

Welcome to the spring edition of the newsletter!

Since its establishment Continuum has collaborated with a range of international partners. Focussed on issues relating to WP, we have exchanged experience of developments in a variety of national contexts. International collaboration has taken many forms, including joint research projects, visiting fellowships, study visits, and web links. The significance and impact of such activity is notoriously difficult to quantify, but in the case of our partnership work in Sweden there is now a national WP network being established. Called INCLUDE the network has drawn in large measure on experience of the UK network for access and lifelong learning, FACE.

Opportunities for such knowledge and skills exchanges are critical to the renewal and further development of WP policy and practice nationally and internationally. This is confirmed by the European University Association, Trends V report which recognises the importance of building both national and international WP communities of practice. The report shows that 97% of all European HEIs find widening participation to be either very important or important. The report found widespread support for widening participation and improving access to HE from heads of HEIs across member states. The challenge is to translate such support and commitment into policies and practices that result in institutional changes. By such means we may begin to meet the needs of those learners for whom HE has, hitherto, been an unthinkable option.

If you would like to discuss collaboration with us please email me at:
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John Storan – Director, Continuum

“Not for the likes of us”

Such phrases will sound familiar to colleagues working in a variety of contexts and settings – disadvantaged and disengaged learners of all ages who believe that further and higher education isn't for them. For many older, non-traditionally qualified learners, once their imagination has been opened to the possibility of returning to study, Access courses offer a well trodden and accepted route into Higher Education. The innovative New Beginnings 2 (NB2) programme offers a fast-track route into HE for non-traditionally qualified learners. Developed by Continuum Centre Associate, Dr Pamela Percy, the programme was first offered in 1999 and was project funded until it was embedded within UEL's School of Social Sciences, Media & Cultural Studies in 2003, when it was validated as

a University Certificate. At present there is only anecdotal evidence to suggest that NB2 graduates perform better than their peers and are less likely to drop out of their undergraduate studies.

Continuum's Research Manager, Tony Hudson, is currently undertaking research on the NB2 programme, using a mixed methods approach. Through analysis of secondary data, progression of NB2 students will be explored and compared with their peers. In the second phase of the research Tony will conduct in-depth interviews with NB2 students, using the life grid technique, to explore their learning careers. Tony was recently awarded a research grant from the FACE Research and Development fund which will partly fund this work.

Continuum joins forces with the Swedish Trade Union Federation (TCO)

In a wide ranging presentation to this year's TCO annual conference hosted at Stockholm University, Continuum Director John Storan spoke on the comparative strengths and weaknesses of HE widening participation policy and practice in Sweden and England. He drew on the findings of a joint research project which examined the approaches adopted in each country. With more



From left to right; President of TCO, Sture Nordh, John Storan and Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin (OECD)

than 1.2 million members, TCO represents union members from Universities, Schools and related organisations, many of whom are in the frontline of WP policy developments.

Findings of this joint research project, “Bridging the Gap” can be found on the Continuum website under ‘Publications’.

Continuum International Seminar – Engaging the disengaged and disadvantaged

Over 50 invited delegates attended this seminar to explore innovative practice relating to disengaged and disadvantaged learners. Speakers and discussants shared and critically examined strategies to enable young learners to consider the possibility of HE; to provide flexible arrangements to enable them to access HE; and finally support mechanisms to promote success at HE.

The seminar opened with a presentation by Derek Bland from Queensland University of Technology in Australia, on his work with disengaged and disadvantaged learners in Brisbane through the Student Action Research University Access (SARUA) project. A practitioner turned academic, Derek was able to draw on many years experience working with young learners from indigenous ethnic groups as well as more recent immigrant groups. Through action research, the project engages younger learners in the dialogue of education and empowers them by giving them a “voice.” Whilst

stories of individual learners reconnecting with formal education are captivating and powerful, the project is clearly underpinned by a theoretical framework which draws on the work of Vygotsky, Bourdieu and Habermas.

In the afternoon delegates enjoyed presentations on two very different mentoring schemes. Colleagues from Sweden, Faezeh Khalaji and Maria Hulth, gave a joint presentation on Stockholm’s University for All and the Medvind (Fair Wind) mentoring project which they manage at the University. One of the innovative elements of the project is “stalk a student” which offers high school pupils the opportunity to shadow an undergraduate student for a day or so to get a first hand understanding of university life. This was followed by a UK perspective from Linda Leith, Schools Manager for Aimhigher Kent & Medway who gave delegates a detailed description of a well developed and mature mentoring scheme.



Continuum Web Alert!

Continuum is delighted to announce the launch of a new interactive website. Visitors can access this exciting new site via the following link:
www.uel.ac.uk/continuum

Navigate your way through our latest news and research into widening participation policy - regionally, nationally and internationally. Find out the partnerships and projects Continuum are involved with. Browse through our publication list. Catch up on the latest events, conferences and meetings.

Another innovative new feature of the website is that Continuum welcomes contributions from readers on a range of issues on widening participation and policy globally. So if you are in Newham or Newport, Stratford or Sweden, London or Lesotho, please send us your news and views.

Continuum Director joins NAO panel

The National Audit Office has invited Continuum Director John Storan to join its Expert Panel to consider and advise on its report ‘Closing the Gap: Widening Participation in HE’. The report examines the progress made by DIUS, HEFCE and the HE sector in England in Widening Participation in HE since its last report in 2002.

John is delighted to have this opportunity, recognising that “the NAO report recommendations and contents will be critical to the further development of national WP policy and funding arrangements”.

The NAO report is expected to be published at the end of May beginning of June 2008. Keep an eye on the Continuum website for a briefing and further news on the report following its publication.

Breaking News

Continuum is happy to announce the appointment of Liana Mathurin-Brown as Temporary Centre Research Administrator providing administrative support to the team whilst Maxine Walcott is on maternity leave. Liana studied Psychology with Criminology at Kingston University. Liana is fascinated by social research and is interested in community regeneration via education and training.