

Welcome to Continuum's autumn newsletter. This edition has a distinctly international flavor underlining the point that widening participation to learning opportunities is a worldwide issue. The report about developments in Sweden for example illustrates how that particular country is addressing under-representation in higher education and the importance that needs to be put on building capacity to make the necessary changes. Continuum has had an important role in facilitating links between Sweden and the UK, resulting in an extremely fruitful sharing of policy and practice. The UK policy scene relating to widening participation is particularly active at the present time with as yet uncertain consequences flowing from the introduction of top-up fees in English higher education. Continuum will be monitoring this changing picture and looking at any impacts on participation trends. In keeping with our partnership approach, I would like to warmly encourage you to get in contact if you would like to discuss working with Continuum.

John Storan
Director, Continuum

CONTINUUM IN NEW TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Continuum will be collaborating with the Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research, SISTER, on a transnational research project focusing on widening participation in higher education policy and practice. The project has been commissioned by the Swedish Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education and will examine a variety of recent widening participation policy developments in both countries and the impacts thereof. Furthermore, the project report will include an in-depth analysis of policy trends with a strong comparative dimension.

Continuum and SISTER began working on the project in early autumn and it is to be completed by May 2005. Interim reports from the research team will be available on

both Continuum's and SISTER's website (www.sister.nu). A series of seminars is also being planned and will take place during the course of the project bringing together practitioners and policy makers from Sweden and the UK to discuss project findings.



Sverker Sörlin, Scientific Director of SISTER and Continuum Director John Storan.

CREDIT BASED LEARNING

In December, Continuum will publish a report based on an LSCLE-funded scoping study concerned with credit-based learning in further education for young people. The study gathers the perspectives of staff and students in FE as well as examining how credit fits into the current policy picture.

The report will assert that any further development of credit for young people should draw heavily on the systems already developed in the UK,

including that of Newham College in East London. Also, credit for young people must be linked directly with the Tomlinson proposals, QCA credit for adults, and Lifelong Learning Networks, recently proposed by HEFCE and the LSC.

The report will be available on Continuum's website early in 2005.

Greetings from the University of New Hampshire!

This summer, I had the pleasure of spending a month as an intern with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). As part of that experience, I visited with staff at several universities in and around London who are involved in widening participation work. One such stop on the tour was the University of East London and Continuum, where I had the opportunity to learn about their exciting research into widening participation and policy efforts in the HE sector.

At home, I work as the Coordinator for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Student Services. Our three person staff plays a small part in advancing institution-wide efforts to promote the inclusion of historically marginalized groups. While our office works primarily with black and minority ethnic students and LGBT students, other people and programs at University of New Hampshire provide similar

assistance to students with disabilities, international students and mature students.

In the US, a consensus has begun to emerge that an optimal learning environment rests on the successful recruitment and retention of a diverse student body. I came to England interested in understanding the widening participation agenda: who the stakeholders are; the nature of the interplay between HEFCE and individual HEIs; where resistance is commonly met and how it is managed. Given my background, I was also most interested to learn that the UK widening participation agenda engages with race and ethnicity as well as class issues and how the work is being carried out. Many thanks to those who helped me understand these issues and for making my stay in the UK such a fruitful one.

Bob Coffey



Bob Coffey, Coordinator for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Student Services at University of New Hampshire.

Swedish Widening Participation Report Published

Following three years of investigation and activity, the Swedish Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education launched its final report in October at a conference in Stockholm. A major feature of the work of the committee was its funding for widening participation development projects. About 100 different projects were supported making this the single biggest initiative of its kind in Sweden. Major areas of work within the projects centered on raising aspirations, bridging courses and activities providing student support within HEIs. The impact of the projects and the issues they have raised will be the subject of a research project being undertaken jointly by the Swedish Institute for

Studies in Education and Research (SISTER) and Continuum.

The title of the report, 'Fair access - a matter of visions, incentives and attitudes', reflects the committee's findings particularly well. Amongst other things, the report points out that the Swedish higher education system has to be able to meet the needs of a more diverse student body or the work for widening access will not be credible. This is closely connected to the funding structure as well as the needs for major incentives for HEIs to really focus resources on long-term widening participation work. An English summary of the report and a link to the full report can be found on the Continuum website.

UK HE Admissions Fair or Unfair?

Who gets into which universities and is the admission process fair to all? A recently published UK report on admissions to higher education highlights the need for change. An excellent summary of the main findings and recommendations of the Schwartz report is available on the Continuum website, courtesy of Liz Allen of Action on Access.

New Centre Associate

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Dr. Pam Percy as Editorial Centre Associate. This brings us up to four associates appointed since Continuum was established. Continuum Director John Storan said "We are very pleased indeed that Dr. Percy has agreed to take on this important role.

She was a founding member of the centre and has been a key figure in UK access and widening participation from the beginning. As well as advising and supporting Continuum's publications, Pam will also contribute to forward planning work."