



# Generating growth and opportunity in the West Midlands

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Birmingham

# Universities in the West Midlands: overview

The impact of universities on people and places can be truly transformational. Universities are crucial to sparking growth and opportunity, by bringing together student populations, research partners, local businesses, and employers to create vibrant communities, jobs, and opportunity across the UK.

## Universities in the West Midlands: in numbers

Number of universities: **10**

Number of full-time UK undergraduate students: **112,485**

Number of part-time UK undergraduate students: **16,545**

Number of UK postgraduate students: **33,240**

Number of international students: **49,005**

Total number of students: **211,275**

Number of staff (full time equivalent) employed: **28,965**

Gross output of universities: **£8.1 billion**

Universities in the West Midlands are located across key cities including Birmingham, Coventry, and Wolverhampton.

Analysis by London Economics estimated that universities in the West Midlands had a **total economic impact of £18.82 billion** in 2021–22. This figure includes the economic activity generated by employing people, purchasing of goods and services, the local spending power of staff and students, as well as the impact of research and knowledge exchange activities.

In 2021–22, universities in the West Midlands spent over **£2.1 billion** on staff. Staff spend a proportion of their income with local businesses and on local services which supports a thriving economy.

# Training public sector workers

Training key public sector workers is one of the most visible ways in which universities contribute to their local communities. Even at the height of the pandemic, universities were able to continue teaching students on vital medical courses and support them into front line key work.

Universities work closely with their local NHS services to train the doctors, nurses, paramedics and other allied health professionals of the future, but also to refresh the skills of key health workers to ensure top quality patient care.

Since 2021, universities across the West Midlands have trained around:

- **16,900** nurses
- **5,650** medics
- **18,825** teachers

## Case study: Simulated placements at Staffordshire University

The [Centre for Health Innovation at the University of Staffordshire](#) has been recognised by International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL) for its healthcare simulation standards.

As well as bringing immersive learning to more than 2,000 student nurses, midwives, operating department practitioners and paramedics, the Centre also offers an exciting platform for new collaborations with local business and healthcare and technology industries.

# SMEs and business growth

Universities support existing businesses of all types through their infrastructure, facilities, and expertise. They also encourage the creation of new businesses and social enterprises.

In the West Midlands universities support entrepreneurialism across local communities and within their student populations to spark the development of new businesses. Start-up companies founded by students and graduates of universities in the West Midlands turned over more than **£24 million** in 2023–24, and spin-out companies with some university ownership turned over more than **£26 million** in the same year.

Spin-out, start-up and social enterprise companies founded at universities in the West Midlands attracted more than **£118 million** in external investment in 2023–24 and created more than **3,00 FTE** job positions.

Universities also support existing businesses to grow, especially small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and microbusinesses. SMEs are critical employers across the UK, particularly in areas that don't have larger employers or well-developed economic clusters. They are typically the businesses that have the greatest potential for growth and job creation, but the least time or resource to achieve this. Universities in the West Midlands provided consultancy to SMEs over **1,000 times** in 2023–24.

## Case study: New Keele Deal

The New Keele Deal is a plan for £70 million of investment by Keele University, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust and the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to use the potential of Keele University's world-leading research and facilities.

This investment will help to tackle low productivity and grow a positive culture of innovation and research within the region. It will deliver a significant number of higher value jobs for the next 20 years, improve local health and healthcare, and inject innovation into the heart of the local business community to allow them to be more globally competitive.

## Case study: SymbioTex a graduate start-up from the University of Wolverhampton

SymbioTex is a start-up founded by University of Wolverhampton graduate Olivia Simpson. While studying Medical Science and Clinical Practice, Olivia undertook a placement in the NHS, where she witnessed first-hand the vast amount of medical plastic waste generated. For example, each year over 60 million inhalers are distributed in the UK and only 0.5% are ever recycled.

SymbioTex uses renewable seaweed as a sustainable alternative to plastic. The patented material allows manufacturers in the medical sector to create bio-degradable 3D printed products like gallipots, sharp bin lids and cosmetic pots.

# Research and development

Universities' research activities attract investment, make world-leading discoveries, generate knowledge, and create and nurture new, innovative businesses and jobs across the UK.

Universities support existing businesses of all types by using their facilities and expertise to drive local collaboration. They also encourage private sector investment into research and development by developing collaborative relationships with businesses.

In 2023–24, higher education providers across England provided the use of facilities to companies **29,747 times**, including, for example, a wind tunnel and a digital media suite.

The research universities conduct in partnership with business, the NHS, charities and other organisations is diverse in discipline and scope. University research is responsible for major scientific and medical breakthroughs, but also plays a major role in our day-to-day lives.

## Case study: University of Birmingham's Tyseley Energy Park

The University of Birmingham has invested more than £3 million of quality-related (QR) research funding in a new facility that is driving the development of innovative energy technologies in partnership with government and industry.

The Tyseley Energy Park (TEP) is an energy innovation zone that is helping shape how Birmingham develops infrastructure for renewable heat and power, energy storage, clean transport fuels and advanced waste processing.

*'This is a fantastic opportunity for the University to put back into the City of Birmingham as it develops as a place which is at the centre of the energy transition in the UK; the Energy Capital.'*

Professor Martin Freer, Director, Birmingham Energy Institute

# Building pride in place and local communities

The UK's creative industries are one of the economic success stories of the past decade, growing at four times the rate of the UK economy as a whole between 2010–19. They bring international production teams to the UK, while employing local and regional talent.

Universities play a key role in supporting the creative industries and cultural life in the UK, from producing skilled creative graduates to working with local councils to supporting the UK's cultural prosperity and social wellbeing.

A recent study by Savanta ComRes for Universities UK revealed that more than two-thirds (69%) of parents think students gain vital creative skills at university, which are essential to powering the UK's creative industries.

The West Midlands region is rich in culture. In 2023–24, over **1.3 million attendees** accessed cultural events run by universities in the region, including museum and gallery exhibitions, public lectures and dance and music performances. Universities in the West Midlands make sure culture is free for everyone to access: free events and material (such as podcasts and online lectures) were accessed **over 8 million times**.

## Case study: City of Culture award for Coventry

Coventry was awarded the UK's City of Culture for 2021. As a Principal Partner, Coventry University played a significant role in ensuring the City of Culture had a lasting legacy for everyone who lives, learns, and works in the city.

This included hosting the Assembly Festival Garden with four pop-up venues and programme of events. Students and staff at the university also supported the festivities through their projects and volunteering. For example, Coventry Digital, an archive of thousands of photos, videos, maps and documents, was launched to capture Coventry's rich cultural history.

Universities UK is the collective voice of the UK's universities, bringing them together to pursue a common cause: thriving universities, serving society.



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