



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

Pascal Universities Regional Engagement (PURE)

ACTION PLAN

ESSEX, UNITED KINGDOM

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1. The PURE Project

The PURE Project seeks to evaluate the contribution of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to the economy of a given area through a benchmarking exercise which can then be used to highlight areas for development, draw comparisons with other regions within the project, and facilitate dialogue among HEIs on regional engagement and their strategic priorities.

The aim is to see whether HEIs' actions are beneficial to the region by benchmarking their activity against the processes that underpin regional competitiveness: enhancing regional infrastructure; human capital development; business development; interactive learning and social capital development; community development; cultural development; and promoting sustainability.

The PURE CDG (shared with Kent County Council) consists of Liam Jarnecki, Victor de Kosinsky, Chris Shepherd and is headed up by Michael Joris. The CEO of the Pascal Network of Universities, of which 'PURE' is one project, John Tibbitt, formerly headed up our CDG. Essex County Council's involvement is led by Fiona Bodle and Adam Bryan, with some assistance from Andrew Grenfell and other members of the Leader's Office where required. The University of Essex contacts are Janice Pittis and Nigel South. Chris Davies represents Anglia Ruskin University. It is Essex County Council, Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Essex's intention to work more closely together to ensure that the PURE project has a real transformative impact on HEI engagement with local businesses.

The PURE CDG team spend a day and a half in Essex, and saw presentations from the University of Essex, Anglia Ruskin University, Insight East and EEDA. The study period gave an accurate account of Essex's position on the engagement of HEIs in the economy and also helped put Essex in an East of England context. The outcome was an increased awareness of possibilities for cooperation with the universities on matters of economic intelligence; policy and strategic decision-making; and community involvement. It was agreed that there was considerable scope for increased cooperation between HEIs and the rest of the public sector in Essex. All three institutions directly involved in the process demonstrated their eagerness to develop a new and effective way of joint working for the benefit of Essex, its people and its businesses.

2. Resourcing Change

Both universities and Essex County Council are tasked with putting the right resource on track to ensure that a joint strategy for engagement is produced.

All parties are aware of the impact that the programme could have on the universities' regional engagement. Essex County Council is committed to ensuring the success of its involvement with the PURE project and will integrate the development of this with other new strategies relevant to the work of



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its corporate Policy, Community Planning and Regeneration directorate. The engagement of both universities in the process and the information they could contribute in support of the skills agenda means that a robust mechanism for engaging them in the decision making and policy process must be developed.

3. Looking Back at the RVR1

The RVR1 was presented to Essex County Council on the 29th June 2009 and outlined key issues for attention across the areas of university engagement, partnership working and the identification of skills needs. The report does well to bring out the very different qualities that the two universities bring to the table as well as introducing what is a very sophisticated public sector partnership network. However, more work is needed to strengthen dialogue in the county as current links between universities; local authorities and the business sector are described as being fragmented and occasional. Developing the right framework for engagement here is therefore central to our action plan.

Essex County Council is described within as being an innovative authority and it is in this context that we approach our work on the PURE agenda. We will ensure that all partners play their part in contributing to the correct positioning of Essex and, as the report suggests, we will see what can be done to increase the international competitiveness of Essex businesses, especially important in the context of the recession.

4. Action Plan

We have elected to take a unique approach to the PURE action planning process. In line with the above and with the early recommendations emanating from the initial CDG visit to Essex in April 2009, it is our intention to develop a joint prospectus of work with both universities. To support this process, we are in the process of scheduling regular meetings between representatives of all three institutions. The project is as yet untitled.

Our skeleton approach to this work is set out below, representing our 'action plan' for PURE purposes. We expect that as areas of work and projects are further developed, this will be reflected in newer iterations of the prospectus.



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ECC/ARU / UoE Joint Prospectus of Work

Version 0.1 – August 2009

Background/Rationale

The details of our approach will be developed in time.

Fundamentally we should work together to ensure that the output of graduates is matched to the skills needs of our businesses; and that we are able to bring different insights, skills sets and talents to bear in Essex, to underpin our status as an innovative county.

As a minimum, we should try to ensure that local graduates are encouraged to stay in Essex. Beyond this, we should increase the number of graduates from outside the county that stay here to work – ensuring that the opportunities are there.

How do we get there?

- Establish a memorandum of understanding as a first stage in this process by Christmas 2009.
- Use ECC's development of Integrated County Strategy to ensure consistency, work together to agree a draft engagement framework by March 2010.
- Work with PURE partner regions to benchmark and quality assure the engagement strategy and test with regional partners by May 2010.
- Finalise the strategy / engagement framework by Summer 2010 alongside a major marketing push for a tangible product which demonstrates the benefit of university and public sector engagement.
- Ensure that universities are involved in setting the strategic direction for Essex's economy, through involvement in key partnership groups including the Essex Economic Board - this has already been achieved through Prof Michael Thorne's involvement in the Essex Economic Board and the universities' involvement in the Essex Partnership.
- Encourage more take up of the opportunities already offered to influence public sector spending such as the Essex Partnership Forum and Essex Management Board.

Initial Project Areas

1. In the process of developing an economic development strategy, undertake smarter ways of investigating which skills needs are growing, where in the county and in which businesses they are arising. Also ascertain the two or three key sectors for intervention in Essex and the roles that HEIs could play in the expansion of these sectors.
We need to be cognisant of the difference between generic employability skills required by all (e.g. problem solving and project management) and the technical or discipline specific skills that will be demanded by most of our businesses.
 - Develop an approach to this in the Skills Team at ECC.
 - Pull together a joint ECC/universities team to research business need on skills in the winter 2009/2010.
 - Undertake research and have short review completed by Spring 2010.
 - Focus delivery on two key sectors within Essex and, under the auspices of the Essex Economic Assessment, align strategies to ensure that interventions are targeted appropriately. Demonstrate results by March 2010.
2. Explore the opportunities available for Essex's HEIs to encourage Essex's businesses to innovate to survive and to learn to trade internationally. In achieving this, we should engage the Essex Research



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and Development Network which is likely to have a key role in encouraging new interaction between businesses and HEIs.

- Develop a short methodology to be shared with the Essex Economic Board. Seek agreement on what this should look like, whether that includes dissemination, written materials or events.
 - Establish what the costs of this exercise might be and utilise the consultancy time of the PURE CDG team in pushing activity forward.
 - Tie this activity in to any work that Essex County Council might undertake in respect of providing integrated business support to businesses in Essex, aligned with Phase II of the Banking on Essex project.
3. Take part in the PURE sub-clusters insofar as they seem relevant to the achievements of 1 to 4 above, and are deemed relevant by the Essex Economic Board and the Integrated County Strategy.

Essex indicated that its preferred sub-clusters are:

- Regional Innovation and Renewal;
- Green Skills and Jobs; and
- Tertiary Systems.

Our partner universities have indicated that reviewing the contribution that the creative and cultural industries might make to the local economy is important. If resources permit, we could be interested in participating in the appropriate sub-cluster.

4. Utilise university research expertise to inform evidence gathering and public sector intervention planning.
5. Increase propensity of university spin outs where research expertise is complementary to the county's industry sectors and encourage local institutions to exploit IP for benefit of local economy and employment.
6. Explore international examples on how to secure economic benefits from Olympics.