



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

MY CHARACTER

ENHANCING FUTURE-MINDEDNESS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

A FEASIBILITY STUDY

JAMES ARTHUR
TOM HARRISON
KRISTJÁN KRISTJÁNSSON
IAN DAVISON

with
DAN HAYES
JENNY HIGGINS

FOREWORD BY PROFESSOR KEVIN RYAN

School of Education, University of Birmingham

The University of Birmingham is a top ranking British University. Founded in 1900, it was England's first civic University and has been ranked University of the Year 2013-14 by the *Times* and the *Sunday Times*.



The original Department of Education was founded in 1894 and became the School of Education in 1947. Ranked in the top 50 Schools of Education in the world today, it has a long-standing reputation as a centre of excellence for teaching and research in a wide range of areas of educational practice and policy, with fields of expertise including disability, inclusion and special needs, education and social justice, and professional education.

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. Based at the University of Birmingham, it has a dedicated team of 30 academics from a range of disciplines: 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.

My Character

Enhancing Future-Mindedness in Young People

A Feasibility Study

CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Executive Summary	5
Purpose of the Report	7
Background	8
Historical Background	8
Problem Statement and Conceptual Clarifications	8
Overall Evaluative Goals	10
Methodology	11
Ethical Considerations	11
Findings	12
Randomised Controlled Trial: Feasibility Pilot	12
Interviews with Teachers and Students	14
School Case Studies	14
Overall Findings	16
Interpretation and Discussion of Findings	19
Recommendations	21
References	23
Appendices	24
Appendix 1: Project Timeline	24
Appendix 2: Students' Reflections on Future-Mindedness	26
Appendix 3: Results Table	28
Project Team	29
Acknowledgements	30

‘THOSE WHO EDUCATE CHILDREN WELL ARE MORE TO BE HONoured THAN THEY WHO PRODUCE THEM; FOR THESE ONLY GIVE THEM LIFE, THOSE THE ART OF LIVING WELL.’

Aristotle

Foreword

Professor Kevin Ryan

Since the end of World War II, the traditional role of schools to foster the habits and dispositions that constitute good character has noticeably flagged. This is particularly true in democratic nations that fund education from public taxes. Schools once saw the transmission of their society's core moral values as their central mission along with knowledge, but such schools have been stymied. In the face of questions like 'Whose values?' and 'Whose morality?', they have left the field to other contending parties, such as parents, churches and a toxic mass media.

This retreat has left students ignorant of civilization's treasure of understandings about what constitutes a good and worthy life. In turn, this educational failure to teach about and promote good character has left democratic societies increasingly vulnerable in terms of lacking the social glue necessary to flourish and promote the common good. In response to these individual and societal dangers, a relatively small number of educators have advanced ideas and made efforts to refocus elementary and secondary school on what had historically been a central focus. While some of these efforts have been interesting, most have been small in scale and isolated. One indication is the plethora of names under which these efforts have stumbled forward: moral education, moral development, education for virtue, ethics education, philosophy for children and so on.

More recently the label 'character education' has gained prominence and has emerged as the flag under which these various approaches have been co-ordinated. While this may be a step forward, two things have been missing: leadership and a coherent corpus of research-based knowledge. The research developed in the field of character education is a linguistic swamp of undefined terms, porous research designs and dubious findings. The very target of these studies – the formation of good character – is typically left undefined or

reduced to behaviours observed within a short time frame. It is against this background that I read the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues report on the *My Character* project.

The *My Character* project appears to be a break-through effort in character education. Besides being directed by a clear and sound understanding of human character, the project is driven by an idea continually lacking in the great majority of such efforts. *My Character* leads students to realise that the kind of person they want to become is 'their work', 'their own responsibility'. It engages them actively in the crafting of their own characters. The individual student is guided to engage his or her own life and future through readings, journal writing and group activities. The project's materials and activities appear to have imaginatively engaged two primary human questions: Who am I and what does the future hold for me? While people at all ages are concerned with the questions, their salience is greatest in the very formative teen years. To most students (and to the great frustration of many dedicated educators), little in the curriculum or the student's life in school reaches these areas of concern. Learning to be future-minded, to focus on what you desire to become and then how to move toward that goal is a winning strategy. More importantly, it is the essence of a good education.

As mentioned above, the field of character education is characterised by a spongy knowledge base at best. Large, well-funded studies typically rest on a flawed concept of human character. Smaller, well-focused studies lack proper controls and suitable design. *My Character* is a striking and welcome exception: the sample is large; the six schools are varied; and there are multiple data sources. Most impressive is the use of the Randomised Controlled Trial [RCT], which is the gold standard methodology for social science research. Independent of the project's results,

this use of RCT – along with guided self-reflection, textual analysis of students' writing, interviews and cases studies – is an important model for future research in the field.

Today, much of what postmodern culture communicates to the young is a message of victimisation and their lack of control over their fate. *My Character's* demonstration that future-mindedness can be taught and, in turn, valued by students further enhances this project's contribution. Our new technologies, for all their benefits, have trained the young in the opposite direction: to be present-minded. All of us are surrounded by screens cleverly crying out for our attention. Children and young adults are particularly vulnerable to these siren-songs of pleasure and frothy distraction. *My Character's* enlightened use of this same digital technology to pull them away (at least temporarily) from the seductive, commerce-driven media world and to take on the big issues and life-questions confronting them are additional contributions.

Up until recently one of the besetting sins of the 'character educating movement' has been its lack of leadership. When a teacher or a school administrator or the members of a school committee looked for an entity that speaks about character education with specificity, practicality and authority, the search was disappointing. The impressive results of the *My Character* project and the richness of the Jubilee Centre's website strongly suggest that the leadership issue is solved. However, most encouraging to this observer is the Centre's recognition that character formation is not something that a teacher or a school does for or to a student. Rather, informed students do this for and to themselves. This fundamental shift is perfectly captured in the project's title: *My Character*.

KEVIN RYAN
Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

Executive Summary

The aim of the *My Character* project was to develop a better understanding of how interventions designed to develop character might enhance moral formation and future-mindedness in young people. Future-mindedness can be defined as an individual's capacity to set goals and make plans to achieve them. Establishing goals requires considerable moral reflection, and the achievement of worthwhile aims requires character traits such as courage and the capacity to delay gratification.

The research team developed two new educational interventions – a website and a hard-copy journal – with the specific aim of developing future-mindedness. After development, the website and journal were piloted over a one-year period by over 1,000 11–14 year olds in six schools across England. Various research methods, including group interviews and case studies, were implemented to assess impact. In addition, a pilot RCT was conducted to assess the feasibility of using experimental methods to measure character.

The main findings from the research are that:

- Students benefit from opportunities in school to think about future-mindedness; this can be successfully taught through character education.
- Harnessing new technology, such as the Internet, offers exciting opportunities for character education.
- It is beneficial to investigate the impact of new character education resources in order to bring greater clarity about 'what works'. The most useful approach is a mixed methods one that allows for triangulation of evidence.
- It is possible to run RCTs and other experimental research in schools to assess developmental projects of this kind, but applying the method in schools and creating suitable outcome measures present challenges for researchers.
- A positive indicator of the success is that five out of the six pilot schools have embedded *My Character* into their curriculum. In addition, many new schools, both in Britain and internationally, have started to use the website and / or journal.

This report describes the research, analyses the impact of *My Character* and concludes with recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and researchers embarking on similar projects. These recommendations include:

- i) advocating that schools create space in the curriculum to teach future-mindedness through character education
- ii) enhancing traditional character education teaching methods with opportunities brought by Internet technologies
- iii) evaluating character education interventions using triangulated evidence drawn from a mixture of research methods





1 Purpose of the Report

My Character was a bold and ambitious pilot project. It was inspired by a desire to find a creative solution to a complex problem. The overall aim of the three-year project was to discover a new way of teaching character and, more specifically, the virtues of future-mindedness. We also sought to test the feasibility of running trials in schools to measure the impact of character education interventions. As such, the project tested the following specific hypotheses:

- Specifically developed character education resources, designed to develop future-mindedness, can be embedded in the curriculum. Furthermore, they are more likely to engage young people if they use new digital technologies.
- Guided self-reflection can be stimulated by carefully planned social interactions, which in turn gives young people the opportunity to become more future-minded.
- The impact of character education interventions, such as *My Character*, can feasibly be measured through the use of RCTs.

From the outset, the project team believed that self-reflection in the form of keeping a journal or interacting with a specifically designed website will encourage young people to discuss goals, strategies, and performance. In turn, this will lead to them becoming more accomplished and successful adults in terms of character development. We also assumed that developing future-mindedness in young people should be a key concern of all schools. Future-mindedness is defined as the capacity for setting goals and making plans to achieve them. The project's starting point was a conviction that establishing goals requires considerable moral reflection involving beneficial purpose (towards oneself, one's loved ones, and one's community) and a serious consideration of the virtues supporting such purpose, like courage and creativity. To succeed requires, among other things, the capacity to delay gratification and save for the future in pursuit of firmly held goals.

This report gives an account of the *My Character* project and makes recommendations based on the research. We hope that the report will not only be an inspiration for future ventures of a similar nature, but will also provide important evidence about how best to conduct such projects so as to ensure maximum benefit for young people and the societies they serve.

**'PEOPLE GROW THROUGH
EXPERIENCE IF THEY MEET LIFE
HONESTLY AND COURAGEOUSLY.
THIS IS HOW CHARACTER IS BUILT.'**

Eleanor Roosevelt

2 Background

My Character draws together and builds upon promising evidence about how future-mindedness might best be enhanced in young people. The project team could find no attempts, in Britain at least, to develop a new character education intervention that targets 11–14 year olds and focuses exclusively on the virtues of future-mindedness, although they could find existing knowledge about the component parts of such a venture. Before the development of *My Character*, we conducted a critical review of the current research in the field in order to establish why the development of such an intervention might be necessary, as well as an assessment of what currently works. The following section provides a background to the current state of play in the field.

2.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The conception and development of the *My Character* project comes at a time when the notion of character education is gaining significant traction in Britain (Arthur, 2003; Arthur, 2010). The project aimed to develop and test a new character education teaching activity that taps into this renewed interest, but which also reflects current dominant thinking in the field. Questions are being asked about the purpose of schools – should they simply prepare young people for a life of tests, or should they also be preparing them for the tests of life? The *My Character* project was based on a belief in the latter, and schools interested in expanding their character education provision adopted the journal and website.

The dominant moral tradition of current character education in Britain is virtue ethics (Kristjánsson, 2007; Carr, 2007; Curren, 2010). The concepts of 'character' and 'virtue' are central components of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (Anscombe, 1958; Hursthouse, 1999; Foot, 2003). The virtues making up good character are widely contested, and lines are often drawn between moral, performance, intellectual and civic virtues. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues considers moral virtues to be essential for

individual and societal flourishing. However, the Centre recognises that other types of virtues are also important for individual flourishing¹. Of the virtues central to the *My Character* project, some are moral (eg, courage), some are performance (eg, determination), some combine moral and civic elements (eg, helping others) and some might be considered purely intellectual (eg, creativity).

A recent Populus poll indicated that parents think schools can and should teach character². Many high profile politicians³, such as Tristram Hunt⁴, and employers have recently said the same, while the CBI has called for character education to become a more conscious part of schooling⁵. Most schools recognise their responsibilities, and some form of character education takes place in every school in the UK. However parents, employers and increasingly politicians seem to be saying that it is important for character education to be intentional, planned, organised and reflective, rather than assumed, unconscious, reactive and random. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has led the call for schools to make character education a visible and conscious part of their everyday practice and has also collected evidence to show that character education can be taught. The *My Character* project was an attempt to develop a resource that explicitly teaches character and one that all schools can adopt.

2.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

2.2.1 Framing Future-Mindedness for the 'My Character' Project

Developing future-mindedness can be considered a component of character education. As a term, future-mindedness has not been widely used in Britain, but it has clear antecedents in the classical virtues which, according to Platonic philosophy, were prudence (wisdom), justice (fair-mindedness), temperance (self-control) and courage (determination). The latter two virtues are particularly salient to the achievement of future

goals. As such, human flourishing and happiness are strongly linked to the wise selection of life goals that recognise the value of relationships and the importance of respecting others' rights to achieve the same goals – hence the importance of fairness. These classical virtues were enhanced in the Western tradition by a group of Christian virtues including hope, faith and love, which also place a strong emphasis on the importance of future goals.

A contemporary manifestation of future-mindedness is found in the fields of 'positive thinking' and 'positive psychology'. Positive psychology is an outgrowth of humanistic psychology which seeks to achieve 'a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving individuals, families and communities' (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology includes understanding, appreciating, or being grateful for positive experiences (including relationships, hobbies and interests), leading a life of 'purposeful engagement' and developing a strong sense of meaning and purpose. The latter particularly supports the positive appreciation of future-mindedness as a key to human flourishing.

From the outset, the project team believed it important to learn from young people themselves about which virtues they thought were important towards achieving their long-term goals. Acting as consultants during development of the journal and website, we invited the students to suggest virtues they felt were fundamental to being future-minded. After consultation with all 250 students involved, they suggested 30 virtues which they saw as important to being future-minded. The *My Character* steering group, made up of educational professionals and other experts, discussed the most popular suggestions and selected the following eight virtues: Having a Dream, Having Courage, Being Patient, Saving for the Future, Working in Teams, Helping Others, Being Creative, and Being Determined. Some of the virtues, such as being patient, are

¹ See the Framework for Character Education available at www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/472/character-education/the-framework

² See Populus (2013) 'Should schools teach character' at www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/471/character-education/populus-survey

³ Including David Cameron and Michael Gove

⁴ See www.government-world.com/schooling-for-the-future-speech-by-tristram-hunt/

⁵ See CBI (2013) First Steps report http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2473815/First_steps_end_of_year_report.pdf

clearly linked to virtues such as delaying gratification, but it was important that the students understood the meaning of each virtue as well as its 'everyday' application in their lives.

2.2.2 Reflective Learning and Character Education

A belief that personal reflection is an integral part of the ethical life is not new. For example, its importance was recognised by Socrates who is said to have stated that the 'unexamined life is not worth living'. Responsible action requires what Aristotle called *phronesis* or good moral sense – wisdom in action, namely the ability to apply ethical reasoning to current situations in order to make wise and informed judgements and to do the right thing. Reasoned reflection prior to action can encourage acts that hit the golden mean of virtue and restrain more unreflective passionate responses (which is consistent with the Aristotelian view of the importance of temperance as a virtue). Retrospective reflection, on the other hand, enables individuals to make a critical analysis of past actions in order to learn from them and in this way to gain wisdom and understanding of both personal and human affairs (Kolb, 1984; Moon, 1999). Therefore, both forward and retrospective thinking are required for character development.

Moral thinking has been shown to be largely automatic and intuitive, even for adults (Narvaez, 2008). However, habits of thinking are not innate but gradually become automatic through repeated practice. By developing and mastering an ethical vocabulary and the skills to resolve moral dilemmas, young people's ability to become reflective is increased and they are thus enabled to become more aware of who they are, what their true or deepest aspirations are, and what their ethical strengths and weaknesses might be. Such thinking is often internal or expressed orally, but there is value in committing such reflections to writing. Writing is a linear process and the discipline of having to complete a line of reasoning often

requires the sometimes more skittish mind to follow its own thinking to a logical conclusion.

Hallberg (1987: 289) says that reflective writing in the form of a personal journal is 'person making': 'Journals are far more powerful and far-reaching in their effects than is generally recognised. They change students' enduring attitudes, values and sense of personal identity.' The ethical life should be one in which actions are increasingly authentic ie, synchronous with one's personal identity and deeply held values. Likewise, Lockwood (2009) argues that certain character education programmes emphasise role modelling, habituation and/or obedience to authority at the expense of individuals understanding why certain values or behaviours are to be regarded as 'better' than others. Personal reflection is a key ingredient in the process of internalising values and taking ownership of them. This developmental perspective recognises that reasoning and reflection about the good becomes increasingly informed and complex with age.

Some critics of moral education fear that the subject exposes students to indoctrination by politically motivated teachers and, for this reason, discussion of contested issues should not feature in schools. Baggini (2011) suggests that an emphasis on personal reflection within moral education is the answer to those who are concerned that it could be a form of indoctrination, as it encourages young people to think for themselves and to own their personal behaviour. For this reason, Seldon (2013) advocates the value of reflective practices punctuating the school day and promotes a range of techniques to be used in schools to encourage individuals to reflect on their own worldviews. Debates, discussions, and philosophical enquiry sessions may not be 'private' but they are personal if they are relevant to students' lives and experience. Other forms of reflective writing are constructed so as to be more private eg, forms of journaling or keeping a personal diary, as in the *My Character* project.

2.2.3 New Technology and Character Education

Moral or character education is not as advanced or as well supplied by new technology as most other subjects. This is why the *My Character* project attempted to address this gap. The *My Character* website is an ambitious attempt to use new technologies for the purposes of cultivating character in young people. It draws on the benefits of enhanced interactivity and increased opportunities for personal and private reflection to engage students in a new and hopefully exciting way. The project team hoped that the new technology would increase student motivation, enhance learning and improve the quality of written outcomes, particularly the passages of personal reflection. Computers and new technology have been shown to stimulate different types of thinking, including critical thinking, creative thinking, cross-cultural understanding, communication and collaboration.

Ever since new technologies were introduced into the British classroom in the 1980s, teachers have tried to optimise their use as tools to support and enrich learning. Broadly speaking, three different kinds of usage have been identified in classrooms. First, computers are good sources of information and knowledge. Secondly, they can support learning with pedagogical tools of many different kinds and thirdly, they can assist students in mastering essential computer skills that are so important and all pervasive in today's knowledge society (Somekh, 2000; Tondeur, Van Braak and Valcke, 2007). Hence the government has placed computer skills and the acquisition of media literacy at the heart of both the primary and the secondary curriculum (Wegerif, 2010).

In the case of *My Character*, where the nature of the thinking to be encouraged is, ideally speaking, reflective, personal, creative, critical and deep, the capacity of the computer to enable students more easily and quickly to proceed from draft to polished writing and from shallow to deeper thinking may result

both in more enjoyment by students and better quality thinking leading to enhanced attainment. Somekh (2000: 26) points out that computer-based learning can create a freer and less intense culture in which teachers' supervisory responsibilities are reduced because children take more responsibility for their own learning and it becomes possible for teachers to engage in one-to-one discussion with individual children to take their thinking forward. In this way, the culture of the classroom can be transformed in support of more autonomous learning by students. As far as the *My Character* project is concerned, this culture shift would be entirely consistent with an approach that asks students to be more personally reflective with less emphasis placed on plenary classroom activities and more on personal exploration.

2.3 OVERALL EVALUATIVE GOALS

Despite the calls, outlined above, for character education to be made a visible and conscious part of everyday schooling, there are too few rigorous studies on the impact of character education teaching interventions. This means that there is not enough practical advice available on the most efficient teaching methods in this field and how they can be evaluated. The project aimed, more generally, to address those shortcomings by tackling the following theoretical and practical questions:

How might an intervention designed to develop character be embedded into a school curriculum and sustained?

The majority of character education teaching resources are currently 'drop in' or stand alone, so this project aimed to understand how character education might be successfully embedded into the curriculum. Research has shown that well targeted interventions can help young people develop good characters as well

as a fuller understanding of the virtues (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz and Bier, 2004; Seider, 2012). However, much of the research to date has been carried out in an American context. The requirement is for a close examination of how a character education intervention can be integrated into different types of British schools. The key question is how new interventions can become the catalyst for a reinvigorated, conscious focus upon character education in schools, which will in turn bring about a necessary and proper balance to the educational process. In addition, new knowledge will be gained about how to help young people bridge the moral gap between where they think they currently are in their character development to where they want to be.

How might guided self-reflection be stimulated by carefully planned social interactions, which in turn lead to young people becoming more future-minded?

Research carried out by Learning for Life (Arthur, 2010), in partnership with the University of Birmingham, demonstrated that young people in the UK are not being supported to carry out sustained periods of reflection on their character and future-mindedness. Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence about how best to teach future-mindedness and on where best to place structured learning opportunities that enable young people to develop their own 'laws of life'. A practical problem is that there is little or no space in the curriculum for sustained periods of self-reflection and therefore students have little time to think about what character virtues might actually help them become more future-minded. This research aims to enhance knowledge in this area. Specifically, it aims to explore the features of a new, specifically designed character education resource that are most likely to engage young people, whilst also maximising their learning about future-mindedness.

Do character education resources that have been developed by young people and that utilise digital technology engage young people more than 'traditional' teaching resources?

Although schools are making increasing use of new technology to aid teaching and learning, there are few examples of character education interventions that utilise emerging technologies. However, new technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones, provide exciting new possibilities for learning about character and virtue. We need more evidence about how a move beyond traditional teaching methods might allow for the discovery of new and perhaps more fruitful ways to encourage young people to think about their character and values.

Can the impact of character education interventions be feasibly measured through the use of Randomised Controlled Trials?

To date many character education interventions have used light-touch evaluative methods. We need a greater understanding of how more scientifically rigorous methods, such as RCTs, might be harnessed to measure the impact of educational interventions, and more specifically those designed to develop character. A greater understanding of how to measure impact will in turn provide a better understanding of 'what works' in character education. More robust evidence will be useful to make the case for character education to both policy makers and practitioners.

These overall evaluative goals were then fed into the three more specific hypotheses that laid the research foundation of the *My Character* project (described in Section 1, on the purpose of this report).

**'WE MAKE A LIVING BY
WHAT WE GET, WE MAKE
A LIFE BY WHAT WE GIVE.'**

Sir Winston Churchill

3 Methodology

The *My Character* project examined whether, by testing through a carefully structured pilot utilising a number of research methods, it was possible to gain a better understanding of how interventions like *My Character* might enhance moral formation in young people. It was clear by the engagement of the schools and students involved in the trial that most benefited in some way from the project (for an insight into students' reflections on future-mindedness, see Appendix 2). However, the project team was keen to dig deeper and answer more questions than the simple one: did the schools and students 'like' the *My Character* website and journal? Challenges associated with measuring character are widely recognised. Nevertheless, there is a growing understanding that the use of mixed methods and allowing for the possibility of triangulating evidence is the best approach. Given this, the project team sought to answer these questions using a number of research methods, including case studies and interviews with teachers and students. An additional aim of the project was to test the feasibility of running a RCT designed to measure the impact of a character education intervention; the relevant methodology

discussion is in the section on Findings. See Appendix 1 for the Project Timeline.

Due to the specific nature of this project the discussion about strengths and limitations of methods employed, which would normally appear in the Methods section, will be addressed in the Findings section.

3.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For each of the methods, we sought and were granted ethical approval by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee. We regarded adherence to ethical considerations as particularly pertinent given the fact the research was being carried out with young people. After explaining the nature of the trial, a senior member of staff from each school signed to indicate that they understood the nature of the trial, and gave permission for students to be involved. Letters were sent to pupils and parents explaining the *My Character* activities and evaluation, stressing confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the trial at any time.

‘AS WE GET PAST OUR SUPERFICIAL MATERIAL WANTS AND INSTANT GRATIFICATION WE CONNECT TO A DEEPER PART OF OURSELVES, AS WELL AS TO OTHERS, AND THE UNIVERSE.’

Judith Wright

4 Findings

In this section we discuss the findings from the three research methods: the RCT, interviews and case studies. We deal with each method in turn and because this project focused essentially on testing the feasibility of methods to serve its stated purpose, we incorporate the methodological considerations (including limitations for each) into the relevant subsections below. We deal with the discussion and interpretation of the findings from all the methods together in Section 5.

4.1 RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL: FEASIBILITY PILOT

Randomised Controlled Trials [RCTs] are considered one of the best ways to determine 'what works' in education and are increasingly being required by funders such as the Education Endowment Foundation (Cook, 2012). However, few successful RCTs have been undertaken within character education. This project included a pilot and feasibility trial to address the following three research objectives:

- Investigate the feasibility of undertaking a cluster RCT into future-mindedness in Key Stage 3 within six schools.* 'Feasibility' considers whether it is possible to run a successful RCT; the recruitment and retention of schools, classes and young people are key indicators.
- Pilot the suitability of two outcome measures.* This piloting investigates the suitability of the two questionnaires used as outcome measures; these were an 'I Believe' questionnaire and a delayed gratification instrument that asks young people whether they would prefer 'money now or money later?'
- Estimate the impact of the interventions (website and journal) using the two outcome measures.* As a pilot and feasibility trial, it is not expected to demonstrate that the *My Character* materials enhance character virtues, but possible impacts were explored. Consequently, more traditional, qualitative evaluations were also undertaken and have been reported below.

For each of these research objectives the methodology, findings, limitations and lessons learnt are outlined below.⁶

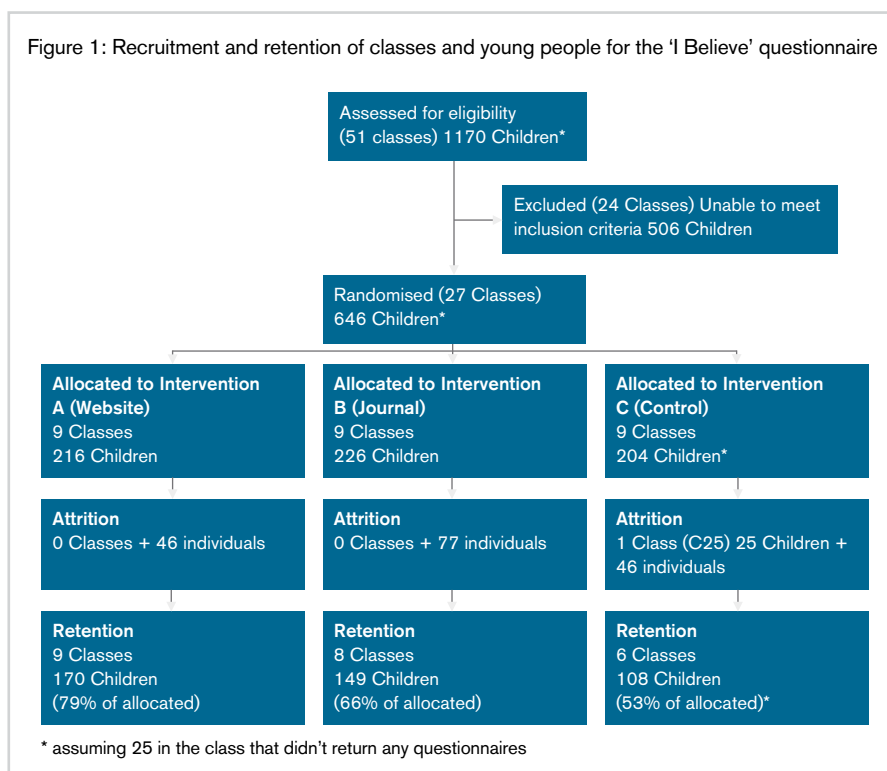
4.1.1 Investigate the Feasibility of Undertaking a Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial into Future-Mindedness in Key Stage 3 within Six Schools

In keeping with best practice (Moher et al, 2010), the project team specified in advance the proposed trial in a protocol that was structured using the CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) statement and checklist. The protocol was published in advance⁷.

There were three arms to the trial: website, journal and control. Six schools were involved in this pilot trial. We allocated groups (ie, classes) randomly within schools. Figure 1 shows that we asked 27 classes ie, 9 blocks of randomly allocated website, journal and

control classes to participate in the trial; a further 24 classes were not included in the RCT, but data were obtained for analysis. For successful 'retention', the young people needed to return both the pre-project and post-project questionnaires to a certain standard. For the 'I Believe' questionnaire, 79% of children were retained in the website group, 66% in the journal, and 53% in the control group. Much of this difference is due to one journal and three control classes not returning any of the post-project questionnaires. Another problem was that two schools completed the post-project questionnaires after the summer holidays, so children may have moved classes or schools. This was probably because communication with these two schools was often intermittent, in one case because the link teacher had left the school. This contrasted with the other four schools where there was regular and positive communication.

Figure 1: Recruitment and retention of classes and young people for the 'I Believe' questionnaire



⁶ The full report on the RCT can be found at www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/mycharacter

⁷ The RCT Protocol can be found at www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/mycharacter



The 'Money now or money later' questionnaire indicated that 'one person in your year group will actually get the amount of money they choose for one question'; therefore urging young people to complete the questionnaire carefully. Unfortunately however, not all schools arranged for the money to actually be awarded, and this lack of authenticity may have led to the small decline in the consistency of responses to the 'Money now or money later' questionnaire, post-project.

4.1.2 Pilot the Suitability of Two Outcome Measures

We developed the 'I Believe' questionnaire specifically for this trial with considerable involvement from many relevant stakeholders, so its psychometric properties required investigation. The aim was to capture views on the eight character virtues that the *My Character* project seeks to develop. The individual questions had good psychometric properties, exhibiting the range of responses without obvious ambiguity. The project team decided to avoid re-writing essentially the same questions in slightly different ways. This would have produced high correlations between the items but these would tell us little in terms of content. However, it turned out that all the correlations within virtues were low (below 0.4) and the maximum test-retest correlation for a virtue (ie, average of the five questions) was

just 0.38. A possible explanation for this lack of correlation is that the complexity of character virtues means that a person may have very different attitudes to different aspects of a single virtue. For example, '(I believe) I will always have the courage to stand up to bullies' and '(I believe) I always try to do the right thing, even when it is hard to do so' are both concerned with courage but the low correlation (0.22) is perhaps unsurprising given the difference between these types of courage. Moreover, a year is a long time in young people's lives, so their attitudes may change considerably between completing the pre- and post-project questionnaires.

Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency for the five questions related to each virtue was low: it varied between 0.18 and 0.55 (with a mean of 0.34), whereas alpha should be between 0.7 and 0.9 for a good scale (Streiner and Norman, 2008). The factor analysis gave no evidence for these eight virtues being distinct. A more important finding, comprising two factors, was the differing response to positively and negatively worded questions, which may be due to a minority of students giving positive ratings ie, '(strongly) agree' to these negatively worded questions whereas the majority gave negative ratings ie, '(strongly) disagree'. So this result may be caused by differences in wording rather than

differences in self-perception of virtues. The questionnaire as a whole had alpha of 0.74; since none of the inter-item correlations are high, this suggests the questionnaire is assessing a reasonably broad, single 'virtue'. Clearly, it is a limitation of the questionnaire that the eight virtues are not easily distinguishable.

The second outcome measure was the 'Money now or money later' questionnaire⁸. The students in this study responded very consistently to this questionnaire in that over 90% had only 0 or 1 out of 9 responses that were inconsistent, depending on the size of the reward. At the pre-project stage, they were prepared to wait up to 208 days on average for twice the reward if the reward was large, but only up to 98 days for a small reward⁹. This 'magnitude effect' is in line with previous findings in the literature. Again, it suggests reliable completion of the questionnaire by the young people.

4.1.3 Estimate the Impact of the Interventions, Website and Journal, Using the Two Outcome Measures.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) between groups was undertaken with the two-factor solution (referred to above in 4.1.2) from the 'I Believe' questionnaire. This analysis indicated that these factors (and the remaining questions grouped as a third factor) were significantly associated with

⁸ Questionnaire based on the monetary choice questionnaire developed by Kirby, Petry and Bickel (1999).

⁹ The overall effect of reward size is highly significant ($F(2,430) = 84, p < 0.001$).

schools, pupil year and ethnicity. There was also a significant difference in how the three arms of the trial (website, journal and control) varied between pre- and post-project, suggesting that the *My Character* intervention may have an impact on self-reported character traits. However, the pattern of results was complex and required significant interpretation; the effects of school and year group were large, making it difficult to disentangle the impact of the website and journal interventions. Furthermore, it must be stressed that these analyses are exploratory, particularly as the clustered nature of the data was not taken into account.

A table containing the results can be found in Appendix 3. The table displays data for the 'indifference k', which is the inverse of the number of days for money to lose half its value. For example, if a young person has $k = 0.1$, then £20 now is equally valuable to them as £40 in 10 days ie, they are very impulsive. The lower the value of k, the more the young person is prepared to delay gratification. Analysis of variance of data from the 'Money now or money later' questionnaire displayed a non-significant trend that the website intervention encouraged young people to delay gratification relative to the journal and control conditions ($F(2, 431) = 17, p=0.09$). However, there was also a substantial, significant reduction in delaying gratification overall ($F(1, 431) = 6.3, p=0.01$): further research would be required to understand whether this is due to maturation, time of year, absence of actual rewards (ie, distrust) or other reasons. Again, it should be noted that the exploratory, non-clustered nature of these analyses is an important limitation. However, at this stage one can say that this questionnaire appears to be suitable for assessing the propensity to delay gratification by young people in secondary schools.

4.2 INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

In order to gain an insight into the impact of the intervention, we conducted interviews with teachers and students involved in the project. Group interviews are an effective tool for the analysis of the subjective effect of an intervention. They have a number of advantages over one-to-one data collection, notably the sheer volume of data that can be collected in a short space of time (Silverman, 2008). However, and more importantly, the most salient feature is the naturalistic and dynamic

style of discussion facilitated, which can include features such as debate and disagreement (Jarrett, 1993).

4.2.1 Methodology

We interviewed ten teachers involved with the project at both the midpoint and end of the trial. Most of these were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. In addition, ten focus groups also participated in group interviews, involving 54 students who undertook the project. The group interview sizes varied from four to seven students. Discussion was facilitated by an interview schedule centred on the primary research questions. We subsequently had the interview recordings transcribed and conducted a thematic content analysis. We then grouped the interview responses by characteristic themes that tracked to the research questions. These themes consisted of 'character development and future-mindedness', 'character education resources' and 'technology in teaching'. During the coding process it very quickly became apparent that we would soon reach theoretical saturation (Krueger, 1994) within these classifications as very similar responses, opinions and discussion emerged from both the teachers and students.

4.2.2 Limitations

There are two main limitations in using teacher and student interviews to assess the impact of the *My Character* project. The first is the chosen sample. Although we interviewed teachers from each of the participating pilot schools, the schools were pre-selected based on existing relationships with the research team. Therefore there is likely to be a bias of teachers who were, prior to trial, already broadly in favour of character education. The second limitation is that evidence is drawn from self-reports. It has not been possible to gather data that can be independently verified (ie, through observation), and the evidence is therefore all drawn from the experience of teachers and students involved in *My Character*. This means there might be some bias in the data due to selective memory, exaggeration and / or embellishment, among other things.

4.2.3 Findings

The following provides a summary of the findings from the teacher and student interviews.¹⁰

4.2.3.1 Character Education Resources

All of the teachers felt that well-structured character education resources can help

stimulate discussion of important topics amongst students. However, we noted that time constraints within the curriculum sometimes prevented the material being explored and implemented in full. Teachers felt that this was due to character education not being currently prioritised in educational policy and therefore not given space in the curriculum.

It was precisely for this reason that many of the teachers welcomed the opportunity to use *My Character*, even though it was difficult to find the time. It provided a direct approach to teaching character through the curriculum. For example, a Year 9 teacher commented: 'It was useful – it gave structure to form times and gave them an opportunity to explore future choices and their own character.'

Some of the students and teachers felt that the fact the work was not assessed was both a benefit and a challenge. The students appreciated the time to reflect and think about themselves without having to be concerned about marks and exams, but they also felt the work was 'less important' because it was not being assessed. Several students commented that they felt it was pointless to write so much if they weren't getting a mark for it.

4.2.3.2 Character Development and Future-Mindedness

It was clear from interviews with the students they felt they benefited from opportunities to be involved with projects such as *My Character*. Most of the students did not think that character education was actually taught at their school, but almost all also considered it of importance. Some students even thought that it was more important than academic study. Many of the students stated that the *My Character* project was the only time at school when they had been encouraged to think about their character strengths and weaknesses. For example, one Year 8 student reflected that *My Character* was 'better than other bits of school because it involves working on yourself as a person. Nothing else really does that at school'.

Structured learning opportunities that allow young people to think about their future and, more importantly, the character virtues needed to achieve their future goals, were seen as important by both the teachers and students. The interviews showed that students were concerned about their futures, but are not given much opportunity to think about or discuss such issues. This leads to a more short-term

¹⁰ The full report on the interviews can be found at www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/mycharacter

focus based on immediate factors such as exam results. Discussions with students highlighted their lack of 'space' to conduct this kind of reflection, which they felt that the *My Character* resources provided. For example, a female Year 7 student commented 'It makes me think about what I want to be and who I can be when I grow up', whilst another female Year 9 student believed that she is able to 'think lots more about the future now – the things I have to do, and the challenges I might face'.

4.2.3.3 Technology in Teaching

The interviews showed that the use of technology as a tool for character education appears to be a promising avenue to explore in terms of participant engagement. In particular, both students and teachers praised the semi-structured and original nature of the *My Character* website. It was described as engaging, interactive, well designed and fun, with one Year 8 teacher commenting that 'the website is bright and engaging and lets them work at their own pace'. Many students also liked the concept of 'gamification' in the website, where they completed levels and achieved badges, which clearly had a function in incentivising participant use.

An additional benefit of the website was that it was seen as a great way to allow the students to undertake independent learning. This was particularly important given the focus of the *My Character* project, as students were able to come to their own understanding about their character strengths and weaknesses without feeling restricted by teachers watching over their shoulders and seeing their work in the journals. The website allowed the young people a greater sense of private, personal reflection, which was seen by most teachers and students as beneficial.

The fact that the students were so keen to use the website did raise challenges for the RCT when the journal and control groups felt disappointed that they were unable to use it. One Year 8 teacher commented 'the journal doesn't have as much 'status' as the website, and because my class can see the students in the other class using the computers, they want to be doing that as well'. Another challenge was the lack of easy access to IT facilities in schools. A couple of the schools taking part said that it had been difficult to ensure that all students had access to computers at the relevant times, and room allocations sometimes prevented students from using the website.

4.3 SCHOOL CASE STUDIES

Over 1,000 students from six secondary schools in the UK used the *My Character* resources during the trial period. Some schools delivered the project each week as part of Ethics, Citizenship or PSHE lessons, while others used it for around 20 minutes each day as part of Form Time. An aim of the project was to assess how an intervention, such as *My Character* might be embedded into different schools' curriculum. It was deemed that developing case studies of the projects in schools would illuminate how schools actually used *My Character*.

4.3.1 Methodology

As part of the *My Character* trial, in-school project coordinators were required to write an extended statement reflecting on their experience of delivering all aspects of the project including the website, journal, the RCT elements such as the questionnaires, as well as simply creating the clusters and recruiting other teachers to the 'cause'. The use of these reflective statements as secondary data in the evaluation of the *My Character* RCT is another step in the process of teachers themselves becoming partners in education research.

It has been noted that case studies such as this, due to the depth and richness of information elicited by participants' intimacy with the subject matter, are particularly suited to 'answering [the] why and how research questions rather than simply what and, therefore, they have the potential to evaluate or explain for example, why a particular programme did or did not work' (Day-Ashley in Arthur et al, 2012). The three descriptive case studies that follow are written by three teachers who explain how they went about negotiating the challenge of implementing *My Character* in their school¹¹.

4.3.2 Limitations

The case study method suffers from similar limitations to the interview method outlined above. The research team selected the teachers and, although they were asked to provide an honest and unbiased account of their experience of the *My Character* project, they were still likely to be favourable to the project's aims. This means that they are perhaps more likely to report positively on the project. However, the case studies do provide useful evidence about the challenges of rolling out the *My Character* project in different schools.

¹¹ The case studies have been shortened but can be found in full at www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/mycharacter



4.3.3 Findings

CASE STUDY 1: QUEEN ELIZABETH GRAMMAR SCHOOL, ASHBOURNE

Mr Matt Bawden: Faculty Leader of Social Science & Culture & Able & Talented Coordinator

We have always been interested in approaching Personal, Social, Health and Emotional education [PSHEe], or whatever one calls it, in new and interesting ways guided by the principles that it should benefit our students, their community, and any future interactions they might have. We also identified a clear need to equip QEGS students with the character virtues which might be required to find good jobs, to raise happy families, and to make a positive contribution to the wider world outside our hilly borders. In short we want our students to flourish. Traditional PSHEe programmes have always struggled with the provision of such opportunities and, as such, the *My Character* project was too good an opportunity to miss.

We ran the Project with three classes of Year 7 students in their fortnightly, one-hour PSHE lesson. One class acted as the control and was taught a normal programme of PSHE, while there was also one class working from the hard-copy journal and one from the website. The website variant was popular with the students, who enjoyed the flexibility the IT provided and the clear pathways they could take through the different sections. Having

their own login information enabled a small degree of personalisation within the site, which was appreciated by the students as well as the staff delivering the course. The students themselves saw the future of this project as lying with the web version. They live in a world of mobile technology and wondered whether there might be an app version at some point in the future. Parents were clearly pleased with the rich nature of the resources, both in terms of content and presentation. They also loved the fact that students were able to take on such a high level of ownership.

'It's good to make me think about my future in Year 7 – important that we think about our character now.' Year 7 Student, Queen Elizabeth Grammar School

At the end of the project, in the summer, I was asked to attend a meeting of our full Governing Body and to explain to them a little of what we had done. I went armed with student testimonies, completed journals, areas of the Jubilee Centre website to explore, and a smile which conveyed my honest appreciation that they had let us take part in this three-year project. The Governors were all really enthusiastic and soon my 10-minute slot had grown to take over the meeting. Community Governors loved the fact that the journal reached out from within the school to the world at large; Staff Governors were able to expound

about its merits in their own classrooms; the Head Teacher felt it had helped set us apart from other similar establishments; and there was a general murmur about the fact that Ofsted had seen the project as 'green shoots' which offered real potential for the whole school in the future.

We decided to carry on with the *My Character* project into this academic year. We have recently moved from a curriculum model where there are PSHE lessons throughout the timetable to one where there are lessons in Year 7 and 8 and then a range of sessions which are delivered weekly by Year 9, 10 and 11 tutors. As a result we had to audit our PSHE model and move topics to new locations. The *My Character* project is really useful in this as it features everything we need for large chunks of both the emotional and economic wellbeing elements of the national curriculum for PSHEe as well as elements of Citizenship.

'The *My Character* project helps me learn about myself and others and helps me plan my future.' Year 7 Student, Queen Elizabeth Grammar School

In summary, we appreciate the opportunity that this resource provides for discussion and development of the whole child. We are now looking for ways of integrating the work of this project into the wider curriculum through developing a shared approach to the 'whole child' via the use of the language of character education.

CASE STUDY 2: MEADOWHEAD SCHOOL, SHEFFIELD

Mr David Timms: Teacher of Ethics and Co-ordinator of PSHE

In 2010, an ethics faculty at Meadowhead was born. There had always been some overlap between PSHE and Religious Education, so it was fairly natural to marry them together into one subject. It is against this background that the school was attracted to the *My Character* project. As an idea, the concept of looking at and encouraging certain personality traits clearly complemented what we were trying to do in ethics: to develop ethically tolerant, thoughtful, literate and aware young people, who would go on to live helpful and hopefully happy lives.

Our first experience with the project was in the design stage, when about 20 of our gifted students were taken off timetable for a day to work on plans for the website and journal. The day was a great success, and the contribution of a number of students was impressive. The write-up by one of the students in the school newsletter referred to the fun they had and the worthwhile feel to

the activities. At the time, I think they felt that they were contributing to the education of others in a meaningful way.

As for the students involved in the project itself, the experiences were mixed, though mainly positive. I taught the journal group, and delivered the ten lessons at intervals of three to four weeks throughout the year. With so much reading and writing, it was important to guide them through the activities at their own pace. A strong student spoke of liking the 'inspirational people' biographies, and they were generally positive about the chance to think about themselves, and the quotes. An honest comment (backed up by their behaviour in lessons) was that they appreciated doing something different from the normal pattern of classes, which is perhaps a message for education in general. The website group seemed to have the most positive experience overall. They commented on the well designed, accessible website, the fun activities and videos, and it seemed to encourage more team work and interactivity for most of them. Their teacher was equally effusive about the way the students engaged and got on well with independent learning.

'I found out more about my personality – and also from a moral point of view. It helps me practise what is important in my life. Helps make my dreams seem possible.' Year 8 Student, Meadowhead School

As for the impact of the project in relation to the eight aspects of personality, the hardest element is finding school based evidence. Such issues as patience, courage, dreams, helpfulness and saving are more readily assessed outside the school environment as students relate to friends and family and plot a path through life. Certainly there are gradual improvements in students' ability to work together, be determined to complete a task and be creative. All in all, we are delighted to have taken part in the project. Even the control group appreciated it, as the questions on the pre- and post- survey were stimulating, leading to a discussion. It was a nice touch to offer the money to a random student based on the risk survey, and one of the control group was understandably delighted to win.

We have continued to make use of the website with both Year 8 and Year 9 students this year. The extra enthusiasm with which the students approach computer tasks confirms that choice.

CASE STUDY 3: STOCKPORT SCHOOL, STOCKPORT

Mr Jon Modral: Head of PSHE and Citizenship

One of the initial attractions of the *My Character* project has been the way it sits nicely beside some of the topics we cover in our KS3 curriculum. The concept of future-mindedness is very relevant to teaching and learning within PSHCE at Stockport School with regard to preparation for and accepting responsibility for students' own education. One of the roles of a successful school is to allow students the space and time to develop a character identity and to discover what is required to be a success in the future. Making an active, successful contribution to society runs parallel to the government's Every Child Matters policy and in creating an identity, a sense of purpose is developed. Then students realise how important it is to be able to interact successfully with each other to maintain and achieve this identity and purpose. *My Character*, and in particular future-mindedness, sits very comfortably with this.

Being consulted and asked to attend a day at the University of Birmingham was definitely enjoyable and helped me to understand more of the project's aims and methods. It prompted a higher level of involvement as the more I saw the more I bought into the project. Meeting other colleagues from the participating schools helped share ideas and, more importantly, share some solutions.

Our current Year 11s were also heavily involved with the research and development stage of the project. They spent two full days with the project team, working on the design and layout of both the theme and content of the website and how best to encourage other students to explore future-mindedness and character virtues. Our Year 8 students involved with the trial were impressed to recognise some Year 11s appearing on their computer screens as part of the web based resources!

Once the trial in school was underway, I think that all the students were very impressed with the quality of the website. Its layout and navigation with the different themes were easy to find and follow. The compass was certainly distinctive but many students were unsure why it was there. Once explained, most saw its relevance and understood more about the aims of the project as a result. I think that the 'personalised' first page was a masterstroke and certainly involved the students right from the start – indeed; many spent a surprising amount of time getting their theme 'just right.' Without this, the students would certainly have struggled with some of the following pages and tasks. The percentage calculator to show how much work is completed was used a lot. This was a useful tool but perhaps indicated that the students' interest was flagging towards the end.

The Year 7 class with whom I used the journals were totally impressed by the weight, size and quality of the journal; students wanted to take it home and keep it somewhere safe. They were

also impressed with the range of people used as case studies; they were very interesting and definitely broadened the students' knowledge base.

'I didn't know about these people featured in the biographies – it was good to be introduced to them. I could relate to them.' Student, Stockport School.

Some students did struggle with the length of the journal and with the difficult language. This is especially the case with younger (Year 7) students. I think editing the journal down and making the language easier would help.

As the link teacher at Stockport School I was impressed with how well the whole project seemed to be organised and put together. The students who were quizzed about the design, layout and to some extent, the content matter were certainly very well managed – and subsequently very motivated and keen to assist, especially with the filming side of things.

There were definitely some challenges faced by the teaching team, as mentioned above. However the benefits certainly outweighed the difficulties and on the whole our students both enjoyed and learned from the experience. It illustrates how important it is to have positive character traits and helps to create an awareness that how the students interact and think and what they decide will have an impact on their future. I look forward to seeing the results of the trial.

'IT IS NOT UNIMPORTANT, THEN, TO ACQUIRE ONE SORT OF HABIT OR ANOTHER RIGHT FROM OUR YOUTH; RATHER IT IS VERY IMPORTANT, INDEED ALL IMPORTANT.'

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

4.4 OVERALL FINDINGS

In summary, the main findings of the project as a whole were:

- Students benefit from opportunities in school to think about who they are and who they want to be, and these big questions can be addressed successfully through character education.
- Involving young people in the creation and development of new resources helps to engage other young people to use them.
- Developmental tools, such as *My Character*, provide students with structured opportunities not only to identify their goals, but also consider how they might reach them.
- Harnessing new technology, such as the Internet, offers exciting opportunities for character education.
- It is beneficial to investigate the impact of new character education resources in order to bring greater clarity about 'what works'. A mixed methods approach that allows for triangulation of evidence is the most useful.
- It is possible to run RCTs and other experimental research in schools to assess developmental projects of this kind, but researchers need to understand the school context, and teachers and school staff need to be aware of the requirements of the research. A particular issue is the creation of suitable outcome measures.
- A positive indicator of the success is that five out of the six pilot schools have embedded *My Character* into their curriculum. In addition many new schools, both in Britain and internationally, have started to use the website and / or journal.



5 Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

This section considers the findings in light of the three hypotheses stated at the start of this report and explains how they are either confirmed or undermined by the research.

HYPOTHESIS 1: SPECIFICALLY DEVELOPED CHARACTER EDUCATION RESOURCES, DESIGNED TO DEVELOP FUTURE-MINDEDNESS, CAN BE EMBEDDED IN THE CURRICULUM. FURTHERMORE THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IF THEY WORK ON NEW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES.

The interviews with the teachers and students, alongside evidence drawn from the case studies, highlighted the successes and challenges of implementing the *My Character* project. The interviews showed that programmes such as *My Character* were seen as useful and necessary and filled an identifiable gap in the curriculum. The three case studies show a certain level of consistency as well as the fact that the teachers understood the aims of the project and believed that there is a genuine need for character education. Teachers welcomed the flexible nature of the intervention and the materials themselves, and the resources fitted well into aspects of the curriculum such as PSHE, whilst also providing a new and interesting way of getting students engaged – something which traditional PSHE programmes have often struggled with. Perhaps the most promising evidence to confirm this hypothesis is that most of the schools in the pilot continue to use *My Character* as well as many new schools have signed up to use the programme.

A significant implication of the feedback is the enthusiasm for the use of web-based technologies as a tool for both character education and, more broadly, in wider pedagogy. The case studies and interviews demonstrated that harnessing new technology such as the Internet offers

exciting opportunities for character education. The website arm of the trial proved to be a particular favourite with students and gained praise both for its ability to engage students and for the quality of the content. A further significant finding was that involving young people in the creation and development of new resources helps to engage other young people to use them. In particular, the case studies showed that both teachers and students appreciated being involved in the design of the interventions and found the consultation days worthwhile and fun. The opportunity for teachers to exchange ideas with the project team also contributed to a higher level of involvement.

There were useful suggestions for improvement in developing this work further. The length of the journal and the difficulty of the language could be revised to enable easier access for less able students, particularly those in the lower year groups where some difficulties were encountered. Furthermore, the commitment required in order to sustain the project over the whole academic year could be addressed with the view to reduce pressures on teachers in terms of curriculum time. The amount of time the students could use the *My Character* website was often hindered by limited access to computers in some of the schools, which could be overcome by increased use of the hard-copy journal.

On the evidence drawn from the research it appears that character education resources specifically designed to develop future-mindedness can be embedded in the curriculum. However, there are some challenges in implementing such programmes, which mainly revolve around curriculum priorities and time pressures in schools. Furthermore, they are more likely to engage young people if they work on new digital technologies, even if access to computing facilities might limit such an approach.

HYPOTHESIS 2: GUIDED SELF-REFLECTION CAN BE STIMULATED BY CAREFULLY PLANNED SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, WHICH IN TURN GIVES YOUNG PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME MORE FUTURE-MINDED.

Although there were several limitations to the exploratory RCT, there was a non-significant trend suggesting that the website intervention encouraged young people to delay gratification relative to the journal and control conditions. There may also be an impact of the *My Character* interventions on self-reported character traits. However, in order to demonstrate impact, any future study ought to take steps to reduce the effects of individual schools and different year groups eg, by using more schools and focusing on just one year group, with Year 7 looking most suitable.

Supporting this finding, evidence can be drawn from the case studies and interviews to show that the participating students benefited from opportunities in school to think about who they are and who they want to be, and that such questions can successfully be addressed through character education. Furthermore, most of the teachers also believed that an integrated, consistent and planned approach to developing future-mindedness is more beneficial than a stand-alone or one off intervention. The teachers and students also appreciated the fact *My Character* was well conceived, structured and designed; they believed these features helped their students to undertake guided self-reflection.

On this evidence, developmental tools such as *My Character* seem to provide students with structured opportunities not only to identify their goals, but also reflect on how they might reach them.

HYPOTHESIS 3: THE IMPACT OF CHARACTER EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS SUCH AS MY CHARACTER CAN FEASIBLY BE MEASURED THROUGH THE USE OF RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIALS.

The overall feasibility aspects of the RCT were successful with all six schools and 85% of classes undertaking the trial as website, journal or control groups as well as completing the 'I Believe' pre- and post-project questionnaires. The development of excellent relationships with the pilot schools over a number of years was crucial to the success of the pilot. Hence, a major limitation is that it is hard to determine how feasible it would be to scale up this trial into a full RCT with unknown schools. There were a few areas that challenged the integrity of the trial despite the best efforts of the project team. In particular, in order to run a successful trial, greater attention is required to:

- i) maintain contact with all schools, even when there are changes in staffing, so as to ensure the trial is conducted in a timely manner
- ii) persuade the schools to award monetary prizes as described in the 'Money now or money later' pre- and post-project questionnaire
- iii) encourage all classes to complete the questionnaires in a timely fashion – this was particularly challenging with the control group

The choice of suitable outcome measures is a further important element of running a successful RCT designed to measure the impact of an intervention for the development of character. The project used two outcome measures, one developed specifically for the trial and another that was pre-validated. The 'I Believe' questionnaire demonstrated several positive aspects; however, more development

work would be required to create a validated scale. It might be better to focus on just two traits; with more questions relating to each trait, it would be possible to create more reliable scales. If an intervention was then designed to improve just one of these traits, then the differential impact could be assessed using a two-trait questionnaire. The 'Money now or money later' questionnaire appears suitable to assess 'delayed gratification' in secondary schools. There are no obvious limitations other than the feasibility issue of providing rewards.

The evidence shows that although it is possible to run RCTs in schools to assess developmental projects of this kind, researchers need to understand the school context, and teachers and school staff need to be aware of the requirements of the research. A particular issue is the creation of suitable outcome measures.



6 Recommendations

If character education is to be transformative, effective and address some of the bigger questions of today, new forward thinking and entrepreneurial interventions must be developed. Pilot projects, such as *My Character*, need to develop and grow so that new knowledge and understanding can be introduced to the field of character education in Britain.

It is in this spirit that the report concludes with some recommendations for consideration by practitioners, policy makers and researchers interested in character education. The following list of recommendations is based on the research evidence from this project.

- Create formal space in school for students to think about their character strengths and weaknesses. This could be as part of the Ethics, PSHE, or Citizenship classes, or in Form Time, but should be integrated into the curriculum and not seen as an 'add on'. There should be sustained opportunities for self-reflection and not just a 'drop in'.
- Involve students as co-creators and co-collaborators in the development of character education learning resources. This could involve running 'resource development' times with young people, making them an integral part of the design and concept, rather than just asking them to comment on the finished product. A balance must be struck between how much 'adult voice' and 'young person's voice' goes into the creation of new character education resources.
- Create developmental tools and resources, such as *My Character*, to provide students and teachers with structured opportunities not only to identify their goals, but also to consider how best to reach them. These newly developed resources must account for the different learning abilities of students as well as being flexible enough to fit in with diverse school curricula.
- Explore possibilities to enhance traditional learning techniques with opportunities brought by Internet technologies including websites, social networks and mobile phone apps. This will also include ensuring, where possible, that schools and students have easy access to computers and other necessary materials.
- Evaluate character education interventions and resources, and base further curriculum development on evidence. This could include RCTs and other experimental research in schools and certainly triangulation of methods such as interviews, classroom activities, reports from teachers and other measures. The construction of the research protocol and measurement tools should be conceived from the outset and developed as an integral part of the project, and not viewed as a bolt on.
- Use RCTs to assess interventions designed to develop character and virtues as a rigorous way to discover 'what works', but these must be scrupulously planned and administered. In addition, it is advisable that both the activities themselves as well as the outcome measures are thoroughly and successfully piloted prior to the RCT. Researchers developing the trial design must understand the context of the school, and teachers must be closely involved in the planning and conception. Training relevant teachers in the necessary research methods should be considered.

'CHARACTER IS POWER.'

Booker T. Washington

References

- Anscombe, G.E.M. (1958) 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy*, vol. 33, no. 124, pp. 1–19.
- Arthur, J. (2003) *Education with Character; the Moral Economy of Schooling*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Arthur, J. (2010) *Of Good Character; Exploration of Virtues and Values in 3–25 year-olds*, Exeter: Imprint Academic.
- Baggini, J. (2011) 'Does Character Exist?', in Lexmond, J. and Gist, M. (ed.) *The Character Inquiry*, London: Demos.
- Berkowitz, M. and Bier, M. (2004) 'Research Based Character Education', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, vol. 591, no. 1, pp. 72–85.
- Carr, D. (2007) 'Character in Teaching', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 369–389.
- Cook, D. A. (2012) 'Randomized Controlled Trials and Meta-Analysis in Medical Education: What Role do they Play?', *Medical Teacher*, vol. 34, no. 6, pp. 468–473.
- Curren, R. (2010) 'Aristotle's Educational Politics and the Aristotelian Renaissance in Philosophy of Education', *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 36, no. 5, pp. 543–559.
- Day-Ashley, L. (2012) 'Planning Your Research', in Arthur, J., Waring, M., Coe, R. and Hedges, L.V (ed.) *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*, London: Sage.
- Foot, P. (2003) 'Virtues and Vices', in Darwell, S. (ed.) *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hallberg, F. (1987) 'Journal Writing as Person Making', in Fulwiler, T. (ed.) *The Journal Book*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hursthouse, R. (1999) *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jarrett, R.L. (1993) 'Focus Group Interviewing with Low-Income Minority Population: A Research Experience', in Morgan, D.L (ed.) *Successful Focus Groups Advancing the State of the Art*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Kirby, K. N., Petry, N. M. and Bickel, W.K. (1999) 'Heroin Addicts have Higher Discount Rates for Delayed Rewards than Non-Drug-Using Controls', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, vol. 128, no. 1, pp. 78–87.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2007) *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994) *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 2nd edition, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lickona, T. (1991) *Educating for Character: How our Schools can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, USA: Bantam Trade Paperback Ed. Bantam Books.
- Lockwood, A.L. (2009) *The Case for Character Education: A Developmental Approach*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Moher, D., Hopewell, S., Schulz, K.F., et al. (2010) 'CONSORT 2010 Explanation and Elaboration: Updated Guidelines for Reporting Parallel Group Randomised Trials', *British Medical Journal*, vol. 340, no. c869–c869.
- Moon, J.A. (1999) *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: Theory and Practice*, London: Kogan Page.
- Narvaez, D. (2008) 'Human Flourishing and Moral Development: Cognitive and Neurobiological Perspectives of Virtue Development', in Nucci, L.P. and Narvaez, D. (ed.) *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, New York: Routledge.
- Seider, S. (2012) *Character Compass: How Powerful School Culture can Point Students Toward Success*, Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Seldon, A. (2013) *Priestley Lecture University of Birmingham: Why the Development of Good Character Matters More than the Passing of Exams*, [Online], Available: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/education/events/priestley-2013-anthony-seldon.pdf> [9 Jan 2014].
- Seligman, M.E.P. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000) 'Positive Psychology: An Introduction', *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 5–14.
- Silverman, D. (2008) *Qualitative Research: Theory Method and Practice*, London: Sage.
- Somekh, B. (2000) 'New Technology and Learning: Policy and Practice in the UK, 1980–2010', *Education and Information Technologies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 19–37.
- Streiner, D. and Norman, G. (2008) *Health Measurement Scales: A Practical Guide to their Development and Use*, 4th edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tondeur, J., Van Braak, J. and Valcke, M. (2007) 'Towards a Typology of Computer Use in Primary Education', *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 197–206.
- Wegerif, R. (2010) *Mind Expanding: Teaching for Thinking and Creativity in Primary Education*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Project Timeline

MAY 2011

Partner schools recruited

Six secondary schools from diverse areas of the UK, serving students from a wide range of backgrounds, were recruited to take part in the *My Character* trial.

NOVEMBER 2011

Prototypes of the materials reviewed by focus groups involving 120 young people

Students who had not been involved with the development days were invited to consult on the materials and feedback their thoughts and ideas.

JULY 2011

Website and journal development days

Initial ideas for the *My Character* website and journal were developed at six development days alongside students, designers and experts in the field of social networking and future-mindedness.

JULY 2012

RCT Protocol published

2011

2012

JUNE 2011

Literature review

On future-mindedness, self-reflection for character development and use of information technology in schools.

FEBRUARY – JULY 2012

Outcome measures developed and piloted in schools

Pre- and post-project questionnaires, aiming to measure the impact of the *My Character* project on young people, were developed and piloted.

SEPTEMBER 2011

Steering group formed

Educational professionals from schools, colleges, universities, the voluntary sector, religious groups and businesses were recruited to form a steering group. The expert group met three times over the development period and provided advice, opinions and expertise to the project.

OCTOBER 2012

Trial starts

Pre-test questionnaires were completed by experimental and control participants.

AUGUST – DECEMBER 2013

Data analysis

Data from the pre- and post-project questionnaires was inputted and analysed by the project team. Interview data was analysed.

JULY 2013

Trial ends

Post-test questionnaires were completed by control and experimental participants. End of project interviews were held with teachers and students. Samples of student work were collected.

MARCH 2014

Website and journal re-launched

Journal was re-launched as downloadable e-resources, and website was updated with new videos, quotes and stories.

2013

2014

MARCH 2013

Mid-Point reviews

Interviews were conducted at schools, gaining feedback from staff and students about the materials and any impact on students' character and future-mindedness.

MARCH 2014

Celebration event

My Character celebration and dissemination event was held for students who took part in the project.

SEPTEMBER 2013

New schools sign up

Schools across the world signed up to use the *My Character* website, while schools who had taken part in the RCT started using the website with new cohorts of students, building it into their core curriculum.

SEPTEMBER 2012

My Character website and journal launched

The final version of the *My Character* journal and website, based on the ideas, vision and hard work of the students and other experts, was launched.

Appendix 2: Students' reflections on future-mindedness

The students were encouraged to write personal reflections on each of the character virtues in their journals and website. The following is a sample of reflections and show how self-reflective opportunities lead to young people thinking about their character virtues, and if required, develop them. Further reflections from the students can be found on the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues website.

THINKING CREATIVELY

- I like the quote 'Life is what you make of the future – it is the picture that you draw for yourself' (Anon) because it states that you control your future and that it isn't up to other people to decide it.
- My favourite quote is 'Everything starts with someone's daydream' (Larry Niven) because everything does start with a daydream in my head.



WORKING TOGETHER

- It's good to work as a team so that you can learn to cooperate better and make more friends, becoming a better leader or helper.
- I think a good team worker should have courage and determination, and be fair and thoughtful.
- A good team worker has the ability to think of the team before themselves.



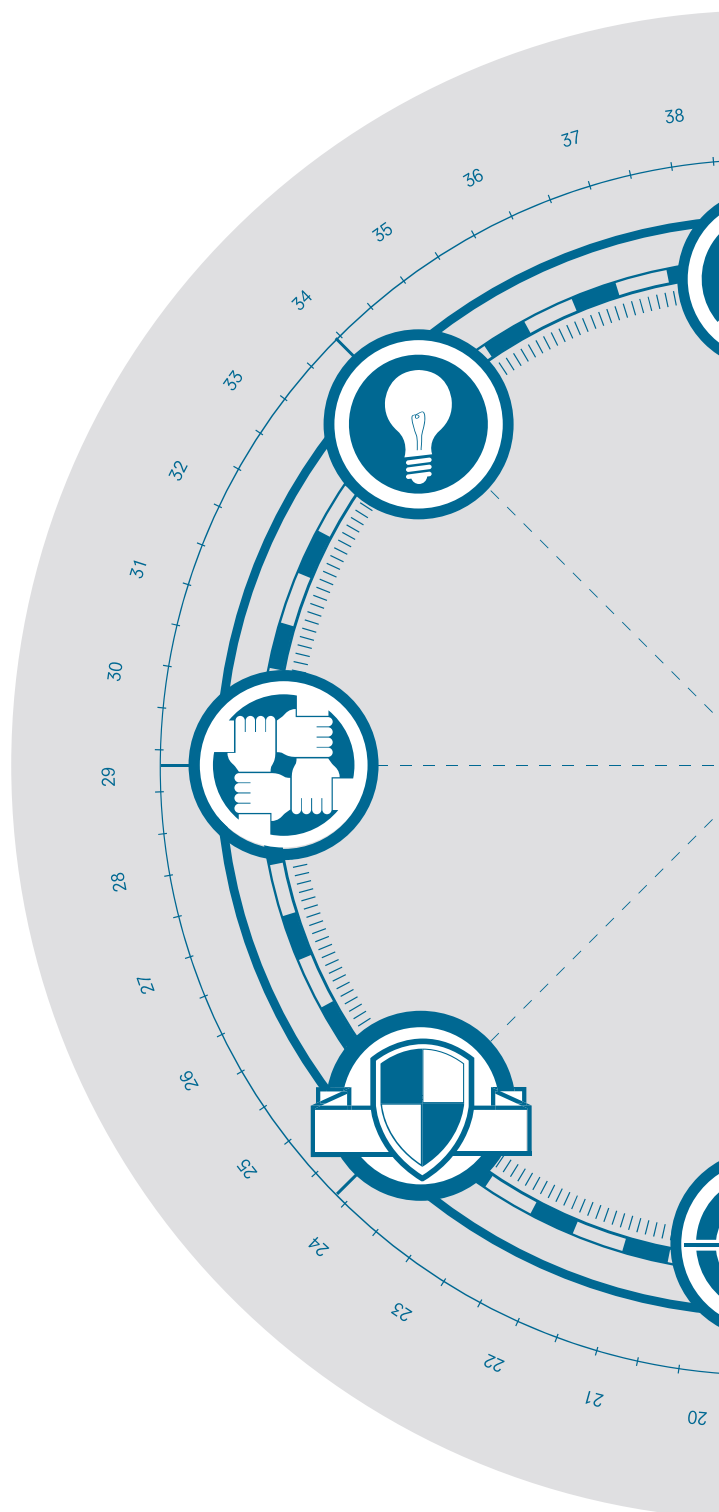
HAVING COURAGE

- Courage means doing the right thing even when it is the difficult thing. Even sometimes when we are scared we have to have courage because if we don't then we might miss out on great opportunities.
- I have told the truth whenever I get in trouble at school because it's better to tell the truth and get the consequences than let someone else take the blame.
- I like the quote 'The harder you fall, the higher you bounce' (Anon) because it means that every time you fail at something you get back up and try even harder at the next challenge.



BEING DETERMINED

- It's important to be determined because if you are not, you will never get what you want out of something... you have to really push your body and mind.
- I was not very determined when we were put in groups. I didn't say a thing and agreed with what everyone else said, even though I had different ideas. I could have spoken out and given my opinions. I'm now determined to get a better score for the activity, to bring my determination level up to around 8.
- You may not reach your full potential if you don't try. This can affect your whole life if you don't try for more important things.





HAVING A DREAM



- It is important to me to achieve my dream because then I will prove to myself that if I try I can do it, and I could also do the thing I love.
- I like the quote 'It takes a person who is wide awake to make his dream come true' (Roger Ward Babson) because if you're not properly awake you cannot achieve what you are trying to achieve.
- I know I will achieve my dream because I think I am smart enough and have the skills, brain and determination to get it!

SAVING FOR THE FUTURE



- My favourite quote is 'A wise man should have money in his head, but not in his heart.' (Jonathan Swift) because it means that you shouldn't love money, you should love your family, and that you shouldn't be greedy and selfish.
- Getting into debt is bad because debt is like a hole... don't dig too deep or else you may not be able to get back out again.

HAVING PATIENCE



- Next time I really want something I shall think if I really need it or just want it. Then if I am going to get it I will save up for it with my own money.
- My favourite quote is 'Nobody can do everything' (Anon) because everyone can do something. Just because they're not good at it doesn't mean they can't do it. Also nobody can do everything. Everyone does something wrong in life and everyone does something right.
- If you spend everything on things you want, you won't have money for the things you need.

HELPING OTHERS



- What I do to help others is I sometimes give money to charity. I do this by putting some of my money into charity boxes in shops or mosques. I am quite upset with myself that I don't do more but I think I should start. I should start giving more money to charity instead of spending it on sweets and other things.
- Whenever someone is feeling down and thinks there is nothing more to do, I would encourage them to never give up, because the biggest mistake in your life is doing nothing, because you're scared of making a mistake, so you might as well try your best at everything. You may think it's too late to make it but is it too late to try? Nothing is over unless you give up, but there is always a little bit of hope.
- I help my Nan all the time because she means a lot to me and I would like to help others in the same way because I care for them and think just because they're old or disabled they are no different to us and should get the same opportunities as we do.

Appendix 3:

Table showing change in indifference k , pre- and post-project, for different arms of the trial and reward sizes

Trial Arm		Large reward			Medium reward			Small reward		
		Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change
Control (n=125)	X	0.006	0.0082	0.0022	0.0085	0.01	0.0015	0.0104	0.0107	0.0003
	SE	0.0033	0.0058	0.0025	0.0037	0.0051	0.0014	0.0047	0.0054	0.0007
Journal (n=160)	X	0.0049	0.0081	0.0032	0.0078	0.0121	0.0043	0.0123	0.0156	0.0033
	SE	0.0026	0.0037	0.0011	0.0027	0.0043	0.0016	0.0041	0.0041	0
Website (n=149)	X	0.0043	0.0051	0.0008	0.0079	0.007	-0.0009	0.0108	0.0103	-0.0005
	SE	0.0046	0.0042	-0.0004	0.0048	0.0044	-0.0004	0.0048	0.0039	-0.0009
Total (n=558)	X	0.0051	0.0069	0.0018	0.0084	0.0099	0.0015	0.0113	0.0129	0.0016
	SE	0.0018	0.0022	0.0004	0.0018	0.0022	0.0004	0.0022	0.0022	0

x = Geometric Mean, SE=standard error of the mean



Project Team

JAMES ARTHUR – PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Professor James Arthur, Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, is the Head of the School of Education and Professor of Education. He has written extensively on the relationship between theory and practice in education, particularly the links between communitarianism, social virtues, citizenship, religion and education. A leading expert in the field of character and values, James is also Editor of the *British Journal of Educational Studies* and Director of CitizED, an organisation in higher education promoting citizenship.

TOM HARRISON – PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Tom Harrison is a Deputy Director in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, leading on all the development projects enabling the Centre's work to be transformative. Having previously worked on many research and development programmes in the field of character and citizenship education, Tom has led projects on behalf of various organisations including engagED, Learning for Life, CitizED, the ASC as well as the national volunteering and training charity CSV. Tom's specialist interests are character and virtue ethics, citizenship, community development, student leadership and volunteering.

KRISTJÁN KRISTJÁNSSON

Professor Kristján Kristjánsson is a Deputy Director in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues and Professor of Character Education and Virtue Ethics. He is also an editorial board member of the *Journal of Moral Education*. Kristján leads and oversees all the research activities in the Centre and has written widely on moral education, with his main area of interest being research in character and virtues at the intersection between moral philosophy, moral psychology and moral education.

IAN DAVISON

Dr Ian Davison is a Lecturer in the School of Education and is the trial coordinator for the *My Character* project, providing expertise on statistical analysis. Ian specialises in quantitative methods including factor analysis and has been involved in researching pupil attainment, out-of-school educational provision and experiences of disabled students.

DAN HAYES

Dan Hayes is a Research Associate in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues and provides research support to the development projects across the Centre. His background is in Political Science and in particular the effect of Campaign Finance Reform Legislation in the United States.

JENNY HIGGINS

Jenny Higgins is Development Officer in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, co-ordinating the development projects, such as *My Character*, within the Centre. She previously worked for the charity CSV, managing their volunteering-in-schools programmes and projects which help develop leadership skills and community awareness in young people.



Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many people and organisations that have made the *My Character* project possible. In particular we would like to thank the head teachers, teachers and young people from

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Ashbourne
Meadowhead School, Sheffield
Park View School, Birmingham
Stockport School, Stockport
Maltby School, Maltby
Saltley School, Birmingham

The authors would also like to especially acknowledge the contribution of David Lorimer, who edited and proofread the report. Also, Kevin Ryan, for his support at the conception of the project as well as his comments on early draft of the report and for providing a foreword.

We would also like to thank Kent Hill, Craig Joseph and Sarah Hertzog from the John Templeton Foundation for their advice and support.

In addition, the project team wish to extend their gratitude to the many people whose valuable contribution and willing participation made the project possible. In particular we would like to thank:

Danielle Wartnaby
Dan Wright, Godalming College
David Timms, Meadowhead School
Don Rowe
Emma Roberts, Maltby Academy
Joe Pochodzaj
Jon Modral, Stockport School
Lee Rogerson
Matt Bawden, Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School
Mark Lawrence, Meadowhead School
Nick Veal, Maltby Academy
Paul Edwards, University of Birmingham
Paul Warwick
Rashpal Sian, Park View School
Sophie Earnshaw, CSV
Sophia Roberts, Saltley School
Stephen Edgall, Tendring Technology College
Sue Packer, Park View School
Sue Gogarty, BT





JOHN TEMPLETON
FOUNDATION

This project was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

School of Education
College of Social Sciences
Edgbaston, Birmingham,
B15 2TT, United Kingdom
www.birmingham.ac.uk



For more information about the *My Character* project and the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues please contact:
tel: 0121 414 3602
email: a.p.thompson@bham.ac.uk
www.jubileecentre.ac.uk

ISBN: 987-0-7044-2842-3