

WMCA AI Adoption Blueprint

Guide to the outputs

June 2025



West Midlands
Combined Authority

AND

Note on the use of this report and its components

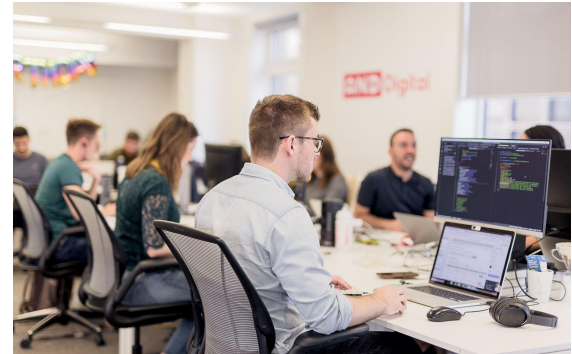
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Background, objectives and approach to the AI adoption and economic case work

The West Midlands has long had the foundations to lead in applied AI, with world-class research institutions, industrial strengths, and a dynamic cluster-based economy. To retain its competitive edge as other regions pursue similar ambitions, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) commissioned work to accelerate AI adoption and translate strategic intent into clear, investable plans.

This work:

- Developed an **AI Adoption Roadmap to guide practical adoption** across high-growth clusters, with a primary focus on a set of early adopters, and additional direction for secondary and emerging clusters.
- Aimed to **secure visibility and build trust in the region's AI ambition**—by using roadmaps, action plans, and proposals to demonstrate readiness and capability to internal stakeholders, businesses, and external audiences including Government and potential investors.

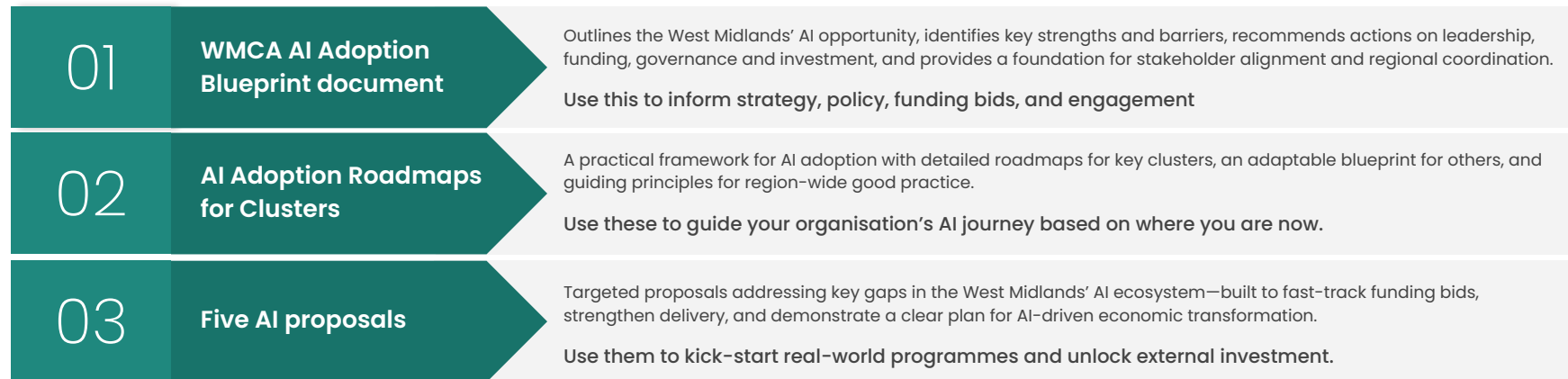


WMCA appointed AND Digital to deliver the commission during the first quarter of 2025. The work was grounded in a series of stakeholder interviews with businesses, institutions, and cluster leads from across the region and beyond, ensuring it reflects both local priorities and national policy direction.

Introducing the WMCA AI Adoption Blueprint and supporting tools

The WMCA AI Adoption Blueprint is a practical framework to help accelerate the use of artificial intelligence across the West Midlands. It is designed for regional leaders, businesses, public sector organisations, and universities who want to take practical steps to use AI in ways that boost innovation, improve productivity, and grow the regional economy.

It consists of three key components:



How to use this guide

Start with the **Blueprint** to understand the region's AI opportunity and align your strategy; Use the **Roadmaps** to assess your organisation's readiness and follow the path that fits your stage and sector; Apply the **Proposals** to fast-track funding bids, shape delivery programmes, or build partnerships around shared priorities.

Introducing the AI Adoption Roadmaps

What are they?

A flexible, three-tiered framework to guide organisations of all sizes through their AI journey—whether starting out or scaling up.

Who are they for?

Businesses, clusters, public sector bodies, and others across the West Midlands looking for practical, tailored support to adopt AI.

What do they include?

Tier 1

Detailed, step-by-step roadmaps for early adopters

- HealthTech, Aerospace/Manufacturing and Creative Industries
- Helping organisations pilot and apply AI quickly

Tier 2

A flexible, general roadmap that clusters can adapt for their own sector

- Designed to be adapted for subsequent clusters
- Clusters can create Tier 1-style roadmaps by conducting interviews and assessments

Tier 3

High-level principles and good practice for AI adoption

- A guide for clusters planning long-term AI adoption
- Encapsulate the vision, ethics & governance standards

How to use them?

Begin by segmenting member organisations based on their AI maturity. The roadmap is not linear—it functions as a flexible toolkit, with tools and templates that can be picked up as needed to support practical progress.

Why they matter?

They reduce barriers, support collaboration, and turn ambition into action—enabling confident, coordinated AI adoption across the region.

Introducing the AI Proposals

What are they?

A set of five strategic proposals designed to remove key barriers to AI adoption and accelerate real-world delivery across the West Midlands.

Three AI proposals form a **value chain** that supports companies from early-stage growth, through hands-on experimentation and awareness & capability-building to operational integration of AI.

AI Adoption Accelerator

Provides structured guidance, affordable testing environments, and essential tools for confident experimentation and implementation.

AI Activation Model

Offers tailored roadmaps and access to vetted AI providers, enabling deeper integration into operations and sustained productivity gains.

AI Startup Studio

Supports emerging businesses with funding, mentorship, and investor access—positioning the region as a hub for AI entrepreneurship.



Underpinned by two **foundational AI proposals** targeting skills development and well governed, ethical and trusted use of AI.

AI Skills Development

AI Governance & Ethics

How to use them

Each proposal is developed to be flexible, modular and provide a solid starting point in responding to funding opportunities. Use them as templates for collaborative delivery, adapt them to suit specific needs, or include them in funding bids to accelerate implementation.

Introducing the AI Proposals

The following pages provide a summary of AI projects and programmes concepts that have been developed as part of the AI Adoption Blueprint.

The WMCA will use these initial scopes to inform thinking around its priorities for AI as part of its policy and programme work on tech adoption more broadly.

AI Proposal 1

AI Adoption Accelerator & AI Sandbox for SMEs in the West Midlands

This proposal sets out a region-wide initiative to support SMEs in the West Midlands to adopt artificial intelligence (AI), addressing barriers such as low awareness, limited technical capability, and lack of access to affordable tools. The programme comprises two integrated components: the AI Adoption Accelerator and the AI Innovation Sandbox.

The AI Adoption Accelerator is a fully funded, scalable digital solution that builds AI capability and confidence. SMEs can choose between a self-serve learning pathway or a structured 12-week cohort programme featuring expert-led sessions, mentoring, real-world case studies, and practical tools to help identify use cases, develop prototypes, and plan implementation.

The AI Innovation Sandbox is a secure, cloud-based environment that enables SMEs to experiment with AI tools in a low-risk setting. It offers pre-configured environments, curated datasets, and technical support to reduce the cost and complexity of innovation.

Delivered through a regional digital platform and supported by public, academic, and industry partners, this initiative guides SMEs from awareness to adoption—boosting innovation, productivity, and inclusive regional growth.

Introducing the AI Proposals

AI Proposal 2

AI Activation Model for Business Adoption

This proposal outlines a region-wide initiative to help SMEs in the West Midlands move from AI awareness to adoption. While many have completed early-stage training, few have the tools, support, or confidence to implement AI in practice. The AI Activation Model addresses this gap with a practical, scalable approach to turn interest into action.

It combines five core components: sector-specific AI roadmaps and playbooks, a digital marketplace of trusted providers, hands-on implementation support, workforce and leadership training, and scale-up assistance. Together, these provide SMEs with a complete journey—from identifying opportunities to embedding AI into operations.

A flexible digital platform underpins the model, enabling self-serve access or structured support based on business needs. This ensures SMEs receive step-by-step guidance, expert help, and actionable tools that deliver real value.

Delivered through a regional partnership of public, academic, and industry stakeholders, the programme is built for long-term impact. The AI Activation Model enables SMEs to deploy AI confidently, enhancing productivity and innovation while positioning the West Midlands as a national leader in practical, business-focused AI adoption.

AI Proposal 3

AI Skills Development and Training Program for the Workforce

This proposal outlines a region-wide AI Skills Development and Training Programme to equip the West Midlands workforce with the capabilities needed for responsible AI adoption. While interest in AI is growing, many organisations face significant skills gaps. This programme addresses that challenge through a coordinated, scalable, and sector-focused approach.

It brings together four core components: regional skills mapping and coordination; sector-specific pathways and training partnerships; applied, business-facing AI learning; and flagship initiatives including a digital AI Skills Platform and Hub, an AI Leadership Academy, and an AI Skills Challenge Fund for employer-led pilots.

A digital platform supports flexible learning—offering self-assessments, progress tracking, and tailored content from foundational literacy to advanced, sector-specific training. Delivery is blended across online, in-person, and workplace formats. Built around a strong regional partnership of public bodies, providers, employers, and inclusion organisations, the programme is designed to grow and adapt over time. It will close critical AI skills gaps, drive SME readiness, and position the region as a national leader in workforce-centred AI capability.

Introducing the AI Proposals

AI Proposal 4

Regulatory & Ethical Challenges in AI – A Guidance Framework for the West Midlands

This proposal outlines a plan to create a Regulatory and Ethical AI Guidance Framework for the West Midlands, helping businesses—especially SMEs—adopt AI responsibly and with confidence. As AI use grows, many organisations struggle to navigate legal, ethical, and governance requirements. Without clear guidance, SMEs risk non-compliance, reputational harm, and missed opportunities.

The framework offers a practical, coordinated solution built around six components: governance toolkits, compliance and ethics training, risk and impact assessment models, legal advisory services, sector-specific guidance, and a Regional AI Governance Hub to drive knowledge-sharing and engagement. Supported by a digital platform, the framework provides flexible access to resources—ranging from self-serve tools to structured support such as workshops, certifications, and tailored legal advice.

Delivered through a regional partnership model, the programme aligns with national AI policy and builds long-term capacity. It positions the West Midlands as a national leader in trusted, ethical AI adoption—turning regulatory readiness into a driver of innovation.

AI Proposal 5

AI Startup Studio and Investment Readiness Programme

This proposal sets out plans for an AI Startup Studio and Investment Readiness Programme to accelerate AI venture growth in the West Midlands. Despite strong research, talent, and demand, the region lacks a dedicated support ecosystem for AI startups, which often face long development cycles, limited technical backing, and difficulty attracting informed investors.

The programme offers end-to-end support across five components: tailored founder development and investment readiness; a hands-on AI Venture Studio for technical co-development; access to market testing with regional partners; a digital AI Shop Window to showcase ventures to investors; and coordinated infrastructure to drive long-term growth.

A digital platform underpins the offer, giving founders flexible access to tools and structured cohort support. The programme is delivered through a regional partnership of public bodies, accelerators, universities, funders, and industry networks. By bridging the gap between research, innovation, and investment, this initiative will help AI startups scale locally, attract private capital, and establish the West Midlands as a leading hub for responsible, investable AI ventures.



Thank you

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