

CELEBRATING

25

Years

**OF COLLABORATION
& IMPACT**

GMLPN **25**
Greater Manchester
Learning Provider Network

25 YEARS OF COLLABORATION & IMPACT

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*As we look to the future, it is clear that the next phase of GMLPN's journey will be shaped by significant **challenge**, rapid **change** and real **opportunity**.*

Mark Currie, Chair of GMLPN

For 25 years, the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network (GMLPN) has brought together providers, partners and stakeholders with a shared ambition: **to strengthen the skills system and improve opportunities for individuals, employers and communities across Greater Manchester.**

What began in **2001 as a small, informal group of training providers** meeting to share intelligence, navigate challenges and represent a collective voice has evolved into a recognised and influential network at the heart of Greater Manchester's skills and employment landscape.

By 2006, GMLPN had formally incorporated, creating a platform to grow its reach and influence.

Membership expanded, partnerships strengthened, and the network began to play a more active role in shaping skills priorities across Greater Manchester. What has remained constant, however, was its core purpose: **to represent and support its members**, and to champion the value of vocational education and training.

As the skills landscape evolved – shaped by devolution, funding reform and changing employer needs – so too did GMLPN. The network moved beyond convening and into delivery, designing and leading programmes that supported providers to grow, helping employers access the skills they need, and created opportunities for learners to progress and succeed.

From large-scale initiatives such as the Apprenticeship Ambassador Programme, the Skills Gateway, ASK Programme and Demonstrating IMPACT, to campaigns such as #SEEDIFFERENT, **GMLPN has consistently acted as a bridge – connecting policy with practice**, employers with providers, and ambition with delivery.

Its influence extends beyond programme delivery. Through sustained engagement with local, regional and national partners, GMLPN has **ensured the provider voice is heard at every level**, helping to shape policy, inform investment and strengthen system responsiveness.

During times of challenge, that role has been even more critical. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, GMLPN provided a vital space for collaboration, rapidly adapting to support members through uncertainty while continuing to influence policy and advocate for the sector.

Today, **GMLPN is a network of over 140** members and a recognised part of the skills system in Greater Manchester and beyond. It continues to bring people together, facilitate collaboration and support the sector through **challenge, change and opportunity.**

This story belongs to the many organisations and individuals who have contributed their time, expertise and commitment over the past 25 years.

GMLPN's impact has always been collective – shaped by the strength of its members, partners and a shared belief in the power of skills to change lives.

As we look ahead, that collective spirit remains our greatest asset, and the foundation on which the next 25 years will be built.

25 YEARS IN THE CHAIR'S WORDS

Since 2011 the Chair's annual foreword have quietly charted the story of GMLPN and, in doing so, reflected the wider evolution of the skills and employment landscape in Greater Manchester. Taken together, they tell a story of growing influence, constant reform, and a network that has continually adapted to serve its members, learners, and the wider economy.

Formal Chair's forewords were introduced as part of GMLPN's annual reporting from 2011 onwards. This section brings together selected extracts and recurring themes from those statements to capture that journey in the Chair's own words.

A sector finding its voice (2011–2013)

*"There has been such **strong connectivity** between Independent Training Providers, FE Colleges, local councils, funders, and key partners across Greater Manchester." (2011/12)*

*"The GMLPN is where it should be – at the table and **an active participant in discussions relating to skills and employment.**" (2011/12)*

*"Our network is now extremely **well positioned and very well represented** — more so in GM than in any other sub-region nationally." (2012/13)*

Membership growth, early European Social Fund successes, and deepening engagement with regional partners signal a sector beginning to consolidate its influence and confidence. The early years are marked by optimism and momentum. The network is increasingly recognised as a credible voice in regional skills policy, with a growing sense that partnership working is strengthening and beginning to influence decision-making at scale.

Building influence and infrastructure (2013–2015)

*"We established a clear vision to achieve an **ever-closer alignment between the skills system and the needs of employers**, individuals and the economy of Greater Manchester." (2013/14)*

*"We are committed to bringing about a step change in the level of **employer investment in skills and Apprenticeships.**" (2013/14)*

*"We have **strengthened our joint work...** to 'make the market for skills' and to convince more employers of the business benefits of skills investment." (2014/15)*

This period reflects a shift from establishment to delivery. The focus turns to shaping systems, influencing policy, and building practical mechanisms to connect skills provision with economic need. Initiatives such as Skills Gateway, Employer Ambassador programmes, and deepening partnerships with employers and representative bodies begin to define the network's role as both convenor and catalyst.

25 YEARS IN THE CHAIR'S WORDS

Reform, pressure, and system change (2015–2018)

*"We are currently responding to an **unprecedented level of change.**" (2015/16)*

*"The **advent of the Apprenticeship Levy**... marks a seismic shift in the way we plan for and deliver our Apprenticeships." (2015/16)*

*"As predicted the past year has proved to be one of the **most challenging for both employers and training providers alike.**" (2017/18)*

*"Collectively all of this makes for a **difficult operating environment.**" (2017/18)*

The tone begins to shift as major national reforms reshape the skills landscape. The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, new funding systems, and structural policy change create both opportunity and instability. This era is defined by adaptation under pressure. While reform promises greater employer-led control, providers face operational strain, falling starts, and increasing complexity. Amid these challenges, the network's role as an advocate, convenor, and source of practical support becomes more critical than ever.

Collaboration, devolution, and resilience (2018–2022)

*"Greater Manchester has now published its Industrial Strategy, which highlighted the **critical role that skills play in tackling unemployment and low productivity.**" (2018/19)*

*"We've achieved **7 years' worth of change in 7 months.**" (2020/21)*

*"Vocational training in GM has continued to be delivered and **learners have continued to be supported.**" (2020/21)*

*"The Network is in good shape to **face future challenges and membership is growing.**" (2021/22)*

Devolution becomes a defining theme, with Greater Manchester increasingly shaping its own skills agenda. Collaboration across the city-region deepens, alongside continued advocacy for a more coherent and locally responsive system. Then comes COVID-19 - a moment of disruption and acceleration. The pandemic forces rapid innovation in delivery, communication, and partnership working. Digital and remote learning become embedded, and the network plays a stabilising role for members navigating unprecedented uncertainty.

25 YEARS IN THE CHAIR'S WORDS

A more complex system, a stronger collective voice (2022–2025)

*“There are exciting developments underway in Greater Manchester surrounding the **Mayor’s vision for an integrated technical and vocational skills system.**” (2022/23)*

*“**Apprenticeship funding rates... are unsustainable** for providers if this continues.” (2022/23)*

*“**FE recruitment and retention remains a key challenge.**” (2022/23)*

*“We have greatly **increased our membership to 135 members** and significantly increased the **reach and diversity** of our members.” (2023/24)*

*“The principle of ensuring **everyone is given the right opportunity and support to succeed** must continue to guide our work.” (2024/25)*

In recent years, the system has become more complex, more devolved, and more interconnected. Alongside new opportunity, there is growing concern about funding pressures, workforce challenges, and long-term sustainability. At the same time, the network’s reach, maturity, and partnerships continue to expand. The most recent reflections reveal both ambition and tension: a system striving for coherence while navigating funding constraints, policy reform, and changing labour-market realities.

Looking back ➔ Looking forward

Across the Chair’s forewords, a consistent thread remains:

- **Commitment to partnership and collaboration**
- **Belief in the value of skills and vocational and technical education**
- **Determination to influence and improve systems for learners and employers**
- **A network that continues to adapt in the face of constant change**

What has changed is the scale and complexity of the environment - not the purpose.

As the Chair’s words show over time, GMLPN has moved from establishing its voice, to strengthening its influence, to navigating system-wide reform, while remaining anchored in our core mission: **connecting skills, people, and opportunity across Greater Manchester.**



25 YEARS OF GMLPN: KEY MILESTONES

2001-2006 | Foundations: A collective provider voice

2007-2011 | Building the Network



2004

Mark Currie appointed Chair of GMLPN

Providing long-term leadership and stability as GMLPN evolved from an informal network into a recognised and influential system partner.

First full time member of staff appointed to the Network



2006

GMLPN incorporated

Formal incorporation provided a platform to grow membership, strengthen governance and increase influence across the skills system.



2010

First GMLPN Annual Report published

Signaled maturity as a network, with a clear strategic role supporting, lobbying and campaigning for members.

2001

GMLPN Founded

Established as an informal network of training providers across Greater Manchester to share intelligence, navigate challenges and represent a collective voice – coordinated and chaired by David Guthrie.



2005

Early regional collaboration

Providers working collectively on skills, apprenticeships and employer engagement across Greater Manchester, ahead of formal devolution structures.



2007

GMLPN Team began to grow

The expansion of the GMLPN team marked a shift towards a more structured and sustainable delivery model, enabling increased programme activity, stronger member support, and greater influence across the skills system.



25 YEARS OF GMLPN: KEY MILESTONES

2012–2014 | *From convening to delivery*

2015–2017 | *Scaling Impact*



2013-2014
Demonstrating IMPACT programme launched
Flagship provider-support programme supporting organisational development, quality and employer engagement.



2015
Greater Manchester Apprenticeship Hub & #SEEDIFFERENT
GMLPN plays a central role in changing perceptions of apprenticeships across the city-region.



2016
Apprenticeship reforms advocacy
GMLPN and partners correctly predict and lobby on the impact of reforms, ensuring provider voice is heard nationally.

2012-13
GMLPN influences GM skills investment
Sector deep-dive intelligence informs GM skills priorities and contributes to securing major ESF investment.



2014
Skills Gateway launched
A new employer-facing service bridging the gap between businesses and training providers.



2015
Skills for Business Awards launched
Celebrating excellence in skills and employer engagement across Greater Manchester, in partnership with GMCC.



25 YEARS OF GMLPN: KEY MILESTONES

2018–2019 | Intelligence, employers and collaboration

2020–2021 | Leading Through Crisis

2022–2024 | Inclusion, system change and recognition

2019

Intelligence, employers & collaboration

Ground-breaking partnership with GMCC to gather real-time employer intelligence at a local and sectoral level – building the foundations for the later established Local Skills Improvement Plans.



2021

New vision, values, priorities and logo launched

Membership-led refresh reflecting equality, collaboration, impact and system leadership.



2023

SME Employer of the Year

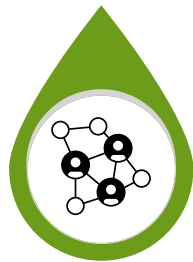
Recognition of GMLPN as an exemplar employer and advocate for apprenticeships at the NW Apprenticeship Awards.



2019

GM Skills Summit: "From Ambition to Action"

In partnership with GMCC, senior leaders from education and industry come together to align priorities and strengthen collaboration.



2020

COVID-19 response

GMLPN pivots rapidly to virtual delivery, intensified lobbying and direct member support during unprecedented disruption.



2022

Inclusive Pathways: Autism Support

Targeted programmes supporting autistic individuals into apprenticeships and vocational pathways.



2024

Membership reaches record levels

Over 140 members; launch of new website, enhanced digital presence and expanded partnership working.

25 YEARS OF GMLPN: KEY MILESTONES

2025-2026 | *Shaping the future*



2025

GM Skills Awards launched

Evolution of Skills for Business Awards, in partnership with GMCC, celebrating cross-system collaboration and excellence in the Further Education and Skills Sector.

2025 **Leading Social Mobility Conversations**

GMLPN leads a GM-wide conversation on NEET reduction, influencing local and national policy discussion.

Further development of GMLPN Community Membership, ensuring the VCSFE sector is strongly represented across the network's work.



2026

Transition to CIC

Transition to a Community Interest Company is underway - bringing greater alignment with GMLPN's purpose and ambition to supporting Greater Manchester's Providers, Employers and residents.



2026

25 years of GMLPN

From informal network to recognised system partner at the heart of Greater Manchester's skills landscape.

GMLPN25 celebrates the impact and collaboration of the Network, members and partners over the last 25 years.

IMPACT & COLLABORATION: MEMBERSHIP

Our Collective Strength

At the heart of GMLPN's impact is its membership. For 25 years, the network has existed to serve, represent and amplify the voice of learning and skills providers across Greater Manchester. Everything GMLPN has achieved – influencing system change, responding to employer need, and improving outcomes for learners – is rooted in the strength, diversity and commitment of its members.

From our origins as a small group of independent training providers seeking shared understanding and influence,

GMLPN has grown into a broad and inclusive network spanning further education colleges, independent providers, higher education institutions, specialist and community-based organisations, and more! This diversity is a strength: it enables collaboration across delivery models, learner groups and employer sectors, and ensures that system conversations are informed by the full breadth of provision across Greater Manchester.

What Membership Enables

Membership of GMLPN is not passive. It provides a mechanism for collective influence, shared learning and practical collaboration.

Through GMLPN, members work collectively to shape priorities and influence policy at local, regional and national level, using their shared insight and experience to inform decision making. The network also creates opportunities to share practice, build capability and collaborate across organisational boundaries, helping to strengthen quality, resilience and coherence across the skills system.



MEMBERSHIP AT A GLANCE

OVER

140
MEMBERS

723%
GROWTH IN MEMBERSHIP
SINCE INCEPTION

MEMBERS INCLUDE:

- Independent Training Providers
- Further Education Colleges
- Higher Education Institutions
- Community Providers
- Employer Providers
- Local Authorities
- Careers Organisations
- Awarding/Assessment Organisations
- Software Providers
- Employers
- Consultants
- Recruitment Organisations

IMPACT & COLLABORATION: INFLUENCING AND INFORMING THE SKILLS SYSTEM

A TRUSTED VOICE, GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE

For 25 years, GMLPN has played a consistent and credible role in shaping skills policy, investment and system design across Greater Manchester, the North of England and beyond. By combining provider insight, employer intelligence and strong partnerships, the network has ensured that decision-making is informed by delivery reality and regional economic need.

Building a Northern Voice (late 2004–present)

In 2004 the GMLPN formed the North West provider Network (NWPN) with Lancashire, Merseyside, Cheshire and Cumbria providers. GMLPN has been a driving force behind the NWPN, now developed into the Northern Skills Network (NSN), which GMLPN proudly co-chairs. GMLPN members have been consistently represented at senior level, including board representation, ensuring that Greater Manchester's provider voice informs wider regional and national discussions.

A key moment in this work was the North-West Apprenticeship Trailblazers and Reforms event, attended by 150 senior leaders from independent training providers and colleges. Delivered at a time of significant policy change, the event supported collective understanding and coordinated sector response.

Alongside NWPN, GMLPN supported a large-scale employer engagement exercise, surveying more than 450 employers across the North-West. This intelligence underpinned sustained lobbying during apprenticeship reform, helping to ensure that the strongest features of the existing system were retained as new arrangements were introduced.



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: INFLUENCING AND INFORMING THE SKILLS SYSTEM

Intelligence-Led Influence in Greater Manchester (2013–2016)

Between 2013 and 2016, GMLPN led the development of a series of Sector Deep Dive labour-market intelligence reports, grounded in 710 detailed employer surveys across key sectors. These reports provided a robust evidence base on skills demand, workforce challenges and progression needs.

This intelligence directly influenced:

- Greater Manchester's draft Skills and Skills for Growth investment plans (2014–2020)
- System understanding of employer demand and workforce development needs
- The successful case for investment that helped secure a £14 million European Social Fund (ESF) contract focused on developing skills in the workplace

During this period, GMLPN worked closely with GM Skills and Employment Board, New Economy, the ESF Skills Support for the Workforce Strategic Oversight Group. Through these roles, GMLPN acted as a bridge between providers, employers and policymakers, translating intelligence into strategy and investment.

Shaping Strategy and System Design (2014–2020)

Working in close partnership with New Economy, GMLPN supported the development and refinement of key Greater Manchester strategies, including:

- The Greater Manchester Skills Strategy
- Enhancement of the Apprenticeship Hub
- Refinement of the Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Strategy
- Development of the 2014–2020 European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy

This work reinforced GMLPN's position as a trusted system partner, contributing practical insight to long-term planning and helping to align skills provision with economic priorities.

GM Futures and Cross-System Collaboration (mid-2010s)

GMLPN was also instrumental in the establishment of GM Futures, a partnership between:

- Greater Manchester Colleges Group
- Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations
- Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network
- The Growth Company
- The Manchester College

Created to make the skills system work better for the people, businesses and communities of Greater Manchester, GM Futures supported the delivery of the ESF Skills Support for the Workforce programme, strengthening collaboration across economic, employment and skills partners.



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: INFLUENCING AND INFORMING THE SKILLS SYSTEM

Continuing Influence - Representation, Trust and System Leadership (ongoing)

Building on a legacy of evidence-led influence, GMLPN has continued to shape system thinking through initiatives such as the Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) Project and Tackling the NEET Challenge across Greater Manchester activity and position paper, reinforcing our role as a credible, collaborative and influential system partner.

Across the last two decades, GMLPN has consistently represented the provider voice on a wide range of boards, steering groups and advisory forums at local, regional and national level. This sustained presence has built trust and credibility, enabling GMLPN to influence policy constructively and ensure that reform is informed by frontline experience.



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- 450+ employers surveyed across the North West to inform apprenticeship reform
- 710 in-depth employer surveys underpinning GM Sector Deep Dive intelligence
- £14m ESF investment influenced through evidence-led system engagement
- 150 senior leaders convened at a major NW apprenticeship reform event
- AEB flexibilities extended during COVID-19 in response to provider and learner need
- Multiple boards and strategic groups supported, including GM Skills and Employment Board, ESF Strategic Oversight, Northern Skills Network Board, GM Colleges Advisory Group, and Education, Work and Skills Executive

IMPACT & COLLABORATION: MAKING SKILLS VISIBLE, VALUED AND INCLUSIVE

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS. RAISING ASPIRATION. CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE.

GMLPN has continue to work hard to change how skills, apprenticeships and vocational pathways are perceived across Greater Manchester. Alongside system influence and delivery, the network consistently focuses on visibility, aspiration and inclusion – ensuring that learners, employers and communities recognise skills as valuable, credible and transformative routes to opportunity.

Inspiring Young People Through ASK (2016 – 2025)

During 2016-2025, GMLPN has played a leading role in the delivery and coordination of the Apprenticeship Support & Knowledge (ASK) programme across Greater Manchester. ASK supported young people, parents and teachers to better understand apprenticeships and technical routes.

Through assemblies, workshops, events and targeted engagement, ASK has:

- Raised awareness of apprenticeships as a high-quality progression route
- Challenged outdated perceptions of vocational education
- Supported more informed career choices at key transition points



GM Apprenticeship Ambassadors (2011-2021)

For 10 years, GMLPN led the Greater Manchester Apprenticeship Ambassador programme, placing lived experience at the heart of engagement activity.

Apprenticeship Ambassadors are powerful advocates, sharing real-world insight into apprenticeship pathways and outcomes. By speaking directly to learners, parents, educators and businesses, they bring credibility, relatability and inspiration to conversations about skills.



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: MAKING SKILLS VISIBLE, VALUED AND INCLUSIVE

#SEEDIFFERENT - Greater Manchester Apprenticeship Hub (2014-2021)

Through the #SEEDIFFERENT - Greater Manchester Apprenticeship Hub project, GMLPN worked to both change how apprenticeships are perceived and make the system easier to navigate.

Launched in 2014, #SEEDIFFERENT challenged outdated views of apprenticeships by showcasing real stories of learners and employers, helping to position vocational and technical routes as aspirational, high-quality pathways.



#SEEDIFFERENT
THINK APPRENTICESHIPS

OVER **200,000** YOUNG PEOPLE REACHED

MORE THAN **23,000,000** SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

ENGAGED OVER **23,000** EMPLOYERS & **110** TRAINING PROVIDERS



Broadening Participation and Opportunity (ongoing)

Alongside this work, GMLPN has supported a range of activity focused on early engagement, inclusion and access, including the Enterprise Game, Year 9 Options Evenings and WorldSkills, "Have a Go" experiences that allow young people to explore vocational pathways in a practical, hands-on way. GMLPN has also played a role in supporting autistic individuals into apprenticeships, working with partners to develop more inclusive pathways and raise understanding of how the skills system can better meet diverse needs.

Together, these initiatives reinforce GMLPN's commitment to ensuring that skills opportunities are accessible, inclusive and meaningful, particularly for those who may otherwise face barriers to participation.



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: MAKING SKILLS VISIBLE, VALUED AND INCLUSIVE

Celebrating Excellence: Skills for Business → GM Skills Awards (2015 – present)

From 2015-2017, GMLPN, in partnership with GMCC ran the Skills for Business Awards to celebrate excellence in skills delivery, employer engagement and partnership working across Greater Manchester. The awards were created to shine a spotlight on success, innovation and collaboration within the further education and skills sector – often overlooked in traditional awards landscapes.

In 2025, the awards relaunched as the GM Skills Awards, again delivered in partnership with GMCC. This evolution reflected both the maturity of the sector and the increasing importance of cross-system collaboration, celebrating excellence not just within organisations, but across partnerships that support learners and employers.

- Over 1,000 nominations since 2015
- More than 3,000 attendees across the award ceremonies



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: RESPONDING TO EMPLOYER AND ECONOMIC NEED

CONNECTING SKILLS TO GROWTH AND PRODUCTIVITY

A core aim of GMLPN's work has been its ability to support the sector to respond quickly and practically to employer demand and economic change. By acting as a broker between employers, providers and system partners, GMLPN has helped ensure that skills provision aligns with real-world workforce needs, particularly for SMEs and priority sectors across Greater Manchester.

Skills Gateway – Supercharge Your Workforce (2013–2018)

The Skills Gateway – Supercharge Your Workforce, delivered as part of the ESF Skills Support for the Workforce programme, provided a clear, employer-facing route into skills support. Designed to reduce complexity and improve access, the Gateway helped employers identify workforce development needs and connect with appropriate provision.

The programme strengthened employer engagement with skills, particularly among SMEs, and supported Greater Manchester's wider ambition to boost productivity through workforce development.



Skills Ambassador Programme (2013–2015)

Employer and Skills Ambassadors played a vital role in strengthening employer confidence and engagement with the skills system. Ambassadors acted as trusted peers, articulating the return on investment of skills, apprenticeships and workforce development in language that resonated with employers.



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: RESPONDING TO EMPLOYER AND ECONOMIC NEED

Supporting SMEs to Engage with Skills and Apprenticeships (2021-2023)

GMLPN secured funding from the Department for Education to deliver the Apprenticeship Support for SMEs project, working in partnership with the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce (GMCC), the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and the Lancashire Work Based Learning Forum. The project engaged 243 SMEs across Greater Manchester and East Lancashire.

The programme strengthened employer engagement with skills, particularly among SMEs, and supported Greater Manchester's wider ambition to boost productivity through workforce development.



The project supported SMEs to:

- Develop their awareness and understanding of apprenticeship requirements and processes
- Understand the business benefits of employing apprentices
- Identify appropriate apprenticeship standards and suitable training provision
- Receive end-to-end support through the recruitment process, from initial enquiry through to apprentice start

Taking Teaching Further (2018-2020)

In partnership with GMCC the Taking Teaching Further programme, worked with providers and employers to attract experienced industry professionals into teaching and training roles within further education and skills.

The programme responded directly to workforce capacity and recruitment challenges across priority technical sectors, supporting providers to strengthen specialist teaching capability while embedding current industry expertise into vocational learning.



35 TRAINING PROVIDERS AND 26 EMPLOYERS ENGAGED



51 INDUSTRY EXCHANGES FACILITATED



EXCHANGES INCLUDED:

Curriculum Design
Teacher Placements
Employer Masterclasses
Equipment and Facilities Review



CURRICULUM CO-DESIGN TOOLKIT AND LMI E-TOOLKIT DEVELOPED



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: BUILDING CAPACITY ACROSS PROVIDERS & PARTNERSHIPS

STRENGTHENING THE SYSTEM

A key part of GMLPN's role over the last 25 years has been supporting providers, practitioners and partners to adapt, improve and grow within an increasingly complex skills landscape. Through targeted programmes, peer learning, practical resources and collaborative networks, GMLPN has helped build organisational resilience, strengthen workforce capability and create stronger connections across the system.

Network Meetings – Bringing the Sector Together

Throughout its 25-year history, GMLPN's Network Meetings have provided a consistent space for providers, partners and stakeholders to come together to share intelligence, hear from key decision makers and strengthen collaboration across the skills system.

Network Meetings have brought together hundreds of our members at over 100 meetings, covering major developments including Ofsted and ESFA updates, GMCA priorities and devolution developments, Apprenticeship reform and employer engagement, funding and accountability changes, local labour market intelligence and economic priorities and more!

We've welcomed key sector speakers and policy makers including, Ofsted, GMCA, ESFA (SFA), New Economy, DfE, DWP, AELP, Andy Burnham plus many more. The meetings have also provided opportunities for providers to share learning directly with peers, including reflections from recent Ofsted inspections, examples of effective practice and collaborative discussions on shared challenges.



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: BUILDING CAPACITY ACROSS PROVIDERS & PARTNERSHIPS

Demonstrating Impact Programme (ESF Skills Support for the Workforce) – evolving to Provider Support Programme (2013-to date)

GMLPN has played a central role in supporting training providers to navigate an evolving skills landscape, ensuring they are equipped to respond to policy reform, employer demand and quality expectations. What began as the Demonstrating Impact Programme under the ESF Skills Support for the Workforce initiative has evolved into the Provider Support Programme (PSP) - a sustained, responsive offer focused on organisational development, collaboration and continuous improvement.

Launched in 2013–14, the Demonstrating Impact Programme supported training providers to position themselves within a fast-evolving, employer-led skills system. It combined diagnostic needs analysis with tailored organisational development planning, followed by coaching and masterclasses to embed change.



Support focused on leadership, strategy, employer engagement, delivery and administration. As the system shifted - including the Apprenticeship Levy, Standards, Ofsted expectations and funding changes – the Demonstrating Impact Programme evolved into the Provider Support Programme. Support includes targeted workshops, sector updates, consultancy and peer learning.



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- 82 organisations engaged and 355 attendees (2016–17)
- 59 organisations engaged and 30 supported through consultancy (2018–19)
- 797 attendees across webinars and professional exchanges (2020–21)
- Over 1,130 attendees across 24 events (2022–23)
- Ongoing engagement with 90%+ of members

Multiply Provider Support Programme (2024-2026)

Funded by GMCA, the Multiply Provider Support Programme (2023–2025), focused on strengthening adult numeracy delivery and improving engagement with learners facing barriers to maths confidence and progression.

- Engaged 316 individuals from 90 organisations, with 651 total engagements
- Delivered 110 CPD activities, including webinars, workshops, in-house consultancy, and exchanges
- Achieved 90% good or better feedback from participants
- Recruited 39 GM Maths Ambassadors, supported by an online toolkit to sustain peer support and share best practice

We're proud to have continued support for the GM Maths Ambassadors into 2026 to promote the value of Maths across GM.



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: BUILDING CAPACITY ACROSS PROVIDERS & PARTNERSHIPS

Toolkits to support the Sector

Alongside its wider programmes, GMLPN has developed and supported a range of practical toolkits designed to help providers, employers and partners improve delivery, widen participation and strengthen outcomes across the skills system.

These resources have been developed in collaboration with members and partners, ensuring they are grounded in real practice and responsive to sector need.

Traineeship Toolkit (2014-2016)

Developed to support providers and referral agencies to design, deliver and promote high-quality traineeship programmes, the toolkit provided practical guidance on eligibility, delivery models and progression routes into apprenticeships and employment.



Traineeships
A stepping stone
towards an
Apprenticeship.

The Traineeship Toolkit helped standardise and strengthen practice across Greater Manchester, with providers reporting improved recruitment and progression outcomes and more consistent delivery approaches.

This was supported by a series of workshops and masterclasses for providers and referral agencies to strengthen delivery, share best practice and improve eligibility, recruitment and progression outcomes.

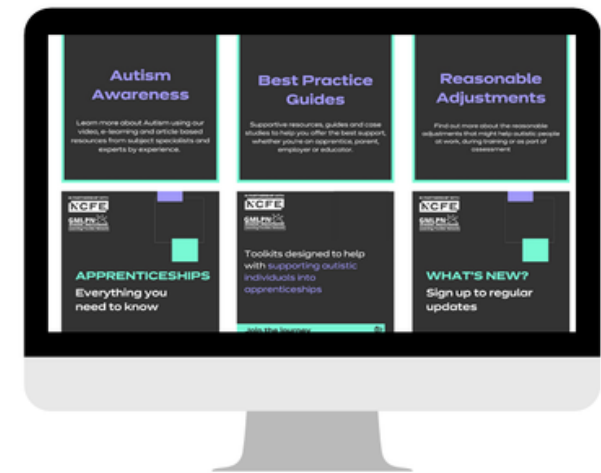
Inclusive Pathways - Autism Support

Following successful delivery of the Supporting Autistic Individuals into Apprenticeships project, in partnership with NCFE, GMLPN developed the Inclusive Pathways - Autism Support toolkit.

The toolkit brought together resources, case studies, videos, articles, signposting information together in one place. The toolkit was also supported by an online CPD package.

The CPD modules aim to arm training providers, other education practitioners and wider stakeholders with an overview of autism. The CPD modules include information on:

- co-occurring conditions
- empowering individuals
- a strength-based approach
- funding
- vocational pathways
- case studies from Oldham College, Digital Advantage and NowSkills!



IMPACT & COLLABORATION: BUILDING CAPACITY ACROSS PROVIDERS & PARTNERSHIPS

Professional Exchange evolving to GMLPN Exchanges

Originally funded by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), the Professional Exchange programme was established to strengthen collaboration across the skills system by bringing practitioners together to share practice, explore common challenges and improve delivery through peer learning.

Professional Exchange (ETF funded): building collaboration (2016–2020)

The programme provided structured, thematic sessions focused on real delivery challenges, including quality, employer engagement, safeguarding, digital delivery and curriculum development.

Participants consistently valued the opportunity for peer learning and practical insight: *“There is so much value in discussing issues with fellow practitioners.”*

Evolving into GMLPN Exchanges (2021–present)

Following the end of ETF funding, the programme evolved into GMLPN Exchanges - a sustained, member-led model continuing to support sector collaboration and improvement.

Delivered in partnership with NCFE in previous years and currently Manchester, UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning, the Exchanges bringing members together to discuss: AI, CEIAG, Business Development, Quality, Safeguarding, Quality, Mental Health and Wellbeing, SEND, FE workforce and recruitment, Youth Employment Exchange, Audit.

Recent activity includes 7 active Exchange chaired by sector practitioners, with strong ongoing engagement across the membership. The Exchanges continue to provide a valued space for shared learning, helping providers respond collectively to system challenges and improve practice. Since 2021 we have engaged over 1000 attendees from c. 80% of member organisations.

Mental Health and Wellbeing (2020–ongoing)

Initially Funded by AoC, this project explored how mental health support could be strengthened within apprenticeship and training settings, focusing on the relationship between learners, providers and employers.

- Recruiting 29 Mental Health Champions
- Developed a Mental Health toolkit, downloaded by over 100 people from 80+ organisations
- Funded a Menopause Package of Support for GMLPN Members - training 18 Menopause Ambassadors

79 TRAINING PROVIDERS ENGAGED

OVER 60 PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE MEETINGS

OVER 600 DIRECT PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED

ADDITIONAL INDIRECT REACH THROUGH WIDER ORGANISATIONAL SHARING

MEMBER & PARTNER VOICE

For 25 years, GMLPN has brought providers, partners and stakeholders together through collaboration, shared purpose and collective leadership. The reflections below highlight the impact of the network in strengthening relationships, supporting the sector and keeping learners at the heart of the skills system.

"The energy that GMLPN has been bringing to its work for its members and with stakeholders for a quarter of a century is an inspiration for what can happen at a regional level, and how that can interoperate with what happens at the national level. Here's to the next 25!"

Ben Rowland | CEO, AELP

"Working alongside GMLPN has been a rewarding part of my role at NCFE. As a strategic member of the network, NCFE has been proud to work with providers on projects supporting apprentices, improving outcomes for autistic learners, and strengthening English, maths and digital skills. I've also valued the opportunity to contribute to network meetings, sharing learning and working collaboratively across the partnership."

"As GMLPN celebrates 25 years, it has been a real pleasure to watch the network grow while continuing to support members through some of the most challenging political and policy contexts the sector has faced. The care, commitment and leadership shown by Charlotte and the team make a genuine difference, and I feel proud to have played a small part in a values-led network that consistently puts learners first."

David Redden | Commercial Manager, NCFE

"The term 'collaborative working' is often used in reports about skills and apprenticeships, but GMLPN makes it genuinely happen. As members, we benefit from true collaboration across the sector, which strengthens our connections in Greater Manchester and provides a high-profile network for our GM learners through the annual awards."

Jenny Pelling | Director of Skills and Strategy, Kaplan UK

"GMLPN is one of the strongest examples I know of a partnership with real purpose. By bringing together a wide range of providers and other organisations that are critical to the development and delivery of skills in Greater Manchester, GMLPN sits at the forefront of skills policy and development. This collective approach not only supports its members but also plays a vital role in strengthening the wider business community across Greater Manchester. GMLPN has been instrumental in supporting our work on the LSIP, ensuring that the provider voice is central to shaping and delivering this essential agenda."

**Chris Fletcher | Executive Director Skills Policy,
Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce**

MEMBER & PARTNER VOICE

"I'm delighted to celebrate the 25th birthday of the GMLPN in both my roles as NSN Director co-chair and as Yorkshire Learning Providers. Across the North, GMLPN have been a constant dedicated partner in setting the direction for the northern skills network and have been instrumental in its success to date. Their commitment to supporting the FE & Skills landscape across the North has seen some real impacts to the way other networks respond and operate and their insights are always valuable. From co-chairing with Anne Gornall for many years, setting the high standard for the work we do and the impact we have, to now co-chairing with Charlotte, has even further cemented GMLPN as a key voice not only for GM but the north.

For my network across Yorkshire, they have been a constant ally, friend and companion in our joint efforts to support the sector and provide the best service for our members. We meet, share, and collaborate frequently and have a genuine and open relationship that I respect and truly value. At a time when our sector is facing vulnerability, chaos and confusion, networks like GMLPN (& other regional networks) play a critical role in bringing stability and safety to our members, and I look forward to our continued professional and personal relationship. Congratulations GMLPN! Enjoy your celebrations"

**Alex Miles | Managing Director, YLP |
Co-Chair, Northern Skills Network**

"Through this partnership, Evolve Academy strengthens its collaboration with local training providers, employers, and key stakeholders across the region. The membership supports the Academy in upholding its core values of high-quality teaching and assessment, while also providing access to relevant professional development and up-to-date policy information."

Martin Hawkness | CEO, Evolve Academy

"Congratulations to GMLPN on 25 years of service to learning providers across the city region. It has always been a privilege to work alongside GMLPN and their committed staff and board members. The sheer scale of their network events is evidence of the need that they serve and their impact across the system. They continue to be a key partner for anyone working on the skills agenda across Greater Manchester."

Richard Caulfield | Senior Policy Manager, GMColleges

"Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to GMLPN25. What an achievement and it's fantastic to be part of celebrating such an important milestone. Being a member of GMLPN has provided support that is second to none. The network has continually encouraged my development, often pushing me out of my comfort zone which has ultimately led to me taking on the role of Wellbeing Chair. The collaboration, encouragement, and accessibility of support whether by phone, email or Teams has made a real difference both personally and professionally. I'm proud to be part of such a strong and supportive network and look forward to seeing its continued impact across the sector."

Kate Day | Director of Operations, DH Associates

"Being part of the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network enables FTW Training to collaborate with other providers and key organisations across the region, share best practice and strengthen opportunities for local residents. Through this partnership, we aim to support more people across Greater Manchester to access quality funded training, gain in-demand skills and progress into meaningful employment while contributing to the continued growth of the regional economy."

Paul Maleque | Partnership & Engagement Lead, FTW Training

MEMBER & PARTNER VOICE

"The network is simply vital. It engages all layers of the FE sector and provides a hugely important forum for providers to reach policy makers and gain insight. Locally it has help connect and allow for pathways and relationships between organisations to flourish. It is a key cog in the GM careers journey as learners will nearly always flow through someone in this network to get to where they need to be."

**John Hamilton | Head of Business Development,
Gateway Qualifications**

"Tameside College is proud to be a member of GMLPN and the values it represents. The network enables the college to share best practice in a supportive and collaborative environment with other GM providers and to learn from colleagues across the sector in GM. Tameside College is also very proud to showcase the talent of our learners and staff alongside our colleagues across the GMPLN."

Jackie Moores | Princiapl & CEO, Tameside College

"Being part of the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network has created valuable space for honest conversation, shared insight and collective problem-solving across the sector. Through my work as a Maths Ambassador in Greater Manchester, I've seen first-hand how the network brings providers together to strengthen practice, build confidence and respond to system change in a way that keeps learners at the centre. That sense of collaboration and shared purpose is what makes this network so impactful."

Christine Edwards | Creating Excellence

"Congratulations to GMLPN on 25 years of impact across the Greater Manchester learning and skills sector. For MEI, adult maths forms a core part of our strategic ambition to improve the quality of mathematics education in all adult settings, and our growing involvement with GMLPN has been pivotal to that journey. Being appointed in 2023 as one of four consultants on the GMLPN Multiply support programme gave us invaluable opportunities to work with colleges, training providers, employers and housing associations across Greater Manchester."

"Since becoming members, we have been proud to support the maths ambassadors programme, mentor leaders and teachers, and engage actively in the network. Under Charlotte's outstanding stewardship, GMLPN has not only delivered a highly effective Multiply programme and sustainability post project, but has also played a vital role in supporting our strategic aims to strengthen post-16 maths education and skills. We are especially grateful to Charlotte for her leadership, organisation and collaboration, which have made this experience both impactful and enriching for MEI."

Martin Newton | Assistant Director - Adult Mathematics, MEI

"GMLPN is a key partner of Manchester's UNESCO City of Learning movement, bringing deep expertise and a long-standing track record of effective collaboration. Having worked with GMLPN for over 15 years, I have seen first-hand the consistency, integrity and impact of their work. They have played a significant role in shaping learning across the region, championing learners and providers, contributing to policy and practice and influencing decision makers. Consistently led by a strong and experienced team, GMLPN continues to deliver high work for both our region and its people."

Simon Joos | Work and Skills Specialist, Manchester City Council

MEMBER & PARTNER VOICE

“As a member of the GMLPN, NOCN Group greatly values the opportunity to stay up to date with key regional developments and to create meaningful connections with partners from across the region. Opportunities for collaboration like this are incredibly important, as they help drive collective progress and make a tangible, positive difference.”

Jeanine Reed | Business Development Manager, NOCN

“Pearson has enjoyed a strong and enduring partnership with the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network for more than 16 years, during which time we have been proud to support the network’s growth and development. GMLPN has consistently provided a valuable forum for collaboration across further education, skills and apprenticeship provision in the region, bringing together providers, employers and stakeholders to share insight, address challenges and support learners.

Through our long-standing engagement, Pearson has worked closely with GMLPN and its members to support high-quality assessment practice, respond effectively to sector change and promote continuous improvement across the skills system. The network’s commitment to partnership, openness and regional impact has been central to its success, enabling strong alignment between national priorities and local delivery.

This collaboration has fostered innovation, encouraged constructive dialogue and helped ensure that programmes deliver meaningful outcomes for both learners and employers across Greater Manchester. As GMLPN celebrates its 25th anniversary, we are proud of what has been achieved together and remain committed to supporting the network as it continues to champion skills, innovation and opportunity across the region in the years ahead.”

Rachael Beasley | Manager - Assessment, Higher National & Apprenticeship Assessment, Pearson

“Being part of the GMLPN community membership network means we’re not working in isolation. For us at HMHC, it’s about sharing knowledge, learning from other community adult education providers, and building partnerships that genuinely widen opportunities for our learners. Being part of GMLPN helps us align community provision with other education providers, so community learning feeds into the wider skills and employment system.”

Kate Harrison | Service and Business Manager, Healthy Me, Healthy Communities

“It has been great to be part of the GMLPN network over the past couple of years as it helps us to connect with key organisations and be part of an environment that shares best practice and strives to create the best possible opportunities for local young people.”

Lucy Connell | Head of Education, Stockport County FC

“I began my career in 2001, the same year GMLPN was founded, and in many ways the network has embodied my professional journey. Starting as a trainee in the careers and youth sector, learning and development have always been central to my role—values that GMLPN and its members strongly represent. Through collaboration, leadership opportunities, and invaluable support from the network, I’ve progressed into an advisory board role with GMLPN and a service lead role within my own organisation, Positive Steps, helping to shape future skills for young people across Greater Manchester. As GMLPN celebrates 25 years, it is a privilege to recognise the lasting impact of the network and the invaluable role it continues to play in supporting providers, practitioners, learners, and the wider skills system.”

Donna Graham | Service Lead, Positive Steps

BOARD REFLECTIONS



GMLPN has had a hugely positive impact on my career. Spending time—whether at the golf club or more recently at a range of excellent venues—alongside peers who truly understand the daily pressures, challenges and rewards of our sector has been invaluable. Every interaction brings

genuine insight: the nuggets of advice, the reassurance, and the motivation I've taken from each meeting have played a significant role in my personal and professional development.

Now, as a Director, I value these interactions just as much. GMLPN provides a unique space to connect with like-minded professionals who understand the realities of the role. The opportunity to both receive support and contribute—through sharing experience, offering guidance, and influencing others—makes the network even more powerful.

The future is incredibly positive. Membership continues to grow, and both the short- and long-term landscape presents exciting opportunities. Through authentic collaboration and a shared commitment to excellence, I'm confident we will continue to succeed together.

Allan Milne | Director of Apprenticeships & Employer Engagement, Salford City College Group



I'm pleased to serve and celebrate GMLPN at this incredible milestone. GMLPN has been critical in bringing together those directly in the sector and those that support & contribute to it. To name a few, we've seen devolution, a financial crisis, a global pandemic and major apprenticeships reform

Now we're just seeing what impact artificial intelligence will have on people, skills & jobs. I'm confident GMLPN will remain ever strong, supporting members well into the future.

Daniel Wells | Managing Director, NowSkills



For 25 years, GMLPN has brought the sector together to influence, support and deliver impact across Greater Manchester. Its strength lies in collaboration and navigating policy reform collectively. As change accelerates, this shared voice will be critical in shaping a responsive system that serves our communities, employers and learners.

Tracey Wood | Chief Commercial Officer, Trafford & Stockport College Group

BOARD REFLECTIONS



We are proud in GM of the institutional mechanisms and mature stakeholders who make the implementation of devolution priorities possible and impactful. GMLPN is one such stakeholder successfully articulating the voices of providers for 25 years. GMLPN is also a vital

partner for GMCC; the collaboration between the two organisations has lasting impact on GM. As our city region navigates the next phase of its own growth amidst a changing economic and technological landscape, the role of GMLPN will become even more important. Here is cheering GMLPN on for the next 25 years!

Subrahmaniam Krishnan-Harihara | Director of Business Policy & Research, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce



GMLPN has always been there during often very turbulent times within our sector, including rapidly changing national and local strategies and even a pandemic. Through all of this journey, GMLPN has remained consistent in its approach – collaboration lobbying and sharing of best practice makes

everyone stronger. As a famous Mancunian once said “we do things differently around here” and I’m sure GMLPN will continue to champion the sector and our providers for many years to come.

Andrew Turner | WBL Skills & Participation Devt Officer, Rochdale Borough Council



For the past 25 years the GMLPN has been the heartbeat of the region’s skills and employment landscape. What started as a small, informal group in 2001 has blossomed into a driving force of over 140 members, bridging the gap between policy and practice. GMLPN’s influence on the sector has been nothing short of transformative, providing a unified voice by bringing together a diverse mix of independent training providers, FE College, Universities, employers and the voluntary sector. The network ensures the provider’s voice is heard at local, regional and national levels. On a personal level being part of the network means I never have to work in isolation, it provides a safe space for honest conversation and collective problem solving. The network is far more than a membership body, it’s a community of peers who truly understand the pressures and rewards of our sector. None of these things could be achieved without the exceptional work of the operational team. Charlotte, Chloe and Hannah continue to take the network from strength to strength. Here’s to another 25 years and beyond!

Nikki Bardsley | Head of Client Solutions and Quality, Kaplan Assessments

SPECIAL THANKS

GMLPN would not be possible without the commitment, expertise and generosity of those who have served on our Board and Advisory Board over the past 25 years. These individuals have given their time freely, bringing deep sector knowledge, strategic insight and a shared belief in the power of vocational and technical education to change lives. Through periods of growth, reform and challenge, their guidance, challenge and support have helped shape GMLPN into the trusted and influential network it is today.

Our Board has provided strong governance and long-term leadership, while our Advisory Board has ensured that GMLPN remains closely connected to the realities facing providers, employers, learners and communities across Greater Manchester. Together, they have played a critical role in strengthening collaboration, amplifying provider voice and enabling GMLPN to respond to change with confidence and purpose.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the GMLPN operational team, past and present. Their dedication, professionalism and commitment have been central to turning ambition into action - delivering programmes, supporting members, building partnerships and ensuring that collaboration leads to real impact. Often working behind the scenes, the team has been instrumental in sustaining the network through periods of significant change, growth and challenge.

This report, and the impact it celebrates, is a testament to their collective contribution. On behalf of our members, partners and stakeholders, we extend our sincere thanks to everyone who has supported and shaped GMLPN over the past 25 years. Without them, the network simply would not exist.



SPECIAL THANKS



CURRENT

Board

Allan Milne
 Andrew Turner
 Billy Darroch
 Daniel Wells
 Mark Currie (Chair)
 Nikki Bardsley
 Subrahmaniam
 Krishnan-Harihara
 Tracey Wood

Advisory Board

Donna Graham
 Jonathan Lawson
 Jon-Paul Rimmington
 Melanie Nicholson
 Rachel Yates
 Robin Lindsay

Team

Charlotte Jones
 Chloe Forrest
 Hannah Bolsher
 Amaya Emmanuel
(T Level Learner)



Board

David Guthrie
 Debra Woodruff
 Elaine Walsh
 Raymond Bettany
 Nissa Smyth
 Anne Gornall
 Andy Fawcett
 Jonathan Bourne

Advisory Board

Abdi Yusuf
 Adrian Fantham
 Alastair Brooks
 Amy Pond
 Carol Halford
 Cathy Broderick
 David Gallagher
 Emma Yorke
 Hollie Walsh
 Jan Hill
 Jayne Worthington
 Jerry Stokes
 Jill Nagy
 John Whitby
 Jonathan Bourne

Team

Amy Brockway
 Angie Took
 Carol Garton
 Coral McFarlane
 Emma Brennand
 Gail Power
 James Lees
 James Ridgeway
 Jenny Liversidge
 John Dorris
 Karen Turner
 Lauren Greig-Williams
 Maryan Omar
 Matthew Leigh
 Richard Nash
 Rob York
 Steph Hodgson
 Sumayya Ali



PAST



LOOKING FORWARD

MARK CURRIE, CHAIR OF GMLPN



As we look to the future, it is clear that the next phase of GMLPN's journey will be shaped by significant challenge, rapid change and real opportunity. The context in which we operate continues to evolve at pace, economically, technologically and socially, and our collective response will be critical.

One of our most pressing priorities must be how we support the next generation. Young people, particularly those whose education and early career experiences were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, require focused and sustained support. Over the next five years, we must work collectively across providers, employers and partners,

to ensure they are not left behind. This means strengthening pathways into employment, improving the quality and availability of opportunities, and investing in the mentoring and pastoral support that enables individuals to succeed.

At the same time, the system itself faces real pressures. Capacity and sufficiency challenges within further education, alongside ongoing funding constraints, require a more coordinated, collaborative response. No single part of the sector can address these issues alone. GMLPN will continue to play a key role in bringing partners together to find practical, collective solutions that support stability and growth across all types of provision.

The nature of work is also changing rapidly. Advances in artificial intelligence, digital delivery, and immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented reality will reshape how we teach, learn and develop skills. Providers will need to remain agile, creative and open to new models of delivery, whether that is in the classroom, the workplace, or online. At the same time, we

must ensure that quality, consistency and learner experience remain at the heart of this evolution.



LOOKING FORWARD

MARK CURRIE, CHAIR OF GMLPN

Employers will continue to be central to this agenda. As major infrastructure projects and economic developments create new opportunities across Greater Manchester, the challenge will be to align skills provision quickly and effectively with emerging demand, including for roles and skills that do not yet fully exist. This will require stronger partnerships, better intelligence, and a shared commitment to innovation.

There are also important questions ahead around funding and policy - from the future of the Apprenticeship Levy to the need for longer-term, more flexible investment approaches.

As a network, we will continue to represent the voice of our members, ensuring that policy decisions are informed by delivery reality and that the system works for providers, employers and learners alike.

For GMLPN itself, the future is about sustainability, inclusivity and continued impact. As we transition and grow, we remain committed to ensuring parity across the diverse range of providers we represent (colleges, independent providers, universities, community organisations and employer providers) recognising that each plays a vital role in a strong and connected skills system.

What has always set GMLPN apart is its collective strength. The willingness of members to collaborate, share and support one another has been the foundation of our success over the past 25 years. That spirit will be even more important in the years ahead.

There is no doubt that change will continue, but so too will our commitment to working together to shape a skills system that delivers for individuals, employers and communities across Greater Manchester.

