FOREWORD

We are facing challenging times ahead - politically, socially and economically.

The University of Kent is an anchor institution in Kent and Medway. The Kent Business School plays a leading role within the University in monitoring and researching business-related developments, taking part in the public debate and providing academic expertise where we can. The University has an excellent track record in advising businesses locally, nationally and internationally. We are here to help.

Now, more than ever, there is a need for the business community, local government and the academic world to discuss and work together in finding solutions to pressing issues. Through this three-way cooperation, we facilitate and help achieve innovative thinking - and work out the best ways forward for our county.

The Kent Business Summit in 2018 was the first event of this scale in Kent to do exactly that. Kent Business School has worked closely together with the Federation of Small Businesses and the Institute of Directors to create an event where businesses, government and academics can meet, exchange ideas, forge new relationships and sustain economic growth in the uncertain years ahead of us.

This was no one-off event. The second edition of the Kent Business Summit will take place on Friday the 11th of January 2019: save the date in your diary!

Let us keep talking and developing the ideas arising in the meantime. Please refer to the list of key summit-related events in 2018 on p. 18.

Special thanks go to Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP for their financial support to the summit.

Professor Karen Cox
Vice-Chancellor
University of Kent

Professor Martin Meyer
Director
Kent Business School

‘A really great event - very helpful, enjoyable and thought-provoking’.
Feedback in summit survey
University of Kent

Pledge

The University of Kent welcomes the Government’s Industrial Strategy, launched on 27 November 2017 by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. It supports the idea of developing strong partnerships between universities, industry and the public sector by forming ‘innovation clusters’ that can address the needs of local innovative businesses and contribute to regional development.

The University is committed to educating the next generation of students with the skills required to help the UK thrive. It will continue to explore how its mix of courses and modules can best provide the sought-after skills needed by the business community and to ensure that its graduates have the employability skills that they need. University research explores ways in which it can contribute to the economic growth of the nation, but also of the region in which it is located.

The University is an active economic actor in its own right, adding over £700mln in GVA to the economy of the southeast. It is working to build capacity within Kent and Medway in a range of areas. There is a new centre for Higher and Degree Apprenticeships at Medway; it has a partnership with the KM Group to deliver the region’s only local TV station; and it has just been successful in a joint bid with Canterbury Christ Church University for a new medical school that will help improve healthcare services across the county.

Kent Business School

Actions

Against this background, Kent Business School will be taking forward the following actions from the summit:

Skills development

1. Kent Business School, together with other University departments, to explore the development of an innovative Kent leadership training programme in partnership with business and local government.

2. Kent Business School to explore how its international students/graduates (alumni) can be the language/cultural ‘bridge’ between (Kent) businesses and export markets in Europe/Asia/Africa.

Research related to Kent economic growth

1. Kent Business School to continue research into the internationalisation of Kent businesses.

2. Kent Business School to help develop a market positioning strategy for Kent and to provide input to an updated marketing message(s) drawing investors, businesses, commuters and visitors to the County.

3. Kent Business School to liaise with local government in identifying (digital) infrastructure requirements for Kent necessary to stimulate innovation and economic development in the county.

Innovation and education

1. Kent Business School to be a creative environment for businesses/start-ups through its ASPIRE project to encourage entrepreneurial learning.

Networking and facilitation

1. Kent Business School to run a series of Business Soundbites networking events, following on from the summit outcomes (for dates, see p. 18)

2. Kent Business School to host collective partner bodies working in economic development (KCC, LEP, sector bodies and others) at the School (Canterbury and Medway) and pending theme of discussion, invite academic experts from across the University to provide advice and to act as sounding boards.

Very enjoyable and constructive Summit which positioned the University at the centre of the local growth/Brexit debate, particularly in its approach to business and enterprise. Key will be to ensure some of the points from the Summit are now progressed.

What needs to happen now is for there to be ways into action. Rather than wait another 12 months, it would be good to see things happening; links being developed and further meetings happening straight away. Look forward to the next Summit.

Feedback in summit survey
Federation of Small Businesses - FSB

Pledge
Following the first Kent Business Summit, FSB Kent and Medway pledges to:
1. Engage with the Kent SME community via a minimum of 50 face-to-face networking and training events throughout 2018
2. Share FSB reports and policy recommendations with the Kent business community and decision-making bodies
3. Act as a collaborative partner with Kent local authorities and stakeholder organisations for the benefit of the SME community

Practical recommendations
FSB recommends that local authorities and MPs plan for the creation of a supportive business environment for self-employed and the SME through, for example:

1. Encouraging and enabling an increase in flexible ‘hub’ office space for micro and start-up businesses
2. Increasing the communication of funding available, for instance via the Kent and Medway Growth Hub
3. Requesting Leadership and Management Champions are sourced and available via the Kent and Medway Growth Hub
4. Pushing for political decision-making with regards to Operation Stack and Kent lorry parks

Institute of Directors - IoD

Nationally
The Institute of Directors is committed to its continued national campaign for:
1. More investment into lifelong learning in acknowledgement of huge technological and demographic changes
2. Increased broadband access across the UK (businesses need access to 10 giga bits per second)
3. A smooth Brexit transition, including clarity for business on export and import arrangements and access to the EU labour market

Regionally
The Institute of Directors – Kent branch will continue to work on the innovation and research agenda for the county, and push for a new fresh USP for Kent.

Kent’s economy is predominantly driven by small and medium enterprises (SME).
Key sectors of economic activity relate to business administration and support services, construction and other professional services. This provides an interesting and diverse mix of activities, which is however not always supported by generic policies of regional economic development. These industries require specific support actions and the development of an infrastructure that enables them to fulfil their potential.

Kent Business Population and Characteristics
Building on data from the Office of National Statistics and more specifically the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR), this section offers an overview of Kent’s economy. The three tables below present Kent’s business population by size (in terms of employment - Table 1 and turnover - Table 2) and by economic activity (Table 3). In parallel, we present the same data for the overall UK business population to establish whether Kent’s profile differs significantly from the rest of the UK.

It is evident from Table 1 that approximately 90% of companies belong to the micro category, employing less than 10 employees. Despite Kent’s overall profile being similar to that of the UK, it is worth highlighting that the proportion of large companies in the region is below the UK one and their total number is below 200. This creates a challenging mix for policy makers, as the need for support of micro and small enterprises can be quite different from company to company, and therefore the design and implementation of generic support policies might not be effective.

Table 1 Business distribution by employment size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count of Enterprises</th>
<th>Proportion of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: 0-4</td>
<td>1,985,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: 5-9</td>
<td>292,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: 10-19</td>
<td>148,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: 20-49</td>
<td>78,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: 50-99</td>
<td>25,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: 100-249</td>
<td>14,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: 250+</td>
<td>9,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment size band: Total</td>
<td>2,554,510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ONS – IDBR 2016
Table 2 Business distribution by turnover (Thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count of Enterprises</th>
<th>Proportion of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £0-49</td>
<td>433,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £50-99</td>
<td>604,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £100-249</td>
<td>795,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £250-499</td>
<td>309,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £500-999</td>
<td>181,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £1000-1999</td>
<td>103,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £2000-4999</td>
<td>69,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £5000-9999</td>
<td>26,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £10000-49999</td>
<td>22,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: £50000+</td>
<td>7,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover size band: Total</td>
<td>2,554,510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ONS – IDBR 2016

Table 3 Business distribution by economic activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIC07</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Kent</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Kent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01-03 : Agriculture, forestry &amp; fishing</td>
<td>147,600</td>
<td>2,295</td>
<td>5.78%</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05-39 : Production</td>
<td>146,320</td>
<td>3,260</td>
<td>5.73%</td>
<td>5.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-43 : Construction</td>
<td>301,855</td>
<td>9,120</td>
<td>11.82%</td>
<td>15.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 : Motor trades</td>
<td>73,460</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>2.88%</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 : Wholesale</td>
<td>103,985</td>
<td>2,575</td>
<td>4.07%</td>
<td>4.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 : Retail</td>
<td>192,395</td>
<td>4,135</td>
<td>7.53%</td>
<td>7.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49-53 : Transport &amp; Storage (incl. postal)</td>
<td>92,860</td>
<td>2,165</td>
<td>3.64%</td>
<td>3.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-56 : Accommodation &amp; food services</td>
<td>148,020</td>
<td>3,335</td>
<td>5.79%</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58-63 : Information &amp; communication</td>
<td>206,960</td>
<td>4,170</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-66 : Finance &amp; insurance</td>
<td>52,435</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68 : Property</td>
<td>90,990</td>
<td>1,790</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
<td>3.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-75 : Professional, scientific &amp; technical</td>
<td>456,600</td>
<td>10,420</td>
<td>17.95%</td>
<td>17.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-82 : Business administration &amp; support services</td>
<td>208,465</td>
<td>5,070</td>
<td>8.16%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84 : Public administration &amp; defence</td>
<td>6,985</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>0.27%</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 : Education</td>
<td>41,850</td>
<td>1,075</td>
<td>1.64%</td>
<td>1.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-88 : Health</td>
<td>113,475</td>
<td>2,590</td>
<td>4.44%</td>
<td>4.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99 : Arts, entertainment, recreation &amp; other</td>
<td>168,255</td>
<td>3,650</td>
<td>6.59%</td>
<td>6.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97 : Total</td>
<td>2,554,510</td>
<td>58,935</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ONS – IDBR 2016

From an economic activity perspective, Table 3 offers some interesting findings. Services, in the form of professional, scientific and technical activities are the biggest sector in Kent’s regional economy. Companies engaged in this activity represent over 17% of the total number of businesses. This is followed by construction at 15%, a proportion that is substantially higher from the national profile. Finally, Business Administration and Support services is the third biggest sector with a proportion close to 9%. The above indicates a significant reliance of the local economy on services.

It is evident by the three tables that Kent’s economic activity profile does not substantially differ from the overall profile of United Kingdom. Kent is a region where the vast majority of the firms belong to the micro category (less than 10 employees).

Construction together with professional, scientific and technical services account for more than a third of the companies and therefore this regional profile should drive the regional economic policy design and implementation.

Interestingly the group of large companies is further reduced to 125 from 195 indicating that the actual population of large companies in the region is much smaller than the one estimated looking at employment. A significant number of companies has a very small turnover overall ranging from £0 to £49,000. Almost 15% of the companies in the region belong to this group. These tend to be entrepreneurial companies of a single owner trader. The largest group of companies in the region consists of those generating an annual turnover between £100K and £240K. The proportion of these companies in the region is slightly higher than the overall UK profile.
A study for Kent County Council in 2016 has found that just over a third of the companies located in the county reported some engagement in export-oriented activity.

Whilst this is relatively high and does not compare with the data provided by previous studies, there is no recent benchmark study which offers levels of internationalisation through exports at the county level (i.e. Kent) for the UK. In the same study a large group of companies consider exporting, though, only a small part of their overall activities with almost a third of them noting that the contribution of exports to their turnover does not exceed 10%. However, 36% of companies in the same sample maintain that export activities contribute to 50% or more of their turnover, with 10% of Kent firms stating 90% and higher dependence on exports. These firms tend to come from manufacturing, professional, science, and information and technology sectors.

**Key markets for exporters**

The findings of the same study regarding the key markets are unquestionably worth comment, especially in the context of the decision of the UK to leave the EU and the Single Market. Over 80% of the companies considered the EU as their key market for internationalisation, followed by the United States and United Arab Emirates. Emerging markets, such as China and India, are still relatively low on the list. This finding demonstrates the significant importance of EU markets for Kent located companies.

**Foreign Direct Investment in Kent**

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the county picked up in 2015 and there was a significant slowdown in FDI activity in 2016 reflecting the overall uncertainty following the EU referendum. Whilst FDI in the UK is still at its lowest point (data source FDI Markets.com) Kent seems to be bucking the trend and showing positive signs of FDI.

Figure 1 shows the amount of FDI projects in the county since 2014 in number of projects, jobs created and capital expenditure. It is evident that all three measures show a positive trend in 2017. This investment is primarily driven by retail projects in the region by a number of multinationals. This is verified by the sectoral composition of FDI presented in Figure 2. Retail trade accounts for over 42% of all investments, showing the significant presence and trust of FDI in the future growth of the local market.
Summary of discussions

We are living in a world that is volatile, unpredictable, chaotic, and anarchic (VUCA). A world that requires from its business leaders the ability to change, transform, and be prepared for any future disruptions.

Effective leadership should provide vision and guidance, looking at the longer term (What markets will they be looking at, what products will they be making, who will they be employing and how will they be employing them?) rather than just pursuing short-term goals. Similarly, in order to achieve sustainable economic development in these uncertain times, we need strong but empathetic leaders who underwrite ethical trading and the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda. Leaders have an important role to play in communicating a clear message to all stakeholders.

Adapting the workplace to a new digital world provides an additional challenge for business leaders. Concerns were raised about the lack of government investment in digital infrastructure due to the focus on Brexit rather than the country. Add to this the shrinking pot for tech investments in certain industries, such as the food industry, due to the higher cost of imported goods. Lagging tech investment will place UK companies at a disadvantage internationally, whereas digitally savvy companies may be able to circumvent some of the trade barriers that Brexit will put up. It is important to embrace technology despite or, more aptly put, because of Brexit.

The changing workforce is both an opportunity and a challenge for business leaders. Millennials and digital natives, the generation born after 2000, are now entering the workplace. How do leaders harness their digital skills and empower this new generation of employees to achieve success for the business - especially when changing jobs every three years has become the norm? Does this snowflake generation need a more meritocratic, touchy-feely approach, or does it make common business sense to step away from the traditional leadership role and work in a less hierarchical way?

Action points

Developing a new leadership programme

In an uncertain world, we need visionary leaders with a fresh approach to corporate governance. Ethical leadership, Corporate Social Responsibility and the promotion of a less hierarchical organisational structure should be promoted as ways to ensure sustainable economic development. Educating (future) business leaders should not just take place in a university setting, but could be done through an apprenticeship-type training programme or take the form of, less expensive, (digital?) peer-to-peer business mentoring.

A business leader almost has to have a dual personality. On the one hand, he has to be a tyrant, and sometimes he has to be the touchy-feely leader. The leader is the person who can play more than one instrument and knows when to play what.

Participant to the round table discussion

Summary of discussions

Internationalisation, through exports and/or foreign direct investment, is an area that will be influenced substantially by Brexit.

Even without Brexit, internationalisation is a challenging process for most businesses, due to its significant resource commitment, a lack of knowledge of new markets and the differing regulatory and cultural frameworks in foreign countries. Looking to the future, there are four key areas that require consideration when supporting businesses to internationalise successfully:

1. The first key area to take into consideration is the cost of labour in the UK and accessing skilled labour. Kent exporting businesses, and in particular SMEs, generally have difficulties finding and retaining skilled staff. Few candidates come from, or have graduated in Kent, and most are reluctant to move to the county or stay here for a long period. There is much competition with other parts of the UK and the EU. Some sectors struggle more than others. Skilled engineers, for example, are in huge demand in the manufacturing sector, but very difficult to find.

For exporting companies, recruiting skilled staff with additional language skills and local knowledge of foreign markets is a logical step - but even more difficult. With English considered the world language of trade, the British often have little incentive to learn another language. How can businesses tap into the University’s cultural and language diversity and use this to their advantage?

Participant to the round table discussion

The second area to take into consideration is the need for in-market intelligence. Businesses in Kent are still insufficiently aware of the internationalisation support available from government (UKTI) or business support organisations such as the Chambers of Commerce. In addition, they often do not know how to access cross-border networks. These networks act as risk-sharing mechanisms when entering a new market and can thereby help businesses to internationalise. Whilst these networks take time to be established, maintaining and developing them can help to build knowledge about markets, manage risks, understand a business culture and most importantly develop relationships.

The third area to consider is the complexity of the regulatory environment. For small and medium enterprises wishing to internationalise, keeping track of changes and new regulations to ensure ongoing compliance across the world can be resource intensive. Especially the uncertainty surrounding the regulatory environment post-Brexit presents a significant obstacle to long-term planning. It remains to be seen how much new legislation will be integrated into British law and how will this impact on UK’s ability to trade. Businesses at the round table said they would welcome any help from trade bodies on government regulatory affairs and customs processes.

The fourth and final area concerns difficulties finding and accessing business support funding. The constantly shifting nature of government support is problematic and finding is not always visible to companies. In addition, funding is often rather limited in size and time.

Skills development at the University of Kent

The University of Kent should work together with industry/industry bodies in designing relevant (extra-)curricular courses in an attempt to close the skills gap in Kent. Furthermore, industry should offer practical experience, not just in modules (guest lectures, case studies) but also through placements and internships. Businesses could for example recruit students to help with trade fairs. Students need real-world experience before entering the job market. Finally, the University and local government should explore together how international graduates could be a language and cultural ‘bridge’ between Kent businesses and global markets.

Clearer communication on export advice and available funding

It is important to understand from UKTI what export topics are of interest, and to respond to that. Local government should establish clear communication channels with the local business community to be able to respond effectively to changes in needs but also ensure that the support offered is accessible in a simple way and is relevant to the problems faced.

Action Points

If you want business in China to happen, you will make it happen. I don’t think you can wait around and see what is going to happen with Brexit, you just need to get on with life.

Participant to the round table discussion
**ROUND TABLE / INNOVATION PENDING BREXIT**

**Summary of discussions**

Innovation is fostered by the creation of a collective knowledge pool. The education system, especially at HE level does enable innovative thinking. This process should not stop at the university gates.

Educational institutions, business and government should support the establishment of creative environments, to enable people to be creative throughout their professional career. Innovation is particularly important for younger generations.

Round table participants stated that young people are proud to be innovative, and this is excellent news for the future of the UK economy. The calibre of people coming to the UK enhances knowledge development in universities and consequently in businesses.

Brexit, on the other hand, creates uncertainty, which is stalling innovation activity and is due to a lack of available EU labour, and the uncertainty created by Brexit, other industries such as construction and hospitality are also facing challenges due to a lack of available EU labour, and the unwillingness of UK workers to take up certain jobs.

**Action Points**

**Developing/supporting creative environments**

Developing the right environment to be creative - whether this is the ASPIRE space at Kent Business School, Innovation Centres across the County, or a corporate mentality that encourages creative thinking in the workplace - is a commonly shared responsibility of businesses, local government and education providers. Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors and the Federation of Small Business play an important role in raising awareness to opportunities that enable the creation of environments fostering and facilitating innovative thinking.

Creativity in the workplace is about allowing the individual to think outside the box and question certain working procedures. Companies have the responsibility to create the right environment for their teams to be creative, but complex corporate structures often work against this. A too stringent focus on compliance suffocates innovative thinking.

The right level of balance has to be found, where we follow regulations and rules without these eventually becoming barriers to creativity and innovation.

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**ROUND TABLE / THE UK WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE**

**Summary of discussions**

Substantial work is required to shape the UK workforce of the future. Simply trying to ‘catch up’ on skills development could be a waste of time. What is actually required is a leap-frog jump to get ahead of the game.

The constant changes in education regulations and systems – the closing of technical colleges, the push to ‘study at a university’, the change in the school leaving age – has not helped the development of a skilled labour force. The UK is facing huge skills gaps on the one hand, whereas the number of university graduates keeps increasing. Are we doing something wrong?

With the introduction of robotics, education in engineering in particular has to be a key focus area. The economy will need more engineers and this is currently a sector with the biggest skills gap, especially in mechanical engineering.

Brexit and the associated uncertainties related to available labour creates a further challenge for the labour dependent ‘blue collar’ sector. Both the agricultural and horticultural sectors in Kent, for example, have struggled to hire sufficient seasonal workers in the last six months. Other industries such as construction and hospitality are also facing challenges due to a lack of available EU labour, and the unwillingness of UK workers to take up certain jobs.

Emergency training must be available to fill any skills gaps as and when they occur. Businesses must take an active role in ensuring their employees are up to speed with the 21st century workforce.

Training-on-the-job is another way to shape the workforce of the future. Current training schemes, however, are not always effective and efficient. Apprenticeships for example may be a good way to train youngsters whilst employed, but the uptake so far is low, and the scheme has not had a discernible impact as yet. Training should also take into consideration the nature of the workforce. Currently, a significant number of new entrants to the job market are Millennials. Their work and career expectations differ significantly from previous generations. Millennials expect rapid promotions and pay increases, have limited loyalty to an employer and hop from one job to the next, which makes the implementation of skills development programmes a tricky one.

**Action Points**

Businesses to rethink how they recruit and retain skilled workers

To address the challenges managers are facing in ‘selling’ their business to prospective employees and attracting and retaining committed workers, we need to look at ways to change the mind-set of young graduates. Working locally should be made more exciting. In addition to attracting young people, businesses must provide opportunities to its existing workforce to ‘up-skill’ – existing staff should not be excluded from training and development opportunities. Government should provide incentives to businesses for training and upskilling their existing employees, and offer retention schemes.

Revising the apprenticeship scheme

The current apprenticeship system needs redefining and should be marketed more effectively. The government should consider tax breaks to companies who take on apprentices, instead of utilising complex mechanisms such as the apprenticeship levy.

**Summary and Actions**

**Speaker**

Jane Ollis, IOD Kent, Keynote Speaker

'I want everybody in this room to be really excited and optimistic about creating a stronger and more innovative future for Kent business. We should look at a different way of working together. What we do need is the connectivity between us. Research suggests that the more opportunities you have to meet with different people to discuss different ideas, the more likely you are to come up with fresh solutions to problems'.

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*Business owner during round table discussion*
What is its USP

Tunbridge Wells? Kent is diverse and has political capital: is it Canterbury, Maidstone or vast, with old market towns dotted around start-ups and hospitality. Its cultural heritage from agriculture to manufacturing, techie home to a wide variety of businesses, ranging Kent is a patchwork. Its geography is a mix of Fragmentation the Kent road network is not good even without destinations, especially rural ones. The happens when tourists get off the train? only covers a few areas of the county. What is not recognised in the pricing structure. capacity on the public transport network that threefold: an exciting place to work, live and/or visit are However, the challenges of presenting Kent as appropriate time to change people’s perception of Kent. Presenting the region in an exciting way will help to draw more people – tourists, businesses, residents - to the county. However, the challenges of presenting Kent as an exciting place to work, live and/or visit are thwarted:

Infrastructure

Kent is a car-intensive county. There is capacity on the public transport network that is not recognised in the pricing structure. High-Speed One has been a success, but only covers a few areas of the county. What happens when tourists get off the train? They are dependent on cars to get to other destinations, especially rural ones. The Kent road network is not good even without Operation Stack. Congestion is a regular problem.

Fragmentation

Kent is a patchwork. Its geography is a mix of rural countryside, small cities and seaside. It is home to a wide variety of businesses, ranging from agriculture to manufacturing, techie start-ups and hospitality. Its cultural heritage is vast, with old market towns dotted around the county but no clear social, cultural or political capital: is it Canterbury, Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells? Kent is diverse and has a lot to offer, but struggles to define the collective. What is its USP?

Information about the county is similarly fragmented. Where do potential investors, visitors, residents go to find out information about Kent? The absence of a centralised ‘information hub’ and the plethora of organisations, government bodies and quangos acting on behalf of the county, makes the presentation of Kent’s commercial, social and cultural opportunities seem somewhat disjointed. We must combine efforts and present our collective ambitions or we will continue to be overlooked by central government, and receive ‘crumbs’.

Better cooperation between organisations acting for or on behalf of the county

The different organisations, government bodies and quangos representing the county – Kent County Council, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), individual Local Authorities. Locate in Kent, Produced in Kent and Visit Kent, to name but a few - should work much closer together and streamline their strategies, policies, plans and communication messages to external audiences. For example by creating a central hub for information and communication for tourists, businesses, investors and (future) residents.

Naming the white elephant in the room

The challenges surrounding the Kent infrastructure are multi-faceted, and will only become more complex post-Brexit. Stakeholders seem reluctant to start a discussion on possible ways to tackle these challenges. Existing problems regarding the physical and the digital infrastructure should be addressed before they become unsolvable.

This report builds on the findings arising from the Kent Business Summit 2018 that took place at Kent Business School, University of Kent on the 12th of January 2018.

Interactions between the three summit parties (Triple Helix: businesses, government and academics) took place in thematic round table discussions covering export, innovation, leadership, workforce of the future and putting Kent on the map. These individual sessions were followed by a plenary session with summaries of the key findings of the round tables, four presentations on related topics and a Q&A session.

This report highlights the key findings from each of the thematic sessions and links these to the discussions that followed in the plenary session. It provides a summary of the discussions as well as key actions highlighted at each roundtable through textual analysis of the discussion transcripts.

Transcripts of all roundtable discussions as well as the plenary session form the body of textual data collected for this report. The textual data ‘we mean ‘any text, which constitutes a relevant and necessary source material for answering the questions one is interested in’ (Alexa, 1997). There are many kinds of textual data that can be used for sociological text analysis, such as open responses to questionnaires, newspaper editorials, reports, company annual reports, memos, newspaper reports, public speeches, and so forth (Alexa 1997).

The methodology used in this exploratory research is of a qualitative nature. We follow an inductive approach in order to gain an understanding of the key themes emerging from each roundtable. The analysis of the data involved coding of the transcripts in order to identify consistently emerging patterns in the discussions. More specifically the research used a focus coding research method, whereby the researcher examines all the data in a category, compares each piece of data with all other pieces and finally builds a clear working definition of each concept, which is then given a CODE (Charmaz, 1983, page 117).

This approach ensured that a systematic analysis of all discussions took place and we have removed any potential bias in the reporting of the key findings and the consequent actions.

The coding and analysis of the data was done through NVivo, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software package. The key themes emerging from the codes correlate to key discussions and actions that appeared frequently in the different roundtables. Contents analysis of the transcripts and the coding process is based on a categorisation scheme, where words or phrases are given a code. The focused coding requires the researcher to develop a set of analytical categories rather than just labelling data in a typical fashion. Modifying code themes is also an important aspect of this method.

References


APPROACH TO THE REPORT
DEVELOPING THE SUMMIT THEMES IN THE YEAR AHEAD

24 April 2018  Kent Food and Drink - Conference
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent

2 May 2018  Business Soundbites event: The Curiosity Cost
Allowing your employees to be curious
Business Soundbites on location @the Turner Contemporary, Margate

10 May 2018  Guest lecture: Transformational Leadership through Responsible Management
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent

14 May 2018  Smart Eco City: Canterbury 2050 - Conference
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent

16 May 2018  Kent Vision Live

1 June 2018  ZC Live Social Media Training day, Strood Academy

7 June 2018  Business Soundbites event: Cyber security
How safe is your business?
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent

28 June 2018  Summit summer sessions
Putting Kent on the Map: working towards a Kent Industrial Strategy
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent

12 Sept 2018  Business Soundbites event: Female Leadership in Small/Large Organisations: Is the future female?
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent

21 November 2018  Business Soundbites event: Man and machine: the end of an era?
Are robots taking over the workplace?
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent

11 January 2019  Kent Business Summit 2019
Kent Business School, Sibson building, University of Kent
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