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Ethics, professional standards and on-going training at the heart of professionalism

A recent poll about the ethics and honesty of 30 occupations supports the high standing of professional groups in the community where there is a clear commitment to professional standards, ethical behaviour and on-going professional development.

The annual Roy Morgan telephone survey on the Image of Professions conducted last week (4-5 May) asked 655 Australian men and women aged 14 and over to rate 30 occupations on their honesty and ethical standards.

Ninety two per cent of respondents ranked nurses as the most ethical and honest profession in 2016. This was the 22nd year in a row that nurses have achieved this top ranking.

High ranking professions in 2016 included: Doctors 86% (up 2%), Pharmacists 86% (up 2%), Engineers 78% (up 4%), School Teachers 77% (down 1%), Dentists 75% (up 4%), Police 72% (up 3%), High Court Judges 71% (up 3%) and State Supreme Court Judges 70% (up 1%).

The professions who increased their score in this poll from 2015 included Engineers 78% (up 4%), Accountants 51% (up 6%) and Lawyers 35% (up 4%).

President of Professions Australia Michael Catchpole said there were fundamental requirements for professional groups wishing to secure and maintain community confidence, including:

- a code of ethics and professional standards that underpin integrity, competence, confidentiality, and professional behaviour;
- specialist knowledge and skills derived from research, education and training at a high level, plus on-going professional development.

“All of these factors must be present and their application will ensure that professionals are acting in the public interest in the fulfilment of their duties,” Mr Catchpole said.

“This poll shows the high esteem in which the professions are consistently held by the Australian community. Members of professional associations are bound by these fundamental principles and practices which are embedded in their codes of ethics with appropriate consumer protection mechanisms.

“It is also clear from this poll that some occupational groups clearly have more work to do with the community in terms of their behaviour, practices and public perception,” he said.

Media Contact: Liz Lang on 0400 402 904 or ceo@professions.com.au

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