

Senate 12 September

The University of Kent

Our Education and Student Experience Strategy 2018-25

We are an intergenerational community of learners, and our students are the future.

Where staff and students work in genuine partnership, we can build exceptional student experiences, enhance opportunities, and change lives for the better. We aim to develop, recognise and value excellent education; support students to achieve their potential regardless of where they start from; and help our graduates emerge as independent learners with the attributes they need to shape the changing world in a sustainable and creative way.

Kent will be one of the very best universities in the UK in which to teach, learn and be a student, if we build on our strengths and address weaknesses through a cycle of continuous improvement. Research is crucial to our reputation, but student numbers and student satisfaction are essential to keep Kent sustainable. Our challenge is to commit to an environment where excellence in education and research are valued equally, and where productive interactions between teaching and research or professional practice create world-class experiences for students and staff.

To develop, deliver and reward excellence, and to make Kent a top 10 university in education and student experience by 2025, we need to take action on five themes, which are also key to the Kent Union Education Strategy (2016-20):

1. Enhancing and recognising excellence in education.
2. Embedding and sharing good practice to improve the consistency of student and academic experience.
3. Student engagement.
4. Modern curriculum with modern delivery.
5. Student life.

Priority One: Enhancing and recognising excellence in education.

Many academics, and other staff supporting teaching, work in higher education because they were inspired by their own lecturers and supervisors. We need to pass on to our students that enthusiasm for, and enjoyment in, knowledge and learning. Both staff and students will benefit from an environment in which excellence in education is appreciated and where opportunities exist to try new approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment and feedback. We need to articulate what we mean by research-led teaching, and indeed teaching-led research, and what added value these bring. And we must respect the need for quality and protect our high academic standards, while embracing a culture of continuous enhancement and improvement.

To make this happen, we will:

- Develop a shared sense of the distinctive values of the Kent education experience, including actively discussing the interaction between teaching and research or professional practice.
- Find better ways of gathering and using student feedback at all levels, to ensure that the student voice informs developments and guides decisions.
- Support our colleagues to gain teaching qualifications and Senior / Principal Fellowships of the Higher Education Academy, to build a community of innovative teachers and reflective practitioners.
- Strive for rigorous but responsive and streamlined processes of quality management, approval and review which maintain standards and reputation but increase agility.
- Encourage, recognise and reward outstanding contributions to excellence in education so that both academic and professional staff can be confident their efforts and achievements will be recognised in their career development.
- Provide clear, high quality and personalised feedback in a timely fashion to help students improve their performance.
- Ensure that every programme includes a coherent assessment regime, with an appropriate variety and number of assessment types, distributed deadlines, and criteria that are understood by students.
- Ensure that student satisfaction is combined with intellectual stretch, so learning experiences are both inspiring and challenging.
- Understand the traits that are characteristic of an inspiring educator, and ensure these are reflected appropriately in our people processes.

Priority Two: Embedding and sharing good practice – improving the consistency of student and academic experience.

Excellence needs to be shared as well as recognised, to develop a culture of continuous improvement and encourage innovation. Being student-focused means aiming for greater clarity, coherence and consistency. There is superb good practice in many areas at Kent, but students also observe unexplained and unnecessary differences in practice, which can compromise their achievement and experience. We must confront current disparities in retention and attainment, and move to close gaps. And we need to present the different and exciting offers at our different campuses and centres as positive opportunities in their own right, while ensuring there is parity of experience in terms of quality and access for all our students.

To make this happen, we will:

- Ensure equality of opportunity for all students through inclusive teaching and learning practices.
- Develop policies which deliver greater clarity and consistency of approach to assure parity of the core academic experience across schools and programmes of study.
- Build on our outstanding record and reputation for employability and positive student outcomes, by combining the platforms and programmes we offer

students, to reduce confusion and increase accessibility, as well as improving efficiency of delivery.

- Develop specific narratives about our offer at Canterbury, Medway and the European Centres, acknowledging that these will appeal to different cohorts of students, but underpinning all we do with uniformly high quality and a sense of belonging to the Kent community.
- Promote an honest and open debate about what we should do centrally and what locally, so we maximise both the benefits of devolved structures, and clarity and parity for students.
- Mainstream Student Success initiatives across all Schools to reduce student achievement or attainment gaps for students with protected characteristics, through blended and targeted academic, peer and pastoral support.

Priority Three: Student engagement.

Everyone has an example of a student who scarcely attended, and participated in virtually no co-curricular activities, but nonetheless completed their degree to a good standard and went on to a successful career. But this is not the norm. For most students, greater engagement and involvement, and taking the opportunities available, are strongly linked with a better chance of successful completion, higher attainment, and greater readiness for employment or further study. We need our students to expect to engage, and to seek out, take and indeed design more opportunities to do so; this will make their university experience more fulfilling and enjoyable, improve satisfaction, and enhance the staff experience too.

To make this happen, we will:

- Explore barriers to engagement, and seek to remove them, especially when these disproportionately affect specific cohorts of students such as commuters, carers, or those with a disability.
- Address expectations on engagement through clear communications using the right channels, improved monitoring of attendance and rapid follow-up action, to ensure that students continue successfully and complete their programmes of study.
- Instil in our students a desire to learn and to achieve a deep and genuine understanding of their subjects of study.
- Work in partnership with Kent Union to improve the student representative system, reassuring students that their voice is heard and attended to.
- Ensure that students are aware of the available opportunities for both curricular and co-curricular involvement, and encouraged and enabled to participate through removing barriers to access.
- Provide opportunities for students to feel engaged both on- and off-campus, through both physical and digital resources.
- Identify and enhance factors and facilities which make students more likely to remain on campus when they attend for classes.

Priority Four: Modern curriculum with modern delivery.

Students increasingly want curricula designed for a diverse community of learners, delivered in an interactive manner, using a variety of appealing teaching styles, in highly technologically-enabled spaces, with outstanding equipment and online resources. It is reasonable for them to expect us to have progressed beyond 'chalk and talk', and we need to develop our teaching practice and spaces in ways that support us in putting thought and passion into our teaching styles, promote innovation in delivery, and encourage curriculum development and modernisation. We need to consider the amount of choice we offer, and accessibility for all and from everywhere; and to celebrate the changing and broadening demography of our student body.

To make this happen, we will:

- Review our portfolio of programmes and modules so that we offer a level of choice that is sustainable, broad without being overwhelming, and sufficient to showcase research-led teaching without compromising students' sense of belonging to a cohort with intellectual common ground.
- Celebrate equality, diversity and inclusivity, and rejoice in the breadth and depth of social and cultural experience our staff and students bring to our campuses. This breadth must be reflected in our curricula and reading lists.
- Help students access our programmes from where they are, with a renewed emphasis on blended and online learning, accessible resources as standard (including lecture capture), and work-based learning, for instance through Higher and Degree Apprenticeships.
- Develop new undergraduate pathways to give the option of a 4th year for everyone on or off campus, including intercalated years (like the Year in Computing), integrated masters, year in industry or year abroad.
- Remodel our teaching and learning spaces to support innovative and inclusive practice, with minimum standards for seminar rooms and lecture theatres.
- Proactively explore and research enhancements in both teaching and learning practice; and provide training and guidance to enable students and staff to use digital and assistive technologies effectively for teaching, learning, assessment and student success in class and beyond.
- Ensure that employability, and the scope to develop relevant attributes and skills, can be embedded in or pursued alongside all disciplines.

Priority Five: Student Life.

We want our graduates to be ready for highly skilled employment, self-employment or further study, so each individual can be successful, whatever that means for them. Our graduate attributes sum up the qualities we can develop in partnership with our students, regardless of their starting points, through induction and transition experiences which welcome them, build their confidence, and encourage them to contribute to building a better Kent community. Individuals can choose their level of focus on academic work, co-curricular music, theatre and arts, sports or society

involvement, academic community, social or leisure activities, in co-creating their own unique student experience; but we will ensure these are accessible to all. Students and staff thrive through a sense of belonging to and shaping intersecting communities.

To make this happen, we will:

- Support our students to develop the graduate attributes of confidence; creativity and innovation; critical reflection; global and cultural awareness; integrity and accountability; intellectual curiosity; and resilience. Each individual will be enabled to coordinate curricular and co-curricular elements to construct their own student journey.
- Renew our approach to induction and transitions, providing targeted support at different stages, and mapping and resourcing the student journey from applicants to alumni.
- Build more effective and accessible student communities in colleges, clubs and societies, and establish a network of Residents' Support Officers who are student staff in university accommodation.
- Co-locate and integrate student-facing support services, providing greater clarity on where to go for support.
- Raise awareness of disability, and support for mental health and sexual harassment and violence; and improve the range of services available to students, and the options available for improving health and wellbeing.
- Reduce barriers of accessibility or cost, so all can participate in services and facilities, including sports and societies.
- Develop intergenerational academic communities, including common room space and discipline-based societies, involving staff and students, to give students a sense of belonging and identity in their Schools.

How will we recognise and measure success?

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and the National Student Survey (NSS) are much debated, but they have undoubtedly brought education and the student experience centre-stage in higher education. For an ambitious university like Kent, the metrics embedded in TEF and the NSS allow us to benchmark our performance against our peers and to identify outstanding successes and areas for improvement.

While these metrics are not ends in themselves, but rather imperfect proxies for teaching excellence, they do allow us to measure and track areas where we surely want to excel. We want our students to feel that they have had an excellent experience which they have contributed to creating. We want them to engage, and to be encouraged to do so through facilities and services they value. We want them to complete their programmes of study successfully and to achieve to their potential; and we want their university experience and award to propel them forward into future success with attributes and skills which will make them desirable employees and confident contributors to society.

Our Implementation Plan will therefore include NSS and TEF metrics on student voice, assessment and feedback, satisfaction with teaching and facilities, retention and employment, which lie at the heart of the student experience. We will also include measures of teaching qualifications and HEA fellowship for staff; recognition and success for staff who focus on education and student experience; recruitment statistics; and data on quality and standards, for instance through successful renewal of accreditation for programmes of study. These metrics may change; and the emphasis on maximising student outcomes, tailoring support, and value for money for an increasingly diverse student body mean that we need to be open to adjusting our measures of success through ongoing dialogue across our learning community.