

Welcome to the winter edition of the newsletter!

The HE widening participation agenda both in the UK context and internationally is often difficult to define in any holistic sense. However, it is crucial that it is situated and in turn helps to shape the emerging lifelong learning policy debate. This issue was highlighted for me at a recent seminar I participated in concerned with lifelong learning policy in the UK. During the seminar I was struck by a comment made by a colleague who I have known for many years. He said that the trouble with fairness and lifelong learning policy (and I guess by extension practice) is that there is not enough of it to go around. Not enough fairness to go round, I replied, but you make it sound like baked beans! This was of course precisely the point he was trying to make and one that he went on to develop. The essence of his argument being that fairness is often seen, presented and understood in much policy debate in relation to HE access as if it were a commodity that could be packaged up and redistributed through a mix of WP policy and funding arrangements. It is not a new argument and one which I am sure is familiar to many readers. I can't say I agreed with all of the analysis made on the commodification of fairness but my strong sense is that such words are often used without sufficient care and this in turn can lead to illconceived and ineffective policies for widening access to HE which not surprisingly disappoint their producers, funders and providers but worst of all produce no benefit for the communities and individuals they are designed to create fairness for. The need for a critical account of fairness is vital if a shared, agreed and operationally viable approach is to be achieved.

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

Continuum project showcased at EAP Conference

Imperial College in London played host to a celebration event for the British Council funded England and Africa Partnership scheme which brought together representatives from the wide range of Universities that have been involved in the scheme. The event included a conference to launch the latest programme: 'Education Partnerships in Africa' (EPA). The programme aims to encourage English and African Universities and Colleges to develop collaborative partnerships. It has been shown that such collaboration can contribute to the development of employability and entrepreneurship initiatives within educational institutions, both in the UK and in sub-Saharan Africa.

A keynote speaker at the Conference, Professor Roy du Pré, Vice Chancellor of Durban University of Technology, spoke of the Continuum-led EAP



Continuum Director John Storan with Professor Roy du Pré, VC, Durban University of Technology

project which forged collaborative actions between the University of East London and Vaal University of Technology in South Africa. Professor du Pré cited this partnership as an example of the ways in which a significant contribution – in this case to curriculum development, accreditation and assessment systems – could be made in both partner institutions.

Learner Voices

Continuum research fellow Dr Petula Peters gave a dynamic presentation on Learner Voices to a group of academics and widening participation practitioners at the 2008 FACE annual conference held at York St John University. The paper, based on a literature review that Pet had recently completed, was well received and participants engaged in a passionate debate on the topic. Interest in learner voice has been steadily increasing in the UK for more than a decade, and is becoming embedded in both policy and practice in educational institutions and

government departments. In spite of this, many scholars argue that there is still much to be done to empower learners by providing appropriate ways of listening to their concerns, interests and needs. By this means, it is argued, it is possible to develop educational experiences better suited to learners. Pet's work on learner voice will be developed in a new project just beginning. Continuum has been commissioned by ESCalate the Education Subject Centre to undertake this work in partnership with Professor Jean Murray and the Cass School of Education at UEL.

Australian Visiting Fellow



Terry O'Brien from Sydney NSW visited Continuum in September. Terry, the principal of George's River College Senior High School, included a visit to Continuum as part of a NSW Department of Education and Training research fellowship. Terry is investigating how overseas

educational institutions are managing the challenges to learning and teaching strategies posed by the changing learning needs of twenty first century students. She is including both school and post-school age learners in her enquiry.

Continuum Commissioned for Communities and HE Research

Continuum is to lead a major WP research project. Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the project will focus on HE participation patterns in the Barking and Dagenham areas of East London. This study is part of a programme of six projects to be undertaken across England in the lowest HE participation areas. Continuum Director John Storan said about the project:

"These studies will provide an important opportunity to develop a better understanding of the social, economic and cultural factors behind the lower participation rates in these communities. I also hope that the six projects, both collectively and individually, will identify what needs to be done to make a real difference".

Continuum will be working closely with colleges, schools and other stakeholders in the area and will report in June 2009. The Continuum website, and future editions of the newsletter, will provide updates on the project.

Thames Gateway HE Participation

Continuum's Dr Petula Peters and Research Assistant Liana Mathurin-Brown have recently completed a Context Report on the London Thames Gateway. The work, commissioned by CHERI, will form part of a forthcoming larger report funded by the HEFCE. The report covers key issues ranging from educational provision and progression to the demographic changes which the London Thames Gateway has witnessed over the past decade. This snapshot provides important insights into the local economy and labour market and highlights the skills shortages which the area is facing. Continuum wishes to thank the Thames Gateway London Partnership, particularly Gary Tindall and Stephen Bromwich, for their invaluable contribution to the report.

Action on Access wins new contract

Action on Access, the national co-ordination team for widening participation, have been successful in their bid to operate the team for the next three years following a competitive tendering process. Continuum Director, John Storan will jointly lead the team which will be working closely with the HE sector, WP partnerships and the Funding Council.

John said:

"I am very pleased indeed to be directing the team for another three years. This will be a challenging period, without doubt. We submitted a strong bid and we believe Action on Access can make an important contribution to the realisation of the national WP agenda building on the work that it has already undertaken".

As well as co-directing the team, John will also have particular responsibility for, work with Institutions, Northern Ireland and the Disability Equality Partnership.