



University of Essex



Impact Report

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Introduction: Thank you for supporting Essex

We are so grateful for your support. This report tells you some of the inspiring stories of the difference philanthropy makes at the University of Essex.

Essex is a place where change happens, and it happens thanks to people like you. In 2023, you were part of a nearly 2,000-strong group that helped us to raise more than £1 million. That's enough to fund more than 150 scholarships, 370 emergency hardship grants and offer match-funding to 75 student projects. You're amazing.

We're now in our 60th year as a university, a milestone that reminds us of where we started and how far we have come.

As we enter a new decade in Essex history, we thank you for your support. Whether a one-time contribution, regular gift, or legacy in your will, your philanthropy underpins our community and helps it to continue to thrive.

Please forward this Impact Report to your network to spread the word about our work.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynsey Dawson'.

Lynsey Dawson, Head of Philanthropy

Meet Lubna, the first Essex Futures scholar

In a world often overshadowed by challenges and adversity, stories like Lubna's stand out. The very first Essex Futures scholar, Lubna Shah Zaman (pictured below on the right) is 39 and from rural Pakistan. She travelled over three and a half thousand miles to the University of Essex where she is now studying an MA in Refugee Care in the Department of Sociology.



"I'm from a middle-class Pakistani household, in a rural, conservative location. Leadership traits are rarely associated, if not actively discouraged, with women and I have witnessed discrimination at various stages through my personal life and professional career."

"This degree and scholarship will open the door to specialised career opportunities. I want to develop an inclusive migration management and refugee policy which will help achieve a better outcome for the refugees and host community."

Lubna wants to transform the refugee policy in Pakistan, a country currently hosting over 4.4 million Afghan refugees, 1.73m of which are undocumented and have recently been demanded to leave or face deportation detailed in an Al Jazeera article.

"I want to contribute to developing of a comprehensive and inclusive migration management and refugee policy for my country which will help achieve the desired better outcome for the migrants, refugees, and host community."

Ignoring the gender stereotypes which shape traditional Pakistani society and driven by the confidence and determination that her late grandmother had instilled in her from a young age, Lubna had already

carved out a successful career as a civil servant. But she still found herself discriminated against.

In breaking down gender stereotypes in Pakistan, and transforming the country's migration policies, Lubna also wants to pave the way for a brighter future for generations to follow. When talking about how her Masters in Refugee Care will enable her to reach her goals, she said:

“After completing this course, I will have the tools to give back and contribute to the betterment of my community and beyond through research, community service, or advocacy for human rights.

“I am confident that the immense international exposure this scholarship offers, a strong graduate degree from a world-class UK research university, and my previous work experiences will enable me to effectively channel my capabilities and professional networks toward materialising these aims.”

The [Essex Futures Refugee Care scholarship](#) covers the cost of her international tuition fees and is the reason she made it to Essex. Without it, she simply could not afford the fees in addition to accommodation and rising living costs.

Supporting scholarships at Essex

The [Essex Futures](#) fundraising appeal is over halfway to its target of raising £1 million to invest in pioneers, innovators and trailblazers. It's clear that Lubna is one of them with her dreams of bringing skills and knowledge gained at Essex to transform the treatment of refugees in Pakistan.

Since the appeal's launch in 2022, over £510,000 has been raised by alumni, staff and friends of the University. Among them are more than 400 members of staff who donate monthly via their payslip through a staff giving scheme, [Donate Your Pennies](#).

Donate your Pennies gives members of staff from the University the option to round down their payslip to the nearest pound, donating the leftover pennies – anything from 1p to 99p – to support scholarships. If you're a staff member interested in signing up to donate your pennies, email the Philanthropy Team at thankyou@essex.ac.uk.

Celebrating 40 years with a gift in will

Simon and Alison Bull stepped onto campus for the first time 40 years ago in Autumn of 1983. Simon, eighteen years old and starting a BSc in Accounting, though would later change courses to a BSc in Mathematics and Computing.

Alison, also eighteen years old and studying a BA in Mathematical Economics.

In 1983, the University was nearly twenty years old; Margaret Thatcher had been in office for four years and a pint in the Union bar cost a lot less than it does now.



What started as a convenient university choice, largely due its close distance from both their homes, but also its small but friendly nature, became one of the most important places for Simon and Alison. It became the place where their relationship began.

They lived in the same, now iconic, towers block, William Morris, and took a common module in Mathematics. These mutual connections were the start of what is now a four decade-long relationship, enjoying a busy life and successful careers in IT and accounting before recently retiring.

In celebration of the 40th anniversary of starting their studies at Essex, and therefore their relationship, Simon and Alison updated their wills to leave a gift to the place where it all began.

“What we learned in and outside the classrooms of our brutalist Colchester Campus shaped not

just our education, but our core values, friendships, and the trajectory of our lives. But the landscape of education has evolved since our days as students. The cost is vastly different now. This is one of the reasons we've decided to leave a gift to Essex in our will."

Simon and Alison have left a gift in their will to 'do some good for future students' and hope that the funds will help to 'offer the same care and support for students and be as friendly as when we were there'.

Knowing that the current needs of the University may differ to those at the time the money is inherited, Simon and Alison have left an unrestricted gift meaning that it can be used in the area of greatest need, whenever the time comes.

"Legacies like ours are important, both for people to be remembered and also as so sensibly tax efficient."

Gifts in will, often referred to as legacies, are a vital source of planned funding for charitable organisations like the University of Essex and give you the chance to recognise the legacy of a pivotal time in your life while creating a new one for future generations of Essex students.

By leaving a gift to Essex, you too become part of the story of philanthropy that our very own University was founded on sixty years ago.

To find out more about giving a gift in your will, [visit our legacy page](#).

East 15 prize winners make West End debut



Tom Bennett was 25. Born and bred in Essex. Funny, kind and lovable. His sister describes him as ‘the life of the party’. He was sociable, with lots of friends and had a budding career in acting and DJing ahead of him as a first-class graduate from East 15 Acting School. He’d studied the BA in Contemporary Theatre Practice and performed in plays in London and the Edinburgh Fringe. An exciting future was ahead of him.

But he was also 25 when he passed away unexpectedly from Sudden Arrhythmic Death (SAD) syndrome. Tom’s family wanted to honour his life and let his legacy live on in a way that recognises who he was and what he loved. As well fundraising to raise awareness about SAD and other related heart conditions, they set up a prize with East 15 Acting School to continue supporting Tom’s fellow graduates in what he knew was a tough industry to get started in. The Tom Bennett Award was set up in 2014, and the first prize awarded the following year, and every year since.

Fast-forward to 2019, and Tom's Sister, Georgie, was planning her wedding with Swiss husband-to-be, Nans. Georgie, said his loss left a 'gaping hole' in her life.

“I’ve taken many years to come to terms with not having a brother to share life’s ups and downs with. We supported each-other in many ways through childhood and into adulthood and the start of our careers and were always telling each other how proud we were of each other.

“We received many kind donations at Tom’s funeral, including several family friends who continue to donate annually which keep the award going. And one of the easiest wedding planning decisions we made was deciding to forego gifts and instead ask for donations to the Tom Bennett Award and the charity, Cardiac Risk in the Young. This was one of the important ways to include Tom in our wedding celebrations. We raised quite a bit of money through generous donations of our wedding guests that will enable us to continue the Tom Bennett Award for many years to come.”

The recipient of the award is decided each year at a cabaret evening put together by final-year students on the BA Acting and Contemporary Theatre course at East 15. Georgie and her parents, along with the help of course director, Uri Roodner, select a winner to receive £500.

“It’s a hilarious evening and we hope that the £500 helps in launching their acting careers. I know Tom would be proud and I’m proud that we are able to support many budding young actors in Tom’s name.”

Recipients of the Tom Bennett Award



Since the first prize was awarded in 2015, twelve students have been chosen and £5,000 awarded. We caught up with two of the first recipients, Allie, one of the first recipients, to find out where her career has taken her.

29-year-old Allie Dart received the Tom Bennett Award in 2016, graduating just a few months later and has had a number of roles on stage since. Earlier this summer, Allie made her West End debut in 2:22 A GHOST STORY, playing the cover lead of Lauren alongside Sophia Bush, Jamie Winstone and Ricky Champ. She’s now joined the cast of Unfortunate, a musical parody of the untold story of Ursula the Sea Witch, for a UK tour and London run in the role of Sebastian.

Allie said: ***“Winning the Tom Bennett Award came as such a surprise. Not only was it a massive compliment but it funded my accommodation for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that year. I had***

always loved comedy and wanted to take it further so winning the award was a real boost to my confidence and spurred me on to keep creating and to believe in myself.

“Straight after graduating from East 15 Acting School, Robyn Grant and I set up a company called Fat Rascal Theatre and started to create comedy musicals including BUZZ, Vulvarine and Tom and Bunny

Save the World. We continued working hard to grow the company and the productions over the years and I am currently starring in our biggest and most popular show to date, Unfortunate; The Untold Story of Ursula the Sea Witch (Southwark Playhouse and UK Tour).

“This year, I also had my West End Debut in 2:22 A Ghost Story (Apollo Theatre) which was a real proud moment for me. Comedy is at the heart of everything I do and I am so grateful to the Tom Bennett Award for considering me a worthy winner.”

For information on remembering a loved one through a scholarship or prize, visit our [Remembering Essex page](#).

How you're making dreams

click

We saw the potential of crowdfunding and the big ideas our student community had, so we came up with Click, an award-winning platform, and developed a network of support for crowdfunding projects run by students, alumni and staff.

Within its first decade Click has supported more than 1,700 students to raise over half a million pounds stretching across the performing arts, business start-ups, sport, cultural events and research.

The dreams of students have been backed by £173,000 in match funding from donors to our Student Experience Fund.

Click can support so many different types of projects, and in the last year had supported LGBTQ+ projects including enhancing the visual element of Colchester Library's LGBTQ+ History Month exhibition and contributing to the University's Gender Affirmation Fund for transgender, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming students.

Playwrighting PhD student Noah Pantano also created one of the first queer horror scripts written for theatre and raised £1,365 through Click, which included £150 of match funding.

With the money raised, Noah was able to premiere the show to the highest spec at a packed Lakeside Theatre. He was since invited to put it on as part of the Colchester Fringe Festival and is now preparing for the Brighton Fringe Festival.



"I was amazed by the support I received through Click. I'm still floating in the air a little bit. This was probably one of the most essential steps in my early career - to begin to develop my work in the arts and to find people who I'm going to be working with, probably for the rest of my life. I cannot thank and praise Click enough."

Showcasing our commercial partners



In 2023, an exciting new venture gave local businesses the opportunity to team up with the University's elite Essex Rebels programmes.

The Essex Rebels are made up of professional Basketball and Volleyball Teams, with both the men and women's teams competing at the highest level of British competition. Many of the

players, alongside their studies at Essex, are even playing at a national level. Our role has been to support their commercial activity, and we've so far secured over £100,000 across both teams to grow the franchises and widen participation in the local community.

Our headline commercial partner is Elavon, a leading international card payment solutions and merchant services providers, with local private hospital The Oaks being our secondary partner. They are supported by another 18 commercial partners of varying levels, all providing the much-needed financial support that continues to allow the Rebels to compete against the very best in the UK.

Dave Parry, Director of Sport at the University of Essex said:

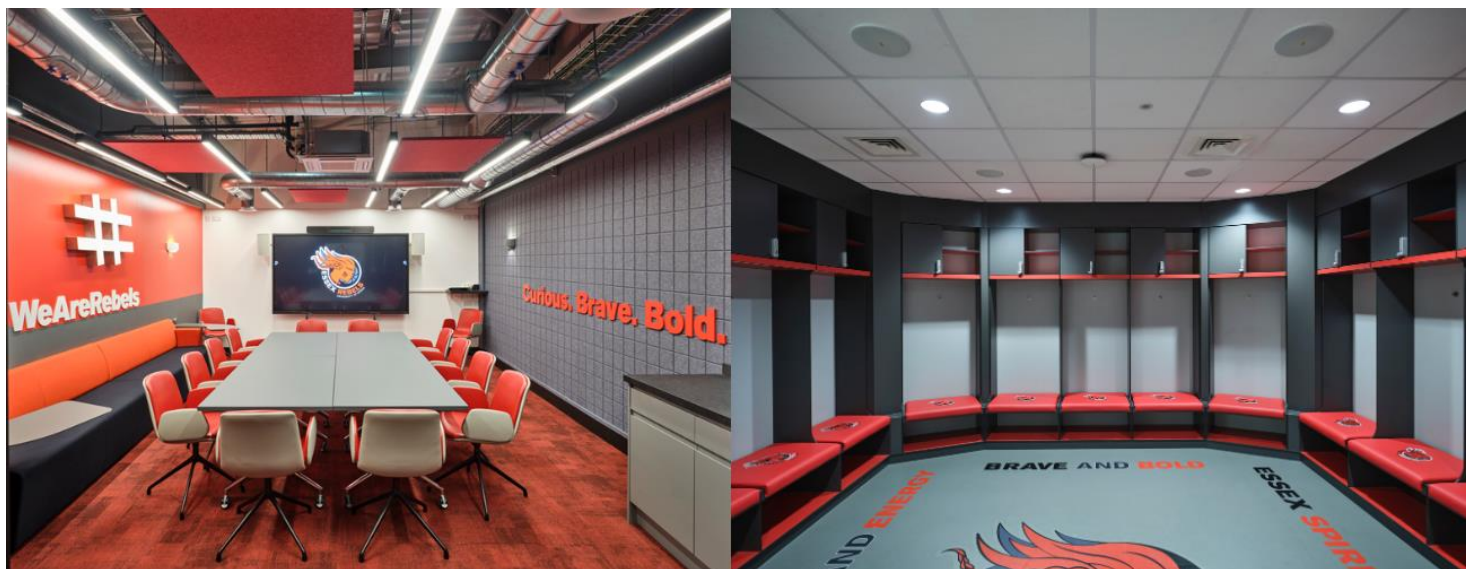
"I am immensely proud of what the Essex Rebels activities have become, and I would like to thank all of our commercial partners for their ongoing support. Our teams are comprised of University of Essex students and on top of their studies, they compete in the top leagues in the country which draw large audiences from the local community to our family-friendly game days.

"Outside of the courts, our players are role models to the thousands of children and young people in local schools and communities who engage in our outreach work. As such, Essex

Rebels has become something significant and special, not just for the University of Essex, but also for the wider community. This success is very much dependent on the commercial partners who support our work, and without which we would not have been able to achieve so much in such a short period of time.”

Among our twenty commercial partners is Showcase Interiors, an independent furniture dealer based in Ongar, Essex. Showcase have been supplying furniture solutions to the University for many years, and recently undertook a high-spec renovation of the Rebels changing rooms and installing a state-of-the-art [Coaching and Performance Suite](#) which allows our coaches to analyse performance like never before.

On the left, the performance analysis suite with a large table and red chairs. On the right, the Rebels changing rooms with individual stations and red seats.



Our professional relationship has now developed into a commercial relationship, with Showcase Interiors becoming a named commercial partner and their logo proudly displayed on players shorts. Essex Rebels Commercial Partners enjoy a suite of bespoke benefits, including exclusive marketing asset rights, and a general ticket allocation.

If you are interested in discussing a commercial partnership with the Rebels, please contact James Martin at jrmartin@essex.ac.uk.

Valuable ways you can give back

Philanthropy comes in many shapes and sizes and there are various ways you can make a valuable contribution to our community. Volunteering, gifts-in-kind, commercial partnerships, and business partnerships all have their place in helping to make Essex thrive.

Sir Nigel Wilson, who has just retired after 11 years as CEO of Legal and General, recently sponsored venue space at L&G's Head Office to host our latest Essex in London event where expert academics discussed the global challenges affecting society, using their leading research to link bold ideas with actionable solutions.

This discussion was themed around social inequality and provided various perspectives in the fields of social epidemiology, finance, economics, and management.

[Read more about the Essex in London event](#)



Volunteering your time

[Volunteering](#) can support the development of your own skills, help you to make new contacts and aid promotion of Essex in your local area. To get involved, [please register your interest](#). You could provide a graduate profile and feature in our blog or on social media, advise and network with current students and fellow alumni, or be a guest speaker at one of our career events.

Why I've supported Essex for 8 years

As part of the 2023 Annual Meeting and Summer Reception, alumna Sharon White, former Chief Executive of Stephenson Harwood LLP, spoke about why she donates to the University of Essex. Read an excerpt of her speech below.

As I thought about what I wanted to say today, it was quite sobering to realise that this year is the 40th anniversary of my own graduation, in the first cohort of students graduating with law degrees at Essex.

It was a proud moment, not only for me, but for my family, not least as I was the first in my family to go to university, both my parents having left school at 15.

I qualified as a solicitor in 1986 before moving to City law firm, Stephenson Harwood, in 1988. There I practised as a corporate lawyer, which I hugely enjoyed, eventually leading on corporate deals with a value of hundreds of millions of pounds. I became a Partner in 1997 and later Head of Corporate Practice, and in 2009 was appointed as the Chief Executive of the firm. I have had a hugely satisfying and rewarding career and hope that this year's graduates will gain similar fulfilment from their own future endeavours.

My time at the University of Essex very much set the foundation for my career. It was not the information that I learnt that was important but learning how to think, how to analyse, to argue and debate and express myself and to have the confidence in my abilities to do all that. Without those skills, I could not have gone on to have the successful career I had.

I qualified for the full maintenance grant so left university with no debt. Today's students are not so fortunate of course. Coming from a working-class family where the only acceptable form of debt was a mortgage, I often wonder whether I would have gone to university if I had had to borrow to pay tuition fees and support myself. I am not sure I would have had the confidence



that I would have been able to repay that debt - I certainly never envisaged I would earn what I did – and my parents would have been very concerned about me taking on such a debt.

I appreciate how lucky I was to have had that financial support and that is another reason why I have been pleased to be able to give back a little and to help the work the University does to support students.

Final thank you

We hope that you have felt inspired reading the latest edition of our Philanthropy Impact Report. It is the support and generosity of our community of donors that helps makes what we do possible.

From all of us at Essex, thank you.