



Department
for Education

Greater Manchester Area Review

Final report

November 2016

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Background

In July 2015, the government announced a rolling programme of around 40 local area reviews, to be completed by March 2017, covering all general further education colleges and sixth-form colleges in England.

The reviews are designed to ensure that colleges are financially stable into the longer-term, that they are run efficiently, and are well-positioned to meet the present and future needs of individual students and the demands of employers. Students in colleges have high expectations about standards of teaching and learning and the extent to which their learning prepares them to progress further, to higher education or directly into employment.

The local steering group was chaired by Theresa Grant, Chief Executive of Trafford Council, on behalf of Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). The steering group met on 6 occasions between September 2015 and June 2016, and additional informal meetings also took place to consider and develop options in greater detail. Membership of the steering group comprised each college's chair of governors and principal, representatives from GMCA, the Greater Manchester LEP (GMLEP), Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and the Roman Catholic Dioceses, the Regional Schools Commissioner, and representatives from the former Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the Education Funding Agency (EFA), and the Department for Education (DfE).

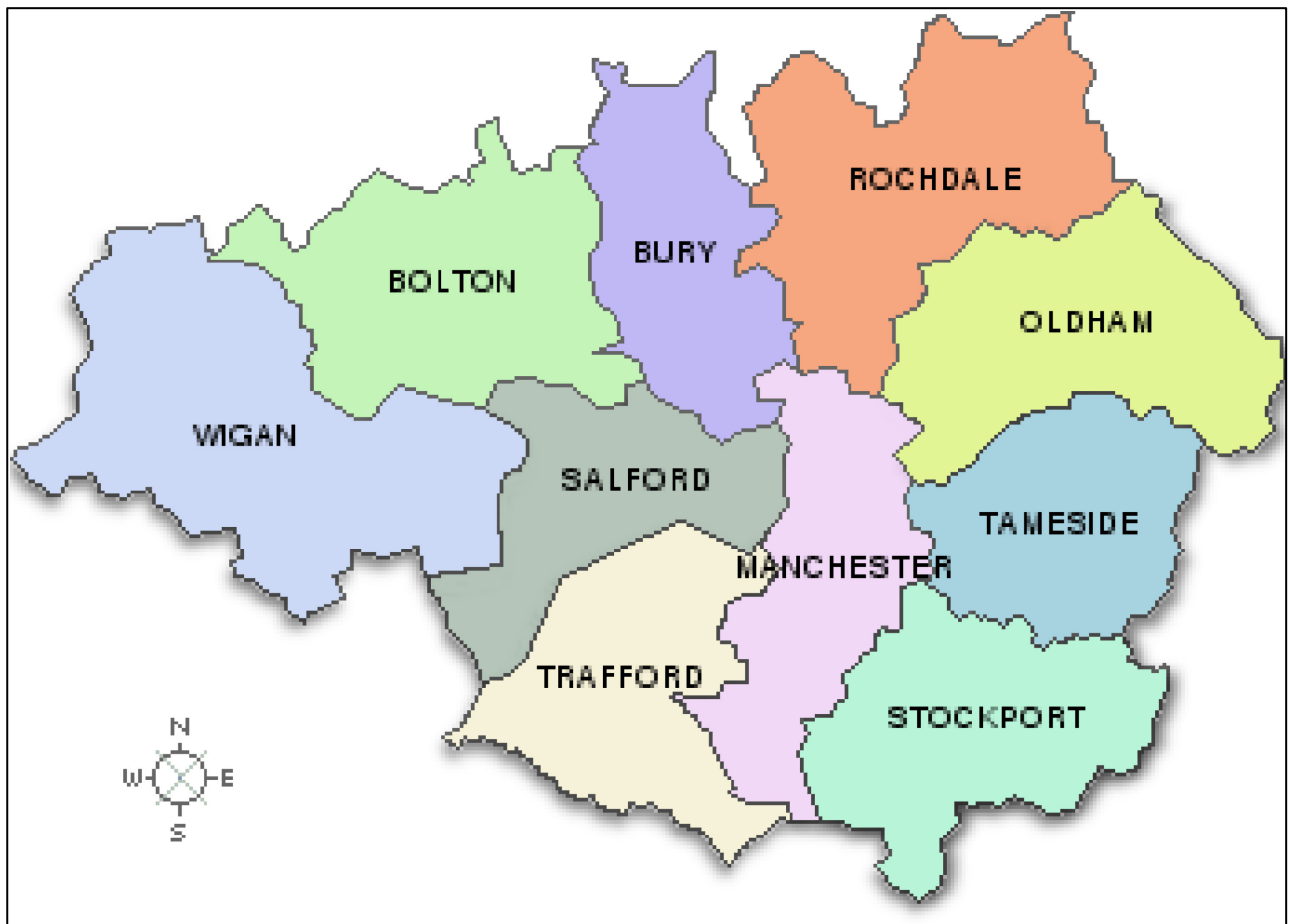
Visits to colleges and support throughout the process were provided by staff from the Further Education (FE) Commissioner and Sixth Form College Commissioners' teams. The Joint Area Review Delivery Unit (JARDU) provided the project management, administrative support and developed supporting materials and papers used by the steering group. JARDU also led on consultations with local stakeholders.

The needs of the Greater Manchester area

Demographics and the economy

Greater Manchester area review covers the footprint of the Combined Authority, and is comprised of the ten local authority areas of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan. The total population is 2.76 million¹.

The area is illustrated on the map below²:



¹ ONS Local Authority Profiles – see data annex – Local socio-economic data.

² [Map of the Greater Manchester area](#)

The table below provides a snapshot of key demographic and economic data³, which has acted as a starting point for this review.

| | Bolton | Bury | Manchester | Oldham | Rochdale | Salford | Stockport | Tameside | Trafford | Wigan | Great Britain |
|--|---------|---------|------------|---------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|----------|---------|---------------|
| Total Population (2015) | 281,600 | 187,900 | 530,300 | 230,800 | 214,200 | 245,600 | 288,700 | 221,700 | 233,300 | 322,000 | 63,258,400 |
| Population aged 16 to 64 (2015) | 62.2% | 61.9% | 70.6% | 61.7% | 62.8% | 65.7% | 61.3% | 63.0% | 62.2% | 62.9% | 63.3% |
| % with Higher Education Qualifications | 30.4% | 37.0% | 39.4% | 27.6% | 25.4% | 31.0% | 36.1% | 25% | 48.4% | 28.4% | 37.1% |
| Those aged 16 to 64 formally qualified to level 2+ | 71.2% | 75.7% | 70.7% | 62.2% | 66.1% | 69.1% | 79.7% | 68.2% | 82.5% | 70.8% | 73.6% |

³ ONS Local Authority Profiles – see data annex – Local socio-economic data. Please note that ONS update the data set on a regular basis and that the data included relates to the point at which the report was written.

| | Bolton | Bury | Manchester | Oldham | Rochdale | Salford | Stockport | Tameside | Trafford | Wigan | Great Britain |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|------------|---------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|----------|---------|---------------|
| Gross weekly pay ££ of residents | £468.90 | £516.8 | £483.70 | £444.00 | £463.40 | £476.70 | £540.10 | £447.30 | £565.60 | £503.40 | £529.60 |
| Gross weekly pay ££ by workplace | £458.20 | £482.40 | £533.10 | £427.50 | £429.60 | £515.90 | £502.10 | £434.50 | £475.70 | £459.50 | £529 |
| Out-of-work benefit claimants | 3.1% | 2.5% | 2.9% | 3.2% | 2.9% | 3.0% | 1.9% | 2.8% | 1.7% | 2.6% | 1.8% |
| % of main benefit claimants | 15% | 13.1% | 15.4% | 15.3% | 16.6% | 15.8% | 11.4% | 15.2% | 9.6% | 13.6% | 11.8% |
| Jobs density ⁴ | 0.68 | 0.65 | 1.05 | 0.61 | 0.61 | 0.82 | 0.80 | 0.55 | 1.06 | 0.58 | 0.82 |

⁴ Job density relates to the level of jobs per resident aged 16-64. For example, a job density of 1.0 would mean that there is one job for every resident aged 16-64. The job density for the north-west as a whole is 0.78, below the national average.

| | Bolton | Bury | Manchester | Oldham | Rochdale | Salford | Stockport | Tameside | Trafford | Wigan | Great Britain |
|------------------------|--------|-------|------------|--------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|----------|-------|----------------------------|
| Total workplace units: | | | | | | | | | | | Average for the North West |
| Micro ⁵ | 82.7% | 85.2% | 78.4% | 81.8% | 81.5% | 80.8% | 84.1% | 82.4% | 82.8% | 82.4% | 82.1% |
| Small | 13.9% | 12.2% | 16.5% | 14.8% | 14.8% | 15.2% | 12.9% | 14.7% | 13.4% | 14.4% | 14.4% |
| Medium | 3.0% | 2.4% | 4.2% | 3.0% | 3.2% | 3.5% | 2.6% | 2.4% | 3.2% | 2.8% | 3.0% |
| Large | 0.5% | 0.3% | 0.9% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.5% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.5% | 0.5% | 0.5% |

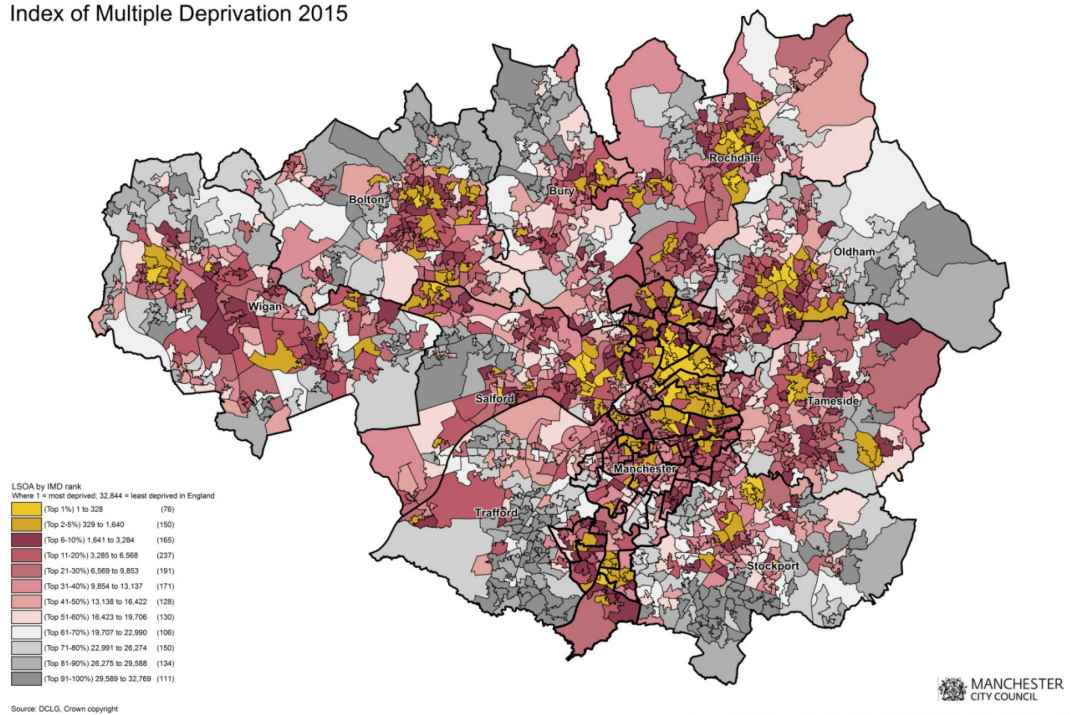
⁵ Micro-businesses have a total of 1-9 workers; small businesses have 10-49 workers (2015 data)

The key points to note are:

- across the area, there are almost 50,000 individuals claiming out-of-work benefits, and 250,000 main benefit claimants
- Trafford, Bury, Stockport and Manchester are the only local authority areas where level 4 qualifications match or exceed national averages. Oldham, Rochdale, Salford and Tameside have low levels of those aged 16 to 64 who are qualified to level 2+
- there are high numbers of jobs in Manchester and Trafford (above 1 per resident aged 16 to 64), in sharp contrast to those of neighbouring authorities. Oldham, Rochdale and Wigan score particularly poorly on this measure
- there is a predominance of small businesses in common with the rest of the United Kingdom, but the significant size of Greater Manchester still means that there are 570 employers classified as 'large' (such as, with over 250 employees)
- earnings vary between local authorities, partly reflecting patterns of commuting, but pay is typically less than the national figure of £529.60 per week.

Greater Manchester has high levels of multiple deprivation (IMD)⁶. For example, in the Manchester district, 40% of neighbourhoods fall within the most deprived 10% nationally, and in both Salford and Rochdale about 28% of neighbourhoods are within the most deprived 10%. Neighbourhoods to the edge of the Greater Manchester footprint and the local authority districts of Stockport and Trafford are significantly less deprived, but all local authority districts have areas which score poorly on the IMD measures. The pattern by neighbourhood across Greater Manchester is illustrated below:

Greater Manchester
Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015

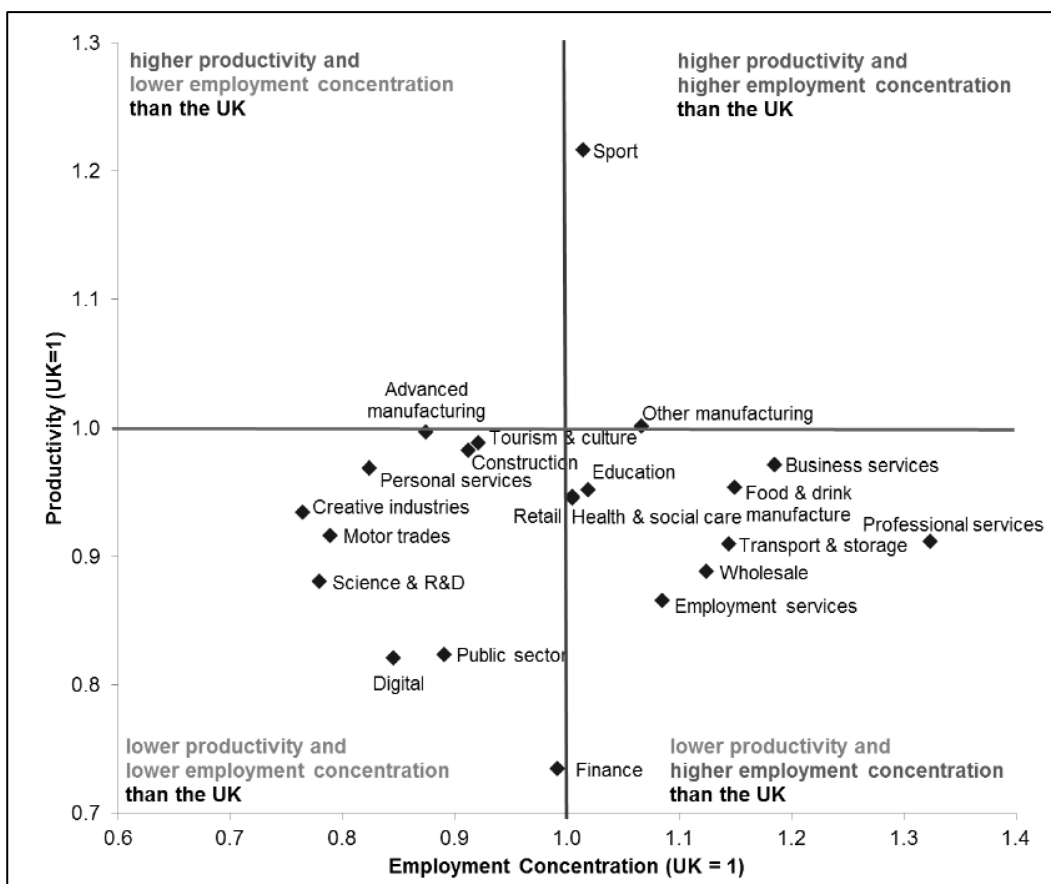


⁶ Greater Manchester Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015.

Patterns of employment and future growth

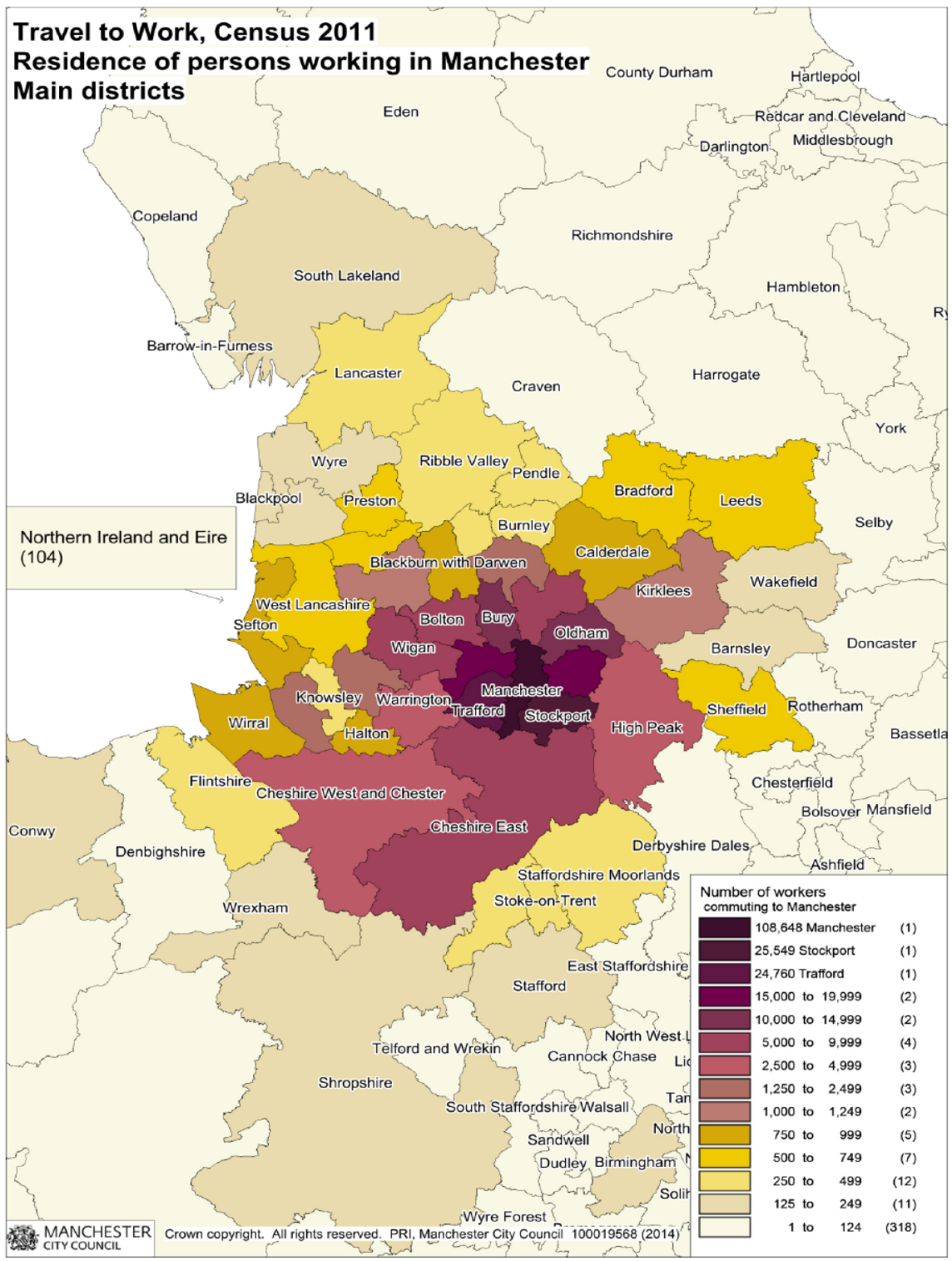
Greater Manchester generates £56 billion⁷ in gross value added, and is the largest functional economic area outside London. It supports a diverse range of employment sectors, the largest of which are financial and professional services, manufacturing, health and social care, retail, education, and digital and creative. Several large national companies, including Co-op Banking Group, RBS, BNY Mellon, MediaCity (home of BBC and ITV), Siemens, and Adidas have a significant presence within the city.

These 6 sectors, together with construction, hospitality and tourism, and logistics are Greater Manchester's 9 priority sectors set to boost economic growth, the employment base, and improve productivity. The diagram below, taken from New Economy's Skills Analysis, illustrates the breadth of the sectors represented in Greater Manchester and the extent of the challenges faced.



⁷ [New Economy – Greater Manchester Skills Analysis 2015/16](#)

Commuting into central Manchester extends across the whole of the north-west, and into Yorkshire, Cumbria, Wales and the West midlands. The pattern of commuting, which illustrates the draw of Central Manchester as a place to work, is illustrated below⁸:



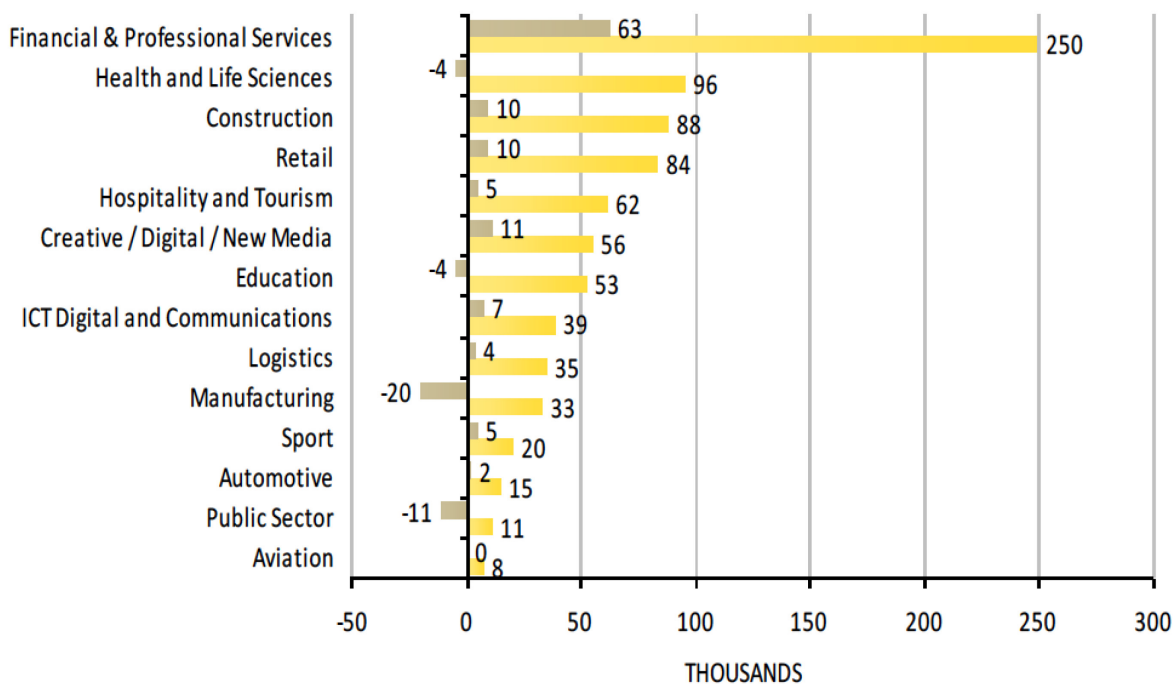
8 Travel to work analysis, Manchester City Council, August 2014

Jobs growth to 2022

New Economy⁹ report that the professional services sector has been the fastest growing over the 3-year period to 2015, with property, arts and entertainment, retail, and recreation sectors all adding jobs over the period since 2008. Within this growth, there has been a particular increase in jobs which are part-time, and a very significant increase in self-employment. Overall, manufacturing (although not advanced manufacturing which embraces new technologies and requires higher-level skills) continues to decline.

New Economy has published 'deep dives' on the GMCA's 9 priority sectors¹⁰. These reports provide a detailed overview of each sector, skills needs and future growth, and are an important source of reference for planning and delivering education and training related to jobs.

Future growth in jobs (2014 to 2022) using the Greater Manchester Forecasting Model¹¹, shows particular growth in business, financial and professional services, digital and creative, retail and construction, with most new jobs expected to be at level 4+.



9 Greater Manchester Skills Analysis, New Economy, January 2016

10 [New Economy Deep Dives Skills Report](#)

11 In the chart yellow bars in each case indicate replacement demand, brown bars indicated whether jobs will be gained or lost for each sector represented

Feedback from LEPs, employers, local authorities and students

Feedback from LEP representatives, local authority representatives, and employers consulted during the area review process drew attention to:

- the importance of regular dialogue between employers, local authorities and colleges to ensure high quality, relevant provision which leads directly to jobs. Colleges must continue to listen to the changing needs of the employment market. They should be in a position to adapt their education and training programmes accordingly and to employ trainers and assessors with relevant industry experience
- issues of duplication. With few exceptions, employers consider that colleges offer training in sectors relevant to the Greater Manchester economy and that progression to high levels of study is available. Many employers expressed concerns about direct duplication of provision between colleges and other providers. Several employers were critical of a system which resulted in multiple 'cold calls' from colleges, providers or agents, often daily, offering free training or apprenticeships. Examples included both local and national providers. They favour a joint, coordinated approach to contacting employers about training provision
- the vital need for good information, advice and guidance, in a complex world of academic or technical education based in colleges or sixth-forms, or the alternative of employer-led provision through traineeships and apprenticeships. In some cases, employers offered to be involved directly in ensuring that young people make good decisions about subjects, sectors and pathways
- a greater focus on employability skills, which in some school leavers were considered to be lacking. Employers placed importance on basic skills, on improving young people's attitudes to work, and on ensuring that local people perform well in application and selection processes for jobs. They place a high premium on relevant work experience and broader work readiness
- greater specialisation. A simpler system of checking experience, quality of training, and the extent of any specialist facilities would enable employers to identify an appropriate training partner to fulfill their requirements.

Employer organisations and other representative bodies consulted directly by JARDU emphasised the breadth of training programmes offered by colleges and the private sector across Greater Manchester. They reinforced the importance of using the wealth of data available about future skills needs to inform the content and focus of training. Areas for improvement related to duplication of provision, the level of direct engagement between employers and colleges, and the importance of keeping college staff and specialist facilities aligned to employers' needs.

As part of each area review there was engagement with students coordinated by the National Union of Students (NUS). Where the NUS submitted a report on the views of students these are available on [NUS connect](#).

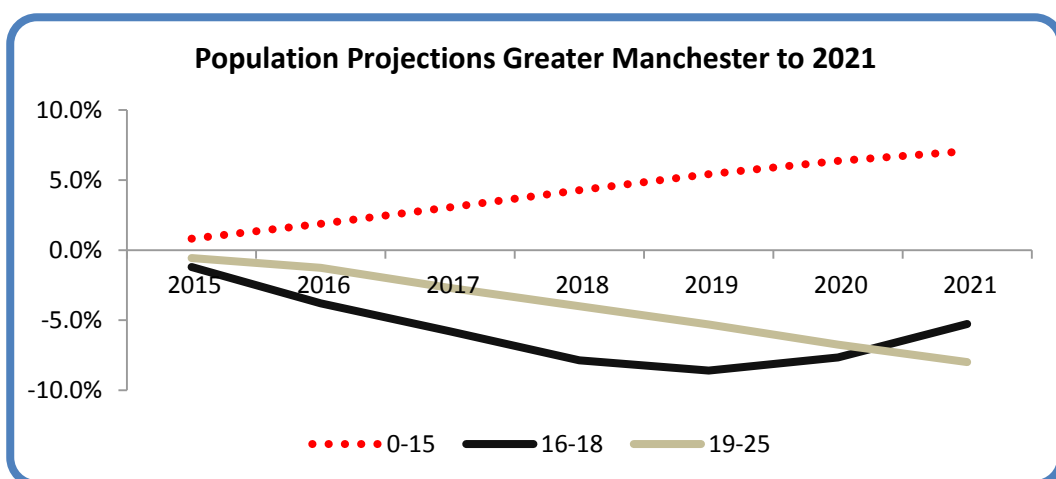
The quantity and quality of current provision

The steering group considered information provided by each local authority about population projections, focusing on the changes in the number and needs of young people aged 16+.

In Greater Manchester, the number of young people aged 16 to 18 is declining in the short term from just over 100,000 in 2014, down to less than 93,000 in 2019, before starting to rise again¹².

In contrast to this, the numbers of 0 to 15 year olds is growing significantly, suggesting that the 16 to 25 population will start to rise after 2021, and will continue to do so, on present projections, for at least a further 5 years.

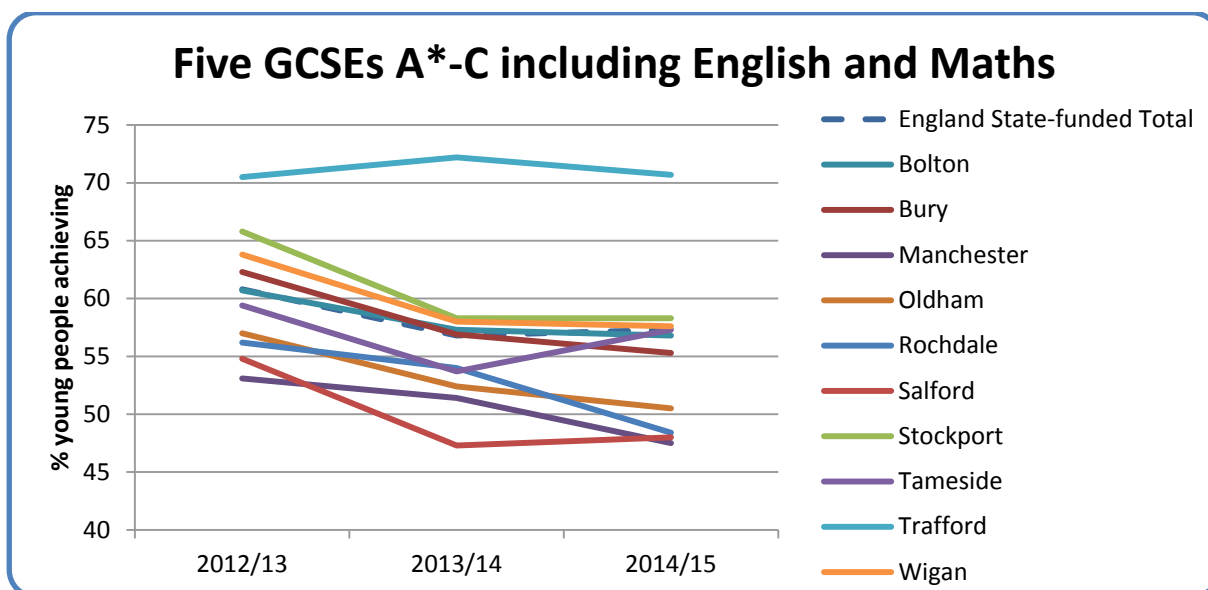
Some colleges are seeing a decline in the 16 to 18 learner population and have been planning accordingly. In all cases, there is a need for colleges to be cautious in their plans for growth in 16 to 18 student numbers over the next 3 years.



¹² ONS sub-national population projections – see data Annex – Population projections

Performance of schools at Key Stage 4

The recent trend in GCSE pass rates for 16 year old school pupils completing year 11 across the ten local authorities is illustrated below¹³.



The performance of schools in year 11 (key stage 4) is below the national average within 6 local authority areas. While Tameside and Wigan are almost identical to the national average, Trafford is considerably above at 70.7%. Only Salford and Tameside show improvement.

Trafford has a very strong record of GCSE performance, maintained over a 3-year period, in contrast to the national picture and those of other districts¹⁴. Manchester, Salford, Oldham and Rochdale have GCSE results well below the national average. These are the local authorities with high multiple deprivation, lower educational achievement, and high numbers of residents claiming benefits.

Schools with sixth-forms

Area reviews of post-16 education and training institutions are predominantly focused on general FE and sixth-form colleges in order to ensure there is a high quality and financially resilient set of colleges in each area of England. Schools with sixth-forms have the opportunity to seek to opt in to a review if the local steering group agrees.

The underpinning analysis for the review included current post-16 provision in the area made by schools with sixth-forms. Regional Schools Commissioners and local authorities have had the

¹³ School Key Stage 4 results – see data annex. Local authority and total (state-funded sector) figures covering achievements in state-funded schools only.

¹⁴ In 2013/14, a change in how the GCSE performance of schools was defined led to a drop in the overall numbers of students achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C, including English and maths.

opportunity to identify any issues with school sixth-form provision, and feed these into the review. We expect Regional Schools Commissioners to take account of the analysis from area reviews in any decisions they make about future provision.

There are currently 53 funded schools with sixth-forms in the review area, including 15 local authority maintained and 38 academies. This includes 3 free schools, 1 studio school and 4 university technical colleges¹⁵. Most school pupils in the age range 16 to 18 are enrolled on A level courses.

Overall funded student numbers in mainstream school sixth-forms increased by 7% in the years 2013 to 2014 to 2015 to 2016 with a total of 9,616 young people funded in a mainstream sixth-form setting in 2015 to 2016¹⁶. School sixth-forms in the area vary in size but using as a guide, for illustration purposes only, the application threshold of 200 for new school sixth-forms in academies, there are 34 school sixth-forms (including local authority maintained and academies but excluding special schools) that were funded below that figure in 2015 to 2016. The majority of schools with sixth-forms were graded by Ofsted as good or better.

The further education and sixth-form colleges

Twenty-one colleges, (11 sixth-form colleges and 10 general FE colleges), participated in this review.

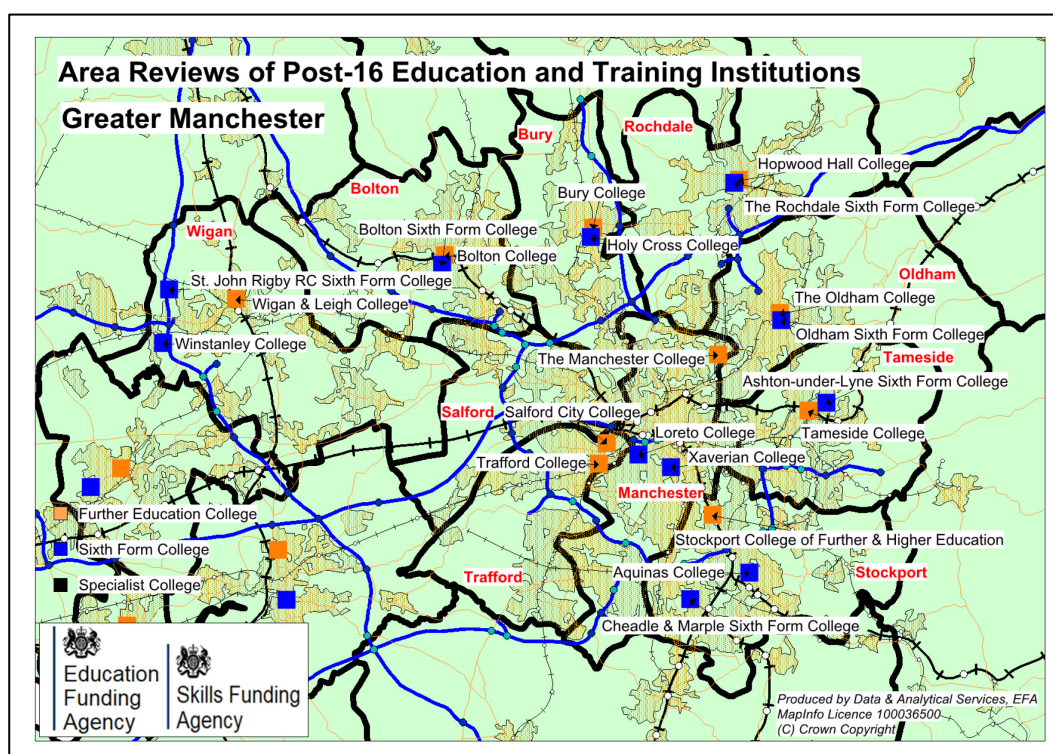
| The sixth-form colleges: | The general FE colleges: |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Aquinas College | Bolton College |
| Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College | Bury College |
| Bolton Sixth Form College | Hopwood Hall College |
| Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College | Salford City College |
| Holy Cross Catholic Sixth Form College | Stockport College |
| Loreto Sixth Form College | Tameside College |
| Oldham Sixth Form College | The Manchester College |

¹⁵ EFA allocations – see data annex: 16-19 funding.

¹⁶ EFA allocations – see data annex: 16-19 funding. Where part of a local authority is in the review area, that local authority has been included in the school sixth form data.

| The sixth-form colleges: | The general FE colleges: |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| The Rochdale Sixth Form College | The Oldham College |
| St John Rigby Sixth Form College | Trafford College |
| Winstanley Sixth Form College | Wigan and Leigh College |
| Xaverian Sixth Form College | |

The location of these colleges is shown below:



Part of the area review process involved a visit to each college by specialist further education and sixth-form college advisers who report to the respective commissioners. The advisers met with governors, senior managers and staff, and reviewed a wide range of documents and data relating to each college's current range and quality of provision, their track record in attracting students, and their overall financial health. Through a data sharing protocol between members of the steering group, the information from each of these visits was shared with colleges and has informed the evidence base to the steering group for this review.

The current offer in the colleges

With the exception of Cheadle and Marple College Network (which is comprised of separately branded sixth-form college sites in Cheadle and Marple), the sixth-form colleges primarily focus on A levels, with a range of technical classroom-based provision at level 3, and sometimes at level 2. Despite competition from school sixth-forms and general FE colleges, most of the sixth-form colleges have maintained or increased their student numbers. In Loreto Sixth Form College and Rochdale Sixth Form College funded student numbers over the period since 2012 to 2013 have increased sharply¹⁷.

In Bolton Sixth Form College and Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College funded student numbers have reduced since 2012 to 2013 (although Cheadle and Marple's have recently begun to recover), and both colleges have taken actions to reduce their cost base in response to lower funding allocations¹⁸. Ofsted grades in the Greater Manchester sixth-form colleges are uniformly at least good and several colleges have been graded outstanding.

A number of sixth-form colleges have formal partnerships with schools, and support Greater Manchester schools through sponsorship of academies, and participation in multi-academy trusts.

The general FE colleges offer a wide range of classroom-based technical education for post-16 students. Five of the general FE colleges (Bury, Manchester, Salford, Tameside and Trafford) also offer A levels in areas where sixth-form colleges and/or schools also offer A level provision.

For 16 to 18 year olds, provision offered includes full-time classroom-based technical education provision, apprenticeships (where students attend college on a regular day each week or for a 'block' of study) and short courses to integrate young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) back into studies. Technical courses are available in a wide range of options at levels 1, 2 and 3. These include STEM subjects (construction, engineering and digital skills), business management, health social care and early years, creative and performing arts, sport, hairdressing, beauty, travel and tourism, animal management and uniformed services.

For adults, colleges offer a similar range of full and part-time study routes beyond level 3 including higher education and professional qualifications at levels 4 and 5, charging fees where they are required to do so. Colleges also offer significant provision for adults aged 24+ at level 3 and above which attract loans, replacing previous SFA funding. There is substantial provision offered for learners aged 19+ at levels 2 and below, improving standards of maths, English and preparing adults for employment or re-employment. Employers use colleges for both apprenticeship support and delivery, and for short updating courses charged at commercial rates.

¹⁷ EFA allocations – see data Annex: 16-19 funding

¹⁸ EFA allocations – see data Annex: 16-19 funding

The most recent Ofsted grades presents a profile where 5 of the 10 general FE colleges are requires improvement, 4 are good, and one is outstanding.

The particular strengths of provision and technical specialisms discussed during the review were:

- hospitality and catering, roofing, work with students who have sensory impairment, and foundation learning, at Bolton College
- construction, engineering, and work with students who have sensory impairments at Bury College
- ICT, health, early years, hospitality and catering at Hopwood Hall College
- higher education in FE, performing arts, business and management, hair and beauty, computing and digital, sport and public services, dental technician training, offender learning, provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities at The Manchester College
- hair and beauty, creative and performing arts, digital technology and ESOL at Oldham College
- horticulture/animal care, performing arts, media and ICT at Salford City College.
- art and design and aspects of construction at Stockport College
- engineering, hospitality (bakery) and work with students with learning difficulties and disabilities at Tameside College
- engineering, hospitality and hair and beauty at Trafford College
- engineering provision and aspects of renewable energy at Wigan and Leigh College.

Across the Greater Manchester area, there is significant competition for students, and travel patterns are heavily influenced by the availability of good public transport routes. Growth in sixth-forms has contributed to the competition.

With a declining age 16 to 19 cohort in the short-term, local authorities emphasised intense competition for students age 16+ across Greater Manchester. They stressed the importance of reviewing carefully any new school sixth-form applications to ensure that they did not destabilise good providers, or duplicate what was already available.

In terms of travel to learn central Manchester is particularly attractive as a place to study, but students are prepared to travel to neighbouring local authorities (or out of area to Liverpool and Lancashire). Work undertaken by New Economy indicates that at higher levels (3 and 4+) there is much greater willingness to travel than at levels 2 and below¹⁹.

This reinforces the importance of keeping provision at levels 2 and below local, if levels of educational achievement across Greater Manchester are to improve.

¹⁹ [New Economy – Greater Manchester Skills Analysis 2015/16](#)

Some of the general FE colleges have seen a decline in their 16 to 18 student numbers, with the steepest decline at Stockport College²⁰. All of the general FE colleges have experienced a decline in their Skills Funding Agency allocations; some have successfully built up alternative funding streams from commercial and international work²¹.

Where colleges have experienced a reduction in demand, most have implemented savings successfully. However, in the case of Stockport College, a combination of falling demand and acute long-term financial difficulties now need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Quality of provision and financial sustainability of colleges

The following table provides a summary of the size and quality in each of the colleges:

| College | Most recent overall Ofsted grade ²² | EFA allocations (2015 to 16) ²³ | SFA allocations (2015 to 16) ²⁴ | Total college income (2014 to 15) ²⁵ |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| Aquinas College | Good (Sept 2013) | £9,090,000 | £88,430 | £10,931,000 |
| Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College | Good (March 2016) | £9,090,000 | £178,189 | £9,840,000 |
| Bolton Sixth Form College | Good (Jan 2014) | £7,630,000 | | £8,708,000 |
| Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College | Good (March 2014) | £7,020,000 | £750,047 | £9,973,000 |
| Holy Cross Catholic Sixth Form College | Outstanding (Feb 2007) | £9,300,000 | | £10,713,000 |
| Loreto Sixth Form College | Outstanding (Nov 2009) | £15,610,000 | | £15,222,000 |

20 EFA allocations – see data Annex: 16-19 funding

21 SFA allocations – see data Annex: Adult funding

22 Ofsted – see data annex: College inspections

23 EFA allocations – see data annex: 16 to 19 funding

24 SFA allocations – see data annex: Adult funding

25 College accounts academic year 2014 to 2015 data – see data annex: College accounts

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Oldham Sixth Form College | Good (Feb 2013) | £10,450,000 | | £11,078,000 |
| Rochdale Sixth Form College | Outstanding (March 2013) | £7,050,000 | | £6,578,000 |
| St John Rigby Sixth Form College | Good (Nov 2012) | £6,800,000 | | £7,798,000 |
| Winstanley Sixth Form College | Outstanding (Oct 2007) | £8,830,000 | £2,228 | £9,115,000 |
| Xaverian Sixth Form College | Outstanding (Feb 2008) | £10,110,000 | £86,080 | £11,095,000 |
| Bolton College | Requires Improvement (March 2015) | £11,770,000 | £5,498,183 | £26,259,000 |
| Bury College | Outstanding (Feb 2007) | £22,050,000 | £5,533,927 | £33,373,000 |
| Hopwood Hall College | Good (May 2011) | £14,360,000 | £6,033,116 | £23,217,000 |
| Salford City College | Good (November 2015) | £25,140,000 | £7,734,597 | £40,666,000 |
| Stockport College | Requires Improvement (Dec 2014) | £7,950,000 | £4,533,306 | £22,749,000 |
| Tameside College | Requires Improvement (Jan 2015) | £12,000,000 | £4,083,266 | £21,078,000 |
| The Manchester College | Good (May 2014) | £32,560,000 | £23,950,723 | £168,042,000 |
| The Oldham College | Requires Improvement | £13,990,000 | £5,701,840 | £25,683,000 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | (May 2015) | | | |
| Trafford College | Good (Jan 2015) | £12,620,000 | £6,037,215 | £23,825,000 |
| Wigan and Leigh College | Requires Improvement (March 2015) | £11,390,000 | £7,533,580 | £27,998,000 |

Where a college was subject to a financial notice of concern or a financial notice to improve, this factor was taken into account in the assessment of options for structural change in the review. Stockport College is subject to a financial notice of concern issued by the Skills Funding Agency.

Generally, colleges in the review area are in good condition and have reasonable space and running cost efficiency. Some colleges have higher average space per student than others, but this does not necessarily indicate being over-spaced. Each college has unique circumstances and constraints regarding estates. The area review has highlighted some instances where rationalisation or further investment might be considered further during implementation.

Higher education in further education²⁶

Progression of young people to higher education across Greater Manchester is variable. Data provided by New Economy²⁷ indicates that just over half of young people who complete A levels in Greater Manchester progress to university, which is slightly higher than the national rate.

The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Bolton and the University of Salford offer the majority of higher education in the area. Manchester is also home to The Royal College of Music and Manchester Business School. The colleges have a role in delivering higher education, although on a relatively small scale. There is a range of study options and sectors available, addressing most of the key priority sectors for Greater Manchester, the largest of which is engineering. In addition to these, colleges offer professional qualifications, particularly in financial and professional services, charging full fees to students.

The development of new apprenticeship routes (higher apprenticeships and graduate apprenticeships) gives an opportunity for employers, colleges and universities to expand work at level 4 and to create attractive opportunities for young people to combine higher education study with work to meet priority sectors and skill shortages.

²⁶ HEFCE POLAR 3– see data annex: Higher education progression

²⁷ The 2015/16 skills analysis

Provision for students with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and high needs²⁸

In 2015 to 2016, the EFA funded around 2,350 post-16 places across the 10 local authorities in colleges, special schools and specialist post-16 institutions. Colleges delivered 1,100 funded places between them. The colleges delivering the highest numbers of funded places are Bolton College, Bury College, The Oldham College, Tameside College, and The Manchester College, which together account for about 60% of the total. Of the sixth-form colleges, Loreto College is the largest provider. In identifying areas of specialist provision, the general FE colleges were keen to emphasise their role in supporting students with high needs, backed by significant levels of capital investment which have been used to ensure high quality specialist facilities and equipment.

In addition, around a further 1,250 places were funded by the EFA in special schools, specialist post-16 institutions, school sixth-forms, academies and other providers. Specialist post-16 institutions include Bridge College, Langdon College, Chatsworth Futures, The Seashell Trust and The Media College. Some of this provision caters for students with profound and complex needs, and is residential.

During the review, local authorities expressed the view that the demand for high needs provision places was growing and investment would continue to be required in this provision.

The steering group acknowledged that structural changes taking place as a result of the review should not disadvantage post-16 students with SEN or high needs.

Apprenticeships and apprenticeship providers

Contributing to the government's target of ensuring that there are a total of 3 million apprentices by 2020 is a key priority for Greater Manchester. In 2014 to 2015, there were over 30,000 apprenticeship starts²⁹. However, less than 20% of these were delivered by the colleges within scope of this review, with the remainder delivered by a total of 370 different providers (local authorities, group training associations, small independent providers, colleges based outside the Manchester area, national organisations and by employers themselves). In terms of Greater Manchester colleges, The Manchester College, Wigan and Leigh College, Bury College and Trafford College recorded the highest numbers of new apprenticeship starts. Overall the most popular frameworks are health and social care, business administration, engineering, retail and commercial enterprise, and construction.

²⁸ EFA Allocations – see data annex: 16-19 funding

²⁹ Numbers of apprenticeships by provider and LA – see data annex: Apprenticeships

With the introduction of the apprenticeship levy from 2017³⁰, further growth is anticipated in apprenticeships, and colleges with strong, direct relationships with medium and larger employers are likely to benefit. Feedback suggests that developing a system which does not result in multiple approaches to the same employers will be fundamental to ensuring that employers and colleges are able to work together positively to expand provision.

³⁰ 'Apprenticeship levy and how it will work' on gov.uk

The need for change

Area reviews are intended to ensure that the further education sector has a strong and sustainable future – in terms of efficiency of operation, quality of provision, and the responsiveness of courses to the needs of individuals and employers.

At the start of the review the GMCA set out their priorities that to support Greater Manchester's growth and reform agenda, the outcomes of the area review should allow for the creation of an effective infrastructure across the post-16 education and training landscape. It was crucial that the infrastructure acted as a key enabler for further education providers to work in a more cost efficient and sustainable way in order to reflect recent and future reductions to budgets; and to be more responsive to the needs of businesses, particularly those in priority growth sectors.

GMCA set out its criteria for proposed options:

- proposals using Greater Manchester (GM) Labour Market Intelligence and future skills requirements that better deliver the higher level and technical skills required by GM's core and growth sectors
- proposals with a strong role for employers both in shaping the curriculum to meet future needs or supporting delivery – embedding work experience, enterprise skills and knowledge transfer
- provision which integrates timely, quality careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) building on successful GM initiatives
- proposals which are focused on outcomes, not only qualifications, reducing the number of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and increasing English and maths attainment by age 19 as well as employment opportunities
- proposals that support an integrated approach to skills and employment provision, in different places, including post 16, delivered through different models which have the individual and employer at its heart
- access to level 2 and 3 and below provision within each area of GM (a presence in each district), but with specialist higher level provision, working closely with GM's employers, at specific sites in GM with excellent transport connections - recognising travel to learn pattern
- proposals with clear pathways for progression to further/higher education or into employment and to develop higher level skills to drive up productivity
- strong collaboration between institutions and employers to ensure there are seamless progression routes for people across geographies.
- strong academic post-16 offer, distinct from general FE, with more young people succeeding in STEM subjects at level 3
- ensuring that there is sufficient provision for adults and learners with special educational needs and disabilities
- remove duplication in provision (both at local level and across GM specifically for level 3+).
- proposals built on the existing strengths of institutions as demonstrated through volumes delivered, Ofsted grading and learner and employer ratings

- greater specialisation focused on level 3+ provision including the opportunity for one or more Institutes of Technology in GM; GM to be at the forefront of developing innovative models
- focus on growing provision in key GM sectors where skills shortages are emerging and impacting on growth
- demonstrating and delivering clear progression routes to further education or skilled employment
- proposals that deliver significantly more 16 to 18 apprenticeships, with a focus on level 3 apprenticeships in GM's key economic sectors
- growing the number of level 3 apprenticeships for those already in employment
- increasing GM employment rates by supporting progression into work
- reducing reliance on public funding by growing provision funded through adult loans, apprenticeship levy and direct employer investment
- proposals which are flexible to meet changing future demand, including new models of delivery and virtual learning (not just investment in fixed infrastructure costs and traditional institutions)
- financially viable tested against the expected reductions in both 16 to 18 and 19+ budgets to 2020
- greater efficiency against the key cost drivers, at least meeting national benchmarks set out by the FE Commissioner
- make more efficient use of the land, buildings and technology in line with 'one public estate'- allowing delivery in a varied range of the whole public estate
- proposals with strong leadership and management, with reduced overheads and back office costs and flexibility to support different models in different places
- Creating the right infrastructure for the future, for GM learners and the economy, rather than protecting any one existing institution
- exploring all models of delivery including greater commission of activity from third parties and business led.

The key areas for change

Taking the preceding points into account, the key issues in relation to this review, and deliberated during steering group meetings, are:

- there are significant variations between local authority areas in relation to levels of education of adults and the performance of young people at GCSE level. Rochdale, Salford, Oldham and Tameside are well behind other local authorities on these measures. This reinforces the need to focus on access to education and training at a local level, progression, and rapid improvement of quality in particular schools and colleges to ensure that provision is uniformly at least good

- specific action is needed to address the weak financial position and building condition of Stockport College, and quality of provision in the 5 colleges with overall Ofsted grades of requires improvement
- Greater Manchester's challenges include building greater capacity to provide specialist higher level skills in the priority sectors, and raising overall productivity. Colleges are independent institutions, but it is essential that they work collectively to address the wider skills issues across Greater Manchester, which includes providing high quality accessible training, aligned to priority areas, up to and including levels 4 and 5
- employers wish to see improvements in the quality of information advice and guidance for young people, and new entrants to the workforce better prepared for employment. They want to be confident that the local education and skills offered by all providers is accessible, high quality, up-to-date, and responsive to change
- the government has set a target of 3 million apprenticeships by 2020, and Greater Manchester is committed to supporting rapid growth in the numbers of high quality apprenticeship opportunities available locally. New models of apprenticeships developed by employers, and the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 is expected to drive up demand, but colleges will need to work hard at developing direct links with local employers if they are to increase their current modest contribution to the training of local apprentices across Greater Manchester
- control of the skills budget for adults aged 19+ from 2017 to 2018 will enable GMCA to review how effectively funds are spent to help people obtain work, and what contribution these funds should be making to the wider goals of growth and economic prosperity. Employers consulted during the review expressed views that the skills system needs streamlining and simplifying to ensure that they are able to access training quickly and cost-effectively. They also need assurances that all providers involved in post-16 education and training are appropriately skilled, qualified and resourced to deliver what they offer.

Initial options raised during visits to colleges

During their visits, advisers reported that all colleges had given considerable thought to potential strategic options in advance of the review. In some cases, this meant informal discussions with neighbouring colleges and stakeholders to canvas views and to assess the potential level of support for change.

The types of options discussed were:

- formal structural change (including mergers between colleges and with universities, federations and joint venture companies) primarily to improve curriculum planning, streamline delivery, reduce management and back-office costs, strengthen quality of provision, provide more progression to higher education, or share the costs of investment in areas of specialisation

- discussions between colleges about greater specialisation at higher levels, with each college focusing on one or more of the Greater Manchester's priorities for growth, including the development of an Institute of Technology (IoT). Specialisation would enable concentration of investment in capital facilities and in specialist staffing, with potentially greater capacity to develop courses at level 4+ and expansion of commercial updating courses aimed at employers
- shared services, between colleges, groups of sixth-form colleges, and sixth-form colleges with schools. Specifically, this was in the context of enabling savings in back office costs
- the case for remaining stand-alone. In some cases, student numbers have been maintained or increased despite growing competition, quality is at least good and underlying finances are sufficiently strong to withstand policy and funding changes. In these cases, colleges stressed the need to remain focused on local issues, or to build on particular success without broadening their base of activity to new areas of work
- conversion to an academy. This option is available primarily but not exclusively, to sixth-form colleges and the Catholic sixth-form colleges had early discussions about the potential of working collaboratively, with or without academy status. By becoming an academy, a college is able to develop partnerships more easily with other schools in the area. In order to be approved, academisation proposals must be able to demonstrate how they will lead to strong links with schools, whether through joining or establishing a multi-academy trust (with other academies) or as a single academy trust collaborating with other schools in the area. Like other academies, sixth-form colleges which become academies would be eligible to receive reimbursement of their non-business VAT and would be classified as public sector bodies.

Criteria for evaluating options and use of sector benchmarks

Assessment criteria

In each area review, 4 nationally-agreed criteria are used for the process of assessment. These are:

- meets the needs of current and future students and employers
- is feasible and generates financial sustainability
- raises quality and relevance of provision, including better outcomes
- achieves appropriate specialisation.

FE sector benchmarks

To support rigorous assessment of proposals, particularly options leading to major structural change, DfE have developed a series of sector 'quality and financial indicators and related criteria'.

Financial benchmarks relate to delivering operating surpluses of 3% to 5%, ensuring borrowings stay below 40% of annual income (the maximum threshold set for affordability), staff costs of no more than 65% of total income (FE sector average) and a current ratio greater than 1. Financial plans were assessed for each option, including colleges seeking to stand-alone, prior to consideration by the local steering group.

A number of other indicators are also taken into account by the steering group. These relate to the impact of proposed changes on quality of provision, on teaching efficiency, and how they actively support growth in apprenticeships and work at levels 4 and 5. Within proposals, overall levels of provision for high needs students should be maintained. New strategic plans need to be supported by LEPs and local authorities. Colleges may also need to review their senior staffing and their governance to ensure that they have the required skills, and the capacity to implement rapid change.

The assessment of options indicated that, based on the information available to the area review steering group, the colleges would move towards the benchmarks and indicators through successful implementation of options, and that the protected characteristics groups, including high needs students, would retain at least equal access to learning.

More detail about these benchmarks is contained in area review guidance Annex F³¹ (revised March 2016).

³¹ Reviewing post-16 education and training institutions: updated guidance on area reviews Annex F, Pages 49-53

Recommendations agreed by the steering group

Twenty recommendations were agreed by the steering group at their meeting in June 2016.

These were:

- merger of Oldham, Stockport and Tameside Colleges
- merger of Bolton College and Bury College with the University of Bolton
- Trafford College to join the LTE Group on the equivalent basis to The Manchester College
- Hopwood Hall to remain as a stand-alone further education college
- Salford City College to remain as a stand-alone further education college
- Wigan and Leigh College to remain as a stand-alone further education college
- Aquinas College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved
- Cheadle and Marple College Network to convert to an academy
- Ashton Sixth Form College, to consider conversion to an academy but if not, to remain as a stand-alone sixth-form college
- Oldham Sixth Form College to convert to an academy and form a multi-academy-trust
- Rochdale Sixth Form College to convert to an academy
- Holy Cross Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved
- Bolton Sixth Form College, to convert to an academy
- Winstanley Sixth Form College, to consider conversion to an academy but if not, to remain as a stand-alone sixth-form college
- St John Rigby Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved
- Xaverian Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved
- Loreto Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved
- a strategic planning group to be formed, including all general FE colleges and sixth-form colleges, the newly converting 16 to 18 academies and GMCA to ensure that the needs of learners and employers are met. The group will support and monitor delivery of the recommendations of this review and undertake joint work on areas including, but not limited to, curriculum, transport, quality and estates
- GMCA to develop a proposal for an Institute of Technology, to be submitted to government for funding, that will deliver high level technical learning (particularly focused on level 4 and 5) in STEM areas to support growth in a range of GM employment sectors. This would be developed in conjunction with employers and provision at all levels to ensure access and progression for individuals

- GMCA to lead an apprenticeships delivery group to develop a GM strategy for growth in apprenticeships provision, across colleges and other high quality providers, which responds to the needs of employers.

Each of these options is now outlined in more detail:

Oldham, Stockport and Tameside Colleges

Oldham, Stockport and Tameside Colleges to merge.

- Oldham, Stockport and Tameside are districts which lie adjacent to each other on the eastern edge of the Greater Manchester area. The colleges recruit primarily from their home local authorities, but they also draw students from the outer fringes of the Greater Manchester geographical area and beyond its boundaries
- the proposed merger will develop a new post-16 institution which focuses on progression to high quality technical education and training. The merger will release significant cost savings in management and support functions. These savings will be used to support additional investment in teaching and learning, and to fund a comprehensive approach to transforming quality, which specifically includes a focus on maths and English to improve achievement at GCSE
- the curriculum will be reviewed and re-planned to avoid unnecessary duplication, but each town will retain a wide range of study options up to level 3 for adults and young people, including apprenticeships, and a selective offer at level 4+ to meet local demand. The option drew support from the 3 local authorities, employers and partners
- Stockport College is financially weak, and all 3 colleges were graded 'requires improvement' in their most recent Ofsted inspection. The colleges have highlighted the need for funding to address the levels of commercial debt and to rationalise estates in order to improve efficiencies and reduce costs, to reconfigure buildings to suit planned provision and to improve building condition.

Bolton College, Bury College and the University of Bolton

Bolton College and Bury College to merge with the University of Bolton.

- Bolton College and Bury College, 6 miles apart, serve the northern part of Greater Manchester area. Bury College recruits students from a wide catchment, which includes from Bolton and Rochdale. Bolton College's recruitment area spreads north and west towards Wigan
- The University of Bolton is situated on a compact, modern campus adjacent to Bolton College. Bury College was graded overall outstanding in its most Ofsted inspection. Bolton College was graded as requires improvement. Both colleges will work together to improve quality in Bolton College, but the proposed merger will retain individual identities through

the use of a group structure. The merged organisation will map and provide comprehensive pathways of study from entry level through to PhD

- the strengths of the merged organisation in science and health provide an opportunity to participate in the development of an Institute of Technology serving the Greater Manchester area. The combined turnover of the merged organisation will be £100 million+ which will ensure financial resilience in the face of any future changes in public funding.

Trafford College

Trafford College to join the LTE Group on the equivalent basis to The Manchester College.

- the LTE Group is the trading name of a group structure which includes The Manchester College, a separate apprenticeship unit, MOL (a national provider of qualifications in professional human resources qualifications), Total People (a large regional work-based learning provider) and NOVUS, which specialises in offender learning
- Trafford College plans to join the group, which would make the LTE Group well-positioned geographically to provide comprehensive education and training across Central and South West Manchester. These are the areas from which both colleges primarily recruit their classroom-based students. The colleges have strong links with employers and both were graded good by Ofsted in their most recent inspections
- proposed benefits would be in joint curriculum planning which would reduce overlap between the colleges, campus redevelopment and rationalisation across the 2 colleges, savings in back office costs and a joint approach to quality. The group has expressed a commitment to contributing to a reduction in NEETs, improving quality towards outstanding, investing further in information, advice and guidance (IAG), growing apprenticeships, and the development of an Institute of Technology. Improvements in transport from outlying areas into Central Manchester are expected to result in rapid growth across all areas of the group's operations
- initial financial analysis indicates that the proposal is within FE financial benchmarks.

Hopwood Hall College

Hopwood Hall College to remain as a stand-alone further education college.

- Hopwood Hall College, based in Rochdale, plans to stand-alone. It has 2 sites, one in central Rochdale and one in Middleton, closer to central Manchester. Currently it recruits students primarily to the north east of Greater Manchester and into Lancashire
- Rochdale is a local authority with significant areas of deprivation. GCSE results are below the national average, and the proportion of adults qualified at level 2 and level 4 is comparatively low. These are important local challenges which will need to be addressed within the college's future strategic planning. The college also plans to expand apprenticeships and provision for students with high needs

- the college indicates a forecast that it will maintain a strong financial position. In its most recent Ofsted inspection, the College achieved an overall grade of good.

Salford City College

Salford City College to remain as a stand-alone further education college.

- Salford City College is the second largest college in Greater Manchester. It was formed in 2009, as a result of a merger between Pendleton, Eccles and Salford Colleges, when significant rationalisation was achieved between the 3 founder colleges. It now recruits extensively across the western part of Greater Manchester into Bolton and down towards Trafford and westwards to Leigh
- the college achieved an overall grade of good in its most recent Ofsted inspection. The Board agreed the recommendation that the college should stand-alone, broadening the present offer at level 2 and below, and implementing a planned digital learning strategy. They have committed to working with neighbouring Wigan and Leigh College to expand apprenticeship provision, to improve quality, and to explore the feasibility of participating in a joint Institute of Technology
- financial performance compared to national benchmarks is good.

Wigan and Leigh College

Wigan and Leigh College to remain as a stand-alone further education college.

- Wigan and Leigh College agreed the recommendation to stand-alone, and also to work with the local authority, Job Centre Plus, employers and other providers to develop an integrated education model to better serve local needs. The college has a relatively contained catchment, bordered by 3 motorways (M6, M61, M62), including its home towns, Ashton-in-Makerfield and Hindley. Current partnerships are with schools and colleges which include those in Lancashire and Liverpool
- the college plans to work with neighbouring institutions, including St John Rigby and Winstanley Sixth Form Colleges on areas such as shared services, and with Salford City College on apprenticeship growth, expansion of higher education and on quality improvement. The college plans to rapidly achieve an Ofsted grade of outstanding from its current position of requires improvement
- curriculum areas expected to grow include logistics, engineering and manufacturing, health and social care, digital skills, construction, and business/financial services. In 2017, it plans to open a University Centre in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN)
- the college is on track to meet the required FE sector financial benchmarks.

Aquinas College

Aquinas College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved.

- Aquinas College recruits students extensively from Stockport, and towards the south east into Cheshire and Derbyshire. In its most recent Ofsted report, it achieved an overall good rating
- the Board agreed the recommendation that the college should continue as a stand-alone sixth-form college, but will consider academisation once the implications for Catholic sixth-form colleges are clear
- financial plans show that by 2020, the college should be in a position to meet the sector financial benchmarks.

Cheadle and Marple College Network

Cheadle and Marple College Network to convert to an academy.

- Cheadle and Marple College Network (which comprises distinct sixth-form college centres at Cheadle and Marple) propose to convert to an academy. This would involve the college joining the South Manchester Academy Trust, and aiming to secure some reduction in costs through shared services. Its current catchment is based from the south east of the Stockport local authority area through into Cheshire and Derbyshire
- separately, the college has committed to engage with the 2 other colleges based in Stockport to review provision and remove duplication
- the College's most recent Ofsted inspection resulted in an overall grade of good
- proposals to dispose of surplus land within 12 months will make an important contribution to the college's financial position.

Ashton Sixth Form College

Ashton Sixth Form College, to consider conversion to an academy but if not, to remain as a stand-alone sixth-form college.

- the college has a wide catchment which includes 16 to 18 year old students from its home local authority of Tameside, down into Stockport, west towards Central Manchester, and east into Derbyshire
- in 2013, the college formed the A+ Trust in collaboration with 6 local schools. The college now proposes to convert to become an academy, and to create a new multi-academy trust with those current members of the A+ Trust who wish to convert. The college will continue to work closely with all local schools, but has also committed to working collaboratively with the proposed Oldham, Tameside and Stockport Colleges merger on curriculum planning. The college's most recent Ofsted inspection resulted in an overall grade of good

- the proposal includes the development of shared services for payroll, HR and financial transactions, with expected efficiency savings. Future financial forecasts point to an improvement in the operating performance of the college towards sector benchmarks.

Oldham Sixth Form College

Oldham Sixth Form College to convert to an academy and form a multi-academy-trust.

- Oldham Sixth Form College recruits within its home local authority, and also to the north and west of Oldham towards West Yorkshire. The college plans to establish a multi-academy trust, and to work to improve outcomes of local schools firstly at key stage 4 and subsequently at key stage 2. The proposal has the full support of the local authority
- the proposed trust will help reduce management and operating costs through centralisation of some back office functions
- the college currently indicates a financial position that is strong, and in its most recent Ofsted inspection it achieved an overall grade of good.

Rochdale Sixth Form College

Rochdale Sixth Form College to convert to an academy.

- Rochdale Sixth Form College recruits from within the town itself, and to the north and east of Rochdale. The college plans to convert to an academy, and establish a multi-academy trust. It is actively discussing proposals for improvement with a range of local secondary schools, and the local authority is supportive of this option
- the college indicates it is in a sound financial position, and was rated an overall outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspection.

Holy Cross Catholic Sixth Form College

Holy Cross Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved.

- the college recruits from a very wide catchment, including south from Bury into Manchester and north into Lancashire. The Board agreed the recommendation that the college should continue as a stand-alone sixth-form college, but it will consider academisation once the implications for Catholic sixth-form colleges are clear. It will also potentially participate in the Catholic sixth-form college collegiate proposal
- the college is in a sound and potentially improving financial position, with strong reserves, and was rated an overall outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspection.

Bolton Sixth Form College

Bolton Sixth Form College, to convert to an academy.

- the college recruits both from Bolton, and extensively towards Wigan. There is commitment from the Board to converting to an academy, and to exploring shared services within a multi-academy trust. This would include payroll, catering services and premises maintenance, and potentially sharing resources in areas of high cost with others (for example, performing arts)
- the college currently indicates it has a sound financial position, but would need to maintain this with careful attention to costs, should income reduce. The most recent Ofsted inspection resulted in an overall grade of good.

Winstanley Sixth Form College

Winstanley Sixth Form College, to consider conversion to an academy but if not, to remain as a stand-alone sixth-form college.

- Winstanley College has a very broad catchment which includes south to the M62, and north into Lancashire. The College has significant experience of academies through sponsorship, and is firmly committed to exploring conversion to become an academy and to join a multi-academy trust. The college intends working with Wigan local authority and other post-16 providers in Wigan, including Wigan and Leigh College, and St John Rigby College as part of the Wigan Colleges Partnership, to review the curriculum offer and share best practice
- the college indicates it is in a sound financial position. It's most recent Ofsted inspection resulted in an overall grade of outstanding.

St John Rigby Sixth Form College

St John Rigby Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved.

- the college recruits to the west of Wigan, and from communities which border the M6 and the M58. The intention is to explore the option to convert to become a single academy trust, but continuing to work closely with the other Catholic sixth-form colleges. There is a commitment to working with Winstanley Sixth Form College and Wigan and Leigh College as part of the Wigan Colleges Partnership. There are already strong links with 7 schools in Liverpool and West Lancashire through the Catholic Schools Direct Partnership
- the college indicates it is in a sound financial position, and achieved an overall grade of good in its most recent Ofsted inspection.

Xaverian Sixth Form College

Xaverian Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved.

- the college recruits extensively from the south of Central Manchester, although some students travel from across the city. It agreed the recommendation to continue as a stand-alone sixth-form college, but to consider academisation once the implications for Catholic sixth-form colleges are clear
- the college indicates it is in a sound financial position and obtained an overall grade of outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspection.

Loreto Sixth Form College

Loreto Sixth Form College to stand-alone as a sixth-form college, retaining the option to academise when the issues around Catholic sixth-form colleges academising have been resolved.

- Loreto College recruits from right across Manchester. The Board agreed the recommendation to continue as a stand-alone sixth-form college, but to consider academisation once the implications for Catholic sixth-form colleges are clear. The preferred option on conversion is to form a single academy trust, working extensively through its nationally accredited teaching school status across Greater Manchester schools, the Salford Diocesan Multi Academy Trust, and the Catholic Sixth Form Collegiate and sixth-form colleges in general
- the college indicates it is in a sound financial position and obtained an overall grade of outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspection.

Formation of a strategic planning group for Manchester

A strategic planning group to be formed, including all general FE colleges and sixth-form colleges, the newly converting 16 to 18 academies and GMCA to ensure that the needs of learners and employers are met. The group will support and monitor delivery of the recommendations of this review and undertake joint work on areas including, but not limited to, curriculum, transport, quality and estates.

- GMCA places considerable importance on the impact of changes in the college infrastructure on the Greater Manchester ambitions for economic success
- GMCA wishes to see an education and skills offer which closely matches the needs of individuals, employers and Greater Manchester's priority growth sectors. The formation of a strategic planning group will ensure that individual plans are shared, and that changes

- are made to ensure that each element aligns to the needs of other public services, and contributes to the well-being and prosperity of the Greater Manchester area as a whole
- the group will monitor delivery of recommendations agreed by the steering group. Joint work in particular to analyse the curriculum offer, transport, quality improvement and estates will link to the wider picture. Work on transport will link into the GM Transport Strategy, and proposals to rationalise the college estate.

Development of a proposal for an Institute of Technology

GMCA to develop a proposal for an Institute of Technology, to be submitted to government for funding, that will deliver high level technical learning (particularly focused on level 4 and 5) in STEM areas to support growth in a range of GM employment sectors. This would be developed in conjunction with employers and provision at all levels to ensure access and progression for individuals.

- the GMCA's proposal for an Institute of Technology (IOT) will deliver high level technical learning, particularly focusing on STEM at levels 4 and 5 to meet employers' needs. It would work in close partnership with colleges and with universities, building routes for progression through to higher levels, including to higher and degree-level apprenticeships
- the current plans are for a new autonomous institution, working closely with existing providers and governed by employers and current further and higher education providers. The IoT would be equipped with industry-standard facilities at the cutting edge of new developments
- a working group of employers, providers and the Combined Authority will be set up to oversee the feasibility of these proposals and the extent of financial support required.

An apprenticeship delivery group

GMCA to lead an apprenticeships delivery group to develop a GM strategy for growth in apprenticeships provision, across colleges and other high quality providers, which responds to the needs of employers.

All general FE colleges have expressed a firm commitment to increasing apprenticeships. GMCA will draw up proposals to work with employers, colleges and other providers to ensure that there is a comprehensive apprenticeship offer that meets the needs of each locality and of Greater Manchester as a whole.

Conclusions from this review

The purpose of area reviews is to put colleges on a stronger financial footing whilst also enabling them to better meet the economic and educational needs of students and employers for the long term.

Throughout the review, colleges have worked closely with their LEP, local authorities and the review team, sharing detailed information about their performance and processes. Each local steering group member has been in a position to offer ideas for change, and make comments and assessments about others' proposals and plans for their area. The review team is grateful for the positive approach taken by all the local stakeholders involved in the review.

The issues arising from the area review summarised in 'The need for change', will be addressed through:

- Greater Manchester will have a more sustainable college infrastructure as a result of these proposed changes with performance forecast to improve against the published benchmarks, particularly in the case of those options leading to mergers, such as for Oldham, Stockport, and Tameside
- quality and performance should also improve as a result of the improved levels of collaboration across the education sector, between general FE colleges, sixth-form colleges, and schools
- proposals from the general FE colleges focusing on addressing local economic needs, including GMCA priorities, and ensuring that local provision is retained within each district. They will also delivery a much greater focus on apprenticeships, progression, and relevant skills at levels 4 and 5
- proposals by the sixth-form colleges will improve partnership working with schools, including arrangements for seamless transition of pupils within phases of education, cost-sharing, and ensuring exchange of best practice in teaching, learning and assessment to improve outcomes at GCSE and A level and in English and maths
- Greater Manchester remains an area of intense competition for post-16 students and the GMCA will wish to monitor the implementation of proposals and recommend further actions to the colleges should it become clear that quality or viability is at risk. The viability of small school sixth-forms will also continue to be under scrutiny by local authorities and the Regional Schools Commissioner. The effectiveness of the information, advice and guidance offer within this environment will need to be reviewed during the implementation stage
- growth in apprenticeships will be boosted through the structural changes and through the focus provided by the delivery group, bringing together the colleges and other providers with GMCA to generate stronger links with employers and achieve the rapid growth in apprenticeships required in Greater Manchester
- the recommended options in all cases will either preserve or enhance the offer to high needs learners.

In implementing these proposals, and addressing the points raised in the case for change section of the report, it will be crucial to ensure that the colleges, new 16 to 19 academies, and other providers work closely with the GMCA to meet the education and training needs of Greater Manchester.

Next steps

The agreed recommendations will now be taken forward through recognised structural change processes, including due diligence and consultation.

Proposals for merger, sixth-form college conversion to academies, or ministerial approval, for example of a change in name, will now need intensive work by all parties involved to realise the benefits identified. Colleges will want to give consideration to making timely applications for support from the [Restructuring Facility](#), where they can demonstrate that the changes cannot be funded through other sources. Colleges exploring academy conversion will be subject to the application process and agreement by the Sixth Form College Commissioner and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Primary responsibility for implementation of recommendations relating to individual colleges rests with those institutions. However, it will be important to understand how progress is going in the round in each area and each set of area review recommendations will be formally monitored at both national and local levels. As the [guidance](#) produced for LEPs and local authorities sets out all those involved in the local steering group will be expected to play their full part in ensuring that changes happen within the timescale agreed. In this context, LEPs and local authorities are expected to retain their focus on driving changes, and assessing how implementation of recommendations is contributing to local economic performance. The EFA and SFA, with oversight from the FE Commissioner and Sixth Form College Commissioner, will also be monitoring progress across all areas.

A national evaluation of the area review process will be undertaken to assess the benefits brought about through implementation of options. It will include quantitative measures relating to the economy, to educational performance, to progression, to other measures of quality, and to financial sustainability. This analysis will also take account of the views of colleges, local authorities, LEPs, students and employers about how well colleges are responding to the challenges of helping address local skills gaps and shortages, and the education and training needs of individuals.



Department
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