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MANCHESTER**



Greater Manchester  
Chamber of Commerce



# GM Labour Market Insights Pack

Spring 2026



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# Purpose of Pack

This pack collates Labour Market Information and Sector Insights from various sources, which is reviewed and corroborated by the GM Labour Market Insights Unit.

The purpose of the pack is:

- To provide a unified evidence base for GM's devolved policy and programme development.
- To inform the skills and employment ecosystem in provision development, adaptation, and refinement.
- To supplement existing insights and data sources which are signposted for deeper research.

1. [GM Labour Market & Skills Intelligence Pack](#)
2. [Purpose of Pack](#)
3. [Economic Summary](#)
4. [Key Insights](#)
5. [Quarterly Economic Survey](#)
6. [Business Survey](#)
7. [Inward Investment Landscape](#)
8. [Greater Manchester Workforce](#)
9. [North West Unemployment](#)
10. [North West Economic Inactivity](#)
11. [GM Vacancy Market](#)
12. [Sector Insights – Construction](#)
13. [Sector Insights – Transport](#)
14. [Sector Insights – Logistics](#)
15. [Sector Insights – Creative, Culture, and Sport](#)
16. [Sector Insights – Retail and Hospitality](#)
17. [Sector Insights – Manufacturing](#)
18. [Sector Insights – Financial, Business, and Professional Services](#)
19. [Sector Insights – Digital/Tech](#)
20. [Sector Insights – Health and Social Care](#)
21. [Sector Insights – Education](#)
22. [Sector Insights – Emergency Services](#)
23. [Sector Insights – Green Economy](#)
24. [GM in-demand occupations](#)
25. [GM in-demand common skills](#)
26. [GM in-demand specialist skills](#)

# Economic Summary

- In the OBR's March 2026 forecast, real GDP growth is expected to slow to 1.1% in 2026 (from 1.4% in 2025) before averaging 1.6% a year from 2027–2030.
- Inflation is still above target (CPI 3.3% to March 2026), though the OBR expects inflation to return to 2% in late 2026 as the labour market loosens and price pressures ease – however this may be impacted by pressures on fuel caused by the conflict in Iran.
- In April the National Minimum Wage increased to £12.71/hr, lifting baseline pay and adding to cost pressures in lower-pay sectors.
- For the latest period (Dec 2025–Feb 2026) the UK unemployment rate was 4.9% - with the North West at 4.6%.
- The most recent quarterly data suggested around 66,600 people in Greater Manchester were unemployed.
- Pay is still rising, with regular earnings up 3.8% annually, equivalent to around 0.4% in real terms, with faster growth in public (5.9%) than private (3.3%) sectors.

## Key upcoming events:

- **July 2026** – Release of GM Local Skills Improvement Plan.
- **July 2026** – Release of GM Post-16 Pathways Report, conducted by HEIs and Further Education Colleges.
- **Summer 2026** – Release of Milburn NEET Review.
- **Summer 2026** – Release of further IS-8 “Jobs Plans”

## Further reading:

GMCA – [Greater Manchester Strategy](#)

Government – [Post-16 White Paper](#) / [National Industrial Strategy](#) / [Keep Britain Working](#) / [UK Budget 2025](#)

GM Chamber of Commerce – [Quarterly Economic Survey](#)

Business Growth Hub – [Growth Survey SITREP](#)

# Key Insights

## General:

- GM's economy **remains healthier than the wider UK.**
- Business **confidence has remained fairly stable in GM**, with the GM Index, a composite business confidence indicator, rising slightly into early 2026.
- **Rising costs and persistent inflation remain the top concerns** of many GM businesses – 2026 may see these rise in prominence even more as the Iran conflict impacts play out.
- **Support for business planning & innovation remained the top** reported need for businesses – though more now report a need for support with sales and marketing strategies.
- **Financial markets expect the Bank of England to cut interest rates**, though this may be delayed due to rising inflation risk.
- **In April, the IMF suggested that the UK will be one of the worst hit countries by the impact of the Iran War**, largely due to higher fuel and energy costs.

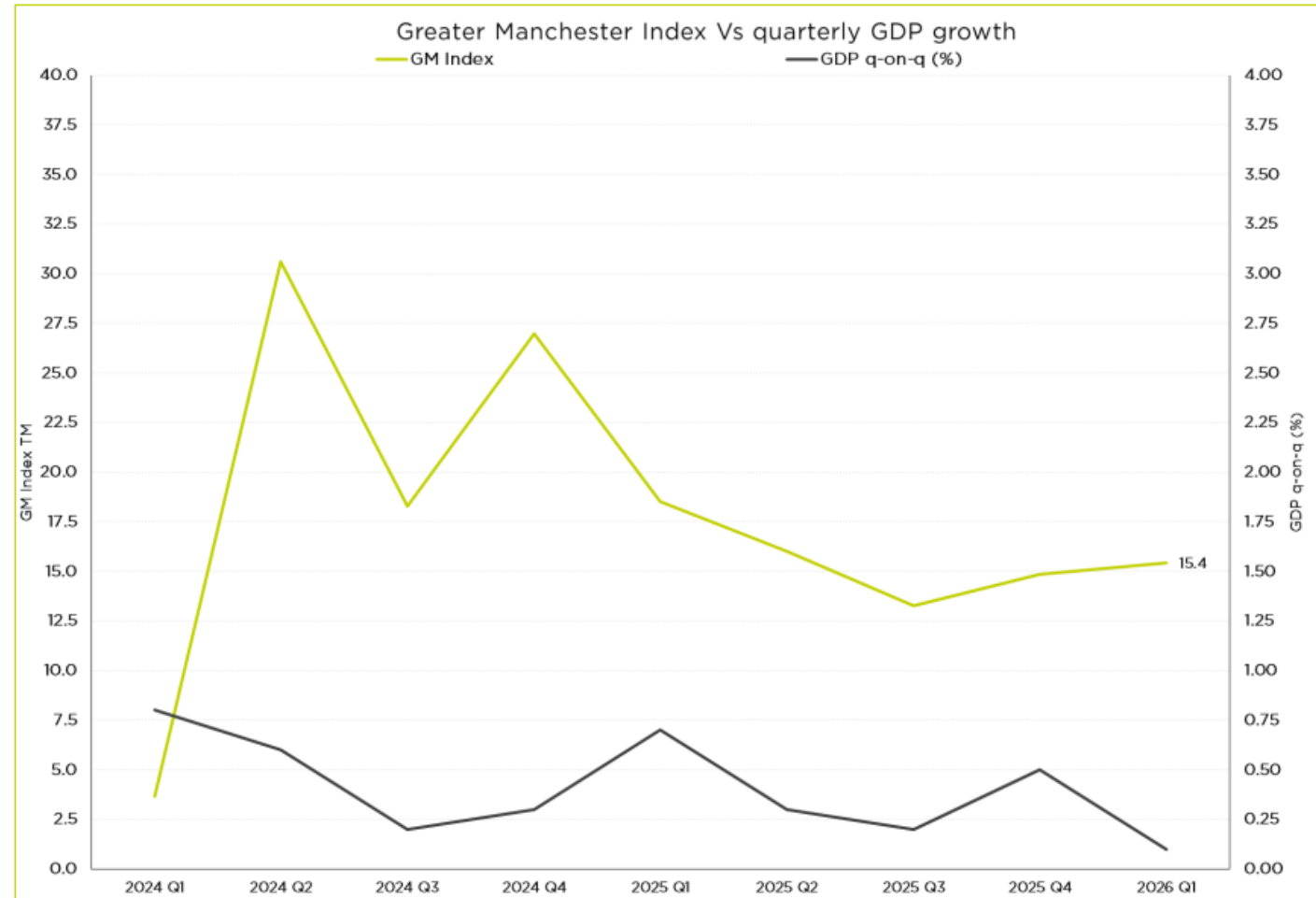
## Labour Market:

- **Unemployment levels have dropped from where they sat for most of 2025** – the costs of employment remain high however, but unemployment remains roughly at pre-pandemic levels.
- **The number of economically inactive residents in GM remained fairly stable in 2025** – 439,000 working age people are “inactive”, 76,000 of which want to work but can't.
- **Vacancy levels in Greater Manchester have broadly stabilised** – they remain slightly above pre-pandemic levels, but far below the peaks of 2022 and 2023.
- **GM's real pay growth has been higher than the national average for several years**, with latest data suggesting 2025 pay in GM was 8.9% higher than in 2008, compared to 6.0% nationally (adjusted for inflation).
- **Government's focus is on Youth Unemployment – NEET rates have been rising since 2021.** But they remain below the levels seen post-financial crisis in 2011.

# Quarterly Economic Survey

The Quarterly Economic Survey is run by the GM Chamber of Commerce and includes results from hundreds of businesses across the city region. Q3 2025 findings:

- **GM Index in Q1 2026: 15.4** (↑ 2.1pts since Q3 2025)
- Business confidence remains fairly stable.
- Inflation pressures are still apparent – businesses expecting to increase their prices by sector:
  - Services **42%** (→ with Q1 2025)
  - Manufacturing **63%** (↑ from Q1 2025)
  - Construction **57%** (↓ from Q1 2025)
- Services businesses expect to keep recruitment roughly the same – but construction and manufacturing firms expect lower levels of recruitment than in 2025.
- Business investment remains relatively low, as borrowing costs remain high.



# GC Business Survey

GROWTH, BUSINESS CONFIDENCE AND INVESTMENT	MAIN IMPACTS AND FINANCIAL RESILIENCE	FUTURE BUSINESS CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>GC Business Confidence Index</b> (GC-BCI) for April 2026 stood at 7.2 out of 10, similar to the previous quarter. Confidence levels are above average for Utilities LCEGs, Manufacturing, Construction, and BFPS, and lower in DCT, Health Care, Life Sciences, Hospitality, Education and Creative industries.</li> <li>➤ <b>Current sales &amp; future profits.</b> 17% (unchanged) of firms reported an increase in sales, and 9% (unchanged) reported decreased sales in the last 12 weeks.</li> <li>➤ <b>Investment.</b> 36% (vs 34%) of firms expect to increase capital expenditure in the year ahead. Sectors most optimistic about increasing investment are Utilities LCEGs, Manufacturing, Logistics</li> <li>➤ <b>Workforce development.</b> 25% (vs 26%) of firms plan to increase investment in workforce development – a significant decrease on previous months.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Main impacts.</b> 27% (vs 25%) reported rising costs as the main impact, followed by cashflow issues 14% (vs 15%), staff shortages due to recruitment difficulties 7% (vs 8%), and minor supply chain challenges 6% (vs 5%).</li> <li>➤ <b>Cash reserves.</b> 53% of firms (vs 51%) report having cash reserves to last over 6 months. Reserves were highest in Utilities LCEGs, Manufacturing, Engineering, Life Sciences, Retail, Healthcare, BFPS and Logistics; and lowest in DCTs, Education, Hospitality, Construction, and Other Services.</li> <li>➤ <b>Cashflow.</b> 14% (vs 15%) of firms reported cashflow problems. Micro-sized firms (&lt;49 employees) were more likely to face this challenge than larger SMEs (50– 249+ FTEs). Higher cashflow risk was reported in Manufacturing, Engineering, Retail, Hospitality, DCT and Education. Just 4% reported late payments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>The main challenges for businesses in the near term</b> are accessing new domestic sales, 49% (unchanged) of firms cited accessing new domestic sales. This issue is particularly acute in Utilities LCEGs, Manufacturing, Engineering, Logistics, Retail, DCTs, BFPS.</li> <li>➤ <b>International trade.</b> 19% of firms (vs 17%) export goods/services, with 16% (vs 18%) expanding into new markets, a trend particularly notable in the DCTs, Manufacturing, Engineering, and Retail sectors. 10% (vs 9%) of firms engaged in overseas trade are looking to expand in their current markets.</li> <li>➤ <b>Future support.</b> The main areas where firms seek future support are business planning 37% (vs 38%), innovation 35% (vs 34%), sales &amp; marketing 32% (unchanged), WfD/skills 26% (vs 28%), and financial advice/guidance 28% (vs 26%). 9% (vs 8%) require assistance with managing their environmental impact.</li> </ul>
RECRUITMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS ISSUES	RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION	SOCIAL VALUE AND GOOD EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Recruitment:</b> 20% (vs 23%) of firms are currently recruiting new staff. The proportion of firms recruiting are highest amongst larger SMEs (50+FTEs). By sector, firms were more likely to be recruiting in Utilities LCEGs, Manufacturing, Life Sciences, Logistics and BFPS. Sectors least likely to be recruiting are DCTs, Education, Hospitality, Healthcare, and Retail.</li> <li>➤ <b>Workforce skill gaps.</b> 43% (vs 38%) report that their existing workforce skills are fully aligned with their business plan objectives. 43% (vs 58%) indicate that skills are only partially at the required level, and 9% (vs 3%) stated that their workforce skills are not at the right level. (6% said ‘don’t know’).</li> <li>➤ Smaller SMEs were more likely to report gaps in sales &amp; marketing skills, whilst firms with 50+ FTEs were more likely to report gaps in motivating staff, management &amp; leadership and developing teamwork.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Future Innovation.</b> 32% (vs 31%) of firms are looking to increase investment and R&amp;D, highest in Utilities LCEGs, Manufacturing, Life Sciences and DCTs. 25% (vs 26%) of respondents said they were likely to invest in workforce development to support innovation and growth.</li> <li>➤ <b>Digital Transformation.</b> 15% (unchanged) of firms are looking to invest in digital transformation, highest within Manufacturing, Retail, Logistics, BFPS and Other Services; and less likely in Healthcare, Hospitality, Construction, Life Sciences.</li> <li>➤ <b>AI Adoption:</b> 49% (vs 43%) have adopted AI into business. Firms were most likely to have implemented AI in data processing and analytics &amp; automation</li> <li>➤ <b>Digital innovation.</b> 11% (vs 12%) have invested in the acquisition of digital products, and 7% (vs 6%) made investments in the acquisition of new machinery - especially in Utilities LCEGs, Manufacturing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Organisations were asked if they had/or intended to have the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Paying employees the Real Living Wage.</b> 48% of firms (vs 50%) paid the RLW, while 29% (vs 28%) indicated they are likely to implement it in the future.</li> <li>➤ <b>Investing in leadership.</b> 42% (vs 44%) said that they are investing in leadership, while 37% (unchanged) indicated they are likely to do so in future.</li> <li>➤ <b>Offering flexible working options to employees.</b> 41% (vs 43%) said this currently applies, and 31% (unchanged) said likely to implement in the future.</li> <li>➤ <b>Involving employees in the overall direction of the business.</b> 37% (unchanged) said this currently applies. 33% (unchanged) said they were likely to do so in future.</li> </ul>

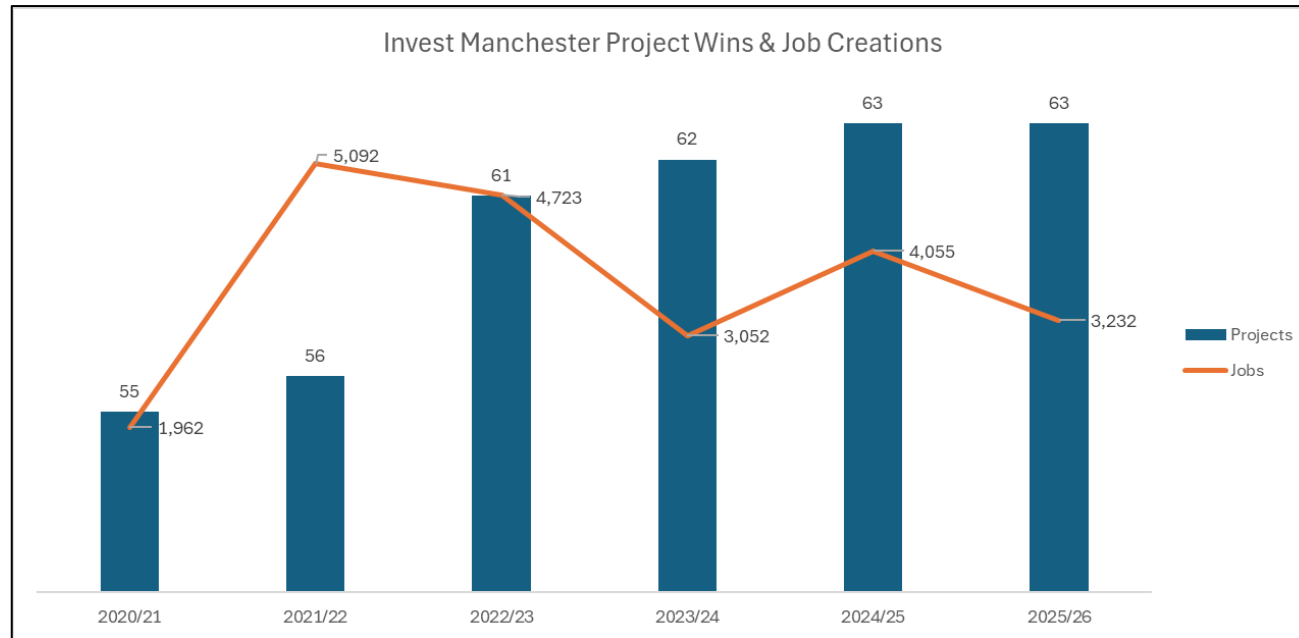
# Inward Investment Landscape

Invest Manchester supported the successful closure of 63 inward investment projects in 2025/26, with 3,232 corresponding job creations. Manufacturing was the leading sector for overall inward investment, with 20 projects and 1,487 job creations. The other leading sectors were Digital (13 projects, 363 jobs), Life Sciences (11 projects, 288 jobs) and Financial Services (6 projects, 492 jobs). Looking specifically at new investors, the leading sectors were Life Sciences (10 projects, 248 jobs) and Technology (9 projects, 308 jobs).

59% of inward investment projects were from new investors (no prior site in Greater Manchester). This is the highest proportion of new investors since 2019/20, and higher than the prior five-year average of 48%. The proportion of projects from foreign investors with no prior UK footprint (i.e. choosing Greater Manchester as their UK entry point) was 24%, above the prior five-year average of 16%. 81% of inward investment projects were from foreign investors. This is the highest proportion on record, and higher than the prior five-year average of 75%. The largest foreign source markets for investment projects were the United States (15 projects), Ireland (5 projects), India (4 projects) and Australia (4 projects).

## Inward Investment roles created YTD

Inward Investment Jobs Created 2025/26	
Role Type	%
Tech/ Digital	22%
Other	14%
Engineering	14%
Admin/ Customer Services	13%
Manufacturing/ Construction	10%
Scientific/ Research/ Product Development	10%
Internal Supply Chain/ Logistics	6%
Executive Leadership	5%
Business Development/ Marketing	3%
Creative/ Media	2%
Professional Services	1%
Strategy/ Policy	1%
Internal Finance/ Accounting	0%



- **The shape of GM’s workforce continues to change to the end of 2025 and into 2026.** Estimates reveal where jobs are being created and lost:
  - Some sectors are losing workers as automation and market trends impact them – Construction (down 5,000 on 2024), Agriculture & Fishing (down 2,200)
  - Other sectors continue to grow strongly due to private and public investment – Utilities (up 2,000) Banking, Finance, and Insurance (up 12,000), and Public Admin, Education & Health (up 32,000).
  - Manufacturing employment has stabilised at around 89,000 workers.
- Comparing GM with other regions:
  - GM has a **higher concentration of Financial, Business, and Professional Services** workers – 19%, compared with Liverpool (15%), West Midlands (16%), but lagging far behind London (27%).
  - GM has a **lower concentration of Manufacturing workers** – around 6.5%, compared with stronger areas like West Yorkshire (8.4%), or West Midlands (10%)
- **Public Services employ a growing proportion of workers in GM at around 1 in 3 (36.1%),** across health, education, emergency services, and local government. This is roughly comparable with other regions, except London at only 30%.
- Around **1 in 5 workers (21%) in GM are employed on a part-time** basis – but this varies hugely by sector, locality, age, and gender.
- **The rate of self-employment in GM has turned a corner and started growing again** – though 20,000 fewer people are self-employed since the pandemic.
- **GM’s Hospitality and Retail sectors shows some signs of recovery, adding 3,000 jobs in the past year** – however there are around 60,000 fewer workers than 2019.

## GM Workforce Overview

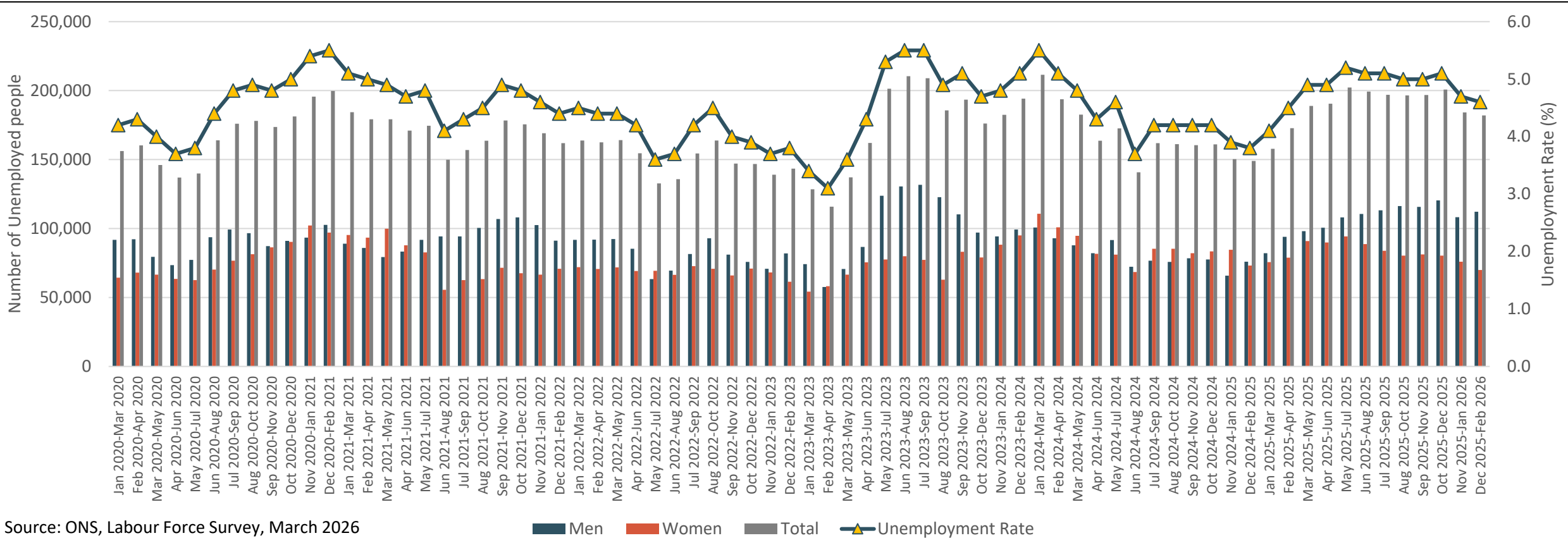
Industry (SIC)	Approx. Number of Jobs	Proportion (%) of jobs
A: Agriculture & fishing	600	-
B,D,E: Energy & water	17,900	1.3%
C: Manufacturing	89,000	6.5%
F: Construction	73,200	5.4%
G-I: Wholesale, retail, hotels & restaurants	207,100	15.2%
H-J: Transport, Digital & Communication	128,100	9.4%
K-N: Banking, finance & insurance etc.	261,200	19.2%
O-Q: Public admin, education & health	490,400	36.1%
R-U: Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	83,400	6.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>~1,358,200</b>	<b>~100.0%</b>

Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS, December 2025 (Latest)

Further detail: [GMCA Labour Market and Skills Dashboard](#)

# Unemployment

Unemployment, number and rate (16+), North West (NW), Jan-Mar 2020 – Dec 2025 – Feb 2026



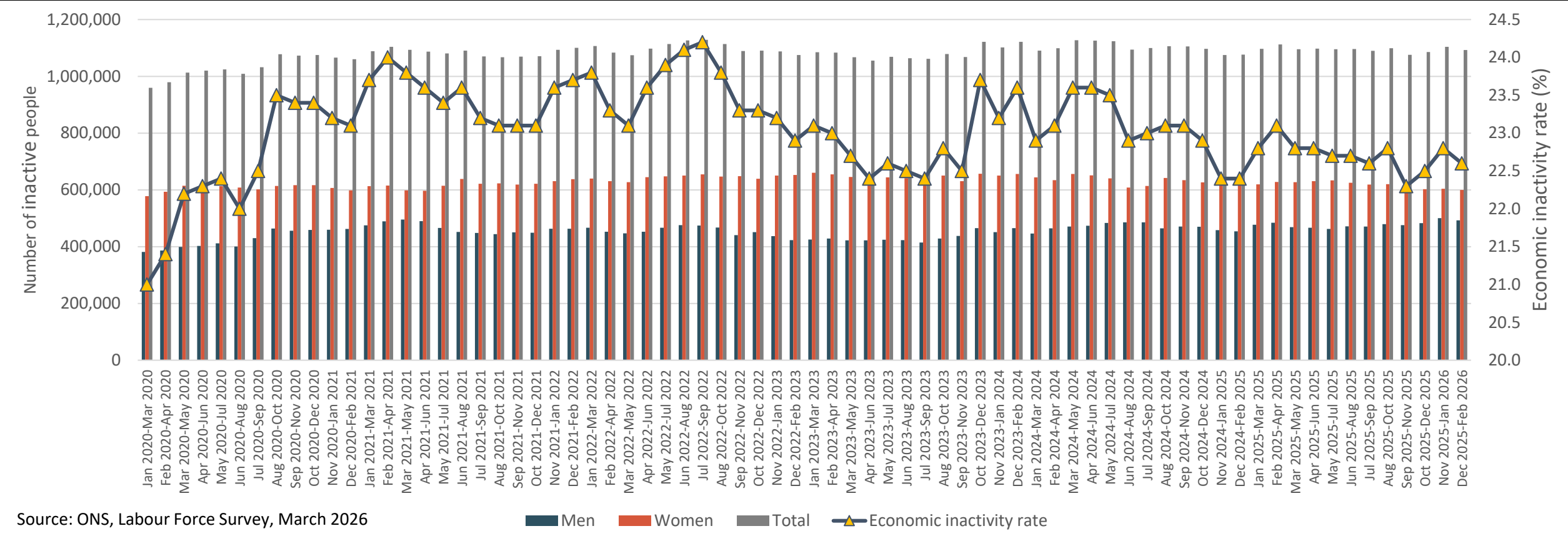
Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey, March 2026

For the latest period (between Dec 2025 – Feb 2026) the unemployment rate fell slightly to around 4.6% in the North West of England (compared with 4.9% in the UK) – representing approx. 182,000 people. This rate has fallen from above 5% where it had stabilised for most of 2025. The most recent quarterly data suggested around 66,600 people in Greater Manchester were unemployed.

Revised data from the Labour Force Survey suggests that in the North West, unemployment for men has generally dropped from recent peaks in mid-2023 and early 2024 (from roughly 130,000 to around 112,000). In GM, approximately 43,300 men and 23,300 women were unemployed.

# Economic Inactivity

Economic inactivity number and rate (16-64), North West (NW), Jan-Mar 2020 – Dec 2025 – Feb 2026



Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey, March 2026

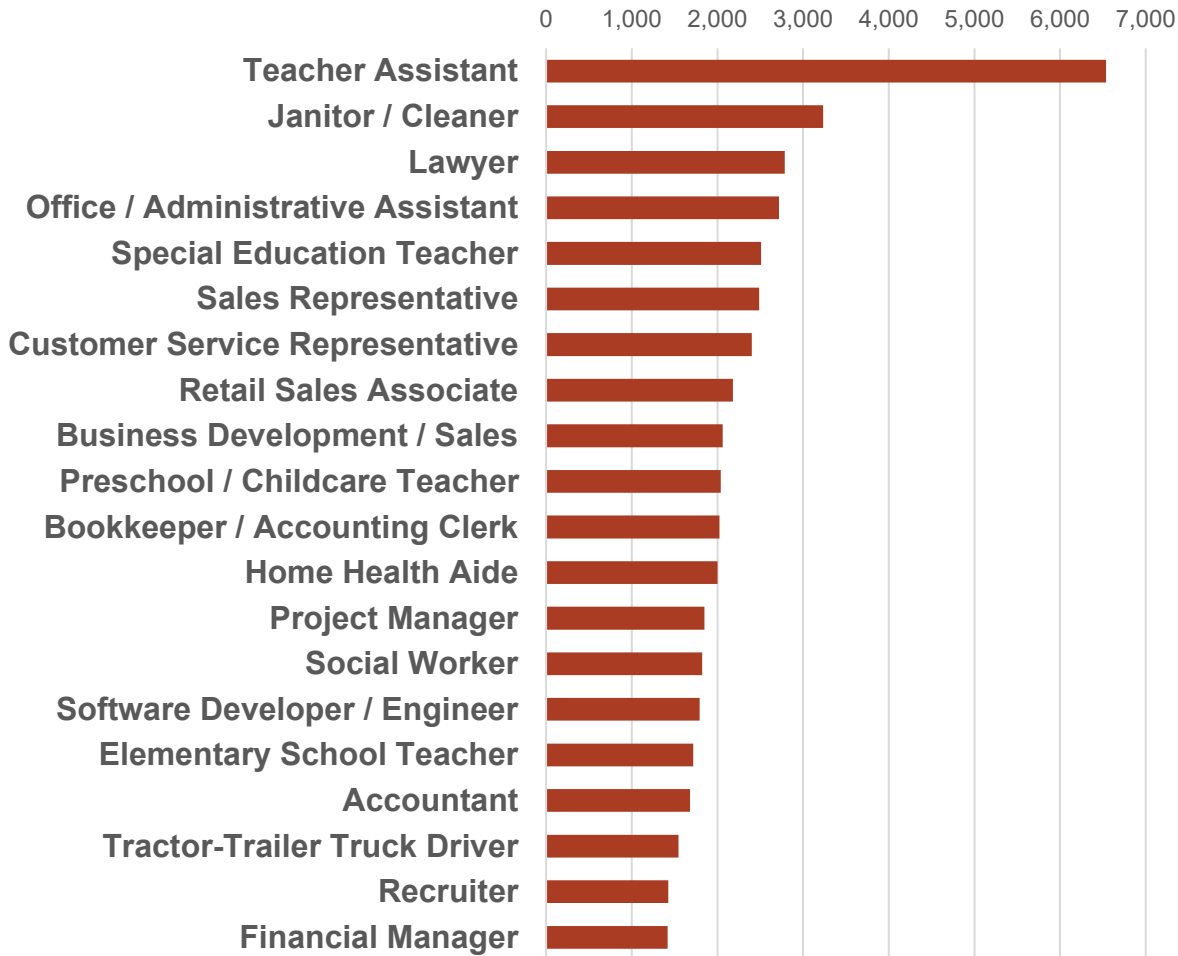
Men Women Total Economic inactivity rate

Economic inactivity refers to people who are not participating in the labour market: they are neither working nor seeking employment. The reasons for inactivity are varied, but the high levels are being driven by long-term ill-health among lower-paid workers and early retirement among higher-paid workers.

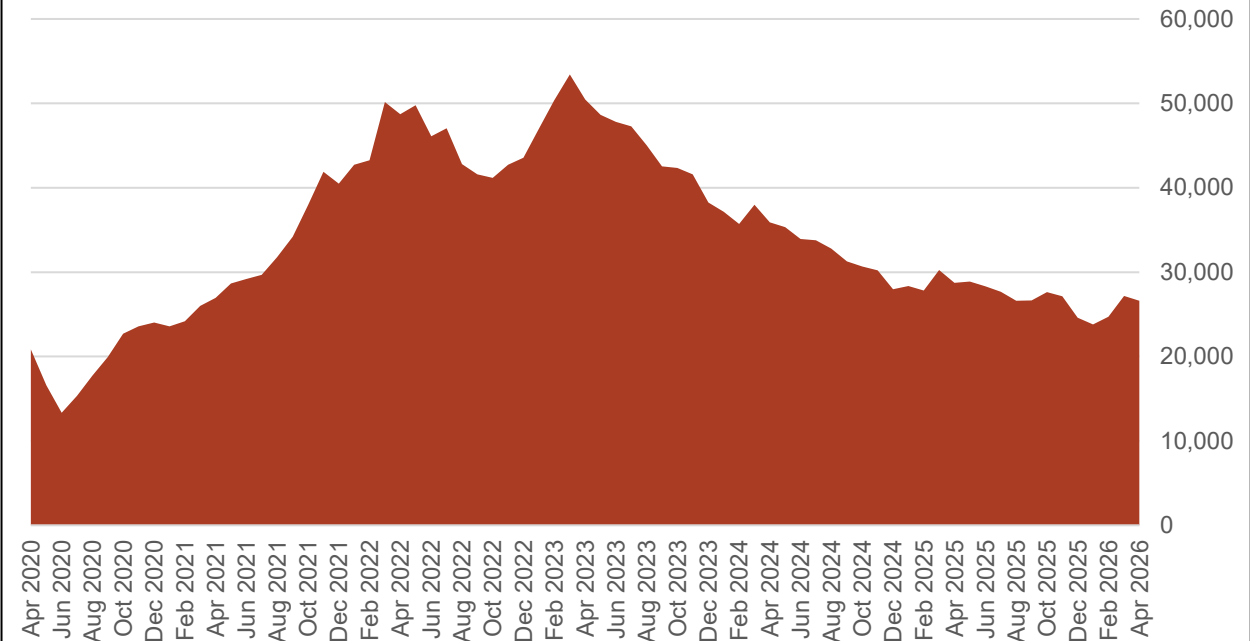
The revised Labour Force Survey Data suggested that Economic Inactivity in the North West fell slightly for the latest period (Dec 2025 – Feb 2026) at 22.6% - higher than the national rate at 21%. Around 439,700 of GM’s 16-64 population are economically inactive – 75,900 of which want a job. There are around 140,000 more economically inactive people in the North West than before the pandemic – with around 110,000 more men and 30,000 women.

# GM Vacancy Market

Unique Postings in GM – Last 6 months  
(Nov 2025 - Apr 2026)



Unique Job Postings in GM - 3 Month Moving Average  
(Apr 2020 - Apr 2026)



- Despite a dip at the end of last year, GM’s job market remains relatively healthy – with around 155,000 postings in the last 6 months, across just over 13,250 employers – 4,000 more than the previous 6-month window.
- The median salary being advertised in Greater Manchester has risen by 12.4% in the last 3 years.
- Teaching Assistant remains the most advertised role.

## Overview

**Greater Manchester's Integrated Investment Pipeline continues to take shape into 2026**, with many housing, energy, and infrastructure projects being added to a [map of the city region](#) to show where development will be happening.

- **GM's £1bn Good Growth Fund will accelerate this over the coming years, with the first wave of projects announced in March 2026.**

**Development in GM continues at scale, but delivery risk is increasingly driven by workforce capacity rather than demand.** Since the pandemic, this has accelerated, with the sector recording 9% average growth since 2020. Planning applications in GM are up around 50% in the past decade.

- Recent work on the Construction Pipeline Analysis conducted by the Chamber of Commerce projected a verified pipeline of around £36bn in the next 4 years.

**Labour demand for the sheer scale of development in GM is far more than the existing workforce can manage** – demand is expected to peak in 2026 at around 200,000 workers, double the amount that work in the sector in GM. This is likely to result in workers from across the North West travelling to GM to work on these projects.

**Further details emerged on the Construction Skills Package as Greater Manchester's Integrated Settlement was finalised.** GM will get a £19m boost to Construction skills provision over the next 3 years – funding training capacity in colleges, industry placements, and teacher industry exchange programmes.

**In order to inform this funding, GMCA have led the development of a Construction Workforce Plan along with the Local Authorities and stakeholders like GMCC, Colleges, and GC.** It focuses on improving provision, social value, data, workforce health, and entry routes into the sector.

**In early 2026, several GM providers started to deliver the first construction foundation apprenticeships**, and short course units through the Growth and Skills Levy.

## In-demand Occupations

Manchester City Centre, Bolton, Stockport and Salford have the highest number of Construction vacancies. Construction within a mile of the city centre is significant – around half of the jobs posted in the last 6 months were in Manchester.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026)

- Estimator / Quantity Surveyor (895) ←
- Construction Site Manager (824) ↑
- Surveyor (588) ↓
- Construction Helper / Worker (537) ↑
- Carpenter (467) ←

## Skills Requirements

Entry level roles have some strict site safety requirements (usually H&S cert or CSCS card) – for site labouring or general maintenance roles. Progression is often linked to ongoing CPD to learn new trades or equipment, additional “cards” and certifications, including plant machinery licences, installer safety certifications and additional site H&S certs.

Professional roles like civil engineering, architecture, project management, and surveying all usually require higher level qualifications – L4/5 or degree equivalent.

In-demand skills include:

- Electrical engineering
- Structural fabrication and steel erection
- Construction process/project management
- Site engineering, quantity surveying, retrofitting.
- Digitalisation

## Overview

**Greater Manchester is now entering the delivery phase of a fully integrated public transport system, with the Bee Network moving into a multi-modal model.**

- Bus franchising has been fully implemented across the city-region, with services now under local control, improved reliability, and increased patronage.
- The next phase will integrate local rail services from December 2026, marking a significant step towards a unified system covering bus, tram, and train.

A new line linking Liverpool and Manchester, previously announced as a part of the Northern Powerhouse Rail project, **faced some delays, despite £15bn committed from the Treasury for transport infrastructure in the North.** Some elements of it were embedded in the King's Speech in May – with repurposed elements from the HS2 bill featuring.

**Greater Manchester's Bee Network continues to set the bar for devolved transport.**

- TfGM are undertaking a major programme of engineering works across the Metrolink network during 2026, alongside recruitment drives to train new drivers.
- Performance metrics for buses continue to improve – with average punctuality, capacity, and patronage all rising in 2025, and continuing to improve into early 2026.

**From May 2026, rail services between Manchester Piccadilly and the Airport will run every hour throughout the night.** This will support passengers to access the airport better with overnight flights, and workers at sites in the airport to arrive at work for early morning shifts, something which employers have asked for over the past few years.

**Manchester Airport continues to grow strongly both as the third largest airport in the UK, but also as a key employment site in the city region.** Flight numbers are up 2.4% and passenger numbers are up 2.7% in the 12 months to April 2026.

The **future of cheap air travel may be damaged by a spike in jet fuel prices** caused by conflict in Iran and blockades of fuel exports. Some fuels have surged in price by around 80% - adding extra costs to airline operators.

## In-demand Occupations

Roles are concentrated in Manchester city centre (particularly in rail) – around a third of the total adverts. Jobs are also seen in transport hub areas like Stockport, Bolton, and Wigan advertising a relatively high number of vacancies.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Automotive Service Technician / Mechanic (721) ←
- Van / Taxi / Shuttle Driver (310) ↑
- Heavy Equipment Mechanic (306) ↓
- Automotive Customer Service Representative (176) ↑
- Transportation Manager (156) ↓

## Skills Requirements

Employers report skills shortages in project offices, transport planning roles, and engineering & other technical roles. These roles often have lower numbers of applications and limited resource.

Customer-facing roles are often difficult to recruit to and see high levels of turnover – not many understand the reality of the role. These roles take careful customer service and organisational skills.

In-demand skills include:

- Vehicle Maintenance and Inspection
- Steel-fixing and metal-workers
- Driving and operation
- Project Management
- Electrical engineering
- Communication Network specialists

## Overview

**The price of oil hit a 4-year high in late April**, subsequently raising shipping and petrol costs. In May, Trade bodies in Logistics pushed for government support in response to the oil price shocks following the Iran war and blockades.

- In a partial response, **DfT announced the £1bn of grants for purchasing Zero Emission Trucks and Vans**, so logistics firms and fleet operators can accelerate their electrification, reducing their need for petrol and diesel.

**At the end of March, the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority released the projects that will make up the Government Major Projects Portfolio.** Road, freight, and airport expansions all featured, and were largely well received by businesses in the logistics sector, despite long timelines on many of the projects.

**Several major logistics and warehousing developments in GM progressed in Spring 2026:**

- Ask Real Estate secured planning for the £30m "Horizon" logistics scheme at Manchester Business Park, featuring 116,000 sq. ft. of last-mile units near the airport, with construction starting summer 2026.
- Network Rail unveiled a new £10m freight maintenance depot at Guide Bridge with significant solar power capabilities to improve logistics connectivity.
- Kier Property started construction on a trade and logistics development in Sharston – with 9 units making up 100,000 sq. ft. of space.

**Businesses continued to invest in their supply chain development – with many considering rationalising their number of suppliers and the number of “steps”.** Greene King opened a new supply chain depot in Middleton, in March. It will handle 21,000 tonnes of drinks and 11 million cases of food each year for its 1,000 pubs in the North West.

Although part of the foundation “everyday” economy, logistics businesses are adopting new technology. **Logistics UK, the sector body, recently published a Logistics Innovation Opportunities Map, which highlights how automation and process improvement are creating savings and growth within the sector.**

## In-demand Occupations

Roles tend to be clusters in transport-accessible areas – industrial parks, areas used for warehousing and goods production – close to road, rail, or air freight depots. Supermarkets are recruiting a lot delivery drivers – Tesco are the largest single business recruiting drivers.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- HGV Truck Driver (1,458) ←
- Warehouse Worker (998) ←
- Sales Delivery Driver (824) ←
- Scheduler / Operations Coordinator (642) ↑
- Light Truck Delivery Driver (519) ←

## Skills Requirements

In addition to the core driving roles central to the sector, businesses also report a high demand for Mechanics, Transport Planners, Logistics Administrators, Transport Managers and Transport Co-ordinators.

Employers report a small but increasing need for workers who can work on and operate vehicles which are alternatively fuelled – low-emission and electric vehicles.

In-demand skills include:

- Digital Warehousing / Reverse Logistics.
- Transport planning / Fleet Management.
- Warehousing & Supply Chain management
- Software Skills
- Forklift truck operation
- Mechanics

## Overview

The parliamentary Communications and Digital Committee published a report on “AI, copyright, and the creative industries” – highlighting the concerns of workers and businesses in the sector about the training of AI models on human-created content. It gives various recommendations to government, including an overhaul of licencing to strengthen copyright protections for creatives.

The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) continued to convene their Local Skills Accountability Board (LSAB) aiming to address the skills needs within the sector.

In May, the Creative Industries Policy Evidence Centre released a skills audit – highlighting the fact that around half of businesses want to expand but are constrained by the skill deficiencies in the labour market.

- Technology plays a large role – the skills needed are rapidly changing as new software, techniques and devices become more widespread in the sector.

March 2026 saw the official approval of Year One projects under the £25m Creative Places Growth Fund. This investment spans 3 years and will support businesses in the music and screen production sectors, split across revenue and capital funding.

Businesses from across GM took part in the GM Creative Industries Exchange in April. Held at New Century Hall in the city centre, it focused on skills and talent, freelancing, and AI as three major themes faced by businesses in the sector.

One issue still facing the sector is the prevalence of freelancing for many creatives.

Around 30% of the workforce operate on a freelance basis – far higher than most other sectors. This effects the stability and opportunity for work – around two-thirds of these have reported a decline in work since the pandemic.

- GMCA is currently recruiting for a “GM Freelancer Network” to advise on the unique issues faced by workers under these conditions.

## In-demand Occupations

Most creative and cultural roles are found in the city centre, but sport roles are widespread across clubs, leisure centres, and sports facilities across GM.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Coach (601) ←
- Interpreter / Translator (271) ↑
- Physical Education Teacher (212) ↑
- Graphic Designer (167) ↓
- Sound Engineering Technician (96) ↑

## Skills Requirements

Many sectors see a growing need for workers with digital art and design tool skills. Despite recent turbulence, games development is a growing area in Greater Manchester with studios moving to the region.

Physical fitness along with dealing with customers are often key skills required for most sporting roles. Additionally, employers in the sector look for mental resilience, teamwork and communication, strategic thinking and enthusiasm.

In-demand skills include:

- Marketing
- Social media
- Project management
- Sales
- Teamwork
- Creativity

## Overview

**Retail is still seeing drops in footfall as consumer behaviour changes.** Total UK retail sales fell by 3% in the year to April 2026.

- Greater Manchester has generally been going against this trend however, with town centres across the region seeing a range of new businesses and venues open.
- The city centre leads the way, with a modest 1.5% increase in footfall, and over 40 million visits to retail and hospitality venues in the city centre in 2025.

**Retail businesses saw mixed fortunes as spending habits continued to change.** Co-Op group have announced a major physical rollout, with 24 new stores, but TG Jones (what was WH Smith) is facing a restructure which will likely see 150 of its 500 stores closing.

**Inflation still plagues the sector,** with retailers and hospitality providers raising prices several times each year. Although the overall rate of inflation (CPI) has come down significantly over the past 18-24 months, the prices of food & drink are once again rising at a higher rate than other products. Conflict in the middle east effecting fertiliser production is expected to increase the price of food production even more.

**Therme Manchester continued construction into 2026** – the leisure and wellbeing facility at TraffordCity which, when completed, will be the largest in the UK. When operational, it should create 650 direct jobs on the site.

**Concerns around the health of the hospitality sector continued into 2026** – the first quarter of 2026 saw 2 UK pubs close their doors each day. Greater Manchester again sees some positives against this backdrop – with new pubs and luxury dining venues opening in various town centres and the city centre.

**Manchester entered the Top 10 of Colliers UK Development Index for the first time** – indicating a growing tourist economy and demand for additional hotel rooms. It highlighted affordable land costs, nimble planning and development infrastructure, and a growing status of Manchester as an international destination.

## In-demand Occupations

Roles are heavily concentrated in Manchester City Centre and regional town centres, with other hubs like the Trafford Centre and Retail Parks seeing many opportunities.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Janitor / Cleaner (3,071) ←
- Retail Sales Associate (1,314) ←
- Bartender (779) ↑
- Maid / Housekeeping Staff (745) ↑
- Sales Assistant (731) ↑

## Skills Requirements

Entry level roles are often open to many, with on-the-job training provided as part of induction. Management and team leader roles are common after workers have enough experience.

Roles within hospitality often have unsociable shift patterns, physically demanding duties, and long-hours, but there are many opportunities for those who stay and develop a career in the sector. Skilled bar staff and chefs can often find many roles.

In-demand skills include:

- Customer service
- Sales
- Communication
- Food safety and sanitation
- Teamwork and adaptability
- Food preparation

## Overview

**April 2026 saw confidence in the sector at a 4-year high.** The UK Manufacturing PMI rose to 53.7, and output, new order, and employment all increased. However, supply chain pressures continue to impact many businesses as the flow of materials was disrupted by conflict in the Middle East.

- In response to this, many manufacturers are looking to reduce their reliance on international supply chains – the Manufacturing Technology Association (MTA) estimate three-quarters of businesses want to do this.

**Recent data from FourJaw Manufacturing Analytics suggested that both output productivity growth in Manufacturing in the UK has outstripped other countries,** despite a smaller workforce and higher inflation. Output is 6% larger than in 2020, and productivity is 10% higher. This highlights the role the sector must play in driving economic growth and high-skill, high-pay jobs.

**Four Further Education Colleges have been designated as the “Technical Excellence Colleges” for Advanced Manufacturing as part of DfE’s TEC programme rollout.** They will attract both capital funding for capacity building and updating teaching equipment, and revenue funding for working on teaching quality and industry links.

**Analysis by sector body MakeUK suggested:**

- **52,000 vacancies in the sector are unfilled**
- Investment intentions remain high – with many businesses intending to invest into their growth over the next 12 months. This will include adaptations for lower energy use, new capital equipment, and new product development.

**A government announcement shared further details of targeted sector-specific skills investment with £182m in the Engineering Skills Package.** This will be split across Adult Skills, TEC funding to improve quality in FE provision, and the expansion of apprenticeships and T Levels for young people. The announcement also included an expansion of Made Smarter – business support for SME Manufacturers for innovation and adoption.

## In-demand Occupations

While there is a sizeable concentration of other businesses in the city centre, manufacturing firms are spread across GM. Wigan, Rochdale, Stockport, and Tameside all have large numbers of manufacturing firms.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Manufacturing Machine Operator (823) ←
- Electrical Engineer (476) ↑
- Production Worker (436) ↑
- Welder / Solderer (356) ↑
- Facilities Engineer (328) ↑

## Skills Requirements

Entry level production roles have low requirements, but roles are generally unskilled and poorly paid. Workers can progress by learning to use additional tools and equipment, specialising in the likes of mechanical, electrical, welding, or machining.

Some staff are supported on engineering training programmes if they want to develop – cross-skilling of mechanical and electrical engineers is desirable.

In-demand skills include:

- Welding
- Industrial electrical trades
- Green energy, lean manufacturing, sustainability
- Robotics and automation
- Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM) software, digitalisation, electronics engineering technicians

## Overview

**Despite various headwinds, the FBPS sector continues to be a bright spot for the UK.**

- Businesses in the sector are growing and constitute 12% of the UK's economic output.
- Exports have grown, with London retaining its spot as the largest financial centre in Europe. FBPS generates the largest trade surplus of any sector in the UK.
- JP Morgan exemplified this by announcing the construction of a new £3bn headquarters in London.

**Consumer behaviour continues a trend towards more digital banking.** The latest data suggested that around half of Brits have a digital-only bank account – with disruptors like Monzo, Starling and Revolut becoming more popular with users. These trends confirm the shift towards tech and digital roles in financial services, over customer service.

**UK Research and Innovation – a DSIT-funded body – announced £118m to support businesses in the sector to drive technology adoption and innovations in the sector.** It will build on the Made Smarter model of diffusion and adoption, supporting with consultancy, grants, and skills development.

**The Financial Services Skills Commission released their annual report in March.**

- It highlighted that headcount had dropped in the sector as businesses look to automate certain processes with AI tools. However, **Early Careers intakes grew** – driven primarily by apprenticeship starts rather than graduate intake.
- There are many “hard-to-fill” roles in the sector – but these generally **split into technical roles related to transformation, and industry-specific roles** like underwriters, accountants, and pricing analysts.

**Firms in various parts of Financial, Business and Professional Services are gearing up for changes to the Apprenticeship levy,** which will stop employers using their levy to fund higher level qualifications, which include the widely used Accountancy and Taxation Professional (L7), and the Solicitor (L7) Apprenticeship. While it may cause an initial dip, there was a healthy commercial market for these qualifications pre-Levy.

## In-demand Occupations

Most roles in financial services like insurance, wealth management and private equity are advertised in the sector are in Manchester city centre, but each area of GM has some accountancy and legal firms.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Lawyer (2,785) ←
- Bookkeeper / Accounting Clerk (2,024) ←
- Project Manager (1,802) ↑
- Accountant (1,678) ↓
- Financial Manager (1,419) ←

## Skills Requirements

Progression within the sector is fairly structured and often heavily linked to further accredited qualifications:

- Accountancy: ACCA, ACA, CIMA, CIPFA, CTA
- Financial Services: IOC, IMC, CII, CFA
- Law: LLB, LPC, CILEX

There is increasing emphasis on soft skills as well as technical skills required to work in the sector, in particular:

- Communication (strong oral and written)
- Teamwork
- Attention to detail
- Curiosity & commercial awareness
- Problem solving
- Analytical skills

## Overview

**Artificial Intelligence continues to disrupt in a number of ways in 2026.** Recent usage data suggests that the increasing adoption of AI will fast meet a bottleneck in terms of physical infrastructure. Record amounts are being invested into data centre capacity – with investment expected to quadruple by 2029. FinTech and LegalTech are two subsectors seeing more AI use. GM has substantial clusters of both types of businesses.

**BDO predicted that “alternative” connectivity will continue to gain prominence in 2026** – low orbit satellite networks are now able to provide high-speed internet connections and are becoming preferred over some traditional suppliers. Early 6G infrastructure is another area that may see growth for mobile connectivity.

After a surge in demand over the course of the pandemic, demand in the sector has dropped to a more stable level. **Job adverts in digital roles peaked in May 2022 at just over 7,500 and have since dropped back in April 2026 to 1,700.**

- The **race for AI development talent continues** however – the number of specific roles advertised has doubled in the past year.
- Manchester Digital’s 2026 skills audit highlighted AI Skills, DevOps, and software engineering as some key gaps – and noted that senior level roles are hard-to-fill.

**Central Government departments are playing a role in growing the digital ecosystem in Greater Manchester.**

- [March 2026 saw the Government Digital Campus final confirmed](#), tying together the digital teams of departments with a presence in GM like DWP, DSIT, DfE, and HMRC.
- Government continue to explore the adoption of AI to improve public services – though 45% of services still lack a digital pathway as of late 2025.

**In April, The Manchester College was designated as a Digital Technical Excellence College**, recognising the quality of provision, employer relationships, and potential for growth. It will receive funding to support the development of quality provision and increased capacity on digital training programmes.

## In-demand Occupations

Digital specialists needed in wider sectors include data analysis, digital marketing, digital finance, cyber and information security. Most dedicated roles are in Manchester and Salford, but many firms now need in-house digital experts.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Software Developer / Engineer (1,791) ←
- Computer Support Specialist (939) ←
- Computer Systems Engineer (797) ←
- Cybersecurity Engineer (771) ←
- Data Analyst (484) ↑

## Skills Requirements

Early career roles in the sector mostly require a high level of skills – in the shift to AI-powered software development, there are fewer entry level positions available, so they have become more competitive.

Development roles usually require programming languages (SQL, Javascript, Python, C++) or familiarity with large suites of digital cloud infrastructure (Microsoft Azure, Amazon Web Services). Progression within the sector is often linked to improved technical skills, project management, and leadership opportunities.

In-demand skills include:

- Agile Methodology
- Problem-solving
- Automation
- Web Development
- Machine Learning and Large Language Models

## Overview

Health and Social Care remains the largest sector in GM by workforce and must continue to grow to keep up with increasing demand on services. **The sector directly employs over 200,000 people, nearly 1 in 6 in GM. Hundreds of thousands more residents take up roles as unpaid carers and volunteers.**

**The 10-year plan announced in 2025 for the NHS** focused on shifts from Hospital to community care; from analogue to digital and from treatment to prevention. These changes will impact the workforce in a number of ways:

- **Location:** the shift away from large acute hospital settings to neighbourhood health centres and clinics will change where people work.
- **Collaboration:** with more multi-disciplinary work expected.
- **Integration:** more direct contact and cross-over working with social care settings to improve care once patients leave.

**Pay continues to be a critical issue in Social care** – increases in the National Minimum Wage have resulted in more pay compression, particularly in the Social Care sector. Before the increases in NMW in April 2026, Skills for Care estimated that the median hourly rate of a care worker was £12.60, below the living wage. With the change, around 640,000 have had a pay rise in April.

**AI adoption is continuing in some settings in an attempt to drive efficiency.** Although not wholesale replacing staff, AI is being used as a “second pair of eyes” in radiology and dermatology to speed up diagnoses, and accurate voice transcription is supporting clinicians to record documentation in an easier way.

**GM continues to lead the way in Health Innovation** – with a record milestone reached in March 2026 as over half a million patient records being accessed through the new GM Care Record system in a single month. This digitalisation and integration is connecting tens of thousands of staff across different parts of the Health and Care system, to refine how they deliver outcomes for patients.

## In-demand Occupations

Health and Social Care is the largest single workforce in GM – employing around 14-15% of workers. However, many settings have an ageing workforce with concerns about how some of this knowledge will be replaced. Jobs are found across GM, with big concentrations around hospitals and care trusts.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Home Care Assistant (2,000) ↑
- Family / School / General Social Worker (1,727) ↓
- Caregiver / Personal Care Aide (1,340) ↑
- Registered General Nurse (947) ↓
- Youth Counsellor / Worker (770) ↑

## Skills Requirements

Personal values are often more highly prized than skillset by employers – compassion / empathy / good communication skills / personal resilience. Values based recruitment is becoming popular for some roles

Public Health skills and preventative advice is needed in all roles – not just specialist ones – to reduce strain on the service. This reflects the

In-demand skills include:

- Mental Health Awareness
- Basic Clinical Skills
- Personal Care
- Social Work
- Clinical Governance

## Overview

**In July 2026, a GM Post-16 Pathways report will be released, commissioned by the Civic Universities Board and Further Education Colleges.** It analyses pathways between FE and HE, digging into learner retention in GM across different sectors, routes through different qualifications to competence, and a focus on Level 4 and 5 qualifications.

Over the past 6 years, **some areas of the sector are seeing much higher levels of demand than others as the demands from the sector changes.** Since October 2019, the number of job adverts for Computing Teachers is 16 times higher, the number of Early Years Teachers is roughly double, but demand for Drama and Art Teachers has nearly halved.

**Government announced plans on the reform of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision.** Spending on SEND provision has tripled in the last decade, because of a 71% increase in learners with an Education, Health and Care Plan.

- The new reforms introduce a tiered system (instead of the previous “all-or-nothing” setup) and a focus on inclusion and keeping SEND children in mainstream schools.

**Although the number of staff in Early Years settings has been rising for the past 4-5 years, the numbers into 2025-26 appear to have plateaued,** despite government efforts to expand the number of settings. An NFER report using DfE datasets showed that the workforce only grew by 0.2% between 2024-25.

In January, **the University of Manchester developed a partnership with Microsoft, becoming the first university in the world to ensure every student would have access to Copilot** – 65,000 licences for students and staff will roll out by the end of the summer.

- This will change the way teaching is done – several policies are being developed to “categorise” the degree to which AI can be used in modules.

**Education providers will be able to respond to GM’s new Local Skills Improvement Plan, due for release in July.** It will be the aggregated voice of thousands of employers across the city region, so can support making provision more labour market relevant.

## In-demand Occupations

Staff with industry skills and experience to be able to teach higher level qualifications are in very high demand in most education settings. Retention of staff is difficult – and worsening, with only 60% expecting to remain in the profession for the next 3 years.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Teaching Assistant (6,524) ←
- Special Education Teacher (2,513) ←
- Early Years Teacher (2,044) ←
- Elementary School Teacher (1,720) ↑
- Tutor / Teacher (1,414) ↓

## Skills Requirements

Education recruitment is highly seasonal – since the last seasonal report (Nov 24 – Apr 25), Teaching Assistant posts are 3 times as common and SEND teaching posts have doubled as schools and education recruit additional posts for the year. Generally, the levels of demand are comparable to 2024.

FE teaching roles do not require the same formal teaching qualifications as schoolteachers but sometimes do not have the same parity of pay either. Early Years Educators similarly see lower wages than schoolteachers.

In-demand skills include:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) awareness
- Mathematics
- Learner Support - particularly around mental health
- Safeguarding and child protection
- Careers leads

## Overview

Between them, the 3 emergency services of GM handle around 5 million calls a year – around 13,700 a day. The emergency services still see difficulties due to **large increases in demand and an ageing population, a lack of funding, and widespread workforce shortages.**

**Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service** has 41 fire stations, 52 fire engines, and the service employs 2,100, of which 1,200 are frontline firefighters.

- A new [Fire Plan for 2025 – 2029](#) was launched in May – highlighting prevention, response times, developing firefighters with improved training provision, and pushing for financial efficiencies to provide better value for money.

**Greater Manchester Police** is the third largest of 43 police forces in the country – employing around 8,500 officers and around 5,000 support staff.

- The improvement journey for GMP continues – with a review of spend underway to address budget pressures, improvements in response times, and new systems for managing digital evidence and paperwork making the force more efficient.

**North West Ambulance Service** serve more than seven million people, including residents of Greater Manchester, across approximately 5,400 square miles.

- It is served by around 7,000 staff including paramedics, MERIT Doctors, and dispatchers, and is supported by 1,200 volunteers like community first responders.

**Recruitment into the sector varies** – demand is largely driven by public investment and regulation. Job postings data over the last 6 years shows a focus on fire safety – with 5 times more Fire Safety Specialists and 3 times more Fire Inspector roles than in 2019 – driven by the Building Safety Regulator and changes brought in after the Grenfell disaster.

**AI, data analytics, and the increased quality of video surveillance are all growing trends in the sector.** This means the type of experts needed to work on criminal cases and in forensics has changed significantly in the past decade.

## In-demand Occupations

Roles are concentrated around police stations, ambulance depts, and fire stations – Manchester, Salford, Stockport, and Bolton see higher demand than other areas. Private Security roles are largely concentrated in the city centre around venues.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Security Officer (331) ←
- Fire Safety Specialist (45) ↑
- Criminal Investigator (70) ↑
- Dispatcher (64) ↓
- Police Officer (64) ↓

## Skills Requirements

Primary front-line roles need exceptional people skills – empathy and compassion are critical for most of the duties performed on the front-line.

Digital skills both in using new equipment and in combatting different emergencies – as crime moves online, the need for cybercrime and fraud specialists is growing in most police forces across the UK.

In-demand skills include:

- Preventative measures
- Leadership skills
- Resilience
- Community engagement including BSL and other language skills;
- Health and wellbeing (including mental health expertise)
- Physical fitness

## Overview

**ONS figures released in March 2026 showed that the amount of “green jobs” in the UK have grown by 28% over the last decade.** Rapid growth is concentrated in energy efficiency products, waste management and renewable energy.

**GM’s eighth Green Summit was held in March 2026 at Co-Op Live.** The event highlighted the progress made in areas like transport emissions, green spaces, and air quality, while setting out for further ambitions for clean energy deployment, retrofit, and waste.

**Government activity to support retrofit has continued to accelerate in 2026:**

- In January, a “Warm Homes Plan” was launched – with £15bn of investment to support decarbonisation and lowering energy costs in households.
- In March, government announced they would legislate to make plug-in solar panels available in shops in the UK in a matter of months.

**In April, companies which were part of the HyNet project in the North West – a hydrogen pipeline and carbon capture infrastructure project – urged the government to prioritise it.** An open letter from 40 firms pointed to successful trials, the willingness of the business community to back it, and the impact it would have on economic growth and jobs.

**GM’s Business Growth Hub has a Green Economy arm, which in 2024-25 supported nearly 500 businesses across the city region** with consultancy and growth advice, workforce development and decarbonisation efforts. It has been instrumental to the Bee Net Zero network of businesses, which continue to collaborate on sustainability aims.

**A wide partnership coordinated by the North West Net Zero Hub have developed a Clean Energy Skills Action Plan for the region.** Released in May 2026, it focuses on how a patchwork of devolved areas like the North West can support the development of skills across the range of occupations needed. It will be supported by the designation of City of Liverpool College as the Clean Energy Technical Excellence College – aiming to drive up quality, develop capacity, and streamline employer engagement.

## In-demand Occupations

Roles in the Green Economy well paid in comparison to the broader labour market in GM – job postings have around £40,000 median salary.

Main roles in GM (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026):

- Sustainability Specialist (110) ←
- Environmental Planner (60) ←
- Waste / Recycling Worker (43) ↑
- Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Manager (36) ↑
- Geotechnical Engineer (27) ↑

## Skills Requirements

Skills needed for the Green Economy are broad. The size of sector will grow greatly as GM and wider UK moves towards Net Zero targets. Adoption of technology like low carbon heating and electric vehicles are already growing rapidly.

Innovation, digital skills, and creativity will drive adoption and optimisation of new technology. Various senior roles in many occupations and subsectors go unfilled, some skillsets are in very high demand.

In-demand skills include:

- Management
- Sales
- Project Management
- Carbon Literacy
- Construction trade skills are critical in several areas
- Natural environment – waste and water management

# GM In-demand Occupations – Nov 2025 – Apr 2026

The top 5 occupations across GM reveal a little about the specific employment profile in each borough. Some foundational roles like Cleaner and Retail Sales Associate appear in most areas.

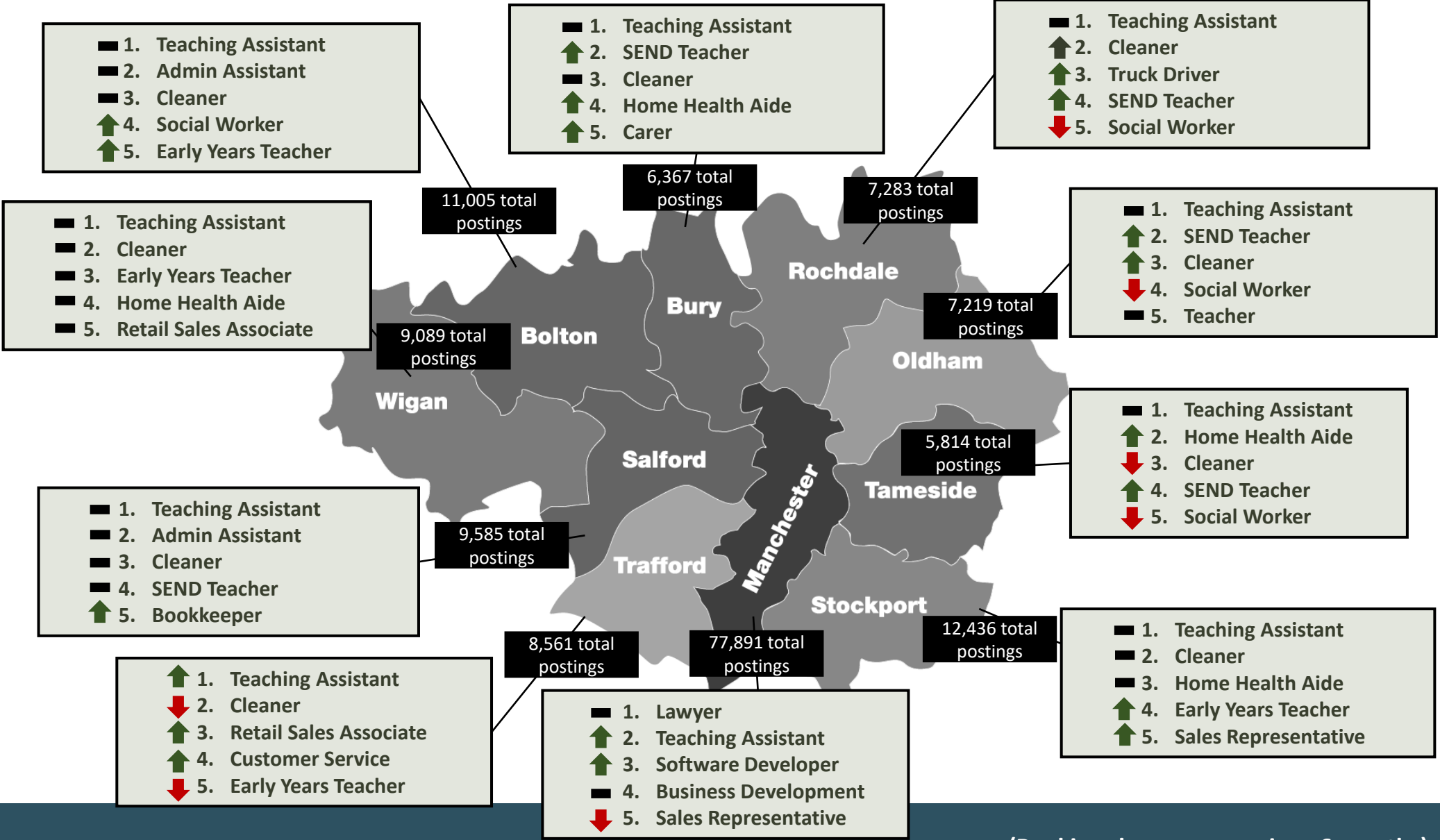
Teaching Assistant vacancies remain the highest across every Local Authority area bar Manchester.

Manchester sees legal roles top – with other “head office” roles like Business Development and Software Developers in the top 5.

Rochdale’s central role as a logistics hub can be seen – with adverts for Truck Drivers now 3<sup>rd</sup> most common.

**Key:**

- ↑ Rose in ranking
- ▬ No change
- ↓ Fell in ranking



# GM In-demand Common Skills – Nov 2025 – Apr 2026

The top 5 common skills are largely the same across the whole of Greater Manchester – Communication and Management are particularly important.

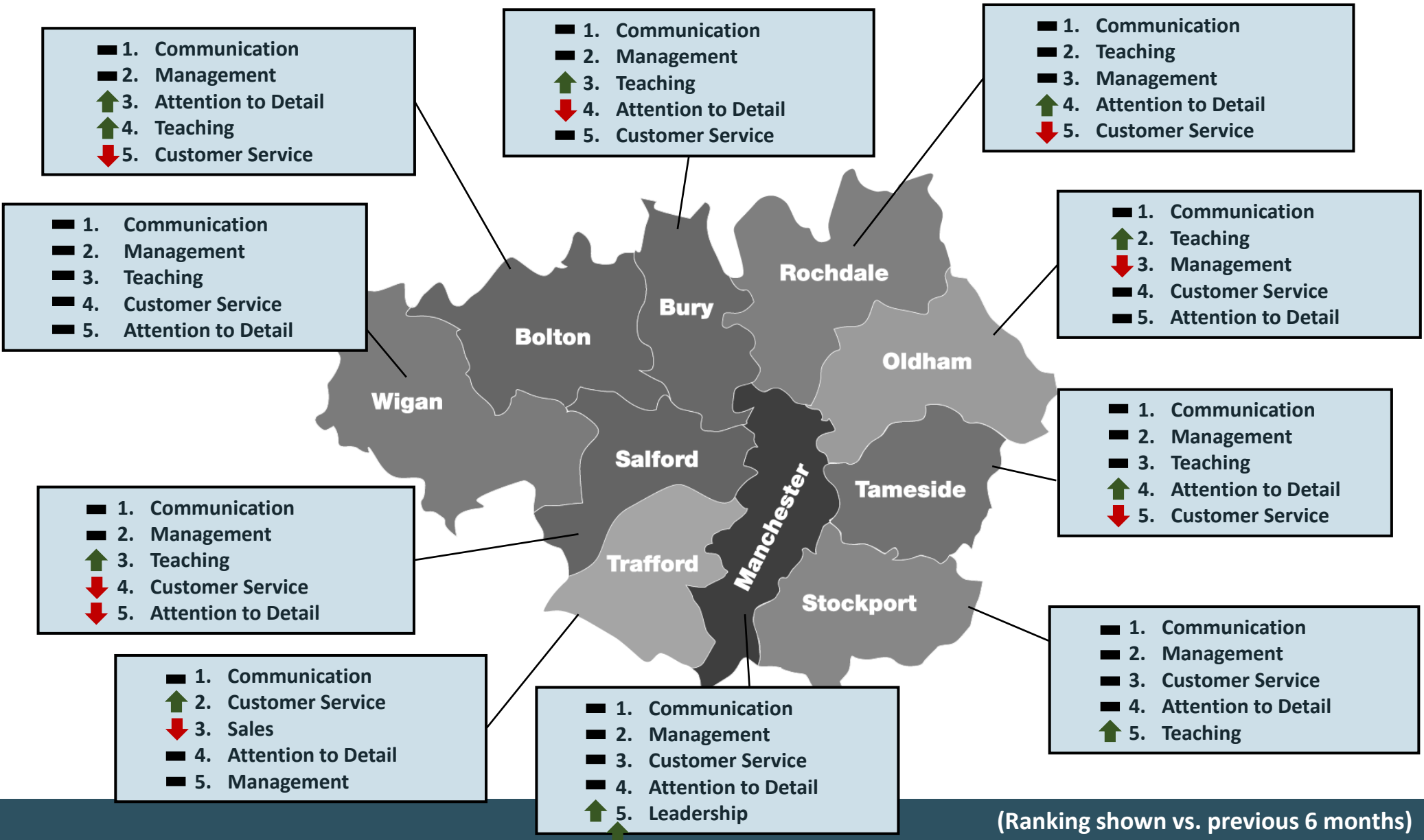
Though less popular than previously, skills in sales and customer service are important across many sectors

Teaching remains in the top 5 skills in many areas – though this is almost exclusively driven by the sheer scale of recruitment into schools.

Leadership has entered the top 5 skills in demand in Manchester – alongside management, with employers recognising they need both.

**Key:**

- ▲ Rose in ranking
- No change
- ▼ Fell in ranking



(Ranking shown vs. previous 6 months)

# GM In-demand Specialist Skills – Nov 2025 – Apr 2026

The top 5 skills on job adverts varies frequently and shows a more unique flavour to the roles in each borough.

While demand for Mental Health Awareness has dropped in some areas, condition-specific skills like Autism Awareness can be seen in areas with high education and health needs.

Auditing, Invoicing and Finance appear frequently – many managers are expected to have strong financial skills for managing budgets.

Continuous Improvement is rising in many areas – postings mentioning it are up 70% since 2019.

**Key:**

- ↑ Rose in ranking
- ▬ No change
- ↓ Fell in ranking

