

Election Address for the role of General Secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP)

Donna Wiggett, Senior Educational Psychologist, Education Authority Northern Ireland (EANI)

Dear member,

It's an honour to be standing for the role of General Secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP). I do so with a deep respect for the profession we all serve and a strong belief in the power of collective voice, collaboration and principled leadership.

EPs, Assistant EPs and Trainee EPs are a highly skilled and essential element of the nation's workforces. Throughout my career, I have been guided by a simple conviction — that psychology, applied with compassion and rigour, can change lives. I have had the privilege of applying psychology at every level of our profession: from my earliest days as a Classroom Assistant and Teacher, to my work as an Assistant EP, Maingrade EP, Senior EP, and Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP). I have served in both England and Northern Ireland (UK's biggest EPS), bringing a broad and balanced perspective to the complexities we face across the UK. I am currently a Senior EP in the Education Authority Northern Ireland (EANI).

Alongside my professional practice, I have committed myself to service within our Association. I've represented members locally and regionally, and for the past four years, I've had the privilege of serving on the National Executive Committee (NEC). Through this work, I've had a front-row seat to the challenges and opportunities that define our profession today — and I am ready to take the next step in leading us through them.

We are at a crucial juncture. Workload pressures are rising. Recruitment and retention have become critical concerns. The expectations placed upon Educational Psychologists are increasing, even as resources tighten. And yet, amidst these challenges, we are seeing renewed recognition of the vital role we play — in schools, in policy, and in the lives of children and young people.

As General Secretary, I will bring experience and energy to these issues. I have worked collaboratively with our union colleagues, Unite, GMB, Prospect, NIPSA and the teaching unions such as UNISON and NEU. I've sat at Joint National Committees (JNC) and local negotiation tables. I've been trained in media engagement by Connect Public Affairs Company, and I understand the importance of telling our story — clearly, credibly, and passionately — to policymakers, the public, and the press.

My commitment to social justice is not just a value, it is a compass that guides my work. It led me to establish the Northern Ireland Branch of the AEP after networking at conferences and recognising the need for a stronger voice in the region. It drove me to invite the Children's Commissioner and engage with Department for Education colleagues and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) at Stormont — to advocate, to influence, and to champion the needs of the EPS and the most vulnerable in our society.

As PEP, I was part of a steering group who helped set up the University of East Anglia Doctorate course in 2017. I was on the interview panel for University of East London (UEL) in 2018. I link in with Queens University Belfast (QUB) to deliver training. I am the AEP NEC link on the steering group for the

University of Manchester training course where the AEP have commissioned trainee EPs to carry out research on ‘What good looks like for EPS sufficiency?’

I believe the AEP needs a General Secretary who is rooted in the reality of practice, but who is not afraid to lead, to speak out, and to bring people together. Someone who knows the journey from classroom to committee room, who has walked in the shoes of our members, and who is committed to a stronger, more inclusive, and more responsive Association.

I recently completed an Open University course on Project Management, where I was particularly inspired by this definition of leadership from the Association of Project Management (2019): *‘Leadership is the ability to establish vision and direction, to influence and align others towards a common purpose, and to empower and inspire people to achieve success.’* If elected, I will embody these principles—representing your interests, amplifying your voice, and championing the values that unite us as a profession.

Thank you for your trust, your support, and for the work you do every day. Together, we can shape a future that values psychology, respects our profession, and protects the children, families and communities we serve.

Areas I would like to focus on for us as a profession and trade union:

1. Actively listening to members to gain trust and support for collaborative working
2. Reviewing, actioning and fulfilling the motions put forward by you as members and passed by you as members at the annual general meetings (AGMs)
3. Continue to campaign for the Doctorate funding, linking with BPS and the Select committees
4. Supporting and advising the President, Vice-President and NEC members, including Regional Reps and Subcommittees with policy and operational matters and decisions
5. Work alongside our Professional Officers to continue to advocate the role of psychology in policy and development
6. Work alongside the AEP office staff on areas such as website design and communication relevant to your jurisdiction
7. Continue collaborations with our sister trade unions, Prospect and NEU in Soulbury negotiations to ensure members have the recognition, support and working conditions we need and deserve
8. Promoting Social Justice and embedding inclusion within education reform, strengthening early intervention through better training and support in schools
9. Continuing to work collaboratively with many other professionals to provide expertise across the education sector as well as offering a psychological understanding of education and child development in other sectors including health, and social care. This will involve promoting the five core functions of the EP role (Consultation, Assessment, Intervention, Training and Research) (Currie report, 2000)
10. Support the development of integrated approaches to SEN provision, early intervention strategies, and providing psychological insight at a strategic level to inform staff development, commissioning, policy development, and workforce planning across local authority and partner services.

I need your input into achieving these goals, as together ‘we’ are the AEP. Thank you.

DWiggett