1. **Site and Proposal Summary**

- **Property: First Floor, Virginia House, 5 Great Ancoats Street, Manchester**
- **Proposed Use: Class F1(a) – Education (language school and examination centre)**
- **Floorspace: 2,350 sq ft**
- **Proportion of building floorspace: 16%**
- **Elevational alterations: None proposed**
- **Nature of works: Internal, non-structural** only

2. **Building Context and Office Stock Quality**

Virginia House is classified as **secondary Grade B office stock** rather than Grade A, and is well suited to the proposed change of use to **Class F1 (education)** for the following reasons:

- The building does not provide the level of specification, ESG performance, or contemporary amenities typically associated with modern Grade A office accommodation in Manchester City Centre.
- The first-floor suite measures 2,350 sq ft, representing 16% of the total building floorspace. The proposed change of use therefore affects only a limited proportion of the building, and the retention of the wider office function is not compromised.
- The existing internal layout, floorplate characteristics and building services are better suited to small-scale, flexible occupiers rather than large corporate office tenants seeking prime Grade A accommodation.

In addition, the accommodation is located at first-floor level on an active city-centre thoroughfare, with a significant proportion of the windows in close proximity to neighbouring buildings. As a result, levels of natural daylight are more limited than would typically be expected of modern Grade A office accommodation.

Access to the upper floors is provided via functional shared circulation spaces, which are characteristic of secondary office buildings rather than the high-specification, highly representative arrival environments generally sought by premium corporate occupiers.

The current and historic pattern of occupation reinforces this positioning.

The building accommodates a mix of uses, including professional offices, leisure and fitness uses, as well as vacant office floors. Notably :

- Solicitors occupy the fourth floor;
- Escape rooms (leisure use) occupy the second floor and have been in place for over 10 years;
- A gym and pilates studio occupy the ground floor and basement as a self-contained unit;
- The first and third floors are currently vacant.

Importantly, the first floor was previously occupied by Macpeople Digital Training, which operated as a training college delivering IT education. This establishes a clear precedent for educational use within the building and demonstrates that such use is both compatible and appropriate in this location.

The suite itself is fully self-contained, with its own kitchen and toilet facilities, and benefits from 24-hour access via a coded door and video entry system. The building already accommodates members of the public accessing leisure facilities, confirming its suitability for controlled public-facing uses. Student numbers are modest, concentrated mainly during early evening hours, and do not generate noise or servicing demand for the building beyond what is already typical of the existing uses.

The space was fully refurbished approximately five years ago and would be capable of further internal refurbishment to meet the needs of any incoming tenant. Any proposed internal, non-structural alterations associated with the F1 use would be reversible and would not require removal were the space to return to office use in the future, as a subsequent occupier could readily adapt or reuse the improvements.

Overall, the building's classification, physical characteristics, historical use and tenant mix confirm that the proposed educational use is appropriate, proportionate and fully compliant with planning policy, and does not result in the loss of strategically important Grade A office accommodation.

3. **Compliance with Core Strategy Policy EC2**

The proposal satisfies Core Strategy Policy EC2 for the following reasons:

a) Retention of Employment Space

The proposal involves a partial change of use only, with the majority of the building retained in office and employment-related functions. As such, it does not result in the loss of a strategically significant quantum of office accommodation.

b) Office Market Suitability

The building does not comprise Grade A office stock and is not optimally positioned to meet current prime office market demand. The proposed educational use allows for the continued

productive occupation of the space, without undermining the supply of high-quality office accommodation within Manchester City Centre.

c) Compatibility with Surrounding Uses

The proposed use is fully compatible with the existing mix of occupiers within the building, which includes professional services, leisure and fitness uses. The educational use does not give rise to land-use conflict and operates within a scale and pattern of activity consistent with the established character of the building.

d) Strategic, Economic and Place-Making Benefit

On balance, the proposal delivers clear strategic and economic benefits aligned with the Core Strategy's spatial objectives. In addition to supporting education, skills development, cultural activity and city-centre vitality, the Alliance Française de Manchester will actively add value to the building as a whole.

The occupation of the space will contribute to the ongoing animation, modernisation and positive perception of the building, through investment in internal refurbishment, a contemporary operational presence and regular, managed activity throughout the week. As an internationally recognised cultural and educational institution, the Alliance Française will also introduce an international and outward-facing dimension to the building, enhancing its profile and attractiveness.

These factors contribute positively to the long-term sustainability of the building, reinforce its role as an active and diverse city-centre destination, and are fully consistent with the aims of Policy EC2, which seeks to balance the retention of employment space with the delivery of wider economic, social and cultural benefits.

4. **Contribution to Manchester City Centre's Economy**

Alliance Française de Manchester is a long-established cultural and educational institution, operating continuously from Manchester city centre since 1997, with a clear public-interest mission centred on education, cultural exchange and international engagement.

The organisation delivers high-quality French language education for adults, primarily serving a professional, culturally engaged and economically active audience.

The majority of learners are working professionals aged approximately 30–50, with strong purchasing power, who choose to study in the city centre alongside their professional lives.

Alliance Française de Manchester is the only officially accredited French language examination centre in Manchester, recognised by both the French Ministry of National Education (DELF/DALF) and the Paris Île-de-France Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TEF). These qualifications are internationally recognised and required for higher education, professional advancement and immigration procedures to countries such as France, Canada and Switzerland.

The delivery of these examinations places Manchester within an international education and mobility network and supports the city's global connections.

The organisation generates regular and sustained footfall into Manchester city centre through courses, examinations and cultural activities delivered throughout the year, with new sessions launched approximately every eight weeks.

In 2025 alone, Alliance Française de Manchester welcomed 870 clients and delivered 2,135 course enrolments, alongside over 250 examination candidates. This activity translates into consistent use of public transport and strong engagement with local shops, cafés, restaurants and cultural venues.

In parallel, Alliance Française de Manchester maintains longstanding partnerships with key city-centre institutions, including Manchester Central Library, HOME Manchester, higher education institutions and hospitality venues. These collaborations support a diverse cultural offer, free public events and international dialogue, reinforcing Manchester's reputation as an outward-looking, culturally rich city.

The organisation also delivers in-company language training across Manchester and Greater Manchester, supporting businesses that operate internationally or are seeking to develop links with French speaking countries and markets. This contributes directly to workforce skills, economic competitiveness and the attractiveness of Manchester as a location for international business.

Continued operation within Manchester city centre is therefore fundamental to maintaining accessibility, connectivity and economic impact, and ensures that the organisation can continue to draw a high-value, professionally active audience into the heart of the city on a regular basis, in line with the city's wider economic and cultural objectives.