

# Proposed Merger Consultation Feedback



# Introduction

Firstly, we would like to thank the people who contributed directly to the four week public consultation on our proposal to merge Stafford College and Newcastle-under-Lyme College.

The feedback was **significantly in favour** of the merger and has reaffirmed our ambition to complete the merger in November.

The consultation is an important and integral part of the merger process because our colleges provide a vital service to our communities and so all our customers and stakeholders should have a say in their future.

We are pleased with the level of response and satisfied that everyone affected has had ample opportunity to comment. The survey results and comments will be taken into consideration in our detailed planning and communication.

The level of interest and positive support mean we can continue our hard work to ensure the merger is successful for the benefit of our students, employers, the community and our staff.

We are now confident that our stakeholders endorse our goals of:

- **Maintaining a broad curriculum offer with increased focus on advanced and higher level skills**
- **Investing in quality education and training for the communities we serve**
- **Developing a strong reputation for the merged colleges, with high quality and a student focus at the heart**
- **Preserving the current campus identities**
- **Benefiting from economies of scale.**

We thank you for your support and will drive forward to create an institution of which the communities of Staffordshire can be proud. ■



**Mark Winnington**

Chair of the Corporation  
Stafford College,  
Earl Street, Stafford, ST16 2QR



**George Stonier**

Chair of the Corporation  
Newcastle-under-Lyme College,  
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# Summary

The Corporations of Stafford College and Newcastle-under-Lyme College together held a formal public consultation from 13<sup>th</sup> June to 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016 on the proposal to merge the two institutions to create a new Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group.

The proposal was described in a 12 page document called “**Proposed Merger: Stafford College and Newcastle under-Lyme College**”. The consultation document set out the need for change and the benefits of the merger as viewed by the governing bodies of both colleges.

It was distributed widely and:

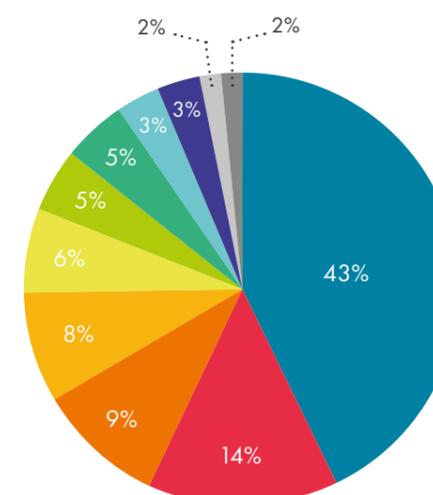
- Posted on both colleges’ websites
- Launched and advertised in national and local media
- Promoted on social media
- Sent directly to over 100 key stakeholders
- Distributed at a college open day
- Briefed directly to staff, local MPs, stakeholders and employers.

We received **61 responses** to the online survey and two written responses. Responses were received from staff, parents, learners, the local community, employers, schools, Further education/sixth form colleges, a university, local government, and a business group. More than 40% of respondents were college staff.

The vast majority of those who responded told us they:

- **Supported** the proposed merger of Stafford College and NULC
- **Agreed** that both colleges should retain their individuals names, identity and branding
- **Agreed** with plans by the new Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group to invest in student opportunities and provide employers with training and skills that contribute to growth in the local and regional economy.
- **Agreed** that the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group should share good practice across our campuses in order to further enhance the quality of learner and customer experiences.
- **Agreed** that the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group should focus on innovation, access to quality learning and being a source of pride for our local communities.

This report sets out and analyses the responses received during the consultation period. It also clarifies and responds to issues raised and sets out the next steps in the process. ■



## Responses

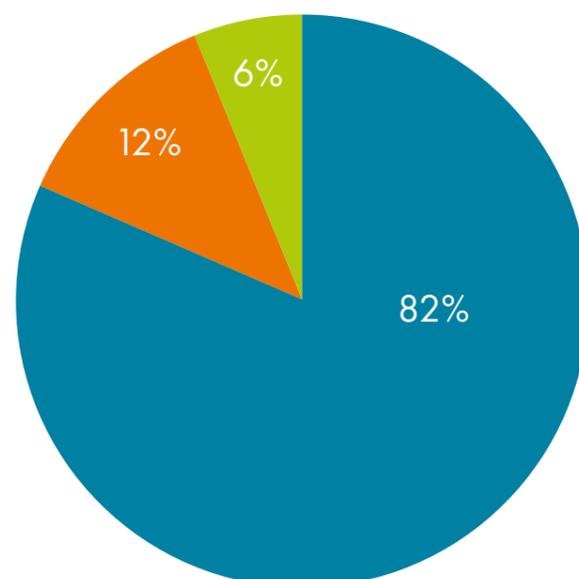
• Staff	27	• Learner	2
• Other	9	• School	2
• Local community	6	• HE	1
• Employer	5	• Business group	1
• Parent	4	• Government body	0
• FE/6th form college	3	• Union	0
• Local government	3	• Third sector	0

## Question 1 & 2 responses

### Q1

*Do you support the proposed merger of Stafford College and NULC?*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure



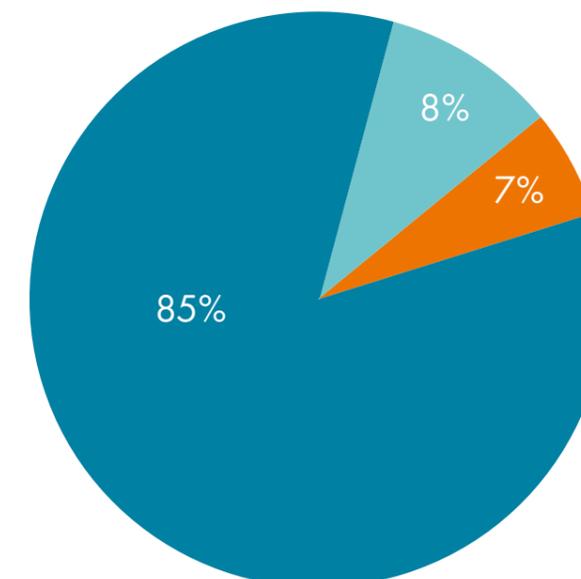
#### Comments synopsis

- The consultation document sets out a clear proposition that has ambition and a credible prospect of delivering important and useful benefits for all stakeholders and interested parties.
- Sharing and rationalising resources - including HR and quality - and the expertise of a quality, high performing and financially sound college seems very sensible and will give students, in both localities, a chance to further their future prospects.
- It will create the potential to increase college sustainability improve quality and quantity of delivery by virtue of a larger and more dynamic organisation.
- It will be important to ensure there is a commitment to keep both operating at the same level over the long-term.
- We would wish to see a college that is both financial stable and economically successful. This would be best achieved through a merger with NULC which has a successful track record of investment and academic achievement.
- Ensures we have a consistent education offer across Staffordshire especially beneficial for employers who are pan-Staffordshire.

### Q2

*The proposed group name is Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG) with both colleges retaining their name and brand identity. Do you agree that both colleges should retain their individual names, identity and branding?*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure



#### Comments synopsis

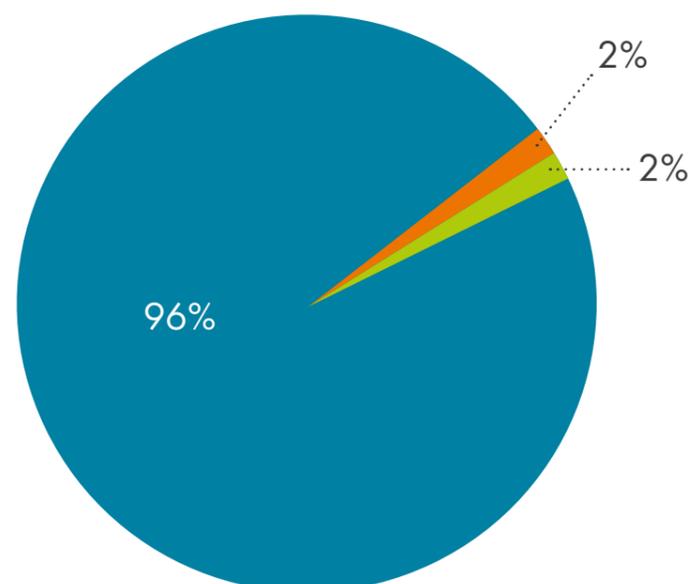
- The tradition of both towns should be reflected.
- It's how the colleges are known in their respective communities.
- Each brand has value in their respective areas.
- Maintaining individual names will give both communities a sense of ownership of their local college.
- Some unification might be useful, particularly for higher education, learners or a more regional name to allow for future expansion.
- The new group title should be more forward-looking and modern while respecting 'history and heritage'.
- The colleges should have a shared name that reflects Newcastle's excellence and a new phase for Stafford.
- There are strong reasons for retaining the existing names, identities and branding to enable the retention of pre-existing community connections.

## Question 3 & 4 responses

### Q3

*As the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group, we plan to invest in student opportunities and provide employers with training and skills that contribute to growth in the local and regional economy. Do you support these aims?*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure



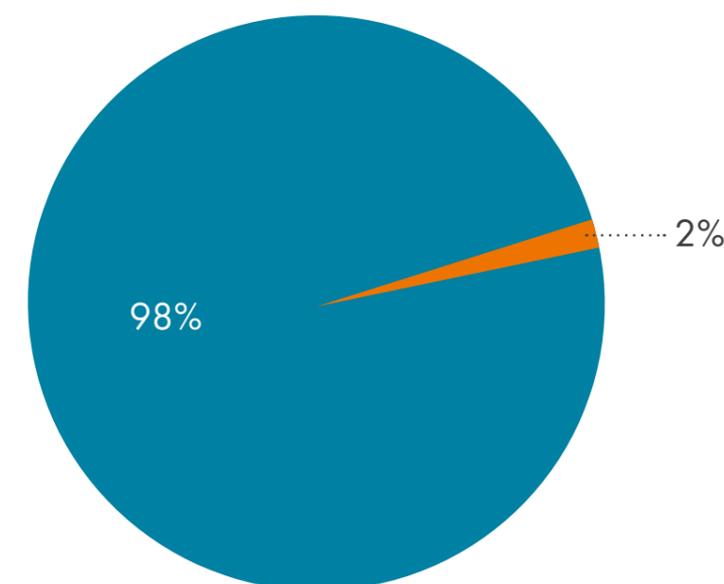
#### Comments synopsis

- We are entering new markets and welcome the training and skills on offer from NULC.
- Economic growth is happening and needs increasing standards of education delivery.
- Colleges are fundamental and very important partners in the national skills agenda.
- We are very supportive of plans to invest in student opportunities, training and skills that will contribute to growth in the local and regional community.
- Such investment, if aligned with LEP priorities, would be welcome in itself and may also provide opportunities for colleges and higher education to work together.
- Although Stafford College has seen investment in its estate in recent years, work remains to bring the campus up to modern day standards which in turn would sustain student numbers and contribute to raising academic standards.

### Q4

*As the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group, we plan to share good practice across our campuses in order to further enhance the quality of learner and customer experiences. Do you support these aims?*

- Yes
- No



#### Comments synopsis

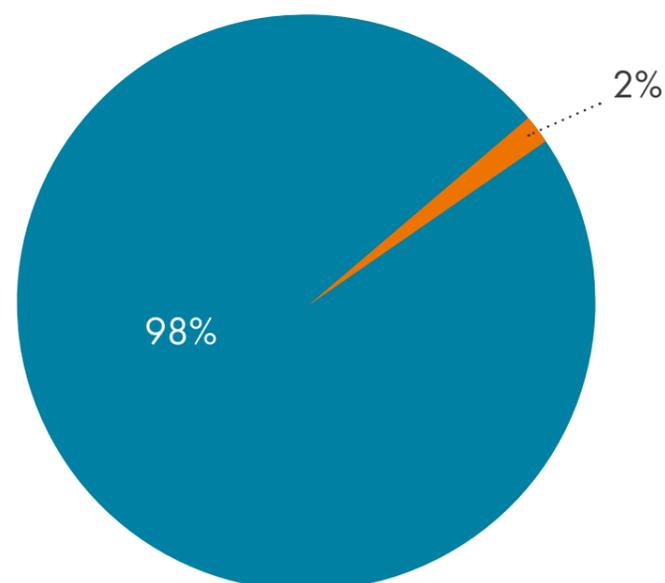
- As an employer we have received a first class service from NULC. We would recommend that their employer engagement is recognised.
- Close working between the colleges would be beneficial to both students and staff.
- Raising educational standards across the region and at all levels is an urgent need.
- Sharing good practice to enhance the quality of learner and customer experiences has to be the fundamental aim of the merger.
- It is recognised that increased investment in equipment and learning technologies and innovative teaching practices, as well as the provision of a well-designed pastoral curriculum and enrichment programme, are all vital to students' success.

## Question 5 & 6 responses

### Q5

*As the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group, we will focus on innovation, access to quality learning and being a source of pride for our local communities. Do you support these aims?*

- Yes
- No



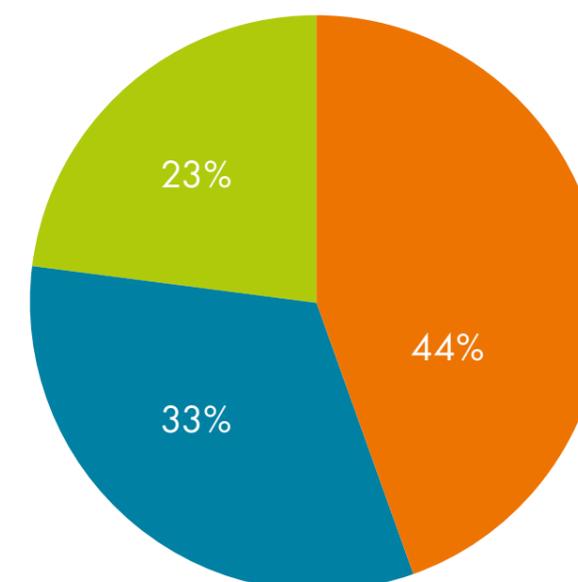
#### Comments synopsis

- All colleges in the further education sector have a central role in encouraging, indeed leading in the innovation agenda.
- The development of up to date and exciting methods of teaching and learning in the college and new ways of working with external partners are essential to the national skills agenda and importantly the whole round educational experience of students. I look forward to seeing Stafford College placed alongside some of the higher performing colleges in the FE Sector.
- If you do not move forward you stagnate. Being at the forefront of success and high quality will build the pride that the community deserves to see.
- As a local employer we fully support the focus on innovation.
- Both colleges should aim to have a high reputation with both local employers and beyond which will enable all students to have pride in the training they have undertaken.
- Innovation is a vital requirement to the support of the economic growth plan.
- In our fast-changing world, students need to be equipped with the skills to enable them to be flexible and ready to meet the challenges ahead.

### Q6

*Do you think anyone, including students or staff, will be adversely affected by the merger plans?*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure



#### Comments synopsis

- The short, medium, and longer terms benefits of the proposed merger seem to significantly outweigh any transition challenges.
- Inevitably staff supporting the merged colleges will have some concerns. However, this is far outweighed by the greater good.
- There needs to be careful consideration of the potential impact of change for all involved and contingency plans to mitigate any unforeseen issues.
- The new organisation should look at both colleges to find the best staff in each department.
- Communication between senior management and staff is crucial to ensure all staff understand the merger plans and feel fully supported in the process.
- A school didn't want to see provision diluted
- Stafford College students and staff will benefit from being included in the quality assurance and monitoring systems already in place and operating at NULC.

## Response to issues raised

*While it is clear that more than 80% of respondents are in favour of the merger, the purpose of the consultation was to confirm not only the degree to which our proposal and aims are supported but also to understand more clearly any concerns felt by those affected.*

We aim to take these into account in our future planning and to communicate directly with those who have raised issues.

**Broadly the issues and our responses are as follows:**

### › BRANDING AND IDENTITY

A small number of concerns were raised that NULC's students, culture, reputation or financial position may suffer as a result of the merger with Stafford College. We believe students at both colleges will benefit in a range of ways including increased investment in equipment and learning technologies and innovation, improved teaching quality through shared good practice and enhanced links to business through wider engagement with employers. Our culture will be determined by best practice sharing and it is our intention is to maintain separate identities and branding and to ensure that the economies of scale benefit the new entity of Newcastle and Stafford Colleges group. We are undertaking significant risk assessment and due diligence to make sure that together the merged colleges enjoy long-term financial security.

A couple of respondents were concerned that Stafford people may feel a lack of inclusion or that opportunities were disappearing from the town. On the contrary, the governing bodies of both colleges want to ensure that Stafford students and community enjoy relevant and accessible learning opportunities and Stafford Borough Council, Newcastle Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council have pledged support to making the merger a success.

### › POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON STAFF

A small number of respondents thought there would or should be redundancies. Understanding funding reductions in further education and wider public sector, we believe the proposed merger offers the best opportunity for long-term financial security at both colleges. And, while we cannot give any guarantees, we have reassured staff regarding their contractual terms and conditions.

Two respondents also raised concerns that staff or students would face additional travel costs. However it is not our plan to move students or staff between colleges. Any staff who are required to visit the other campus will be reimbursed under the standard expenses policy.

### › SHARING BEST PRACTICE

Two comments were received expressing concern that there were more economic ways of further enhancing the quality of learner and customer experiences than sharing best practice. We have a common-sense approach to sharing best practice which will ensure that we continue to deliver value-for-money for the taxpayer.

We will continue to maintain a dialogue with learners, staff, employers and our communities to provide a clear mutual understanding that will help ensure long-term success for the merger. And we look forward to a new era in further education when, from 1st November, the merged colleges form the **Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group**. ■

**Our vision for the merged college is to be the college of first choice where staff and students are proud to work and study.**



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