

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2005

The AGM of the Society will be held on **Friday 1 April 2005 during the Annual Conference** (time tba) in the Renold Theatre, The University of Manchester, Renold Building, Sackville Street, Manchester M60 1QD.

The Open Meeting will commence immediately after the AGM. (Please see special notes below.)

Professor Ann Colley, Honorary General Secretary

OPEN MEETING and COMMUNICATING WITH YOU – THE MEMBERS

Members are actively encouraged to attend the Open Meeting. This year it will be held on Friday 1 April 2005 immediately following the AGM (see above).

The Open Meeting is one of the opportunities for members to ask questions, raise issues and stimulate topics for discussion with and for consideration by the Trustees.

Informal notes of last year's meeting are available from the chief executive's office.

In order for the meeting to be structured, please submit your questions in advance. The deadline for questions to be received is 3pm Thursday 31 March 2005. Please send your questions to me by e-mail: aoc@leicester.ac.uk, or in writing, or by completing slips provided around the Annual Conference venue. I look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at the meeting.

Professor Ann Colley, Honorary General Secretary



Ken Brown

Contact Ken Brown via the Society's Leicester office, or e-mail: president@bps.org.uk.

This month sees the launch of the Society's new corporate look (see p.40). It is easy to be dismissive of such changes, but the diverse nature of the large number of subsystem publications did not present a cohesive or professional image of the Society. Many members will already have received redesigned documents, and several newsletters with January publication dates have been produced in the new style. The response from the editors of these publications has so far been very enthusiastic, with most seeing their new-look publications as a definite step forward. Central to the redesign is the revised logo that should now be familiar to everyone as it occupies pride of place on the subscription renewal forms and new membership cards for 2005. The existing chartered logo is also being replaced by a new-style logo. This is already being sent out to members who ask for it, and it will be available for download from the Society's website. Chartered members will be encouraged to update the logo when they get new stationery printed, with the aim that it should be in use by the end of 2005. In addition to the many forms and publications that are being revamped, we are trying to redesign the various Society awards and certificates into one consistent style. Thanks are due to Geoff Ellis (Preparation for Publication Manager) and his team for their effective management of this complex project.

This issue of *The Psychologist* introduces the first of a series of articles devoted to the Society's theme for 2005 – the 'Year of Relationships'. Judy Dunn's article on non-resident fathers is very topical, given the recent publicity stunts by fathers seeking fairer access to their children and the mess enveloping the Child Support Agency's attempts to obtain support from absent fathers for their children. The 2004 theme was 'Brain and Behaviour' and a strong contender for the 2006 theme is 'Conflict'. It will be interesting to see whether the idea of themed years will be sustained. I would encourage members who may have ideas for future themes to submit them to the Chair of the Publications and Communications Board, Dr Pam Maras, on p.f.maras@gre.ac.uk.

Members may not be aware of the many attempts made by the Society to bring psychology to the attention of the public. The Public Engagement with Psychology Group, which straddles various parts of governance (the Pubs and Comms Board, the Research Board, the Professional Practice Board and the Standing Conference Committee), was set up to coordinate the many activities which were generated as a follow-up to the extensive series of events that occurred during the Society's centenary year in 2001. The events

now include: an annual joint lecture with the British Academy (the most recent a very successful evening with Professor Brian Butterworth talking about dyscalculia); a joint day seminar with the Nuffield Foundation; a joint event with the Dana Centre (part of the Science Museum); events at the Cheltenham and Edinburgh Science Festivals; a sponsored link between Society Branches and British Association branches; and the development of a small grants scheme for members and subsystems to allow them to organise 'public engagement' events. As an example of the latter, I visited the Northern Ireland Branch stand this year at the Royal Ulster Agricultural Show. This was a success once the farmers and their families became used to psychologists handing out leaflets among the tractors, combine harvesters and prize bulls!

Another great success has been the Research Digest (see p.39). This is a free, fortnightly e-mail publication aimed primarily at school and undergraduate students, containing synopses of peer-reviewed journal papers mapped to the students' curricula. In a little over a year, and with minimal expenditure on promotion, it has garnered well over 10,000 subscribers. Praise for the quality and usefulness of the publication is received almost daily and some schools are basing after-hours clubs on the Digest. One half-time editor who works from home produces the Digest. This kind of expenditure is just one of several ways in which the Society is attempting to secure a future for the discipline by attracting and educating students.

As many of you will know, we have been expecting the Department of Health to publish the consultation document on the statutory regulation of applied psychologists. Since the summer we have been told that its appearance was imminent. I have been trying to time some comments on the implications of statutory regulation (SR) for the Society to coincide with its publication. If it appears before Christmas then my timing will be perfect. Space does not permit a lengthy commentary; I will devote some space in a couple of future columns to post-SR life. What I will say at the moment is in response to those members who may be considering leaving the Society under the impression that the Health Professions Council (HPC) will be looking after their interests. The HPC's remit is the protection of the public; HPC is not interested in the future of psychology as either a discipline or a profession. It has no Divisions, Sections, Branches or Special Groups. It will not respond to government legislation on behalf of psychology. The Society will still function on your behalf and, out of self-interest if nothing else, you should continue to be a part of it.

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NEWS

News of interest to our readers should be sent to *The Psychologist* on psychologist@bps.org.uk or at the Leicester office. We also welcome lively, informative and evidence-based analysis of current events (up to 1500 words). Contact the editor first on jonsut@bps.org.uk.

PALS TO AID LEARNING

THE Psychology Network has published a new resource for psychology teachers who are attracted to the idea of problem-based learning but who are unsure of how to begin. *Psychology Applied Learning Scenarios (PALS)* contains vignettes and case histories with instructions on how to use them in teaching or assessment.

☐ The PALS pack is available both in hard copy and online from www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk.

ROWNTREE REPORTS

TWO reports have been produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the current state of safeguards for children. One report deals with children living away from home, the other examines specific issues of sexual abuse, young people in prison and disabled children.

☐ The reports can be downloaded free from www.jrf.org.uk.

ONLINE CONFERENCE

THE Mental Health Foundation is to host an online conference on public mental health on Thursday 13 January. 'Mental Health for All' will provide an opportunity for professionals and lay people to consider what research, policy and action is needed to put mental well-being at the heart of the public health agenda. Registration is free.

☐ For details and registration go to www.connects.org.uk/conferences.

BE THE NEW FACE OF SCIENCE

FAMELAB, an initiative of the Cheltenham Festival of Science, is offering to the most entertaining and original science presenter a prize of broadcasting time on Channel 4, a masterclass in science communication, a schedule of speaking events and £2000 cash. Auditions take place in March and April with the final held at the Cheltenham Festival on 11 June. Judges include Robert Winston and Simon Singh.

☐ For full details of the scheme go to www.famelab.org.

Public health on agenda

THE government has been laying out its new vision for public health and health promotion, with contributions from, and implications for, psychologists.

The Society's Division of Health Psychology contributed to the consultation that resulted in the White Paper *Choosing Health: Making Healthier Choices Easier*. Many of their recommendations appear to have been acted upon, including those for less complex and more prominent nutritional information on food, and legislation to ensure that all workplaces and enclosed public areas are smoke-free.

Professor Eamonn Ferguson (University of Nottingham) said: 'The White Paper has particular relevance for health psychologists in terms of its guiding principles (e.g. informed choice) and its emphasis on behavioural change focusing on self-regulation of health

protective behaviours such as diet, exercise and sexual health. Also, appropriately trained health psychologists (via BPS accredited courses) will bring the skills required to fill the

proposed new position of "health trainer" within the NHS.'

According to Dr Rebecca Lawton (University of Leeds), 'psychology now has centre stage', but tackling inequalities in health will be the real challenge.

Dr Jan Graydon, a Division of Sport and Exercise

Psychology committee member, welcomed the report but questioned its scope.

'Numerous research efforts have suggested that physical activity may enhance mood, self-esteem and cognition. We know it is hard to change sedentary behaviour, but that it is possible if the intervention is targeted to specific circumstances and individual motivational levels.

'Young people are especially targeted, and quite rightly so with increasing levels of childhood obesity, and rates of teenage pregnancy. However, there are disappointingly few specific interventions targeted at older groups. Reviews of investigations into the benefits of exercise have indicated that positive outcomes – particularly related to cognitive activity – are especially likely to be found in older populations.'

☐ *The White Paper* is available at tinyurl.com/4uovd.

Camps get the boot

PROGRAMMES that rely on scare tactics to prevent children and adolescents from engaging in violent behaviour are not only ineffective, but may actually make the problem worse, according to an independent state-of-the-science panel.

The panel, convened by the US National Institutes of Health, found that group detention centres, boot camps and other 'get tough' programmes often exacerbate problems by grouping young people with delinquent tendencies, where the more sophisticated instruct the naive.

Professor Leo Hendry

(University of Aberdeen) agreed with the panel's conclusions: 'The boot-camp approach demonstrates to young people that adult society can be overtly aggressive (as well as overprotective) in seeking conformity from the young. Conformity through fear or bullying is only short-term.'

The panel highlighted two approaches that are clearly effective: functional family therapy and multisystemic therapy, which have in common a focus on developing social competency skills, a long-term approach and family involvement.

Professor Hendry said: 'Young people need tolerance

and support to work out their values and lifestyles, which often takes them to the boundaries of acceptable and legal behaviours – and beyond – in their progress towards adulthood. To place them in a "delinquent" subculture will only increase their antisocial behaviours and enhance their antisocial skills through imitation and practice. Thus, it is clear that a "systems theory" approach to therapies is required. I am not surprised that the panel found that holistic, interactive treatments are the most effective.'

☐ Access the full report via <http://consensus.nih.gov>.

Talking to young people about HIV

ON 9 November a report, *Talking with Children, Young People and Families About Chronic Illness and Living with HIV*, was launched at a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on AIDS at Westminster.

The report, published by the National Children's Bureau and funded by the Department of Health, the Elton John AIDS Foundation and Crusaïd, was edited by Jennifa Miah, a member of the BPS Division of Clinical Psychology's Faculty of Sexual Health and HIV. The launch meeting was introduced by Neil Gerrard MP, chair of the APPG, who said that HIV

has tended to be an adult-dominated issue. He welcomed the report on the views of children and young people.

Jennifa Miah also co-wrote (with DCP members Sarah Waugh and Alex Divac) Section 1 of the report, which provides a psychological framework for talking to children about health and illness. It looks at issues of managing disclosure of medical diagnoses and of promoting good practice to encourage openness, while acknowledging the reality of the wider context and the need to tackle discrimination.

Paul Andrews, chief executive of the National Children's Bureau, welcomed the

report and said: 'It is important to remember not only those children and young people who are infected with HIV, but also those who live with people with the illness.'

Other sections of the report deal with specific issues of disclosure and talking to young people.

Sam Walters, head of paediatric HIV services at St Mary's Hospital, London, called the report 'truly excellent', adding: 'This is the most comprehensive review of this subject that has been published to date.'

□ *The report is downloadable free of charge at www.ncb.org.uk/HIV.*

Have you heard the one about...?

PAUL REDFORD reports from 'Humour, Art and the Brain', a one-day festival held at the Theatre Royal, Winchester.

WHY do we find things funny? What is the psychological basis of humour? Why can't we tickle ourselves? 'Humour, Art and the Brain', the second in a series of Art and Mind events, set out to explore the nature of humour with the aid of psychologists, neuroscientists, sociologists and artists. And the self-proclaimed 'unfunniest person in Winchester' (she faced tough competition) was trained with the help of experts to become funny by the end of the day.

The results of a worldwide study of jokes and laughter were presented by Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire). Drawing from a web-based project and explorations across cultures, Wiseman took us through the findings, including the world's funniest joke (see www.laughlab.co.uk). And evidently, 6.03pm is the time that jokes get the most laughs!

It seems that most laughter occurs not at jokes, but at life. Laughter, according to Harry Witchel (University of Bristol), is primarily to do with incongruity and unpredictability. This is the reason we can't tickle ourselves. When we know what our hands are doing, we know the effect they will have. But why do we laugh? Laughter

is not only a human facet; Witchel argued that laughter is apparent in primates and even rats. Witchel says it is a false-alarm system, a social signal that something that looks painful, aggressive or insulting is not real.

Psychologist and humour consultant Eduardo Jauregui put forward the case for humour as a complement to social embarrassment. He sees humour as an aesthetic emotion (highlighting the art theme of the day).

Accidental blunders (mistakes, botched attempts); appearance defects (inelegance, tackiness); accidental invasions (private spaces, private parts), ruining another's performance (practical jokes, satirists); fictional comedy (misunderstandings, idiotic behaviour) are all about unaesthetic behaviour.

Christie Davies (University of Reading) then attempted to deconstruct the nature of ethnic humour. Davies argued that there are universal patterns in ethnic humour in almost all societies. The jokes are universal, but the targets are culturally varied, with the

focus of the jokes always a close neighbour. Davies then moved on to disaster humour, where disasters and accidents (9/11, the space shuttle disaster, Princes Diana's death, etc.) are the focus of jokes. This type of joke did not exist before the 1960s and the emerging universality of television, and this is the key to understanding them, argued Davies. Television tells us what to think and how to feel; humour is the way round this dominant discourse. When presented on television, shocking events are often interspersed with triviality: with adverts, with sport, with sitcoms. This incongruity can find its way into the disaster jokes: according to Davies, they often include reference to brands and corporate images.

In the evening a roundtable session brought back all the presenters and John Lloyd (creator of *Not the Nine O'Clock News*) to discuss the role of satire in sitcom. Then, after a day's training with Richard Wiseman and Mervyn Stutter, the unfunniest person in Winchester returned, having been taught the skills of delivery, presentation, timing and confidence... But it seems there is still a long way to go before we fully understand the complexities of humour.

■ *Dr Paul Redford is at University College Winchester.*