

## Welcome to the autumn edition of the newsletter!

Continuum team meetings take place each month, and there we consider amongst the usual array of university news both our current and also future projects. Invariably our discussion turns to a central concern: the interface between research, policy and practice as this relates to widening participation in HE.

Since its inception, Continuum has sought to explore and improve dialogue between formal research, policymaking, and practical implementation. Recently, for example, at the conclusion of a research project, we mounted a dissemination event involving a wide range of participants: funders, policy makers, researchers from related projects and practitioner colleagues. This eclectic mix enabled us to generate valuable feedback on our project. At the same time a wider and richer debate was made possible by contributions from a variety of perspectives.

Recognising and understanding the intersections between these different constituents is one of the major challenges of writing up research reports and deciding on the best form of dissemination. If you get it right the research can be much more useful and impactful than might otherwise be the case. By fostering dialogue between interested groups, we aim to contribute to research based policy and practice informed research.

If you would like to discuss collaboration with us please email me at: [j.storan@uel.ac.uk](mailto:j.storan@uel.ac.uk)

**John Storan** – Director, Continuum

## EPA Project: Creative Industries – Creative Solutions

Returning from a recent visit to South Africa, Continuum Research Manager, Tony Hudson was pleased to report that the team at Durban University of Technology (DUT) continue to make excellent progress. This collaborative project is being managed by Continuum in partnership with the Department of Visual Communication and Design at DUT. The aim of the project is to enhance the employability and entrepreneurial skills of graphic design students at DUT by establishing a Work Integrated Learning graphic design studio.

Tony visited DUT with Liz Pearson, Director of the Creative Way Lifelong Learning Network who is undertaking an evaluation of the project. During the visit the project team organised three

workshops for staff and students. This was an opportunity for Liz and Tony to meet some of the students and staff who will benefit from the studio, which is funded through the project.

The team at DUT will shortly be interviewing prospective BTech students to work as designers in the studio. Competition for places in the studio is likely to be fierce since graduates will be able to gain valuable work experience whilst completing their course.

The studio will be operational from late January 2010 and would be pleased to offer Continuum readers a proudly South African design service. For further details please contact: Rowan Gatfield: [rowang@dut.ac.za](mailto:rowang@dut.ac.za), or Kailash Maharaj: [kailashmaharaj@mail.com](mailto:kailashmaharaj@mail.com)

## Continuum Director Meets Lord Mandelson

Professor John Storan, Continuum Director, met the new First Secretary of State for Business, Innovation & Skills, Lord President of the Council following his first major speech to the HE sector in London over the summer. Commenting on the speech and meeting with Lord Mandelson, John said:

"I warmly welcome the speech and in particular the comments which recognised the centrality of widening HE access and the value and significance of the social role of universities. Lord Mandelson also said that he was impatient for progress on social mobility in the wake of Alan Milburn's report. Recognising that access to HE will inevitably define the degree of social mobility in Britain was a reoccurring theme that Lord Mandelson returned to at several points in his speech. This was very encouraging as it will be critical to widening participation in HE given the growing pressures on public spending."



*From left: Professor John Storan  
and Lord Mandelson*

# Barking & Dagenham Project

Continuum recently launched its report and DVD of a research project commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to investigate low participation rates in Higher Education in Barking & Dagenham, and four other low participation areas in England.

Set against wider issues such as the government's cap on HE student numbers, the freeze of bursaries available, and the current production of the Widening Participation Strategic Assessments which are being compiled by HEIs - this research is timely. Barking and Dagenham has made enormous strides with regards to young learners entering HE – with numbers increasing year on year since 2001 when there were 261 young learners progressing into HE, compared to 2007/8 figures of over 600 progressions.

Early findings show that although there have been improvements in the numbers applying for, and being accepted into university, there are still some groups of young learners that are facing barriers in their educational careers. These barriers may be financial, with many concerned about student debt and the recession. The barriers might also be related to previous academic achievement – with poor GCSE results hampering individual learner's



*(From left: John Morris, Director of HE Development, Havering College; Karina Berzins, Research Fellow, Continuum; Cathy Walsh, Principal, Barking College; Professor John Storan, Director, Continuum)*

progression. The research found that while 60% of young people want to go on to HE, many families have other directions in mind. Overall those who are at most risk of disengaging from education are boys from the lower socio-economic bands. Underlying all this is the role of schools, HEIs and other organisations that provide information, advice and guidance directed at young learners. This research shows how each of these organisations have an ongoing role and duty to provide support to young learners in the borough, and fully equip them for the choices they make in their educational careers.

Information on the project report and DVD is available at [www.uel.ac.uk/continuum](http://www.uel.ac.uk/continuum), or contact Karina Berzins Continuum Research Fellow at [k.e.berzins@uel.ac.uk](mailto:k.e.berzins@uel.ac.uk).

# Continuum Supports FACE

The 2009 FACE Conference, 'Towards a New Agenda for Lifelong Learning: Access, Diversity and Participation', was hosted by Staffordshire University.

The entire Continuum team made a contribution, disseminating findings from several recent research projects. The Continuum display stand provided an arena to share and discuss reports, newsletters and other Continuum publications with national and international colleagues.

Congratulations are due to Nicola Stephenson, Continuum Centre Administrator, for organising and managing the stand so well.

The FACE conference is a valuable dissemination event, the premiere networking event of the year for policy makers, practitioners and researchers in the areas of lifelong learning, HE access and widening participation. Exchanging knowledge and experience as part of a community of practitioners reminded all in the Continuum team of the value of working together with colleagues from universities, colleges and related organisations from every part of the UK and beyond. Next year's FACE conference will be held at Southampton Solent University, 30th June – 2nd July 2010.

# Getting Strategic with WP

HEFCE has asked higher education institutions in England, and those FECs who are funded directly, to submit widening participation strategic assessments (WPSA). Part one will provide an overarching statement on WP that indicates the place of WP in the institution's planning; sets out the overall aims and objectives, includes a high-level statement on admissions and also indicates how the institution will measure success.

Part two will set out the full range of the institution's WP activity; the detailed targets and milestones; and the level of resource committed to WP including the HEFCE WP allocation and the spending on outreach bursaries included in the access agreement.

Continuum Director, Professor John Storan, in his role as Director of Action on Access has been working closely with both HEFCE and the HE sector supporting the development of the

WPSAs. John commented, "I see this as a really exciting development in WP. The strategic assessment should be seen as developmental, providing HEIs the opportunity to set out the extent of their commitment provision and investment in WP, as well as the challenges they might for see. Taken together, the WPSAs will also constitute a vital evidence base in order to better understand the extent to which WP has become an integral part of policies, processes and cultures of HEIs."



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