The contributions that the various authors have made to this edition of the newsletter represent a range of voices and perspectives. In inviting these rich and insightful inputs, my co-editor Tony Hudson and I quickly realised we had agreed to deliver the undeliverable, and that was a newsletter that was all about lifelong learning. We of course had choices (the prerogative of exercising editorial responsibility, you could say) but we may have also gone about the job in a different way.

We could have asked our contributors to all write about lifelong learning, and kept them strictly to this brief. In fact, as you will see, we did invite one piece on lifelong learning head on, as it were, and this is the contribution from Professor Danny Saunders at the University of Glamorgan, which offers a telling strategic overview of lifelong learning in Wales. The intention with the other contributions was to try to illustrate something of the breadth of provision which might fit most tellingly into a strategy or vision for lifelong learning. Does this selection of pieces represent lifelong learning? No, it certainly doesn’t as there are gaps in terms of age based provision, informal and experiential learning to name just a few. Lifelong learning has a multiplicity of meanings and therefore it could be argued that any meaning that is applied is both contestable and problematic. The 2009 Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning (Schuller and Watson 2009) recognised this when it observed that for the purposes of the report, ‘lifelong’ means from cradle to grave and includes the implications for early childhood education and for schooling. However, here we are not in tune with the inquiry, in that our focus in bringing together this collection of articles has been largely on adult, further and higher education (HE). So, partial and limited it is, but perhaps through the breadth and particularities of the contributions, we gain a glimpse of what a truly lifelong learning vision of learning might constitute. So, each of these papers offers a part of the landscape for thinking about what a...
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We are especially interested in items which:

- Show innovative practice in your Education Department;
- Celebrate National Teaching Fellows and other awards for teaching and learning;
- Showcase student achievement.
vision for lifelong learning might need to include. As you will see, the scope and contents of each piece is as rich as it is insightful, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each contributor for their individual pieces, that form part of an emergent lifelong learning education landscape. To whet your appetite a taster of each contribution is now provided.

For example, in his piece, Tony Acland helps us to consider the value and significance of the future of outreach work, and how the lessons and successes of the Aimhigher programme in England can be further built upon.

The adult college perspective provided by Alan Brown illustrates an imaginative and innovative approach to continuing professional development, aimed at both community volunteers and also qualified tutors. The progression and professional learning opportunities this programme has produced has significantly enhanced tutoring capacity.

Understanding and raising participation in Northern Ireland is the focus of Dr. Damian O’Kane’s paper. He gives a strategic perspective on the policy developments which are currently underway in Northern Ireland. Drawing on his extensive and impactful ‘Step-Up’ programme, he reminds us just how critical it is to connect up practice and policy in this area of lifelong learning.

The perspective of learners is provided by a group of McNair scholars from the University of New Hampshire who also gave an international perspective, or at least a commentary, from a USA standpoint. Coming to terms with an unfamiliar system of education and taking part in a short post-graduate programme, their developing research skills are framed by their formative experience of their time meeting and learning alongside lifelong learning educators at the FACE conference, as well as other contexts.

Work integrated learning (WIL) is the focus of Tony Hudson’s article in which he reflects on an innovative project: Creative Industries - Creative Solutions, designed to enhance graphic design students’ employability. Given the portfolio careers that many creative and cultural industries graduates are likely to experience, such programmes need to operate in a climate of intellectual enquiry which enables and encourages students to become lifelong learners.

The multi-national character of the PASCAL Universities Regional Engagement project is the backdrop for Professor Mike Osborne’s piece. The PURE project illustrates the way in which a wide range of international knowledge and expertise can be mobilised to support and engage with higher education institutions and their regions across a range of areas, including widening access, CPD, and knowledge exchange through economic, social and cultural lenses. The paper reminds us, if indeed we need reminding, that the questions and issues that many of the contributors highlight are truly global questions, and in a sense take us back to the need for a vision.

Last but by no means least, Andrew Rawson provides an insightful account of the lifelong learning networks which have done so much between them to broker HE progression opportunities between partners in different parts of the country.

So at the risk of being seen to make the conclusion fit the evidence, I am drawn back to the deliberations of the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning that offers a vision of society in which lifelong learning is central. By using this picture of a learning society, we can begin to see the values, perspectives and aspirations of our seven contributors in a way that speaks loudly to this vision.

**Our vision is a society in which learning plays its full role in personal growth and emancipation, prosperity, solidarity and global responsibility. We believe that it is intimately connected with the achievement of freedom of choice, health and wellbeing, dignity, cultural identity and democratic tolerance. As a consequence, we begin from the premise that the right to learn throughout life is a human right.**

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**Reference**


**John Storan**

Director of Continuum, the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies at the University of East London.

Professor John Storan is also Director of Action on Access which is the national Coordination team for widening participation. As founding current Chair of the Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) he represents communities of practitioners involved in Access and Lifelong Learning from across the UK and beyond. For many years John has has been an influential regional and national figure on Lifelong Learning and Widening Participation in HE.

In 2001 he was made a Professorial Fellow at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). He is also an ESCalate Advisory Board member.
Lifelong learning in Wales: policy, strategy and action

Danny Saunders provides an overview of developments in the lifelong learning landscape in Wales.

As I apply fingers to keyboard the Welsh Assembly have just published a series of policies on Further Education and Higher Education (HE) governance (on the same day!) followed by proposals to change the structure of education services set out in: The structure of education services in Wales (Independent Task and Finish Group, 2011). They reinforce our big-picture strategy narratives of 2010, including re-shaping and merging universities and colleges, an economic renewal plan for Wales, and a review of careers services. So in writing this article about lifelong learning in Wales it is hard to know where to start! We are going through education changes of seismic proportions, where the earthquake was the credit crunch and the public sector cuts the tsunami. The challenge is to make sure our learners are not the casualties. As with so much public policy turbulence there are positive and negative forces at work behind the scenes. If we take the half-empty glass perspective then Wales has a disturbingly high proportion of young people who are not in education, work, or training. We also have large numbers of people who are long-term unemployed due to the savage dismantling of heavy industry over the past four decades. There is a high dependency on employment...
Of most significance to lifelong learning practitioners are the dual targets shared by all education providers: developing a buoyant economy and achieving social justice.

Within the public sector, which is slowing down our recovery from recession (despite some impressive achievements in the manufacturing, media, energy, service and retail sectors). And of course when cuts come along training and lifelong learning are often the first to suffer. Perhaps the most serious recent concern has been the announcement of a depressed ranking for Wales’ 15 year-olds in the PISA literacy and numeracy league table. The overall consequence is a clarion call from the Welsh Assembly for a better use of front-line resources, the need to shake up what some commentators have described as a complacent schools sector and the priority for universities to adapt or die in order to serve the nation more effectively.

But let’s balance all of this doom and gloom with a view of the glass that is half full. A schools effectiveness framework is promoting discovery learning and pedagogic reform in primary and comprehensive schools. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is becoming a priority for teachers as well as support professions old and new – including the allocation of CPD funding directly to schools rather than relying on local authority re-distribution.

Transformation plans are developing tertiary frameworks that share provision between school sixth forms and colleges. A new careers framework is being developed for a ‘family’ of information advice and guidance professionals who work with clients of all ages at all stages.

Learning networks for 14-19 year olds are planning numerous progression pathways – facilitated by Learning Coaches – to employment and HE. An exciting new Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is gaining momentum at advanced, intermediate and foundation levels. A new generation of apprenticeships has appeared through close partnerships between employers and further education colleges and private training providers. The Wales Union Learning Fund has provided numerous employee-centred case studies which upskill workforces at grass-roots levels. Foundation degrees are being developed alongside accredited work-based learning thanks to significant support from European funds.

Of most significance to lifelong learning practitioners are the dual targets shared by all education providers: developing a buoyant economy and achieving social justice.

The result is policy, strategy and action which – on a local area as well as a regional basis – tackles basic skills deficits, promotes advanced skills, and encourages community regeneration. There has been an over-riding concern with employability, spearheaded by the Wales Employment and Skills Board. This has become a vital agenda in Wales where companies and business are being encouraged to improve...
productivity and to create more jobs. We want to replicate the same levels of agglomeration as other UK regions – even the affluent South East of England, with all of its business headquarters and research and development centres. This is why we are busy promoting management and leadership skills through high performance working and the recognition of anchor companies that provide significant and sustained employment for their own workforces as well as supply chains. In terms of lifelong learning this means recognising and accrediting in-house training, using new technologies effectively, linking knowledge transfer and research with education, and providing flexible qualifications stretching from entry to postgraduate levels – and always with the active participation of employers in the design of the curriculum.

On the social justice front some major large scale developments are making quick progress. They include Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol as a new Welsh medium initiative in HE, and UHOVI - the Universities of the Heads of the Valleys Institute. UHOVI links with tertiary planning in Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale, where new lifelong learning campuses will offer state of the art resources for post-16 provision. They will fill the vacuum created by the disappearance of such giants as Corus and Hoover, and we hope that after years of educational mediocrity the attainment levels of 16-19 year-olds will match, and then exceed, those recorded in other parts of the country. The key educational model underlying UHOVI is called Escalator, based on the need to develop informal learning and then gently introducing a more serious commitment to study through bite-sized accreditation before sustained participation within further and higher qualifications. Our policy and funding methodology is predicated on the need to provide targeted support for learners from Communities First wards, defined through a series of deprivation measures including education, welfare, health and employment.

One illustration involves the three regional Reaching Wider projects in Wales, where university partnerships work with children and parents living in Communities First areas. Our funding council, HEFCW, has just announced its commitment to supporting these programmes – alongside other widening access applications – for a further three years. There is still much to do – especially in the area of adult and community learning, where non-accredited provision seems to be disappearing along with an entire suite of non-vocational programmes. We have an urgent need to demonstrate the positive contributions that this neglected aspect of lifelong learning make to health and well-being.

The future of outreach: drawing upon the successes of the Aimhigher experience

Tony Acland considers how the lessons learned from Aimhigher can inform opportunities for sustaining outreach programmes.

Since 2001, Aimhigher and its predecessor organisations\(^1\) developed a well-respected record for supporting schools and colleges in a range of outreach activities, which were designed to raise attainment and aspirations in order to promote progression to HE from previously under-represented social groups. The Government’s announcement in November 2010 that the Aimhigher programme in England would terminate was greeted with almost universal consternation across the education sector. Many Head Teachers, College Principals, Vice-Chancellors and Local Authorities feared for the

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\(^1\) Predecessor initiatives include Excellence in Cities, Excellence Challenge, Education Action Zones and Partnerships for Progression (P4P). For the purposes of this paper the term ‘Aimhigher’ is used to refer to the aspiration-raising, attainment and progression core elements of all these programmes which merged in April 2004.
future of outreach and the potential damage to the social mobility mission, to widen participation in Higher Education (HE). Whist sharing this concern, this paper attempts to look forward and consider the opportunities for sustaining outreach programmes and reflects upon the lessons learnt from the successes of the Aimhigher programme.

With the impending termination of Aimhigher funding in July 2011, partnerships have been actively seeking effective ways of sustaining their successful outreach activities. Fortunately, the Coalition Government has thrown a lifeline to those anxious to sustain outreach to promote access for under-represented groups in HE. The government has confirmed its commitment to promoting upward social mobility and, in order to support this goal, has insisted that any university wishing to charge more than £6,000 per annum for student fees in 2012 must submit a Widening Participation Strategic Assessment to be approved annually by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA).

**Key lessons to carry forward**

As universities prepare their Widening Participation Assessment Strategies and with available funding increasingly tight, it is important to consider the key lessons universities can draw from the successes of the Aimhigher partnership experience.

1) As the OFFA guidance suggests, sustaining Aimhigher partnership working is to be recommended. Certainly, Aimhigher partnerships have found that considerable cost savings can be made through collaboration by avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort. However, it is important to note that flexibility is important if universities are able to ‘play to their strengths’.

2) **Robust targeting methodologies** are essential to ensure that limited resources are directed at those learners who could most benefit from outreach experiences. Universities and their partners would be prudent to sustain Aimhigher’s tried and tested targeting methodologies, which are well understood by schools and colleges.

3) **Coherent and balanced Outreach programmes.** Evaluation of the earlier years of Aimhigher suggested that programmes could be enhanced by developing a ‘learner progression framework’ where learners experience a planned sequence of activities across school years, not “one off” activities. Aimhigher teams recognised that even the most motivational activity could be quickly forgotten and there is a need to plan follow-up events in order to sustain interest and commitment to progress to post-compulsory education.

4) **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)** has been a core element of all Aimhigher outreach activity and it has been a puzzle to many that the Coalition Government, which advocates IAG as a priority, did not recognise this crucial role which Aimhigher played. Aimhigher partners long realised that raising aspirations and attainment will not lead to progression without carefully focused IAG components to activities and events.
5) **Monitoring and evaluation** has been an increasing concern of Aimhigher partnerships, particularly as funding bodies and governments rightly insist on evidence of successful impact of activities. In developing future plans, some partnerships are considering sustaining and further developing the Aimhigher monitoring and evaluation methodologies developed, including common databases to show progression of targeted learners to HE.

6) **HE and FE student ambassadors** have proved to be a most effective resource in the armoury of Aimhigher teams. Evaluations demonstrate that young people listen to ‘real’ students and their experiences, and that student ambassadors have an essential role in ensuring the impact of almost all outreach activities. Furthermore, university and college partners emphasise the multiple benefits for sustaining this powerful resource. Student ambassadors benefit from additional income and enhanced learning experiences, as well as providing them with work experience and examples for their CVs.

In conclusion it is appropriate that all involved in the Aimhigher programme should be proud of their achievements. However, it is more important that key lessons learnt from the last decade of outreach are sustained.

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Tony Acland has worked in HE as a lecturer, manager and consultant for over 30 years, specialising in widening participation strategies in further and higher education.

He has a particular interest in promoting effective access strategies for specific groups who are under-represented in higher level study, including disabled young people, care leavers and those minority groups who continue to face disadvantages.

His publications include Race and Higher Education (1998 PSI) with Tariq Modood and he is an executive member of the Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE), co-editing FACE publications, such as Access, Retention and Employability: Transforming Higher Education (2005 FACE) and Challenging Isolation: the role of lifelong learning (2009 FACE).

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Reference

Tony Acland, Aimhigher Hampshire & Isle of Wight
The Adult College of Barking and Dagenham is well known for providing a wide range of courses to the community it has served for over 30 years. What is less well known is that the College now has a series of innovative and creative interventions to train and develop local people as part of the College workforce.

The College employs approximately 80 tutors and provides learning across a range of vocational and Skills for Life areas. These are pre-entry to level 3 and range from business apprenticeships to health and beauty, literacy and numeracy. Last December the College was given a ‘good’ rating by OFSTED, up from ‘satisfactory’ in 2006. This article focuses on two aspects of staff development that have contributed to this success.

One Continuing Professional Development (CPD) pathway focuses on volunteer support for staff and learners. The other focuses on the development of higher order teaching skills for qualified tutors. Both are a long term strategic commitment to develop staff.

In the first CPD pathway, volunteers are drawn from the locality and are often former or recent Skills for Life learners. They follow a structured programme that includes exposure to a wide range of teaching situations as well as qualifications. Considerable advice and support is given throughout by a mentor who is also a practicing tutor. Student Services place volunteers in classes and direct support is provided. There is a focus on ‘stretch’ and developing skills, such as reflecting on personal practice. This lays the foundations for future professional development as teaching assistants and tutors.

Our experience has also lead to understanding the specific issues associated with this programme. For example, our learners are now advised to consolidate their learning for a year before moving onto our pathway for aspiring tutors. Over time, a significant number of volunteers have progressed to become Skills for Life tutors. Some have then progressed to become ‘star’ grade 1 tutors. Consequently, the College has a base of local staff with personal experience of the issues faced by many of our learners. We believe this has contributed to our success rates and has provided knowledgeable, committed and valued teaching staff.

There are a number of other drivers which contribute to the success of this programme: volunteers have high levels of contextual knowledge and can empathise with learners; the balance of classes they support is built around volunteers’ personal goals, and there is a focus on volunteers’ starting positions. Moreover, the whole ethos is safe and non-judgemental.

Alan Brown describes two innovative approaches to professional development in an adult college, supporting volunteers’ development and using coaching programmes.
Funding for this pathway comes from a number of sources. Relatively flexible Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLiDC) funding is used as seed corn to develop core skills and qualifications. Progression towards full tutor status is supported by a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) qualification which we recently began to deliver. Funding for this is usually drawn from the CPD budget but can be drawn from other sources depending on circumstances.

Our second major CPD pathway is a structured coaching programme for qualified tutors and assessors. Grade 3 and 4 tutors are automatically offered coaching to develop their teaching skills. Assessors are offered similar support by the vocational coordinator. Individual programmes are then negotiated between the coach and staff, with input from the line manager.

Over time, several of our outstanding tutors have been coached, including those who were former volunteers. Analysis shows that once coached, tutors gain the confidence and skills to keep improving, often by two or even three grades over successive years. Of the current cohort of tutors, approximately 30% rise by two observation grades and 70% rise by one.

Coaching is carried out by two managers in the Quality Team. This creates a safe space for discussion and development and content is drawn from a wide range of internal and external sources, including colleagues in the East London Quality Partnership.

Other key determinants of success include paying sessional tutors and negotiating content; using peer support, and building the programme around the individual circumstances. The ten-session programme can be completed in up to three terms depending on the issues and capacity of the tutor to engage. Continuity of provision and gentle reminders of expectations keep staff focussed on completing their individual programme.

In future, the increasing numbers of volunteers progressing into formal teaching raises a different set of challenges. We have identified that former volunteers tend to have a ‘cluster’ of skills that require post-qualification development. Consequently, we are now considering discrete CPD for former volunteers.
Higher Education (HE) participation rates in Northern Ireland have grown exponentially over the last two decades and at around 50% the region now has the highest participation rate of any area of the UK. Data from 2008-09 shows that 41.7% of Northern Ireland’s young full-time first degree entrants were from socio-economic groups 4-7 compared with only 32.4% in England and 28.2% in Scotland. This level of success has been achieved with relatively modest levels of funding as Northern Ireland has the lowest level of widening participation funding per annum compared to other regions in the UK.

Why then has Northern Ireland signalled its intention to develop and implement a regional strategy for widening participation? In March 2010 the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI) established a Higher Education Widening Participation Regional Strategy group and four expert working groups to help develop an integrated strategy for the region. On 6 March 2011 the draft proposal was issued for consultation and will run until 3 June 2011 (www.delni.gov.uk).

The move towards a regional strategy is largely a response to some stubborn pockets of inequality and under-representation within some sections of the population. People from NS-SEC groups 5-7; those with disabilities; young Protestant males from low participation areas and older learners are significantly underrepresented in HE in Northern Ireland. There is also a realisation that most widening participation initiatives are almost exclusively concentrated in and around Belfast and Londonderry. As a result individuals who live outside these geographical areas have little opportunity to participate in widening access activities. A regional approach is intended to ensure greater equality of opportunity.

**Damian O’Kane** discusses how structured and collaborative approaches, such as the Step-Up programme, successfully support widening participation strategies.
The intent of the Government, contained in the draft strategy, is clear: ‘Our collective efforts must be focused on ensuring that the people who are most able but least likely to participate are given every encouragement and support to achieve the necessary qualifications to apply to and benefit from HE that is right for them, irrespective of their personal or social background’ (DELNI, 2011).

There appears to be an appreciation of the level of activity that will be required to tackle the stubborn pockets of under-representation that exist. Aspiration-raising activities alone, while important, will not be enough. There is a requirement to work in a structured, systematic and supportive way to ensure that many more individuals, who have the potential to benefit from HE, have an opportunity to do so.

Personal experience of delivering the Step-Up programme in Northern Ireland over the past 12 years convinces me that under-representation in HE can be meaningfully addressed if a structured collaborative approach, drawing upon the expertise and resource of a range of stakeholders, is adopted.

The Step-Up programme at the University of Ulster provides new learning experiences in science for disadvantaged pupils who traditionally have low attainment levels and low expectations of their educational abilities. A two-year intensive tutoring programme, which includes a summer school, aims to raise pupil and school performance in science subjects, assist in the development of pupils’ general and subject-specific skills and provide pupils with direct experience of university teaching research and assessment methods.

The programme actively involves the university, schools, local industry, hospitals and government agencies in a collaborative partnership, where the partner organisations contribute to the teaching of the Double Award Applied GCE Science curriculum, on a weekly basis, within a highly structured programme of academic and vocational activities.

Over 1,000 pupils, who were typically described by their teachers as ‘underachievers’ or ‘low-flyers’ and who initially expressed no interest in HE, have progressed through the programme and been supported to obtain the necessary qualifications to allow them to progress to UK universities, many to high demand courses such as pharmacy, optometry, physiotherapy, radiography and law.

The 95% degree completion rate for Step-Up students is largely attributable to the methods used to ‘prepare’ students for HE and the ongoing mentoring support that is available for students who enrol at the University of Ulster. Almost 72% of Step-Up students who have participated in HE have obtained first class or second class upper division degree classifications.

The Step-Up programme, if the draft consultation document can be taken as an indicator of future intent, will be central to the realisation of a regional strategy for widening participation in Northern Ireland. If only it were as straightforward as that! Draconian cuts to the HE budget in Northern Ireland, and the tuition fee regime that will emerge as a consequence, threaten to de-rail the regional strategy and undermine the positive widening participation developments that have already taken place.

Will the Northern Ireland devolved administration, the Assembly, have the courage to protect and make special provision for widening participation activity? Only time will tell!

**Reference**

DELNI (2011) A consultation on a regional strategy for widening participation in Higher Education. DELNI: Belfast

**Damian O’Kane**

Head of Access and Educational Partnerships and Director of the Step-Up programme at the University of Ulster

Dr O’Kane has an established reputation in the area of social inclusion and widening access, and has contributed locally, nationally and internationally to the development of government and institutional policy and strategy in Northern Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, ROI, Netherlands, Finland and the USA.

Dr O’Kane acts as external moderator to a number of universities across the UK and also sits on various national advisory bodies in the area of widening access. He has independently attracted £14 Million over the past 10 years for community based education programmes.
Many readers in the UK will be familiar with the Aimhigher programme in England, a national programme which aims to raise the aspirations and achievement of young learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds mainly in secondary, but also in primary schools, through a variety of activities and interventions. In the US the federally funded TRIO programmes provide outreach and student services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programmes targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate (postgraduate) programmes. The capstone is the Ronald E McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Programme, or McNair Programme for short, which seeks to increase the attainment of PhD degrees by students from underrepresented segments of society. Institutions funded under the programme work closely with McNair scholars as they complete their undergraduate studies and prepare them for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. Each institution organises its own application and selection process, but in addition to being drawn from income-eligible underrepresented groups, learners must demonstrate academic excellence.

Our participation in the FACE annual conference was one element of a four week custom-made programme organised by Continuum at the University of East London. Through a series of seminars and workshops with a range of policy makers, practitioners and academics, we were introduced to the English education system and the policy and practice of widening participation and access to higher education (HE). Following this we will undertake fieldwork – both primary and secondary research – on our individual research projects.

The annual FACE conference brings together practitioners, policy makers and academics working in a variety of contexts and settings, all of whom have an interest in widening participation and social justice and therefore provide an opportunity to learn and network. For those of us who were first-time conference participants, we arrived without knowing what to expect, having no experience or knowledge of a professional conference, and this made the experience so much more valuable. From what we had heard from fellow scholars in the US, all the conferences that they had attended were held in big cities with 200 to 500 delegates. However, our conference was held at the University of East London, a university which is home to over 25,000 students from over 150 countries and which has a vibrant and diverse community. This made the experience even more enriching, as we were able to learn from the diverse perspectives of our fellow scholars and to build relationships with them that we can continue to build on in the future.
300 (in some cases thousands of) attendees from all over the US. Upon viewing the conference centre at Southampton Solent University, we immediately felt comfortable. We were not bombarded by a large conference and were able to enjoy the intimacy of a smaller group sessions with up to 20 delegates and plenary sessions with fewer than 200 delegates. The delegates at FACE were engaged and passionate about HE and the work that they do at their particular institution. The conference was complemented by the diverse set of activities that were offered in the evenings. From the pleasant atmosphere at the city art gallery to the gala dinner, there was a satisfying mix of cultural enrichment and entertainment throughout the three day event. The Casino Night and Magic Show were enjoyable pieces of the conference and were a welcome addition to a rewarding educational experience in Southampton. The setting allowed us to engage in face-to-face conversation, providing opportunities to hear from educators from all over the world.

As the first undergraduate students to attend a FACE conference, and being from the US, we were struggling to make sense of what widening participation actually means. For us the social activities were an important element of the conference, providing another opportunity to engage with educators from all over the world.

...as McNair Scholars we were present not only to see great changes being planned for widening participation, but to take an active part in those changes.
opportunity to engage with other delegates and through this we came to a greater understanding of education itself, observing similar struggles, as well as accomplishments. In sincerity, when Professor John Storan said we would be the first undergraduate students to attend a FACE conference, we thought he was joking. We then wondered: “Well, why us? Why now?” Reflecting back on our time at the conference, it seems clear why our presence was welcome, and maybe even necessary. When we read the conference title: “Which Way Now To Widen Participation: Lifelong Learning, Economy and Society”, we realized that as McNair Scholars we were present not only to see great changes being planned for widening participation, but to take an active part in those changes. That active part included contributing to the policy debate by sharing our experience as beneficiaries of the TRIO programmes in general, and the McNair programme in particular, through a formal session at the conference as well as during the numerous social and networking opportunities.

We were pleased with the networking afforded at the conference. By introducing ourselves and being introduced to delegates, we were able to gather viewpoints from a range of people who represent a wide range of institutions from the UK and overseas. Additionally, we were able to hear from people from other organizations, such as HEFCE, that strongly affect efforts to widen participation. Thanks to networking, we were able to gain contacts to further our individual research projects, which included Access and memory: HE in the UK (Vidal); Support for non-native English speakers in English HEIs (Albair); Support for deaf and hard of hearing students in English HEIs (Fitzgerald); Recession and public investment in English higher education (Guidice); and Policies that impact HE access in England (Henriquez).

We were especially impressed by the interest that delegates had regarding our McNair programme and our student experiences. We truly appreciated the special quality everyone exhibited that allowed them to be earnestly interested in our viewpoints. All of the attendees were welcoming, which made it easy for us to talk and network with professionals. Not only were we able to make meaningful connections, gather further insight and participate, but we were made to feel that our input was important. Presenting at a conference, even for seasoned and experienced academics can be a daunting task. One of the best qualities of the FACE conference is that it provides a safe environment for less experienced presenters and at the same time offers the opportunity for engaging debate and discussion.

As McNair scholars our experiences with the US educational equity and access programmes have been life altering, and they have given us the support and guidance needed to succeed in HE. It is from this perspective that the FACE conference was a highly enriching experience that would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the conference planners and the execution team, as well as the participating delegates. It was well organized and we were truly impressed by the passion of the attendees. The conference also gave us the chance to see all the efforts that go into planning for widening participation, and we are truly grateful for all of the work done by professionals in this field.

Conferences such as this, and educators such as those committed to the widening participation movement, make change possible. Overall, we are all delighted to have been able to participate in the conference; and for those for whom this was their first conference it was an especially valuable learning experience.

Joshua Albair, Katie Fitzgerald, Ryan Guidice, Arisbel Henriquez, and Michael Vidal, University of New Hampshire, USA
Work integrated learning: where there’s a WIL, there’s a way

Tony Hudson reflects on his experiences of an innovative work integrated learning programme in Durban, South Africa.

This article reports on an innovative partnership project: Creative Industries – Creative Solutions, between Continuum, the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies based at the University of East London (UEL) and the Department of Visual Communication and Design (VCD) at Durban University of Technology (DUT) in South Africa. It attempts to reflect on the challenges of designing and delivering a particular work integrated learning (WIL) programme. Work integrated learning enables students to experience workplace practice and professional culture, as well as enhancing their knowledge, skills and personal attributes which are difficult to foster through academic study alone.

The creative and cultural industries (CCI) constitute an important and growing global economic sector (Cunningham, 2007) and as Guile (2007) has noted, career development programmes for the sector are an international priority. The CCI form a significant employment sector in both the London Thames Gateway region in England and the Durban Metropolitan Area in South Africa, where UEL and DUT are located respectively. For learners in both countries whilst the chances of employment and career options will increase by getting a degree before entering the labour market; employability can be enhanced and employment opportunities in the sector increased through appropriate work experience.

Employability in higher education is not a new debate, but since the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) it has assumed greater prominence as part of successive government policies to increase the skills base in the UK. The HE system, as Knight & Yorke (2003:3) have argued, “has been charged with promoting graduate employability.” In England, employability is one of the performance indicators on which higher education institutions are measured against benchmarks set by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

At DUT it is a requirement that all courses should have a WIL component, however the extent to which this requirement is implemented varies depending on the field of study. Whilst staff in department of Visual Communication and Design have successfully worked with a ▶
range of employers to provide simulated work experience for learners, employers have been reluctant to offer learners paid internships.

Our research with learners in London (Percy & Hudson, 2007) and Durban (Hudson, 2010) confirms the challenges learners from widening participation or non-traditional backgrounds encounter when seeking to gain work experience or employment within the creative and cultural industries. Such learners often lack the cultural capital and financial resources necessary to obtain work experience or internships in the CCI sector, many of which are unpaid.

Funding from the UK Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) under the Education Partnerships in Africa (EPA) programme administered by the British Council, provided the opportunity to develop a creative solution to the challenge of developing a meaningful WIL programme at BTech level for graphic design students. The innovative solution was to set up a graphic design studio within the DUT, staffed by student interns, which would provide a service, primarily to external clients, but also to internal clients with a graphic design requirement.

The project team at DUT, led by the Head of the Department of Visual Communication and Design, Piers Carey assisted by lecturer Rowan Gatfield, set up the studio in a previously underutilised loft space - think artist’s atelier - at DUT’s City Campus. Final year students on the National Diploma (ND) (a three year programme equivalent to an ordinary degree) in Graphic Design were given the brief to develop a brand for the new studio. They were also invited to apply for one of the four internships which would enable them to gain a BTech (a one year honours course) in graphic design through work integrated learning. With a distinctive brand and name, the Workspace studio started trading in January 2010 with four interns, supervised by a studio manager and an assistant studio manager. In the field of graphic design we believe that the WIL programme at Workspace is unique in terms of content, delivery and duration. There are graphic design departments in Australian, UK and US institutions where learners are given the opportunity to work on “live briefs” but not to the extent and duration that Workspace interns are afforded. Interns are required, in addition to their creative work, to engage in all aspects of the business including administration, finance, liaising with suppliers, developing proposals and strategy documents, pitching and managing client relations. They are also required to conduct independent research to produce an academic report on an area of study related to the professional practice of graphic design.

During the project funded phase, the interns coped with a number of challenges including, forced relocation due to refurbishments at the City Campus coupled with the impact of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.
The interns learned valuable lessons about contingency planning and business continuity as well as the need for a sense of humour! At the end of the project funded phase the Workspace studio, due in no small part to the dedication of the staff and creative output of the interns, not only demonstrated proof of concept - to successfully deliver a work integrated learning programme on campus, but had become embedded within the institution and was rapidly moving towards becoming self-sustaining. In such a brief article it is impossible to capture all of the institutional challenges that have to be overcome when implementing an innovative project nor recognise all those who contributed to its success. However it may be expedient to highlight some of the lessons learned from listening to learners.

Whilst the primary aim of the project was to enhance employability by setting up a self-sustaining graphic design studio to provide WIL internships, the project also envisaged that the studio would be used as a site for research as well as a catalyst for further employer engagement. In terms of research outputs colleagues at DUT have delivered a number of presentations at international conferences including the Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) and Design Education Forum of South Africa (DEFSA) and published in peer reviewed journals. In terms of employer engagement, industry interest in the Workspace studio and student demand for internships led to other members of academic staff in the department setting up internships. A total of five paid internships were arranged, two with a local university and three with a large graphic design company, with all of the interns registered for the BTech in graphic design through work integrated learning.

In feedback sessions all of the interns were vocal about their experiences in the workplace. On some issues, such as remuneration, variety of work, and academic support there were clear differences between the interns based in the Workspace studio and interns based elsewhere. Whilst the Workspace interns received a lower salary in comparison to other interns they benefitted from more creative freedom, accessible academic support, the opportunity to experience a wider variety of tasks and roles within the studio, but most importantly the opportunity to link theory to practice. The interns who were employed in a graphic design company, whilst pleased to be earning a reasonable salary, felt constrained by the lack of creativity, and disappointed by the limited opportunities to experience a wider range of tasks within the company. What was evident from the feedback from interns in the graphic design company and the other local university was the absence of any mentoring by the employer. The issues and concerns raised by the learners reflect the fact that employers in Durban are not experienced in supporting WIL programmes and many academics are unfamiliar with the theoretical underpinnings of WIL and how best to deliver it in the CCI.

Hopefully, this brief article illustrates that work integrated learning programmes have the potential to deliver significant benefits to: learners; academic and professional staff; and industry. However, the challenge is not only to ensure that adequate resources are provided to deliver a quality programme and experience; but more importantly to enable students who will follow non-conventional career paths in the CCI to become lifelong learners.

References

Tony Hudson
Research Manager, Continuum, University of East London

On the Monopoly board of life Tony Hudson started down the Old Kent Road, avoided jail, passed GO, but failed to collect £200! A social scientist by training and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy Tony is an experienced manager, teacher and researcher. He has worked in the voluntary sector latterly as General Secretary (Chief Executive) of a learned society and taught on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at a number of HEIs. At UEL this has ranged from teaching on a fast track access course to contributing to the EdD programme. In his current role he manages research and evaluation projects locally, nationally and overseas.
The PASCAL Universities Regional Engagement (PURE) project

Mike Osborne takes an international perspective on higher education institutions’ engagement with regions.

The PURE project concerns the higher education (HE) system of regions – including both universities and HE components of Vocational Education and Training (VET) – and its engagement with those regions. It is of potential interest to ESCalate members since it seeks to identify the range of engagements of higher education institutions (HEIs) with the regions. In so doing, PURE situates matters such as widening access, continuing professional development and knowledge exchange into an all encompassing framework that also includes economic, social, cultural and environmental perspectives as defined by HEFCE (2002). Indeed, as part of its methodology, the project utilises an adapted tool for the benchmarking of the regional engagement of universities, which was developed by David Charles of Strathclyde University, based on his previous work for HEFCE. This classifies engagement within seven themes:

1. Enhancing regional infrastructure
2. Human capital development processes
PURE grew out of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s work in Regional Development from the late 1990s and is coordinated at the University of Glasgow through the PASCAL Observatory (http://pascalobservatory.org). PURE’s work has expanded through Europe where it has a European base at the University of Glasgow, a US base at Northern Illinois University, an Australian administrative headquarters at RMIT University, Melbourne and an African base at University of South Africa in Pretoria. The essence of PASCAL is sharing knowledge, experience and mutual learning amongst subscribing members drawn from regional government and universities. It seeks to offer an innovative approach to accessing state-of-the-art international knowledge and expertise on place management, social capital and learning cities and regions, and to bring this knowledge to bear on policy and practice issues faced by regional authorities.

The PURE project is one of a number of multi-national PASCAL initiatives, and has been undertaken in 19 regions in four continents. It involves a systematic review of the engagement of the university sector (including short-cycle providers, e.g. in the UK any further education colleges providing HE) with regional stakeholders, and seeks the perspectives of universities and those to whom they potentially transfer and exchange knowledge. The areas of work for PURE have included:

1. To monitor and compare approaches to the innovation system and human capacity-building work of HEIs across all strands of balanced social development - cultural, civil society, health and welfare, environmental as well as economic.
2. To identify barriers and ways of overcoming them, where appropriate trying out approaches new to partnership and organization, which have been successful in other regions.
3. To interrogate and use existing data more effectively and study the impact of HE partnership on regional development, with realistic tasks and targets for HE partnership-based regional development (metrics and impact evaluation) including ‘soft’ social, cultural, health and sustainability dimensions.
4. To benchmark activities of engagement.
5. To explore the impact on regions of global warming and other ecological questions (such as transportation, waste management and disposal), and the contribution of HEIs (where science and social science can be applied) to analyse and compare trends towards and away from greater devolution.
6. To compare different intermediary models for university engagement.
7. To exchange approaches to advocating engagement nationally and rolling out regional engagement elsewhere in their countries.

Clearly not all regions involve themselves in all activities, and PASCAL agrees with regions which areas of thematic interest they wish to focus on. Thereafter PASCAL agrees a work plan with regions. This includes two visits from an international review group assembled from its associates, and the team’s academics and regional planners.
Many review methodologies require regions to undertake a detailed self-review, using a common general template, before there is any outside involvement from a review group. PURE differs in several ways from such approaches. It is tailored to the unique circumstances of change in each region. Rather than offering just evaluative and judgmental reviews, PURE seeks to bring to each region a consultative and developmental approach - hence the term for its review team of a Consultative Development Group (CDG). There is an explicit focus from the outset on changing and improving the quality of partnership, and on beneficial outcomes in terms of regional development, which will also benefit the HE sector.

Direct exchange with other regions sharing similar ambitions and challenges assists practical learning, and the adoption of good practice. CDGs reinforce the PURE networking approach, drawing members where possible from other participating regions, and ‘twinning’ regions so that ‘reciprocal reviewers’ between regions share common interests. This is what we term as ‘peer reviewing’.

In the review process it is essential to learn from past and present experience, and to make best use of data available from all sources to inform regional governance and the management of productive partnerships. In order to do so we work with regions via a dedicated Link Partner and local representative Regional Co-ordinating Group, and we use well-validated benchmarking tools within the HEI system and regions. Thereby we collect and analyse a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data, gaining multiple perspectives from both the supply and demand side of engagement.

“PURE helps make all parts of the engagement and their connectedness explicit, and thereby helps create good arguments for sustaining all components of the offer as part of regional and international strategies.”
A number of benefits have been identified for regions involved. These include:

- Participating, where appropriate, in the strands of action inquiry set out above
- Specific opportunities for international benchmarking
- Access to transferable practice across regions
- Direct learning from regions already engaged in analysing how HE can support regional competitiveness and balanced, sustainable development
- Connecting with regions both within the OECD and outside in clusters of common interest, mediated through web-conferencing, face-to-face meetings and twinning visits, reflecting the reality of global learning and global regional competitiveness.

As a result of initial work a number of interest clusters were developed, each led by regions themselves. These are:

- Regional Innovation and Renewal
- Social Inclusion and Active Citizenship
- Creative and Cultural Industries
- Green Skills and Jobs
- Tertiary Systems
- Sustaining Rural and Remote Communities
- Lifelong Learning and the Learning Region.

We are in an age when lifelong learning, and especially adult education in all sectors including within HE, is being challenged as cuts in public expenditure become increasingly fierce. Traditional adult and continuing education in the university sector has been decimated, partly because it has been isolated and is not part of the core offer of public engagement activity. PURE situates all aspects of lifelong learning, including adult education, within the liberal tradition and places widening participation within a broader notion of engagement. It helps make all parts of engagement and their connectedness explicit, and thereby helps create good arguments for sustaining all components of the offer as part of regional and international strategies.

Further information
Full details of the PURE project are available at the PASCAL website (http://pascalobservatory.org) where extensive documentation is available. If readers are interested in this work or any of the other projects we offer, including the PASCAL Universities for a Modern Renaissance (PUMR) or PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE) focusing on learning cities, then please send a request to be a user of the site using the ‘Contact Us’ button on the website or email sysadmin@pascalobservatory.org. Being a user allows individuals to receive information not available to the casual browser.


Supporting vocational and work-based learner progression into Higher Education

Andrew Rawson reports on a study exploring how Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning programmes support vocational progression to higher education.

In July 2010 Action on Access, in partnership with the Lifelong Learning (LLL) National Forum, commissioned a scoping study to identify joint Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Network activity that supports vocational and work-based learner progression to Higher Education (HE) (Smith and Harvey, 2010). Judy Smith, Senior Adviser at the Higher Education Academy and John Harvey, a consultant within the Action on Access Academy team authored this scoping study for Action on Access, in partnership with the Lifelong Learning (LLL) National Forum to identify joint Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Network activity that supports vocational and work-based learner progression to Higher Education (HE).

The scope of the report was specifically to focus on the work of LLNs and Aimhigher partnerships to support vocational progression into
higher education and was written while coalition government policy was developing. It does not attempt a wider analysis of these issues, and the recommendations focus on:

- The extensive good practice on higher progression of Aimhigher and LLNs
- The significant part for vocational progression to HE to play regarding fair access to the professions in the pursuit of social mobility
- The importance of the provision of relevant IAG resources
- A recommendation around the 14-19 diploma, as developments continue
- The benefits of this type of collaborative partnership activity in general.

Overall it is clear from this report that Aimhigher partnerships and Lifelong Learning Networks have seen advantages to working collaboratively in local areas and regions, and have worked carefully to ensure the work they have been doing is complementary.

The report reveals ways in which Aimhigher and LLNs have been developing connected or integrated programmes. These articulated programmes have been developed differently in different geographical areas but are seen to comprise of:

- Shared IAG materials and resources and related activities (such as fairs, summer schools and residential events, mentoring schemes and student ambassador programmes)
- Progression pathways and protocols
- ‘Passports’ schemes allowing routes into HE
- Higher apprenticeship progression maps
- The pooling of resources to develop models for tracking vocational and work-based students.

"Overall it is clear from this report that Aimhigher partnerships and Lifelong Learning Networks have seen advantages to working collaboratively in local areas and regions, and have worked carefully to ensure the work they have been doing is complementary."

Overall it is clear from this report that Aimhigher partnerships and Lifelong Learning Networks have seen advantages to working collaboratively in local areas and regions, and have worked carefully to ensure the work they have been doing is complementary.
Aimhigher partnerships are actively looking at ways to continue their work.

Nationally, government money has been announced for development to the Apprenticeship programme and the National Apprenticeship Service has included in its priorities to ensure more level 4 apprenticeships are available, and to make £5 million available for Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to develop higher apprenticeship frameworks and to pilot new composite honours and masters frameworks. Employers, employing organisations, training providers, the National Apprenticeship Service, Sector Skills Councils, funders and policy makers and others will all be important to the success of vocational and work-based learner progression to higher education.

However, if improved provision of pathways and progression for vocational and work-based learners is to continue, there is a necessary ongoing role for universities and colleges - particularly within their access agreements and widening participation strategic assessments - to work with continuing collaborative partnerships and each other and to consider the recommendations, as well as the good practice contained in this report.

There are also examples of joint curriculum articulations in the report.

The LLN national forum has a growing database of progression agreements, including for advanced apprenticeships. Nearly 2,000 vocational pathways are available to download. (Advanced apprenticeships work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ level 4, or for example the knowledge-based Foundation Degree which has options to lead to a full honours degree, and enables access to progression into team leader or management roles.)

One of the original rationales for Aimhigher partnerships and LLNs was to develop and then embed work within other structures and organisations once the programmes had ended. There is always a distinct danger that with the cessation of funding there is a cessation of the activities and collaborative work that the programmes funded. The extent of this embedding in local areas and regions is unclear at the time of writing as funding comes to an end, although developmental discussion and plans are taking place. For example, some LLNs have funding in place to continue, new (for example sector skills-based) LLNs have developed, and Aimhigher partnerships are actively looking at ways to continue their work.

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Reference

Further information
Some of the work described in the report can also be found on individual LLN and Aimhigher partnership websites, on the LLN National Forum website at: http://www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk/ and will be included in the legacy information of the Aimhigher programme and Action on Access as funding ends.

Andrew Rawson
Deputy Director, Action on Access, National Coordination Team for Widening Participation

Deputy Director since 2006
Andrew has worked in the national coordination team since 2001, coming from a background in the Careers and Connexions service, student services and adult guidance, and involvement in major WP initiatives from Excellence Challenge through to Aimhigher. He is firmly committed to widening and deepening participation in education and training, particularly higher education.
How did you come to develop an interest in lifelong learning and why do you think it is important?

It’s absolutely personal: my father gained his degree from the London School of Economics through part-time evening study, my sister, who’s nine years older than me, started her higher education the same year as I did after doing an access course, and my wife also did her degree as a mature student. I did my first adult teaching for the Workers’ Educational Association while notionally a full-time student. Lifelong learning is as natural as breathing for me – although I have to confess to having dropped-out from my OU Masters course when my son was born.

What does NIACE do and what is your role?

NIACE has a wide range of members – including the BBC, the Army, the Women’s Institutes as well as universities and colleges. Rather than acting as a providers’ ‘trade association’ the membership asks the organisation to act as a voice for the advancement of adult continuing education and adult learners in a very broad way. We sum up what we’re about in three words: ‘more’, ‘better’ and ‘different’ - to which I’d add the question ‘Who’s missing?’ What we try to do is to encourage a properly informed debate with policy shapers and influencers and to contribute to a thoughtful and reflective civil society. My own role is to try and ensure that our messages are coherent and consistent, and to maximise the charity’s impact.

Since it was established 20 years ago Adult Learners Week has sought to inspire and transform the lives of learners. What have been the most unusual and inspiring stories?

Every year since 1992 I’ve been part of the group which selects award winners to exemplify the diverse ways in which adults transform their lives (and those of their families and communities) through learning. And every year their stories leave me hugely uplifted. Each year has accounts of quiet determination and achievement so what we try and do is find different ways to use them to reach out to others and to encourage, motivate and inspire.

This year as NIACE celebrates its 90th anniversary, what do you see as the key challenges facing lifelong learners, practitioners and providers?

I am optimistic. While the current funding constraints are undoubtedly bad news in terms of the range and volume of public provision, I think we are seeing the re-discovery of adult education as a social movement rather than it simply being seen as a public service. Demography is also on our side with more of us living longer! Technology is also transforming the whole ecology of learning, and I’m sure we’ll see new forms of association, discovery and understanding emerge.

Alastair Thomson joined the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education NIACE on a two year contract in 1987. He lives in dread that the Institute’s HR department will one day learn how to use a calendar. His early career combined teaching sociology and communications in further, higher and adult education in Cambridge with work in print and broadcast journalism. This was followed by a spell as a government information officer at the Department for Education and Science.
Dear Colleagues,

ESCalate, collaboration and the future

ESCalate has existed for ten years. Evaluations tell us that it has provided important access points and practical support for professional development in education and teacher education. Many colleagues, from across the UK, have contributed to these provisions.

From 1st January 2012, these roles will be taken up directly by the Higher Education Academy. A person to lead this work is being appointed – but ESCalate itself will cease to exist.

Until the end of 2011, ESCalate will be both providing its normal services and working on the transition. There will be four major dimensions of our transition work:

- We will work closely with the HEA and its education specialist, once appointed.
- To maximise public access, we will offer appropriate selections of high quality resources to relevant public organisations within our field which serve Education stakeholders. We also hope to distribute resource packs to HEI education libraries.
- We will work in alliance with such sector organisations to identify gaps which will be left in provision following the demise of ESCalate, and to consider how these might be filled with, or without, HEA funding.
- We will encourage establishment of a process for regular liaison between key organisations in our field in relation to access and practical support for professional development in research and teaching for education and teacher education.

So what does this amount to? ESCalate’s final months will be devoted to sharing available assets and encouraging an organised and pro-active stance by our stakeholders in relation to making the most of new circumstances and of the HEA’s new funding opportunities.

We plan to work on this agenda at an ‘association’s summit’ to be convened by ESCalate within the BERA conference in September, and to take it forward again at an event within the UCET conference in November.

ESCalate, at its best, has been the product of value-committed educationalists working and sharing together. As we move towards its conclusion, we will maintain this position and encourage organisations within our field to fill the spaces and take up new opportunities.

Andrew Pollard, Director ESCalate