



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

SIE Project Internationalisation Case Study – Kent



Background:

A 2010 study confirmed that Kent was underperforming with export levels compared to other areas in the South East of England. Feedback from companies also highlighted that there was confusion from businesses about available support. Recommendations were made which led to Kent County Council setting up the Kent International Business initiative with a range of local partners.

Summary:

Kent International Business (KIB) is an umbrella programme which brings together various support services, initiatives and projects which aim to help Kent-based SMEs with internationalisation and access to overseas business opportunities. KIB is led by Kent County Council and includes local contacts from the Department for International Trade, Enterprise Europe Network, Chambers of Commerce and a range of business support organisations and membership bodies as well as higher education institutes and professional services.

Activities:

KIB brings together a range of 'core' support services which are available to Kent companies as well as carrying out other activities which add value to this offer and provide opportunities for local businesses to enhance their internationalisation. Activities can be summarised as follows:

1. **Engaging with companies:** raising awareness of the benefits of international trade through a [website](#), newsletters, presence at local business events and exhibitions and sponsoring local business awards
2. **Incubating internationalisation:** providing practical support for companies through local events, market visits, trade missions and sector-focused networking events
3. **Growing International business:** helping Kent companies to increase international trade through organising Kent stands at international trade shows

KIB activities are supported by various sources of external funding; EU funding (Interreg), national funding and local funding to develop and deliver initiatives which provide practical support for specific sectors and make use of Kent's international connections. The most important part of the KIB programme is a **successful local partnership** which shares the same aims to boost international trade in Kent.

Links to Policies:

The KIB programme supports Kent's local economic strategies (Kent's Regeneration Framework) and policies which govern the activities of the KIB partners: Britain Open for Business – UK Government, British Chambers of Commerce - Business Plan for Britain, the local European Structural & Investment Fund strategy for Kent & Medway.

Management & Governance:

KIB is managed by Kent County Council and a local steering group which meets regularly.

Results & Impacts:

The KIB partners help to measure the results of the project by capturing the following information:

- Number of SMEs supported
- Direct export orders
- Business wins (values of contracts won, new business secured)
- Number of new collaborations / partnerships in place

Transferability:

Kent International Business (KIB) is a programme that could be replicated in different European regions to promote exporting and business internationalisation. The model is dependent on stakeholder engagement and a strong partnership approach which requires good day to day working relationships and regular communication to succeed. It is also essential to engage with businesses in order to be able to respond to evolving needs. The ability to put in place projects and support activities that respond to these needs and take advantage of emerging opportunities is also important in the KIB model.

Sustainability:

Although the support services provided by individual KIB partners can change from time to time, the KIB 'umbrella' incorporates all of these so that the overall programme is visible although the support offer can be different. With committed partners and a key organisation to drive the programme forward, KIB will continue to evolve and look for new ways to address the challenges faced by local businesses with internationalisation.

