

AECC University College Value for Money Report

October 2023

1. Introduction

The question of what is ‘Value for Money’ in the context of higher education is open to interpretation. For many years demonstrating value for money was associated with universities demonstrating how they managed public funds through efficient and effective financial strategies.

The introduction of £9,000 fees following the 2012 Browne Review fundamentally changed the relationship between the student and their institution. The question of value from a student perspective shifted to what value students derived from their investment in higher education. Students increasingly want to know where their money is going, the quality of the product they will receive and what they should expect in return.

With the introduction of higher tuition fees there has also been an increasing expectation that universities address the value of HE to taxpayers who subsidise the student loan system and, through the OfS Teaching Grants, make direct contributions to some institutions. The Government expects that only about 25% of current full-time undergraduates will repay their loans in full.

Section 69 of HERA (Higher Education and Research Act 2017) gave the OfS a duty to have regard to the need to promote value for money in the provision of higher education by English higher education providers. This enables the OfS to conduct efficiency and effectiveness studies in the management or operations of a registered provider.

Although it is acknowledged that the value of a university education to the student are broad and individualised, this report provides an overview of activity at AECC University College (AECC) according to the most recently stated definitions of value for money in HE articulated in the OfS [VFM Strategy \(2019-2021\)](#) as follows:

- **Students:** to receive value for money when they experience the full benefits of higher education – both during their studies and afterwards – in exchange for the effort, time and money they invest;
- **Taxpayers:** to receive value for money when higher education providers use public money and student fees efficiently and effectively to deliver graduates, from all backgrounds, who contribute to society and the economy.

2. Student Experience and Opportunities

Extensive opportunities for student engagement and personal growth exist both within the teaching environment and the wider university setting. For each student, different parts of the university experience will add value.

Students at AECC can join a range of clubs and societies, giving them the opportunity to engage in extra curricular activities they enjoy, as well as to network with like minded students. We recognise and celebrate key dates in the calendar such as University Mental Health Day to support students to take ownership for their wellbeing and develop self-care skills to support them should they need them. We ran a very successful pop up food bank at this event, recognising the additional challenges students may be facing in the current financial crisis.

The ASU provide many opportunities for student representation, including acting as officers, champions and year reps. Each of these will help students to develop vital employability skills. Alongside this there are variety of paid roles open to students at the university, so those who need to work alongside their studies can still feel engaged on campus, whilst contributing to the institution and supporting themselves financially.

A number of these roles provide further student voice opportunities, such as the Specialist Student Ambassador team who share their experiences as an underrepresented student to inform our Access and Participation work and support other potential students to overcome barriers they may be facing on their journey to Higher Education. Our Peer Leaders, work with a group of new students in a lower year to support them to transition successfully to university, develop the required study skills and understand expectations of them as a student.

Alongside supporting students to develop employability skills in these ways, we hold employability workshops such as CV writing both in and out of the curriculum to help students prepare for their future career. In January 2023 we held our Future Pathways event to support chiropractic students with their next steps, attended by more than 40 industry partners, which will be expanded across all career discipline areas in the coming year.

As a specialist health sciences University College, we are committed to the health and wellbeing of our students. We provide complimentary treatment for all students in 34 room purpose built onsite chiropractic training clinic. The premises also include MRI, digital imaging, and diagnostic ultrasound facilities. We provide onsite placement opportunities for more than 120 students per year within our clinical and imaging services for chiropractors, physiotherapists and radiographers.

We have a wide range of specialist teaching facilities onsite, including a human prosection laboratory which is used regularly by University College students to support and enhance learning in anatomical sciences. This is the only such facility in a non-medical education institution in the UK. We also have a practice related learning facility providing simulation-based education, including our virtual imaging and radiotherapy systems, high fidelity mannikins, anatomage and force sensing tables, and VR clinical education systems. In addition to our new Integrated Rehabilitation Centre providing 9 consulting rooms and a state-of-the-art rehabilitation centre, we have a fully equipped activities of daily living 'flat', a podiatry suite and a rehabilitation hub.

3. Teaching Quality and Outcomes

The OfS report '[Value for Money: the student perspective](#)' identified 'quality of teaching', 'fair assessment and helpful feedback' and 'learning resources' as the primary concerns for the majority of students. Graduate outcomes i.e. high salaries, securing a job within six months also feature in the top six areas of concerns for students in the report.

In considering how to report on Teaching Quality and Outcomes there are a wide range of metrics available to the University that are considered proxy metrics for quality. These can be categorized into:

Measures of Student Experience: i.e., NSS data

Measures of Student Outcomes: i.e., OFS Conditions B3

Other data such as the NSS is annual for 2023 comparing to previous years is difficult due to methodological changes. Graduate Outcomes replaced the Destination of Leavers in HE (DLHE) survey and has reported since 2017/18.

3.1 Student Experience Measures

Table 1 below provides a comparative analysis between NSS 2022 and NSS2023 (noting the differing methodologies for within scope provision). The data is presented by theme not by individual questions. Raw data is available [here](#)

The data demonstrates that AECC is below benchmark for teaching on the course, learning opportunities and assessment and feedback, but above benchmark for academic support and learning resources. It is important to note that the scores are generated by a single cohort of students in the final year of the chiropractic course (4 or 5-year course).

This data is analysed and considered alongside the qualitative NSS comments, and discussed with staff and students. In an attempt to enhance the experience of the students, initiatives and interventions are developed and implemented at an institutional / school / course level as appropriate (including NSS Action Plans).

2023 Question / Source: External Taught Data, NSS Results Portal, Whole Population	2023 Positivity %	2023 Benchmark	2023 Comparison	2022 Positivity %	2022 Benchmark	2022 Comparison	AECC Difference to 2022	% Distance Travelled AECC	Sector Difference to 2022	% Distance Travelled Sector	2022 Question / Source: External Taught Data, NSS Results Portal, Whole Population	Notes - SEE ACCOMPANYING TAB RE COMPARING YEARS
The Teaching on my Course	77.36	84.9	-7.54	69.16	80.0	-10.9	8.2	11.9	4.9	6.1	The Teaching on my Course	Overall improvement remains below benchmark
Learning Opportunities	70.88	81.4	-10.52	65.11	79.4	-14.3	5.77	8.9	2.0	2.6	Learning Opportunities	Overall improvement remains below benchmark
Assessment and Feedback	52.25	77.8	-25.55	36.21	68.5	-32.3	16.04	44.3	9.3	13.5	Assessment and Feedback	Overall improvement in distance travelled to benchmark
Academic Support	85.14	83.5	1.64	60.9	73.9	-13.0	24.24	39.8	9.6	13.0	Academic Support	Overtaken benchmark
Learning Resources	88.16	86.2	1.96	71.96	80.9	-8.9	16.2	22.5	5.3	6.6	Learning Resources	Overtaken benchmark

Table 1: NSS 2022 vs NSS 2023

3.2 Student Outcome Measures

The OfS B3 conditions are:

- **Continuation:** The proportion of students who were observed to be continuing in the study of a higher education qualification (or have gained a qualification) one year and 15 days after they started their course (two years and 15 days for part-time students)
- **Completion:** The proportion of students who were observed to have gained a higher education qualification (or were continuing in the study of a qualification) four years and 15 days after they started their course (six years and 15 days for part-time students).
- **Progression:** The proportion of qualifiers who identify managerial or professional employment, further study or other positive outcomes among the activities that they were undertaking when responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey 15 months after they left higher education.

The OfS publishes this data via its [website](#). This data is constructed from the various data returns submitted by Universities to HESA and other statutory bodies.

This data is in the public domain via the OfS website and is readily available to provide opportunities for both students, and the taxpayer, to consider the University's performance against other Universities.

The OfS dashboard also sets benchmark data for all providers against which we are measured. The data is aggregated across multiple academic years (different for each metric) AECC uses its more recent data for reference for within scope provision.

The aggregated data for OfS condition B3 fields are as follows

Continuation: 2017-18 to 2020-21
Completion: 2012-13 to 2015-16
Progression: 2017-18 to 2020-21

The OFS raw data is available [here](#)

Table 2 - Continuation numbers and rates

Year	No of Students Assessed (Y1)	Proceed	Fail/Repeat	Proceed (%)	Benchmark *
21-22	186	172	14	92.47	90.7
20-21	176	163	16	92.61	90.7
19-20	155	154	1	99.35	90.7
18-19	137	127	10	92.70	90.7
Overall	654	616	41	94.29	90.7

Note: The data presented in Table 2 is NOT from the OFS Dashboard but AECC internal data set which represents a more recent data-set. The OFS database includes the period prior to AECC being awarded TDAP and data from our time as a partner of BU. The data below captures AECC only data.

Table 3 - Completion numbers and awards

Year	Non-Completion (n) + %	3rd	2:2	2:1	1st	Total Awards
21-22	3 (2.1)	0	6	93	41	143
20-21	5 (3.6)	0	2	47	83	137
19-20	1 (0.9)	0	0	29	77	107
18-19	1 (1.7)	0	2	22	33	58
Total (%)	10 (2.2)	0	10 (2.2)	191 (42.9)	234 (52)	445

Progression

OFS dashboard data has insufficient data from the Graduate Outcomes Survey to report on progression for AECC undergraduates (reported in June 2022). This report covers the academic year 19-20, 2017/18 was the first year of our operating our own taught degree awarding powers, and therefore numbers graduating from any course remain small.

QUICK VIEW		FULL TABLE					
Sorted by: Graduate prospects – outcomes	University name	Overall score / Max 100	Entry standards / Max 189	Student satisfaction / Max 5	Research quality / Max 4	Graduate prospects – outcomes / Max 100	Graduate prospects – on track / Max 100
1	AECC University College VIEW COURSES →	78.7 79%	133 70%	3.45 69%	2.07 52%	100.0 100%	100.0 100%
1	University of South Wales VIEW COURSES →	97.7 98%	134 71%	4.04 81%	3.25 81%	100.0 100%	100.0 100%
3	University of Plymouth VIEW COURSES →	77.1 77%	127 67%	4.05 81%	n/a	93.0 93%	90.0 90%

The Complete University Guide (<https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/>) does however use this HESA Graduate Outcomes data to inform university rankings currently ranking the AECC 5th of all universities in the complementary medicine category and 1st in category for both graduate prospects-outcomes and graduate prospects.

3.3 Academic teaching qualifications

A number of other metrics can be used as a proxy for teaching quality other such measures could include Teaching Qualifications (% of staff who have a teaching award (e.g. Advance HE award or qualification such as PG Cert). This data is reported annually to HESA.

When looking at a specific teaching qualification we have an increasing number of staff who have achieved such an award 60% (30/50) up from 55% (25/45) for 2019/20. These numbers are comparable with other small specialist providers in England with a similar number of staff (see below)

Table 4 – Percentage of academic staff with academic teaching qualifications

University	% Staff with Academic Teaching Qualification
AECC University College	60
Royal Agricultural University	67
University College of Osteopathy	60
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama	56
University College of Estate Management	59

Data provided by the various dashboard and awards (NSS/TEF) provide the opportunity for continuous monitoring and analysis to inform activities and actions to address any areas for development i.e. NSS Action plans. Analysis of this data shows that there are areas where the University needs to address concerns, this is particularly true around retention (continuation). This is vitally important both from the students' personal perspective but also in relation to the sustainability of university finances. In future reports the OfS Data Dashboard will start to provide year on year data which will assist the University in identifying trends and this will be reflected in future VFM reports.

4. Financial Review

4.1 Income and Expenditure for the Year

AECC continues to grow with total income in 2022-23 increasing by 19.4% over the previous year, from £12.4m to £14.8m. This means that we have now grown in excess of 60% during the 4 years since 2018-19, despite the considerable disruption caused as a result of the Covid pandemic during that period.

The operating surplus for the 2022-23 year was lower than in the last two years at £811k, but still means that we were able to fund our annual capital expenditure investments from this year's activities, enabling us to retain a healthy cash balance, which at the end of July 2023 was £7.25m, only £45k down on the same time last year. This healthy cash position, together with a lack of borrowings, means that we are in a good position to continue with our ambitious plans to invest in the organisation going forward.

This healthy growth in the year was primarily due to the ongoing strategy to diversify from our core Chiropractic activity. The Integrated Rehabilitation Centre was opened in November 2022 and income from this new facility has grown steadily over the year, and is anticipated to continue to increase over the next few years as we introduce new clinical services.

We also launched 4 new MSc pre-registration courses in allied health disciplines in January 2023. Recruitment for this first year has been modest, with the exception of Speech & Language Therapy, which recruited better than anticipated. However, as these are two-year full-time courses, there will be a second cohort starting in January 2024, and currently indications are that recruitment will exceed the January 2023 intake. This increase in student numbers will mean that we can spread the cost of running the course more effectively giving better value for money.

We also expanded our Continued Professional Development provision during the year and are now able to offer PG Cert courses in First Contact Practice and Health Sciences Education and, following our successful application to be admitted onto the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers, have started an MSc in Advanced Clinical Practice as a degree apprenticeship. We have also continued to develop our ties with NHS Trusts in the region and are offering bespoke health related courses geared to the workforce development needs of their staff.

We have also accelerated our investment in research activities, which has been boosted by £200k of Knowledge Exchange Funding during the 2022-23 year from UK Research and Innovation, and will continue with Higher Education Innovation Fund support of £273k for the coming year. This has enabled us to appoint a full time Head of Research and a Research and Knowledge Exchange Manager to help accelerate the development of research and KE activity, including increases in research student numbers and grant income aligned to our Strategic Plan and in support of future HE-BCI, REF and KEF returns.

AECC has also benefited from higher UK interest rates during the last 12 months with interest received increasing 11-fold from the previous year.

Staffing numbers and costs have continued to increase over the period in line with our increased activity. During the year we made a pay award of 3.5% to all staff, plus an additional amount of £500 per full time employee for all lower paid staff. In addition, all staff received a one-off “cost of living” payment of £600 as a contribution towards the impact of inflation, which was particularly high over the winter period. As a consequence of this, plus the investment made in additional key posts, the amount of income spent on staffing has increased from 57.6% to 60.9%.

In line with virtually all organisations AECC was hit by a large increase in the price of energy, with costs for gas and electricity increasing by almost two thirds from the previous year to £467k. This, together with other pressures as a result of the growth of the organisation and high levels of UK inflation meant that non-staffing expenditure increased by nearly 30% to £4.245m.

Figures 1 and 2 below provide a pie-chart illustration of AECC Income and AECC Expenditure for respectively for the year 2022/23.

4.2 Capital Investment

AECC invested nearly £1.6m in capital improvements during the 2022-23 academic year, virtually all of which was funded from operational activities during the year. Of that £546k was for the completion of the construction and fitting out of the Integrated Rehabilitation Centre, £254k on a new ultrasound system, for use both clinically and as an educational resource, £138k on Teaching equipment and £634k on improvements to the premises and IT infrastructure of the University.

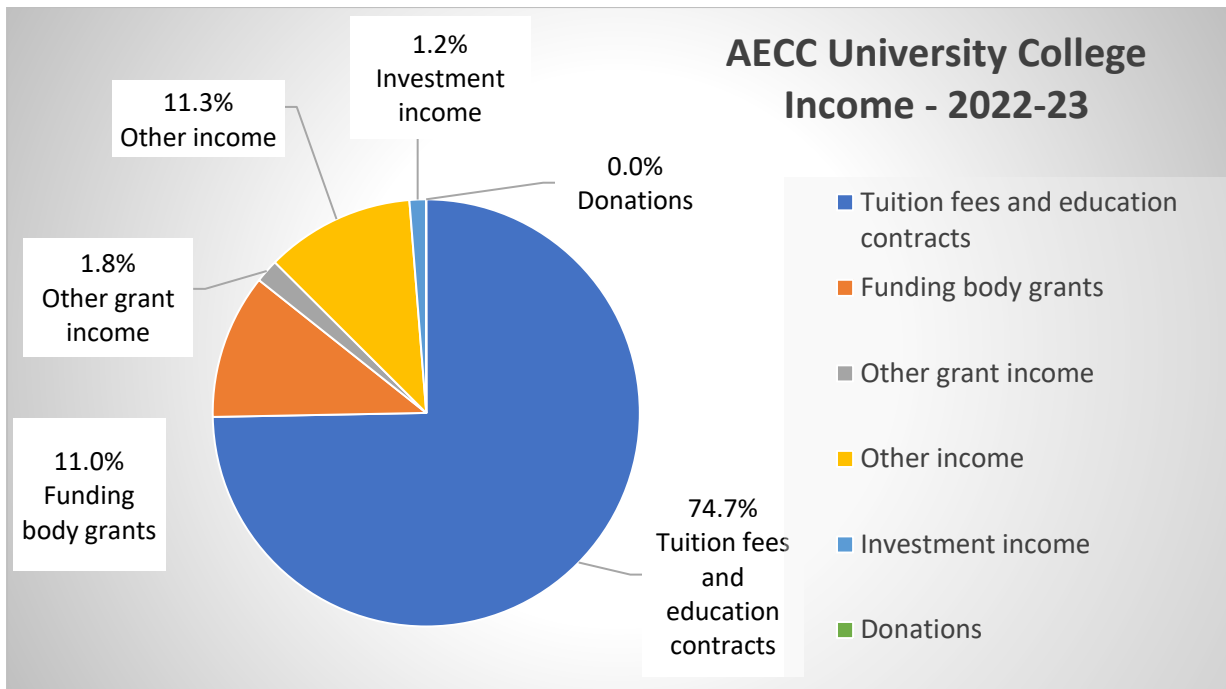


Figure 1 – AECC Income Chart

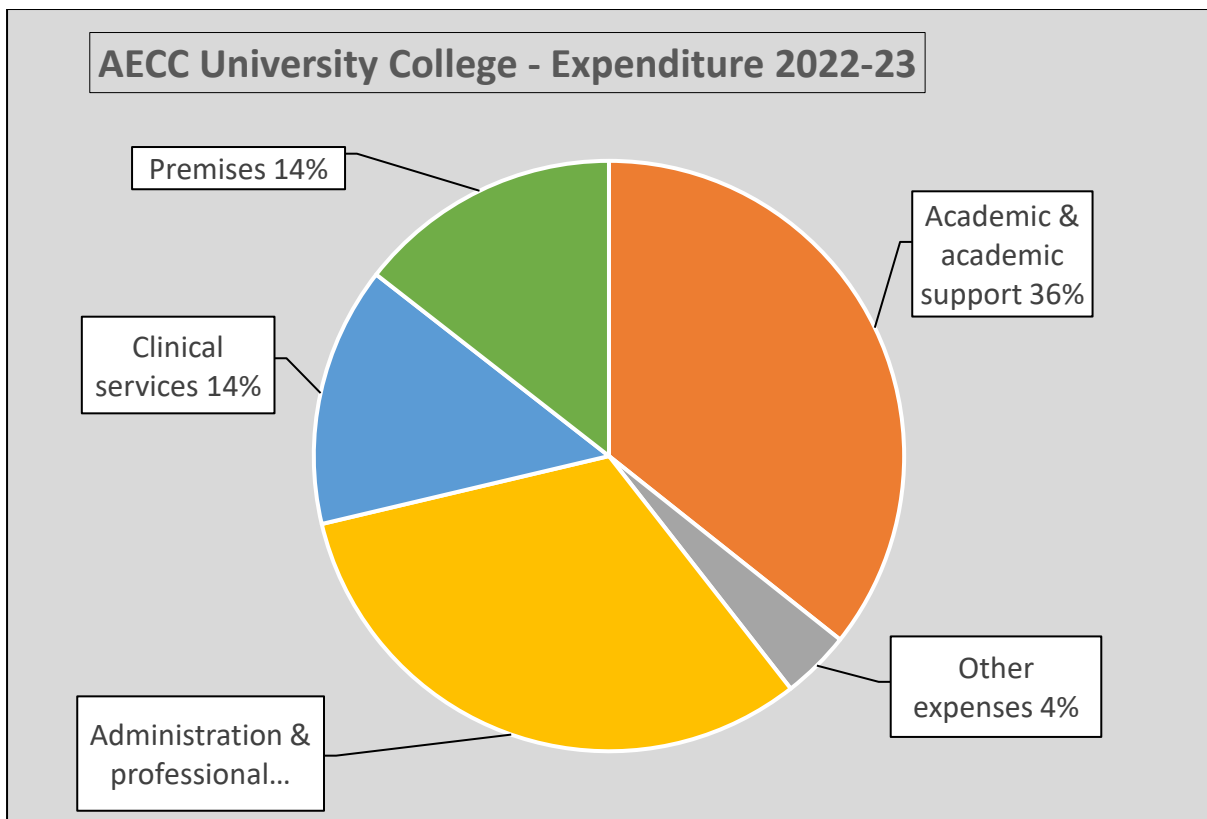


Figure 2 – AECC Expenditure Chart

4.3 Student Financial Support/Bursaries

Three types of financial support have been provided to students during the 2022-23 academic year. These are:

1. Emergency and short-term funding support
2. Bursaries
3. Scholarships

Emergency and short-term funding support:

There were three types of funding provided to students to meet short term needs during the 2022-23 academic year:

- Emergency Fund (where students need immediate financial support), 4 payments made
- Student Support Fund (where students need support to meet a short-term funding need), 56 payments made
- NHS Placement Fund (short term fund provided as a one-off by the NHS to support placement students, 83 payments made)

Bursaries:

During 2022-23 Maintenance Bursaries totalling £84,500 were paid to 44 students, plus 1 student received an Estrangement Bursary of £500 and 1 received a travel bursary of £91.

In addition, 22 students were provided with stethoscopes for use in their studies at a total value of £1,562.

Scholarships:

During 2022-23 Global Partnership Scholarships totalling £78,000 were allocated to a total of 26 students. These scholarships are awarded to undergraduate students who achieved the highest level of academic achievement prior to enrolling at AECC and are given as a reduction in tuition fees for year one.

In addition, 2 students were awarded Sport Scholarships totalling £570 to help support them to develop as elite sports performers alongside their studies.

5. Public Benefit and Social Value

AECC is an anchor institution within the local ward, county and region. We provide a base for local community organisations including the Pokesdown and Boscombe Community Forum and the Anglo-Italian Society, and we have developed our onsite forest area to provide a Forest School for the local primary school.

We contribute to the Boscombe Towns Fund Board, Local Skills Advisory Board, and their constituent committees, contributing to local bids including the Local Skills Improvement Plan.

Working closely with local NHS providers, our key role is to provide healthcare graduates to support local and regional workforce needs. Based on our long-standing global reputation for the training of chiropractors, our chiropractic graduates are sought after internationally as well as nationally.

As a Care Quality Commission-registered (CQC) healthcare provider we are subcontracted to provide musculoskeletal and clinical imaging services on behalf of our local Trust. We host onsite musculoskeletal triage clinics for a local Community Trust, and a lymphoedema service provided by a local cancer charity. We are contracted to supply First Contact Practice professionals to the local primary care network. In 2022/23 we won a large, multi-year tender for the training of First Contact Practitioners.

We also provide a free weekly breastfeeding clinic for mothers and babies delivered jointly between chiropractors and midwifery colleagues from Bournemouth University.

We provide clinical imaging services to the local and regional population– including an open upright MRI scanner (one of only 7 in the UK), ultrasound and X-ray. Other clinical services include chiropractic, podiatry, physiotherapy (musculoskeletal, neurological), 1-2-1 rehabilitation and community rehabilitation classes. Within this we provide low-cost options for the community delivered by fully-supervised students in chiropractic, podiatry and rehabilitation.

We provide a range of health testing and exercise prescription services to the local community, from patients referred on an Active Dorset referral scheme to elite athlete testing and support in our human performance laboratory.

We have been designated a Community Diagnostic Centre Spoke site for the delivery of CT and ultrasound services in Dorset, sit on the Board of the Dorset Integrated Care Partnership, and the Dorset Allied Health Council and Faculty.

We are involved in multiple research projects in chiropractic, podiatry and musculoskeletal interventions, contribute to the Dorset Innovation Hub and are founding members of Wessex Health Partners.

6. Conclusion

The annual report for 2022/23 demonstrates that AECC continues to ensure it provides a highly supportive and largely positive experience for our students, with excellent graduate outcomes, and a wide range of highly specialist learning resources.

AECC manages its resources efficiently and effectively to the benefit of its students and the wider community.