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can you afford *not* to join?

See www.bps.org.uk/smg or e-mail anna.woolley@bps.org.uk



Ray Miller

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Psychology is a soft option? So some of the media coverage of A-level results over the summer would have had us believe. I wrote to a number of editors correcting their misconceptions. There is a mistaken notion that science is less rigorous when applied to mind and behaviour than when applied to subatomic particles. However even quarks, one of the basic building blocks of matter, turn out to have qualities of strangeness and charm. Cue for a song by Hawkwind?

This issue of *The Psychologist* is being sent to around 15,000 psychology undergraduates setting forth on their courses, and they will find that psychology is a rigorous discipline, based on scientific methodologies and practice. They will acquire a thorough knowledge of experimental design, measurement and statistical analysis in a wide range of biological and behavioural domains. Course content is complex and demanding and success requires a breadth of knowledge and skill. Psychology graduates will be among the brightest and most able students – something increasingly recognised by employers.

But psychology is much more than that. Not just a scientific experience but a philosophical one. Fundamental questions about human personality are explored. From the nature of thought and memory, through emotions, feelings, beliefs and attitudes and the basis of our actions and reactions: issues that stretch the mind and the imagination. Few fields of study can be more intellectually challenging. The student of psychology is an explorer in a strange yet familiar landscape; mapping out new features while finding novel ways of understanding even those aspects we take for granted. Do you detect a touch of envy as I remember again what that felt like 35 years ago? You bet!

The Society values its student members highly. The Student Members Group (SMG) (www.bps.org.uk/smg) is a subsystem run by students for students. It is just one of the ways in which undergraduate members can link in to the latest developments in the discipline and profession and influence their future. SMG has its own quarterly newsletter, *Psych-Talk*, and *The Psychologist* is free to all members, providing a monthly opportunity to gain an overview of the pioneering work being undertaken in the many disparate fields the subject covers, as well as news, updates and opinions. There is a special student section (see page 612) that provides information and advice on a range of pertinent issues.

A key aspect of the Society is member benefits.

For students that includes discounts on books and journals, reductions on fees for conferences and events and opportunities to network with other students and members. The Research Digest (www.researchdigest.org.uk) is a weekly electronic newsletter and archive providing summaries of current research with weblinks to relevant journals, plus syllabus advice. There is also the *Appointments Memorandum* in both hard copy and electronic (www.appmemo.co.uk) forms. This is the premier guide to job vacancies for psychology graduates.

Enough of the sales pitch! Whether you are a new student or a course organiser, the Society has something to offer. We look forward to welcoming many new members in the coming months.

Of course we are also interested in what happens to graduates. Only a small proportion will move on to jobs in the applied psychologies. Many of those will value and retain membership. They will remain part of a professional organisation disseminating the knowledge and practice of psychology, maintaining standards and influencing policy and strategy at every level from educational institutions to government legislation.

Many more will move into employment where their psychology background, while not a core aspect of their role, is nonetheless central to their ability to carry out their work efficiently and effectively. I hear regularly from people in such diverse fields as human relations, finance and engineering who tell me how their training in psychology prepared them well for insightful analysis, balanced evaluation and working with others to achieve personal or corporate goals. Often they retain their interest in psychology and its continued expansion of ideas and practices. The Society is looking urgently at how we can provide more support for those graduates and enable them to keep up their links with the discipline.

Maintaining links and continuous updating is important for all of us. I find it hard to stay out of bookshops and harder still to leave without a purchase. On a recent trip I couldn't resist the tongue in cheek challenge of Adam Cash's *Psychology for Dummies* (Wiley, 2002). I found it an interesting introduction with a light and readable style. One thing it conclusively demonstrated, however, is the sheer range and depth of the topic. Psychology's popularity, whether as a course of study or a source of interest for an informed public, has never been greater. But it is certainly not for 'Dummies' and no soft option at all!

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