

KMPF SEND PP Conference

Pathways to Possibility: SEND Transitions to Higher Education

Wednesday 1st July 2026
University of Greenwich, Medway Campus

For professionals working with SEND students, supporting pathways and transitions in secondary and post-16 education



Welcome

KMPF, in collaboration with the University of Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church University, is delighted to welcome you to the first SEND Progression Partnership conference: *Pathways to Possibility, SEND Transitions to Higher Education*.

The SEND Progression Partnership (SEND PP) was established in 2020 as part of the Kent & Medway Progression Federation (KMPF), with the aim to ensure that education professionals and advisers are equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to support SEND students in successfully progressing to higher education. The partnership created a range of meaningful resources, with the student voice at the centre of this work.

As the landscape of education continues to change, and as more young people are identified with SEND, **transitions remain a key barrier to successful progression at all stages**. This can reduce opportunities to progress in pathways to further education, higher education and employment, and it is this insight that has shaped the focus of today's conference. With increased work pressures and less resource, a connected and collaborative approach is required to ensure a more **joined-up approach** to student progression.

The SEND PP collectively includes education professionals, local authorities, careers experts, SEND specialists and student voices. Together, we have planned this event as a platform for **a renewed SEND PP**. We invite you to **listen, reflect, and contribute**. Your experiences, insights, and ideas will help shape what comes next.

Thank you for being part of this important work. We hope you enjoy the day.

Georg, Irma-Jane & Poppy, The SEND PP Core conference team

The Kent & Medway Progression Federation

KMPF is a collaborative partnership of four universities, three colleges and 45 non-selective schools.

Collectively, we aim to increase the participation of underrepresented students in higher education through outreach, advocacy and research.

As a partnership, we aim to improve the educational outcomes of all students facing disadvantage and, in particular, four priority groups:

- Boys from lower socio-economic areas
- Children in care
- Children from armed forces families
- Disabled students

Agenda

9.15 – 9.45	Arrival and Refreshments
9.45	Welcome: University of Greenwich
9.50	Introduction to the SEND PP Partnership Irma-Jane Caggiano , Development Manager, KMPF Poppy Ring-Drimala , Head of Outreach and Educational Partnerships, University of Greenwich Georgina Hamilton-Hopkins , Head of Support and Access, Canterbury Christ Church University
10.00	Setting the Scene: Career Pathway Choices Dr Anne Chant , Head of Professional Learning, School of Social Work, Education and Teacher Education, Canterbury Christ Church University Dr Rachel Mallia-Borg , Course Leader and Senior Lecturer, Canterbury Christ Church University
10.30	Setting the Scene: The SEND Landscape Ruth Gately , Specialist Lead Adviser (SEND and Inclusion), The Education People
11.00 – 11.15	Break, Refreshments Provided
11.15	Information Sharing Shona Eagles , STAART Graduate Ambassador & PhD student, STAART & NRI, University of Greenwich Nicola Turner , Adviser Engagement Partner, UCAS Georgina Hamilton-Hopkins , Head of Support and Access, Student Wellbeing and Support, CCCU
12.00	Lived Experience: Panel of those supporting transition and lived experience
12.45 – 13.30	Networking Lunch and Marketplace
13.30	Round table: Discussion and Feedback
14.45	Closing Remarks

Speakers



Dr Anne Chant

Head of Professional Learning, School of Social Work, Education and Teacher Education, Canterbury Christ Church University

Anne is Head of Professional Learning and Development in the School of Social Work, Education and Teacher Education, and previously Director of the Centre for Career and Personal Development at Canterbury Christ Church University. A researcher and author, she is also Chair of the Network for Innovation in Career Counselling in Europe (NICE).



Dr Rachel Mallia-Borg

Senior Lecturer in Speech and Language Therapy and Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, Canterbury Christ Church University

Rachel is a Senior Speech and Language Therapist and Senior Lecturer who has worked with children with Autism for over 15 years. She currently works as a Course Director for the Masters in Speech and Language Therapy and also the BA (Special Educational Needs and Inclusion) at Canterbury Christ Church University. She graduated from the University of Malta as a Speech and Language Therapist and later earned her Masters Degree in Education (Speech and Language Difficulties) from the University of Birmingham. In 2018 she completed a Professional Doctorate at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh. Her research currently focuses on university students' experiences of learning support plans.



Ruth Gately

Specialist Lead Adviser SEND and Inclusion, The Education People

Ruth has over 30 years' experience in secondary education, including over 10 years in senior leadership. She has experience in working in Kent schools as a subject lead, pastoral lead, school leader, SENDCO and as the senior leader for SEND and Specialist Resource Provision. Ruth has led the development of a high-quality, inclusive model in a school with a large SRP, enabling all pupils supported by the SRP and SEND to access their education. She has been responsible for leading strategic school improvement, training and developing inclusive practice. Her main role within The Education People is SEND and inclusion specialism, providing support and advice for school leaders, SENDCOs, teachers and stakeholders to review and develop their SEND policy, provision and inclusive practice.



Speakers



Shona Eagles

STAART Graduate Ambassador & PhD student, STAART & NRI, University of Greenwich

Shona Eagles (ANutr), is a graduate ambassador for STAART and a passionate advocate for disability inclusion, accessibility, and belonging in higher education. Drawing on her lived experience as a neurodivergent student, she works to promote greater understanding of disability-inclusive practice and challenges barriers that can prevent disabled people from fully participating in education and wider society. Shona is also a doctoral researcher at the University of Greenwich, exploring sustainable diet strategies and food systems transformation. She is passionate about fostering communities where everyone feels seen, valued, and able to thrive. Her work with STAART includes promoting disability-inclusive language and encouraging organisations to adopt more accessible and inclusive approaches.

STAART



Nicola Turner

Adviser Engagement Partner, UCAS

Since joining UCAS in 2016, Nicola has prioritised the needs of under-represented students – initially in the Policy team and the Fair Access Team, where she oversaw the introduction of new application questions, developed dedicated content with expert organisations, and authored UCAS's Next Steps reports on student mental health, disabled students, and care-experience. Now based in the Adviser Experience Team, Nicola brings the fair access lens to how we ensure advisers and wider supporters have the resources and knowledge they need to help all students make informed decisions.

UCAS



Georgina Hamilton-Hopkins

Head of Support and Access, Canterbury Christ Church University

Georgina leads a range of student-facing services, including disability support, student finance, and provision for students from widening participation backgrounds. She brings extensive experience across post-16/18 education, having overseen student destinations, led careers provision in a secondary school setting, and taught in Further Education. This breadth of experience has given her a strong understanding of post-16/18 pathways and the structural and personal barriers that students can face in accessing and succeeding in higher education. She has a particular interest in how special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) interact with other barriers to progression, and in shaping transitions that enable all students to access the support they need to succeed.



Lived Experience Panel

Chaired by Irma-Jane Caggiano, Development Manager, KMPF

School & College

Otis, A Level Sixth Form Student, The Whitstable School

Claire Iandolo, Transition Officer, MidKent College

Dionne Groves, Transition Officer, MidKent College

University

Ez, First Year Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation Student, Canterbury Christ Church University

Laura Obeng-Frimpong, Senior Lecturer in Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation, Canterbury Christ Church University

Gwen Thomas, Disability and Dyslexia Coordinator, University of Greenwich

Employment

Adam Connelly, IT Assistant, Pro Legal Group Ltd

Tom Vowles, IT and Compliance Manager, Pro Legal Group Ltd



Marketplace

We have brought together professionals who can offer help and support in their areas of specialism. Please visit them during breaks and networking lunch.

bemix

At bemix we believe you should be seen, be heard and belong. People including autistic people, and people with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities, do not always have the same opportunities to be fully involved in our society. We run projects which support people to learn skills, gain qualifications and become more confident and independent. We also work together with employers, businesses and services to make sure what they do is inclusive.

Sharon Duckworth

sharon.duckworth@bemix.org



Connect to Work

Connect to Work is a voluntary supported employment programme offering up to 12 months of fully-funded one-to-one support from a dedicated employment specialist. It's designed to help people who face barriers to employment, such as health conditions, disabilities, or other complex barriers find - and stay in - meaningful work.

Rosalie Cort, Project Officer

SES@theeducationpeople.org

CONNECT TO WORK

Funded by **UK Government**

Department for Work and Pensions

The DWP is a UK government department responsible for welfare, pensions, and child maintenance policy. It administers the State Pension and a variety of benefits for working-age individuals, people with disabilities, and those with health issues, serving around 18 million claimants/customers. The DWP is the largest public service department in the UK and plays a crucial role in supporting the welfare system.

Sarah Hallows

sarah.hallows@dwp.gov.uk



Forward2Employment

Forward2Employment works alongside Fortis Trust to support people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) across Medway, Kent, and the South East, in finding permanent and purposeful employment. We passionately believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to work in their local community, to feel valued and have a place in society.

Tina Pincott

tina.pincott@forward2employment.co.uk



Marketplace

Information Advice and Guidance Team

Our team oversee the NEET and Not Known cohort in Medway. We support young people who are not attending education, training or employment, to support them back into a sustainable provision. Our criteria to be eligible for this service is Academic Ages 16-17 (School Year 12/13), living in Medway, and Not attending Education, Employment or Training.

Amy Heeney

iag@medway.gov.uk



Kent & Medway Careers Hub

Our mission is to inspire and prepare young people for the world of work. The Hub brings together 167 secondary schools, colleges and special schools, alongside employers and other partners. Careers Hubs are key to the Government's aims to improve careers education, and they support education settings to help every young person find their best next step.

Izzy Thompson

Sara Bennett

izzy.thompson@theeducationpeople.org / sara.bennett@medway.gov.uk



Kent Council SEND Enquiries Hub

SEND Enquiries Hub, taking in any enquiry around SEND across the County, covering all of Kent. Service is for any parent, carer, or young person with an Education Health Care Plan.

Matthew Bates

matthew.bates@kent.gov.uk



Medway Council SEND Team

The Medway SEN Team assesses children's needs, creates and reviews EHCPs, allocates support and funding, manages placements, works with families and professionals, handles disputes, and supports transitions— ensuring children and young people with SEND receive appropriate education and preparation for adulthood

Katie Uden

Alison Knights

seneducation@mefway.gov.uk



Marketplace

MidKent College

MidKent College is a further education provider in Kent offering vocational, academic and higher education courses for students aged 16+. It delivers training, apprenticeships and qualifications from beginner to degree level, helping learners gain skills for employment, career progression or further study while supporting local communities and economic growth.

Claire Cotterill-Smith / Hayley Rose

claire.cotterill-smith@midkent.ac.uk / hayley.rose@midkent.ac.uk



Medway Parents and Carers Forum

Medway Parents and Carers Forum is a parent-led organisation representing families of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It gathers views, influences services across education, health, and social care, and works in partnership with professionals to improve local support, information, and outcomes for Medway families.

Maxi Card / Lisa Scarrott

info@medwaypcf.org.uk



The Education People - NEET Support Service

Our NEET Support Service helps young people aged 16 to 18 years old - who are not participating in any form of education, employment or training - by offering one to one support. The team take referrals from our Engagement and Tracking Officers, schools, colleges and other local authority or voluntary services that support young people.

Vali Salari

vali.salari@theeducationpeople.org



Support from Medway Council

There is no marketplace stand, but staff will be available throughout the day

The Post 16 Team lead NEET prevention initiatives across post 16 pathways, working collaboratively with internal teams and external partners to support successful transitions for young people. We promote joined-up, multi-agency working, reducing siloed practice and improving outcomes. We also oversee Kent Choices, ensuring effective tracking, engagement, and progression support for learners.

Alex Simonds, Post 16 Lead /Samantha Shade, Post 16 Liaison Officer

samantha.shade@medway.gov.uk

As a Skills & Employment Project Manager, I lead projects that support the delivery of the Medway Council Skills & Employability Plan. I'm passionate about helping individuals grow in confidence, develop new skills, and move into meaningful education, training, or employment. I also collaborate with businesses encouraging them to play a key role in building a skilled workforce.

Melanie Phelps, Skill and Employment Officer

melanie.phelps@medway.gov.uk

Feedback and Opportunities



Thank you to the SEND PP conference steering group, who have been actively involved in shaping today's event:

The Canterbury Academy
Fulston Manor
MidKent College
EKC Group
The University of Kent
STAART
Medway Council
Kent County Council
The Education People
STAK.Life



Please use the QR code to provide **feedback** on the conference and to let us know if you would like to be involved in **SEND PP**



[click here](#)



Contact us
kmpf@canterbury.ac.uk

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www.kmpf.org