STRONGER TOGETHER
A vision for Bracknell & Wokingham College and Activate Learning
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STRONGER TOGETHER - A VISION FOR BRACKNELL & WOKINGHAM COLLEGE AND ACTIVATE LEARNING

1. FOREWORD FROM THE TWO CHAIRS

We are very pleased to propose an exciting new partnership to transform the post-16 educational landscape in Berkshire. By joining forces we intend to harness the strengths of our two organisations, bringing together four successful colleges in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, working together for the benefit of local learners and businesses.

This new venture would provide four colleges, their learners and staff, with new opportunities and choices, giving them access to growth and development opportunities made possible by being part of a larger group with national influence.

We will be stronger together, delivering excellent provision for learners and using the greater strength of the partnership to help our local communities to thrive and prosper.

Together we will support individuals, communities and businesses in the area. We will make best use of the opportunities in the local economy for new income and grow colleges that are even greater assets to Bracknell and Wokingham and their communities.

Having the support and backing of the communities we serve is very important to us. We would be delighted if you would read through the details of our proposed merger and let us know your thoughts.

To respond, please follow the link on page 16.

David Cook, Chairman of Governors, Bracknell & Wokingham College
Chris Jones, Chairman of Governors, Activate Learning
2. OUR ORGANISATIONS

**Bracknell & Wokingham College**

Bracknell & Wokingham College is a successful general further education college, based in Bracknell with delivery across Berkshire. Our broad spectrum of learning provision serves the needs of local learners and a growing number of businesses. Programmes are for school leavers, adult learners, university-level learners and apprentices and their employers. In total we work with approximately 1,000 full-time learners, 4,000 part-time learners and 600 business clients.

We are an aspirational, entrepreneurial college with firm roots in our community. We set high expectations of ourselves and our learners, and are on track to become recognised as an outstanding provider. A key priority is to establish a financially firm operation - a stable platform from which we can innovate and thrive. Our vision for success is encapsulated in our Vision statement:

- A vibrant place.
- Inspirational for learners.
- Passionate for success.
- A leader of innovation.
- In the heart of our community.
- An effective business

**Activate Learning**

Activate Learning is a forward-thinking education group working across further education, higher education, schools, apprenticeships and training. The further education division comprises Banbury and Bicester College, City of Oxford College and Bracknell & Wokingham’s closest neighbour, Reading College.

We aim for far-reaching and progressive change and impact through learning. With a mission to provide work-ready talent for business and transform lives through our Learning Philosophy, we are working with 12,000 further education learners and 1,250 business clients in the local region and nationally.

Our distinctive, award-winning approach to learning, our Learning Philosophy, is based on understanding how the brain works so we can create the positive environment that empowers learners to achieve high levels of motivation and overcome emotional barriers to learning.

Improvements in our core business are driven by the group’s Applied Learning Foundation, our centre for expertise and innovation in teaching, learning and assessment.

We raise aspirations by giving learners a line of sight to employment and by enabling them to carve out their individual career pathway. Our group is recognised for its success in partnering with employers to design and teach programmes that are relevant for the jobs of today and tomorrow. We have worked with them to develop a set of core attributes that will ensure that our learners are sought-after employees who add value to the businesses they join.
3. OUR STRENGTHS

Bracknell & Wokingham College and Activate Learning are effective providers, with our successes and strengths validated by our learners, business clients, partners, Ofsted, award wins and most importantly by the good results and progression destinations reached by our learners.

Both colleges are recognised by Ofsted as good providers. In their 2018 report, Ofsted ranked Activate Learning as Good and highlighted improvements in teaching, learning and assessment that have led to being awarded an increased rating for learner outcomes and progression.

In 2018 Ofsted graded Bracknell & Wokingham College as remaining Good (Grade 2). Ofsted highlighted that learners and apprentices receive good teaching and training, and achieve good results, and that all those who study or work at the college are rightly proud of the prevailing culture. This is characterised by a friendly, welcoming and very well-kept learning environment.

Both colleges have a track record of rising achievement rates over the past four years and perform above the national average.

Bracknell & Wokingham's strengths include

- Progression to university, apprenticeships and further training above the national average
- Working with one of the main UK energy suppliers to support their apprenticeship programme
- Best in Berkshire for learner satisfaction in the FE learner satisfaction survey
- 99% achievement rate for A-levels
- Employers value the strong relationships they have with the college
- Strong links with Berkshire public services

Activate Learning

- Experience of successfully managing mergers and establishing new schools
- Excellent progression to employment - 35% against the regional average of 31%
- Four year trend of increased learner success in further education
- High pass rates in English and maths
- Silver provider in the higher education Teaching Excellence Framework
- Three Association of Colleges Beacon awards in the last three years
4. OUR PROPOSAL

We propose that Bracknell & Wokingham College will become a member of Activate Learning. The target date for the change is 1 August 2018.

The corporation of Bracknell & Wokingham College will dissolve just prior to the merger and the college, along with any property, rights and liabilities, will transfer to the governing body of Activate Learning. The name Bracknell & Wokingham College will be retained and the college will continue to be the further education provider that serves the Bracknell and Wokingham areas.

The college will join Reading College and the group’s two Oxfordshire colleges, City of Oxford College and Banbury and Bicester College in a forward-thinking education group that also includes Activate Apprenticeships, Activate Business School, ATG Training, Activate International and six schools within its multi-academy trust - Theale Green School and The Bicester School; UTC Reading; UTC Swindon; UTC Oxfordshire and Bicester Technology Studio.

The combined larger group will serve some 17,000 further education learners and 1,800 employers.

Our new venture will provide learners, staff and employers in the area with new opportunities and choices, giving access to growth and development opportunities made possible by being part of a larger group with national influence.
5. WHY WE ARE JOINING FORCES

We believe that our new partnership will be in the best interests of learners in Bracknell, Reading and Wokingham and across Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Cultural fit
We share the same enterprising spirit and a clear commitment to raising learners’ aspirations, striving for excellence in teaching and learning and forging productive partnerships for the benefits of the local people and the business communities we work with. This is an excellent basis for our new partnership.

Quality
By working together there is great opportunity to share our common and individual strengths and raise the bar in terms of quality of provision. Working together we will combine strength, resources and expertise to ensure the provision of a high quality and responsive offer for residents in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Focus on teaching and learning
We will have an improved focus on teaching and learning. Building on our complementary strengths, we have the capability to deliver outstanding learner outcomes and create an exceptional learner experience. Together our focus on outstanding curriculum management will raise the quality of every aspect of teaching and learning and thereby enable the colleges to meet employer demand and learner aspirations.

More choice
Together we have the opportunity to develop, innovate and expand our curriculum. We will continually improve and evolve our learning programmes so they meet the changing needs of the workplace and equip learners for successful careers in jobs that we can’t even conceive of now.

Industry alignment
The businesses in our areas look to us to provide talented employees so they can drive business growth. Building on our existing strength in engaging employers in devising and delivering our programmes, and in successfully delivering apprenticeships, as a united force we will be even better placed to encourage and foster still closer involvement of industry in curriculum development and in engaging our learners in short-term work placements and longer term employment opportunities.

Growth
As a larger and more influential organisation we will be better able to create opportunities and build new partnerships. Our united entity will be able to grow and expand and be able to withstand the risks to continuity which we would be more exposed to as smaller organisations.

Efficiency
Our shared group support services, spanning areas such as HR, finance, IT, marketing and facilities, will mean our operations become more efficient, freeing up leaders to focus on the core business of teaching and learning.
6. IMPACT ON STAKEHOLDERS

Learners

By being stronger together we will ensure better outcomes and a better experience for our learners.

Existing and incoming learners at Bracknell & Wokingham College will transfer to the merged college and will continue on their learning programmes at the same location as before the merger.

Learners will benefit from a stronger and even more effective partnership that will provide new opportunities and choices, including opportunities for progression between campuses, access to better resourced and supported teachers and investment in even better facilities.

The new partnership will ensure strong and responsive local colleges that serve the learners, businesses and communities of Bracknell, Wokingham Borough, Reading, Oxford, Banbury and Bicester, delivering excellent provision for learners and using the greater strength of the partnership to invest in new facilities.

Learners will benefit from a greater choice of programmes and opportunities across the expanded group’s campuses at Bracknell, Reading, Banbury and Bicester. Closer working between teaching staff in all four colleges will allow them to further improve provision.

Learners across Berkshire and Oxfordshire will also benefit from greater opportunities for apprenticeships and work-based training through Activate Apprenticeships, the Activate Business School and ATG Training.

Learners will benefit from an expanded and integrated student support service. Both organisations have invested in supporting learners at potential disadvantage.

Support services are centred on the individual learner and learners receiving learning support perform on average 10% better than learners without support.

Support includes:

- Strong focus on the internal progression of existing learners
- Weekly performance measures for advanced recruitment tracking
- Professional interview training linked to career pathway discussions with learners
- Single support plans (student support and learning support) to ensure learners have a smooth transition to college
- Activate Careers – our own, independent careers advice service
Staff

For our learners, our staff are the most important part of a college. Working together we will be able to invest even more in staff development and learning technologies. Our informal sharing and knowledge exchange programme, Pass It On, won the AoC Beacon Award for Staff Development in 2015. This has now been incorporated into a broader portfolio of staff development tools, delivered by the Applied Learning Foundation (ALF).

The ALF raises standards by promoting a professional learning culture, targeted at individual personal and professional development needs. The ALF also acts as the nucleus for quality improvement for teaching, learning and assessment, leading research and providing strategic expertise in these subjects, with teachers deployed across faculties.

Employer engagement is central to developing and delivering relevant learning programmes that offer learners a direct line of sight to employment. Together we will develop a more formalised industry immersion scheme for teaching staff and similar opportunities for our group services team members. This will be supported by the delivery of training in engaging with external businesses for key teaching staff.

Working together will offer considerable opportunities for career progression for staff, in both the academic and business support areas. This will enable the best teachers and leaders to take on broader responsibilities across the wider Thames Valley area, opens up opportunities for networking, sharing of best practice and staff development.

Staff will benefit from intra-group progression, such as permanent job moves or fixed-term secondments. This is supported by a well-established programme of appraisals and reviews and training in leadership and coaching, delivered by our own Activate Business School.

Benefits for business

The government’s Post-16 Skills Plan and Industrial Strategy, informed by the findings of the Sainsbury’s Review, puts a new emphasis on the relationship between FE providers and employers. Over the last two years we have been working to connect learning programmes with industry needs by mapping out career pathways aligned to faculty, and industry sectors. Learners no longer join a course, but join the first stage in their career pathway. This model of partnering with employers, via formal and informal arrangements, offers learners opportunities to engage in real-life projects and build relationships with potential future employers.

Together we can provide an even better service for businesses seeking apprentice provision. New data from Thames Valley Berkshire LEP shows that only 6% of Berkshire workforces have apprentices, a smaller proportion than in any surrounding LEP area and Berkshire has the lowest employer awareness of apprenticeships at 36% of employers.

Bracknell & Wokingham College is already the market leader amongst FE providers in Berkshire but as a whole, FE providers in the county only took 27% of all apprenticeships starts in 2015/16. That gives us huge potential for growth.

Activate Apprenticeships is the apprenticeship division of Activate Learning, supporting over 1,250 businesses every year. Colleges in our group benefit from Activate Apprenticeships’ 130 FTE employees, dedicated to delivering and managing apprenticeship programmes and operating in 12 sectors: automotive, business, care, construction, digital, education, engineering, furniture, hair, hospitality, logistics and sport.

The apprenticeship levy is attracting more large employers to treat their apprenticeship programmes as a true strategic investment, and this gives us more opportunities to work with large employers in our local area. With our national delivery capability, clients who need support across the UK can be seriously considered.

Community

Activate Learning and Bracknell & Wokingham College both have strong track records of supporting the needs of the local community and have excellent local knowledge and stakeholder involvement. We understand the importance of building strong relationships with local authorities in the communities.

We work with over 150 schools, delivering careers advice, providing information about college options and offering a dedicated transition service for school leavers.

As a multi-academy trust (MAT) sponsor for five schools, Activate Learning Education Trust includes three university technical colleges (UTCs), a studio school and a comprehensive academy. Additional schools, including Theale Green School and UTC Heathrow are expected to join the MAT in 2018.
7. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

February to June - Due diligence is carried out and teams from both organisations work together on the plans for the new group.

- **MARCH 2018**
  - Public consultation to hear your views.

- **APRIL 2018**
  - The two organisations consider the views received.

- **MAY 2018**
  - Results of the public consultation are published.

- **JUNE 2018**
  - The governing bodies of Activate Learning and Bracknell & Wokingham College vote.

- **AUGUST 2018**
  - Bracknell & Wokingham College joins Activate Learning.

8. VIEWS OF STAKEHOLDERS

We welcome all views about our proposal and we will be formally inviting the following stakeholders to respond:

- FE and sixth form colleges
- Schools and academies
- Local authorities
- Members of Parliament
- Education and Skills Funding Agency
- FE Commissioner
- Higher Education Funding Council for England
- Local enterprise partnerships
- Our key partners and employers
- Secretary of State for Education

As part of the consultation process, we would also welcome views from any of the following:

- Sixth Form College Association
- Association of Colleges
- Employer representative groups
- Employee representative groups
- Ofsted
- Staff
- Learners
- Parents
- Third sector organisations
- Universities
9. HOW TO HAVE YOUR SAY

To respond, please provide your comments by 27 April 2018 by clicking here or visiting www.strongtogether.info

The results of the consultation will be published on our college websites by 31 May 2018. You can request a copy of the report to be sent to you free of charge by visiting www.strongtogether.info.