

**Report on the statutory  
public consultation on the  
proposed merger of the Royal  
Forest of Dean College and  
the Gloucestershire College  
of Arts and Technology  
(known as Gloucestershire  
College)**

**October 2010**

Of interest to stakeholders in the proposed merger



## Foreword

As Chief Executive of Skills Funding, I am pleased to publish this report on our recent statutory public consultation on the proposed merger of the Royal Forest of Dean College and Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology.

We received 178 responses in all. I thank everyone who took the time to provide their views online, by email or in writing.

While some concerns were expressed, most respondents were supportive of the merger so the two colleges will now develop a final proposal to merge. As well as the Government's published criteria for merger, I will expect this to demonstrate how the colleges have responded to the outcomes of this consultation.

A submission will then be made to the Secretary of State who will decide whether to make the order to dissolve the further education corporation of the Royal Forest of Dean College and transfer the property, rights and liabilities of that corporation to Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology.

If you have any queries about this report or would like it in another format, please contact [providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](mailto:providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk)

Thank you again to everyone who responded to the consultation.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Russell  
Chief Executive of Skills Funding

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

This is a report on the statutory public consultation on the proposed merger of two Further Education (FE) colleges – the Royal Forest of Dean College and Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (Gloucestershire College).

The consultation was undertaken by the Chief Executive of Skills Funding in accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

The consultation lasted for the statutory minimum of a calendar month between 14 September and 14 October 2010. Views could be submitted in an online consultation survey, by email or in writing. Public notices were issued in line with legislative requirements including in a local newspaper.

### **Responses**

A total of 178 responses were received:

- 169 online survey responses
- one hard-copy return of the online survey
- four letters
- four emails.

The hard-copy return of the online survey was uploaded by the Agency, resulting in 170 online responses overall. This is the first time an online survey has been used and appears to have resulted in a greater response rate than previous merger consultations.

Respondents to the online survey were asked to describe their interest. The distribution of those who answered the question was:

- College Staff (74.8 per cent)
- Learner (5.3 per cent)
- Other (5.3 per cent)
- Local Community (4.6 per cent)
- Employer (2.3 per cent)
- Government Agency/Body (2.3 per cent)
- Local Government (2.3 per cent)
- College or Training organisation (1.5 per cent)
- Local Business (0.8 per cent)
- Local School (0.8 per cent).

### **Key messages**

These are the key issues for the development of the final merger proposal from the consultation:

- **There is a majority in support of the proposed merger.** 75 per cent of the online responses supported the proposed reorganisation, 83 per cent supported the objectives of the merger and 81 per cent supported the new college's mission and aims. Additionally, three local Members of Parliament emailed their support for the proposed merger and another FE college wrote to confirm they had no objections to it.
- **There is some lack of support for the proposed merger and, in particular, some uncertainty over support for it.** 24.7 per cent of the online responses were either not in support of the proposed merger or not sure if they supported it. 4.7 per cent did not support it. Two of these responses confirmed their interest as learner and local community respectively and the comments all related to the loss of an independent college with a local identity in the Forest, with some mention of other issues such as the impact on staff. 20 per cent of responses were not sure of support for the proposed merger. The majority of these who confirmed their interest were college staff (17) with one each from local community, employer, Government agency/body, learner and other. The impact on staff was the main reason for uncertainty but loss of the Royal Forest of Dean College's character, financial viability of investment, lack of information generally, potential impact on learners and benefits for Gloucestershire College were also mentioned.
- **There is a majority in support of the proposed curriculum but some questions on this.** Over a quarter of online responses (27 per cent) were not sure if they supported the proposed curriculum and 3 per cent did not. Most of the comments were about the need for more detail on the proposed curriculum with some specific questions including the continued availability of programmes on both sites, the future of programmes for vulnerable members of the community and what new provision and opportunities there might be.
- **Local identity and ownership is important.** 78 per cent of online responses supported the proposed arrangements for governance and management but the comments showed concern about the potential loss of local identity and sense of ownership in the Forest and for existing local partnerships to be affected. Some respondents asked for more information on the proposed advisory board.
- **There is concern over the impact on college staff.** Almost three quarters of online responses were from college staff and many highlighted the potential for an adverse impact on them, such as redundancy, the need to work from a different site or the need to work and travel across both sites. There were also many requests for more information on the implications for staff.
- **The college name change is supported.** 90 per cent of online responses supported Gloucestershire College as the proposed college name but a few comments felt it contributed to the loss of local identity.
- **There are concerns about an adverse impact on students.** 45 per cent of online respondents said students might be adversely affected by the proposed changes (20 per cent thought they would be and 25 per cent were not sure). The comments showed that travel and transport was the greatest area of concern, including for part-time students and those with school-age children.

- **There are questions about the financial business case.** 31 per cent of online responses were unsure whether the proposed merger provided value for money and 6 per cent said it did not. More information on this was requested in comments, especially how the proposed developments in the Forest would be affordable and funded.

### **Next steps**

The two colleges will now produce a final proposal that meets the Government's published criteria for college merger and addresses the issues raised through this consultation. This will be assessed by the Chief Executive of Skills Funding and a submission made to the Secretary of State who will make the final decision. The proposed date for the merger is 31 January 2011.

## Background

In accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (the 1992 Act) as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, responsibility for the public consultation on a proposed FE college merger lies with the Chief Executive of Skills Funding.

In this case, the corporation of the Royal Forest of Dean College has proposed the dissolution of the corporation to enable the college to merge with Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (known as Gloucestershire College). The proposal is for the property, rights and liabilities of the Royal Forest of Dean College to be transferred to the corporation of Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology. The proposed date for the merger to take effect is 31 January 2011.

The Governing Body of Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology has at the same time consulted on a proposal to change the name of the college to Gloucestershire College.

Following the consultation, the colleges will produce a final merger proposal. This will be reviewed by the Chief Executive of Skills Funding and a submission made to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will decide whether, under section 27 of the Act, to by order provide for the dissolution of the FE corporation of the Royal Forest of Dean College and the transfer of its property, rights and liabilities.

The Government confirmed its merger criteria for FE colleges in *Further Education Colleges – Models for Success*, August 2008.

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills/fe-improvement/models-for-success> These are that the proposal:

- is likely to address the needs of learners and employers
- is likely to increase opportunity for the learner to exercise choice and encourage diversity in the education and training available
- is likely to increase local participation rates and result in improved quality and success
- is likely to develop innovation and improve access to learning for the community
- ensures the embedding of all aspects of equality and diversity
- is likely to promote effective community cohesion through community presence and representation within governance structures
- is likely to provide better value for money.

## Consultation Process

The two colleges produced *Consultation Document, Proposed Merger of Gloucestershire College and Royal Forest of Dean College*<sup>1</sup>, September 2010 which was endorsed by the Chairs of both Governing Bodies. This was used by the Chief Executive of Skills Funding as the consultation document.

The statutory public consultation began on 14 September 2010 and ended on 14 October 2010. The period of one calendar month was in accordance with the provisions of section 51 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

A Statutory Notice (Annex A) appeared in the 14 September edition of *The Forester* newspaper; a local newspaper to the Royal Forest of Dean College, the Corporation that would be dissolved under the proposal. The statutory notice was also placed at main entrances of both colleges and sent to 17 public libraries in the Forest of Dean and Gloucester City.

There were three ways for stakeholders to respond to the consultation:

- completing an online survey;
- sending an email to a dedicated address;
- or writing to the Chief Executive of Skills Funding.

Notice of the consultation with information on how to respond and links to the consultation document and online survey were available on the Consultations area of the Skills Funding Agency website for the whole of the consultation period. Stakeholders were also given ways to contact the Agency if they wanted a paper copy of the consultation document or a copy in another format. Links to the information were displayed on both college websites.

The Chief Executive of Skills Funding wrote to a list of potential national, regional and local stakeholders to notify them of the consultation and invite a response (Annex B).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/SFA/MergerConsultationDocument.pdf>

## Responses received

A total of 178 responses were received:

- 169 online survey responses
- one hard-copy return of the online survey
- four letters
- four emails.

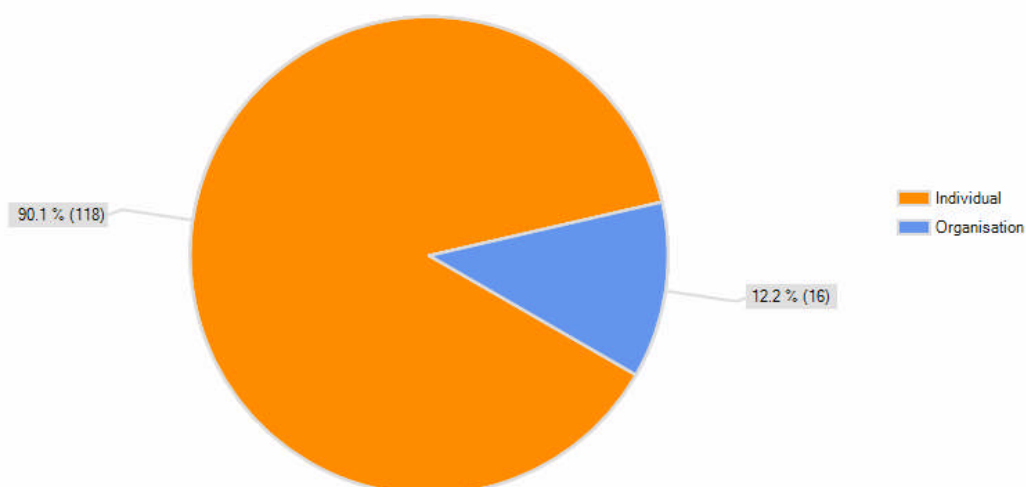
The hard-copy return of the online survey was uploaded by the Agency, resulting in 170 online responses overall, of which:

- 131 were completed surveys
- 39 were incomplete surveys.<sup>2</sup>

## Types of respondent

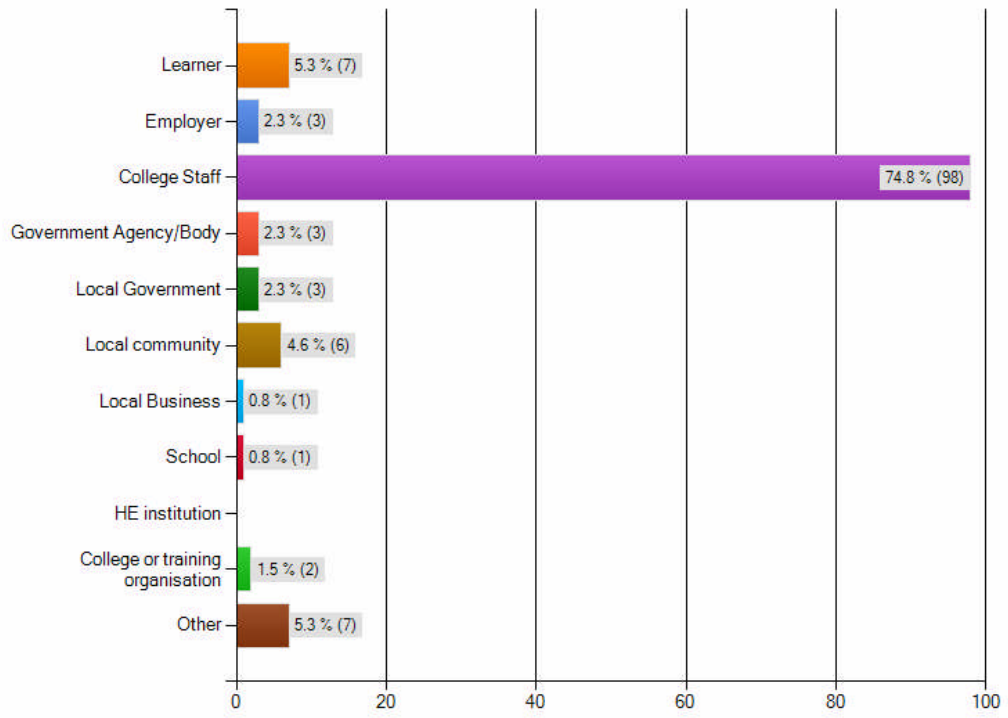
In Questions 10 and 11, respondents were asked to confirm if they were a) replying as an individual or on behalf of an organisation and b) what best described their interest. The answers are shown in the charts below.

**Chart 1: Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?**



<sup>2</sup> Questions were answered but the 'Done' icon at the end of the survey was not clicked.

**Chart 2: Which of the following best describes your interest?**

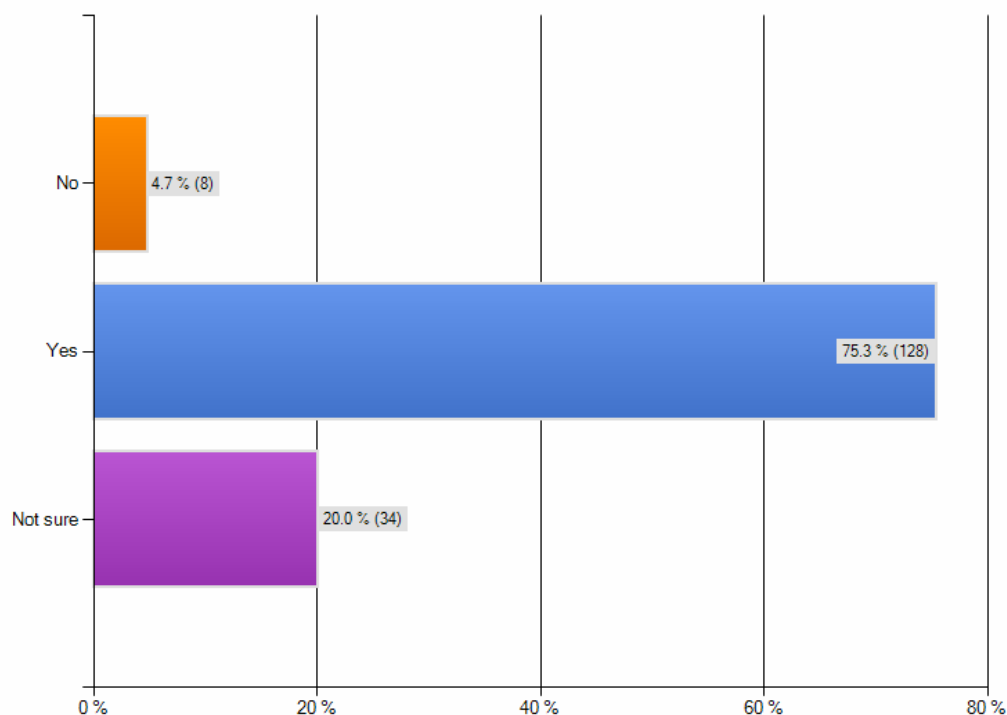


## Analysis of online survey responses

The charts below confirm the responses to the online survey questions.

The number of responses to each question varies because some respondents chose not to answer every question.

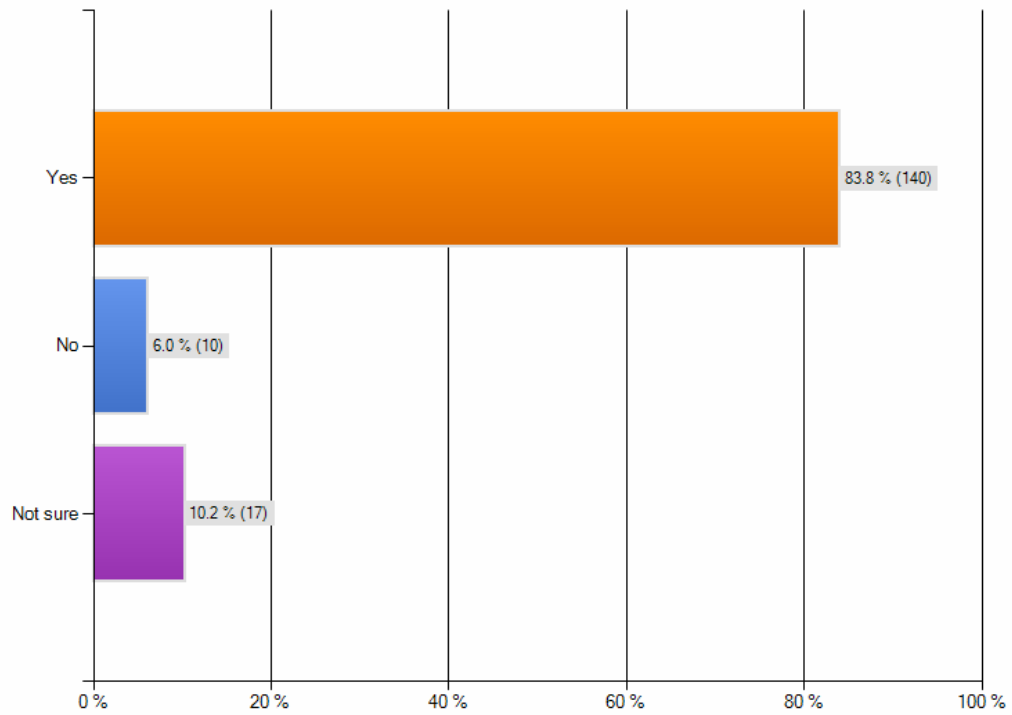
**Chart 3: Do you support the proposed reorganisation?**



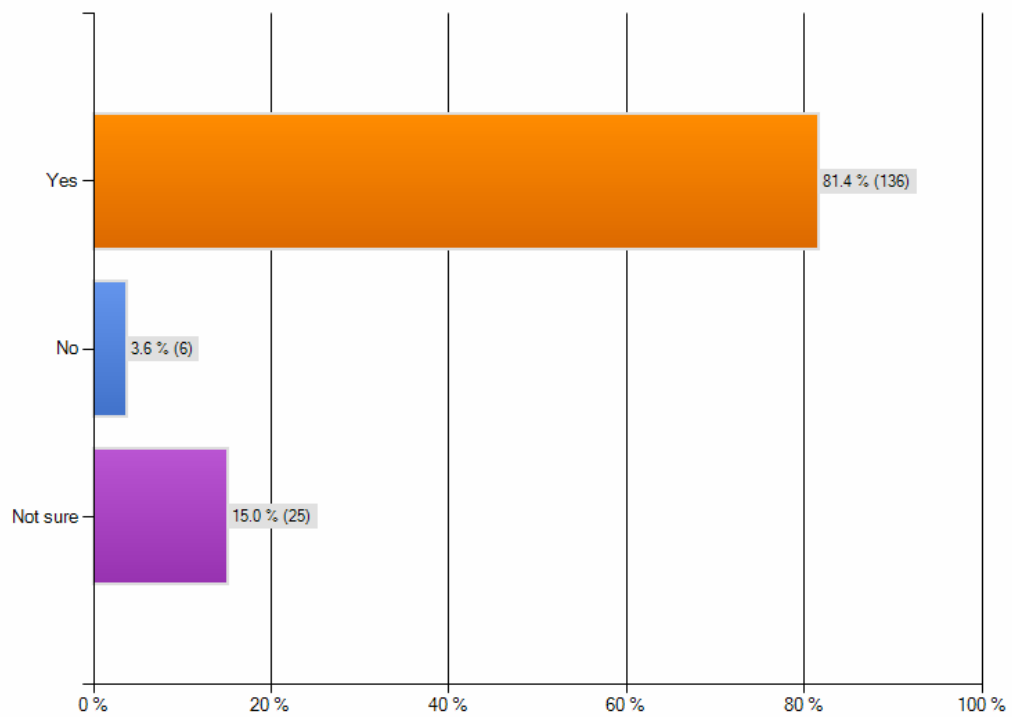
Where respondents to this question also confirmed what best described their interest (Question 11), the distribution is shown in the table.

Interest	Do you support the proposed merger?		
	Yes	No	Not sure
Learner	71.4% (4)	14.3% (1)	14.3% (1)
Employer	66.7% (2)	0	33.3% (1)
College Staff	80.6% (79)	2% (2)	17.3% (17)
Government Agency/Body	66.7% (2)	0%	33.3% (1)
Local Government	100% (3)	0	0
Local Community	66.7% (4)	16.7% (1)	16.7% (1)
Local Business	100% (1)	0	0
School	100% (1)	0	0
HE institution	0	0	0
College or training organisation	100% (2)	0	0
Other	85.7% (6)	0	14.3% (1)

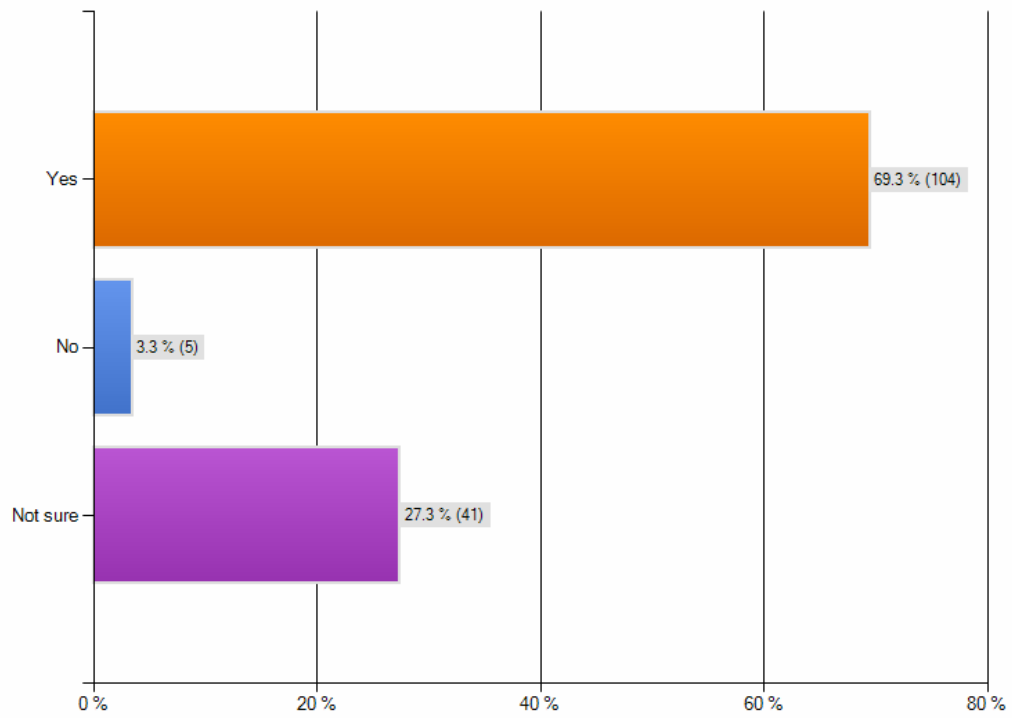
**Chart 4: Do you support the objectives of the merger?**



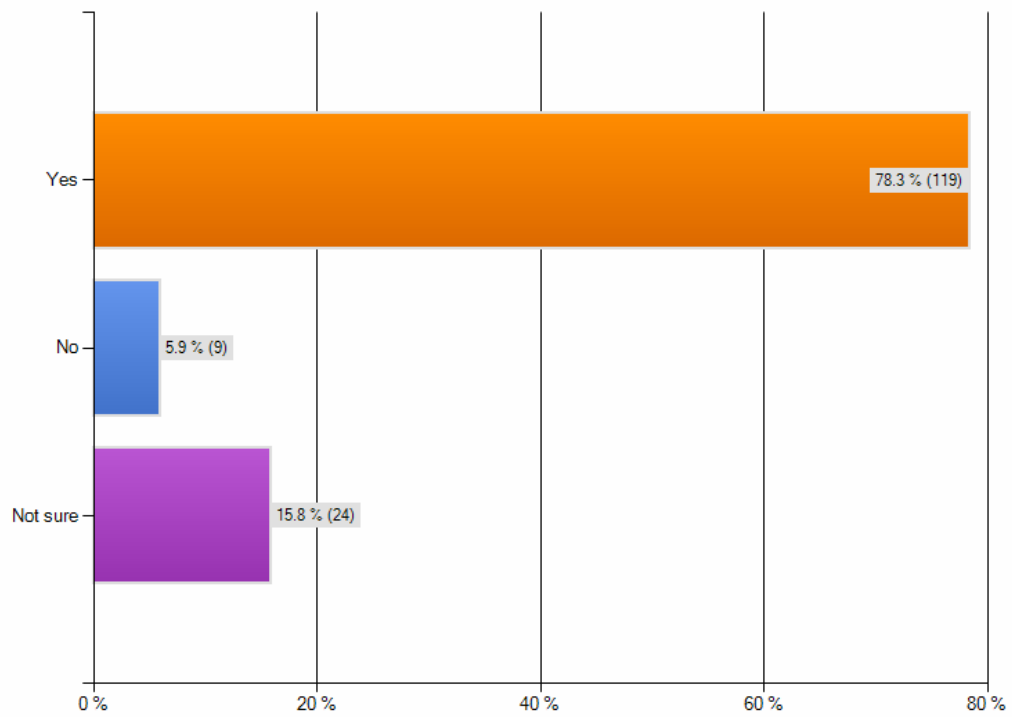
**Chart 5: Do you support the new college's mission and aims?**



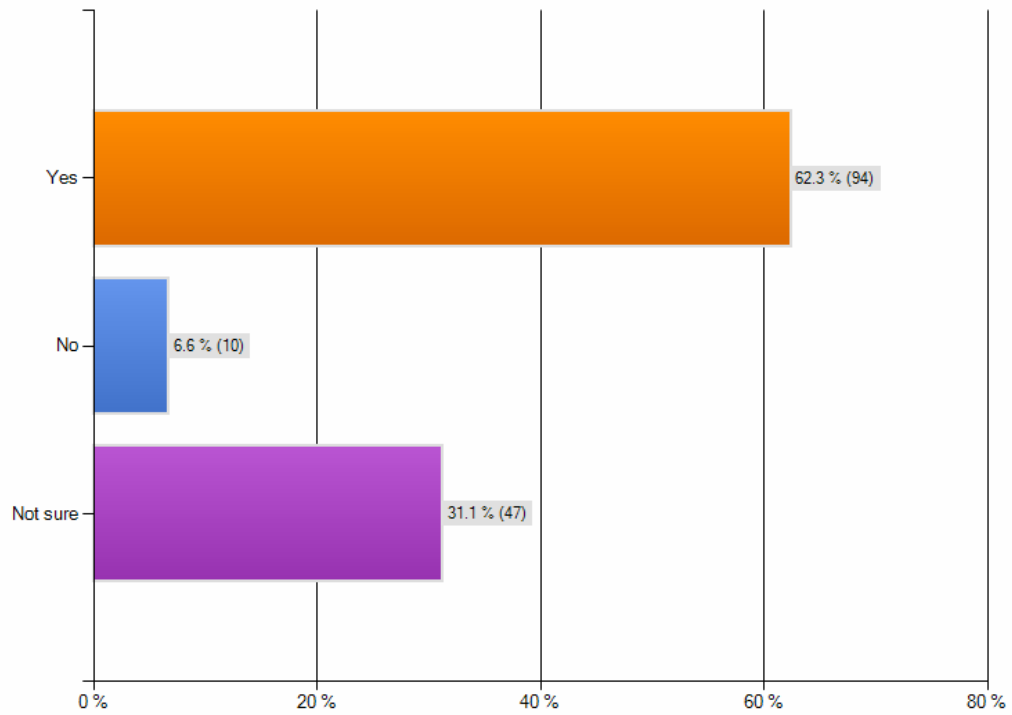
**Chart 6: Do you support the proposed curriculum?**



**Chart 7: Do you support the proposed arrangements for governance and management?**



**Chart 8: Do you think the proposed merger provides value for money?**



**Chart 9: Do you think any group(s) of students would be adversely affected by the changes?**

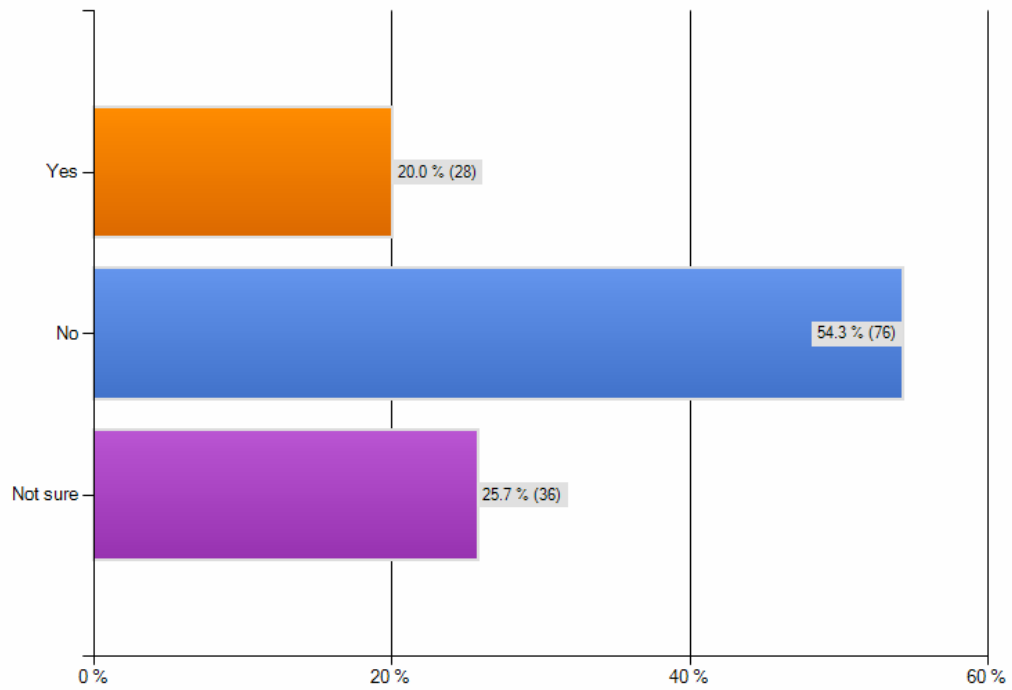
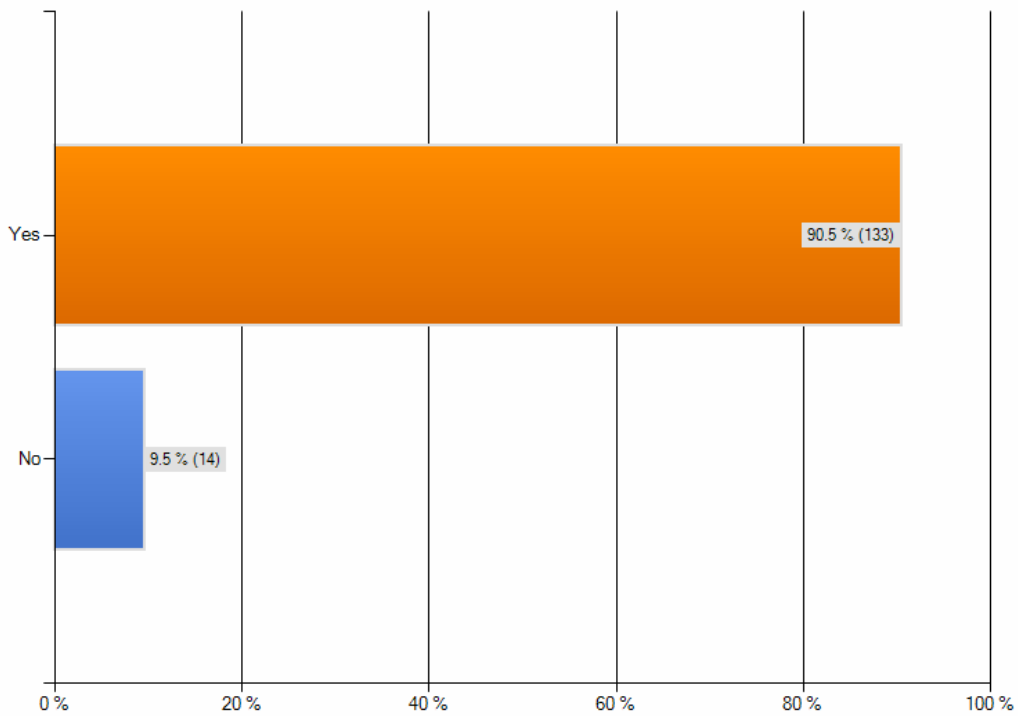


Chart 10: Do you support the proposed college name?



### Non online responses

The eight written and email responses are summarised below:

- three Members of Parliament supported the proposed merger
- one FE College confirmed no objections to the proposed merger
- one national body highlighted the proposed college's Higher Education (HE) role
- a sector skills council, a local academy and a national body had no comment on the proposed merger.

## Respondents' comments

For every question except Question 8 (Do you support the proposed college name?) respondents were given the opportunity to add comments. Towards the end of the survey, Question 9 (Do you have any other issues or comments?) provided an opportunity for comments not invited by the previous questions.

In the survey home page, respondents were advised that responses would be shared **in full** with the colleges. This was to enable them to fully address the issues raised in their final merger proposal.

This is a high-level summary of the issues emerging from the comments:

- comments supporting the merger ranged from positive endorsement to a wider view that it is inevitable and the best solution for the circumstances
- many comments related to the level of information in the consultation document; either that there was insufficient information overall or insufficient information on a specific issue to give an informed response
- many comments related to the impact on staff, including redundancy, job losses and the need to travel more and a general request for more information on the implications for staff
- many comments related to what were seen to be potentially significant travel and transport difficulties for learners and staff
- many comments focused on the curriculum – some seeing the potential for new or improved provision but many asking for more information on the new curriculum offer for example
- some comments related to the potential for the character of Royal Forest of Dean College (for example its rural focus) and its good practice (for example its pastoral support system) to be lost in merger with the larger Gloucestershire College
- some comments related to the need for more certainty over the future of current college sites
- some comments focussed on the potential loss of 'localness' as a result of the merger, that is the loss of a Forest identity in the college name or local control and influence. Some saw the advisory board as important in addressing this and wanted more information on it
- some comments highlighted the potential risk to the economy of the Forest of Dean area, for example as a result of job losses or the closure of sites
- some comments highlighted the risk of potential disruption to existing partnerships, for example with schools and higher education institutions
- some comments related to the need for more information on how the merger demonstrated value for money and on how the proposed improvement in facilities in the Forest would be affordable and/or funded.

## Key messages from the consultation

These are the key issues for the development of the final merger proposal from the consultation:

- **There is a majority in support of the proposed merger.** 75 per cent of the online responses supported the proposed reorganisation, 83 per cent supported the objectives of the merger and 81 per cent supported the new college's mission and aims. Additionally, three local Members of Parliament emailed their support for the proposed merger and another FE college wrote to confirm they had no objections to it.
- **There is some lack of support for the proposed merger and, in particular, some uncertainty over support for it.** 24.7 per cent of the online responses were either not in support of the proposed merger or not sure if they supported it. 4.7 per cent did not support it. Two of these responses confirmed their interest as learner and local community respectively and the comments all related to the loss of an independent college with a local identity in the Forest, with some mention of other issues such as the impact on staff. 20 per cent of responses were not sure of support for the proposed merger. The majority of these who confirmed their interest were college staff (17) with one each from local community, employer, Government agency/body, learner and other. The impact on staff was the main reason for uncertainty but loss of the Royal Forest of Dean College's character, financial viability of investment, lack of information generally, potential impact on learners and benefits for Gloucestershire College were also mentioned.
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- **Local identity and ownership is important.** 78 per cent of online responses supported the proposed arrangements for governance and management but the comments showed concern about the potential loss of local identity and sense of ownership in the Forest and for existing local partnerships to be affected. Some respondents asked for more information on the proposed advisory board.
- **There is concern over the impact on college staff.** Almost three quarters of online responses were from college staff and many highlighted the potential for an adverse impact on them, such as redundancy, the need to work from a different site or the need to work and travel across both sites. There were also many requests for more information on the implications for staff.
- **The college name change is supported.** 90 per cent of online responses supported Gloucestershire College as the proposed college name but a few comments felt it contributed to the loss of local identity.

- **There are concerns about an adverse impact on students.** 45 per cent of online respondents said students might be adversely affected by the proposed changes (20 per cent thought they would be and 25 per cent were not sure). The comments showed that travel and transport was the greatest area of concern, including for part-time students and those with school-age children.
- **There are questions about the financial business case.** 31 per cent of online responses were unsure whether the proposed merger provided value for money and 6 per cent said it did not. More information on this was requested in comments, especially how the proposed developments in the Forest would be affordable and funded.

**Annex A: Statutory Consultation Notice**

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

As Chief Executive of Skills Funding, I hereby give 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 **The Royal Forest of Dean College** and the transfer of the property, rights and liabilities of that corporation.

Dissolution of the corporation is proposed, at the request of the corporation of **The Royal Forest of Dean College** in order that the college may merge with **Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (known as Gloucestershire College)**. It is proposed that the property, rights and liabilities of the corporation to be transferred to the corporation of **Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology**.

The date proposed for the dissolution is 31 January 2011.

The Governing Body of Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology is separately proposing to the Secretary of State that the name of the college be formally changed to Gloucestershire College.

Provision will be made for all students at **The Royal Forest of Dean College** who have not yet completed their courses of study by the date of the proposed dissolution to complete their studies at Gloucestershire College.

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 14th October 2010. Representations can be made at <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/allthelatest/consultations/> or in writing to [providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](mailto:providerreorganisations@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk) or to:

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

Date: 14 September 2010

Signed:



An agency of the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

## **Annex B: Stakeholders notified of the consultation on the proposed merger of the Royal Forest of Dean College and Gloucestershire College**

157 Group	Hartpury College
Alliance of Sector Skills Councils	Heart of the Forest Community Special School
Archway School	Summerhouse High School for Girls
Asset Skills	Higher Education Funding Council for England
Association for College Management	HOLEX
Association of Colleges	Improve Ltd
Association of Learning Providers	Institute of the Motor Industry
Association of National Specialist Colleges	Katherine Lady Berkeley's School
Association of Teachers and Lecturers	Lantra
Balcarras School	Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults
Beaufort Community School	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
British Chambers of Commerce	Lifelong Learning UK
Brockworth Enterprise School	Marling School
Business to Business Ltd	MP for Cheltenham
C&G Services (Europe) Ltd	MP for Cotswold
Cheltenham Bourneside School	MP for Forest of Dean
Chipping Camden School	MP for Gloucester
Chosen Hill School	MP for Stroud
Churchdown School	MP for Tewkesbury
Cirencester College	National STAR College
Clarkson Evans Ltd	National Union of Students
Cleeve School	National Union of Teachers
Cogent	Newent Community School
Construction Skills	Ofsted
Creative and Cultural Skills	Pate's Grammar School
Department for Business Innovation and Skills	People 1st
Energy & Utility Skills	Proskills UK Ltd
e-Skills UK	Prospects Services Ltd
Farmors School	Redknock School
Federation of Small Businesses	Regional Offender Manager's Office - SW
Filton College	Ribston Hall High School
Financial Services Skills Council	Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
Gloucester Academy	Sir Thomas Rich's School
Gloucestershire County Council	Sixth Form Colleges' Forum
Gloucestershire Training Group Ltd	Skills Active
Go Skills	Skills for Care and Development
Government Office for the SW	Skills for Health
Government Skills	

Skills for Justice  
Skills for Logistics  
Skillset  
Skillsmart Retail  
South West RDA  
St Peter's RC High School  
Stroud College  
Stroud High School  
Summit Skills  
Tewkesbury School  
The Cotswold School  
The Crypt School

UK Commission for Employment and Skills  
UNISON  
Prospect Training Services  
University and College Union  
University of Gloucestershire  
University of West of England  
University of Worcestershire  
Wiltshire College  
Wyedean School  
Young Gloucestershire  
Young People's Learning Agency

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