

## Note to Senate members:

The following pages describe where we are with the strategy based on the numerous comments and suggestions from many of you over the past months. Pages 1 – 4 introduce, give an outline of what we want to achieve and state the deliverables. Pages 5 – 15 describe the deliverables in more detail. If you are limited on time then you may want to just look at pages 1 -4; your input into any part is greatly appreciated. Please add comments and track any changes you would like to make. Thank you very much for your help to create this important strategy.

## Introduction

In early 2020 the University's 'Our Future' vision set us on a path towards 'increased student choice and flexible learning through combinations of face-to-face, online and blended learning at greater scale'. Weeks after its publication, the world changed. Suddenly finding ourselves teaching and learning from our homes, we adapted our approaches at a pace that would have previously been unthinkable. During this period of forced change, we learnt a lot about the strengths and weaknesses of both new and traditional ways of teaching and learning. We also began to understand how the lived realities of intergenerational inequality and societal injustice extend ominously into the online space: to privilege or distance and even exclude. As the pandemic loosens its grip it is clear that flexibility in our education, work and private lives is more desirable and valuable than ever. Yet, making this work inclusively demands more than new technologies and modes of delivery. Where both literature and thinking on flexible learning was previously tied to mode, its post-covid reality requires a distinct philosophy of flexible learning. One that actively champions the educational imperatives of *Teaching, Research, and Social Responsibility*. There are long-held assumptions to be challenged and opportunities to be grasped. Our future students will expect an education that prepares them for this increasingly flexible, digital, interconnected and intercultural world. To achieve this we must, as a University community, think differently.

In 2021 Senate approved our 'first steps to flexible learning', committing us to a default model of blended learning. This strategy follows on from those first steps. It is an educational strategy to enable, and not enforce change; putting in place the processes, infrastructure, policies and incentives that will allow us to be agile and adapt with the minimum of friction as the world continues to change around us. It sets out three fundamental changes in mindset and culture necessary to achieve the vision of 'Our Future'; it defines the dimensions of flexibility that will frame this work; and it provides a plan of action over 5 years that will enable and embed our flexible future.

We are also seeing changes from the Government regarding the student loans and the move to the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). Their ambition is for every student with the aptitude and the desire to go to university, to get the support they need, but also for everyone to be given a real choice in life, and not to feel there is only one route, or one shot at success. From 2025, the LLE will provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of 4 years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime. It will be available for both modular and full-time study at higher technical and degree levels (levels 4 to 6), regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or universities. Many learners, and in response to employers' needs, will need to access courses in a more flexible way, to fit study around work, family and personal commitments. Such "leave it 'till later" financial incentives combined with student loan repayments changing from 2023 to the advantage of the better off betoken a significant change in access to HE, whether notional or actual. As a result, it is likely that many demographics will embrace this change, but some less advantaged sectors of society will certainly no longer profit from higher education as "life gets in the way". Our accommodation of social responsibility into this flexible approach actively seeks to pre-empt such policy changes, generating our flexible learning spaces as a value proposition based upon shared University of Manchester values.

The strategy sets out three fundamental changes in mindset and culture necessary to achieve the vision of 'Our Future' and enable our offering to be flexible by design and flexible by delivery. Below we explain what those changes of mindset are, and what we plan to put in place to make them happen.

## What we mean by flexibility

We intend to increase flexibility<sup>1</sup> across four areas. Three of these -- pace, place and pathway -- are generally accepted as being in the core of 'flexible learning'; we have added Profession<sup>2</sup> as our fourth to emphasise our intention to bring flexibility to our staff as well as to our students

#### Pace

Flexibility of pace means not only making it possible for learners to manage the rate at which they access content within course units, but also to stage their learning throughout their lifetimes to suit their aspirations and career needs and to have some control over when in their life they study – how much, at what level and what kind of intensity. It implies support for accelerated and part-time study.

#### Place

Remote, on-campus, hybrid, transnational.

#### Pathway

Pathway is about thinking more broadly than our traditional three or four year full-time offerings, making it possible for people to hop on and hop off the educational experience, or top up existing qualifications through Continued Professional Development (CPD). Our goal is to make the creation of other pathways beyond our regular on-campus programmes seamless and agile, allowing us to respond to changes in demand and funding. This implies support for micro credentials / stackable qualifications, CPD (open and closed programmes), and apprenticeships.

#### Profession

Supporting flexibility of pace, place and pathway can only be achieved by playing to the strengths of our staff, enabling them to balance the demands of research and teaching to maximise both job satisfaction and outcomes. This implies design and delivery by team, parity of esteem, flexible expectation / rewards / promotion criteria and effective contribution models.

## Changing our ways of thinking

To become more flexible, we will need to think differently. The *first steps to flexible* shifted our default style of delivery from 'traditional' to 'blended' but still gave people plenty of scope to work in a way and style that was best suited to their discipline area. The FL strategy enables a shift of the default style of design, delivery and assessment without outlawing or banning of anything.

#### Pathways to Lifelong Learning

Our University and others like it will always provide a campus education for those most empowered to partake of it, yet increasingly our offering will become more inclusive, accommodating another educational demographic which is off campus, online and blended. There is a clear and growing need for different educational pathways to support learners' aspirations at every stage of their lives. Employers require a greater breadth of digital skills from graduates, but also have a growing unmet need to develop the skills of their existing staff. This is reflected in the way that access to education will be funded, with the UK Government's Lifelong Learning Entitlement aiming to 'support more flexible access to courses, helping people train, upskill or retrain alongside work, family and personal commitments, as both their circumstances and the economy change'. Embracing and embedding a breadth of educational pathways that give access to a Manchester education throughout learner's lifetime must become the Manchester norm.

#### Design and Delivery By Team

Universities have historically been built on the model that world leading experts in research naturally make expert teachers. As education has become more inclusive, accessible, and digital, the limitations of this model

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<sup>1</sup> We are not addressing flexibility in the sense of 'extra choice of course units'. This is about the ways in which we design and deliver teaching and learning, not about the content.

<sup>2</sup> 'Profession' chosen here in the absence of a better term, and admittedly because it starts with P.

have become increasingly exposed. Designing learning for today's diverse audiences to be delivered through varied modes requires knowledge and skills from multiple specialist areas. In recognising that such expertise is far more than it is reasonable to expect any individual to master, we need a shift in ownership of course creation from the individual towards design and delivery of teaching and assessment by team.

#### Flexible First

Much of the flexibility we experience in our everyday lives comes from the ubiquity of digital technology. Creating digital learning<sup>3</sup> resources that can be re-used and remixed will be key to delivering a flexible education. We will need a modern digital learning environment that is able to adapt and evolve as the world continues to change; digital literacy will need to pervade everything our staff and students do. In recognising that digital skills evolve rapidly we will need to provide the infrastructure, support and training to make this happen.

## What FLP will deliver

In order to achieve the mindset shifts we need deliverables in both the physical and digital estate to support 'anywhere, anytime, anyhow' learning.

#### D1: A Digital Learning Environment

We will need an infrastructure that has flexibility built in end-to-end, from the point where a prospective learner browses the courses we offer, becomes a student, through to the teaching and learning experience, and on to the point of receiving their qualification. Through working with colleagues (and programme teams) across the University we will ensure that the Digital Learning Environment provides a more integrated, interconnected, inclusive and accessible infrastructure.

#### D2: A Digital Learning Service

We will need to provide colleagues with the support and training they need to create and deliver a high quality experience where everyone plays to their strengths. For this we will create what we are currently calling a Digital Learning Service. This is a one stop shop that will provide support and guidance on all aspects of digital and flexible learning, from consultancy and help with learning design through to asset creation and video editing, and from assessment design to supporting the delivery of assessment and feedback which feeds forward into future learning.

#### D3: Digital Skills and Literacy Support

We will also put in place a programme of activities to help staff and students build their digital skills so we can all operate effectively in our increasingly digital and interconnected world. We will combine personalised opportunities, so the capabilities developed are relevant for individual students and staff, with an embedded institutional approach. We support the idea of creating time in the academic calendar to enable and support staff digital capability development.

#### D4: Pilots

We will be put out calls for support for new flexible pilot courses or programmes, whether these be digital twins of on-campus programmes, modular CPD, apprenticeships or whatever, and we will work with these pilots to shape and provide the support necessary to make them happen. In recognising there are excellent initiatives across the University there have been opportunities to support some pilots already and it has proven to be an extremely powerful way of understanding where we have barriers in terms of policy, infrastructure or process to moving towards flexibility.

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<sup>3</sup> There are many pieces of terminology used in this strategy that are less than satisfying. 'Digital learning', for example is an unhappy shorthand intended to convey and encapsulate the digital skills and tools associated with learning, and not to imply that learning itself somehow digital (whatever that would mean). It is tempting simply to describe things as being 'flexible' since that is our end goal – but such circular references tell the reader little about what we mean, so instead in the absence of better ones we are forced to lean on imperfect labels. We have used 'Flexible First' instead of Digital First to avoid any misunderstanding around "*Universities to keep teaching online*" Some of these are well-established terms; others we have imposed our own meaning on. Suggestions for more elegant names are very welcome.

#### D5: Centre for Flexible Learning

To choreograph the above we will establish a Centre for Flexible Learning. It will house flexible learning services (e.g, Digital Learning Service, UCIL, transnational education) and be responsible for developing and supporting the strategy beyond FLP and alongside national and global policy. It will be the place we go for support when we have ideas for new offerings, and it will also be the place that scans the horizon for new opportunities and to work with colleagues to commission courses as demand arises. Whether this is a virtual organisation or one that has a physical space (or a combination of both) is still to be determined by engaging with colleagues to find out views on this in the next stage of the programme.

#### D6: Space on Campus

Our University is committed to providing an outstanding campus-based learning community, alongside exploring how we can expand our off-campus options and offering new courses in innovative ways. Within this campus-based context, the challenge for academics and those who support them is to provide students with a learning environment that is stimulating, supportive, responsive and/or flexible. Where technology is used to achieve this, we first need to address the concerns expressed by academics and students. We also need to examine the assumption that learners are sufficiently skilled to access programmes and services and that they have the capacity to learn through technology-based learning approaches. We are establishing physical space to give staff and students the opportunity to familiarise themselves with new technologies, where they can co-create new ways of teaching and learning, build their digital capabilities, identify, and address any accessibility issues, and offer a dedicated environment to support lifelong learning.

Enabler E1: Flexible Pathways / Lifelong learning - The thread through all of the deliverables is the need to support flexible pathways. The strategy enables, not enforces, flexibility in the pathways we offer, providing support to design and deliver content and to create material that it's ready for an increasingly flexible world.

## D1: A Digital Learning Environment

Facilitating the discovery, reuse and repurposing of learning materials

### Why – what do we want to achieve?

Virtual learning environments (VLEs) and digital tools have played a vital role in our teaching for many years as a means of structuring, delivering, and accessing content and activities. The pandemic has highlighted the benefits that could be found in flexible learning. However, as we have capitalised upon the opportunities afforded through our current digital infrastructure, significant limitations and gaps have also been highlighted. A world-class digital infrastructure, both in terms of tools and support, will be essential to our future success in teaching, learning and the wider student experience. The Digital Learning Environment (DLE) includes the virtual learning environment (VLE) technology (web-based platforms that support teaching and learning), alongside the wide range of digital tools and applications required to support the teaching, learning and student experience. With our current VLE provider contract due for renewal and the imminent retirement of their current product ('Blackboard Learn') in favour of a more modern system ('Blackboard Ultra') this means there is no 'status quo' option, as whatever direction we decide to take, substantial effort in migrating to a new system will be required. Experiences of teaching and learning during the pandemic and the start of our university's journey towards more flexible and blended learning, combined with the practical necessity for a system migration makes this the ideal moment for a strategic review and renewal of our needs in terms of our DLE. We will also facilitate a group to develop a strategy for the future of student computing to explore models of learning and assessment using PCs and laptops (for example should we reduce the amount of student PCs on campus and replace with BYOD / giving each student a laptop?).

Aim: The DLE will provide information we can act upon through a suite of services and tools working together seamlessly to optimise student access and success.

### What we will achieve

In consultation with stakeholders we have identified the underlying principles any new DLE system should satisfy to enable everyone to be successful in their learning environment:

- **Consistency of Approach**  
This requires suitable course structure templates and processes that provide a more consistent learning journey, reinforce effective practice and reflect the University's principles of curriculum design; automation of common TLSE processes; and the availability of a core set of easy-to-use tools with appropriate support and training whilst ensuring futureproofing with clearly defined and simplified processes for requesting, reviewing, procuring, and licensing new solutions.
- **Openness and Sharing**  
Which encourages communities of support for both academics and students; encourages wide access to all materials and courses, to enable re-use and re-purpose of existing materials and academic access to other programmes; supports easier access to our DLE for all learners and staff.
- **Connected and Seamless Journeys**  
Which facilitates proactive not reactive behaviour; single sign on and integration with core journey platforms and software provides better user experience; facilitate "Single Point of Truth" (i.e., avoid entering same information independently in multiple places).
- **Accessibility**  
Ensuring accessibility is built into the basic fabric and design of our DLE.
- **Student Focus**  
Through facilitating the most effective engagement methods including feedback and feedforward; encouraging students to work together; enabling student input into the creation of learning content and the design and development of support structures.
- **Device Agnostic**

Which will ensure the DLE is usable by different users on multiple connected devices; it should also be futureproofed with the use of recognised/supported formats and platforms

- Resilience  
Core platforms must be robust with downtime kept to a minimum; consistent, transparent and highly responsive support processes should be in place.

#### How we will achieve it

Following extensive consultation, feedback gathering and reflection including specific student and staff focus groups to identify the above principles, a series of recommendations will be produced. Within the recommendations will be a list of product areas that need solutions and potential agile methodology approaches based around the principles to identify and release components of the DLE. Any considerations will explore potential bespoke solutions in comparison to something closer to off-the-shelf, taking into consideration the relative costs (both financial and in terms of IT Services manpower and expertise), alongside process, licencing and support.

## D2: A University-wide Digital Learning Service

### Why - what do we want to achieve?

Much of the flexibility we will use to meet the future demands of Higher Education comes from a 'design and delivery by team', a 'flexible first' mindset, and the use of digital tools to create resources that can be re-used and re-mixed for flexible delivery. This is not our current way of thinking, and while the shift will require staff with teaching responsibilities to have core digital skills, there are many other aspects best delivered by skilled specialists. The Digital Learning Service (DLS) will provide front-line support to colleagues for their core activities, and specialist design and development services to help create high-quality content and courses reflecting Manchester's teaching and learning ambitions in all modes of delivery. The focus of the DLS will be to enable subject-experts to focus on being subject-experts, with professional support (especially in the design stage) from skilled instructional/learning designers, multimedia creators, digital technology innovators and so forth.

Aim: the DLS becomes an integral partner in teaching-and-learning design, delivery, quality assurance and enhancement that all subject-experts collaborate with by default, not a bolt-on accessed by a few and/or reactively. The quality of digital learning services becomes recognised as best-in-class by making the most of and recognising and rewarding the value of every contributor's different skills and development goals and result in a measurably better and more consistent experience for students and staff.

### What will we achieve

We will create a staff-facing university-wide service that combines the strengths of the existing eLearning teams operating in faculties, the Library and the Education Development Team within Student and Academic Services. The service will cater for staff that want to develop advanced digital learning skills and/or enhance their understanding of digital/online pedagogy themselves, provide services for the creation and refinement of digital resources, and support those in need of urgent trouble-shooting support or advice. It will flex, adapt and evolve to support our Flexible Learning Strategy as our delivery of teaching and learning responds to the future needs of our students. The service will include:

- Front-line eLearning support; rapid help with quick-fix problems or providing immediate support/advice by phone / video call / online-chat as appropriate.
- 'At-elbow' support and training.
- A catalogue of bookable services with defined expectations and agreed service levels. These will include instructional design; asset and multi-media creation; video / audio recording and editing and others.
- Coordination of the procurement of digital tools and resources to evolve our Digital Learning Environment.
- Assessment design and build and support for the delivery of assessment.
- Instructional design to support the creation or review of a course unit or programme (e.g., initial consultation, instructional design, creation of resources, booking of video suites, project oversight and administration, etc).
- An effective interface with ITS and Media Services to develop strategy, manage resources, maximise capacity and increase capability.
- Online resources and sharing of practice to disseminate effective practice.

### How we will achieve it

The DLS will operate as a virtual organisation: a virtual layer of co-ordination superimposed on existing real organisational structures in the Faculties, Library and Student and Academic Services. It will be tasked with delivering both local and university-wide strategic priorities, balancing the inherent tensions, and exposing and managing resource implications. Leadership of the DLS's activities will include academic and PS representation from the participating components. Functions of virtual teams will align with those recognised in the broader industry to make recruitment easier and to provide better career mobility for staff. The DLS will continue to provide services through Faculties, the Library and the Education Development team linked to local objectives and will also draw upon relevant specialist skills from across the service to facilitate the delivery of cross-faculty and university-wide priorities. DLS specialists will also liaise with the Institute of Teaching and Learning

(ITL) to support academic development around digital pedagogies. Performance indicators for the DLS will be aligned with the overall goals for teaching, learning and student experience.

With minimum disruption and risk, this approach will create greater agility and scalability, more opportunities for cross-institutional working and wider opportunities for sharing effective practice while retaining local organisational structures to support Faculty specific priorities and local 'friendly faces' valued by service users. It will allow us to be more agile in using resources where they are needed, to scale according to our ambition and to evolve in a managed way from our current model towards a more flexible one.

## D3: Digital skills and literacy support

### Why – what do we want to achieve?

*Our Future* strategy calls for both students and staff to develop and embrace digital capabilities. As the Senate-endorsed *First Steps to Flexible* paper recognised, providing the support needed to enable our digital development as [individuals](#) and as an [institution](#) is critical for the success of this strategy, our people and our University. This will be addressed by combining personalised opportunities, so the capabilities developed are relevant for individuals - students and staff - and for Programmes of study, with the oversight and development of an embedded, institutional approach.

### Aim:

- Students to be supported and encouraged to develop the digital capabilities necessary to prepare them for their University studies and the workplaces beyond. Students are empowered to take ownership of the capabilities they develop through curricular and extracurricular activities and are able to showcase them to potential employers.
- Staff to be supported and encouraged to develop, maintain and enhance digital capabilities relevant to their roles. Support and development opportunities are clearly signposted and available from induction, enabling and enhancing development and cultivating confidence.
- Across our university digital capabilities need to be integrated and promoted in our culture and practices. Expectations around digital capabilities are transparent and shared pre-induction (in course materials / marketing for students and job adverts for staff), at inductions and throughout their studies / role. A shared language around digital capabilities raises awareness and fosters understanding and effective practice is shared, recognised and celebrated.

### What will we achieve

We will collaborate with colleagues and students across the University to implement pathways that enable their digital development. Work will be focused around the following 5 themes, aimed at: Raising awareness; Supporting & Empowering; Promoting & Recognising; Embedding and Evaluating.

- We will raise awareness & support transitions to establish a shared language and expectations around digital skills development  
Pre-arrival, students and staff will be able to see how they will develop their digital skills during their time at Manchester and signposted opportunities will help them to prepare. Staff will additionally understand the University's expectations around the digital capabilities required for their role. At induction, students and staff will be supported to understand their digital practice and start planning their development through the use of the [Jisc Discovery tool](#), already implemented through FLP. Students preparing for graduation and recent alumni<sup>4</sup> will be supported to consolidate and showcase their digital skills to potential employers.
- We will support & empower  
Support will be accessible and clearly signposted. Staff will be supported to embed digital capabilities within curriculum design, development and redevelopment. As students progress through their Programmes of study, they will be supported to recognise and take ownership of their digital development.
- We will promote development opportunities & provide recognition  
Development opportunities will be championed across UoM. Digital development and progression will be recognised for students and staff and effective practice will be celebrated. Extracurricular opportunities will provide further spaces for students to explore and enhance their digital skills and development. Opportunities for staff to further develop their capabilities will be embedded throughout staff development. Peer support will be scaffolded.
- We will embed support for digital capabilities as a matter of principle

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<sup>4</sup> Alumni are supported for up to 2 years post-graduation by The Careers' Service

Recognising and reflecting our commitment to digital development, we will embed support for digital capabilities in our Programmes, culture and practices.

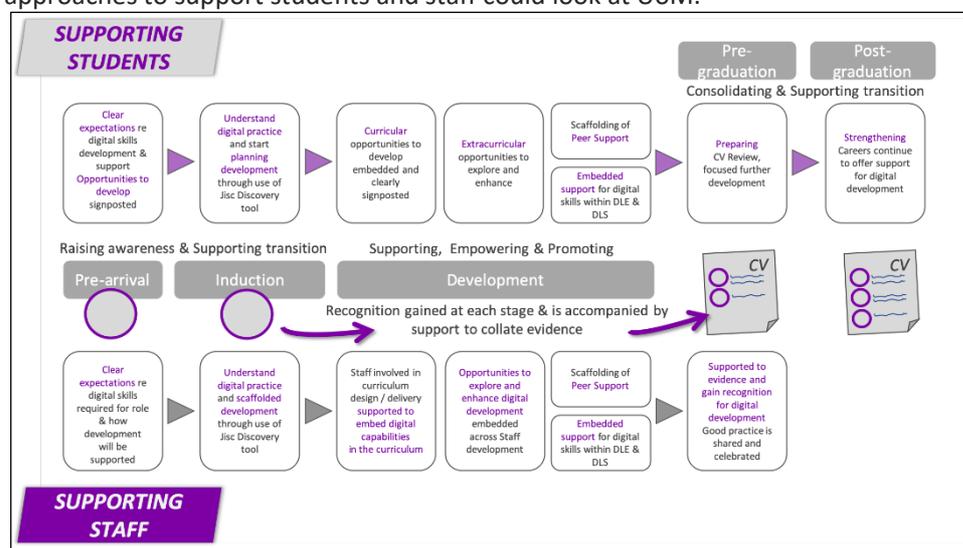
- We will evaluate  
In order to improve as individuals, as an Institution for our TLSE & our future.

How we will achieve it

By adopting Jisc's Building Digital Capability Framework, further contextualising as appropriate for our University / Faculties / Schools / Programmes, to enable a common language around digital capabilities that is widely used within UK Higher Education. The language of the Framework is also used by The Jisc Discovery tool. The tool, introduced at UoM for students and staff by the FLP, is a key enabler, raising awareness around digital capabilities, promoting understanding and supporting development.

### Through work aligned to the five enabling themes

The Jisc Discovery tool will be embedded in Inductions, Programmes and staff development opportunities, introducing students and staff to digital capabilities on arrival and providing them with further opportunities to reflect on progress and evidence their development. The below figure illustrates how the outlined approaches to support students and staff could look at UoM.



Descriptions of what and how digital capabilities will be developed during courses will be incorporated into promotional materials for potential students and into job descriptions for staff, setting clear expectations around digital capabilities at UoM. Support for digital capabilities will be clearly signposted, inclusive and accessible at every point of the students' journeys and throughout staff careers; embedded within the DLE and augmented through the DLS. Language will be shared with students about the digital capabilities they are developing through their learning, empowering them to communicate and evidence their capabilities to potential employers.

Effective practice will be easily shared and accessed and opportunities for students and staff to develop digital capabilities will be championed throughout UoM by FLP, ITL, SL&OD, the Faculties, The Library, Student Support and the University Peer-Support Network.

Students and staff will have the opportunity to discuss their digital development with their Academic Advisors and Line Managers, respectively. Time will be included within staff workload allocation to enable engagement with development activities. Pathways that recognise digital development will be created for students and staff and effective practice will be celebrated.

Digital capabilities underpin curriculum development and delivery and will be integrated into our educational development practices and processes. They will be embedded in curriculum design, represented in

programme specifications and evaluations and reviewed in our annual processes, e.g., APRs, SEAPs (or equivalents).

In order to improve, as individuals and as an Institution, we need to benchmark, evaluate and further develop. The anonymised data from the Jisc Discovery tool will be fed back to Faculties / Schools / Programmes / Staff development to inform further support provision. At present we do not have a systematic and standardised approach to evaluating the student and staff 'digital experience' at UoM, the Jisc Digital Experience Insights surveys will be implemented to address this gap and identify priorities for future development.

## E1: Flexible Pathways / Lifelong Learning

### Why – what do we want to achieve?

*Our Future* strategy calls for a focus on developing opportunities for both lifelong and flexible learning. We will aim to increase the employability of our students but also prepare them with the right skills and mindsets for an increasingly digital world. Post-pandemic the government has laid out its plans to *Build Back Better* (1), with improving skills central to economic recovery. The Lifetime Skills Guarantee, pledges to provide access to the education and training that people need throughout their lifetime. At the heart of these plans are improved access to education and training for all, a shift towards technical provision and a strong focus on skills-based education and training, driven by employer demand. We have already seen the introduction of Skills Bootcamps (2), higher technical qualifications and employer-focussed pivots to the apprenticeship levy, allowing large employers to transfer up to 25% of their levy contribution to small or medium sized businesses.

The [UK skills mismatch in 2030 report](#) (3) led by the industrial research council highlighted that digital, senior management, STEM and teaching and education will be key areas where workers will be under skilled by 2030. The [Greater Manchester Local Skills Report and Labour Market Plan \(2021\)](#) (4) identified that mid-higher level digital skills will help residents to progress in their careers and address the shortage of digitally skilled talent experienced by many businesses. Several cross-cutting skill sets were identified that would help to address productivity and skill shortages in the GM region including: software and programming, computer and networking support, data analysis, digital design, CRM, digital marketing and machining & manufacturing technology. Programming and software development skills feature most commonly in job vacancies across the GM economy. These economic and employer-driven demands on skills require agile responses and flexible solutions to address them and will place greater emphasis on re-training and up-skilling the current workforce. Access to lifelong learning will be enabled over the next few years by the government's introduction of the lifelong loan entitlement in 2025, allowing learners to apply for a loan of up to 4 years of modular study (at levels 2-6), accessed via an account at any point during their lifetime.

### What we will achieve

Online and blended education presents a significant opportunity to meet the demands of lifelong learners by providing flexible programmes that can fit around work, family and personal commitments, allowing study at any time and importantly, at their own pace. At the same time, we must be aware that flexible learning may privilege some over others and remain critically reflective of this reality as we build and grow. Manchester's flexible educational pathways must accommodate wide-ranging needs from addressing our civic university commitments in the local Greater Manchester area by improving access to higher education, to working with strategic business partners to develop bespoke educational programmes for their employees. Manchester has vast experience in the development and delivery of both fully online and short courses (UCIL, UMW, Executive Education in Alliance Manchester Business School). We will harness this wealth of educational expertise to provide employers and learners the flexibility to co-develop with us, personalised (at the individual learner or business level) programmes of education, curated from subjects taught across the institution. We will build the capability to curate a flexible portfolio of credit and non-credit CPD via our digital learning environments, enabling rapid responses to employers' education and training needs paired with institutional-wide re-use and re-purposing of educational materials in a way never done before at Manchester and will help to expand our professional learning portfolio and generate revenue for the university.

### How we will achieve it

To ensure lifelong learning is fit-for-purpose employers need to be front and centre in both the design and delivery aspects of any education or training. We will build on the success of funded pilot programmes such as the [Agile Software Development Course](#) developed at Manchester in collaboration with IBM, Fuzzylabs and the Start-up Factory. We will co-create programmes with strategic business partners, employers in the Greater Manchester region and key stakeholders such as the NHS or the Turing Institute, developing flexible education and training to address current, emerging and future skills shortages.

To accommodate the diverse needs of lifelong learners we recognise that no one size will fit all, and individual learner's needs will change as they progress through their career and personal life as will employer's needs in response to the economy. Motivations for employers and employees may differ, as will those new to higher

education versus those experienced in study. In the [employer skills survey in 2019](#) (5) identified inability to spare staff time as a key consideration, this is where more flexible online and blended programmes may help those in full-time work. The flexible learning programme needs to carefully consider each of these needs and design and develop our provision accordingly, we outline how we will do this in more detail below.

- **Improving access to higher education**  
To improve access to all learners to a Manchester education we will expand our attractive portfolio of education delivered via Massive Online Open Courses. We aim to retain learners through-out their lifetime by leveraging the large-scale marketing power and reach of MOOC provision and bring learners back to study at Manchester as their personal circumstances and skills needs change throughout their careers. We will develop any MOOC provision to also link to our strategic flexible learning programmes so that they will act as lead generation and marketing tool to our credit-bearing programmes.
- **Apprenticeships**  
Apprenticeships represent an opportunity to diversify our funding streams, with key investment by the government there is a strong trajectory to continue with this approach. If the University does not look to diversify its income streams, we risk losing current income to other institutions that have pivoted to this delivery approach. An important driver for apprenticeships is to improve access and social mobility within local communities and widen access to training and education. From a learner-centric perspective they tend to promote higher retention than typical standard degrees and thereby provide the apprentice with much higher chances of employability and better staff retention rates for employers. Investment in apprenticeship partnerships with FE colleges in the region will address issues related to social mobility and access may help to meet the needs of Greater Manchester by addressing known skills shortages.
- **Our place in the Greater Manchester Ecosystem**  
We will work in partnership with key local employers to understand where the current skills shortages are and where level 6 and 7 apprenticeships provision may address these requirements. We will work with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and regional businesses to develop pilot programmes for delivery. For any new partnerships, the relationship between training provider and employer needs to be collaborative and flexible to work in concert to deliver the relevant apprenticeship standard. We will work to continue to support current pilot programmes such as the senior leader standard and postgraduate diploma offered by the Manchester Alliance Business School <https://www.alliancembs.manchester.ac.uk/study/apprenticeships/> and other apprenticeship opportunities being explored at UoM including the Level 7 Deaf Education PG Diploma. We can gain added value here by building strong employer/provider partnerships leading to opportunities for knowledge exchange and research collaborations. Focussing on apprenticeships that will retrain or upskill the current workforce will remove the barriers of salary/overhead costs that employers face when taking on new apprentices [Grant Thornton mid-market use of apprenticeships](#). Other benefits to the employers will include increased job satisfaction and better retention rates. From a learner-centric perspective apprenticeships present a lower risk alternative to self-funding with more of a guaranteed prospect of long-term employment, through the networks created.

### **Professional Learning**

- **Micro-credentials**  
Through existing strategic links via our business engagement teams we will build much closer collaborative partnerships with business to develop education and training. We will leverage added value from the wealth of blended learning that Manchester has (eg UCIL and UMW), by developing a portfolio of micro-credential courses (5-10 credits), that can be stacked together to form larger qualifications. These short courses will also act as marketing leads to larger blended and fully online programmes, thereby building a pipeline from MOOC, to micro-credentials to full level 6 or 7 degrees.
- **Employer-led Partnerships**  
We will work in partnership with businesses and the business engagement team to develop bespoke non-credit bearing CPD, where appropriate and other provision does not meet their needs. Early

indicators illustrate these are likely to be areas such as digital skills, data science, artificial intelligence Real Estate, Educational Leadership.

Note to Senate members: we need to add information here on our transnational education offering (current UMW).

### D3: Pilots

Note to Senate members: We need to write up some of the pilots we are currently (opportunistically) supporting and outline the process for a 'call for pilots'. Any ideas you have on this process please add them!

### D4: Centre for Flexible Learning

To choreograph all of this we'll establish a Centre for Flexible Learning. It will be responsible for strategy beyond FLP, keeping on top of national and global policy. It'll be the home for UCIL and transnational education (UMW) and the place we go when we have ideas for new offerings, and it'll also be the place that scans the horizon for new opportunities and to commission courses as demand arises. Whether this is a virtual organisation or one that has a physical space (or a bit of both) will be clearer in a few weeks when we've worked through the recommendations from the workshops, and the space-on-campus workshops in particular.

### D5: Space on Campus

#### Why – what do we want to achieve?

Our University is committed to providing an outstanding campus-based learning community, alongside exploring how we can expand our off-campus study options, offering new courses in innovative ways. Within this campus-based context, the challenge for academics and those who support them is to provide students with a learning environment that is stimulating, supportive, responsive and/or flexible. Where technology is used to achieve this, we first need to address the concerns expressed by academics and students. We also need to examine the assumption that learners are sufficiently skilled to access programmes and services and that they have the capacity to learn through technology-based learning approaches.

Aim: To provide pilot spaces in which we can empower staff and students to engage with flexible and technology-enhanced educational experiences to develop and apply new methods of teaching and learning, as well as promoting lifelong learning.

#### What we will achieve

We will establish space on campus to give colleagues and students the opportunity to familiarise themselves with new technologies. With the right funding in place, we want to expand this concept to create a space where staff and students can co-create new ways of teaching and learning, build their digital capabilities, identify, and address any accessibility issues, and offer a dedicated environment to support lifelong learning. At the heart of the design is co-creation with staff and students. We will trial new approaches to teaching and learning, working with employers and industry leaders, to develop the curricula of the future, enabling active, experiential, and problem-based learning, and facilitating student engagement. This will help students to develop new skills and confidence, learn how to apply knowledge, and has the potential to guide their career decisions and increase employability. With a year-on-year increase of students coming to our University to study STEMM subjects many spaces could specifically support STEMM and laboratory-based subjects. A further focus is on graduate employability and expanding course models that increase student choice, such as flexible, part-time, stackable and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses.

We also aim to help tackle some of the issues presented by digital poverty, a key barrier to digital uptake. This can be a lack of digital literacy and access to technology, or the knowledge, skills, and confidence to use the technology and devices available. In this space, academics and staff will be supported in trialling new approaches, allowing them to build confidence in engaging with new technologies, as well as gaining a better understanding of which available technologies and tools can add real value to their teaching.

#### How we will achieve it

We will make space available to try out different approaches to learning. Often the first time an academic sees the technology available to them in the teaching rooms is when they are ready to give their first lecture. An Emulated Lecture Theatre and Teaching Space will allow staff to continually familiarise themselves with the technology set ups that appear in the lecture theatres and flat space teaching rooms across campus in a “safe” environment.

While students have grown up in an increasingly digital world, they do not necessarily have the skills or access to use different types of technology effectively in an educational setting. That’s why we have a responsibility to ensure students are getting the most from the technology that’s available to them. We need space where staff and students can familiarise themselves with new or emerging technologies that can enhance the teaching and learning experience.

The trend in the Higher Education sector is towards more intentionally designed physical spaces and learning opportunities for our students. The ultimate goal is to provide learning environments that encourage creative, active, and hands-on learning experiences that will prepare students to be thinkers, collaborators, innovators, and problem-solvers now and in the future. These environments do not necessarily need the latest technology. The space could provide an invisible technology zone that is flexible and can be easily adjusted to support learning activities, allowing for movement, hands-on exploring, curriculum integration, as well as supporting social interaction and development. Other spaces could include recording suites to enable staff and students to capture high-quality materials, including teaching materials, vlogs, and audio, video theatre and editing suite to enable staff and students to produce high-quality video and a VR/Visualisation suite for virtual and augmented reality and immersive learning experiences.