University of Kent
Employability Strategy

Introduction

The University of Kent is committed to enhancing the employability of all our students, undergraduate and postgraduate, in order to enable them to compete and flourish in a competitive, fast-moving knowledge-based economy.

The University’s Employability Strategy is designed to contribute to the achievement of the University’s Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy and to build on existing good practice within the University. This includes:

- Acquisition of discipline-specific and transferable skills through the curriculum
- Support for Personal Development Planning
- High quality careers guidance
- Vocational relevance curricula that support work-based and work-related learning within the curriculum including sandwich year placements
- Opportunities for volunteering and placement experience overseas
- Support for Innovation and Enterprise initiatives and activities

The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy is intended amongst other things to:

*Enhance students' employment prospects and promote lifelong learning through the provision of flexible and diverse learning opportunities*

Aligned with that aim, and working within the framework of our evolving Student Experience Strategy, our Employability Strategy consolidates and seeks to enhance activity in a range of areas pertinent to graduate employability.

Developing Employability Attributes

A set of core attributes and capabilities are identified by graduate recruiters as indicators of their needs and as hallmarks of ‘graduateness’. These relate to ‘world of work’ behavioural practices such as reliability, good timekeeping, confidence and complex problem solving, and to transferable skills such as communication, team working ability, the capacity to operate independently and to demonstrate contextual sensitivity, including intercultural awareness. A recognition of the value of these attributes/skills and their relevance to HE learning within and outside the curriculum underpins the ambitions of this strategy document, which is intended to help us develop our students as independent learners through the different stages of their student experience, and to prepare them for employability.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TRANSFERABLE SKILLS</strong></th>
<th><strong>ATTRIBUTES</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Communication (oral, written)</td>
<td>Adaptability (flexibility &amp; mobility)</td>
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<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Energy</td>
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<td>Team working</td>
<td>Drive and resilience</td>
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<td>Planning and organization</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Enterprise</td>
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<td>Problem solving</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>IT and quantitative/qualitative analysis skills</td>
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**External Drivers**

Awareness of the need for graduates to make an effective contribution to the labour market has been around for a long time. The Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) highlighted the notion, as did the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, the Dearing Report (1997). These made explicit the importance of education for employability, and emphasised the value of core skills development and work experience in enhancing students’ potential for employment.

The National Student Forum was set up by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) in early 2008, to give voice to students on HE courses and to ensure that policies “were the better for being informed by the student voice.” Its view was that:

“employability emerged as a recurring, cross-cutting theme for the Forum …. Although we fully endorse the view that the rigorous study of a discipline is an end in itself, it is nonetheless clear that the link between higher education and better job prospects is high on the agenda for many students.”

A plethora of relatively recent national and regional initiatives and policy documents highlighting crucial issues within HE have brought these matters to the forefront, and have re-enforced the importance of the employability agenda for the University.
These include:

- The publication of the White Paper on “The Future of Higher Education”, which highlights the need for students to develop skills to meet the needs of employers.
- The recommendations of the Roberts Review and the Joint Research Council/AHRB generic skill requirements for all new Council funded research students.
- The changing criteria of employability performance indicators, especially the defining and subsequent weightings of graduate and non-graduate destinations.
- Increased numbers of students in HE are leading both to greater competition and a change in the nature of the graduate labour market where the distinctions between ‘graduate’ and ‘non-graduate’ jobs are becoming less and less clear cut.
- University league tables, which highlight the perceived success or failure of institutions and individual disciplines to lead to appropriate graduate employment destinations.
- Widening participation institutions will need to demonstrate that a concern for employability is an integral component of Widening Participation strategies. The experience of students who find themselves disadvantaged in the graduate labour market will, indisputably, have the effect of discouraging others - particularly those from prospective applicants without a tradition of participation in Higher Education.
- Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) issued to graduates.
- The contribution to the UK economy by the employability of graduates has been acknowledged in the CBI and NUS report (2011) and the Wilson Review (2012).
- Government requirements for universities to provide more detailed information for prospective students to use in order to enhance student choice brings a further focus on the destination of leavers from higher education (DLHE) information produced annually by all universities. This information forms a vital part of the Key Information Sets published by all HEIs.
- Economic forecasts suggest that the UK will continue to experience limited economic growth until 2017 (HM Treasury Forecasts for the UK Economy 2013). In particular, increasing youth unemployment in the UK (exceeding 20%) requires graduates to develop a diverse range of skills and significant resilience in order to be successful in a challenging national and international labour market.

The University of Kent undertakes active dialogue with employers in order to inform how it can best equip its students with the necessary skills and qualifications needed for long-term employability. The University places great importance on business engagement initiatives to bridge the gap between student skills development and graduate recruitment and seeks to involve regional, national and international employers from all industry sectors and sizes in both curricular and extracurricular programmes and initiatives.
Furthermore, via the Careers and Employability Service, Academic schools and Kent Union the University actively supports the development of work placement opportunities and provides employers with the opportunity to advertise part-time and full-time graduate vacancies to students and recent graduates.

**University of Kent Employability Strategy**

The University of Kent is committed to providing opportunities for its students to develop skills and attributes which will enhance their employability. These opportunities are available to students at every level of study, regardless of their personal circumstances.

Underpinning this strategic commitment are **five primary objectives**:

- To maintain the University’s position as the region’s leading institution for student employability;
- To improve the overall quality of graduates’ first employment destinations – as evidenced by improved league-table positioning;
- To incorporate employability-related skills and training activities across all academic disciplines and other relevant areas;
- To increase the range and availability of student placement opportunities in the UK and abroad;
- To establish and maintain high quality, co-ordinated links with leading national, international and local graduate recruiters.

The University aims to achieve these objectives by:

- Continuing to embed higher level, subject specific, intellectual and transferable skills within the academic curriculum;
- Increasing and enhancing opportunities for work-related learning;
- Preparing students for employment in a global economy;
- Continuing to offer access to specific career search skills through its Careers and Employability Service;
- Recording personal development.
- Continuing to deliver the European Diploma Supplement to every graduating student

**Goals for stakeholders:**

**For the University**

- Increasing awareness of the employability issue across the University. Ensuring that schools assume responsibility for promoting the employability strategy.
• Working towards recognising volunteering and work experience through assessment, accreditation or other forms of recording.
• Improving the routes and mechanisms for the sharing of identified good practice and for the dissemination of employment related skills and development opportunities.
• Incentivising students to participate in employability schemes.
• Providing academic staff with appropriate advice and guidelines on good practice.
• Organising regular reviews of the operation of this Employability Strategy and assessing how far specific goals are being met.
• Sustaining and improving links with international institutions who offer overseas employment or placement opportunities to our students.

For Academic Schools

• Developing the curriculum further to embed transferable skills and promote opportunities for work experience, placement or volunteering activities.
• Engaging with employers and institutions at home and abroad to support and enhance curriculum design and delivery, and provide opportunities for lectures, visits, work experience or placement activity.
• Promoting engagement of staff and students with CES to promote awareness of specific job-seeking skills and modern graduate employment trends and issues.

For the Careers and Employability Service (CES)

• Providing advice on ‘career-searching’ skills, and specific targeted ‘jobseeking’ skills (for approaching employers, for preparation of CVs, for interviews, etc).
• Enhancing the provision and promotion of help available to international students through the CES.
• Devising a system for developing and acknowledging students’ experience of work - KEW (Kent Experience of Work framework).
• Developing a broader network of local SMEs and national employers who can offer placements and future graduate employment via the Senior Employability Officer.
• Developing further the CES Careers Employability Award on Moodle.

For the Kent Innovation and Enterprise Unit (KIE)

• Enhance student creativity and innovation through the delivery of student enterprise events, opportunities and workshops
• Offering student support and facilities to develop self-employment, and business start up and development skills, through the Kent Enterprise Hub, an incubation unit for Kent students, graduates and staff.
• Grow the Employability Points Scheme to include students from all academic schools, disciplines and campuses

For the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UELT)

• Offering all students the opportunity to develop a range of skills to support their academic and personal development.
• Advising academic schools to articulate the intended learning outcomes of programmes and modules, including subject-specific, academic and transferable skills.
• Providing information and support to staff and students on academic skills and Personal Development Plans (PDPs) through the new Academic Advising System and use of e-portfolios.
• Developing opportunities for all students to engage in the process of personal development planning, in conjunction with academic schools, KIE and the Careers and Employability Service, in order to enable them to take responsibility for their own development including progression to employment

For the Graduate School

• Offering a Global Skills Award Programme for postgraduate taught students.
• Providing a Researcher Development Programme for Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Researchers.

For CEWL

• Offering students lunchtime and evening language courses, on a non-credit-bearing basis, in order to develop students’ intercultural awareness and international communication skills, and working with SECL to encourage uptake of language learning for extra credit or as part of the mainstream curriculum.
• Investigating the development of summer course provision bringing home and international students together to build transferable skills and share cultural perspectives.

For Kent Union

• Directly employing students therefore helping them develop transferable skills, gain qualifications and build their self-confidence
• Helping students to find employment through JobShop
• Facilitating the election of students to serve in representative volunteer positions of responsibility (course and school reps, part-time officers, democracy zone committee members and student committee members) where they develop transferable skills and build their self-confidence
- Offering a wide range of student activities, including clubs, societies, student media and volunteering through which students develop transferable skills, build their bank of life experiences and develop self-confidence
- Helping students understand, reflect upon and capture how they have increased their employability in all these activities by using the Kent Union Employability toolkit

**Implementation and Outcomes**

The strategy will be supported by the Employability and Skills sub-committee, chaired by PVC External, and whose membership will include representatives from Academic Schools and Professional Service Departments.

The Employability Group will construct and monitor an annual action / implementation plan with clear goals and timelines.

The following easily identifiable aspects will be primary indicators as to the success of the Strategy:

- the progression of students into employment or further study, taking into account the type of employment concerned and its relevance to the student’s future career plans within the context of broadening graduate employment trends.
- the level of active understanding among students of the skills which they are developing.
- feedback from students on the support they are given and its value to them in identifying and obtaining appropriate employment and/or further study.
- feedback from employers on the suitability of our students for employment taking into account employer expectations in respect of continuing professional development.

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