

Our vision for inspirational and outstanding further education in the heart of west London

The governing bodies of three of west London's further education colleges, Harrow, Uxbridge and West Thames Colleges, are exploring an exciting partnership.



Through this partnership it is proposed to deliver outstanding and sustainable further education provision that forms a core component of the infrastructure of west London, critical to the needs of employers and residents for employment and long-term economic prosperity.

We would like your views.

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Introduction

This consultation is taking place within the context both of national Government-led 'Area Reviews' which are looking at all colleges in the country, and the on-going financial challenges faced by the Sector. The London reviews are scheduled to complete during 2016.

Against this background, our vision is 'to become a leading high quality education and training provider with a strong financial profile that will ensure its sustainability and growth in the future'.

We are proposing a new west London college group that will build on the educational character, values and strengths of the respective partners whilst providing cohesive further education not only in the three boroughs within which the colleges are located – Harrow, Hillingdon, and Hounslow – but also beyond into London and more specifically in west London, to the benefit of students, employers and the wider community.

This document sets out our vision.

Your views

As we set out our vision, we are inviting comments to inform our discussions, plans and the future of education and training in west London.

Feedback is particularly welcome from stakeholders, including students, employers, local government, schools and academies, staff, unions, neighbouring educational institutions, local community groups, employers, councils, funders and other interested parties and individuals.

Comments are also invited from other post-16 education and training providers interested in linking up with this collaboration.

If this proposed merger goes ahead, the implementation will be carefully considered to ensure stability, best value and maximum local benefit.

Timescales for responding

The consultation will be open from Monday, 24th October. The final date for receipt of comments is Monday, 5th December 2016.

Decisions will be made on the proposed merger by colleges before the end of December 2016. If it is decided to go ahead, we will develop a clear collaboration plan, with dedicated resources, to ensure success in achieving our vision. More detailed consultation with internal stakeholders will also take place at this stage, with regular communication to inform both internal and external stakeholders of progress.

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1. Our shared vision

Our shared vision is for our further education provision to play a critical role in helping to ensure the economic success and social cohesion in west London and more broadly in London.

Our aim is to develop an outstanding further education provision as a core component of the infrastructure of west London that:

- 1.1 Maximises the volume of high quality education and training, and the opportunities for success of students and communities in the local area;
- 1.2 Achieves a grade of 'Outstanding' for its effectiveness by Ofsted;
- 1.3 Responds to employers' and residents' needs for skills – to become a/the preferred provider in specialist areas;
- 1.4 Maintains and develops an effective and robust strategic partnership with individual local authorities, the West London Alliance and Greater London Authority, local schools and Higher Education institutions.

To achieve this:

- 1.5 The joining of resources is critical to ensuring the delivery of long-term sustainable and cohesive further education provision for west London. This will be particularly important given the current high level of downward pressure on college income nationally as it:
 - Would enable our communities to realise their ambitions, and local businesses and industry to continue to access a well-trained and qualified talent pool for their future success;
 - Will allow the further development of provision at all levels, but particularly at higher levels in the Local Enterprise Panel (LEP) priority areas, and add value to our engagement with employers;
 - Will facilitate the sharing of best practice to improve the already strong quality base, ensuring high quality provision across the three areas and regarded as outstanding for its effectiveness by Ofsted;
 - Will facilitate the achievement of a more robust financial position to safeguard the future sustainability of further education provision in west London building on the strong financial profiles of the colleges.
- 1.6 The colleges will provide a strong and robust mix and balance of provision and age groups, with a diverse funding base. Continuity of the 'local offer' in each Borough will be a key principle with the aim to:
 - Increase opportunities for student progression;
 - Meet the needs of all local employers;
 - Maintain a robust and effective strategic partnership with the local authority;
 - Share best practice between staff to expand high quality education and training.
- 1.7 A robust local offer in each Local Authority area will be enhanced by clear, accessible specialist pathways. Existing specialisms will be maintained and enhanced whilst new areas of expertise are developed to reflect the colleges' expertise in particular sectors (e.g. STEM) and meet regional and local skills needs.

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“Our merged organisation will give us greater resilience and greater scope to invest and increase our capacity to innovate and to respond effectively to regional and local needs.”

A comment endorsed by the Chairs of our Governing Bodies

We’d like your views

- This document has been produced to provide the context to our discussions, and encourage stakeholders to contribute their views and comments about the proposal.
- Please note the questions within this document, and either reply directly to the clerk or complete the online consultation questionnaire. *Details can be found at the end of this document.*

2. Why is a merger between Harrow, Uxbridge and West Thames being proposed now?

Individually, each College has a successful history of supporting local people to achieve their best, to train and qualify for higher level study and for work. Each has actively adapted their provision over the years, to anticipate and meet the changing needs of their communities and to make sure of a strong talent pool to meet the skills needs of west London’s booming economy.

However, the further education and skills sector has faced year-on-year cuts in funding over successive years, and unfortunately this has affected provision for some of our most vulnerable communities. Now, the Government is looking to rationalise further education provision across the country and has embarked upon a programme of ‘Area Reviews’ to achieve this, with the likelihood that the number of providers will reduce further.

Despite the current and continuing challenges within the education environment, the colleges believe that opportunities are presented for taking a unified approach to the provision of Further Education, which will be of benefit locally and to west London. It is considered that this provides a compelling argument for merger.

Firstly, the adjoining boroughs of Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow share many characteristics. All boroughs benefit from diverse communities, with people from different ethnicities, religions and cultures living, studying and working alongside each other. All boroughs have high levels of small to medium sized businesses alongside major employers such as Heathrow.

Secondly, an opportunity to join forces ensures the continued future of provision through the combining of our respective strengths, the further development of specialisms, the continued and more efficient delivery of the valuable education and training that we offer to our communities with resources firmly focused on front line delivery.

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Will the individual colleges that comprise the proposed merged institution continue as we know them?

The colleges all place a high priority on responding to the needs of their local communities and the west London sub-region, and this commitment will be a feature of the proposed new strategic alliance.

It is the Colleges' intention that there will still be a local college presence in each Borough with college names and identities to be retained.

To what extent does the proposed offer meet local and regional needs?

The West London Alliance representing all councils in west London has set out its vision for this sub-region.

West London Vision for Growth

The **West London Vision for Growth** is to be a thriving and prosperous part of a premier world city, with highly profitable businesses investing in west London, successful residents and resilient communities.

The Vision outlines six key objectives:

- To achieve a step change in partnership with business and industry to facilitate sustainable economic growth;
- To increase small business start-up and survival rates through business support hubs, higher exports and focused collaboration with higher education institutions;
- To remove the skills gap and support low-paid residents in work to enable them to achieve pay levels that can sustain and improve their living arrangements;
- To radically improve success rates for employment programmes for residents with all young people in education, employment or training;
- To deliver at least 74,000 homes as part of a housing programme that meets the needs of our residents and supports growth;
- To create and maintain thriving town centres which are hubs for work and living.

In each borough there must be a well thought through and clearly defined local offer which meets the needs of the local communities – employers, local authorities, young people and adults. For example, the colleges offer strong ESOL and SLDD provision which is accessible in each of the boroughs alongside excellent Foundation learning which is a stepping stone towards further education, training or employment. The broad offer up to level 3 in a wide range of vocational areas offers robust progression routes, particularly for the 14-19 year olds.

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The new merged institution will build on its existing strong employer relationships to contribute significantly to these key priorities within the boroughs it services not only directly but also more widely across west London because of its good transport links. It will have a very good coverage of the western “arc” of west London bordering on Heathrow as well as contribute to delivering the training needs around other developments such as Crossrail/HS2, Old Oak and Park Royal Developments, and other borough opportunity areas (e.g. Brent Cross).

What would be the scope and scale of the newly created organisation?

The combined strength of the colleges lies in a broad, high-quality vocational offer across 14 areas, offering progression routes from Entry level through to level 3 and to higher level provision in several specialist areas. The overwhelming majority of provision at the colleges aligns with the LEP priority areas, providing a good platform for further development including a joint apprenticeship offer.



The intention of the merged organisation is to maintain a broad curriculum which builds on the substantial curriculum delivery expertise across 14 sectors. This is in the interest of young people in particular and will support alignment with the 15 new vocational pathways identified and set out in the white paper being developed by Lord Sainsbury. Within this broad curriculum offer, areas of specialism will also be promoted as outlined below, and some areas will be further developed.

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Are there other areas of the curriculum development that will be prioritised initially by the proposed new organisation?

Specialist areas

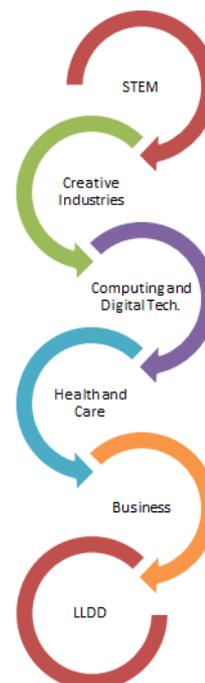
The colleges will look to develop the following areas in line with London region and west London needs identified by the GLA, West London Alliance and employers, as set out in the diagram opposite. For example, there is strong Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths provision across the colleges, which is a good base from which to develop particular specialist provision including related areas such as sports science.

Higher Education

Each of the colleges delivers higher education provision in several vocational areas both directly funded through HEFCE and in partnership with HE Institutions. Currently HE numbers across the three colleges is over 800. The opportunities provided through the proposed alliance would allow us to strengthen the offer, develop new provision such as Higher Apprenticeships more extensively, and provide an enhanced experience to higher education students.

Apprenticeships

The colleges are at different stages of development in relation to Apprenticeship provision. However, there has been a concerted effort to reduce dependence on sub-contracting and to embed apprenticeships as part of the mainstream offer provision of the colleges, offering clear progression routes and pathways. The colleges have developed Apprenticeships in areas where they have a proven track record of quality delivery, and good employer links. In order to grow this offer more rapidly, without impacting on quality the combined colleges will pool their existing expertise to build further capacity to work with employers and offer greater access to those apprenticeships which meet the identified skills gaps in the west of London.



An important principle of any change is that no courses will be closed part-way through delivery.

We'd like your views on curriculum collaboration.

In the proposed merged organisation:

- Are there any key principles which should be adopted to support future curriculum planning?
- Which subjects could be further developed as a specialism, including increased higher level work?

Have students travel to learn preferences been considered?

Yes. Currently, there is very little travel to learn between the three boroughs, the vast majority of younger students do not travel nor do those who are harder to reach because of their personal and economic circumstances. Consequently, there will still be a need for complementary provision. However, there is an expectation that people will travel to advance their job prospects and career aspirations. This will enable the merged organisation to provide more specialist higher level provision at one location.

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How will the proposed curriculum offer be of benefit to learners?

Although across the three main boroughs which the amalgamated college group will serve – Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow – there will inevitably be some cross-border travel by learners, we do not perceive any negative impact with respect to competition arising from this proposed alliance, especially as the number of 16-18s is set to increase across west London as we move towards 2020. The intention will be to maximise learner choice across the geographical area as far as possible. This would include by Level and by pathway as well as by SSA.

Will the quality of curriculum provision be affected by the proposed merger?

Of the three colleges, one is graded 'Outstanding' (Uxbridge) by Ofsted, one is graded 'Good' (West Thames) and one is graded as 'Requires Improvement' with good provision for adults and high need learners (Harrow).

It is the intention of the proposed merged college that all provision will become outstanding and this will be achieved in part by peer review and sharing best practice with regard to structures, strategies and quality assurance.

We'd like your views on improving our quality

In the proposed merged organisation:

☐ Apart from recommendations from Ofsted, on which other areas should we focus quality improvements?

How will the combined resources of the colleges coming together impact on opportunities for staff?

Across most colleges, there are dedicated staff and physical resources in 14 SSAs, with the vast majority of provision at good or better quality (see Ofsted reports and success rates trend data for 16-18s and 19+ SSA Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels). This resource base can be drawn on for workplace based delivery as well as classroom based. There will be multiple entry points for learners by level. The breadth of the curriculum offer and the staff expertise associated with this, combined with the good or better quality of the majority of the provision, suggests that the sharing of best practice across the entirety of the provision will be extremely beneficial with respect to workforce development.

In addition, the continued focus on developing the employer interface to build apprenticeship provision and to create opportunities for employers to have a central role in the design and delivery of vocational courses will also impact positively on workforce development. For example, the strategic partnership with Heathrow provides relevant Continuing Professional Development opportunities for staff on the latest industry developments, brings students in contact with employees of Heathrow and related organisations and gives Heathrow staff the opportunity to contribute/lead on what students learn.

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How will the combined resources be used to ensure all campus facilities are of a high quality?

It is important for further education colleges to invest in their property, in order to maintain the best possible environment for learning. In vocational areas, students need to train with industry-standard equipment in workplace environments to make sure that they are well-prepared to progress from their studies into work. Whilst there are high quality resources in all colleges, in Harrow there is a greater need to update building stock.

The proposed merged institution has a commitment to ensure all facilities across all campuses are of a high quality. It will ensure that every opportunity is taken to re-invest and will be in a stronger position to do this from the combined finances of all colleges and by applying for LEP funding.

We'd like your views on facilities and accommodation.

In the proposed merged organisation:

- ☐ What are the resource benefits and disadvantages of having a new merged organisation across three boroughs?

Will the combined organisation have a robust financial position?

Income for the whole further education sector is forecast to decrease still further in the coming years as Government funding for post-16 education and training continues to be reduced albeit with other opportunities through apprenticeships and devolution. In order to remain viable, colleges increasingly need to generate other sources of funding and further rationalise their expenditure.

The financial health of the proposed merged organisation will provide a strong financial profile that ensures its sustainability and growth. Key aspects are as follows:

- Turnover of circa £72m;
- Operating surplus forecast between £2.2 and £2m;
- There are circa 8,100 EFA 16-18 learners, and approximately 2,000 apprentices. Plans to grow apprentices by circa 12%. EFA learners remaining stable;
- SFA Funding circa £14.6m, HE income just under £4m and adult learning loans £1.8m rising to £2.3m;
- Staff costs circa 64% of income (benchmark <65%)

We'd like your views on financial issues.

In the proposed merged organisation:

- ☐ Do you agree that collaboration could result in a more robust financial position?
- ☐ What are the opportunities for greater income generation in a collaborative model?
- ☐ In order to retain viability, colleges will need to deliver efficiently. Please tell us where you feel that efficiencies could be made in the context of this proposed collaboration?

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How to respond

This consultation paper notes some of the core themes of our discussions, and forms an important part of our journey to achieve our vision.

If you have any comments, in addition to those suggested through this document, please put them in the final box of our online consultation questionnaire at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HUWT> Or you can access the survey from each college's Home Page.

We look forward to hearing your views and to working with you to secure an outstanding vision for the future of further education in west London.

Please note that we must receive your views by Monday, 5th December 2016 to be able to consider them in this stage of the process.

Thank you for your contribution.