AHPD Strategy Workshop
18 October 2024
1330-1530
Regent's University London
Facilitated by Strive Higher

Workshop Headlines

1. Imagining a 2030s World

Participants were asked to respond to the following questions, across each of the PESTLE domains:

- How could it impact our discipline?
- How might we respond/adapt?

The PESTLE analysis highlights the key external factors influencing the discipline of psychology and the sector more broadly:

Political	Government policies on tuition fees, immigration, and perceptions of 'low-value' degrees could affect institutional reputation and funding. The role of universities in combating misinformation and addressing global challenges is increasingly crucial.
Economic	Pressures on funding models, the preference for increasingly diverse delivery modes, and partnerships with industry are emphasised. Economic disparities, increasing inequality, and a potential decline in research capacity are also significant concerns.
Social	Shifts in demographics, the need for mental health support (staff and students), and rising demand for flexible learning options are shaping student preferences. Cultural diversity and the relevance of traditional Western-dominated content must be reconsidered.
Technological	The rise of AI presents both opportunities and challenges. While AI can enhance accessibility and close educational gaps, staff training and ethical considerations need addressing.
Legal	The complex regulatory environment is influenced by multiple bodies, from academic regulations to safeguarding and employment rights. Universities are becoming increasingly risk-averse in response to an increasingly regulated, financially unstable, and politicised landscape.
Environmental	Sustainability and climate action are becoming central to university research, education, and operations. Changing preferences for net-zero campuses and sustainable practices are key, alongside considerations of student and staff well-being.

Emerging questions:

- How will advancements in technology, such as AI and virtual reality, shape therapeutic practices and psychological research?
- What role will interdisciplinary approaches play in addressing complex mental health issues, and how might this evolve in the coming years?
- How can psychology adapt to the changing societal landscape, including shifts in cultural norms and increased focus on mental health awareness?
- In what ways might our understanding of human behaviour and cognition evolve with emerging research in neuroscience and genetics?

Emerging threats:

- The major threats include tightening government regulations, funding cuts, and growing economic inequality. However, there are significant opportunities in technological advancements, evolving delivery methods, and addressing global challenges like sustainability, which could help the Discipline in shaping the future.

Addressing key threats:

1. **Government regulations and perceptions of 'low-value' degrees:**

- Advocacy and evidence-based communication: The Association could engage in ongoing dialogue with policymakers, using robust data to demonstrate the broader societal and economic value of the discipline. This can help counter negative narratives and protect programmes perceived as 'low value'.
- Curriculum alignment with national priorities: Tailoring programme to address national and global challenges like climate change, sustainability, or public health can help shift public perception, aligning education more closely with government priorities.

2. **Funding cuts and limited research capacity:**

- Diversifying revenue streams: The Association might explore new revenue sources, such as offering CPD courses, modular learning, and expanding industry partnerships. Additionally, fostering international collaborations and attracting philanthropic funding can provide alternative research funding streams.
- Collaborative research models: Strengthening partnerships with industries and other universities can help share research costs and resources. The Association could also focus on interdisciplinary research that taps into broader funding opportunities (e.g., sustainability, health, AI).

3. **Economic inequality and polarisation of disadvantage:**

- Enhanced student support services: Developing targeted support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including bridging programmes, scholarships, and more inclusive learning environments (e.g., flexible learning options), will help improve access and retention.
- Inclusive admission practices: Widening participation by reviewing admission criteria and offering foundation or preparatory courses to students with lower qualifications can support a more diverse student body.

4. **Complex regulatory environment:**

- Streamlined compliance strategies: Working collaboratively with university legal and compliance teams to help navigate the increasingly complex regulations (e.g., for immigration, BPS accreditation, GDPR). Proactive engagement with regulatory bodies will ensure that the Association stays ahead of upcoming changes.
- Risk management and training: Offering staff training in risk management, regulatory compliance, and safeguarding will ensure that universities remain compliant while minimising legal risks.

Identifying emerging themes/opportunities:

1. **Technological integration and AI:**

- Enhanced learning and accessibility: AI presents a tremendous opportunity to personalise education, offering tailored learning experiences based on students' needs. The Association, together with institutions, could develop AI-driven tools that help with student assessments, content delivery, and accessibility (e.g., for non-native English speakers and students with disabilities).
- Staff development: Providing professional development in AI-related tools and digital literacy will help academics adapt to technological advancements and integrate them meaningfully and responsibly into the curriculum.
- Innovative research: AI can enhance research capabilities, including the analysis of big data, simulation modelling, and even aiding in the co-registration of imaging. This expands research into previously inaccessible areas.

2. **Flexible learning models:**

- Modular and CPD Courses: There is increasing demand for flexible programmes, short courses, CPD, and remote learning. Capitalising on this trend by offering flexible, non-traditional learning options will attract a broader range of students, including working professionals, career changers, and international students.
- International student recruitment: By offering more flexibility of offering, universities can tap into new international markets, allowing students worldwide to participate in more innovate ways, which also aligns with environmental sustainability goals.

3. **Industry partnerships and employability:**

- Work-integrated learning: Expanding partnerships with industries to offer more internships, placements, and work-integrated learning can enhance employability for graduates.
- Franchising and collaboration: While franchising poses risks, it also opens new revenue streams and opportunities for cross-institutional learning if managed well. Joint degree programmes or partnerships with industry can enhance the reputation and reach of the discipline.

4. **Sustainability and climate action:**

- Green campuses: Universities and departments that commit to sustainability, such as reducing their carbon footprint and promoting green practices on campus, can attract environmentally conscious students and staff. Green credentials are becoming increasingly important for institutional reputation.

- Sustainability research and curriculum: The Association can position the discipline as leaders in sustainability research by focusing on the behaviours associated with climate change, renewable energy, and environmental psychology. Incorporating sustainability into the curriculum can appeal to both students and funding bodies, reflecting broader societal values.
- Behavioural science in climate action: The discipline can play a vital role in understanding and promoting behaviour change related to sustainability. The Association could support universities to develop niche programmes or research initiatives focused on these intersections.

5. **Cultural diversity and mental health support:**

- Culturally inclusive curriculum: Revising programmes to be more culturally relevant and globally focused can help attract international students and meet the needs of increasingly diverse domestic student populations. This may involve decolonising the curriculum and incorporating non-Western perspectives.
- Strengthening mental health services: Expanding mental health support systems, particularly as students face more complex challenges post-pandemic, will help cater to student well-being. This could include training academics in mental health awareness and offering more integrated mental health services within the student experience.

2. The Art of the Possible: Co-Creating a Vision

Given the previous discussion around the external drivers of change, reflect on these questions and then co-create a vision for the discipline by 2030:

- What is your vision for the discipline in 2030 and beyond?
    - Psychology must emphasise the value of its qualifications for both students and employers.
    - Highlighting transferable skills like critical thinking and communication.
    - Establishing a clear and defined career pathway for graduates.
        - Key words: relevant, socially engaged, impactful

- Which significant contributions could our discipline be making in a 2030 and beyond world?
    - Psychology's potential to address global challenges, such as conflict resolution.
    - Expanding its impact on various fields, enhancing service evaluation, and data analysis.
        - Key words: behaviour change, CPD leaders, mental health, societal needs

- Which direction might our discipline take?
    - Focus on sharing positive stories, reducing self-criticism, and showcasing successful graduates.
    - Emphasis on digital literacy, applied skills, and broadening roles beyond clinical psychology.
        - Key words: multidisciplinary, responsive to societal needs, integrated, articulate value of Psychology

- What is different if our discipline takes this direction?
    - Improved societal perception of Psychology, increased focus on applied skills, and evolving career paths.
    - Modularisation of learning and better alignment with employer expectations.
        - Key words: responsive, socially relevant, value of Psychology recognised, wider application

3. Developing our Future Narrative

Given the vision that we have just co-created, now consider what the compelling narrative would be for each of these personas.

- Who is your persona? Think about the future of the discipline from their perspective.
- What will the narrative be for them?
- What will they care about in terms of where the discipline contributes in 2030 and beyond?

Overall Headline:	Psychology education offers a range of benefits, from societal impact to personal and professional development.
Grant Funder	Emphasises the importance of societal impact, financial efficiency, effective communication, and a psychological approach to problem-solving
Graduate Market/ Employer	Focuses on the potential benefits of hiring Psychology graduates, their skills, and their ability to contribute to the workplace.
VC or Dean	Highlights the importance of impact, collaboration, innovation, sustainability, financial viability, and student development.
Parent	Seeks information about what Psychology entails, career opportunities, earning potential, teaching methods, and practical experience.
International Recruiter	highlights the broad applicability and quality of Psychology graduates
Daily Mail Reader/ General Public	Emphasises the scientific nature of Psychology, its relevance to everyday life, and its potential to improve mental health.
Prospective Student	Expresses an interest in Psychology, career paths, inclusivity, flexibility, and societal impact.
NHS/Clinical Practice	Focuses on improving workforce wellbeing, promoting public health, and utilising data-driven approaches.
British Psychological Society (BPS)	Aims to establish a standard of excellence for Psychology, ensure its relevance, and maintain its large membership base.