

Embracing Change: A College for the Future

A consultation document on the proposed merger of
Swansea College and Gorseinon College [summary version]



Abbreviations:

DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
NEETS	[Young People] Not in Education, Employment or Training
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government

The consultation documents [full and summary versions] and the response form are available to download from www.swancoll.ac.uk and www.gorseinon.ac.uk

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1. Introduction:

This summary document sets out the background and rationale for a proposal from Swansea College and Gorseinon College that they should merge to form a single new college.

Any merger proposal will require the formal approval of the Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills [DCELLS] before it can be put before the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills for a decision.

DCELLS will consider the result of this consultation, due diligence studies and the full outline business case for merger in late 2009. DCELLS will then decide whether to forward a proposal for merger to the Minister for determination.

Responses are invited by 30th September 2009. If you would like to comment on the proposed merger please use the response form enclosed with this document.

All responses should be emailed to a.lowe@swancoll.ac.uk or posted to Allison Lowe, Communications Officer, Swansea College, Tycoch Road, Sketty, Swansea, SA2 9EB.



2. Our vision for a post-16 provision in Swansea

Our vision for a merged college is that it will bring together two complementary, successful organisations to create an institution that will provide outstanding learning opportunities and experiences for young people, adults and employers in Swansea.

A single merged Further Education [FE] college in Swansea will be part of a broader transformation of provision in the City and County of Swansea. By 2015 there will probably be fewer school sixth forms and those remaining will include Welsh language and faith schools. Provision will be monitored and agreed mutually between schools and the college to avoid unnecessary competition and duplication and to ensure that the offer meets the needs of the learner, irrespective of where they live in the area. There will be agreed guidelines on entry requirements and on other measures of quality such as successful retention and completion rates.

Together we will provide a 'mixed economy' of learning opportunities in Swansea that will meet everyone's learning preferences, be that a desire to remain in school or to progress into FE to experience academic and vocational learning that will lead either to high quality employment or to Higher Education [HE] in Wales and beyond. Indeed, HE provision will also have been factored in to the changes envisaged for Swansea so that articulation between vocational provision at Level 3 and Foundation Degree/Degree programmes becomes a central part of our academic planning.

We will retain the current colleges' unique identities. The new merged college will offer 'the best of both'. It will be on two main sites as well as a number of smaller 'satellite' centres. In the short term the main sites will be Belgrave Road in Gorseinon and Tycoch Road in Swansea. In the longer term, a new centre will be opened in Parc Tawe to replace the Tycoch campus and other satellite centres. In this way, areas to the east of the city will be served more adequately than at present.

The centre in Belgrave Road will be a 'sixth form' centre and will retain its identity as 'Gorseinon Centre' or 'Gorseinon Sixth Form College'. The Swansea centre will be home for the heavily resourced vocational provision up to degree level and be open to learners of all ages. Both sites will expand to absorb additional learners who have not previously progressed to post-16 education or training or who have moved as a result of closing sixth forms.

A new campus in the city centre will become an even stronger attraction to employers and their staff, those in schools and those who are not in education, employment or training. Easy access for people living to the east of the city, as well as iconic learning environments and the most modern of technology, will add to the attraction of this centre.

All the sites operated by the new college will be of the highest standard. As efficiencies are achieved, monies can be directed to front line delivery and resources. Development that can only be dreamed of at present will become a possibility within a larger institution. This will especially be the case as financial support for capital projects from the Welsh Assembly Government [WAG] promises to reward those institutions that respond positively to the Transformation Agenda. The days of operating out of sub-standard accommodation will be long gone: overcrowding will be replaced with spacious learning and resource areas. To the public, therefore, the change they see to post-16 learning in Swansea will be for the better.

Competition will be reduced as a coherently planned provision will be available with clear pathways from entry to intermediate and advanced level courses. There will no longer be barriers to effective progression at 16 because all providers will ensure that learners are made fully aware of the options that they can follow at 14, 16 and beyond. The college and schools will be centres of excellence in particular academic and vocational disciplines. A range of newly formed 'academies' within the college will be magnets to young people and adults in the area through the choice that they offer and the very highest quality of the provision. In addition the merged college will look to build upon existing employer links in order to develop a single point of contact to facilitate productive working relationships and a responsive provision to meet skills needs locally and regionally.

By August 2010 there will be a new legal entity formed and a newly created Corporation made up in equal parts from the existing Governing Bodies of Swansea and Gorseinon Colleges. Additional Governors will be sought where there are gaps in the experience and expertise of existing Board members. Before August 2010, there will be a new Chair of the Board and a new Principal/Chief Executive Officer [CEO.] Other changes to the college will have begun but a fully-fledged new institution will have yet to be formed. During this change period it must be emphasised that there should be no detrimental impact on existing learners. It must be 'business as usual.' The new college will take shape over the ensuing 12 to 18 months so that change evolves and is managed rather than suddenly imposed. In this way, a stronger and more positive culture will be nurtured in the new organisation.



The leadership team in the merged college will focus on people during this critical period with clear, open and transparent communication and fair and consistent management. The team will demonstrate empathy as change is managed effectively within the organisation. Systems and procedures will need to be refined but in a measured manner ensuring that risk is minimised, people are consulted and that the impact on customers is minimal. Uniformity will not be imposed where it leads to mediocrity. The merged college will always aim to retain the best customer service at all times.

The new college will be the second largest in Wales with an annual turnover of nearly £40m. In times of increasing economic uncertainty and likely further cuts in the funding available from government, such a large organisation will be better able to withstand such financial pressures than a smaller unit. It will create a powerful voice and lobbying force and will be better placed to generate income from work with employers and more favourably positioned than at present to benefit from new sources of funding. It will also be more likely to prevent the level of job losses that we have already seen in our separate institutions and in the Welsh FE sector as a whole. Indeed, it is likely that we will need to grow to accommodate new learners that will attend this vibrant, exciting new college.

Our aim is that the merged college will be an even stronger organisation than its predecessors. It will retain the best features of the individual institutions and be an integral part of a new, coherent Swansea post-14 curriculum offer.

Our vision for education in Swansea is a compelling one. It is not dependent on a single transformation within the area's providers but on 'root and branch' reform of the whole provision. Merger will not, of itself, affect the changes described here but rather needs to be part of a broader change.

Uniquely, and for the first time in a generation, the opportunity has arisen to create a coherent and exciting response to the Government's call to action. We must embrace, manage and shape this change.

Alan Thomas

Chair of Governors, Swansea College




Robin Kirby

Chair of Governors, Gorseinon College

3. The Benefits for the Merger

A merged college would have increased opportunity to provide clear unambiguous options to learners with pathways extended, developed and available within the same institution.

Estyn compliments both colleges on their outstanding support for their learners. Bringing this support together, with the advantages of increased economies of scale and expertise within different areas, levels and types of curriculum delivery, should improve the range and scope of this support.

The proposed merger will create a college that can deliver:

- **For 14-19 year old learners** – a high degree of choice through providing distinctive alternatives to school based provision. This would contribute to the Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales strategy by providing an extended, diverse range of high quality, exciting and relevant learning opportunities that match the needs and aspirations of all young people in Swansea and the surrounding areas.
- **For employers** – a flexible and responsive service that can respond rapidly to employer needs, providing a very wide range of business support and training services through a single point of contact.
- **For adult learners** seeking qualifications and training – the maximum availability of adult training and development programmes that assist the WAG in achieving its workforce targets; and
- **For HE learners** – an extended HE offer for Swansea with increased progression routes and the ability to collaborate and act in partnership with HE providers.



The total number of learners will establish a substantial provider with significant scope for economies of scale and the ability to respond rapidly to initiatives and local needs. Changing demographics and adjustments to funding methodology could be absorbed more readily and may be managed more creatively.

The merged college will:

- Increase local participation rates by launching new educational and training opportunities to meet the needs of young people, adults and employers.
- Work with the local authorities and other local providers to deliver new provision targeted to reduce the proportion of local 16-18 year olds who are NEETS and develop further the education and training opportunities for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Contribute to the economic development of Swansea by improving skills and preparing people for work, there by sustaining and attracting employers in and to the area and increasing levels of entrepreneurship.
- Increase learners' opportunities to exercise choice by offering breadth within the curriculum.
- Work with HE providers to develop new local opportunities including new foundation degrees
- Have increased capacity and resources to deliver higher quality outcomes and improved success rates for learners.
- Allow the development of a single comprehensive business support and training service for local employers.
- Build on the substantial existing, high quality work-based learning and employer engagement activities of both colleges.

- Exploit ICT to develop e-learning, providing more interactive and flexible learning opportunities.
- Build on the best practice available within each college currently and extend this across all provision so all students would therefore benefit. In particular, this will develop 'best practice' in all aspects of its teaching and learning and for student support arrangements.
- Provide better progression and development opportunities for staff which would enhance professional development and improve staff recruitment and retention.
- Run an expanded and more cost effective Continuing Professional Development [CPD] training programme, building on existing Professional Development programmes in both colleges.
- Capitalise on economies of scale to improve financial efficiency and maximise value for money.

In proposing the merger, the colleges do not underestimate the challenges arising from both the changing external environment and the need to bring together two separate organisations, their structures and cultures. The existing colleges have demonstrated their capacity to improve and both have a track record of strong financial management. As a result, the Governors and Senior Managers are confident that the merged college will have the capability and capacity to meet the challenges. They are also confident that the merger will provide the deprived communities in Swansea with better education and training opportunities than would be achievable without merger.

4. The context

In the recent document, 'Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales: Delivering Skills that Work for Wales (2008),' a key priority for the WAG is to secure a workforce that is sufficiently skilled to access future high level employment opportunities. Evidence referred to in the report suggests that to help achieve this, the WAG should seek ways to more fully integrate the work of schools, FE institutions, HE institutions and other post -16 providers to transform the ways in which education and training provision is delivered.

The WAG believes that 'FE mergers significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of FE within a geographic area and promote wider access and opportunities for post-16 education and training including work based training and community provision.'

Following the publication of the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Transforming Education and Training in Wales', and in subsequent discussions with key stakeholders in the county and region, the Corporations of Swansea College and Gorseinon College commissioned a feasibility study into a proposed merger between the two colleges.

The full consultation document is based upon the findings of the feasibility study and, together with 'due diligence' enquiries about the colleges' financial, legal and Human Resources issues, will form the basis upon which the Minister will make the final decision about merger.

The Corporations have decided that the WAG's vision of transformation would be best achieved through a formal, voluntary merger between the two colleges following the dissolution of both existing Corporations and the formation of a new entity. This would provide both institutions with an equal opportunity to influence, manage and shape the new merged organisation. However, they also recognise that becoming a single FE institution for the City and County of Swansea is only part of the solution, albeit an important part, that needs to be put in place in the longer term to fully address the challenges laid down in Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales.



The case for merger outlined in this consultation document reflects the desire of both colleges to move forward on the basis of the policy and strategy outlined in the Transformation of Education for Wales agenda.

The individual sites' strong reputations for specialist areas of excellence should not only be safeguarded but enhanced.

The analysis of each college's profile shows that they complement each other's provision and services. Gorseinon College focuses its provision on academic and Level 3 courses whereas Swansea College concentrates on vocational programmes across a range of levels and the majority of the sector skills areas, with the exception of agriculture and horticulture.

For 16-18 year olds there is little difference between the colleges' levels of activity. It is for 19+ learners that Swansea College shows considerably more activity [nearly 3.5 times Gorseinon's volume.] In terms of overall volume of activity, Swansea College delivers twice the amount of FE provision of Gorseinon. If current provision was combined there would be very few obvious gaps in terms of learner pathways and progression opportunities. The pro-active nature of both colleges has ensured responses to identified needs and local priorities.

The proposed merger will create a college that can deliver a high degree of choice for the 14-19 year old learner. It will deliver a flexible and responsive service for employers with a wide range of business support and training services through a single point of contact. The availability of adult training and development programmes will be maximised to assist the WAG in achieving its workforce targets and it will provide an extended HE offer with increased progression routes.

It will also be important that an open dialogue is maintained with the City and County of Swansea's LEA and sixth form schools during and after the merger process. Nugatory competition must be minimised, but without removing the element of choice for parents and pupils who prefer the more traditional A Level route.

A merger will also give a potential for efficiencies arising from a reduction in management costs and a move towards common support services. Savings in energy, utilities and maintenance will only come about through investment in new and more efficient premises, rather than through merger per se.

Both Swansea College and Gorseinon College have one main campus and a number of satellite sites. There is scope for a rationalisation of estates that would result in reduction of operating costs, maintenance costs and capital required for backlog maintenance.

The primary driver for merger is that of improved opportunities for the learners of Swansea. That said, a merger will also enable the more cost efficient delivery of that learning.

