

CASE STUDY

Helping local business adopt AI: Greater Manchester Colleges

Across Greater Manchester, Billy Gilchrist, Business Innovation Advisor at Hopwood Hall College, has been supporting a range of businesses, including small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), to adopt AI effectively. Through a series of workshops and events delivered across colleges and business networks, Billy has delivered AI training to over 600 businesses since 2024. This activity forms part of the Greater Manchester Further Education Innovation Partnership (GMFEIP), a programme funded by Innovate UK's Further Education Innovation Fund (FEIF).

Each session is designed to be practical and hands-on, focusing on how AI tools can be used in everyday business activity. Over the course of three to four hours, businesses are introduced to a variety of tools, including those for creating presentations, videos, websites and supporting research. A large part of the session focuses on using ChatGPT effectively, including building custom GPTs and applying them to real tasks. Many businesses also receive tailored follow-on support from Billy to implement AI solutions relevant to their needs.

One example is CThe Solution, a professional coaching business, which had minimal knowledge and no prior use of AI before receiving training. Through Billy's support, the business was introduced to AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Otter AI and Gamma to complete administrative tasks, research and client-facing materials. Over a 12-month period, CThe Solution saved approximately 180 hours of time, equivalent to around 23 working days, by streamlining routine processes.

AI training has also improved planning, communication and client delivery. BAS Recruitment, a financial recruitment consultancy, received training from Billy to use systems such as ChatGPT for drafting job adverts and marketing, as well as Sourcwhale and Firefish CRM to support outreach and engagement. As a result, work that previously took one to two hours can now be completed in 10–15 minutes, freeing up time to focus on existing client relationships and sourcing job applicants. Similar improvements have been seen at Bee Clean, a commercial cleaning company, where AI training has been used to strengthen compliance documentation and business proposals, and support more structured operational planning.

Through hands-on workshops and tailored support, the college is helping more SMEs like Bee Clean, BAS Recruitment and CThe Solution move from early experimentation with AI to using it in their day-to-day operations.

This is a great example of how the FE sector is supporting local economies – sharing valuable knowledge and expertise to help businesses explore and adopt AI to improve the way they work.

