

Values and Character:  
Higher Education and  
Graduate Employment

# Graduates of Character

Report Summary

James Arthur  
Kenneth Wilson  
Ray Godfrey  
with  
Ben Gray  
Nigel Newton

**learningforlife**  
*exploring core values*

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



*This report is to be launched at the House of Lords on 23rd November 2009  
by Lord Watson of Richmond.*

#### MEMBERS OF ADVISORY BOARD

Lord Watson of Richmond (Chairman)

Sir Stephen Lamport, Receiver-General of Westminster Abbey

Stephen Brenninkmeijer, Enterprise Education Trust

Very Rev'd John Hall, Dean of Westminster

Professor John Annette, Pro Vice Master, Birkbeck, University of London

Mary Macleod, Responsible for Global Operations Change with ABN AMRO

Gary Powell, Director, NM Rothschild

#### THE RESEARCH TEAM AND REPORT AUTHORS ARE:

Dr. James Arthur, University of Birmingham

Dr. Kenneth Wilson, Visiting Research Fellow, Canterbury Christ Church University

Dr. Ray Godfrey, Canterbury Christ Church University

with

Dr. Ben Gray, Canterbury Christ Church University

Nigel Newton, University of Bristol

Booklet preparation: David Lorimer

A copy of the full report and references can be found on  
[www.learningforlife.org.uk](http://www.learningforlife.org.uk)

## FOREWORD

There is widespread public criticism of the condition of British society which often focuses on what is perceived to be the failure of the education system to satisfy the basic need of the British economy for appropriately educated, skilled and competent employees. But there is a deeper concern. We want educated people but not simply to perform an economic function. Persons who are genuinely educated will take a generous view of their role in their employment, and look for opportunities to make a responsible contribution to the well-being of society at large. Indeed in the course of this research employers frequently drew our attention to the vital dimension of character. Employers are concerned to employ 'good' people, if that is not too bland a word to cover the range of qualities which they seek when recruiting.

Employees and indeed all stakeholders in modern civil society focus – when considering higher education – on outcomes. This is the magic measure. Yet in calculating outcomes we too often miss the most important outcome of all – the quality and character of graduates. On their quality, values and character much of our future depends. For this reason, this is the focus of this report.

**Lord Watson of Richmond**  
Chair of Advisory Board

# CHARACTER, VALUES AND THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION

*Schools and universities in Britain are subject to an understandable pressure to provide skilled graduates equipped to meet the highly competitive demands of employment. In doing so, however, there is a risk of taking for granted another critical dimension of education – encouraging students to develop their values and become aware of themselves as responsible people.*

We believe that education needs to be seen as a total lifelong process involving families, schools and employers in a political and social framework concerned with personal well-being, moral sensitivity and the flourishing of human society. All dimensions of education are essential if students are to assume their personal role in society equipped with the personal qualities, dispositions, attitudes, values and virtues to take responsibility for themselves and to contribute to the common good. Good habits encouraged in the process of university education underpin the ability and inclination to engage in the necessary business of further lifelong personal development and learning. Moreover, while employers often draw attention to lack of skills and relevant knowledge in their new employees, they also point to the missing dimension of personal 'character', especially qualities that will make them good 'team players.'



Character is an interlocked set of personal values and virtues which normally guide conduct and includes the virtues of responsibility, honesty, courage, self-reliance, reliability, generosity, self-discipline, and a sense of identity and purpose. This entails active character development, which is not simply about the acquisition of academic and social skills: it is ultimately about the kind of person we become and want to become.

There is widespread public criticism of the condition of British society which often focuses on a perceived failure of the education system to satisfy the basic need of the British economy for appropriately educated, skilled and competent employees. But there is a deeper concern. We need educated people, but not simply to perform an economic function. Genuinely educated people will take a generous view of their role in their employment, and look for opportunities to make a responsible contribution to the well-being of society at large. Indeed, in the course of this research employers frequently drew our attention to the vital dimension of character. Employers are concerned to employ 'good' people, if that is not too bland a word to cover the range of qualities which they seek when recruiting.

# CHARACTER IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

*The socio-economic and political situation in which Higher Education finds itself today is complex and demanding. Changes in higher education continue apace and are subject to much controversy.*

Numbers of universities have greatly increased along with the number of students: indeed it is government policy to provide places for 50% of the 18 year old cohort as well as increasing numbers of mature students. The pressure on the universities to produce graduates qualified to meet the demands of the British economy in a competitive global environment influences students choice of discipline and has extended the range of courses available.

The landmark Robbins Report of 1963 affirmed the traditional purposes of higher education as:

- Instruction in skills.
- Promotion of the general powers of the mind.
- The advancement of learning and the search for truth.
- The transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship.

The main aspects of a university education as affirmed in the Robbins Report might be expected to stand: an ability to think with the necessary skills and knowledge, the transmission of a 'common' culture and 'common' standards of citizenship. Yet it is precisely the perceived failure of the universities to succeed in this cultural



aspect which is commonly criticised by both society at large and employers in particular. This raises the question: does a contemporary UK university education adequately prepare the student for life in the broadest sense? Do universities consider the moral framework of higher education, as the UNESCO report suggests they should?

***Higher education itself is confronted therefore with formidable challenges and must proceed to the most radical change and renewal it has ever been required to undertake, so that our society, which is currently undergoing a profound crisis of values, can transcend mere economic considerations and incorporate deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality. (UNESCO, para. 3, II, 6-10. Bold in original).***

An investigation into the values of university students and graduates at the beginning of their careers, their sense of responsibility, commitment to lifelong

*The solution to the major challenges [higher education] faces, require the strong involvement not only of governments and of higher education institutions, but also of all stakeholders, including students and their families, teachers, business and industry, the public and private sectors of the economy, parliaments, the media, the community, professional associations and society as well as a greater focus of higher education institutions towards society, and accountability in then use of public and private, national or international resources.*

*The Report on the World Conference on Higher Education  
(UNESCO (1998))*

learning and willingness to serve the well-being of society at large offers from one point of view a judgment on the performance of the education system as a whole. How is it performing? It produces the academic goods, which it is required to do and corresponds to what students say they want first and foremost from their universities. The students and graduate employees with whom this report is concerned are all deemed to be successes of the education system: all gained the requisite 'A' level grades to enter on university courses and subsequently earned degree classifications which led major employers to take them on.

However, we focus here on that equally important dimension of the education process which concerns the character, values, attitudes, dispositions and virtues which are embodied in the lives of students and graduates, and the influences which formed them. This is regarded as vital to the well-being of society at large and a matter of interest to employers.

Employers want staff who are not only well-informed and competent; they want persons of integrity, who are trustworthy, responsible, loyal, courageous, committed to lifelong learning and willing to take criticism without resentment.



We take seriously the view of William Sullivan and Matthew Rosin in their 2008 book, *A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice*, when they claim that 'the academy's educational mission is a formative one' and that 'Higher education contributes most to society and is most faithful to its own deepest purposes when it seeks to use its considerable intellectual and cultural resources to prepare students for lives of significance and responsibility'.

# INTRODUCTION TO LEARNING FOR LIFE RESEARCH PROJECTS

*Learning for Life involves a series of major research projects, largely funded by the John Templeton Foundation and Porticus UK. It is an ambitious and groundbreaking initiative with few parallels in the UK. Indeed, this is the first coherent exploration of character development that studies all educational age groups and on into employment. Within the overall project, Learning for Life, Graduates of Character is one of five separate studies:*

- (a) A character perspective in the early years;
- (b) Consistency in values - the transition from primary to secondary school;
- (c) The values and character dispositions of 14-16 year olds;
- (d) The formation of virtues and dispositions in the 16-19 age range; and
- (e) Values in higher education and employment.

The research focuses on the age range 3 to 25 years, which makes the scope and the approach unique. The five studies constitute the empirical background to our final report which will focus on Character Development as a whole, an often neglected but essential dimension of all sound education.



The overall sample involves tracking more than 4,000 children and young people, 300 parents and 100 teachers over a two-year period in Birmingham, Bristol, Canterbury and London, together with a series of group interviews and case-study observations. In addition, the sample of this report contains in-depth interviews with over 85 undergraduates and 65 graduate employees. Additional case studies of particular issues have also been undertaken. Each project has a dedicated full-time research fellow working over a two to three year period.

For a short literature review of the origins of character education the reader should consult the previous report - *Character Education: The Formation of Virtues and Dispositions in 16-19 Year Olds* with particular reference to the religious and spiritual – referred to in this report as the Bristol Report ([www.learningforlife.org.uk](http://www.learningforlife.org.uk)).

# INTRODUCTION TO GRADUATES OF CHARACTER

*Graduates of Character is the product of an empirical enquiry into the values, virtues, dispositions and attitudes of a sample of students and employees who volunteered to be involved. The research team sought host sites which would offer a diverse set of interviewees in gender, ethnicity, religion and aspiration.*

It was important to involve a contrasting group of universities, and of commercial enterprises. Four universities participated in the project. The universities were: King's College, University of Cambridge; Canterbury Christ Church University, a Church-related University; the University of Essex, a civic campus university (1964); and the Cass Business School, a specialist School within a recently established major city centre university (1996). Although these research sites are based in the South of England, they all recruit nationally and internationally; the sample of students is multicultural and sufficiently diverse to provide a representative set.

The four graduate employers chosen are all successful, high profile employers. They were chosen so as to include the commercial, retail, service and financial

sectors and because they have large well-established graduate employment programmes, providing the necessary variety and scope for the research. The firms are: Price Waterhouse Coopers, management consultants; British Telecom, telecommunications; DTZ, commercial property management; and Tesco, food and general retailers.

The interviewees were all volunteers, solicited with the support of named person(s) in the research sites, a director or manager in the employment organisations or a Senior Tutor / Head of Department at the University sites. Although the participants were unsystematically selected and self-nominating, care was taken to ensure a diverse sample in terms of background, gender and ethnicity so that the research sample adequately reflected the wider community of the organisations taking part. In fact, the majority of students at London City's Cass Business school were from ethnic minority groups, describing themselves as Asian or Anglo-Asian. Ethnic minorities and women were also fairly represented in the employers. Numbers were about equally divided between students and employees.

Because participants were expected to have very varied experiences to relate and views to express and because they were likely to be very articulate, the whole data collection phase of the study was devoted to interviews.

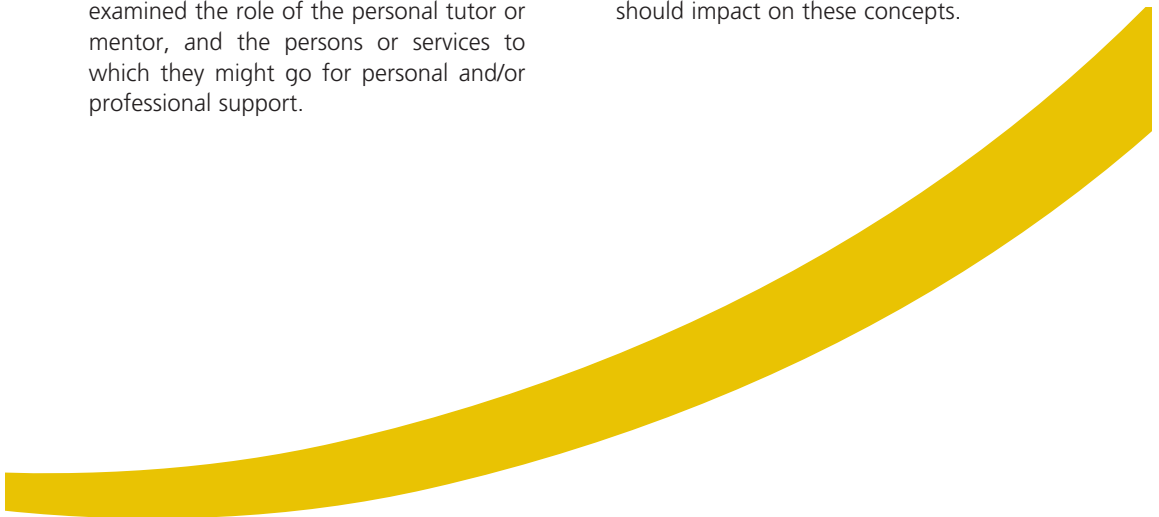




<i>University</i>	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS		
	Face-to-face	e-mail	Total
Canterbury Christ Church University	21	10	31
Cass Business School (London City University)	12	6	18
King's College Cambridge	37		37
Essex University	7	1	8
<i>Employer</i>			
PricewaterhouseCoopers	24	3	27
British Telecom	19	4	23
DTZ	12	2	14
Tesco	-	11	11
<b>Total</b>			<b>169</b>

In this study we discuss what character is taken to mean by students and employees in their years of higher education and employment. We examine what their values are, what they gain from the university, what they believe employers look for when recruiting, what they hope to give to an employer, and what they expect from their employer. We then explore who or what influenced their values and moral development. We also examined the role of the personal tutor or mentor, and the persons or services to which they might go for personal and/or professional support.

As far as possible the research strategy was designed to explore the ways in which young people describe how they think, feel and behave. A large number of concepts arise in this project: values, morality, virtues, duties, and principles. However, there is no consensus either on the meaning of these words or on how these should be fitted into a single system of thought. Moreover, there is little agreement on how education does or should impact on these concepts.



# KEY FINDINGS

## WHAT IS GOOD CHARACTER?

It was generally agreed that good character implied good morals and right behaviour. The interviewees believed themselves to be concerned with their own good character and to regard it as an essential ingredient of all successful relationships. They had a genuine interest in the subject, entered easily into conversation and thought seriously when responding to the issues raised.

Empathy, tolerance, care for others and a capacity for friendship were accepted as essential aspects of good character. Honesty, reliability, sincerity, trustworthiness, and integrity featured prominently both as personal qualities of good character and as essential aspects of employment.

## PERSPECTIVES ON CHARACTER

No single philosophical tradition could be identified as lying behind or bringing coherence to the moral perspectives discussed. It was notable that traditional virtues such as courage, justice, temperance, wisdom were explicitly mentioned comparatively rarely, though they could be said to underpin many of the perspectives offered. Core values naturally overlapped with marks of good character. Good education, family, altruism, perseverance, a sound work ethic, equality and fairness all featured. There was almost universal acceptance of the importance of lifelong learning.

## INFLUENCES ON VALUE FORMATION

The primary influence on values was stated to be family, most particularly the mother, though fathers were not infrequently mentioned. This finding corresponds to research with other age groups. Travel and meeting different types of people made a significant impact. Indeed, it was largely through the opportunity to meet different sorts of people that higher education was thought to have been an influence in forming values; most claimed that their values had been formed by the time they entered university. Where school or university was alluded to as an influence on values it was almost always with reference to the influence of a particular teacher or tutor.

Several interviewees acknowledged the influence of religion on values, specifically Christianity but also Islam; this was often through parents, when they themselves had no particular faith. Several affirmed the value of religion as bringing moral coherence to a society even when they themselves were atheists. A few regarded



religious belief as illusory, essentially inimical to human well-being and even dangerous.

Almost all rejected the view that the media had influenced their values or their behavior, although there was some suspicion that it might influence others. Education had encouraged them to be aware of bias and sensationalism and to access a range of opinion in order to form well-founded judgments.

## REASONS FOR ATTENDING UNIVERSITY

Responses confirmed that career prospects and potential future prosperity were major motives for going to university; for many this was also consistent with a genuine interest in learning. It was often thought to be the next natural stage in life. The personal benefits of university in respect of character development were thought to come simply from living away from home, fending for oneself, managing one's own finances and meeting people from different backgrounds.

## MOTIVATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT

Motivations for employment included the vocational and the economic, factors that were not mutually exclusive. There were many reasons given for selecting one employer rather than another. Apart from the remuneration package, which was probably assumed by the majority but not formally mentioned by a large number, great importance was attached to career support, the size and reputation of the



company. This included its reputation for ethical behaviour, the quality of personal relationships, respect of the company for work/leisure balance and, in a good number of cases, commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

## CHARACTER AND EMPLOYMENT

Interviewees regularly stated that employers were looking for character when recruiting, since all shortlisted candidates would have the requisite qualifications and intellectual skills. It was generally understood that this would need personal effort: it did not come easily. For example, learning to play one's part in a team was recognised to require hard work, mutual understanding and commitment.

*Communication skills* were recognised to be vital in all relationships, at university and in employment. Insofar as the experience of university supported the development of such skills, it was considered to be the result of participation in non-curricular activities, for example in clubs, societies and voluntary work, rather than a direct consequence of the course



and/or pedagogy. A sense of humour was thought to be helpful as a dimension of communication skills.

In employment, good character was affirmed to be central to effective relationships, as well as of vital importance to a company, its reputation and success. Nevertheless, most thought that companies were concerned to ensure professional compliance rather than to encourage good character as the prerequisite of good behaviour.

Employment confirmed a sense of ***personal responsibility*** since whereas at university failure impacted only on oneself, in employment it impacted on colleagues and the company as a whole. Team work contributed to self-understanding and underlined the importance of hard work.

## IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTARY WORK

Voluntary work was a major dimension of engagement with society both at university and in employment. It offered significant stimulus for developing character: it was personally testing; it increased awareness of the needs of others and provided an opportunity to give something to them. When it involved travel and working overseas there was a double benefit arising from experience of a new culture. Schools and universities encouraged it, as also often employers through CSR.



# THE VIEWS OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

*The face-to face interviews did not force participants into giving highly structured answers to highly structured questions although a large majority of participants spoke of good character exclusively in terms of specific qualities, partly because the scheduled interview question referred to those terms.*

However, a considerable number broke with the tone of the question to give a general statement linking the notion of good character with notions such as good morals or knowing what is right. It is nevertheless clear that the notion of 'moral character' has some currency with these students and graduate employees. Interestingly, many of the comments seem to relate more to what makes a good employee, a good student or a good leader rather than what makes a good person as such.

Bad character was contrasted with good character, quite often in literal terms; words meaning the opposite of those applied in describing good character are used to describe bad character. The words included most particularly *'selfish', 'disrespectful', 'dishonest', 'untrustworthy'*. But several others were prominent, *'rude', 'deceitful', 'lazy', 'unkind'* as well as attitudes such as *'unwilling to co-operate', 'failure to pay attention or listen', 'lack of concern for or interest in others'* and *'a closed mind'*. Qualities that appear only as aspects of good character are, therefore, of interest (see Appendix for details).



The breakdown into sections largely follows the structure implied by the interview schedule, even though the interviews did not adhere strictly to this structure.

Major themes covered are:

- Ideas about personal qualities, character and values
- Ideas about leadership and their relation to the above
- Influences on character and values, including qualities of self in different situations
- The role of higher education and qualities of being a student
- The importance of lifelong learning and training
- Graduate employment
- Engagement with society and civic involvement

Participants used a huge number of different character-related words in describing good or bad character and in talking about their work, studies, religion, role models and other things. This summary discusses the findings in terms of the following partly overlapping headings:



- Attitude to Self and Others
- Attitude to Oneself
- People skills
- Communication skills and people skills
- Friendliness
- Flexibility and openness
- Honesty, reliability etc
- Intellectual & Work related skills
- Motivation
- Leadership
- Miscellaneous qualities
- Traditional virtues

## ATTITUDE TO SELF AND OTHERS

It was found, not surprisingly, that attitudes to self and others are closely related. Showing consideration for other people and thinking only of yourself cannot sensibly be discussed in isolation from each other. Three main themes emerged here:

- Thinking of others v being self-centred.
- Actively caring for others
- Being nasty or nice

The general trend was for participants to imply that good character is largely about treating others as you would be treated



yourself. About a quarter of participants made statements about bad character that used phrases like *'selfish'*, *'self-absorbed'*, *'love themselves too much'*, *'doing things just for the gain of yourself and not thinking of others, really'*, *'so self-centred that everything in life revolves around them'*.

The notions of arrogance, pride, being dismissive of others, talking down to people and dominating together with the opposed notion of humility, were almost equally common. In contrast, good character was characterised by many as involving empathy, compassion, forgiving others, taking an interest in them, making time for them and understanding them. One even remarked: *'I think that a strong moral sense without empathy is fairly useless.'* Good character was not only the domain of great leaders, grand gestures or those with the courage and capacity to articulate their values and say what they thought was right. Good character was also expressed in much smaller detail in the minutiae of everyday life, as in the example of voluntary work.

## ATTITUDE TO ONESELF

Three qualities mentioned in this context were restraint, ambition and confidence. Restraint included patience, level-headedness and the ability to be serious. Ambition was mentioned mainly in terms of a quality that employers looked for in potential employees rather than as an aspect of good character. And confidence was mentioned largely as an example of what employers and Cambridge colleges were looking for in their employees or students.

## INTERPERSONAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

This dovetails with *'the ability to get along with people'* as part of good character. In employment, interpersonal skills were considered important largely because of the importance of customer relations. A very different pattern of responses might have appeared if the employees had been recruited from roles that were not client facing.

Listening is also important and is associated with general friendliness and approachability: *I would judge someone as having a 'good character' if they were friendly, willing to listen and generally treated others how they would like to be treated themselves.*

## FRIENDLINESS

In the context of values and character development, friendship is a very important notion. It is interesting, therefore, that about one participant in five gave friendliness, or something very much like it, as an aspect of good character or as a requirement of employment: *Components that make a good character are a good personality, friendly, approachable, lively, enthusiastic, honest and trustworthy.*

## FLEXIBILITY AND OPENNESS


Openness was important to about one in five people partly in the sense of openness to people, shading into friendliness and interpersonal skills: *Good character is definitely fairness, openness to anything around you.*

## TRUSTWORTHINESS: HONESTY AND RELIABILITY

Honesty, integrity, sincerity, trustworthiness, reliability or similar ideas were used by about half the respondents, mainly in connection with good character and sometimes linked with the requirements of employment: *integrity and trust. For me, these values are the bedrock of what I'm about. They enable me to work well with people and build good relationships.*

The word integrity was introduced by more than one in ten participants, partly in relation to the demands of employment: *ethics and integrity are extremely important if you're going to have a good business relationship, because they're underwritten by good values.*

Reliability was valued both in terms of being someone who would keep their word and in terms of being trusted to act



decently. About one person in six used the word trust or trustworthy in this connection. The related idea of loyalty, mainly to friends, was mentioned by a small number of people. The rarity of reference to loyalty is worth remarking upon given the importance of loyalty to an employer in reducing recruitment costs.

## INTELLECTUAL AND WORK-RELATED SKILLS

Whereas about one person in three mentioned some form of intellectual ability or academic attainment as part of what employers or universities required, there were only three participants who explicitly included something of this sort in their description of good character.

## MOTIVATION

This sometimes refers to self-improvement, but more usually as a personal value which is connected with pulling one's weight in a team or what a person wants to believe one contributes in employment. More than one participant in four used 'hardworking' or related phrases. About a quarter of those who saw this as part of good character only mentioned it in terms of laziness, which was seen as part of bad character.

## LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Qualities attributed to a good leader by many people were simply notions that were also applied to good character in general. This suggests that for those participants good leaders have to be good characters, not that leadership was an ingredient of good character. Good leaders were said by individual participants to be approachable, broad minded, ambitious, friendly, generous, tolerant, and those who lead by example.

## TRADITIONAL VIRTUES

The structure presented above is to a large extent arbitrary. Many remarks could easily be transferred from one section to another. Many sections could be radically rearranged; but how far would it be possible to bring things into line with traditional notions of virtue?

Justice, courage, wisdom and moderation do appear in the interviews, but largely in subsidiary roles. Courage is mentioned occasionally in reference to standing by one's beliefs. Justice occasionally appears as fairness. Wisdom is better represented and could almost have been used as a part of the structure above, absorbing parts of existing sections. Friendship plays a much more robust part in what participants had to say. Many of the qualities mentioned could be interpreted as extending aspects of friendship to a broader community. Integrity and particularly honesty are rather old-fashioned virtues, but are also seen as important.



# VALUES AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS

In the interviews a variety of words and phrases were used to elicit comments about character. No emphasis was laid on any conceptual difference between them, but in each case respondents were asked about their own 'core values'. The term values was variously interpreted as meaning; aspects of character: things aimed at; things or people valued; imperatives to be followed. Participants frequently slid from one interpretation to another and often elided two concepts of value. The following sections highlight these various connotations, and also include attitudes to lifelong learning.

## VALUES AS CHARACTER

The most common interpretation of the term 'values' was in terms of aspects of character. Many respondents spoke as if their core values were those aspects of their own character that count as good. Analysis of detailed comments made would largely recapitulate the structure given above for notions of good character. Caring, hard work, integrity, honesty and respect, trustworthiness, helpfulness, openness were among the more popular qualities mentioned.



These core values, it is clear, are not considered private matters. They are understood to be the basis of sensible and creative society; they are concerned with how they wish to treat and be treated by others. The establishment, maintenance and development of relationships seem to be identified here as key features revealed by the statements of the participants. Honesty, integrity and trustworthiness are core values, but they also therefore include friendliness, kindness, empathy, open-mindedness, loyalty, respect, and politeness. These may be presented in terms of making time for others, being a good communicator, and caring.

## VALUES AS AIMS

*I think my top values were: remuneration, working with others, variety in work.*


*My core values are to work hard and to achieve the best that I can, to value my friends and family and to be happy.*

## VALUES AS THINGS VALUED

Friends or family were mentioned by about one respondent in ten as things to be valued. Education, freedom of thought, and happiness were each mentioned once. The environment was often implied to be something of value.

## VALUES AS IMPERATIVES

Some respondents interpreted values to mean imperatives, things that one ought to do or at least aspire to. Among those who saw the request for their 'core values' as an invitation to describe the better



aspects of their own character, there were still some who described an ideal and were aware that would need to improve if they were to attain it. Equality and diversity were sometimes introduced in terms of imperatives, though this was sometimes accompanied by qualifications on how far people ought to go towards allowing for diversity. Seeing values as imperatives was sometimes associated with an emphasis on Christianity. The fits well with the way that much biblical teaching on character and morality is expressed.

## LIFELONG LEARNING

The attitude of virtually all the interviewees was positive. Interestingly there were frequent references to personal growth as well as continuing professional development. The assumption seems to be that without a commitment to lifelong learning one would lose one's capacity to be oneself and to contribute to the well being of the wider society including employment: *It's important as lifelong learning, you're always improving yourself, you're always developing, so you're striving to be a better person*

*and produce better quality work, better quality relationships and sort of broaden your horizons all the time.*

Employers were commended for their support and encouragement of further training, though there were questions asked about the quality of their commitment to encouraging the development of essential personal character. What is on offer arguably focused upon enhancing professional skills at the expense of the development of those personal values essential to the company's reputation with clients and customers.

# INFLUENCES ON VALUES AND CHARACTER

Each interview included a specific question on the respondent's perception of who had shaped their values. About two-thirds of respondents mentioned a positive influence from their parents, sometimes specifically mother or father, and about half of these mentioned no other influences. The remainder spoke of other family members or friends, sometimes as more important than parents (see Appendix for details).

The range of people seen as sources of personal support closely followed the range seen as influencing values, although parents appeared less often whilst other family members (particularly siblings) and friends appeared more often. Since participants were grown-up, it is easily understood why friends should displace parents as the most common category. Spouses, partners and boy/girlfriends were also mentioned. A small proportion of those mentioning religion as a source of values also mentioned it as a source of support. Some mentioned people with a professional responsibility towards them - mentors, tutors. Some interesting interviewees made clear statements to the effect that they were responsible for their own values.



Role models are not dealt with separately since they fall into two categories: people close to the respondents who were also described as strong influences on their character and values, and famous people who, though they may be inspirational figures, seem to be chosen as role models because they exemplify values already held by the respondents - Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama and a host of lesser figures.

## PARENTS AND FAMILY

Mention of the family was mostly accompanied by specific reference to parents. Only occasionally was the family as a whole, or particular members such as siblings, grandparents or an aunt, not accompanied by an emphasis on parents. The idea that parents are a major influence (and in some cases the only major influence) on values received more general support across the interviews than any other idea. This is consistent with findings in the Hodge Hill report and from the Values Poster Awards, where the mother is the most influential figure.

*Probably my parents have guided my values the most. But I don't think I really settled and decided what my values were probably until I went to university, I guess.*

*I think my dad has been quite influential in guiding me throughout my life so far. And the biggest value he has taught me is considering other people.*

Some respondents also pointed out the limitations on the influence of parents and even emphasised the way they had moved

away from their parents and developed values independent of them at university.

*Other than being taught to do as you're told by my parents, I have learnt my values through my own life experiences socially and professionally. To some degree I think some of the values come pre-programmed with my own personality.*

*My values were taught to me initially by my parents, and were further refined by my time at University.*

*I never really thought about my values until I went to university. My parents didn't guide my values. I guess it was at university where I developed my values, just from the environment of being there.*

None of this calls into doubt the fact that parents are a major influence on values. Many of the one in three people who did not mention parents may have thought their influence was too obvious to require mention. Even if some were mentioning parents partly because parental influence is a generally accepted phenomenon, this does not imply that the phenomenon is not a real one.

However, it is equally important to emphasise influences that complement or take over from parents: teachers, religion, friends, travel, education and employment.



## FRIENDS

Friends are also mentioned by more than one person in five, usually in combination with parents or family in general. In terms of personal support, friends seemed to be about as important as family.

## TRAVEL AND MEETING DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE

The influence of friends can be important at any stage in life. Experiencing different environments and different types of people was most often seen as moving people on beyond the values of their parents. Those who spoke with the broadest acceptance of people with other attitudes to life were often those who had seen more of the world. Sometimes this was through travel, sometimes by having lived and worked in very different countries. Sometimes it was simply the fact that coming to university had confronted them with a broader range of people than they were accustomed to - for example in a privileged boarding school or in a working class neighbourhood school.

## SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

A few respondents mentioned teachers as an influence on their values. This was usually one specific teacher, though on occasion reference is made to school or education in general. Those who

mentioned teachers usually did this in conjunction with parents and possibly friends: *My values were shaped mostly at school ... My values were guided probably most by my teachers at school, really, more than my parents. People say when you're 12 – 14, you solidify who you are.*

## RELIGION

The range of responses to the question was significantly broad. Some did not give an opinion. Many others declared that they had no religious belief. Others stated that they were atheists. Most who professed a religion or who acknowledged influence on their values from a religious tradition - even if they no longer regarded themselves to be religious - were Christian. Some were Muslim, four were Hindu.

A considerable number of those who said they had no religious beliefs said they understood why people did have a religion, and even in some cases accepted that religion was important to a society's stability. There was no evidence to support the view that religious belief was unimportant personally, nor on the other hand that it had any specific contribution to make to public debate on ethics, morality or the development of character. Only comparatively few stood firmly in a religious tradition which they found illuminating and fulfilling.

Religion is acknowledged to be an influence - in some cases by interviewees who do say that they are not religious and even some who say they do not hold religious views.

*Values come from parents, religion and the Bible. Christianity has influenced me, because I don't think I'd be as patient and calm. Christianity is less about what I can gain from it, it's more about what I can give to it. ... Faith is important because without it I wouldn't be who I am today.*

*My religious views are enormously atheist. I'm an atheist because I don't think anyone with intelligence can believe in God, as you can't prove He's there. I really do believe it's the root of everything that's wrong with the world.*

## HIGHER EDUCATION

Very little was said explicitly that linked higher education with values or character development except in terms of the opportunity it gave to meet new types of people or in response to a specific question about its impact, already mentioned above. This raises questions about the wisdom of policies that influence young people towards attending college or university near to home and continuing to reside in their home communities. This sample is not representative even of

people studying or working in the same institutions; but it seems credible that at least some students derive a moral benefit from leaving home to study that may outweigh the economic cost of living elsewhere.

## EMPLOYMENT

Interviewees were asked to reflect on the influence of employment on their behaviour after university and in what ways, if any, the experience had challenged their values. In many cases the interviewee drew attention to their enhanced sense of personal responsibility and the greater public accountability for their work. This in turn brought greater self-awareness and confidence.

*With employment rather than university, what you're doing isn't just for yourself. People are relying on you to do your work.*

*Employment has changed my attitudes by making me more time-aware. You have to get things by certain dates and you can't just do it at your own pace.*

## MEDIA

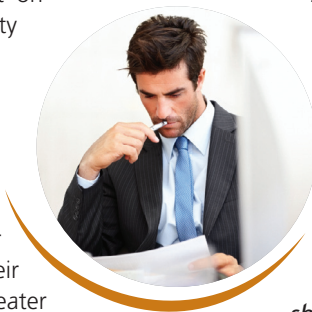
The majority of the responses to the questions about the media indicated suspicion concerning its influence, although the interviewees rarely saw this influence as affecting their own values. A small number were complementary about the quality of some newspapers, the BBC or some internet sites.

Criticisms between them covered a wide range. The media were in business to make money, were prejudiced in their reporting even on occasions inventing stories: they were frequently in bad taste, and by exaggeration gave the impression that certain bad behaviour by individuals was prevalent when it was not so: they were too focused on the cult of celebrity.

*I think the internet is a good thing, but I do think that the media focuses a lot on the negative news stories and doesn't focus on positive situations. I think that does breed a negative society.*

*The research skills you get at university show you shouldn't just rely on one source and show that you shouldn't just rely on the internet as a research source, because it's biased.*

*The media has had a big influence on values, but this is decreasing with the internet. People are creating their own views, you know with You Tube, My Space, Face Book. People have a lot more platforms for sharing their own views, values and ideas now than ever before.*



# THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

## MOTIVATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Historically higher education has been justified in the eyes of many by its impact on the character of those who receive it. In recent years, the emphasis in government policy, and perhaps in the public consciousness, has been on instrumental economic benefits. The latter view was clearly included in many of the responses. About a quarter of all respondents mentioned career prospects as part of their reason for entering higher education.

*It gives you a lot of leverage to help in a career. You start off to prove yourself, I suppose, at university. The primary objective is a good degree and good career.*

This motivation was often linked with the idea that for some types of people going to university is just the natural thing to do.

*In many ways it was an assumption that I'd go to university. Not that I didn't want to go but almost like it was a non- question. It's the next stage in becoming a normal member of society in some ways.*

*I wanted to be a student because it was the number one route to teaching and even if I didn't want to go into teaching I would have wanted to come to university because you only get one opportunity.*

A smaller number spoke of academic success as their motivation, though this is not incompatible with seeking to improve career prospects and may even be an indirect way of referring to instrumental

motives. Others emphasised purely intellectual aspects:

*I just really enjoy learning and I knew I wanted to go to university. I love the challenge of learning every day. In research you don't always have the answers you have to find a way of getting them.*

## BENEFITS OF UNIVERSITY

Various respondents indicated a number of ways in which the benefits of attending a university extend beyond initial motivations. Having to cope with freedom and the responsibility attached to moving away from home were occasionally mentioned as stressful; but actually coping with these demands was more often seen as a highly beneficial contribution to character development. It encouraged personal discipline and time management.

Opinions varied greatly on whether courses provided the opportunities for creativity and whether the formal structures of the university encouraged character development or influenced values. More frequently opportunities and influences of this type were connected with extra-curricular activities involving



societies and sport, and most particularly in the broadening of experience which flowed from participation in a more diverse community of peers. Each of these things was seen by some to be both of personal benefit and a necessary preparation for employment because of the vital importance of the interpersonal skills that could be acquired.

Responses relating to sources of personal support further emphasise the importance of informal structures rather than formal student support mechanisms. Few students said there was an explicit ethical dimension to their courses unless it was in some way intrinsic to the course, for example in theology, philosophy, psychology or the study of literature.

## PERSONAL TUTORS

Although there were outstanding examples of good practice, these were outnumbered by poor experience. Indeed, in many institutions the formal structures seemed to create many of the problems, while informal personal relationships and support for example through a wise course tutor could be positive in cases where tutors had gone beyond their job in making time for them and helping them. These comments were mirrored by employees' views of mentors and buddies.





# GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

## MOTIVATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

There was a strong division between those who for various altruistic or emotional reasons had 'always wanted to be' a teacher or a nurse or had turned to such professions and on the other those who saw management and similar professions as a route to economic benefits. The division, however, was not an absolute one and one respondent had moved from a job in the City to teaching. The motivation for trying to join one firm rather than another showed concerns for things other than professional advancement, although the majority referred to benefits the firm offered them personally. Some respondents, especially those with volunteering experience, added that CSR programmes had been a factor in their choice (see d) below).

## BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES

As with higher education, the benefits perceived to arise from working in a particular firm were broader than the factors that motivated joining it. Opportunity, support and training, personal interest, challenge were frequently mentioned. The remuneration package was obviously a factor, but rarely listed as the number one consideration; the quality of the personal relationships and work life balance were of greater concern.

## EMPLOYERS' REQUIREMENTS

The expectations of employers are well documented and appreciated by the



interviewees, both students and employees. Intellectual competence, willingness to learn, personal confidence and ambition, inter-personal and communication skills, and good team work were all mentioned. Hard skills were recognised as being easier to compensate for with training than the absence of soft skills. Respondents commented that employers were looking for involvement in voluntary work, which said something more about character and was recognised as an opportunity to develop capacity to work and communicate with people.

## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

About a quarter of all respondents (including students) mentioned influences that just arise naturally from being in the job. This resonates with views expressed about higher education mainly affecting values and character because of meeting a wider range of people or the freedom and responsibility that comes with moving away from home. In a similar way, employment was seen as leading to a more serious attitude to life and a sense of collective responsibility.



*At university everything you did was for yourself. If I didn't do something then I would fail. If I don't do something here it just doesn't relate to me it relates to everyone in the team around me. You're responsible and accountable to other people, not just yourself.*

The most commonly mentioned intentional contribution of employers to character development was their policies on Corporate Social Responsibility. A good CSR strategy certainly adds to the kudos, standing and respect of companies, leading to the perhaps cynical suggestion by some students and graduate employees interviewed that CSR is a matter of public relations, of image management, rather than being genuinely motivated. In the main, however, CSR initiatives could be taken as demonstrating the potential for employers and their employees to demonstrate moral and social awareness, contribute to society and the communities in which they are based and therefore be seen to engage in a high standard of business ethics.

## ETHICS IN BUSINESS

The importance of ethical behaviour to company success was agreed by all the interviewees who chose to respond to this question. However, it was not clear in all cases whether this was a practical business matter, a matter of compliance, or a genuine concern for morality. Confidentiality, client-and centred behaviour were the most frequently mentioned aspects of business ethics in building relationships of trust.



# ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIETY AND CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

## VOLUNTEERING AND CHARITY WORK

Volunteering is a growing and global phenomenon and universities increasingly promote the voluntary activities of their students. Opportunities to do voluntary work while at university are multifarious and complex. Most respondents contributed to a wide ranging list of activities in which they had engaged, including work with disadvantaged groups such as people with learning disabilities; work with ethnic minorities; helping the elderly, visiting schools to help in classes, for example with reading or personally mentoring a child and sports coaching, or encouraging aspiration for HE; working with youth organisations; and manifold charity, fund raising and awareness raising events with environmental issues, working..

## MOTIVATION FOR VOLUNTEERING

As with CSR, the motives for engaging in voluntary work vary greatly. They may be grouped under three heads: those that were genuine – it's good for its own sake; self-interest – it looks good; utilitarian – what matters is the outcome, never mind the motivation. The two quotations below illustrate contrasting motivations:

*I think that it's important to give something back to the world. If you're just in it for yourself all the time, then it's a very sad life it's going to be. And also you learn about yourself as well, you learn about other people and I think it makes you appreciate things more ... You need to try and make a difference.*

*I've done voluntary work [at school]. You get a certificate for 50 hours, you get a t-shirt for a hundred hours. It's something you can put on your c.v.*

## BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

The research tends to show that there is a strong link between the voluntary work of students and the CSR activities of graduate employees. Those who had engaged in voluntary work at university were more likely to participate in CSR when they came into graduate employment.

## CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

There was very little mention of involvement in civic or political activity, though this could be because in the minds of most respondents civic and political activity is not seen as a form of voluntary work or as related to character.

## POLITICAL VIEWS

Despite the apparent lack of political or civic engagement, respondents were generally able to say something about their political views. About one in ten explicitly spoke of left wing (or even Labour Party) sympathies. A similar number spoke of being undecided or confused about politics. Rather fewer expressed views that were clearly liberal, and there were occasional mentions of pacifism. Explicit avowals of right wing views were less common, although some of the other comments made seemed to imply a preference for small government and for people who worked hard and could earn good money (like the respondents) being able to keep their earnings.

# APPENDICES

The full report contains detailed linguistic data of words associated with good character. Here we reproduce the top ten preferences in each category. The full lists from NVivo8 analysis can be found in the main report.

## GOOD CHARACTER

- honest
- helpful
- trustworthy
- friendly, friendship
- kind
- integrity
- work hard
- empathy & sympathy for others
- sense of humour & fun
- openness, open-mindedness

## BAD CHARACTER

- selfish and self absorbed
- dishonest
- arrogance
- not taking an interest in others
- disrespectful
- laziness
- rudeness
- aggressive & violent
- hurtful
- untrustworthy & treacherous

## CORE VALUES

- honesty
- hard working
- integrity
- do best
- helpful
- respect
- trustworthiness
- empathy
- caring
- friendly

## INFLUENCES ON CHARACTER (NUMBER OF MENTIONS)

- Parents
- Friends and Peers
- Family
- University Tutors / Supervisors
- Mother
- Girlfriend / Boyfriend
- Work Colleagues
- Work Mentors
- Managers
- Meeting People from Different Backgrounds

## POLITICAL BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS

- political beliefs non specific
- left wing
- Conservative
- liberal
- people disillusioned with politics
- welfare state
- important to consider political values
- centre
- difficult to define
- don't like Tories



## RELIGIOUS AND OTHER BELIEFS LIST

- not religious
- don't believe in God / atheist
- I am a Christian
- agnostic / open minded
- belief in higher being / God
- nominal Christian
- undecided about religion
- confession and forgiveness take away guilt
- provides common morality
- non-practising

## HE MOTIVATION

- career related – many specific to teaching or nursing
- expected of me
- enjoy & continue learning
- subject interest
- natural progression
- encouraged by teachers
- opportunity for personal development
- reputation
- parents
- reputation for being the best University / course

## BENEFITS OF HE

- independence
- personal development
- time management
- academic skills
- understanding others different backgrounds
- communication skills
- responsible for own learning, self motivation
- critical & analytical skills
- confidence
- interpersonal skills

## HE INFLUENCE ON VALUES, ATTITUDES AND DISPOSITIONS

- doesn't influence values
- broadens thinking, makes you question
- meeting people from different backgrounds
- reinforced & shapes values
- confidence
- self-reflective & self-knowledge
- responsible
- as a consequence of environment you are influenced
- tolerance and open mindedness
- grow up

## EMPLOYMENT MOTIVATION

- training & graduate scheme
- reputation
- wage
- big company
- benefiting others
- job opportunities within company
- career potential & advancement
- interest in work area
- people
- job satisfaction

## CORE EMPLOYER VALUES (AND QUALITIES)

What interviewees thought were important to employers and their business

- best client service
- team work
- being distinctive
- encourage learning and development
- trustworthiness
- integrity
- care of employees
- progressing the company's success
- communication
- making it happen

## QUALITIES IMPORTANT TO EMPLOYERS IN EMPLOYEES

What interviewees thought employers were looking for in employees

- communicators
- academic skills & qualifications
- interpersonal skills
- hardworking
- team work
- ambition
- well rounded character
- intelligence
- initiative
- commitment & effort

## QUALITIES HE CONSIDERS IMPORTANT

Node detail	References
• intelligence	7
• originality of thought	7
• potential	6
• confidence	4
• enthusiasm	4
• creativity	3
• hard working	3
• achievers	2
• problem solving	2
• rebellious / disregard authority	2

## EMPLOYMENT INFLUENCE ON ATTITUDES & VALUES

Node detail	References
• grow up responsible	7
• confidence	6
• no influence	5
• time aware	5
• more focused	4
• realistic	4
• values awareness	4
• importance of image / presentation	3
• self-confidence	3
• work ethic	3

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to take this opportunity to thank the universities and companies without whose support and interest we would have been unable to carry out this research. Many tutors, members of personnel departments and directors of graduate employment gave their time freely in discussion and to them we extend our heartfelt gratitude. And, of course, we are especially appreciative of the contributions of students and employees whose willing participation contributed the serious meat to the enterprise - and a great deal of the enjoyment.

## THE UNIVERSITIES

King's College, University of Cambridge  
Canterbury Christ Church University  
Cass Business School, City University  
University of Essex

## THE BUSINESSES

British Telecom  
DTZ  
PricewaterhouseCoopers  
Tesco

We would also like to thank members of our advisory board for their valuable contributions and the John Templeton Foundation whose generous funding made this research possible. The opinions expressed within this report do not necessarily reflect the position of the John Templeton Foundation.

We would like to thank in particular Professor David Carr of the University of Edinburgh and Professor Vivian Williams of St. Peter's College, Oxford for their advice and comments on drafts of this report, and Nigel Newton for his work in assisting with the analysis of the data.

**Professor James Arthur**  
Director, Learning for Life



Contact

**James Arthur**

University of Birmingham

Birmingham

B15 2TT UK

Tel: +44 (0) 121 414 5596

Email: [j.arthur@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.arthur@bham.ac.uk)

[www.learningforlife.org.uk](http://www.learningforlife.org.uk)

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



JOHN TEMPLETON  
FOUNDATION