



# Double top

**Ray Miller:** Members may not know much about either of us, so let's start with some background. Were you involved with psychology before taking up the post of Chief Executive a year ago?

**Tim Cornford:** I have two strands to my career. I have been an educational publisher in an area that has brought me into contact with a lot of psychologists. My last job before joining the Society was working for a test publisher – NFER Nelson, the biggest test publishers in the UK. The other strand to my career is in government service, and I worked in a succession of three educational 'quangos' running the national curriculum assessment. So I have a mixture of experience in private sector publishing, government bureaucracy and advisory work, and delivery of national projects.

What about you?

**RM:** I trained as a clinical psychologist and since then I have also become a health psychologist and a member of the Divisions of Health and Occupational Psychology. I currently work for the health service; I'm based in Edinburgh, where I'm head of the adult mental health services and professional adviser for psychology.

My involvement with the Society began as far back as 1984, when I was Treasurer of the Division of Clinical Psychology. I am one of those people who might occasionally be referred to as a 'BPS junkie'. I have never managed to avoid having some office within the Society – I was Chair of the DCP and then of the Professional Practice Board, which led to the role of incoming President.

**TC:** One of the most important things is how the two roles of President and Chief Executive 'mesh' with one another. I have been appointed to run the office, you have been elected President. But does that mean that you run the office? How do you see the divide?

**RM:** The Society was once described as a professional society run by amateur volunteers. In terms of what we know about running an organisation I think we could be described as amateurs. But what we do know about is psychology, and that is where the responsibility divides quite neatly. Running the Society efficiently and effectively is largely the work of the Chief

*The Society's new President in discussion with the Chief Executive. How do their roles work together, and where do they see the Society going?*

Executive and the office – ensuring that the nuts and bolts work. It is the job of the membership and professionals as members to provide the strategy and policy and sense of direction of the Society – ultimately the President gives some leadership and steer. Sometimes the President is not the best person for the work involved, and part of the role is to ensure that the team who do carry out the work do so effectively.

**TC:** Yes, we're seen as a professional body and a charity, but I describe the office as a service organisation. The Trustees, the boards and the membership decide what the policies and strategies should be, and the office should be sufficiently equipped with expertise and experience to put them into practice.

However, we in the office are paid to work for the Society, and members on the whole give their spare time. They probably shouldn't be expected to work on detail of policy matters and strategy – they should be able to pick up the advice from the office and examine it and base decisions on that range of advice. This is a difficult balance to keep, and in some places there's a tradition that members will not only make a broad policy decision but will also get to grips with the operational implementation. Often I can see the office staff asking, 'Why don't they let us get on with it?'

**RM:** Perhaps the Society has not always recognised that the office staff are part of that team or have incorporated staff fully into that team. One of the changes I have been glad to see over recent years is the Senior Management Team having greater input as part of the decision-making process. But it's all a balance – we have responsibility as employers to our staff to support and develop them, to ensure that their working conditions are appropriate, and that we are not actually demanding unreasonable things alongside our own parochial interests. We rely very much on the Chief Executive and the SMT to keep us in line in terms of what we are planning, of how we implement strategy and policy

and what is reasonable to attempt.

**TC:** A lot of it is down to communications – knowing who is doing what and keeping the necessary networks involved and in touch with what is going on. The Society is a complicated entity not only in its governance structure but also in its membership structure – what we call the subsystems – and in the first few months I found it difficult to know how to use that structure and to involve it. It might be helpful in the future to review whether we really have developed the right governance structure.

Moving on, are you looking forward to your year as President?

**RM:** With some trepidation, yes! There are some days I wake up and wonder how I managed to get into this position. Having been involved with the Society for as long as I have, and having seeing so many processes start, it is interesting to have the feeling that you will be in a position to reap the development of these processes at least for a period of time. It's a great honour too – I am conscious of having some degree of approval from my peers that I am able to undertake this task. I have no illusions; it is going to be a lot of hard work.

**TC:** There are one or two psychological societies where the President is almost a permanent position. What does a new President taking up office think they can achieve in their term?

**RM:** The idea that you can introduce many radical changes in a short term as President is just untenable. The advantage of a revolving Presidential role is that you have the support of someone else who has just done it all and become Vice President.

Any incoming President probably would hope to help the Society move in a particular direction – for example, the need to change the nature of the Society in some ways so that as a membership organisation it supports its members in a range of professional services, information and resources, and gives support to

members in areas of CPD, or in regulation. Statutory regulation will continue during my presidency. It will totally change the way in which the profession works, it will make demands upon us and in the future will open up considerable opportunities. We need to take advantage of those opportunities.

**TC:** Do you think we have thought enough about what happens once statutory regulation is implemented?

**RM:** I think that over the last two or three years there has been considerable thought about the impact on the Society as an organisation and for its members specifically. There are a number of things about our role in disciplinary and investigatory procedures that will change but will not necessarily entirely disappear – we'll still need to regulate our members. That gives us an opportunity because we shall no longer be taking the role of prosecutor. We can begin to look at how we can support our members to ensure that they do not come into conflict in terms of statutory regulation, or we can support members in changing their performance and in rehab. We are also looking at ways in which we communicate with members better in order to support these changes.

**TC:** Two things you have touched on there are important in terms of my role. One is the level and quality of service from the office to members as support and communications with members. We need to do quite a lot within the office to develop and enhance the various modes of communication we already have. We still churn out print for the whole Society and *The Psychologist* does retain an important role within that. But increasingly there are electronic communications and the website to keep in touch with members. Communications with and between members need support from the office, and the speed of communications is crucial.

**RM:** As a Scot, of particular interest to me is the growing devolution within the Society as significant developments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are putting pressure upon the Society to ensure support of their activities. I am also supportive of development within areas of England. How the office supports activities

in regional areas with their different regulations and environments is a key area.

**TC:** A paper from about four years ago from a member describes the Branches, not the subsystems, as the 'beating heart' of the Society.

**RM:** That is perhaps an idealised view, and the truth is that the Society has missed the beat on more than one occasion. The Trustees have been very aware of that and have actively tried to ensure that there is a Branch in every area of the country; and there have been recent developments to



**Tim Cornford (left), Chief Executive of the BPS, in discussion with the Society's new President, Ray Miller**

try to ensure that this is the case. We see Branches as perhaps the key area that may coordinate activities of the Society across a region as well as providing a focus for CPD for members.

**TC:** Devolution brings up a number of issues to do with the relationship between psychology as a discipline, the BPS as a Society, and government policies. I have been struck over the recent months by how much the Society can contribute to social policy. We have taken one particular step in that direction in supporting that within the office with the formation of a policy support unit, but my sense is that this needs to go further.

**RM:** It needs to go a lot further, but I think, to be fair, psychologists often don't appreciate the impact they have over a variety of issues. Key decision makers are very interested in what psychology has to say because there is a sense in which society is becoming increasingly

'psychologised'. It is pretty hard to open a newspaper these days without someone talking about the psychological aspects of one thing or another; and, whether they are talking in a professional manner or not, the fact is that people are beginning to be aware of what psychology has to contribute to their lives. The Society is only just over a hundred years old, and we have made enormous strides in ensuring that key decision makers are more aware of psychological issues. But there is a lot more we can do, and we need to look at office organisation and support and use the knowledge of members to get it targeted to the right people at the right time.

**TC:** Early on I got down on paper all the services that the office provides to membership – when you put together what each directorate does it's quite a long list. My sense is that we don't tell members about it enough. You have been a member for a long time and have 'stuck with it' – what's your message to, say, a graduate psychologist who has not paid their subscription fee?

**RM:** Despite the great and apparent diversity of the Society there are things of basic interest to all psychologists. Scientific methodology and using evidence-based methods applies across all members, and that leads to a unity in the way we approach life as professionals and underpins the way psychologists work. If we believe in that sense of professionalism, there are ways in which we can support networking, professional updating. When I attend the Annual Conference, hearing what other branches of psychology have been doing is often useful to my area of clinical psychology and shows how unified the discipline is in many ways. For these reasons we need to project and defend the Society and the discipline.

One of the questions that has been raised is, if statutory regulation comes into place, whether we need a Society when important issues will be taken care of by a regulatory body. But a regulatory body will have no interest in developing and advancing psychology or promoting the interests of psychology as one of the leading key sciences of society. If there is to be a very powerful body regulating psychology, we need a body to promote psychology.