

20  
2004  
-  
2024

YEARS

OF WMG AND  
THE MANUFACTURING  
SUPPLY CHAIN



Founded 200 years ago, bathroom manufacturing firm,  
Samuel Heath & Sons Plc in Birmingham with WMG's James Black and Liz McArdle

# WMG at the University of Warwick is celebrating 20 years of helping SMEs innovate and grow.

During this time, WMG has delivered 12 impactful SME and supply chain programmes supporting SMEs across the region with investment from Innovate UK, West Midlands regional funding, and the public and private sector.

## The programmes are:

2004 - 2006  
**Innovation Direct**

2004 - 2008  
**West Midlands Collaborative Commerce Marketplace**

2008 - 2013  
**International Digital Lab**

2010 - 2012  
**Low Carbon Vehicle Technology Project**

2012 - 2015  
**International Institute for Product and Service Innovation**

2015 - 2018  
**Product Innovation Accelerator**

2016 - 2020  
**Advanced Steel Programme**

2018 - 2023  
**Digital Innovation for Manufacturing**

2021 - 2022  
**Made Smarter West Midlands 1.0**

2021 - onwards  
**Net Zero Innovation Network**

2022 - onwards  
**Made Smarter West Midlands 2.0**

2023 - onwards  
**Business Energy Advice Service**

As a High Value Manufacturing Catapult centre, we offer a suite of targeted support to the manufacturing sector, as well as delivering established programmes such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and our own internship scheme.

Acknowledged as an exemplar in how to deliver knowledge exchange and innovation programmes, WMG has played a pivotal role in the revival and ongoing development of the West Midlands region.

## Our Approach

Over the course of the last twenty years, our programmes have encompassed short knowledge exchange projects, internships, events, collaborative research, and the provision of leading-edge workspace, equipment, and expertise. Today we continue to work with the same model and have over 100 company projects currently in progress with a range of dynamic and talented businesses in the UK.

Our aim is to make SMEs more productive and profitable, backing businesses to make more in the UK and to level up the West Midlands region.

Typical projects delivered with SMEs include product design and development, materials testing, manufacturing feasibility, process innovation, shopfloor digitalisation, business change and transformation.

We are now helping SMEs manage the energy crisis with a tailored **Manufacturing Energy Toolkit** and have a **Net Zero Innovation Network** which delivers roadmaps to Net Zero for businesses as well as sustainable change projects and the funding of new assets.

## Customer Focus

We have an SME charter to ensure that the businesses we work with know the steps we take to respond to their query. It is a robust process that results in us either supporting that business or referring them to another provider that can help.

The SME customer is at the heart of the programmes we create and the projects we undertake with businesses are often centred on how we can help them meet their client's requirements.

## Learnings

Over twenty years, we have developed a good understanding of the needs and requirements of manufacturing firms. Our main takeaways from delivering knowledge exchange activity of this nature are:

**Keep it simple** - Businesses find the support landscape confusing, and its complexity is off-putting.

**Hide the wiring** - Businesses do not care who owns schemes, or the bureaucracy behind them. They want easy access and assurance of quality.

**Make it stable** - Settle on an approach then leave it alone. Businesses cannot keep up with the changes and providers are change-weary. This is why our model has remained unchanged for much of the twenty years we have been helping SMEs innovate and grow.

## Engagement & Legacy

We develop success stories and promotional materials to provide insight about the importance of innovation in the manufacturing sector. We secure high profile coverage across regional, national and industrial press in order to inspire manufacturers to work with us.

The International Digital Lab and International Institute for Product and Service Innovation represent our legacy in physical form. These labs are research hubs that house equipment and machinery for collaborative research with manufacturers and are venues for events and workspaces for University and Industry teams.

Each project we deliver is a building block to the next as we strive to help SMEs become more "innovation active," widening opportunities for companies that are still new to digital technology and are yet to embrace more sustainable modes of operation. We encourage manufacturers to move up their respective value chains by investing in in-house design capabilities and create products of their own, which can lead to better margins. Our most recent evaluation report conducted for the DI4M programme concluded that **92% of respondents felt the support had positively changed the behaviour of the business.**

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"This special 20 year report shows that targeted, high value support can help SME manufacturers accelerate growth, improve productivity, and create jobs. It is imperative that we continue to be a guiding force to help businesses implement new technologies, develop their teams, and continue to innovative and prosper. We have an important legacy to protect and continue and I am delighted to lead a team of industry experts working tirelessly to do just this."

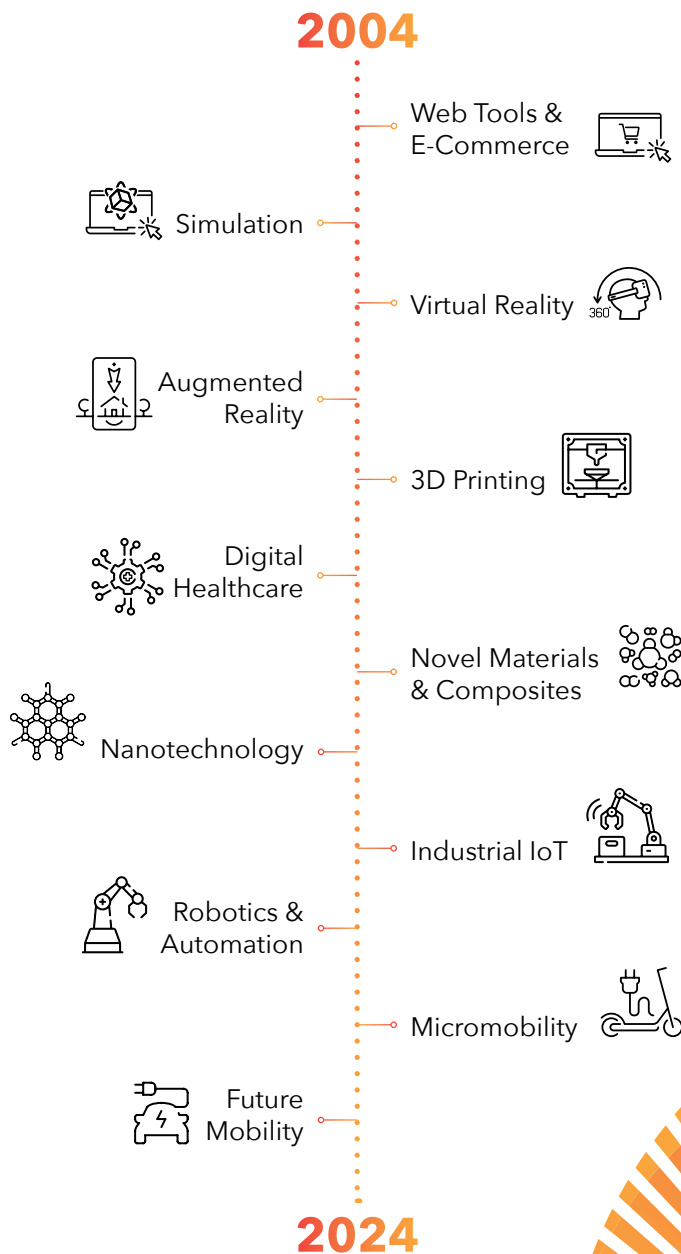
**Dr Mark Swift**

Director of SME Engagement



## Bridging the gap between innovative technology and industrial application

Over the years, we have helped manufacturers navigate new industrial landscapes and stay one step ahead with technologies such as:



### Key delivery initiatives include:

- Online marketplaces to help SMEs access new customers
- A new multi-discipline digital laboratory
- A new product and service institute
- Internships to embed innovation in manufacturing SMEs
- The largest digital adoption programme in the Midlands
- Establishing the first UK Net Zero network for the manufacturing sector
- Delivering the first (pilot) energy advisory service for energy intensive businesses
- Coordinating multi-country SME EU research projects such as PlasTeam and Imagine

## Impact in Numbers

(Gathered through independent evaluations and company feedback data.)



**13,900**

jobs that would not have existed without our intervention



**350**

new businesses created



**355**

internships



**780**

new product and process innovations



**5,580**

company projects  
(see pages 6 & 7 for examples)



**15,000**

strong SME network

## Value for Money

Over the course of twenty years, we have contributed almost **half a billion pounds** in GVA (Gross Value Add) to the West Midlands economy.

For every **£1 invested**, programmes have **returned between £8 and £22** back to the local economy\*

\*This figure is based on the programmes where GVA was recorded. Most of the data gathered to compile the impact statistics are from evaluation reports completed by external reviewers. It should be noted that it is only regional programmes that mandate independent reports and there will be differences in how each reviewer compiles data of this nature. Data from some programmes is missing. Data gathered for the Made Smarter scheme is forecast GVA only.



**20** YEARS OF WMG AND THE MANUFACTURING SUPPLY CHAIN

## Success Stories

From helping start-ups gain funding to supporting supply chain SMEs scale up and become OEMs, we have worked with over 2000 businesses on specific projects. Below you will find a small selection of highlights from the last 20 years:

### Midlands Assembly Network

WMG has worked with the MAN group and its eight member companies since 2011. They work across various supply chains including automotive, aerospace, and medical.



"WMG has been an outstanding source of support and guidance for all members of the MAN Group. The specialist assistance has helped us unlock innovations, bring new services to market, achieve efficiency gains and, accelerate our move towards sustainable manufacturing."

**Peter Davies**

Co-Chair of the Manufacturing Assembly Network and CEO of James Lister & Sons



### Goodfish Group Ltd

Serving Tier 1 Suppliers and OEMs, Goodfish is an established group of high growth toolmaking and injection moulding companies with bases in the Midlands and North West. Back in 2015 we helped the group move forward with their own product ideas for the cycling industry allowing them to become an OEM selling directly to their customers for increased profit margins. We also supported them to implement company wide energy monitoring, resulting in a 20% reduction in monthly energy usage.



### Autins Group

Specialist insulation firm Autins Group has worked with us for over ten years initially when they started their expansion into Sweden. From important chemical testing work to collaborating on an SME leadership scheme as well as internships, we supported them on their journey to further international expansion and eventually to public ownership, securing work from JLR and Polestar amongst others.

### Barton Coldform

(now part of Optimas Group)

In 2015, specialist cold forging firm Barton Coldform worked with WMG to trial additive manufacturing for developing demonstrator parts for key clients in the automotive sector. They were spending up to 14 weeks to develop trial parts and through the partnership cut this down to just several days. As a result, they also secured new client orders worth £300,000 and continued to grow.

### Pashley Cycles

Britain's longest established bicycle manufacturer, Pashley has collaborated with us for over ten years on a series of projects including the development of two major products.



"Working with WMG gives Pashley the opportunity to take advantage of skills, expertise and facilities which we would never otherwise have access to. This is really helping us create robust and reliable, yet lightweight products which we're confident will give us a competitive advantage in the market."

**Adrian Williams**

Managing Director, Pashley Cycles



### Char.gy

Startup company char.gy led by Richard Stobart created a new electric vehicle charging point product - which can be easily installed onto existing lampposts. In 2018 we helped rapidly design, build, and test a prototype of the new electronics board to achieve EU certification deadlines. We also supported with some further testing work, helping them to take the product to market, set up a factory established in Coventry, and win major new contracts.

### Ramfoam

Almost a third of UK manufacturers saw orders decline by up to 50% following the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, according to a report by Make UK. As a result of the downturn, Birmingham-based Ramfoam immediately thought about how it could use its expertise to fight covid and created a PPE product for the NHS. We helped them scale up their facilities to produce 54 million RamfoamCare+ products, a protective face visor and foam headpiece that frontline staff could assemble in seconds.



### Polestar

Our programmes also include OEMs who work with us so that we can support their supply chains. Our current Net Zero Innovation Network invites one large company to join each cohort.



"At Polestar we realise that the journey towards Net Zero and improved sustainability can't be done alone. We want to work with the wider automotive industry and engage our supply chain to help improve the overall impact of the UK automotive industry on the environment, so that these benefits are not just realised by Polestar but by any other company who works with our suppliers."

**Victoria Rothwell**

Principal Engineer, Polestar



Our aim is to make  
SMEs more productive  
and profitable.




Get in touch with us  
to find out more:

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 [warwick.ac.uk/wmgsme](http://warwick.ac.uk/wmgsme)

 [wmgsme@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wmgsme@warwick.ac.uk)

 024 761 50230

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