Public Engagement (Research) Strategy

At Kent, we are committed to ‘Contributing to the broader educational, employment, social and cultural objectives of our communities and our region.

We will create and make available a range of social and cultural experiences for our communities. We will reaffirm our commitment to widen access and provide educational opportunities to all those who have ability and will benefit.’

University Plan 2015 - 2020

Overview

The University of Kent has a well-established tradition of public engagement with research (PER) but recognises the need to formalise its approach and support to ensure the embedding of a culture of engagement across the University.

This strategy focuses on public engagement with our research and will allow us to build on the current, and not insignificant, level of activity. It will enable the University to more easily derive clear and demonstrable benefits from its engagement activities including the enrichment and development of research, teaching and learning activities together with clearer accountability and better public understanding of the University as an institution, its activities and its values.

‘Public engagement’ is a broad-reaching term subject to a variety of interpretations. The public can be anyone, from the general public on a high street, to a group of professionals within a multi-national organisation. The most important element of ‘public engagement’ is the engagement itself; the quality or meaningfulness of the interaction between the public (or publics) and the research.

The development of this strategy has been informed by the definition outlined by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE):

‘Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.’

It is worth noting that University’s publics can be at a regional, national or international level, but that these boundaries are increasingly blurred.

The Strategy

This strategy underpins the commitment in the University Plan and focuses on embedding and integrating PER across the University and the development of high quality, innovative and effective activities.

Key Priorities

- To encourage and support staff and students in the delivery of high quality, innovative and effective PER activities leading to evidenced impact and the consideration of societal implications and public attitudes to conduct and use of research.
- To promote and develop working in partnership both internally and externally.
• To raise the profile of the University as an engaged institution, committed to making an impact as a force for good, and to foster a wider understand of HE among the public.

Objectives

To encourage and support staff and students in the delivery of high quality, innovative and effective public engagement activities leading to evidenced impact outside of academia

• We will establish a Public Engagement with Research network of champions to promote the development and sharing of good practice and to encourage applications for funding available within and outside of the University. The network will contribute to the realisation of the aims of the strategy.
• We will further develop the existing programme of formal and informal staff development opportunities in public engagement skills.
• We will ensure that provision for planning and delivering public engagement activities is included in work allocation models and that such activities are recognised in promotions criteria (as stated in guidance at https://www.kent.ac.uk/hr-staffinformation/documents/promotion_salary-review/academic/generic_promotions_documentation/Principles_and_procedure_promotions_1516.pdf).
• We will encourage the practice of assessing the needs and interests of the wider community in order to inform new projects.
• We will ensure that the inclusive and diverse ethos of the University is reflected in public engagement practice.

To promote and develop working in partnerships both internally and externally.

• We will encourage PER activities within a multidisciplinary context across the University.
• We will encourage PER activities with other institutions and external partners with a view to co-creation of knowledge and the generation of new ideas.
• We will encourage community and public participation in our research and, where appropriate, will encourage direct engagement with members of those publics as co-researchers in new and innovative ways.
• We will make it easier for potential partners to understand the ways in which they can engage with Kent.

To raise the profile of the University as an engaged institution, committed to making an impact as a positive force for good, and to foster a wider understand of HE among the public

• We will encourage and support our researchers to make the outcomes of research available and accessible to a range of publics with a view to enthusing them about aspirations and outcomes.
• We will have an effective internal and external communications strategy to raise the University’s profile as an engaged institution; in particular, we will look to celebrate excellence and maximise digital and social media opportunities.
• We will help maximise the social and economic impact of research through public engagement.
• We will seek to promote the presence of the University in its various locations as a positive force for good.

**Review**

This strategy will be reviewed by the Public Engagement with Research Advisory Group on an annual basis.