

Statutory regulation – What is happening?

AFTER three ballots of the membership, with overwhelming support for statutory regulation, the process is now launched in a new and exciting direction that will affect all practising members, and anyone practising who is not a member too. That is the vital difference between our BPS Register, which is voluntary, and statutory regulation. Under the present system, anybody can claim to be a psychologist and offer a service to the public. Even where a qualified member is complained about and, after a disciplinary hearing, is removed from the Society's Register, he or she can continue to practise, albeit not as a Chartered Psychologist. The protection for the public by a system like this is not strong enough, and protection of the public has always been the main purpose of a drive towards statutory regulation.

I should add that one insight I get as chair of the Investigatory Committee is that there are relatively few complaints about the work of psychologists – about five to ten new cases a month. The vast majority of the complaints do not reveal major problems, when taken to close investigation, which involves non-psychologists in the majority. We are a set of professions with sound training, good codes of practice, and generally very high standards of performance. So it should be, and statutory regulation will provide a better safety net to catch the few deviants who fall short of these standards. Very few are wilfully wicked, as far as I can see, and the number who fall significantly below the level of acceptable practice is also small.

So on 4 June 2003 the UK Health Professions Council (HPC) received our application, and decided to recommend to the Secretary of State for Health that it be accepted (see News, July 2003). That was a huge step, and our team led by Geoff Lindsay did extremely well in presenting our case and answering questions.

If the Secretary of State endorses this decision, the timetable is broadly like this. It goes to the Department of Health to draft

an Order, which will begin over the summer, and is then put out for consultation. This is a real public process, run by the Department of Health, which will have to summarise the responses, and suggest amendments to the draft Order. Hugely important issues are involved, like what exact wording covers the 'protected titles' – what it will become illegal to call

'It is vitally important that all non-members who are qualified psychologists are also made aware'

yourself when offering and providing services to the public, if you are not registered with the HPC. At the end of this process, an Order will be put before Parliament, at which stage it cannot be modified or amended, but only supported (or opposed). So it is likely to be mid- to late 2004 before the Order would be passed.

After this the HPC will be taking steps to give every practising psychologist a chance to register. This should be straightforward for those on the BPS Register, and arrangements will be made to allow all on our Register to be accepted. It is vitally important that all non-members who are qualified psychologists are also made aware of the changed situation, and given a chance to register. The BPS is not a closed shop, and there are probably a few thousand psychologists eligible to register who are not currently on our Register. Also there will be a 'grandparenting' period to allow those who are partially qualified to attain the necessary qualifications in order to register.

There are and will continue to be some costs in all this. The HPC has set the fee for being on their Register at £60 a year. From this money they will run their disciplinary procedures, share in our accreditation of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and take an interest in CPD. For those who

do not get in under direct arrangements, there will be a charge for grandparenting – a time-limited way of scrutinising the qualifications and experience of others already in the profession who are not on our Register.

So this change will have an impact on the BPS office staff, as well as members, and we are trying to face up to this as effectively as possible. It will also have a large impact on the HPC, where we will be one of their larger (of 13 or so) groups.

Registration under the HPC may not be ideal. We would have preferred a freestanding body specifically for psychologists. But it was made abundantly clear by ministers that this was the only route available, and our Council and Board of Trustees have approved this vehicle, which should attain statutory regulation after 30 years of trying to get it.

By the way, the BPS website offers an e-mail alerting service, where you can sign on to get updates about what is happening. I have just signed on there myself.

Don't hesitate to let me or the office know if you have any questions or concerns.

Zander Wedderburn

Contact Zander Wedderburn via the Society's Leicester office or e-mail: president@bps.org.uk.

WRITE FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

This is probably the only place where psychologists can write an opinion piece without having contacts in the press industry. We don't all need or want to write academic journal articles all the time.

Robert Forde, 'Counterpoint: Defending the indefensible', July 2003

Writing for The Psychologist was initially a daunting prospect. But the complete process of publication was trouble-free and enabled a sense of achievement that is highly recommended.

Lesley Thoms, 'Student writer winner: Back to our roots for serenity?', July 2003

See p.447 for contributors' information

DISCUSSING WELL-BEING

THE Royal Society is holding a scientific discussion meeting on 19–20 November entitled 'The science of well-being – Integrating neurobiology, psychology and social science'.

For details, contact the Royal Society. Tel: 020 7451 2581; website: www.royalsoc.ac.uk/events.

OPENING ACCESS TO JOURNALS

GOVERNMENT officials on both sides of the Atlantic are stoking the debate over free access to electronic journals. A UK government body has announced that it will pay the publication costs of any British university researcher who submits a paper to open-access journals published by BioMed Central; and a member of the US Congress has introduced a bill designed to prevent private publishers from monopolising information by denying copyright protection to work produced with 'substantial' government funding.

LEARNING DISABILITIES AND PATIENT SAFETY

THE National Patient Safety Agency has announced a programme of work to assess how people with learning disabilities are affected by patient safety. A team of people with learning disabilities will start the process by gathering the experiences of service users in England and Wales.

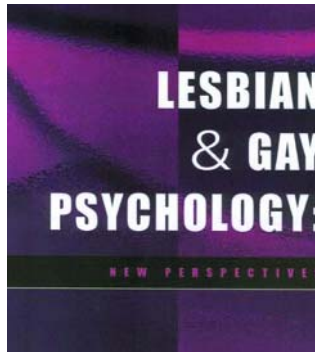
STUDENTS SEEK MORE COUNSELLING

A BRITISH Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy survey shows that the percentage of students attending counselling rose in 2001/2 compared with the previous year in all types of institution except FE colleges. But the proportion of males attending counselling has declined: men now make up less than one third of all counselling clients in each of the sectors.

Award for Society members and BPS Blackwell

ADRIAN Coyle and Celia Kitinger, the current and inaugural chairs of the Society's Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section, will this month receive an American Psychological Association award for their co-edited book *Lesbian & Gay Psychology: New Perspectives*.

The book, published by BPS Blackwell in 2002, has won the 2003 APA Division 44 (the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues) Award for Distinguished Book in Lesbian, Gay, and/or Bisexual Psychology. The award will be presented at the APA's



Convention in Toronto.

Dr Coyle (University of Surrey) said: 'It's a real honour to have received this award. To date, the majority of leading texts in lesbian and gay psychology have been produced

in the US, and scholars in Europe can sometimes feel like the poor relations. However, this award conveys the message that our particular perspectives on lesbian and gay psychology are valued highly by our North American colleagues. Of course it's also a great accolade for those who made the book possible, namely those who contributed chapters; the BPS Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section, which was instrumental in supporting its production; and BPS Books and then Blackwell, who did such a great job in supporting Celia and myself in our editorial role.'

Mental incapacity legislation on the way

ADRAFT Mental Incapacity Bill was published in June by the Department for Constitutional Affairs, a development welcomed by both the BPS and the Making Decisions Alliance (MDA).

The present law in England and Wales suggests that a person has either full capacity or no capacity, unlike Scotland where legislation introduced in 2000 provided a framework for decision making with regard to finances, welfare and health. The draft bill aims to give the same rights in England and

Wales, putting into law the principle that all adults are assumed to have capacity to make decisions for themselves. This is vital for people who are currently often wrongly assumed to be incapable of making decisions – for example, people with dementia, people with profound learning disabilities, severe mental health problems, autism or severe head injuries.

A spokesperson for the MDA said that publication of the bill would be 'the beginning of the end of 14 years of growing frustration, and good news for the millions of people who are likely to be affected'.

In the current draft there is no specific statutory role for

practitioner psychologists. Karen Ehlert, the BPS representative on the Mental Incapacity Focus Group, said: 'We feel that the bill now needs to explicitly recognise the expertise of practitioner psychologists with appropriate training and experience in the assessment process.'

Over the next few months a parliamentary committee will be examining the bill in greater detail. Selected practitioner psychology representatives from the BPS will have the opportunity to advise officials and members of the committee in the scrutiny process. They will help ensure that the legislation provides takes full account of psychological factors.

NATIONAL HONOUR

Society member Professor Thomas Miles of the University of Bangor becomes an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. The honour is for his services to dyslexia.

WEBSITES

www.geocities.com/lazaridou

Psychology Lab – links, information and resources, mostly applied psychology

If you come across a website that you think would be of interest to our readers, let us know on psychologist@bps.org.uk.

CUTTING COSTS OF ADOPTION

THE huge emotional and financial cost of adoption failure can be cut according to research carried out by the Anna Freud Centre, Coram Family and Great Ormond Street Hospital.

The research, presented at a conference in London in June, followed previously maltreated children for the first two years of their adoption. Adoptive parents who had positive past experiences or had come to terms with their own poor experiences of parenting, separations or traumatic events were more successful in their relationships with the children they had adopted.

Psychology book wins science prize

A PSYCHOLOGY book has won the **Aventis Prize for Science Books**. The award in the **General (Adult) category** has been given this year to ***Right Hand, Left Hand*** by **Chris McManus** (University College London).

The judges said that Chris McManus's book was 'an accomplished celebration of asymmetry and a perfect balance between science and culture'. The book was selected from a shortlist of six, which included two other psychology-related titles. The judges thought that *Reckoning with Risk* by Gerd Gigerenzer did 'a very good job of explaining a counterintuitive idea', and *The Blank Slate* by Steven Pinker was described as 'powerful, provocative and challenging'.
 □ See www.righthandlefthand.com, and for information on the Aventis Prizes go to www.aventissciencebookprizes.com.



FESTIVAL OF SCIENCE

FROM 8 to 12 September the British Association's Festival of Science will take place at the University of Salford. Among the psychological highlights will be a presentation of latest research in the psychology of developmental learning disorders, looking at biological and physiological causes and how they may affect the development of behaviour. In other sessions the BA Psychology Section will be asking whether the work of Sigmund Freud has any relevance in current efforts to understand consciousness and the depths of the unconscious mind, and whether subtle differences in language indicate differences in our view of the world.

□ Further information and online booking at www.the-ba.net/festivalofscience, or call the British Association on 020 7973 3052.

Contributing to social policy

PSYCHOLOGY played an important part in the ESRC's Social Science Week from 23 to 27 June. The week brought social scientists together with key opinion formers in national and local government, business and the voluntary sector to demonstrate how social science can determine what policies will work and why.

Two ESRC projects involving Society members were promoted. The first, led by Professor Vicki Bruce (University of Edinburgh) used characters from Irish soap operas and *The Simpsons* to discover how we get to learn people's faces. 'There has been good theoretical progress about the way we recognise familiar faces,' said Professor Bruce, 'but there remains a gulf between our understanding of familiar and unfamiliar face perception and memory.' Her team found that for unfamiliar faces, memory appears

dominated by the 'external' features, but where the face is well-known it is 'internal' features – such as the eyes, nose and mouth – that are more important. In fact the



Vicki Bruce

team could trace shifts in the importance of internal features during the course of learning, and these shifts occurred rapidly – after just a few minutes of exposure. Other experiments showed that people are better or more confident at learning faces that belong to well-known, though previously unseen, personal identities. In

studies using faces claimed to belong to characters playing in *The Archers* and *The Simpsons*, learning new faces was found to be easier.

In the second study published as part of Social Science Week, Professor Gavin Bremner (University of Lancaster) investigated how babies up to six months old perceive an object that moves from left to right but passes behind a screen at the halfway point. Do the babies perceive it as a single object moving continuously, or as two separate segments? Four-month-olds perceived trajectory continuity when the screen the object moved behind was narrow, but not when it was wide. By the age of six months, babies perceived continuity even when the screen was wide. Professor Bremner commented: 'A great deal is claimed about what young babies know about the world but our findings favour a much more cautious approach.'

Stress — A firm role for employers

JENNY HEAD looks at a new government approach to reduce stress at work.

CAN you cope with the demands of your job? Do you have a say over the way you work? Is the support from your colleagues adequate? Are you subjected to unacceptable behaviours? Do you understand your roles and responsibilities? Does your organisation engage you when undertaking organisational change?

The government hopes that firms will soon be asking employees these questions as a matter of course. In a major step forward to tackle work-related stress the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recently released draft management standards (see www.hse.gov.uk/stress), largely based on research evidence from our 'Whitehall II' study (Head *et al.*, 2002; Stansfeld *et al.*, 2000).

Set up in 1985 to study explanations for social inequalities in health, the Whitehall II study is a multidisciplinary project

including psychology (see www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology/white/white.html). We have followed 10,308 participants, aged 35–55 when the study began, from 20 civil service departments in London. Our findings show that the psychosocial work environment is associated with both mental and physical health (Bosma *et al.*, 1997; Kuper & Marmot, 2003; Stansfeld *et al.*, 1997). For example, low control at work was associated with increased risk of poor mental health, including depression, increased rates of sickness absence and increased incidence of coronary heart disease. High job demands were associated with poor mental health and increased risk of coronary heart disease. Good levels of social supports at work had a protective effect on mental health and reduced the risk of spells of sickness absence. It is encouraging to see that the HSE is now acting on these findings and that it is

placing emphasis on organisational level actions to improve management practice.

A pilot last year had indicated that firms preferred a simple approach to risk assessment. Thus for the current pilot, HSE have developed a two-step tool for use by employers (although employers may opt to use their own 'in-house' methodology instead). The first step, the 'first pass filter tool' consists of six questions, one for each of the draft standards (see box). Each standard is measured as the percentage of workers exposed to each of these stressors. The cut-off points for Demands, Control and Support have been set at 85 per cent, whereas the cut-off points for Relationships, Role and Change have been set at 65 per cent. The HSE says it has chosen a lower cut-off point for these latter three because the evidence linking them to health is less robust.

If a firm does not meet the standards for one or more of the six work stressors, they can use HSE's 'second pass filter tool' questions to obtain further information relating to the failed standards. These consist of around five to 15 questions for each of the six areas. For Demands, Control and Support, they include the full set of Karasek Job Content Instrument questions used in the Whitehall II study (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). So if a workplace fails to meet the standard for Support, responses to the 'second pass filter tool' can be used to help diagnose where problems lie, such as lack of support from supervisors or inadequate information from managers.

A pilot of the standards is currently

DRAFT STANDARDS TO BE ACHIEVED BY AN ORGANISATION

Demands	At least 85 per cent of employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their job
Control	At least 85 per cent of employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work
Support	At least 85 per cent of employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors
Relationships	At least 65 per cent of employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours (e.g. bullying at work)
Role	At least 65 per cent of employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities
Change	At least 65 per cent of employees indicate that the organisation engages staff frequently when undergoing change

under way in around 20 volunteer organisations. The HSE plans to finalise and issue the standards next year, probably in the form of an Approved Code of Practice.

Will it work?

An approach to risk assessment based on a single question in each of the six domains would clearly be attractive to employers, but it remains to be seen whether these single-item questions can provide reliable measures of levels of work stress. There is also a possibility that these single items may be more prone to learning effects than a multi-item scale and that employees may change their responses as they realise how the results will be used.

In addition, although the questions contained in the second pass filter tool are based on well-validated measures of these work stressors and will thus provide better estimates of the percentages exposed to each stressor, they may not be specific enough to provide useful information on where problems lie in an organisation. The assessment tools are designed for studying exposures at the group level, but the question of whether these tools can reliably

identify individuals suffering from work-related stress may well arise.

Other questions also remain. How will employers be judged against the standards if they choose to use alternative methods of assessing stress levels? Will employers need to assess levels of stress in different sections of their workforce? And will employers fear more stress claims or will they recognise that monitoring their progress against standards will help them demonstrate that they take stress seriously?

The HSE emphasises that the processes

to measure the draft standards are not a finished product and they are looking for feedback on their approach. As part of our ongoing research on work and health, we have been commissioned by the HSE to help refine and evaluate both the risk-assessment tools and the cut-off points for the standards. This will include an evaluation of the usefulness and validity of the six single-item questions.

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