

Consultation document
for the proposed merger
of Barnfield College and
West Herts College

November 2018

Merger proposal: consultation feedback



INTRODUCTION

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the public consultation, which was open from 14 September to 15 October 2018.

Feedback was strongly in favour of the merger between Barnfield College and West Herts College, which is scheduled for 1 February 2019.

Consultation is an integral part of the merger process. It is vital that local people have a say when significant changes of this nature are planned.

We are satisfied that there was opportunity for everyone affected to have their say and to feedback comments – the results of which will be taken into consideration during our detailed planning and onward communications.

This report reviews the responses received during the consultation period, addressing and clarifying issues raised.

Thank you for your support and interest.



Peter Hill
Chair of Governors
Barnfield College



Phil Thompson
Chair of Governors
West Herts College



OVERVIEW

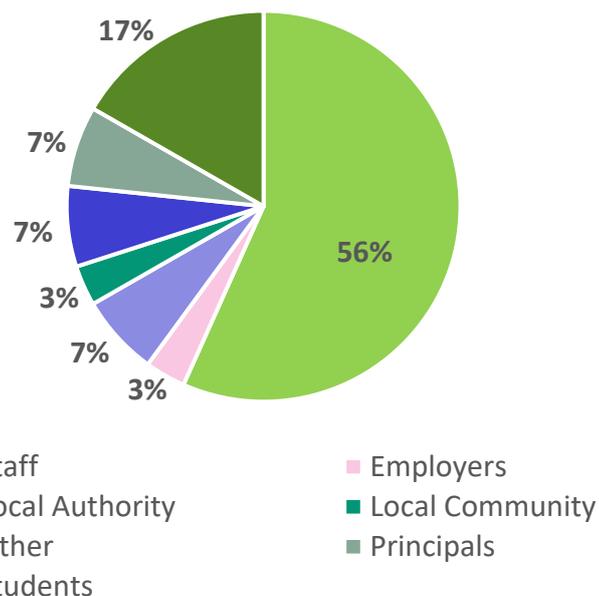
The level of positive interest in the merger means that we can continue with our plans – looking to the future with confidence in terms of our ambition to:

- Create a combined further education college serving Luton, Hemel Hempstead, Watford and surrounding areas
- Equip students with the skills they need to maximise opportunities in life and work
- Develop the longer-term aspirations of young people and adults
- Root the New College in its local communities and economies – boosting productivity and prosperity
- Ensure the New College sustains the financial strength required to deliver high-quality services
- Deliver specialist skills to support niche employment sectors with high growth potential
- Build dynamic partnerships and stakeholder coalitions for the shared benefit of our communities

Who responded to the Consultation?

We received 30 responses: from college students and staff, an employer, local community representatives, a learning trust, further education colleges and local authorities.

56% of respondents were college staff.



Support for the proposed merger of West Herts College and Barnfield College

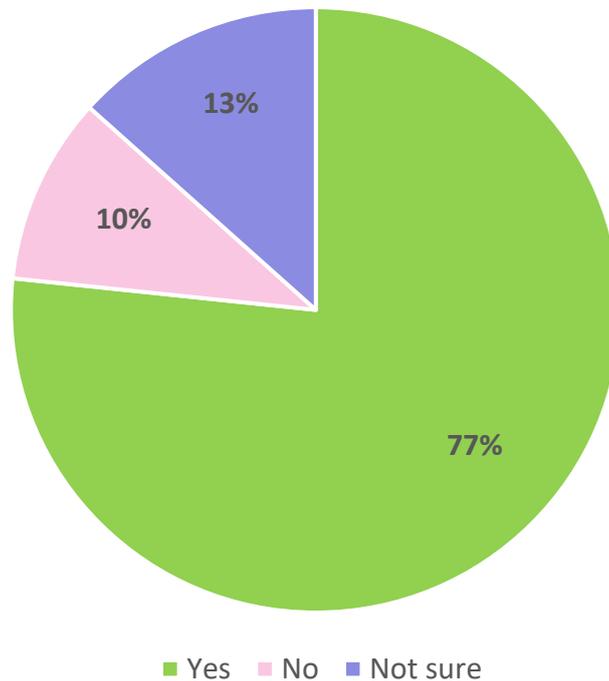
Summary of feedback comments

In favour:

- A positive move for the community, students and staff
- Likely to increase community engagement
- Offers greater financial stability
- Potential for enhancing college processes and energising college services

Concerns:

- Wouldn't a local merger be preferable?
- Could it be time-consuming – distracting from services for students?



We plan to retain the local identities of West Herts College and Barnfield College, do you support this?

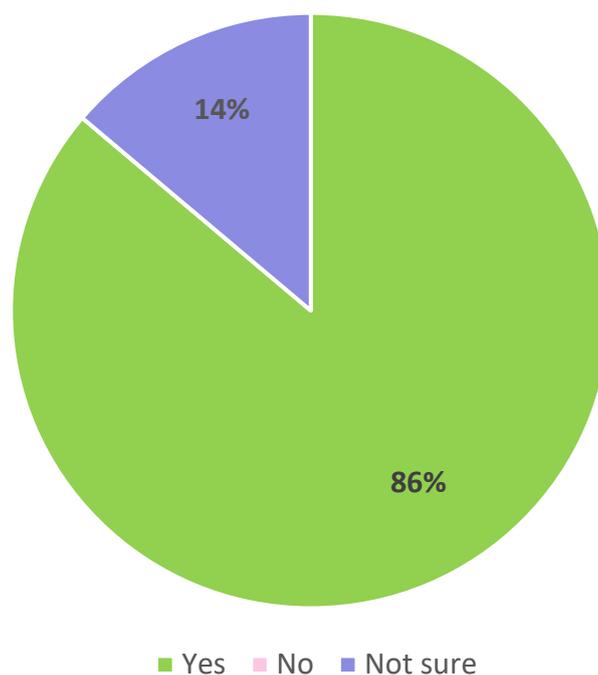
Summary of feedback comments:

In favour:

- Separate identities will serve the communities best in all localities
- Yes: Barnfield needs to reflect the local communities it serves

Concerns:

- Yes: but over time maybe a closer identity would be advantageous



Are there particular aspects of sharing good practice that you would like to be considered?

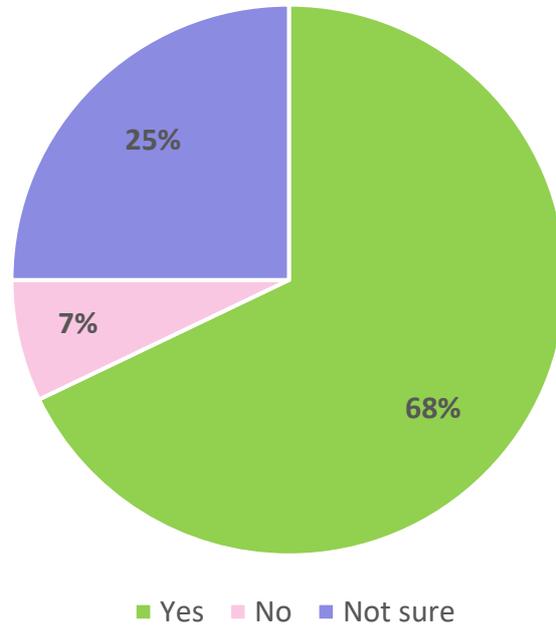
Summary of feedback comments

Suggestions for sharing:

- Teaching practice, training and development
- Local engagement: communities, businesses and residents
- Business processes: to boost efficiencies

Wider observations:

- New facilities at Barnfield College are as important as enhanced services
- Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire are different places – check for synergies before deciding what to share



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

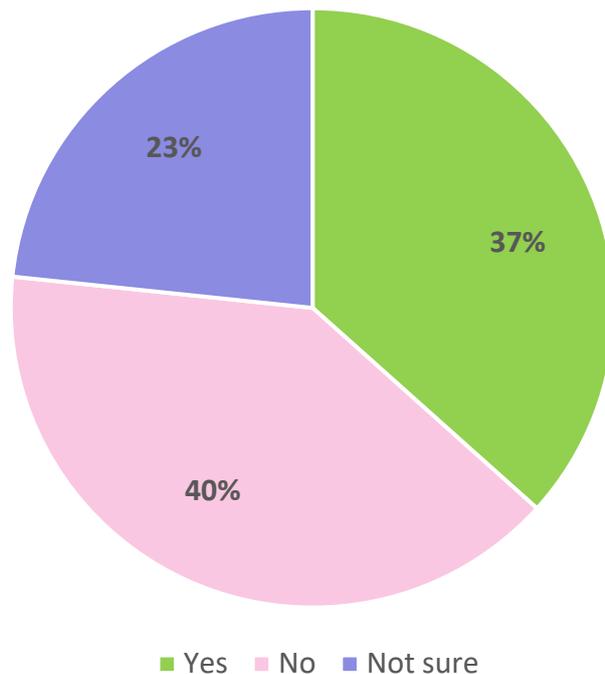
Summary of feedback comments

Suggestions:

- A coordinated period of transition will limit disruption
- Both colleges should keep their local focus – for residents and employers
- Ultimately, greater rationalisation will enhance services for students

Comments and observations:

- Inevitably, some staff will be anxious about their futures – this should be managed sensitively
- If additional travel was required for students or staff, this could prove a barrier



The online survey included an opportunity to make general observations and raise wider issues

GENERAL COMMENTS

Summary of feedback

Observations:

- It's great... makes sense logistically... positive for long-term reputation... an exciting development
- Increasing capacity to engage with local employers will be key to success
- Beware of too many changes too soon that can't be managed
- There's every prospect that the new institution will be greater than the sum of its parts

WIDER ISSUES

Addressing general queries and questions raised

Is financial sustainability ensured?

College mergers offer much by way of financial security, with the new larger organisation having access to a combined (larger) pool of funding alongside longer-term growth potential.

Risk assessment involving external auditors is central to the due diligence process in the lead up to a formal merger.

Will students need to travel further now?

No students or staff will need to travel further as a result of the merger, with provision to remain in place on all campuses and in each town*.

Are staff at risk of redundancy?

Given the limitations on public funding for education we believe the proposed merger offers the best opportunity for long-term financial security at both colleges.

While we cannot give any guarantees, we will be reassuring staff regarding their contractual terms and conditions.

Please note: We will continue to maintain a dialogue with stakeholders – learners, staff, employers and our communities – to ensure clear mutual understanding.

**NB At West Herts College, Kings Langley campus will be closing as part of a separate development which is redeveloping the site at Hemel Hempstead.*

Summary of the online consultation process

A four-week online consultation was hosted jointly by Barnfield College and West Herts College.

Outlining the scope of the proposed merger between the two colleges, it detailed our ambitions for the future alongside opportunities for feedback via an online survey (which was available in print, on request).

A 16-page online document entitled *Have You Say*, provided full details of our merger ambitions, setting out the change and the benefits of the proposal as viewed by the governing bodies of both colleges.

It was distributed widely:

- Posted on both colleges' websites
- Launched and advertised in national and local press
- Promoted on social media
- Issued directly to over 60 key stakeholders
- Promoted to students and staff at both colleges
- Briefed directly to local MPs, local authorities and stakeholder groups
- Notified to the Secretary of State for Education