

West Midlands Insights on Society and Economy

A monthly newsletter on the trends that matter to the West Midlands.

Issue 9, June 2024

1.0 Headlines

1.1 June Editorial

Many would argue that the UK housing crisis stems from a chronic lack of affordability across all tenures, an insufficient supply of new affordable homes, especially social homes, and the dire condition of our existing housing stock.

Since 2020, England has had the highest proportion of inadequate housing in Europe, with 15% of all homes not meeting the Decent Homes Standard, a basic regulatory measure of housing quality (WMCA area 2019 estimate 17%, or roughly 200,000 homes). Damp and mould, and their detrimental impacts on health and wellbeing, are part of the critical issue of poor-quality housing.

In 2023 the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) secured nearly £15 million from the Social Housing Quality Fund (SHQF) to tackle severe damp and mould in social housing properties across the region. The Centre for the New Midlands (CNM) has been commissioned to evaluate the range, scope and scale of organisational and tenant impacts of this funding programme.

We are determined, as a think tank, to work collaboratively with stakeholders and communities to produce rigorous research with, and for, our region. Our recent co-design workshops have been invaluable in helping refine and improve our research tools like our tenant survey and interview protocols.

These sessions, attended by tenants with lived experience of severe damp and mould, academics, health practitioners, charity and civic organisations, have revealed how the topic of damp and mould provides a frame for a plethora of interconnected issues such as:

- the competing demands between developing new homes and improving the quality of existing older stock;
- the importance of trust and communication between landlords and tenants in both gaining access to undertake repairs and understanding how to live with the new technologies and interventions in their homes;
- the inextricable link between housing, health and wellbeing, and the cost of living;
- the overlap between damp and mould interventions and retrofitting homes in the transition to net zero housing.

We need to make the environmental, the social impact and the economic case for improving our housing stock. Poor housing conditions are profoundly harmful to our region and its citizens, particularly vulnerable groups living in poor quality and unsuitable accommodation. Both the development of new social housing and improving the quality of existing housing are crucial to ensure everyone in the West Midlands, and beyond, has access to a safe, affordable and decent home.

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1.2 Coming Up in the Month Ahead

- [LGBTQ+ Pride Month](#) – June
- [Race Unity Day](#) – 9 June
- [Men’s Health Week](#) – 10–16 June
- [UK regional trade in goods statistics](#) – 13 June

1.3 National Headlines

- General election called for July
- The UK economy on temporary high
- Infrastructure Commission urges urgent action for growth
- Revitalising English Devolution to tackle incomplete devolution and insufficient powers

General election called for July

Parliament was dissolved on 30 May following the statement by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak calling a general election on 4 July.

The UK economy on temporary high

Latest figures from the ONS revealed that the UK economy grew by 0.6% in the first quarter of 2024, while inflation fell to just 2.3% in April. Nevertheless, [some have warned](#) that the consumer-led growth in the first quarter of the year will be short-lived without further efforts to improve productivity, and inflation is [widely expected](#) to rise again slightly during the summer before returning to the 2% Bank target only at the end of 2025. The 2.3% figure was also higher than anticipated and economists pointed to core inflation remaining sticky. As a result, it is now [less likely that base interest rates will begin to be cut](#) in June as was widely hoped, but some cuts are still anticipated in the second half of the year.

Infrastructure Commission urges urgent action for growth

The UK's National Infrastructure Commission warns that stagnation in infrastructure development over the next five years could hinder economic growth and climate goals. While some progress has been made, challenges persist. Funding shifts, renewable energy growth, and water management issues are highlighted. Urgent action is advocated, including coherent policies and increased public investment. Devolution and water sector reforms are emphasised, alongside railway network assessments. The Commission stresses the need for detailed plans and increased infrastructure investment, especially in the North and Midlands. Failure to act risks impeding future growth and connectivity. The [report](#) calls for decisive action to ensure infrastructure readiness for the future.

Revitalising English Devolution to tackle incomplete devolution and insufficient powers

The [report](#) by the Institute for Government urges the incoming government to revamp English devolution with 30 proposals over five years, addressing incomplete devolution and insufficient powers. Metro mayors have proven their efficacy in boosting regional economies through transport upgrades and urban renewal projects. Recommendations include extending devolution to 85% of England's population, finalizing devolution boundaries, expanding devolved powers, and fostering tax-sharing initiatives. Legal frameworks and electoral reforms are proposed to solidify devolution's foundation. Regular communication between the Prime Minister and metro Mayors are suggested for strategic alignment. Ultimately, the aim is to enhance both Conservative "levelling up" goals and Labour's growth objectives.

1.4 Regional Headlines

- Local Election Roundup
- Net zero transition presents an opportunity to revitalise UK manufacturing
- Richard Parker plans to take back control of regions buses

[Local Election Roundup](#)

It was a close-run race in May with Richard Parker, the Labour candidate, pipping Andy Street, the Conservative candidate at the post. With 225,590 votes to Andy Street's 224,082, Richard Parker was duly elected the new Mayor of the West Midlands. In other local election news, Dudley council moved to no overall control; however, the Conservative administration will continue.

[Net zero transition presents an opportunity to revitalise UK manufacturing](#)

A new [report](#) by the IPPR presents a case for developing green manufacturing in the UK. Despite historical neglect, the UK retains manufacturing strengths in regions sidelined during services-driven growth. Amidst stagnation and the urgent need for net zero transition, the government must refocus on these regions recommends the report. Investment in green industries, particularly wind and heat pumps, leveraging existing capabilities, is crucial. The West Midlands has a large presence of ordinary manufacturing that is related to the wind and green transport sectors, and some places in these regions also have high levels of employment in sectors related to heat pump manufacturing.

[Richard Parker plans to take back control of regions buses](#)

The WMCA has previously allocated over £75 million in subsidies to sustain the region's bus services for 18 months. This funding prevents fare hikes and service cuts that could affect thousands of passengers. With subsidies expiring soon, talks between TfWM and government aim to secure further funding. Mayor Richard Parker [proposes](#) franchising the bus network by 2025 to ensure affordability and reliability, consulting communities for input. Currently, private operators manage routes, but under franchising, TfWM would oversee operations. Rising costs and post-pandemic challenges necessitate exploring more efficient models. Investments focus on greener, integrated transport solutions for a sustainable future.

2.0 In More Depth

2.1 National Roundup

Unlocking Regional Potential: Rethinking Inward Investment Strategies for Economic Growth

The levelling up challenge addresses regions trapped in low skills and productivity cycles. [The Productivity Institute](#), tasked by government bodies, explores nuanced inward investment strategies to break this cycle. Inward investment, especially transformational FDI, can boost skills and productivity. Research focuses on key questions regarding investment attraction: prioritizing sectors, nurturing existing investments, emphasizing knowledge creation, and job generation. Evaluating a location's investment capacity is crucial, urging a shift towards region-specific approaches aligned with strengths. Public policy interventions should aim at enhancing absorptive capacity and linkages between investors and local firms.

Strategic Approaches to Foreign Investment Post COVID to improve productivity

The Productivity Institute's [fourth briefing](#) into the UK's Foreign Investment Position post-Brexit and COVID-19, focuses on how strategic approaches to inward investment could bolster regional equality and productivity. Collaborative research by Warwick Business School and Moody's Analytics reveals disparities in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) across regions and sectors, with lagging areas attracting lower productivity FDI in some sectors compared to other regions. Notably, the West Midlands appears to attract more high-productivity greenfield investments than other regions. Addressing these regional inequalities necessitates targeted policies to attract high-productivity investment to underdeveloped areas, aligning with the broader goal of "levelling up" the UK economy.

Public sector knowledge assets review

A [study](#) commissioned by the Government Office for Technology Transfer (GOTT) delves into spinouts originating from public sector knowledge assets. It outlines aims like building a spinout database, analysing equity distribution and innovator involvement, and suggesting best practices. Findings highlight a decline in UK public sector body (PSB) spinouts and variability in equity stakes, influenced by international standards and PSB support levels. Reward policies for innovators vary, with mechanisms like patent payments or spinout shares. Approval processes and risk aversion hinder spinout establishment, calling for streamlined procedures and more expert support. GOTT's interventions aim to enhance spinout ecosystem vitality and equity.

Addressing obesity: A call for systemic change in the UK

Obesity correlates with economic inactivity and reduces productivity among workers. But it is influenced by working conditions, environmental changes, and the food system, not solely individual responsibility. According to a [new report](#) by the IPPR, public opinion favours government intervention over failed individual-focused policies. A holistic approach is recommended, involving all sectors of society to combat obesity. Key policy suggestions include improving school meals, promoting flexible working, investing in anti-obesity initiatives, government funding and regulation, increased local health grants, and expanding NHS interventions within guidelines.

SMF, Labour Economics: Thinking through Labour's economic agenda

With the Labour Party having vowed to achieve the fastest growth in the G7, this [report](#) reflects on Labour's proposed approach and the gaps it needs to fill. The report explores ideas such as "securonomics" and "modern supply side economics" and considers the extent to which there is a clear theory guiding growth plans.

Redefining Conservative Economics

The UK economy boasts strengths like being the sixth largest globally despite its population size and leading sectors in finance and innovation. However, challenges like low incomes, regional disparities, and productivity gaps demand a shift from past economic strategies. Onward's [report](#) advocates for an active industrial strategy to rebuild manufacturing, boost exports, and reduce reliance on foreign

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capital. It proposes tax breaks for families, development zones to increase housing, immigration reforms, and educational restructuring. Emphasizing market reform, national productivity, and fairness, it calls for bold, innovative approaches in any future Conservative Economy.

Labour's High Street Revival: Pledges, Policies, and Practical Implementation

Labour is proposing to revitalize high streets, including short-term interventions such as banking hubs and tackling shoplifting and fundamental shifts, such as replacing business rates and repurposing empty shops for community assets. [These policies](#) aim to rebalance the high street economy and address wider structural issues like insecure contracts and absentee landlords. Labour's approach aligns with trends identified in research projects like the Future Business District study. Cities like Birmingham, Manchester, and London are already implementing similar strategies, emphasizing the importance of practical policy implementation and addressing local economic disparities.

SMF, Assessing Public Support for Member Choice Proposals

A new [article](#) by the Social Market Foundation presents public attitudes to 'member choice' pensions. The UK pensions landscape faces challenges with numerous small pots and issues of adequacy and awareness. Government proposals aim to consolidate schemes, but new pots continue to emerge. 'Member choice' proposals could curb small pot proliferation, empowering savers and enhancing engagement. A survey found 72% support for member choice, especially among those with higher education and existing pension engagement. Concerns about employer support are mitigated, with many not reliant on employer information. While most prefer choice, only 28% would switch providers. Member choice may boost engagement and contributions, yet many still prefer employer management. Overall, it's a step towards addressing pension challenges but may not lead to significant changes in behaviour.

The costs of delaying an increase in auto-enrolment contributions

This [report](#) from Phoenix Group and WPI Economics explores the costs of delaying an increase in auto-enrolment pension contributions. The consensus calls for raising default contributions from 8% to 12%, stressing the urgency of implementation. Delaying could significantly impact retirement incomes, with potential losses of £35k over 15 years, especially detrimental for midlife savers. Economic costs include £16.5bn in investment across various sectors for every 5 years of delay. Future housing costs for retirees are expected to rise, potentially increasing poverty rates and housing benefit spending. Increasing pension contributions offers a partial solution.

Unveiling Progress: Assessing Levelling Up in England Since 2015

The Levelling Up White Paper amalgamated diverse governmental policies, each with its own monitoring frameworks. Recently, a [Levelling Up analysis](#) conducted by the City-REDI looked at how we could establish whether a region had 'levelled up'. Their suggested method utilizes metrics and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aligned with the White Paper's 12 missions to assess Local Authorities' performance in England since 2015. The method adopts a baseline year of 2015, considering data availability and predating major economic shifts. Success was defined by surpassing 2015 averages across metrics and SDGs. Methodological and data issues highlighted include inconsistent data over geographies and the absence of clear monitoring and targets.

How big cities can organise their capacity to think and solve problems

This [article](#) argues a "City Collaborative" could prove a useful tool to leverage the intellectual and technological resources of big cities for effective problem solving. Despite abundant expertise and investments, cities struggle to channel their brainpower towards pressing issues. The concept proposes a systematic approach, akin to a 'city brain', integrating various forms of intelligence. Key components include informal networks, cross-cutting working groups, research commissions, knowledge repositories, collaboration platforms, and citizen engagement. Examples like Open Research Amsterdam and the London Collaborative demonstrate how such initiatives can function, albeit with

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varying success. However, many major cities globally lack structured mechanisms for efficient knowledge mobilization, hindering effective urban governance and innovation.

Revitalising the Civil Service

According to a [report](#) by Reform, the government must elevate its capabilities, breaking from past crisis responses. The Civil Service must refocus on outlier performers, fostering exceptional talent and addressing poor performance to enhance overall effectiveness. The current system fails to attract external talent and stunts internal progression, burdened by managing underperformers. Reform is imperative, according to the report, replacing the current stalemate with a streamlined, strategic Cabinet Office overseeing talent identification and essential functions. Departments must take ownership of their talent pool, with central support and consequences for failure. This shift demands a cultural embrace of excellence, incentivizing top talent while holding poor performers accountable, necessitating frank discussions for meaningful change.

Action needed to address fiscal challenges in UK governments budgeting process

The current spending review cycle concludes in March 2025, coinciding with the end of budgets for UK government departments and local authorities. This [report](#) by the Institute for Government (IfG) argues that due to the impending general election, budget setting for the following year faces unprecedented challenges. Arguing the next government, irrespective of party, must promptly address this issue upon election.

General election puts stop to legislative progress

With parliament dissolved until after the next general election, several pieces of legislation currently making their way through the legislature have been put on hold. Bills include:

- Arbitration Bill
- Criminal Justice Bill
- Data Protection and Digital Information Bill
- Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill
- Football Governance Bill
- Litigation Funding Agreements (Enforceability) Bill
- Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill
- Renters' (Reform) Bill
- Sentencing Bill
- Tobacco and Vapes Bill
- Holocaust Memorial Bill

2.2 Regional Roundup

Labour force headlines

Claimant counts

Latest data showed the total claimant count rose by 0.1% in the WMCA area on the year to April 2024 (UK: 1.9%). The number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16–64 was 6.9% compared to 3.8% for the UK in April 2024. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, Greater Manchester was the second highest at 5.2% down to 2.8% for the West of England.

Latest data showed the youth claimant count rose by 9.3% in the WMCA area on the year to April 2024 (UK: 4.9%). The number of youth claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18–24 was 8.8% compared to 5.1% for the UK in April 2024. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, Tees Valley was the second highest at 7.7% down to 2.6% for the West of England.

WMCA Economic Dashboard May Highlights

The West Midlands Business Activity Index increased from 52.8 in March 2024 to 55.5 in April 2024, the strongest rate of growth since March 2022. The increase in activity was linked to a rebound in demand, new business gains and an improvement in the market sentiment. Meanwhile, the Future Activity Index remains high. Trends in the proportion of businesses that are innovation active continues to fluctuate. Following the national trend (decreasing from 44.9% in 2018–2020 to 36.3% in 2020–22), the WMCA area decreased from 45.0% in 2018–20 to 31.7% in 2020–22. Finally, the labour market continues to slacken with unique job postings falling again in April.

Transport for West Midlands publishes quarterly research briefing

TfWM has published [Issue 18](#) of their Quarterly Research Paper. This quarterly publication captures and highlights some of the latest projects that have been carried out by TfWM and provides links for further reading and opportunities to learn more about the work of the team.

This issue contains:

- Weather and Bus ridership – Winter Study
- Demand Responsive Transport study in Coventry
- Midland Metro Customer Satisfaction Survey 2023
- Stepping Out Survey
- Travel Trends and Behaviours Study (TTABs) 2023–24 Annual Report
- Modelling Spot: PRISM 2019 Update
- Impact of National Express Strikes

WorkWell pilots to provide tailored support for people in their local area so people can stay and progress in work

Fifteen areas across the UK, including Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country, are part of a new £64m pilot aimed at providing integrated work and health support. The initiative, called [WorkWell](#), connects 59,000 individuals with tailored local services like physiotherapy and counselling to aid them in staying in or returning to work. This move follows welfare reform efforts, including a review of the fit note process to relieve pressure on GPs. WorkWell offers personalized assistance from Work and Health Coaches, focusing on managing health conditions and identifying workplace adjustments. The aim is to prevent economic inactivity, boost the economy, and enhance individual lives through a holistic approach.

Mayoral Elections break free from national trends

The mayoral elections highlighted some interesting tensions between local accountability and national political trends. Andy Burnham and Andy Street's campaigns focused on personal records rather than party affiliations, which led to an [article by the Institute for Government](#) which suggests national parties risk undermining this model by emphasizing broader implications for party standing over individual candidate performance. IFG argue that high-profile mayors advocating for local

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achievements bolster the case for effective devolution. While national media may prioritize general election implications, IFG suggest that divergence from national trends in mayoral contests might signal progress towards genuine local accountability.

CNN investigative journalist delves into struggles of Britain's underfunded local authorities using Birmingham as case study

By international standards, English local government has poor levels of local tax collection. In Britain less than 5% of taxes are collected locally. Other countries give local government more revenue raising power. In France 14% of taxes are raised locally; in Germany 25%; and, in Sweden 35%. This is alongside a fall in grant income from central government in real terms between 2009–10 and 2021–22 of 21%. While funding was cut, demand and costs of services rose, often at rates far above national inflation. In 2017–18 Birmingham spent £20 million on home to school transport for children with special educational needs. By 2021–22, this rose to £40 million. The author [emphasizes](#) the need for central government support and highlights the detrimental impact of asset sales and service cuts.

2.3 Regional Business Roundup¹

Connected Places Catapult calls for applications

Connected Places Catapult is [seeking applications](#) for the Clean Futures Accelerator's second round. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with innovative ideas can seek support and funding to address one of four challenges in the green transport sector. A £1m fund is allocated to assist 20 selected companies in this second year of the program, with each eligible for up to £50,000 in funding. Led by Connected Places Catapult, the initiative collaborates with the Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation (BCIMO), Coventry University, and Coventry University Services.

King's Award Success for West Midlands businesses

The West Midlands has seen [21 of its businesses recognised](#) in the King's Awards for Enterprise, out of a total of 252 recipients nationwide. The Awards are designed to recognise and encourage outstanding achievements in the fields of Innovation, International Trade, Sustainable Development and Promoting Opportunity through social mobility.

Manchester Prize finalists include two business from the West Midlands

Two West Midlands organisations – Evophase from the University of Birmingham and Aiolus from the University of Warwick – have been [selected as finalists](#) for the inaugural Manchester Prize, an award recognising breakthroughs in AI for public benefit. Each of the ten finalists are seen as pioneers in the next wave of AI innovations in energy and the environment and have been awarded £100,000 to develop their solutions over the next eight months.

Coventry Building Society acquires Co-operative bank

The [£780m acquisition](#) of Manchester-based Co-operative Bank by The Coventry Society will go ahead, creating a new powerhouse in the UK's high street banking market. The bank is set to return to mutual ownership when it becomes a subsidiary of Coventry and will continue to operate with a separate independent board post-completion. The deal is set to create a combined group with around five million clients, more than 110 branches and a mortgage portfolio of around £70m.

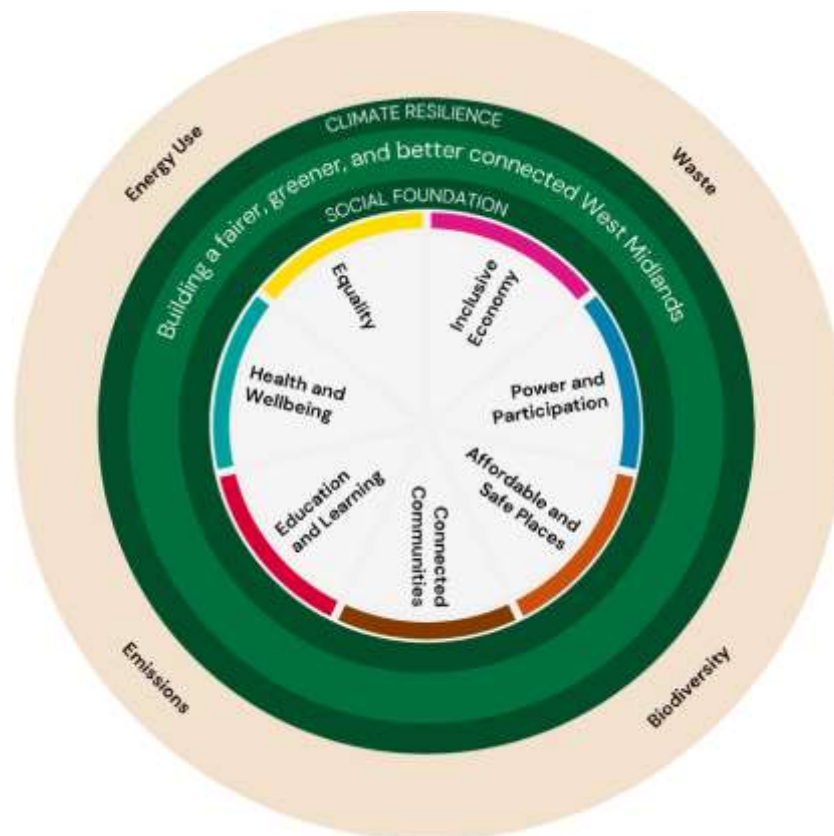
New housing plans for Digbeth approved

More than 1,300 homes [will be delivered in Digbeth](#) after approval of plans from Dandara Living. The scheme will be delivered over across ten new blocks of four to 15 storeys and in five phases. The first four, involve river works alongside the development of 1,056 one to three-bedroom as well as more than 30,000 sq ft of commercial/flexible floor space across the entirety of the ground floor. Phase 5 could see a further 295 homes and over 46,000 sq ft of flexible floorspace developed.

¹ See the [annex](#) for more business updates.

2.4 Inclusive Growth Roundup

This section looks at the regional news highlights which relate to our eight fundamentals of the [West Midlands Inclusive Growth fundamentals](#).



Climate

[Resolution Foundation, How can we decarbonise electricity without disadvantaging poor families?](#)

The [Resolution Foundation](#) explores how a transition to low-carbon electricity is crucial for the UK's journey to net zero, powering not just homes but also transportation. However, this shift requires substantial investment, eventually impacting household costs. Economic shifts suggest a departure from historically low interest rates, challenging assumptions of continuously decreasing clean energy costs. Variable consumption patterns could exacerbate the impact of higher prices on households. Despite these challenges, stopping investment isn't an option. Policymakers must pre-emptively address potential cost increases by ensuring affordable generation contracts, shielding low-income households, and strategizing grid modernization. Increased investment, projected to quadruple in a decade, is imperative for decarbonizing the economy while safeguarding affordability and equity.

[Government calls to address heat health risks, resilience, and improve public awareness](#)

The House of Commons [report](#) highlights the urgent need for action on heat-related health risks and climate resilience in the UK. It emphasizes the significant impacts of heat on health, productivity, and mortality, urging the incorporation of humidity metrics into weather forecasts. Recommendations include expanding green infrastructure, amending building regulations for thermal comfort, and establishing a national retrofit program. The government's response outlines measures taken, such as funding schemes and training initiatives. It acknowledges challenges in disseminating heat-related information effectively and suggests tailored approaches for vulnerable groups. The report also proposes naming heatwaves to raise public awareness, pending successful trials.

Education and Learning

[Rebalancing education in the post-pandemic era](#)

A [groundbreaking study](#) by the University of Exeter reveals the profound impact of Covid-19 on children's education, unveiling a significant decline in both cognitive and socio-emotional skills,

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particularly among disadvantaged groups. International evidence highlights a loss of up to 6 months of learning, disproportionately affecting low-income children. England's academic-centric response fails to address socio-emotional needs, exacerbating long-standing educational disparities. Gender differences emerge, with boys relying more on cognitive skills for academic success, while girls excel with socio-emotional abilities. The repercussions include a forecasted decline in GCSE achievement and widening socio-economic gaps, leading to diminished income mobility. Proposed solutions advocate for holistic approaches, including tutoring, enrichment programs, wellbeing assessments, and teacher support to bridge educational inequalities post-pandemic.

[MAC review recommends maintaining Graduate Route integrity](#)

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) review of the Graduate Immigration Route finds no widespread abuse and no detriment to UK higher education quality. The [report](#) recommends maintaining the route as is, highlighting its alignment with government objectives. It suggests addressing misleading information from agents and calls for mandatory agent registration. Most graduates on the route are postgraduates from non-Russell Group universities, with a majority aged 26 and over. Indian nationals constitute 40% of route users. Despite concerns about job sectors, graduates generally contribute positively to the economy. MAC advises clearer government objectives and better support for international students entering the workforce. Meanwhile, the UK Government has [announced new measures](#) to tackle 'abuse'.

[Health and wellbeing](#)

[Addressing UK's Health Inequalities: A call for collaborative governance and holistic approaches](#)

In recent years, the UK's major political parties have targeted health inequalities through policy missions, acknowledging stark disparities in life expectancy and health outcomes. Despite commitments, little change has occurred since the 2010 Marmot review according to a new academic [paper](#). The government's "levelling up" agenda emphasizes health improvements but lacks specifics on reducing inequalities. Labour proposes a "mission-driven" approach, aligning with existing goals but emphasizing geographic disparities. The paper claims that both parties focus on healthcare, neglecting wider determinants like housing and employment. Urban development plays a crucial role, requiring coordinated efforts across various stakeholders. The authors argue that meaningful change demands a shift from top-down approaches to collaborative governance, integrating public health into all policy decisions.

[Equality](#)

[Diversity Crisis in UK Schools: The Struggle for Representation and Equality](#)

New [research](#) from Warwick Business School reveals a significant lack of diversity in UK primary schools. Over half (55%) of primary schools lack ethnic minority teachers. Additionally, nearly a third (30%) have no male classroom teachers, while 23% only have white female teachers. The lack of diversity extends to senior leadership roles in schools as well. Diverse representation is important for students' academic performance and future equality. However, progress towards diversity remains slow, exacerbated by high teacher turnover and recruitment challenges. Reasons for the shortage of male teachers include low application rates, placement disparities, and higher attrition rates post-training.

2.5 Latest Blog Roundup

[When Developing and Evaluating Place-based Interventions, Do We Need a Double-Theory Approach?](#)

To develop and evaluate place-based interventions, George Bramley [draws](#) on a recent review of the evaluation of place-based approaches by the Youth Endowment Fund.

[Understanding the UK's Higher Education Excellence Frameworks: Why They Matter to Local Policy Innovation Partnerships](#)

Elizabeth Goodyear [explains](#) that more fulfilling partnerships can be formed with Universities when organisations have an understanding of the UK's Higher Education excellence frameworks.

[9DF: A Nine-Dimensional Framework for Community Engagement](#)

Sara Hassan has published a new [paper](#) with Lucy Natarajan which explores the 9-dimensional framework (9DF) that can be used to gain a more community-oriented evaluation of community engagement.

[Improving Economic Statistics in the Creative Industries](#)

Matthew Lyons has produced a [report](#) with Kevin Connolly for the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre that proposes a comprehensive approach to capturing the true value of creative industries at a regional level.

[Activating Communities for Regional Renewal](#)

Alison Park, Head of Creating Opportunities of Improving Outcomes, UKRI, and Deputy Executive Chair of ESRC [discusses](#) how research and innovation are crucial for delivering benefits across the UK. But how can we achieve this while appreciating the unique needs of specific areas? Alison looks at the important role that the Local Policy Innovation Partnerships (LPIPs) program can play to help foster R&D that meets local needs.

[Tackling Congestion and the Rise of Single Occupancy Cars](#)

Daljit Kalirai, Sales and Partnerships Director at National Express, [explains](#) that by prioritizing mass transit, reducing congestion, and fostering partnerships with businesses to promote commuting by bus, the West Midlands can mitigate environmental damage and stimulate economic growth.

[Conceptualizing Decent Work: An Explorative Study of Decent Work in England's Midlands Region](#)

Anne Green, Xuebing Cao, Tony Dobbins, Paul Johnstone and Will Foster have published a [research article](#) in the Policy Studies journal on the study of decent work in the Midlands.

The West Midlands Insights on Society and Economy (WISE) newsletter is a monthly publication by the West Midlands Combined Authority that sets out the social and economic trends that matter to the West Midlands. The newsletter contributes to our understanding of the economic conditions of the West Midlands, as part of the wider regional research and intelligence ecosystem. Further information is available on the West Midlands research and insights website at wmca.org.uk/research and previous issues are available at wmca.org.uk/wise.

This edition was prepared by Phillip Nelson, Victoria Tidy, and Tawfieg Zakria, and incorporates commissioned content from the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) and other regional partners.