

# Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund Prospectus 2019-2020

**GMCA** GREATER  
MANCHESTER  
COMBINED  
AUTHORITY



Department for  
Digital, Culture,  
Media & Sport



DIGITAL SKILLS  
**PARTNERSHIP**  
LANCASHIRE



Lancashire  
Enterprise Partnership

## Foreword

### Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Greater Manchester's ambition is to be a world leading digital city region; one with a bold digital economy, which actively encourages businesses to invest and grow, and one, which puts people, our greatest asset at its heart. Together we are working to achieve a city region education, skills and work system that develops the skilled talent needed for our rapidly emerging digital and tech strengths and acts as a key enabler of lifelong learning and progression for all of our residents and communities, whatever their starting point.

Greater Manchester's Local Industrial Strategy sets out our priorities for building upon our unique digital/tech strengths and ensure all people in GM can benefit by:

- Grow existing and emerging sector strengths in cyber security, broadcasting, content creation and media, software development, digital telecoms, fintech and e-commerce.
- Underpin cross-sectoral growth by developing the digital skills pipeline required to adopt productivity enhancing digital technologies.

Businesses right across GM's economy continually cite challenges in recruiting digitally skilled talent<sup>1</sup>, including for some of the industry's most in-demand roles with developer roles consistently proving the hardest to fill. Engagement with employers has particularly highlighted coding and developer skills, data literacy and analytics, digital marketing, digital methodology e.g. agile and user experience as being key skill shortage areas.

**This Fast Track Fund is an exciting opportunity for Employers and Training Providers (including Colleges and Universities) to work together to develop new and innovative models of addressing digital skills shortages across Greater Manchester.**

### Lancashire

The Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership (LDSP), a trailblazer supported by DCMS and part of the Skills and Employment Hub of the Lancashire LEP, is a collective of public, private and charity sector organisations that work together to address the digital skills needs of the County.

The LDSP, as part of the Skills and Employment Hub, aims to facilitate and enable a balanced, skilled and inclusive labour market, which underpins and contributes to economic well-being and growth across the LEP area and works to the Lancashire Skills and Employment Strategic Framework.

<sup>1</sup> In 2018, 29% of businesses surveyed by Manchester Digital had been unable to recruit in the last year. Manchester Digital's Skills Audit 2019 (<https://www.manchesterdigital.com/digital-skills-audit-2019>) reported that 31% of respondents turned away work due to being unable to recruit skilled talent.

The digital sector is a priority sector for Lancashire due to its significant projected growth. The research<sup>[1]</sup>, to date, identifies priorities relating to digital skills and has identified that there are recruitment challenges within the digital sector, which has a much higher incidence of skills shortage vacancies. The skills reported as hardest to obtain by employers were advanced IT or software skills of a technical nature such as cyber skills or PHP programming.

Lancashire LEP have supported and commissioned a range of initiatives to support the digital skills priorities across all levels of digital skills. Current ambitions in Lancashire with regards to digital skills are:

- Essential digital skills: Lancashire residents have basic online skills and the confidence to access digital technology to live and work well.
- General digital skills: Lancashire employees have the right digital skills to enable Lancashire businesses to thrive.
- Specialist digital skills: Lancashire businesses have access to skilled people to enable them to drive digital innovation and be at the forefront of Industry 4.0.

This Fast Track fund addresses the third ambition and has the opportunity to address the skills shortage vacancies already identified and those of a growing sector.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <http://www.lancashireskillshub.co.uk/about-us/evidence-base/>

## Introduction

1. The purpose of this prospectus is to provide employers, training providers (including colleges & higher education) and key stakeholders with further details of the £3m Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund, including the objectives of the fund and application process. The fund will be open for applications in the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and Lancashire LEP areas from 25 June 2019. Consortia can bid for between £50,000 & £180,000 to run innovative digital training schemes linked to skills shortage vacancies.
2. Employers and training providers should start to consider what they would like to gain from the fund and what they can offer. We encourage those that might be interested in applying to start talking to potential partners now and we will provide further help to facilitate the building of consortia through a launch event in Greater Manchester & Lancashire on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> June. Registration for both events will be via Eventbrite using the links below:
  - **Greater Manchester:** <https://fasttrackfundgm.eventbrite.co.uk>
  - **Lancashire:** <https://fasttrackfundlancashire.eventbrite.co.uk>

## Aim and scope

3. The aim of the 'Fast Track' Fund is to help employers in the Greater Manchester and Lancashire areas to address their specialist digital skills needs through short, innovative, bespoke training. Government will invest alongside industry to help employers improve their productivity by developing specialist digital skills that are needed to recruit to hard-to-fill occupations. **There is an expectation that employers that will benefit from the fund will offer match-fund support to any proposals.** This can include in-kind funding but we would be looking for this to be monetised where possible.
4. Proposals will be sought to train individuals for occupations that require specialist digital skills; table 1 below provides examples of possible areas of focus. Essential digital literacy skills and digital skills for the general workforce whilst important are not within the scope of this fund.

Table 1: Specialist Digital Skills

Digital Skill Type	Digital Skill Cluster	Description	Common Occupations
<b>Specialised</b>	Software & Programming	Programming languages such as Java, SQL, and Python	Programmers, Software Developers, Database Administrators
	Computer & Networking Support (inc Cyber Security)	Set up, support and manage computer systems and networks; configuration, systems, cyber security & technical sup.	Network Administrators Software Developers, IT User Support Technicians
	Data Analysis	Data analysis tools like R or Stata, Big Data, Data Science	Management Consultants, Economists, Statisticians, Business Analysts
	Digital Design	Digital production, graphic design, online advertising skills	Marketing Associate Professionals, Graphic Designers
	CRM	CRM software, such as Salesforce or Microsoft Dynamics	Sales Professionals, Marketing Associate Professionals, Customer Services Managers
	Digital Marketing	Digital marketing technologies (e.g. social media platforms) and analytics tools (google analytics)	Sales & Marketing Professionals. Marketing Associate Professionals, HR Officers
	Machining & Manufacturing Technology	Machining and engineering software and tools such as CNC machining and computer aided design	Machine Operators, Civil Engineers, Quality Control & Planning Engineers

- Consortia are encouraged to propose projects, which best address, the current digital skills gaps experienced by Greater Manchester & Lancashire employers. Further information on digital skills gaps will be shared at the launch events.
- This fund aims to empower consortia to develop responsive solutions to the digital skills needs that employers currently face. We want to test models by which employers can use digital skills provision that can be quickly implemented and delivered that will have an immediate impact. Training provision can be accredited or non-accredited.
- Funding should predominantly be allocated to the delivery of training provision but there is scope for funding to be provided for other activities e.g. pre-delivery activity including careers inspiration events. We expect considerations about target candidates to be taken into account in the design of a bid. We would also

encourage bidders to explore options for these supportive activities to be provided as match-fund in-kind.

8. In keeping in line with this, proposals for training should aim to be delivered to participants in up to 12 weeks for full time provision and 20 weeks for part-time provision. (These are maximum timescales and we are ideally looking for courses that cover a range of different timescales).

## Who should apply?

9. We expect the fund to be of particular interest to:
  - employers facing challenges in recruiting for occupations that require specialist digital skills across all sectors, who seek new and responsive approaches to filling these gaps in their workforce
  - And training providers/colleges/universities interested in delivering innovative and flexible industry focused training provision
10. It is expected that training provision is co-designed by consortia of **employer(s) and training provider(s)** to address local digital skills gaps. The level of collaboration will be a key consideration when proposals are assessed.
11. Geographic eligibility:
  - Employers must have a base in Greater Manchester or Lancashire.
  - Providers of training courses will be required to demonstrate that they have links with employers in Greater Manchester or Lancashire.

## Innovative approach

12. As this is a new approach, we aim to fund a variety of different creative, innovative and flexible digital skills projects. This document provides guidance on what the parameters are to help structure early ideas. We are keen employers and training providers, who know the local skills market best, draw up proposals that will meet current demands and their needs.
13. In particular we welcome projects that offer innovation in the following areas:
  - Designing training provision that matches current industry digital skills needs leading to employment and career progression. Particularly where the demand is not currently being met by existing digital skills provision.
  - Embracing new methods of recruitment to the programmes to widen diversity and attract new people to work in the sector

- The formation of new, mutually beneficial partnerships between employers and providers that can demonstrate sustainability in their training models
- Flexible delivery models to ensure that a wide-range of participants in varying circumstances are able to access and benefit from training

At the launch event, we will outline some existing innovative practice in digital skills training to help bidders formulate approaches.

## Strategic context

11. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Greater Manchester Combined Authority, supported by the Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership have worked together to set the strategic objectives for this fund. Greater Manchester Combined Authority will be administering the programme and delivering the fund across Greater Manchester and Lancashire LEP areas.
12. In November 2018, the Government announced £3m for this pilot to help employers address local digital skills gaps through bespoke short training courses. These courses should aim to:
  - Address locally identified digital skills gaps, filling hard-to-fill digitally-focused vacancies
  - Improve engagement between employers and training providers; building their capacity to deliver industry relevant, flexible digital skills training
  - Improve productivity of employers through digital upskilling of local people and improvements to business practices through increased adoption of technology
  - Support individuals with career progression by helping participants move into better paid, better quality roles.
13. Research has shown that general and specialist digital skills are required across almost all jobs and sectors and that they will continue to grow in importance for employers. We also know that a number of employers are unable to fill vacancies, often due to a lack of specialist digital skills. For example, Manchester Digital's 2019 Skills Audit reported that 31% of respondents had turned work away due to being unable to recruit the right talent. Digital skills offer potential to improve business productivity, boost the earning power of individuals and support wider economic growth.
14. We also know that there are regional variations in the type of digital skills that are needed and these requirements are constantly changing. Therefore, solutions to tackle skills shortages are likely to be most effectively met through local partnerships that can quickly respond to changing demands.

15. Short, flexible, intensive training that is based on regional need offers one way of supporting employers to recruit hard to fill digitally focused roles while offering individuals the chance to progress into better quality and paid employment. This style of 'Fast Track' training has worked for employers in the past, and there is a growing market, but we want bidders to build on that model and look to how it can be broadened and adapted to suit their particular needs.
16. There is no one size fits all solution to addressing the digital skills gaps that employers face now, and will continue to face into the future. By improving coordination between employers, who can identify the roles they need to fill and the skills needed, and training providers, who can help design bespoke and adaptable courses and work with participants, this fund aims to support targeted training for occupations that require specialist digital skills.
17. The specific strategic aims of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Lancashire LEP areas are outlined in the foreword (page 1 & 2). We encourage bidders to draw on these in developing their proposals.

## Funding and delivery ambitions

In this section we set out the key ambitions for the fund that consortia should take into consideration when developing their proposals. Full application forms will be released at the launch event, which will detail the requirements in more detail.

## Expected outcomes

18. Through the delivery of targeted training, bidders should primarily be bringing in **new staff to their organisations to fill hard to fill vacancies that require specialist digital skills**. However, we are also open to bids that enable existing staff to progress from lower-skill roles into medium to higher skilled digital roles.
19. There is an expectation that the majority (at least 85%) of **participants on the training will graduate with a positive outcome**. For example: new employment, a move to a higher salaried position or a quality apprenticeship.
20. Consideration should be given to not only developing digital skills during the programme but also the broader employability and commercial skills relevant to working in a specialist digital occupation and how the transition to employment is supported e.g. mentoring, work experience.

21. As part of the process of securing a positive outcome for participants, employers are expected to offer **guaranteed interviews** to those participants that satisfactorily complete courses. This doesn't need to follow the traditional model of formal interviews; we are looking for creative approaches e.g. talent days, speed dating with employers, group interviews etc.
22. The formation of **local partnerships** that bring together employers, training providers (or those with experience of delivering training) to design and deliver innovative, responsive training that meets the ambitions of the fund. Ideally, this partnership will run across the length of the project proposed and demonstration of sustainability of those partnerships will be viewed positively.
23. As we want to use the fund to help improve the **diversity** of groups traditionally underrepresented in digital roles (see 'Target Candidates section below) flexible delivery options will be a key component to help ensure there are fewer unnecessary barriers to certain participants undertaking training.
24. Development of responsive training that shows value for money and a **sustainable and scalable model** for future delivery.

### Target candidates

30. As a primary target (in terms of candidates), we want to ensure this fund is helping to **improve career progression for those who are in lower paid roles who are resident in Greater Manchester or Lancashire.**
31. We also want to ensure that training is accessible to a wide-range of residents and helps to improve the diversity of the digital talent pipeline. Target participants include:
  - i. Those seeking a career change – this may include, but are not limited to, those in low paid and non-technical roles with some experience of a digital environment, those in unstable employment such as seasonal work or zero/low hours contracts.
  - ii. Those only recently out of the job market.
  - iii. Underemployed/unemployed graduates who are currently not utilising their degrees.
  - iv. Returners to the Tech Industry – who need upskilling on recent technological developments and changes
  - v. Returners to work - those who may need reskilling e.g. full time parents, full time carers

- vi. Groups underrepresented in the Tech Industry e.g. women, BAME, people with a health condition/disability, people over 50.

32. We are keen for bidders to consider the full range of participants that this fund could support and the benefits those participants could bring to their organisations. We are keen to see targeted approaches that could work with specific groups including those set out above.

## Next steps and indicative timelines

32. This prospectus marks our first stage in engagement with potential bidders to the fund. On 25th June, we will be launching the full application form and holding events in both Greater Manchester and Lancashire to give potential applicants the chance to learn more about the fund. The event will also offer the opportunity to bring together all interested parties to start forming consortia, if not already in place, that proposals can be developed from.

33. To help us plan the event we ask that you sign up for the event via Eventbrite and answer the questions included in the registration process:

- **Greater Manchester:** <https://fasttrackfundgm.eventbrite.co.uk>
- **Lancashire:** <https://fasttrackfundlancashire.eventbrite.co.uk>

34. For those that are unable to attend the launch event all information about the fund and how to apply will be shared after the event at the following links:

- **Greater Manchester:** <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/digital/>
- **Lancashire:** <https://www.lancashireskillshub.co.uk/>

35. If you have any further queries about the fund email us at:

- **Greater Manchester:** [FastTrackDigital@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk](mailto:FastTrackDigital@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)
- **Lancashire:** [lancsskillshub@lancashirelep.co.uk](mailto:lancsskillshub@lancashirelep.co.uk)

## Indicative timelines

36. The indicative timelines are as follows. We will confirm these at the launch of the fund.

<b>Date/s</b>	<b>Delivery action</b>
Early June 2019	Fund prospectus published
25th June 2019	Fund opens for applications for round 1, full criteria published. Launch events in Greater Manchester and Lancashire
6th September 2019	Deadline for applications for round 1
Late September 2019	Applicants informed of outcomes for round 1
Late October 2019	Grant agreement for successful applicants signed.
Late October 2019	Round 2 of the fund open to application.
10 <sup>th</sup> January 2020	Deadline for applications to round 2
Late January 2020	Announcement of outcomes of round 2.
Late February 2020	Grant agreements signed with successful bidders to round 2.