

The Centre for the Study of Global Development (CSGD)

Human wellbeing for a better world

On 24th June 2021, the Faculty of Wellbeing Education and Language Studies (WELS) at The Open University launches a new centre for the study of global development (CSGD). This Centre will create a unified space for multi and interdisciplinary research to advance knowledge in human wellbeing for a better world. It will also offer a platform for researchers, practitioners, thought leaders and policy makers in the global development community to share knowledge on how to improve human wellbeing for sustainable development.

The Centre's vision is based on the Open University's Open Learning philosophy – using knowledge from research to democratize education, health, and wellbeing by making it more affordable, accessible, and attainable to all students, their families, and communities no matter their location or income. It builds on the Open University's history of innovation and democratization of knowledge; to reconfigure the siloed disciplinarity and geopolitics of development knowledge, framed around the commitment to openness, inclusion, diversification of ideas and ways of working.

Why a new Centre

The world faces unprecedented challenges. The global Covid-19 pandemic has raised deep questions about how we secure human wellbeing for economic and social development. It has also raised agonising decisions about life and livelihoods, health and education, and the environment. The pandemic has sharpened awareness of the threats facing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its targets. The core of the 2030 Agenda on the SDGs is human wellbeing: the SDGs aim to ensure that 'all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity, equality and in a healthy environment.' However, inequalities and opportunity gaps have widened and the challenges in fulfilling this aim have become more multifaceted and complex. Success in tackling them requires a new vision for research that can offer governments and development organisations deeper understanding on human wellbeing and capabilities in a post-Covid world. The new Centre aims to fulfil this vision. The Centre's approach to the study of global development will be distinctively unique. It will be interdisciplinary, critical, and reflexive, grounded in the theoretical and methodological expertise of our team whose research draws from a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.

Leadership

The Centre is led by **Professor Kwame Akyeampong** who has over 25 years of experience in international education and development. He has served as a Senior Policy Analyst with UNESCO in Paris and is a current member of the World Bank and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP).

Dr. Alison Buckler is the Deputy-Director of the Centre. She is a Senior Research Fellow in International Education and currently the Vice-Chair of the British Association for International and Comparative Education.

Supporting the Centre is a six-member external advisory board chaired by **Professor Freda Wolfenden**. The Board comprises leading thinkers and influencers in global development. It will advise on the Centre's activities to enhance the relevance, reach and impact of its research, and offer pathways into user groups and international stakeholders.

Centre Research Hubs

The research priorities of the Centre will be clustered around four broadly distinct but deeply interconnected domains: Schooling, Informal Education and Learning; Health and Wellbeing Across the Life Course; Youth and Transitions and Discourse, Culture and Technology.

Research Hub 1: Schooling, Informal Education and Learning (SIEL)

Hub leads: Dr. Liz Chamberlain and Dr. Jane Cullen

More than half of all children in low- and middle-income countries lack the comprehension skills for meaning by age 10, and foundational literacy and numeracy is still a global issue, despite the ambitions of Sustainable Development Goal 4 for “inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all.” This high rate of learning poverty is just one indicator of the wide learning gaps that prevent education from providing the opportunity it should. The SIEL hub will research to understand what is effective in enabling more children to start school, what encourages them to remain or return, what enables them to progress through primary and secondary education or what engages them in alternative, appropriate learning programmes. It will research the role of parents and the community in supporting successful learning for children and young people. It will research learning appropriate to local, community and cultural expectations, aligned with national policy objectives. The areas it will focus on include: learning and teaching, accelerated learning, teaching to the needs of the child, girls' education, community education, the role of teachers, pedagogic leadership, management and governance of schools, school improvement, and the political economy of education systems in low and middle income countries. One immediate focus will be the consequences of the current pandemic on the learning, wellbeing, life chances, and economic productivity of children and young people. The SIEL RH will have an abiding interest in how to address the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students, including the opportunities and challenges afforded by technology-based approaches to teaching and learning.

Research Hub 2: Health and Wellbeing across the Life Course (HWLC)

Hub leads: Prof. Cathy Lloyd and Dr. Philippa Waterhouse

Health is essential to sustainable development and is intertwined with issues such as economic growth and poverty, education, gender equality and the environment. Health is not merely concerned with disease and mortality, but also promoting physical, mental and social well-being for individuals and populations across the life course. Despite significant improvements in health and wellbeing across the globe, it is widely acknowledged that this has masked inequality in progress between and within countries. Social justice is a core value of the HWLC hub, and our expertise in participative and inclusive research methods will be used to explore diversity and inequality in health and wellbeing from the cradle to the grave. The hub will bring together research in the areas of children, young people and families, ageing, death, dying and bereavement, reproduction, sexualities and sexual health, learning disability and long-term conditions. It will focus on the complementarities of health and wellbeing and the impact on sustainable development.

Research Hub 3: Youth and Transitions (YAT)

Hub leads: Dr. Michael Boampong and Dr. Anthony Gunter

The Youth and Transitions research hub will focus research activity on youth transitions within diverse contexts (social class, gender, ethnicity etc.) and place and explore links to individual and population health, wellbeing, and livelihoods. It will also focus on young people's transition to parenthood and consider related topics such as young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) including access to contraception and comprehensive sexuality education. How they manage the combination of parenthood with their economic roles and transition – the intersections of employment/economic work, education, and family will also be of focus. Young people are often offered the hope that progress through education will lead to secured jobs, and that the situation of their families and that of their children will be better. However, young people across the world, especially in low- and middle-income countries face increasingly complex life transitions, including school-to-work transitions, family transition, sexual and gender-based violence and housing transition amid jobless growth in most countries. This research hub will research the social and economic factors as well as the local and global conditions that shapes youth aspiration and transitions for deeper understandings of contemporary youth transitions.

Research Hub 4: Discourse, Culture and Technology (DCT)

Hub leads: Dr. Mirjam Hauck and Prof. Rosina Marquez Reiter

Language is central to people's personal, social, political, and professional lives, and a powerful resource for communicating, learning, and building knowledge. Committed to the values of equality, diversity and inclusion, this hub takes language as a social practice as its point of departure, more specifically linguistic practices in contexts of exclusion, marginalisation, and disparities in access. Our approach is interdisciplinary, critical, and reflexive, grounded in the theoretical and methodological expertise of a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. We are interested in questions such as 'How do we communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries under conditions of rapid social change worldwide?' 'How can we account for social biases and discrimination in discourses and communication relating to race, gender, and class?' 'How are linguistic practices intertwined with technologies?' 'How can educational technologies contribute to addressing inequalities and help promote social justice in teaching and learning'?