



NAPEP Chair Closing Speech

Friday 15th May 2026, Majestic Hotel, Cardiff

It is my privilege, as your new Chair, to bring this event to a close. I have a choice here; to either look up and see your wonderful faces OR I don the glasses so I can see what I have written- so here goes!

Thanks

I'd like to start with a round of thanks.

Thank you to NAPEP Exec colleagues who have been involved in the planning of this important annual event and for those PEP colleagues who took part in the running of the day checking on virtual attendees and wonderful visual 'graphic-ing'- Rhona is our resident artiste, who had hoped to have paper and pens to 'graphic' during the day- she has the pens but could not get hold of the paper, and what you will not know, is that, instead Rhona has done this on her tablet and I have had a sneak preview and her captures are amazing- we'll be able to circulate these and upload them on to the website-so thank you Rhona.

Thank you to all colleagues and guest speakers who have kindly given their time to our day.

Thank you to the fantastic team at KC Jones for the smooth organising and running of today- you really do make our work so much lighter – good to know we are in safe hands with you. An event like this would simply not be possible without you. When Mo and I came into the room this morning before our event started, I had a feeling that resonated with an experience I had had early in my EP career. I had had the pleasure of being a link EP for a primary school whose heart and community were amazing, yet they had the most awful premises. Then, they got permission for a new build, and I was invited to the opening. It was such a feeling to finally see an environment that felt fitting and matching all the good inclusive work and sense of heart and community. And that's how I felt walking into the room this morning presented as it was. We realised last night that we

had been working with KC Jones for around 10 years now, and we have developed a really good relationship where they understand what we are about.

Thank you to your all here and for those of you joining us remotely from ‘back at the ranch’ - your active participation is key to the reflections we are all able to take home

Motivation

And what kinds of things do we take home?

After each annual learning event (aka conference), we look at the delegate feedback. It is very clear that there are many reasons and varied motivations for PEPs and seniors wanting to come to this event- people seek different things: an escape from the office, a chance to switch off from approving mileage claims forms and other tasks you never knew could be part of a PEP role or to immerse yourselves in psychological thinking, enjoying the reflecting space, reconnecting with familiar colleagues and forging new connections. Whatever your motivation, we hope you have found some of what you were looking for today.

Content recap

We have had, I hope you’ll agree, a varied and fascinating day- all wound together with the precious thread of psychological safety, weaving the past into the present and onto the future. Sue opened our event reflecting on the themes of positioning, narratives, containment and psychological safety. Then, we heard from Kate, Deputy Director for SEND and AP. Kate joined us last year and set us off with asking for our responses to 7 key questions: It has been fantastic that Kate has been able to join us again. This year Kate has encouraged us to think about 2 broad areas of discussion: areas of development and assessment. She also encouraged us to submit responses to the consultation; we have until midnight on Monday. Sue referred to this at the AGM, and as not everyone attended, I am going to recap a couple of paragraphs from her report for those of you who missed it,

” The quintet also wrote a high-level document for the DfE to influence its policy on how the educational psychology profession can be mandated to have most impact on a reformed SEND system in England and therefore most impact on better outcomes for children. In this document we called for the EP workforce to be mandated as a statutory service, rather than a statutory task, providing services for children and young people earlier, more flexibly, and most importantly as a core offer.... However, this work is not finished. Primary and Secondary legislation will need to be passed through government and how the profession is written into new legislation is still to be determined”

So please do get a response in. It is long, 39 questions, and if you are tight for time this weekend, if you do nothing else, please answer question 39- it is a space asking, “anything else you would like to say?” We thank Kate for all the time she has given to

working with NAPEP to understand the skilful work of our profession and the difference we make to staff in settings, the experiences of families and the outcomes for children and young people. We then had the session 'opening the black box: decision architecture and leadership in education from Dr Melissa Jones. Wow! 4 years of PhD graft distilled and imparted into 60 minutes, crafted with direct relevance to our work. Thank you for providing us with the theory, the framework, and the language to make the implicit, explicit. The 'longer-later' and space for EP-Teacher consultation for systemic thinking is invaluable. The Experts at Hand model does provide an opportunity to consider crafting decision making architecture. Thank you for the nudge not to fall into the trap of rushing this thinking.

This was followed during lunch by the AGM and awards. The AGM is an important part of the governance of NAPEP as an organisation and this year we have had the additional pleasure of formally celebrating professional contributions. Not much praise comes the PEP way, and it is important that hard work, commitment and going the extra mile on behalf of the profession are celebrated.

After our AGM we had a wonderful session from our very own Dr Phil and Dr Shin. "What behaviour change can you buy for £200 million? Well, the answer it seems is, "not a lot!" Unless we pay good attention to real change being more than a change in perceptions and understanding IF we want outcomes for children and young people to be different. The SEND reforms perhaps present a challenging context within which to consider the complex nature of the transfer problem. Thank you Shin and Phil for whetting our appetite and making complex content accessible. We have talked about EPs' sophisticated thinking today and this level of thinking has been evident across the day.

Then finally, we had 3 'flash presentations' on the theme of 'Journeys into leadership' (James, Joanna and Malcolm). I got the title wrong earlier. Originally called the Joy of Leadership, we must have changed our minds about the title of this session along the way- I can't imagine why! I hope you found them joyful. I know I did.

Bridge

I don't have references to Punk Rock (as per the flash presentations), but I will borrow from the words of Beyonce, and "let's take it to the bridge now"- Sue reflected on some key issues and on the year past and orientated us to our day ahead. I hope you all have found value in the content and process of the day- a lot of thinking, talking and planning, much of it in people's own time, goes into the day. So, What now? And what next? Well, we'll be heading home and thinking of all sorts on our journeys and over the coming days, and weeks. I would like to raise 3 points to ponder: 1) an Educational Psychology identity crisis, 2) giving psychology away, and 3) our comfort with being experts.

Point to ponder 1- Our identity crisis?

Numerous articles have been written on the topic of the EP role: sometimes speaking about a **distinctive** contribution. Sometimes speaking about a **unique** contribution. In the context of my experience over the last year (conference to conference year!) I have been thinking about whether the EP profession has really had an identity crisis at all. Or is it more the case that role constriction in some/many EP services has led to a constriction of other people's understanding of the EP profession and EP contribution. There are now people working in SEND, and schools in some places, who really have a very restricted understanding about the extent or variety of the ways EPs can and do work. EPs have become synonymous in some places as EHCNA writers or technicians, like other supporting services and helpers.

But whilst others may have developed a restricted view of our role or purpose, I am not sure that WE have lost sight of our identity, role and purpose. I think our crisis, if we have had one, and it is an ironic one given our day- to- day skills in communication, is articulating our role, purpose and skillset **on the wider stage**, in ways that **others have been able to galvanise into action for the benefit** of children and young people.

We hope that the publication of the NAPEP papers we call Part 1 and Part 2 (roles and responsibilities and Currie Matrix infographic sent to you all and now on the NAPEP website) very much help set out key information in an accessible way to help others understand just what an EP is and can do. Let's get **consistently** good at explaining ourselves at this time of opportunity for national reset.

Point to ponder 2- 'giving psychology away'

When I was an Assistant EP, back in the late 90s, I was rebuked by a Senior EP for copying the phrase I had heard someone else use, along the lines of EPs 'giving psychology away'. I felt very told off at the time. And the memory is still there, but I don't think it has really been since this last year, that I have understood why that comment might have caused that reaction. I think the reaction was about 'selling the profession short' - that we had skills/knowledge /experience that could be simply 'given away' - any old body can use psychology... so what do we mean? Do we mean that we **'apply'** psychology (instead) and that part of our skill (or expertise dare I say) is that when we apply psychology, we do it in ways that are accessible- so partners (be that staff in schools or anywhere else) understand what we are trying to convey/ the meaning we are trying to impart? Our skills are such that we make 'helping' look it easy. But that is **not** the same as recipients of our help, somehow being 'psychologically 'full' or enlightened. Think about the sheer iceberg of knowledge, skills, experience that we draw on in every encounter. I want to contend, that we do not simply give psychology away at all, and

that ensuring a **consistent** narrative that we ‘**apply**’ psychology will be more helpful to the profession.

Point to ponder 3- We are not experts. But we have expertise

Yes, we do have expertise – my point to ponder 2 about applying psychology is about our expertise. But why the discomfort with the notion of being an expert? Has being an expert somehow become conflated with the idea of being big headed or a professional who knows more than or better than?

Well, we do know more on a specialist topic- we know more about applying psychology across systems and levels to the benefit of children and young people. That’s what we do. No one else does that. But that is not the same as knowing better or more than. It’s bringing different expertise. And a differently informed perspective.

And yes, we are experts! It’s official- we are in the experts at hand model. It’s there in black and white. The government train us. They think we are experts. I am going to suggest that we reflect on the discomfort some of us have had, of referring to ourselves as experts. The E@H model planning that is steaming ahead, with various degrees of stakeholder engagement and practitioners jostling for position in land grabs, is clearly demonstrating that others are not shy in considering themselves experts. We’ve got this! Be bold!

In areas where you or the LA EPS is perhaps being sidelined and does not have a seat at the table, the late Sir Tim Brighouse would encourage us to pull up our own chair. Sometimes easier said than done. We can’t necessarily position ourselves through sheer will power alone. And not all of us like scraped elbows/wear elbow pads. Where we can’t, it might be a case of steadfastly developing an alternative approach to positioning the service as a voice of reason when the success of the reform implementation is being evaluated. Let’s not forget, this is system of reform over time. There will be opportunity to review and take stock about progress. So, if you are in a moment right now that feels difficult, take heart. Slow and steady wins the race. Let’s support one another in our respective races.

So, let’s be bold where and how we can. As the saying goes, no step we take is ever a lost step: we know who we are and what we can do. We apply psychology skilfully to promote positive outcomes for CYP, positive experiences for families, and professional support to colleagues.

From points to ponder to non- negotiables

Thinking now about the reforms as a period of change requiring us to be flexible in approach and adapt to working within new legislation and system processes. The reforms are about a fair and sustainable system that works for the benefit of all CYP. Working **in the service of children and young people** is what we do. It's our bread and butter. We **already** can, do and will work jointly and with work creativity with children and young people at the fore of our thinking. My own values around credible psychological practice include:

- To be authentic in my encounters.
- To work with transparency and accountability
- To work with criticality and curiosity
- To work in collaboration with others.

You will likely have your own values that guide your practice. Whatever those are, we must **all** stand firm on the issue of rigour: of our psychological principles, of our practice and of psychological understanding and formulation. Without standing firm on this rigour, we will not be set apart from the 'wild west' of so-called helpers that we have been experiencing or observed emerging.

The proof of the pudding

The Children's Commissioner will have a statutory responsibility for holding the government to account about the progress /success of the implementation of education and send reforms. Key for them, will be a methodology that can be deployed nationally, with metrics that can and will hold local areas to account for their decision making. At the core of the metrics will be, making a difference to children and young people (in other words impact).

So, what does that mean for PEPs and their services? EPs are funded to train by the DfE. We are a key workforce. Indeed, we are **their** experts at hand. What will be the proof of the pudding of our expertise in applying psychology, locally, regionally, nationally? I want to come back to the idea of **consistency**. National consistency with local flexibility, acknowledging that each local area, and its EP Service, will have its own contextual features and challenges.

Key areas to strive for consistency and evidence our accountability

We have had some fantastic national work done over the last year or so: The supporting school attendance work, work on AI, and benchmarking. All crucial work.

Thinking about what work will be important for the year ahead: I want us to consider quality and impact as interconnected domains.

Quality -how do we ensure we demonstrate or evidence quality in EP Services? We are experts in applying psychology- what **consistency** can we achieve nationally about our approach to ensuring quality of delivery and **evidence** this approach to rigour, with rigour, not least for when the office for the children's commissioner calls. We have the 'wild west' of so-called experts all saying they can do what we do. How can we **consistently** evidence rigour and quality of what we deliver. Whatever we happen to be delivering in our particular context. What is our 'level 8-ness' and how do we show it?

Impact- again, how do we ensure we can **consistently** demonstrate **or** evidence our impact. The case study work that we have started is part of that, and this needs to be built into a framework of evidence not only to be celebrated but used to demonstrate value in local and national decision-making arenas. The 'so what?' factor.

And finally, **sustainability/workforce development**. We cannot address quality and impact, alone, in isolation from sustainability. Sue mentioned this in her opening address. What work needs to be done to ensure access to EP services in all local areas? What work needs to be done to build succession planning within individual services and within the profession?

NAPEP Executive committee, informed by regions, will be considering an action plan of priorities for the year ahead.

To my mind, we are leaving an era of enforced competition, local boundaries and local self-preservation (austerity and trading). Now more than ever, it is time for LA PEPs to come together, and stay together, for the greater good. Share. Talk to your neighbour. One for all, and all for one. There is **lots** to do. And doing it together, will make the world of difference to our own journey, and ultimately, for children and young people. Onwards.

And with that, we wish you all a safe journey home. And to those of you already at home, 'What's for tea?'

Dr Fiona Alexander, NAPEP Chair, 2026-27 (Slough Borough Council).