



INNOVATION SUMMIT 2025

FOREWORD

By Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

“Greater Manchester and the Ruhr have always been places that lead change. Today, our pioneering spirit and sense of purpose has brought us together to tackle some of the biggest challenges of our time, from decarbonising the economy to modernising healthcare and keeping our digital infrastructure secure.

“Together our regions are made up of nearly eight million people and our economies generate over £230 billion. We share a proud industrial heritage and modern-day strengths in many of the same sectors. We recognise the power of innovation to create opportunities for businesses, people and places that haven’t always had their fair share. Most importantly, we are united by our shared belief that growth should be good growth, prioritising fairness, sustainability and opportunity for all.

“As Europe’s largest economy and the fourth largest globally, Germany is priority market for Greater Manchester. There are huge opportunities for trade and investment in areas like advanced manufacturing, engineering, clean technology and digital innovation.

“These are all reasons why Greater Manchester has made Germany, and the Ruhr in particular, a priority international partner. Our relationship has blossomed in recent years through reciprocal trade missions, new partnerships between businesses and ever-closer collaboration in research and development.

“The Innovation Bridge we established in May 2025 saw us take a further step forward. With its focus on hydrogen, cybersecurity and digital health, it’s an example of what we do best – working together to find answers to some of the biggest problems in a changing world, while driving forward UK-Germany relations.

“Our first-ever Innovation Summit was about turning discussions into action. I was proud to welcome our partners from the Ruhr to Greater Manchester and it was fantastic to see hundreds of leaders from both regions come together to create tangible opportunities for good growth. We have built a strong foundation and we are excited to build on this in the years to come.”



GREATER MANCHESTER – GERMANY INNOVATION SUMMIT 2025

Collaborating to tackle global challenges

On 24–25 September 2025, the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester hosted the first Greater Manchester–Germany Innovation Summit.

With more than 300 invitees in attendance – including a 45-strong German delegation – the event was backed by Greater Manchester Combined Authority, GM Business Growth Hub and Innovation Greater Manchester, and focused on three high-potential sectors where both regions are investing heavily: hydrogen, digital health, and cybersecurity.

It brought together businesses, senior industry figures, prominent researchers and public sector leaders to explore mutual challenges and spark fresh thinking. Across two interactive days, delegates took part in panel discussions, site tours, workshops and live pitch sessions – sharing knowledge, insights and case studies on the deployment-ready solutions that are emerging.

Discussions ranged from scaling AI in healthcare to protecting infrastructure from cyber threats; Greater Manchester’s new Hydrogen Strategy launched as a focal point for future collaboration, while the Bosch Challenge invited local SMEs to become part of a global hydrogen supply chain. Challenges and opportunities explored across both days included regulation, costs,



“I heard several concrete ideas – from participants from the Ruhr region and from Greater Manchester – which we can continue to work on together to further deepen the relationship between our regions.”

Jörg Kemna, Managing Director,
Business Metropole Ruhr

infrastructure, cultural attitudes, as well as the need for stronger skills pipelines.

Marking the first major milestone since the signing of the Innovation Bridge UK agreement earlier in the year [see page 5], the event opened the door to practical partnerships, laying the foundations for new trade, investment and innovation on both sides.

The result was a clear sense of momentum, with a number of early-stage partnerships already in progress. If the Innovation Summit 2025 demonstrated anything, it’s that Greater Manchester and the Ruhr region are not only aligned in ambition, but increasingly aligned in action to tackle how we can make the world greener, healthier and more secure.



“This Summit was a key moment. Collaboration, across Greater Manchester and internationally, is driving real change that will see more high-quality jobs and comprehensive support for new and developing businesses. What we do here is an example that can be replicated across the UK, and even further afield thanks to our partners in the Germany and the Ruhr region, as well as acting as a blueprint for our initiatives with other international partners.”

Andrew Hodgson, Chair, Innovation Greater Manchester

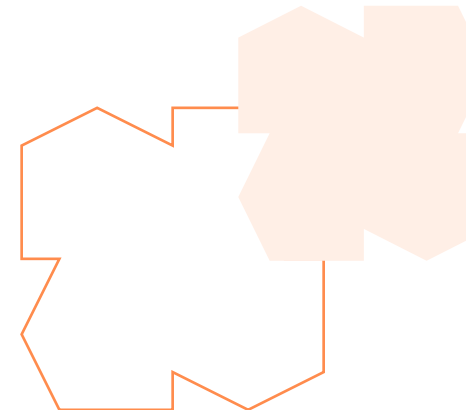


“Innovation does not just happen in laboratories or boardrooms; it thrives when people meet, connect, exchange ideas, and gain trust.”

Sandra Morrison, German Honorary Consul for Manchester

German delegation

- Bochum Economic Development
- Business Development Agency Herne
- Business Metropole Ruhr GmbH
- Centre for artificial intelligence, medical informatics and data science, Knappschaft Kliniken University Hospital Bochum
- Chamber of Industry and Commerce Essen
- Chamber of Industry and Commerce Lower Rhine
- Cube 5 @ HGI
- denki health
- Duisburg Business & Innovation GmbH
- Economic Development Agency Dortmund
- ENTRYZERO
- EWG (Economic Development Agency for the City of Essen)
- G DATA CyberDefense AG
- H2UB
- HAGEN.WIRTSCHAFTSENTWICKLUNG GmbH
- neuroTime
- NRW.Energy4Climate
- NRW.Global Business
- Regional Association Ruhr/Business Metropole Ruhr
- Ruhr-University Bochum
- TechnologyCenterDortmund
- The Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Center ZBT
- thyssenkrupp AG
- University of Hagen
- Vonovia SE
- WiN Emscher-Lippe GmbH



INNOVATION BRIDGE

Growing together

The Innovation Summit is the latest step in a cross-border initiative that started in 2021 and led in May 2025 to the creation of the Innovation Bridge UK between Greater Manchester and the Ruhr region – the first British-German strategic partnership at a regional level.

Uniting industry, academia and local government from the two regions – which together span 94 towns and cities and almost eight million residents – the Bridge promotes innovation, supports business relocation and strengthens economic partnerships. With an initial focus on hydrogen, digital health and cybersecurity, it provides a clear route for British businesses, investors and networks that want to tap into the German market via the country's largest metropolitan area.

The Ruhr is emerging as one of Europe's leading hydrogen regions, home to globally active technology companies, start-ups and research institutions, including ZBT – The Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Center, Fraunhofer UMSICHT (Fraunhofer's institute for environmental, safety and energy technology) and the H2UB open-innovation platform.

Its healthcare economy, supported by networks such as MedEcon Ruhr and leading institutions like University Hospital Essen, offers ideal conditions for international innovation in digital health, while the region also hosts one of Europe's strongest

cybersecurity clusters, led by Ruhr University Bochum's Horst Görtz Institute and companies such as G DATA CyberDefense.

At the same time, the Bridge enables companies and institutions from the Ruhr to benefit from access to partners in a city-region that has posted the fastest productivity growth in the UK since 2004. Greater Manchester combines a £100bn economy with five universities and more than 100,000 students, a devolved £6bn health and social care system, and nationally significant assets that include GCHQ Manchester, the Digital Security Hub (DiSH), Health Innovation Manchester, and the Oxford Road Corridor.

Greater Manchester has world-leading graphene facilities (NGI and GEIC) and is building a hydrogen ecosystem aligned to its 2038 net-zero goal, with the Manchester Fuel Cell Innovation Centre and the Trafford Green Hydrogen project as key assets.

The foundations for long-term, cross-border cooperation are in place. Now comes the task of creating practical routes into each other's markets, helping companies identify opportunities, connect with the right partners, and move from discussion to delivery. The mix of knowledge transfer, targeted introductions, pitching forums and site visits seen at the Innovation Summit is an important step on this journey.



“We see the Ruhr as a leading base for British companies that want to expand into the European market. That’s why our aim is to simplify access to the German market for British companies and connect them with the right partners in the Ruhr.”

Jörg Kemna, CEO, Business Metropole Ruhr

“The Ruhr region and Greater Manchester share not only a proud industrial heritage, but also the will to reinvent ourselves again and again through innovation. If we continue together on this path to a green future, our regions will benefit.”

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester



TIMELINE

The GM-Ruhr story so far

September 2021

A new cooperation agreement is struck between Greater Manchester and Metropole Ruhr, Germany's largest conurbation, aimed at strengthening economic and cultural links. Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham is part of a visiting delegation to North Rhine-Westphalia that includes an Oldham-based green tech company and Manchester Metropolitan University's Fuel Cell Innovation Centre. A Memorandum of Understanding is signed in Essen, establishing the new strategic partnership and recognising the two regions' shared industrial heritage and priorities.

August/September 2022

Greater Manchester is one of six global regions invited to the Metropolitan Innovation Summit Ruhr 2022, themed 'Creating Innovation Networks for Sustainable Transformation'. GM presents its innovation ecosystem on the main stage, visits Ruhr innovation hubs, and contributes to workshops on energy, smart health and ecosystem governance.

October 2023

A delegation from the Ruhr meets several key bodies across Greater Manchester's innovation ecosystem, including Energy House Labs, Fuel Cell Innovation Centre, Turing Innovation Catalyst, and Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation. Discussions are held around the opportunities to deepen economic links between the two regions.

October 2024

Metropole Ruhr and Greater Manchester co-host a joint session at Europe's leading property and investment fair EXPO REAL 2024 in Munich, showcasing the partnership.

Mayor Andy Burnham leads a Greater Manchester delegation to the Ruhr to further develop trade and innovation links. He's joined by businesses across software, cybersecurity and indoor media, as well as Alliance Manchester Business School, Fuel Cell Innovation Centre, GM Business Growth Hub and the University of Salford. Site visits include SmartHospital.NRW, the H2UB hydrogen hub and Bochum's G DATA CyberDefense, creators of the world's first antivirus software.

TIMELINE

The GM-Ruhr story so far

May 2025

Innovation Bridge UK launches, strengthening UK–Ruhr cooperation in the hydrogen, cybersecurity and digital health sectors. Designed to simplify market access and connect firms with the right partners in both regions, the Innovation Bridge builds on the trust and networks developed between the two regions over the preceding years.

Five firms travel with GM Business Growth Hub to the 10th edition of the ruhrSUMMIT, the region's leading start-up event, to represent Greater Manchester's strengths in cybersecurity, digital identity, translation services and green tech.

September 2025

The inaugural GM-Germany Innovation Summit successfully brings together business, academia and local government. Over two days, participants explore opportunities for R&D collaboration, investment, market access, and skills and talent development, laying the groundwork for joint action in tackling shared challenges. Greater Manchester launches its five-year hydrogen strategy for consultation, focusing on research and innovation; skills and supply chain; and production, distribution and usage.

November 2025

Cohort announcement for the GM Hydrogen Supply Chain Innovation Challenge. Launched at the Summit by GM Business Growth Hub in collaboration with Bosch and Manchester Metropolitan University, the five-month programme equips 10 selected firms with the capabilities to bring hydrogen solutions to the UK market. The firms will be supported through mentoring by companies from the Ruhr. As well as workshops, mentoring and commercial support, Bosch – a global leader in hydrogen – will open its facilities and shares hands-on expertise on how hydrogen systems are developed and tested. The Challenge helps firms identify their role, build capability and compete for UK tenders, creating opportunities to work with major partners while advancing Greater Manchester's ambition to become a hydrogen hub.

2026

The second Innovation Summit will take place in the Ruhr, further deepening cross-regional collaboration across hydrogen, digital health, cybersecurity and other sectors with the partnership now firmly focused on delivery and long-term value.

The Königswinter Conference will be held in Manchester. The Königswinter Conference 2026 will be the first conference after the UK and Germany signed the Treaty on Friendship and Bilateral Cooperation in 2025.

HYDROGEN

The time to act is now

Day one opened with remarks from GM Mayor Andy Burnham and Sandra Morrison, Honorary Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany in Manchester, and focused on the production of green hydrogen.

Highlights included:

- **Launch of the GM Hydrogen Strategy 2025-2030 for consultation**

The five-year plan sets out how Greater Manchester will scale its hydrogen ambition, inviting input from partners in Germany, across GM and nationally. Detailing hydrogen's role in meeting the city-region's 2038 net zero goal, it identifies three growth pillars – Research & Innovation, Skills & Supply Chain, and Production, Distribution & Usage – that provide a practical roadmap for collaboration and investment.

- **Launch of the GM Hydrogen Supply Chain Innovation Challenge**

Aiming to accelerate the commercialisation of hydrogen technologies, the programme pairs Greater Manchester SMEs with Bosch. It enables firms to co-develop demonstrator systems and learn about Bosch's electrolyser stack technology and how they can form part of the Hydrogen supply chain as a live model.

- **Plans for the Hydrogen Technology Electrolysis and Cell Hub (HYTECH)**

This new hydrogen testing facility, modelled on the ZBT fuel-cell/hydrogen centre in Duisburg in the Ruhr, will accelerate market expansion by giving existing facilities and academic researchers equal access to cutting-edge technology in the city region.

Workshops, panel discussions and site visits gave delegates from Germany and Greater Manchester the chance to engage in open, balanced conversations. And the message was clear: the time to act is now. Unlocking hydrogen's potential requires investment in transport, harbours, electrolysers, pipelines and public demand. That means cutting through planning barriers and funding regulations to reduce costs and offer alternative financing models.

Delegates also called for fewer decision-making bottlenecks, campaigns to shift public attitudes, closer international collaboration and integrated renewable networks, as well as highlighting the need to support SMEs to enter hydrogen supply chains and emphasising upskilling and reskilling the workforce to meet the pace of hydrogen deployment.

Day two included site visits to the [Manchester Fuel Cell Innovation Centre](#), [Henry Royce Institute](#) and [Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre](#). Delegates joined guided tours, meeting

the academics and technical teams advancing fuel cells and graphene-based applications. They received a briefing on the Royce Hydrogen Accelerator and how it can support scale-up. Q&A sessions explored partnership routes, integration into Greater Manchester's innovation ecosystem and supply chains, and practical steps for companies to access laboratory and pilot facilities through membership.



“This is one of the very first cross-regional collaborations around hydrogen technologies that we’ve had between the UK and Germany. It’s time now to take the next step and create tangible outputs we should be accountable for.”

Amer Gaffar, Director of Industrial Strategy Partnerships, Manchester Metropolitan University

DIGITAL HEALTH AND CYBERSECURITY

Shared challenges, cross-border opportunities

Day two was opened by Andrew Hodgson OBE (Innovation Greater Manchester) and was chaired by Professor Mandy Parkinson (University of Salford).

Highlights included:

- **Keynote speeches showing how AI can be adopted safely to transform healthcare**

Laura Rooney (Health Innovation Manchester) and Professor Sebastian Merkel (Ruhr-University Bochum) highlighted the potential of data-driven healthcare to improve patient outcomes and called for collaboration on standards, interoperability, and research. Both speakers warned of the barriers in this sector: long time-to-market, strict regulation, evidentiary data requirements and proof of cost-effectiveness.

- **Pitching forum for Greater Manchester and Ruhr companies**

Partnership-focused, rather than investor-led, the session saw businesses from both regions shared their concepts and explored opportunities for joint projects. This was real-time collaboration in action – a live exchange of ideas, with introductions made on the spot and follow-up conversations already underway.

- **A tour of innovation facilities**

Site visits that included global cyber and software resilience firm **NCC Group, DiSH Manchester** (a key initiative of the Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint), **Manchester Science Park, the University of Salford's virtual health suite, and Manchester Metropolitan University.**

Speeches, panels and workshops were again balanced with representatives from both regions, framing international collaboration around shared threats, joint projects and future workforce needs.

Cybersecurity was cited as a prerequisite for growth. Greater Manchester's mature cyber ecosystem serves as a model in tackling the rising complexity of cyber threats, while Ruhr approaches to SME support and platforms sparked follow-ups. Though eager to adopt new technology, many SMEs underestimate their vulnerability to cyber-attacks and assume suppliers 'have it covered'. Proactivity – for example: training, backup systems, supply chain resilience, and GDPR compliance – is far less costly than the reputational and financial impact of an incident.

Digital health adoption at scale means working with how health systems operate: align with clinical workflows, connect to research partners, plan for data integration and address financing

early. Regulation is a recurring theme – essential for patient safety, effectiveness and data protection, but often engaged too late, leading to rework, delays and added cost in already lengthy commercialisation cycles.

Comparing the UK's devolved health system with Germany's federal model highlighted policy synergies and gaps, and both regions outlined practical steps on workforce development. With foundations now in place, the emphasis shifts to helping businesses navigate cross-border challenges and convert opportunities.

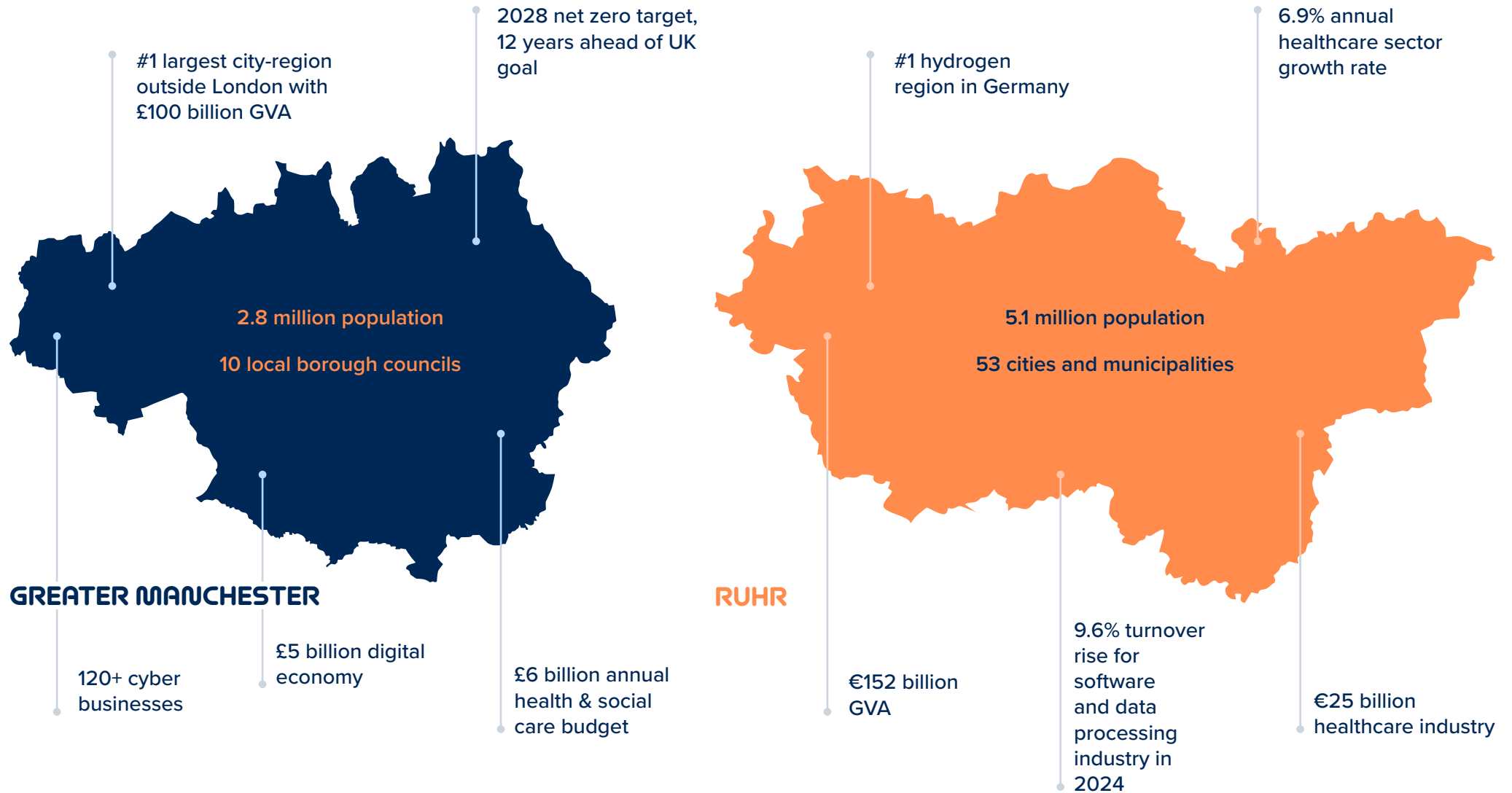


“Delay in this [digital health] area is not neutral – it costs lives.”

Laura Rooney, Deputy CEO & Chief Strategy Officer, Health Innovation Manchester

TWO REGIONS, ONE AMBITION

GM x Ruhr



SUMMIT REFLECTIONS

Greater Manchester

“After visiting the Ruhr earlier this year, it’s been a pleasure to host our partners. The work across both innovation ecosystems is exciting and accelerating, and this event underlined that we share the same mission to develop forward-thinking environments where innovation is tangible.”

Janine Smith, Director, GM Business Growth Hub

“Success will mean we have joint partnerships, joint funding, businesses here exporting to the Ruhr, Ruhr businesses investing in Greater Manchester, and public-private investment partnerships. If we get it right, which I’m sure we will, then we’ll have a brilliant blueprint on how to work more collaboratively and how to change the dial on innovation.”

Professor Mandy Parkinson, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Knowledge Exchange, University of Salford

“I’m inspired by what we achieved together. The openness, the collaboration, and the willingness to share challenges and ideas made this so much more than just an event.”

Nicole Strickland, Trade & Investment Principal, Greater Manchester Combined Authority

“Greater Manchester’s green tech sector is thriving and growing, with hydrogen at the heart of its future potential. Building the right skills and strengthening supply chains are critical to unlocking this opportunity. That’s why I’m excited to launch the Hydrogen Challenge alongside colleagues at GM Business Growth Hub, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Bosch – bringing together expertise and innovation to accelerate progress towards a low-carbon economy.”

Vicky Wilding, Green Tech & Services Lead, Green Economy



SUMMIT REFLECTIONS

The Ruhr

“Two days full of energy, ideas and collaboration – it was fantastic to be part of the Greater Manchester–Germany Innovation Summit. This summit wasn’t just a meeting of minds – it was a celebration of shared values: heritage, transformation, and the power of working together.”

Rebecca Großmann, Project Manager - Internationalisation & Location Marketing, Business Metropole Ruhr

“A wonderful chance to get in touch with the vibrant Manchester innovation ecosystem to exchange on hydrogen, digital health, and of course cyber security. It was truly impressive to see how both our regions have transformed from industrial powerhouses into innovation hubs of the future.”

Jessika Lüning, Head of Public Affairs, G DATA CyberDefense

“Visits to the Manchester Fuel Cell Innovation Centre, the Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre and Hydrogen Safe make it clear how closely science, education and business work together in Manchester. It is precisely this link that is also of central importance for Duisburg in order to expand our role as a location for various industry sectors.”

Dominik Bartz, Internationalisation Hub Manager, Duisburg Business & Innovation

“Two packed days of innovative people, site visits and planning ways to collaborate – all while proudly holding up a flag for Bochum.”

Dr. Daniela Heeg, Deputy Head of Science and Administration, Knappschaft Kliniken University Hospital Bochum



“The two days showcased impressively the successful transformation of our both regions from industrial to future-tech champions.”

Frank Speer, Head of Internationalisation & Location Marketing, Business Metropole Ruhr

NEXT STEPS

From Summit to action

The Greater Manchester–Germany Innovation Summit 2025 showed what’s possible when long-term vision is backed by practical steps and a commitment to collaboration.

Activity is now shifting towards delivery, with both regions working to turn strategic alignment into real-world outcomes across hydrogen, cybersecurity and digital health. This next phase will be shaped by four clear lessons that emerged during the Summit:

- **Trust and mindset matter.** Infrastructure is vital, but so is building long-term relationships and challenging assumptions on how we think about cross-border collaboration.
- **SMEs and start-ups need structure.** Support must be targeted and practical, helping businesses to scale and build resilience in fast-changing global markets.
- **Skills development can’t wait.** It must begin early, ideally in schools, and continue through into training and career development.
- **Equity must be embedded.** Innovation must work for everyone, bringing in people and places often overlooked in traditional economic models.

There is strong intent to move forward together, aligning funding, enabling cross-border projects, and addressing barriers to innovation, whether commercial, regulatory, or technical.

The coming months are expected to see the formation of dedicated working groups around priority themes, including collaborative R&D, SME supply chains, digital infrastructure and workforce development. These groups will be tasked with developing joint projects and unlocking opportunities for engagement between sectors and across borders.

Progress is already being made. Partners from Hydrogen Metropole Ruhr have taken part in the consultation phase for GM’s Hydrogen Strategy 2025–2030, which will provide a strong platform to support businesses, research institutions and delivery bodies to access funding, test ideas and scale solutions with real market potential.

Greentech.Ruhr plans to connect its advanced hydrogen supply chain with SMEs in Greater Manchester, offering mentorship through the Hydrogen Challenge programme. This will give GM firms direct access to operators with deployment experience, insight into procurement and standards, and introductions across the Ruhr ecosystem.

Further opportunities for joint working and investment are being explored, with the aim of developing scalable, cross-border projects. And preparations are already underway for the next Summit, to be held in the Ruhr in 2026. In the meantime, both regions will continue building

momentum. The message coming out of Greater Manchester and the Ruhr is clear: the framework is in place, and the focus is now firmly on turning ambition into action.

“The breadth of knowledge and expertise over the Innovation Summit showed just how much potential we hold in our city-region. I truly believe that Greater Manchester is the best place in the UK to be right now. We’re already working behind the scenes with our partners to share more opportunities for people to get involved and innovate, whether that’s here in Greater Manchester, the Ruhr region or even further afield. It’s really exciting to be part of what’s to come.”

Yvonne Grady, Head of Innovation, GM Business Growth Hub

GET IN TOUCH

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