

Annual Review

2024-25



Innovate. Compete. Grow.

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Foreword

As I reflect on the last 12 months, I couldn't be prouder of what the RTC North team and our partners have achieved. It's been a year of delivery, growth, and real impact, supporting thousands of businesses and individuals across the North to build resilience, embrace innovation, and move confidently towards the future.

From helping SMEs navigate supply chain challenges to companies scaling up through our Innovate UK and local programmes, we've strengthened our role as a trusted partner to both businesses and government. Our work with major primes has shown that there's real appetite to connect with smaller companies, not just in their own supply chains but also in adjacent industries where innovation can take root. RTC is proud to act as a bridge between these worlds.

Our support has reached deep into communities, from schools encouraging young people into STEM, to businesses scaling up through Innovate UK support. We know that solving the skills challenge demands a long-term plan. The newly launched Modern Industrial strategy sets a bold longer term vision for the economy but crucially also makes the link between investment and our future skills needs. Through our STEM programmes and work with regional skills partnerships, we're already laying those foundations.

Productivity remains a national priority, but our focus is making it real at the firm level. For manufacturers, this might mean improving QCD

or reducing lead times; for service businesses, it's about metrics like revenue per employee or conversion rates. We're pushing for funding models that reflect this diversity, helping businesses measure what matters and evidence their impact in meaningful ways.

Innovation continues to be central to what we do and while funding is available, we believe more needs to reach SMEs that are close to market, with real customers and strong commercial potential. That's why our focus is on helping these companies access the right support at the right time, whether in digital, health, advanced manufacturing or clean tech.

Looking ahead, there's so much to be excited about. Trade deals with India and the US are opening fresh doors. Our relationship with the EU appears to be strengthening, offering renewed hope for better access to our biggest trading partner. With RTC's support, businesses across the North can seize these opportunities and grow beyond their current boundaries.

Devolution is another bright spot. As more powers and funding shift from Whitehall to our regions, we're better placed to tackle local challenges and play to our unique strengths, whether in clean energy, advanced engineering, or life sciences.



Jamie Ollivere, Chief Executive, RTC North

The potential of The Great North collaboration if harnessed could be enormous. At RTC, we've always believed the North is stronger together and we're energised by the prospect of deeper cross regional working.

Our ambition for 2025/26 is clear, to help more businesses break through to the next level, to shift more micros to small and medium sized enterprises, drawing and locking more wealth into the region. It's not just about funding or advice. It's about helping people grow their confidence to take informed risks. It's about unlocking leadership potential. And it's about building an economy where opportunity is shared, and prosperity is genuinely inclusive.

To the RTC team, thank you! Your passion, creativity, and determination continue to inspire. And to our partners, clients, and friends, let's keep building. The best is yet to come.

Jamie Ollivere,
Chief Executive, RTC North

Our year in numbers

During 2024/25 we have supported:



So far*, these businesses have:



And our work in STEM continues to deliver for young people across the North:

61,958	5,498	1,756	3,237	160,000+
Volunteer Hours	STEM activities delivered	Schools engaged	Approved STEM Ambassadors	Young people engaged

*Figures will increase as the CRM is finalised at year end.

Our strategic priorities: Innovate, Compete, Grow

At RTC North, we believe the success of our region depends on the success of its businesses, and that success looks different for everyone. That's why our strategy is built around three interconnected priorities: Innovate, Compete, and Grow. Together, they provide a clear framework for how we support businesses at every stage of their journey – from early ideas to scale and long-term sustainability.

These pillars are underpinned by two cross-cutting commitments: our work in STEM, which builds the future talent pipeline, and our focus on supply chains, which helps businesses open up new markets, adopt shared best practices, and unlock innovation opportunities through collaboration.

These priorities are not standalone. They are deeply connected - businesses that innovate are more competitive, and competitive businesses are more likely to grow. Our approach is rooted in place, powered by partnership, and underpinned by a deep commitment to practical, tailored, people-first support.

By focusing on Innovate, Compete and Grow and strengthening them through STEM and supply chain excellence, we aim to unlock potential and drive positive change across the North.

<h3>Innovate</h3> <p>Innovate is about turning creativity and knowledge into action. We help businesses explore new ideas, develop products and services, adopt new technologies, and embed innovation into how they think and operate. This includes nationally recognised programmes like Made Smarter and Regional Talent Engines, and personalised support that helps founders grow their innovation confidence and capability.</p>	<h3>Compete</h3> <p>Compete is about giving businesses the tools to stand out – locally, nationally, or globally. We support SMEs to improve operational performance, adopt digital solutions, strengthen supply chains, and meet regulatory and sustainability standards. Our supply chain work plays a crucial role here, enabling businesses to benchmark, learn, and scale through access to new partners and opportunities.</p>	<h3>Grow</h3> <p>Grow focuses on building long-term capability in leadership, people, and strategy. We work with businesses to strengthen teams, access finance and investment, develop leadership capacity, and create sustainable growth plans. This is about turning ambition into momentum and ensuring that growth is inclusive, resilient, and future-proofed.</p>
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STEM: Building a strong STEM pipeline is vital to unlocking the region's innovation and growth potential, developing future talent, closing skills gaps, and ensuring young people are equipped to thrive in high-value sectors.

Supply Chain: Strengthening local supply chains boosts regional resilience, supports SME competitiveness, and helps anchor economic value in the North, enabling more businesses to access opportunities and scale with confidence.

Innovate

Innovate: turning ideas into impact

Innovation is the lifeblood of a competitive, resilient economy. Our commitment is to help individuals and businesses across the North turn bold ideas into commercial opportunities, because we know that new thinking drives future growth and helps tackle some of the most pressing issues facing people, planet and place. Whether it's supporting a solo founder to shape their first product or helping early-career engineers transition into entrepreneurship, our innovation programmes are designed to unlock potential and build confidence in the journey from idea to action.

1,650

founders and businesses supported

As a long-standing delivery partner for Innovate UK across the North, we play a key role in connecting national innovation priorities with local potential, translating strategy into action on the ground. Over the past year, we've supported 1,600 founders and businesses through programmes such as Innovative Entrepreneurs and Regional Talent Engines, providing tailored coaching, peer networks and strategic insight to help people build viable ventures and bring innovation to market.



“““

Innovation isn't just about tech or invention, it's about solving real problems, creating value, and having the confidence to take the first step. Our job is to walk that journey with them.

Chantelle Brandon Reeves,
Innovation Coach, RTC North

Regional Talent Engines: shaping the innovators of tomorrow

The Regional Talent Engines programme supports early-career engineers in turning technical ideas into viable business ventures, building a stronger pipeline of innovation talent across the North East, Yorkshire, North West and Northern Ireland.



Empowering Women Through Technology:
Closer Health's AI-driven platform supports women in syncing their cycles with their schedules, enhancing well-being and productivity.

Innovative Entrepreneurs: inclusive support that works

Funded through the West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and delivered in partnership, the Innovative Entrepreneurs programme provides early-stage founders with practical, human-centred coaching to develop their businesses, test ideas, and build strategies for growth.

So far, we've supported 70 founders from across West Yorkshire's five mayoral districts, over half are women, 30% from ethnically diverse backgrounds, and nearly a quarter disabled or neurodivergent. The inclusive model has been described by Leeds University Business School as "the scaffolding that holds the programme together."

Helen Hill, co-founder of Be the Future Immersed, joined the programme following a major pivot in her climate education business. Traditional business planning left her uninspired, but through a creative and visual coaching approach, she was able to reframe her thinking, refine her proposition, and ultimately secure a £50k Innovate UK grant to develop a prototype for a new immersive education experience.



“““

I came in with big ideas and no idea how to make them real. Thanks to RTC North, I now have a team, a funded pilot, and a business that reflects who I am.

Helen Hill, Be the Future Immersed,
Yorkshire and the Humber

Helen – Founder of Be the Future Immersed

Be The Future IMMERS[ED] design and deliver interactive learning experiences that inspire all ages to engage with sustainability through play, storytelling, and technology. They work with cultural, heritage, and educational partners to create immersive, cross-generational experiences that spark curiosity and drive meaningful, community-led change.

“““

Having someone who really listened, challenged me, and kept me on track made all the difference.

Adenike Bamigbade, Closer Health Ltd,
Yorkshire and the Humber



Coaching support was delivered through tools like Miro, tailored to Helen's visual strengths and creative mindset. With continued support from Innovate UK Business Growth, Helen is now building partnerships, developing hardware and software, and preparing for commercial launch in 2025.

Another participant, Adenike Bamigbade of Closer Health, launched her health-tech app during the programme and credits the coaching with helping her stay focused and accountable.

Building an ecosystem that supports innovation

Through all our innovation work, we've seen the power of coaching to unlock clarity, confidence, and commercial potential. We continue to build networks that connect founders with the support, insight and inspiration they need to grow. We do this because we know that when innovative ideas are backed with the right support, they don't just lead to great businesses, they shape better futures for us all.

48

engineers supported

This year, we supported 48 engineers through the programme, helping them develop core entrepreneurial skills, build commercial strategies, and explore routes to market. Over 80% of participants rated the programme's content and coaching at the highest level during an independent review.

Compete

Helping Businesses Compete with Confidence

At RTC North, we believe competitiveness is about more than just price, it's about clarity, capability, and long-term resilience. Helping businesses improve performance, adopt smarter processes and prepare for future markets is central to our mission. In today's fast-moving economy, standing still isn't an option, and our programmes are designed to help businesses across the North stay sharp, agile and ambitious.

From supporting manufacturers to embrace digital transformation through Made Smarter, to building future skills through our STEM Hub, we've helped businesses of all shapes and sizes strengthen their competitive edge.

Because staying competitive isn't just about the here and now, it's about securing the talent and skills needed for the future. Our work brings education and industry closer together, ensuring young people understand the careers available to them, and businesses have a direct stake in developing the workforce they'll depend on tomorrow.



Seaward GMC-Instruments Ltd

Smarter Manufacturing with Made Smarter

Our role in delivering part of the Made Smarter programme continues to boost competitiveness for manufacturers across the North. Through a combination of technical guidance, capital funding, and leadership support, the programme helps SMEs adopt digital technologies that increase productivity, reduce waste, and improve sustainability.

In 2024, we supported over 130 manufacturers, helping them unlock efficiencies through technologies such as robotics, data analytics, and smart automation. But the value goes beyond the tech, our strategic coaching ensures change sticks by focusing on leadership behaviours and long-term thinking.

Seaward GMC-Instruments Ltd joined the programme to modernise their traceability system. With our

support, they implemented a laser engraver to replace a manual card system, using QR codes for electronic tracking, improving both efficiency and data accuracy. By applying insights gained during peer-learning sessions, they also discovered time-saving improvements using software they already owned, saving approximately one hour per day on data capture tasks.

“The big benefit was learning from other industries — seeing how a bakery or a food manufacturer solved a challenge helped me rethink how we do things in electronics.”
Chad Murray, Quality Lead, Seaward GMC-Instruments Ltd, North East



Surface Experts: Southport-based company Poly UP specialise in high-quality sports and safety surfacing solutions designed for durability, performance and protection

“The support gave us clarity and filled the gaps with practical advice. It's completely transformed how we approach new opportunities.”
Lewis, Director, Poly UP, North West

Ready to Win: Practical Procurement Support for SMEs

Competitiveness isn't always about grand strategy, sometimes, it's about knowing how to win the next contract.

That's the focus of our Supply Chain Support work in the Liverpool City Region, delivered in partnership with Growth Platform and Liverpool

City Region Combined Authority. Our Introduction to procurement workshops and 1:1 support helped over 150 SMEs improve their tendering knowledge, confidence and success rate.

Workshops were tailored to key sectors like advanced manufacturing, digital and creative, and life sciences. Each session included practical presentations, peer learning, expert

speakers, and post-event action planning, helping businesses develop the clarity and skills to win work. For Poly UP, a Southport-based surfacing business, this support proved transformational. Following one of our sessions, the team successfully secured an £85,000 contract, avoided common tendering pitfalls, and are now planning to hire a new team member.

Building Competitiveness from the Classroom Up

Long-term competitiveness starts with education. Our STEM Hub is building the region's future skills pipeline — helping to close gaps in engineering, digital, manufacturing, and other high-demand sectors.

In 2024:

- We delivered over 40 events, including large-scale STEMFests and Career Ready sessions
- Engaged more than 160,000 students
- Welcomed 820 new STEM Ambassadors across the North East and Yorkshire & Humber
- Hosted our flagship CyberFirst Education Conference, bringing together over 100 educators and professionals



“Our commitment to STEM is about building a future-ready workforce — not just for today's economy, but for tomorrow's industries.”
Janine Marshall, Head of Business Development, RTC North

From the classroom to the shop floor, and from the bid room to the boardroom, we're proud to be helping businesses and communities across the North compete with clarity, ambition and resilience. The challenges are big — but so is the opportunity.



Grow

Helping businesses grow with purpose

At RTC North, we are proud to be the biggest champions of business support and growth. We know that businesses are the cornerstone of the UK economy, from early-stage start-ups to established SMEs and fast-scaling firms. Together, they account for 99.9% of the UK business population, employ over 16 million people, and contribute more than £2.4 trillion to the economy each year. We love that we've played a part in helping almost 700 of them across the North of England to grow and reach their full potential.

We understand that growth looks different for every business. Some need support to build confidence and test ideas; others need help breaking into new markets, strengthening supply chains, or preparing for scale. Our job is to meet businesses where they are and back them with tailored support, expertise, and insight to move forward. This year, we've done just that through our flagship Scaleup and Supply Chain programmes delivered in partnership across the North.

Scaleup North East: from ambition to impact

Through our Scaleup programme, we help high-potential businesses overcome the barriers that can hold them back, from access to finance and leadership capability to market entry and commercial clarity. Our experienced Partners are the jewel in the crown of this programme - accomplished business leaders who have themselves successfully scaled companies. Their lived experience

gives them a unique ability to act as mentors, sounding boards, and strategic challengers.

Jaymac Solutions are a family-run pallet and packaging company that secured £2.15m in funding, expanded across four sites, and landed a long-term contract with a major international supermarket. With the support of Scaleup Partner Craig Huntingdon, they were able to rethink their strategy, secure new partnerships, and make confident investment decisions.

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Craig's knowledge and network helped us take meaningful steps forward. We now have a long-term vision and the confidence to deliver it. His insight helped us connect with the right opportunities at the right time and put plans in place that will continue to shape our future.

Wes Thompson, Managing Director, Jaymac Solutions, North East



Another standout success is Savour Bake Café, a high-end artisan bakery and hospitality business founded by entrepreneur Josh Freudiger. Through one-to-one support, peer networking and strategic mentoring, Josh worked with Craig to refine his business model, build leadership capacity and stay focused through a challenging period of growth.

This year we welcomed Dan Martin to the team, a serial entrepreneur with a strong track record in launching, scaling and exiting multiple ventures. Dan brings deep expertise in sales, marketing and customer strategy, and joins our experienced Scaleup Partner cohort, including Craig Huntingdon, Angelina Bell, Mark Harrison, Steve Bell and Tony Brooks. Together, they offer a powerful mix of sector knowledge, scaling experience and leadership insight, forming the backbone of our scaleup support and ensuring every business we work with receives expert, relevant and actionable guidance.



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Craig believed in me when things were tough. His support and insight gave me the confidence to keep going. Having someone experienced in hospitality to guide and challenge me made all the difference.

Josh Freudiger, Founder of Savour, North East

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Helping someone grow a business they love is one of the greatest privileges. We're not just consultants - we're in it with them.

Dan Martin, Scaleup Partner

Supply Chain Support: opening doors to new markets

To grow, businesses often need to diversify and increase their resilience, something that can be complex, time-consuming and expensive. Our Supply Chain programmes in West Yorkshire, Tees Valley and Sunderland are designed to reduce those barriers by connecting SMEs with large buyers in sectors such as defence, decarbonisation, and advanced manufacturing. Likewise our Liverpool City Region Supply Chain Readiness Programme aims to equip businesses with the tools and knowledge to secure and deliver services through successful bid and tender processes and our Burnley Manufacturing Programme offers comprehensive business support for manufacturing companies in Burnley and Pendle. This programme emphasises technology adoption and productivity enhancements.

We were thrilled to support Simply Ltd, a West Yorkshire-based manufacturer of promotional merchandise, as they looked to break into the local engineering and manufacturing supply chain. Through our tailored support, they developed a targeted growth plan, engaged new regional partners and explored market diversification.

Now with new connections and a clearer strategy, Simply Ltd is

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RTC North helped us identify our key customers and prove market fit. Their insight and support gave us the confidence to push ahead with purpose.

Simply Ltd, Yorkshire and the Humber

expanding into new sectors with confidence, positioning their sustainable and regional-first approach to align with emerging buyer priorities.

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It's not just about helping SMEs win work, it's about creating capability and confidence that lasts. Localising supply chains builds resilience, reduces risk and creates new value in the regions we serve.

Lesley Hawke Project Manager (Sunderland City UKSPF Supply Chain)

Alan Whittaker, RTC North's Head of Operations has played a central role in shaping and delivering these programmes. Alan and his team bring not just delivery oversight, but deep knowledge of manufacturing, buyer expectations, and the nuances of regional supply networks.

Our work in supply chain development continues to prove that when small businesses are equipped to meet the demands of major contracts, everyone benefits, from local jobs and carbon savings to innovation that drives entire sectors forward.

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The support has been truly invaluable. I'm no longer scared to try new things, and I feel confident about the future of our business.

Glad, Gardenside Lodge, North East

Place-Based Growth: Supporting Durham Businesses to Thrive

We've loved working with Business Durham to deliver the Durham Business Growth programme, supporting sustainable and inclusive development across the county. From marketing and digital adoption to decarbonisation and business planning, we've helped a diverse mix of businesses unlock new opportunities.

One example is Gardenside Lodge, a countryside retreat facing rising energy costs and changing customer expectations. With limited marketing and digital experience, the owners accessed one-to-one mentoring, practical workshops, and support to improve their website, branding and energy efficiency.

Through the programme, they launched a new website with an integrated booking system, learned how to create content using Canva, and secured funding for insulation to improve guest comfort. The result is a stronger digital presence, a more confident team, and a growing customer base.

Growth looks different for every business, but the right support at the right time can transform potential into progress. We're proud to play a part.



**We are looking forward to 2025/26,
follow along on our journey:**

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RTC
inspiring growth