

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Continuum newsletter and the new academic year. With a diverse and growing portfolio at local, national and international levels this promises to be an exciting and interesting year for the Continuum team.

Through its work Continuum seeks to explore the relationship between research, policy and practice, and the pioneering programme for McNair Scholars at UEL is a tangible example of this. Participants and contributors welcomed and benefitted from the rich debate generated when policy makers, researchers, practitioners, funders and academics engaged with learners. Planning for an extended programme in 2011 is already underway.

Regular readers will be aware of Continuum's work in Sweden, collaborating with the government, as well as working with educational agencies and a growing number of universities. This work has now been extended to the school sector with the exploratory research being undertaken for Baggium, a provider of vocational education for 16-19 year olds.

At local and national level the team continue to undertake research and evaluation on a wide variety of issues relating to widening participation. The golden thread that runs through all of this work is a commitment to partnership working and a focus on the learner.

If you would like to discuss collaboration with us, please email me at: j.storan@uel.ac.uk

John Storan – Director, Continuum

Continuum pioneer program for McNair Scholars at UEL

The Continuum team have been working with colleagues in the United States over the past year to develop an innovative academic program for undergraduate students enrolled as McNair Scholars at their institution in the US.



UNH McNair Scholars with Continuum Director Professor John Storan (far right) and Research Manager Anthony Hudson (far left)

In the US the federally funded TRIO program provides a range of "Aimhigher type" activities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the capstone program, McNair prepares undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have demonstrated progress to doctoral studies, to prepare for doctoral studies. The goal is to increase the attainment of PhD degrees by students from underrepresented segments of society.

Over the summer McNair scholars from the University of New Hampshire, accompanied by their program director, Dr Antonio Henley, participated in the first Continuum International Summer Institute (ISI) at UEL. Through a combination of expert seminars, workshops and participation at an international conference,

students gained an understanding of the English education system and the issues around access to higher education. The program provided students with the opportunity to engage with a wide range of academics, practitioners and high level policy makers.

“ This experience has left such a positive imprint on both my academic and personal life. ”

In addition there were opportunities to develop and extend their research skills in preparation for their individual research projects and future doctoral studies.

“ Armed with a better understanding of the UK educational system, I am confident that I am equipped to begin a search for a graduate university here. ”

Planning for the second ISI in 2011 is now underway for McNair Scholars drawn from institutions across the US including the universities of New Hampshire, Central Florida and de Paul in Chicago.



UNH McNair Scholars with recent UEL Graduates

Continuum work in Sweden takes new turn

Continuum's extensive Swedish links have been strengthened with new work with schools. Throughout the last year Continuum has been working with Baggium, a Swedish education provider that specialises in vocational education for 16 to 19 year olds. They have 41 schools across Sweden, and their students study core subjects and vocational skills, alongside work placements. Baggium also have a strong international profile as they organise work placements for their students in Africa, the USA, Europe and in London. Continuum has been assisting Baggium with their ambitions to enhance and develop their London placement scheme. The ambitions are to have organised accommodations and work placement opportunities for 60 students by the end of this year, in a wide range of industries – from floristry, to welding to social care. This follows on from other work done in Sweden including study visits, advising

government committees, conferences, knowledge exchange activities, policy analysis, joint seminars, and an extended stay in Sweden for Prof John Storan, and Karina Berzins due to the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland. Continuum is continually developing these links with Sweden and will begin to undertake more development work for Baggium in the near future.



From right: Katarina Mollberg from Baggium Vocational Schools, Professor John Storan and two current Baggium students

Continuum evaluates innovative CABLE project delivered by UEL and ICS

Continuum has recently completed the evaluation of the JISC funded Student Lifecycle Relationship Management (SLRM) project. This project was delivered by a partnership between UEL and the International Correspondence Schools (ICS), who deliver much of the UEL distance learning offer.

The projects' main objective was to improve the student experience for distance learners, working towards a parity of experience between distance and on-campus learners. The resulting project – Creating a Better Learning Experience (CABLE) helped UEL's distance learners access a wide array of online student services, register in a more efficient way online and engage

more closely with their academic tutors. UEL has almost 5,000 distance learners around the world, which makes it the second largest provider of distance learning in the UK, behind the Open University.

Findings show that the project achieved its main objective to improve the parity of student experience, with initial results showing that the measures put in place have enhanced the distance learners' experience.

Indeed, initial feedback from students and tutors has been very positive. It is expected that these positive outcomes will continue for future students who choose to study their degrees via distance learning.

Widening participation and lifelong learning in the present South African landscape

Prof Roy du Pré, Honorary Visiting Professor of UEL, and immediate past Vice-Chancellor of Durban University of Technology and Chairperson of the South African Technology Network offers some comments.

In the 1980s, South Africa underwent a political and social revolution culminating in the introduction of a non-racial democratic dispensation under Nelson Mandela in the early 1990s.

One of the buzzwords at the time was "Lifelong Learning." Many were concerned that greater opportunities be provided for persons who had never previously had an education; persons who had been denied access to higher education; and adult workers who wanted to continue studies to acquire skills or higher qualifications. To implement such ideas, ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) courses were developed; "night" schools established for adults to study after work; part-time classes and short courses offered by universities to assist professionals; and the establishment of departments of continuing education at universities to develop curricula and qualifications to promote lifelong learning.

Twenty years later, "Lifelong Learning" has been buried under a mass of policies and other initiatives designed to redress the past. South Africa has to commence a campaign to rejuvenate and invigorate Lifelong Learning. The lessons we have learned are that universities have an important role to play in countries undergoing political and social change, to ensure that "Widening Participation" and "Lifelong Learning" remains clearly defined and high on the agenda.