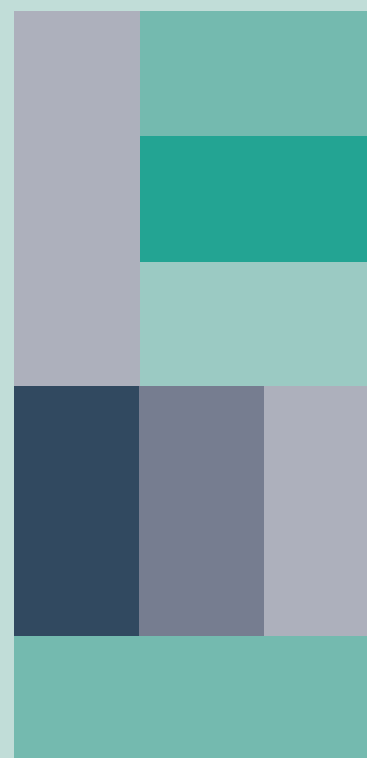
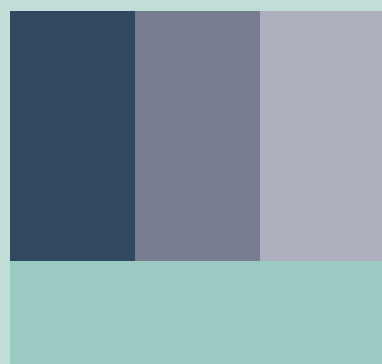
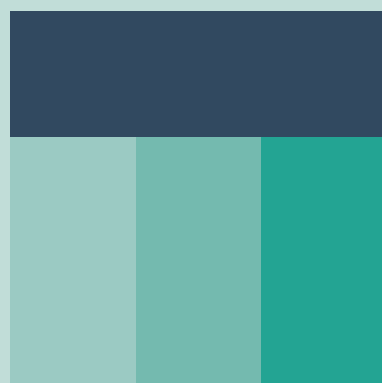


OUTCOME OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED MERGER BETWEEN

Northern College and Barnsley College

December 2025



Introduction

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the public consultation on the proposed merger of Northern College with Barnsley College currently proposed for 1 March 2026.

During the consultation period we engaged with our stakeholders and provided a range of opportunities for responses, and we are pleased that all interested parties have had the opportunity to comment.



Marie Lang
Chair of Board of Governors
Barnsley College



Mark Sanders
Chair of Board of Governors
Northern College

We have listened to the positive comments, the concerns raised, and the questions asked, and all these points will feed into our ongoing, detailed planning.

We recognise that this is a starting point, not an end. There is a lot of work to do to ensure the merger is implemented successfully for the benefit of our students, staff, employers, and the communities we serve, but we believe that this exciting new partnership is the best way to achieve our goals.

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Background

The Corporations of Northern College and Barnsley College held a joint public consultation from 17 October 2025 to 17 November 2025 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
- Students
- Trade Unions
- Schools, Colleges, Academies and Universities
- Local Authorities
- South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authorities
- Secretary of State for Education

Details of the consultation were also communicated to staff at both colleges via internal briefings.

A statutory notice of dissolution was placed in the Daily Telegraph and in the Barnsley Chronicle.

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

Responses to consultation questions

We received a total of **31** responses to the public consultations.

The distribution of the **31** respondents were as follows:

Category	Count
Staff of Northern College	4
Students at Northern College (former and current)	6
Governors of Northern College (former and current)	7
Past employees of Northern and/or Barnsley Colleges	3
Community Members	2
National Trust Volunteer (general)	6
Members of the House of Lords	2
National Trade Union Organisations	4
Local Authority	1
FE Institution	1
FE/HE Institution	1
HE Institution	1
Other	1

Note: some respondents are in more than one category.

Executive Overview

We are grateful for all responses and feedback received as part of the consultation exercise. This will help inform the future planning for the merger and the post merger institution.

Overall the consultation revealed broad support for the merger provided that Northern College's distinct identity and mission are protected.

A substantial proportion of respondents identified three elements considered important to ensure the success of the merger.

These included:

- > Dedicated senior leadership for Northern College with access to the leadership team at Barnsley College with day to day autonomy;
- > Governance arrangements to ensure that Northern Colleges voice and ethos are protected;
- > A detailed curriculum plan which demonstrates how Northern College residential adult education provision will continue.

Feedback also identified a number of positives in relation to Northern College merging with Barnsley College. **These included:**

1. Greater Financial and Organisational Stability

Several respondents—particularly Northern College staff—express support because they believe the merger will create stronger long-term stability. They see Barnsley College as a financially secure and well-resourced institution that could offer Northern College much-needed resilience.

2. Improved Opportunities for Students

Positive feedback suggests that a merger could:

- > Broaden the curriculum offer;
- > Create more progression routes;
- > Expand specialist provision by combining institutional strengths;
- > Give learners access to a wider pool of expertise, resources, and support.

This is seen as especially beneficial for adult learners and those with additional needs.

3. Enhanced Resources and Facilities

Staff mentioned the potential for improved:

- > Digital infrastructure;
- > Teaching facilities;
- > Learning spaces;
- > Access to modern college systems.

Barnsley College is seen as having a strong infrastructure from which Northern College could benefit.

4. Strengthening of Community and Regional Impact

Some comments recognise that the merger could:

- > Increase education access across South Yorkshire and more widely;
- > Strengthen outreach in disadvantaged communities;
- > Help protect Northern College's heritage and mission by ensuring sustainability within a larger organisation.

5. Improved Staffing Support and Development

Positive comments included:

- > Increased professional development opportunities;
- > More robust HR and operational support;
- > Shared expertise across both institutions.

Staff believe merging may create a more secure working environment with better long-term prospects.

6. Protection of Northern College's Mission

There was acknowledgement that if handled correctly, the merger could:

- > Preserve Northern College's unique offer;
- > Maintain adult residential education;
- > Safeguard specialist provision that may otherwise be at risk.

Key messages received from stakeholders

The Council fully supports the proposed merger and are working with Northern College and Barnsley College to sustain and safeguard the provision of education at Wentworth.

Local Authority

We trust that this ethos and partnership model will continue post-merger.

TUC Official

The proposed merger offers exciting opportunities for the organisation. The strong reputations of both institutions in their respective fields and the additional financial and organisational resilience of the combined organisations will provide the foundation for further success for learners and their communities.

Northern College Governor and HE leader

If it does not have dedicated oversight it is all too likely that this will not be a merger in any real sense but simply a takeover of facilities.

Member of the House of Lords

Northern College in particular has a distinctive life changing residential provision for working class adults and any merger should include assurances to retain this distinctive ethos and identity.

UNISON

I think the merger would be a good thing. It makes financial sense for the future of the Northern College.

Volunteer

Matters Raised

A number of concerns were raised as part of the consultation exercise and our responses to those concerns are below.

Significant concerns were raised that Northern’s unique ethos, culture, and identity could be lost.

It is acknowledged that the unique ethos, culture and identity are important. The brand and identity of Northern College will be retained post-merger.

Northern College will be integrated into Barnsley College. Northern College will be managed by a ‘Campus Principal’ who will have the responsibility for design and delivery of the curriculum and will be an expert in Adult Education.

The Northern College campus principal will be supported by the wider Barnsley College leadership team in delivering transformational experiences at Northern College on the Wentworth Castle estate.

Staff expressed anxiety about potential redundancies and concerns about being forced to work across both sites.

There are no plans to make any curriculum or support staff redundant.

There are no plans to make staff work across both sites.

Barnsley College is nationally recognised as a great employer recently being reaccruited as Investors in People Gold. The merger will improve opportunities for professional development for all staff as well as career progression opportunities through a larger organisation.

Concern that there will be a dilution of learner support post-merger.

Barnsley College has a strong reputation for providing outstanding learner support.

The merger will ensure that best practice is shared across both colleges and that learners support is not impacted negatively.

Loss of Northern’s distinct adult-only provision.

Northern College will continue to run only adult-only courses post-merger.

Concerns that residential education may be reduced or discontinued post-merger.

Residential provision with effective wraparound support will continue to be available subject to funding, and where it meets individual learners’ needs.

Community members raised concerns that without Northern’s unique offer, vulnerable adults may lose access to education, deepening inequality.

One of the benefits of merger will be the opportunity for Northern College to grow and develop the curriculum that can be offered to ensure it meets local and regional priorities and needs. Previously Northern College has not had the capacity to fully respond to these.

Both colleges are highly regarded both regionally and nationally and the inclusion of Northern College, Tailored Learning funding and its residential adult education into Barnsley College will provide further opportunity to evidence sector leading provision.

There is a need for further detail on how Northern College will be run post-merger, who would lead it and whether the governance structures would preserve its identity.

There will be a Campus Principal for Northern College post-merger who will be supported by the wider Barnsley College leadership team in delivering transformational experiences at Northern College on the Wentworth Castle Estate. The Campus Principal will be responsible for the design and delivery of the curriculum and be an expert in Adult Education.

Barnsley College will welcome membership on the board of governors for two current Northern College governors.

Volunteers stressed the importance of maintaining house tours and protecting the historic site.

House tours will continue.

Summary and next steps

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

The Corporations have taken account of all the responses and views 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 March 2026**.

The merger pages on both colleges’ websites will be kept up to date on progress.

