

# BUILDING THE FUTURE WE NEED

NORTH WEST DIGITAL DIALOGUE AND REGIONAL REPORT 2020



# TECHUK DIGITAL DIALOGUES

Throughout the past year, techUK held a series of Digital Dialogues with leaders across the United Kingdom's nations and regions to better understand how we can harness digital innovation to build a better future in the wake of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Working together with stakeholders and members these conversations were intended to help understand what actions could be taken at the local level in the short, medium, and long-term to support a levelled-up recovery and build the future we need.

# Ambition in the face of adversity

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present huge challenges for the UK's nations and regions.

As we plot a course to recovery, we have an opportunity to apply technology with purpose to deliver better outcomes for people, society, the economy, and the planet.

Our mission should not be simply to get back to where we were, but to build the future we need.

A future that empowers people, strengthens society, grows the economy, and restores the planet.



THE THING I WOULD LIKE TO THROW OUT THERE, AT THE START OF THIS DIALOGUE, IS REALLY TO START THINKING ABOUT DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY AS A HUMAN RIGHT. I THINK IT IS BECOMING THAT FUNDAMENTAL. BECAUSE IF THE CONVERSATION IS HAPPENING IN THAT PLACE, YOU CANNOT WALL SOME PEOPLE OUT OF IT BECAUSE THEY CANNOT AFFORD THE DATA OR CANNOT AFFORD THE DEVICES.

**Andy Burnham,**  
**Mayor of Greater Manchester**



# Executive summary

The North West Digital Dialogue brought together local leaders from across the public and private sectors on 18 September 2020 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the North West and how digital technology can support a levelled-up recovery.

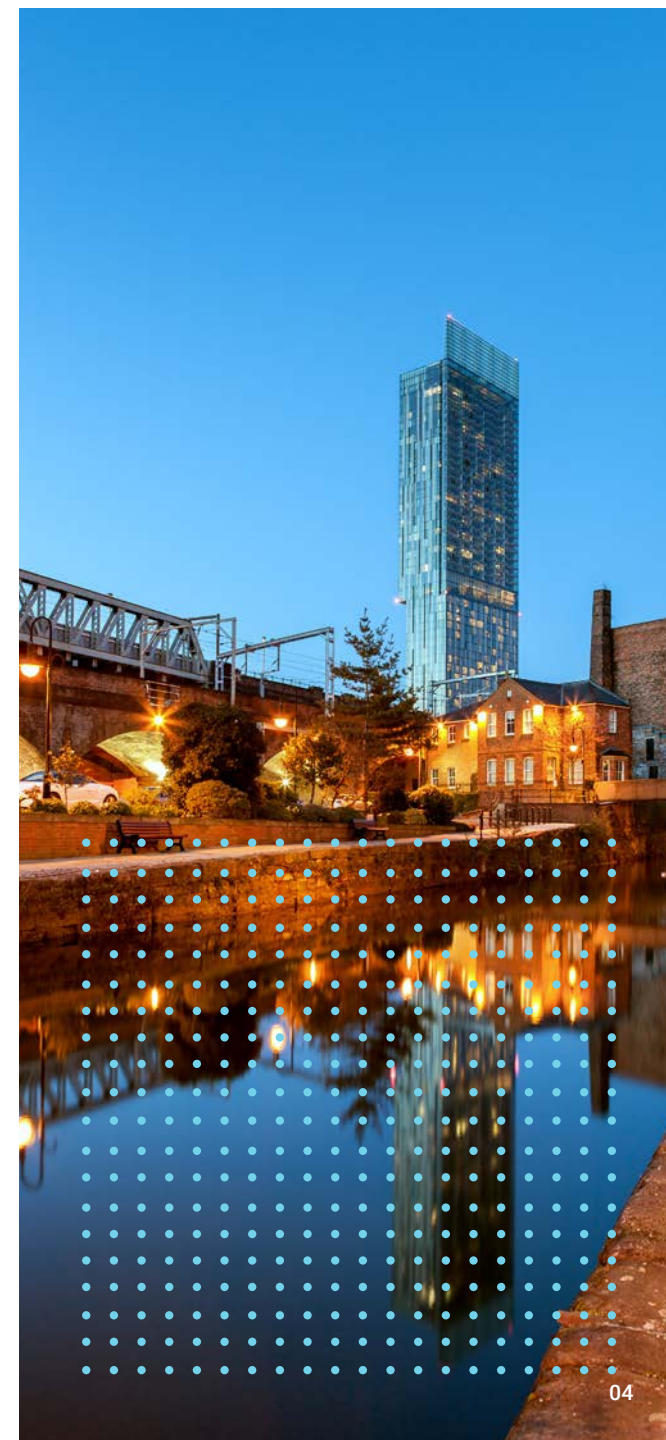
The discussion revealed serious concerns about the social and economic impact of COVID-19 and the long-term ambition to level up the whole of the UK.

However, these concerns were matched with optimism about the opportunity to accelerate digital transformation and apply digital technology to address both long-standing issues and new challenges brought about by COVID-19.

There is a strong desire for greater collaboration across public and private sectors to drive digital innovation and help the region recover from the impact of COVID-19.

This report sits alongside six other national and regional reports, as well as a UK-wide report, and sets out some recommendations, based on the Digital Dialogue, about how this could be achieved in the North West, focusing on the following areas:

- › Strengthening local digital capital
- › Seizing local growth opportunities
- › Innovating to tackle urgent problems



# TABLE OF CONTENTS



- I. North West Digital Dialogue
- II. The impact of COVID-19 on the North West
- III. Challenges and opportunities for the North West
- IV. Recommendations from the Digital Dialogues:
  - A. Strengthening local digital capital
  - B. Seizing local growth opportunities
  - C. Launching local innovation challenges
- V. Conclusions





# NORTH WEST DIGITAL DIALOGUE



## Participants

The key senior stakeholders who participated in the digital dialogue came from a variety of organisations, from the tech sector and beyond. These ranged from large corporates to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); professional services and legal firms; trade organisations, cluster groups, and incubators; the public sector and government; and universities and other educational institutions.

# The impact of COVID-19 on the North West

Footfall in town centres in Greater Manchester was **reduced between 45 and 71%**, with estimates suggesting unemployment could rise to between 140,000 and 170,000 from a base of 70,000. The number of people on Universal Credit in Greater Manchester grew by 65,820 to 240,460 in April 2020, a 38% increase from March 2020.

Lancashire **lost nearly 19,000 jobs, and 82 businesses** in the county collapsed in May 2020.

The overall gross value added (GVA) of the **North West was estimated to shrink by 9.5%** in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, among the top four regions to be worst hit by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.



# Concerns from the Digital Dialogue

**Funding for NHS digital programmes:** concerns about funding difficulties and the need for long-term investment to enable innovation by utilising technology, and the difficulties in long-term planning caused by COVID-19.

**Lack of digital leadership:** the need for many SMEs to have better digital leadership and awareness. Many SMEs do not know what they do not know, and they are starting to undergo digital transformation journeys and will need guidance to make those successful.

**Skills and talent shortage:** the lack of skills in the region, and the need to make sure that all the pathways and different levels of skills needed by companies are looked after – not just entry-level positions, but more experienced talent (five or more years of experience) and the need to target, keep, and attract more experienced people to the region. It is also vital to reskill people and help people of all ages retrain with new skills. There are other issues, around the funding and resources for schools at the foundational level and provide more inspiration and understanding of the tech sector, a need for greater networking between schools, and a need to address the pockets of the region that are falling behind, particularly rural areas, and certain pockets within Greater Manchester.



PRIORITY NUMBER ONE FOR COMPANIES HERE IS TALENT – WE NEED TO MAKE SURE WE HAVE ALL THE PATHWAYS AND DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE LEVELS THAT COMPANIES NEED.

Digital Dialogue Participant



MANY SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE MANUFACTURING SUPPLY CHAIN DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY DO NOT KNOW, AND THEY ARE STARTING ON A DIGITAL JOURNEY. THEY WILL NEED A LOT OF HELP, AND WHO ARE THE DIGITAL LEADERS WHO WILL HELP THESE COMPANIES MOVE FORWARD ACROSS THE NORTH WEST?

Digital Dialogue Participant

# COVID-19 as a catalyst for change in the North West

Participants in the Digital Dialogue discussed a number of opportunities that could catalyse positive change brought about by digital technology in the North West.

**Better coordination:** the region needs better coordination between all parties – and particularly between students and industry. Helping students work and collaborate with local industry is key to helping those industries innovate and digitise and will help students gain work experience and find jobs in the region.

**Reverse rural migration:** as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown remote working to be effective, there is a chance to rebalance between the city and the countryside. If less people are commuting into a city for work, and can continue to access the job market, that increase in flexibility and the potential to revitalise smaller towns and villages is a big opportunity.

**Create an SME ecosystem:** make it easier for SMEs and local experts in the region to worker with larger industries – to help them digitise and to further the local prosperity agenda. An ecosystem such as this could also help birth new start-ups and develop them into scale-ups, by providing leadership programmes, role models, case studies, financial investment, and longer-term planning to the firms participating. An ecosystem could also help with signposting – informing SMEs about what resources are available, as well as trying new models for skills development – pop-up centres in empty high street storefronts and better utilising available spaces outside of city centres.

**Inspire the young and raise aspirations:** participants spoke about the opportunity to build better mechanisms to inspire people into the tech sector – the use of case studies and role models to fire up young people, or taking a bus, sponsored by tech firms and local communities into deprived areas and bring kit and tech leaders to give talks. Other opportunities include better leveraging apprenticeships and work experience and creating a system with multiple pathways into tech.



THERE ARE A LOT OF ACTIVITIES IN THE SKILLS AND EDUCATION ARENA WHERE WE COULD COORDINATE BETTER AND COLLABORATE AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER. THIS IS KEY BECAUSE DEMAND IS SO HIGH AND RESOURCES ARE LIMITED – THE MORE WE COLLABORATE THE QUICKER WE'LL PROGRESS.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Recommendations

A wide range of ideas were discussed at the Digital Dialogue which have been synthesized into three broad recommendations for next steps:

## **Work together to strengthen local digital capital**

The North West's potential to recover will depend upon the strength of its local digital capital. Local stakeholders from across the public and private sectors should work together to develop an integrated regional plan to strengthen the eight component parts of local digital capital.

## **Use digital to accelerate local growth opportunities**

The North West has several sectors that are primed for success, including advanced manufacturing and the digital, creative, and media sector. Concerted action should be taken to ensure that these sectors are at the forefront of digital adoption to support and accelerate their growth.

## **Launch local innovation challenges to tackle urgent problems**

COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on many businesses, services and communities across the region. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority and other local and regional governments should challenge local innovators from across the public and private sector to come forward with new ideas and innovative solutions to some of its most urgent local problems, from housing and healthcare to supporting high streets and the creative economy.







# STRENGTHEN LOCAL DIGITAL CAPITAL

# Local Digital Capital

Local digital capital describes the inputs needed at the local level to maximise the benefits of digital.

These eight components were identified by participants across techUK's Digital Dialogue events as the essential inputs necessary for a nation or region to benefit from digital innovation.

techUK believes there is real value in thinking about these inputs in aggregate and developing a strategy that focuses on strengthening digital capital at the national and regional level.



# Strengthen local digital capital

While participants in the Digital Dialogue touched on many of the different aspects of local digital capital, the four that were the most frequently discussed were:

- › Digital skills
- › Digital infrastructure
- › Data ecosystems
- › Collaboration and coordination

Participants discussed the need for greater levels of digital skills and to retain talent within the region in order to address skills shortages - not just at the entry-level, but at more senior or experienced positions as well.

Second, digital infrastructure was another key theme, particularly the need for greater connectivity in rural areas, and more affordable kit to fully access the benefits of digital transformation, remote working, and remote learning. The inclusion point was another key point for the participants.

Third, regarding data ecosystems, participants saw the opportunity to combine open source, government, and private data, which has been done at the UK-wide level but should also be done at the regional level.

Finally, collaboration and coordination was a common theme throughout the Digital Dialogue, with participants often stating that organisations and various government bodies throughout the region needed to communicate more clearly and ensure that they are all working towards their shared goals and learning from each other's best practices.



WHEN WE TALK ABOUT INCLUSION – WHICH IS A BIG ISSUE – WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT HOW WE ARE INCLUDING PEOPLE AND KEEP THAT AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR MINDS. WE NEED TO CONSISTENTLY MAKE SURE WE ARE INCLUSIVE IN OUR SOLUTIONS AND OUR APPROACHES.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Digital skills

A **new report** by the Good Things Foundation suggests as many as 1.2 million residents in Greater Manchester could be excluded in some way to access the benefits digital brings – with over 700,000 people in Greater Manchester only using the internet in a narrow or limited way and a further 450,000 classified as “non-users”.

Manchester was **recently named** the fastest growing tech city in Europe by **Tech Nation**, with investment growing by 277% in 2019 from £48 million to £181 million. Other figures from the organisation show the city’s tech sector has seen a 36% increase in vacancies from June to August 2020 and last year it had the third-highest increase in tech salaries across the country, with average pay climbing 7%. This growth creates the need for a deeper talent pool.

**Manchester Digital’s 2019 Skills Audit** found that almost a third of digital businesses in the region had turned work away over 2019 as a result of not being able to find the right talent to fulfil it.

The North will need to produce **80,000 digital workers by 2020**. If current rates of growth continue over the next 25 years, then 1.23 million workers will need to be supplied by 2050. This is, however, a fairly blunt metric which does not take into account existing skills gaps in the sector – it should therefore be treated as a floor level necessary to maintain the current performance of the sector. The number of people that could be recruited will be significantly higher given existing skills gaps in the sector, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).



IT WILL BE VITAL TO CONTINUALLY RESKILL THE PEOPLE WE’VE GOT – CONTINUAL LIFELONG LEARNING NEEDS TO BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR THINKING, AND THAT’S A PART OF THE INCLUSION AGENDA AS WELL.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



THERE IS A BIG THEME AROUND INSPIRATION – DIGITAL IS A VERY ABSTRACT TERM AND NOT WELL UNDERSTOOD. SOMETHING WE’RE FINDING IS A GAP AROUND INSPIRING PEOPLE TO MOVE INTO DIGITAL AND A FUNDAMENTAL LACK OF UNDERSTANDING. THIS GOES FROM SCHOOLS ALL THE WAY INTO BUSINESSES, AND LOTS OF BUSINESSES HAVE PEOPLE WHO DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**

# Digital infrastructure

4G **data is available across 72% of the North West** region by all operators, and for voice calls it's 95.8%.

Manchester **ranks third in 5G geographical coverage** according to research in March 2020 by umlaut, with 10.53% (slightly behind London's 10.76%).

In March 2020, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) appointed **Virgin Media to deliver up to 2,700km of new fibre optic broadband infrastructure across the region through its £23.8M Local Full Fibre Networks Programme**, which will also connect more than 1,700 public sites across the city-region.

B4RN is a **rural fibre broadband network based in Lancashire**. It is a Community Benefit Society, which means the business belongs to the communities who need it, as community members own the enterprise, and in B4RN's case, they also actually build a lot of the infrastructure themselves.



WE FORGET HOW MANY PEOPLE ONLY HAVE A MOBILE PHONE AS THEIR SOLE CONNECTION TO THE DIGITAL WORLD.

Digital Dialogue Participant



AN ISSUE FOR MANY OF OUR STUDENTS IS COST – MANY STUDENTS ARE COMING TO UNIVERSITY FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND DO NOT HAVE LAPTOPS OR APPROPRIATE COMPUTING FACILITIES. COST IS A BIG ISSUE BUT SO IS SOCIAL MOBILITY – BEING ABLE TO AFFORD THE TECH AND OVERCOME THE HURDLE TO ENGAGE WITH DIGITAL COMMUNITIES. THIS IS VERY RELEVANT IN MORE RURAL PARTS OF THE REGION AND OUTLYING TOWNS.

Digital Dialogue Participant

A BIG CHALLENGE IS THE AVAILABILITY OF BROADBAND. WE HAVE 5,000 STAFF WORKING FROM HOME, BUT RELIABLE BROADBAND IS A CRITICAL FACTOR TO DO YOUR JOB, AND WILL BE MOVING FORWARD TO GETTING A JOB.

Digital Dialogue Participant

# Data ecosystems

The GMCA has created a Greater Manchester Open Data Infrastructure Map to support the use of existing local, regional and national datasets on a variety of topics.

Manchester is home to the Institute for Data Science and AI at the University of Manchester, GCHQ's new strategic hub (first outside the South), Greater Manchester AI Foundry and the Manchester Science Park which includes the CISCO Bright Building.

Numerous other organisations and programmes are a part of the North West data ecosystem, including MIDAS, Cisco, Coop Digital, ARM, and CGI.



WE SHOULD BE COMBINING OPEN SOURCE, GOVERNMENT, AND PRIVATE SECTOR DATA. WE HAVE DONE WITH THIS CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, WITH TAX CREDITS. WE'VE FOUND THAT RATHER THAN THE TRADITIONAL METHODS OF SELLING PRIVATE SECTOR DATA, OR GOVERNMENT USING ITS OWN DATA, COMBINING THEM ALL TOGETHER HAS BEEN VERY POWERFUL. WE'VE NEVER DONE THAT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL AND THAT'S SOMETHING WE'D LIKE TO EXPLORE.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Collaboration and coordination

Collaboration also emerged as a key priority in the North West, with participants citing the benefits of a strong devolved administration, while also wanting deeper collaboration within the digital sector and between the digital sector, local government, universities and colleges, and other economic sectors.



SOMETHING I SEE IN MY STUDENTS THAT IS INTERESTING, AFTER THE LOCKDOWN BEGAN TO LIFT, WAS THAT THERE WAS A REAL INTEREST FROM COMPUTER SCIENCE STUDENTS TO HELP LOCAL INDUSTRY RECOVER AND TO WORK WITH AND COLLABORATE WITH INDUSTRY MORE BROADLY.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# SEIZE LOCAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

# Seize local growth opportunities

The participants in the Digital Dialogue highlighted a few key sectors in the region where digital innovation can be applied to drive economic recovery and growth.

- › Advanced manufacturing: discussion around the importance of resilience and how many manufacturers have been willing to invest in digital tech, a large shift from before the pandemic, and the “Made Smarter” initiative looking at digitising SMEs.
- › Digital: the region has great strengths in digital communications and media and those should be fully utilised. Lots of discussion around how to help SMEs digitise and grow, from start-ups to scale-ups, and the need for sufficient funding to do so.



OUR WORKFORCE HAS RESPONDED WELL BUT WHAT THEY'VE DONE IS JUST USE SKYPE OR TEAMS BUT THEY DON'T NECESSARILY CHANGE HOW THEY ACTUALLY WORK TO BETTER INTEGRATE DIGITAL. WE NEED TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY AND WORK TO EMBED THAT LEVEL OF CHANGE.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADOPT DIGITAL SKILLS AND WORKING PRACTICES, TO CHANGE WORKPLACE PRACTICES TO BETTER USE TOOLS AND ADOPT PRACTICES FROM DIGITAL INDUSTRIES AND LEVERAGE THOSE BENEFITS. DON'T JUST HAVE HOUR LONG DIGITAL MEETINGS, BE MORE AGILE.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Seize local growth opportunities

In addition to what was discussed in the Digital Dialogue, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, in its strategic economic plans, has spotlighted the following six sectors (among others) as key sectors for growth. Many of these are complementary with the key growth areas discussed by the participants, providing further evidence of their importance.

- › Advanced manufacturing: aerospace, automotive, and nuclear
- › Health: biosciences research and medical device manufacturing
- › Digital: communication and media, big data
- › Clean growth: carbon neutral retrofitting, green energy, and sustainable transportation
- › Business and financial services: office administration, financial services, and human resources (HR) outsourcing
- › Visitor economy: particularly in Blackpool but across Lancashire

These key sectors are ripe for innovation and growth driven by digital innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need to double down on these key growth sectors to help the North West recover and thrive post-COVID-19.

Opportunities for collaboration and coordination should be deepened by building up strong networks, to join up sectoral ecosystems and harness any potential spill over effects from the tech sector to other sectors.

New business starts should also be encouraged in the key growth sectors in the long-term, in order to better utilise the developing talent pool, encourage entrepreneurship, and raise productivity.

These sectors are the key sectors we believe have the best chance of increasing digital uptake and innovation.



DIGITAL INCLUSION IS  
AT THE FOREFRONT  
OF OUR ECONOMIC  
RECOVERY, AND PART OF  
THAT IS WORKING WITH  
INDUSTRY. IT NEEDS  
TO BE AN ECOSYSTEM  
APPROACH.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**

# Advanced manufacturing

Lancashire has a long tradition of engineering and strengths in the nuclear and aerospace sectors, with the largest single concentration of aerospace production in the UK, employing over 20,000 people. The use of digital tech will be crucial to enabling innovation and agility to adapt to emerging market challenges.

Greater Manchester has a history of developing advanced materials, such as graphene with the establishment of the National Graphene Institute at the University of Manchester.

Manchester also has a strong advanced manufacturing base with particular strengths in materials and textiles, chemicals, and food and drink. This sector is ripe for innovation and digital transformation by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, driving productivity and efficiency improvements through the use of digital tech and artificial intelligence (AI).



RESILIENCE IS A WORD THAT COMES UP CONSTANTLY, ESPECIALLY WITH MANUFACTURING BUSINESSES. WE HAVE SEEN A SURGE IN THE UPTAKE OF DIGITAL INDUSTRIAL TECH, A BIG CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS POSITION. WE'VE SEEN MUCH LESS SCEPTICISM AND MORE WILLINGNESS TO INVEST IN DIGITAL.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**

# Health

Lancashire has significant activity in high-level biosciences research as well as medical product manufacturing, both of which enjoy strong support from the region's universities to drive research and development and innovation using digital tech.

Greater Manchester has several strengths including life sciences research, medical devices and technology, and health services, as well as a focus on ageing populations – it the UK's first World Health Organisation Age Friendly city region and is home to the Innovation Partnership on Health Ageing. Greater Manchester should capitalise on this focus to utilise digital tech to drive innovation and the real-world testing and commercialisation of wellbeing solutions to support healthy ageing.

“

WE HAVE A PROGRAMME, DIGITAL HEALTHY SCHOOLS, IN SCHOOLS ACROSS LANCASHIRE, TO SUPPORT TEACHERS TO HELP THEM TEACH ABOUT HEALTH AND DIGITAL HEALTH. WHAT ACTUALLY HAS COME OUT OF THE PROGRAMME WAS A LACK OF AWARENESS OF ROLES IN DIGITAL HEALTH. LOTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE THOUGHT THEY HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN HEALTH OR DIGITAL, AND WHAT WE'VE SEEN OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS IS MORE YOUNG GIRLS INTERESTED IN DIGITAL HEALTH AS THEY BECOME AWARE OF IT.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**

# Digital, creative, and media

Greater Manchester has the largest digital sector outside of the South East of England, with significant clusters in broadcasting, content creation and media, cyber security, as well as e-commerce.

The North West has a particular strength in digital communications and media, with the presence of MediaCityUK in Salford.

Lancashire has a developing expertise in big data centred on Lancaster University. Data aggregation and analytics services are a significant opportunity for new commercial enterprises.

The North West should double down on its strength in the digital and creative sector to enable future economic growth.



WE HAVE STRONG ACADEMICS AND EXPERTISE IN AI, MACHINE LEARNING, AND IMAGE RECOGNITION. IT'S ABOUT WHERE THOSE ACADEMIC STRENGTHS TURN INTO LOCAL BUSINESSES AND THEN FLOURISH INTO START-UPS AND SCALE-UPS.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



I DID WORK IN SALFORD FOR A LONG TIME, AND I DID FEEL THERE WAS A LOT OF UNREALISED POTENTIAL. FOR ME, WITH DIGITAL, COMMUNICATIONS, AND MEDIA, WE ALMOST HAVE THE BALANCE OF POWER TIPPED TOWARDS US, AND I WONDER IF THERE'S MORE WE CAN DO IF WE ALL GOT BEHIND THAT.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Clean growth

Greater Manchester set a goal of having all new homes and commercial buildings be net zero carbon by 2028.

Greater Manchester has also set out to reduce car use to not more than 50% of daily trips by 2040, by incentivising public transit, cycling, and walking. Tech and big data can be used to optimise public transit routes and timetabling, and tech-enabled advanced manufacturing has a key role to play to develop and produce innovative lightweight and durable materials to increase efficiency and reduce emissions from both private and public transport.

Digital tech should be utilised in all of the key target areas to ensure that the net zero goals can be reached on time, by improving design and building efficiency, transportation efficiency, and enabling innovation to find new solutions to reduce emissions.



# Business and financial services

Lancashire is home to a significant business services sector, particularly office administration, contact centres, and business process outsourcing – including financial services and HR outsourcing. As the trend has moved from “off-shoring” to “near-shoring”, the region has been able to take advantage and position themselves as efficient “near-shore” locations, able to provide both reduced costs and a skilled workforce.

Greater Manchester has particular strengths in legal and accounting, insurance, and business services.

Tech has a key role to play in driving innovation across this sector, from enabling efficiency and productivity gains through digital connectivity and flexible working, to using AI and big data to provide new services and products.

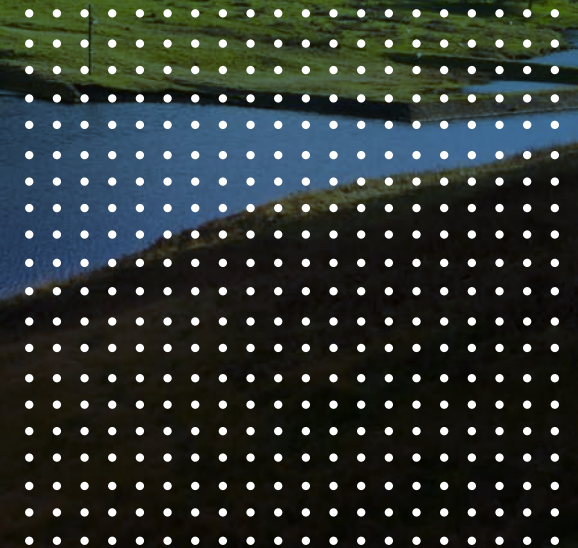




# Visitor economy

The visitor economy is a key sector for Lancashire, and particularly Blackpool. It accounts for nearly 60,000 jobs across the region and in Blackpool, 20% of the workforce works in the sector, more than twice the national average.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the role of tech even more crucial. Everything from social media, online marketing, and digital sales platforms through to virtual reality (VR) experiences and robotics will drive innovation and economic growth in the sector.





# Digitising key growth sectors

Best way to enable the digitisation of the North West's key growth sectors is to do two things:

- › Ensure that the strategic economic planning for key growth sectors has a strong digital underpinning.
- › Foster greater collaboration, crossover, and links between local tech firms and firms in the key growth sectors, to best utilise digital technology to supercharge growth sectors. This could take the form of events to generate collaboration or the creation or expansion of cross-sectoral groups and organisations.



A BIG BARRIER TO ACHIEVING SUCCESS IS ABOUT TRUST. SMES DON'T NECESSARILY TRUST PRODUCTS, AND THE CHALLENGE IS ABOUT FINDING WHICH SOLUTIONS AND PRODUCTS CAN BE TRUSTED. WE NEED A DEEPENING OF THE LOCAL ECOSYSTEM THAT CAN PROVIDE LOCAL TRUSTED SOURCES.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



THERE IS A PILOT PROGRAMME RUNNING HERE IN THE NORTH WEST, OUT OF THE MANCHESTER GROWTH HUB, CALLED 'MADE SMARTER' THAT IS ABOUT DIGITISATION AND SMES, AND HAS BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL SO FAR. WE ARE LOOKING AT EXPANDING THE SCOPE AND A NATIONAL ROLLOUT. IT BRINGS TOGETHER SMES, LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMES, ROLE MODELS AND CASE STUDIES. IT ALSO BRINGS SOME INVESTMENT AND A DIGITAL ROADMAP, AND WORKS WITH BUSINESSES TO DEVELOP FURTHER DIGITALISATION.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



A photograph of a busy pedestrian street in Manchester, likely Oxford Road, with a teal overlay. The street is filled with people walking, some carrying shopping bags. In the background, there are modern buildings with large glass windows. One building has a sign for 'food COURT' with logos for 'SUBWAY', 'McDonald's', and 'KFC'. Another building has a sign for 'MANCHESTER ARNDALE'. A large white text overlay reads 'LAUNCH LOCAL INNOVATION CHALLENGES'.

# LAUNCH LOCAL INNOVATION CHALLENGES



# Launch local innovation challenges

Digital technology is not a panacea to deep-rooted issues but can help support new approaches and solutions.

Regional authorities and local enterprise partnerships should set out “local innovation challenges” in the model of “The Grand Challenges” in order to spur new local innovation, with a commitment to scale successful ideas.

Participants discussed how tech could be used to create “pop-ups” and other small businesses, small manufacturers and start-ups in empty spaces in high streets and town centres, paired with the use of open data to build a good picture of footfall and traffic numbers and to take advantage of the trend of reverse rural migration where fewer people now are commuting into big cities and thus are spending more time in towns and villages across the region.

This is one example of many local innovation challenges where digital solutions should be considered.



WE HAVE A NUMBER OF SPACE OPPORTUNITIES AND WE ARE INTERESTED IN WHAT OPPORTUNITIES THERE ARE – NOT JUST IN CODING OR SOFTWARE, BUT ALSO MANUFACTURING AND SMALL START-UPS. WE DO NOT ALWAYS HAVE THE CONNECTIONS INTO INTERESTED PARTIES, AND I THINK THAT HAS TO BE A PART OF OUR THINKING ABOUT TOWN AND CITY CENTRES GOING FORWARD – WE WILL NEED A DIFFERENT MIX.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Conclusions

The continuing COVID-19 crisis remains a huge constraint on recovery efforts.

However, every effort should be made to incorporate digital into the region's recovery strategy and future economic planning. There is evidence this is happening, but this will need to be maintained and built upon.

This report sets out some initial thinking on how that could be done, building upon existing strengths and assets.

Further work is required to develop these ideas, and the Digital Dialogue made it clear that collaboration both within the North West and across the UK will be essential for success.



WE HAVE SHARED GOALS, AND WE'VE TALKED ABOUT IT A LOT TODAY. WE ALL KNOW THAT IF WE HAVE A CLEAR SENSE OF PURPOSE, IT MAKES IT A LOT EASIER TO DO THINGS TOGETHER AND TO UNDERSTAND WHY. IT'S ABOUT UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER'S GOALS, KNOWING EACH OTHER'S GOALS, AND ALSO GETTING BEHIND A BIG VISION AND COMMUNAL GOALS.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**

# Survey of participants

techUK recently surveyed the participants of the North West Digital Dialogue, asking them how optimistic they were about the potential for digital innovation to drive the economic recovery in the region, and where they felt digital transformation efforts could make the biggest difference.

Of the respondents, one-third were somewhat optimistic, and two-thirds were very optimistic since taking part in the Digital Dialogue.

Respondents felt that digital technology could make the biggest difference in the following areas:

- Digital industry has a wide variety of possibilities to support new roles and training, particularly with apprenticeships and the apprenticeship levy.
- Manufacturing and retail sectors, with Industry 4.0 and the Made Smarter programme as a good example of digital transformation in
- the manufacturing sector, and the work Health Innovation Manchester are doing in the health sector.

eCommerce, banking, legal, and local government agencies.







## Participants

Liz Ashall-Payne, Founding CEO, Orcha

Professor Rob Aspin, Faculty of Science and Engineering, Manchester Metropolitan University

Miranda Baker, CEO, East Lancs Chamber of Commerce

Sean Beech, Senior Partner – North West, Deloitte

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

Paul Daley, Sales Director, GBG

Greg Doran, Director, Barclays Corporate Banking, TMT

Helen Douglas, Director, Communications & Apprenticeships, Cisco

Matthew Evans, Director – Markets, techUK

Professor Joe Finney, Department – Computing and Communications, Lancaster University

Chris Fletcher, Policy and Marketing Director, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

Blaise Hammond, Business and Client Services, Informed Solutions

Abigail Harrison, Chief of Digital and Innovation, North West Ambulance Service

Rachid Hourizi, Director, Institute of Coding

Dr James Hughes, Research Director, NW Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre

Ewan Hutton, CTO, B-North

Claire Jolly, Partner – North West, Deloitte

Ben Jones, Regional Sales Manager Solutions, Cisco

Glyn Jones, Tempest Delivery Director, BAE Systems

John Morrissy, Director of Organisational Development, Lancashire City Council

David Muir, CEO and Co-Founder, Code Nation

Liz Needleman, BT Group North

Tim Newns, CEO, MIDAS

Audrey Peers, Business Development Manager, MIDAS

Maxine Power, Director of Quality, Innovation, & Improvement, North West Ambulance Service

Beena Puri, Innovation & Partnerships Manager, GMCA

Lucy Riding, Digital Information Strategy Analyst, BAE Systems

Margaret Sambell, Head of Strategy, Tech Partnership Degrees

Hannah Smith-Pickup, Client and Industries Lead, Deloitte

Hadleigh Stollar, Customer Director, Graphnet Health

David Taylor CBE, Executive Chairman, UCLAN/DTP88

Elizabeth Vega, Group CEO, Informed Solutions

Antony Walker, Deputy CEO, techUK

Nick Webster, Head of Digital Information Strategy, BAE Systems

Dion Williams, Director of Research, Lancaster University