

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Members of the Society are invited to submit nominations for the following positions on the Society's main Boards to serve from April 2004

RESEARCH BOARD

One Ordinary Member

(two-year term)

One Ordinary Member

(one-year term)

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE BOARD

One Ordinary Member

(two-year term)

PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS BOARD

Two Members

(two-year term)

(renewable)

MEMBERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING BOARD

One Ordinary Member

(two-year term)

One Ordinary Member

(one-year term)

PSYCHOLOGY EDUCATION BOARD

Two Ordinary Members

(two-year term)

NOMINATIONS

Nominations should reach the Chief Executive's office by Monday 5 January 2004. To ensure validity of nomination, you should use the standard nomination form, which gives details of the information and signatories required.

VOTING

The Board membership for which nominations are invited in this issue will, if contested, be decided by postal ballot prior to the Annual General Meeting 2004. Voting papers will be sent out to Members during February to be returned to Electoral Reform (Ballot Services) Ltd, which will administer the count and confirm the results to the Chief Executive and President before the meeting.

Elections will be conducted using the single transferable vote system, except in the case of elections to fill single seats where there are only two candidates, in which case voters will be asked to place a mark against the candidate of their choice.

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Time to let all our flowers bloom – But how?

FOR me, one of the biggest challenges our Society faces (and I mean the BPS, but it's perhaps true of our nations too) is how to help all our varied members grow and bloom – generally, but especially as psychologists (because that's what we are here for). To be personal for a moment, I'm a keen amateur gardener, and I can get quite ecstatic about roses, columbines, runner beans, and even the mouldy little petunias in my 'windae box'. It's the autumn equinox while I write this, but by the time it reaches you, it will be barren November. So back to the BPS.

Somebody once reckoned we had over a thousand members who currently hold office or carry out BPS duties in a voluntary capacity. That is pretty impressive, if hard to count exactly; and if you add in past officers and workers, it is (at a rough guess) five times that number. I'd better be careful, or my rampant imagination will take me into feeding the five thousand, and I've only got two small fishes in my garden pond and five slices of bread left.

So what's the best way of looking after all our members, meeting their needs for growing and blooming, helping the BPS thrive, and thus brightening and enriching our wider society?

Of course, flowers need to be nourished. If we had a subscription twice the size, as many professional and learned organisations do, we could have twice the staff, offices all over the place, and a host of focus groups finding out what you really want. But at the top we tend to believe that members prefer their subs to be kept as low as possible, and Geoff Lindsay as Honorary Treasurer has achieved miracles in keeping it steady for many years. So we need to look at a smart, low-cost solution for my dream.

I wonder if the internet offers us possibilities that we have only touched the surface of so far. Of course, we do plan to keep expanding our internet services, among all the other IT needs of a modern organisation. Indeed, there is a huge amount already on our Society pages (including faces and biogs of the Trustees if you want to see them), plus an updating service on the progress of statutory regulation. And there are discussion threads

on our members-only pages, where anybody can start a discussion about anything. But to my eye, this has never quite gone into orbit.

As a comparison, one of my sons is a small-animal vet, and he can key in a question about a guinea pig with toothache or strange magenta spots, and he will get answers from other vets all over the world in no time at all. For rare and difficult

'we need to look at a smart, low-cost solution for my dream'

conditions, that's an amazing facility. There are 60 or so business psychologists in Scotland who run a network quite independently of the BPS, which whizzes round e-mails about events, vacancies, social gatherings and all sorts of things. The five thousand or so 'young entrepreneurs' who started off as First Tuesday, Scotland, run a similar e-mail network, and get into hot debates about everything from the best way to fry up Spam, to how to charge clients for casual help with their PC problems, to the failings of government policy in being really useful to us.

I also have a strange varied bunch of friends on three different instant chat programs who have over time sorted me out on animated gifs from South Africa, crocodiles in Australia, cheap hotels in Rio de Janeiro, herbal remedies for arthritis, ways of filtering ponds efficiently, and CBT for anxiety. Some were real-world friends first, but some just popped up in the random way they can. ICQ can even permit multiple instant chat, like a teleconference but with a visible and written record, and less of a sore ear syndrome.

So why don't we somehow use the web to stimulate more networking, member groupings with very special interests, who could easily chat, discuss, support and work with each other. What do you think? Do you belong to other organisations and networks who do this well? Tell me and our office about it. If you're a techie genius who knows about leading-edge ways to do

it, give us hints and tips. Perhaps I should start a thread about this.

For a start, speaking personally I would like to see a 'Very Special Interest Group' for psychologists who haven't quite given up smoking yet; for shiftwork researchers; for poetical psychologists. None of these are really large enough to justify Sections, far less Divisions, or Special Interest Groups of a formal kind. But they might allow our garden of psychologists to bloom in a way that was really exciting and beautiful.

Zander Wedderburn

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

STARS SHINE FOR AUTISM

A CELEBRITY Christmas concert entitled 'Stars Shine for Autism' will be held at St Paul's Church, Wilton Place, Knightsbridge, on Tuesday 2 December at 7.30pm. Jane Asher, President of the National Autistic Society, as well as Zoe Wanamaker, Stephen Fry, Diana Rigg and Lynda Bellingham, will be reading at the event, and The Bach Choir and international soprano singer Christine Cairns will also be performing. Post-concert drinks will be held at The Berkley Hotel from 8.45pm.

☐ Tickets are available at a range of prices from www.theplace.org.uk or by calling 020 7387 0031.

NEW FIGURES ON WORK-RELATED ILL HEALTH

THE Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published a new summary of the latest statistics on occupational ill health in Britain. In 2001/02, 2.3 million people self-reported work-related ill health, accounting for 33 million working days lost, according to a recent household survey. *Occupational Health Statistics Bulletin 2002/03* analyses the demographic characteristics of those affected, and provides comparative figures for different occupations, industrial sectors and geographical areas.

☐ The bulletin is available on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/ohsb0203.pdf.

JOINT BA/BPS LECTURE

ON Wednesday 3 December there will be a joint British Academy/BPS lecture held at the Academy's offices at 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1. The lecture, entitled 'Working memory and learning during school years', will be given by Sue Gathercole, Professor of Psychology at the University of Durham. Professor Gathercole will provide an overview of evidence that children with poor working memory capacities often fail to achieve normal scholastic progress in key learning areas such as literacy, mathematics and science.

The lecture will start at 5.30pm. Seats are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. There is no admission charge for attendance, but those wishing to attend should inform the Academy's meetings department in advance.

☐ For more information contact the British Academy. Tel: 020 7969 5246; e-mail: lectures@britac.ac.uk.

Improbable knowledge

BRITISH psychology has again pulled off a win at the Ig Nobel award ceremony, held last month at Harvard University. First prize in the medicine category went to a University College London team for their discovery that the 'knowledge' of London taxi drivers may be related to structural changes in the hippocampus, the brain area associated with memory.

The Ig Nobels are organised by the *Annals of Improbable Research*, and aim to honour people whose achievements 'cannot or should not be reproduced'. It is the second year running that a Society member has scooped the medicine award: Chris McManus won last year for

his paper on scrotal asymmetry in man in ancient sculpture.

Dr Eleanor Maguire (Institute of Neurology, UCL), said: 'Overall we are pleased about the award. Making neuroscience more accessible to the public is important to us, and the taxi driver work certainly seems to have provoked huge interest across the board, being fun on one level, to being potentially important for understanding brain plasticity at a more

serious level. The nature of the Igs seems to be changing, with the emphasis more on science that makes you laugh but also makes you think.'

The prize in the psychology section went to Gian Vittorio Caprara and Claudio Barbaranelli of the University of Rome, and Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University, for their 1997 *Nature* paper 'Politicians' uniquely simple personalities'.

☐ For more information see www.improb.com/ig/ig-top.html.

Should services be segregated?

FEELINGS were running high at the Institute of Psychiatry during a debate on gender issues within psychiatric services. Several women service users gave heartfelt testimony to their experience of the vulnerability of women within mixed acute wards, in particular to sexual exploitation and violence.

The motion of September's 23rd Maudsley Debate was

'This house believes that in-patient psychiatric services should be segregated'.

Proposing the motion were Professor Dora Kohen, a consultant in charge of a women-only in-patient unit, and Lynne Clayton, a campaigner for single-sex wards at the Maudsley Hospital and co-chair of Southwark MIND. Opposing them were Professor Peter Tyrer, editor of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, and Dr Eleanor Cole, a consultant

psychiatrist at the Maudsley. Dr Lyn Pilowsky of the Institute of Psychiatry chaired the debate.

The audience started strongly behind the motion but with a number of voters waiting to be persuaded. The proposers centred their arguments on issues of women's safety and were opposed by a counter-attack emphasising the importance of patient choice. At the end of it all there were fewer people on the fence, but the percentages barely changed.

WEBSITES

www.sportspsyuk.co.uk

Sports Psychologist UK – British Association of Sports Psychologists

uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/brainrehab/

Neuropsychology/Brain Injury Rehabilitation Network – message board, chatroom, articles, support, downloads

uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/classpsych/

West Midlands Assistant Psychologist Network

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

Mental health in London

LONDON'S mental health needs are considerably different from those in the rest of the country, according to a new report published by the Mayor of London. One of the main findings was that 23 per cent of in-patient admissions in the capital are for schizophrenia, schizotypal and delusional disorders – compared with 14 per cent in the rest of England overall.

Produced by the research organisation Dr Foster, *Availability of Mental Health Services in London* also highlights marked variations in provision across the capital, with relative performance in the different boroughs closely linked to financial resourcing.

The report shows that mental health organisations in London are having mixed

success in providing services that are accessible and responsive to the local population. London has a large minority ethnic community, including a very high refugee population, which can be overrepresented in requiring mental health services. There can however be difficulties in accessing services for cultural or language reasons.

The Mayor, Ken Livingstone, said: 'The capital has high levels of mental illness and our health services need to be able to respond effectively to people with complex and varied needs. Although London has some of the most innovative mental health services in the country, it continues to face significant challenges in meeting the diverse requirements of all London's communities.'

The report suggests a number of areas where resources could be directed to improve on the current situation, such as greater support and development of commissioning skills in primary care services, a comprehensive

language support strategy, a pan-London strategy to improve retention rates and the development of black and minority ethnic staff. *The full report can be downloaded via www.london.gov.uk.*

ARE YOU BURNING TO ENTHUSE CHILDREN AND ADULTS ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY?

The BA (British Association for the Advancement of Science) invites BPS members to present talks to members of the public, via its network of branches throughout the UK. BA branches are currently planning their programmes for next year. Presentations should last 15–45 minutes, normally followed by an open discussion of the social and scientific issues raised. Please contact Julian.Jacobs@the-ba.net, who can put you in touch with your nearest branch.

Alternatively you can engage adults and children, and raise the profile of your institution, by holding a competition, performing a mass experiment or doing something equally exciting during National Science Week (12–21 March 2004). Contact Paula.Wallace@the-ba.net or visit www.the-ba.net/nsw.

Call for Nominations Chair of the Professional Practice Board 2005–2008

Nominations are required for the Chair of the Professional Practice Board to serve in office from 2005 to 2008. The person will serve as Chair Elect following the 2004 Annual General Meeting before becoming Chair following the 2005 Annual General Meeting.

The person appointed will be a Trustee of the Society and have a seat on the Board of Trustees. For additional information regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Chair and associated duties, please contact the current Chair of the Board, Ray Miller at ray.miller@raymiller.net

NOMINATIONS

Nominations should reach the Society's office no later than **30 January 2004**. To ensure validity of nomination you should use the standard nomination form, which gives details of the information and signatories required. A short personal statement will also be required.

The candidates will be considered by an Appointments Panel of the Board of Trustees who will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees. Any decision will be taken to the 2004 Annual General Meeting of the Society for ratification.

For more information about the Board, its full terms of reference and a job description with indication of time commitment contact Christina Docchar (PPB Administrator): chrdoc@bps.org.uk or 0116 252 0506.



the **BA** festival of science

CHRISTIAN BERESFORD JARRETT reports from the British Association Festival of Science, held at the University of Salford, 8–12 September 2003.

X-plaining autism

AUTISM is up to 10 times more common in men than women, and women with Turner's syndrome – who, like men, have just one X chromosome – are two hundred times more likely to have autism than other women. Until now these facts have been unexploited by research. But to David Skuse (Institute of Child Health) these statistics suggested the greatest risk factor for autism was having just one X chromosome – a fact that could hold the key to the condition.

So Skuse's team conducted a range of brain imaging, gene mapping and neuropsychological investigations involving women with Turner's syndrome and women with genetic abnormalities on one of their X chromosomes. They subsequently identified a section of the X chromosome that influences the development of the amygdala. The amygdala is involved in social cognition, and is a subcortical structure known to be abnormally developed in autism.

Next they discovered that women who lacked the stretch of genes linked with amygdala development had difficulty recognising the facial expression of fear – just as people with autism do. Visibly excited by the implications, Skuse said these findings point strongly to this same bundle of genes playing a key role in autism, and could also explain male vulnerability to the condition.

disabilities are not distinct entities but rather just the extreme of the normal range of ability. Second, the same genes influence different aspects of a developmental disorder. Taking the example of reading, the same genes appear to influence letter-by-letter reading and whole-word reading. This is also reflected in behavioural measures, with the two abilities tending to correlate. Third, the same genes appear to be involved in different developmental disorders. That is, it's mostly the same genes that affect maths and reading (dis)ability.

Is there a gene specialist in the house?

FORGET the idea of there being a specific gene for this condition or a certain gene for that disorder. Genes are generalists. That was the message, loud and clear, from Robert Plomin's (Institute of Psychiatry) presentation of the latest findings from TEDS, the largest ever twin study conducted in the UK. TEDS has been following 7500 twin pairs since their birth between 1994 and 1996. The latest results are based on teacher assessments and telephone-administered IQ tests taken when the children were seven years old.

If this all sounds reminiscent of Spearman's observation that there exists a 'general cognitive ability' or *g*, then you won't be surprised to learn that Plomin believes *g* is the prime candidate for the target of these general genetic influences. Plomin argued against the popular conception of the mind as modular and suggested it made more sense that the brain has evolved to work globally to solve problems. Consequently, Plomin predicts that when a gene is identified that is involved in, say, reading disability, then that gene will also be implicated in other abilities, like maths.

Plomin explained how, when it comes to cognitive development, genes are generalists in three ways. First, the same genes are responsible for variation in normal and abnormal cognitive ability. So, genetically speaking,

□ See www.iop.kcl.ac.uk/IoP/Departments/SGDPsy/research/TEDS.shtml

Goodbye Freud

'DOES Freud have a future?' asked Chris McManus (UCL), chair of the BA Psychology Section's afternoon debate. In a restrained opening Martin Conway (University of Durham) saw echoes of Freud in his work with neurological patients, including anosognosics who, despite limb paralysis following right-hemisphere brain damage, refuse to accept they have anything wrong with them.

Next up, Colin Blakemore (University of Oxford, chairman of the BA and chief executive of the MRC) argued that Freud was a proto-scientist who proposed many interesting ideas, but failed to test any of them empirically. In fact his treatment of patients, like Anna O, often ended in failure.

Then, in an impassioned, erudite display, Christopher Badcock (LSE) righted some wrongs ('Professor Blakemore will recall that Freud never treated Anna O; Breuer did'), and showed, through selected quotes, how so many of Freud's ideas were ahead of their time.

Last to speak, Lewis Wolpert (UCL) was unequivocal – psychoanalysis is psychobabble, can be used to explain anything, and damages people and their families. 'The Tavistock Clinic is evil,' he said. The audience voted overwhelming for Freud having no future in science. However, a similar majority thought Freud would live on in the arts and psychoanalysis.

IN BRIEF

Three very different experiments, one astonishing implication. Presented with a random sequence of pleasant and disturbing pictures, the pre-emptive sweatiness of people's fingers suggests they can somehow foresee which picture is coming next. Prayer in one country can increase the success of fertility treatment in another. And near-death experiences seem to occur during the brain silence that follows cardiac arrest. All evidence that the mind can surpass the brain in space and time, argued Peter Fenwick (Institute of Psychiatry).

Ongoing and intensive intervention can prevent the downward spiral of dyslexia. That was the implication of the Cumbria Mainstream Project described by Margaret Snowling (University of York) in her presidential address. Over 400 children starting mainstream school were screened, and on the basis of their reading ability, those most likely when older to be referred as dyslexic were selected. For the next two years these children were given highly structured reading tuition combined with specific training in phonological awareness – interventions that appeared to prevent the developing pattern of reading difficulties that would otherwise have been expected.

Lions can count. That was the message from African field work conducted by Karen McComb (University of Sussex). Using a speaker system, she played a pride of female lions the sound of other lions growling. The speed with which a lion subsequently approached the speaker depended on the size of her own pride relative to the number of lions growling on the recording.

Girlie giraffes

Do the quirks of language affect the way we see the world? Italian gives a gender to its nouns, so that, for example, 'giraffe' is a feminine word regardless of the sex of the beast in question. Gabriella Vigliocco (UCL) asked Italian and English speakers to rate the femininity/masculinity of a range of animals to see whether the gender specification in Italian would have any effect on how Italians thought about these animals. Indeed, such an effect was found – giraffes were seen as more girly by Italians. However, this finding was not replicated with tools, for which Italian also has gender allocation. It seems that having a biological basis for gender differentiation is necessary for the effect to occur.

Another quirk of language that varies between cultures involves whether words can be pluralised. In English some foods, like *broccoli* and *garlic*, cannot, whereas others can, like *potato(es)* or *carrot(s)*. It's as though words like *broccoli* are treated by the English language as a 'substance' or 'mass' – you have a certain amount rather than a certain number. Japanese has no such distinction.

English and Japanese speakers were asked to rate how substance-like a range of foods were. No effect of language on thought was found this time – both groups rated foods logically according to their appearance (e.g. soup rated as more substance-like than broccoli), rather than being influenced by their linguistic nature. Vigliocco hopes further research will ultimately aid the teaching of foreign languages.

KATE GREY

Not so easy as 1-2-3

THERE are at least two ways of reading a word – either by translating each letter into its given sound or, if it's familiar, by recognising the word as single unit. Brian Butterworth (UCL) described a similar distinction with numbers. When we're presented with up to four items, we can either count each one in turn, or instantly grasp how many items there are just by sight – so-called subitising.

At an interactive display at the new Explore-At-Bristol museum (www.at-bristol.org.uk), people are asked to indicate as fast as possible whether the number of dots in an array matches a numeral (e.g. 2) presented at the same time. The reaction times of over 7000 people have been gathered and analysed in this manner.

Brian Butterworth and Penny Fidler (At-Bristol) found that women were significantly faster than men at this interactive display, but only when there were fewer than four dots – that is, when subitising but not when counting. This sex effect hints strongly at a genetic underpinning for the ability to subitise. Butterworth is planning a twin study to explore this further.

By varying whether the dot array was presented on the left or right side of space, Butterworth and Fidler were also able to look for lateralisation effects. They found that when the dots were presented on the left (processed by the right hemisphere), people responded significantly faster, but only when there were more than five dots – that is, when they were counting.

Dyscalculia is a recently identified developmental disorder that affects up to 20 per cent of the population. Individuals with dyscalculia are particularly impaired at subitising, so the task described here could become a useful tool for identification of the disorder. This would be a significant development, Butterworth explained at the festival press conference, because at present children with the disorder are 'misdiagnosed by their teachers as stupid, they are misdiagnosed by their parents as stupid, they think of themselves as stupid, other kids think they are stupid and the daily maths lesson is a daily humiliation for them'.

