

Proposed Merger

Response to Public Consultation

Richmond Adult and Community College
and
Hillcroft College

Introduction

On 30th March 2017, Richmond Adult and Community College (RACC) and Hillcroft College issued a Public Consultation document on the proposed merger of the two colleges from 1 August 2017. This document sets out the response from stakeholders from both colleges and addresses questions and issues that have been raised.

Merger Proposal

In December 2016 the RACC Governing Body and the Hillcroft Council considered a feasibility study that evaluated the benefits and challenges that a merger would present. The benefits of the merger were considered to be significant, particularly in relation to:

- improved opportunities for adult learners through the provision of a broad range of foundation, vocational and wellbeing programmes available on a day or residential basis
- Protection of the Hillcroft 'women only' curriculum offer based at the Hillcroft site in Surbiton.
- The ability to meet a broad range of learning needs through the delivery of specially tailored programmes aimed at e.g. SMES, adults seeking wellbeing, adult career improvers, people who have a disability etc.
- A financially sustainable business model for the merged college.

The merger proposal was set out in a prospectus called "Consultation on Proposed Merger" which also provided information on the legal basis for the merger. A 'Type B' merger was proposed that would result in RACC dissolving from 1st August 2017.

The consultation ran from 30 March 2017 to 5 May 2017, providing a five-week window for stakeholder responses.

Various methods of communication were used to raise awareness of the consultation and stakeholders were positively encouraged to respond. These included:

- Emails sent to multiple stakeholders including staff, students, employers, schools, MPs and local authorities;
- Staff meetings;
- RACC and Hillcroft Colleges' websites;
- Publications deposited in local libraries;
- Displays and feedback boxes at each college; and
- Statutory notices in the Guardian and local press.

Stakeholder Responses to the Merger Proposal

As of 5 May 2017 (the consultation response deadline) 62 responses had been received.

47% of those that responded were positive about the improved opportunities available to learners. 37% expressed no preference but commented on the importance of:

- Maintaining Hillcroft's residential provision for women;
- Continuing to offer the broad range of RACC's leisure and wellbeing provision; and
- The need to ensure that local needs continue to be met.

Responses to issues raised

Outlined below are the key themes raised by respondents and details of the plans that have been put in place to address concerns.

Women only provision

Although the proposal for merger contains a commitment to protect and develop Hillcroft women's residential provision, concern was expressed by 16% of respondents, that merger could lead to a loss of this valuable provision.

Governors from both Hillcroft and RACC have taken steps to safeguard the women's offer and recognise the importance of this type of provision in supporting disadvantaged women to develop independence, skills and resilience and take initial steps into education. The revised charitable objects of the merged college enable the education of men but clearly make a commitment to continue to provide the Hillcroft curriculum that is curated and developed for women only.

The Hillcroft 'women only' residential courses will continue to be provided at the Hillcroft site after the merger. Provision for men will be developed and delivered separately. The current offer will be published as usual for September 2017. In future, the 'women only' residential offer will be promoted through the Hillcroft brand.

Other specialist and discreet offers for particular groups such as adults with severe disabilities, SMEs and Jazz musicians will continue to be promoted through their own brands. Other residential offers will be developed for adults who would benefit from this approach to learning at times when the residential facilities are not in use for women only provision.

The future of leisure provision

A number of RACC students, although supportive of the merger, did ask for reassurance that non-accredited leisure and wellbeing provision would also be protected.

As set out in the consultation document, a clear aim of the merger is to have no loss of provision. Therefore all current provision delivered at RACC will continue at Parkshot subject to learner demand. There is no plan to make any major changes to the basis upon which fees are charged. The intention is to provide a seamless transition for learners.

Meeting local, regional and national needs

The merged college will continue to work with the local authorities in our area to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of local residents and the business sector. In addition, we will play an active part in the South London Partnership and will contribute to the wider regional agenda through our work with other colleges and partners in meeting regional needs.

Hillcroft has a mission to operate at a national level in meeting the educational needs of disadvantaged women. The merged college is fully committed to maintaining and developing this mission so that more disadvantaged women learners will be able to benefit from this work.

Membership of the Governing Body

Some respondents expressed a view that the new board should continue to have adequate representation from the local area.

A rigorous approach has been adopted in the appointment of governors to the board of the merged college. This has involved a thorough analysis of the skills required by the new college and Board. This has informed the recruitment process.

The board of the merged college will have a range of skills to match to the needs of the college in the post-merger period. Membership includes governors who have knowledge of local needs and those who have an understanding of the broader strategic issues affecting adult learners and their learning needs.

Governors and management will take the issues raised during the public consultation into account in future planning and will continue to maintain a dialogue with learners, staff, and our communities to provide a clear understanding that will help ensure long-term success for the merger.

Both Colleges have considered all the feedback and comments received, and would like to thank all those that participated and took the time to provide detailed feedback.