

EQU ALLITY

Edinburgh Colleges' Equality Panel

Newsletter 5

NOVEMBER 2010

Hello again to all our stakeholders. Here is an update on our last event which we held in October at Edinburgh's Telford College.

At this event our theme was 'Race Inequality & Social mobility - how can colleges make a positive change?'

This time the format of the panel was to have 2 presentations, then an open question and discussion on the topic. The first presentation was delivered by Professor Fernando Ameida Diniz, who is the chair of the board of the Community for Race Equality (CORE) based in north Edinburgh; this was followed by a presentation on Current ESOL (English as Second or Other Language) provision and how it supports equality by Ann Morgan-Thomas, Head of CBESOL at Stevenson college.

The first presentation was wide ranging, covering such diverse aspects as current re-thinking of Higher Education policy and the opportunity this gives colleges to look at the curriculum they offer, and to consider both areas of overlap and differences between what colleges and Higher Education institutions offer. Critically, Professor Diniz provided statistics which prompted him to ask whether widening participation in Higher Education had really made any significant impact on the social mobility of the minority ethnic (ME) population here, and in Scotland generally. All agreed that the qualifications gained by many ME students has widened their access to education, but that they could not easily find the appropriate jobs here.

It became clear in the presentation that we now have a "settled" third generation here in Edinburgh, while at the same time a dramatic recent change and diversity of incoming ME people, and that we need in some ways to revisit the previous models of how we actually increase access and more importantly equality.

Professor Diniz took us on a personal tour of who benefited from Higher Education in the previous decades since the 1960s

to present day. We considered the divide between academic and vocational education, and the controversial introduction of such degree programmes as Golf Management, and whether this kind of provision has in fact made any impact on social mobility. In 2010 we still see socioeconomic barriers as the most significant, especially to high-status professions such as medical science, engineering or law. As we see students from disadvantaged backgrounds taking less "economically valuable" subjects – the result being that they do not enter highly-paid professions. Professor Diniz wondered if the time for revisiting the previous polytechnic approach had come around as a key opportunity for colleges to offer vocational and technological education up to degree level.

Ann Morgan-Thomas provided a retrospective on how much ESOL funding and effort has been put in place over a similar time-frame to offer English language provision as part of increasing social mobility – language being the most fundamental tool to influence this, along with awareness-raising about infrastructure political structures and accessing services, and how these all contribute to establishing a sound framework for civil liberty that we started our debate and discussion with. The development of SQA qualifications in ESOL from level Intermediate 2 upwards, within courses that offer language development alongside learning in vocational areas, plus work experience or volunteering are providing the most effective mechanisms colleges can offer to aid transition and social mobility.

There was a lively discussion on a number of the issues and concepts raised, and in reality we simply ran out of time!

HERE ARE THE KEY POINTS WE WILL PICK UP ON:

- 1 Continue to offer further education level programmes in colleges with a key focus on employment
- 2 Use the good practice discussed here today for ESOL programmes as we review our curriculum offer across



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- Edinburgh as a collective group of colleges.
- 3 Work closely with schools to build programmes that will encourage BME young people to consider vocational education
 - 4 Grasp opportunities from the review and evaluation being carried out by Scottish Funding Council seeking cost effective Higher Education- especially to build on work based subjects and college expertise in those aspects
 - 5 Maintain a balance between full-time and part-time provision of courses, as this widens access
 - 6 Take positive action in building vocational courses in partnership with

BUSINESS SECTORS, COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND COLLEGES.

Evaluation at the end of the event showed that around 72% felt the event had been of value and 90% felt the duration of the event was 'just right'. A few people felt that they would welcome further discussion e.g. sharing what works well for support for ME people with a learning disability. A number of students were at the event and participated, but panel members would really like to hear more about students' experience, and we will manage time more effectively next time to ensure there is more opportunity for meaningful exchange and dialogue on solutions.

Suggested topics for future events included:

- Implications of the new Equalities Act for us all
- Community Learning and development and Curriculum for Excellence in colleges
- Leadership challenges and How to engage grass roots community groups, generally - especially in planning

HERE'S WHAT WE HAVE DONE SINCE THE LAST MEETING

- We use role models within Prospectus and website information to share experience of people who have taken non-traditional career paths
- We are working very closely with schools on developing appropriate courses as part of Curriculum for Excellence and 16+ entitlement
- Staff and student engagement with relevant equality ambassadors and speakers

FUTURE PANEL MEETINGS

The next ECEP event will take place in May after the publication of Public Sector Equality Duty, at Jewel and Esk College.

OTHER COLLEGE NEWS

- We are working jointly on materials to raise cultural awareness as part of staff capacity building in all three colleges
- Stevenson College Edinburgh has been working with the government funded body: Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics Network (STEM). In September 2010, 25 staff and students from the Science department of SCE signed up to become Science ambassadors. The aim of the scheme is to

"... support pupils, teachers and schools by enriching and enhancing the curriculum, thereby encouraging an interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects."

From an equality point of view one of the aims is to provide positive role models for young people in these areas. The Science Ambassadors have attended a GlobalScience event in Edinburgh and various links were made with interested schools which are being followed up. There is a planned calendar of events for the Science Ambassadors, including linking with local primary schools. Future plans include utilising the female Science Ambassadors to engage directly with female pupils to reinforce positive role models.

- Scotland's Colleges are taking part in two projects funded by the Scottish Funding Council to support the delivery of its equality and diversity framework for 2010-13:
- identifying priority areas for development across four key elements of Leadership, Capacity Building, Action Research and the provision of Information and Advice
- working with institutions in the higher education and college sectors to further embed equality and diversity within curriculum design, delivery and assessment.
- Funding for colleges. We already know that budgets will be cut, and that this means challenging times ahead. Once we have specific and clear information to share, we will be in communication with you

Best wishes for a great festive season to all!

Barbara Lawson

Gillian Russell

Maggie Stevenson