

Student Meeting

with Elaine McMahon Interim Principal & CEO of Kensington & Chelsea College (KCC)

and Garry Phillips CEO of Ealing Hammersmith & West London College (EHWLC)

18th December 2017 KCC Kensington Centre

How much was the College sold for?

The College was sold to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) for £25,350,000 in Summer 2016, with payments made in tranches:

- Completion of sale and leaseback – 50% £12,675,000
- Summer 2017, 12 months from completion – 33% £8,365,500
- End of leaseback period – 17% -£4,309,500

EHWLC have made a commitment to retaining provision in North Kensington and do want to stay in the area. We sent an open letter to the RBKC asking to extend the lease of the Kensington Centre on Wornington Road for 10 years. We will share with you a copy of the open letter to the Borough (RBKC).

We would like reassurance that no staff would be made redundant or receive pay cuts if the merger takes place.

- If we do not merge and KCC stands alone it will be faced with having to make cuts as it would not be sustainable. If KCC merges then we will not need to make these cuts.
- The cycle of business means that to generate income there are costs and if there is no income cuts will need to be made.
- Colleges who don't get enough income have to make staff cuts, merger will stabilise colleges' positions – therefore merger should not create redundancies.
- KCC are already operating on minimal staff therefore we want to retain as many staff as possible.
- KCC's provision is complimentary to EHWLC's and not in competition e.g. EHWLC want to offer higher level (4) provision to some courses which KCC do not offer which will give students progression routes. We recognise that not many FE colleges in London offer Access courses.

Many students applied to courses at KCC in the summer but were told they were cancelled in September.

- Yes courses were advertised over the summer but some were cancelled due to not enough people signing up for them. We do however recognise that the enrolment process and contacting students on a timely basis could be managed better and are working on changing and

improving processes so to avoid any misunderstandings in the future. We are currently working with EHWLC to improve various processes throughout the College.

- Last year the College made substantial cuts but were able to review and reinstate some of these courses over the summer.

If the Kensington Centre were to close I would struggle to travel elsewhere and also not many FE colleges in London offers the particular course I am studying.

- As we had mentioned earlier we have made a request to the Borough for an extension to our lease at Wornington Road as we would like to stay there and to jointly fill the building since it is currently underutilised. We recognise that KCC offer many specialist courses that are not available elsewhere and would like to continue and grow these provisions.
- It should be noted that many students travel from far afield to attend these courses so they are not just local.

When will the request for the extension for the lease of the Kensington Centre be approved?

- It is beneficial that the FE Commissioner is coming in the New Year to review the merger process and the 'pause' will give us time to reflect on some things. The FE Commissioner and his team will also help liaise with the Borough with regards to achieving a positive outcome for the College's future. We welcome and recognise the FE Commissioner's review of the merger and his recommendations and believe that it is the right thing to do at this time.

How is current dialogue going with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea?

- We are still in negotiations with the Borough with regards to our request to an extension of the lease at Kensington and have engaged Savilles property developers to help negotiate on our behalf. We have not had any firm responses and agreement to negotiations from the Borough as yet.
- Note that KCC owns its Chelsea Building.

We have been informed that there was a Governing Body paper which proposed making 50 staff members redundant – can you explain this?

- This may have been interpreted from information on different financial business modelling. It is important for the College to have different business models based on all possible scenarios whether merger or no merger. The reason a college has to make redundancies may not be merger related. Merger can result in growth and increased employment/career opportunities.

What benefits are there for staff from merger?

Staff at EHWLC benefit from various incentives:

- Staff loyalty scheme Perk Box which allow discounts from many retailers
- Staff will receive a 1% pay award this year based on good performance
- Development schemes for managers
- Literacy and numeracy for all staff L2 English and Maths qualification
- The College have helped the development of 10 Beacon teachers, 15 Google innovators, 58 members of staff achieving Google qualifications.

Our Access lecturers are excellent at what they do. Can you confirm that their jobs will not be affected?

- There will be no risks to any staff from the merger process. If there is demand for subjects they will continue, however if they do not recruit they will be at risk as in any circumstances.

We believe that there is a lot of interest in many subjects and therefore do not understand why they would fail to recruit – the Marketing department are told what courses to promote by management. We are disappointed that students were not informed until September that some courses were not running, we would expect a more reliable and transparent process.

- We agree that there should be better marketing of courses and with that improved and better management of recruitment. We would suggest that the Marketing and Student Services teams should meet with you the students to talk about a marketing strategy and will arrange this for the new year.

Why don't you ask what students want to study?

- As per the answer above we agree this is a good idea and we will arrange for students to meet with the Marketing team in the new year. Student ideas can contribute to the Marketing Strategy but we also need to look at Marketing intelligence, funding arrangements, travel to learn patterns as well as locality and local secondary schools. Working with the new Marketing department from WLC has already helped KCC.

As a result of the late changes in courses, this affected my timetable and therefore I needed to reorganise work plans to fit this in, I had to speak with my tutor to ask for flexibility – I would have preferred this to be avoided.

- We are pleased that your tutor was able to give you the flexibility and work out a plan to suit. As mentioned before we recognise the need to improve marketing and recruitment processes to avoid informing late changes in the future. We would advise that in these circumstances that

students are able to talk to their tutors to ask for flexibility and to agree a plan that would suit them.

We are not informed of any College developments or knew anything about the merger until now.

- We recognise that the sharing of information may not have been managed properly. There are College student governors and student representatives here at KCC who should be inviting other interested students to meetings for college updates and student feedback/discussions.

Does EHWLC provide provision for students with special needs?

- Yes EHWLC does, which includes the provision of sign language for adults and young adults who are deaf or mute. Students with needs are able to study whatever course they wish, they are assessed and depending on their ability are each given a care plan. We have a 95% success rate for special needs students who go on to gain successful employment – we were actually nominated for a national award for this. We also recognise that KCC are presently not equipped to offer such support for students with special needs and that there is a need in the locality.

What would you change to improve 100% standards for students?

- We need to have broader and wider engagement with student body - management to meet with Student Governors and representatives on a regular basis, from the start of the year. We will look at ways to strengthen the student voice through regular meetings.

A previous Principal spent a lot of money on International business and nothing was gained from this – why have lessons not been learnt a year on?

- Many improvements have been made by management over the past year and there has been a move away from past errors. Under the leadership of the previous interim Principal and leadership team the College made an 8% improvement in success/achievement rates which was a significant leap. These successes were achieved from combined efforts starting from initial Board decisions, senior leadership implementation, managers driving changes and teaching staff responding to them.

Why has the government made cuts to colleges? Why can't we stand up to them?

- As college leaders we have been campaigning in various ways, including staying active on social media and tweeting. For example, the Government made funding cuts to ESOL a couple of years ago, 140 principals signed an open letter to the Prime Minister which helped to secure funding. The funding scene constantly changes and we may get more money in the future because of skills shortage.

Why did anyone not think of the consequences when the Kensington Centre was sold to the Borough?

- We cannot comment on the decisions that a previous leadership team made, what is important is to move forward and concentrate on the building's future. We want to keep provision in North Kensington and KCC is paying £1.1m per year to the Borough for tenancy of the Wornington Road building and therefore, we need a long term solution and estates strategy. EHWLC faced its own problems some years ago as it was spending its own cash reserves to pay staff and not generating the income, now this has turned around. We agree there are lessons to be learnt from the past.

When will final merger decisions take place?

- The merger has been paused until April 2018. This is a positive step for various reasons as it allows us time to take a step back, listen to staff and students and to assess things, the Kensington Centre building has not been secured yet so until then we cannot have a 3 year strategic plan. The plan for merger is definite as if we don't merge KCC will no longer be financially viable and as it goes on longer in its current (non-merged) state it will put more strain on finances and will impact on students.

We now understand things a little more about the College's circumstances and the merger instead of just hearing what has been reported by other sources. We just want clarity of the facts and want to help with getting the right messages out there – it would have been good if we had these talks much earlier.

- We agree with this. It is important to be aware that there is a lot of fake news out there and managing this properly is needed e.g. the college is not closing which is what many people have been led to believe. It would be useful if you as student representatives help to get the messages and what we have talked about today out to other students.

[Final word from student] ***We are prepared to help with this.***