

Welcome to the spring edition of the newsletter!

The Continuum portfolio of projects continues to grow, with the recent partnership contract to support the development of a UK regional strategy for widening participation to HE in Northern Ireland. In addition, the British Council has commissioned Continuum to partner with a Durban University team to explore and report on HE/work transitions. In their different ways, both these projects, and indeed many others in our portfolio, make a contribution to the various contexts each project is focused on. The introduction, or reintroduction, in England of widening participation strategic assessments, which has been announced since the previous Continuum newsletter was published, offers a further example albeit on a national scale of the relationship between the context or mission specificity of, in this case, HE providers and a sector wide policy for widening participation in HE. Universities and HE providers in FE are therefore currently in the process of preparing their institutional WP strategic assessments which are due to be submitted by June 2009.

The opportunity presented by the preparation of widening participation strategic assessments, regional strategies and HE/work planning will all involve HE providers in setting out their institutional plans and expenditure on widening participation in the context of their particular mission, management and organizational structures. Future editions of this newsletter will provide updates on these three developments and explore the synergy between them.

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

Widening Participation beyond Graduateness

The main focus of the debate about widening participation to HE in the UK has been almost entirely confined to undergraduate provision with little attention on the picture in the post-graduate world. In order to raise the level of discussion on this part of HE, Continuum has been exploring with Dr Antonio Henley, Director of the McNair Graduate Opportunity Programme at the University of New Hampshire, what lessons might be learned from this particular long established scheme. Below, Dr Henley provides a brief overview of the programme and its success to date.

As one of the federally funded TRIO programs, the McNair Scholars Program at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) is one of 182 grants under the Ronald E. McNair Post baccalaureate Achievement Program, which was originally authorised into law in 1986 after the space shuttle Challenger disaster and appropriated with funding in 1989. On the UNH campus, the program has secured continual funding since 1991.

The McNair Program is a comprehensive graduate study preparation initiative. It

functions to assist US American undergraduate students from low-income, first generation social class and students who by virtue of race and ethnicity are considered under represented in graduate education. Students engage in an intensive research project under the guidance of a faculty mentor, and have opportunities to present findings at academic symposia. The program aims to increase the number of Ph.D. holders who represent historically marginalized backgrounds. Through their participation, students also have access to a stipend and various fee waivers. In addition, students receive academic advising and support throughout the graduate school application process. Over the years, McNair scholars have become highly sought by graduate programs. The UNH McNair Program has helped to place more than sixty percent of its participants into graduate school. Further, twenty-three alumni to date have earned doctoral degrees. We aim to be collaborating closely with Continuum over the coming months with a view to establishing a scholarly exchange programme.

Turning up the volume on learner voice

Continuum, together with colleagues in the Cass School of Education and Education & Community Partnerships are hosting a one day conference: Listening to Learners: Partnerships in Action at UEL's Docklands Campus on the 22nd April 2009. The programme includes presentations from pupils, practitioners, policy makers and academics plus four parallel workshop sessions and musical interludes. During the course of the day there will be opportunities for discussion and networking.

To register for the event visit the conference web site at:
www.uel.ac.uk/listeningtolearners

Continuum supports local HE participation

Continuum has been commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to undertake research on low participation rates in Higher Education in Barking & Dagenham.

This new project will build on research previously commissioned by HEFCE on young peoples' participation in Higher Education, which provided a rich and complex picture of the social, economic and cultural processes that underpin these low rates. This round of research is a further stage of geographically focused work with a direct emphasis on the facilitation of longer term HE engagement in low participation neighbourhoods and the development of transferable models

of practice. The methodology is largely qualitative, and will involve a high level of engagement with young people in the borough. Research collaboration between HE and FE parties will be critical to the project which is being steered by a joint advisory group.

For more information about the project, please feel free to contact Karina Berzins (Continuum Research Fellow) k.e.berzins@uel.ac.uk

For more information about the previous round of research – the Four Cities research please see <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2007/4cities.asp>

Blended professionals – stirred but not shaken

At a recent workshop, New Learning Professionals, hosted at HEFCE, London, Tony Hudson reported on findings from an ESCalate funded survey of HE staff working with student ambassadors and mentors. The aim of the survey and follow up focus groups was to identify the development needs of these niche professionals who work in both academic and professional domains, and builds on previous research Tony has undertaken on widening participation practitioners. The findings from this focussed research project will be published in May.

Dr Celia Whitchurch, who has also a longstanding interest in blended professionals - staff who work in both professional and academic domains - reported on findings from research funded by the LFHE on the changing roles and identities of professional staff in HE. In setting out her conceptual framework, Celia discussed the implications for an emerging "third space" in which such staff operate. Celia and Tony's presentations are available on the Continuum web site.



Tony Brown, Celia Whitchurch & Tony Hudson

Breaking news

Continuum has just been awarded a second British Council grant to lead a joint project: Creative Industries – Creative Solutions with colleagues from Durban University of Technology and the Creative Way Lifelong Learning Network.

The aim of the project is to improve the employability and entrepreneurial skills of Graphic Design Students at DUT whilst at the same time forge stronger links between employers and education providers; improve articulation between Further and Higher Education and signposting routes from FE through to HE and into employment. Further details of the project are available on the Continuum web site.

Swedish Study Visit



Continuum hosted a study visit by four elected officers from Jonkoping Student Union in Sweden. In addition to meetings with the UK National Union of Students, the group visited a number of institutions including LSE and UEL. As part of a packed programme at UEL, the group enjoyed lively sessions with: Joseph Bitrus, President UELSU; Mercy Oghenekaro, Schools Partnership Co-ordinator; Brian Hipkin, Director of Student Services, Tony Hudson, Research Manager, Continuum and John Storan, Director, Continuum.