" This offered respondents the chance to clearly state their support or rejection of a

common criticism. Other questions took an indirect approach (Cohen et al., 2003) to avoid influencing respondents answers.

### Piloting

A draft version of the interview schedule was piloted with a volunteer. From this I identified and edited some leading questions. Data from the pilot was not used in my analysis. The pilot interview was also too short (30 minutes), so in subsequent interviews I made more use of short and non-verbal prompts (Kvale, 1996) to encourage respondents to elaborate on their answers.

### Sampling

Hope Works was identified as a suitable case study on the basis that character education was part of its mission and it had a clear policy for using character in its programmes. As an insider researcher (Mercer, 2007) I also had easy access to staff. My original aim was to use respondent triangulation by interviewing young people and educational leaders at Hope Works (See and Arthur, 2011; Merriam, 1998). However, due to operational constrictions I had to confine my target population to adults. My sampling frame was thus the list of current staff and volunteers (Gorard, 2001). Interviewees were selected using a mix of purposive and convenience sampling (see Appendix B for sample characteristics), the latter being a common choice in qualitative educational research (Briggs et al., 2012; See and Arthur, 2011; Merriam, 1998). I deliberately interviewed all members of the senior staff team. I then sought to interview people from a range of positions in the organisation in order to have maximum variation in sample characteristics (Merriam, 1998, See Appendix B ). The size of sample was limited by my production of time intensive global transcripts (Cohen et al., 2003). I thus chose to focus on depth over breadth but obtained a sample large enough that I started to achieve saturation - no new major themes or information emerged in the final interviews (Coleman, 2012; Merriam, 1998). Non-random sampling methods have the potential for researcher bias (Gorard, 2001), however my sample, although too small to be representative, gave a good cross section of authority positions at Hope Works.

## Data collection

All interviews were conducted individually to give interviewees the privacy to share their opinions. My position as an insider researcher resulted in an easy rapport with participants, all of whom gave long detailed answers to the majority of questions with only occasional prompting needed (Brenner, 2012; Mercer, 2007; Schostak, 2006). Interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and backed up by notetaking. Brenner (2012) comments that taking notes is often expected by interviewees, encouraging longer answers. The notes were also member-checked by respondents at the end of the interviews increasing the validity of their accounts (Brenner, 2012; Coleman, 2012). As the global transcripts were each ten pages or more in length it was not practical to ask interviewees to member-check these. Staff were in two different office sites, so I conducted a mixture of face-to-face and Skype interviews. Although this reduced the reliability of my findings, office meetings were frequently conducted via Skype so I knew this would not affect my ability to develop rapport (Cohen et al., 2003).

Interviewer bias was a considerable concern affecting the validity of interviews, as there were status differentials between myself and the senior and junior staff interviewed (Coleman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2003). Prior to interviews I avoided discussing my research with staff to avoid participants being influenced (Mercer, 2007). To reduce the impact of the status differential I explicitly used introductory grand tour questions (see above) to establish the interview as a bounded space separate from the everyday work environment (Brenner, 2012; Mercer, 2007; Schostak, 2006). However, interviews are inevitably interactional processes with both participants involved in shaping meanings (Brenner, 2012; Schostak, 2006). Schostak argues that attempting to limit interviewer bias by controlling interview variables can in fact further reduce the validity of interviews as it acts to limit respondents' answers. In general, the interviewees gave full and seemingly frank answers to questions – which included sharing of personal information like their leadership style. Of more impact may have been self-censorship due to awareness that the interview was being recorded (Coleman, 2012). In a couple of instances remarks were prefaced by 'this is off record' or

'personally', usually if specific partners or projects were named. The same awareness may have made junior staff reluctant to be critical of the policy or leadership. On the other hand, the fact that participants felt confident enough to request this suggests that I had established an atmosphere of trust.

### Data analysis

In keeping with my Weberian social constructivist approach to research and policy, I used discourse analysis as my primary method of data analysis (Perryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2003). Discourse is defined as "the ways in which language works in our engagements with the world...and each other, so creating and shaping the social, political and cultural formations of our societies" (Hyland and Paltridge, 2011 cited in Perryman, 2012, p. 310).

Discourse analysis involves the detailed reading and linguistic analysis of texts (Cohen et al., 2003). Discourses are valid subjects for research especially in educational policy (Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Ball, 2003) as they can act to shape thought structures and even limit dissent (Perryman, 2012). Examining discourse illuminates issues of power and social control, and allows the researcher to preserve a sense of the text as a whole (Perryman, 2012; Schostak, 2006; Cohen et al., 2003).

Analysis is undertaken on complete texts which are as naturally occurring as possible – hence my use of open questions. I used voice recordings to write global transcripts for each interview (Cohen et al., 2003). Although transcripts can never capture the full context of an interview – with body language lost - I mitigated this by including voice tone, hesitation and other contextual data as far as possible in the transcripts (Schostak, 2006; Cohen et al., 2003).

I took an inductive approach to my findings. Transcripts were closely read, compared and re-read to identify common themes and patterns (Brenner, 2012; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004). I verified my analysis by using some emergent coding, generating theme maps (see Appendix C) to confirm themes common to the majority of participants (Cohen et al., 2003). Finally, I used peer debriefing with a professional colleague to check my conclusions and to help limit partiality (Brenner, 2012).

## Ethics

As noted by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), research should respect: “persons, knowledge, democratic values, quality of educational research and academic freedom” (BERA, 2011, p. 4).

Permission to undertake research was gained from the CEO of Hope Works. All participants gave voluntary informed consent prior to arranging interviews and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time (BERA, 2011; Cohen et al., 2003). Before each interview, I read a set of statements to interviewees (Appendix A) making it clear that participation was voluntary, explaining how interview data would be used and seeking consent to make an audio recording. All participants agreed with the statements. No incentives were offered for taking part in interviews. As discussed in my ethics form (Appendix D) there is a slight chance that the case study organisation may be identifiable from the description of its work, so I ensured that all interviewees and the CEO gave informed consent on this basis. I have used pseudonyms throughout and removed mentions of partner schools. To maintain confidentiality and privacy I have not published some of the organisation’s contextual details. The full transcripts of interviews and policy documents were also not included as they had the potential to contain identifying information. Interviewees were also asked to read notes made at the end of the interviews and given the opportunity to withdraw or edit the record as they wished.

Overall, I felt that my research design enabled me to collect relevant and useful data. I was surprised at the extent to which participants were happy to discuss the character education policy in detail in the interviews and the transcripts provided a rich source of evidence for discourse analysis. If I were to repeat this work I would seek to interview a wider selection of volunteers to gain further insight into the praxis of the policy. However, the length of the interviews meant that eight participants gave me plenty of data to analyse.

## Analysis

I have structured my findings thematically using my three research questions.

1. In the perception of the educational leaders, what definitions of character and character education are used in Hope Works policies?
2. In the perception of educational leaders at Hope Works, what is the rationale for character education, and what outcomes do they hope to achieve?
3. What leadership and policy processes have been used to formulate and implement Hope Works' character education policy?

For each I have integrated a description of my findings with my analysis and discussion. Selected quotes from the interviews have been used to illustrate and exemplify points. I explore the definitions of character and character education used at Hope Works in text and praxis. I then explore the rationales given for character education by the educational leaders in the study, and the outcomes they hoped to achieve. Finally, I consider the contextual influences that have shaped the production of these policies and conclude by discussing the implications of my findings for character education policy and educational leadership.

### Q1: In the perception of educational leaders, what definitions of character and character education are used in Hope Works policies?

#### **Definitions of character and character education**

Hope Works' policy texts (on their website and in training materials) specifically support an Aristotelian, virtue based definition of character and character education, quoting the Jubilee Centre definitions (2015). They identify four specific character strengths which Hope Works aims to develop: fairness; self-control; staying power; good judgment. Of these, good judgment and fairness were identified as having a moral component. The

four character strengths identified in the policy's texts had clearly become a central part of the staff's approach to character education. All the staff members interviewed, including the intern, referenced them specifically when asked to describe the Hope Works approach to character education.

*"It was really nice, because you could see her...working on her self-control"*

Combined there were over 160 separate mentions of these four character strengths throughout the eight interviews. In comparison to the vast array of values and skills used in the national discourse (Gutman and Schoon, 2013) Hope Works' staff held an integrated vision. However, the extent to which this was shared by the volunteers working with the young people is more debatable. The volunteer interviewed could not initially recall any of the four character strengths and instead talked about promoting manners.

*"There were other character traits that we were trying to instil but I can't remember what they were"*

Both the CEO and the Director of Operations specifically mentioned Aristotelian virtue ethics. They argued that Hope Works helped young people to lead "good" lives and make "choices which are good for yourself and others" suggesting they saw character education as having a moral component (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013). Additionally four out of eight interviewees identified happiness as being one of the aims of character education which supports Pring's (2010) argument that it should promote student wellbeing.

However, the majority of the respondents' language focused on performance definitions of character. Like Gutman and Schoon (2013), the Head of Monitoring and Evaluation used a purely performance based definition of character as "non-cognitive skills". Five of the eight educational leaders interviewed made only slight references to the moral side of character education. Instead "educational success", "employment" and "aspiration"

were frequently referenced as the desired outcomes of character education (Kristjánsson, 2015; Tough, 2013).

*“It will help them .... To achieve positive things in life and achieve what they want”.*

Good judgement, the most overtly moral of Hope Works’ character strengths, was only referenced 14 times compared to over 100 mentions for self-control and staying power.

Overall, although there was some support for values education, performance based definitions dominated the discourse. Ball argues that a focus on targets and outcomes by educational leaders is a hallmark of the standards agenda (Ball, 2003). My analysis suggests educational leaders were less comfortable discussing morals. The policy texts described ‘character strengths’. The CEO noted he had recently decided to change this from ‘character virtues’ as virtues “are like I think this is right and that is wrong”. Other interviewees also avoided using virtues, mainly using neutral words such as strengths and traits (see below).

Table 1: Words used to describe character

Description of character	Number of educational leaders using (total more than 8 due to multiple words used by individuals)
Strengths	4
Traits	3
Values	3
Virtues	(2 mentions as explaining why don't use any more)

Whether due to the influence of the standards agenda (Ball, 2003) or simply a lack of confidence discussing values in a pluralistic society (Suissa, 2015; Arthur, 2005), the educational leaders here focused on performance based outcomes of character education (DfE, 2016a).

### Implementing character education at Hope Works

Exploring the impact of Hope Works' character education programme is beyond the scope of this inquiry. However, comparing policy texts with interviewees' descriptions of projects, gives us an insight into its praxis.

The policy texts aimed to teach character by means of a 'character journey', a four-stage process whereby young people were first taught to 'know and recognise' character; 'chose' to develop character strengths'; 'practised' it; then 'reflected' on their progress. Another feature of the policy as praxis, mentioned by senior staff, was the need to be explicit about character in sessions. This reflects Aristotelian virtue ethics which view morality as based on phronesis or rational thought (Hursthouse, 2013).

Whilst the policy encouraged students to choose character strengths to develop, in keeping with a constructivist approach (Was et al., 2006), these were, in practice, limited to the four predefined character traits. Thus, the leaders had a predefined ideal which they encouraged students to conform to.

*"By the time she left in year 10 she was really much much [sic] more focused and better behaved."*

Hope Works' policy was therefore much more traditional than progressive (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; Was et al., 2006) as it took a didactic approach.

During interviews, the CEO's description of running sessions aligned with the policy texts. He explicitly asked the students to identify what fairness would look like in football (know/choose), praised specific examples of fairness (practice) during the activity, and ended by asking young people to reflect on their use of fairness. Other staff members also described using character in this way during sessions.

*"The Project Leader in my group she was really good because everything she did she brought character into it"*

However, the volunteer (who had worked on two different projects) suggested that the implementation of the character policy was much less unified across the charity. She couldn't recall her project leaders explicitly mentioning character and suggested improving the programme by:

*“telling the mentors what the aims of the games were, so you could make sure kids were getting the right skills and the right things from the activities.”*

Overall, although the senior staff had a relatively clear vision for how the organisation implemented character education, based on my limited sample the policy seemed to be less consistently applied by some sessional staff.

### [Q2: In the perception of educational leaders at Hope Works, what is the rationale for character education, and what outcomes do they hope to achieve?](#)

The national policy discourse promotes character education on a variety of pretexts (see above). I examine what problems the educational leaders at Hope Works thought their character education policy could address, the outcomes they hoped for and compare these to research. Given that concern has been raised over the unexamined ideological underpinnings of character (Suissa, 2015), I analyse what the respondents' answers reveal about their attitudes to society and education.

#### **Problems**

Hope Works was part of the Fair Educational Alliance which aims to end educational inequality. It is therefore unsurprising that the interviewees were all motivated by perceived problems with inequality in the UK, especially as this a recurring theme of recent education policy (Greening, 2016; May, 2016; DfE and Morgan, 2014; Hoskins and Barker, 2014, p. 20).

Addressing educational inequality was viewed by all the respondents as a rationale for character education, despite the limited research evidence supporting its efficacy.

*“We want to focus on disadvantaged young people”*

*“I think it would help close the attainment gap, so I think the kids from most disadvantaged areas in the UK”*

A lack of opportunities or aspirations in disadvantaged areas was mentioned by all eight interviewees.

*“I think it allows... children to have opportunities that they may not have due to certain circumstances or their social background”*

Parental and family background was also mentioned by four out of eight staff as one reason why some children lacked character strengths needed to be successful.

*“They are often brought up in families where self-control isn’t taught... I’m not blaming them I’m just saying that’s how it works.”*

Others suggested that the culture and limited knowledge of opportunities in disadvantaged communities could limit young people’s aspirations.

*“Living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood um... sighs...there might be fewer people who have luxury of you know teaching virtues things [sic] to children rather than pragmatic ones”*

*“it provides an attachment to a different kind of world outside their own local community”*

Hoskins and Barker (2014) found that pupils’ aspirations and career ambitions were often shaped by their families and communities, which they explain using the Bourdieun concepts of habitus and cultural capital. Similarly, to Bourdieu, the staff and volunteers at Hope Works believed that children from disadvantaged families and communities did not acquire the character values (or cultural capital) needed to succeed. Class culture was

thus for them a cause of educational inequality. Like Tough (2013) and (Goodman et al., 2015) they saw poverty as linked to poor social and emotional skills and character education as a way of overcoming this.

The attitudes of the respondents here does little to assuage the concerns of theorists who believe that character education blames the poor for inequality (Suissa, 2015). The educational leaders perceived educational inequality as caused by cultural rather than structural problems. Cohen (1971) argues that the norms and values of education – such as hard work or delayed gratification - are primarily middle class values. In keeping with this, Hope Works encouraged its participants to subscribe to a set of values which its leaders believed were often absent from their families and community.

A second rationale for character education mentioned by all interviewees was to reduce poor behaviour and youth crime.

*“We do work with some really very tricky young people– on the extreme end of behaviour. In the main we help engage young people in school more effectively”.*

Character education was seen as improving behaviour in two ways. Teaching self-control would enable students to “engage”, do better academically, and “create a good learning environment in the classrooms for everyone else”. Furthermore, having good self-control and good judgment would prevent students from getting involved with gangs and crime.

*“He knows lots of people who are in gangs ... I think character can stop people going down that route”*

Unlike Cohen (1971) the interviewees perceived students’ behaviour as an individual issue solvable by improving character. Children taking part in Hope Works’ programmes were referred by their schools, often for behaviour problems, which may have had an influence on the interviewees’ perceptions. However, links between character education and worries about

youth behaviour are not new. Researchers interviewing teachers have found they are also likely to see character education as a tool to improve behaviour, (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004). However, student voice research has suggested that they are critical of didactic approaches to character education viewing it as moral intimidation (See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004). By trying to reduce behaviour problems through encouraging youth to subscribe to a predetermined set of values set by its leaders, Hope Works' policy can be seen as an agent of social control (Arthur, 2005). It encouraged conformity rather than addressing underlying causes of poor behaviour and crime (Cohen, 1971).

Kristjánsson and Pring's (2013; 2010) argument that character education should promote wellbeing and counteract the standards agenda had limited support. The intern and the project manager viewed character as an addition to attainment "making them a more well-rounded person" and the volunteer and Regional Manager expressed some disaffection with education's focus on standards, "the schooling system ... sees you as a number". However, none viewed character education policies as a way to counterbalance this. Although improved wellbeing was seen as a potential outcome of teaching character, respondents did not problematise students wellbeing in the same way that they did behaviour and educational inequality (Goodman et al., 2015) Interestingly the problems that they were trying to address were wide scale (educational inequality, crime, poor behaviour in schools) but the solution – good character – was individual.

### Outcomes

Hope Works' mission statement – quoted almost verbatim by three interviewees – was to enable students to reach "their full potential" and lead "good, successful and happy lives". How did staff define this?

All but one respondent mentioned the idea that Hope Works allowed students to "expand their horizons" or build their "aspirations". The assumption made by all the leaders was that British society is basically

meritocratic. Like Tough (2013), Morgan and others (Goodman et al., 2015; Heckman et al., 2014; Morgan, 2014), they believed that if students used staying-power, good judgment etc. they would be able to realise the opportunities.

*“I think Hope Works lets kids realise they can do whatever they want to do. They’re not restricted by you know - by social class or where they live”*

*“If they wanted jobs in finance would be able to pursue that [sic]. If they wanted a job in acting they would be able to pursue that. They would have the staying power to keep trying... you know to eventually be an actor or whatever.”*

Academic attainment was perceived as key to realising students’ aspirations.

*“Strong character traits I think this sets them up for the future. As well as having positive attainment at school getting those grades helps them in the future entering the world of work or getting into further education or training.”*

The staff at Hope Works were generally supportive of Morgan’s argument that character and academic attainment were two sides of the same coin (DfE, 2016c). In accordance with Duckworth (2005) and Lovat (2011) they suggested that character education could contribute to improved academic outcomes, and thus reduce educational inequality. However, as noted in the literature review, empirical evidence for the impact of teaching character was limited (Rimfeld et al., 2016; Gutman and Schoon, 2013; WWC and US Department of Education, 2007; Was et al., 2006).

*“With things like staying power it...creates those good habits so definitely an end to educational inequality which in turn would have a massive effect on poverty, on the housing crisis, on people out of work all that kind of thing.”*

Barker and Hoskins found that students they interviewed had internalised the idea of meritocratic society and viewed hard work and educational

achievement as the routes to success. Where they failed to succeed they blamed themselves (Hoskins and Barker, 2014). The educational leaders I interviewed held very similar views and unlike Whitty (2002), Hoskins and Barker (2014) did not consider whether other factors such as economic circumstances could prevent young people from achieving their ambitions.

The final component of 'success' envisaged as an outcome for character education was employment. Success at work was mentioned by six of the eight interviewees as a beneficial outcome of character education, something which echoes the CBI and Morgan (DfE, 2016a; CBI, 2012).

*“our kids would get jobs... they like ....and more likely to get well paid from them.”*

By contrast, moral outcomes of character education received much less attention. Three interviewees did suggest that character education could lead to a more virtuous society and four mentioned happiness. However, these were much vaguer outcomes compared to the specific model of success outlined above.

*“ they would ... um ... benefit society because they would be making better choices.... society as a whole would be a happier and a safer place to be.”*

*“Hope Works also tries to teach is more empathy and understanding so perhaps, perhaps ...we might have a nicer society”*

Overall the educational leaders at Hope Works believed that character education had the potential to reduce educational inequality and change society for the better. Yet I would argue that the policy at Hope Works serviced a highly conservative view, which unquestioningly assumed the meritocracy of English society. They believed changing the 'character' of individuals would lead to success, with the unvoiced implication that poor character was the cause of problems like crime and low educational attainment. Their prescriptive vision of 'success' focused on attainment and

jobs, producing gainfully employed and well behaved citizens. Hope Works' leaders did not verbalise or question the assumptions which lay underneath the programme (Suissa, 2015), thereby supporting a conservative policy discourse.

### Q3: What leadership and policy processes have been used to formulate and implement Hope Works' character education policy?

In this section I use Ball's (2012) cyclical model of influence, production and practice to analyse Hope Works' character education policy. I explore how the structure of the education system has affected educational leaders' agency to implement and formulate policy.

#### **Influence**

There were three main influences on the policy identifiable from the interviews: academic research, DfE policy and religion.

An unexpected influence was religion, specifically Catholicism. The official policy documents made no reference to religion, suggesting a secular organisation. During interviews three participants commented that character education allowed them to talk about values without mentioning religion, an argument also used by Tough (2013).

*“it enables me to talk to kids about being good people, without it being related to religion or another set of values”*

*“It doesn't impose a particular ideology not a religious type of value or organisational type of value”*

However, when asking about the policy's origins I found that the original founders and CEO (who left in 2014) were committed Catholics. They had based the four character traits on the Catholic cardinal virtues – prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (Catholic Church, 2003). The traits were reworded between 2013-14, ostensibly to make them more accessible.

However, the ideas behind the chosen values remained the same. For example, prudence is defined in the catechism as using morals to make good judgement, justice as respecting the rights of others and treating them fairly and fortitude as carrying on in the face of difficulties – i.e. staying-power (Catholic Church, 2003). Religious values were therefore a key part of Hope Works' policy discourse in that they underlie its four central character strengths.

One concern about character education is its potential to impose values (Suissa, 2015; Kristjánsson, 2013). Accordingly, I asked staff to respond to this criticism during the interviews. They rejected it quite vehemently, with all but one of the eight interviewees justifying character education by appealing to the notion of universal or consensus values.

*“One the great things about Hope Work’s character strengths I think they are universal things which humans believe are fundamentally good for each other, for themselves and each other”*

*“the character strengths themselves are kind of purer than human values”*

*“I think there are certain things which cross all lines and ... are a common thread and I think character done in the right way ... is that”*

The CEO and Director both told the same story about ‘fairness’ and their conclusion that fairness was like pi “it definitely exists, it’s a real thing you just can’t define it”. The language used here has clear religious undertones. The idea of universal values is a feature of catholic morality or divine ethics (Hare, 2014), rather than Aristotelian virtue ethics which takes a relativistic approach (Hursthouse, 2013). The exception to this was the volunteer who made a similar argument to Kristjánsson (2013), that education inevitably imposes values (through the hidden curriculum) so it’s better to do so explicitly. Despite appearances, social partnerships are rarely ideologically neutral (Selsky, 2005). The fact that Hope Works’ religious ideology was

unstated prevented critical analysis by participants who wrongly presumed secularity.

*“Maybe if there was that slight religious undertone that would sit differently.”*

A second influence on senior staff was literature on character education. It was evident that they had undertaken significant research on character education; Angela Duckworth, the Jubilee Centre and Paul Tough all received multiple mentions. Other references included Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. The Jubilee Centre was clearly influential, quoted verbatim in the policy text. Tough's (2013) and Duckworth's (2005) work was also cited by three senior staff.

*“[Tough's book] it's really interesting and gives a lot of points about sort of character education and the sort of theory behind it... the evidence shows that developing character is worthwhile.”*

*“[we] have got a really solid evidence base to show that if you have self-control and persevere then you will do well in life regardless of IQ”.*

The influence of American researchers like Tough and Duckworth illustrates how education policy has become a global discourse with international research influencing micro-scale policy (Lingard and Ozga, 2007). Senior staff clearly felt they had taken a research and evidence based approach to character education.

*“Then we started thinking about them why have we got those four [character strengths]? Do they actually help young people?”,*

*“That's why we kept the values, I think if they were shown not to be working we would have chucked them away.”*

However, academic research was not necessarily the main determiner of policy. The junior staff had far less knowledge about character education

and did not cite any research in their interviews. None of the respondents made any reference to literature criticising character education, apart from the Head of Monitoring and Evaluation who mentioned difficulties measuring its impact (Was et al., 2006).

Although Hope Works promoted itself as a character education programme, the interviews revealed that character had only become such a prominent part of policy in the last two to three years.

*“I joined in 2004, and \_\_\_\_\_ (ex CEO) didn’t talk about character education, it wasn’t a very formal concept and, it wasn’t a particularly um well-articulated”*

The founder and the trustees had included character in their original mission but the policy and four character values had been reworked by the senior staff team from 2013-15.

*“I didn’t know they [Hope Works] did character education I thought it was homework and football.... It is interesting quite a few of our funders say that ....., I don’t think we talked about it until it became fashionable discourse”.*

The question is what prompted Hope Works to do this? Around this time there was an increase in academic and popular literature on character education (Heckman et al., 2014; Paterson et al., 2014; Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Tough, 2013) and a growth of cross-party political support (DfE and Morgan, 2014; Garner, 2014). Both the CEO and the Regional Manager specifically mentioned the DfE’s support for character as an influence on policy.

*“I think there was a bit of a reawakening in it about three years ago when certain bodies particularly the Jubilee Centre and then Nicky Morgan started to talk about character education.”*

Morgan’s discourse on character education was very similar to Hope Works’. The idea that character education could help young people reach their “full

potential” came up repeatedly in DfE speeches and releases on character, (DfE, 2014, 2015d, 2015c, 2016a; DfE and Morgan, 2014). The ideas that character could improve social mobility and lead to employment – key themes in the interviews – were also themes in many of Morgan’s speeches (DfE and Timpson, 2016; DfE, 2015e, 2015e, 2015d, 2015c, 2015a, 2016a). Finally, several of the references given by Hope Works’ staff as evidence for character education, such as the Jubilee Centre, and Duckworth were also cited by Morgan (DfE, 2016a; DfE and Morgan, 2014). My findings support Seddon’s (2007) argument that social partnerships are likely to be very responsive to government policy as they are working in a market framed and funded by the government. The fact that character education had become “fashionable” in both academic and political circles seems to have encouraged Hope Works to promote a character education policy closely aligned with the government’s, perhaps because it helped them sell their services to schools.

*“Now we have Ofsted who are saying they want to see how young people’s personal development is being supported by the school. We’ve got the government who are talking about character, and overlaid that with character grants - 6 million quid ... you know what I mean it’s massive for schools”*

In discussing Hope Works’ ambitions for the future, it was even suggested that they wanted to be able to influence national and government policy on character education.

*“[we want to] be at the forefront of discussions around character especially with government”*

The national policy context as well as the values of the original staff members influenced the decisions and approach taken to character by Hope Works’ educational leaders.

## Production

Using the model of leadership as a multi-directional influence process (Yukl, 2009) I now explore how the leadership style of those interviewed affected the policy's production and praxis.

Overall, the production of the character education policy was the result of a top down rather than shared or distributed leadership style (Leithwood et al., 2009; Pearce et al., 2008). Young people and volunteers had no involvement in the formulation of the character policy. The majority of formal decision making appeared to be made by the senior leadership team and the trustees, with some consultation of staff. For example, the character journey was discussed at a staff meeting but written and finalised by the Director.

*Question: How are decisions made at Hope Works?*

*"I like to think we try and involve the whole organisation in terms of getting input for ideas and then .... appropriate person be given final say [sic] ... if it's more organisational or more strategic then the SMT [Senior Management Team]."*

*"We [SMT] work hard with our board of trustees to make sound decisions."*

*"Whenever we're doing anything when SMT make decisions...I know that you guys aren't there when we're having these conversations."*

*"I think because we are a charity we are managed by trustees. Decisions are made based on the mission of the charity."*

*"Top down with little input from staff...there's no real consultation."*

The lack of student voice involved in the production of the policy is not uncommon, (See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004) and illustrates that the character policy was primarily traditional or didactic in its approach (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; Was et al., 2006). Courtney and Gunter (2015) and Fitzgerald (2008) have also suggested that top down

decision making is a relatively common feature of educational leadership, especially with the focus on transformational leadership of schools (Barker, 2007).

The CEO and Director had a crucial role in the policy production, researching, writing the character journey, and rewording the four character strengths. They both mentioned shared conversations and shared ideas, for instance the need to be explicit about character. It was in effect their vision of character which the organisation was based upon. Their focus on organisational outcomes and their appeal to moral values is also similar to the model of transformational leadership (Parolini et al., 2009).

All eight interviewees expressed support for character education and the aims of Hope Works in general. A reluctance to criticise may be expected due to self-censorship, however the support expressed was unanimous and strong. Although educational leaders were aware of different approaches to character, there was a strong sense, particularly among permanent staff, that Hope Works' approach was a superior one.

*“Hope Works is one of the only organisations out there that talks about character in a very clear and um referenced way.”*

*“I think there is a lack of understanding in organisations, what we could change is the perception of character education and we could standardise its understanding.”*

*“We do it well and so many other organisations miss. It's not their fault I think there's a lack of understanding out there.”*

When asked what they would change if they were in charge all suggested practical changes. My findings here support Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey (Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004), who also found that American teachers were unlikely to view character education as controversial.

One potential reason for staff support was that most had learnt about character education from Hope Works (Table 2). Those that had done their own research were members of SMT who had used this to shape the character policy.

Table 2: Where did you learn about character education?

Interviewee	Hope Works staff	Hope Works training	Academic/education literature	Other
CEO	1		1	1 (DfE)
Director of Operations	1		1	
Head of Monitoring and Evaluation	1		1	
Regional Manager	1	1		
Project Manager	1	1	1 – recommended by CEO	
Volunteer Officer	1	1		
Intern	1	1		
Volunteer		1		1 (interview prep reading HW website)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>

The top down production and dissemination of the policy created a policy discourse that was strongly supportive of character education – perhaps unquestioningly so.

Finally, one way in which leadership was distributed was that all participants saw themselves as role models, who could influence the character and behaviour of the young people.

*“I try to live our character strengths as an example.”*

*“So yeah I think by living by those things [character strengths] we were meant to be an example.”*

*“Our mentors as role models come and demonstrate that behaviour.”*

This supports the findings of many researchers (Thornberg and Oğuz, 2013; See and Arthur, 2011; Lemming and Yendol-Hoppey, 2004) who found that teachers frequently view themselves as role modelling character for students. However, See and Arthur (2011) found that students often did not view their teachers as role models for good character, so whether the children participating in Hope Works' programmes saw the mentors as role models in practice would be an interesting area for further research.

### Practice

As discussed in question one, some elements of the policy text appeared to have been changed in praxis. Key pressures were schools' interests and the context of a competitive market (Seddon et al., 2007). Members of the leadership team certainly viewed themselves as market providers. The Regional Manager commented on difficulties "selling" character education to schools, and viewed Hope Works as in competition with other social partnerships:

*"it's a hard sell when people don't understand it and they just think we're another organisation, offering another intervention".*

Schools were effectively Hope Works' customers who bought their services (Seddon et al., 2007) and their needs shaped the policy's practice. It was evident that school context had led to changes in how character education was taught in the two different projects the volunteer had worked on. Whilst neither was explicit about teaching character, the second project was more maths based, "felt more like a homework club" and didn't do games or group activities. The volunteer also commented that the school was much more closely involved in the second project, providing worksheets and having a teacher present during the sessions.

*"It also felt more slightly more like a normal classroom it felt slightly more like we were tutoring rather than doing something different."*

Seddon (2007) argues that social partnerships blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning, leading to interest conflict. Here the school's interests seemed to prioritise academic outcomes over character education. In face of this conflict, Hope Works had clearly adapted their policies to suit the school, removing non-academic activities.

It was not clear on what leadership level the decision to adapt the programme had been taken, and it must be seen as a single example rather than representative of the organisation as a whole. However, it illustrates how the market position of social partnerships can influence policy decisions of educational leaders. We can suggest that one of the reasons the school was focused on maths was SATS. Interviewees commented that the pressure schools felt to meet government targets affected decision making.

*“State schools are targeted on results nothing else so that’s what they will do. Private school are targeted on destinations and really nothing else so character is vital.”*

The Regional Manager worried that government promotion of character could lead it to become “another tick box exercise” for schools. Interviewing school leaders working with social partnerships would be an interesting area for further research here.

A second area where markets had clearly influenced the decision making was the decision to locate the programme in major cities as these were a) areas where educational disadvantage was seen as a problem, for which b) they could obtain funding.

*“I think everyone would benefit from a bit of mentoring but obviously, we need to focus it because it’s a costly business.”*

*“Schemes like this tend to be based in cities. In lots of towns we don’t have the same funding from councils, kids don’t have same opportunities.”*

*“I think that if money was freely available then.... would do as much as possible. Where you have limitations you focus on what you can, the disadvantaged.”*

Stevenson (2007) argues that neoliberalism forces educational leaders to prioritise their market position over personal values. Hope Works was operating in a market in two ways. Firstly, it targeted areas with high concentrations of young people who it felt were especially in need of their services – highly disadvantaged communities. Secondly, it was competing with other organisations for subscriptions, and funding. Both these concerns led its leaders to decide to focus their work in major cities, although they acknowledged that others would benefit from character education.

The CEO saw one of his main roles as “raise[ing] our profile”, as this would enable Hope Works to sell their services to more schools and “help as many children as possible”. Hope Works’ ability to market itself was therefore perceived as vital in enabling it to realise its aims. The need to fund the programmes was a central concern for the senior management team. The Head of Monitoring and Evaluation estimated that 60% of her time was spent on fundraising, and the CEO’s major objective for the next 12 months was to end the financial year in surplus. One way this affected the character education policy was the need to be able to measure the impact of the programmes in order to gain funding.

*“A lot of talk is about what is the best way to measure impact. How can we measure their fairness?”*

As Was notes objective measures of character are exceedingly difficult to develop (Was et al., 2006). Both the volunteer and the volunteer officer expressed concern over how the need to measure character could potentially affect the policy.

*“I think there’s a danger it becomes something... that’s graded, you have to get a grade in character. It doesn’t sit right with me”*

Furthermore, the need to obtain funding and to sell the programme seems to be one of the reasons why outside agencies such as the DfE and the Jubilee Centre had had a strong influence on the programme.

*“We have discuss with the Jubilee Centre and the DfE to make sure actually that our work is validated I guess and character education is validated [sic]”*

Funding and support from the DfE would clearly have massively benefitted Hope Works and was thus an incentive for them to match their policies with the government's. One staff member commented that a “ton of money is getting thrown into social action”, naming another charity which had recently received government money.

Despite Pring's (2010) argument that character education could counter the influence of the standards agenda in education, the practice of the character education policy at Hope Works was strongly shaped by the structure of the neoliberal state. Despite Morgan's talk of autonomy (DfE, 2015c, 2016a), the structure of the market strongly restricted the agency of the educational leaders at Hope Works. In order to succeed or even remain viable in a competitive market they needed to support the government educational policies (Seddon et al., 2007). This case study illustrates how what Ball terms the culture of performativity (Ball, 2003) changes the ethics of decision making for leaders in wider educational policy landscape, not just teachers. Although Hope Works set its own mission, objectives and targets, leaders were forced to consider not only who would benefit most from character education but also whether their policies would enable them to succeed in a competitive market, in which changeable government policy had huge influence (Seddon et al., 2007; Selsky, 2005).

## Conclusions

Character education raises profound questions for educational leaders about the nature and purpose of education. What values should we teach our

young people? How should we decide these? What type of society are we preparing them to be a part of?

Unfortunately, at Hope Works these debates did not happen. Instead character was presented as an apolitical consensus policy (Suissa, 2015). For the educational leaders character education was beneficial because it helped young people; they did not stop to question or consider its ideological underpinnings. Character education at Hope Works was not apolitical, it was based on a conservative and religious model of society.

My findings capture Hope Works' policy as expressed during the interview dialogue and are based on my interpretations of these discourses (Schostak, 2006) and they can be summarised as follows.

Hope Works' policy discourse was very similar to the national one and closely followed the ideas of the DfE under Nicky Morgan. The policy supported both performance and virtue based definitions of character, but it was the former which was dominant.

Educational leaders at Hope Works supported character education primarily because they believed it would address what they saw as major social problems - educational inequality, poor behaviour, and crime. Their vision was based on a highly conservative narrative, in which individuals' choices and cultural background were causing societal problems. British society was a meritocratic one in which staying-power or hard work would enable young people to overcome disadvantage, with academic attainment and gainful employment the prescribed route to success and happiness.

The organisation's leadership process was primarily top-down and hierarchical, with content of policy determined by senior staff. Staff at all levels used a didactic approach, encouraging young people to conform to a vision of good character which had grown from religious not secular beliefs.

The formulation and implementation of policy illustrates how leadership decisions are influenced by national and international policy discourses (Lingard and Ozga, 2007). International research, particularly that of Americans like Tough, played a role in micro-level policy decisions, yet leaders chose research which was supportive of character education (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015; Tough, 2013; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005), and overlooked work questioning character education's effectiveness (Rimfeld et al., 2016; WWC and US Department of Education, 2007; Was et al., 2006).

In production and practice the educational leaders' agency to make policy decisions was limited by the neoliberal structure of education in the UK. Hope Works' position as a social partnership forced leaders to prioritise marketing and funding in their decision making. Aligning their character education policies with the government's, enabled them to 'sell' their services to schools and made them more likely to obtain funding. As per the standards agenda (Ball, 2003) they needed to measure character education's impact in order to obtain funding – again encouraging them to focus on performance outcomes (Was et al., 2006). Pressure from schools to reach their own impact measures may have also led individual project leaders to focus on tutoring, not teaching character.

My findings support Courtney, Gunter, Ball and others (Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Hoskins and Barker, 2014; Barker, 2007; Ball, 2003) in illustrating how markets in education do not lead to independence or autonomy but force educational leaders to align with government policy. Hope Works had not always prioritised character education, but its leaders reworked and promoted the policy when it became "fashionable". In the process, they subscribed to a view of success and happiness for their young people which was bounded by a neoliberal and capitalist conception of society. Their vision of success for students was a narrow one which focused on material gain and well paid employment.

Finally, my research highlights the need for qualitative, as well as quantitative, research on the impact of educational policies. Quantitative studies are most frequently cited in support for character education (Goodman et al., 2015; Heckman et al., 2014; Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005) precisely because they do not capture or consider the more troubling aspects of the policy. Completely values-neutral or objective education policy cannot exist, but if we truly want to reduce educational inequality and improve social mobility, educational leaders need to be open about the theoretical basis for policies which are posited as solutions. Character education is only a viable solution for educational inequality if you support the idea that the solutions are individual not structural. Leaving this unvoiced suppresses debate and leaves a neoliberal values system and model of society unchallenged by educational leaders and practitioners.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Schedule

**Interview No:**

**Time:**

**Date:**

**Job role of interviewee:**

**Purpose of Research (explain to interviewee at start)** Research is separate from my job role and for purpose of my master’s degree. I’m looking at how Hope Works leads character education.

**Consents: (read before and recheck at the end)**

- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time
- I understand that there is a small risk that charity and my role within it may be identifiable from the description of its work in this research
- Are you happy for an audio recording to be made of this interview?
- I have been given the opportunity to read these notes
- Are you happy for anonymised summaries or quotes from these notes to be included this research?
- Are you happy for anonymised summaries or quotes from these notes **to be linked to your job role** in this research? –
- I understand that this research may be read by members of the public and Warwick University

<p><b>1. Tell me about your role at Hope Works? (How long have you worked at Hope works? What do you do?)</b></p>
<p><b>Mission</b></p>
<p><b>1. What you think Hope Works’ aims to do as charity?</b></p>
<p><b>2. How do you think attending Hope Works affects young people? What could be the benefits of attending HW ?</b></p>
<p><b>3. If Hope works was working in every school in the country what do you think would change?</b></p>
<p><b>4. If Hope works achieved all its goals what would that look like?</b> For the kids? For HW? For the UK in general</p>
<p><b>Character education</b></p>
<p><b>5. What do you know about character education?</b></p>
<p><b>6. Tell me about Hope Works’ approach to character education Why do we teach character?</b></p>

<b>How do we teach character?</b>
<b>7. How did you learn about character education and Hope works' approach to it?</b>
<b>8. How do you implement character education?</b>
<b>9. What character strengths if any do you see as most important?</b>
<b>10. Have you ever had an instance where someone has disagreed with HW character values?</b>
<b>11. How do you see others implementing HW approach to character education? Do you think everyone has the same approach?</b>
<b>12. Do you see Schools' as having a role in character education?</b>
<b>13. Some people have criticised character education saying it imposes values on others – what do you think about that?</b>
<b>Leadership</b>
<b>14. How are decisions made at HW?</b>
<b>15. How are decisions made about character education?</b>
<b>16. How do you make decisions in your role?</b>
<b>17. What do you know about how HW decided the 4 character traits / how HW's approach to character education was decided?</b>
<b>18. Is there anything you would change about how we teach character?</b>
<b>19. If you were in charge of Hope works for a year what would you do?</b>

## Appendix B: Sample characteristics

Interviewee	Member of senior management team (SMT)	Length of time at organisation	Rational for choosing
CEO	Yes	6 years	Senior leader with longstanding involvement and influence on policy
Director of Operations	Yes	4 years	Senior leader with longstanding involvement and influence on policy
Head of Monitoring and Evaluation	Yes	2 years	Senior leader – responsible for measuring impact of programmes
Regional Manager	Present in some meetings	1 year	Operated programme at different city
Project Manager	No	2 years	Responsible for day to day implementation of policy
Volunteer Officer	No	1 year	Alternative perspective on policy
Intern	No	2 months	Alternative perspective on policy
Volunteer	No	1 year	Alternative perspective on policy (convenience – had access to)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8</b>		

## Appendix C: Sample of emergent themes mapping

### Outcomes

- Careers/work jobs (life chances destinations)
  - Successful 4
- Opportunities 8
- Expanding horizons/ beyond community (1,3, 4,5, 7, 8 3, 6- meet uni students, 2 only talks about in reverse opportunities given by public schools)
  - Aspirations 1 6 (strongly)
- Social skills 4 (teamwork)
- Confidence 3
- Moral
  - Good 3
  - Ability to choose own values 1
  - Fair 3 (nicer more empathy)
- Improved Ro character values, 7
- Happy 4
- Grades/ academic attainment 8
  - Engagement in school 7
- Improvements to society
  - Community unity (volunteer sees it as way with engaging in local community) 2
    - Bridging gaps between groups 1
  - Behaviour (reduced) 7
  - (if not taught people will say their undisciplined)
    - Anti social 3
    - Gangs 3
    - Criminality 5

- School behaviour helps others as well 2
    - Reducing educational inequality 7
    - Reducing inequality more generally 6
  - Part of movement for change (involves other partners) 3
  - Independence 1,

[Appendix D: Ethical Approval Form](#)



# Application for Ethical Approval

**Name:** xxxxxx

**Course and module:** MA educational leadership (Teach First) Dissertation

**Dissertation/Project title:** Leading Character: perceptions of a Character Education Programme

**Supervisor:** xxxxxxxx

**Participants:** (if children, specify age range)

- Adults working for educational charity,

**Consent** - will prior informed consent be obtained? yes

From participants? YES

From others? n/a

Explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:

Adults:

- Prior consent obtained from charity to undertake research for MA
- Verbal consent gained from participants prior to organising interviews
- Simple written consent form signed before each interview

Will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status? YES

**Confidentiality**

Will confidentiality be assured?

Small chance that charity and thus some adult participants may be identifiable from the description of its work. Consent gained from CEO to pursue research on this basis and informed consent will be gained from all adult participants on this basis.

How will confidentiality be ensured?

- Pseudonyms used for school, charity and interview participants
- Anonymising names and other identifying details of participants in all documents including notes from interviews
- Participants will have the chance to review and correct notes from interviews at the end of the interview
- All participants give informed consent and have the right to withdraw at any time.

### Protection of participants

How is the safety and wellbeing of participants to be ensured?

- Research will take place in accordance with health and safety procedures of the organisations involved. All participants will give informed consent and have the right to withdraw at any time.

Is information gathered from participants of a sensitive or personal nature? NO

If yes, describe the procedure for:

- a) ensuring confidentiality
- b) protecting participants from embarrassment or stress

### Observational research n/a

If observational research is to be carried out without prior consent of participants, please specify:

- a) situations to be observed
- b) how privacy and cultural and religious values of participants will be taken into account

Signed (Student):	xxxxxxx	Date: xxxxxxx
Signed (Supervisor):	xxxxxxx	Date: xxxxxxx

(Typed names are sufficient)

**Action:** Once both you and your supervisor have signed this form, save the signed copy until you submit your work. The signed copy should be included as an appendix to your assignment/dissertation