

# News

From the Association of Regional Observatories



## May 2009

Yorkshire Futures launch  
"Progress in the Region"

Intelligence East Midlands  
support sub-regional climate  
change research

Spotlight on... the West  
Midlands

North East Regional  
Information Partnership  
introduces "About the Region"

North West Regional  
Intelligence Unit supports the  
development of the regional  
strategy evidence base

The launch of a new  
regional observatory: Insight  
East

South West Observatory  
conference examines the  
challenges faced by the region

London's DMAG Borough  
Stat-pack 2009 now available

South East England Intelligence  
Network boasts refreshed  
website

This quarterly newsletter is designed to regularly update the Association of Regional Observatories and stakeholders with current events and news of note. Please feel free to circulate this to those who might be interested. Submissions for the next newsletter should be made by the end of July.

## All ARO Meeting: June 25th, The Studio, Birmingham

This meeting is open to all those working in an organisation that's a member of ARO, and is much more than a meeting - it's a chance to meet your colleagues and learn new skills in an inspiring environment. The morning will focus on area profiling; a topic which continues to develop, and will be of importance as Local Economic Assessments become a priority. The afternoon will be an interactive workshop on the research and policy-making process. Add to that a chance to hear snapshots from work in other observatories, and you get a really worthwhile day so make sure you've got this date in your diary!

### Sub-groups

The Association can be a good way of working with your colleagues in other observatories who have similar professional interests to you. ARO is supporting GIS specialists to get in touch with one another, and is funding their attendance at a relevant conference. The modelling specialists amongst us are also considering how

to use their expertise to benefit the network as a whole. Do you think there's a way in which ARO can help you to network and learn from colleagues? If so, let the Coordinator know.

### The ARO wiki

Wouldn't it be great if there was a list of all staff in observatories? Somewhere to share future research plans whilst still at the early stage? A way of saying that you've got expertise or experience in a particular area, and that you can help advise colleagues in other observatories? Or even a way of working collaboratively on documents or tenders? The wiki is a website for everyone who works in a regional observatory, that can be edited and used by them in the ways they want. If you haven't signed in already, the Coordinator can help you out, and coming soon will be a point of contact in each observatory who can help you get the most out of it.



## Events coming soon

### May 2009

12th: East Midlands Intelligence Network event - Population and Migration, 10am, Nottingham Science Park

13th: European Spatial Observation Network workshop - Targeting analysis on migration and economy, 11.15am, London

14th: Burisa conference - Location, location, location - Whither geographical information? 10am, London

20th: Local Government Chronicle conference - Fundamentals of Information Management, 9am, London

### June 2009

2nd: RSS seminar - Measuring Change over Time in Worklessness and other small area statistics, 5pm, London

3rd: South West Public Health Annual Scientific Conference, Weston-super-Mare

8th & 9th: NWRIU research conference, Liverpool

### July 2009

7th: Data Visualisation day - giCentre, City University, London

## Yorkshire's Progress Report - an improving performance in difficult times



The number of adults in the region doing regular sport is above the national average

Hilary Benn, Minister of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, joined over 200 delegates attending the launch of the 'Progress in the Region' report. The report, produced by Yorkshire Futures, assesses progress in key areas like transport, jobs, housing, crime and the environment.

*"We must not lose sight of the wider issues that affect people's wellbeing. I congratulate everyone who has not only helped to bring about significant improvements but has worked to ensure that we are better informed than ever before about the state of our region and that we act on the evidence."*

Hilary Benn MP

Good news that stands out includes:

- A 48% increase in the region's Index of Sustainable Economic Wellbeing (an indicator that adjusts GVA to take account of social and environmental aspects of growth)

- Income (median weekly pay) is the second highest annual growth in the country at 3.5%
- Total recorded crime has decreased since 2002
- The number of adults doing regular sport and active recreation has increased and is above the national average.

The report also points to 'Landmark Issues' where the region is working to tackle problematic long term trends such as:

- Transport - the trend to more traffic, longer journeys and a higher proportion by car and lorry, with consequences for congestion and emissions
- Climate change - greenhouse gas emissions are not yet reducing in line with targets and 'adaptation' issues such as flood risk are also key
- Productivity and Innovation – innovation and the need to raise business R&D investment remains a key issue.

Speaking at the launch, Bea Jefferson, Programme Manager at Yorkshire Futures said "In such uncertain economic times, it is important to remind ourselves of the steady progress we have made in the region over the past 10 years. Progress in the Region highlights these improvements, but recognises that there are still areas where we need to do considerably more if we are to move towards fully sustainable development. The economy is undoubtedly important, but maintaining improvements in our environment, health and quality of life, and reducing inequality have to remain a central goal for regional policy makers".

For the full report, and the four "Progress in the City Region" reports, see <http://bit.ly/4D01b>

## Intelligence East Midlands supporting research into climate change policy at sub-national level

IEM and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) are supporting a full-time PhD studentship based at the University of Nottingham.



Nottingham's Jubilee Campus library

This innovative research project will focus on the delivery of climate change policy at the sub-national level, principally within the East Midlands, and examine ways in which sub-national policy contributes to achieving national climate change policy goals.

The project will also investigate tensions between national and sub-national climate change policy and between proposals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other policies at the national and sub-national level.

Throughout the duration of the project, briefings papers and seminars will be used to disseminate research findings to a wider policy/practice audience; in particular, outputs from the literature review, survey and interviews.

Warren Pearce has been selected as the research student for this project. Warren holds an MA in Public Policy, specialising in climate change policy, and has been Programme Assistant at Regeneration East Midlands since September 2007.

Preparatory discussions are now under way with the project starting in October 2009. If you would like to find out more about the project, please contact Warren or read the project summary: <http://bit.ly/XCRe1>

# The West Midlands Regional Observatory

## The recession: short- and long-term responses

### What might the West Midlands look like post-recession?

The West Midlands Regional Observatory is currently exploring what the West Midlands region might look like post-recession, through commissioning a series of “think pieces” that explore how the region can prepare itself for the end of the downturn.

The ultimate aim of the report will be to stimulate debate, promote discussion and influence policy on the future growth of the region. The focus will be on the future of the West Midlands, rather than on the effects of the recession, and will explore the region’s ability to maximise post-recession potential.

We are currently commissioning a number of authors, who will each write a chapter for the report. Some of the themes we hope to cover include: lessons that can be learnt from past recessions about how the region adapted to change; how changes will affect the workforce, what skills will be needed, where the skill gaps will be and how people’s work patterns will change; and whether this is this a good time to address environmental concerns and what opportunities are available.



*What skills will be needed in the future?*

We hope to have the report available for launch in July, and it will inform the discussion at the Observatory’s annual conference on 20<sup>th</sup> October.

### An intelligent response to the recession

Alongside the Observatory’s continuing work on the medium to long term economic prospects of the region, the current economic downturn has highlighted the importance of regular up-to-date analysis of short term leading indicators.

Since the middle of 2008, the Observatory has provided monthly briefings on emerging economic conditions. Through regular contact with regional Chambers of Commerce, Engineering Employers Federation, Confederation of British Industry, Office for National Statistics and regional agents from the Bank of England, we are able to collate the latest evidence and provide updates to partners.

Looking ahead at the potential impact of the downturn on the region, as well as individual local authority areas, is a critical part of identifying the key areas for intervention. As new information becomes available, economists are being forced to review their approaches to forecast the prospects for 2009 and beyond.

The Observatory has been leading research in advancing regional models to examine structural economic change. We have highlighted the weaknesses in traditional economic models, most notably where these models rely on the continuation of statistical relationships as the basis of projecting forward.

Evidence from emerging economic data highlights that these relationships have been significantly strained. This is more pronounced at local levels where the importance of key employers is more marked. For example, if an employer exits a local economy, the impact is felt and noticed more at a local level than it is when viewing the sector as a whole at a regional level. The requirement therefore is for a flexible

*The impact of employers’ decisions is more marked at local level*

and adaptive model that enables analysts to explore a range of potential impacts of employment change on local economies within a single framework.

The Observatory’s Integrated Policy Model (IPM) provides an important tool for examining the potential implications of the recession for local authorities in the region. The model has the flexibility to incorporate revisions to economic conditions and how they may impact across neighbouring local areas. The model draws on national and regional forecasts, enabling the Observatory to incorporate international and national impacts on certain sectors such as motor manufacturing. These are combined with the impacts, direct and indirect, of localised economic change on sectors such as retail or consumer services.

In a rapidly changing economic climate, it is essential to have a model flexible enough to examine emerging implications of the downturn. The IPM will allow the Observatory and its partners to look at a range of scenarios at different geographical levels, including the potential depth and duration of the recession. This has the strength of enabling a range of potential impacts to be considered, rather than reliance on a single forecast reflecting national impacts.

Read more on the Integrated Policy Model: <http://bit.ly/qNltd>

Read more on the recession monitoring: <http://bit.ly/61YJy>



### North East introduce online report to keep partners up to date with the important information "About the Region"

**About the Region (ATR)** is NERIP's successor to 30 years of the State of the Region Report. The main difference is that ATR will be an on-line product only. This means that it will be possible to keep the product constantly up-to-date, and also that there are no constraints around the length or range of content.



ATR will tell a series of stories about Business, People, Place and the Environment in the North East, illustrated with graphs, maps and tables. The data behind the indicators will be downloadable from the site.

ATR is being coordinated by the NERIP team, with experts on different themes writing individual chapters. ATR will be a key tool for policy-makers seeking to understand the issues the region faces, now and in the future, as they develop the integrated Regional Strategy. For more details contact Rebecca Hulbert ([rebecca.hulbert@nerip.com](mailto:rebecca.hulbert@nerip.com)).

### North West RIU produces weekly economic briefing

The current economic downturn presents challenging and difficult times for firms, individuals and Government. In light of this the Regional Intelligence Unit has continued to provide a weekly summary of economic conditions and have added an NWDA produced monthly overview which is more qualitative and provides anecdotal evidence from regional businesses on issues being faced. Experian, on behalf of the NWDA, also produces a monthly economic briefing which provides a macroeconomic context for the regional and national economies.

For more details, see the latest NWRIU newsletter: <http://bit.ly/Vqvg7>

### North West's regional evidence stimulates debate to prepare for the regional strategy

The Regional Intelligence Unit (RIU) is now updating the Regional Strategy evidence papers, following a series of consultation sessions held during September 2008 and taking account of new or updated data sets. The papers are also being updated in conjunction with many kind offers of help received from consultees and it is expected that the papers will change and evolve with the discussion, either in content, coverage or relevance of topics going forward. The purpose of the evidence papers was to be a first draft to stimulate debate and discussion, in developing an approach to formulating a new regional strategy.

It is important to emphasise that these papers do not constitute the full evidence base required; backward looking data updates clearly do not explore future priorities or choices

about future actions. That exploratory work will occur during 2009 and starts with an analysis of the issues facing the region and the principles we might adopt – the "Principles and Issues Paper". This has been published jointly by 4NW and NWDA and was subject to full consultation.

#### State of the Region Report

The RIU has just published the 'State of the Region Report' which is a culmination of work that has been carried out by the RIU team throughout 2008. It draws together work carried out within the 2007/08 research programme, drafting of the Regional Strategy evidence papers and the constant data and intelligence monitoring work the team does.

Find it online here: <http://bit.ly/6o4j5>

### Intelligence East Midlands learns the lessons of analytical training

#### The 'why?' and 'how?'

Intelligence East Midlands offered a full training programme for the first time in 2008, as part of the wider Regeneration East Midlands training package. The courses were aimed at those working in the public and voluntary sectors with little or no experience of research and analysis but who need to find and use evidence to inform their work.

Conceived as a series of introductory sessions, the programme covered the key steps in the process of using evidence, from finding data online to disseminating findings. By restricting the size of the groups in each session, there was greater opportunity for tailoring content to participants' needs as well as fostering an environment where people felt comfortable asking questions.

#### Feedback

Participants at all the training sessions reported a clear increase in their

confidence levels between the start and end of the day, with almost all agreeing that they would be able to use what they had learnt in their project or team. From the longer-term interviews conducted so far, 85% of participants agreed that the training had made a significant and positive difference to them.

Most participants selected courses from the IEM programme which interested them, rather than responding to gaps in their knowledge that they'd already identified; in other words they "didn't know what they didn't know". Research following the end of the programme has also confirmed the potential for a greater market for training in the future. IEM's 2009 programme, formed in partnership with the RIEP and working with emda and the ONS Regional Statisticians will cover the most successful courses from 2008, and some new sessions.

# insighteast

economic intelligence for the east of england

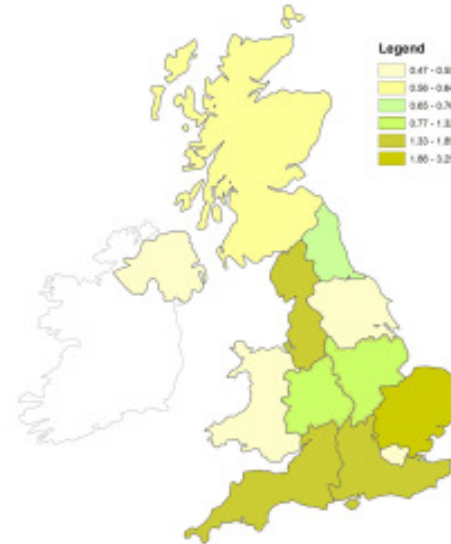
## The launch of 'Insight East': the new economic intelligence centre for the East of England

Insight East - the new economic intelligence centre for the East of England was launched on 27 March with an event on the current challenges facing the region and its response to recession. Funded by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), Insight East's role is to help ensure that decisions about the economy are better informed.

Insight East provides a range of services to ensure the region's decision-makers have better access to current information on the economy and factors affecting it. These include:

- quarterly economic briefings on the state of the regional economy
- special research reports on specific factors affecting the economy
- use of geographic mapping techniques for providing and analysing intelligence
- a fully searchable online resource of all Insight East materials, together with access to a wealth of materials from other organisations
- regular electronic briefings you can subscribe to – keeping you up to date on latest Insight East news and reports available on the website.

At the launch of Insight East, the report 'Innovation Insight: The Innovation Performance of the East of England' was released. This report reveals that this region is highly successful when it comes to innovation and is one of the top three performers amongst the 12 UK regions for 21 out of 36 measures of innovation performance. Of these measures, the region has the best performance of all UK regions for nine measures, including the highest level of business innovation expenditure, the



Source: CBE BEIRD by Government Office Region (2006), ONS GVA (2006)  
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*Business Enterprise Investment in Research and Development in UK regions as a proportion of Regional GVA, 2006*

highest share of employment in research and development personnel, and the largest share of enterprises who actively innovated.

The East of England's innovation performance also performs strongly when compared to other EU and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) regions.

But skills may be holding back the innovation potential of the region. Ranking 10th for graduates in the workforce, and 12th (last) for the number of higher education graduates who confer their degrees in the region per capita, the region performs worse than most other UK regions when it comes to higher education.

Nonetheless, innovation is a regional strength that has a lot of further potential, and will help us emerge from recession into recovery.

More information is available at [www.insighteast.org.uk](http://www.insighteast.org.uk)

## “Tracking Perceptions in Personal Finance” reveals people in Yorkshire and Humber are “not despondent” about the economy

Most people (53%) thought that the current state of the economy was poor and 39% stated the economy was in a very poor condition. This indicates a greater degree of pessimism than in the summer 2008 survey, when only 18% thought conditions to be very poor. However, 51% of people feel their personal situation is not as bad as portrayed in the media and 22% expect to be better off in the next 12 months. This has improved from the summer 2008 survey, suggesting improved optimism among some in the region.

At the time of the survey, in January 2009, most people said they were pessimistic and worried over job security which is having an effect on their spending. The report indicates that people were cutting back by: reducing high street spending; saving on items, such as holidays and home improvement; taking measures to combat rising bills.

However, over 70% feel confident about being in a job in three months' time and 56% expect to receive a pay rise. 61% feel confident about being in a job in 12 months' time.

Bea Jefferson, Programme Manager at Yorkshire Futures, commented, “Although our personal finance survey shows a growing pessimism and worry about jobs, a significant number of people surveyed think the situation is not as bad as is portrayed in the media, and when asked about their jobs, they feel reasonably secure.”

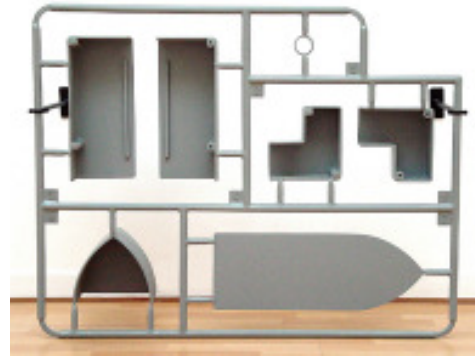


### North East modelling framework

The development of an evidence base for the Regional Strategy is now well underway, and discussions have already been held about the desirability of a suite of quantitative models that can enable policy-makers to evaluate future scenarios for the region, and to understand the effects of change in one area of policy on another – for example, the effects of growth in a specific industrial sector on carbon emissions.

As with other aspects of the evidence base, the models should be capable of developing our understanding at a range of geographical levels, within the constraints of the availability of data. It follows that a variety of organisations in the region should have access to and capability to operate the models as the Regional Strategy develops. In recent years, the region has invested heavily in the development of models, and a range of good quality products already exists.

Nonetheless, there are likely to be gaps where new models are needed to



*A modelling framework?*

*Ship for the Sinking (Sculpture Kit) © Paul Lewthwaite*

meet policy needs and work is required to further develop others. For example, there are probably issues about the extent to which outputs from the existing models are consistent with each other – the ideal being that the outputs of one model can become the inputs for another, so that there can be consistency in data and assumptions that the different models are using. NERIP is working with colleagues from around the region to develop the modelling framework further.

For more details, contact David Mell ([david.mell@nerip.com](mailto:david.mell@nerip.com)).

### Northwest

#### Research Conference

The Regional Intelligence Unit is holding the Northwest Research Conference on **Monday 8<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2009** at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. The purpose of the event is to communicate the findings of recent projects funded by the Regional Intelligence Unit and partners in addition to providing guidance on regional and local data produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Presentations and sessions on the first day will follow a Business & Economy theme whilst day two will be devoted to Places, Environment & Opportunity for All. The event will take place from approx 10am to 4pm on both days and delegates will be able to sign up for sessions of interest. Delegates are free to attend either or both days.

Invites will be sent out during the first week of May. Keep checking the RIU website ([www.nwriu.co.uk](http://www.nwriu.co.uk)) for information.

### South West Observatory conference provides insight into regional resilience and future-proofing



On 11<sup>th</sup> March, the South West Observatory held its 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol. Entitled **'Weathering Storms: Regional Resilience and Future Proofing'**, the Conference brought together experts and policy-makers to consider the challenges of climate change, economic change and demographic change faced by the region now and in the future. By drawing together these strands it posited that although no future is ever certain, if the region is to remain on course to weather the storms ahead, it must ensure that its policy-making is based on the most reliable evidence.

Speakers on the day included former National Farmers' Union Chair Sir Ben Gill, Forum for the Future Chief Executive Peter Madden, Experian's Heather Wells and Jon Bright, Regional Director of the Government Office for the South West. You can find more information via: [www.swo.org.uk/conference09](http://www.swo.org.uk/conference09)

### London's DMAG launches Borough Stat-pack 2009

In January, DMAG published their annual Borough Stat-pack. The Stat-pack is designed to provide a wide range of borough level data and comprises a leaflet and a data CD. The CD contains nearly 200 spreadsheets of borough data.

The aim of the CD is to reduce the amount of time spent searching for data. By using the links within the spreadsheets, it is possible to navigate to the source of the data where even more data on that subject can most likely be found.

This year's stat-pack disc also contains a set of Interactive maps using InstantAtlas technology. A selection of key variables can be found in this informative set of thematic maps. The maps instantly reveal geographic patterns in the data that would otherwise be difficult to recognise. View the pack: <http://bit.ly/v0tSS>

## West Midlands: State of the Region

The West Midlands Regional Observatory's new State of the Region process is well and truly underway. The new process, introduced in early 2008, aims to strengthen the links between evidence and policy



Last year's successful 'State of the Region Report'

through a series of themed dialogues. The findings from the process will be drawn together into a short synthesis report, which will be published in October at the Observatory's Annual Conference.

Reports on the first four dialogues of the Knowledge Economy (<http://bit.ly/1b57n2>), Innovation (<http://bit.ly/wiffd>), Sustainable Communities (<http://bit.ly/As9i9>) and the West Midlands' Evidence base (<http://bit.ly/Ppaap>) are due to be published in late spring to early summer 2009.

In the meantime, new dialogues on Climate Change (<http://bit.ly/x8zaG>) and Population Change (<http://bit.ly/15mVP9>) have begun. The presentations from both have been made available on the Observatory's blog, Observations (<http://wmro.wordpress.com/>), as slidecasts, meaning that presentations can be viewed and listened to online.

At both workshops, delegates from research and policy disciplines discussed the quality of available evidence and identified some of the key gaps in that evidence. They then moved on to discuss how evidence can be used to inform and deliver policy in the region, and began to identify priorities for enhancing the evidence base for this purpose.

The work programmes will now be taken forward by the Observatory's Environment and Population & Society groups and will report in the autumn.

## Introducing the Sub-national Data User Group (SNUG)

The steering group, initiated by ARO and ONS, and supported by the Statistics User Forum, met in April for the first time, to take forward their aims of representing the voice of users to producers and legislators, and identifying and addressing issues of concern to those users. The steering group, made up of colleagues from local authorities, the third sector, and sub-national and sub-regional agencies, will be shaping a series of events and workshops, providing a forum for data users to learn from (and question) one another, and to engage in dialogue with statistical

producers.

An initial session is planned for later this year, looking at population denominators and the National Indicator set, with future events planned around cross-cutting themes of interest to a broad group of users of regional, local and neighbourhood level data. If you'd like to join the mailing list in order to receive news of events and other activities, please email Nicola Underdown, the ARO Coordinator, on [nicola@regenerationem.co.uk](mailto:nicola@regenerationem.co.uk).

## South East England Intelligence Network launches refreshed website

The revamped SEE-IN website was launched in February. Working with graphic design company 3 Men and a Suit, and website development company Rendili, SEE-IN have created a new modular design for the front page of their website. This allows greater freedom over the front page content and displays more information than before.



The new modular design displays more information and shows useful features such as shortcuts to commonly used tools

New features on the front page include:

- **Useful Tools:** Shortcut links to commonly used tools. In this case, the Data Hub, Events Calendar, a new SEE-IN blog (SEE-IN Comment) and the South East Cultural Observatory.
- **What's New:** A slight redesign on the previous site feature. Automatically picks up the four most recent items added to the Research Database or Document Library.
- **SEE-IN Highlights:** A static box displays new content added to the Events Calendar, SEE-IN Comment and a direct link to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the Region pages to raise their profile.
- **SEE-IN Partners Latest:** A rolling news ticker displays rss feed content (headlines and brief description) from South East regional organisation websites.

## Redesigning the existing Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the Region pages

SEE-IN have applied a variation of the Research Database front page template to the 'ONS in the Region' pages. The content had been crudely formatted to mimic the layout, but now a professional template has been applied to it.

## SEE-IN Update, an automatic E-Alert

As part of the website refresh, SEE-IN set up an automatic email alert to go to registered users on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month, detailing what has been added to the site in the preceding month, and upcoming events in the next month. The first e-alert was sent out on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009. You can register to the SEE-IN website to receive this alert by visiting <http://www.see-in.co.uk/signup.html>