Manchester Metropolitan University | Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre

Final Evaluation

Report 5: Final Evaluation And Assessment – Graduates For A Greater Manchester (OfS Local Challenge Fund Project)

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Prepared By The Decent Work And Productivity Research Centre Research And Evaluation Team

AUTHORS: FIONA CHRISTIE, CATRINA PAGE, ORESTIS PAPADOPOULOS, BEN LUPTON

Graduates for a Greater Manchester

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Graduates for a Greater Manchester project management team, Steering Group, sub-project teams, project partners and students who have contributed data and insights that are included in this report.

List of abbreviations

CRAC .....Careers Research and Advisory Centre

GfGM.....Graduates for a Greater Manchester

OfS .....Office for Students

UoM .....University of Manchester

Man Met Uni .Manchester Metropolitan University

T and CD .....Tech and Creative Digital

Executive Summary

Graduates for a Greater Manchester (GfGM) was a three-year project led by Manchester Metropolitan University Careers Service (in partnership with University of Manchester Careers Service) - one of sixteen funded by the OfS Local Challenge Fund to tackle employability support for 'local' students. It sought to develop tech and creative digital skills amongst student participants, and opportunities for them to apply skills and gain recognition for their development, with a view to enhanced employment outcomes. It also sought to develop greater connectivity between participating Universities and local tech and creative digital SME networks and industry/sector bodies in the city region.

The project was delivered via two sub-projects, 'RISE Digital' at Manchester Metropolitan University (Man Met Uni) and the 'Digital Capabilities and Careers Self-Efficacy' sub-project at the University of Manchester (UoM). RISE Digital was one stream within a large-scale University wide programme to enable students to claim academic credit for traditionally extra-curricular activity including one off events, self-directed online courses, internships, skill development courses and more. Students undertook a range of activities with partner organisations in the local tech, creative and digital sectors. The UoM sub-project involved the enhancement of two academic modules to build digital skills and confidence for students on the BSc Psychology programme. Students either completed a work placement unit or a career management unit as part of their second year of study.

The leadership of the project was supported by a steering group comprising stakeholders from within the Universities and a range of experts from the local businesses and institutions with an interest in the delivery and outcomes of GfGM. Evaluation was coordinated by an independent team of researchers from the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre at Man Met Uni, who drew together evaluation activities from the project management and delivery teams, OfS evaluation data, and data from their own evaluation and research activities to produce this report.

The project design and evaluation were underpinned by a Theory of Change approach, which addressed issues of appropriateness, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. The key outcomes in relation to each aspect are summarised here.

Appropriateness

The conception and design of the project was seen as having several strengths:

- The collaboration between two Universities allowed for diversity in delivery, supported their joint civic mission, and enabled learning and partnership across campuses.
- External partners and stakeholders were heavily involved in the design and delivery, providing expertise, and developing relationships.
- The project's remit in relation to particular skills and industries enabled it to focus resources and expertise and build deep collaboration. The overarching involvement of two careers services enabled both project management and careers expertise to be deployed in enhancing design and delivery.
- The fact that both sub-projects reached out to students who were not already interested in T and CD skills or careers, and was pitched appropriately to their needs, was seen a strong positive feature by stakeholders.
- The engagement of an independent research and evaluation team was seen as enriching the range of evaluation activities and enhanced their coordination. It contributed to enabling the project to address wider labour market/career development/employability agendas.

There were some features of the original design where appropriateness was perhaps less clear cut:

- There is some room for interpretation around the meaning of 'Technical and Creative Digital' (the focus of the project) and understanding among students about skills and careers involved in that sector/roles was not always strong. Although paired in the project 'tech digital' and 'creative digital' are distinct from one another in many ways.
- The project interventions were seen by stakeholders as more appropriate for developing some skills than others. It was recognised by partners that some more complex technical skills required longer to develop than was possible given the timescales of the interventions.
- There was a developing recognition among stakeholders that a focus on T and CD skills within the T and CD sector/roles was perhaps overly narrow, and that development of these skills in other sectors and roles is also of importance.
- There was a growing recognition among stakeholders that developing digital confidence is important alongside developing digital skills, and that it is important to develop such skills alongside other generic employability skills that employers value.
- There is a recognition that employment outcomes for participants are difficult to demonstrate in the timescales of the project/evaluation and that more nuanced and longer term measures are needed to assess impact.

Efficiency

There is strong evidence that the project was delivered efficiently:

- The project was delivered on time and within budget.
- Both sub-projects considerably exceeded their target number for participants, and impacted large numbers of students, almost 750 at University of Manchester and over 2000 at Man Met Uni, where there were over 21,000 hours of skills training delivered and over 35,000 hours of project and placement work.
- The scale of delivery meant that costs per engagement were low, ranging between £25 and £75 per student.
- Senior stakeholders reflected positively on the governance and project management, in particular reflecting on the positive input of external stakeholders/partners and the flexible approach and helpful guidance from the funder (OfS).
- These management and governance strengths were seen as key in enabling the project to pivot quickly and effectively to online delivery during the Covid and ensuring that the project met employer and industry needs.

Effectiveness and impact

There was evidence from several sources to indicate the effectiveness and impact of the project:

- Data from the sub projects indicated that –

» More than 400 students at Man Met Uni gained a relevant external qualification/ accreditation and over a 1000 gained academic or practice credits from the University
» At the University of Manchester all students on the 'Building Confidence' module in each year of the project went on to complete career enhancing behaviours. The vast majority of participating students went on to complete one or two career enhancing behaviours in their final year.

- Data from the UoM career efficacy survey showed that perceptions of career self-efficacy, digital capabilities and confidence all improved following participation in the project. Improvements were stronger among 'widening participation' students.

- Data from the national CRAC survey, which included Man Met Uni students indicated that:

» Many students indicated that relevant skills had improved because of the project (more so than the national average for equivalent projects).
» There were high levels of confidence among participants in getting the type of job that they wanted, and this was overwhelmingly attributed to participation in the project.
» There was a slight shift towards greater interest in careers in the T and CD sectors.

- Data from qualitative interviews/focus groups with Man Met Uni participants by the evaluation team suggested:

» Higher levels of confidence in

* Communicating and networking.
* In prospects of securing a job requiring digital skills.

» Greater awareness of, and interest in, T and CD roles.
» Reports of considerable improvements in career self-efficacy.
» Reports of increased confidence and career self-efficacy were stronger than those relating to increases in digital skills.

- Evaluative work with partners indicated

» An increasing perception of positive and lasting partnerships between the Universities and external stakeholders.
» Recognition of a shared responsibility to develop student skills and address skills gaps.
» Partners involved in RISE Digital were overwhelmingly supportive of the sub-project as a vehicle for raising awareness of the sector and gaining relevant skills, but also as an opportunity for employers to address skills gaps and connect with potential recruits.
» Overall partners viewed the project as effective in supporting the development of varied employability skills (highlighted as important alongside digital skills), digital literacy, and some specific T and CD sector skills (e.g., app development, photography, digital marketing). This range of skills were seen as valuable across all industry sectors not just the T and CD sectors.

Sustainability

There were several reflections from the project pertaining to the sustainability of the initiative

- Collaboration between Universities, and with external partners, provides a sound basis for sustainability.

- An issue of focus emerged during the project, between providing 'high end' technical skills for potential entrants to the T and CD sector/ roles, and more fundamental digital skills for a broader group of students who may enter non specialist roles.

- There were also questions emerging around the emphasis on developing specific skills and developing confidence and self-efficacy; and the need to develop digital skills alongside a broader suite of employability skills.

- Delivery partners were candid about the limited potential of short intensive learning experiences to develop complex skill sets, though confident that such interventions would stimulate interest and further development.
- Stakeholders highlight that a lack of clarity around, and knowledge of, T and CD roles (particularly new and emerging roles) may deter students from entering the field. There were also concerns that there may be barriers to inclusivity. Projects such as GfGM have potential to play a key role in addressing these issues.
- Partners and stakeholders recognised the importance of work experience, and the opportunity to develop 'digital artefacts', for students seeking to enter the sectors, but also the barriers to availability of such experience, particular for some students.
- It was recognised in relation to both Man Met Uni and UoM projects that learning, and engagement were to a great extent self-perpetuating. An important challenge, therefore, seems to be around encouraging students to make their first engagement.
- The relatively short timescale of the project meant it was not possible to capture employment outcomes through the national Graduate Outcomes survey. With hindsight, there is recognition that it may have been beneficial to have developed alternative measures to track student employment outcomes.
- The need to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic created an enormous interest in digital skills that may not be so easy to replicate in more 'normal' times. Adapting delivery of such projects to a new context of both in-person and virtual learning will require continuing innovation.

Lessons for future policy and practice

Here we consider the implications of the learning from the project for future interventions and initiatives in this field for various stakeholders;

For Educators

- Continue to offer short, intensive, experiences for students, as there is good evidence for their impact both academically and professionally, both in developing skills, enhancing confidence, and promoting awareness of the sector.
- Consider ways (working with partners) in which skills gaps which were not addressed (e.g., data analysis, user experience/UX, and a range of' higher-end' level digital skills) might be addressed in future, while also providing foundational digital skills for those seeking to enter non-specialist roles.
- Explore ways to develop digital skills alongside more general employability skills.
- Further develop opportunities for work experience and creation of digital artefacts.
- Work with employers and other stakeholders to develop a long-term and comprehensive plan to address skills shortages in advanced digital skills.

For Careers Professionals

- Raise awareness of the range of digital roles and opportunities in the local labour market.
- Explore ways of raising students' level of understanding of the range and nature of 'digital skills' required in the modern workplace.
- Continue to communicate the benefits to students, including 'non-cognate' students, of engaging with digital skills development, and in general of engaging with more than one activity.
- Work with industry and professional partners to develop available careers guidance and advice in order to address the lack of understanding of T and CD careers among many students, and the changing nature of roles and skill requirements. This would include a focus on atypical forms of work (e.g. platform working).

- Consider ways of broadening the reach of activities and other ways of addressing barriers/perceived barriers to particular types of T and CD work for particular demographics of students.

For Employers and Sector Partners

- Further develop partnership working with education providers to influence skills supply and to communicate skills needs.
- Promote benefits of such engagement more widely in the sector, for example in terms of potential for employers to influence skills provision and to address recruitment issues.
- Work with educational providers to develop a long-term and comprehensive plan to address skills shortages in advanced digital skills.
- Consider the role of employers in fostering a functioning skills eco-system, for example in offering 'good work', promoting diversity and inclusion, and where possible offering development and career progression.

For Funders and Project Managers

- Consider further funding of initiatives to raise digital skills, interest and awareness.
- Be aware that projects like GfGM, whilst demonstrating a range of positive outcomes, are unlikely on their own to address local skills shortages.
- Foster partnerships both between Universities and employers and other stakeholders as there are a range of demonstrable benefits.
- Include specialist independent research and evaluation into projects to support learning and understanding of wider context.
- Find ways to capture employment outcome measures, where national measures are not available.
- Find ways to capture consistent demographic monitoring data across sub-projects.

Purpose of this report

This final report is the fifth report written by the Decent Work and Productivity Research team and weaves data from a range of sources to make a final assessment and evaluation of the project. It aims to create a summary of value to the Steering group members and the communities they represent. It is written for a wider public audience too who are unfamiliar with project details but are interested in learning from how the project was delivered and what it achieved.

1. About the project

1.1. Introduction

Graduates for a Greater Manchester (GfGM) was a three-year project funded by the OfS Local Challenge Fund. The priority of this national OfS fund was to tackle employability support for 'local' students. The successful Greater Manchester bid was one of sixteen projects to be funded nationally. The project was led by Manchester Metropolitan University's Careers Service and the University of Manchester Careers Service acted as a Contributing HE partner and provider. Much of the project's eventual life span coincided with the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022) which altered how the project was delivered, albeit it is one of very few of the sixteen national projects that was able to keep going despite the pandemic. Originally conceived in 2018 the original project proposal explicitly sought to:

> improve the employability of disadvantaged students studying at Manchester Met and UoM, and domiciled in the Greater Manchester city-region (GM), by delivering intensive aspiration-raising and skills development interventions in partnership with local SMEs, predominantly in the creative, digital industries[1]

In response to OfS guidance, a revision to the original bid focussed on the scaling up and growth of two pilot projects at both institutions - namely Enhanced Third Term (later to be re-branded RISE) at Manchester Metropolitan University (Man Met Uni) and the Careers Self-Efficacy programme at the University of Manchester (UoM). In the revision, both universities expressed the aim to target local home-domiciled students; particularly those groups were known to have differential outcomes. The composition of Man Met Uni's student population meant it was well-placed to attract local students to RISE activities. Similarly, UoM's focus on Psychology as a discipline was appropriate as that subject attracts higher than average number of local students at UoM. Both sub-projects sought to utilise new curriculum spaces to benefit students but also open

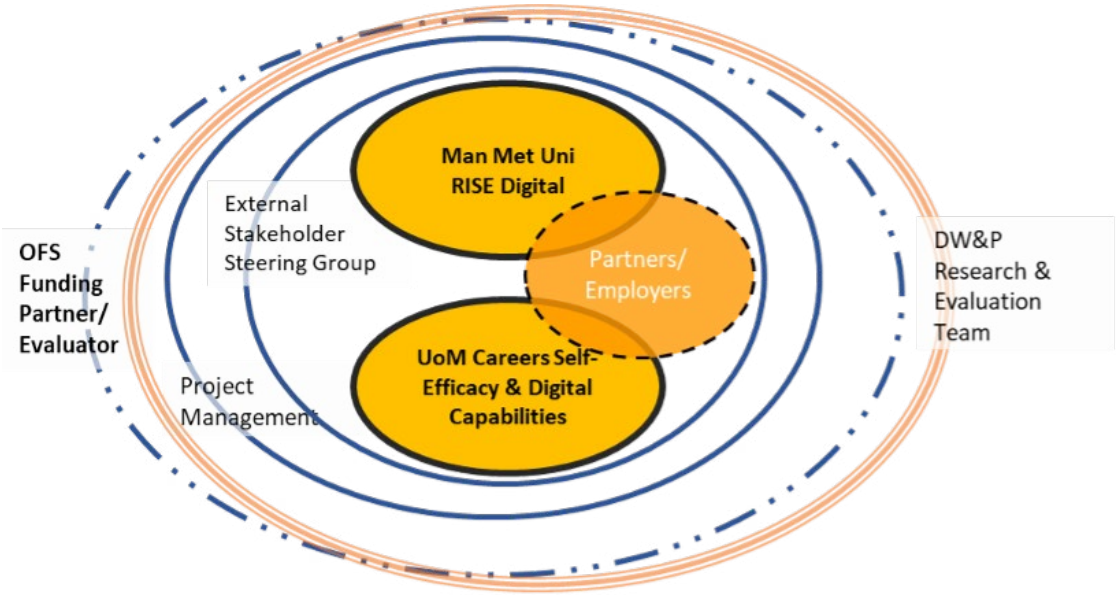
[1] source - original project bid document, 2018

better two-way interaction between regional stakeholders, and between the two universities. The broader contextual focus of both sub-projects was tech and creative digital industries (T and CD) and skills.

At a high level, both projects in different ways aimed to create measurable development of tech and creative digital skills amongst student participants; increased opportunity to apply such skills in the workplace and the wider community; achieve recognition of activities through course credits and certificated CV-enhancing possibilities; and importantly, to develop greater connectivity with local tech and creative digital SME networks and industry/sector bodies in the city region.

Effective partnership was at the heart of the project with two universities working alongside city policy makers and sector representatives in both the planning and design of activities. Both sub-projects also sat within their own supporting local infrastructure, which helped them to continue when other OfS-funded projects could not. At Man Met Uni, what became known as the OfS-funded 'RISE Digital' project was one stream of skills development activity within a well-supported, popular, and expanding university-wide co-curricular provision. At UoM, what became known as the 'Career Self-Efficacy and Digital Capabilities' project benefitted from being embedded within the Psychology degree, with OfS-funding contributing to effective collaboration between the academic department and Careers Service. Figure 1 outlines key high-level elements of the project.

Figure 1 Key elements of Graduates for a Greater Manchester project



Over time, the project emphasis in promotional activity has been on digital skills for employability, highlighting the importance of reaching students from disciplines not associated with tech and creative digital skills and industries. These aspects have been foregrounded rather than its original aim to support local 'disadvantaged students'. This has been a pragmatic development and reflects the difficulties of explicitly targeting specific groups of students. Both sub-projects designed activities that would benefit such students but not be exclusive to them. Information was collected to capture the proportion of 'local' students who participated.

1.2. Rationale for the project – the importance of tech and creative digital skills

A uniting priority of the project on inception was the digital skills development of students. Headline aims were to equip students better for labour market demands and to help the pipeline of talent into the tech and creative digital industries. The successful bid to the OfS was able to highlight how a focus on tech and creative digital skills aligned with what city policymakers and sector representatives were calling for. The Decent Work and Productivity Evaluation team were able to create additional insights on the city region labour market context in two initial reports[2][3], which supported the project's rationale.

The Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy (2019)[4] built on the findings of the Greater Manchester Independent Prosperity Review's (2018)[5] and its detailed analysis of the local economy and the social and environmental challenges. In the Local Industrial Strategy, strong opportunities for growth are identified as digital and creative media, health innovation, clean growth and advanced materials and manufacturing. All these broadly align with the 'Graduates for a Greater Manchester' project's focus on tech and creative digital sectors. The Prosperity Review authors also identified a misalignment between learning provision and sector requirements most clearly in Digital and Creative, and Business and Professional Services.

The Local Industrial Strategy responded to this with numerous policy aspirations regarding people and skills. A specific one is - 'a skills and work system that enables people to realise their potential, supports emerging industries and is responsive to employers'. Universities and the education they provide are part of this process of creating a skilled workforce and helping to ensure a skilled and qualified workforce, that can respond to high tech and digital needs. However, the Prosperity Review also highlighted that sometimes high skilled labour is under-utilised, and productivity is being significantly limited by low demand for skilled labour and poor skills utilisation by businesses and in the public sector. This feeds into a wider national debate about a traditional over-emphasis in policy on the supply of skills at the expense of demand. A recognition of the need for shared responsibility for skills development which balances supply and demand issues led to the partnership working that was integral to the GfGM project design through both planning through the Steering Group as well as design and delivery of activities.

Although less explicitly framed in the headline project rationale, equally important aims addressed wider issues of employability, career self-efficacy and confidence as a foundation for digital skills development. Career self-efficacy was included in the name of the UoM sub-project (drawing upon psychological theory) but was also relevant to the Man Met Uni's RISE Digital project, which was part of the larger university project which aimed to support all aspects of student and graduate employability.

1.3. About the stakeholders and student participants

Sub-project teams as well as the project management team collected monitoring data about student beneficiaries. Details of participation are included in section 3.4.

Regarding student beneficiaries, the target group at UoM was Psychology students in their second year of study. This group was specifically targeted due to weaker Graduate Outcomes, higher number of local students (compared to UoM average) and their potential untapped expertise to work in digital industries. The sub-project activities were embedded in the curriculum so were compulsory, albeit with some optionality of specific skills development activity.

In contrast at Man Met Uni, RISE Digital activities were optional and open to all students. Specific targeting of promotional activity was to students from subjects not aligned to tech and creative digital industries or skills. However, any student could apply and complete a RISE Digital activity. The expansion of RISE from original plan to be timed in the 'third term' (typically June) to occurring at any time during the year broadened the scope for participation.

[2] Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) REPORT 1: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': LABOUR MARKET TRENDS AND GRADUATE SKILLS IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

[3] Ball, C., Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) Report 2: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': PATTERNS OF GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

[4] GMCA. (2019). Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy. GMCA: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/economy/greater-manchesters-local-industrial-strategy/

[5] GMCA. (2018). Greater Manchester Evidence Review: The Greater Manchester Prosperity Review. GMCA: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1132/gm_prosperity_review_baseline_report___evidence_review___november_2018.pdf

In addition to student beneficiaries, project stakeholders included the project management team at Manchester Metropolitan University, sub-project leaders at both universities, city policymakers and sector representatives and specialist delivery partners (mainly from SMEs). The Steering Group membership included representatives from all of these. Table 1 provides details of the Steering Group membership.

Table 1: Steering Group membership

The Manchester Metropolitan University (Man Met Uni)	Lead HE Provider	Project Management team RISE Digital sub-project lead Decent Work and Productivity Evaluation team
The University of Manchester (UoM)	Contributing Partner and HE Provider	Careers Self-Efficacy and Digital Capabilities sub-project lead/s
Manchester Digital	Contributing Partner	Advisory role
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	Strategic Partner	Advisory role
Greater Manchester LEP / Skills Hub	Strategic Partner	Advisory role
Manchester City Council.	Strategic Partner	Advisory role
Sharp Futures	Strategic Partner	Advisory role/delivery partner (RISE Digital)
Manchester Met Students' Union	Strategic Partner	Advisory role
UoM Students' Union	Strategic Partner	Advisory role
JISC (formerly Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU))	Strategic Partner	Advisory role/ evaluation report author

At Man Met Uni, the RISE Digital sub-project enlisted numerous specialist tech and creative digital organisations as delivery partners to contribute to the provision of tech and creative digital skills development activities. The OfS funding gave the impetus to enlist local sector organisations to support skills development. This provided valuable mutual learning between universities and such partners about 'what works for effective learning.

2. About the evaluation

2.1. Introduction, Aims and Objectives

The evaluation sought to explore the appropriateness of project design, the effectiveness of project implementation, the efficiency of the project, its impact and future sustainability. These are core themes associated with any evaluative process[6]. A Theory of Change logic was developed by the project management team to guide the whole project, with differences for each sub-project (see section 2.2). The programme logic was developed in a participatory way in consultation with the OfS evaluator from CRAC, sub-project leaders and the Decent Work and Productivity (DW&P) Evaluation team.

Monitoring and evaluation data was collected by various parties. The project management team and sub-project leads collected a range of participation and outcomes data. The national OfS Evaluation team from CRAC undertook two surveys with students and the Decent Work and Productivity Evaluation team were responsible for formative and summative evaluation activities which addressed wider learning from the project.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data. Monitoring data collected by sub-projects and the project management team to review participation, completion and outcomes were generally quantitative, whereas the Decent Work and Productivity (DW&P) Evaluation team utilised qualitative methods through focus groups and interviews to get insights about impact from stakeholders. The DW&P team's qualitative work included interviews with RISE Digital delivery partners, students (a focus on distance travelled) and senior sub-project team leads and the project manager/director. Table 2 lists the reports done by the Evaluation team. These have been influential in writing this final report.

Table 2: DW&P Research and Evaluation team - Evaluation reports

Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) REPORT 1: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': LABOUR MARKET TRENDS AND GRADUATE SKILLS IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University
Ball, C., Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) REPORT 2: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': PATTERNS OF GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University
Christie, F., Papadopoulos, O. Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 3: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University
Christie, F, Page, C., Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 4: PARTNER PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University.

From the outset, the project management team wanted to create a legacy for the project through its evaluation via appropriate writing and publishing of reports. For example, in 2020, two reports were created and published by the DW&P Evaluation team which focused on tech and creative digital industries. The first report reviewed relevant academic and grey literature about labour market skills and trends[7]; the second report generated a new analysis of patterns of graduate employment[8]. These publications responded to the project's Theory of Change logic to be aligned to labour market needs.

In the development of the project's Theory of Change logic, the project management team recognised the challenge of measuring some of the outcomes from the project. Most specifically regarding the improvement of graduate outcomes. The length of time of the project meant that students would not have completed the official Graduate Outcomes Survey by project end. Hence it was decided to use other data to explore student intentions via the CRAC survey and focus groups with students.

[6] Markiewicz, A., & Patrick, I. (2015). Developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Sage Publications.

[7] Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) REPORT 1: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': LABOUR MARKET TRENDS AND GRADUATE SKILLS IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

[8] Ball, C., Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) Report 2: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': PATTERNS OF GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

2.2. Theory of Change and success criteria – the value played by these

In consultation with sub-project teams, the Steering Group, CRAC and the DW&P evaluation team, the project management team developed a Theory of Change model for the project (see appendix 1 and 2). Theory of Change is an established process which aims to make explicit the processes underway in a project exploring the relationship between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. A theory-driven approach has influenced all parties involved in monitoring and evaluation activity.

> A theory- based approach can be broadly understood as developing models of how a project works, and through the practice of evaluation, examining the viability of the model, including the level of appropriateness and accuracy... The evaluator is required to identify and understand the assumptions that underlie anticipated changes brought about by the project[9].

At project commencement after creation of a high-level Theory of Change model, the project management team developed success criteria (partially presented in appendix 3) which traced the relationship between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and linked this to evaluation methodology. A Theory of Change data table was created which mapped the Theory of Change model diagrams against success criteria and data for reporting (see appendix 4). At project end, a return to these success criteria is valuable in reflecting upon how and what has been achieved, recognising that unexpected outcomes are possible and may be as valuable if not more valuable to project stakeholders and beneficiaries. In this final assessment, we primarily focus on outputs and outcomes.

In the success criteria confirmed in 2019/2020, the proposed outputs of the sub-projects were as follows. Full details of proposed outputs, outcomes, evaluation methods and data to be used are in appendix 3.

Manchester Metropolitan University

- Improved alignment between the Third Term (re-branded RISE) Programme and the city-region.
- Improved connectivity between students and the city region.
- Improved recruitment to the T+CD component of the third term programme.
- Improved alignment to T+CD in non-feeder courses more broadly.
- Increased T+CD skills and competences to students from non-feeder courses.
- Increased external engagement with relevant sector partners.
- Increased distinctiveness of graduates, and growth of quality kitemarks associated with them.
- Integration of learning as a curricula, rather than extra-curricula, experience.
- Increase in students from non-feeder course progressing into the city regions T+CD employment market.

University of Manchester

- Assignments that directly develop and assess: digital skills and include reflection on digital competence and potential.
- Career Self Efficacy is significantly, positively correlated with 'career enhancing behaviours'.
- Increase in students with opting for and passing presentation/interview/and self-presentation assignments.

Inspired by the project's Theory of Change logic, this final assessment aims to provide answers to the following questions:

1. **Appropriateness** - To what extent was the design of the project suitable in meeting the needs of key stakeholders and beneficiaries?
2. **Effectiveness** - To what degree was the project implemented as intended? If it wasn't, why not? To what degree can the project be assessed as being of value to its key stakeholders and beneficiaries?
3. **Efficiency** - To what extent was the project implemented in an efficient manner?

[9] p.35. Markiewicz, A., & Patrick, I. (2015). Developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Sage Publications.

4. **Impact** - What results, expected and unexpected and direct and indirect were produced by the project?
5. **Sustainability** - To what degree was there an indication of ongoing benefits attributable to the project?

2.3. Wider learning

In addition to the outputs and outcomes that the project success criteria aimed for, the project management team and Steering Group were eager to allow for the evaluation of the project to generate unexpected insights. Project stakeholders were aware of the complex relationship between students, universities, and employers and that measuring numerically skills development activities of relevance to the tech and creative digital labour market could only be one part of the picture created by the project. For example, early on, it was clear that both sub-projects would reach a far wider group than the 'local' ones that had been targeted in the original proposal, and sub-project leads had to navigate with sensitivity the risk of any deficit implications associated with just seeking to reach local students. This led them to make activities open to all in the target populations (i.e. Psychology students in Year Two at UoM, and all students at Man Met Uni).

This scope to make unexpected discoveries was heightened as the sub-projects had to pivot to the shock of the Covid pandemic. The pandemic and subsequent readjustments most significantly affected the aim to increase opportunity to apply such skills in the workplace and the wider community. Whilst the rapid pivot from face-to-face delivery to virtual digital delivery, did not significantly change the content of the activities the delivery mechanisms were impacted, such that any external physical interaction with workplaces or community were eliminated in 2020, and continued into 2021 and 2022 due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions.

Interestingly, changes served to confirm the importance of digital skills as education, training and work activities had to move online in 2020. In this spirit, this report goes beyond the original success criteria to consider both the impact and legacy and sustainability of the project. In preparing this final assessment, it is noteworthy that some outcomes and impact generate insights that could not have been foreseen on project commencement.

3. How was Graduates for a Greater Manchester delivered?

3.1. Introduction

Project activities ran from the Autumn of 2019 for three years until 2022. The impact of the disruption of Covid-19 was enormous. The first cohort of UoM students completed their activities in the Autumn of 2019 in a traditional way, but the commencement in March 2020 of the first three-month national lockdown, led to dramatic changes thereafter. Online and hybrid modes of delivery were to remain until the end of the project in 2022.

For UoM, the embedded nature of the sub-project within the Psychology programme meant the impact of lockdowns was less dramatic and planned curriculum activity adjusted to required modes of teaching and learning across the university. However, sub-project leaders and students commented on how the disruption of Covid-19 firmly drove home the importance of digital skills amongst Psychology students who had previously been indifferent to use of digital skills.

For the Man Met Uni sub-project team, the impact of COVID and national lockdowns meant that some of the intended activities were significantly impacted, and providers of RISE Digital activities were required to rapidly amend their activities to online delivery. To expand the offer to students at a time of unprecedented lockdown, there was also a rapid shift to scale up short intensives (e.g., everything from one hour to one-week activities), in addition to more extended activities envisaged in original Third Term model.

The DW&P evaluation[10] explored how partners delivering RISE Digital activities experienced both benefits (e.g., ability to scale up) and some drawbacks (harder to identify talent) from a shift to online. Whilst the courses and activities designed by partner organisations were not delivered as intended, partners' expertise meant they were able to adapt efficiently to new demands. Many delivery partners (already immersed in tech and creative digital fields) commented that online delivery had been relatively easy for them, but even these digital specialists missed face-to-face interactions and argued that both in-person and virtual activities are crucial for the development of students' more generic employability skills. Questions were raised about what mode of delivery works best for different purposes in relation to various skills. Short online activities were considered good for working at scale, basic upskilling, creating awareness of job roles, and building digital confidence. Partners observed that online activities required students to do more independent exploration of digital skills that can lead to a greater self-learning ability, which tested their own skills as activity creators.

Arguably, the shift to online which was an unexpected consequence of the pandemic, was helpful to the project as it served to accentuate the role of digital skills as moves to online learning and delivery were accelerated.

3.2. Administration, governance and costs

The Graduates for a Greater Manchester project was managed centrally by a Man Met Uni Careers Service project manager whose responsibilities included strategic and operational management as well as liaising with the steering group and key stakeholders. The project director acted as chair of the steering group. The project manager and director designed the overall administration and governance of the project seeking input from participating stakeholders where appropriate. They acted as key individuals to connect all stakeholders. UoM and Man Met Uni sub-project leads took responsibility for local planning and delivery of activities. The project manager fulfilled an additional role as Man Met Uni delivery lead reporting to both the project Director and the sub-project leader of RISE (including RISE Digital). Regular Steering Group meetings allowed for wider consultation about the review and planning of activities. The project management team also met regularly with sub-project leads.

The total OfS funding award in 2019 was £290,000. The high-level project costs were as

[10] Christie, F, Page, C., Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 4: PARTNER PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University.

follows:

- Project management and support for regional partnerships - £150,000
- Delivery/interventions - £120,000 (divided equally between the two sub-projects)
- DW&P Evaluation - £20,000

The OfS funding made specific aspects of work possible. Funding at UoM allowed sub-project leads to devote earmarked time to focus on the project. Funding at Man Met Uni contributed to being able to contract in specialist tech and creative digital partners for activity delivery. Funding also provided the impetus for numerous individuals and partners to give their time gratis to the project.

Both Universities co-funded staff time including line management, technical support, facilities as well as staff delivery time across various activities. Therefore, the design and the structure of the project was appropriately organised to fully meet the needs of the project in terms of sufficient budget, governance, administration, and oversight.

As part of the preparation for this final evaluation report, senior stakeholders[11] were asked to consider and reflect on the extent to which the administration and governance of the project was suitable in meeting the needs of both the student and stakeholder beneficiaries, in line with the key aims of the project. They noted that strong project management skills were key to the efficient and effective delivery of the project as a whole. Over the lifetime of the project there were three project managers and each brought skills, qualities and enthusiasm to the project. Feedback from stakeholders suggested that the initial scrutiny of the project that required revisions by the funding partner (OfS) contributed to flexibility and agility from the outset, in prioritising the two main areas of activity. Furthermore, when considering what helped the successful administration of the project, a key insight concerned the relationship with the funding partner (OfS). Direct comparisons were made by senior project leaders between the often bureaucratic and 'dogmatic nature' of some funding partners where project ambitions can be 'thwarted' by a lack of appreciation of 'practical and pragmatic considerations'. By way of contrast, it was noted that the OfS were supportive when required, but also allowed a significant degree of autonomy which allowed the project leaders to make changes where and when necessary – again ensuring the agility and flexibility needed.

Such flexibility continued throughout the project in different ways. The Steering Group appreciated the two sub-projects' different approaches and how these could be beneficial. The engagement of external stakeholders was a particular strength of the project that was very helpful in pivoting to the requirements of the pandemic and getting feedback about employer and industry needs. Senior stakeholders identified a strength in the two sub-projects in that they 'met students where they were' in terms of their lack of knowledge and understanding of T and CD sectors. They felt that the design of both sub-projects helped in attracting students beyond those who might already be engaged or interested in T and CD skills and industries – this was seen by them as 'the big win of the project. However, they also recognised the project's limitations regarding what it could achieve and how it was able to operate (explored further in section 5).

[11] Project director, project manager and sub-project leaders

3.3. What was provided by sub-projects?

RISE Digital was one stream within RISE which is a large-scale University wide mechanism for enabling students to claim academic credit for traditionally extra-curricular activity including one off events, self-directed online courses, internships, 4–8-week skill development courses and more. It is open to all students and features several different activity strands, one of which is Digital. The OfS grant specifically funded the following RISE Digital activities. However, there were many more under the RISE Digital umbrella that relied on mainstream university funding:

Table 3: RISE Digital list of funded activity

- SharpFutures; 4/6 week Creative Digital Incubators in each year, 2 Digital Photography Bootcamps, 1 UX Design Bootcamp and 2 sets of fortnight long Marketing and Production Placements.
- FreshRB; 6 week Media for Wellbeing Advocacy activity in all three years.
- HIVE; Coding introductory sessions named "Make a …. with Code" sessions included music, stories and art.
- Barclays; Digital Eagles – Involved all years offering access to specialist training on AI, Influencing and future proofing your profile
- Jellyfish; 2 sets of social media introductory sessions focussing on using social media to build a personal brand and to use it professionally.
- Agent Academy; digital career workshops.
- Prodigy Learning; online certifications for Adobe & Microsoft.
- Dead Pixel Films; created an online learning resource for student learning in social media.
- DMA; two one day events called Creative Data lab.
- BobCat careers; Delivered two sessions on more career confidence themes and weren't exclusively focussed on digital, but a wider remit.
- Creative Resource; Delivered two sessions for us on 'Using LinkedIn to Smash your job Search'
- Tech for Good; 2 x Design Thinking intensives
- Robin Wilson; Man Met Uni Associate lecturer, former IBM employee with extensive experience within the Marketing/Digital sector. Delivered 3 x sessions for us on 'Content marketing' 'International MarComms Management' and 'Influencer Relations Management'

The University of Manchester G4GM sub-project involved the enhancement of two academic modules to build the digital skills and confidence of its students. The three-year project focused on the BSc Psychology programme and their second year 20 credit modules. Students either completed a work placement unit (The Short Work Placement Unit) or a career management unit (Career Management) as part of their second year of study.

The OfS project funded the development of a new blogging assignment and associated blogging/ social media training for students on both modules. They completed this reflective blogging assignment in April each year, reflecting on their experience. The OfS project also involved the creation and delivery of an accredited Building Confidence academic module delivered as one option on the Career Management unit. The aim of the module was to build student confidence

helping students to engage in career enhancing behaviours, the discovery and exploration of their career options and new employment sectors (including digital).

During the final year of the project, an online Building Confidence resource was developed in order to provide an alternative option for building student confidence. This resource took the key elements and success factors of the academic module and built them into an Articulate RISE learning resource. This is embedded into core University wide services.

The final year of the project also saw the creation of a two-day experience for Psychology students with SharpFutures to build the digital and creative career awareness of the students, with a focus on the transferability of their psychology learning to the sector. They also built digital skills through a series of training workshops.

3.4. Numbers who participated in the sub-projects' activities

Table 4 (RISE Digital – Man Met Uni) and Table 5 (Career Self-efficacy and Digital Capabilities - UoM) summarise the total number of participants. Both sub-projects exceeded their target outcome numbers proposed in original success criteria (see appendix 3 for proposed outcomes).

Man Met Uni's proposed target outcome for engagement with the RISE Digital on project commencement was 100 in 2020, 200 in 2021, 400 in 2022 (data in Table 4 also includes the number of local students). Numbers In Table 4 reflect students on courses whose curricula were not predominantly composed of tech and creative digital content. Notably, students from degree subjects that could be considered aligned to tech and creative digital could do a RISE digital activity, and there were many examples of how students from for example, a more technical degree could engage in creative digital skills development that was very different from their main academic studies. Such students were not counted for the project's success metrics but are evidence of the wider benefit of the sub-project that the OfS funding contributed to.

Table 4 - Growth in engagement to the RISE Digital strand: proposed and Actual outcomes

Year by year	Engagement to the Third Term (RISE) Programme T+CD (Digital) strand. Man Met Uni	
Date	**Target**	**Actual**
2020	100	**Engaged: 634**[12] Engaged students from Greater Manchester Local Authority 'local students': 262
2021	200	Engaged: 861 Engaged students from Greater Manchester Local Authority 'local students': 372
2022	400	Engaged: 534 Engaged from Greater Manchester Local Authority 'local students': 245

[12] In first year, numbers of students recruited was also collected: 732 (pre March – 216; Post March– 516). However, for clarity across years only 'engaged' figures are included. Recruited was initially tracked and then engaged was preferred as a more accurate measure.

UoM's proposed target outcome on project commencement for the number of students who had engaged in a digital literacy assignment and reflection on skills was cumulatively 200 in 2020, 400 by 2021, 600 by 2022 (equivalent to 200 per year).

Table 5 – UoM participation figures: Career Self-efficacy and Digital Capabilities

Cumulative	Number of graduating students having engaged in a digital literacy assignment and reflection on skills. UoM	
Date	**Target**	**Actual**
2020	200	204[13] Engaged from a Widening Participation[14] background: 34
2021	200	232 Engaged from a Widening Participation background: 40
2022	200	307 Engaged from a Widening Participation background: 64

3.5. Unique features of Graduates for a Greater Manchester

In a context in which universities are often in competition with each other, Graduates for a Greater Manchester worked to foster collaboration between two of the city region's major universities. This collaboration preceded but sits well with the joint civic mission of both universities (formally announced in 2021) and partnership with city policymakers and sector partners[15]. Collaboration was not just about attending meetings together but also for sub-project leads to share more detailed experiences about their work and learn from each other.

The two sub-projects were very different from one another although they were both interested in digital skills and capabilities. The UoM project incorporated a more tried and tested model of curriculum embedding, whereas the Man Met Uni sub-project introduced a more radical departure as part of a large-scale co-curricular initiative (albeit with scope for academic credits integrated into the model). Sub-project leads had considerable autonomy in adapting their activities to their own local contexts. As such this was a project that fostered considerable trust in sub-project leads. This contributed to the creativity and enthusiasm of staff involved in the sub-projects.

The utilisation of a Man Met Uni internal evaluator for the project is arguably unusual practice in the sector. Rather than rely only on project leaders' internal evaluation, the DW&P Evaluation team embedded 'live evaluation' and were able to produce reports that could inform the project formatively and seek out wider learning to contribute to the legacy of the project. This approach departs from much evaluation that occurs in higher education in which projects evaluate themselves. The independent internal evaluators acted as a critical friend to project, albeit with an insider status within Man Met Uni, holding a different viewpoint on the project compared to the OfS evaluation team from CRAC.

An explicit focus on the labour market needs was integral to the project. Both tech and creative digital (T and CD) sectors were of importance in response to the nature of the city region labour market. It is rare for employability-related projects to have such a focus on specific skills and industries. This presented some challenges given what is known about the changeable nature of student career decision-making/planning. As a project management team, with longstanding expertise in career development theory and

[13] 194 completed the final assignment /questionnaire (some students did not submit everything at the end owing to the University's policy of no negative impact on their marks for any online submissions during Covid-19. Hence 204 is an accurate measure.

[14] UoM collected data based on Widening Participation indicators so not just those who are 'local'

[15] Greater Manchester Civic University partnership Agreement (2021)

practice, the professional Careers Service at Man Met Uni was positioned well to recognise and respond to this.

3.6. Conclusion

The Graduates for a Greater Manchester project chartered new territory in its collaborative approach bringing together two of the city's major universities alongside regional policymakers and sector stakeholders. It also showed enormous adaptability in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic as many activities were disrupted and moved online. Its focus on both digital skills and career self-efficacy was timely in a way that project originators could never have imagined. The pandemic stimulated an explosion in use of digital technology, and fractured opportunities for student work experience and career development. Students' adaptability was tested by the shock of lockdowns and social distancing.

The project was supported by strong co-funding by both universities and determined project management which motivated and brought parties together when some other OfS Local Challenge funded projects were unable to continue. Both sub-projects surpassed their participation goals and in Man Met Uni's case, the participation numbers of students were much higher as RISE Digital pivoted to short intensives and skills activities. The numbers of local and widening participation students appear to reflect each university's population. According to national data sources Manchester Metropolitan University has a far higher number of students from less well-off backgrounds whose home domicile is the city region[16].

Each sub-project was led effectively by its sub-project leader/s. The two sub-projects were very different from one another but each was able to learn from the other via interaction at project and Steering Group meetings. With the input of formative evaluation work and as the project evolved it was able to review its original aims to align to the tech and creative digital labour market. Collectively, there was considerable reflection on what digital capabilities really are and the difference but synergies between tech digital and creative digital.

[16] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/

4. What has Graduates for a Greater Manchester achieved?

4.1. Measurable outcomes

On commencement, success criteria for both sub-projects were developed. In addition to total participation numbers recorded in section 3.4, many of these were quantitative outcome targets (see appendix 3).

Man Met Uni's target outcomes addressed hours of skills training, hours of placement and project work, number of students holding a relevant T and CD external accreditation, credits accrued by students. Table 6 includes target and actual outcomes for these.

Table 6 – RISE Digital outcomes – hours of skills training, hours of placement/project work, external accreditations, student credits gained

	Hours of skills training in T+CD	
Date	**Target**	**Actual**
2020	2000	6696
2021	4000	10161
2022	8000	5973
	Hours of placement and project work	
Date	**Target**	**Actual**
2020	1000	2516
2021	2000	21527
2022	4000	11540
	Number of students holding a relevant T+CD external accreditation17	
Date	**Target**	**Actual**
2020	100	176
2021	200	155
2022	400	128
	Number of credits accrued by students	
Date	**Target**	**Actual[18]**
2020	1500 credits (equivalent to 50 students)	22 students – with a further 143 students gaining practice credits
2021	3000	Practice credits: 5535 credits (184 students) Academic credits awarded to date: 11070 credits (369 students)
2022	6000	Practice credits: 7200 credits (240 students) Academic credits: 2460 (82 students)

[17] Microsoft, Adobe and the IDEA Award. First two years entirely iDEA award, 3rd year currently 62 iDEA with 26 Microsoft Office Specialist/Adobe Certified Associate qualifications.

[18] Method of reporting altered during the three years (i.e., number of students vs number of credits). Practice credits are students eligible for academic credit that have not claimed it, they will be on transcript but not influence the award.

UoM's sub-project outcomes addressed student interest in engaging in career enhancing behaviours. Data from the UoM project team illustrate that all students on the 'Building Confidence' module in each year of the project went on to complete career enhancing behaviours.

Career enhancing behaviours included activities in relevant modules as well as other activities undertaken by students. Table 7 indicates target and actual outcomes.

Table 7 - Career Self-efficacy and Digital Capabilities: project outcomes

Targets	Actual
Year on year 20% increase in students from population of interest engaging in targeted career enhancing behaviours in their 2nd and final year of study. (data from UoM team) Participants: 50 in 2020, 100 in 2021, 200 in 2022. Increase in students with opting for and passing presentation/interview/ and self-presentation assignments.	All students on the Building Confidence module in each year of the project went on to complete career enhancing behaviours. 2nd year: All participating students completed either a video interview or a presentation assignment in year one and three. This is a 100% increase in career enhancing behaviour. (In year two the figures are reduced owing to COVID -19 and an adaptation to the assignment requirements) Final year: Most students went on to complete one or two career enhancing behaviours in their final year as follows: Year 1 – 208 out of the 214 final year cohort (97% completion/ increase in career enhancing behaviour) Year 2 – 192 out of the 202 final year cohort (95% completion/ increase in career enhancing behaviour) Year 3 - data not yet available until 2023

4.2. Partnership working (planning, design and delivery)

Proposed project outcomes (see appendix 3) for the RISE Digital sub-project and reflecting their status as being attached to the lead HE provider addressed delivery of an external stakeholder Steering Group including T and CD representatives from the city region and an increase in 'deep partnerships', i.e., stakeholders who contribute to either the steering group and/ or programme design, delivery and placement provision (5 for 2020, 10 for 2021, 20 for 2022).

The project management team's interaction with the Steering Group, T and CD representatives from the city region (partner employers, policy makers and sector representatives) allowed important connections and relationships to develop and flourish. During the planning and delivery of the project industry experts and employer partners feedback and guidance was important. Working together contributed to lasting and trusting relationships. Moreover, these relationships and connections create opportunities for project legacy as senior stakeholders can leverage this community of interested parties to identify new prospects for future projects of mutual benefit.

4.2.1. University/city policymaker/sector partnerships (Steering Group)

The Steering Group met regularly through the three years of the Graduates for a Greater Manchester project, albeit representatives from different organisations varied over time. The project management team were able to exploit the collective expertise of Steering Group members. Members were interviewed as part of the initial labour market skills and trends activity conducted by the DW&P team[19]. Additional meetings were arranged between members to discuss the GM labour market for graduates. The HECSU (now JISC) representative was contracted to undertake data analysis of graduate patterns into employment in the tech and creative digital industries[20]. The project management team and sub-project leads were invited to share information at relevant sector events (e.g., Manchester Digital led event/s).

Moreover, the administration and governance allowed flexibility in terms of determining at what points external industry sector bodies and employers engaged with the project, meaning that organisations could enter and engage with the project where it was most beneficial, e.g., in providing activities or later on promoting and celebrating the success.

4.2.2. Sector Partnership working (design and delivery of skills training for RISE Digital)

The DW&P Evaluation team[21] conducted qualitative research interviews with a range of partners/stakeholders (summer of 2020 and 2021) who were responsible for providing and delivering a range of RISE Digital activities and courses for students from July 2020 onwards. This evaluative research contributes to evidence of 'deep partnerships' in which sector specialists collaborated with RISE Digital project leaders to create learning experiences for students.

The interviews sought to understand partners' perspectives of the RISE Digital sub-project at Man Met Uni. Moreover, the findings from these evaluative research interviews explored the extent to which the RISE Digital skills sub-project successfully addressed the labour market needs and the effectiveness of the industry partnerships enlisted to deliver specialist activities. The proximity to provision of their activity and engagement in the evaluation varied in timing due to the dispersed nature of RISE Digital provision.

Overall, the evaluative work with these partners indicated that there was an increase in the perception of positive and lasting partnership between the parties. Notably, all were supportive of a shared social responsibility to develop student skills and address skills gaps. The partners recognised the important role that by working together to provide placement opportunities, short intensive courses, project work and opportunities to network they were well-placed to identify emerging roles, occupations, and skills gaps. The collaboration between partners and the RISE Digital team for example enabled them to adapt their activity design swiftly (as a response to Covid-19) to ensure they delivered appropriate activities to meet the needs of both the wider digital community (addressing skills shortages) and that would appeal to the students.

Partners involved in RISE Digital were overwhelmingly supportive of the sub-project. RISE Digital was considered mutually beneficial, valuable, and positive for both students and for themselves as employers, stakeholders and learning providers. Partners described RISE Digital as successfully offering the opportunity to raise awareness of the sector and contribute to upskilling the next generation providing a talent pipeline to fill entry level positions. Some participants who acted as recruiters saw engagement in RISE Digital as an opportunity to spot future talent. All partners acknowledge the success in delivering effective courses, were keen to continue their collaboration with Man Met Uni and RISE Digital and were excited to develop their activities further.

In addition, the RISE Digital program was considered an effective way of enabling students to gain valuable experience which would help students transition from university to work. Therefore, RISE was seen as mutually beneficial in helping to creating a mini- digital skills ecosystem whereby,

[19] Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) REPORT 1: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': LABOUR MARKET TRENDS AND GRADUATE SKILLS IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

[20] Ball, C., Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) Report 2: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': PATTERNS OF GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

[21] Christie, F, Page, C., Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 4: PARTNER PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University.

a. students (taking aligned and non-aligned degrees) can learn about Technical and Creative Digital (T and CD) skills and careers and gain experience and a more realistic understanding of what to expect from their first job.

b. employers can foster and find new talent whilst also addressing both existing and emerging skills gaps.

Notably, the collaboration between the two sub-projects facilitated via mutual engagement in the Steering Group and project team meetings led to the sharing of partner contacts for mutual benefit. Some partners (e.g., Sharp Futures) who had worked with Man Met Uni, went on to get involved in supporting digital skills activities at UoM. The limitations of collaboration are explored further in section 5. Partners were candid about areas for future development, although appreciated the project's work.

4.3. Other outcomes and impact for students

The Man Met Uni and UoM sub-projects collected data about the impact on their student cohorts in different ways. This allowed them to explore wider learning about outcomes beyond those that could be measured numerically (see section 4.1).

Notably, from both evaluative work conducted by UoM and by DW&P Evaluation team[22] for RISE Digital at Man Met Uni, the impact on students was more nuanced than measuring career intentions regarding digital skills, industries and jobs, which had been one of the proposed outcomes for RISE Digital (see appendix 3). An overall assessment of the projects that both UoM and Man Met Uni students were involved in is that subjective feelings of confidence levels increased across the board, with students reporting higher career self-efficacy and preparedness to respond to challenging situations. Although digital skills improved (more so at Man Met Uni due to the nature of the sub-project), most students appreciated more the increased confidence levels that they acquired when interacting with others and undertaking project tasks. The improvement in interpersonal and employability skills was reported in both cases and was particularly appreciated by students in a context of increased anxiety caused by the pandemic. Interestingly, the UoM sub-project foregrounded confidence and career self-efficacy in their work and proposed outcomes to a greater extent than Man Met Uni but this also emerged as a strong theme for Man Met Uni students.

4.3.1. Manchester Metropolitan University – increasing digital skills and confidence

The sub-project explicitly sought to measure how activities influenced the career intentions of participating students. Quantitative data collected by the national CRAC evaluation team[23] as well as data collected in a qualitative way by the DW&P Evaluation team attempted to measure and generate insights about this[24].

As part of the national evaluation for OfS, the CRAC team conducted surveys of students who had participated in OfS-funded activities across the sixteen locations. They were able to include questions of relevance to GfGM about career intentions regarding proposed employment sector to work in after graduation. Students were asked to consider how their ideas had changed since the start of their degrees. These surveys were sent after completion of activities towards the end of 2020 and 2021, capturing insights about Year 1 and Year 2 completers. Findings here relate to Man Met Uni students as career intentions were explicitly addressed in the RISE Digital sub-project's proposed outcomes.

In Year 1, 52 Man Met Uni students responded to the CRAC survey. A slight shift of career intentions towards the creative and digital sectors was observed with all three sectors seeing a small increase in demand since the start of the project. Interest in digital and technology moved from n-0 up to n-3, for creative arts, culture, or heritage from n-2 up to n-3, and advertising, marketing, or PR from n-1 to n-4. In Year 2, 235 students from Man Met Uni responded to the CRAC survey. Like Year 1 there was an increase in interest for digital and technology, n-3 up to n-9, advertising, marketing and PR, n-7 up to n-10. However, for

[22] Christie, F., Papadopoulos, O. Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 3: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Manchester Metropolitan University

[23] The CRAC team supplied unpublished summary data from GfGM respondents to the project management team.

[24] Intended evaluation data mentioned in original Success criteria to be undertaken by the RISE Digital sub-project team through a before, during and after survey did not get enough usable responses.

creative arts, culture and heritage, the number had reduced, n-21 down to n-16.

The CRAC survey also asked questions about how project activities had contributed to the development of various skills. In Year 2, 43% of Man Met Uni respondents indicated that their digital skills had improved compared to 35% of students nationally who took part in Local Challenge funded projects. This was similar to Year 1, when comparator figures were 43% and 34% (albeit with a smaller number of respondents). Notably, the CRAC survey also included findings about many other aspects of the project giving insights into its impact. In Year 1, 80% stated they were now very or somewhat confident of getting the type of job wanted. 66% reported that their level of confidence directly related to participation in the project. In Year 2, 72.9% reported they were very or somewhat confident of getting the job they want, and 86% attributed that confidence to participation in the project.

In addition, the DW&P Evaluation team[25] conducted focus groups and interviews a few months after students had completed a RISE Digital project in order to glean insights about the 'sustained impact' of RISE Digital and how students themselves reflected upon their 'distance travelled' regarding employability. Students who had participated in three projects (Sharp Futures, Barclays Digital Eagles and FreshRB Vlogging) were targeted for this work. This evaluative work was conducted in Spring 2021 and students who participated had engaged with RISE Digital in 2020 in early stages of the pandemic when restrictions on normal life were considerable. This approach was repeated in 2022 and focus groups were conducted with 2021 RISE Digital participants (led by a student intern)[26].

Above all student participants reported higher levels of personal confidence after the completion of a RISE Digital project. Gaining confidence in communicating and interacting with others as well as networking emerged as important. In addition, they reported a greater confidence at the prospect of a job that needed digital skills. Some also confirmed that RISE Digital had led them to discover new career options (types of work or new tasks in existing work roles). Students reported considerable improvements in their feelings of career self-efficacy due to work-related experiences through RISE that made their CV look better and more competitive. Responses indicated how participants viewed changing attitudes towards the skills they gained from the project. More general development of employability skills and career self-efficacy was considered more significant that specific digital skills.

However, students were able to give specific examples that illustrated the benefits they gained from engaging with specific digital skills for which they were either unaware or less familiar before their participation in the project. Students appreciated the improvements they achieved in their digital skills as the result of the project although the less digitally oriented ones were more reluctant to engage in the prospect of a job in the future that requires a high level of digital skills.

Overall, students showed positive changes in their digital confidence levels as the result of their participation in the program. Although some students saw these programs as very short-term and commented on the need for longer duration, however many appreciated that short experiences can introduce topics and spark interest and confidence to learn more. For instance, some students started engaging with specific digital platforms (LinkedIn, Futurelearn and HobSport) as a result of their exposure to the project and the internship experience they had. They also commented that after the participation in the program their confidence in using digital skills in other parts of their lives had increased. The need to be adaptable and to continually learn new digital skills emerged as a theme in student reflections. Students commented on the relationship between developing interpersonal and social skills which complement digital capabilities. For instance, students were particularly positive about learning teamwork skills in an online learning context and facing the difficult challenges of this.

The context in which students undertook these projects was notable. The value of higher education in giving students the opportunity to still gain experience and skills at a time of crisis cannot be under-estimated. Many students recognized the opportunities that the project gave them to keep engaged and connected during

[25] Christie, F., Papadopoulos, O. Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 3: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Manchester Metropolitan University

[26] Hussein, Maryam (2022) Supplementary Report: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT

lockdown restrictions. Overall, students saw their participation as an opportunity in a period that many other career options were closed.

Additional insights about students' experience of two projects (Barclays[27] and Sharp Futures[28]) were created proactively by delivery partners which assisted them in planning the next iteration of activities. Findings from their work align with the themes generated by the DW&P Evaluation team.

4.3.2. University of Manchester – increasing career self-efficacy

The UoM sub-project team created a career self-efficacy survey based on the work of Bandura and Taylor and Betz[29] that students completed at appropriate times before and after activities took place to measure impact and change. Internal reports were created each year using this data[30]. The UoM sub-project put greater emphasis on wider career self-efficacy[31], albeit students were required to develop digital skills in creation of their digital literacy assignment. This is reflected in the impact generated. Differences across the years of the project were observed through the survey. For UoM students, the project contributed to increasing the confidence levels of year one (2019-20) and year two (2021-22) participating Psychology students. When examining both the career self-efficacy and digital capabilities, confidence levels had significantly increased after the completion of the project activities compared with when it started.

In all three years of the project the biggest impact on confidence levels came from those behaviours that the students originally felt the least confident about, namely, connecting with people doing different roles, and marketing themselves to others. Increases in confidence levels were reported by students as a result of being placed out of their comfort zones, having to deal with new and challenging things and working with different groups of people. Experiencing unfamiliar situations and communicating with new people was seen as an important benefit of the project.

The support that the students received from the careers service or the career module seem to have increased their confidence levels with many citing help with applications, coaching for interviews and confidence building sessions as important confidence drivers. Students regularly commented on the significance of the compulsory careers units either short work placement or career management unit (included assessed video interviews, assessment centres and a confidence building option). Becoming involved in work-based learning seems to be appreciated by students when self-reflecting on the reasons that their confidence increased after their participation in the program. All types of part-time work for students - from customer service positions to support worker roles, appear to have had a positive impact on confidence. Because of the increases in confidence levels students improved their sense of self and associated behaviours as evidenced by that way that students described their attitudes towards new situations and opportunities. Most students cited work-related activities including short work placements and volunteering as having a significance impact on their confidence levels.

For example, in year two of the project, the largest shifts in confidence levels during the year came from those behaviours that students originally felt the least confident about, including, connecting with people doing different roles (up 39%), and marketing themselves to others (up 36%). These students identified the confidence module workshop and activities and assessed presentation, or the career management activities (assessed CV, video interview, placement), as being the key drivers of their confidence. The Confidence module and career management activities helped students to position themselves for future placements.

For students in all three years, the experience of completing the career and digital confidence scaling surveys also played a positive role. They frequently commented on the benefits of seeing the scaling results of the group as a whole – it helped them feel reassured or clear of what needed to happen. Students commented that they would not have developed their digital skills or confidence so readily if learning had not shifted online. Becoming proficient at communicating and presenting themselves online effectively during remote learning has boosted digital confidence. The impact of the project on students' confidence

[27] Digital Eagles Reflective Summaries (2021) Unpublished internal document - insights collected by Careers team
[28] SharpFutures internal report (2020) Manchester Met Placements Report
[29] Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control; Betz, N., & Taylor, K. (1994). Manual for the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale.
[30] UoM internal evaluation reports created every year
[31] Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control; Betz, N., & Taylor, K. (1994). Manual for the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale.

levels was also illustrated by looking at students' own reflections from their blogs and stories of confidence development. From these reflections, it was concluded that the confidence module worked well supporting students to overcome a lack of confidence, recognise their strengths and skills and encourage them to take action.

In year 2, students commented on how they appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences with their peers through peer coaching, forums and other activities, stating that this made them realize that what they felt (low confidence levels in some areas) was not a unique experience but it was mutually shared by others. For students in year 2 of their study, confidence and career management activities supported them to secure future work experience. Although many students joined the confidence workshop as an alternative to a work placement (owing to struggling to find a placement during Covid-19 lockdowns), the experience did support them to secure future placement experiences such as year placements. Second year students also appreciated the nudge to make a change or take action, admitting that they don't always know what is expected of them or how it will help.

With regard to digital capabilities, in the first year (2019-20) students' digital confidence levels had increased significantly with large increases observed in relation to understanding what is meant by digital capability and that they would be able to use their digital skills in future work. They also grew more confident that they would be able to apply for jobs either using their digital skills or working in digital organisations in the future. Although students have learnt specific packages such as SPSS and excel as part of their degree programmes, during the pandemic they further increased their digital capabilities and their ability to adapt quickly to the technology available as part of the shift to full online learning.

The reported results by UoM also illustrated that underrepresented groups of students (e.g., widening participation students) started the project with lower confidence levels compared with the whole group. These students exhibited the lowest scoring measures in relation to important indicators including marketing themselves effectively to employers and adapting when things don't go to plan. For instance, only 22% of the widening participation students surveyed felt confident about marketing themselves effectively to employers compared to an "all students" figure of 38%. The impact of the project on those students was substantial since significant (positive) changes were observed in behaviours that students initially felt the least confident about, namely, connecting with people doing different roles, and marketing themselves to others and adapting when things don't go to plan. The results show that the confidence levels for the widening participation students increased more in 7 out of the 9 measures. Growth was again most pronounced in those behaviours that WP students felt the least confident. So, the widening participation students' confidence levels have been more positively impacted compared to the student year group as a whole.

In the second year (2020-21) the largest increases in the students' confidence levels were around being able to use their digital skills in future work, applying for jobs requiring digital skills and applying for jobs in digital organisations. The growth in confidence in these areas was also higher than those in Year 1. This could reflect the additional input and support added to this year's lectures around how psychology students were building digital skills and how they could use these in future career options. Students' confidence that they understood digital capability saw significantly less growth in Year 2, although Year 2 students were much more confident with this at the beginning of Year 2, and the resulting confidence levels in this area were similar at the end of both years. We expect that experience of using technology for online learning during their first year of studies, are likely to have enabled a higher initial confidence level with digital capability.

During the third year of the project, similar increases in digital confidence across all five of the measures were again experienced by the students.

4.3.3. The equal importance of digital skills and employability skills

In evaluative activities, senior stakeholders from universities, partner employers and policymakers reflected on the importance of not only digital skill development but on the 'soft' skills, such as problem solving, emotional intelligence, effective communication, and critical thinking skills that the activities and the project were able to deliver. This blended skillset has been described as 'fusion skills' by the UK Select Committee on Digital Skills[32] and previous research with delivery partners indicates that partners[33] view students who can demonstrate a mix of creative, social and technical skills will be highly sought by the T and CD sectors. Interestingly, the views of partners and stakeholders aligned with student perspectives about the importance of both general employability as well as more job-specific digital skills. Skills, whether digital or 'soft' rarely standalone in their application in work environments.

Stakeholders observed that students often need to be reminded and reassured that they might have several skills employers want already. Furthermore, stakeholders stated that students need to more information about the wider digital industries and how students' courses fit into emerging roles and industries and how both digital and more general employability skills they are developing can be valuable.

Overall, work during the project with industry stakeholders highlighted the tension between a preoccupation with focussing on gaps in technical digital skills and definite career pathways in the T and CD sector with delivering more broadly related employability and creative digital skills that might be more accessible for students and career enhancing regardless of what sector or occupation graduates enter. There was an agreement across partners and stakeholders that often activities with a digital skills focus were also effective at developing some of the 'soft' skills that are likely to be in high demand across all employers and building confidence in students to use those skills was important.

4.4. Legacy of the project

Both sub-projects have plans to continue to activities which will be absorbed into core funding. The merits of the OfS-funding over three years have served to prove the value of continuing activities which focus both on digital skills and career self-efficacy.

In addition, the collaborative partnership that has been fostered between universities and external partners provides the basis for future mutually beneficial work. The coming together of Man Met Uni and UoM was a real strength in attracting external stakeholders. The creation of multiple channels via the Steering Group and delivery activities has brought together city skills policy makers from GMCA and Manchester City Council, alongside sector organisations (Manchester Digital) and a variety of SMEs operating in the T and CD arena. The success of the project can be disseminated with the potential to attract further funding regionally and beyond. Moving forward beyond Covid-19, a future collaborative skills project could be more ambitious in embedding more external activities such as work experience for students.

The project has been an important marker for the importance of a shared responsibility in finding pathways for students (from non-digitally aligned degrees) to develop their skills for areas of work where there are skills shortages and/or perform more effectively in a wide range of occupations. In addition, significant steps have been taken to demonstrate to employers in digital industries that they can tap into wider pools of students, and that the transferable skills of e.g., a psychology or history student are relevant. Work with stakeholders highlighted that what is important beyond just tech digital skills (which can be taught) are general employability skills and a mindset needed for roles in T and CD jobs and industries. For students who have completed a RISE Digital intensive, having a greater level of digital confidence is important in convincing employers of their interest in moving into a career in which digital skills will need to be developed further.

For stakeholders, the experience of having to adapt so rapidly to a transformed virtual (and

[32] House of Lords: Select Committee on Digital Skills (2015) Make or Break: The UK's Digital Future. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/lddigital/111/111.pdf

[33] Christie, F, Page, C., Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 4: PARTNER PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University.

later hybrid) mode of delivery due to Covid-19 has contributed to a confidence in the ability to adapt and to changing circumstances. It has also accentuated the importance of digital skills to an extent that never could have been envisaged on inception. The shift to virtual delivery for RISE Digital in 2020 had some positive, if unintended, consequences. The most significant was the ability to scale up (RISE Digital activities), do more than was intended and reach more students than originally planned. The shock of Covid-19 has ensured that any future projects will be designed with contingencies in mind. For universities and partners, online delivery will now play a bigger part in future projects.

The shift to digital delivery had some benefits for students too as it coincided with many employers shifting recruitment and selection activities online. Both the UoM and Man Met Uni sub-projects could help students prepare for this, whether via online assessment centres or polishing their digital presence.

For RISE Digital, there was a huge increase in student participation as students were restricted in terms of any other activities they could engage in due to the national lockdowns. There was an increase in the wider RISE project up from a planned 3,000 to 14,000 students (2020-1). However, after this surge, university stakeholders observed that the subsequent fatigue with digital delivery have led some students to neither want to be online nor to attend in person activities – perhaps a sense of wanting 'the best of both worlds' and then not doing either. This remains an unresolved issue but epitomises the threshold that has been gone through due the pandemic and a certainty that the new normal will never be what it was pre-Covid-19. We currently understand very little about the impact of digital delivery and students returning to more traditional delivery methods, it seems plausible that students (like many employees) want the best of both face-to-face and virtual online delivery and the ability to choose is likely to be a factor in future activity and course design.

4.5. Value for money

The cost of the project was £290,000. This covered £150,000 for project management, £120,000 was allocated to delivery (£60,000 for each University), and £20,000 was allocated to the DW&P team for evaluation. The project has paved the way for future collaborative work around digital skills but also other issues of concern about the relationship between higher education, skills, and the labour market.

The majority of UoM spending was for the Careers Service Project leader's time in developing and delivering the resource along with addition e-learning support. There was some minor spending on integration of external partner delivery. UoM co-funded in provision of facilities, additional staff time including IT support and the academic leader's time. Effectively, £60,000 delivered enhanced provision to 743 students. This can be calculated at just under £74 per engagement.

Man Met Uni spending was entirely on external partners delivering activity through the RISE Digital sub-project. Man Met Uni co-funded staff time & facilities as well as wider development of the RISE programme to which RISE Digital belonged. £60,000 delivered provision to 2,029 students, which can be calculated at just over £29.50 per engagement. This can also be broken down as 58,413 hours of activity delivered at a cost of just over £1 an hour.

Such figures are approximate and do not account for project management costs or co-funding from either University. UoM spending per student is consistent due to integration into a module but for Man Met Uni, it ranges from £500 per student (£3.50 per hour) for the most expensive activities to £1 per student (1p per hour) for activities delivered at scale such as online courses.

The £150,000 project management funding primarily covered staff costs for three years and included miscellaneous expenses and sponsorship of the Manchester Digital Skills Festival. The £20,000 evaluation cost provided for specialist researcher time, professional transcription, and incentives.

If all aspects of costs considered, the OfS funding helped to provide additional development activities for students at a cost of just over £102 per student (£290,000 provided 2842 student engagements).

4.6. Conclusion

Overall, whilst access to longer term data trends is about entry into the T and CD labour market is limited, the perception is that both sub-projects have been successful in achieving outputs associated with original success criteria.

For Man Met Uni, alignment with the city region's policymakers and sector representatives has been embedded through three years of regular meetings (e.g., Steering Group) and delivery (partners running RISE Digital activities). This has contributed to improved connectivity between students and the regional labour market. Students on non-aligned degree programmes have had the chance to develop digital confidence and skills, which would not have been possible without the RISE Digital stream. Additional learning opportunities have been created for students that can be recognised for academic or practice credits providing an impetus for engagement in activities that may have previously been dismissed by students as just extra-curricular.

For UoM psychology students' digital skills have been paired with career self-efficacy and highlighted via the content and process of what has been learnt. The sub-project was designed to promote career-enhancing behaviours in a way that was appropriate to the student cohort, as they learnt about the theory and practice of career learning and applied digital skills in their assignments.

5. Lessons for future policy and practice

5.1. Introduction

A three-year funded project involving multiple collaborators provides ample opportunity to consider lessons for the future. This section identifies just some of the lessons to reflect upon. Moving beyond the pandemic, future activity development needs to consider the benefits and drawbacks of how and what activities are delivered. Both sub-projects also highlight the nuanced nature of career self-efficacy and the steps required to facilitate this.

Especially for RISE Digital which relies on optional engagement of students, partners and providers will need to carefully consider the intended outcomes of their planned activities before deciding on the duration (short intensive, longer-term courses), format (soft skills development, artefact creation, hard skill development) and mode of delivery (face to face, virtual online, or hybrid delivery).

The UoM's sub-project's more compulsory nature affords other opportunities to embed relevant digital skills in appropriate ways going forward and scale up learning across the university.

5.2. University and stakeholder collaboration and learning

There were many positives about the collaboration and partnership that was at the heart of the project. This was cleverly crafted to ensure mutual benefit. The interaction of different partners also helped open discussions about how to continually develop future interactions of universities with city policymakers and sector leaders and representatives in addressing skills needs in the city region. Stakeholders are well-placed for further discussion about how to address both skills gaps and shortages. There is a tendency to ignore the needs to skill up existing mid-level staff in addition to addressing skills shortages in the recruitment of entry level graduate hires. The fast pace of change in digital industries means that doing both is a challenge for employers.

There is evidence that the collaboration between the two Universities has had a positive impact. Although feedback noted that if perhaps there had been more time earlier on in the project planning, some duplication of effort/activity might have been avoided. However, the development of effective partnership working can take time before performing effectively. There is scope for both universities to reflect and build on the success and learnings about best practice to assist in how they work together more closely with partner organisations in the future.

University stakeholders involved with the RISE Digital sub-project noted their initial bias towards creative digital activities. However, they also acknowledged that certain skills training might have been introduced earlier (e.g., UX and data analytics), whilst also recognising this may have come at the expense of reaching more students. Moreover, it was also acknowledged that in the city region there is a burgeoning career market around digital creative, although skills shortages are fewer than in the tech digital sector. RISE Digital moved from an initial aspiration to provide high-end skills with a definite pathway in to creative digital and technical careers, but during the project (especially triggered by the pandemic) there was a key learning that suggested there is a need for all students to acquire a fundamental set of digital skills to be effective in the workplace. This shift was also supported by delivery partners[34]. RISE Digital had faced a choice between investing in delivering high-end technical skills to fewer students and more broad creative digital skills which can transcend the T and CD sector.

To an even greater extent, UoM sub-project leaders were candid that the priority of their project was career self-efficacy rather than digital skills. Their students had a light touch introduction to digital skills which could spark interest and confidence rather than act to address skills shortages.

Especially amongst RISE Digital delivery partners, the evaluation elicited comments that more complex skills development (e.g., tech digital, data analytics) would benefit from longer activities that was not possible in either sub-project. Delivery partners reflected on the limitations of the short intensive courses delivered by them for RISE Digital. Reflecting further on

[34] Christie, F, Page, C., Lupton, B. (2021) REPORT 4: PARTNER PERSPECTIVES ON RISE DIGITAL ACTIVITIES (OfS LOCAL CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT). Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre. Manchester Metropolitan University.

skills gaps and shortages in tech digital, partners were candid about the limitations of the short intensives and projects that students were engaged in. Many participants commented that longer training would be required to address shortages of programmers, software engineers and data analysts. However, they were confident that the RISE Digital projects would serve to stimulate interest amongst students and lead some to want to get better skilled in specific niche areas.

5.3. The role of employers in the pipeline to the T and CD labour market

Both universities developed sub-projects to support digital skills development. They were supported in this by sector representatives and city policymakers. However, the solution to skills gaps and shortages is the shared responsibility of employers in the sector too. The evaluation highlighted that many employers in the T and CD sectors can do more to help the pipeline of new talent, but this can be more difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Barriers to students considering employment within the T and CD sectors were highlighted by both Steering group members and sector delivery partners, and these included a lack of transparency of roles and careers, the requirement for prior work experience and stereotyped perceptions of employer requirements for person/organisation fit. They also agreed that students often lacked knowledge of roles and career pathways in the T and CD sector and that employers and sector organisations (including themselves) could do more to raise awareness. There were many comments that GfGM activities could support this growing awareness.

Whilst some sector partners were keen to stress there is diversity within the sector and how this varies within sub-fields there was a clear narrative that both tech digital and creative digital sector are largely white[35], and certain roles are dependent on specific behavioural characteristics. Several responses seemed to imply certain behavioural character traits as important for certain jobs role. Further, there appears to be a creeping gendering of roles which are collapsed into character traits, e.g., creative social media roles are increasingly perceived as roles preferred by women, whilst tech (coding and web development) roles are perceived as roles preferred by men.

There was also a distinction between work deemed appropriate for introverts and work that is considered more suitable for extroverts. The stereotype of the introvert as a 'geek' prevails, although there is acknowledgement that in the tech digital sector these characteristics are welcomed and desirable. That said, the notion that introverts might need to learn to behave more extroverted is concerning especially since there was no call for extroverts to behave more introverted.

Some barriers to inclusivity (including gender, ethnicity, disability) may be hidden and were seen as complex. Participants were however keen to stress a culture of inclusivity across the T and CD sectors, where anyone could feel accepted and find suitable work, however, there does appear to be opportunity and scope for more to be done here.

The GfGM project was positively viewed by partners as working to overcome some of the stereotypes and by encouraging women into the tech digital sector. However, there is a greater opportunity to explore how both universities and their partners can explore these sectors further to ensure greater diversity across the T&CD sector in the future.

Stakeholders and delivery partners were in broad agreement about the importance of work experience required to help students get into the T and CD sectors. However, they also recognised that securing work experience was not easy for students and that sometimes employers should be prepared to invest more time in training graduate hires. Their comments also suggest employers in these sectors need to be better at creating relevant work experience opportunities. However, the short intensives created by RISE Digital also appear to offer an effective alternative to standard work experiences that employers could contribute to, which may be especially valuable to students who have not gained 'gold standard' relevant work experience.

[35] Ball, C., Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) Report 2: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': PATTERNS OF GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

5.4. The careers and employability ecosystem for the T and CD labour market

One of the keys aims of GfGM was to raise student awareness of the T and CD sectors in Greater Manchester. All stakeholders and students involved in the evaluation agreed there was a lack of awareness of new and emerging roles in the T and CD sectors. This supports findings from the initial literature review done for GfGM[36]. That review also highlighted how tech digital and creative digital offer very different career opportunities, despite their blending in city policy documents[37] and in the original conception of GfGM.

Moving forward careers advice and guidance can play an important role in addressing these issues. It can inform and motivate, and include provision of information about career options, facilitation of exposure to employers, assistance in skills reflection as well as support in getting work experience.

Partners and stakeholders were keen to stress the value of the GfGM within the careers and employability ecosystem and as a model to address lack of awareness about digital skills and careers. A key objective of the RISE digital activities was to engage and inspire students from across the student body including drawing from courses not aligned to the T and CD sector. The activities were reported to be effective in inspiring students to develop a wider engagement and interest in pursuing careers within the T and CD sectors. In addition, as part of GfGM, students from the UoM Psychology cohort could learn about a broader set of career options that they had not previously considered.

Conveying how non-aligned courses may still match skill requirements (albeit with further training needed) was considered critical in setting the context and relevance of the activities students were engaged in. Some partners stated that students need to understand and feel confident in how they can transfer and maximise the skills they have already invested in and then consider how they might top them up with T and CD sector specific skills.

The important role of work experience (actual or simulated) and digital artefacts was identified by delivery partners as an excellent way for students to learn. More opportunities like this need to be created to assist in building career self-efficacy. Partners described how they created activities to address some of the gaps they identified, for example, coding training, digital photography bootcamp. Several partners mentioned that they saw an important part of digital skills development was to provide students an opportunity to evidence of their learning in the form of a 'digital artefact' which would then enable them to confidently demonstrate their skills in the application and job-hunting process.

An interesting insight was noted by senior stakeholders that once a student reaches a certain tipping point in terms of the level of engagement, they will engage in even more university wide activities, e.g., for the whole RISE programme achieving 100 RISE points seemed to be the tipping point. Stakeholders observed the importance of creating a culture of engagement which has a positive subsequent impact on the likelihood of further activity, which can lead to a 'self-perpetuating' cycle of beneficial engagement for students. The challenge therefore for the careers and employability ecosystem is getting students to engage in just one activity, and this can overcome the barrier of a student's lack of confidence. Engagement and learning about digital skills have a lot of contemporary resonance and credibility so can be a useful pathway into wider engagement activity not just in digital skills development.

5.5. Improving effectiveness of measuring outcomes

A fundamental challenge for GfGM is how it can prove that it has contributed positively to Graduate Outcomes as they appear in the annual Graduate Outcomes survey. From the outset, project leaders knew that this would not be possible within the timescale due to the timing of student participation and eventual completion of the annual survey (15 months after graduation). At project end, data on this is very limited.

[36] Christie, F., Lupton, B. (2020) REPORT 1: 'TECH AND CREATIVE DIGITAL': LABOUR MARKET TRENDS AND GRADUATE SKILLS IN GREATER MANCHESTER. Manchester Metropolitan University

[37] GMCA. (2019). Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy. GMCA: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/economy/greater-manchesters-local-industrial-strategy/

However, stakeholders from each university noted their success in reaching students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. Man Met Uni captured local student engagement and UoM widening participation student engagement (section 3.4). Both sub-projects targeted prospective students from groups that are currently underrepresented and anecdotal evidence from project leaders suggests success in attracting non-aligned students who might not have considered the sector previously are now working in the sector. The evaluation with students (section 4.1 and 4.4) illustrates more nuanced outcomes and impact in terms of career self-efficacy, digital confidence, and career intentions.

There are some opportunities to track longer term student success, unfortunately these measures are outside the scope of this evaluation report. With hindsight, both sub-projects could have developed a specific data collection method to address outcomes and not be reliant on the Graduate Outcomes survey. This is something to consider for a future project. The proximity of GfGM to the newness of the GO survey (which replaced the previous DLHE survey completed six months after graduation) meant that project leaders did not consider alternative collection methods on project commencement. In addition, any future project involving two or more universities would benefit from collecting consistent monitoring data about participants (e.g., widening participation and local student characteristics), in order to make better comparisons.

In relation to stakeholder and partner outcomes it is also difficult to track and evaluate decisively, although all partners were very positive as part of the qualitative evaluation work. Many of the stakeholders and partners involved acted as sector or policymaker brokers/representatives rather than as employers (e.g., Manchester Digital). Going forward more can be done to convince a diverse range of employers of the benefits to them of supporting activities which invest in the future talent pipeline. Various data can be used to make the case for employers to engage with students. Reports suggest that industry sector organisations, policy makers and employers would like to see and hear more about the student success stories and what has contributed to a successful student transition into the sector. Such case studies would be an important communication and sustainability strategy moving forwards.

5.6. Conclusion: sustaining activities

Graduates for Greater Manchester has been very successful in meeting its outcomes. Its relevance and value have only been accentuated by the impact of the pandemic. Stakeholders and partners are now turning their attention to a consideration of legacy and the sustainability of activities that came under the GfGM umbrella. Some of this has been discussed in section 4.5 legacy of the project.

Areas to consider for university partners going forward include engaging the wider employer network beyond main stakeholder/partner organisations. Further work can be done to make this happen and post-pandemic to pay more attention to the 'demand side' of the employability ecosystem in T and CD.

The annual Manchester Digital Skills Festival[38] provides an opportunity to do this and this was attended by sub-project leaders in 2022. The festival offers an opportunity for universities to actively encourage T and CD employers to work with them further and to illustrate how universities are running activities that may help them plug their skills shortages at entry level. Attendance and creation of events that bring employers together with students and university stakeholders is a promising avenue to help ensure partnerships multiply. It is also important to influence sector employers about the value of 'fusion skills' and to encourage them to see beyond shortages of entry level staff who can hit the ground running doing software development.

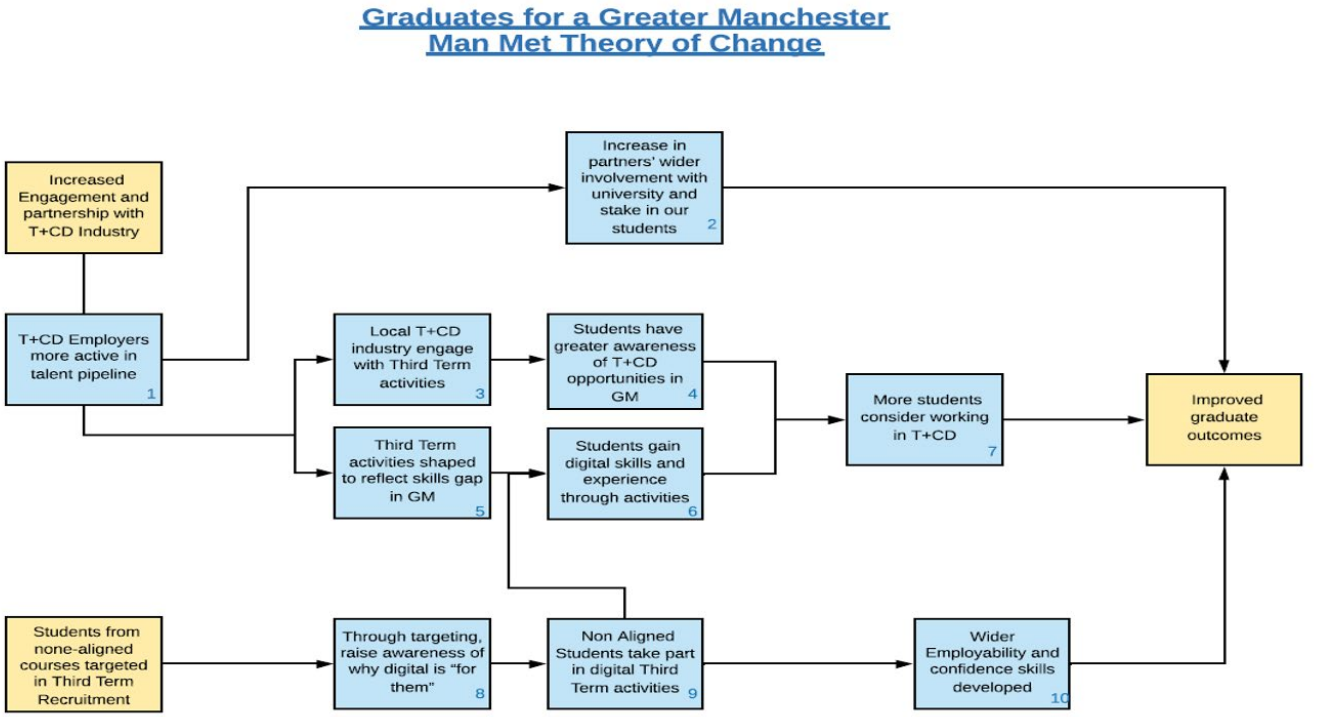
A number of initiatives have been discussed that are taking the best practice learnings from the project, including the creation and development of e-learning modules, online certification, ongoing collaboration with organisations to create further 'experiential learning', evaluation and assessment practices, sharing best practice

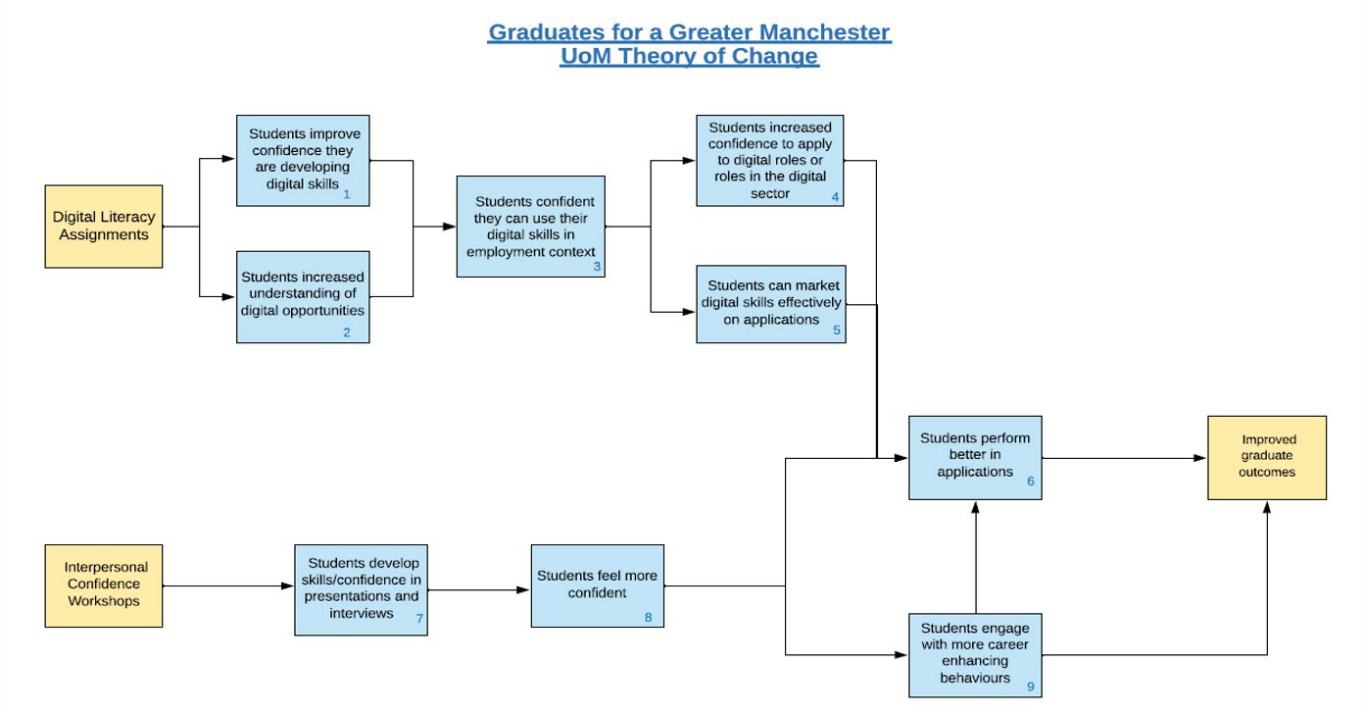
[38] https://www.manchesterdigital.com/talent-and-skills/skills-festival

across institutions, building digital fluency as part of ongoing 'business as usual KPI's.

University partners can also explore further how they can provide more in -depth micro-credential learning in tech digital skills. There is currently tremendous demand in this area of provision, which is being led by private companies, often acting as agencies. Many students and graduates would prefer to do such extended learning (albeit not want to do a full postgraduate qualification) through a university especially if they do not what to be tied into Agency conditions.

Appendix 1[39]: Theory of Change models: Man Met Uni and UoM





[39] Detail of how numbered items in each model evaluated and reported upon are in Appendix 3.

Appendix 2: Success criteria (developed from Theory of Change model) - outputs and outcomes tables

Manchester Metropolitan University - RISE

OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES - numerical targets and timeframes	Evaluation methodology	Data Used and reporting
Improved alignment between the Third Term (RISE Digital) Programme and the city-region. Improved connectivity between students and the city region	Delivery of an external stakeholder steering group, including T+CD representatives from the city region and its governance organisation. Increase in 'deep partnerships' (stakeholders who contribute to the steering group, programme design, delivery and placement provision) 5 for 2020, 10 for 2021, 20 for 2022	Tracking of stakeholder engagement, including codification of 'depth' of relationship. Audit of decision-making processes, and account of decisions that were externally originated or defined. Semi-structured interviews with partner employer stakeholders	Measure of depth based on engagement Minutes from Stakeholder group / feedback collected in focus group - reported in Report 5 Interviews - Report 4 (2021)
Improved recruitment to the T+CD component of the third term (RISE Digital) programme.	Growth in recruitment to the Third Term (RISE Digital) Programme T+CD strand 100 in 2020, 200 in 2021, 400 in 2022 Measure which employment sector students intend to work in post graduation	Analysis of applications to the T+CD third term (RISE Digital) programme Analysis of survey response to Q23. of CRAC student survey.	Applications to Digital stream of TT (RISE Digital) CRAC student survey
Increased T+CD skills and competences to students from non-aligned courses. Increased external engagement with relevant sector partners Increased distinctiveness of graduates, and growth of quality kitemarks associated with them Integration of learning as a curricula, rather than extra-curricula, experience	Increasing hours of skills training in T+CD: 2000 in 2020, 4000 in 2021, 8000 in 2022 Increasing hours of placement and project work; 1000 hours in 2020, 2000 in 2021, 4000 in 2022 Increased number of students holding a relevant T+CD external accreditation, 100 in 2020, 200 in 2021, 400 in 2022 Number of credits accrued by students: 1500 in 2020, 3000 in 2021, 6000 in 2022	Timetabling and student engagement data, Student experience and impact survey Timetabling and student engagement data, Qualitative research on transformational impacts of student engagement Student completion rates, Student Experience Impact Survey Student completion rates, Qualitative research on transformational impacts on student engagement	Third Term (RISE Digital) Activity Third Term (RISE Digital) Activity Third Term (RISE Digital) Activity RISE team
Increase in students from non-feeder course progressing into the city regions T+CD employment market	'To measure student's attitude to working in the T+CD sector or T+CD roles by conducting focus groups with students post activity'.	Analysis of focus group responses	Focus Groups/ Interviews for Year 1 (Report 3). Repeat in Year 2 (organised by project manager).

University of Manchester - Careers Self-Efficacy Programme

OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES - numerical targets and timeframes	Evaluation methodology	Data Used
Assignments that directly develop and assess: digital skills and include reflection on digital competence and potential:	Increased number of students who graduate having engaged in a digital literacy assignment and reflection on skills. 200 in 2020, 400 by 2021, 600 by 2022	Survey of students' confidence in applying for roles involving digital skills/competence.	Survey at start and end of year
Career Self Efficacy is significantly, positively correlated with 'career enhancing behaviours'	Year on year 20% increase in students from population of interest engaging in targeted career enhancing behaviours in their 2nd and final year of study.	1. Direct statistical comparison of pre-post Career Self Efficacy scores. 2. Comparison pre and then year on year numbers of students: volunteering; attending careers meetings; applications for internships and Manchester Gold applications/ creating digital networks.	Initial and End of Activity feedback Careers Activity data. Additional student Feedback on survey
Increase in students with opting for and passing presentation/interview/ and self-presentation assignments.	Year on year 20% increase in students from population of interest engaging in targeted career enhancing behaviours in their 2nd and final year of study. Participants: 50 in 2020, 100 in 2021, 200 in 2022	1. Direct statistical comparison of pre-post interpersonal confidence scores. 2. Comparison pre and then year on year numbers of students: volunteering; attending careers meetings; applications for internships and Manchester Gold applications/engaging in face-to-face and digital networks.	Initial and End of Activity feedback Careers Activity data. Additional student Feedback on survey

Appendix 3: Theory of Change Data Tables

Man Met Activity

See Theory of Change models (ToC) in appendix 1. TOC Ref	Measurement and reporting
1	Measured by 2,3 &5 "Depth of partnership" measure from Steering Group meetings/minutes and DW&P Report 4 (partners evaluation) "Depth of partnership" captures delivery partner and stakeholder involvement and DW&P Report 4 (partners evaluation) DW & P reports 1 and 2 (context-setting) and report 4 (partners evaluation)
2	"Depth of partnership" measure from Steering Group meetings/minutes and DW&P Report 4 (partners evaluation)
3	"Depth of partnership" captures delivery partner and stakeholder involvement and DW&P Report 4 (partners evaluation)
4	CRAC survey of Students pre and post activity, DW & P report 3 and supplementary work (students evaluation)
5	DW & P reports 1 and 2 (context-setting) and report 4 (partners evaluation)
6	Skills, project and placement hours from activity – measure from RISE Digital team.
7	CRAC survey of Students pre and post activity, DW & P report 3 and supplementary work (students evaluation)
8	Applications from non-aligned students – measure from RISE Digital team.
9	Applications from non-aligned students – measure from RISE Digital team.
10	CRAC survey of Students pre and post activity, DW & P report 3 and supplementary work (students evaluation)

UoM Activity

TOC Ref	Measurement
1	Q11 from UoM pre and post activity survey
2	Q1 from pre and post survey combined with blog from 2020/21 academic year
3	Q12 from pre and post survey
4	Q13 and 14 from pre and post survey
5	Q9 and CV Assignment from 2020/21 academic year
6	Question added to pre and post survey in May asking about this
7	Course data of assignments
8	Q1-9 from pre and post survey
9	Question added to survey and review of engagement with careers service and activities
10	CRAC survey of Students pre and post activity, DW & P report 3 and supplementary work (students evaluation)

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This evaluation report was created for the Graduates for a Greater Manchester Steering Group. It was conducted by researchers in the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University.

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