

<b>Institution:</b> University of Birmingham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 23, Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shaping the policy and practice of character education		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Prof. James Arthur	Director, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues	2009-present
Prof. Kristján Kristjánsson	Deputy Director	2012-present
Dr Tom Harrison	Director of Education	2012-present
Dr Sandra Cooke	Director of Partnerships	2012-2016
Dr David Ian Walker	Research Fellow	2012-2017
Emma Taylor-Collins	Research Associate	2014-2017
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p><b>Education provision in the UK and internationally</b> has been shaped by the University of Birmingham's Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (Jubilee Centre) through its <i>Framework for Character Education in Schools</i>. This has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Influenced policymaking:</b> Through direct engagement with the Secretary of State for Education, 'character and resilience' have become a policy priority across the Department for Education since 2014/15.</li> <li><b>Changed professional standards of the national inspection framework (Ofsted) for schools in England:</b> Character development is now included as one of four criteria against which schools' provision for pupils' personal development is assessed.</li> <li><b>Shaped pedagogical practices in primary, secondary and tertiary education</b> in the UK, Montenegro, North Macedonia and the USA.</li> <li><b>Led to the co-production of effective campaigns for social change</b> through engagement with youth social action charities.</li> </ol>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Conversations about barriers to social mobility and reforms to address educational inequalities, both in the UK and internationally, frequently emphasise the development of character and life skills in young people. However, in academic and public discourses, there can be a tendency to prioritise narrow, instrumental accounts of character focused solely on traits such as resilience and self-discipline. The Jubilee Centre's holistic framework seeks to redirect educational practice away from a strict focus on testing and attainment and towards the enrichment of young people. To support this aim, Prof. James Arthur and Jubilee Centre colleagues developed <i>A Framework for Character Education in Schools</i>, a conceptual framework for empirical investigation of the tenets of good character that presents a distinctive neo-Aristotelian philosophy of character and virtue ethics (R1). In contrast to previous research, this framework emphasises the moral, intellectual, civic and performance dimensions of character and identifies the need explicitly to develop virtue perception, understanding and reasoning in young people in order for them to flourish in society.</p> <p>The Jubilee Centre was founded in 2012 by Prof. Arthur and has been funded by successive grants from the John Templeton Foundation (JTF). The Centre's research programme</p>		

encompasses over 25 discrete projects and, through these, has empirically examined the tenets of character presented in the *Framework* (R1) in various educational contexts. Below are relevant **key findings** from the Centre's research:

- Review research identified the dominance of instrumental and non-socio morally grounded accounts of character in academic and public policy discourses and suggested practical and conceptual pathways through which to develop an alternative framework (R2).
- Drawing on R1, Kristjánsson developed a neo-Aristotelian concept of character that incorporates aspects of moral philosophy and moral psychology and that is grounded in the realities of 21<sup>st</sup>-century educational practice. This, in turn, led to the creation of the novel framework for character education that distinguishes between different domains and psychological components of virtue. The *Framework* (R1) provides a practical guide to schools seeking to deliver good character education provision (R3).
- Subsequent empirical findings helped to determine how this framework might be adapted to different educational contexts and which methods and practices of implementation might be most effective. Principal indicative findings include:
  - A literacy-based classroom trial of 1,089 pupils (ages 9–11) found a significant difference in the ability of pupils in the experimental group (over control) to apply virtue concepts, highlighting the potential of character interventions delivered through curriculum subjects (R4).
  - The flagship study of the first JTF grant identified commonalities between schools where students performed well on ethical dilemma tests that were unrelated to school size, location or type. Of these, the importance of a 'whole-school' approach to character development, in addition to the presence of a 'character lead' within the school, were found to be important in effective character education provision (R5; see also S2).
  - Research with social action providers identified the importance of the 'double benefit' — the character development of young volunteers as well as benefits to the surrounding community — as a central criterion in engaging participants in social action initiatives (R6).
  - Subsequent work in this area also found that those who had made a 'habit' of social action were, *inter alia*, more likely to have started volunteering at a younger age and to have participated in a diverse range of programmes (R6).

### 3. References to the research

**R1.** Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. (2017) *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham. Available on [Jubilee Centre website](#)

**R2.** Walker, D., Roberts, M., and Kristjánsson, K. (2015), 'Towards a new era of character education in theory and in practice', *Educational Review*, 67(1), pp. 79–96. DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2013.827631

**R3.** Kristjánsson, K. (2015) *Aristotelian Character Education*, New York: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315752747

**R4.** Arthur, J., Harrison, T., Carr, D., Kristjánsson, K., Davison, I., Hayes, D., Higgins, J., and Davidson, J. (2014) *Knightly Virtues: Enhancing Virtue Literacy Through Stories: Research Report*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues.

**R5.** Arthur, J., Kristjánsson, K., Walker, D., Sanderse, W., and Jones, C. (2015) *Character Education in UK Schools: Research Report*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues.

**R6.** Harrison, T., Taylor-Collins, E., and Moller, F. (2019), 'A habit of social action: Understanding the factors associated with adolescents who have made a habit of helping others', *Voluntas*, 30(1), pp. 98–114. DOI: 10.1007/s11266-018-00070-8

### 4. Details of the impact

The Jubilee Centre has generated a wide portfolio of impacts across the education and charitable sectors nationally and internationally.

### **1. Influencing policymaking related to provision of character education in Schools in England**

Through direct engagement with the Secretary of State for Education (SoS), in 2014/15, **'character and resilience' became a policy priority across the Department for Education (DfE)**. In a speech at the University of Birmingham, the SoS directly acknowledged the Jubilee Centre's influence on her vision for education, stating that her "focus" on character education was "inspired by the work of the Jubilee Centre at Birmingham University and its innovative research on character education and its work with schools to build best practice in this area" (S1). The SoS consequently created a 'Character Unit' comprised of civil servants to focus on this area (Arthur was appointed to the advisory committee) and allocated £5m to a Character Innovation Fund/Character Award scheme in 2014/15; this was followed by a further £9.5m between 2015–17, awarded to schools for the development of exceptional character education initiatives (S2). The announcement of this policy priority followed discussions at a September 2014 DfE roundtable on educational settings for character development, in which the Jubilee Centre's conceptualisation, including the four virtue domains (R3), along with findings and lesson plans from R4, were used as a focal point to shape and structure the discussions.

### **2. Changing professional standards of the national inspection framework (Ofsted) for schools in England**

Through successive governments, Jubilee Centre researchers worked with officials and ministers to firmly embed character-education research within education policy. In May 2019, the national schools inspectorate, Ofsted, published the revised national education inspection framework, which included **character development as one of four criteria against which schools' provision for pupils' personal development is assessed** (S3). Building on the Jubilee Centre's prior collaboration with the DfE, Harrison and Arthur contributed to discussions with Ofsted representatives that shaped character criteria throughout the guidance, drawing on the Jubilee Centre's conceptualisations in identifying different domains and psychological components of virtue. For example, the definition of 'character' used in the national inspection framework is "a set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs [children's] motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely" (S3: 58); this language is replicated from the Jubilee Centre's *Framework* (R1, R2). Since September 2019, England's 22,000+ schools are now required to demonstrate how they develop pupils' character for Ofsted inspections.

### **3. Shaping pedagogical practices in primary, secondary and tertiary education in the UK, Montenegro, North Macedonia and the USA**

The Jubilee Centre has co-produced an extensive suite of downloadable educational resources for use within and beyond the classroom in collaboration with teaching practitioners from 4 countries. Jubilee Centre website analytics indicate the reach of the uptake of these free resources, with over 141,000 resource downloads (>127,100 unique downloads) worldwide in the period July 2017–December 2020 (S4; see Figure 1). Whilst the majority of these downloads (>57,300) came from UK-based viewers, significant numbers are situated in the USA (>6,200), Australia, India, Spain and Mexico.

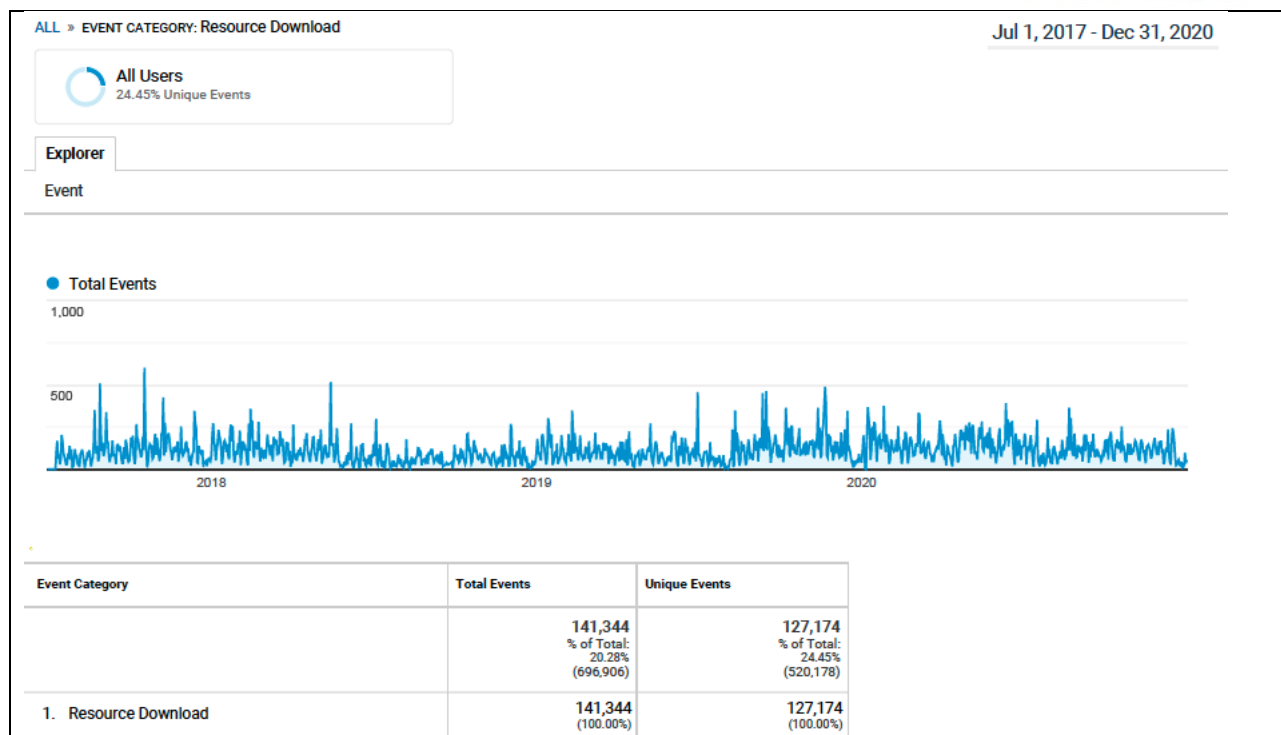


Figure 1. Total Resource Downloads July 2017–Dec 2020 (S4)

Within the UK, **impacts on pedagogical practice** have been generated through school-specific workshops and professional training programmes as well as school-wide, extra-curricular and day-to-day activities, in addition to changes to education policy and school inspection frameworks at the national level. The Jubilee Centre’s impact on teaching in UK schools was documented in a 2020 evaluative report commissioned by the Jubilee Centre with NatGen (S5). The report found that 100% of the schools who participated in the survey had been influenced by the Jubilee Centre in their delivery of character education and were “twice as likely to have been influenced in their approach to character education” by the Jubilee Centre than by other sources, for example the DfE or Ofsted. Further, schools in this study were more likely to offer discrete character education lessons than those in the national study, which suggests that schools partnered with the Jubilee Centre are more likely to adopt an explicit, ‘taught’ approach to character development (S5: 6).

Outside of the UK, collaboration with UNICEF has enabled Jubilee Centre researchers to contribute to **changes in curricula and teaching practices in Montenegro and North Macedonia**. Insights from character education interventions at primary level informed design **changes to the national curriculum in Montenegro**, with lesson plans extracted from the Jubilee Centre Primary Programme of Study and translated into Montenegrin to assist native teachers’ delivery. The translations since have been cited throughout official teacher-training guidelines to aid the nationwide roll-out of the programme (S6). In November 2015, the UNICEF regional office invited Arthur and Cooke to participate in a professional development conference in Geneva that extended this work to other education practitioners in the region. As a result, initial trials have begun on a similar programme of **curriculum design change in early years and primary education in North Macedonia**, and Jubilee staff have spoken at schools, met with government Ministers and engaged with academics in the country, including hosting a visit of North Macedonian Ministers, policymakers and academics in Summer 2019.

The Jubilee Centre’s work also has **influenced the Kern Family Foundation (KFF)** in the USA. As a result of the Jubilee Centre’s work with KFF, the foundation **adopted the Centre’s Framework** as “the benchmark through which [they] judge the character content of grant applications” and **“shifted its funding priorities** to fund more character education grants” **resulting in \$63.3m in grants awarded** since 2017 for character education projects (S7a, S7b). Jubilee Centre staff also provide consultancy to KFF and to new and prospective KFF grantees (R1). The Jubilee Centre’s partnership with KFF has been realised with the award of three grants

to date, one of which was a major grant of \$1.65m to create 75 scholarships for US-based students to study on the Centre's MA Character Education programme. This programme is the first of its kind to provide an academic qualification for those who embrace the study of character and its practical applications.

#### **4. Co-production of effective campaigns for social change through engagement with youth social action charities**

The Jubilee Centre has **informed the way in which YSA programmes are delivered by over 700 organisations nationwide**, through influencing YSA #iwill campaign and shaping its guideline documentation. A partnership between charity Step Up To Serve (SUTS) and the Jubilee Centre was formalised in December 2013, with Research Associate Emma Taylor-Collins seconded from the Jubilee Centre to SUTS to work on a co-produced research stream analysing character and YSA. Findings from this research — particularly the centrality of the 'double benefit' to social action providers — were **incorporated into 'six principles of quality social action'** underpinning the #iwill campaign to make YSA the norm for 10–20 year olds by 2020. Campaign literature cites this principle as a cornerstone of effective YSA, stating that "character development — and the importance of virtue — should be viewed as a core element of youth social action" (S8). The 'double benefit' criterion was subsequently included in guideline documentation produced by SUTS and other YSA charities, and incorporated as an evaluative component of the annual YSA survey (S9). The 2018 survey stated that **58% of 10–20 year olds across the UK participated in such programmes**, with 54% of them recognising the double benefit (S9). Further findings on specific programme characteristics conducive to developing a 'habit' of YSA (R6) have **informed #iwill guidelines and shaped implementation of the government policy commitment** to extending YSA, as indicated by citation in strategic policy documents (S10: 31).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

**S1.** Secretary of State for Education (2014), '[Our Plan for Education](#)', speech delivered at University of Birmingham, 27 November 2014 [Available as PDF]

**S2.** NatCen Social Research & the National Children's Bureau Research and Policy Team (2017), '[DfE Developing Character Skills in Schools](#)'. [Available as PDF]

**S3.** Ofsted (2019), '[Schools inspection handbook](#)'. [Available as PDF]

**S4.** Google Analytics Report [Available as PDF]

**S5.** NatCen Social Research (2020), '[Evaluative Survey: Jubilee Centre Character Education in Schools](#)'. [Available as PDF]

**S6.** Backovic, A., Vujovic, S., Bajkovic, R. Calov-Prelevic, A., Božovic, R., Gavranovic, J., and Jokic, T. (2018), *Moje vrijednosti i vrline – razvoj socijalnih i emocionalnih vještina učenika i učenica: Priručnik za nastavnike i nastavnice u osnovnoj školi* [[My values and virtues — development of social and emotional skills in students: Handbook for primary school teachers](#)], Bureau of Education MNE & UNICEF. [Available as PDF]

**S7.** Evidence of influence on Kern Family Foundation:

a. Factual statement from the Kern Family Foundation (KFF) (6<sup>th</sup> October 2020) [Available as PDF]

b. Text of speech delivered by the President of KFF at the University of Birmingham, 11 December 2019 [Available as PDF]

**S8.** Step Up to Serve (November 2014), '[Raising the Quality of Youth Social Action: Applying Six Quality Principles](#)'. [Available as PDF]

**S9.** Ipsos MORI (2018), '[National Youth Social Action Survey 2017](#)' [Available as PDF]

**S10.** Cabinet Office (2018), '[Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future That Works for Everyone](#)'. [Available as PDF]