UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Professional Services Strategy

I am extremely proud to be Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter, and this is in no small part due to our outstanding Professional Services.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I introduce our new Professional Services Strategy, which has been a collaboration across the University led by our Registrar and Secretary, Mike Shore-Nye. Professional Services are the lynchpin of the University, providing outstanding support to our academic community; enabling an exceptional educational experience for our students and developing relationships with our regional, national and global partners.

The University of Exeter is a dynamic and engaging place to study and work and we believe there is something special about the 'Exeter way'. Our institutional strategy seeks to make the exceptional happen, and live our values of ambition, challenge, collaboration, community, impact and rigour. This Professional Services Strategy complements our institutional vision and mission and I have no doubt will be a powerful driver towards our continued success as a University.

Finally, it goes without saying that our achievements over the last decade would not have been possible without the consistent professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm of the Professional Services team. I look forward to working alongside this committed team in the next chapter of our development as an institution.

Professor Sir Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive

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The University of Exeter's vision is to be a global 100 research leader that creates graduates of distinction within a community of the most talented and creative minds.

The Professional Services Strategy is designed to help us support the delivery of that vision by crystalizing our commitments to ensure we continually improve our outstanding support to our academic community, enabling an exceptional experience for our students and embedding the primacy of the University's mission, vision and values in all that we do is vital to the future success of the University.

Why have a strategy?

The Exeter Professional Services team have been a key enabler for the success of the University over the last decade and have worked tirelessly and have demonstrated incredible commitment through periods of significant change and challenge. The Professional Services team have developed this strategy together through the Professional Services Leadership Team conference, with input from VCEG and SMG, and most crucially hundreds of comments from colleagues via the Green Paper process to ensure it reflects the teams shared vision for its future.

The Professional Services Strategy is aligned with the College Strategies as one of the enabling strategies of the institution's three core strategies – Research & Impact; Education and Business Engagement Strategy – as well as being reflective of and providing the reference point for individual service strategies (Figure 1) which include our People Strategy, Capital Strategy, Marketing and Communications Strategy, and IT and Digital Strategy.
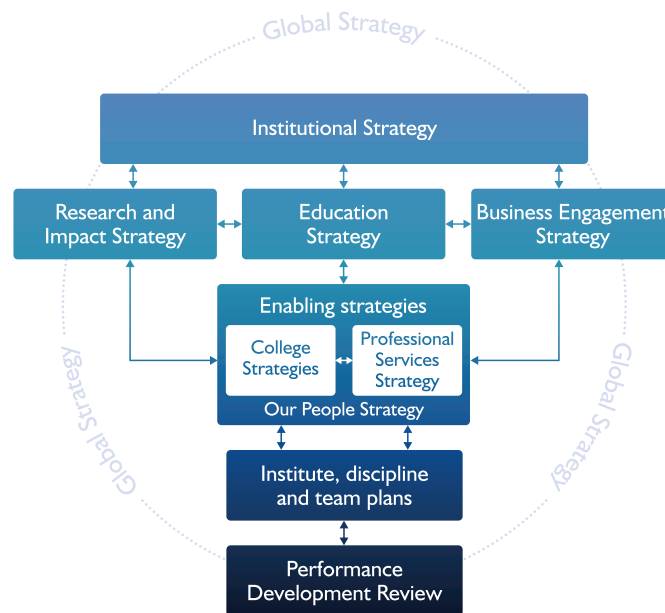
The creation of this strategy is intended to deliver the following outcomes:

- To help us ensure that we consistently provide an outstanding quality service that is co-created and therefore widely understood and valued by our institutional community and benchmarked against the best in the sector to Colleges, Disciplines, academic colleagues and students;

- To codify our commitment to continually seek ways to be more resilient, efficient, effective, data led, agile and compliant and is delivered to a standard that other institutions aspire to;

- To leverage the talent of our amazing team and continue to develop the highest levels of professional capability in creative and collaborative ways whilst ensuring satisfying and enjoyable careers.

We know that we face uncertain times ahead in the University sector and that change will come often more rapidly and severely than we would like or are comfortable with due to political or economic turbulence. We cannot prevent this, but we can reduce and mitigate its negative impact on our Services, our colleagues and our University by supporting each other and staying focused on our longer term strategic goals as described by our vision and values.

Our Professional Services
vision

That we will be recognised as the sector-leading provider of the most efficient and effective Professional Services by all of our stakeholders. We will do what we say we will and it will consistently be regarded as high quality.

We will work together as 'one PS', becoming the definition of cooperative teamwork where communication, resources and functions align exactly with institutional priorities and where colleagues understand what their role is in supporting the success of the University and are empowered to co-create solutions to the challenges our University faces in the 21st Century.

Our Professional Services
values

The Professional Services Strategy must be built from the University's core set of values as they are central to everything we do. These values are important to us because they define 'who we are' and 'how we do things' and are shared by our students, staff, graduates, stakeholders and supporters.

We should as members of Professional Services exemplify our institutional values in the following ways:

AMBITION – a world class University needs a world class Professional Services team who share this ambition and who are supported, trained and enabled through appropriate levels of investment in staffing and systems, to be the best possible team who are 'always stronger when they work together'.

CHALLENGE – we will develop and embed a challenge culture where positive and constructive feedback is encouraged and acted upon at speed to answer the question about any service or activity 'is it Exeter enough?'.

COLLABORATION – ensuring collaborative working across all Services and Colleges with clearly defined frameworks of shared expectations that lead to innovative co-created solutions.

COMMUNITY – shared ownership of goals and objectives across Professional Services and a commitment to always choose to adopt a robust joint working ethic with academics, students and the wider community to develop shared solutions to shared problems.

IMPACT – we will always openly and honestly measure our performance and ensure we use this data to deliver enhanced services that are constantly monitored through the production of clear and simple Key performance indicators focused on ensuring maximum positive impacts for staff and students. We will always deliver what we say we will.

RIGOUR – we will always share best practice across our teams to ensure ownership, consistency and clarity of outcome for all of our business processes. We will use bench-marking and insights from across HE and beyond and welcome constructive feedback to help us get it right first time, every time.

What does 'is it Exeter enough' mean?

Having worked in the sector for 15 years before joining Exeter I had expected to find the transition to my new role relatively straightforward. I was amazed then to find almost immediately that my new teams at Exeter approached everything they did with a focus and intensity that I hadn't experienced before. I soon learnt therefore before proposing a change or launching a new project that I always had to ask myself a few simple questions to confirm before progressing that my thinking was truly world class and 'Exeter enough'. The questions I ask myself and that I think we should all consider using are:

1. Does the expected impact and outcome of my idea or plan meet or exceed the usual standard for ideas and activity at the University?

2. Have I checked that my proposed solution works with my colleagues in my team and with other services, with academic colleagues and with students?

3. Is my idea sustainable longer term and how will I communicate it? Have I made it as simple and efficient as possible or can I make it even leaner?

Once you start this process, it's actually quite good fun and I can assure that it has saved me from making several big mistakes.

Mike Shore-Nye
Registrar and Secretary

Professional Services Strategic
Aims

The Professional Services Strategy needs to identify what we would need to do to 'enable the exceptional to happen'. The feedback from the team directed our focus and efforts on these three aims over the next three years with them being at the heart of the successful delivery of the strategy.

Partnership

Our
Team

Alignment

Performance
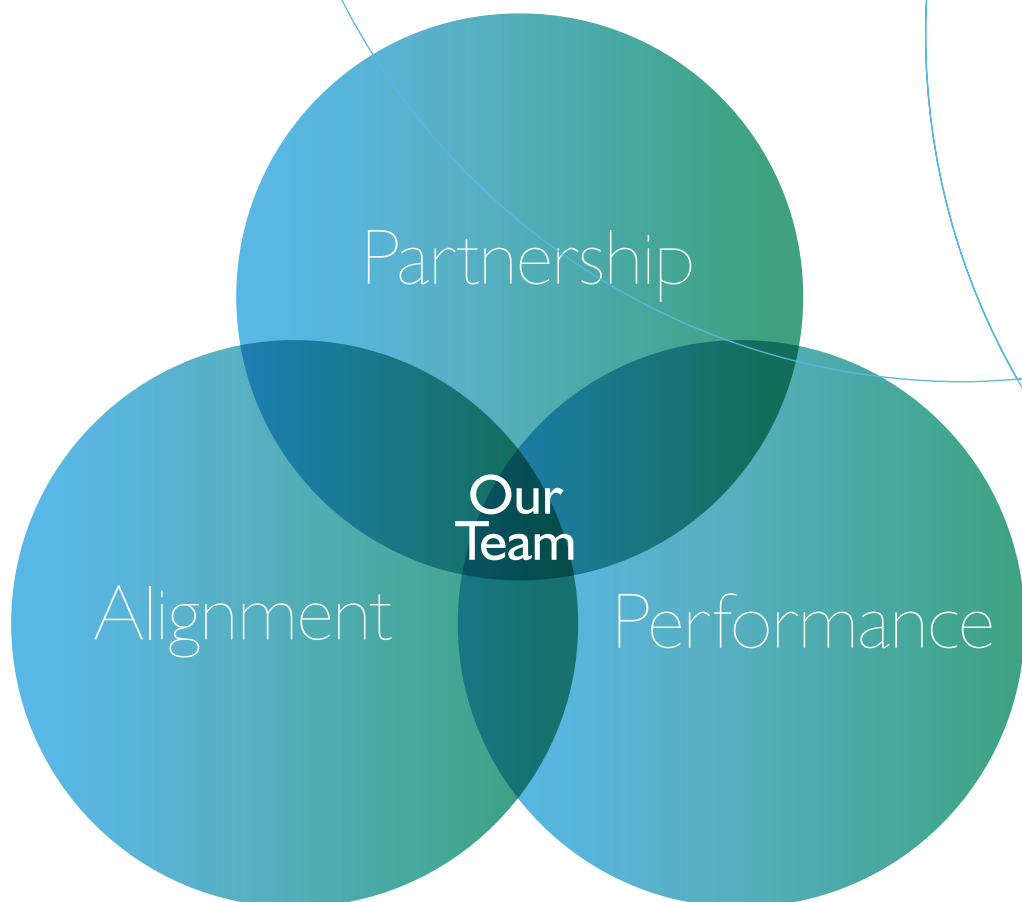
Goal 1 – Alignment

We must ensure that we align our structures, services and strategies alongside the institutional strategy. There must be clear alignment with individual's personal objectives with Service's Annual delivery plans and our Enabling Strategies to ensure maximum effort is deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible in support of 'Making the Exceptional Happen' by delivering the following projects:

1. Aligning Strategy with Personal objectives – A project to launch a new electronic Personal Development Review capability will be rolled out to all Professional Services staff. The key benefits of this project include:
   a. Creating a shared ability to map/align personal objectives with service-level and institutional Strategy;
   b. Helping us clarify the way in which each member of PS contributes to overall institutional deliverables and Key Performance Indicators;
   c. Improving job satisfaction by helping us identify and celebrate individual contributions;
   d. Improving teamwork by sharing objectives and pooling responsibility for projects and complex deliverables.

2. Creating a shared understanding of Professional Services role in delivering and enabling the Institutional Strategy through better communicating to our University community how to access our support and services by:
   a. Providing a Web-based and share-point repository of Service-Level Descriptions using common templates, 'Elevator-pitch' descriptions of each service and short 'day in the life of a ….' videos that explain how to get help and support and what will be provided;
   b. By supplying improved service webpages, including photos for all key College or Service facing contacts and visibility of the key objectives for each service each year that colleagues can comment on and help form;
   c. Developing a revamped induction process for Academic and PS staff that ensure all staff are empowered to best access PS support;
   d. Ensuring PS Job Descriptions are updated to enable PS staff to be engaged with the core institutional academic mission through involvement with activities such as volunteering to help with exam invigilation, Open Days, Confirmation & Clearing or to help at graduations;
   e. Creating an online Repository of PS Above and Beyond awards to share best practice and celebrate success.

3. Encourage a culture where sharing best practice will enhance alignment by enhancing team working across Professional Services by:
   a. Creating more collaborative PS space by developing capital projects to create more open-plan multidisciplinary Professional Services delivery hubs;
   b. Engendering a culture of openness and shared endeavour by inviting services to each others' meetings, share office space, joint community challenge days etc.;
   c. Developing a skills matrix (searchable, based on everyone uploading areas of expertise) to encourage colleagues to develop their careers and move between services;
   d. Developing an App to enable Hot-Desking across the University estate;
   e. Embedding the practice of work shadowing in our culture as part of our approach to personal and career development;
   f. Prioritising internal appointments being offered where possible as secondments to enable career growth.
   g. Continuing to explore ways to 'close the gap' between the Professional Services Senior Leadership Team and the wider Professional Services team.

4. Review and when necessary re allocate Professional Services resources using insights from the annual Cubane benchmarking exercise and the annual planning process to enable us to better support changing institutional priorities and strategies. The key benefits of this approach will include:
   a. Improving service responsiveness, providing more opportunity for development and promotion and a reduction in over burden for staff within pressured services.

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Goal 2 – Partnership

We need to embed partnership working and the spirit of co creation with our staff, students and wider community as a fundamental building block of all Professional Services projects, activities and communications by delivering the following 'Proactive Professional Partnerships' projects:

1. Review, redevelop and then enhance the effectiveness of Business Partners and train all members of the team on how to deliver and benefit from matrix management and develop a communications plan for all stakeholders to enhance understanding of this approach.

2. Optimise the use of 'Students as Partners' and 'Students for Change' within Professional Services projects and activities, building on such exemplars as the Student Ambassador scheme.

3. Share best practice through examples of partnerships spanning the University via the weekly and monthly bulletin and at monthly Team Briefs.

4. Encourage Innovation and ideas generation in partnership with staff and students by launching an Ideas scheme using a software application that makes light work of idea submission, selection and planning and where the owners of the best ideas have an option for secondment to help deliver the project.

5. Enable the Optimisation of partnerships with industry partners and our alumni by investing in a new Customer Relationship Management Service that will then allow us to develop the idea of 'prime PS contacts' who are empowered to seek ideas and input from external stakeholders for particular areas or projects for the benefit of the University

Goal 3 – Performance

We must embed a culture of performance improvement across Professional Services and continually strive to be the best we can possibly be if we truly want to be a world class service to a world class University by delivering the following projects:

1. Embed our University Values as behaviours within our approach to the PDR process by asking colleagues to explain how they 'live our values' in their day to day behaviours and will use the Above and Beyond scheme to reward great performance in this regard. We will ask leaders to be visible exemplars of this approach particularly when undertaking problem solving as members of the 'one PS'.

2. Develop and Publish a new People Development strategy which will demonstrate organisational commitment to personal and professional development by providing:

   a. Structured and appropriately resourced development plans for all job families;

   b. A new leadership and management programme including the opportunity to complete an MBA or take part in international exchange;

   c. Develop networks (coaching, mentoring, specialist networks, shadowing);

   d. Create career development opportunities (career advice, transparency of opportunity);

   e. Create and Deliver a series of best practice toolkits and guidance to support and share new ways of working, e.g. email practices, sharing of calendars, managing meetings, etc.

3. Develop a data-led focus on quality management across all Professional Services activity by developing a Professional Services Dashboard that identifies at least five key process and output measured for services that help us identify and rectify problems early, celebrate and build on success and help us match resource to outputs.