

To wards 2000

Is the Society President a leader or a servant?' asks incoming President, Pat Frankish. Underlying much of our recent conversation was an evident ethic of service — 'I'm just a pragmatic person and if it needs doing I do it,' she remarks. At the same time, it is clear that this is a servant with clear ideas of where she wants to go. 'Change what can be changed, don't try to change what cannot be changed, and know the difference between the two,' is a guiding Chinese proverb of hers.

Some have asked who is this Pat Frankish. She is not an establishment figure, one whose name has 'emerged' as a result of the normal processes in the usual channels. 'A President is not there as of right', avers this President. She is unusual in having contested and won an election to get to this position, just as before when she was elected rather than appointed to Council, and before that elected to the Chair of the Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP).

She clearly identifies with a strategic movement to bring about change within the Society, and so will inevitably cause some disquiet (perhaps we are all conservative at heart). But no one could claim that she achieved a position of power without democratic consent.

We talked in the comfort of Pat's modern home in the lee of the Cleveland Hills. 'I would have preferred an old house but there wasn't one available when I needed to move ... so good to get away from the chemical works and back to the hills.' Watched by her three cats — her three children are grown up and gone away some time ago, though they remain in close touch — we talked of her background and her ambitions.

Carpe diem

As with so many of us, Pat came into psychology almost by chance. She believes in taking advantage of chances that present themselves and certainly does not regret having done so. Bringing up three young children on her own, Pat took employment in a hospital. There she happened to meet a

JOHN SHEPPARD *interviews Pat Frankish and asks her to set out her ambitions for her presidential year.*

trainee psychologist, and thought this could be interesting work.

She had no A-levels to her name, but Alan Clarke offered her a place at Hull —



'I'll always be grateful to him' — and she repaid his faith with an upper second. She then went on to train and practise as a clinical psychologist.

At the time of our interview, Pat was consultant psychologist and clinical director of mental health looking after a large budget and staff group in Stockton. Since 1 April 1999, she has occupied a new post as Head of Clinical Psychology (Learning Disability) at Rampton Hospital

Authority, 'a major challenge at a time of major changes in secure provision'.

In her work as a clinical psychologist Pat soon became involved in psychotherapy for those with learning disabilities. Feeling that this approach had much to offer, she found that it was nevertheless not always available, behavioural treatments being more in vogue. She is pleased to have been instrumental in getting therapeutic approaches accepted as a treatment of choice locally, nationally, and across a wider arena.

She herself now teaches in this field. The week after our interview she was off to Belfast to train a group of doctors, and she will be presenting a keynote address at the European Congress of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability in London this year.

She is proud also of having led a local initiative to integrate Health and Social Services in the provision of mental health and, separately, learning disability services. This has been achieved ahead of Government recommendations for Partnerships. She looks forward to the use of a similar model for care of the elderly and children's services. 'Psychology has much to offer in designing service systems that appeal to people and can work,' she says.

Getting things done

Always involved in voluntary work — arts centres, youth centres, provision for those needing shelter — Pat says she does 'what needs to be done when it needs to be done: start the ball rolling'.

The evidence suggests, though, that she actually does rather more than that. 'Avocet' is a registered charity with over 300 staff providing individual supported living for 80 people with learning disabilities — 'a demonstration of how the voluntary sector can harness resources, an example of co-operative working.' A proud

trustee and former chair of Avocet, Pat relates how it eventually got its first project off the ground only in 1994, eight years after Pat joined as a founder member — ‘there were often only two of us at meetings’.

An interesting feature of the avocet bird, she points out, is that the male and female of the species are almost indistinguishable and share work equally between them. One description of the avocet is ‘a fragile bird which wades through mud’. Whether or not Pat is fragile, she is certainly prepared to wade.

Getting involved

‘I was brought up with an unspoken ethic of service, not you must do it, but just that it is automatic,’ says Pat as we talk of her Lincolnshire childhood. ‘Taking bunches of flowers to old people on our way to Sunday school — I didn’t realise then that not all children do this.’

‘I’ve always been somebody who gets involved,’ she explains. ‘Probably my first committee was the youth club when I was 15. If you are going to start shouting your mouth off, you’ve got to be prepared to do something — and I can’t keep quiet!’ Perhaps not surprisingly, this attitude soon led to her involvement in politics.

She is an active town and parish councillor, as indeed is her octogenarian father, and has stood as a parliamentary candidate for the Liberal Democrats ‘in areas where I could not be elected’.

Well, that may have been the theoretical strategy, but I was certainly watching with interest the contest in the Great Grimsby constituency at the 1992 election, and Austin Mitchell, the sitting candidate victorious but with a reduced majority, acknowledged that Pat Frankish had been a worthy challenger. Unfortunately, ill-health led her to withdraw from her party’s list of candidates the next time round. Or, who knows? We might have had a psychologist MP by now.

‘It was fun,’ Pat says of the election campaign. ‘Door-to-door keeps you in touch with real people — nothing else gives so much access.’ So this President will be anxious to keep open channels of ready communication with members via *The Psychologist* and to encourage e-mail feedback. She may have been elected on a clear mandate, but mandates can become time-expired and circumstances can change.

‘The President is potentially distant — it could be quite lonely in that chair — and you cannot be certain what people want now,’ she acknowledges, though

without any hint of criticising her long line of predecessors. She, one feels, is unlikely to fall into these particular traps.

The year ahead

What, though, are the Presidential ambitions for the year? First, ‘to continue integration within the Society’ — she worries that there are internal splits: ‘potentially disastrous’. She recalls how she was persuaded to stand for the chair of DCP at a time when there were strong pressures for that Division’s independence from the parent body, which would really not have been in the interests of either party.

Second, ‘to help the Society move forward in taking its part in the broader society, as well as providing a service to its own members’. This Government professes to be looking for radical changes, for example in education and in health; Pat believes that our Society should be insistently offering to take an informed lead in promoting such change. The development of services for people with personality disorders was an immediate priority as we talked, an area in which Pat has a particular interest.

A third ambition is ‘to move forward the agenda on occupational standards’. The work already done by and on behalf of the Society on National Vocational Qualifications at level 5 has the potential to unify the currently separate professions within psychology.

Fourth, ‘to open up discussion of Society investments’ — she says she is conscious of some disquiet among members and she wants to extend recent movement towards transparency of accounting and changes in costing procedures.

Fifth, ‘to see what it feels like in 2000’ — she has ‘the occasional nightmare’ of how many people will react adversely to the apparent watershed, but here too the Society should be able to take a lead in helping.

Lastly, ‘to continue the work which derives from the Working Party on the Future of Psychology, already pushed forward by Ingrid as President and by the newly-named Board of Directors’. She wants a strong Board of Directors with a clear vision and the active support of the membership in making the Society more effective.

Already, friends have tried to gently warn Pat, ‘You won’t be able to do all that in one year, you know.’ But our new President responds with: ‘It’s no good starting out thinking I won’t try.’