

At the Society's Annual Conference in York, outgoing President Ray Miller delivered his address: 'Fit for the future?'

I always used to wonder why the Society asks the President to give an address at the end of their term of office rather than at the beginning. I assumed it was on the basis that, whatever was said, it was too late to do much about it. No promises to keep, no hostages to fortune and all the benefits of 20:20 hindsight. That was certainly a comfort to me in preparing my thoughts for this evening.

In a busy year, there have certainly been many moments worth remembering. Among the highlights I will recall the hospitality of our partner organisations, The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) at their conferences. This has been a year of renewed understanding of the shared nature of our commitment to the psychological disciplines that underpin the work we all do and the importance of ensuring that it is widely understood and appreciated.

I recall too the renewed links with our sister organisation, The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) culminating in the signing of an historic Memorandum of Co-operation on the mutual recognition of undergraduate degrees. Their hospitality at their Annual Conference in Galway (yes, I did see the sun go down on Galway Bay) was of the sort for which the Irish are justly renowned. Further collaborations are under way and I noted that they manage to attract over 60% of their membership to their conference. Clearly we have something to learn there and I look forward to our next Annual Conference in Dublin in 2008 when there will be many shared activities with PSI.

I was also privileged to be a guest when our own Northern Ireland Branch marked its 50th Anniversary Conference with a formal "black tie" dinner and a collection of nostalgic photographs presented on screen during it that added a fascinating historic perspective to my understanding of several well known faces.

Indeed, during my year in office I have had the pleasure of visiting many parts of the UK and addressing several subsystems. The drive and energy I found demonstrated the commitment of members to ensuring that the Society is more than just an anonymous bureaucracy in Leicester but, rather, reaches out to address local needs and specialist interests.

The theme I took for my addresses was "Fit for the Future?" a look at change and growth in the Society and our fitness to meet the challenges yet to come. Futurology is a risky business. No 20:20 vision here. Yet, as those of you who have read my column's in *The Psychologist* will know (you DID all read them didn't you?), I am a bit of a Science Fiction fan and thus can't resist the temptation to "Boldly Go" where we have not yet gone and take a peek over the horizon.

But let's start from where we are. Psychology both as a discipline and a profession has never been stronger. The growth in the popularity of psychology at undergraduate and postgraduate levels has been remarkable and sustained. Close to 15,000 students graduate each year with a psychology degree. At postgraduate level many continue to advance the scientific knowledge base of psychology and we see a reflection of that in the success of the wide range of academic journals that are produced by the Society.

Even those who do not end up in the teaching, research or practice of psychology directly, nonetheless carry what they have learned with them and find that an understanding of mind, behaviour and emotion enriches their personal, social and working lives. Psychology graduates are innovative, insightful and structured thinkers bringing analytic and scientific skills to a wide range of settings.

In the applied psychologies we have seen significant development in both traditional and new disciplines. They bring the benefits of psychology to every facet of life across the lifespan and in settings from the family, through development and education, health and wellbeing, work and commerce, to leisure, sport and social activities. Such is the growth of demand for these skills

that in many areas it exceeds supply. In particular we see shortages of psychologists in education and in health. Both are areas in which there is an acknowledged need for improved access to psychological services: needs reflected in government policies. It was therefore disappointing this year to see financial pressures in the public sector leading to cutbacks in training and service investment in these areas. Running counter to long term policy, such short term savings will ultimately be paid for in the unresolved distress of many who will be denied the help they require.

Indeed much attention has been focussed on the social costs of psychological distress this year through the work of Lord Layard and his colleagues at the London School of Economics. They have identified that this is an economic cost as well as a personal one: a cost that, as a nation, we can ill afford on either financial or ethical grounds. There is a clear link between personal and social confidence and well-being and measures of national success. Of course psychology has long proposed such a relationship: often to be met with the argument "Well you would say that, wouldn't you". It is therefore encouraging to receive supporting evidence from such an eminent source.

In the media we see an ever-increasing public interest in psychology and its impact on day-to-day lives. There are programmes and articles supporting the skills of parenting and the importance of early learning for later health and social behaviours. People are increasingly informed on the recognition and psychological treatment of common problems of mental and physical health: removing stigma and providing hope and encouragement for sufferers. There is advice on improving personal motivation and performance whether at work, at home or in sport and exercise. People are appreciating the impact of psychological factors, knowledge and interventions in dealing with the broad range of issues that form the bedrock of daily living. I believe too that the media attitude to psychology has matured. Psychological expertise is often called upon and presented in a serious, scientific context that values what we have to offer. There will always be exceptions but in public image terms it seems clear that we are in the age of psychology and we must welcome the opportunities that brings.

Against that background, the Society too has grown and matured. We now have around 45,000 members with 10 major Divisions and 13 Sections plus 2 Special Groups. Compare that with the 7,000 members in 4 Divisions and 6 Sections when I joined up just over 30 years ago. We have come a long way. In fact we are at some danger of becoming victims of our own success. The range of our engagement and influence increases daily. Our Policy Support Unit co-ordinates our responses to an ever growing number of formal and informal consultations. Devolution is creating new contexts for psychology in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in which we must play a full part. We are invited to participate directly in partnership projects that will formulate today the policies and practices of tomorrow.

Such rapid growth places considerable strain on the Society if we are to fulfil the needs and expectations of members as the premier organisation representing psychology in the UK. The strain is both structural and financial. On the structural side we have engaged in a major exercise this year, in full consultation with our staff, in reorganising the internal operations of the Society. While the full benefits will take some time to realise, the Trustees and the staff believe that we will see significant improvements in the support we provide to members and subsystems with greater opportunities for staff to develop and use their knowledge and skills.

On the financial side we proposed to members last year that it will be necessary to ensure the security of the programme of activity that members expect through a means of reflecting the annual costs of inflation in the membership subscription. The proposal received majority support from members but fell less than 1% short of the required two thirds majority. We have instituted a rigorous programme of cost management and income generation. We do not expect that members should carry the full costs of development alone. Nonetheless we do need a financial plan that enables us to sustain our activities and we will be revisiting this issue.

So much for where we are now but I promised some glimpses of the future? Time to dust off the

crystal ball and peer into the mists of what is yet to be and identify some of the changes yet to occur. Like any prognosticator I take refuge in the warning that the images waver and change even as one struggles to identify them but I shall do my best.

I want to concentrate on three particular images that emerge like mountain tops from clouds. These are the relationship of the Society to its members; changes in the professional structure of applied psychology and the issue of Statutory Regulation.

### The Society and its members

Let me start with the Society and its members. As I mentioned we have now grown to some 45,000 members and the rate of increase has been a relatively stable one over many years. Yet there are many people who have not joined: some for their own personal reasons and some because we have not yet developed a range of services that meets their needs and expectations. In particular, we lose many student members at the point of transition to graduate membership. It can be argued that while we have become much better at providing services for those engaged in the professional practice of psychology in both academic and applied areas, we have much room for improvement in supporting our other members. I received an email only recently from one such member putting forward a range of suggestions for the kinds of information and support that would be of real value to graduates whether they continue in the psychology mainstream or simply wish to maintain links with developments in the discipline. Some of these are already under consideration but I foresee a steady programme of development and incentives that will enhance the recruitment and retention of student and graduate members, from 'A' level onwards, with the potential for new grades of membership to meet emerging needs.

For those who are members, there are increasing expectations of information, resources and support. We are only beginning to tap the opportunities provided by information technology in terms of the ability to target high quality information specifically to those for whom it will be of most interest. Your Society will become more personally tailored and responsive to your needs and interests. The membership survey in November last year was a first step to learning more about you. A better understanding will enable us to provide a portal to a wider range of services and support.

You have already identified Continuing Professional Development as a priority. You have indicated that you want a system that is not simply reactive but proactive. We will develop opportunities not just to record your continuing professional development but to help you access the knowledge, training and skills you need to maintain and update your competence. We also aim to improve the level of ethical, professional and legal advice available to members to assist in dealing with problems and difficulties and provide access to mediation and remediation where that is required. Our aim will not so much be to police shortcomings but to assist in achieving excellence. In this way we will truly fulfil our Charter object of "promoting the efficiency and usefulness of Members".

The Society vision in the crystal ball is therefore one of broader membership, with stronger links through personally tailored information and resources and providing a one stop shop for CPD, advice and support. Fanciful? Some of it is already in development so it may be not that far in the future.

### The professional structure of applied psychology

The professional structure of psychology has grown like Topsy. Not only has the range of applications expanded but the levels of specialism have also developed apace. It has been suggested that psychology is not one profession but a whole family of professions. Sometimes, dare I say, in danger of appearing a dysfunctional family?

To many outside the profession it can look confusing. We may seem to spend more time differentiating ourselves from each other when they would expect our efforts to be directed to our shared object of promoting “the advancement and diffusion of a knowledge of psychology pure and applied”. I believe that there is something we have that uniquely unites us: that clearly distinguishes any psychologist from those who have not studied the discipline. It is with good reason that we insist that psychologists should share the common grounding that is the Graduate Basis for Registration. There are fundamental skills and knowledge of psychological science that remain the foundation for our roles regardless of setting or specialism. The accreditation of undergraduate courses serves the dual function of ensuring that the foundation remains a solid base for further development and that its importance is recognised in the resourcing of undergraduate teaching.

Increasingly, at a post graduate level, the competence of an applied psychologist is decided less by a traditional training route than by a continually developing framework of experience and CPD that builds on that groundwork. Within a short time after achieving Chartered status, we find that the diversity within the existing Divisions is often greater than that between Divisions. Furthermore, that diversity is growing all the time. Traditionally this has led to the growth in Divisions, Sections and Special Groups to which I referred earlier. But diversity can become fragmentation and threaten the very core of the profession. This is particularly unfortunate when, in many areas, we see convergence in both training and practice. The Occupational Standards project of the 1990s showed significant overlaps in core competencies among practitioners. With convergence these overlaps are increasing yet we still tend to emphasise the differences rather than the commonalities.

In the past year the Trustees and the Representative Council have questioned whether uncontrolled growth of subsystems actually serves well the wider needs of the Society and its members. While it would be attempting to put the genie back in the bottle to do away with the existing Divisional structure, there are compelling reasons so seek harmonisation where that leads to greater coherence and unity and to an improved understanding of the varied contributions and specialist perspectives that combine to demonstrate the comprehensive effectiveness of psychology in applied settings.

The external world is keen that we do so. In a few weeks we will see the recommendations of the joint BPS/NIMHE project examining the role of the “family of applied psychology” in health and social care, under the title of New Ways of Working. This will provide an opportunity for the Society to review current professional roles and training routes. This may lead to shared training in some areas of competence and a wider range of career paths for the many graduates who wish to become practitioners but find access to post graduate training difficult.

Equally, within the Society we are already looking at improving the management of autonomy and diversity to harness the energy of members across subsystems. Much of this work is being undertaken through the Boards. Eradicating unnecessary duplication of effort avoids confusion, improves effectiveness and ensures that the discipline of psychology is able to speak with a powerful and unified voice.

The crystal ball hints at a much more streamlined professional structure for the future building on what unites us rather than what divides us. It also hints at the importance of looking beyond our own shores to Europe and the global psychology community. Development of the profession and its structures requires a willingness to learn, share and collaborate on the widest scale. I am pleased that the presence of many international guests and colleagues at this conference demonstrates our commitment to that endeavour.

## Statutory Regulation

This year the work of the Society and the President has been largely shaped by Statutory Regulation. It has been hard work, essential work and work that has held both disappointments

and satisfactions. The greatest satisfaction has been to see the way in which psychologists can come together to present a clear message and to deliver that message powerfully and persuasively. Nor were we alone in that task. It was also both satisfying and encouraging to find allies across the psychological professions and among the many MPs, Peers and MSPs who took an interest in our case.

The message is a simple one. We believe that the public deserves better protection when using the services of people who represent themselves as psychologists. While our current voluntary regulation, through the Register of Chartered Psychologists, provides for well developed standards of training, competence and practice it fails, as any voluntary system must, to ensure comprehensive protection against the untrained, incompetent or charlatan practitioner who chooses not to register. We believe that the primary purpose of Statutory Regulation must be to improve public protection and to ensure for all the essential standards of psychological services the public have a right to expect. This requires a regulator, independent of both profession and employer, who understands the complexity of the many roles of the psychologist and the multiplicity of service settings from the public sector, through industry and commerce to private practice.

The major disappointment has been that the government does not appear to perceive that agenda in the same way. Rather they have increasingly concentrated on concerns about health professionals largely working in the NHS. In doing so, they have proposed a system of regulation that cannot readily provide the comprehensive public protection across all aspects of psychological services that must be the ultimate goal. Some 60% of psychologists work in non health contexts. The major risks from inappropriate or dangerous practitioners are more likely to come from those working outside well structured services where their qualifications and actions may not be subject to adequate scrutiny.

We were concerned that the Foster Review of non medical regulation, published last year, not only focussed on the NHS but envisaged key roles for that organisation in operating aspects of the regulatory process, particularly in the investigation of complaints and the maintenance and revalidation of competence. Those of us who work in the NHS, as I do, are aware that many of the processes alluded to, such as annual appraisal and the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) for CPD, are not well or even universally established. Where they exist they are patchy and often the first casualties of adverse financial pressure. If government is concerned about the vested interests of professions, we are equally concerned about the potential for employer bias. If these concerns exist about the NHS role, then it is even more problematic to see how such mechanisms can be implemented across the dozens of different employment settings in which psychologists operate. How would they be developed in Education, the Justice System, industry and commerce, sport and a burgeoning private sector where there are many sole practitioners.

We, and the 8 other professional organisations that joined with us in a campaign to persuade government that better approaches exist, are firmly in favour of Statutory Regulation but it must be robust, comprehensive and effective. We believe that the government's choice of regulator, the Health Professions Council, is too health focussed and has not so far demonstrated the flexibility necessary to accommodate the complexity of the psychological professions. We proposed a Psychological Professions Council, independent of both professions and employers, that could effectively regulate the 100,000 practitioners we jointly represent. We believed that, either as a model for a new regulator or for the changes that might enhance the operation of an existing regulator, this provided a constructive way forward.

Together we mounted an intense effort at the end of last year to ensure that our message was heard. Many of you will have taken part in that campaign, writing to your MPs and others in a position to influence the Department of Health. The response from many of those with whom we spoke was that they recognised the strong merits of our case. Far from being self serving professions seeking to escape or ameliorate the effects of regulation, we are actually proposing improvements to strengthen public protection.

The publication in February of the White Paper "Trust, Assurance and Safety – the Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century" gives no indication that government has understood the shortcomings of their proposals or that they are prepared to modify them. We continue to believe that such an approach cannot lead to proper public protection and we will continue to press that case. We welcome the principles outlined by Patricia Hewitt in her introduction to the document but doubt that they can be realised through the means offered so far.

However we will not confine ourselves simply to opposing government policy. We are psychologists. We recognise that reliance solely on a confrontational approach would be neither constructive nor likely to succeed in demonstrating the credibility of our concerns. Besides, we agree fully with government on the need for Statutory Regulation to achieve public protection. We will therefore seek to work with them to review the implementation of their policy with a view to helping them achieve their stated objectives in a manner that will win the confidence of public and professions alike. We believe that our considerable experience and expertise in managing voluntary regulation can be a valuable resource in assisting an independent regulator to develop systems and standards that can deliver better regulation and better public protection.

There has been a standing joke in the profession over many years that, at whatever point you choose, Statutory Regulation has always been two years away. Maybe it is a rash prediction but I believe that by the time of our next Annual Conference in Dublin in 2008, we will have seen legislation introduced to make it a reality. The crystal ball is misty on how successful we will have been in modifying the current government stance but it is clear on the fact that, in the public interest, we will have given it our very best shot.

So, are we "Fit for the Future?" This year has seen significant reorganisation within the Society: tighter control of expenditure, developing new sources of income generation, and greater efficiency and effectiveness in our systems and processes. We have acquired new skills of engagement with parliamentary and legislative processes that will stand us in good stead far beyond the current issue. Our profile and influence continue to grow and we have improved communication both externally and internally. Our services for members have increased and we have established a new London base that is already in high demand for meetings and events. You will also see significant improvements to both The Psychologist and our web site over the coming 12 months.

There are challenges ahead but the Society has always shown an ability to change and adapt to make the most of new opportunities. Ultimately the strength of the Society lies in you, its members. Together we can indeed "Boldly Go" and that's a prediction in which I have complete confidence.

Thank you.