

Report to: Lead Member for Economy

Date of meeting: 7 December 2021

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Consultation on the University of Brighton's 'Prospectus for change' advocating the withdrawal of the University of Brighton's campus from Eastbourne

Purpose: To respond to the consultation that the University of Brighton is conducting in relation to the proposed withdrawal of Higher Education provision from East Sussex

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Agree to East Sussex County Council responding to the consultation by the 10 December 2021, expressing our concerns about the proposed withdrawal of Higher Education provision by Brighton University from the county and its implications for the efforts to recover the economy in the wake of the pandemic;
 - 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport, to
 - (a) pursue ways in which the County Council can foster ongoing Higher Education provision via brokerage and partnership working with both the University and our local Further Education providers;
 - (b) explore opportunities to broker relationships with Kent Higher Education Institutes who may be able to support learning across the county; and
 - 3) Confirm that in the event that the University progresses withdrawal, the County Council encourages the University to use all endeavours to minimise the damage to the provision in sectors of high growth and skills required within the local economy such as the Health and Social care sector, and the effect this will have on our ability to train individuals from across the county to become qualified staff.
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1 Background Information

1.1 The University of Brighton has launched a consultation setting out a prospectus for Change which articulates how the evolution of the Brighton Estate will evolve over the next four years. [Prospectus for Change \(brighton.ac.uk\)](https://www.brighton.ac.uk/prospectus-for-change)

1.2 The prospectus outlines how the university will consolidate provision on three campuses in Brighton and proposes the closure of the campus and the Leaf Hospital in Eastbourne from the start of the academic year 2024–25.

1.3 There are normally 1499 students undertaking Sport and Health Sciences at the Eastbourne campus with around 1,100 students graduating from Brighton University courses in 2021 in frontline health work, nursing and midwifery.

1.4 The University of Brighton delivers a range of learning from the Eastbourne campus and is a top 10 UK university for world-leading research impact in allied health professions, nursing and pharmacy. The University also works in close collaboration with the NHS to develop new routes into the healthcare sector such as apprenticeships.

1.5 The rationale for the move is to offer improved collaboration between university faculties, and the cost of provision. University analysis suggests that the campus at Eastbourne will cost the University disproportionately more in maintenance costs over the next decade compared to other facilities and that it comprises some of its oldest, least accessible, least sustainable and most expensive to maintain buildings – which represents a disproportionate and significant long-term challenge for the University’s financial position and limits the University’s ability to invest in enhancing the student and staff experience.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 The Prospectus does not acknowledge the withdrawal of Higher Education (HE) provision from Hastings in 2019 or the wider implications on the economy of a move from the town. Neither does it make proposals for how and what HE offer will be delivered in the County post 2024. The prospectus seems contrary to national strategies and policies such as the Levelling Up fund, the Interim NHS People Plan and the Chief Medical Officer’s annual report 2021: health in coastal communities. It also acts contrary to the recommendations for higher level learning provision outlined in the South East LEP Skills Strategy.

2.2 The University is a board member of Skills East Sussex (SES) the county’s recognised employability and skills board, which has recently agreed and adopted new priorities. These priorities include:

- the need to increase the skills of the East Sussex workforce beyond Level 3;
- the importance of facilitating the provision of a highly skilled workforce to sustain and attract business in the area;
- to move the low or unqualified into skilled work in sectors where there is significant demand and opportunity.

2.3 The University is also a contributor to the East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan, which addresses the impact of the pandemic and explores the ways in which our Educators can support the post-Covid economy. Youth unemployment remains high and withdrawing the Eastbourne campus seems counterintuitive to the University’s commitment to support recovery.

2.4 There are significant recruitment shortages in our Health and Social Care sector within the county among frontline care staff, nursing and allied professionals. This is having significant implications for our NHS services in terms of capacity to deliver services and in terms of the ability to discharge from hospitals into care settings. Staff shortages mean that ESCC is less able to ensure the effective delivery of commissioned contracts such as home care provision or social care and care home provision.

2.5 The University is also a positive contributor to the local sport, fitness and health sector. Students undertaking Sport and Health Science courses participate in a wide range of sport and fitness groups, services, and organisations. Withdrawing the Eastbourne campus will likely negatively impact this sector locally. There would also likely be a loss of health and fitness leisure facilities should the amenities such as the swimming pool, gym and pitches not be replaced or maintained.

2.6 The University has been delivering a programme of intervention (Uni Connect) to raise the aspirations of young people in the county to access HE. This National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) was developed in 2016 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in response to the Government’s ambition to double the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering HE by 2021. Led by the Sussex Learning Network

(SLN) at the University of Brighton, NCOP funding has targeted disadvantaged students in Years 9 – 13 living in identified ward areas where progression into HE is lower than expected based on GCSE attainment figures. The overall aim of NCOP is to close the gap and increase the number of learners (by a third nationally), residing in these ward areas into higher education and the project has had a significant impact.

2.7 As a result of Uni Connect, the proportion of students in East Sussex wards saying that they intend to progress to higher education increased by 14 percentage points (ppts) in schools (from 1 per cent at the start of the year to 16 per cent at the end) and by 15 ppts in Further Education Colleges (FEC) (from 48 per cent to 63 per cent). The proportion of participants in schools saying that they were very likely to or definitely would apply to university increased by 8 ppts, from 37 per cent in the start of year survey to 44 per cent in the end of year, for FEC students the increase was 32 ppts, from 20 per cent to 52 per cent.

2.8 In East Sussex the majority of NCOP wards are in Hastings and Eastbourne. It is of concern that the momentum could be halted if there are significant pockets of East Sussex residents, for whom travelling to learn will prove an insurmountable barrier to progression into HE. In addition, disabled pupils are significantly less likely to attend university than able-bodied pupils, and attendance at university varies by ethnicity.

3. Risks and Challenges

3.1 After the withdrawal of the University campus in Hastings, the proposed removal of the campus in Eastbourne and at LEAF Hospital will leave East Sussex without any HE provision at a time when the SES board has agreed to continue to support and especially prioritise higher level skills for residents.

3.2 It is unlikely that those living in Hastings, Rother and Wealden who may have an interest in undertaking higher level courses in Health and Social care would travel to Brighton to undertake training. This has implications for employment levels in Hastings, Eastbourne and the surrounding county area.

3.3 The Health and Social Care sector is experiencing significant skills shortages. We would have hoped to see an expansion in the delivery of Health and Social care, and specialist training provision in East Sussex, rather than the removal of it, so as to help address these significant shortages and offer meaningful skilled employment opportunities to our residents.

3.4 The Uni Connect work funded by HEFCE to increase aspirations and encourage young people into Higher Education, could be undone if there is no Higher Education provision left in the county. Although East Sussex College Group (ESCG) accommodates some Higher Education provision, this would need to be significantly expanded to redress the balance.

3.5 The Eastbourne campus offers employment opportunities for teaching staff, attracts students into the area, and this has economic benefits for the town and its residents. The loss of the campus will potentially mean a loss of local employment opportunities for residents and income for the local economy.

3.6 The Eastbourne campus offers sport, health, and fitness leisure facilities to residents. The loss of these facilities will reduce options to residents to maintain and improve their health.

4. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 The proposals in the Brighton University 'Prospectus for Change' will have a negative impact on learning in East Sussex. It will have a detrimental impact on the local economy in terms of jobs, spend, post-pandemic recovery, and most significantly will remove Higher Education provision from the county. At a time when the health sector has recruitment shortages and when there are cohorts of potential learners across the county, particularly to the East, who are ready

to enter the sector, removing allied professional health courses and sports science courses will have a detrimental effect on our NHS, Care, sport, health, and fitness sectors locally and on our important leisure infrastructure.

4.2 Consequently, the Lead Member Economy is recommended to approve the recommendations and submit a formal letter response to the consultation by the 10 December 2021, and delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to explore opportunities for ongoing collaborative work with education providers.

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