



ScaleLeaders Sheffield

Building Stronger, Fairer
Economies

April 2025



"There's something powerful that happens when people come together with curiosity, honesty, and a shared commitment to do better, and in Sheffield, that felt real.

We curated a space for those navigating the complexity of scale, founders balancing ambition and capacity, and public leaders working to make policy land with meaning. What defined the day wasn't volume or velocity, but the depth of thinking, the quality of listening, and the sense that progress depends on holding space for both challenge and care.

A quiet consensus emerged: that credibility matters, that relevance beats reach, and that support must be designed for the reality of scaling, not just the idea of it. We left not with a blueprint, but with shared momentum, and a community more committed than ever to getting it right."

Matt Johnson, Managing Director, Form

ScaleLeaders

ScaleLeaders is a leadership programme for the people and places driving scaleup success across the UK.

Form

We are a B-Corp committed to building fairer, stronger economies.

We work with economic leaders to design and deliver support that helps scaleup's and high-potential businesses grow, while strengthening the ecosystems around them.



Welcome and Scene Setting

Louisa Harrison-Walker OBE,
Chief Executive Officer, Sheffield
Chamber of Commerce

*"Sheffield has all of the
substance and none of
the hype."*



In the Room

Louisa opened with generosity and insight, offering a deeply personal and place-rooted view of Sheffield's business ecosystem.

Speaking as both a civic leader and entrepreneur, she shared how the city's identity, grounded in authenticity, resilience and collaboration is shaping a new model for regional growth.

Key Signals

Relevance is everything. Growth strategies mean little unless they connect with real business needs, many firms still don't see themselves in local plans.

Place is strength. Sheffield's economic diversity, civic-minded businesses, and proximity to nature create a uniquely balanced environment for sustainable growth.

We're past rivalry and into orchestration. South Yorkshire's public, private, and third sectors are increasingly aligned around long-term goals, but coordination took years and still needs care.

Short-termism is corrosive. Great support often fails to scale because it isn't funded or planned long enough to matter.

Voices need oxygen. Sheffield's innovation often thrives in spite of systems, not because of them. What more could be achieved with sustained, meaningful investment?

What to Take Forward

- How do we help businesses not just know about regional plans, but see themselves in them?
- Can we treat business engagement as design input, not just consultation?
- What would a truly high-oxygen environment for regional innovation look like, and who needs to build it?



Can Real Estate Be a Catalyst for Scaleup Success?

Charlotte Thompson, Project Director, Sheffield Innovation Spine

Jeremy Bamberg, Co-Founder, Factory Berlin

Rob Valentine, Regional Director, Bruntwood SciTech

Chair: Darren Balcombe, Partner, Form



In the Room

This session surfaced the often-overlooked dynamics behind innovation space, not just who builds it, but who makes it work. Rather than debating aesthetics or square meterage, the conversation focused on what scaleups actually need from space to grow, connect, and stay rooted.

The panel examined the operating models, funding mechanisms, and governance arrangements that underpin effective space - especially when trying to balance commercial viability with inclusive economic outcomes.

Key Signals

Curation is the infrastructure. The real value lies in who connects and leads, not just what gets built. Long-term impact needs embedded stewardship, not one-off design.

One size won't scale. High-growth firms follow messy paths. Space must flex, with modular fit-outs, tailored terms, and programming that fits sector and stage, not generic assumptions.

Ownership shapes impact. Shared incentives between public, private and operators are key to balancing purpose and viability.

Start before the cement sets. Effective space design begins with users at the table, not after the build. Collaborative development beats top-down planning every time.

Rethink what counts. Job tallies and lettings miss the mark. Better metrics reflect retention, skills, sector links and community value, not just square metres filled.

What to Take Forward

- **Put lived operator insight at the heart of design**
The people running buildings often hold the clearest view of founder needs - from growth pinch-points to wellbeing struggles. Listening at this level is critical to shape space that scales.
- **Build for evolution, not just occupancy**
Spaces for scaling firms need to flex with business models, team dynamics, and hybrid ways of working. Long-term success means planning for change, not just lettings.
- **Make place leadership a strategic function**
Property can't deliver inclusive growth in isolation. A joined-up approach across local authorities, real estate, and innovation partners is needed to unlock shared civic and economic value.



The Resilient Leader – Health & Wellbeing Strategies

Dr. Ed Lynch, Founder, The
Wellbeing Doctors

*“What you do in the
next 6 months shapes
the next 6 years of
your life.”*



In the Room

This session reframed high performance as a physiological challenge, not just a strategic one.

Grounded in clinical insight and data, the discussion explored how wellbeing, from cardiovascular health to circadian rhythm, underpins sharper decisions, better leadership, and sustained creativity.

Rather than treating health as personal or peripheral, participants interrogated how founders and teams can embed rest and recovery into the core mechanics of scale.

Key Signals

Health is performance infrastructure. For scaleups, wellbeing isn't a wellness perk, it's the foundation for energy, decision-making, and leadership resilience.

Small changes, big gains. Simple interventions like increasing zone 2 cardio, improving sleep, or aligning eating habits with circadian rhythms, can significantly improve mood, cognitive clarity, and day-to-day performance.

Breath is a lever for coherence. Measurable shifts in heart rate variability show how something as basic as controlled breathing can move individuals from stress to a state of calm focus in minutes.

Workplaces carry a hidden health tax. Fatigue, presenteeism, and burnout silently drain productivity. Investing in baseline health improves team capacity, retention, and long-term value creation.

What to Take Forward

- **Design cultures that support recovery.** How might leadership rhythms, workplace policies, and physical environments evolve to reduce hidden stress loads and support sustainable high performance?
- **Breathe like it matters.** Can techniques like coherent breathing become part of the toolkit for meetings, pitch prep, or even decision-making resets?
- **Make the invisible visible.** What is your team's "health tax," and what would it take to recover its cost through smarter investment in people?



High-Growth Business Support – What Really Drives Scaleup Success?

Janice Mears, Head of Business
Growth, Growth Platform

Kylie Reid, Managing Director,
hi-impact

Yiannis Maos, Founder, TechWM

Chair: Sarah Goulden, Director,
Form



In the Room

What do high-growth businesses actually need, and are current support systems keeping up?

This discussion cut through policy noise to focus on what really helps scaleups thrive.

Drawing on lived founder experience and regional delivery insights from Liverpool and the West Midlands, it made the case for support that's timely, bespoke, and built on trust, not volume targets.

With uncertainty over public sector funding and political narratives shifting, speakers called for stronger public-private alignment, braver funding bets, and deeper peer connectivity to unlock the next wave of scaleup growth.

“The problem is we’re tackling the scaleup challenge backwards - trying to scale startups that were never fit to scale.”

Key Signals

Fit beats scale, but only if it's funded properly

Tailored programmes aligned to growth stage, sector, and specific blockers consistently outperform generic offers. But delivering this support depends on bold commissioning, not just tight outputs or short cycles.

Real alignment means shared risk, not just shared strategy

Successful ecosystems share accountability across public and private actors. Authorities must enable, not deliver; private providers must invest, not extract. Mutual skin in the game matters.

Leadership is a team sport

Backing the founder isn't enough. Support that engages full leadership teams boosts alignment, retention, and implementation, especially during change or commercial stretch.

We measure the wrong things

Counting jobs or outputs won't drive the next wave of growth. Metrics must reflect what matters: founder confidence, investor readiness, team resilience, and real traction.

What to Take Forward

Build strategy around readiness, not just ambition

Scaling success depends on backing firms ready to grow, not just those that want to. That means strong leadership, traction, and clear barriers support can unlock. Systems must get better at spotting these signals and braver in backing them.

Fund through the middle, not just the start

Long-term success demands support that lasts through pivots, setbacks, and the messy middle. Growth needs grit and staying power beyond early-stage optimism.

Back places to move first, not just follow

Regions need permission to lead, not just deliver. Real change will come from local actors testing new models, with the freedom and backing to learn fast.



Policy, Place and Investment to Support High-Growth Businesses

Angelene Woodland Singleton, Chief Customer Officer, British Business Bank

Tracey Johnson, Director, Tech SY

Angelina Cannizzaro, Deputy Director, Small Business Strategy, Department for Business and Trade

Chair: Yiannis Maos, Founder, TechWM



In the Room

Scaling ecosystems takes more than strategy, it takes alignment, trust, and long-term commitment across government, finance, and delivery.

This session surfaced what often goes unspoken: the tensions between national ambition and local accountability, and the need to fund what works, not just what's visible.

“There isn’t a silver bullet. Every region has different plates to spin, at different velocities, to get the right things happening.. and resourcing that properly is the next big step”

Key Signals

Capacity is the constraint behind the ambition

From stretched teams to short-term funding, delivery capacity often falls short of policy ambition. Without resourcing what's promised, even the best-designed scaleup strategies risk stalling at implementation.

Finance isn't enough, firms need guidance

Access to capital remains a barrier, but many businesses lack the insight to choose the right funding. Better intelligence and trusted advisors are essential.

Narrative is strategy, but it needs orchestration.

Building a regional identity that attracts investment and talent isn't about slogans. It takes repeated, coordinated storytelling rooted in data, founder voices, and civic intent, not just civic pride. Without orchestration, good stories go unheard.

Regions can't be expected to innovate with generic tools

National templates often miss local nuance. Ecosystems thrive when regions are trusted to shape solutions based on place-specific intelligence, blending national ambition with local delivery know-how.

What to Take Forward

Empower delivery without duplicating it

Public sector should set the conditions, not replicate the market. Its role is to convene, enable and de-risk, not crowd out expert provision.

Back the connective tissue. Regions need time, trust and capacity to join the dots - across actors, boundaries and into government. This requires patience and permission.

Measure what enables, not just what happens

Job counts and revenue uplifts tell part of the story. We also need metrics that reflect enabling conditions, from leadership capacity and ecosystem connectivity to inclusive participation.

Treat insight as infrastructure

Place-based data, practitioner experience, and founder voice must shape strategy. National alignment should follow where the insight leads, not the other way around.





A special thank you to the incredible community who joined us, and the cast of speakers who generously shared their experiences and candid insights.

If these conversations have sparked your interest, we invite you to join us as we continue shaping the future of scaleups together - join us for more at the next ScaleLeaders event.

Stay involved

Stay connected with us and keep an eye out for more ways to get involved.

If you would like to play a part, join the community or explore how we can help map and grow your ecosystem, please reach out to Darren Balcombe, Partner, Form.

Darren@form.studio



Form is on a mission to leave people and places better than when it found them. We are committed to equity, diversity and inclusion in our team and encourage all organisations we partner with to impact people, profit and the planet positively.