

# Black Country Innovation Service

Funded by Innovate UK

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Innovate  
UK

# Background to the Black Country Innovation Service

- ❖ The Black Country Innovation Service is funded by Innovate UK (IUK)
- ❖ It came about due to **“Talent and Skills being a barrier to innovation”**.
- ❖ IUK have funded university projects for a long time. Recently, they wanted universities to set up outpost centres for innovation and talent.
- ❖ Work done by some staff at Innovate UK and Innovate Business Connect identified that **“Further Education (FE) colleges were important to talent and skills and getting students with the skills for innovation”**.
- ❖ The conclusion: **“outpost centres already existed via FE colleges”**.
- ❖ FEs were seen as having a **“learn and do approach”** i.e. **design and do it** e.g. through apprentices, T-level students, employer engagement etc and are important centres for innovation.
- ❖ IUK set up 34 FE Colleges Innovation pilot projects across the UK including 15 across 3 clusters of the WMCA area: Black Country (5), Birmingham and Solihull (6) and Coventry and Warwickshire (4).

# Black Country Innovation Service

- ❖ **Is a twelve-month pilot project from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and now extended to 31 March 2026. Beneficiaries are SMEs.**
- ❖ **It is delivered by five Further Education Colleges, namely:**
  - ❖ Walsall College (the Lead Partner)
  - ❖ Dudley College of Technology
  - ❖ Wolverhampton City College
  - ❖ South Staffordshire College
  - ❖ Halesowen College
- ❖ **Each college has set up an Innovation Centre (Hub) for local businesses seeking technical expertise, practical support and access to college equipment & facilities.**
- ❖ **With teams of Innovation Consultants, Technicians and other college staff to work closely with local businesses**

# Dudley College Manufacturing Hub

Based at the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology, Dudley College has set up a Manufacturing Hub. The hub provides services in various technological domains including:

- ❖ **High-end CNC production**
  - ❖ **Automation and Robotics**
  - ❖ **Computer Aided Design**
  - ❖ **Rapid Prototyping**
  - ❖ **Additive Manufacturing/ 3D Printing**
  - ❖ **3D Scanning**
  - ❖ **Materials and Product Testing**
- ❖ **Based in a £22m campus at the heart of Dudley, the hub has given local businesses, the opportunity to engage with a range of engineering and manufacturing technologies.**

# Wolverhampton College Digital Innovation Hub

At Wolverhampton College, the Digital Innovation Hub is a virtual hub. The hub provides services in various technology domains including:

- ❖ **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**
- ❖ **Cyber Security**
- ❖ **Green Technologies**
  
- ❖ **The hub also provides digital transformation services in collaboration with Cisco, IBM and ThirdwaveICT offering a series of free self-paced courses.**
- ❖ **These courses are available to all colleges, students and businesses.**

# South Staffordshire College Green Technologies Hub

Based at the SSC Net Zero Centre, South Staffordshire College has set up a Green Technologies Hub. The hub provides services in various technological domains, including:

- ❖ **LEAN**
  - ❖ **Net Zero**
  - ❖ **Green Technologies**
  - ❖ **Engineering**
  - ❖ **Construction**
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- ❖ **Services will include Training, Workshops/ Demonstrator sessions.**

# Halesowen College Digital Innovation Hub

The Halesowen College Innovation Hub is a drop-in-access point, working with Halesowen College's Skills Shop. The hub provides services in various technological domains, including:

- ❖ **Web technology**
  - ❖ **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**
  - ❖ **Cyber Security**
  - ❖ **Other technology interests**
- ❖ The hub also has access to college studio facilities which are operated by T-Level students under the guidance of lecturers, to record and deliver virtual workshops from the studio.

# Walsall College Digital Hub

Based at the Wisemore Campus, Walsall College has set up the main Digital Innovation Hub. The hub provides services in various technological domains including:

- ❖ **Electric Vehicle (EV) Safety for nontechnical staff**
- ❖ **Podcasting on how to plan, set up, record, edit & deploy your podcast**
- ❖ **360 degrees Image and video capture – hardware, planning, capturing & editing 360 degrees content**
- ❖ **Software Training in a range of software**
- ❖ **Service – 360 Photography and video service**

Services include Training, Workshops/Demonstrator and Testing sessions e.g. AI Marketing including cyber security, hyper MILL 2.5D and 3D Machining and 2.5D and 3D parts.