



## TO THE EDITOR...

Letters should be marked clearly 'Letter for publication in *The Psychologist*' and addressed to the editor at the Society office in Leicester. Please send by e-mail if possible: [psychologist@bps.org.uk](mailto:psychologist@bps.org.uk) (include a postal address). Letters over 500 words are less likely

to be published. The editor reserves the right to edit, shorten or publish extracts from letters. If major editing is necessary, this will be indicated. Space does not permit the publication of every letter received. Letters to the editor are not normally acknowledged.

## Reporting disciplinary cases

**C**OMPLAINTS against BPS members are, rightly, taken very seriously, and much careful thought is given to disciplinary procedures and hearings. However, I wonder if others share my disquiet at the disciplinary notice regarding Andrew Walton (*The Psychologist*, July 2002). I must state immediately that I do not know Mr Walton, have never met or corresponded with him, and have no information about his behaviour other than what was reported in the notice.

The report states that the psychologist was found guilty of several instances of professional misconduct. The first is that he 'misrepresented his qualifications and professional status by including non-academic qualifications... in his advertising materials'. I find this curious (and alarming). Is there an implied disapproval of therapeutic trainings not linked to universities? If a psychologist has a non-academic qualification – for example, from a psychotherapy training not linked to an academic establishment – is it wrong to mention it on a business card or website?

The second instance of misconduct is that the psychologist 'failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries by disclosing personal information about himself... offering [his client] tea and biscuits and a light snack... suggesting a venue for a pub quiz...'. Whilst I would not do such things myself, this is because I am a psychoanalyst; there is a very



Sympathy – but no tea

clear rationale why a strict therapeutic frame and the avoidance of self-disclosure are important when working from a psychoanalytic perspective. I am not aware of a similar rationale from other clinical perspectives (such as behaviour therapy). Indeed I know that many clinical psychologists consider that some degree of self-disclosure and general friendly supportive chat with patients is helpful. In any other profession would it necessarily be considered unethical for a practitioner to chat with a client about his or her life over tea and biscuits?

The third instance of misconduct consists of a failure to preserve confidentiality by conveying information about the complainant to his client's employer without her permission. The report does not indicate the circumstances, but it is clearly possible for breaches of confidentiality to occur as a result of a well-intentioned misjudgement.

Lastly, the psychologist

is said to have shown 'lack of regard for the complainant's well-being by writing an intimidatory and threatening e-mail to her solicitors following their letter reminding him of his obligation to maintain confidentiality'. This raises a dilemma. Whilst one would wish to maintain concern for a former client's well-being, might there not be some legitimate constraints on this? Is a psychologist not entitled to put up a defence, perhaps a robust one, in a letter to a solicitor? Note that the psychologist is reported to have written to the solicitors, not to the complainant directly.

The Ethics Committee considered this case serious enough for a special comment, in which the psychologist's behaviour is described as 'quite an extreme response'. However, the report fails to make clear quite what the psychologist has done that is in essence unethical, as opposed to misjudged.

A disciplinary hearing of the

BPS is a serious business – a quasi court sitting, in which the Society employs a prosecuting barrister to state the case against the respondent in forceful terms. Since this is done on behalf of members, I think it is right that disciplinary procedures and decisions be open to scrutiny. Perhaps a note accompanying disciplinary notices in *The Psychologist* could say that a full report is available on request. Without this, one must expect the sort of worries and possible misinterpretations expressed in this letter.

**Phil Mollon**  
Mental Health Unit  
Lister Hospital  
Stevenage

**READ** with interest and a little alarm the disciplinary notice (July 2002) describing the expulsion of Andrew Walton from the Society. Among the charges made against him it was alleged that he had disclosed personal information about himself to a client, provided her with tea, biscuits and a light snack, and arranged for her to accompany him to a social event. It was also said that he had failed to undertake regular supervision.

When I was seeing a severely depressed client a few years ago, who had virtually stopped eating and was turning to skin and bone before my eyes, I resorted to buying ready meals for her when I did my own shopping. She then paid for these at the end of the session and took them home to put in the microwave. Unorthodox as this might

seem, she started eating again and eventually recovered her normal body weight. I agreed to accompany another client, at her urgent request, to the recently discovered grave of her long-lost and greatly beloved foster father. The agreement was enough: she actually went on her own.

I have a current client who is chronically late for appointments, and I mean very late. When she asked for help in changing this behaviour, we agreed that if she arrives on time I will make her a cup of coffee. If she's late I won't. I make coffee most weeks now. I selectively disclose personal information if I think it will assist the therapeutic process. I also sometimes doubt the value of regular supervision as a compulsory requirement for experienced practitioners, having found it at times to be expensive, time-consuming and not very helpful.

I wonder whether all this makes me a candidate for expulsion from the Society too.

**Stephen Munt**

*Chair-Elect, Division of Counselling Psychology School of Psychology & Counselling University of Surrey Roehampton*

**T**EA and biscuits', eh? 'Pub quiz!' The plot thickens. Threatening a lawyer – Respec'!

There was a proven case of serious betrayal of confidence in the disciplinary case reported in the July issue. This may or may not have warranted the expulsion of the member concerned. But why, yet again, does the BPS provide this sub-tabloid spectacle? This article not only constituted the utter humiliation of someone who may well be a rather decent, useful person in the normal run of things, but also degrades the readership.

I have come across diverse acts of dishonesty (often dressed up as professionalism) in my contacts with psychologists, but the general focus for official opprobrium appears to be sex, drugs and lack of social graces.

Can we not have either 'Fred Bloggs was expelled', perhaps with a list of other people every few months – end of story – or, if you are truly trying to teach ethics to your readership, anonymous case studies. This would be far better than this rather tasteless and ludicrous literary hobby.

**Cole Davis**

*154 Cheviot Gardens London NW2*

**Dr Louis Kramer, Chair of the Disciplinary Board, replies:**

*The Disciplinary Board appoints disciplinary committees to consider cases on their merits taking into account the specific context in which the alleged misconduct has occurred. While it may well be that in some contexts the disclosure of personal information or the provision of hospitality and supportive chat might assist the therapeutic process, the committee was satisfied that this did not apply in the Walton case and that as a result he had blurred professional and personal boundaries to an unacceptable degree.*

*The Society's Royal Charter requires disciplinary committees to publish the names of those disciplined, and since October 2000 disciplinary hearings have been open to the press and public. The Disciplinary Board is keen that the details of cases that proceed to hearings are reported as openly as possible so that members are made aware of circumstances in which certain types of conduct might be found to be unprofessional. The Board is also keen that members should be aware of the ethical lessons that might be learned from such cases, and to this end disciplinary notices include comments from the Ethics Committee where relevant.*

*The Disciplinary Board is, however, continually reviewing the way in which it reports matters and welcomes the views that have been expressed. It will take them into account when considering improvements for the future.*



**I** READ with great interest Jennie Murray's letter 'Dyslexia – Children still lost in the maze' (July 2002), the latest contribution to the fascinating debate started by Peter Faire's article (March 2002). As an educational psychologist with a keen interest in this area I felt compelled to respond in defence both of the DECP working party definition of dyslexia and of educational psychologists' practice.

The argument that the definition militates against early identification would have weight if early identification were necessary to prevent failure – it is not. Good-quality research-based teaching of reading and spelling from an early age is the most important factor in prevention of failure. It is towards this I feel our energy should be directed. Models of 'diagnosis', 'treatment' and of 'early identification improving prognosis' are medical ones, inappropriate in relation to issues of teaching and learning. Jennie notes that the definition makes no reference to aetiology – this is, as I see it, a deliberate omission for two reasons. First, because there is an absence of agreement about the evidence, in relation to any organic root cause. Second, because it is an attempt to provide a functional, working definition that demystifies dyslexia by focusing on key areas of difficulty.

I appreciate the view that educational psychologists have avoided answering the question 'Does this young person have dyslexia or not?' We have

indeed as a profession been guilty of this – and with good reason. In the past the plethora of definitions and of pseudo-medical notions surrounding dyslexia (some scientific, some distinctly less so) has made it an impossible question to answer. Giving a simple yes or no would have been frankly unprofessional – denying the complexities and controversies implicit in the question. The new simpler definition does enable a more direct response, and I have found that parents welcome this greater clarity.

I couldn't agree more with Jennie's point that good multisensory teaching and dyslexia-friendly classrooms never caused any damage – indeed I believe they are highly beneficial for all pupils, and I would like to see schools develop in these areas. I am intrigued to know what 'untold damage' failure to diagnose might cause. Damage is, surely, more likely to result when time, money and energy are spent on lengthy assessment procedures (often of dubious validity) to 'diagnose' children, thus directing resources away from effective intervention.

I strongly believe that children with severe and persistent reading and spelling difficulties need our help. Identifying areas of need, building self-confidence and providing effective literacy teaching are vital, but should not be reserved exclusively for those with a 'diagnosis' – they are the rights of all children.

**Julie Cozens**  
*4 Wycliffe Road Northampton*

## Gale and the winds of change

**WELCOME** Tony Gale's article on accreditation ('A stranglehold on the development of psychology?', July 2002) as a contribution to the debate about the way in which the Society relates to the field of psychology. However he seems too willing to accept the ways in which 'quality assurance' in psychology is being taken over by government agencies.

The aims of governments are not those of academia. Even if we agree with Tony Gale's main argument about the Society's Graduate Qualifications Accreditation Committee (GQAC), there is no necessary reason to think that these politically driven initiatives will improve matters. If we are worried about 'inflexibility' and 'straitjackets', I would suggest that benchmarking is likely to be far more restrictive than ever GQAC was. Moreover,

benchmarking is inherently reductionist. The model of higher education it appears to be based on assumes that learning, understanding, reasoning, and so on, are 'skills', like bicycle riding, that can somehow be broken down into bits and taught. There is no recognition of the deep disagreements amongst educationists and psychologists as to the validity of such models.

Tony Gale defends the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as protecting the interests of students, parents and taxpayers. No mention here of the widespread academic agreement that QAA visits have been enormously wasteful of time, effort and material, whilst failing to uncover any serious shortcomings. I don't think any psychology department has got less than 19 points, and it seems many are perfect.

Again, I think I am right to say that QAA visits are intended to evaluate a course against its own aims. This is not at all the same as judging its academic worth. Benchmarking and QAA have more than a little to do with our old friend 'spin'. Their purpose is to show industrialists that degrees really will be a fit preparation for the 'world of work' and to convince the general public that academia has not been harmed by 20 years of underfunding and grossly expanded student numbers. We should regard them just as critically as we regard the BPS's own attempts to regulate our discipline.

**Josh Schwieso**  
Eastgate House  
Four Forks  
Spaxton  
Somerset

**A**T last! Someone who wants GBR abolished as much as I do! ('A stranglehold on the development of psychology?', July 2002.) Whilst I understand the reasoning behind its introduction (and would not in any way wish to see a decline

in the standards of psychology courses being offered to undergraduates) the pursuit of these three little letters has added years to my training as an educational psychologist.

My undergraduate degree was combined honours (50 per cent psychology and 50 per

cent English literature), and at a careers interview when I was 17 I was told that this was ideal for getting me on to my PGCE after university (EPs at present need two years' teaching experience to get on an MSc course). Unfortunately, I discovered not only that my course was not 'accredited' for GBR when I graduated (I believe GBR accreditation was awarded in the September after I graduated in the July!), but also that I could not add top-up modules of psychology at master's level.

I was informed that I had two basic options: sit five three-hour exams at the cost of a few hundred pounds or take a whole year to sit a conversion course. Many phone calls later and after pleading my case with the BPS membership department I was told that despite having my A-level psychology course and an additional year of practical experience working as an assistant EP, GBR was an 'absolute concept' (direct quote!) and there was no way to get around it if I wanted to gain access to the MSc. OK, determined to get the career I wanted, I moved on.

I was accepted on to a

conversion course, and I thought I would be able to progress directly to the MSc after finishing it, but it was not to be! Since applications for the MSc have to be in by the November of the preceding year (and in order to apply you have to have your GBR) I now have to work for yet another year before I can apply in November to start the MSc in Sept 2003.

I have now completed the conversion course (most of which was recapping basic psychology concepts that I already knew) and am hoping that this gap year is my last hurdle. I know of several other students in my position, all of us equally frustrated with the Society's refusal to look creatively at 'appropriate life experiences' and with its stubborn non-acceptance of other forms of degree courses.

A shortage of educational psychologists there may be, and quite frankly I am not surprised. Get rid of GBR and give those of us with a 'genuine interest in psychology' a chance to prove ourselves!

**Samantha O'Shaughnessy**  
4 Jackman Avenue  
Heywood  
Lancashire

## Mental health proposals – Act now

**T**HE government published its draft Mental Health Bill in June. The proposals are broadly similar to those in the White Paper published in December 2000. They have very serious implications for psychologists and those who use their services, and they have come under sustained criticism from the Mental Health Alliance (of which the Society is a core member), the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Law Society because of the disproportionate and misleading focus on risk.

Unusually for a bill, the government has introduced a consultation period. It is of utmost importance that members of the Society write to express their views on the

proposals to:  
Sara Raisbeck, Room 318  
Wellington House, 135–155  
Waterloo Road, London SE1  
8UG. Fax: 020 972 4147;  
e-mail: mhbillconsultation  
@doh.gsi.gov.uk.

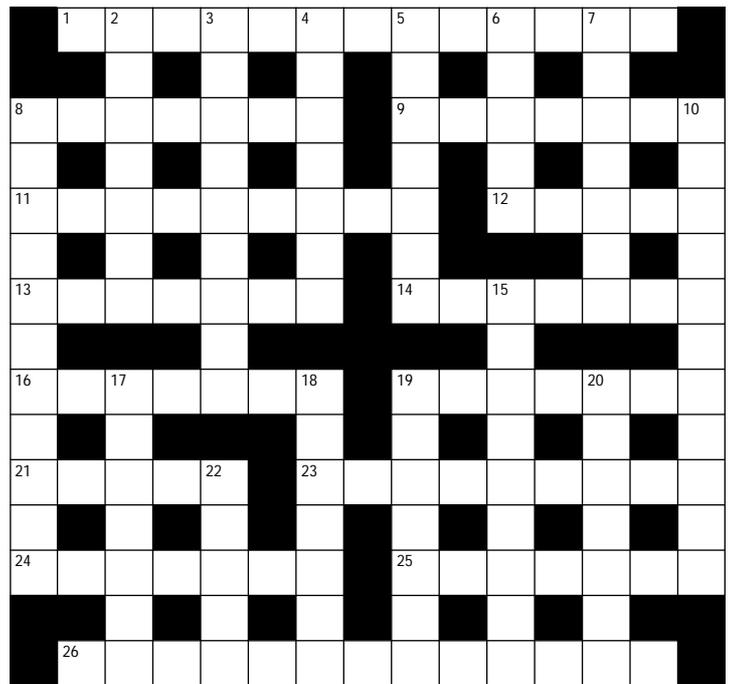
The consultation period ends on Monday 16 September 2002.

The Mental Health Alliance is organising a mass rally to voice concern about the bill in Whitehall at 12 noon on Saturday 14 September.

**Dave Harper**  
Department of Psychology  
University of East London

*Editor's note: See p.444 for details of the Whitehall rally.*

## PRIZE CROSSWORD No.5



### INFORMATION

■ I HAVE set up a **website with simple graphic images of approximately 60 facial expressions**, based on the raggedy photocopies often seen stuck to filing cabinets in learning disability services. It is available at

[www.jimcromwell.demon.co.uk/emotions/Home.htm](http://www.jimcromwell.demon.co.uk/emotions/Home.htm), which is not a memorable URL, so if anybody would like to host it under a relevant domain name, I would be delighted.

#### Jim Cromwell

National Deaf Services  
South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust  
Old Church  
146a Bedford Hill  
Balham  
London SW12 9HW  
Tel: 020 8675 2100

■ I AM interested in speaking to **psychologists working in child development teams/centres** to find out more about the services they provide and what their day-to-day job entails. I am particularly interested in speaking to psychologists working in small community settings as we are hoping to shape service delivery in the future.

#### Carina Waters

East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust  
Carousel Ward  
Buckland Hospital  
Coombe Valley Road  
Dover CT17 0HD  
Tel 01304 201624 ext 43106

■ I AM a second-year postgraduate psychology conversion student with a first class honours degree in politics

and history. I am looking for an **unpaid clinical work placement for one day a week in London in any specialism**. Previous experience in youth work, adult mental health and homelessness and a certificate in counselling.

#### Emma Jacobs

E-mail: [eemmajacobs@aol.com](mailto:eemmajacobs@aol.com)

■ AFTER years of accumulation I am looking to dispose of **copies of BPS Bulletins** volumes 20-40 covering the years 1967-1987; and **copies of The Psychologist** from 1988 to 2002. Both are virtually complete sets and are offered free.

If anyone would like to respond via the e-mail address below then we could discuss details. Please don't wait longer than eight weeks from the publication of this letter.

#### Nicholas Evens

E-mail: [nevens@argonet.co.uk](mailto:nevens@argonet.co.uk)

■ DID you e-mail me in March 2001 suggesting **collaborative research into leadership?** I received such an e-mail from someone in South Africa. The message was downloaded on to my laptop, which was stolen shortly afterwards. I have since been trying to trace the sender without success. Please get in touch again.

#### Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe

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### Solution to Prize Crossword No.4

**Across:** 1 Metempsychosis, 9 Tight, 10 Landscape, 11 Aperiodic, 12 Event, 13 Eats, 14 Incoherent, 17 Compromise, 19 Stub, 22 Optic, 24 Stay awake, 26 Expectant, 27 Emend, 28 Brief encounter. **Down:** 1 Methane, 2 Tegmentum, 3 Matrix, 4 Solid, 5 Conscious, 6 Obscene, 7 Image, 8 Beat it, 15 No mistake, 16 Extravert, 17 Chorea, 18 Recycle, 20 Breeder, 21 Gateau, 23 Taper, 25 Attic.

**Winner:** Tanya Woolf, London

Send entries (photocopies accepted) to: **Prize Crossword, The Psychologist, St Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR. Deadline for entries is 27 September 2002. A £25 book token goes to the winner, drawn at random from all correct entries.**

### Across

- 1 Understanding test, sort of (13)
- 8 Seasonal affective disorder sits awkwardly with those who enjoy inflicting pain (7)
- 9 Diplomatic, might act fulsomely to some extent (7)
- 11 Dear former spouse appearing thoughtful (9)
- 12 Throw away support for broken limb (5)
- 13 Badge awarded to group restricted by repetition (7)
- 14 Drive in sporting contest shown by plain (7)
- 16 Girl I spotted on sheltered side of sea (7)
- 19 Dismissed when bowler's trajectory reaches boundary (7)
- 21 Let in German with bill held in front (5)
- 23 In conclusion, the whole point is being preoccupied (9)
- 24 Staying power proving a problem for a mantis (7)
- 25 Irritated having taken the front after demand (7)
- 26 Blotting paper needed for this psychological examination? (9,4)

### Down

- 2 Confused episode out east put around university by complex Greek character (7)
- 3 Mail sent over to South African province after happy event (9)
- 4 Follow limited appeal for room with bathroom (2,5)
- 5 Exceptional text remembered in section (7)
- 6 Gives the boot to musical instrument, say (5)
- 7 Not on team, one is in no position to score (7)
- 8 That woman took right lines above mirror in schooner? (6,5)
- 10 Dizzy, got down when circling cape (5-6)
- 15 Inward-looking type seen at home with itinerant non-drinker outside (9)
- 17 Remove the top of flower for rheumatic pain (7)
- 18 Optical bath is complete nonsense! (7)
- 19 Non-chemical farming dealt with by a branch of chemistry? (7)
- 20 Lust and sin thrown out as slanderous taunts (7)
- 22 Heads for the other side (5)

Name.....

Address.....

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