INTRODUCTION

The University of Kent takes the view that wellbeing is fundamental to a positive student learning experience. Students who are happy, confident and able to establish meaningful relationships are better placed to achieve good academic outcomes during their studies.

A key principle for informing an effective wellbeing strategy should be to promote a safe and supportive environment for students, which celebrates equality, diversity and inclusivity. A wellbeing strategy should provide an opportunity to reaffirm our belief that the University is a key place to promote a positive, physical, social and mental state and create an environment where students feel secure, healthy and, as far as possible, happy.

Experiencing positive relationships, having some control over one’s own life and having a sense of purpose are all important attributes to wellbeing. Also the attainment of high self-worth, positive values and self-esteem are important contributory factors. Wellbeing research suggests that experiencing positive emotions over time can lead to the build-up of valuable personal internal resources.

A person’s wellbeing is shaped by their genes, upbringing, personal circumstances, choices and the social conditions in which they live. Factors like our genes and external events are outside our control. However, some commentators believe that what students decide to do at study and/or work, rest and play accounts for a substantial part of their sense of wellbeing.

It is important to offer students a comprehensive range of support services at University and School level. It is also important to instil the fact that this is a collaborative process, with which students are encouraged to proactively engage, and in which they must take a leading role. A collaborative approach should enable students to work towards, and achieve, a degree that reflects the realisation of their true academic potential.

This student wellbeing strategy focuses on intentional activities that we can choose to do ourselves. Inevitably some of these intentional activities cross over. However, for the purposes of effective implementation of this strategy at Kent, six broad themes are presented. These are:

1. Meaning and Purpose;
2. Psychological Wellbeing;
3. Social Engagement;
4. Physical Fitness;
5. Physical Environment; and
6. Personal Finances.

Each of these broad themes will be discussed in more detail below.
STUDENT WELLBEING STRATEGY, 2014-2019

The intention is to construct an operational calendar to ‘join up’ all relevant and existing student wellbeing activity at Kent, and to produce an action plan for 2014-17, to progress any key areas that are not currently being addressed.

1. MEANING AND PURPOSE

This can be defined as allowing students to develop meaning and purpose in their lives, as well as being a student at university.

Key Aims:

- Developing positive **self-worth**. *Be comfortable with who you are*
- Motivating students to set **goals** to enhance their competencies with future reference to family, career and contributing to society. *Have a sense of direction*
- Building **skills in resilience** to endure hardship, homesickness, change, relationship break-up, failure and death. *Finding ways to bounce back*
- Uncovering and implementing **values** to live more intentionally. *Being aware of what you believe in*

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

This can be defined as the extent to which every individual is, relatively speaking, happy and satisfied, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and is able to work productively and make a positive contribution to University Life.

Key Aims:

- Putting in place **support systems** for students moving away from home, family and friends
- Addressing **barriers to inclusion**, including disability, age (mature students), sexual orientation, race and religious belief
- Establishing support structures for dealing with the **stresses of University life**, including financial worries, making the transition to independent living and study, relationship issues, academic expectations and employment
- Encouraging students’ with pre-existing mental health difficulties to register for support, to **protect and enhance** their psychological wellbeing
- Ensure that systems are in place to **offer advice and support** to students encountering significant life events, such as bereavement and divorce
- **Raise awareness** of the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse
3. SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

This can be defined as students making social and emotional connections with fellow students and the local community.

Key Aims:

- Foster a sense of belonging amongst students within the University community
- Provide students with the space to meet socialise and integrate with each other, the university and wider society
- Promote the building of student clubs and societies, to support social engagement and good health
- Encourage students to enhance their wellbeing by interacting outside of their academic studies
- Encourage social exchange with other students and the local community, in the form of offering and receiving help

4. PHYSICAL FITNESS

This can be defined as the body's ability to function efficiently and effectively in work, study and leisure activities and to meet emergency situations.

Key aims:

- To enable students to have access to a broad range of physical and recreational activities, in order to enhance their level of physical fitness
- To create a greater awareness of the opportunities available to students in relation to physical and recreational activities
- To create a greater awareness and understanding of the benefits of physical fitness in relation to student health and wellbeing
- To identify and breakdown the barriers facing students in relation to participation in physical and/or recreational activity

5. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Public Health England has defined the Physical Environment as “the material and tangible conditions in which we live” (natural, built, socio-economic and cultural). The physical environment is recognised as an important determinant on the wellbeing of students. The aim should be to enhance the quality of life that results from a healthy relationship between the individual and the physical environment.
STUDENT WELLBEING STRATEGY, 2014-2019

Key Aims:

• To **promote** the development of a safe, secure and aesthetically pleasing University environment
• To **support** the creation of buildings that engender a sense of community and belonging, allowing students to interact and develop healthy, enriching relationships and interests
• To **support** the creation of spaces and places on each campus, fit to serve a community of varied interests and needs. For example, designated quiet spaces, student social space, outdoor spaces that lend themselves to relaxation and calm as well as physical activity
• To **build awareness** of, and engagement with, environmental issues, encouraging individual responsibility in relation to sustainability and ‘natural capital’

6. PERSONAL FINANCES

This can be defined as encouraging and supporting students to become independent when it comes to managing their own financial affairs.

Key aims:

• To create a **greater awareness and understanding** of money matters amongst students
• To **support students** encountering financial difficulties
• To **encourage** students to become more responsible when it comes to managing their personal finances

MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy will be in place for the period 2014 to 2019, and the Student Wellbeing Strategy Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Student Experience Committee on an annual basis.

WLC
October 2014