

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

CAN THE PROFESSIONS BE VIRTUOUS?

www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/professions





Examining professional education across Britain

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has explored the place of virtues and values in initial education, training and subsequent professional practice in key professions in the UK today. Across the professions of teaching, law, medicine, nursing, business and the British Army, the research has looked at the perceived and 'ideal' character strengths of professionals throughout their training and subsequent careers, as well as their levels of virtue-based reasoning when faced with moral dilemmas.

For more information on the Jubilee Centre's research in the professions please visit:

www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/professions

PARTICIPANTS

Findings are drawn from empirical data gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with trainee and experienced professionals, as well as their educators.



568
DOCTORS



722
NURSES



925
LAWYERS



526
TEACHERS



824
BUSINESS

3,565

PARTICIPANTS COMPLETED THE SURVEY ACROSS FIVE PROFESSIONS: PARTICIPANTS WERE EITHER FIRST YEAR STUDENTS, GRADUATES OR ESTABLISHED IN-SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

PERSONAL AND 'IDEAL' CHARACTER STRENGTHS

The research examined how members of each profession conceive their own character strengths and how this compares to their descriptions of the character strengths ideally needed to be a 'good' professional within their context. Below are two examples of the identified personal and 'ideal' character strengths of doctors and teachers.



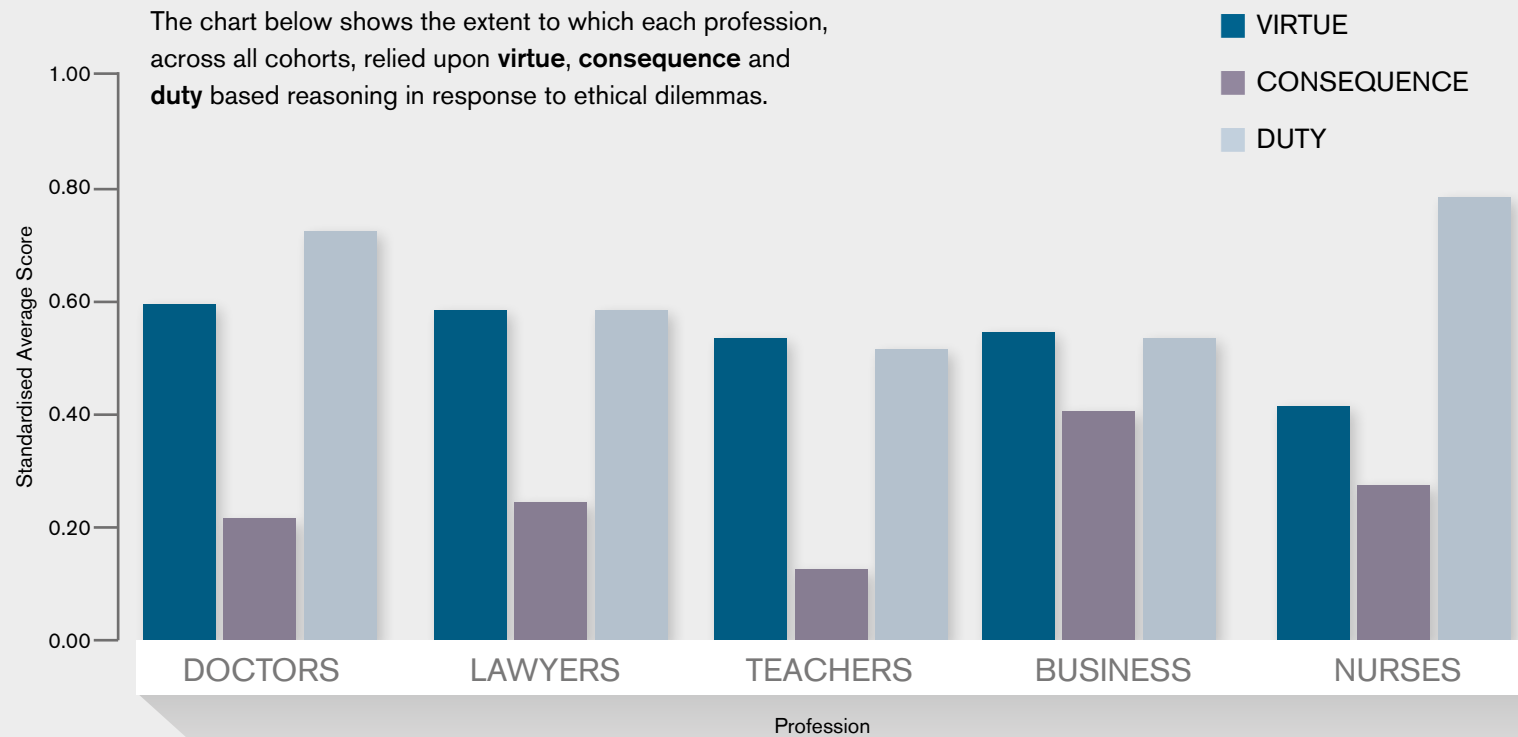
REASONING IN RESPONSE TO ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Participants were presented with ethical dilemmas they may face in their daily practice; the focus of interest was not on their chosen course of action but rather to challenge respondents to explain their choices, and, in particular, to understand different types of reasoning in that process.

A panel of experts from within each profession designed the relevant ethical dilemmas with a choice of possible courses of action to take in response. They then

identified six possible reasons for selecting each course of action. These reasons related to rules as set out by professional bodies, regulations and codes of conduct; to consequences that might occur if a particular course of action was or was not taken; and to moral virtues being upheld in the situation they faced. The analysis of responses therefore examined how virtues, codes of conduct, and the consequences of actions can contribute collectively to decision-making.

The chart below shows the extent to which each profession, across all cohorts, relied upon **virtue**, **consequence** and **duty** based reasoning in response to ethical dilemmas.



SOME KEY OBSTACLES TO BEING A VIRTUOUS PROFESSIONAL

- 37% of experienced teachers stated that they did not have sufficient time to do their job to a standard they believed was right
- While the character of doctors is often recognised as important, it is not part of the formal curriculum in medical schools
- Ethics education receives very little attention in the curricula for undergraduate law students
- Virtue-based reasoning declines over time and is overtaken by rule-based reasoning upon entering the nursing profession; obstacles such as lack of staff, time and resources were found to play a huge role in preventing nurses from displaying character in their practice
- In business, financial aspirations presented an obstacle to serving the common good

‘And the consultant comes round or something like that, that’s when the caring, compassion goes out the window, no matter what you’re thinking.’

Experienced Nurse

‘I’m struggling all the way through this with character strengths, personal qualities, which might say something about how little time I spend conceptualising them as I develop my teaching, which is, in itself, important to you, I think.’

Law Educator

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the key recommendations borne out of the research are highlighted below:

- More time should be dedicated to ethics education in the undergraduate teaching, and continuing professional development, of professionals.

Training should include examination of a range of ethical theories and the application of those theories to practice.

SENIOR STAFF, ROLE MODELS, AND SUPERVISORS SHOULD WORK TOGETHER TO PROVIDE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTING ON ETHICS IN THEIR WORKPLACE.

A POLL OF MORE THAN

2,000

people found that the majority feel it is most important for **doctors, politicians, and teachers** to be morally good people.





JOHN TEMPLETON
FOUNDATION

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About the Jubilee Centre

The Jubilee Centre is a pioneering interdisciplinary research centre focussing on character, virtues and values in the interest of human flourishing. The Centre promotes a moral concept of character in order to explore the importance of virtue for public and professional life. The Centre is a leading informant on policy and practice in this area and through its extensive range of projects contributes to a renewal of character virtues in both individuals and societies.



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