



GREATER MANCHESTER HIGHER

YEAR IN BRIEF

2023 - 2024



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FOREWORD

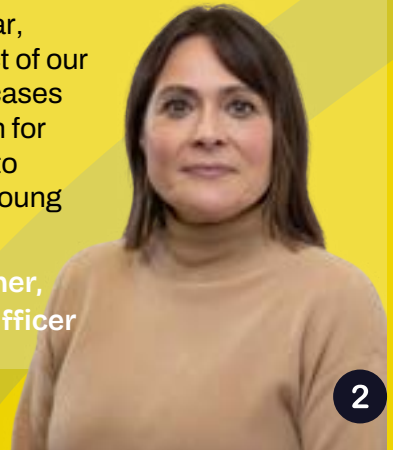
Greater Manchester Higher is dedicated to supporting the Government's social mobility goals by increasing the number of young people from under-represented backgrounds entering higher education. Through our comprehensive programme of impartial Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG), we aim to inform and inspire learners and their key stakeholders, empowering them to make well-informed decisions about their future educational pathways.

As one of 29 Uni Connect partnerships nationwide, we collaborate with over 10 higher education institutions across the region. This collaborative effort allows us to leverage a wide range of resources and expertise, ensuring that our outreach and support are both effective and far-reaching. By working together, we strive to create a more inclusive higher education landscape where every young person, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to succeed and achieve their full potential.

Since our inception in 2017, we've engaged with over **110,000** learners in the region, providing them with valuable IAG about higher education and its benefits. Additionally, nearly **8,000** target learners have received an 'intensive package' of outreach during this time. This means they've participated in a sustained programme of at least **11 hours** of activities, including summer schools, mentoring, and campus visits, throughout their school and college journey.

This report reflects on the **2023/24** academic year, highlighting our key achievements and the impact of our work on learners, schools, and colleges. It showcases our efforts to increase access to higher education for under-represented groups and our commitment to social justice and equality of opportunity for the young people of our region.

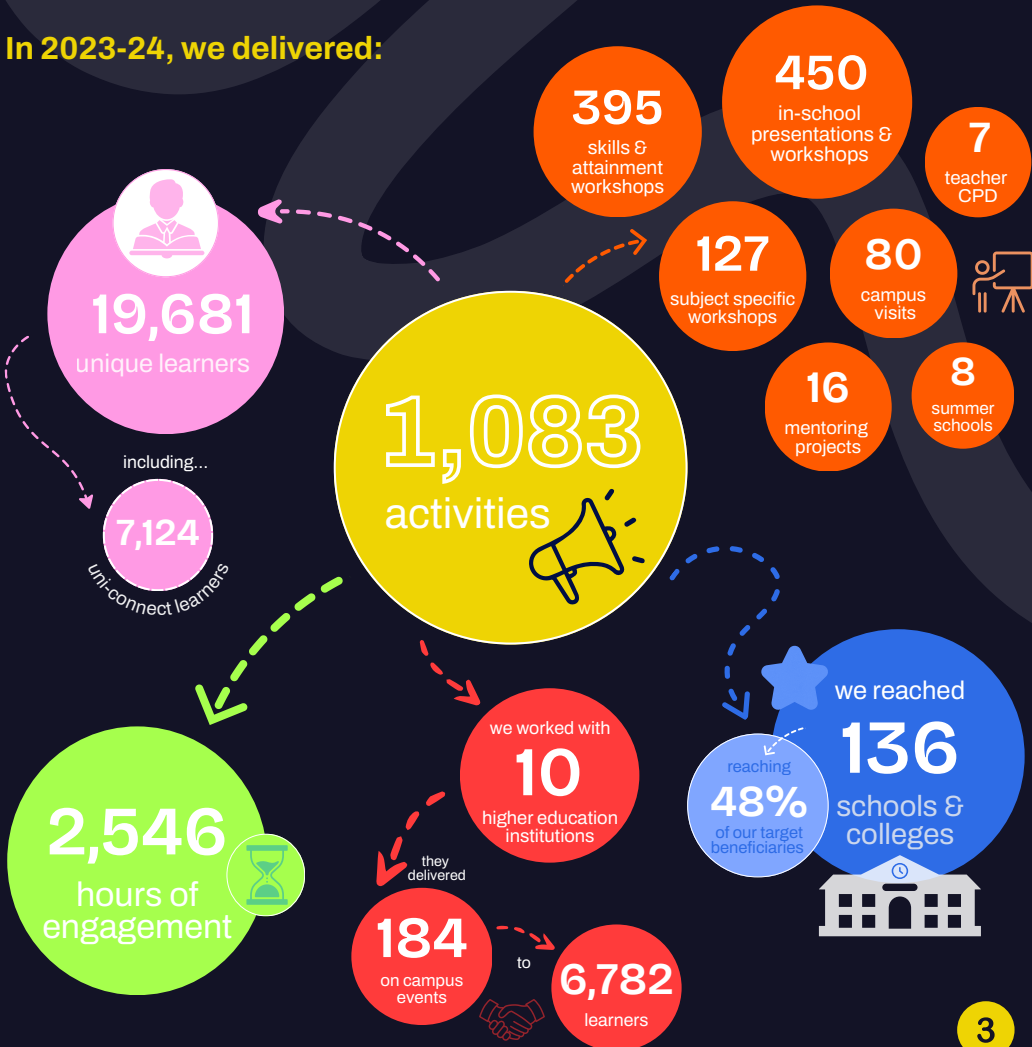
Helen Lord, Head of Greater Manchester Higher,
Hafsah Musamod, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer



OUR DELIVERY

We offer an extensive programme of activity, from workshops and presentations about higher education and the various pathways into study, to subject and career insights, intensive projects for specific groups, summer schools, and mentoring programmes.

In 2023-24, we delivered:



WHAT WORKS

We take an evidence-based approach to closing equality gaps and transforming access to higher education, following the ‘What Works’ principles by using the best available evidence to inform our programme.

Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) in Higher Education is an affiliate ‘What Works’ Centre, and we engage regularly with their training and resources. For example, TASO find there is medium-strength evidence about the impact of providing IAG to support young people to make informed choices about their educational options, and this is a key feature of our programme. Similarly, tutoring and mentoring show medium strength and emerging evidence on student outcomes, so our Maths Buddy and Go for Growth programmes are designed to leverage these insights, enhancing the support we provide to students. This gives us greater confidence in the effectiveness of our activities, knowing they are grounded in a reliable and evolving evidence base.

TASO Transforming Access
and Student Outcomes
in Higher Education

In addition, we’re also contributing to the growing body of evidence around ‘What Works’. We have a comprehensive Evaluation Framework which integrates several externally validated scales, and we follow TASO’s Monitoring and Evaluation Framework approach by taking a ‘Diagnose’, ‘Plan’, ‘Measure’, and ‘Reflect’ approach. Each of our activities has a Theory of Change that is reviewed annually, allowing us to produce more robust and reliable impact evidence, and more intentionally and meaningfully develop activity.

“
It’s fantastic to see GMH consistently embedding robust and meaningful approaches to monitoring and evaluating WP activities. Most notably, their investment in the professional development of frontline staff stands out. By taking an evidence-informed approach, the partnership can continuously identify gaps and adapt practices, aligning with sector standards while considering the diverse groups they engage.”

Orlagh McCabe PFHEA, Head of the University Teaching Academy, Assistant Director of LEED, Manchester Metropolitan University



REGIONAL FOOTPRINT

By targeting our activities to specific schools, colleges, and learners, we can effectively address educational inequalities and provide targeted assistance where it's most needed. This strategic focus allows us to identify and support those who face significant barriers to accessing higher education. By working closely with institutions in geographical outreach 'cold spots' and prioritising learners who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), care-experienced, young carers, learners with disabilities, and those who are the first in their family to consider higher education, we ensure that our efforts are both impactful and targeted. This approach not only helps to level the playing field but also empowers these learners to realise their full potential and pursue their educational aspirations.

Navigating the uncertain future of national collaborative partnerships and the challenges of an unstable annual funding model is no easy task. However, thanks to the commitment, enthusiasm, and loyalty of our staff, we are proud to have achieved so much, and to have engaged with so many of our wonderful schools and learners.

In 2023-24, we reached **19,681** unique learners from **136** schools and colleges across all Local Authorities in Greater Manchester.

— “ —
Since GM Higher have been involved with us, we've gone from special measures to good and gone from being progress 8 minus 2 (bottom 10% of schools nationally) to progress 8 plus 0.24 (top 25 % of schools nationally). There are a lot of factors in play but the massive effect that being aspirational has on students is huge and seeing universities and what they can offer makes a massive difference. — “ —

Teacher, Hazel Wood High School

— “ —
We highly value the services and support offered continuously by Greater Manchester Higher in engaging our students in meaningful and enriching experiences. The sessions are interactive, current and I know our students are richer for the experience. We look forward to continuing to work with GM Higher. — “ —

Teacher, St Thomas More RC College

The following pages showcase some of our most high-profile activities.

GO FOR GROWTH

Mentoring has been proven to enhance academic attainment, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It also positively influences non-academic outcomes such as attitude, attendance, and behaviour.

That's why we developed our Go for Growth mentoring programme for Year 10 learners. Delivered by our inspiring Graduate Advisors who serve as positive role models, the programme focuses on fostering a positive mindset among participants. It helps them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, understand self-care and wellbeing, learn effective study strategies, and set realistic, achievable goals to stay motivated.

Conducted in a supportive and safe peer environment, we've observed that learners feel listened to, validated, encouraged, and believed in. This has significantly boosted their confidence and motivation to do well in their studies, and feedback from schools and learners has been incredible, so we're thrilled to share some of their feedback about the programme here.

Learners who took part in GfG reported...

- ★ 18% increase in confidence
- ★ 16% increase in motivation

— “ —

Running this project has enabled me to make each project, in each school, a unique and personal one. Feedback from the learners showed that being relatable made it easy for them to put their trust in me from the first session, which enabled them to open up. I am so proud to have been part of delivering this project across Greater Manchester schools, making a difference to young people's mindsets.

Saima Mahmood,
Graduate Advisor & GfG Mentor

— “ —

GfG definitely had a positive impact on the learners. It's also had a positive impact on the school in terms of the way they engage themselves in lessons, but also in the fact that they're willing to be more ambitious.

Teacher, The Derby High School

— “ —

It opened my mind to lots of possibilities and it has helped me feel better about myself and less self-conscious.

Year 10 participant



SUCCESS4LIFE

Our colleagues at partner institutions and staff at Greater Manchester Higher are deeply committed to supporting young people in the region who have experience of the care system.

Together with the University of Manchester, Manchester Met, Wigan and Leigh College, the University of Salford, and the University of Bolton, we proudly deliver the Success4Life programme. This fantastic 8-week initiative focuses on essential life skills through engaging and interactive sessions. From leadership, teamwork, and communication activities, to university visits and creative insights, we aim to promote wellbeing and confidence. By addressing negative self-talk, we help transform mindsets and encourage young people to envision their future possibilities with greater positivity.

But don't just take our word for it— let's hear from the young people who have participated and the dedicated staff who deliver the programme about the profound impact it has on those we work with.

— “ —
Being involved with the creation and delivery of Success4life is one of my proudest achievements in 15 years working in Widening Participation. Watching young people grow and develop in confidence week on week is a total joy. Being part of their journey in learning more about Higher Education, and empowering them to discover their skills and talents is incredibly rewarding. Listening to their speeches at Graduation and seeing their excitement for their future will forever be a happy memory for me. — ” —

**Emma Lewis-Kalubowila, Student Access & Success Team,
University of Manchester**

— “ —
Since coming to Success4Life, I now plan to go to university! I enjoyed week 7 the most because I was writing positive things about myself and realised all the good things about myself. — ” —

Year 9 participant



— “ —
My young person has very little interest in education and higher education. This project is opening her eyes to what is available to her and her future in education. — ” —

Carer of a looked after child

— “ —
I learned it's better to work as a team than as one... and it's good to speak out more and talk about stuff, not bottle it up. My goal is to be a physiotherapist for pro athletes and university would be an important part of this journey. — ” —

Year 9 participant



Work with care experienced young people?

The GM CEEN (Care Experienced Education Network) is a coalition of professionals dedicated to supporting care-experienced young people in their educational journeys. Our membership includes representatives from higher education, further education, schools, Local Authorities (virtual schools and leaving care teams), and the third-party and charity sector. Chaired by GM Higher, the network meets regularly to connect HE staff with those working directly with looked after young people.

Meetings provide opportunities to share expertise, exchange knowledge and best practice, discuss sector developments, and cultivate cooperative relationships

If you're interested in joining this network, contact: a.richardson@mmu.ac.uk

— “ —
Care experienced students often have walls up and can struggle to see their future with perspective, but seeing them have a light-bulb moment means so much. It means they are dreaming, planning, and preparing for a future with all the things they had possibly given up on. These moments mean aspirations are rising and barriers are falling, and you catch a glimpse of who the student really is. Through an instance of vulnerability, or a burst of humour, these moments make all the hard work worthwhile. — ” —

Jen Morgan, Outreach Officer, Wigan and Leigh College & S4L Event Lead

— “ —
Taking part in Success4Life helped me become more confident in school and think about my future positively. — ” —

Year 9 participant

UNI:4U

Each year, we offer a diverse range of summer schools, delivered by our partnered higher education institutions on their campuses. Our dynamic Uni:4U summer school programme for Year 10 learners is a fantastic way for young people to experience what it's like to be a higher education student, whether in a university or further education setting. It provides participants with a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in student life and explore various courses and career pathways, empowering them to make well-informed decisions about their future. The programme fosters personal growth and development, encouraging students to build confidence, and develop new skills.

From delving into the worlds of science and arts to exploring gaming, sport, and even strutting down the catwalk at a fashion show, our summer schools offer an exciting and diverse range of activities. These enriching experiences cater to learners from various educational backgrounds, ensuring there is something engaging for everyone.

— “ —
Thank you for giving my son this opportunity, he loved every single minute of it and benefitted so much! Please pass on my sincere gratitude to everyone involved, for letting him be a part of this fantastic opportunity, looking after him and guiding him. When I was at school we didn't get things like this and I can see how much he benefitted. Please keep impacting further students like this as you are helping shape their futures and lives! — ” —

Parent of participant

— “ —
I loved it! Especially getting more information about financial support for students like me. — ” —

Uni:4u Success4Life participant

— “ —
What a brilliant idea this is. To some children, it can be very daunting going to university and this may just change their minds and show them they can achieve it if they want it. The staff were so lovely and you could see they were passionate about the summer school. — ” —

Parent of participant



In 2024, we delivered...

8

summer schools

228
learners



to

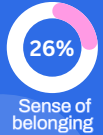
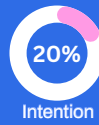
from

92%

evaluation response



After attending Uni:4u learners indicated an increase across the following proxy measures:



Learners rated the following aspects of the summer school as useful:

Accommodation experience



Group work/ project



Campus tour



Guest speakers



Subject tasters



Social experience



It was very fun, engaging, and interesting. I enjoyed doing the experiments and being able to do things more independently.

Uni:4U Scientific You participant

It was nice to see how games were made and to be shown how to do it.

Uni:4U Games Design participant

I learned a lot and it was very interesting. It makes me want to study coding and practice at home.

Uni:4U Code & Conquer participant



CHAMPIONING WORKING CLASS BOYS

The story so far...

Boys have been under-performing in education for decades. Working class boys in particular are significantly less likely to achieve five GCSEs at grades 4-9, and are subsequently under-represented in higher education. Whilst there have been some attempts to address this disparity through research, educational policy and reports highlighting the inequity, it remains a stubborn and pernicious issue, and is exacerbated by compounded disadvantage and socio-economic deprivation.

At Greater Manchester Higher, we're helping to mobilise the movement to improve educational outcomes for boys who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSMs). Collaborating with colleagues from Ulster University, whose research developed the "Taking Boys Seriously" principles, and Arts University Bournemouth, who are advancing this initiative in England, we're taking a research and evidence-based approach to drive this agenda forward. Together, we're building momentum and playing a pivotal role in leading meaningful change in learning, teaching, policy and practice.

If you are interested in joining the Greater Manchester Impact Hub, please contact the Chair, Helen Lord, on: h.lord@mmu.ac.uk

In September 2023, GM Higher hosted the Boys Impact Conference at Manchester Metropolitan University. The conference brought together educators, researchers and practitioners to deepen their knowledge and understanding in pedagogy, policy and practice in relation to young men at the sharp end of educational inequality.

In January 2024, we established the second regional Boys Impact Hub in the country. Chaired by the Head of GM Higher, we're leading the way in advocating for and championing the experiences of young men, connecting local action to a UK-wide movement for change.

Speaking at local and national conferences, we've helped drive momentum and interest in the movement across the sector, supporting other regions in establishing their own Hubs.

In March, the Head of GM Higher attended a collaborative enquiry visit to Ulster University in Belfast, meeting the researchers behind the Taking Boys Seriously principles. The visit provided insights into how these principles are being applied in practice, and how collaboration across the ecosystem can better serve young people. We're committed to playing our role in the next steps of this movement, which aims to influence government policy.

REDEFINING MASCULINITY

Over the past year, we've closely collaborated with Mike Nicholson from Progressive Masculinity. Mike's exceptional workshops support young men in exploring what it means to be a man in today's world, helping them navigate external influences in a safe and non-judgmental space. Pupils are empowered to explore their masculinity and its potential by constructing models of masculinity that align with their values. They're then encouraged to become ambassadors within the school, amplifying the impact of this work and promoting positive messages about masculinity.

At a time when boys and young men at the sharp end of society feel forgotten and left behind, we're doing what we can to advocate for them, and Mike's pupil workshops, teacher CPD and parental support are a crucial part of this work.

— “ —
You get 12 young men at the start who don't want to be there, don't trust you and think you're going to try to make them look 'weak' and 'soft'. Then over the next 6 hours you build this lovely relationship with them and by the end they're saying things like 'will you come back and do some more with us'? — ” —

Mike Nicholson, Founder and Facilitator, Progressive Masculinity

— “ —
I just wanted to let you know that I think the progressive masculinity workshop that my son has done for the past two days is amazing. He has come home and has told me all about it. He can't stop talking about it. I think it has helped. He had a perception that he had to act a certain way (despite me being very open with him in discussing his feelings) and would not allow himself to cry, even though we are going through a difficult time at the moment. I can tell that the workshop has changed some of his thought processes about what it means to be a man. I just wanted to share how pleased I am with the workshop and thankful that he was chosen to attend. More workshops like this so more boys could attend would be amazing. — ” —

Parent of participant



GMH & UNI CONNECT

Shaping the future of national outreach

As we look to the future, Greater Manchester Higher and Uni Connect are poised to navigate significant changes in the higher education landscape. The Office for Students (OfS), in collaboration with Public First, are developing a Theory of Change (ToC) for a future national collaborative outreach programme. This initiative underscores the OfS's commitment to prioritising collaboration and advocating for the continuation of a national outreach programme. GM Higher has actively participated in discussions to develop the ToC, providing feedback on the initial draft to ensure our perspectives and experiences shape this evolving framework.

Scale and ambition

The UUK report, "Opportunity, Growth and Partnership: A Blueprint for Change," sets a bold vision for the future. It recommends a whole-of-tertiary sector participation target of 70% of the population aged 25 studying at level 4 or above by 2040. Regional partnerships can play a crucial role in achieving this ambitious goal, leveraging our infrastructure, relationships and outreach programmes to expand access and support lifelong learning.

However, the HE sector must also prepare for demographic shifts. The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) report highlights an expected decline in the number of 18-year-olds after 2030, which could significantly impact student demand. A strategic, proactive, and collaborative approach to outreach should play a vital role in helping HEIs navigate the demographic shift, and ensuring the provision of IAG effectively promotes HE pathways and strengthens talent pipelines to meet regional growth needs.

Evolving landscape

In line with Bridget Phillipson's higher education reform agenda, we're committed to prioritising access and success for disadvantaged learners. Her focus on reducing inequalities and enhancing opportunities aligns with our mission to support under-represented groups in accessing higher education.

Whilst promising, these developments signal change. To navigate this evolving landscape, we're taking a proactive approach by conducting stakeholder planning workshops to explore various funding scenarios – ensuring we remain committed to providing high-quality educational outreach, regardless of external challenges.

By staying adaptable and forward-thinking, GM Higher will continue to drive positive change, fostering a more inclusive and accessible outreach programme for all.

We are proud to be a collaborative partnership and thank all our partners for their continued commitment to Greater Manchester Higher.





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