

# How to get involved

*Is there an issue which you would like the Society to consider, or would you like to get more involved in the Society yourself? In this article, Jackie Sherman explains what to do.*

**T**HE Society is a democratic organization run by and for the members. This is a time-consuming business for the volunteers who sit on the Society's many working parties, groups, committees and boards. At the moment, around 1,200 members are involved in this way.

All of these various pieces of the jigsaw operate only with the agreement of you, the members, and at any time you can question, criticize or applaud the action taken and policies made in your name. The answers to the following questions explain how you can make an impact.

**Q:** How do I raise an issue relating to any aspect of psychology for consideration by the Society?

**A:** Write to or e-mail the Honorary General Secretary, c/o the Society's office, outlining the issue you wish to raise. That issue may have already been considered and it may even be one on which the Society has a clear agreed policy. If so, a member of staff will provide a factual reply. Otherwise, your letter will be directed to the appropriate officer or committee and, if the latter, it will often be placed directly onto the committee's agenda.

**Q:** Is the Honorary General Secretary the only person to whom I should address letters to the Society?

**A:** No. If you already know the group which would be concerned with your particular issue, then write directly to the Secretary of that group via the Society's office. At busy times you may not get an immediate reply, especially if your letter has been forwarded to an honorary officer, but all letters will be considered carefully. Innovative ideas in letters to *The Psychologist* are also frequently considered by the Society's committees.

**Q:** If I am not satisfied with the reply, or if I disagree with the present actions and policies of the Society, what do I do?

**A:** Write again. Your views, like those of all members, are important, even if in the end they are not accepted. Statute 17 provides every voting member with the right to raise a resolution for debate at an Annual General Meeting, provided one per cent of the other members are prepared to support the motion. However, this is normally unnecessary since all a member needs to do is raise an issue in a letter and the matter will be considered, potentially by Council or one of the Boards (Professional Affairs Board,

Scientific Affairs Board or Membership and Qualifications Board). Also remember that at the Society's Annual General Meeting you can question the Society's Annual Report and get a direct response from the Chair of the appropriate committee.

**Q:** If I want to become more involved, how can I join an appropriate committee and influence policy-making?

**A:** Members can join a committee by one of three methods: direct election, nomination as a representative of a subsystem or by invitation, or by being a specialist in a particular area of psychology. (The Society reimburses expenses incurred in attending committee meetings, but does not pay for the time involved.)

● Direct elections are used to fill only a few places on Council and the



*The Society's office in Leicester*

Boards, but any voting member of the Society can stand. Of course, the Society's senior officers are also elected (President Elect, Honorary General Secretary, Deputy President and Honorary Treasurer). Usually, elections for officers take place each year. In the past, the number of spontaneous nominations for these senior offices has not been good, which has led to the Council putting forward its own nominees to ensure that at least one person is nominated for each senior post. However, recently more individuals have agreed to stand for office. If you would like to stand, write to the Honorary General Secretary indicating your area of interest.

- Most members who serve on Council and the Boards have gained their places by being selected as a representative of one of the subsystems. So initially you should stand for election to the committee of the Division, Section, Branch or Special Group of which you are a member. There are few enough willing volunteers with the time to involve themselves in Society work, and the talents of a volunteer will soon be recognized.
- If you have an established reputation as an expert in a particular area of psychology, then you should write to the Chair of the relevant functional

committee (see box), c/o the Society, stating your area of expertise and that you are interested in serving. Members of these committees are always on the lookout for others with relevant expertise and the willingness to become involved, so some people are approached directly. Equally, you can let someone already on a committee know that you are interested. Increasingly, when the Society is proposing a new initiative, calls for volunteers are published in *The Psychologist*.

**Q:** *But I don't really want to get that involved in the day-to-day running of the Society; it is just that I have this strong interest in the Society doing something about such-and-such. Can't the Society deal with this issue?*

**A:** Although you can write, raise questions or resolutions and thereby keep up pressure on the Society for action, the harsh reality is that, unless you are prepared to become involved, the issue may well remain untackled. The Society's effectiveness depends almost entirely on the energies of volunteers drawn from the membership.

Thus the message is: keep writing to the Society and be prepared to become involved yourself in tackling the issue you are raising. You could also consider

### Society committees

The Society has three main types of committee:

- **Subsystem committees** — represent groups within the Society. These committees choose one or sometimes two of their number to serve on a representative committee.
- **Representative committees** (Council and the Boards) — represent the whole membership and are made up of representatives of all the various subsystems, plus a few elected members. These committees appoint functional committees.
- **Functional committees** — fulfil specialized tasks, e.g. the Steering Committee on Test Standards and the Books and Special Projects Group.

writing a letter to *The Psychologist* on the subject.

*This article is based on a leaflet by Colin Newman, Executive Secretary, entitled 'The Society, its structure — a guide', which is available on request.*

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