

Report to Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Digital sector: Developing a workshop to review apprenticeships across Oldham and the offering of digital apprenticeships by the Council.

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Purpose of the Report

The Board has requested a report to support the discussion to develop a workshop to address issues relating to the development of the digital sector in the town, the review of apprenticeships across Oldham and the offering of digital apprenticeships by the Council, as raised in a Youth Council Motion to Council.

Consideration would relate to both the Employment, Work and Training and the Youth/Young People 'themed'/significant issue considerations.

This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to the digital sector, digitalization as a cross sector issue and the core skills platforms that are operating to support young people and sets out topics for a workshop.

Recommendations

Feedback is sought from the Board and Youth Council to help shape the remit and purpose of the workshop.

The Digital sector: Developing a workshop to review apprenticeships across Oldham and the offering of digital apprenticeships by the Council.

1 Background

- 1.1 The O&S Board proposed that a meeting would give initial consideration to a proposals for a workshop involving Committee Members, the Youth Council and relevant officers (as agreed by the O&S Board in September 2020), to address issues relating to the development of the digital sector in the town, the review of apprenticeships across Oldham and the offering of digital apprenticeships by the Council, as raised in a Youth Council Motion to Council.
- 1.2 Consideration would relate to both the Employment, Work and Training and the Youth/Young People 'themed'/significant issue considerations.
- 1.3 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to the digital sector, digitalization as a cross sector issue and the core skills platforms that are operating to support young people and sets out topics for a workshop.

2 Current Position

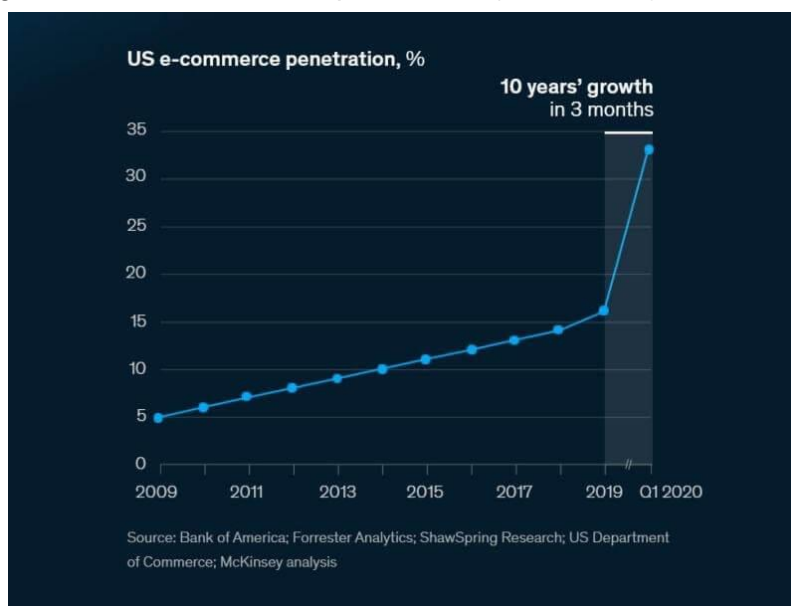
2.1 Background

2.1.1 The "Digital Economy/Sector" is defined as:

- e-commerce / e-business (the trading of goods or services over computer networks such as the internet)
- supporting infrastructure (that is, hardware, software, telecoms)

2.1.2 The Covid 19 pandemic has clearly had a significant economic impact upon the business community, which has seen both decline and growth of key elements, one of which has been the accelerated demand for digital sector skills. According to the Bank of America/McKinsey (figure 1) the growth of e-commerce more than doubled, bringing forward e-commerce penetration by 10 years.

Figure 1 – US E-commerce penetration (2009- 2020)¹



¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/five-fifty-the-quickening>

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- 2.1.3 This digital sector and digital skills growth demand is evident in the GM and Oldham economy as each sector responded to the Covid 19 pandemic by increasing digitalisation within every facet of the workplace (public and private sector). Therefore, it is proposed that the theme for the workshop includes both the direct influence of e-commerce/infrastructure e.g., creative and digital skills sector (web design, programming, game design, social media etc.) as well as the growth of embedded skills in different sectors.
- 2.1.4 The Growth Company Business and Skills survey report for Oldham is open to all sectors and is not specifically interested in this topic – however across all three themes the consistent message related to digital skills growth. The Oldham report focuses upon 3 key areas:
- i. **Recruitment** - Headline analysis from the Growth Company Business and Skills Survey reported that job advertisements had increased by 44% from January 2021 – December 2021 which demonstrated the economy was recovering there were 3 sectors that had jobs described as “hard to fill” specifically:
 - Manufacturing (machine operatives);
 - Logistics (drivers);
 - **Digital (all levels, mostly web-design/social media).**
 - ii. **Skill gaps in the current workforce.**
 - management and leadership (team management, motivating staff through C19 & time management),
 - **digital skills (across all roles, especially advanced IT, networking, data engineering etc. sales and marketing skills, typically allied to technical expertise).**
 - iii. **Future issues and support needs summary:**
 - **digital skills are important,**
 - basic skills across all occupations as much as advanced skills.
 - Current emphasis is just focussing on making the business work now, less about the future, but firms seeking to hire and develop sales & marketing (**online/digital**), and customer facing staff.

2.2 Development of the Digital Sector Strategies and implementation/impact

- 2.2.1 The Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint² sets out a range of key investments including the delivery of the Local Full Fibre Network which has seen a significant increase in fibre infrastructure that will bring 1Gig download speeds to domestic as well as business customers. The strategy aims to support the creation of an additional 10,000 digital sector jobs across GM.
- 2.2.2 **Oldham’s Digital Strategy** sets out the ambition to deliver a Digital Oldham for everyone. One of the strategic areas of focus is a Digital Workforce which will ensure that by April 2024, Team Oldham will have the digital skills and confidence to exploit and deliver digital service improvement. Digital Skills development is therefore a crucial deliverable on the roadmap for success.
- 2.2.3 To prepare for this journey, Team Oldham have engaged with both Oldham colleges as part of our commitment to provide work placements for T-Level students; a new 2-year technical qualification for 16-18-year olds which involves a 45-day placement with an employer. In 2021 we partnered with Oldham Sixth Form College to provide four Digital T-Level

² https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4640/gmca_blueprint_jun-21.pdf

placements to students across IT, Communications and HR OD as part of the pilot rollout and we have pledged to continue to offer more placements each year. The college students are mainly Oldham residents who come from diverse backgrounds, so this targeted initiative will make a positive difference in addressing challenges around both the age profile of our workforce as well as ensuring we are attracting a broad range of local talent. It also means we are engaging students before they make decisions to move away to study or work out of Borough. It is our intention to use our 2022/2023 T-level placements to offer a number of the placement students guaranteed apprenticeship roles within the Council following completion of their studies, ensuring that we can retain talent within the Borough.

2.2.4 The LGA have recognised a low take up of the opportunity and are asking all councils to provide one young person a T-Level placement, so we're proud that Oldham are leading the way on this. Furthermore, despite the challenges of the pandemic, Team Oldham successfully delivered the placements in the workplace to give the students the best possible experience of what it's like to work for the public sector. The feedback received from the students has been fantastic, highlighting that all students would recommend Team Oldham as a place to work and would consider a career here for themselves. All four students are now back at college to complete their studies and we are keeping in touch with them to promote future digital opportunities within Team Oldham. The next natural step for T-Level students is a higher level apprenticeship.

2.2.5 A paper was recently approved at Management Board to secure funding to create additional apprentice jobs to increase the opportunities we can offer Oldham residents. This is a major step forward for Oldham to reach our ambitions in increasing apprenticeships. We're utilising our partnership networks through the Early Careers Network monthly meeting to extend our reach to Oldham residents and we are building an attractive apprenticeship proposition, recruiting in cohorts three times a year and supporting all apprentices with networking opportunities, as well as wraparound support to increase their chances of securing permanent employment.

2.2.6 Since 2018, the Council's Levy has funded four digital/IT apprenticeships. Work will continue at pace to increase the number of apprenticeship jobs available to meet the needs of our workforce and support the Team Oldham Digital Strategy.

2.3 Bootcamps

2.3.1 In addition to the T-Levels and Apprenticeship pathway, the Government and GMCA have commissioned at least 10 providers to deliver intensive, 12-16 week long "bootcamps" which provide young people with core digital IT skills and at the end of the programme each attendee is offered an interview with an IT/Tech/Digital company. These are targeted at young people aged 19+.

2.4 Creative Improvement District

2.4.1 As part of the Council's Creating a Better Place regeneration strategy there is a proposal to develop a Creative Improvement District as part of the Oldham town centre offer. This will benefit from piloting a new Mayoral Enterprise Zone, that will offer incentives and business support to creative and digital businesses that move into the District. This will include the creation of an incubator hub and a pipeline proposal for an artist studio. The creation of such spaces is recognized a key to enabling the collaboration and skills sharing across entrepreneurs.

3 **Key Issues for Overview and Scrutiny to Discuss**

- 3.1 The Board wished to receive a proposal to develop a workshop to engage with the Youth Council to review the work relating to Digital Sector, apprenticeships, and investment.
- 3.2. It is proposed that a workshop is convened that includes representations from the following agencies/groups to discuss with the Board and the Youth Council the impact of the above schemes and to discuss the issues, barriers and opportunities to support the Youth Council Motion.
- 3.3 Invitees could include representatives from
- Oldham Youth Council
 - O&S Board
 - Oldham Sixth Form College and The Oldham College
 - Bootcamp providers/GMCA lead
 - Job Centre Plus Manager
 - Oldham Council officers:
 - Youth Service Manager
 - OD/HR lead
 - Library Digital Lead
 - Economic Growth Lead
 - Education and Skills Officer

4 **Key Questions for Overview and Scrutiny to Consider**

- 4.1 Feedback on expectations and anticipated outcomes from the workshop.

5. **Links to Corporate Outcomes**

- 5.1 The topic links to a Youth Council Motion. It also links to the Creating a Better Place plan.

6 **Additional Supporting Information**

- 6.1 N/a

7 **Consultation**

- 7.1 N/a

8 **Appendices**

- 8.1 N/a
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