EDUCATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE STRATEGY 2016-2020
The Education and Student Experience Strategy underpins one of the three key strategic objectives in the University Plan 2015-2020. The Strategy sets out how Kent students and staff will work together to promote and ensure student success through inclusive, inspiring and positively challenging opportunities. Our objectives are ‘to attract excellent students ambitious to learn, to ensure an excellent educational experience, both curricular and extra-curricular, and to produce graduates equipped for personal and professional success’. We envisage an outstanding learning environment, with a portfolio and curriculum updated and relevant for today’s and tomorrow’s student; a diverse student body with members supported to achieve their potential; innovative and technology-enhanced teaching of uniformly high standard across subjects and campuses; and employability embedded in the curriculum. We aim for greater consistency and clarity in our offer and our practice, and for greater coherence between the curricular and co-curricular aspects of student life, through which students gain a sense of belonging to intersecting communities. Graduates will have gained and will exhibit attributes including curiosity, integrity and accountability, and global awareness, which will help them gain influence, respect and success in their chosen futures. In the spirit of partnership and engagement, this Strategy will operate closely alongside the Kent Union Education Strategy, and up to 2020, we will work together towards a genuinely co-produced strategy for Education and Student Experience at Kent.
CONTEXT AND KEY THEMES

The University Plan 2015-2020 stresses that ‘Kent’s commitment to its students has never wavered, ensuring they are inspired, challenged and educated in the broadest sense’. It is therefore appropriate that aspirations in the current Plan follow directly from such earlier commitments. We aim to be a top 20 University by ensuring direct and clear links between teaching and research or professional practice; by investing in facilities that enhance and enable all aspects of the student experience; and by valuing and assuring equality, diversity and inclusivity.

The Kent student experience remains central to achieving this vision. Our students are the future. By working in partnership with the student body to build an excellent student experience, thereby enhancing opportunities for students to achieve success, we are shaping their future and securing our success. This is not only our responsibility, but also our privilege.

Teaching and learning are now coming centre-stage through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the revised National Student Survey (NSS) with its increased focus on academic communities, student voice, and stretch and rigour in the curriculum, and national projects to define, measure and analyse Learning Gain. For an ambitious and high-achieving University like Kent, confident in its offer but always striving to improve, the NSS, TEF and similar surveys and measures allow us to benchmark our performance against our peers and to identify outstanding successes and areas for development. These

Tim Grocer
The UK’s European university

Instruments are not ends in themselves, but measure aspects of our education provision at which we should want to excel: student satisfaction and engagement; student-facing facilities and services; a respect for professional, technology-enhanced and up-to-date learning and teaching; and an environment that attracts, nourishes and develops the best people. Around 80% of the University of Kent’s income comes from student fees and associated grants. So whilst research is crucial to our reputation, it is maintaining student numbers and student satisfaction, and ensuring our students recognise the value of strong links between teaching, research and professional practice that will keep Kent sustainable. Our challenge is to raise the profile of teaching by committing to create an environment where teaching excellence is valued equally to research and their interaction provides a world class experience for students. While this challenge exists in any case, it becomes an imperative given the increasing public focus on teaching through the TEF.

In one way or another, it is everyone’s job in the University community to recruit and retain excellent students who are able to benefit from being at Kent; assure and deliver excellent teaching; and enhance the environment for student support, academic and co-curricular experience. Many academics produce outstanding research and enjoy doing so enormously – but it is also true that many academics have come into the profession because they were inspired by their own university teachers and supervisors. It is up to us to ensure that we pass on to our own students that enthusiasm for enjoyment in, and engagement with knowledge and learning. Professional services staff, in their interactions with students, also add value to both curricular and co-curricular activities, as well as enriching the sense of community on our campuses. By supporting and training staff (where required or requested), we can ensure both good quality and consistency of experience across our provision. Likewise, by working with the student body and Kent Union on improvements to student representation, student feedback and academic communities, we create a virtuous circle of attracting strong students who themselves contribute to and enhance our community.

As a University community we aim to be both inspiring and challenging. Kent will demonstrate through success in NSS and TEF and collaborative work with Kent Union that student satisfaction can and should sit alongside genuinely stretching academic work at the highest level. We do not believe that students need or want their educational experience to be made easier – on the contrary, the best and most ambitious students understand that high achievement involves being intellectually challenged and sometimes feeling stretched. It is up to us to provide tailored support, both academic and pastoral, to enable all Kent students from all backgrounds to understand these advantages, and to work towards the graduate attributes that develop from them. Part of that support comes from students’ sense of belonging to inter-generational academic communities, which we aim to strengthen through the review of our curriculum to ensure there is intellectual common ground for students as well as appropriate levels of choice. These developments must be underpinned by the provision of appropriate academic and social space that can support student-led academic societies and related co-curricular activities.

Equally important in creating positive student experiences are the recognition, support and investment given to co-curricular activities and achievements through sporting, musical and other societies, volunteering, and paid work within and beyond the University. These are both life-enhancing, and are where friendship groups between students are formed. We must therefore develop, publicise and invest in further opportunities for work, internships, partnerships with employers, placements, activities and societies, and in equality of access to such opportunities for all our students on all our campuses.

Students should be able to expect their university to provide clear, inclusive, accessible and comprehensible frameworks for their learning and teaching. Clearly, they do not expect everything to be exactly the same across different disciplines – but nonetheless we do need to work towards greater clarity, coherence and consistency of practice. There is superb good practice in many areas at Kent that needs to be shared better; but there are also unexplained and unnecessary differences in practice that must be reduced.
CONTEXT AND KEY THEMES (CONT)

to promote student engagement and satisfaction. We will work to achieve:
• Coherence between the curricular and co-curricular elements of student life;
• Clarity of our curriculum offer through effective communication at all stages of the student journey, with a clear differentiation of our different campus communities, each promoted on its own merits;
• Equality of opportunity for all students through inclusive teaching practices;
• Co-production with Kent Union and student representatives of a well-supported and clearly articulated framework within which students can construct their own unique student experience.

As with recruitment and teaching, student support and success are everyone’s responsibility at Kent and just as vital to our future sustainability, so we must ensure staff are confident their efforts and achievements in these areas will be recognised in their professional and career development. A concerted effort to reward, recognise and encourage outstanding contributions to excellence in education and the student experience, for both academic and professional staff, must be built into all areas of management practice and HR policies to promote a cultural shift at Kent.

As a University community, we are extremely fortunate to have the additional resource of the first Kent Union Education Strategy (2016-2020), which indicates the thoughtful commitment and welcome challenge of our student body. The key aims and aspirations above, and the KPIs and themes for implementation below, draw significantly on the themes in the Kent Union Education Strategy. Staff and students will work together on a range of groups and committees, including Kent Union’s own Education and Student Experience Board (with invited staff membership) to ensure the links between the two connected strategies become stronger and closer.

Our Strategic Priorities, interwoven in the outline above, map onto the five main themes of the Kent Union Education Strategy (2016-20):

1 **Teaching excellence** – to share best practice; support teaching qualifications for staff; enhance support and training for GTAs and sessional staff; encourage teaching innovation and improve access to learning resources through our online learning environment; develop a range of accessibility initiatives and a more accessible learning environment for all students.

2 **Consistency of academic experience** – to close retention or attainment gaps (eg between BME and white students); provide equivalence of experience for students on our Medway campus and European Centres; develop flexible modes of delivery using digital technology (specifically, lecture capture).

3 **Student engagement** – to improve the engagement of student in the Learning Community through academic societies; plus better course representation (Student Voice) and monitoring how student feedback enhances students’ learning and their experience.

4 **Modern curriculum** – to increase the number of four-year programmes with a year in industry or abroad, embed Learning Opportunities to develop a more inclusive curriculum with key skills and opportunities for work experience; provide support to build graduate attributes for future career success and employment.

5 **Assessment and feedback** – to provide clear, high quality and personalised feedback promptly to help students improve performance; through implementation of the Assessment and Feedback Policy with increased management of assessment online, combined with improvements to the Academic Adviser system.

This will engender a shared sense of purpose and approach to education that will build relationships and value the different contributions that all students and members of staff (from academic Schools and professional services) make to the educational experience. Alongside this, and with the endorsement of Kent Union, we introduce a sixth theme to stress initiatives supporting broader student life at Kent, in the interests of enhancing the overall student experience:

6 **Student life** – to provide opportunities for social and leisure activities, accessible to all students. These will stand alongside the academic environment and communities, together maximising the ‘cultural capital’ of students supported by life in college and residential communities, student-facing facilities and services, including those focused on general health and wellbeing.
The five strategic objectives of the *Education and Student Experience Strategy* for the period 2016-2020 build upon the strengths and progress of the previous Learning and Teaching Enhancement strategy and respond to the key strategic aims of the University plan:

**1.** Provide a relevant, viable and sustainable portfolio of programmes that is internationally attuned and attractive to high quality students

**2.** Improve the success of student performance by equipping graduates for personal and professional success

**3.** Deliver an excellent student experience at Kent that is an exemplar of good practice in the higher education sector.

**Objectives**

1. **Strategic objectives**
   - Provide a relevant, attractive and viable portfolio of programmes
   - Improve the success of student/graduate performance

(1) **Challenge and support students in realising their ambitions through active engagement with their studies and full participation in the academic community**

We will ensure that the University’s portfolio of taught and research degree programmes is balanced, viable and intellectually challenging by:

- Using market intelligence to plan and maintain Kent’s recruitment position in the sector;
- Addressing student and employer needs, whilst retaining breadth and flexibility of choice;
- Using a diverse, but inclusive, range of pedagogies that support a diverse student body and promote curriculum internationalisation;
- Ensuring that all programmes are informed by research and professional practice and include both international and employment perspectives;
- Supporting student transitions into the University community and discipline;
- Improving student retention and success through a blended and targeted programme of academic, peer and pastoral support.

(2) **Increase students’ employment prospects and promote lifelong learning through the provision of flexible and diverse learning opportunities**

We will promote effective strategies for curricular and co-curricular provision to enhance the skills, internationalisation and employability of our graduates by:

- Attending to the values and attributes of the Kent Graduate in all our programmes;
- Ensuring employability skills can be embedded in, or combined with, all disciplines;
- Fostering student mobility through international and employment opportunities within and outside the curriculum (e.g. placements, internships, summer schools, relevant work experience) across all our UK locations and European centres;
- Recording all curricular (transcripts) and verifiable co-curricular activity through the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) and celebrating student success;
- Using Student Success (EDI) initiatives in all schools to reduce student achievement or attainment gaps for those with protected characteristics.
Provide a student experience that is an exemplar in the sector

(3) Embrace innovative and inspirational approaches to teaching, assessment and support that foster student learning and success

We will support innovative and inclusive practice in learning, teaching and assessment, including digital and assistive technologies, to enhance student engagement and outcomes by:
• Increasing teaching qualifications and/or relevant other experience for all staff and students who teach;
• Recognising and rewarding staff for excellence in education through awards and promotion, to raise the profile and value of teaching;
• Improving the digital literacy and scholarship of staff and students to maximise the potential of blended learning, by providing guidance and training to staff and students in the use of digital and assistive technologies;
• Equipping staff and students to use technologies effectively for teaching, learning and student success, to complement in-class time, enhance access and deliver innovation;
• Ensuring students are aware of and benefit from strong and productive links between teaching and research, scholarship and professional practice;
• Applying the Assessment and Feedback Policy to improve student performance and satisfaction;
• Re-invigorating the Academic Adviser system to enhance personal and professional development of students.

Develop learning environments that enhance the student experience

(4) Develop and sustain well-resourced, inclusive learning environments that support our educational provision and enhance student life

We will deliver an integrated range of student support services that guide academic achievement and personal development, and enable graduate success. We will provide an excellent student experience by:
• Developing and investing in teaching and learning spaces, as well as student-facing services (accommodation and social facilities), in response to staff and student needs and feedback;
• Building more effective and accessible student communities in colleges, clubs and societies and establishing a social network of Residents’ Support Officers (student-staff) in college accommodation and Park Wood;
• Exploring plans to co-locate and integrate student-facing support services;
• Actively promoting student health and wellbeing and improving student engagement in health, leisure and sporting activities;
• Raising awareness of disability and mental health support and improving the range of services available to students;
• Creating more and different types of spaces to meet the diverse needs of student communities, including quiet, social and activity spaces.

Deliver academic excellence in partnership with students

(5) Encourage the engagement of staff and students in raising academic standards and quality

We will support the achievement of institutional objectives and enhance all aspects of teaching quality and the student experience by:
• Developing the University’s quality management systems to maintain high academic standards;
• Monitoring implementation of core policies and procedures to ensure that all students have an excellent experience and are treated equitably;
• Revising quality management processes in response to external reviews (eg QA Reviews) and outcomes of TEF;
• Using student feedback at all levels (including both internal and external surveys (eg NSS/Kent Union reports) to ensure that the student voice informs the enhancement of the opportunities available to students;
• Working in partnership with Kent Union to improve the student representative system to ensure that our academic excellence and student experience continues to be an exemplar in the sector.
IMPLEMENTATION

The success of this Strategy is closely dependent upon the University’s broader commitment to the development of the physical estate, digital infrastructure, student skills and support services. Together these resources will build strong academic and co-curricular communities and create a culture that promotes a sense of belonging and enhances both staff and student success. Staff will be encouraged to be innovative and creative in their teaching and support of learning through collaborations between academic schools and professional services; and University policies and practices will be developed to ensure that excellence is both shared and recognised.

To support the implementation of this Strategy and its integration with other institutional strategies, consultations at the Education Board and Student Experience Board will be progressed further through the Faculty Education and Student Experience committees and forums. Discussions will continue with Kent Union and course representatives. Additional support for Schools and staff in relation to engaging with key themes of the Strategy will be delivered through relevant sessions at several University networks and forums throughout the academic year. Schools will be encouraged to reflect upon their engagement with this Strategy as a result of their annual monitoring reviews to inform their future plans for educational provision and student experience.
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) – TARGETS (2020)

- **Recruitment statistics** – increase student numbers at Medway by 1000 FTE and European centres (by 50%) with EU (up to 15%) and international students (up to 25%) of our student population
- **Tariff entry** – top quintile of UK Universities
- **Retention* & progression** – >95%; all campuses
- **Achievement** – 1/2i (<5% BME gap)
- **National Student Survey** – top 20
- **Destination leavers survey (DLHE)*** – top 20
- **Academic teaching qualifications** (ATQs) of staff – 80%

Using appropriate benchmarking data for the above, plus:
- External examiner reports – maintain quality & standards
- PSRB accreditation reports – successful renewal
- Quality Assessment Review – enhanced quality & student experience

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

i University Plan (2015-20) ‘an excellent education, delivered by world class researchers’
ii Kent People Strategy (2015-20) ‘We will develop our reward and recognition arrangements to encourage and incentivise the attributes we need in our people and support the achievement of our ambitions and reward initiative’
iii Kent Union Education Strategy (2016-20)
iv NSS 2017 – to address new questions on Learning Community; Student Voice and Learning Opportunities
v Assessment & Feedback Policy (2016-20)
vi Arts & Culture Strategy – in preparation
vii Widening Participation Strategy (2015-20)
viii Internationalisation Strategy (2016-20)
ix Employability Strategy (2013-16; 2017-20)
x Graduate Student Strategy (2016-20)
x Estates Strategy (2015-25)
xii Information Services Strategy (2014-16; 2017-2020)
xiii eg Learning & Teaching, Quality Management & Enhancement (QME), Personal Academic Support (PASS) Networks; e-Learning Forum
xiv Targets (2020) taken from University Plan