



Pam Maras

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This is my eighth column as President; ninth if you count that I've written it twice! In my first effort I focused on all of the exciting new developments the Boards are considering, including plans for improving member services and new work to increase the Society's international relations profile – all things that relate to the Society's object, the promotion of psychology pure and applied. This will now be published in the December issue. Statutory regulation is looming large and is likely to become a matter of public consultation before the winter break, so I decided that it was important to update you, the membership.

In the last month the President's Negotiating Team, supported by Society staff, have spent many days on statutory regulation related matters. This has included discussions and correspondence with the Department of Health, attending the Health Professions Council Professional Liaison Group and responding to numerous consultations, as well as meetings with members of both the House of Commons and Lords.

We have made some headway in persuading the Department of Health to take on board our major concerns about public protection and standards, but many still remain. The government now intends to publish a draft public consultation, which may well be out by the time you read this. The consultation will invite stakeholders and individuals to comment and will include the draft legislation which will be laid before Parliament in order that, probably in the spring, psychology will be regulated by the Health Professions Council.

You may be asking yourself 'What's all the fuss about – why do I need to respond to this?' After all the Society has been lobbying for many years that our Code of Conduct, though well developed, does not offer enough public protection because it is voluntary and not backed by the law. Well, the reason it is in fact vital that you respond is that the proposed model of regulation is likely to offer the public less protection than our own voluntary system (with the exception of it being legally binding) and has the potential to unduly criminalise those who don't fit the 'boxes' of the regulator.

The main problems are that:

- there is a fundamental lack of understanding about the complexity and diversity of psychology underlying all discussions and subsequently proposed legislation;
- the Department of Health seems committed to a type of regulation that removes the expertise of the professional organisations representing psychology; and

- the focus of the regulation, despite our protestations, is almost entirely on health and in many cases the National Health Service.

It has been suggested by the Department of Health that our concerns about their proposals for statutory regulation are just about the Society protecting its own self-interest. This is nonsense. If we were protecting our own, why on earth would we have been seeking statutory regulation independent of the Society for so many years? Indeed our own regulatory processes predominately comprise non-psychologists and we have recently undergone a statute change to increase the level of independence from the Society at the investigatory stage.

As a responsible organisation, and despite our concerns, we remain in negotiations with the Department of Health and are represented on the Health Professions Council Professional Liaison Group. Similarly, as the main professional body for British psychology representing over 45,000 people, we have responded to all government consultations. But, I have to tell you, our responses have largely been ignored.

The regulation of psychology will be carried out through the laying of secondary legislation, which merely involves placing before Parliament a statutory instrument that must be voted on within 40 days. There is no opportunity for debate and statutory instruments are rarely challenged in either House. That is why it is essential that all of us respond to the prior consultation as individuals and as a Society.

On p.658 of this issue of *The Psychologist*, Christian Jarrett celebrates the 100th edition of the Society's very successful Research Digest service (www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog) by asking a number of psychologists to speculate on the most important experiment that has never been done. Let's hope that the Department of Health listens to the public (who have a right to proper protection) and the psychology community and doesn't make the statutory regulation of psychology the most disastrous experiment that was ever done.

We will post information on how you can contribute on the President's briefing at www.bps.org.uk/statreg as matters unfold. I am also happy to continue to receive any comments or questions; indeed, this could lead to a published Q+A in a forthcoming edition of *The Psychologist*.

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