



GREATER MANCHESTER HIGHER

YEAR IN BRIEF

2024 - 2025



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FOREWORD

I am pleased to present our Year in Brief annual report, highlighting the achievements and collective effort that have shaped another impactful year for Greater Manchester Higher.

The 2024/25 academic year was one of significant change for Greater Manchester Higher following a funding reduction, which resulted in uncertainty and a period of adjustment. In spite of this, our staff demonstrated their usual professionalism and commitment, accepting the changes whilst maintaining focus and continuing to deliver high-quality support for the young people we serve. Their dedication is always a credit to the partnership, and I am immensely proud of everything they have achieved during a demanding period.

Despite reduced resources, delivery has remained strong, decreasing by only 30% in the context of a 38% funding cut – and we even saw a slight increase in the hours of delivery received per learner. We also introduced a series of new and innovative activities, including the relaunch of Teen Tech, three NHS taster days, and our first ever Young Carers Day, which welcomed 70 pupils onto campus. These developments demonstrate the creativity and determination of our team who continue to work tirelessly to sustain and enhance provision.

Our regional and national engagement has continued to strengthen. We responded to the OfS Call for Evidence on behalf of the partnership, ensuring that the Greater Manchester perspective was represented in national discussions about the future of access and participation. We have deepened our relationships with the GMCA and re-engaged with careers services across the region to enhance alignment with wider strategic priorities. Nationally we have continued to play an active role in the Boys Impact movement, contributing as a Steering Group member, presenting at conferences, and representing Greater Manchester at a launch event in the House of Commons.

In a year marked by challenge, what stands out most is the unwavering commitment of our staff, partners and stakeholders. Together, we have not only maintained the quality and reach of our work but have also built strong foundations for the future. I am grateful for the resilience shown across the partnership, and I look forward to continuing our collective mission to break down barriers to higher education and support young people to realise their potential.

Helen Lord, Head of Greater Manchester Higher



OUR IMPACT

In 2024-25, we continued to offer a diverse and inclusive programme of activity designed to inspire and inform learners about their future pathways

Learners

we reached

13,304

unique learners

These learners participated in at least **one** of our activities.



Activities

we delivered

874

programme activities



Engagement

In total, we spent over 2,200 hours of **direct time** with learners through workshops, on-campus events, mentoring, summer schools, and more.



To put that into perspective, if a football match lasts 90 minutes, that's 1,333 matches taken place!

2,260

hours of contact

POLAR Profile

66%



66% of the learners we've worked with come from POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2, indicating they are from areas with the **lowest levels** of higher education participation.

*POLAR refers to participation of local areas

Activity Type



309 In-school presentations & workshops

56 Campus visits

304 Skills & attainment workshops

7 Summer schools

84 Subject specific on-campus events

14 Parent/carer & Teacher CPD

87 Mentoring projects

13 Other

● 2023-24
● 2024-25

Mentoring projects

+22%



This year, we prioritised sustained activities, leading to a 22% increase in mentoring projects and support for 260 learners.

On-campus events

140



Together with our partners, we delivered 140 on-campus events across our partnered institutions.

Partners

we partnered with

9

higher and further education institutions to deliver our activities



Institutions

we reached

128

schools & colleges across Greater Manchester



UNI:4U

Every summer, we deliver a range of summer schools in partnership with local universities and further education colleges. Through our Uni:4U programme, young people gain a real taste of higher education, exploring courses, career options, and student life in an engaging and supportive environment. These experiences are designed to build confidence, develop new skills, and help learners make informed decisions about their future.

From science and gaming to criminal justice courts and even fashion shows, our summer schools offer exciting, hands-on activities that cater to a wide variety of interests.

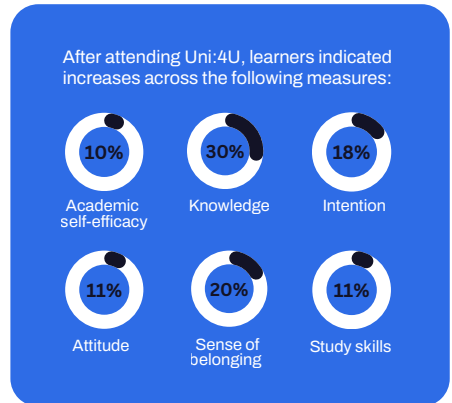
Additionally, our Uni:4U Success4Life Summer School reflects our ongoing commitment to care-experienced learners - a group of young people who face systemic barriers such as disrupted education, limited social and cultural capital, and reduced access to guidance - all of which can make progression to higher education more challenging.

Uni:4U Success4Life is designed to address these challenges head on, providing experiences which build confidence, foster belonging, enable connection, and provide practical tools for success.

By creating inclusive opportunities and safe spaces to explore their options, we aim to ensure care-experienced learners not only aspire to higher education but feel empowered to achieve their ambitions.

Uni4U Success4Life is an opportunity for school leavers who are care experienced to explore their transition to FE and understand their options for Post-18 HE study. Programmes like this matter because it is an opportunity to build relationships with care experienced students, guiding them through mutual respect to a recognition that education is for people like them. Success4Life focuses on 3 pillars, communication, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging. — ”” —

Jen Morgan, Outreach Officer and Uni:4U Success4Life Lead, Wigan & Leigh College



YOUNG CARERS DAY

Working in partnership with Manchester City Council, we were proud to deliver our first Young Carers Day in July. Young carers often face significant challenges in balancing their education alongside caring responsibilities, which too often remain 'unseen'. This can result in unmet needs that impact attainment and limit access to opportunities and tailored guidance about the support available to them in higher education.

Welcoming over 70 learners from Years 9–12, our bespoke campus experience placed their needs at its heart, providing information, advice and guidance tailored to this often-overlooked group. Through subject tasters, learners were encouraged to explore a wide range of opportunities, helping to broaden ambitions beyond the traditional care-related pathways they are frequently steered towards. Sessions focused on wellbeing services, student networks and financial support showcased the support available, offering young carers the recognition, space and practical insight needed to feel seen, supported and empowered to take their next steps with greater confidence that higher education is for them – and that tailored support is available when they get there.

Participants reported:

27% increase in belief that HE is for them

17% increase in intention to apply to HE

Manchester Met University proudly hosted young carers from Greater Manchester, in partnership with GM Higher. Young carers are less likely to go to university than their peers, and research shows that many struggle to combine learning with caring. Showing them what a university looks like, what we do, and how we work, can open doors and raise aspirations, showing young carers that we are not ivory towers for a select few, but that we are places and spaces for inclusion, opportunity, and hope, for them, their families and communities.

Professor Saul Becker,
Founding Director for
The Institute of Children's
Futures, world leader in
Young Carer's Research

When I first came in I always said "I don't want to go to university" but now I have experienced uni I think I will look into going, and I see university in my future.

Year 10 Pupil

The students were able to discuss their role as a young carer with other students: I heard some of our girls open up and compare their situations, realising they're not alone.

Year 9 Teacher

The part that was most useful for me was the tour and student Q&A because I got a clear preview of how the university is and how they accommodate their students, and questions or worries I had got answered.

Year 10 Pupil



NHS INSIGHT DAYS

In July, Greater Manchester Higher partnered with the NHS to deliver three career insight days for nearly 200 Year 10 learners. The events offered students the chance to explore a wide range of NHS roles, hearing directly from professionals to deepen their understanding of both clinical and non-clinical careers.

Across the three days, learners engaged with three distinct pathways, spanning STEM-focused areas such as Pharmacy and Biomedical Science, as well as care-based roles including Nursing and Social Care. Sessions highlighted the importance of transferable skills, patient-centred practice, and the variety of routes available into NHS careers.

With health and social care representing one of the fastest-growing sectors in Greater Manchester, and several NHS occupations identified as local priority roles, these insight days aimed to widen access for young people. Many learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, often miss out on NHS pathways due to limited awareness and reduced access to work experience, which is increasingly difficult to secure within healthcare settings.

By connecting young people with real-world role models and showcasing the diversity of the NHS workforce, the insight days not only support informed decision-making but contribute to strengthening the future talent pipeline for the region's health and care sectors.

It was useful learning about job roles in the NHS, speaking to NHS staff about pathways into the industry- traditional and otherwise, as well as practical skills like communication, teamwork, problem solving etc.

Year 10 Teacher

I learnt all sorts of other careers exist in the NHS, not just doctors and nurses, and a deeper explanation into how to do CPR, and what life is like for a stroke survivor.

Year 10 Pupil

My students were telling me how interesting the sessions were. They said they were fun, practical and engaging. The practical elements were a particular highlight.

Year 10 Teacher

I learnt about different ways to help people and how to directly and calmly speak to a patient without worry or fear.

Year 10 Pupil

Learners who took part in an NHS Insight Day reported:

10% increase in belief that HE is for them

9% increased interest in working in an NHS Health & Social Care Career

19% increased knowledge of the skills and qualifications required for a career in the NHS

10% increase in belief they would succeed in an NHS career

CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Creative Encounters was developed to give Salford students from under-represented backgrounds a hands-on introduction to higher education and creative careers.

Addressing limited exposure to the arts, the programme offers workshops, field trips, and collaborations with professional artists to build confidence, skills and motivation in creative subjects. It also highlights the many career pathways within the arts and the value of art-based qualifications, particularly in Manchester's thriving creative sector.

In 2024-25, Creative Encounters engaged **154** students from **three** Salford schools across Art, Design, Photography, and Textiles. Participants joined online sessions, in-school visits working alongside inspiring artists, designers, creative professionals, an on-campus experience featuring workshops, a Degree Show tour, and student life activities.

The programme is led by Jack Brown, a Stockport-based artist with extensive experience in arts engagement and education, supported by the University of Salford. Each workshop is tailored to meet the needs of participating schools.

The theory of change was updated from last year's project, shifting the focus away from attainment and towards building self-confidence. This change allowed the project to move beyond grades and place greater emphasis on self-exploration.

— ” —
Exploring the different media and art displays was useful because it demonstrated the opportunities available. — ” —

Year 10 Pupil

— ” —
They really enjoyed exploring different forms of art, speaking with real artists, and creating unexpected outcomes. Some pupils have even kept and mounted their work as part of their current projects. — ” —

Year 10 Teacher

— ” —
I imagine it doesn't feel as tough at uni when you're doing something you're really passionate about. — ” —

Year 10 Pupil

— ” —
Several pupils are interested in progressing to university but are unsure about funding and which specialism to pursue; the sessions provided valuable insight. — ” —

Year 10 Teacher



TECH IN FOCUS

Our subject and industry offer is designed to strategically support the evolving labour market needs of Greater Manchester. By focusing on key growth areas, we highlight the digital roles and specialised skills employers need now and in the future. Below, we showcase a selection of events that directly contribute to this mission. In total, we delivered 35 events, reaching 964 learners.

TeenTech Insight Day

This insight day introduces pupils to a range of STEAM industries through interactive, employer-led activities and challenges. Delivered in partnership with TeenTech and Arden University, the event gives learners hands-on exposure to emerging technologies such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence, data analysis, and machine learning. Participants explore how these technologies are applied in real-world industries, develop an understanding of the skills and personal qualities employers look for, and learn about progression routes into related subjects and careers.

Digital Arts Masterclass

This hands-on event, led by the School of Digital Arts (SODA) at Manchester Metropolitan University, introduces pupils to practical creative technologies and the pathways available in higher education. Participants have the opportunity to take part in two interactive workshops drawn from areas such as animation, games design, web and UX design, music and sound, photography, and filmmaking. Throughout the day, pupils explore key digital arts skills, learn about related university courses, and a range of career opportunities.

3D Printing Industry Masterclass

This event introduces pupils to 3D printing and digital design, combining software-based learning with hands-on product creation. Students learn the basics of modelling and texturing using Autodesk Fusion, and they have the chance to design their own product for a competition. The session helps pupils understand pathways into the field, explore careers in manufacturing and computer-aided design, and see how digital design and 3D printing contribute to a green economy.

Secret STEM

With so many diverse industries, it can be difficult for learners to recognise where STEM truly plays a role. While some STEM careers are obvious, others require a closer look to uncover the science, technology, engineering, and maths behind them. Secret STEM, a one hour in-school session, reveals the hidden STEM elements within unexpected industries, helping learners have a stronger grasp of STEM subjects, understand the wide range of opportunities available and the skills needed to succeed in them.

— 👤 —
One thing I have learnt from this event is digital is diverse with multiple course options. — 🗣️ —

Year 10 Pupil

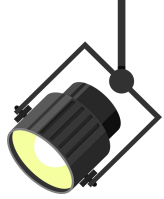
— 👤 —
It was useful teaching students more about STEM, some students had minimal knowledge. It was nice to see students engaging and ask questions. — 🗣️ —

Year 10 Teacher

— 👤 —
I learnt about how fast our economy is changing and how technology is evolving. — 🗣️ —

Year 10 Pupil

SUBJECT SPOTLIGHT



Murder on Campus

Murder on Campus is an interactive criminal justice workshop, offering participants an interactive insight into the different roles and tactics needed for a criminal trial. Serving as the Prosecution, Defence and Jury, pupils are able to explore the context and details of the crime from a range of perspectives. In preparation for the trial, pupils work with a range of legal and judicial professionals. The trial itself offers an opportunity for learners to question the accused and other key witnesses (played by staff and Student Ambassadors), building confidence or doubt in the minds of the Jury. Presiding over these proceedings are academic staff with real-life Judicial experience.

— 👤 —
It gave me an insight of how the different areas of law operate. — 👤 —

Year 10 Pupil

— 👤 —
We always get such a broad cross-section of young people interested in these workshops. It's wonderful to be able to open learners' eyes to the sheer range of career options across the industry—and indeed careers in other industries that may somehow relate. The most satisfying of all, though, is watching young people of all academic abilities and confidence levels share their knowledge and experience with their peers, including from different schools. There's always a strong sense of unity and healthy competition during the trial, with all parties demonstrating fantastic professionalism and commitment to their roles. — 👤 —

Gaia Worley-Barstow, Outreach Officer, University of Greater Manchester

All About Law

All About Law, developed alongside academics at the University of Salford, has been running for several years now. It is designed to give participants a meaningful insight into studying Law in higher education. The event offers an immersive, curriculum-aligned experience that aims to spark interest, build motivation, and equip pupils with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about future study pathways. Participants engage in academic-led workshops, meet Student Ambassadors, and work in teams to build and present a prosecution or defence in a mock courtroom. A campus tour broadens their awareness of university life, subjects, and facilities.

— 👤 —
The mock trial showed me how people make informative conversations and decisions. — 👤 —

Year 10 Pupil

— 👤 —
It's so lovely to see the young people that take part in the day develop their confidence, public speaking and critical thinking skills by working on legal problems, and arguing their points in a mock courtroom at the end of the day. Quite often the idea of speaking in front of the rest of the group (especially in the wigs and gowns that we provide!) can be really daunting, but most exceed their own expectations in what they can achieve while doing this. — 👤 —

Liam Shaw, Widening Participation Officer, University of Salford

SUPPORTING SUCCESS

Parent & Carer Sessions

Parents and carers can have a significant impact on their child's decision making, yet we know it can be difficult to support them to make the right choices. Our range of online talks aims to empower parents and carers by providing them with the knowledge they need to guide their young person when navigating higher education.

The series included topics covering pathways to higher education, options after Year 11, student finance, Disabled Students' Allowance and accessing support in higher education.

During 2024-25, we delivered 6 sessions, reaching around 70 parents and carers, with 'Supporting GCSE Options' being the most well attended.

“
I've got a much better idea of where to direct my daughter to look at post-college options.”

Parent



WP Professional Network

In May 2025, we launched a Widening Participation Professional Network, a new Community of Practice bringing together practitioners, strategic leaders, and organisations committed to improving social mobility and widening access to higher education.

The network connects colleagues from education, business, charities, and the non-profit sector, enabling them to share best practice, resources, and research to strengthen support for under-represented learners.

Members benefit from a collaborative and supportive professional community, access to guidance and shared expertise, and opportunities for continuing professional development through presentations, discussions and workshops. Sessions have covered topics such as collaborative widening participation strategies with employers, tackling digital exclusion, and co-production through design thinking.

The network has established a strong foundation for a more aligned and impactful approach to widening participation across the region.

If you'd like to join the Network, visit:
gmhigher.ac.uk/wp_network

CHAMPIONING WORKING CLASS BOYS

Our work with the Boys Impact Hub has gone from strength to strength this year. Membership of the regional Hub continues to grow – not just in numbers, but in energy, commitment, and shared purpose. There is a real sense of momentum as awareness of the challenges facing boys and young men gains attention from policymakers and partners across the nation.

Alongside hosting the Hub, we also supported members with funding for the Progressive Masculinity pupil programme and CPD, helping schools and practitioners bring meaningful conversations and practical tools into their settings. Whilst the programme has achieved national and even international coverage, it also caught the attention of the Manchester Evening News, resulting in a welcome (and still all too rare) piece of positive coverage about masculinity and the important work happening with boys and young men.

This summer, our Head of GM Higher completed specialist training to deliver boys-focused professional development, equipping us to spread the word even further. This training explores the complex mix of influences shaping boys' and young men's perceptions of masculinity today, and the way these beliefs connect to engagement, attainment, and progression to higher education. It also introduces practitioners to the growing impact of the "manosphere": an online ecosystem ranging from self-improvement spaces to more harmful anti-feminist or extremist content, and the role algorithms play in amplifying it.

Through this expanding programme of work, we are also beginning to contribute to the wider evidence base about what really works for boys and young men. By capturing learning, defining what success looks like, and sharing insights, we aim to support more impactful, informed practice across the sector.

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

**BOYS'
IMPACT**

THE ROAD

For many boys growing up in Greater Manchester, the journey through school can feel like travelling without a map. Research shows that boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to struggle with attainment and less likely to progress into higher education. But behind those statistics are real young people, full of potential, curiosity, and talent, who often just need the right environment to explore what's possible. The Road was created to offer exactly that.

Delivered by The University of Manchester, the pilot programme invited fifteen Year 10 boys to step out of their everyday routines and into a space built for reflection, challenge, and growth. Here, they are encouraged to question assumptions about who they are, what motivates them, and what futures they can imagine for themselves.

Inspired by Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously principles and the insights of Boys Don't Try? (Pinkett & Roberts, 2019), The Road rejects stereotypes about boys. Instead, it focuses on evidence-based approaches that build confidence, agency, and long-term engagement. Through academically stretching activities, honest conversations, and hands-on exploration, participants connect with themes like identity, aspiration, critical thinking, and self-efficacy, all within a supportive and reflective learning environment.

The programme blends campus experiences with in-school sessions, giving learners a chance to see themselves in new environments while staying rooted in their day-to-day context. Alongside this, they receive clear, practical guidance on their post-16 and post-18 options; from apprenticeships and college pathways to higher education routes and careers.

What emerges is not just new knowledge, but a shift in mindset. By the end of the programme, participants will have gained valuable CEIAG knowledge, improved attitudes toward learning, and a renewed sense of confidence in their ability to shape their own educational journeys and beyond.

— ●● —
Creating and delivering The Road as a pilot has been fantastic. It was really instructive to see the value of place based sustained interventions and the impact this had on participants. The programme attempted to merge aspiration and attainment work with developing a sense of belonging and identity for its participants and we were able to take some significant learnings on what works best to inform our future plans and development of the programme. — ●● —

Jonathan Benett, Student Access, Success and Development Officer, The University of Manchester

You can find out more about Boys Impact at: www.boysimpact.com

LOOKING FORWARD

As we look ahead, it is important to recognise not just what we have delivered, but the impact our collective work continues to have. Two significant pieces of evidence on the Uni Connect programme, Public First's economic evaluation and HEAT's national progression analysis, highlight what our partners and practitioners see every day, that Uni Connect provides a strong return on investment, improves outcomes for disadvantaged learners, and plays a vital role in supporting progression to higher education. It is encouraging to see this external validation of a programme we know makes a real and measurable difference.

Alongside this, we have also laid important foundations for the future. Through a series of consultation workshops with Governing Board members, partner institutions and network staff, we began shaping a major strategic programme of work to guide the next phase of GM Higher's development and support our transition to the Regional Access Partnership model. This collaborative work has already strengthened our shared vision, and we are excited to build on it in 2025/26 as we co-design the next stage of our programme.

In a year defined by change, the collective commitment across our partnership has once again demonstrated that when we work together, we achieve more for the young people of Greater Manchester. With a strong evidence base behind us, a clear strategic direction emerging, and a community of dedicated colleagues, we are well positioned to continue driving meaningful, equitable opportunities for all learners in the years ahead.



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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