



WORKPLACE HEALTH & WELLBEING

SEPTEMBER 2020



Workforce wellbeing and economic prosperity go hand in hand

Covid-19 has shone a spotlight on the nation's physical and mental health. And so as we embark on a series of deep dives into important challenges and opportunities facing our region, workplace health and wellbeing was the obvious choice of topic for our first Midlands Engine Partnership focus.

A number of partners have contributed their time and insight into creating this long read. Over the next few pages we explore issues including mental

health, with a particular focus on the Mental Health and Productivity Pilot, innovations within our region's universities, the effects of coronavirus, rehabilitation and more. Many voices are also featured, from Mind's Faye McGuinness and Jaguar Land Rover's Dr Steve Iley, to key university leaders. Thank you to everyone for collaborating and ensuring that the subject is covered from many interesting angles.

Supporting our region's wellbeing at work



Health and wellbeing are inextricably linked with economic prosperity, with the latter dependent on the productivity of our region's workforce. Now, as we navigate COVID-19, the physical and mental health of our people is more important than ever.

The UK has already faced a devastating year. National and regional lockdowns have inevitably taken their toll on our citizens' mental health. As we move into winter and start to face the prospect of a second wave, how will this impact our mental wellbeing, and in turn our region's prosperity?

Mental health across the Midlands

Physical and mental health and wellbeing across the region has inevitably been affected by the pandemic. A positive COVID-19 diagnosis, bereavement, quarantining, navigating symptoms and waiting for test results has impacted some people, or those close to them. For others, changes to working patterns, such as a shift to remote working, have also played a big part in mental wellbeing. Later on in this Midlands Engine deep dive into this issue, we highlight some of the work being done across the region to support organisations and their employees through the pandemic.

There are direct links between good mental health and strong productivity. The statistics can help to

paint a clear picture of just how important mental wellbeing is for output. **An Enterprise Research Centre report funded by the Midlands Engine** - 'Employee wellbeing, mental health and productivity in Midlands firms: an employer perspective' - produced the statistics below amongst its findings.

Absenteeism is one of the big impacts on productivity as a direct result of mental and physical wellbeing. Indeed, 41% of establishments reported at least some long-term (more than four weeks) sickness absence in the last year. And this type of absence is associated with a 27.2% drop in productivity.



For most of us, what work looks like has changed a great deal in the last six months, and it has already been recognised that these changes, unless understood and supported, have the potential to cause significant mental health problems, and more.

I have seen first-hand the effects of poor workplace mental health on colleagues and the impact of lost productivity for businesses. Beyond the personal impact is the economic impact - a loss of some £45billion a year in the UK. So I know just how important our partnership-led Mental Health and Productivity Pilot programme is in supporting Midlands businesses, especially during these exceptionally challenging times.

Sir John Peace
Midlands Engine Chairman

Meanwhile, 31% reported mental health sickness absence - which was more likely to be in larger or multi-site organisations. As a result, over half of these said they had noticed an impact on company performance, with productivity lower by up to 24.5%.

While issues out of work are often cited as a cause of poor mental health, research has shown that some in-work factors also have an impact. This includes lone or remote working, client expectations on time, quality and cost, job insecurity and recruitment practices.

The figures highlighting impact on overall productivity may seem alarming. And with a report from Deloitte suggesting the cost of mental ill health is a potential £45 billion a year, the financial statistics are also staggering. But many employers will only

know the exact costs to their organisations if they measure productivity.

Presenteeism is also a big factor on our region's mental health - when employees feel they must be in work at all costs attend when they're unwell or work beyond their contracted hours. 33% of firms reported presenteeism, which is more likely to occur in the hospitality and business services sectors.

In fact, presenteeism contributes £29 billion in costs to employers. And there is a human cost, too. Sadly, around 800,000 people take their own lives every year, and many are in work, so employers have a key role to play.

READ MORE

Making good on our intentions

Reassuringly, many employers do offer support to their workforce. The European Research Council's report found that 44% of establishments offered some form of proactive support in terms of mental health, and almost half of these provided training for line managers. Just over a fifth of all firms have a mental health plan, 35% have a health and wellbeing lead at senior or board level, and 40% use data to monitor their employees' health and wellbeing.

And it seems most are keen to continue improving their efforts, with almost two thirds of companies saying they would like to provide more mental health and wellbeing support.

While this is an admirable vision, it's vital that organisations see this through. In such uncertain times, employee wellbeing is an essential part of productivity and prosperity. Good working conditions with the right support equals boosted morale and better output.

Our regional response

The **Mental Health and Productivity Pilot (MHPP)** is a three-year programme funded by the **Midlands Engine** and forms the core of our regional response to mental wellbeing at work. It is a collaborative partnership of local universities, mental health charity Mind, local authorities and Public Health England. The overarching aim of the MHPP is to support employers across the Midlands, helping to improve workplace mental health and wellbeing.

The **MHPP** will see new workplace interventions implemented at pilot organisations and existing interventions rolled out in small, medium and large businesses across the Midlands Engine region.

"The power of this collaboration lies in the shared endeavours of all our diverse partners to provide human support to employers and employees in the region and catalyse change in ways we think, talk



Professor Guy Daly, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Coventry University

and act on mental health and wellbeing – something that affects everyone," says MHPP Lead Partner **Professor Guy Daly of Coventry University**. "Mental health and wellbeing is the underpinning condition to protect and safeguard humans in the workplace and beyond. MHPP's aim is to support employers in the workplace achieve this, which in turn will ensure employee satisfaction and consequently have a positive impact on productivity."

As well as contributing to reducing mental health distress, the programme aims to contribute to the break down of the barriers to accessing care, and to support people experiencing mental illness in their continuation in and return to work. The ultimate aim is to make a positive contribution to organisational productivity, in both monetary and wellbeing terms.

Dame Julie Moore, Chair of MHPP Strategic Advisory Board, and Sir Norman Lamb, key MHPP member:

"The MHPP programme is a collaborative effort bringing together organisations across Midlands looking to improve the mental health of the workforce. This pandemic has made this work even more vital, as working conditions have changed so significantly. Many have lost their usual support systems and employers will need to find new ways to support their staff through these difficult times."

[READ MORE](#)

In its first year, the focus of the MHPP has been on developing a baseline of need and current activity, something it achieved via a combination of the employer survey; qualitative research and systematic review of literature.

This research found that there is still much to be done to help organisations develop a coherent approach to workplace mental health and wellbeing. Currently, there is a limited understanding of the impacts of mental health issues on productivity, and the associated financial costs.



Faye McGuinness, Head of Workplace Wellbeing Programmes (Strategy and Development)

"Measuring presenteeism and productivity is not easy," says **Faye McGuinness, Head of Workplace Wellbeing Programme for Mind**. "We may not see a huge shift during the lifetime of the pilot. But we would like to see an increase in awareness of the importance of workplace mental health across the region: employers, in terms of what they can do for their staff, and employees, in terms of what they can do to look after themselves. But there will be actions as well – we've produced a contract for employers to sign up to."

"For many years workplaces have talked about health and safety, but the focus has really been on safety. Now we need to see more of a focus on health and creating psychologically safe environments."

[READ MORE](#)

The research also showed that for the MHPP to meet the outcomes required, fundamental changes in workplace culture, and operational practice is required. A review of existing workplace mental health models showed that there is currently no single mental health framework that meets the

diverse needs of organisations across the Midlands, and that there is a regional difference between the East and West Midlands in terms of funding and logistics. The MHPP is trying to meet this challenge by working collaboratively across the Midlands to help employers in this context.

Via the MHPP, there is an opportunity to provide clearer evidence for the future delivery of interventions to workers in the private and public sector across the Midlands.

It is a hugely significant driver for improving workplace mental health and wellbeing in the Midlands. Research findings are clear. Mental health issues at work are a major concern, from both an economic and human perspective. As the MHPP moves into its second year, it will kickstart new pilot interventions, ramping up existing ones and engaging further with employers.

As part of this second phase, researchers from Midlands Enterprise Universities partners, Coventry University, University of Derby and University of Lincoln are working with businesses across the region. They will be supporting and advising participants in the scheme on ways to implement effective mental health strategies. Midlands Innovation University* members - Warwick, Birmingham, Nottingham and Loughborough - are also part of the MHPP, in both the first phase of baseline research as well as the new pilots.



Dr Paula Holt, Pro Vice-Chancellor Dean of the College of Health and Social Care at the University of Derby

Dr Paula Holt, Pro Vice-Chancellor Dean of the College of Health and Social Care at the University of Derby, said: "The cost to the economy of mental health across the UK could be more than £45bn this year.

"Yet research shows that for every £1 invested in supporting the mental health of employees, the return to the employer in productivity is £5. Those returns are greater still when employers take preventative, rather than reactive, steps to help their staff."

[READ MORE](#)

Faye McGuinness adds: "In addition to funding, Midlands Engine provides the ability to strengthen collaboration so that we can ensure our work impacts on a regional level at scale. We can create a huge amount of learning that can be adapted across the UK."

"So the Midlands Engine role is about influencing the regional and national landscape when it comes to workplace mental health. But Midlands Engine will also be about ensuring the work we do now has a meaningful legacy - to ensure this three-year programme has a lasting effect."

Also supporting the region's wellbeing at work is the **Institute of Mental Health (IMH)**. This partnership between the **University of Nottingham** and **Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust** was created to ensure that research and education are informed by the NHS agenda and needs and to make sure the work of researchers is aligned and relevant to patient needs.

"At IMH we have recently looked at the impact of COVID-19 on workplace health, in particular the impact of being furloughed on mental health compared with those who continued working," says **Louise Thomson, Associate Professor in Occupational Psychology, IMH**. "How do organisations communicate with those working



Louise Thomson, Associate Professor in Occupational Psychology

from home or that are furloughed? There are some interesting findings coming out.

"We know that physical and mental health are intertwined - and both are important for overall wellbeing."



Dr Steve Iley, Chief Medical Officer, Jaguar Land Rover

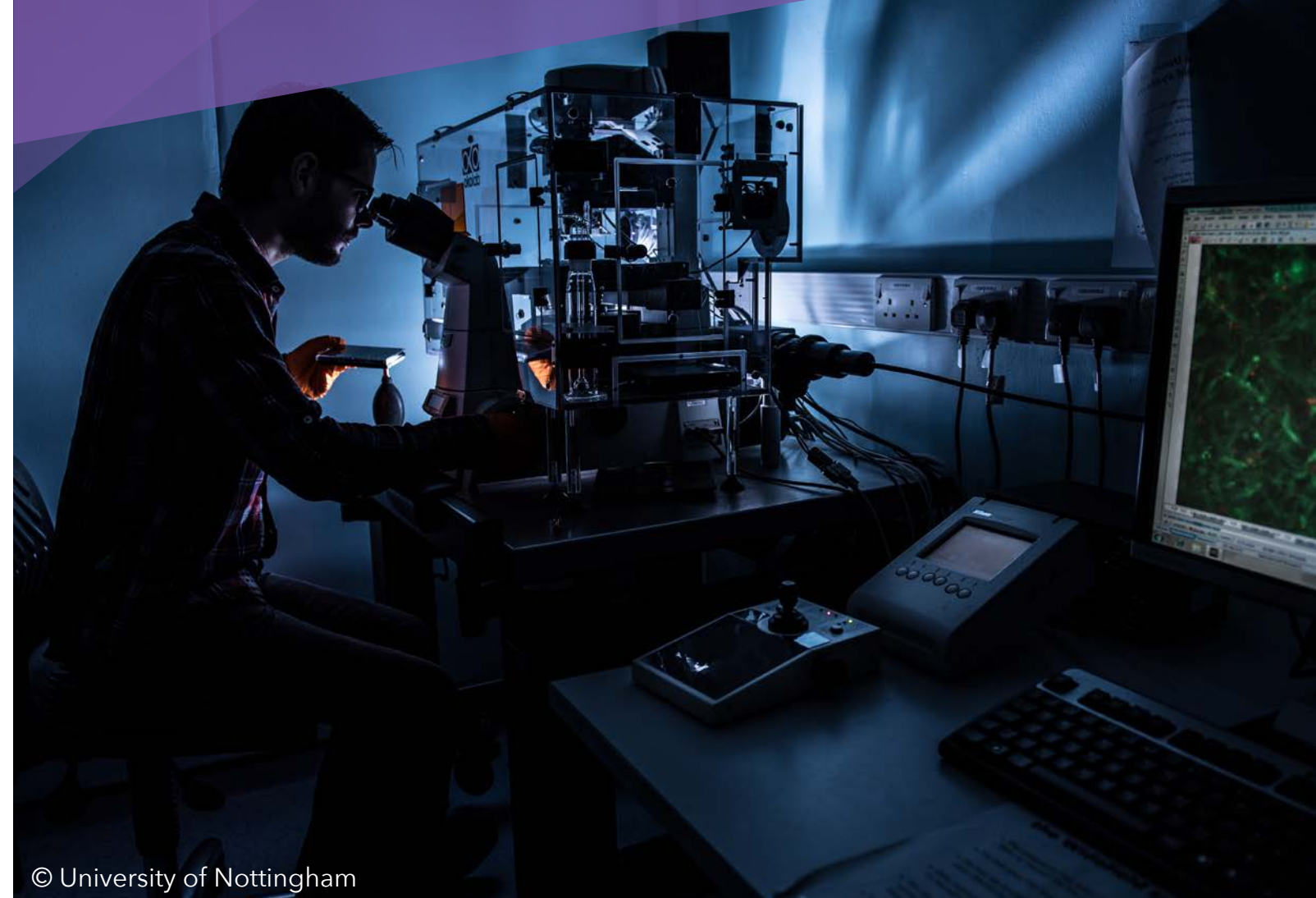
A sentiment echoed by **Jaguar Land Rover**, who have been placing an increased focus on their employees' health and wellbeing. **Dr Steve Iley, Chief Medical Officer, Jaguar Land Rover**, says: "We have developed a global wellbeing brand and strategy linking all elements of health and wellbeing under the Mind-Body-Life pillars. We provide support and options for employees and managers at all stages of their healthcare journey, whether they are thriving or struggling.

"We concentrated in the early days on making it accessible and open source, deepening the offerings as colleagues got used to accessing through the app and website.

"We know that good health and wellbeing leads to better engagement with colleagues. There is already published evidence on linking wellbeing to engagement and secondarily reducing absence. We want to contribute to the evidence that it actually makes a difference, and have shown in internal data that the managers we have put through our mental health training make earlier referrals to occupational health and shorter absences. It has been so successful we are rolling it out to all managers this year.

"Our absence levels have been reducing over the last year and our engagement as measured through our Pulse survey is increasing."

[READ MORE](#)



© University of Nottingham

Creating practical innovations in health & social care

The Midlands Engine Partnership has identified health and life sciences as a priority area for focus during 2020/21. This is of particular importance as we reflect on the COVID-19 learning points and look to recover the Midlands economy. The overall aim is to encourage the creation of practical innovations that address clinical and social care need and that are created within the Midlands. In doing so, we will increase the strength and resilience of the regional supply chain into the health and social care service delivery network as well as increase the regional economic impact of this sector.

Midlands Engine Health aims to work closely with a range of national partners and funders e.g. the Department for Health and Social Care, the Office for Life Sciences, UKRI including Innovate UK, NIHR, the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for International Trade. The alliance will also coordinate the visions of various local stakeholders including LEPs, local authorities, business representative organisations and regional and local NHS groupings.

The impacts sought by Midlands Engine Health:

- Acceleration of the economic impact of the med-tech and wider health science agenda across the Midlands
- Creation of agreed objectives based on data and intelligence linked to the med-tech and health science sectors
- Promotion of regional capability and opportunity at scale, including providing good visibility for Government policy and investment
- Securing future investment in key initiatives in this field that generate greater economic impact in the Midlands

Midlands Engine Health will ensure that the region's five core strengths are central to its ambitions. These are medical technologies, imaging, health data, rehabilitation and trauma, and clinical trials.

[READ MORE](#)

Keeping the Midlands moving

Meanwhile, Midlands universities have been coming up with innovative new ways to keep our physical health in peak condition, with a series of projects looking into boosting our wellbeing at work.

For example, sitting for long periods of time can be linked to poor health. So how can we keep ourselves moving more during the working day? Researchers at **The National Centre for Sport and Medicine (NCSEM-EM)** have exploring this issue.

A partnership between **The University of Leicester, Loughborough University, The University of Nottingham, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust and Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust**, the NCSEM-EM has looked into ways to reduce sitting time and keep us moving more. Their findings discovered that using adjustable workstations, communicating about sitting behaviour and encouraging standing can lead to an improvement in health and wellbeing.

For those not at desks but on the road, the Structured Health Intervention for Truckers (SHIFT) is a programme developed by NCSEM-EM researchers, designed to help truckers lead healthier

lives. Interactive education session, physical activity challenges and exercise equipment and workouts that can be done in the cab all combine to keep lorry drivers as active as possible.

Meanwhile, building on existing knowledge about the benefits of connecting with nature, at home or in the workplace, the **University of Derby** is seeking to find out how different ways of engaging with nature benefit mental wellbeing.



Professor Miles Richardson of the University of Derby

One of the lead researchers in the Nature Up Close and Personal project, **Professor Miles Richardson of the University of Derby** says: "We know that getting up close and personal with nature is good for wellbeing, but nature-based citizen science has a different focus to the noticing nature activities we've tested successfully before. Rather than simply enjoying the sounds, sights and beauty of nature, citizen science requires people to identify wildlife and directs people to engage with nature in a methodical way.

"In this project, we will test whether the benefits of citizen science are unique, add to or complement those that ask people to simply enjoy the good things in nature. The results will enable us to make recommendations on the most effective ways to engage with nature for wellbeing."



Physical health for mental wellbeing

Good mental health often goes hand-in-hand with good physical health. Regular exercise and movement, quitting smoking, eating healthy foods and managing stress can all play their part in keeping wellbeing levels up. For some organisations, investing in the wider health of their people forms part of their mental health and wellbeing strategy.

"Food and mood are inextricably linked and there is increasing evidence to support this, too," says **Dr Anne Coufopoulos, Associate Dean, Coventry University**. "Food choices that include starchy

carbohydrates such as wholegrains, fruit and vegetables at regular times keep blood glucose levels stable, and eating breakfast can often help us feel full for longer and help prevent snacking on high-fat or sugary foods throughout the day."

Almost half the firms across the Midlands provide healthy food and drinks, while 30% offer financial wellbeing advice. In terms of physical exercise, 29% of organisations provide incentives, and 26% give training to improve personal resilience. The larger the firm, the more likely they are to offer all of these.

'...we have a lot of things in place We have like push bikes on the side that you can take out at lunch time. We sort of insist on people having the break from their desk that they go and sit, either in the meeting room, which is quite nice, it's got a big sort of large screen TV if you wanted to put the TV on. We're right in the middle of rural Shropshire, so we got a lot of bird feeding stations.. We've got a garden for the staff to use, picnic benches to sit outside on.

Marketing Director, Manufacturing, Small firm, West Midlands

'...we do have an office dog..... quite often if people who have just, you know, if they've come off the phone to a customer that's annoyed them or something, and sometimes they just come in and they'll just have a little cuddle with him.'

Head of Data & MIS, Training provider, Medium size firm, East Midlands

'... we have brew Mondays, we have things like, gym or GP benefits, so all employees will either have a sports membership or private health care, so that's all offered to all employees, we do try and do a lot of employee engagement, which is all linked to mental health if you like, it's about- but it's more about releasing often, not directly saying it's mental health.'

HR Benefits & Compensation Adviser, Logistics, Large firm, West Midlands

The proposed National Rehabilitation Centre is also a prime example of the connection between physical health and mental wellbeing. This flagship project has drawn from military experience at Stanford Hall Defence National Rehabilitation Centre, and will form a regional centre of excellence.

Dr James Hopkinson, Joint Clinical Chair, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire CCG, said:

"The creation of an NHS Rehabilitation Centre will provide NHS patients with access to teams of skilled professionals working as part of a medical consultant-led team to support their rehabilitation,

enabling them to return to their daily lives. The potential benefits include greater access to care through open referrals, increased capacity for specialist rehabilitation in the region and shorter waiting times for treatment.

"We believe that the services proposed will provide better outcomes for patients and crucially, help them get back to their lives sooner because they have received intensive rehabilitation."

READ MORE



Moving through COVID-19 and beyond

It's abundantly clear that the pandemic has had a massive impact on our region's economy, with lockdown causing unprecedented changes to working practices. It has also thrown up significant new challenges for employers as they navigate the balance of remaining productive and supporting their employees.

As part of the MHPP, **Loughborough University** has created a new toolkit for Midlands-based businesses, offering free resources and support to manage the return to work of employees on sick leave during the pandemic.

Speaking about the project **Dr Fehmidah Munir, from Loughborough's School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences**, said: "This is an important time for us all to support the return to work of employees whilst taking care of their mental health. Our toolkit can be used by any employer or employee where mental health may be a concern, even if that is not their primary reason for sick leave."



Dr Fehmidah Munir, from Loughborough's School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences

[READ MORE](#)



Supporting staff and enhancing productivity is also the focus of a research project led by **Aston University in partnership with the Universities of Birmingham, Keele and York**.

The pandemic presents a real threat to the mental health and wellbeing of workers at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are 99.9% of UK businesses. This collaborative project will develop a multi-disciplinary perspective on the best strategies, interventions and policies informing SMEs regarding how to support their staff and boost their productivity.

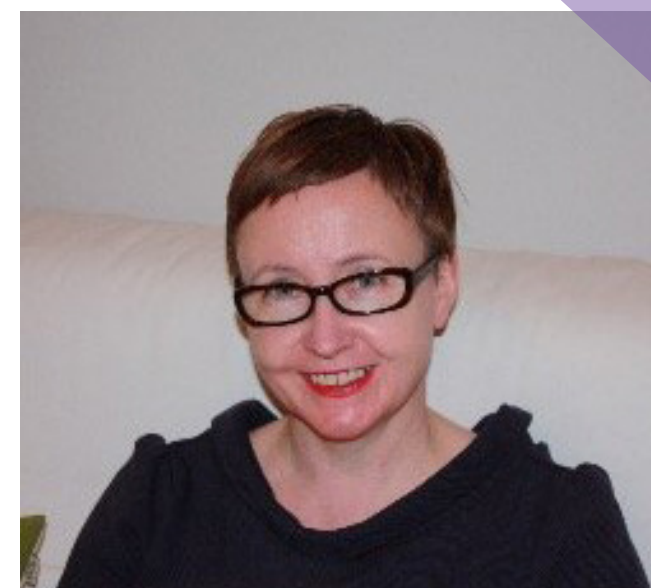
[READ MORE](#)

Meanwhile, in a collaboration with **The Women's Budget Group (WBG) and The University of Warwick, The University of Nottingham** is seeking to discover how working-class women are responding to increased pressures presenting by coronavirus. The WBG found that 2.5 million of the 3.2 million UK workers employed in the highest-risk roles during the pandemic are women, many of whom are low paid. This is leading to them carrying an extra physical and emotional burden.

Dr Tracey Warren, Professor of Sociology, said: "We know that working-class women already worked tirelessly through their 'double-burden' of work at paid employment and then at home before coronavirus. Now we can get a very clear picture of the whole of the UK and how the pandemic has affected women."

And work-life balance is also under the spotlight. In their project **COVID-19: Work-Life Balance and the Pandemic**, researchers at **The University of Leicester** are examining the effects of new ways of working instituted in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our region, along with the rest of the nation and indeed the world, has faced immensely challenging times lately. And it seems these are set to continue, at least for the short term, as we steer our way through the winter months. It is clear that a number of regional initiatives are already in place to support employees' mental wellbeing, with further projects planned by the MHPP. Employers must be mindful of the commercial costs of not introducing wellbeing strategies, and understand that bringing in workplace support can help them not only meet their responsibilities but also boost productivity.



Dr Tracey Warren, Professor of Sociology



All images credited to source websites, Tweets and press releases



**TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR
NEWSLETTER CLICK HERE**



midlandsengine.org



**FOLLOW US ON
SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Midlands Engine is a coalition of Councils, Combined Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), Universities and businesses across the region, actively working with Government to build a collective identity, to enable us to present the Midlands as a competitive and compelling offer that is attractive at home and overseas. Copyright © 2020 The Midlands Engine, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is: Midlands Engine, Trent Bridge House, Fox Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham, NG2 6BJ

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

Every effort is made to provide accurate and complete information in the Midlands Engine newsletter. However, Midlands Engine cannot guarantee that there will be no errors and makes no claims, promises or guarantees about the accuracy, completeness of the contents of its newsletter and expressly disclaims liability for errors and omissions in the contents of this newsletter.