



Science and practice

Do you have a 'vision' for the Research Board?

Dominic Abrams: My priority is to do the best we can to maximise the opportunities for funding, and to sponsor and disseminate psychological research. I see our role as helping to make apparent the value of psychological research methods and evidence for education, science and society.

What is the main barrier facing the Board in its work?

DA: The barriers are the same as those facing any voluntary organisation, there is only so much that one can ask of volunteers who already have important commitments elsewhere. I do not believe the Board as a whole has faced any insurmountable barriers, and it seems to work very cooperatively both among its membership and with other parts of the Society.

Does the Society have much clout with the main funders of psychological research?

DA: Yes, we meet routinely with all of the main research funders to convey our aspirations and concerns. We do this together with the Association of Heads of Departments of Psychology and the Experimental Psychology Society. However, the meetings are coordinated by the Research Board's scientific officer, and through the Board we are able to consult with the entire constituency of researchers in psychology. We have very constructive relationships with the research councils, and also represent our interests through the Academy of Social Sciences, and (in future) through the Science Council.

Is psychology good at collaborating with other disciplines?

DA: This is a difficult question. Psychology itself is a very disparate discipline. For example, methodological and theoretical differences between neuropsychology and discourse analysis in psychology are far greater than differences between most branches of sociology and anthropology. I think there is quite a lot of very good collaboration between different branches of psychology, but probably less collaboration between psychology and other disciplines. There is no doubt that if psychology is to optimise its access to

In the latest of our interviews explaining the Society's directorate structure, we meet Professor Dominic Abrams (Chair of the Research Board), followed by Ray Miller (Chair of the Professional Practice Board).

research funds, it will have to find more and better ways to collaborate with other disciplines in the future.

We have a difficult task here because we need to persuade research funders that *intradisciplinary* collaboration is just as innovative (and important to fund) as *interdisciplinary* collaboration. I cannot see any rational basis for the belief that research is necessarily better if it involves collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. Disciplinary boundaries are themselves somewhat arbitrary. Sometimes cross-disciplinary work is more interesting and innovative, but sometimes it is less well focused and makes critical compromises in methodology.

Part of the Board's terms of reference is to 'encourage new developments in

psychological science and its applications'. Can you give an example?

DA: We do this in all kinds of ways, including supporting the planning of conferences, our various schemes for promoting psychological research (such as the Research Seminars Competition, the Initiatives Fund, and the Postgraduate Study Visits Scheme), our continual assessment of critical issues such as support for postdoctoral researchers, ethical criteria for research, and so on.

Have new ways of disseminating research made conference attendance a thing of the past?

DA: Certainly not. Conferences are as much about meeting colleagues and sharing ideas as they are about presenting papers. Downloading a paper from a



Dominic Abrams (and twins)

computer is not the same as meeting the author face to face and discussing their work.

Is the Society doing enough to 'promote the advancement and diffusion of a knowledge of psychology'?

DA: This is something for the Society as a whole to consider. I think the Society does a very good job, given the scale and complexity of psychology.

For a long time I have been impressed by the work of the press office and the quality of *The Psychologist*, and the Society does much more behind-the-scenes work. Examples include the work of our parliamentary officer and liaison with select committees, the Society's continuing relationship (and contribution) to the British Association, and other organisations such as the Academy for Social Sciences and the Science Council, and internationally through the European Federation of Psychologists Associations and the International Union of Psychological Sciences.

Do the Society's awards succeed in recognising the cream of the crop?

DA: Yes, but not sufficiently widely. In the current environment other disciplines, particularly in the natural sciences, are much more generous in recognising the excellent work that is done. There are many more active researchers and researchers conducting outstanding work now than there were when many of our schemes were set up; we need to continue to find ways to expand opportunities to recognise and promote such work. It is extremely difficult for our award panels to make choices when faced with so many excellent candidates for any particular award. It would be good to have a wider range of methods of recognising excellent work.

The popularity of psychology shows no sign of abating. Does this make your job easier?

DA: It makes it very interesting, and I am delighted that psychology is so popular, as this ensures its prospects are good in the longer term. As more psychology graduates move into key roles in organisations and government there should be an increased public recognition of its value for society. I'd like to think that a psychologist would be a valued member of any group that is responsible for shaping policy in areas such

ABOUT THE SCIENCE AND PRACTICE DIRECTORATE

One of five Society office directorates, the Science and Practice Directorate supports the Professional Practice Board and the Research Board. Beneath these boards lies a complex array of standing committees, Divisions, Sections and Special Groups (see p.60 in the Annual Report). Here we introduce some of the directorate staff, under the leadership of the newly appointed directorate manager, Dr George Delafield, who joined the Society in April from the Royal Mail Group.

Supporting Dr Delafield are the directorate secretary, Liz Beech, and directorate coordinator, Felicity Hector (who also supports the work of the International Committee and Standing Committee for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities).

The individual directorate teams are:

Conferences and events

Helen Wilson leads a team of four organising Society events and supporting subsystem conferences. Reporting to the Standing Conference Committee, they play a vital role in fulfilling the Royal Charter objectives of 'diffusion of a knowledge of psychology pure and applied'. Attendance at most Society conferences is rising – with efforts to increase the appeal and scientific content of the conference programme for academics and practitioners (linking together the science and practice of psychology). People or subsystems needing help organising events should e-mail helwil@bps.org.uk.

Science

Lisa Morrison Coulthard is the Society's scientific officer, supporting the Research Board and its executive and standing committees, the Joint Committee (with the Association of Heads of Psychology Departments and Experimental Psychology Society) on Resources in Higher Education, the Student Members Group and PsyPAG. Lisa also conducts research on behalf of the Society and liaises with the research councils and other major funders of psychology to encourage and promote support for psychological science.

Practice

Christina Docchar is the Professional Practice Board administrator, advising and supporting the Board, its subcommittees and working parties. Christina also coordinates responses to consultations and ensures that links to a wide variety of external organisations are developed and maintained.

Subsystem services

Covering Branches, Divisions, Sections and Special Groups of the Society, the staff in subsystems are engaged in a range of administrative and clerical support. This includes advice and dissemination of information that forms the basis of service delivery in helping the subsystems achieve their aims and objectives.

Regional offices

Administrators work in each of the regional offices: Ann Kerr in Belfast, Sally Adams in Cardiff, and Anthony Sneider in Glasgow.

Psychological Testing Centre

Gail Steptoe-Warren leads this team of five, reporting to the Steering Committee on Test Standards. Since its inception in January 2000 the PTC has launched www.psychtesting.org.uk (boasting a mass of information about tests and testing), the Occupational Certificate in Test Administration Level A, and the Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing Level A.

as health, education, work and the management of societal change.

What do you get out of this role?

DA: I think the work of the Board is important and I welcome the opportunity to be a strong advocate for our discipline. We have young twin daughters and I underestimated how demanding both the professional and family roles could be! For example, chairs of Boards are also members of the Board of Trustees of the Society, which meets rather more frequently than is feasible for me to

attend. I am certainly grateful for the support of my family, and my colleagues in the Department of Psychology at Kent, and am conscious of the value of working in an organisation that does its best to operate in a family-friendly way.

The Board is a very positive and constructive group of people whose company I enjoy. I also enjoy being able to be involved at the interface between psychology and society at large. The role includes dialogue among my colleagues but also a continual orientation towards the external audience – whether these are

research funders, government ministers, the general public, or people from other academic disciplines. The role is also very much being part of a team. I work closely with my deputy chairs, Patrick Haggard and Judi Ellis, and an executive group within the Research Board. We are very lucky to be supported by the expertise and skills of Lisa Morrison Coulthard, our scientific officer. Lisa is fantastically efficient, works extremely well with all members of the Board, and generally ensures we stay on track with the tasks we take on.

Is the Professional Practice Board (PPB) the most influential board of the Society in terms of its input to decision-making bodies?

Ray Miller: The Board aims to promote, develop and enhance professional practice in applied psychology. We are increasingly attempting to play a more proactive role and providing psychological input at an earlier stage when draft government policy is being drawn up. For example, the Society has considerable input into many of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence guidelines produced by the Department of Health. Also, there has been important work from the Mental Health Working Party in terms of responding to the proposed reforms of the Mental Health Act.

But ultimately the PPB plays its part alongside the other boards of the Society, who also have key roles in relation to education, training, research and communications.

How does the Board decide what issues to comment on?

RM: This depends. The chair or board administrator sometimes identifies important issues or is contacted by members of the Board, Society or public with matters for consideration. These are then forwarded to the most appropriate party; sometimes the Board itself or one of its committees or working parties. The Board also works closely with the Society's parliamentary officer to keep informed of relevant activities.

The Board also seeks out government work that might be of relevance to psychology, such as response to consultations. These are then forwarded to Divisions, Special Groups or Sections for comment. At this stage, the judgement of

the subsystem comes into play and a response is collated if necessary.

How do you know what expertise exists in any area, and how do you get the appropriate people involved in your work?

RM: Expertise is usually sought through the Divisions, Special Groups or Sections of the Society.

What if a psychologist wants to be on the Board?

RM: All Divisions and the single Special Group (there is just one at the moment) have two representatives on the Board itself and other positions are co-opted or ex officio. There are, however, two AGM-elected positions for two years. These appointments are advertised in



Ray Miller

The Psychologist and on the Society's website.

And how did you get to be Chair of the Board?

RM: My interest in professional practice has been fostered through a long involvement with the Division of Clinical Psychology. Over the years I held a number of officer positions culminating in being Chair of the DCP in 2001. I have always believed that all branches of applied psychology have a significant contribution to make – the opportunity to serve in the role of PPB Chair seemed a logical way to further collaborative working.

What are your main worries for the future in psychology?

RM: The contribution of psychology is increasingly being recognised in legislation and the development of statutory and public services. This places an increasing demand on psychologists for both consultation and implementation. We need to ensure that the Society is developing the necessary mechanisms and resources to support a strong professional voice and to ensure that sufficient numbers of psychologists are being trained to meet expectations on service delivery.

How far are we from having a CPD system that is accepted by psychologists and employers as a whole?

RM: Following the vote by the Society membership in autumn 2000 to make CPD mandatory for all chartered psychologists holding practising certificates, work is under way on the development of a CPD system to implement this. Initial mapping exercises, consultation and a developmental pilot study have been used to revise the Society's CPD guidelines. An online system for planning and recording CPD is being developed, which we hope will be available for use by autumn 2004. The new system will operate Society-wide, with common requirements, planning and recording format, and monitoring processes. There will, however, be a provision for Divisions to give specific additional guidance for members as required.

The current drive towards statutory regulation and the government's push towards increased public accountability and the re-registration of professionals reinforce the necessity for a robust CPD scheme for the Society.

How far is the PPB the public conscience of the Society?

RM: The PPB aims to support and promote the highest standards of professional practice and is involved with Divisions in developing and maintaining guidance to members on practice and conduct. Close links are maintained with the Society's Ethics Committee, and we are very conscious of the need to set the professional contribution of psychology in a social and ethical context.

Is psychological testing an area that concerns the Board, ethically and practically?

RM: There are areas of concern. The first is that more is being asked of tests in the main areas of health, education and work. Some expectations will be met, while others will not. These expectations are generated by the public, politicians and other lay people, not by psychologists themselves who normally understand the strengths and limitations of tests and the need to combine test results with other types of evidence.

The second worry is that there has been a huge growth in testing – particularly occupational testing – in the last 20 years, which is not subject to any statutory controls. The BPS has been assiduous in developing standards for test use and test development and in encouraging the registration of test users. The more reputable test publishers have supported this, but it is still a fact that anyone can create and sell a psychological test. However, because of the Society's efforts, the test-using public are generally much better informed about the standards to be expected of an effective test.

The third area is the growth of testing on the internet, which brings with it a whole raft of difficult problems. For example, who has ultimate responsibility for the impact of a test session when a test has been created in the US, requested by a company in the UK, administered by a company in Holland and scored by a company in Norway? Also, how do you know who has actually taken a test if it is administered on the internet? The BPS and the APA both have groups examining these problems and a BSI standard (BS7988) has been recently produced dealing with educational testing on the internet.

What pleases you most about the current state of the profession?

RM: The increasing recognition of the contribution that psychology can make in every avenue of day-to-day life: education, work, leisure, health and well-being. We are genuinely 'bringing psychology to society'.

What are the most pressing issues for the PPB to begin dealing with next?

RM: The role of the Society itself will change with the advent of statutory regulation; this is beginning to be reflected in the activities of the PPB, which will need to evolve to take advantage of new opportunities. For example, as key disciplinary and investigatory functions move to the Health Professions Council, the Society can begin to consider options for helping potentially vulnerable members in terms of advice, prevention, support and rehabilitation if necessary. We believe that enhanced services for members will play a key role in enabling us to meet the Society's object of the promotion of their efficiency and usefulness by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge.

Press Committee

Media Training Days 2004

Monday 24 May 2004

Monday 27 September 2004

Monday 29 November 2004

All Media Training Days will be held at the Society's London office at 33 John Street.

The days will include:

- news writing
- snapshots of the media
- media releases
- interview techniques

For a registration form and further details contact:

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