

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



THE  
JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

# REPURPOSING THE PROFESSIONS: THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL CHARACTER

INITIAL INSIGHTS

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# Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

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 20 academics from a range of disciplines, including: philosophy, psychology, education, theology and sociology.

With its focus on excellence, the Centre has a robust and 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 largely been 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.



VIRTUES IN THE PROFESSIONS



# Repurposing the Professions: The role of Professional Character

## Initial Insights

## Overview

Since its inception, the Jubilee Centre has conducted a significant amount of research into ethical decision making in the context of specific UK based professions. This research has resulted in the production of a number of empirical research reports, specifically within the professions of law (Arthur *et al.*, 2014), medicine (Arthur *et al.*, 2015a), teaching (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b), business and finance (Kristjánsson *et al.*, 2017a) and nursing (Kristjánsson *et al.*, 2017b). The current project, *Integrating Practical Wisdom in the Professions*, extends this research by exploring commonalities and differences between these professions. By examining the professions more broadly, this project seeks to offer new conceptual understandings and practical recommendations that are pertinent to 'good' general professional practice and ethical training.

The present report draws on research conducted with 2,340 entry-level and established professionals from five distinct professions between 2012 and 2017; namely, law, medicine, teaching, business and finance, and nursing. Grounded in a neo-Aristotelian perspective of virtue ethics, the research takes a holistic view of professional character by exploring the relationship between professionals' character profiles and their sense of professional purpose. The findings revealed 13 distinct virtues which were valued by professionals in their working environment, across the professions. Subsequently, four distinct professional character profiles were identified that varied in their valuation of *moral* and *intellectual* virtues. Professionals who placed higher importance on moral and intellectual virtues in combination reported a higher sense of professional purpose than groups that did not value either virtue type or only *intellectual* virtues. No significant differences were found, however, between the group that valued both virtue types and those that only valued moral virtues. In addition, professionals who reported experiencing time restrictions, unfair treatment and stress at work were more likely to lack a sense of professional purpose; this was more prominent in those entering their profession than in those more established in their careers. Differences between specific professions were also identified in the research.

Overall, the report considers the interplay between moral and intellectual virtues within a broad professional context and offers an foundation for further research to be conducted regarding moral character in the professional realm. By interpreting these findings using a neo-Aristotelian lens (Aristotle, 2009), this evidence indicates that the 'good' professional, and one that might exhibit *practical wisdom*, will value moral standards along with a degree of deliberation and judgement in their practice. The report recommends that professional and regulatory bodies ensure that ethical training programmes emphasise the moral implications of 'good' professional practice, in the first instance, and subsequently provide professionals with the opportunities to develop and employ their own judgement and deliberation towards moral decision-making. In doing so, professionals may develop a greater sense of purpose in their work. It is also important for professional and regulatory bodies to ensure that the working environments of practicing professionals facilitate the development and demonstration of moral character and professional purpose, both from the outset and throughout their career.

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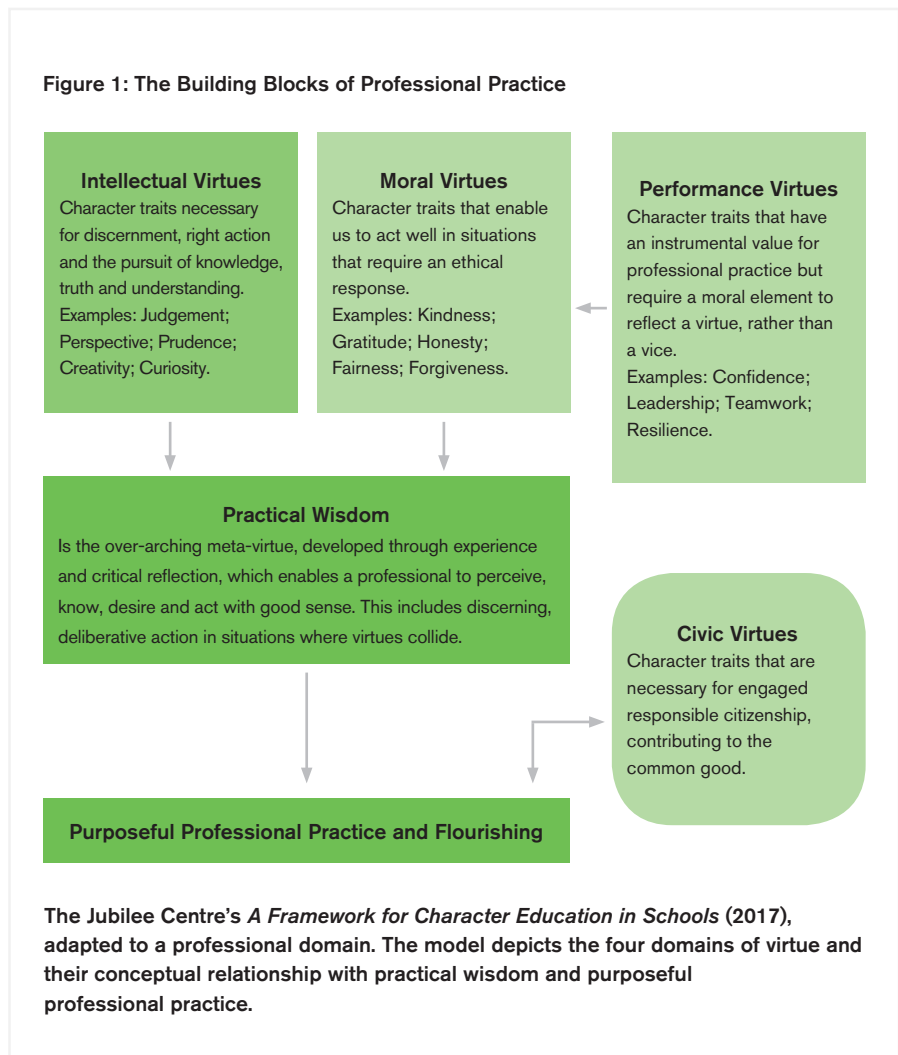


# 1 Background

The public places high demands and expectations on the professions, and those who work in them. Professionals are relied upon for moral probity, diligence, fairness and resolve and are expected to do the right thing for those whom they serve – be they clients, customers, patients, students, or civilians – and for society more broadly (Carr *et al.*, 2011; Jubilee Centre, 2016). Practically, this can be achieved through a sense of professional purpose which extends beyond the self and to the community beyond (Moore, 2017). However, a predominating focus on instrumental approaches such as managerialism, auditing and performance metrics, in a quest for commercial success, has increased the pressure on professionals to maintain this broader sense of purpose. Thus, the divide between the moral principles and purposes that underpin the professions and the realities of contemporary professional practice has seemingly widened (Holbeche and Springett, 2004; Dixon-Woods *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, a number of calls have been made to ‘repurpose’ the professions, in order to reconnect professionals with the professions they represent (Blond *et al.*, 2015).

## 1.1 THE CHARACTER OF A PROFESSIONAL

According to a neo-Aristotelian philosophy, professionals that develop positive character traits, known as virtues, should flourish personally, as well as enabling others in society to flourish (known as *eudaimonia*; Aristotle, 2009, p.5 [1095a17-21]). The Jubilee Centre provides a conceptual framework for the distinction between different types of virtues (see ‘The Building Blocks of Character’, Jubilee Centre, 2017). Figure 1 presents an adapted version of these ‘Building Blocks’, for application to professional contexts. Virtues characterised as moral in nature, such as honesty, kindness and modesty, are viewed as intrinsically good in themselves and good for their own sake (MacIntyre, 1981). Performance virtues, such as perseverance, teamwork, resilience and leadership, offer instrumental means through which a professional can employ the moral virtues. In their own right, such performance virtues are particularly valuable for professionals given that they are habitually associated with pursuits of excellence and success, even under conditions of adversity (Chun, 2005; McCann *et al.*, 2013). So, from a neo-Aristotelian perspective, the application of moral and performance virtues



in combination comprise an integral foundation for one's character.

Professionals may face workplace dilemmas where they are required to make decisions that conflict with the desires of external agents, such as customers, stakeholders or government (Moore, 2015). It is in such situations that the intellectual virtues, such as judgement, perspective, prudence and critical-thinking, are exercised to ensure actions and decisions are undertaken for the right reasons, at the right times (Carr, 2018). This deliberation forms a central component of the overarching meta-virtue *phronesis* (ie, 'practical wisdom' or 'good sense', Aristotle, 2009: 106-107; see Figure 1). It is *phronesis* that helps individuals demonstrate the 'golden mean' of virtue, and avoid employing them in excess (eg, foolhardiness) or deficiency (eg, cowardliness; Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010).

To practice with *phronesis* is to act with care, diligence and open-mindedness. To practice without *phronesis* would mean acting carelessly, indecisively, and with a degree of negligence to the surrounding circumstances or possible consequences (eg, Kotzee *et al.*, 2016).

The *phronetic* professional is one that is posited to endorse both moral and intellectual virtues in conjunction of one another (as illustrated in Figure 1). Although morals without intellect, and vice versa, may enable a professional to function to some end within their profession, greater purpose and ethical practice is surmised to be consonant with both virtue types combined. Exploring the interplay between professionals' valuation of moral and intellectual virtues may offer new insights into how professionals may differ in their professional practice and ethical conduct.



It should be noted, the Jubilee Centre also considers civic virtues to be an additional distinct virtue type (see Figure 1). Civic virtues, such as citizenship, community awareness and service, signify important character traits for social responsibility and acting towards a common good in the interest of others. In this regard, civic virtues, and the notion of citizenship, have close connotations with morality and working towards a higher moral purpose (Peterson, 2011). The notion of civic virtue is not explicitly examined in the present report (in part, due to the choice of measurement tool, which did not include specific civic virtues); however, civic virtues symbolise essential elements of the wider societal purpose that professions are intended to serve and are therefore reflected in the present consideration of professional purpose (see Figure 1).

## 1.2 CHARACTER AND PROFESSIONAL PURPOSE

A neo-Aristotelian approach to professional ethics can shed light on the ways in which professionals draw on their disposition for moral character to identify with a purpose for their work (Carr *et al.*, 2011: 3-4). A sense of moral purpose represents a central tenet of an

Aristotelian philosophy (ie, *telos*; MacIntyre, 1981), where 'good' professionals will develop and habituate moral and intellectual virtues that serve a 'good' end (Moore, 2015). The role of the professional extends beyond simply doing 'work' by developing mastery of technical skill or knowledge in a particular field (Beadle and Knight, 2012; Steger and Dik, 2010). Rather, professionals require a capacity to deliberate and make judgements with a distinct ethical dimension (Carr, 2018). Many of the occupations that one might deem to be professions have been created to fulfil some human or social need, and as a consequence, inherently contain some aspect of moral service to others. For instance, the purpose of a teacher should not just be to transfer knowledge to others for the reasons of employability or citizenship, but rather to nurture the personal development and wisdom of themselves and students. Likewise, the primary aim of business professionals should not be to grow businesses purely for self-serving financial gain, but instead to offer quality services for the benefit of a community. Medical professionals should aim to promote the well-being of society at large in the same way that lawyers should foster truth and justice to develop a fair and considerate society, rather than the mere upholding of rules and laws.

Consequently, the notion of professional purpose reflects, and is defined in this report as, a personal commitment, volition and motivation to do useful work for the betterment of others and society which sees beyond immediate individual or organisational goals (Kempster *et al.*, 2011).

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The overarching aim of the present research was to adopt a person-centred analytical approach to identify distinct profiles of professionals based on the value they ascribed to moral and intellectual virtues. These profiles were then compared in terms of reported professional purpose. Specifically, the research was separated into four distinct phases:

**Phase 1:** This first phase aimed to identify specific virtues that were valued across both a personal and professional domain, or specifically valued in a professional context. The virtues that professionals endorse and utilise in their private life may differ to those they endorse in their professional life (eg, Harzer and Ruch, 2013; Saldaña *et al.*, 2014). The Jubilee Centre has identified specific virtues which are valued within the professional contexts of medicine, law, teaching, business and nursing (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2017a; 2017b). Banks (2010) conceptualises a notion of 'professional integrity' which exemplifies one's professional character as 'standing for something' that extends beyond professional norms, and represents a personal commitment to professional ideal values along with a capacity for 'moral competence'. Identifying specific virtues that may be fundamental to professionals personally, as well as those important in a broad professional context, may be valuable for professional bodies in considering ways to foster these virtues in their practitioners.

**Phase 2:** The second phase of the analysis aimed to identify distinct groups of professionals that differed in their valuation of moral and intellectual virtues. Previous analyses of virtue have typically been conducted through variable-centred approaches which treat each virtue, or categorisations of virtues, as independent of one another. For example, multiple studies have examined specific virtues, such as zest, hope and gratitude, (eg, Andersson *et al.*, 2007; Peterson, *et al.*, 2009; Waters, 2012) or categories of virtues (eg, Harzer and Ruch, 2015) in relation to outcomes such as job satisfaction, well-being, professional responsibility and a sense of calling at work (for alternative virtue categorisations, see McCloskey, 2006; McGrath, 2015). The Jubilee Centre posits that moral and intellectual virtue types are required in balance to be able to develop practical wisdom (Jubilee Centre,



2017). Professionals that endorse intellectual virtues at the expense of moral virtues could be at risk of developing self-serving motives that do not correspond with the wider societal purpose that professions are proposed to serve. Conversely, practitioners with a developed sense of moral virtue may be unable to actualise these moral principles if they do not value the intellectual virtues required for ethical judgement. Consequently, the present research espoused a person-centred, rather than variable-centred, methodology to explore how professionals differed in their character typology (Bergman and Andersson, 2010). Specifically, professionals were grouped based on the extent to which they valued moral and intellectual virtues in combination, only one virtue type exclusively, or neither. This approach lent itself well to exploring the overriding conception of a purposeful professional *telos*. It was proposed that the professionals who valued both moral and intellectual virtues would report a higher sense of professional purpose than groups that valued only one type or neither. In contrast, it was surmised that the

professionals who valued neither moral nor intellectual virtues would report the lowest sense of professional purpose, when compared to other groups.

**Phase 3:** This research also investigated how professional purpose varied across professional domains. A profession is not 'merely a passive container that holds the virtues of its members', but can embody a generative, or maladaptive, context that fosters or diminishes virtue (Bright *et al.*, 2014: 456). Indeed, it is recognised that professionals operate in unique domains and within distinct institutional cultures (Carr, 2018). Certain professions, such as teaching, medicine and nursing, appear to have a prima facie commitment to the ethical care of 'people' and, on the surface, may promote a greater sense of care, empathy and deep personal or emotional commitment towards their professional practice (Carr, 2011; Leffel *et al.*, 2018). In contrast, those in other more commercialised and profit-orientated professions may place a greater value on instrumental and intellectual

character traits in response to financial and performance-based objectives. MacIntyre warned against a sole emphasis on the latter, at the expense of more internal virtues, branding such a focus as the 'corrupting power of institutions' (1981). Perceptions of a caring work climate have previously been shown to have a positive association with work satisfaction, while a perceived instrumental climate (ie, towards one's own or the organisation's self-interest) has a negative association with work satisfaction (Victor and Cullen, 1988). It was suspected that participants that worked in more 'people' professions would report higher notions of professional purpose, in line with a wider public contribution, compared with those from private sector institutions such as business and law, which may be more predisposed to placing greater emphasis on organisational or individualistic commercial objectives.

**Phase 4:** The final phase of the research explored the relationship between professionals' perceived work-related constraints and their sense of professional purpose. Workplaces that restrict professionals with overbearing financial and structural constraints have been found to link with lower experiences of volition, well-being and job satisfaction at work (Blau, 2000; Cropanzano and Wright, 2001; Duffy *et al.*, 2012a; Gagné and Deci, 2005). It was therefore hypothesised that greater reports of work-related constraints may correlate with lower perceived professional purpose. Exploring the association between the professional context and professional purpose may provide useful insights for professional bodies in fostering working conditions that facilitate, rather than inhibit, a sense of purpose among professionals.

## 2.2 PARTICIPANTS<sup>1</sup>

A total of 2,340 professionals ( $M_{\text{age}} = 36.48$ ,  $SD = 14.33$ , 60% female, 40% male) participated, deriving from the professions of medicine ( $n = 19\%$ ), law ( $n = 25\%$ ), teaching ( $n = 12\%$ ), business and finance ( $n = 23\%$ ) and nursing ( $n = 21\%$ ). With regards to stages of career, 49% of the participants were entry-level professionals, having just completed their course of study or professional training, with the remaining 51% representing established professionals with at least five years of practical experience in their respective field. Entry-level professionals were recruited on completion of their university degree or professional training (eg, Qualified Teacher

Status or Legal Practice Courses), whereas established professionals were predominantly recruited through university alumni offices and a range of profession-specific organisations and regulatory bodies. The ethnic make-up of the cohort was 84% Caucasian, 9% Asian or Chinese, 3% either Black-African or Black-Caribbean, 1% Arabian, and 3% multiracial or from other ethnic backgrounds. The participants were predominantly UK nationals (93%), with 7% reporting non-UK based nationality.

## 2.3 MEASURES

### Personal Virtues

Participants' personal virtues were assessed using the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Participants were asked to respond to the statement *Please choose the six strengths which you think best describe the sort of person you are* by ranking their top six virtues out of a possible 24. The 24 specific virtues were: Appreciation of Beauty; Bravery; Creativity; Curiosity; Fairness; Forgiveness; Gratitude; Honesty; Hope; Humility; Humour; Judgement; Kindness; Leadership; Love; Love of Learning; Perseverance; Perspective; Prudence; Self-Regulation; Social Intelligence; Spirituality; Teamwork; Zest. Participants were asked to rank the virtues in descending order with a value of 1 depicting the most valued virtue to them personally, and a score of 6 reflecting their sixth most valued virtue to them personally. The use of rankings enabled professionals to order the respective qualities in the extent to which they valued them in their given environment and minimised the potential inflation bias sometimes associated with self-scoring (Yannakakis and Hallam, 2011). Rankings were then reverse-point scored (eg, a ranking of 1 was assigned a score of 6, a ranking of 2 assigned a score of 5, etc) with any virtue not ranked given a score of 0.

### Professional Virtues

The virtues that professionals perceived as most ideal for their profession were assessed employing the same 24 virtues from the VIA-IS used to measure personal virtue. Professionals responded to the statement *Which of these character strengths would make the ideal professional?* in relation to their respective profession. These professional virtues were ranked and reverse scored with a procedure identical to that used with the personal virtues.

### Professional Purpose

Professionals' perception of professional purpose was assessed using six positively worded items, adapted from a Europe-wide workplace survey (Eurofound Working Conditions Survey, 2010). In line with the definition of professional purpose (eg, Kempster *et al.*, 2011), these items were used to tap into professionals' personal feelings of commitment and engagement towards their work (eg, *I am motivated to work to the best of my ability and I am emotionally involved in my work*), their sense of volition in their role (eg, *I am able to apply my own ideas in my work and I am able to influence decisions that are important for my work*), and their perception of doing meaningful work for the betterment of society (eg, *I have the feeling of doing useful work to make a social contribution*; for wording of all six items see Table 1). Participants read the stem *Please indicate how often this has been the case in the environment in which you work* and rated each item on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*). Table 1 illustrates the item factor loadings and internal consistency for the professional purpose variable.

### Work-Related Constraints

Professionals' perceptions of negative feelings and organisational constraints in their work environment were measured using six negatively worded items taken and adapted from the Europe-wide workplace survey (Eurofound Working Conditions Survey, 2010). These items assessed professionals' experiences of negative affect at work (eg, *I experience stress* and *My work requires that I hide my feelings*), as well as perceptions of the environment preventing them from being themselves (eg, *My work involves tasks that are in conflict with my personal values* and *My work requires that I hide my feelings*; see Table 2 for all item wordings). Participants read the stem *Please indicate how often this has been the case in the environment in which you work* and rated each item on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*). Internal consistency and item factor loadings are presented in Table 2.

## 2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Preliminary analysis involved calculating the mean ranking score for each virtue across participants' personal and professional domains. A score equal to or above 1 indicates the most valued virtues for each respective domain (see Chart 1). A technique originating from personal

<sup>1</sup> For a full description of the methodology, recruitment methods and ethical considerations of the original research conducted between 2012 and 2017 please see [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/professions](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/professions)



construct theory was used to identify discrepancies between the valuation of virtues in the professional and personal domain (see Butler and Hardy, 1992). Virtues were ranked in order based on mean scores within each domain and then reverse-point scored (ie, a ranking of 24 given a score of 1; a ranking of 1 given a score of 24). The personal score for each virtue was then subtracted from the maximum score possible (ie, 24), and multiplied by the respective professional virtue score. The greater scores represented virtues that were given importance in the professional domain but were at greater incongruity with the personal domain scores (see Table 3). Virtues ordered highest in both personal and professional contexts, as well as those displaying the greatest discrepancy scores, were retained for the profiling of professionals.

Based on a neo-Aristotelian conception of virtue (see habitual versus *phronetic* virtue; Kristjánsson, 2015, p.17), virtues that reflected moral or instrumental qualities were included in a moral virtue composite variable, with the intellectual virtues categorised separately. Composite scores for moral and intellectual virtue were calculated using personal mean scores and used as clustering criteria to profile professionals. Both composite grouping variables, and the outcome variable of professional purpose, were standardised to enable comparisons across professions (ie, the sample mean was equal to 0). Univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted to examine differences in professional purpose between the character profiles and profession domains, respectively. Significant ANCOVA were followed up by post-hoc comparisons to explore specific group differences. Linear regression analyses were used to examine the relationship between perceived work-related constraints and professional purpose.

**Table 1: Component Factor Loadings For Professional Purpose**

Item	Factor Loading
I am motivated to work to the best of my ability	.68
I am able to apply my own ideas in my work	.69
I feel 'at home' in my workplace	.71
I have the feeling of doing useful work to make a social contribution	.76
I am emotionally involved in my work	.60
I am able to influence decisions that are important for my work	.75
<b>Internal Consistency (a &gt; .70)</b>	<b>.79</b>

**Table 2: Component Factor Loadings For Work-Related Constraints**

Item	Factor Loading
I experience stress	.48
I am not treated fairly	.62
My work involves tasks that are in conflict with my personal values	.67
My work requires that I hide my feelings	.69
I do not have time to do my work to a standard I believe is right	.61
At work it is difficult to do the right thing	.71
<b>Internal Consistency (a &gt; .70)</b>	<b>.70</b>

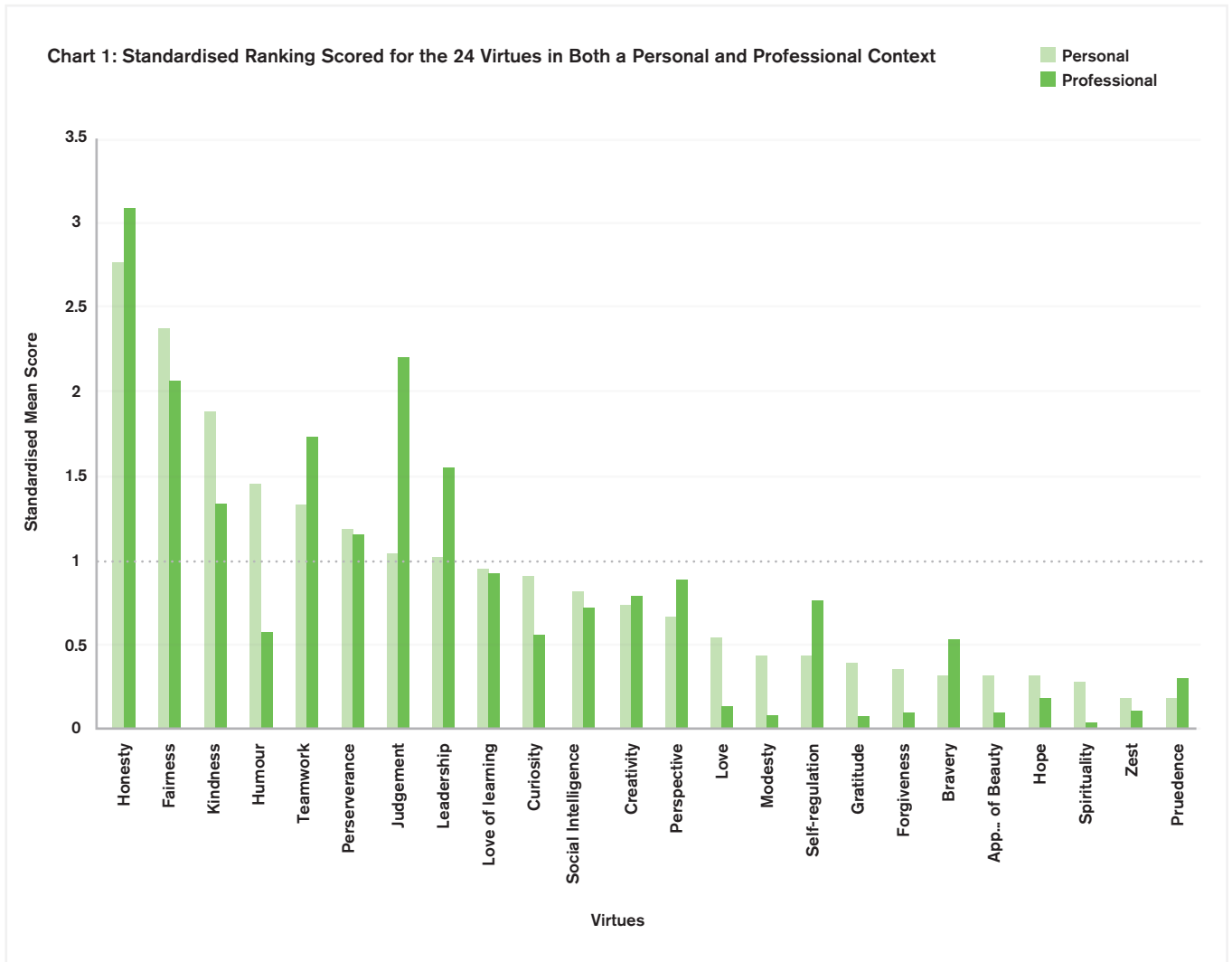
# 3 Findings

## 3.1 IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT PROFESSIONAL VIRTUES

Chart 1 displays the standardised ranking scores of each of the 24 virtues specified in the VIA-IS (Peterson and Seligman, 2004), in both the personal and professional domains. As shown, seven specific virtues were ranked highest in both the personal and professional domain with a mean score equal to or above 1; these were, **honesty, fairness, kindness, teamwork, perseverance, judgement and leadership**. The virtue of humour was reported in the top six personally ranked virtues, but not in the professional context. Furthermore, Table 3 presents the virtues which showed the

largest discrepancies between those deemed more important for the professional context, but which were ordered lower in the personal domain. As illustrated, the largest discrepancies in personal value were seen in the virtues of **self-regulation, prudence, perspective, bravery, creativity and hope**, when factoring in the importance of the professional value. Consequently, the seven virtues valued across both domains and the six that showed the highest discrepancies in personal value were retained to group professionals.





**Table 3: Discrepancies between Professional and Personal Virtues**

Virtue	Discrepancy Score
Self-Regulation	210
Prudence	207
Perspective	192
Bravery	180
Creativity	165
Hope	160
Leadership	140
Judgement	138

### Profiling Professionals

Table 4 illustrates the categorisation of the retained virtues, based on a neo-Aristotelian conception. Eight virtues were categorised as moral virtues and five were intellectual virtues. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for both moral and intellectual virtue composite variables, as well as all other study variables are available in an online appendix<sup>2</sup>.

Four distinct profiles were identified based on the extent to which participants differed in the value they assigned to these moral and intellectual virtues (see Chart 2 for graphical depiction). Firstly, an *alternative character* group ( $n = 491$ , 21%) was identified, which reported below average scores in the value of both moral and intellectual virtues. This group placed higher value on virtues not retained as important professional virtues. An *intellectual character* group ( $n = 660$ , 28%) was characterised by professionals that reported above average scores in the value of intellectual but not moral virtues. A *moral character* group ( $n = 836$ , 36%) comprised of professionals that reported scores above the sample mean in the value of the moral virtues only. Finally, a *phronetic character* group ( $n = 353$ , 15%)

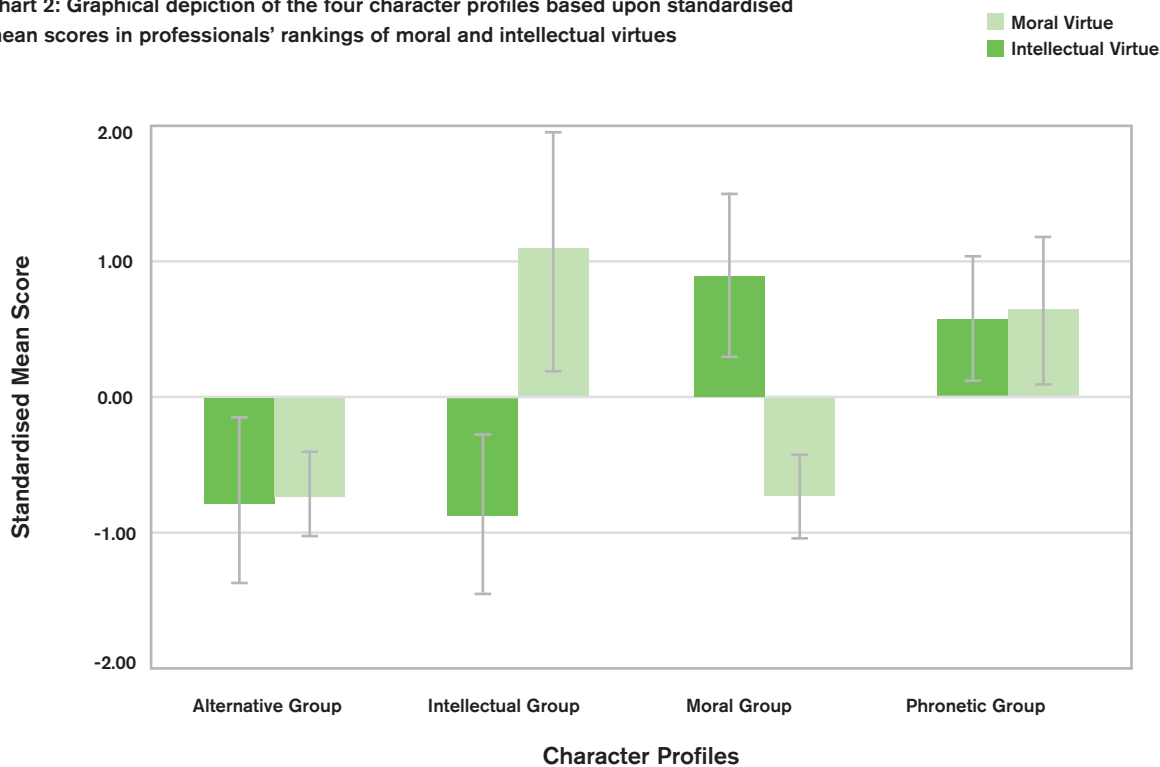
**Table 4: The Specific Virtues Comprising the Moral and Intellectual Virtue**

Moral	Intellectual
Honesty	Judgement
Fairness	Creativity
Teamwork	Perspective
Leadership	Prudence
Kindness	Self-Regulation
Perseverance	
Bravery	
Hope	

*Note: The moral virtues also include virtues which are instrumental in nature.*

comprised of professionals that reported scores above the sample average in the value of both moral and intellectual virtues. All groups statistically differed from one another in moral and intellectual virtue ( $p < .05$ ), with the exception of *alternative* and *moral* groups which did not differ in the value ascribed to intellectual virtues.

**Chart 2: Graphical depiction of the four character profiles based upon standardised mean scores in professionals' rankings of moral and intellectual virtues**



<sup>2</sup> See [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/integration](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/integration)

Significant differences in the gender distribution across the four character profiles were found,  $\chi^2(3, n = 2245) = 91.49, p < .001$ ; 43% of female professionals were categorised in the *moral* group compared with 26% of men, whereas only 23% of females were categorised in the *intellectual* group, in contrast with 37% of men. Independent sample T-tests revealed no gender differences in professional purpose ( $t = .63, p = .53$ ). Significant differences were found in the distribution of professionals' stage of career across the four character profiles,  $\chi^2(3, n = 2281) = 30.27, p < .001$ , albeit these differences were minimal (ie, all  $\% \Delta < 7$ ). In general, a higher proportion of entry-level professionals were categorised in the *alternative* and *moral* groups, whereas established professionals were greater represented in the *intellectual* and *phronetic* groups. Independent sample T-tests also revealed statistically significant differences in professional purpose across stages of career ( $t = -15.05, p < .001$ ). Overall, established professionals reported higher senses of professional purpose compared with entry-level professionals. Consequently, stage of career, but not gender, was included as a covariate in all subsequent analyses. Furthermore, the distribution of different professions across the four character

profiles was also found to be significant,  $\chi^2(12, n = 2340) = 223.90, p < .001$ ). The proportion of each profession represented in the *alternative* profile varied from 27% of doctors to 17% of business professionals and nurses. Only 11% of nurses were represented in the *intellectual* group, whereas 59% of nurses were represented in the *moral* group. The proportion of each of the remaining four professions ranged between 26% and 37% in both the *moral* and *intellectual* groups. In the *phronetic* group, business professionals had the greatest proportion of representatives (22%), with the four remaining professions similarly distributed (11–15%). To avoid interpretation of multiple complex interactions however, group differences across character profiles and different professions were examined in separate analyses.

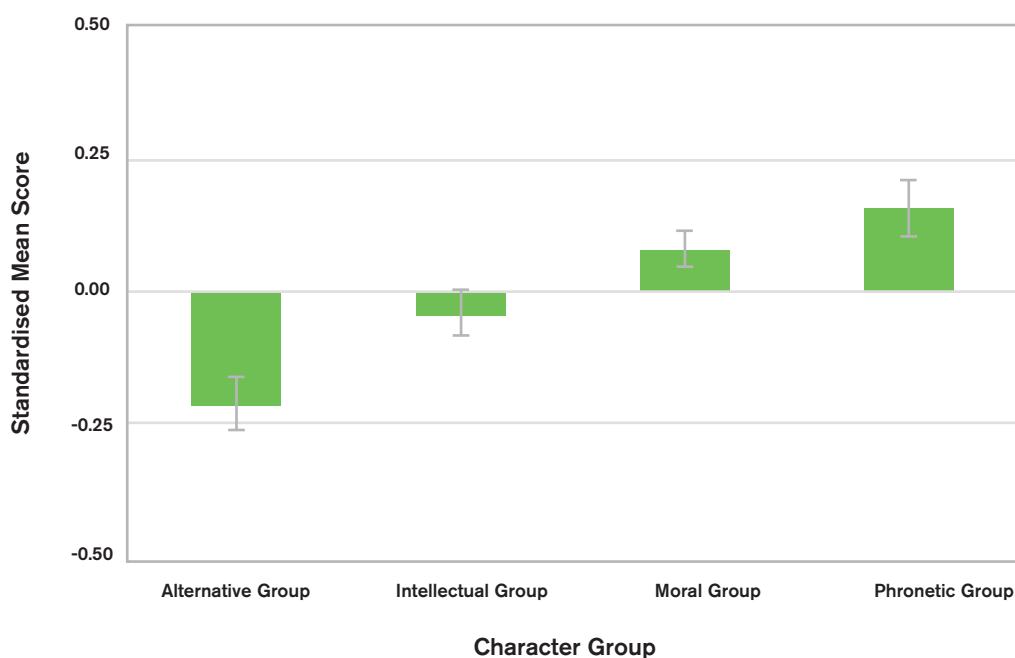
#### Differences in Professional Purpose

##### By Character Group

ANCOVA identified significant differences in perceived sense of professional purpose across the character profiles when controlling for stage of career,  $F(3, 2054) = 11.13, p < .001$ ;  $\eta p^2 = .02$ . Tukey's Honest Significant Difference post-hoc tests revealed that the *phronetic* group were statistically higher in

perceived professional purpose than the *alternative* ( $p < .001$ ) and *intellectual* groups ( $p = .03$ ), but not the *moral* group ( $p = .68$ ; see Chart 3). The *alternative* group were found to be statistically lower in reported sense of professional purpose than all other groups ( $p < .04$ ). No statistical differences were found between the *intellectual* and *moral* groups ( $p = .12$ ), nor between the *moral* and *phronetic* groups ( $p = .68$ ). Tests for an interaction effect revealed these character group differences in professional purpose were consistent across all five professions.

Chart 3: Standardised mean differences in professional purpose across the four character profiles



### Differences in Professional Purpose

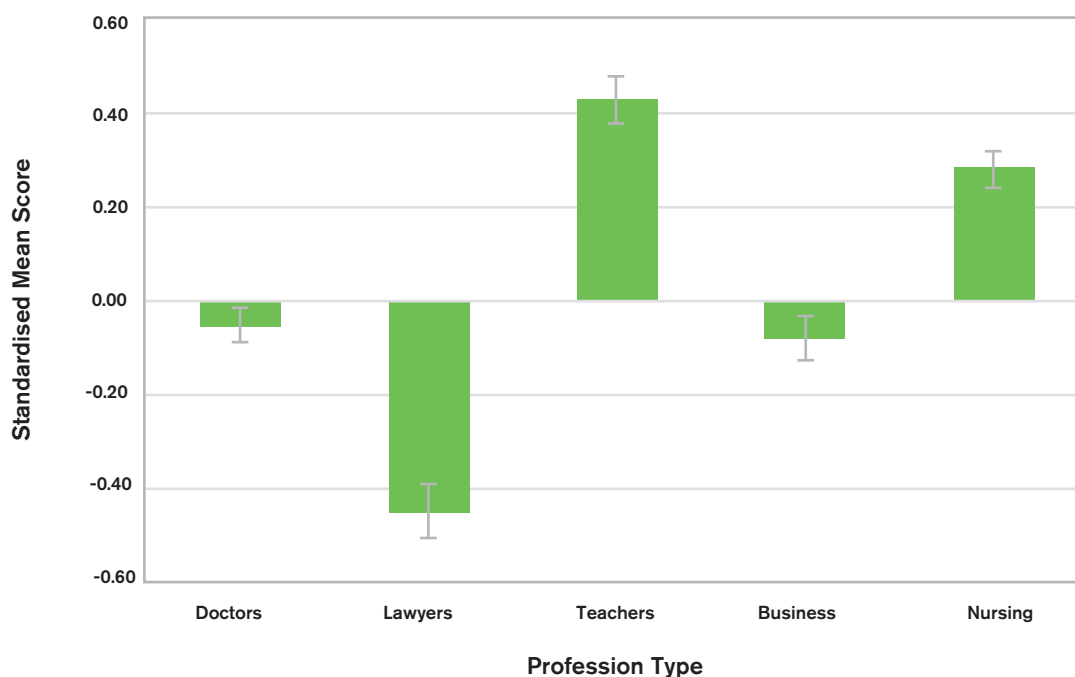
#### By Profession Type

ANCOVA revealed that there were significant differences in perceived sense of professional purpose across profession type,  $F(4, 2053) = 52.87, p < .001; \eta p^2 = .09$ . Post-hoc analysis revealed that teachers and nurses reported statistically higher professional purpose compared to doctors, business professionals, and lawyers, respectively ( $p < .001$ ; see Chart 4). In contrast, lawyers were found to report statistically lower perceived professional purpose, when compared with all other professions. All group differences were found to be statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), except those between nurses and teachers ( $p = .27$ ), and between doctors and business professionals ( $p = .99$ ).

### Associations with Work-Related Constraints and Stage of Career

Multiple regression analysis was used to test whether a perceived sense of professional purpose could be predicted by a professional's perceived work-related constraints, along with their stage of career. Together, work-related constraints and stage of career explained 15.8% of the variance in professional purpose,  $F(2, 2056) = 193.60, p < .001$ . Work-related constraints were found to predict professional purpose ( $\beta = -.26, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = -.30 \sim -.22$ ) as did stage of career ( $\beta = .41, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = .37 \sim .46$ ). Professionals who perceived fewer work-related constraints and who were further into their professional careers were more likely to have reported higher senses of professional purpose than peers that had recently entered their profession and who perceived greater work-related constraints.

Chart 4: Standardised mean differences in professional purpose across the five different professions



# 4 Insights

The findings presented in this report offer a person-focused perspective of the relationship between professionals' character and their sense of professional purpose, taking into consideration the role of the working environment and professional domain. Adding to previous variable-centred approaches to professional virtue (eg, Harzer and Ruch, 2015; Peterson *et al.*, 2009), valuing the moral virtues appears to be a central component for professional purpose when intellectual excellences of character are valued at the same time. The findings indicate that professional bodies may need to explore methods of reducing perceived work-related constraints within each distinct professional domain to encourage professionals to value excellences of character and conduct purposeful practice. The findings are discussed in more detail below, in line with the four over-arching aims outlined earlier in the report.

## Identifying Integral Professional Virtues

13 virtues were found to be given particular importance by professionals in their professional life. Seven of these virtues were identified as important across both a personal and professional domain; these were **honesty, judgement, fairness, teamwork, leadership, kindness, and perseverance**. Indeed, qualities such as moral integrity (ie, honesty and fairness), connection to others (ie, kindness and teamwork) and volition in one's life (ie, leadership, judgement, and perseverance) have been found to be central components of a flourishing life (Aristotle, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2017). Employers, professional bodies and educators/trainers may be best guided to foster these virtues in their practitioners, and may even consider these qualities in their recruitment and selection of future professionals.

When considering the perceived importance in the professional context, the six virtues that showed the biggest personal discrepancy were **self-regulation, prudence, perspective, bravery, creativity, and hope**. Professionals are often required to respond to a multitude of scenarios, problems and dilemmas with clear thought, caution and emotional-control (Carr, 2018). In such instances, the intellectual virtues of self-regulation, prudence, perspective and creativity are essential for professionals to



achieve perspective-taking, emotional regulation and imaginative deliberation (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2006; 2010). On the other hand, bravery depicts the optimal mean between foolhardiness and cowardliness (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Professionals will often be faced with challenging predicaments, and thus will be required to act with bravery, for example, to action their deliberated judgments and decisions (Harzer and Ruch, 2014). The virtue of hope is synonymous with forward-thinking and conceptualised in relation to personal agency for achieving desired goals (Snyder, 1995). Professionals who are hopeful in their work may be more likely to engage and commit to the purpose of their work (Youssef and Luthans, 2007; also see Peterson and Park, 2006). As such, hope is seen to be an important quality to foster in professionals for engaged purposeful practice. Professional leaders and regulatory bodies should ensure their professionals are able to develop and value these virtues in their specific practices, promoting them through

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, ethical training and general day-to-day practices.

## Professional Character Profiles

Using the retained virtues highlighted in the preceding section, the subsequent profiling of professionals enabled the relationship between moral and intellectual virtues to be inspected. The empirical findings highlighted the importance of developing a *phronetic* character profile for the enhancement of perceived professional purpose. That is, one that encompasses a value for both moral and intellectual virtue simultaneously as opposed to in isolation of one another. It is telling that this *phronetic* group only differed in reports of professional purpose with the *alternative* and *intellectual* groups, both of which placed a lower value on the moral virtues. Valuing the moral virtues may therefore be crucial for developing a sense of purpose that extends beyond the self and to the community in which one works. Indeed, the 'good' professional

should aim to capture the moral dimensions of their practice in order to safeguard the rights of clients and to uphold the responsibilities of service providers (Tanchuk *et al.*, 2016). However, it is only when a moral compass is synergised with a valuation of the intellectual virtues, that professionals are likely to experience the greatest possible sense of professional purpose. Ethical professional training programmes may be best served by being grounded in the moral implications of professional practice (Rest and Narváez, 1994). Subsequently, the development of intellectual virtue may help professionals decipher what constitutes 'good' professional action in accord with a moral compass (Moore, 2017).

Conversely, the *alternative* character group reported the lowest sense of perceived professional purpose of all three groups. Ascribing value to moral and intellectual virtues disproportionately may offer some compensatory benefit to professionals' sense of purpose, however a lack of value of both virtue types may put professionals at risk of losing sight of the greater purpose that their profession is intended to serve. In turn, this loss of purpose may result in these professionals becoming less productive, less committed, or less satisfied in their work (Duffy *et al.*, 2011; Duffy *et al.*, 2012b). It should be noted that the *alternative* character group in this study placed value on different virtues, specified in the VIA-IS, which were not categorised as important professional virtues in the earlier analysis. Thus, it is not that this *alternative* group lacked character *per se* and, in fact, may have valued certain virtues that are related with general well-being and purpose, outside of the professional context (eg, Wood *et al.*, 2011). Rather, this group placed less emphasis on the virtues given particular value in the professional domain. In light of incidents of malpractice and poor ethical judgment, regular ethical training based upon excellences of character and professional judgment may be influential in instilling a sense of purpose, particularly for professionals that lack a value of both moral and intellectual virtue.

This technique of profiling professionals may be of practical use for professional bodies in helping them recognise how different professionals value different character virtues. Previous variable-focused research found that workers from professional and managerial occupations (such as the ones included in the present report) typically reported higher scores in intellectual virtues regarding wisdom and knowledge, compared to administrators and blue collar workers (Peterson *et al.*, 2010). The present findings indicate that males who

are established in their professional career, rather than entering the profession, may be more likely to be represented in groups with higher intellectual virtues (ie, the *intellectual* and *phronetic* groups). In contrast, a greater proportion of females displayed a moral character profile, with a particularly high proportion of nurses also reflecting this profile. This is not dissimilar to previous evidence that found workers in the homemaker professions, ie, household management and care for others, scored higher in their value of moral virtues, such as kindness and love (Peterson *et al.*, 2010). It may be worthwhile for organisational regulators within distinct professions to explore methods to ensure that established professionals do not lose sight of their moral duty, whilst providing opportunities for entry-level professionals to develop the intellectual virtues necessary for professional practice, regardless of gender or specific profession.

#### The Professional Domain

Examining the character profiles of professionals offers a unique opportunity to look into what may constitute a 'good' professional across a number of discrete professions. Across distinct professions, however, teachers and nurses reported a greater sense of professional purpose than medical, business, and legal professionals. Teaching and nursing are seen as 'people'

professions by their nature, in which the fundamental aim is to facilitate the education of, or care for, the public (Carr, 2011). Thus, those in both occupations may be predisposed to experience a greater sense of purpose for a wider public good compared to other professions. In principle, both professions are 'caring professions', underpinned by an 'ethics of care' which requires the professional to develop a deeper level of personal commitment towards others (Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2015; Swanson, 1993). This is only in principle, though, as there are instances within both professions where this position of care has been neglected or abused (Barrett *et al.*, 2012; Hutchison, 2016). It is interesting that nurses reported significantly higher levels of perceived professional purpose than doctors, considering that both professions are rooted in healthcare. The key difference between doctors and nurses may come down to their relationships with those whom they serve (patients). Where doctors are often responsible for making decisions regarding diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of those in their care, nurses are obligated to carry out these decisions more intimately with patients on a daily, if not hourly basis (Oberle and Hughes, 2001).

By way of contrast to those in the caring professions, participants from the legal professions reported the lowest sense of professional purpose. Rather than a sense





of professional purpose being absent in lawyers, it may be that the sense of professional purpose that lawyers do hold is more focussed on commercial gains, when compared to public sector professions of teaching and nursing. Whilst one could argue that a lawyer's sense of purpose is to uphold the law of a just and fair society, the demands of clients and the requirement to turn a profit are dominant features of private sector professions (Feenan, Hand, and Hough, 2016). In this sense, participants from the legal profession may have responded to the professional purpose items from the perspective of the benefit to individual client(s), rather than to any wider societal or community good. Thus, the tension between public and private sector demands should not be underestimated in this work. In developing a sense of purpose in professionals, professional bodies cannot ignore the bespoke and inherent requirements or objectives of their specific profession.

#### Work-Related Constraints

Reports of perceived professional purpose were found to be higher when professionals perceived fewer work-related constraints in their professional context and were more established in their career. When professionals experience negative emotions, feel unsupported in their required work, and in conflict with their personal values, they may find less meaning in their work (Rosso *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, professionals who are overburdened with limited time and workload pressures will likely experience lower well-being and satisfaction at work (Blau, 2000; Duffy *et al.*, 2012b), which may in turn reduce performance and productivity (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001). In more recent times, traditional professions have developed cultures in which relationships have become more transactional and mistrustful, aiming to meet commercial or materialistic objectives (Holbeche and Springett, 2004). Such instrumental climates may have a negative influence on professionals' satisfaction and engagement with their work (Victor and Cullen, 1988).

Furthermore, established professionals may be better placed to identify with the purpose of their profession. This sense of purpose may develop over time, through practice, and through developing an idea of what is important to them as professionals, in order for them to best fulfil their roles. Professionals just entering their profession may be more focused on orientating themselves with the working norms of their profession and forging a career path for themselves. Even when knowing the right course of action, entry-level professionals may

often choose to bend the rules or engage in questionable behaviour to further their own career (Fischman *et al.*, 2005). Evidence has shown that entry-level professionals' initial ethical reasoning is often lower at the start of their career and typically increases over years of practice (eg, Varghese and Kristjánsson, 2018). Professional bodies and policy-makers may need to explore methods of alleviating pressures and restrictions placed upon professionals at work, if they are to enhance a sense of purpose within their workforce (Sekerka *et al.*, 2009). Future initiatives may examine how professional training programmes, along with university degree courses and apprenticeship schemes, may best prepare potential future professionals for the daily requirements of their professions, and the wider moral purpose that they are intended to serve.

#### 4.1 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present research attempts to provide a more holistic account of professionals' characters and offers a starting point for wider exploration of character and virtue in the professional sphere. The use of hierarchal rankings enabled an exploration of the extent to which professionals valued each specific virtue, and categorisation of virtues. Future studies could replicate the profiling methodology of the current research using quantitative scoring of each virtue. Such an approach would enable professionals to be grouped in the extent to which they *endorsed*, rather than *valued*, moral and intellectual virtues. Furthermore, the present assessment of professional purpose was derived through a factor analysis on previously collected data. Future research may use multiple measures of meaning and purpose at work, such as the *Work as Meaning Inventory* (Steger *et al.*, 2012) and the *Work Volition Scale* (Duffy *et al.*, 2012a), to explore if the patterns found in the present research are replicated with more comprehensive measures of professional purpose.

The inclusion of entry-level and established professionals in the present research enabled differences in professional purpose to be explored across stages of career, and controlled for in the analyses. Future studies may also want to examine professionals from the onset of their professional education through to professional practice, to investigate how their character profile and perceived senses of purpose may change over the course of their careers. Doing so would lend itself to measurements over multiple time points and enable variation in professionals' character profiles to be explored over time. Such an analysis would also facilitate within- and

between-person associations to be examined across multiple years of practice and may offer further insights into sustaining 'good' ethical professional development.

In addition to professional purpose, the Jubilee Centre has collected a wealth of data regarding professionals' responses to ethical dilemmas. Each profession specific set of dilemmas was developed based on scholar and practitioner knowledge to tap into professionals' choices of action in certain scenarios along with their justifications for choosing this action (for examples of previous dilemmas see Patterson and Ashworth, 2011; Thoma *et al.*, 2013). As part of the current Jubilee Centre project *Integrating Practical Wisdom In The Professions*, this dilemma data will be explored more extensively both within and between professions. It would be valuable to explore whether the character profiles identified in the present research differed in their action choices and justifications when responding to these dilemmas; such analysis would provide further insights into how professionals' character profiles are associated with indicators of moral reasoning and behavior within their professional practice.

Finally, in addition to moral, intellectual and instrumental virtues, the Jubilee Centre maintains that some virtues can be civic in nature. Such civic virtues reflect qualities that are directed towards social responsibility for a common good, such as citizenship and service (Peterson, 2011). These virtues may be particularly relevant within the professions given the inherent purpose of a professional to serve in the best interest of others and society at large (Moore, 2015; 2017). The VIA-IS (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) used in the present research does not include any virtues that would be categorised as exclusively civic, with teamwork being the most comparable to citizenship. The inclusion of civic virtue measures in future studies may offer a new grouping variable to distinguish different professional profiles.

#### 4.2 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The evidence presented in this report sheds light on how professionals' character profile and professional context may influence their perceived sense of purpose for their profession. The person-centred focus of the character profiles helped unravel the complex interplay between moral and intellectual virtues as excellences of character. The findings provided initial support to a neo-Aristotelian conception of practical wisdom (Aristotle, 2009), indicating that valuing the moral virtues can play a meaningful role in the re-purposing of professionals, but that this moral compass needs to be accompanied with a value for the intellectual virtues. Specifically, the findings offered empirical weight to the philosophically proposed links between 'good' character and a purposeful *telos* of the professions (MacIntyre,

1981). Initiatives of character education within the professions may be of substantive value in ensuring professionals understand the ethical ends that their practice is intended to serve. The research also highlighted that reductions in the work-related constraints that professionals perceive may be beneficial in fostering greater senses of professional purpose. As such, the development of character in the professional sphere is concerned with both the professionals themselves and the professional context within which they practice. Professional bodies and regulators may be best served by grounding ethical and professional training in notions of character and ensuring workplace conditions foster both the moral and intellectual development of entry-level and established professionals.





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