Report on the public consultation on the merger between Lewisham Southwark College and NCG

May 2017
INTRODUCTION

We would like to thank the people and organisations who have responded to the recent consultation on our proposal to merge the corporations of Lewisham Southwark College and NCG. Your views are extremely important and will help to shape the future of Lewisham Southwark College within the merged group.

We are satisfied that the consultation gave people a good opportunity to respond and we were pleased to note the strong support for our merger proposals, particularly amongst our students, staff and local businesses in London. We have listened to all the comments that have been made during the consultation, whether positive, negative or neutral and will use these to shape the final proposal for the merger.

This is just a starting point and there is much work to do to ensure that the merger is completed successfully to secure the benefits for students, staff and the wider community. We are, however, excited by the opportunity to develop Lewisham Southwark College within NCG in order to realise these benefits and provide a platform for continued future excellence.

Chris Bilsland
Chair
Lewisham Southwark College

Jamie Martin
Chair
NCG
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

› This is a report on the statutory public consultation on the proposed merger of two further education (FE) corporations: Lewisham Southwark College and NCG.

› The consultation was undertaken jointly by both organisations in accordance with the statutory provisions.

› The consultation took place between 17 March and 21 April 2017.

› Views could be submitted in an online form, paper form, by email or in writing.

› Public notices were issued in line with legislative requirements, including in local newspapers.

› The consultation asked respondents to comment on the proposed merger, to feed back on which benefits of the proposed merger are most important to them and to tell us about any other improvements they would like to see.

› This report includes high-level summaries of the comments made by respondents. In the interests of concision, comments that recurred more than once are not repeated.

Responses

In total there were 95 responses during the consultation period, with a further 2 responses arriving within a few hours of the deadline; for transparency we have included all of these responses in this report. A response from one of the London boroughs was received several days after the end of the consultation - we have included reference to this response in the narrative but it is not in the statistics below. The responses can be broken down as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Response</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper based survey</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written responses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Respondents to the survey were asked to describe their interest. The distribution of the 97 respondents who answered the question was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LSC employees</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCG employees</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE institutions</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or training organisation</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government agency</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of individual responses was relatively high for recent college merger consultations and we were delighted to see the participation and responses from so many college learners. The volume of responses from Lewisham Southwark Employees was also pleasing.

A response was also received from the Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, who responded on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education as a statutory consultee. He confirmed that he was content that the colleges were following the statutory process as outlined in the Publication of Proposals Regulations. This response is included in full as Appendix 3 to this report.

The response received from the London Mayor’s office was positive, welcoming the outcomes of the London Area Review and the “efforts of London’s colleges to pursue new institutional structures to increase colleges’ financial resilience and responsiveness to local need”.

Key messages from the consultation

The survey requested respondents to comment on which benefits of the proposed merger are most important to them and about any other improvements they would like to see.

The responses demonstrate that there is a strong local support for the merger amongst college staff, students and local employers/businesses. On the whole staff responses were extremely positive, with 80% being supportive and just 10% of responses being negative or against the merger. 90% of learners were in favour of the merger and none believed the merger should not proceed. The responses from local employers and businesses were also overwhelmingly positive, with no respondents being negative towards the proposed merger.

In the few cases where concerns have been raised they tend to be because either the lack of information over any future job losses or a desire to see a local merger solution. There remains some opposition to the merger from the local boroughs and LSBU.

The key benefits identified by respondents are:

› Increased stability for the college as part of a larger national group
› Enable the college to grow and increase the range of opportunities for students
› Increased opportunities to develop the apprenticeship offer
› Opportunities to share expertise, good practice and ideas
› Enabling the development of Higher Education provision
› Increasing the range of specialist or bespoke provision for employers

There were a number of concerns that were raised during the consultation

› Further detail on how the key benefits identified by the consultation are to be delivered will be required
› Responses to the feedback on why a local solution is not being considered
› Assurances for LSC staff around pay and conditions, along with more information on the likelihood of future redundancies
› Queries around how the governance of the merged college would ensure true responsiveness to local stakeholders

These have been addressed in the Final Merger Proposal. 1 August 2017 remains the proposed date for dissolution of the Corporation of Lewisham Southwark College and merger implementation.
In accordance with the provisions of Education Act 2011 responsibility for the public consultation on a proposed FE college merger lies with the corporations of the two institutions. The consultation document set out that this would be a Type B merger, where the corporation of Lewisham Southwark College would be dissolved and its assets and liabilities transferred to the corporation of NCG. The proposed date for the merger to take effect is 1 August 2017.

Following the consultation, the corporations will produce a final merger proposal (FMP). Under the Education Act 2011 the power to dissolve lies with the corporation of Lewisham Southwark College. The College must pay due regard to key documents and guidance regarding delivery models and mergers in the FE sector, specifically the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (DBIS) publication *New Challenges, New Choices* and the subsequent clarification given in the *Further Education Minister’s letter of 13 February 2013*. The DBIS guidance highlights that a transparent, formal public consultation on the merger is a key step in the process before any final decision.

The merger also takes into account the recommendations of the recent Area Based Reviews of FE Colleges in Central London. The main recommendation in relation to Lewisham Southwark College was to pursue merger with a suitable partner and the report noted that:

“Lewisham Southwark College have confirmed the college corporation’s decision to pursue a merger with NCG in December 2016”

**Consultation Process**

The two organisations produced a Consultation Document which was endorsed by both Governing Bodies. The consultation was undertaken jointly by the two organisations in line with the requirements of the Education Act 2011 and the DBIS publication ‘*New Challenges, New Choices*’. This consultation took place between the 17 March and 21 April 2017 and public notices were issued in line with legislative requirements, including in local and national newspapers.

**Views could be submitted via a number of channels:**

- Online forms on the websites of both institutions
- Through paper forms available in both institutions
- By writing to either institution
- By e-mail to one of two specific addresses set up for the consultation

The format used in the consultation is included as **Appendix 1**. The question was specifically designed to capture feedback and comments on the benefits of the proposals rather than to be a ‘referendum’ on whether the merger should proceed.

Statutory Notices appeared in the 20 March 2017 editions of the Times and the 21 March 2017 edition of the Mercury (South London Press) (**Appendix 2**). Notice of the consultation, with information on how to respond and links to the consultation document and online survey, were available on both the Lewisham Southwark College and NCG websites for the whole of the consultation period. Paper copies of the Consultation Document were available in the receptions of the Lewisham and Southwark Sites and at the reception of NCG’s West End College headquarters.
Letters were written to a list of potential national, regional and local stakeholders, including all those identified as statutory consultees within the relevant legislation, to notify them of the consultation and invite them to respond.

Key stakeholders were invited to meet one to one with the College during the consultation period. Two ‘town hall’ style meetings were held for staff at the Lewisham and Southwark Campuses to enable them to meet the NCG CEO, Joe Docherty, and ask direct questions pertaining to the consultation; over 100 staff actively participated in these events. An e-mail question line and regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) were also in place.

A breakfast event for local employers was held at the Southwark Campus on 30 March enabling them to provide their views on the merger and see how the newly merged college would facilitate them in delivering apprenticeships. Specific events were also held with students on both the Lewisham and Southwark Campuses during the consultation period. These proved to be very popular events and helped to contribute towards the high rate of responses from students.

Lewisham Southwark College also held informal consultation events at their board’s request during January 2017. These events were attended by students, staff and over 50 employers. Feedback at the events in relation to the proposed merger was very positive. 85% of students believed that the merger was a good idea or would add benefits and none thought it was a bad idea. 94% of the 152 staff member who attended though that the merger was would either be ‘very positive with many benefits’ or ‘quite positive with some benefits’. Feedback from employers was also positive with 80% supporting the benefits that merger would bring and just one employer being against the plans. These results are not included in the report below.

Responses Received

In total there were 95 responses during the consultation period, with a further 2 response arriving within a few hours of the deadline; for transparency we have included all of these responses in this report. A response from one of the London boroughs was received several days after the end of the consultation – we have included reference to this response in the narrative but it is not in the statistics below. The responses can be broken down as follows.

- Online survey: 39
- Paper based survey: 55
- Written responses: 3

The number of individual responses was relatively high for recent college merger consultations and we were delighted to see the participation and responses from so many college learners. The volume of responses from Lewisham Southwark Employees was also pleasing.
We have carried out a full analysis of the written responses in order to respond to the key points being raised. For each question, a chart confirms the answers given followed by some conclusions from the answers. There is also a summary of the comments made by respondents. In the interests of concision, comments that recurred more than once are not repeated.

At the start of the online survey, respondents were asked to tick the category that best described their interest. The answers are shown in the table below and in Charts 1 and 2 respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSC Employee</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCG Employee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Agency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE Institution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other College/Training Provider</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Union</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1 – Which of the following best describes your interest?
The majority of responses were received from individuals (79%), compared to organisations at 21%. Of those who chose an option to describe their interest, the greatest percentage was college staff at 41%, followed by learners at 38%, then local employers/businesses (12%). No responses were received from schools or members of the local community.

Key messages from the Consultation

Respondents were asked to answer a simple question in relation to the proposed merger:

“Please tell us which benefits of the proposed merger are most important to you and about any other improvements you would like to see.”

The responses comprised a variety of lengths and covered a large number of topics. This section of the report aims to summarise the key messages from them.
Staff Responses

There were some very distinct themes in the responses from college staff. On the whole staff responses were extremely positive, with 80% being supportive and just 10% of responses being negative or against the merger. The key benefits staff identified from the merger were:

› Increased stability for the college as part of a larger national group (17 responses)
› Opportunities to share expertise, good practice and ideas (10)
› Development of Higher Education provision (6)
› To allow the college to grow and increase the range of opportunities for students (8)
› Introduction of the NCG values (5)
› Development of the apprenticeship offer (3)
› Developing and sharing expertise in international and commercial training (2)
› Improvements in staff development and training (3)

Individual responses also mentioned the development of a new campus in Lewisham Borough, retaining a high degree of autonomy in the Group and an increased ability to lobby government in the interests of our students and the college.

There were a number of concerns raised by staff through the consultation:

› The possibility of redundancies or jobs being moved out of London (4)
› Concern that contracts will be changed or new roles introduced (2)

Individual responses also questioned the need for the current organisational review and asked why a merger with London South East Colleges had not been considered. The response from the NCG employee was positive in support of the proposed merger, highlighting the benefit that financial stability would bring.

Examples of the comments made by college staff include:

“To become (again) a formidable FE Provider in Central South London. Security/stability to allow us to do our jobs in the best way possible”

“Really liked the ‘values’. I think that the merger will be very positive”

“I feel that the merger will be good for the College and will give staff and learners a feeling of stability that has been missing of late”

“This merger will secure a future for local people in South London. As a local person and staff member, the prospect of this merger will positively impact me, my friends and family for years to come”

“Enable Lewisham Southwark College to grow into a bigger, stronger and more vibrant college in order to provide the very best education and training for students, supporting the businesses and communities of Central South London”

“Being part of a larger organisation would enable the college to be more competitive within the sector and to grow rather than reduce provision. There will also be opportunities for sharing of good practice with other colleagues within the group which would benefit curriculum.”
“I am concerned about possible redundancies. I would like reassurance that our contracts will stay the same or improve. (i.e.; salary and holidays)”

“Why hasn’t a merger with London South East Colleges been considered with as much enthusiasm as the NCG merger? Surely this would benefit students, staff and the local community”

Learner Responses

Current Lewisham Southwark College learners represented the second largest group of respondents to the survey with 38% of responses. Overall 90% were in favour of the merger and none of the respondents believed the merger should not proceed. The key benefits that learners identified from the merger were:

› The ability of the college to offer a wider range of courses and more opportunities for students (21 responses)
› Increased opportunities for apprenticeships (9)
› Increased range of HE provision as an alternative to University (8)
› Improvements to courses and resources (4)
› The ability of students to remain at their current campus (2)

There were a few concerns that students mentioned in their submissions, for example any impact of offering more courses on the quality of lessons being taught, the fact that Lewisham Southwark College would not be an individual college anymore and a query whether a merger with a closer college had been considered.

Examples of the comments made by students include:

“I am pleased that students will remain at their current campus with no expectation to travel further to complete their studies or progress to new courses”

“I think this sounds like a great idea – as more opportunities will be created for aspiring students and maybe those that don’t want to go travel to university. I think the merger will encourage more students to enrol.”

“I think this initiative will have a really positive impact on current students as well as potential students coming to the College. More variety in courses and more accessible resources will help students in their local areas.”

“The merger will be beneficial, however Lewisham Southwark College will not be an individual college any more as they would now be identified as NCG, but I think the wider range of courses available will be appreciated by many”

“It’s a good idea but maybe it should be done with a closer college.”
ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESPONSES CONTINUED...

Employer/Local Business Responses

The responses from local employers and businesses were also overwhelmingly positive, with no respondents being negative towards the proposed merger. The main benefits that employers identified from the proposals were:

› More opportunities to develop apprenticeship programmes (6 responses)
› The ability to work with LSC as part of a group with a national delivery footprint (2)
› Increasing the range of specialist or bespoke provision for employers (2)

Individual employers also noted that improvements to the stability of the college would be beneficial, as would increasing the number of training ‘windows’ to offer more flexibility.

Examples of the comments made by local employers and businesses include:

“More chance to get the right apprentice in short time that my organisation is looking for”

“We would need help in developing programmes specially tailored for the NHS, such as nursing degrees and other specialised higher apprenticeships”

“We are an international organisation providing support services to many employers in hospitality, security, reception duties and facilities management in the UK. If this merger means you and your partners could have national coverage for training that could be of benefit to both of us”

“If this merger means Lewisham College will have a better portfolio of courses and apprenticeships then that would be good”

Department for Education response

There were responses from DfE, a local authority and the London Mayor’s office during the consultation. The response received from the Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, was on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education as a statutory consultee. He confirmed that he was content that the colleges were following the statutory process as outlined in the Publication of Proposals Regulations. This response is included in full as Appendix 3 to this report.

Mayor of London response

The response from the London Mayor’s office was positive, welcoming the outcomes of the London Area Review and the “efforts of London’s colleges to pursue new institutional structures to increase colleges’ financial resilience and responsiveness to local need”.
Local Government Responses

The responses from the local Boroughs were mixed. One borough reiterated the opposition to the merger as previously stated during the area review process, the other borough whilst stating that the merger was not their preferred option made some very constructive suggestions around how the merged college could ensure that it is offering a high quality and responsive service to local people. There were also concerns raised around the real level of autonomy that remain in London and around the pace at which improvements could be made. The responses did, however, address some of the benefits that they would like to see should the merger proceed, for example “a local skills offer that is more aligned to employer needs and that focuses on collaboration to create a local curriculum that is more fit for purpose and able to meet the needs of residents and businesses” and “a secure and improved quality offer for learners, especially those with additional needs”.

Responses from other education providers

Responses were received from two Universities and one FE College. The FE College response was supportive of the merger, indicating a strong desire to collaborate with both LSC and NCG moving forwards. The University responses were mixed – one response was highly supportive of the merger, highlighting the financial sustainability it would bring and maintenance of the strong local offer to learners. The second response was strongly against the merger on the grounds that it believed there would be a loss of local autonomy and commitment, loss of a distinctive FE offer and a lack of local stakeholder support.

Other Responses

A response was received from branch representatives of a college Trade Union after the consultation had closed. This response questioned whether the merger would bring the required financial stability and raised concerns around the degradation of teaching contracts.
Conclusions from the consultation responses

The responses demonstrate that there is a strong local support for the merger amongst college staff, students and local employers/businesses. In the few cases where concerns have been raised they tend to be because either the lack of information over any future job losses or a desire to see a more local merger solution.

The key benefits identified by respondents are:

› Increased stability for the college as part of a larger national group
› Enable the college to grow and increase the range of opportunities for students
› Increased opportunities to develop the apprenticeship offer
› Opportunities to share expertise, good practice and ideas
› Enabling the development of Higher Education provision
› Increasing the range of specialist or bespoke provision for employers

Development of the Final Merger Proposal (FMP)

The FMP contains a summary of the consultation outcomes and specific sections have been updated as a result of feedback as follows:

› General inclusion of consultation data where relevant
› Further detail on how the key benefits identified by the consultation are to be delivered
› Clarification of the reasons why a local solution is not being considered
› Assurances for LSC staff around pay and conditions, along with more information on the likelihood of future redundancies
› A section setting out how local stakeholders will be engaged in future development of the college
1 The Survey

## PROPOSED MERGER: YOUR VIEWS

Details of the proposed merger are outlined in this document and on both NCG and Lewisham Southwark College’s websites; once you have read them fully please respond below or on the website.

In the consultation document we have highlighted a number of key benefits of the merger for students, employers, staff and the wider community. Please tell us which benefits of the proposed merger are most important to you and about any other improvements you would like to see.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Postcode</th>
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</table>

**I am (tick as appropriate):**

- Learner
- Employer
- Parent / Carer
- LSC Staff
- NCG Staff
- Private Training Provider
- School
- Government Agency
- FE Institution
- Local Government
- HE institution
- Other

**Your views**

Please return your views to the reception desk at the Lewisham Way campus or at West End College, Newcastle.

Or by post or email to either of the addresses below:

Carole Kitching, Principal and CEO, Lewisham Southwark College, Lewisham Way, London SE4 1UT consultation@LSCollege.ac.uk

Chris Payne, Group Director Strategic Partnerships, NCG, West End College, Muscott Grove, Newcastle upon Tyne NE15 6TT consultation@ncgrp.co.uk

You can complete this survey online at: [www.LSCollege.ac.uk/consultation](http://www.LSCollege.ac.uk/consultation)

The deadline for responses is 12.00 midday on 21 April 2017.

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**2.1 The Times**

The Corporation of Lewisham Southwark College proposes to merge with the Corporation of NCG with effect from 1st August 2017.

From the 1 August Lewisham Southwark College will continue to offer courses to people of the two boroughs on the same basis as its operating division of NCG. All continuing students will be unaffected. It currently has approximately 7,700 16-18 year olds and adult learners.

In order to effect this merger, it is proposed that the Corporation of Lewisham Southwark College a general further education college based across south east London, be dissolved and its assets and liabilities transferred to the Corporation of NCG.

This proposal is subject to statutory consultation which will open on Friday 21 April 2017. A copy of the full proposal and information on how to take part in the consultation may be obtained from [LSCollege.ac.uk](http://LSCollege.ac.uk) or [ncgrp.co.uk](http://ncgrp.co.uk) or in writing from Carole Kitching, Principal and CEO at Lewisham Southwark College, Lewisham Way, London, SE4 1UT.

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**2.2 Mercury (South London Press)**

The Corporation of Lewisham Southwark College proposes to merge with the Corporation of NCG with effect from 1st August 2017.

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3 Response from Minister of State

Carole Kitching  
Principal and CEO  
Lewisham Southwark College  
By email: Carole.Kitching@LSCollege.ac.uk

Thank you for your letter, addressed to the Secretary of State, about the proposed merger of Lewisham Southwark College and NCG, and for inviting comments on the proposal. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

I am content that you are following the statutory process as outlined in the Publication of Proposals Regulations.

As set out in the Area Review Guidance published on www.gov.uk, my officials in the Skills Funding Agency and Education Funding Agency will continue to work with you to support and monitor the implementation of the planned merger.

All matters relating to this letter, in the first instance, should be directed to Malcolm Rodrigues, (Malcolm.Rodrigues@sfa.bis.gov.uk), Head of Intervention Team.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Robert Haffon MP  
Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills