



JUNE 2025

OUTCOME OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION CONCERNING THE PROPOSED MERGER BETWEEN STRODE COLLEGE AND BRIDGWATER & TAUNTON COLLEGE

(INCLUDING THE CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL TO
CHANGE THE NAME OF BRIDGWATER & TAUNTON COLLEGE
TO UNIVERSITY CENTRE SOMERSET COLLEGE GROUP)



BACKGROUND

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, benefiting the communities served.

This document outlines the merger proposal and the feedback from the public consultation process which ran from 27 March to 30 April 2025.



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“We remain firmly committed to the merger and believe it will deliver regional prosperity through employment, world-class education, skills, and partnerships to our region.”



Denys Rayner
Chair of Corporation
Bridgwater & Taunton College



Jane Viner MBE
Chair of Corporation
Strode College

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the public consultation concerning the proposed merger of Bridgwater & Taunton College and Strode College, and the proposed name change of Bridgwater & Taunton College to University Centre Somerset College Group (UCS College Group), to take effect on 1 August 2025.

The consultation was an important step in shaping our collective future, and we are grateful to all who took the time to share their views.

The public consultation ran from 27 March to 30 April 2025. During this time, we welcomed feedback from students, parents and carers, employers, staff, community organisations, and other key stakeholders. We are confident that all interested parties had the opportunity to contribute with the responses strengthening our belief that a merger will bring benefits to our communities. With this in mind, we plan to proceed with the merger.

We have taken note of all the feedback, including any concerns and queries raised. This feedback will play a valuable role in informing the next phase of our detailed planning.

The outcome of the consultation represents the beginning of a significant process, to create a new College Group comprising of four local Colleges and the University Centre Somerset.



BACKGROUND

Strode College and Bridgwater & Taunton College launched a public consultation exercise on both the proposal for Strode College to merge with Bridgwater & Taunton College and on the proposal for Bridgwater & Taunton College Corporation to change its name to University Centre Somerset College Group (UCS College Group) at the point of merger, currently proposed as 1 August 2025. The consultation ran from 27 March 2025 to 30 April 2025, the outcome of which follows.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation was conducted in accordance with the Department of Education statutory guidelines, and ran from 27 March 2025 to 30 April 2025. During this time, the emergency services, relevant agencies, stakeholders and other educational institutions in the region were consulted.

PROPOSED MERGER TIMELINE





Denys Rayner
Chair of Corporation
Bridgwater & Taunton College

Jane Viner MBE
Chair of Corporation
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.”

University Centre Somerset College Group



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.

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

In total, 159 responses were received, including 13 formal letters of support from prominent stakeholders across a range of key organisations such as education, business, healthcare and local government, including other leading FE colleges, NHS Somerset, Members of Parliament, local chambers of commerce, and regional authorities.

The breakdown of responses is as follows:

Category	Total
BTC Staff	18
BTC Student	2
HE Institution	2
Local Government	3
Parent/Carer	23
Private training provider	2
Prospective student	8
Strode College staff	37
Strode College Student	54
Other	10
Total	159

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES RECEIVED

The table below summaries the responses received in relation to whether people agreed with the proposed merger between the two colleges.

Category	No	Unsure	Yes	Total
BTC Staff		7	11	18
BTC Student			2	2
HE institution			1	1
Local government	1	2		3
Parent/Carer	9	6	8	23
Private training provider	1	1		2
Prospective student	2	3	3	8
Strode College staff	13	8	16	37
Strode College Student	13	22	20	55
Other	1	3	6	10
Total	40	52	67	159

IN SUMMARY:

42% of respondents agreed with the proposed merger

25% of respondents disagreed with the proposal to merge

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they supported the merger but not to provide reasons. However, they could send questions or comments by email, but no specific comments about the merger were received.

Please note: where respondents identified with more than one category (e.g. BTC staff and a parent), their response was grouped according to the first category selected in the form for reporting purposes.

IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY

Respondents suggested a range of ways the merged college could strengthen its community engagement. Suggestions included more frequent and transparent communication with parents and stakeholders, greater collaboration with local employers and community groups, tailored skills provision, increased use of local facilities such as Strode Theatre, and improved accessibility. There was also support for maintaining open days, promoting higher education, and ensuring local representation within the governance structure.

EMPLOYER TRAINING NEEDS

As part of the consultation exercise, employers were asked what training needs they would wish the merged college to address.

A number of themes emerged which included; offering a wide choice of apprenticeships, ensuring there are courses that increase digital skills knowledge, ensuring a good balance of academic and vocational courses are offered, improving arboriculture and horticulture courses, short business courses and safeguarding training.



OUTCOME OF PROPOSED NAME CHANGE CONSULTATION

The Consultation process included the proposal to change to legal entity name of Bridgwater & Taunton College to University Centre Somerset College Group (UCS College Group) and to name each of the colleges within the Group as Bridgwater College, Taunton College, Cannington College and Strode College.

KEY THEMES FROM THE CONSULTATION

STRONG EXTERNAL ENDORSEMENTS

Multiple stakeholders voiced strong support for the proposal including:

- “The UCS College Group reflects the group’s commitment to providing university-level education and driving the regional development which Somerset needs.”
- “This is an exciting development and I am pleased to share our full support for your plans.”
- “This can only further the commitment to providing university-level education in the county and driving the regional development which Somerset needs.”

SUPPORT FOR A UNIFIED GROUP IDENTITY

Many staff and stakeholders understood and supported the strategic reasoning behind creating a single, future-facing group name:

- “Seems a sensible choice.”
- “A bit long and will be forgotten all the time to begin with I suspect. Having ‘University’ in any corporation name will give the appearance of an elevation of some sort, which is a good thing and reflects the scope and level of study that can be achieved.”
- “I think the new name is good :)”

CLEAR REGIONAL VISION AND ECONOMIC ALIGNMENT

Supporters appreciated the merger’s potential to boost Somerset’s economy and workforce:

- “We recognise that the proposed new college group will have an improved ability to respond to Somerset’s developing educational and economic needs, and to deliver the support that businesses need.”
- “The Group will have the ability to respond to Somerset’s evolving educational and economic needs... ensuring each College is effectively contributing to the regional and national economy.”

IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL IDENTITY

While supporting the merger, many respondents valued the retention of local college names. The proposed approach to retain individual college names was generally seen as logical, meaningful, and supportive of local identity and community ties, though a small number of respondents expressed concern about potential disconnection across the group and suggested using the term ‘campus’ instead of ‘college’.

Local identity and branding will remain central to the group structure, and this will be clarified and reinforced through clear communications.

- “We agree that having local boards will help to make sure each college remains closely connected with the communities they serve.”
- “I am happy for each College to retain their own name.”
- “It’s nice that Strode gets to keep its name. For a lot of people in the community, we have grown up knowing Strode as Strode.”
- “The names have a strong identity within their local communities. It preserves the sense of the individual establishments having their own culture and ethos yet working within the framework of the wider group.”

EMERGENCY SERVICES FEEDBACK:

The local fire and rescue service raised no concerns about the proposed name change.

There were no formal objections to the name change.

OTHER:

Some respondents were concerned about the potential loss of local college identity, or thought that the name was not memorable, overly long, complex and did not reflect the core of the colleges provision.

These appear to stem from a misunderstanding of the proposal.

Ensuring the continuity of local names and identities of the colleges remains a priority, and this will be addressed clearly through the planned approach to branding and the communications strategy if the proposal is approved.

RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE NAME CHANGE

The current higher education offer at Bridgwater & Taunton College is delivered via the OfS approved University Centre Somerset. The golden thread across the four Colleges within the group will be our UCS Higher Education offer. Utilising the University Centre Somerset name for the College Group name is a deliberate step towards a bigger vision for our community. It is not only educationally significant, but it promises to deliver economic stimulation to Somerset, strengthening the skills offer for local employers, ensuring alignment to Somerset’s economic needs and growth priorities whilst also delivering against the government’s ambitious growth targets.

UCS College Group will comprise of four distinct Colleges; Bridgwater College, Cannington College, Taunton College (formerly Bridgwater & Taunton College campuses) and Strode College.

Each College will retain its identity and community focus, while benefiting from the strength of a College Group.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

After carefully considering the views of respondents, the Corporations have decided that proceeding with the proposed merger is in the best interests of both the colleges and the local communities using the proposed name change and structure of the newly merged institution.

The colleges remain committed to completing the merger on the proposed date of 1 August 2025.

On the day of the merger, all assets and liabilities currently held by Strode College will be transferred to Bridgwater & Taunton College/UCS College Group.

Updates on the merger process will continue to be posted on each college’s website.

For any questions or concerns about the merger, please contact us at the email addresses listed below:

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