Launch of the new Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER)

CHEER brings together higher education researchers at different stages of their careers who share interests in the socio cultural and interdisciplinary aspects of higher education.

Over 70 people attended the Launch of the new centre on the 15th November, hosted by the Sussex School of Education. National and local higher education scholars, policymakers and practitioners were welcomed by Professor Louise Morley, the Director of CHEER. The event was introduced by Vice Chancellor Professor Michael Farthing and closed by Pro Vice Chancellor Professor Bob Allison.
The keynote presentation 'The Struggle For “Fairness” in Higher Education: Universities Behaving Badly?' was delivered by Professor Sir David Watson, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Brighton and currently Professor of Higher Education Management at the Institute of Education, University of London. The sound file and powerpoint presentation are available on the CHEER website.

In her welcome, Professor Morley explained why the new Centre had been set up. CHEER members have identified some major gaps in current scholarship. She described how Higher Education Centres exist around the globe e.g. in Japan, Brazil, Germany, The Netherlands, USA, Canada and Australia. The same applies to Centres for Social Inclusion, Gender Mainstreaming and Affirmative Action. There are also sophisticated empirical, theoretical and publishing bases for sociology of school-based education and development of theory on globalisation and internationalisation of higher education. However, few centres exist that are developing theory and informed practices in sociology of higher education, with emphasis on equity, on a national and international basis. Professor Morley also argued that current policy debates in the UK and in the wider international policy community frequently equate and reduce equity to quantitative change e.g. counting more students into higher education systems. There is limited theorisation of how wider systems of power operate and the cultures that they generate to promote or impede inclusion.
CHEER has expertise in particular structures of inequality e.g. gender, social class and disability and on how they intersect. CHEER research projects include:

- Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard. (ESRC/DfID)

- Exploring the under-representation of young people in mathematics and science and strategies for improvements (Marie Curie Foundation)

- Improving the experiences of disabled students in Higher Education (Higher Education Academy).
CHEER has identified 3 areas where social divisions appear to interact with opportunity structures:

- Identities – how social identities form, co-exist and sometimes collide with academic identities;
- Assessment - how discourses of measurement can conceal or reproduce inequalities;
- Transitions - how social capital influences movement in and out of higher education e.g. the type of higher education institution one enters, the programme of study and one’s employability in the labour market.

Professor Morley also suggested that, with the insertion of neo-liberalism and the dominance of audit and accountability, critical commentary on higher education is frequently constrained by the imperative to critique existing structures. Sociologists of higher education have to spend a lot of time saying what they don’t like, rather than envisioning new models of higher education.

CHEER activities will include:

- Research
- Publications
- Consultancy
- Developing Theory
- Informing Practices
- Contributing to Policy

Professor Morley invited supporters of CHEER to join attempts to develop a new conceptual grammar and new vocabularies for examining equity and for envisioning more equitable and inclusive higher education systems.
In his keynote address, Professor Sir David Watson focused on the ethical responsibilities of universities. He discussed the problematic of higher education as a positional good *i.e.* its value is that others do not have it, and how this ethic can promote elitism and impede equity. He was critical of some of the over-used concepts in higher education policy such as ‘excellence’ and ‘meritocracy’ and posed some challenging questions about whether pressures on universities mean that their reputation for probity and virtue is in the process of deconstruction or rapid deterioration. The policy contexts of marketisation and the audit culture were raised in relation to representation, competition and reputation. Professor Sir David Watson expressed his support for CHEER’s aims and suggested that the development of theory of equity in higher education needed to include self-reflection that incorporates

- Outside-in perspectives;
- Inside-out perspectives;
- History;
- Social justice and the public interest;
- The psychological contract.
The core members of CHEER are:

- Professor Louise Morley (quality, equality, gender, micropolitics, international policy)
- Dr Sarah Aynsley (transitions into Higher Education, employability)
- Professor Jo Boaler (mathematics, science and equity)
- Dr Barbara Crossouard (formative and summative assessment in doctoral education and pedagogy)
- Dr Pat Drake (professional and mathematics education)
- Dr Máiréad Dunne (institutional processes, knowledge, power and identity, educational inclusion, research methodologies)
- Dr Viv Griffiths (gender, identity and professional development)
- Professor Valerie Hey (psycho-social analysis, feminist post-structuralism, class, gender and sexualities)
- Dr Angela Jacklin (disability, social inclusion, professional learning)
- Dr Rosemary Lugg (equity, international education policy, research capacity building)
- Dr John Pryor (sociological analyses of assessment and Higher Education pedagogies)
- Carol Taylor (cultural studies, identity, transitions into Higher Education)
CHEER Seminar Programme

Monday, 21 January 2008

‘The Silence Of The Girls’…Talking And Not Talking In Higher Education

Professor Mary Evans, Visiting Professor in Sociology and Gender London School of Economics

Monday, 18 February 2008

Taming the Beast - Higher Education and the Market

Professor Roger Brown, Co-Director of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development, Liverpool Hope University

Summer Term 2008

Monday, 28 April 2008

The First Year In UK Higher Education: Experiences And Departures

Mantz Yorke, Visiting Professor, Lancaster University

Monday, 19 May 2008

The Challenges Of Diversity And Equity For Teaching And Learning In Higher Education: A Critical Perspective On Research Practices And Pedagogies

Professor Miriam E. David, Professor of Education, Institute of Education, University of London

Time: 5 - 6.30pm Venue: Arts D110

The seminars are free and all are welcome to attend. For further information about CHEER, please consult the website: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer