GMCA Sector Development Plan: Digital, Cyber, and AI

How this plan will work

The Purpose of this plan

This plan, as well as corresponding plans for Greater Manchester's other frontier sectors (Advanced Manufacturing and Materials, Health Innovation & Life Sciences, Creative and Media, and Low Carbon goods and services) serve several purposes outlined below:

- **To provide strategic direction** for GMCA, local partners, institutions and businesses to work towards the development of each of Greater Manchester's Frontier Sectors, including shaping thinking regarding future funding utilisation (e.g. Industrial Strategy Zone phase 2). Plans will be 'living documents', that will have an iterative approach to how it is written and implemented.
- **To identify intervention priorities** which the evidence suggests will support the development of the sector including areas such as physical developments, skills, business support, research and innovation programmes, or non-financial sector development initiatives and partnership models.
- **To provide an updated understanding of the state of our frontier sectors** including current and planned activity that is taking place within them, which were last reviewed as part of the Local Industrial Strategy process.
- **To support the development of the Local Growth Plan and the National Industrial Strategy** and its "targeted Sector Plans".
- **To map out key inter-regional partnerships** and supply chain dependencies and links to National and international initiatives.

We know that there are deep connections between our frontier sectors, be it in terms of supply chains, or technologically enabling one another, meaning these plans need to speak to one another. In this regard these plans include actions that are shared across all of these plans, as well as activity which will inherently benefits the other sectors which we need to ensure that we are continuing to understand as best as possible.

Our Approach

Greater Manchester's partnership working across the public, private and academic sectors is one of its key strengths. This approach has underpinned the city-region's success in recent years in increasing productivity, driving growth and investment in its frontier sectors, and making the clear case for the benefit of greater devolution to empower place led control.

The ongoing development of devolution of powers and control of budgets has greatly increased GM's control over delivering some of the changes needed to realise our vision and strategic priorities. However, in some areas this control remains limited, so our ability to work collaboratively with partners to develop compelling cases for funding, more powers and control, and to develop collaborative, innovative ways of achieving our goals, will remain a primary element of how we deliver this plan.

There are therefore guiding approaches that will sit as overarching principles for how this plan develops and delivers.

- This is a living document, that will have an iterative approach to how it is written and implemented. As befits a sector that is so rooted in new developments and innovation, the plan cannot be set in stone or it will rapidly become irrelevant.
- The Plan, from its vision, through its strategic priorities, to the interventions that deliver these, will be co-designed with the sector. We will continue to strengthen our sectoral engagement as future iterations of these plans are developed.
- Where possible, this will focus on impact and outcomes, over realistic timescales, rather than the delivery of blunt outcomes to arbitrary, short deadlines.
- Governance and oversight will be proportionate, flexible and responsive, rather than imposing rigidity, bureaucracy and excessive reporting requirements.

We will ensure that different parts of the ecosystem work together and that various interventions complement and support one another. To unlock new employment spaces for growth, we must ensure the availability of necessary skills, transport to get people there, leadership to communicate the vision and attract interest, and business support to help businesses locate and thrive. These components complement each other, and we will work to break down silos and take a strategic approach to implementing, prioritising, and sequencing interventions to create the most impact for the sector.

Resources

The Industrial Strategy Zone (formally called the Investment Zone), launched at Spring Budget 2023, gives GM a £160 million envelope over 10 years to catalyse local growth and investment across the Advanced Materials and Advanced Manufacturing sector (AM&M). This focus on AM&M was selected as it offered a clear focus on one of GM strengths, whilst also allowing for the development of an approach that supported the adoption of AI, Cyber and Mixed Reality capabilities from our Digital and Tech strengths, created increased capacity for the manufacturing of diagnostics and advanced medicines in life sciences, and grew our focus on light-weighting and carbon intensive materials replacement to boost our clean growth ambitions.

GM has outlined its plans for the first 5 years of this programme, encompassing £80 million of grant funding. As well as being able to utilise grant funding for projects GM will retain the growth in business rates for 25 years across Sister and Atom Valley and can reinvest these into advanced materials and advanced manufacturing activity. This sector development plan, and future iterations of this plan will help inform thinking regarding future Industrial Strategy Zone funding allocations, as well as other funding streams.

This plan will be supported by resources allocated via the integrated settlement and local budget setting, with an initial £1 million allocated over the next 2 years to support activity across all our frontier sectors. Other funding sources also support the activity outlined in this plan, including £33 million of government funding supporting the GM Innovation Accelerator programme and the Local Innovation Partnership Fund.

The National Industrial Strategy launched in June 2025 announced a set of national Sector Plans and funding for sector-led growth that included the Digital and Tech sector, and GMCA will actively pursue routes to aligning these national resources with the priorities in this plan and private sector investment opportunities.

Digital, Cyber, and AI – Plan on a Page

GMCA GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED

Sector Definition

The spectrum of economic activity relating to cyber and artificial intelligence technologies, including commercial operations, R&D, and associated infrastructure. In addition, economic activity that directly employs specialist technical skills and infrastructure to develop and deploy digital products, goods, and services; this consists of activities including software development, digital telecoms, and data management.

Current State of the Sector

- A £5 billion+ tech ecosystem; the UK's largest AI cluster by headcount and second largest by business count
- 4,885 operational digital businesses in the city-region, with 51,250 digital roles filled.
- Digital accounts for a larger share of employment in Manchester, Trafford, and Salford than the UK average.
- Key subsectors include Cyber security, AI, Fintech, and E-Commerce.
- Internationally significant apex assets, including: GCHQ; Matillion; Microsoft.
- R&D is supported by numerous innovation assets such as the Turing Innovation Catalyst; the Centre for Digital Innovation; and the Home of Skills and Technology

Strengths

- Strong business base
- Collaborative culture
- High quality research institutions
- Well-developed digital infrastructure

Threats

- Fragmentation
- Lack of talent retention
- Imbalanced growth
- Lose out to global competition for investment

Opportunities

- Accelerate convergence to drive R&D commercialisation
- Develop accessible pathways to digital careers
- Celebrate successes
- Align activities to create joined up mission-led sector

Weaknesses

- Lack of alignment and vision
- Underdeveloped VC and angel investor networks
- Shortage of talent

Infrastructure and physical development

- Future growth is dependent on continued rollout of high performing digital infrastructure to provide internet connectivity.
- Digitisation of the economy makes GM increasingly reliant on services and capacity delivered by data centres. GM is currently a leading location for new data centre development, and ensuring continued access to this infrastructure is essential to growth.
- Development of districts in the Central Growth Cluster presents opportunities to increase the availability of commercial property space for collaboration and innovation, stimulating sector growth and attracting talent.
- Opportunities for digital innovation presented by hospital redevelopments in the Airport City & Southern Growth Corridor, and in the logistics sector in the Western

Vision for the sector

Greater Manchester's digital, cyber, and AI sector will drive regional and national growth. The sector will be underpinned by a robust foundation of a highly-skilled, large and diverse workforce, a strong pipeline of innovative technologies, and high-performing and resilient digital infrastructure.

Strategic priorities

1 – Grow the digital industry clusters in the central growth cluster, focusing on the strengths in artificial intelligence and cyber security

2 – Attract further international and UK inward investment by promoting Greater Manchester on a global stage as a leader in digital innovation and practice.

3 – Cultivate a nurturing digital ecosystem, supporting business to access investment, develop skills, and innovate

4 – Expand and better exploit our R&D and commercialisation assets to increase the productivity of the digital, cyber, and AI sectors

5 – Enlarge and strengthen talent pipelines into digital careers, to support businesses to access the skills and expertise needed for innovation and growth

6 – Build out world-class, resilient digital infrastructure that underpins the development of our growth zones

Key Actions

Establish a new national AI innovation and adoption programme

Deliver business support programmes to foster AI adoption in the GM business base – drawing on best practice in GM

Convene sector networking groups to align activities and drive missions in subsectors

Establish an innovation hub connecting the cyber ecosystem to national security agencies

Leverage AI and data technologies to deliver better public services in GM

Align and expand digital skills training to industry requirements

Develop more commercial space for start-ups, to promote collaboration and innovation

Develop infrastructure that enables the sustainable growth of data intensive industries

Sector Definition

For the purposes of this sector development plan, Greater Manchester Combined Authority provides a definition of the Digital, Cyber and AI sector. Cyber and AI denote vertical subsectors encompassing the full spectrum of economic activity related to these technologies, including commercial business operations, R&D initiatives, and associated infrastructure. Digital refers to economic activity where specialist technical skills and infrastructure are directly employed to develop and produce digital products, goods, and services. This consists of activities including software development, digital telecoms, and data management.

Statistical analysis

Due to the breadth of activities and the rapid pace of change within the Digital, Cyber, and AI sector, it is challenging to provide a precise statistical definition. GMCA analysis offers two primary routes to capturing the sector statistically.

The first analysis employs the definition of the digital sector used in the GM Independent Prosperity Review.[1] The analysis relies on Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes, and therefore may be outdated as these codes struggle to capture the nuanced dynamics of modern sectors. SIC codes often fail to reflect the complex operations of businesses that utilise digital technology, overlooking new and emerging technology sectors. For instance, an e-commerce company, despite its foundational reliance on digital technologies, might be classified under retail according to traditional SIC codes.

The second analysis relies on 'UK Innovation Clusters Map' developed by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). The tool classifies sectors into Real-Time Industrial Classifications (RTICs) using machine learning to trawl the text of firms' websites for indicators of the sector. This definition is more effective for examining the prevalence of new and emerging clusters, however may be unreliable as website text may not always accurately describe the services businesses provide.

[1] GM Prosperity review panel, 2019. *Audit of productivity*

Strategic Context

Why this is a frontier sector

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority defines a frontier sector as a sector that:

- Has nationally & internationally recognised R&D strengths and complementary industrial / commercial assets
- Is innovative, bringing about new ideas, methods, products, services, or solutions and creating the jobs of the future
- Is highly productive, as well as helping drive productivity across the economy through the adoption of their innovations

These sectors contain multiple clusters where technologies, assets and businesses combine in a place, creating potential for innovation and creation of new markets or knowledge that increases the value being created in the cluster and the competitiveness of the wider sector in the region.

This definition applies to Greater Manchester's digital, cyber, and AI sector. With a thriving tech ecosystem valued at over £5 billion, the UK's largest AI cluster by employee count, and the presence of internationally renowned organisations including the National Cyber Force, GCHQ, Microsoft, and Cisco, alongside GM-grown tech unicorns including Matillion and The Hut Group, Greater Manchester is the UK's leading digital hub outside of London.[2]

As Greater Manchester rapidly establishes itself as a world-leading digital-city-region, the dynamic ecosystem of established organisations, innovative SMEs, public sector assets, and complementary research institutions offer unparalleled opportunities for innovation, inclusivity, collaboration, and growth.

The 2025 refresh of the GM Science and Innovation Audit has confirmed that Digital, Cyber & Ai is still an opportunity for innovation led growth, with AI & Data Analytics / Software Engineering being identified as one of Greater Manchester's 7 Priority capabilities. This was assessed against the criteria that "there is outstanding knowledge capability in GM universities & a realistic prospect of this being translated into superior economic growth (new or additional) in GM's private sector, or that existing strong sectors and/or high growth sectors in GM have strong demand for the knowledge capability area in view, irrespective of GM's universities' comparative advantage

Alignment with policy

Several regional strategies over the past ten years highlight the strategic and economic significance of digital technologies in Greater Manchester.

[2] HM Government, 2019. *Greater Manchester local industrial strategy*

- The **2016 Cheshire East and GM Science and Innovation Audit** [3] identified Greater Manchester as having a "fast-growth opportunity" in digital – reiterated in the **2019 Independent Prosperity review**.[4]
- The **2019 Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy** focussed on the strengths and opportunities relating to the digital, creative, and media sector in GM.[5] Co-designed with business, the community, the voluntary and social enterprise sector and citizens, the strategy outlines a set of long-term policy priorities to help guide industrial development and provides a plan for good jobs and growth in GM.
- The **2021 Greater Manchester Strategy** set out a 10-year route to deliver a city-region where everyone can live a good life, growing up, getting on and growing old in a greener, fairer more prosperous city-region.[6] This provides the overarching vision and framework within which GM will operate, including this sector development plan.
- The **2022 Greater Manchester Innovation Plan** identifies AI, digital & advanced computing as key technology family in GM.[7] Led by Innovation GM – a trailblazing triple helix local-national innovation partnership – the plan focuses on how to stimulate the whole innovation ecosystem for the long term, how the whole city region can benefit from this, and create a template for how better ways of working can be achieved between business, universities, and local government that can be refined, scaled and replicated across the UK.
- The **2020 GM Digital Blueprint** set out the ambition for Greater Manchester to be a top five European digital city-region and recognised globally for its digital innovation.[8] The updated **2023 GM digital blueprint** built upon these ambitions, detailing the vision for a "resilient and prosperous economy", where we "enable all businesses to use technology better and support the creation and scaling of digital organisations for the benefit of the UK and the people of Greater Manchester."[9]
- The **2023 GM Cyber Strategy** identified GM's specific strengths and opportunities in Cyber and detailed an action plan to develop the cyber ecosystem.[10]
- In July a refresh of the **Greater Manchester Strategy** was published. [11] The GMS 2025–2035 sets out a bold 10-year vision for a "thriving city region where everyone can live a good life." The strategy is structured around seven mission-led workstreams, including inclusive economic growth, net zero, and innovation. This plan as well as the local growth plan support

[3] Department for business, energy & industrial strategy, 2016. *Greater Manchester and Cheshire East Science and Innovation Audit Report*
[4] GM Prosperity review panel, 2019. *Reviewers report*
[5] HM Government, 2019. *Greater Manchester local industrial strategy*
[6] GMCA, 2021. *Greater Manchester Strategy*
[7] Innovation GM, 2022. *Greater Manchester Innovation Plan*
[8] GMCA, 2020. *The Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint*
[9] GMCA, 2023. *GM Digital Blueprint 2023-26*
[10] GMCA, 2023. *GM Cyber Strategy*
[11] GMCA, 2025. *Greater Manchester Strategy*

the delivery of the GMS, including via its focus on driving innovation-led growth and creating high-quality jobs.

The 2023 Trailblazer Devolution Deal with Government has provided GM with the opportunity to take greater control over the levers of economic growth and prosperity. Work is underway to develop the GM Investment Plan, which will outline how the set of tools in the Devolution Deal will be utilised to support economic growth across GM, including in our key sectors and Growth Locations. This sector development plan will identify requirements for the sector to maximise innovation-led growth opportunities and will inform and evidence priorities for the Investment Plan. GMCA is also currently developing its process for allocating integrated settlement funding agreed in the 2023 Trailblazer Devolution Deal. The "Local Growth & Place" functional pillar in the Settlement will include investment that can support the growth of our economy, including our Frontier Sectors.

This Sector Development Plan is a foundational component of Greater Manchester's emerging Local Growth Plan. The Growth Plan consolidates strategic priorities across sectors and geographies, leveraging devolved powers to deliver inclusive, innovation-led growth. The actions and ambitions outlined here inform the Growth Plan's investment priorities, particularly in relation to the Integrated Pipeline, Industrial Strategy Zone, and national sector alignment.

Technology families

In 2021 the government published the UK Innovation Strategy. The strategy contained a focus on missions & technologies that will stimulate innovation to tackle major challenges faced by the UK and the world, and drive capability in key technologies where the UK is considered to have an 'industrial and R&D edge'. Seven technology families were identified in the strategy, of which three listed below were adopted in the GM Innovation Plan due to GM's research, development, and innovation strengths, and for their cut across our frontier sectors in terms of potential applications.

Sustainable Advanced Materials: Within GM, Sustainable Advanced Materials form a pivotal segment of the £49 billion global Advanced Materials market, projected to double by 2026. These materials play a crucial role in advanced manufacturing, net zero initiatives, and health innovation & life sciences, with opportunities in industrial coatings, construction materials, textiles, acoustics, and the sustainable production of batteries. Moreover, they facilitate breakthroughs in health innovation, such as wearables and biosensors.

Artificial Intelligence, Digital and Advanced Computing: The landscape of digital technology in GM is expansive and rapidly growing. Artificial intelligence (AI), anticipated to revolutionise industries globally is set to reach a market value of $294 billion by 2026. The immersive tech economy, forecasted at £130 billion by 2023, opens avenues in manufacturing, construction, defence and security, Life Sciences, education, and training.

Diagnostics & Genomics: In GM, Diagnostics & Genomics present a burgeoning opportunity. With 31 Genomics companies employing over 2,000 people, there's clear potential for growth. The intersection of genomics, diagnostics, AI, advanced computing, and sustainable advanced

materials offers spillover benefits, fostering innovations in analytics, medicine, and diagnostic devices. Advances in personalized healthcare not only reduce NHS waiting lists but also address health inequalities, improving health outcomes for the residents of GM. The region's focus on R&D and technology has garnered significant funding, as evidenced by the NIHR grant of £59.1 million to the Manchester Biomedical Research Centre. This investment enhances the GM's capacity to conduct cutting-edge clinical trials, contributing to advancements in healthcare.

Wider Context

At the 2025 London Tech week, Prime Minister Keir Starmer emphasised the transformative power of digital technologies for the UK. The tech sector can deliver "money in your pocket … wealth in your community … good jobs and vastly improve our public services".[12]

These messages resonate with the priorities of Greater Manchester. For GM, the opportunity digital technologies present is not just growth, but 'good' growth. Growth that is equitable and sustainable, where economic prosperity is intertwined with social well-being and environmental responsibility. The city-region has all the ingredients necessary: a large and diverse talent pool, strong innovation assets, a well-developed business base, and a responsive public sector. Greater Manchester's vision, as set out in the GMS, is to build "a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life".[13] Digital technologies are at the heart of this transformation, and can position the city-region as a global exemplar in sustainable development.

The Prime Minister's messages reinforce a succession of strategies and initiatives announced by Government in the last year.

In January 2025, the **UK AI Opportunities Action Plan** was published.[14] The plan commits to "ramping up AI adoption across the UK to boost economic growth, provide jobs for the future and improve people's everyday lives." There is a notable focus on public sector AI adoption, to simultaneously improve public services and stimulate demand, innovation, and AI development in the business base. This approach is also reflected in Government's **Blueprint for Modern Digital Government**[15] and the recent changes to the **Government Digital Service**. As of 2025 the GDS is now responsible for the **i.AI** function, which identifies and scales opportunities to harness AI specifically in public services.

In June 2025 the **UK's Industrial Strategy 2025** launched, setting out a 10-year plan to grow future industries, including Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy, and Digital Technologies.[16] The **Digital**

[12] Prime Minister's Office, 2025. *Prime Minister's remarks at London Tech Week 2025: Monday 9 June*
[13] GMCA, 2025. *Greater Manchester Strategy*
[14] DSIT, 2025. *Independent report: AI Opportunities Action Plan*
[15] DSIT, 2025. *A blueprint for modern digital government*
[16] DBT, 2025. *The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025*

and Tech Sector Plan, published alongside the strategy, includes a raft of commitments and initiatives designed to boost investment and innovation in the sector.[17]

Within this context, Greater Manchester's sustained commitment to tech-enabled, innovation-led growth positions the city-region as a key contributor to national objectives. This is underlined by the concentration of national assets and expertise in the region, including GCHQ (which has increased its footprint in Greater Manchester in recent years) and the National Cyber Force (hosted in the North-West). Manchester also serves as the location for DSIT's second HQ, and there are plans underway to establish the Government Digital and AI Innovation Campus within the city-region.[18] The UK's Digital and Tech Sector Plan recognises GM's strategic role, identifying the city-region as a key location for investment and innovation. This Sector Development Plan shares significant alignment with national priorities and supports the work of the national sector plan, including activity to deliver on national sector plan interventions and priorities.

Greater Manchester's national significance extends beyond just digital. The city-region is an integral part of the 'Northern Arc' strategic growth corridor stretching from the Mersey to the Pennines, linking GM with Liverpool City Region, Cheshire and Warrington, and extending into West and South Yorkshire, and providing a counterbalance to the Oxford – Cambridge corridor as hub for innovation and the development of new innovative industries.

Greater Manchester is also a founding member of 'The Great North', the UK's first mayoral-led pan-regional partnership aiming to unlock £118 billion in economic value by coordinating investment in variety of key economic priorities, enhancing Greater Manchester's ability to attract global investment, influence national policy, and deliver large-scale development aligned with the ambitions of this plan.

GM will continue to maximise opportunities for the city-region that arise from the national industrial strategy and its corresponding sector plans. This also included an announcement that the Industrial Strategy Council will be based in Greater Manchester.

Growth Locations & Integrated Pipeline

GM has identified six 'Growth Locations' as prime opportunities for driving transformative change, each with brownfield and greenfield land for housing, employment and industrial growth. This plan aims to support driving growth in these locations by identifying the physical and wider requirements for the sector for it to grow, and by providing a joined-up narrative of our ambitions and plan for supporting the sector going forward.

Through aligned strategy and planning policy, the growth locations will support clusters of innovation in all these areas, working with their existing business bases to maximise supply chain linkages,

[17] DSIT & DBT, 2025. *Digital and Technologies Sector Plan*

[18] Cabinet Office, 2025. *Thousands of Civil Service roles moved out of London in latest reform to the state*

providing local grow-on space of the quality and type needed, and establishing links into communities, schools, and town centres to develop the spill-over for all the city-region's residents. This approach focuses on providing digital connectivity, integrated transport infrastructure, innovation assets, and tailored support to foster innovative businesses.

To support this activity Greater Manchester has developed the Integrated Pipeline which captures the projects and interventions needed to deliver the full scale of our ambitions through investment in physical infrastructure, including our strategic employment and housing sites, town centres and city centre developments over the next 10 years, bringing them together for the first time into a single platform. The pipeline will enable residents and businesses to see the type, scale and timing of development that is coming forward and ultimately enable us collectively to make better informed investment decisions.

Four of the growth locations include Digital, Cyber, and AI as a key focus for their growth vision:

- The **Central Growth Cluster**, the economic heart of GM and the key hub for digital innovation in the city-region. This is the leading area for the knowledge economy and R&D, bolstered by world-class universities and collaboration spaces. Key relevant initiatives taking place within this Growth Location include the development of Sister, and Media City phase 2.
- **Airport and Southern**, the international gateway to the north. A proposition for growth built around digital innovation in the health sector, seeing the transformation of two hospitals (Wythenshawe health campus, and Stepping Hill hospital) accelerated by R&D at the enterprise zone at MIX Manchester (formally airport city).
- **Western Gateway,** the UK's largest sustainable regeneration opportunity. A proposition around clean growth and digital innovation across the logistics sector, enhanced by a unique digital and sport offer, including the expansions of Port Salford and development of Trafford Wharfside.
- **Eastern Growth Cluster,** home to the Ashton Innovation Corridor. The redevelopment of St Petersfield in Ashton aims to deliver modern, tailored development that will stimulate growth of the Digital and Tech sector.

Connections and applications in other sectors

Digital technology, skills, and infrastructure underpin the functionality of health tech, green tech, and advanced machinery. As a key enabling technology cutting across all frontier sectors, digital innovations already have a profound impact on Greater Manchester's economy.

AI adoption has potential to grow the UK economy by £400 billion by 2030, through enhancing innovation and productivity. [19] This presents significant opportunity for Greater Manchester's innovation-intensive frontier sectors, where AI applications can leverage existing industry and research strengths to achieve substantial improvements in output, innovation, and overall productivity.

[19] Public First quoted in DSIT, 2025. *Independent report: AI Opportunities Action Plan*

Similarly, cyber security has a significant cross-sectoral role. The security and resilience needed to cultivate a sustainable growth ecosystem is characterised by well-developed cyber security capabilities, assets and expertise. There is consequently strong complementarity between the region's cyber capabilities and other sectors, including aerospace and defence, energy and nuclear, finance and professional services, and manufacturing.[20]

Given the nature of digital as a key enabling technology, there are specific opportunities to exploit at the intersection between digital and other frontier sectors.

Advanced Materials and Advanced Manufacturing

Greater Manchester's large traditional manufacturing sector has considerable potential for digitisation. The North West is home to the 'Made Smarter' Pilot, a business support programme that supports manufacturing SMEs to adopt digital technologies. The success of the Made Smarter initiative to date proves how digitisation can significantly boost efficiency and competitiveness in the industry.

There are clear commercialisation routes for AI technologies in this sector, leveraging the sector-focused translational capabilities of key R&D assets like the Advanced Machinery and Productivity Institute, the Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre, the Henry Royce Centre, Innovation Accelerator-Funded Centre for Expertise in Advance Materials Sustainability, and the Northern England Robotics Innovation Centre.

Advanced manufacturing and development of graphene for use in semi-conductors could have a similarly transformational impact on digital technologies. Innovation in this space creates opportunities for low energy data storage, sensors, and quantum computing.

Health Innovation and Life Sciences

There are major opportunities related to digital health and life sciences, building on assets including academic strengths in diagnostics and genomics, the Advanced Diagnostics Accelerator, public sector health datasets, and the devolved health and social care system in Greater Manchester.[21]

Aligning GM's health and digital innovation strengths could transform existing health infrastructure through the development of digital and AI-powered diagnostics, predictive analytics, and telemedicine. The Christabel Pankhurst Institute supports the commercialisation and clinical readiness of digital technology – including AI – into healthcare, and the DEVOTE Programme provide further use of the capacity for HealthTech development.

Health innovation also creates opportunities for Greater Manchester's tech sector. Following their integration into the GM Secure Data Environment, the UK BioBank and the GM Patient Record provide unique data sources to support the development of data handling, visualisation, and AI-based diagnostic tools.

[20] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*

[21] Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021. *Assessing the UK's Regional Digital Ecosystems*

Low Carbon Goods and Services

Green technology has huge value to be gained from digital innovations. AI solutions in tech can optimise energy usage, waste management, and environmental monitoring, while cyber capabilities are instrumental in providing the resilience and integrity of energy infrastructure.

The Innovation Accelerator Funded Future Homes Project, Energy Accelerator for Non Domestic Buildings, our innovative Local Energy Market research, and the Net Zero Accelerator funding all provide capacity for the use of AI in development of tools for the net zero sector, which will be vital in terms of managing energy flows and reducing carbon requirements as the city-region moves to electric vehicle fleets.

Green innovations and development will be crucial in supporting the advancement of digital technologies. Increasing reliance on digital technology has long-term consequences for energy consumption and carbon emissions. Artificial intelligence in particular demands enormous processing power through data centres, which poses a significant challenge for the city-region's net zero targets. Green technologies will be essential in mitigating the environmental impact of digital technology.

Current State of the Sector

Key information

Greater Manchester is one of the fastest growing major tech clusters in Europe.[22,23] The tech sector is valued over £5 billion,[24] and the annual growth rate is estimated at 118.3 per cent, notably higher than the national average 97.9 per cent.[25] Growth is fuelled by investment, with Manchester tech firms raising $389m of funding in 2024, $108m of which was raised by AI firms.[26]

Estimations for growth using public statistics rely on data available for the 'Telecommunications, Computer programming and consultancy, and Information service activities' sectors, using this to create a proxy for the whole sector's Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution (£4,763m). ONS data indicates that the sector has grown 224 per cent since 2012 and ultimate output is significantly larger than all other similar ITL2 / mayoral combined authorities' areas.[27,28]

Over the next decade, growth in global demand will continue to chart Greater Manchester's promising progress. Global demand for digital products and services creates more opportunities for export-led growth.

[22] CBRE, 2022. *Leading Tech Cities*
[23] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*
[24] MIDAS, 2023, *Invest in Manchester*.
[25] Tech Climbers, 2023. *Greater Manchester Tech Climbers 2023 Entries report*
[26] Turing Innovation Catalyst, 2025. *AI Catalyst Report*
[27] ONS, 2022. *Regional Gross Value Added (Balanced) by Industry: all ITL regions & city and enterprise regions – 2019 prices*.
[28] Analysis utilised ITL2 areas mapped as close to the MCA areas as possible. Data limitations in the CA SIC codes do not allow for granular analysis of sub-sectoral GVA figures but ITL2 data does.

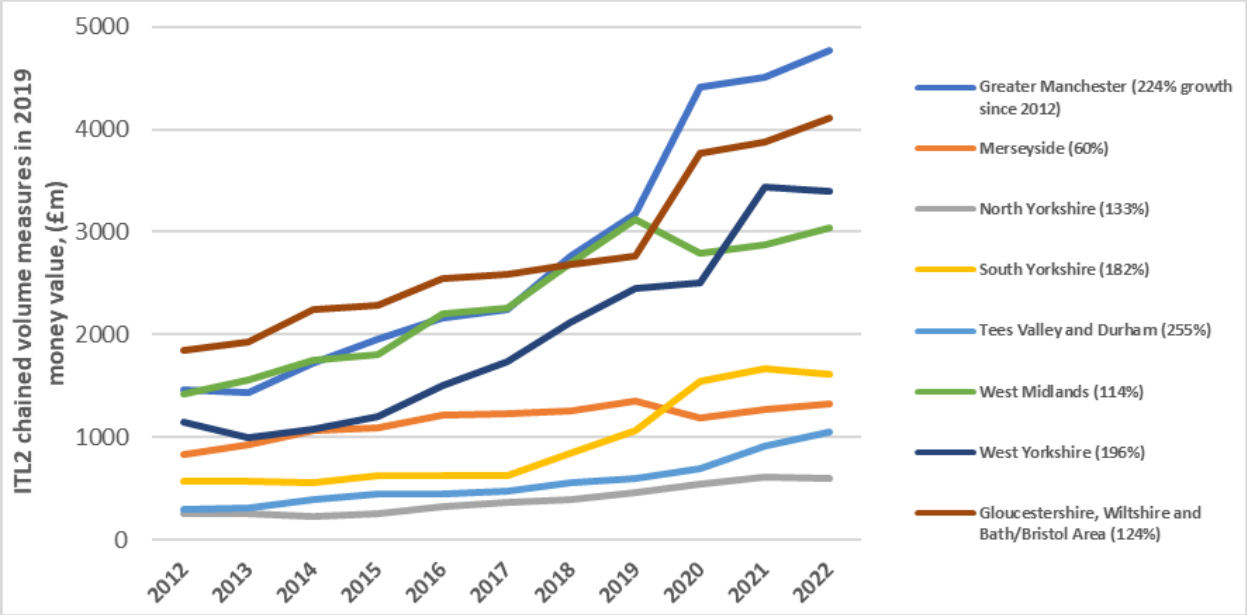

Figure 1: Telecommunications, Computer programming and consultancy, and Information service activities sectors GVA by ITL2 areas, 2012-2022[29]

Business base

Greater Manchester's digital economy is underpinned by 4,885 digital businesses.[30] Major tech companies located in GM include Cisco, Booking.com, Amazon, Google, and Arm,[31,32] but the vast majority are micro-enterprises, indicating a strong prevalence of freelancers and start-ups in the ecosystem. As a result, a common priority for business leaders is accessing talent and investment to scale and grow.

[29] ONS, 2022. *Regional Gross Value Added (Balanced) by Industry: all ITL regions & city and enterprise regions – 2019 prices.*
[30] ONS, 2024. *Business Counts.*
[31] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*
[32] Steer, 2025. *Greater Manchester Science and Innovation Audit Refresh*

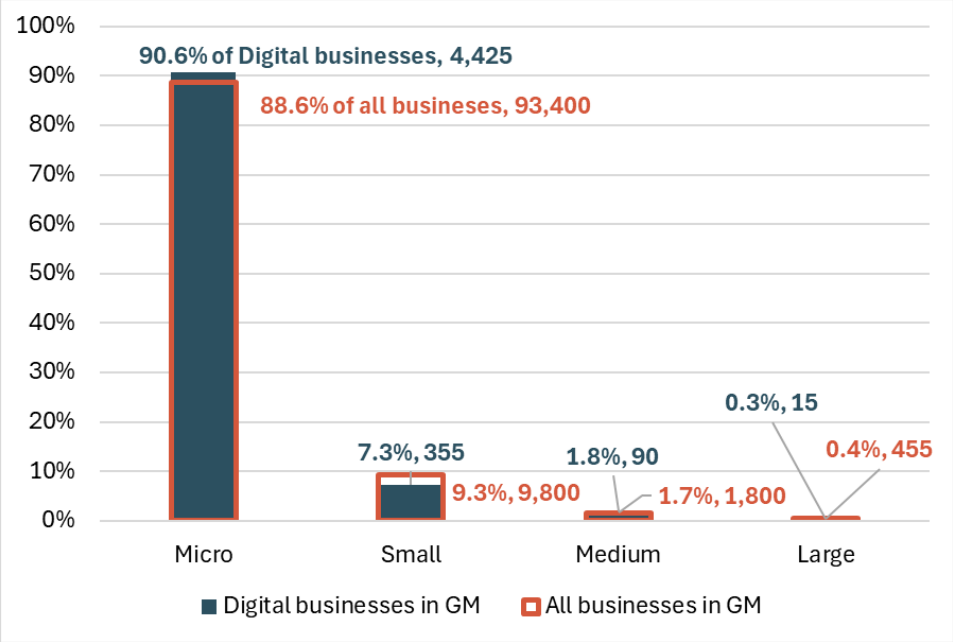

Figure 2: Share of GM businesses by size, comparing digital sector businesses with all businesses[33]

However, raising finance remains a consistent challenge. Many GM tech companies have secured significant volumes of VC investment – including from Sure Valley ventures, Praetura Ventures, Northern Gritstone, and EHE ventures – but many others struggle to access funding. Stakeholder engagement identified that limited visibility of the city-region's offerings to national and international audiences hinders growth opportunities for digital businesses. To attract greater investment in the future, Greater Manchester needs to more effectively showcase its successes and promote the city regions unique selling points.

Geography

The geographical distribution of the digital economy is illustrated through employment figures. Digital employment is primarily concentrated in Manchester, recording a share of employment in the sector significantly exceeding the national average. Salford and Trafford also boast strength in digital, each exceeding the national average. Given the concentration of the sector in these three localities, Manchester, Salford, and Trafford combine to account for over three quarters of the total Greater Manchester employment in the digital sector.

The concentration of employment is consistent with the distribution of the city-region's major commercial and R&D assets, and key employment sites such as the Oxford Road Corridor and MediaCityUK. As a result of the competitive advantage this area exhibits, it has been termed the 'Central Growth Cluster'.

[33] ONS, 2024. *Business Counts*.

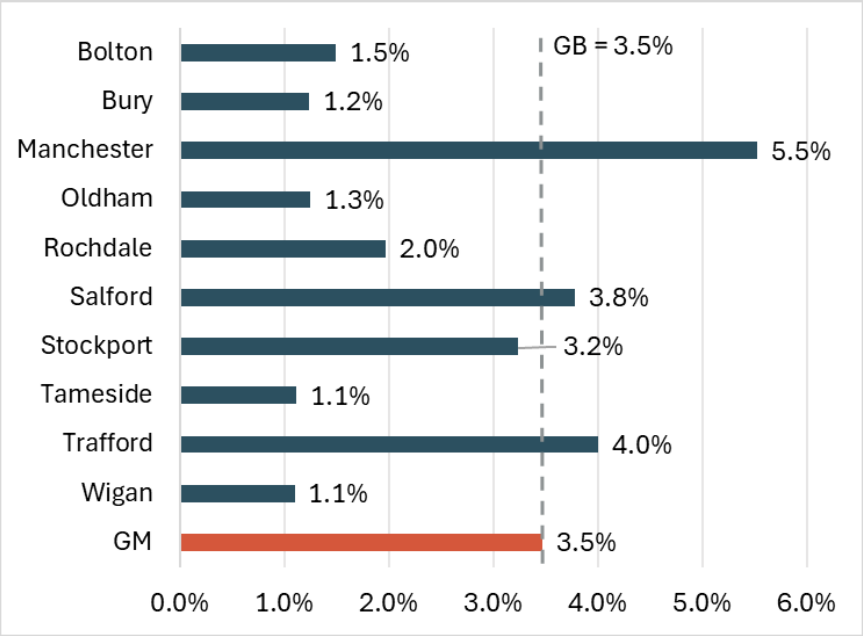

Figure 3: Share of district employment in the digital sector, by district[34]

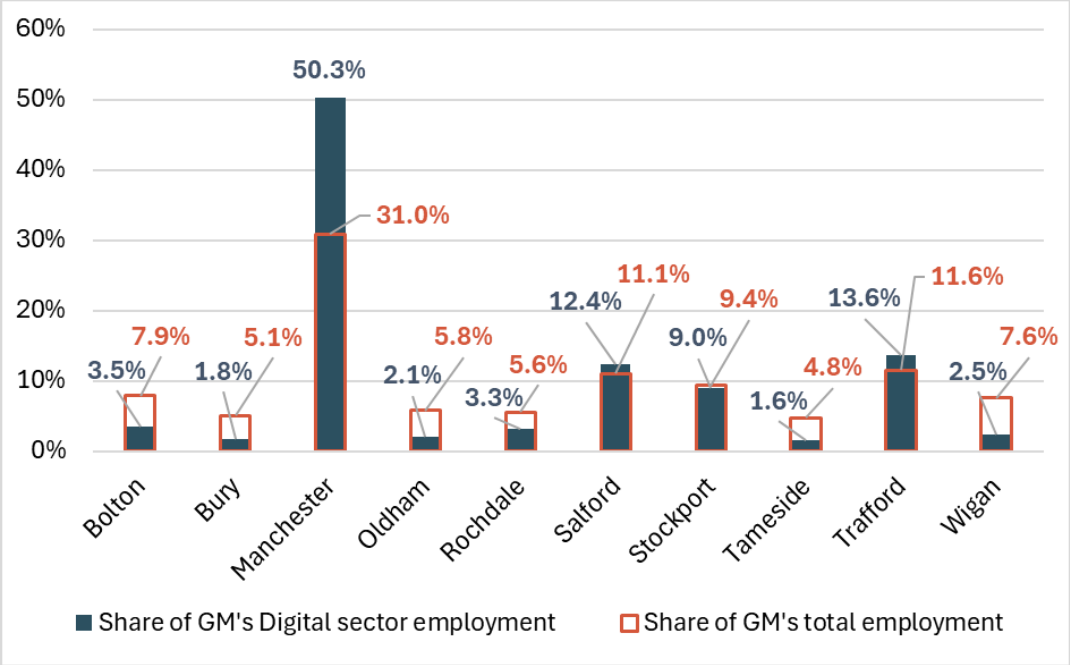

Figure 4: Share of GM employment, by digital sector and total employment[35]

[34] ONS, 2023. *Business Register and Employment Survey*

[35] ONS, 2023. *Business Register and Employment Survey* & ONS, 2024. *Business Counts*.

Sub-sectoral specialisms

Digital is a key enabling technology across the economy, and as such is accompanied by a rich diversity of emerging subsectors.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology provided the UK Innovation Clusters Map as a tool for examining the prevalence of new and emerging subsectors.[36] The tool provides an indication of the size of digital subsectors in Greater Manchester by detailing company count figures, and estimated employee and turnover figures.

Table 1: Digital subsectors in GM[37]

Sub sector (ordered by no. of employees)	Employees	Turnover (£bn)	Distinct Company Count
Data Infrastructure	15,400	£5.40	835
Artificial Intelligence	13,500	£1.78	244
Sensors	13,100	£5.85	175
Cryptocurrency Economy	8,600	£3.24	97
FinTech	7,400	£1.65	446
Software as a Service (SaaS)	6,000	£1.47	178
Software Development	6,000	£1.14	524
Cyber	5,800	£1.62	176
Telecommunications	5,300	£1.73	173
Digital Creative Industries	5,200	£0.44	800
Electronics Manufacturing	4,000	£0.89	247
Computer Hardware	3,400	£0.57	151
Gaming	2,900	£1.29	128
Data Intermediaries	2,800	£0.41	144
Food Tech	2,400	£0.60	110
MedTech	2,200	£1.96	120
AgriTech	2,000	£0.50	122
Wearables and Quantified Self	2,000	£0.16	34
CleanTech	1,800	£0.51	176
AdTech	1,500	£0.43	39
Streaming Economy	1,500	£0.20	34
E-Commerce	1,000	£0.48	98
Photonics	900	£0.21	38
EdTech	700	£0.24	34
Immersive Technologies	700	£0.05	121
Internet of Things	600	£0.07	51
Quantum Economy	600	£0.09	65

[36] DSIT, The Data City and Cambridge Econometrics, 2023. *The Innovation Clusters Map*.
[37] DSIT, The Data City and Cambridge Econometrics, 2023. *The Innovation Clusters Map*.
GM clusters are defined as those that include 'Greater Manchester' in the name of the cluster

Geospatial Economy	500	£0.05	152
Design and Modelling Technologies	477	£0.04	50
Autonomy and Robotics	131	£0.02	30

This analysis demonstrates the considerable breadth and size of the digital activity in Greater Manchester. Producing a credible sector plan with relevance across all these sub-sectors is therefore beyond the capability and scope of this document. As a result, to maximise the opportunities for Greater Manchester, GMCA will prioritise subsectors that occupy the intersection between:

- *Global Demand: Areas with significant worldwide interest and market potential.*
- *Greater Manchester Potential: Subsectors where GM's existing capabilities and expertise can create competitive advantages.*
- *Strategic Alignment: Subsectors that contribute to GM's overarching business goals and objectives.*

Greater Manchester features notable subsectors that offer promising opportunities because of their alignment with these specified criteria.

Cyber

The cyber security sector is a prominent area of specialism for Greater Manchester, with keystone organisation GCHQ increasing its presence in the city-region significantly in recent years. This has reinforced supply-chain opportunities for residents and businesses, and presents new opportunities for growth.

Across GM cyber sector clusters, 5,800 individuals are estimated to be employed, generating an estimated £1.62 billion in turnover.[38] Cyber businesses are concentrated in the regional centre, with 272 cyber security offices in Manchester, the second highest for any city nationally. This includes 177 unique cyber security businesses (c. 9% of all UK cyber security businesses) including BT, Darktrace, Deloitte, KPMG, Microsoft, NCC Group, and Thales.[39]

[38] DSIT, The Data City and Cambridge Econometrics, 2023. *The Innovation Clusters Map*.
[39] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*

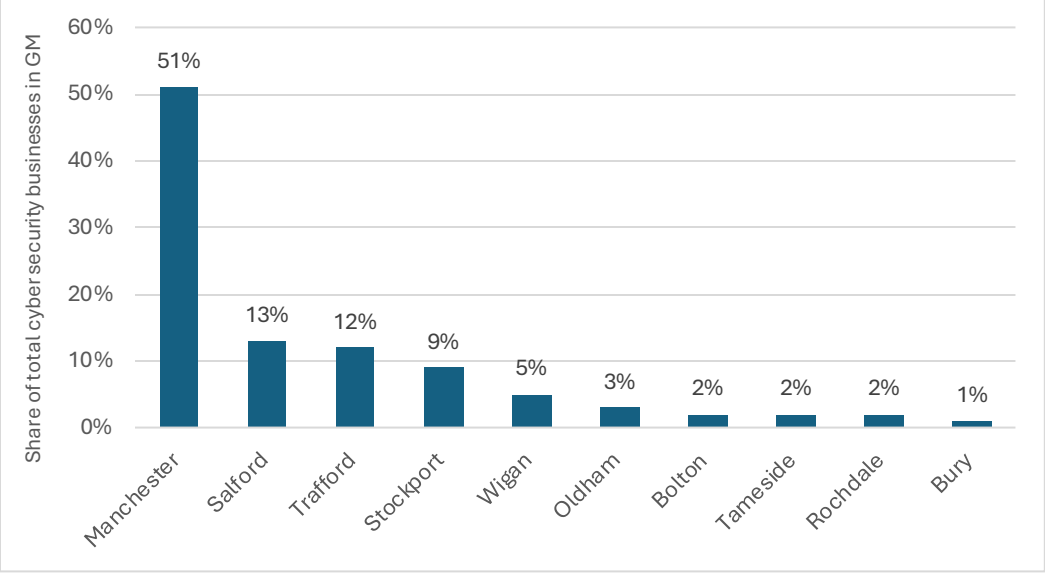

Figure 5: Share of cyber security businesses by GM local authority[40]

As well as being a distinct sector, cyber security is a crucial cross-sectoral function providing resilience across the GM economy, and therefore operates on a horizontal as well as a vertical basis. The data suggest a 50/50 split between dedicated and diversified cyber security companies in the Greater Manchester area, reinforcing the embeddedness of cyber security within broader sectors such as finance, insurance, and professional services in the region. [41]

Five universities offer cyber security (and wider computer science) courses – including the University of Manchester, University of Greater Manchester, University of Salford, and Manchester Metropolitan University. The University of Manchester is now also an Accredited Centre of Research Excellence (ACE) by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). Approximately 1,700 cyber security and computer science graduates emerge from GM universities annually as of 2020/21, with numbers growing by 15 per cent per year. Across the whole North West, there were an estimated 12,000 FTEs working in cyber security in 2023, with growth estimates suggesting this will reach 30,000 FTEs by 2035.[42]

Despite this however, demand is still outstripping supply. This growth rate of labour supply is only half the rate needed to fully realise the growth potential of the sector. [43] Talent deficits across the digital economy are discussed in detail below, but cyber security also faces sector-specific challenges. Both public and private cyber security organisations require lengthy security clearance processes when onboarding employees, which has led to a bottleneck in hiring cyber professionals.

[40] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor (GM findings)*
[41] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*
[42] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*
[43] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*

Stakeholders have identified that accelerating these clearance processes would significantly ease pressures on the sector.

The GM cyber cluster also connects into and complements the strong regional ecosystem. The North West region hosts 300 unique cyber security companies, alongside over 150 public, defence, and research assets, including the University of Lancaster, the National Cyber Force in Samlesbury, the National Crime Agency, Information Commissioner's Office, Home Office's Security Operations Centre, GCHQ, and NCSC. The region benefits from strong collaboration, with efforts to boost investment in the North West exemplified by the CyberFocus project.[44]

Government recognises the importance of strengthening the UK's cyber ecosystem. The Industrial strategy illustrated this commitment through announcements for increased funding for the Cyber ASAP programme to support commercialisation for innovators, and a new Cyber Runway accelerator to provide scale-up support for early stage start-ups.[45] With a Cyber Growth Action Plan to be published in 2025 as well, it is key that GM ecosystem has the awareness and capability to respond to opportunities.

Given cyber capabilities directly contribute to national security, there is also significant opportunity for Greater Manchester in this area. The city-region already plays a vital role in the UK's national security activities, serving as the location for one of GCHQ's three strategic bases.[46] Further strategic utilisation of expertise within GM's business and research base could enhance national security capabilities while also fostering highly productive jobs, advancing innovation, and driving dual-use tech development.

Similarly, the intersection between the city-region's growing strengths in artificial intelligence and advanced computing, and its established cyber assets, presents significant potential to power innovation-led growth through these synergies. Stakeholders emphasised that accelerating convergence should be a priority to drive economic performance.

Artificial Intelligence

The Greater Manchester AI cluster has an estimated turnover of £1.8 billion, across 250 AI companies employing an estimated 13,500 individuals. This is the largest AI cluster in the country by employee count, the second largest by business count, and at 6 per cent of the total national AI sector, the second largest by size behind the Clerkenwell cluster in Greater London.[47]

AI companies in Greater Manchester raised $108 million in VC investment in 2024, powering the growth of the ecosystem. The combined valuation of Greater Manchester's AI companies has

[44] The project brings together the Universities of Lancaster, Manchester, Salford, Central Lancashire, Cumbria, Manchester Metropolitan and Liverpool to strengthen trusted partnerships between academia, industry, and civic bodies and deliver strategic investments in the region's cyber ecosystem, accelerating economic growth and addressing regional needs.

[45] DSIT & DBT, 2025. *Digital and Technologies Sector Plan*

[46] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*

[47] DSIT, The Data City and Cambridge Econometrics, 2023. *The Innovation Clusters Map*.

reached £3.14bn, representing a fivefold increase compared to their 2020 valuation. Projections indicate that with the right support and investment there is substantial further potential: the city-region's AI ecosystem could be worth £11.2bn by 2035. This growth is expected to increase the number of AI jobs to 25,000 and contribute £18.67bn GVA to the economy.[48]

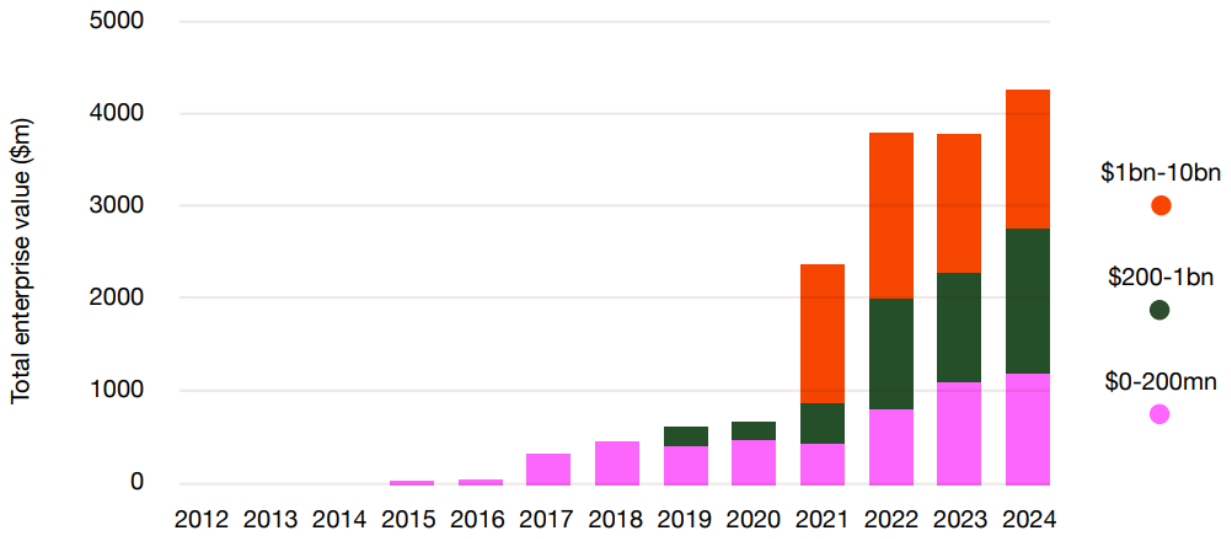

Figure 6: GM AI company enterprise value by valuation bucket (2012-2024) [49]

Manchester and Salford are the epicentres of the AI cluster in Greater Manchester. In April 2025, and for the second consecutive year, Manchester has been recognised as the UK's most AI-ready city, owing to its concentration of AI-related companies, tech-based jobs, and R&D investment. Salford placed in the top 5 for the second consecutive year, a result of its high number of AI jobs and the presence of internationally significant assets BBC and ITV, both pioneering AI innovation in media.[50]

Standout organisations include AI unicorn Matillion, and 'soonicorns' Peak AI, Connex AI, and Urban Chain.[51] Greater Manchester's even distribution of early, mid and late-stage AI companies (30% early, 31% mid, and 39% late stage), has created the conditions for a flywheel effect of talent, capital and scaling knowledge recycling in the ecosystem.[52]

The AI business base is complemented by significant data and computing research strengths across GM's universities (covered in detail below). Start-ups and entrepreneurs are supported with commercialising AI products and services through the innovation-accelerator funded Turing Innovation Catalyst, based in the University of Manchester.

[48] Turing Innovation Catalyst, 2025. *AI Catalyst Report*
[49] Turing Innovation Catalyst, 2025. *AI Catalyst Report*
[50] SAS, 2025. *SAS AI cities index*
[51] Tech Nation, 2025. *UK AI Sector Spotlight*
[52] Turing Innovation Catalyst, 2025. *AI Catalyst Report*

Given the significant national (and global) emphasis on AI development, GM's strengths offer a significant opportunity to both grow the AI sector and accelerate AI adoption in the wider business base. The Industrial Strategy's Digital and Tech Sector plan committed £500 million for a Sovereign AI unit, while a further £500m will be used to fund an AI Adoption Fund, AI Skills programmes and to unlock the potential of AI in scientific discovery.[53] For GM, it is important to seize the opportunities that will emerge from this in the coming months.

Furthermore, Greater Manchester also has a huge opportunity for AI-driven public service transformation to drive innovation and development. GM public sector agencies have a history of mature collaboration and strong triple helix working resulting from multiple devolution deals, and the city-region's public and health services have boundaries that are largely co-terminus with the economic area. GM's integrated public services, complementary research and business base, and Mayoral support for public service reform, make it ideally placed to be a testbed for public sector AI adoption. GM can respond proactively to the recommendations in the UK's AI opportunities action plan, leading development of AI solutions to establish the UK as world-leader in AI innovation and development and drive productivity.[54]

If Greater Manchester is to fully capitalise on the considerable opportunities presented by artificial intelligence in an inclusive and ethical way, this will require careful future planning, engagement, and strategy design. Stakeholder engagement has identified several critical factors that must be addressed. These include: prioritising improved social outcomes in public sector AI adoption; overcoming data standardisation and quality barriers; establishing robust governance and regulation that emphasises informed consent, clearly identified beneficiaries, and the promotion of equality; and supporting strong skills development and foundational AI literacy initiatives to manage the AI transition.

Other notable specialisms

AI and Cyber currently present the biggest opportunities for innovation-led growth in Greater Manchester. But there are other notable areas of specialism with significant global demand and strategic alignment to GM ambitions.

E-Commerce is an example. Greater Manchester's e-commerce clusters are estimated to employ 1,000 people across 98 firms in GM, generating an estimated £0.48 billion in turnover.[55] The subsector has grown rapidly over the past decade, with companies such as Boohoo and The Hut Group successfully introducing new digital technologies to disrupt traditional retail, logistics, and manufacturing.[56] The success of Bolton-based electronic retailer AO.com reflects a positive environment for the expansion of digital start-ups.[57]

[53] DSIT & DBT, 2025. *Digital and Technologies Sector Plan*
[54] DSIT, 2025. *Independent report: AI Opportunities Action Plan*
[55] DSIT, The Data City and Cambridge Econometrics, 2023. *The Innovation Clusters Map*.
[56] Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021. *Assessing the UK's Regional Digital Ecosystems*
[57] CBRE, 2022. *UK Tech cities*

Similarly, the Greater Manchester **FinTech** cluster is estimated to employ 7,400 individuals across 446 firms, generating an estimated £1.65 billion in turnover.[58] Greater Manchester now hosts 7 FinTech unicorns, and has key strengths in Payments, Lending, WealthTech, and Banking.[59] Separate analysis has identified Manchester as part of Pennines FinTech cluster, the largest cluster in the UK outside of London.[60]

The DSIT cluster map also points to emerging GM strengths in subsectors such as quantum, signalling the significant role in driving growth that these areas may play in the future.

Furthermore, the cluster map underscores the city-region's strengths at the intersection of various frontier sectors.[61] The data reveals significant overlap between: digital creative, gaming, and immersive technologies with the creative sector; medtech with the health innovation sector; cleantech with the low carbon technologies sector; and autonomy and robotics with the advanced manufacturing sector. These crossovers emphasise the enabling role that digital technologies have across the GM innovation ecosystem, and demonstrate the substantial activity at the convergence of the frontier sectors, which is already fuelling growth.

Digital infrastructure

The rapid growth of Greater Manchester's tech cluster is attributed in part to the city-region's strength in digital infrastructure. The well-developed network of data centres and backbone connectivity in GM provides the resilience, connectivity, and capacity necessary for growth.[62]

Digital connectivity

The city-region has invested heavily in this agenda, with over £100m collectively invested in projects which have boosted connectivity, coverage, and capacity across the city-region.[63] These projects involve not only building new digital infrastructure but also focus on transformative data life cycle management, cyber security, health digitisation, better data governance and analytical capabilities.

Gigabit coverage in GM is now at 94.3 per cent and full fibre coverage at 82.6 per cent (the national averages are 86.7 per cent and 73.7 per cent respectively).[64] Going forward, high quality infrastructure, including dark fibre and 5G/6G connectivity will be crucial for digital business development and for consumers to engage on digital platforms.

[58] DSIT, The Data City and Cambridge Econometrics, 2023. *The Innovation Clusters Map*.
[59] Whitecap, 2023. *Greater Manchester FinTech ECOSYSTEM REPORT 2023*
[60] Kalifa Review of UK Fintech, 2023.
[61] DSIT, The Data City and Cambridge Econometrics, 2023. *The Innovation Clusters Map*.
[62] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*
[63] HM Government, 2019. *Greater Manchester local industrial strategy*
[64] Thinkbroadband, 2025. *Local broadband information* [accessed at: Broadband Coverage and Speed Test Statistics for Unknown]

Data centres

Data centres house servers and data storage systems that provide capacity for growth in the digital sector, and deliver services that enable digital media content to reach customers.[65] They provide the capacity to support the development of new technologies, including AI, which demands extremely high processing-power.

Greater Manchester is the UK's second largest hub of data centre capacity, due to its availability of land, power, and digital connectivity. In 2024, Kao Data's £350 million 40MW data centre began construction in Stockport, designed with the capacity to host AI and high-performing computing. GM's advantage comes in contrast to the South East, which reportedly lacks the capacity for further large-scale data centres.[66]

Although not an immediate concern, there is a future risk that lack of access to compute becomes a significant constraint on the growth of the digital economy, particularly given the substantial energy and computing demands of AI.[67] DSIT's Digital and Tech Sector Plan therefore include ambitions to commit £1 billion to scale up the UK's AI compute capacity by a factor of at least 20 by 2030, and to create AI Growth Zones (AIGZs) – areas with enhanced access to power and support for planning approvals for data centres.[68] GM's thriving digital economy and the strengths in digital infrastructure place it well to capitalise on both these opportunities. Investment into AI infrastructure in GM can accelerate innovation, driving adoption in the public and private spheres and increasing productivity.

Research and innovation assets

Digital, cyber, and AI innovation in Greater Manchester thrives through a dynamic ecosystem that connects startups, SMEs, education institutions, and public agencies. Innovation takes place across diverse spaces – from tech parks and university labs to coworking hubs and digital platforms. Outside of London, Manchester has the UK's largest market of flexible coworking spaces, accelerators, and incubators.[69] SMEs benefit from access to diverse business networks, academic expertise, collaborative R&D opportunities, and tailored support programs.

The regional business base has grown in tandem with the city-region's world-class universities, which provide cutting-edge upstream research, train skilled talent, and foster spinout companies. These institutions collaborate closely with commercialisation and translation assets, helping early-stage companies develop and scale digital solutions. The region's success is highlighted by the 127 spinouts currently active in the North West.[70]

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[65] KPMG, 2024. *Equinix's contribution to the UK's economy*
[66] KAO data, 2024. *Investing in data centres: Why Greater Manchester?*
[67] Government Office for Science, 2024. *AI Scenarios 2023*
[68] DSIT & DBT, 2025. *Digital and Technologies Sector Plan*
[69] CBRE, 2022. *UK Tech Cities*
[70] Barclays Eagle Labs, 2025. *Tech in the UK 2024*

Looking ahead, stakeholder engagement identified that facilitating more collaboration opportunities between the business base and academia can drive further ecosystem development. The findings of the 2025 GM Science and Innovation Audit reinforce this, as it identifies both 'AI & Data Analytics' and 'Software Engineering' as two areas where "there is outstanding knowledge capability in GM universities and a realistic prospect of this being translated into superior economic growth in GM's private sector", and where "existing high growth sectors in GM have strong demand for the knowledge capability area in view."[71]

Upstream Research & Development

Crucial to the ecosystem's innovation system is the presence of world class educational institutions. Strong collaboration between these institutions is exemplified by partnership between the University of Salford, University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Lancaster on the **Greater Manchester AI Foundry** and **Cyber Foundry**, and ongoing collaboration on the development of Cyber technologies.[72] The standing of the universities also enables collaborations with assets outside of Greater Manchester – such as with the University of Cambridge and with the Hartree Centre in Daresbury.[73]

The Industrial Strategy's Digital and Tech Sector Plan leans heavily on universities to support the growth of the AI sector.[74] £1 billion has been allocated to scale up national compute capacity which will be a dedicated AI research resource. This presents huge opportunity for Greater Manchester's universities specialising in digital research.

The University of Manchester

UoM has a strong and well-regarded research program in Computer Science, AI, and Cyber security. In recognition of its internationally leading cyber security research the University has been named an Academic Centre of Excellence (ACE-CSR). The various research centres, institutes, and other activity based across the University include:

- **Institute for Data Science and AI** – The institute acts as an access point to the University's expertise in data science hosts over 900 active researchers, including 33 Turing Fellows and a Turing Bicentennial Chair. The University's membership of the Turing Institute and European Laboratory for Learning and Intelligent Systems hub accreditation are testament to GM's AI research quality.
- **Centre for AI Fundamentals** – A cross-disciplinary home for foundational Artificial Intelligence
- **Centre for Digital Trust and Society** – A focal point for research across the University that explores aspects of trust and security in our digital world

[71] Steer, 2025. *Greater Manchester Science and Innovation Audit Refresh*
[72] Lancaster University, 2024, *Cyber Focus* [accessed at Cyber Focus - Lancaster University]
[73] Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021. *Assessing the UK's Regional Digital Ecosystems*
[74] DSIT & DBT, 2025. *Digital and Technologies Sector Plan*

- **Centre for Robotics and AI** – The Centre brings together interdisciplinary research developing, integrating and applying novel AI approaches in the design of robots and autonomous systems.
- **Arm Centre of Excellence** – This Centre of Excellence expertise covers the full spectrum of modern processor technologies, machine learning theory and applications, and automation of reasoning to build trustworthy hardware and software systems.
- **Division of Informatics, Imaging and Data Sciences** – The division uses big data to evaluate statistical links across all biological and medical fields.
- **Centre for Quantum Science and Engineering –** The Centre brings together experts to exploit quantum effects with capability in imaging, timing, computing and sensing, and translate these into quantum 2.0 technologies. The Centre is partnered with the National Physical Laboratory, and also brings together advanced manufacturing and materials research from the National Graphene Institute and the Henry Royce Institute.
- The **SPRITE+** initiative is led by UoM, a UK-wide network that convenes experts from academia, business and industry, government, and civil society to tackle existing and emerging challenges to security, privacy, identity and trust in the digital age.
- The University has a **Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Cambridge**, bringing together both Universities capabilities, and allowing the South East to benefit from GM's capacity to host infrastructure.

Manchester Metropolitan University

MMU undertakes a breadth of research across AI, digital, and cyber-physical streams, with a strong focus on ethical, responsible use and positive societal impact. The University is part of The **Turing University Network**, focussing on data science and artificial intelligence expertise, and offers comprehensive AI training for undergraduates, postgraduates, doctoral students and early career researchers. Research assets include:

- The **School of Digital Arts (SODA)** – a £35M investment into workspaces, networks, teaching and research for students to study creative disciplines that span film, animation, UX design, photography, games design, AI and more.
- The **Data science research theme** – Developing data science techniques and technologies to address societal challenges in healthcare, agriculture, smart cities, social care, and education.
- The **Machine Intelligence research group** – Exploring biology-inspired computing, artificial intelligence and data ethics, and computer science in education.
- The **Data and artificial intelligence ethics research group** – Working with SMEs, citizens and policymakers to ensure future artificial intelligence and machine learning systems are inclusive, fair, safe and trusted.

Previous projects have included leading on the European Regional Development funded **Greater Manchester AI Foundry** and **Cyber Foundry**, founding a **Peoples Panel for AI** with support from the Alan Turing Institute, and co-producing the world's first **People Charter for Artificial Intelligence.**

The University of Salford

The University has a history of success and achievement in Computer Science and Information Systems research over the last thirty years, and in 2022 launched a new Artificial Intelligence postgraduate degree course. The University is home to various centres undertaking research in the areas of digital, data, AI, and cyber technologies, including:

- **Creative Technologies Research Centre** – an interdisciplinary research community exploring the intersections between creative practice and emergent technology innovations, with a focus on creatively utilising technology in areas such as film, music, performance, broadcasting, games, immersive media, AI and machine learning.
- **Informatics Research Centre** – the Centre is developing novel methods and systems for the analysis and recognition of various data sets, learning behaviours and causal models. Forensic computing, digital investigation and Cyber security is another area of expertise supported by the Centre both at the theoretical and application levels.
- **Centre for Engineering the future** – the centre develops world-class research excellence in core engineering disciplines, including advanced robot and machine design that leverages AI.

The University of Greater Manchester

The University of Greater Manchester's **Centre of Intelligence of Things (CIOTH)** serves as a hub for collaborative research, development, and education, fostering partnerships between academia, industry, and government agencies. It provides a platform for researchers, practitioners, and students to exchange ideas, conduct experiments, and develop cutting-edge solutions that leverage AI technologies to enhance the capabilities and intelligence of IoT, Big data, and robotic systems.

Commercialisation and translation assets

The city-region boasts a number of notable assets which support the diffusion of Greater Manchester's research excellence to the business base. Many assets provide upskilling and business support, alongside opportunities to network and collaborate with other innovators.

- **Centre for Digital Innovation, Manchester Metropolitan University** – Manchester
  CDI is a programme funded through the Innovation Accelerator. It is a partnership of universities, further education and industry partners making digital technology expertise and facilities available to businesses in the North West. The programme covers four digital strands: Artificial intelligence; Cyber security; Industrial digitisation; and Immersive technology.

- **Centre for Sustainable Innovation, The University of Salford** – Salford
  The CSI supports SME growth by collaborating with businesses to develop new processes, innovations, products or technologies. CSI helps businesses with digital transformation, by leveraging cutting-edge academic research and providing access to powerful insights from

industry leaders and experts. CSI received £100,000 of funding from Innovate UK to help educate SMEs across GM on the intersection of AI (artificial intelligence) and cybersecurity.

- **Digital Innovation and Security Hub (DiSH)** – Manchester
  DiSH is a cyber security hub offering growing digital security businesses and the wider Greater Manchester community help with access to business support, mentoring, dedicated growth programmes, training, and career opportunities. It is led by a consortium of Barclays Eagle Labs, Plexal, Lancaster University and the University of Manchester, illustrating how strong triple helix cooperation creates effective innovation.
- **Greater Manchester Colleges Further Education Innovation Programme** – Pan-GM
  Across Greater Manchester localities, FE Colleges establish 'Innovation Hubs', providing businesses with access to facilities, training and support to navigate the innovation ecosystem. The programme builds the capacity and capability of FE Colleges to increase the adoption of innovations by businesses in their locality, and to create better links between them and the city-region's innovation ecosystem.
- **Hartree National Centre for Digital Innovation** – Daresbury
  While it falls outside the boundaries of Greater Manchester, the region also benefits from the £210 million centre which supports businesses to accelerate the development of AI and quantum computing capabilities. The **Satellite Applications Catapult** has also established a Space Enterprise Lab here, serving as a vital centre for the region's space community.
- **Home of skills and technology (HOST)** – Salford
  HOST is an innovation hub located in MediaCity. The hub offers workspaces, business support services and advice, networking, technology training and social spaces for connecting and collaborating. The hub also hosts state-of-the-art innovation labs in data, cyber, and immersive, to support R&D and commercialisation.
- **MediaCity Immersive Technologies Innovation Hub (MITIH)** – Salford
  An innovation-accelerator funded hub in immersive technologies based at MediaCity. The primary areas are: Virtual and Augmented Reality Experiences to future-proof businesses and develop new audiences; Virtual Production techniques and processes to expand the creative potential of Film, VFX and TV; and Innovation in Gaming and Interactive technologies, shaping a range of sectors such as Esports.
- **Manchester Technology Centre** – Manchester
  A campus in Circle Square that hosts a cluster of digital and tech businesses across flexible, high-quality workspaces, meeting and event space. It is home to global brands, start-ups and scale-ups working across health tech, cyber security, AI, blockchain, cloud computing, web3 and more. The site also provides business support programmes advising on funding, training and collaboration including the **Manchester Tech Incubator**.
- **Sister, The University of Manchester** – Manchester
  Previously known as ID Manchester, Sister is a joint venture between The University of Manchester and Bruntwood SciTech to establish a £1.7bn innovation district and neighbourhood on the site of the University's former North campus. Sister will specialise in

advancing innovation across sectors including digital tech, health innovation, biotechnology, advanced materials and manufacturing. It will provide access to state of the art facilities, connecting early-stage high growth potential businesses with investors, while creating a collaborative ecosystem that enables UK and global businesses to benefit from cutting edge innovation. Sister will be run by Unit M, the University of Manchester's new function to connect and catalyse the innovation ecosystem in Manchester and the wider region to accelerate inclusive growth.

- **Turing Innovation Catalyst, The University of Manchester** – Manchester
  An innovation accelerator-funded hub fostering collaboration between researchers and businesses across the AI landscape, with a focus on commercialising and accelerating AI, deep digital tech, and digital trust technologies.

Public sector innovation

The public sector plays a crucial role in driving innovation in the city-region. The collaborative ethos of Greater Manchester extends to public agencies, demonstrated by a history of effective triple-helix working. Digital innovation is central to numerous projects, working with industry and academic stakeholders to deliver pioneering city-wide services for residents and businesses. These include the:

- **5G Innovation Regions Smart Decarbonisation Network**
- **Bee Network**
- **GM Early Years App**
- **GM One Network**
- **Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) Programme**

Building on these successes, there is particular opportunity regarding AI-driven public service reform. Initiatives already underway include TfGM's Smart junctions pilot, Bolton and Wigan Councils' GenAI pilots, and Salford City Council's enhanced planning application management. AI solutions that address local challenges and improve public services in an inclusive manner, can position GM as an innovation testbed and exemplar for public sector AI adoption across the UK. Leveraging triple-helix partnerships will be central to successful AI-led transformation.

Business Support and Peer Networks

The digital sector is constantly evolving, driven by rapid technological advancements. This means that businesses in this space need agile and responsive business support to keep up with demands. Stakeholder engagement identified that the city region benefits from a wide array of public and private business support and investment options catering to a variety of business sizes. However, navigating the available business support offers can be a challenge. This is particularly true for smaller enterprises, which lack to overheads and dedicated capacity to access available support.

The Industrial Strategy's Digital and Tech Sector Plan recognises the value of business support in supporting tech ecosystems and committed to introduce new targeted initiatives in the sector. [75] GM should be prepared to capitalise on these opportunities, which include national plans to promote AI adoption, through a new AI adoption fund and regional business support.

The Growth Company

The Growth Company (GC) is a key strategic partner in Greater Manchester's economic development ecosystem. Operating as a social enterprise, GC delivers a range of services that support inclusive growth, employment, and innovation across the city-region. Its activities are closely aligned with GMCA's priorities and contribute directly to the delivery of this Sector Development Plan.

GC's business support functions are delivered primarily through the **GM Business Growth Hub**, which provides tailored advice and guidance to businesses across the digital, cyber, and AI sector. This includes support for innovation adoption, workforce development, access to finance, and sustainability. The Hub's publicly funded model ensures that services are accessible to businesses of all sizes and stages, helping to unlock productivity and growth across the sector.

MIDAS, Greater Manchester's inward investment agency, also sits within GC and plays a critical role in attracting and supporting businesses seeking to invest in the city-region. Through market intelligence, property search support, and stakeholder engagement, MIDAS helps businesses navigate the local landscape and connect with relevant networks and assets.

The Growth Company's wider priorities that will contribute to the sector plans are listed below.

- **GM Global Promotion & Propositions:** Take the growth ambition, including Investment Pipeline, new innovation and experience assets to audiences through activation of our global networks, international missions to key markets and city to city partnerships that profile GM as a superlative place to visit, invest, study, live and do business.
- **Upgrade our Global Investment Outcomes:** create new, and leverage existing international networks, with segmented market strategy to attract transformative high value investment in priority sectors and markets, maximising knowledge base/university linkages, workforce/employment opportunities and local business benefits.
- **Increase impact of Business Support and simplify customer access** building on opportunities to be presented by the SME Review, devolution (also national government Business Growth Service), with more Local Authority and local partner integration. Extend provision in key theme of innovation, export and scale-ups whilst maximising use of business relationships across GC as key mechanisms for GMCA business engagement.
- **Step Change Sector Development**: including frontier sectors, foundational and visitor economy (where they have unique leadership role via Marketing Manchester), particularly centred on strategic and research insight, market opportunities, supply side and workforce development.

[75] DSIT & DBT, 2025. *Digital and Technologies Sector Plan*

Leverage as a key mechanism for business engagement to maximise buy-in and support for the GM Vision.

- **Enable Sustainable Growth**, making GM the easiest place to be a net zero business. Also grow Low Carbon sectors by transforming the climate challenge into economic opportunities, through innovation, inward investment, local business and upskilling residents.
- **Realise Workforce Opportunities and Better Connect Residents to Good Work**: through Business Workforce Development activities create more and more inclusive opportunities including promotion of technical education pathways (T levels and apprenticeships) and increase the ability of residents to access these through upskilling and personal support (Education & Skills and Employment) assisting the key GM objective of having 80% of residents economically active.

The Growth Company contributes to the Digital, Cyber and AI sector by delivering:

- Enterprise, business and innovation support through the GM Business Growth Hub, supporting businesses in the sector to start, scale and thrive. GM Business Growth Hub will also provide sectoral horizontal support by education on and encouraging the adoption of DCAI technology across all sectors through GM BGH's innovation programmes, working with key partners such as EY.
- Enhanced support will be developed through the introduction of a new BGH sector lead to drive the sector plan forward in BGH, building on previous successes and enhancing the evolving needs of the sector, bringing together key assets in GM across the ecosystem to stimulate growth. Activity between the Digital, Cyber and AI sector development plan and the Creative Industries sector development plan will be connected to ensure the crossovers between creative industries and digital are maximised, building on the work of the Create Growth programme.
- Targeted inward investment promotion and attraction through MIDAS.

Beyond publicly funded initiatives, digital, cyber, and AI businesses benefit from sector-led business support and peer networks. Greater Manchester's long-standing collaborative ethos is exemplified by its digital networks, which connect SMEs and foster innovations. Stakeholders identified that building upon this collaborative culture and facilitating business partnerships will be essential to accelerating convergence and innovation.

Manchester Digital

Manchester Digital is the trade association for the digital and technology sector in Greater Manchester. The membership organisation brings together a community of over 400 members - including large corporations, innovative SMEs, cutting-edge startups, freelancers and leading agencies across all tech verticals, serving as a collaboration network for digital and technology organisations in the city-region.

Manchester Digital empowers Greater Manchester's tech community through:

- **Influence and Engagement** – Advocating for members at local and national levels to shape the digital landscape and position the region as a tech leader.
- **Community and Collaboration** – Providing a central hub for networking, events, and knowledge exchange to spark partnerships and innovation.
- **People and skills** – Addressing the digital skills gap through programs like Digital Futures and the Digital Skills Festival, ensuring access to a skilled workforce.
- **Events & Training** – Offering programs on the latest tech trends and skills development to keep members informed and competitive.
- **Research & Insights** – Supplying data, trends, and industry analysis for informed decision-making and strategic planning.
- **Talent & Recruitment** – Facilitating access to top talent through a jobs board and recruitment initiatives.

Tech North Advocates

Tech North Advocates is a private sector led coalition of expert individuals from the tech sector and broader community who are committed to championing the North of England's potential as a world-class hub for tech and digital businesses.

It supports the North's tech start-ups and high-growth businesses in finding new investment, new talent and continued success. The group consist of technology entrepreneurs, established digital giants, journalists, government figures and vital suppliers to the industry.

Greater Manchester Cyber Advisory Group

The GM Cyber Advisory Group brings together representatives of the city-region's cyber ecosystem in Greater Manchester to guide and inform the GM Cyber strategy and work streams. It provides a means through which new opportunities are identified and progressed, and ensures relevant connections are made across to the other activities with the GM Digital portfolio and more widely outside Greater Manchester.

Pro-Manchester

Pro-Manchester is the largest business development organisation in the North West. It supports networking, sharing and collaborating across the Greater Manchester business community and the North West.

North West Cyber Security Cluster

The North West Cyber Security Cluster is a collaboration of cyber security professionals and experts in the North West region. Their purpose is to support, connect and empower the cyber security community by focusing on 3 key areas: Innovation Connection; Skills Growth; and Ecosystem Development.

Real Estate Premises and Requirements

Unlike Greater Manchester's other frontier sectors, digital businesses do not typically demand comparably large volumes of industrial space, warehousing, or wet lab space, to innovate and develop solutions and services. Much of the sector's innovation takes place in digital realms.

However stakeholder engagement identified that greater access to shared commercial spaces would support with business-to-business networking, collaboration, and co-design. Whilst GM has significant research and innovation assets within the region, this is largely clustered within the city centre along the Oxford Road corridor, creating potential constraints for spin-out and start-up growth. Atom Valley (a vision to create a vast innovation mega-cluster situated between Rochdale, Bury and Oldham) and Sister (focused on expanding the cluster of R&D facilities) are a response to this, both of which have received Industrial Strategy Zone funding.

Sector talent pool

One of the most prominent issues in the digital, cyber, and AI economy is persistent talent shortages. The talent pool is growing, but is struggling to keep up with the pace of growth of the sector. This reflects trends that are observed nationally.

In 2023, there were an estimated 51,250 digital roles filled across GM.[76] The city-region's employment in the sector equals the national average, and constitutes a larger share of the city-region's workforce compared to most other mayoral combined authorities (including all others in the North of England).[77]

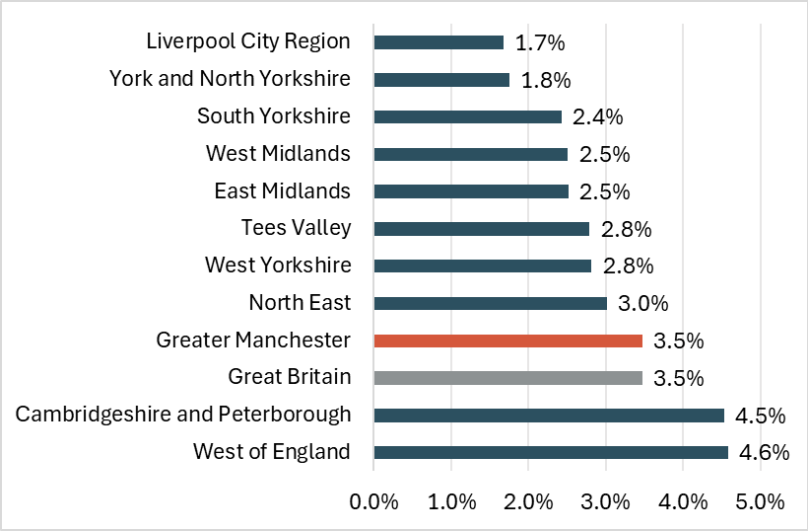

Figure 7: Share of employment in the digital sector, by Mayoral Combined Authority area[78]

[76] ONS, 2023. *Business Register and Employment Survey*
[77] ONS, 2023. *Business Register and Employment Survey*
[78] ONS, 2023. *Business Register and Employment Survey*

GM has the advantage of high-quality higher education institutions (HEIs) offering courses in digital specialisms, and the large and diverse student population provides a potential source of talent for industry. The availability of a highly skilled graduate workforce has been a key factor attracting multinational software and data companies to locate in Manchester.[79]

However, despite the output of graduates, labour demand is still outstripping supply. In the cyber security sector for example, the number of graduates in the North West region is growing by circa 15 per cent annually, half the rate needed to fully realise the growth potential of the sector.[80]

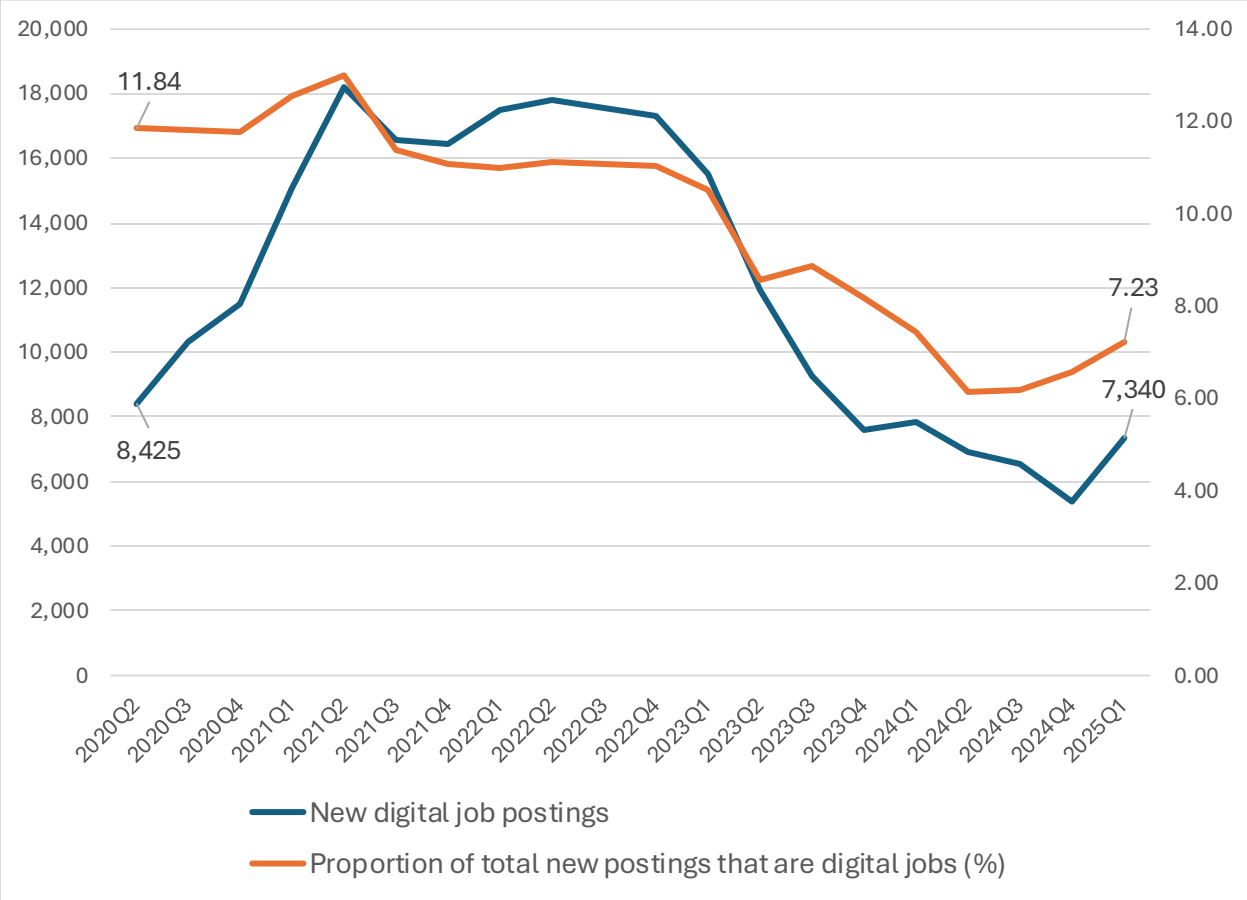

Figure 8: New digital job postings and Proportion that digital job postings make up of total new job postings in GM[81]

Latest quarterly digital job postings figures indicated a minimum of 7,340 digital vacancies in the city-region. Digital job postings comprise 7.2 per cent of all job postings in GM. The number of new digital jobs postings and the proportion as proportion of total job listings in GM peaked in 2021 as

[79] CBRE, 2022. *UK Tech cities*
[80] Perspective Economics, 2023. *The North West Cyber Corridor*
[81] GMCA digital vacancies analysis of ONS, 2025. *Labour Demand volumes by Standard Occupation Classification (SOC 2020), UK*

there was a surge in demand for digital professionals as services moved online over COVID. Although both have shown steady decline since 2021, talent shortages remain high.

Digital specialists are sought after in sectors including data analysis, digital marketing, digital finance, cyber, and information security. The main roles advertised between July and September 2024 include: Software Developer / Engineer; Computer Support Specialist; IT Manager / Director; Computer Programmer; and Cyber / Information Security Engineer / Analyst. Most roles are in Manchester and Salford, but many firms now need in-house digital experts. The need for digital experts to implement digital solutions in the public sector is rising in particular – increasing digitisation of health service, and emergency services all driving the need for basic digital skills.[82]

Stakeholder engagement identified lack of access to talent as one of the key obstacles to digital sector growth. Various factors have been cited to explain why skills shortages persist:

- **Lack of soft skills development** – Digital businesses express particular concern in the lack of access to talent with appropriate soft skills. Key skills in leadership, innovation, and critical thinking, are not developed. These skills are regarded as essential to evaluate and develop digital content. In digital vacancy postings, the most sought after skill is 'communication'[83]. 'Leadership & Management' is a consistent gap amongst employers, linked to the speed of digital transformation in traditionally "non-digital" sectors.
- **Inaccessible talent pipelines** – Digital businesses further cautioned that an inaccessible and complex talent pipeline contributes to this inadequate talent pool. The job route to digital careers is not visible to young people from an early stage, leaving jobs inaccessible. Closer collaboration between industry and education providers to develop a dependable talent pipeline is essential to remedy this.
- **Poorly connected talent** – Greater Manchester's large population offers large potential sources of talent, but inadequate infrastructure confines opportunities to those in the select areas of the city-region. Salford and Manchester represent the strongest centres of activity, but suboptimal public transport connecting the localities with these clusters results in reduced opportunities for residents living outside the regional centre.
- **Brain drain** – Better job opportunities elsewhere is a significant issue for digital businesses if it leads to talent leaving the city-region. Retaining skills and expertise is essential is building a productive and sustainable digital ecosystem.

Interwoven with these challenges are significant diversity and access barriers. A lack of early exposure to digital opportunities has resulted in a shortage of diverse digital talent across all demographics. This impact is particularly pronounced among underrepresented groups: women, individuals with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. At a national level, only 29 per cent of UK tech employees are women or non-binary, and 25 per cent are ethnic minorities. For senior tech positions these figures are lower, with only 21 per cent being women or non-binary and 14 per cent being ethnic

[82] GMCA digital vacancies analysis
[83] GMCA digital vacancies analysis

minorities. Additionally, only 9 per cent of tech employees come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.[84]

Greater Manchester's tech companies have expressed concern about the lack of diversity in their local workforce. This underrepresentation of diverse groups can limit perspectives, stifle creativity, and hinder innovation. Moreover, restricted access to digital careers has broader implications for Greater Manchester's strategic ambitions. By limiting social mobility, it undermines the goal of universal access to digital opportunities.

Tackling the talent gap in the digital sector requires concerted efforts to increase employer engagement and train residents to align with evolving skills demands. Greater Manchester already benefits from numerous programmes and institutions which upskill individuals, and broaden awareness and access to careers in tech:

- **CyberFirst** – a programme of opportunities ran through the National Cyber Security Centre to encourage a diverse range of talented young people to pursue careers in cyber security.
- **Digital Futures** – delivered by Manchester Digital, a purpose-led technology training company aiming to support individuals from all backgrounds acquire the necessary skills to start a career in tech.
- **Digital Her** – an initiative set up by Manchester Digital provide the support, the opportunities and the guidance needed to inspire and empower girls and women to consider a career in technology and support them throughout their career development.
- **Further education colleges** – GM is served by nine further education colleges, working to ensure students are equipped with the technical skills and real-world experience needed to excel driving the skills pipeline needed for the sector. These colleges have in recent years made several investments in cutting-edge facilities with funding provided via the Local Skills improvement Fund.
- **GM Raspberry Pi computing qualification** – the Greater Manchester Business Board and the GMCA have collaborated with the Raspberry Pi Foundation to design a first-of-its-kind Applied Computing qualification, which will be made available to secondary school pupils through the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc).
- **InnovateHer** – based in the North West, this charity delivers programmes in schools such as tech inspired courses, live events and assemblies to support girls and non-binary students to pursue a career in the tech sector
- **Northcoders** – a training provider offering courses and bootcamps to anyone aiming to begin a career in tech
- **TeenTech** – a charity working collaboratively with companies, universities, business organisations and education business partnerships to build programmes that support teenagers in gaining skills, experiences and connections to guide them into tech careers

[84] Tech Talent Charter, 2024. *Diversity in Tech*

- **University Academy 92** – a higher education provider partnered with Lancaster University and industry partners committed to making higher education accessible to a wide range of students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The institution offers industry-inspired courses aiming to prepare students for the world of work, across four main specialist areas: Business, Media, Sport, and Digital.

Going forward, Greater Manchester must continue learn from these and other initiatives to inform future strategy, and should pursue new opportunities as they arise. Notably, the UK's Digital and Tech Sector Plan announced £187 million for a new TechFirst skills programme, building on the success of CyberFirst to support young people into the workforce.[85] The scheme, and the regional delivery hubs that will support this programme from 2026, present an opportunity for GM to drive a place-based approach to skills support.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property (IP) is a critical enabler of innovation-led growth across Greater Manchester's frontier sectors, where businesses are often IP-rich but may not be able to fully realise the commercial value of their intangible assets. SMEs in these sectors may lack the knowledge and understanding to fully realise the benefits of IP protection, which can act as a barrier to scaling and investment.

Greater Manchester benefits from a strong local offer through the Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) Greater Manchester,[92] part of a national network supported by the British Library and the Intellectual Property Office (IPO)[93]. The BIPC provides free access to expert guidance, market intelligence, and IP databases across a network of libraries, including Manchester Central Library and key locations in Bury, Stockport, and Tameside. This offer is complemented by regular workshop s and events, often delivered in partnership with the IPO, to build IP literacy and support businesses to protect and exploit their innovations. The region also benefits from a strong partnership between the GM Business Growth Hub and the IPO with both organisations working together to ensure that SMEs within the region receive IP support and guidance at the right time in their journey in order that they can make informed decisions in respect of their IP assets.

International trade

Creative, media, digital and technology is identified in the 2022-2025 GM export plan as one the seven primary industry export sectors, owing to the strength in cybersecurity and technology in Manchester city centre. Considering recent trade performance and trade policy, favourable export-markets include Japan, Canada, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, and UAE.[86]

The UK–Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) create new opportunities for UK digital and tech firms to export to Japan, whilst also attracting greater investment into the UK from Japan's leading digital industry. In 2018. The UK's digital industry exported £675m worth of services to Japan. CEPA also includes provisions that govern the cross-border flow of data in the

[85] DSIT & DBT, 2025. *Digital and Technologies Sector Plan*
[86] GMCA, 2021. *Greater Manchester Export Plan 2022-2025*

digital economy, including agreements to avoid unjustified restrictions on the free flow of data between the UK and Japan.[87]

The UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement similarly provides more opportunities for UK firms to trade digitally with Australia, including in British tech, creative industries, finance, and telecommunications. It secures the free flow of data necessary for British businesses to provide many products and services to customers. The deal guarantees fair access for telecoms companies into Australia and forges greater cooperation on 5G and cybersecurity.[88]

Despite the benefits afforded by these free trade agreements, the GM Business Growth Hub Organisation Growth Survey indicates that accessing international markets remains a key challenge for digital, creative, and tech (DCT) organisations.[89] 20 per cent of DCT businesses perceive this as a challenge compared to 14 per cent in GM overall. This trend is particularly pronounced among larger organisations, with 50 per cent of DCT businesses with over 250 employees interested in support to manage international trade. [90]

Digitisation of the city-region at large is also identified as a strategic enabler to boost exports. Well-developed digital infrastructure and connectivity support international trade, particularly post-Covid as inter-business communications and networking increasingly moves online. Similarly, the development of e-commerce platforms allows for smoother exchange of products and services internationally.

Investment

Digital and Technology are priority sectors for MIDAS, Greater Manchester's inward investment promotion agency. Over the three financial years from FY 2021/22 - FY 2023/24, 29 projects and 1,943 jobs were created, generating a total GVA value of £131,515,841. 19 of these investments were new to Greater Manchester, of which 4 projects were companies establishing their UK HQ location and a further 13 projects intending to undertake R&D activity.

Of these 29 projects, 22 were from the 'Technology sector', creating 840 jobs with a GVA value of £56,857,000. The remaining 7 projects were from the 'Creative and Digital sector', creating 1,103 jobs with a GVA value of £74,658,000. These projects were also broken down by subsector and source market.

[87] Department for international trade, 2020. *The UK–Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership: Benefits for the UK*

[88] Department for international trade, 2021. *Ten key benefits of the UK-Australia Free trade agreement*

[89] GM Business Growth Hub Organisation Growth Survey, 2024. *DCT RESEARCH – INSIGHTS AND KEY LESSONS*

[90] GM Business Growth Hub Organisation Growth Survey, 2024. *DCT RESEARCH – INSIGHTS AND KEY LESSONS*

Table 2: Inward investment projects in GM by sector

Subsector classification	IT services	Gaming	Software	Cyber	AI and Data	Broadcast & Media Production	IoT/Smart Cities
No. of projects	8	6	5	4	4	1	1

Table 3: Inward investment projects in GM by source market

Source market	UK	USA	Australia	China	India	Japan	Netherlands	Switzerland	Bulgaria	Ireland	South Africa
No. of projects	10	9	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Looking forward, the U.S. continues to be the primary market for FDI projects while Ireland is expected to constitute a more significant source market. In the FY 2024-25 so far, Ireland has provided a source for 3 projects, Canada, Italy and Lithuania each have 1, and the U.K. and U.S. have another two each. India and France have been the top inbound destinations for UK inward investment for Digital & Technology in recent years and this is expected to continue.

Greater Manchester is also working closely with national investment institutions to ensure alignment with the UK's evolving industrial strategy and to unlock long-term, mission-aligned capital for the city-region. The British Business Bank (BBB) and the National Wealth Fund (NWF) have both been given a strengthened remit to support the growth of the eight priority sectors identified in the UK's Industrial Strategy (IS-8), including Digital and Tech.

The British Business Bank is prioritising regional investment and scale-up finance through initiatives such as the British Growth Fund and Strategic Equity Programme. These are designed to address structural gaps in access to capital for high-potential businesses and to support innovation, commercialisation, and productivity improvements in key sectors. Greater Manchester will continue to work with BBB to ensure that local businesses in the digital and tech ecosystem can access these opportunities, particularly those with strong growth potential or operating in strategic supply chain

The National Wealth Fund, launched in 2025, is focused on crowding in private investment to support the UK's clean growth and industrial transformation missions. Its priorities include supporting the development of strategic infrastructure, accelerating the commercialisation of innovation, and enabling the scale-up of technologies aligned with net zero and digitalisation. GMCA is engaging with the NWF to explore how its capital can be deployed to support the delivery of key areas including the Industrial Strategy Zone, the Integrated Pipeline, and the ambitions of this Sector Development Plan.

The GMCA is also currently undertaking research to understand what additional public investment tools could be developed to address key investment gaps for our frontier sectors, building upon the success of the GM Advance programme in the advanced manufacturing sector.

Greater Manchester Digital, Cyber, and AI SWOT analysis

Based off the sector analysis above, this section identifies the key Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats the sector faces.

Strengths 1. **A strong business base:** a high level of output across a breadth of subsectors and specialisms. 2. **Collaborative ethos:** The ecosystem benefits from a strong willingness to collaborate. Effective triple helix cooperation has led to effective innovation and clear success stories (e.g. DiSH). 3. **Public-private investment:** Smaller organisations benefit from various public-private funding opportunities and initiatives. 4. **High-quality research institutions:** Strong universities offer courses relevant to digital, and provide a large and diverse student population. High quality research facilitates innovation. 5. **Well-developed collaborative infrastructure:** Coworking spaces, MediaCity and the Oxford Road Corridor provide opportunities for creativity, innovation and investment. 6. **Liveability:** The city-region's high quality public spaces, jobs, entertainment and affordability make it attractive to talent. 7. **Well-developed digital infrastructure:** Gigabit coverage is well above the UK average	***Weaknesses*** 8. **Subsectors lack a clear vision:** No consistent articulation of the aims of the ecosystem leads to fragmentation. Difficulty coordinating and aligning activities hinders growth and development. 9. **Underdeveloped venture capital and angel investor networks.** Poor visibility of GM businesses and GM localities creates obstacles to accessing finance from national and global investors. 10. **Complex funding system:** SMEs can struggle to navigate the available business support opportunities. 11. **Shortage of talent:** The strengths of the universities do not translate to the job market. Retaining talent is a challenge, leading to a shortfall in key skills which stifles innovation. Lack of diversity creates design bias and impedes innovation. Poor connections into the cluster hubs disconnects regional talent from businesses. 12. **Limited collaborative office space** , particularly away from the cluster hubs in Manchester and Salford, impeding SME development. 13. **Accessing international markets.** Digital, creative, and tech businesses find this more challenging than the economy as a whole.
Opportunities • **Develop a unified subsector mission:** Use a common narrative to align and incentivise activities for growth. Identify credible civic and sector leaders and advocates to drive and promote the mission. • **Celebrate successes:** Attract global investment and markets by showcasing success stories and promoting the city's unique selling points. • **Support commercialisation:** Translate the strengths in R&D to commercial opportunities. Accelerate the convergence of R&D in digital specialisms to drive innovation. • **Develop accessible pathways to digital careers:** Build a talent pipeline with a focus on creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Align education with industry needs, create incentives for companies to hire local talent, and improve career advice. Foster diversity and inclusion in the workplace and bridge the digital divide. • **Become a global exemplar for a connected place:** Leverage digital infrastructure and transport to support the growth of the digital economy. Take lessons from global cities that do this well. • **Stimulate local demand and improve GM's reputation as a world-leading city-region** by leading the way on digital transformation across both the public and private sectors, wider economy and society.	***Risks*** • **Siloes develop:** Fragmentation and competition between internal groups hinders collective progress. • **Lose out to regional and global competition for investment:** Potential investors overlook the city-region. • **Stagnation of innovation and technological adoption:** A lack of thought leadership results in the city-region falling behind competitors and failing to capitalise on the commercial opportunities of emerging technologies. • **Lack of talent retention:** A lack of opportunities results in brain drain, with skills and expertise leaving GM, compounding issues. • **Imbalanced development:** Over-focus on the city centre leaves community infrastructure and growth behind, entrenching geographic inequalities. • **Job displacement:** New technologies such as AI displace the workforce if it is not equipped with the digital skills needed to adapt to the new division of labour between humans and machines. • **Environmental degradation:** as demand for power and processing capacity increases, a lack of standards in digital projects jeopardises GM's environmental commitments. • **Inadequate infrastructure:** the pace of change in the digital sectors is not matched by the development of enabling connectivity and data infrastructure, constraining growth of the sector

Ambitions for growth

The vision for the sector in GM:

The long-term vision is for Greater Manchester's Digital, Cyber, and AI sector to drive regional and national growth. The sector will be underpinned by a robust foundation of a highly-skilled, large and diverse workforce, world-class and resilient digital infrastructure, and a strong pipeline of innovative technologies, combining to form a highly attractive and lucrative investment destination. This ambition resonates with the priorities set out in 2023-26 GM Digital Blueprint.[91]

Dynamic and interconnected R&D-intensive business clusters will be centred on Greater Manchester's digital industries, fuelling productivity growth and prosperity throughout the UK. Strong partnerships between academia and industry will position Greater Manchester at the forefront of global innovation, through the fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and technological convergence.

The strength of the Digital, Cyber, and AI sector will establish Greater Manchester as a recognised global centre for digital innovation, research and practice. A globally competitive investment environment will be cultivated that attracts both patient capital and risk-seeking investors, granting tech startups easy access to finance that supports them to scale and foster positive local and regional impact.

Greater Manchester's digital sector will be characterised by strong leadership that fosters a shared sense of purpose. Collaborative networks will facilitate expertise and knowledge-sharing between organisations, creating an ecosystem that supports growth and development. The city-region will foster a sustainable, high-skilled, and inclusive talent pool for digital careers that develops and retains talent locally and reflects the diversity of the communities of GM. Underpinning this vision is world-class digital infrastructure that will connect the city-region, enabling growth and providing resilience, accessibility, and sustainability.

Strategic priorities:

Drawing on the sector analysis provided above, alongside a combination of Greater Manchester's local industrial strategy,[92] the GM Innovation Plan,[93] Digital blueprint,[94] and recent engagement with the sector, these six areas encapsulate the strategic priorities to develop the Digital, Cyber, and AI sector.

1. Grow the digital, cyber, and AI sector

[91] GMCA, 2023. *GM Digital Blueprint 2023-26*
[92] HM Government, 2019. *Greater Manchester local industrial strategy*
[93] Innovation GM, 2022. *Greater Manchester Innovation Plan*
[94] GMCA, 2023. *GM Digital Blueprint 2023-26*

- Sustain and expand the digital industry clusters in the Central Growth Cluster, taking a strategic and spatial approach to growth.
- Concentrate on the existing and emerging strengths in cyber security, AI, software development, digital telecoms, fintech, and e-commerce, to drive productivity in the city-region and foster environmentally sustainable and inclusive growth.
- Take a spatial approach that also supports digital innovation opportunities in hospital redevelopments in the Airport City & Southern Growth Corridor, and in the logistics sector in the Western Gateway Growth location.
- Through continuing to develop a world leading, responsible digital security ecosystem and sector this strategic approach is designed to propel Greater Manchester's digital economy to £7 billion by 2029.

2. *Attract international and UK inward investment*

- Attract further international and UK inward investment by promoting Greater Manchester on a national and international stage as a leader in digital innovation and practice.
- Ensure Greater Manchester is known as an extremely attractive place to develop, grow and stay, for individuals and businesses contributing to digital innovation.
- Enhance Greater Manchester's reputation as a UK and European centre for AI, data driven technology, and digital trust and security.

3. *Cultivate a nurturing digital ecosystem, supporting business to access investment, develop skills, and innovate*

- Foster deep business networks within the digital ecosystem, to catalyse enterprise and entrepreneurship, and to create a supportive environment that nurtures the growth of small businesses.
- Learn from existing GM networks that successfully facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration, to create more potential for cross-sector convergence that drives innovation.
- Support digital enterprises to access the opportunities to innovate, to secure investment, and to develop skills.
- Champion Greater Manchester as a place with an incredible, collaborative digital ecosystem, to encourage deeper connections between GM's innovation ecosystem and partner cities and regions both domestically and internationally.

4. *Expand and better exploit our research and development assets to increase productivity*

- Harness the world-leading assets in GM, in particular our universities, to stimulate innovation and increase the productivity of the digital, cyber, and AI sectors.
- Capitalise on the momentum of the Turing Innovation Catalyst and the Centre for Digital innovation, to spark innovation, attract investment and drive productivity across the digital economy.

5. *Enlarge and strengthen talent pipelines into digital careers*

- Enlarge the tech talent pipeline and develop advanced technical skills, supporting businesses to access the skills and expertise needed for innovation and growth.
- Provide clear and accessible pathways into digital careers for both young people and career changers.
- Align local employment needs with educational institutions to sustain a thriving digital ecosystem long-term.

6. Build out resilient digital infrastructure that enables growth

- Ensure we have world class, resilient digital infrastructure that stimulates economic growth and enables the development of our growth zones, across sectors and localities.
- Ensuring access to high-speed connectivity for the digital, cyber, and AI business base across GM, promoting balanced development and economic prosperity.

What we need to do to achieve growth

Our Approach to Delivery

This section outlines what GM can (and is) doing now to support the Digital, Cyber, and AI sector, what we would do in the future with additional resources, what we believe government should do to support the sector, and finally what we believe business should do. Not all these actions are therefore funded, whilst others are already in progress.

The current GM Sector Support picture has developed over years, shaped by short-lived strategies, rapidly changing senior ministers, and short-term funding from various sources, often competitive and driven by the output-based approach of EU funding programmes. Sector leadership bodies like GAMMA or Health Innovation Manchester, and business support schemes like Made Smarter, have developed mainly due to GM's efforts to influence national policy, and often budgeted for in response to funding being provided on a year-to-year basis. The development of Places for Everyone, the GM Local Full Fibre Network, the GM Good Employment Charter, the Innovation GM Board, GM Innovation Plan, Innovation Accelerator Pilot Programme, Further Education Innovation Fund, and the UKSPF Funded Innovation Ecosystem Navigation Service show that, despite short-term strategic and funding limitations, a place-led approach to shaping interventions for our frontier sectors can deliver better outcomes.

With the new Government taking a new approach to National Industrial Strategy and local growth plans and suggesting longer-term funding settlements will now be the norm, and the powers and funding control coming to the city-region, we are now able to review what is in place and begin to plan and deliver on a longer-term basis.

We will ensure that different parts of the ecosystem work together and that various interventions complement and support one another. To unlock new employment spaces for growth, we must ensure the availability of necessary skills, transport to get people there, leadership to communicate the vision and attract interest, and business support to help businesses locate and thrive. These components complement each other, and we will work to break down silos and take a strategic approach to implementing, prioritizing, and sequencing interventions to create the most impact for the sector.

How our action plan is structured: Levers of growth

Realising these objectives requires a coordinated approach across five key themes.

Sector Leadership

Strong local leadership is central to the economic prosperity of an area and to be successful requires partnership across the political, business and institutional spectrum. Local leaders know the needs and opportunities of their areas best and can build coalitions with entrepreneurial leaders from business, research institutions, and other local stakeholders to forge a clear vision for their areas.

The Greater Manchester Digital Steering Group, chaired by the council leader holding the digital portfolio for GMCA, governs and coordinates the GMCA led digital programme, connecting public sector, academia, businesses, and voluntary and community organisations. Leveraging the expertise and leadership of this group, as well as other networks such as Manchester Digital and the GM Cyber Advisory Group, will be crucial to delivering on regional ambitions.

Other areas of Greater Manchester's digital economy would also benefit from sector-led cooperation and vision-setting. Aligning the focus and activities of the AI ecosystem for example would support skills development and innovation creation. The positive record of productive triple helix collaboration across the city-region is a good basis for a strong sector leadership group that can guide and inform a strategy going forward.

Development, planning and infrastructure

A liveable Greater Manchester is key to attracting and retaining talent. To achieve this, the key is to develop an attractive and affordable city-region, where citizens enjoy proximity to high quality public spaces, entertainment, and efficient public transport.

Development of collaborative infrastructure engenders a thriving business environment. Increases in commercial property space, spaces for innovation, collaboration and sharing of ideas, enabled through the planning system, has been found to positively impact employment and turnover in local areas.

Digital infrastructure underpins digital sector growth, delivered through two key infrastructure types. First, mobile and fixed broadband networks provide the internet connectivity essential for businesses and residents to participate in the digital economy. Enhanced connectivity enables the development of smart places, improving mobility, safety, health, and facilitating access to public services, collectively contributing to a more liveable city-region. Expanding access to these networks can also bridge the digital divide and create opportunities for growth in underserved areas. Second, data centres provide the capacity to deliver applications and services across the entire digital economy. The facilities house the processing power required for the development of emerging technologies which require increasingly intensive processing power, including AI.

Through the adoption of Places for Everyone and the developing Stockport Local Plan, Greater Manchester has established a clear pipeline of future employment and housing growth opportunities. This has allowed the identification of 6 key growth locations in the city-region, allowing for the development of investment pipelines and strategic planning to begin focusing on getting the maximum impact from the funding that GM controls to develop economic infrastructure in the city-region. Digital infrastructure is essential to supporting and future-proofing development across GM's growth locations.

Innovation and Research

Evidence demonstrates that R&D grants, loans, and subsidies have a positive impact on R&D expenditure and increase the rate of innovative activity that takes place. Innovation is a key to raising long term productivity, outputs, and economic growth, with higher levels of R&D spend associated with higher growth. GM is reflecting this as a priority through support for initiatives such as TIC, CDI, and MITIH which are focussed on commercialisation and translational activity.

The Greater Manchester Innovation Plan[95] has laid out a Cluster Led approach that the city-region will take to developing its Innovation Ecosystem, looking to develop translational capacity, and build linkages and networks, which support our frontier sectors to develop and commercialise innovations based on our key technology strengths.

Enterprise and business support

Studies indicate that through collaboration with business, universities and research institutions such as catapults play a vital role in regional and national growth, while SMEs play a large role in local economic performance but often lack knowledge of applicable university support to improve performance. Business support services can also be crucial in unlocking early-stage financing and enabling commercialisation, as demonstrated by hubs such as DiSH, which are responsive to the sector's needs.

As with skills, local enterprise and business support has been an agenda the Greater Manchester has been working towards greater local control of for some time, working to the principle that a place-based approach, with local knowledge and understanding, coupled with a strong evidence base will achieve better outcomes. Success stories such as Made Smarter, which was developed in GM, initially delivered across the North West, and will soon be rolled out nationally, show how we have been able to develop impactful interventions, in the face of uncertain budget allocations and shifting strategy. The sounder footing that the next phase of devolution will bring will allow for more such focused and targeted interventions to be developed across our frontier sectors.

Skills and labour supply

Industry and business often raise the challenge of available skills and expertise as a barrier to investing and expanding. Lack of necessary training and skills can also shut existing communities out of new innovative opportunities in their local area.

Since the 2014 City Deal, Greater Manchester has been lobbying for greater local control of skills funding and policy, on the principal that we better understand the needs of our employers, residents and the capacity of our providers. Under the latest devolution deal we will have increased control of post 16 skills provision and the Adult Education Budget for the city-region. Work already done on the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc), Local Skills Improvement Plan and improvements from the Local Skills Improvement Fund has better prepared us to be able to look at short courses,

[95] Innovation GM, 2022. *Greater Manchester Innovation Plan*

apprenticeships and other interventions to address broad skills, enabling targeted interventions such as the GM Raspberry Pi computing qualification – a first-of-its-kind Applied Computing qualification available to secondary school pupils through the MBacc.

Delivery plan

The below plan provides a series of actions that we believe GM needs to take to support the sector going forwards.

The table below outlines how these actions are: aligned to our different levers for growth; if this activity is an ongoing or new activity proposed in this plan; if this is currently funded; lead organisations; and timeframes for this activity (short term – 25/26 FY, or medium term - beyond this timeframe).

Actions are categorised in three different ways:

- "Distinctive" actions that are only relevant to this sector development plan
- "Shared" actions that thread together our frontier sectors and their plans
- "Strategic" actions that sit above sector development plans and support business activities across the economy

Growth Lever	Action	Lead	Kind	Strategic priority	Time frame	Programme	Action type
Enterprise and Business Support	Pilot business support programme to foster AI adoption in the GM business base drawing on best practice in GM	GMCA & partners	New activity	3	Medium	SDP RBR budget	Distinctive
Enterprise and Business Support	Design and initiate the programme management of a Greater Manchester AI challenge prize	GMCA	New activity	1,3	Medium	SDP RBR budget	Distinctive
Enterprise and Business Support	Explore options for how additional business incentives (e.g. match funding) to attract businesses to the region could be structured if resources are made available.	GMCA & MIDAS	New Activity	1,2	Medium		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Complete research to understand what additional public investment tools could be developed to address key investment gaps for our frontier sectors	GMCA	New Activity	1,2	Short		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Explore how we can enhance resources available to proactively engage major, global innovative firms and develop sophisticated inward investment plans to attract them, including via lunching key campaigns working with MIDAS	GMCA & MIDAS	Ongoing Activity	2	Medium		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Continue to develop closer working with DBT teams in post in target markets to strengthen FDI relating to cluster focus areas.	GMCA & MIDAS	Ongoing Activity	2	Short		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Explore the introduction of a GM programme that provides an easily navigable platform for all frontier sector organisations to understand the current ecosystem of organisations and access opportunities for investment and grants, with regularly updated data, as well as options for creating "innovation" champions to support business with accessing grant support and other opportunities in the ecosystem.	GMCA	New activity	3	Medium		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Expand existing programmes, such as Made Smarter, into other frontier sectors and other sub-sectors within frontier sectors.	GMCA & Growth company	Ongoing activity	3	Medium		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Work to develop a framework for higher quality output metrics for support programmes that focus on capturing progress towards commercialisation and quality of programme benefits for businesses	GMCA	New Activity	3	Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support the continued operation of Growth Company networks, and ensure we are maximising the reach of current initiatives to support businesses to access programmes and funding, such as Made Smarter Programme, innovation ecosystem navigation service, and BeeNetZero programme.	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity	3	Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support the GM Business Board with the implementation of the review Business Support offer in GM, to identify gaps and / or the need for specialisation of support for the sectors.	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity	3	Medium		Strategic

Growth Lever	Action	Lead	Kind	Strategic priority	Time frame	Programme	Action type
Enterprise and Business Support	Undertake a cross-sector mapping exercise to identify key international markets and trade relationships for each of Greater Manchester's frontier sectors. This will include analysis of sub-sector strengths, export potential, and alignment with global demand, and will inform the development of targeted international engagement and trade propositions.	GMCA & MIDAS	Ongoing Activity	2,3	Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support UK Govs Supply Chain Centre and Digital Supply Chain Hub with the data and collaboration activities as required	GMCA, UK Gov	New Activity	1,3	Medium	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Ensure we are maximising opportunities for GM businesses to access funding via the British Business Bank, including the Industrial Strategy Growth Capital, Strategic Equity, IP-Backed Lending and Nations and Regions Investment programmes	GMCA, UK Gov	New Activity	1,3	Medium	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support the role out of UK Govs cluster champions programme and their North West Deployment	GMCA, UK Gov	New Activity	1,3	Short	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Ensure we are maximising opportunities for GM businesses to access funding via the enhanced remit of the National Wealth Fund announced as part of UK Govs National Industrial Strategy	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity	1,3	Medium	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Complete a review of our current business engagement forums and processes across our frontier sectors and strengthen businesses voice in the development of our strategies and plans, including further iterations of sector development plans	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity	3	Short		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Strengthen and tailor Greater Manchester's intellectual property (IP) support offer across all frontier sectors by working with the Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) Greater Manchester and the Intellectual Property Office (IPO), maximising our support to IP-rich SMEs most in need of support, and ensuring that IP is embedded into wider business support and innovation programmes across GM.	GMCA Intellectual Property Office	New Activity	1	Medium		Strategic
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Support the development of mobile and fixed broadband, such that digital businesses can access high-speed connectivity.	GMCA & BDUK	Ongoing activity	6	Short		Distinctive
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Ensure that securing data centre and supercomputer infrastructure is reconciled with sustainable grid infrastructure development and clean energy ambitions	GMCA & partners	Ongoing activity	6	Medium		Distinctive
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Develop a GM data centre strategy that future-proofs digital sector growth by securing data centre and supercomputer infrastructure, while reconciling this with alignment to clean energy ambitions and ensuring sustainable grid infrastructure development	GMCA & partners	Ongoing activity	6	Short		Distinctive
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Develop a better understanding of the quantum of market demand for physical infrastructure, including modular lab space, scale up space, larger sites for larger businesses including FDI, GPU compute, and digital connectivity infrastructure	GMCA & partners	New activity	3	Short		Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Ensure the Investment Plan embeds provision for digital-first infrastructure (including AI Growth Zones, dark fibre, and 5G/6G) and clean energy systems required by the sectors at key locations to ensure sustainable development.	GMCA	Ongoing activity	6	Medium	IP	Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Launch and utilise £2m Planning and Development fund for Districts to draw from to plan and prepare for the development of strategic sites	GMCA	Ongoing activity	6	Short/Medium	IZ	Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Explore interim commercial space solutions for start-ups and scale-ups guided by the Integrated Pipeline and Regional Economic Spatial Plans (RESPs). This includes identifying opportunities to accelerate delivery through the Strategic Sites Accelerator and Mayoral Recyclable Growth Fund.	GMCA & Partners	Ongoing Activity	3,4	Medium		Shared

Growth Lever	Action	Lead	Kind	Strategic priority	Time frame	Programme	Action type
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Develop understanding of the compute capacity required by our frontier and growth sectors, and secure access to sufficient compute to enable them to deliver on our local goals and the national mission for growth.	GMCA & Partners	New activity	6	Medium		Shared
Planning and Development	Support the development of cross-sector creative hubs for collaboration and innovation.	GMCA / Local Authorities	New	4	Medium		Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Ensure we are maximising opportunities to unlock key strategic sites via the UK Govs Strategic Site Accelerator, Mayoral Recyclable Growth Fund and Connections Accelerator Service	GMCA, UK Gov	New Activity	6	Medium	NIS	Strategic
Innovation and Research	Develop the business case for a UK centre for national security advanced technologies to join up the cyber innovation ecosystem with national security agencies	GMCA & partners	New activity	1,4	Medium	SDP RBR budget	Distinctive
Innovation and Research	Establish a new national AI innovation and adoption programme	University of Manchester	New activity	4	Medium	UoM, NIS/UKRI	Distinctive
Research and Innovation	Maximise the impact of the Extended Innovation Accelerator Pilot and centre frontier sector needs in the development of Greater Manchester's response to the Local Innovation Partnership Fund	GMCA	Ongoing Activity	2, 4, 5, 7	Short		Shared
Innovation and Research	Increase our understanding of industry and academia R&D partnerships in the city-region relevant to the frontier sectors, to drive for GM to be a testbed for investment in innovation with commercial application.	GMCA & partners	New activity	4	Short		Shared
Innovation and Research	Explore the creation of a localised GM fund which reinvests the value from innovation into social value projects, e.g. data assets for health.	GMCA	New Activity	4	Medium		Shared
Innovation and Research	Explore the creation of a seed fund for high risk/reward pilots that industry cannot absorb but tackle key socio-economic challenges including net zero.	GMCA	New Activity	4	Medium		Shared
Innovation and Research	Support and input into the Science and Innovation Audit on behalf of all frontier sectors	GMCA	Ongoing Activity	4	Short		Shared
Innovation and Research	Explore potential opportunities for a Joint Technology Transfer office to sit across all universities and maximise technology transfer opportunities across GM	University Partners Innovation GM	New Activity	3,4	Medium		Strategic
Sector Leadership	Convene sector networking groups to align activities and drive missions in digital, cyber and AI subsectors	GMCA & partners	Ongoing activity	3	Short		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Establish the AI + Data Innovation Office (ADIO) to support the leveraging of AI and data technologies to deliver better public services across Greater Manchester	GMCA	New activity	1,3	Short		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Develop and communicate a compelling narrative for GM's digital sector (including for individual localities and sub-sectoral specialisms) which highlights USPs to potential national and international investors	GMCA & MIDAS	Ongoing activity	2,3	Short	SDP RBR budget	Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Engage with GCHQ, NCF and the Lancashire cyber ecosystem to support the development of the Northwest Cyber Corridor	GMCA & partners	Ongoing activity	2,3	Medium		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Produce an AI sector insights report that builds knowledge of AI trends, strengths, assets, challenges and opportunities in GM	GMCA & partners	New activity	3	Short	SDP RBR budget	Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Communicate the narrative of GM's cross-cutting sectoral strengths to internal and external stakeholders, including industry and government, to inform national policy & strategy for the sector and ensure they are aware of GM's strengths and opportunities, initiatives locally, and gaps in our ability to develop the sector locally.	GMCA & partners	Ongoing activity	1,2	Short		Shared

Growth Lever	Action	Lead	Kind	Strategic priority	Time frame	Programme	Action type
Sector Leadership	Develop a mechanism for ongoing review of the evidence base regarding GM's frontier sectors, sub-sector strengths, and their development needs, responding to emerging capabilities.	GMCA	New activity	3,4	Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Undertake research to map the gap between where sectors are now and where they need to be to deliver the 5YEP's targets, considering what sectors are currently delivering, what they are capable of, and focused activity required to plug the biggest gaps.	GMCA	New activity	1	Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Explore options to develop a mechanism to facilitate cross sector communication between frontier sectors and increase engagement in decision making processes.	GMCA	New Activity	3	Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Explore options to increase our understanding of the supply chains that both services, and our businesses in the sector service, including the businesses in GM that make up these, and what is driving key decisions around supply chain management for OEMs and key opportunities for GM	GMCA	New Activity	3	Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Ensure Greater Manchester is represented on relevant national industry groups supporting the delivery of the national industrial strategy	GMCA, UK Gov	New Activity	3	Medium	NIS	Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Undertake a discovery exercise to determine the value of establishing a national security talent accelerator to connect skills training with national security agencies	GMCA & partners	New activity	5	Medium	SDP RBR budget	Distinctive
Skills and Labour Supply	Work with partners to increase the impact of employer engagement in shaping the curriculum within colleges by working with existing advisory boards within colleges and facilitating events/conferences at a GM level where they add value	GMCA & FE Colleges	New Activity	3, 5	Medium		Shared
Skills and Labour Supply	Review the opportunities for frontier sector relevant short courses, bootcamps etc. opened up by the new Devolution Deal on skills funding	GMCA	New Activity	3,5	Short		Shared
Skills and Labour Supply	Ensure that we are aligning sector priorities with MBacc, and that young people have a clear line of sight to jobs in the sectors.	GMCA	Ongoing Activity	4	Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Align Skills and Employment Support interventions with Greater Manchester's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), led by the GM Chamber of Commerce and utilise new devolved powers from the Integrated Settlement and existing programmes (e.g., Adult Education Budget, Skills Bootcamps) to address priority skills gaps. Support young people and adults in developing academic and technical skills identified through sector skills analysis, informed by business needs and feedback on the Skills System.	GMCA	Ongoing Activity	3,5	Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Work to ensure that employers and learners are more aware of existing provision and access points into it. This will include a concerted effort to link employers with providers to ensure that awareness of current provision is up to date taking in established options such as Apprenticeships and 'newer' options such as T-Levels and a range of shorter course options around HTQs	GMCA & Partners	Ongoing Activity	3,5	Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Explore opportunities for new paid internships placing university students in SMEs to provide innovation support	GMCA & Universities	New Activity	3, 5	Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Increase our understanding of specific graduate needs for frontier sectors and developing our approach to increasing retention in GM.	GMCA & Universities	Ongoing Activity	5	Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Foster greater collaboration between all parts of the skills systems (HE institutions, FE colleges, ITPs), facilitate shared learning by exemplar institutions on effective programmes, and join up existing assets within GM, using this as a platform to better engage industry and connect their future skills needs to available	GMCA, Fe Colleges, Higher Education Institutions and Partners	Ongoing Activity	3,5	Medium		Strategic

How we will measure success

These metrics (alongside delivery of actions outlined in this plan) will be used for the process of monitoring and evaluation. As outlined, this is a living document, that will have an iterative approach to how it is written and implemented, and as such these metrics may change in response to this. We will continue to evaluate our approach and the success of the delivery of these plans on a regular basis and adapt them as required in response to changing circumstances. These will also change in line with emerging information regarding National Industrial Strategy implementation (and corresponding national sector plans) as well as single settlement governance.

Measures:

- Number of jobs created
- Amount of private sector investment leveraged towards the sector
- Number of people trained in key skills suitable for jobs in the sector
- Number of businesses supported via schemes to grow in the sector
- Number of businesses able to commercialise due to interventions
- Amount of floor space unlocked for the sector

Impacts:

- Increase in productivity and growth in the sector
- Increased earnings of businesses in sector
- Increased proportion of businesses signed up to the good employment charter
- Increased investment in R&D (public and private)
- Reductions in Carbon emissions from business in the sector