

Twelve ways to make an impact

by Professor Jamie Hacker Hughes FAcSS FBPsS FRSM

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Maurice Chazan, Chris Clegg, John Cole, Sabrina Halliday, Glyn Humphreys, Joan Kirk, Steve Onyett, Gerald Randell, Mike Startup, Toni Whitehead, Jane Wardle. All of these psychologists gave so much to our profession and for our profession, and they all made such an impact on, through and for psychology and we are deeply grateful for their work. We honour all these colleagues, and any others not just named, that have been lost to psychology over the past year.

One of the themes of this year's British Psychological Society 2016 Annual Conference is that of impact and so that is to be the theme of this year's Presidential Address.

Over the past year we have, together, marked several Society anniversaries – 60 years of the BPS in Northern Ireland, 50 years of our Royal Charter and of our Division of Clinical Psychology, 21 years of our Division of Counselling Psychology and 10 years each of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology, the Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section and the Research Digest. The BPS in Northern Ireland, the DCP, DCoP, SGCP, QMIP and every other one of our member networks and their members have, together with the rest of the Society, made a tremendous impact over the time that they have each been in existence.

We also recognise that the Society itself has been in existence under its present name for 110 years this year, after five years as simply 'The Psychological Society'. Another of our conference themes, that of ageing, is therefore also appropriate.

But how do psychologists, and how does psychology, make an impact?

This year's Address will look at some of the many ways in which the BPS and our members have made major impacts on science, on society, on our country and our world over this past year. So it was right and proper that, before we did anything else, we paid tribute to those colleagues who we have lost over this past year, some, tragically, well before their time.

During this presidential year, I, together with my colleagues in the Presidential Team, have sought, in a number of ways, to increase the Society's impact in all of these key areas by seeking to increase and maximise the presence, voice and visibility of British psychology and our psychologists. This has relied on the work, dedication and commitment to psychology, as our chosen discipline and profession, of all of our nearly 60,000 members.

The Society is growing fast and over this last year alone has seen an increase of just under 5 per cent in our membership. If my calculations are correct this means that if we continue growing at anything like this rate we shall have a 100,000-member Society in around 10 years' time.

1. Research and teaching

The traditional way of achieving impact by psychologists has always been through research, and achieving impact has become an integral component of research funding and assessment. On top of this, the government is now placing increasing emphasis on the need for evidence of economic and social returns from its investment in research. In response to this, and as a means of providing active support to researchers in psychology, we have established a Society Research Impact Portal, which enables us to showcase high-quality research that has potential social, economic and cultural benefits and that is important to, among many others, all those involved in the development of policy, service provision, legislation or behaviour change.

Let us look at just three of these as examples.

John Drury from the University of Sussex and his co-investigators – Steve Reicher, Chris Cocking, Damian Schofield, Andy Burton, Paul Langston, David Novelli and Clifford Stott – carried out research on the psychological effects of crowd participation, and this has provided new rationales that have changed the crowd and emergency management practices of a number of bodies and institutions. And their research on informal resilience in crowds has also contributed to the rationale for a new approach now evident in both NATO and Department of Health guidance and training.

Secondly, an independent review of the teaching of early reading (Rose, 2006) cites many research papers by Jane Oakhill and her colleagues Kate Cain, Peter Bryant and Nicola Yuill, and this had fed directly into recommendations for practice in the revised Primary National Curriculum for English (2008 and 2013). Inspired by the studies of Jane Oakhill and her co-investigators, and as a result of the increasing emphasis on the development of skills for reading, a programme of 'inference training' has been developed and published and is now in use across the UK.

Lastly, Professor Tim Jackson and his colleagues Dr Birgitta Gatersleben, Professor David Uzzell and Dr Niamh Murtagh from the University of Surrey's RESOLVE project (Research on Sustainable Values, Lifestyles and the Environment) contributed to national and international debates about energy, climate change and sustainability, raising the profile of social science. Their research programme provided a robust evidence base for policy and campaigning, and the team worked closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Cabinet Office, the National Audit Office, the Home Office, Ofgem and the House of Lords in their respective work on behaviour change and reduction in environmental impact.

Looking to the future, our Research Board has established a REF Working Group to support the discipline leading up to next Research Excellence Framework exercise. For example, we will be liaising with the Higher Education Funding Council for England in terms of ensuring that representation is appropriate on the panel as well as

doing various pieces of work to help our members (by, for example, currently evaluating Impact Case Studies from REF2014). The Society has also recently made a response to Lord Stern's review urging the establishment of a psychology subpanel and a unified psychology unit of assessment in the next, probably 2021, REF. Also, the Joint Committee for Psychology in Higher Education (the British Psychological Society, the Experimental Psychology Society and the Association of Heads of Psychology Departments) are hosting an event at the Royal Society in May to discuss reproducibility and replication in psychology research.

In teaching, we now have the Department for Education's Teaching Excellence Framework. The teaching of psychology is such an important way of achieving impact, as we'll be learning shortly.

In addition to the traditional methods of assessing research impact, there are new ways of disseminating British and other research too. The Society's Research Digest blog (which is launching its new app here at the conference) received 5,266,138 page views in 2015 – a monthly average of 438,844. Of some of the British psychological research disseminated over the past year in this way, I should like to tell you about two of the most popular posts.

The first of these was about work done by Aaron Walker, who had been awarded the 2013 BPS prize for the best-achieving student, and Jane Tobbell of the University of Huddersfield on selective mutism (SM), in which individuals remain silent in some situations while speaking comfortably in others. Their paper, 'Lost voices and unlived lives: Exploring adults' experiences of selective mutism using interpretative phenomenological analysis', published in *Qualitative Research in Psychology* set out to address gaps within the literature on SM by presenting the subjective experiences of adult sufferers and to enable those hitherto excluded voices to broaden our understanding of this difficulty.

The second was based on a paper by Gillian Forrester and Alina Rodriguez of the University of Westminster, 'Slip of the tongue: Implications for evolution and language development', published in last August's *Cognition*, which investigated the phenomenon of why it is that children stick their tongues out whilst concentrating.

Today our new podcast, PsychCrunch is approaching 30,000 downloads. We're approaching 38,000 subscribers to the Research Digest email, and we have over 61,000 followers on Twitter. That's impact isn't it? I have a twentieth of that number.

2. Conferences

Our conferences, like this one, are a second way in which we can have impact. Over the past year the Society and its networks have organised 21 conferences attended by 5421 delegates. At conferences organised by our conferences team, we've had 1712 papers submitted, of which 1141 have been accepted, together with 62 keynotes, and we have also attracted 131 exhibitors.

As well as having a major impact on the Society members and the many others who attend, a large number of messages from some of the papers presented at Society conferences have travelled far and wide.

For example, a paper presented at this year's Division of Occupational Psychology annual conference, which I attended here in Nottingham earlier this year, had massive media interest in the UK and globally. The paper, 'How you manage your emails may be bad for your health', presented by Dr Richard MacKinnon from the Future Work Centre, focused on the bad habits many of us have developed to deal with our ever-increasing number of emails and how this creates more stress. After delivering his paper, Richard found himself in demand overnight and appeared on *BBC Breakfast*, was interviewed on Radio 2 and Radio 5 and featured in many of our daily national and regional newspapers (*Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*) with interest from across the world.

In much the same vein, a study by John Hackston of business psychologists OPP found that most people find elements of modern office-working features (such as hot-desking and open-plan working) uncomfortable.

A paper presented at last year's 2015 joint Developmental Psychology Section and Social Psychology Section annual conference in Manchester, a brilliant example of networks working together and which, again, I attended, was reported widely in the media. A study on how teenagers' night-time use of social media may harm their mental health by Dr Heather Cleland Woods and Holly Scott of the University of Glasgow was reported by *The Guardian*, BBC News and *The Independent*.

Thirdly, one of the more widely covered papers from last year's Annual Conference in Liverpool was a paper by Sandie McHugh, of the University of Bolton, on how our view of what makes us happy has changed in 80 years. This story was covered not only across the UK but also in France, the USA and India.

Lastly, Professor Cary Cooper's keynote presentation on how emails are sapping the life out of Britain's workforce and contributing to a lack of productivity made the front page of *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* and was also covered by BBC News

Over the course of last year's Annual Conference, our Press Office put out 18 releases, generating 555 news articles in 18 countries, our Facebook post reach peaked at approaching a quarter of a million people and tweets reached nearly 400,000 users.

Now that's what I call impact. Don't you?

So, conferences such as this one make a tremendous impact on those of us fortunate enough to attend them and, as we have just heard, our messages often travel far further afield and impact those who read or hear them.

3. Public engagement

But as well as all this, we psychologists often step out of our labs, clinics, universities and conference centres to take the psychological message into the world in ways that are even more overt.

For example, we currently have a conservative estimate of 14,000 interactions at our stand at last month's Big Bang Festival, out of a total attendance of 75,000, while

1500 attended our Cheltenham Literature Festival events in October, 600 attended our Cheltenham Science Festival events in June, and 400 attended our Royal Institution 'Science of Sleep' event in February.

There are over 100 universities offering psychology courses in the UK, with over 50,000 undergraduates and there are 100,000 students studying psychology at pre-tertiary level. That means that there's absolutely massive potential for impact through the teaching of psychology and, with our own Psychology for Students and Psychology for Graduates events attracting just under 1500 visitors between them, it's clear that interest in psychology, and in careers in psychology, is huge.

The British Psychological Society is wonderful, of course, but it is not always possible to achieve the impact that we would like to achieve on our own. So, internationally, over this last year we have signed two Memoranda of Understanding, with the Russian Psychological Society and the Psychological Society of Ireland, and in just a few hours we're about to sign two more, with the Swedish Psychological Association and the New Zealand Psychology Society. We hope that we may make a positive impact on them, that, in return, that they will have an impact on us, and that we may be able to work together, through sharing, to influence others.

We are also key members of EFPA, the European Federation of Psychological Associations, and IUPsyS, the International Union for Psychological Science. Through them, and along with our fellow members, we exert influence and impact not just on a national but also on a European and international scale.

Through such public engagement, therefore, and through our national and international professional and other collaborations, we can effect impact on the UK public, on the British nation and on the world.

4. Awards and 5. Recognition

A fourth way in which British psychology and UK psychologists can achieve impact, or have our impact recognised and commended, is through the conferring of prizes, awards and honours.

During this last year, Professor Peter Fonagy won the British Academy Wiley Prize for lifetime achievement in psychology and one of last year's conference keynote speakers, Professor Sarah-Jayne Blakemore won the Klaus J. Jacobs Prize, awarded to recognise exceptional achievements in research and practice in the field of child and youth development, for her research on understanding emotional and social brain development during adolescence.

In last year's 2015 Queen's Birthday Honours one of this year's keynote speakers, Professor Vicki Bruce, was made DBE for services to higher education and psychology, Professor Emeritus Roy McConkey was made OBE for services to people with intellectual and developmental difficulties, Dr Susanne McGowan was made OBE for services to armed forces personnel, Dr Janet Carr was made OBE for services to people with Down's syndrome and their families, and Emma Cravitz was made an MBE for services to children and their families, particularly in London.

This year, in the 2016 New Year's Honours List, Professors Lesley Fallowfield, Til Wykes and Margaret Whitehead were all made Dame Commanders of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) for services to psycho-oncology, clinical psychology and public health respectively, while Professor Nichola Rumsey was awarded an OBE for services to people affected by an altered appearance.

And so we have the fifth way of making impact. We congratulate all those who have achieved recognition for their work in the academic and wider community.

6. Media

Many of you will know of my preoccupation of getting as many psychologists in and on the media as possible, and those of you on Twitter will often have seen my #psychologistsinthemedia hashtag. *The Psychologist* has picked up on this and is running a feature on the impact of psychology through the media and policy in the May issue just published. For me, the solution is simple. Every applied psychology course, at the very least, needs to have media and policy training on the syllabus – and perhaps this could start at first degree level too.

But – have we been making impact through appearances in and on the media this year? We most certainly have. A very large number of our psychologists have been featured on television, on the radio and in the press throughout this last year.

7. Practice

So much of our work is concerned with practice, both the professional practice of applied psychology through our 10 applied divisions and four special groups, but also a number of other areas of psychology that also have a clear influence on practice.

Examples of the former are *A Psychological Perspective on Hoarding: DCP Good Practice Guidelines* and, from the DCP's Faculty for Children, Young People & Their Families, *What Good Looks Like in Services for Children, Young people and Families*, while the Germanwings disaster tragically provided the backdrop for our psychologists, especially Professor Robert Bor, to influence practice in the aviation industry for the better. More recently a group of clinical psychologists from the leadership and management faculty have been working with Jeremy Clarke from New Savoy and me as President to launch an Employer's Charter for Psychological Wellbeing.

For those of us working in applied psychology, therefore, and for many researchers, working to improve and influence practice may be our bread and butter, but it is also important to acknowledge what a vital focus of impact this is.

8. Policy

Our Royal Charter obliges us 'to promote the advancement and diffusion of a knowledge of psychology pure and applied', and so we work singly, or with others, to inform policy in a number of areas.

Over this past year we have signed 30 letters and statements as a Society and in coalition with a number of user organisations and professional organisations and colleges. We are also engaged in a process of entering into a framework agreement with three psychotherapy provider organisations, the British Association for

Counselling & Psychotherapy, the British Psychoanalytic Council and the UK Council for Psychotherapy, to increase further our reach and influence in that sector.

Perhaps our greatest effort this year, though, has gone into providing advice to the government on the psychological imperatives when assessing the needs of the disabled and needy through such tools as the Work Capability Assessment for Personal Independence Payments, Employee Support Allowance or other benefits. We have produced a Call to Action, sought meetings with secretaries of state and ministers, spoken through the media, and worked with our members working in the Department of Work and Pensions and in other government departments, all 'in order to promote the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of psychology, pure and applied' and 'to co-operate with other organisations with a view to the promotion of the objects of the Society or any of them'.

Other areas of policy in which we have been engaged in the past year have included participation in the Mental Health Taskforce in England, and in the obesity strategy that BPS Wales presented to the Welsh Assembly, together with the document on evidence-based psychological interventions and support that we have recently compiled. BPS Scotland hosted a roundtable with Alzheimer's Scotland to discuss our recommendations for the Third Scottish Dementia Strategy, and this was attended by over 50 people including the Scottish Government. Finally, BPS Northern Ireland mounted an excellent dementia event at Stormont, which over half of the MLAs attended.

9. Politics

For the first time in the Society's history, as far as we are aware, we have a psychologist MP in Westminster able to exert influence and impact at the heart of the nation. Dr Lisa Cameron MP, a clinical psychologist working with older adults, was elected SNP Member of Parliament for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow.

The Society has already held events in Westminster this year, and our members have been prominent in, for example, the *Mindful Nation UK* report launch (Mark Williams and Bill Kuyken) and the launch of the Academy of Social Sciences' *Making the Case for the Social Sciences. No. 11: Dementia* (Bob Woods). In a fortnight's time Dr Cameron will be hosting a Westminster event as part of the DCP's half-century celebrations, and I happen to know that another significant announcement will be made there about a way in which the impact of psychology on Westminster will shortly be taking a wholly new turn.

Members of the Presidential Team, with our policy advisers, have attended all of the main party conferences and have had numerous meetings with ministers, shadow ministers and peers. We also have a number of members who are involved in a variety of APPGs – All Party Parliamentary Groups.

Outside Westminster, and as you have just heard, the Society has organised a number of extremely successful events with each of the devolved nations – in Cardiff at the Welsh Assembly, in Edinburgh with the Scottish Government, and in Stormont with the Northern Ireland Assembly. I was thrilled to be at all of them.

So – impact by psychology and the Society on the government and governments the length and breadth of the UK.

10. Social justice

It is impossible to be a psychologist in 2016 without being aware of, and disturbed by, the psychological impact of such socio-economic and political factors as unemployment, food poverty, homelessness, poverty and migration.

Hence Walk the Talk, a 100-mile walk by psychologists from Leicester to London (and, again, I was proud to be one of them) to draw attention to such psychological consequences; hence Psychologists Against Austerity; hence the Society's Social Justice Taskforce; and hence our Presidential Taskforce on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants.

If psychology cannot have an impact, and speak out on these areas, then who can?

11. Structure

And in order to have maximum impact we, as a Society, need to be in the best possible form and structure to have the most effective function. So we are currently in the midst of a radical programme of restructuring the Society from bottom to top, from side to side and from top to bottom. When the final structure is decided upon, sometime over the coming year, it will be the most radical structural transformation that the Society has ever seen. We are doing much to improve our accessibility, our inclusivity and our diversity too, in order to become a Society where psychologists of every creed, every colour and every gender are all welcomed to fulfil our maximum potential as psychologists – although we have a long, long way to go.

In order to carry out our work as a Society, and in order to have impact on and of the types that I have described we rely entirely on our members – in our Sections, our Special Groups, our Divisions and in our Branches. As President, I have been hugely privileged to visit the majority of our 15 Sections, two of our three Special Groups, all but one of our 10 Divisions and every single one of our 11 Branches. I am greatly indebted to them and to their Chairs and committee members for all of the work that they do in enabling the Society to deliver on its Objects.

The responsibility of running the Society lies with the Trustees, several of whom chair the Society's Boards. Some are elected, some appointed, but many dedicate vast amounts of time to work for our Society. I am hugely grateful to have had the opportunity of working alongside such colleagues and would like to play an especial debt of gratitude to Dot Miell, Richard Mallows and Peter Kinderman, who have so ably and willingly supported me in my two years so far working in the Presidential Team.

And behind the scenes, of course, there are our nearly 100 staff, led by our Chief Executive and her Senior Management Team. Without them, our impact would indeed be non-existent and so I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our staff and to the fabulous work that they do with us, and for us.

12. Vision

So – to recap – psychology has, and needs to continue to have and develop, impact through our research, teaching and publications, by means of our conferences, through public engagement, via awards and recognition, in and through the media, and having influence practice and impact – on policy, on social justice and through our organisation and our structure. But, most of all, we need to have an impact on our future. Our Society is in an ever-improving state of wellbeing, not just financially (although that's another whole address in itself) but in increased and increasing wellbeing in our membership, structure and functioning.

This President is perceptibly ageing (you will just have noticed how I have just succeeded in weaving each of this year's four conference themes of impact, ageing, wellbeing and faces into this Presidential Address), the Presidential Team is changing, but the future lies ahead of us. In what way will our impact most be remembered in the textbooks (or their implanted chemical microchip equivalents) of a 100 years' time?

As individuals we can only do so much on our own. But as a Society, in the true meaning of the word *society*, we can, collectively, and by working together, achieve the most amazing things and leave a real legacy for posterity. Not one psychologist, I would argue, of the hundreds of faces that we have looked at this afternoon, or the dozens of faces sitting in this hall, has been able to accomplish many of the things that they have achieved entirely on their own. That is why the Society is important. And that is why a Society that's growing bigger and bigger is important. Because the bigger our Society, the bigger the impact.

So – let us, together, make sure that our discipline, psychology, our Society, and our psychologists succeed in making a real impact on the future. We owe to psychology, we owe it to our Society, we owe it to the future, and we owe it to the world. Together, we can!

Reference

Rose, J. (2006). *An independent review of the teaching of early reading: Final report*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.