

Welcome to the third edition of the Continuum newsletter. In this issue you can read about our ongoing work with the Swedish government on widening participation and the beginning of the operational phase of a major national research project looking at ethnicity and employment. This edition also gives news on the launch of our website. We hope the site will be of interest and that it will become a valued resource for research and development purposes. On the national policy scene, we have been exploring the implications of the Tomlinson report for widening participation. To promote debate on this and more generally the place of credit in educational reform, we are mounting a series of seminars. Finally, the partnership ethos of Continuum continues to develop, and I would like to thank the many colleagues who have been in touch to explore collaborative links.

John Storan

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS IN WIDENING PARTICIPATION

For over a year, Continuum has been working closely with the Swedish government's cross-party Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education. Together, we have established a dialogue on widening participation policy and practice.

In February we were pleased to welcome a group of academics from Swedish universities and government departments to Bristol to meet a range of colleagues from the region who are engaged in widening participation. At the welcome reception at University of Bristol, we were also joined by Nigel Fletcher, the Swedish Honorary Consul.

Our visitors learned about regional funding for widening participation from Mike Farmer and his partners on the AimHigher sub-regional committee. Their partnership activities are an impressive example of collaborative working. Working sessions were hosted by the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England, and widening participation staff in both institutions gave inspiring accounts of their work with students, schools, colleges and communities. Striking similarities and differences were seen in the Swedish and English approaches to social inclusion.

Other discussions concerned the utility of different kinds of interventions. Why do we choose to develop *activities* in one context (student ambassadors etc) but *materials* in other contexts (guides for young people etc). Too often, it was suggested, discussions focus on the content of widening participation interventions, rather than the efficacy of the form.



Our Swedish visitors together with colleagues from Hefce and the Continuum team.

Hefce hosted the final part of the study visit where Kevin Whitson, David Barrett and Clare Streatfield welcomed us. Kevin is Head of Widening Participation Policy at Hefce and gave us a lively, thoughtful and provocative account of the features of educational disadvantage in England. The Swedish party were reminded that inequalities are deeply rooted and were left in no doubt of Hefce's resolve to address this imbalance.

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/continuum>

We are delighted to announce that Continuum's website is now up and running at the above address. The site provides information on the Centre and its projects and events. We hope it

also will serve as a useful resource to keep you up to date on widening participation developments more generally. Under 'publications', you can find all the issues of the Newsletter

and also a number of other useful publications noticed by Continuum. In the future we plan to set up a database of widening participation literature, accessible via our website.

Perspectives on Credit and the Tomlinson Report

In February, Continuum held the first in a series of seminars on the topic of credit accumulation and transfer in education. The seminar was presented by Dr. Ken Spours of the Institute of Education. Dr. Spours is an accomplished scholar and some of his recent work has been focused on reforming 14-19 education. Dr. Spours led an interesting and spirited discussion on the role that credit might play in reforms proposed in the interim Tomlinson Report. This report outlines radical changes for 14-19 education, including the adoption of a diploma system to replace the existing qualification system.

The seminars complement the current LSCLE research being carried out by Continuum on credit accumulation and transfer in local FE colleges. The series, entitled *The Place of 'Credit' in Educational Reform*, provides a forum for debate and discussion of the issues related to credit. Granting numerical credit for units of learning achieved is an important topic in further and higher education and a part of the greater widening participation agenda. Breaking learning into smaller units and allowing learners to earn credits for these units can provide learners with choice and flexibility. The seminars are timely for FE in particular, as the QCA and LSC are developing a National Credit Framework for England.



Key speaker Dr. Ken Spours, far right, together with Research Fellow Julie Andreshak-Behrman and Continuum Director John Storan..

Project update

Continuum was commissioned this autumn by the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to create a selected annotated bibliography and summary report on the status of widening participation research in the UK. A main conclusion of this exercise was that although there is a good deal of research centred on factors that impact student participation and success, there is a relative scarcity of research that succeeds in establishing a chain of evidence between a certain intervention and an outcome.

A second commissioned project is currently underway for Waltham Forest in support of the borough's objective to positively impact the success of young people. Focused on mentoring schemes, this project aims to describe and understand schemes currently available across the borough and how they are perceived by stakeholders.

Ethnicity and Employment takes off

With our partners in the University of Bradford, Leeds Metropolitan University, Edge Hill College of Higher Education and Brunel University, Continuum is leading a national research project on the theme of Ethnicity and Employment.

The focus of this enquiry is initially to obtain a better understanding of the ways in which minority ethnic students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of institutional strategies and measures designed to promote student success, and, secondly, to comment on the relationship between perceived learner needs and institutional provision for minority ethnic students in higher education.

A team has been established including all partner institutions and Continuum has recruited two excellent research staff to lead the project – Dr. Maki

Kimura and Ms. Rahila Ahmed who will work together with Pam Percy, research manager. We warmly welcome them to the team. Watch this space for future updates on this innovative research project.



Representatives from University of Bradford, Leeds Metropolitan University, Edge Hill College of Higher Education and the Continuum team.