UNIVERSITY OF KENT
INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN
2012-15
WELCOME

The University’s Institutional Plan is more than a document: it is a point of reflection, a chance to restate our mission as an institution, and to highlight some of the main challenges which will face us in the near future. The Plan is also a tool to guide us in meeting those challenges, and others which arise along the way.

This Institutional Strategic Plan is one which builds on the firm foundations of the 2009-12 iteration, and the extensive work which has taken place to implement that strategy. Since that earlier document was written, we have progressed significantly within all the areas of the University. Our research has increased in depth and quality; our financial position is stronger than ever; and our campuses have expanded and been modernised. Student satisfaction continues to improve: we are popular, but not complacent, and continue to enhance our scholarship and our professional services.

Many of the challenges we face in the coming years are well known. We will submit our research to scrutiny in 2013-14, in the Research Excellence Framework, an activity which involves hundreds of academics and support staff in a complex process. The changing nature of the undergraduate and postgraduate funding arrangements, and the implications for recruitment of students, will also require continued careful management. There will, of course, also be challenges we do not yet know, but I am confident that our resilience as an institution is sufficient not only to cope, but to thrive in the future.

As well as the challenges, there are inevitable opportunities. With a spirit of creativity and willingness to experiment, we will continue to transform the world for the better through inspirational teaching and research. We will develop further our position as the UK’s European university, capitalising on our existing programmes and partnerships.

The next three years will be an exciting time as we work our way to the University’s 50th Anniversary. I commend this Institutional Strategic Plan to my colleagues and look forward to working with you all to make its aspirations a reality.

Professor Dame Julia M Goodfellow, DBE, CBE
Vice-Chancellor
INTRODUCTION

The period 2006-9 marked the start of an increasingly competitive and challenging period in the history of universities in the UK, and indeed the global higher education system.

The competition manifested itself in student and staff recruitment, in attracting increasingly scarce public and private funding, and in the need for agile responses in an increasingly turbulent economic and political environment. Within a generally volatile and uncertain external environment, the University of Kent, however, was increasingly buoyant and confident in 2009 when the 2009-12 plan was written.

What has changed since 2009? If anything, the external environment became increasingly volatile, while the University has attempted to steer a steady course to ride out this tide of uncertainty. So far, perhaps, so good.

What will change between 2012 and 2015? Perhaps little, perhaps a lot. On the positive side, considerable confidence, enthusiasm, optimism and pride has been built up within the University; students react positively to their experience at Kent, and staff find working here a friendly and rewarding experience. If we continue to recruit students in sufficient numbers to fund our current commitments (particularly to staff and the development of the estate) we will be able to continue to pursue our objectives with confidence. But uncertainties over undergraduate student recruitment from September 2012 (and postgraduate recruitment in 2015), the outcome of the Research Excellence Framework exercise in 2014, and the increasing need to justify to others the value of what we do, cast a shadow over this particular plan that we cannot ignore. It is essential that we mitigate the risks associated with these uncertainties in order to secure our long-term position.
VISION

The University of Kent has a distinctive mission. We are the UK’s European university with an international reputation in which Europe meets the world.

We are a leading research-intensive UK university creating a global student and staff community that together advances knowledge and stimulates intellectual creativity, and performs at the highest levels in all our activities.

We believe in the unity of research and teaching, in the freedom and responsibility that staff have to question and test received wisdom, in the transforming power of higher education to change for the better the lives of individuals and our society, in acting with integrity, and in the value of an inclusive and diverse university community.

We are committed to growing, shaping and supporting the regions in which we operate by investing our research and intellectual value in these regions, by improving our national and international competitiveness, and by developing our students and staff as professional and academic leaders with broad horizons, so that we may have a positive impact regionally, nationally and internationally.

KEY MESSAGES FOR 2012-15

The University of Kent – the UK’s European university – will:
• Proactively develop distinctive attributes that others seek to emulate, in particular for
  - our inspiring and distinctive education that prepares students to make a positive contribution to help shape a better world
  - our innovative and world-leading research
  - our positive impact regionally, nationally and especially internationally
• Promote diversity and inclusivity in the University community by offering fair treatment and equality of opportunity to every member of the University (staff and students), keeping morale high
• Work with partners in whom we have confidence (internally and externally) for mutual benefit
  and:
  • Communicate well (internally and externally)
  • Recruit well (staff and students)
  • Understand our external context, and be agile in responding to it
• Be efficient and effective throughout our internal operations.
This Plan has been written in a time of considerable uncertainty. Higher education is increasingly stratified and marked by (at the time of writing) some unpredictability of outcomes.

This is happening at a time of global economic uncertainty, fast-moving technological change and vastly increased regulation, when there is also a desire for increased corporate social and environmental responsibility. It seems sensible, therefore, to focus on more generic strategies to support our vision and enhance our reputation and position at this uncertain time.

“Reputation” involves a complex group of inter-related attributes involving internal and external, academic and other professional stakeholders. It is an important driver that focuses attention on generating high-quality results, and guides us when we have to choose between generating income and reducing expenditure. Reputation includes: the quality of our research outputs; the quality of our education (as perceived by students and potential students); the attractiveness of our courses, and whether they allow students to achieve their longer-term ambitions; our curricular and extra-curricular provision; the perception of our local, regional, national and international activities; whether students and staff are safe, comfortable and healthy within the University environment; our inclusiveness as an employer (as perceived by current and potential employees); our professional competence; the attractiveness of our residential facilities; our dynamism; our reliability as an academic, professional and commercial partner; our commitment and contribution to the economic impact of the region.

“Position” is how we are perceived by our peers, students and potential students. We should strive actively to improve the University’s reputation and position in the context of our vision and key messages, and support our academic Schools in maintaining their own reputations and positions within their disciplines.

Key to abbreviations in the text, indicating primary responsible sections within the University

AD Academic Division
BRE Board for Research and Enterprise
CorpComms Corporate Communications Department
DEV Development
Deans Faculty Deans, Dean of Graduate School, Campus Deans
EG Executive Group
EMS Enrolment Management Services
Estates Estates Department
Fin Finance Department
Heads Heads of Academic Schools and/or Professional Service Departments
HR Human Resources Department
ID International Development
IS Information Services Department
KIE Kent Innovation and Enterprise
LTB Learning and Teaching Board
PBIO Planning and Business Information Office
PDO Partnership Development Office
PSD Professional Service Departments
Schools Academic Schools within the University
SEC Student Experience Committee
SHE Safety, Health and Environment Unit
WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

We will proactively develop distinctive attributes that others seek to emulate.

In particular we will focus on:
• our inspiring and distinctive education that prepares students to make a positive contribution to help shape a better world
• our innovative and world-leading research
• our positive impact regionally, nationally and especially internationally

To do this we will:
• Develop and maintain attractive modern programmes in Humanities, Science, Social Science and Health, at undergraduate and postgraduate level [Schools]
• Provide an education that is demonstrably academically excellent, responds appropriately to student expectations, enhances their capabilities, and prepares them for the future [Schools]
• Create a global student community that broadens horizons and encourages tolerance and respect [SEC] by providing distinctive opportunities for national and international placements, exchanges, paid employment and volunteering, with a particular focus on our European associations
• Produce innovative world-leading research, with strong themes that attract reputation, and where possible, direct external funding [Schools]
• Provide pathways to deliver research impact through knowledge transfer routes [KIE]

Our campuses
Canterbury delivers broad-based academic provision on a residential campus in an historic cathedral city
Medway focuses on creative, professional and practice-based provision delivered in a metropolitan setting near to London
Brussels focuses on postgraduate programmes in the Social Sciences delivered in the political capital of Europe
Paris focuses on postgraduate programmes in the Humanities delivered in the cultural capital of Europe

• Be proactive, innovative, creative and enterprising [KIE]
• Understand our competition [PBIO], and improve our competitive position as a leading UK university [Schools]; understand particularly what only Kent can offer; understand what we are not going to do too; understand what is driving our reputation, and act to enhance it [Schools]
• Understand and articulate the distinctive contribution of each of our campuses/sites [Deans]
• Ensure that each academic School has, and promotes, its distinctive features [Schools]
• Encourage leadership at all levels of the University, including students.
The University of Kent was ranked 24th out of 159 institutions for its world-leading research in the most recent Research Assessment Exercise, with six subjects in the top ten of their disciplines and five subject areas at Kent in the UK’s top 20.

With such a record, it is not surprising that the University’s research findings often receive media coverage. One of the most recent studies to make the headlines was Nina Gurung’s research into Gurkha settlement and integration in the UK. The recent large increases in Gurkha populations in Hampshire and Kent had initiated anxiety about pressures on local services, and there had been much publicity about the plight of veterans struggling to settle in the UK.

Nina’s research found that, in fact, Gurkhas are outward-looking, self-reliant, and the majority consider proficiency in English, education, employment and training to be most important. Employment rates for Gurkhas are high, with over 90 per cent of males and females under 60 in full-time work. Home ownership is at 56 per cent, many rent privately, and reliance on housing benefit is mostly confined to older veterans.

The research provided background for one of the councils concerned to make a case for establishment of the Government’s Gurkha Integration Fund, worth £1.5 million. It has also shown the importance of preparation for large influxes of immigrants, and how working with newly established communities does much to counteract hostility and distrust.
The University of Kent is committed to the creation and support of an inclusive and diverse community. Each department has an Equality and Diversity representative and there are staff networks dedicated to supporting various aspects of the University’s equality plans. Further guidance is provided by staff in both Human Resources and Student Services.

Each year, the University publishes a report which recognises and celebrates the diversity of our university community. In addition, we publish plans which help ensure we are taking a proactive approach to ensuring equality of opportunity and eliminating discrimination. All staff and students can access online equality and diversity training and, in addition, other development opportunities are provided throughout the year to both staff and students.

The University is a member of Stonewall’s Diversity Champions programme which helps us to promote a good working environment for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff. We use external benchmarks such as the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and the Athena SWAN Award for women in science to help us focus our equality work. Kent Union achieved the Investors Diversity level 2 award in 2011.
OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

We will promote diversity and inclusivity within the University community by offering fair treatment and equality of opportunity to every member of the University (staff and students), keeping morale high.

To do this we will:

- Encourage, recognise and celebrate success [individual responsibility]
- Encourage diversity; promote equality of opportunity [individual responsibility]
- Treat everyone with respect and dignity [individual responsibility]
- Provide a demonstrably high quality of education to all students, creating real academic engagement and challenge, and raising ambition [Schools]

- Prepare students for a future (including, but not only, employment) that is improved and enriched by having been to the University [Schools]
- Maximise cultural and developmental opportunities for all our students, utilising placements, internships, international opportunities [ID, Schools, Careers, KIE] and extra-curricular activities [Music, Sport, Volunteering, Events], encouraging all both to take part and to lead

- Maximise cultural and developmental opportunities for our staff (particularly in equipping staff to lead within their roles) [HR]
- Encourage staff to be confident in themselves and the University [all with responsibility for others]
- Develop an appropriate framework for performance management of all types, focusing on helping all staff to achieve their full potential; find a balance between empowerment and holding to account [EG]
- Keep students and staff safe, comfortable and healthy within the University environment [SHE].

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Diversity in any society, and particularly in a society such as a university, is important because it increases our range of choices, improves the quality of decision-making if diverse insights are used to produce a better collective insight, and brings new imagination and creative energy into the University.

The University derives significant reputation from the global nature of its networks and relationships. We style ourselves as the UK’s European university, and recruit nearly 20% of our students from outside the UK. We applaud freedom, particularly freedom of speech, and encourage divergent views for the purpose of debate. We encourage tolerance, particularly between students from different racial and ethnic groups that may have limited regard for each other outside the University. We give great autonomy to staff over how they carry out their jobs. A university is a place in which, by its very nature, diversity should thrive.

Recent changes to legislation also support equality and diversity, primarily through the Equality Act 2010, which requires public bodies to have due regard for the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Further, it encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities, so that their policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people’s needs. This includes students, the curriculum, research, staff, and the community, in which the University has a crucial role to play in exemplifying good equality and diversity practice.
OUR PARTNERS

We will work with partners (internal and external) in whom we have confidence for mutual benefit.

To do this we will work:
• With students, to ensure students engage with the academic provision, and provide them with good and prompt support to do so [Schools]; encourage students to take part in the formulation of University policies and procedures [SEC]
• Internally, to create a sense of an inclusive community within the University (including academic Schools, professional service departments, the College structure, Kent Union, and trades unions), achieving cross-institutional engagement and developing a global community [EG]
• Internally, to improve our project management skills, especially on large, multi-departmental projects [EG]; ensure that our partnerships are “joined up” where they cross academic School/professional service boundaries [Schools, KIE, DEV]
• Locally, in the region(s), especially Canterbury City Council, Medway Council, Kent County Council, to promote employment opportunities [KIE]; act in a socially responsible way [EG]; provide support to Kent and Medway schools to maximise opportunities to enter higher education [PDO]
• Nationally, to form alliances with other leading higher education institutions, especially in research and postgraduate training; establish partnerships outside the HE sector, especially in innovation and employment opportunities [Schools]
• Internationally, in Brussels, Paris, Athens and other similar locations, to form alliances with other leading higher education institutions in multi-layered strategic associations, especially in research and student/staff exchanges [Schools, ID].
The University of Kent launched KentHealth in March 2011. Building links not only with other departments in the University, but also with external partners around the region, including Canterbury Christ Church University, the Kent and Medway Care Alliance, and the East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, we are creating a virtual faculty of clinicians and other healthcare professionals. In the absence of a medical school in Kent and Medway, KentHealth can therefore deliver high-quality academic health provision across the region.

Collaborative health research projects initiated by the University have attracted over £10 million in the last three years, and KentHealth puts us in an even stronger position to acquire such funding. Such joint research is also already bearing fruit: a new treatment is benefiting stroke victims; work is ongoing to improve the outcomes of patients who develop deep-seated fungal infections; and there is a host of innovations in the area of assistive technologies.

KentHealth is also working closely with regional NHS Trusts and the NHS Postgraduate Deanery for Kent, Surrey and Sussex (which co-ordinates GP and dental training) to improve education and training, and gain academic accreditation of existing postgraduate courses.
As the only UK university with a postgraduate centre in Brussels, as well as long-standing partnerships with more than 100 higher education institutions on the continent, Kent is proud to be able to declare itself the UK’s European university, with almost every department offering opportunities for students to study abroad.

Underlining this reputation, Kent has won two awards in as many years to co-ordinate joint doctorates under the European Commission’s Erasmus Mundus scheme, which aims to enhance quality in higher education through scholarships and academic co-operation between Europe and the rest of the world. The European Commission has also awarded Kent the E-Quality Label for its outstanding Erasmus activities, and the European Diploma Supplement Label for helping to develop the Diploma Supplement. The University also has strong research links with Europe, generating £1.2 to £1.5 million each year in research grants from European sources.

Kent also looks further afield. It has been a major partner in the Lotus programme, promoting partnership and co-operation between European and South East Asian universities, and a prominent partner in LiSUM (Linking Sino-European Universities through Mobility). It has partner universities around the world, itself welcomes students from over 120 countries, and maintains these links long after students have graduated – 25 per cent of our 74,000 active alumni are based outside the UK.
COMMUNICATION

We will communicate well, internally and externally.

To do this we will:
- Understand our key partners and produce integrated external engagement strategies to underpin and ensure the reach of our wide-ranging activities and strong brand identity; focusing on public engagement with research, and engagement through our economic, social and cultural impact [CorpComms]
- Internally for students, who are extensively networked, be discriminating and coherent in the use of technology [IS] ensuring all students are able to access appropriate online resources for each programme [AD]; provide feedback mechanisms for students; and respond to their feedback [Schools]
- Internally for staff, be clear and concise about all aspects of the University’s operation, but especially about our shared goals, what staff are expected to do and any challenges that are to be faced; make sure the communication is two-way and effective; make sure messages are received as well as transmitted; share good practice [CorpComms]
- Externally, promote the University locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, particularly concentrating on our distinctive attributes (especially reinforcing our European credentials; see panel, left), the benefits that we provide, the systematic building of professional networks and work with external organisations [Schools, facilitated by CorpComms]
- Communicate appropriately for different audiences in different locations to maximise impact, but communicate our pride for Kent and our passion for what it does [CorpComms]
- Maximise the opportunities presented by the University’s 50th anniversary (2014-15) across all our activities [DEV].

COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

The last three years have seen technological changes that, while they may have taken place in small increments, are nevertheless cumulatively significant. Twitter, for instance, created in March 2007, has 140 million active users generating 340 million tweets per day. The 2012 Barcelona-Chelsea Champions League semi-final was reported to have set a sports Twitter record for most tweets per second (13,684), while televised showing of a Japanese movie (9 December 2011) generated over 25,000 tweets per second. Meanwhile, Facebook has grown from 175 million users in February 2009 to one billion in October 2012, with 28% of users in Europe (the largest continental grouping). Eighty four per cent of the UK population now uses the internet.

Students now use internet-based communication and social networking as the normal mode of communication and work naturally in a collaborative style (online and offline). They have 24/7 e-connectivity in their personal lives, and expect their academic work to integrate with this.

Students are therefore typically engaged in many parallel activities at any one time, giving the notion of “part-time” a whole new set of meanings.

Perhaps driven by the use of technology, the world’s largest number of English-speaking people can now be found in China.
RECRUITING OUR PEOPLE

We will recruit well (staff and students).

To do this we will:

- Understand [PBIO] and respond [EMS] to the home and international student markets
- Attract [EMS] and retain [Schools] sufficient numbers of good students at the right levels (UG, traditional PG, modern PG, flexible learning provision)
- Attract, develop and retain sufficient numbers of good staff to deliver our academic vision [Schools, HR]
- Attract, develop and retain sufficient numbers of good professional service staff to support all areas of the University [PSD, HR]
- Encourage all those who can take advantage of higher education to do so [PDO]
- Attract and retain a diversity of staff [managers].

Recent discussions with academic colleagues have focused in part on the nature and operation of the University’s business.

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Since 1965, universities have been under constant pressure, particularly in respect of government funding, and have seen regular reductions in funding, some small and sustained, others more abrupt. To this constant stream of financial pressures have been added increased government regulation around education (Subject Review, Teaching Quality Assessment, Institutional Audit), research (Research Assessment Exercise, Research Excellence Framework), planning (Corporate Governance Statement, Operating and Financial Review, Public Benefit Statement) and the increased operational demands inherent in running a £26 billion mass higher education sector (Audit, Employment Law, Financial Regulations, Freedom of Information, Health & Safety). In addition, students, parents and other funders seek ever-greater accountability from universities for resources under their control. Individual universities have not sought, of themselves, this increased regulatory burden; rather, it is externally driven. Individual universities cannot ignore this: it needs to be controlled.

Reflecting on the roles of staff generally and academic staff in particular is also important. National statistics show that there were students in 1965. Student:staff ratios have at least doubled in the same period. The “special status of academic and academic-related staff” in 1965 has to be seen in the context of the “rarity value” of academic staff, which comprised 0.04% of the UK population in 1965, but 0.29% of the population now. The role of academic staff has also become more varied, encompassing (in varying degree for different members of staff) teaching, research, scholarship, academic and student support, enterprise, etc, blurring the boundaries between academic and professional staff.

In reality, the University is running at least two distinct forms of business: an academic-based business, and a commercial business providing catering and residential services to students and other visitors. (There may also be a significant academic-welfare business too.) While the areas of business have many similarities and compatibilities, there are also points of tension (particularly over the use of space, and the perceived lack of competition).

The way in which we lead and manage this complex organisation, including the role that we expect the Executive Group, Deans, Heads of Academic Schools and Heads of Professional Service Departments to perform is crucial, as is communication between the different parts of the University, particularly on large, complex projects requiring significant contributions from different parts of the organisation.
The University of Kent has a strong economic impact on the south east. Altogether, the economic worth is £0.6 billion per annum. Some of this is obvious: direct spending on salaries, goods and services generates economic activity throughout the region as its suppliers make purchases and its employees and students also spend money. Students alone contribute around £211 million to the region’s economy in this manner.

But other ways in which we contribute are less obvious. Our local suppliers are able to grow their businesses because of our custom; we attract students to the area who draw in their own visitors, and many graduates remain in Kent; Kent Innovation and Enterprise makes University resources available to businesses and assists in Knowledge Transfer Partnerships; Kent Law Clinic provides free legal advice, obtaining compensation of well over £1 million; and as the largest conference venue in the south east with award-winning accommodation, we help bring high-spending delegates to the area.

With extensive sports and arts facilities, the University also makes a valuable contribution to arts and recreation. We welcome all abilities to use the campus sports facilities, from an over 50s tennis and badminton group to a professional mountain bike rider, while the Gulbenkian theatre and cinema provides regular workouts for the brain with a lively programme of entertainment. The University’s musicians regularly entertain at concerts on and off campus, and the public are encouraged to participate in the University Chorus, Symphony Orchestra, Concert and Big Bands.
We will understand our external context, and be agile in responding to it.

To do this we will:
• Understand the threats to our sustainability, and the opportunities to improve our position; develop plans for both [EG]
• Monitor our performance against an appropriate peer group [PBIO]
• Generate inputs (financial and non-financial) from diverse sources [EG]
• Give up activities that have little further contribution to make, so that new things can begin [EG].

We will be efficient and effective throughout our internal operations.

To do this we will:
• Deploy technology appropriately, especially in teaching [IS]
• Give staff the resources (particularly time and resilience) to do what we need them to do [Heads]
• Give staff the skills to do what we need them to do [HR]
• Generate sufficient cash to allow strategic investments [Fin]
• Expand our capability to attract philanthropic funds to support all activities in the University [DEV]
• Manage risk and uncertainty [EG]
• Ensure that our infrastructure remains fit for purpose and efficiently used [PSD], particularly in respect of attractive, well-adapted space [Estates] and other facilities, and the efficiency of teaching [AD]
• Use natural resources creatively, responsibly and sustainably [Estates].

Social responsibility

One would not have thought, in the late 1990s, that the UK population would have become so interested in refuse collection, but in 2012 most people differentiate rubbish that can be recycled from that which cannot. Students are environmental champions, and expect the University to demonstrate corporate social responsibility in the use of natural resources. Attention to the costs of consuming natural resources can only become more important in the future.

To what extent does corporate social responsibility extend beyond this environmental agenda? The significant reduction in Pfizer’s presence at its site in Sandwich leaves the University as one of the largest employers in East Kent, so the economic sustainability of the region is very much tied to the sustainability of the University (whether the local community realises this and appreciates it, or not). The effects of the Coalition’s agenda on localism, where more decisions are made locally, are uncertain for a university that sees itself increasingly as an international player in a competitive international market.

The University also provides sporting and artistic facilities (and perhaps to a lesser extent, educational facilities) for the local community, which make important contributions to the dynamism of the locations in which the University operates.
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Browne Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, published in October 2010, following the formation of a new Coalition Government in May 2010, accelerated the marketisation of higher education, particularly in the significant refocusing of state funding for higher education through the Student Loans Company, the partial deregulation of undergraduate higher education, and the encouragement of private providers.

Yet this marketisation is constrained by the government’s need to restrict student support costs as it grapples with other reductions in public expenditure. Consequently, the opportunities for sector-wide growth in undergraduate numbers – a strong feature of the last decade – have been severely curtailed, while signs of a change in the balance of applications, from less obviously vocational to the more vocational courses, are perhaps emerging.

Likewise any continuing and future government funding must be under threat as it responds to the worldwide economic downturn since 2009, and the prospect of sluggish economic growth for the foreseeable future. Nor is it clear that this situation will improve in the long term as public finances come under increasing pressure, in part from an ageing population and declining workforce. This, in turn, will have an impact on the availability of (graduate) employment opportunities, which may make the proposition offered by higher education less attractive to potential undergraduates, but may increase the popularity of postgraduate programmes (assuming potential students think they are affordable after incurring the costs of an undergraduate course) as undergraduates seek to distinguish themselves in the employment market. It will also impact on the funding of research and research training – increasingly focused into ‘big’ areas.

Demand from overseas students seems to remain strong, but other countries, particularly in the Eurozone, are suffering the same economic uncertainties as the UK, while India and China are expanding their own university systems.

Increased fee levels following the Browne Review will not only change the pattern of demand for higher education but strengthen students’ perceptions that they are paying for their education; they will expect a demonstrably high quality of education in return. More students may study from home, as they prioritise paying for their education over paying for accommodation (and other parts of the student experience). The offerings of the private HE sector, with their greater focus solely on the academic component of the broader student experience, and of the more vocational sectors, may prove attractive to a significant proportion of our student market, as may the option of studying outside the UK.

However, in this time of considerable change, it is perhaps worth asking whether there are any constants. Universities have existed since the early 13th century. Of the roughly 85 world institutions that have existed since 1520 (including the Catholic Church, Parliaments of Ireland and the Isle of Man, some Swiss cantons, and the Bank of Siena), 65 are universities, within which there are elements that would have been recognised in 1520.

Although everything else has changed, and much has changed suddenly and out of all recognition, universities are nevertheless very long-lived because higher education is perceived by the public to be of value. There is also good OECD evidence that a well-developed higher education system contributes very beneficially to national health, prosperity, welfare, safety and general quality of life. We can take comfort from this, but must also not forget that we may from time to time need to justify to others the value of the system of which we are a part.
By helping students acquire work experience, and helping businesses find promising, highly motivated employees, the University of Kent’s Employability Points Scheme (EPS) acts as a bridge between academic study and practical skills.

Launched in September 2010, the Scheme encourages students to engage in non-curricular activities and make use of personal development opportunities. Doing this earns them points and points – as everyone knows – mean prizes: training programmes and paid internships with the 86 EPS sponsors including Tesco, Penguin Books, the National Trust, Kent County Council and Coca-Cola Enterprises.

HELPING OUR STUDENTS STAND OUT

The scheme currently has 1,933 students signed up, and has provided 39 work placements and 135 training places. Students also receive travel expenses for interviews and work placements, as well as advice and feedback throughout the process of applying for positions and attending interviews.

At a time when there is so much uncertainty in the jobs market, and questioning of the value of higher education, it is encouraging to hear the comments of EPS sponsors. Jon Sale of Tesco remarked: “This is a great opportunity for us to stay connected with graduates.” Kate Shaw of the National Trust says the scheme “gives us access to students we wouldn’t normally have access to and these are the people we need to help us… move forward.”