



## KENT CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITY

### PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

July 2010

#### Context

Kent is a large diverse authority serving nearly 1.4 million people across 18 towns and 400 villages  
 It is a largely rural county, with one of the longest coastlines of any authority.  
 Ethnically the county is predominantly white (Minority Ethnic Groups make up only 3.1% and are based largely around the Dartford & Gravesham areas)  
 Nearly 1 in 4 children live in 1 parent families. 14.7% of children live in "workless" homes.

#### Summary

This case study illustrates how an authority led approach to providing Study Support for young people for 3 consecutive Saturday mornings on a termly basis has evolved over time to include extensive partnership working with a variety of private sector companies of varying sizes. The scheme, partially developed and managed by Kent Children's University (KCU), is entitled "Learning Destinations" and has resulted in reduced costs, high-quality activities and a "win-win ship" for all stakeholders. In 2008/09 Kent Children's University offered places to over 4000 young people. It offered informal, but structured, learning opportunities. However, with the increasingly competitive extended services market it became clear that costs had to be reduced and choice expanded – without a loss of quality. KCU launched a small-scale pilot, "Learning in the Wild" This proved to be very popular and has since evolved into Learning Destinations, a UK-wide scheme, offered by national CU which accredits out-of-school-hours learning.

<b>Target Group / Key Stage:</b>	<b>Venues:</b>
Children 7-14	Various tourist attractions county wide
<b>Local Authority :</b>	<b>School /Centre:</b>
Kent County Council	Kent Children's University

### **What was it like before the work and why was the work undertaken?**

Kent has 610 schools. There are 100 Secondary Schools, 3 Middle Schools, 1 City Technology College, 1 Academy, 470 primary Schools, 1 Nursery, 25 Special Schools and 10 PRUs in the county.

Out of school hours provision was mainly provided by school teachers offering the more traditional football, netball and drama clubs for pupils who attended their own school only.

In 1997 KCU began offering out-of-school-hours courses on Saturday mornings hosted by local schools. The scheme was supported by the Big Lottery Fund and was offered in over a dozen areas of the county.

As time progressed the offer was extended to KS1-KS3 and families, frequently with no charge to participate.

With the advent of the extended services agenda many more providers emerged and the market became more competitive. This led to funding for the LA run KCU scheme becoming increasingly harder to obtain and there was a risk that the scheme could be wound-up due to falling numbers and rising costs.

### **What was planned?**

In the autumn term of 2008 it was clear that radical solutions were needed to ensure KCU could continue. Many of the long-term sponsors of the scheme (local borough councils and school cluster groups) reduced or removed their funding. On a trip to Manchester the KCU Manager came to the conclusion that to ensure sustainability the scheme had to dramatically reduce costs. The biggest costs for KCU were tutor wages and venue hire charges. If these could be removed then the scheme would have the chance to continue. However, with no tutors or venues what was actually left?

Feedback received from previous KCU participants was, on the whole, positive. However, a theme was seen to re-occur. This was that participants enjoyed the informal nature of the lessons, and many clearly gained from the experience, but why were they always held on Saturdays, and why did they have to take place in schools? Children were in school Monday to Friday, they wanted to go somewhere else.

A radical new project was developed, from an idea discussed at the national CU conference that would meet the demands of the users, reduce costs and ensure quality. As it was to take place outside school it was entitled "Learning in the Wild."

Using Google the top twenty tourist attractions in Kent were identified. They were contacted and meetings arranged. At these meetings a proposal was presented that would offer a symbiotic relationship for all partners. Each venue would create (with guidance from a qualified teacher) a venue-specific activity pack. This would be given away free of charge to any child who requested one if they had a KCU Passport to Learning. These passports are obtainable from KCU directly without charge. The venue would be able to charge a standard entry fee, and KCU would advertise the venues on their website and directly to schools via the KCC e-bulletin.

Initial response was positive and many of the venues were keen to link to KCU and use activities which had already been developed. Some of these were educationally sound. Others required updating as KCU was determined to ensure the activities were worth-while and had impact on attainment, knowledge and confidence.

As venues varied in size, and therefore the amount of time a child would probably spend there, each site was given a "credit rating" This rating would indicate how many credits the child would receive if she/he completed the activity pack. Thus a two credit activity would take around two hours, and a one credit activity around 1 hour. Once the child had collected 8 credits, they would return their passport and receive, via their school a KCU certificate.

The trial of Learning in the Wild lasted for 6 months. In that time around 20 venues were signed up including Dover Castle, Canterbury Cathedral and Howlett's Zoo. We were very keen to receive feedback and were proactive in contacting participants to receive their views. Feedback was, as expected, positive with children and families citing the benefits gained from participation in the scheme. However, there was one area of concern – that of cost.

Although the passports and activity packs were all free, some families complained that the travel costs to get to the venues, plus the entrance fee, meant their children were unable to participate fully. After consultation with the venues it was agreed that a reduction in admission price would not be possible. Therefore another solution was needed.

The KCU Manager was able to negotiate free entry to the KCC run venues (such as the county parks) but this still did not remove the costs of getting to and from the venue.

Following discussions with a number of schools it was proposed that they could also affiliate to the scheme. This would then allow any study support activities they offered to become accredited. The benefit of this was that more children would take part as the cost and travelling issues raised from by those who took part in the pilot would no longer be an issue.

As children would now be able to earn credits at a potentially faster rate it was decided to link in with the nation CU certificates which were awarded for 30, 65 and 1200 hours respectively.

One of the aims from the start was to provide exciting, fun and educational activities for children, of all abilities. The goal was that Learning in the Wild would not only give the participants a stimulating learning experience but also give the students a vision of the possibilities open to them in the learning community both now, and later on in life.

The aims of the scheme are:

- To help children, of all abilities, view learning as an enjoyable and "lifelong" activity.
- To improve confidence by recognising achievement and devising some of the activity pack questions in such a way that it encouraged children to question staff at the venues of the answers.
- To raise attainment of the participants (7-14 year olds).
- To raise the aspirations of those who attend.
- To integrate the programme with existing Community Education & Youth Service provision and help to ensure Kent schools were at the centre of their local communities.

The national scheme, Learning Destinations, from where Learning in the Wild was developed launched nationally.

The concept of Learning Destinations was shared with other relevant KCC colleagues. This led to a further advancement of its provision when it was suggested that external providers could also accredit themselves. Therefore expanding the choice of the young people still further.

Although it could never be argued that an activity pack would be a better tutor than a teacher it is our view that something is better than nothing. The scheme is now in a stronger position to continue and it

### **What took place?**

In 2008

- There were over 36750 additional hours of tuition provided in the county
- There were 4900 places given to students over the course of the year.
- Over 300 courses were delivered.
- We have worked in partnership with 8 school cluster groups, the library service, a number of local universities & colleges and individual schools and organisations (such as Turner

Contemporary), to provide courses covering almost all of the county.

- KCU Courses were delivered at 25 host centres (usually schools)
- The KCU Web Site proved popular, especially since we allowed e-mail bookings for some of our events.
- Over 85% of courses evaluated by the children were designated 8 or above (on a scale of 1 – 10 where 10 is excellent and 1 is poor)
- 100% of tutors independently evaluated by the Teaching and Learning Assessment Scheme offered courses which were satisfactory or better.
- We believe Kent offers one of the largest LA Out-Of-School-Hours learning programmes in England.

In 2009

The pilot for Learning in the Wild was started. It quickly took off and by the end of the year KCU was working with over 20 tourist attractions in the county. By the end of the year, due to stakeholder feedback, it was decided to allow schools to affiliate to the scheme. On a national level it was known by other CUs as Learning Destinations.

In Spring 2010 the Learning Destinations programme was piloted in around ten friendly schools. This was to ensure any teething problems were ironed out before the scheme was launched to all schools. It was deemed very important that the schools how were invited to attend in the Autumn term found the process as easy as possible and one which was able to demonstrate clear benefits to ensure they would buy in.

In July 2010 the scheme will be officially launched at the Kent County Show by the Managing Director of the KCC Children, Families and Education directorate. There is planned media coverage and the website will be revamped.

In autumn 2010 all 610 schools in Kent will be invited to become Learning Destinations. Each destination and external partner now has to complete a partnership agreement (covering areas such as safeguarding, insurances and content of activities) as well as pay a nominal affiliation fee. In return each venue will receive an acrylic sign and official sticker and stamp. It is expected that soon children will have their passports with them for much of the time and could potentially stumble across a Learning Destination and be eager to complete it's activity and gain another stamp for their passport.

### **What has been the impact and how verified?**

Anecdotally the improvements to children's confidence, attainment and social skills are frequently commented on by parents, teachers and the children themselves.

KCU is keen to measure the impact on attainment and collect clear data on the impact our provision has on those who take part. For this reason we have been working closely with the Study Support coordinator and Manager of Kent PFS to create and use the KIT (Kent Impact Tool). This will enable longitudinal data collection over a number of years, which will track pupils progress against Ofsted defined criteria.

As well as using the KIT KCU also will use the data stored on the passport database. This will be shared with both national CU, local schools and the LA to strengthen our assertions about the scheme.

In terms of sustainability the impact has been large. The scheme, in its former state, was not sustainable. It had to be flexible and evolve. Indeed, some of the CUs that did not make this switch have already been closed. By reducing costs, but ensuring quality, the scheme has been able to weather the economic downturn and it will be able to show it offers effective provision.

The scheme has been hailed as a "win-win –ship" as all stakeholders gain.

- The **children** are offered a wider range of high-quality accredited learning
- The **venues** see their foot-fall increase and have an opportunity to work with professional

- educators to create meaningful activity packs
- **Parents** have a worthwhile activity to engage their children with
- **Schools** are able to have their current out-of-school-hours provision accredited.
- **KCU** continues at reduced costs, and with increased participation

As we have only recently started to track individual students, due to capacity issues, it is harder for us to provide quantitative feedback.

For many of our pupils taking part in a KCU event is a first step on the ladder to involvement in a particular subject area. We have examples of children participating in our Learning Destination scheme and then continuing to attend classes or workshops throughout the year offered by the host venue.

KCU is popular with parents and the following quotes sum up the message we get from parents.

“My son was worried about being the only boy in the group, but he has really enjoyed it, and now has another hobby other than football or Playstation.”

“Thank you, it was so nice to see my son come out of school smiling and clutching his passport”

“Very well done, [my child] really enjoyed the [name of venue] pack. He enjoys collecting the stamps and now we have very busy weekends!”

“The enthusiasm of the staff at [name of venue] has really helped [my child] to enjoy the course. He cannot wait until the next one.”

“It is a shame that more venues are not involved. [My child] and her friends would all be happy to visit more attractions throughout the year.”

A testament from a head teacher of a local school,

“Children’s University courses allow children to experience learning in a fun “grown up” environment. It’s wonderful to see them grow in confidence as the course progresses, and hopefully, it sets them on the road to lifelong learning.”

Another head teacher, from a secondary school, noted, “Offering courses to children from our local feeder schools enabled us to give them an insight into how we operate. It allows them the chance to visit the “big school” and gives them the opportunity to meet some of their new teachers before the September transition.” We have found that this is a valuable method to aid the transition process.”

Working in partnership with libraries, which have also become Learning Destinations, lead to this account being received from the library staff

A child attended from a small rural school which, although it has been affiliated to KCU, has never had any pupils attend our Learning Destination before. The child, a year 6 boy, turned up and immediately stated, “I can’t do this, I’ll be rubbish.” However, by the end of the morning he had produced a number of pieces of written work which he was able to share with the librarian. At the end of the session, when his Mum came to collect him, the boy insisted that he be allowed to join the library. He eventually left the library clutching an armful of books. His Mum told the Centre Manager, “Xxxx suffers from dyslexia and always shies away from reading and writing. However he volunteered to write a piece to read out, explaining what he had learned, at the presentation. This was a huge milestone and a first for him. I feel the course gave him such confidence it was unbelievable.” We hope to see him return to subsequent events.

## **What has been learnt and what are the next steps?**

Eg- continuation, expansion etc

- *A reflection on the key issues emerging from the work including challenges faced and overall judgement about the effectiveness of this programme area. This would include the critical factors for success, identification of next steps and transferability to other contexts/ groups?*
- *Do you have any suggestions for others who wish to develop similar programme areas?*

**KCU has been operating in the county since 1997. The key messages which we have discovered in that time are :**

### **Talk to people face to face**

It is great to create invitation packs, application forms and other glossy publications. However, nothing beats talking to people face-to-face. The time taken, and costs incurred, driving to a venue to speak to a new attraction manager are nothing compared to the problems which could occur if a particular person does not understand, or misinterprets, what is required of them. The benefits far out-weigh the costs in terms of time and travel expense. The face to face approach also enables the reading of body language and helps ensure both parties understand what is required without the need to wade through so much time-consuming paperwork.

### **Keep communication channels open**

Ensure all stakeholders are fully aware of the "vision" and aims of the scheme. Offer regular updates to ensure all are aware of the current state of affair within the organisation. This leads to higher self-confidence and often results in better dialogue between the Manager and the venues, resulting in small problems being dealt with at source rather than growing and becoming major headaches before they are shared with he manager.

### **Get independent recognition**

When seeking funding we have discovered that statements such as "we are good value" etc are given more credence if they are repeated by independent scrutineers. It is for this reason we have had an independent evaluation of our work produced by the University of Cambridge, University of Kent, and also why we have taken part in the QiSS recognition process.

### **Celebrate Successes**

Coming from a teaching background it is often easy to focus on the negative and ignore the successes. This needs to be avoided. When something works well tell others about it and celebrate it. Share the good news and others will be keen to become associated with you. This helps to make new partnerships easier to obtain.

### **Never lose sight of the aims (making learning fun)**

It is easy to become "bogged down" in paperwork and form filling. For the scheme to be successful the bureaucratic load must be as low as possible. Enthusiastic tutors want to teach, not fill in forms!

### **Communicate with all stake holders regularly**

Ensure all stakeholders are aware of what is going on on a regular basis. Give them as much ownership as possible and ensure communications channels are easily accessible.

**Be learner led and flexible in what you offer**

Do not think you know what the learners want. Ask them. Take time to focus on those who attend, but take even more time on those who currently don't. Try to ensure you offer them something which will make them come along.

**Be meticulous in your vetting of staff and venues. Ensure all safeguards are in place**

You can never be too careful when it comes to child protection. Ensure you have a CP policy in place and that all staff is trained to be aware of the correct procedures to follow in the case of any potential CP issues.

**Expand gradually and ensure the infrastructure is in place to cope**

If seeking external funding to expand the project, ensure there is sufficient capacity within the current structure. We had times when the rapid expansion of the scheme (going from 5 areas to 11 areas over night) caused a lot of problems due to capacity issues. There are over 80 tourist attractions in the county. We are keen to work with all of them, but recognise that we need to expand and consolidate to ensure we keep clear focus on our aims and ensure long-term benefits to our participants.

**Case Study Reference:**

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