

# Chapter 3: A highly skilled city

## Strategic overview

The economic crisis driven by the COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe economic disruption, affecting productivity, income and employment levels. The nature and unprecedented scale of the pandemic have the potential to have a medium to long-term impact on the way the city performs and operates across different sectors. Manchester City Council and its partners have responded to this challenging and unprecedented crisis by protecting the most vulnerable and ensuring the city is ready to bounce back as quickly as possible through inclusive growth. Not all sectors were affected adversely during the pandemic; there was strong growth in employment in the digital, health and social care, and education sectors. Manchester is ready and will play a leading role in levelling up the city and country. Manchester's Economic Recovery and Investment Plan, '[Powering Recovery](#)', is a key part of the response, alongside the development of an Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) for the city to help build confidence in the long-term future of the city. The plan also responds to other factors, such as Brexit, climate change, and building on the city's strengths to maintain confidence.

This chapter will explain how we have responded to these challenges, starting with education. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the delivery of education for children and young people in the city. As well as the cancellation of national assessments and exams (including GCSEs and A levels), schools were closed for most pupils for significant

periods of both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. The focus therefore has been on supporting schools, early years settings and other providers to ensure a good-quality remote learning offer as well as additional support for the most vulnerable. The development of a long-term plan to address the pandemic's impact on the education of our children and young people is a major priority for the city.

The wider impact on young people, unemployment levels, and a range of businesses means that the scale of the challenge in returning to strong inclusive growth is high. The Council and its partners have demonstrated that the city is in a strong position to rise to these challenges and has already started to do so. This strength is based on our track record of delivery, spirit and continued resilience (including a diverse economy with assets and strengths in major growth sectors and a young and diverse population), and effective partnerships. The plan focuses on the three strategic aims identified in the [Our Manchester Industrial Strategy](#) – People, Place and Prosperity, and on the priorities of inclusive growth and our zero-carbon commitments.

An important part of the recovery work has focused on skills, the labour market, and business-support activity. Our response has been to deliver activity that tackles the impact of those furloughed or newly unemployed, youth unemployment, skills and employment support for adults and inequalities. Our response has been based on intelligence and a strong understanding of the evolving impact on our residents and communities.

The Employment Partnership was created to tackle emerging trends relating to unemployment and skill shortages, as well as to provide immediate employment support for residents. The Youth Unemployment group have prioritised delivering Kickstart effectively for young people, as well as maximising apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities. The Skills and Employment Support for Adults has responded by supporting providers and learners to continue participating through lockdowns when physical teaching has not been allowed or severely restricted. The [Manchester Adult Education and Skills Plan](#) remains at the heart of our response. Digital exclusion has been highlighted throughout the pandemic and has been a successful part of our response to ensure that all residents can be supported to access and effectively engage with the internet for both work and life.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on skills and the labour market. With the rapid change of the skills supply-and-demand landscape, some occupations are growing rapidly while others are declining; at the same time, requisite skills within occupations are changing as a result of automation and digitalisation. Physical skills are becoming less important, and analytical and interpersonal skills are becoming more important. Negotiation, co-ordination and critical thinking are frequently the most desired skills reported by employers. However, there are some sectors that do still require physical skills, such as construction, and in particular those whose emerging growth of retrofit skills will help achieve the city's net zero-carbon ambitions.

Throughout this chapter we will look at the challenges and progress made in the past year in achieving inclusive growth, responding to the skill needs referred to above, and supporting young people through careers advice and guidance. We will discuss the impact of welfare reform in the context of responding to the pandemic, the challenges of the anticipated significant increase in unemployment and business closures, as well as the impact of education disruption on young people. We will also give our responses, such as: a focus on working with distressed businesses as new opportunities emerge; youth skills and encouraging young people to stay in education; graduate reskilling; apprenticeships schemes; and support for Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents and those aged over-50, who have also been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

## Analysis of progress

### Increasing the number of children arriving at school ready to learn

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) assessments – the teacher assessment of children’s development at the end of the academic year in which the child turns five – were cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic.

The Council remains committed to improving school-readiness through continued engagement with our Early Years settings and schools, and by providing an integrated universal Early Years offer for all families with specific targeted early help and intervention where it is needed.

The city has a range of high-quality Early Years provision, including free entitlement places for children aged 2–4. Most providers work with our Early Years Quality Assurance team, who provide training, challenge, and support for settings and ensure that they are aware of the city’s wider priorities. Most of our Early Years settings have remained open throughout the pandemic and worked in partnership with the Council to ensure that settings are safe and able to provide places for our most vulnerable children throughout.

Sure Start Children’s Centres have also remained open and have continued to support the delivery of information, advice and guidance, essential health care and mental health support through our blended offer. Group work involving babies continued to be on a needs-led basis, as has one-to-one work with families. Early Years outreach workers continued to provide information advice and guidance.

Throughout the pandemic the service has worked with key partners and wider organisations to adapt and flex its approach to service delivery. It has offered support on a one-to-one basis or within a small group, delivered face-to-face or online, and telephone support has continued. Services offered throughout this period included:

- Health visitor sessions with families
- Outreach worker one-to-one sessions
- Breastfeeding support
- WellComm assessment (language development) and REAL intervention sessions (literacy development)

- Small group work for babies and Baby Box Project (gifting sensory boxes to newborns)
- Cooking projects, where parents are supplied with the ingredients and cook a meal online with other parents
- Links to support from the Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter, Manchester Adult Education Service and Talk English.

The Early Years’ service also focused on targeting two-year old children eligible for free entitlement to mitigate against the potential impact on their learning and developmental opportunities during the pandemic.

Outreach workers ran a project over the summer targeting two-year old children who were unable to continue with their free entitlement due to setting closures or parental choice. Over 1,000 families were contacted and provided with an activity pack. The resources and activities promoted key early learning skills in the prime areas of communication, language and literacy. The activities were also designed to support positive wellbeing and mental health for two-year-olds. Families with three-year-olds were provided with a resources pack to support the transition into nursery. The project ran for 12 weeks between June and September 2020, and pre- and post-intervention assessment showed an improvement in all the learning areas measured.

## Improving educational attainment to be above national average

### School inspection judgements

School inspections conducted by Ofsted were suspended in March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before schools partially closed their sites, the overall Ofsted outcomes for Manchester in March 2020 indicated 90% of schools and 98% of early years settings were good or better. Both these were above national average and indicated an improving system. 93.3% of Manchester primary schools and 73% of secondary schools were judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding (this compared to figures of 87% and 76% nationally at 31 August 2019, the last date for which comparable data is available). Of note was the sustained improvement in the secondary sector, which had seen a ten percentage point improvement each year for the past two years, with 53% judged to be good or better in February 2018 and 63% in February 2019.

Throughout the 2020 autumn term, Ofsted carried out visits to ten Manchester schools. These visits looked at how schools were getting pupils back up to speed after so long at home. They consisted of collaborative conversations, without any judgements being made. Head teachers reported that inspectors listened to their experiences and provided constructive challenge around their future plans. The visits were not graded, and no concerns were raised in any school. For each school, a short letter has been uploaded to the Ofsted website helping parents to understand what steps were being taken to help children back into full-time education.

During the spring term, Ofsted conducted additional monitoring inspections in nine Manchester schools that had previously been judged 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'. Most of these inspections were conducted remotely. Inspectors explored how leaders were ensuring all pupils at home as well as those at school had access to a full education offer during the national lockdown. They also looked at how the school's curriculum was being developed. The outcome of all the inspections was overwhelmingly positive and most reports have been published on the Ofsted website. In all schools, leaders and governors were judged to be taking effective action to provide education under difficult circumstances.

### School attendance

School attendance rates have been a success story in Manchester, with improvements being sustained over several years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, absence and persistent absence rates in both primary and secondary schools were below national figures.

Following the first lockdown (spring/summer 2020), there was a multi-agency commitment to improving attendance with the introduction of an attendance hotline available for schools, professionals and parents/carers, and continued involvement from the Early Help hubs to promote good attendance during the autumn term 2020. This approach was effective, with overall attendance during this term 94% if children who were self-isolating (due to symptoms, awaiting a test result, or contact with a case of COVID-19) are excluded from data; this was higher than initially anticipated. Owing to high infection rates in the city during the autumn term, many pupils in Manchester missed significant amounts of schooling.

Since schools welcomed all children back following the second lockdown in March 2021, attendance has been good. While figures are not comparable with other data, attendance during half-term 5 (the first full half-term after lockdown) was 94% across all our schools. Across categories this is as follows: primary – 95.38%, secondary – 92.88%, special – 84.20%.

For many children, returning to normal hours of school attendance will develop their resilience and assist their transition back to some degree of normality, while also enabling them to reach their own academic and social aspirations.

### School attainment

In spring 2020, as part of steps taken to fight the spread of COVID-19, the Government announced that all exams due to take place in schools and colleges in England in summer 2020 were cancelled, and that school or college-level educational performance data based on tests, assessments or exams for 2019/20 would not be published. Early Years Foundation Stage assessments were also cancelled, and results of Key Stages 2, 4 and 5 were based on teacher assessments, as no examinations took place. The most recently available attainment from the academic year 2018/19 is summarised below:

- 65.9% of children achieved a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage 2019 profile, lower than the national average of 71.8%
- 61% of pupils achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths, remaining below the national average of 65%

- Progress made by Manchester pupils in Reading, Writing and Maths was statistically significantly above the national average, with the most relative progress being made in Maths
- At 43.3, Manchester had a slightly lower Attainment 8 score than the national Attainment 8 score of 44.7
- 35.5% of pupils achieved a GCSE in both English and Maths, below the national figure of 40.1%
- 15.1% of Manchester pupils achieved the English Baccalaureate, with grade 5 or above in English and Maths, remaining below the national average of 15.8%, but the gap narrowed
- Progress 8 score of -0.11 was higher than the north west region but below the national progress score of zero
- Of the 8,310 A level entries, 22.2% achieved A\*–A grades, slightly below the England average of 22.6%. 97.4% of A level entries achieved A\*–E grades, remaining above the England average of 97.3%
- Of the 2,964 A level entries in STEM subjects, 24.9% achieved A\*–A grades, remaining below the England average of 29%. 96.3% of A level entries in STEM subjects achieved A\*–E grades, above the England average of 95.9%.

Throughout the pandemic, most schools remained open to vulnerable pupils, those with special educational needs, and children of key workers, with all schools and colleges retaining contact and an overview of all their pupils. Officers from the Council worked with education leaders to support them with their current offers for children who attended on-site and for the many more who were learning from home. This included regular communication

and virtual meetings with head teachers and school leaders with responsibility for different roles across various phases and partnerships, as well as school governors and early years settings.

The Council provided advice and direct support for individual schools, distributed PPE, and allocated over 3,000 laptops to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children. It also gifted thousands of books to schools and pupils, including a book to every child in year 6 in both 2020 and 2021 as a Manchester transition read.

The Council's School Quality Assurance Team visited schools during the autumn term, focusing on the remote learning offer provided by schools in order to ensure that all pupils could access high-quality remote education resources. All these visits demonstrated a remote learning offer and an extended curriculum offer, including for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Schools have needed to be flexible in their approach, developing bespoke solutions to the needs of their pupils, the impacts of positive COVID-19 cases, and the need for classes to self-isolate. Some schools loaned significant IT resources to pupils, while others found a more paper-based approach was more suitable as a way of providing remote learning. Other steps taken by schools to ensure good-quality remote education resources and additional support for particular cohorts of pupils where required include:

- Assessments used to identify gaps in the curriculum, with adjustments made accordingly, as well as bespoke changes dependent on the needs of the cohort (eg. increased focus on reading with identified year groups)

- Training and support for school staff to support rapid upskilling and build confidence in delivering a remote and/or blended learning offer, with specific 'blended learning leaders' and digital champions appointed
- Use of a blend of online platforms (Google Classroom/MS Teams) and online resources (eg. Purple Mash, Timetable Rockstars)
- Teachers retaining significant contact with pupils in their classes, for example through live registrations to start the day and live activities to finish the day
- High schools have been utilising the facility within a number of platforms for monitoring times students are actually engaged in learning, and have used this to target support for those who seem to be less engaged
- High schools have successfully provided live lessons across the whole range of national curriculum subjects. This included a specific example of curriculum enrichment activities on Fridays
- Special schools have strived to ensure some therapy sessions can still be provided online, eg. working closely with Nordoff Robins Music Therapist.

Additional consideration has been given to pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Pupils across the city have been provided with specific support, in terms of devices, learning platforms, access to teaching assistant and keyworker support, practical activity and resource packs based on their individual needs, as well as training to help them learn through play and experiential learning. Additional support was also given to help with confidence and the transition back to school following periods of lockdown.

Feedback from young people themselves following the periods of lockdown indicated that they were eager to get back to school to restore routines and learning, and many children reported that they enjoyed accessing online learning. The impact of lockdowns on students will not only be on missed elements of the taught curriculum, but also on wellbeing and physical health, and the development of other skills such as teamwork, communication, making friends and managing friendships. It is also recognised nationally that the impact will likely be greatest on those children who are disadvantaged, and as the city has higher-than-national levels of disadvantaged children, this impact will be significant across the majority of our schools.

Following the COVID-19 crisis, improving outcomes for all Manchester children will remain a key educational priority. There will also need to be an increased focus on emotional resilience for all Manchester children as schools recover from the crisis, with expected increased anxiety levels among the pupil population.

Education Services within the Council will continue to work very closely with all the city's Early Years providers/settings, 186 state-funded schools, Manchester independent schools, alternative provision-providers and post-16 providers, other partners and education leaders to develop a long-term plan to address the impact of the pandemic on our children and young people's education.

This plan will take a holistic approach to education, build on what we already know works in the city, and allow school leaders the flexibility to innovate and develop solutions that will work for their communities. It should not just be about schools

but also how other agencies, community assets and services are able to support this plan. Furthermore, schools and services need to be ready to respond quickly to any new and emerging consequences of children and young people's missed education that we have not yet anticipated.

The impacts of the pandemic on children and young people, including consequences for their education and how they have been supported, are explored in more detail in the '[A progressive and equitable city](#)' chapter.

### **Post-16 provision Key Stage 5**

Education providers across the Manchester post-16 sector have collaborated differently to support those most impacted by the pandemic by sharing information and changing delivery. They all transitioned to a remote learning offer following the first lockdown, and since then have managed to successfully switch between a remote, blended and face-to-face offer in line with Government guidance. Positively, the overall attendance and engagement levels of most learners has remained high. Vulnerable students or those unable to study at home were invited to attend on-site provision throughout the periods of lockdown. Robust safeguarding systems have been maintained, the mental health and wellbeing of students has been monitored, and additional services have been commissioned where needed.

All providers have responded effectively to the digital exclusion challenge, issuing devices and data to students where they have identified need. This has not been without its challenges, in terms of building an accurate picture of the level of need,

the quality of Wi-Fi and connectivity, and difficulties in the supply of laptops. The Council has responded by brokering devices into the city and working with GMCA and businesses to fill gaps.

The post-16 sector across Manchester has risen to the many challenges as a result of COVID-19 and Government guidance, which includes dealing with two academic years of assessing grades and supporting their Year 12 and Year 13 students to progress, alongside keeping students and staff safe.

### **LTE estates**

The Manchester College and its higher education arm UCEN Manchester deliver a significant volume of post-16 technical education – over 5,200 16 to 18-year-olds, 6,000 adults and 1,300 higher-education students enrol every year. The College's vision has been supported by the LTE Group's ambitious £140million estates strategy for The Manchester College and UCEN. The new estate will provide students of all ages with state-of-the-art, industry-standard facilities from which a high-quality technical education can be delivered, and this remains on programme despite the challenges of COVID-19. The first new facilities came online in September 2021 with the renovated and expanded facilities at the Openshaw Campus ready for students in Sport, Care Professions, Public Services, Construction and Automotive. This will be followed in September 2022 when the new campus in Manchester City Centre, next to the Arena, will open with new facilities for courses linked to the digital and creative sectors, as well as other high-growth industries linked to the regional economic growth strategy.

The College's T Level courses, starting in 2021, will sit within the Industry Excellence Academies with a minimum 45-day industry placement. For those students who are undecided or need more time to determine the best technical route for them, dedicated support will be provided within Learning Hubs to transition them into Centres of Excellence or Industry Excellence Academies.

This commitment to ensuring that all students achieve their full potential, underpinned by focusing on future employment prospects, has also played an integral role in seeing the College become the number one college in Greater Manchester for overall achievement (with a 91.7% achievement rate in 2019/20<sup>1</sup>). In the 2018/19 academic year, the College was ranked first for 16–18 and adult achievement, both higher than the national rates overall and at every level of study (levels 1, 2 and 3). In addition, the College was also rated number one in the country for achievement of basic skills in Maths and English across all ages.

### Case study: Greater Manchester Colleges Group – Digital and Blended Learning Project

Greater Manchester Colleges Group are leading the way on a collaborative project to develop digital, remote and blended learning to enable high-quality learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Working collaboratively with colleges from across the city region, this project aimed to rapidly improve the quality of digital and blended learning in response to the challenges of the pandemic to provide good-quality off-campus learning. Led and managed by a small team from The Manchester College (LTE Group) the project was steered by senior leaders from across all nine further education colleges that serve the communities of Greater Manchester. Funded by the DfE College Collaboration Fund, the project built on the experience of the central team of The Manchester College in developing dynamic 'communities of practice' to sustainably improve the quality of their own college provision.

The key objective of this project was to bring together expertise from across all partner colleges to quickly evaluate, develop and deploy the most effective digital content and resources for use by teachers and students. Recruitment of Digital and Blended Learning Champions within each college enabled the rapid upskilling of teachers, building on 'what worked well'. This collegiate approach has had a significant and rapid impact on the confidence and skill level of teachers, enabling

them to support their students to continue in learning through even the most challenging times of the pandemic. Over 70,000 students have benefited from the improved confidence of their teachers and having access to high-quality resources that can support their learning outside the college campus sites.

The project has strengthened collaborative working across Further Education colleges and has been funded for a second phase, from August 2021 to the end of March 2022. During this next phase we will continue to strengthen and build cross-college relationships at all levels, from curriculum departments to senior leadership teams, and always with a focus on improving what we do for our students, whatever barriers they face. It is clear from our evaluation of the project that we have much to learn from this experience and, though we are yet to realise the potential of digital technologies to enable and enhance learning, we now recognise how important digital skills are for students and their teachers alike.

<sup>1</sup> Centre-assessed grade

### Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

The Council has a pivotal role in ensuring young people continue in education or training until at least age 18. We aim not only to fulfil this role, but to go beyond to give our schools support to ensure our young people make a successful post-16 transition to a destination of their choice.

Manchester has supported young people through the pandemic by ensuring that the number and rate of NEET and unknown has not been exacerbated. In November 2020 there were 3.7% (434) 16/17-year-olds (academic Years 12 and 13) who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and 5.5% (649) unknown. One of the main challenges has been that Career Connect, which provides our NEET prevention and NEET re-engagement service, has not been able to visit young people face to face or in their homes due to restrictions.

Through our networks and social-value partners, we are working with employers to create more opportunities for NEET young people to enter the labour market. We are specifically targeting sectors that will recover and grow beyond the pandemic, including construction, health and social care, digital, and the creative industries.

#### The Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI)

In 2019, the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) was introduced to high schools, including the Pupil Referral Unit, special schools and alternative providers, to identify Year 11 learners most at risk of becoming NEET. This enabled schools to provide additional support and interventions to ensure their RONI students had a secure and appropriate post-16 destination and the additional support to

make a successful transition into further education, training or work. In February 2020, out of a total cohort of 5,611 Year 11s, 472 learners were assessed as being high risk and 550 were assessed as being medium risk (18.2% of the cohort).

Most schools were able to continue to maintain contact with their RONI cohorts throughout the lockdown period; they were able to secure destinations for the majority, and where appropriate put plans in place to help them make the transition. Contact was maintained with 75% of all high schools and colleges throughout the lockdown period via weekly bulletins and network meetings. This enabled us to support post-16 transition and monitor the progress of Year 11 destinations.

The Council has collaborated with NEET providers, including The Prince's Trust, YMCA, Growth Company, City in the Community, MUFC, Sale Sharks, the voluntary and community sectors, and youth providers to reduce the number of young people who experience more than one session of being NEET.

### Skills for a zero-carbon economy

Powering Recovery: Manchester's Recovery and Investment Plan clearly sets out Manchester's commitment to a green, zero-carbon and climate-resilient recovery. It sets out our commitment to create good green jobs, to support socially responsible businesses to thrive, to secure investment for zero-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure, and to establish the products, services and business models that we need to succeed. Manchester's new employability programmes will aim to prioritise green economy skills to broaden the skills base and support growth in the digital economy.

To deliver the substantial change needed in the UK economy by 2050, Manchester City Council will play a key role in facilitating technology transitions in homes and businesses, informing residents through work in neighbourhoods, supporting local businesses and the upskilling of the local workforce. While the wealth of Government and local government net-zero targets will drive demand for low-carbon goods and services over the coming years, it's crucial that Manchester has a workforce in place to deliver the change needed by 2050.<sup>2</sup>

It is important that Manchester understands the skill gaps that will emerge within the low-carbon sector and that it capitalises on the opportunities for reskilling the workforce. Work is underway on the development of a zero-carbon skills framework to understand the skill needs and level for each sector. These include:

- Retrofitting buildings – requiring construction-related skills and technological advancements
- Low-carbon heating – understanding the skills needed to meet increasing demand for the design, specification, installation and ongoing maintenance of heat pumps (new jobs requiring NVQ level 3+ qualifications)
- Low-carbon transport – skill requirements in the ongoing maintenance of electric vehicles
- Consultancies and financial services (part of low-carbon services), requiring the highly skilled (NVQ level 4+); demand is ongoing and required to ensure service-sector organisations can respond to emerging opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> Local Government Association

Manchester cannot work in isolation, and as Table 3.1 shows, we are working within a national, north west and Greater Manchester context, recognising that each area will have a different journey, different assets and different opportunities to deliver on this agenda.

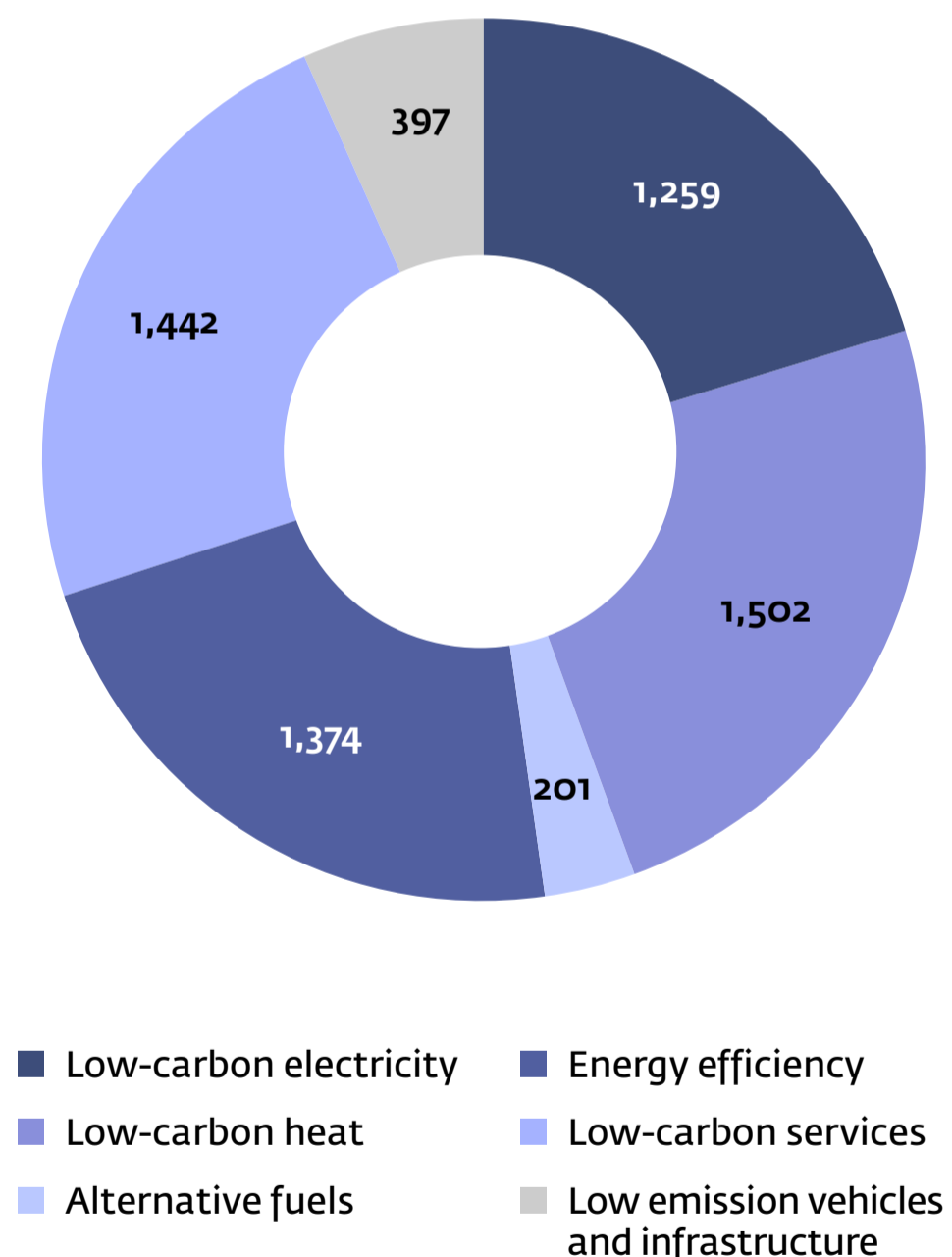
**Table 3.1:**  
Skills Needs Assessment at different regional levels

Assessment of the Skills Provision for a 'Well Adapted and Low Carbon Northwest' (Final report to the NWDA/ Dec 2009):	GMCA's mission based challenge groups:	Manchester City Council – zero carbon skills framework:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low carbon buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low carbon buildings</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture and sequestration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy and energy materials – low carbon heat, alternative fuels</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low carbon energy technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy and co-ordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural capital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring and research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circular economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural environment and natural asset management</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness of and support for practical action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The things we buy and throw away.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy supply</li> </ul>	–	–
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy efficiency and demand</li> </ul>	–	–
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risks and opportunities.</li> </ul>	–	–

Source: GMCA Industry Intelligence Team 2021

Figure 3.1 shows the projected number of new jobs created in Manchester by 2030 for each low-carbon and renewable-energy economy sector. It is estimated that 6,175 additional jobs will be required by 2030, reaching 10,763 by 2050.

**Figure 3.1:**  
The number of new jobs in the low-carbon and renewable-energy economy sectors in Manchester – 2030 projection



Source: Ecuity Consultants and Local Government Association, 2021



The clear emerging opportunity for the city is domestic retrofit and the retrofitting of Council estates and buildings, and this has already begun with the major decarbonisation of Manchester's Civic Quarter. The transfer of Northwards Housing back into local authority control presents a major opportunity to drive the retrofit programme, not only to improve housing stock and bring it up to standard, but also to make headway into our emissions targets as set out in the Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2020–2025. Opportunities are being explored with GMCA to look at how we fund this work, as well as the skills needed to deliver the programme.

We are collaborating with GMCA to analyse skills intelligence and gather information into subsectors of the green economy to understand the occupations, skills and progression pathways, as well as identify specific gaps in provision.

**Inspiring the next generation to be the best they can be and providing them with the knowledge, skills and resilience they need to succeed.**

**Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)**

Good career guidance helps inspire pupils towards further study and enables them to make informed decisions whenever choices are open to them. It also makes it more likely that they will make a successful transition into their next learning or work opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the challenge to ensure that young people making transitions continue to receive good-quality careers advice, despite the effect of lockdowns on the education system and wider society.

Throughout the past year we have continued to support and encourage businesses, particularly from Manchester's growth sectors, to continue to work with our schools and colleges to help our young people reach their full potential, to support a bounce-back in the economy and especially work-based learning.

**CEIAG Network and Support for Transition**

The Council continues to facilitate the CEIAG Network, which meets each term and brings together careers staff from high schools, colleges and key partner agencies for the purpose of improving the careers offer for all students from Years 7 to 13. Despite the pandemic, last year we successfully maintained the network for over 80% of our high schools and colleges through virtual meetings and regular CEIAG bulletins.

Throughout 2020, the network was introduced to more than fifteen businesses, with many having a social-value commitment to Manchester. To support young people to build on their ambition and aspiration, schools and colleges have connected to businesses working in Manchester across a variety of sectors.

This year, there has been a much greater focus on supporting high schools to secure appropriate post-16 destinations for all Year 11 school-leavers, with an emphasis on vulnerable learners impacted by the pandemic. To support this work, the Council co-ordinated and distributed a transition guide to 16 settings, followed by weekly bulletins focusing on the key messages and actions from the guide, and the promotion of partner offers.

**GM Careers Hub**

The Council has continued to work closely with the Greater Manchester Careers Hub and Enterprise Co-ordinators to strengthen the quality of CEIAG in Manchester. They have continued to fund one of two Enterprise Co-ordinators to work with schools and representatives from business, the co-ordinators linking volunteers from business (Enterprise Advisers) to schools. These Enterprise Advisers have used their business knowledge and skills to support schools' strategic approach to careers, encouraging good-quality employer engagement. They have also helped schools to continue to progress and achieve the Gatsby benchmarks for high-quality careers guidance.

**Skills for Life**

Launched in June 2019, Manchester's Skills for Life programme was developed in response to requests from young people and employers for a 'curriculum for life' to equip children and young people with the 'softer skills' and knowledge so they can be better prepared for and succeed in the real world. The programme has a clear focus on the development of five skills: communication, teamwork, self-management, self-belief, and problem-solving.

Education and youth and play providers continue to use Skills for Life for campaigns and promotional materials, focusing on vulnerable groups due to the pandemic. A guide for employers has been produced and is being used on the Our Town Hall project and construction network.

### Sir Howard Bernstein Legacy Fund

We Love Manchester Charity (WLMC) launched the Manchester's Rising Star Fund (supported by the Sir Howard Bernstein Fund) in January 2021. The fund supports ambitious young people with a donation of up to £2,000 to overcome barriers that are preventing them from progressing in education, employment, training, or self-employment. This year, the fund has awarded donations to several exceptional young people, including: a Paralympic swimmer, to fund an attachment to her wheelchair; a talented Royal Northern College of Music musician to purchase her own viola; a self-employed football coach to purchase equipment and resources; a neurodiverse videographer to fund specialist IT equipment; and ambitious young women received donations to purchase hair and beauty kits for college. Since January 2021, over £35,000 has been awarded to young people.

### mEET Your Match

The [mEET your Match](#) website was commissioned by the Council, delivered by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO), and is now live. It has over sixty pre-employment opportunities listed, including study programmes, employability courses, traineeships, entry-level 1/2 apprenticeships, and volunteering opportunities.

### Increasing the number of graduates in the city

A key factor in Manchester's continued success and resilience has been the development of a diverse economy supported by an increasingly skilled workforce. Increasing the number of graduates remaining in the city continues to be a high priority to retain skills and talent for the city's employers. Manchester is a young city because of

its population growth and is partly driven by the strong higher education (HE) provision and good graduate retention. Within the city, The University of Manchester (TUoM), Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) and UCEN provide a plethora of undergraduate and postgraduate level courses in academic and vocational fields.

Our analysis of business start-up and dissolution data provided by our partner Experian suggest that in 2020, 6,004 new businesses were formed in Manchester, while 5,501 businesses ceased to trade – an increase of 503. The city's successful track record in fast-growing and efficient start-ups is mainly due to the hiring of graduates who can offer immediate and long-term value through their adaptability and eagerness to learn – both of which are essential to help new businesses succeed.

Manchester's HE institutions are also home to world-class specialisms and centres of excellence, whose research and expertise have supported growth in the city's key sectors. Importantly, much progress has been made in ensuring that some of Manchester's most disadvantaged young people access the city's world-class HE offer and beyond via widening participation initiatives and improvements in careers information advice and guidance. One of the key factors in Manchester's overall success and post-COVID-19 resilience has been the presence of a stable economy with a young, diverse and increasingly skilled workforce. This is essential for the creation of the jobs the city needs, to drive investment and enable the city to grow. In the academic year 2018/19, 73,299 students enrolled at Manchester's two universities. The latest figures show that this cohort increased to 73,906 in the academic year 2019/20.

Despite initial concerns about transition to higher education, admissions in September 2020 were strong nationally and locally. International students' enrolments also remained strong in 2020. Indications based on admissions data for 2021 also show strong levels of applications to higher-education providers in the city.

In recent years, the city has seen major growth and investment in the digital sector, including creative and digital, cyber, fintech, bioscience, and advanced materials, with continued growth into 2021/22. Early indications show that the graduate recruitment market is recovering to pre-pandemic levels. Manchester University remains one of the most targeted UK universities for corporate graduate schemes.

The true impact of a shift to remote working on graduate retention in the city remains to be seen. Graduates are now faced with more flexibility and choice and can potentially work remotely from other locations and/or for businesses based outside of Manchester. Despite this, Manchester's leisure, culture, and sport offer remains an attractive option for young people leaving university in the city and beyond. Manchester University estimates that approximately 48% of its graduates express a desire to stay in the city for work.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Graduate Outcome survey is now focused on the work location of graduates 15 months after graduating, and such data reporting on 2020 graduate destinations will be publicly available in summer 2022. Table 3.2 shows that the proportion of graduates indigenous to Manchester who entered work in the city within 15 months of graduating in

the 2018/19 academic year was 23%, with a further 13% working elsewhere in Greater Manchester. This represents a slight increase on the previous year's graduate cohort, when 20% were working in the city 15 months after graduating.

**Table 3.2:**  
Work location of graduates indigenous to Manchester 15 months after graduation

Location of employment	Academic year 2017/18	Academic year 2018/19
Manchester	20%	23%
Greater Manchester (excluding Manchester)	13%	13%
Greater Manchester	33%	36%
North west (excluding Greater Manchester)	32%	39%
UK (excluding north west)	32%	22%
Non-UK	3%	2%

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey (survey taken 15 months after graduation)

**Building awareness of and growing the number of apprenticeships in the city**

The provision of good-quality apprenticeships across all ages, levels and sectors is crucial to a strong and resilient economy, and will be even more important as a route to provide opportunities for young people who have been adversely affected by COVID-19. Good-quality apprenticeships enable businesses to grow, and support residents to develop the skills and qualities needed to succeed in the labour market.

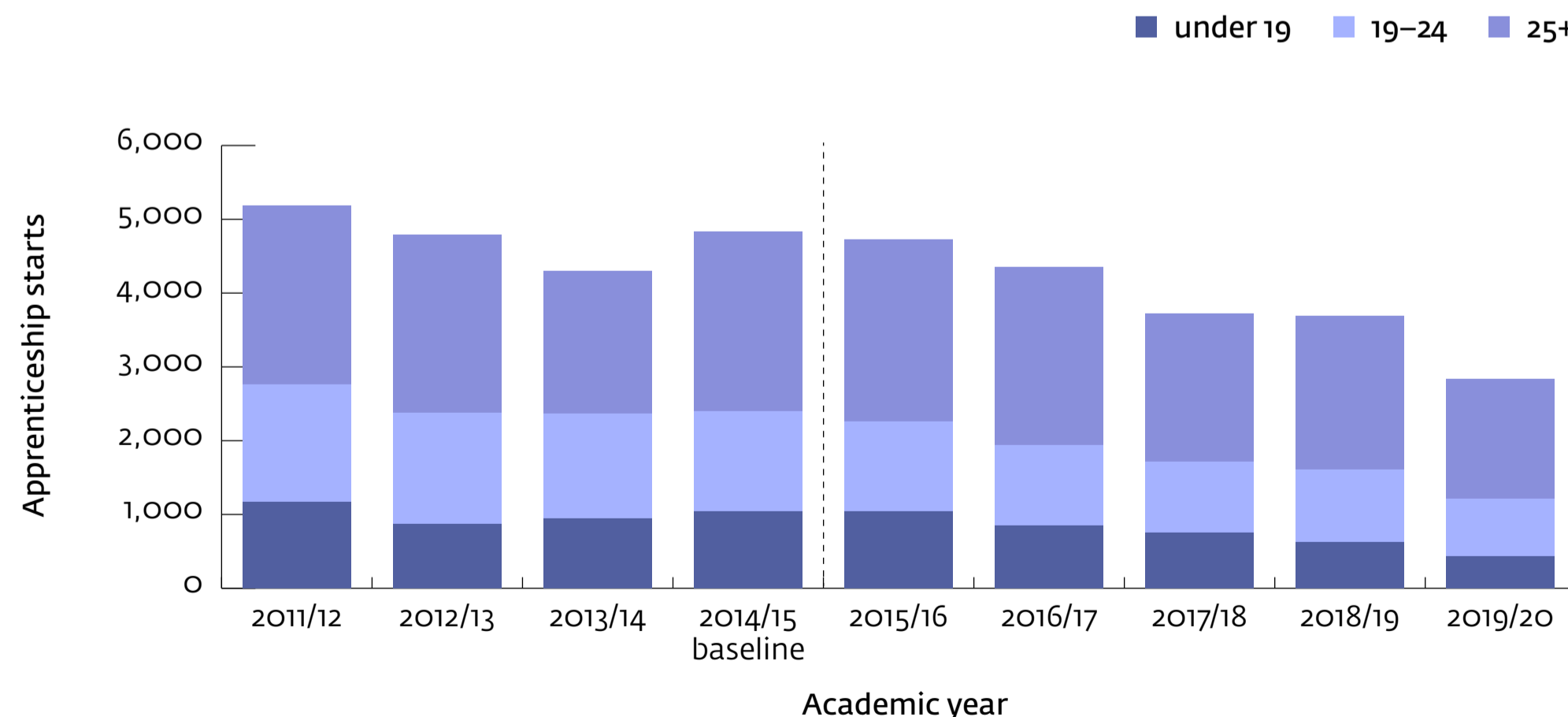
2020/21 has been a challenging period for employers, providers and those in or seeking apprenticeships. During the period after the COVID-19 lockdown began (23 March 2020 to 31 July 2020), there was a decrease of 47% in the overall number of apprenticeship starts nationally compared to the same period in 2019. Sectors such as hospitality, travel, tourism, and retail have been severely hit; at the same time, COVID-19 has impacted significantly on current apprentices, their employers and learning providers. Business inactivity, furlough and redundancies all contributed to the disruption of apprenticeships.

Practical issues such as working from home, recurring lockdowns and social distancing have posed significant challenges for apprentices –

with many not having access to equipment or internet. Some learning providers have closed their doors for extended periods. Young people finishing school or college, particularly disadvantaged young people, have faced profound difficulties accessing face-to-face career guidance, networking events and work-experience opportunities.

In the academic year 2019/20, apprenticeship starts fell by 18% nationally and fell by 23% in Manchester compared to 2018/19. Figure 3.2 shows the trends in apprenticeship starts by age from 2011/12 to 2019/20. In 2019/20, compared to 2018/19, apprenticeship starts decreased across the age ranges, with a 31% decrease for under-19s, a 19% decrease for ages 19–24, and a 22% decrease for the 25+ age group.

**Figure 3.2:**  
Apprenticeship starts by age

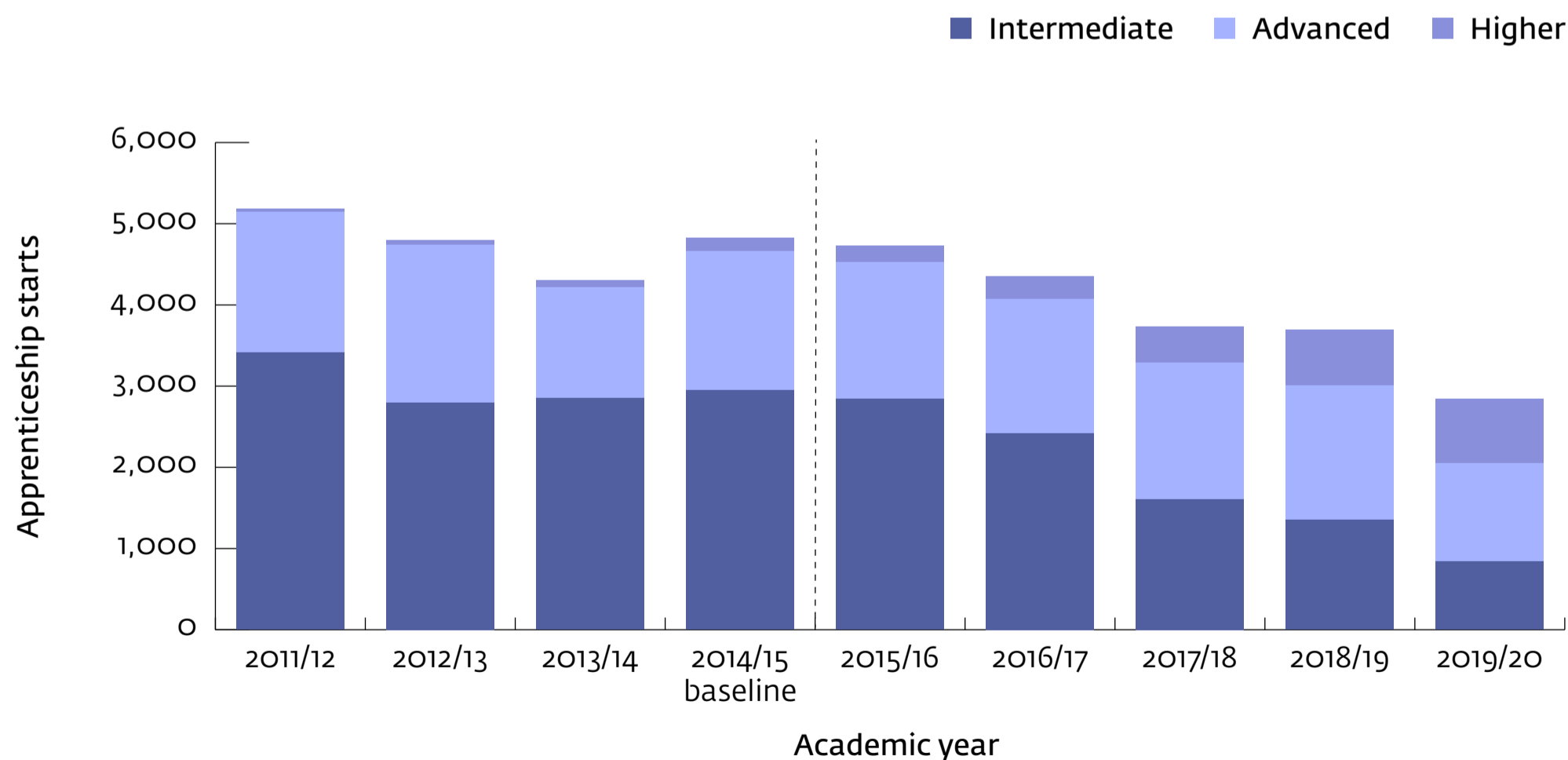


Source: Skills and Education Funding Agency

Prior to COVID-19, a key priority for the city was to increase opportunities for 16 to 19-year-olds to begin their careers as apprentices. As these figures show, this now presents an increasing challenge in Manchester as the full impacts of the pandemic are felt.

Figure 3.3 shows a reduction in both intermediate and advanced level starts across 2019/20, with intermediate level the hardest hit, decreasing by 37%. On a positive note, the table shows a marginal 16% increase in higher-level apprenticeship starts in 2019/20, to 790. Higher-level apprenticeship starts increased significantly between 2014/15 and 2018/19, from 170 to 680.

Figure 3.3: Apprenticeship starts by level



Source: Skills and Education Funding Agency

This data supports the view that COVID-19 has shifted the focus of employers towards higher-level and older apprentices and away from entry-level opportunities accessed by younger age groups.

Owing to the time lag on data relating to apprenticeships, it is difficult to assess the full impact of COVID-19 at this time, though it is anticipated that apprenticeships will be further affected by the end of furlough, phased reopening of sectors, and any future restrictions. It is also hard to predict how the many support packages put in place in response to COVID-19 will mitigate the negative impacts.

Support for apprenticeships in response to the pandemic continues to be delivered at a national, regional, and local level. In August 2020, the Government introduced financial incentives for new apprentices – an additional £2,000 for each new start aged 16–24 and £1,500 for those aged 25+. The March 2021 budget extended this incentive eligibility period to September 2021 and increased the size of the grant to £3,000 per new apprentice, irrespective of age. Also, in March the Government announced the launch of Flexi-Apprenticeships aimed for the end of 2021. These new-style apprenticeships should provide employers and apprentices with greater flexibility around working and learning choices.

The Kickstart scheme, launched in September 2020, provides fully subsidised work-placement opportunities for 16 to 24-year-olds at risk of long-term unemployment. Kickstart offers six months of work placements paid at the national minimum wage. In Manchester this scheme is supported by a strong partnership of local

partners, such as DWP (Department for Work and Pensions), Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Manchester Growth Company, training providers and Manchester employers. The Council is seeking to provide over forty Kickstart placements to young people in 2021 across a range of service areas. The Council has committed to topping-up the Government's minimum wage payment to the Manchester Living Wage threshold for these placements.

At a regional level, programmes such as Stimulating Employer Demand for Apprenticeships (SEDA), SME support grants and the Greater Manchester Levy Matchmaking Service have provided vital support for the apprenticeship landscape in Manchester. The SEDA programme has created 309 new apprenticeships across Greater Manchester. The SME support scheme gave apprenticeship grants to 45 Manchester businesses and the Levy Matchmaking Service supported 312 new apprenticeship starts in the three years from 2019 to 2021.

For National Apprenticeships Week in February 2021, we worked alongside a range of partner organisations to promote the Build the Future theme. Our communications campaign was delivered together with a series of events and workshops, video case studies, inspirational posts, and the promotion of current apprenticeship opportunities across a variety of Manchester-based employers. The campaign gathered over 50,000 social-media interactions.

The Council continues to work with Manchester employers of all sizes through a myriad of initiatives, such as business engagement and business network

support. This is in addition to existing procurement, social value, and planning mechanisms. A central focus of this work is to support local benefit – increasing training and job opportunities for Manchester residents. Throughout COVID-19 we have continued to drive forward key projects to strengthen apprentice recruitment in the city.

### Our Town Hall

Our Town Hall (OTH) supports M-Futures, an innovative higher-level shared-apprenticeship scheme that provides a unique vocational pathway into professional roles in construction. The first intake of six apprentices, recruited to the scheme in September 2017, completed their apprenticeships in summer 2019. Three apprentices from this cohort are taking degree-level qualifications paid for by their employers, Mace, F&G and Ramboll. Following the success of the first cohort, a further nine apprentices have been appointed to the design team and management contractor Lendlease. As the project progresses into the construction phase, OTH aims to create at least 100 apprenticeship opportunities at level 2 or level 3, predominantly in trade roles. These opportunities will be targeted at Manchester residents and be linked to the existing skills and training offer in the city. This is in addition to the target of 50 higher-level apprentices.

### The Factory

The Factory is a new venue for performing arts, visual arts and popular culture developed in collaboration with Manchester International Festival (MIF), the Council and the Arts Council. It will provide a catalyst for the cultural sector to collaborate and deliver specialist training and apprenticeships.

MIF are leading on a Cultural Training Academy to develop a paid summer internship programme for students. As part of the wider social-value commitments, MIF is employing 65 new apprentices. In addition to this, a partnership between MIF and the Science and Industry Museum will provide work-experience opportunities for 450 residents throughout the construction and operational phases of the project.

### The Hut Group

Throughout 2020/21, The Hut Group (THG) have created 150 new apprenticeship roles every month across their north west sites, with most of these opportunities available at their Airport City headquarters.

Since 2019, we have worked closely with THG to support the development of their Airport City sites and their ongoing commitment to recruiting locally in Manchester. We have played a key role in facilitating links between THG and schools and colleges in south Manchester to inspire their future talent pool. In the long term we will continue to develop links with THG and the local community to support their aspiration to recruit hundreds of apprentices at Airport City over the next five years.

### **Reducing the number of residents with no or low qualifications and increasing the opportunities for people to improve their skills throughout their working lives**

It has been well documented that improvements made in recent years to skills, qualifications, job security and wages have not reached all our residents and communities. The ONS Annual Population Survey estimates that over half the

Manchester working-age population with low or no qualifications are not in employment (39,000 out of 68,000). This has led to a persistent gap between workforce and resident wages. Manchester's residents, particularly the over-50s and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, are still underrepresented in higher-paid, higher-skilled sectors and occupations, and overrepresented in lower-paid jobs, with too many paid below the real living wage as discussed further in the '[A thriving and sustainable city](#)' chapter.

The proliferation of lower-skilled occupations and low-productivity sectors, such as hospitality and retail (sectors particularly hit by the pandemic), where many roles are part-time, is a key contributing factor to this. There is also a local disparity in that 39% of residents work in low-skilled roles compared with 29% of those who work in the city but live outside it.<sup>3</sup>

Essential core skills needed for work, including resilience, communication, team-working, initiative, self-reliance, and an interest in lifelong learning, as well as job-specific skills and qualifications, are key to ensuring residents in some communities in the city are not left behind in benefiting from the growth and opportunities the city's economy presents.

Prior to the pandemic we knew that some groups were already more likely to have low skill levels, particularly older residents, those for whom English is not their first language, disabled residents, and residents with a long-term illness. Low skill levels are linked to lower rates of employment and with employees being less likely to access learning and

training opportunities. They are more likely to be employed in low-paid jobs vulnerable to automation, and have difficulty with moving into better-paid, good-quality work. Low-skilled workers are therefore now more vulnerable to job losses related to both structural changes in the economy and COVID-19.

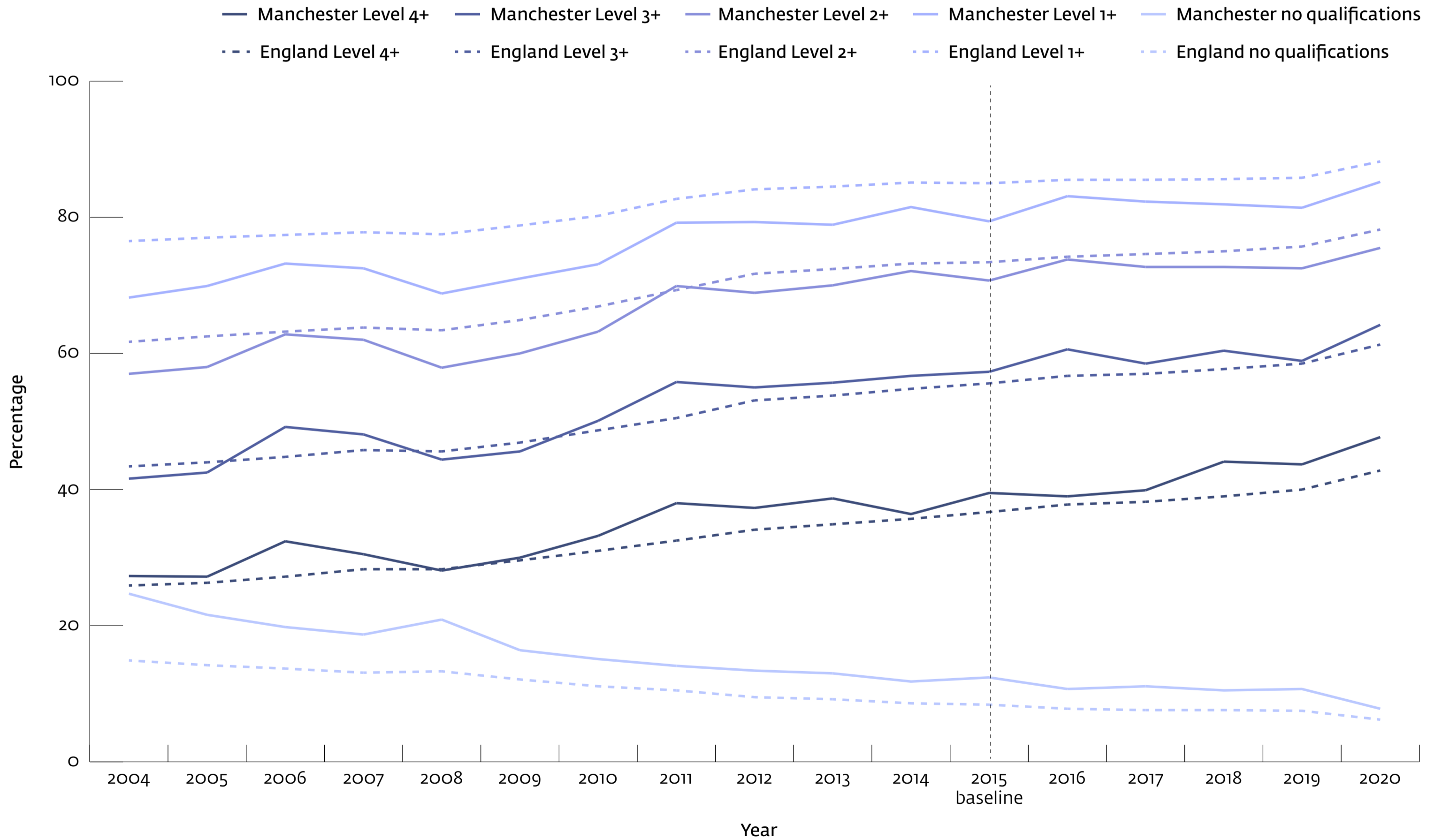
In response to the economic crisis, the Council set up a partnership to intervene. Through this, Manchester residents could request support if they were facing redundancy, end of furlough or reduced hours, so they could retrain or find new employment. The partnership has successfully supported residents facing redundancy at Manchester Airport, the Arcadia Group, Debenhams, and Princes soft drinks factory in north Manchester.

As part of this approach, a Council web page has been set up [www.manchester.gov.uk/helptonetwork](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/helptonetwork) for residents to request support from three main triage agencies: Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), National Careers Service (NCS) and Career Connect. Ninety-four people have requested support through this triage referral system. About 75% of residents using the programme were unemployed and most were looking for advice on how to secure a new role, with 80% interested in working in a new sector. In addition to referral to a triage agency, residents can also sign up to remote courses from Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) and National Careers Service, including skills development, CV writing, interview skills, careers fairs and webinars. We are also aware that hundreds of residents have contacted DWP and NCS directly to access their redundancy support package.

Of the working-age population, 50 to 67-year-olds are the most acutely affected, making it harder for them to be part of the city's economic growth. Figure 3.4 suggests that there has been an overall decline in the proportion of residents with low or no qualifications, and an increase in the proportion of the Manchester working-age population with higher-level qualifications. The most significant contributing factor to this is the retention of graduates in the city, as outlined previously.

<sup>3</sup> Ekosgen 2019

Figure 3.4:  
Percentage of resident population aged 16–64 qualified to NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) level

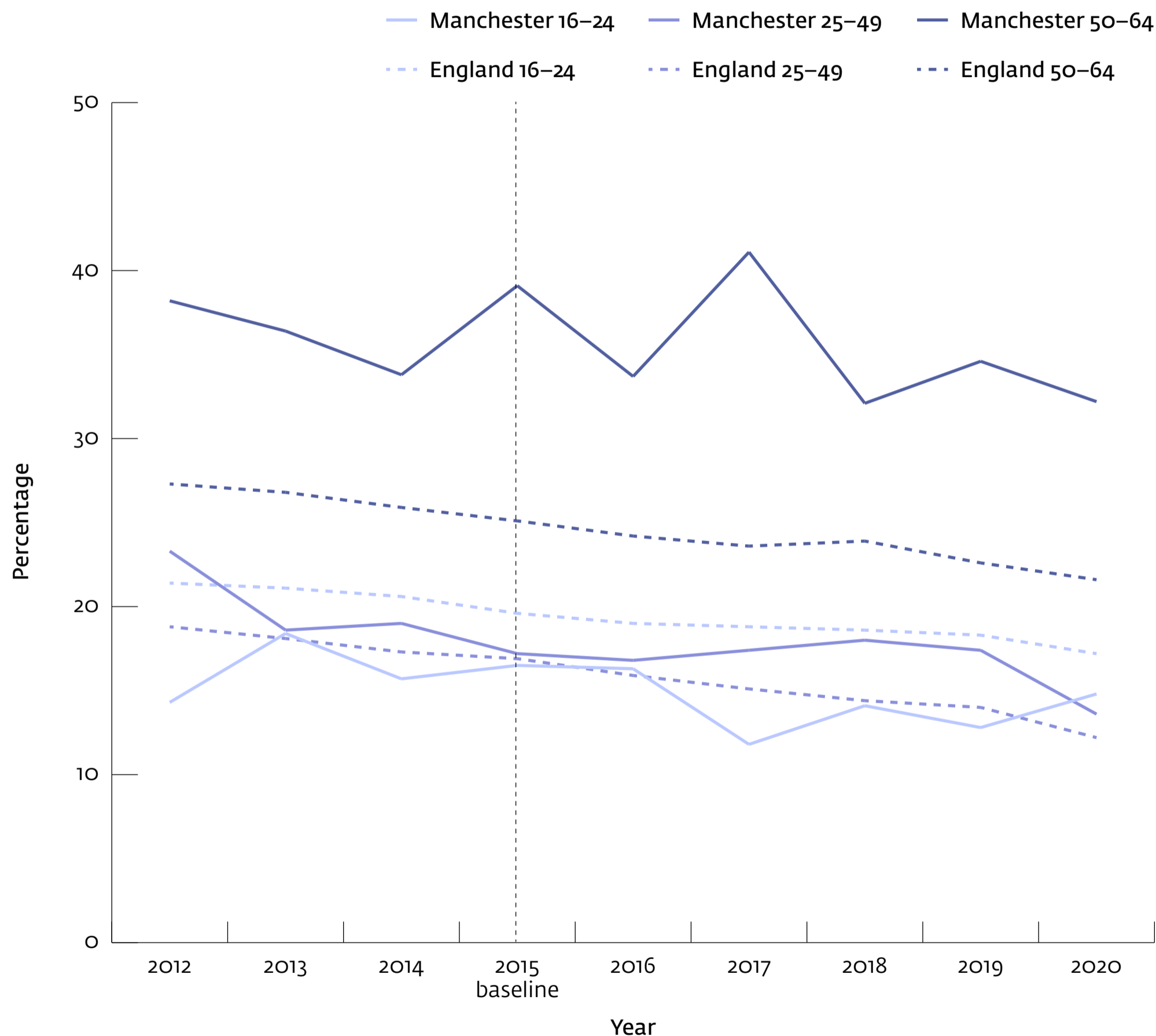


Source: Annual Population Survey, 2020, ONS © Crown Copyright

According to the ONS Annual Population Survey, the proportion of the Manchester population not holding any qualifications fell from 12.4% in 2015 to 7.8% in 2020. The most recent 2020 figures show a positive trend in that the gap we reported on last year, namely the proportion of the Manchester population with no qualifications at all compared to the national average, has now halved in the past year from 3.2% points to 1.6% points.

Conversely, a high proportion of Manchester's residents are qualified to degree level or above, with 47.7% now holding higher-level qualifications, higher than the national average (42.8%). Over the past 16 years, the proportion of residents with no qualifications has reduced from 24.7% to 7.8%. Skills and qualifications have an impact on how residents fare in the labour market. In Greater Manchester, the employment rate of those with higher-level equivalent qualifications (Level 4+) is 84%. In contrast, only 37% of people with no qualifications are in employment. Figure 3.5 shows the number of residents with no or low qualifications by age group. Manchester has a higher proportion of residents aged 25–49 with no or low qualifications: 13.6% compared to the England average of 12.2%, a slight closing of the gap since last year. There is a much higher proportion of residents aged 50–64 with no or low qualifications: 32.2% (a decrease of 2.4 percentage points since last year) compared to the England average of 21.6%. It is recognised that the resident population aged over 50 in Manchester is particularly challenged by a lack of qualifications.

**Figure 3.5:**  
Percentage of resident population with no or low qualifications



Source: Annual Population Survey, 2020, ONS © Crown Copyright



The proportion of older learners going into sustained employment following their learning in the city was already much lower than other age groups before the pandemic. There is a concentration of older people in sectors that were closed during lockdown, including non-food retail, restaurants and hotels, passenger transport, personal services, and arts and leisure services.

### Adult education

Manchester's adult skills landscape has continued to evolve, change and adapt since last year's State of the City Report. This section of the chapter provides an overview of the city's skill shortages and challenges, and the impact of COVID-19 on skill provision and labour-market requirements, explaining how the city has responded so far. It also includes the impact of and current predictions about long-term change and opportunities, the important role adult learning plays in a successful economic recovery, and how residents aged 19+ will be connected to opportunities both now and in the future.

The THINK report, which the Council commissioned in June 2020, identified key inequalities and groups of residents in unemployment:

- **Young people** – significant rise in unemployment last summer in the 18 to 24-year-old age group. Latest figures show this is starting to change.
- **Graduates** – SMEs have had limited ability to support graduate recruitment and development, and some larger employers have had concerns about on-boarding young talent (graduates and apprentices) during the pandemic.
- **Older workers** – prior to the COVID-19 crisis, people aged 50–64 already had the lowest re-employment rates following redundancy.

- **Ethnic minority groups** – the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, with higher unemployment, lower earnings, lower self-employment rates and higher housing costs; a spike in the claimant count in neighbourhoods with large Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities was linked to occupations in hospitality and the night-time economy.

The Manchester Adult Education and Skills Plan has four main objectives:

- Our residents will be inspired to learn and enabled to develop the skills and attributes they need to succeed in life and work
- Our employers will value the adult education and skills system and actively engage in shaping programmes that help them to thrive
- Our providers will deliver world-class education that leads to good-quality employment and enriches lives
- Everyone in our city will value the contribution that adult education and skills make to achieving our ambitions for Manchester.

These objectives were set to respond to the key labour-market challenges, such as:

- The disconnect between growth in labour demand at advanced and higher levels, and the focus of adult education in the city at intermediate level and below
- Fast growth in labour demand in sectors that rely on low-skilled, low-paid employment
- The need for upskilling of existing staff for employers to get the skills they need, providing more low-paid residents with access to good-quality jobs

- The changing skill needs
- Employers needing to better support and understand the inequality in opportunities that exists in the city.

However, there have since been significant changes that have impacted on the delivery of the skills system, including lockdowns, a sharp rise in unemployment, and Brexit.

In addition, there have been significant developments in national policy that continue to reshape how the system delivers for post-16 learning in Manchester, such as the Government's [Plan for Jobs](#), announced in summer 2020; [Manchester's Recovery and Investment Plan](#), developed through spring 2020; the recently published [Skills for Jobs](#) DfE White Paper; and the 2021 Budget.

There has been significant investment into welfare-to-work provision, such as Kickstart, the JETS (Job Entry Targeted Support) programme, and Restart, which have, in parts, aligned well with the city's priorities. There is nothing specific in the programmes for minority ethnic residents or older workers who have also been adversely affected by the impacts of the pandemic. In addition, most of the programmes are commissioned nationally – presenting a challenge and the necessity to join them up with skills and wider support services in the city.

The Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper called for a transformation of skills provision to meet the requirements of employers in local regions. It envisages the creation of local skill plans that will be driven by close collaboration between employers and local learning providers. The development of

local skill plans will be led by business representative organisations, which will set out the key changes needed to make skill training more responsive to employers' skill needs. Manchester has a long history of public, private and business representative organisations working together effectively to create a skilled workforce and grow the economy. We will strengthen existing partnerships and forge new partnerships to develop a skills system that can adapt to the changing needs of employers. We will also enable Manchester's residents to make use of new opportunities afforded by technology adoption and innovation, and support the city's net zero-carbon ambitions.

The Adult Education Budget (AEB) remains the most substantial source of funding for adult learning in the city. Devolution enabled the GMCA to provide stability for the city's Further Education colleges and training providers through more flexible and responsive provision to meet the emerging needs of residents and businesses during the 2020 restrictions.

The Community learning fund continues to commission community-based learning through VCSE providers, who play an important role in engaging residents with low levels of skills and confidence in learning. The ongoing role of community-based learning will be particularly important for creating pathways into learning and in increasing adult participation among those socially excluded groups that could benefit most.

GMCA awarded each of the ten Greater Manchester Authorities £200,000 through the Local Authority Grant Programme – forming part of the GMCA Devolved AEB and Local Growth Fund

GM Digital Talent and Skills Programme. This funding has provided additional resources to further develop the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Advice Service initiative, the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, and the Manchester Adult Education and Skills Plan. Over the next 12 months these extra resources will enable the Work and Skills team and stakeholders to effectively deliver more adult-learning initiatives to priority groups.

Digital skills continue to grow in importance across all occupations, as well as in everyday life, as digitisation and automation continue to play a significant role in the changing skill needs in the economy and the world of work. Recent findings from the Greater Manchester Industry Intelligence Team tell us digital skills are needed across all growth sectors, based on the impact and further acceleration of digitisation.

To respond to the first national lockdown, our adult education providers rapidly and successfully adapted to the needs of their current learners and developed new models of blended and distance learning.

## Case study: Manchester Adult Education Service

Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) have continued to build on their work with employers, enabling businesses to enhance the learning programmes of adult learners through their work on social value, and working with recruiting organisations to find the talent they need from Manchester residents.

The service has developed an ongoing relationship with Laing O'Rourke. The company has delivered several sessions for learners, took a group of adult learners on a week's placement (pre-pandemic), and has recently delivered a training course on careers in STEM for 12 MAES learners. Organisations such as G4S, Engie, Lendlease and One Manchester have also delivered sessions for learners who are considering secure work by reviewing CVs and conducting mock interviews.

MAES have also developed a strong reputation with DWP for delivering good-quality provision and for being responsive to the needs of their partner employers. They have been the delivery partner for several sector-based work-academy programmes and have seen some positive job outcomes from this work. For example, MAES recently worked with GSTS to recruit security personnel for the hospital. From an initial cohort of eight, six have secured permanent employment, and GSTS would now like to partner with MAES on a regular basis when recruiting, as they found that applicants who came via this route were much better prepared for the roles than via traditional recruitment methods.

DWP selected MAES as a training partner when they wanted to expand their own capacity and recruit new job coaches who could support those who lost employment due to the pandemic. MAES devised a two-day course to prepare applicants for the DWP selection process and have delivered this to more than 120 participants since September 2020.

MAES have also added the new Essential Digital Skills qualification to their offer for 2020/21. The qualifications are built around the new digital-skills framework, which recognises the range of digital skills needed to fully engage in work and life in current times. It is a significant development from previous IT qualifications, which tended to be computer system-based; 379 participants have enrolled for the new qualifications to date.

However, MAES recognise that for many residents who find themselves digitally excluded, qualifications are not their motivation and so different types of provision are in place to ensure the offer is inclusive. MAES run 'Skills Up' workshops, where residents are able to drop in and focus on specific things relevant to them, whether it be how to use Zoom, or how to search the internet. These sessions ran (socially distanced) throughout most of the recent lockdown so that digitally excluded people had the support they needed to engage. However, as lockdown lifts, MAES have plans to offer more of these sessions and have already introduced them at community locations such as North City Library and Clayton Sure Start.

In addition, MAES also sought to address the digital inclusion of learners who didn't have devices throughout the pandemic. The service offered a Chromebook loan scheme to all learners who could not engage with online learning otherwise. At its peak, the scheme provided devices for over a thousand people. MAES have now resumed classes in centres and most of the Chromebooks have been returned.

MAES are still operating in a socially distanced way, which makes the delivery of some provision more complex than usual. They have a curriculum plan for 2021/22 that is based on social distancing coming to an end. However, it is well placed to respond should social distancing be necessary again. Having developed significant expertise with online learning, MAES have also added several distance learning programmes to their offer for the next academic year.

## Addressing the increasing demand for digital skills

The pandemic has been a catalyst for digital transformation across all sectors in the city. This has accelerated the demand for more technical digital skills for all sectors and sizes of businesses. The types of skills needed are wide-ranging and include high-level technical skills needed within existing IT teams in businesses (especially around areas such as cyber, data analysis and software development), digital-specific leadership and management skills (especially around the more supportive, remote team management roles), and digital skills for non-technical staff (data analysis, cyber, user experience and digital marketing skills).

There continues to be a high volume of creative and digital businesses based in the city that is rapidly increasing the demand for digital and technical skills. Headline findings from the 2021 Manchester Digital Skills Audit show a positive picture in comparison to some industries, with '40% of businesses reporting an increase in revenue in the past 12 years' and '34% still being able to grow their teams'. However, there was a decline in the diversity of the workforce among most ethnic groups and no significant change in the gender imbalance since 2019. Developers remain in demand, with '60% of businesses believing developers will be key in relation to company growth over the next three years. The other top four key skills in demand for the future of work were identified as: user experience, strategy, sales and business development, and marketing.

The industry is working collaboratively to respond to many of these challenges through networks such as the Manchester Digital Skills Network and the cross-sector Responsible Tech Collective.

## Case study: Responsible Tech Collective

In autumn 2019, the Responsible Tech Collective was established with a vision of establishing Manchester and the wider region as an exemplar for ethical tech, and a mission to bring home the humanity to tech.

For funders Luminate and the Co-op Foundation, the city region's rapidly growing digital ecosystem combined with its progressive social history and diverse demographic to offer the potential for a culture of responsible technology. Structures enable the practice of data ethics and design ethics, and address diversity and inclusion, and digital exclusion. They also empower data ethicists to become change-makers in their organisations and industries.

Led by systems-change agency Noisy Cricket, the collective emerged as a result of bringing together cross-sector organisations, including the Co-op Group, the BBC, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and Manchester City Council. These are bolstered by responsible tech pioneers such as Open Data Manchester, Ethics Kit, Diverse and Equal, and People's Powerhouse.

While awareness of the negative consequences – and subsequent damaging PR – of technology among the collective was high, understanding of how to engage in more conscientious conduct was low, as was the ability to influence teams, leaders and organisations in practising responsible tech. Taking action was also high on the agenda, recognising the opportunity to learn while doing, and creating solutions

that could help organisations deliver better products and services, and fuel performance and innovation too.

With the intention of effecting wider systems-change in its wake, the Responsible Tech Collective focused on four locally aligned challenge areas, using participatory practice to put people, communities, society and the environment first in its creation of the following:

- A people-powered smart city governance model and marketplace
- An ethnic equality in-tech set of standards and consultancy tools
- A citizen-led security-standards policy and communications tool
- A responsible tech diagnostic-tool framework and innovation service.

Working with local service designers, user researchers, data analysts and tech ethicists from Reply and Honey Badger, the collective developed principles and standards, infrastructures and prototypes that will be developed into pilotable products and services. The ambition is to scale the Responsible Tech Collective and its multi-disciplinary solutions to tech hubs across the UK and internationally.

At a Greater Manchester level, Digital Bootcamps have been effective in bridging the gap by providing the technical and coding skills needed in industry now. They allow residents who would not normally be able to afford to participate in bootcamps to take part, and at the same time support the industry to diversify by including more underrepresented communities. Half the 1,322 participants were Manchester residents, and those who completed their training moved into employment; 35% of participants who entered the courses found employment in a skilled digital role, and more are expected to do so. Participants have been trained for a wide range of digital roles, including software development, data analysis, content creation, dev-ops, cyber security, digital marketing, cloud engineering, and additive manufacturing.

The programme has provided a pathway for a diverse range of residents into digital roles, including women returners, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, unemployed young people, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, and people displaced by COVID-19 and/or on low pay and needing to retrain or upskill into a new role. It continues to be important that these programmes align with the roles that the industry tells us are difficult to fill through the Digital Skills Audit, and an extension of the bootcamps will support an extra 124 participants into software development and cloud roles.

### Case study: Fast-track Digital Workforce Fund

The Fast-track Digital Workforce Fund, has been effective in addressing immediate digital-skills shortages by providing participants with the technical and digital skills needed in industry now. The £3million fund is a joint venture between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership. It was established to support Greater Manchester and Lancashire residents with accessible routes into digital employment.

It has enabled residents who would not normally be able to pay to participate in flexible digital bootcamps to do so, and at the same time is supporting the industry to diversify by including more underrepresented communities.

TechEquity Mcr is one of the skills bootcamps offered to residents and embodied a diverse consortium of community and education partners, including; T.A.P, the Heroworx Institute, and Malleable Mind. Over the course of two years, the career-readiness project addressed specific skill gaps in Linux, computer networking and cyber security for participants who identified as women or transgender.

The aim of TechEquity was to offer high-value technical careers to residents who would normally be excluded from these types of opportunities. The project offered a pathway into tech for Hulme and Moss Side residents in

particular – wards that have neighbourhoods experiencing deprivation and high levels of racial inequality.

A grass-roots, traditional approach was taken to recruitment. The consortia built strong relationships with local organisations to create trust pathways into communities, eg. working with Caribbean and African news and radio outlets in south Manchester to reach the community. This holistic approach resulted in more than 300 local enquiries for 36 placements. The tailored cultural and gender-sensitive marketing resulted in more applications from ethnic minorities (66% of the applicants) and 75% recruited for the programme, which is four times higher than the current 14–15% (across genders) in the UK tech workforce (Inclusive Tech Alliance Report 2019).

Learners undertook professionally recognised technical qualifications in Red Hat Enterprise Linux, LPIC Linux Professional Institute and CompTIA. Within the six months after the 16-week course, 55% of learners went on to secure employment in STEM-related businesses and organisations or went on to higher learning. The demand for programmes such as TechEquity to upskill and create opportunities for residents was demonstrated, as enquiries outstripped supply ten to one.

Developments such as MMU's new £35million digital arts school, School of Digital Arts (SODA) and The Cyber Resilience Centre for Greater Manchester (CRCGM) will attract growth and add to the city's creative and digital technical skills and training offer. This acceleration, supported by the pandemic's restrictions, has also put a spotlight on the city's growing digital divide and the need for digital skills for access to services and support, as well as for learning and work. In 2020, the ONS Internet Users survey estimated that 27,000 adults in Manchester were digitally excluded.<sup>4</sup> With better data metrics in place through the Manchester Digital Exclusion Index, we know this number is in fact much higher and growing, GMCA believing 1.2million people to be digitally excluded across Greater Manchester. The pace of digital transformation means digital inclusion is important to skills acquisition generally and more residents will need support to adapt and upskill throughout their working lives.

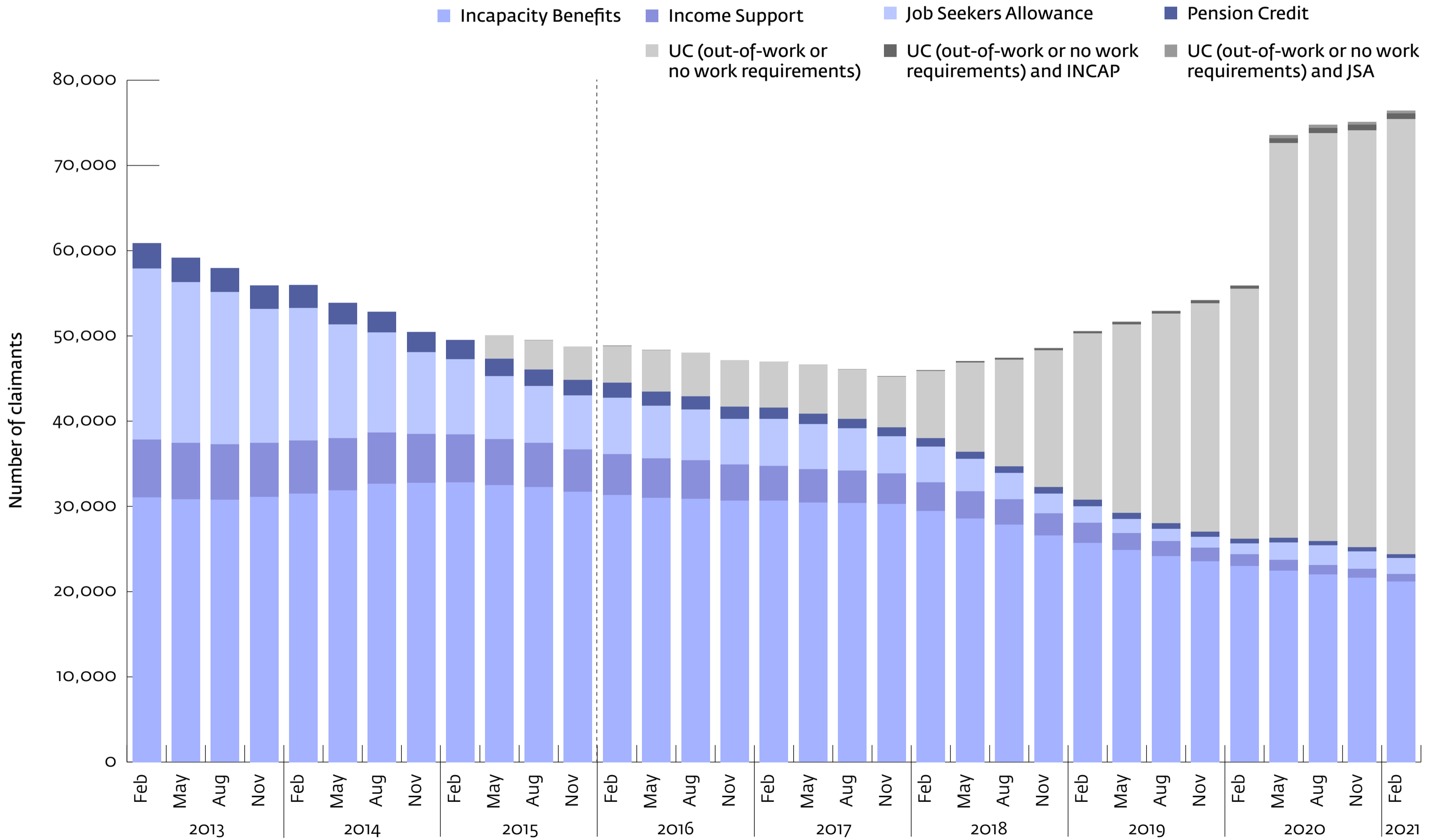
Over various lockdowns and restrictions, adult-learning providers and VCSE have responded and adapted well to increase their basic digital skills offer. However, there was already a challenge for providers engaging with learners who have low levels of digital skills and confidence with digital-skills training. One of the key issues is the availability of digital kit and data, and for many learners having a place where they can safely and proactively engage in learning. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan, which has been developed by the Work and Skills Team and Libraries, provides a cohesive plan of action to reduce digital inclusion over the next year. Digital inclusion is discussed in more detail in the '[A connected city](#)' chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Used the internet over three months ago or never used the internet.

### **Creating new jobs accessible to Manchester residents and reducing the number of people who are out of work.**

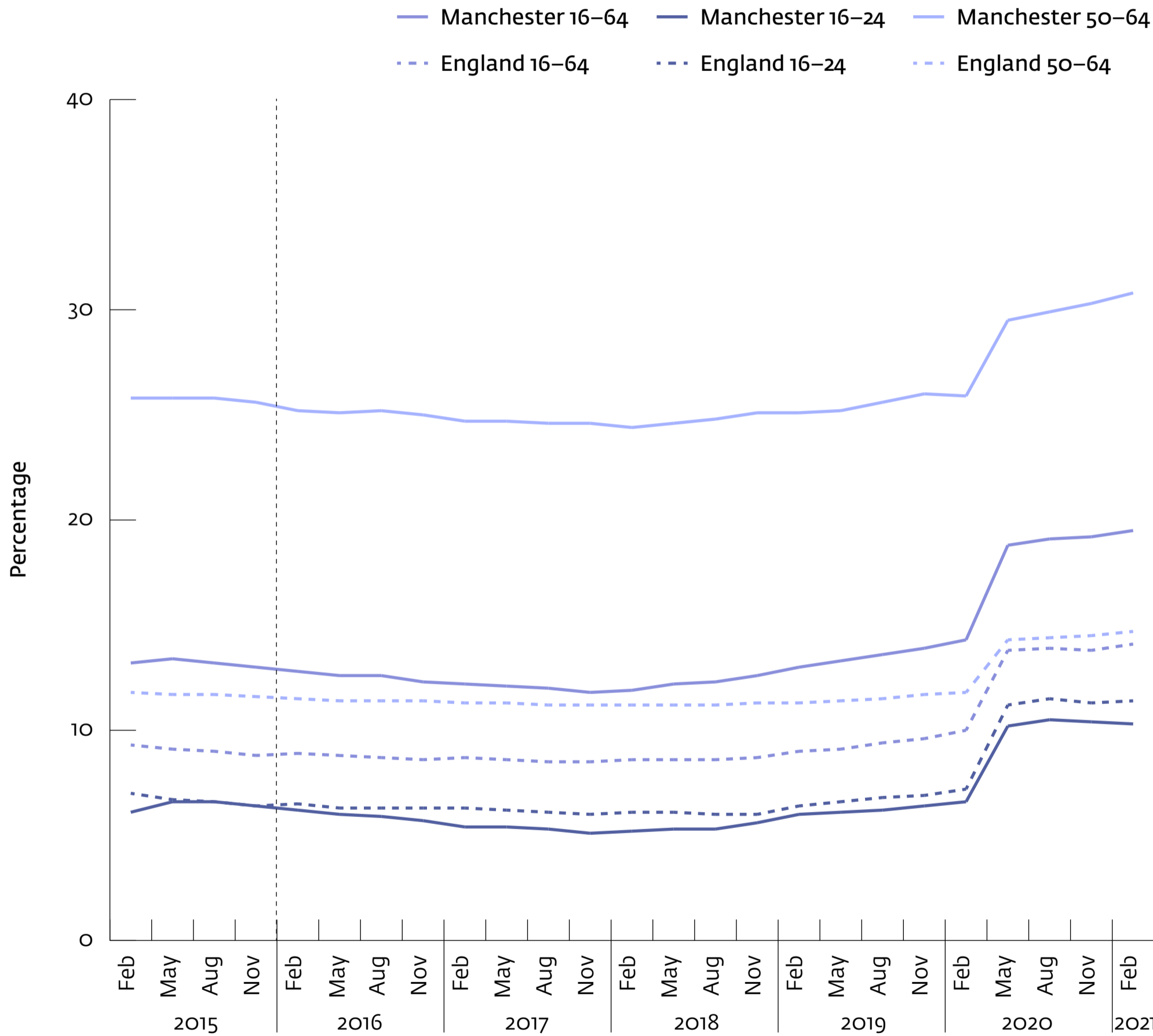
Figure 3.6 shows that in February 2021 there were 76,436 people aged 16–64 claiming out-of-work benefits in Manchester. The worklessness levels in the city fell steadily between February 2013 and November 2017, from 60,871 to 45,278, and then increased to 56,785 in February 2020. However, due to the rising levels of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic, by May 2020 the out-of-work benefits claimant count increased significantly to 73,583, with a further increase to 76,436 by February 2021. Out-of-work benefits include Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS), Universal Credit (UC) (where the claimant does not work) and Pension Credit. This figure includes some claimants who may not currently be actively seeking employment, eg. those in the support group of Employment Support Allowance, but not those who are working a low number of hours, who would previously have been recorded within the out-of-work benefit claimant numbers undertaking 'permitted work'.

Figure 3.6:  
Working-age residents (aged 16–64) claiming an out-of-work benefit by type



Source: Department for Work and Pensions. Note that those who claim UC with no-work-requirements are now included and figures have been revised retrospectively to reflect this.

**Figure 3.7:**  
Percentage of resident population claiming an out-of-work benefit



Source: StatXplore, Department for Work and Pensions. Note that those who claim UC with no-work-requirements are now included and figures have been revised retrospectively to reflect this

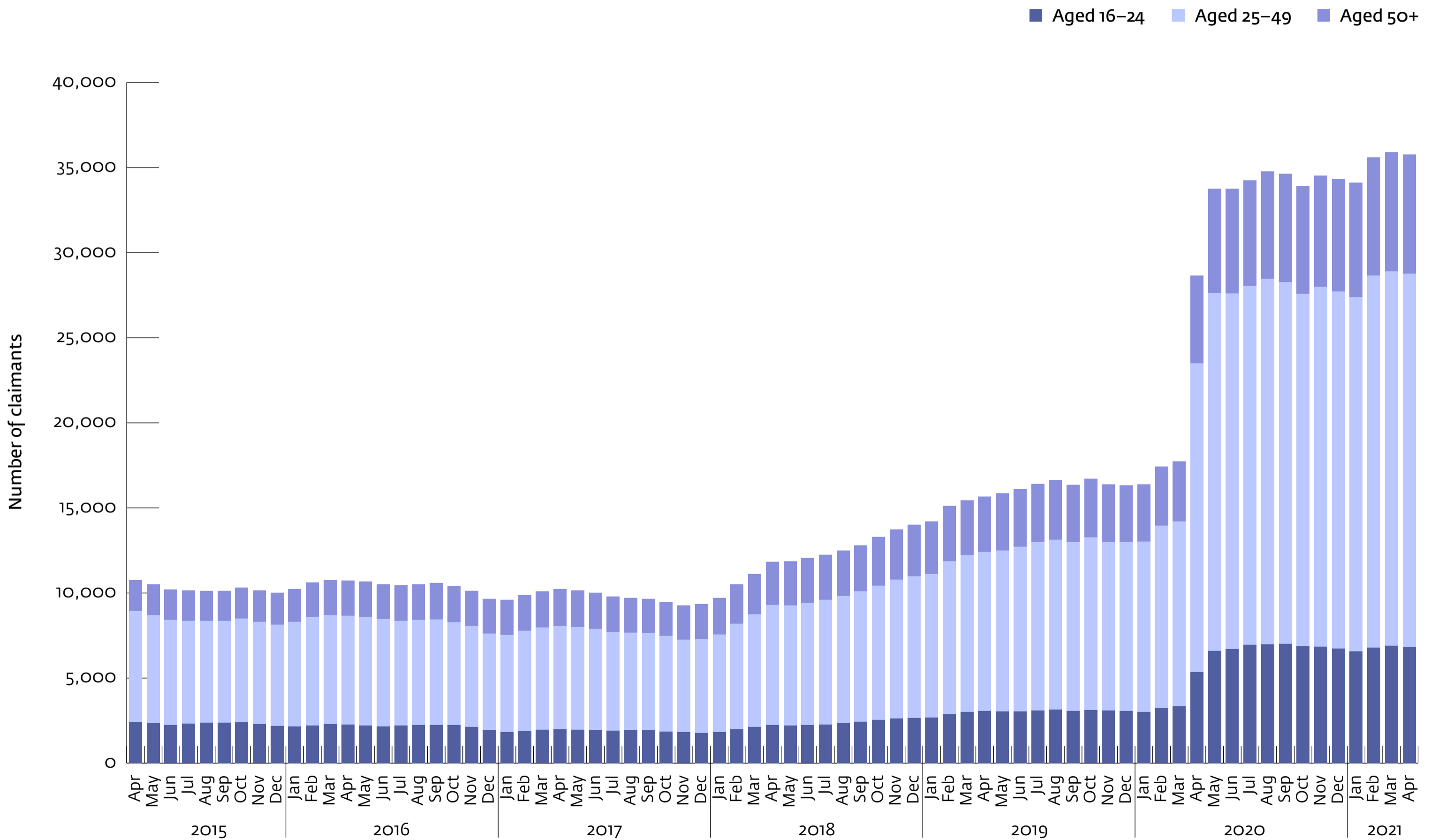
At 19.5% in February 2021, the out-of-work benefits claimant rate for those aged 16 and over in Manchester remains higher than the national rate of 14.1% (Figure 3.7). Owing to the rising levels of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic, the out-of-work benefits claimant rate increased significantly from May 2020, creating a 5.4 percentage point difference between Manchester and the national average in February 2021. Figure 3.7 shows that 25.9% of Manchester residents aged 50–64 were claiming an out-of-work benefit in February 2020 and had remained at this level for some years; this rate increased to 30.8% in February 2021, more than double the national rate of 14.7%.

It is worth noting that not everyone who is out of work claims an out-of-work benefit, and the number of residents who are out of work is likely to be much higher, particularly in the 18 to 24-year-old age group. The ONS claimant count is the headline indicator of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed. It includes the number of people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance, as well as those who claim Universal Credit and are required to seek work and be available for work. In Manchester there were 17,740 claimants in March 2020.

Figure 3.8 shows this almost doubled to 33,750 by May 2020 because of the first COVID-19 lockdown. It remained stable until the start of 2021, when it slowly rose to 35,755 claimants in April 2021, an increase of 102% from March 2020 compared to a 114% increase nationally. Significant increases were noted across all age groups between March 2020 and April 2021: claimants aged 16–24 doubled, from 3,340 to 6,815; claimants aged 25–49 doubled, from 10,860 to 21,945; claimants aged 50 and over almost doubled, from 3,540 to 6,995.



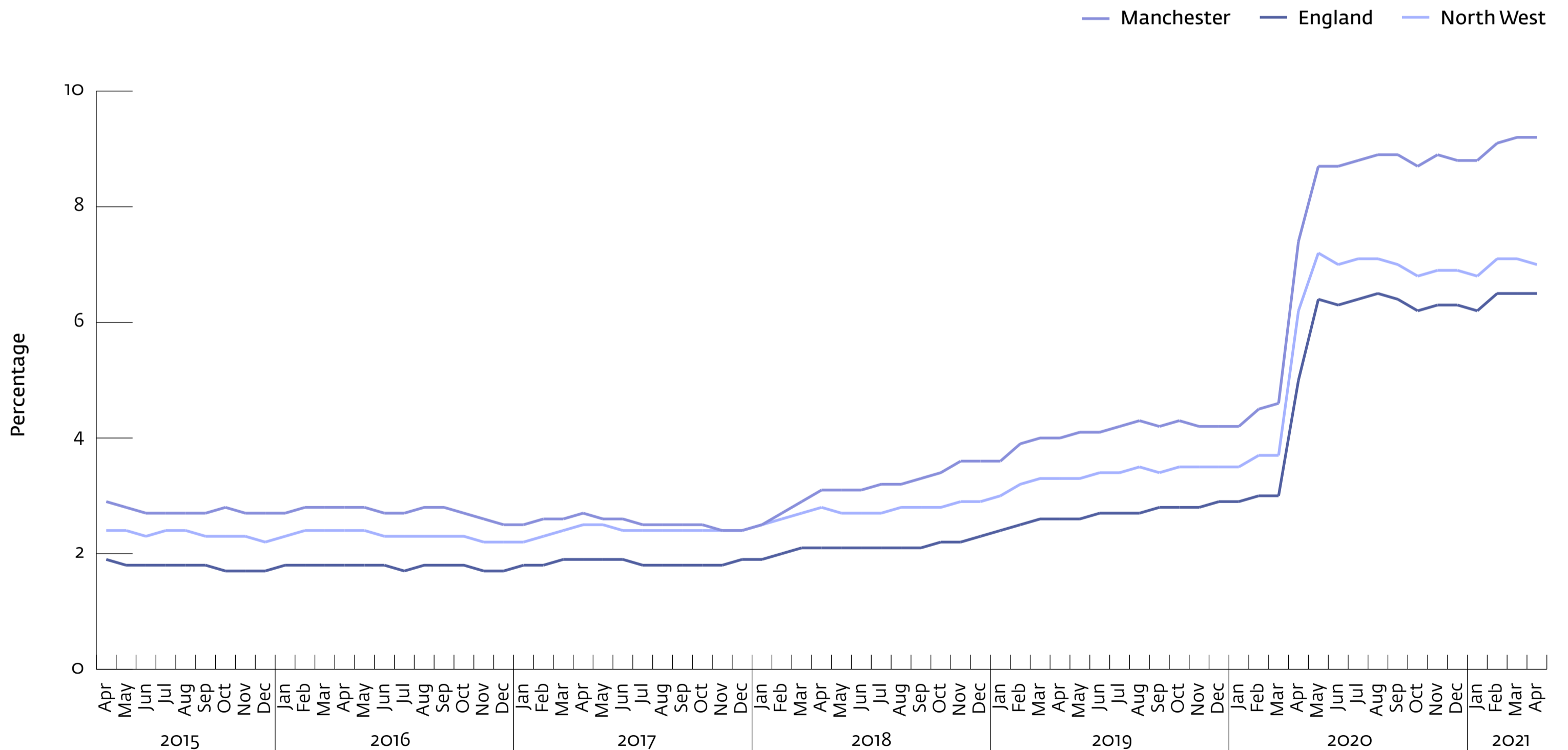
Figure 3.8:  
Manchester claimant count – number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed



Source: ONS claimant count (experimental statistics), ONS © Crown Copyright

Figure 3.9 shows that the unemployment claimant rate in Manchester has remained above national and north west regional levels for many years. Between March 2020 and April 2021, the rate increased significantly, from 4.6% to 9.2%, while nationally the rate increased from 3% to 6.5%.

**Figure 3.9:**  
Percentage of resident population aged 16–64 claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed



Source: ONS claimant count (experimental statistics), ONS © Crown Copyright

Prior to the pandemic, in-work poverty was already a significant issue for Manchester, resulting from welfare reform and the rise in the gig economy compounding pre-existing issues of poverty and deprivation. We have witnessed some sectors experiencing growth in this past year, such as online retail and food and drink sales. However, the impact of COVID-19 has been devastating to certain sectors, notably hospitality, retail, leisure, culture, and the night-time economy, which will take time to rebuild following the easing of restrictions. The sectors most affected were those that had insecure and part-time work and those not benefiting from furlough or Government business grants. People who had never claimed benefits before became increasingly reliant on food banks and state benefits.

Benefit enquiries to the Citizens Advice Bureau have increased by 15% since the start of the pandemic, and the number of debt enquiries has started to increase, suggesting a delayed impact on resident finances. The number of Housing Benefit claimants (including those on Universal Credit) remained steady between March 2019 and March 2020, then started to rise in April 2020. By November 2020 it had increased by some 20% since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of the growth coming from households living in the private-rented sector.

Manchester Housing providers, including One Manchester, Northwards Housing, Wythenshawe Community Housing Group and others, continue to offer welfare rights and debt advice to their customers and have been instrumental in providing a wide range of support for those impacted by COVID-19. This includes support with claims,

calculating benefit entitlement, and ensuring customers get access to the help they need through energy vouchers and food parcels for those in crisis. They also provide sustainable offers by signposting to long-term affordable food options, such as pantries and food clubs. In addition, the citywide advice contract through Citizens Advice Manchester and partners such as Cheetham Hill Advice Centre (CHAC) have also supported residents with benefit claims and debt advice to ensure customers receive the advice and support they need in a timely manner regardless of tenure. The Council's Appeals Team has continued to support vulnerable and disabled clients with their benefit appeals despite the lockdown.

The Council has continued to provide work-club activity online to provide access to employment, training and skills development opportunities. Analysis of activity shows that in 2020/21, 20 organisations were supported with funding, 4,543 residents engaged with a work club, 1,888 had been supported into employment/training or volunteering, and 570 moved into part-time or full-time employment. Many of the organisations funded provide specialist support, such as Manchester Deaf Centre, Back on Track, refugee groups and mentors. We are re-commissioning work clubs for next year, providing £150,000 in grants, and giving a maximum of £10,000 to each organisation.

In March 2021, there were 79,295 Universal Credit claimants, which is an 88% increase since March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Manchester had 42,120 Universal Credit claimants. In March 2021, 20% of working-age Manchester residents aged 16 or over were claiming Universal

Credit – the second-highest rate in Greater Manchester behind Oldham at 23%; this compares to an average of 18% for Greater Manchester and 15% for England. In March 2021, 34% of Universal Credit claimants were in work compared to 32% in March 2020, showing that the number of residents in work and claiming has increased, due to the high level of furlough and/or periods of unemployment or reduced hours. Universal Credit claimants aged 16–29 increased the most between March 2020 and March 2021, almost doubling. Claimants aged 30–44 remain the largest group; however, younger residents aged 16–29 account for an increasing proportion of in-work claimants. Also, since March 2020 there has been a growing concentration of Universal Credit claimants in east Manchester, and it is estimated that the Universal Credit uplift has led to an extra £4.816million per month for Manchester residents; this will likely cause considerable hardship when it is removed.

The staggering number of Universal Credit claimants requires rapid intervention to get residents back to work and prevent a generation of worklessness, a situation we witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s and are still responding to the social and economic impact of today. Focusing on young people, the over-50s, those with poor levels of skills, and some of our Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who have been most affected by changes experienced in employment due to COVID-19 will have the biggest impact.

## Conclusion

Improving outcomes for all Manchester children will remain a key priority, with an increased focus on emotional resilience for all Manchester children. Young people, those still in education and at early stages of their career have been particularly impacted by COVID-19 and are likely to continue to be in the future. Closures to education and varying degrees of home and online schooling will undoubtedly lead to setbacks in attainment, though it is not easy to quantify the impact of this at present.

Work focusing on young people reflects the importance of CEIAG, and up to date labour-market intelligence is critical in ensuring young people, and their parents and carers, are supported to make well-informed and realistic decisions about their future. The premium placed on transferable life and employability skills, flexibility and resilience by employers has been highlighted even more sharply throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be key to ensuring residents and businesses can recover from resulting changes to the labour market in the years ahead.

The skill requirements to 'build back better' with the continued focus on supporting the foundational economy continues to be a priority, as businesses and sectors review how the new normal of agile working will impact on their sector, business and their staff. It is important that inequalities identified at the start of the pandemic – issues relating to poor health, digital exclusion, lack of skills, and lack of childcare – are responded to as we move back into various hybrid or full-time models of working. The move to a more inclusive economy must look

at and attempt to mitigate these trends in gender inequality, skills and pay if home/hybrid working becomes the norm in future.

A successful economic recovery will be based around Manchester's globally recognised sectoral strengths and its key assets, including the city centre. It will also require a focus on people, ensuring all the city's residents have the right skills and qualifications to access any new opportunities now and in the future. Recovery planning and implementation must connect more residents to the opportunities available in the economy, improve financial resilience, and broaden life outcomes. Existing challenges remain for the over-50s, and those with low qualification levels and skill gaps in key sectors. The pandemic has resulted in widening inequality in the city, and although an intersectional approach is needed to tackle the divide, the Council and its partners also need to work with those communities that have been disproportionately affected. This will enable skill providers, welfare-reform initiatives and employment support to better tailor and focus efforts to deliver better outcomes for our priority groups.