



GRAD *Post* ²⁰²³

*the New
Normal*

Spring

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Editorial

Hello! Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of “GradPost”. This edition’s theme is the **New Normal**. How do postgraduate students understand this theme and reflect upon it in their studies and beyond? This year, we at GradPost are committed and excited to explore this theme by bringing in fresh, creative & enriching voices and perspectives in a friendly and accessible newsletter. In this newsletter, we are very happy and proud to showcase articles that inspire, give food for thought, and enable you to see diverse aspects of student life here at the University of Kent: from sharing personal stories about empowering experiences at Kent, to discussing real tech such as AI, living abroad and the challenges and opportunities it presents, and, finally, to showcasing fascinating art pieces. These experiences can encourage us to open our eyes and minds about what is behind these pieces. “GradPost” is an opportunity to celebrate you at Kent, share success stories and learning journeys, and to build a sense of community in this space. We look forward to sharing your experiences through these articles, and to encourage participation in future editions of GradPost. We will be unveiling the theme for our upcoming 2023 Summer edition in the Afterword at the end of this edition, and we cannot wait to encounter more interesting perspectives and unique voices. If you wish to contribute to the newsletter, have an idea to share, or are interested in joining the GradPost team, please email gradpost@kent.ac.uk.

Power to you all, keep going and shine as a star. It is worth it.

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'NEW NORMAL'

By Fiyinfoluwa Balogun

PART 1:

"I hope it stops raining before I get to my stop."

I thought about the ride from Canterbury to Dover. It has been 5 weeks since I started my new job, and it takes me almost 2 hours to get to work every day and the same to get back.

"Yeah! I wish I could drive."

PART 2:

No, it didn't stop raining, but I didn't walk any faster than I would on a normal day. I prefer to get to work exactly at 10:00 am, not a minute earlier, then I leave by 8:00 pm, and dear readers, not a second later.

PART 3:

"My bed, my bed, my bed"

I walk back to the bus stop after work and wait 30 mins for bus 15 to show up. Sometimes, I walk back from the Canterbury bus station to school. Other times, I take the school bus. It's raining again this evening and...

Salesman: What would you like?

Me: To be in my bed earlier than I can imagine.

Salesman: That would be 2 pounds, please. Thank you.

I get onboard the Uni bus and savour a relaxing evening till I actually get home.

THE END:

Yikes! That's my new normal. Come rain, come sunshine, I have to make a Canterbury – Dover transit twice a week.

Silt

By Sneha Kashyap

A golden shaft filtered through the pulled apart blinds making me giddy about the prospect that awaited. As we set off from Woolf, the biting wind whipped around our parkas, and we were grateful for the insulation of our Stagecoach rider. As the wheels rolled onward, our eyes feasted on the rolling countryside and Blean, which were soon replaced by quaint little shops along Whitstable High Street.

There was a spring in my step as we disembarked from the omnibus. We stumbled upon a Kent Little Free Library – a conspicuous red booth that sits in the middle of the triangular patch that marks the fork in Tower Hill – on our way to the Castle. I thought of the journeys these books had taken in winding up here, the human impressions they bore. A tap on my shoulder emphasized that we had tarried enough.

Entering the castle grounds, the green floor bed, clear skies, and the light hitting the glass windows made me ardently long for spring. Continuing our historical trail, we made our way to the community museum. The enthusiasm of our elderly guides was second only to the impressive steam engine that meets the eye upon entrance and the story of the rail tracks, including a tunnel beneath our own Tyler Hill. After electronically exchanging pound sterling for souvenirs, including some rare finds in charity shops, we heeded to the rumbling of our stomachs.

Munching on my battered cod at Tankerton with the sea spray permeating the air was sheer bliss. In the softly fading light, we ambled along the shore with the waves gently crashing. I picked up a handful of sand as I gazed upon the blue grey horizon. Like gently falling silt in my palms, we too, must allow us allow ourselves to be borne by the current to unexplored horizons.

From ___ to ___

By *Nethra Singhi*

From waking up at 6 to getting to bed at 4. From 9 am work calls to 9 am classes. From making friends because networking to making friends because it's fun. From adulting to #adulting. From presenting in meetings to a disinterested audience to now being the audience, although rarely disinterested. Seems chronologically backward. Nevertheless, that's my new normal. Getting back to school after a four-year gap, I have had to adapt or rather relearn a new routine.

But this experience is not just *deja vu*. Even though I did not have access to *maa kehaath ka khana* in the city I studied in back home, this time, the gap has increased to continents across oceans. In the new normal, it's not just about returning to school. It's about studying, cooking, learning, and hopefully adjusting to a totally new environment where everything is different: the people, the language, the culture, the weather.

This is the new normal: Instead of waking up at 7 after the sun has risen, I wake up at 7 way before the sun wants to rise. From coming home at 11 pm to having to leave for parties at that time. From multiple coffees for the energy to sustain polite small talk to multiple coffees for the energy to attend classes, cook food, clean up and do my own laundry. From glass offices mirroring a soulless but economically rewarding life to a mirror of constant self-reflection and improvement that has bled me broke, but is paying off with satisfaction.

Away from home for the first time

By Umi Sanghavi

Leaving a brown household as a 21-year-old for the first time for a master's degree in Neuropsychology? Pretty unusual considering you are the confused, middle child of the three siblings. I made the decision to study abroad right after completing my high school. It was one of those instances where young teenagers romanticize independence, only to find myself sobbing in my room while I write this article because I miss my mother's home-cooked meals.

Now don't get me wrong, independence is essential, particularly with regards to realizing your own potential. But what is often overlooked are the little things – the moment your friend back home mentions how they visited your favourite restaurant, when your sister calls you to show you the new dress she bought, listening to your dog bark because they miss you – and the most painful moment is when your mother sends you a picture of your favourite meal that she cooked.

What I am trying to say is, these are bittersweet moments when you realize that life is moving on, with or without you, and you need to do the same. Whether a festive occasion or a low tiring day, the beauty to it is that although you're miles apart, you will always have a home.

Reminding yourself of the purpose of this journey and refocusing on your goal will help make these moments less painful. What this has helped me achieve is something I have struggled with in the past – living in the present. Most of our time is wasted either by fixating on the past or worrying about the future. But, there comes a different kind of joy when you learn to appreciate the present because we will never be able to bring back certain moments and relive them.

This is just one of the many things I learned, and I know I will be carrying a suitcase full of them when I go home.

The Challenges of Living Abroad for the First Time

By Patrick Ubane

Moving to a new country for the first time can be a challenging experience that requires a substantial amount of time to adjust to. Adapting to a new environment, weather, and cultural differences can be daunting, even with English as a first language. The transition can be further complicated by having to navigate unfamiliar systems and ways of life, whilst simultaneously encountering individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Adjusting quickly is crucial, as there is no room for procrastination in this new environment.

Furthermore, securing suitable accommodation can be a frustrating experience for international students, especially for those who opt to reside off-campus. Landlords and agents typically impose strict requirements that may not be conducive to the needs of newcomers. Therefore, students often face the challenge of spending significant amounts of money and effort in finding a place to stay at the commencement of term.

Being away from family can prove to be an emotional challenge. The absence of loved ones, coupled with the pressure of adapting to a new environment, can be overwhelming. Fortunately, the Student Dependent Visa allows for the presence of immediate family members, offering the opportunity for students to have a familiar support system, which can make the transition smoother, and boost productivity.

As a postgraduate student, the demands of the academic workload can add another layer of pressure to the transition. The pace of lectures, exams, and deadlines can be daunting, and the pressure of having to manage them whilst adapting to a new environment can be overwhelming. Having someone by your side to provide comfort and support can be invaluable.

In conclusion, living away from home for the first time can be challenging, but it can also be a transformative experience that shapes one's character. Overcoming these challenges requires resilience, determination, and an openness to new experiences. With the right support systems in place, students can adjust to their new environment, adapt to the cultural differences, and achieve academic success.

Living Away from Home for the First Time

By Hazim Abdulsada

Living away from home for the first time can be exciting for some people. This is because they will be independent and have a chance to do so on their own terms. On some occasions, however, it may be difficult because you are no longer living with your family in the same country. You must take care of yourself without any assistance from them.

Additionally, you will need to manage your time, balance your finances, and make decisions on your own in certain situations. Despite feeling lonely, under stress, or homesick, you will still be able to learn new skills, meet new people from different backgrounds, learn a new language, or even become an expert in some cuisine from a different culture.

Furthermore, seek support when needed. When you feel overwhelmed or homesick, you can talk to a trusted friend, family member, or campus services like student support. Do not be afraid to reach out for help. It is also imperative to take care of yourself by eating well, getting enough sleep, taking breaks from your studies, pursuing hobbies, and exercising regularly.

For career advancement, you will enhance your resume and become a more attractive candidate for future employment opportunities. In addition to the opportunity to work with well-known companies for an internship or temporary position, you will be able to establish international contacts, which can be highly beneficial in your future career.

Overall, living away from home for the first time can be a rewarding and transformative experience. However, it can be difficult or sometimes challenging. The key thing is to be prepared, stay positive, seek support when needed, and be open to exploring experiences and cultures.

Post Graduate Studies in the New Norm

By B. Ogunjumo

In September 2020, I began studying for a part-time master's degree in Electronics Engineering at the University of Kent. During this period, the COVID-19 pandemic affected studies around the world, disrupting research, changing study plans, and creating challenges in academic achievement. Despite this, like most people, I was able to adjust and cope with the changes brought about by the pandemic.

The following are some tips that were helpful to me during the pandemic and that might be useful to postgraduate students studying in the New Normal.

1. Adapt your research plan:

The pandemic has disrupted a lot of research plans, but there are still ways to adjust your research. For example, you might need to switch to a different research method, work remotely, or postpone some experiments until you can do them in the lab under new working conditions.

2. Stay in touch:

If possible, stay in touch with your supervisor and peers for advice and support, and be aware of any changes to your study plan. If you wish to remain connected to others in your field, you may wish to consider joining online communities or participating in virtual conferences. During the pandemic, my research was presented at an online IEEE conference, where I won the award for best presentation.

3. Maintain a healthy lifestyle & prioritise self-care:

During the pandemic, everyone has experienced stress in one form or another. Postgraduate students may be particularly susceptible to burnout. Get enough sleep, eat healthily, and exercise regularly. You might also find it helpful if you practice mindfulness or stress-reduction techniques. I enjoy long distance running, weight training and playing 5-a-side football.

Post Graduate Studies in the New Norm

By B. Ogunjumo

4. Flexibility is key:

As a result of the pandemic, we've grown to understand the urgency of adapting to new situations as they arise. This may mean adjusting your study plan, changing your research focus, or exploring new opportunities to make your study more effective. As a postgraduate student during the pandemic, there were many challenges that needed to be overcome. However, in the New Normal, you can succeed by adapting your research, staying connected, taking care of yourself and remaining flexible.

The Goal is Achievable

By Adetutu Oyerinde

I finally submitted my first paper. It was being prepared for an academic conference scheduled later in the year, but the deadline for submission of developmental work was in March. “How am I supposed to turn in a paper under such short notice” I asked myself. Then I recall that the PhD is a lonely one, and that such questions can only be answered by myself and myself alone.

The PhD adventure is one that is characterized by many challenges. To me, it is like experiencing a big ocean, where you swim, drown, float, and sometimes feel numb – and yet, you come out alive. In this situation of having to make a very tight deadline, I reminded myself that this is another obstacle of my PhD journey that needed to be surmounted. So, with no further hesitation, I started to put my thoughts together, then planned my ideas and organized the structure of the paper in line with the theme of the conference. By the time I was done I had only an hour left until the submission deadline.

At that point I felt very exhausted and worried, it was as if my brain had stopped responding to my queries even though I had an important task to complete in less than an hour. Some people work better when under pressure, and while I think I am one of those people, this style of working comes with a cost.

Eventually, I was able to regain control of my thoughts and finalized the paper. And BOOM! The submission deadline was met.

The feelings that come when you achieve what seemed unachievable are incredible. First you feel like a conqueror, and then you start to build more confidence in preparing for the next challenge. This appears to be my cycle and experience at every stage of my PhD journey.

The goal is always achievable. If you can think it, then you can do it.

RETURNING TO KENT AFTER FOUR YEARS

By Miguel Santos

After finishing my undergraduate degree here in 2018, it was simultaneously exciting and daunting to return to Kent. I wasn't sure if I was ready to come back, as my time here was a challenging but fulfilling experience which I felt I needed closure and space from.

Certainly, the 'new normal' at the University of Kent has changed. One positive change is that the University is more focussed on sustainability. Projects such as the Diamond Anniversary Orchard illustrate how sustainability is more than just a buzzword; it's inspiring to see the University celebrate its outdoor spaces, which are more valued now due to the pandemic. On a personal note, as the former Environment Officer at Kent, it was touching to see the Oasis Garden thriving, since that was one of my projects.

Despite the obvious changes in the student body, I still recognise numerous staff members around campus. My department, the School of English, is largely the same; as a research student, I've had the opportunity to network and share ideas more closely in this community with staff that I looked up to and respected.

There are quite a few differences that I do miss from my time here, however. The college student committees were a huge part of my student experience, with myself working closely with the former postgraduate college committee, the Kent Graduate Student Association (KGSA). The KGSA ran a diverse range of events to strengthen the postgraduate community, alongside our former Woolf mascot, Gandalf the cat. (Don't worry – even though Gandalf isn't around Woolf anymore, he's being taken care of!) Now as a research postgraduate, I hope to continue the legacy of the KGSA, especially Rowena and Tom's, with the Postgraduate Network.

Returning to Kent has been an opportunity to reflect on my own development, delving into genuine self-introspection about how everything is changing, in my mind and the world around me. This new normal at Kent in 2023 for me is different from the Kent of 2018; however, there are always openings of memories and the past that propels me forward to envision a better Kent and a better version of myself.

Relax & elevate your study game with a DJ Set

By B. Ogunjumo

Music, including DJ sets, can help you relax while you study. Listening to music can improve your concentration, mood, and motivation. Personally, I find playing a DJ set after a long study week relaxing for me. I did this a lot during my postgraduate research master's studies at Kent.

Although, I would not classify myself as a professional DJ, I have played at a couple of house parties and once live streamed a Christmas DJ session during the pandemic. The sounds in my mix sessions are usually inspired by a variety of music genres from the 90s, including Hip Hop, New Jack Swing, R&B, House, and Dance music. In addition, I find it interesting mixing genres, like the old ones with more recent ones such as Afrobeats or Trap.

If you plan to use DJ sets for relaxing whilst studying, be aware of the following things:

- You should choose the right kind of music for listening. Different people find different kinds of music relaxing, so try different types and see what works best for you.
- You should listen with headphones.
- Blocking out external distractions, you can create a more relaxing and immersive atmosphere.
- Take regular breaks whilst DJing as extended DJing sessions may lead to burnout.
- Lastly, don't worry about being perfect when mixing for the first time, just enjoy the experience.

Relax & elevate your study game with a DJ Set

By B. Ogunjumelo

Most importantly, you do not need a professional DJ set as you can now use DJ apps on your phone or tablet. It is also possible to access music via a variety of popular streaming services. However, you will need to pay for these services. I currently use a Pioneer DJ Controller connected to an iPad. The app I use on the iPad is DJay Pro. My personal MP3 collection and Tidal music streaming service are also used for music.

In general, using DJ sets to relax whilst studying can help boost focus and motivation as well as reduce stress and tension. Just experiment with different music and settings to find what works for you.



THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS: HOW IS THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT HELPING?

By Aatika Kouser Kundasari

According to the House of Commons Library publications, the UK's annual inflation rate reached a 41-year high in October 2022.

This has had a significant impact on people across all walks of life, especially students and working professionals. Many have found it difficult to afford even basic necessities, and students, in particular, are struggling to balance academic demands with part-time jobs. To help ease the cost of living crisis for students, the University of Kent has:

- **reduced meal deal prices to £3 at the Rutherford Dining Hall on the Canterbury Campus,**
- **a selection of £3 meal deals at The Deep End at The Hub and Venue Café in Pilkington on the Medway Campus.**

They have introduced these measures while still serving the same delicious menu items. This has proved highly popular among students and has made life easier for those studying at University of Kent.

Additionally, the Canvas and Mandela Building Pantry offer short-term supplementary meals for students at the Canterbury campus, while The Hub allows students at Medway campus to fill out an online form for emergency food packages. Moreover, various buildings across both of the University of Kent's campuses have hot water points and microwaves.

While some of these resources have existed for a while, the recent changes demonstrate the University's commitment to helping students feel secured and supported during challenging times.

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ART GALLERY



By Sneha Kashyap



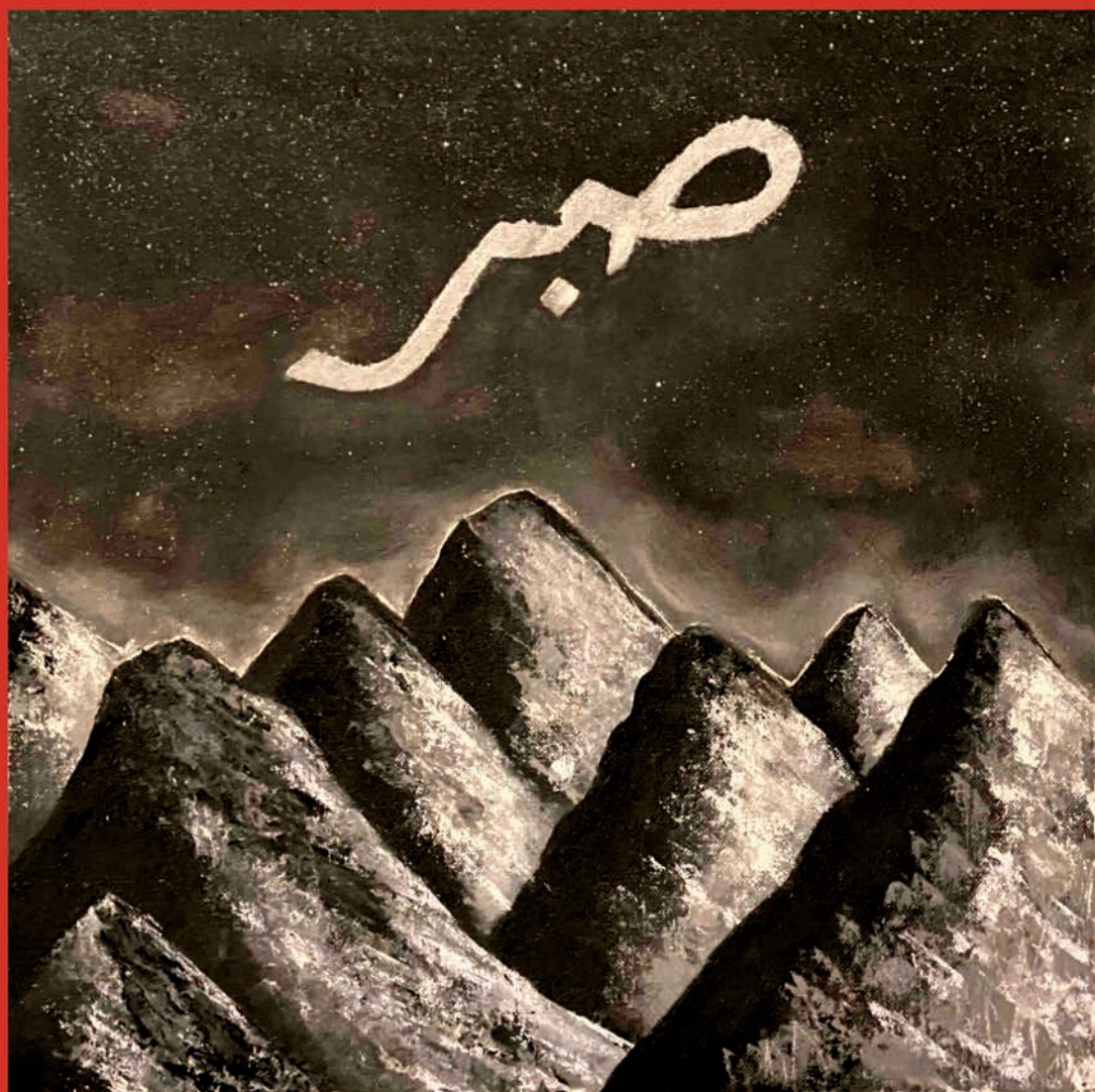
By Aatika Kouser Kundasam



By Sneha Kashyap



By Iliquid Muetter



By Aatika Kouser Kundalam

Afterword

In deciding the theme of New Normal, we at GradPost drew upon novel changes that have seeped into the fabric of the everyday since the pandemic began, ranging from the gradual resumption of normalcy to the ongoing cost of living crisis. In particular, it has been wonderful to hear so many students share their colourful experiences of studying abroad. This New Normal has given us the unique opportunity to work with and learn from a diverse team of postgraduates, culminating in this anthology of experiences of the student community at Kent.

Now, we would like to welcome you to the theme for the Summer term newsletter: "New Life". This edition will be all about embracing new opportunities, new perspectives, and new visions for the future. We want to inspire our readers to have a fresh outlook on life, and to move forward with positivity. From personal stories of overcoming adversity to expert advice on achieving your goals, our articles will cover a wide range of topics to help you forge the path you want. Please share your experiences of meeting new people and exploring new cultures. Whether you're looking to start a new career after university, travel the world, or simply make the most of every day, this newsletter is for you. We can't wait to read your insights and perspectives on the exciting possibilities that await us all in our new lives!

As blossoms bloom and get you catching feelings, may the change of seasons from bitter winter to hopeful spring move you to pick up your pens and paintbrushes for the next edition of GradPost.

Features Editor Sneha Kashyap

News Editor Aatika Kouser Kundalam

An abstract background featuring a vibrant orange-red color palette. The surface has a textured, painterly quality with visible brushstrokes and some darker, almost black, areas. A prominent white, vertical brushstroke is located on the right side, and another white, horizontal brushstroke is visible near the top center. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and artistic expression.

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