



Meet the President

After statutory regulation, members may start to reconsider what they are getting from the BPS for their membership fee. Are we doing enough to prevent a mass exodus?

I am worried about being trampled by a mass *influx* of people. Many psychologists, probably thousands, who are currently offering services to the public, but who have chosen not to join the BPS, will want and need to register with the HPC, will discover they need professional support, and will now turn to the Society for it. For example, they will need to be part of a continuing professional development programme, will need advice on ethical and professional issues, will want access to events from the subsystems and events in the regions, and will want their say in legal and political developments and in service issues. It is the whole point of statutory regulation that those people operating outside the system, often not accountable to any professional body, will now have to become part of the system, become properly accountable, and ensure their professional skills and knowledge are up to date.

Will it be the same kind of Society post-HPC?

With the main regulatory function run by the HPC rather than the Society, there is the opportunity for the Society to shift emphasis from regulatory activities to service-oriented initiatives at every level, from better ensuring that legislation reflects our members' views and skills, down to better funding and servicing of local workshops and conferences.

The Society and its subsystems already put on well over 20 conferences a year, but with increased support for our already excellent conference office these can be of a higher quality with more varied formats and more focused on precise need. There are many other things our members are now pressing for, such as access to APA journals and abstract services, careers advice, advice on workplace issues, an expanded Directory, a package of financial advantages, better information about current policy positions and initiatives, more CPD events, more special interest groups, and in general a high-profile Society of which they can be proud and which is behind them, backing up their initiatives and ambitions, not tomorrow, but now.

Psychologist editor **JON SUTTON** interviews the new Society President, **GRAHAM POWELL**.

That's a lot to ask from what is primarily a voluntary organisation.

Well in fact, in my experience, members are demanding a Society whose services are supplied more by employed professional staff rather than relying so much on volunteer input from members. I agree, but this will have to be paid for. We can raise funding for new services in a variety of ways. One is by maximising our investment income, though our investment policy is currently so effective it is difficult to see how its performance could be enhanced. A second way is to

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bring more commercial enterprises on stream, and this will be done, though there is a long lead-in time. A third way will be to adjust subscription levels strictly on the understanding that this is for identified new services development (no member, including me, will want to pay more for what we are already getting). A final way is to use some of our reserves to fund initiatives, and this will be achieved by careful risk management.

So does the presidential role become less important as more services are supplied by the staff side?

The issue is the difference between governance and management. Because the Society is bigger and more diverse in its activities, the office has grown to manage all this. But this is different to governance, which is the determination of strategy. It doesn't matter how big the office is, there will always have to be effective governance in place. It is the President's job, as chair of the Trustees, to ensure that strategy continues to develop and that good governance is sustained.

We have received fewer nominations in recent years for the honorary positions, but that is because they are seen as ever more demanding roles, not because they are

seen as less important. As I have said, the Society has to do everything it can to support people while taking on this role.

Presidents from the practitioner side seem relatively rare – why is that?

The current system favours those with the greatest flexibility in their diary, and this often seems to be academics, and it also favours those with employers who can absorb any financial losses and the effects of reduced staff time. This makes a self-employed practitioner like myself a rarity as President, and I hope that I can encourage the Society to explore every way possible of enabling self-employed people to make a contribution to the functioning of their Society.

Also, in thinking about membership services, I realise that the Society has really done nothing to help people like myself to run a psychology business. Perhaps there will be a demand for this sort of training in the future, as more psychologists run consultancies and businesses.

On *The Psychologist* we hear a lot of rumblings about the Society's disciplinary process. Are you happy with it?

I am impressed with what it has achieved and have great respect for the expertise in the office. This can be built on by extending its work more into membership services, and this is happening. I presented a paper to the Trustees on plans for this. The Investigatory Committee will be more proactive in advising members about good practice or best practice, before problems arise to which the Investigatory Committee has to react in a disciplinary manner. For example there will be an occasional column in *The Psychologist* picking up on ethical and disciplinary issues, with case examples and practical advice. As psychologists work in more diverse settings, so there is a need for this support of our members.

Your time on the Psychologist Policy Committee showed you are keen on the Society's main objective: 'diffusion of

a knowledge of psychology pure and applied'. Any plans in this area?

One cornerstone of the Strategic Plan is membership services and the other is the extent to which we reach out, inform and influence.

I have already mentioned political influence, ensuring that psychology informs the making of legislation, but we also have to make better contact with the public in general, in the way, for example, that the Publications and Communication Board funds public engagement initiatives and has created a Research Digest e-mail that is free to all subscribers [see www.researchdigest.org.uk].

The profile of the discipline is important at all levels. Government should routinely and automatically seek our advice on how psychological knowledge bears upon current issues, but at the other end of the spectrum, students choosing their A-levels, or considering which university course to do, should be aware of psychology and what it has to offer. How do young people come to know about subjects? It is not just through teachers or the vocational section of their library. They are just as likely to come across psychology by watching TV, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and magazines. We have to have a presence in these media. We should continue to encourage our members to engage with the media, we need a strong press office, need public engagement projects, and need to continue to pursue the possibility of our own voice in the media, such as with our own magazine.

Mind you, once we have attracted students onto university courses, we have to make sure that psychology funding is not so shredded that the psychology they learn is not psychology as we know it. The Research Board and Psychology Education Board are struggling to protect university funding for psychology.

How will the Society be different at the end of your presidency?

We will have successfully completed the transition to regulation by the HPC. The current membership has, through the Council, voted unanimously in principle to regulation by the HPC, and we will have negotiated hard to ensure that the final details of such regulation maintain the standards that the Society had striven so hard to set. A draft order has been

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published, and the consultation document circulated, with a view to the register being open by the end of this year or early 2006, according to the Department of Health.

We will have found a way to absorb into the Society all those who for the first

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time have chosen to be regulated in their provision of psychology services. We will have completed our priority review of membership needs, and there will be a management plan in place and in progress, with the necessary funding in place. For the first time, psychologists will have statutory recognition by the Mental Health Bill and training will be being planned for the statutory roles of 'Examiner' and 'Clinical Supervisor', and the new Policy Support Unit will be up and running and helping our members make coordinated and effective inputs into further legislation. The new College of Fellows will have been offering events and initiatives. The plan to move from John Street to a new London

centre that is disability compliant and that reflects members' demands for its range of resources will be in place and the funding sought. In general, the Society will be confident and forward-looking and carrying out the agenda for growth and development that the Strategic Plan demands.

You seem like a very busy man. How do you relax?

Recently I went to Sadler's Well to see a ballet called *Ataxia*. I am a neuropsychologist, and as you probably know, ataxias are movement disorders. How on earth, then, can you make a ballet about ataxia, when ballet is about refined motor control and ataxia is about deficits in that very control? Wayne McGregor, the choreographer, went as a research fellow to the neuroscience department at Cambridge, studied these disorders, and came up with a jaw-dropping ballet, so demanding for the dancers because of the unpredictability and lack of fluidity of movement. There was a wonderful *pas-de-deux* of two people trying to dance as one; but of course involuntary movements kept snatching them away from each other, a powerful comment on relationships. And I paint.