

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

VIRTUE, PRACTICAL WISDOM AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

A PILOT INTERVENTION DESIGNED TO ENHANCE VIRTUE KNOWLEDGE,
UNDERSTANDING AND REASONING IN STUDENT LAWYERS, DOCTORS
AND TEACHERS

RESEARCH REPORT

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About the Jubilee Centre

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues is a unique and leading centre for the examination of how character and virtues impact on individuals and society. The Centre was founded in 2012 by Professor James Arthur. Based at the University of Birmingham, it has a dedicated team of 30 academics from a range of disciplines, including: philosophy, psychology, education, theology and sociology.

With its focus on excellence, the Centre has a robust, rigorous research and evidence-based approach that is objective and non-political. It offers world-class research on the importance of developing good character and virtues and the benefits they bring to individuals and society. In undertaking its own innovative research, the Centre also seeks to partner with leading academics from other universities around the world and to develop strong strategic partnerships.

A key conviction underlying the existence of the Centre is that the virtues that make up good character can be learnt and taught. We believe these have been largely neglected in schools and in the professions. It is also a key conviction that the more people exhibit good character and virtues, the healthier our society. As such, the Centre undertakes development projects seeking to promote the practical applications of its research evidence.



Virtue, Practical Wisdom and Professional Education

A Pilot Intervention Designed to Enhance Virtue
Knowledge, Understanding and Reasoning in Student
Lawyers, Doctors and Teachers

Research Report

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Executive Summary

Members of the law, medical and teaching professions are, arguably, not being sufficiently prepared to deal with the ethical dimensions of their practice; pre- and in-service educational programmes typically spend little or no time on character and virtue-based approaches to professional ethics education (Arthur *et al.*, 2014b; 2015a; 2015b; Kristjánsson *et al.*, 2017a; 2017b). This report describes the methods employed in developing, implementing, and piloting a new online intervention, entitled *Character in the Professions*, designed to introduce the concepts of character, virtue, and practical wisdom (or, more precisely, professional *phronesis*) to student lawyers, doctors, and teachers. The intervention was piloted with 1,456 students from 10 institutions across Britain, none of which had previously taught a discrete course on character-based professional ethics.

The primary aim of this research was to consider how a professional education intervention on character might be implemented. The research also sought to explore the likely impact of the intervention on participants' understanding of character virtues (Virtue Knowledge and Understanding) and their ability to reflect upon the appropriate application of the virtues (Virtue Reasoning); two of the seven components of virtue as defined in the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017). The course was evaluated through a mixed methods approach.

Key findings

Key findings from the pilot study were:

- students became more familiar with the theory of virtue ethics and related concepts – participating in the intervention developed their Virtue Knowledge and Understanding;
- medical students developed their Virtue Reasoning during the intervention and were more likely to give character-based, as opposed to rules- and/or consequence-based, reasons for responding in a certain way to an ethical dilemma after participating;
- student teachers and law students were more positive about the potential influence of the intervention on their virtuous practice than their medical counterparts; and,
- participating students and tutors found the intervention to be of high quality and of relevant content that complemented existing programmes of study.

The findings indicate that character-based intervention can have a positive influence on the professional practice of those who participate in it; these findings should, however, be treated with some caution, due to the pilot format and the developmental nature of the evaluation. However, simply introducing such intervention into professional education is not in itself sufficient for the development of professional practical wisdom, which would require wider institutional and societal efforts.

‘IF WE BECOME INCREASINGLY HUMBLE ABOUT HOW LITTLE WE KNOW, WE MAY BE MORE EAGER TO SEARCH.’

John Templeton

1 Purpose of the Report

This report gives an account of the development, delivery and pilot of a new intervention designed to introduce the concepts of character, virtue and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) to students training to be lawyers, doctors and teachers. Evidence shows that members of these professions, and others, are not being sufficiently prepared to deal with the ethical dimensions of their practice (eg, Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2013; Sockett, 2012; Willense Lunenberg and Korshagen, 2008). Further, pre- and in-service educational programmes typically spend little or no time on character and virtue-based approaches to professional ethical education. More specifically, previous research conducted by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues found that initial professional education programmes in law, teaching and medicine allow little time for reflecting on what moral, and other, virtues are important, as professionals embark on their careers (Arthur *et al.*, 2014b; 2015a; 2015b). The research revealed that students and experienced professionals were unhappy with the content of the ethics education they received at university (if any); they maintained that it focussed either on too abstract theoretical principles or too specific rules and codes, with the 'moral middle' – namely engagement with real-life moral scenarios – being squeezed out.

Given reports of high-profile scandals and misconduct in various professions over recent years (Blond, Antonacopoulou and Pabst, 2015; Hall, Wixon and Poulson, 2011; Wald, 2004; Dixon-Woods, Yeung and Bosk, 2011), it is timely to consider how professionals are being prepared for the ethical dimensions of their roles. This report showcases a new approach to the education of professionals that is founded on the development of moral character virtues, and importantly, the meta-virtue of *phronesis* – the intellectual ability to adjudicate conflicting demands in order to do the right thing at the right time. The approach adopted here focussed specifically on the development of virtue literacy; further, it examined the inter-related components of Virtue Knowledge, Understanding and Reasoning (Jubilee Centre, 2017). The ultimate aim was for the intervention to emphasise the importance of Virtue Action and Practice in student teachers, doctors and lawyers and to offer an educational strategy by which such practice can be cultivated.

This report provides an account of the methods employed in developing, implementing and piloting a new online course entitled *Character in the Professions*.

The course was subjected to a mixed method evaluation that was deemed appropriate for an intervention in development – as determined by the evolutionary evaluation model (Brown-Urban, Hargraves and Trochim, 2014). The evaluation findings add weight to the call for an increased emphasis on the cultivation of virtue literacy and, in particular, practical wisdom in the education of professionals. Further, the positive findings give confidence that the *Character in the Professions* course should be rolled out to a wider professional audience and subjected to a more advanced evaluation.

'A VIRTUE-BASED APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION WOULD SEEK TO STRENGTHEN THE CHARACTER OF ALL WHO ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE.'

Jubilee Centre, 2016



2 Background

The professions enjoy a unique and privileged place in the public eye. They are relied upon for moral probity, diligence, fairness and resolve, frequently in complicated circumstances and often in the face of conflicting demands. Professional people are expected to do the right thing; and they are expected to do the right thing both for individuals – be they clients, customers, patients, pupils, victims of crime or enemy combatants – and for society at large. (Jubilee Centre, 2016)

In response to findings from previous research that showed a gap in character-based approaches to ethical education (Arthur *et al.*, 2014b; 2015a; 2015b) a new online course entitled *Character in the Professions* was developed by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues in collaboration with experts in the field of professional education and virtue ethics. The course was designed for students training to be teachers, doctors and lawyers at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. The course drew heavily on previous theoretical and practical work undertaken by the Jubilee Centre (eg, Arthur *et al.*, 2017; Kristjánsson, 2015; Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016), and prioritised virtue ethical moral theory in order to encourage professionals to make wiser decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas.

2.1 CHARACTER IN THE PROFESSIONS COURSE

Despite the increasing calls for character-based approaches to be adopted in the ethical education of professionals, there are few examples of this occurring at scale in practice. While recent editions of textbooks used in professional ethics education tend to contain longer treatments of virtue ethics as a moral theory, deontological or duty-based approaches are still the theories of choice in practice.

Nevertheless, the research team came across several excellent examples of departments or teachers who were running, at the time of writing, individual sessions or short courses on virtue ethics (see for example, Fish, de Cossart and Wright, 2015); however, these had not been subjected to any substantive evaluation. One initiative that stands out is the 'Phronesis

project' being run by the School of Medicine at the University of Virginia, USA founded by Dr. Margaret Plews-Ogan.

The project started in 2014 and strives to inspire wisdom and empathy in student physicians, primarily through early and long-term relationships with patients. At the time of writing, the project was trialling a new *phronesis* curriculum that encouraged students to 'see the patient as a person, rather than their disease'; findings from the research are yet to be reported and the project is now in its third year (Kobert, 2016). Another notable study, also yet to report, is the 'Phronesis and the Medical Community project', an initiative being run by the School of Medicine at the University of Birmingham. Exploring the place of ethics in making good decisions at a leadership level in medicine, the project specifically aims to 'offer significant and improved understanding of how medical students and doctors acquire *phronesis*; how they generate and transmit professional values; negotiate ethical problems and apply virtues' (University of Birmingham, 2016). When it concludes, the project will also offer a methodology for researching the complex aspects of *phronesis* using a combination of arts and humanities and social science approaches.

Drawing inspiration from the projects outlined above and from findings in aforementioned Jubilee Centre reports on professional ethics, the development of the *Character in the Professions* course started with a scoping period, including a review of literature and discussions with a range of experts representing a range of institutions and the law, teaching and medical professions. Members were selected to form an expert advisory group for the project based on their occupation and their involvement in the teaching of, or research into, ethics in law, teaching and medicine; advisory group meetings were held to discuss initial ideas for the course.

Early discussion related to the duration, layout, content and structure of the course and how this might be adapted to suit each profession. Following this, a draft hard copy of the online course for each of the professions was developed and the group provided feedback before content was produced in an online format to be piloted.

The course comprised of three interlinked units containing learning activities directly relatable to each of the professions. In Unit 1 students were introduced to character education, as well as the philosophical theory behind virtue ethics. In Unit 2, students learnt about how they might apply practical wisdom to ethical dilemmas and were also encouraged to reflect on their own personal character virtues in relation to their practice. Unit 3 contained a series of reflective activities designed to inspire the students to apply their learning to their daily practice. The course was designed to enable face to face teaching by the tutor, as well as offering the flexibility for students to work their way through the course independently at their own pace or to a schedule provided by the tutor. In all cases, it was recommended that tutors introduced the course to students in a classroom setting, even if students were to complete the activities independently. Where independent learning would take place, the course featured discussion boards where students could engage with other learners and reflect on some of the key issues raised by each course activity. The course, whilst having content tailored to each profession, followed the same structure across professions; the structure of the course for medical students is illustrated in Table 1.

'OUR EXAMINATION IS NOT TO KNOW WHAT VIRTUE IS, BUT TO BECOME GOOD.'

Aristotle

Table 1: Course Content and Aims (Examples from course for Medical Students)

Course Activities	What will students learn?
<p>Unit 1: Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To give an overview of the course structure and layout ■ To help students understand virtue ethics and provide details of why virtue ethics has been chosen as the framework to teach character for the rest of the course ■ To help students understand <i>phronesis</i> (practical wisdom) and its place and importance in character education ■ To start to link <i>phronesis</i> with the medical profession and help students understand the meaning of being a virtuous professional 	
<p>1.1 Introduction to the Course Students are introduced to the learning objectives for the course, its structure and key features.</p> <p>1.2 What is virtue ethics? Students consider Aristotle's concept of the 'golden mean' in relation to a set of virtues/vices.</p> <p>Students compare the similarities and differences of the moral theories of virtue ethics, utilitarianism and deontology.</p> <p>1.3 What is Phronesis? Working in small groups, students think about a time where they have demonstrated <i>phronesis</i> in their personal and professional life that week and explain what factors affected their decision-making, and which virtues came into conflict.</p> <p>1.4 Phronesis in the Professions Students summarise key points following reflection on quotes provided about virtue ethics.</p> <p>1.5 Why does Character Matter? Working in small groups, ideally, students note ways in which character was taught or developed when they were at school or college. They are asked to consider how character development might have been improved in these environments? Reading the Jubilee Centre's <i>Virtuous Medical Practice</i> research report, students consider the character strengths of the 'ideal' doctor.</p> <p>1.6 Reflection Students are asked to complete a quiz to reflect on what they have learnt so far.</p>	<p><i>By the end of this unit students should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Understand the course layout and feel comfortable with navigating the web pages ■ Understand the reason they are taking the course and how it relates to their profession ■ Understand how virtue ethics links with character ■ Understand the importance of <i>phronesis</i> when the demands of two or more virtues collide ■ Explore the importance of <i>phronesis</i> in the medical profession more generally and understand the importance of virtue cultivation in one's professional practice



Unit 2: *Phronesis* in Medicine

- To help students learn the difference between moral theories; the unit provides an overview of how virtue ethics, a credible alternative to these theories, can be applied to the practice of medicine
- To help students consider the questions of character contained within the most recent scandals in the medical profession
- Encourage students to understand the meaning and importance of being a virtuous professional
- Encourage students to reflect on morally challenging ethical dilemmas in the workplace
- To help students to reflect on their own character strengths and how these personal virtues relate to their practice

2.1 *Phronesis* in Medicine

Students review the [24 personal character strengths](#) as listed in the VIA Survey of Character Strengths. Students select the character strengths which they feel are most important for their profession.

2.2 *Doctors in the News*

Students are presented with a number of news reports to read and are asked to rank them in order of descending seriousness. Students work in small groups to identify the common themes of character, virtues and vices that are displayed.

2.3 *Personal Character Strengths*

Students complete the VIA test. Students think of an event in their life where they have been required to use some or all of the character strengths in their top 5 on the VIA survey. How did they use those strengths? Did the character strengths clash or compete with one another?

2.4 *Role Models*

Students think about those in their professional life who inspire them and highlight five positive character strengths they possess. Beyond their immediate family, students are asked to think about who else has demonstrated these character strengths? Are these character strengths often demonstrated in formal and informal settings? As a point of contrast, students are also asked to think about the influence of negative role models.

2.5 *Ethical Dilemmas*

Students are presented with ethical dilemmas (relating to their profession) illustrated either as an animated film, or as text. In small groups, or working on their own, students carefully consider each dilemma and think about how they might approach such a situation in practice.

2.6 *Codes of Conduct*

Students review the codes of conduct from their handbooks for their profession and are asked to consider in light of these what different stakeholders expect from them as doctors. Students are asked to design their own ethical dilemmas after reviewing the code(s) of conduct.

By the end of this unit students should:

- Be able to explain the difference between moral theories, in particular, the importance of virtue ethics in teaching character
- Recognise the importance of being a virtuous professional in medicine
- Understand that they may not always be able to rely on the codes of conduct in morally challenging situations at work, and the importance of the development of *phronesis*
- Understand that certain virtues may need to be prioritised in different situations
- Know more about their own character strengths and how they relate to the practice of medicine

Unit 3: Reflection

This unit was designed to help students assess their knowledge at the end of the course by providing them with a number of reflection tools

In this section students have the opportunity to assess their understanding of the concepts they have learnt about in the previous two units. The reflection tools listed below help them develop their knowledge and understanding of virtue ethics and *phronesis*, particularly in the context of their chosen professions.

- Presentation activity
- Quiz
- Reflective essay
- Ethical dilemma app
- Debate
- News search

By the end of this unit students should:

- Feel more confident and aware of the place of *phronesis* in their profession and the importance of virtue ethics in their training

2.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

2.2.1 Rethinking the Ethical Education of Professionals

With the development of contemporary sciences, and the onset of the industrial revolution, came scepticism, and sometimes outright rejection, of virtue-based theories, which prior to that – since the days of Aristotle – had dominated the field (MacIntyre, 1984; Veatch, 1985). The implications of this erosion of tradition for the ethical management of professional practice mean that it became overtaken by codes of conduct, largely based on deontological (duty-based) and utilitarian lines of thinking (Burrige and Webb, 2007; de Zulueta 2015; Shortt *et al.*, 2012). Schwartz and Sharpe (2010) argue that this 'carrot-and-stick' method of ever-stricter rules and greater rewards does not work and note the importance of recognising that many moral considerations are uncodifiable. In addition, deontological and utilitarian theories do not take into consideration the different nuances of a professional's role; as Oakley (2015: 48) notes, specifically in relation to medical practice, such direct approaches tend to 'neglect ethically distinctive role-differentiated features of medical practice'. An accumulation of examples of misconduct and incidents of unprofessionalism indicates that rules and incentives are insufficient on their own and even demotivate professional practice (Blond, Antonacopoulou and Pabst, 2015); public trust in the professions is therefore eroding (Tallis, 2006).

Research shows that professional education nowadays still broadly reflects the dominant tradition and ethical training of professionals by focussing on codes of conduct (Jubilee Centre, 2016); this is the case in the training of teachers (Freeman and Johnson, 1998; Campbell, 2000; 2001; Strike and Ternasky, 1993), medics (Pellegrino and Thomasma, 1993; Pellegrino, 2007), and lawyers (Duncan and Kay, 2011). A number of problems are presented by this approach.

Firstly, codes of conduct are at times abstract and professionals are often called on to use their character virtues to judge situations that are not covered by any ethical standards (Shortt *et al.*, 2012). Secondly, professionals may often find themselves caught between following the code and remaining true to the conviction of their character (Carr, 2000; Strike and Soltis, 1992; Shortt *et al.*, 2012; Cody, 2015); this can place a barrier between professional conduct and personal values, beliefs, truthfulness, conscience and the internal necessity to care, ultimately jeopardising a professional's integrity, and even leading to burn-out (Krieger, 2005).

Thirdly, written codes are not aspirational (Burrige and Webb, 2007) but are fundamentally disciplinary; they may result in professionals conforming to duty merely in order to avoid negative consequences, rather than taking positive action when facing challenge (Victor and Cullen, 1988; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Finally, it has been found that certain behaviours developed during preliminary training often correlate with future behaviour (Papadakis *et al.*, 2005; 2008); hence supporting the call for virtue ethics as an approach to cultivating reflective habituation into good practice rather than simply adopting the mind-set of compliance. These problems provoke concerns about the suitability of current approaches to the education of the professions; such concerns, in turn, call for the foundations of the ethical training of professionals to be revisited (Jubilee Centre, 2016).

2.2.2 Virtue Ethics-based Approaches to Professional Education

While attention is often given in such education to the more general principles, or 'do's' and 'don'ts', of good practice, there seems to be less exploration of the morally problematic dimensions of professional engagement – especially of those in which there may be real tension between best 'situated' professional judgement and received convention, and in which practitioners may precisely require personal initiative, integrity and courage to counter unhelpful institutional and social trends and pressures. (Jubilee Centre, 2016)

Education for students aspiring to join any profession should provoke in them a desire to be a *good* professional – not just a competent professional. Research has shown that experienced practitioners highlight shortcomings of contemporary professional ethical education, notably an over-emphasis on abstract moral principles (such as patient autonomy, in medicine) or technical competencies (such as behaviour-management 'techniques', in teaching) (Arthur *et al.*, 2014b; 2015a; 2015b). Trainees and early career professionals also learn about practical codes and rules (on 'bedside manners' or dress codes or confidentiality protocols, for example).

The moral dilemmas faced by professionals, that often put their character to the test, tend to be given less attention. What is needed is appropriate time and space for moral reflection, evaluation and action, particularly on the part of today's trainees, graduate-level entrants and early career professionals who will become the leaders of their professions (Jubilee Centre, 2016).

This argument has led to a growing call for the ethical education of professions to include modules on virtue ethics (Miles *et al.*, 1989; Musick, 1999; Fox, Arnold and Brody, 1995; Eckles *et al.*, 2005) and an emphasis on the meta-virtue of *phronesis* (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010; Miles *et al.*, 1989; Singer, 2000; Sulmasy, 2000; Shelton, 1999). Recent years have seen the revival of virtue ethics as a viable alternative moral theory to deontology and utilitarianism, not only in professional ethics but moral philosophy in general (Anscombe, 1958; Foot, 1978; Hursthouse, 1999). As described by Kristjánsson (2015), 'virtue ethics' refers to any moral theory that foregrounds the concepts of character and virtue, and its roots are typically based in Aristotelian philosophy. In comparison to utilitarianism and deontology, virtue ethics, with its focus on character, takes an 'agent-orientated' or 'person-centred' approach to understanding human conduct; it forces us to make moral evaluations on the basis of what would count as good character (Saguil, 2006). Further to this resurgence of virtue ethics, empirical research has shown professionals themselves have identified the need to be provided with character-based ethical training (Jubilee Centre, 2016; 2civility, 2015; Carey, Curlin and Yoon, 2015). Although, as Menkel-Meadow (1991) and Nussbaum (1999) identify, there has been limited challenge to this position, it is now widely accepted that virtue-based approaches to training will strengthen the character of professionals (CIPD, 2015), and may help towards making education a morally fulfilling experience for teachers and students (Kristjánsson, 2015). Aside from the professions discussed in this report, virtue ethics has also been seen as integral to the education of other professions, including nursing (Vanlaere and Gastmans, 2007; Kristjánsson *et al.*, 2017b), business (Mintz, 1996; Kristjánsson *et al.*, 2017a), social work (Pullen-Sansfacon, 2010), youth work (Bessant 2009), sports coaching (Hardman, Jones and Jones, 2010), and the military (Olsthoorn, 2014), amongst others.

The project presented in this report was grounded in the belief that character- and virtue-based education programmes are required to bolster existing approaches to the ethical training of professionals. Two central virtue ethical concepts help define such an approach; the first is *arête* or virtue. Research has shown that different professions prioritise different virtues (Cooke and Carr, 2014), but there is a broad consensus that virtues such as courage, compassion and honesty are crucial to any 'good' professional practice.

The second concept is *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is an intellectual meta-virtue required for balancing the other virtues, especially when their requirements seem to collide, by helping professionals to reflect on the specificities of the situation and negotiate dilemmas in order to reach virtuous outcomes. The focus of *phronesis*-centred education should be to cultivate in professionals the ability to make wise decisions and moral judgements when faced with ethical dilemmas. Taking the time to reflect meaningfully upon experiences would help them to understand the moral norms embodied in their virtuous actions (Graham, 1995). To understand the moral essence of being a professional, one needs to look closely at the complexities and ethical problems in practice. Such preparation helps to 'tune' the practice in a way that allows professionals to make better judgments when virtues collide, or when there is a clash between codes of conduct and personal virtues. This approach helps to develop ethical knowledge and hone moral sensibilities in professionals (Campbell, 2008). The critical question that this report attempts to address is: can character virtues and *phronesis* be augmented throughout training with the aim of enabling teachers, doctors and lawyers to flourish in their role?

2.2.3 Virtue Knowledge, Reasoning and Practice

The debate about whether character can be *taught* is well rehearsed (Jubilee Centre, 2017; Arthur, 2008; Carr, 2008; Davis, 2003). The project presented in this report was grounded on the assumption that carefully planned and delivered learning activities expose professionals to the language and philosophy of virtue ethics, which subsequently influences their professional practice. Theorists supporting this assumption include Annas (2011), who argues that virtue can be acquired just as technical and practical skills are learnt, and Curzer (2016), who argues that although educating the virtues is not a straightforward linear process, between discrete stages different interventions will help different components of the virtues to grow. As such, a key aim of the *Character in the Professions* intervention was to engage the students in critical thinking about their own character and virtues, and bring the sometimes unconscious into the cognitive.

In order to provide a clear theory of development, the *Character in the Professions* course was specifically targeted at the development of Virtue Knowledge and Understanding, and Virtue Reasoning in

professionals; collectively known as virtue literacy; Virtue Knowledge and Understanding and Virtue Reasoning are two of the seven components of virtue as defined in the *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017). Virtue literacy is a construct that has been developed most notably in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' *Knightly Virtues* programme (Arthur *et al.*, 2014a; Carr and Harrison, 2015). Essentially, to be virtue literate is to acquire a language of character through familiarity with virtue terms. As Vasalou (2012) notes, it is *thick* virtue terms like 'honesty' that provide an apt moral language for character education rather than *thin* terms like 'rightness'. The *Character in the Professions* intervention sought to develop a 'language of character' by exposing professionals in training to virtue concepts that relate to their role. To illustrate here, one activity encouraged students to reflect on the presence or absence of virtues in different news stories relating to their chosen profession, for example.

Virtue Reasoning might be seen as both being dependent upon Virtue Knowledge and Understanding, and also a tool that can be used to enrich it (Jubilee Centre, 2017). Virtue Reasoning can be viewed developmentally; it recognises the value of introducing new, and perhaps more complex, ways of making judgements about behaviour, that disrupt existing cognitive structures. Like moral reasoning, Virtue Reasoning builds on the idea of rational judgments but places the emphasis firmly on character virtues and, in particular, the previously explained concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom.

In considering the literature, developing the ability and confidence to respond to conflicting virtues when faced with a dilemma, needed to be a key component of the *Character in the Professions* course. It was felt that the use of real life, profession-specific dilemmas would provide a useful basis for discussion and encourage the development of moral reasoning in students, as evidenced in research by Van Hise and Massey (2010) (see also, Rest, 1986; Mintz, 2006; Pullen-Sansfacon, 2010). The opportunity for students to critically reflect was also woven into each of the courses, so to prevent the completion of activities in total isolation (Benninga, Sparks and Tracz, 2011; Bullough, 2011; Biesta 2001). As Sherman (1999: 248) asserts, the acquisition of virtue 'must involve the employment of critical capacities, such as attending to a goal, recognising mistakes and learning from them, understanding instructions, following tips and cues', and

so forth; the repetition therefore of tackling moral dilemmas in ethics education provides space for students to refine their approach to decision making through what Sherman terms 'successive trials'. Despite the infamous gap identified between virtue literacy and Virtue Action and Practice (acting virtuously) (Blasi, 1980), it can be hypothesised that those who possess Virtue Knowledge and Virtue Reasoning are more likely to practice virtues, since virtuous practice presupposes attention and understanding. Virtue Action and Practice should therefore be the ultimate aim of ethical education in the professions, and of the *Character in the Professions* course specifically – so that the professionals in training do not just acquire some cognitive understanding of what would be the desirable virtue to display in certain circumstances, but are able to translate this knowledge and reasoning into action as part of their everyday practice.

2.3 EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS WITH CHARACTER-BASED COURSES

The present project was built on a belief that universities and other training institutions should aim to contribute towards the preparation of virtuous professionals in their area of expertise, through prioritising the integration of character-based education and training. There appear to be at least two potential problems with this position, however, one *normative* and one *practical*.

The *normative* problem is whether training providers are warranted to go beyond simply teaching the knowledge and skills associated with the profession to considering questions of ethics, character and virtues. This position is untenable, for being a professional means by its very definition to uphold the values and traditions of a particular practice for the benefit of the public or the 'common good'; questions of ethics and character are therefore fundamental to training (Cooke and Carr, 2014). For individuals to understand the importance of their character in the professions they practice they must understand that virtuous conduct contributes to societal flourishing. A related and common refrain is to question 'whose' virtues should be promoted in professional education. The virtues emphasised in the *Character in the Professions* course were chosen because they are recognised and embraced by people from all cultures and religions, as well as those of no religion, and are recognised as important to the professions themselves (Jubilee Centre, 2016).

The *practical* problem is finding time and space in pre- and in-service training for courses on character, virtue and *phronesis*. It is a challenge that is duly acknowledged in the literature (Bondi *et al.*, 2012). Even if professional training programmes have room for courses on ethics, these do not all cover virtue ethical theories and approaches, which are sometimes seen to be about supererogatory niceties rather than the hard core of codified ethical requirements (Duncan and Kay, 2011; Cooke and Carr, 2014; Pellegrino and Thomasma, 1993). Carving time and space out of an already busy curriculum for such courses relies on tutors recognising their importance and prioritising them over competing demands. In the development of the *Character in the Professions* course, the feasibility of tutors being able to deliver the course, without sacrificing time committed to 'core training', was crucial in shaping the format of the course; the research reported here, therefore, addresses both these normative and practical problems.

2.4 OVERALL EVALUATIVE GOALS

Attempts to devise practical interventions devoted to character education and targeted at teachers, lawyers and doctors in professional education have been few and far between in the UK context. In this regard, it is clear that the *Character in the Professions* intervention was pioneering in the field; as such, the programme sought to address two overall evaluative goals.

The first overall evaluative goal was to discover how virtue-based ethical training programmes might be inculcated into wider professional training provision; to address this, students at different stages of their training were encouraged to participate in the pilot and accessed the learning materials in different formats (for example, through online learning, face-to-face teaching, or a combination of the two). An initial goal was to address the pedagogical problem – how to implement the *Character in the Professions* course into actual classroom and online teaching and learning practice.

This included which methods of instruction might be adopted, and teaching resources developed, for the most effective communication of the significance of theories of character, virtue and *phronesis* for the professions. A second goal was to address a more practical problem – how to fit the *Character in the Professions* course into the existing curricular provision. Evidence from the research would enable a better understanding as to how other professional educators might adopt such programmes into their own curricula.

A second goal was to evaluate the influence of the course on the Virtue Knowledge and Understanding, Virtue Reasoning, and Virtue Action and Practice of the student doctors, teachers, and lawyers who participated in it, with a view to provide research evidence for a more widespread inclusion of virtue-based approaches in professional education. It was hoped the evaluation of the intervention would highlight the effectiveness, suitability and flexibility of the course and therefore inform future decisions regarding its viability, dissemination to a wider audience, and the value of conducting a more sophisticated and rigorous evaluative trial.

Related to the goals outlined above, the research would also provide an opportunity to explore ways in which the influence of character education interventions might feasibly be measured or evaluated, a crucial issue to address if any intervention is to be successful. To date, many character education interventions, in higher education and schools, have either avoided evaluation altogether or been subjected to fairly basic evaluations. A greater understanding of how more rigorous methods, such as pre- and post-tests and the use of ethical dilemmas, might be harnessed to measure the impact of character education interventions is needed. Enhanced knowledge of how to measure impact will in turn provide a better understanding of 'what works' in character-based curricula initiatives that will inform future research. More robust evidence will also be useful to make the case to both policymakers and practitioners, for an enhanced focus on character and virtue in professional education.

'IT IS OUR MORAL OBLIGATION TO GIVE EVERY CHILD THE VERY BEST EDUCATION POSSIBLE.'

Desmond Tutu



3 Methodology

The *Character in the Professions* course was newly created and so formed a previously untested intervention. The primary aim of the research was to create and then pilot a new course designed to introduce teachers, doctors and lawyers to the concepts of character, virtue and professional *phronesis* and, therefore the research was primarily developmental and practical. In order to evaluate the programme, an 'evolutionary evaluation model' (Brown-Urban, Hargraves and Trochim, 2014) was adopted. In this model, evaluation of new programmes follows evolutionary phases, which are in turn aligned with multiple types of validity. The model anticipates that there is often misalignment between an intervention and type of evaluation, such as conducting a Randomised Control Trial on a programme in its infancy. The model is also useful for supporting both researcher-derived and practitioner-derived programmes. The evaluation of the *Character in the Professions* intervention is classified at a 'development stage' (p. 129) in the model. This is the second recommended stage after initiation – where a basic evaluation was undertaken by the advisory group of experts who helped develop and revise the intervention from its conception. The development stage is when 'most programme elements are implemented consistently though minor changes may still be taking place as some elements continue to develop' (p. 132). The recommended methodology for the evaluation of interventions at the development stage is to use an 'unmatched pre- and post-test of outcomes' (p. 129). At the same time, it is recommended that the evaluation methods themselves are evaluated for effectiveness and viability for possible use in future and more advanced evaluations.

The evaluation described here consisted of an unmatched pre- and post-survey completed by 539 students out of 1,456 who participated in the course. In all, the sample had 377 unmatched pairs (27%

of the total population) which give the findings a 95% confidence level with a 5+/- % margin of error. Although the data cannot be disaggregated by institution and participants were not randomly assigned, taken as a whole the survey is robust and reliable for the level of evaluation. The survey findings were further supported and illustrated by qualitative data gained through interviews with tutors and students. The following three questions informed the approach to data collection:

- How was the course implemented by the institutions?
- How was the course content and its relevance rated by the students and tutors?
- What did the student doctors, teachers and lawyers learn from the course? Did it develop their Virtue Knowledge, Understanding and Reasoning?

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

Pre- and post-intervention surveys

Pre- and post-intervention surveys are a well-used method of data collection, particularly for determining the effect of an intervention. As the research project was conceived as a pilot study, it was not deemed necessary to randomise, or use controls, although this should be undertaken when evaluating a more advanced and stable intervention. Members of an advisory group, made up of representatives from each of the three professions, were asked to review the content, layout, and functionality of the pre- and post-intervention surveys during their development. Amendments, based on advice from this group, were made before the surveys were finalised. The survey included the following sections:

- i) Demographics;
- ii) Previous professional ethical education experience and attitudes;
- iii) Evaluation of the course (post-test only) – content and features of the course that students found the most and least useful;
- iv) Virtue Knowledge and Understanding – familiarity with key concepts related to virtue ethics;
- v) Virtue Reasoning – the inclusion of a profession-specific dilemma in each of the pre- and post-intervention surveys was used to test the Virtue Reasoning of participants. Dilemmas are frequently used in research into character (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016) and considered a suitable method for investigating how individuals give either virtue-based or non-virtue-based reasons for taking a particular course of action. The dilemmas used in the pre- and post-surveys were relevant to each of the professions being studied, and had been used in previous Jubilee Centre research (see Arthur *et al.*, 2014b; 2015a; 2015b);
- vi) Virtue Action and Practice (post-test only) – how the course had encouraged participants to reflect on their profession, and the potential of the course to influence their professional practice.

Online versions of the pre- and post-surveys were presented on Survey Gizmo – an online survey platform. For those participants not able to complete the survey online, hard copies were provided. Table 2 illustrates the number of participants, from each of the three professions, who completed the pre- and post-surveys. The demographic breakdown of the participants can be viewed in Appendix 1.

'JUSTICE CONSISTS NOT IN BEING NEUTRAL BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG, BUT IN FINDING OUT THE RIGHT AND UPHOLDING IT, WHEREVER FOUND, AGAINST THE WRONG.'

Theodore Roosevelt

Table 2: Number of Participants Completing the Pre-intervention and Post-intervention Survey

		PRE-		POST-	
		Count	%	Count	%
Profession	Medicine	277	51.4%	207	54.9%
	Law	139	25.8%	61	16.2%
	Teaching	123	22.8%	109	28.9%
	Total	539	100.0%	377	100.0%

Interviews with tutors and students

To support and illustrate the survey findings, 30 interviews with students and tutors were conducted.

The interview schedule for students consisted of three sections. Section one sought opinions on the most valuable and useful parts of the course for their profession; how would they improve the course and what were its best features? Section two focussed on students' learning from the course, specifically with regards to their understanding of *phronesis*, character and virtue. Section three was aimed at understanding how the students thought the course would impact on their professional practice; the key question here was whether they felt the course had changed them and their approach to their job.

The interview schedule with tutors consisted of four sections. First, tutors were asked about the overall experience of teaching the course. Second, they were asked to comment on the usefulness of the course for students in their profession; the impact it had on them. Tutors were then asked about the knowledge and skills that they thought their students had gained as a result of taking the course, and the ways in which they envisaged students may apply their new knowledge and understanding gained through the course. The final section asked tutors about overall strengths and weaknesses of the course – where might improvements be made – and their opinion regarding the importance of virtue ethics to the flourishing of their profession.

Interviews with tutors/students were conducted after the course had been completed. Participants were selected through convenience sampling; those available and willing to give their time to be interviewed. Most interviews were one to one, although some students were interviewed in small focus group settings. Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher visiting the tutors and students, others were conducted over the phone for convenience.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

3.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Survey responses were initially examined for levels of completion, and only those that were fully completed were included in the working dataset. Analysis included cross-tabulation and descriptive analysis of all questions in the pre- and post-intervention surveys. For those questions where it was hoped a change would be seen between the pre- and post-surveys (including the ethical dilemmas), a series of statistical tests were undertaken in SPSS to see if and where any differences lay.

Analysis of the interview data and reflective statements was conducted thematically using constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The research team developed codes and categories which were refined and reviewed throughout the analysis process, using NVIVO software. Students and tutors were given the opportunity to check through the interview transcripts and examine the data that were recorded. Respondent validation allowed participants to check the accuracy of the data gathered and comment on whether their attitudes and thoughts were reasonably represented, so improving the confidence and reliability of the data collected.

3.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although this research was carefully prepared, it is subject to some limitations and shortcomings. The study utilised convenience sampling in all three methods and therefore the data is likely to contain some bias; the findings cannot be generalised to the population. Further, unmatched pre- and post-surveys were used which presents a challenge for the validity of the data; this method is considered suitable for evaluating programmes, such as the present one, which are in their infancy. Further, as the course was delivered across multiple sites it was unlikely to have been experienced consistently by all the participants which presents a further challenge to validity.

However, as the research is considered a pilot it is not intended that the findings would be generalisable or present conclusive conclusions as to the effectiveness of the intervention.

There are well known challenges in measuring character and virtues (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016; Kristjánsson, 2015) and the instruments used in this study are likely to contain limitations that affect their validity. The survey was based on self-report that, as a data collection method, has inherent risks of bias, owing to self-delusion, social desirability or self-confirmation. There is also some controversy over the use of ethical dilemmas as a tool for gauging virtue performance. Some theorists still insist that such tools only measure (at best) virtue reasoning, rather than giving any indication of overall moral functioning (Kristjánsson, 2015). The questions relating to Virtue Practice relied on participants making judgements about their own future actions and behaviour, which is a methodologically weak form of evidence from which to draw conclusions.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study received ethical approval from the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee. Students and tutors were fully informed that participation in the course, completing the surveys, and taking part in the interviews was voluntary and that they could opt-out of the study up to six months after the data collection phase ended. Participants' confidentiality was protected by not revealing their identity, including names and other personal information.

4 Findings

The following section reports the findings organised into three sections which link to each of the over-arching areas of inquiry set out above. Where survey findings are presented percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number. Illustrative quotes, obtained from the interviews with tutors and students, are also provided to support the survey findings.

4.1 HOW WAS THE PILOT COURSE IMPLEMENTED?

One of the primary concerns of the research was to discover if and how a course that prioritised learning about professional character, virtue and *phronesis* might be implemented in universities and institutions that educate teachers, doctors and lawyers.

Over 100 UK universities and institutions that taught teachers, doctors, and/or lawyers at either undergraduate or postgraduate level, were contacted by email and post about the course. Initially, 22 expressed an interest in the course, and of these 10 chose to fully participate. Those who expressed an interest and did not participate primarily cited the following reasons for not doing so; lack of space in the teaching programme; lack of support from colleagues/leadership; lack of time to prepare for delivery; students were already under pressure from preparing for exams and assignments at the time.

The following 10 institutions offered the *Character in the Professions* course to their students.

Medical Education

- The Royal Blackburn Teaching Hospital
- University of Leicester, Leicester Medical School

Law Education

- Nottingham Trent University, Law School
- The University of Law, London
- University of Birmingham, Law School
- University of Huddersfield, Law School
- University of Leicester, Law School
- University of Warwick, School of Law

Teacher Education

- University of Birmingham, School of Education
- University of Sussex, School of Education and Social Work

None of these 10 institutions had previously taught a discrete course on character-based professional ethics. In most cases, the course was integrated by these institutions into existing programmes of learning, including pre-established modules on general ethics. Before agreeing to be involved with the pilot, tutors from participating institutions agreed to deliver the course to a minimum standard; their students would be expected to fully and actively engage with all units in the course. After completing the course, the students who participated in the evaluation were asked how long they had spent undertaking the learning activities. The average learning time reported by participants was four hours, with 6% of participants spending more than eight hours, and 12% less than two hours undertaking the learning activities.

The law students participating in the research reported spending the most time engaging with the course, followed by student teachers, and then medical students.

On completing the course, students were asked how they thought the course should be delivered; 35% of students preferred to take the course predominantly online, with some face-to-face teaching, compared to 26%, who preferred it to be predominantly face-to-face, with some online content. Only 14% of students reported that they would prefer face-to-face teaching as the sole method of delivery, and 25% of students preferred self-directed learning. The results were similar when broken down by profession.

Participants were asked to rate various features of the course after they had completed it. The highest-rated features were the ease of navigation through the online resources (86% rated 'good' or 'excellent') and the course content (83% 'good' or 'excellent'). Of the participants, 76% reported that they considered the course structure to be 'good' or 'excellent', and the same proportion rated the explanation of the knowledge and concepts as 'good' or 'excellent'. The feature that received a lower rating was the overall aesthetic of the course, where 73% of respondents rated this as 'good' or 'excellent'. Participating law students were the most positive about the course, consistently rating it higher than the participating student teachers and medical students.

For example, 53% of the participating law students reported that the explanation of concepts was 'excellent', compared to 22% of participating student teachers and 14% of medical students.

‘IT IS THE SUPREME ART OF THE TEACHER TO AWAKEN JOY IN CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND KNOWLEDGE.’

Albert Einstein

Overall, 1,456 students (292 medics, 704 lawyers, 460 teachers) completed the course, and of these 377 unmatched pairs completed the pre and post-survey. The participants in the survey were asked to detail what, if any, ethical training they had previously experienced. A large majority (82%) of participating students had never received any form of ethical training prior to the programme starting. Some 89% had not studied the role of character and virtue in their chosen profession. One aim of the course was to equip the participants with the knowledge and understanding to consider different forms of ethics, and in particular, the differences between ethical reasoning based on codes of conduct and ethical reasoning based on character.

Data drawn from interviews with students demonstrated that most of the participating students had no, or little, prior knowledge of character-based approaches to professional ethics.

Many of the tutors mentioned that they knew the importance of 'character strengths', but had minimal experience of teaching about virtue ethic concepts such as *phronesis*. One law tutor explained how their students may have studied ethics as part of an undergraduate law course, but that it would have focussed primarily on theoretical approaches, rather than practical implications.

Participating students were asked after completing the course, to what extent they felt that character matters, and whether it is important in their profession.

Across the three professions there was over 95% agreement that character was 'important' or 'extremely important', with student teachers believing it to be marginally less important than the other two professions.

4.2 HOW WAS THE COURSE CONTENT AND RELEVANCE RATED BY THE STUDENTS AND TUTORS?

4.2.1 Rating of Course Activities

Participants were asked to rate some of the individual activities, on the course in order to determine which were believed to be the most useful (see Chart 1).

Participating students reported that they found the ethical dilemma activities the most helpful aspect of the course content (91% rating them 'helpful' or 'very helpful'). The 'news report' activities (85% rating them 'helpful' or 'very helpful') and the 'codes of conduct' (86% rating them 'helpful' or 'very helpful') were also reported to be helpful.

There were some differences between how the three professions rated the activities, although all participating students reported the ethical dilemmas as the most helpful.

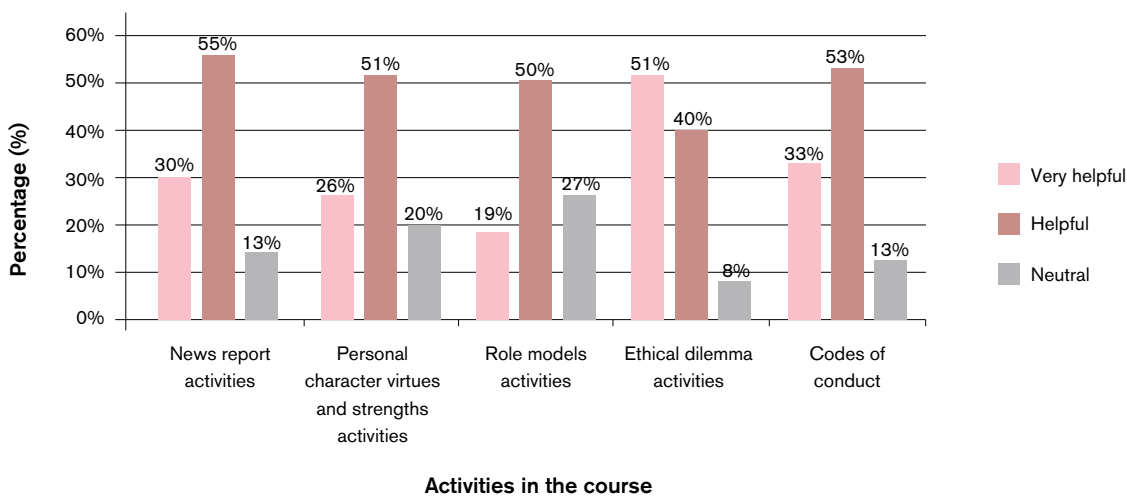
The majority of the interviews with medical, law, and teaching students supported the findings from the surveys regarding the highest rated activities. Many students commented on the usefulness of being able to discuss the options available for each ethical dilemma with their peers and tutors. One student teacher commented:

I was really impressed by the ethical dilemmas, they were very interesting and I remember I had very meaningful discussions with my course mates about those dilemmas and it was very interesting to see how there were very different responses to the same questions and how the same questions could be tackled in different ways. (Student Teacher)

Tutors commented that they found it particularly useful to work alongside students on resolving the ethical dilemmas and observing the ways in which the dilemmas generated discussion.

The interviews showed that the 'codes of conduct' activities were the most familiar to students. Students commented on the usefulness of being able to contrast the

Chart 1: How the Participants Rated the Activities in the Course (all cohorts)



codes relevant to their profession with the principles and the theory that they had discussed in the introductory unit to the course. One law student suggested that the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) codes may need reforming considering what they had learned about virtue ethics and the importance of character. A medical student explained that having the General Medical Council (GMC) guidelines to look through alongside the activities on the course brought about a new perspective for them on the role of the guidelines in their practice.

However, some of the tutors commented that they felt challenged by the inclusion of such a 'codes of conduct' activity in the course, and that this presented difficulty given, at times, seemingly contradictory teaching on the subject. One law tutor commented:

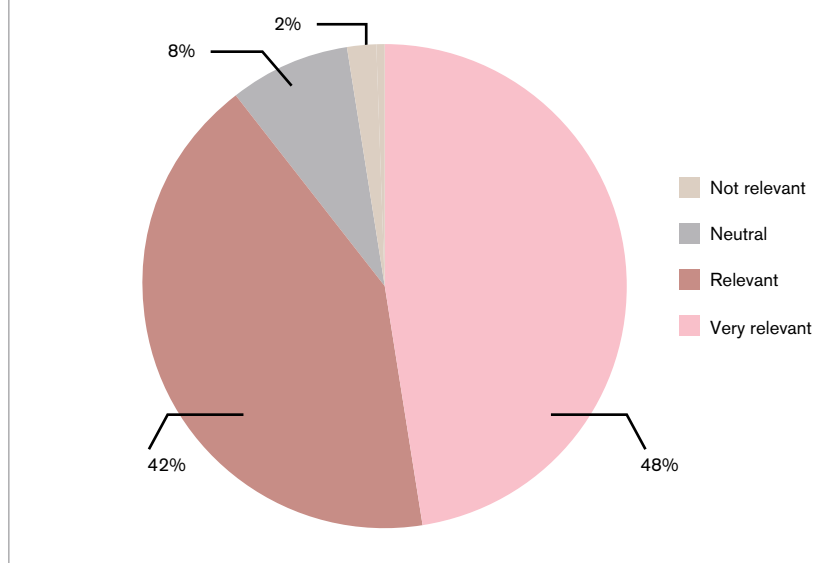
some of those (dilemmas), for a practising lawyer, they're not ethical dilemmas, there's a particular conduct rule which requires you to act in a particular way. (Law Tutor)

4.2.2 Relevance of the Course

Of all participants, 90% rated the course as 'relevant' or 'very relevant' to their profession (see Chart 2).

Of participants from the three professions, law students were the most positive in this regard, with 94% of students agreeing that the course was 'very relevant' to their professional education. This compared to 93% of student teachers and 86% of medical students. The majority of the students from all three professions expressed at interview how important and relevant the concepts that they learnt in the course were to their professions. The participating student teachers appeared to have especially enjoyed being able to link the theories that they had learned in Unit 1, to the practical examples that were presented to them in Unit 2.

Chart 2: Relevance of the Course to the Profession (all cohorts)



Students compared the course to other taught courses that they had participated in, which were seen as being heavily related to only theoretical teachings, with minimal explanations of how students would need to apply the knowledge and skills in practice. One of the tutors of the student teachers explained that the course helped him generate good discussions with students and the activities were 'very powerful tools' to get students to think about the different scenarios they may encounter as teachers. He explained further:

It's very easy on a teacher education course for people to identify only with their subject or phase and I believe that having this opportunity to introduce students to the idea of being an ethical teacher was really important and one that I think should be part of any teacher education course. (Student Teacher)

4.3 WHAT DID THE STUDENT DOCTORS, TEACHERS AND LAWYERS LEARN FROM THE COURSE? DID IT DEVELOP THEIR VIRTUE KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND REASONING?

One aim of the evaluation was to consider the influence of the course on learning; to determine if there was a positive effect on students' Virtue Knowledge, Understanding and Reasoning. Data pertaining to the potential influence of the course on the Virtue Action and Practice of the participants is also provided below.

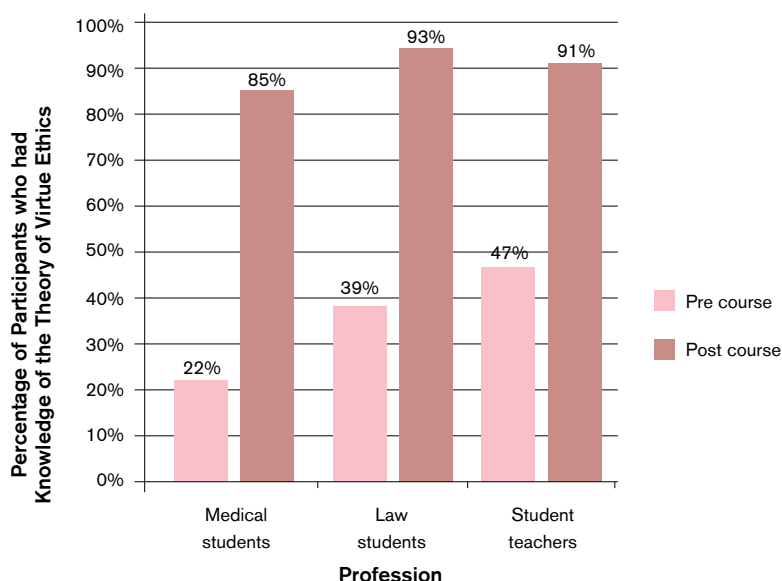
4.3.1 Virtue Knowledge and Understanding

Participants were asked about their understanding of terms and concepts relating to character-based approaches to ethical education (Charts 3 and 4). Prior to participating in the course, 66% of all students said they did not know what the moral theory 'virtue ethics' was, but this figure fell to just 4% after completing the course. Of the three professions, medical students were least familiar with the term, prior to undertaking the course only 22% declared to know it. Similarly, 7% of medical students said they knew what the term *phronesis* meant before beginning the course.

'GOOD CHARACTER IS NOT FORMED IN A WEEK OR A MONTH. IT IS CREATED LITTLE BY LITTLE, DAY BY DAY. PROTRACTED AND PATIENT EFFORT IS NEEDED TO DEVELOP GOOD CHARACTER.'

Heraclitus

Chart 3: Knowledge of the Moral Theory of Virtue Ethics



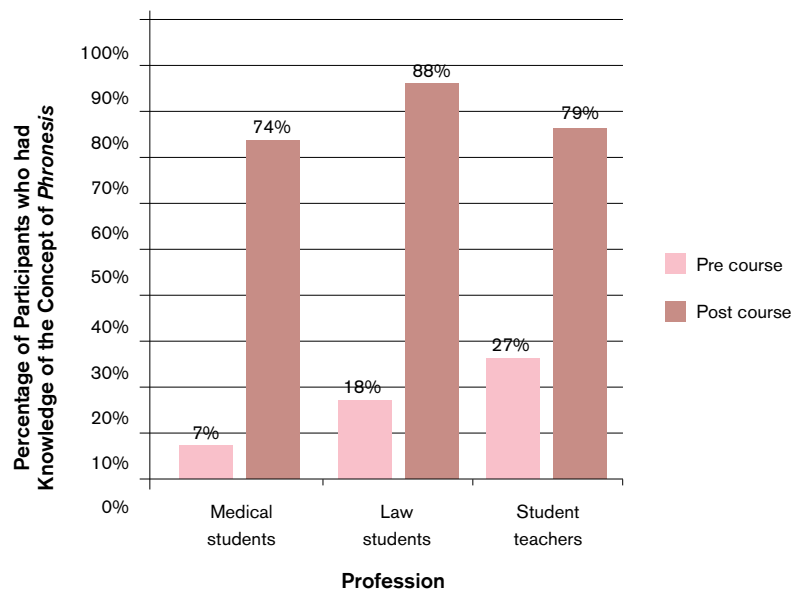
more depth on something, I would love to know more about that, about this kind of how you exercise practical wisdom, I thought that was just brilliant. (Law Tutor)

A concern was raised by one of the medical tutors that the term '*phronesis*' clashes with something that medical students were already familiar with called 'professional judgement', and that this may have caused them to struggle to come to terms with its importance and relevance. The tutor explained:

Professional judgement is something which is well ingrained into medics and that's where phronesis, with the professional wisdom that comes, personal wisdom, there was a bit of a mismatch that led them to struggle slightly. (Medical Tutor)

Tutors were also asked about their thoughts on whether their students developed a 'language of character'. The majority of tutors commented that their students were able to grasp the concepts and start to use the terms in explaining their thoughts, by the end of the course. One tutor said that they were 'most pleased' that their students, who were from a range of diverse backgrounds, and had different skills, could freely discuss these topics without the pressure of being formally marked. One student explained how they thought that this sort of teaching should be at the forefront of any professional development programme:

They're basic virtues that I'd say everyone has in some way, form or matter, it's just when we enter a profession, we tend to forget them, kind of focus on the rules of what you've been taught. (Student)

Chart 4: Knowledge of the Concept of *Phronesis*

Many of the students participating in the post-intervention interviews were able to define virtue ethics; however, many struggled to give a definition of *phronesis*. It became apparent that students who had received face-to-face sessions with tutors had a better understanding about the different terms introduced to them in Unit 1, when compared to those students who completed the course alone online. Tutors were asked whether they thought their students had understood the terms introduced to them in Unit 1, particularly *phronesis* and virtue ethics.

One tutor explained that their students might not have understood *phronesis* because they did not go into great depth in trying to help them understand the concept. However, they hoped that their students would seek out more information about the concept, in order to further their learning:

No, but I love that, I love that myself, I didn't know about it, but I thought that was fascinating and I was a bit disappointed that they didn't seem quite so fascinated as I was with it. I think you could do so much with phronesis, if I was going to go into

4.3.2 Virtue Reasoning

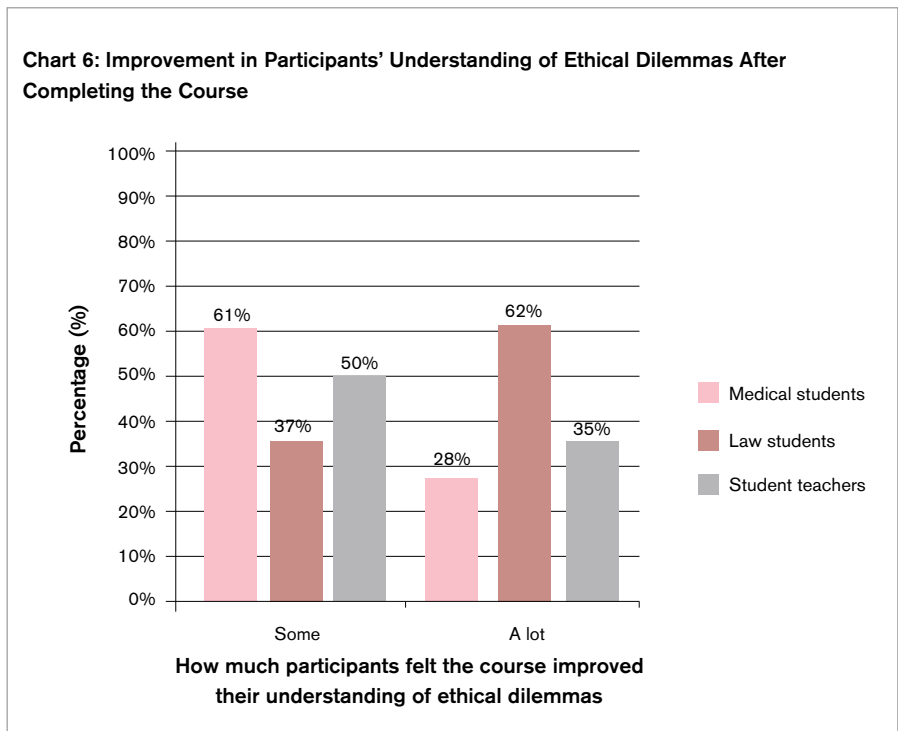
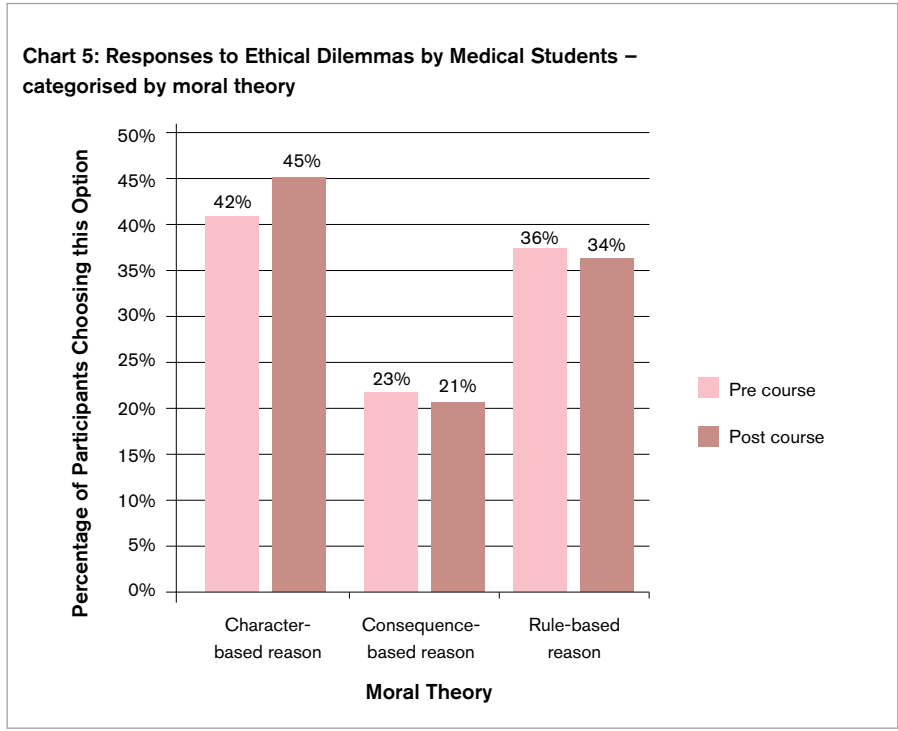
Medical students were presented with an ethical dilemma relevant to their profession in the pre- and post-intervention survey¹. Students were asked to choose between two courses of action and then give their reason for taking this action. After taking the course, medical students reported as being more likely to give a character-based reason than a rules- or consequence-based reason (see Chart 5).

In the post-intervention survey, students from all three professions were asked to respond to the question 'To what extent has your understanding of ethical dilemmas in the workplace improved as a result of the course?'. Across the three professions, 36% answered 'a lot' to this question and 54% 'some'; just 2% said 'not at all'. Participating law students were the most positive in their response to this question, with 62% believing their understanding had improved 'a lot', compared to 35% of student teachers, and 28% of medical students (see Chart 6).

Data from the interviews conducted was able to shine further light on the influence of the course on the ethical reasoning of the participating students. Students explained that after completing the course, they felt that they understood that sometimes there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer when faced with a moral dilemma, and that they would need to do some deeper thinking in order to determine a course of action, and that their continuing character development was an important aspect to this. One student commented:

... it's made me more aware that there's some very difficult situations where, yeah, there's a very thin line between right and wrong and it's made me more aware that they're likely to crop up and they could come up in any form they come up, I mean, I think it engages that kind of thinking, if they were to come up, whereas before, you probably would have focussed more on the rules. (Student)

Many tutors felt that the course helped students feel better equipped to think through some of the issues that may arise in training and professional practice. Tutors were hopeful that their students might have gained the 'basic framework' that would equip them for when they actually face such dilemmas in practice, and that they might realise that not everything is 'straightforward'.



Tutors were concerned that their students should learn 'how' to deal with making decisions more than 'what' they would do. Tutors of the law and medical students in particular, were concerned with their students understanding that they could and should be able to say 'no' to certain requests, and that they should be able to stand up to mentors, managers, and those in more powerful positions.

Tutors were hopeful that in participating in the course, students became aware that they might come across situations where they may need to have 'difficult conversations' in the workplace, and that this course of action was appropriate, provided it was the right thing to do. A medical tutor felt that the focus on character-based responses to ethical dilemmas would help to disrupt what he termed his students' insistence on following 'decisional algorithms', largely based on codes of conduct.

¹ Note that insufficient data from law and teaching students for this question meant that a robust analysis could not be conducted.

4.3.3 Potential Influence on Virtue

Action and Practice

Data pertaining to the potential of the course to influence the Virtue Action and Practice of the participating students was obtained from the interviews and reflective statements; this was in order to acknowledge difficulties in obtaining statistical evidence about changes in character over a short period of time. Overall, data showed that students and tutors thought that the course would have some influence on their future Virtue Action and Practice – but that there were concerns, especially from the medical students, about the limitations of this influence. Many students conveyed in their interviews that they believed that the primary effect of undertaking the course was more cognitive than affective in nature – participating in the course encouraged them to think and reflect more about their character when in professional contexts. Tutors believed that the courses provided a new way to think about ethics, particularly a way that would legitimise appropriate character-based responses by the professionals when faced with a professional dilemma.

Medical students were found to be the least convinced of the importance of their own character in their profession, and therefore felt that the course had little influence on them, in comparison to the other two cohorts. Virtue ethics was seen by some as ‘another perspective to their reflection’ – rather than necessarily essential. Some of the reflective statements showed that the students were not convinced that the course could help them in their practice. One student argued that such preparation should be advisory and taught sensitively, as it could be seen to be contradictory to other approaches to ethics that had been taught.

Interviews and reflective statements completed by law students suggested that they felt positively about the potential impact on their Virtue Action and Practice. One student explained that they would be more mindful of the ‘bigger picture’, which would help them make ‘better’ decisions in different scenarios. After completing the course, law tutors were hopeful that their students would be able to reflect more critically; think about the consequences of their actions in greater detail; and potentially make ‘wiser’ decisions to protect them and their clients.

Many of the student teachers felt that they could apply knowledge developed during the course in their professional practice, once they were teaching in schools.

Student teachers indicated that they felt that the course encouraged them to model good character to their pupils; that they recognise their own role as character educators when in school; and that they felt confident to speak with pupils, and to handle issues that may arise when pupils share personal and academic issues. Analysis of the reflective statements completed by participants found that students had engaged in some form of deep critical thinking about their own practice and their characters, and also how they would go on to continue reflecting on these parts of their lives.

Teacher education tutors reported positively on the influence of the course on their students. One tutor felt that their students would think more critically about their practice, and they hoped that this would help students respond carefully in different environments.

The tutor explained:

What I like about it, is it challenges teachers not to automatically apply a rule in which they often have no say in developing or creating, so that there are rules within the school environment which they have to respond to and sometimes those are problematic and more often than not, they do follow them, but I do like the way in which it gets students to be critical and you know, to be critically reflective of authority in their environment, rather than just blindly accepting whatever is presented to them. (Tutor)

Law students and student teachers demonstrated both hope and ambition in terms of implementing the content of the course into their practice. Medical students, whilst reporting that they found the course ‘useful’ and ‘inspiring’ could not see it significantly changing how they practise their profession in the same ways as law students and student teachers.

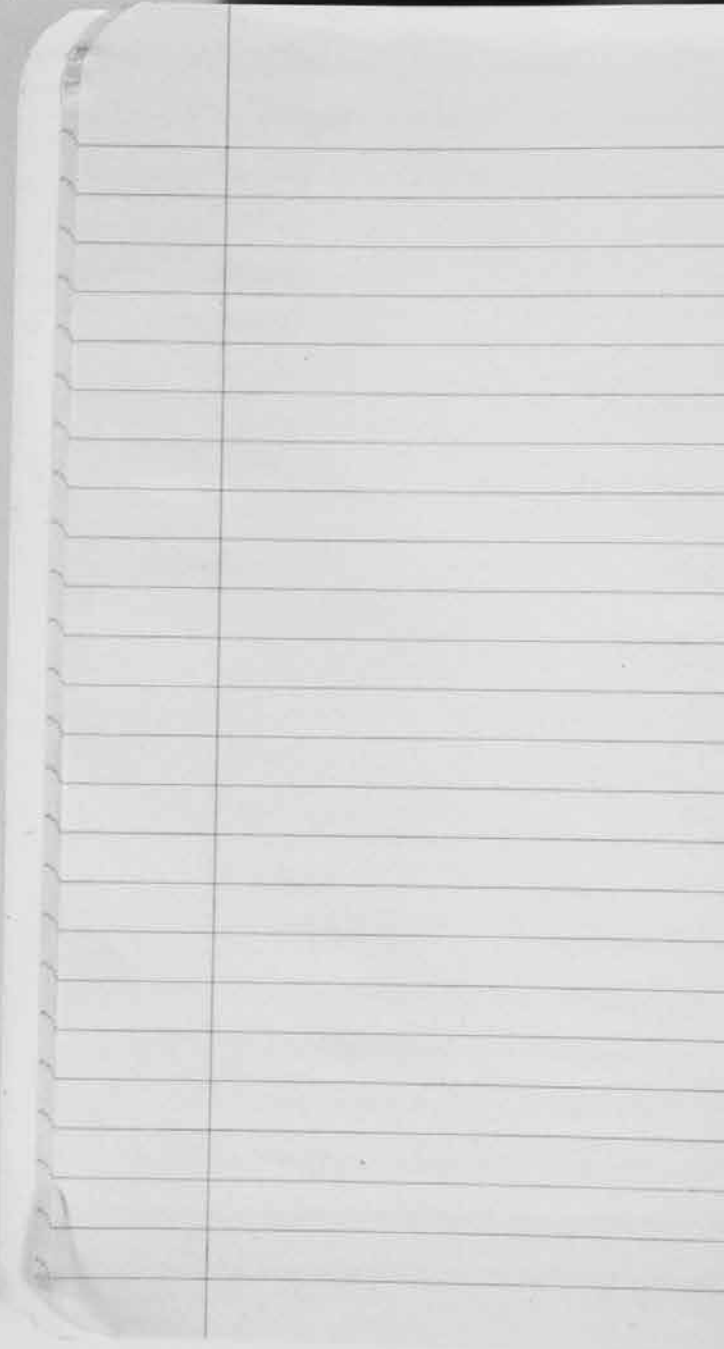
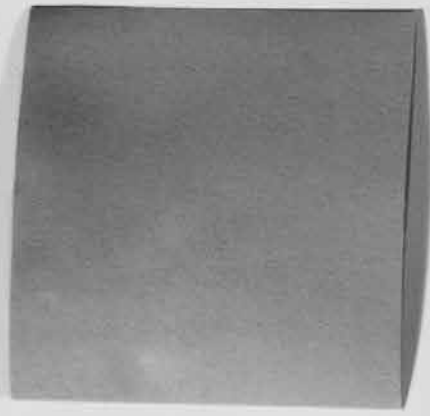
4.4 OVERALL FINDINGS

Key findings from the pilot were:

- Of the 1,456 students training to be law, medical and teaching professionals who participated in the course, 82% had never had any form of ethical training prior to the course starting. Further to this, 89% had not studied the role of character and virtue in their profession.
- Across the three professions there was over 95% agreement that character and virtues were important or extremely important to their profession.
- Participating students and tutors found the course to be of high quality and of relevant content, which fitted well into existing modules and courses.
- The majority of participants rated all features of the course ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. The law students were most positive about the course.
- The ethical dilemma activities were rated the most helpful (91% rating them ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’). The news report activities and the codes of conduct were also regarded highly.
- Students were exposed to, and became more familiar with the theory of virtue ethics and related concepts – so developing their Virtue Knowledge and Understanding.
- Students were more likely to give character-based, as opposed to rules- and/or consequence-based, reasons for responding in a certain way to an ethical dilemma after participating in the course – it developed their Virtue Reasoning.
- Across the professions, 36% believed their understanding of ethical dilemmas had increased ‘a lot’ and 54% ‘some’ after the course.
- Student teachers and law students were more positive about the potential influence of the course on their virtuous practice than their medical counterparts. They felt this impact was initially likely to be more cognitive than affective. A few students were able to give examples of changes they had made to their practice as a result of the course whilst on placements.

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INCHES 1 2 3 4



3
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5 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reported above provide evidence for the call for a greater emphasis on character and virtues in professional ethical education – a well-known lacuna (Jubilee Centre, 2016). The *Character in the Professions* course was piloted in order to gain a better understanding of how virtue-based ethical education might be incorporated into existing provisions. The resulting data, although not without limitations, provides valuable insights into how such programmes of learning might be implemented. This section discusses these insights in the light of the wider literature and concludes with some recommendations.

Previous research has highlighted the practical challenges universities face in implementing character-based approaches to professional education (Bondi *et al.*, 2012). With respect to the ongoing challenge of lack of curricular time, findings from the present study demonstrate that it is possible for professional educators to carve out dedicated time and space for courses on ethics more generally, and virtue ethics more specifically. Tutors reported that offering the course in an online format provided the necessary flexibility required to adopt the programme into the existing curriculum; this reflects a more general move towards online and blended technology-enhanced learning in higher education (Thai, De Wever and Valcke, 2017; Hainey, Green and Kelly, 2017; Khatoon, Hill and Walmsley, 2014; Ruiz, Mintzer and Leipzig, 2006). However, it was clear in the interviews that some tutors had to make a difficult trade-off between extended periods of face-to-face teaching, which would have been preferable for deeper learning, and the use of online learning to ensure all the course content was covered. This point echoes wider debates about what constitutes quality online learning and teaching (Pechenkina and Aeschliman, 2017; Oliver, Colebourn and Taylor, 2016; VanSickle *et al.*, 2015) and has important implications for the scalability of such courses both within the three professions addressed in this research and beyond. New and advanced approaches to online learning, that offer more opportunities



for interaction and engagement, do make it conceivable that a course similar to the *Character in the Professions* could be offered to all students undertaking professional education.

A question is raised by the research about when, in a student's professional education, it would be most beneficial for them to participate in the course. It was felt that as the course was directed at enhancing virtue literacy (including a knowledge and understanding of virtue ethical terms and concepts) it would be important for students to undertake the learning early in their professional education, allowing the new knowledge to be drawn on and applied throughout their studies. This position is supported by a recommendation made by the Jubilee Centre:

Every member of a professional community should have a basic understanding of such ethos and seek to cultivate it yet further. For this to be possible, explicit acknowledgement of the importance of character and virtues is required. This may require considerable changes in the way professional education is conducted, including greater use of the language and typology of virtue, throughout training (Jubilee Centre, 2016).

Further, Strike and Ternasky (1993) found that although students are familiar with moral ideals, they do not always have the language to describe them and, therefore, encouraging students during training to make clear and insightful practical connections between virtues and likely ethical principles of their future daily work, is vital.

Overall, students rated the features and activities in the course favourably and most notably the learning that focussed on ethical dilemmas. The use of real life dilemmas in professional education has been seen by others as important (see, for example, Van Hise and Massey, 2010; Pullen-Sansfacon, 2010). It was inferred that such activities create space for students to have meaningful and lengthy discussions with their tutors and peers about different professional cases, and the variety of possible responses to the same question or dilemma. Tutors were seen as important in helping students form more critical discriminations when giving reasons for their response to a dilemma. This process might be considered necessary for the creation of 'dilemmatic spaces' (Fransson and Grannäs, 2013) where dilemmas that have no clear right or wrong answers can be discussed and debated with peers, and importantly, instead of being regarded as specific events or situations, dilemmas are considered as ever-present in people's living and working space. Further, such a learning process might be considered conjunct to the enhancement of professional *phronesis*, as space has been created for students to refine their approach to decision-making (Jubilee Centre, 2016; Sherman, 1999).

A key aim of the course was to encourage the students to consider ethical dilemmas where different virtues appear to clash; bringing attention to the concept of practical wisdom. The purpose here was to increase the likelihood of the students considering the morally problematic dimensions of professional judgement that often call for virtue-based reasons when defending particular courses of action. The research team found several examples of scenarios depicting ethical dilemmas being used in professional education (see, for example, Scott, 2016; Verrinder, Ostini and Phillips, 2016; Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016; CIPD, 2015). However, few of these had an overt focus on helping students to understand the role of their own character and virtues when dealing with dilemmas in the workplace, and this should be considered a particular strength of the *Character in the Professions* course.

Further, the interview data showed that many students' previous experiences of professional ethics had tended to focus on general principles of good practice, which were overly focussed on codes of conduct, largely based on deontological (duty-based) and utilitarian lines of thinking (Arthur *et al.*, 2015; de Zulueta, 2015). The pilot findings show that after finishing the course, many students, had, for the first time, considered a tension between personal judgement and received convention or code. It is clear from the findings that this awareness was more keenly felt by law students and student teachers than the medical students. Whilst the positive response from law students and student teachers gives reason for optimism, the less positive response from the medical student cohort is somewhat disappointing and requires further research to find out why this might be the case. It is hypothesised that medical students are more likely to be guided by what one tutor termed 'decisional algorithms' and are therefore less willing to make character-based decisions when they appear to challenge received wisdom, convention or established protocols.

Conclusion

Although the findings should be treated with a degree of caution, due to limitations of the evaluation (explained in Section 3.4), they do present evidence that a course of this nature can have a positive influence on the professional practice of those who experience it, countering the concern that students of these professions are not being sufficiently prepared to deal with the ethical dimensions of their practice (Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2013; Sockett, 2012; Willems Lunenberg and Korthagen, 2008). However, it is important to remember that the simple introduction of such courses into professional education is not in itself sufficient for the development of professional practical wisdom, which would require wider institutional and societal effort or even transformation (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010; Jubilee Centre, 2016).

The findings from the evaluation of the pilot course call for a more widespread inclusion of virtue-based approaches in professional education, as well as more in-depth studies into their impact on professional ethical practice. Further studies of a longitudinal nature may reveal the effects on students' behaviour and practice and provide further evidence to support existing arguments that such courses should be a feature of the education of professionals beyond those considered in the present study (Arthur *et al.*, 2017). This will in turn require similar interventions and evaluations to be conducted with professionals, such as social workers, police, nurses and others. Finally, the evaluation gives confidence that the *Character in the Professions* course should be offered out to a wider audience. Following this initial evaluation, it meets the criteria for being in the 'stability' phase of evaluation as it has 'clearly stated expectations and has been carried out at least several times with some degree of implementation success' and 'is no longer dependent upon particular individuals for implementation' (Brown-Urban, Hargraves and Trochim, 2014). An evaluation methodology that includes control groups should be considered for further testing of the effectiveness of the course against its stated aims.

'DOCTORING IS
THROUGH AND
THROUGH AN
ETHICAL ENTERPRISE.'

James F. Drane

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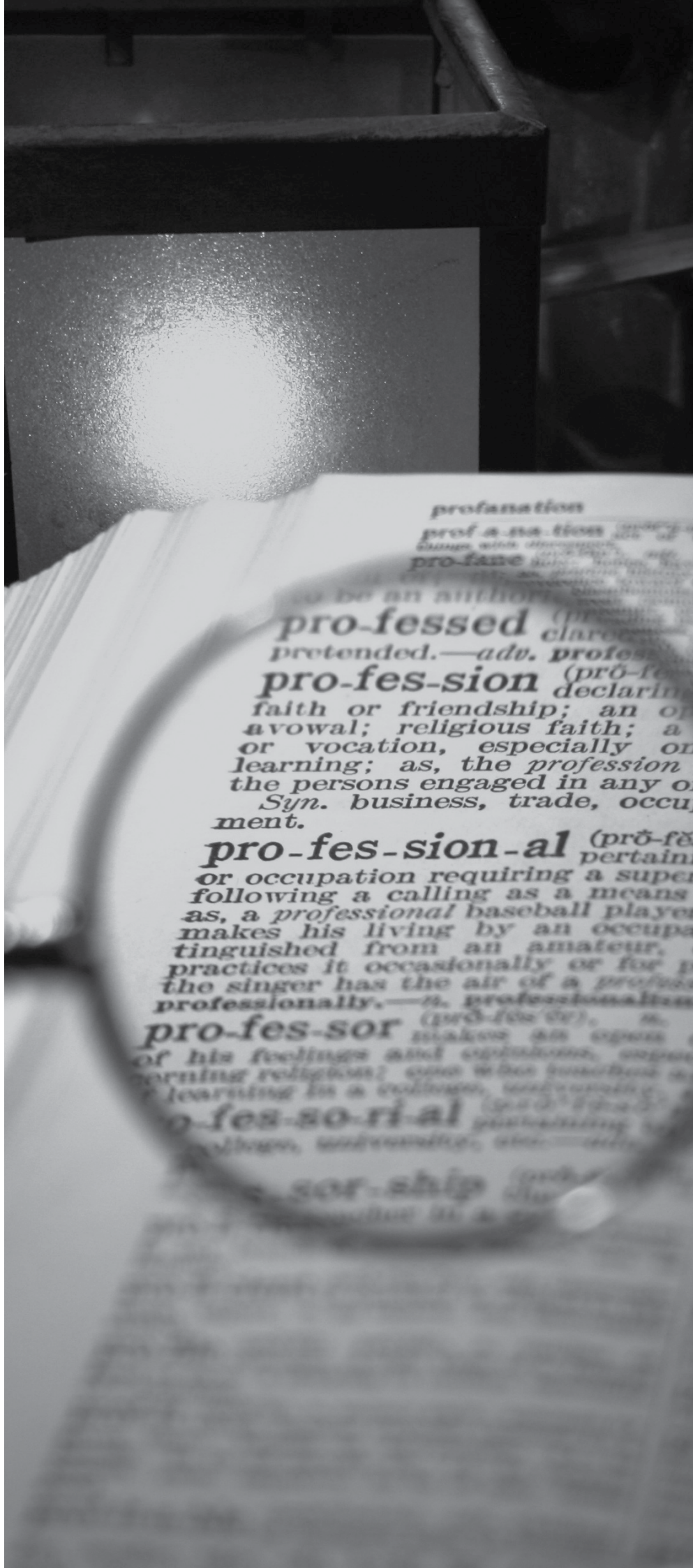
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Demographics of Participants Completing the Survey

Number of Survey Respondents by Gender							
Question		Timing					
		ALL COHORTS		PRE		POST	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Are you:	Male	608	66.9%	357	66.9%	251	66.9%
	Female	301	33.1%	177	33.1%	124	33.1%
	Total	909	100.0%	534	100.0%	375	100.0%

Number of Survey Respondents by Profession							
Question		Timing					
		ALL COHORTS		PRE		POST	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Profession	Medicine	484	52.8%	277	51.4%	207	54.9%
	Law	200	21.8%	139	25.8%	61	16.2%
	Teachers	232	25.3%	123	22.8%	109	28.9%
	Total	916	100.0%	539	100.0%	377	100.0%

Number of Survey Respondents by Profession and Age									
Question		Profession							
		ALL COHORTS		MEDICINE		LAW		TEACHING	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
What is your age?	18–23	651	71.6%	344	71.4%	145	74.4%	162	70.1%
	24–29	185	20.4%	116	24.1%	20	10.3%	49	21.2%
	30–35	23	2.5%	7	1.5%	12	6.2%	4	1.7%
	36–41	25	2.8%	5	1.0%	9	4.6%	11	4.8%
	42–47	14	1.5%	3	0.6%	7	3.6%	4	1.7%
	48–53	5	0.6%	2	0.4%	2	1.0%	1	0.4%
	54 and older	5	0.6%	5	1.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	908	0.1%	482	100.0%	195	100.0%	231	100.0%

Number of Survey Respondents by Ethnicity							
Question		Timing					
		ALL COHORTS		PRE		POST	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
What is your ethnicity? (Categories from 2011 UK Census)	English/Welsh/ Scottish/Northern Irish/British	512	56.4%	297	55.6%	215	57.5%
	White and black Caribbean	9	1.0%	5	0.9%	4	1.1%
	White and black African	8	0.9%	5	0.9%	3	0.8%
	White and Asian	14	1.5%	8	1.5%	6	1.6%
	African	26	2.9%	15	2.8%	11	2.9%
	Pakistani	65	7.2%	36	6.7%	29	7.8%
	Irish	10	1.1%	7	1.3%	3	0.8%
	Indian	86	9.5%	48	9.0%	38	10.2%
	Chinese	22	2.4%	14	2.6%	8	2.1%
	Caribbean	7	0.8%	5	0.9%	2	0.5%
	Bangaldeshi	16	1.8%	7	1.3%	9	2.4%
	Arab	10	1.1%	7	1.3%	3	0.8%
	Any other background	36	4.0%	26	4.9%	10	2.7%
	Any other mixed or multiple background	14	1.5%	10	1.9%	4	1.1%
	Any other asian background	47	5.2%	29	5.4%	18	4.8%
	Any other ethnic group	8	0.9%	5	0.9%	3	0.8%
	Prefer not to say	18	2.0%	10	1.9%	8	2.1%
	Total	908	100.0%	534	100.0%	374	100.0%

Research Team

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