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# GM FURTHER EDUCATION INNOVATION PROGRAMME

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## Invitation to Tender - Project Evaluation



## **Section 1 – Background to Greater Manchester Colleges**

GMColleges is a long standing and mature partnership of the nine general further education colleges that serve the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. We have a strong track record of effective collaboration and ambition for the future.

Our high performing colleges meet the needs of the employers and the GM workforce, current and future, in key growth and employment sectors with training at all levels and ages from entry to post graduate.

GMColleges collectively delivers learning to over 70,000 students (>30,000 16-18 year olds and >40,000 adults) and over 7,000 apprentices. Collectively we work with approximately 10,000 businesses, the majority of whom are small and medium-sized enterprises.

## **Section 2 – Executive Summary**

The GM FE Innovation Programme has received £2.5m revenue from InnovateUK to run in the 2024/25 financial year. Our programme is a collaborative partnership of all 9 GM FECs covering the 10 Boroughs of the Greater Manchester. This scale of collaborative FE innovation intervention is nationally unique.

GMFEIP builds the capacity and capability of Further Education Colleges (FECs) to enable their staff to increase the adoption and diffusion of innovations by businesses in their locality and create better links between them and the city region's innovation ecosystem. This addresses the challenge of low productivity, and limited engagement with innovation support services, especially in the outer areas of the City Region.

Innovation support is a new area to GM FE. It differs from other Innovation Support services because of the business base FECs are networked into as anchor institutions in their community. In many cases the local college is the only touch point between the SME and public / education sector.

### **Project Aims**

The underpinning concept of the GM Further Education Innovation Programme is diffusion of innovation knowledge and capacity, radiating out from industry and research to business via 10 'Innovation Centre' Hubs, one in each Greater Manchester borough. The overall programme aims to:

1. Position Business Innovation Support in 10 Innovation Centres outside the city region's core, where there are lower levels of productivity and less engagement with support services
2. Increase FEC capacity and capability to promote and support business innovation in technologies, business models and processes through CPD, and by piloting the placement of 4 peripatetic 'Innovators in Residence'
3. Maximise use of LSIF funded capital investments in immersive technologies, robotics and engineering equipment
4. Test whether Apprentices, already employed as staff within GM SMEs and with strong FE relationships, can contribute to 'innovation readiness' and be agents for change in their host businesses.
5. Move towards the 'levelling-up' of the GM Innovation Ecosystem

#### **Work Programme 1 : Innovation Centre Teams – one per Borough, each with:**

**Business Innovation Advisor** - After conducting an innovation readiness diagnostic, Business Innovation Advisors will refer the employer to other support services, such as Innovation Accelerators or Catalysts, or introduce employers directly to facilities and training provision to secure the workforce development that enables innovation and growth.

These may be employers of any size or sector, but we will target energy on those who aren't already networked into support services.

**Business Innovation Coordinator** - provide the 'front of house' for the Innovation Centres. They build networks and community, and will coordinate the hosting of local events and facilitate connections between local businesses and college staff into the wider innovation ecosystem.

A GM FE 'Business Innovation Network' will be established for peer learning and support as the Business Innovation Advisors and Coordinators develop into these new fields. They will record their experience and impact to inform GMFEIP evaluation, share practice on what has/hasn't worked, and be supported in their professional development.

#### **WP2: Innovators in Residence**

Innovators in Residence (IiRs) are a new concept for FE. The four IiRs will have specialist knowledge of adoption and diffusion of innovations in the GM Frontier Sectors:

- Sustainable Advanced Materials and Manufacturing
- Digital & Creative
- Health Innovation and Life Sciences
- Net Zero

Whilst we have secured high quality individuals for the top two roles, bringing new skills and knowledge into the sector, we are exploring alternative recruitment approaches for the second two roles in these emergent fields where expertise is more scarce.

### **WP3: Apprentice Innovation Ambassadors**

The colleges currently have over 7000 apprentices predominantly in GM businesses. GMFEIP will develop an innovative training resource for apprentices (who are already employed in local businesses) to gain an additional certificate in ‘*Innovation Literacy*’ and become ‘Apprentice Innovation Ambassadors’ who increase the innovation capacity in the SMEs where they are based. An AIA Coordinator role will be based in each college to communicate the value of this training to apprentices, employers and apprenticeship delivery colleagues, facilitate delivery of the Innovation Literacy training and monitor and celebrate impact.

## **Section 3 – Key requirements**

The purpose of this invitation to tender is to commission an independent evaluation of the project success in achieving the intended outcomes over the thirteen-month funding period and identify learning for both Greater Manchester Colleges (GMColleges) and the wider FE sector on how innovation projects can be delivered within the FE system.

The purpose of this programme evaluation is for GMColleges and partners to understand the impact of the pilot programmes on all beneficiaries and the essential ingredients for its success to share across the sector.

The evaluation will outline whether the programme activities have achieved their anticipated goals and highlight activities and approaches that have had the greatest impact with clear recommendations for taking work on business innovation forward within FE in the future.

### **a. Objectives of the GM Further Education Innovation Programme evaluation**

We are looking to evaluate the overall programme at two stages as well as each of the work streams, their approaches, and the experiences of project beneficiaries: apprentices, businesses, FE providers and the wider partners.

The analysis at stage 1 (7months in) will consider:

- What has been successful in the early development of the project
- What could be improved in the latter stages
- Key factors critical to success
- Any lessons from different approaches taken in the ten localities
- How each work programme is delivering against its intended aims to date

\*The final evaluation (March 2024) will consider:

- What aspects of the project have been successful
- What improvements should be made in future projects

- Key factors critical to success
- Any lessons from different approaches taken in localities
- How each work programme delivered against its intended aims

*\*in the eventuality that longer term funding becomes available during the delivery of the project, the final aims may be adapted to inform the longer-term developments*

Proposals should describe how the following specific research questions aligned with programme will be addressed by the evaluation:

1. How has the project supported colleges to engage in the innovation ecosystem in GM?
2. How has the project engaged small and medium sized businesses in innovation?
3. How have learnings and evidence gathered throughout project supported improvements across the individual colleges?
4. How could the programme be replicated across the country and what are the lessons learnt?

In addition to experience of carrying out similar evaluations using relevant methods, we are particularly interested in proposals that can demonstrate:

- Experience working within the FE sector and understanding of relevant context
- Experience evaluating programmes related to economic development and innovation.

**b. Activities, suggested but not limited to:**

The evaluation will begin as soon as an appointment is made and monitor outcomes throughout delivery.

As a minimum, the external evaluator will undertake an initial consultation, semi-structured interviews with participants and review progress. Although we are open to proposals suggesting a range of methods and activities.

We expect proposals to be sensitive to the demands on time of both lead colleges and project partners.

We anticipate activities will include working with:

- core project team members to understand rationale for project structure and approach
- individual colleges to understand their approach and priorities
- individual colleges to understand key data sets that will aid evaluation
  - businesses engaged through the project to understand benefits they have realised
  - college staff to understand what benefits they have realised through CPD and business engagement
  - college leaders to understand strategic benefits gained
  - Working with partners including InnovateGM, GM Chamber of Commerce and GMCA to understand realised and perceived benefits of approach
  - Working with apprenticeship ambassadors to understand impact of training and support provided

Activity should include, but not be limited to:

- Initial consultation (in the form of interviews or workshops) with pilot leads and pilot partners.
- Interviews with participating apprentices, project staff, college leaders and partners.
  - Collection of sufficient primary data through additional surveys, interviews and case studies and ensure the data collected is representative of programme participants.

- A written interim and final report with evidence-based conclusions and recommendations for future delivery of innovation programmes in FE that relate to strengthening and informing future programme design.

We are open to proposals suggesting additional or alternative methods to obtain useful information to help meet the objectives of this evaluation.

**NB** we have phased project delivery so work programme for apprenticeships will not be fully up and running at the interim stage and engaging with apprentices will only take place in the second stage of evidence gathering.

### c. Outputs

- Initial proposal and project plan submitted detailing timeline of activities (End of July 2024)
- Online keep in touch (KiT) meetings no less than every two months, to update on progress towards the final reports
- Interim report (October 2024)
- Final report for GMColleges (May 2025)

Please demonstrate in your application how you plan to distribute your time and resources across the programme duration to meet the evaluation objectives. It is desirable that applications build flexibility into their proposals to be responsive to the project as it develops

The style of report should be engaging and accessible to a range of audiences. Tender submissions should include an example of previous work, indicative of the report style you would propose for this exercise.

## Section 4 – Timetable and next steps

The indicative timeline for the tender process is set out in the table below

Deadline	ITT Activity
20 June 2024	Invitation to Tender launched
4 July 2024	Deadline to submit clarification questions
Midday 15 July 2023	Deadline for submissions including example of previous work
w/c 22 July 2024	Interviews to be held with two of the highest scoring applicants
w/c 29 July 2024	Notifications to be sent out to all bidders
w/c 29 July 2024	Contract awarded to successful bidder

The overall budget allocated for this work is £20,000 inclusive of VAT

Submissions should be sent to [ekambara-rao.ardhimi@oldham.ac.uk](mailto:ekambara-rao.ardhimi@oldham.ac.uk) : please note the contract for the work will be with Oldham College as the lead accountable partner for this programme.

