

# A hive of activity

**W**ELL it wasn't quiet this time! After last year's London Conference I complained that the press office was too quiet. When I arrived in Glasgow on the Wednesday the press office was already buzzing with journalists interviewing speakers, answering mobiles and tapping into laptops; my colleagues on the Press Committee too busy to eat their sandwiches; and phones ringing. And so it went on for the next couple of days before the journalistic hordes packed their bags and left, having filed their stories for the weekend, leaving me in full control of a tomb-like press office for the Saturday.

The Press Committee had roped in the subsystems press officers, and with their help 26 press releases had been selected from the 400 or so papers, posters and symposia. Coverage in the dailies was achieved for 15 of these, with more coming through in the weekly or monthly magazines and specialist press.

The proportion of releases converted into stories decreased during the conference from 100 per cent of those embargoed for the Wednesday, to 77 per cent (Thursday), 40 per cent (Friday) and 33 per cent (Saturday). It seems inevitable that papers embargoed for the Saturday were less likely to attract coverage because the journalists had already been working hard to file stories for the Thursday, Friday and Saturday editions. My impression was that after three strenuous days they had run out of steam and wanted to go home. Moreover, Saturday presentations often don't feel like news by Monday, and the Sunday papers work to a different timescale.

Which stories actually get reported seems to reflect current and continuing preoccupations with health, education and the workplace, as well as a more varied selection influenced by a good headline or a photo-opportunity.

## Health issues

The greatest number of column inches was devoted to the effects of Ecstasy on prospective memory reported by Thomas Heffernan and colleagues from the University of Northumbria ('How Ecstasy turns lives upside down' – *The Herald* (Glasgow)); 'Escape into Ecstasy leaves gaps in reality' – *The Times*; 'Ecstasy users

are damaging their brains' – *The Daily Telegraph*; 'Regular Ecstasy users risk loss of memory' – *The Guardian*). Also covered was the role of anger or grumpiness in heart disease ('An angry man is first in line for a coronary' – *Daily Express*), and this provided a good photo-opportunity – Victor Meldrew and Emmerdale's Jack being two examples. Cancer too was a popular topic, with the results of relaxation treatment approaches being discussed (*The Independent*), as well as analysis of why men don't talk about their cancer in the same way as women (*The Guardian*). ADHD in adults was also mentioned in several papers.



## Education

Bullies as 'manipulators' or successful 'mindreaders' was widely covered (e.g. 'Mindless' bullies are really quite clever' – *Daily Express*) based on the work of Jon Sutton (formerly of Glasgow Caledonian University). Good coverage too for the effect of mental bullying reported by Mike Eslea (University of Central Lancaster). Advertising and children was discussed by Karen Pine and Avril Nash (University of Hertfordshire) and extensively reported (e.g. 'Dear Santa, is TV giving children a lesson in greed?' – *Daily Express*; 'Leave kids alone with TV today, pay later' – *The Times*). Shy children doing worse at school was picked up by the *Sunday Mirror*.

## Workplace

'Interviews for jobs are "biased by sex"' was the headline in *The Times*, while the *Daily Express* went for 'Women's raw deal

at interviews', both based on the paper presented by Joanne Silvester (City University, London). This was also covered in widely in other papers. On a slightly different agenda *The Guardian* reported the study of male and female employers in retail and banking carried out by Liz Stoloe (University College Worcester) and Janet Smithson (Manchester Metropolitan University). *The Guardian* ran with the headline 'Women macho about their jobs', *The Scotsman* 'Macho culture still has a stronghold in the office' and *The Herald* (Glasgow) with 'Workplace still a masculine domain'.

## More exposure

Psychologists are a diverse bunch and study a wide range of topics. Some of these grab the public imagination more than others, and some certainly lend themselves to media headlines. Much column interest in many of the dailies was devoted to the investigations of paranormal experiences, particularly ghosts and the healing powers (or not) of crystals. Documentary soaps are also a popular topic for media coverage and a paper investigating the effects on the participants of exposure in a 'docusoap' was always likely to receive coverage (*The Observer*, *Scotland on Sunday*).

A couple of stories that had a wide appeal but which hadn't been picked out for release gave us the headlines 'Defeatist England fans put victory down to luck' (*The Daily Telegraph*) and 'Perfumes hold key to the sweet smell of exam success' (*Daily Mail*). Which just goes to prove that the journalists do read the conference programme – even one as dense as the Centenary Conference – and don't rely solely on the press releases, although I think our hit rate of nearly 60 per cent for coverage of released papers is pretty impressive, and the cuttings are still coming through. Definitely a successful conference.

■ Dr Camilla Herbert is at the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit, Ticehurst House Hospital, East Sussex, and is a member of the Society's Press Committee. Co-ordinating Editor is Professor Pam Briggs.