

## INTERVIEW WITH INCOMING PRESIDENT, DR MEGAN GAFFNEY



### *The IP is delighted to introduce Megan, who takes on the role of President of PSI for 2021*

*Megan, can you tell us a little about yourself for those members who may not know you?*

Firstly, I'm delighted to be taking on the role of the President of PSI, particularly in these challenging times. My journey to the PSI has been a bit of an unusual one – I grew up in Connecticut on the east coast of the US and came to Ireland originally around 20 years ago. At that time, I was an undergraduate in my psychology degree at Boston University. I returned to Ireland to study counselling psychology in Trinity College Dublin (TCD), and never moved back to the US. I am a counselling psychologist with my own practice, which I run out of Centric Health (formerly the Albany Clinic), where I work with adults and adolescents. I have worked in a few interesting settings, including the Irish Defence Forces and secondary schools in the Kildare/Wicklow Education and Training Board. After being out of education for a few years, I went back to do a part-time research PhD, which I finished in 2018. As well as running my own busy practice, I lecture in the School of Psychology in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and in Open Education in Dublin City University (DCU).

*How did you come to be involved in PSI and what roles have you played within the Society so far?*

I first became active within the Society around 2010, around the time that I started to consider my move to Ireland permanent. At that stage, I joined as a committee member of the Counselling Division. I was Secretary and Membership Secretary of the Division, and went on to chair that Division. A little later on, I joined PSI Council, where I have been a director of the Society for a number of years. During that time, I have had the opportunity to work with colleagues across different divisions, committees, and specialisms. I have also had the opportunity to be the Membership Secretary of the Society, and to see how other areas of the Society work, such as accreditation, communications and governance.

*What aspects of your involvement in PSI have you found most interesting to date?*

During my time on the Counselling Division, our committee ran a membership survey. It was very interesting to see the demographics of members and their thoughts and levels of engagement with the Society and with the wider profession. During my time on Council and as Membership Secretary, I was fortunate to be involved with another, much larger membership survey. Again, I was heartened that many members took the time to share their thoughts and concerns with the Society. It is always interesting to learn what connects members to the Society and to their broader profession.

Like many of you who filled out our membership engagement survey last year, I have found PSI to be a welcoming community and have been fortunate to have had many connecting experiences through the Society. I have gotten to know colleagues, and even made friends and mentors through my involvement with PSI. Surveys provide us with valuable information, because it's also important to know what we are not getting right, and the concerns and anxieties people have about the Society and their role within the broader profession.

*Have you any specific goals for your time as President of PSI?*

Yes, possibly too many! I hope to continue some of the good work started by my colleague Mark Smyth during his presidency: Working to advocate for and establish parity between professional training programmes, working to get more training places and resources for psychologists, working to bring psychological knowledge to the public and sharing how the work of psychologists is relevant and accessible, as well as evidence based.

In conjunction with my colleague PSI CEO Shane Kelly, we hope to expand the capacity of PSI to create more policy and develop PSI as a place with dynamic ideas in relation to training and research. PSI will be relocating premises in 2020, and may make a more permanent move in the next year or two. Based on feedback from the membership survey, and the particular challenges we are faced with during COVID-19, we are thinking about how we can make training and continuing professional development (CPD) more geographically accessible for members by offering remote solutions.

*What do you think are some of the opportunities for the Society in the next 12 months and how will you approach them?*

As I mentioned earlier, we conducted a membership engagement survey in 2019 as part of an overall engagement plan within PSI. While many members were happy with the sense of community PSI provided, others were disenfranchised and reported issues such as geographical barriers, social and professional hierarchies, and feeling a sense of disconnection with the Society.

The coming year is filled with many challenges, both for PSI and for everyone in our profession as we deal with the aftermath of a large scale trauma. Hopefully, we will see the end of it in the coming year. PSI will face challenges as well as it moves premises and prepares for the opening of the CORU register. Any challenge inherently presents an opportunity. There are opportunities to create a sense of belonging and a more unified Society. These circumstances open the door for psychologists to support each other, to create a sense of community and to try to overcome challenges together through increased collaboration and communication.

*To finish, do you have any other message for the readers?*

If you have an opinion on something in the PSI world, reach out and we will try to connect you with others who are working on the same thing. We would love to hear from you!

