



# 10 Years of Growth

Impact Report

## Foreword from the Chair of Governors

The mission of EKC Group is to play a leading role for East Kent in developing the economic and social prosperity of the diverse communities we serve. With ten years of growth, transformation and improvement behind us, and a future focused on playing an even greater role in supporting regional growth and economic development ahead of us, we are keen to capture the impact we have had whilst delivering our core mission through excellent education, skills and training.

At the heart of everything we do is community. We are ambitious for every learner, every partner, every business we work with and everyone that works for us. We believe our role is to provide solutions that support the development and improvement of educational opportunities, economic growth and employment prospects for the people of East Kent. We do this by delivering inspiring, inclusive and purposeful education that enables our learners to achieve their goals.

This independently produced impact report offers a comprehensive overview of the Group's extensive contributions, showcasing the tangible ways in which we contribute to the social, economic, and cultural fabric of East Kent and beyond. It is a testament to the collective efforts of staff, students, and partners, reflecting an unwavering commitment to excellence in education and community service. As we look to the future, we invite our stakeholders to explore the breadth and depth of the impact we have and to work together with us to build a brighter, more prosperous future for our region.

This report clearly shows how we have evolved and responded to the needs of the region working proactively to address structural issues in further education, by making substantial investments in the communities we serve, by delivering outstanding education and training, by being an employer of choice and by driving active citizenship through our education and training programmes.

Our educational, economic and social impact on Kent and Medway and the communities we serve is clear as is the significant impact we make to the national education landscape and the economic prosperity of the country. Not only are we leaders across the region, but we are also leaders across the national further education sector. As one of the country's largest college groups, we take our responsibility for systems leadership seriously whilst ensuring we stay focused on meeting the needs of the people, businesses and communities of East Kent.

We are proud of what we have achieved, and I am delighted to present our impact report to you.

**Charles Buchanan**  
Chair of Corporation

## 10 Years of Growth



## About the EKC Group

The East Kent Colleges Group stands as a beacon of educational excellence and economic empowerment in the heart of Kent and Medway. As one of the region's largest employers and a pivotal force in shaping the local workforce, EKC Group has consistently demonstrated its commitment to transforming lives and supporting economic growth across East Kent.

The journey has been characterised by significant evolution and growth, adapting to the changing landscape of Kent and Medway and the needs of its communities. The Group's primary focus is on developing an offer of high-quality education, skills and training to ensure each of the six colleges and nine training centres meet the needs of their local communities.

EKC Group was formed through a series of mergers and structural changes and has always been clear about its role as a willing partner in providing solutions to strengthen the further education offer available to the learners, businesses and communities of the region. With origins in the former Thanet College, they then became East Kent College and in 2014 assumed responsibility for further education in Dover and Folkestone. In 2018 the Group was formed through a merger with Canterbury College and in 2020 expanded its reach by bringing Ashford College and the land-based centre at Spring Lane in Canterbury into the Group. This means the Group operates across the whole of East Kent as the largest provider of further education and technical skills training in the region. In 2023, Ofsted recognised EKC Group as an Outstanding

provider, making it the first large college group in the country to receive the highest possible inspection rating.

Today EKC Group educates and trains around 7,000 young people, over 5,500 adult learners and over 1,300 apprentices each year. They support 2,300 Kent and Medway businesses and partner with them to upskill their workforce and build their talent pipelines. The Group employs nearly 1,500 people, the majority of whom are East Kent residents.

The Group is at the forefront of addressing the region's skills needs through Kent and Medway's Local Skills Improvement Plan. By working closely with employers and stakeholders, they ensure the curriculum offer aligns with industry demands. They play a key role in bridging skills gaps and by doing so play a vital role in preparing the workforce for current and future industry needs, contributing to the economic resilience and growth of Kent and Medway.

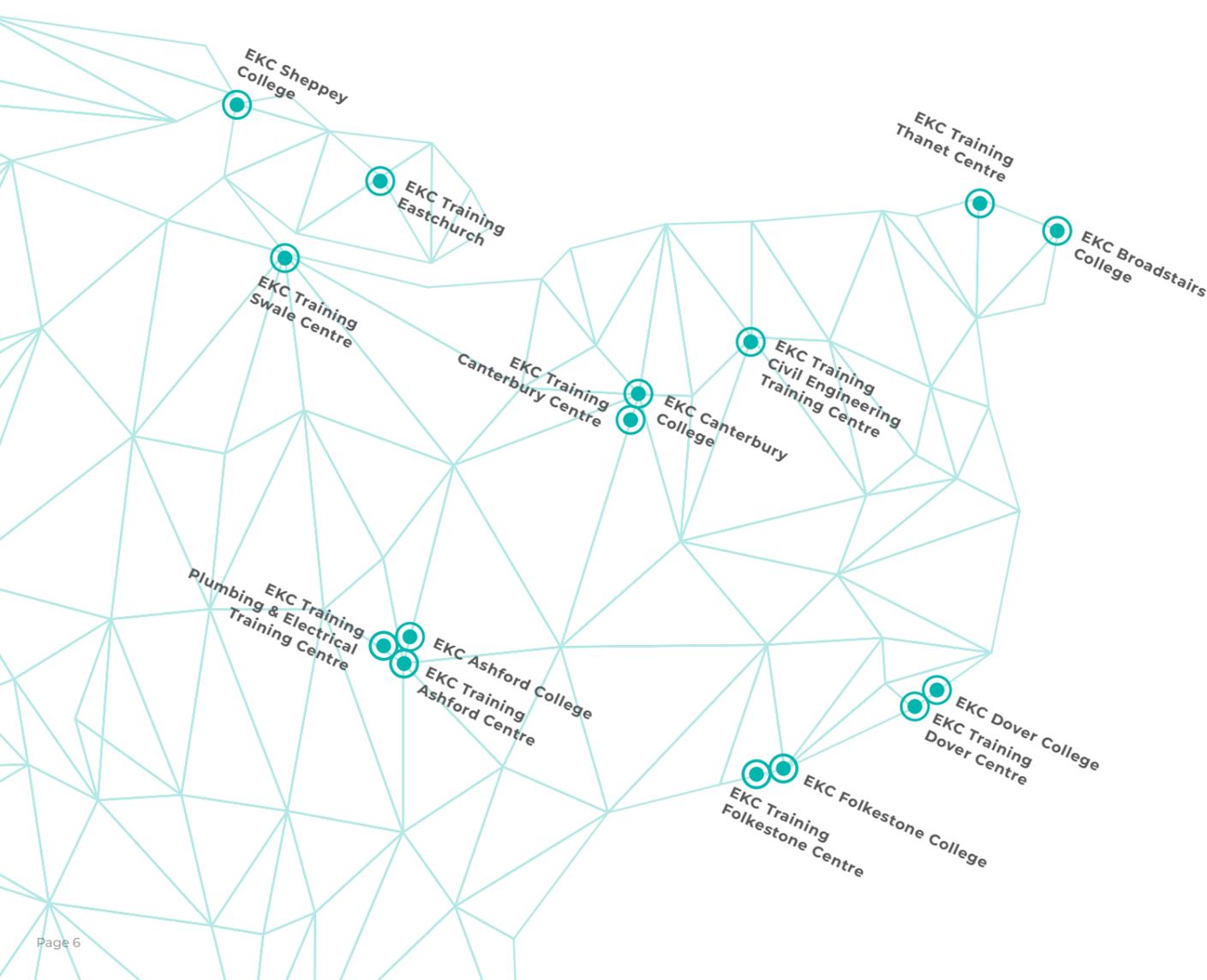
The EKC Group is more than just an educational institution; it is a catalyst for regional transformation. Its impact resonates through the lives it touches, the businesses it supports, and the communities it serves. As the Group continues to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of the region, it remains steadfast in its aim of providing outstanding education and training that empowers individuals and supports economic prosperity.

## 10 Years of Growth

From early beginnings as Thanet College, to East Kent College and then to the East Kent Colleges Group, growth has been a key feature of the group's journey. Growth however has had one clear purpose; to ensure the region has a resilient and high-quality further education system that supports the economic and social prosperity of the communities they are in service to.

### The Journey

EKC Group, was formed through a series of mergers and structural changes. To the right is a timeline of the key mergers and events from 2014 to the present day that have contributed to the formation of EKC Group in its current form.



**2022/23**

**2022/23:** The Group achieves an Ofsted grade of **Outstanding**, including all eight sub-grades, in March 2023.

**2019/20**

**2019/20:** EKC Group acquired Ashford College (graded Requires Improvement) and the Spring Lane land-based campus in Canterbury, following the collapse of the Hadlow Group. EKC Group now serves all six districts of East Kent.

**2017/18**

**2017/18:** The successful merger between East Kent College and Canterbury College on 1st February 2018 created EKC Group. The Group served five distinct local council areas (Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale, and Thanet).

**2016/17**

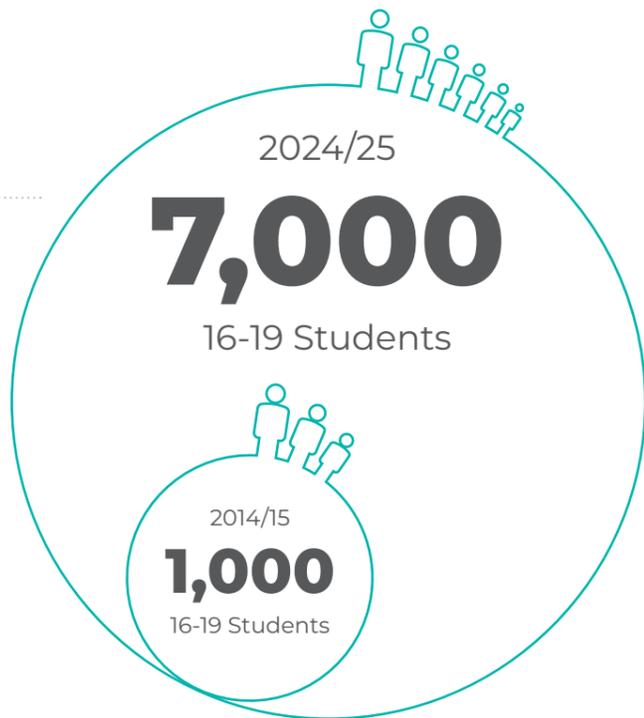
**2016/17:** As a precursor to merger, the East Kent College leadership team was asked to lead a rapid financial turnaround of Canterbury College. An operating surplus was achieved at year end, turning around a deficit of £2.43m in 2015/16. A Good Ofsted grade was achieved by Canterbury College in 2017. The College had been graded as 'Requires Improvement' or 'Satisfactory' for the previous 15 years.

**2014/15**

**2014/15:** East Kent College acquired the Dover and Folkestone sites from K College, enabling the enlarged College to serve East Kent districts (Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, and Thanet). The rapid turnaround of inadequate and financially weak provision culminated in five Outstanding grades (including leadership and management), and an overall Ofsted Good inspection outcome in 2017.

### Supporting more learners

As the largest provider of further education and technical skills training in the region, EKC Group's reach and impact on learning has been characterised by growth. Its educational provision for young people has grown from supporting just over 1,200 young people to the position we see today where 7,000 young people are supported. They have also increased the number of adult learners they work with across a range of programmes from entry level through to higher levels of education and training. Today just over 5,500 adults choose the EKC Group to upskill, reskill and improve their prospects in the workplace.



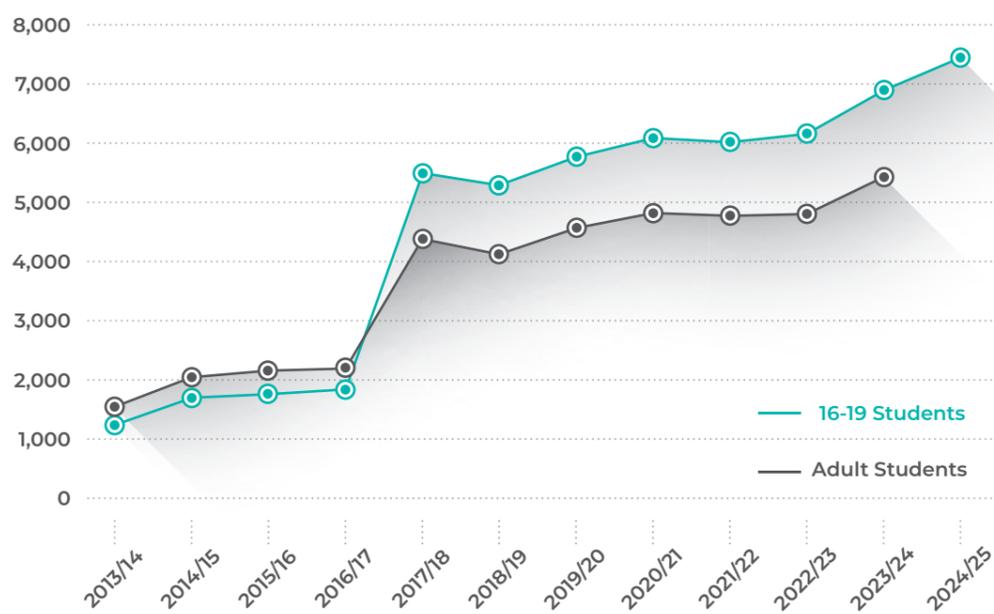
### Growing the Talent Base

The Group's workforce has been central to its success and the impact on the thousands of learners supported each year. They have enabled the delivery of excellent education and training and worked collaboratively to ensure learner ambitions are achieved. The Group has steadily grown its headcount over the 10-year period and is now proud to be one of the largest employers in East Kent.

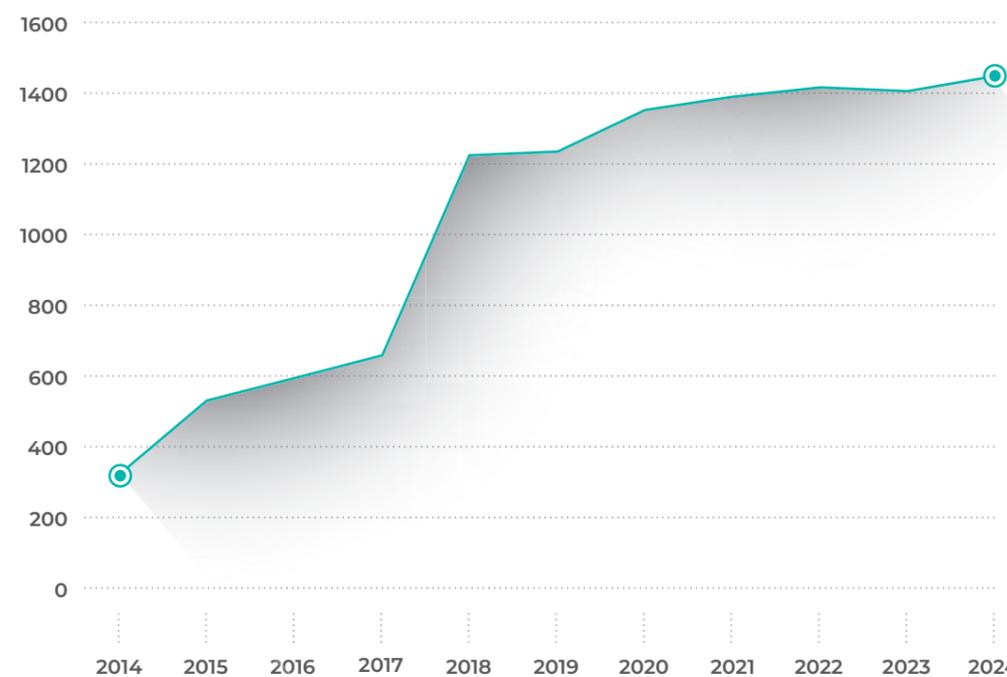


Since 2022/23 staff turnover has reduced by **5.9%**

EKC growth in 16-19 & Adult enrolments 2014-2024



EKC Group employee headcount



**£6.2m**

Sheppey College  
Expansion

**£9.3m**

Ashford Phase 2  
Extension

**£4.1m**

Broadstairs  
Transformation

**£9.2m**

Folkestone College  
Development

**£5.8m**

Margate Digital  
Levelling Up

### Community First, Collaboration Always

Collaboration and community are at the heart of EKC Group's culture and there is the strong belief in working in partnership with residents, employers, councils and other stakeholders to deliver learning opportunities for all and to support the transformation of East Kent communities. Fulfilling this belief means continually innovating and breaking new ground by ensuring provision adapts and evolves to support the changes taking place in Kent and Medway's economy and businesses.

Over the past 10 years, the Group has invested in new areas of curriculum provision. They have been innovative in the way education and skills training is delivered and have partnered with a number of organisations on key skills initiatives. Recent investments in immersive classrooms across all campuses, assistive technology suites to support the future health and care workforce, and robotics for engineering and manufacturing characterise the Group's dedication to providing cutting-edge learning experiences.

The Group's impact extends deep into the fabric of local communities. Through multiple initiatives, students and staff contribute thousands of hours to community projects, volunteering, and social action. These activities not only

enrich the local area but also provide invaluable real-world experience for learners, bridging the gap between education and community engagement.

As one of the largest employers in the region, the Group plays a crucial role in the local economy. The impact extends beyond direct employment, contributing significantly to the Gross Value Added (GVA) of Kent and Medway.

### Securing Investment for Growth

Ongoing capital investment has been key to the growth of the EKC Group and the improvement of facilities for learners, staff, businesses and the wider community. Over a 10-year period projects totalling over £80 million have been delivered, all of which make a significant impact on the growth and prosperity of the region.

By delivering on commitments to modernising and expanding education and training facilities across multiple sites, East Kent learners and employees are assured of being trained in cutting edge facilities and being prepared for the jobs of today and those of the future. The Group's capital investment programme is closely aligned to the needs of the economy and to the skills required by the region's employers.

EKC Group has made a **£350m contribution** to East Kent's GVA over the past 10 years.

## A Champion of Inclusion

In its 2020-2024 strategic plan EKC Group set itself the ambitious objective of being recognised as the most inclusive education group in the UK by providing access and opportunity for all. There is a genuine commitment for supporting all individuals to access education so that they may thrive in their communities. They aim to ensure there is no differential in the access, achievement and progression of different groups and types of learners across local communities and that any gaps in provision for vulnerable learners and the most disadvantaged are addressed.

In 2023/24, the impact on providing the most accessible and inclusive education and training has been significant as evidenced by the numbers of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners served.

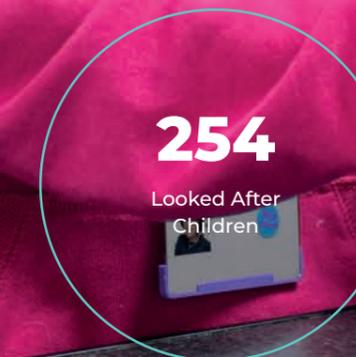
EKC Group's strong commitment to inclusion and access extends beyond the numbers of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners supported; it is also shaped by the extensive range of partnerships and initiatives developed, supported and invested in.

**The Amey Challenge Cup** at EKC Canterbury College inspires young women to explore careers in Engineering, a key sector for the Kent economy.

**91.2%** of 14-16 year old Junior College learners progress to full time study programmes within the Group.

EKC Group's work with **Kent Prisons and the Ministry of Justice** enable skill development and rehabilitation and contribute to a reoffending rate of 5.72% which is significantly below the national average.

Collaborating with **Kent Refugee Action Network**, programmes for unaccompanied asylum seekers have enabled English language acquisition and provided opportunities to build networks and friendships.



## A Beacon of Educational Excellence



In 2023, EKC Group achieved a remarkable milestone by becoming the first General Further Education provider to receive an "Outstanding" rating from Ofsted across all areas of assessment as well as a judgement of 'Strong' for the contribution the Group makes to meeting local skills needs. This accolade serves as a testament to the unwavering commitment to providing high-quality education that is highly aligned to local skills needs without compromising inclusion, access to appropriate provision for all, and a relentless focus on raising students' aspirations for their studies and careers.

The Group's focus on excellence means that learners are provided with unique experiences that go beyond traditional classroom education. Learners rapidly acquire the skills they need to succeed in their learning and in their future workplaces. Through social action projects learners are strong ambassadors for their communities and the support provided builds their confidence and develops their characters.

A pioneering programme of social action ensures there is a focus on the holistic development of learners. Whilst promoting active citizenship, this programme also ensures that learners impact positively in their communities through volunteering projects.

Over 10 years,  
**48,000** learners  
undertook  
**Community  
Action Projects**,  
delivering  
**348,000** hours  
of social action.

Educational innovation and transformation is central to the Group's mission and the curriculum is continually developed to ensure learners are provided with every chance of success. A significant impact has been made on technical education in Kent and Medway by enrolling over 600 students on the new T Level programmes, achieving pass rates exceeding 90% in sectors like Business, Health, and Construction and contributing to social mobility by producing work-ready T Level graduates.

A new A Level programme has been introduced at EKC Canterbury College enrolling over 330 individuals and expanding the range of academic options available to learners in the region.

The curriculum has also been redesigned for school leavers by introducing a Level 2 pathway across two years, significantly increasing the number of learners able to study at this level, whilst raising aspirations and securing sustainable careers.

In 2023/24 an  
outstanding **92%**  
of students achieved  
a positive destination



## An Employer of Choice

Since 2014 Group staff headcount has increased from 347 to 1,463. The role played by staff in delivering such significant impacts since the creation of the EKC Group is recognised and appreciated across the organisation. Staff make a significant contribution to learner outcomes and play a key role in ensuring learning environments combine support with high expectations.

The Group works hard to cultivate long-term loyalty across the staff body and the decreases seen in staff turnover, coupled with the increases in staff retention and satisfaction show the commitment to be an employer of choice across East Kent. A key focus is on creating inclusive workplaces and developing the talent of their people through in-house apprenticeships in areas such as finance, people services, marketing and nurseries.

Staff are proud to be part of the Group and create a positive working environment by being open and providing support and initiatives that enhance employee wellbeing and satisfaction. Strong levels of investment in staff training and development have been maintained and in 2024 EKC Group were named as the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Employer of the Year.

As part of the EKC Group, staff can make a positive change across East Kent, not only through their roles within the college but also through the community volunteering opportunities provided. In 2023/24, 1,319 staff members contributed 10,552 hours to community projects, which demonstrates the impact their people have beyond the confines of their campuses. In 2023, work in social action was recognised with an Association of Colleges Beacon Award.



**1,319 staff members**  
contributed **10,522**  
**hours** to community  
projects.



## Building Futures Together

Partnerships and collaboration are at the core of EKC Group's work. They have worked purposefully with a range of businesses and organisations to support them in the fulfilment of their missions, deriving benefits for their learners. As a key partner in the Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan the Group are committed to playing a full role in achieving the ambitious vision for the future economy of the region. They have actively responded to skills priorities by developing curriculum, improving resources and facilities and upskilling staff. The Group have also contributed to strengthening the provision of skills central to the regional economy by investing in provision for Green Skills and investing in areas such as robotics, virtual and augmented reality and automation. They have invested in assistive technology for the health and care sector

and embedded core skills needs in digitalisation, decarbonisation and SME engagement into college operations.

The Group's approach to partnership working is exemplified by the broad range of industry, community, education and public service organisations worked with. Support and their focus on economic and social prosperity are at the heart of joint working.

### Notable partnerships:

**EKC Schools Trust:** EKC Group work closely with its sister organisation, EKC Schools Trust, and have supported the growth of the Trust to 8 primary schools and the EKC Sheppey Secondary School. All Group colleges work with their local Trust schools to enhance the curriculum, provide opportunities for children to experience technical and vocational education, and enable learners to share their technical skills and passion for their chosen industry.



**Morgan Sindall:** Our Memorandum of Understanding with Morgan Sindall launched the Knowledge Quad provision at EKC Canterbury College. This initiative involves Morgan Sindall staff working with students to develop future construction professionals, raising aspirations and providing pathways into further study or employment in the industry.



The Group's Chair of Corporation has supported **8 colleges** and **3 Local Authorities** as a National Leader of Governance.



### MARLOWE THEATRE

**The Marlowe Theatre:** Partnered with The Marlowe to deliver the 'Marlowe Academy of Performing Arts,' students learn from industry professionals and gain hands-on experience in theatre operations. This collaboration provides students with insights into performing arts and opens progression pathways. The theatre also enables widening participation; offering students opportunities to deepen their understanding of the arts.

The Group's commitment to collaboration extends beyond its geographical boundaries and the role it plays in creating a stronger national further education sector is exemplified by the number of leaders who provide direct support to other further education and skills organisations. Several of the Group's leaders work with Ofsted and take part in college inspections, and the college has also enabled leaders to work as part of the Further Education Commissioners teams in national support roles.



**Kent Cricket Club:** The EKC Group collaborates with Kent Cricket Club to offer a Cricket Coaching course, providing students access to the top-tier team. The Group promotes inclusivity in cricket through various initiatives, including the T20 Taskforce, where catering and hospitality students managed services for T20 games, and sports students gained valuable work experience.

**14 Further Education Colleges** have been supported by the Group's CEO through the National Leader of FE initiative.



**£49m**

£49m of annual income was spent on employing nearly 1500 people, up from £8.4m in 2013/14.

**£7.3m**

£7.3m was spent on supporting the futures of staff by spending on pension contributions.

**£3.3m**

Public services were supported through national insurance contributions of £3.3m

## Supporting Prosperity

As a large provider of education and skills training, EKC Group's focus on economic and social prosperity extends to the role played in directly supporting the local, regional and national economies through their role as an employer and as a public service organisation with spending power.

As well as delivering educational excellence and supporting residents, businesses and communities with their skills and employment goals they use their resources to make an important contribution to the growth agenda. In 2023/24:

**£7.3m**

Wages paid to construction industry staff as a result of capital investments.

**1,100**

EKC Group did business with 1,100 local suppliers of goods and services, spending a total of £9.4m locally.

**£350m**

GVA Contribution

## A Bright Future

The past 10 years have seen EKC Group emerging as one of the leading education groups in the UK. They have built on the firm foundations of their heritage as a successful single college to an outstanding Group of colleges focused on economic and social prosperity. They are ambitious for their learners, their staff, the communities they serve, the businesses they support and the stakeholders they partner with.

positioned to deliver more opportunities to the residents of East Kent. As they look to the future, they are ensuring strong plans are in place to respond to a more technologically advanced world, make further contributions to addressing climate change and strengthening their partnerships to ensure and enable social mobility, community cohesion and strengthened aspirations.

Whilst they have demonstrated the positive impact they have had, they know there is more to do and are extremely well

**This report has been independently produced by Chris Davies and Matt Atkinson of FE Associates Ltd.**

## Glossary

### **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**

- a legal document which describes a child or young person's aged up to 25 special educational needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they would like to achieve.

**End-point assessment (EPA)** - is the final stage of an apprenticeship. It is an impartial assessment of whether an apprentice has developed the skills, knowledge and behaviours outlined in the apprenticeship standard.

**English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)** - a term used to describe programmes that teach English to people whose first language is not English.

**Further Education (FE)** - includes any study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree).

**GVA** - Gross Value Added. GVA is a measure of economic output and productivity. It represents the value of goods and services produced in an area, sector, or industry.

#### **Specifically, GVA is defined as:**

- The value of the goods and services produced in the economy
- A measure used to gauge the overall economic well-being of an area
- Often presented as GVA per head, which is the amount of GVA per adult population in a given area

GVA is a crucial indicator for assessing regional economic performance and is typically used to measure the contribution to the economy of individual sectors, industries, or producers.

**Learners with High Needs** - Learners with high levels of need are defined as those with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities who require additional support to help them progress and achieve. These learners receive additional funding to provide the support required to meet their individual needs.

**Level 2** - A Level 2 qualification is typically awarded to students who have completed their GCSEs or equivalent qualifications. It provides knowledge and experience in a specific area and is equivalent to GCSE grades 9 to 4 (A\*-C).

**Looked After Children** - Children who have been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours.

**Positive destination** - after completing their course, a positive destination for an individual is continuing in education or progressing to employment (including an apprenticeship).

**T Level** - two-year courses which are taken after GCSEs and are broadly equivalent in size to three A Levels. These courses have been developed in collaboration with employers and education providers to meet the needs of industry and prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship or related technical study through higher education.

