



Cheshire College
South & West



Outcome of the Public Consultation on the Merger Between Macclesfield College and Cheshire College – South & West

MAY 2026



Introduction

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to contribute to the public consultation on the proposed merger of Macclesfield College with Cheshire College – South & West, which is planned to take effect on 1 August 2026.

Throughout the consultation period, we engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and provided opportunities for feedback. We are satisfied that all interested parties were able to comment and have their views considered.

The feedback received has reinforced our ambition to proceed with the proposed merger.

We have carefully considered the positive responses and the observations raised. All feedback will inform our ongoing, detailed planning as the proposals continue to develop.

We recognise that this marks the beginning of the process rather than its conclusion. Significant work remains to ensure the merger is implemented successfully and delivers clear benefits for our learners, staff, employers, and the communities we serve. However, we believe this new partnership provides the strongest foundation to achieve our shared ambitions.



Lesley Davies

Chair of Corporation
Cheshire College – South & West



Ceri Johns

Chair of Corporation
Macclesfield College

Background

The Corporations of Macclesfield College and Cheshire College – South & West held a joint public consultation from 27th March 2026 until 28th April 2026 on the proposed merger between the two institutions.

A consultation document was produced that set out the context for the merger, the proposal, and the benefits.

The consultation proposal was available to download from each of the Colleges' websites and copies of the proposal were emailed to:

- Staff
- Learners
- Trade Unions
- Schools, Colleges, Academies and Universities
- Local Authorities
- Local Enterprise Partnership
- Key Employers
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Secretary of State

Details of the consultation were also:



Sent via a press release to local media to raise awareness amongst parents and the wider community.



Briefed to staff at both corporations via internal briefings.



Placed on the Colleges' social media channels

A statutory notice of dissolution was placed in both The Telegraph and Macclesfield Express.

This report sets out and analyses the responses received during the consultation period.

Responses to Consultation Questions

We received a total of 22 responses to the public consultation which includes 9 letters of support from:

- East Cheshire NHS Trust
- Cheshire East Council
- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Chancery Multi Academy Trust
- Justin Madders, MP
- Tim Roca, MP
- West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber of Commerce
- East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce
- Storyhouse

The distribution of the 22 respondents were as follows:

Category	Number
Learners	6
Staff	2
Parent/Carer	2
School/Academy Trust	2
Other	2
Member of Parliament	2
Employers	2
Local Authority	2
Chamber of Commerce	2
TOTAL	22



Feedback Received

Analysis of the consultation feedback highlights several recurring benefits that respondents believe could result from the proposed merger.

These include:



Stronger financial and organisational resilience

Respondents noted that the challenging economic climate for Further Education makes collaboration and scale increasingly important. A merged college is seen as better positioned to:

- Withstand funding pressures
- Pool resources more effectively
- Make strategic, long term investments rather than short term savings decisions



Broader and more sustainable curriculum offer

A frequently cited benefit was the potential to expand, enhance and protect the breadth of curriculum provision including:

- Broadening the range of technical and professional courses available
- Increased subject and pathway choice for learners
- Greater ability to sustain specialist or low volume provision
- Enhanced progression pathways for young people and adults
- Expend specialist training
- Responding effectively to the skills priorities identified in the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and strengthen the local skills pipeline





Improved Investment in Staff, Facilities and Infrastructure

Supporters highlighted that a larger College could support:

- Greater investment in staff development (CPD)
- Improved learning environments and equipment
- Modernisation of infrastructure and digital resources

This was seen as essential to meeting new curriculum reforms and workforce development needs over the next five years.



Enhanced Opportunities for Learners

Learners and parents believed the merger could lead to:

- More employment focused learning
- Expanded apprenticeship opportunities
- Stronger links/collaboration with employers and industry partners

Respondents felt that a combined organisation would be better placed to respond to evolving labour market demand and local skills needs.



Stronger Leadership and Strategic Capacity

Some stakeholders expressed confidence that a merged college would benefit from:

- More robust leadership capacity
- Shared expertise across institutions
- Clearer strategic direction

This was viewed as particularly valuable in managing educational reform, growth, and quality improvement



Wider Community and Regional Benefits

Several respondents felt the merger could:

- Strengthen the FE presence across the wider Cheshire area
- Reduce isolation of individual colleges
- Create a stronger, more connected educational community

This was linked to both social mobility and regional economic growth.

Questions, Comments and Observations

A number of questions, comments and observations were raised as part of the consultation exercise. The table below details the themes of these and the Colleges responses to them:

Theme	Response
Risk of staff redundancies and job security	<p>The merger is not being driven as a cost cutting or redundancy led exercise. The proposed merger is intended to strengthen long term financial sustainability and protect employment across the organisation. There are no plans for compulsory redundancies as a direct result of the merger.</p> <p>Staff expertise and local knowledge are recognised as critical to delivering high quality education and training.</p>
Loss of institutional independence and identity of Macclesfield College	<p>The identity, heritage and local presence of Macclesfield College remain central to the merger proposal. Macclesfield will continue as a distinct campus with a clear local focus, local employer relationships and curriculum offer shaped by local need.</p> <p>While legal governance will transfer to a single corporation, this provides greater strategic strength rather than loss of voice. Local leadership, advisory arrangements and engagement with stakeholders will ensure that Macclesfield retains its character and continues to serve the community it was established for. This approach has been successfully embedded and evidenced in the 2017 merger between South Cheshire College and West Cheshire College.</p>



Theme

Response

Asset risk and campus security

The merger with Macclesfield College will not divert focus, investment or resource away from Chester, Ellesmere Port or Crewe. Cheshire College – South & West is classified by the Department for Education as having Outstanding financial health, providing a robust platform to deliver growth without compromising existing commitments.

Furthermore, the Principal/CEO and Deputy Principal/Deputy CEO led the successful delivery of the 2017 merger and remain in post. The existing highly experienced Board of Cheshire College – South & West will remain in post following the merger and their commitment to all the communities served is absolute. This continuity of leadership, combined with proven experience, gives confidence that the proposed merger will be delivered smoothly and without adverse impact on existing campuses.

We recognise the importance of the Crewe Campus and fully agree that it continues to provide a positive destination for many young people from Northwich and Winsford.

Over time, it is believed that the merger will lead to a reduction in learners from the Macclesfield area currently travelling to Crewe, as enhanced local provision becomes available. This, in turn, creates opportunities to strengthen access for learners from Northwich and Winsford to provision at Crewe, supporting improved participation and outcomes.

Quality and performance concerns between Colleges

The merger creates an opportunity to share best practice, strengthen quality assurance and drive continuous improvement across all campuses. Closer and detailed analysis of headline achievement data evidences complementary strengths across both Colleges, which will help ensure best practice is shared across all campuses.

Cheshire College – South & West is a member of the Tertiary Colleges Group, which is a small group of high performing colleges, which allows sharing of good practice across the best performing colleges across England. In addition Cheshire College – South & West has only ever been judged by Ofsted as either good or outstanding. Both Colleges also have some of the highest apprenticeship achievement rates in the sector.

Three senior managers at Cheshire College – South & West are also experienced Ofsted inspectors and have all participated in inspections of other institutions under the new Ofsted toolkit.

Benefits of economies of scale following the merger will also allow more specialist quality improvement and CPD staff, to support continuous improvement.

The intention is not to dilute quality but to raise standards consistently through shared leadership, systems and expertise.

Quality improvement will remain a priority at every campus.

Theme	Response
Geographical distance and local benefit of the merger	<p>While the campuses are geographically dispersed, the merger is designed to enhance local provision rather than centralise it. Learners will continue to access education at their local campus, with curriculum planning aligned to local labour market demands.</p> <p>The merged College will enable better coordination, resource sharing and strategic investment, allowing each campus to grow provision that meets the needs of its local community while benefiting from the scale and capacity of a larger organisation. The merger of South Cheshire College and West Cheshire College has proven that learners, employers and communities have benefited from increased investment, increase in provision choice (without the need to travel to other campuses) despite the campuses being significant distances from each other.</p>
Fear of disruption to learners following merger	<p>There will be no disruption to learners as a result of the merger. The Colleges will continue to operate on their existing campuses, and current learners, along with those applying for courses from September 2026, will continue their programmes and qualifications as planned.</p> <p>Learners who have not completed their studies by the merger date will continue their education at the same campus as part of the merged College.</p> <p>There will be no changes to learner support services or pastoral care.</p>
Access to specialist facilities and development across the merged college	<p>The planned investment of the Centres for Automotive and Construction Skills at Macclesfield will ensure the same standard across all four campuses.</p>
Inclusion, achievement and ambition for the merged College	<p>While the merger will remove nugatory competition, it will not lessen our commitment to ensuring the highest quality provision for all communities the merged College will serve.</p>
Partnership working and impact in deprived communities	<p>We firmly believe that achieving the best outcomes for learners in our most deprived communities requires a multi-agency, collaborative approach. The elimination of nugatory competition, combined with the benefits of economies of scale, will enable the merged College to invest additional time, resource and dedicated named staff to work closely with Councils, schools, employers and other partners.</p> <p>This approach will enhance our shared ability to design responsive provision, address skills gaps and achieve maximum impact, particularly for those learners who require the greatest levels of support.</p>



Summary and Next Steps

The Corporations are grateful for all the responses received during the consultation process.

The Corporations have taken account of the views of learners, parents/carers/guardians, staff, the community, and other stakeholders, and have concluded that it would be in the best interests of the Colleges and the local communities to proceed with the proposal to merge.

The Colleges are committed to merging on the proposed date of 1 August 2026.

On the day of merger, all assets and liabilities previously owned by Macclesfield College will transfer to Cheshire College – South & West.

The merger pages on all College's websites will be kept up to date on progress. The following email addresses can be used to contact the Colleges for any merger enquiries:



merger@ccsw.ac.uk
merger@macclesfield.ac.uk