



University of Essex



# Impact Report

**June 2023**

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Publication date: 29 June 2023

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# INTRODUCTION

Thank you for supporting Essex over the past year. We are incredibly grateful for the generosity of our community and proud to be able to tell you the difference your support makes in our Impact Report.

You may remember back to this time of year, warm weather appearing and our campuses full of life, students cramming in revision ahead of final exams, barbeques by the lake to mark the end of the year, and, for some, the end of their degree.

As we come to the end of the academic year, we look back at what we have achieved as a community. Since our last report, we've received close to **8,000 gifts** from over **1,250 people** and organisations. These donations have supported life-changing scholarships, student activities outside the classroom, and our emergency hardship fund.

These numbers are a reminder that Essex simply would not be where it is today without the generosity of others and the strength of our growing community of friends and supporters.

This edition of the Impact Report gives an update on our Essex Futures appeal as we mark its first birthday, our crowdfunding platform Click hits another milestone, and we catch up with some of the students to benefit from your support over the past year.

Please forward it 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**

# SCHOLARSHIPS



## Essex Futures reaches 50% of £1 million target

It's almost a year since we launched Essex Futures, our pioneering fundraising appeal that provides scholarships to students who, without one, simply would not be able to afford the education they need to set them on the path they wish to take. We've already raised over £500,000, taking us halfway to our £1 million target and enabling us to provide 100 students with a life-changing scholarship.

We meet our new scholars at the start of every academic year. Getting to know them, their background, the challenges they have overcome and what they want to achieve demonstrates the impact a scholarship can have. It doesn't just benefit the student; it's benefitting us all through the difference they will make in the future.

While the subjects they study and the subsequent careers they hope to build can differ dramatically, what our scholars have in common is a desire to make a positive impact on society. We are inspired by them and hope you are too.

Read more about the [Essex Futures appeal](#).



## One step closer to finding a cure for cancer

When asked what Nerthiga's scholarship meant to her, she described it as a 'pathway to achieve all my dreams'. The dream for Nerthiga has always been cancer research, and after graduating with an MSc in Molecular Medicine in March, the journey is just beginning. Following a break to return to India to celebrate her academic achievements with family, Nerthiga is back in the UK and preparing for a PhD.



## Accounting for the climate crisis

Recipient of a fully-funded scholarship, James Site Faimu who is originally from Samoa has said that Essex has 'blown his mind'.

A student in MSc Accounting and Financial, the environmental advocate hopes his learnings from Essex will help prepare him to join the green finance industry, he said: "Climate change is a real issue today and I want to be part of that movement. I also want to advocate more for sustainable accounting and hold large corporations to account by ensuring they report on the Corporate Social Responsibility contributions." **[Read about James' inspiration for studying at Essex.](#)**



## **From the frontline in Ukraine to the Human Rights Centre**

Seeing the brutality of the war in Ukraine led Maria Kurinna to join a human rights movement to help people who were left behind in war zones. Developing expertise in refugee law and women's rights, she worked on the frontline, visited international organisations like the UN and European Parliament, and spoke at global summits. But Maria wanted to deepen her knowledge and skills in order to make an even bigger difference, and she looked towards our Human Rights Centre to do just that.

Maria secured funding for her Masters in Theory and Practice of Human Rights through a scholarship from the University and additional funding via Chevening Scholarship Program. With the war forcing the cancellation of all flights out of Ukraine, she faced a long drive across Europe to reach Essex and begin her Masters, which she started last October. Now over halfway through her studies, Maria has said: "I enjoy every lecture and seminar, every piece of reading, and every discussion. I want to bring all this knowledge back to Ukraine and strengthen our efforts and rebuild Ukraine with more transparent and more effective policies, services and legislation in place."

**[Read about Maria's journey from Ukraine to Essex.](#)**

# LEGACY GIVING



## **Inaugural Rima Cherri prize awarded**

The inspiring legacy of Rima Cherri, a PhD student who passed away aged just 34 following a battle with cancer, lives on in a new departmental award. Rima dedicated her life to giving a voice to the voiceless by shining a light on the plight of child refugees. Following her tragic passing, Rima's family set up an annual prize in her honour, awarding £1,000 to the student with the best dissertation in MA Refugee Care.

The inaugural prize has been awarded to Benedicte Mulholland who previously worked with child refugees as a humanitarian communication consultant for UNICEF. Her research on biometrics, AI and its practical and ethical implications impressed the department and was deemed to make an 'important contribution' to the field.

**[Read more about this year's recipient.](#)**

# STUDENT EXPERIENCE



## Click funds over 400 student projects

Since our very own crowdfunding platform, CLICK, was launched seven years ago, it has helped more than 1,500 Essex students, raised half a million pounds from thousands of donations and funded over 400 projects.

The unique thing about CLICK is that projects led by students - from theatre shows to sport competitions and even startup businesses - are generously matchfunded by donations by alumni and friends to our Student Experience Fund. And over the seven years, we've given out a whopping £165,000 in matchfunding - something we simply could not have done without your support.



## **Over £300,000 awarded to student startups**

In keeping with our Essex spirit, we know that not all our graduates dream of working for a FTSE 100 company, some have aspirations to build their own. This is why we're proud to be supporting students and graduates with big business ideas and, through our partnership with Santander Universities, we've awarded more than £30,000 in funding to 11 student and graduate startups since August last year.

Through innovative workshops, mentoring, and generous funding opportunities, our Essex Startups team offers a wide range of support to our community of budding entrepreneurs. With recently funded startups including athletic spike cover overshoes, an energy converter box, a theatre production company and an English language app, we're so proud to be nurturing and empowering the next generation of entrepreneurs who will go on to create, innovate and transform the world we live in.

**[Get to know our student and graduate entrepreneurs.](#)**

# STUDENT SUPPORT

## Hardship Fund supports through cost-of-living crisis

The cost-of-living crisis is affecting us all in different ways, and our students are no different. Our Hardship Fund offers one-off payments to UK and international students who are facing emergency financial needs resulting from unexpected costs, or a loss of a source of planned income.

Thanks to your continued support, our Hardship Fund has served as a lifeline to the many who have found themselves struggling financially. Compared to this time last year we have seen a 112% increase in applications since October 2022.



## Payslip pennies provide laptops for local students

Our staff giving scheme, Donate Your Pennies, is one of the ways that staff at Essex come together and play their part in our culture of philanthropy. The hundreds of staff who are opted into the scheme have their net pay rounded down to the nearest pound every month, with their pennies going towards support for new students from the local area.

With the funds raised last year, nearly 20 laptops were purchased for students from local sixth forms and colleges who started their undergraduate degree at Essex in October. With digital poverty on the rise, laptops offer flexibility and mobility in where, when and how students study, financial relief from the costs of technology and act as a vital piece of equipment for career and interview preparation.

With over 1,000 staff members currently signed up, the pennies donated through the scheme have now exceeded £31,000. And for the fifth year running, we've won the Pennies in Heaven Gold Award in recognition of our achievements.

## **Roxana named Volunteer of the Year**



We are pleased to share that Roxana Mohammadian-Molina (MSc Financial Economics and Econometrics, 2007) has been announced as this year's alumni Volunteer of the Year. The finance expert, who is currently Chief Strategy Officer for Blend Network, has been a committed supporter of Essex for many years - mentoring students, delivering guest talks and providing advice and guidance for those interested in entering the fintech industry.

A recognised leader in the financial technology sector, Roxana is an international investor and entrepreneur, and Chief Strategy Officer of FinTech Blend Network. She is a proud advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion in the financial sector. Roxana also

runs *Smart Investress*, a free weekly newsletter that makes reading about finance more enjoyable for students and young professionals.

Over the last four years, Roxana has been a committed supporter of our Careers Mentoring Programme, helping numerous students with one-to-one support and guidance, empowering them to reach their potential. Alongside volunteering as a mentor, Roxana has spoken at careers focused events, delivered a guest lecture to economics students, and participated in mock interview panels. She also sits on the Economics Advisory Board and Employer Advisory Committee at the University, bringing her wealth of experience in industry to support student experience and employability.

Roxana is an advocate and champion for the University's newly established Student Investment Trading (SIT) Fund. The SIT Fund is enabling Essex students, many of whom are from under-represented backgrounds, to gain vital experience of financial markets by developing investment strategies and trading real funds, that will help to enhance their future prospects of working in the financial sector. Roxana is also part of the University's women in finance group for our [Angels@Essex](#) investment platform which links angel investors to entrepreneurs with innovative ideas.

We asked Roxana why she enjoys volunteering so much and she told us: "I get inspired by the energy, ideas, and initiative of my mentees. It is every time a very rewarding experience for me to be able to share my journey and experiences with such a diverse and culturally rich group of young women and men who are so determined to succeed in their respective fields. I also learn from their experiences and journeys."

One of Roxana's mentees said: "Roxana helped me to build my confidence which is something I definitely struggled with. I was able to secure a job for when I leave university, along with many skills/tips I can take with me and use throughout my working life. In summary, the help I received from my career mentor was extremely useful and I cannot thank Roxana enough!"

Rebecca Payne, Career Programmes Officer praised Roxana's support over the years. "She has been amazing to work with, Roxana is a consummate professional, extremely

kind, an inspiration and always happy to support both the University and its students in any way she can.”

We are so grateful to all alumni who give up their time to support the University and the next generation of students. Essex was built on the generosity of others, and this legacy continues thanks to our community of alumni.

If like Roxana, you would like to help and give back to the University, here is a small snapshot of the many ways alumni have volunteered their time to support Essex this year:

- providing a graduate profile and featuring in our marketing materials
- contributing to our social media
- chatting to applicants about life at Essex
- providing career support
- mentoring

If you'd like to know more about any of these opportunities, or other ways you can share your expertise with current students, [register your interest](#) and we'll be in touch.

# SPONSORSHIP

## Elavon becomes headline sponsor for Essex Rebels



Award-winning payments provider, Elavon Merchant Services, took its sponsorship of the elite Essex Rebels basketball teams to the next level by becoming the headline sponsor for this past season.

Elavon said that they 'see the Rebels as role models in their communities and are inspiring younger people to pursue both their academic and sporting passions' and that 'the spirit of giving back' aligns with their core values as an organisation.

Our WBBL Essex Rebels finished the season with a record-equalling 6th place in the league and are looking to build on that success in the 2023/24 season.

Read about the Rebel's record-breaking basketball game and how you can join us next season.

# 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.