

Pascal Universities Regional Engagement (PURE)

PURE Regional Visit

Report of Second Regional Visit (RVR2)

KENT 11-12 May 2010

Consultative Development Group (CDG):

Chris Duke, Liam Jarnecki, Michael Joris (CDG leader), Stephanie Young

Executive Summary

- **The global financial and economic crisis means widespread economies and cutbacks in Kent. Financial and staff constraints will have negative effects.**
- **A crisis is seen in Kent as an opportunity to make desirable changes, and not allowed to go to waste.**
- **Given the sharply altered situation, collaborative action could enable Kent to innovate in ways needed to thrive in these new conditions.**
- **Good things are happening, but there are missed opportunities. There is the potential for the universities to contribute much more to regional development. Most projects could be consolidated within the PURE approach, creating more synergy.**
- **Based on the first CDG report, Kent Link Partner Peter Welsh drafted a PURE action plan for Kent which identified as challenges:**

*HEIs' contribute to higher level skills and the development of policy options
Increased linkages of the research of Kent-based HEIs with local economic policy development*

Kent's place in the wider impact of Thames Gateway developments.

Strategic development partnerships with other PURE regions

Broadening co-operative working between HEI's, regional government and private and voluntary sectors for a sustainable economic base.

- **There is as yet no Kent dedicated PURE network. This should be activated by means of a Regional Coordinating Group.**
- **Additionally a wider Forum would enable stakeholders to build on momentum from the CDG visit, share examples of good practice, and pursue collaborative working and funding opportunities. Stakeholders, actors and interested parties should come together for a PURE kick-off conference day.**
- **Representatives from civil society organisations, the cultural sector and the business community should be involved. The PURE clusters and the use of the international networks can provide inspiration for further development.**

- **Following separate meetings with the two main partners it would be valuable to bring the two sectors together. In a full three-day CDG schedule, civil organisations, social and cultural organisations and the business sector should all be involved.**
- **Many project-based activities lack sustainable underpinning, and are not well embedded in good governance. The PURE methodology and partnerships could help in developing an integrated policy framework.**
- **The Kent public sector wishes to cooperate more with the universities. It is advisable also to include the colleges of further education, which have significant potential and a key role especially in skills development.**
- **A new architecture for cooperation is needed, with joint strategies and planning based on an overall regional strategy. Existing mechanisms for mutual consultation and cooperation should be developed and used by all sectors. Leadership, direction, crossovers and knowledge brokers are required. Horizontal bridges are vital, with a common language, funding and a way to cut across silos.**
- **Universities must be plugged in closer to the local community and economy. Employers and universities need to consult each other about future employment challenges, and plan for graduates not yet to be found on the labour market.**
- **The University of Kent is seen as rather remote, internationally focused and in pure research, relating less to the people and needs of Kent. Christchurch relates better with the Kent public sector, injecting a number of projects with academic support. Its community based work involves lifelong learning and community regeneration, with pro-active planning in chosen professional areas.**
- **The University for the Creative Arts is new in its current form and finding meaning in its campus localities. The creative industries are the fastest growing and should be a priority for further development, generating new jobs and aiding graduate retention.**
- **A new organisational culture and structure are needed in both the universities and the public sector, re-energising them through good relationships. A starting point could be to set out the mutual benefits to be won from cooperation between higher education, the public sector, and industry.**
- **Some university partners question the validity and desirability of the knowledge economy and social capital. This shows the need for more discussion, and for self-evaluative and monitoring benchmarking. Kent County Council will co-ordinate regional benchmarking.**
- **Cooperation should take place internationally as well as nationally. Kent is close to the French Nord-Pas de Calais and the Flemish region in Belgium, where there are good contacts. Kent has its own Kent Brussels House, and the University of Kent has a campus in Brussels.**
- **A consortium of higher education institutions may be possible within the wider Thames Gateway Region, extending to include both Essex and Kent. This would provide a good forum for the universities, which are few in number and diverse in character, to consult and collaborate.**

Preamble – the Background and Context Common to Essex and Kent

The participation of the English Counties of Essex and Kent in the Pascal PURE project is unique, taking a path different from those of all other PURE Regions. It originated in a proposal to extend the Thames Gateway Region's PURE participation by adding to that as a PURE Region the extended estuarine coastal strips of the two counties, north and south of the Thames Estuary. On this basis each Authority paid a half fee to take part. In the event, it was decided that the full Authority areas would be included, dividing the benefits and costs of participation on an equal basis. As a result, the first CDG visit early in 2009 spent only one full day in Kent and two in Essex. This second visit reversed the arrangement. The CDG met in Essex on Sunday evening 9 May and spent Monday 10th there, moving to Canterbury in Kent for a preparatory meeting that evening and the two full days of 11-12 May.

The CDG visits were therefore also different from those to other PURE regions. In Essex the Group used the time for sustained review, consultation and planning with the joint lead contact persons, in the County Council's Chelmsford offices. In Kent, one day was dedicated to two half-day meetings with groups of officers within or affiliated to different portfolios in Kent's administration, followed by an evening dinner meeting with political leaders of the Authority. On the second day there were half-day meetings with two groups of university personnel from the four universities in Kent. The morning meeting was joined by a member of the HEFCE staff involved with a project in Kent and two neighbouring counties.

For the first morning in Kent, the CDG was joined by a member of the host borough authority for the County Town of Maidstone. Because the Pascal contract was with the two county authorities, it technically omitted the three unitary area authorities embedded within their boundaries, Southend and Thurrock Essex and Medway Towns in Kent, which were part of the administrative county until early in the decade. It is the view of the CDG that if there is involvement of these two regions after 2010, this should formally extend to include the whole socio-economic and geographical areas of the two historic counties, including these urban regions. Given the change of national government that took place in the UK coinciding with these CDG visits, and the prospect of significant changes in public sector management and funding in coming months, this proposition sounds entirely reasonable. The expression 'let us not waste the opportunity of a good recession' was a backdrop to the whole visit.

Because of the unique circumstances of the Essex and Kent reviews, also, there was not the prior consultation with different stakeholders, private and third as well as public sector and higher education, which is normal, leading to the creation of an active Regional Coordinating Group (RCG). Consequently, understanding and active participation was modest. This has been most marked over misapprehension and reluctance to consider taking part in benchmarking – perhaps a misnomer better thought of as self-evaluation and ongoing monitoring. The first CDG visits at the beginning of 2009 were fact-finding missions and a preliminary exploration, rather than a full CDG visit, in both cases. The second visits, in May 2010, are best thought about as an intensive 'head office' consultation in the case of Essex, and a successful cross-sector and cross-institutional development consultation in the case of Kent.

Whether the two Regions decide to remain involved in the PURE Project and network after 2010 is for them to decide. The view of the CDG is that there is potential benefit to be gained by doing so, so long as more active partnership (via a RCG) can be built. The massive changes foreshadowed with the change of national government in May 2010, as it set out rapidly to reduce the level of national borrowing, makes such an ongoing consultative and development process the more fitting for all parties.

Another possibility at a very early stage of consideration at the time of reporting, is for a consortium of higher education institutions within the Thames Gateway Region, and extending to embrace both Counties, somewhat on the lines of the Manchester consortium and the Melbourne Office for Knowledge Capital (OKC). If this materialises it offers one tangible means for local collaboration and networking, both with the larger region and among the different higher education institutions, in this context. This wider setting may provide a better forum for the universities of Essex and Kent, which are few in number and diverse in character, to consult and collaborate over how to complement one another in pursuit of their somewhat different missions in the regional context.

The 2009 CDG membership was changed for several reasons. Of the original four Liam Jarnecki and Michael Joris remained, and Chris Duke and Stephanie Young joined the team.

We now report separately on the discussions and resulting advice and suggestions from the linked 2nd CDG visits. The fact that only one day was spent in Essex and two in Kent was unfortunate. The CDG feels that both visits were incomplete.

The Second PURE CDG visit to Kent

The first PURE CDG visit to Kent in 2009 did not go well (see Pascal PURE Website Kent RVR1). The timing was poor, immediately following the Easter vacation; there were a number of last-minute cancellations of panel members and there was only one day for the visit. The CDG advises against one-day visits to cover the activities of quite large and complex regions such as Kent and Essex, in any circumstance.

Therefore the presentations in 2009 did not get much beyond giving general information on the county of Kent, with presentations from Professor Vickerman of Kent University on the spatial and economic impact of the University on the regional economy, and from David George focussing on the developments in transport infrastructure and regeneration of Kent Thameside, within the Thames Gateway area of the County. Because of illness, a planned presentation of Kent strategies for vocational education in schools and further education could not be given.

Kent Action Plan – progress and overall prospects

The Kent Link Partner, however, succeeded in drafting an interesting PURE action plan for Kent, which was based on the CDG report and summed up a number of

challenges and actions. A brief overview is given here, since they had an impact on the organisation and content of the two-day CDG-visit.

challenges

- The extent to which local HEIs can contribute to increasing higher level skills within the Kent economy and leading to the development of policy options which may be taken forward in a local and national context
- Increased linkages between the research base of Kent-based HEIs and local economic policy development
- How Kent fits within the wider impact of the Thames gateway developments.
- Where strategic development partnership opportunities may exist with other PURE regions.
- How to broaden co-operative working between HEI's, Regional Government and Private and Voluntary sectors for future sustainable economic base.

These challenges are to be addressed by means of the following Pure Project Actions

- Formalise and Enhance the Kent PURE Reference Group
- Develop a Kent HEI engagement policy
- Apply the PURE Benchmarking Tool to Kent's Universities
- Identify Key PURE Priorities and Clusters
- Identify and Establish Officer Support for Kent PURE Activities
- Identify Which PURE Areas can benefit for wider support from PASCAL

It was seen in the 2010 CDG 2nd visit as a problem that the first PURE CDG visit had not been successful in bringing all the actors round the table together. Therefore not much of the Pure Action Plan had been realised. There certainly is commitment on the part of the KCC, but the Link Partner is still working in a rather isolated way; there is not yet a dedicated and committed network.

The CDG recommends therefore that the PURE network should be activated in Kent, by means of a Regional Coordinating group, especially in view of the many examples of good practice that were shown during the CDG visit in 2010.

The regional Link Partner of KCC himself has been active in the Pascal-PURE network, attends the Pascal-PURE conferences and Pascal Board meetings, and wanted to use the second visit as a fresh start for Kent in PURE.

The action plan, though well conceived and ambitious, had not been activated. In 2009 the universities presented some interesting cases, but they were rather unrelated to any more comprehensive policy covering development in and of Kent. Benchmarking too proved to be a bridge too far. The universities had been very reluctant regarding their participation in the benchmark exercise. The regional link

partner therefore wanted to use the presence of the CDG to explore the possibilities for having a benchmarking workshop.

From the meetings and discussions it became clear that Kent was suffering from the same problems as Essex - the global financial and economic crisis had the expected number of negative consequences. There are economies and cutbacks everywhere, and the new UK government is bound to economise even further because of a different approach to addressing budgetary issues. So both financial and staff constraints are very considerable, and will have negative effects.

There was also some frustration because of the missed opportunities, and because the 2009 CDG report did not show the full range of activities and the true potential in Kent. The 2009 report gave general and specific information on conditions in Kent and Essex, but could not provide much information on activities in Kent. The analysis of the situation and background in the two counties was however valid.

The focus on this year's visit, therefore, was going to be on the activities taking place in Kent. Indeed, a lot of good and interesting things are happening here. The 2010 visit was therefore to be used to introduce these to the CDG team. Basically then the meetings were set up to get the actors to meet one another, get them introduced to the PASCAL-PURE network and methodology, and inform the CDG on a number of activities in Kent.

As it happened, the two-day visit turned out to be one day with people in the public sector and one day with people from all the universities. The discussions and presentations were very interesting. The CDG felt that most of the presented projects could be consolidated within the PURE approach to create more synergy. There is huge potential in this.

At the end it was felt that a third day would really have been valuable to bring the two sectors together and actually create an integrated platform. Also, with a full three-day CDG schedule, the civil organisations, social and cultural organisations and the business sector could and should be involved.

The Kent visits and round table sessions

On 11th and 12th May, the CDG was met by a large number of enthusiastic people, all of them telling inspiring stories.

Round table public sector

The first day was organised in one of the buildings of Kent County Council (KCC) in Maidstone where a panel representing the Kent Public Sector was present to talk: John Foster, Nigel Fairburn, Sue Dunn, Sue Williams, Des Crilley.

In the afternoon a second panel was composed of Megan McKibbin, Martyn Ayre, Theresa Bruton, Emma Barrett, Hugh Martyn, Ross Gill, public sector representatives who talked about economic development, social inclusion and businesses.

The CDG team were informed of a great number of good practices. Some could serve as a model, nationally and even internationally. From the discussions it became clear that many people have a good view on what is going on, and of where the shortcomings and prospective opportunities are to be found. Many activities are project-based and lack sustainable underpinning, not well enough embedded in good governance. The PURE methodology and PURE partnerships could be of help in developing an integrated policy framework.

There is also some frustration over the cooperation modalities experienced when working with the universities. A new architecture for cooperation is to be developed, with joint strategies and planning based on an overall regional strategy.

The interviewees evidently experience a substantial difference between the conduct of the different universities.

The University of Kent is seen as more remote from the region, in the sense that they are more internationally focused (they call themselves “the European University”) and more pure research based, rather than relating to the people and the needs of Kent.

Christchurch University seems to have better relationships with the Kent public sector, and helps inject a number of projects with academic support. Christchurch is more community based, and gets involved in lifelong learning and community regeneration projects.

The University for the Creative Arts in its current form is a rather new player and needs to find its meaning in the localities where there are campuses. The CDG team was given the impression that these representatives of the Kent public sector were indeed keen on cooperating more and better with the university sector in Kent. It is also advisable to connect with the colleges of further education, since these tertiary education institutions have significant potential and a key role especially in terms of the skills development agenda.

It is clear that people from the public sector are looking for sponsors to seek out opportunities to involve and engage key personnel and decision-makers. A recurring theme in the stories was that good sound leadership is needed to secure a sustainable network of partnerships, setting objectives and making the engagement of all stakeholders and actors really effective and efficient. As it is the CDG saw that the normal tensions were present, such as problems with financial acquisition and attracting investment. However, in a number of projects it was said that there has been an improvement of the relationship between the various actors, who seem to know one another better because of the project. In the projects an added value is looked for; e.g. a regeneration project is to be paralleled with a cultural strategy. The creative industries are the fastest growing economy. They should therefore be given plenty of attentions for further development. They will generate new jobs and lead to graduate retention.

As was pointed out in the first PURE RVR report, the absence of large cities is a problem, exacerbated by the magnetic influence of the very big metropolis of nearby London. It is difficult to cluster these creative industries, and it is difficult to attract people from outside Kent to come and live there. The proximity of London is the reason for this; it is easy for people to commute. The result is that many of these businesses find it difficult to lure people to come and work for them.

There was a plea to invest in making Kent as a region more attractive by investing in cultural development: maybe there could be a master plan for the renaissance of Kent. This would require a forum and mechanisms to bring people together to plan for and to implement it.

In the conversations the importance of cooperating with people and institutions outside Kent recurred. This cooperation should take place in an international context as well as nationally. Kent is very close to the French Nord-Pas de Calais and the Flemish region in Belgium. There are contacts with these regions, the County of Kent has its own Kent Brussels House, and the University of Kent, uniquely within the UK, has a campus in Brussels. Even the excellent relationship with Denmark and the proximity of the Ruhr area could be put to good use.

Another issue that came up runs parallel to what was said earlier about attracting people to come to live and work in Kent. It is clear that in a number of sectors there are not enough students to fill the gaps that will occur in the future. Both the employers and the institutions need to speak to each other about these future employment challenges. This discussion echoed what was said in Essex. Here too there is a wish to start branding certain types of industries which will need graduates in a few years' time, in order to attract prospective students for specific fields of study - graduates that are not to be found on the labour market yet. Pipelines need to be created for these now.

The universities have to act in a more pro-active way than they are now doing. The exception is Christchurch, which shows more pro-active planning, focusing on specific professional areas, than do the University of Kent, Greenwich University and UCA. Research and Development (or Research and Demonstration) should, beside pure research, also invest in community-based research. There are examples of platforms where this already is happening, where there is mutual consultation and cooperation. These platforms should now be translated into active models and interfaces that can be used in all kinds of sectors. Leadership, direction, cross-overs and tools are required, and possibly also knowledge brokers. In order to be successful the universities must be plugged in, so that they are closer to the local community and economy. The CDG group felt that the university as an institution still acts from within a silo approach; horizontal bridges are absolutely necessary, a common language, funding and a place to cut across the silos. One of the problems is that this silo-thinking occurs also at the highest levels, including Whitehall, This makes things more difficult. Furthermore the Chinese wall between further education and higher education must be pulled down.

In order to achieve this it is necessary to create a renewed architecture, a new organisational culture and a new organisational structure, both in the institutions and in the public sector, to re-energise them through good relationships and making better

use of the shared space. A good starting point would be to set out what mutual benefits are to be won from cooperation between higher education, the public sector, and industry).

In the evening dinner conversation hosted by Alex King, deputy leader of Kent County Council there was much discussion about how future possibilities would be influenced by the new government that was announced that same evening. On a positive note it was maintained that a crisis was an opportunity to effect desirable change and should not be allowed to go to waste.

Round table university projects

On the second day the meetings took place in Canterbury. In the morning a workshop was conducted on the projects run by the universities in the South East Coastal Communities, with Liz Hoult, Stuart Ashenden, Steve Matthews, Jonathan Pratt, and Jenni Chambers from the national higher education funding council HEFCE.

This successful pathfinder project could like some other activities serve as a model for national and international projects. The idea of having pathfinder projects is very appealing: they allow us to get models for both project and issue based approaches, and can serve as a model to enable sustainable development as well. This project started from a well developed business case, allowing for a good plan. The whole project was started with an audit and a benchmark of what was being done in the region.

This is not the place to describe this project in detail, but it could become textbook material and set an example. It may be suitable to write up on the PURE Website as an example of good practice. Because it concerned the third mission of the university, it was significant that they did not start from an existing offer. In the baseline phase of the project they concentrated on three issues: the collaborative funding model, the demand side-responsive model (need-led) and the development of infrastructure and relationships to create leverage and sustainability.

Here was an example of true capacity-building executed by both the universities and the community partners. It did not rely uniquely on a (limited) number of specialists.

University benchmarking round table

In the afternoon a workshop on university PURE benchmarking activities attracted representatives of all the universities in Kent - Liz Hoult, Stuart Ashenden, Sheila Boulton, Carole Barron, Lucy Druesne and Uwe Derksen.

The workshop addressed the fact that the universities were rather reluctant to cooperate in benchmarking. A lively discussion ensued in which the philosophy and the practical use of the benchmarking tools were explained. The resistance is due to a number of factors. There were ranking and comparison issues, questions about the methodology itself, and concern at the time it takes to fill in questionnaires.

In Flanders the questionnaire was translated into a web tool. Kent will be given access to that tool, so that the participating universities will be able to fill in the benchmark questionnaire on line. This is a lot faster, and allows specific data-mining. In the discussion it became clear that it would be a good idea for Pascal PURE itself to improve their website and offer an on-line toolkit.

It was noticeable that some university partners still have questions regarding the validity and the desirability of issues such as 'knowledge economy' and 'social capital'. This clearly points to the need for a larger discussion. One of the most interesting observations in this connection was made by Carole Barron, Director of Enterprise of the University of Kent. She said that in all this it was important to find out what you are good at locally, and to develop that and bring it on a global scale. That would be the regional input for the researcher aiming for global effect.

Conclusion

This second CDG visit to Kent felt more like a first meeting with the actors. Very good examples were given and interesting observations were made by all the participants. There is a lot of potential, and a lot is happening in Kent. It was a pity that there was not a third day for a common meeting with the two groups that took part separately. These were however very good panels indeed, weakened only by the absence of the civil organisations, cultural organisations and business.

This CDG report and recommendations may serve both as a mirror and as a starting point for PURE activities in Kent. Meanwhile two actions could be planned with those were present during the two-day CDG visit:

1. Establish a Kent PURE Regional Coordinating Group (RCG) and perhaps also a wider Forum. The purpose of this is to provide a forum for stakeholders to build on the momentum from the CDG visit, provide a critical review team to use and build beyond the report, share examples of good practice more widely, and pursue collaborative working and funding opportunities.
2. Undertake PURE benchmarking for the Region and the Universities. KCC will be co-ordinating the Regional benchmark; university colleagues have already received the tool for their use.

The CDG then recommends that the stakeholders, actors and interested parties be brought together for a PURE kick-off conference day, where the framework and possibly the results of the benchmarking will be presented.

In summary, there are many good things going on. A platform and an interface need to be created where people can meet under good leadership. Representatives from the civil society organisations, cultural sector, and the business community need to be involved. The PURE clusters and the use of the international networks can be inspiration for further development. Given the sharply altered situation arising from the global financial crisis and the change of UK central government, collaborative action drawing on and focusing the resources of the universities and colleges could

enable Kent to move in new directions and undertake the new projects necessary to thrive in these new conditions.

Annex. Participants met by the CDG in Kent 11-12 May 2010

Name	Organisation	Job Title
Ashenden, Stuart	University of Greenwich	Director of Academic Planning
Ayre, Martyn	Kent CC	Senior policy manager
Barrett, Emma	Kent CC	SILK manager
Boulton, Sheila	University of Kent	External relations manager
Bruton, Theresa	Kent CC	Head of Regeneration projects
Chambers, Jenni	HEFCE	HE Policy Officer
Crilley, Des	Kent CC	Director of Community Cultural Services
Derksen, Uwe	University for the Creative Arts	
Dunn, Sue	Kent CC	Head of 14-24 Innovation Unit
Fairburn, Nigel	Kent CC	Workforce Development Manager
Foster, John	Maidstone Borough Council	Regeneration and Economic Development Manager
Gill, Ross	Kent CC	Economic Policy and Strategy Manager
Hoult, Elizabeth	Canterbury Christchurch University	Director of Regional Academic Development
Kendal, Jane	Kent CC	County Delivery manager - Gateway
King, Alex	Kent CC	Deputy Leader
Martyn, Hugh	Kent CC	Learning Account Manager
Matthews, Steve	Step Ahead Ltd	Director
McKibbin, Megan	Kent Economic Board	Executive Director
Oxlade, David	Kent CC	Head of RSI
Pratt, Jonathan	Step Ahead Ltd	Research Director
Welsh, Peter	Kent CC	PASCAL, PURE Regional link person
Wickham, Andrew	Kent CC	Lead Member for Regeneration
Williams, Sue	Kent CC	Research Manager