

The Development of Psychology as a Profession

Ingrid Lunt, *President Elect and Chair of the Council Working Party*, reports.

THE final report on the Development of Psychology as a Profession was accepted by the Council at its October 1997 meeting. The main contribution of this Council Working Party has been to construct a vision for the Society, which was welcomed and accepted by the Council in May 1996, and to organize a Colloquium for subsystems to discuss this vision and the Society's Strategic Plan. The Colloquium took place in March 1997. The vision was expansionist and optimistic, setting a direction for the Society to build on its many strengths. It also supported strongly the development of psychology both as a science and as a profession, in its basic research, applied research and applied practice aspects. The report was warmly welcomed, both by Council and by subsystems and individual members, and reflected an expressed need for vision and direction.

The Working Party has envisioned a healthy and challenging future for psychology in the UK. Its consultations reveal that members have a positive and optimistic view of the future. However, one of the key preconditions for moving forward into the next century is to have a Society which manages effectively to combine its various roles and responsibilities.

Evidence

The Working Party met over two-and-a-half years, and its consultations, interviews and requests for evidence and views have resulted in many pages of evidence from the Boards, Divisions, Sections and other subsystems, as well as individual members of the Society and members of staff. The Working Party was fortunate also to learn from other organizations, both other professional organizations and psychology associations from other countries. There was a remarkable unanimity of evidence. Essentially, society at large — and the professions which work within it and for

it — have changed and will continue to change beyond recognition. Psychology's success story, and the widespread acceptance of psychology as a discipline in society at large, mean that we have to stand back and explore how we can maximise our contribution.

The Society, its success and its growth

There was an awareness of the multiple and interacting roles of the Society: it is our flagship, the public face of our integrity, our professional association and learned body, and our key means of gaining public influence. The Society is also a collegial network for members, which gives them considerable satisfaction and personal support. These various roles of the Society need to be main-

'... consultations reveal that members have a positive and optimistic view of the future.'

tained, developed and sustained. In addition, the rate of growth of the Society, its increasing complexity of structure, and its essential support systems have created an organization which has many strengths but, like every major organization, also has typical problems — in communication, in policy development, in decision-making, in evaluating the different demands and priorities for effort and finance, in the development and deployment of personnel, and in the management of resources both financial and personal.

Honorary members

Along with the Society's growth, the working conditions and requirements of

its honorary members have changed considerably. In the past, members were free and able to make a contribution to the day-to-day running of the Society. Now employers and members themselves have to count the cost of every hour away from the workplace. This means that:

- it is harder to secure individuals of appropriate calibre to contribute their time to the Society;
- greater burdens of responsibility are placed on the office staff of the Society;
- there is a feeling that the psychologists themselves are no longer the prime movers of their own affairs and destiny.

In the light of the enormous growth of the Society (it now has around 30,000 members and over 80 members of staff at the Society's office) and the profound changes in the universities, services and contexts in which psychologists work, The British Psychological Society, the second largest psychological society in the world, must be in good shape to support psychologists, to promote and develop the discipline and to ensure quality in all its activities and initiatives.

Possible threats

The Working Party pointed out the potential threats to our success if we do not adapt to changes. These included:

- the growth of a Society which is too large to have common purpose;
- the dominance of bureaucracy over service to the membership;
- a split between academics and practitioners;
- the alienation of the membership from the central structures of the Society;
- *ad hoc* decision-making and considerable opportunity costs through lack of forward planning;
- discharge of authority and power in the absence of accountability or

- personal responsibility;
- an office which is insufficiently informed about the needs of psychologists;
- an office staff whose human resources are insufficiently nourished and developed;
- a loss of the goodwill and human resource of a rapidly dwindling volunteer force;
- an inability to have appropriate influence on the future, not only in the UK, but also in Europe and internationally.

Recommendations

The final report made four key recommendations to Council:

- that the Society continues urgently to develop formal procedures to ensure proactive strategic planning and prioritization, financial planning, the allocation of specific responsibility
- portfolios to individuals, and the regular monitoring of achievements and progress;
- that, in the light of the urgent and very widely expressed need for restructuring, the Society reviews urgently the roles, responsibilities and functions of its senior Honorary Officers (the President, Honorary General Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and Chairs of Boards), including the development of clear job descriptions and achievement targets, in order to ensure effective and accountable leadership;
- that the Society examines the functioning of the Society, in the light of its vision statement, and considers how this vision may be realized through the Society's Strategic Plan, its committee structure, its decision-making procedures, and their integration with the operation of the Society's office; and that it considers the feasibility and cost of engaging an organizational change consultant to carry out this work, and reports to Council on this issue;
- that the Society considers what further steps it needs to take to enhance its public image and its standing both within society at large and in the minds of British psychologists: this might also call for the appointment of a specialist consultant and/or the establishment of a new Working Party on the Public Image of Psychology.

The full report is available from the Society's office.

Dr Ingrid Lunt is in the Psychology and Special Needs Group, Institute of Education, University of London, 25 Woburn Square, London WC1H 0AA.