

BETTER TOGETHER - STRONGER TOGETHER

A summary on the consultation process
on a merger of HCUC (Harrow College & Uxbridge College)
with Richmond upon Thames College

1. Executive Summary

Thank you to those of you who actively contributed to the consultation on the merger of HCUC (Harrow College and Uxbridge College) with Richmond upon Thames College (RuTC).

Creating a new partnership of colleges for West, South and Central London provides a significant opportunity to bring together strong organisations to form a partnership of equals. The partnership will pool expertise, resources and connections to develop a new model that fuels economic growth and skills in a unique way – a way that ensures an appropriate focus on London’s skills priorities, whilst preserving a local focus.

Through the merger of HCUC with Richmond upon Thames College we are committed to developing a new partnership which serves our learners, businesses and communities better and through locally targeted provision. Harrow College, Uxbridge College and Richmond upon Thames College are already extremely strong brands with a highly visible presence in their own local communities and across London. However, by creating this new partnership of colleges we can ensure the new organisation plays an even more significant role in contributing to the skills agenda of London.

Bringing HCUC and Richmond upon Thames College together is a deliberate and positive way to protect, grow and develop further education and skills in Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge and we are confident that this proposal makes sense for learners, staff, employers and communities.

A wide range of stakeholders were invited to comment and contribute to the consultation on the merger, and the process for this is outlined in section 2. In summary, we received 10 direct emails from individuals, 10 individuals attended the online public consultation events, over 110 students took part in student forums and over 700 staff in total across the Colleges have attended briefings on the merger. Section 3 provides an overview of those who actively took part in the consultation.

Section 4 represents the frequently asked questions with additional direct questions asked from the online public consultations and student forums followed by Section 5, which outlines the next steps of the merger process.

Finally, the Boards of both organisations would like to thank all those who have been involved in supporting and promoting the consultation process.



Nicholas Davies
Chair, HCUC
(Harrow College & Uxbridge College)



Ian Valvona
Chair, RuTC
(Richmond upon Thames College)

2. Public Consultation Process

For a public consultation on a college merger the Department for Education specifies a set of statutory stakeholders that the dissolving college, RuTC, must consult.

As we set out our proposal, we invited comments to inform our discussions and plans for the future of education and training across Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge.

Feedback was welcomed from stakeholders including students, parents and carers of students, staff, employers and employer organisations, local government, schools and academies, unions, universities, community groups, funders and other interested parties.

As required under the Further Education Corporations (Publication of Proposals) (England) Regulations 2012, the formal statutory notice was published, and the consultation process was launched.

In order for RuTC to meet the statutory requirements, the notice and consultation document were publicised and distributed as follows:

- publication of statutory notice in The Times and The Richmond and Twickenham Times
- email and consultation document to all colleges within the local area
- email and consultation document to all local universities
- letter, consultation document (via email) to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chief Executives of the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Association of Colleges and the Chief Officer of the Greater London Authority and the Members of Parliament of local constituencies
- email to schools within the local area.

We also held two online live public consultation events on 14 and 27 April 2021, student forums across the Colleges and staff briefings.

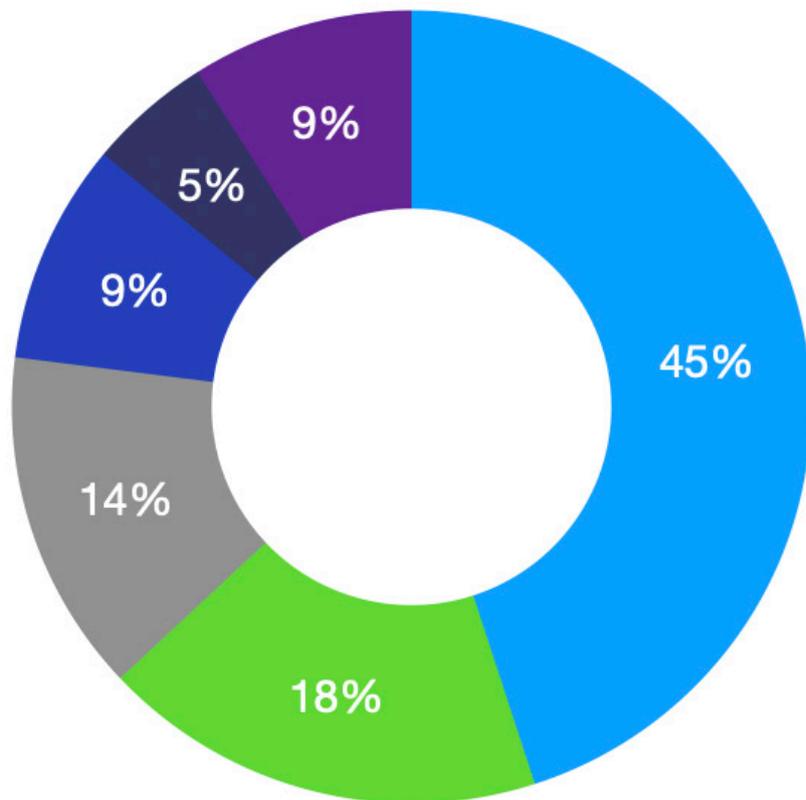


3. Responses to the Consultation

On 25 March 2021 we published our consultation document outlining a shared vision for “better together – stronger together”. Within the document was a commitment to provide a college group that focuses on maximising opportunities, resources and talent to help build futures and achieve ambitions.

The consultation period closed on 3 May 2021, by when 22 responses had been received from students, local partners, community representatives, universities, schools and local authorities.

Although consultees were not asked specifically whether or not they supported the merger, a majority of respondents made clear that they were in favour. A number of specific questions were raised by respondents and these are addressed in Section 4 of this document.



- Community
- RuTC Students
- Other
- Local Partners
- University
- HCUC Students

4. Questions and Feedback from Stakeholders

Responses to questions raised by Staff

1. Why is the merger being considered?

The merger proposal emerged from a robust Structure and Prospects Appraisal undertaken by the governing body of Richmond upon Thames College in conjunction with the Government's Further Education Commissioner. The recommendation of this appraisal was that RuTC should merge with Harrow College and Uxbridge College (HCUC) to create a sustainable college group.

We are confident that by joining forces we will be able to do more for our learners, and the delivery of a high-quality learner experience is at the centre of our proposals. Both HCUC and RuTC are committed to ensuring that the benefits to learners increase as a result of this merger, including a shared prioritising of students achieving more, progressing further and being more work ready.

Through the merger the Colleges will be “Better Together – Stronger Together”.



2. What are the benefits of merging?



Learner Experience

Current and new students can expect a new college partnership which recognises their individuality and provides a responsive and inspiring programme of study that enables them to progress on to new learning opportunities, university, apprenticeships or employment and supports them in achieving their ambitions. There will be an enhanced offer to students across all Colleges, greater learning opportunities and more progression routes.



Quality

Excellent teaching and learning that delivers outstanding outcomes for our learners is at the heart of this merger proposal. By joining forces, we will have the combined strength, expertise and resources to accelerate the achievement of improved standards and we will be able to implement a programme of rapid quality improvement.



Partnerships

We will work closely with regional and local employers to address skills gaps. We will be able to prioritise courses and qualifications that are valued by employers, that enable our learners to secure great jobs and will support our economy to compete with the world's best. We will be able to work with organisations such as Chambers of Commerce to ensure we have a local skills improvement plan that ensures our offer is impactful and beneficial to learners, employers and the distinct communities we serve.



A Strong Local Offer

Each college within the partnership will retain its unique brand identity and trading name and will have the freedom to develop and deliver a high-quality education and training offer that responds to local needs.



Robust Financial Health

A combined income of over £70m per annum provides a robust and sustainable financial base to maximise opportunities and resources to invest in an excellent experience for learners and communities.

3. What is the timeframe for the public consultation process?

The public consultation runs from Thursday 25 March 2021 until Monday 3 May 2021. The results of the consultation will be published no later than 14 June 2021 on the HCUC (www.hcuc.ac.uk) and RuTC (www.rutc.ac.uk) websites.

4. If the merger goes ahead what date will the Colleges become one organisation?

The proposed merger date is 30 July 2021.

5. Will each college keep its own name and brand identity?

Each college within the partnership will retain its unique brand identity and trading name. Each college will be member of the Group and the Group name is still to be agreed.

6. How will the merger affect our students?

The Colleges deliver a commitment to continuity of provision ensuring that all students will be able to complete their course(s) without any changes to location. The Colleges will also deliver a commitment to run programmes in 2021/22 as advertised. Student choice across all three Colleges will be enhanced by enabling students to access high-quality apprenticeship provision and progress to full and part-time higher education within the Group.

HCUC's leadership of a range of high profile and leading-edge initiatives such as T Levels and the new West London Institute of Technology (WLIoT), and RuTC's expertise in the development of new, higher-level employment focused provision, will enable innovation across the whole college partnership. Richmond upon Thames College's new, sector-leading campus will provide the resources to deliver new learning in state-of-the-art facilities.

7. Will students have to travel between different colleges for their classes?

No, students will not have to travel between colleges. All students will be timetabled for classes at their chosen college.

8. Can students access enrichment and extra-curricular activities at the other colleges?

Students could have the opportunity to enhance their student experience through enrichment activities, work experience, career-related activities, sport and inter-college competitions across all sites.

Students will continue to have their voice heard at each college and we hope students will share their experiences so that we can improve what we do.

9. Will the merger affect student applications?

No, each college looks forward to welcoming you and supporting you to meet your potential.



Response to questions raised at public events (14 and 27 May 2021)

1. Have the Colleges put together a curriculum offer?

The merging Colleges have been working closely to produce an enhanced curriculum offer mapped at different levels and different types; academic, vocational and technical, which importantly, incorporates apprenticeships offered across the sector subject areas.

The offer strongly complements and provides synergy across each campus and our priority is not to rationalise but to utilise collective expertise to develop provision, in the same way that has proved successful with the Harrow and Uxbridge merger. Areas of expected growth are in adult and apprenticeship provision as well as enhancing high needs provision.

We will ensure entry points and progression pathways, from entry and Level 1 through to the higher-level qualifications, are well structured and have clear line of sight to progression and work. Upskilling and reskilling individuals in work is a current local and national economic priority and being able to offer our students a range of delivery methods, including remote and modular learning, is crucial and this will be particularly important with adults at the higher skills levels. We aim to be innovative in our delivery to meet the needs of learners and so the way we deliver the curriculum is likely to be mixed. We currently have a good balance and mix of courses available and a strong bedrock of 16-19 provision, which is a good foundation.



2. Will finances, and all the key things that will ensure the college is viable, continue to provide opportunities and benefits for students and staff based on what has been presented through the proposal document?

Due diligence from a legal and finance perspective has been carried out and projected budgets for the merged College have been examined from a realistic as well as a worst-case scenario. In-year indicators for HCUC and RuTC do show learner applications on an upwards trajectory and, if converted to actual numbers, this will feed into core funding following the merger.

We continue to make use of the funding opportunities that are being made available and we are confident the finances going forward will continue to allow the newly merged College Group to be recognised as in 'outstanding' financial health. Finance is the major priority for the Governors, and they will continue to robustly scrutinise this area of work and, on the basis of stability, guarantee consistency in order to invest in high-quality education going forward.

3. What savings will be achieved from the merger and where will they occur?

There are opportunities to make savings across the merged Colleges in terms of contracts and licences so real savings will be made. Savings will also be found in the merger of staff at executive level as interims are currently in post at RuTC. Each strand has been looked at to see what benefits can contribute to the financial pot for the benefit of students, employers and the communities we serve. We will also be able to take advantage of savings through economies of scale.

4. What has the initial response been from students, parents and local community from HCUC and RuTC?

Students always come first. We have had a number of dynamic, student-led forums at HCUC and RuTC with excellent responses and the feedback shows that students are enthused about the merger.

A few students and parents have wanted reassurance that their current course will run at the local College and we have been able to give them this assurance. They have also realised that being part of a larger college group will enable more connections with employers and job opportunities. We have shared with them all information relating to the merger and associated benefits, especially on increased partnerships with universities and those at Foundation Level and why that might grow.

Furthermore, HCUC houses the West London Institute of Technology (one of only three Institutes of Technology in London and one of only 12 nationally) and this provides unique opportunities for the newly merged College learners, who along with others in the West London region, now have access to high-quality, industry developed, higher technical education and qualifications. This is very much a central part of Government expectations in its recent Skills for Jobs White Paper.

Feedback received from these stakeholders has been very positive.

We have also received positive responses from the local community broadly welcoming and supporting the merger and we support their plea to protect the local provision and to make sure the local brands are maintained. Community representatives have asked key questions such as “what are the risks?” and we are have been able to answer this with confidence, including benefits, whilst being clear about our commitment to financial viability.



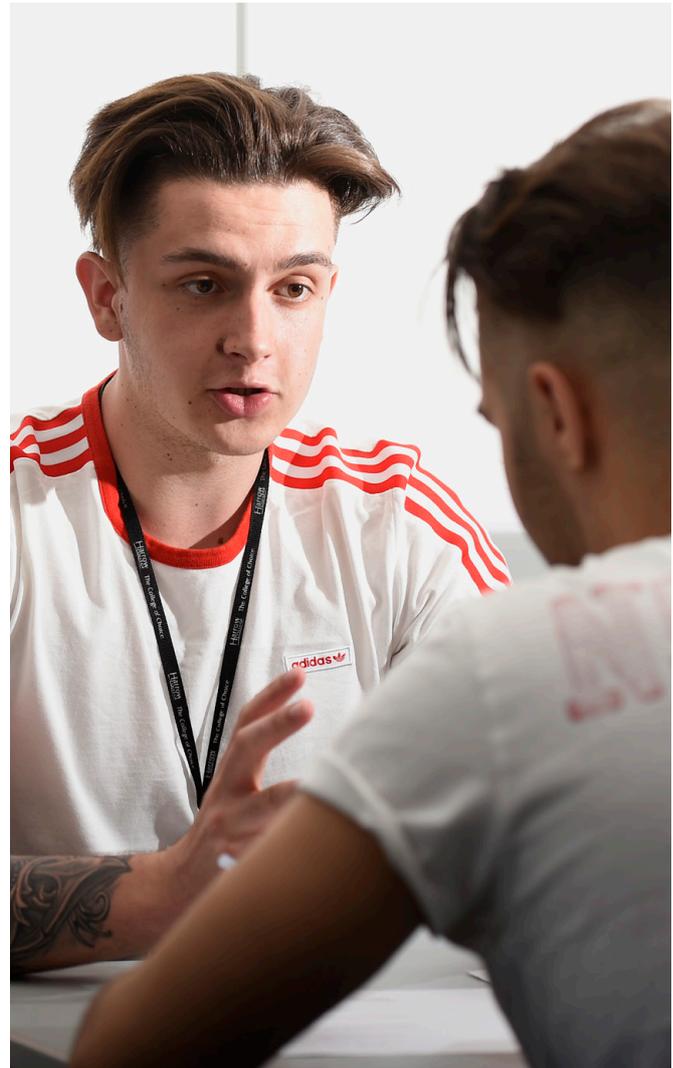
5. Will there be travel between locations for staff?

The local College brand and local provision is paramount. The expectation is that the advertised curriculum offer at each of the three Colleges, will be the offer that is delivered at each campus. The level of travel for the majority of staff will therefore be minimal but the arrangement also allows for strength in connectivity. Following the pandemic, we will now be utilising technology to carry out remote meetings where previously we would have travelled to site.

6. What is the feedback from staff and employers?

Many of the staff have already been through a merger process and have been able to experience the benefits first-hand. Enhanced job security through financial security and developmental opportunities have been discussed in some detail as we have been consulting with staff right from the start.

There has been a lot of positivity from businesses and other organisations we work with and the merger is seen as an opportunity rather than as rival organisations. Where we have mutual partnerships, there is benefit in having a joint voice as well as looking at separate opportunities.

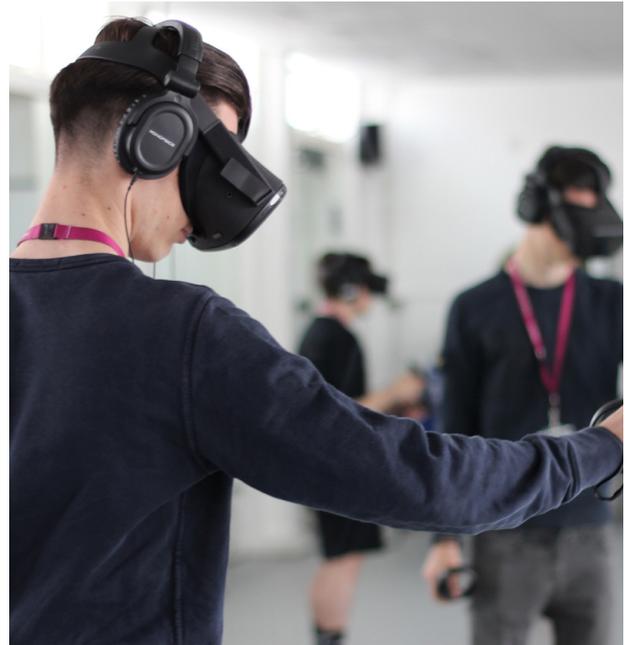


7. Based on the consultation document and the FAQs, it states students will not have to travel between sites and you will you be providing a wider offer including remote learning. How will you ensure this does not impact on the quality of teaching and learning?

Quality of teaching and learning and the learner experience is central. It is a critical part of what we do and we will ensure high-quality teaching, learning and assessment is in place. We will make certain student views are being taken into account and work with them to offer a delivery that fits their needs. Having to rely on remote learning to offer a provision at each college is not an immediate concern. However, remote learning is seen as a delivery method that can enhance pedagogy for certain delivery modes and learners. It is right for us that remote learning and development of digital skills is part of the provision, but the extent of this will need to be based on the level of independency of the learner. We will work on enhancing all learners' digital skills to equip them for the world of work that they will no doubt be facing and, again, remote digital skills will be part of this.

8. Can colleagues cover how they see STEM developing over the next five years as a partnership?

HCUC and RuTC have long-standing strengths in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and on the back of that we support the highest of skills required in STEM subjects. We have a good foundation to grow this work and the co-creation of STEM-related programmes will continue to support it. We will continue to strengthen the offer and deliver across all three Colleges. The West London Institute of Technology (WLIoT) is a good example of how this type of work is already being undertaken. The West London Institute of Technology (WLIoT) is STEM-based higher technical provision and the co-design and co-creation of programmes, closely involving industry partners and awarding bodies that is successfully taking place, points the way forward.



9. Have the benefits been highlighted more closely in regard to particular departments e.g. Adult Ed versus apprenticeships versus other areas. How do the benefits compare across areas?

HCUC and RuTC are currently sharing curriculum mapping activities and good practice and we are looking to expand adult and apprenticeship provision. The apprenticeship provision will be centralised to enable a more collaborative approach when working with employers and meeting the needs of the local economy. We are working with new businesses, not just for growing apprenticeships but also adult education, to progress careers in a more rigorous way. We have seen some innovative growth with industry and government departments, Department for Work and Pensions, Job Centre Plus and of course, the Chamber of Commerce based on site, developing new approaches to work with business and to fulfil the skills agenda.



10. Is it likely to be a realignment of curriculum and types of courses in 2022 and onwards?

With the current interest and indicators from learner applications, we expect growth in numbers, and we plan to grow our provision from pre-foundation all the way through to undergraduate qualifications: professional, technical and vocational. We envisage this merger as being successful because of the synergy that is already apparent and the benefits of working together with our current curriculum to enhance and expand what is there. The merger of Uxbridge and Harrow Colleges has been able to demonstrate how it is possible to grow provision and indeed with the collective effort, not lose provision that would otherwise have been the case. It is worth mentioning our A Level provision at both HCUC and RuTC, which is an increasingly rare offer in general further education colleges. We plan to continue to strengthen our A Level provision and have already seen an increase in applications. We also expect to utilise expertise across the Colleges to further develop, for instance, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Special Educational Needs (SEN) and provision for vulnerable learners.

We will continue to work with local catchment area schools to support the growth and development of curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils progressing to further education and we will continue to be a careers college.

11. How will you ensure you close the attainment gap for minority students, especially black and white working-class students? With the increase of black students representing the local demographic, how will you ensure this increase is reflected in staffing at the College Group and how will you ensure good role models are created?

We will be continuing to lobby to maintain and increase levels of FE funding for disadvantaged learners, that will assist in the support of key student groups. HCUC has attracted 70%+ 16-19 Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) learners from across London for a number of years and sits number one for 16-19 learner achievement in London, meaning all our learners achieve well.

HCUC staffing profile represents around 35% BAME employees and we continue to monitor and act to ensure our staffing represents the demographics of our students. So perhaps HCUC has experience of bucking this trend of underachievement of traditionally under-represented learner groups. As an example, as part of a collaborative West London colleges' project, a mentoring scheme to support black learners has proven highly successful in allowing those learners to be retained and achieve. This does matter and HCUC and RuTC senior management teams will ensure it continues to be a priority. Focusing on ensuring we are an inclusive college is critically important to the success of the learners and benefits the community as a whole.

12. What impact will the merger have on the finances?

Finance is the major priority for the Governors and they will continue to robustly scrutinise this area of work and, on the basis of stability, guarantee consistency in order to invest in high-quality education going forward. By using a financial modelling tool, we are confident the finances going forward will continue to allow the newly merged College Group to be recognised as having 'outstanding' financial health.



Questions from students (via student forum)

Will the quality of learning and other services be compromised because of the three colleges merging? How will you ensure you do not focus more on the one college with less focus on the other college? How will you ensure brands/images do not get lost or confused?

A key merger priority is to continue to provide – and to further improve – an outstanding and consistent experience for all students, staff and stakeholders across the College Group. As was the case in the Harrow and Uxbridge Colleges merger, the merged group will provide an exciting opportunity to combine the valued strengths of each college and fast-track the quality across the Group. Robust and standardised quality assurance approaches will be embedded consistently across the Group to ensure a high-quality student experience for all.

Staff continuous professional development and stakeholder collaboration will be shared across the Group to further advance teaching and support services practice. This provides students, stakeholders and staff across the three colleges an exceptional opportunity to uniformly deliver sector valued courses that meet demanded employment opportunities. A joint strength in employer partnerships and stakeholder collaboration will continue to develop the validity and readiness of the Group's curriculum that delivers the workforce of our future and guarantees opportunity for all students to participate. Expertise in supporting disadvantaged groups will be enhanced through shared practice, ensuring students including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those in receipt of wider support, are actively supported to achieve their aspirations including student achievement rates that will maintain the Colleges' reputation as the highest performing in London.

The Group's enhanced management structure, robust college reporting and quality assurance systems ensure a focus on each of the colleges' performance and quality. As was the case with Harrow and Uxbridge Colleges, the merger will strengthen the student experience at each of the constituent colleges.



During the forums, students at each of the Colleges were highly positive regarding their teaching, the College cultures and the College environment, noting strengths including:

- “Warm and friendly environment”
- “Great culture”
- “Inclusive environment... everyone equal”
- “Relationship between students and teachers”
- “You know where to go to for help”
- “Teachers are very amazing at their subject they always help students a lot...”
- “Teachers work hard for us”.

Students also commented on the benefits of the merger including:

- “Meeting new people”; “A wider network of student communities will be connected”
- “More ideas!”
- “Opportunity to do new courses”
- “All colleges could be improved”
- Staying number 1 college in London!

5. Next Steps

Together we have an exciting, ambitious and unique vision. This new collaborative and inclusive partnership will create and describe a new West London Arc in the region, which is recognised for:

- High-quality education, skills and training delivery with excellent outputs that propel learners into their futures
- Being inclusive, responsive and in tune with local and London-wide demand
- Being a favoured choice for learners, primarily in West, South and Central London, with a reach that serves beyond these boundaries.

The consultation feedback has provided a positive foundation to support the merger and has encouraged community-wide engagement in the process. The Boards of HCUC and RuTC would like to thank all those who have been involved in supporting and promoting the consultation process.

Consequently, both Boards will agree, at their respective July 2021 Board meetings, to progress plans for working together towards the proposed merger which will take place on **30 July 2021**.

Engagement with staff, students, employers and key stakeholders will continue through this implementation phase to help the management and the Board of the merged College Group to successfully deliver its vision for ambitions to be inspired and achieved through learning.

Copy of dissolution notice:

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN by the Further Education Corporation of Richmond upon Thames College, known as RuTC, Langhorn Drive, Twickenham, Middlesex, TW2 7SJ, in accordance with the Further Education Corporations (Publication of Proposals) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012 No. 1157, of the proposal to merge with the Further Education Corporation of HCUC, Park Road, Uxbridge, UB8 1NQ on the 30 July 2021. It is proposed that all RuTC's property, rights and liabilities will transfer to HCUC immediately before RuTC is dissolved on the 30 July 2021.

Further education will continue at RuTC after this merger is proposed to take place and current and prospective students will continue their courses of study as planned. For further information about the proposed merger and the benefits it will offer to students, staff and employers and to access a copy of the consultation document, please visit the website at www.rutc.ac.uk

The consultation period runs from 25 March 2021 until 3 May 2021. The results of the consultation will be published no later than 14 June 2021 on the RuTC website.