Training and Planning (TAP) day 14 Mar 2016 Higher Education

The Bradford College Spring Colloquium – ‘Exploring the Bradford Context’

Venue: Michele Sutton Lecture Theatre. David Hockney Building Bradford College

This was a relatively new venture in three main respects.

- For the College to increase its research portfolio regarding the local and regional context with a view to redressing the balance of the Bradford image as reported in the press.
- To energise the College’s engagement with Bradford: its communities, its varied agencies, its professional groups etc.
- To create an added focus on the employability agenda.

It was badged as a colloquium to emphasise the nature of the event as one that is primarily discursive, with many opportunities for all delegates to contribute to the various debates. It was aimed at embracing externality, whilst stimulating research activity internally. There has been ongoing research into local issues by many staff over several decades, but this event brought about a greater focus on the many socio-economic factors that impact upon the individual and the communities of Bradford. This focus had both a micro and macro perspective in that the Colloquium contained input from a large government funded regional research project (Born in Bradford) and a national agency aligned to the London School of Economics (Centre for Cities). There were 142 delegates including various guests. These included Richard Wightman and Dr Cath Orange (College Corporation), Patrick Leonard and Dr Debbie Meakin (Association of Colleges) and Professor Mark Davies and Patricia Lowrie (QAA). The aims of the day were as follows:

1. To link with agencies and fellow professionals involved in the Bradford Context
2. To update the Bradford College Academic Community on issues which are salient to the Bradford Context
3. To generate research opportunities and to build on current research projects.
4. To establish another platform to continue to develop curricula and the learning experience of our students.
5. To share and celebrate the scholarship and research portfolio of Bradford College as teacher-scholars and as contributors to the social, economic and cultural life of people and communities: locally, regionally, nationally and internationally
6. To provide an enjoyable event for staff in sharing expertise, experience and ideas

At the outset it is safe to say that, to varying degrees, all of these aims were realised. The discussion below describes how this was achieved.
The Colloquium was opened by the GCEO Andy Welsh who welcomed all delegates, and wished everyone well for a productive day. Dr Graham Stevens (Dean) gave a brief overview of the day, and then introduced the new Provost Richard Thomas, who presented the College’s current SAR operation, and how it will be developed. Richard explained how students will be more involved in joint research projects, the new opportunities for interdisciplinary research that the HE structure presented and also how the College will be moving forward on knowledge transfer projects and greater external collaboration. This was a fitting introduction to the business of the day that was led by our external speakers.

**Externality:**

BORN IN BRADFORD: Dr Pippa Bird, Dr Liz Andrews. Senior Research Fellows

Both presenters have a background in health and social research that includes health inequalities, cognitive and health psychology, health and wellbeing. Their exposition gave an extremely enlightening and fascinating insight into the Bradford Context through relating the evolution of the Born in Bradford Project, together with its emergent findings. This is a brief synopsis of their input:

‘Born in Bradford is a long term study of a cohort of 13,500 children, born at Bradford Royal Infirmary between March 2007 and December 2010, whose health is being tracked from pregnancy through childhood and into adult life. This study is a powerful way of researching into the many influences that shape our lives: our parents and our wider family, our genes, the way we choose to live, the local environment, the services we access and how all these come together to affect our health and wellbeing. The information collected from the BiB families is being used to find the causes of common childhood illnesses and to explore the mental and social development of this new generation.

The Born in Bradford cohort study offers a unique window of opportunity to initiate an innovative and multidisciplinary programme of research. By recruiting pregnant women, their partners and their newborn babies to the cohort, this study offers the potential to:

- assess the determinants of childhood and adult disease
- assess the impact of migration
- explore the influences of pregnancy and childbirth on subsequent health
- generate and test hypotheses that have the potential to improve health for some of the most disadvantaged within our society.
The Bradford community provides a unique setting for a birth cohort study exploring the determinants of childhood and adult disease because of its diversity of population and high levels of ill-health.

Despite these challenges there is a great optimism in the city about the potential to create a better and healthier place to live and work. The people of Bradford have long shown an ability to think imaginatively and to work together for their community. This is a city where there have already been excellent examples of the health service, local government, and community groups working together.

These are some of the research areas that have already been, or are being, investigated by researchers, based on the information we have been so generously given by Born in Bradford families:

- **Society**: Parenting practices, social capital, ethnic density
- **Mind**: Maternal depression, Children’s well being
- **Growth & Obesity**: Factors influencing growth patterns
- **Environment**: Asthma & Allergy, Family use of green spaces
- **Heart**: Heart disease & Diabetes
- **Genes**: Risk factors for genetic disorders, Vision problems
- **Movement**: Measurement of physical activity
- **Technology**: Motor co-ordination & robotic arm’

The above is taken from their website which can be found at:

http://www.borninbradford.nhs.uk/about-the-project/How-the-Project-Works/

CENTRE FOR CITIES. (London School of Economics): Ed Clarke. Senior Analyst

The Centre for Cities states the following as their main focus:

‘Our main goal is to understand how and why economic growth and change takes place in Britain’s cities, and to produce research that helps cities improve their performance. Through our focus on the drivers of urban success, we have developed a deep understanding of the economic performance of UK cities. We work with cities, business and Whitehall to ensure our work is relevant, accessible and of practical use to cities and the policy community’.

http://www.centreforcities.org/city/bradford/

In reference to this goal the input contained the following:
• Overview of the Bradford Context.
• Interventions that are ongoing and their emergent evaluation.
• The political background of Bradford regarding the Northern Powerhouse.
• A framework for staff research projects into understanding the Bradford Context and providing potential solutions. This will generate a closer relationship between the College, the Bradford Community, local and national agencies and employers – the latter to support employer engagement and the employability of students.

‘Internal’ Externality: Papers given by College Staff

These were geared to dovetail with the generic content of the external presenters. Two followed directly form the ‘Born in Bradford’ session (a.m.) and two followed the ‘Centre for Cities’ session (p.m.).

James Archer. Scholarship and Research Coordinator. McMillan Faculty of Education. ‘Unpicking the Threads’.

James focussed on the transformation properties of ITE (Initial Teacher Education), with some thought provoking observations on the centrality of the school teacher’s role in shaping individuals and their communities, and how teacher educators are the key scaffolding agent to realising both that role and its attendant aspiration. The transformational power of the educational enterprise, as driven by ITE, was captured by his quote from Plato. ‘The object of education is to teach us to love what is beautiful’. The correlate of that position to the wellbeing and the happy development of each Bradford child was well made.

Pam Brook: Head of School and Scholarship and Research Coordinator. Faculty of Art and Creative Industries. ‘The Northern Centre for Research into Art and Material Culture: Process/Philosophy and Praxis’

Pam reported on the recent initiation of the Faculty’s Research Centre: ‘In our post-industrial context, the city and the Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries believe this title will not only encompass some of the themes of our research but connect the words ‘Northern’ and ‘Material’ to the challenges of the current social and political climate.’

Pam went on to explain how the Research Centre will play its part in tackling city decline – an issue at the heart of both external presentations.
Dr Trevor Rodgers-Gray and Ian Jones: Scholarship and Research Coordinators, McMillan Faculty of Social Care and Community Practice. ‘Researching the Bradford Context’

Trevor and Ian discussed the putative Research Centre for the Faculty and the key themes of social pedagogy, safeguarding and comparative practice through international collaboration. They covered potential research opportunities into the Bradford context in relation to these themes and the impact that such work would have on individuals and communities. They also related their work to both external presentations and how the Centre for Cities work and the Born in Bradford findings would inform their scholarship and output, and how this in turn would have a significant impact on the student learning experience.

Richard Hall: Head of Faculty: Applied Science. ‘Widening Participation’

Under the broad heading of ‘Widening Participation’, Richard gave a fascinating analysis of this somewhat ill-defined concept by relating it to the pronouncements of the recent Green paper, and questioning what is really meant by the term, and what are the underpinning assumptions. He refreshingly posed more questions than answers in his following statements:

- Widening participation is based upon neoliberal notions of competitiveness and economic growth
- The concept of ‘social mobility’ accepts the existing social structure and does not set out to change this
- If people are able to rise from “the bottom to the top” there has to be bottom and there has to be a top
- Widening participation makes questionable assumptions about the role of education in promoting social mobility.
- If access to Higher Education is unequal, can an ‘equal opportunity to get ahead’ really be achievable?

Richard went on to present the experience of various institutions and resolved to leave delegates with the sobering thought that the ‘WP’ agenda may well have failed/is failing many people. A caveat for our praxis at Bradford College.

The Q & A Sessions

In the true spirit of colloquia there were four sessions dedicated to plenary discussion which were extremely lively. Questions were apposite and challenging and reflected a range of scholarly interests and expertise. External speakers and guests (e.g. the AoC) all commented upon the incisiveness of the contributions from
the floor and the main difficulty was ensuring that all enthusiastic questioners could be accommodated. Some examples referred to:

- The projection from current findings in BiB to future educational attainment at Bradford College
- The research design and methodology of BiB and comparable studies
- The implications of research outcomes of BiB for further work
- A Marxist analysis of the schools system and the issue of freedom (reference to Goethe that ‘there are none so oppressed as those who believe themselves to be free!’)
- The paradoxical notion of social mobility and the economic future of the UK
- The economic future of the UK and the Bradford context.

As a result, all of these sessions overran much to the satisfaction of the audience!

Closing Remarks

The Provost, Richard Thomas brought the colloquium to a close by summarising the day and, on behalf of all concerned, thanking all speakers both internal and external. He pointed out that although we were focusing on the Bradford Context that this of itself is part of a much wider national and international context. He closed by paying tribute to the College Academic Community and the transformational higher education they provide for their students.

Evaluation

The event achieved, either in part or in toto, all aims as set out above. More specifically feedback from staff declares that it was extremely useful and enjoyable. It has already launched the research imagination of many who are in the process of ‘laddering’ ideas with colleagues in ‘research clusters’. The external contributions were extremely illuminating, and for the large part fascinating, and staff welcomed the opportunity to triangulate their own knowledge and expertise of the Bradford Context with that of major research projects. All the content will at some stage impact upon curricula and the student learning experience. The day was one of unity celebrated by all, and served to develop further close relationships between the various cognate areas and individuals.

Thanks

A note of thanks should be made to all who contributed to the success of this event. These include all presenters, SHELT, delegates (especially for their enthusiastic
input), and particularly Clare Lamkin, Helen Farrar and all the events team (including IT).

E Stream record at:

Part 1
https://estream.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/View.aspx?id=7297~4z~b0w2tYQE&code=yo~qHiGTcdLu0NheIRmQH9nlq70lSJjcFzCI4mKMbFoodoUaFiYiP8w&ax=6T~kQeeHfS1km7&chapID=10681

Part 2
https://estream.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/View.aspx?id=7296~4y~AqqjYFh&code=yn~Q7UhhZTBXcTYHHqFK7GWzqFCvi4sCTBIHGvKnKhcbQSKUDdyry&chapID=10682

Part 3
https://estream.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/View.aspx?id=7295~4x~8CS08NtU&code=ym~okEEy0Igzb9ujRRbDxnINqU8HaIAmnQw9WJgRpa0Q2JSC38pKv&chapID=10683