

Exchange	Youth Employment
Date of Meeting	05/05/2026
Location	Microsoft Teams
GMLPN Staff	Charlotte Jones, Chloe Forrest, Hannah Bolsher
Chair	Andy Turner – WBL Skills & Participation Devt Officer Rochdale Borough Council
Speakers:	John Hamilton - Gateway Qualifications Sharon Weetman - GMCA
Attendees:	Addison, Gary (Growth Company), Bradburn, Andy (Bury Council), David Redden (NCFE), Helen Emerson (Skills People Group), Liane Kirk (Groundwork), Christina Turner (Bright Direction Training), Harley Crolla (Smartworks), Ryan Whittaker (Kooth), Tom Ashton (Acorn Training), Paul Moogan (Leap Group), Georgina Farrell (Rochdale Training), Oxford, Alison (Growth Company) A.Fraser (Crompton House), Gill Scott (Gill Scott Consultancy), Tamika Williams (TMC), J.livesey (Altusep), Sean McLaughlin (Career Connect), Stevenson-Miller, Helen (Growth Company), Zilkha, Andy (Trafford Council), Katie Goodwin (TCSG), Grindley, Lynette (Growth Company), Sandrine Beaunol (Salford CVS), Marina Cadman (Rise Up), Donna Graham (Postive Steps), Sarah Allen (Salford CC), Brookwell, Joanne (Wigan Council), Chloe Jackson (Kings Trust), Amanda Youlden (Oldham Council), Rachel Green (Progress Arc), Walker, Adele (Growth Company), Stevenson, Cameron (Growth Company), Murray, Claire (Growth Company), Stockwell, Matthew (Wigan Council), Barbara Crawley, Zack Grimes (MarcommEd), Carl Richards (Future Fit), Juidith Godfrey (Coop Academies), Melanie Griffiths (Manchester CC), Robbie Higginson (Skills People Group), Anne Oxton (Edstart), Angela Davey (Coop Academies), Lauren Thompson (Groundwork), Angela Lofters (Barnardo's), Abby Brooker (Michael John Training), Joanne Taylor (TMP College),
Key Themes / Discussion Points	
System complexity & confusion - Significant confusion across providers, careers advisors, employers and young people about reforms, pathways and opportunities. - Rapid policy changes (e.g. qualifications reform, Youth Guarantee, Foundation Apprenticeships) creating uncertainty. Qualification reform concerns - Transition to T Levels and new Level 2 qualifications raising concerns about: - Loss of accessible pathways - Increased exam-based assessment (minimum 40%) - Potential rise in NEET numbers due to reduced accessibility - Level 1 provision likely to become more critical. Employer engagement challenges - Employers facing:	

- Economic pressures (wages, NI increases)
- High demand for employer engagement across provision (T Levels, work experience, apprenticeships)
- Perception that NEET young people require additional support → lower employer uptake.

Need for clearer pathways

- Lack of clarity for young people navigating post-16 options.
- Demand for a “clear line of sight” from education into jobs.
- Multiple fragmented application systems (colleges, apprenticeships, etc.).

Soft skills vs academic focus

- Strong concern that policy focus is too heavily weighted toward employment outcomes and assessments.
- Need to prioritise:
 - Confidence
 - identity building
 - social skills
 - readiness for work

Careers guidance pressures

- Careers advisors lack up-to-date information to guide young people effectively.
- Important risk: careers professionals being “left behind” in system changes.

Equity & access issues

- Barriers such as transport, locality, family expectations and EHCP pathway limitations.

Local collaboration strength

- Greater Manchester recognised as strong in collaboration.
- Positive working relationships between providers, GMCA, and stakeholders.

Breakout room feedback

Employer Engagement

- Need for incentives (financial or recognition-based)
- Employers overwhelmed by competing asks
- Suggestion to use frameworks like Good Employment Charter
- Importance of local/community-based employer networks

Provision & System Challenges

- Lack of long-term funding stability

- Short-term contracts affecting staff retention
- Need for consistent delivery models across areas

Young People & Support Needs

- Concerns around:
 - EHCP access and post-16 placement capacity
 - CAMHS waiting times
 - Emotional impact of rejection and limited opportunities
- Need for more personalised, flexible pathways

Work Experience

- Move away from traditional “2-week placement” model
- Need for:
 - structured, meaningful placements
 - better employer preparation
 - ongoing support during placements

Localised Approaches

- Young people often prefer opportunities within their own communities
- Need to:
 - engage local SMEs
 - reduce transport and accessibility barriers
 - build trust-based employer relationships

System Improvements

- Simplify and align application processes
- Greater integration between education, employment and support services
- Stronger collaboration across providers and stakeholders

Resources / Links Shared

[Lost in transition • Resolution Foundation](#)
[Youth Employment Exchange - May 2026](#)

Actions

Strengthen employer engagement

- Explore incentives (financial or non-financial)
- Improve coordination of employer asks across programmes
- Provide clearer guidance and support to employers

Improve clarity of pathways

- Simplify messaging for young people and parents
- Develop centralised, consistent information systems
- Improve course and progression visibility

Enhance careers support

- Ensure careers advisors are included in policy implementation – as the ones promoting post-16 pathways
 - Provide ongoing training and updates

Focus on accessible provision

- Expand Level 1 and flexible pathways
- Maintain provision suited to NEET and at-risk learners

Prioritise soft skills development

- Embed personal development into programmes
- Recognise its importance alongside qualifications

Support employer readiness

- Offer training on working with young people (e.g. neurodiversity, engagement)
- Develop simple frameworks/checklists for work placement delivery

Next Steps

Next Youth Employment Exchange – September (date TBC)

Ongoing engagement

- Continued Youth Employment Exchange sessions
- Potential to hold September Meeting F2F
- Padlet feedback to remain open for additional input: [Youth Employment Exchange - May 2026](#)

GMCA to incorporate feedback into GMS Delivery Plan

Further development of initiatives

- Expansion of Beeline (GM careers platform)

- Potential for apprenticeship brokerage/pilot model
- Work on Youth Guarantee delivery and integration

Future focus areas

- Cutting through system complexity for young people
- Improving communication to parents and careers advisors
- Aligning provision with employer demand and local needs