A student-driven conference shaping the future of optics and matter: NW-MYROM 2026

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One of the most valuable experiences in the early stages of a scientific career is the opportunity to connect with peers, exchange ideas, and explore future collaborations. Conferences play a crucial role in this process, but what happens when such an event is entirely organized by students?

From April 16th to 18th 2026, the North Western Meeting of Young Researchers in Optics and Matter (NW-MYROM) returned for its third edition in Salamanca, Spain. What began as a joint initiative between the EPS Young Minds sections of Santiago de Compostela (LUZADA) and Salamanca (OSAL), originally focused on optics and photonics, has now evolved into a broader platform that also embraces materials and related areas of physics. At the same time, the event has expanded its network to include additional student groups, such as the EPS Young Minds section of Valladolid (Physics League) and the OPTICA Student Chapter of the Basque Country (Fotonekin). More than just a scientific meeting, NW-MYROM has grown into a collaborative, student-driven space where young researchers, from undergraduate to PhD level, can actively participate, present their work, and build meaningful connections within the scientific community.

What makes NW-MYROM different?

Unlike many scientific conferences embedded within larger senior events, NW-MYROM is entirely driven by students and early-career researchers. This model allows participants to take an active role not only in presenting their work, but also in shaping the scientific program and the overall experience of the event. As a result, the meeting creates a more open and approachable environment, where discussions feel closer and more interactive, and where young researchers can engage more directly with both peers and invited speakers.

How did we organize it?

Organizing a conference of this scale as students is both a challenge and a learning experience. The preparation of NW-MYROM 2026 started in September 2025, several months in advance, and required continuous coordination between different student groups based in different cities. To keep the process on track, regular online meetings were held every two weeks, where tasks were distributed, short-term goals were set, and progress was shared among the team. Balancing the organization with academic responsibilities was one of the main challenges, but it also became a valuable learning experience in teamwork and communication.

What did the scientific program look like?

The aim of this conference was to approach early-stage students to such a broad concept as Academia. NW-MYROM included a wide set of scientific activities, including the visit to cutting-edge facilities, such as the Centro de Láseres Pulsados (CLPU) and two research laboratories (ALF-USAL & QMADE labs) where students could exchange insightful ideas with researchers in the field. Besides, there was a space for scientific talks, comprising 4 senior talks given by researchers linked to the 4 organising Student chapters. From the students' side, they had the opportunity to both give their first short presentation and defend their first scientific poster. These experiences, held in a friendly and near atmosphere, broadened the mind of many participants and inspired them to pursue an academic path.

How did the meeting support professional development?

In addition to the purely scientific sessions, a roundtable was organized to present different career perspectives from both academia and industry. The aim was to show younger

▲ FIG. 1: The first day integrated a visit to the cutting-edge Centro de Láseres Pulsados (CLPU).

▲ **FIG. 2:** The poster sessions aimed that students could defend their early scientific work in a relaxed atmosphere.

generations the possible career paths available after graduation. Moderated by Yann Amouroux, the roundtable included two speakers from academia, Carlos Hernández García (USAL) and Gabriel Pérez Callejo (UVa), and two from industry, Christina Graham (MeetOptics) and Guillermo Gil (Tecnalia). Interdisciplinary talks were also presented. The first was given by Casandra Pablos (USAL), who provided useful stress management tools for young researchers and students. Additionally, to demonstrate that people with visual impairments can equally engage in scientific dissemination and research, Enrique Pérez (Instituto de Astrofísica de Andalucía) spoke about the challenges he overcomes every day and how light beautifully becomes music. Furthermore, a networking activity was organized, consisting of traditional games such as charades, rope jumping, and a sack race, to foster team-building and improve communication skills, so important in the professional environment.

Can a conference go beyond academia?

Of course! Taking advantage of the organizers' backgrounds as part of student groups, the event finished with an outreach activity in one of the most popular squares in Salamanca. During the morning, all four student groups together with members from the OPTICA Student Chapter of Valencia (Photonets UV), brought experiments like a bed of nails, Van de Graaff generator, diffraction glasses, optical fibers, a quantum cryptography kit, and a model of a human eye with simulations of various conditions. Beyond bringing physics closer to the general public in Salamanca, this final activity served as an excellent opportunity to share outreach ideas and experiments between sections, as well as closing the conference in a memorable way.

Was it worth it?

Without any doubt, the North Western Meeting of Young Researchers in Optics and Matter has been an absolute success. And not only because we have carried out a very diverse program where everyone had a good time and, at the same time, they got new ideas and feelings. The most valuable teaching of this event has been the strong teamwork between sections and how we have managed every aspect of the meeting to demonstrate that students are the best option to organize a conference for students. We are truly excited to see how this initiative has grown, to meet familiar faces again as well as new ones, and to become, at each edition, a bigger family. ■

▲ **FIG. 3:** Group photo of the organizer committee during the outreach event.