



**a.r.u.** | Writtle  
College

# Writtle College Accountability Statement

**2023-24**





# Purpose

Writtle College was established as a Further Education Corporation on 29 February 2024 following the merger of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and Writtle University College (WUC). Writtle College offers a range of further education and apprenticeship courses and shares its campus, teaching spaces and facilities with ARU Writtle, which is part of Anglia Ruskin University. Following the merger the Writtle College Strategic Plan will be developed over the next twelve months.

ARU's vision for the merger was rooted in three strategic aims that align with our shared values and goals:

- **Sustain:** Achieving financial sustainability through an effective shared services model. Building a strong financial foundation for the future growth and development. Maximising resource allocation for teaching, resources, and facilities at the ARU Writtle Campus.
- **Synthesise:** Fostering education connections across the merged institution. Leveraging complementary strengths and expertise to enhance the student experience and improve outcomes. Creating a more well-rounded education experience for students through effective synthesis.
- **Grow and Develop:** Unlocking opportunities for growth and development across the curriculum through linking with ARU's academic and non-academic offerings. Empowering staff and students to reach their full potential through greater progression opportunities. Realising the full potential through strategic linkages with ARU for mutual growth and development.

ARU is committed to the long-term sustainability of education and knowledge exchange in ARU's communities. ARU's goal is to equip individuals and businesses with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary for growth and prosperity. ARU has committed significant and ongoing investment which will benefit both FE and HE operations at the ARU Writtle campus.

Writtle College is committed to provision of high-quality, specialised land-based education, where students make good progress on their courses and or apprenticeships gaining technical and employability skills sought by employers. We continue to build partnerships with local, regional, and national employers, of all sizes, to best equip students and our community for personal and career progression and wellbeing.



# Context and Place

The Writtle site has a long history of land-based education. Originally established in 1893, it is one of the UK's oldest specialist institutions, primarily focusing on vocational courses related to Animal Management and Science, Equine, Horticulture, Agriculture, Land-based Service Engineering, Sports, Land and Wildlife, Veterinary Nursing, and Dog Grooming.

The campus is located on the edge of the village of Writtle, in the middle of the Essex countryside. Set among open fields, farmland and landscaped gardens, the campus features a host of specialist teaching facilities including dedicated equine, animal, and canine centres, as well as a working farm. would be better to make statements about the specialist facilities you have available, the linkage with the HE facilities for inspiring progression, the college farm etc. Our facilities bridge the gap between FE and HE. Equine and canine centres, laboratories, and workshops are accessible to all students, fostering collaboration and skill development. The working farm serves as a hub for agricultural education, where students gain hands-on experience in sustainable farming practices. Greenhouses, nurseries, and gardens are shared spaces where students explore plant propagation, landscape design, and environmental sustainability. Writtle's commitment to horticulture extends beyond the classroom, promoting responsible land management and ecological awareness.

Writtle College stands out from traditional sixth forms and further education colleges by offering a unique learning environment. The shared FE and HE facilities enriches our distinctive curriculum and engaging student experience. This dynamic environment fosters collaboration, learning, and progression opportunities. Our resources enhance the student learning experience, equipping them with both theoretical and practical skills. Recognised as a high-achieving market leader with award-winning alumni, we offer a clear path to HE Higher Education through our collaboration with ARU. This makes Writtle College a compelling choice for both students and parents.

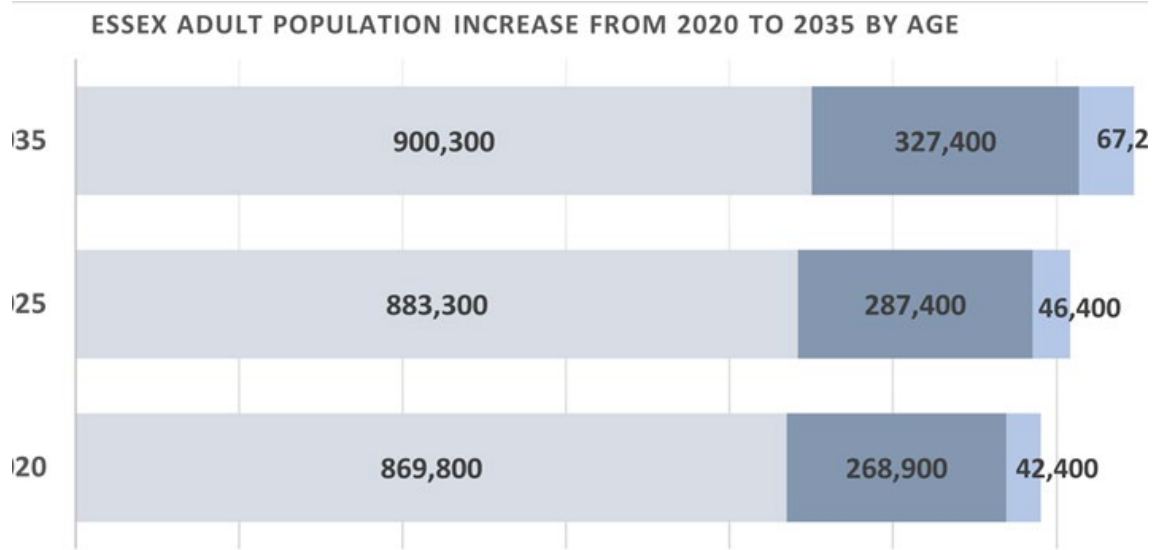
## Regional Context

Essex, one of England's largest counties, is home to a population of 1.5 million. It is diverse, with one of the longest coastlines, approximately 72% of its land is considered rural, and it includes some of the wealthiest and the most deprived parts of the country.

Notably, 61.2% of Essex's population are of working age and 22.8% are under the age of 19. Among this demographic, White British individuals are predominant. However, in areas of higher population density or closer proximity to London, ethnic diversity is more pronounced.

### Population Growth

Essex is growing by around 10,000 people every year. Over the last 10 years, the population of Essex has grown at a faster rate than England (0.64% growth per year). Essex's growth rate is similar to London (0.74% growth per year), though this may be in part due to the impact of the pandemic on where people were living on Census Day. Every district & unitary within Greater Essex has seen their population increase since the 2011 Census. The areas with the highest average annual growth rate are Uttlesford, Harlow, and Thurrock. The areas with the lowest average annual growth rates are Castle Point, Rochford, and Southend. The expected population growth over the next 10 years is shown in the graph below:



## Employment

The Annual population survey from the ONS reveals that Essex consistently maintains a higher employment rate (78%) than the national average (75%). During the pandemic, self-employment decreased by approximately 37,000 people, while the number of employed individuals increased by around 60,000. Overall, employment levels in Essex have seen a 4% rise since 2013. Proximity to London is significant to the labour market, with high levels of commuting into the capital and other areas (10% of Essex residents travel more than 10km to work). Home working is now sizeable, with 32.1% of residents working from home. Proximity to areas such as Cambridge, Hertfordshire and Suffolk are also factors for people commuting in and out of Essex.

## Education & Skills

There is a significant disparity in qualification levels across Essex. For instance, Tendring and Castle Point have a 10% higher proportion of residents without qualifications, which can be attributed to factors like deprivation. Conversely, areas near universities such as Colchester and Chelmsford, as well as those in close proximity to London like Uttlesford, exhibit higher numbers of residents with Level 4 qualifications. The Essex Skills Plan 22/23 confirms skills levels have improved but are still generally below the national average, although there are variations at district level as shown in the table below:

	Basildon	Braintree	Brentwood	Castle Point	Chelmsford	Colchester	Epping Forest	Harlow	Maldon	Rochford	Sudbury-on-Sea	Tendring	Thurrock
o	6%	5%	12%	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%	4%	6%	4%
y	21%	18%	18%	17%	19%	19%	19%	22%	18%	17%	19%	15%	23%
	10%	10%	8%	11%	8%	8%	8%	11%	10%	11%	10%	11%	9%
	13%	14%	13%	14%	12%	12%	12%	12%	13%	14%	13%	13%	12%
	13%	15%	4%	14%	14%	16%	13%	13%	15%	15%	14%	13%	13%
	19%	21%	14%	15%	28%	26%	26%	19%	21%	19%	22%	17%	20%
ns	16%	15%	29%	20%	12%	12%	15%	16%	16%	16%	16%	22%	17%
	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%





## Deprivation

Whilst a relatively affluent county, there are pockets of high deprivation particularly in the South and North. This is shown in the table below, within the listed areas, there are wards that rank among the top 10% of national deprivation. The data highlights three key areas of deprivation: income, employment, and education and skills training. These percentages reflect the proportion of wards within the district.

	Income	Employment	Education, Skills and Training
Basildon	18%	7%	19%
Braintree	0%	0%	5%
Brentwood	0%	0%	0%
Castle Point	5%	2%	14%
Chelmsford	1%	1%	1%
Colchester	1%	1%	6%
Epping Forest	0%	0%	1%
Harlow	0%	0%	0%
Maldon	0%	0%	0%
Rochford	2%	0%	2%
Southend-on-Sea	12%	12%	8%
Tendring	15%	18%	20%
Thurrock	5%	2%	8%
Uttlesford	0%	0%	0%

*Source: Indices of multiple deprivation. MHCLG 2019.*

## Recent Impacts

Over the last 2-3 years Essex has seen an increase in financial poverty due to COVID, the cost-of-living crisis, and inflation. Collaboration between the public and private sector is already strong, with a flourishing SME sector and some world-renowned employers already working to support skills in a variety of ways.



## Stakeholder Engagement

Writtle College places learners at the heart of its mission, driving positive economic and social impact. Engaging stakeholders at every level, the College ensures its approach is informed and enriched by diverse perspectives.

Learner feedback is gathered through regular meetings at course, campus, and strategic levels, shaping educational direction, resource management, and support services. Transparency and active student participation in decision-making are prioritised, enhancing employability and service quality.

The College actively engages potential learners, parents, schools, and local training providers to align its offerings with future needs. Through events, recognition activities, and marketing campaigns, it anticipates demand and adapts its approach. Partnerships with schools and local institutions facilitate student progression, with additional support for learners from diverse backgrounds and a commitment to quality assurance.

We have recently invested in Vector, the only tool in the education sector that offers a comprehensive view of all post-16 further education, including apprenticeships. It integrates local community demographics, skills need, and progression opportunities in our area. In the next 4-5 months this will allow us to leverage national ILR and school data, along with local demographic information and labour market intelligence, to provide us with enhanced insight and evidence to shape our curriculum and recruitment plans. This investment aligns with our commitment to informed decision-making and strategic planning in further education.

Employer engagement is a key priority, ensuring curriculum relevance and enhancing employability. High employer ratings, participation in local strategic skills planning (through the Essex Chambers-led Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and other key economic fora, such as Freeports, Green Skills Initiatives, etc) and collaborations like the Case New Holland Apprenticeship exemplify this commitment. We garner regular employer feedback through our day-to-day work and through advisory panels, enabling us to refine programs and integrate industry insights to ensure currency, relevance and the best opportunities for sustainable employment and progression for our students.

These relationships also help us to secure high quality, meaningful work placements in industry, as well as enhance our CIAG support for learners.

The College's success is deeply connected to its community relationships. It collaborates with local organisations to drive regional regeneration, promote inclusivity, cultural diversity, and equal opportunities. Outreach efforts focus on widening participation and encouraging varied career paths, ensuring the College's positive impact extends throughout the community through a range of activities including work with tier 1 and 2 local authorities, local employers, schools, community groups and local sector representative bodies, such as Essex Agricultural Society, with whom we plan and deliver a schools' "Food and Farming Day".

Writtle College actively engages with other colleges in the local area, as a member of Federation of Essex Colleges (FEDEC) to foster collaboration, share best practices, and enhance educational outcomes, as well as deliver on the outcomes determined by the LSIP. As a member of both Landex (Land-Based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence) and AoC (Association of Colleges), Writtle College contributes to sector-wide networks, promotes professional development, and strengthens its commitment to high-quality education.

## 2023/24 Student Profile – Size and Shape

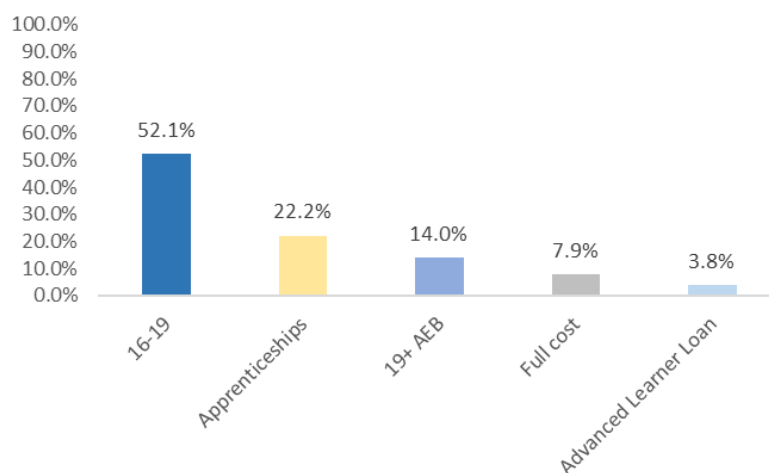
The student profile at Writtle College is predominantly 16-19 learners with nearly half studying animal studies. In the 19+ adult learners there is a more balanced split between floristry, horticulture, and dog grooming. Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships are also offered in Animal Studies, Equine, Horticulture, Veterinary Nursing and Land Based Service Engineering.

The number of students with declared disabilities varies across programmes but overall is a substantial proportion (40%) of the total enrolments. Programmes attract students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, as indicated by enrolment from both deprived and non-deprived areas, affirming a commitment to accessibility.

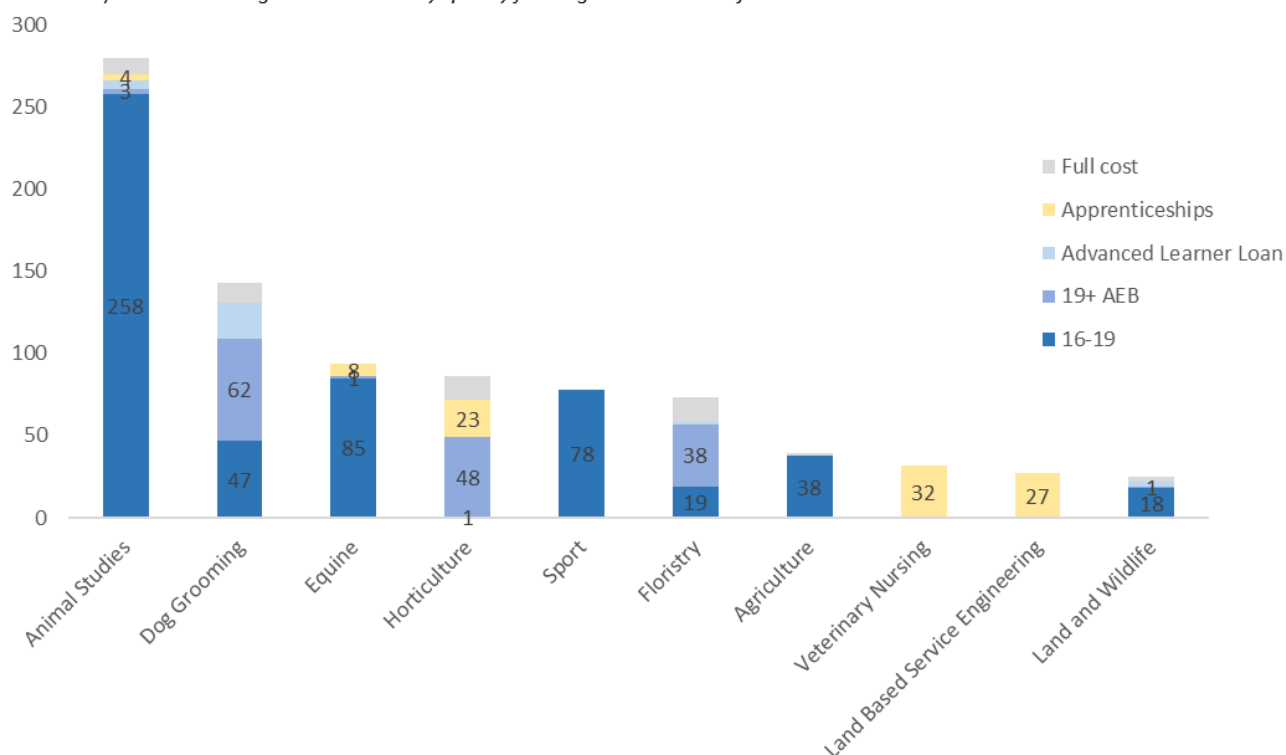
POLAR classification groups UK areas by young people's higher education participation, ranging from low (quintile one) to high (quintile five) participation rates. For Writtle College there is a high proportion of students from lower participation neighbourhoods, this varies across programmes but overall accounts for 38% of enrolments, reflecting widening participation efforts.

The graphs below provide further detail.

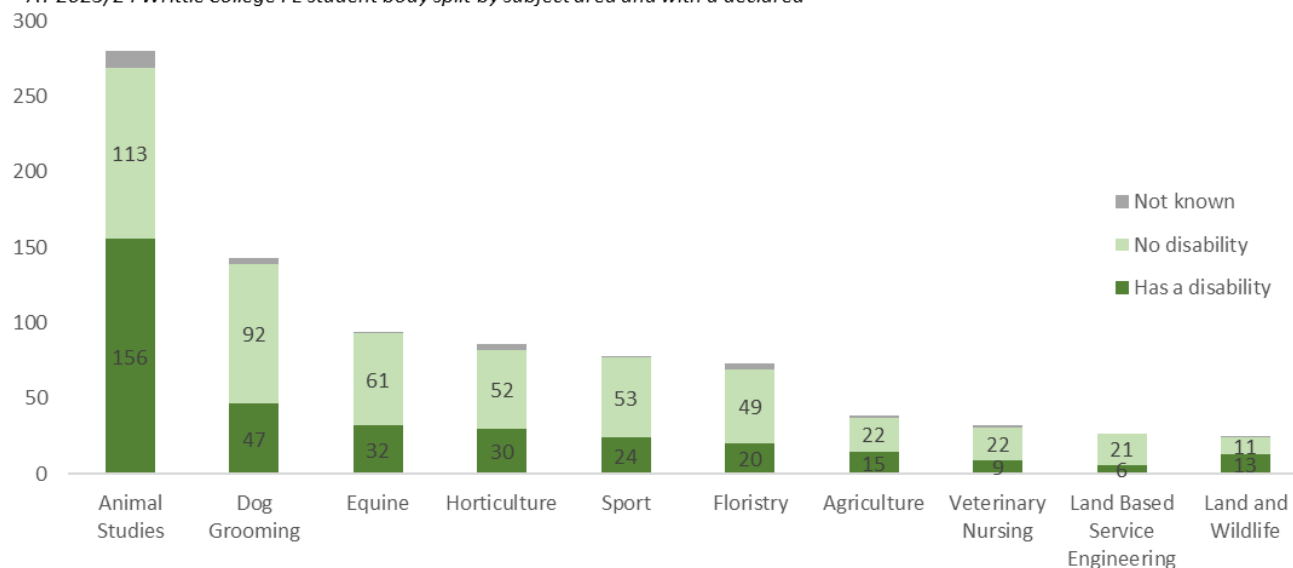
*AY 2023/24 Writtle College FE student body split by funding stream*



AY 2023/24 Writtle College FE student body split by funding stream and subject area

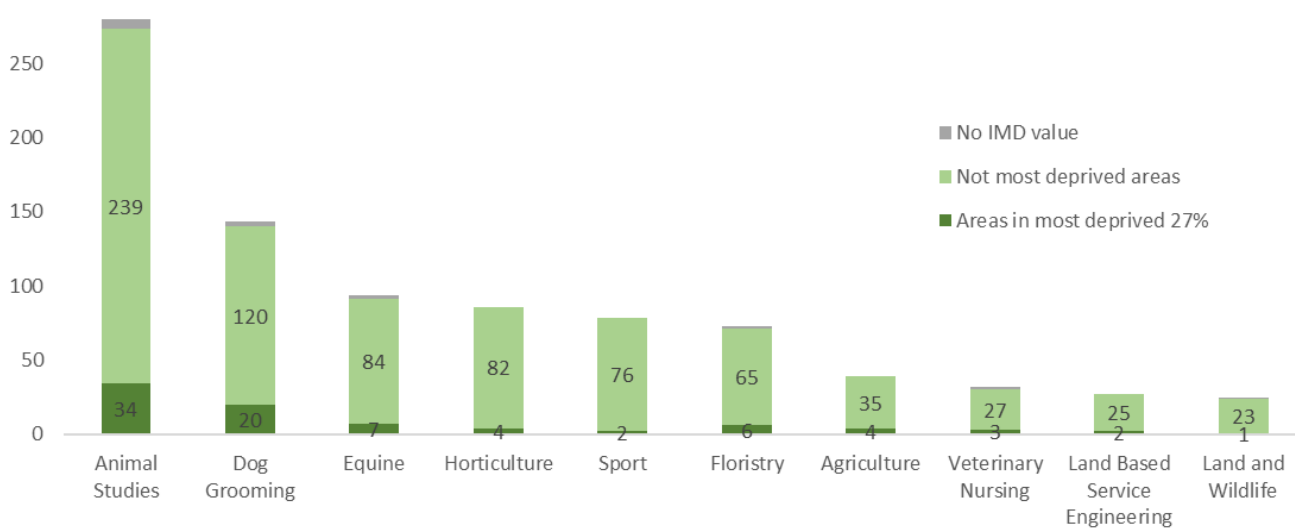


AY 2023/24 Writtle College FE student body split by subject area and with a declared

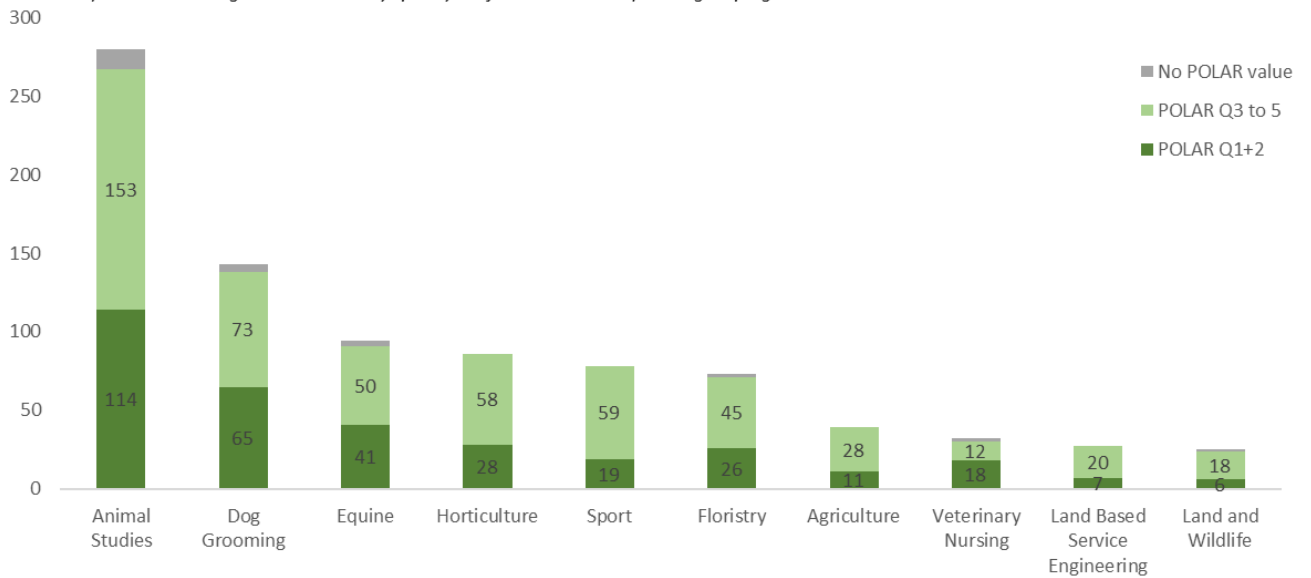




AY 2023/24 Writtle College FE student body split by subject area and home postcode is in bottom 27% of most deprived areas



AY 2023/24 Writtle College FE student body split by subject area POLAR quintile grouping

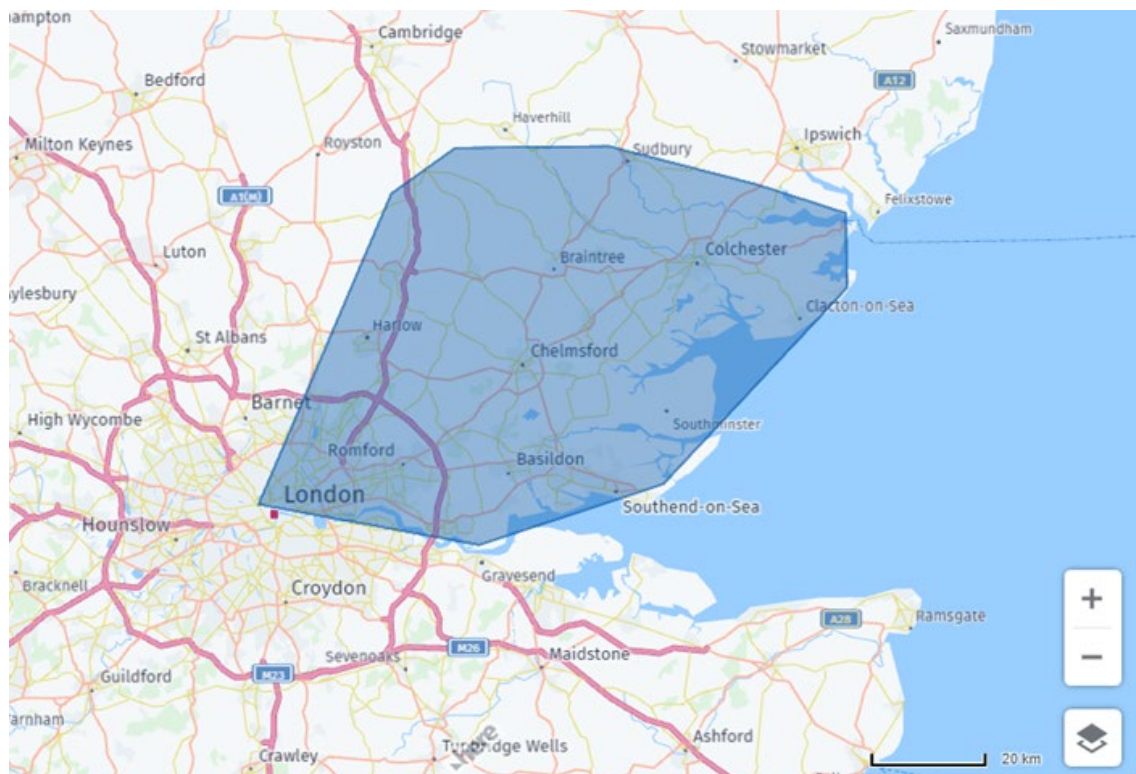


## 2023/24 Student Admission Areas

Students studying at Writtle College come from across the UK but in the main from the southeast as shown in the map below. Those outside of the immediate locality are primarily comprised of those on Land Based Service Engineering Apprenticeship programmes.



With concentration in Essex and immediately adjacent areas.









# Approach to developing the annual accountability statement

This annual Accountability Statement has been developed, considering a number of sources including:

- Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) - Essex, Southend, and Thurrock
- Existing data/insight from the former Writtle University College and its stakeholders, including the Section 28 merger document.
- Essex County Council, Chelmsford City Council, as well as North Essex and South Essex local authority clusters
- South East Local Enterprise Plan data and reports (noting SELEP ceases to exist after March 2024)
- Key employers and employer groups/representative bodies
- Central government and accountable departments, such as DfE, DWP and DEFRA, plus government bodies such as ESFA, who monitor and provide guidance on this document.
- Local, regional, and sectoral stakeholder groups such as Landex and Association of Colleges.

A working group was set up, comprising senior managers from both Writtle College and the wider ARU group to develop the Accountability Agreement for approval by the Writtle College Board of Governors, prior to publication online and submission to the ESFA.

Our predecessor, Writtle University College (along with partner employers and stakeholders), was involved in the development of the Essex, Southend-on-Sea, and Thurrock LSIP, both as part of the Federation of Essex Colleges (FEDEC) input and specifically within the AgriTech and FoodTech sectors via the Writtle Farmers Club. Writtle College's chair of Governors is also the LSIP Executive Director for the Essex Chambers of Commerce, so we are closely aligned with strategic skills planning in our area.



# Contribution to nation, regional, local priorities

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) identifies skills priorities for the region, including green skills, which speaks to the course offering at Writtle College. We are committed to integrating green skills into our adult skills and employability programmes. With a strong emphasis on employer-led initiatives and comprehensive essential skills development, encompassing areas such as mathematics, English, and digital literacy. We plan progression pathways for Writtle College's learners, guiding them from entry-level qualifications to Higher Education and High Technical Qualifications (HE/HTQs). Our focus on green skills not only aligns with its vision for a more sustainable future but also with the University's ambitions to contribute to broader societal well-being and the economic prosperity of its region.

In our Section 28 submission pre-merger, we outlined some headline growth forecasts for our FE provision. These are based on a pragmatic approach, where consolidation and establishing a solid foundation for growth are key. The headline numbers are as follows:

	Applications		Withdrawals		
ESFA Funding Line	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
16-18 (exc. Apprenticeships)	669	612	645	670	705
Of which, T-Levels				25	50
Adult Education Budget (AEB) exc. short courses	228	224	192	200	213
Apprenticeships	127	109	120	135	155
Advanced Learner / Full Cost (Short Courses)	90	100	75	85	90

Whilst systems are integrated and consolidated, we are undertaking a strategic review of provision to see where we can grow the FE offer to align with local, regional, and national needs within our core provision, along with exploring how we can further support wider priorities identified by the LSIP.

The LSIP identifies "soft skills" and Agri-Tech / Food-Tech as priorities – the new FEC is well-placed to further develop this in partnership with local and regional employers, by growing 19+ adult education budget (AEB) provision for adults (including the introduction of SWAPs and exploring Bootcamp provision); consolidating and growing 16-18 opportunities (including pre-Apprenticeship routes); and expansion of the Apprenticeship portfolio. Writtle College will explore a wider AEB offer to support entry into existing ARU provision - e.g., maths and English to support entry into Nursing Degree Apprenticeships.

The Writtle College growth plan links directly with the emerging priorities of the Essex, Southend-on-Sea, and Thurrock LSIP. Information has been analysed from the regions labour market through feedback from employers and stakeholders documented in the LSIP Emerging Priorities Annex A updated June 23. Priorities such as Green Skills, AgriTech, Food Tech and Advance Manufacturing and Engineering link directly into the FE offer and course target growth plan.



Essential emerging LSIP skills and occupations such as welding and fabrication, field service engineering, telehandler operators and mechanical engineering and increasing female engineers are all delivered through the new Level 3 Land Based Service Engineering Technician Apprenticeship. Agriculture, Horticulture and Land and Wildlife courses develop career opportunities in LSIP priorities such as landscaping/groundskeeping, farm/nursery/greenhouse workers, arborists/tree surgeons and pest control technicians. The LSIP priorities for the Animal and Equine sector require Veterinary Nurses and Assistants, Veterinary Technicians and Pet Care Managers.

Overall, the predicted growth in these courses is driven by a combination of factors such as industry trends, societal demand, and strategic enhancements that align with the Essex Skills Plan and Local Skills Improvement Plan's goals as outlined earlier in the application. Writtle's strong reputation in these areas also plays a vital role in attracting students and fostering sustainable growth over the next 5 years.

The farmland is one of Writtle's greatest strengths, which we will sustain, building on the capability at Writtle College, and bringing in expertise from ARU to establish a national reputation for evidence-based sustainable agriculture and become a centre for sustainable future food production (aligning with the LSIP AgriTech and FoodTech priority sector).

A key focus for Writtle College is ensuring facilities and staffing levels are invested in, the smooth introduction of T-levels, a training pipeline based on the LSIP and Essex Skills Plan and improving FE to HE progression. Job vacancies in the Essex economy include animal management and science industries, vet nurses and agriculture and horticulture estate workers - all areas in which Writtle offers well-respected and established courses that will remain under the FE Subsidiary. Agriculture in the region is currently heavily based around arable. The Writtle College will deliver, through its programmes, a supply of agricultural and horticultural workers to meet the skills need. The College will also explore (with industry partners) the feasibility of developing an HTQ offer to complement the existing FE/HE provision.

Agricultural businesses also need to diversify into related enterprises to feed an ever-expanding population and to ensure their future economic viability. And there is an urgent need for Land Based Service Engineering Technicians (LBSET). This is only going to increase in the future due to a combination of an ageing workforce in the industry and the increasing technical complexity of the machinery (robotics, drones, sustainable farming practices and the drive to net zero). The LBSET Apprenticeship at Writtle College has made significant inroads and with future investment has the capacity to grow as demand continues to outstrip supply. There is a growing need for farm-based research and development in response to climate change, and Writtle plays a vital role in meeting the skills shortage by providing tailored education and training programmes to prepare individuals for careers in these critical areas (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agricultural-workforce-in-england-at-1-june/agricultural-workforce-in-england-at-1-june-2023>).

We recognise that in the land-based sector, as well as the wider economy, digital skills play a pivotal role in shaping the future. As farms and green spaces adopt automation, workers need skills to operate and maintain robotic equipment. Understanding precision agriculture, autonomous machinery, and robotic systems is essential. Farms increasingly rely on electronic tools such as GPS-guided tractors, drones, and soil sensors. Integrating data collected from sensors, drones, and electronic devices into decision-making processes ensures efficient resource utilisation, enhanced efficiency, reduced waste, and improves productivity. Understanding the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture and land management is also becoming important for sustainable practices. Writtle College, with support from experts from the wider ARU group will continue to evolve

their curriculum to embrace digitalisation, equipping students with relevant skills and understanding of how to leverage data-driven decision-making, automation, and emerging technologies. By doing so we pave the way for a resilient workforce who embrace new ways of working. It is also anticipated that the College will expand the portfolio to plan and deliver pathways into existing ARU areas of expertise, such as digital, green skills, net zero and sustainability and non-clinical healthcare.

Writtle College will continue to build upon the excellent links with employers to drive up skills that are required to support modern farming techniques and support food security. We recognise the impact of the net-zero transition on SMEs and anticipates extending its apprenticeship offer and training programmes to focus on sustainability. These initiatives will empower the workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills to drive eco-friendly practices within SMEs. By doing so, we aim to bridge the gap between ambitious sustainability targets and practical steps for SMEs, making us pivotal in advancing the net-zero agenda. There are also opportunities for the sport offering to support the health and care sector with population health and wellbeing. Strong employer engagement and partnership working are vital to this work.

The education experience is designed to foster partnerships and engagement with local communities and businesses, promoting social and economic development and creating opportunities for experiential learning and career advancement. Apprenticeship growth and supporting new entrants and career changers through labour market demand-led provision. Creating pathways into sustained employment and careers, with skills training at levels 2 through to 8.

The above activity and growth will be partly informed by engagement with the LSIP and employer advisory panels, which will provide the sector expertise and "sense check" to ensure currency, relevance, and viability. The panel(s) will also act as ambassadors to assist in the sector-based approach to promoting Writtle College as a leader in its field. The college will also engage with our wider stakeholders (as identified in our stakeholder plan) to ensure strategic fit, relevance, support, and funding to initially consolidate, stabilise and grow the new FEC.

The College will also engage with local partners such as Essex Chambers of Commerce (local LSIP lead) and Essex County Council to support the forthcoming careers portal, to provide valuable insight into the industries we serve and how to enter them effectively.

Once the college has established post-merger, we will look at other opportunities across both the ARU sector/occupational portfolios and geographic spread (including devolved authorities such as CPCA), to reduce over-reliance on established funding streams. We will also look to grow AEB and commercial short course provision in our areas of expertise and beyond. This will include technical, vocational, essential skills and leisure/wellbeing provision, as we recognise that we are also a key part of our local communities.

The college hosts monthly business networking events, with over one hundred attendees, all of which are Essex-based SMEs. We intend to grow this engagement to help inform curriculum development and diversification, linked to wider ARU as well as Writtle areas of expertise.

There will also be the opportunity to develop strong, effective pathways into higher level learning, as well as servicing businesses that have traditionally engaged at HE level, by supporting new entrant/essential skills needs.

# Corporation Statement

Writtle College is committed to designing and delivering an innovative Further Education & Apprenticeship programme that leverages our expertise. Our commitment is to provide high quality opportunities to a diverse spectrum of individuals, fostering sustainable career paths and progression. We aim to meet the evolving skill requirements of partner businesses and the broader regional economy, while also serving as a core part of the community and its wellbeing. With a rich 130-year legacy in land-based industries, our vision is to elevate Writtle College to a centre of excellence, particularly focusing on smart and sustainable farming, food security, animal care, and planetary health. By building on our heritage, we strive to be a catalyst for positive change, ensuring our learners are well-equipped for success in these fields, actively contributing to the welfare and growth of our community.

As a part of ARU, Writtle College shares its values with those of the wider university, advancing the shared goals of widening participation, promoting skills development, and supporting economic growth. We are driven by ambition to innovate boldly, foster community, uphold integrity, and take responsibility for positive impact, ensuring all our students reach their full potential.

The [ARU vision and values](#) resonate with the ambition for the College to deliver inclusive, high quality learning that supports our learners to progress in life and work, whilst in a safe and supportive environment. We also aim to support our communities, business, and stakeholder partners to contribute more effectively to the economy and wider society; and support their ongoing health and wellbeing.

## Live link to website where published version is located

[Writtle College - ARU](#)

## Supporting documentation

[LSIP Report | Essex Chambers of Commerce](#)

[Data and Intelligence Centre - The South East Local Enterprise Partnership \(southeastlep.com\)](#)

[Writtle College - ARU](#)

[Vision and values - ARU](#)