Proposed Merger Consultation Feedback

North Nottinghamshire College and Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
Introduction

We’d like to extend a warm “thank you” to the people who directly contributed to the five week public consultation on our proposal to merge Rotherham College and North Nottinghamshire College to create a single combined college serving the towns of Rotherham, Dinnington and Worksop and the surrounding catchment areas.

We are satisfied that we gave people ample opportunity to comment. We are very pleased to note that the majority of respondents support our merger proposals.

The feedback we received has reaffirmed our ambition to complete the merger in readiness for February 1st 2016.

We have listened to the positive, negative and neutral comments made during the consultation process and all comments will feed into our on-going detailed planning.

We recognised this is a starting point, not an end. We have much work to do to ensure the merger is implemented successfully for the benefit of our students, employers, the community and our staff, but we believe that this exciting new partnership is the best way to achieve our goal to

- Combine the complementary strengths of two already good organisations to offer more educational and training opportunities to school leavers, higher education students and adults wanting to develop higher-level skills for employment or business.
- Increase high-quality workplace and higher skills training for thousands of businesses locally, regionally and nationally.
- Create an organisation with a combined turnover of around £46 million each year, which will enable more investment in learner resources and facilities.
- Develop an organisation with greater capacity to engage nationally and regionally with partners, in order to bring greater benefits to our local communities.
Executive Summary

The Corporations of Rotherham College and North Nottinghamshire College held a joint public consultation from 24th August 2015 to 2nd October 2015 into proposals to merge the two institutions to create a new FE college serving the region.

An 18 page consultation document was produced called “Proposed Merger - Rotherham College and North Nottinghamshire College”. The consultation document, which was widely circulated, set out the proposal for merger and outlined the need for change and the benefits of merger, as viewed by the governing bodies of the existing colleges. It outlined what the merged college would offer and the perceived benefits and impact of the merger. It also outlined the potential risks associated with the merger and the steps being taken to mitigate the risks to ensure a successful transition in to the new large single college.

This report sets out and analyses the responses received during the consultation period. It also clarifies and responds to issues raised and sets out the next steps in the process.

It should be read in conjunction with the original consultation document, which is referred to on a number of occasions and can be viewed online at: www.rotherham.ac.uk/merger and www.nnc.ac.uk/merger

At the same time, we also consulted on proposals to name the new, overarching institution the RNN Group, whilst retaining the existing local names and identities.

We received ten written responses from individuals and organisations to our merger and/or naming proposals, either by way of a letter, email or by completing a standardised response form online or in writing.

We also offered the opportunity to attend a couple of public Stakeholder Consultation Meetings on 22nd September at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology and 24th September at North Nottinghamshire College. For information, no one attended either meeting.

A majority of those who responded told us:

- They believed a merger would positively impact on opportunities for learners and address the needs of employers in the region
- They understood the need to safeguard a wider range of provision for future learners and increase local participation rates, resulting in improved quality and success
- They supported our aim of developing innovation and improving access to learning for the community.
- They understood the merger would provide better value for money and greater public benefit

A summary of the responses can be seen in the next section.
1. Do you support the proposal for the merger of Rotherham College of Arts and Technology and North Nottinghamshire College?

Six respondents were positive about the proposal, and two were unsure.

2. The proposed name for the merged college is “RNN Group”. Local campuses will retain their names, ie “Rotherham College”, “North Notts College”. Do you support this?

All eight respondents supported the proposed name change to “RNN Group”.

The Chief Executive of the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency has also confirmed that neither Agency has any objection to the proposed use of the name for the merged college.

All respondents were also in support of the proposal to retain the names of the local college campuses, although one respondent did express reservations about the use of the shortened name for “Rotherham College”.

3. As “RNN Group” we plan to widen the range of opportunities for students, and expand our employer focussed provision and services. Do you support these aims?

All respondents supported the proposed aims, although one neighbouring further education college suggested that care should be taken not to replicate high quality provision already in existence elsewhere.
4. As “RNN Group” we plan to share good practice across our campuses, in order to further enhance the quality of learner and customer experience. Do you support this aim?

100% Yes

All respondents were in support of this aim.

5. As “RNN Group”, we will focus on innovation, improve access to learning and provide opportunities for communities to come together. Do you support these aims?

100% Yes

All respondents were in support of these aims.

6. Do you think any group, including staff and students, would be adversely affected by the merger plans?

Yes 90%
Unsure 10%

Two respondents felt that no groups would be adversely affected, and six were unsure. None of those who were unsure were from groups directly involved in either college, such as students or staff.
Responses to issues raised

Whilst there was a very limited response to the formal consultation, the Colleges believe that this is indicative of the extensive informal consultations which have taken place throughout the period leading up to the formal merger proposal.

In formulating the merger proposal, the Colleges consulted extensively with their external stakeholders, including other colleges, schools, Local Authorities, LEPs and employers. These consultations took the form of a confidential in-depth interview, conducted by an independent body. The resultant report confirmed overwhelming support from all of these sectors for the proposed merger.

Although there were no objections to any of the proposals within the consultation, some of the responses did raise specific issues. Following further consideration of these issues, the Colleges offer the following responses.

**Use of local names**

There were no objections to the proposed new name for the merged college, and the proposal to retain the local names for each of the college sites was strongly supported by students and staff.

Although reservations were expressed by one local college about the use of the shortened name for “Rotherham College”, this style has been in use for several years, reflecting the broad range of curriculum now offered, and it is the name by which the college has become known within the locality. There is no evidence to suggest the use of the shortened name has caused any confusion, either to students or to employers, as other local further education colleges have their own separate identities linked to their particular localities (e.g. Dearne Valley College).

**Risk of expansion duplicating existing provision**

Whilst the merged college has a clear aim to expand its curriculum offer and range of services to employers, there is no intention to duplicate existing high quality provision offered by other providers. Both Colleges have a long track record of working collaboratively with other local providers across the region. Our curriculum is tailored to the local labour market, and is responsive to the needs of employers, to ensure that the broadest choice of high quality provision, offering the strongest possible progression to work or further study, is made accessible to all within our locality.

**Possible effects on staff**

The Colleges have held regular briefings and consultation meetings with staff and recognised Trades Union representatives, which have enabled any concerns to be raised and addressed at an early stage. Within the limitations of the very real uncertainties regarding future funding, faced by the whole of the further education sector and the wider public sector, both Colleges have provided reassurances to staff regarding their continuing employment and contractual terms and conditions.
Locations of the colleges and existing transport links

Key
- Bus Route
- Northern Rail and Robin Hood Line
- Rotherham College Bus Route
- North Nottinghamshire College Bus Route
- North Nottinghamshire College Campus
- Rotherham College of Arts and Technology Campus