

Welcome to the spring edition of the newsletter!

We ended 2009 in the UK with a spate of reports and reviews, each of which had different but significant implications for widening participation to HE (Milburn report, Fees review, Higher Ambitions, HE & Communities: Barking and Dagenham WP report to mention just four). In their different ways, these reports highlight between them another issue which I have come across in recent meetings and discussions and that is, the discourse of WP. One colleague at a national level meeting made the point that many of the terms we (meaning those participating in the meeting) use are only understood by those deeply involved in WP policy and practice. This, it was argued, made communication with the 'public', and in particular with families and their prospective HE learners outside this fairly inclusive grouping, at best difficult or at worst impossible. Communication incompatibility rather than breakdown perhaps was the analysis offered. These comments did however remind me of the significance of a change in words or a different use of words, and often does signal a change in policy and direction. One example of this I heard at a recent conference involved a strong disagreement between two delegates over the use of the words raising expectations rather than raising aspirations. Such differences may not appear at first sight to be important but as in the UK we get closer to a general election in which access to HE and the costs involved might be an ever important part of the policy mix and consequences for WP.

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

John Storan – Director, Continuum

Staff Development that makes a Difference

Continuum together with Arethusa Projects and HTI have been commissioned by Universities HR (UHR) and the Association of University Administrators (AUA) to undertake a HEFCE funded scoping study into the feasibility of establishing a national staff development brokerage – Intersect HE, with a focus on secondments, work shadowing and external project management experience.

Mike Moore, UEL's Director of HR and Chair of UHR is leading the project with support from the AUA and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE). Initially six pilot institutions: Kingston University, Thames Valley University, University of Bristol, University of East London,

Leeds University and Newcastle University have been identified, although the scoping study will engage more widely across the sector.

Tony Hudson, Continuum Research Manager is working with Professor Robin Smith, Centre Research Associate & Director of Arethusa Projects on the "demand" side of the project, whilst Dani Saveker from HTI has been working with public and private sector employers on the "supply" side.

HR Directors from across the sector have commented on the value of this type of development activity and the need for a shared service whilst the response from staff provides evidence of demand.

Continuum forms a Creative Partnership

Continuum Director, Professor John Storan formally opened "Workspace" – the work integrated learning (WIL) graphic design studio which is at the heart of the British Council funded Creative Industries – Creative Solutions project based at Durban University of Technology (DUT).

Addressing DUT's academic community at the launch, John said: "The project is based on a firm foundation of good educational principles and focused on providing support and preparing student for entry into the world of work. It provides creative solutions and a good start for students to benefit in a measurable way. I am inspired to be part of an innovative facility which demonstrates a new way of thinking about the employability of students."



One of the first studio users

Workspace is based at DUT's City Campus as part of the Visual Communication and Design Department's BTech Programme. The visual identity of the studio was generated by third year graphic design students under the direction of Rowan Gatfield, Workspace Studio Manager and Graphic Design Lecturer.

First Continuum UEL Visiting Professor

Professor Roy du Pré, Vice Chancellor at Durban University of Technology, has been awarded an honorary Professorship at Continuum, UEL. As a leading figure in African higher education, Professor du Pré has built a close working relationship with Continuum through his collaboration and partnership with Professor John Storan and his team. Over the last five years, this collaboration has taken many forms, including regular staff development visits, senior management exchanges, joint conference presentations, publications and mutual knowledge exchange on a range of disciplinary and organisational questions. The partnership has so far led to two major research and development projects funded by the British Council. The British Council acknowledged the work of the partnership by inviting Professor du Pré to give a keynote presentation at a major international conference on England Africa Partnerships at Imperial College London.

Commenting on the award, Professor John Storan said "I am delighted that Professor du Pré and the collaboration



Professor Roy du Pré and Professor John Storan

that has developed have been recognised in this way. Professor du Pré is a remarkable higher education leader not just at his own university but also through his contribution to African higher education and the wider international links he has built. I have had the pleasure of working closely with him over a number of years and have learned an enormous amount through his huge experience of so many aspects of higher education and practice. It was my pleasure on behalf of UEL to personally present this award to Professor du Pré and thank him for the enormous contribution he has made through his work in HE access and many other areas I look forward to our future collaboration."

Continuum works with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Aimhigher

Continuum has been commissioned by Aimhigher – Hampshire & Isle of Wight to undertake a detailed evaluation and sustainability study.

Over the coming months, Tony Hudson and Professor John Storan will be working with a range of stakeholders across the partnership to evaluate activity and identify good practice. Whilst the study will draw on existing local and national research, the researcher will be undertaking extensive fieldwork at the four partner HEIs (Portsmouth, Southampton, Southampton Solent, Winchester) as well as selected schools, colleges and Education Business Partnerships.

The intended outcome of the study is to produce a report detailing which Aimhigher type activities could be further developed and sustained post 2011.

Continuum Supports New WP Policy Development

Continuum Director Professor John Storan has been working on the meta-analysis of the widening participation strategic assessments (WPSAs) as part of his Action on Access role. For many in the HE sector, the arrival of the WPSAs mark a new phase of widening participation which requires every HEI to set out both the place of WP in an institution's planning as well as the overall aims, objectives and measures of success against which progress will be assessed. The WPSA also includes information on the type and range of an institution's WP activities and as part of this the level of resource that are committed to WP, including the HEFCE allocation and the spending on outreach bursaries which are part of

the access agreement. The advent of the WPSAs mean that widening participation is now seen by HEIs as a strategic issue, in a similar way to academic planning, teaching and learning and financial planning. While the meta-analysis is still very much a work in progress, it is beginning to reveal the extent to which WP is becoming a mainstream part of what universities do. According to John, "Looking at the WPSA's, the sheer breadth of activities and sector wide commitment to widening participation comes through strongly. These are very rich documents indeed and show the extent to which WP is a substantial feature of the HE landscape. As well as setting out the

relationship of WP to the mission and management of the institution each WPSA also covers: WP activity and commitments, investment in WP, targets and milestones, evidence of success admissions and fair access. We have been feeding back to the sector the emerging headlines from the meta-analysis which is the first part of our dissemination strategy. There is a clear developmental dimension to the WPSA's and it will be important to create on-going opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and practice around the different aspects of strategic assessments". Visit the Action on Access website at www.actiononaccess.org for more information on WPSAs.