

# **South Thames Colleges Group**

## **Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2023**

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# **South Thames Colleges Group**

## **Strategic report**

### **NATURE, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES**

The governing body present their annual report together with the financial statements and auditor's report for South Thames Colleges Group for the year ended 31 July 2023.

#### **Legal status**

The Corporation was established under The Further and Higher Education Act 1992, originally for the purpose of conducting Kingston College, now renamed South Thames Colleges Group. The College is an exempt charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 2011.

On 1 August 2017 Kingston College merged with Carshalton College and South Thames College. South Thames and Carshalton College Corporations dissolved, and all assets and liabilities transferred to Kingston College Corporation on this date. The Kingston College Corporation subsequently changed its legal name to South Thames Colleges Group.

#### **Mission, vision and values**

Governors reviewed the Group's mission during 2021 and agreed a new strategic plan that was published in the Autumn 2021. It builds on the previous plan and sets the Group an ambitious aim to grow in scale through innovation and development of its curriculum. The plan will be due for renewal in 2024.

The headline elements of the plan are summarised here:

#### **Growing great futures**

##### Mission

To achieve the ambitions of more students and partners than ever before.

##### Vision

South Thames Colleges Group aspires to be an exceptional Further and Higher Education provider, leading our sector in London and beyond.

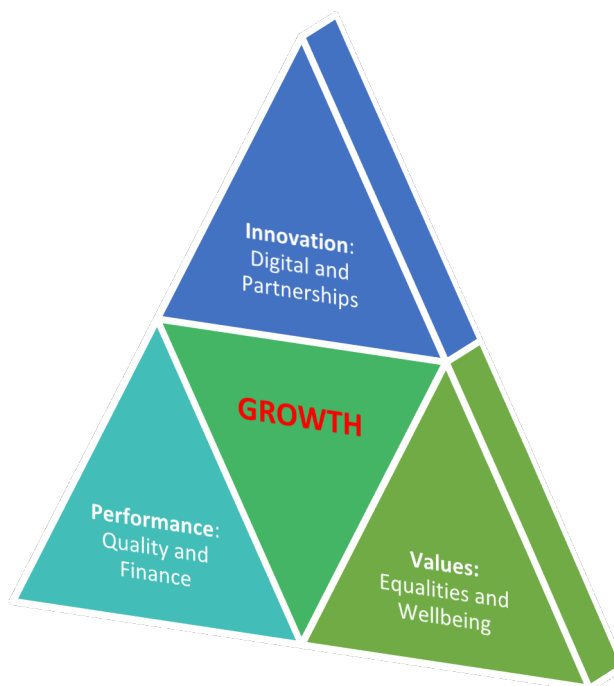
This will mean:

- Excelling in our curriculum, securing great outcomes for our students
- Growing our provision, attracting new students and developing new pathways to success
- Transforming our teaching, learning and services through digital innovation
- Establishing and sustaining effective partnerships with employers and schools across the region
- Upholding the fundamental values of our community, especially equalities and wellbeing
- Managing resources well so that we are financially robust to invest in our buildings and staff

### Our strategic plan

This strategic plan sets the Group on an ambitious path as it helps to lead its communities through the recovery following the pandemic and building on the substantial success enjoyed by the Group since merger. It sets out to combine its existing strengths in both curriculum quality and financial management with a bold plan to grow and innovate while remaining true to its fundamental beliefs.

The core of our strategy will be:



### Our strategic approach

This strategic plan restates the core purpose of the Group and directs all of our organisational capital towards growth and development, doing so in service of our communities and making sure that our regional roots stay strong throughout the process of transformation.

We aim to grow this organisation in order to ensure that more individuals and partners benefit because of our involvement.

Many of the innovations set out here are designed to deliver our mission more widely and in new ways. This includes our ambition for comprehensive digital transformation of our curriculum and services and the bold expansion of our partnership activity, seeking more integration with more employers and schools. In setting out actively to broaden and grow this Group of Colleges, we will remain true to our fundamental values.

These values span many influences and expectations from within and beyond the Group and are captured here, updated to reflect our new priorities. At South Thames Colleges Group, we

- **Aspire** to excellent outcomes for everyone, ensuring our students succeed and progress to great futures, improving our work continuously through reflection and mutual support
- **Innovate** to develop and expand the Group, with an active focus on new ways of working, digital transformation and meaningful partnerships
- **Care** about the wellbeing of our staff and students, building resilience in a challenging world, safeguarding the vulnerable and promoting happiness

- **Make equality happen**, equalising outcomes, raising diverse talent through our work and including everyone from all our communities

To secure these values in practice, we have committed to a curriculum which will:

- Secure equal **access** for students from all backgrounds
- Ensure structured and ambitious **learning** towards successful attainment of meaningful qualifications
- Develop **capable** people, able to adapt, progress and continue to learn into the future
- Sustain a line of sight on **employment** and its requisite skills across a broad range of vocations

And we wholeheartedly embrace British Values, committing the Group to:

- Democracy
- The rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs

## Stakeholders

The Group has many stakeholders including:

- its current, future and past students;
- its staff and their trade unions;
- the employers it works with;
- the professional organisations in the sectors where it works;
- its partner schools, especially the schools of which it is a sponsor, The Kingston Academy and Fernhill primary School in North Kingston
- its partner universities, especially Kingston University
- the wider college community through various associations and memberships, such as the AoC
- Employer and business groups, such as Kingston First, local Chambers of Commerce and the South London Partnership
- the four local borough councils in Kingston, Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth
- other local councils who fund and support High Needs Students to attend the Group
- the Greater London Authority, now a significant funding body with the devolution of responsibility for most of our AEB activity to the GLA
- Government offices, such as the DfE and ESFA, with which the Group works closely
- regulatory bodies, such as Ofsted
- 

## Resources

The Group has various resources that it can deploy in pursuit of its strategic objectives.

During 2022/23, the Group employed an average of 918 permanent members of staff, of whom 555 were teaching staff.

The total number of students enrolled by the Group during 2022/23 was approximately 16,731. The college's student population includes 4,626 16-to-18-year-old students, 586 apprentices, 573 higher education students, 8,063 adult learners in directly-funded provision

and 2,252 adult learners in the two adult education contracts delivered by the Group for Wandsworth and Merton Councils.

As at 31 July 2023, the Group had £74.4 million of net assets, long-term debt of £4.8 million and a pension asset which has been capped at £nil in the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of FRS102. Tangible resources include six main campuses across South London.

## **Public Benefit**

South Thames Colleges Group is an exempt charity under the Part 3 of the Charities Act 2011 and is regulated by the Secretary of State for Education as Principal Regulator for all FE Corporations in England. The members of the Governing Body, who are trustees of the charity, are disclosed on page 25 and 26. In setting and reviewing the Group's strategic objectives, the Governing Body has had due regard for the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and particularly upon its supplementary guidance on the advancement of education.

The Group's strategic approach is to base its work around the values and ethos of public service and to provide a community-based Further Education offer firmly rooted in south-west London.

In delivering its mission, the College provides the following identifiable public benefits through the advancement of education:

- High-quality teaching and excellent student outcomes
- Widening participation, tackling social exclusion and supporting social mobility
- High participation rates for students with High Needs
- High rates of progression for students into further learning or employment
- Strong student support systems, with particular emphasis on mental health at this time
- Links with employers, industry and commerce
- Well-developed partnerships with local authorities, universities and other local and national agencies

The legacy organisations brought together on merger have long records of committed public service and had undertaken structural reforms before the Local Area Reviews, with South Thames College and Merton College merging and Kingston and Carshalton Colleges entering into their novel alternative to merger, an FE Federation. The Group's long-established historic approach to the delivery of public benefit is further exemplified in its newest strategic plan, although this also extends the work of the Group to diversify its curriculum and expand its student numbers through partnership and innovation.

The culture and focus of the Group's leadership remain strongly guided by a meaningful commitment to public service and the Group has demonstrated that its values are firmly aligned to the public bodies it partners, locally, regionally and nationally. These values are restated in the new strategic plan and the Group is currently delivering full, detailed programmes to strengthen its impact on equalities, wellbeing and climate change. It has formed Advisory Groups to help the leadership team to expand its perspective on these issues and understand expectations across and beyond the Group.

During the periods of the lockdown and following the disruption of the pandemic, the Group has exemplified this approach through a number of positive measures:

- Sustained provision for vulnerable students from March to July 2020 and then January to March 2021 during the full national lockdowns
- Work with DWP to train job coaches to support unemployed people back into work
- Local leadership of recovery efforts to support businesses in the Royal Borough of Kingston, including a Borough jobs and careers fair delivered by the Group on-line in 2021
- Work with local schools to ensure young people leaving year eleven were able to access the FE curriculum and begin planning their next steps, using a mix of virtual and in-person activities to deliver this
- Establishment of a schools liaison team within a strengthened Marketing and Recruitment Department, intended to enhance the offer to schools and school-leavers in the region and improve the Group's likelihood of securing growth
- Delivery of a sub-regional ESF project to reduce the incidence of young people becoming NEET
- Developing delivery solutions and innovations that enabled it to retain its many learners and continue to support the participation and success of its students in spite of the disruptions consequent on the pandemic, including effective use of the small-group tuition fund for 16-19 year-olds
- Renewed efforts to diversify and expand the Group's curriculum offer to meet better the evolving demands of a sophisticated market for 16-18 education and training, including the launch of new combined A Level and BTEC courses in Autumn 2022 and the roll-out of T Levels in 2023

Separately from the impact of the pandemic and the measures the Group is taking to tackle its legacy, the Group has worked on a number of projects to develop further the impact of its benefit to the community, continuing through the merger to influence the operations of the Group and drawing on the work of all the colleges becoming part of the merged Group:

- Increased focus on learner destinations and detailed metrics developed to report on students' progression and participation post-college
- Strong emphasis on our enrichment curriculum to diversify students' experience and provide opportunities for volunteering, project activity and community engagement
- Particular emphasis on the expansion and development of work experience opportunities, especially for younger students and has benefited from additional Government investment through its Capacity Development Fund in this area, which expenditure the Group opted to sustain after it ceased in 2022
- An active focus on the protection of students from safeguarding and radicalisation risks
- A whole-organisation approach to welfare, wellbeing and mental health issues, including active participation in the NHS Mental Health Trailblazer
- Contribution to significant public projects, such as the establishment of the new Free School in North Kingston, The Kingston Academy, now having extended this activity further to establish a Multi-Academy Trust and support the work of a local primary school in partnership with Kingston University and the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames
- Participation in skills competitions, such as World Skills
- Project activity, such as the pilot of the T Level industrial placement scheme and significant European Social Fund projects, such as the Careers Cluster initiative, both led by South Thames College from before the merger

- The merger itself has generated public benefit by creating a consolidated institution, better able to reduce cost and invest in its key priorities and making for a more resilient organisation in the context of straitened public finances
- Significant investment in its buildings and resources through its evolving Estates Strategy, which has created space for a new primary school in Wandsworth, a base for a Job Centre Plus in Tooting and investment in the dilapidated building at Kingston Hall Road, completed during the year 2022-23

The Group is also actively engaged with the new policy agenda established by the Government in 2022, requiring the Group to develop further its focus on skills, employment and the regional economy. The Group has embraced this with enthusiasm and is strongly committed to extensive partnership with employers, having previously created a well-distributed employer partnership network throughout its schools as well as establishing Employability teams in every College in 2018. The Group is working to assess the impact of these efforts through internal reviews carried out during 2022-23 and is seeking to add further strategic resources to its ability to respond to local and regional skills needs by:

- Establishing an Employer Advisory Group
- Establishing sectoral and local employer panels
- Appointing a lead Governor for Skills and a senior leader with a designated responsibility for this development theme
- Enhancing its partnerships with key bodies, such as Chambers of Commerce, the South London Partnership and Business LDN (the organisation designated by Government as the regional Employer Representative Body)

The Group has benefited significantly from additional Government investment through the national Strategic Development Fund with the Group's allocation being dedicated to the rapid expansion of sub-regional capacity to deliver skills training for those working in industries now using more low-carbon technologies, such as electric vehicles and renewable energy sources. During 2022-23, the Group led this sub-regional partnership, with Croydon and Richmond Colleges as key partners, further adding social value through its leadership and organisation of public resources. The year also saw the publication of the Local Skills Improvement Plan for London and the Group is working to enhance its response to this by leading the South London response and supporting its partners to deliver relevant skills training.

The Group published its Accountability Statement as required by the DfE, setting out its commitment not just to use hypothecated funding for the development of its response to London's skills priorities, but orienting both its curriculum development and estates strategy to the needs of its communities and businesses.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE**

### **Financial Review**

The Group incurred a deficit of £3.7 million for the year ended 31 July 2023 (2022: deficit of £5.8 million) and EBITDA of £2.5 million (2022: £4.9 million). Based on the ESFA's financial health measures, the Group is in 'Good' financial health at the end of 2022/23 with a financial health score of 220. The performance indicators that inform the Group's financial health assessment can be found on page 21 of this report.

During 2022/23, the Group faced the significant challenge of containing the impact of a 270% increase in energy costs. The financial targets set within the budget for 2022/23 recognised the extraordinary nature of the increase in energy prices and the EBITDA target for the year was set at a realistically low level. Through a combination of Government

intervention in energy costs, fixing prices a year in advance and reduced consumption, the Group was able to reduce the impact of the price rises. The actual EBITDA for the year was a 67% improvement on the budget for the year.

During 2022/23, the number of 16-19 students enrolled by the Group colleges exceeded the funded target for the year and the Group also exceeded its devolved AEB funding allocation by more than 3%. The cash balance at the end of 2022/23 was healthy and at £7.5 million, net cash flow from operating activities was strong. At the balance sheet date, the Group held current assets of £22.7 million and net assets of £74.4 million. The defined benefit pension scheme valuation was a surplus position, which has been capped at £nil in the financial statements in accordance with FRS102. The financial covenants contained within its loan agreements were met with a comfortable margin in 2022/23.

The budget for 2023/24 that was approved by the Governing Body in July 2023 as well as the College Financial Forecast Return (CFFR) submitted to the Funding Body at the end of July 2023 indicate that the Group will remain in 'Good' financial health over the next two financial years. The EBITDA target for 2023/24 has been set at a low level in recognition of the requirement to provide higher pay awards and continue to meet high energy prices. The Group has sought to reduce its total indebtedness and has achieved a 70% reduction on its total borrowings since the merged Group was formed in August 2017. By making Significant voluntary repayments between December 2020 and July 2022, the Group has improved its borrowings ratio and is also less constrained by loan covenants in its operational decisions and financial target setting.

The Group's Estates Strategy seeks to improve the quality of accommodation and facilities as well as align it to current requirement. The Strategy is intended to provide learners with high quality learning facilities at the same time as improving efficiency and reducing operating costs. Parts of the estate were disposed of in 2019 and the proceeds were utilised in part to fund the reduction in long term debt. The disposals also enabled the Group to make significant investment in the Kingston Hall Road campus between 2020 and 2023. Further investment is planned for 2023/24.

## **Reserves**

As at 31 July 2023, the Group had accumulated reserves of £74.4 million (Income and expenditure reserve of £68.2 million and revaluation reserves of £6.2 million) and cash balance of £20.5 million. The defined benefit pension has been capped at £nil as noted above following the last valuation of the LGPS (2021/22: liability of £2.8 million). It should be noted that when a pension liability is included in the balance sheet, this does not represent a liability which is payable because the contributions payable to the LGPS are based on the results of the triennial revaluation of the scheme. Further details of the LGPS can be found in the notes to the financial statements.

The Group seeks to continue to accumulate reserves and cash balances in order to retain a safety net as well as to fund future capital development.

## **Sources of income**

The Group has significant reliance on the education sector funding bodies for its principal funding source, largely from recurrent grants. In 2022/23, the FE and HE funding bodies provided 78% of the Group's total income (76% in 2021/22).



## Group companies

The Group has two subsidiary companies, Kingston and Sutton Educational Partnership Limited (KSEP) and KCTC Limited. The principal activity of KCTC Limited is the rental of sports facilities and equipment. KSEP Limited is a dormant company that has not traded since merger on 1 August 2017.

Any surpluses generated by the subsidiary companies are normally gift aided to the parent Group. KCTC Limited generated a surplus of £63,000 for the year ended 31 July 2023. The adjusted surplus of £101,000 will be donated to the parent.

## Developments

The Group developed its Estates Strategy for all campuses during 2017/18. The Strategy was further refined during 2018/19 and parts of the estate were put up for sale. In addition to the disposals already completed, further disposals are planned for completion in 2023/24 and beyond. The disposals offer the Group the opportunity to generate additional reserves for reinvestment in our poorer quality facilities, such as the building at Kingston Hall Road. A new Estates Strategy is currently under development, reviewing the accommodation needs of the Group as it refreshes and expands its curriculum.

It is clear that the Group still enjoys capacity beyond that warranted by its curriculum delivery and there are persistent risks of internal competition and lags in critical developments as sectors grow and contract. The Group's pace and focus in responding to economic trends and employment demands need further refinement and the Estates Strategy will be governed by a refreshed Curriculum Strategy, both for publication during 2023/24.

The main capital project completed during the financial year was the completion of the first phase of development of Kingston Hall Road, including a new front entrance and Learning Resource centre as well as the ongoing replacement of the original windows in the tower block. Investment was also made during the year in refurbishment works and IT and other equipment purchases. The Group, as it embarks on the next phase of its major investment programme, will continue to seek to build reserves through the generation of operating cash flows as well as the disposal of surplus accommodation, although 2022/23 saw reductions in cash generation as the Group met rising costs from staff salaries and utility prices.

Further investment is planned in 2023/24 and beyond for the next phase of the replacement and refurbishment programme at Kingston Hall Road and this will in part be funded through strategic use of capital funding from DfE through the Local Skills Improvement Fund and other investment programmes designed to support the sector's development.

## Academic performance

At merger, the separate constituent Colleges that came together to form the Group had a range of inspection grades:

Kingston College	South Thames College	Carshalton College
Good (2016)	Requires Improvement (2016)	Requires Improvement (2016)

At merger, the Group self-assessed the quality of its provision as Requires Improvement. This was because:

- results across the different Colleges in the Group were too disparate
- English and Maths achievement and high grades were too low
- the quality of teaching and learning was too variable

- work experience was insufficiently developed
- standards of provision at Carshalton College were generally very poor

In addition, the original silver rating for Kingston College in the Teaching Excellence Framework reduced to bronze as the other Colleges' HE provision and its data were drawn together in the Group.

In 2018/19, significant focus was sustained in raising the standards of teaching and the proportions of students achieving their outcomes. Considerable attention was given to assessment practice across the Group, with greater focus on students successfully completing their assignments to deadline and then being stretched to aspire to higher grades. This has led to some increases in the value-added scores at Kingston College, Carshalton and Merton College using the ALPS measurement system. In Carshalton, Merton and South Thames Colleges, student achievement rose substantially, in some cases surpassing the historically high achievement levels seen previously at Kingston College.

On the basis of these improvements, as well as strong progression rates, and a strengthened approach to work placements and subcontracted provision, the Group was inspected successfully in February 2020, its grade profile being:

Further education and skills inspection report



## Inspection of South Thames Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 4–7 February 2020

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Good</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Provision for students with high needs	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected

After this, the impact of the pandemic was to disrupt teaching and learning significantly and exacerbate educational disadvantage nationally. While the Group sought to mitigate these effects as fully as possible, participating diligently in both the Centre-Assessed (2020) and Teacher-Assessed (2021) Grade processes, some impact remained and student attainment proved uneven. This was especially true in areas where no adaptations were made to

assessment practice and, for example, Functional Skills and Apprenticeship outcomes fell back in the results recorded by the Group in 2021, alongside similar national trends in the same provision. 2021/22 saw some improvements in Apprenticeship and Adult provision, although less progress in Functional Skills and some decline in Study Programmes for young people.

2022/23 saw significant progress in a number of key outcome measures for the Group, although retention proved challenging in some of the Group's colleges as student engagement showed an unusually high level of variability and incidents among the learner population disrupted progress for some. The key data for the Group is captured here:

Group FE 2022/23 Achievement Rates - All Qualifications									
College	Age Grp	Leavers Overall 21/22	Leavers Overall 22/23	%	Retained Overall 22/23	Ach Overall % 21/22	Ach Overall % 22/23	Nat Ach Overall % 21/22	Diff to National Ach %
Carshalton College	16-18	1,182	1,123	13.4	84.8	77.0	76.2	81.1	-4.9
Merton College	16-18	1,382	1,316	15.7	90.8	79.4	83.0	81.1	1.9
CC/MC Combined	16-18	2,564	2,439	29.1	88.0	78.3	79.9	81.1	-1.2
Kingston College	16-18	3,947	4,336	51.7	91.9	80.3	85.2	81.1	4.1
South Thames College	16-18	1,564	1,619	19.3	92.6	76.8	81.8	81.1	0.7
<b>Group</b>	<b>16-18</b>	<b>8,075</b>	<b>8,394</b>		<b>90.9</b>	<b>79.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>1.9</b>
Carshalton College	19+	396	431	2.5	91.4	77.8	81.9	86.7	-4.8
Merton College	19+	1,249	1,498	8.8	91.9	86.0	85.4	86.7	-1.3
CC/MC Combined	19+	1,645	1,929	11.3	91.8	84.0	84.6	86.7	-2.1
Kingston College	19+	2,948	3,164	18.6	96.4	89.6	91.4	86.7	4.7
South Thames College	19+	10,858	11,927	70.1	92.1	84.3	87.7	86.7	1.0
<b>Group</b>	<b>19+</b>	<b>15,451</b>	<b>17,020</b>		<b>92.8</b>	<b>85.3</b>	<b>88.1</b>	<b>86.7</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Carshalton College	All	1,578	1,554	6.1	86.6	77.2	77.8	83.8	-6.0
Merton College	All	2,631	2,814	11.1	91.4	82.5	84.3	83.8	0.5
CC/MC Combined	All	4,209	4,368	17.2	89.7	80.5	82.0	83.8	-1.8
Kingston College	All	6,895	7,500	29.5	93.8	84.2	87.8	83.8	4.0
South Thames College	All	12,422	13,546	53.3	92.2	83.4	87.0	83.8	3.2
<b>Group</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>23,526</b>	<b>25,414</b>		<b>92.2</b>	<b>83.1</b>	<b>86.4</b>	<b>83.8</b>	<b>2.6</b>

The review below summarises the Group's emerging position and identifies areas for future improvement activity.

### Overall Education & Training:

The Group performed well through the time of the pandemic, with high levels of retention and sustained achievement for 16-18 year-olds and most adults, although some provision showed a decline, especially in practical and craft subjects. While 2021/22 showed some signs of decline, 2022/23 saw significant improvements in spite of a number of challenges:

- Variable and weak student attendance
- Poor retention rates in some areas
- More students enrolled for GCSE retakes rather than Functional Skills

### Adult Programmes

This provision was much less subject to adaptations to its associated assessment practices during the pandemic, although some programmes such as GCSEs were subject to different

approaches. In 2020/21, recruitment, retention and achievement all fell for the Group's adult provision, more so in some Colleges, but the general picture was one of decline through this period.

In 2021/22, still with low levels of student recruitment in evidence, the Group did make progress, drawing on the efforts of both its in-house delivery teams and those of its sub-contracted partners, to a higher level of student achievement, improving the headline rate by about four percentage points. This level of improvement was sustained in 2022/23 and adults' outcomes reached a very high level at 88.1%.

Student recruitment also showed signs of improvement during 2021/22 year and enrolments during Spring 2022 rose as confidence grew after the pandemic. This trend has continued into Autumn 2023 and areas such as ESOL and Workforce Development have reported much higher numbers than have been seen for some time, which may further strengthen the Group's ability to reduce its dependence on subcontracted delivery and this process of rebalancing is now underway.

## **Apprenticeships**

The Group's Apprenticeship provision had improved following merger, but a combination of weak internal systems and the effects of the pandemic on employment in a number of sectors in which the Group operates saw a marked decline in Apprenticeship achievement rates. The published national average showed a significant decline, but not as great as that experienced by the Group. In 2021/22, national achievement rates fell to 57.7%, while the Group's rate declined further, to 49%, with a very differentiated level of performance across the Colleges.

The Group resolved to address these deficiencies and established new roles and quality processes to attempt to improve its performance in this regard. Apprenticeship achievement rates have improved to around the level of the previous national average and compliance and administrative issues have been largely eliminated with positive internal and external audit reports received during 2021/22 and 2022/23. Further progress is required here, but the position has improved to a more acceptable level and the variations in performance between the different colleges will need concerted effort to correct them positively.

Apprenticeship recruitment has remained flat or declined over recent years, while competitors have reported increases. The Group's ability to deliver successful Apprenticeship provision remains patchy and its use of these programmes to respond successfully to employer needs is limited.

## **High Needs Students**

The Group's provision for High Needs Students had not made sufficient progress to improve consistently to a good standard in all areas by the time of inspection in 2020. It is also a fast-growing element of the Group's provision, with numbers rising from around 200 at the time of merger to around 750 in 2022; this number was sustained in 2022/23, indicating a flattening trend in this recruitment.

It was evident at inspection that more work was needed here to secure whole-Group improvements. Concerted efforts to enhance this thriving area of the Group's provision have been undertaken during and after the pandemic, with a focus on raising expectations for High Needs Students and ensuring they attain and progress at rates comparable to students from across the Group.

New structures were adopted in 2021 and, although they have taken some time to fill to capacity, they are having an effective impact, with strong college-based leadership and good

levels of partnership with mainstream curriculum teams. This provision has improved significantly and, with the exception of Functional Skills outcomes and high grades at GCSE, this cohort of students is generally performing at a level comparable with its peers and has now done so for two years running. A developmental priority will be the expansion of work-oriented curriculum provision to ensure students with these needs have an equal opportunity to engage in work experience and, ultimately, employment.

Students with High Needs are now attaining at rates comparable to the peers. On vocational programmes, effective support and the use of adapted assessment practices have ensured that this group of students achieve better than their peers. This is not yet true for English and Maths, where GCSE and Functional Skills present significant challenges and ongoing work to improve these programmes for Students with High Needs remain an improvement priority.

## **Study Programmes**

The Group has a strong track record in the delivery of Study Programmes for young people and this has been a very substantial part of its provision for many years, with about half of the Group's annual grant income derived from this cohort.

The quality of provision has largely been sustained since it became an improvement focus post-merger, given the inconsistencies in standards and the limited extent of Work Experience and Employability opportunities. These areas were rapidly addressed in 2019 and practice improved significantly with interventions in teaching and learning, English and Maths and the establishment of the Employability teams across the Group. Standards rose to match the best in the Group and this was reflected in the inspection outcomes in 2020.

Since then, the pandemic has disrupted progress and temporarily removed any meaningful set of national benchmarks. Student outcomes were largely sustained through the pandemic, although the picture was not wholly consistent across provision types and the different Colleges. Nonetheless, progression rates remained strong and almost all students in this cohort progressed to a positive destination.

Data for 2021/22 appears to show a decline in some outcomes, for example Functional Skills and Level 3 BTEC Diplomas with new, examined elements within the syllabus. Teachers also commented on the study skills and resilience of this student body during the past few years and indicated that a number of critical aspects of student engagement fluctuated seriously in parts of the Group, impacting attendance, retention and behaviour in particular. However, concerted efforts through 2022/23 enabled the Group to deliver general improvements in the attainment levels of young people, which rose by around 4 percentage points and exceed national averages.

Of particular note is the progress made by the Group in the delivery of English and Maths since merger. This is a requirement on all colleges and a condition of funding for their 16-18 Study Programmes, meaning that all young people attending an FE College must retake their English and Maths if they don't already have a grade C or grade 4 in the new grading methodology introduced in 2016. Most colleges struggle to do this well and the national average for the proportion of young people retaking their English and Maths and achieving a grade 4 or above is between 20% and 30%; the four Colleges drawn together in the merger are no exception, but continued improvement, building on the progress in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and based on the Group's approach to the Teacher-Assessed Grades system adopted across England during the pandemic, saw sustained progress in this area.

This was enhanced further in 2021/22, where early data appears to show that national averages for high grades in English and Maths GCSEs fell by about 12-15 percentage points nationally. The Group's own data shows a very similar position between 2020/21 and 2021/22, with a very limited reduction in its high grades profile, demonstrating the integrity of its local assessment decisions and strong teaching and learning in these key subjects, although the performance has been less positive for students taking Functional Skills. More High Needs Students took GCSEs in 2022/23, raising the Group's pass rates, but reducing the proportion of retakes achieving a high grade.

## **Curriculum intent**

During 2018/19, the Group commissioned and completed a thorough and comprehensive review of its curriculum offer, providing signposts towards a reinvigorated digital skills strategy, better employer engagement and stronger internal progression for students among several other recommendations. These have been adopted and a curriculum strategy for the Group was agreed during the Autumn of 2019; it states that, at South Thames Colleges Group, the curriculum will:

- Secure equal **access** for students from all backgrounds
- Ensure structured and ambitious **learning** towards successful attainment of meaningful qualifications
- Develop **capable** people, able to adapt, progress and continue to learn into the future
- Sustain a line of sight on **employment** and its requisite skills across a broad range of vocations

These statements were reviewed during 2021/22 and their validity has been sustained through and after the pandemic, especially with the new Skills policy as a key influence for curriculum expectations. A new action plan to enhance the curriculum's relevance to the employment market and develop its reflection of the realities of the workplace was agreed for implementation during 2022/23 and this will influence curriculum planning among other operations within the Group. A new Curriculum Strategy will be developed during 2023/24, building on the previous work in place.

The Group also reviewed its historical subcontracting activities and in 2019/20 it reprocured all of this provision in line with the Group's new curriculum strategy, focusing better on priority provision in key regions. This has proved successful and the consistency and strength of its subcontracted work have improved significantly. Further procurement exercises were run effectively in Autumn 2020 and Summer 2022, again with a strong emphasis on the quality and relevance of the provision as well as the safety and wellbeing of learners. This area of the Group's adult provision is now stable, but likely to reduce as the Group's own direct delivery continues to expand.

## **FUTURE PROSPECTS**

### **Ongoing improvements**

Significant efforts are now being exerted to continue these positive trends and remedy the emerging shortcomings, by identifying and tackling those areas still under-performing and in need of further improvement. The Group adopted a matrix development and improvement structure over the Summer of 2018 to draw staff together from across the Group to share practice and ensure greater consistency for students. In Autumn 2018, the Group was successful in securing a Strategic College Improvement Fund allocation to help it invest in critical improvements in partnership with Chichester College, an outstanding college.

This additional funding allowed the Group to build best practice, draw on support from a strong partner College and provide additional development opportunities to teachers and junior and middle leaders. This focus on CPD opportunities and the development of strong, distributed leadership capabilities has continued beyond the life of the Strategic College Improvement Fund and is one vehicle for the Group's ongoing improvement over coming years.

Two further bids for improvement funding were successful in 2020/21 and the Group led two major national projects to support development and improvement in the sector, with over £500,000 of designated funding managed with partner Colleges.

The Group will use its improvement focus in 2023/24 to:

- Identify specific areas for intervention with a priority attached to Apprenticeships and Construction provision
- Review areas previously under intervention, such as programmes for High Needs Students
- Review and improve the Group's delivery of Employability, both across the curriculum and strategically
- Enhance teaching and learning, with a strong developmental focus on the use of digital technologies in the classroom

### **Further developments**

The Group has invested in its facilities over a number of years, and engaged proactively with the Area Review Process that led to the merger of Kingston, South Thames and Carshalton Colleges on 1 August 2017. The merger was intended to secure a strategic solution to the sectoral challenges faced by all three Colleges and eliminate some over-supply in the local FE marketplace. In particular, the duplication in the curriculum provision spanning both Merton and Carshalton Colleges, so very near each other, was eliminated during the Summer of 2018. The merged Group is continuously seeking to improve efficiency and resource utilisation across all its campuses and performance to date demonstrates decisively that the Group has made significant progress in achieving this, its quality of provision at inspection rated 'good' in 2020 and its financial health has remained 'outstanding' or 'good' since 2019/20.

The Group will seek to draft and agree a new Estates Strategy during 2023/24, having successfully delivered the previous plan to rebalance its facilities, divesting its over-capacity and investing in enhancements for students, staff and stakeholders.

The Group will also implement new curriculum development plans during 2023/24, with the purpose of further enhancing its relevance to the regional economy and to ensure that it is able to grow. After a gradual start in 2021/22 and 2022/23, this approach appears to be yielding some positive impact based on early indications from the Autumn 2023 enrolment patterns emerging and the Group will refine and sustain this strategy over the coming year. Numbers of young people and adults joining the Group to study appear to have risen by about 15 percentage points against 2022/23.

The Group is also committed to sustaining the quality and capacity of its workforce and is embarked on a set of reforms to its pay and grading systems, addressing legacies from a number of previous and now defunct institutions and their employment practices. The Group

was operating around seventy-five different contracts and pay scales and tackled these during 2022/23, with some final elements of these reforms planned for implementation in 2023/24.

The Group has also had to acknowledge significant cost pressures on its employees' households during a time of challenging inflation levels. Amplifying these challenges, trade unions representing staff at the Group have argued forcefully for stronger action in the Group to tackle pay levels, with disputes raised and the prospects of industrial action averted. The Group seeks to make its pay strategy generous and effective in recruiting and retaining staff and it has set out plans to improve staff pay by an average of 6.94% in 2023/24, drawing on the very welcome intervention from the Department for Education to improve study programme funding rates for colleges nationally during the Summer of 2023.

### **Financial plan**

The Group has a Financial Policy in place that sets parameters for capital investment, minimum cash balance and EBITDA generation. The Governing Body approved the Financial Policy along with Group's budget for 2023/24 in July 2023. The budget formed the basis of the College Financial Forecast Return (CFFR) submitted to the Funding Body in July 2023. The CFFR sets out the Group's financial objectives for the two years ending 31 July 2025 and indicate that the Group will remain in 'Good' financial health over the plan period.

The budget for 2023/24 and the CFFR for 2022 to 2024 took account of the Strategic Plan that came into effect in 2021/22 and identified growth as its main ambition. The EBITDA target for 2023/24 has been set at a low level in recognition of the requirement to provide higher pay awards and continue to meet high energy prices. An EBITDA target of 3.03% has been set for 2023-24 because the minimum EBITDA of 6% required by the Group's Finance Policy is not a realistic target in these exceptional circumstances. The Group has sought to reduce its total indebtedness and has achieved a 70% reduction on its total borrowings since the merged Group was formed in August 2017. By making Significant voluntary repayments between December 2020 and July 2022, the Group has improved its borrowings ratio and is also less constrained by loan covenants in its operational decisions and financial target setting.

### **Treasury policies and objectives**

The Group has a separate Treasury Management Policy and procedures in place that set out the treasury management arrangements for managing cash flows, banking arrangements and the risks associated with those activities.

At the point of merger on 1 August 2017, the existing loans of South Thames and Kingston Colleges were consolidated into borrowings from one lender. The total loan balance at 1 August 2017 was £16.75 million. The Group repaid £5,000,000 of its term loan in December 2020, and a further voluntary repayment of £2,100,000 in July 2022 means that the Group has now fully repaid one of the two term loan facilities that were in place in August 2017. In total, through a combination of monthly repayments and voluntary payments the Group has reduced its total loan balance by 70% over a six-year period. Reducing long term borrowings has enabled the Group to set a realistic EBITDA target for 2023/24 and still remain compliant with its loan covenants and in good financial health.

In December 2020, the Group entered into a Revolving Credit Facility agreement for £5,000,000 at the same time as the voluntary repayment of the term loan. This enabled the Group to reduce its debt without losing access to finance should a requirement for significant investment in estates arise and also provide a safety net against cashflow risks. Following



the reclassification of colleges in November 2022, the Group cancelled the Revolving Credit Facility as no amounts had been drawn down and cash flow forecasts do not indicate a requirement for the Facility to be accessed prior to March 2025.

Short term borrowing for temporary revenue purposes is authorised by the Accounting Officer. All other borrowing requires the authorisation of the Corporation.

### **Cash flows and liquidity**

The Group's cash balance improved significantly through improved operating performance and disposal of parts of its estates. Disposals during 2019 contributed £13,200,000 to cash reserves. Proceeds were used in part to re-accommodate activities that were previously housed in disposed parts of the estate. The disposals also enabled the Group to repay a part of its borrowings as well as fund the much-needed investment in parts of its estate.

There were no disposals of fixed assets in 2022/23 and the proceeds from a land disposal that was previously planned for 2023/24 is no longer expected to be realised. The Group continues to explore opportunities for reducing its accommodation to match its requirement, allowing capacity for growth. This is intended to generate proceeds for further improving the accommodation as well as reducing operating costs.

The net cash flow from operating activities in 2022/23 was £7.42 million (£4.02 million in 2021/22). The improvement of £3.4 million in net operating cash flow from 2021/22 is mainly attributable to the following:

- Creditors payable within one year increased by £2.6 million. The main reason for this is the change in the ESFA creditor balance at the end of 2022/23 (£2.7 million compared to £0.9 million in 2021/22). This is, in part due to the Funding Body changing its approach to recovering AEB funding.
- Capital grants of £3.3 million received in 2022/23 (2021/22: £0.25 million)

As the EBITDA target set for 2023/24, the Funding Body grants will be recovered in the year and no specific capital grants have been approved at this stage, cash generation in 2023/24 is expected to be low. The budgets and forecasts for 2023/24 indicate that net cash flow from operating activities may not meet the level required to maintain debt service cover of 1 or more. In recognition that redundancy costs are an essential cost of efficiency measures, the Group's lender has agreed to exclude redundancy costs in measuring performance against loan covenants in 2023/24. This, coupled with the reduced level of borrowings, will enable the Group to remain covenant compliant in 2023/24.

Cash balance at the end of 2023/24 is expected to fall to £12.1 Million as operating cashflow is forecast to be less than £1 million and the investment in phase two of the Kingston Hall Road project will also impact the cash balance. Despite the reduced cash inflow during 2023/24, the Group will still hold a healthy cash reserve that is higher than the target for minimum cash balance set within its finance policy.

The size of the College's total borrowing and its approach to interest rates have been calculated to ensure a reasonable cushion between the total cost of servicing debt and operating cash flow. This margin was maintained during the year ended 31 July 2023, and will be maintained in 2023/24 with the agreed treatment of redundancy costs.

### **Reserves**

The Group has a Cash Reserves Policy and recognises the importance of reserves in the financial stability of any organisation, and ensures that there are adequate reserves to support the College's core activities. The Group's Financial Policy sets parameters for capital investment, minimum cash balance and EBITDA generation. A minimum percentage

target for EBITDA (percentage of income) is set each year as part of the budget setting process.

The EBITDA target for 2022/23 was 2.3% (£1.5 million). This was lower than the minimum required by the Group's finance policy, but set at this level in recognition of the exceptional rise in energy costs. The actual EBITDA of £2.5 million (3.9%) is an improvement of £1 million on the target for the year. The income and expenditure reserve balance at 31 July 2023 has improved by £2.3 million following the latest valuation of the LGPS pension that put the scheme in a surplus position, which has been capped at £nil in the financial statements.

The Financial Policy also requires the Group to maintain minimum year end cash reserves of £7,500,000 and an average cash balance of £5,000,000 throughout the financial year. The Group takes a risk-based approach to its reserves target each year and environmental volatility or poor financial performance may increase the minimum average cash balance by up to 75% from the base requirement of £5 million. The purpose of this target is to build up sufficient reserves to enable further investments in accommodation and teaching resources.

### **Going concern**

During 2022/23, the Group faced the significant challenge of containing the impact of a 270% increase in energy costs. The financial targets set within the budget for 2022/23 recognised the extraordinary nature of the increase in energy prices and the EBITDA target for the year was set at a realistically low level. Through a combination of Government intervention in energy costs, fixing prices a year in advance and reduced consumption, the Group was able to reduce the impact of the price rises. The actual EBITDA for the year was a 67% improvement on the budget for the year. The EBITDA target for 2023/24 has also been set at a low level in recognition of the requirement to provide higher pay awards and continue to meet energy prices that remain high.

The College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) submitted to the Funding Body in July 2023 indicates that the Group will remain in 'Good' financial health in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The Group has sought to reduce its total indebtedness and has achieved a 70% reduction on the total borrowings since the merged Group was formed in August 2017. By making Significant voluntary repayments between December 2020 and July 2022, the Group has improved its borrowings ratio and is also less constrained by loan covenants in its operational decisions and financial target setting.

Total loans outstanding as at 31 July 2023 amounted to £4.81 million. The borrowings are secured on a part of the Group's estate and repayable over 13 years commencing 1 August 2017. Loan covenants for the year ended 31 July 2023 as well as the previous four years were met with a comfortable margin. A Revolving Credit Facility of £7m agreed at the beginning of 2022/23 was cancelled in January 2023, following the reclassification of colleges as public sector organisations. The RCF was cancelled based on evidence that the Group had no requirement to utilise the Facility. The Group's forecasts and financial projections indicate that it will be able to operate within the existing facility and covenants for the foreseeable future. The CFFR submitted in July 2023 includes monthly cash flow forecasts up to 31 July 2025 and indicates that the cash balance will remain above the Group's minimum cash balance target of £7.5 million throughout the two-year period.

The Group has net current assets at 31 July 2023 and creditors payable within one year include a holiday pay accrual and deferred capital grants (total of £2.5 million) for which payments are not required. Additional 16-19 funding allocated by the Funding Body after the 2023/24 budgets were set has enabled the Group to improve its staff recruitment and retention through an improved pay offer. The Group has significantly exceeded its 16-19

enrolment targets for 2023/24 and early forecasts contained within the management accounts to date for 2023/24 indicate an improvement in the budgeted financial performance for the year.

Accordingly, the Group has a reasonable expectation that it has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future, and for this reason will continue to adopt the going concern basis in the preparation of its financial statements.

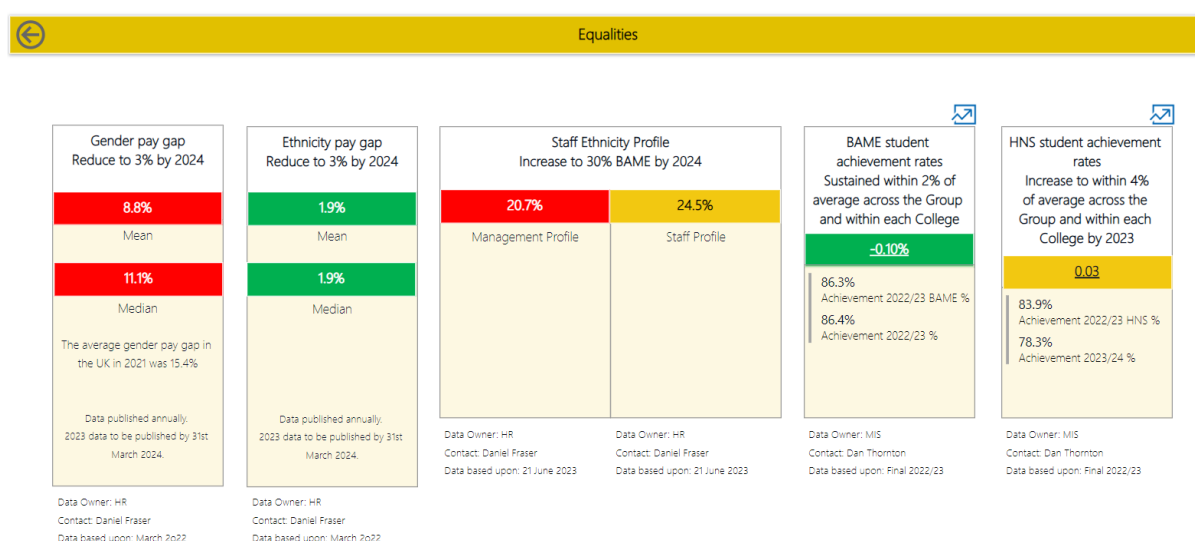
## PRINCIPAL RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES

### Risk management

The Group has well developed strategies for managing risk and strives to embed risk management in all that it does. Risk management processes are designed to protect its assets, reputation and financial stability. The governing body has overall responsibility for risk management and its approach to managing risks and internal controls is explained in the Statement on Corporate Governance.

A risk register is maintained at the Group level which is reviewed at least annually by the Audit Committee and more frequently where necessary. The risk register identifies the key risks, the likelihood of those risks occurring, their potential impact on the College and the actions being taken to reduce and mitigate the risks. Risks are prioritised using a consistent scoring system. Not all the factors which constitute or contribute to a risk may be within the Group's control. Given the significant changes to funding systems, governance arrangements and public sector finances, other factors besides those listed within the risk register may also emerge which adversely affect the Group and these are identified and incorporated in the Risk Register as they arise. The committees of the Governing Body own a number of the Group's risks and report on these and their levels of assurance at the end of each meeting.

The Group has also invested in the development of dashboard, capturing key metrics in a live interactive display, allowing risk areas such as enrolment, attendance and retention for example, to be monitored closely. The Group has cemented the use of this as an effective governance tool by introducing Key Performance Indicators to highlight progress or lack of it in critical areas, an example shown below:



The main risk factors affecting the Group are outlined below along with the action taken to minimise them. Other factors besides those listed below may also adversely affect the Group.

## **1. Funding and income levels**

The Group has considerable reliance on funding for 16-18 year olds, and about 50% of total income in 2022/23 was derived from this student cohort. The Group recognises the risk that recruitment will be affected by competition from other providers including schools, and insufficient internal progression and retention. The risk is mitigated through curriculum planning, internal delivery targets set above funding targets, internal marketing targeted at improving progression and the development of curriculum clusters aimed at maintaining quality and reputation. The Group had seen gentle but constant decline in 16-18 recruitment over the years 2017/18 to 2021/22. This had given the Group a considerable challenge in consolidating to a level of activity that is affordable and based on reliable and stable student numbers and cost reduction had become a constant habit in the Group.

However, recruitment to the Group's Study programmes with the number stabilised in 2022/23. New initiatives such as curriculum development and a new schools liaison team have been undertaken to address this issue and there are signs in Autumn 2023 that this trend may have reversed and the Group seems set to grow its numbers by a substantial margin, with efforts now turning to actions to make this a sustained and successful pattern, spread across all the colleges.

Significant opportunities exist for the Group to grow its adult provision further and there are major investment funds available to the Group from Government as it promotes engagement and supports employment across the economy. The Group has got better in realising these opportunities over recent years and plans to deliver provision more in line with its funding allocations in 2023/24, relying less on subcontracted provision to achieve this.

HE recruitment continues to be a significant concern and the withdrawal of some key collaborative programmes from Autumn 2018 has created further pressure on the Group to reduce costs and find growth elsewhere. Apprenticeship recruitment has fallen and remains a cause for concern. The recruitment of High Needs Students is generating growth, but contribution rates for this provision to central costs is limited. Additionally, the complexity of claiming funding from a large number of Local Authorities has proved challenging and these bodies regularly engage with the Group to challenge costs and pricing for this provision.

The Group resolved to identify the decline in 16-18 recruitment as a principal strategic risk to its future over the medium-term and actions to address this rightly formed the core of its new strategic plan from 2021 onwards.

## **2. Staff recruitment**

In common with many employers, the Group has experienced significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff after the Covid-19 pandemic. A number of

measures have been implemented or proposed to address the issue, including the proposed implementation of a new pay and grading structure. These measures have significant cost implications that the Group has estimated and current forecasts indicate that the additional costs will not impact the Group's financial viability. New income secured as well as other savings will compensate the additional expenditure and the Government has implemented funding changes in Summer 2023 to address exactly these challenges.

### **3. Cost efficiency**

Where income targets are not achieved, if fixed costs are not controlled, there is a risk that expenditure will exceed affordable levels and undermine efficiency. In order to mitigate the risk, the Group sets an annual EBITDA target and a minimum contribution target for each delivery area. Annual budgets also contain an allowance for contingency. Monthly financial performance monitoring meetings are held to review the forecast outturn and lead to detailed monthly reports to the Group Leadership Team and Governors and the impact of these measures have been decisive in returning the Group's financial performance to a positive level after the first year of merger.

From 2022/23 onwards, the Group faces the significant challenge of containing the impact of the increase in energy costs as well as other cost of living increases. The Group has also introduced a new paying grading system during the year and invested in improving its staff recruitment and retention through an improved pay offer. The financial targets set within the budget for 2023/24 recognise the environmental factors that are impacting the Group's efficiency and the EBITDA target for the year has been retained at a low level for a second consecutive year.

#### **Quality improvement**

The progress seen in student achievement rates during 2018/19, 2019/20 and now 2022/23 are commendable. There remain a few curriculum areas within the Group where performance is not yet at an acceptable level, but the Group has been judged 'good' at inspection and finds significant reason to reduce the rating of this risk as it clearly has deployed an effective set of quality improvement measures to raise standards. Data for 2019/20 and 2020/21 shows that Apprenticeships declined and reinstates the risk of a critical opinion of this key area of work, with some progress in evidence from 2021/22 sustained in 2022/23.

Provision for High Needs Students has improved rapidly and benefits from considerable investment in new middle and senior leadership resources. Achievement rates for young people have risen again in 2022/23 and student satisfaction levels across the Group remain very high from numerous sets of survey data.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

### Financial performance indicators

	2022/23		2021/22
	Actual	Target	Actual
Sector EBITDA as % of income	3.9%	2.3%	7.5%
Staff costs (excluding restructuring & sub-contracted income) as % of income	69.6%	67.6%	69.8%
Cash balance	£20.5M	£15.8M	£18.4M
Cash days in hand	121	90	104
Adjusted current ratio	2.17	2.17	2.57
Borrowing as % of income	7.48%	7.40%	8.30%
Reliance on ESFA income	78%	86%	76%
Financial Health Score	220	210	260
Financial Health grade	Good	Good	Outstanding

### Performance against bank covenants

	Bank target	Actual
<b>Operational leverage covenant</b>		
Ratio of borrowings to EBITDA less than	3.0:1	1.93:1
<b>Debt Service covenant</b>		
Cash flow : debt servicing cost	>100%	>100%
<b>Security cover covenant</b>		
Property value: loan	>140%	>140%
<b>Minimum Cash balance covenant</b>	£5M	£20.5M

## OTHER INFORMATION

### Equality

South Thames Colleges Group is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all who learn and work here. We respect and value positively differences in race, belief, gender, sexual orientation, disability, class and age.

At South Thames Colleges Group, we will continue our work to ensure wherever we can that:

- equality of opportunity is embedded in all policies, practices, decision making and evaluation processes;
- we actively promote access to learning programmes and services for all our learners and potential clients to enable them to improve their skills, to make progress and be successful in realising their ambitions;
- we create a visibly diverse environment which values and celebrates difference and raises the aspiration of existing and potential learners;
- we develop a staff profile, management team and governing body which are commensurate with the above;
- we provide services which are effective in recognising and assessing the specific needs of individuals and ensuring that the right kinds of support and interventions are provided to meet these needs;

- we tackle discrimination, whether direct or indirect, and ensure that we have well understood and well used procedures for challenging all forms of discrimination, harassment, bullying and other unacceptable behaviour;
- we promote an ethos within the Group whereby all learners and members of staff respect the views, values, culture and beliefs of others - regardless of ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religious beliefs, political affiliation, age, social class, disability, trade union membership or non-membership, employment status, role as a parent, guardian or carer, or whether someone has a criminal record;
- all governors and staff are clear about the Group's standards and strategies to meet diverse learner needs and are equipped to respond effectively;
- we undertake rigorous and open monitoring of learner and staff performance and experience to identify and act on equality gaps;
- we develop comprehensive feedback systems to capture the views and perceptions of learners, staff, governors and stakeholders about how well we do things and what we could improve. We will remain alert to patterns of inequality and related concerns which are not identified through statistical monitoring tools;
- we develop a systematic approach to assessing the impact of new and existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure that negative impacts on the equality of opportunity are identified and addressed.

The Group has adopted the IHRA definition of Anti-Semitism and is proud to make public its absolute resistance to any form of anti-semitism in the words below:

*Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.*

The Group's senior leaders have also agreed to sign the Black FE Leadership Group's open letter committing to an active anti-racist campaign in the sector and redoubling the organisation's efforts to combat all forms of racism.

The Group actively encourages applications from people with disabilities. Where an existing employee becomes disabled every effort is made to ensure that employment with the Group continues.

The Group endeavours to provide an environment that is free of discrimination to staff with disabilities and its policy is to provide training, career development and opportunities for promotion that are, as far as possible, identical to those for other employees.

In 2022, a new and comprehensive action plan was adopted and specific, quantifiable equality and diversity targets were published, with actions under implementation for better outcomes in a number of equalities strands. A link Governor for equality and diversity was appointed and this became a specific responsibility for one of the Group's Governance committees. New actions are in place for 2023/24 to improve recruitment practice and establish talent and retention programmes.

## **DISABILITY STATEMENT**

The Group seeks to achieve the objectives set down in the Disability Discrimination Act 2000 (and the subsequent Special Education Needs and Disability Acts 2001 and 2005) and the Equalities Act 2010 and in particular makes the following commitments:

- a) As part of the continuing redevelopment of the buildings all facilities will continue to ensure that there is ready access to people with a disability;

- b) The admissions procedure aims to ensure that no applicant will be denied the opportunity to apply for a course at the group on the grounds of having a disability and/or learning difficulty;
- c) Specialist equipment and accommodation adaptations will be provided, or made, whenever possible or practical;
- d) The admissions policy for all students is described in the Group policies. Appeals against a decision not to offer a place are dealt with under the complaints policy;
- e) The Group has made a significant investment in the appointment of staff to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who can provide a variety of types of support for learning. The Group arrangements ensure the provision of a high level of appropriate support for students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- f) Specialist programmes are described in programme information guides and achievements are recorded and published in the standard Group format;
- g) Counselling and welfare services, which are available to all learners, are described on the Colleges' websites;
- h) The Group has produced a Disability Equality Scheme and an associated action plan which seeks to eliminate discrimination and harassment, promote equality of opportunity, promote positive attitudes towards disability, take account of people's disabilities - even if this means treating someone more favourably, and encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

### Trade union facility time

The Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017 require the Group to publish information on facility time arrangements for trade union officials at the Group. The trade union facility time for 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 is set out below.

Number of employees who were relevant trade union officials during the relevant period	FTE of trade union officials during the relevant period
17	14.5

Percentage of time	Number of employees
0%	0
1-50%	16
51-99%	1
100%	0

Total cost of facility time	£88,670
Total pay bill	£36,484,507
Percentage of total bill spent on facility time	0.24%

Time spent on paid trade union activities as a percentage of total paid facility time	11.66%
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### **Payment performance**

The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998, which came into force on 1 November 1998, requires Colleges, in the absence of agreement to the contrary, to make payments to suppliers within 30 days of either the provision of goods or services or the date on which the invoice was received. The target set by the Treasury for payment to suppliers within 30 days is 95 per cent. During the accounting period 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023, the College paid 98 per cent of its invoices within 30 days. The College incurred no interest charges in respect of late payment for this period.

### **EVENTS AFTER THE REPORTING PERIOD**

There are no significant post balance sheet events to report.

### **DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION TO AUDITORS**

The members who held office at the date of approval of this report confirm that, so far as they are each aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the College's auditors are unaware; and each member has taken all the steps that he or she ought to have taken to be aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the College's auditors are aware of that information.

**Approved by order of the members of the Corporation on 7th December 2023 and signed on its behalf by:**



**Robert Foulston**  
Chair

## Governance Statement

The following statement is provided to enable readers of the annual report and accounts of the College to obtain a better understanding of its governance and legal structure. This statement covers the period from 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and financial statements.

The College endeavours to conduct its business:

- i. in accordance with the seven principles identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership);
- ii. in full accordance with the guidance to colleges from the Association of Colleges in The Code of Good Governance for English Colleges ("the Code")

In the opinion of the Governors, the Group complies with all the provisions of the Code, and it has complied throughout the year ended 31 July 2023. This opinion is based on an internal review of compliance with the Code undertaken for the Corporation by the Head of Governance (last review May 2023) and an external compliance review carried out by the College's Internal Audit Service in June 2022. The Governing Body recognises that, as a body entrusted with both public and private funds, it has a particular duty to observe the highest standards of corporate governance at all times. In carrying out its responsibilities, it takes full account of The Code of Good Governance for English Colleges issued by the Association of Colleges in March 2015, which it formally adopted in July 2016 together with the September 2021 revisions to this.

The Group is an exempt charity within the meaning of Part 3 of the Charities Act 2011. The Governors, who are also the Trustees for the purposes of the Charities Act 2011, confirm that they have had due regard for the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and that the required statements appear elsewhere in these financial statements.

## The Corporation

The Governors who served on the Corporation during the year and up to the date of signature of this report were as listed in the table below.

Name	Date Appointed/ Re-Appointed	End date for Term of office	Date resigned	Committees served	Corporation & Committee Meeting attendance from 1/8/22 to 31/7/23
<b>Chair</b>					
Mr R. Foulston	01.08.2019	31.07.2027		Finance Planning & Resources, Remuneration, Estates Sub- Committee, Search & Governance	16 of 17 : 94%
<b>Two Vice-Chairs</b>					
Dr. J Brumwell	01.08.2019	31.07.2023		Finance Planning & Resources, Remuneration, Safeguarding, Special, Estates Sub-Committee	16 of 18 : 89%
Ms K. Driver	10.07.2017	31.07.2025		Audit, Search and Governance, Special	10 of 12 : 83%
<b>Other general members</b>					
Ms L. Austin	01.08.2023	31.07.2027		Remuneration, Finance Planning & Resources	
Ms S. Axbey	01.08.2023	31.07.2027		Safeguarding	
Mr J. Azah	10.07.2017	31.07.2025		Safeguarding	3 of 9 : 33%
Mr D. Cheema	10.07.2017	31.07.2023		Finance Planning & Resources, Quality Learning & Standards, Special, Remuneration, HE Committee	13 of 23 : 57%

Name	Date Appointed/ Re-Appointed	End date for Term of office	Date resigned	Committees served	Corporation & Committee Meeting attendance from 1/8/22 to 31/7/23
Cllr K. Akinola	7.11.2022	31.07.2026		Audit	4 of 9 : 44%
Cllr B. Fraser	01.08.2019	31.07.2023		Quality Learning & Standards, Remuneration, Search & Governance	14 of 17 : 82%
Cllr S. Gordon	10.07.2017	31.07.2025		Search & Governance, Safeguarding	10 of 12 : 83%
Ms H. Harper	01.01.2023	31.07.2026		Quality Learning & Standards, HE Committee	9 of 9 : 100%
Cllr A. Holt	30.09.2020	31.07.2024		Finance, Planning and Resources, Estates Sub-Committee	4 of 12 : 33%
Prof H .Laville	25.05.2021	31.07.2025		HE Committee, Quality Learning & Standards	5 of 15 : 33%
Mr J. Marshall	01.08.2021	31.07.2025		Finance Planning & Resources, Estates Sub-Committee, Remuneration	14 of 14: 100%
Mr K. Mohamed	01.01.2023	31.07.2026		Safeguarding	5 of 6 : 83%
Mr T. Monger- Godfrey	10.12.2019	31.07.2023		Finance Planning & Resources,	5 of 12 : 42%
Ms M. Pottinger	01.04.2021	31.07.2025		Quality Learning & Standards, Audit	11 of 15 : 73%
Mr K. Shipman	08.07.2020	31.07.2024		Safeguarding	7 of 9 : 78%
Mr M. J. Stone	14.05.2019	31.05.2027		Quality Learning & Standards, HE Committee, Audit	16 of 17 : 94%
Mr G Willett	01.08.2019	31.07.2023		Quality Learning & Standards, Search and Governance, HE Committee	17 of 18 : 94%
<b>Staff members</b>					
Ms W. Miles	28.09.2021	27.09.2025		Safeguarding	8 of 9 : 89%
Ms C. Streliaev- Pivetta	28.09.2021	27.09.2025		Quality Learning & Standards	11 of 12 : 92%
<b>Student members</b>					
Ms S. Francis	01.08.2022	31.07.2023			0 of 6 0%
Ms D. Garwood	01.08.2022	31.07.2023			1 of 6 : 17%
Mr T. Plarre	01.08.2023	31.07.2024			
<b>Group Principal / CEO</b>					
Mr P Mayhew- Smith	01.04.2010			Finance Planning & Resources, Search, Quality Learning & Standards, Safeguarding, HE Committee,	25 of 26 : 96%
<b>Head of Governance</b>					
Mrs H Meredith	(appointed 1 September 2017)				

## The governance framework

It is the Corporation's responsibility to bring independent judgment to bear on issues of strategy, performance, resources and standards of conduct.

The Corporation is provided with regular and timely information on the overall financial performance of the College together with other information such as performance against funding targets,

proposed capital expenditure, quality matters and personnel-related matters such as health and safety and environmental issues. The Corporation meets each term – usually twice a term.

The Corporation conducts its business through a number of committees. Each committee has Terms of Reference, which have been approved by the Corporation. These committees are Finance Planning & Resources, Quality Learning & Standards, Remuneration, Search and Governance, Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Equalities, Audit and a Higher Education Committee. Full minutes of the main Committee Meetings, except those deemed to be confidential by the Corporation, are available on the Group's website at [stcg.ac.uk](http://stcg.ac.uk) or from the Head of Governance at:

Kingston College  
Kingston Hall Road  
Kingston upon Thames  
KT1 2AQ

The Head of Governance maintains a register of financial and personal interests of the Governors. The register is available for inspection at the above address.

All Governors are able to take independent professional advice in furtherance of their duties at the College's expense and have access to the Head of Governance, who is responsible to the Board for ensuring that all applicable procedures and regulations are complied with. The appointment, evaluation and removal of the Head of Governance are matters for the Corporation as a whole.

Formal agendas, papers and reports are supplied to Governors in a timely manner, prior to Board meetings. Briefings are also provided regularly.

The Corporation has a strong and independent non-executive element and no individual or group dominates its decision-making process. The Corporation considers that each of its non-executive members is independent of management and free from any business or other relationship which could materially interfere with the exercise of their independent judgment.

There is a clear division of responsibility in that the roles of the Chair and Accounting Officer are separate.

### **Appointments to the Corporation**

Any new appointments to the Corporation are a matter for the consideration of the Corporation as a whole apart from the elected positions for staff and student Governors. The Corporation has a Search and Governance committee, consisting of five members of the Corporation, which is responsible for the selection and nomination of any new member for the Corporation's consideration. The Corporation is responsible for ensuring that appropriate training is provided as required.

Members of the Corporation are appointed for a term of office not exceeding four years and may serve up to two terms of office, a maximum of eight years. This may be extended in exceptional circumstances for example where a governor is undertaking a new and more senior role, such as chair or vice-chair of the Corporation or chair of a Corporation Committee.

### **Corporation performance**

The Corporation carried out a self-assessment of its own performance for the year ended 31st July 2023 and graded itself as "Outstanding" on the Ofsted scale.

The extract from the February 2020 Ofsted Report which relates to governance is as follows:

"Following the merger of Carshalton, Kingston and South Thames colleges, Governors and senior leaders have been effective in securing a clear strategic direction for the South Thames Colleges Group. They have placed a strong focus on maintaining a distinct college ethos for each of the colleges in the group. As a result, each college has maintained good local connections and continues to serve its communities well.

Governors and leaders have taken decisive action to establish a relevant curriculum in each borough. They have streamlined the courses they teach at Carshalton and Merton colleges, so that students benefit from well-resourced, high-quality provision. They have closed a declining A-level provision at Kingston College. Managers have taken effective steps to reduce the numbers of subcontractors with whom they work. They have taken appropriate action to improve the quality of the remaining subcontracted provision. As a result, most areas of the college now perform at a consistently high standard”.

In 2021 the Corporation requested a review of Board effectiveness to be carried out by the ETF which found that *“the board of STCG has some positive impact on the college’s outcomes and there is strong evidence that it is proficient in many key areas.”* Areas identified for improvement were incorporated into a Governance improvement action plan for implementation. The Corporation considered DfE guidance on board reviews and has commissioned an external review to take place in 2024. It was reviewed by the ETF in summer 2021 as a pilot college for External Board Reviews.

The Corporation is committed to personal development to continue to improve the effectiveness of governance. Governors and the Head of Governance attended many training and development activities during 2022-23 including :

- A full day Governance Awayday on 7 November 2022 organised by the College including keynote presentation by Shelagh Legrave, FE Commissioner.
- Webinars organised by the Association of Colleges, the Education and Training Foundation and the National Governors’ Association
- 1 Governors attended a new governor induction organised by the Association of Colleges
- 1 Student Governor attended a Student Governor induction run by Unloc
- 1 Staff Governor attended a Staff Governor conference
- All Governors and the Head of Governance complete annual online refresher training on Safeguarding and complete Prevent Duty training every two years
- Two governor training sessions organised by the college ; one in person on Governance responsibilities for Safeguarding led by an external speaker and one online session on Ofsted inspection
- 3 Governors attended the residential Annual Association of Colleges Conference
- 3 Governors attended the online AoC / ETF Governors’ Conference
- the Head of Governance attended the online Association of Colleges Governors’ Professional Conference
- 1 Governor undertook Safer Recruitment Training
- The Head of Governance attended training sessions for Governance Professionals organised by the Education and Training Foundation and the Association of Colleges, webinars run by Ofsted , Advance HE as well as webinars run by the DfE and firms of Accountants in relation to the re-classification of colleges to the public sector.

## **Remuneration Committee**

Throughout the year ending 31 July 2023 the College’s Remuneration Committee comprised five members of the Corporation. The Committee’s responsibilities are to make recommendations to the Board on the remuneration and benefits of the Accounting Officer and other senior post holders (some of who are also the College’s key management personnel). In carrying out its responsibilities,

it takes full account of The Colleges Senior Staff Remuneration Code issued by the Association of Colleges in December 2018, which it formally adopted on 25 February 2020.

Details of remuneration for the year ended 31 July 2023 are set out in note 7 to the financial statements.

## **Audit Committee**

The Audit Committee has a minimum of three and maximum of eight members. In addition, the Committee can appoint up to two co-opted members including a finance/audit specialist. The Corporation Chair, the Head of Governance, the Accounting Officer, Members of Finance Planning and Resources Committee and senior management staff may not be members of the Audit Committee. The Committee operates in accordance with written terms of reference approved by the Corporation.

The Audit Committee meets on a termly basis and provides a forum for reporting by the College's internal, regularity and financial statements auditors, who have access to the Committee for independent discussion, without the presence of management. The Committee also receives and considers reports from the main FE Funding Bodies as they affect the College's business.

The college's internal auditors review the systems of internal control, risk management controls and governance processes in accordance with an agreed plan of input and report their findings to College management and the Audit Committee.

College Management is responsible for the implementation of agreed audit recommendations and internal audit undertakes periodic follow-up reviews to ensure such recommendations have been implemented.

The Audit Committee also advises the Corporation on the appointment of internal, regularity and financial statements auditors and their remuneration for audit and non-audit work as well as reporting annually to the Corporation. The audit committee met three times in the year to 31 July 2023. The members of the committee and their attendance records are shown below:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Audit Committee Meeting attendance from 1/8/22 to 31/7/23</b>
Ms K. Akinola	2 of 3: 67%
Ms K. Driver	3 of 3: 100%
Ms M. Savage	2 of 3: 67%
Mr J. Stone	3 of 3: 100%
Mr L. Linton (Co-opted Member)	3 of 3: 100%
Mr N. Ratnavel (Co-opted Member)	3 of 3: 100%

## **Internal control**

### *Scope of responsibility*

The Corporation is ultimately responsible for the College's system of internal control and for reviewing its effectiveness. However, such a system is designed to manage rather than eliminate the risk of failure to achieve business objectives, and can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss.

The Corporation has delegated the day-to-day responsibility to the Group Principal / CEO, as Accounting Officer, for maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of the College's policies, aims and objectives, whilst safeguarding the public funds and assets for

which he is personally responsible, in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to him in the funding agreement between South Thames Colleges Group and the Funding Bodies. He is also responsible for reporting to the Corporation any material weaknesses or breakdowns in internal control.

#### *The purpose of the system of internal control*

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of College policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. The system of internal control has been in place in South Thames Colleges Group for the year ended 31 July 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts.

#### *Capacity to handle risk*

The Corporation has reviewed the key risks to which the College is exposed together with the operating, financial and compliance controls that have been implemented to mitigate those risks. The Corporation is of the view that there is a formal ongoing process for identifying, evaluating and managing the College's significant risks that has been in place for the period ending 31 July 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts. This process is regularly reviewed by the Corporation.

#### *The risk and control framework*

The system of internal control is based on a framework of regular management information, administrative procedures including the segregation of duties, and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular, it includes:

- comprehensive budgeting systems with an annual budget, which is reviewed and agreed by the governing body
- regular reviews by the governing body of periodic and annual financial reports which indicate financial performance against forecasts
- setting targets to measure financial and other performance
- clearly defined capital investment control guidelines
- the adoption of formal project management disciplines, where appropriate.

South Thames Colleges Group has an internal audit service, which operates in accordance with the requirements of the ESFA's *Post 16 Audit Code of Practice*. The work of the internal audit service is informed by an analysis of the risks to which the College is exposed, and annual internal audit plans are based on this analysis. The analysis of risks and the internal audit plans are endorsed by the Corporation on the recommendation of the audit committee. At minimum, annually, the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) provides the governing body with a report on internal audit activity in the College. The report includes the HIA's independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the College's system of risk management, controls and governance processes.

### *Risks faced by the Corporation*

The Corporation has overall responsibility for risk management.

The Group has well developed strategies for managing risk and strives to embed risk management in all that it does. A risk register is maintained at the Group level which is reviewed at least annually by the Audit Committee and more frequently where necessary. The risk register identifies the key risks, the likelihood of those risks occurring, their potential impact on the College and the actions being taken to reduce and mitigate the risks. Risks are prioritised using a consistent scoring system. Not all the factors which constitute or contribute to a risk may be within the Group's control. Given the significant changes to funding systems, governance arrangements and public sector finances, other factors besides those listed within the risk register may also emerge which adversely affect the Group and these are identified and incorporated in the Risk Register as they arise. The Corporation committees each 'own' a number of the Group's risks and report on these and their levels of assurance at the end of each meeting to the Audit Committee. If further assurance is required, each Committee or the Audit Committee can request that additional assurance is provided internally or commissioned externally.

The main risk factors affecting the Group are set out below along with the action taken to minimise them. Other factors besides those listed below may also adversely affect the Group.

Risk	
Funding and income levels	<p>The Group has considerable reliance on funding for 16-18 year olds, and about 50% of total income in 2022/23 was derived from this student cohort. The Group recognises the risk that recruitment will be affected by competition from other providers including schools, and insufficient internal progression and retention. The risk is mitigated through curriculum planning, internal delivery targets set above funding targets, internal marketing targeted at improving progression and the development of curriculum clusters aimed at maintaining quality and reputation. The Group had seen gentle but constant decline in 16-18 recruitment over the years 2017/18 to 2021/22. This had given the Group a considerable challenge in consolidating to a level of activity that is affordable and based on reliable and stable student numbers and cost reduction had become a constant habit in the Group.</p> <p>However, recruitment to the Group's Study programmes with the number stabilised in 2022/23. New initiatives such as curriculum development and a new schools liaison team have been undertaken to address this issue and there are signs in Autumn 2023 that this trend may have reversed and the Group seems set to grow its numbers by a substantial margin, with efforts now turning to actions to make this a sustained and successful pattern, spread across all the colleges.</p> <p>Significant opportunities exist for the Group to grow its adult provision further and there are major investment funds available to the Group from Government as it promotes engagement and supports employment across the economy. The Group has got better in realising these opportunities over recent years and plans to deliver provision more in line with its funding allocations in 2023/24, relying less on subcontracted provision to achieve this.</p> <p>HE recruitment continues to be a significant concern and the withdrawal of some key collaborative programmes from Autumn 2018 has created further pressure on the Group to reduce costs and find growth elsewhere. Apprenticeship recruitment has fallen and remains a cause for concern. The recruitment of High Needs Students is generating growth, but contribution rates for this provision to central costs is limited. Additionally, the complexity of claiming funding from a large number of Local Authorities has proved challenging and these bodies regularly engage with the Group to challenge costs and pricing for this provision.</p> <p>The Group resolved to identify the decline in 16-18 recruitment as a principal strategic risk to its future over the medium-term and actions to address this rightly formed the core of its new strategic plan from 2021 onwards.</p>



Staff recruitment	In common with many employers, the Group has experienced significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff after the Covid-19 pandemic. A number of measures have been implemented or proposed to address the issue, including the proposed implementation of a new pay and grading structure. These measures have significant cost implications that the Group has estimated and current forecasts indicate that the additional costs will not impact the Group's financial viability. New income secured as well as other savings will compensate the additional expenditure and the Government has implemented funding changes in Summer 2023 to address exactly these challenges.
Cost efficiency	<p>Where income targets are not achieved, if fixed costs are not controlled, there is a risk that expenditure will exceed affordable levels and undermine efficiency. In order to mitigate the risk, the Group sets an annual EBITDA target and a minimum contribution target for each delivery area. Annual budgets also contain an allowance for contingency. Monthly financial performance monitoring meetings are held to review the forecast outturn and lead to detailed monthly reports to the Group Leadership Team and Governors. The impact of these measures has been decisive in returning the Group's financial performance to a positive level after the first year of merger.</p> <p>During 2022/23, the Group faced the significant challenge of containing the impact of a 270% increase in energy costs. The financial targets set within the budget for 2022/23 recognised the extraordinary nature of the increase in energy prices and the EBITDA target for the year was set at a realistically low level. Through a combination of Government intervention in energy costs, fixing prices a year in advance and reduced consumption, the Group was able to reduce the impact of the price rises. The actual EBITDA for the year was a 67% improvement on the budget for the year. The EBITDA target for 2023/24 has also been set at a low level in recognition of the requirement to provide higher pay awards and continue to meet energy prices that remain high.</p> <p>The College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) submitted to the Funding Body in July 2023 indicates that the Group will remain in 'Good' financial health in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The Group has sought to reduce its total indebtedness and has achieved a 70% reduction on the total borrowings since the merged Group was formed in August 2017. By making Significant voluntary repayments between December 2020 and July 2022, the Group has improved its borrowings ratio and is also less constrained by loan covenants in its operational decisions and financial target setting.</p>
Quality improvement	<p>The progress seen in student achievement rates during 2018/19, 2019/20 and now 2022/23 are commendable. There remain a few curriculum areas within the Group where performance is not yet at an acceptable level, but the Group has been judged 'good' at inspection and finds significant reason to reduce the rating of this risk as it clearly has deployed an effective set of quality improvement measures to raise standards. Data for 2019/20 and 2020/21 shows that Apprenticeships declined and reinstates the risk of a critical opinion of this key area of work, with some progress in evidence from 2021/22 sustained in 2022/23.</p> <p>Provision for High Needs Students has improved rapidly and benefits from considerable investment in new middle and senior leadership resources. Achievement rates for young people have risen again in 2022/23 and student satisfaction levels across the Group remain very high from numerous sets of survey data.</p>

#### *Control weaknesses identified*

No significant control weaknesses were identified by internal audit.

### *Responsibilities under funding agreements*

The Corporation ensures that the College's funds are used only in accordance with the corporation's powers as set out in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the College's own statutory duties and other obligations. The Corporation also ensures that the College's funds are used only in accordance with the College's powers as set out in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the College's Instrument and Articles of Government.

Action taken by the Corporation to ensure this includes the scrutiny undertaken by the Corporation and its committees of the work undertaken by the College including oversight of quality and financial performance, health and safety and fraud and irregularity. Examples of this include:

The Finance, Planning and Resources Committee reviews monthly management accounts which include an assessment of financial health. The Committee meets twice a term to monitor financial performance closely.

The Audit Committee and senior management review the Risk Register which includes assessment of risks to financial health. Under the College Board Assurance Framework each Committee reviews the assurance levels on the risks allocated to it and reports to the Audit Committee on its judgments.

The Audit Committee reviews the risk of failing to comply with the procedures and regulations connected to learner funding (as set out by each funding body including the utilisation of expected compliance processes such as PDSAT) at its termly meetings.

The Audit Committee receives an annual presentation on data management and compliance strategies by MIS.

Any instances of fraud are reported to the Chair of the Audit Committee and reviewed by the Audit Committee at each meeting.

The Department for Education and Education and Skills Funding Agency introduced new controls for the college on 29 November 2022 on the day that the Office for National Statistics reclassified colleges as public sector organisations in the national accounts. The ESFA chief executive communicated these changes to all college accounting officers and explained plans to introduce a college financial handbook in 2024. The college has reviewed its policies, procedures and approval processes in line with these new requirements to ensure there are systems in place to identify and handle any transactions for which DfE approval is required.

### *Statement from the Audit Committee*

The Audit Committee has advised the Corporation that there is an effective framework for governance and risk management in place. The Audit Committee believes the Corporation has effective internal controls in place.

The specific areas of review undertaken by the Audit Committee in 2022/23 and up to the date of the approval of the financial statements were as follows:

- STCG MIS controls – the committee received a presentation on the controls
- Annual Report on GDPR implementation
- Internal Audit Reports in relation to the following areas:
  - GDPR - No opinion / Advisory
  - Exams - Substantial Assurance
  - HR Controls - Reasonable Assurance
  - High Needs and Additional Learning Support follow up- No opinion / Advisory
  - Key Financial Controls - Substantial Assurance
  - Learner Number Systems - No opinion / Advisory
  - Learner journey - Reasonable Assurance

Where auditors have made recommendations, management action to implement the recommendations has been followed up by a Tracker Report reviewed by the Audit Committee at following meetings and the Audit Committee is satisfied that the action taken is sufficient to address each recommendation.

#### *Review of effectiveness*

As Accounting Officer, the Group Principal /CEO has responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. His review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by:

- the work of the internal auditors
- the work of the executive managers within the College who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework
- comments made by the College's financial statements auditors, the reporting accountant for regularity assurance, the appointed funding auditors (for colleges subject to funding audit) in their management letters and other reports.

The Accounting Officer has been advised on the implications of the result of his review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control by the Audit Committee, which oversees the work of the internal auditor and other sources of assurance, and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system is in place.

The senior management team receives reports setting out key performance and risk indicators and considers possible control issues brought to their attention by early warning mechanisms, which are embedded within the departments and reinforced by risk awareness training. The senior management team and the Audit Committee also receive regular reports from internal audit and other sources of assurance, which include recommendations for improvement.

The Audit Committee's role in this area is confined to a high-level review of the arrangements for internal control. The Corporation's agenda includes a regular item for consideration of risk and control and receives reports thereon from the senior management team and the Audit Committee. The emphasis is on obtaining the relevant degree of assurance and not merely reporting by exception. At its December 2023 meeting, the Corporation carried out the annual assessment for the year ended 31 July 2023 by considering documentation from the senior management team and internal audit, and taking account of events since 31 July 2023.

Based on the advice of the Audit Committee and the Accounting Officer, the Corporation is of the opinion that the College has an adequate and effective framework for governance, risk management and control, and has fulfilled its statutory responsibility for *"the effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the institution and the body and the safeguarding of their assets"*.

**Approved by order of the members of the Corporation on 7 December 2023 and signed on its behalf by:**



**Robert Foulston**  
Chair  
7 December 2023



**Peter Mayhew-Smith**  
Accounting Officer  
7 December 2023

## Statement of regularity, propriety and compliance

As accounting officer, I confirm that the corporation has had due regard to the requirements of grant funding agreements and contracts with ESFA and has considered its responsibility to notify ESFA of material irregularity, impropriety and non-compliance with terms and conditions of funding.

I confirm on behalf of the corporation that after due enquiry, and to the best of my knowledge, I am able to identify any material irregular or improper use of funds by the corporation, or material non-compliance with the terms and conditions of funding, under the corporation's grant funding agreements and contracts with ESFA, or any other public funder.

I confirm that no instances of material irregularity, impropriety or funding non-compliance have been discovered to date. If any instances are identified after the date of this statement, these will be notified to ESFA.



**Peter Mayhew-Smith**  
**Accounting officer**

**7 December 2023**

## Statement of the chair of Governors

On behalf of the corporation, I confirm that the Accounting Officer has discussed their statement of regularity, propriety and compliance with the board and that I am content that it is materially accurate.



**Robert Foulston**  
**Chair**

**7 December 2023**

## Statement of responsibilities of the members of the Corporation

The members of the Corporation are required to present audited financial statements for each financial year.

Within the terms and conditions of the Corporation's grant funding agreements and contracts with ESFA and other relevant funding bodies, the Corporation is required to prepare financial statements which give a true and fair view of the financial performance and position of the Corporation for the relevant period. Corporations must also prepare a strategic report which includes an operating and financial review for the year. The bases for the preparation of the financial statements and strategic report are the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting for Further and Higher Education, ESFA's College Accounts Direction and the UK's Generally Accepted Accounting Practice. In preparing the financial statements, the Corporation is required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements
- assess whether the Corporation is a going concern, noting the key supporting
- assumptions, qualifications or mitigating actions, as appropriate (which must be consistent with other disclosures in the accounts and auditor's report)
- prepare financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to assume that the Corporation will continue in operation


The Corporation is also required to prepare a strategic report, in accordance with paragraphs 3.23 to 3.27 of the FE and HE SORP, that describes what it is trying to do and how it is going about it, including information about the legal and administrative status of the Corporation.

The Corporation is responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, the financial position of the Corporation and which enable it to ensure that the financial statements are prepared in accordance with relevant legislation including the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and Charities Act 2011, and relevant accounting standards. It is responsible for taking steps that are reasonably open to it to safeguard its assets and to prevent and detect fraud and other irregularities. The Corporation is responsible for the maintenance and integrity of its website(s); the work carried out by auditors does not involve consideration of these matters and, accordingly, auditors accept no responsibility for any changes that may have occurred to the financial statements since they were initially presented on the website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Members of the Corporation are responsible for ensuring that expenditure and income are applied for the purposes intended and that the financial transactions conform to the authorities that govern them. In addition, they are responsible for ensuring that funds from ESFA, and any other public funds, are used only in accordance with ESFA's grant funding agreements and contracts and any other conditions, that may be prescribed from time to time by ESFA, or any other public funder. Members of the Corporation must

ensure that there are appropriate financial and management controls in place to safeguard public and other funds and ensure they are used properly. In addition, members of the Corporation are responsible for securing economic, efficient and effective management of the Corporation's resources and expenditure so that the benefits that should be derived from the application of public funds from ESFA and other public bodies are not put at risk.

Approved by order of the members of the Corporation on 7 December 2023 and signed on its behalf by

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R Foulston', written in a cursive style.

**Robert Foulston**  
**Chair**

# **Independent auditor's report to the Members of the Corporation of South Thames Colleges Group**

## **Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of South Thames Colleges Group ('the College') and its subsidiaries (together 'the group') for the year ended 31 July 2023 which comprise the Group and parent college statement of comprehensive income, the group and parent college statement of changes in reserves and balance sheets, the group statement of cash flows, the principal accounting policies, and the notes to the financial statements. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the group's and the College's affairs as at 31 July 2023 and of the Group's deficit for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; and
- In all material respects, funds from whatever source administered by the College for specific purposes have been properly applied to those purposes and managed in accordance with relevant legislation;
- in all material respects, funds provided by the OfS, UK Research and Innovation (including Research England), the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Education have been applied in accordance with the relevant terms and conditions; and
- the requirements of OfS's accounts direction have been met.

## **Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the group and the College in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

## **Conclusions relating to going concern**

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the members of the Corporation's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the group's and the college's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the members of the Corporation with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

### **Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The members of the Corporation are responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements, or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

### **Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Post 16 Code of Practice issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- proper accounting records have not been kept;
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- all the information and explanations required for the audit were not received.

We have nothing to report to you in respect of the following matter, in relation to which the the Office for Students requires us to report to you, if in our opinion:

- The College's grant and fee income, as disclosed in the notes to these financial statements, has been materially misstated.

### **Responsibilities of the members of the Corporation**

As explained more fully in the statement of responsibilities of members of the Corporation, the members of the Corporation are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the members of the Corporation determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the members of the Corporation are responsible for assessing the group and the College's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the members of the Corporation either intend to liquidate the group and the College or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.



### **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud is detailed below:

Our approach to identifying and assessing the risks of material misstatement in respect of irregularities, including fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations, was as follows:

- the Senior Statutory Auditor ensured that the engagement team collectively had the appropriate competence, capabilities and skills to identify or recognise non-compliance with applicable laws and regulations;
- we identified the laws and regulations applicable to the group and the College through discussions with management, and from our knowledge and experience of the sector;
- we focused on specific laws and regulations which we considered may have a direct material effect on the financial statements or the operations of the group and the College, including the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, funding agreements with the ESFA and associated funding rules, ESFA regulations, data protection legislation, anti-bribery, safeguarding, employment, health and safety legislation;
- we assessed the extent of compliance with the laws and regulations identified above through making enquiries of management and inspecting legal correspondence; and
- identified laws and regulations were communicated within the audit team regularly and the team remained alert to instances of non-compliance throughout the audit.

We assessed the susceptibility of the group's and the College's financial statements to material misstatement, including obtaining an understanding of how fraud might occur, by:

- making enquiries of management as to where they considered there was susceptibility to fraud, their knowledge of actual, suspected and alleged fraud; and
- considering the internal controls in place to mitigate risks of fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations.

To address the risk of fraud through management bias and override of controls, we:

- performed analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships;
- tested journal entries to identify unusual transactions; and
- assessed whether judgements and assumptions made in determining the accounting estimates set out in the accounting policies were indicative of potential bias;

In response to the risk of irregularities and non-compliance with laws and regulations, we designed procedures which included, but were not limited to:

- agreeing financial statement disclosures to underlying supporting documentation;
- reading the minutes of Corporation meetings;
- enquiring of management as to actual and potential litigation and claims; and
- reviewing any available correspondence with HMRC and the group's and the College's legal advisors (although none was noted as being received by the group and the College).

There are inherent limitations in our audit procedures described above. The more removed that laws and regulations are from financial transactions, the less likely it is that we would become aware of non-compliance. Auditing standards also limit the audit procedures required to identify non-compliance with laws and regulations to enquiry of the members of the Corporation and other management and the inspection of regulatory and legal correspondence, if any.

Material misstatements that arise due to fraud can be harder to detect than those that arise from error as they may involve deliberate concealment or collusion.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at [www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities](http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities). This description forms part of our auditor's report.

### **Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the members of the Corporation, as a body, in accordance with the College's Articles of Government. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the members of the Corporation those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the group and the College and the members of the Corporation as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.



Buzzacott LLP  
Statutory Auditor  
130 Wood Street  
London  
EC2V 6DL

Date: 13 December 2023

## **Reporting accountant's assurance report on regularity**

**To: The Corporation of South Thames Colleges Group and Secretary of State for Education, acting through Education and Skills Funding Agency (the ESFA)**

In accordance with the terms of our engagement letter dated 22 June 2023 and further to the requirements and conditions of funding in the ESFA's grant funding agreements and contracts, or those of any other public funder, we have carried out an engagement to obtain limited assurance about whether anything has come to our attention that would suggest, in all material respects, the expenditure disbursed and income received by South Thames Colleges Group during the period 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023 have not been applied to the purposes identified by Parliament and the financial transactions do not conform to the authorities which govern them.

The framework that has been applied is set out in the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice (the Code) issued by the ESFA and in any relevant conditions of funding concerning adult education notified by a relevant funder.

This report is made solely to the corporation of South Thames Colleges Group and the ESFA in accordance with the terms of our engagement letter. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the corporation of South Thames Colleges Group and the ESFA those matters we are required to state in a report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept, or assume, responsibility to anyone other than the corporation of South Thames Colleges Group and the ESFA for our work, for this report, or for the conclusion we have formed.

### **Respective responsibilities of South Thames Colleges Group and the reporting accountant**

The corporation of South Thames Colleges Group is responsible, under the requirements of the Further & Higher Education Act 1992, subsequent legislation and related regulations and guidance, for ensuring that expenditure disbursed, and income received, are applied for the purposes intended by Parliament, and the financial transactions conform to the authorities that govern them. Our responsibilities for this engagement are established in the United Kingdom by our profession's ethical guidance and are to obtain limited assurance and report in accordance with our engagement letter and the requirements of the Code. We report to you whether anything has come to our attention in carrying out our work which suggests that in all material respects, expenditure disbursed and income received, during the period 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023 have not been applied to purposes intended by Parliament or that the financial transactions do not conform to the authorities which govern them.

### **Approach**

We conducted our engagement in accordance with the Code issued by the ESFA. We performed a limited assurance engagement as defined in that framework. The objective of a limited assurance engagement is to perform such procedures as to obtain information and explanations in order to provide us with sufficient appropriate evidence to express a negative conclusion on regularity. A limited assurance engagement is more limited in scope than a reasonable assurance engagement and consequently does not enable us to obtain assurance that we would become aware of all significant matters that might be identified in a reasonable assurance engagement. Accordingly, we do not express a positive opinion. Our engagement includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence relevant to the regularity of the corporation's income and expenditure.

The work undertaken to draw to our conclusion includes:

- An assessment of the risk of material irregularity and impropriety across all of the College's activities;
- Further testing and review of the areas identified through the risk assessment including enquiry, identification of control processes and examination of supporting evidence across all areas identified as well as additional verification work where considered necessary; and
- Consideration of evidence obtained through the work detailed above and the work completed as part of our financial statements audit in order to support the regularity conclusion.

## **Conclusion**

In the course of our work nothing has come to our attention which suggests that in all material respects, the expenditure disbursed and income received during the period 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023 has not been applied to purposes intended by Parliament, and the financial transactions do not conform to the authorities that govern them.



Buzzacott LLP  
Chartered Accountants  
130 Wood Street  
London  
EC2V 6DL

Date: 13 December 2023

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Consolidated and College Statements of Comprehensive Income**

	Notes	Year ended 31 July 2023		Year ended 31 July 2022	
		Group	College	Group	College
		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>INCOME</b>					
Funding body grants	2	51,801	51,801	50,876	50,876
Tuition fees and education contracts	3	11,845	11,845	13,112	13,112
Other income	4	2,567	2,410	2,109	1,881
Investment income	5	626	646	88	96
Donations	6	-	102	-	(71)
<b>Total income</b>		<b>66,839</b>	<b>66,804</b>	<b>66,185</b>	<b>65,894</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>					
Staff costs	7	46,147	46,147	48,617	48,617
Other operating expenses	8	17,545	17,528	15,977	15,962
Depreciation	10	6,215	6,158	5,696	5,638
Interest and other finance costs	9	639	639	1,686	1,686
<b>Total expenditure</b>		<b>70,546</b>	<b>70,472</b>	<b>71,976</b>	<b>71,903</b>
<b>Deficit for the year</b>		<b>(3,707)</b>	<b>(3,668)</b>	<b>(5,791)</b>	<b>(6,009)</b>
Unrealised surplus on revaluation of defined benefit pension liability	16	5,382	5,382	63,615	63,615
<b>Total Comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>1,675</b>	<b>1,714</b>	<b>57,824</b>	<b>57,606</b>
<b>Represented by:</b>					
<b>Unrestricted Comprehensive income</b>		<b>1,675</b>	<b>1,714</b>	<b>57,824</b>	<b>57,606</b>

## South Thames Colleges Group

### Statements of Changes in Reserves

	Income and Expenditure account	Revaluation reserve	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Group</b>			
<b>Balance at 1st August 2021</b>	7,337	7,590	14,927
Deficit from the income and expenditure account	(5,791)	-	(5,791)
Other comprehensive income	63,615	-	63,615
Transfers between revaluation and income and expenditure reserves	699	(699)	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	58,523	(699)	57,824
<b>Balance at 31st July 2022</b>	65,860	6,891	72,751
Deficit from the income and expenditure account	(3,707)	-	(3,707)
Other comprehensive income	5,382	-	5,382
Transfers between revaluation and income and expenditure reserves	699	(699)	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	2,374	(699)	1,675
<b>Balance at 31st July 2023</b>	<b>68,234</b>	<b>6,192</b>	<b>74,426</b>
<b>College</b>			
<b>Balance at 1st August 2021</b>	7,333	7,590	14,923
Deficit from the income and expenditure account	(6,009)	-	(6,009)
Other comprehensive income	63,615	-	63,615
Transfers between revaluation and income and expenditure reserves	699	(699)	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	58,305	(699)	57,606
<b>Balance at 31st July 2022</b>	65,638	6,891	72,529
Deficit from the income and expenditure account	(3,668)	-	(3,668)
Other comprehensive income	5,382	-	5,382
Transfers between revaluation and income and expenditure reserves	699	(699)	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>2,413</b>	<b>(699)</b>	<b>1,714</b>
<b>Balance at 31st July 2023</b>	<b>68,051</b>	<b>6,192</b>	<b>74,243</b>

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Balance sheets as at 31 July**

	Notes	Group	College	Group	College
		2023 £'000	2023 £'000	2022 £'000	2022 £'000
<b>Fixed assets</b>					
Tangible fixed assets	10	104,869	104,682	106,104	105,860
		<b>104,869</b>	<b>104,682</b>	<b>106,104</b>	<b>105,860</b>
<b>Current assets</b>					
Stocks		10	10	10	10
Trade and other receivables	12	2,153	2,541	1,272	1,739
Cash and cash equivalents	17	20,538	19,925	18,430	17,974
		<b>22,701</b>	<b>22,476</b>	<b>19,712</b>	<b>19,723</b>
<b>Less: Creditors – amounts falling due within one year</b>	13	(12,959)	(12,730)	(10,292)	(10,281)
<b>Net current assets</b>		<b>9,742</b>	<b>9,746</b>	<b>9,420</b>	<b>9,442</b>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>		<b>114,611</b>	<b>114,428</b>	<b>115,524</b>	<b>115,302</b>
Less: Creditors – amounts falling due after more than one year	14	(37,894)	(37,894)	(37,056)	(37,056)
<b>Provisions</b>					
Defined benefit obligations	20	-	-	(2,799)	(2,799)
Other provisions	16	(2,291)	(2,291)	(2,918)	(2,918)
<b>Total net assets</b>		<b>74,426</b>	<b>74,243</b>	<b>72,751</b>	<b>72,529</b>
<b>Unrestricted reserves</b>					
Income and expenditure account		68,234	68,051	65,860	65,638
Revaluation reserve		6,192	6,192	6,891	6,891
<b>Total unrestricted reserves</b>		<b>74,426</b>	<b>74,243</b>	<b>72,751</b>	<b>72,529</b>

The financial statements on pages 44 to 70 were approved and authorised for issue by the Corporation on 7 December 2023 and were signed on its behalf on that date by:



**Robert Foulston**  
**Chair**



**Peter Mayhew-Smith**  
**Accounting Officer**

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Consolidated Statement of Cash Flows**

	Notes	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>			
Deficit for the year		(3,707)	(5,791)
<b>Adjustment for non cash items</b>			
Depreciation		6,215	5,696
(Increase)/decrease in debtors		(881)	790
Increase/ (decrease) in creditors due within one year		2,635	(1,183)
Increase/ (decrease) in creditors due after one year		1,415	(1,308)
Decrease in provisions		(263)	(262)
Pension costs less contributions payable		1,992	4,476
<b>Adjustment for investing or financing activities</b>			
Investment income		(626)	(88)
Interest payable		639	1,686
<b>Net cash flow from operating activities</b>		<b>7,419</b>	<b>4,016</b>
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>			
Investment income		626	88
Lennartz payment refund		-	665
Payments made to acquire fixed assets		(4,980)	(7,927)
		<b>(4,354)</b>	<b>(7,174)</b>
<b>Cash flows from financing activities</b>			
Interest paid		(412)	(527)
Repayments of amounts borrowed		(545)	(2,993)
		<b>(957)</b>	<b>(3,520)</b>
<b>Increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the year</b>		<b>2,108</b>	<b>(6,678)</b>
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of the year		18,430	25,108
Cash and cash equivalents at end of the year	17	<b>20,538</b>	<b>18,430</b>



# South Thames Colleges Group

## Notes to the Accounts

### 1. Statement of accounting policies and estimation techniques

The following accounting policies have been applied consistently in dealing with items which are considered material in relation to the financial statements.

#### Basis of preparation

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the *Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting for Further and Higher Education 2019* (the 2019 FE HE SORP), the *College Accounts Direction for 2022 to 2023* and in accordance with Financial Reporting Standard 102 – “*The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland*” (FRS 102). The College is a public benefit entity and has therefore applied the relevant public benefit requirements of FRS 102.

The preparation of financial statements in compliance with FRS 102 requires the use of certain critical accounting estimates. It also requires management to exercise judgement in applying the College's accounting policies.

#### Basis of accounting

The financial statements are prepared in accordance with the historical cost convention as modified by the use of previous valuations as deemed cost at transition for certain non-current assets.

#### Basis of consolidation

The consolidated financial statements include the College and its subsidiaries, KCTC Limited and Kingston and Sutton Educational Partnership Ltd. In accordance with FRS 102, the activities of the student union have not been consolidated because the College does not control those activities. All financial statements are made up to 31 July 2023.

#### Going concern

The activities of the Group, together with the factors likely to affect its future development and performance are set out in the Report of the Governing Body. The financial position of the Group, its cash flow and liquidity are presented in the financial statements and accompanying notes.

During 2022/23, the Group faced the significant challenge of containing the impact of a 270% increase in energy costs. The financial targets set within the budget for 2022/23 recognised the extraordinary nature of the increase in energy prices and the EBITDA target for the year was set at a realistically low level. Through a combination of Government intervention in energy costs, fixing prices a year in advance and reduced consumption, the Group was able to reduce the impact of the price rises. The actual EBITDA for the year was a 67% improvement on the budget for the year. The EBITDA target for 2023/24 has also been set at a low level in recognition of the requirement to provide higher pay awards and continue to meet energy prices that remain high.

The College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) submitted to the Funding Body in July 2023 indicates that the Group will remain in ‘Good’ financial health in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The Group has sought to reduce its total indebtedness and has achieved a 70% reduction on the total borrowings since the merged Group was formed in August 2017. By making Significant voluntary repayments between December 2020 and July 2022, the Group has improved its borrowings ratio and is also less constrained by loan covenants in its operational decisions and financial target setting.

## South Thames Colleges Group

Total loans outstanding as at 31 July 2023 amounted to £4.81 million. The borrowings are secured on a part of the Group's estate and repayable over 13 years commencing 1 August 2017. Loan covenants for the year ended 31 July 2023 as well as the previous four years were met with a comfortable margin. A Revolving Credit Facility of £7m agreed at the beginning of 2022/23 was cancelled in January 2023, following the reclassification of colleges as public sector organisations. The RCF was cancelled based on evidence that the Group had no requirement to utilise the Facility. The Group's forecasts and financial projections indicate that it will be able to operate within the existing facility and covenants for the foreseeable future. The CFFR submitted in July 2023 includes monthly cash flow forecasts up to 31 July 2025 and indicates that the cash balance will remain above the Group's minimum cash balance target of £7.5 million throughout the two-year period.

The Group has net current assets at 31 July 2023 and creditors payable within one year include a holiday pay accrual and deferred capital grants (total of £2.5 million) for which payments are not required. Additional 16-19 funding allocated by the Funding Body after the 2023/24 budgets were set has enabled the Group to improve its staff recruitment and retention through an improved pay offer. The Group has significantly exceeded its 16-19 enrolment targets for 2023/24 and early forecasts contained within the management accounts to date for 2023/24 indicate an improvement in the budgeted financial performance for the year.

Accordingly, the Group has a reasonable expectation that it has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future, and for this reason will continue to adopt the going concern basis in the preparation of its financial statements.

### Recognition of income

#### Revenue Grant funding

Government revenue grants include funding body recurrent grants and other grants and are accounted for under the accrual model as permitted by FRS 102. Funding body recurrent grants are measured in line with best estimates for the period of what is receivable and depend on the particular income stream involved. Any under or over achievement for the Adult Education Budget is adjusted for and reflected in the level of recurrent grant recognised in the statement of comprehensive income. The final grant income is normally determined with the conclusion of the year end reconciliation process with the funding body following the year end, and the results of any funding audits. 16-18 learner-responsive funding is not normally subject to reconciliation and is therefore not subject to contract adjustments.

The recurrent grant from OFS represents the funding allocations attributable to the current financial year and is credited direct to the Statement of Comprehensive Income.

Grants (including research grants) from non-government sources are recognised in income when the College is entitled to the income and performance related conditions have been met. Income received in advance of performance related conditions being met is recognised as deferred income within creditors on the balance sheet and released to income as the conditions are met.

#### Capital Grant Funding

Government capital grants are capitalised, held as deferred income and recognised in income over the expected useful life of the asset, under the accrual method as permitted by FRS 102. The College does not have any capital grants from non-government sources. Income received in advance of performance related conditions being met is recognised as deferred income within creditors on the Balance Sheet and released to income as conditions are met.

#### Fee Income

Income from tuition fees is stated gross of any expenditure which is not a discount and is recognised in the period for which it is received.

# South Thames Colleges Group

## Investment Income

All income from short-term deposits is credited to the income and expenditure account in the period in which it is earned on a receivable basis.

## Agency arrangements

The College acts as an agent in the collection and payment of certain discretionary support funds and any other arrangements. Related payments received from the funding bodies and subsequent disbursements to students are excluded from the income and expenditure of the College where the College is exposed to minimal risk or enjoys minimal economic benefit related to the transaction.

## Accounting for post-employment benefits

Post-employment benefits to employees of the College are principally provided by the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). These are defined benefit plans, which are externally funded and contracted out of the State Second Pension.

### Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS)

The TPS is an unfunded scheme. Contributions to the TPS are calculated so as to spread the cost of pensions over employees' working lives with the College in such a way that the pension cost is a substantially level percentage of current and future pensionable payroll. The contributions are determined by qualified actuaries on the basis of valuations using a prospective benefit method. The TPS is a multi-employer scheme and the College is unable to identify its share of the underlying assets and liabilities of the scheme on a consistent and reasonable basis. The TPS is therefore treated as a defined contribution plan and the contributions recognised as an expense in the income statement in the periods during which services are rendered by employees.

### London Pension Fund Authority Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)

The LGPS is a funded scheme. The assets of the LGPS are measured using closing fair values. LGPS liabilities are measured using the projected unit credit method and discounted at the current rate of return on a high quality corporate bond of equivalent term and currency to the liabilities. The actuarial valuations are obtained at least triennially and are updated at each balance sheet date. The amounts charged to operating surplus are the current service costs and the costs of scheme introductions, benefit changes, settlements and curtailments. They are included as part of staff costs as incurred. Net interest on the defined benefit liability/asset is also recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Income and comprises the interest cost on the defined benefit obligation and interest income on the scheme assets, calculated by multiplying the fair value of the scheme assets at the beginning of the period by the rate used to discount the benefit obligations. The difference between the interest income on the scheme assets and the actual return on the scheme assets is recognised in interest and other finance costs.

Actuarial gains and losses are recognised immediately in the statement of comprehensive income. The actuarial valuation as at 31 July 2023 indicates net pension assets of £26.4 million. In line with the approach standard approach taken by its financial statements auditor, the Group has only recognised actuarial gains up to a value that reduces the liability at this date to zero.

## Short term Employment benefits

Short term employment benefits such as salaries and compensated absences (holiday pay) are recognised as an expense in the year in which the employees render service to the College. Any unused benefits are accrued and measured as the additional amount the College expects to pay as a result of the unused entitlement.

# South Thames Colleges Group

## Enhanced Pensions

The actual cost of any enhanced ongoing pension to a former member of staff is paid by the college annually. An estimate of the expected future cost of any enhancement to the ongoing pension of a former member of staff is charged in full to the College's income in the year that the member of staff retires. In subsequent years, a charge is made to the statement of comprehensive income using the enhanced pension spreadsheet provided by the Funding Body.

## Tangible fixed assets

Tangible fixed assets are stated at cost less accumulated depreciation and accumulated impairment losses. Certain items of fixed assets that had been revalued to fair value on or prior to the adoption of FRS102, are measured on the basis of deemed cost, being the revalued amount at the date of that revaluation. A review for impairment of a fixed asset is carried out if events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying value of any fixed asset may not be recoverable. Shortfalls between the carrying value of fixed assets and their recoverable amounts are recognised as impairments. Impairment losses are recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure.

Where parts of a fixed asset have different useful lives, they are accounted for as separate items of fixed assets.

### *Land and buildings*

Freehold buildings are depreciated over their expected useful economic life to the College of between 20 and 50 years. The College has a policy of depreciating major adaptations to buildings over the period of their useful economic life as follows

- freehold land – not depreciated as it is considered to have an infinite useful life.
- freehold buildings – between 20 and 50 years
- leasehold buildings – over lower of 50 years and life of lease
- leasehold improvements – over lower of 50 years and life of lease
- building improvements – 10 years on a straight-line basis

Where land and buildings are acquired with the aid of specific grants, they are capitalised and depreciated as above. The related grants are credited to a deferred income account within creditors, and are released to the income and expenditure account over the expected useful economic life of the related asset on a systematic basis consistent with the depreciation policy. The deferred income is allocated between creditors due within one year and those due after more than one year.

On adoption of FRS 102, the College followed the transitional provision to retain the book value of land and buildings, which were revalued in 1993, as deemed cost but not to adopt a policy of revaluations of these properties in the future.

### *Assets under construction*

Assets under construction are accounted for at cost, based on the value of architects' certificates and other direct costs, incurred to 31 July.

### *Subsequent expenditure on existing fixed assets*

Where significant expenditure is incurred on tangible fixed assets after initial purchase it is charged to expenditure in the period it is incurred, unless it increases the future benefits to the College, in which case it is capitalised and depreciated on the relevant basis.

# South Thames Colleges Group

## *Equipment*

Equipment costing less than £1,000 per individual item is recognised as expenditure in the period of acquisition. All other equipment is capitalised at cost.

Capitalised equipment is depreciated on a straight-line basis over its remaining useful economic life as follows:

Motor vehicles– 4 years on a straight-line basis

Computer equipment – 4 years on a straight-line basis

Other equipment – 6 years on a straight-line basis

Furniture, fixtures and fittings – 6 years on a straight-line basis

## **Borrowing costs**

Borrowing costs are recognised as expenditure in the period in which they are incurred.

## **Leased assets**

Costs in respect of operating leases are charged on a straight-line basis over the lease term to the Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure. The College has no finance leases or hire purchase agreements

## **Investments in subsidiaries**

Investment in subsidiaries is accounted for at cost less impairment in the individual financial statements.

## **Inventories**

Inventories are stated at the lower of their cost using the first in first out method and net realisable value, being selling price less costs to complete and sell. Where necessary, provision is made for obsolete, slow-moving and defective items.

## **Cash and cash equivalents**

Cash includes cash in hand and deposits repayable on demand. Deposits are repayable on demand if they are in practice available within 24 hours without penalty.

Cash equivalents are short term, highly liquid investments that are readily convertible to known amounts of cash with insignificant risk of change in value. An investment qualifies as a cash equivalent when it has maturity of 3 months or less from the date of acquisition.

## **Taxation**

The College is considered to pass the tests set out in Paragraph 1 Schedule 6 Finance Act 2010 and therefore it meets the definition of a charitable company for UK corporation tax purposes. Accordingly, the College is potentially exempt from taxation in respect of income or capital gains received within categories covered by sections 478-488 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010 or Section 256 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992, to the extent that such income or gains are applied exclusively to charitable purposes.

The College is partially exempt in respect of Value Added Tax, so that it can only recover around 3% of the VAT charged on its inputs. Irrecoverable VAT on inputs is included in the costs of such inputs and added to the cost of tangible fixed assets as appropriate, where the inputs themselves are tangible fixed assets by nature.

# South Thames Colleges Group

The College's subsidiary companies are subject to corporation tax and VAT in the same way as any commercial organisation.

## **Provisions and contingent liabilities**

Provisions are recognised when

- the College has a present legal or constructive obligation as a result of a past event
- it is probable that a transfer of economic benefit will be required to settle the obligation, and
- a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation.

Where the effect of the time value of money is material, the amount expected to be required to settle the obligation is recognised at present value using a pre-tax discount rate. The unwinding of the discount is recognised as a finance cost in the statement of comprehensive income in the period it arises.

A contingent liability arises from a past event that gives the College a possible obligation whose existence will only be confirmed by the occurrence or otherwise of uncertain future events not wholly within the control of the College. Contingent liabilities also arise in circumstances where a provision would otherwise be made but either it is not probable that an outflow of resources will be required or the amount of the obligation cannot be measured reliably

## **Judgements in applying accounting policies and key sources of estimation uncertainty**

In preparing these financial statements, management have made the following judgement:

- Determine whether there are indicators of impairment of the College's tangible assets. Factors taken into consideration in reaching such a decision include the economic viability and expected future financial performance of the asset and where it is a component of a larger cash-generating unit, the viability and expected future performance of that unit.

### *Other key sources of estimation uncertainty*

- *Tangible fixed assets*

Tangible fixed assets are depreciated over their useful lives taking into account residual values, where appropriate. The actual lives of the assets and residual values are assessed annually and may vary depending on a number of factors. In re-assessing asset lives, factors such as technological innovation and maintenance programmes are taken into account. Residual value assessments consider issues such as future market conditions, the remaining life of the asset and projected disposal values.

- *Local Government Pension Scheme*

The present value of the Local Government Pension Scheme defined benefit liability depends on a number of factors that are determined on an actuarial basis using a variety of assumptions. The assumptions used in determining the net cost for pensions include the discount rate. Any changes in these assumptions, which are disclosed in note 20, will impact the carrying amount of the pension liability. Furthermore, a roll forward approach which projects results from the latest full actuarial valuation performed at 31 March 2022 has been used by the actuary in valuing the pensions liability at 31 July 2023. Any differences between the figures derived from the roll forward approach and a full actuarial valuation would impact on the carrying amount of the pension liability.

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**2 Funding Body grants**

	Year ended 31 July 2023		Year ended 31 July 2022	
	Group	College	Group	College
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Recurrent grants</b>				
Education and Skills Funding Agency - adult	840	840	979	979
Education and Skills Funding Agency - 16 - 18	32,367	32,367	32,602	32,602
Education and Skills Funding Agency - apprenticeships	1,931	1,931	2,392	2,392
Greater London Authority - Adult	11,999	11,999	11,205	11,205
Office for Students	191	191	194	194
<b>Specific Grants</b>				
Releases of government capital grants	1,864	1,864	1,362	1,362
16-19 Tuition Fund	424	424	515	515
Further Education Professional Development grant	(7)	(7)	258	258
College Collaboration Fund	-	-	178	178
Strategic Development Fund	385	385	-	-
Multiply Grant (Greater London Authority)	394	394	-	-
Teachers Pension Scheme contribution grant	1,413	1,413	1,191	1,191
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,801</b>	<b>51,801</b>	<b>50,876</b>	<b>50,876</b>

**3 Tuition fees and education contracts**

	Year ended 31 July 2023		Year ended 31 July 2022	
	Group	College	Group	College
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Adult education fees (including full cost)	1,529	1,529	1,616	1,616
Apprenticeship fees and contracts	80	80	85	85
Fees for FE loan supported courses	720	720	982	982
Fees for HE loan supported courses	1,611	1,611	2,054	2,054
International students fees	229	229	249	249
<b>Total tuition fees</b>	<b>4,169</b>	<b>4,169</b>	<b>4,986</b>	<b>4,986</b>
Education contracts	7,676	7,676	8,126	8,126
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,845</b>	<b>11,845</b>	<b>13,112</b>	<b>13,112</b>

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**4 Other income**

	Year ended 31 July 2023		Year ended 31 July 2022	
	Group	College	Group	College
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Catering and residences	534	534	496	496
Other income generating activities	1,669	1,512	1,273	1,045
Other Grant income	359	359	314	314
Other income	5	5	26	26
	<b>2,567</b>		<b>2,109</b>	
	<b>2,410</b>		<b>1,881</b>	

**5 Investment income**

	Year ended 31 July 2023		Year ended 31 July 2022	
	Group	College	Group	College
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Interest receivable	626	646	88	96
	<b>626</b>		<b>88</b>	
	<b>646</b>		<b>96</b>	

**6 Donations - College only**

	Year ended 31 July	
	2023	2022
	£'000	£'000
Unrestricted donations (Gift Aid from subsidiary company KCTC Ltd)	102	(71)
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>(71)</b>

The provision made in the year ended 31 July 2022 for the subsidiary to donate its profits for the year to the College has been reversed in the year ended 31 July 2023.



## South Thames Colleges Group

### Notes to the Accounts (continued)

#### 7 Staff costs - Group and College

The average head count of persons (including key management personnel) employed by the College during the year was:

	2023 No.	2022 No.
Teaching staff	555	580
Non teaching staff	363	372
	<u>918</u>	<u>952</u>

South Thames Colleges Group pays a number of sessional staff throughout the year based on actual hours delivered. The sessional staff have no contracted hours of teaching or other duties and are not included above.

#### Staff costs for the above persons

	2023	2022
Wages and salaries	30,002	30,426
Social security costs	3,012	2,912
Other pension costs	7,313	10,045
	<u>40,327</u>	<u>43,383</u>
Contracted out staffing services	5,545	4,838
	<u>45,872</u>	<u>48,221</u>
Fundamental restructuring costs (contractual)	275	396
	<u>46,147</u>	<u>48,617</u>

#### Key management personnel

Key management personnel are those persons having authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the College.

The College defines key management personnel as the CEO and Group Principal, Deputy CEO and two College Principals (reduced from three College Principals at the end of August 2022 but the sickness absence of a remaining College Principal has been covered by an interim College Principal since January 23). The Group's management structure has been subject to continuous review since merger in August 2017 and the Group has sought to clearly define responsibility for key decisions. The key management personnel have adopted a matrix approach to distinguishing between accountability and responsibility for key functions within the Group and accountable staff have been defined as key management personnel.

#### Emoluments of key management personnel, Accounting Officer and other higher paid staff

	2023 No.	2022 No.
The number of key management personnel including the Accounting Officer was:	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>

One of the College Principals left at the end of the first month of the financial year.

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**7 Staff costs - Group and College (continued)**

The number of key management personnel and other staff who received annual emoluments, excluding employer's national insurance and pension contributions but including benefits in kind, in the following ranges was:

	<b>Key management personnel</b>		<b>Other staff</b>	
	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>
£10,001 to £15,000 p.a	1	1	-	-
£30,001 to £35,000 p.a	-	1	-	-
£60,000 to £65,000 p.a	-	-	5	8
£65,001 to £70,000 p.a	-	-	14	9
£70,001 to £75,000 p.a	-	-	1	4
£75,001 to £80,000 p.a	-	-	2	1
£80,001 to £85,000 p.a	-	-	2	4
£85,001 to £90,000 p.a	-	-	3	1
£90,001 to £95,000 p.a	-	-	2	3
£95,001 to £100,000 p.a	-	-	1	-
£100,001 to £105,000 p.a	1	-	-	1
£105,001 to £110,000 p.a	-	-	1	-
£120,001 to £125,000 p.a	-	1	-	-
£125,001 to £130,000 p.a	1	-	-	-
£130,001 to £135,000 p.a	1	-	-	-
£155,001 to £160,000 p.a	-	1	-	-
£160,001 to £165,000 p.a	1	1	-	-
£210,001 to £215,000 p.a	-	1	-	-
£220,001 to £225,000 p.a	1	-	-	-
	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>

Including part time workers grossed up to full time equivalent, two further members of other staff received emoluments of £60,000 or more in 2023. They were paid in the £65,001 to £70,000 (one) and £90,001 to £95,000 (one) bandings (2022: one in £65,001 to £70,000, one in £85,001 to £90,000) and one in £90,001 to £95,000. These staff received actual emoluments below £60,000 and are not included above (2022: two). A further part time member of other staff included in the £75,001 to £80,000 banding (2022: £70,001 to £75,000) above would be in the £85,001 to £90,000 banding if grossed up. The emoluments of other staff who started or left during the year have not been disclosed if this is below £60,000.

Based on basic pay only, the numbers disclosed above will change for a number of pay bands as follows :

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>
£90,001 to £95,000 p.a	-	-	3	4
£105,001 to £110,000 p.a	-	-	-	-
£145,001 to £150,000 p.a	-	1	-	-
£150,001 to £155,000 p.a	1	-	-	-
£155,001 to £160,000 p.a	-	1	-	-
£160,001 to £165,000 p.a	-	-	-	-

Key management personnel compensation is made up as follows:

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Salaries	749	687
Employers National Insurance	99	92
Benefits in kind	15	16
	<b>863</b>	<b>795</b>
Pension contributions	80	40
<b>Total key management personnel compensation</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>835</b>

## South Thames Colleges Group Notes to the Accounts (continued)

### 7 Staff costs - Group and College (continued)

The pension contributions in respect of key management personnel are employer's contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme and are paid at the same rate as that for other employees. No pension contributions were made in respect of the Accounting Officer in 2023 or 2022.

There was no waiver of the Group Principal and CEO's salary in the year (2022: £4,000). There were no salary sacrifice arrangements in place for key management personnel. The above compensation includes amounts payable to Group Principal and CEO who is also the Accounting Officer (highest paid officer) of:

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Salaries	224	213
Benefits in kind	-	-
	<u>224</u>	<u>213</u>
Pension contributions	-	-

The governing body adopted AoC's Senior Staff Remuneration Code in December 2019 and assesses pay in line with its principles.

The remuneration package of key management personnel, including the Group Principal and CEO, is subject to annual review by the Remuneration Committee of the governing body who use benchmarking information to provide objective guidance.

The Group Principal and CEO reports to the Chair of the Corporation, who undertakes an annual review of his performance against the College's overall objectives using both qualitative and quantitative measures of performance.

Relationship of Group Principal and CEO pay and remuneration expressed as a multiple

	2023	2022
Group Principal and CEO's basic salary as a multiple of the median of all staff	6.6	6.4
Group Principal and CEO's total remuneration as a multiple of the median of all staff	5.9	5.6

There were no payments of compensation for loss of office paid to former key management personnel or higher paid staff in the year.

The members of the Corporation other than the Group Principal and CEO and the staff members did not receive any payment from the College other than the reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses incurred in the course of their duties.

The Group made the following severance payments during the financial year:

#### Severance payment

	No. of staff
0 - £25,000	12
£25,001 - £50,000	3
£50,001+	-

#### Special severance payments

The severance payments above include an allowance of £10,000 for a special staff severance payment that the Group is proposing to make to a part-time employee. The Group has submitted an application to the DfE for approval of this proposal and no actual payment has been made to the employee.

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**8 Other operating expenses**

	Year ended 31 July		Year ended 31 July	
	2023	2023	2022	2022
	Group	College	Group	College
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Teaching costs	4,407	4,407	4,366	4,366
Non teaching costs	5,229	5,212	5,576	5,561
Premises costs	7,909	7,909	6,035	6,035
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,545</b>	<b>17,528</b>	<b>15,977</b>	<b>15,962</b>

**Other operating expenses include:**

	2023	2022
	£'000	£'000
Auditors' remuneration:		
Financial statements audit*	58	51
Internal audit**	62	66
Other services provided by the financial statements auditors***	3	3
Other services provided by the internal auditors****	55	11
Hire of asset under operating leases	135	139

\* includes £58,000 in respect of the College (2022 £51,000)

\*\* includes £62,000 in respect of the College (2022 £66,000)

\*\*\* expenditure refers to taxation compliance and includes £0 in respect of the College (2022 £0)

\*\*\*\* includes £54,861 in respect of the College (2022 £10,962)

**9 Interest payable**

	Year ended 31 July		Year ended 31 July	
	2023	2023	2022	2022
	Group	College	Group	College
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
On bank loans, overdrafts and other loans:	412	412	527	527
	412	412	527	527
Enhanced pension provision finance costs (note 16)	93	93	56	56
Net interest on defined pension liability (note 16)	134	134	1,103	1,103
<b>Total</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>1,686</b>	<b>1,686</b>

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**10 Tangible fixed assets (Group)**

	Land and buildings		Equipment	Total
	Freehold	Long leasehold		
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Cost or valuation</b>				
At 1 August 2022	226,982	2,852	30,813	260,647
Additions	3,580	-	1,400	4,980
<b>At 31 July 2023</b>	<b>230,562</b>	<b>2,852</b>	<b>32,213</b>	<b>265,627</b>
<b>Depreciation</b>				
At 1 August 2022	126,143	312	28,088	154,543
Charge for the year	4,914	46	1,255	6,215
<b>At 31 July 2023</b>	<b>131,057</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>29,343</b>	<b>160,758</b>
<b>Net book value at 31 July 2023</b>	<b>99,505</b>	<b>2,494</b>	<b>2,870</b>	<b>104,869</b>
<b>Net book value at 31 July 2022</b>	<b>100,839</b>	<b>2,540</b>	<b>2,725</b>	<b>106,104</b>

**Tangible fixed assets (College)**

	Land and buildings		Equipment	Total
	Freehold	Long leasehold		
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Cost or valuation</b>				
At 1 August 2022	226,982	2,852	30,468	260,302
Additions	3,580	-	1,400	4,980
<b>At 31 July 2023</b>	<b>230,562</b>	<b>2,852</b>	<b>31,868</b>	<b>265,282</b>
<b>Depreciation</b>				
At 1 August 2022	126,143	312	27,987	154,442
Charge for the year	4,914	46	1,198	6,158
<b>At 31 July 2023</b>	<b>131,057</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>29,185</b>	<b>160,600</b>
<b>Net book value at 31 July 2023</b>	<b>99,505</b>	<b>2,494</b>	<b>2,683</b>	<b>104,682</b>
<b>Net book value at 31 July 2022</b>	<b>100,839</b>	<b>2,540</b>	<b>2,481</b>	<b>105,860</b>

## South Thames Colleges Group

### Notes to the Accounts (continued)

#### 11 Non current Investments

	College 2023 £	College 2022 £
Investments in subsidiary companies	200	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>

The College owns 100 per cent of the issued ordinary £1 shares of KCTC Limited, a company incorporated in England and Wales. The principal business activity of KCTC Limited is the rental of college facilities.

The College also owns 100 per cent of the issued ordinary £1 shares of Kingston and Sutton Educational Partnership Limited (KSEP Ltd), a company incorporated in England and Wales. KSEP Ltd was a cost sharing vehicle that was jointly owned by Kingston and Carshalton Colleges prior to the merger on 1 August 2017. The company became a wholly owned subsidiary of South Thames Colleges Group on merger and ceased trading on the same day.

#### KCTC Ltd

##### Statement of Comprehensive Income

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Turnover	157	228
Cost of Sales	-	-
Gross profit	157	228
Administration expenses	(17)	(15)
Depreciation	(57)	(57)
Operating profit	83	156
Interest payable	(20)	(8)
Profit for the year before taxation	63	148
Profit for the year	<b>63</b>	<b>148</b>

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**12 Trade and other receivables**

	<b>Group 2023 £'000</b>	<b>College 2023 £'000</b>	<b>Group 2022 £'000</b>	<b>College 2022 £'000</b>
Amounts falling due within one year:				
Trade receivables	418	414	368	361
Amounts owed by Subsidiary undertakings	-	610	-	474
Prepayments and accrued income	1,304	1,086	404	404
Amounts owed by HMRC	275	275	275	275
Amounts owed by the ESFA	156	156	225	225
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,153</b>	<b>2,541</b>	<b>1,272</b>	<b>1,739</b>

**13 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year**

	<b>Group 2023 £'000</b>	<b>College 2023 £'000</b>	<b>Group 2022 £'000</b>	<b>College 2022 £'000</b>
Bank loans and overdrafts (note 15)	577	577	545	545
Trade payables	3,701	3,701	1,687	1,687
Other taxation and social security	54	50	38	33
Accruals and deferred income	3,398	3,173	4,486	4,480
Holiday pay accrual	1,060	1,060	1,214	1,214
Deferred income - government capital grants	1,450	1,450	1,400	1,400
Amounts owed to the ESFA	2,719	2,719	922	922
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,959</b>	<b>12,730</b>	<b>10,292</b>	<b>10,281</b>

**14 Creditors: amounts falling due after one year**

	<b>Group 2023 £'000</b>	<b>College 2023 £'000</b>	<b>Group 2022 £'000</b>	<b>College 2022 £'000</b>
Bank loans (note 15)	4,235	4,235	4,812	4,812
Deferred income - government capital grants	33,659	33,659	32,244	32,244
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,894</b>	<b>37,894</b>	<b>37,056</b>	<b>37,056</b>

## South Thames Colleges Group

### Notes to the Accounts (continued)

#### 15 Maturity of debt

##### Bank loans and overdrafts

Bank loans and overdrafts are repayable as follows:

	Group 2023 £'000	College 2023 £'000	Group 2022 £'000	College 2022 £'000
In one year or less	577	577	545	545
Between one and two years	611	611	577	577
Between two and five years	2,052	2,052	1,941	1,941
In five years or more	1,572	1,572	2,294	2,294
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,812</b>	<b>4,812</b>	<b>5,357</b>	<b>5,357</b>

The Group has a secured term loans from Barclays Bank. The fixed rate loan of £7.7m (Facility A) is repayable in instalments falling due monthly over a 13 year period commencing August 2017. The loan is secured on a portion of the Group's freehold land and buildings.

#### 16 Provisions

	Defined benefit obligations £'000	Restructuring £'000	Enhanced pensions £'000	Total £'000
<b>At 1 August 2022 (Group and College)</b>	<b>2,799</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>2,832</b>	<b>5,717</b>
Payments in the period	(2,034)	-	(263)	(2,297)
Charge to expenditure:				
Current service cost	3,987	-	-	3,987
Past service costs	39	-	-	39
Net interest on pension liability	134	-	93	227
Actuarial gains	(4,925)	-	(457)	(5,382)
<b>At 31 July 2023 (Group and College)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>2,205</b>	<b>2,291</b>

Defined benefit obligations relate to the liabilities under the Group's membership of the Local Government pension Scheme. Further details are given in Note 20.

The enhanced pension provision relates to the cost of staff who have already left the Group's employment and commitments for reorganisation costs from which the Group cannot reasonably withdraw at the balance sheet date. This provision has been recalculated in accordance with guidance issued by the funding bodies.

The principal assumptions for this calculation are:

	2023	2022
Price inflation	2.80%	2.90%
Discount rate	5.00%	3.30%



**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**17 Cash and cash equivalents (Group)**

	At 1 August 2022 £'000	Cash flows £'000	At 31 July 2023 £'000
Cash and cash equivalents	18,430	2,108	20,538
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,430</b>	<b>2,108</b>	<b>20,538</b>

**18 Capital commitments**

	Group and College	
	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Commitments contracted for at 31 July	1,516	1,528
	<b>1,516</b>	<b>1,528</b>

**19 Lease Obligations**

At 31 July 2023 the group had total minimum lease payments under non-cancellable operating leases as follows:

	Group and College	
	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
<b>Total future minimum lease charges payable:</b>		
<b>Equipment</b>		
Not later than one year	135	140
	<b>135</b>	<b>140</b>

## South Thames Colleges Group

### Notes to the Accounts (continued)

#### 20 Defined benefit obligations

The College's employees belong to two principal post-employment benefit plans: the Teachers' Pension Scheme England and Wales (TPS) for academic and related staff; and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for non-teaching staff. Both are multi-employer defined-benefit plans.

The pension costs are assessed in accordance with the advice of independent qualified actuaries. The latest formal actuarial valuation of the TPS was as at 31 March 2016 and of the LGPS 31 March 2022.

#### Total pension cost for the year

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Teachers Pension Scheme: contributions paid	3,287	3,345
Local Government Pension Scheme:		
Contributions paid	2,034	2,224
FRS 102 (28) charge	1,992	4,476
Charge to the Statement of Comprehensive Income	4,026	6,700
<b>Total Pension Cost for Year</b>	<b>7,313</b>	<b>10,045</b>

#### Teachers' Pension Scheme

The Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) is a statutory, contributory, defined benefit scheme, governed by the Teachers' Pension Scheme Regulations 2014. These regulations apply to teachers in schools, colleges and other educational establishments. Membership is automatic for teachers and lecturers at eligible institutions. Teachers and lecturers are able to opt out of the TPS.

The TPS is an unfunded scheme and members contribute on a 'pay as you go' basis – these contributions, along with those made by employers, are credited to the Exchequer under arrangements governed by the above Regulations. Retirement and other pension benefits are paid by public funds provided by Parliament.

Under the definitions set out in FRS 102 (28.11), the TPS is a multi-employer pension plan. The College is unable to identify its share of the underlying assets and liabilities of the plan.

## **South Thames Colleges Group**

### **Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

#### **20 Defined benefit obligations (continued)**

Accordingly, the College has taken advantage of the exemption in FRS 102 and has accounted for its contributions to the scheme as if it were a defined-contribution plan. The College has set out below the information available on the plan and the implications for the College in terms of the anticipated contribution rates.

The actuarial valuation of the TPS which applied during the year ended 31 August 2023 was carried out as at 31 March 2016. The valuation report was published by the Department for Education (the Department) in April 2019. The valuation reported total scheme liabilities (pension currently in payment and the estimated cost of future benefits) for service to the effective date of £218 billion, and notional assets (estimated future contributions together with the notional investments held at the valuation date) of £196 billion giving a notional past service deficit of £22 billion.

As a result of the valuation, employer contribution rates were set at 23.68% of pensionable pay from September 2019 onwards. DfE paid a teacher pension employer contribution grant to cover the additional costs during the 2022-23 academic year.

A full copy of the valuation report and supporting documentation can be found on the Teachers' Pension Scheme website.

The latest actuarial TPS valuation results, as at 31 March 2020, were released in October 2023. The valuation result is due to be implemented from 1 April 2024, from this date employer contribution rates will increase to 28.68% (including a 0.08% administration levy). DfE have agreed to pay a Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution grant to cover the additional costs in the 2023-24 financial year.

The pension costs paid to TPS in the year amounted to £3,287,000 (2022: £3,345,000).

## South Thames Colleges Group

### Notes to the Accounts (continued)

#### 20 Defined benefit obligations (continued)

##### Local Government Pension Scheme

The LGPS is a funded defined benefit scheme, with the assets held in separate funds administered by the London Pensions Fund Authority (LPFA). The total contribution made for the year ended 31 July 2023 was £2,860,000 of which employer's contributions totalled £2,034,000 (The Group was not required to make deficit reduction payments) and employees' contributions totalled £826,000. The agreed contribution rate for future years is 11.9% for employers. Employee contribution rates will vary from 5.5% to 7.5% depending on salary. The employer contribution is calculated as a percentage of salary, and the College did not make any separate, lump-sum contributions into the pension scheme during the year. No deficit reduction payments will be made in the year ending 31 July 2024.

##### Principal Actuarial Assumptions

The following information is based upon a full actuarial valuation of the fund at 31 March 2022 updated to 31 July 2023 by Barnett Waddingham LLP.

	At 31 July 2023	At 31 July 2022
Rate of increase in salaries	2.85%	2.75%
Rate of increase for pensions (CPI)*	2.85%	2.75%
Discount rate for scheme liabilities	5.15%	3.40%

The current mortality assumptions include sufficient allowance for future improvements in mortality rates. The assumed life expectations on retirement age 65 are:

	At 31 July 2023 years	At 31 July 2022 years
<i>Retiring today</i>		
Males	20.90	21.80
Females	23.90	24.50
<i>Retiring in 20 years</i>		
Males	21.30	22.70
Females	25.00	25.90

##### Sensitivity analysis

	At 31 July 2023 £'000	At 31 July 2022 £'000
Discount rate +0.1%	(1,638)	(2,692)
Discount rate -0.1%	1,680	2,752
Mortality assumption - 1 year increase	3,886	4,922
Mortality assumption - 1 year decrease	(3,731)	(4,731)
Long term salary increase rate +0.1%	90	181
Long term salary increase rate -0.1%	(88)	(179)

The above sensitivities refer to the present value of total obligations and show the increase/(decrease) in the total obligations if rates change.

**South Thames Colleges Group**  
**Notes to the Accounts (continued)**

**20 Defined benefit obligations (continued)**

**Local Government Pension Scheme (Continued)**

The College's share of the assets in the plan at the balance sheet date was:

	Fair Value at 31 July 2023 £'000	Fair Value at 31 July 2022 £'000
Equities	78,319	72,377
Target return Portfolio	23,760	27,690
Infrastructure	16,652	13,418
Property	12,613	12,524
Cash	2,009	1,534
<b>Total market value of assets</b>	<b><u>133,353</u></b>	<b><u>127,543</u></b>

<b>Actual return on plan assets</b>	<b><u>3.718</u></b>	<b><u>9.391</u></b>
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The amount included in the balance sheet in respect of the defined benefit pension plan and enhanced pensions benefits is as follows:

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Fair value of plan assets	133,353	127,543
Present value of plan liabilities	<u>(133,353)</u>	<u>(130,342)</u>
<b>Present value of defined benefit assets</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(2,799)</b>
Present value of unfunded liabilities (note 16)	<u>(2,205)</u>	<u>(2,832)</u>
<b>Net pension asset/(liability)</b>	<b><u>(2,205)</u></b>	<b><u>(5,631)</u></b>

Amounts recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Income in respect of the plan are as follows:

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
<b>Amounts included in staff costs</b>		
Current service cost	(3,987)	(6,700)
Past service cost	(39)	-
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>(4,026)</u></b>	<b><u>(6,700)</u></b>

**Amounts included in interest payable**

Net interest payable	<u>(134)</u>	<u>(1,103)</u>
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**Amounts recognised in Other Comprehensive expenditure**

Return on pension plan assets	(549)	7,651
Experience gains arising on defined benefit obligations	(12,020)	(10,525)
Changes in assumptions underlying the present value of plan liabilities	11,242	66,048
<b>Amount recognised in Other Comprehensive expenditure</b>	<b><u>(1,327)</u></b>	<b><u>63,174</u></b>

## South Thames Colleges Group

### Notes to the Accounts (continued)

#### 20 Defined benefit obligations (continued)

##### Local Government Pension Scheme (Continued)

##### Movement in net defined benefit liability during the year

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Deficit in scheme at 1 August	(2,799)	(60,394)
Movement in year:		
Current service cost	(3,987)	(6,700)
Past Service costs	(39)	-
Employer contributions	2,034	2,224
Net interest on the defined liability	(134)	(1,103)
Actuarial loss	4,925	63,174
<b>Net defined benefit liability at 31 July</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(2,799)</b>

##### Asset and Liability Reconciliation

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
<b>Changes in the present value of defined benefit obligations</b>		
<b>Defined benefit obligations at start of period</b>	130,342	178,959
Current Service cost	3,987	6,700
Past Service costs	39	-
Interest cost	4,400	2,843
Contributions by Scheme participants	825	791
Experience gains and losses on defined benefit obligations	12,020	10,525
Changes in financial assumptions	(8,805)	(66,057)
Changes in demographic assumptions	(6,252)	-
Estimated benefits paid	(3,203)	(3,419)
<b>Defined benefit obligations at end of period</b>	<b>133,353</b>	<b>130,342</b>

##### Reconciliation of Assets

<b>Fair value of plan assets at start of period</b>	127,543	118,565
Interest on plan assets	4,266	1,740
Return on plan assets	(549)	7,651
Other actuarial gains/(losses)	2,437	(9)
Employer contributions	2,034	2,224
Contributions by Scheme participants	825	791
Estimated benefits paid	(3,203)	(3,419)
<b>Assets at end of period</b>	<b>133,353</b>	<b>127,543</b>

The estimated value of employer contributions for the year ending 31 July 2024 is £1,463,000  
The movements in the unfunded pension provision has been disclosed separately under note 16.  
The fund was valued using the EPP calculator provided by the Association of Colleges.

##### Deficit Contributions

Following the most recent valuation of the scheme, the College is no longer required to make additional contributions for deficit reduction until the next full valuation at which point the situation will be reviewed again.

## South Thames Colleges Group

### Notes to the Accounts (continued)

#### 21 Related party transactions

The total expenses paid to or on behalf of the Governors during the year was £846 in respect of two Governors (2022: £1,881; seven Governors). This represents travel and subsistence expenses and other out of pocket expenses incurred in attending Governor meetings and charity events in their official capacity.

No Governor has received any remuneration or waived payments from the College during the year (2022: None).

#### 22 Amounts disbursed as agent

##### Learner support funds

	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Funding bodies grants - 16-19 Bursary	815	853
Advanced Learning Loan Bursary	520	518
Other Funding body grants	115	62
	<u>1,450</u>	<u>1,433</u>
Disbursed to students	(989)	(911)
Administration costs	(37)	(32)
Balance unspent as at 31 July, included in creditors	<u><u>424</u></u>	<u><u>490</u></u>

Funding body grants are available solely for students. In the majority of instances, the College only acts as a paying agent. In these circumstances, the grants and related disbursements are therefore excluded from the Statement of Comprehensive Income.

#### 23 Access and participation expenditure

	2023 £'000	Restated 2022 £'000
Access investment	10	10
Financial Support	13	12
Support for Disabled Students	25	31
	<u><u>48</u></u>	<u><u>53</u></u>