

**Pascal Universities Regional Engagement (PURE)
Kent, United Kingdom
Action Plan**

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 Essex 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.

Kent County Council's involvement is led by Peter Welsh with some assistance from Ross Gill and other officer's of KCC where required.

2 PURE Resource Implications

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

At the time of the RVR1 there was limited officer resource available to support the PUR activities. This therefore highlighted one of the Key actions below. Kent also wish to pursue the possibility of drawing down PASCAL support for the PURE work.

3 Key Points from the RVR1

The RVR1 was based on a joint review of both Kent and Essex. Both Authorities had prepared regional briefing papers for the CDG: the CDG spent 1 day in Kent and a day and a half in Essex. In Kent, the team heard presentations from Professor Vickerman of Kent University on the 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, and was able to discuss a range of issues with a number of stakeholders in a plenary meeting. Unfortunately, because of sickness, a planned presentation of Kent strategies for vocational education in schools and further education could not be given. This and other areas of work will be carried forward into the action plan and RVR2.

As a result of timing and the short duration of the RVR it was difficult for Kent to mobilise a wholly representative sample of actors. This is strongly reflected in the RVR1 which only skims the surface of activity in Kent.

However a number of points raised in the RVR1 have been central to the formation of priorities in this Action Plan (see below). These include:

- Varied and contrasting level of engagement across Kent HEIs
- Recent growth in community based campuses (e.g. Thanet, Medway and Folkestone)
- The challenge of responding to a selective secondary education system in Kent
- Difficulty in engaging with the business sector in a polycentric region
- Policy gap in regional engagement of HEIs – where will the leadership come from?

4. Action Plan

Draft PURE Action plan for Kent Oct 2009

Rationale

Fundamentally we should work together to ensure that the output of the Universities of Kent are matched to the needs of our businesses and public services.

Key Challenges

- a) The extent to which local HEIs can contribute to increasing higher level skills within the Kent economy (for example by enabling increased participation from within the existing workforce) and leading to the development of policy options which may be taken forward in a local and national context
- b) 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.

Draft PURE Project Actions

1. Formalise and Enhance the Kent PURE Reference Group

Following the findings and recommendations of RVR1, we will build upon the membership of the Kent PURE Reference Group (KPRG) to include wider representation from organisations but also a targeted approach to the individuals representing those organisations.

2. Develop a Kent HEI engagement policy

A formal policy to focus activity within HEI engagement in Kent may go some way to galvanising the current lack of visibility of action in this area.

3. Apply the PURE Benchmarking Tool to Kent's Universities

The RVR1 for Kent found that there was little to relate in terms of substantial regional engagement activity. This does not resonate with the views of the KPRG, hence the application of the benchmarking tool is of central importance to furthering PURE work in Kent. The KPRG will provide a clearer picture of evidence to support this view in preparation for RVR2.

4. Identify Key PURE Priorities and Clusters

The KPRG will establish which areas of PURE are of most relevance to the Kent situation during the study period.

5. Identify and Establish Officer Support for Kent PURE Activities

The RVR1 process highlighted the fundamental need for Kent to have dedicated resource to support the implementation of PURE.

6. Identify Which PURE Areas can benefit for wider support from PASCAL

Explore how the PASCAL networks can assist Kent in filling gaps in skills and knowledge that relate to achieving PURE outcomes.

Endnote

The six actions outlined above are interdependent and key to ensuring the Kent receives the greatest returns on its investment in PURE. The RVR2 (APRIL 2010) will serve as a measure of how far we have achieved the above.