



MARCH 2025

PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

THE PROPOSED MERGER AND
NAME CHANGE OF
BRIDGWATER & TAUNTON COLLEGE
AND STRODE COLLEGE



YOUR VIEWS ARE IMPORTANT

Bridgwater & Taunton College and Strode College are proposing to merge, bringing together their combined strengths to form a new College Group.

The newly formed College Group will deliver an outstanding education and opportunities for all, benefitting the communities served. This document outlines the merger proposal and the benefits to students, employers, and wider communities.

Your views are welcomed on the proposal and you are invited to share your feedback as part of the public consultation – please see page 21. All responses will be carefully considered and will contribute to shaping the final proposal.



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“We are delighted to be working together to combine our strengths and deliver an outstanding educational experience for the region.”



Denys Rayner
Chair of the Board of Governors,
Bridgwater & Taunton College



Jane Viner MBE
Chair of the Board of Governors,
Strode College

“As Chairs of our respective boards, we are united in our enthusiasm for this merger and see it as an opportunity to leverage our combined resources for greater impact. By merging, we can combine our strengths and deliver a high quality, responsive and financially sustainable provision for the region.

Bridgwater & Taunton College and Strode College have similarly aligned, student-focused vision, mission and values, both Colleges have high-quality, complementary, and varied curriculum. The aim of the merger is to harness the shared vision of both colleges, build on their outstanding reputations and deliver innovation and growth, making a significant contribution to the economic vitality of our region.”

We are keen to hear your views on our vision for the future of our colleges and invite you to participate in the consultation.

Our vision is to unite the very best aspects of our colleges. The merger will enable us to work together to create a College Group which will unlock the full potential of both colleges, transforming lives and communities through learning and partnerships.



THE MERGER

This merger is a strategic response to the evolving educational and economic needs of Somerset. By combining our strengths, we can provide more comprehensive support to our students and staff, deliver enhanced services to employers, and more effectively contribute to the regional and national economy.

The College Group will create a financially robust organisation that will benefit from a central strategic approach and provide the capacity and resources to leverage their combined strengths; enhancing the educational provision and operational efficiencies.

The College Group anticipates an annual turnover of approximately £81 million, employing over 1,500 staff and engaging with over 1,600 employers, ensuring a dynamic and responsive organisation created to deliver against regional and national needs.

PROPOSED MERGER TIMELINE





Ofsted
Good
Provider



STRODE COLLEGE



John Reville
Principal and CEO
Strode College

Strode College, nestled in Street, Somerset, has evolved significantly since its inception in 1899. Originating as a technical school and transforming into a fully-fledged college in the 1970s, Strode has built a formidable reputation for academic excellence. With a 97% A Level pass rate in 2024 and a notable increase in admissions to prestigious Russell Group universities, the college stands as a beacon of educational success.

The College offers a wide array of programmes ranging from A Levels and vocational qualifications to apprenticeships and adult learning. The College has 4,000 learners, employs 350 staff and has an annual turnover of £16m.

Strode's extensive community integration is evident through its partnerships with local businesses, healthcare providers, and civic organisations, which enrich its curriculum and open pathways for student careers. With over £20 million invested in state-of-the-art facilities and resources, students enjoy a learning environment equipped with the latest technology and support systems, ensuring they are ready for today's dynamic workplace challenges.



Ofsted
Outstanding
Provider



BRIDGWATER & TAUNTON COLLEGE



Andy Berry CBE
 Principal and CEO
 Bridgwater & Taunton College

Bridgwater & Taunton College (BTC), traces its roots back to 1888, with a history rich in growth and integration, evident from the merger of Bridgwater College, Cannington College, and Somerset College to form the modern BTC. Recognised for its Outstanding Ofsted rating, BTC exemplifies educational excellence and innovation across its campuses in Bridgwater, Taunton, and Cannington. BTC has 22,000 students, employs 1,200 staff and has an annual turnover of £65m.

BTC is renowned for its academic excellence alongside strong employer partnerships, significantly influencing the curriculum and fostering regional economic growth. Notable projects include the National College for Nuclear (NCfN) and initiatives supporting the new gigabyte factory at the Gravity site. The award-winning University Centre Somerset (UCS), part of BTC's portfolio, delivers degrees tailored to regional and employer needs, emphasising sectors such as nursing and nuclear engineering.

Each campus boasts specialist facilities that mirror real-world environments, from advanced engineering centres to fully immersive nursing suites in Taunton. Facilities not only enhance the educational experience, but also serve as community assets, such as the McMillan Theatre and the Quantock Restaurant.

BTC's vision to transform lives through innovative learning and partnerships is realised through comprehensive support systems, diverse extracurricular activities, and a commitment to creating a supportive, inclusive learning environment.



Bridgwater College



Cannington College

University Centre Somerset College Group



Strode College



Taunton College

Denys Rayner
Chair of the Board of Governors,
Bridgwater & Taunton College

Jane Viner MBE
Chair of the Board of Governors,
Strode College

“Our vision is to unite the very best aspects of our colleges, unlocking their potential, transforming lives and communities through learning and partnerships.”

CREATING A COLLEGE GROUP

Each College - Bridgwater, Cannington, Strode and Taunton - within the group will remain committed to the delivery of inspirational teaching, learning and skills development, creating a culture of safety and inclusivity. The offer at each of the Colleges will remain unchanged, with students continuing their studies on the same campus with the benefits that being part of a College Group will bring.

Each College within the Group will continue to build partnerships that positively impact students and their community. Partnering local employers, councils, and community organisations, each College will deliver education and skills training that is closely aligned with local needs and priorities, boosting social mobility and economic prosperity.

The proposed name of the newly formed College Group is University Centre Somerset College Group (UCS College Group). Adopting the University Centre Somerset name for the College Group is a deliberate step towards a bigger vision for our community. This evolution is crucial not only for its educational significance but also for the economic stimulation it promises to deliver to Somerset.



EMPLOYER PARTNERS

Access to a Larger Talent Pool: Benefit from the group's extensive training programmes and talent pools, whilst collaborating with local campuses to tailor training that meets specific local industry needs.

Enhanced Partnership Opportunities: Engage in partnerships with a College Group that has a significant track record of influencing national education and skills policies that unlock opportunities to deliver skills locally.

Innovation and Growth: Participate in an innovative ecosystem that is at the forefront of advancing regional economic interests. The College Group's proven track record in spearheading major regional initiatives showcases its capacity to pilot and scale cutting-edge projects that adapt seamlessly to local needs, fostering sustainable growth and transformation.

STAFF

Professional Development: Leverage the training and development programmes offered by the College Group, enabling the opportunity for personal development and increased opportunities for progression across the College Group structure.

Collaborative Networks: Through the creation of the College Group, staff will be able to access a wider peer support network, sharing best practices and innovative teaching methods whilst delivering and addressing local community needs.

Contributing to Social Inclusion: Work within a financially stable and supportive environment that aligns with the national educational and skills agenda, contributing to the region's economic prosperity and social mobility; transforming lives of those within our communities.

STUDENTS

Enhanced Educational Opportunities: Access to a broader range of support and resources whilst enjoying a local college experience tailored to local needs and opportunities.

Strong Skills Informed Curriculum: Through the network of employer partners, curriculum and opportunities will be enhanced at a local level; unlocking opportunities that deliver social mobility and inclusion within our local communities.

Increased Access to Enrichment and Learning Outside the Classroom: Benefit from the extensive range of opportunities made possible by being part the College Group such as academies and competitive sporting opportunities.

Enhanced Learning Resources and State-of-the-Art Facilities: study in facilities designed to mirror real world environments, from A Levels to specialised fields such as engineering, students will be equipped with required industry skills and behaviours needed to get ahead in their careers.

COMMUNITY

Strengthened Local Impact: Benefit from improvements in local education standards, workforce readiness, and economic growth, driven by the College's ability to leverage group resources and initiatives that align education with local economic needs and employment opportunities.

Enhanced Educational Opportunities: Access to a wider range of specialised facilities and technology for upskilling and retraining. This includes expanded university-level options at University Centre Somerset, aligning education with local economic needs and employment opportunities.

Working in Partnership with Key Stakeholders: Fostering deeper partnerships with local businesses, government bodies, and community organisations. Enhancing the impact of community projects and initiatives, leading to more comprehensive support for local development and delivering social mobility and inclusion for all.

Policy Influence and Regional Development: Leverage the College Group's established influence in shaping educational and economic policies that benefit the entire region. Through strategic initiatives and partnerships, the College Group plays a pivotal role in driving initiatives that enhance local infrastructures, improve community welfare, and ensure that educational advancements translate into broad-scale economic benefits.

Financially Robust: The University Centre Somerset College Group (UCS College Group) will continue to invest in facilities for the benefit of our communities. Facilities include theatres in Strode and Bridgwater, award-winning restaurants, hair and beauty salons, historic walled gardens, conferencing, sports facilities and much more.



STRODE COLLEGE: STATUTORY NOTICE FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION ACT 1992

Notice is hereby given by the Corporation of Strode College, Church Road, Street, Somerset, BA16 0AB in accordance with the Further Education Corporations (Publication of Proposals) (England) Regulations 2012, of the proposal for the transfer of the property, rights and liabilities to the Corporation of Bridgwater & Taunton College, Bath Road, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 4PZ and the subsequent dissolution of the Corporation of Strode College.

The Corporation of Bridgwater & Taunton College is separately proposing to the Secretary of State a change of name for the Corporation to be effective from 1 August 2025. The proposed name of the merged college Corporation is University Centre Somerset College Group (UCS College Group).

Dissolution of the Corporation of Strode College is proposed in order that it may merge with Bridgwater & Taunton College. The merger will create a strong institution delivering high-quality education and skills training for learners and employers across Somerset.

The date proposed for the dissolution of the Corporation of Strode College is 1 August 2025.

All students at Strode College who have not yet completed their course of study by the date of the proposed dissolution will continue their education in the merged college on the same campus where they studied immediately prior to the dissolution of the Corporation of Strode College. This will affect approximately 4,000 students: 1,355 16-18-year-olds (FE learners) and 2,645 adults.

A copy of the consultation document on this proposal is available at www.strode-college.ac.uk or by writing to Strode College, Church Road, Street, Somerset, BA16 0AB.

The consultation period runs from 27 March to 30 April 2025.

All responses and representations must be received by the closing date through:

- completing the online response form at www.strode-college.ac.uk or www.btc.ac.uk
- emailing merger@strode-college.ac.uk or merger@btc.ac.uk

A summary of the feedback and the outcome will be published by 30 June 2025 on the Strode College and Bridgwater & Taunton College websites. A copy of the document will be available free of charge to any person who requests it.

THE GOVERNING BOARDS INVITE YOU TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE PRESENTED MERGER PROPOSAL.

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS CAN BE ANSWERED USING THE ONLINE FEEDBACK FORMS AT:

www.strode-college.ac.uk

www.btc.ac.uk

You may also email your response to merger@strode-college.ac.uk or merger@btc.ac.uk.

Alternatively, please post your response to Strode College, Church Road, Street, BA16 0AB or Bridgwater & Taunton College, Bath Road, Bridgwater, TA6 4PZ.

All responses must be received by 30 April 2025 to be considered as part of the consultation process.



Name

Address and Postcode

Your organisation (if applicable)

Please circle the category/ies which best describe/s you:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Strode College Student | Other FE institution |
| BTC Student | HE institution |
| Prospective student or parent/carer | Private training provider |
| Strode College staff | Employer/local business |
| BTC Staff | Local government |
| Trade Union Representative | Government body |
| Parent/Carer | Other |
| School | |

1. Do you support the merger? (please circle one answer) Yes / No / Unsure

2. Do you have any suggestions as to how the College Group can improve its engagement with the community?

3. If you are an employer, what are the training needs you would wish the College Group to address?

4. Your comments on the proposed corporation name: University Centre Somerset College Group.

5. Your comments on the names of the proposed Colleges within the newly formed College Group.



PRIVACY STATEMENT

Any personal information you provide to Bridgwater & Taunton College and Strode College as part of the consultation process will only be used for the purposes of acknowledging your participation and/or responding to any queries you submit at your request.

Personal information will not be published as part of the outcome of the consultation; only anonymous comments and responses will be made public. Any personal information you provide will be kept for six months and then destroyed in a secure manner.

You retain the following rights:

- The right to access your personal information, using the College's subject Access Request process
- The right to have inaccurate personal information changed
- The right to restrict the processing of your personal information
- The right to object to the processing of your personal information
- The right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office in relation to how Bridgwater & Taunton College and Strode College have processed your data.

You can do this at: www.ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint



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