

The Greater Manchester Lifelong Learning Network Executive Summary

The Context

Greater Manchester (GM) has experienced unprecedented levels of economic growth over the last decade and recent evidence suggests that this growth is set to continue over the next decade. It is forecast that 100,000 new jobs will be created over this period, many of those requiring higher-level skills.

GM has the highest concentration of higher education establishments outside London and therefore has the capacity to educate and build up a skilled pool of “knowledge workers” from which to draw the labour force of tomorrow. Yet despite this level of provision within Greater Manchester, the HE participation rates across the conurbation remain lower than national averages.

The Greater Manchester Lifelong Learning Network (GM LNN) will seek to capitalise on the sub-region’s educational assets and to increase the number of GM learners participating in HE by maximising opportunities for vocational lifelong learners through enhanced provision of programmes, improved progression opportunities and better partnership working with employers.

This economic expansion of the sub-region coupled with increased participation in HE will lead to a strong economy and vibrant society with benefits for learners, employers and HE providers - **“win-win-win for everyone”**.

The GM LLN

The GM LLN will act as the single, coherent point of information and support for learners, having a presence in all partner institutions together with a central facility. The LLN will be supported by work physically distributed amongst the GMSA partners.

By 2010 it is envisaged that the GM LLN will be a permanent asset to the GM learning environment, the natural first port of call for vocational lifelong learners in GM and information and advice on a wider range of HE opportunities than is currently available.

The development of the lifelong learner in GM will bring reality to the idea of a learning club where learners will have a ‘passport’ giving access to a wide range of institutions. Thereby the student campus becomes the whole of GM, and encompasses all the units offered to the LLN by member institutions enabling the learner to embark on their lifelong learning journey.

The already successful partnerships fostered in GM over the last three years by the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA) and by the West Pennine group will form a LLN that will maximise opportunities for vocational lifelong learners in GM by enhancing provision of programmes, progression opportunities and partnership with employers.

The vision for the GM LLN will be achieved by:-


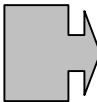
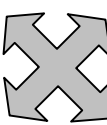
- providing vocational learning opportunities that match the needs of learners and employers
- using credit to make it possible to move from one course to another via guaranteed progression routes as part of lifelong learning
- working to provide learning opportunities where, when and how the learner wants them, enabling learning to be tailored to meet specific employments needs
- providing local and central support for learners working their way through the range of choices open to them
- valuing previous learning of all types, and enable such learning to be built upon in a variety of ways
- have partners that work collaboratively to develop, deliver and quality assure programmes of study
- being proactive in ensuring that learning opportunities mirror those required for changing patterns of local and regional employment

The GM LLN proposal is informed by sub-regional information on the skills needs and the priorities for the GM economy. The GM LLN will tackle skills needs with existing and developing curriculum, and through new programmes. There is a need to address level four skills to enable people to acquire the necessary skills to move into the growing number of jobs in identified skills shortage areas. The GM LLN will provide learning opportunities that mirror local and regional employment patterns and trends. GM LLN curriculum will continue to be developed in conjunction with employers and employer intermediary organisations, the views of which will lead to the development of demand led curriculum and provision flexible enough to meet the needs of employers and their employees. GM LLN will work with CoVEs to encourage progression from level three to four and investigate how level three apprenticeships might articulate with appropriate Fds.

The vision for the GM LLN requires sustained work over the period February 2006 to July 2010 and, alongside contributions from the membership of the GMSA, the **GM LLN seeks funding from the HEFCE of £5.7 million** to realise its bold vision and to meet the ambitious objectives detailed in the proposal.

Within the proposal for a LLN the GMSA is requesting Additional Student Numbers (ASNs). The ASNs will be used to expand capacity through the building on existing strengths, though innovative and creative courses designed to meet sub-regional skills needs. **The GMSA will be looking for 116 FTEs for 2006-07 and 313 for 2007-08.**

The GMSA has completed preparatory work for the LLN with 12 months of funding from the HEFCE Strategic Development Fund and achievements are detailed in the proposal. The GMSA has also identified, in consultation with regional strategic organisations, seven sectors with skills shortages on which new curriculum developments will focus.

To develop the GM LLN further the focus will be upon five themes, each with a number of objectives:-		This work will be managed by four operational panels:-
Learner Support		Information, advice & guidance
New Vocational Learning		Curriculum
Curricular Infrastructure		
Progression through Collaborative Working		Progression
Research, evaluation and dissemination		Infrastructure

See appendix 5 for exact mapping of objectives to operational panels

The GMSA will continue to be managed by a **Council** and a **Management Board** whose membership is drawn from the members of the GMSA organisations. The operational panels have grown from the preparatory work already completed by the GMSA working groups to reflect the new challenges to be taken forward by the LLN. The work will be completed through a combination of partner staff, with shared interests and experience, and GM LLN full-time staff who will drive forward the objectives by drawing on partner expertise. Each panel will report to the Management Board.

The work completed so far under the first phase of HEFCE funding has also raised a number of questions that need further investigation and together this will form part of the mainstream activities for the LLN.

The GM LLN Themes

Three sorts of generic processes will be followed to achieve the aims of the GM LLN:

1. **Learner support** processes will ensure that learners, advisors, employers and others have access to clear information, and appropriate advice, guidance and support to enable informed decision-making to facilitate planning for lifelong learning. This process will focus on the following objectives: communicating information; developing IAG services and providing tutor and admissions staff development programmes.

Developments will include enhancing available information and training staff, and developing an advice and guidance service via “one-stop shop” call-centre and on-line support. This process will also improve the information available to employers to engage their workforce in higher-level learning, investigate admissions practices with regard to vocational learners and develop a GM system for progress files and PDP which will support learners engaging with more than one GM institution. Staff development programmes

will be developed to ensure that member institution's staff are familiar with GM LLN developments and how they operate within their institution.

2. Through the **progression through collaborative working theme** the LLN will develop and implement, with all partners, robust processes, mechanisms and agreements that will clarify access to and progression through the full range of HE provision and institutions in GM. These processes will focus on the following objectives: promoting progression; quality assurance; funding; tracking learners; and strategic planning.

The GM LLN will look to this opportunity to develop collaborative systems and mechanisms to offer more provision to vocational learners and to drive developments that require collaborative work. Collaborative working will involve implementing the innovative funding models already developed, implementing the credit transfer and accumulation scheme, the creation and operation of suites of progression accords and the development and operationalisation of collaborative quality systems. The collaborative proposal by the GM LLN to pilot a project in credit-based funding is seen as one way to develop the smaller learning packages required to meet employer needs and to further develop the CAT scheme.

3. The GM LLN will use **research, evaluation and dissemination** to underpin the work of all aspects of the GMSA LLN and to raise the profile, benefits and opportunities that vocational learning in HE can offer to learners, employers and other stakeholders in GM, the wider NW region and nationally. This process will focus on the following objectives, researching learners, and the GM LLN performance.

The GM LLN will need to obtain accurate data of the learners it is trying to encourage into and through higher-level learning. Tracking learners from level three through their next destinations is important to inform the picture of availability of progression opportunities for vocational learners. Research will initially focus on the subject areas identified as skills shortage areas.

The GM LLN will also evaluate the success of pilot activity and disseminate any research output from this. It will also engage in external research and participate in the evaluation of other LLNs.

The GM LLN will also follow two **learning innovation and development** themes to enhance curricular opportunities for vocational learners and designing and delivering new vocational products aligned to the employment market.

1. The first theme of **curricular infrastructure** will further develop and implement curricular frameworks, together with enhanced staff engagement, so as to facilitate enhanced flexibility and progression opportunities for learners, maximising the value of the work place as a learning environment. The LLN will focus on the following two objectives within this theme: supportive frameworks; and enhancing learning innovation by staff
2. The second theme of **new vocational units and programmes** will develop a comprehensive range of HE provision that is relevant to vocational learners, with a heavy emphasis on work-based and work-related learning that is

located within the GMSA credit framework. The two objectives will be focussed on: new products and new learners.

The time is right for a GM LLN. The LLN will maximise the opportunities offered by the GM educational institutions and capitalise on other sub-regional strengths that include: -

- a culture of strong sub-regional partnerships
- a growing urban economy
- a positive can-do attitude and unique spirit that now exists in Greater Manchester
- bold HEI and FEC leadership & a reputation for delivery
- an innovative, entrepreneurial and creative business community
- unrivalled connectivity of the conurbation both physical and virtual

..... *The Greater Manchester LLN – progression through lifelong learning.*