

Meeting local skills needs

The responsiveness of further education and skills providers in Greater Manchester

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Executive summary

This project forms part of Ofsted's improvement activity and professional engagement with Greater Manchester further education (FE) and skills providers, the Chamber of Commerce and New Economy. It was commissioned by Ofsted's North West Regional Director to identify and disseminate aspects of good practice and the barriers facing providers when developing their curriculum to meet local needs. The research methodology and the providers visited by the three of Her Majesty's Inspectors that completed the project are outlined in Annex A.

Greater Manchester is the largest economic region, outside of London, in the UK. Although the population in Greater Manchester is the fastest growing in the UK, it has a comparatively low-skilled workforce – over 15% of residents have no qualifications and in 2013, unemployment in the region was above the national average. Data published by the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills showed that, at the end of 2013, the percentage of 16–18-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) within Greater Manchester stood at 5.5% and the activity of a further 6.1% of young people was unknown.

In 2011, the Association of Greater Manchester local authorities (AGMA) developed a statutory Greater Manchester combined authority (GMCA) to coordinate key economic development, regeneration and transport functions. It was the first of its kind in the country. Devised in March 2013, the 'Stronger Together' Greater Manchester strategy 2013–2020 set an ambitious vision to secure long-term economic growth and enable the city to fulfil its economic potential.

Working with the Greater Manchester local enterprise partnership, the Greater Manchester chamber of commerce, FE and skills providers and employers, New Economy has produced 'deep dive' reports into the skills issues in nine priority skills sectors. Four of these were chosen to form the basis for the research:

- advanced manufacturing
- digital and creative
- construction
- logistics.

Inspectors observed many good examples of provision being developed to meet the skills needs of the Greater Manchester area. A few providers mapped their curriculum alongside other local provision to identify any gaps and then developed courses to meet employers' needs. However, there was no overview of the provision across Greater Manchester to ensure that there are no gaps or unnecessary duplication.

Inspectors found that all the providers used a wide range of good-quality labour market information to inform strategic and curriculum planning to meet Greater Manchester's skills needs.

Most of the providers visited found it difficult to establish meaningful employer advisory groups to support curriculum development, particularly when most employers were small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Providers have made links with individual employers, but these links do not effectively ensure that the curriculum meets local needs. Employer advisory groups worked best where providers were engaged with large employers.

Arrangements for collaborative working among providers within Greater Manchester were well established. Current collaborative projects had developed a coordinated approach to providing work experience for 16–19-year-old learners on study programmes. However, these projects were very new and it is not clear what impact they will have.

In 2012/13, the proportion of apprentices successfully completing their programme and the achievement of qualifications for classroom-based learners for each of the 10 local authorities within Greater Manchester broadly matched regional and national averages.

The processes for collecting data for learners' actual destinations on leaving the provider and for longer-term tracking were in the early stages for most providers. Consequently, it is difficult to establish how effective providers have been in delivering courses that secure employment and/or further training for their learners.

For many providers, the rapid rate of technological change and the cost of replacing and updating resources and up-skilling staff to keep in line with industry standards were significant barriers in developing new courses. Recruiting staff with current expertise was a key challenge, especially where industry salaries were well above those available within the education and training sector.

School leavers and their parents did not receive effective careers advice and guidance about the full range of vocational and academic pathways available to them to inform their future choices. A collaborative project to improve how providers engaged with potential learners aged 16 to 18 was still at an early stage of development.

Recommendations for further improvement

Providers should:

- work collaboratively and more systematically with employers of all sizes to develop the curriculum to meet local needs and ensure that learners develop the skills that employers are looking for
- rapidly develop detailed collection and analysis of actual learner destinations and progression to judge the effectiveness of their curriculum and the outcomes for learners.

New Economy should:

- contribute to raising outcomes for learners across Greater Manchester by working with FE and skills providers to identify the reasons behind the wide variations in apprenticeship success rates and the achievement of classroom-based qualifications for providers in different local authorities
- encourage and enable providers with high success rates and qualifications to share good practice to benefit learners and employers within Greater Manchester
- rapidly develop and implement strategies to improve the quality of initial careers advice and guidance available to young people and learners to meet the needs of Greater Manchester.

The Greater Manchester Colleges Group and the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network should:

- improve the collaborative working between FE and skills providers and schools to ensure that all school leavers and their parents understand the full range of progression routes, including apprenticeships, and the relative merits of the different career pathways
- develop collaborative approaches to staff development, including back-to-the-floor activities, to ensure that learners benefit from teaching and training staff with a good understanding of current industrial practices
- develop a coordinated approach to mapping the curriculum across Greater Manchester to ensure that it meets local skills needs effectively and removes any unnecessary duplication of provision.

Research findings

Strategic planning to meet local skills needs

- The mission statements and strategic plans of all the providers visited showed a strong commitment to meeting local skills needs and contributing to the economic development of the Greater Manchester region.
- The providers used a wide range of local, regional and national labour market information to inform their strategic and curriculum planning. Good quality information was available for the Greater Manchester region, although this did not always reflect sufficiently the differences in local economies. Labour market information data provided nationally were often not sufficiently recent to provide a current and accurate picture of the sector.
- Ten providers had set up pre-employment training programmes in response to predicted sector growth areas in Greater Manchester, supplied by New Economy and local intelligence from employers.
- Curriculum planning in each provider used labour market information well to justify the introduction of new provision.
- Most of the providers were investing in and using software to map the curriculum offer in the area, carry out competitor analysis to identify gaps in the market, and avoid duplication of provision. However, there was no overview across all of the provision within Greater Manchester to ensure that curriculum was meeting local skills needs or reducing unnecessary duplication of provision.
- Deep dives provided a detailed picture of each of the nine priority skills sectors within Greater Manchester for provider staff at all levels to use when planning their curriculum. In four providers, in-depth market research provided additional, focused local data.
- All the providers recognised that employer involvement was central to the planning of their curriculum. Most engaged with skills and employer groups. However, they often found it difficult to develop internal employer advisory groups and much of the consultative work done with employers was at an individual employer level.
- Where providers had career academy programmes or were involved with university technical colleges, employers were very active in supporting and reviewing the design, delivery and assessment of the curriculum.
- Employer skills groups, which were Greater Manchester's approach to delivering the government's employer ownership of skills initiative and that were created to bring together employers, employees, trade unions, colleges and training providers, had not yet had a major impact.
- Although sector consultation often reflected the needs of large employers who had a clear view of their emerging skills needs, SMEs were often much less clear about their longer-term needs and identified needs were often immediate.

Providers indicated that they regularly found it challenging to engage with these SMEs to collect their views to inform strategic or curriculum planning.

- Providers recognised the necessity and benefits of good partnership working through, for example, the Greater Manchester Colleges Group and the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network. However, the tension between collaboration and competition, as providers sought to meet their individual funding targets in a geographically compact urban area, appeared to be a significant barrier.
- Providers were active in a wide range of national, regional and local strategic partnerships and groups. Increasingly, these were being used to develop collaborative approaches to current policy, such as the apprenticeship reforms and when bidding for funding for specific projects.
- Plans for new build, departmental restructuring and the approach to curriculum development and business planning in the colleges visited were increasingly aligned with the Greater Manchester priority sectors and in developing providers' curriculum to meet employers' demand for skills. However, colleges regularly identified the lack of good and appropriately qualified teaching and assessment staff as a barrier to meeting local skills needs.
- A community learning trust made up of FE and skills providers, third sector, Job Centre Plus, the housing trust, health improvement team and other service providers was working on a project collecting and analysing the most reliable sources of labour market information. Along with local knowledge from the members in the group, they produced fact sheets for each ward and distributed them to local stakeholders. The fact sheets used maps, graphs, tables and narrative to provide useful and informative information to inform local planning.
- Providers recognised that capturing actual destinations of learners leaving a provider either during or after successfully completing their studies was an area for significant development. Four providers were further advanced in collecting actual learner destinations and progression. The data, however, was not yet robust enough to aid curriculum planning or inform self-assessment judgements about the appropriateness of curriculum design.
- In 2012/13, the achievement of classroom-based learners varied considerably between the different local authorities and was too low in a few areas. Achievement in the Greater Manchester region as a whole was similar to the national success rate.
- The Greater Manchester success rate for apprentices was around the national average with large variations by local authority. Warehousing, distribution and information communication apprentices achieved well.

Examples of good practice from the providers visited

- There was good collaborative working between New Economy, colleges and independent training providers to secure project funding to address issues critical to the FE and skills sector. Examples included a project looking at a collaborative approach to organising work experience for the study programme by bringing employers, colleges and other providers together.
- In one college, each division had a comprehensive local management information (LMI) pack tailored to their specific curriculum/sector area to support good planning to meet local skills needs. These packs were informed by several relevant sources, including New Economy publications, local enterprise partnership (LEP) information, local authority plans and strategies and national datasets. They included a detailed analysis of the curriculum offer using applications against enrolments, destination data, competitor provision, local economy sector-specific growth or decline and employer identified needs.

Barriers to meeting local skills needs

- The lack of good and appropriately qualified teaching and assessment staff to ensure that learners developed the up-to-date skills that employers were looking for.
- Difficulties engaging with and planning to meet the needs of small- and medium-sized enterprises that were often not clear about their own longer-term skills needs.
- Labour market information that was often out-of-date and did not give a current and accurate picture of the sector.

Curriculum planning to meet local skills needs

Advanced manufacturing sector

- Nine of the 13 providers visited covered this sector.
- The providers used established links with individual employers and awarding bodies to discuss new qualifications required to meet industry needs. Staff found the identification of current needs through individual employer links to be the most useful form of labour market information. All the providers had used this information to inform changes in provision to meet employers' needs. For example, providers had introduced modules in programmable logic controllers in

electrical engineering and in computer-numerically-controlled machining in mechanical engineering. However, provider perception was that small- and medium-size enterprises often struggled to identify their own skills gaps.

- Most of the providers no longer hosted employer advisory boards, as they were not considered to be effective and attendance was often low. Ten providers used breakfast meetings with employers to discuss recruitment, share good practice and improve employer involvement. Although attendance remained low, the providers indicated that these meetings often generated useful information on employer needs to inform curriculum changes.
- Where providers worked with larger companies, each employing several apprentices, the use of key account managers linked to particular industries or employers had helped to build relationships and secure detailed information about employers' needs. However, sustained engagement of employers, particularly SMEs remained a major challenge. All colleges worked closely with independent training providers and this had improved their access to employers, particularly when developing apprenticeship programmes.
- Colleges and work-based learning providers worked together closely when they each delivered aspects of the apprentice framework with, for example, the local college delivering the technical certificate. Providers used joint delivery as one of the main methods to maintain viable class sizes, particularly in specialist courses.
- Providers offered a mainly traditional engineering curriculum from level 1 to level 5, but some specialist developments met specific employers' needs. For example, one provider had engaged a subcontractor to deliver rail engineering (track) to meet an identified skills gap. Providers identified that the range of pathways available within engineering apprenticeship frameworks, insufficient flexibility in the delivery models set by awarding bodies and extended lead-in times for new qualifications and resolution of accreditation issues for centre-devised programmes made it difficult for them to respond quickly to employer requests and in meeting specific local needs.
- The availability of the provision varied across Greater Manchester. High set-up costs and consumable costs forced many providers to be selective in their curriculum offer.
- Joint planning and delivery by engineering/manufacturing departments across different providers was still insufficient. However, where it worked well, it had improved the range of provision offered and improved work experience opportunities helping full-time learners to make informed career choices.
- Four of the providers visited said that they worked very closely with particular large employers to offer bespoke courses specifically tailored to meet their needs. These included mechanical to electrical skill enhancement courses, courses in programmable logic control, engineering drawing, computer-numerical control (CNC) machining and business improvement techniques. In return, a few employers had donated industry standard equipment or sponsored training rooms to provide high quality training facilities. A few providers delivered courses on

employers' premises to meet the business needs of employers more efficiently and to provide training using specialist equipment.

- Tutors' range of knowledge, up-to-date skills and relevance of experience were major concerns in relation to providers' ability to deliver courses to develop the skills required in the advanced manufacturing sector. Generally, there was an ageing staff profile. The providers visited could not compete with high salaries paid in industry and so had difficulty in recruiting suitably knowledgeable, experienced staff, particularly to meet skills gaps in newer, advanced technologies. Where providers had good links with employers, they had started to facilitate up-skilling tutors through 'back-to-the-floor' initiatives, but this was embryonic.
- The Greater Manchester forecasting model 2012 predicts an increased demand for higher level skills. In response, more providers were planning to provide opportunities for employees in local firms to develop these by offering higher-level engineering apprenticeship programmes covering mechatronics, programmable logic control, simulation software and rapid prototyping, and the exploitation of new technologies. One college had developed a centre for sustainable technologies but employers had been slow to engage with this due to the uncertainties in government policy and financial support for sustainable technologies.

Examples of good practice from providers visited

- One college had tailored the curriculum offer to meet the needs of particular employers more effectively through close partnership working. One example is the Siemens strategic partnership that had evolved over the past 18 months and culminated in the development of a specialist training facility within the college to replicate the technologies used by Siemens in their workplace. Tutors developed the skills to enable them to deliver the employer's technological requirements and tailor the curriculum. This provision had widened the curriculum choices for the full-time learners in the college, enabling them to meet the needs of local employers in advanced manufacturing more effectively.

Barriers to meeting local skills needs in advanced manufacturing

- Providers identified that equipping a provider to respond to many of the skills gaps and creating specialist provision in niche areas were extremely expensive in terms of equipment and consumable resources.
- Local industry often struggled to clearly identify their own skills gaps and/or articulate these needs to providers.
- An ageing workforce with specific and traditional skillsets. Up-skilling staff to meet future needs and the recruitment of qualified lecturing

staff with specialist advanced manufacturing skills was a long-standing problem, which continued to hamper delivery.

- The limited range of pathways available within engineering apprenticeship frameworks, insufficient flexibility in the delivery models set by awarding bodies, extended lead-in times for new qualifications and the slow resolution of accreditation issues for centre devised programmes made it difficult to respond quickly to employer requests and to meet specific local needs.
- Employers were unwilling to become involved in forums or advisory groups to help shape curriculum and identify issues. Despite several initiatives to attract employers, it was difficult to get sustained attendance at advisory groups, particularly managers of SMEs who had little capacity to present their views.

Construction sector

- Ten of the 13 providers visited covered this sector.
- The providers visited agreed that local economy data had proved much more useful than any nationally produced data. The providers made good use of employer and learner feedback to inform curriculum developments. Where providers had a particular interest, they had accessed more specialised information through, for example, the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce Low Carbon Skills Group and the National Skills Academy (Environmental Technologies). The providers indicated that the recent downturn in the construction industry had led to a reduction in the number of learners applying for construction courses and that the majority of employers were small enterprises for whom training had not been a key focus in recent years.
- Only four providers specifically hosted employer advisory groups. Although a variety of approaches had been tried, attendance at such groups tended to be poor and sustained engagement of employers was a major challenge. Where an employer advisory group was present, it had successfully generated work-experience placements and apprenticeship opportunities. Three of the providers visited had engaged employers using breakfast events but, generally, participation rates had been low unless a major employer sponsored the event itself.
- Close working between work-based learning providers and colleges was common where colleges delivered technical certificates on behalf of other providers.
- Providers had been successful in starting to change provision and offer new courses to meet the needs of the industry, including specialised, niche work. The availability of the provision varied across Greater Manchester. There was not enough joint planning and delivery by construction departments across different providers. Consequently, much of brickwork, carpentry and joinery and, to a lesser extent, plumbing and heating apprenticeships was duplicated.

- Providers worked closely with employers to offer apprenticeships tailored to meet their local needs. One provider had specifically integrated level 1 and level 2 dry lining into their multi-skills course. Higher-level qualifications had been developed in civil engineering and in construction management to develop employees' skills to become managers. However, insufficient flexibility in the delivery models set by awarding bodies and the rules of combination for units meant that these did not always meet the specific needs of local employers.
- Providers were working more closely with industrial partners to seek innovative solutions to meet identified needs, particularly where the specialist skills required in specific trades or by different employers often meant that the number of learners in a group was too low to make a course viable. For example, one construction department was developing new provision in conjunction with an external commercial flooring company to meet the needs identified by the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce for wooden flooring apprenticeships. They were also developing a higher national civil engineering programme to a need identified through the Greater Manchester construction skills pipeline analysis. Another provider was developing provision in steel fixing and shuttering joinery by establishing partnerships for joint delivery with a local employer.
- Providers recognised the importance of work experience in developing learners' employability skills, analytical skills and allowing them to put their new found construction skills into practice in a realistic environment. However, the sourcing of work experience opportunities remained a problem with employers identifying barriers, such as insurance costs, age restrictions to specific construction work and the dangers posed by site work to inexperienced young people. A few providers had developed innovative ways of providing learners with meaningful work experience through participation in local community projects, such as erecting stalls for Christmas markets and renovation work at local sports clubs.
- A major issue in delivering relevant courses was the range of knowledge, skills and experience of provider staff. Where skills gaps were in niche professions or newly emerging trades, the providers visited found it difficult to recruit capable staff or train existing staff to develop and deliver courses. All providers had started to plan for tutors to spend time in industry each year to ensure that they updated their industrial skills and knowledge, but this was not always possible in areas of skills shortage.

Examples of good practice from providers visited

- One provider had sourced meaningful work experience for full-time learners who participated in community projects and supported local sports clubs by, for example, building changing rooms at a cricket club, building planters for a flower show and building benches for use by cricket clubs and for spectators of the Tour de France.

Barriers to meeting local skills needs in construction

- Providers identified that construction is a space-intensive provision with a high cost to creating specialist provision in niche areas and providing industry standard resources required to deliver training.
- The downturn in the construction industry during the economic recession led to fewer numbers of learners applying for construction courses. While construction was once again a growing industry, many employers had not yet started taking on apprentices. The majority of employers were small enterprises where training had not been a key focus in recent years.
- Up-skilling sufficient staff to meet future needs and the recruitment of qualified tutors with specialist construction skills was a long-standing problem.
- Insufficient flexibility in the delivery models set by awarding bodies and the rules of combination for units meant that these did not always meet the direct needs of employers.

Digital and creative sector

- Eight of the providers visited covered this sector.
- The wide range of good quality labour market information data was used well by managers to design provision that develops learners' skills for employment in digital and creative industries. The use of the New Economy 'deep dive' report, combined with information from sector skills councils, national and the Greater Manchester employer skills groups and surveys, had improved the quality of the information available to managers, tutors and employers, especially in relation to actual employment and forecasted growth and change.
- At regional and local levels, the providers visited had significant involvement with a wide range of strategy groups, such as the digital and media groups within local authorities, the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership, and employer groups such as Manchester Digital. The employer advisory group supporting one college's successful bid to become a digital and creative career college had been instrumental in developing the curriculum content. Other providers visited, however, have not been able to engage individual employers in curriculum advisory groups.
- Greater Manchester colleges had started to work together to plan for a common approach for work experience for learners and progression of learners to higher-level course. This collaboration did not yet systematically extend to work-based learning providers.
- Three providers visited were developing strategies, initiatives and innovative courses to meet the identified skills gaps in particular industries. These included working with high prestige employers and projects, such as Media City UK, BBC

Radio 6 and ITV. These specific employer links had led to a considerable number of work placements, raised the profile of the providers and enhanced the tutors' exposure to up-to-date practices and technologies.

- The use of live project work, such as producing video films for local employers and community groups, had broadened the experience of learners in working on industry-standard projects, such as gaining experience in cyber technology.
- The providers visited recognised the importance of work experience for learners in developing their employability or analytical skills and making them better informed about their future options. However, they reported that many employers could not provide suitable work experience for learners, often due to the small size of the organisation and operational imperatives.
- A number of factors impacted on curriculum delivery, planning and development. The most important observed was the tutors' knowledge and expertise in the use of new and rapidly changing technology. The cost of technical equipment and software also played an important part. A challenge for providers was keeping abreast of changes and innovation in a rapidly developing digital and cyber economy. All providers had started to plan for tutors to update their skills in industry but mostly the arrangements were not fully developed or were at the embryonic stages.
- All providers visited had been proactive in changing the provision and offering new courses to meet the increasing demands for digital and creative employers. For example, they had introduced courses in web authoring, telecommunication, television production and art and design at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. The availability of the provision varied across Greater Manchester; joint planning and delivery was limited. The specialist skills required by different employers and sectors of the industry meant that too often the number of learners in a group was too low to make individualised courses viable.
- Providers were planning to offer a wider range of apprenticeship programmes, including level 4 in digital and creative industries, had concerns about securing employment for apprentices due to the large number of freelance workers and one-person companies in the Greater Manchester area.
- The providers reported a significant increase in demand for courses in digital technology, such as games design and photography, and a decline in media studies. Providers indicated that many employers required bespoke in-house training for their employees.
- Providers used various strategies to monitor the progression of learners from their courses to employment or further and higher education, but the processes for collecting detailed data on learner progression and destination data mostly required further development.

Examples of good practice from providers visited

- One college used the digital and creative sector to pilot and develop an effective approach to new course development. Additional research complemented the 'deep dives' published by New Economy and provided more focused, college-specific market intelligence.
- In September 2014, one Greater Manchester college opened the UK's first Digital Career College specialising in digital industries and technologies to provide combined academic and vocational studies for young people aged 14 to 19.

Barriers to meeting local skills needs in digital and creative

- Attracting and recruiting the right teaching and assessment staff with appropriate industry specialisms and ensuring that existing staff maintain up-to-date industry expertise and knowledge in this fast changing sector.
- The high cost of industrial standard hardware, software and licences and maintaining the standard of resources in a rapidly changing market.
- Engaging with employers, especially one-person businesses and freelance workers, to inform planning, development and delivery of the curriculum.
- Difficulties in providing work experience for learners on study programmes. Not all employers were able to offer learners suitable work experience and the large number of very small businesses, often based from an individual's home, brought significant safeguarding issues for the placing of 16-18-year-old learners.
- The specialist skills required by different employers and sectors of the industry meant that, too often, the number of learners in a group was not sufficiently high to make individualised courses viable.

Logistics sector

- Five of the providers visited covered this sector.
- While this sector has a large proportion of small businesses, often with fewer than 10 employees, the Greater Manchester area includes major storage and transport infrastructure, including Manchester Airport, Manchester Ship Canal, Trafford Park, and is close to the M6 and M62 motorway networks.
- The use of labour market information across the providers visited was more variable than in other sectors. One specialist logistics provider made extensive use of labour market information, such as the New Economy 'deep dives' together

with intelligence from its extensive connections within the sector to plan future provision. However, one provider had not used the 'deep dive' report and another did not use official labour market information, relying more on the individual contacts with its customers.

- Another provider made good use of business needs analysis linked to business metrics in identifying their customers' skills needs and linked these to measurable improvements in, for example, reduced fuel consumption and reduced vehicle maintenance, leading to cost reductions.
- The sector has many small businesses and engaging with these providers to discuss their needs was often difficult. The providers visited used various approaches to overcome these difficulties. At one provider, the use of social media provided strong employer communication and an effective way to advertise training opportunities to employers. A warehouse technology group brought together suppliers of warehousing equipment and employers. Suppliers sponsored some of the providers warehousing equipment ensuring that learners were trained using industry standard equipment.
- Recruitment of school leavers is low, partly due to age restrictions in key job roles such as driving and fork-lift truck operation. The sector does not have a high profile as a career route for young people. Consequently, the providers visited had a strong focus on providing pre-employment training for unemployed people and on traineeships and apprenticeships for young people. Providers were working with local businesses that were frequently reluctant to train existing employees due to the impact of downtime and a common perception that the employee will move to another employer once qualified.
- In three of the five providers visited, logistics was a relatively new introduction to the curriculum and was developed in response to specific employer feedback or particular economic regeneration developments. The Airport City development will further increase demand for the skills required to meet the employment opportunities.
- The sector has a large requirement for 'licence to practice' regulatory qualifications that do not attract government funding. This is a barrier to engaging employers in other training. The New Economy 'deep dive' report identified particular issues around the lack of qualified fork-lift truck drivers. Providers have responded well, providing specific training in pre-employment provision and integrating it into apprenticeship programmes.
- The move to online retailing and e-commerce is leading to changes in the skills and expertise required in the sector. Providers were responding by including customer service and contact centre operations into their curriculum.
- Provision covers primarily lower-level qualifications. The providers were attempting to increase the higher-level provision but most apprenticeships within warehousing and distribution were still at intermediate level.
- The sector faces a fast pace of change and this has created difficulties for providers to invest in the most current equipment for learners to use in their

training. The providers also cited the difficulties in recruiting staff with the correct skill sets and providing professional development to existing staff to maintain and develop industry relevant skills.

Examples of good practice from providers visited

- A project led by the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network together and a college was building staff capacity to engage more effectively with employers to develop their understanding of the cost and productivity benefits of investing in employee training and skills development.
- Good employer engagement through the development of a warehouse technology group (WTG) brought together suppliers of warehousing equipment and employers. Suppliers sponsored some of the providers' warehousing equipment ensuring that learners were trained using industry standard equipment. The WTG events focused on specific aspects, such as hidden costs, displaying new equipment and providing networking opportunities between employers and with suppliers.
- One provider used social media particularly well to communicate with sector employers and advertise training opportunities.

Barriers to meeting local skills needs in logistics

- Industry reluctance to train existing employees due to increased downtime and the perceived likelihood of employees moving to other employers once qualified.
- Keeping up to date with the rapid technological changes and new equipment used by employers. The high capital cost of replacing equipment to deliver the provision.
- Providers' ability to recruit training staff with the correct skills set and the cost of providing continuous professional development in the workplace to maintain tutors' up-to-date skills.

Other priority sectors in Greater Manchester

- The providers visited had been successful in starting to change provision and offer new provision to meet the needs of different priority skills sectors, but there was still much work to do. We found evidence of developments to meet identified skills gaps in the business and professional, health and social care, hospitality and catering, and education and training sectors, but provision varied across Greater Manchester and joint planning and delivery was either embryonic or non-existent.

- Financial services is one of Greater Manchester's priority sectors and most of the key national training providers in this sector are based in, or have centres within, the city. Consequently, the providers had been strongly involved in developing the new Trailblazer standards from level 3 to level 6 in, for example, retail banking, actuarial, general insurance and investment operations.
- In the health and social care sector, projects funded by the European Social Fund provided bespoke training to care homes in response to identified training needs including dementia care, end-of-life care, stroke awareness, diabetes care and infection prevention. One provider had developed a healthcare foundation degree as a progression route for learners who had achieved advanced-level qualifications but not secured a place in nursing.
- Labour market information showed that the hospitality and catering sector required a considerable number of lower-level skills jobs. This had led to the development of a range of pathways for learners below intermediate level. Some study programmes had been structured to include front-of-house qualifications to develop and enhance learners' customer service skills, an identified need in the sector.
- Projects in the education and training sector included up-skilling prison officers to enable them to progress to introductory teaching qualifications, providing teacher education to North West NHS Trusts and developing programmes and engagement to build capacity in the mainly unqualified Orthodox Jewish community to improve teaching skills. Providers were starting to work collaboratively in the education and training sector to create appropriate progression routes.

Examples of good practice from providers visited

- A partnership between a college and a regional restaurateur in Media City had resulted in the use of a high quality restaurant to provide the increasing regional demand for trained hospitality and catering staff. Over 20 apprentices are 'hot housed' in the restaurant to a very high standard and provide a talent pool to local employers.

Barriers to meeting local skills needs

- Providers recognised recruiting qualified lecturing staff, with appropriate specialist skills to deliver training in line with changing priorities, as a long-standing problem. Salaries paid within many of the identified priority sectors are higher than those offered by colleges and training providers.
- As is evident in other sectors, very few providers specifically hosted sector-specific employer advisory groups. Sustained engagement of employers, particularly small- and medium-sized businesses remained

a major challenge.

- Difficulty in finding high calibre applicants for quality apprentice vacancies was acute, particularly young people aged 16 to 18 who wished to pursue a career in hospitality, food service and front of house. Similarly, providers in the education sector reported difficulties in recruiting teacher trainees who have the skills, commitment and potential to make an outstanding contribution to the educational needs of people across Greater Manchester.
- As in other sectors, providers found delivery models set by awarding bodies inflexible, affecting the ability of providers to react to labour market information in a timely manner. Often, the rules of combination for specific units meant that these did not always meet employers' needs.

Information, advice and guidance

- Staff providing initial careers advice and guidance in the FE and skills providers visited attended a range of networks within the region and used a wide variety of labour market information to maintain a good understanding of the changing employment sectors in Greater Manchester.
- Provider staff felt that careers guidance for school leavers did not focus enough on vocational progression routes. Many learners and parents had very little understanding of the full range of the options available to them for an intended career.
- The Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Partnership recognised their role in raising the profile of apprenticeships with employers, learners and parents. New Economy, together with the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network, was undertaking projects to improve the quality of advice and guidance in Greater Manchester, but these were very new and it was too soon to measure their impact.
- Providers faced difficulties in developing positive images for sectors, such as construction and logistics, and in attracting women and young people into a male-dominated and/or ageing workforce. Providers were seeking to increase the number of women on these programmes and to make programmes more attractive to younger people. Initiatives so far have had limited success.
- Providers recognised that initial advice and guidance must focus on careers rather than courses or qualifications. However, a few staff too frequently concentrated on providing information on courses available without considering the longer-term career opportunities. A greater understanding of the specific skills needs of employers was a recognised priority area for further development. Where providers had initial advice and guidance staff linked to curriculum areas, this was proving effective in developing their expertise in particular skills sectors.

- Providers made good use of 'Work Matters Greater Manchester', a web-based, career-choices resource, produced as a result of collaborative work between staff from Connexions services across the 10 local authorities, led by Careers Solutions and New Economy.
- The tracking of learner destinations was recognised as an important aspect to inform and improve advice and guidance. Much work was currently underway within providers to provide more detailed information on learner destinations and their progression once in employment. The providers visited recognised that this was still an area for significant further development.

Examples of good practice from providers visited

- The Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network was developing ambassador programmes to train adult learners, apprentices and employers to be involved in raising the profile of apprenticeships and skills development among young people, schools, parents and employers.
- Sector-specific materials developed by colleges for use in tutorials gave learners a good understanding of the employment sector that they were looking to enter. The materials included career opportunities and job developments in Greater Manchester in the next few years.
- The inclusion of advice and guidance into the observation of teaching and learning process was helping raise the profile and relevance to tutors and learners. Where appropriate, the quality of advice and guidance was reviewed and development points agreed with the member of staff.
- The use of a fork-lift truck simulator at school events provided pupils with the opportunity to test out working in a warehouse environment.
- The development of collaborative working between the colleges, independent training providers and New Economy had secured funding to address issues recognised as being critical to improving initial advice and guidance. Examples of projects included:
 - the development of a Skills Gateway Service providing an independent referral service for employers seeking information on training available in Greater Manchester to meet their needs
 - a project to work with schools and colleges to improve the provision of initial advice and guidance across Greater Manchester. Providers can work towards achieving a bronze, silver or gold award status for their initial advice and guidance provision.

Barriers to meeting local skills needs

- Providers felt that careers guidance for school leavers did not cover vocational progression routes well enough and that many learners and their parents had little understanding of the full range of the options available to them for an intended career.
- Some initial advice and guidance staff still saw their role as primarily focusing on the immediate course preferences of the learner rather than balancing this with the longer-term career potential in different sectors.
- Providers indicated that potential learners were often put off by inaccurate preconceptions and a narrow view of engineering/manufacturing, construction and the logistics industries.
- Providers indicated that there were difficulties developing a positive image and attracting women and young people into the male-dominated and ageing workforce in logistics and advanced manufacturing.

Annex A: Research methodology

During summer 2014, three of Her Majesty's Inspectors visited 13 FE and skills providers including nine general further education colleges, three independent training providers and one employer each for one day. All the providers selected were judged as good or outstanding at their previous inspection and are major providers in one or more of the four priority skills sectors identified as the focus for the project. Research information was derived from the 'deep dives' produced during 2013 by New Economy Limited. Additional meetings were held with stakeholder groups.

The research objectives were:

- to evaluate the extent to which FE and skills providers participate in strategic partnerships and work collaboratively to identify and address economic skills needs and gaps
- to evaluate the extent to which FE and skills providers use labour market information to inform their strategic direction and curriculum development
- to identify good practice in partnership working or curriculum development
- to make recommendations to contribute to further improvement within Greater Manchester.

In planning provider visits, inspectors arranged interviews with senior managers, curriculum managers and members of the initial advice and guidance teams. The visits primarily focused on four of the Greater Manchester's nine priority skills sector areas: advanced manufacturing, construction, digital and creative and logistics. Providers were also given the opportunity to identify any specific projects relating to the other five priority skills sectors as part of the visit. Managers at each of the visits provided information relating to strategic planning to meet local skills needs, curriculum planning to meet local skills needs and initial advice and guidance.

The FE and skills providers visited as for the research were:

Alliance Learning

Bolton College

British Telecom PLC

Bury College

Economic Solutions Limited

Hopwood Hall College

Mantra Learning limited

Tameside College

The Manchester College

The Oldham College

Trafford College

Salford City College

Wigan and Leigh College

Annex B: Further information

New Economy Limited; www.neweconomymanchester.com

Greater Manchester Colleges Group; www.gmcg.ac.uk

Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network; www.gmlpn.co.uk

Greater Manchester Combined Authority; www.agma.gov.uk

Association of Greater Manchester Authorities; www.agma.gov.uk