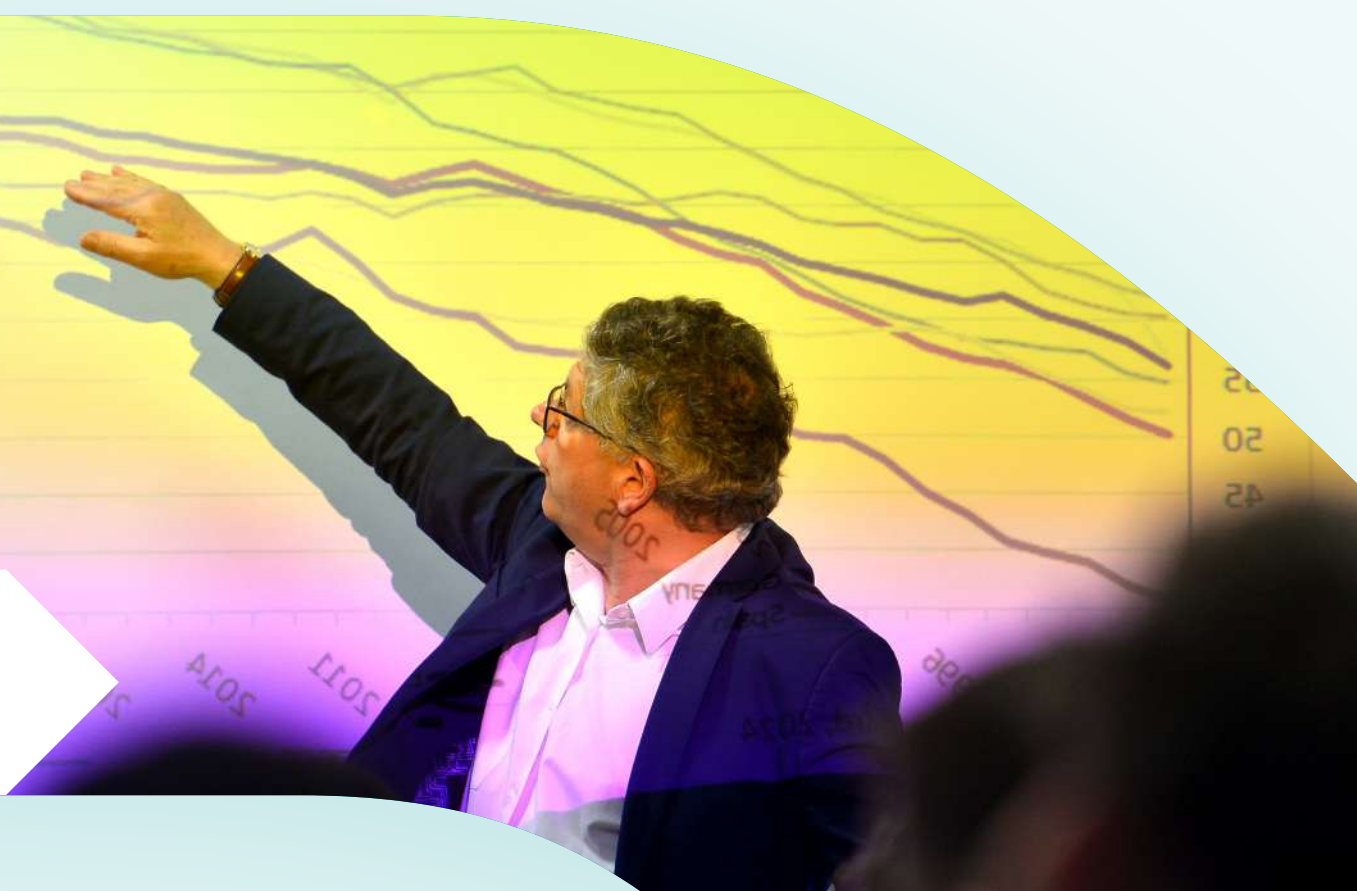


Impact studies

Productivity for Business Growth: Greater Manchester Combined Authority Case Study





The opportunity

The Productivity for Business Growth course is delivered by Alliance Manchester Business School in partnership with The Productivity Institute.

Led by Professor Bart van Ark and supported by experts from across both organisations, the four-day course helps senior leaders understand the drivers of productivity and apply practical tools and strategies to improve their organisation's long-term performance.

This impact study explores how representatives from Greater Manchester Combined Authority applied learning from the course to strengthen productivity measurement, introduce a new work management system and build a more consistent understanding of productivity across the organisation.



The organisation

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) brings together the ten local councils of Greater Manchester and the Mayor to work collectively on issues including economic growth, transport, housing, skills, investment and public service reform.

Representing a city-region of more than three million people, GMCA works with businesses, communities and public sector partners to improve outcomes for residents and support sustainable growth across Greater Manchester.

This case study draws on the experiences of Elisha Keswick, Assistant Director of Economy, and David Rogerson, Principal, Strategy and Policy, who attended the Productivity for Business Growth course and subsequently applied its insights within GMCA.



The impact

Why did you attend the course?

We were interested in understanding productivity challenges from a business perspective and what productivity means for a public sector organisation like GMCA. We were also aware there were a lot of elements to productivity measurement which we didn't fully understand, even though we talk about it on a daily basis with businesses. So, the question we were asking ourselves was 'what more do we need to know about productivity and how can we better measure it?'

Aligned to this there was a feeling within the organisation that we were not picking up and measuring all the productivity gains from our economic programmes because there were so many intangibles. The internal sharing of data was also an issue for us in this context. The GMCA has grown significantly in recent years as more services are devolved, and over the last two years our directorate has doubled in size. As such, our responsibilities and remit are growing all the time. So, another key element was that we wanted to ensure that we were embedding good practice across all parts of our team, and that we were all speaking the same language when we refer to productivity.

How does GMCA measure productivity at the moment?

Public sector productivity is very much seen as a driver for economic growth by central government. Yet historically we have measured productivity across our organisation in many different ways because we have a huge array of different directorates. So, trying to find a way to talk about productivity in a unified fashion and for us all to speak the same language is really important. For instance, some of our programme teams talk about KPIs, while some talk improving efficiencies. But what does this actually mean in practice? Is productivity simply too abstract a concept for us to talk about?

Coming onto this course, we wanted to better understand if these challenges around productivity measurement were affecting our performance. In local government there is not a huge amount of data about how productivity improvement has worked in directorates similar to ours as a lot of the data is focused on frontline teams.

Which elements of the course were most applicable to GMCA?

Firstly, it is important to say that we really benefitted from the level of knowledge in the room, both from presenters and fellow attendees. Invitees talked about how they had implemented productivity in their own businesses and it was fascinating to hear those stories.

In terms of practical measures, the course had particular relevance to the ongoing reorganisation of our own work management model, especially in terms of helping to plan realistic targets for our teams. For instance, to give you just one example, in terms of the business support programmes that we deliver, we can now go to central government and say we achieved x amount of productivity gain from x number of businesses who took part in the programme.

Another big takeaway was within the area of change management. When looking at structures and procedures, you can do that on your own with a piece of paper, but getting everyone to come along the journey with you is a big challenge. What we learnt from the workshop was that improving productivity can be messy and it can often be a case of one step forward, two back. Productivity doesn't run in a straight line.

What specific changes did you implement after the course?

We have now started to implement a new work management system, really thinking about how it looks and how productivity measurement is embedded within it. Employees across each team within

our directorate now record what they are working on via Sharepoint and we have clear deliverables and milestones. This gives us more clarity across the entire directorate and also significantly reduces the number of catch-up meetings we need.

We are already seeing that employees benefit from this more efficient way of working. Some teams have specific deliverables so are fully on board already, while in other teams we are still at the stage where we are finding out what precise structure might look best for them.

As the directorate has grown significantly, so the connections between individuals has become more complicated within the directorate. As such, it's really important for employees to continue to make the right connections that they need to make within the organisation. Everyone having loads of their own spreadsheets and working too much in silos is simply not sustainable as the organisation grows.

What tangible results have you seen since applying these changes?

Staff have been really interested in this project and it has already had a lot of positive impact. One of the most direct impacts is that we have now negotiated a specific productivity measure with central government as part of the Integrated Settlement Outcomes Framework for 2026/27. This process used learnings from across GMCA, other productivity researchers, and the learnings from this course to reach a cohesive answer as to how we measure productivity.

In large part the changes have been really welcomed and we have found that staff really wanted to get a better idea of what productivity meant for them. Indeed, this course has proved a really useful catalyst for a wider conversation around productivity within GMCA and, crucially, we are now speaking with a shared language around productivity.

From a personal point of view, it has helped us reframe what productivity means to each of us, while also stressing the importance of cultural change in delivering productivity improvements.





The University of Manchester
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The Productivity Institute is an organisation that works across academia, business and policy to better understand, measure and enable productivity across the UK. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. (grant number ES/V002740/1).

Find out more at productivity.ac.uk

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