

The past three months have been a fantastically productive time across the Group, with the pinnacle of our achievements coming in the form of an 'Outstanding' rating by Ofsted. The fact that each aspect of our provision was rated as such shows how effective colleagues across our Group have been in developing and delivering truly inspirational learning opportunities for our students across East Kent.

As part of this strong commitment to boosting skills in the communities we serve, we have also signed a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with key organisations across our area of operations. These are cementing partnerships that will benefit our students for years to come and we're excited to work together to support numerous sectors in the county.

WE'RE OUTSTANDING!



EKC Group has been graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted following its latest inspection, with the education watchdog giving the Group top marks in every single category.

The results make the Group the first General Further Education college to achieve the highest rating in all categories since a new enhanced inspection framework was introduced last July. The categories that the Group achieved 'Outstanding' in are as follows: The Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, Leadership and Management, Education Programmes for Young People, Adult Learning Programmes, Apprenticeships, Provision for Learners with High Needs and a 'Strong' judgement for Skills; the highest an organisation can achieve.

The Group received significant praise for its work to meet skill needs across East Kent, with the report stating that: "Leaders have excellent knowledge of the local economy and review their course offer to respond quickly to employers' new and developing needs such as green technology and digital skills."

Ofsted sent 18 inspectors to assess the Group's provision between 7 and 10 March, meeting staff, students and stakeholders the Group works with, as well as doing numerous 'deep dives' into areas of the organisation's provision.

Overall, the report found that: "Learners and apprentices thrive in calm, positive and inclusive environments," whilst stating that "The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs" in the localities it serves.

Inspectors particularly praised the inclusive learning within the organisation, and the fact that the Group offers opportunities for the whole of the communities it serves.

The report states: "Leaders and governors are passionate about tackling social inequality through education and training. They rightly pride themselves in offering a range of inclusive, accessible and challenging learning opportunities to the communities in East Kent. Governors, leaders and staff are highly ambitious for all learners and apprentices irrespective of their starting points, particularly for those with high needs or from disadvantaged groups. They place a high priority on learning and progression to ensure that learners and apprentices complete their studies and move on to their desired next steps."

Despite the Group's rapid expansion since the last inspection, standards have increased from its previous 'Good' rating awarded in 2017. The 'Outstanding' status comes after a successful visit by Ofsted last year, which saw the Group's latest acquisitions – Ashford College and Spring Lane – awarded the highest rating possible during a monitoring visit.

EKC Group Chief Executive Officer Graham Razey OBE said: "This Ofsted rating is a momentous occasion for us as an organisation, and we are delighted that inspectors recognised the incredible work put in by staff and students.

"To be deemed outstanding in all aspects highlights the excellent standard at which we operate, with everyone playing their part to provide top quality training and improve the socio-economic prosperity of the communities we serve."

The organisation has some 15,000 students, with colleges in Ashford, Broadstairs, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Sheppey, as well as a regional business unit, EKC Training, which provides Apprenticeships, community learning, employability provision and prison education. Within this the Group is the largest provider of High Needs learning within England, delivering education to more than 900 students that have Education and Health Care Plans.

Graham continued: "I am particularly proud of the fact that we have been able to achieve this rating, whilst also ensuring that we remain a fully inclusive organisation that seeks to meet the needs of absolutely everyone within the communities we proudly serve.

"I am truly passionate about delivering for every learner regardless of their background or learning requirements, and it fills me with real joy when I am able to witness the transformational impact our Group has on so many young people and adults who develop their skills within our provision.

"My thanks go to all of the staff and stakeholders who work so hard to ensure we continue to create the best learning opportunities possible for learners across East Kent."

NEW WAY TO PLAY



College students can now try out an increasingly popular form of football thanks to a new specialised arena.

Broadstairs College launched its 'Panna' arena just before the Easter holidays, comprising a round concreted pitch enclosed in a cage.

This allows learners to play Panna, a contemporary form of football in which players must either score the most goals in three minutes or kick the ball through an opponent's legs.

Made possible by a donation by OhSoRetro Events, the Panna arena

project was decided upon due to the campus' hillside location and the facility's ability to be used year-round.

Staff and students are excited for this new sporting opportunity, which is open to all Broadstairs College students.

Programme Director of Sport and Leisure, Amicia Wingfield said: "As a department, this is something that we have been working towards for some time and we are ecstatic we now have this vital piece of equipment.

"The Panna arena will not only be accessible to Sport and Leisure

students, but to all learners who we hope will gain a sense of community and enrichment through playing in the arena.

"The arena will allow any student to step in and express themselves through their skills and it will help to encourage learners to grow in confidence and creativity – great skills that are transferable to everyday life."

Students and staff who have already had the opportunity to play in the arena were full of praise and eager to continue in their Panna training.

GROUP CEMENTS PARTNERSHIP WITH JENNER



The Group has cemented its partnership with one of Kent's largest building companies by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the firm.

Jenner Contractors' Managing Director Martin Sandall and Head of Communications and Business Development Ella Brocklebank visited Folkestone College to see the training and facilities offered to students.

Joined by the Group's Chief Executive Officer Graham Razey OBE, the visitors talked to staff and students from across the College's many Built Environment courses before signing the MoU.

YouTube video link:

<https://youtu.be/mjmC1FKw8qA>



The document solidifies a strong ongoing collaboration between the Group and Jenner, with the company currently building Ashford College's Phase 2 extension. Folkestone College students have also been treated to site visits to many Jenner local developments such as the major Folkestone Seafront project, and where many students have viewed their trade first-hand.

Mr Razey said: "The signing of this Memorandum is another fantastic moment in our long-standing and effective collaboration with Jenner. Our students have already benefited from the relationship, enjoying visits and talks from those already in the industry they are working hard to join.

"Through working with them on the Ashford Phase 2 project, we can clearly see why Jenner is among the most well-

respected construction companies in the South East and for our students to learn from this wealth of experience is an excellent boon to the high-quality training we offer across our sites.

"We look forward to working with Jenner as we enable our students, and in turn the construction industry, to thrive."

Signing the MoU, Mr Sandall said: "The relationship has always been strong between our organisations and this opportunity to work in partnership with the Colleges, to provide more opportunities to visit live construction sites for students learning their trades as well as work experience, is so important. They offer an excellent way of embellishing their interest in the industry and hopefully will lead to them into full-time employment in the sector and a rewarding career.

"The sector has struggled to attract apprentices over the last 20 years and there's been a huge reduction in the number of people coming into the industry. But it's a hugely rewarding industry to be in with many different facets to it, as demonstrated by the wide range of courses offered here at Folkestone College.

"Students are the lifeblood and future of the construction industry and if, through this partnership, we can encourage more people to join the sector, it will prosper and thrive as a result."



CUTTING-EDGE LAB LAUNCHED



Robots, conveyor belt systems and a virtual reality suite may not sound like things you'd find in a college, but Canterbury College students now have access to all of these.

Following funding from the government's Strategic Development Fund, the College now boasts a new learning zone designed to futureproof learners and train businesses how to use emerging technologies.

The Green Engineering Centre and Mechatronic Lab welcomed its first students in March, with learners quickly taking the reins by controlling giant Kuka robotic arms and programming the small conveyor belt system.

YouTube video link:

<https://youtu.be/I95UUvLzJIU>



Launched in association with sustainable manufacturing consultants HSSMI, the exciting new facility is not only being used by students across a number of internal departments. Businesses are being invited to 'try before they buy', with opportunities to see how such systems can boost their production ahead of automating their company.

Victoria Copp-Crawley, Principal of Canterbury College, said: "This facility is an excellent opportunity for students to train with these emerging technologies which will become more prevalent in workplaces across all sectors.

"The vision for this lab was to show the exciting equipment that exists, engaging not just with our own students but also with schools, careers guidance services, and universities to inspire as many young people as possible to pursue jobs in engineering.

"This lab is really well placed in the heart of the College, so it acts like a showroom for students and staff from other pathways such as art or sports to get excited about the equipment here and become interested in futureproof technologies.

"We are also going to work with businesses, allowing them to test equipment and see whether an investment in robotics and automation is right for them. So it's an exciting chance for us to create employer engagement and boost the local economy."

Kent County Councillor Mel Dawkins, who attended the lab's launch, said: "I'm so impressed and pleased for our young people who have got this incredible learning opportunity here. The equipment here is the future and it's going to provide so many possibilities to them in later life.

"This facility offers realistic career options, possibly into jobs that don't even exist yet. This is what all about - giving learners the skills that will get them employed. The equipment and training opened up by this lab will certainly achieve that."

Among the students demonstrating the equipment was Adam Wood, who is studying his Level 5 qualification in Computing at Broadstairs College. Operating the two-metre robotic arm, he said: "I thought it looked really cool and I was then asked whether I wanted to operate it so of course I said yes.

"It only took me about half an hour to get to grips with the different modes and controls, it's an incredibly intuitive machine to learn and use. The equipment on offer here is a fantastic addition to the teaching I've experienced at both Broadstairs and Canterbury College."

STUDENT ART BRIGHTENS TOWN



Art and Photography students have been helping brighten up a town by creating art installations which are set to be enjoyed by the public for the foreseeable future.

Ashford College collaborated with Ashford Borough Council on the local authority's latest art trail, titled Unframed: Ashford Mural Festival. Learners were allowed to let their creativity run wild on a brief spanning two locations – one outside the Ashford International Station entrance and another on a wall outside the College.

Weeks of designing and production resulted in two fantastic installations, which sit on the Unframed trail alongside world-renowned artists including Mr Doodle and Alex Chinneck.

Perhaps the most prominent is named "A Fish Out of Ashford", being unmissable to any commuters coming into or leaving the train station. The work comprises two parts, the first being the word 'welcome' weaved from willow which is a common sight along waterways in Ashford and the surrounding area.

These have been placed inside planters which form the second part of the work, in that they have been vinyl wrapped with artwork created by two Level 3 students, Leah Bunting and Claudia Otto. Their designs were inspired by the movement of Ashford as a transport hub, and the flow of the nearby Great Stour River which runs through the town. Each planter also shows a letter, which when viewed together spells out the word 'Ashford'.

Lighting up at night, this project – carried out in partnership with Ashford International Station, Southeastern and Kent Community Rail Partnership – means students are welcoming people to Ashford at all times of the day and night.

The second mural designed and created by students is entitled "Light Up Ashford" and is located underneath the College's Phase 2 Development, on the wall on Station Road.

This mural was designed by Photography students and is made up of a series of photographic light drawings which they did in the College's on-site studio. Each panel also spells out a letter of the word "Ashford", with its bright colours highlighting the strength and vibrancy of Ashford College's creative arts courses. The technique employed also reflects the busy and high-speed nature of Ashford's culture.



The College's creative arts students and staff were able to attend the mural trail's official opening at nearby Coachworks on March 31, where they enjoyed art workshops, live painting displays, artists' talks about their Unframed work and live music. Despite an original end date of April 16, the Unframed trail's popularity has seen the council decide to keep the displays in place "for the foreseeable future."

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE



EKC Group announced a new partnership with Otterpool Park LLP that will boost skills in East Kent and ensure that education, employment and training for local people are at the heart of the Otterpool Park garden town development.

The announcement follows a decision by Folkestone and Hythe District Council's Planning and Licensing Committee earlier this month (4 April) to grant outline planning permission for Otterpool Park, giving the green light for the next stage of the project. Otterpool Park LLP is progressing detailed plans for phase one of the new garden town, with a view to starting work on site by the end of the year.

YouTube video link:
<https://youtu.be/o0SL-4d0CjA>



The collaboration agreement between Otterpool Park LLP and EKC Group will support the delivery of the new garden town by supporting housebuilders, contractors and their supply chains to meet their skills needs throughout the 25-year construction programme. It will also create opportunities for EKC Group students to engage with the development and promotion of Otterpool Park.

The Group's Chief Executive Officer, Graham Razey OBE, said: "EKC Group is the biggest trainer of construction students in England and there are lots of young people who are going to want to have their employment locally.

"Otterpool Park will have a huge build programme and there is a real opportunity within the construction phase

for young people in Folkestone to take a stake in what is happening in their locality and ensure that the garden town is in line with the aspirations and hopes of young people in the area.

"Partnerships such as this, between education and industry, demonstrate both to our young people and to our communities that we can work hand in hand to create better futures. Our students will have the opportunity to look at future industry practices and train in the skills that enable them to be able to secure opportunities when they finish their studies."

Signing the collaboration agreement, Andy Jarrett, Managing Director of Otterpool Park LLP said, "10,000 homes will be built here over 25 years and it's very important to ensure that skills are available when we need them, both for ourselves as the master developer and for our partners.

"As a sustainable garden town, we place a strong emphasis not just on the delivery of new homes and facilities but on providing opportunities for education, employment and training.

"EKC Group has an excellent reputation for construction skills training and the partnership will also help us to engage with local people, and we will be creating, in addition to construction skills, 9,000 long-term jobs.

"Together with EKC Group we will seek to work with a whole range of third parties that can benefit through this type of cooperation."