



Wigan<sup>♥</sup>  
Council



**NHS**  
Wrightington, Wigan and  
Leigh Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Civic University Agreement



# Background and Purpose

The Edge Hill Civic University Agreement recognises the pivotal role the institution plays in supporting economic development and enhancing the lives of those within the Wigan borough.

As a university, Edge Hill receives almost one-thousand applications from Wigan residents each year, highlighting that we are the next step on the ladder for many in terms of their education. Focusing on the later stage of the student journey, we know that a significant number of our graduates secure employment within the Wigan borough after graduating, with many serving the local community through skilled positions in schools, hospitals and care settings. In 2020 we established the Wigan Education and Skills Partnership (WESP) with a Memorandum of Understanding between Edge Hill University, Wigan and Leigh College, Wigan Council and Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. The partnership was set up to improve access to education and create opportunities for Wigan residents to further their knowledge and skills through to high quality employment. This agreement further solidifies that partnership and places Edge Hill University as the University for Wigan borough complementing the University Centre Wigan and Leigh College’s higher-level curriculum offer, creating a wraparound educational, skills development and employment offer that the borough can be proud of.

## Our Objective

Through our ongoing work as part of the Wigan Education and Skills Partnership, we have created pathways for the community to increase aspiration and knowledge, enabling people to boost their opportunities.

The objective of this Civic University Agreement is to further develop specific career pathways which improve life chances for Wigan residents. The key pathways we will focus on are:

- / Education
- / Health and Social Care
- / Digital
- / Business & SME engagement

These pathways form the foundations of our agreement, as we commit to further enhancing outcomes for Wigan by ensuring that education and employment opportunities underpin the economic, health and social prospects of the borough.



# To collectively develop the pathways set out in our objective, we commit to:

1. Raise educational aspirations working with mandatory school age, post-16, and higher education students.
2. Respond to the needs of employers, identifying strategies to promote and secure a skilled, local workforce for industries with staff skills shortages, with a particular focus on the health and social care sector.
3. Improve educational, health and employment life chances by increasing educational attainment at level 4 and above.
4. Attract employers with higher-level skilled vacancies to the borough, by upskilling the workforce with the appropriate skills.
5. Increase apprenticeships and work placements, securing a talent pipeline of local people into sustainable, local jobs.

This agreement sets out the ways in which we can collectively achieve our objectives and highlights the impact of the partnership to date.

Wigan borough is a place of great ingenuity and opportunity. All partners to this Civic University Agreement share a passion for the place and are fully committed to working together with our communities to enhance opportunities, reduce social inequalities and raise aspirations. We firmly believe that through utilising Edge Hill University as an anchor institution, we can boost economic performance and productivity, develop highly skilled local people, and best prepare Wigan residents for future opportunities.

## Signatures From Anchor Institutions

Dr John Cater, Vice-Chancellor  
Edge Hill University

Edge Hill University

David T. Molyneux, Leader of the Council  
Wigan Council

Alison McKenzie-Folan, Chief Executive  
Wigan Council

Wigan Council

Anna Dawe, Principal and Chief Executive  
Wigan and Leigh College

Wigan and Leigh College

Mark Jones, Chair  
WWL

Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh  
Teaching Hospitals NHS  
Foundation Trust



# Partnership focused on creating pathways to employment through education



## Partnership Background

The Wigan Education and Skills Partnership (WESP) was established in 2020, with a Memorandum of Understanding signed by strategic leads at:

- **Edge Hill University**
- **Wigan Council**
- **Wigan and Leigh College**
- **Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**

Prior to the establishment of the partnership, the Wigan Employment and Skills Strategy was launched. The strategy sets out how Wigan Council will work with anchor institutions to create a thriving economy which provides opportunities for Wigan residents to achieve their aspirations. Following publication of the strategy, the WESP was created to harness the collective power of anchor institutions to boost education opportunities and improve economic and health prospects for Wigan residents.

Although partnership activity is focused on creating pathways to employment through education, we believe that raising aspirations, linking courses to local labour needs, and helping Wigan residents develop the skills they need, will have a direct positive impact on life outcomes.



# Edge Hill University

The award-winning Edge Hill University was founded in 1885 and is based on an attractive 160-acre campus in Lancashire. An educational community, providing high quality teaching, support, and transformational opportunities; it's a place where students discover ideas, attain subject knowledge, and achieve their full potential.

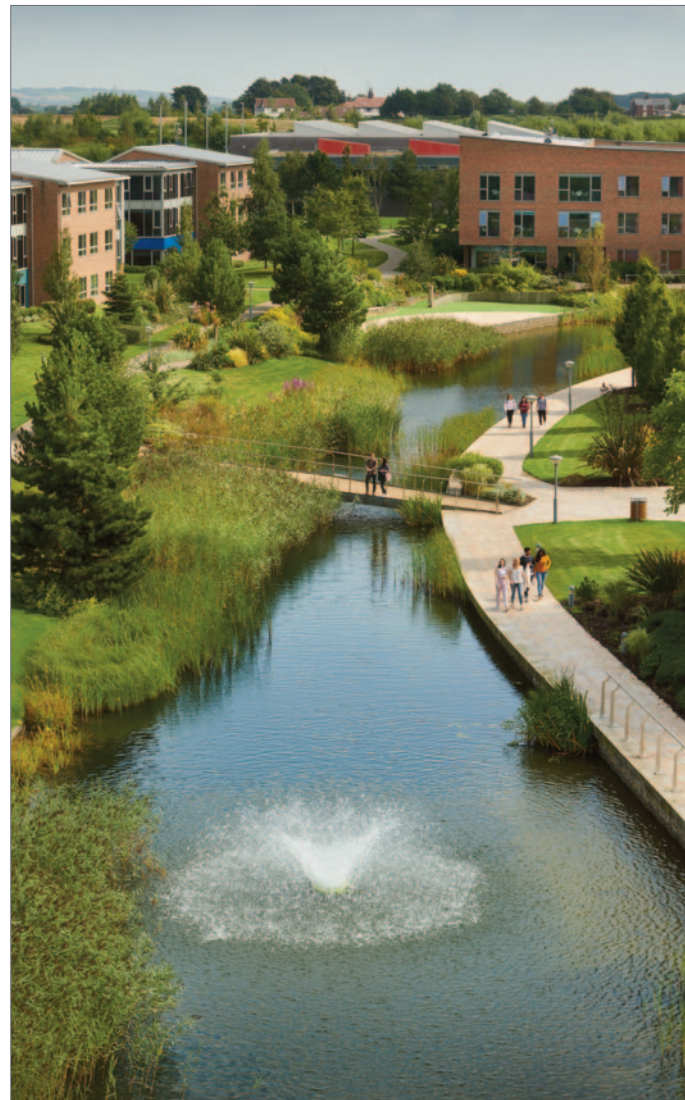
The University has over 14,000 students studying at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The University has three Faculties, covering:

- Health, Social Care and Medicine
- Arts and Sciences
- Education

The University's significant success in achieving its mission is recognised by a range of awards including Educate North's University of the Year 2020/21. It is one of the select few to have held the coveted Modern University of the Year title (2022), awarded by the Times and Sunday Times; and the UK University of the Year (2014) awarded by Times Higher Education.

Edge Hill has expertise in supporting students from non-traditional higher education backgrounds, with the University winning the 2023 Educate North Social Mobility Award for widening access and participation. The University has invested £350m in the campus over the last decade. Construction is underway on a new £17.4m Life Sciences Building and a £35m investment is planned on brand new accommodation and Students' Union building. The University is continuing its journey and diversifying its portfolio of courses to include Maths, Physics, Engineering and Chemistry in the near future.





Wigan Council provides over 700 public services to the 330,000 residents that it serves across the 14 towns and neighbourhoods making up the Wigan borough.



As the ninth largest metropolitan borough council in England, Wigan Council employs over 5,000 people in a diverse range of areas and professions and spends over £350m per year on local services and goods in addition to over £100m of capital spend in the local area.

Wigan Council is recognised as one of the highest performing and innovative councils in the country and has developed a pioneering approach to public services that has seen it awarded the UK's 'Council of the Year' twice in the past 5 years.



Wigan Council is the custodian of a borough of over 77 square miles, two thirds of which are green countryside, nurtured from the remnants of the town's industrial heritage. The Flashes of Wigan and Leigh were declared a National Nature Reserve in 2023, the largest urban nature reserve in the country and this unique chain of wetland habitats originally formed by the flooding of former coal mining sites, is now home to nationally significant wildlife populations. This provides the council with a wonderful platform from which to educate and inspire future generations and tell the incredible story of this unique landscape, which has been forged by its rich industrial heritage and is so important to the borough.

Wigan Council is committed to growing an economy that works for all the people of the borough through an approach known as Community Wealth Building. Determined to address the economic inequalities across the borough and between other places, the council is working with Wigan and Leigh College, Edge Hill University and Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to put more economic control into the hands of local people and to use the significant spending power of these institutions to the benefit of local communities.



# Wigan and Leigh College

**Wigan and Leigh College is a large general further education college and has a long-standing history in providing post-16 quality education and training.**

The college was created in 1857 as a mining college and today serves over 10,000 students. The college specialises in the delivery of technical education to 16-18-year-old students, adults and community education, apprenticeships and higher education through the University Centre Wigan and Leigh College. With campuses across the borough of Wigan the college works closely with partners in the secondary and primary school sector and as one of the largest college providers of apprenticeship training in the North-West, works with over 3,000 employers.



The College is rated as Ofsted 'Good' and under the new enhanced inspection regime has been assessed as making a 'strong' contribution to meeting local skills needs. With achievement rates significantly above national averages across all provision, quality is at the heart of its delivery.

Curriculum specialisms are focused around Centres of Excellence in Engineering & Construction, Health & Social Care, Sport and Creative Arts and the commitment to providing the best teaching and learning is led by the college's Teaching & Learning Academy

Over the past five years the College has invested £10.6m in resources and the estate including the creation of clinical health wards, specialist power and sustainability workshops and a new computer aided virtual environment (CAVE) facility. The College is currently undergoing a £40m rebuild at its main campus at the heart of Wigan town centre.

Committed to collaborative working, the College is part of the Greater Manchester (GM) Colleges Partnership, is the lead Further Education partner in the GM Institute of Technology and is a committed member of the GM Good Employment Charter





# Wrightington, Wigan<sup>and</sup> Leigh

## Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



**WWL is a medium-sized acute and community foundation trust. It comprises of three hospital sites and an outpatient clinic based in Wigan.**

It also utilises a significant number of community assets, meaning WWL has a presence in 43 individual local sites. It primarily draws activity from the Wigan borough, but many services attract patients from other parts of the North West. Wrightington's orthopaedics service is designated as the regional orthopaedic hub, but has a reputation which stretches far further afield with an international market. WWL is rated as a 'Good' provider of healthcare services by the Care Quality Commission.

The Trust is a major employer within the local area, with over 7,600 staff. Of this, 69% live within the Wigan borough. For this reason, WWL places great emphasis on its role as an anchor institution. WWL recognises its potential to positively influence social and economic opportunities within its catchment through its employment practices and investment decisions – such as selecting companies and service providers who can demonstrate they have shared values around fair pay for employees. In the last financial year, WWL spent £34m with companies based in Greater Manchester, of which £13m was with companies based in Wigan.

WWL is regarded a key asset for Greater Manchester in its recovery from the pandemic and the requirement to reduce the size of elective waiting lists. This has resulted in investments across its estate, but with a particular focus on the elective sites at Leigh and Wrightington. This has been made possible by attracting £33.4m of external investment from NHS England between 22/23 and 24/25 where business cases could demonstrate a proportionate increase in diagnostic and elective capacity would be achieved for the investment requested.

The developments which will be delivered as a result of these investments align neatly to the ambitions described in the refreshed Trust Strategy, which was published in 2021; and complementary work which has been done since to produce strategies which define the future of WWL's clinical services; digital offer, and green approach. The Strategy 2030 is available to read on WWL's website. The document describes in detail how the Trust intends to develop through the 2020s by focusing its energies around three core commitments to:

**NHS**  
**Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals**  
NHS Foundation Trust

Who are the anchor institutions?



**Improve** the quality of care that we provide, and the experience that our patients and community have in our care.

**Integrate** to build on our relationships with our strategic and operational partners and work to reduce gaps in pathways between services.

**Innovate** to harness the opportunities available through implementing new models of care or introducing novel technologies support better healthcare.





# Creating a space for students to thrive



## Creating a place for pathways

The Wigan Education and Skills Partnership has already achieved several outcomes since the partnership was formed. The most notable being the opening of the Centre for Advanced Technical Studies (CATS) in 2022. This has enabled the partnership to begin to meet the objective of creating pathways into employment for Wigan residents. Wigan and Leigh College were successful in their bid to take over the Rushton Building after outlining the plans for the centre, which were closely aligned to the objectives of the Wigan Employment and Skills Strategy.

The centre provides a venue for local residents to undertake advanced level study in key sector areas such as integrated health care, digital and civil engineering. The co-location of training facilities for Wrightington Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Wigan Council and Edge Hill University has provided learners with a clear sight of progression through education into employment in essential sectors. This placed alongside a one-stop-shop for employer engagement has created a facility that drives aspiration and ambition and ensures that the partnership is responding directly to business need and the Wigan economy. As well as creating space for students to thrive, the opening of the centre now provides a space for new programmes to be developed, and enables activities in the pathways highlighted to be delivered in the heart of the local community.

### Pathways for Wigan Residents

The Wigan Education and Skills Partnership has an absolute commitment to lifelong learning and ensuring the very best destinations for the borough's community. Quality advice and guidance, a targeted and relevant curriculum offer, tailored pastoral support and meaningful, positive destinations are all strategic priorities for the partnership.

Post-Covid there is a demand to respond to skills shortages whilst also preparing for the skills of tomorrow. Wigan borough's new Economic Strategy highlights areas for growth in a number of key foundational sectors, Health and Social Care, Construction, Manufacturing, Digital and Green Economy. In addition, Education continues to be a high employment sector with skills gaps in some areas. The partnership aims to respond and prioritise the following skills areas:

- Raise levels of attainment at levels 3 and 4 to above the North-West average
- Respond to workforce challenges in key foundation sectors:
  - Health and Social Care
  - Education
  - Digital and Industry Digitalisation
- Meet the needs of Wigan's business community and promote community wealth building and innovation.



# Supporting the development of digital skills will unlock opportunities



## Education

The partnership's vision is to develop routes into Initial Teacher Education and other education provision including through lifelong learning and professional development.

The agreement will allow partners to develop further routes into education for the people of Wigan. Since we began our partnership in 2020, we have created a BA (Hons) course in Primary Education with QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) awarded by Edge Hill University at Wigan and Leigh College. The programme is delivered part-time allowing those who may not be able to access full time courses, such as in-post Teaching Assistants, to reach their next step in becoming a qualified Primary Education Teacher. Delivered at the Centre for Advanced Technical Studies, the course provides expert facilities to develop the next generation of teaching staff. The second cohort of students will commence their studies on the programme in September 2023, the cohort has already doubled in size, showcasing the demand from local people for quality education that helps them reach their career goals, whilst fitting in with their needs.

To further solidify links with Further Education and provide a seamless education journey for young people, Edge Hill have run the Tomorrow's Teachers programme for college students in the borough. As part of the programme, workshops are delivered by Edge Hill University, offering students a glimpse into teaching and how a career as a teacher can be pursued. Upon completion, students are then guaranteed an interview for education courses at the university.

It is our mission to continue to work with anchor institutions in the future to align our priorities and bridge local gaps to improve the Wigan education and career pathway. As part of this, we will set out to ensure we create opportunities for all young people in the borough, with a particular focus on those that are looked after by the authority, care leavers and those with SEND. Through working as a collective we can ensure we are creating opportunities for those who may not have access without the support of anchor institutions.

We will look to strengthen the academic partnership to increase cohort numbers for education courses, as well as creating additional courses to meet demand within the local community for certain types of provision. We will work to increase the awareness of our programmes, and better prepare young people for the next steps of the pathways developed so that they are equipped to use their knowledge to access opportunity.

The partnership of the University and the College provides a unique opportunity to develop workforce solutions for the FE workforce. The education training specialism of EHU working with Wigan and Leigh College's Teaching and Learning Academy will enable innovative approaches to be developed in the training of technical teaching professionals and delivery of technical education.

## Digital

Wigan Council have succeeded in recent years in undergoing a digital transformation which improves the lives of people, businesses, and education institutions through technology. The world of technology is advancing at a rapid pace, and we recognise the need for the community to have access to education that provides them with the digital skills they need to thrive.

Through the partnership, we are delivering Edge Hill University taster sessions and visits to several Wigan secondary schools, as well as securing work placements across Wigan Council, WWL and local businesses for digital T-Level students. These activities were designed to promote computing subjects and increase the take-up of digital courses. The aim is to retain local talent in highly skilled careers within the digital sector.

We believe that supporting the development of digital skills within the community will unlock opportunities for people to achieve greater outcomes. To support this, we will continue to promote digital skills and careers within schools to increase participation. In addition, we will support the continuing professional development of teachers to ensure a pipeline of talent to encourage and inspire young people to pursue careers in digital.

## Business Engagement

As a partnership we recognise the importance of connecting with local businesses. Whilst we are focussing on the skills development across our education and anchor partnership, we understand the need to connect out to local businesses to develop opportunities around work experience, placements, work shadowing and engagement in the various courses that will be developed. We need to ensure that residents are exposed to the breadth of local opportunities in the borough.

There is a commitment to developing strong pipelines through from education and training into employment. We will nurture the various different routes to employment, whether that be through apprenticeship opportunities or straight into employment following education at entry level through to a graduate route. We are committed to lifelong learning and providing the right progression routes. Our business sector will be key to helping us shape the education offer so that we are developing the right skills that are needed in local jobs.

We already have strong partnerships with businesses, through a number of forums such as the Enterprise Board, Business Consortia. In addition, there are a number of business networks that we are connected into. There are several structures across the borough that bring businesses together such as the Wigan and Leigh College 'Business Breakfast'.

Through our Ethical Provider Framework, we have strong partnerships with the afore-mentioned care providers who share our passion for developing the local workforce and improving economic outcomes for residents. In addition to providing the majority of placements, careers insights and work experience opportunities, providers have committed to supported employment opportunities for individuals with a disability.

As we firm up our priorities, we will connect back out to the sector in order to shape our offer and opportunities together.



# Better prepare young people for the next steps



## Health and Social Care

The partnership's vision is to respond to the workforce crisis within the integrated healthcare system by increasing the talent pipeline to address the skills gaps.

The borough of Wigan needs health and care workers to meet increasing demand within the local community. Wroughtington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (WWL) and Wigan Council have identified that to provide the most efficient care to the community, 1 in 10 school leavers in the borough will need to enter the health and care sector every year for the next 10 years at least.

As anchor institutions, we are committed to developing the talent pipeline to meet the demand for healthcare staff. We have made progress with the following initiatives:

- Pre-degree Nursing pathway – The partnership has developed an end-to-end training pathway designed to guide students from college age to a full nursing qualification. Utilising a nursing education pathway alongside 50 T-Level enhanced industry placements, students progress to Edge Hill to continue their studies while gaining practical experience through placements with WWL, Wigan Council and commissioned social care partners. Trained by Wigan's anchor institutions, graduates are already able to feel part of the health and care workforce and see a role for themselves in caring for their own community.
- Wigan Council and commissioned care providers offer significant numbers of placements for Wigan and Leigh College's students studying other T-Level Health and Social Care pathways, and BTEC Level 3 in Health and Social Care. This provides students with \ essential social care experience to support their studies and onward journeys into university or employment.
- Careers Advice and Guidance Programme – Utilising the Healthier Wigan Partnership and the dedicated careers facility at the Centre for Advanced Technical Studies; masterclasses, industry talks and guest speakers provide a programme of awareness raising and advice for students at key stage 4 and 5 across the borough.
- The co-location of the WWL training facility sees health care professionals working alongside post-16 students, creating a professional learning community.
- The economic strategy will see the council and local employers who represent key growth areas take a strategic approach to careers guidance, building understanding and aspiration and offering robust placement and employment opportunities.
- The partnership is currently developing a Health and Care Academy and a dedicated Allied Health and Social Care training facility located at Wigan and Leigh College's Adult Learning Centre in Leigh. The new training facility will complement the clinical health facilities that have been created at the Centre for Advanced Technical Studies and will respond to social care, primary care, mental health and public health training needs and careers support, creating more opportunity for young people and adults.
- Workforce Training Programmes – Partners have developed traineeship programmes and sector work academy programmes for clinical and non-clinical roles at WWL. Wigan Council, together with commissioned social care providers, have developed traineeships, pre-employment programmes and sector work academy programmes in partnership with Wigan and Leigh College. The College delivers the skills training and education, and the council and partners deliver the placement and employment opportunities.
- Wigan Council, mental health and social care partners are working with Edge Hill on the development of a new degree programme to meet workforce needs and provide further access to careers in health and social care. The programme is focused on Health and Social Wellbeing - Community Practice.

We will continue to ensure these programmes attract staff into the sector and provide young people with aspirations for careers in health and social care.

We will address inequality to ensure that all pockets of society are able to access the provision they need to build skills and acquire sustainable employment in the sector. The Care to Join Us recruitment campaign promotes entry level roles in social care, targeting local people and opening the door to significant numbers to join the borough's social care workforce with jobs or apprenticeships.

We continue to work with partners such as Department for Work and Pensions to identify ways in which we can widen participation.



[edgehill.ac.uk](http://edgehill.ac.uk)

[wigan.gov.uk](http://wigan.gov.uk)

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