

KU Children's Services Submission to 2016 Employer of Choice Awards



Artwork by Max, aged 4 years, KU Bradfield Park Children's Centre

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Appendices

Appendix 1: KU Strategic Plan

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1. Organisational Profile

Organisational overview

KU Children's Services (KU) operates a portfolio of approximately 140 early education services, including preschool, long day care, vacation care, out of school hours care, occasional care, family programs and specialist programs designed to promote and facilitate the inclusion of children with additional needs including vulnerable children and children with disabilities within early education programs.

Our vision is that:

“Every child can experience high quality early childhood education, where they can play, discover and learn.”

Alongside our vision, we strive to achieve the following overarching objectives:

- ▶ Delivering the best positive outcomes for children and families
- ▶ An inspired community of professionals
- ▶ Witnessing that the 'KU Way' is understood and valued
- ▶ Developing and operating innovative early education services models
- ▶ Fostering equitable access and participation
- ▶ Shaping sector and government thinking and policy
- ▶ A well managed and sustainable organisation

Refer to **Appendix 1: KU Strategic Plan** for more information on the KU Vision, Values and Objectives.

Organisational history

Established in 1895 as the Kindergarten Union of NSW, KU was the first provider of early education in Australia and has since gone on to operate continuously for over 120 years.

The aim of the first kindergarten was to provide education to the community's most disadvantaged children. Today KU is one of Australia's largest and leading providers of preschools and childcare, and remains proudly a not for profit organisation.

Widely recognised as a leader within the early education sector, KU has been involved in facilitating a number changes to service types and early education operations over the past 120 years, including:

- ▶ Opening Australia's first 'free kindergarten' in 1895
- ▶ Opening Australia's first kindergarten teachers training college in 1902
- ▶ Achieving pay parity between primary and kindergarten teachers in the 1970s
- ▶ Establishing the first 'Special Education Advisory' team to support the inclusion of children with additional needs within mainstream early education services in the 1980s
- ▶ Opening Australia's first work-based childcare centre in the 1980s
- ▶ Expanding operations into Victoria in the 1990s
- ▶ Employing Australia's first dedicated Child Wellbeing Manager, Indigenous Consultant and Sustainability Manager within an early education organisation in the early 2000s
- ▶ Becoming the first National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider (NISSP) responsible for brokering Government funding to support the inclusion of children with additional needs into childcare services nationwide in 2010

Further information about KU's history can be found at www.ku120.com.au

Corporate structure

As a not-for-profit organisation (Company Limited by Guarantee), KU is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors, and is led at an operational level by the Chief Executive Officer.

Part of the 'KU Way', is the high level of support provided to our frontline educators and staff by KU Central Office. This includes specialist support from a team of highly experienced and qualified early childhood practitioners, and professionals with experience in Finance, Marketing, Property, IT, Human Resources, Payroll, WHS and other related fields.

KU's operations and support services are organised into 6 key functional areas, including:

- ▶ Early Education – Operations
- ▶ Early Education – Professional Practice
- ▶ Early Education – Inclusion
- ▶ Finance
- ▶ People and Culture
- ▶ Engagement

*Refer to **Appendix 2: KU Organisational Structure.***

Whilst all KU services benefit from the full range of KU Central Office support services, KU's commitment to quality early education is best demonstrated by the close working and reporting relationship between our individual service Directors, and the three Early Education teams.

Each KU service employs a Director, who is a university qualified Early Childhood Teacher, and is responsible for managing the service's operation on a day-to-day basis. All aspects of service delivery are also supported by a dedicated Area Manager and Education Support Manager.

The Area Manager is responsible for overseeing all compliance and regulatory requirements, supporting continuous quality assurance and improvement, assisting with budgetary and financial needs, and supporting staff in the development of a quality educational program, the inclusion of vulnerable children and/or children with additional needs, and working with families and community support networks.

Further support is offered by the Education Support Manager whose role is to provide advice, and support staff with the successful inclusion of all children and families into the service's community.

This support and expertise enables centre-based staff to focus on the provision of quality early childhood education, while maintaining well-functioning, viable centres.

Regulatory requirements

As an Approved Provider of early education and care services, KU is required to operate within the National Quality Framework (NQF). The NQF is a national approach to improving the education and care of children within all early education services.

Within this framework, the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 provide the regulatory framework by which KU operates all of our early childhood services. The Regulations detail requirements in relation to a range of areas including educational program and practice, children's health and safety, physical environment, staffing arrangements, leadership and service management.

KU's commitment to quality

To date, 83 of KU's eligible services have been assessed in accordance with the National Quality Standard Assessment and Ratings process, and received their final report and rating.

As outlined in **Figure 1: KU National Quality Standards (NQS) Results**, 97.6% of KU centres assessed so far have been rated as Meeting, Exceeding or Excellent under the National Quality Standard. This far exceeds the national average of just 68% of services Meeting or Exceeding the NQS.

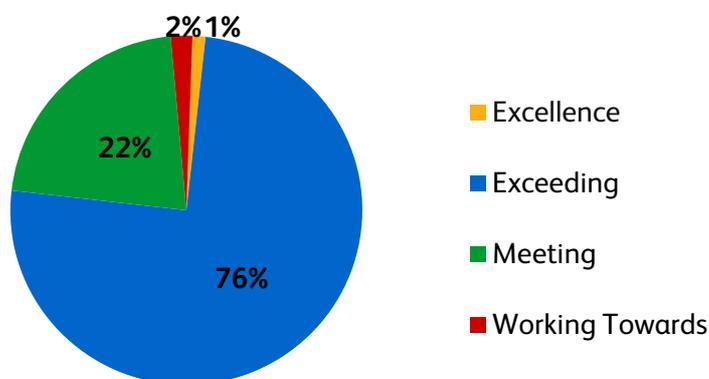


Figure 1: KU National Quality Standards (NQS) Results as at 29 February 2016

These outstanding results position KU with the highest overall ratings amongst large early education providers, and clearly illustrate KU's long-standing commitment to delivering quality early education for children.

Inclusion of children with additional needs

KU has a commitment to the inclusion of children with additional needs. By maintaining professional relationships with relevant agencies, referring bodies and allied healthcare professionals, KU ensures continuity of care and support for children with additional needs and their families.

KU's organisational commitment to inclusion is further evidenced by KU's specialist team of Education Support Managers; a multidisciplinary team, who support KU centres to include in excess of 850 children with additional needs annually.

A commitment to sustainability

KU has a demonstrated commitment to sustainability through the incorporation of sustainable principles into our educational programs for children, centre designs, business practices, research and professional development opportunities for staff. KU is also an active member of the NSW Early Childhood Environmental Education Network (NSW ECEEN).

KU's commitment to sustainability has been demonstrated for a number of years through the employment of a Sustainability Manager; the development of a dedicated Environment Policy and resources; and the provision of a range of professional learning opportunities specifically focused on developing staff's understanding of sustainable principles and practices.

2. Culture, Leadership and Strategy

KU has earned an enviable reputation for offering high levels of professional support to our service staff and people-friendly terms and conditions of employment. Working for KU provides employees with the opportunity to join a dynamic and innovative organisation, helping to “make a difference” in the lives of young children.

The diversity of KU staff reflects the diversity of the children in KU services. As an organisation, KU values and supports staff while nurturing a culture of respect, trust and dignity.

KU Values

All KU employees are encouraged to embody and ‘live out’ the following key Values:

- ▶ **Childhood**

We recognise childhood as a special time in itself; a time for all children to be immersed in secure and trusting environments that allow them to explore, play, discover and learn.

We nurture the development of identity, confidence and capability which form the foundations of a lifelong love of learning. We ensure the voices of children contribute to the work that we do and the decisions we make.

- ▶ **Integrity**

We act with honesty, openness and consistency. Our relationships are built on authenticity, ethical behaviour, respect and trust. We welcome feedback and make decisions that are responsible and fair.

- ▶ **Leadership**

We are driven by the passionate pursuit of quality early childhood education and encourage others to share that journey. We lead by example drawing on our experience and knowledge to shape early childhood education thinking, policy and practice.

- ▶ **Innovation**

We have the courage to pursue bold visions of the future. We are committed to continual professional learning and organisational development. We collaborate and explore new ideas and different ways of thinking.

- ▶ **Sustainability**

We acknowledge and consider both our heritage and our future. We embrace our responsibilities within the world around us – to our children and communities, our people, our environments and the long term sustainability of our organisation.

- ▶ **Diversity and Inclusion**

We recognise that everyone has their own culture, beliefs, values and strengths contributing to our rich and diverse community. We embrace and advocate for the rights of all children to access and actively participate in our programs and have a sense of truly belonging.

*Refer to **Appendix 1: KU Strategic Plan** for more information on the KU Vision, Values and Objectives.*

Strong leadership

The KU Board and Executive team understand that the ability to motivate and inspire others, and adapt to the changing and competing demands within the early education sector are critical to the ongoing success of the organisation.

Both the KU Board and Executive team model the KU Values and foster inclusiveness and diversity at every opportunity. This can be attested to by the breadth of engagement of a diverse workforce across the many varied service models and programs that KU manages, and the quality outcomes that KU services deliver for children and their families.

Strategic direction

From 2013 to 2015 the KU Strategic Plan “Building on the ‘KU Difference’” was implemented, enabling KU to adapt, improve and innovate as a sustainable organisation into the future.

The Strategic Plan has brought the successful implementation of real time systems, brand leadership, new revenue streams, investment in professional development and training, sector leading National Quality Standard results, and a revitalisation of many passionate early childhood professionals in their journey with the KU family.

These many initiatives and achievements attest to KU’s ability to manage and implement wide reaching change successfully, and to ensure the ongoing achievement of KU’s current and prospective strategic direction.

Collaboration and change management

KU realises that collaborating with its workforce is one of its key strengths. Most recently, this has been evidenced by the successful implementation of the ‘Evolution Project’ in 2015. The Evolution Project involved collaboration between all departments and staff from across the organisation, working together to review, reinforce and realign KU’s operations and strategic direction into the future.

Pivotal to the successful implementation of the outcomes from the Evolution Project have been the KU People and Culture, and Early Education Operations teams. Both teams have positively contributed to the implementation and maintenance of a range of initiatives targeting change across the KU workforce, including investment in a workforce planning and talent strategy, the implementation of a recruitment management system, the development of a new KU Careers team.

3. Education, Training and Development

KU values ongoing professional learning as an opportunity to contribute to a strong professional identity, and supports engagement by individuals and teams in regular professional learning to help foster continuous improvement and maintain contemporary understandings of early education practice across the organisation.

KU Professional Learning

KU's commitment to leadership within the early education sector is supported through a comprehensive professional learning program.

The range of courses and workshops on offer through the internal KU Professional Learning Calendar provide opportunities for all KU early childhood professionals to access professional learning that supports targeted, compliance-based and interest-based learning.

The categories of learning on offer include:

- ▶ Education, Program and Practice
- ▶ Transition to School
- ▶ Children's Health and Safety
- ▶ Physical Environment
- ▶ Staff Arrangements
- ▶ Relationships with Children
- ▶ Collaborative Partnerships
- ▶ Leadership and Service Management
- ▶ Technology

Further information on the range of opportunities currently available through the KU Professional Learning Calendar is available at www.ku.com.au/professional-services

Delivery methods

The KU Professional Learning Program is delivered in a range of ways, catering to the various learning styles and needs of staff. These learning methods include:

- ▶ One-off workshop sessions
- ▶ Two-part or three-part workshop series
- ▶ International Presenters/Guest Speakers
- ▶ Tailored professional learning
- ▶ Webinars/eLearning
- ▶ In-Residence Consultation
- ▶ Professional Learning Communities
- ▶ The KU Annual Conference
- ▶ Publications and Resources

Workshop sessions

KU offers a range of one-off and multi-part workshop sessions based on sharing information and ideas in relation to a wide range of specialist areas, including those listed above and others relating specifically to aspects of the day-to-day running of an early education service, e.g. workshops for service-based Cooks specialising in food preparation and nutrition; and training in finance and information technology systems. These workshops are based on latest practise and research from the early education sector in Australia and beyond.

Tailored professional learning

Alongside the KU Professional Learning Calendar for KU staff, tailored professional learning offers KU services and others the opportunity to package together a variety of different workshops and training sessions, enabling them to address specific needs within their operations. These tailored packages are particularly effective in supporting services' professional learning needs in rural and remote areas.

Webinars/eLearning

In addition to the tailored professional learning offered through the KU Professional Learning Program, a range of Webinars and eLearning opportunities are provided to allow educators from KU services and external organisations to access workshop and training at a time and place that is convenient to them.

'In Residence' Consultants

Unique to KU is the option to couple professional learning sessions with 'In Residence' visits. 'In Residence' visits provide services with a dedicated KU Professional Learning Consultant who offers on-site coaching and mentoring to support learning. This model has been delivered across KU services for many years, and provides opportunities for the development and implementation of concepts on the floor while the service is in operation.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Professional Learning Communities provide KU educators with an opportunity to share information and learning over a sustained period of time. Focusing on key learning areas, these communities enable KU educators to discuss ideas, critique and develop planning tools and resources to be shared across the organisation. Previous PLC topics have ranged from the use of technology within educational programs with children, to sustainability, and a focus on the needs of infants and toddlers.

KU Annual Conference

The KU Annual Conference has been running for over three decades and is designed to bring together early education professionals to share in professional learning and networking opportunities. The Conference attracts renowned speakers in early childhood, including thought leaders, policy makers and academic researchers from around the world.

With a combination of both large-scale presentations and practical, hands-on workshops, the Conference provides professional learning opportunities for over 600 early education professionals from all levels of skill and experience, and both KU and external early education services. See

www.ku.com.au/professional-services/ku-annual-conference

Publications and Resources

The suite of publications and resources reflect KU's commitment to high quality early education and has been developed through unique action research and professional learning communities. The range of publications and resources are designed to support high quality practice and provide for both individual and team learning.

Achieving quality outcomes

KU's commitment to the ongoing professional development of staff is widely recognised across the early education sector as a key component of the 'KU Way' and a significant factor in ensuring KU's longevity over the past 120 years.

The continued growth of the KU Professional Services and Learning program and range of offerings has enabled KU to remain at the forefront of early education practice, evidenced by consistently high results across the organisation under the National Quality Standard.

KU's internal professional learning program has also been identified as one of the key reasons why KU's staff retention rates continue to be incredibly high within a sector that has traditionally had a very high turnover of staff.

4. Performance, Recognition and Remuneration

KU staff are supported and recognised in a number of ways, both formally and informally, throughout their employment with the organisation.

Orientation

KU offers all new staff a comprehensive orientation program. The orientation is presented by members of the KU Executive team and management, and provides new employees with information about varying aspects of the organisation. This program is delivered to ensure that all new staff members start their journey equipped with a detailed knowledge of the organisation, its systems, policies and processes and the many opportunities available within KU.

Probation

KU's commitment to ensuring that all new staff are equipped to fulfil the requirements of their role, including being an active team member who contributes positively to the organisation, have been clearly defined through a probationary review system. The probationary review offers all new employees an opportunity to formally review their progress and work performance and receive feedback from their manager or supervisor. All new employees undergo two probationary reviews in their first six months of employment.

Ongoing professional development

Throughout their employment, KU actively supports staff to develop their skills and progress their careers in the early education sector through the KU Professional Learning Program (see previous section), including access to a wide variety of workshops, courses and network meetings.

One key opportunity includes subsidised traineeships and loans to enable educators to undertake study in the Certificate III and Diploma areas, ensuring compliance with the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 and the formal recognition of staff's skills.

Career enhancement

Opportunities for career enhancement and movement within the organisation are offered to staff through the KU Staff Intranet and an internal transfer system, enabling educators to experience different aspects of the organisation. At times, secondment opportunities are also offered to employees, enabling them to experience differing roles and responsibilities for a defined period of time.

As a key outcome of the 2015 Evolution Project, an increased focus on organisational succession planning and opportunities has also been undertaken.

Performance reviews and planning

KU's human resources strategies and processes support employees by identifying opportunities for professional development and career advancement. The annual performance review process identifies areas in which employees have particularly strengths and weaknesses, and identifies clear pathways to support their progress and careers, including opportunities for professional development, mentoring and secondment.

Where an employee's performance does not meet a satisfactory standard, an appropriate process of investigation and corrective action is taken in-line with the relevant legislation and sector best practice, and guided by the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

KU's ongoing performance reviews ensure that fair and effective systems exist for managing unsatisfactory work performance and allegations of unacceptable conduct or workplace behaviour, ensuring the wellbeing of both staff and children.

Referrals program

KU recognises that employees are working professionals, often with vast networks within the early education sector and in broader fields. To ensure that employee's colleagues, family, friends and acquaintances are aware of, and have an opportunity to apply for positions within KU, a recruitment referral and incentive scheme has been introduced.

Remuneration

Staff within KU services are employed under one of two Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) – the KU Children's Services Teachers Agreement and the KU Children's Services Administrative Employees Agreement. These EBAs ensure that KU employees are entitled to generous remuneration and innovative, flexible, people-friendly terms and conditions of employment.

Many of the conditions of employment offered by KU's EBAs are envied and well respected amongst early education professionals across the sector, with KU's conditions of employment including above Award wages, flexible working conditions, and paid parental leave, often held up as a sector standard by other early education providers. Recent responses to the KU Employee Engagement Survey highlight the importance of the EBAs to KU's employees:

- ▶ I understand my Enterprise Agreement – 69 %
- ▶ The conditions and wages are better than other ECE providers – 64 %

Recently KU has also negotiated and achieved parity for all staff nationwide, ensuring that the terms and conditions of employment are consistent, and above the conditions and remuneration stipulated by law in some states.

Formal recognition of KU staff

KU employees have the opportunity to be formally recognised in three main ways:

▶ **KU Long Service Awards**

KU staff with a tenure of more than 10 years are formally recognised by their peers at the KU Annual Conference through the presentation of KU Long Service Awards. Certificates and a gift are presented by the organisation to recognise the achievement of 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 years of service.

▶ **KU Making the Difference Awards**

The KU Making the Difference Awards are presented at the KU Annual Conference and recognise individual staff and teams for going above and beyond their normal duties. The Awards are presented for 'Making the KU Difference' in the following categories:

- For Children
- For Families
- For the Community
- For Staff
- To Quality
- Through Sustainability
- Through Innovation
- For Representing KU

▶ **KU Marcia Burgess Award**

The annual KU Marcia Burgess Award is presented to individual staff and teams that have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to fostering inclusion and enriching the lives of vulnerable children and their families. This award helps to recognise and reinforce KU's commitment to diversity and the inclusion of children with additional needs.

External awards and recognition

In addition to these internal awards, KU also applies for a range of external awards on behalf of individual employees and teams. Recent significant successes have included:

- ▶ **2016 Australian Institute of Landscape Designers and Managers – Best in Category and Gold Award: Commercial Design over \$100,000**
Presented to KU ANSTO Children's Centre
- ▶ **2015 Australian College of Educators – Outstanding Practice Award**
Presented to KU Wombarra Preschool
- ▶ **2015 Central Coast Business Excellence Awards – Sustainability**
Presented to KU Ourimbah Children's Centre
- ▶ **2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education Awards – Advancing Pedagogy and Practice**
Presented to KU James Cahill Preschool
- ▶ **2014 Australian Family Early Education and Care Awards – Queensland Early Childhood Service of the Year**
Presented to The Joey Club Brisbane
- ▶ **2014 North Shore Local Business Awards – Business of the Year**
Presented to KU Greenwood Children's Centre

5. Health, Safety and Satisfaction

A healthy, safe and supportive work environment

KU is committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, children and their families, visitors, contractors and others by providing workplaces that are free from risks to health and safety. KU is also committed to continually improving health and safety performance, recognising that safe and healthy employees are best equipped to provide quality services to children and their families.

KU has established a comprehensive employee wellness and safety management system to give effect to this commitment. The system promotes a strategic, informed and deliberate approach to employee wellness, injury prevention and risk mitigation. The system is aligned with AS 4801 Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems, and is built around six broad objectives:

- ▶ Health and safety planning with key WHS performance indicators for KU's Executive Team
- ▶ The adoption of a risk management approach to controlling risks in KU workplaces
- ▶ Proactive approach to injury management and workers compensation
- ▶ Consultation with employees and others on WHS matters
- ▶ Comprehensive reporting, review and continuous improvement arrangements
- ▶ Promoting a joined-up health and safety culture across the organisation

KU's organisation-wide employee wellness and safety plan is implemented through a series of operational health and safety action plans, developed, implemented and reviewed biennially with management and supervisory personnel. In line with this, KU has established and trained employee health and safety representatives in each KU service, and the KU Work Health and Safety Committee meets regularly to review KU WHS procedures and other organisation wide WHS initiatives.

KU works with its key equipment suppliers to review, and where necessary, redesign equipment to promote employee safety. Recent examples have included:

- ▶ The redesign and replacement of children's cots to reduce bending and twisting
- ▶ Redesign and replacement of adjustable nappy change tables to eliminate the requirement to lift children
- ▶ Adoption of ergonomically designed cutting knives in KU kitchens to reduce the risk of overuse injuries
- ▶ Replacement of shovels and rakes in KU sandpits with more ergonomically friendly designs to reduce bending and muscular forces.

KU also offers comprehensive training to its employees in WHS risk management, injury management and workers compensation, manual handling and infection control practices, ensuring that staff have the best advice and skills to respond appropriately to the activities and risks associated with their roles.

To support the WHS program, KU employs in-house employee wellness and safety specialists, and partners with external providers including QBE Insurance, Jardine Lloyd Thomson, Kairros Injury Management and Rehabilitation Services.

Wellbeing and motivation

KU is proud to be able to support employee wellbeing and promote motivation and satisfaction through a comprehensive range of programs and employee benefits, including:

- ▶ Private health insurance at significantly discounted rates through arrangements with two of the largest providers, NIB and BUPA
- ▶ Subsidised gym membership for employees and their family members through an alliance with Fitness First
- ▶ Salary packaging opportunities for all staff

- ▶ A program of employee stretching and physical exercises to assist employees maintain peak flexibility and core strength
- ▶ Promotion of early return to work of employees with non work-related injuries, through a program of modified duties, allowing employees to return to work on reduced duties as soon as medically and operationally feasible to do so
- ▶ Counseling and crisis support for both work-related and personal issues through the Employee Access Program, available at any time and no cost to all KU employees
- ▶ KU also actively encourages the vaccination of employees against vaccine preventable diseases, and pays for the cost of all required occupational vaccinations.

Staff satisfaction

KU measures the satisfaction of employees through an annual Employee Engagement Survey. The results of the survey are used to facilitate discussion at both Executive and Board level, and over time have led to improved conditions and better working environments for staff. Some of the key outcomes of the most recent Employee Engagement Survey include:

- ▶ 90 % of KU employees would recommend KU as an employer
- ▶ 74 % of KU employees feel valued as an employee

KU staff also identified the following as reasons why they enjoy working for KU:

- ▶ Cultural and lifestyle diversity is respected in my workplace – 91 %
- ▶ We work as a team and I am supported by my colleagues in my workplace – 90 %
- ▶ My colleagues – 84 %
- ▶ I have a sense of ownership in my workplace – 83 %
- ▶ We provide quality early childhood education for families and children – 74 %

KU Staff Association

Established to support KU's educational staff, the KU Staff Association regularly meets with KU Management and discusses operations and issues that arise from KU services. This is a very active and dedicated group of educators who make a positive difference to their colleagues in this forum. Many initiatives put forward at the KU Staff Association meetings are adopted across the organisation. The KU Staff Association also coordinates the awarding of long service awards for staff employed for over 10 years at the Annual KU Conference.

Retention initiatives

KU believes that staff retention is fuelled by quality and consistency. In 2015, staff retention was over 85 %, with over 29 % of KU staff having recorded tenure of more than 10 years.

In response to stiff competition for early childhood educators across the sector, KU has worked to strengthen its employee value proposition along with its employer brand over the past year. By investing in existing talent, ensuring flexible working options are available and promoted, improving earning potential for current staff and creating future pathways for staff at all levels, KU is continuing to work on improving retention rates across the organisation.

In 2015, the KU 'Evolution Project' sought to undertake an holistic review of the organisation's operations. Through close collaboration between all KU Central Office departments and service-based staff, the 'Evolution Project' successfully identified opportunities for improvement and growth, and helped to realign the organisation's objectives, ensuring that staff continue to have employment and opportunities within the KU family, well into the future.