

Interview with Graham Townsend
Technical Director, Research and Development, Scotland
ST Microelectronics

“We have a complete silicon design team here including the software, hardware and digital analog mixed-signal teams.

Right now, we've got a total of 85 people here on-site, of whom maybe 50 to 60 are actually engineering staff and the remainder are associated with the operations and manufacturing side.

Time to market is extremely important for us. Typical product lifetimes can be 18 months or less, and so we have to get very rapidly into the market – and not just to prototype but of course time to volume is very important. We find that the local infrastructure here is extremely useful in being able to meet these aggressive time scales.

I would say the Alba Center has been very instrumental in identifying Scotland as a key area for remote design centers and for start-ups in the silicon design area.

The Alba Center provides a useful focus for a number of different activities that are required to bring the complex silicon systems of today into volume production with our customers. And by providing facilities in terms of test, in terms of system-level integration, in terms of diagnostics and coordinating those together, and IP. exchange as well, then the Alba Center actually helps both small companies and large companies to realize their ideas in systems on silicon. So the ability to locally have prototype devices assembled, be able to do focused R&D milling, to determine problems and failures of devices, these are all part of the local infrastructure that allows a company to rapidly bring devices to volume. Then, coupled with the existing industrial background, companies that are already here, providing a ready supply of experienced engineers, and then of course, the educational university background as well, supplying the graduates -- all together it makes a total package, which is very attractive to any company seeking to locate a design center or a start-up in the electronic design field.

In my experience, there aren't any other areas that I am aware of which have quite such a concentration of both manufacturing and design. And in that sense, bringing those together and specifically focusing the activities on supporting both the smaller start-ups and the larger multinationals, I would say that the environment is unique within Europe.”