

# NEW SKILLS HUB LAUNCHED TO SUPPORT BUSINESSES



**EKC Group is among the partners of a new online facility that will help students' employment opportunities while boosting business at the same time.**

EKC Group, University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University have been working with Pfizer and Sandwich's Discovery Park to create a Skills Hub – a virtual platform demonstrating what Kent has to offer businesses.

Launching late last year, the Skills Hub is committed to supporting businesses large and small within Discovery Park in a number of ways.

These include upskilling their current workforce, as well as finding new talent to take their business forward.

Businesses can access a range of services through this partnership, from recruiting apprentices or professional graduates, to collaborating with us to grow their business and the regional economy.

The scheme will also help companies navigate the complex landscape of qualifications, from work placements and

traineeships, through internships and apprenticeships to graduates. It will also help promote awareness among businesses of the recently created T Levels, which are the equivalent of three A Levels and designed to meet the needs of industry.

Jonathan Smith, EKC Group's Director of Stakeholder Engagement, said: "Our Group's mission is to play a leading part in enhancing the social and economic prosperity of the communities we serve, and through this partnership we'll be helping deliver against that key agenda of ours.

"We're excited to work in collaboration with our partners to ensure that the Skills Hub serves the needs of businesses at Discovery Park and acts as a catalyst for their continued growth by developing the next generation of skilled employees."

A big asset to the scheme is that students from across all six of EKC Group's Colleges are eligible to join the platform and benefit SMEs at Discovery Park.

# OFSTED GIVES NEW EKC GROUP CAMPUSES TOP MARKS

**Two newly acquired EKC Group campuses have received top marks all round in their first OFSTED monitoring visit.**

The Group - which consists of six Further Education Colleges and four Business Units - took over the Ashford College and Canterbury Spring Lane sites at the height of the pandemic.

The education watchdog surveyed the sites on January 19 and 20, overall finding 'significant progress' had been made at both.

Inspectors assessed integration into EKC Group's shared vision and strategy, creation of an effective governance structure and how effective training is.

On all of these factors, inspectors deemed the Group to reach the highest standard.

In a summary of findings, head inspector Carolyn Brownsea said the EKC Group strategy had been implemented successfully "to deliver an ambitious vision and mission, supporting employers, stakeholders and students.

"Leaders and managers have revised the curriculums, to develop the knowledge and skills required to support the economic and social prosperity of the communities of east Kent and to enhance students' career prospects."

They also noted staff were clear on their role in helping to create positive results and benefiting the Group's wider strategy.

Praise was also heaped onto the integration of the sites into the Group-wide umbrella, highlighting how all staff had been given a laptop and clear guidance on how to achieve short- and long-term goals.

EKC Group's leadership was highlighted for "astutely" using "their business and sector knowledge to assess the benefits of bid applications related to curriculum developments.

"They meticulously assess local plans, including those of the relevant local councils, to inform strategic and curriculum planning. Leaders have successfully bid for funding, including for an engineering hub in Ashford, providing employers with access to new technologies and training as part of the 'decarbonising Kent' initiative."

Awareness of the communities served by each College was later raised again, when inspectors stated that leaders at both Ashford and Spring Lane "have used their highly effective engagement of employers and stakeholders to inform the local and east Kent curriculum plan.

"They successfully engage with employers, ensuring that teaching and learning facilities meet industry standards. Employers agree that students are well prepared to meet the needs of the workplace."



The students themselves were also recognised for their attitude to studying and eagerness to excel in their chosen courses.

The report reads: "Students are motivated and interested in the work they complete as part of their work experience. Employers give them increasing responsibilities as a result. Students are able to put into practice theory and practical skills that they have learned at college."

It was also noted that through annual 'social action weeks', students had the opportunity to develop practical skills through projects both in the classroom and with external partners.

Concluding the monitoring report, the inspectors write: "Students develop skills such as problem-solving and planning, which prepares them for their work placements and future work or further education opportunities."



# COMMUNITIES REAP GOVERNMENT FUND REWARDS



**After successfully securing government funding to help East Kent's Covid-19 recovery, communities across the region are reaping the rewards of EKC Group's success.**

Despite the short time since the Group's bid for Community Renewal Fund (CRF) money was granted, the £3million investment has already begun to promote skills training.

Particularly aimed at people aged 18 or over, money will be used to promote not just career-related skills training but also tutelage in life and digital skills.

So far, around 500 beneficiaries have seized the opportunities afforded by the Group's three CRF "Skills Renewal" Projects in Thanet and Dover, Canterbury and Folkestone and Hythe, and Ashford and Swale.

Within that, 66 adult learners have taken part in the Group's Step Into College offers, which span ten different vocational CRF programmes of learning.

Working in collaboration with EKC IntoWork, the CRF team is also developing a wide-ranging series of events for the residents of Stanhope Estate in Ashford which aim to provide a skills engagement programme that is inclusive and accessible.

Further initiatives include 'vocational taster days', in which members of each community are invited to attend one of the Group's six Colleges in order to get a glimpse of possible career pathways.

Project Manager Kirsty McChesney said: "These projects made possible by the Community Renewal Fund are all about communities and we're very much trying to reflect that with the money we've been given.

"We're offering people the exciting opportunity to gain new skills, get back into work and find a career that they are passionate about.

"A major part of this is promoting digital skills and working with people who may have little to no experience with computers or the internet.



"While we will be assisting those in the targeted 'levelling up' communities, our approach seeks to help everyone across East Kent who feels they want to get back into education and working life."

# COLLEGE STUDENTS MAKE TURNER GALLERY DEBUT

Three college students have joined the likes of Tracey Emin at a new exhibition in the Turner Contemporary.

As part of their Broadstairs College lessons, budding artists were encouraged to answer a call for pieces to go in the gallery's first Turner Contemporary Open exhibition. Of the 4,200 anonymised works submitted, just 450 were selected to be exhibited as part of the 10th anniversary collection.

The three students whose work is being highlighted are Level 3 Art student Ellie Robins, Level 3 Media student Morgan Erbe and former Level 3 Media student Jasmine Henwood.

Matthew Bowen, Programme Director of Creative Industries at Broadstairs College, was overjoyed when the results were announced.

He said: "It was fantastic to see the ambition of all our students, who produced a real variety of work in different media as entries for this exhibition. From painting and photography to drawing and graphic design, the standard was incredibly promising.

"A huge congratulations to Ellie, Morgan and Jasmine. The fact they were chosen anonymously alongside internationally recognised artists demonstrates their capability and skills. The effort served as a great opportunity to teach students about getting their artwork into galleries, the process of doing so and also writing blurbs to explain or describe what they had produced."

Morgan Erbe, whose piece 'The Gateway' was among those selected, said: "It's quite surreal to see all of these impressive artists' work with mine next to it.



"For anyone considering entering in the future, it's definitely worth it. Go for it! There are no limits so you can do whatever you like and it's an amazing opportunity to see your work in the Turner."

Mr Bowen also highlighted the close partnership between the college and the Turner Contemporary, with the institution often getting involved in the gallery's competitions or benefitting from artists' visits facilitated by the Turner.

After waiting months for results to be announced, the senior lecturer welcomed the news and took several classes to the Open Exhibition over the course of its run which ended on February 20th.

## EKC GROUP GIVES THE GIFT OF JOY THIS CHRISTMAS

**Not only does EKC Group give thousands of learners a great education, it also helps its local communities wherever it can. That's why, for the second year in a row, the Group teamed up with London-based Christ The King Sixth Form Colleges to create a Christmas charity drive.**

Altogether, the effort brought in £3,551 with a GoFundMe campaign and charity art auction.

The money was split between Porchlight, Demelza Hospice Care for Children, Refuge, and St Vincent de Paul Society.

The art auction - which ended on December 17 - consisted of pieces donated by staff members and students, raising £621 by itself.

A particular highlight was a signed limited edition photographic print from award-winning Photographer and Lecturer at EKC Group's Folkestone College, Zak Waters, which raised £100.

Meanwhile the GoFundMe brought in a total of £2,930. The top donations saw £1,000 given by Metric Capital OurTurn Global, £500 from David Kelly and £500 by DSP Drainage.

On top of these two efforts, CTK and EKC Group organised a donation drive for gifts in aid of those less well-off this Christmas.

Students and staff members handed in about 1,500 gifts which were then distributed across Kent and South London.

The superlative effort has been spearheaded by husband-and-wife duo Graham and Shireen Razey, who are Chief Executive Officer of EKC Group and Executive Principal of Christ The King Sixth Form Colleges respectively.

This charity drive ran alongside numerous charitable deeds by students at both College groups. One example is that of Animal Management students at Canterbury College, who created festive packages for their four-legged friends at Dogs Rescue and AA Dog Rescue.

# PRIMARY SCHOOL WINS BIG AT NATIONAL CRICKET AWARDS

Staff and pupils at a Faversham primary school are celebrating after receiving a national award for their cricketing enthusiasm.

Bysing Wood Primary School - a member of EKC Schools Trust - was selected by national cricket charity Chance to Shine as its 'Primary School of the Year', an award handed over at a luxurious ceremony at Lord's Cricket Ground.

The charitable organisation ran coaching sessions for Years 3 to 6 in the school, as well as mental wellbeing classes and games.

As part of the Chance to Shine programme, each year group had an extra 45-minute PE class on Fridays from June 2021. These sessions were run by Kent Cricket Community coach Jamie Harris and focused on developing a full range of cricket skills.

Sports leaders at Bysing Wood also had a weekly meeting with Chance to Shine representatives to strengthen their ability to run cricket activities for the rest of the school.

Bysing Wood Primary School's Headteacher Andrew Harrison believes the training has had a hugely beneficial impact on those who took part. He said: "Our Chance to Shine coaching reminded everyone that being active benefits both physical and mental wellbeing.



"We also made use of an additional opportunity specifically about taking care of our mental health, which Chance to Shine made available to us.

"Everyone is immensely proud that what we do as a matter of course has been recognised at a national level. We don't feel that we deliberately did anything special other than make the most of what Chance to Shine offered by applying the enthusiasm of the children and staff."

Meanwhile Kent Cricket Community Coach Jamie Harris said: "I think that among the reasons for them winning the award is that everyone here has worked so hard and really taken to our training sessions."

"For many pupils it was their very first time playing cricket, and it's incredibly obvious how much they now enjoy the sport.

"While we are promoting the sport, we also aim to introduce children to situations where they might win, lose or face a conflict of ideas during a game. These are present throughout life and through cricket, we can teach them how to handle such moments.

"We would like to thank Bysing Wood for taking the opportunity to not only get involved with the Chance to Shine project, but also for their enthusiasm throughout."

Bysing Wood's accolade even won them a spot on an evening broadcast of BBC South East Today after the school was visited by reporter Juliette Parkin.



# EKC GROUP ROOTING FOR GOLD MEDAL HOPEFUL

**As the Winter Olympics draws to a close, EKC Group is excitedly awaiting the beginning of the Winter Paralympics – not least of all because an ex-alumnus will be taking to the slopes in the hope of achieving gold.**

Former Broadstairs College student James Barnes-Miller will be flying to China in March to represent Team GB in the Para-snowboard competition, aiming to build on success at the world championship.

Barnes-Miller, known as Stubber to his friends, was born without a right hand and actually came to the sport very late when compared to fellow competitors. However when he left the gate at the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in 2018, he became the first ever British snowboarder to compete in the Paralympics.

Despite not reaching the podium on his first outing, he has since gone from strength to strength. At last year's Para-snowsport World Cup in Italy, he was awarded the Crystal Globe for best overall competitor of the season.

Last January, he continued to achieve great results by winning three medals in the three disciplines he entered at the World Para Snow Sports Championships – two bronzes and a silver.

With his focus fully on winning gold in China, he spoke to the EKC Group and said: "I can't wait, it's what we have been training hard for.

"It's certainly going to be a very different experience compared to the last Paralympics but I'm trying to treat it as just another race.

"I feel very on form after my latest results. We train hard all summer, but you don't really know how well you're riding until you get into the big races. So doing what I did at the world championships has given me a massive confidence boost."

Director of External Affairs Kamie Weir said: "We have been following his career since its inception and we're incredibly proud of everything James has achieved throughout his snowboarding career."

"To hear he's on fine form heading into the Paralympics is fantastic, and I know everyone across the Group – including family members who still work and study with us - will be cheering for him every step of the way!"



# EKC GROUP BEGINS DECARBONISATION CAMPAIGN



**EKC Group held its inaugural green manufacturing workshop in late January as part of its work to help Kent's business community on its decarbonisation journey.**

The work by the Group on its 'Decarbonising Kent' project has been made possible following a successful bid for funding through the Government's Skills Development Fund. As part of this work, EKC Group has partnered with sustainable manufacturing consultants HSSMI and KPS to deliver a series of workshops.

The first of these expert-led sessions saw advice given to manufacturers on creating more environmentally-friendly business practises and promoting green innovation in the industry. Local company the Maidstone Distillery showcased its sustainability journey so far in the workshop, with other speakers giving attendees insight into some of the innovations in the area.

The next workshop is set to focus on post-Covid recovery in the manufacturing sector, with an overview of how manufacturing companies can future-proof their firm and make use of digital skills to grow and flourish.

If you'd like to find out more or sign up for the next of these workshops, you can register [here](#).

Alongside the workshops, the Group is also hard at work to develop green engineering centres - or 'Learning Factories' - which are being set up at Ashford and Canterbury College and will be available to both students and external partners.

These centres will house state-of-the-art equipment, with industry leading techniques being taught to ensure

companies and the future labour market are both future-proofed, whilst also moving forward with environmental awareness at their core. These new 'learning factories' will include a Green Engineering and Design Centre based at Ashford College and, at Canterbury College, a Green Engineering and Mechatronic Lab with Electric and Assisted Vehicle Centre.



Alongside these inspirational new learning environments will be incubation spaces for start-up businesses, allowing employers the opportunity to make use of the cutting-edge equipment present in the areas. Specialist advisers will be on hand to chat with businesses about what they can do to decarbonise as well as how they can future-proof their company and workforce. Access is also being granted to Continuing Professional Development Opportunities across the Group's sites which will help firms upskill their current employee base.