

Nurturing the next generation

WHY do you want to study psychology? This is a question that most readers will have been asked to consider at some point in time. I suspect that the answers given were not dissimilar to those of today's prospective students, namely around being interested in people and wanting to help them. Whatever direction subsequently followed, and regardless of personal shifts in perspective, it is to be hoped that the initial enthusiasm for the discipline remains and that readers would wish to encourage and support the next generation of budding psychologists.

Fortunately, students are clamouring to learn about psychology, and opportunities to study psychology today abound. In the opening piece of this special issue, Martin Conway and Peter Banister provide an interesting discussion around why this may be so. Yet instead of celebrating the fact that thousands of students are engaging with the discipline of psychology, the educational sector has been bogged down in a mire of difficulties around subject coverage, teacher training and linear progression. For too long, these difficulties have resulted in what has amounted to an uneasy stand-off between pre-tertiary and higher education programmes of psychology.

Simon Green, in the second article, provides a concise account of where some of the difficulties arise and indicates how developments involving the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and other interested parties may be providing some of the stepping-stones required to put pre-tertiary psychology on a firmer footing. In contrast, Jenny Toal, whilst exposing some of the myths around pre-tertiary psychology, starkly outlines continuing problems for those teaching psychology at this level.

At this point, readers may conclude that the difficulties around pre-tertiary psychology education are of little concern to others. Indeed, you may go along with the view, as has been cited by policy-makers, that psychology does not have

ANNIE TRAPP, from the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network, introduces the special issue on pre-degree psychology.

anything to worry about, given that there are more than enough highly qualified psychology students progressing through pre-tertiary and tertiary level and applying for the limited number of training places for a career in professional psychology.

I would urge you to read on. Jarvis eloquently challenges us to consider how 'bright and enthusiastic young people' can

the wide-range of pre-tertiary experience. This would require higher education to accept the various limitations of the different pathways into tertiary education and search for ways of providing for the rich supply of motivated students who have had two, or in some cases four, years of prior knowledge.

Meanwhile, there is an urgent need and demand for courses that will prepare qualified teachers who are non-psychologists to teach psychology. Pressure needs to be brought to bear on the government to provide more direct training routes for qualified psychology graduates to teach psychology and to obtain qualified teacher status. There is work to be done around educating pre-tertiary leaders and managers about the demands of psychology as a discipline, the appropriate competencies for those teaching psychology and the ability of those teaching psychology to provide a psychological perspective to a wide-range of school policies. Scope also exists for HE to develop more continuing professional development for existing qualified teachers.

Addressing these challenges is clearly a shared responsibility between government, professional bodies, examination awarding bodies, training providers, HE and others. Since the Future Directions event (see www.bps.org.uk/n7cw), organised by the British Psychological Society and the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network in December 2005, these groups have been in dialogue. In October 2006 the National Science Learning Centre brought these groups together as a 'community of practice' to discuss future development of the subject at pre-tertiary level. This is a promising development that has the potential to provide a more powerful and unified voice to influence standards of psychology education across the sector.

CHRISTA STADTLER (PHOTOFLUSSION)

be 'nurtured into the next generation of psychologists'. He reminds us of the importance of providing a positive experience for students on initial courses, and indeed he reports high levels of satisfaction from students at pre-tertiary level. However, despite very often having achieved high grades, the skills and experiences of these students appear to be of little value when they progress to higher education.

Perhaps the time has come for higher education to meet pre-tertiary education halfway and to be more creative in how it designs programmes of study that build on