

**13-15****The 1st International Conference on Enhancing Teaching and Learning Through Assessment**

Venue: Hong Kong, China.

<http://www.polyu.edu.hk/assessment/>**20-23****Eden: Annual Conference for the European Distance and E-learning Network**

Venue: Helsinki, Finland.

<http://www.eden-online.org/eden.php>**23-26****What a Difference a Pedagogy Makes: Researching Lifelong Learning & Teaching**

Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRLI)

3rd International Conference

Venue: University of Stirling.

<http://crl.gcal.ac.uk/conf.htm>**July 2005****2-6****Higher Education in a Changing World**

Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) Conference 2005

Venue: University of Sydney, Australia

<http://www.herdsa.org.au/2005/>**10-13****Internationalising Entrepreneurship Education and Training Conference**

15th IntEnt Conference

Venue: University of Surrey

<http://intent05.som.surrey.ac.uk/>**August 2005****31 Aug- 2nd September****Flows and Spaces in a Globalised World**

Royal Geographical Society- Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) Annual Conference

Venue: London

<http://www.rgs.org/templ.php?page=3resann05int>**September 2005****6-8 September****Exploring the frontiers of e-learning: borders, outposts and migration**

The Association for Learning Technology, ALT-C 2005

Venue: Manchester

[www.alt.ac.uk/altc2005](http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2005)**INFORMATION FOR THE OVERWHELMED**

*The world of learning and teaching in Higher Education is in a constant state of flux. This column is intended to provide a brief synopsis of the latest developments, initiatives and policies to help you stay up-to-date with the ever-changing landscape.*

**The Higher Education Academy**

In May 2004, the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE), the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund National Co-ordination Team (TQEF NCT) were merged to form the Higher Education Academy: a new UK-wide organisation set up to support quality enhancement in teaching and the student experience in higher education. (See page 2 of this issue for further details). <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>

**Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)**

In January 2004, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) invited bids for recurrent and capital funds to establish Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs). At stage one, 259 eligible bids were received from 126 different institutions. These spanned all the main subject areas and a wide range of thematic topics in learning and teaching. 106 bids were selected to proceed to stage two of the bidding process, and the list of successful CETLs will be announced in January 2005. (See page 3 of this issue for further details.) <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/CETLs/>

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI) invited applications from all higher education institutions for recurrent funds for Areas of Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The Northern Irish process is non-competitive and DELNI have announced 7 bids moving through to the next stage.

**Widening Participation**

For some HEIs 'widening participation (WP)', in the sense of providing appropriate opportunities for those who have not traditionally had the chance to develop their educational potential at this level, is nothing new. It has long been part of their mission, ethos and culture. For other HEIs, the challenges are new and ways forward disparate.

The Government has set targets for widening participation with a view to reaching 50% of all 18-30 year olds by 2010. The key groups with which the Government wishes to enhance participation are those that are currently under-represented, and include those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, those with disabilities, and certain ethnic minorities. Much of the recent expansion of opportunities within HE has come through the introduction of Foundation Degrees, which are vocational qualifications developed in partnership with employers.

The GEES Subject Centre is currently working with the Geography Discipline Network on an inclusive curriculum project designed to develop, disseminate and embed resources for supporting disabled students studying geography, earth and environmental sciences in higher education. In addition, two of our small-scale projects, being undertaken by Emma Treby at Bournemouth and Seraphim Alvanides at Newcastle, are also directly related to these issues (see pages 35/6 of this issue). See:

- Higher Education Academy Widening Participation pages. <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/199.htm>
- GEES Inclusive Curriculum Project. <http://www.glos.ac.uk/gdn/>

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- Foundation Degree Forward (provides support for the development of high quality Foundation Degrees). <http://www.fdf.ac.uk>
- Action on Access, the national co-ordination team to support WP strategies for England, and also for Northern Ireland (DELNI). <http://www.brad.ac.uk/admin/conted/action/>
- The National Disability Team (NDT), is committed to WP for disabled students in higher education institutions across England and Northern Ireland. <http://www.natdisteam.ac.uk/>

### Employability

There are many definitions of what it is to be 'employable', and many views on the processes involved. The Higher Education Academy offers a wide range of perspectives on the employability of graduates, based on the premise that, in higher education, 'employability' is about good learning. GEES graduates go on to careers in an enormously wide range of areas including higher education.

Employability is a government concern for at least two reasons. First, it is important to the widening participation strategy - which, if it succeeds, will result in more graduates looking for jobs. Second, the government believes that a good supply of highly-skilled employable graduates is essential for national economic and social well-being.

Initiatives linked to the employability agenda include the introduction of Personal Development Planning for all students from September 2005; and the development of entrepreneurial skills within the curriculum (see p.44 this issue on the GEES Entrepreneurship project).

- GEES Subject Centre employability web pages. <http://www.gees.ac.uk/projects/employ.htm>
- Higher Education Academy employability pages. <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/Employability%20.htm>

### External examiners

The Higher Education Academy is leading a programme of research and development work aimed at engaging with the problem, 'how can we improve the support given to external examiners and the function of external examining?' The project is being brokered by Universities UK with the Standing Conference of Principals (SCoP) and is being funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The work is being undertaken to address the recommendations made in the Teaching Quality Enhancement Report, but also to address the wider contexts associated with the changes in UK higher education. An important goal of the project is to scope the External Examiner support function within the new HE Academy. Information on the GEES Subject Centre's survey of external examiners can be found on page 30 of this issue. Higher Education Academy external examining pages <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/externalexaminers.htm>

### Professional standards

The 2003 White Paper on Higher Education stated that "from 2006 all new teaching staff should obtain a teaching qualification that incorporates agreed professional teaching standards". Universities UK, SCoP, and the UK HE Funding Councils have proposed that the Higher Education Academy take forward the development of national professional standards for academic practice and continuing professional development in teaching and learning in HE. The first phase of this has involved the Academy working collaboratively with these organisations to consult the

UK HE sector and other representative bodies. Updates on the consultation will be available at the end of November 2004. <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/119.htm>

### Scotland and Wales

Many of the above initiatives are being promoted by the Government through HEFCE and DELNI. Hence, the main impact and support will be focused on England and Northern Ireland. However, Scotland and Wales are also committed to similar goals. For example, a unique Quality Enhancement model has been designed by a 4-way partnership of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), the Quality Assurance Agency in Scotland (QAA), Universities Scotland and the National Union of Students, Scotland. The *Enhancement Themes* initiative aims to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas (themes) for development. The themes for 2004-05 are Employability and Flexible Learning. The GEES Subject Centre has been represented at each of the two annual events held at the beginning of the thematic years. <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/> and <http://www.shefc.ac.uk/>

In 2002, the Welsh National Assembly published its *Reaching Higher* strategy for higher education which included reconfiguration and widening access as key priorities for the short term. The GEES Subject Centre is keen to identify topics and themes in which departments in Wales would welcome support and, to this end, has undertaken visits to departments and is planning a regional meeting /seminar at the University of Glamorgan. See: Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) <http://www.hefcw.ac.uk> and Welsh National Assembly training and education pages <http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/index.asp>

Despite being located in the far south-west of England, the GEES Subject Centre is committed to supporting all parts of the UK: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In addition to our programme of departmental workshops that are available to all UK higher education institutions, our small-scale projects fund is open to all UK staff who teach or support learning, our publications are circulated to all UK GEES departments and our on-line Resource Database is available to everyone, this year we will be also be running regional events in Wales and Scotland.

### ... and ideas for the underwhelmed

Sitting at home? Watching TV? Turn it off and do something for GEES! Why don't you get in contact - we're always on the look-out for people to do reviews for the Resource Database, to undertake small-scale commissioned research or development work, or to offer examples of interesting practice. If you want to get more involved in working with and supporting your learning & teaching colleagues in geography, earth and environmental sciences throughout the UK then get in touch. Your Subject Centre needs you!

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