

**CONSULTATION ON THE  
PROPOSED MERGER OF BELL  
COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY AND  
THE UNIVERSITY OF PAISLEY**

**ANALYSIS REPORT**



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

March 2007

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On 24<sup>th</sup> October 2006, the Scottish Executive launched a consultation paper on the proposed merger of Bell College of Technology and the University of Paisley. The consultation invited comments on the proposal by the governing bodies of the two institutions which would result in a single institution with four campuses in Ayr, Dumfries, Hamilton and Paisley.
2. Respondents were asked to comment on the rationale for the merger, and on the expected impact a merger would have for the local area; other institutions; and current students.
3. Responses were generally supportive of the merger although some specific concerns were raised in a number of areas.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

4. Under the terms of section 47 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, the consent of Scottish Ministers is required for any proposals to merge designated institutions. The institutions submitted their formal business proposal for a merger to the Scottish Executive in October 2006.
5. To inform their consideration of the merger proposal, Ministers requested views from anyone with an interest in higher and further education. Ministers also sought advice from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. In addition, the University of Paisley undertook a separate consultation of stakeholders on a proposal to change its university name to 'University of the West of Scotland'.
6. The consultation paper inviting views on the merger proposal was distributed to 7 main categories of interest groups, identified as key stakeholders:
  - Universities and Colleges;
  - Local government;
  - Scottish Parliament;
  - Government Departments and organisations;
  - Trade unions and staff associations;
  - Business sector; and

- Equality and diversity groups

7. The consultation period ended on 12 January 2007. The paper can be viewed at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/10/bellpaisleymerger>. 32 responses were received from organisations and individuals offering comments on the proposed merger.

#### Consultation Method

8. As well as being made available on the Scottish Executive's website, hard copies of the paper were distributed to key stakeholders. A full list of those consulted is available at Annex A.

9. General views were sought on the proposal, and four specific questions (see para 14) were raised in the consultation paper for considering the potential impact of a merger.

#### **RESPONSES**

10. By the end of the consultation period, 32 individuals or organisations had replied.

11. Comments on the proposal were received from:

- 4 Local Government;
- 4 Government Departments/Organisations;
- 7 Higher Education (HE);
- 11 Further Education (FE);
- 2 Trade unions/staff associations;
- Universities Scotland;
- Association of Scotland's Colleges; and
- 2 Others

#### Publication of Responses

12. Of the 32 responses, 31 were non-confidential while one requested that their response should remain confidential. A list of the respondents is at Annex B. A hard copy of the responses is available from the Scottish Executive Information & Library Service, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh, EH11 3XD.

13. All non-confidential responses can also be viewed on the 'consultations' page of the Scottish Executive Website at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/02/20091421/0>.

## **FINDINGS**

14. Respondents were asked to respond to the consultation in any way, although the following four questions were posed:

- What is your view on the impact of the merger on higher and further education provision and delivery in Ayr, Dumfries, Hamilton, Paisley and beyond?
- To what extent do you agree with the rationale for merger as set out in the attached summary?
- What impact, if any, would the merger have on other higher and further education institutions?
- What impact would the merger have on students at Bell College of Technology and University of Paisley?

15. Some of the respondents dealt with the four questions in turn, and others gave a more general response, or dealt with a particular issue that was relevant to their organisation.

16. Some of the additional areas that were discussed were:

- Concerns about the impact of the merger on staff in the two institutions;
- Views on how the merger should be carried out; and
- The effect on the teaching of health related subjects.

17. 32 organisations responded to the consultation. Of these, 30 either supported or did not object to the merger. One respondent stated that they did not support the merger. One other wrote in with concerns. A number of the respondents that supported or did not object to the proposal did have concerns or qualifications that they would like to be addressed.

**What is your view on the impact of the merger on higher and further education provision and delivery in Ayr, Dumfries, Hamilton, Paisley and beyond?**

18. A number of the respondents commented on the benefits of enhanced HE provision for the area, although some others expressed concerns that the merger may lead to some problems in specific areas.

- One respondent questioned the need for a new campus at Ayr, due to its proximity to Glasgow.
- A large number of respondents welcomed the merger as a positive move for the wider area. It was commented that Lanarkshire would benefit from a university presence, and the West of Scotland would benefit from enhanced HE provision. It was also suggested that the presence of four campuses should ensure, through strong local identities, that the different economic and learning needs of each area are taken into account.
- One respondent commented that the merger would offer new opportunities to strengthen partnership working at local level between the university and education and leisure services.
- Benefits to the surrounding community, in terms of participation and access to HE, were also mentioned by a number of respondents.
- One respondent specifically mentioned the benefits of establishing a higher education identity 'outwith the main Glasgow-Edinburgh conurbated area' as strengthening the 'educational and economic hinterland' and therefore benefiting Scotland as a whole.
- Concern was expressed that the merger may lead to a diminished FE presence in Paisley or impact curriculum development at the Paisley campus.
- One respondent also felt that the merger would have a negative impact on HE and FE provision in Ayrshire.

**To what extent do you agree with the rationale for merger as set out in the attached summary?**

19. On the whole, respondents seemed to agree with the rationale for merger – particularly in terms of increased efficiency for the institutions, and benefits to the community through wider access.

- A number of respondents mentioned the benefits to the institutions in terms of increased efficiency.
- It was also commented that the increased efficiency could help the sustainability of the two institutions. Some respondents commented that the future of one or both institutions was unclear if the merger was not supported.
- A number of the respondents found the rationale to be sound, indicating that they agreed with the challenges and values outlined by the consultation paper.
- The commitment to social inclusion was commended by a number of respondents. Specific hard-to-reach learners were mentioned, such as those in less affluent communities or in rural communities.
- The commitment to a vocational approach was also commended.
- The emphasis on flexible learning was welcomed as a means to meet the needs of a section of young people for whom traditional tertiary education may not be possible. Another respondent commented on the opportunities this would provide for those in work needing to upskill and sustain employment.
- Two of the respondents expressed concern that the institutions may engage in 'mission drift'.
- The respondent that did not support the merger suggested that retention rates were low for the two institutions and that 'the concept of merging two particularly weak institutions to form the fourth largest university in Scotland causes concern.'

A number of the respondents discussed the issue of partnership working as a key part of the merger. Their comments are discussed in further detail in the next section.

**What impact, if any, would the merger have on other higher and further education institutions?**

20. There were a variety of responses to this question. Some of the respondents felt that the merger would have no effect, or a limited effect, on other higher and further education institutions. Others discussed the opportunity for partnership working. Some respondents expressed concern about competition in certain areas of provision.

- o Many of the respondents welcomed the idea of partnership working and the possibilities for articulation. One in particular welcomed the assurances of a 'non-competitive model'.
- o It was suggested that the merger would provide an opportunity for a 'fresh look' at articulation arrangements in place.
- o One respondent suggested that the merger was predicated on a strong relationship with colleges that does not necessarily exist. Another respondent also mentioned a lack of engagement with Further Education Colleges.
- o Some respondents expressed concern that provision may directly compete with that on offer by colleges in the area.
- o It was suggested that safeguards should be put into place to prevent duplication and competition that would result in displacement from existing colleges.
- o One respondent suggested that insufficient regard had been paid to existing partnership links between colleges and HEIs.
- o Some respondents expressed concern that colleges had not been adequately consulted about future plans or previous estate developments.
- o Some of the respondents suggested that it would be useful to clarify the position regarding partnerships and programmes agreed between merging institutions and local colleges. It was suggested that discussions between Paisley University, Bell College of Technology, and local colleges, should be initiated before further progress is made.

- o Some respondents indicated that they expected the merger to have little or no effect on other Further and Higher Education Institutions.

**What impact would the merger have on students at Bell College of Technology and University of Paisley?**

21. A number of benefits were mentioned, particularly increased choice and opportunity.

- o It was also suggested that the merger would result in improvements in research quality, which would have positive implications for student teaching and staff retention.
- o It was also suggested that the students of Bell College would benefit from increased choice and the 'kudos' of gaining a university title for their campus.
- o One respondent commented on the distance of the Hamilton campus from the main campus, and suggested that effort may be required to ensure that this is not detrimental to those students based at Hamilton.
- o Some respondents warned of the impact and disruption to students and staff caused by the merger. One suggested that this could be minimised through good management and transparent engagement with stakeholders.
- o One respondent questioned whether the avoidance of duplicate costs would lead to courses that are currently run in both locations being run in the future on only one location, and expressed concern that this would lead to added travel for students, which would negatively impact student numbers.

**Other comments**

22. **Health:**

- o A merger of the two institutions would create the largest school of Health, Nursing & Midwifery. This was discussed in a number of responses, with respondents welcoming the increased strength in provision and flexibility.

- o The increased flexibility was welcomed by one respondent who feels that there are 'limited educational resources available to healthcare employers'.
- o Another respondent commented on the positive impact on research and knowledge transfer.
- o One respondent commented that current provision in these areas at Napier University, Caledonian University and Queen Margaret University should not be undermined, but that they would like to see the four universities engage in sharing best practice and identifying collaborative opportunities.

23. **Implementation of the Merger:**

- o A number of respondents, while supporting the merger, had a range of specific concerns about the way in which the merger should be carried out.
- o One respondent was concerned that the timetable for implementation of the merger seemed ambitious.
- o Another respondent felt that the breaking down of cultural barriers should be addressed 'sooner rather than later' and suggested that a process of formal and informal meetings between staff at all levels should be commenced as soon as the Ministerial decision is known.
- o Concerns for the future were also raised, that the merger should not be subordinated in later years – for example, if the resources of Bell College were used as a justification to withdraw from other more remote campuses such as Dumfries and Ayr. It was suggested that the constitution of the new merged institution should contain protection clauses for these other areas.

24. **Staff:**

- o There were some concerns raised about how staff would be affected by the merger. It was stated that the majority of academic staff at the University of Paisley opposed the merger.

- o It was also suggested that more should be done to set out the proposed academic structure of the new institution and to identify the direct impact on staff.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

25. There was overall a broad consensus of support for the merger proposal put forward by Bell College of Technology and the University of Paisley, although it is recognised that concerns are raised in some of the responses to the consultation paper. The views expressed in response to the consultation paper, along with the advice from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council helped inform Scottish Ministers in their consideration of the merger proposal.

## **CONSULTATION EXERCISE: FINAL REPORT**

26. All responses received were carefully considered, along with advice on the merger proposal from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council Education (SFC) in support of the merger going ahead, by Scottish Ministers in reaching their decision to formally approve the merger of Bell College of Technology and the University of Paisley. The merger will be affected by an Order to close Bell College of Technology and transfer its rights, assets, liabilities etc to the University of Paisley. Subject to the Order completing its Parliamentary procedure, it is anticipated that the merger will be implemented on 1 August 2007.
27. In approving the merger, Ministers have concluded that the proposal offers substantial benefits which include the creation of a regional university serving the west and south of Scotland, offering expanded opportunities for learning, particularly through establishing a university presence in Lanarkshire; the creation of a stronger, more responsive nursing school, able to use its expanded critical mass to better serve the needs of the five health boards in the area; and the opportunity to develop partnership models with further education colleges in the south and west, tailored to suit local conditions such as transport links, local provision, infrastructure and facilities available.
28. Ministers note however that potential risks were identified in some of the responses to the consultation and in the advice to Ministers from the SFC. The main risk identified is the financial and associated risk arising from sustaining a four campus institution over time and potentially creating an institution that will compete with colleges for a limited HE market in the South West. However, the SFC considers that the institutions have assessed these risks and their implications thoroughly. The institutions themselves have indicated that they remain committed to the withdrawal of sub-degree provision and are developing an action plan to ensure that their revised portfolio (to be offered from session 2008/09) is geared to ensure coherence wherever possible. They also indicate that they have written to the Principals of FE Colleges across the West of Scotland, emphasising their desire to ensure a coherent offering of further and higher education courses that meet the needs of the communities they serve and have agreed to follow this up with visits to the colleges. In conveying his approval of the merger in a letter to the Principals of the institutions, The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning asked the institutions to continue to work with the SFC to minimise the identified risks.

## ANNEX A

### LIST OF CONSULTEES

All chambers of commerce in Scotland  
All local enterprise companies in Scotland  
All Scottish Further Education Colleges  
All Scottish Higher Education Institutions  
All Scottish Local Authorities  
All Scottish MEPS

Association of Head Teachers in Scotland  
Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE)  
Association of Scottish Colleges  
Association of Scottish Chambers of Commerce  
Careers Development and Work  
Careers Scotland  
CBI Scotland  
Centre for Studies in Enterprise,  
Coalition of Higher Education Students in Scotland (CHESS)  
Commission for Racial Equality  
Communities Scotland  
Copyright Libraries  
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)  
Disability Rights Commission  
Education Institute of Scotland (EIS)  
Enterprise and Culture Committee  
Equality Network  
Equal Opportunities Commission  
Federation of Small Businesses  
Futureskills Scotland  
Head Teachers Association of Scotland  
Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
HM Inspectorate of Education  
Institute of Chartered Accountants for Scotland  
Institute of Directors  
Lead Scotland  
Learndirect Scotland  
Learning and Teaching Scotland  
Linking Education and Disability Scotland  
National Association of Schoolmasters  
Union of Women Teachers in Scotland (NASUWT)  
NHS Education for Scotland  
NUS Scotland  
Professional Association of Teachers  
Quality Assurance Agency Scotland  
Scottish Agricultural College  
Scottish Civic Forum  
Scottish Council for Development and Industry  
Scottish Council for National Training Organisations  
Scottish Council for Research Education  
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations  
Scottish Enterprise  
Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council  
Scottish Inter Faith Council  
Scottish Parliament's Information Centre  
Scottish Qualifications Authority  
Scottish Refugee Council  
Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association  
Scottish Youth Parliament  
Sector Skills Alliance Scotland

SKILL: National Bureau for Students with  
Disabilities  
STUC  
Student Awards Agency for Scotland  
Student Loans Company  
UNISON

Universities Scotland  
University and College Union  
Volunteer Development Scotland  
Young Enterprise ScotlandList of  
Respondents

## **ANNEX B**

### **LIST OF RESPONDENTS**

Association of Scotland's Colleges  
Ayr College  
Careers Scotland  
Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce  
Dumfries and Galloway College  
East Ayrshire Council  
Educational Institute of Scotland  
EIS-ULA Local Branch University of Paisley  
Elmwood College  
Glasgow Caledonian University  
Glasgow Metropolitan College  
Heriot-Watt University  
John Wheatley College  
Lanarkshire Colleges Group  
Langside College  
Motherwell College  
NHS Education for Scotland  
North Lanarkshire Council  
The Open University in Scotland  
Paisley Northwest SNP  
QMUC  
Renfrewshire Council  
The Robert Gordon University  
SAC  
Scottish Enterprise  
South Lanarkshire Council  
SQA  
Stevenson College  
Stow College  
Universities Scotland  
University of Glasgow  
West Lothian College