

Proposed College Merger – Frequently Asked Questions

Why are the colleges exploring options including merger and what are the future opportunities?

All the partner Colleges are committed to serving the communities and economy of Hampshire to grow and succeed. We believe that there are opportunities to do this more effectively by uniting to offer centres of excellence and seamless pathways into work and higher levels of study. We believe that this will attract inward investment and support regeneration, further enable skills development, whilst also tackling unemployment and low wage work for generations to come. We want to create a prosperous future for our young people, communities and stakeholders. Combining would also offer the opportunity to create a financially stronger organisation able to invest in staff and resources to meet the future needs of a modern college. We believe that through coming together that opportunities for staff career development and progression will also be enhanced.

What are the potential risks of this merger?

It is the firm belief of all three colleges that the benefits of merger outweigh any potential risks that have currently been identified. As part of our planning process, we have developed a risk register and mechanisms to manage any risks which occur. We have engaged experienced project managers who are working closely with all the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to support the potential merger and have also established a Joint Steering Group (JSG) with governor representatives from all three colleges who are overseeing the project. We have comprehensive plans in place to mitigate and manage the risks identified to ensure any merger is delivered in the smoothest way possible.

Our main risk is around securing adequate funding to support our merger plans and we are working closely with the agencies to ensure we have robust in place which support the essential request for funds. Other risks which are currently identified and are being managed include the challenging timescales to achieve a proposed merger date of 1st August 2023 and ensuring that robust plans are developed in respect of estates, operational integration and system alignment.

Another potential concern for staff could be job losses and / or restructures. Please be assured that we aim to build a stronger college by bringing the three current colleges together and in doing so will require a valued and committed workforce. We will look to minimise changes, pay careful consideration to future needs, and manage necessary restructures required over the longer-term following consultation with recognised trade unions and staff.

When will we know if the merger is definitely happening?

We are at the beginning of the process. We have formed a Joint Steering Group (JSG) made up of Governors of the three partners colleges, workstreams made up of staff from each organisation and appointed expert support where needed. We have a number of processes to follow including due diligence and

a public consultation exercise as well as a bid for support funding from the Government. By spring we should have most of the required processes complete, but a final decision will not be made until the summer, and it must be stressed that any final decision will require government funding.

How will I know the progress of the merger, and how will this be communicated?

The JSG, made up equally of representatives from all three College Boards, is committed to ensuring all students, apprentices, staff and stakeholders are kept informed of progress and developments through a range of channels. There is a communication plan that will keep people informed of progress in a timely manner throughout the process. We will also provide regular staff briefings through normal channels and the ability for staff to ask questions directly to the CEOs. If you have any specific questions about the proposed merger, please email merger@southampton-city.ac.uk

What dates would the merger take place?

Our collective aim is that the merger, if agreed, would take place on 1st August 2023.

What will the new name of the College be?

It is proposed that the Fareham College Corporation changes its name to: South Hampshire College Group. It is, however, planned that each partner College would keep its name and identity.

How will the new college ensure that quality is challenged and maintained?

The merged college will ensure that the good practices already in place in all three colleges will be shared and the best of existing arrangements will be used to further improve our services. Governors and leaders will work to ensure that quality levels are maintained and improved. By building on our strong foundation and learning from each other, all colleges will be able to share best practices, share resources and create improved learning environments for students and apprentices.

When would changes start to take effect?

Merging three colleges is a complex process and although we are aiming, that if agreed, the merger would take place on 1st August 2023, operationally and practically there will still be considerable work to do to ensure we gain the maximum benefit from joining together. We are keen that the separate campuses within the new college will retain their own unique characters and curriculum offers within the overall new college but also be enhanced by the establishment of centres of excellence.

How big will the merged College be?

The combined college will have a turnover of around £42m and be an employer of in excess of 800 staff. Annually the combined college would be responsible for the education and training of over 3,600 students aged 16-19, over 1,200 apprentices, and over 5,000 adults. Additionally, the college will work with a breadth of employers and other key stakeholders across the Solent LEP region and beyond.

Progressing the merger between the Colleges will be a time consuming and complex process which could take resource away from the College core business, and reduce focus on students and apprentices, how will this be managed to ensure that this does not happen?

The Governors and Leadership teams are very mindful of the interests of our current and new students and apprentices. We have clear priorities for further quality improvement and supporting our students and apprentices. To help us do this the merger process is being overseen by the JSG and supported by specialist project managers.

How will the proposed merger affect students and apprentices applying for on or after September 2023?

We are committed to ensuring that it is business as usual for our students, apprentices and employer partners. Existing students and apprentices will complete their studies as normal. Whilst we progress our work towards merger students and apprentices should continue to apply for a programme offered in the usual way and follow the existing application guidance and procedures of each college. Our priority throughout the process is to ensure that students and apprentices studying at each college continue to have the high-quality education and training they expect. As the proposed merger of the colleges' progresses, we will keep applicants up to date with the latest news and will update each college website to help ensure everyone has the information they need. The vast majority of students and apprentices will continue to have their programmes delivered on the campus site they are expecting to attend.