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ScaleLeaders Leeds

Growing Smarter,
Fairer Economies

—
October 2025



"ScaleLeaders Leeds brought together voices from across the scaleup economy, those shaping the policies, data and ideas behind how regions grow.

The discussions were forward-looking and connected, with clear momentum in West Yorkshire around scaleups as the engine of regional growth. Sarah Bowes and Mandy Ridyard from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority opened the day with a clear focus on what matters most, practical action and tangible outcomes.

The sessions explored how procurement can open markets, how better data can guide decisions, and how regions can build the confidence and systems to grow on their own terms. What stood out most was the openness and collaboration in the room, exactly what ScaleLeaders exists to create."

Matt Johnson, Managing Director, Form

A woman with glasses on her head is speaking into a microphone while gesturing with her hands. She is standing in front of a large window that looks out onto a city street with arches and a fence. In the foreground, a person with long blonde hair is seated at a conference table, facing away from the camera. The table is covered with papers, sticky notes, and glasses. Another person is visible on the left side of the frame. The overall atmosphere is professional and focused on a presentation or meeting.

“Growth isn’t just a number,
it’s a network of relationships,
data and decisions that shape
what happens next.”

—Richelle Schuster, Creaticity

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.



Navigating Global Trends: Climate, Conflict and the Future of Business

With Lieutenant General (Ret'd)
Richard Nugee CVO CBE

Global Trends

- Session Overview

Lieutenant General (Ret'd) Richard Nugee CVO CBE opened with a clear view of how global systems are shifting.

As the former head of sustainability at the Ministry of Defence, he spoke about the links between conflict, climate and resources, and how each is now shaping the conditions for growth and security.

He outlined three connected crises: biodiversity loss, resource depletion and climate disruption.

The question, he said, is how we adapt.

His message was direct. Disruption is inevitable, but so is innovation if we act.



Key Signals

- **Resilience has overtaken efficiency.** The world we built for efficiency no longer works. Supply chains, food systems and public budgets are too tight to absorb shocks. The next competitive edge is the ability to flex, recover and adapt.
- **Climate change is a national security issue.** Nugee described climate not as a moral cause but as a security threat, driving conflict, migration and resource scarcity. Acting early reduces risk, stabilises markets and strengthens national resilience.
- **Power follows control.** From lithium to rare earths, the race for critical materials is reshaping geopolitics. Regions that recycle, substitute and recover resources locally will have more control and bargaining power.

Key Signals

- **Leadership determines adaptability.** Resilience depends on decisions made by people, not systems. Just as cyber risk moved from IT to the boardroom, climate resilience must now sit at the centre of corporate strategy and public governance.
- **Storytelling shapes action.** In the Q&A, Nugee warned that data alone won't shift opinion. The language of "net zero" has been politicised; what wins people over are stories about security, prosperity and health.
- **Opportunity lives in the transition.** The shift to resilience isn't only defensive. New technologies, industries and skills will emerge from solving these systemic problems. Businesses that move early will define the new markets.

“There’s more gold in a tonne of mobile phones than there is in a tonne of gold ore - yet we throw them away.”

—Lt Gen Richard Nugee CVO
CBE



What to Take Forward

1. Reframe the language of action.

Start with outcomes, security, prosperity, cost and health, not emissions or targets. The same work lands differently when framed through what people value most.

2. Build resilience into strategy.

Efficiency is no longer the measure of success. Plan for disruption in supply chains, skills, energy and leadership, and design systems that can flex when conditions change.

3. Invest in sovereignty and circularity.

Regions that recover, reuse and generate locally will hold more control and stability. Resource security and energy self-sufficiency are the new foundations of competitiveness.

4. See opportunity in the transition.

The businesses that treat sustainability as innovation, finding new uses, new markets and smarter processes will define the next decade of growth.

5. Lead through evidence.

Make the business case visible. Talk in savings, stability and future market access. That's how boards and investors move from awareness to action.

Nugee's Ten Signals for Business Action

1. Think long term.
2. Look at everything through a sustainability lens.
3. Analyse embedded carbon in your supply chain.
4. Explore dual-use innovation, technologies that can serve multiple markets or solve multiple problems.
5. Diversify your supply chain.
6. Onshore where you can.
7. Question whether "just in time" still works.
8. Build energy self-sufficiency.
9. Assess climate-induced risks and mitigations.
10. Always make the business case.

Procurement as a Growth Strategy

Adrian Johnston MBE, Innovation Commissioner at Innovation City Belfast

Mandy Ridyard, FD at Produmax, Mayor's Business Advisor & Chair Space Hub Yorkshire

Mick Davies, Management Consultant, KPMG

Chair: Matt Johnson, MD, Form

Procurement - Session Overview

The procurement panel brought together corporate buyers, public innovators and scaleup founders, from KPMG's view of how large organisations buy, to Belfast's challenge fund approach, and Mandy Ridyard's experience of winning aerospace contracts by building trust with major primes.

The discussion focused on how buying decisions can open markets, how risk can be shared rather than shifted, and how contracts can reward innovation and long-term value, not just cost. Above all, procurement was seen as a culture change, a shift from compliance to growth strategy.



Key Signals



- **Procurement is growth infrastructure.** Access to markets is as powerful as access to capital. For many scaleups, winning a first anchor customer does more for growth than any grant or equity round.
- **Risk aversion still blocks innovation.** Corporate and public buyers are trained to avoid risk. Incentives need to shift, from punishing mistakes to rewarding outcomes.
- **Local value can be designed in.** From Sizewell C's 35% local supply mandate to West Yorkshire's inclusive growth policies, there are real examples of how procurement can anchor prosperity locally, if written into the brief from the start.

Key Signals

- **Relationships trump portals.** Founders don't break into supply chains through tender portals alone. They do it by knowing the technical buyer, the economic buyer, and by building credibility early.
- **Procurement is culture change.** It is a "a massive cultural shift" for public bodies to see procurement as innovation, not admin. It needs leadership from the top and permission to experiment within the rules.
- **Speed and process are still the enemy.** From defence to local government, delays and red tape are pushing out the very firms procurement claims to help. Procurement "light" models could help, matching process to scale of risk.



What to Take Forward

1. Procurement sets the conditions for growth.

The way we buy defines who can compete, when contracts back innovation and local delivery, they turn spend into strategy.

2. Build inclusion in from the start.

Set out expectations for local participation, SME access and faster payment terms early, not as a box-ticking exercise later.

3. Reward outcomes, not just compliance.

Buyers need room to make decisions based on value and innovation, not only on cost.

4. Use procurement as a space for innovation.

Challenge funds and outcome-based contracts can help new suppliers deliver fresh solutions within live procurement, not on the sidelines.

5. Join up support and supply.

Help founders understand how procurement really works, and help buyers see what smaller suppliers can offer.

6. Keep learning visible.

Shorten, simplify and share what works. The more we show others how change happens, the faster we can make it real across regions.



Smarter Signals for Scaleup Ecosystems and Policy

Alex Craven, Co-founder at The Data City

James Phipps, Deputy Director, Innovation Growth Lab, Nesta

Sarah Bowes, Head of Business, Innovation and Inclusive Economy, West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Richelle Schuster, Creaticity - Host

Data - Session Overview

With more responsibility for growth decisions being made locally, the question is whether regions have the right data to guide them. The session brought together perspectives from the Innovation Growth Lab, The Data City and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to explore how evidence, real-time signals and open evaluation can shape smarter support for scaleups.

The panel explored how new data sources can help regions see what's really happening in their economies, and how learning, trust and collaboration have to become part of how we work, not just how we report.



Key Signals

- **We're still measuring the wrong things.** Too much policy still relies on old data - headcount, turnover, sector codes that haven't changed in 15 years. The economy has moved on; our metrics haven't.
- **Real-time data can show what's next.** The new "frontier economy" - the mix of creative, digital and science-led businesses driving UK growth - doesn't fit neat boxes. Real-time data can show where new markets are forming before the traditional stats catch up.
- **Evidence needs to be shared, not stored.** The best evaluation work often never leaves local systems. When funders and delivery teams don't share learning, everyone pays for the same mistakes twice.



Key Signals

- **We can't evaluate ourselves honestly.** Too many programmes are assessed by the people who deliver them. Independent, open evaluation is essential if we're serious about learning what works.
- **Inclusion and impact must be visible.** Growth can't be measured just in output or GVA. We need to track who benefits and whether opportunities reach beyond the usual networks.
- **Benchmarking should drive learning, not competition.** Comparing data across regions should help collaboration, not fuel league tables. The goal isn't to win, it's to learn faster together.



What to Take Forward

1. Share what we already know.

Too much evidence sits unused. Opening up evaluations and datasets allows others to learn faster and build on what's already working.

2. Be honest about what works.

Independent evaluation should be built into every programme. What matters is learning, not proving.

3. Use data to guide what's next.

Real-time signals can show where growth is forming before the official stats catch up, if we're ready to use them that way.

4. Learn as we go.

Evaluation shouldn't be a postscript. The best ecosystems test, adapt and improve while the work's still live.

5. Measure what matters to people.

Growth is about more than numbers. Track who benefits, who's included and whether change lasts.



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 stay part of the community and 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.