

PASCAL Report to the Thames Gateway

PURE Work 2009-2010

A. Distinctive and unique features of the Thames Gateway.

The Thames Gateway running eastwards from Tower Bridge in the City of London to the Thames Estuary and the North Sea is one of the most complex PURE regions in both governance and in terms of higher education provision. This 'sub-region' was created by Central Government to drive the regeneration of East London and the areas of Essex and Kent which lie alongside the river. The area covers parts of two county authorities, the riparian area covered by the Greater London Assembly, the delivery agency for the London Olympics, eighteen municipalities, and until recently three regional development agencies and three regional government offices. These were overseen by a central government ministry. There are also eight universities, eight specialist higher educational institutions and twelve colleges of further education.

The Thames Gateway is the largest urban regeneration project in England with major infrastructure developments, including high speed rail links to the European mainland, new industries, new populations, major new investment in higher education, the London 2012 Olympics and a concentration of development based on the sustainable re-use of derelict land.

Whilst the complexity in terms of governance and the range of educational institutions is challenging, there is nevertheless a vibrancy in the Gateway, and many notable world class achievements. Therefore, whilst there have been calls to simplify the delivery structure, there are strong indicators of cooperation at all levels and within most institutions; the view currently is to leave well alone.

Progress to date in engaging with the PURE project has been disappointing, due in the main to limited resources across a range of stakeholders. These resources are now being further reduced with budget cuts of over 30% in higher education (combined with an increase in student fees), and a 25% cut in public services with the closure of several government agencies serving the Gateway.

Since the first PURE visit in March 2009 national and London economies have been hit by the recession, and particularly the banking crisis. The following statistics give an idea of the various impacts

- June 2009: economic performance (measured by GDP) 5.5% below peak of March 2008; national income per head not predicted to return to March 2008 levels until March 2014
- Youth unemployment has grown most

- Number of managers and professionals claiming jobseekers allowance rose by 154% in the year to June 2009. These claimants are concentrated in London
- 20% of graduates from London Metropolitan University not working or studying 6 months after graduation
- Some employers cutting graduate entry jobs by 25%
- Graduates often taking low-paid jobs (bar work etc)
- 1 in 10 graduates in architecture, building and planning unemployed
- One in five young people (1.2m) not in education, work or training
- 4927,000 16-24-year-olds unemployed

Most recently these economic trends have started to reverse, with all the banks returning to profit. The level of private sector investment has remained steady, and the loss of public sector jobs in London is expected by the Government to be balanced by an increase in private sector job opportunities.

B Formal and informal means of engagement

The universities in the Thames Gateway have an excellent record of working together. On several occasions universities have co-located, sharing facilities such as libraries and in one case a student union cover three separate institutions. There are also examples of universities working with further education and sharing common facilities.

Generally the colleges of further education have closer working links with their communities. Some of the universities are using these links to access the networks held by the FE colleges. It should also be noted that whilst there is good community access, contact with SMEs and business is patchy and could be improved/

The small specialist higher education institutions have all demonstrated close cooperative working, not just with each other through initiatives such as the creative way but also directly with the communities where they are located.

It was noted during the second PURE CDG review that as before not all universities are equally engaged in the Thames Gateway project despite the coordinating role provided through the Thames Gateway Team. This was particularly marked so far as the University of Greenwich was concerned, contrasting starkly with other providers both large and small.

It was also noted that links with businesses remained patchy, particularly with SMEs, although the FE colleges maintained wider links than the HEIs. It was also evident that not all the colleges and universities were taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Olympics and planning to capture the legacy of such a major event.

When benchmarking is completed, it will be possible to get a better overall picture of the type and depth of engagement. It is however acknowledged that with the current preoccupation with cuts in public funding, benchmarking will not be given high priority at this time.

C Benefits and prospective future gains from international networking

London is an outward-looking international city, one of the main centres for world banking and one of the most prosperous parts of the UK. It has first class transport links with the world through five London airports, and an international hub for high speed rail transport to the European mainland.

London and in particular the Thames Gateway is the new centre for commerce and service industries, hosting companies from around the world. Therefore, whilst London and the Gateway can benefit from links with other city regions it can also offer experience to others.

Most recently the link with the City of Melbourne has strengthened with a study visit by a small delegation from Melbourne, examining the green energy initiatives currently under development in the Thames Gateway.

The PURE study has also highlighted opportunities presented by international links looking at creative industries, education-led regeneration, SME engagement, mega-events, and eco-regions.

Previously the DCLG indicated that they would be interested in all of the PURE cluster subject areas, but felt that their focus would necessarily be on city regions rather than the remote/rural. A cities group has therefore been established including Melbourne, Helsinki, Glasgow, Flanders (Brussels, Antwerp) Puglia (Bari city) and Thames Gateway. This was due to be coordinated by the OKC in Melbourne but might now be coordinated by a similar organisation in one of the other city regions.

D Getting more value from engagement between the region and the universities

To engage effectively each partner must calculate what arrangements hinder or assist fruitful engagement.

For the universities

Hitherto the Government has funded a post through HEFC to coordinate the activities of the universities in the Gateway. This has raised the awareness of the rich variety and value that the universities offer the region.

This funding is of a temporary nature. All the institutions have indicated their wish to see the coordinating activity continue irrespective of the funding decisions by Central Government. As a consequence Kent County Council has been exploring the opportunity to establish an Office for Knowledge Capital for the Gateway along the lines of the OKC in Melbourne.

The inter-institutional working enables the universities and associated colleges to work collectively with external partners. There are many excellent examples of institutions working collectively or individually in the fields of health, creative arts, science, energy, etc.

Issues remain concerning the universities' contribution to applied research and workforce development particularly with SMEs. However, progress more generally through the actions set out in the Thames Gateway Skills Framework (published in November 2008) has been most positive. Recent successes are set out in the Thames Gateway Annual Report (June 2009).

For the Thames Gateway sub-region

The complexity of the region and its governance model makes it difficult to ensure that full benefit derives for the region as a whole, although there are some outstanding examples of where the region has capitalised on the intellectual capital of its institutions.

Unfortunately much of the institution/regional contact remains at an individual level, particularly relationships with industry and the private sector more widely. This is recognised but no solution has yet been found, although the SME Engagement Pilot in Scotland may be of value to emulate if it proves successful.

Implementation and delivery of the actions set out in the Skills Framework continue to be a priority for the Thames Gateway Directorate and the Homes and Communities Agency with whom delivery is shared. If this is successful it should embed the long- term relationship

There is energy and commitment in the stakeholders as noted especially the view that even if the Government focus moved away from the Gateway over time, there was now enough belief and commitment to maintain the partnerships and continue with the development of the region, which is underpinned by the engagement process.. There is a willingness to take risks to achieve the best outcomes. There is however less understanding about how to get the most out of the 2012 London Olympics and other major events in the Capital

The success of the Creative Way concept has the potential to expand into new fields, bringing together other HEIs and FE colleges to develop an even richer

programme of education and skills development in partnership with regional and national bodies.

Note. *A social divide continues between the high value financial services industries and the job prospects enjoyed by many of the residents living within sight of Canary Wharf. The Financial Skills Academy is a courageous attempt to address the low skills base in East London, and to help local people into employment in these large financial institutions. It uses trainers from within the industry to provide much of the teaching. However, the employment success rate so far is limited; unless the Academy can achieve greater success in the near future it may be more cost-effective to use this excellence for training to go into other trades and professions.*

E Evidence that the work of PURE will be sustained in the future.

The work of many current projects examined by the PURE team may be at risk as a consequence of the major reductions in public finances. Therefore it is impossible to predict whether the enormous efforts made by the institutions and their region partners can be sustained.

If Central Government, Kent County Council and other strategic partners support the establishment of an Office for Knowledge Capital for the Gateway, then prospects for sustaining and deepening the engagement will improve.

Following the second visit by the CDG in March 2010, a series of recommendations were made to the Thames Gateway partners and between the institutions and the wider community.

These key points were identified

- Consider establishing a model of engagement for universities, further education colleges and other partners along the lines of the Office for Knowledge Capital in Melbourne and Manchester, to improve cooperation and raise institutional aspiration.

[An Office for Knowledge Capital is a partnership between public authorities, colleges and universities within a region intended to support collaboration across the tertiary education sector to underpin and develop the region's physical and social capital]

- Develop the Creative Way model to support other university and college programmes and encourage their closer cooperative working, which would be greatly assisted if the point above is adopted.
- Develop the Creative Way model to act as a focus for SMEs and to act as an additional marketing tool for inward investment.

- Adopt a fresh approach to achieve better engagement with SMEs and larger employers. Use this engagement to better prepare the new HEI/FE curriculum and skills development programmes.
- Encourage the Thames Gateway Institute for Sustainability to engage more actively with the universities in the Gateway.
- Support the Ravensbourne approach to bring in trainers from industry to support other areas of activity within universities and colleges.
- Make better use of alumni to give advice on careers, and raise aspirations in cooperation with the LEAs
- Complete the benchmarking as a matter of priority.
- Review the action plan in the light of this report and the output from the benchmarking.
- Take an active part in the new PURE urban regions cluster alongside Glasgow, Melbourne, Helsinki and Flanders (Antwerp)

A change in the way the UK Government approaches regeneration, moving from a more centralised coordination to a local delivery model, does not invalidate the PURE findings. It does however pose a challenge for the local authorities and other partners as to how to take this forward, and how to handle such a major transition without loss of momentum, energy and hard-won shared experience.