

OBSERVATORY



**Supporting our Partnership with
up-to-the-minute intelligence and insights**

About the Observatory

The Midlands Engine Observatory gathers data and intelligence, shapes policy insights and helps target investment for recovery and growth in our region. It is the first pan-regional Observatory in England.

Supported by academic researchers and leading economic and industry experts, the Observatory runs a programme of in-depth research projects, ensuring that our Partnership is kept fully informed with a growing, robust evidence base.





Roger Mendonça Chief Executive, Midlands Engine

Foreword

The Midlands Engine Observatory fulfils a vital role of gathering policy-led thought leadership alongside key insights and intelligence on key priorities using real-time and real-world evidence of the challenges facing our economy. This underpins the work we deliver through the Midlands Engine Partnership, seamlessly aligning with our Business Plan and enabling horizon scanning for future opportunities and challenges facing the region.

When it was established in 2018, the Observatory led the way as the first pan-regional observatory in England. Since its inception it has developed into an important alliance of leading academic researchers and economic and industry experts. The Observatory has secured **almost £800,000 of co-investment** from university and other academic partners, against core Midlands Engine research areas – as identified in the **Midlands Engine Business Plan 2023-26**.

The Observatory works continuously to expand and deepen its evidence base. The result is an invaluable resource providing a better understanding of the Midlands economy which is available to government and all partners. Frequent intelligence briefings provide real-time insights into contemporary decision-making through activities such as roundtables, workshops and strategic debates.

The strength of our Partnership across local authorities, universities and business enables the Observatory to access expertise and data from the entire region. The new **Research, Intelligence and Policy Partnership (RIPP)** formalises an integral part of the Observatory, bringing together intelligence, research and economic policy experts from across

the Midlands. Facilitating thought leadership and the development of new ideas across sectors and drivers for economic growth, the group comes together three times a year to **steer research, collaborate on projects, and secure external funding**.

The work of the Observatory is the foundation for developing Midlands Engine policy thinking and proposals to government across our four strategic drivers and five regionally significant sectors, as agreed by our partners. Outputs encompass deep dive research and white paper commissions as well as long-term foresight research into global megatrends and the implications for the way we live and do businesses in the Midlands.

The breadth and expertise of our Partnership is our strength. With a commitment to creating impact through policy and strategy, the Observatory works to promote and disseminate the work of our region, and to co-ordinate, gap fill and commission research of value to partners and stakeholders. This is only possible because of the dedication to true collaboration across our entire Partnership and the vital evidence and expertise so willingly shared.

As the role of our Observatory continues to grow in breadth and significance, it will continue to underpin the development of the Midlands Engine Partnership and the crucial evidence-led, pan-regional work we undertake, together. ▀

ROGER MENDONÇA

Research & policy programme

Since the approval of the Midlands Engine Business Plan 2023-26, a comprehensive policy and research programme has been established. This programme is pivotal in realising the objectives outlined in the Business Plan, aiming to identify, shape and deliver policy changes and drive investments which will foster economic growth in the Midlands.

Work is supported by research and intelligence from the Midlands Engine Observatory and is co-produced with partners. Research commissioned so far includes:

- Megatrends**
 Seeking to understand what Megatrends are and how they might unfold to come together to define a 'new age'.
- Cluster Development**
 Collecting and publishing wider regional evidence on the five critical technologies identified within the UK Science and Technology Framework.
- State of the Region**
 Publishing an annual report providing a review of economic performance across the Midlands Engine pan-region.
- Food White Paper**
 Articulating the Midlands' significance and potential in the development of a sustainable, regenerative UK food system and supply chain that supports sustainable, inclusive growth in the region and national policy.
- Digital Economy & AI**
 Mapping of AI capabilities within the Midlands for business growth.
- Energy White Paper**
 Evidencing the significance of the Midlands to the UK's transition to a secure, low carbon energy system.

Evidencing Midlands opportunities, providing policy-led thought leadership and horizon scanning for future opportunities and challenges.

Reports, insights and briefings

The Midlands Engine Observatory produces regular briefings and insights and serves as a source of truth on the latest data and its impact on our region. These are produced in partnership with The Economic Intelligence Unit (The EIU), providing partners and government with the reliable and timely information needed to power economic growth and recovery. The Observatory produces:

- Monthly Regional Economic Impact Monitors**
 Monthly digests of the Midlands economy bringing together a range of qualitative and quantitative data to provide insights into current performance.
- Economic Performance Scorecard**
 At-a-glance information on how the Midlands economy is performing across a range of headline strategic outcomes indicators. This helps inform the context of our work and provides a crucial capability to proactively monitor the economy in real time to ensure Partnership activity is being targeted in the right places.
- Global and Investment Scorecard**
 High-level summary of the region's performance across key indicators including trade, business, investment, higher education, and tourism.
- Intelligence Briefings**
 Regular insights into the current performance of the Midlands economy. These provide a series of updates including Purchasing Managers Indexes, Regional Trade, Claimant Counts, Gross Disposable Household Income, and Business Activity.
- Intelligence Hub**
 Easy-to-navigate website showcasing the latest pan-regional data, research, and expert insight from the Midlands Engine Observatory organised into areas of focus. The Hub serves as a regional evidence base providing accessible, up-to-date intelligence for Midlands Engine partners, business, and government.



Quarterly economic briefings

The Observatory holds Economic Briefings every quarter where attendees can share and discuss the latest research, data and findings alongside panel discussions on relevant topics. They are open to anyone wanting to learn more about the health of the Midlands economy, particularly those working in economic and business development within local authorities, government, academia, and business. The events are well attended, with delegates comprising a well-informed and engaging group contributing constructive and incisive questions.



Research, intelligence and policy partnership (RIPP)

Formed in early 2023, the group is an open forum for the region's government, academic and business organisations involved in gathering and disseminating economic intelligence in the Midlands. It is the successor of the Midlands Engine Intelligence Community (MEIC) and Midlands Engine Research Partnership (MERP). The group meets three times a year, collaborating to steer research, secure external funding for projects, and contribute to key policy reviews and strategy formulation for the Midlands Engine. ▴

Our partners



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The Midlands Engine is a coalition of local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, universities and businesses across the region, actively working with government to build a collective identity, to enable us to present the Midlands as a competitive and compelling offer that is attractive at home and overseas.

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