

With governmental changes imminent it is vital that we press for continuing political commitment, and associated funding, for fair access and widening participation. The issues of commitment and funding will no doubt occur in the workshop sessions and keynote addresses at the forthcoming FACE conference. This year the conference, which runs from 2nd – 4th July, will be hosted by Continuum here at the University of East London.

With funding so often contested and political commitment in need of renewal this may well appear in the opening conference speech by Bill Rammell, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education. However, I am equally confident that conference delegates will also be debating different aspects of funding during the workshop sessions. One conference paper, for instance, looks at the impact that the accumulating burden of debt being carried by so many HE learners from the poorest backgrounds is having. This burden affects not only students but also their families and communities. The paper argues that, given the ongoing changes to learner financial support, the financial barriers to participation are becoming more and not less of a deterrent to participation in HE. With student debt in the UK currently exceeding £3bn there is certainly a real debate to be had.

The value of working in partnership is highlighted throughout this newsletter and, like the issue of funding, is also a major conference theme and central to many of the conference papers. Perhaps this illustrates something of the shifting boundaries and differing areas of responsibility that are being experienced by providers. Full conference report in next edition.

*John Storan
Director, Continuum*

CONTINUUM DIRECTOR CALLS FOR GREATER INVESTMENT IN WP

In his keynote address to the annual National Widening Participation Conference held at the Barbican Centre in London, Continuum Director, John Storan called for greater investment and continuing policy commitment to widening participation. Pointing to the growing evidence of the impact that outreach programmes such as Aimhigher are having, he argued that continuing funding was crucial to support the excellent work being undertaken by Aimhigher partnerships throughout England, and that it was making a significant contribution to both raising aspirations and attainment in the carefully targeted schools that Aimhigher partnerships support. The outcome of the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) would, he said, be key to the future of Aimhigher. The CSR settlement will be a test of the government's commitment to Widening Participation.



At the same conference Bill Rammell MP, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, made very positive comments about the future funding from the CSR for Aimhigher. So we wait with interest the outcome.

MAKING EXPERIENCE COUNT



The role and significance of prior experiential learning for Higher Education in Italy was the focus for an address by Continuum Director, John Storan. The conference, which took place at the University of LUMSA in Rome on the 29th May, brought

together delegates from HE across Italy as well as government officials. As a pioneer of the Assessment of Experiential Learning (APEL) in the UK, John drew upon examples from both policy and practice to explore some of the central conference issues. He noted that the London communiqué of the latest round of the Bologna process had identified APEL as a particular area on which European HE could make progress. The conference organiser, Professor Consuelo Corradi, paid tribute to John's contribution and she noted how important it was to be sharing practice in this and other areas of HE practice.

Researching The Creative Way

Continuum has been awarded the contract to undertake a key research project for The Creative Way – The Thames Gateway Lifelong Learning Network for the Creative & Cultural Industries. Liz Pearson, Director of The Creative Way said: "The Thames Gateway region has a vibrant creative and cultural industries sector, one which supports employment opportunities and economic prosperity. This is a knowledge-based, high skills sector in which graduates form a higher than average proportion of the workforce. And yet a significant number of students opt not to go into HE. We want to understand better why some learners following vocational programmes in the creative and cultural subject areas opt to progress to HE whilst others do not."

Dr Pam Percy, one of Continuum's team of Research Centre Associates, will be working with Research Manager, Tony Hudson, to investigate and chart learner perceptions of progression, specifically from level 3 to level 4, in subjects related to the creative and cultural industries in the Thames Gateway. As part of the fieldwork phase, Pam and Tony will be conducting group interviews with learners at a number of institutions across the Gateway. Continuum has worked closely with a number of LLN's on their business plans and, given its track record on project evaluation and action research, is well placed to work with LLN's around evaluation and impact analysis.

Further information on The Creative Way is available at: www.thecreativeway.org.uk and further details of the project are available on both The Creative Way and Continuum websites.

England-Africa Partnerships

Continuum, together with colleagues from Vaal University of Technology (VUT), will be hosting a dissemination event at the University of East London on 2nd July. Organised by Tony Hudson (UEL) and Professor Linda du Plessis (VUT), the event will be chaired by Professor Roy du Pré, Deputy Vice Chancellor at VUT. Supported by the British Council, this will be a chance for colleagues from the sixteen partnerships drawn from England and countries throughout Africa in the first wave of funding to share initial findings and outcomes from their work to date.

The event will coincide with the first day of the 2007 FACE Conference which is being opened by Bill Rammell, MP, and Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further & Higher Education who will also have an opportunity to meet with some of the partners and hear first hand about their achievements.

Further information on the UEL & VUT project can be found on the Continuum website and the VUT website: www.vut.ac.za

Credit Transfer between FE and HE

Commissioned by the QCA, Continuum has been conducting research, to look at how there could be greater interaction between the higher level qualifications in FE and HE, especially in the light of the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) that the QCA are developing. A series of semi-structured interviews have been conducted in HEIs around the country, talking to experts on credit transfer, HE/FE partnerships and quality assurance about the attitudes that HEIs might have towards a more flexible interaction between the academic and vocational higher level qualifications.

Although most interviewees said that the idea of greater interaction between the vocational and academic sectors was to be welcomed, they also felt that there were many obstacles to be overcome before easy transfer of credit could be achieved. Those HEIs actively involved in delivering HE in FE

through various kinds of partnership arrangements were often those who already knew most about the new QCF and were most likely to foresee fewest problems in interacting with a fully unitised credit based system. However, universities were generally very nervous of becoming too involved with a centrally controlled FE system, and preferred to remain autonomous and retain control of their own quality assurance and validation systems. The findings and research report have now been delivered to the QCA to be evaluated as part of the test and trials process for the QCF.

For more information on this project, please contact **Claire Pooley, Research Fellow.** (c.pooley@uel.ac.uk)