

The Kent People Strategy

(Approved by Council on 27 November 2015)

The People Strategy for the 5 years to June 2020, will form an integral part of the next Institutional Strategy and will need to provide an effective response for the many challenges and uncertainties that are facing the Higher Education sector over the next 5 years as well as addressing those issues which may be specific to Kent.

The External Context

The external context that will inevitably influence the shape of the strategy is characterised by:

- A fall in the home student demographic which combined with the removal of the cap on student numbers will increase competition within the sector. Student outcomes and satisfaction with the overall student experience will be key to maintaining and improving Kent's competitive position as will research performance and esteem;
- Performance across the sector is rising as the recent REF results demonstrate – small differences in performance are making a big difference in league table positions and public perception; the capacity to focus, plan and execute improvements in performance in key areas – and persist in the face of difficulty - will be vital to realising our Institutional Plan;
- Costs will increase. The additional cost of pensions, national insurance, inflationary pressures, government spending reviews and an ageing and expanding university estate, will mean that we will need to stretch our resources further, work smarter, be flexible and responsive, make difficult decisions about the allocation of resources and manage change well;
- For all these reasons, the focus on performance and realising our ambitions will inevitably increase and effective leadership will be central to our success (1);
- Alongside the rest of the sector, Kent will be increasingly reliant on overseas markets to maintain its income and research and innovation profile. Kent will need to develop a clear competitive edge to continue to attract both exceptional home and overseas students and staff;
- Demand for new staff is rising (2); March 2015 saw the biggest increase in demand for staff across all sectors since May 1998. This is combined with a marked increase in starting salaries and a decline of available candidates; the ability to offer an attractive and competitive employment proposition is a critical part of ensuring that we can attract the staff necessary to realise our ambitions;
- In line with UK trends and forecasts (3) the average age of the university's workforce is anticipated to increase as people stay in work longer. This trend will be exacerbated by changes to pension schemes and the affordability of retirement;
- Changes to pension schemes and tax allowances for pensions will increase the employee focus on the whole reward offer and a desire for flexibility in reward;

- Stubborn gender imbalances remain within UK workforce. This is reflected in particular in our academic workforce where women are under-represented, particularly in senior roles. The identification and removal of barriers to the career progression of women will continue to require focus;
- The new generation of so called “Millennials” (4) will continue to exercise influence over how we develop and position our employment offer. Millennials deliberately seek out employers whose corporate social responsibility values match their own, where they can achieve work life balance and where they can work within a strong cohesive, team-oriented culture (5). They do however share with the “baby boomer” generation a strong desire for career development and job security.

Organisational Factors

The most recent THE Workplace survey rated Kent in the top five employers against 3 of the 4 key indicators. Looking forward it is important to retain and build upon the strengths in Kent’s employment offer and balance this appropriately with the need for change as well as understanding and responding to the one area (Leadership Performance) where Kent is not so highly rated.

To understand the priority issues as seen from within the university, our workforce data has been reviewed (although this is not as comprehensive as it needs to be and will be partly addressed through the introduction of the new Staff Connect HR System) to identify trends. The HR team has also engaged the university community through a mix of one to one discussions, focus groups and mini surveys. In addition to supporting and recognising the implications of the external factors already highlighted, the main people related themes to emerge from these discussions for HR and leadership attention are:

- There is a strong sense of affiliation with and support for our core values of equality, fairness, collaboration and respect; this needs to be nurtured and safeguarded going forward if staff confidence is to be retained during times of change;
- A recognition that we need to develop our leaders at all levels in the organisation to drive innovation and improvement, support staff through change, and increase our visibility (nationally and internationally);
- A need to identify and manage our talent in a targeted way, ensuring that we structure experience, professional and personal development to ensure that we develop successors for our key leadership roles and where shortages are anticipated;
- In a highly devolved structure the presence of clear and explicit cross university frameworks and principles is an essential component of consistent practice and freeing up academics to focus on those areas where their creativity and insight can have most impact;
- That in a strongly collegiate environment more is often achieved through influencing, persuasion and informal networks than through the formal exercise of role based authority – meaning that our leaders at all levels require a high level of communication and influencing skills and an understanding of the roles of others in the decision making process;

- A recognition that we need to enhance our ability to attract the excellent staff from both home and overseas that we will continue to need and underpin this with a compelling employment offer and reward arrangements;
- A need to be clearer in expressing what our expectations are of our people – whether in terms of leadership, academic enterprise or professionalism and the contribution they make to our ambitions;
- The importance of continuing to support our staff and their ability to make a contribution through appropriate development opportunities;
- The need to support our academic staff to become more technically adept and able to deliver innovative learning methodologies;
- A strong desire for the potential for career progression and clear career paths;
- A desire for greater transparency in our people practices and policies particularly as these relate to career development and pay related decisions and better internal communication generally;
- A recognition that we need to redefine the role of Teaching & Scholarship contracts as a part of an integrated offer of excellent teaching based on world leading research and innovation and demonstrable scholarship. Looking forward these contracts, in smaller numbers than presently, will play a crucial role in enabling and providing innovative, research based teaching by closely aligning their contribution to colleagues on Research & Teaching contracts;
- A concern that “Internal work”, in the form of unnecessary layers of process and central control may stifle innovation and our ability to be responsive and agile in the face of change.

While the survey work picked up broad consensus from across the organisation on the issues that need to be addressed through a people strategy it was notable that in relation to nearly every indicator academic staff indicate relatively more dissatisfaction with their leadership, environment, opportunities and peer support than their non-academic colleagues.

Our Guiding Principles

In addressing all these issues it will be important to draw upon the inherent strengths of the Kent culture and what the university’s staff currently value in the Kent employment offer. In developing a People Strategy for the next 5 years each area for action has therefore been tested against the following guiding principles and considerations:

- **Realising Ambition**

Kent is an ambitious and aspirational organisation. We are proud of all that we have achieved so far in increasing our research performance, the quality of our learning and teaching and improving the experience of our students. These are the aims that drive and motivate us both as an organisation and individuals. In developing our people practices we

will nurture that pride and ambition, help to focus it and increase the visibility of our achievements.

- **Ensuring an Inclusive Approach**

Our commitment and approach to equality, diversity and inclusivity is a source of competitive advantage and strength that will influence the way our strategy develops and is implemented. Building an inclusive work place that inspires all staff to perform at their best will mean ensuring that we are seen to place value on different perspectives both in developing our thinking and executing change. This in turn will help to create the supportive and creative culture necessary to be successful and continue to engage us all .

- **Staff Safety, Health and Wellbeing**

- The University is committed to being a safe and healthy place for all to work, study and enjoy. Wellbeing is a state of mind that balances individual, personal resources and the demands that are placed upon them. Safety, health and wellbeing will be embedded in everything the University does, in recognition that resilient staff are its greatest asset.

- **Containing “Managerialism”**

The last staff survey (2008) indicated that Kent is widely perceived as a good place to work by the people who work here. This is reinforced by the published findings of the THE Best Workforce Survey (2015) with Kent ranked in the top five of 150 Universities in 3 key indicator areas. Early indications from two short surveys carried out as a part of the Strategy Stakeholder engagement survey for this process, indicate that Kent’s management ethos of enabling autonomy and supporting academic endeavour within a broad framework of corporate standards without highly formal targets and managerial tools is valued by staff. Despite the need to focus on performance, and the important place of “good” management, the university needs to continue to strike the right balance between frameworks and incentives, and a “lighter touch” that gives Kent a degree of distinctiveness in the sector and a competitive edge.

- **Enabling Flexibility**

In responding to change effectively it is important that internal structures, processes and contractual arrangements do not unnecessarily inhibit flexibility and enterprise and that unnecessary bureaucracy is eliminated. Opportunities to remove unnecessary bureaucracy, and manage risk appropriately, will be proactively sought and implemented wherever this can be achieved. .

- **Value for Money**

Given the cost pressures that the sector will face the focus will be on interventions and developments that represent good value for money and cost conscious solutions.

- **Keeping Focussed**

No employer has infinite resources to address the many challenges and multiple demands

that it may face. This is particularly true in the Higher Education sector where financial constraint and volatility of income and costs are increasingly prevalent. In developing the People Strategy resources will be focussed on where they can make most impact on the realisation of our ambitions. In doing this, the focus will be on the actions and programmes that have the potential to make an impact across a wide range of the issues that need to be addressed. As an employer, we also recognise that many individuals, throughout the university, can help us in that task – and so wherever we can we will work to support and facilitate the positive role those individuals can take.

- **Securing Engagement**

Lastly, the development of the strategy will need to take into account the considerable evidence base around securing employee engagement to improve organisational performance and secure competitive advantage (6). The evidence base indicates that key organisational features that support staff engagement include: so called “transformational” leadership styles, meaningful work, a perception of justice and transparency around employment decisions and effective two way employee communication and collaboration.

Taking into account the strategic context, the ambitions set out in our Institutional Plan, feedback from stakeholders and our guiding principles the following sets a positioning statement on Kent’s employment offer for the future together with 6 strategic objectives with underpinning actions.

Our Employment Offer.....

Space for Passion, Room to Grow....

Kent is a distinctive and attractive place to work – and those who work here want to keep it that way. Since its founding it has maintained a focus on academic and professional values, and a collegial and collaborative style of working, that in turn has ensured it continues to attract people who value the opportunity to advance and share knowledge within a supportive and inspirational environment. It is also an ambitious and imaginative organisation, recognising the need for change if it is to continue to realise those ambitions in an ever more challenging environment.

Looking forward the task of the People Strategy is to retain a focus on the university’s core values, giving everyone space to grow and be creative, while attracting, engaging and enabling those who work here to respond positively to the changes that will be necessary to continued success in an increasingly competitive world. Our aim is to be increasingly recognised as an innovative and supportive employer, and to strive to combine the best academic traditions and commitment to equality with the fresh perspectives and approaches that will enable us to adapt to our changing environment.

The Kent People Strategy

The University’s People Strategy is focussed on 6 inter -connected strategic objectives to be primarily led and delivered by the HR function working with other key colleagues and stakeholders (eg Business Improvement, UELT, Health & Safety and Estates).

We will take a fresh approach that ensures we can continue to attract and employ the

excellent people we need to fulfil our ambitions to be recognised, both nationally and internationally, as a high performing university. To do this we will:

1.1 Develop a compelling employer brand that will stand out among our competitors attracting the high calibre people with the attributes we need – both at home and overseas;

1.2 Develop and review our Recruitment Strategy and policies increasing our focus on effective search and assessment in key areas and specialisms (eg teaching capability and research credentials), and reviewing the impact of our current recruitment practices on equality and responsiveness to operational needs;

1.3 Articulate what we require of our leaders and managers through the development of competency frameworks and assessment tools – linking these to our reward, succession planning and recruitment policies and practices where appropriate;

1.4 Review our pay and benefit arrangements to ensure that we are able to attract staff from all the key markets in which we operate and need to attract high quality staff from;

1.5 Introduce “Graduate Trainee and Development” Schemes in Professional Services Departments and develop a policy on the use of Interns to support student employability.

2 We will engage with and develop our leaders at all levels of the organisation to drive innovation and improvement, support staff through change, and increase our visibility. To do this we will:

2.1 Provide skills based programmes to strengthen the capacity of our leaders and managers to:

- Formulate, lead and implement effective change programmes that both strengthen our performance and secure and inspire the confidence of our people;
- Exercise influence in positive ways, engage in difficult conversations and respond effectively to individual performance issues where they need to;
- Continue to develop and support their own staff – through coaching, effective feedback and development opportunities;
- Facilitate personal development of staff through mentoring and coaching;
- Develop effective and efficient business processes and organisational structures;
- Network and build relationships across the academic and business community to increase our visibility as a potential employer and partner.

2.2 Through the provision of a programme of Leadership and Management Speakers, create opportunities for our LASR Leadership Alumni to become a community of networked leaders exchanging good practice, engage in personal challenge and facilitate innovation;

- 2.3 Review and refresh our management development programmes to ensure that our managers are equipped with the practical people skills they need – taking into account the context and culture of Kent.

3 We will ensure that all our people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential while helping to realise our significant ambitions. To do this we will:

- 3.1 Review and clarify our policies on the use of hourly paid staff and teaching and scholarship contracts – ensuring that we use these contracts for reasons that support excellence in teaching and an inclusive and supportive culture for all our staff;
- 3.2 Review the employment offer to our hourly paid flexible work force – focussing on issues of security, equality and inclusivity;
- 3.3 Introduce a structured approach to succession planning ensuring that we identify those staff with the potential to progress into key or scarce skill roles and ensure a learning and career experience that ensures we have the necessary people to meet our needs at the appropriate time;
- 3.4 Facilitate succession planning and retention of high potential/key staff through the development of policies designed to open up career paths and opportunities eg career grade schemes and facilitating retirement;
- 3.5 Review RPD policy and processes – taking the opportunity to respond to different organisational needs where we can and linking RPD to succession, development of our culture and recognition opportunities;
- 3.6 Review the quality of probationary discussions and process and review the probationary process so that all probationers receive the support they need;
- 3.7 Provide support and guidance to ensure that all staff can plan their careers and develop the skills they need that will in turn help the University achieve its ambitions;
- 3.8 Review our employment policies to better support our staff who work overseas;
- 3.9 Use accreditation processes such as Athena SWAN, liP and HR Excellence in Research, to address equality issues and embed inclusivity;
- 3.10 Continue to improve accessibility of our physical environment and services for disabled employees;
- 3.11 Support our people to realise the internationalisation strategy through the development of training in cross-cultural communication, incubator training, effective networking and relationship building skills.

3.12 Develop an Employee and Talent Development Policy to ensure that everyone understands their role and that the University's policy and practice is transparent – better enabling the creation of a diverse and engaged community of staff.

3.13 Develop a policy and process on the use of Exit Interviews to ensure that we identify any issues around the management of our people that require a response.

4 We will work to develop an environment and culture based on a shared sense of purpose, collaboration, confidence about the future and openness to change. To do this we will:

4.1 Develop a HR based employee engagement role and activity, to support employee understanding and engagement working closely with the corporate communications department;

4.2 Improve two way communication with all our staff by providing a mechanism for staff to check understanding of decisions or make a query about issues that affect the whole organisation;

4.3 Create opportunities for engagement with our academic leaders to share, clarify and agree mutual expectations around those roles to ensure that the contribution they are able to make to wider academic endeavour and their school community is maximised and supported;

4.4 Conduct at least two Staff Surveys exercises over the plan period to achieve a better insight into the views and expectations of our people, how we can respond to those and measure progress;

4.5 Support the continuing review of School Governance structures and processes and a review of the WAM policy framework to ensure that these align with our ambitions for our culture;

4.6 Review and restructure our web site presence to improve accessibility and transparency of key HR information, news and policies;

4.7 Through *Valuing Everyone* and related initiatives, build shared understanding, awareness and capability across the University to embed our values of equality, fairness, collaboration and respect, cope with change and develop resilience;

4.8 Support staff networks to guard against the creation of functional siloes and increase the sense of collaboration and communication between different staff groups;

4.9 Increase our Management Information capacity and use of KPIs to facilitate a better and deeper understanding of the performance and expectations of all parts of our workforce to help us manage change effectively and inform our action planning and prioritisation.

5. 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 . To do this we will:

- 5.1 Increase the alignment between reward and performance through a review of our discretionary pay policies to strengthen the link between achievement of our ambitions and individual contribution;
- 5.2 Review our reward policies to ensure that we can address issues of market rate and scarce skill issues while also increasing transparency around our decision making processes;
- 5.3 Introduce cost effective staff benefit arrangements that increase the value and variety of the reward package for all our staff recognising that people value different things at different times;
- 5.4 Complete our Equal Pay Audit and Action Plan identifying and responding to any issues raised;
- 5.5 Respond to any challenges presented by the changes to the USS and Saul Schemes and tax allowances – ensuring we can continue to compete effectively for staff, and manage any impact on our staffing profile and costs.

6 We will contribute to the development of a responsive and agile organisation that equips us to meet the challenges of the future while protecting our core values of equality, fairness, collaboration and respect. To do this we will:

- 6.1 Review our job evaluation and grading arrangements making use of career grades and job families so that we can be more responsive to the changing shape and needs of the organisation;
- 6.2 Release resources, creativity and energy by redesigning and streamlining HR structures, processes and work practices – utilising the new Staff Connect HR system where relevant;
- 6.3 Support the development of strong project management and effective business processes through leadership and management development;
- 6.4 Train managers in the use of the new staff ordinances ensuring that they are confident in their role and able to interact effectively with both their staff and HR;
- 6.5 Review our contracts of employment to ensure that they balance the need to protect the organisation, the individual and enable necessary flexibility in our employment arrangements;
- 6.6 Enable staff and management self-service through Staff Connect;
- 6.7 Ensure that the HR Department itself is fit to deliver on the new Strategy ensuring clearer lines of accountability and the development of new centres of excellence in Reward Management, Employee Communications and Overseas Employment.

Measuring Our Success

In keeping with a commitment to minimise the use of indicators and targets the success of the People Strategy will be measured initially through the following global KPIs:

- Voluntary Staff Turnover to remain at or below the sector benchmark of 7.5%;
- Staff costs as a percentage of operating costs to remain below 55%;
- Formal staff grievances remain around the sector benchmark of 3.2 per 1000 staff;
- Increase percentage of female staff at Professor level from 22% to at least 25% by end of plan period.

During the course of this plan period the following indicators will also be introduced:

- Average time between advertisement and appointment to be less than 6 months for academic posts and less than 4 months for non-academic posts;
- Productive time lost through sickness absence to be no higher than 6% of productive days;
- Average percentage of staff agreeing with the statement “Kent is good place to work” (as measured through Staff Surveys) to exceed 75% of all respondents.

End

Notes:

- 1 University Challenge 2014 – Berkshire Consultants Ltd
- 2 The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) and KPMG Report on Jobs – Mar
- 3 The Impact of the Poor Academic Job Market on PhD Graduates, 2015 Sally Feldman (University of Reading) and “Who says innovators have to be young?”, [Amanda Goodall and John Montgomery](#), The Times, 22 May 2014
- 4 Defined as those born between 1979 and 2000
- 5 PwC’s NextGen: A global generational study – evolving talent strategy to match the new global reality, Dennis Finn and Anne Donovan, 2013
- 6 Engaging for Success – A report to Government, David McLeod and Nita Clark, July 2009

Strategy Link to Institutional and Other Major Thematic Areas

Theme	Objective Number																						
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5		2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.10	3.11	3.12	3.13	
Support for Research	√	√		√			√	√							√	√		√		√			
Support for Education	√	√		√			√	√		√					√	√							
Support for Internationalisation	√		√				√	√													√		
Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity	√	√	√				√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
Developing our Culture	√	√	√				√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√		√				√	√
Enhancing our attractiveness as an employer to potential staff	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	
Maintaining and Improving Well being			√				√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
Facilitating high performance		√	√				√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√					√	√	
Improving the experience of Hourly Paid Staff		√	√	√			√			√	√			√	√	√		√				√	
Development of professional services staff					√		√					√	√	√	√	√						√	
Development of Academics										√	√	√		√	√	√		√			√	√	
Development of our managers			√				√	√	√			√		√	√	√						√	
Development of our leaders			√				√	√				√		√	√	√					√	√	
Workforce Planning		√	√		√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√				√	
Developing and Improving Engagement	√				√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√				√	√
Enhancing Flexibility and responsiveness		√		√	√					√			√				√	√	√				
Increasing Transparency		√	√	√						√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√				√	√
Removing Unnecessary Bureaucracy		√		√	√								√		√								
Value for Money		√		√	√			√		√	√	√				√							

Theme	Objective Number																				
	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.9	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5	6.6	6.7
Support for Research	√		√		√					√	√		√						√		
Support for Education	√		√		√					√	√		√						√		
Support for Internationalisation			√							√											
Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity			√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√	√								
Developing our Culture	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√		√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√
Enhancing our attractiveness as an employer	√	√				√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√						
Maintaining and Improving Well being	√	√		√	√		√	√	√			√						√			
Facilitating high performance			√		√		√		√	√					√	√	√	√			√
Improving the experience of Hourly Paid Staff				√			√														
Development of professional services staff							√								√		√				
Development of Academics			√		√		√														
Development of our managers							√										√	√			
Development of our leaders					√		√											√			
Workforce Planning									√					√	√						
Developing and Improving Engagement	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		√	√		√			√			
Enhancing Flexibility and Responsiveness			√		√						√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Increasing Transparency	√	√		√	√	√				√	√		√		√			√	√		
Removing Unnecessary Bureaucracy					√						√				√	√	√			√	
Value for Money			√						√		√	√		√	√	√					√

