PROJECT MADE

A VISION AND ACTION PLAN FOR ADVANCED MANUFACTURING GROWTH ACROSS THE WEST MIDLANDS

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RIGBY · UNIPART · WMG THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK · West Midlands Combined Authority · WEST MIDLANDS GROWTH COMPANY

"This excellent report is a clarion call for the West Midlands to join all its forces together for greater impact and provides a clear plan of how to do it. It aligns with the national Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan and will support its delivery."

THE RT HON GREG CLARK,
Executive Chair, University of Warwick Innovation District and Member, HM Government's Industrial Strategy Advisory Council

Project MADE **Foreword**

The Midlands has long been synonymous with manufacturing and engineering excellence. Generations of businesses, innovators and skilled workers have built brands and capabilities that positioned the region as a leader not only within the United Kingdom but across Europe. That legacy is a source of pride. However, in an era defined by rapid technological advancement and intensifying international competition, heritage alone is insufficient to secure future prosperity.

History can inform the future, but it does not guarantee it. A region's industrial legacy, however distinguished, is not in itself a safeguard against global competition. Sustained success depends on strategic clarity, a realistic understanding of our place in the world, and disciplined execution over time.

Global competitors are moving at pace. Nations such as Singapore, China, India, Mexico and Brazil are investing strategically in advanced manufacturing, combining capital, skills, economic competitiveness and long-term industrial policy to accelerate growth. The competitive landscape is evolving quickly and the Midlands must evolve with it. The current geopolitical pressures on energy and supply chain resilience make it more important than ever that we strengthen the ecosystem that supports a strong regional economy.

Successive UK Governments have recognised the challenges facing the sector and have introduced important programmes to strengthen competitiveness. Initiatives such as DRIVE35 demonstrate the seriousness of intent and represent meaningful progress. Isolated interventions, however well-intentioned, cannot by themselves reverse structural decline. Over the last decade automotive production, for example, has fallen from approximately 1.7 million to around 0.75 million vehicles last year. While other sectors, including aerospace and defence, have shown much greater promise, the overall trajectory underlines the need for coordinated and sustained action if opportunities and challenges are to be met.

The Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Ecosystem programme, **Project MADE**, was established to respond to this challenge. Starting in the West Midlands, but positioned to work with the wider Midlands and other UK centres of manufacturing excellence in the future, it has brought together leaders from the region's industrial and research base, including representatives from the Manufacturing Technology Centre, Warwick Manufacturing Group, HORIBA MIRA, Unipart Manufacturing, Midlands Aerospace Alliance, BCIC West Midlands, Coventry University, Rigby Group and regional policy makers. Together, we have examined the full ecosystem that underpins advanced manufacturing and developed a forward-looking vision designed to strengthen competitiveness through coordination, ambition and strategic alignment.

Our region is well positioned to succeed. The essential components are in place: globally recognised OEMs, deep, diverse and capable supply chains, a skilled workforce, both current and emerging, significant public investment in world-class research and development (R&D) facilities, available land for development and importantly a renewed national industrial strategy[1] and Local Growth Plans setting out a ten-year framework for growth.

[1] DBT, The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy (2025)

Foreword - continued

The central question is not whether the Midlands has the capability to compete but how it will deploy its assets effectively in an increasingly competitive global environment. We believe the region is globally competitive, among the leading advanced manufacturing clusters worldwide and capable of regaining and sustaining its international prominence.

Project MADE has led to the recommendation to create a new strategic leadership body for the manufacturing ecosystem that brings together existing cluster organisations, policy makers and R&D assets, not replace them. The team will work as part of a long-term plan to strengthen productivity, innovation and resilience across the sector. This plan is designed to be practical, deliverable and aligned with both local and national priorities, with an initial and evolving focus on the West Midlands but an approach that could be adopted by the wider Midlands. With the support of local and central government and through continued partnership with industry and academia, 2026 can mark a decisive step in reorienting the Midlands' advanced manufacturing sector towards sustainable and globally competitive growth.

The opportunity is clear. The task now is execution.

Steve Rigby
Chair, Project MADE.

Executive Summary
A pivotal moment for UK advanced manufacturing

Manufacturing is a major driver of the UK's future economic success. The Modern Industrial Strategy is clear about the growth potential of an industry that provides 760,000 highly skilled jobs, worth £82bn gross value added (GVA), more productive than the wider economy, and the potential to expand by over a third.

The West Midlands is at the heart of the national manufacturing economy, exporting more manufactured goods than Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire combined. There are over 3,000 SMEs, major OEMs and Tier 1s with a wide variety of manufacturing capabilities operating in multiple supply chains. Alongside is a dense concentration of world-class research, testing and industrialisation assets, providing the ecosystem and platforms needed for firms to move from research through to prototypes and into production, all within close proximity to each other. This system is competitive across all manufacturing subsectors and will form a major element of future UK manufacturing growth.

The UK manufacturing sector is facing a range of pressures, including weak demand, rising energy and labour costs, and constraints on land supply. These challenges are well recognised, and while national action is required and being supported by Government, there is increasing scope for regional approaches, particularly as devolved powers and funding expand in areas such as energy, skills and infrastructure. The West Midlands is the natural centre of demand for strategically important technologies including advanced materials, batteries, power electronics, propulsion and electrified manufacturing systems. Yet these strengths are emerging at a time when the region faces significant structural pressures.

Project MADE started in November 2025, bringing together major industry and regional partners including Unipart Manufacturing, HORIBA MIRA, Midlands Aerospace Alliance, BCIC West Midlands, Warwick Manufacturing Group, Manufacturing Technology Centre, the Rigby Group, Coventry University, Coventry City Council, and West Midlands Combined Authority. Partners have come together to focus on 5 challenges that are particularly relevant to the West Midlands:

5 Regional Challenges

1. **Co-ordination & leadership:** Fragmentation across sectors and institutions, limiting strategic alignment and collective momentum.
2. **Market signals**: Leveraging signals from OEMs and global buyers to drive innovation and resilience, development and commercial growth of the supply chain.
3. **Investment & capital**: Not consistently reaching the firms and technologies that will shape the next phase of industrial growth.
4. **Land supply & delivery:** No consolidated view of the development pipeline, including the land and sites required to enable growth.
5. **Skills:** Mismatch between provision and need, compounded by an ageing workforce and insufficient pipeline of technical talent.

Executive Summary - continued

The Advisory Group has curated a new Vision with a clear set of goals and an Action Plan to address these challenges, focused on increasing commercial demand whilst strengthening the competitiveness of this vital UK ecosystem. The actions we have identified build on the strong partnership that exists between industry, research institutions, Catapults and the public sector in the region. We have also sought to maximise the levers, powers and funding that the region already has through devolution and to deliver the goals set out in the West Midlands Growth Plan.

A new Vision and Goals for Advanced Manufacturing

By 2035, the West Midlands will be the UK's leading advanced manufacturing supercluster, recognised for turning world-class R&D into scaled production. The supercluster will integrate multiple subsectors and leverage the region's engineering expertise to build resilient high value supply chains that underpin long-term competitiveness and economic growth

This vision reflects the shared ambition and commitment of the partners engaged through Project MADE, whose insight and collaboration have been vital to shaping a credible path forward. We have agreed the following ambitious goals to underpin delivery of this vision:

1. **High Growth:** By 2035, the West Midlands will achieve 5% compound annual GVA growth in advanced manufacturing, delivering £44bn in final annual output.
2. **Cross-sector technology adoption to enhance productivity:** By 2035, 90% of manufacturers will have adopted core digital manufacturing technologies, and 60% will have embedded automation into at least one stage of production, with 20% reaching advanced automation levels.
3. **Building a future-ready workforce:** By 2035, the West Midlands will have created 50,000 new jobs in advanced manufacturing through a combination of new employment and upskilling, with 15% dedicated to AI and automation, driving a new talent pipeline in response to evolving industry needs and digital transformation.
4. **Securing strategic investment:** By 2035, the West Midlands will attract £1.6bn in aggregated advanced manufacturing investment, creating 25,000 jobs through foreign direct investment (FDI) over 10 years.
5. **Increasing scale-up performance:** By 2035, the West Midlands will increase the number of scaling advanced manufacturing firms by 50%, with over 160 more scaling firms in the ecosystem.

We have agreed detailed actions against four priority delivery areas:

1. **Setting up a new strategic leadership body for the manufacturing ecosystem:** Establishing clear sector leadership and driving co-ordination across the different parts of the advanced manufacturing ecosystem.
2. **Advanced Manufacturing Investment Proposition:** Strengthening the regional advanced manufacturing proposition and creating a more integrated approach to inward investment.
3. **Improving commercial demand and demand signalling.** Embedding a demand-led action plan to stimulate new business opportunities for the supply chain while boosting the effectiveness of existing business support programmes and economic development activity.
4. **Strengthening the foundations for growth and scale:** Ensuring the region has the sites, facilities, capital and skills required to enable businesses to grow and expand.

Next Steps

Project MADE has brought the region's advanced manufacturing community much closer together: building consensus, establishing a shared understanding of the challenges we face and shaping a clear set of priorities for action. The collective commitment from key partners who have supported this report has been vital to build momentum and achieve clarity.

The next phase is about turning this momentum into focused delivery and implementation. There is a narrow but critical window to act.

Crucially, the region is better positioned to deliver now than at any point in the last decade, with strong industry commitment, a clear UK Industrial Strategy, a stronger West Midlands Growth Company, a single funding settlement and new Growth Plan. The task ahead is to convert this shared ambition into focused, collective action, starting immediately.

'Manufacturing' and 'Advanced Manufacturing' are used interchangeably throughout this report. The shared view of the Advisory Group is that all competitive and successful manufacturing firms at all levels now and in the future must be 'advanced'.

Figure 1. Project MADE recommendations

VISION

By 2035, the West Midlands will be the UK's leading advanced manufacturing supercluster, recognised for turning world-class R&D into scaled production. The supercluster will integrate multiple subsectors and leverage the region's engineering expertise to build resilient high value supply chains that underpin long-term competitiveness and economic growth

CHALLENGES

1 Coordination & Leadership
No unified sector voice or shared strategic direction

2 Investment & Capital
Insufficient FDI and private investment flows

3 Market Signals
Weak demand signals between OEMs & SME supply chain

4 Skills Gaps
Addressing an ageing workforce with future skills needs

5 Land Supply & Delivery
No consolidated real estate pipeline for AM investment

ACTIONS

1 Establish an Advanced Manufacturing Supercluster
Unified sector leadership • Strategic voice & coordination body

2 Create the Advanced Manufacturing Investment Proposition
Inward investment • Red carpet offer • Growth support framework for AM firms

3 Improving Commercial Demand and Demand signals
OEM-SME challenge cycles • Demand signals • Supply chain linkage

4 Strengthen the Foundations for Growth & Scale
Skills • Access to capital • Land pipeline • Enabling infrastructure & facilities

2035 GOALS

High Growth
5% annual GVA growth
£44bn GVA

Technology Adoption
90% digital adoption
60% embedded automation
20% advanced automation

Future-Ready Workforce
50,000 new jobs
15% in AI & automation

Strategic Investment
£1.6bn attracted
25,000 FDI jobs

Scale-Up Performance
50% growth in scale-up volume
160 additional scaling firms

Project MADE
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Advanced Manufacturing and Project MADE

UK manufacturing has long been at the forefront of industrial progress, both economically and technologically. It is a driving force of innovation and a major engine of our global competitiveness. In the recent National Industrial Strategy, the Government identified advanced manufacturing as one of eight sectors that combines the strongest growth potential with clear global competitive advantage. Within advanced manufacturing, the strategy identified six frontier industries with particular strength:

UK Advanced Manufacturing Frontier Industries

- **Automotive:** next-generation zero-emission and connected automated vehicles
- **Batteries:** supporting the net zero transition with domestic production
- **Aerospace:** next-generation commercial programmes, alongside defence
- **Space:** scaling from a strong R&D base into end-to-end satellite manufacture and launch
- **Advanced materials:** composites, advanced metallics, and biomaterials
- **Agri-tech:** technologies including robotics, sensors, and AI to boost farming productivity

UK Advanced Manufacturing

Nationally the six sectors set out on the previous page contribute over £82bn in gross value added (GVA), support 760,000 highly skilled jobs, and outperform the broader economy on productivity.[2] By 2035, GVA is expected to expand by more than a third, unlocking significant growth opportunities across a range of industries and technologies.[3] Successful growth in these higher productivity sectors will create stronger wages, greater investment, faster innovation and deeper export capabilities.

However, the operating environment is increasingly challenging following a series of events including the Covid-19 pandemic, trade tariffs and continuing geopolitical tensions. Supply chains have therefore been heavily disrupted and UK manufacturing firms have been grappling with greater exposure to external risks, creating significant challenges to profitability. In response, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) and Tier 1 manufacturers are actively reviewing and reorganising their supply chains to build greater local resilience and to reduce exposure to global threats. The majority are also facing profitability challenges.

To tackle supply chain fragility and intensifying competition, the UK must be assertive in securing its position within a global market. Electrification, digitalisation, automation and resilience are each reshaping global production systems. But progress is slow. While 70% of UK manufacturers are investing in digital tools, only 10% operate fully digital factories.[4] The UK significantly lags leaders in automation with only 111 robots per 10,000 workers,[5] compared to a global average (in 2023), of 162 robots per 10,000 workers.[6] We are the only G7 country with a robot density below the world average. This highlights the gap between the required investment and scale of transformation, but decisions are being made now that will determine the shape of industrial growth for decades.

The National Industrial Strategy recognises this context and sets out ambitious national targets, aiming to double business investment, modernise production, decarbonise industry and strengthen domestic resilience, with an increased focus on national security and defence. Success will depend on backing the UK's industrial heartlands as the engines of national growth, directing innovation and investment to where they deliver the greatest impact and where industry needs are most acute.

"The foundations for success are firmly in place; Project MADE is about mobilising them with purpose and urgency."

STEVE RIGBY,
Joint CEO, Rigby Group

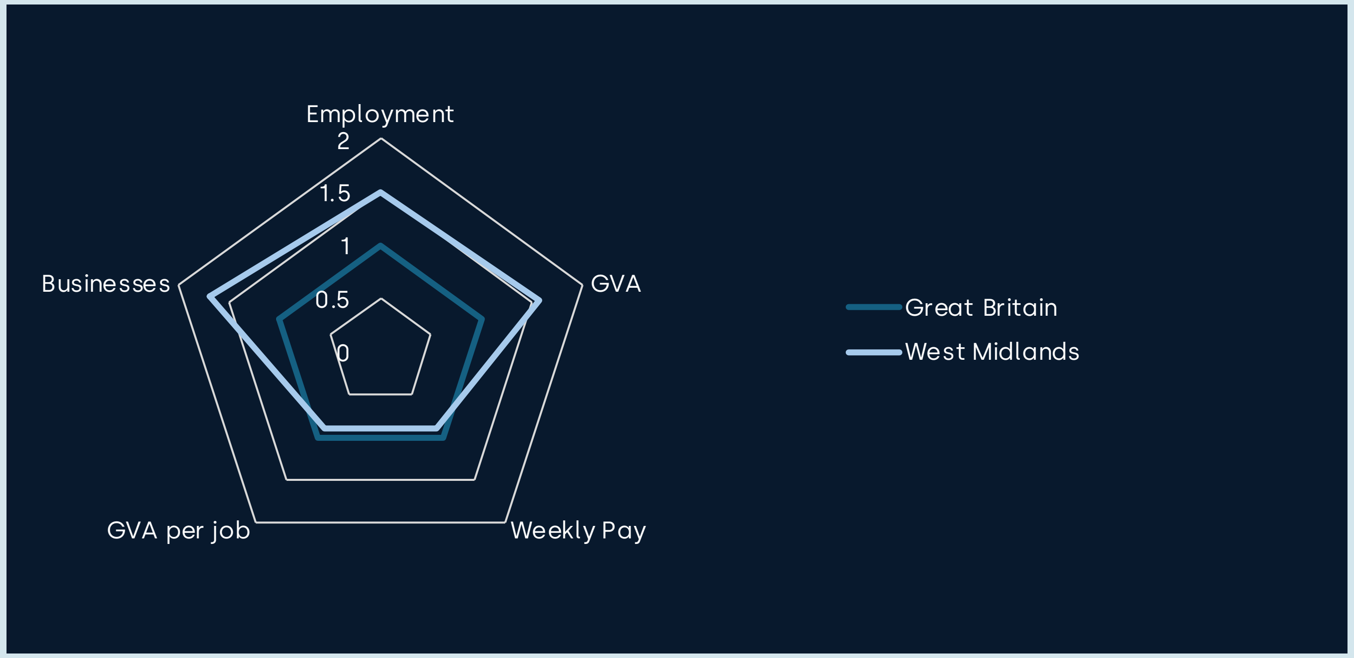
[2] *DBT, Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan (2025)*
[3] *DBT, Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan (2025)*
[4] *MAKE UK, Making it smarter (2025)*
[5] *MAKE UK, The Case for Increased Robotics and Autonomous Systems Adoption in the West Midlands (2025)*

Advanced Manufacturing in the West Midlands

The West Midlands stands at the centre of the UK's advanced manufacturing economy. It is a region defined not only by the sheer scale of its industrial base, but also by the complexity and variety of its supply chains and the depth of its technical and research capabilities. It brings together a globally significant concentration of manufacturing businesses, a uniquely diverse mix of subsectors and a nationally significant ecosystem of R&D, testing and industrialisation assets. This combination of scale, complexity and capability makes the West Midlands a critical platform for the UK's industrial growth ambitions.

The West Midlands advanced manufacturing cluster is one of the most significant in Europe. Relative to the UK average, the sector in the region employs 50% more people, generates 50% more output (GVA) and is home to 50% more businesses – a depth and density of industrial capability that underpins its national strategic importance.

Figure 2. West Midlands Combined Authority advanced manufacturing profile (index where Great Britain = 1)



Source: ONS, Regional GVA (2025)

Compared to its peers the West Midlands produces more exported goods than Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, and the Liverpool City Region combined. That scale extends across the breadth of the sector (from aerospace, mobility, defence to advanced manufacturing construction) to its depth (from research, production to export)[8]:

Figure 3. West Midlands key facts

60 percent of the UK's automotive R&D and a third of all cars produced [9]

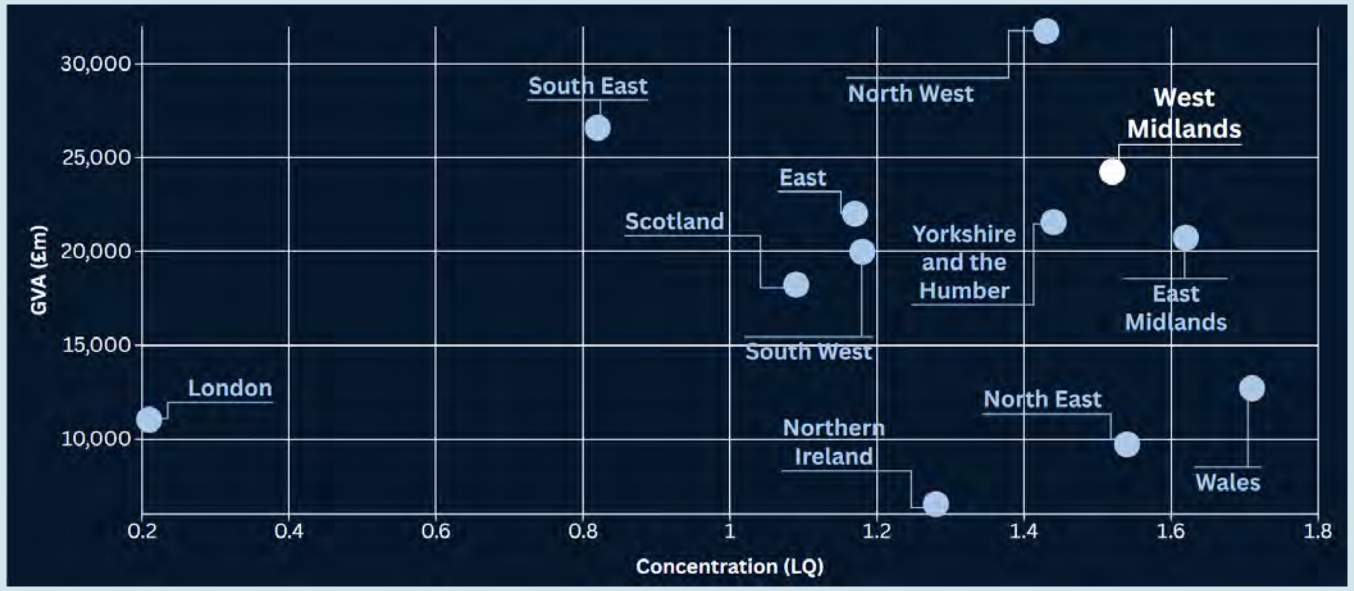
exports 7% of UK manufactured goods [10]

3,360 small-mid sized firms, 40,000 micro manufacturing businesses [11]

the three most productive local authorities for electric light vehicle production [12]

Manufacturing employs 8% of the West Midlands' workforce and generated £24bn in GVA in 2023.[13] This scale reflects an industry that has continually adapted over time, surviving waves of industrial decline and responding to major technological shifts. Today, that long-standing resilience has created a powerful ecosystem of firms spanning the multiple subsectors within advanced manufacturing. This is supported by two of the UK's High Value Manufacturing Catapult centres – Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG), part of the University of Warwick, and the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) with its strategic partnership with the University of Birmingham. The broader ecosystem of research and innovation institutions include UKBIC; the Advanced Propulsion Centre; Coventry University's Institute for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering; and Aston University's UK leading delivery of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) for SMEs.

Figure 4. Manufacturing output in UK regions (£m)



Source: ONS, Regional GVA (2025)

[8] ONS, Subnational trade in goods (2025)
[9] WMGC; WMCA
[10] ONS, Subnational trade in goods (2025)
[11] WMCA, Local Innovation Partnership Fund (2025)
[12] Public First, West Midlands: Drivers of Growth and scenario analysis of opportunities by 2035 (2025): Solihull, Coventry and Birmingham
[13] BRES (2025); ONS, Regional GVA (2025)

While the concentration is significant, sustaining success and achieving greater scale requires the right conditions for continued growth and resilience. The recent cyber-attack involving Jaguar Land Rover provided a stark reminder of the importance of domestic resilience, where a temporary pause in production cost the UK economy an estimated £1.9bn, disrupting more than 5,000 organisations and reducing monthly UK GDP by 0.17%.[14] The reach and connectivity of regional supply chains reiterate how the regional sector is tied into international competitiveness and output. If national ambitions around investment, decarbonisation and domestic resilience are to be realised, targeting sustained growth within the West Midlands' advanced manufacturing businesses will be essential.

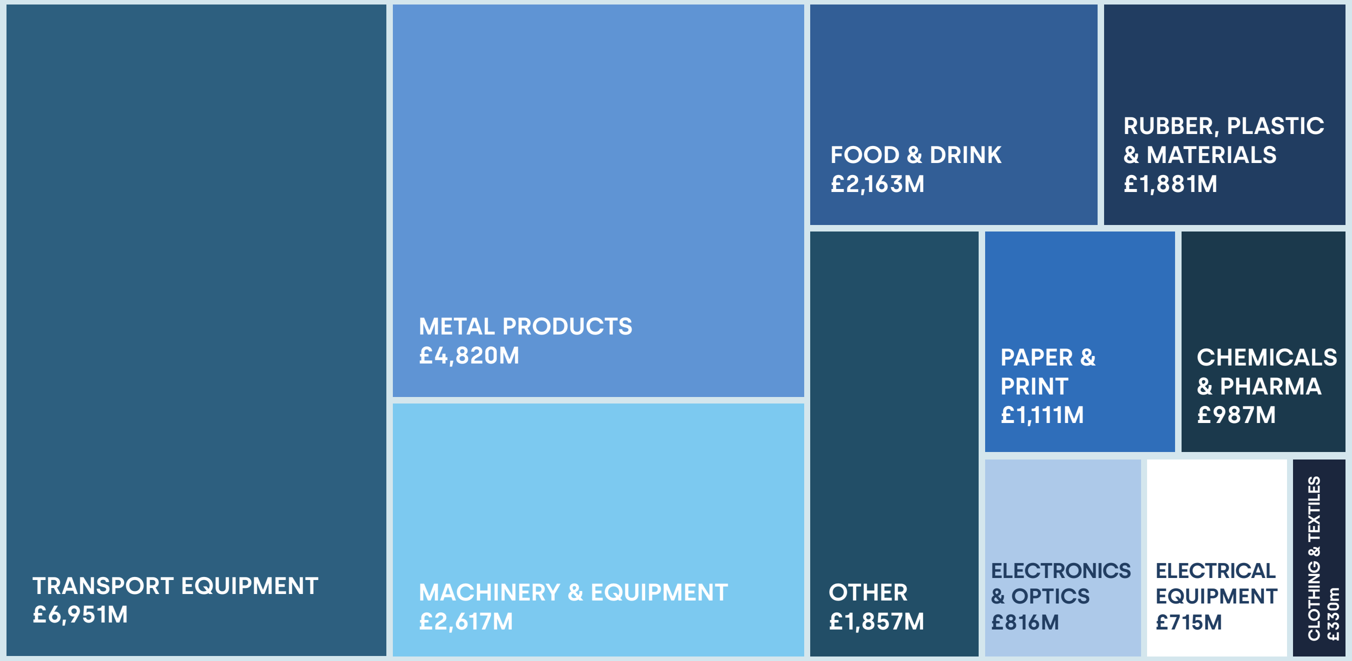
Industrial complexity and supply chains

The West Midlands is home to one of the UK's most interconnected and diverse advanced manufacturing ecosystems, ranging from automotive to aerospace, clean energy to defence (Fig. 5), creating unique specialisms and capabilities across the supply chain. This makes it uniquely equipped to be commercially flexible and support multiple strategic sub-sectors of advanced manufacturing, a strategic strength as manufacturing becomes increasingly integrated and cross-sector. One such strategic sub-sector is industrialised construction which is supported by the West Midlands Advanced Construction Cluster (WMACC).

Underpinning advanced manufacturing in the West Midlands is the region's strong logistics sector ensuring the swift and safe movement of products created across the West Midlands around the country and beyond.

Figure 5. Manufacturing GVA in the West Midlands by sub-sector

TOTAL £24BN GVA



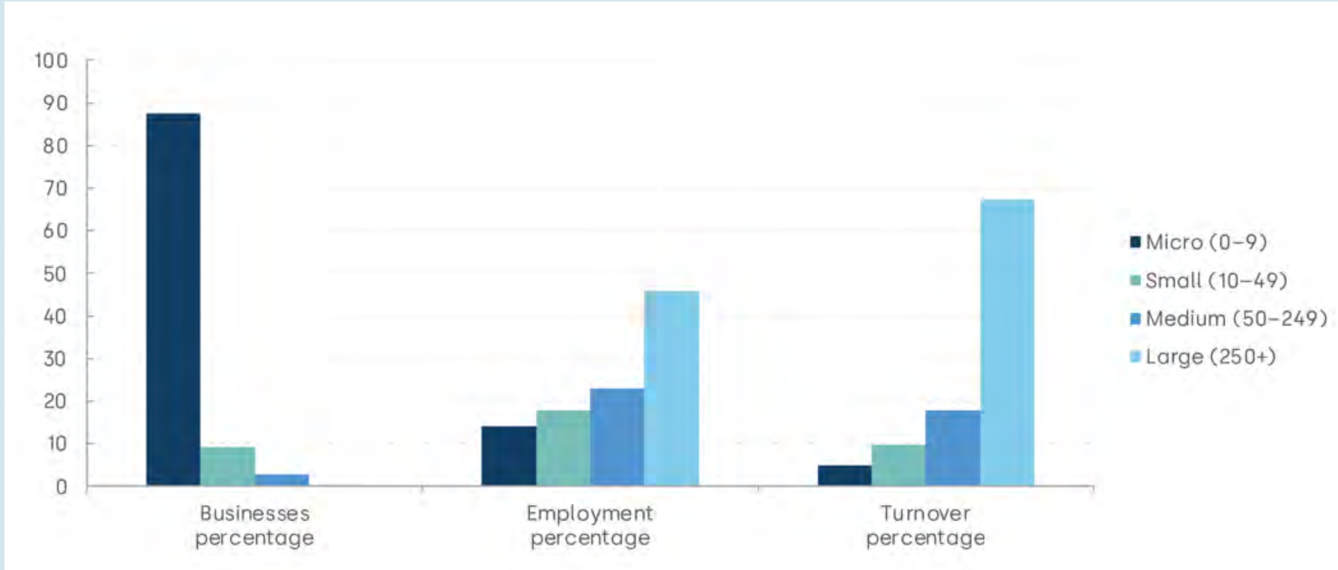
Source: ONS, Regional GVA (2025)

The supply chains within the West Midlands extend far beyond administrative boundaries. Firms are deeply embedded across multiple regions and countries, connecting regional specialism to wider economies. The membership of the Midlands Aerospace Alliance illustrates this well, with firms spanning the Midlands, the rest of the UK, and internationally. This is a networked manufacturing base where capabilities, suppliers, and markets are distributed across the UK but anchored in the West Midlands *(Fig. 7)*.

[14] ONS, Gross Domestic Product, 2025.

The region's anchor firms, including Jaguar Land Rover, Aston Martin and BMW, are central to this cluster, representing just 1% of the business population but accounting for over two-thirds of regional manufacturing turnover. These are complemented by several other OEMs and Tier 1 manufacturers including Babcock, Moog Aerospace and Safran. Alongside these large firms are over 3,360 manufacturing SMEs which form the backbone of the ecosystem, employing around 55% of the workforce, operating in multiple supply chains and providing a range of development and production facilities.[15]

Figure 6. Distribution of businesses, employment, and turnover by firm size in the West Midlands manufacturing sector



Source: DBT (2025)

Ecosystem capability

The region's industrial strength is reinforced by a dense concentration of world-class research, testing and industrialisation assets, forming a powerful capability base that enables firms to move from research to prototype and into production, all within close proximity (Fig. 7).

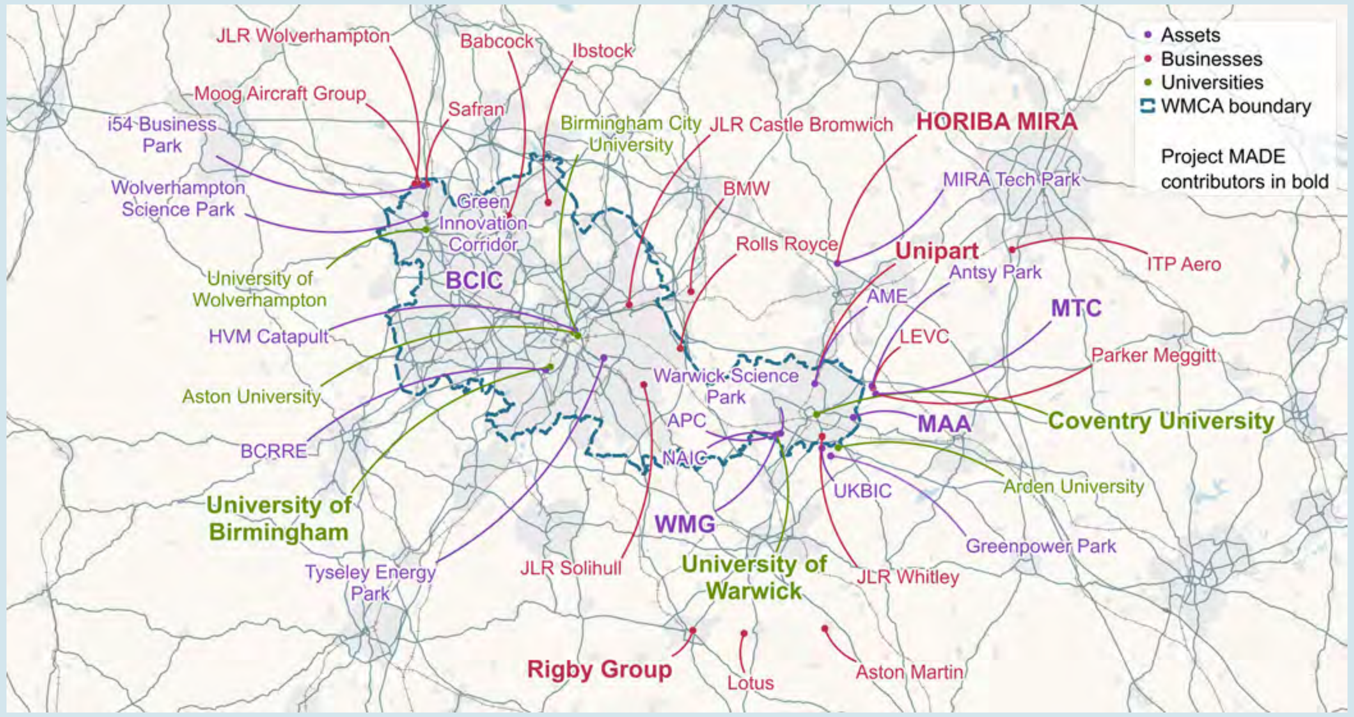
The region contains 3 Catapults and 6 major research universities: Aston University (Global Top 5% University for Engineering), Birmingham City University (93% of research recognised internationally), The University of Birmingham (a Global Top 100 University and UK Top 10 for engineering research), Coventry University (with 170 industry collaborations), University of Wolverhampton (#1 UK ranked by Post Graduate Researchers for STEM), The University of Warwick/WMG (Ranked Global #4 for its Masters and MBA)[16].

While there are clear examples of effective collaboration across the ecosystem, it is inconsistent. Many of these assets are seen as operating predominantly independently with limited integration or coordination between institutions, firms and public sector initiatives, which becomes a limiting factor in allowing the ecosystem to fully leverage its collective ability.

There is scope to further utilise the capacity that exists across equipment, facilities, and production space. While the West Midlands hosts an exceptional concentration of high-quality capabilities, businesses do not have the visibility or support needed to access these types of facilities. This creates an untapped opportunity across the ecosystem, where better coordination and sharing of resources would help businesses scale quickly without the need for securing major new investment.

[15] DBT, Business Population Estimates (2025)
[16] Sources: QS World University Rankings 2026, REF2021, 2025 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

Figure 7. West Midlands advanced manufacturing ecosystem – Asset Map



We can build a more purposeful alignment between the needs and challenges faced by OEM/Tier 1s and the existing and evolving capabilities of the SME base. By strengthening these connections through closer collaboration and information flows, the West Midlands can leverage existing strengths, create tighter relationships, and build more resilient local supply chains that ultimately supports growth, scaling businesses, and innovation across the sector.

Figure 8. Concentration of IS-8 advanced manufacturing businesses within the West Midlands relative to the UK

IS-8 advanced manufacturing subsector	Location quotient vs. manufacturing	Key
Automotive	2.4	High concentration (LQ>1.25)
Aerospace	1.7	
Advanced Materials	1.5	
Space	1.2	Moderate concentration (LQ 0.75-1.25)
Batteries	0.8	
Agritech	0.5	Low concentration (LQ <0.75)

Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of The Data City (2026)

There are a range of existing publicly funded programmes targeting areas including technology adoption and supply chain transition. These are designed to be aligned to broad industry challenges. However they tend to be designed and managed as discrete interventions, rather than being part of integrated growth pathways to support growing business.

Figure 9. Overview of publicly funded programmes in the West Midlands

	Programme	Focus	Target firms	Reach
Capital, R&D and industrial	**DRIVE35 Regional Pilot**	Pilot £50m capital grants programme supporting firm-level EV manufacturing transition	WM automotive SMEs and mid-tier manufacturers	80 Supported Targeting ~ 800 jobs created or safeguarded
	LIPF	£22m, 5-year innovation programme supporting advanced manufacturing SMEs through R&D grants, business support and scale-up pathways; led by WMG	Advanced manufacturing SMEs	£66m co-investment; 220 supported 960 jobs created or safeguarded £240m GVA
Innovation and technology adoption	**Made Smarter**	£3m digital adoption programme providing technology advice, roadmaps and grants to manufacturing SMEs	Manufacturing & engineering SMEs	827 registrations; 435 supported; 188 grants awarded
	Innovation Hub	£2.4m Innovate UK programme delivering free tech adoption support through FE colleges	SMEs across all sectors, with emphasis on advanced manufacturing, green tech, digital and cybersecurity	Pilot active across 14 colleges in 3 WM consortia
Supply chain and business transition	**Supply Chain Transition**	£15m WMIZ programme with coaching, R&D grants, training to help SMEs pivot into growth sectors	WM manufacturing SMEs across priority clusters	c.200 businesses with Phase 1 fully subscribed
	Decarb-onisation	Formerly both Repowering the Black Country and WMCA's Decarbonisation NZ Programme	SMEs for WMCA's programme and energy-intensive manufacturers for Repowering	4,000 assessments delivered
International Growth	**Exporting Starts Here WM**	Provided by BGWM and the Chambers of Commerce, initiative delivers export support, through free expert advice	New-to-export and new-to-market SMEs	100+ businesses supported since launch

[17] Not a comprehensive view but a snapshot.

"With its scale, supply-chain depth and concentration of industrial assets and innovation ecosystem, the West Midlands is central to the UK's advanced manufacturing future."

PROF DAVID GREENWOOD,
CEO, WMG High Value Manufacturing Catapult

Project MADE

Recent Government evaluations are clear: future competitiveness depends on stronger regional supply chain localisation and a deeper clustering of production, innovation and industrial capability aligned to market demand. Project MADE addresses this directly, an industry-led response to confront the pressures and challenges faced by UK advanced manufacturing to accelerate growth.

Project MADE started in November 2025, bringing together major industry and regional partners including Unipart Manufacturing, HORIBA MIRA, Midlands Aerospace Alliance, BCIC West Midlands, Warwick Manufacturing Group, Manufacturing Technology Centre, the Rigby Group, Coventry University, and West Midlands Combined Authority. Through a series of workshops, this has built a shared understanding of the West Midlands' advanced manufacturing opportunity and where collective effort would have the greatest impact. Their insight and experience have shaped the project from the outset, informing the analysis, priorities and actions throughout.

Project MADE has begun in the West Midlands, recognising the region as one of the UK's powerhouses for advanced manufacturing, characterised by the scale of its business base, the complexity of its industries and the concentration of nationally significant research, innovation and industrial assets.

However, these strengths also leave the region particularly exposed to the structural pressures facing UK manufacturing. This is most evident in the automotive sector, where supply chain distress is approaching critical thresholds while more than half of major UK based automotive manufacturers are experiencing sustained profitability challenges. These issues, which are particularly acute for supply chain firms, compounded by the global disruptions including economic tariffs and Brexit, have made it clear that manufacturing requires coordinated intervention to maintain competitiveness and meet national and regional economic objectives.

Recognising that the UK's ability to strengthen national investment, decarbonisation, domestic supply chains and business resilience will depend heavily on the capabilities within the West Midlands, Project MADE has focused on how best to unify and coordinate the region's strategic assets to enhance collaboration, investment and demand generation.

Core to our approach is the need to drive demand by increasing opportunities for firms to scale. We have considered the investment, programmes, assets and relationships that create demand within the system and across the supply chain. By aligning actions with future demand opportunities across different parts of advanced manufacturing, our aim is to provide more businesses with the opportunities they need to grow, scale, and become more resilient, ensuring the long-term strength of the UK's manufacturing base.

Our initial focus has been on key industrial assets and supply chains of the West Midlands rather than administrative boundaries, recognising that ecosystem improvements could drive further growth across the region and the wider Midlands area. The collective contribution of our partners has been instrumental in shaping the vision, objectives and actions proposed.

"Sustainable growth in advanced manufacturing will only be achieved by aligning innovation, investment and skills with clear market demand."

CAROL ROSE BURKE (CBE),
Managing Director, Unipart Manufacturing

Overcoming the Five Key Challenges Facing Advanced Manufacturing

Co-ordination & leadership
Fragmented across sectors and institutions, limiting strategic alignment and collective momentum.

Market signals
Leveraging signals from OEMs and global buyers to drive innovation, resilience or commercial growth of the supply chain.

Investment & capital
Not consistently reaching the firms and technologies that will shape the next phase of industrial growth.

Land supply & delivery
No consolidated view of the development pipeline, including the land and sites required to enable growth.

Skills
Mismatch between provision and need, compounded by an ageing workforce and insufficient pipeline of technical talent.

Figure 10.

The UK manufacturing sector is facing a range of pressures, including weak economic demand, rising energy and labour costs, land availability issues, and ongoing disruptions due to shifting economic tariffs. These challenges are well-recognised and being considered at the national level. This report focuses on the nature of the challenges specifically facing the West Midlands.

While in some parts of the sector (particularly in aerospace) where growth in manufacturing is driven from within the existing supply chain rather than through spin-outs and start-ups, we have not been effective enough at enabling successful start-ups to stay in the West Midlands (and UK) and scale here. We also see research and development carried out by MTC, WMG, HORIBA MIRA, our globally leading universities, and others taken elsewhere by global firms to their country of origin. The challenge is to make more of this value and potential commercial opportunity stick in the region, with OEMs and Tier 1s investing in assets and development in the UK.

Our strategy to address these challenges has three elements, growing the number of businesses and supply chains with genuine high-growth potential, enabling existing scale-ups to accelerate and expand, and attracting new high value businesses. To do this, we have to deliver the support needed so that both existing firms and those we attract have the conditions, capabilities and support required to scale successfully in the West Midlands.

While the West Midlands has a similar number of manufacturing scale-ups to the North West, for example, turnover is significantly lower, indicating smaller average firm size. Productivity data shows that the region's 50 largest manufacturers generate GVA per job 48% above the UK average, while the broader manufacturing base lags 10% below, highlighting uneven scaling across the sector rather than a lack of excellence at the top.

Figure 11. Manufacturing scale-up statistics

Region	Scale-Ups	% of UK total	Employees	% of UK total	Turnover (£bn)	% of UK total
North West	325	12%	33120	14%	16.9	22%
West Midlands	**325**	**12%**	**18687**	**8%**	5.1	7%
South East	310	11%	25105	11%	7.4	10%
Yorkshire & The Humber	305	11%	35465	15%	8.1	11%
East Midlands	285	10%	22452	10%	5	7%
East of England	265	10%	20176	9%	4.6	6%
South West	245	9%	16565	7%	5.9	8%
London	180	7%	11881	5%	6.9	9%
Scotland	180	7%	16276	7%	6.3	8%
Wales	130	5%	13135	6%	5.1	7%
North East	105	4%	7389	3%	2.4	3%
Northern Ireland	95	3%	9563	4%	3	4%

Source: Scale Up Institute 2024

"The region's opportunity lies in turning a combination of world-class research and local industrial assets and capabilities into sustained, high value production at scale."

PROF MARCOS KAUFFMAN,
Director, Institute for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, Coventry University

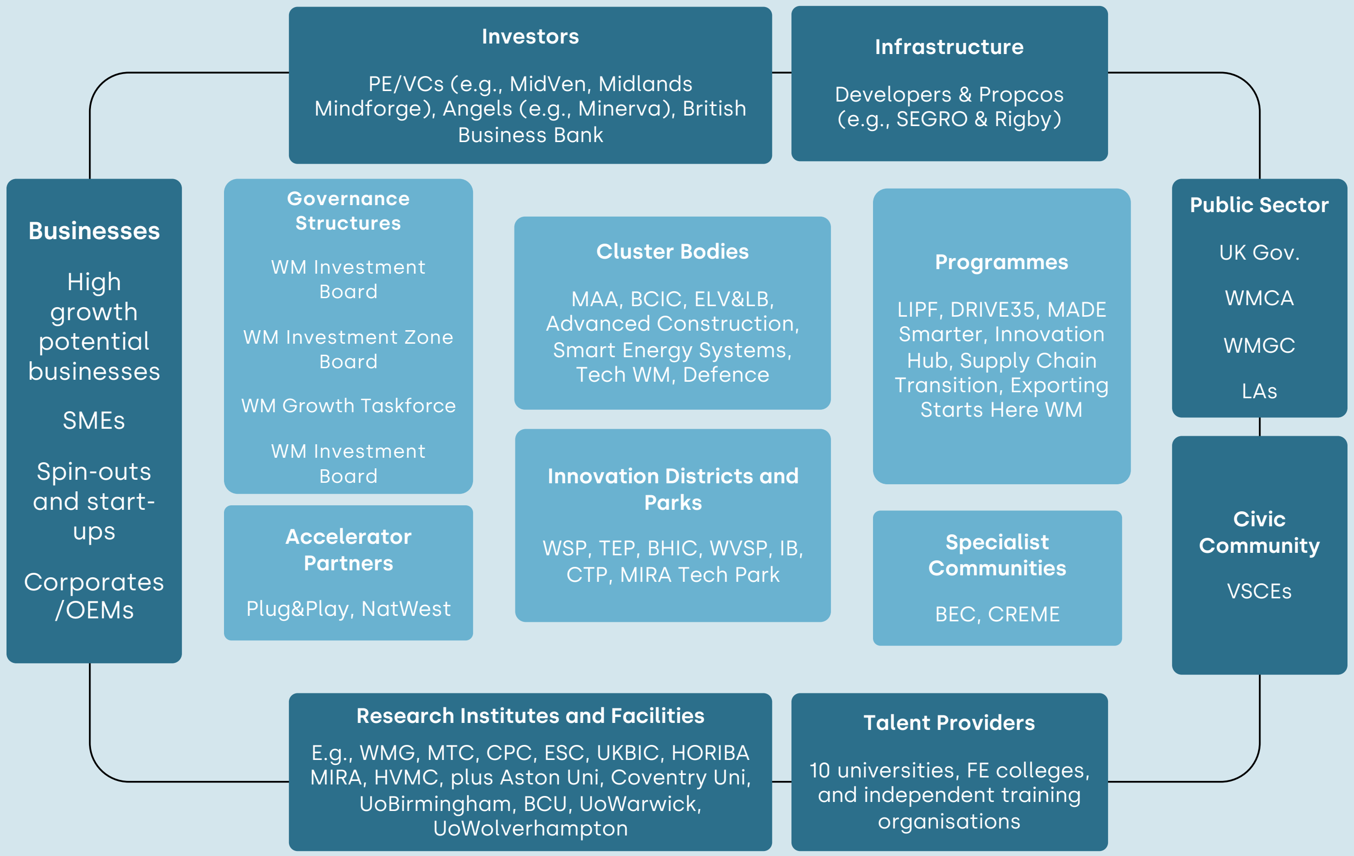
CHALLENGE 1: Co-ordination and leadership

The complexity and diversity of the region's sector base has produced multiple clusters and mature supply chains, with a range of support programmes and interventions which play a valuable role. However, the West Midlands lacks a unified advanced manufacturing proposition and a shared strategic direction. The absence of a shared vision has created fragmentation in co-ordination, duplication in engagement, and inconsistencies in the regional narrative presented to investors and government.

This lack of coordination and alignment is hindering the ability to effectively stimulate demand and create the conditions for firms to scale. There is strong emphasis on R&D and supply-side initiatives, with insufficient focus on industry-led growth or market-pull. This imbalance limits both the region's responsiveness to market forces and its capacity to build a sustainable advanced manufacturing ecosystem.

There is a clear need to create a cross-sector leadership and coordination that brings the region's strengths and capabilities together. Its role would not be to replace existing clusters but align and amplify them, providing a clear front door for engaging with industry.

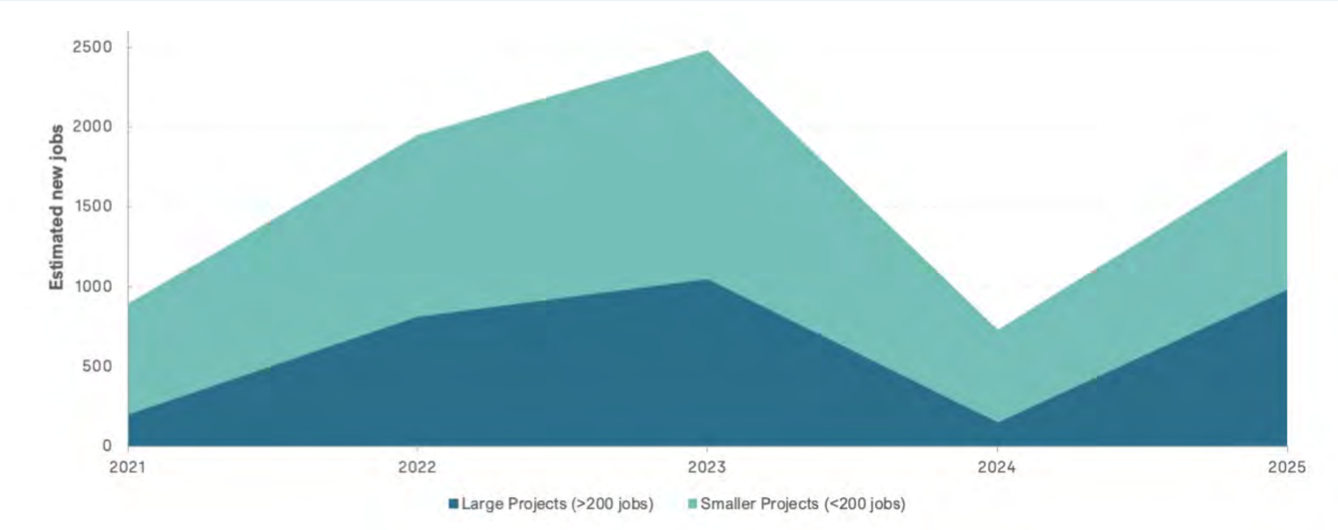
Figure 12. West Midlands advanced manufacturing ecosystem



CHALLENGE 2: Investment and capital

Over the past five years, advanced manufacturing has attracted over 168 FDI projects but flows have been uneven and have not involved a new large-scale OEM or significant numbers of new Tier 1 firms. This lack of additional incoming investment has contributed to a dampening effect on demand within the ecosystem.

Figure 13. Estimated new jobs created from FDI in the West Midlands



Source: WM Growth Company (2025)

Over the same period (2021-25) HORIBA MIRA & MIRA Tech Park (not included in WM figures above) attracted over £290m in FDI creating over 600 jobs. Businesses with their R&D base at MIRA Tech Park also raised over £2.3bn in venture capital.

Business investment is also lower than it could be. As of 2025, only 101 manufacturing firms in the West Midlands were backed by private equity and venture capital.[18]

This is a strikingly small share given the size of the industrial base, the region's strategic importance and the scale of public R&D funding from UKRI. At the same time, OEM profitability pressures and rising input costs are constraining investment, which has knock-on effects for Tier 1 and SME suppliers that rely on clear customer signals before committing capital. The automation gap exemplifies this challenge. The UK ranks 19th globally for robotic density, below Slovenia and Austria, with annual installations of industrial robots behind each of Spain, France, Germany, and Italy.[19]

Nationally, **70%** of UK manufacturers report investing in digital tools

Only **10%** operate fully digital factories

Regionally, **80%** of West Midlands manufacturers use some form of robotics, digital, or automated processes.

Only **16%** report automating between **25%** and **50%** of their processes.[20]

Without stronger and more coordinated capital deployment, underinvestment will restrict productivity growth and weaken supply chain resilience at a time of structural industrial transition when new technologies are redefining global competitive advantage. **The response must be two-fold. Firstly, to reposition the West Midlands as the UK's premier advanced manufacturing investment destination with a proactive inward investment approach. This will need to work across administrative boundaries with the full involvement of the West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) to target the firms and technologies that offer significant scaling potential. Secondly, we need to create additional demand and demand signals within the ecosystem.**

CHALLENGE 3: Market signals

Stronger coordination and greater investment in automation and AI adoption are necessary foundations for growth, but they are not sufficient on their own. Ultimately, the future of advanced manufacturing must be shaped by clear demand signals from industry and lead customers if it is to translate into sustained competitiveness.

The region already benefits from a strong portfolio of programmes (Fig. 9) which focus on building capabilities and providing support, including on supply chain transition, decarbonisation and digital adoption. These initiatives are crucial for building capability and supporting the sector. However, there are critical components lacking in the system:

1. **Understanding demand signals:** There is insufficient engagement with industry to identify specific business needs amongst the OEMs and Tier 1s.
2. **Programme alignment:** Current support programmes are not always closely aligned with industry needs or established demand signals.
3. **Stimulating Demand:** Across the range of current support programmes, there is a strong emphasis on supply side R&D, less on driving commercial demand between OEMs, Tier 1s and supply chain firms.

In practice, the link between OEMs and Tier 1s and the wider SME supply chain is weaker than the scale of the ecosystem suggests. While some firms like JLR, Toyota, and BMW broadly understand their supply chains and are considering localisation strategies, this is less the case for many other sectors across advanced manufacturing. Larger organisations often lack the capability to engage effectively with start-ups and SMEs, particularly where technologies are early-stage or business models are evolving. Conversely, smaller firms can struggle to articulate their readiness, reliability and route to delivery in ways that can address OEM challenges. The result is missed opportunity rather than lack of capability. At the same time, there is a real opportunity for us to support growth and expansion in our existing Tier 1 firms, including Bosch, Dana, Unipart, HORIBA and to engage with them to help bridge gaps in market demand signalling.

The West Midlands has significant strengths and capabilities, but to achieve scale and growth, the ecosystem must better align these strengths with clear market demand (both market demand and supply chain market demand). **By integrating industry insights, demand signals, and coordinated efforts across the supply chain, the region can create the conditions for businesses to scale and thrive, driving both immediate and long-term growth.**

This does not diminish the importance of supply-side support. Interventions supporting decarbonisation, automation, and transition remain essential, but their impact will be maximised when aligned with real market needs.

[18] UK Private Capital, Investing in Advanced Manufacturing and the West Midlands (2025.
[19] International Federation of Robotics, 2025 World Robotics Report (2025)
[20] MAKE UK, The Case for Increased Robotics and Autonomous Systems Adoption in the West Midlands (2025)

CHALLENGE 4: Skills

The West Midlands continues to face strong demand for advanced manufacturing skills, driven by automotive transformation, battery technology, robotics, and precision engineering. Across the UK, 76% of engineering firms report difficulties recruiting skilled workers, a trend strongly felt across the region's manufacturing hotspots due to the density of businesses.[21] This is reflected in 7,000 open vacancies and rising wages.[22]

These pressures are expected to intensify. WMCA Regional Skills Policy identifies advanced manufacturing as one of the top priority sectors for 2025–26, alongside digital and green skills, with a projection of generating 16,000 new jobs by 2035. At the same time, the workforce is ageing. Of the region's 200,000-strong workforce, around one-third are over 50 years old, meaning 70,000 new young people will be required to maintain current employment levels, while skills needs are continually evolving. 38% of the population of Birmingham is under 35, making it the youngest city in Europe. The region has the basis on which to meet the skills challenge, but we need to enthuse and inform young people about the highly skilled careers that are and will be available locally.

Although training capacity is expanding and new initiatives are being developed, (e.g. City of Wolverhampton College, one of only four UK Advanced Manufacturing Technical Excellence Colleges, the West Midlands Colleges' recent Robotics Adoption Bid) it remains insufficient. Over the past 5 years, the region recorded a total of 4,953 SSA2 Manufacturing Technologies Apprenticeships and 1,176 Degree apprenticeships started (level 6 and 7). These were delivered by 115 providers, although only 57 are located in the West Midlands.[25]

57% of these training providers were independent, a quarter were general FE colleges, a fifth were universities, and 5% were employer providers.[24] Across the ten regional universities, around 60,000 students graduate each year, yet only 1,500-3,000 students graduate in engineering and technology courses relevant to manufacturing.[23] Programmes such as the WMCA's £140m Adult Education Budget are targeting priority sectors as the supply of highly skilled technical labour continues to fall short of industry demand.

There is a need to develop closer coordination between education and training providers and industry to develop combined skills development programmes that are driven by businesses that also address the current commercial barriers for both providers and firms.

"Project MADE reflects a shared industry view that long-term competitiveness requires stronger collective leadership across the manufacturing ecosystem to help direct academic and public investments effectively and in partnership."

MATTHEW RHODES,
Director and Acting CEO, BCIC West Midlands

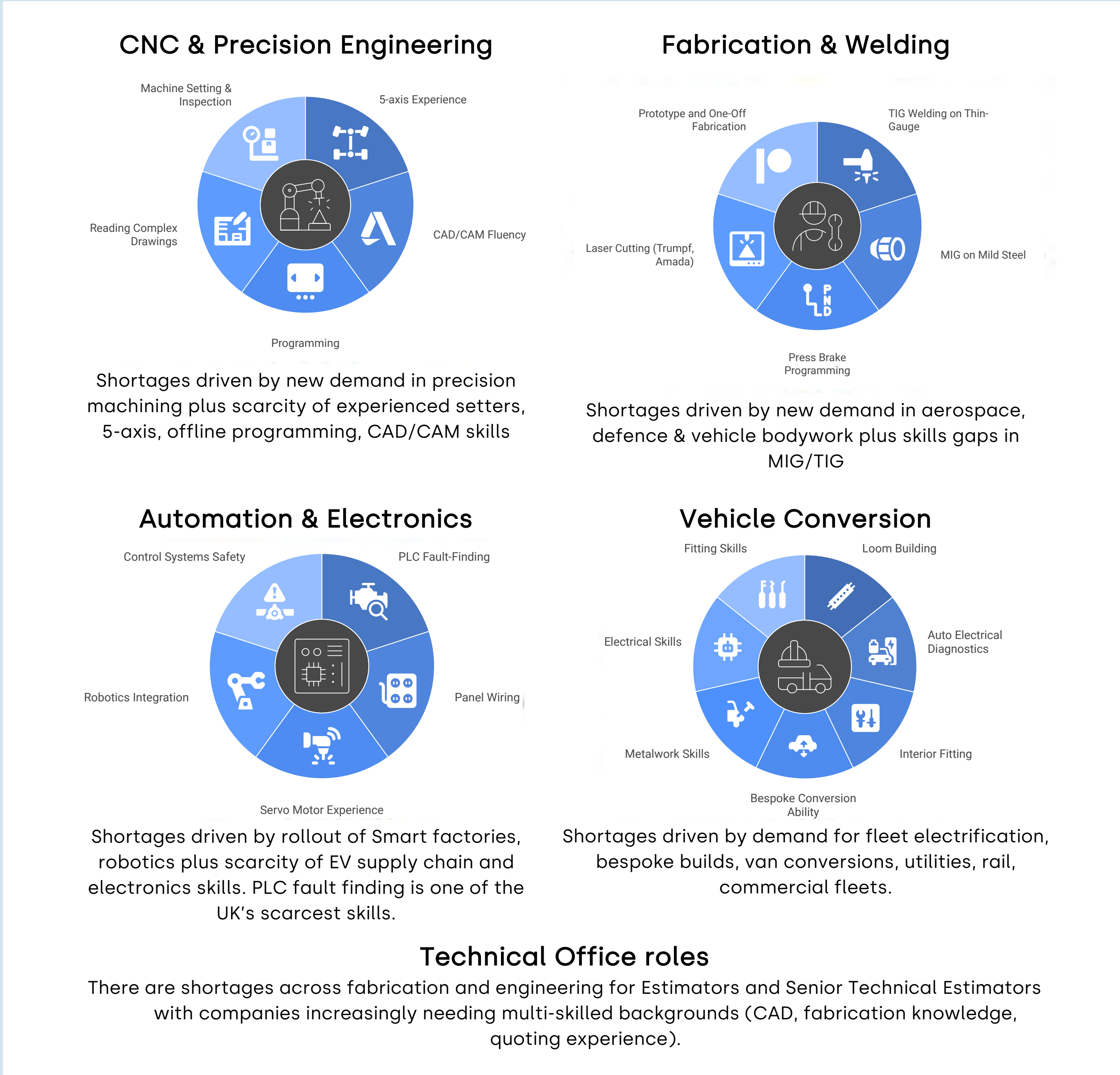
[21] Institution of Engineering and Technology, UK Engineering and Technology skills survey (2025)

[22] WMCA, Engineering and Manufacturing Plan (2023)

[23] Yortru, West Midlands Training Providers; AELP: 2020/1-2024/25

[24] AELP: 2020/1-2024/25

Figure 14. Advanced Manufacturing Skill shortages in the West Midlands



Source: Midlands Engineering Jobs Outlook 2026, Advanced Resourcing

[25] Estimates based on HESA Data (DfE CAH Table 50)

CHALLENGE 5: Land supply and delivery

To compete effectively for advanced manufacturing investment and provide the necessary infrastructure required to support businesses to scale, we need the right land and facilities and the ability to plan their availability and readiness. We do not currently have a consolidated real estate pipeline for advanced manufacturing. This has led to opportunities for inward investment being missed because we have been unable to present a comprehensive, regional portfolio with options for investment. Instead, sites are promoted individually and while many are credible in isolation, the absence of a unified spatial proposition weakens competitiveness at critical moments.

There are several constraints in bringing forward employment land, particularly around energy capacity, infrastructure delivery and planning, which are recognised national challenges. Power availability, access improvements and enabling works often determine whether a site is genuinely investable rather than simply allocated on paper. This is most visible in the current shortage of production ready facilities for growing manufacturers seeking to expand quickly, again limiting the ability to support real scale across the sector.

However, a ten-year development pipeline is emerging across the region, from i54 and the Wolverhampton Green Innovation Corridor in the West to HORIBA MIRA in the East. If mobilised effectively, this will provide a robust response to advanced manufacturing demand, including supporting services infrastructure such as logistics. A small number of strategic locations represent potential catalytic options that will support regional growth ambitions. The proposed West Midlands Spatial Development Strategy is an important opportunity to embed site prioritisation for advanced manufacturing, based on a clear and agreed pipeline of sites. To complement this, clusters such as WMACC can quickly mobilise robust construction supply chains to build the much-needed advanced manufacturing facilities across the West Midlands.

Figure 15. Illustration of the emerging advanced manufacturing real estate pipeline using the Coventry and Warwickshire area

Site	Development land available	Role in the 10 year supply	Readiness position	Primary constraints	Practical positioning
MIRA Tech Park	c.230 acres	Innovation, engineering and advanced manufacturing-led land supply	Credible proposition; established campus with extensive facilities	Sector focus	Existing R&D cluster for near term innovation and high value manufacturing enquiries
Greenpower Park	c.164 acres	High optionality strategic campus at scale	Deliverable via defined enabling programme	Enabling works; utilities and off-site infrastructure; planning timing	Build to requirement advanced manufacturing platform
SEGRO Coventry	c.118 acres (indicative)	Institutional delivery platform for industrial space	Fast delivery of consented & serviced plots	Serviced plot availability; power; scale fit	Spec or build to suit industrial & logistics delivery to market timelines
Gaydon	100+ acres (allocation; constraints vary)	Cluster-led strategic supply adjacent to OEMs	Strong logic; delivery shaped by sequencing	Planning and highways; infrastructure; land restrictions	Supplier clustering and advanced manufacturing adjacency
Ansty Park & Walsgrave Hill	c.196 acres site-wide; near-term plots limited	Supportive pipeline capacity and corporate-led park	Strong longer-term potential; availability led	Plot release cycles; committed or under-offer land; power	Complementary capacity where serviced plots align

For illustration, the emerging pipeline in the Coventry and Warwickshire area of the region reveals several gaps that limit the ability to respond to near-term advanced manufacturing demand. There are a set of common constraints, from limited availability of power-enabled plots to significant enabling works still required before facilities become market-ready. As a result, the region faces a shortage of ready-to-occupy or rapidly deliverable production space.

If advanced manufacturing is to scale in the West Midlands, sites must be viewed collectively as strategic assets rather than standalone development opportunities. Land supply is central to the advanced manufacturing proposition. While each faces defined constraints, an immediate priority must be to establish a consolidated outward-facing development portfolio that is aligned with regional growth ambitions.

The Vision

By 2035, the West Midlands will be the UK's leading advanced manufacturing supercluster, recognised for turning world-class R&D into scaled production.

The supercluster will integrate multiple subsectors and leverage the region's engineering expertise to build resilient high value supply chains that underpin long-term competitiveness and economic growth.

Project MADE

Five goals to achieve the Vision

Success will be determined through a set of objectives shaped around tangible economic outcomes: stronger growth, accelerated technology adoption, new jobs and skills, greater strategic investment, and a thriving scale-up environment. The priority is that advanced manufacturing growth in the UK is anchored, scaled and built from the Midlands. We see this growth through a wide lens, including long supply chains and multiple capabilities and current economic opportunities for all kinds of enterprise. These objectives should be hard-coded into regional ambition and reviewed annually.

1. High Growth:

By 2035, the West Midlands will achieve 5% compound annual growth in advanced manufacturing GVA, delivering £44bn in final annual output. This growth will be driven through demand side interventions, technology adoption, enhanced supply chain resilience, and a thriving ecosystem that leverages the region's strategic supply chain competencies and manufacturing know-how alongside world-class engineering expertise and R&D excellence.

2. Cross-sector technology adoption to enhance productivity:

By 2035, 90% of manufacturers will have adopted core digital manufacturing technologies, and 60% will have embedded automation into at least one stage of production, with 20% reaching advanced automation levels. This will drive productivity growth, by improving operational efficiency, enhancing competitiveness, and enabling our most innovative established manufacturers to expand into new supply chains.

3. Building a future-ready workforce:

By 2035, the West Midlands will have created 50,000 new jobs in advanced manufacturing through a combination of new employment and upskilling, with 15% dedicated to AI and automation, driving a new talent pipeline to respond to the need for digital transformation in evolving global supply chains across multiple sectors.

4. Securing strategic investment:

By 2035, the West Midlands will attract £1.6bn in aggregated advanced manufacturing investment, creating 25,000 FDI jobs over 10 years. This growth will be driven by an increase in deal flow, leveraging the region's skilled workforce, established innovative manufacturing capabilities and cutting-edge innovation, and market access to position the region as a global leader in advanced manufacturing.

5. Increasing scale-up performance:

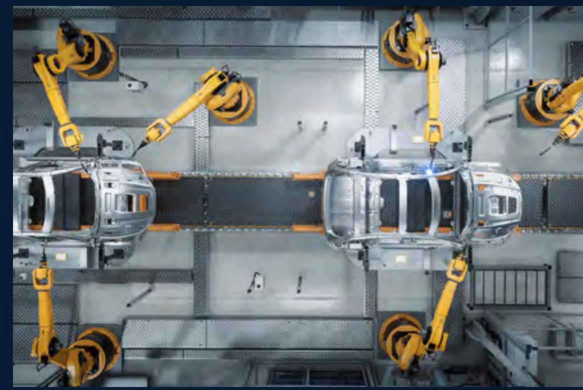
By 2035, the West Midlands will increase the number of scaling advanced manufacturing firms by 50%, with over 160 more scaling firms in an ecosystem that enables sustained growth and keeps innovative firms within the region, supporting long-term industrial leadership.

Action Plan

"This report provides the clarity and focus that has been missing at a time when pressure, opportunity and policy are converging."

JAMIE CLYDE - Strategic Advisor to Project MADE

Project MADE



The recommendations set out below are designed to enable the advanced manufacturing ecosystem in the West Midlands to achieve scale and deliver these objectives. Core to achieving our goals is increasing the level of commercial demand within the system and ensuring that regional capability is mobilised in response. By strengthening how the ecosystem generates and responds to demand, the region can increase the scale of existing firms, expand the depth of the industrial base and position the West Midlands as a leading location for advanced manufacturing investment. These are shaped around the following themes:

1. **Setting up the advanced manufacturing supercluster:**

   Creating a new industry body to establish clear sector leadership and drive co-ordination across the different parts of the advanced manufacturing ecosystem

2. **Creating the advanced manufacturing investment proposition:**

   Strengthening the regional advanced manufacturing proposition and create a more integrated approach to inward investment.

3. **Improving commercial demand and demand signalling:**

   Stimulating new business opportunities for the supply chain with the added benefit of boosting effectiveness of existing business support programmes and economic development activity

4. **Strengthening the foundations for growth and scale:**

   Ensuring the region has the sites, facilities, capital and skills required to enable businesses to grow and expand

1) Setting up an advanced manufacturing supercluster

The initial priority is to establish a formal strategic leadership body for the ecosystem. Its core purpose is to address fragmentation, strengthen coordination and create a single, unified voice and proposition for advanced manufacturing across the West Midlands and, over time, the wider Midlands' economy.

The supercluster will not replace existing cluster organisations or delivery bodies but will instead bring them together under a single umbrella, supported by delivery functions embedded within the West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC). This enables the supercluster board to focus on vision and priorities, with access to existing operational capacity to support execution. It is envisaged that the board will create a task and finish group, drawing on resources from organisations represented on the board and from the wider membership.

The objectives of the advanced manufacturing supercluster are:

- **To set a clear vision and proposition across the whole of advanced manufacturing in the region, including OEMs, supply chains, R&D assets, investors and the supporting ecosystem**
- **To forge closer strategic partnerships between the R&D assets in the region, universities and clusters**
- **To provide a strategic business voice to support local, regional and national policy**
- **To coordinate delivery of ecosystem capability to support growth and productivity, notably business and technical support, facilities, skills and investment**

The next step is to formalise this collaboration into a clear industry-led leadership structure with defined authority and supporting delivery capacity.

Supercluster Board Responsibilities

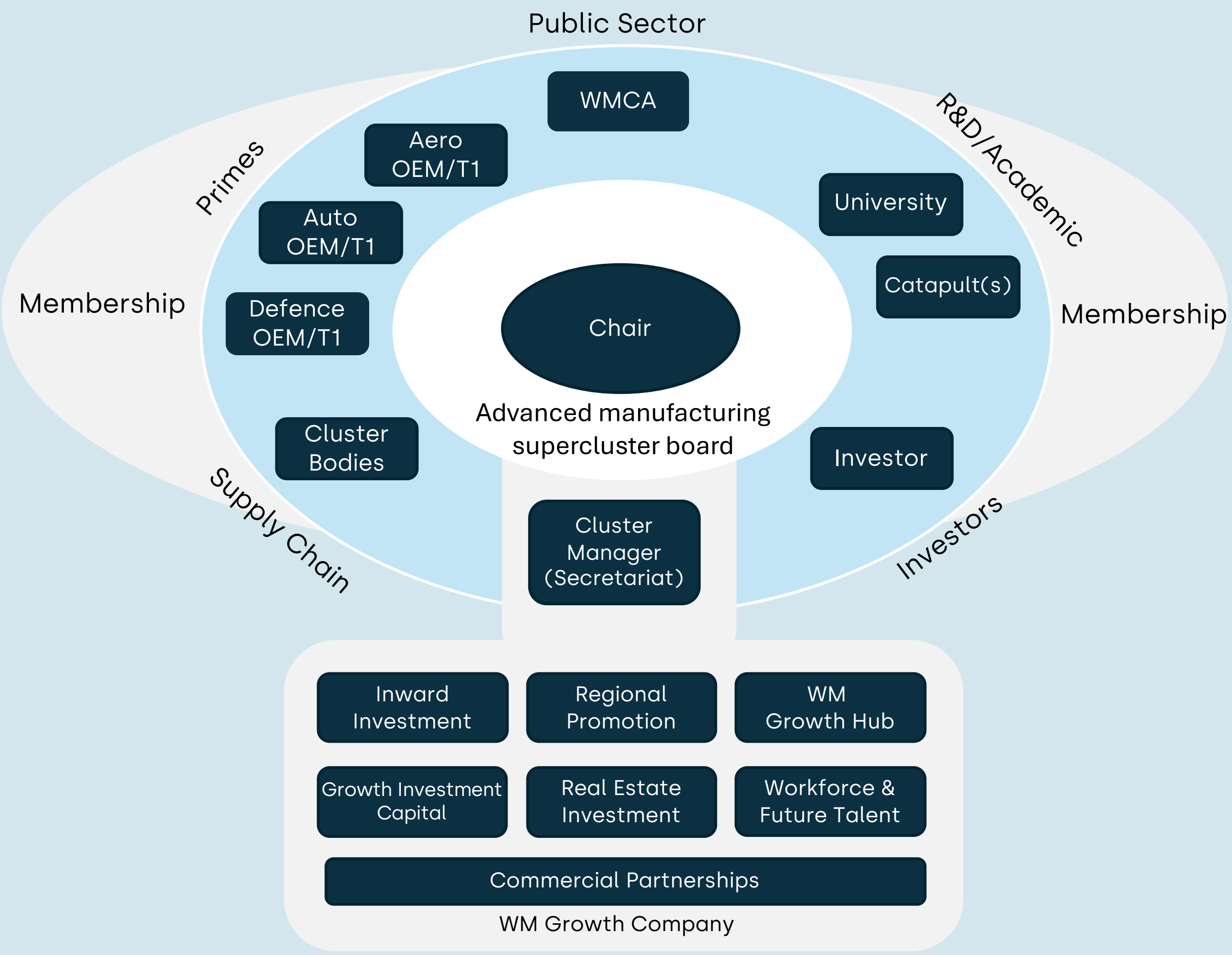
- Set the vision, growth ambitions and priority actions.
- Develop a coherent regional investor proposition.
- Shape delivery around defined industry demand
- Strengthen links between OEMs, Tier 1s and the supply chain.
- Oversee the development of a coordinated and investable pipeline of strategic sites.

Supporting Capacity Responsibilities

- Supporting operational capacity via the new cluster management function in the WM Growth Company
- Coordinate programme delivery and provide secretariat support.
- Maintain a live regional pipeline of land and infrastructure.
- Integrate inward investment, business growth, real estate and skills.
- Drive customer demand-led engagement and programme rollout.

*APC, DBT, OFI, DSIT or UKRI

Figure 16. Industry-led supercluster framework



The foundations for this have already been laid. Project MADE has convened a partnership of industry, research and public sector leaders who have informed the design of the supercluster. It will be industry-led, with a high profile non-executive Chair with an industry background, providing the leadership and expertise required to shape and drive strategic direction. This will be supported by a formal board structure with roles to ensure appropriate leadership from across the ecosystem:

- **A Cluster leader to represent all Cluster Body organisations and their respective communities, notably their supply chain businesses.**
- **A senior University leader to represent the various regional academic institutions.**
- **A senior Public Sector representative to act on behalf of Combined Authorities (CA) and local authorities (LA).**
- **A senior leader of one of the High Value Manufacturing Catapults (i.e. WMG and MTC)**
- **Three industry leaders from OEMs/Tier 1s across automotive, aerospace and defence to provide input from across the wider manufacturing base.**
- **A senior leader from the investment community (e.g. APC)**
- **A cluster management specialist from WMGC to provide a secretariat role**

Our priority over the next six months is to transition from Project MADE to a more formal structure for the advanced manufacturing supercluster and to deliver a first set of actions. These are designed to set the strategic direction, build organisational momentum, and ensure the operational capacity needed to drive forward the cluster's development.

Implementation

An initial focus is to formalise the leadership structure of the supercluster, including both recruiting an experienced chair and identifying the core members of the supercluster board who can act on behalf of the ecosystem. Recommended actions are:

Action One: Form an interim board led by those involved in Project MADE to support initial set up and transition into the formal supercluster.

Action Two: Recruit a Chairperson, led by the interim board with an executive search agency. The aim is to secure a Chair with strong industry background who can act as the figurehead for the sector.

Action Three: Appoint the core supercluster board members and wider governance based on the structure above, maintaining the focus on an 'industry-led' approach with a majority of members appointed from the private sector.

Action Four: Establishing delivery capacity - working with West Midlands Growth Company to establish the cluster secretariat function, embedded within WMGC, ensuring they have the necessary authority and operational capacity to manage day-to-day activities. This includes developing clear protocols for interaction with the supercluster board, any potential task-and-finish groups, and other regional stakeholders, including inward investment, as set out below. The cluster manager should have a proven background in managing complex, cross-sector partnerships and experience within advanced manufacturing ecosystems to be effective in this role.

Action Five: Engage with appropriate regional and national cluster body leads to define how the supercluster engages with, and represents, all sectors and clusters related to the advanced manufacturing ecosystem.

Action Six: Conduct a scoping review of the region's current advanced manufacturing inward investment proposition in partnership with WMGC, who have regional responsibility for Inward Investment, and DBT to create a clear baseline analysis of the current state-of-play.

Action Seven: Finalise the vision and objectives within the first three months, working with WMCA, DBT and OFI and confirming alignment with the West Midlands Growth Plan and the National Industrial Strategy Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan.

Action Eight: Develop a clear communication/marketing plan to ensure that the vision, goals, and actions of the supercluster are well understood and communicated to all stakeholders, including industry leaders, government representatives, and local businesses.

*APC, DBT,OFT, DSIT or UKRI

Securing funding and resources

We have considered funding for the supercluster. More detailed work will be needed, but the potential sources for initial funding include Business Rates Relief through the Investment Zone or the Government's existing revenue funding.

Action Nine: Design and approve the membership model with consideration given to a combination of public and private sources. A three-tier membership structure would be appropriate to ensure both broad participation and support for strategic initiatives. This should include:

- **Plenary membership**: open to a wide range of businesses who wish to be represented within the supercluster. We are suggesting exploring a low fee to encourage broad participation. In order to avoid competing with existing key stakeholder memberships (e.g. Cluster Bodies, Catapults and WMGC Partnership) consideration will need to be made to ensure the supercluster does not conflict with these programmes (e.g. supercluster benefits are included within these existing memberships with or without an extra fee to allow access to supercluster benefit).

- **Advisory membership**: a higher tier designed for firms seeking to have significant influence in the sector. They will have an active role in shaping the direction of the supercluster. The higher membership fee will provide access to a role in governance, marketing and communications, and other strategic initiatives.

- **Founding membership**: the organisations who have contributed to Project MADE.

Action Ten: Partner with WMGC to agree how the advanced manufacturing supercluster can support the delivery of WMGC's Corporate Plan targets and identify any additional funding needs for WMGC to support delivery the advanced manufacturing supercluster's vision and objectives (See Action Seven).

Action Eleven: Develop an additional operational budget for the supercluster, including but not limited to initial set-up costs, marketing and operational activity, using existing Investment Zone funding

"The challenge facing the West Midlands is no longer one of capability, but of coordination, alignment and delivery."

SARAH WINDRUM,
Head of Cluster Development, HORIBA MIRA

2) Creating the Advanced Manufacturing Investment Proposition

While the West Midlands has a strong foundation of advanced manufacturing capabilities, there is a clear need to consolidate the region's offer into a more compelling and consistent investment proposition. We must bring together the full extent of the regional assets available, including facilities, physical development pipeline, financial programmes, and the diverse capabilities within the region as part of a renewed approach to inward investment coordinated by WMGC.

Inward investment

Action Twelve: Define a common set of priority inward investment target businesses: Aligning the new supercluster vision by building on existing research and linking into activities delivered by DBT/OFI, WMGC, Local Authorities, the Investment Zone (IZ), private sector (e.g. HORIBA MIRA) and Universities. Priority investment targets, including key Tier 1 suppliers, should be agreed collectively across regional partners. This process should include as much of the whole region's asset base and inward investment targets as possible.

Action Thirteen: Create the advanced manufacturing 'red carpet' offer: Create a single front door for advanced manufacturing through WMGC, enabling coordinated engagement with investors rather than multiple parallel approaches. This should include a clear 'red carpet' landing proposition covering available sites, innovation and technical facilities, finance programmes, and regional industrial capabilities, informed by the mapping of ecosystem capabilities (Action 15). This should be designed to provide WMGC, DBT and OFI with a compelling and unified offer to take to market.

Action Fourteen: Targeted inward investment plan: Develop a comprehensive plan for attracting OEM and Tier 1 suppliers and high-growth businesses that brings together the whole ecosystem to support WMGC in managing the origination and delivery of projects.

Advanced manufacturing growth support offer:

Action Fifteen: Map advanced manufacturing SME capabilities: The breadth of West Midlands advanced manufacturing capability can be understood and maximised by aggregating insight from Cluster Bodies, WMGC, Chambers of Commerce, Universities and databases to compile a catalogue of firms that contains growth rates, technological specialisms, proven production and engineering expertise, expansion capacity, and innovation capability. This can be used to identify businesses that align with industry challenges and have the potential to scale with targeted support.

Action Sixteen: Map regional support capabilities: Undertake a comprehensive mapping of infrastructure and facilities (physical accommodation as well as manufacturing assets and equipment), funding and finance, business support, skills provision, and technical/IP support and other services delivered within the ecosystem across the sectors being served. This will then be used to identify gaps in provision and areas of latent capacity.

Action Seventeen: Design a set of incentive programmes to activate regional capabilities: Identify how resources from regional partners could be pooled and used to maximise the use of infrastructure and capabilities where there is potential latent capacity. We recommend the region explores an innovation voucher scheme, or similar, to provide access to flexible workspace, manufacturing facilities and equipment, and specialist technical or mentoring support.

3) Improving commercial demand and demand signalling

We need to work together to tackle structural issues that hold back customer demand and complicate demand signals in different parts of the advanced manufacturing supply chain. We need to do so in ways that do not increase complexity within the current system. By creating mechanisms to generate and better signal customer demand, we can amplify the performance from existing programmes (e.g. Local Innovation & Partnership Fund (LIPF), Supply Chain Transition (SCT), DRIVE35) as well as inward investment activity, the work of Cluster Bodies and WMGC's new High Growth Service.

Existing programmes offer an effective mix of supply side interventions to support innovation and capability development. The challenge is to enhance these by creating more commercial opportunities for a) scale-up firms in the region b) scale-ups that could be attracted into the region and c) regional SMEs with growth potential by improving the demand signals through facilitated engagement with OEMs/Tier 1s based in the region and elsewhere.

An early priority for the supercluster is to develop and commission interventions that enable OEMs/Tier 1s to articulate commercial, operational and innovation challenges that give new opportunities for Scale-ups and SMEs. This will not be achieved by one stand-alone programme, but by a set of actions developed over time, led by individual partners.

The headline conclusion of Project MADE is that there is a strong case for additional action to drive customer demand and that co-ordinating these actions closely with existing programmes will increase the competitiveness of regional anchors and enhance the inward investment proposition for businesses looking to locate or expand in the West Midlands *(Fig. 17)*.

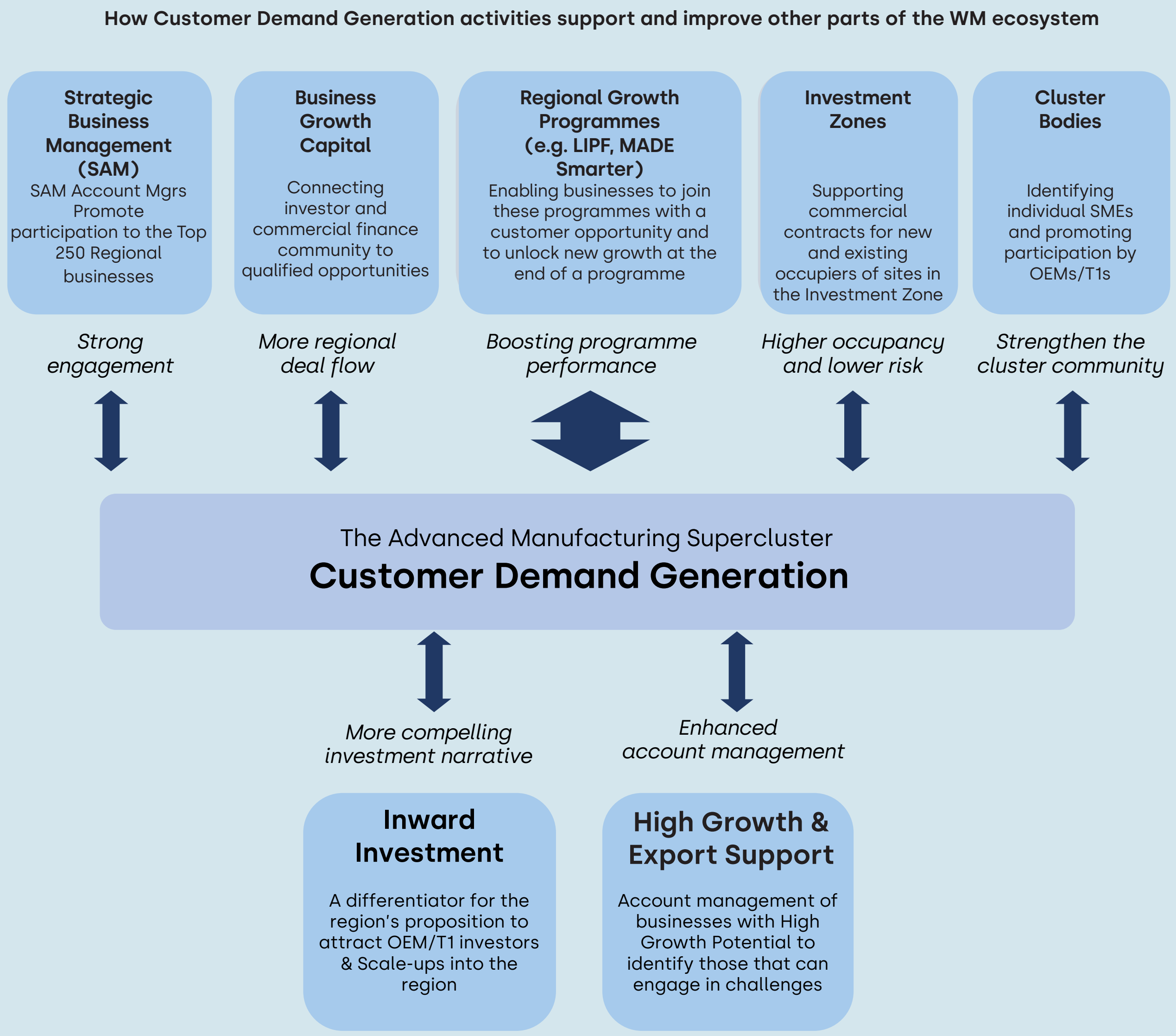
> **"International competitors are moving quickly and with intent; Project MADE sets out how the West Midlands can respond with equal clarity and pace."**
>
> **GRAHAM HOARE, CEO, Manufacturing Technical Centre (MTC)**

Principles of Customer Demand Generation

Further design work by the supercluster and individual partners will be informed by the following principles:

- **Industry challenge–led, multi-buyer and multi-sector**: Challenges should be typically framed at sector/supply chain level and shaped by a panel of OEMs/Tier 1s rather than by individual firms. This maximises reach for businesses responding to them, creates greater return to the sector as a whole and appropriately manages commercial sensitivities.
- **Public–private funding with anchor fees**: Participating OEMs should pay to participate reflecting the direct commercial value gained, while public co funding is used to derisk collaboration and crowd in private investment. Therefore public funding should be focused on testing new types of challenges and running challenges that are either non-competitive or address market failure. Bespoke challenges for individual OEM/T1s should be commercially funded.
- **Integration, not duplication:** Integrating with existing programmes/ecosystem services to enhance their performance rather being another standalone programme (Fig 17):
  - *Regional Growth Programmes (e.g. SCT, LIPF, MADE Smarter)* can source businesses that have secured these commercial opportunities to join their programmes, or offer access to these customer demand opportunities once businesses complete their programme.
  - *Strategic Account Management service (WMGC)* can promote the opportunity to set challenges to OEMs/T1s in the region
  - The new *High Growth Service (WMGC)* can refer relevant businesses to customer demand challenges.
  - *Business Growth Capital Service (WMGC)* with access and showcase businesses seeking investment and finance as part of its goal of increasing deal flow.
  - *Investment Zones:* can offer businesses looking to relocate to the Investment Zone with new commercial opportunities, reducing risk and increasing occupier growth potential.
  - *Cluster Bodies:* provide their members a route to new commercial opportunities,
- **Local benefit commitment:** Selection and awards by partners prioritise regional SMEs/scale-ups; supplier localisation and diversification; anchoring investment in the West Midlands; with outcomes aligned with major strategic sites and the IZ.
- **Transparency and alignment:** Challenges are selected and designed to provide clear beneficial outcomes for both OEMs/Tier 1s and SME/Scale-ups. All OEM/Tier 1s declare at the outset their position on the range of outcomes and any relevant hurdles for any business that collaborates with them to address their challenges (e.g. procurement, investment, acquisition, showcasing).

Figure 17. Multiplying the impact of existing programmes

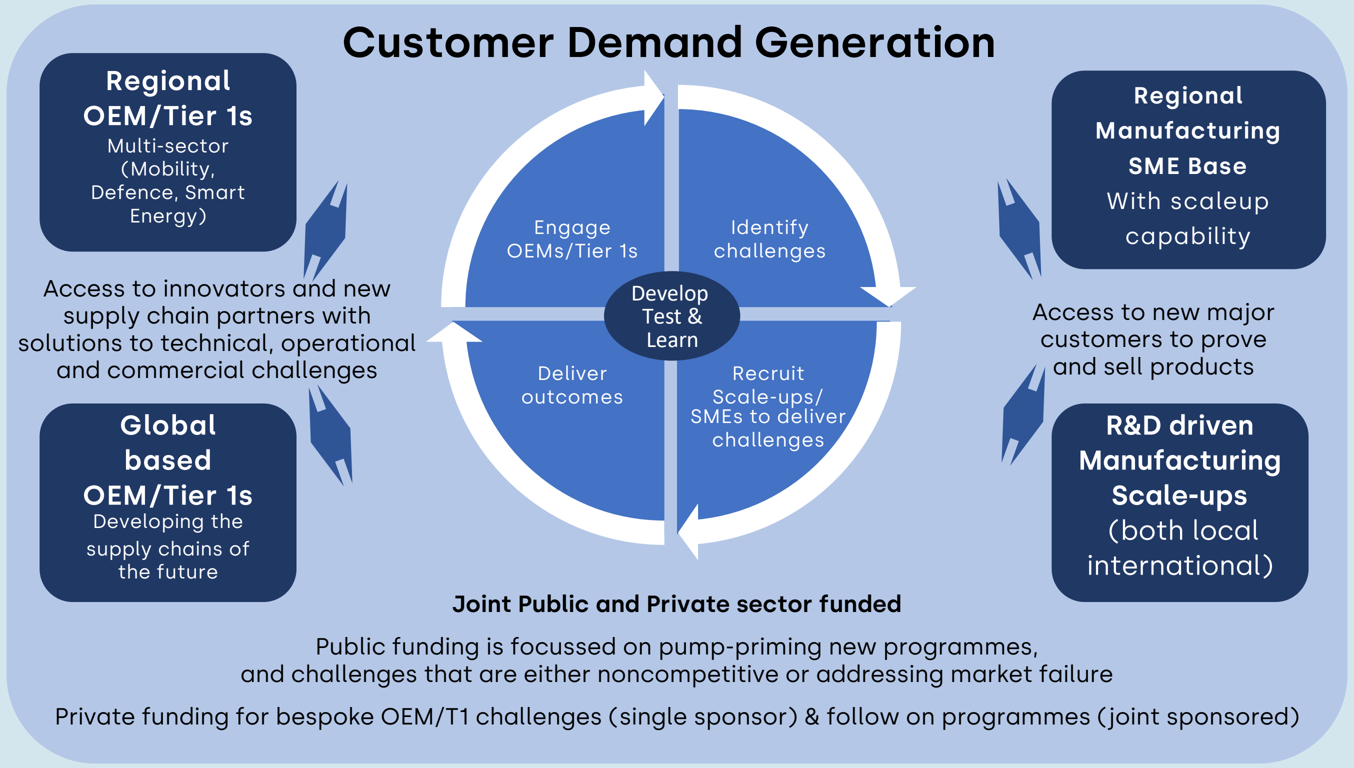


Scope and objectives of Customer Demand led Challenges

The aim is to bring together OEMs/Tier 1s and SMEs/scale-ups, reflecting both market 'push' and 'pull.' Subject to further work by the partners, potential ways of approaching this include the challenge cycles:

- **International competitiveness challenges:** Our work indicates that local OEM/Tier 1s are increasingly motivated to work locally to build resilience within their supply chains. We can help articulate specific supply-chain needs and connect these to regional firms who have the capability to respond.
- **Creating competitive supply chains:** Groups of regional SMEs and Innovators are assembled and engaged to work with the OEM/T1s (both in and outside the region) to develop and test new supply chain solutions.
- **Paths to market:** Conventional procurement can often fail to surface the breadth of potential supplier relationships. By taking a reverse innovation and procurement approach, we can curate a catalogue of the region's manufacturing capabilities and target a combination of relevant local and global OEMs/Tier 1s to promote new commercial relationships, leveraging adjacent sectors (e.g. marine, rail) which can act as a proving ground.

Figure 18. Approach to increasing demand and improving demand signals.



Actions for customer demand generation:

Action Eighteen: Fully scope and define the first set of demand generation actions: This could include proposals led by existing Catapults and Universities using national, regional and local funding, involving the challenge cycles above. This could include for example EPSRC Manufacturing Hubs (such as Co-AIMS: Research Hub on Collaborative AI for Manufacturing Sustainability at The University of Birmingham) to bring together OEMs and SMEs with universities and Catapults. Partners will work together to ensure maximum impact on regional as well as relevant national goals, shaping regional scale-up and SME specific outputs and outcomes expected from delivery.

Action Nineteen: Secure interest from OEMs: As initial propositions are developed, working with the new Strategic Account Management team in WMGC to leverage existing senior relationships across WMCA/WMGC/LAs and approach regional OEMs/Tier 1s with the aim securing their participation in initial resilience and/or innovation challenges including those run by individual partners.

Action Twenty: Support ecosystem linkages as proposals develop: Support the points of integration between the selected delivery partner and regional programmes (e.g. LIPF/SCT/DRIVE35/MADE Smarter), WMGC's functions (Inward Investment, Business Growth Capital, High Growth Service, Strategic Account Management), Cluster Bodies (e.g. MAA, BCIC, ELV and Battery), and the West Midlands Investment Zone (WMIZ) sites.

Action Twenty One: Showcase success and build further demand: Develop a process for capturing and publicising success stories and use these to generate further interest from OEMs/Tier 1s, attract new participants.

Figure 19. Example of a potential demand focused intervention

Resiliency Challenge Platform.

Set Up

- *The regional capability audit (See Action 15) identifies a group of businesses with globally leading technical capability in lightweight materials.*

Lightweight Sustainable Materials

- *A lead partner brings together OEMs that have an interest in lightweight materials, to participate in 'the challenge' by signalling their particular interest (e.g low cost carbon fibre for an automotive chassis)*
- *This creates a broad 'cross-industry, regional challenge' on a particular category, with different OEMs/tier 1s sponsoring different elements.*
- *Once the challenge has been defined and objectives created, it is shared with the supply chain with relevant organisations proactively targeted.*
- *The most promising supply chain partners (a diligence process) are convened to explore a collaboration project which could be funded either privately or through public sector support.*
- *Results of the challenge are shared and impact recorded.*

4) Strengthening the foundations for growth and scale

The success of the proposed actions will rely on having strong enabling foundations and addressing structural barriers to growth, ensuring that the core conditions for growth are in place. This includes a workforce equipped with the right skills, access to capital, and the availability of suitable sites and facilities.

Skills development:

Action Twenty Two: Map the current and long-term skills supply: Support WMCA to conduct a full region-wide skills mapping of current advanced manufacturing skills provision and capability potential across Universities, Colleges and independent training providers. This should include apprenticeships (SSA2 & Level 6&7) and degree courses. This should align with annual goals to support the objective to create 50,000 additional roles by 2035.

Action Twenty Three: Build a consolidated view of advanced manufacturing workforce requirements: Support the WMGC and WMCA to develop a demand-led view of the future skills requirements that aligns with the evolving needs of the advanced manufacturing supercluster. Collaborate with industry and education providers to ensure training is targeted and relevant.

Action Twenty Four: Create a new plan for regional apprenticeship: Address cost barriers for providers, and drive increased apprenticeships in advanced manufacturing by defining a region-specific target and ensuring alignment with sector needs. This work should be undertaken with MTC, WMG and the Association of Employment, WMCA Skills team and Learning Providers to understand where delivery is financially unsustainable and identify options to improve viability for providers and employers.

Action Twenty Five: Create an advanced manufacturing skills plan with a focus on enablers such as AI, robotics and automation skills: Develop targeted programmes to equip the workforce with essential skills in AI and automation to deliver the target 15,000 AI skills over 10 years to address both current and future technological demands.

Access to investment:

Action Twenty Six: Create a deeper investor pool: Implement the recommendations from WMCA's forthcoming 'Access to Finance' report to strengthen the regional investor ecosystem by building relationships with commercial lenders, private equity and venture capital investors active in advanced manufacturing. This should include engagement with networks such as UK Private Capital and closer collaboration with national institutions such as the British Business Bank to increase both the number and scale of investments into West Midlands manufacturing firms.

A. Work with WMGC's new Business Growth Capital team to maintain active relationships with the top 15 active investors in the region and the 101 companies currently backed by private equity or venture capital.
B. Convene annual investor roundtables and targeted events bringing together private equity, venture capital and private credit investors with high growth advanced manufacturing firms.
C. Consider how the use of export finance support could further enhance regional prospects and availability to capital.

Action Twenty Seven: Align finance with programme delivery: Ensure businesses participating in regional programmes such as LIPF, MADE Smarter and supply chain initiatives have clear pathways to investment. This should involve structured engagement with investors throughout programmes to ensure scaling opportunities are matched with capital.

Action Twenty Eight: Develop an investable advanced manufacturing pipeline: Create a curated pipeline of high potential advanced manufacturing companies and investment opportunities that can be presented to investors through the supercluster and WMGC.

Action Twenty Nine: Engage with Midlands Mindforge: Link into the newly launched Midlands Mindforge investing in spin-outs from eight Midlands universities including Cranfield and Warwick, to gain early visibility of future commercial and innovation opportunities

Land and real estate pipeline:

Action Thirty: Create a consolidated real estate pipeline: Incorporate the initial work in this report outlined in Figure 15 to compile detailed information on all current, planned, and available sites across the region suitable for advanced manufacturing. This should include data on site size, zoning, infrastructure readiness, planning status, energy capabilities and scalability to create a unified regional portfolio. Consider if a single overarching real estate agent should be appointed to promote the region on behalf of the WMGC.

Action Thirty One: Map sites against advanced manufacturing needs: Assess the land and development sites in the context of the specific needs of the advanced manufacturing sector, including supporting services infrastructure such as logistics. This involves cross-referencing site capabilities with the infrastructure requirements of key manufacturing sectors to incorporate within an inward investment offer. Particular focus should be given to aligning land supply with scaling requirements, identifying the types of spaces and production facilities needed to support business growth.

Action Thirty Two: Engage with local authorities to accelerate planning for agreed sites: Work with district and unitary authorities to fast-track planning processes for priority advanced manufacturing locations.

Action Thirty Three: Develop a site activation strategy: Prioritise and create an actionable plan to fast-track the mobilisation of high-potential sites. This means matching development timelines with infrastructure investments required in order to align advanced manufacturing needs with investor attraction. This should also include a route to unlocking the Business Rates Retention Scheme (BRRS) in line with regional needs to fund both growth programmes and support property development.

Action Thirty Four: Develop proposals for additional innovation focused, co-located facilities: While the West Midlands has a deep concentration of advanced manufacturing firms, there is strong demand for further production facilities - dedicated, co-located environments that bring together industry, investors, skills providers and business support services. The supercluster should prioritise further scoping and development of this requirement which could consist of expansion of existing sites and/or development of new Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Campuses. These additional hub(s) will strengthen the inward investment proposition for advanced manufacturing, create spaces to convene the ecosystem, deliver regional support and shared services, and engage with investors. Elements would need to act as a strategic enablers rather than a standalone commercial facilities.

Action Thirty Five: Review funding options and operating models for additional provision: Assess how regional mechanisms, such as Business Rates Relief Scheme (BRRS) or the Mayoral Revolving Growth Fund, could be used to finance delivery, where there are non-commercially viable elements required.

Action Thirty Six: Explore use of national incentives: Consider designating sites (including Investment Zone incentive sites) as locations for the new Business Industrial Competitiveness Scheme to strengthen the inward-investment offer.

Summary of asks

The West Midlands advanced manufacturing sector is at a critical point. Either we support its development with an ambitious and far-reaching plan and cement its future in the region or we continue to see its decline and lose our heritage and critical economic contribution. We strongly believe the former outcome and we stand ready to engage on this plan.

We have a number of asks, particularly from WM Combined Authority and Central Government, to be considered before the end of July 2026. These are tightly aligned to our four delivery themes of Sector Leadership, Investment Proposition, Customer Demand Generation, and Enabling Foundations set out within this report. They are carefully designed to be deliverable within current funding envelopes and the regional settlement.

Stakeholder	Recommendation
UK Government	**To support this plan to facilitate regional delivery of UK Policy** 1. DBT recognises this plan nationally as a practical adoption of a regional strategy for the National Industrial Strategy that could be replicated and support its onward development. 2. DBT engages with the Project MADE leadership to examine potential sources of funding that could be used to fund segments of this initiative. 3. UKRI works with the Project MADE leadership to examine potential sources of funding that could be used to fund segments of this initiative and how we integrate with existing programmes. 4. OFI works with the Project MADE leadership to examine potential sources of funding that could be used to fund segments of this initiative. 5. DSNZ works with Project MADE leadership to implement national incentives and to pilot other similar place-based initiatives and policy innovations
WMCA	**To adopt the recommendations within regional policy making:** 1. Replace with: Explore with the Project MADE Advisory Board how WMCA can stimulate investment using innovation vouchers and other incentives, working with the newly expanded WMGC. 2. Consider all forms of funding, such as Mayoral recyclable fund and other strategic funding mechanisms, such as second-phase WMIZ funding, from 2029. 3. Review how resources such as, but not limited to, the WMIZ Business Rate Retention scheme can be used to fund critical infrastructure and potential loans to enable rapid growth from 2027. 4. Unlock immediate resources to allow the formation of the interim board and creation of the advanced manufacturing supercluster.
Local Authorities	1. Partner with the supercluster to ensure the industrial strengths of all parts of the region are fairly represented and recognised in its plans through an understanding of individual local demographics and challenges. At the same time Local Authorities recognise the industrial imperative to operate beyond local area boundaries.
WMGC	**To adopt this plan to support the execution of WMGC's new Corporate Plan:** 1. Engage in scoping of the expanded support for advanced manufacturing cluster 2. Allocate WMGC's new Advanced Manufacturing Cluster Manager to act as secretariat for the supercluster 3. Partner with the supercluster to help shape delivery of key WMGC functions, notably Inward Investment, Business Support and Future Workforce and Skills, Business Growth Capital
Industry (OEMs/Tier 1s & Cluster Bodies)	1. Membership of the supercluster through participation on the Board. 2. Participation in the generation of end user demand by placing resilience and innovation challenges to innovators and the West Midlands supply chain.
Universities & HVMC partners (e.g. WMG, MTC) & wider research assets	1. Participate in membership of the supercluster through participation on the Board. 2. Participation in the generation of end user demand by placing resilience and innovation challenges to innovators and the West Midlands supply chain. 3. Commit to a co-ordinated offer to indigenous and potential inward advanced manufacturing investors in the region

Moving Forward

Project MADE has brought the region's advanced manufacturing community much closer together: building consensus, establishing a shared understanding of the challenges we face, and shaping a clear set of priorities for action. The collective commitment from key partners who have supported this report has been vital to building momentum and achieving clarity. The work to date represents significant progress and has delivered what the region was lacking: in a shared vision, a coherent set of objectives, and a detailed action plan that translates ambition into practical steps. The next phase is about turning this momentum into focused delivery and implementation.

There is a narrow but critical window to act. The West Midlands continues to confront fundamental pressures, from the disruption caused by the 2025 JLR cyber attack and the wider, escalating geopolitical uncertainty, to persistent skills shortages in an ageing workforce, and chronic underinvestment in automation and technology transformation. These challenges cannot be addressed in isolation; they require a coordinated, system wide response that aligns leadership, investment and capability across the ecosystem.

Importantly, the conditions for action are particularly favourable. The creation of a stronger West Midlands Growth Company, with enhanced cluster support and inward investment capacity, working directly to the Combined Authority Board is rewiring how support is delivered to businesses. The £22m Local Innovation Partnership Fund is enabling new collaboration and deeper capability-building across advanced manufacturing. The energy, consensus and partnership forged through Project MADE provides a strong platform for mobilisation. The task ahead is to convert this shared ambition into focused, collective action, starting immediately.

This report has been produced by Metro Dynamics, following input from the Project MADE Advisory Group and supported by Plug and Play.

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