

VC's message

Over the last couple of weeks it has been great seeing our campuses come alive again with new and returning students. With the start of the new term comes a new round of university activities and events.

We welcomed Lord Adonis for the first of the 'In Conversation' series this year with an interesting discussion on Brexit and where this could take us. Last Friday I was delighted to welcome Lord Willets as our guest of honour for the annual Foundation Day speech and dinner. I was also pleased to welcome representatives from the Chinese Embassy.

In terms of the cycle of university business, the top priority will be responding to the implications of the drop in student admissions on our finances: we are heading for a potential financial deficit this year of between £3.5 and £10m. We are reviewing urgently what options are available to close the gap. David Nightingale will be discussing this with academic schools and Denise Everitt with PSDs. We will feed back initial conclusions at the Senior Leadership Forum meeting in two weeks time. There is a difficult balance to be struck between having to make savings to bridge the gap and to continue to invest to support the ambitions we all have to strengthen areas and grow new activities. All of which, of course, help to address our recruitment and income challenges. I know there is much thinking and activity underway on this front as we review school and professional service plans for the years ahead.

As you know, through open meetings and strategy development work, reviewing how we are organised is another area of focus. I have received some preliminary advice on options and this combined with the views many of you have fed in over the last few months is leading to us being able to consider a range of approaches to how we might best organise our schools, faculties and professional services. We will need to further develop this thinking and test any options out more widely in terms of utility and practicality. I hope to be able to say a little more at the next SLF meeting and get your views on this early thinking.



EG Update

The meeting of EG on 25 September was an opportunity for a preliminary discussion of the implications of the drop in student admissions for university finance. EG also received an update on Kentvision and agreed changes to the university travel and subsistence policies, to be rolled out shortly. There was also a presentation from PwC on the University Organisation Project.

The main business of the Extended EG meeting on 2 October was to take note of progress on the forward plans for the six schools reviewed last year (KSA, SAC, Computing, Psychology, English and SPS) and to continue this year's Track A planning cycle. The plans for SMSAS, SSES and CEWL were discussed with the senior teams from each. The process is that there will be written feedback to pick up points made at the meeting. No decisions on resource bids will be made however until the track A round has been completed (by the end of October). EEG also discussed some of the lessons learned from the USS dispute earlier this year.

SLF Update

Staff Connect Phase 2 is moving forward as new functionality goes live. From 23 October staff will be able to request a reservation for L&OD training sessions and secure record appraisal information on Staff Connect. For those who have not already sent through delegations, need to do so in order for approvals to be made. The new absence and annual leave management function will be going live as of the 1 January 2019 for the new leave year. More information can be found on the [HR pages](#)

As part of the University's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a new [Sustainable Food Strategy](#) has been launched as of the 1 October. This is a joint initiative with Commercial Services, Estates and Kent Union.

The Centre for Higher and Degree Apprenticeships has [signed a new partnership](#) with the UK Civil Service to provide a new degree-level economics apprenticeship delivered by the School of Economics.

League Table Update

The Times Good University Guide (published 2018) saw a reversal in the University's rise in the league table with a fall of 24 places to rank 55th.

Our overall ranking has been affected by a low score in student satisfaction which was based on data from the National Student Survey (NSS). Kent's performance in the two new NSS themes of student voice and learning community was not as good as we would have wanted and, as a result, we have introduced a number of initiatives to address them in conjunction with Kent Union. These include the establishment of a group to ensure student feedback is being used to inform change, an initiative to provide free student membership to relevant academic societies and further improvements to the existing student course representative programme.

The fall in ranking was also the result of the recent alignment of our staffing load calculations. This change in the calculations did not reflect a change in the number of contact hours delivered or class sizes but it did result in a substantive change to our SSRs, which in turn impacted on our league table position.

The Guide did recognize the award to the University of a gold rating in the government's recent Teaching Excellence Framework and also praised the University's Student Success Project, describing it as 'outstanding'.

Master Plan Update

A public consultation on our Framework Masterplan gets underway this week. We'll be sharing our vision for the future evolution of our Canterbury campus, both in the short-term (2018 to 2021) and medium-term (2022 to 2031). It provides the University a chance to show how we would manage our land under a number of different scenarios.

The Framework Masterplan takes into account the feedback that staff, students, local amenity groups and residents provided during previous consultation phases, in 2016 and 2017. A number of opportunities are coming up for staff to find out more and can be found on the [Masterplan webpages](#).

On Thursday 18 October, 10.00-16.00, a consultation event will take place at Darwin Conference Suite. Senior Leadership Forum are invited to allow their staff to attend where possible. Our response to the views staff express during this stage of the consultation will be published in a Consultation Statement later this year. This will feed into the final stages of development of the Framework Masterplan document.

Other events are taking place at Westgate Hall in Canterbury, Tyler Hill Memorial Hall and Blean Village Hall.

Policy Update

Parliament is currently in recess for the conference season and will return on Tuesday 9 October.

Last week the Labour Party held their national conference in Liverpool. The [main headlines](#) to come out of the conference was around Labour's stance on Brexit. The conference voted to approve a motion to keep all options open if MPs become deadlocked on Brexit, including a fresh referendum. Higher education was rarely mentioned with a focus more on primary and secondary education.

This week the Conservative Party are meeting in Birmingham for their annual conference. Damian Hinds' speech also focused on primary education and skills and vocational courses rather than higher education. Today Theresa May [set out her vision for the UK](#) and covered a number of topics including moving forward with Brexit, more funding for the NHS, particularly on creating a new cancer strategy and support to back businesses staying and setting up in the UK. She also used her speech to say that "the end is in sight" after eight years of government austerity programmes. She did not mention any new announcements of higher education or research in her speech.

Policy Briefings

The University has a corporate subscription to the Wonkhe newsletter which gives a daily update on HE policy developments. You can now sign up to the [Wonkhe Monday Morning briefing](#) and the [Wonkhe Daily briefing](#) online if you use your Kent email.

If you would like to highlight the work of your school or department or have news relevant to Senior Leadership Forum and University Council, please send this to Megan Wells (M.M.Wells@kent.ac.uk).

The [latest Executive Group Blog](#) is by David Nightingale and looks into what the University of Kent Academies Trust does and why we sponsor two academies in our region.