

# ECER Online Conference 2021



## Re-building a research community post-Covid 19: The case of the Centre for Education and Research (CER)

**Cristina Devecchi PhD & Jane Murray PhD**



@FEHresearchUoN

6<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> September 2021

[cristina.devecchi@Northampton.ac.uk](mailto:cristina.devecchi@Northampton.ac.uk)

[jane.murray@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:jane.murray@northampton.ac.uk)

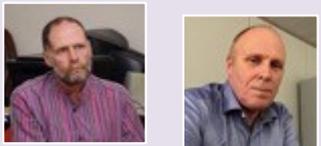
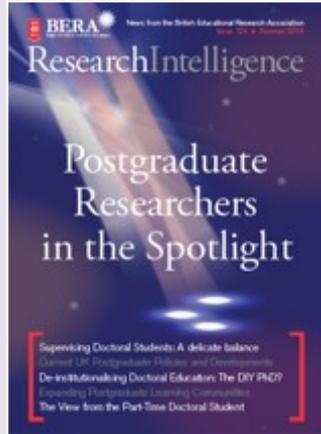
# Change, change everywhere: a preamble

2020 has been a challenging year across the world. Covid19 has caused pain, disruption, financial and health woes to millions. Higher education has not been immune from any of them. In no time, and due to lockdowns, universities have had to switch to online teaching and students to get used to remote learning. But these were only the tip of the iceberg as an avalanche of other changes took place. In the UK universities were asked to make their campuses Covid-ready, to cater for students on campus and students off-campus, assignment deadlines were rescheduled, policies revised. Research had to adjust to online data collection, and, if not possible, postponed. Amidst all the changes, many universities had to freeze their recruitment, and, in some cases, going through painful restructures, internal mergers, and the loss of staff.

This presentation focuses on one of such restructures as it describes and reflects on the journey taken by the authors leading the revival of research within the Education Department in a teaching-intensive university. In doing so, our reflections as Co-directors of the Centre for Education and Research (CER) offer colleagues a 'map' of how to lead change during a volatile, complex, uncertain and ambiguous historical context.



# CER 2010-2020: transition, transformation, disruption & opportunity



## STABILITY

2010-2018

School of Education

Centre for Education and Research

2 professors and 3 core researchers post 2014 REF

## IN-STABILITY

2018-2019

Move to Waterside Campus

**Faculty restructure:** Faculty of Education and Humanities

De-centering the Centre for Education and Research

2 professors retired

3 co-directors moved back into their specific departments

## OPPORTUNITY?

2019-2021

**Further restructure:** Faculty of Health, Education and Society

New Faculty Research Plan

3 Faculty research centres

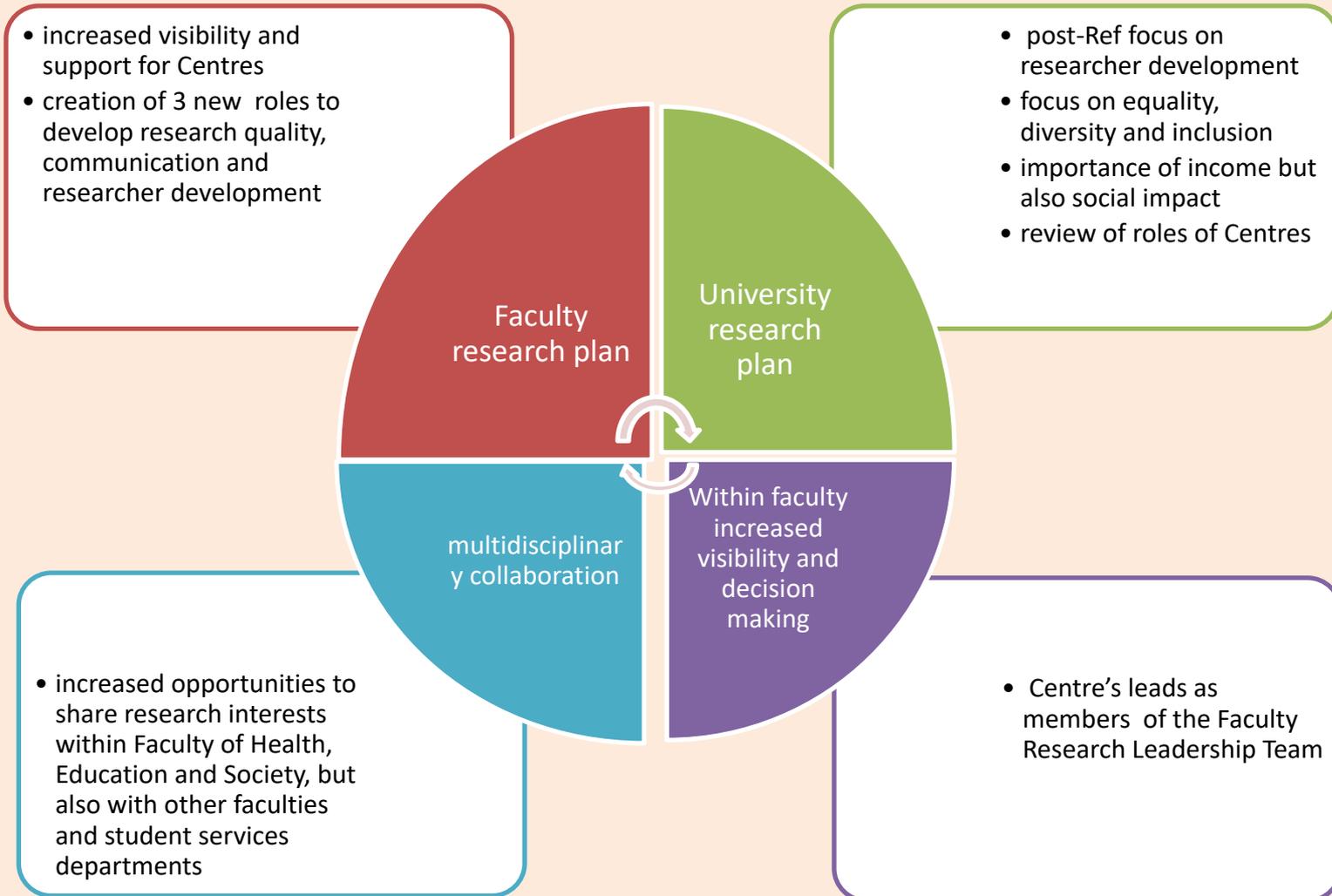
3 and then only 2 CER co-leads

**Restructure of Education department:** from 5 to 2 'subjects'

# 5 past, current, and future challenges

- **Challenge 1:** CER co-directors were reallocated into subject teams, which made maximizing their effectiveness and collaboration with colleagues more challenging, and CER co-directors lost the direct research line management and had to carve a new identity and space for developing research
- **Challenge 2:** Internal and external (e.g., Brexit and C19) changes to the research bidding process have impacted negatively on CER members' efforts to bid for research funding
- **Challenge 3:** Continue restructuring led to the loss of CER key research active staff members, including our only two professors in Education. This has impacted negatively on supervisory capacity as well as the collegial support we shared.
- **Challenge 4:** While CER's co-directors have supported colleagues and junior supervisors informally through mentoring, co-authorships, support for grant writing, bidding, and more, there remains no formal recognition and workload allowance for the important work of staff development.
- **Challenge 5:** future restructure of role and responsibilities of all research centres and foreseeable disruption to current established practices

# Opportunities





## Reviving CER: leading plans and actions for change

Change is not only about bringing people on board, but more about giving them a say on the route to take, how to get there, and what to do and see on the journey.

Major developments of the role and nature of HE were already taking place both internationally and in the UK. Such changes have been redefining the role universities would and should play both as engines for economic development and growth, and as pivotal to promoting teaching and research which has a social impact. A redefinition of the nature of HE is therefore caught between ensuring two seemingly opposite aims: open competition for survival within a marketised paradigm, and enhancement and achievement of common good (Goddard and Vallance, 2011) within a context of heightened managerialism (Deem, *et al.*, 2007; Naidoo, 2008), or what McGettigan

(2011) calls the HE 'toxic' environment. To these, we need to add the ongoing crisis of Education and its undisciplined disciplined nature as a subject (Bridges, 2006), and the increased competition from other research-intensive universities and not-for-profit and commercial research companies.

Leading change within these constraints, including over-worked and generally teaching-focused colleagues, demanded to adopt a flexible, adaptable, inclusive and diffused style of leadership (Devecchi and Potter, 2020), which was "emergent" ... more genuinely shared ... as a property of groups' (Sweetman, *et al.*, 2018: 4).

Leading change is not about change, is about people.

# CER's Response: Building an inclusive research community

The CER overarching aim 2020-2025 is:

**To nurture and promote social justice, equity and inclusion within Education and related disciplines through a culture of high quality research that is accessible to all.**

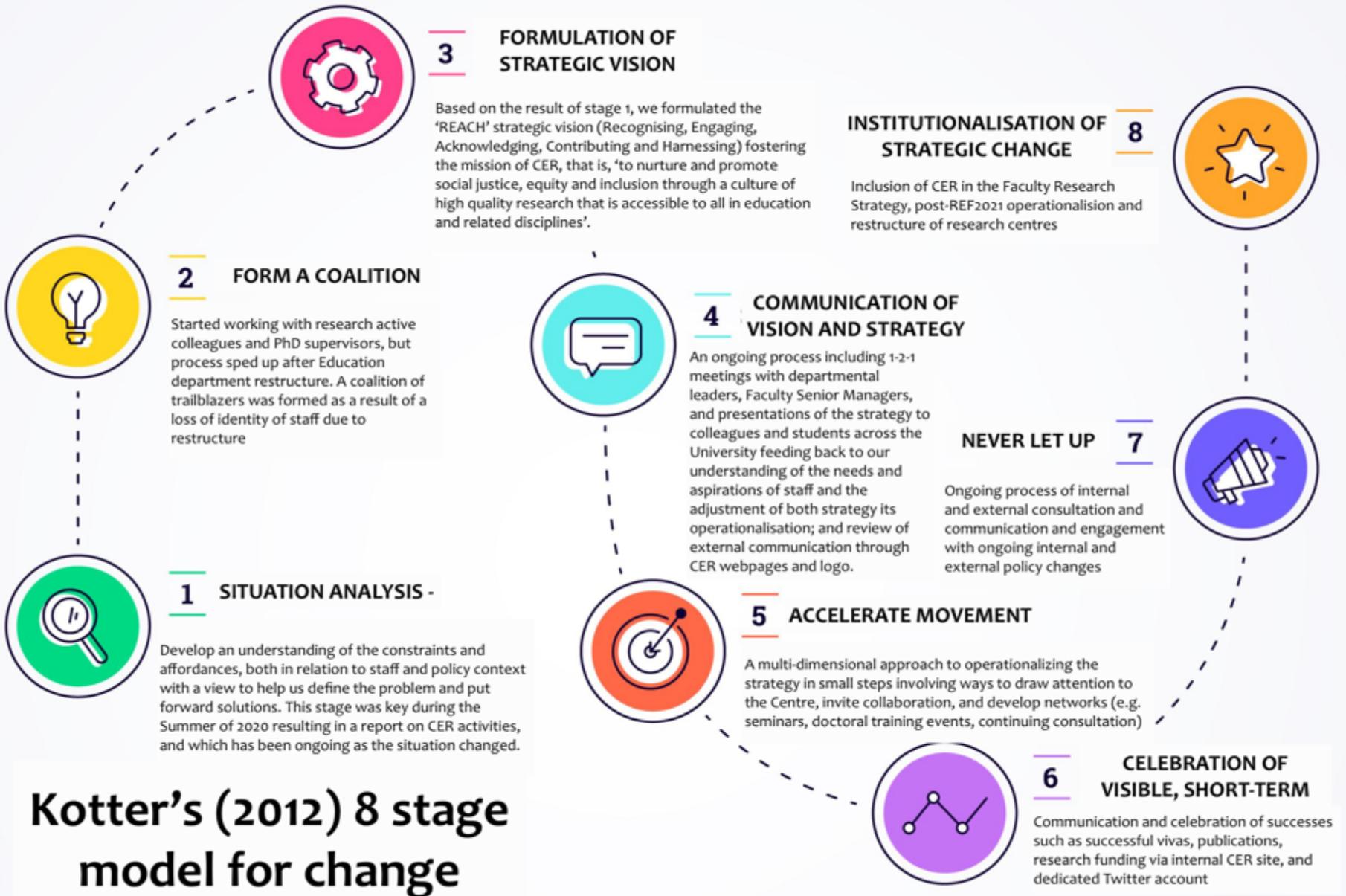
To achieve this aim, CER will draw from - and contribute to - an inclusive community who will work:

- To foster excellence in education research and its applications to teaching, learning, policy-making and social impact
- To provide and promote activities and resources to support research and researcher development in the field of Education and related disciplines
- To cultivate and sustain an environment for a community of research collaboration at local, national and international levels to enhance lives.
- To produce high quality research outputs in the field of Education and related disciplines



# Centre for Education and Research (CER)'s values: REACH





# Kotter's (2012) 8 stage model for change

# CER now: a brief overview

## Achievements

CER Key Team comprises **19** supervisors, **1** Emeritus Professor, and **2** Associate Professors

**13** members of Education staff undertaking a PhD or other doctoral qualification

**7** funded projects completed in 2019-2020, with at least 6 going forward to 2020-21

Working with more than **80** external partners by 2019-2020

Supervising more than **40** PhD students

Including **40** colleagues as members within education

Cross-faculty and University departments collaboration and membership

Establishment of **7** special interest groups

Launch of seminar events

PhD and early career researcher development programme

# Special Interest groups as enabling communities



Following the internal restructure of the Education department in 2020, SIGs were conceived as helping colleagues to:

- re-build a sense of professional identity
- create a safe space for innovation and experimentation
- give colleagues and PhD students intending to pursue a research career the opportunity to lead research in their specialized area
- bridge the gap between teaching and research
- improve internal and external visibility
- build wider networks across disciplines, and with local, national and international partners and stakeholders

# Future Forward & Fair

To nurture and promote social justice, equity and inclusion within Education and related disciplines through a culture of high quality research that is accessible to all.



- Building research capacity : everyone a researcher
- Revitalise the trans-disciplinary / Multidisciplinary / Inter-disciplinary nature of Education

through

- CER aim and objectives 2020-25 / UoN Strategic Plan
- UoN R+E Strategy
- FHES business plan
- FHES R+E strategy

Visit [CER](#) webpages to find out more

# Leadership for change: reflecting on our leadership of CER

- **The nature of leadership** - managing and leading are the results of the 'messy', disorderly, and tense accumulation of ongoing, dynamic and transformative social encounters. Leadership and management are therefore fluid, relational, contextual, diffused (Devecchi *et al*, 2018; Devecchi and Potter, 2020) and, above all, and despite our best hopes and much literature, messy.
- **The purpose of leadership** - leadership is not imposed. It is used to foster the wellbeing, success and flourishing of the individuals to the benefit of the community. Within that community, each and every one gains and shares leadership, using its power to bring about change and taking on themselves the responsibility of the decisions and actions which inform their way forward.

# A final remark: what leadership for the future?

In the current and ongoing volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous reality of universities, my path as a leader is indeed treacherous. Every decision is a leap in the dark, for the evidence I need is either missing, kept from me, or changes are top-down and at the whims of political expediency. Yet, working with students and colleagues to build something out of the ruins all around us is rewarding. It is so because I agree with Branson, *et al.* (2018:1) that traditional New Public Management approaches to academic performance and performativity are to be shed because,

**‘People want to be led, not managed. They want to be inspired, not restrained; encouraged, not restricted; affirmed, not impugned; involved, not appeased’**

In drawing a more reassuring and secure map, transrelational leadership focuses on 4 leadership practices:

**‘being an authentic member of the group they [the leaders] are leading; championing the group; changing the group’s identity; and bringing the external relevant influences to the attention of the group’ (Branson, *et al.*, 2018:13).**

# A final double metaphor



From the burning ashes,  
high it rose,  
the flaming bird, reborn  
in the searing heath



Drunk with power, Icarus flew  
higher than fiery bird,  
as high as his dreams could take him  
closer and closer to the golden disc,  
the ultimate hard-won prize.  
And now he lays in molten wax  
waiting for the ashes of his wings  
to rise again as the flaming bird.

# References

- Branson, C. M., Marra, M., Franken, M. and Penney, D. (2018) *Leadership in Higher Education from a Transrelational Perspective*. London: Bloomsbury
- Bridges, D. (2006) Disciplines and discipline of educational research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 40, 2, 259-272
- Deem, R, Hillyard, S. and Reed, M. (2007) *Knowledge, Higher Education, and the New Managerialism: The Changing Management of UK Universities*. Oxford, MA: Oxford University Press
- Devecchi, C. and Potter, J. (2020) The reflective educational change leader: concluding remarks on a journey into delivering educational change. In Potter, J. and Devecchi, C. (2020) *Delivering Education Change in Higher Education: A Transformative Approach for Leaders and Practitioners*. London: Routledge
- Goddard, J. and Vallance, P. (2011) The Civic University: Re-uniting the University and the City. *In Higher Education in Cities and Regions: For Stronger, Cleaner and Fairer Regions*. Paris: OECD
- Kotter, J. (2012) *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- McGettigan, A. (2011) New providers: The creation of a market in higher education. *Radical Philosophy*, 167, 2-8

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON  
THE 7 SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS**



# Children & Young People SIG

## Who?

- Researchers, scholars, professionals, everyone
- interested in a broad spectrum of topics... theories of childhood and youth, children and young people's lives at home, school and in communities; cultures of childhood and youth, children and young people's rights and participation; children's geographies....and more

## What?

Home to a regular programme of seminars, workshops and other activities to empower synergies between research activity and teaching, the provision of specialist training in research methods with children and young people, the development of research project, bids for funding, ideas for scientific publications

### SIG Lead

[federico.farini@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:federico.farini@northampton.ac.uk)



# Digital Technologies for Education Special Interest Group

The Digital Technologies and Education SIG recognises that digital technology in education is poised to move forward into a new era.

## Our vision is to:

- share, reflect and discuss all matters related to research and its practical application to the use of digital technology for education.
- support innovation across a broad spectrum of digital technologies in research and education.
- define digital technology within education across sectors, including formal/informal education/early years to lifelong learning.
- foster a community that develops expertise and discovers and shares research informed solutions.
- foster collaboration in scholarship and practice in the field of digital technology for education.

# Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) SIG



## Vision

- To share, reflect and discuss all matters related to research and practice in relation to ECEC
- To support innovation across ECEC practice and research.
- To foster a community that develops expertise and discovers and shares research informed solutions
- To promote relevant SDGs to ECEC, for example, 4.2
- To focus on the social impact of our work as members of the SIG.

### SIG leads:

Dr Tanya Richardson, [tanya.richardson@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:tanya.richardson@northampton.ac.uk)

Michelle Bugby, [michelle.bugby@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.bugby@northampton.ac.uk)

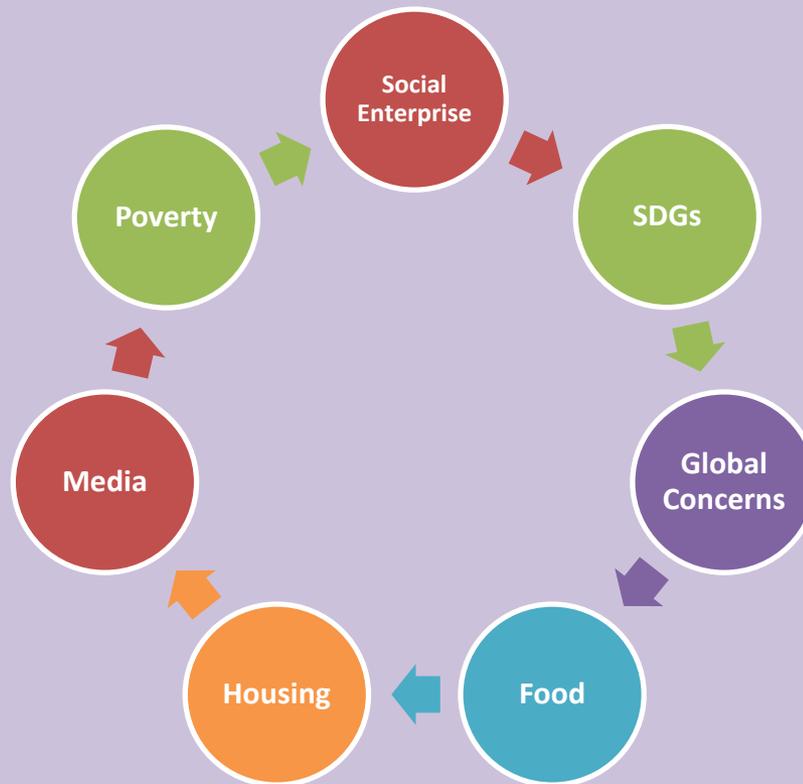
# Education in Schools SIG



# Families and Communities SIG

## Vision

Our vision is to provide a transformative non-judgmental space for research and showcasing current issues relating to families and communities.



## SIG Leads:

Dr Emel Thomas, [emel.thomas@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:emel.thomas@northampton.ac.uk)

Dr Eunice Lumsden, [Eunice.lumsden@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:Eunice.lumsden@northampton.ac.uk)

# Further, higher and adult education SIG

## FURTHER, HIGHER AND ADULT EDUCATION (FHAE) SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

### *Building Better Futures*

#### **Vision**

*The Further and Higher Education SIG is based on the ideal of critical inquiry as a key element in the advancement of knowledge, understanding and development of practice which is grounded in the principles of equity, equality and inclusion of all voices and contributions from all who research, study, and work in the sector.*

#### **Aims**

*The Further and Higher Education SIG aims to bring together a multi and interdisciplinary community of academics, professionals and students interested in research and practice on a wide range of topics related to tertiary education and lifelong learning*

### Areas of interest

Learning and Teaching

Student & staff experience

Leadership, Management, Administration & Governance

Sustainability for a better future: SDGs

Entrepreneurship Education

Researching Further, Higher and Adult Education



#### **Contact**

**Dr Cristina Devecchi (FHES)**  
– SIG Lead

**Dr Hala Mansour (FBL)**  
– SIG Co-Lead

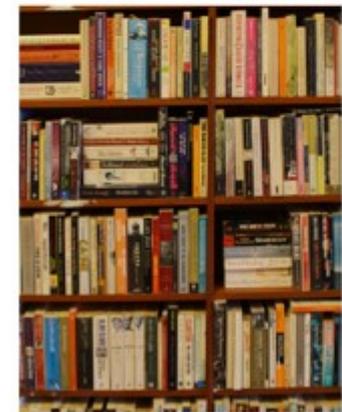
#### **Contribute to our:**

- Seminars
- blogs
- roundtables
- webinars

#### **Stay in touch**

@FEHresearchUoN

#FHAESig



#### **SIG Leads:**

Dr Cristina Devecchi, [cristina.devecchi@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:cristina.devecchi@northampton.ac.uk)

Dr Hala Mansour, [hala.mansour@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:hala.mansour@northampton.ac.uk)

# Inclusion, Diversity and Special Education (IDSE)



## Vision and Aims

**Vision**: A multi-disciplinary group, fostering discussion on all aspects of inclusion in formal and non-formal educational settings

**Aims**: To create a space for researchers to discuss, share, synthesise and publish on all areas associated with IDSE as a multi-disciplinary group

**Activity**: A programme of events planned for 21/22. Identify common interests within and between SIGs. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) programme being implemented for PGRs

### SIG Leads:

Tereza Aidonopolou, [tereza.aidonopolou@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:tereza.aidonopolou@northampton.ac.uk)

Linda Maguire, [linda.maguire@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:linda.maguire@northampton.ac.uk)

Patrice Seowou, [patrice.seuwou@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:patrice.seuwou@northampton.ac.uk)