People Strategy – 2020-25 (Strategy Refresh)

OVERALL VISION AND STRATEGY

1.1 Kent 2025
Kent’s refreshed Institutional Strategy puts its values and its people at the heart of delivering an ambitious range of objectives. It recognises change as a positive dimension of institutional life where it is supported by collegiality, a strong sense of community and common purpose. It emphasises the importance of realising personal potential and the unifying and supportive environment provided by empowering but accountable leadership. These themes continue to resonate with an employer brand based around a single idea and commitment, first expressed in the 2015-20 People Strategy:

“Space for Passion, Room to Grow…”

1.2 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 has continued to attract people who value the opportunity to advance and share knowledge within a supportive and inspirational environment. It is also an ambitious organisation, recognising the need for change if it is to continue to realise those ambitions in an ever more challenging environment.

1.3 Looking forward, and reflecting on the refreshed institutional plan, the task of the People Strategy to 2025 remains to retain a focus on the University’s core values, giving all employees space to exercise the creativity and passion that is so essential to academic endeavour, while attracting, engaging and enabling those who work here to grow both personally and professionally, and respond positively to the changes that will be necessary to continued success in an increasingly competitive and fast changing world. Kent will need to find new ways to engage with its workforce and have a mature discussion about the challenges the University faces and how collectively it can respond. Inevitably, there will be a need to do things differently and to focus in the medium term on those key shifts that will enable underlying issues of culture and performance to be dealt with.

Difficult issues will need to be addressed with confidence and resolve. Leaders will need courage and vision to make the changes needed whilst being constant to our values. We will need to be prepared to change some of our established ways of working and organising ourselves because we believe in the benefits for students and staff that this will deliver. While delivering an ambitious strategy we also need to strengthen career development, recognition arrangements and transparency, not only so that are staff are equipped for the challenges that face the University, but to retain their confidence and support as it embarks upon a necessary programme of change.

Part Two – Objectives

2 A Refreshed and Re-focussed Approach

2.1 Over the next 5 years, and acknowledging the important shifts in the Institutional Strategy, the People Strategy is designed to enable the positive changes that are now required. In particular the significant shift towards an increased focus on excellence in education and a newly defined approach to research mean that new work will be required to ensure that our workforce profile evolves to match our strategic objectives. Work to support these objectives will join other important strategic projects and is summarised in the following refreshed People Strategy objectives:
These strategic objectives are to:

- **Equip and Empower our Leaders** – we will expect more of our leaders at all levels and place them at the heart of delivering cultural and operational changes. We will develop organisational systems, tools, policies and structures that empower them and free them from unnecessary administrative burdens wherever possible. We will help them to develop resilience and relevant knowledge through the development of new and re-focussed leadership programmes and tailored support for Heads of School, that provides them with the confidence and skills to exercise accountability, execute change, support their staff and match our performance to the increasing demands upon us. We will work to develop and support leaders who are motivated to achieve what we need them to, confident, engaging, solution orientated and resilient.

- **Develop and Increase our Organisational Capacity** – we recognise that our ability to develop, recruit and retain the excellent people we need has, with an improving economy and Brexit, become a more challenging task. As well as refreshing our employer brand, modernising our offer to potential applicants, streamlining our recruitment process and improving our selection approach so that we recruit the very best people we can, we will introduce structured approaches to talent management and succession planning: ensuring that we identify and act upon the potential of our people to help to move the organisation forward. We will consider the implications of Brexit for our current staff and those we recruit from the EEA and develop policies and approaches. We will increase access to developmental activity – empowering our staff to manage their own development and offering new ways to access learning wherever we can. We will capitalise on the clarity offered by the proposed Academic Career Map and develop further competency frameworks. We will embrace the Technician commitment, work to expand our use of Apprenticeships (particularly in hard to fill areas) and remove barriers to workforce diversity - and in doing so change our workforce. Lastly, we will look at what support can be put in place to support the international mobility of our staff.

- **Reward and Recognise Excellence**– we will articulate what is expected of all parts of our workforce, increasing transparency and better supporting career development. We will develop our reward and recognition systems to better reflect desired standards and achievements. We will strengthen the quality of appraisal and mentoring to ensure that all our people have the equal opportunity to realise their potential. We will work to narrow the gender pay gap.

- **Make Sure the Right People are in the Right Place at the Right Time** – as the Institution shifts emphasis towards educational excellence, areas of signature research, empowered leadership and cost effective, flexible structures we will work alongside our leaders and managers to ensure that we develop and maintain a workforce profile that is reflective of things we need and want to do and that our people play to their strengths, and understand the importance and value of their contribution – in whatever role they play. Our continued commitment to engaging effectively with our staff, strengthened approach to appraisal, talent management and career development will all be key to meeting this objective – as will our support in directly restructuring and changing the profile of our workforce through organisational and departmentally led programmes.

- **Shift our Culture to be more Agile, Responsive and Focussed on Meeting Challenges** – Kent’s values underpin its attractiveness as an employer and retaining a focus on the best parts of the Kent culture that support collegiality, consensus building, mutual respect, trust and collaboration is important. It is important also to acknowledge that some of these strengths when taken to excess can be weaknesses that obstruct progress – delaying decisions, preventing innovation, and mitigating personal responsibility. Changes to structures, streamlining of systems, reviewing of levels of control, engagement, clarity of expectation, recruitment practice and leadership development will all contribute to a necessary and positive shift in organisational culture.
In support of these objectives and in the 5 years to July 2024 the HR Directorate will undertake a major programme of work and strategic projects that will enable the University and its staff to improve the student experience and research environment while ensuring the development, reward and recognition of the staff behaviours needed to provide a first class educational experience and research achievements. Much of this work will be cross cutting, with single projects designed to make an impact across research, education and engagement activities. Individual project highlights that will be initiated for 2018/19 and relate directly to the Institutional Strategy include:

**RESEARCH, EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT**

- **The Completion of Phase 1 of the Recognising Excellence in Academia Project**: this major project and its multiple strands will ultimately transform how we are able to develop, support, promote, reward, recognise and recruit first class academic staff. In 2018/19 we will deliver the Academic Career Map and supporting behaviours that will provide a foundation for well-focussed career development and set out the expectations of academic members of staff. It will be accompanied by a revised promotion policy and processes and Academic Contracts Transitions Policy. We will develop these concepts further later in the plan period to extend them to professional services and support staff to ensure that our whole workforce benefits.

- **The Workforce Profile Project**: this project will support and strengthen the student experience and academic sense of community and joint purpose by reducing our reliance on Hourly Paid Lecturers (HPLs) in favour of the employment of substantive academic staff. For those HPLs and Graduate Teaching Assistants who remain, we will ensure that their terms of employment and the support we offer facilitates a first class educational experience for our students and consistent quality of offer. In Student Services we will move a long term timesheet workforce to full contracts of employment and ensure that students and staff benefit from continuity, certainty and people capital that we will be able to build through the application of staffing policies and practices. Other outcomes will include a revised policy and process on the employment of HPLs and a Workforce Profile Policy.

- **Reviewing the Academic Career Structure and Exploring Options for Change**: as requested by the UPC we will explore the potential to change our academic career structure to better support our staff and streamline processes, bring forward options for consideration and manage the implementation of any changes.

- **The Scoping and Development of a revised Reward Strategy for Kent**: this work will ensure that we can compete for and retain the excellent staff we need, and reward individual contributions that bring us closer to achieving our vision for the University. This work will link pay progression to the positive behaviours and achievements that will be set out in frameworks such as the Academic Career Map and will address any issues that arise through changes to our academic career structure. We will review some our established policies around, for example, incremental progression and how these can better reward individual and collective contribution.

- **Supporting the Organisational Design and Simplifying Kent Roles and Relationships Projects**: these two interlinked projects will ensure that Kent has the structure it needs to provide excellent education and research activities in a value for money and efficient way. It will ultimately facilitate the creation of clear pathways for career development and progressions routes for PSD staff in schools and ensure effective and consistent school governance and accountability supported by strong leadership.

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1 This is a recent addition to the Work Plan and the full implications for other projects cannot yet be worked through.
• **Extending and Strengthening our Equalities Related Work:** we will continue to create an environment in which every member of our staff is able to fulfil their potential and our students are supported by a diverse and creative workforce whose multiple and diverse perspectives, at all levels, enrich the student experience. We will continue to work towards the achievement of Athena Swan Silver at organisational level, Silver awards for our Science Schools and at least Bronze awards for all other schools. We will put in place a clear programme of action to reduce the Gender Pay Gap and consider the implications of the University’s commitment to the Race Equality Charter.

• **Delivering the HR Strand of the Kent & Medway Medical School:** HR will have a key role to play in putting in place a set of arrangements that position the school to recruit and retain the staff it needs to fulfil the vision for it to transform medical capacity and ways of working in our region.

• **Supporting a Strategic Review of Vacant and Replacement Posts:** so that we are well positioned to make the strategic investments that we need to and are well positioned to support our staff in the implementation of the outcome of the Organisational Design and Roles & Relationships Projects.

**ENGAGEMENT**

• **Embedding and supporting RPD:** we will work closely with managers and their staff to ensure that RPD is effectively carried out and supports role and career planning. This will be the first step towards integrating talent management into RPD in future years and enable a future shift toward more manager led salary reviews.

• **Developing the policies and processes to deliver on our Technician Commitment:** we will utilise the tools available to support this commitment (bid dependent) and improve career planning and development for our technical staff.

• **Improving Support to our European Centres (and reducing risk):** resources allowing we will work with the Dean for Europe, as requested, to develop bespoke policy support for our European staff and reduce the compliance risks that our European presence creates.

• **Review and Refine the Staff Survey:** we will propose and develop a revised approach to the Staff Survey that better meets the needs of our staff and enables effective action planning. We will support managers to develop a “You Said We Did” type set of key messages to encourage engagement and build confidence in leadership.

**EDUCATION**

• **Supporting the Teaching Constraints Project:** we will work closely with senior academic staff to develop a policy to optimise the use of teaching space and enable a more flexible timetable. We will scope the impact on our staff and work with Heads, where we need to, to manage any transitional arrangements and recognise any particular individual issues.

**RESEARCH**

• **Supporting REF2021:** we will work closely with Research Services to consider the impact of Individual Special Circumstances on the REF submission and enable the University to reach an objective view on the impact of ISC on research outputs and offer support to those staff affected.

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2 Using the PIBO definition
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 move toward a position of 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 35% by end of plan period.
- 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