



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Lews Castle College

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean  
Colaiste a' Chaisteil



North Highland College  
University of the  
Highlands and Islands



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
West Highland College

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean  
Colaiste na Gàidhealtachd an Iar

# Building a Better Future Together

A consultation on the proposed merger of

**Lews Castle College UHI**

**North Highland College UHI**

**West Highland College UHI**

## Have Your Say

We would welcome your views and comments on our proposals outlined in this document.

**Please submit your views using the online form on the website**

[www.rural-islands-merger.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.rural-islands-merger.uhi.ac.uk)

## Building a Better Future Together

The governing bodies of Lews Castle College UHI, North Highland College UHI and West Highland College UHI are exploring an exciting new strategic partnership through merger.

Through this partnership, it is proposed to create a new single college of scale within the University of the Highlands and Islands that builds on the excellence and expertise of the current three colleges, providing outstanding, sustainable tertiary education, skills, research and innovation for the rural Highlands in Lochaber, Lochalsh, Wester Ross, Sutherland, Caithness and Easter Ross, and the island communities of Skye, the Inner Hebrides, and the Outer Hebrides.

Emerging from the fallout of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic as well as responding to the climate emergency the new college is envisaged to create a step-change for the rural and island communities it serves. It will make a significant contribution to a green recovery supporting all the innovation and educational opportunities this presents.

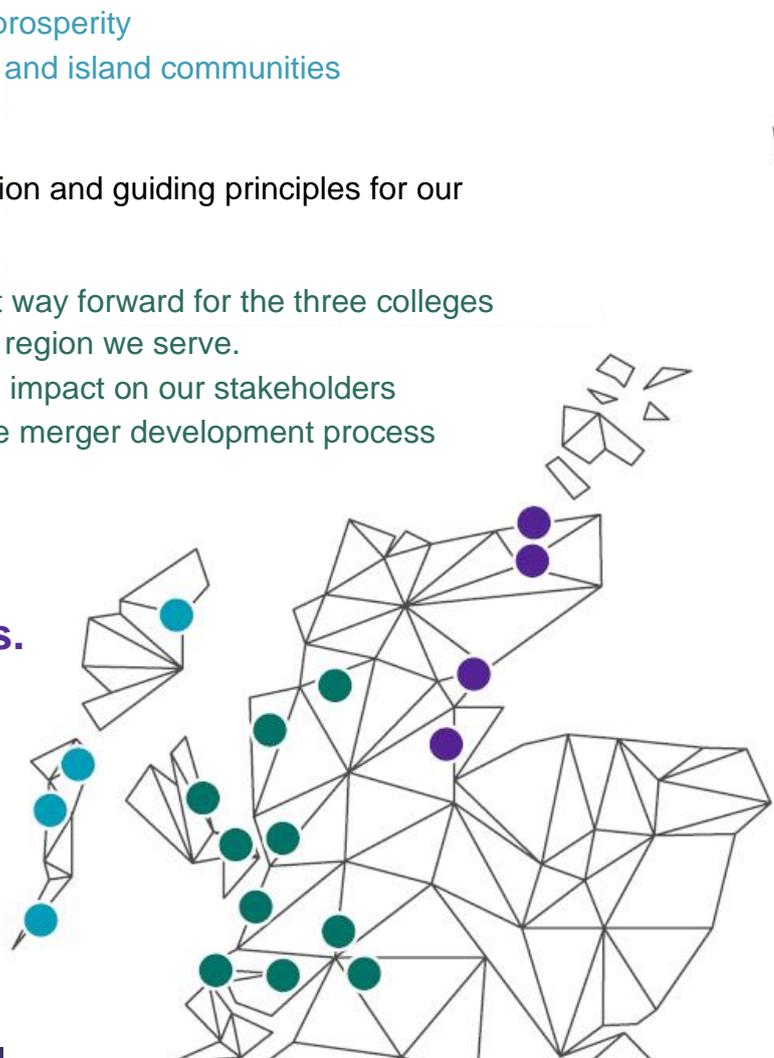
By coming together, we seek to create

- A new college of scale
- that will be an anchor institution
- supporting our economic, employment and skills infrastructure,
- and that is critical for a sustainable and thriving future
- and long-term economic prosperity
- for the people in our rural and island communities

This document sets out our ambition and guiding principles for our proposed merger, and explains

- why we think it is the right way forward for the three colleges and the communities and region we serve.
- how this development will impact on our stakeholders
- how you can input into the merger development process

**We welcome your views.**



## Introduction from the Chairs of Boards of Management

In early 2021, our colleges commissioned a strategic review into our long-term strategic future. This review was undertaken to ensure that our colleges would be in the best possible position for the future to ensure our long-term sustainability.

Our colleges are situated across large and diverse rural, coastal and island areas, with some of the sparsest population in the UK. Our rural and island communities all require more infrastructure and inward investment to help secure a strong and prosperous future for our people and to attract new talent into our region

Faced with the impacts of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the global climate crisis, our role as colleges is to deliver world-class learning, skills, research and innovation which equip our people for a sustainable future in a changing world. We know that our communities need us to be the best we can be to help them be strong and resilient, thrive and prosper.

We now have before us a once in a generation opportunity to bring together our three organisations to form a new college based on a partnership of equals, within the wider partnership of the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Through the merger of Lews Castle, North Highland and West Highland UHI colleges, we will be able to pool expertise, resources and our extensive networks to develop a single college of scale that can fuel economic growth and renewal in a unique way for our region whilst preserving local focus and provision in each of our communities and ensuring we connect them beyond national boundaries.

We are building on three individually successful colleges, each with their own strong brand and identity. By coming together, we can ensure a positive and more sustainable future for our colleges. As a single larger organisation, we can better support the economic and social renewal of our often fragile rural and island communities. Together, we will be better able to protect, develop and grow tertiary education, skills, research and innovation, and unlock new opportunities for our region we currently are unable to achieve as individual small colleges.

We are confident that this proposal to develop a new college is the best way forward to benefit our students, our staff, our partnerships and our communities, building a better future together where we can deliver on our ambition to support local, regional, national and international opportunities.

We welcome your views on this proposal and look forward to hearing from you.



Archie Macdonald, Chair  
Lews Castle College UHI



Robbie Rowantree  
North Highland College UHI



Derek Lewis, Chair  
West Highland College UHI



## Our future re-imagined – a unique opportunity

Together, we have an exciting, bold and ambitious vision.

This new collaborative and inclusive partnership of our three colleges will create a new arc of learning and innovation for all of rural Highland, Skye and the Western Isles:

- A new college of scale and impact within UHI, which builds on existing local excellence and expertise to create a step-change for tertiary learning, skills, research, enterprise and innovation
- An expert voice for our remote rural and islands communities, within UHI and beyond, rooted in our communities, but with regional, national and international reach and impact by harnessing the strategic capacity of a single organisation

In a post-Brexit and post-Covid world, tertiary education will play an even greater role in supporting economic regeneration, workforce reskilling, the changing needs of employers and the careers aspirations of learners.

By forming this new partnership through merger, we will be creating an organisation that has the resilience, resources, talent and expertise to meet the challenges of rebuilding our region's economy and help achieve the ambitions of individuals and our communities.

Serving circa 9000 students, 600 staff, across 19 locations, with a combined turnover of circa £24M, we will be able to deliver real and better benefits for our students, staff and communities.

By coming together, we will

- Bring improved equity of opportunity to our people living in the most fragile remote rural and island communities in Scotland and the UK
- Act as a catalyst for change and we will work with existing and new partners to provide a more coherent and integrated offer, driving economic recovery through upskilling, reskilling, and applied research, innovation and enterprise
- Seek to unlock new opportunities of the natural, social, human and economic capital in our unique areas, to help achieve strategic development and investment through ambitious collaborations and projects we are currently unable to achieve individually

## Why merge?

Lews Castle, North Highland and West Highland UHI colleges experience very similar challenges and opportunities in their rural, coastal and island contexts.

Our colleges are rooted in our communities, delivering education in a distributed way. We have an alliance built on very closely aligned vision and values.

By creating a single organisation, we will be more resilient than the three colleges on their own

- We want to provide a better deal for our students and those seeking to benefit from education, training and skills we offer, by providing more and enhanced learning opportunities
- We want to expand the opportunities available to our staff and our communities, by securing a better long-term future and strategy for our colleges in our region
- We are ambitious for our region, and we can deliver a new, dynamic and innovative organisation that will deliver better to our communities and beyond.

Securing a better, more sustainable future for our three colleges will create

- **A stronger, sustainable and enhanced local curriculum offer**

Each of the three colleges will benefit from the strength, scale and expertise of the whole organisation whilst developing and delivering a tertiary education and training offer which truly responds to local needs. With opportunities for collaboration and enhanced quality of learning and teaching, we will be able to create in each of our locations an expanded, more flexible curriculum offer and more opportunities for the local communities we serve.

- **Enhanced capacity for engagement and partnerships**

Our governance model will enhance existing local stakeholder engagement, ensure local priorities are met, and new opportunities are developed which benefit the whole region. The new college will enhance our capacity at all levels of our organisation and be better able to provide thought leadership for our communities, by strengthening existing engagement and creating new partnerships.

- **Better opportunities for staff**

Becoming part of a larger organisation increases opportunities for both academic and professional staff to share knowledge and expertise to consolidate and enhance our best practice approach, create new jobs and professional development opportunities, including secondments and special projects, research and scholarly activity. We will build on the excellence of our three individual colleges to implement sector-leading assurance and enhancement processes for the whole organisation to advance the skills of our staff to deliver an outstanding experience for each and every learner.

- **A better organisation**

Building on economies of scale and sharing resources and expertise, we will be building an organisation with better capacity, service provision and facilities and infrastructure benefitting all. With 19 distributed centres of learning, we will seek to invest in our estates and infrastructure to secure a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment responding to the needs of our rural and island communities and economies.

- **A stronger financial future**

With a combined income of circa 24M per annum, the merged college partnership will be much better placed to weather any future changes in public funding. It will provide a robust and sustainable financial base to maximise opportunities and resource to invest in an excellent experience for our learners and communities.

- **An enhanced response to regional and national priorities**

The proposed merger creates a new organisation that delivers locally, but will plan strategically across the region it serves, contributing to the region's economic recovery and development plans as a key enabler. The new organisation will be a strong and positive partner within the University of the Highlands and Islands. As a larger scale organisation, the new college will be better placed to respond to national skills priorities, initiatives, and strategies. Our combined resource base and leadership capacity will make it possible for us to act as early adopters and leaders for the new and emerging priorities in Scotland, including technical and professional education, distributed learning and place-based research, innovation and enterprise.

## Leadership and Governance

In developing and consulting on the plans and full business case for a merged college, we are committed to three fundamental guiding principles which will underpin all our planning and development work:



### **Building for a better future**

Enhancing resilience and management and leadership capacity to focus on growth and investment



### **Doing more, not less**

Enabling more innovation, development and leadership to benefit our students, staff and communities



### **Remaining local**

Creation of a merged college which balances the benefits of a single organisation and strategy with local management and operations, ensuring we maintain a strong presence in our local communities

In developing our merger plans for a single new college, we will consider leadership and governance structures to ensure appropriate local and strategic leadership is in place. We will develop governance structures which will reflect best practice in corporate governance whilst providing the opportunity to ensure local needs are responded to.

In creating a new single Board of Management and a new single executive team for the new college, we will take great care that the new college continues to meet the needs of our communities and their diverse contexts, whilst securing all the benefits of jointly pursuing improvement and excellence in delivery across all our localities and operations. The details of the new Board and the anticipated management structure of the new merged college are currently under development and will form part of a further formal consultation on the full merger business case.

The three colleges, via the Partnership Board overseeing the merger development process, have made three key early commitments to assure the above three guiding principles:

- A clear commitment that there will be no compulsory redundancies as a direct result of the proposed merger, as well as a commitment to work positively with our staff and Trade Unions throughout the process. Any new organization will be signatory to the National Recognition and Procedures Agreement for colleges.
- An agreement that that any savings identified and resulting from the proposed merger will be reinvested to strengthen teams at all levels to enable innovation and leadership
- There is no intention for any form of centralization, and a key development will be the introduction of three local advisory committees

## Local Advisory Committees

To ensure a continuing strong local voice and to oversee the implementation of the merger in each locality, the new Board will operate three local Advisory Committees, one for each of the founding colleges.

Membership will be typically drawn from a wide range of local stakeholders, including local employers, public service agencies and local authorities, schools, community groups and residents.

These committees are intended to provide an effective way of ensuring 'the right learning in the right place', local accountability for the quality of the learning experience and the delivery of strong outcomes for learners, as well as ensuring that each college is effectively linked into relevant local developments, strategic opportunities, priority projects, and partnerships.

The local advisory committees will have a Chair and Vice-Chair who are members of the main college Board. This will ensure that the new college continues to meet the needs of all its communities.

## Our People

The skill, expertise and enthusiasm of our people will be critical to the success of the new College. We recognise that the quality of the college's provision is very much dependant on the skills of the staff employed, which in turn depends on effective training and development. The College will be fully committed to ongoing investment in its entire staff through training and development. It is our view that the merger will create greater opportunities for staff career development and progression in a substantially larger organisation than would be the case in separate organisations.

Clearly, the rights of staff under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employment) regulations will apply to those staff transferring. The merged College will be committed to full consultation with recognised trade unions and staff covering all staffing and structural issues relevant to the new College.

The new College structure, organisation and People Strategy will be developed in consultation with staff representatives to ensure that we meet both the needs of our learners, and our staff.

An early and ongoing priority will be to promote openness and transparency through communication and consultation across a number of workstreams which have been set up for this purpose, including a trade union engagement forum.

The new college will develop a united ethos and culture focussing on shared values and behaviours, encouraging people to work together for the benefit of our learners and to make a positive difference for our communities.

## Our Shared Vision and Purpose

<b>Vision</b>	To be an anchor institution for the region – a connected, flexible, distributed and sustainable learning organisation, opening doors to a world of opportunity
<b>Mission</b>	We will connect rural and island Scotland, pioneering distinctive education and research opportunities to enable our students and communities to shape their futures in a changing world.
<b>Values</b>	<p><b>Trust</b> We take pride in what we do. We are highly trusted by our students, our staff and our partners. We are recognised for our leadership and dedication to deliver more for all whom we serve.</p> <p><b>Integrity</b> We take responsibility for all we do, assuring full transparency and accountability. We ensure that people are at the heart of everything we do and that our organisation operates in collaboration and openness, with an ethos of dignity and respect for everyone.</p> <p><b>Excellence</b> We are ambitious for our learners, our staff, our college and our communities. We drive innovation. We aim to be sector leaders and benchmark our performance on national and international standards.</p>
<b>Behaviours</b>	<p><b>Be Bold</b> We are confident in our ability to transform tertiary education for our region, connecting individuals and communities to learning and education</p> <p><b>Be Agile</b> We encourage new ways of thinking and support our people to explore new ways of thinking and doing things. We respond and adapt quickly through innovation</p> <p><b>Be collaborative</b> People working together are at the heart of everything we do. We value our ability to collaborate through a diverse workforce, where everyone's voice matters.</p>

## The Benefits of Joining Together

The main benefits that merger would create for our students are:

### Benefits for our students

- We will develop a more consistent and sustainable curriculum year on year
- We will optimise the range of curriculum we offer to maximise access and opportunities for our students
- We will have a greater commonality of approach, consistency and quality of what we offer, wherever a student chooses to study
- We will improve the social aspect of our college and university life and our student health and wellbeing as we increase the number of students on each course – whether this is delivered through local face-to-face or online means
- We will enhance the experience of students through intelligent investment in technology and equity of opportunity across the new college
- Student representation and voice will be consolidated and stronger, ensuring students are at the heart of everything we do
- Students will have a more equitable learner journey and experience, delivering the best place to study in our region



### Benefits for our staff

- Being part of stronger, larger teams, we will increase the flexibility for staff
- We will reduce the duplication of task and share workloads more effectively
- We will increase job satisfaction by creating more time for colleagues to focus on what matters most
- There will be greater job security as we develop and deliver a more sustainable curriculum
- Our staff will be able to specialise rather than being stretched across multiple areas, leading to better career progression
- We will have greater access to specialist advice and support, whether that be academic or professional
- A larger organisation will increase opportunities for doing new and enhanced things – with more scope and increased capacity for research, innovation and enterprise for our staff to get involved in
- A larger college partner in UHI will ensure that the regional approach better matches the needs of our rural and island communities, enabling staff to make a better difference
- Delivering these benefits will improve the health and wellbeing of our staff.



- Being a large regional employer and workplace of choice, we will secure better talent attraction and retention, delivering the best place to work in our region

### Benefits for our communities

- We will invest in our estates, our partnership with business and community, our learning centres and our specialist infrastructure assets that matter most and deliver the greatest benefit to businesses and our communities
- We will increase the impact we have by retaining high quality jobs locally and reduce the “brain drain”
- We will increase our curriculum offering, encouraging those who would have travelled away, in particular our young people, to stay in our rural and island communities to study
- We will be able to offer enhanced employability skills, ensuring access to a local workforce and skills pipeline matching local demand and need
- We will be able to offer more responsive sectoral provision, specialist research and entrepreneurial opportunities, creating new opportunities for inward investment opportunities into our rural and island areas
- With the enhanced capacity of a larger organisation, we will have the opportunity to relaunch our offer and partnership working with our partners in the public, private and third sectors, providing talent, expertise and leadership to help our communities emerge from Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic stronger and support an inclusive and green recovery
- We will be able to help create a new arc of prosperity, empowering rural and island communities in Highland and the Western Isles in becoming the best places to live in our region.



## Our Colleges



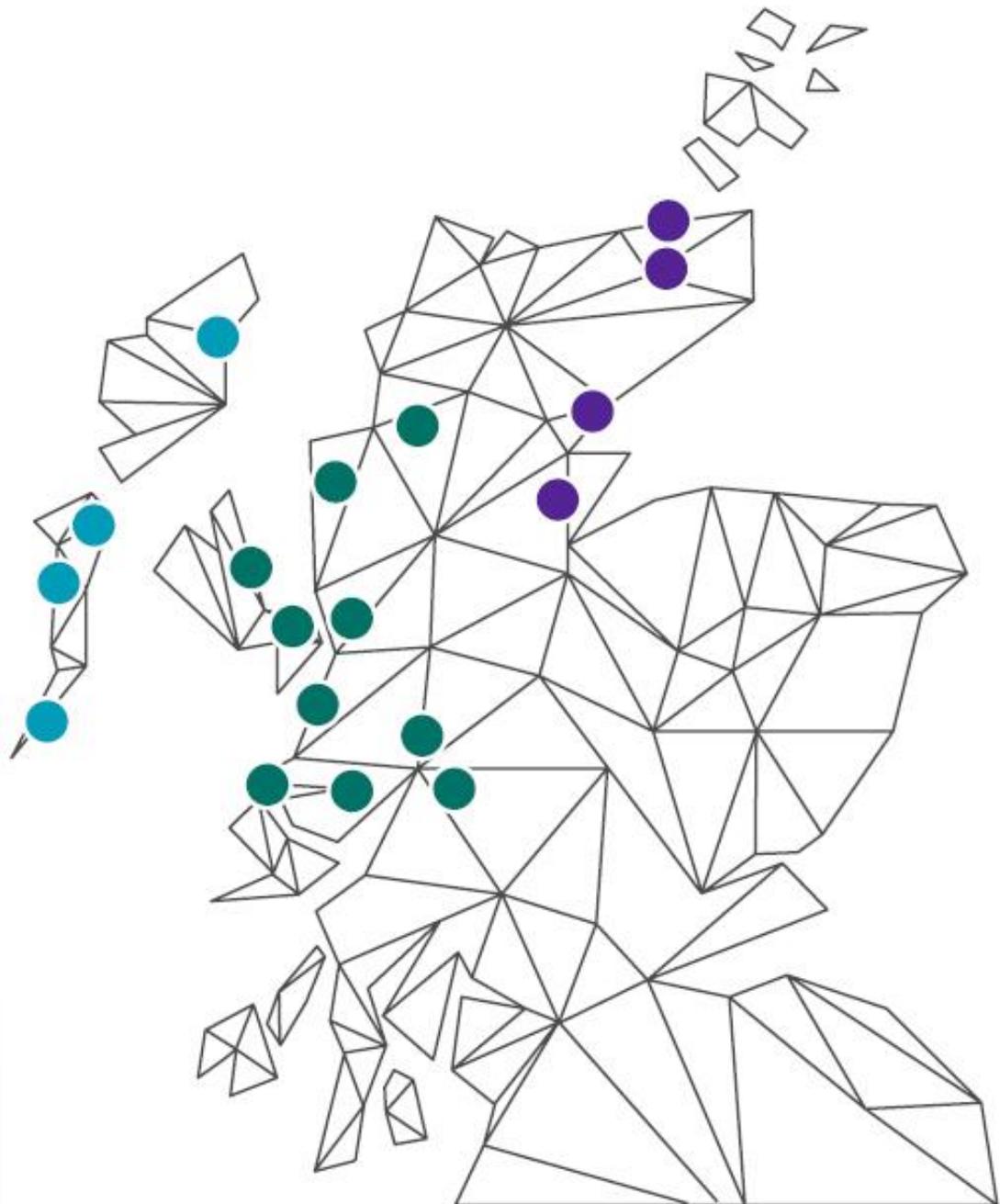
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Colleges Learner Activity Profile Academic Year 2019-20					Share of UHI Learner Activity Academic Year 2019-20	
	 Lews Castle College UHI	 North Highland College UHI	 West Highland College UHI	Combined Total of three colleges	UHI Total	Three colleges combined share of UHI Total
Further Education Credits*	4,160	11,936	7,079	23,175	109,529	21%
Higher Education FTE**	266	394	246	907	6,840	13%
Post-Graduate FTE**	72	49	2	123	714	17%
FA*** MA/SVQ ***	9 71	29 346	42 59	80 476	465 3,637	17% 13%
Total number of enrolments****	<b>2,111</b>	<b>3,486</b>	<b>3,188</b>	<b>8,785</b>	<b>38,771</b>	<b>23%</b>

\* Credit = 1 Credit equates to 40hours of learning (funding unit for Further Education)

\*\* FTE = Full Time Equivalent Student (funding unit for Higher Education)

\*\*\* FA/MA/SVQ = Foundation Apprenticeships/Modern Apprenticeships/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (number of enrolments on work-based vocational learning qualifications)

\*\*\*\* total number of enrolments = number of student enrolments in that academic year, irrespective of level of study, attendance mode or funding mode

## How will we create the new college?

We are currently considering the options available which would best deliver a new merged college. This is currently part of our 'due diligence' work and will form part of further consultation on the full merger business case later in 2022.

## What will the new college be called?

As part of the merger process, the governing bodies will consider a new name for the merged college that is reflective of the three founding colleges within the new organisation.

However, students, staff and stakeholders value their local colleges which are also part of the UHI partnership and regional brand.

We will consult further on whether the three constituent colleges should continue to operate under their own names and brand identities within the UHI partnership brand, i.e. UHI Lews Castle, UHI North Highland and UHI West Highland, or move to a new single brand.

As part of this first consultation, we invite you to give us your view on your preferred approach to brand and name of the new college.

## How we will consult

Given the transformational change envisaged to deliver this proposed merger, we are fully committed to a transparent and inclusive information, engagement and consultation process, to ensure all students, staff, trade unions, partners and stakeholders can get involved and have their say.

As we develop our full proposals, we are inviting comments to inform our discussions and plans for the future of tertiary education, training and research for the people of rural and coastal West and North Highlands, the island communities of Skye, the Inner Hebrides, and the Outer Hebrides.

Your views and feedback will help influence and shape the development of our full merger proposal and business case. This will be subject to a separate public consultation process later in 2022. Subject to the outcomes of these consultations, agreement by each college board, and the Scottish Government., the target vesting date for the new college could be in early 2023.

### November 2021

- Due diligence work to begin
- Consultation on outline business case
- Working groups established and work streams identified

### February 2022

- Publication of responses

### April 2022

- Consultation on full merger business case

### August 2022

- Scottish Government consultation period

### November 2022

- Parliamentary consultation process

### January 2022

- Development of full merger business case

### March 2022

- Approval by College Boards of Management of full merger business case.

### July 2022

- Consider responses
- Finalise merger business cases
- Publication of responses
- College Boards of Management approve submission to SFC

### September 2022

- Implementation planning and delivery

### January 2023

- Proposed vesting date

We are seeking views at this early stage of our development to ensure that our plans secure the best way forward to ensure best value, sustainability and opportunity, as well as maximum local benefit.

We are seeking feedback from all who have an interest in the future of our three colleges, but we are specifically looking forward to hearing views from

- Our current students and their parents/guardians
- Our Staff
- Trade Unions
- Local employers and business organisations
- Schools and Education Directorates in the Highlands and the Western Isles
- Enterprise, economic development and key sector agencies and funders for the Highlands and Islands
- Community and Third Sector organisations in the Highlands and Islands
- Partner organisations within the University of the Highlands and Islands
- Local Authorities in the Highlands and Islands
- Elected members of Scottish and UK Parliaments for the Highlands and Islands
- National skills and qualification authorities, and college and university sector bodies in Scotland, and the Scottish Funding Council

## How you can respond to this consultation

We would welcome your views and comments on our proposals outlined in this document.

**Please submit your views using the online form on the website**

[www.rural-islands-merger.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.rural-islands-merger.uhi.ac.uk)

We are holding a series of online consultation meetings for students, staff and stakeholders whilst this consultation is open.

<b>Staff consultation meetings</b>	Tuesday, January 11; Wednesday January 12 and Tuesday, January 18.
<b>Public consultation meetings</b>	Tuesday, January 18; Wednesday, January 26 and Monday, February 7
<b>Student consultation meetings</b>	Friday, February 4 and Wednesday, February 9

**This first consultation closes on 15 February 2022.**

A summary of responses received will be published on [www.rural-islands-merger.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.rural-islands-merger.uhi.ac.uk)