

**Senate 12 September**

**The University of Kent**

## **Our Research and Innovation Strategy 2018-2025**

### **We are an interdisciplinary community of scholars**

The University was forged in a time of optimism and belief, when conventions were being questioned and traditions being challenged. It was founded as a new kind of institution, a 'community of scholars'<sup>1</sup> that worked across disciplinary boundaries to find answers to intractable problems.

We remain true to this guiding belief. At a time when many institutions chase metrics rather than knowledge, we allow our scholars, students and service staff the space and intellectual freedom to think creatively, and to work together in a spirit of honesty and respect.

More than fifty years after we were founded the need for such creative thinking has never been greater. Our research is socially aware, radical and disruptive. It is engaged with and for the benefit of humanity. We are diverse enough to understand the multifaceted nature of national and global challenges, but small enough to work together to find solutions.

This Strategy will support our community in doing this, and encourage it to grow and reach out to others in society. We will recognise our strengths, and develop new interdisciplinary ways of working. By doing so we hope to create a resilient framework that will ensure that our researchers continue to be free to question, to challenge, to discover, and to solve.

### **Our four priorities**

In order to create this resilient framework, we must do four things:

- **We must increase our output of world-leading research**, so that our reputation grows, our work becomes better known, and we can increase our community and our network of interdisciplinary collaborations;
- **We must ensure that our research is available to and used by those who need it most**, whether that be industry, government, charities, creative and cultural bodies, or the wider economy;
- **We must ensure that our research and innovation is fully and appropriately funded**, so that we are able to work to the best of our ability, and thereby increase our output, impact and reach.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/KentInterVideo>

- **We must support and develop our postgraduate community.** Our postgraduates represent the next fifty years of our story; they are crucial to the future development of knowledge.

### **Priority One: increase our output of world-leading research**

In order to increase our reach and raise our profile, we must increase our output of world leading research. We recognise that, within our broad portfolio, there are specific areas where academics have a greater opportunity to do so. These will be our **signature themes**. They will be areas that already have a significant volume of outputs, that have an international profile, and that have sufficient income to be self-sustaining. They will be interdisciplinary and will involve both research and innovation.

These signature themes will be identified through a transparent and clear process, which will be fully articulated in the Implementation Plan that will follow this strategy. They will not be static. They will change over time, as different areas grow and develop. We will support this growth and development through a '**research developer**' approach. We will identify and support individuals and research groups to deliver significant high quality outputs and impact and generate income with the potential to become the next signature theme.

Those in our community who do not currently have the potential to be in a signature theme will not be overlooked. They will be supported in developing clear **progress plans**, and they will have a transparent framework of expectations to recognise their skills and abilities. These will either be in teaching and research or teaching and scholarship, and both will be equally valued in what they contribute to our work. Our early career researchers (ECRs) will be part of this group, and we will ensure they have the appropriate help and support as they develop their careers.

### **What we will do to support this goal**

We will:

- Make sure that our recruitment, promotion, development and reward arrangements are fit for purpose;
- Prioritise our signature areas when we allocate our resources;
- Establish effective peer support groups of up to 10 academics each supported centrally by Research Services and Kent Innovation and Enterprise (KIE). They will be given seedcorn funding to develop their activities;
- Give support through our professional services departments that is enabling, simplifying, explaining, and guiding.

In return we expect our individual academics and researchers to:

- Nurture creativity, excitement and mutual support within their research groups;
- Address big questions, globally, nationally and locally;
- Be willing to change as these questions change;
- Reach out and engage within their professional communities;

- Manage their time well, finding a balance between teaching, research and personal life. There is no need to excel at everything;
- Disseminate the results of their work using all appropriate and modern methods, and, wherever possible, making it free at the point of access;
- Bring all undergraduates into contact with research during their studies. Our research will contribute to the success of our education;
- Be active in building our community of scholars. This includes our students, early career researchers, postdocs, academics and professional services staff. We will enhance equality and diversity in this community. All members of this community are citizens contributing to the University;
- Maintain research integrity of the highest standard.

### **Priority Two: ensure that our research is available to and used by those who need it most**

Research that has no engagement with its end users has only travelled a part of its journey. It has not reached its destination. Whether it be industry, government, charities, creative and cultural bodies, or the wider economy, we must do all that we can to ensure that our research is available to and used by those who need it most.

This is what we call innovation. Innovation is not an isolated activity, or something that doesn't affect us or our work. It is not something that is only for others. It can take many forms, be it commercialisation or policy briefings or working with charities or advising politicians. It can be licensing or exploiting our discoveries. It can be offering help to architects, archaeologists, or amateur astronomers. We welcome and support innovation in all its forms.

### **What we will do to support this goal**

We will:

- Create an intellectual climate that is conducive to innovation. As part of this, we will offer each of our academics the opportunity to work at the site of a client one day a week;
- Make our intellectual property more visible, including creative outputs;
- Bring all undergraduates and taught postgraduates into contact with innovation during their studies;
- Be broader and more creative in how we recognise innovation, such as through the quality of our networks, the effect of our impact, and the income generated;
- Encourage all schools to have an external advisory board, and support the development of such boards between our schools and across our university as part of our interdisciplinary mission;
- Improve our regional engagement by working with local individuals, groups, and communities to understand our research, and help us identify potential ways it can be used by them.

In return we expect our individual academics and researchers to:

- Explore the potential benefit of their research to those outside the academic community;
- Conduct research that involves stakeholders or end users, if appropriate;
- Include non-academics in their professional networks.

### **Priority Three: ensure that our research and innovation is fully and appropriately funded**

Financial sustainability is necessary to secure our future as a university. Although different research and innovation activity requires different amounts of funding, it cannot be done without it. Some research requires equipment, consumables and postdoctoral researchers, some needs to pay for surveys and archival visits. All of it involves an investigator's own time. This is paid for through our central funding, which comes from a variety of sources, such as student fees, 'block' funding, and profit from hospitality activity.

We need to seek more funding for research and innovation from those organisations that specifically fund research and innovation. To do otherwise will mean that other areas of our activity may lose out, such as recruiting new staff, maintaining infrastructure, or providing the services that are necessary to support our work. Seeking funding externally will also mean that we become more self-sufficient in our research, and will allow us to continue our world-leading activities.

#### **What we will do to support this goal**

We will:

- Provide support for complex grant applications and highly visible public engagement. This will include top-up PhD scholarships, if their inclusion will increase our chances of success in seeking funding;
- Support commercialisation of intellectual property;
- Identify areas that are less successful in their research, and work with them to build their quality or divert their energies to other, equally important, activities;
- Improve our estimation of both income and expenditure. The former should take into account specific research plans and areas of work; the latter should include new staff, equipment and PhD scholarships, as well as the transition of funded fellows to lecturers;
- Have clear expectations of what staff can and should be able to secure, bearing in mind external opportunities and success rates. We will monitor individual research and innovation plans on an annual basis;
- Benchmark the physical space for research and innovation, and maintain an estates master plan that allows for expansion.

In return we expect our individual academics and researchers to:

- Seek to ensure that regional, national and international partnerships are properly funded and sustainable;
- Include all allowable overheads when calculating the cost of a project. This includes such costs as the maintenance of buildings, utilities, and administrative

and technical support. If a grant does not include these, there needs to be a demonstrable benefit for us.

#### **Priority Four: support and develop our postgraduate community**

The size and quality of our postgraduate community is a signal of our health as a research intensive university. They demonstrate our long term commitment to the development of our collective research, and to their individual careers. All three of the preceding priorities encourage more postgraduate students to join us. With an increase in the size of the postgraduate body, we must ensure that we fully support and develop them, giving them the training and preparation that they need and deserve for their future.

#### **What we will do to support this goal**

We will:

- Provide high quality training for postgraduate research students through our Graduate School;
- Maintain or start doctoral training centres in all three faculties;
- Review annually the number of postgraduate taught and research (PGT and PGR) students per member of staff on a teaching and research contract.

#### **How will we know if this strategy has succeeded?**

Although we do not wish to be led by metrics, the responsible use of them is valuable in assessing our success. For this strategy, we will measure success in two ways:

- **By the number of highly cited outputs we get**, as defined by subject area. This will vary, but we define highly cited outputs as being in the top 5% field weighted;
- **By the amount of research and innovation income we secure**, and by minimising our reliance on funding from other University activities to subsidise these activities.

By implementing our four priorities, we believe that these measure will increase. The Implementation Plan that will follow this strategy will offer the detail of the metrics that will be used to measure this success. These will be split between the actions that we as a university will be responsible for, and those that are down to individuals. It will also provide transparency and detail about how our signature themes will be selected.

These metrics are not an end in themselves. They are not the drivers for our strategy. Rather, they are an effect of them. For example, increasing the quantity of high quality research will have the effect of increasing highly cited outputs.

We should never lose sight of what makes us unique: we are an interdisciplinary community of scholars that are seeking to answer difficult questions that will improve society, the economy and

the environment. This strategy exists to provide a framework by which we can support and grow our research and innovation for the benefit of our students, our region and, ultimately, our future.

*Philippe De Wilde<sup>2</sup>*  
*DVC Research and Innovation*  
*June 2018*

---

<sup>2</sup> in consultation with RIB on 24/5/18 and Directors of Research Network on 7/6/18, and following the VC Strategy Refresh consultation (4/6/18), and EG Away Day 12/6/18. Also based on visits to 22 schools and centres 8/3/18 to 30/5/18. Includes contributions from Phil Ward.