1. Preamble

It is remarkable to pause and reflect on the step-change that has been achieved within the University of Kent during the last five years. Staff and students at the University have contributed great energy and creativity towards making the University thrive as a large multi-sited entity. They have shown that the passion that people feel for their subject, be it through learning, teaching or research, now lives within the context of a shared awareness of broad participation and physical location. The positive elements of a traditional university now thrive within an
organisation that is responsive to its wider environment and is actively engaged in shaping the
diversity of the student body.

2. Review of the Widening Participation Strategy (2001-06)

The University’s widening participation strategy (2001-06) set out to raise aspirations and support
retention and achievement within a context of delivering institutional growth. By 2001 the
University had begun to plan a major new campus in Medway, embarked upon a series of
successful bids for additional student numbers, established formal partnerships with three local
FE colleges and had engaged in a variety of informal partnerships to improve participation and
progression opportunities across Kent and Medway.

2007 and the University has established a new campus at Medway which is co-located with other
higher and further education providers, providing a unique learning environment which is also
recognised as making a major contribution to the regeneration of the area. During this period it
has also been one of the most successful institutions in England with regard receiving and
delivering additional student numbers (an increase of 3154 full time equivalents since 2001)\(^1\).
Partnership working with our associate colleges remains strong, within the emerging context of
foundation degree developments and the fledgling Lifelong Learning Networks. In addition to
these existing partnerships the University has committed to formal partnership agreements with
19 local non-selective secondary schools to enhance progression to higher education. Kent has
also worked closely with the Kent Adult Education Service (KAES) to secure a concordat to
promote routes for adult learners.

Within the last 6 years there has been significant investment by the University to improve
progression. Kent has also worked in partnership with projects, such as Kent and Medway
Aimhigher, to widen participation. Involvement in this work has shifted from a small committed
group across sectors towards a much wider engagement in the practical and academic support of
transition into higher education. The University has considerable talent amongst its academic
and development staff who engage on a weekly basis with school and FE learners via delivery of
a range of activities. Equally, more and more schoolteachers are engaging with the University,
becoming actively involved and aware of the particular role that staff from the University can
provide. Last but not least, there has been a praiseworthy burgeoning of the systematic
involvement of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the offering of pre HE curriculum and
events. Both the diversity of the student body and the diversity of the learning experience at Kent
are changing.

One area that has worsened considerably during this period has been that of adult learning
opportunity and this has had a detrimental impact on the University’s aspirations to build upon
existing foundations. The University has had a strong tradition of liberal adult provision that it had
planned to build upon and extend through targeting of particular community groups and the
development of flexible provision. It had planned to proceed in partnership with local colleges
and with adult education services. However, funding for adult learning places has dropped
dramatically during this period and many of the learning opportunities once available have now
been withdrawn. Only recently it was reported that up to 700,000 adult learning places have
been lost due to cuts in funding\(^2\). This of course has had a resultant negative effect on students
accessing higher education.

The University has responded to the massive reduction in funding for adult learning in a number
of ways. Firstly we have retained our commitment to develop an effective Assessment of Prior
Experiential Learning (APEL) framework and the University now offers APEL and flexible
professional development degrees via the Centre for Work and Learning. Equally, the University

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\(^1\) Kent Student Planning and Data Office
\(^2\) [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6162977.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6162977.stm) 13th December 2006
has retained its commitment to community based learning through the successful development of 0-1 level provision in outreach settings via blended learning (traditional and virtual learning environments). The University is also tackling nationally 'problematic' subject-specific areas with local solutions, for example by working in partnership with KAES to provide languages provision to adult learners. The University is also piloting work with parents as adult learners in school settings.

The University has succeeded in reaching the bold aims set out in the last widening participation strategy. To continue to succeed the University will need to continue to drive forward a range of focussed participation objectives, while ensuring that gains over the last five years are consolidated. We need to innovate, create and evaluate and review in equal measure. Engaging and maintaining the involvement of staff and students across our partnership work is vital to achieving broad participation, particularly in a world full of competing and unpredictable pressures.
1. The Participation Strategy 2007-2010

Overview

Introduction

Since the writing of the last Widening Participation Plan the University has moved with great speed to effectively embed the innovative delivery of progression opportunities across Kent and Medway. Furthermore, the University’s Widening Participation strategy and ethos have been instrumental to the effective growth of the institution through successive successful bidding for, and meeting, additional student numbers (ASNs) targets thereby helping to define the fundamental shape of the University.

The current Participation Strategy seeks to build upon this policy and delivery to ensure that the University retains and builds upon its diverse learner profile within the context of emerging agenda and changing circumstances.

As such, we will continue to work towards a demonstrable diversity of our participation profile, which in turn will act as the prime transformative agent within the University. In other words, our learners will drive the key changes within our organisation. The diversity of our student corpus, our provision, and the diversity of our learning and assessment strategies will strengthen and promote the University’s exceptional student experience.

Aims

We will:

- Serve participation aims through bold innovation and with tenacity.
- Undertake partnership work with integrity and transparency.
- Work to ensure the diversity of our student body and the diversity of engagement across the region and nationally.
- Ensure that EU and international learning experiences are created and are accessible to all students.
- Contribute toward societal, economic, cultural and educational sustainability via individual and collective engagement within Kent and Medway.
- Undertake sustainable growth in student numbers, with a greater proportion of students as defined by widening participation criteria engaged in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
- Offer a range of opportunities for teachers, support staff and families from our Partner Schools and Colleges.
- Provide professional development opportunities for local workers.
- Consider the needs of older learners.
- Develop sustainable learning provision and progression with Partners and collaborators.

Objectives

We will focus upon:

- The development and maintenance of successful partnerships with schools, colleges, adult education and HEIs.
- Making a significant contribution to progression curricula for Kent and Medway learners.
- Demonstrable success in partnership-based and creative project management.
- International links via local partnerships.
- Student engagement and investment in the wider community.
• Participation to support regeneration and equality of opportunity.

Delivery

The University's priorities are:

• Progression links with Partner Schools underpinned by diagnostic and subject based curriculum, student ambassador links and merit-based scholarships. Programmes and outreach will be extended to include teachers, support staff and families.
• Mutually beneficial links with Associate and Partner Colleges with a focus upon delivering effective vocational progression routes.
• Community engagement at HE levels 0-6.

We will give additional focus to:

• Improving progression and retention for students from Partner Schools and Colleges with vocational qualifications.
• Involving and recognising all staff in the delivery of the participation strategy, in particular: innovative and systematic curriculum development and delivery in Partner Schools and Colleges; engaging student subject ambassadors and undertaking 'expert witness' work within communities.
• Collective and individualised learning.
• Extending the range and reach of our work-based undergraduate and postgraduate offer.
• Extending student ambassador schemes to include paid, voluntary, and credit bearing modes with a focus upon progression to and retention within the University.
• Cohere international, enterprise and participation strategies through targeted local partnerships with schools and colleges.

Participation baselines and targets

• Percentage of students, as defined by widening participation criteria, who apply and accept places onto undergraduate programmes.
• Increase the number of students engaged in flexible and part time learning.
• Increase the percentage of students, as defined by widening participation criteria, who apply and accept postgraduate offers.
• Increase the number of older learners engaged in programmes.

Monitoring and evaluation

• Monitor and review annually against applications and acceptances baseline (set 2004-05) from Partner Schools.
• Monitor the relationship between means-tested bursaries and merit-based scholarships.
• Monitor and review targeting and engagement in Partner Schools.
• Undertake controlled trials and work with non-participants in UoK activities in Partner Schools.
• Evaluate Partner-cohorts post entry through linking outreach and student records.
• Monitor and evaluate Kent funded work in relation to externally funded partnership-based participation projects.
• Monitor resource allocation for outreach and engagement activities through the use of the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC).  

3 Within the context of addressing gaps in widening participation research as outlined by Gorard, p 116, Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education, HEFCE, July 2006.
Definitions

- We aim for a rich diversity within the student body. Within the context of targeting widening participation students of all ages, our criteria include: students from lower social economic groups (parental occupation; EMA eligibility; free school meals – as relevant to age); first in family to attend HE; low participation neighbourhoods.
- The University also recognises the difficulties faced by the majority of students possessing vocational qualifications with regard to progression and therefore will work with partners to address these difficulties.

4 As recommended by HEFCE, p4, Widening Participation: a review, HEFCE, November 2006.
4. The Participation Delivery Plan 2007-10

Introduction

Since the writing of the last Widening Participation Plan in 2003 the University has moved with great speed to effectively embed the innovative delivery of progression opportunities across Kent and Medway. Furthermore, the University’s Widening Participation strategy and ethos have been instrumental to the effective growth of the institution through successive successful bidding for, and meeting, additional student numbers (ASNs) targets thereby helping to define the fundamental shape of the University.

During this time the University has moved from a position of good but disparate outreach activities undertaken by academic departments and a central team undertaking a variety of project style initiatives, to a more systematic participation offer underpinned by formal agreements between partners supported by the allocation of recurrent resource to central, faculty and departmental levels.

The delivery plan does not seek to represent all of the activities that currently make up the University’s offer to schools, colleges and communities. These are outlined in the following annexes. Rather, it highlights those areas that require particular focus to ensure that the strategic engagement with participation issues continues to drive the University forward.

Flexible and part time learning delivery

With regard current delivery, the Partnership Development Office (PDO) will continue to innovate in the area of community engagement by the further development and roll out of the Moodle-based programme and through more traditional engagement with community centres. During 2006-07 it is planned to run a minimum of 5 Moodle-based credit bearing modules.

The PDO will continue to support the bold curriculum innovation being undertaken by the Centre for Work and Learning (CwLa) that will deliver new undergraduate provision within 2006-07 academic year and postgraduate provision by 2008.

The PDO will work with the Centre for Work and Learning to engage students, who meet widening participation criteria, in postgraduate learning opportunities.

Schools and Colleges:

Partner Schools and Colleges delivery summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Scale of offer</th>
<th>Development, design and delivery</th>
<th>Monitoring and evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>Establish links with 18 schools and 3 colleges</td>
<td>Offer progression curriculum (including visits); student ambassador links and 2 undergraduate scholarships per year (and one for each Access provider)</td>
<td>Review targeting strategy and establish baseline data (OFFA\textsuperscript{5} target: the offer of 60 visits and/or activities; achieve 1000 student ambassador paid hours)</td>
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</tbody>
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\textsuperscript{5} University of Kent Access Agreement 2006.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>Links with 19 schools and 3 colleges</th>
<th>Progression curriculum from all departments available to all schools</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pilot 'affiliated partner schools' through established clusters in which our Partner Schools sit. This will allow sixth formers from additional schools with access to a shared timetable to access some of our curriculum and events at the Partner School. Pilot will have the following 3 foci: Medway; Languages; Sciences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteering, paid and credit bearing student ambassador schemes clearly presented to students as linked activities. Engage depts with credit bearing ambassador schemes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assess potential of family learning in partner schools to engage parents. Potential pilot</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pilot Moodle based stepping up programme and subject based curriculum</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| | Establish curriculum or event provision in every academic department |
| | Offer residential summer school for year 11 Partner School students |
| | Offer residential summer school for Associate College students (Vocational routes) |
| | Subject Specialists to support faculty level admission role for partner intake |
| | Up to 90 paid student ambassadors in place |
| | Create the Partner School brand and market more broadly to schools intake |
| | Recurrent resources for curriculum development established |

As Partner activity is primarily funded as a widening participation activity ensure that destinations of all students are recorded in addition to applications to Kent.

Evaluation against baseline data
| 2008-10 | Review number of partner institutions and type of offer | Resources for curriculum development within departments to increase in line with fee income  
Work with Building Schools for the Future initiative on progression curriculum offer. | Although it is likely that any genuine change in the culture of the school will take up to 10 years to emerge, we will undertake a review and evaluation during this academic year to assess initial impact of the scheme on progression and attainment. We will also assess the relationship between means tested and merit based scholarships and bursaries  
*(OFFA target: the offer of 150 visit/type activities for between 12-250 participants across 15 venues by 2011-12)* |

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**Student Ambassadors**

There are examples of voluntary, paid and credit bearing student schemes across the University. The PDO will work with these schemes to highlight to students the variety and potential relationship of schemes on offer. The PDO will work with departments that do not currently offer credit-bearing schemes to see if there is scope for extension of opportunities within the curriculum.

There are many examples of undergraduate and postgraduate student engagement with innovative schemes like the Lego League championships hosted by Computing, the Biosciences contribution to the public understanding of science through its communication programme and the Physics Department use of students during Space School which can be built upon.
Student ambassadors provide an important element of the stepping up and subject-based curriculum within partner schools and colleges. It is intended that a project-based module offered entirely by student ambassadors will be developed.

Cohering the International, Enterprise and Participation Plan

A number of the Partner Schools with which the University works have developed innovative links with other countries. One partner school has engaged with a school in India to promote links and work jointly on business and enterprise projects and offer exchange visits to students. It is recommended that the University work with a limited number of schools to cultivate an international dimension in our local participation and progression work which can continue during students’ undergraduate careers.

Widening Participation and Recruitment

The Partner School and College initiative was established by the University as part of its commitment to widen participation to higher education. As such the primary concern of the partnership is not to recruit solely to the University of Kent although equally we aim to ensure that students are not deterred from applying to a more traditional university through lack of knowledge or guidance.

The Partner School resources are targeted specifically at non-selective schools across Kent and Medway. Equally, all the schools we work with are established as part of a local cluster of schools that include grammar schools. Many schools are developing joint sixth form provision that allows free movement of students between schools to allow wider access to curriculum opportunities. In light of this arrangement, twinned with the University’s interest to engage students in language and science provision, it is proposed that the University pilots a small number of cluster based projects which draws upon both partner based and recruitment resources. The initial focus of the pilots will include Medway, languages and science. Other schools within the cluster that agree to take part in the pilot (both non selective and selective) will become ‘affiliated partner schools’ via our arrangement with the primary partner. As such, the schools will be able to access our progression curriculum offer. However, access to partnership scholarships will remain exclusive to Partner School status.

5. Annexes

Outreach and Progression

5.1 The University of Kent’s Access Agreement
http://www.offa.org.uk/

5.2 Partner Schools and Colleges information
http://www.kent.ac.uk/schools/partnership.html

5.3 School and College Compacts
(document annex 5.3)

5.4 Community development plan
(document annex 5.4)

5.5 Finance information for students
http://www.kent.ac.uk/financial-aid/

5.6 Aimhigher business plan 2006-08
5.7 Lifelong Learning Network Business Plan 2006-09
(URL under construction – available on-line June 2007)

5.8 Communications and Development Office
http://www.kent.ac.uk/cdo/

Engagement and Retention

5.9 Learning, Teaching and Assessment
http://www.kent.ac.uk/ueit/strategy/index.html

5.10 Work placed learning strategy
(April 2007)

5.11 Student Services
http://www.kent.ac.uk/guidance/

5.12 Student Disability strategy
http://www.kent.ac.uk/guidance/DisabilityStrategy.htm

5.13 Student Accommodation
(document annex 5.13)

5.14 Student Ambassador Plan
(April 2007)

5.15 Student Union Plan 2006
http://www.kentunion.co.uk/display/kent/Home

Exit

5.16 Careers Service
http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/

Monitoring and Evaluation

5.17 Monitoring and evaluation framework with qualitative testing matrix and HEFCE PI trends
(document annex 5.17)

5.18 University Statistics