

# Unity through diversity: An achievable goal

THE Society has a complex structure. It has survived for almost 100 years, reacting to expansion and gaining accretions without radical change to its fundamental structure. With more than 30,000 members, it has over 100 committees, with 1200 or so members serving on them, and, at the last count, 37 different grades of membership.

As the membership has grown and the discipline has diversified, so have subsystems. There are now 14 scientific Sections and nine professional Divisions and Special Groups, admittedly still a small number compared with the 52 Divisions of the American Psychological Association (APA), which are not separated into further subgroups along the lines of our own Sections and Divisions.

This diversification follows the increasing specialisation and professionalisation of the discipline, and the expansion is to be welcomed as a sign of its health and success. Nevertheless,



*In her 1999 Presidential Address, INGRID LUNT outlined her belief in the Society's ability to draw strength from the many facets of the discipline of psychology.*

there are two problems for the Society that might be addressed.

The first is our separation into Sections and Divisions, as though scientific interests were separable from professional concerns, and as though staff in universities had no contact with professional psychologists in practice. This separation needs to be addressed, and might be reduced by renaming all subgroups 'Sections' and supporting them as usually the most significant scientific and professional forums for members.

A second problem is that increased specialisation continues to lead to yet

further separate education and training routes and membership categories, with no rationalisation or coherence in terms of commonalities — a problem both in principle and in practice.

The history of the Society demonstrates this growing diversity and differentiation. On 24 October 1901, this learned society was formed by 10 scientists; 1919 saw the formation of the first three Sections — medical, educational and industrial — demonstrating that, from an early stage, applied psychology had a home there. The Society has grown and diversified since then.

When the Society was founded, its aim was to 'advance scientific psychological research and to further the co-operation of investigators in the different branches of psychology' (Knight, 1954). Its major object today, according to the Charter of Incorporation, is 'to promote the advancement and diffusion of a knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of Members of the Society by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge'. The Society makes no explicit commitment to 'a profession', nor to 'human welfare'.

The APA began life in 1892, also with the object of 'the advancement of psychology as a science'. This sufficed until 1943. Faced with a potential crisis that year, the APA restructured and in 1945 became explicitly both a learned society and a professional body. The phrases 'and as a profession' and, significantly, 'and as a means of promoting human welfare' were added to its objects.

These three prongs — science, profession and human welfare — provide a sharp focus for the APA's three major areas

This Address was given at the Society's Annual Conference in Belfast in April. Ingrid Lunt began by expressing the hope that its title would prove appropriate in relation to the situation in Northern Ireland, and that 'unity through diversity' may also be achieved there.

The main focus of the address was on the Society, rather than on the discipline of psychology. As Ingrid Lunt explained, the Society is poised on the threshold of both the new century and its own centenary. This, she felt, was a crucial moment in the Society's history.

With its burgeoning membership, and almost 100 staff, the Society is no longer a small organisation. More widely, there are about 30,000 students taking A-level psychology this year, and almost 10,000 are due to graduate with psychology degrees. Such growth has been particularly marked in the last 15 years.

This expansion is mirrored by changes of another kind. As a science and as a

profession, psychology is becoming increasingly specialised and differentiated. Rapid growth coupled with increased specialisation poses a major challenge for the Society as the body to unite psychology and psychologists in the UK.

At Belfast, Ingrid Lunt set out her vision of how, against a background of change in society as a whole, the challenge of accommodating plurality within a fast-growing organisation can be met — of how the Society can achieve unity through diversity.

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*Requests for reprints should be addressed to:*

Dr Ingrid Lunt  
Institute of Education  
University of London  
20 Bedford Way  
London WC1H 0AL

of activity. Similarly, the Australian Psychological Society (APS), founded in 1966 out of the Australian Branch of The British Psychological Society, has as the first of its 30 objects: 'to advance the scientific study and professional practice of psychology and enhance the contribution of psychology to the promotion of the public welfare by encouraging the development of all branches of psychology' (APS Memorandum of Association, section 2). These statements provide an explicit focus and commitment.

As is well known, for its first 50 years, the Society was predominantly a scientific society; after the Second World War and the enormous expansion of practitioner psychology, particularly in the National Health Service and in local education authorities, it has been under increasing pressure to be a professional body. The combination of values, aspirations, concerns and priorities of a learned society with those of a professional body pose major challenges, particularly in the context of exponential growth and diversification.

### The Society's self-analysis

In 1988, a Scientific Affairs Board working party presented an excellent report on the future of the psychological sciences. This report highlighted the diversity of the discipline, saying that 'psychology is at one and the same time a scientific, social, nomothetic, idiographic, arts, and applied discipline' (The British Psychological Society, 1988, para 4.15), and stating that 'diversity is a sign of intellectual strength' (ibid., para 13.13.4).

However, the report suggested that some aspects of the Society's organisational arrangements might be impeding 'cross fertilisation'. This suggestion was repeated in 1991 by a task force of the Professional Affairs Board set up to consider future developments in psychology. Its report stated that 'it is necessary to find a way of functioning that maximises commonality of interests and avoids exacerbating divisions' (The British Psychological Society, 1991, p.2).

Finally, in 1997, the Council Working Party on the Development of Psychology as a Profession also warned of the dangers of the academic/practitioner split, potentially exacerbated by the Society's structures (The British Psychological Society, 1997, para 4.19). The Working Party articulated a vision of a unified profession in which '[t]he professional practice of psychology will be informed and enhanced by ... research and scholarship. ... [And] research

will have become more dynamic, with a strong focus on topics of direct relevance to practitioners ...' (ibid., para 7.5).

The statement of vision continued: 'The Society will have given psychology a coherence in the public arena through successfully asserting a legitimate claim that psychology is both a pure science and a policy science.' (ibid., para 7.6.) This statement coincided with the Society's first strategic plan in 1997, in which it attempted to operationalise the vision and to articulate its goals in relation to the objects of the Society.

Thus the Society itself has clearly identified some of the potential problems of its success and expansion. It needs to approach its next 100 years with structures to provide the flexibility and permeability to foster unity through diversity, and to respect the pluralism which is the result of success and expansion.

traditions later formed a coalition. This enabled universities to gain students (psychology is practical and therefore useful) and practitioners to gain status (psychology is scientific and therefore respectable). Though, as he put it, 'conflicts and tensions indicate a continuing polarisation between basic and applied psychology' (p.23).

Fraser Watts, one of my predecessors as President, was concerned that 'psychology does not really hang together as a coherent enterprise' (Watts, 1992, p.489). He identified three 'fault lines' which he believed threatened to split psychology. These spanned the substantive subject matter of psychology, which ranges from biology to sociology, the increasingly diverse methods used by psychologists and the relationship between basic research and professional application.

Watts concluded that we cannot afford

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The enormous expansion of practitioner psychology, particularly in the NHS established under Nye Bevan, increased pressure on the Society to be a professional body

However, this diversity and pluralism is an intrinsic feature of the discipline itself, which not only embraces diverse subfields, but also contains major fault lines (Watts, 1992) that could pose a threat to unity.

The discipline of psychology Schönpluf (1992) takes a historical perspective and suggests that, from the start, psychology encompassed two entirely separate traditions in Western thought: the pragmatic — embraced by applied psychology, and concerned with utility; and the ontological — embraced by basic psychology, and concerned with truth.

According to Schönpluf, these two

to do without a coherent discipline of psychology. Others have welcomed the increasing pluralism created by indigenous psychologies (Rosenzweig, 1992; Lunt, 1998; Wilpert, 1998).

Finally, Lévy-Leboyer (1992) warned that 'if psychology is no longer seen as having a clear identity, firmly anchored in basic scientific and ethical principles, it will be virtually impossible to struggle successfully against charlatanism at a time when the proliferation of social needs is encouraging its spread' (p.277).

It is important that, as a Society, we are aware of the potential depth of these historical, disciplinary and epistemological



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fault lines, and that we develop structures to maximise integrity and the strength of this diversity. This would provide the context for the growing specialisation and diversification of psychology, and for the pressure for regionalisation yet globalisation that faces the Society today.

It is a well-rehearsed belief that psychology as a discipline started with the formation of Wundt's experimental laboratory in Leipzig in 1879. What is perhaps less well known is the development even at that time of two distinct approaches: on the one hand, laboratory-based experiments for relatively simple psychological processes — experimental psychology; on the other hand, naturalistic observation for processes that were influenced by social and cultural factors — cultural psychology. This distinction reflects psychology's dual origins in philosophy and physiology; it may in its modern version replicate the cultural divide of the sciences versus the humanities.

Psychology in anglophone countries became dominated early on by the paradigm of natural science, in a quest to establish the discipline as a 'true' science. Indeed, the first 50 years of this century were dominated mainly by what some have seen as an overzealous attachment to a positivist paradigm (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 1995a, b; Shotter, 1975), through which

psychology attempted to establish itself as a respectable science, emulating the methods and the knowledge claims of the natural sciences in preference to the semiotic or the hermeneutic sciences.

Almost another 50 years later, it may be a sign of 'discipline maturity' to accept that psychology straddles the natural and semiotic sciences, and draws some of its strength and richness from this dual identity.

Part of this richness derives from a number of polarisations and divergences. These include methodological, epistemological, ontological and professional differences which, as mentioned earlier, might at times appear to threaten the integrity of the discipline. Indeed, with its interface with biological and natural sciences on the one side, and social and humanistic sciences on the other, psychology provides the opportunity for multi-faceted exploration of human functioning.

I referred earlier to two cultures of psychology: one a mechanistic science, based on a positivist paradigm seeking general laws of behaviour; the other a hermeneutic science, based on an interpretivist paradigm. Some have contrasted the 'old paradigm', seen as mechanistic and reductionist and Anglo-Saxon in origin, with the 'new paradigm', based on subjectivity and human agency,

originating with the hermeneutic traditions of continental Europe (see Smith *et al.*, 1995b).

Indeed, there are those who suggest that 'psychology's long-standing inferiority complex in relation to the natural sciences' (Smail, 1970) is responsible for its neglect of the historical and social context of its development, while others refer to 'the misplaced scientism of the natural sciences model' (van Langenhove, 1995).

Burrell and Morgan (1979) have contrasted the 'subjectivist approach' with the 'objectivist approach', the former based on a nominalist ontology, an anti-positivist epistemology, a voluntarist view of human nature and an idiographic methodology; while the latter is based on a realist ontology, a positivist epistemology, a determinist view of human nature and a nomothetic methodology.

These polarisations capture some of the tensions in psychology. Within much of the discipline, these continua are oppositional, and provide justification for competition and mutual mistrust between 'old' and 'new' psychology and 'old' and 'new' paradigms. We need to be aware of the limits and possibilities both of quantification and of interpretation, combining the strengths of diverse paradigms to maximise constructive interchange and collaborative creativity.

### Some challenges

Our codes of ethics make substantial claims — those of public interest and of a base in 'science'. The assumption is made that what psychologists do as researchers, clinicians, teachers, supervisors or consultants is basically benign, since it is based in 'science'.

*Meaningful applications of psychology must be based on a sound scientific foundation. Consequently, ethical applications of psychological principles to social problems must await the development of relevant theory which has been tested by empirical research.* (Spielberger, 1984, p.xi.)

But as we saw earlier, psychological science has different manifestations with different ideologies, epistemologies and value systems. And as another of my predecessors, Geoff Lindsay, pointed out in his own Presidential Address (Lindsay, 1995), psychology does not operate in a value-free social vacuum.

Ethical codes claim that psychologists

work for the benefit of humanity. For example, the code of ethical principles for Scandinavian psychologists starts with: 'Psychologists contribute to the betterment of people's living conditions and quality of life by developing and making known psychological knowledge and by the practical use of this knowledge.' And the code of the Netherlands Psychological Association (NIP) states: 'The unwavering standpoint on which the NIP wishes to place itself is that of respect for the human being.'

The codes claim also that psychologists' practice is based in science, arguably a unifying aspect of professional practice. For example, the code of the APA begins: 'Psychologists work to develop a valid and reliable body of scientific knowledge based on research ...', while the Austrian code states: 'The psychologist strives at all times to use the methods that are of the highest standard according to the latest scientific developments.'

These are major and worthy aspirations, which may be challenged by the realities of practice. Dawes (1994), for example, suggests that professional psychologists have abandoned their commitment to research-based knowledge, in favour of what he calls 'trained clinical intuition'. Others suggest that positivistic science provides an inappropriate paradigm for clinical work (e.g. Pilgrim & Teacher, 1992).

The Society's own commitment to the competence of psychologists' practice enables complaints to be brought against incompetent practice, but cannot provide an arbitration between rival paradigms. However, this does highlight some of the tensions in the discipline and the profession, and the importance for the Society both of integrating the scientific and the professional, the experimental and the hermeneutic, the biological and the cultural, and of tolerating the co-existence of multiple paradigms.

What is the Society doing in this area? First, it has set up a task group to be chaired by the incoming President, to review the investigatory and disciplinary procedures. Second, it is developing a cautious interest in the currently politically fashionable area of evidence-based practice, which we hope will integrate scientific evidence with clinical, and perhaps educational and human resource, outcomes. Thirdly, it continually seeks to enhance its quality assurance procedures for the recognition of psychology degrees and professional qualifications. Finally, it

continues its efforts towards bringing about the statutory registration of psychologists.

### The Society and the future

The Society cannot be complacent about its survival, virtually intact, as a national psychology organisation for almost 100 years. It needs to be vigilant and active in its role in promoting unity through diversity.

I am apparently not alone as President in this commitment, as Jack Tizard (who himself served as President from 1975 to 1976) pointed out when he said that '[a] belief in the interdependence of scientific and professional psychology was expressed by many of our most illustrious predecessors. ... Among those who saw psychology as a rounded, unified discipline were C.S. Myers, the first President of the Psychological Society [as it then was] ...' (Tizard, 1976, p.225).

Our 14 Sections reflect the blossoming of subfields. Yet it is only relatively recently that the Society has admitted subfields with less traditional methodologies, epistemologies and subject matter into its structure. This is a crucial development, and should be welcomed and encouraged in order that the Society may truly represent, value and embrace the full diversity of the discipline, and the separate and interrelated contributions of its multiple subfields.

The proliferation of professional Divisions clearly reflects another aspect of the discipline, the increasing specialisation and fragmentation of its professional practice. This brings not only the benefits of expanding roles for psychologists in more fields of application, and enhanced training to support these, but also the disadvantages of parochialism, competition and potential rivalry between professional subdivisions.

Within the present structure of the Society, the Boards play a crucial role in providing the forum for the scientific and professional subfields to co-operate and communicate. Nevertheless, it is puzzling that the Sections and Divisions remain separate, and that Divisions continue to be concerned with entry to the profession, and with specialist requirements of training.

An alternative model creates Divisions as interest groups, with nothing to do with qualifications or eligibility for membership. This would, arguably, encourage practitioners and scientists to share and develop common interests. Indeed, it may be a moral as well as a practical difficulty to separate the scientific discipline

(universities and academics) from its professional training and practice (the practitioners who are trained by the universities).

What kind of an organisation is the Society and what kind of an organisation does it wish to be in the future?

This year the Society formed Directorates, with the intention of increasing its effectiveness, its initiative and its strategic planning and implementation. At present, there are seven Directorates to cover the main areas of activity. It is hoped that the changes initiated in the past year will prepare the Society to change, to adapt and to meet the challenge of the future with increased efficiency, transparency and democracy.

### Some concluding propositions

I start with some of the realities of the world we live in.

- We live in a world characterised by: unpredictability and change, major changes in work and employment, changes in values, growing internationalisation and globalisation, the breakdown of familiar rules and patterns. We need to ensure that the Society keeps up with, and even anticipates, some of the changes, and that its own structure is sufficiently flexible, transparent and robust to adapt to change.
- We are encouraged to live in a 'learning society' and much has been written about 'learning organisations'. We need to make sure that we learn both from our own experience and from other organisations, that as an organisation we are open to learning and change, and that the Society can become a 'learning organisation'.
- We live in a world where the professions are under increased scrutiny, where science and expertise cannot assume their hegemony, where organisations such as our own are required to be more accountable, responsible and transparent. We need to be politically aware and 'intelligent', to communicate and co-operate with other organisations, and to develop a 'modern' professionalism.
- Psychology's growth and popularity means increasing differentiation and specialisation, and new fields of research, application and practice. Tony Gale, the Society's Honorary General Secretary, has referred to psychology's 'time bomb' waiting to explode. The Society needs to be strategic when

planning for and reacting to such expansion that shows no signs of reducing.

What does this mean for us as psychologists and as members of the Society?

The Society is in a strong position, and should develop from this. It needs to be flexible and integrative in its view of psychology, to be receptive to a wide range of approaches and applications, and to be confident that the diversity of the science and its practice provides a strength and a flexibility.

The Society should explicitly reaffirm its commitment to unity, through acknowledging and encouraging its diverse groups and interests; further, it needs to examine the implications of this affirmation. It will need to be vigilant, reflexive, purposeful and 'intelligent' in its own development and organisation over the next decade and more.

I also believe that as psychologists we should be able to apply our understanding of groups, families, systems and organisations to our own organisation and its functioning.

As members of the Society, we have a responsibility to ensure that the Society is flexible and receptive to new demands for knowledge and skill, is able to respond to new fields of research and application, and can take a proactive stance in supporting universities in their task of educating the future generations of psychologists.

CHRIS CHAFFRON

Is psychology's 'time bomb' waiting to explode?

It is essential that we make efforts to communicate with psychologists from different subfields and to capitalise on collaboration between specialisms within the discipline and with other disciplines. There continues to be a need to ensure that scientists and practitioners inform each other's work in a mutually productive partnership. The Society's structures should encourage this, to help avoid one of the many splits that at times may appear to threaten our discipline.

We need to emphasise, but not overemphasise, the scientific and ethical

base to practice. We need to unite in our commitment to 'public interest or good' or 'human welfare'. We need to acknowledge that science does not have to be value-neutral and that we do have an overriding commitment to use our science and our professional activities for human benefit or welfare, as articulated in the APA and APS objects quoted above.

Finally, we need to have the confidence to celebrate our diversity while valuing the unity of the discipline, in order to maximise and integrate the contributions of our many specialisms to human and social well-being.

When I delivered this Address, I began with a quote: 'In my Father's house are many mansions.' I used the analogy to refer to subfields of psychology. I end by reminding colleagues that we are a flourishing Society with a flourishing discipline; and in our house there are many mansions, with room for many more.

In concluding, I make a plea for tolerance of diversity. For us as a discipline to respect the diversity of epistemologies, methodologies, cultures and modes of application, and to discover how to be true to our own humanity while retaining a coherent account of our science. And for us as an organisation to ensure that our diverse interest groups have a welcome and well-resourced 'home', and to strive to fulfil the sometimes disparate functions of 'learned society', 'professional organisation', 'disciplinary body' and 'membership organisation' in as coherent and complementary a manner as possible, developing a constructive and productive coexistence, cohabitation and symbiosis.

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