

Report of ATPS Conference 2010

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Having overcome the challenge of getting to Stirling University's Management Centre for 9.30am on a Saturday morning (the cryptic bus timetables being one of those things that make you wonder quite how you ever got a university degree), I was pleased to see an agenda packed with informative sessions relevant to my role as a psychology teacher.

This was my first ATPS Conference – I heard about the ATPS and joined after attending the SQA Central Marking event for Higher Psychology in Dunfermline. While I'd found the magazine useful and am a regular user of PsychExchange, I wasn't sure what I would gain from attending Conference, but decided to give it a go. As a 'sole practitioner' of Higher Psychology in a relatively small centre (Stow College), I welcome any opportunity to spend the day with others who can share tips, experiences and materials, and this was one of the main benefits of the day for me.

The morning session split into two groups, one covering the recently reviewed NQ Psychology courses (mainly Higher) and the other, HN provision. I predominantly teach at NQ level so attended this session, and was very glad that I had – key information on the changes to the 'Social Context' section of the exam had failed to filter through from the SQA, and I will now be making changes to my Prelim paper as a result. Whether this was a communication breakdown within my own institution or further afield is unclear, but I was not the only attendee in the dark about these important changes.

One of the highlights of the day was a talk by Dr Paula Collin of Tayside NHS on eating disorders, a new addition to the 'Atypical Behaviour' topic for Higher. Although I had taught this before (Stow runs a Diploma Women's Studies course which includes an HN-level 'Women and Psychology' unit) this was a really informative talk and I feel much more confident in tackling the topic with my Higher group.

I felt a slight frustration with the round-table discussion on teacher training and psychology in the afternoon session. The panel was impressive, but I felt the discussion would have benefited either from more time (which would have meant extending the day, as all of the other sessions were equally good!) or a smaller group. My main frustration, however, was with the failure to acknowledge the huge role played by FE lecturers in the delivery of psychology courses in Scotland. I am sure the SQA could confirm the figures, but I suspect that the vast majority of NQ Psychology is delivered by FE lecturers, either in college or through school-college partnerships – and is done so with a high level of success. At present, PGCE-trained teachers can move into FE, but TQFE-trained (and experienced!) FE lecturers cannot move in the opposite direction without re-training - and who in their right mind would give up secure employment to re-train in the current climate? As an FE lecturer, this debate left me with some concerns over the perception of FE as a 'second class' sector.

The final session of the day was positive and informative, though, with Marie Morrison updating us on Curriculum for Excellence and its relevance to NQ Psychology – welcome information which I'll be taking back to others in my college.