

# Kent Connects - A Partnership Success Story

## Case Study: Shared Learning

### At A Glance:

#### Project Name

Kent Connects MBA Cohort Programme

#### Implementation Partners

Local authorities partnered with Kent Business School @ University of Kent (KBS) MBA students

#### Project

Kent Connects and KBS are working in collaboration to bring together partners with MBA students on a range of countywide projects.

#### Key Challenges

Finding a common language and sharing expectations between project sponsors and students.

#### Solution and Services

A prototype scheme was developed by Kent County Council's Technology Transformation team with KBS. This formed the basis of the current programme.

#### Implementation Highlights

Students are working on real topics and understanding the issues affecting local government. Partners are getting the benefit of critical thinking and a new perspective to difficult problems.

#### Key Benefits

- Local authorities have gained specialist skills and expertise that would otherwise be costly
- Students have had an opportunity to gain practical experience of the public sector and develop their skills.

#### Future Development

- Upon project completion in September 2011, the scheme will be reviewed so that improvements can be made to next year's activities. This learning will be shared across the partnership.

"At a time of severe resource and financial constraints, the MBA cohort programme enables Kent Connects partners access to some fresh thinking to help resolve real, significant issues within the public sector. In turn, students are gaining valuable experience in some of the difficulties and issues facing local authorities today."

*Carol Patrick,  
Head of Kent Connects*

### Business Students Connect with County's Local Authorities

Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the Kent Business School @ University of Kent are currently undertaking joint projects with a range of local authorities from across the county, under a new scheme aimed at transferring business skills.

The initiative sees KBS and Kent Connects working in collaboration to bring together partners and MBA students on a wide range of projects. The MBA Cohort

Programme enables partners to access a range of expertise from the students. In turn, partners provide the students with invaluable insight and experience of the public sector.



### Unlocking Innovation

KBS is one of the leading business schools in the UK. It provides individuals and organisations with the tools and knowledge to unlock innovation within the regional, national and international communities.

As part of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, students have worked on different projects and activities to gain vital practical experience. A prototype project was developed by Kent County Council's Technology Transformation Team in partnership with KBS, which tested out how further joint research projects could be developed. Using the lessons learnt from the prototype, Kent Connects established an MBA cohort programme which was aligned with organisational priorities. A key lesson has been the need to incorporate a common language and shared expectation between project sponsors and students.

## The Kent MBA Programme

A dozen projects commenced in June 2011, with one student dedicated to each. Each topic was scheduled for delivery throughout the summer months with completion in September. The MBA Cohort Programme's projects include Applying Systems Thinking in the Public Sector, Social Return on Investment, and Income Generation. Another example is directed at 'Open Kent', an initiative developed following national success at the innovate08 wards. This project enables partners and customers to access and visualise a range of publicly available data. A student is working with the lead partners to analyse how entrepreneurs could make use of the data on Open Kent to develop smart applications. "This programme, developed with KBS, shows an innovative model of co-operative working. Together we are co-designing research for new models of commissioning and using digital technology, while making the best use of our local students," said Project Officer, Noel Hatch. Partners are also reaping financial benefits: the value of the work being undertaken by the students is estimated at nearly £90,000.

## A Dynamic Learning Environment

The MBA Cohort Programme is working to develop a pool of talented individuals and give them an integrated approach to education, allowing them to gain practical experience which is pivotal to their future success. It provides students with the flexibility to acquire valuable knowledge of the strategic and operational environment in a specific area of business within the public sector. It also gives them the opportunity to form mutually supportive networks that may benefit them throughout their professional careers. In return, organisations are being linked with talented students who are providing specialist knowledge and expertise at minimal cost.

"This is an innovative programme of activities designed to provide a meaningful and critical insight into the strategic and relational environment of the public sector. The projects provide a collaborative approach for students to grow tangible business connections and gain a deeper understanding of the challenges public sector organisations face, as well as sharpen their leadership skills."

*Rajendra S Shirolé, Kent Business School,  
Director of Kent MBA Programmes.*

## Connecting People

Upon completion of the students' projects in September 2011, work will commence to review the scheme. Kent Connects and KBS will evaluate outcomes and will use the information when developing the 2012 Cohort offer. It is anticipated that this initial programme will form the basis of future initiatives between Kent Connects and KBS.

*Kent Connects is an award-winning partnership of all Kent and Medway authorities, Kent Fire & Rescue Service and Kent Police, a powerful alliance of public service providers. Together we tackle the technological barriers to the joining up and sharing of public services through co-ordinated research and development, commissioning and procurement and networking and training events. We also provide a number of partnership services.*

## Further Information:

for further information, please visit [www.kentconnects.gov.uk](http://www.kentconnects.gov.uk)  
or email the Kent Connects Partnership Office at [enquire@kentconnects.gov.uk](mailto:enquire@kentconnects.gov.uk).