

Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction

Futures of Risk

Causes | Consequences | Change

Report on the 14th Annual Conference

Held on Tuesday 25 June 2024

14th Annual Conference of the Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction (RDR)

Futures of Risk: Causes, Consequences, Change

Lead Rapporteur: Roquia Salam – PhD student at UCL Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction

Associate Rapporteur: Kim-Anh Anastasia Chau – PhD student at UCL Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction

Preface

This year, Dr Myles Harris organised the 14th Annual Conference of the Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction (RDR). The conference offered an array of sessions that facilitated a deep dive into the future of risks. These sessions were led by academics, research fellows, and students from the department.

The conference was inclusive, inviting students, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to converge, share insights, and build professional networks. This open format encouraged a diverse exchange of ideas and fostered collaborations across different sectors and disciplines.

Throughout the day, participants engaged in various sessions designed to foster a comprehensive understanding of risk futures. These sessions spanned a wide range of topics, creating valuable opportunities for learning and discussion. The students of RDR played a pivotal role in the conference, presenting their ongoing research through detailed and informative poster sessions (online). This active participation highlighted the department's commitment to integrating student research into broader academic and practical discussions.

Keynote Speech

Ms Paola Albrito, Director of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Panel discussion – What are the futures of risk?

Chair:

RDR student session (debate)

Public Awareness and Engagement: Thaisa also highlighted the rise in public awareness and activism around climate change, exemplified by movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion. Increased media coverage and celebrity involvement in climate issues help garner broader public support for resilience-building efforts. She pointed out that such engagement is crucial for implementing effective policies and fostering community action towards resilience.

Policy and Funding Initiatives: Thaisa noted the growing financial commitments and international agreements aimed at tackling climate change and promoting disaster risk reduction. She argued that harnessing these resources effectively could lead to significant improvements in resilience over the next decade.

Evolution and Adaptation: Gianluca Pescaroli reinforced the idea that resilience involves learning from mistakes and continuously improving. He illustrated this with personal anecdotes and historical examples, suggesting that human progress often follows a pattern of setbacks followed by recovery and growth. Gianluca stressed that resilience is about bouncing forward and adapting to new challenges, a process that he believes will lead to a more resilient future.

intelligence and false alarms, and examining corporate social responsibility in disasters and recovery. Lastly, he highlighted the need to study the impact of donors on setting priorities for response and recovery efforts.

Plenary Panel – What are the opportunities for industry and academia to work together to mitigate future risks?

Chair: Myles Harris – Lecturer, UCL Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction

Panellists (RDR Alumni): Kirsty Johnson, Felicity Schultz-Steinen, Lucy Buck and Timo Baader

Kirsty Johnson: Kirsty graduated from the IRDR (now RDR) in 2019 and now works for the UK Government in risk assessment. She emphasized translating academic knowledge into practical policymaking in resilience and risk management. Her work focuses on understanding various risks, including emerging ones like space weather.

Felicity Schultz-Steinen: Felicity graduated recently and works as an ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) consultant at Accenture, focusing on sustainability and corporate governance. She highlighted the broad scope of ESG beyond just disaster-related risks. Her IRDR (now RDR) education helped her ask the right questions and apply structured risk analysis in her consultancy work.

Lucy Buck: Lucy graduated in 2015 and has since worked in various roles, including tsunami research and maritime risk. Her career path reflects a focus on environmental risk assessment and disaster resilience. She emphasized the evolving nature of risks, from traditional concerns to emerging global interconnected risks.

Timo Baader: Timo, with a background in crisis management from the army, graduated in 2018 and has since worked in crisis consulting and is now as an independent advisor. He stressed the interdisciplinary approach of IRDR (now RDR), which broadened his perspective on crisis and risk management. Timo highlighted the importance of continuous learning, staying updated, and personal resilience in managing crises effectively.

Each speaker brought a unique perspective shaped by their career trajectory post-IRDR and underscored the evolving nature and interconnectedness of risks in today's world. They also emphasized the importance of collaboration between academia, research, science, and industry to address these complex challenges effectively.

The key points discussed by the panellists:

Collaboration and Communication Across Sectors: There is a recognized need for better collaboration between academia, government, and industry to effectively address risks and increase resilience. Industry can identify emerging issues, government can provide policy frameworks, and academia can offer expertise and research to support these efforts. Current communication and collaboration channels between these sectors are seen as inadequate and need improvement.

Enhancing Risk Literacy in Business Education: There's a significant gap in risk literacy within business education, both at undergraduate and master's levels. The lack of understanding of strategic, joined-up, or disaster risks hampers effective risk management and decision-making in the private sector. There is a call to integrate more comprehensive risk education into business curricula to foster better risk-aware decision-makers.

Practical Application of Academic Concepts: Panellists highlighted the challenge of translating academic theories into practical applications. Academia sometimes focuses excessively on theoretical best practices without adequately addressing practical implementation challenges. Practical exercises and engaging methodologies are suggested as effective tools to bridge this gap and enhance understanding and application in real-world settings.

State Capacity and Pandemic Preparedness: The COVID-19 pandemic underscored deficiencies in state capacity despite perceived preparedness. The discussion highlighted the need to learn from these gaps and improve resilience strategies moving forward. Lessons from the pandemic are expected to shape future policies and investments in resilience and risk management.

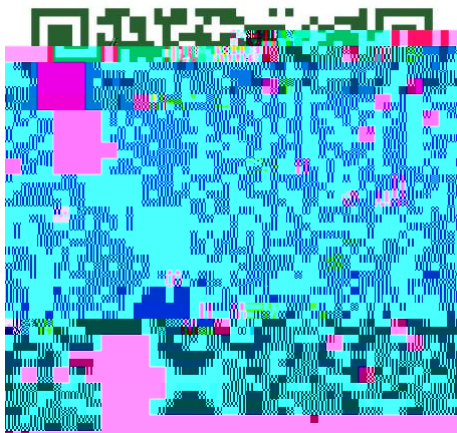
Learnings from IRDR (now RDR):

Professor Joanne Faure Walker closed the 14th annual conference of the department of RDR by emphasising the importance of critical thinking, continuous inquiry, imagination, and adaptability, especially in an age where AI can handle many tasks. She reiterated the conference's key questions: What are the features of future risks? How can we make disaster risk reduction relevant?

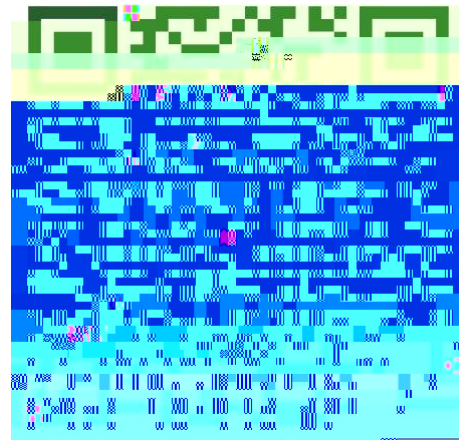
She called for ongoing education, genuine collaboration, and active listening across sectors to address real-world issues. She viewed interconnectedness as both a challenge and a solution, offering greater access to information and resources.

She urged everyone to maintain their energy and optimism, inspiring future generations to improve disaster risk reduction. The conference concluded with a call for continued collaboration and innovation.

Scan this QR code to view the online poster gallery of the conference



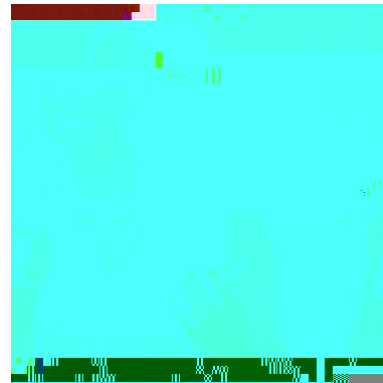
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A Selection of Images from the Conference



Professor Joanna Faure Walker



Mhari Gordon



Dr Mohammad Shamsudduha



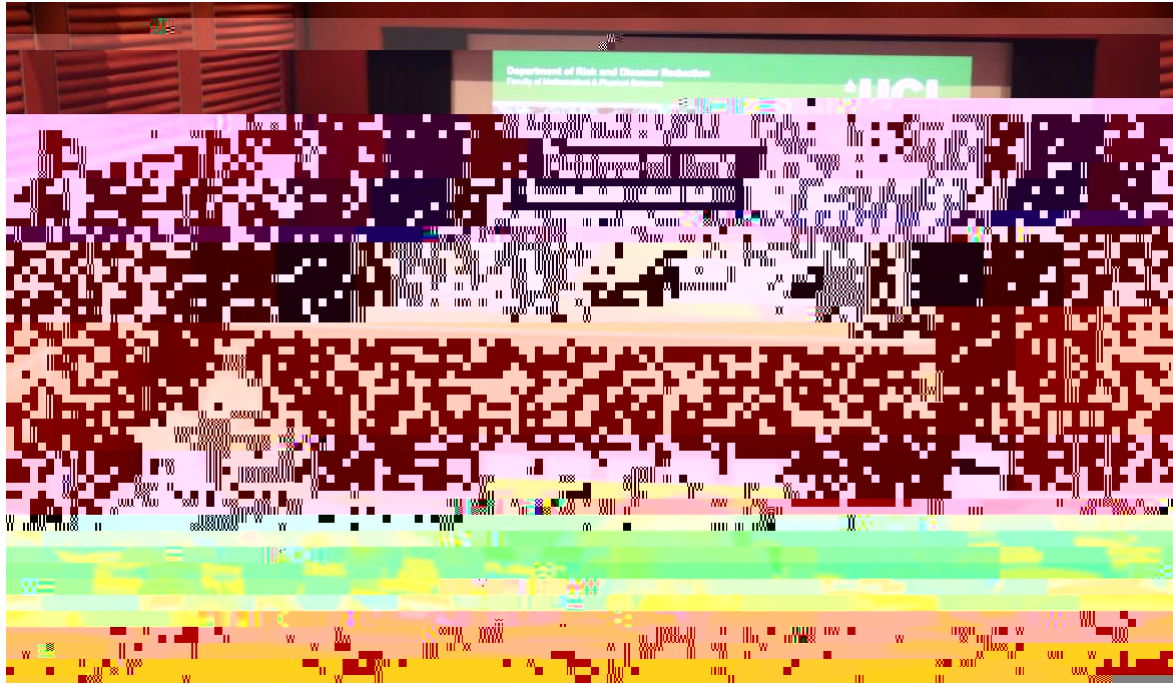
Dr Myles Harris



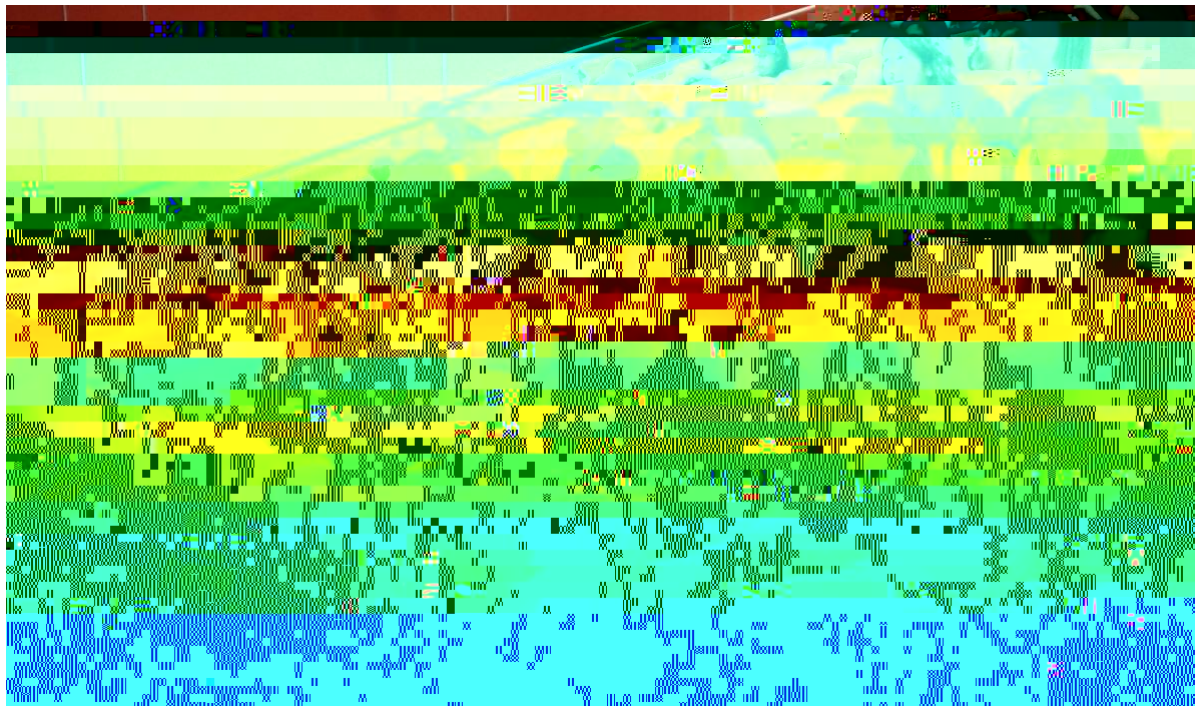
Dr Punam Yadav



Dr Roberto Gentile



Before the inauguration of the conference



A group of audience members at the conference



Panellists of the RDR student session: From the left a) Professor Maria Kett, b) Dr Thaisa Comelli, c) Dr Susannah Fisher and d) Dr Gianluca Pescaroli



Q & A session

Panellists of the plenary panel: From the left a) Kirsty Johnson, b)

UCL Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction

People

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/risk-disaster-reduction/people>

Research

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/risk-disaster-reduction/research-0>

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Research Programmes

[MRes Risk and Disaster Reduction](#)

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