

FIRST COLLEGE-BASED FOREST SCHOOL IN EAST KENT LAUNCHES



Students can get even closer to nature, now that – in a first for East Kent – a College has launched its own on-site forest school.

Broadstairs College officially opened its new green space in a ceremony headed by EKC Group's Chief Executive Officer Graham Razey OBE.

The forest school will be used by many students including the Level 1 and Supported Learning groups, with an aim of creating another area for the wider student body.

The forest school, which has been called 'Nurture', has reclaimed a long-disused patch of land that had become heavily overgrown.

Assistant Principal Nicola Kelly came up with the idea for the project several years ago, and after a lot of planning the work began in October. Students got stuck into the effort, picking up shovels and secateurs to complete both the initial clearance and consolidation of the land.

Lecturer Rob Tye led the project, and said the 30 students involved had shown an incredible level of passion for creating the forest school.

At the launch he said: "Already we've seen incredible impact just during the construction of the area. Students have consistently been coming to the provision and have even asked to stay behind after their regular College hours to spend more time learning in this new provision.

"It's required a huge amount of work, from stripping trees of ivy, to laying paths and digging out weeds down to the roots. The fact that students took so well to these strenuous tasks and gained an interest in landscaping at the same time is very encouraging!

"The Level 3 Forest School training I've completed means we'll be able to teach students how to make fires responsibly, use tools, and create art, shelter and structures from natural materials.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for the students, and I'd like to thank all of the staff and students involved in making this vision become a reality."

The opening ceremony consisted of staff, EKC Group's Chief Executive Officer and external stakeholders getting a tour of Nurture, before enjoying a fire created by a student.

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The student in question, Paris, noted how the project had helped her find a route back into learning and a renewed confidence - so much so that she was able to talk about the work in front of the gathered visitors.

Among the attendees of the launch was David Foley, Chief Executive of the Thanet & East Kent and Dover District Chambers of Commerce.

He praised the Nurture project, saying: "This forest school will equip the students using it with much more than experience in a natural environment. It will also improve a wide range of skills, boosting mental wellbeing and community engagement.

"It offers an excellent example to Further Education providers everywhere, showing what can be achieved with the right ambition, staff, and students."

Forest schools have been proven to provide a wide range of benefits to learners. According to Forestry Commission research, attendees come away with more confidence, better communication skills, bolstered knowledge of nature, and increased physical skills.

The Government's latest Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment shows that 16 - 24 year olds are least likely to access outside spaces, a fact that inspired Nicola's original idea to create Nurture at the College.



The forest school is the latest success in a string of efforts designed to make Broadstairs College a more environmental place to study.

[Boxes were installed](#) to create an on-site colony of swifts, and a family of foxes currently reside on the campus. Also, each department has created a sustainability pledge, setting out how they're reducing the environmental impact of their team and students.

EKC GROUP AWARDED DFE MATRIX STANDARD



Achieving the Department for Education's (DfE) matrix Standard is a key indicator of how well educational institutions support students' future pathways, and EKC Group is proud to say we've met the accreditation standard.

EKC Group received an inspection earlier this year to review the matrix accreditation it had previously been given in 2018, and was found to once again meet the high standards required by the DfE.

The scope of the matrix Standard inspection was to assess the efficacy of the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) teams across the Group's six Colleges. Assessors explored the quality of information on offer to students in regards to future opportunities, and how well-promoted future education or work options are.

Of particular note to the assessor is the embedding of employability in the curriculum, which the assessor highlighted as an effective method of supporting students. In his report, assessor Steve Jackson wrote: "For example, the employability needs of students at [Ashford College](#) are being addressed through improved local enrichment by engaging with the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.

"Their President was interviewed as part of the partner discussions and he was both impressed by the College's open approach and very keen to support the College by using the

Chamber's members to provide meaningful encounters with employers."

Mr Jackson also noted EKC Group's use of Progression Mentors to monitor and support vulnerable students has expanded. He also wrote that there had been "advances in the use of assistive technology to improve communications and access".

The Group was found to have "excellent partnerships with local strategic organisations such as local authorities" and that, in terms of adult education, "The EKC IntoWork Unit is an excellent bridge between learning and worklessness."

The work of the Safeguarding team in its approach to students' mental wellbeing has led to "excellent wellbeing practice", and that work with external partners in that area had created strong impact.

The report states: "Analyses of student feedback showed 90% plus of those surveyed were satisfied or better with support provided by EKC Group.

"There was much evidence that EKC Group provides highly effective individual advice and guidance. Student feedback was extremely positive about the support received."

The assessor also found that the Group's Strategic Plan was clear and laid out effective objectives and outcomes, with "effective measures in place to improve and a more systemic approach to raising performance."

STUDENTS LAUNCH ART SHOW IN PARTNERSHIP WITH KENT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

In an effort to make art accessible to everyone, photography students held an art exhibition for those with limited or no sight.

The Canterbury School of Visual Arts (CSVA) at Canterbury College created a number of artworks either for those with visual impairments, or to highlight the difficulties these impairments cause.

Running in Butchery Lane from Saturday, June 25 to Sunday, July 3, the 'Touch the Artwork' display was part of a larger free exhibition of students' pieces called Bright Young Things

Featured were so-called tactograms – plaster casts with braille inclusions which the public were invited to touch and read.

Pictures also conveyed the concept of sight and what goes unseen, for example microscopic images of everyday objects.

Using a PENfriend from the Royal National Institute of Blind People, visitors were able to hear audio descriptions of displayed works of art, a first of its kind by any local college.



The exhibition formed part of the work experience project that Year 1 Photography students undertook with Kent Association for the Blind (KAB). Amanda Broadmaide of KAB ran a workshop with the students about the challenges faced by those with visual impairments. This enabled them to create an accessible exhibition of their photography.



Lecturer Danny Whitcher said: "When our Industry Liaison Officer Denise Knights-Toomer first approached us with this project, it was a daunting challenge as our medium is entirely visual.

"However, it's actually been really fun and interesting to adapt and learn about art for the visually impaired.

"We had Amanda from the Kent Association for the Blind come in to brief the students on the requirements of the audience, and she also brought in special eyewear that gave a sense of what it would be like to have a visual impairment.

"During lessons, we also ran an exercise where two students would sit back to back with one describing an object and the other having to draw it. It led to some very interesting artwork, and really conveyed the difficulties faced by visually impaired people.

"Through these activities, our students fully engaged in the project and revelled in the challenge of taking their specialism – photography – and showing it to a wider and more inclusive audience."

KENT TORTOISES CHANGE SCIENCE'S VIEW ON HOW THEY AGE



Tortoises at [Canterbury College](#) have contributed to a landmark scientific study which has found some species could live almost forever.

Canterbury College's [Spring Lane](#) tortoises were studied to provide some of the vital data used in a landmark report that found the animals' life expectancy is unaffected by age, at least if they avoid illness or other factors.

Whereas other species - when they reach sexual maturity - trade off reproductive ability with an inability for cells to divide, the Species360 report has found tortoises and turtles continue to grow and spend energy on repairing cell damage.

A researcher on the study, Dr. Fernando Colchero, said: "It is worth noting that the fact that some species of turtle and tortoise show negligible senescence does not mean they are immortal; it only means that their risk of death does not increase with age, but it is still larger than zero. In short, all of them will eventually die due to unavoidable causes of mortality such as illness."

The findings, which are available on the widely-used Zoological Information Management System (ZIMS), are part of a wider study to create benchmark statistics for survival, reproduction and growth across a number of animals.

The studied reptiles in Canterbury are named Elsie and Bevis, a male and female pair that were rescued from an

international smuggling scheme. Believed to be over 25 years old, the two African Spurred tortoises have been receiving the best possible care at the Spring Lane campus for more than 10 years.

The ground-breaking research, published in the renowned journal *Science*, will be available to institutions such as zoos, aquariums and conservation centres to determine whether a population is healthy and thriving.

Included in the anonymised data are statistics on survival of the species based on age, the ages at which births most often happen, litter size, birth seasonality and body size.

Ben Woolmer, Animal Care and Land-Based Resources Manager, said: "We're incredibly proud that Elsie and Bevis are part of this landmark study, which will allow us and other institutes to better understand and care for tortoises.

"Our inclusion is a real testament to the hard work of staff and students to keep meticulous records and maintain best practice."

[Plans have been submitted](#) for the redevelopment of the Spring Lane at Canterbury College campus, which was brought into EKC Group in April 2020. The new facilities would enable students to have an even better experience while vastly reducing the site's carbon footprint.

NEW BUILDINGS NEAR COMPLETION

Work on two EKC Group building projects is progressing apace as they are readied to welcome students later this year.

Hersden

In Hersden near Canterbury, Quinn Estates has made significant progress on the Group's upcoming EKC Civil Engineering Training Centre, which will specialise in the fields of construction and engineering.

The building will feature offices, classrooms and a host of facilities that enable industry-standard training and practice to take place.

The Lord Mayor of Canterbury, Cllr Pat Todd, visited with Sturry Ward representative Cllr Georgina Glover, and heard how Quinn Estates was working in partnership with the Group to deliver the new centre which will provide training in a highly sought-after skillset.

Mark Quinn, Chairman of Quinn Estates, said: "We are passionate about contributing positively to the communities in which we build. The planning committee voted unanimously in favour of this scheme a few years ago and we are delighted to now be on site and delivering on a project that will train young people for careers in the exciting construction sector."

Kurt Salter is the Managing Director of EKC WorkHigher, and will lead the training centre when it opens. He said: "It's amazing to see this centre coming to fruition. There's a clear skills gap in the civil engineering sector in this area, and our vision is for the centre to fully fill that, ensuring that



employers have the right skills to grow and flourish in the future.

"We're aiming to be the training centre of choice for local employers who need their staff to get formal qualifications, such as our Apprenticeships, as well as for the smaller certificates they need. We're really excited by the progress, and can't wait to get in here to start training the next generation of talented construction professionals."



Alongside these will be classrooms for a range of subjects, including Catering, Hair, Beauty, English, Maths, and ESOL. The building work will enable hundreds more people to study at the College each year, and opens up even more opportunities to access state-of-the-art equipment and training.

The new facilities are also vital in delivering the Government's new T Level qualifications, which will offer students an unprecedented education both in the classroom and through work placements. To ensure T Level learners feel confident during their work experience, EKC Group is sparing no expense in filling the new building with the latest equipment and hiring quality lecturers to match.

Folkestone

Meanwhile, in Folkestone, structural work on [the new Welcome building](#) is almost complete.

It is set to house the College's brand new refectory, Student Centre, and reception when it launches this year.

The Welcome building project follows the completion of a major overhaul on the neighbouring Ames building, which was converted from an old office block into Anne's – a Group-owned restaurant which provides hands-on experience to Folkestone College's Catering students and was [awarded the Taste of Kent Award](#) for Best New Food/Drink Business.

COLLEGES' GREEN EFFORTS LEAD TO AWARDS



Five of EKC Group's Colleges have been recognised by an awards scheme aimed at boosting Kent's wildlife.

[The Wilder Kent awards](#), run by the Kent Wildlife Trust, are a countywide initiative aimed at boosting environmental efforts in schools and organisations.

After a strong showing last year, this year's haul has proven to be even better!

[Dover Technical College](#) was given a commendation, meanwhile our Colleges in [Ashford](#), [Broadstairs](#), [Canterbury](#) and [Folkestone](#) received the bronze award – worthy recognition during a time of increased environmental efforts across the Group.

With every department across our six Colleges completing sustainability pledges, social action projects have also been giving wildlife a lift. Train stations, including Dover Priory and Charing, have been given a boost by planting projects carried out by students, meanwhile litter picks have been held on beaches and in parks across the county.

Many of EKC Group's Colleges now boast bug hotels, and efforts have been made to reforest and replant in suitable

areas of each College. In Broadstairs College, staff and students have installed bat, bird, and dormouse boxes to promote the populations resident nearby.

While the Wilder Kent award wins are very well received, there are no signs of slowing down in the ongoing campaign to create environmentally friendlier campuses and communities.

Canterbury College Principal, Victoria Copp-Crawley, said: "Our ongoing efforts to promote biodiversity and environmental awareness have been led by our passionate student body, and this award demonstrates the good work we've been achieving in the local community. We hope to build on this success in the coming years, and create a greener future."

Nicola Kelly, Assistant Principal Support at Broadstairs College, said: "We're incredibly proud of this achievement, which recognises the hard work put in by our whole College community to boost the biodiversity of the local area. This win will just encourage us to do even more as we continue to face the climate crisis head-on."

To view EKC Group's Sustainability Strategy, [click here](#).