

Since the last newsletter the Continuum team have been hard at work preparing its submission for the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). As Continuum is not quite four years old this has been our first experience of contributing to the RAE which last took place in 2001. However, given the proposed changes to the RAE and in particular the move to a metrics based assessment system, I am hopeful that the new arrangements will prove more beneficial to applied research centres like Continuum than the existing system is likely to be. The reformed system of funding research should recognise and not in effect penalise near policy and applied research and development work that academic centres like Continuum have pioneered and which contribute directly to evidence-based policy. Part of our commitment as a centre is to challenge the obstacles between policy, practice and research in relation to widening participation and HE access. Such a commitment is not only evident in the variety of research methods and approaches we draw upon but also in the types of outputs we produce. This is because so much of our work involves close engagement with WP practitioners, policy makers, funders and other researchers and therefore our outputs are often in the form of reports, case studies and evidence based proposals. Surely really useful knowledge should be recognised as potentially as valuable as other knowledge outputs, and any system that exists to support and develop research capacity across the HE sector should be able to do this.

*John Storan  
Director, Continuum*

## CONTINUUM SUPPORTS THE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND LIFELONG LEARNING AGENDA

Over 200 delegates from throughout the UK and fifteen other countries attended the 2007 FACE Conference organised by Continuum at the University of East London. This was an inspiring international gathering with keynote speeches and workshop papers focusing on different questions and issues relating to the main conference theme of Social Justice and Lifelong Learning. Whilst we are unable here to summarise the papers and debates which took place, the FACE website at: [www.f-a-c-e.org.uk](http://www.f-a-c-e.org.uk) provides more information about the conference including a full set of conference abstracts. There will also be a conference book which will include a selection of the key papers. That too will be available through the FACE website. Feedback from the conference



John Storan at the FACE Conference

was extremely positive both in terms of the social programme and the workshop and keynote speeches. "An amazing conference" and "the best conference I have ever attended" were a few of the many comments received from conference delegates.

## CONTINUUM INTERNATIONAL VISITING FELLOW PROFESSOR CONSUELO CORRADI, FROM LUMSA UNIVERSITY, ROME, TALKS ABOUT HER VISIT

Continuum is a very stimulating place to be in. It seems to me that John and his team are successful in not just working in one strictly defined field, but actually creating and recreating an open space full of ideas and practical commitments for practitioners, teachers and researchers who are interested in widening participation to HE. There is so much going on at Continuum, that I encourage foreign colleagues to spend some time visiting the centre or at least the website. One can get a good overview of the different programmes and possibilities with which an institution in the UK can deal with the democratization of HE, and at the

same time one can see strong connections with (and interesting cultural differences between) what goes on in other countries. My connection with John Storan started around a mutual interest in the accreditation of experiential learning, an issue which is new and growing in Italian universities; but being a Visiting Fellow at Continuum has opened new strands of mutual collaboration: contributing to cross-cultural research on WP, improving quality standards, and implementing bilateral teaching and research projects. I look forward to concretely developing these possibilities in the near future.

## LLN Director praises project

Continuum Research Manager Tony Hudson, and Research Associate Dr Pamela Percy, have recently completed an investigation into learner perceptions of progression. Whilst the voice of learners is often absent, this research focused specifically on listening to learners on level 3 to level 4 courses in the Thames Gateway, and especially on those studying subjects related to the creative and cultural industries. Liz Pearson, Director of The Creative Way Lifelong Learning Network who commissioned the research said:

*'In taking forward our work, we wanted to understand more about the needs and aspirations of learners. We commissioned Continuum to help us investigate this issue further. The research report provides us with a clear picture of some of the key issues we need to address as a partnership of FECs and HEIs as we take forward the challenge of developing a progression agreement scheme which offers new and meaningful opportunities for vocational learners.'* The report will be published in November and copies can be downloaded from the Creative Way (<http://www.thecreativeway.org.uk>) and Continuum (<http://www.uel.ac.uk/continuum>) websites.

Continuum has worked successfully with a number of LLNs, initially developing the business case for funding and subsequently undertaking research and evaluation. With an established track record Continuum is uniquely well placed to work with LLNs on evaluation. Continuum is uniquely well placed to work with LLNs on evaluation impact reports and explorations of further funding opportunities. For an informal discussion about how Continuum's expertise and experience could benefit your LLN please contact Tony Hudson, Research Manager ([a.hudson@uel.ac.uk](mailto:a.hudson@uel.ac.uk))

## England – Africa Partnerships join forces

In partnership with colleagues at the Vaal University of Technology, Continuum were pleased to host a dissemination event for project partners funded by the England-Africa Partnership programme. Organised by Tony Hudson (Continuum) and Professor Linda du Plessis (VUT), the event was chaired by Professor Roy du Pré (VUT) and attended by over 35 delegates from 10 projects. The event was also attended by colleagues from DfES, the British Council and The Africa Unit at the Association of Commonwealth Universities. Thanks to the presenters for sharing their work.

Bill Rammell MP, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further & Higher Education recognised in his speech the importance of the EAP Programme and the dissemination event as an opportunity for capacity building and learning through collaboration.



Roy du Pré at EAP Dissemination event

**(A full transcript of the minister's speech is available on the Continuum website)**

In recognition of the importance of the EAP programme, VUT are collaborating with Continuum in publishing a special edition of their international journal *Sediba sa Thuto* with peer refereed papers from EAP partners.

## Continuum gets full credit!

Over the summer Continuum completed the second and final phase of the QCA/FdF project. The research looked at a sample of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) to examine the role that credit plays in facilitating progression to the higher levels. The particular focus was to examine the development of progression agreements and the role that foundation degrees can play. This research evaluates the role of credit in relation to the current policy developments of the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), the 14-19 Diplomas and the Leitch skills agenda.

Susan Hayday from FdF, commented:

*"Based on a small but representative sample of LLNs I believe this research has some interesting messages for FdF. It will particularly inform our work with LLNs in relation to the context for Foundation degree development and the need to address Foundation degree provision that doesn't overtly address the needs of employers. The research will similarly inform work we are engaged in on 14-19 progression and accredited work-based training programmes."*