

GRC STRATEGY

Graduate and Researcher College (GRC) Strategy 2022-2025



University of
Kent

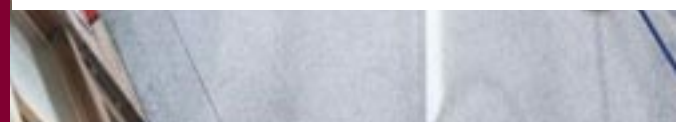
With passion and
focus you can
achieve anything

VISION

We will create a dynamic and inclusive researcher community, inspiring and developing research leaders, and forming networks that take on and build Tomorrow's World.

“I’ve been encouraged to form relationships with academics across the country, and the support I’ve been given has pushed me to form research networks, make plans to co-author articles, and organise research seminars together.”

Rachel Arkell, Socio-Legal Studies PhD





MISSION

We support and challenge all postgraduate students and academic and research staff at Kent to grow. We provide an increasingly inclusive and stimulating environment for research training and development. We assist the career progression of our staff and students, inspire them to improve their skills, and extend their horizons.



“Kent is one of the best places in the UK to study for a research degree. Its supportive environment helps to build confidence and the staff are respectful.”

Isaac Oppong, Mathematics PhD





CURRENT STATUS

Founded in 2008, the Graduate School became the Graduate and Researcher College in October 2020. Building on 12 years of PG growth and success, the GRC now has an expanded remit to support staff as well as students across the whole academic career span, from PGT through to Professor. Located in a dedicated space on the Canterbury campus in Cornwallis East with a training room for all researcher development activities, the GRC is a well-established and vital part of the University of Kent's fabric.

The Graduate School earned this position at the heart of Kent's postgraduate student life through making sure that our postgraduates are recognised and catered for as a specific and distinctive part of our student community.

The GRC's centrality to Kent's mission is evident, from the many postgraduate research student completions and co-authored articles that comprise a fundamental part of our REF 2021 submission, through the establishment of the Global Challenges Doctoral Centre to Kent Union's appointment in 2019 of its first dedicated Postgraduate Sabbatical Officer. Our Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) have made a crucial contribution to our teaching portfolio over the years whilst balancing this with the demands of a PhD. Regular nationally-benchmarked surveys show high levels of satisfaction for our postgraduate experience and programmes. We help bring substantial funding to Kent, with an increased focus now on industry and external income generation which the University match-funds. The GRC oversees engagement in four Doctoral Training Partnerships across its entire academic portfolio including the recent acquisition of a Doctoral Training Partnership in Biosciences, and manages processes linked to annual EPSRC studentship awards.

We guarantee that our students have a high-quality academic experience. Working closely with Quality Assurance and Compliance Office (QACO), we ensure that our Codes of Practice provide effective guidance and maintain high standards. We collaborate equally with the Education Directorate to support our taught master's students, enhancing and championing their experience. The Global Skills Award brings master's students from all programmes together for intellectual growth and skills development, training that increases their employability and strengthens their sense of community. Now we in the GRC are extending our work so that Kent fulfils our commitments to all staff who research according to the Principles enshrined in the Researcher Development Concordat and recognised by the University's HRER Award.

LOOKING FORWARD

The 2022-2025 GRC Strategy will build on and support Kent's ambitions outlined in the University's 2025 Strategy to be a dynamic dual-focus research intensive institution with an excellent teaching offer. The GRC straddles both strands of Kent's core mission.

Postgraduate taught programmes are the start of the research journey, whether aiming for academia or industry, and our students will be supported and valued. This vital stage can only thrive with a critical mass of students to ensure a high-quality student experience. The GRC will lead in setting standards for and expectations about what quality postgraduate education looks like. It has an important role in supporting the development of new modes of delivery and innovative programmes, and in enhancing recruitment.

PhD students are a critical component of any successful research culture and the University would not be able to thrive without their contribution to research, the REF and teaching. The GRC will continue to generate internal and external funding to support a large and diverse PGR community.

With the GRC's guidance and support, our postgraduate students and academic researchers will go out into Tomorrow's World ready, focused and agile. They will have experienced academic rigour, will have known what it is to be part of a thriving and sustainable community, to have been supported individually and collectively to progress, and to be valued for who they are, whatever their background and experience.

Our research activities and communities need to be positive, active, productive and sustainable. The GRC accepts the challenge of our recent review and restructure, and will take researcher development to the next stage by ensuring that all our postgraduate students and researchers are able to build communities, form networks and engage with development opportunities across the whole professional lifespan.



VALUES

The GRC trains, supports and advises a wide range of people, including PGT students, PhD researchers, supervisors, Postgraduate Administrators and academic and research staff at all career stages, with a particular focus on wellbeing and professional development.

We promote equality and inclusivity, recognising how diverse the PG community and our staff base is, and the specificities of postgraduates' needs and experiences. We champion our postgraduates and build communities, activities and events that enhance the experience of everyone involved in research, which now includes academic and research colleagues as well as postgraduates. We make sure our research supervisors' and others' contributions are recognised and appreciated. The GRC helps staff and students, as well as PG applicants, to put Kent first, knowing they are going to be valued, that they can contribute and that they will be heard.

To achieve our objectives, the following set of core values will form a thread throughout our strategy and practice:

Community

We engage with postgraduate students, academic and research staff, and professional service teams to nurture a supportive and intellectual community of researchers.

Challenge and support

We provide an open and supportive environment, whilst challenging all individuals to meet their personal and professional development goals. We provide the skills training and development opportunities to make this happen.

Leadership

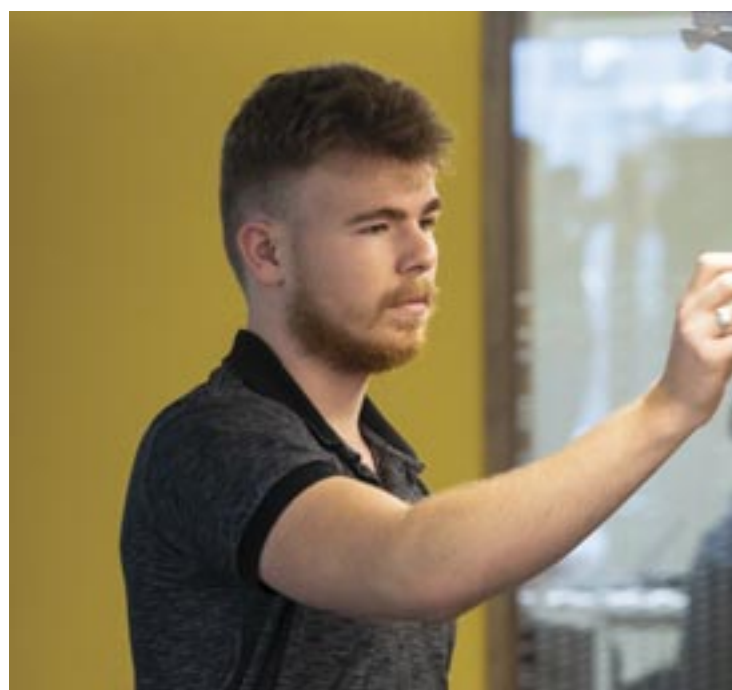
We empower personal growth through training and development, and promote research integrity and civic mindedness. We provide a foundation for our staff and students to work together and develop as leaders.

Inspiring and empowering

We define, demonstrate and promote good practice, set achievable aspirations, and enable and support individuals and communities to fulfil their plans, together.

International outlook

We unite people with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, ideas and influences to question conventional wisdom, to open our minds and to shape, both locally and globally, a better future; Tomorrow's World.



OBJECTIVES

Community of researchers

It is extremely important to have opportunities to engage with other students and staff both professionally and socially, across all of our campuses. We will create and nurture a community of researchers including postgraduate students, academic and research staff and professional service teams. Developing as a diverse and inclusive community has a number of benefits: from offering support, creating lasting professional networks, encouraging knowledge exchange and innovation, and helping to resolve difficult research questions and issues. Our students and staff benefit from the close-knit groups and networks that they create amongst themselves and with staff at all career stages. These encourage interdisciplinary engagement, a key goal of the University's research strategy.

The GRC will:

- Create and nurture an increasingly inclusive researcher development environment to build a dynamic community of postgraduate students, academic and research staff, and professional service teams.
- Provide relevant training and development and community-building activities that cater for all levels of researchers across the University.
- Use appropriate marketing tools and communication channels to promote GRC activities to support the development of an inclusive research culture and community.
- Provide opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration helping individuals and groups to work together.
- Inspire our postgraduates and staff to gain the confidence and skills to lead.
- Foster a distinctive postgraduate identity and encourage postgraduate engagement across the whole University.
- Represent the needs of research staff and postgraduate students through effective consultation and collaboration.
- Look beyond the University through the provision of public engagement training and integration with the University's core Civic Mission.



“Through my involvement with the GradPost, the GRC have provided an opportunity for me to collaborate with staff and students in various fields and allowed me to develop a wider knowledge and understanding of the University of Kent community and feel integrated into postgraduate student life.”

Jemma Gurr, Postcolonial Studies MA

Active sustainable growth

Our postgraduate students come to the University of Kent for a broad student experience as well as for ground-breaking, high-quality, subject-specialist teaching and supervision. They come for our beautiful campuses, for our European partnerships, for the opportunity to spend time with students and staff from other countries and cultures, and for the additional skills they develop and the extracurricular opportunities we provide.

A key part of this experience depends on a thriving and vibrant population of students studying both taught Master's and research degrees as well as academics researching at postdoctoral level and beyond. We need active communities, whether this be in Woolf College, the Kent Graduate Student Network, Kent Union, the Global Skills Award, skills training, across PGR peer mentoring or amongst academic researchers.

Moreover, the financial sustainability of the University is dependent on a variety of income streams. A thriving postgraduate community and active research community will facilitate us to meet our goal to deliver an outstanding student experience in a manageable way. A healthy postgraduate student body in turn encourages the recruitment and retention of excellent research staff.

Growth in our student community needs to be sustainable to ensure that the student experience remains high-quality and that our staff are not overwhelmed. The role of the GRC is critical in providing scale and capacity in skills training, winning external funding, collaborating externally and ensuring we have a good balance of internal scholarships and external funding for our students.

Postgraduate students are an important bridge between education and research and contribute to the success of the University in meeting its planned objectives in both areas.

The GRC will:

- Grow a thriving, diverse, and vibrant population of postgraduate students to enable the student experience to remain a high-quality one and specific postgraduate services and facilities to be retained.
- Ensure that any growth is sustainable so that it can be managed and maintained effectively.
- Encourage innovation in postgraduate taught provision.
- To ensure excellence in postgraduate course provision in terms of teaching, supervision and examination through postgraduate academic regulations and codes of practice.
- Provide a consistent or increased number of externally funded UK Research Council scholarships through continued involvement in Doctoral Training Partnerships.
- Create a new strategic PGR Scholarships Scheme to ensure a diverse funding pipeline and contribute to a thriving research and innovation environment.
- Increase external income through Fellowship awards and Postdoctoral positions through the effective signposting of opportunities to individuals and research groups.
- Support the PG administration and Directors of Graduate Studies communities to enable them to feel confident in dealing with postgraduate issues and day-to-day management of relevant systems and processes.
- Ensure that all supervisors have a suitable level of training and relevant guidance so that individuals and Divisions are equipped to provide a high standard of supervision.
- Welcome international postgraduate students and ensure that we are best placed to support and value an increasingly diverse population of staff and students.



“I have found the resources provided by the Graduate and Researcher College of great help in the further development of my research skills.”

Omolola Oshinlaja, Human Resources Management MSc

“Researchers should be recognised and valued for their contributions in research and beyond, supported in their professional and career development, and equipped and empowered to succeed in their chosen careers.”

Karen Cox, Vice Chancellor and President

Individual development

At the University of Kent, we have a fundamental commitment to supporting and empowering researchers. Continuing professional development is key to success in a world of rapid innovation. We want to ensure our postgraduate students are prepared to thrive in the workplace and that our research staff can meet their and the University’s research and innovation goals, which include making an impactful contribution.

We are recipients of the HRER Award and signatories of the Researcher Development Concordat. We have a rigorous action plan to help us fulfil our commitments to researcher development across the whole career lifespan from taught postgraduate to experienced professor. We are committed to taking active steps to support best practice in relation to our research and innovation environment and culture, the employment of researchers, and their professional and career development.

The GRC will:

- Ensure that we can grow and nurture our research talent through professional and career development, paying close attention to the mental health and wellbeing of staff and students.
- Provide opportunities for our research community to meet together through training and development and social events.
- Promote an equitable, inclusive and positive research and innovation culture for staff and students.
- Support researchers to develop their identity and hone their leadership and research management skills in a digital world.
- Provide development opportunities to ensure our postgraduate students can translate and apply their skills and enter high-quality employment.
- Work in collaboration with Careers and Employability and Divisions to prepare students to go out into Tomorrow’s World ready, focused and agile, through the continual enhancement of our postgraduate curriculum.

“I attended some of the Graduate and Researcher College workshops and I believe they offer valuable support to postgraduate students who will soon be looking for a job. The workshops discuss interesting topics related to improving professional competencies such as presentation skills, networking and writing skills, among others.”

Maria de la Luz Lin, Logistics and Supply Chain Management MSc



POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER STUDENT PROFILE



Many thanks to Matthew Boakes for sharing his experience as a Postgraduate Researcher at Kent.

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I'm currently in the continuation year of my PhD, in the process of finishing writing my thesis with plans to submit it within the next month. My research focuses on mobile biometrics (face, fingerprint, voice, and iris recognition). I am supervised by Prof Richard Guest and Prof Farzin Deravi.

My core aim is to produce a comprehensive performance evaluation framework so evaluators can ensure for end-users (consumers) that the biometric security feature is fit for purpose. I am part of the School of Engineering and a member of the Institute of Cyber Security for Society (iCSS).

Before my PhD, I studied a BSc in Computer Science with a Year in Industry (also at Kent), which provided all the core fundamental knowledge for progressing into my PhD. This is where I first discovered my interest in Cyber Security and Authentication, which led to exploring biometrics.

How do you spend your time when you are not studying?

Admittedly, now I am in thesis crunch mode, spare time is not a luxury I have. However, in normal circumstances, I have a passion for theatre. I often see shows and performances at The Marlowe Theatre (mainly musicals) and occasionally make trips to the West End to see London shows. Since starting my PhD, I have also found an interest in Escape Rooms and hope to spend more time playing the Escape Rooms around Kent when I have finished. At a more casual weekend, I like to play video games, go to the cinema, or simply relax with friends in one of Canterbury's many coffee shops.

Why did you choose to do a PhD at Kent?

Slightly cliché, but I would argue that potentially Kent chose me. In the summer before my final undergraduate year, I completed a research internship alongside Budi Arief and Julio Hernandez-Castro, looking into a biometric application. After that, and during my last year, my current supervisor Richard Guest reached out to me and asked if I would be interested in an upcoming PhD project about to start in biometrics. After an initial meeting to discuss the project, I decided it was something that I would very much like to pursue, and I did. However, I had already fallen in love with Kent and Canterbury from my time as an undergraduate, so it wasn't a difficult decision. In addition, one of the perks that I like is the easy transport links into London.

What are you particularly enjoying about your experience at Kent so far?

The aspect that I enjoy the most and keeps me motivated is the people I have met throughout my time here. Of course, the life-long friends, and the knowledge, discussion and experiences shared over coffee make the more challenging times worthwhile. But that equally goes beyond the university walls. I have had the privilege to meet and interact with some fantastic people across the UK and beyond.

What support/opportunities do you receive as a research student from the University?

My research project provided the opportunity to spend time in the industry to work alongside some of the best cyber security talents the UK has to offer. I won't forget that experience, and to have their input into my project was a great experience allowing for additional feedback.

How has the GRC helped you during your PhD?

The Graduate and Researcher College has acted like a rock throughout my PhD, offering advice and support. They provided a range of workshops to help Early Career Researchers throughout the year. I found this to be a precious experience, particularly as someone who came into a PhD straight from an Undergraduate with no Masters or previous research experience. The GRC team is always willing to help, including Dr Jo Collins, who has helped me in terms of academic and emotional help when required.

How does postgraduate study differ from undergraduate study?

The biggest, but the probably most unsurprising difference, is the style. In hindsight, undergraduate is a very guided experience with teaching delivered to you through lectures and other study sessions. A research postgraduate is very independent and something that, truthfully, I probably wasn't quite ready for when I started. Of course, you have your

supervisors to help guide and provide suggestions, but even then, you need to prepare for many independent studies. However, the experience isn't always as isolated as some people will likely lead you to believe. A big part is probably knowing when to seek help and where and how to find it, usually relying on your friends and fellow postgraduates for advice.

What benefits have you gained from your research community?

The main benefit to me was the people, the range of people, and the research the University of Kent is carrying out, particularly within the Institute of Cyber Security for Society (ICSS). The community is influential, and being a part of it for support, knowledge, and guidance as I embark on a potential career in research is impressive.

How will your PhD support your future career aspirations?

The PhD is more than just the doctorate at the end, although that is a big part. I would argue that the experience (both good and bad) makes it worthwhile. You will gain many transferable skills along the way and the ability to problem-solve and manage your project from start to finish. I know that whatever I decide to do next, the PhD has set me up to try and succeed and offer the best that I can for my future.

What are you planning to do next?

Truthfully, I am waiting to finish and pass my viva before officially deciding what to do next. However, A UK organisation recently approached me for work relating to my current PhD project, which I hope could be a great starting point before future research or industry work.

POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENT PROFILE



Many thanks to Alissa Just for sharing her experience as a Master's student at Kent.

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I am studying the two-year programme International Relations with International Law at the school of Politics and International Relations, hoping to graduate in 2023 with a Master of Arts. I did my Undergraduate in Political Science at the Phillips-University of Marburg in Germany.

How do you spend your spare time when you are not studying?

I built my own camper-van last year during the pandemic and enjoy exploring different areas and regions in the UK. While Canterbury is a beautiful city with lots of opportunities to explore, the rest of the UK has a lot to offer too.

Why did you choose to do a Masters at Kent?

I really wanted to do a two-year programme, since I didn't feel like a one-year Masters would give me enough time to really get into a topic and further my understanding of it, before it was time to write the dissertation. I am enjoying the added possibilities that come with it; a free summer term that I can spend on an internship to enhance my portfolio and more courses that I can attend in total, meaning I don't have to make hard choices on which optional courses to choose.

What are you particularly enjoying about your experience at Kent so far?

The views from campus are magnificent! There's always something happening on campus too, so whenever I feel like joining in on an activity, there most certainly is something going on.

What support/opportunities do you receive as a Postgraduate Taught student from the University?

The careers centre focuses a lot of their offers and events on PG students that need help refining their skills; from salary negotiation to CV writing or essay skills, there is an abundance of opportunities to get PGT students into employment.

How has the GRC helped you during your course?

I've benefited from the Career's Award and the amazing events that were offered by the GRC. It's not only been fun to dive into different topics, but I was able to specifically pick what interested me, from insight on employment, to different topics that I can refine my skillset with.



How does Postgraduate study differ from Undergraduate study?

As a Postgraduate student, you are expected to learn and read on your own. During my Undergraduate studies, reading the core readings was important as the texts would be discussed during the seminar. In Postgraduate study, the core readings are important background information for further discussion on the topics, not necessarily discussing the text itself but giving you arguments and information to enhance and build your own critical thoughts on topics. Furthermore, Postgraduate students are passionate and interested in what they are studying, so breaks, late-nights in pubs, and walking to university is filled with more challenging discussion than during Undergraduate studies.

What benefits have you gained from your academic community?

I think discussions are the best way to refine your argument and find your own standpoint. Whenever I have to explain myself to someone from an opposite point of view, I am able to trace my own thoughts in a way that I couldn't when I am "just" explaining

it to myself or in an essay on paper. Topics and viewpoints that I hadn't considered before, and that challenge my opinion, are brought up and help me to understand the bigger picture.

How will your Master's support your future career aspirations?

I am interested in working in the third sector, in which a Master's degree is not only desirable but expected. The two-year course will also help me to dive into multiple topics that will provide me with background knowledge during my career.

What are you planning to do next?

After my degree I want to work in development cooperation and diversity-focused projects, hoping to make international relations with the global south a little better, one step at a time.

