

EMPLOYABILITY STRATEGY 2022-2026



University of
Kent



INTRODUCTION

At the University of Kent, we are committed to enhancing the employability of our students and graduates, as detailed in our Kent 2025 Vision. Employability is integral to what we do as we prepare our students for their future and this strategy sets out how we will become one of the leading institutions for graduate employability by 2026.

Our new Employability Strategy 2022-26 sets out a comprehensive approach to employability across the institution, incorporating not just attributes and skills, but values and motivations too. The strategy supports all students, undergraduate, postgraduate, taught and research, to better understand themselves, their environment and the impact they have on the world. It identifies sustainability and

employability as being intrinsically linked, and supports our students, graduates and alumni to engage actively with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The strategy also identifies ways that we will strengthen the links between the University and industry, between employers and our students, and between academia and the world of work.



CONTEXT

The world of work is in a state of flux following Covid-19. Commonly held beliefs about the nature and delivery of work have been challenged, and staff and employers around the world are adjusting to this new and ongoing paradigm. Our role as an institution is to support our students in navigating this new world, preparing them for the adaptability and creativity required to work in the modern workplace, and the skills, knowledge and technological literacies to thrive. We must face up to the challenge of preparing our students for a sustainable and global world of work, ensuring that they are supported appropriately whatever opportunities and decisions they take.

The UK Government collects employment data on all graduates (UG, PG, UK and Overseas) from UK Higher Education Institutions through the Graduate Outcomes Survey. These Graduate Outcomes provide access to metrics and analytics such as 'graduate reflection on activity' which measure the value of degrees beyond the final destination. We must challenge ourselves to enhance our performance in these wider metrics and to deliver an education and employability experience that is one of the best in the UK.

We must acknowledge the impact that activities linked to employability and the workplace can have on happiness, wellbeing and broader student experience. Effective career planning motivates students to engage more broadly in their subject,

enhancing their learning and energising their interest and pursuit of a career. It is vital that we provide effective information, advice and guidance to support our students across all stages of their learning, and to recognise the value and authenticity of employability in enriching the curricula.

We should also be cognisant of the growing emphasis placed on individual values, including the impact of individual and collective decisions on the world and society. It is important that we challenge and support our students to develop into the global leaders of the future, enabling them to make the world a better place. We must encourage the development and recognition of individual values and support our students to be active global citizens.





STRATEGIC AIMS

- 1 To increase the Graduate Prospects measure by ten percentage points over the life of this strategy, using the Graduate Outcomes data released in 2021 as a benchmark.
- 2 To improve the Graduate Reflection on Activity metrics through the Graduate Outcomes Survey. Specifically, we will improve the 'I am using what I learnt during my studies in my current activity' positive response rate by 10%, bringing us above average for the sector.
- 3 To foster an environment and culture of employability across the life of this strategy.

We have five key objectives to achieve our aims. These objectives will fundamentally challenge our approach to employability and drive the actions necessary to deliver the outcomes we seek. For the purpose of this strategy, 'employability' is defined to be inclusive of values, attributes, skills, behaviours and strengths.

OBJECTIVE ONE

Building upon our relationships with employers and external partners, we will become the institution of choice for recruiting talent. We will strengthen our partnerships with industry to advise us on the skills, experience and knowledge needed for future employment, and work with them to provide these opportunities.

Enabling activities

- 1 We will be proactive in establishing meaningful relationships with employers in Kent and Medway to establish talent pipelines for their organisations.
- 2 We will continue to build on our national and international profile with employers, ensuring that our processes and systems are not UK focussed. We will extend our network, utilising our alumni as ambassadors and mentors to aid students and graduates in accessing labour markets.
- 3 We will review and improve internal mechanisms for managing employer requests, ensuring we are responding in a timely and positive manner.
- 4 We will work with regional representatives to look at how we can retain Kent talent within the regional economy. This will include campaigns to students highlighting the benefits of remaining in Kent.
- 5 We will develop mechanisms for students and employers to meet and discuss the world of work and to develop mutually beneficial relationships both within the curriculum and at a co-curricular level. This will include a regional internship campaign to provide experiences for our students and building upon the successful Employability Points Scheme.
- 6 We will support employers in making roles attractive to students and graduates and ensure that opportunities reach the right students.
- 7 We will run targeted profile-raising campaigns to employers that point to specific engagement opportunities such as hiring students and graduates, engaging in mentoring, or participating in events.

Outcomes

Students and employers will work together for mutual benefit. Kent will become the regional institution of choice for employers, and establish long-term, meaningful, and mutually beneficial relationships. We will position our support to retain students and graduates that want to remain in the region, whilst recognising the need to support global ambition.

Success criteria

- 1 We will support an additional 2,000 work experience opportunities per year by 2023, with specific opportunities made available for those who traditionally face barriers to entering the graduate labour market, building on the success of the Work-Study Scheme.
- 2 Every subject area will have an Industry Advisory Panel that feeds into the curriculum. These panels will support innovation and ensure that Kent graduates have the employability skills needed for a modern world of work.
- 3 We will establish a single point of contact for external enquiries and have clear guidance around response times and responsible persons.
- 4 A single vacancy portal for employers to advertise their vacancies will be adopted by the end of the academic year 2021/22, ensuring all students are able to access all relevant opportunities.
- 5 Hearing from industry partners will be an established part of the curriculum for the majority of students by 2025.
- 6 Industry engagement will be benchmarked and reported on annually, with case studies used to highlight best practice.

OBJECTIVE TWO

We will ensure students are supported in their understanding of employability, enabling them to understand themselves in the context of their future.

Enabling activities

- 1 We will develop a clear framework for our students to understand and reflect on their employability and future opportunities.
- 2 We will encourage our students to engage actively with this framework throughout their time at Kent.
- 3 We will ensure this framework is inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of their career journey or where they are in the world.
- 4 We will use data-informed approaches to our activities, targeting resources and activities appropriately.

Success criteria

- 1 Development of an employability framework through year one of the strategy, ready for and institution-wide launch at the start of academic year 2023/24.
- 2 Review and expansion of the Kent Graduate Attributes to include explicit postgraduate attributes by the end of the academic year 2022/23.
- 3 Benchmarked activities with identified targets set and monitored at an institutional level, with minimum expectations of 8,000 students engaging in university organised co-curricular employability activities in year one, seeking a 10% increase annually.

Outcomes

Our students will better understand themselves and their abilities, providing a sound foundation for planning and decision-making about their future, and the life they want to lead.



OBJECTIVE THREE

We will ensure that students have the opportunity to engage with career development across all stages of their study, ensuring they have a sound understanding of the global labour market and the options and opportunities available to them.

Enabling activities

- 1 We will ensure access to qualified and experienced careers, placements, and employability staff who will support students in decision making and career planning.
- 2 We will provide materials and resources that enable students to gain knowledge and understanding about career options and the steps required to achieve their goals.
- 3 We will ensure Academic Advisors have access to training and materials that facilitate early conversations with students about their futures.
- 4 We will ensure students have access to industry professionals as part of, and alongside their learning, to support confidence building and commercial awareness.
- 5 We will introduce an institutional mentoring scheme that supports students in engaging with industry professionals.
- 6 Undertake an institutional project to identify those most at risk of unemployment or underemployment and assess the suitability of available interventions.

Success criteria

- 1 Benchmarked student engagement with activities that support employability and establish annual targets for improvement.
- 2 Enhanced provision of online support materials by the end of the autumn term 2022, with monitored engagement in year one, and targets and areas for improvement established for subsequent years.
- 3 Development of Academic Adviser advice packs that support conversations about careers and further study and include guidance for forward referral. Packs to be available by the end of 2022/23.
- 4 In the academic year 2020/2021, 1,888 45-minute Careers Guidance appointments took place. We will seek to grow this annually and ensure that all students are offered this support.
- 5 Collectively, we will deliver 100 co-curricular events in year one of the strategy that are focussed on giving insight into industry. This figure will be increased annually.
- 6 We will develop an employability journey map, detailing the support and opportunities available to students throughout their time at Kent.

Outcomes

Our students will better understand the career opportunities open to them. We will support our students to make decisions about their future, and to be focussed on how they seek out opportunities to gain experience or develop skills. We will provide opportunities for them to discuss their future with experienced and qualified staff, as well as people from their chosen fields. This will support them to be more effective in applying for graduate schemes and jobs.





OBJECTIVE FOUR

We will provide students with a curriculum rich in opportunities that develops employability in a way that is sensitive to the academic subject, context, and requirement for academic rigour. We will make employability explicit within the curriculum and work closely with industry partners to ensure our learning and assessment develop the skills, knowledge and experiences to thrive in future careers.

Enabling activities

- 1 We will audit existing employability provision within the curriculum, identifying opportunities to enhance the student experience.
- 2 Key Performance Indicators will be developed at Division and subject level around the delivery of employability skill development within the curriculum. Performance against this will be reported annually to Education and Student Experience Board.
- 3 We will provide training, and develop an Employability Guide for academic staff to enhance the visibility of employability within the curriculum. This will include support for the redesign of curricula assessments to require application of relevant skills.
- 4 We will develop an institution wide mechanism for supporting speakers from the public, private or voluntary sectors drawing on alumni and business networks
- 5 We will promote sustainability within the curriculum and how this relates to employability, as defined by the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- 6 We will provide opportunities for academic staff to work with partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors to develop curricula which provide academic and pedagogic rigour alongside opportunities to acquire and develop the necessary skills that will make our students stand out in the workplace.
- 7 We will enable the linking of co-curricular and extra-curricular employability schemes to academic modules so that students can see the value and practical application of their academic work

Outcomes

Our students will be better prepared for finding and succeeding in employment. Students will be better aware of their skills and the relevance of their learning to the wider world. This approach will be inclusive and universal, ensuring that all students identify and yield the benefits.

Success criteria

- 1 Development of employability guides for module convenors through year one with targeted launch across the academic year 2022/23.
- 2 Extended access and support for external speaker contributions which enhance the curricula, including administrative processes, financial arrangements and quality assurance. Access guidelines to be established by the end of Spring 2023. We aim to have established 100 externals annually delivering activities or providing insight and support to the curriculum by the end of this strategy.
- 3 Partnering of Divisional Education and Student Experience leads and Senior Careers and Employability Service Advisers to support academic staff in the use of employability resources where appropriate.
- 4 There will be a culture of sharing best practice around employability within the curriculum. There will be forums where new initiatives are discussed and explored beyond the original discipline.

OBJECTIVE FIVE

We will provide a co-curricular range of activities that supports students to build an employability portfolio relevant to their future. We will develop activities that are values led and which include an institutional commitment to sustainability evidenced through engagement with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Enabling activities

- 1 We will work closely with alumni and industry to provide insights and advice to our students on the world of work through advisory panels, speakers and mentoring.
- 2 We will expand our volunteering support and provision to enable our students greater opportunities to gain experience and to have a positive impact on the world.
- 3 We will extend placement and work-based learning opportunities across all levels of study, identifying ways of appropriately enhancing the skills portfolios of our students. Within this, we commit to providing additional opportunities to those students who may face barriers to the graduate labour market.
- 4 We will promote a wide range of co-curricular activities using Kent Extra as an umbrella to incorporate all employability enhancing activities including (but not exhaustive of) GOLD, Year In, Employability Points, Business Start-up Journey, volunteering, employment, placements, mentoring, Global Skills Award, learning a language, Study Plus, and study abroad opportunities.
- 5 We will broaden our Study Plus programme to facilitate specific skills development and training, ensuring that sessions meet the needs of our students and that learning outcomes are explicit.
- 6 We will unify marketing activities to provide a brand and framework for communicating experiences to students.
- 7 We will work collaboratively, with Divisions and Professional Service Departments sharing resources and activities wherever operationally possible to widen the reach and participation by students.
- 8 We will review platforms and resources to enable students to engage with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to identify and share new opportunities and experiences.

Outcomes

We will enhance the roll-out and engagement of employability with our student body, increasing participation in activities and assisting students to make informed decisions about how they use their time. We will share information across employability schemes to reduce administrative burden and better equip staff to supporting students with their choices.

Success criteria

- 1 Development of a mentoring programme for students by the end of academic year 2021/22, with targets of 250 mentoring relationships delivered annually by the end of the strategy.
- 2 Review and update of Kent Extra design and activities by the end of summer term 2023.
- 3 Development of promotional materials that signpost current and prospective students to the wide range of activities no later than the end of summer term 2023.
- 4 Benchmarked student engagement, with appropriate targets for enhanced engagement established, reported and updated to Education and Student Experience Board on an annual basis. Benchmarks to be confirmed by the end of academic year 2022/23.
- 5 Establishment of a university wide mechanism to engage students with the UN Sustainable Development Goals by the end of the academic year 2022/23. Appropriate promotional materials to be developed to support a hard launch in 2023/24. Benchmarks for engagement to be established and reported to Education and Student Experience Board annually.
- 6 Student engagement in Study Plus will have doubled over the lifetime of this strategy, from a benchmark level of 2,530 attendances in 2020/21.



