



**DARTINGTON**  
SOCIAL  
RESEARCH  
UNIT

6 March 2017

Dear Colleague

I am writing to let you know about an exciting development at Dartington – the launch of the Dartington Service Design Lab.

As you might know, in our 50-plus year history our charity has had many incarnations. Initially at Kings College, Cambridge, and since 1965, at Dartington in Devon, with at various times outposts in Glasgow, London, San Sebastián and Madison. We've ranged in size: from four people in 1965 up to 44 in the late 1990s. We've also existed in a variety of structures: integrated into universities; part of another charity – the Dartington Hall Trust; and for the last 13 years as a stand-alone charity. The launch of the Dartington Lab is the latest incarnation.

The Lab will build on many of the strengths of the Dartington Social Research Unit (DSRU): a deep respect for good quality research, science and data; an understanding of public systems; and a focus on doing work that is ultimately beneficial for society. At the same time, the Lab will be different in several ways. It will be more focused: we aim to narrow our span of interest and become known for doing a few things but doing them really well, focusing specifically on system reform and innovation in service design. While retaining a primary focus on children and young people, the Lab will also experiment with application of our approaches to other areas, such as mental health, homelessness and other vulnerable populations.

Most importantly, all the Lab's work will combine science-based design with a greater focus on user-centred design. This means using good quality research to inform and test designs but, critically, combining that with strong design principles that meaningfully involve users (as well as practitioners, managers, commissioners and funders).

These changes are, in part, a response to the tumultuous policy and practice environment and, in part, a natural evolution for a charity that seeks to break new

ground. We are, for example, embracing all the opportunities afforded by modern technology to become a more nimble and virtual organisation allowing our team to be based anywhere in the UK. As a result, we won't need big offices instead retaining a small base in the Dartington area close to our roots.

The changes to the charity will be accompanied by some changes to our team. I will remain as CEO of the over-arching charity, the Warren House Group. Tim Hobbs – who has worked within the charity for over ten years and has shaped this new vision - will take on leadership of the new Lab as its first Director.

As you may know, Michael Little has had a long-standing interest in relational social policy and its consequences for the future use of evidence in public policy. He has now left the charity to pursue these interests further.

Unconnected to this transition, Nick Axford, who joined the Unit in 1997, is taking up an Associate Professor position at Plymouth University where he will work at PenCLAHRC, a centre specialising in applied health research. We are delighted that Nick will continue to work with the Lab in his new capacity with a particular focus on rapid cycle innovation and testing.

As a friend of the DSRU, I wanted to let you know about these changes ahead of time and we will keep you posted with further updates as we complete the transformation. We plan to formally launch the Lab in the summer.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like to know more about these exciting developments.

Best wishes

Louise