



fesussex
The consortium
of Sussex colleges

Annual Report

2022/2023

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1. Introduction and summary of the year



Welcome to my first FE Sussex Annual Report. I was delighted to take on the role of CEO at FE Sussex, part-way through the 2022-23 financial year. I must also take the opportunity to thank Tim Strickland, the outgoing CEO, who has been extremely generous with his time and words of advice during, and since the handover. I have also been brilliantly supported by Anna-Louse Barry, FE Sussex's Executive Assistant, and Project Officer. Anna had worked with Tim as CEO for 15 years, so it was a time of change for her, but she demonstrated considerable flexibility and her organisational skills and knowledge of the organisation and FE Sussex member colleges have been vital to my induction and a successful year.

The development of the FE Sussex Strategy 2023-26 has been a key achievement during this year. Wide-ranging consultation, including meeting all of the Board members at their colleges, helped me to build a speedy understanding of the Sussex skills sector within my first few months of CEO. I was particularly struck by the enthusiasm for collaborative working evident in all of the FE Sussex members, and this is emphasised by the first objective in our three-year Strategy. I am excited to begin delivery of the Strategy in the next financial year.

Collaboration has featured heavily in the main areas of FE Sussex work during 2022-23. The second Strategic Development Fund project was managed by Tim Strickland, who kindly stayed on to see this £2.3m project through to conclusion. Nine Centres of Digital Excellence, Sussex (CODES) were developed, in partnership with employers, to provide training in specialist software for local industries and skill sectors. An application for the next iteration of this funding, now called the Local Skill Improvement Fund, began in 2022-23, focusing on the digital transformation of teaching and learning, careers advice and guidance, and job-seeking.

Other noteworthy areas of FE Sussex activity this year have included a successful Growing Greener Sussex Sustainability Symposium, at Plumpton College in July, and an ETF-funded Leadership Development project. Board meetings have provided two opportunities for political influencing, with the attendance of Becky Shaw, CEO, East & West Sussex County Council, and The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education.

Besides my appointment as a director of FE Sussex, this year Tim Strickland and Andy Cole (representing GB Met College) resigned.

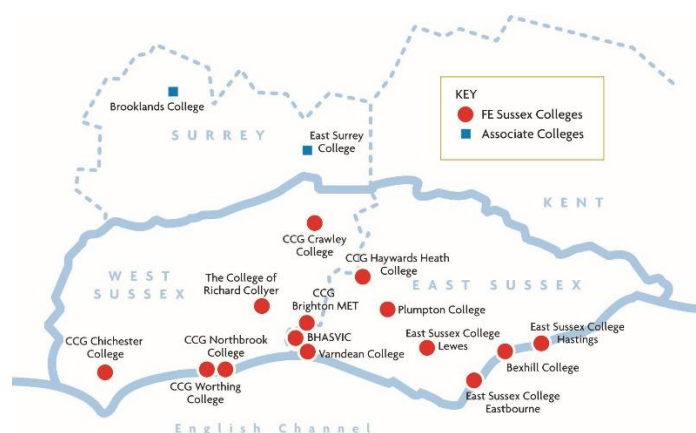
Janet Clark
Chief Executive Officer
FE Sussex

2. Who are we?

FE Sussex is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity which represents the interests of seven post-16 colleges in Sussex and Surrey which comprise:

- Four general further education colleges in Sussex and Surrey
- Four sixth form colleges in Sussex
- One specialist land-based college

Chichester College Group comprises of Chichester College, Brighton MET, Crawley, Haywards Heath, Northbrook, Worthing and Brinsbury colleges. East Sussex College Group comprises of colleges in Hastings, Eastbourne, and Lewes.



Full Members		
		
		
		
Associate Members		
		

3. Purpose & Objectives

The key objectives and business aims of FE Sussex are to:

1. Assist with improving quality standards within member colleges with the aim of achieving the highest quality of education and training
2. Position member colleges to have influence and lobbying power within the sector through strategic alliances and other regional and national links
3. Facilitate inter-member continual professional development to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
4. Provide member colleges with advice, guidance and support for strategic sector developments and disseminate information on new initiatives and agendas
5. Secure and deliver grant funded research and development projects alongside commercial income generation opportunities

Please note that these objects and aims of FE Sussex were reviewed during 2022-23 and will be replaced with the Three-Year Strategic Objectives approved by the Board.

4. Activities 2022-23

4.1 FE Sussex strategic review

With a new CEO in post, the FE Sussex Board took some time to reflect on the organisation's purpose and direction of travel. To ensure that needs of its members and stakeholders underpin the FE Sussex strategy, consultation took place with the following:

- 18 representatives of FE Sussex member colleges.
- 4 representatives of Sussex-based universities, including 2 Vice Chancellors.
- 4 employer representatives, including Sussex Chamber of Commerce, SELEP & NHS.
- 11 other stakeholders, including Sussex-based post-16 education networks, DfE, and representatives of similar FE and Skills consortia from other parts of the country.

At each consultation (the majority were in-person meetings), two questions were asked:

1. What are your top three challenges?
2. What activities do you think that FE Sussex should undertake?

The information gathered was reported to the FE Sussex Board, along with horizon-scanning of relevant government policy and initiatives, and operational parameters, such as staffing capacity and formed the basis of a strategy away day, held in Brighton in January 2023.

The resulting 2023-26 Strategy was signed off by the Board in the summer, and is available, along with the operational plan, on the [FE Sussex website](#). It includes the organisation's purpose and three strategic objectives:

Our purpose: To support members in the delivery of high-quality further education to Sussex learners, tell the stories of Sussex skills provision, and create a supportive workplace for staff in the Sussex FE sector.

Objectives

- Generate and lead collaborative opportunities; provide communities of practice and deliver professional development for the workforce and leaders of FE Sussex members, in order to share effective practice and resources, benefit from economies of scale, and cultivate innovation.
- Support the mental well-being of staff and students working in the FE sector across Sussex, and so facilitate learning environments that enable learners to thrive.
- Influence national, regional and local skills policy on behalf of FE Sussex members.

At its April 2023 meeting, the Board agreed to reinstate membership fees to partially fund activity delivered by FE Sussex to achieve its strategic objectives. From September 2023, fees are payable at 0.02 per cent of each member's previous year's turnover (and at a rate of 50 per cent of this for Associate members). Both the strategy and membership fee level will be reviewed annually.

4.2 Professional Exchange Networks

FE Sussex successfully held Professional Exchange Networks over the academic year for the following groups via online and face to face:

- Exam Officers
- International
- Members
- Quality Improvement Group
- Safeguarding
- Women's Leadership Network
- Chairs

During 2022-23, the Networks were reviewed as part of the FE Sussex Three-Year Strategy development. An analysis of activity duplicated with other similar organisations (including S7 and the Association of Colleges), and meeting attendance levels, resulted in the decision to suspend the Exam Officers, International and the Quality & Improvement Group Networks. Two new Networks were piloted (Chairs of Governors and Women's Leadership) to great success, and will be continued in 2023-24. Participants' preference for in-person meetings, to better facilitate networking, sharing effective practice, and collaborative projects will see the Networks move from online hosting to face-to-face in 2023-24.

4.3 Projects: Strategic Development Fund 2 (SDF2)

SDF2, applied for by FE Sussex on behalf of its member colleges, resulted in an award of £2.271m.

In response to skills shortages identified by the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), published by Sussex Chamber of Commerce, SDF2 funding facilitated the design and delivery of a suite of new digital technology courses as follows:

Chichester College Group	Introduction to Cyber Security Introduction to Virtual Reality: Exploring the Meta verse Introduction into Digital Technologies for Modern Livestock Husbandry Introduction to Games Development & Esports Introduction to Coding: Python
Plumpton College	Data collection, Analysis & Benchmarking for Land-based Industries Monitoring of Animal & Plant Health Performance for Land-based Industries
East Sussex College Group	Introduction to Web Technologies & Software Development for the Web Digital Technology for Building Information Modelling & Energy Management
Bexhill College	Digital Skills to Support Progression onto Further Study or Employment Digital Skills to Support Transition into the Business & Hospitality Sector Digital Skills to Support Transition into the Creative Sector Digital Skills to Support Transition into the Health & Social Care Sector

All learning resources developed through the SDF2 project have been shared with and are available to each Sussex college. Where applicable, courses have been accredited by either City and Guilds or the British Computer Society.

Alongside course development, each of the listed colleges benefited from a major injection of capital funding to establish outstanding facilities with the latest equipment and software.

FE Sussex's contribution to SDF2 included project management, collaborative activity and reporting to the Department of Education and other stakeholders. The following outputs were achieved:

- Nine Centres of Digital Excellence, Sussex (CODES) established and equipped with state-of-the-art digital technology, across five colleges.
- 75 employer-focused modular courses in digital technology delivered.
- 886 learners participated in courses focusing on key digital shortage areas.

SDF2 delivery concluded in March 2023.

4.4 Projects: Improving Digital Education for All Learners (IDEAL)

Co-funded by Erasmus+, this project researched, evaluated, and disseminated international best practice in the delivery of higher education and technical qualifications through online and blended learning approaches. Developed as an international response to the need for

education providers to develop the digital competency and literacy of their staff during and post COVID, the project outputs included:

- An IDEAL Digital Competency Framework.
- A Digital Pedagogy Toolkit.
- A report on Digital Pedagogy.
- A Digital Learning Roadmap.

FE Sussex was one of ten partners in the project, which also included:

- Cogito Development Projects (CDP)
- University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC)
- Include (a UK charity promoting inclusion for people with understanding or speaking difficulties)
- DICE Consortium (a UK based research consortium)
- Turin University
- The Institute of the Deaf of Turin
- Nevsehir University, Turkey
- University of Thessaly (UTH), Greece
- KAINOTOMIA (a TVET institution in Greece)

Begun in the previous financial year, Tim Strickland saw this project through to conclusion for FE Sussex in 2022-23. Further information is available on the [IDEAL project website](#).

4.5 Projects: ETF Professional Standards for Leaders

With funding from the Education & Training Foundation (ETF), FE Sussex oversaw four projects in member colleges to support the development of talent pipelines to leadership roles.

This project was delivered in collaboration with Anju Virdee, ETF's National Head of Leadership, and Dr Stephen Corbett, an academic specialising in FE management at the University of Portsmouth. Using ETF's newly developed Professional Standards for Leaders, and associated training needs analysis, the leadership skills, values and behaviours of a range of aspiring and current leaders and managers were benchmarked at ESCG, Plumpton College, Varndean College, and Bexhill College. The resulting data informed leadership development programmes designed and delivered by the CPD leads at each of the four colleges.

Whilst the ETF-funded activity came to its conclusion in 2022-23, the participating colleges will share their projects with the wider FE Sussex membership in January 2024.

4.6 Projects: Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) Research and Development

During 2022-23, FE Sussex was awarded funding by the Sussex Chamber of Commerce to carry out research and development activity to support the refresh of the [Local Skills Improvement Plan \(LSIP\)](#).

Working with the Sussex Learning Network (SLN), FE Sussex completed a partnership framework and action plan, which supplements the LSIP and serves as guidance for any organisation work delivering a response to its 'Innovation' recommendations. These are the top priority recommendations for flexible high-level technical skills development for Sussex-employers, who particularly emphasised:

- Skills needed to meet Net Zero & Climate Change targets in Land-based and Healthcare sectors.
- Specialist technical skills to support content creation in HI-End TV sector, Streaming services, and Post-Production in the Creative and Cultural sector.
- Leadership and skills for business owners in the Engineering and Manufacturing sector.
- Middle management skills for the Visitor and Hospitality sector.

FE Sussex was also funded by the Sussex Chamber to create a partnership framework, set of principles and an action plan to support organisations addressing the recommendations made within the 'Offer' section of the LSIP. These recommendations focus on tackling teacher shortages in the FE sector, developing an employer-led CPD programme for the workforce, and delivering employability skills.

In addition to creating appendices to the LSIP, the funding enabled FE Sussex to conduct research into the feasibility of employer-led CPD programmes in the region, and mapped the level 2 and above provision at its member colleges.

4.7 Project: Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF)

In June, FE Sussex submitted an Expression of Interest for Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF), on behalf of its members colleges. Responding to the recommendations made by the Sussex LSIP (in particular, the 'Offer', 'Innovation' and 'Talent' strands), and within the constraints imposed by the 75 percent capital funding available, with the limited revenue funding available only until March 2024, we proposed to develop the following:

- **Skills Sussex Mobile App:** matching jobseekers with vacancies, and offering opportunities to develop employability skills, and practice for job interviews.
- **Sussex Centre/s for Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership:** providing leadership development, business advice and high level technical CPD for employers across the seven key Sussex sectors.
- **VR & AR Teaching:** piloting digital solutions to the teacher shortages.

The successful outcome of the Expression of Interest was confirmed in July 2023 and work to develop the stage 2 LSIF application took place over the summer into the new 2023-24 financial year. £4.5m will be available to Sussex to deliver the projects outlined above in 2023-2025. The full application was submitted to the Department for Education ahead of the 15 September deadline.

4.8 Events: Growing Greener Sussex

Growing Greener Sussex, the first FE Sussex sustainability symposium, took place on 4 July at Plumpton College. Attended by 80 learners, teachers, leaders and governors representing all nine of the FE Sussex member and associate colleges, the event proved to be a great success. Feedback from participants included the following comments:

“It had really interesting workshops around various aspects of sustainability, it was a great mix of people from across colleges, organisations and the DfE, it was well-organised with a range of options for different interests, and it was in a lovely setting at Plumpton College” A learner participant

“It was an excellent opportunity to not only see the great work going on across the consortium but to be inspired by amazing speakers ranging from highly experienced practitioners to talented and forward-thinking students.” A teacher participant

We are looking to develop this as a future bi-annual ongoing event as part of the FE Sussex agenda in the future (funding dependant).

4.9 Events: Teacher Encounters (Engineering and Construction)

ESCG hosted the FE Sussex Teacher Encounters event, funded by the East Sussex Careers Hub and The Careers & Enterprise Company in July 2023. The first of kind, this employer-led event for Construction and Engineering teachers, and careers advisers, was designed to upskill and showcase the latest technologies, processes and materials.

A total of 36 participants networked and attended keynote sessions and workshops delivered by employers in the Construction and Engineering sectors. Workshops included demonstrations of the latest decorating products, green technology in the home, AI, and developments in renewable energies and solar car charging. Keynote speeches included a talk on the skills required for careers in sustainable architecture design and a workshop that challenged the traditional perception of engineers and engineering. The event closed with a tour and practical activities at the ESCG De-Carb centre.

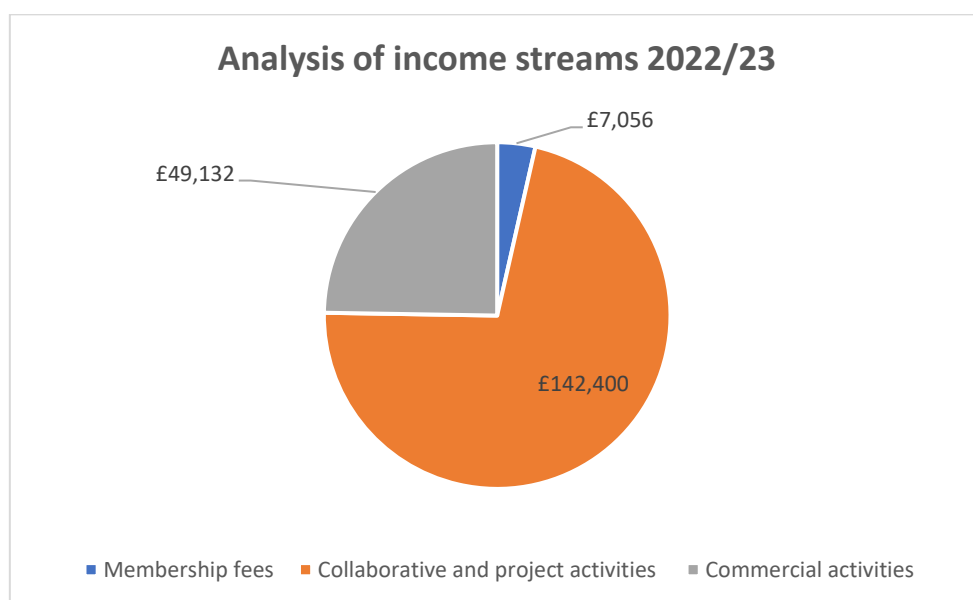
Feedback from the CPD event was excellent, and included the following from a plumbing lecturer at East Sussex College Group:

“All the information has been really useful as I’m currently teaching my year three students about renewable energies – hydrogen, biomass, solar power – everything that’s going to help our planet in the future. “It’s been a fantastic day and I think everyone has really enjoyed it.”

A short video was made to capture participants’ feedback: [Teacher Encounters 2023 - YouTube](#).

5. Financial Information

FE Sussex categorises its income into three main areas: Membership fees, collaborative projects and commercial. For the (academic and financial) year ending 31 July 2023 analysis of our income streams shows:



Total income for the year 2022/23 was £198,588. This represents a planned reduction on the previous year of 43 per cent, attributed to collaborative income for the Strategic Development Fund, which ended nine months into the financial year, with the LSIF not available until the following year (2023/24).

Expenditure in 2022/23 was higher in the previous year at £262,216, compared to £179,966 in 2021/22. This was a planned increase, and mainly due to the additional costs required to deliver the SDF2 project led by the outgoing CEO. The resulting planned deficit of £63,628 for the year brings FE Sussex reserves into line with its Reserves Policy (of one year's activity), standing at £296,980 at the end of the year.

6. Looking towards 2023/24

This year, FE Sussex will deliver activity towards its Three-Year Strategy (2023-26), as outlined in its operational plan. Key areas of work planned for the year are:

- Delivery of the LSIF project, collaborating with FE Sussex member colleges to create:
 - Sussex Skills Mobile App
 - Sussex Centre/s for Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership
 - VR & AR teaching facilities
- Provide communities of practice, deliver professional development, and facilitate collaborative projects for groups of FE Sussex members' staff and leaders, through the following Networks:

- Safeguarding
 - Women's leadership
 - HR Directors/CPD Leads
 - Chairs of Governors
 - Skills Link Governors
 - SEND funding
- Deliver a campaign to influence parliamentary candidates in advance of the likely 2024 general election.

The financial sustainability of FE Sussex will be at the forefront of the CEO's mind throughout 2023/24. In particular, commercial opportunities presented by the LSIF project activity will be explored. The success of the Sussex Skills Mobile app will be contingent on its financial feasibility post-LSIF funding, and may also result in a new income stream for FE Sussex.