A New Approach to Education, Training and Skills in Greater Manchester: Building Capacity for Individual, Workplace and Civic Prosperity.

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Summary

Overview

This paper was commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to inform its Local Industrial Strategy (GMLIS). We were asked to consider what GM should aim to change in education, training and skills, with the primary aim of seeking to reduce inequalities, and what opportunities are or are not offered by devolution. In response, we could have simply proposed a series of specific initiatives and interventions to help nudge GM closer to its goal of being at or above the national average on indicators of education attainment and skills. We do not think this is the way forward. In fact in some cases it may make things worse. To make a step change, GM needs to take a strategic and systemic approach to education and training (E&T), just as it is doing with health and social care. It can then start to address some of the problems in the national system, which are preventing stronger performance and greater equity. The paper suggests how this might be done, given that GM has few specific powers or funding streams at its disposal.

Reframing the Education and Training 'Problem' in GM

In recent years, the objective of system leaders in GM has been to bring our overall performance on educational attainment measures up to or above the national average.   This approach limits what can be achieved and the impact that any local policies will make on qualification levels, economic performance or inequality. The problem is that GM mirrors a national system, which has serious flaws compared with leading international competitors. Chasing national performance targets can lead to practices that produce more problems than they solve (e.g. 'off-rolling' lower attaining students, teaching narrowly to the test, focusing on apprenticeship numbers instead of quality). Instead GM should focus on how to address some of the more fundamental problems of the English system.

We identified five, which we elaborate in our full report:
 a) the separation of the 'education system' from the 'vocational training system' and the workplace;
 b) the variability in quality and availability of post-16 pathways for GCSE 'low attainers' and non-A Level students;
 c) the varying capacity of workplaces (of all types and sizes) to create effective learning environments;
 d) an overreliance on early phases of education at the expense of a lifelong approach;
 e) the propensity of the school system to reproduce rather than overcome socioeconomic inequalities.

To tackle these problems we need an expanded and more ambitious strategy for E&T to build a more stable and resilient model capable of contributing to shared prosperity across GM.

The challenge of change is considerable. In effect the E&T 'system' operates through **six different subsystems:** early years education, primary education, secondary education up to 16, a 16-18 phase where

learners are in different kinds of provision, higher education and a 19+ system for those who are continuing learning but not in higher education. Workplaces sit outside the system but are connected in variable ways. Each of these subsystems exhibits its own problems of fragmentation and competition - for example between schools, sixth form and FE colleges, and apprenticeship providers - which inhibit local collaboration. Each also has different accountabilities and targets, geared to the end of their particular phase, which provide different and sometimes perverse incentives. The challenge as we see it is not so much to improve the individual transitions between one subsystem and the next, but to see the six subsystems as connected areas of learning within **a single framework designed for lifelong learning** and **progression** (whether this is academic or vocational or both), **and for greater equity**. Moreover, improving E&T provision and outcomes alone will not be sufficient – E&T also needs to be aligned with initiatives to improve job quality, skills demand and utilisation, and workplace management. These are challenges, we argue, that the local state should try to meet, by taking an active role in shaping a more robust 'symbiotic ecosystem' that builds capacity and functions more effectively.

The Devolution Opportunity

Narrowly defined in terms of the transfer of powers and funds from central government, devolution (in itself) represents very few opportunities. The only budget area to be devolved (from 2019/20) is the Adult Education Budget (AEB). Control over apprenticeship funding and commissioning and funding for early education, schools, sixth form colleges or FE colleges (for education for 16-18 year olds) are not devolved. However, devolution presents a significant opportunity if we stop viewing it as a shift downwards from central government of specific powers and budgets. Instead, devolution is a shift to a new mode of urban governance, with strategic coordination and decision-making also moving upwards from individual local authorities, and with new networks, links and partnerships formed vertically and horizontally. In GM, devolution is spawning collaboration and innovation, with organisations working together in new ways to tackle local problems. For this reason, we argue that GM does not need to wait for further devolution of powers in E&T to enable change. Some further powers may be needed to enable some local solutions to be developed, but there is considerable scope for change within existing powers if GM applies the wider learning from devolution in other policy areas.

The Example of Health and Social Care

Greater Manchester's approach to health and social care devolution exemplifies how place-based thinking is being put to work in practice. GM's plan for health and social care transformation is based on three levels of managed collaboration:
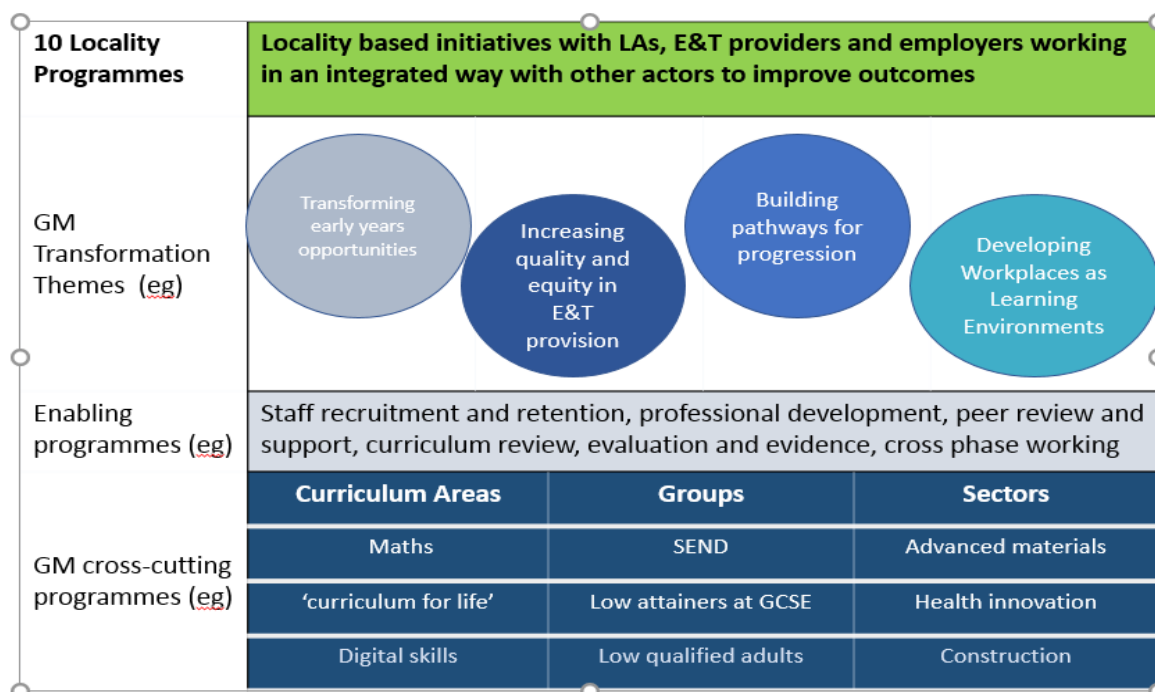
- **locality-based collaboration**, with the establishment of local care organisations with integrated health and social care budgets and a single commissioning framework to respond to local needs.
- **transformation themes** at the GM level: key aspects of the system that need to change in order to achieve a step change in outcomes and resource use (e.g. radically upgrading prevention). These include enabling programmes involving reorganising system resources and mechanisms (such as workforce development). Many of these involve voluntary cross-GM collaboration with organisations buying into GM-wide standards and programmes.
- **cross-cutting** themes, which involve a GM-wide approach to specific challenges such as cancer and diabetes. These have involved the development of cross-organisation strategies, including, in some cases, piloting new interventions before rolling out across GM.

Of course, in the health and social care arena, there are substantial tangible assets to be deployed. But devolution in these policy areas is about more than a transfer of budgets - it is an experiment in dealing with long-standing and seemingly intractable problems in the national system through designing integrated services at the local level. This makes it a valuable example in relation to the E&T system. GM's model suggests that it is possible to take a holistic and strategic approach to a complex, multi-organisation system and to mobilise intangible assets in a place-based collaboration.

A Whole System Transformation Approach to Education and Training

We propose that a similar approach could be taken to the E&T system, embracing the six current E&T subsystems and workforce development. In Figure 1 we provide an illustration, mimicking GM Health and Social Care Partnership's diagrammatic representation of its transformation model. The diagram provides an example of how the same types of managed collaboration might be applied to education and training challenges in GM.

Figure 1: **Example of A System Transformation Approach for GM Education and Training**

10 Locality Programmes	Locality based initiatives with LAs, E&T providers and employers working in an integrated way with other actors to improve outcomes		
GM Transformation Themes (eg)	Transforming early years opportunities / Increasing quality and equity in E&T provision / Building pathways for progression / Developing Workplaces as Learning Environments		
Enabling programmes (eg)	Staff recruitment and retention, professional development, peer review and support, curriculum review, evaluation and evidence, cross phase working		
GM cross-cutting programmes (eg)	**Curriculum Areas**	**Groups**	**Sectors**
	Maths	SEND	Advanced materials
	'curriculum for life'	Low attainers at GCSE	Health innovation
	Digital skills	Low qualified adults	Construction

Locality-based programmes in the E&T case could operate at a variety of different spatial scales: the key issue is that they would involve multiple organisations working collaboratively to promote E&T outcomes in an area.   There are numerous examples from the UK and abroad. These can involve: agreeing shared sets of outcomes; developing new or different measures of success; pooling budgets to fund locality wide services; sharing resources; developing curriculum pathways or pedagogic approaches in collaboration; agreeing to share responsibilities for specialist provision; establishing boards or panels to monitor and manage exclusions; and participating in shared professional development programmes. They occur through different organisational forms, including 'hard' federations of schools and colleges as well as softer collaborations involving employers. The key point about including them in the diagram is that GM would seek to support and guide this kind of locality working and to share models and expertise.

Transformation themes would be identified as the key issues needing to be addressed in order to shift the dial at the GM level. A key area to note here is the enabling programmes that might be needed to support

the other transformation themes: issues such as workforce supply and development programmes, information and data management, or better use of assets and resources. These offer the potential for local organisations to address, collectively, some of the 'elephants in the room' – issues like curriculum design, progression and exclusions – and to collaborate across phases.

We suggest that in the E&T case, **cross cutting programmes** might be usefully divided into three kinds, concerned with:

- specific **curriculum areas** – which would span phases enabling cross-phase professional learning and innovation in curriculum design and pedagogies to enable progression.
- **specific groups**, for example children and adults with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, disadvantaged students, low attainers at GCSE, low qualified adults.
- designated **economic sectors**, enabling demand-led training pathways to be developed across areas and phases, and tackling issues of high quality workplaces and employment practices as well as issues of training supply.

Making it Happen

We recommend that GM should see its local industrial strategy as an opportunity to go beyond silo-based education and skills initiatives, laying the foundations for a more integrated and expansive E&T system capable of demonstrating to central government the benefits of city-region-scale approaches for educational outcomes, economic development, productivity and inclusive growth.   This is about system change and we make six general points about how this might happen before moving to specific recommendations.

- It needs **whole-system leadership.**
- **The conditions need to be created for co-production and collaboration across LA and subsystem boundaries.** This might involve some re-alignment of portfolios and groups, but more importantly leadership of and commitment to an R&D approach with professionals working together to design practical solutions to pressing problems.
- **Many changes can be achieved by reprofiling existing resources, but some new resources will be needed.** GM has the scale and diversity of institutions and types of provision to be regarded as a 'test bed' for new ideas, so should seek to develop, fund and evaluate pilot projects.
- GM is at the early stages of thinking about its E&T system holistically and **calls for new powers should come at a later stage of development**
- The desire and capability to collaborate around GM goals, practices and standards will inevitably be constrained by requirements to meet national accountabilities and by funding. GM needs to **start with programmes which demonstrably add value to the existing system and which recognise professional concerns**, i.e. with approaches that promote a self-improving system, rather than imposing new layers of bureaucracy and control.
- Mechanisms for **system learning** need to be built in.

Recommendations

We make two sets of recommendations. The first set makes specific suggestions for steps GM could take to initiate and support system change. We recommend that:

1) GMCA develops a **dedicated executive leader** (i.e. someone whose sole job is to develop this work, similar to the role of the Chief Officer of the GMHSCP) to support the political portfolio holder for Education, Skills, Work & Apprenticeships.

2) It makes a **symbolic statement of intent to reshape the GM E&T system** to improve it and support children, young people, adults and employers to fulfil their potential.

3) It **aligns its various boards** for early years, education and employability and skills and employment more clearly within a 'whole system structure' and brings them together to deliberate on how they might increase cross-phase working.

4) It **increases its capacity for cross GM and whole system analysis and knowledge sharing**, including quantitative data analysis but also better knowledge of how the system is working currently, drawing on practitioner knowledge, existing practice, and research focusing on key groups and issues of concern.

5) **It develops, in collaboration with DfE, capacity for learning about other systems**.

6) It **begins to develop a transformation model** similar to that in Health and Social Care and to identify some key themes for collective action.

7) It **identifies funds and resources to establish, support and evaluate a handful of locality based collaborative programmes** (mini Opportunity Areas)

8) It establishes a set of **'task and finish groups' to examine key issues in the education system which are producing inequalities:** such as rising numbers of exclusions and 'teaching to the test', and to develop cross-GM responses. This should be supported with research evidence.

9) It **establishes a GM E&T Research and Practice Collaborative** bringing together universities, Teaching and Research Schools and other partners to create a hub for conducting, synthesising and sharing E&T research to support policy and practice.

Our second set of recommendations is for specific initiatives that could be developed to start to demonstrate the effectiveness of cross-GM action on specific challenges. These are grouped under four themes:

A. **Building a systematic approach to E&T for growth sectors** (an example of a sector approach):

i) Review of curriculum content of vocational qualifications at Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 to ensure robust ladders for progression

ii) Identification of which qualifications are classed as 'licences to practise', where they are delivered, how they are funded, and whether they can be expanded.

ii) Colleges and universities to work together on sector-based curriculum pathways – aligned with a review of Applied HE provision and its alignment with provision at Levels 3 and 4.

iv) Review of GCSE English and maths requirements and whether these are unnecessarily blocking access to vocational training.

v) Review of employer investment in training in the sector and how it could be promoted through business support; use of Apprenticeship Levy funds; procurement and planning powers; and other means.

vi) Local development of pre-16 programmes where appropriate and sector focused initiatives with schools and communities.

vii) Career advancement/skills escalator programmes to encourage and support adult retraining (involving advice and guidance, support with funding, childcare and transport).

B. **Strengthening employer involvement and increasing the number of high quality workplaces operating as effective learning environments** (an example of a transformation theme). Such initiatives would need to be linked with other GM programmes around 'good work'. Starting points could be:

   i)   A GM-wide initiative to build an evidence base of workplaces that create and provide quality learning environments and use this to share their expertise.
   ii)   Encouraging employers to relax standard recruitment requirements for young people and adults with low educational attainment to apply for apprenticeships in occupational fields where they might flourish.
   iii) A pilot programme to encourage public and private sector organisations to offer career mentoring and workplace visits to a number of young people equivalent to their number of employees.

C. **Revitalising adult education, particularly through outreach activities for disadvantaged areas of GM**. This could include:
   i)   A challenge to the four GM universities to embrace their 'civic' role and work with FE colleges and community adult education providers. This could link to well-established initiatives such as 'Service learning' and 'students as educators'.
   ii)   A cross-sector approach to Family Learning including inter-generational programmes focused on digital technologies.

D. **Making workforce development a central strand of GM's E&T strategy**. These could include:
   i)   An initiative to promote and develop the technical and professional expertise in colleges and training providers through closer engagement with employers and universities.
   ii)   A Chartered GM teachers/trainer programme to raise the status of these professionals and identify/implement professional development bespoke to the GM context.
   iii) A new GM Challenge-type school-school collaboration programme, supported by experienced advisers and using experienced teachers in support roles working across clusters of schools.

Conclusion

Our short paper argues that GM needs to start from a different point in analysing its E&T system. The challenges GM faces mirror the problems with the English system as a whole and should not be framed in terms of how many points we are slipping behind national averages. GM may not have powers over most of the E&T system but it can develop a whole-system approach based on cross-phase and cross-area collaboration, following the example of its health and social care transformation model, and there are specific things it can do now to make aspects of the system work better. GM can use the opportunity of its local industrial strategy to lead the way in demonstrating why the restrictive straightjacket imposed by the national E&T productive system is no longer viable and how city-region collaborative approaches can deliver greater individual, workplace and civic prosperity.