

Somerset College Merger Creates One of the UK's Largest Education Groups

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A merger between Bridgwater and Taunton College and Strode College has formed the University College Somerset (UCS) College Group, which is now among the larger educational bodies in the UK. The move, which aims to bolster educational and employment prospects across the region, is expected to play a key role in improving Somerset's social mobility and economic outlook.

Cllr Bill Revans, leader of Somerset Council and a former teacher, expressed his enthusiasm for the merger, highlighting how many of the county's brightest students often leave for better opportunities elsewhere. He said, "Those who thrive academically in our system often leave Somerset and go off to employment or education elsewhere. Those that remain have their opportunities held back, regardless of potential."

Revans pointed to limited aspiration as a key factor in Somerset's challenges with social mobility and economic disparity. He described the merger as a "bold and ambitious step forward," one that will help the county better capitalise on employment opportunities in industries such as energy and aerospace, with major local projects like Hinkley Point, Gravity, and Leonardo offering promising prospects for the future.

The merger enables the newly formed UCS College Group to take a more unified approach to serving Somerset, aiming to prepare the region for future economic and workforce needs. The group has pledged to maintain a strong local presence, with each college, Bridgwater, Taunton, Cannington, and Strode continuing to serve its community with dedicated leadership and support.

"Importantly, UCS College Group has made clear its commitment to remain locally rooted," Revans emphasised, adding that this merger is more than just an administrative change; it is a significant investment in the future of Somerset's people and places.

The formation of UCS College Group represents a strategic effort to address persistent issues of educational access and regional inequality, while fostering a more cohesive and future-focused education system. With its focus on community involvement and preparation for large-scale employment opportunities, the merger is poised to have a lasting impact on the region's development and economic prosperity.