

STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

2022-2027

INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan supports the mission and goals of Kaplan Open Learning (KOL) over the next five years from 2022 to 2027.

Strategic Context

Since our establishment in 2007, the external landscape for part-time learning has evolved significantly. The introduction of higher student fees and part-time student loans in 2012 led to a sector-wide decline in domestic part-time enrolments. However, University of Essex Online experienced sustained growth, driven by the expansion of our postgraduate portfolio and increased international student recruitment. The Covid-19 pandemic further reshaped the online learning environment, opening new international markets and increasing competition within the sector.

Over the five years leading up to 2022, Kaplan Open Learning (KOL) consistently achieved outstanding National Student Survey (NSS) results for overall student satisfaction, securing a 95% satisfaction score in 2021—placing University of Essex Online at the top among UK mainstream universities.

Our commitment to high-quality online education has been recognised through several prestigious awards. In 2017, our partnership with the University of Essex was globally acknowledged when we won the Public/Private Partnership of the Year at the inaugural PIEoneer Awards. In 2018, University of Essex Online was awarded a Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), affirming the delivery of outstanding teaching, learning, and student outcomes.

Building on this success, in 2019, we partnered with the University of Liverpool to develop a career-focused portfolio of postgraduate online programmes, launching our first suite in 2021. Our commitment to excellence was further reinforced in 2021 when we secured Approved (fee cap) status with the Office for Students (OfS) and won the Best Online Classroom Experience award at the Global Student Satisfaction Awards.

Since the launch of this strategic plan in 2022, University of Essex Online has continued to achieve sector-leading recognition. In 2023, we were awarded a Silver rating in the government's TEF, followed by Gold in the Times Higher Education (THE) inaugural Online Learning Ranking in 2024 for both University of Essex Online and University of Liverpool Online.

These achievements position us strongly for future growth, reinforcing our commitment to delivering high-quality online education and expanding our impact in the evolving global education landscape.

Our ambition

Our ambition is to increase the online student population of both our university partners and be recognised domestically and globally as a leading online learning provider. By doing so, we will transform lives and deliver positive change for individuals through high-quality, accessible education.

To achieve this, we will continue to develop our programme portfolio, ensuring it meets the evolving needs of students and employers. We will also expand our international recruitment efforts, fostering an inclusive and diverse learning community that upholds the principles of fairness and sensitivity. Growth in student numbers will be essential in maintaining our sustainability as a higher education provider, enabling us to uphold the highest standards of service and education. By working collaboratively with our students and university partners, we aim to establish ourselves as a leading provider of online higher education in the UK.

In the longer term, we aspire to attain Degree Awarding Powers and University Title for KOL, enabling us to develop and deliver our own portfolio of online programmes. This strategic goal will enhance our ability to shape the future of online education and strengthen our position within the global higher education sector.

OUR MISSION

Kaplan helps individuals achieve their educational and career goals. We build futures one success story at a time.

The KOL mission is to continue to transform students' lives and careers by delivering and expanding our suite of innovative, industry led and career enhancing and relevant higher education programmes to a global market.

OUR VISION

KOL's vision is to become a world leader in online learning, making higher education accessible to anyone with the potential and drive to succeed.

In pursuit of the KOL vision, our approach has always been to provide educational opportunities for those who may not have been able to access higher education (HE) at a traditional time or in a traditional way by widening access to high-quality university education that expands across the globe.

The KOL vision is underpinned by the Kaplan core values. Our core values define our company culture and provide the framework for what we deliver to our students and employees each day.

- **Integrity** - we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards in everything we do.
- **Knowledge** - we offer expert resources to help you achieve your academic and career best.
- **Support** - we give you the tools you need to succeed.
- **Opportunity** - we open doors and broaden access to education.
- **Results** - we're dedicated to helping you achieve your goals – we succeed when you succeed.

OUR STRATEGY

We have established clear aims and KPIs for each of the following strategic objectives:

- **Student Number Growth**
- **Student Satisfaction**
- **Digital Innovation**
- **Good Student Outcomes**
- **Staff Development & Enhancement**
- **Quality Assurance**
- **Organisational Sustainability**

This document outlines our approach to achieving each objective. It reflects our current understanding and perspective of the online marketplace and will be updated throughout the strategy's implementation as the online market continues to evolve.

STUDENT NUMBER GROWTH

Our aim

Our aim is to expand our marketing operations and to raise both our domestic and international reputation to enable us to enhance our recruitment capabilities and grow our student enrolments.

Our approach

In order to achieve this aim we will:

- Strengthen brand recognition in the domestic market through targeted marketing investments, with the aim of increasing domestic enrolments.
- Expand the global reach of our marketing activities and improve effectiveness in the international education market.
- Broaden our network of in-country regional agents to enhance recruitment capabilities and leverage local expertise.
- Develop a better understanding of our global target market by developing customer personas and satisfying their educational requirements effectively.
- Utilise marketing intelligence to develop a curriculum that better meets the needs of targeted emerging markets.
- Focus on ensuring meaningful, valuable and positive brand experiences across the student journey by delivering broad-reach brand awareness and activation marketing campaigns.
- Encourage more students and alumni to act as advocates to recruit new students and help to build networks to support existing students.
- Expand marketing and recruitment activities in collaboration with our University partners.

STUDENT SATISFACTION

Our aim

Our aim is to continue to provide an exceptional level of support for students to empower them to achieve their full academic and career potential.

Our approach

In order to achieve this aim we will:

- Maintain high student satisfaction ratings in internal surveys and continue to achieve good outcomes in the National Student Survey (NSS).
- Invest in the development of the learner analytics reporting system to enable the student support team to provide enhanced individualised student support to improve retention rates and good award outcomes.
- Provide development opportunities to staff to offer a broader scope of pastoral support and advice to help students stay healthy physically, mentally and emotionally during their online studies.
- Work with students to expand the range of study skills and disability support we provide to improve accessibility and remove barriers to study.
- Develop a sector leading employability and careers support service for online students to facilitate positive outcomes in career planning and improve Graduate Outcomes results.
- Empower staff and students to develop initiatives to establish a global online learning community and professional network.

DIGITAL INNOVATION

Our aim

Our aim is to invest in digital innovation to ensure that we continue to be at the forefront of the online education sector in the UK and a leading online learning provider in the global market.

Our approach

To achieve this we will:

- Develop and embed innovative assessment activities that harness the latest technological advancements, including AI-driven tools, to enhance online learning.
- Create innovative, technology-enhanced collaborative programmes of study that connect a global community of students in engaging online learning experiences.
- Leverage data-driven insights and AI-powered analytics to enhance student engagement, personalise learning experiences, and drive academic success.
- Continuously develop our learning platform and enhance its content to empower students, encouraging deeper engagement in their academic progress.
- Transform student support services by integrating intelligent and adaptive technologies, including AI-driven solutions, to provide tailored, real-time assistance.
- Assess the pedagogical effectiveness of our innovative approach to online teaching and learning.
- Broaden accessibility to our learning platform, ensuring an inclusive and adaptable learning environment for a diverse global audience.
- Expand our outward-facing efforts and participate in technology-focused, research-led initiatives to increase visibility, enhance impact, and achieve external recognition for our pioneering work in pedagogy and digital innovation."

GOOD STUDENT OUTCOMES

Our aim

Our aim is to achieve outcomes for students which represent outstanding performance in relation to student satisfaction, progression and retention.

Our approach

In order to achieve this aim we will:

- Enhance our curricula to develop professionally focused programmes which provide career enhancement opportunities for our students.
- Collaboratively engage with our students to enable them to contribute to the development of curricula that meets their needs and professional aspirations.
- Engage with academic staff and students to build a community of online learners in a way which recognises both the challenges posed by online delivery and our student demographic but also the unique qualities our students possess in meeting these challenges.
- Further integrate associate tutors into the academic community.
- Create an environment that fosters research and innovation into effective online pedagogy and teaching excellence.
- Drive forward initiatives which focus on student retention and completion and apply developments in learning science, learner analytics and learning technology to:
 - better engage students
 - provide tailored support interventions for students throughout their learning journey
 - measure the effectiveness of developments in teaching, learning and assessment
- Deepen our University partnerships, incorporating their academic scholarship to enhance curricula and develop professionally focused programmes which provide career enhancement opportunities for students.
- Where appropriate and working in collaboration with our University partners, expand the professional recognition of curriculum through professional accreditations.
- Create a reporting dashboard enabling staff to access performance data to enhance teaching, learning and curriculum development.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Our aim

Our aim is to ensure that our provision meets the highest standards for UK Higher Education and that we are internationally recognised for the quality of our teaching, learning resources and educational experience for online students.

Our approach

In order to achieve this aim we will:

- Maintain robust programme validation and annual monitoring and review processes to ensure our programmes meet the requirements of the UK Higher Education Qualifications Framework and UK Quality Code.
- Achieve continuous improvements through the use of benchmarking data.
- Support the professional accreditation of our programmes to provide a learning experience which is career focused and support career enhancement.
- Develop seamless quality assurance processes to support and inform decision making, monitor impact, effectiveness and efficiency and listen and respond to feedback from stakeholders.
- Ensure that our systems and processes support continuous enhancement in line with our plans for growth.
- Conduct regular internal audits to uphold accountability and transparency throughout the organisation.
- Ensure compliance with the Office for Students B3 Conditions of Registration by regular monitoring of student performance data.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT & ENHANCEMENT

Our aim

Our staff are critical to our future success. Our aim is to establish a great place to work by fostering an environment where all staff feel valued and empowered to be innovative and contribute to enhancing the student experience.

Our approach

In order to achieve this aim we will:

- Ensure a thorough induction and new starter training programme in collaboration with the HR team.
- Recognise achievement and contributions made by staff.
- Mentor and support staff to reach their potential and achieve their goals and aspirations.
- Establish a cycle of ongoing training and development opportunities.
- Support staff to participate in external engagement activities which raise the profile of KOL.
- Promote the organisation's 'Gift of Knowledge' scheme and explore further development opportunities on offer to staff through our Learning and Development Policy.
- Organise a calendar of virtual social events to boost engagement and support wellbeing.
- Provide staff with access to counselling services and dedicated Mental Health First Aiders to ensure support is available to everyone.
- Hold regular all staff update meetings to update staff on the performance of the organisation and celebrate achievements.
- Regularly review people metrics ensuring we continue to attract, engage and retain the people we need while fostering an inclusive environment where everyone can contribute and reach their full potential.
- Undertake annual appraisals and salary reviews to ensure that staff feel valued and receive feedback to improve their performance and that salaries are competitive in the market.
- Ensure a work life balance and offer remote working opportunities where possible.
- Improve overall staff satisfaction measured by the annual employee engagement survey.

ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Our aim

Our aim is to maintain a sustainable financial position which enables continued investment in technological innovation, resources and academic excellence to drive successful student outcomes.

Our approach

In order to achieve this aim we will:

- Manage and control costs to generate sufficient financial resource to facilitate future investment in the agreed strategic objectives.
- Monitor and evaluate our curriculum and online delivery model to ensure:
 - Value for money for students
 - Cost effective delivery
 - Continued investment and innovation
- Further invest in systems and processes to enable us to better evaluate the effectiveness and scalability of our pedagogic and digital innovations.
- Continue to invest and develop our Virtual Learning Environment to ensure a that we remain a sector leader in online learning.
- Continue to generate sufficient resource to meet our financial obligations and investment requirements.

