

Summary Report

Pathways for Growth and Prosperity

A Blueprint for Skills
Development in
Greater Manchester

A Framework for Improving Learner Pathways
within the Greater Manchester Post-16 Technical
and Vocational Education Landscape

1. Background

This project was initiated by the Greater Manchester Further Education and Higher Education Leaders Group and delivered through strong partnership working across the city-region's post-16 education and employer landscape. It builds on Greater Manchester's long-standing commitment to collaboration to strengthen alignment between universities, colleges, employers, and economic priorities, and to support the development of a more coherent, connected, and responsive local skills system.

The work aligns closely with key regional and national priorities, including the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the Greater Manchester Strategy, the National Industrial Strategy, the Skills England Assessment of Priority Skills to 2030, and the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper. Collectively, these strategies highlight the growing importance of higher-level technical skills, particularly at Levels 4 and 5, and the need for closer FE, HE, and employer collaboration to address skills shortages, support productivity, and drive inclusive growth.

Greater Manchester already benefits from a mature culture of partnership working, underpinned by established collaborative structures such as the GM FE/HE Leaders Group, GM Colleges, the GM Civic Universities Board, Innovation GM, and the Employer Integration Board. This is further demonstrated through practical cross-institution initiatives, including the Greater Manchester Institute of Technology, GM Higher, shared delivery and progression models between colleges and universities, and collaborative approaches to research, teaching, and workforce development. Together, these initiatives illustrate a strong regional foundation for system-wide collaboration and innovation.

Building on this existing activity, the project responds to national ambitions to expand higher-level learning by articulating a shared vision for a more resilient, flexible, and future-focused post-16 system. It reinforces Greater Manchester's ambition to deliver a world-leading technical education system, with parity of esteem between technical and academic routes and a clear line of sight into high-quality employment.

Taken together, these foundations position Greater Manchester as a strong testbed for system-level innovation and collaborative leadership, with the capability to shape and inform national approaches to post-16 education reform in line with government ambitions.

2. Key Findings

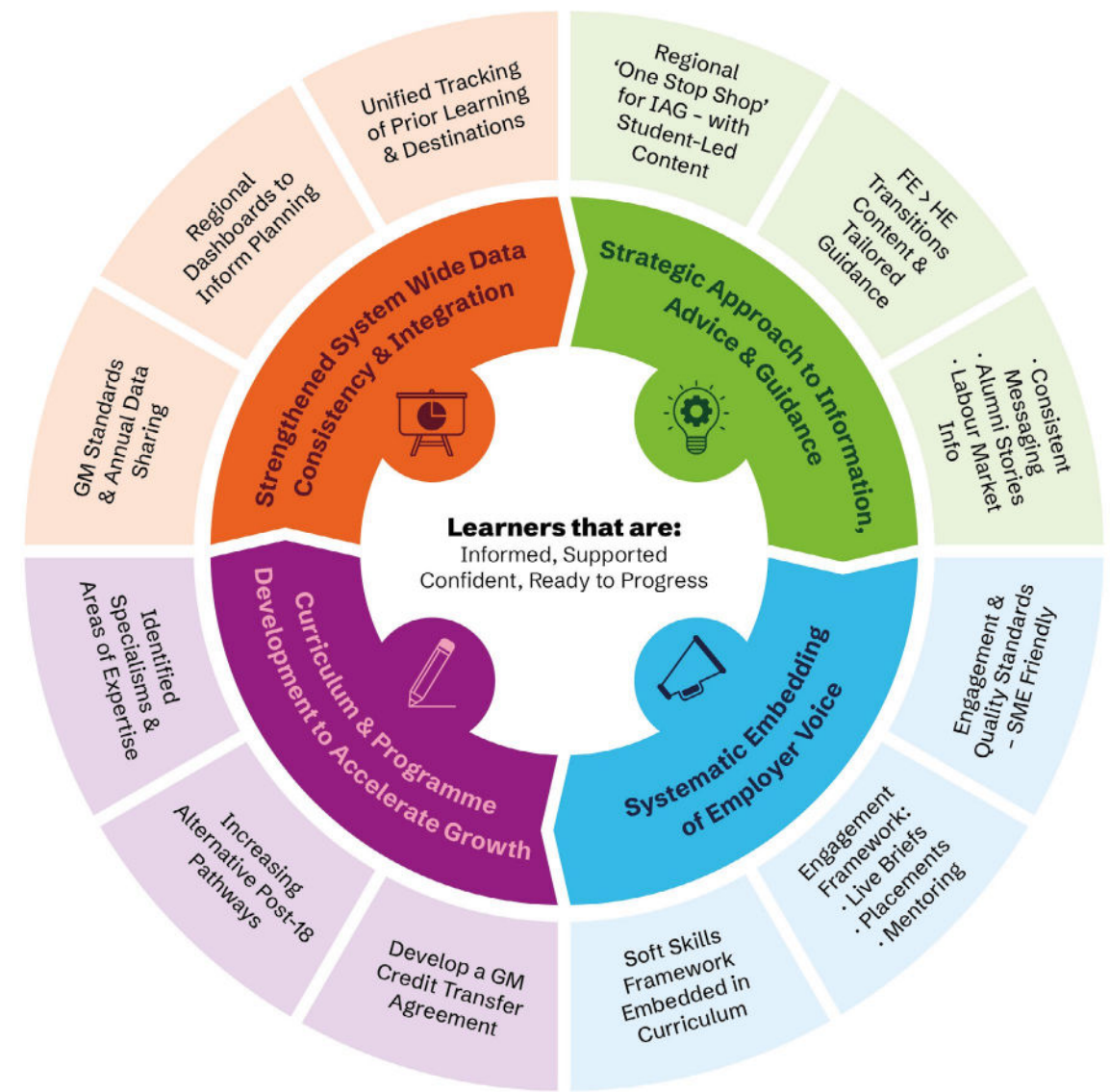
To support analysis, the project team adopted a set of priority sectors that reflect both the Industrial Strategy and the Greater Manchester Strategy. These include Clean Energy & Net Zero, Construction, Creative Industries, Defence, Digital & Technologies, Financial Services, Health Innovation & Life Sciences, Professional & Business Services, and Sustainable Advanced Materials & Manufacturing. The project's priority sectors were also cross-referenced against other regional and national frameworks to support system coherence and consistent insight across Greater Manchester.

The project has, for the first time, combined Greater Manchester's higher education and further education supply data with employer demand data, creating a level of system-wide insight not previously available. However, variations in data collection and recording limits comparative insights, and so the following insights should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive.

- **Distributed pathway information:** IAG is delivered through a wide range of organisations, reflecting strong sector commitment; however, greater coordination would help align messaging and improve visibility of post-Level 3 and non-traditional pathways, creating a more seamless learner experience.
- **Strong alignment between university demand and priority sectors:** Growing demand for university subjects linked to Greater Manchester's priority sectors, applications from Greater Manchester residents account for an increasing share of applications (24.6%) and acceptances (30%), indicating increasing local participation.
- **Growth in priority-sector enrolments:** University enrolments in priority-sector subjects have increased significantly, while at Level 3 in FE some subjects show potential over-supply relative to employer demand.
- **Graduate retention is positive but uneven by sector:** On average 40% of graduates remain in Greater Manchester, strengthening the local workforce. Retention is strongest in place-based sectors (Health Innovation & Life Sciences) and weaker within nationally distributed labour markets (Digital & Technologies and Sustainable Advanced Materials & Manufacturing).
- **Clear employer demand for higher-level and transferable skills:** Employers consistently highlight demand for digital, data and AI skills, alongside business, professional and project capability.

3. Opportunities and Recommendations

Drawing on the themes emerging from the insights, **four overarching recommendations** have been identified to strengthen learner pathways across Greater Manchester’s post 16 technical and vocational education landscape. The figure below sets out the core recommendations, with associated delivery opportunities shown in the outer circle. The recommendations recognise the vital contribution of post 16 providers and system partners in shaping a coherent landscape of opportunity across Greater Manchester.



Developed collaboratively and widely cited by partners as a strong and valuable piece of work, the outputs have secured endorsement and commitment from the region’s FE and HE providers, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and will directly inform ongoing strategic planning. Together, the recommendations provide a clear and actionable framework to strengthen system leadership, improve learner progression, deepen employer engagement, and better align provision with Greater Manchester’s priority sectors and future skills needs.

4. Benefits

This strategically significant initiative poses several high-level benefits, including:



Clearer and More Coherent Pathways

Providing learners with clearer, easier-to-navigate routes into high-skilled, high-growth occupations.



Improved Learner Progression and Outcomes

More flexible, modular, and responsive provision, supported by consistent, high-quality IAG, will enable more learners to progress through the pathways that are right for them, and into high quality jobs within Greater Manchester’s priority sectors.



Stronger Alignment with Employer Needs

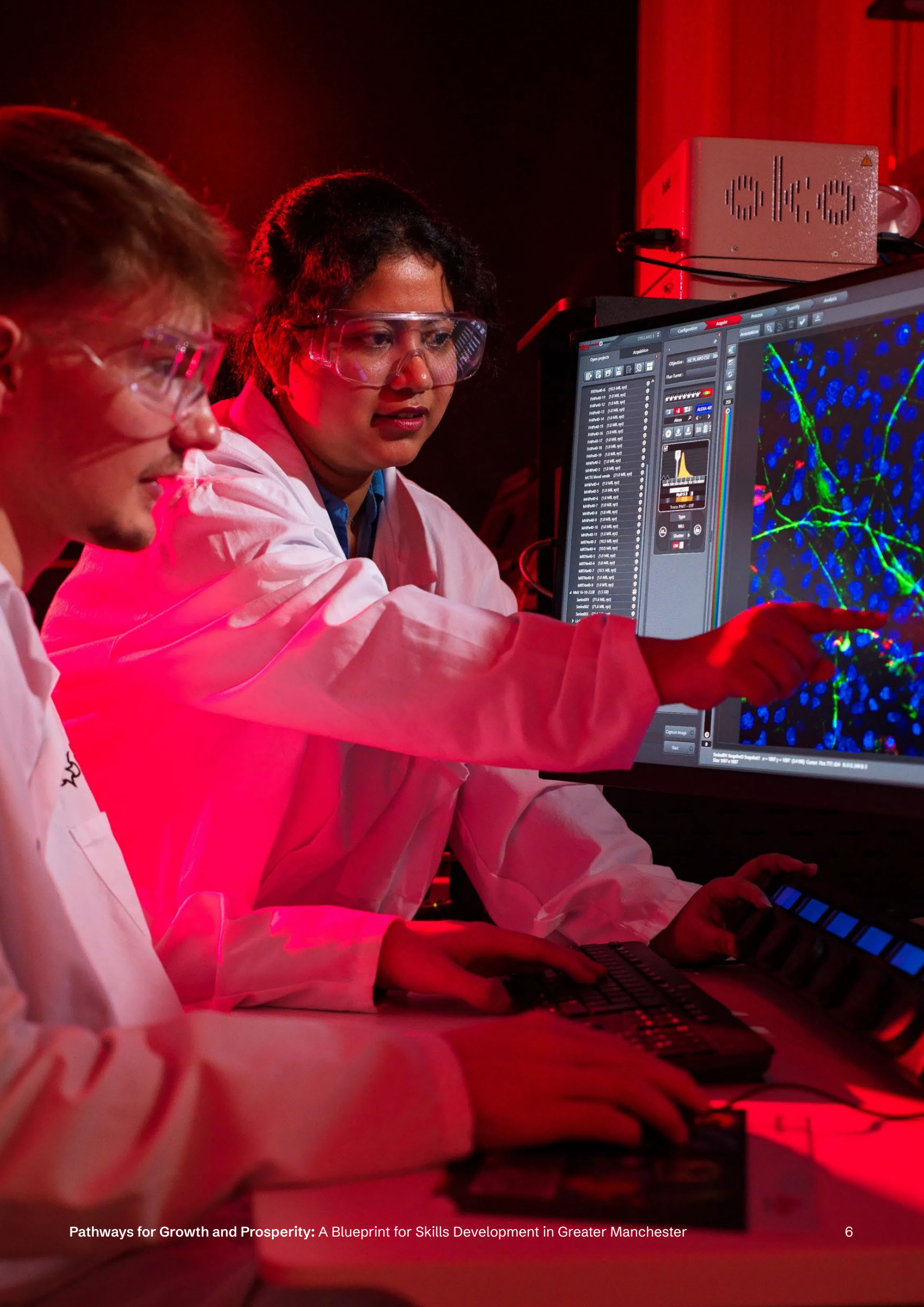
Ensuring that curriculum design keeps pace with emerging employer needs through enhanced partnership working and more effective use of labour market and learner demand/progressions data.



A more Efficient and Collaborative System

Underpinned by a coordinated approach to data sharing, engagement, and pathways designed to reduce avoidable duplication and maximise the collective resource and expertise across partners.





5. Next Steps and Access the Full Report

The full report provides detailed analysis, recommendations, and a proposed action plan to support delivery across the GM system.

Partners across Greater Manchester are now considering the governance, ownership and accountability arrangements needed to support effective delivery of the recommendations as the focus shifts from strategy to co-ordinated system-wide implementation.



Access the full report online, or scan the QR code.

For further information, or to get involved in delivering the recommendations, please contact:
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