



N-ACT Roundtable

Event Summary

15th July 2026

Shipley College

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Introduction

Through its partners, SHY has been organising approximately 3 roundtable events per year since 2021. The purpose of these events has been to bring together the RF and microwave cluster across West Yorkshire and mostly held at the offices of Clarion, a law firm based in Leeds. These roundtables have grown steadily from a handful of RF businesses centred around Shipley & Saltaire to 30+ attendees and from a much wider catchment area which stretches beyond the boundary of West Yorkshire.

The roundtables are designed to stimulate discussion on themes which are common across the cluster and include skills, innovation, market opportunities and access to funding and finance. The events are invitation only with invitees selected from the RF, microwave and wireless ecosystem, including elements of the supply chain. The events are kept relatively small in order that everyone has a chance to participate and contribute to the discussion.

This roundtable was the first to use the N-ACT branding which was unveiled at the inaugural N-ACT Summit held in Bradford in March 2026. Following the Summit, SHY was contacted by the office of the Mayor of West Yorkshire and separately by the office of Anna Dixon, the MP for Shipley. Both had expressed a desire to understand more about the RF cluster, its capabilities and the role the cluster plays in the Global Communications industry and to meet with companies in the cluster. It was suggested to both that the most effective way of achieving these aims was to invite them to a roundtable and curate an agenda which would enable the Mayor and Anna Dixon to hear directly the challenges and issues the cluster faces and the support it needs from the public sector (and SHY) in order to take advantage of the opportunities present across the growing global terrestrial and non-terrestrial communications and connectivity sectors.

Using the N-ACT branding also enabled SHY to attract a wider range of businesses from beyond the Yorkshire & Humber geography.

It was felt that on this occasion the event should return to Shipley/Saltaire, which is at the heart of the RF and microwave cluster and so SHY reached out to Shipley College, who were delighted to be invited to host the event.

Organising Partners

SHY was the lead organiser for the event and received significant support from Shipley College and further support from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, the office of Anna Dixon MP and the North East Space Cluster.



Figure 1: Organising partners

Event Agenda

Session one 11:00am – 11:45am		Session two 11:50am – 1:00pm	
11:00 – 11:10	Welcome & Introductions	11:50 – 11:55	Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire
11:10 – 11:15	Anna Dixon MP	11:55 – 12:10	Introductions - RF companies
11:15 – 11:25	Update from SHY • International activities • Funding • RDSC	12:10 – 12:55	Challenges & opportunities
11:25 – 11:45	Lockheed Martin • NESST	12:55 – 1:00	Closing remarks



Roundtable discussion themes, impact & actions

Audience

As an invite only event, approximately 70 invitations were sent to companies and organisations across the public and private sectors, research and education institutions.

39 people responded to the invitations, including from one of the world's largest Space Primes (Lockheed Martin), 3 universities, 3 FE colleges and over a dozen RF companies. Despite several apologies the event was, in terms of attendee numbers, the most successful RF roundtable event held to date.

Attendees:

Businesses

- Lockheed Martin
- MPG / BSC Filters
- Slipstream Design
- Saras Technology
- Global Invacom
- Optalysys
- Schofield Sweeney
- Diamond Microwave
- Northumbrian Space
- Ecomergy
- Consult Red

HE & FE institutions:

- University of Leeds
- University of Bradford
- University of Durham
- Shipley College
- New College Durham
- Keighley College

Other:

- Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire
- Anna Dixon MP
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- RTC North

Impact

The roundtable brought together leaders from the space, defence, advanced manufacturing, education and technology sectors to identify barriers to growth and develop stronger collaboration across the West Yorkshire innovation ecosystem.

The discussion provided a valuable platform for businesses, education providers and policymakers to engage directly with the Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, and Anna Dixon MP, resulting in several tangible actions and commitments.

A number of critical challenges affecting sector growth were highlighted, including access to investment, funding criteria barriers, security clearance processes, standards compliance, skills shortages and supply chain engagement. Participants shared real-world examples demonstrating how these issues impact innovation, scaling and international competitiveness.

Several organisations received direct offers of support, including follow-up engagement with WYCA on funding accessibility, support for investment opportunities, assistance with supply chain and intellectual property concerns, and consideration of policy interventions to address systemic barriers.

The event reinforced the strategic importance of the West Yorkshire space and advanced RF / ACT engineering sectors, showcasing significant planned investments, including the proposed Space Centre of Excellence in Bradford, expansion of high-growth technology businesses, and initiatives to strengthen regional testing, research and manufacturing capabilities. Discussions also highlighted the risk of losing innovative UK companies overseas due to funding constraints, prompting commitments to explore ways of retaining and supporting these businesses locally.

A strong emphasis was placed on skills development and future workforce planning. Education providers, industry representatives and policymakers discussed pathways into the sector through apprenticeships, work experience, STEM outreach and further education. Particular attention was given to increasing female participation in engineering and space careers, addressing tutor shortages, and improving awareness of manufacturing and engineering opportunities among young people and parents.

New College Durham expressed a desire to connect with FE colleges and SHY as they have been awarded AM TEC status for space skills. The funding requires NCD to undertake activities beyond the NE space cluster borders and would like to understand activities in the SHY region with a view to potential collaboration.

Overall, the session strengthened relationships between industry, education and government stakeholders, identified clear areas for intervention, and generated a number of follow-up actions designed to support business growth, innovation, skills development and regional economic prosperity.

Feedback Summary

What Worked Well

- Strong engagement from a diverse range of businesses, universities, colleges and public sector organisations.
- Open and constructive discussions around genuine business challenges affecting growth and competitiveness.
- Direct access to senior decision-makers enabled participants to raise specific issues and receive immediate responses.
- A number of practical follow-up actions were identified, creating momentum beyond the event itself.
- Good representation of both established organisations and growing SMEs operating across the space, defence and advanced manufacturing sectors.
- Productive discussion around future workforce development, STEM engagement and apprenticeship pathways.

Key Themes Raised

Access to Funding and Investment

- Multiple companies cited difficulties accessing growth and innovation funding.
- Concerns were raised that current funding mechanisms may not adequately support rapidly scaling technology businesses.
- Some organisations reported seeking funding opportunities overseas due to limited availability of large-scale UK investment.

Regulatory and Standards Burden

- Businesses highlighted challenges associated with defence and aerospace compliance requirements.
- Concerns were raised regarding the complexity and volume of standards compared with international competitors.
- Supply chain and intellectual property protection issues were identified as areas requiring further investigation.

Skills and Workforce Development

- Growing demand for engineering, RF and manufacturing skills was consistently highlighted.
- Participants welcomed discussions around addressing tutor shortages in colleges.
- Work placements, apprenticeships and industry engagement with education providers were recognised as critical enablers.

STEM Engagement and Diversity

- Strong support for STEMfest, STEM ambassador programmes and outreach activities.
- Particular concern was expressed regarding the decline in female participation in STEM subjects between primary and secondary education.
- Greater engagement with parents was identified as an important opportunity to improve awareness of engineering and manufacturing careers.

Collaboration and Supply Chain Development

- Opportunities were identified to strengthen collaboration between industry, academia and government.
- Participants supported initiatives to improve SME access to testing facilities, supply chains and prime contractors.
- Interest was expressed in greater engagement through trade missions, clusters and regional networks.

Follow-Up Actions Identified

- WYCA to engage with SARAS Technology regarding funding support and growth opportunities.
- Anna Dixon to explore concerns around IP protection and standards flow-down in defence supply chains.
- Support to continue for development of the proposed Space Centre of Excellence in Bradford.
- Tracy Brabin to raise RF industry involvement within future robotics discussions.
- Organisations encouraged to join the Yorkshire RDSC network.
- Interested businesses to engage with WYCA regarding the India Trade Mission.
- Promotion of Women in Manufacturing and Engineering initiatives to support greater diversity across the sector.
- Ongoing engagement around regional skills, supply chain and investment programmes through WYCA.

Overall assessment

The roundtable was a highly effective stakeholder engagement session that surfaced strategic challenges facing the regional space, defence and advanced manufacturing sectors while generating meaningful commitments from policymakers and partners.

The event demonstrated strong regional ambition, highlighted significant opportunities for economic growth and innovation, and established a clear agenda for future collaboration and action.

Enthusiasm to continue organising these events among those in the cluster remains high and the North East Space Cluster are keen to partner with SHY to deliver an N-ACT roundtable event in the North East in the Autumn, either at Net Park or the new NESST facility.



