

CONTINUUM

where policy and practice come together

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When Continuum was established in 2004, one of its principal purposes was to bring together policy and practice in Widening Participation within HE. One way of connecting policy with practice is through research, and much of the work carried out at Continuum has had a research dimension. This edition of the Newsletter illustrates something of our research priorities.

- My evidence to the Parliamentary Education and Skills Select Committee draws upon the growing base of research that illuminates the complexities of WP. Such research may give policymakers a better understanding of the ways in which WP policy might be further developed.
- In addition, the findings from the WP Practitioners' Survey offers evidence of the extent to which WP is becoming embedded across the HE sector through staff development and accreditation opportunities. A much richer picture is emerging of the relationships between policy, practice and research.
- Continuum is managing a partnership project between South Africa and England. This is already beginning to raise international comparative issues about the relationship between policy, research and practice.
- The 2007 FACE Annual Conference, which Continuum is hosting, will bring together policymakers, practitioners and researchers involved in a wide range of WP developments.

WP is coming of age; those of us working in the vanguard of this social transformation have much to do to ensure that our policy and practice serves our social justice purposes.

John Storan
Director, Continuum

CONTINUUM DIRECTOR TALKS TO MPS

Continuum Director, John Storan, gave evidence before the Parliamentary Education and Skills Select Committee on the 7th March. The Committee is undertaking an inquiry into 'the future sustainability of the higher education sector: purpose, funding and structures'.

Widening participation in HE and issues of social mobility provided the focus of the questioning during the session with the Continuum Director. The committee posed questions relating to the funding and impact of existing widening participation policy and practice. John highlighted the invaluable contribution of programmes such as Aimhigher in making HE accessible to learners, and in helping HEIs to develop their approaches to WP. John pointed to the growing evidence base which is evaluating current policies and informing future policy development. Such evidence indicates the impressive contribution that Aimhigher is making, despite the short period it has been operating in its integrated form. The committee asked about the effects of changes in funding



arrangements on WP and this led to a discussion about bursaries and the amount of support for outreach work. John argued that it is important to maintain a focus on the specificity of WP as this will form an integral part of the long term sustainability of HE in the UK.

For more information on the Select Committee Inquiry and to read a transcript of John's submission, visit the committee homepage at http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/education_and_skills_committee.cfm

FOUR NEW PROJECTS START

Continuum has received funding for four new pieces of research: We are working with Vaal University of Technology in South Africa on Skills for Adults in the Gauteng (see overleaf). John Storan has also been appointed as a Senior Advisor on Widening Participation Policy to the Swedish Agency for Networks and Cooperation in Higher Education for the next two years.

Commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Continuum will

investigate how the new Qualifications and Credit Framework for Further Education will interact with the HE sector in relation to credit. Alongside this project another commission by Foundation Degree Forward is to look at the potential impacts of credit and the new 14-19 Specialised Diplomas on progression to foundation degrees. For more information on either of these two projects, please contact Claire Pooley (c.pooley@uel.ac.uk).

WP PRACTITIONERS' OPPORTUNITIES & LEARNING NEEDS

Continuum has now published the report on Support and Recognition for Widening Participation Practitioners, commissioned by the Higher Education Academy. The electronic survey looked at levels of support and recognition that WP practitioners received within their institutions; collected information on learning and training that they had undertaken; and the forms of staff development which they felt they needed in the future. The findings demonstrate a significant demand for more learning opportunities, and particularly more recognition and accreditation for the range of informal learning that occurs daily amongst staff in WP roles.

In the current policy environment the focus is on embedding WP in HEIs,

linked to the end of the current round of Aimhigher funding. In this context it is important that WP practitioners are supported and recognised as professionals with specialised learning and training requirements within their institutions. As HEIs develop a business case for WP, it is crucial to note the strong economic case for WP staff development. Continuum will now build on the survey, running a series of pilot staff development initiatives on a number of sites. After evaluation, these could form the basis of a professional development framework for WP practitioners.

For more information on the findings of the project or to receive a copy of the report please contact Tony Hudson (a.hudson@uel.ac.uk).

ENGLAND-AFRICA PARTNERSHIP: SKILLS FOR ADULTS IN THE GAUTENG

Continuum has been awarded funding for a joint project with the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) under the England-Africa Partnership (EAP) scheme funded by the DfES and administered by the British Council. It aims to support HE partnerships between England and sub-Saharan Africa and strengthen capacity in African higher education.

Economically, Gauteng is competitively weak due to high levels of unemployment and low levels of education. Wider access to higher level skills is vital for economic growth in the region. The project, Skills for Adults in the Gauteng, will address specific skills shortages and social exclusion through three strands: teacher re-education; community upliftment through the support of entrepreneurs; and developing policies and instruments for the Recognition of Prior Learning to enable adult workers to access HE programmes.



Continuum and VUT teams meet in South Africa in February

VUT and UEL have collaborated for over three years and both universities have a strategic commitment to adult skills development and strong links with their communities. There will be a progress report on this work at the FACE conference, which will have a one day strand devoted to EAP Projects. If you would like further details of the project or dissemination event please contact: Tony Hudson (a.hudson@uel.ac.uk).

CONTINUUM TO HOST FACE CONFERENCE

Social Justice and Lifelong Learning: diversity, globalisation, transformation 2 – 4th July at University of East London

The FACE Conference is always very popular since it is one of the very few places where practitioners, policy makers and researchers can freely exchange experiences and ideas. Conference keynote presenters include the Minister, Bill Rammell MP; there will also be practitioner papers and roundtable discussions on Aimhigher, Lifelong Learning Networks and International Developments in Access and Lifelong Learning. Continuum would like to encourage colleagues to submit an abstract of a paper for review, and to book a place. The conference promises to provide a stimulating environment to discuss the tensions and interplay between policy and practice, to network with both academics and policy makers and to enjoy a variety of social activities.

Brochures, booking forms and abstract submission forms for the conference are available for download from the conference website at: www.f-a-c-e.org.uk/conference2007.htm

CHANGING FACES

Continuum said goodbye to Emma Rowland, our Centre Research Administrator in November as she moved into a research career. The team would like to thank Emma and Jessica Ellis, who stood in so brilliantly for the last few months, for all their hard work. We would now like to welcome Maxine Walcott to the team as our new Centre Research Administrator.