

Cath Lowther – Election Statement

*Do it **now**. Now is the time. Be in touch with it, because now regenerates in an instant. It is always all we have, shapeshifting before our eyes, coming and going away and appearing. It is gone in a moment and around forever. If this paradox will not alert you to the ferocity and significance of the time we are in, what will? Now is when you wake up and decide what the day will be and now is the dream itself, ebbing away with each waking second. **Now** is a result of everything we thought we knew.*

Yrsa Daley-Ward

‘Now’ could elicit hopelessness. There are significant conflicts and humanitarian disasters occurring around the world. Not all children have access to education. Human rights are violated or curtailed. A climate emergency threatens. COVID-19 lingers. Poverty prevails. Discrimination persists.

Closer to home, a cost of living crisis looms and education and inequality gaps continue to widen. Our public services are struggling under the weight of the pandemic and staff shortages. The media is reporting mental distress in our young people and limited access to support. Parents and carers worry about their children’s needs (educational or otherwise). Record numbers of young people are in care. Green and white papers have been published without enough ambition or imagination.

And yet, it is the word ‘hope’ that I have been contemplating while preparing this election statement, primarily within the context of Barack Obama’s book title ‘the *audacity* of hope’. Amidst this wondering a tweet from a TEP landed on my feed citing a post from Educational Psychology Today (20.10.2017) identifying EPs as ‘hope catchers’.

This quote beautifully links my view of our profession with that word ‘hope’. I genuinely believe that EPs change the world. Perhaps not on a global scale, but in minute (or enormous) ways for individual young people, their families and the people who work with them. Hence #EPsChangetheWorld – both a statement of belief and a call to action.

As General Secretary of the AEP, our well-regarded professional association and trade union, I aim to embody hope, now. I want to communicate that EPs change the world and convince even more people of what we can accomplish. I wish to grow on the excellent progress that our current General Secretary, Kate Fallon, has made in this pursuit and to continue to represent our members’ hopes and aspirations for the profession, from all four of our nations, in all work contexts and at different points in their journeys.

My particular priorities are:

- Equality, diversity and inclusion – to ensure that our profession is representative of the people we serve and that the principles of social justice are much more explicitly embedded in our practice. Part of this relates to the accessibility of our training and its ongoing public funding as well as a potential review of training programmes to ensure they meet the needs

of all future EPs and our communities. Making poverty history would be good too, a campaign I had involvement with many years ago.

- Mental health and resilience – to address the medicalised view of emotional distress and to promote a systemic, contextual and socially informed understanding of wellness and resilience; highlighting the role EPs play in supporting the provision of early intervention and mentally healthy settings and communities.
- Education reform – to bolster a growing call for a proper review of education and better SEND reforms, fit for the 21st Century. To challenge the existing content based curriculum and widespread implementation of restrictive practices and to explore person centred learning and relationship based approaches.
- Parity of esteem – to further celebrate the contributions of all public sector staff and to lobby for fair pay increases.
- Young people's voice – to ensure young people's wishes and views continue to be key to everything that we do, as per Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Member involvement – to inspire AEP members to actively participate in changing the world of educational psychology (and by doing so, the world for many others).

At the heart of my intent behind standing as General Secretary, however, is representation. Hence my priorities will in reality be *your* priorities, pursued with the passion and hope that I feel for my own. I therefore pledge to be your voice, to campaign tirelessly with and for you and in that small way, to change the world.

I have been a member of the AEP since my first year of training in 2009. I have been a local rep since 2014 and a member of the NEC since 2018. As local rep, I have represented members collectively in speaking with heads of service, directors and the chief executive as well as during a number of restructures. I have also supported members individually, giving advice and advocacy where needed. I have further participated in AEP meetings with national government civil servants and contributed to AEP responses to government consultations and legislation. I am particularly proud to have represented educational psychology on the Education Select Committee's SEND enquiry: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmeduc/20/20.pdf>

I have experience in leading projects within local authority educational psychology services and have had leadership roles most recently as a Senior EP and previously as a children's centre manager. I have had responsibility for managing budgets of up to £100K. Within these roles, I have also contributed to local authority strategy, for example, relating to SEND and mental health provision. This has been in the context of internal meetings as well as with NHS partners. I am also leading on a local neurodiversity project and play a significant role in a related regional neurodiversity network. Previously to that, I have dedicated my working life to children and young people, as a teacher, youth worker, children's centre manager and EP.

As an EP, I am good at managing a large workload and competing demands on my time. This is particularly so in my current role, where I spend half my time as a senior and half as a specialist working within social care.

I am committed to social justice, solidarity and activism. I believe in the power of trade unions to change the world, just as EPs do (albeit in different ways); a power needed now, more than ever.

The AEP already has clear goals and plans through which to attain them. For example, the AEP will respond to the SEND Green Paper and challenge its shortcomings. The AEP will continue to campaign to limit restrictive practices and for equal protection for children and young people, a greener planet, a review of education and a fairer pay award. And there will be further goals that the AEP will plan for and work towards achieving.

Within psychology, Hope is conceptualised as consisting of goals, planning ('pathways') and agency (Snyder, et al.). By that definition, the AEP *is* hope – now and in the future. The future is likely to bring with it even more challenges but the AEP is an organisation well suited to face them.

We are all the AEP, now is the time. Do it now.

It is in your hands to create a better world for all who live in it.

Nelson Mandela

#cath4gensec