

# Merger Proposal for Otley College and Easton College



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## Foreword

Easton and Otley Colleges are proposing a merger to form one new College serving the areas of Suffolk and Norfolk and the wider Eastern region. The Colleges, owing to their specialist nature, serve a wider community in the Eastern region not constrained by geographical boundaries. This proposal builds on our existing student and employer base and seeks to enhance this offer through a merger. This proposal looks to secure the specialist curriculum areas we offer for our students, and secure the employment of our staff and better serve our employers and other stakeholders through an agreed regional strategy that is developed jointly.

Both Colleges are currently successful but we recognise that there are additional benefits this merger would provide. The merger proposes that we build on the successful partnership we have established. We have been working together at a senior level for more than two years. Both Governing Bodies are committed to providing the best opportunities to our stakeholders and building on the respective strengths of both institutions.

There is a strong commitment to operate and develop the capital infrastructure at both sites.

As two specialist landbased Colleges we have a similar curriculum, culture and ethos. Both Colleges currently come from a position of strength to this merger proposal. Our aim is to enhance and grow our provision for students and employers in both counties. We are firmly committed to ensuring that our courses are of the highest quality and sustainable for the future in these challenging times. Our respective strengths are complementary and the new College can be expected to increase participation, improve the quality of our curriculum whilst looking to be more efficient in its delivery.

Our industries are supportive of this vision for the future and a wide range of stakeholders has already expressed its support for this proposal.

The document sets out in more detail the benefits we think will be gained from the proposed merger. The proposal is subject to the statutory requirement for a public consultation lasting one month. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) will consider responses to the consultation and other information before making a decision to forward the proposal to the Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills. If approved we anticipate merger would take place in June 2012.

Views on this merger proposal are welcomed. Please respond by midnight on 6 March 2012.

Further information and where you can make a response can be found at <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/allthelatest/consultations/> or via email [providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](mailto:providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk)



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*In brief*

**The Proposed Merger of Easton and Otley Colleges**

1.1 In future years the 2010's will surely be looked back on as a decade of massive change, a period of financial austerity but also an era when agriculture and food production became very important issues. In the current financial climate it is difficult to think in terms of growth and new opportunities but the combination of these circumstances creates a very exciting opportunity for Easton and Otley Colleges.

1.2 The past history for both Colleges has been one of significant competition and

Our vision for a new relationship for growth and excellence in a new financial climate

whilst this can be healthy in some circumstances, it can also stifle the more overriding need for two publicly

funded Colleges to collaborate. Collaboration will be essential to meet the very significant skill needs of the industries the Colleges were set up to serve.

1.3 For over two years the Colleges have been working together to explore the potential benefits of collaboration. This started off as an exercise to make cost savings but has delivered far more: an absolute determination to develop the two Colleges together and meet the needs of our

industries and communities through a vision of stability, growth, improved access and quality. To achieve this aim we have to utilise each other's strengths and maximise the efficiency savings we can achieve to invest in a quality service to students.

1.4 In this short consultation document we set out our ideas. As we work together and in partnership with our key stakeholders the benefits have grown in importance. The ideas of our staff, students and communities we serve, and the employers who rely on us are all critically important if we are to make the public asset of the two Colleges deliver a bright future for us all.



This consultation is all about ensuring these ideas are captured and utilised in our plans.

**Our vision for a new relationship for growth and excellence in a new financial climate.**

**Why should Easton and Otley Colleges join forces?**

2.1 We propose that Easton and Otley Colleges merge to form a specialist vocational College serving Suffolk and Norfolk and the wider region in terms of its landbased specialisms. Unlike many mergers where the new college has a new branding and identity our proposed merger will retain and develop the existing branding, history and reputation of Easton College in Norfolk and Otley College in Suffolk.



2.2 The two Colleges both have strong histories of serving the landbased sector alongside other specialist subjects such as Construction, Engineering and Sport. The bigger picture in terms of the economy of Suffolk and Norfolk is still intertwined with a very substantial agricultural industry. The future competitiveness of the

agricultural sector will be determined by the skills of those in the industry and there has been an increasing challenge to recruit the right number and provide the right skill levels to meet industry needs.

These issues are heightened by an age profile for those

We will improve access to our specialist provision across Suffolk and Norfolk

employed in the agricultural sector well in excess of 50 years of age; very significant increases in technical skill levels required and the available number of young people in Suffolk and Norfolk are reducing through demographic change.

The agricultural sector will face massive challenges over the next 50 years to meet the food needs of an expanding world population, to make an important contribution to reducing global warming and in providing an environment in which tourism can prosper. This proposed merger will, without doubt, place the combined College at the heart of the efforts to address these challenges.

2.3 External scrutiny by Ofsted has assured us (and those we serve) that our two Colleges are performing well. Our grades are the result of hard work by dedicated staff and by leadership teams who are committed to further improvement and are

constantly looking forward at the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Key issues we need to resolve include:

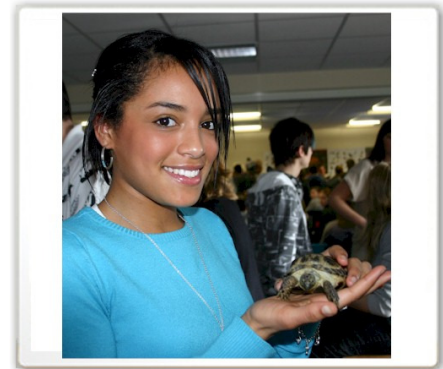
- The substantial shortfall of technical level staff in the landbased sector
- The substantial reduction in government funding for Further Education
- Improving the access and progression for students across Suffolk and Norfolk to high quality specialist landbased and other specialist industry provision
- Increasing the number of young people undertaking Apprenticeships
- Assisting the unemployed to access the career opportunities available in our industry sectors

### **Will the spread and availability of courses, training programmes and apprenticeships change?**

3.1 A key part of our merger proposal is that we improve access to our specialist provision across Suffolk and Norfolk. Our aim is to provide access for students from entry level with progression to higher levels of study (where possible to degree level) to allow individuals to reach their maximum potential in terms of the vocational areas we provide.

Our emphasis then is on growth; growth in our capacity and capability to deliver, and growth in the number of students accessing our provision

A key element of our work will be to collaborate closely with our partners in the school sector, both to ensure students see and have access to pathways to careers in our industries, but also to utilise our curriculum and resources to raise overall student performance and participation.



3.2 Due to the specialist nature of our work it is not realistic to deliver many subjects in local centres, partly due to the high levels of capital investment required. We are, therefore, strongly focusing on our network of public transport routes to ensure effective access to both Colleges. Some programmes are likely to only be viable in one location and the use of residential accommodation at Easton College allows us an alternative to daily travel in these circumstances.

3.3 Much of the provision in both Colleges at both sites will continue as at present but key strengths of the two Colleges will be utilised to support the development of the other.

Easton's strengths in agricultural provision will be utilised to increase the range and volume of provision in agriculture at Otley, whilst Otley's strengths in specialist areas of Construction and Engineering will be used to develop these areas further at Easton.

- 3.4 Increasing the number and range of individuals studying our subjects is critical to

Identifying and sharing good practice across the institution is critical

economic success. Ensuring we provide the right courses at the right level and appropriate mode of study with

access is a key challenge. Following careful consultation with key stakeholders we expect to work in partnership to meet this expectation.



- 3.5 Our emphasis then is on growth; growth in our capacity and capability to deliver and growth in the number of students accessing our provision across Suffolk and Norfolk.

A key commitment will be to further develop the breadth of our provision, particularly for underrepresented groups.

### Will the quality of the courses and training programmes improve?

- 4.1 A key judgement on a college's leadership is the extent to which it raises standards, aspirations and meets the needs of its customers. Identifying and sharing good practice across the institution is a critical part of improving what we do. Both Colleges have spent over two years identifying strengths and weaknesses, sharing strengths to support each other. This has been a very positive experience and has built a very collaborative and supportive relationship between staff at both Colleges.

- 4.2 The partnership we have developed has already gone well beyond friendly conversations. Using shared services approaches we already collaborate on our respective best practice with joint delivery of Finance, Human Resources and Management Information Services and the necessary Information Technology platform is at advanced stages of development. Curriculum development and support is already benefiting from the use of both Colleges' specialist staff and increasingly joined up

approaches to the planning of the curriculum to provide effective progression.

We already see strong evidence of the partnership having significant demonstrable impacts on quality of provision.



4.3 We are already realising the benefits of partnership and we know there are further great opportunities to harmonise and rationalise the new College's functions, resulting in further increased efficiency gains and increasing value for money, but the most important benefits lie elsewhere.

4.4 The Colleges exist to provide high quality learning opportunities that support individuals to move into and develop worthwhile careers over their working life. As specialist vocational institutions we have particular responsibilities to support and work closely with the industry areas we serve. To meet these objectives the students' journey needs to

The partnership we have developed has already gone well beyond friendly conversations and sharing

start and finish at the right level and provide opportunity to progress onto study and or employment at a higher level, in the right subject area, with appropriate support. Both Colleges already work closely with many schools but we need to further expand this work particularly for 14-16 year olds to ensure they are aware of the opportunities in our industries and to make sure they are on the right track. We want to further expand our work with special schools, the voluntary sector and increase our range of taster courses and availability of specialist careers advice to maximise access and to meet the recruitment needs of the industries we serve.

Encouraging a student to study, for example, an Agricultural Apprenticeship will serve no purpose if we

We know there are further great opportunities to harmonise and rationalise the new College's functions

cannot fulfil their aspirations. We will work closely with the employers across Suffolk and Norfolk to create more

apprenticeship opportunities at Level 2 and Advanced Apprenticeships ensuring a full range of our industries areas are covered across both counties. We have already combined the operational management of Work Based Learning in the

two Colleges to maximise our

Ensuring our courses meet industry as well as individuals' needs and lead to progression to and in employment

efficiency and effectiveness in delivering work based learning. It is not, however, just about Apprenticeships, our focus has to be on ensuring our courses meet industry as well as individuals' needs and lead to progression to and in employment. The development of strong work based skills and meeting of employer skills requirements are crucial to our success in giving students rewarding careers. We will continue to develop our partnership with employers to engage them strongly in the design and operation of all of our programmes and ensure they meet their needs.

It should be no surprise that these developments clearly align with both counties and regional priorities and accord strongly with the "New Anglia LEP's" objectives (Local Enterprise Partnership covering Suffolk and Norfolk).

By following this agenda we are confident that we will help build social inclusion, help lower unemployment and be a part in increasing the economic vitality of the region, but there is still more to say on progression.

4.5 Skills needs in our industries are not confined to Further Education level skills. Higher level skills in our vocational areas are in significant demand and this demand from employers will continue to grow with the advancement in technology



we currently see. In both Suffolk and Norfolk the proportion of young people progressing to Higher Education is lower than the national average; we also support a significant number of students wishing to study at Higher Education level in our core landbased subjects.

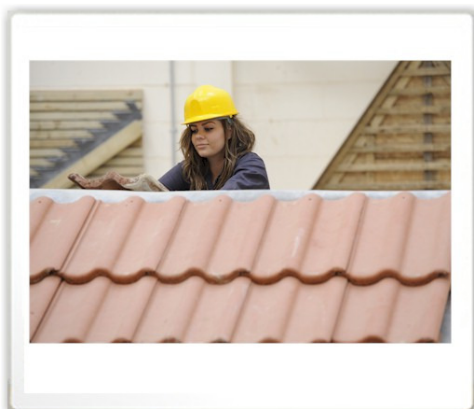
We will help build social inclusion, help lower unemployment and be a part in increasing the economic vitality of the region

This has been putting our industry at a significant disadvantage in terms of the pool of intellectual skills available. The two Colleges work closely with University Campus Suffolk and the University of East Anglia to address these issues.

Both Colleges already deliver vocational Foundation degrees and Easton College has recently been validated to deliver full BSc Honours Degrees in Agriculture and Equitation and Coaching. Currently the numbers of Higher Education students at both Colleges are low and the synergies of working together on Higher Education issues offers significant opportunities for growth and quality improvement.

### Does joining the two Colleges make good business sense?

5.1 Both Colleges have had the opportunity to work together and have already started to realise savings from increased efficiency and synergies from working together. Our shared service collaborative work has revealed to us the significant benefits of moving from a strong collaboration to a formal merger.



Our shared service collaborative work has revealed to us the significant benefits of moving from a strong collaboration to a formal merger

Key benefits will include:

- strong shared leadership delivered on a cost effective basis
- an ability to strategically and jointly develop approaches to curriculum delivery without the threat of inter-college competition derailing the relationship
- a joint investment programme
- the opportunity to create a larger, more resilient organisation with the capacity to cope with the current financial climate, whilst also delivering against the important industry challenges outlined earlier in this document.

Synergies of working together on Higher Education issues offers significant opportunities for growth and quality improvement

It is important to note the two Colleges are both currently financially strong; this is not a merger of necessity but a strategic response to enable us to meet the challenges ahead.

5.2 These merger proposals aim to maintain our financial security in a climate of reducing funding and to capitalise on our ability to grow now for the benefit of our industries and communities. Now is the time to invest in our staff, our development of

curriculum in partnership with industry and in innovative approaches. We need to continue to invest in our learning resources and environments and safeguard our students and industries futures.

We therefore propose a type “A” merger, where both Colleges are dissolved and a new merged College is formed

relationships are important to the Colleges’ success and are fundamental to the proposals for the new merged College. To this end

the names of Easton and Otley College will continue to be used under the

### Tell us what you think

6.1 The principles prescribed in this consultation document already have support from many key stakeholders including MPs’, both County Councils, the New Anglia LEP, industry, charities and employer bodies. It has been clear from the outset that



maintaining the identities of both Colleges will be important to our local communities and that this is seen to be a coming together of two strong Colleges. We therefore propose a type “A” merger, (where both Colleges are dissolved and a new merged College is formed) which will operate the two existing Colleges under their existing names. The local presence, identity and

banner of the new Corporation (with a single Governing Body).

6.2 Our plans for the new College will be strongly influenced by the views given in response to this consultation and through detailed engagement with stakeholders, staff and students.

This is the time to tell us what you think of our plans and help us meet the needs of the local communities, industries and students we serve. We welcome your views on any aspects of our proposal in particular your views on:

- Our understanding of the industry challenges we face and our vision
- Our plans for the development of the curriculum and access to it
- Whether you think any group(s) of students would be adversely affected by the merger

The Skills Funding Agency is

running a consultation on our plans between 6 February and 6 March 2012.

The agency will publish a report on the results within two to three weeks of the closing date so we can take them into account when we



formally propose the merger to the Agency and the Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills later in the year. The criteria against which the final merger proposals will be considered are at Annex 1. The Statutory Notices at Annex J are being used to notify people.

The main way to tell us what you think is by completing an online survey.

This consultation document and a link to the survey are available on the Skills Funding Agency website at:

<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/allthelatest/consultations/>

You will also find the document and a link to the survey on our own College websites. You can also tell us what you think in a letter to:

Assessment and Intervention Team  
Skills Funding Agency  
Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry  
CV1 2WT

or email:

[providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](mailto:providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk)

6.3 We are moving ahead with this proposal in the knowledge that we have strong support from our stakeholders and staff. We very much look forward to your responses and further developing the support our two

Colleges can provide the counties of Suffolk and Norfolk.



6.4 If you require this document in a different language, or in a different format, please email David Lawrence, Principal Easton College, [dlawrence@easton.ac.uk](mailto:dlawrence@easton.ac.uk) or Philip Winfield, Principal Otley College, [philip.winfield@otleycollege.ac.uk](mailto:philip.winfield@otleycollege.ac.uk)

Thank you.

## *In detail*

### **Annex A: The background of the Colleges**

#### **Otley College**

7.1 Otley College is a specialist landbased College situated 7 miles north of Ipswich in Suffolk. It offers provision in 12 subject areas. The total turnover in 2010-11 was £12.531m. It enrolls 1198 16-18 year olds and 1393 adults 19+. The majority of the provision for 16-18 year olds is full-time on campus delivery whilst the provision for adults is predominantly off site. The College enrolls apprentices on to a range of programmes and in 2010-11 the number of apprentices was 502. The College, owing to its specialist nature, recruits students from a large geographical area with students travelling some distance to access this provision. The majority of students are from Suffolk, however, a significant number also come from Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex. Easton College is approximately 43 miles to the north of Otley.

7.2 The College is part of University Campus Suffolk (UCS) through which its Higher Education provision is offered. UCS awards are jointly validated by the University of East Anglia and University of Essex. There are 118 full-time equivalent students studying Higher

Education qualifications at the College. In addition the College works with over 25 local schools through partnership arrangements and delivers vocational curriculum to 295 students from our partner schools. The College offers vocational provision from entry level courses through to degree level programmes.

7.3 The College estate covers an area of approximately 60 acres (which is leased from Felix Thornley Cobbold Agricultural Trust). The College infrastructure is aligned to the curriculum offer and comprises a mixture of theory and practical work spaces. Significant investment in the capital infrastructure has occurred over the last four years. This has improved practical facilities for Animal Care, Construction and Equine students significantly.

7.4 The College recruits students from all the ethnic minorities in the area. The population of students from ethnic minorities is 5.2% compared with 7.2% for Suffolk (2010/11).

#### **Easton College**

7.5 Easton College is a specialist landbased college based 5 miles to the west of Norwich in Norfolk. It offers provision in 13 subject areas. The total turnover in 2010-11 was £12.544m.

It enrolls 1,030 16-18 year olds and 501 adults 19+, the majority of provision being full-time on campus. The College enrolls a number of apprentices onto programmes aligned to the specialist curriculum offer of the College. The number of apprentices enrolled to programmes in 2010-11 was 321. Like Otley, owing to the specialist nature of the provision and the residential facilities on site Easton is able to recruit from a large geographical area including Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. Otley College is approximately 43 miles to the south of Easton.

7.6 The College is a partner of the University of East Anglia (UEA) who validate the awards offered by the College. The recent development of the Centre for Contemporary Agriculture (CCA) has allowed further degree level study to support the landbased industries. There are currently 120 full-time equivalent students studying for degree level programmes at the College. In addition the College also works with 33 local schools and offers a vocational education provision for these students. The total number of students on these programmes is 511.

7.7 The College has a large estate of approximately 245 hectares (freehold). Easton's estate comprises of practical

and theoretical vocational teaching areas including a working farm. In addition the College also has residential facilities for students. The College has invested significantly in the College estate over the last few years. This investment has directly benefited students in that it provides an excellent learning environment in which to study.

Easton College has just completed a major capital programme (£21m) which has included the development of the new Jubilee 3 teaching building, a new equestrian and animal care centre, the Easton tennis centre, 22 additional ensuite student residential bedrooms, a full size 3g football/rugby pitch, an agricultural engineering workshop and new road access to the College.

7.8 The College recruits students from a wide range of ethnic minorities in the area. The population of students from ethnic minorities is 1.28% (for 2010/11 compared with 5.69% for Norfolk in 2009 (latest available data)).

## **Annex B: Leadership, governance, management and staffing**

8.1 In the current economic climate, where budgets are being more constrained, it is essential that colleges look to secure provision locally and regionally for all our stakeholders. Over two years ago Otley conducted a strategic review of the options for the future to protect and enhance the curriculum offer in the Eastern Region. A full review of options was undertaken and discussed by the Corporation of Otley College, the outcome being a proposal to discuss the opportunity to work more closely with another landbased college in the Eastern Region. The college chosen was Easton College. Easton College's Corporation had also been considering their strategic direction and the proposal to work together and ultimately to merge also met their strategic objectives.

After more than two years of partnership working, where senior managers were shared between the two Colleges, it was agreed that the next logical step was a merger of the two Colleges to realise additional benefits. Both Colleges recognised the importance of the landbased sector to the Eastern region and wished to better meet the needs of our stakeholders.

As both Colleges are locally strong it was agreed by the two Corporations to seek a type A merger. This will mean dissolving the existing Colleges and forming a new College. The College Corporations believe this will strengthen the landbased provision locally and regionally and meet the needs of the communities they serve.

8.2 The two Governing Bodies and Senior Leadership Teams have worked together for a number of years. Following the successful shared services project a trust has been built up in both Colleges at all levels. This is key to the successful working of the new College. To move the Colleges to this position a Joint Steering Group (JSG) was set up that had membership from both Colleges' Governing Bodies and Senior Leadership Teams. This steering group has guided the development of the merger proposal and been the reference point for each major decision throughout the process. The JSG has now been dissolved and a shadow board of Corporation members is being set up to lead the proposals through to completion. The members of the shadow board will make recommendations to their respective boards for ratification or action.

8.3 It is proposed that the new College will have one Principal with a Vice Principal based at each campus to oversee operations at a senior level. In addition a Vice Principal with responsibility for support areas will operate between the two Colleges. As part of the shared services project both Colleges are harmonising their back office services to enable a smooth transition to a new structure. The Colleges believe this will provide stability in the new structure. As the Colleges are some distance apart it is not proposed that major curriculum changes will occur at a local level. Both Colleges recognise the need to be responsive and adaptable to their local needs as well as regional priorities.

Ultimately the merger proposal seeks to grow provision locally and regionally. This meets the needs of our stakeholders for an appropriate curriculum and provides better employment security for our staff.

8.4 **Legal considerations and staffing**

The Transfer of Undertakings regulations (TUPE) will ensure that the move to a new organisation will protect staff legally. Both Colleges are consulting with staff formally to ensure that this process is conducted in an open and transparent manner. Both Colleges recognise the key role staff play in the success of the merger.

## Annex C: Equality, diversity and inclusion

9.1 As the Colleges reviewed the option to merge, they commenced an assessment of its potential impact on equality, diversity and inclusion in their work. The assessment to date has shown a positive outcome across all of the indicators, including:

- a coordinated infrastructure to address and support social inclusion in disadvantaged areas;
- increased recruitment of students from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups;
- better access to provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- increased capacity to break gender-biased recruitment patterns;
- improved effectiveness in researching and providing for employers' needs;
- the transformational sharing of good practice in embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in lessons;
- the wider involvement of disparate communities in forums and activities; and
- better access to coherent and coordinated education progression routes, from entry level to HE

9.2 The culture of the merged College will be supported by building on the range of active and effective initiatives

at both Colleges, including: the work of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and the Single Equality Scheme Steering Group.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, chaired by the Vice Principal, includes students, governors and staff. This diverse team has the expertise to guide, promote and improve equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the new College.

The Single Equality Scheme Steering group chaired by the HR Director focuses on the Single Equality Scheme ensuring the College's key targets in regards to equality, diversity and inclusion remain in focus. This group is also supported by student membership.

The new College will adopt the best practice and include two other focus groups one to report on Student Services, which includes physical access to site, and the other on learning materials which include accessibility, readability, differentiation, IAG and Marketing. These groups will be chaired by a senior person from Student Services and a person from the Quality team focusing on Teaching and Learning.

At the heart of any outstanding equality, diversity and inclusion practice is the

success of all its students. So the merged College will prioritise, through their Equality objectives, upon the necessary elements which will enable all students to meet their full potential. Put simply, the College will strive to consistently deliver outstanding student experiences and outstanding success rates. At the heart of the College's future plans is an unrelenting focus on students' progress and achievement – a central influence on the College's planning for learning.

## Annex D: The College sites and the potential impact on providers

10.1 The merged College will bring together two specialist Colleges in the Eastern region. Being over 40 miles apart and based in Suffolk and Norfolk there will be no negative impact on the current offer at either College. Building on the strengths of each College will, in fact, enhance the offer to students at both sites. There is a strong commitment to operate and



develop the capital infrastructure at both sites to enable students to study in the very best facilities.

The bringing together of two specialist landbased Colleges will enable strategic decisions on the allocation of capital projects to be made in a

more coherent way. The capital requirements for landbased colleges is significant and the opportunity to consider these investments strategically should give greater benefit to students and employers locally and regionally.

10.2 Analysis of both Colleges' recruitment shows that students come from most parts of the Eastern region with significant numbers coming from our neighbouring counties.

This is not surprising in that the Colleges do offer specialist curriculum in the landbased disciplines. In the past there has been some competition for students from the border area of Suffolk and Norfolk. In the new College this will not be an issue. Travel-to-learn maps demonstrate that the distance between the two College sites exceeds the comfortable travel-to-study distance for students,

many of whom largely rely on public or College transport. This inevitably limits the opportunity for rationalisation of the curriculum between the two centres. Therefore, the strategy is to actively support and grow a similar curriculum at both centres, sharing the expertise and best practice

from the delivery and management teams in each College to the benefit of a greater number of students and employers. Easton College's main site is situated in the village of Easton in Norfolk. The College has been investing in the site over a number of years with a significant capital investment in recent years. This has improved the resource for students and improved the working environment for students. Otley College is also rurally based approximately 7 miles north of Ipswich in the village of Otley in Suffolk. As part of the recent discussions between the two Colleges meetings of the two Senior Leadership Teams are taking place to ensure capital investments are delivered in the appropriate campus. These recommendations will be put to the new Corporation in due course. These decisions will be based on improving existing facilities or developing modern facilities to support the growth strategy of the merger proposal. Both Colleges assess themselves as fit for purpose but need further investment to ensure they remain at industry standards.

## Annex E: Potential risks of the proposal

11.1 Throughout this document we have identified key issues facing the Further Education sector as a whole and taken account of how these challenges and opportunities will impact on both Colleges going forward.

Both Colleges are aware that the change being consulted on does carry risk to the current operations. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which is the Senior Management Teams of both Colleges, are proactively managing the inherent risks this proposal presents. The SLT meet weekly via video conference to discuss the merger progress and monitor the actions agreed by the strategic group of Governors. Both Colleges have a good track record in managing risk.

The SLT manage the risks associated with the merger proposal and it regularly forms part of the discussion at the joint SLT meetings. Both Colleges separately also have identified the risks in their own College risk registers. These are reviewed by each College independently of the other to ensure that all risks are managed appropriately.

11.2 Examples of the risks that are considered are:

- The rejection of the merger proposal by the Secretary of State.
- Losing focus on day to day routine activities.
- The implications of having to disaggregate already merged systems developed as a result of our partnership over the last two years.
- The sensitivity of both Colleges' information if the merger is not approved. Although both Corporations have agreed to use their best endeavours to protect each other should this happen.
- Maintaining morale within the staff establishments at both Colleges.
- Loss of key staff essential to the merger process.
- A failure to have a joint system in operation for the merger date.
- Negative perception of the merger by our stakeholders.
- Implementing TUPE appropriately to ensure all legislation is complied with fully.

The Shadow Board will give further detailed analysis to the risks identified and develop an operational Risk Register.

The College is anticipating that should a positive response to the consultation

and approval be given by the Secretary of State to the merger that the new college would be in operation for the start of the academic year in September 2012.

## **Annex F: Implementation plan**

The Colleges have developed the initial outline proposal (IoP) jointly and submitted this via the Skills Funding Agency to Government.

Approval has been given to go out to public consultation. The key milestones in the process are as follows:

- Statutory consultation commences 6 February 2012 and closes 6 March 2012.
- Legal and financial due diligence commences early March.
- Proposal developed in more detail and submitted to the Secretary of State for a decision.
- Date proposed for the establishment of a new Corporation 1 June 2012.
- Date proposed for the dissolution of Otley and Easton Colleges 1 August 2012.

## **Annex G: Feedback from some key stakeholders**

“The current economic climate creates a significant challenge to colleges at a time when both Easton and Otley Colleges’ contribution to our rural economy is critical. Over the past year we have seen the benefits that strong collaboration between the two Colleges has already achieved, both in terms of managing funding reductions and enabling new developments. The proposed merger is a logical next step to allow a strategic approach to specialist rural education across Suffolk and Norfolk.”

Deborah Cadman  
Chief Executive  
Suffolk County Council

“We welcome the close collaborative partnership between Easton and Otley Colleges that has already led to a strong focus on developing quality provision and for achieving savings in back office costs to ensure ongoing investment in teaching. The proposed merger will further strengthen this partnership and ensure the two Colleges are able to maximise their valuable contribution to the competitiveness of our rural economy.”

David White  
Chief Executive  
Norfolk County Council

“The Landbased sector in East Anglia is a very significant industry in terms of the economy of Suffolk and Norfolk. The future competitiveness of the landbased industries is critical to the ongoing financial performance of our economy. The proposed merger of Easton and Otley Colleges is an important strategic response to the specialist skill requirements for these industries and we strongly support the proposal.”

Andy Wood  
Chairman  
New Anglia Local Enterprise  
Partnership

“The Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association has a close relationship with Easton College and shares many common objectives in terms of agricultural education. The landbased industries will be extremely important in terms of meeting the impacts of climate change and coping with significant growth in the world population. We support the strategic action both Easton and Otley Colleges are taking to ensure they are in the best place possible to support the industry in rising to these very significant challenges.”

John Purling  
Chief Executive  
Royal Norfolk Agricultural  
Association

“The Suffolk Agricultural Association has had a long relationship with Otley College and is very supportive of ensuring the College is best equipped to meet the skills challenges in the landbased sector and beyond. We see continuing technological change in our industry as a key driver for skilled personnel and the proposed merger of Easton and Otley College is an important strategic action to ensure the right level of investment in staff and resources is made to meet the challenges the industry faces, ensuring that the agriculture and food industry is progressive and competitive.”

Chris Bushby  
Executive Director  
Suffolk Agricultural Association

“Ransomes Jacobsen are pleased to support the merger of Easton and Otley Colleges. We think that the industry in which we operate will need skilled operatives and managers now and in the future to ensure the landbased industries continue to survive and flourish in these challenging times. The bringing together of these two specialist Colleges will strengthen the skills development for our industry.”

Matt Gough  
Ransomes Jacobsen Limited

“I am pleased to support this merger proposal. The success of the landbased sector in the Eastern region is critical to our economy nationally and also locally. As a major employer the region needs the highest level skills possible in the sector. I believe this proposal enhances the offer to employers and students in both counties.”

Dr Dan Poulter  
Central Suffolk and North Ipswich  
MP

“The Landbased sector forms a very important part of the national economy in general and the East Anglian economy in particular. The proposed merger of Easton and Otley Colleges will go a long way to ensuring that agricultural industries in Suffolk and Norfolk benefit from a steady stream of highly skilled graduates and will also help to ensure that the training of these graduates continues to provide value for money. I am delighted to support this merger and I wish Easton and Otley Colleges every success for the future.”

Mr Richard Bacon  
South Norfolk MP

“The proposed merger of Easton and Otley Colleges is an important response to the needs of the rural economy in Suffolk and Norfolk and will be critical in ensuring the future availability of skilled staff for our farmers and landowners.”

Nicola Currie  
Regional Director  
Country Land and Business  
Association

“As the Landlord of Otley College, the Felix Thornley Cobbold Trust are supportive of the merger of Easton and Otley Colleges. This will ensure the continuing prosperity of the College in the future and we are enthusiastic about this proposal. The trust believe that bringing together two specialist Colleges in the Eastern region will strengthen the provision for the agricultural industries both Colleges serve and provide increased opportunities for students and employers in both regions.”

Stephen Cobbald  
Chairman  
Felix Thornley Cobbold Agricultural  
Trust

“One of the key challenges facing agriculture is to attract the right people, with the right skills for an increasingly innovative and high-tech industry. Working closely with our agricultural colleges is vital, so the NFU warmly welcomes the strong focus of the proposed merger on a partnership with industry to address this issue.”

Pamela Forbes  
Regional Director  
National Farmers Union

“We have been involved with both Colleges for many years and have been encouraging both to work in close collaboration to meet the needs of Agriculture and Industry in Suffolk and Norfolk. We have been pleased with the progress the two Colleges have made in recent times. The strategic merger will be an important next step in focusing the two Colleges’ efforts and resource on transforming the level of skills and performances needed by the farming industry.”

Lord Iveagh  
Chairman  
Chadacre Agricultural Trust

“Anglia Farmers Limited fully supports the proposed merger of Easton and Otley Colleges. Together they will be able to offer a strong and effective College providing the crucial skills needed to our large and important industry.

We have an effective and close working relationship with Easton College and we understand that both colleges are pursuing this merger from a position of strength with the objective of delivering an even more effective service to an ever more technical industry.”

Clarke Willis  
Chief Executive  
Anglia Farmers

“The Clan Trust has had a long term strategic relationship with Easton College and we support this next step in ensuring the long term strategic needs of the agricultural sector are met. The costs and investment needed in some specialised areas are significant and to ensure the appropriate investment is made the scale of operation needs to be increased, this proposed merger will help the two Colleges achieve the critical mass required.”

Rob Hughes  
Company Secretary  
The Clan Trust

## **Annex H: Proposed name of the new corporation**

The names and corporate images of both Easton and Otley will continue to be used under the umbrella name of a new corporation. It is proposed that the new corporation should be called Anglian Regional College Group and the address will be:

Anglian Regional College Group  
Easton Hall  
Easton  
Norwich  
NR9 5DX

## **Annex I: Government merger criteria**

(Source: “New Challenges, New Chances)

### **New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan**

#### **Factor Appraisal**

##### **Vision for the future**

- Strategic drivers for change.
- The current and future needs of students, employers and wider community.

##### **Selection of delivery solutions and partners**

- Consideration of the options for different delivery vehicles/partners
- Exploration of routes to secure partner(s) through open, transparent and competitive processes.
- Clear rationale for selection of the proposed delivery model/partner

##### **Value for money**

- Evaluation of the costs/savings/benefits of different options: why the chosen model represents the best value for money.
- Assessment of how the chosen models can lead to efficiencies, eg shared delivery of common services and/or planning of delivery.
- Undertake and evidence due diligence on estates valuation and disposal.

- Development and analysis of longer term investment plans.

##### **Impact on staff**

- An assessment of the implications for staff and appropriate consultations with staff and representative bodies/Trade Unions
- Assessment and resolution of issues in relation to staff Terms and Conditions including differences between staff groups.
- TUPE implications in relation to any transfer of business or service provision change.
- Pensions – an assessment of the implications, including transfer schemes, protection of individuals’ rights, and any funding shortfalls.

##### **Impact on students**

- Impact on the curriculum offer by subject, level, participation and location.
- Implications for access to learning, eg location of sites/campuses.
- Implications on choice for students, including curriculum, type of institution and services.
- Plans to secure continuity for existing students, and to engage new students (14-19, 19+, HE) and to improve progression
- Plans to improve provision for under-represented/under-achieving groups, including NEETs, and LLDD.
- The outcomes of an Equality and Diversity impact assessment.
- Implications of the outcomes of consultations with students.

### **Impact on employers**

- Current employer engagement and proposals for developing this further including brand sponsorship.
- Impact on the development/expansion of Apprenticeships.
- Impact on the development of focused, specialised employer led provision and how this will better meet local and regional skills needs.
- Implications of the outcomes of consultations with employers.

### **Impact within the community**

- Impact on the College's contribution to: skills; services; economic growth; and social cohesion and well being.
- Impact on engagement and strategic partnerships with key community stakeholders, including LEPs and Cities.
- Impact on access to provision for deprived communities.
- Plans for 'branding' provision for the future, including any institutional name proposals and impact on local identity/presence.

### **Impact on competition**

- Assessment of the impact of different delivery models on competition in the local area, drawing upon independent advice.
- What steps will be taken to ensure diversity and choice and guard against anti-competitive behaviours in selection of

partners, choice and operation of delivery vehicles.

### **Quality of provision**

- Current assessment of quality (including Ofsted outcomes).
- Improvement strategies in relation to under-performance.
- Impact of different options/proposals to ensure sustainable improvements and return to above minimum standards, if needed.
- How account is taken of student and employer feedback.

### **Strategic leadership and management**

- Governance and management structures of different options; how to ensure clear accountability lines and effective long term strategic planning.
- How to ensure an orderly and effective transition to new arrangements (including timetables, key milestones, risk analysis).
- How Senior Management and Governors will ensure effective engagement with the communities they serve, forming appropriate strategic partnerships and securing regular feedback.

## Annex J: Statutory Notices



### Statutory Notice - Further and Higher Education Act 1992

The Chief Executive of Skills Funding hereby gives notice, in accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (the Act) as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, of the draft proposal that the Secretary of State under section 27 of that Act should by order provide for the dissolution of the further education corporation of **Otley College** and the transfer of the property, rights and liabilities of that corporation to a newly established further education corporation.

Dissolution of the corporation is proposed, at the request of the corporation of **Otley College** in order that the college may be part of a new further education corporation with **Easton College**.

The date proposed for the dissolution is **1 August 2012**.

Provision will be made for all students at **Otley College** who have not yet completed their courses of study by the date of the proposed dissolution to complete their studies at the new further education corporation.

A copy of the draft proposal is available free of charge from me and will be sent to any person who requests it.

In accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Act, representations may be made to me by **6 March 2012**. Representations can be made at <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/allthelatest/consultations/> or to [providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](mailto:providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk) or in writing to:

**Geoff Russell, Chief Executive of Skills Funding,  
Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT**

Date: 6 February 2012

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoff Russell".

**Statutory Notice - Further and Higher Education Act 1992**

The Chief Executive of Skills Funding hereby gives notice, in accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (the Act) as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, of the draft proposal that the Secretary of State under section 27 of that Act should by order provide for the dissolution of the further education corporation of **Easton College** and the transfer of the property, rights and liabilities of that corporation to a newly established further education corporation.

Dissolution of the corporation is proposed, at the request of the corporation of **Easton College** in order that the college may be part of a new further education corporation with **Otley College**.

The date proposed for the dissolution is **1 August 2012**.

Provision will be made for all students at **Easton College** who have not yet completed their courses of study by the date of the proposed dissolution to complete their studies at the new further education corporation.

A copy of the draft proposal is available free of charge from me and will be sent to any person who requests it.

In accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Act, representations may be made to me by **6 March 2012**. Representations can be made at <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/allthelatest/consultations/> or to [providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](mailto:providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk) or in writing to:

**Geoff Russell, Chief Executive of Skills Funding,  
Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT**

Date: 6 February 2012

Signed:



**Statutory Notice - Further and Higher Education Act 1992**

The Chief Executive of Skills Funding (the Chief Executive) hereby gives notice in accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* (the Act) as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, of the draft proposal that the Secretary of State under section 16 of the Act should by order provide for the establishment of a body corporate to establish and conduct a new institution.

The establishment of the body corporate is proposed in order that **Easton College** may merge with **Otley College** and that the respective further education corporations may be dissolved. It is proposed that the property, rights and liabilities of both corporations should be transferred to the proposed new corporation.

The date proposed for the establishment of the corporation is **1 June 2012**.

Provision will be made for all students at **Easton College** and **Otley College** who have not completed their courses of study by the date of the proposed dissolutions to complete their studies at the new corporation.

A copy of the draft proposal is available free of charge from me and will be sent to any person who requests it.

In accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Act, representations may be made to me by **6 March 2012**. Representations can be made at <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/allthelatest/consultations/> or to [providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](mailto:providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk) or in writing to:

**Geoff Russell, Chief Executive of Skills Funding,  
Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT**

Date: 6 February 2012

Signed:

