

# Report on the statutory public consultation on the proposed merger of Bromley College of Further and Higher Education and Orpington College of Further Education

**March 2011**

Of interest to stakeholders in this 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 Bromley College of Further and Higher Education and Orpington College of Further Education

We received 83 responses. My thanks go to everyone who took the time to respond to the consultation.

There is a clear majority in support of this merger. Those speaking on behalf of key stakeholders in letters and emails for example, were almost all strongly supportive of it. Beneath this high-level outcome, a number of issues and questions were raised by respondents; I have summarised these in what I see as the key messages from the consultation.

The two colleges will now develop a final proposal to merge. As well as the Government's published criteria for merger, this must show how the colleges have addressed the outcomes of the consultation. They will also undertake due diligence, produce a combined financial forecast and submit a final merger proposal to the Agency for assessment.

If this meets the above requirements I will propose the merger for approval to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. He will decide whether to make the order to dissolve the further education corporation of Orpington College of Further Education and transfer the property, rights and liabilities of that corporation to Bromley College of Further Education.

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.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Russell

Chief Executive of Skills Funding

## Executive Summary

### Background

- 1 This is a report on the statutory public consultation on the proposed merger of two further education (FE) colleges: Bromley College of Further and Higher Education and Orpington College of Further Education.
- 2 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.
- 3 The consultation lasted beyond the statutory minimum of a calendar month between 26 January 2011 and 4 March 2011. Views could be submitted through an online consultation survey, by email or in writing and public notices were issued in line with legislative requirements, including in a local newspaper.
- 4 The questions in the online survey are confirmed at **Annex A**.

### Responses

- 5 A total of 83 responses were received.
  - 62 online survey responses
  - 21 non-online responses (15 letters, two emails and four reports by the colleges on their consultation events).
- 6 There were no requests for any of the consultation documents in hard copy or in any other format.
- 7 Respondents to the online survey were asked to describe their interest. The distribution of the 52 respondents who answered the question was:
  - Learner (3.8 per cent)
  - College staff (53.8 per cent)
  - Government Agency/Body (0 per cent)
  - Local Government (7.7 per cent)
  - Local Community (11.5 per cent)
  - Local Business (3.8 per cent)
  - School (0 per cent)
  - HE institution (1.9 per cent)
  - College or training organisation (1.9 per cent)
  - Other (15.4 per cent)

## Key messages for the Colleges from the consultation

- 8 There is a clear majority in support of the merger: 72.6 per cent (45 respondents) of those answering Question 1 of the online survey said they supported it. Of the 21 non-online responses, 20 were supportive (one said more information was needed to reach a decision). Of the 83 responses, therefore, 65 supported the merger – 78.3 per cent.
- 9 Support is further evidenced by the majorities in support of each question in the survey, with 81 per cent of respondents supporting the objectives of merger, 75.4 per cent the new college vision, 74.5 per cent the plans for the curriculum, and 72.2 per cent the arrangements for governance and management; 76.4 per cent said the merger should lead to the availability of diverse education and training relevant to the local community and 72.7 per cent that it provides value for money.
- 10 In Question 8 there was also a majority but a smaller one, with 59.3 per cent of respondents saying learners would not be affected adversely by the merger. Of the remaining respondents, 13 per cent said learners would be affected adversely by merger and 27.8 per cent were not sure.
- 11 Taking into account the above as well as respondents' comments, the colleges will need to address the following issues in the development of their Final Merger Proposal (FMP).
  - **The potential for an adverse impact on learners.** There is concern that the merger could have an adverse impact upon learners. The need for travel was most often mentioned, along with nursery provision, support for learners with learning difficulties and the needs of learners with childcare commitments. An equality and diversity impact assessment should be undertaken to identify any areas of inequality and enable any necessary adjustments to be made and described in the FMP.
  - **The potential impact on staff.** Staff support for the merger was often qualified by concern for impact upon them and requests for more information. The FMP must demonstrate how communication and consultation has been developed with staff. This might include organisational structures, details of when and how has information been shared with staff or their representatives, and plans to manage the HR-related transition to the merged college. The impact assessment above should include an assessment of the impact upon staff.

- **Potential loss of character.** The differences between the two colleges, for instance in heritage, culture and curriculum are valued locally. Some respondents also said that the two colleges already deliver aspects of the vision and objectives for the merged college so why was change needed? The FMP must demonstrate how the merger will balance the retention of valued character and identity with providing a new offer that better meets the needs of local communities and the local economy.
- **The Bromley Brand.** There is support for the proposed 'Bromley Brand' and a wish by other providers to be involved in it. There should be more detail on the new brand in the FMP, including how other providers and partners will be involved.
- **The need for a curriculum plan.** There were many requests for more detail on the curriculum offer – how the current variation of further and higher education across the two colleges will be taken forward, the future of A-level provision, what courses would be offered where, what new provision there will be and what the support structures will be. More information was requested on the offer for learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability (LLDD) and on the future Apprenticeship offer for young people. The FMP must include a curriculum plan for the merged college with appropriate links to estates and HR strategy.
- **The non-financial case for merger.** Some respondents saw the merger as being financially driven, with an emphasis on cost-savings through staff redundancy. A clear case must be made in the FMP for both the educational and community rationales for the merger alongside the financial case.
- **Detail on governance and management arrangements.** The FMP should include more detail on the management structure of the merged college and its governing body, including how the new governing body will be more visible than in the colleges currently.
- **Demonstrating value for money.** There is always more detail in an FMP on the financial case for merger. Because of the issues raised by respondents this must include full detail of the costs of merger and the expected savings. It should be clear how the colleges conclude that the merger provides value for money, including a consideration of any local impact.

## **Next steps**

- 12 The next step for the colleges is to produce an FMP. This must meet the Government's published criteria for college merger and address the issues raised in this consultation. It 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.
- 13 These are the expected timescales for the remaining stages of the process:
  - early April - FMP submitted to the Agency:
  - end of April - assessment and proposal to Secretary of State
  - mid-May - decision by Secretary of State
  - June 2011 - laying of orders before Parliament (if approved)
  - 1 August 2011- proposed date for merger (if approved).

## Background

- 14 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.
- 15 In this case, the corporation of Orpington College of Further Education has proposed the dissolution of the corporation to enable the college to merge with Bromley College of Further and Higher Education. The proposal is for the property, rights and liabilities of Orpington College of Further and Higher Education to be transferred to the corporation of Bromley College of Further and Higher Education. The proposed date for the merger is 1 August 2011.
- 16 Following the consultation, the colleges will produce an FMP. 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 Orpington College of Further and Higher Education and the transfer of its property, rights and liabilities.
- 17 The Government confirmed its merger criteria for FE colleges in [Further Education Colleges – Models for Success](#), August 2008. These are that the FMP ensures the embedding of all aspects of equality and diversity and that it is likely to:
  - address the needs of learners and employers
  - increase opportunity for the learner to exercise choice and encourage diversity in the education and training available
  - increase local participation rates and result in improved quality and success
  - develop innovation and improve access to learning for the community
  - promote effective community cohesion through community presence and representation within governance structures
  - provide better value for money.

## Consultation Process

- 18 The two colleges produced a consultation document, which was endorsed by the Chairs of both Governing Bodies. This was used by the Chief Executive of Skills Funding as the [consultation document](#).
- 19 The statutory public consultation began on 26 January 2011 and ended on 4 March 2011. The provisions of section 51 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 state that the consultation period must be at least one calendar month.
- 20 A Statutory Notice (**Annex B**) appeared in the 26 January edition of Bromley News Shopper. The statutory notice was also placed at main entrances of both colleges and sent to 15 public libraries, including Bromley Central, two district, four neighbourhood, eight community libraries and a mobile library van.
- 21 Notice of the consultation was included in Issue 42 of the Agency's electronic newsletter for all providers, *Update*, on 2 February 2011.
- 22 There were three ways for stakeholders to respond to the consultation:
  - i. completing an online survey
  - ii. sending an email to a dedicated address
  - iii. or writing to the Chief Executive of Skills Funding.
- 23 Notice of the consultation, with information on how to respond and links to the consultation document and online survey, was available on the Consultation section 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.
- 24 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 C**).

## **Responses received**

- 25 There were no requests for the consultation document or the survey in any other format and no requests for a hard-copy of the response form.
- 26 One response was received after the consultation had closed. This was excluded from the analysis but was forwarded to the colleges for consideration when developing the Final Merger Proposal.
- 27 There were 83 responses to the consultation.
- 62 responses to the online survey
  - 21 non-online responses (15 letters, two emails and four reports by the colleges on their consultation events).
- 28 Some respondents did not complete the survey which is done by clicking the 'Done' icon at the end. Of the 62 online responses:
- 52 were complete surveys
  - 10 were incomplete surveys.

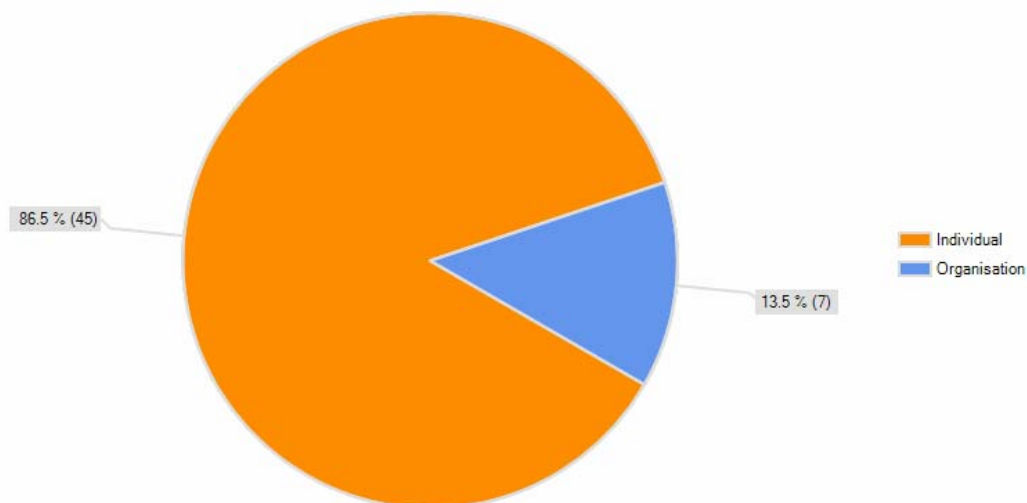
## Online survey responses (62)

- 29 The following sections confirm the answers given to each of the questions in the online survey.
- 30 Although there were 62 responses, the number of responses to each question varies. Some respondents did not answer every question.
- 31 For each question, a chart confirms the answers followed by some key conclusions. There is also a summary of the issues raised in respondents' comments.

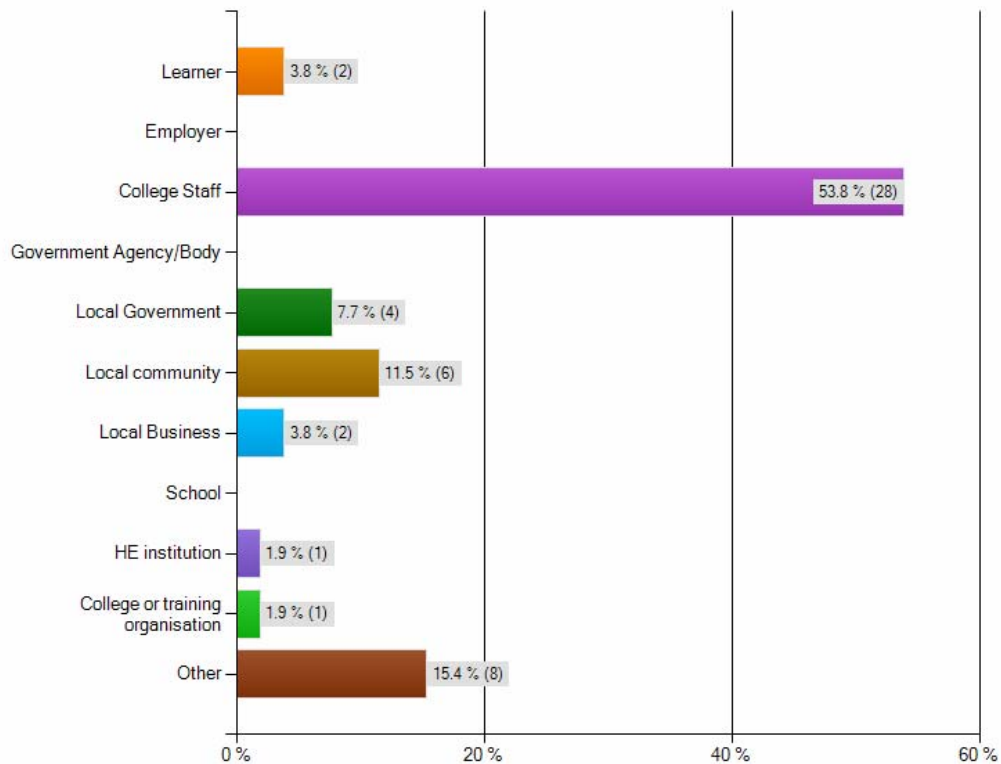
### Questions 10 and 11: Types of respondent

- 32 In Questions 10 and 11 of the online survey, 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.
- 33 The answers are shown in Charts 1 and 2 respectively.

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



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



**Conclusions from the answers**

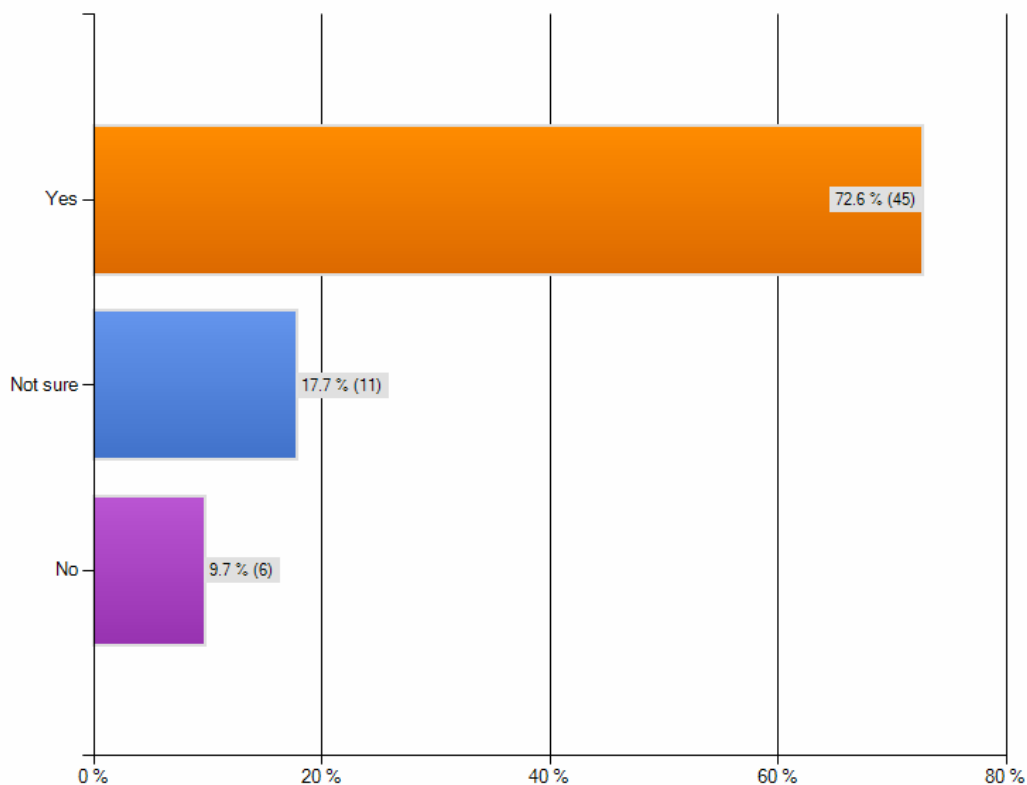
- The majority of respondents to the online survey (over 86 per cent) were responding as individuals.
- Of those who chose an option to describe their interest, the greatest number were college staff at almost 54 per cent, followed by other (15.4 per cent) and local community (11.5 per cent).
- The non-online responses are categorised in this way later in the report.

## Question 1: Do you support the proposed merger?

34 Chart 3 shows the answers to the question.

35 Where respondents also confirmed what best described their interest (Question 11), the distribution is shown in Table 1.

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



**Table 1: Do you support the proposed merger? (by respondent where known)**

Interest	Do you support the proposed merger? (includes only the 52 online responses where interest was confirmed)		
	Yes	No	Not sure
Learner	2.4%(1)	25.0% (1)	0
Employer	0	0	0
College Staff	51.2% (21)	25.0% (1)	85.7% (6)
Government Agency/Body	0	0	0
Local Government	9.8% (4)	0	0
Local Community	12.2% (5)	25.0% (1)	0
Local Business	4.9% (2)	0	0
School	0	0	0
HE institution	2.4% (1)	0	0
College or training	2.4% (1)	0	0
Other	14.6 % (6)	25.5% (1)	14.3% (1)

## **Conclusions from the answers**

- There is a majority in support of the proposed merger: 44 respondents (72.6 per cent) confirmed support for it.
- Six respondents (9.7 per cent) said they did not support it and 11 (17.7 per cent) said they were not sure, accounting together for 27.4 per cent of the responses.
- The table shows that amongst the biggest group of respondents (college staff) 21 supported the merger, six were not sure, and one was against. In the next biggest group (Other), six supported the merger and one each were not sure or against respectively. Amongst local community respondents, five supported the merger, one was against and no-one was not sure.
- The vast majority of respondents saying they were not sure about their support for the merger were college staff at 85.7 per cent.

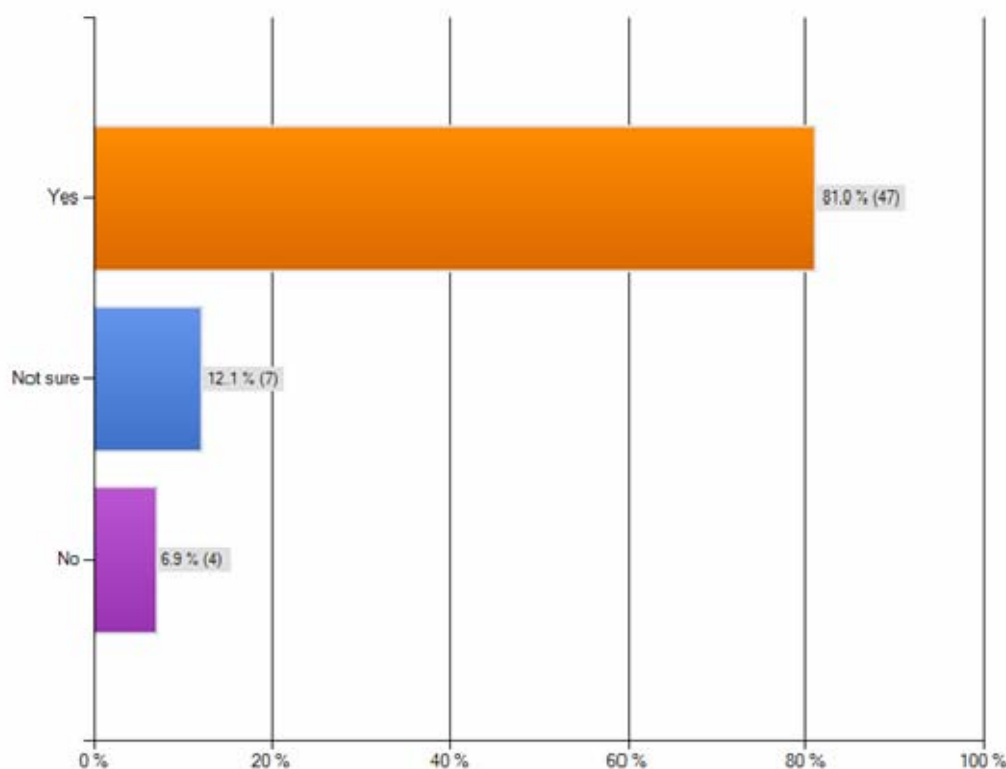
## **Issues raised in comments**

- The merger was seen as logical and sensible given the financial context and with both colleges being in the same borough. Benefits were noted including a wider range of qualifications and learning opportunities locally and the capacity to do more together.
- There was concern that little information had been shared with staff regarding the implications for them, for example on job security and terms and conditions.
- The current character and heritage of the two colleges was highlighted; one respondent said “bigger is not necessarily better”.
- The potential for additional travelling to be required between the two sites was highlighted.
- There was a wish to see more detailed information on the cost-savings, in particular from staff redundancies.

## Question 2: Do you support the objectives of the merger?

36 The answers to this question are shown in Chart 4.

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



### Conclusions from the answers

- There is a majority in support of the objectives of the merger: 81 per cent of respondents said this.
- 6.9 per cent did not support the objectives and a further 12.1 per cent were not sure, accounting together for 19 percent of responses

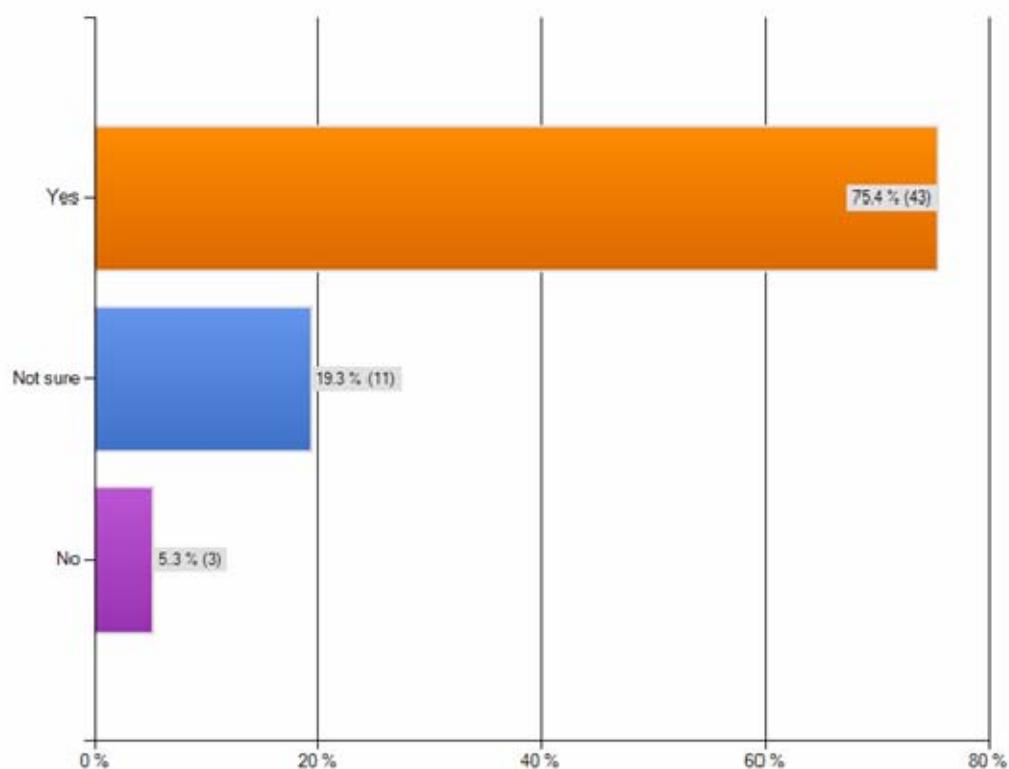
### Issues raised in comments

- Better quality and a wider range of provision in the area were welcomed, as was the potential for different roles and career progression for staff.
- Some respondents saw the need to make savings as the main driver for the merger. As a result they expected and wanted to see more detail on the efficiencies had been identified. Other drivers for merger, for example pedagogical aims, were said to need more explanation.

### Question 3: Do you support the new college's vision?

37 The answers to this question are shown in Chart 5.

**Chart 5: Do you support the new college's vision?**



#### Conclusions from the answers

- There is a majority in support of the new college's vision: 75.4 per cent of respondents said this.
- 19.3 per cent did not support the vision and 5.3 per cent were not sure, accounting together for 24.3 per cent of responses.

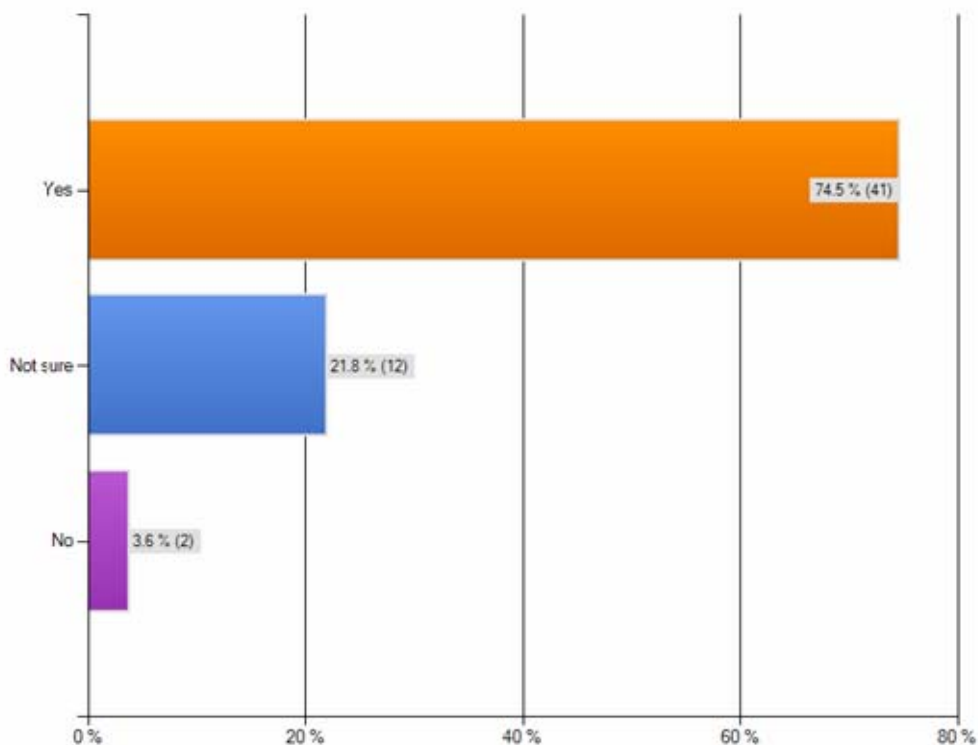
#### Issues raised in comments

- The vision was welcomed by some respondents but others said insufficient detail was available.
- The extent to which the vision differs greatly from or improves the current offer by the separate colleges was questioned.
- The continued availability of a varied offer was questioned – with the Bromley mission currently being to provide vocational education and Orpington a mixture of further and higher education.
- More detail on the greater choice of courses was requested, to show the offer would be more than a re-branding of the current one.

## Question 4: Do you support the plans for developing the curriculum?

38 The answers to this question are shown in Chart 6.

**Chart 6: Do you support the plans for developing the curriculum?**



### Conclusions from the answers

- There is a majority in support of the plans for developing the curriculum: 74.5 per cent of respondents said they supported them.
- 3.6 per cent did not support the plans and 21.8 per cent were not sure, accounting together for 25.4 per cent of responses.

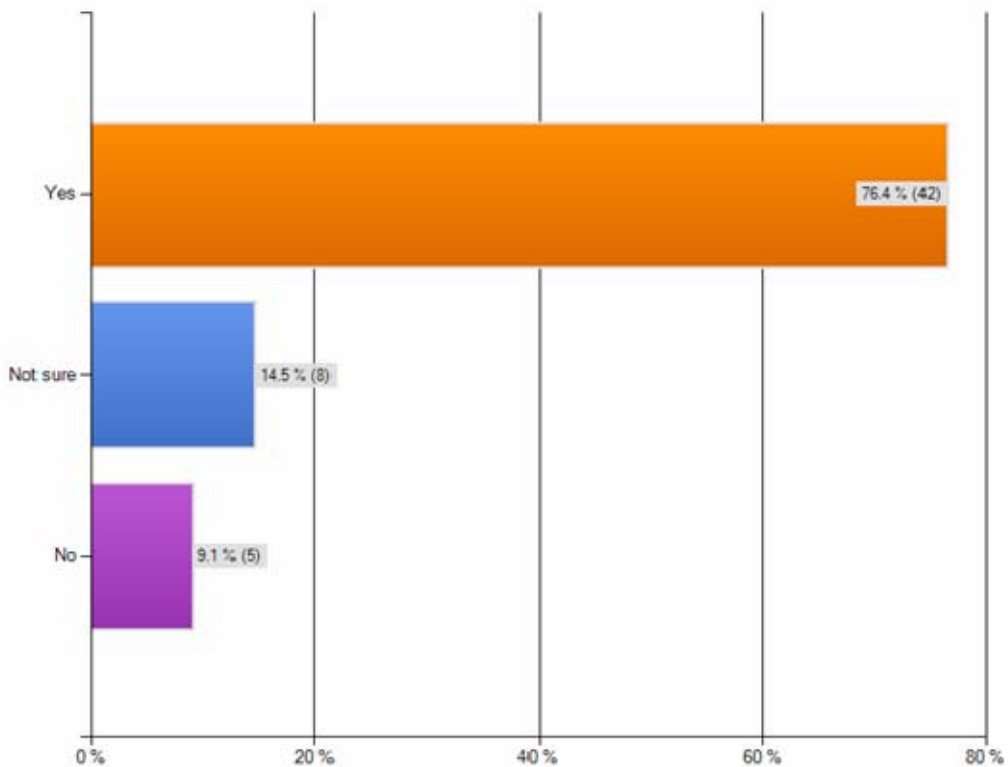
### Issues raised in comments

- Some respondents said there was insufficient information for an informed decision – they wanted more detail for example on the courses that would be on offer, modes of delivery and support structures.
- The potential for the merged college to fill gaps in the curriculum was noted as was better capacity for the core business of education.
- It was unclear how the current range of academic, vocational and higher education provision across both colleges would be developed; such as what areas would be expanded how this would be sustained
- Information on the future of the A-level offer was requested – it was seen as an important route into college for learners and something that should be protected.
- Meeting the needs of learners in the local area should be a priority and there is a need to anticipate changes in Government policy.

**Question 5: Do you think the proposal will lead to the availability of diverse education and training that is relevant to the local community?**

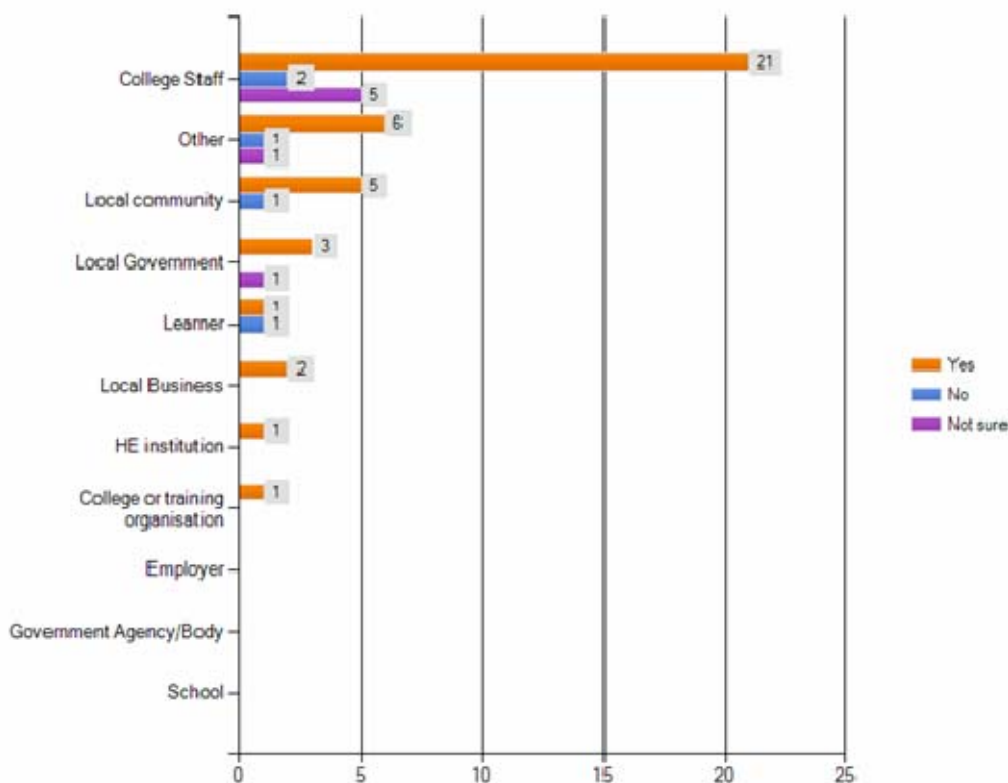
39 The answers to this question are shown in Chart 7.

**Chart 7: Do you think the proposal will lead to the availability of diverse education and training that is relevant to the local community?**



40 For this question we also compared the distribution of responses where the respondents had also confirmed their area of interest by answering Question 11. The results are shown in Chart 8.

**Chart 8: Will the proposal lead to the availability of diverse education and training that is relevant to the local community – respondent by interest type where known**



**Conclusions from the answers**

- A majority of respondents (76.4 per cent) said the merger would lead to the availability of diverse education and training that is relevant to the local community.
- The second chart shows that the main type of respondent saying the proposal would lead to a diverse and relevant education and training was college staff (21 respondents), followed by other (six) and local community (five).
- 9.1 per cent of respondents said merger would not have this outcome and further 14.5 per cent were not sure if it would. Together this accounts for 23.6 per cent of responses.
- Those who said merger would **not** lead to a diverse and relevant education and training offer were College Staff (two) followed by Other, Local Community and Learner (one respondent type each).

**Issues raised in comments**

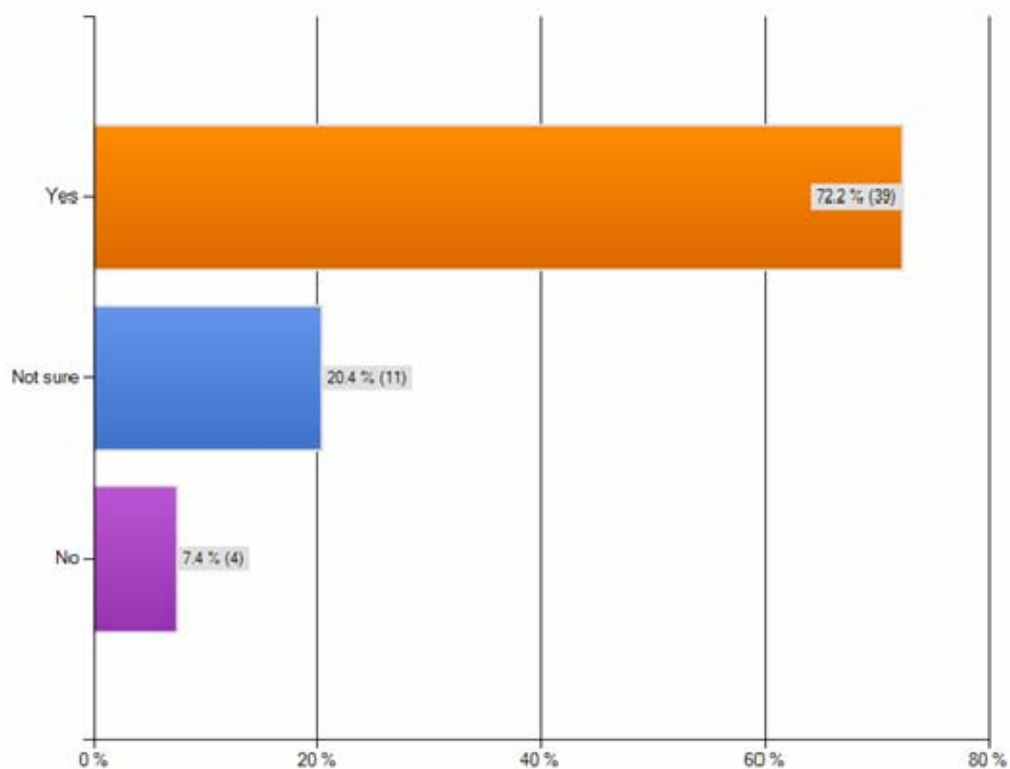
- The two colleges were seen to offer a diverse and relevant offer at the moment.

- Greater collaboration and co-operation between providers across the borough was seen as a necessity for a diverse education and training offer relevant to the local community.
- A more consistent offer across the borough was welcomed as were the benefits from combining the resources and teams of both colleges and the potential for cost-savings to protect front-line services.
- The definition of the local community was questioned, with many learners currently coming from outside the borough.
- The need to develop the curriculum for learners with a LLDD and/or disability, in partnership with others in the area, was highlighted as was the need to offer more Apprenticeships in response to youth unemployment
- The closure of A-level courses was cited as evidence of options already being limited.

## Question 6: Do you support the proposed arrangements for governance and management?

41 The answers to this question are shown in Chart 9.

**Chart 9: Do you support the proposed arrangements for governance and management?**



### Conclusions from the answers

- There is a majority in support of the proposed arrangements for governance and management: 72.2 per cent of respondents answered 'Yes' to this question.
- 7.4 per cent answered 'No' and 20.4 per cent were 'Not Sure' accounting together for 27.8 per cent of responses.

### Issues raised in comments

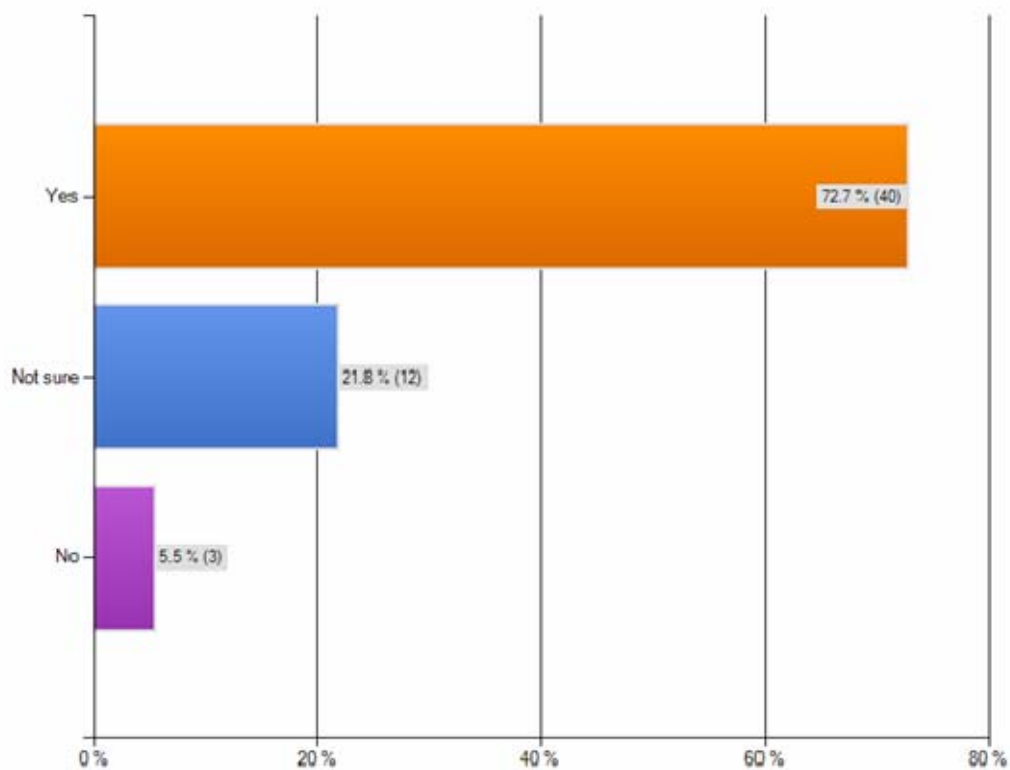
- Safeguarding of Orpington's interest was welcomed.
- More information was requested on management structures, including the balance between leaders and managers from the two colleges and who the new managers and governors will be
- The need for the new governing body to be visible and accountable in the new college was highlighted.

- The potential for efficiencies in the new arrangements was welcomed.
- The post of principal of the new college already having been decided was questioned, for reasons of accountability and lack of competition and in comparison to staff uncertainty about their futures.

### Question 7: Do you think the proposed merger provides value for money?

42 The answers to this question are shown in Chart 10.

**Chart 10: Do you think the proposed merger provides value for money?**



#### Conclusions from the answers

- 72.7 per cent of respondents said the merger provides value for money.
- 21.8 per cent were not sure if it did and 5.5 per cent said it did not, accounting together for 27.3 per cent of responses.

#### Issues raised in comments

- Efficiency savings were welcomed especially in the current financial climate.
- The basis on which value for money was being assessed was queried. For instance impact of redundancies on the wider economy, the cost of the merger

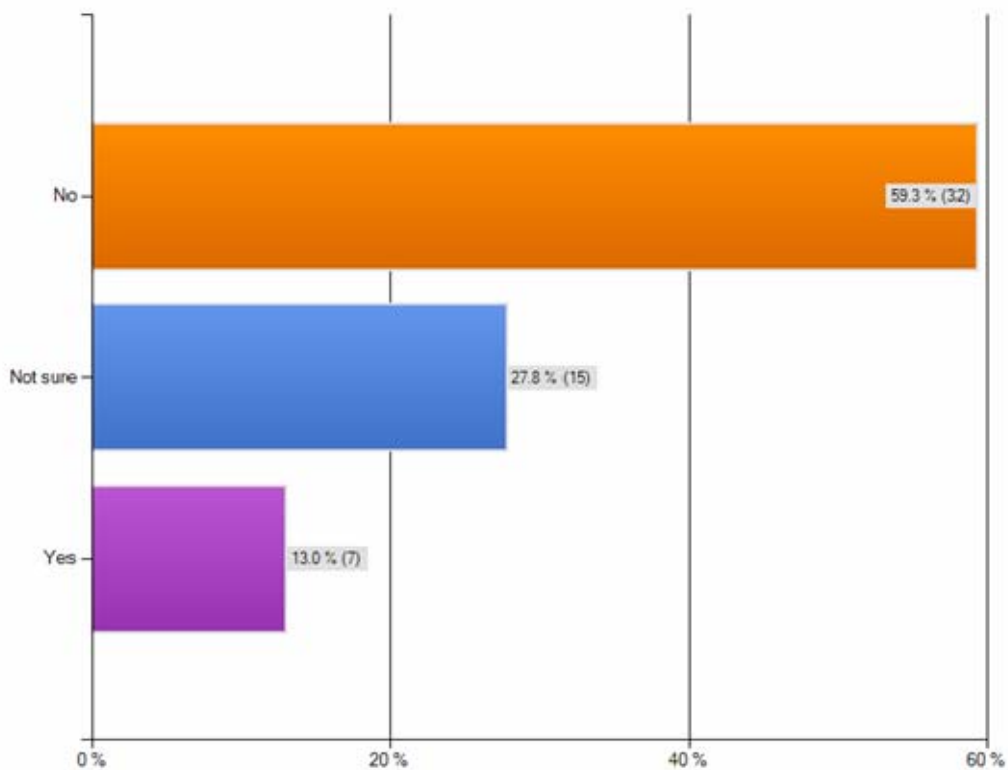
process and whether money for redundancies could be used to protect jobs instead.

- There was concern at the potential for Orpington College’s financial position to weaken the structure of the merged college and that one site might be disposed of in future for financial reasons.

### **Question 8: Do you think any group(s) of students would be adversely affected by the changes?**

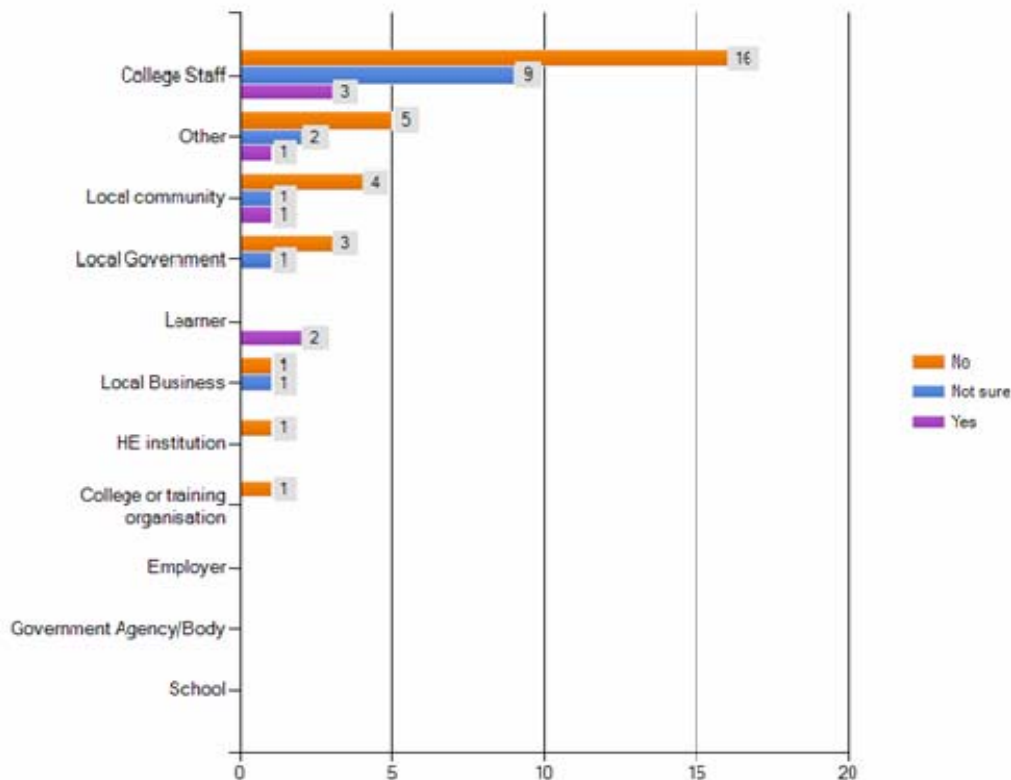
43 The answers to this question are shown in Chart 11.

**Chart 11: Do you think any group(s) of students would be adversely affected by the changes?**



44 For this question we also compared the distribution of responses where the respondents had also confirmed their area of interest by answering Question 11. The results are shown in Chart 12.

**Chart 12: Do you think any group(s) of students would be affected adversely by the changes – number of respondents by interest type (where known)**



### Conclusions from the answers

- 59.3 per cent of respondents said learners would not be affected adversely by the proposals.
- There were more responses than any other saying learners would not be affected adversely by College staff, Others, Local Community, Local Government, HE Institution and College or training organisation respondents.
- 13 per cent of respondents said learners would be affected adversely and 27.8 per cent were not sure if they would be. Together this accounts for 40.8 per cent of responses.
- The respondents who said learners would be affected adversely were college staff (3), learner (2), local community (1) and other (1). Those who were not sure were similarly college staff (9), other (2), local community (1), local government (1) and local business (1).

### Issues raised in comments

- There were requests for more information, especially which courses will be offered where and when any current courses might close.

- One respondent said all learners would be disadvantaged.
- Most queries and concerns were about travel - learners having to move to the other college site to continue their course, longer or more inconvenient travel times if provision was available on one site only, or not wanting to travel to the other site at all.
- Information on support for learners with dyslexia/learning difficulties in the merged college was requested.
- The availability of nursery provision at Orpington College was queried
- Closure of the A-level option at the Orpington site will leave certain learners unable to access the academic route other than at school.
- Adult learners particularly may be affected if they have to travel further to study and have childcare commitments
- The potential for the merger to deter mature learners from returning to study needs to be managed

### **Question 9: Do you have any other issues or comments?**

45 This provides a final opportunity to comment. The issues raised were:

- why does the process takes so long? (“Just get on with it.”)
- what threat is there for Bromley College without a merger?
- the lack of detail and depth to the information in the consultation document
- the process being “railroaded through” and changes being made before the merger is approved
- whether the new college will continue to work with pre-16-year-olds to provide a programme of vocational learning opportunities
- the colleges serve different catchment areas and travel between the two will be difficult
- the reasons for such a radical change not being clear enough
- support for the merger as logical from curriculum and financial perspectives
- support from a local authority for a combined college in the borough
- concern that Bromley College is the stronger partner
- the difficulty for staff of maintaining a positive attitude and supporting learners during a period of uncertainty for them
- the importance of involving learners in the process of change.

## Non-online responses (21)

- 46 Twenty-one non-on-line responses were received with views on the proposed merger: 15 letters, two emails and four reports by the colleges on their own consultation events.
- 47 Using the options for describing area of interest from the online survey the responses can be categorised as follows:
- Learner (2)
  - Employer (0)
  - College staff (2)
  - Government Agency/Body (2)
  - Local Government (5)
  - Local Community (0 )
  - Local Business (1)
  - School (0 )
  - HE institution (2)
  - College or training organisation (4)
  - Other (3)
- 48 The responses from learners and staff were reports by the colleges on their own consultation events. These are summarised in the next section. A high-level summary of the other responses follows:
- a Government higher education body confirmed no objections to the merger
  - a Government body said support was conditional upon the findings of the relevant due diligence studies and subsequent reassurance from the Agency on the provider's financial stability post-merger
  - the Children and Young People Services directorate at a local borough strongly supported the merger. It said the merged college would be in a stronger position to meet the needs of the local community and economy and particularly supported the 'Bromley solution' rather than any merger arrangements beyond the borough.
  - the renewal and recreation department at a local borough supported the merger. The need for both sites to remain open in recognition of the strong local identity of both towns was highlighted along with the need to maintain effective links with other local providers.
  - a local borough wrote on behalf of a local economic partnership to support the merger. Advantages were highlighted, including a possible extension of courses, more flexible modes of learning, efficiency gains and a single voice for FE in the

borough. The proposal to maintain both delivery sites was noted as was the intention to continue working with other providers through the Bromley College's Group and other partners through the economic partnership.

- A local councillor in Bromley supported the merger, highlighting the geographical closeness of the colleges, the synergy of their current offers and the potential for efficiency savings.
- A body representing London's 33 local authorities, the City of London and other public authorities wrote to support the merger. It welcomed aspects of the proposal including the commitment to a distinctive alternative to school-based provision for 14-19-year-olds; the production of a quality improvement strategy; the provision of a highly supportive learning environment; the creation of a 'Bromley Brand'; the expansion of Apprenticeship provision; the commitment to work with those young people not currently engaged in learning and to build capacity and broaden the offer for LLDD learners :and the provision of a single point of contact for the local council.

They also highlighted the need to manage risk, particularly efficiency savings reducing the choice of provision for young people and knowing more about the needs of businesses in the borough. They also assumed the merged college would continue to work with the Borough of Bromley to meet the needs of local communities.

- a university, which described itself as a partner of both colleges for some years, supported the merger. Another, which said it had been a a partner of Orpington College for a number of years, also supported the merger.
- two private training providers supported the merger. One said it was currently working with Bromley College and saw the merger as strengthening the partnership.
- a provider of adult education supported the merger but felt strongly that the development of the single 'Bromley Brand' should include other providers like themselves. More information was requested on the proposed offer for LLDD learners.
- the chair of an association for local college principals supported the merger.
- an organisation that supports and represents local business supported the merger.

- two local Members of Parliament supported the merger. One highlighted the benefits of efficiency savings and streamlined management, increased capacity to offer choice and quality and the creation of a hub for further and higher education in Bromley. Although larger, the merged college would retain local character. The second MP highlighted better value for money and the potential for efficiency savings to shield resources for front-line services.
- a union representing college staff understood the financial drivers but said the proposal did not provide enough detail, including on areas of duplication, staff representation on the new governing body, the funds to be released from efficiency gains and how the merger would affect staff pay, numbers, roles, levels training and locations. They also asked for confirmation that an Equality Impact Assessment would be undertaken and shared.

## College consultations with staff and learners

49 Both colleges held consultation events for staff and learners. The information below is taken from the college summaries of their events.

### Bromley College

50 Five staff meetings were held. Each started with a presentation by the Principal followed by opportunity to comment on the consultation questions, facilitated by the two staff governors; 225 staff attended the meetings and 196 remained for the discussion session.

51 The college summarised the staff views as follows:

*“Overall, the staff response to the consultation questions was generally positive with the majority accepting the rationale and need for a merged college.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“There was also general agreement that students would not be adversely affected.”*

52 The key areas for concern or uncertainty for staff were as follows:

- the potential for job losses and the limited information so far on the merger’s impact on staff
- both colleges continuing to have an individual personality and specialisms following merger
- the detail of governing body and management structures, especially the middle-management structure, which was not covered in the consultation document
- access to information on the disadvantages of merger and the benefits delivered by previous college mergers
- the limited detail on practical considerations, such as bringing together different awarding body processes, closing current courses and putting systems in place to support new learners.

53 Members of the Student Representative Council were invited to a meeting with the Principal. They were asked to read the consultation document and discuss the merger with their class before the meeting. All learners were also offered the opportunity to attend lunch-time or early evening meetings with the Acting Head of Student Services; 25 learners attended meetings, the majority in their capacity as members of Student Representative Council.

54 The college summarised learners’ views as follows:

*“Overall, the student response to the consultation questions was generally positive with the majority accepting the rationale and need for a merged college.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Merger - Staff Consultation Report, Bromley College

55 Key areas for concern or uncertainty for learners were as follows;

- practical implications - courses moving from one college to the other, part-time courses being offered on one site only and learners having to study across two sites
- the potential impact of a bigger college on less confident learners, on the capacity of disabled learners to move around busier buildings and the support available to learners
- having more information on the new curriculum – if there will be more adult provision, if higher education courses will continue
- the potential for the currently good reputation of Bromley College to be affected and for “less positive students and those who don’t won’t to study” under the new vision
- each site continuing to have an individual personality under a common vision
- whether the college name and logo will change.

### **Orpington College**

56 Staff were invited to a meeting that began with a presentation by the Principal (the same presentation was used by both colleges) and a question and answer session. A discussion session followed chaired by the Vice-principal and a representative of the London Borough of Bromley. Around 110 staff attended for the majority of the event.

57 The college summarised staff views as follows:

*“Overall staff strongly supported the merger proposal and viewed it as strategically the right way forward for Orpington College.”<sup>2</sup>*

58 There were areas of concern or uncertainty, in particular the:

- potential for job losses
- limited detailed information, for example on the curriculum and departmental structures
- need to retain Orpington College’s identity following the merger and the merger feeling like a takeover.

59 Learners were alerted to the consultation by email, intranet, website and posters/leaflets in student and reception areas. Tutor group question and answer sessions were held, four attended by the Principal. The Student Council held a special meeting on 27 January, attended by the Principal and Vice-principal. The college summarised learners’ views as follows;

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<sup>2</sup> *Merger - Staff Consultation Report – Orpington College, 22 February 2011*

*“Generally students felt the merger made sense strategically and was the right thing for learners. Those that were unsure wanted to know more of the detailed arrangements before giving explicit support.”*

- 60 The questions asked by learners were answered by the Principal/Vice- principal and were afterwards used in a general communication to all students. Key issues raised by students relevant to the merger were:
- the future of A-level provision in the merged college, including the option of combination with vocational subjects
  - the risk of courses being changed part way through and students having to attend the Bromley site instead
  - a potential fall in student numbers due to travel implications
  - students have a say in any college name change
  - whether there would be staff redundancies if the same subjects are offered at both colleges.
- 61 The staff and student meetings at Orpington College included an informal vote on the question of whether to support the merger:
- staff votes were: Yes (64 percent); No (0 per cent); Not Sure (4 per cent) and Abstained (31 per cent).
  - student votes were: Yes (60 per cent); No (10 per cent) and Not Sure (30 per cent), with no abstentions.

## Annex A: Questions asked in the online consultation survey

Questions which were mandatory are indicated by a \* (but respondents could leave the survey without completing it in full).

For each main question, respondents were given multiple-choice type options for the answer - for example Yes, No, Not sure. The follow-up questions all allowed free text to be submitted.

Main question	Follow-up question
Do you support the proposed reorganisation?*	Do you have any comments on this?
Do you support the objectives of the merger?	Do you have any comments on this?
Do you support the new college's vision?	Do you have any comments on this?
Do you support the plans for developing the curriculum?	Do you have any comments on this?
Do you think the proposal will lead to the availability of diverse education and training that is relevant to the local community?	Do you have any comments on this?
Do you support the proposed arrangements for governance and management?	Do you have any comments on this?
Do you think the proposed merger provides value for money?	Do you have any comments on this?
Do you think any group(s) of students would be affected adversely by the changes?	If so, who and why?
Do you have any other issues or comments?*	If so, what are they?
Are you responding as an individual or an organisation? *	
Which of the following best describes your interest? *	Choice of: Learner, Employer, College Staff, Government Agency/Body, Local Government, Local Community, Local Business, School, HE institution, College or training organisation, Other (If other, please specify)

## Annex B: Statutory Consultation Notice

### 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 **Orpington College of Further Education (Orpington 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 **Orpington College** in order that the college may merge with **Bromley College of Further and Higher Education (Bromley College)**. It is proposed that the property, rights and liabilities of the corporation to be transferred to the corporation of **Bromley College**.

The date proposed for the dissolution is **1 August 2011**.

Provision will be made for all students at **Orpington College** who have not yet completed their courses of study by the date of the proposed dissolution to complete their studies at **Bromley College** and the campus at The Walnuts, Orpington will be retained.

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 4 March 2011. 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: 26 January 2011



Signed:

## **Annex C: Stakeholders notified of the consultation**

157 Group	Institute of the Motor Industry
Ability Business Centre	JACE Training & Assessment
Alliance of Sector Skills Councils	Job Centre Plus
Asset Skills	Kelsey Park Sports College
Association for College Management	Kemnal Technology College
Association of Colleges	Kent County Council
Association of Learning Providers	Langley Park Boys School
Association of National Specialist Colleges	Langley Park Girls School
Association of Teachers and Lecturers	Lantra
Barnados	LEAFEA
Beaverwood School for Girls	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
Bishop Justus C of E School	Lifelong Learning UK
British Chambers of Commerce	LITS
Bromley 14-19	London Borough of Bexley
Bromley Adult Education Centre	London Borough of Bromley
Bromley College	London Borough of Croydon
Bromley College of FHE	London Borough of Greenwich
Bullers Wood School	London Borough of Lewisham
Burwood School	Marjorie McClure School
Business Link	MP for Beckenham
Canterbury Christ Church University	MP for Bromley and Chislehurst
Cator Park School	MP for Orpington
Charles Darwin School	Nash College
Cogent	National Skills Academy Financial Services
Committee of South London Principals	National Union of Students
Community Links Bromley	National Union of Teachers
Construction Skills	NewsShopper
Coopers Technology College	Newstead Wood School
Creative and Cultural Skills	NTS Music
Darrick Wood School	Ofsted
Department for Business Innovation and Skills	Orpington Business Forum
Energy & Utility Skills	Orpington College
e-Skills UK	People 1st
Financial Services Skills Council	Priory School
Glebe School	Proskills UK Ltd
GoSkills	Pupil Referral Service
Government Skills	Ravensbourne School
Hayes School	Ravenswood School
HEFCE	Riverside School
HOLEX	SEMTA
Improve Ltd	Sixth Form Colleges' Forum

Skills Active  
Skills for Care and Development  
Skills for Health  
Skills for Justice  
Skills for Logistics  
Skillset  
Skillsmart Retail  
SLLP  
South East London Chamber of Commerce  
South London Business  
South London Chamber of Commerce  
South London Sub Regional Unit  
Springboard Bromley Trust  
St Olaves School  
Summit Skills  
Sway  
The Child Care Company  
TLT Hair Academy  
UKCES  
UNISON  
UNISON Bromley Local Government Branch  
University and College Union  
University of Greenwich  
YPLA

