



# The Midlands Decision Support Network

*Work programme 2022/23*



Midlands  
Decision Support  
Network

# Summary

- The Midlands Decision Support Network has demonstrated the power of regional collaboration between ICSs and has moved the region into a leading position nationally.
- The programme for 2022/23 builds on its success and will provide essential support for systems to respond to national requirements to develop cross-system intelligence functions, build the capabilities to deliver population health management and address health inequalities.
- We will:
  - Expand the training & development programme in response to highly positive feedback and significant demand, with offerings aimed at analysts and decision-makers
  - Deliver a regional analytical programme focused on member priorities, with an enhanced focus on supporting systems to move 'insight into action'
  - Actively promote knowledge exchange and collaborative working between systems as a means of supporting continuous learning and improvement
  - Add value through regional co-ordination – attracting investment, building partnerships and proactively supporting local DSU development
- Our work programme will continue to be overseen and shaped by members using existing governance arrangements.

# The Midlands Decision Support Network has demonstrated the power of regional collaboration between ICSs - the programme for 2022/23 builds on its success

Each of the eleven Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) within the Midlands region and the NHSE/I regional team need to make high-quality strategic decisions, drawing on insight from quantitative and qualitative analysis, from research and practitioner evidence and from evaluations of previous decisions. The 'Decision Support Unit' model that began in the Midlands region has emerged as a frontrunner means by which to develop the capacity, capabilities and culture needed to make this happen – a multidisciplinary team in each ICS (led by an ICS 'Chief Analyst'), acting as a resource to support strategic decisions at system level. There is now an expectation that each ICS in England will develop a 'cross-system intelligence function', described in NHSE/I's [Integrating Care, the ICS Design Framework](#) and forthcoming guidance to be published in Q4 2021/22. This is described as a core foundational requirement for the successful delivery of Population Health Management.

The Midlands have realised significant benefits by networking the ICSs developing Decision Support Units on a regional footprint - the [Midlands Decision Support Network](#) (MDSN). This represents a collective endeavour by local ICSs as opposed to a 'top-down' initiative. As well as providing opportunities for peer support and collaboration between systems, it has allowed pooling of resources to support the activity of a development centre provided by [The Strategy Unit](#). This has delivered a major educational programme to build competencies to support strategic decision-making, a regional analytical programme prioritised by members and activity to support knowledge exchange between systems (e.g. convening professional networks and developing guidance and standards). It has also attracted a further £430,000 of outside funding for activities to support members in 2021/22 (from £145,000 in 2020/21).

**Feedback on this initiative has been outstanding** – at the formal review of the programme to date at the October 2021 Strategic Group meeting, ICS leaders across the region commented on the quality of offering and a value for money that would be unachievable for individual systems seeking support. The model has been recognised nationally as good practice and has allowed the Midlands region to move into a position where it is informing guidance, as well as having a ready-made source of support in responding to it; other regions are exploring opportunities to replicate this arrangement.

**This paper summarises the planned programme of work for the MDSN development centre in 2022/23.** The programme builds on the success of work to date and will support systems across the Midlands region to effectively respond to the requirements of forthcoming national guidance on Intelligence Functions. The paper sets out the core activities of the programme and describes the governance arrangements to oversee the work.

# Our support comprises an extensive educational offer, a regional analytical programme and active knowledge exchange between systems

## Training & development

- Developing the competencies to support analytically driven strategic decision-making – both in analysts ('supply side') and decision-makers ('demand side').
- Offers focused on building advanced analytical skills, developing analytical leadership, improving decision-making practice and core skills such as evaluation, evidence review, knowledge mobilisation.
- Delivered through development programmes, seminar series, one-day events and an annual learning festival.

## Regional analytical programme

- Three major analytical projects/year, prioritised by members. 'Big questions' relevant to the whole region, with a focus on inequalities and underexplored topics.
- Individual system reports and regional overviews, access to code, webinars and presentations at key forums.
- 'Insight to action support', including ongoing system engagement to shape analysis; support for local analytical teams to conduct follow-up work; facilitated action-planning workshops.

## Active knowledge exchange

- Developing the regional professional communities of practice and associated events (Midlands Analyst Network, evidence & knowledge mobilisation network, evaluation network), support for local network development.
- Co-ordinating collaborative work between systems e.g. R&D projects, evaluations on common priorities.
- Capturing learning and demonstrating good practice – building a regional repository of member outputs, evidence analysis on priority topics.

## Adding value through regional co-ordination

Developing partnerships; attracting investment to the region; relationship management & ongoing support for local systems in developing their DSU; sharing learning from support to other regions and national teams; programme management & evaluation; facilitating network governance arrangements

The following slides provide more detail on each of these components...

# We will expand the educational programme in response to highly positive feedback and significant demand, with offerings aimed at analysts and decision-makers

## Training & Development Lead – [Professor Mohammed A Mohammed](#)

The programme for 2022/23 is focused on building competencies to support **strategic decision-making at system level** – it is aimed both at those who undertake strategic decisions and those who support them with analysis, with content aimed at building technical and leadership skills in these groups.

It is designed in response to feedback from a breadth of sources, including minuted discussions from strategic and operational group meetings, requests from local DSU leaders, surveys of professional communities of practice (e.g. the Midlands Analyst Network) and regional analytical skills assessments undertaken by Public Health England staff. Moreover, it reflects the Strategy Unit's work with the NHSE/ national team and the Association for Professional Healthcare Analysts in defining the nature of intelligence functions and the competencies required from staff.

### The programme will include:

- **Structured development programmes** – Combining formal learning, reflection and project-based work delivered to a cohort across the region. Aimed at building the core competencies for improving strategic decision-making at system level, with attendees selected by DSU leads based on their local development strategy.
- **Short courses** – Typically focused on a particular analytical tool or technique of importance (e.g. time series forecasting) or an entry-level version of one of a structured development programmes (e.g. 'Introduction to Decision Quality')
- **Open events** – Providing an ongoing 'drop-in' programme of educational sessions based on network priorities, including opportunities for sharing and learning from peers. Includes webinars connecting local staff to regional, national and international experts, findings from the regional analytical programme and the INSIGHT 2022 festival (see across).

## Core components of the offer in 2022/23

e.g. 'Decision Quality for system leaders' development programme; thinking tools for decision-making; training in analytical concepts for leaders.

e.g. 'Leadership for Analysts' programme (2x cohorts); communication skills/ arguing with numbers; data visualisation; presentation/ facilitation skills.

**Improving decision-making practice**  
*Providing system leaders with practical tools & techniques for making better, more analytically-informed decisions*

**Developing analytical leaders**  
*Fostering the skills analysts need to work more closely and effectively with decision-makers*

**Strengthening analytical capability**  
*Building technical skills to undertake high-quality strategic analysis*

**Moving beyond the numbers**  
*Ensuring decisions are informed by findings from a range of disciplines*

e.g. advanced PHM analytics; operational research methods; machine learning; time-series forecasting; open-source coding tools.

e.g. approaches to evidence review and avoiding cognitive biases; core skills in knowledge mobilisation; fundamentals of evaluation

## INSIGHT 2022

The network will also host its annual INSIGHT 'festival' of learning at a similar scale and profile to previous years – a programme of talks, panel discussions and training events focused on the leading edge of decision-making practice. In 2021, this included speakers such as Sir Michael Marmot, Jennifer Dixon, Nigel Edwards and Richard Murray, alongside local system representatives (see [here](#) for recordings).

# We will deliver a regional analytical programme focused on member priorities, with an enhanced focus on supporting systems to move 'insight into action'

## Chief Analyst – [Steven Wyatt](#)

The development centre analytical function will undertake a regional analytical programme prioritised by members in 2022/23, aimed at addressing questions where undertaking high-quality work once, at scale, on behalf of the region will achieve best outcomes and value. Projects will be relevant to the whole region, have the potential to influence strategic decisions, will address health and care outcomes, health inequalities or service efficiency and will focus on issues that have not traditionally received sufficient attention.

The budget for network projects will fund approximately three major analytical projects in 2022/23, of a size and complexity comparable to those shown opposite. Strategic Group Members and the system leads for local Decision Support Units will be supported through a facilitated process in Q1 2022/3 to shape an analytical programme that reflects their strategic priorities.

Each project will produce bespoke system reports and systems will also be supported to use outputs as the basis for further analytical work – through briefings for local analysts on methods and access to underlying code and materials, alongside advice and guidance from members of our analytical team. The outputs will serve both as examples of good practice for strategic analysis and a means to build closer working relationships between analysts in local systems and our faculty.

In response to feedback, we have developed an enhanced 'insight to action' offer for 2022/23, to increase the support available for systems to effectively respond to the findings from network projects. This will include (for example): support for local staff to work with their system's decision-making bodies, increased engagement during project delivery to shape outputs to the interests and needs of members, facilitated action-planning workshops in local systems and 'after action' knowledge sharing workshops between ICSs. The network training & development programme will also include an offer around knowledge mobilisation, to support local teams to build capability to respond to strategic analysis.

## Comparable regional projects delivered for the network to date...

- *Health service use in the last two years of life* ([system reports](#) & [launch webinars](#))
- *Socio-economic inequalities in access to planned care: causes & consequences* ([report/pathway analysis](#) & [launch webinar](#))
- *Inequalities in access to mental health services for children and young people* ([report/data packs](#) & [launch webinar](#))
- *MDSN algorithm for classifying outpatient visits by function* ([summary report](#) & [launch webinar](#))

## Projects prioritised by members in progress for 21/22...

- Strategies to reduce health inequalities in planned hospital [project summary](#)
- What are the health implications of reduced access to care during the COVID-19 pandemic? ([project summary](#))
- How is the growth in diagnostic testing affecting NHS practice? ([project summary](#))

# We will actively promote knowledge exchange and collaborative working between systems as a means of supporting continuous learning and improvement

## Building regional professional communities of practice

We will continue to host a series of regional professional communities of practice on behalf of the network. These are aimed at supporting collaboration and sharing between peers across the region, as well as building professional identity in the essential roles that support strategic decision-making.

- **The Midlands Analyst Network:** Our longest standing network, comprising c.600 members across the region meeting in fortnightly educational 'huddles', with contributors ranging from local analysts presenting on current projects to renowned subject specialists.
- **The Midlands Evaluation Network:** Comprising evaluation leads and others with an interest from each system (including graduates of our evaluation training programme), meeting bimonthly for advice and guidance to support local evaluations and to share learning.
- **The Midlands Knowledge Mobilisation Network:** Comprising staff working in evidence & knowledge roles across the region, meeting bimonthly with a focus on sharing resources and making best use of capacity to support local systems' efforts.

An 'analytical leaders' community of practice is also planned for 2022/23, bringing together the Chief Analysts from each system across the region.

## Leading collaborative regional projects

We will use the communities of practice to facilitate several exemplar collaborative projects.

They will be delivered by blended teams from across the region and be designed as a means of providing collective and comparative learning.

These are planned to include:

- **Regional evaluation project:** Community of practice members will agree a topic for a shared evaluation, based on a common issue that aligns with network priorities (e.g. falls prevention, good practice in end-of-life care, support for homeless young people). They will then develop and deliver a common approach to evaluation and meet regularly to share progress and emerging themes. The evaluation lead for the development centre ([Paul Mason](#)) will lead on authoring a final report to summarise learning from the process.
- **Exploring automation in evidence synthesis:** We will assess the potential of data analytics tools to improve the efficiency of the evidence synthesis process, as a means of making better use of the limited capacity within systems available to support rigorous evidence review. The community of practice will identify a suitable pilot project and produce a guide for the wider network, focused on the tools available and their most effective use.

## Capturing learning & sharing knowledge

We will create a regional 'repository', providing a systematic approach to managing and sharing MDSN content.

This will improve the ease of finding insights produced by the development centre and members and raise the profile of the network as a reputable producer of valuable insights.

We will also provide evidence analysis on a series of topics based on network member priorities (in a programme led by our knowledge and evidence lead [Alison Turner](#)). This will contribute to the knowledge base for decision-making and raise awareness of gaps for future work.

It will include:

- **Evidence signposts:** High-level summaries of policy, guidance and selected research evidence to provide a starting point for framing a problem
- **Evidence scans:** Synthesising findings and lessons from policy, guidance, research and practice, to inform improvement efforts.
- **Evidence maps:** At-a-glance overviews of relevant evidence for a topic by theme, enabling decision-makers to identify and explore useful evidence.
- **Evidence updates:** Regular alerts helping decision-makers keep up to date with new and emerging evidence on a topic

# We will add value through regional co-ordination – attracting investment, building partnerships and proactively supporting local DSU development

## Attracting investment into the Midlands region

- **We will continue to seek further investment in the MDSN for the benefit of members** – national and regional bodies have consistently recognised the benefit of the scale at which the network operates, its role as a forerunner model in supporting intelligence functions and its potential as a mechanism for rapidly disseminating learning. We are increasingly positioning the MDSN nationally as an ideal platform for large-scale innovation.
- **To date, the development centre has attracted a further £430,000 funding for activities to support members in 2021/22** (from £145,000 in 2020/21). This has funded the development and delivery of a breadth of educational opportunities for staff across the region. We anticipate being successful in attracting significant resource to support meeting members requirements in 2022/23.

## Developing partnerships

- **We will build on our existing partnerships, undertaking collaborative work to generate learning and relationships that will benefit members.** For example, we are currently delivering a collaborative project with [ADASS](#) in order to build a system dynamics model for domiciliary care, which can be used to investigate scenarios and the implications of policies chosen. Elsewhere, we are working with the [Association of Professional Healthcare Analytics](#) and the NHSE/I national team to describe analyst career pathways. We are also partnering with NHSE/I and [HFMA](#) to support an allocative efficiency programme using the STAR method across the MDSN, focusing initially on respiratory disease.
- **We will continue to engage regionally and nationally to promote the network,** with a particular focus on sharing learning between the MDSN and other regions who are considering adopting a similar model, as well as engagement with national teams to translate learning from the MDSN into informing ICS requirements.

## Supporting local DSU development

- **We will provide active support for local DSU development** – including advice and guidance from the core DSU programme team on the nature of local DSU arrangements, support for recruitment to key roles (e.g Chief Analysts and other professional leads), facilitating DSU 'design workshops' and providing support for systems to develop their local professional networks.
- **We will develop our formal guidance for members in 2022/23** – refining [core documents](#) such as our analytical typology, the network guide to evaluation, DSU design principles, guides to knowledge mobilisation and evidence review. Members' local staff will continue to benefit from access to informal advice and guidance from our [faculty leads](#) in analytics, education, evaluation and evidence.

## Programme management

- **We will continue to provide a high-quality overall programme management function to ensure the success of our planned interventions at regional level.** We have put in place an experienced and knowledgeable [team](#) who will lead programme design and delivery, as well as undertake co-ordination and facilitation of the key network meetings that underpin its governance. They will also undertake an evaluation of programme activities to inform ongoing improvements to the offer.
- **We will work closely with your DSU leads and tailor our support to local needs as they emerge.** Each DSU lead will have a relationship manager working with them regularly to co-ordinate our offer of support. They will also support creation of a local staff development strategy for each DSU, identify opportunities for action in response to regional analytical projects and support engagement with non-healthcare organisations.

# Our work programme will continue to be overseen and shaped by members using existing governance arrangements

It is proposed that the work of the development centre continue to be overseen by existing governance arrangements, consisting of two primary forums:

## The MDSN Regional Strategic Board

### Meeting twice yearly

**Membership:** ICS chief executives from each subscribing member (or a board-level nominee with delegated decision-making authority), board-level nominee from the NHSE/I regional team. Chaired by **Amanda Sullivan** (Nottingham & Nottinghamshire)

### Functions:

- Establish overarching priorities and objectives for the MDSN
- Agree priorities to inform the MDSN analytical and educational work programme
- Agree annual member contributions to fund network activities
- Identify additional funding opportunities to support network activities
- Develop regional and national partnerships to support the work of the MDSN
- Review evaluation of development centre work programme
- Agree recommendations from the operational group/development centre e.g. on network-wide standards to be adopted or other regional initiatives.

## The MDSN Operational Group

### Meeting every two months

**Membership:** DSU leads from each subscribing member (or senior manager with delegated decision-making authority). Chaired by **Lucy Heath** (The Black Country)

### Functions:

- Provide advice & guidance to inform the delivery of the ongoing MDSN work programme, including providing feedback on its local impact and any emerging needs.
- Ensure local systems engage with and take full advantage of network activities, including promoting the educational offer, analytical programme and knowledge exchange activities
- Seek opportunities for collaboration across local DSUs within the region
- Share learning from local DSU development with other systems, including key outputs for inclusion within the network repository
- Make recommendations to the regional strategic board as to network outputs that should become regional standards
- Other activities in support of the priorities and objectives of the MDSN, as agreed by the regional strategic board



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