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## Universities with a commitment to social change can shape the Post-2015 agenda

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6. How relevant and realistic are the Post-2015 goals likely to be?

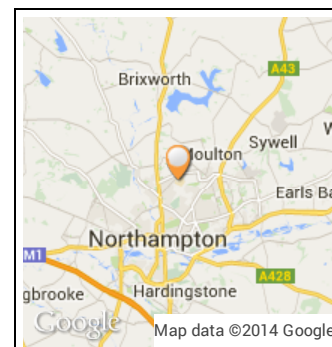


18

### Illustrative Goal(s)



11. Ensure stable and peaceful societies



It is, of course, true that universities throughout the world have had a major role in providing the growing evidence base that underpins proposals for the Post-2015 Global Development Goals (GDG). They have done this through original research in areas like climate change, sustainable development and waste management and through contributions to measurement metrics and rigorous evaluation of intervention programmes. However, at the University of Northampton, we would agree with the ACU in its elaboration to Question 6 that universities have an important role to play not just in supporting but in actively driving and delivering the GDGs.

The University of Northampton is the only university in the UK to achieve a 'Changemaker Campus' status from Ashoka U. As a 'Changemaker Campus', the University of Northampton is at the forefront of social innovation and entrepreneurship in the UK and Europe, and in an elite consortium of 24 universities and colleges from around the world, including institutions such as Brown University and Duke University. That means in reality that we, as staff, have taken on board the underlying philosophy of social enterprise and believe that both ourselves and our students have the ability, and indeed a responsibility, to promote change for social good. And where better to start than Early Years?

Historically, Early Years (a multi-disciplinary approach to children's development from conception to age 8 in the context of families and associated services) is a relatively new area of study in higher education that has expanded alongside recognition that working with young children is not to be dismissed as 'women's work' or 'child's play' but requires involvement of highly trained and knowledgeable professionals if the best outcomes for children are to be achieved, especially in the case of those from socially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence based for the importance of good Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been accumulating over recent years from subjects as diverse as Neuroscience and Medicine to Education and Economics. For example, in a recent article in The Lancet, Margar Chan (2013) clearly articulated what we know about the consequences of poor ECD experiences. Inconsistencies in care, maltreatment, poor nutrition and the lack of safe, nurturing and supportive environments that facilitate learning all impact adversely on development and the effects carry on throughout adult lives. The more extreme the earliest experiences are, the greater the impact will be. These issues are just as pertinent to the UK as to developing countries, as Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer for England, stressed: 'Those who suffer multiple adverse childhood events achieve less educationally, earn less, and are less healthy, making it more likely that the cycle of harm is perpetuated in the following generation'.

The University of Northampton has a small but influential Early Years Division with a growing reputation regionally and nationally and an ethos of engaging the community it serves, for example, through providing a programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events under the banner of Early Inspirations that is open to all Early Years practitioners and managers. What follows is a case study of how one small Division in one of six Schools in a

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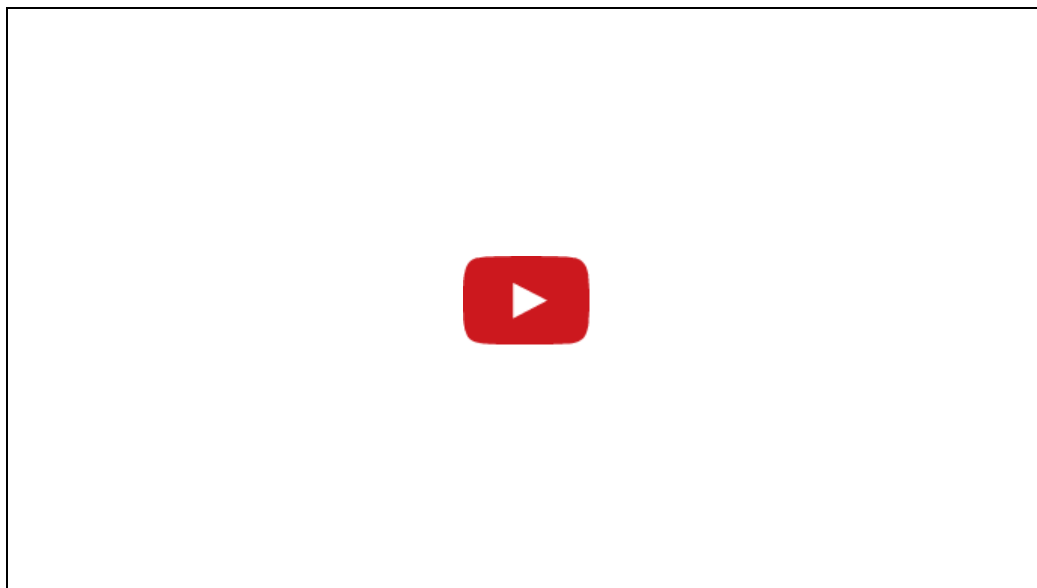
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relatively small university (circa 14,000 FTE) in the East Midlands region of England decided to change the world!

## Case study



Following an inspirational session at an international conference, it was agreed to invite Dr Ulkuer - the retiring Senior Adviser for Early Childhood for UNICEF - to present the University's open Annual Children and Young People's Lecture and to participate in a 3-day Early Years Summit.

As part of the Summit a special meeting of the Early Childhood Studies network was convened, bringing together most of the universities that provide Early Years degree level courses across the UK. This provided a platform through which the growing Early Years sector in higher education could engage with the growing multi-disciplinary body of research evidence for ECD and the importance of the current window of opportunity to influence the Post-2015 agenda to ensure inclusion of a GDG relating to young children.

The Early Years Summit culminated in a parliamentary reception, funded by the University of Northampton and hosted by Dame Tessa Jowell MP who had recently launched a petition in support of a GDG for young children. The reception not only gave a high profile to Dame Jowell's petition but the University brokered a relationship with UNICEF and launched their *Global Handbook of Early Years Research* as evidence in support of an Early Childhood GDG. Given that the British Prime Minister is one of the co-chairs of the High Level Panel advising on the Post-2015 agenda, UNICEF decided to send their newly appointed Senior Adviser, Dr Pia Britto to join Dr Ulkuer on the day.

Thanks to previous good working relationships with one of the parliamentary co-chairs, Dr Lumsden\* (then Senior Lecturer in Early Years) was also able to broker arrangements for the two UNICEF spokeswomen to address the influential All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Conception to Two: the first 1001 days before leaving Westminster. The reception and APPG appearances together had a powerful impact that was to resonate in subsequent short debates in both the House of Lords and the House of Commons, raising the profile of the issues at the highest levels.

A short in-house campaign video by the University (above) made use of brief interviews undertaken with key people at the time of the Early Years Summit in Northampton together with footage of young children in local settings. This was used to reinforce the message across social media, starting with the networks of students, setting managers, and universities known to the University of Northampton. Thanks to being picked up by the comedian Eddie Izzard, it was re-tweeted to all 3 million of his followers world-wide.

## What can we take from this?

This example from the University of Northampton shows that it is possible for a university with a commitment to social change not just to support but to contribute to shaping and driving the GDG on a critical topic. It was a question of unlocking the power of our skilled and knowledgeable staff, our extensive networks with students and wider communities of practice, and of key contacts in politics and in NGOs in support of a goal that speaks to their common interests.

The key features of our approach have been:

- Passion, drive and commitment from key academic staff prepared to invest some of their own personal time and energy to develop a clear case and to make it happen.

Looking forward to the Post-2015 Development Goals

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- Achieving buy-in from all levels of management, up to and including the Vice Chancellor, so that we could tap into wider University resources such as free meeting rooms, expenses for key speakers, support and concrete help from the media/marketing teams etc.
- Effective networking at all levels from local to national and international, including with NGOs and with communities of practice, not just with other universities.
- Cultivating and making use of sympathetic political contacts on points of mutual interest.
- Mobilizing good will in pursuit of a goal that was self-evidently a long term social good and with no immediate or obvious pay off to the University.

Of course, in the very long term the University stands to gain from a raised public profile, enhanced reputation and growing respect from its own staff and the communities it serves. So it is up to those who want to initiate change to make and sell their case for any initial investment and to have the tenacity and commitment to see it through.

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This article was co-authored by Dr Denise Hevey, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Northampton, and Dr Eunice Lumsden\*, Head of Early Years at the School of Education of the same university.

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Tags: Research, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Post-2015 agenda, Higher education institutions, United Nations (UN), United Kingdom, Evidence-based policy-making, Change, Socio-economic development

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