

Debra Fearnshaw – Connected Everything Network Manager

- Summary of background experience

I started in my role as Connected Everything Network Manager in January 2020. It was a natural progression step for me at the University of Nottingham have spent the past 3 years in project related roles within the University. Prior to joining Nottingham I spent 15 years in third sector organisations managing national projects of different sizes, managing up to 60 people across multiple teams. Transferring that experience to HE has been great.

I really enjoy the trust I have been afforded by my PI to make decisions in the best interests of the network. I feel I have scope to develop the network and explore what is possible (within my part time hours!). The role really is what you make it.

I think coping with Covid has been a massive challenge in 2020/21, I had barely started my role when the world turned upside down. We moved all our network activities online within a couple of weeks and delivered some great events (annual conference, summer school etc). It has been brilliant to see the network grow during this time, despite the lack of traditional networking.

- How challenges have been overcome

The project team for Connected Everything is really strong. All the investigators are really engaged and support the networks activities. It is a genuine team effort. In the summer we were able to recruit a new post of Research and Knowledge Exchange Lead which has made a massive difference to me and enabled me to have a little bit of breathing space to move from “doing the doing” to having space to think more widely about network development and what legacy we want Connected Everything to have.

- Examples of specific career development undertaken (training, mentoring, specific experience)

The University of Nottingham is incredibly supportive when it comes to developing its staff. I have recently been successful in my application to a senior leadership development programme which is 6 months long. I am really hopeful this will give me insights to support my career at Nottingham beyond my Connected Everything when the network ends in late 2022. I am also finally going to complete PRINCE2 project management in 2021!

- Future plans / aspirations

I still feel pretty “new” in the world of HE, after spending so long in Charities. I feel I have lots to learn and offer. I feel very fortunate to be in a supportive environment which is willing to invest in my future career. There is a lot I still want to achieve in my current role, while I figure out what my next steps may be.