

# BRIDGING ACADEMIA AND POLICY ACROSS YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER



OUR IMPACT AND  
LESSONS LEARNED



## WHAT OUR COLLABORATORS SAY

Y-PERN is founded on collaboration between the region's universities and policymakers. This is what some of our partners have told us about the impact of Y-PERN in its first three years.

*"Y-PERN has helped strengthen links between our region's universities and the MCA, ensuring we have better access to expertise to support evidence-led decision-making. Via the Policy Fellow initiative we've been lucky to host a Y-PERN Policy Fellow. This support and partnership has been great for introducing new data insights into our work, particularly in developing the region's economic strategy, and strengthening our organisation's analytical capability at a time when our work is rapidly changing and growing."*

**Alice Rubbra, Assistant Director, Growth, Business and Skills Strategy, South Yorkshire Mayoral Authority**

*"Y-PERN has been fundamental to the CA, particularly in helping us to develop our Local Growth Plan. As a newly formed CA, we don't have a large or established data resource in place and it's something we're seeking to strengthen as we move forward. Y-PERN has helped to fill that gap and ensure our emerging strategies are evidence-led. This has included valuable research and analysis on York and North Yorkshire's productivity performance, a refresh of our Labour Market Analysis and utilising their expertise and knowledge to point to useful research around inclusive growth. Y-PERN has been there as a critical friend and a sounding board for research needs. I hope this collaboration can continue into the future and ensure that future decision-making remains led by robust evidence."*

**Kate McHugh, Research and Evaluation Officer, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority**



“I welcome this first of its kind [childcare] report from Y-PERN, and we are already taking action to respond to the recommendations. We must now address the concerns of a workforce that is undervalued and underpaid, and of families who deserve consistent and high quality childcare services.”

**Tracy Brabin,  
Mayor of West Yorkshire**

“The Devolution Project has been a successful collaboration between Yorkshire and Humber Councils and Y-PERN, showcasing the region's commitment to enhance local governance, drive innovation and support collaboration via devolution. At a time where devolution continues to build momentum, with all areas of the Yorkshire and Humber region now covered by an MCA or Strategic Authority, this project has been helpful in demonstrating the region's strong support for collaboration and the potential for devolution to bring significant benefits to local communities.”

**Florence Drew, Head of Chief Executive's Office,  
Office of the Chief Executive Barnsley Metropolitan  
Borough Council**

“Y-PERN has proven absolutely essential in support of York Hungry Minds. The Universities of York and Leeds have complimented each other really well in their research into the effectiveness of the York Hungry Minds Project and the research has also supported effective decision making in the City of York Council through improved evidence and testimonials from the schools, children and families.”

**Cllr Bob Webb, Executive Member for Children,  
Young People and Education, City of York Council**

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Y-PERN

YORKSHIRE & HUMBER POLICY  
ENGAGEMENT & RESEARCH NETWORK



5.4M



POPULATION

12



YORKSHIRE  
UNIVERSITIES

19



COUNCILS &  
COMBINED  
AUTHORITIES

£6M



RESEARCH ENGLAND DEVELOPMENT  
& INSTITUTIONAL FUNDING

A "LIVE LABORATORY"  
APPROACH

BREAKING DOWN  
SILOS



SHARING POWER TO  
DRIVE ACTION

TRANSFORMING  
ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT  
WITH POLICY AND  
ENHANCING REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

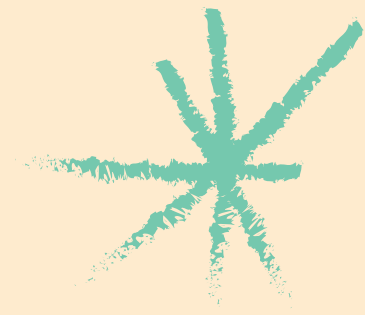
## AN INTRODUCTION FROM Y-PERN'S LEADERSHIP

From Y-PERN's inception in Sept 2022, our mission was clear: to work in partnership with local and regional government policymakers to harness the remarkable multidisciplinary academic data, evidence, and expertise provided by the universities of Yorkshire and the Humber.

Y-PERN's formation was a bold commitment to widen and deepen collaboration across Yorkshire and the Humber, building on the strong foundations laid by the 2021 Memorandum of Understanding between Yorkshire Universities and Yorkshire and Humber Councils to work together to support regional development.

Much has changed since then! When Y-PERN was formed three years ago, only two of the region's Combined Authorities existed. Y-PERN has significantly deepened academic-policy relationships with these (South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire) whilst also supporting the Mayoral transition teams in the York and North Yorkshire and Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authorities.

Our academics, alongside knowledge exchange professionals, have co-developed with policy partners valuable and impactful work on critical issues. Whether it's collaborating on skills needs, integrating childcare and early years education with local growth plans, supporting female entrepreneurship, unpacking the opportunities of devolution, or working with local communities to amplify the voices of different places, Y-PERN has demonstrated the value of collaboration and the significant impact we can achieve when academia, policymakers and partners unite under a common purpose.





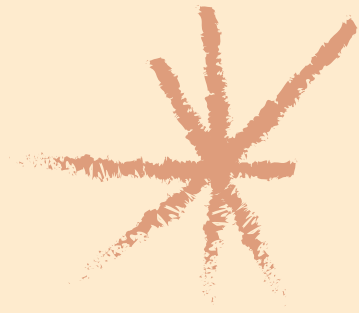
Y-PERN activity has underpinned additional new investment into the region with a value of more than double the original £4m awarded to Y-PERN from Research England (for example, UK Research and Innovation £5m award for the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP) to test and trial innovative approaches to place-based and community research).

The feedback we have received in our independent evaluation has been overwhelmingly positive as well as engaging, which speaks volumes about the passion and dedication of everyone involved to make this work.

We have also learnt valuable lessons on how to hone our approach to further increase Y-PERN's effectiveness going forward. For example, the importance of **responding to demand**, of **co-ownership**, and how **partnership working** is critical at all stages, including the very earliest, of the research and policy cycles.

Above all else, we have learned new lessons and methods for how to strengthen collaboration, how best to connect and communicate, and to celebrate diversity through our network in the challenging times we face.

So let us continue to work together for the benefit of Yorkshire and the Humber – the place we live, work, and call home.



**Andrew Brown (Academic Director), Kersten England (Engagement Director), and Peter O'Brien (Policy Director)**



## WHAT MAKES Y-PERN UNIQUE: A NETWORKED APPROACH TO UNIVERSITY- POLICY COLLABORATIONS

Y-PERN plays a critical bridging role between Yorkshire Universities (YU) and Yorkshire and Humber Councils (YHC). This networked approach facilitates collaboration between these entities, allowing academic researchers with a diverse range of skills and expertise to work together with policymakers to identify solutions to key opportunities and challenges facing the region.

To date, Y-PERN's team of policy fellows, knowledge exchange professionals and researchers have worked with policy partners in the region to raise awareness of the value of university research engagement. This has resulted in new collaborative and co-produced activity, increased understanding across partners in relation to what works and doesn't and identified new models and case studies for engagement.

*Y-PERN has worked on a range of policy areas, from skills and growth plans, childcare and female entrepreneurs to homelessness and floods risk. This has been supported through a diverse range of activity, from commissioned research, policy evaluations, evidence briefings, reviews of local growth plans, data analysis, and systems mapping.*

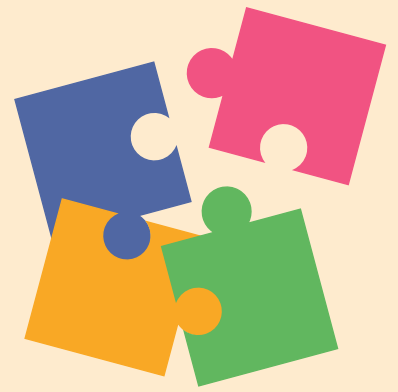


KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE  
WORKSHOP, SHEFFIELD



SMALL & SPECIALIST  
UNIVERSITIES WORKSHOP,  
LEEDS CONSERVATOIRE





Y-PERN has learnt that universities provide additional value in areas important for collaboration. Universities are home to a diverse skillset – not just in academic roles but in professional services too. In addition, universities ability to convene and facilitate different research perspectives and in providing a safe space to test new ideas has been valued by partners.

Y-PERN has worked to unite existing regional networks to enhance learning and attract more funding to the region, with a key example being through winning the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP).

Our goal is to enhance knowledge exchange and research, and improve collaboration across regional networks, simplifying opportunities for partners and fostering new ways to work together.



WORKSHOP ON BARRIERS TO  
FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP



UPEN EVENT, LEEDS  
BECKETT UNIVERSITY



PEOPLE PLACE POLICY CONFERENCE,  
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

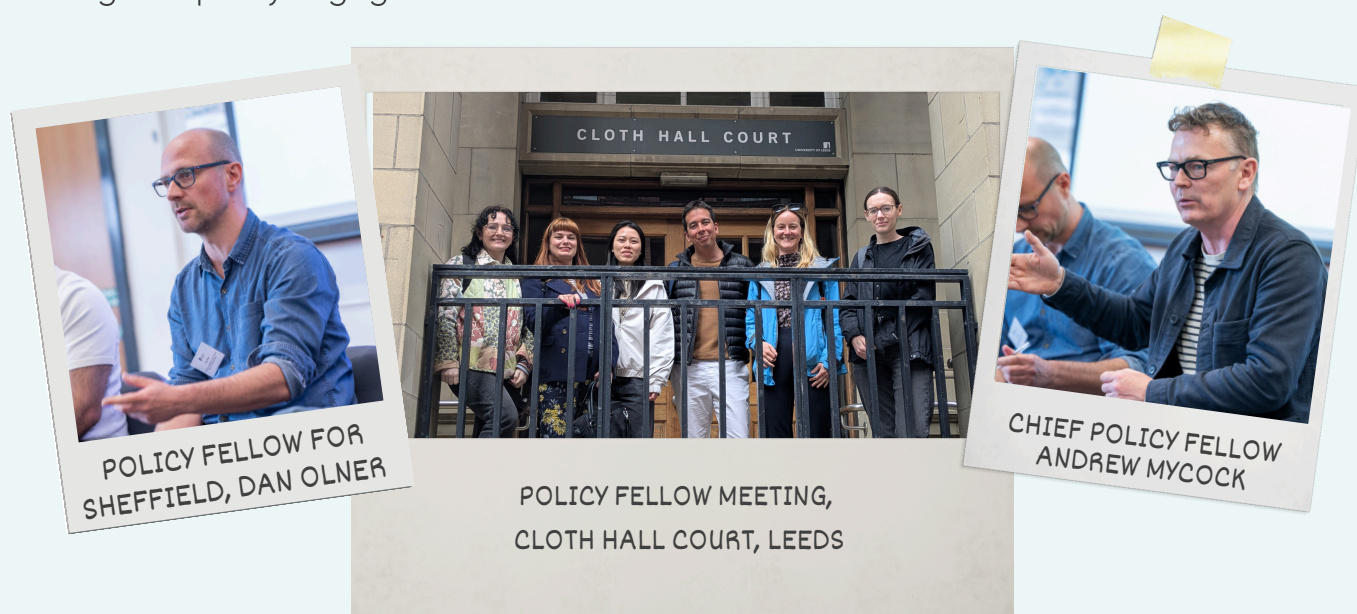
## Y-PERN'S POLICY FELLOW MODEL



Policy Fellows act as a bridge between universities and policy-making bodies in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

They work at both a sub-regional scale (e.g. York & North Yorkshire) and Yorkshire & Humber scale, collaborating closely with their policy counterparts.

The team brings together a diverse range of academic backgrounds, enabling an interdisciplinary approach to regional policy engagement.



### Policy Fellow Model: What we've learnt

Y-PERN's evaluation identified where the policy fellow model works best:

- Where the Policy Fellow is working in a bridging and knowledge broker role, embedded in a policy organisation
- Where the Policy Fellow brings deep expertise of both research and policy context on an issue and works across multiple partners on that specific issue





## THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION: CONNECTING & CONVENING PARTNERS

Yorkshire and the Humber is a region with strong collaboration and expertise in policy and academia. Our 19 local and combined authorities have extensive experience. At the same time, they are navigating new governance and structures in the context of devolution. The infrastructure to engage with research is constantly evolving.

Our 12 universities offer diverse research and expertise, providing distinct strengths for collaboration with the policy community. However, their complexity can make navigation challenging for policy partners.

Y-PERN has sought to help simplify this through providing opportunities for shared learning, piloting different approaches to research engagement, delivering training and capacity building activities and convening networks and discussions to challenge thinking.

As a result, we've identified key areas our region could work better together on:

1. **Joint funding bids:** Build on existing strengths in research and expertise
2. **Data:** Better connect and increase access to existing data projects
3. **Replicability:** Highlight areas of policy or research which other regions could learn from
4. **Community engagement:** Share best practice for supporting community needs
5. **Knowledge mobilisation:** Better understand the skills needed to support this
6. **Areas of Research Interest:** Identify shared research needs at a Yorkshire & Humber scale
7. **Clarify & simplify** our collective offer to all partners



DIVERSE  
SKILLSETS

SHARED LEARNING

PROVIDE  
OPPORTUNITIES



## Y-PERN'S VISION: SYSTEMS & NETWORKS WE'VE SUPPORTED

We progress the way researchers and policymakers work together across Yorkshire & the Humber. By drawing on our expertise in both policy and academia, we unite researchers, policymakers and the wider society to support inclusive, place-based policymaking in the region.



### ☒ RICH ACADEMIC EXPERTISE & SKILL

The region is home to more than 15000 academics. We leverage their expertise in policymaking decisions

### ☒ KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION PROFESSIONALS

We highlight the growing significance of the roles that sit across universities and policy that aim to connect research, expertise and insight to improve local policy

### ☒ AREAS OF RESEARCH INTEREST

Collaborating with our local and combined authorities to identify their Areas of Research Interest (ARIs)

### ☒ POLICY OFFICER NETWORK & EXPERTISE

An inclusive, connected and supported network for Policy Officers to meet, learn and exchange ideas

### ☒ SUPPORT FOR SMALL & SPECIALIST UNIVERSITIES

We showcase the value that our specialist and small universities can bring to the region

### ☒ JOINED UP YORKSHIRE & HUMBER NETWORKS

Building on the networks that our partners have cultivated, we have a vision of a stronger, more diverse and larger regional network



## POLICY IMPACT IN YORKSHIRE

Here we highlight how collaborative partnerships and innovative engagement strategies foster dialogue on critical issues and connect research with practice..



SOUTH  
YORKSHIRE  
POLICY  
IMPACT

### CASE STUDY

## SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY SKILLS STRATEGY

Our South Yorkshire Y-PERN teams are based at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and University of Sheffield (UoS) and comprise Vania Sena, Peter Wells, Elizabeth Sanderson, Jamie Redman, Dan Olnier, and Rich Crisp. The team was actively involved in supporting the development of South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority's (SYMCA's) current Skills Strategy, supporting with regional data analysis on topics ranging from economic growth to the region's level of arts funding.



This consisted of the following activities:



An evidence briefing on skills and labour market eco-systems



An evidence briefing on the current level of economic inactivity and support available for inactive populations in South Yorkshire



A series of workshops feeding into Skills Strategy design



Data analysis to produce key numbers for the Skills Strategy, including estimating South Yorkshire's earnings and qualifications relationship and estimating the region's skill and occupational differences to the rest of the UK

WORKSHOPS

DATA  
ANALYSIS

EVIDENCE  
BRIEFINGS



## SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICY IMPACT

### An integrated Policy Fellow Shaping Strategies with Data

Dan Olnier is a Y-PERN Policy Fellow from the University of Sheffield who has been seconded into South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) to work alongside their officers. This has been found to be valuable for SYMCA, as Dan has brought a new skillset where capacity has been limited.

The partnership has resulted in supporting SYMCA with regional data analysis on topics ranging from economic growth, the region's level of arts funding, economic inactivity, qualification levels, and job-related training trends. Dan has worked on developing a body of open data methods, tools and training for analysing and visualising regional economies.

Ultimately, Dan's work has been used to inform policy discussions and interventions aimed at improving job quality and workforce skills in the region.

*"Trust is the key thing that happens when you're working directly with policymakers and analysts. You get to take part in that highly collaborative environment. I was able to bring my own data skills and, within that supportive space, grow it into a toolset I can now use in other settings. You can gain so much understanding from being there, from different daily ways of working to getting a much stronger understanding of the entire policy landscape, partly just through osmosis."*

**- Dan Olnier**



PLUGGING  
SKILLS GAPS

INCREASED  
CAPACITY



## POLICY CHANGE AT HULL CITY COUNCIL

The Hull Poverty Truth Commission process has prompted a cultural shift to include communities affected by decisions into the decision-making process. The University of Hull supported this process through providing evaluation and community engagement expertise.

Hull City Council launched the first Hull Poverty Truth Commission in 2022. The commission, made up of people with experience of poverty and people in roles with the power and influence to work towards alleviating poverty, met to explore different stories of poverty and explore policies and options for solutions. The group, who didn't wear lanyards and remained anonymous during the sessions, identified three key themes to address: cost of living, access to healthcare (specifically mental health) and navigating systems and services.

### Changes in Cost of Living and In-Work Poverty

The Commission identified concerns about replacing floor coverings for tenants who cannot afford new carpets or curtains when moving into a new property. As a result a review was conducted and a pilot was launched to test the feasibility of retaining carpets and wall coverings if they are in suitable condition. The pilot was successful.

*"The HPTC has been a fantastic initiative, which has given those with power a valuable opportunity to listen to hear people's voices, and genuinely influenced the work the council and its partners does."*

**Cllr Linda Chambers,**  
**Portfolio Holder for Public Health**



HULL &  
EAST  
YORKSHIRE  
POLICY  
IMPACT



**Hull**  
City Council

### KEY METRICS

The commission took place from the end of 2022 to July 2024 and brought change to people in Hull.



**50+**

GATHERINGS/  
MEETINGS



MORE MENTAL  
HEALTH  
RESPONDERS

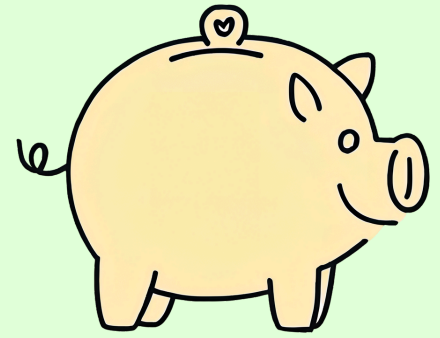


NON-REMOVAL  
OF ADEQUATE  
FURNISHINGS



LETTER TONE  
CHANGES





## Access to Mental Health Services

The group examined the system for potential improvements in accessing mental health services. As a result, key changes have been implemented at Hull City Council, including:

- A dedicated direct line was set up between Mind and the crisis team to allow for quicker access
- Funding to Mind to hire new staff to answer calls
- Administrative staff were reassigned to ensure phones are answered promptly when a crisis practitioner is unavailable
- An evaluation to assess the call handling process

## Changes in Navigating Systems and Services

A key issue identified was the tone and format of council letters, which created panic for the recipient, particularly when focused on bold threats e.g. "Eviction". As a result of this feedback, Hull City Council Customer Services team worked to rewrite these letters, ensuring they used a more supportive tone and focused on identifying help for the recipient.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
EXPERTISE

WORKSHOPS

EVALUATION

## POLICY FELLOW ROLE

Y-PERN Policy Fellow (University of Hull) Juan Pablo Winter and Gill Hughes evaluated the Hull Poverty Truth Commission journey using Transformative Participatory Evaluation, built on the values of Participatory Action Research. As a result of this work, they have been invited to sit on the advisory board for the Sheffield Poverty Truth Commission.

*"Juan worked on many major issues impacting Hull and East Riding, such as of poverty, flooding, coastal erosion and devolution to feed into Y-PERN local views and data."*

**Dr Gill Hughes,**  
**Senior Lecturer, University of Hull**

## KEY RESULTS

### Empowered People

Members of the commission spoke about the stigma they encountered from experiencing poverty and feeling unheard. By the end of the process, they expressed that they experienced trust and felt heard in the process.

### Further Commissions

Two further commissions will follow, funded through the Integrated Care Board (ICB) using the first commission as a crucial working model for future initiatives and an important foundation from which to build.



# CHILDCARE POLICY CHANGES AT WEST YORKSHIRE COMBINED AUTHORITY

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) identified a need for a review of the early years education and childcare. Our report brought together national and regional evidence and took a systems mapping approach for the West Yorkshire early years education & childcare sector.

Y-PERN and University of Leeds colleagues worked closely with WYCA to identify areas where academic expertise could be most useful in designing their Economic Strategy and Local Growth Plan. Following further engagement, WYCA and Y-PERN identified early years education as a key policy priority for regional inclusive growth.

## A Connected Approach

The research team organised three round tables with representatives from West Yorkshire's local authorities, early years' sector representatives, and early years' researchers. These were combined with desktop research to create a 'systems map' of the early years offer in the region. This identified the main challenges facing the early years sector, and the Combined Authority's policy levers to help the sector improve.

## Early Years Education and Childcare System in West Yorkshire Report

The research team's report found that high-quality early years education can transform the life chances of children, reducing entrenched inequalities at the earliest opportunity. Affordable and available childcare enables greater parental and carer participation in the labour market, especially for women. It is therefore central to Combined Authority's aspirations for regional inclusive growth.



WEST  
YORKSHIRE  
POLICY  
IMPACT



West  
Yorkshire  
Combined  
Authority

Tracy  
Brabin  
Mayor of  
West Yorkshire

## KEY METRICS



3

POLICY LEVERS  
IDENTIFIED



200

WORKERS RECEIVED  
TRAINING



1

NEW NETWORK  
BUILT

The sector in West Yorkshire is struggling to provide the high-quality and accessible early years services that families need. The privatised nature of the system means that there are deficits in provision in lower income areas, and private ownership extracts wealth, which could otherwise be utilised to improve outcomes. Providers also struggle to recruit staff to fill positions, thanks to poor pay and working conditions, and inadequate training – especially in providing for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and very young children.

The Combined Authority has limited powers in early years, and cannot fix problems like lack of funding and ownership models on its own. However, the Y-PERN research team identified three policy levers which the Combined Authority could engage in order to improve the early years offer: political leadership and advocacy; information, data sharing and systemic analysis; and the creation of a West Yorkshire workforce plan.

POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS

RESEARCH

WORKSHOPS

## POLICY FELLOW ROLE

Y-PERN Policy Fellow (University of Leeds) Tom Haines-Doran led an interdisciplinary team of academic researchers (Karen Arzate Quintanilla, Lilith Brouwers, Jo Burgess, Aimee Code, Amy Creaser, Erin Dysart, Jack Simpson and Claire Smithson) to explore the Combined Authority's 'policy levers' for improving West Yorkshire's early years offer. Following Tom's work, Y-PERN will continue to engage with the Combined Authority as it develops and implements its early years policy.



## KEY RESULTS

### Workforce Plan

On the basis of Y-PERN's engagement, West Yorkshire Combined Authority has launched a workforce plan strategy, partnering with the Bradford Birth to 19 Institute for the Early Years to work alongside practitioners and academic experts in devising a West Yorkshire workforce plan which will tackle the urgent challenges around recruitment and retention.

### Skills Bootcamps

West Yorkshire Combined Authority has already acted on the report recommendations, by targeting more of its skills bootcamp funding to improve training for 200 Early Years workers in SEND and younger children training.





## FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN YORK AND NORTH YORKS

Our York and North Yorkshire Y-PERN team worked in collaboration with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and Enterprise Works to capture lived experiences of female entrepreneurs in the region.

The research focused on female entrepreneurs across York & North Yorkshire, aiming to identify and address the unique obstacles to business growth females face in the region's diverse urban, coastal, and rural communities. The report highlighted persistent barriers compared to their male counterparts, emphasizing the need for support. Throughout the process, it became clear that many female entrepreneurs in the area had long been advocating for greater support.

### A Connected Approach

This research was conducted in collaboration with the FSB. This partnership was integral, as the FSB engaged its networks to encourage participation and played a key role in reaching communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas. The research was centred around the lived experiences and voices of female entrepreneurs. To ensure inclusivity, participants were engaged through focus groups held both in-person and online. This was complemented by individual interviews, a survey, and a participatory workshop designed to identify barriers and collaboratively develop policy solutions to support female business growth.

*"We look forward to continuing our support for female entrepreneurs and fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial landscape where everyone has the opportunity to succeed."*

**Professor Kiran Trehan, Pro-Vice Chancellor  
for Enterprise, Partnerships and  
Engagement, University of York**



YORK &  
NORTH  
YORKSHIRE  
POLICY  
IMPACT

### KEY METRICS



**100+**  
ENTREPRENEURS  
ENGAGED WITH



**7**  
PRIORITY AREAS  
IDENTIFIED

WORKSHOPS

FOCUS GROUPS

RESEARCH





## Identifying Policy Priorities

The research found that female entrepreneurs often face barriers rooted in outdated gender roles, workplace discrimination, and greater family responsibilities. Female entrepreneurs frequently have greater family and caregiving responsibilities than their male counterparts, requiring them to manage their time differently. Therefore, support from family, spousal assistance, and community networks is crucial for their success.

These research findings were presented to the business board at York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (YNYCA).

The research outlines priority areas to better support female entrepreneurs across the region, which include:

1. Struggling with confidence
2. Difficult pathways to self-employment
3. Understanding and access to finance
4. Understanding and investing in customer acquisition, retention and pricing
5. Quality and availability of various forms of local infrastructure
6. Quality and availability of mentorship
7. Managing business administration

*Following the research, action is ongoing to continue working with YNYCA to identify solutions to female business growth in the region.*

## POLICY FELLOW ROLE

Y-PERN Policy Fellow (University of York and York St John University) Rebecca Kerr was integral to the report's research and the design and delivery of the workshop.



## KEY RESULTS

### Networks & Mentorship

Many female entrepreneurs reported limited access to relevant networks and mentorship opportunities, with several participants noting that business networks often feel like "men-only" spaces.

### Local Challenges

Issues such as high business property rents, insufficient digital infrastructure and a lack of reliable public transport in rural areas make it difficult for entrepreneurs to access networks, clients, and opportunities.

### Funding & Finance

Participants noted that banks are less likely to provide financial support to females than males. Many struggle to access funding that matches their business models, as financing is typically aimed at 'high-growth' opportunities, adding barriers to business growth.

# YORKSHIRE & HUMBER DEVOLUTION



YORKSHIRE  
& HUMBER  
POLICY  
IMPACT

The Yorkshire and Humber Councils' Leaders Board commissioned Y-PERN to explore collaborative working and the devolution of powers, funding and investment from UK government. The objective was to identify areas where the region could be more effective on collaborating on certain issues to maximise the benefit of devolution.

The project was commissioned in summer 2024 with the team leading on 30 interviews with Mayors, Chief Executives and Leaders.

INTERVIEWS

RESEARCH

REPORT

Some of the key findings identified for collaboration include:

1. Continued regional Mayoral collaboration via the White Rose Agreement
2. Increased collaboration across places on Local Growth Plans
3. Continue to work with YU and Y-PERN to:
  - a. bring in critical friends insight
  - b. provide capacity to support national advocacy
  - c. Identify thematic areas for further consideration

## KEY METRICS

To identify areas of improvement Y-PERN interviewed the following...



2

MAYORS



12

COUNCILLORS



17

LOCAL &  
STATUTORY  
AUTHORITY  
CHIEF EXECS



NEIL BARNETT DELIVERING  
Y-PERN AND YHC RESEARCH



DEVOLUTION VIDEO  
VOICEOVER RECORD

## DEVOLUTION PROJECT TIMELINE

Y-PERN undertook an evidence review of existing national & international literature on regional devolution. Team members conducted interviews with Mayors, Leaders and Chief Executives.

Y-PERN interviewed policy officers from across the YHC network. Y-PERN presented a research note on the challenges and opportunities emerging from the English Devolution White paper (published Dec 2024) to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire. The note emphasises that a unified voice from the region is needed to deliver economic growth and the best outcomes for local communities.

At Leeds City Council's Inclusive Growth Partnership event, Y-PERN colleagues led a discussion workshop on devolution, inviting partners to reflect on what the proposal means for organisations, communities, and local governance in Leeds—and, crucially, how we can ensure that community voices are heard in the process.

Peter O'Brien, Andy Mycock and Neil Barnett present findings of the research to a meeting with Yorkshire & Humber Council's Chief Executives.

Neil Barnett presented Y-PERN and Yorkshire and Humber Councils research focusing on the past, present and future of devolution at the Political Studies Association (UK) conference.

A report on Devolution and Collaboration in Yorkshire and the Humber is released. It calls for greater recognition and support as the Yorkshire and Humber region faces increasing service demands without sufficient resources.

SUMMER  
2024

JAN  
2025

FEB  
2025

MAR  
2025

APR  
2025

AUTUMN  
2025



## DEVELOPING PROJECTS AROUND THE REGION

YORKSHIRE  
POLICY  
IMPACT

### Homelessness amongst Refugees and Asylum System

Y-PERN Policy Fellow (University of Huddersfield) Pratichi Chatterjee, has carried out research on homelessness in the region amongst refugees and asylum seekers. Pratichi, alongside Phil Brown, Housing and Communities at the University of Huddersfield, organised meetings with people working in migration, housing and homelessness from the public and charity sectors to understand the organisational, local and regional challenges they face.

The research focussed on collating regional data on insecure housing and homelessness among new refugees, identifying gaps in the process by mapping out the asylum seeking process. Pratichi identified several points and risk factors throughout the process where risk of homelessness is significantly higher. This research will enable discussion and response at a regional level.



12

ENGAGEMENT  
MEETINGS



2

INSIGHTS FROM  
PEOPLE WITH LIVED  
EXPERIENCE



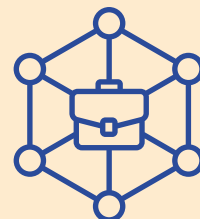
### Challenges for Family-owned businesses

Y-PERN Policy Fellow (University of Bradford) Peter Mukarumbwa, and David Spicer, Small Business Development and Organisational Studies at the University of Bradford, conducted a study focusing on challenges family-owned Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bradford and across the region face.

Their research highlights the significance of these businesses, which represents 85% of the UK's private sector and contributes 28% of the UK's GDP. The study identified three major barriers to growth: access to finance, business succession planning, and the slow adoption of AI. Working with local partners, they aim to inform targeted policy measures to support Bradford's family business community.







ECOSYSTEM  
IMPACT

# STRENGTHENING OUR REGION'S NETWORKS

## Yorkshire & Humber Networks Tool

Yorkshire & Humber is paving the way for a more collaborative approach to place-based policy making. On the 13th of February 2025, we brought together several of the regional networks – working between universities, communities and local policy (including local and combined authorities) – to learn more about each other's work and to explore how we can make it easier for our partners to navigate our complementary and collaborative programmes of work.

As a response to the discussions, Y-PERN commissioned an interactive visual tool that articulates the networks' roles and remits. The tool showcases details about each network, including priority areas, key contacts and website information.

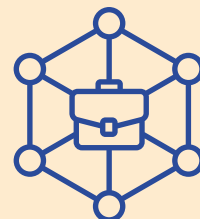
Visit [y-pern.org.uk/network-tool](https://y-pern.org.uk/network-tool) to find out more.

## A New South Yorkshire Policy Forum

Colleagues from Y-PERN and SYMCA piloted a policy forum where academics, policymakers & regional organisations came together to discuss ideas and policy priorities for South Yorkshire.

The forum provided a space to network, build understanding and explore ideas with topic experts.





ECOSYSTEM  
IMPACT



## Yorkshire & Humber Councils Policy Forum

Y-PERN has supported the re-engagement of the YHC Policy Forum through Kersten England's role as Engagement Director for Y-PERN. The group has reconvened to share opportunities for collaboration, discuss experiences on devolution, and bring in expertise.

The goal of the network is to identify common areas of policy work which the research community can better support.



## UPEN Devolved and Regional Committee

Y-PERN has worked with the UPEN's Devolved & Place committee to share experiences of other devolved & regional models of collaboration. This has included working with Insights North East, Welsh Centre for Public Policy, City-REDI, Heseltine Institute, London Research and Public Policy Partnership and Scottish Policy and Research Exchange.

Two reports have been produced: A Landscape Report 2024 and 2024 Reflections, on Devolved and Place-Based Academic Policy Engagement.





ECOSYSTEM  
IMPACT

## TRAINING INITIATIVES

Y-PERN's training initiatives have been instrumental in developing skills among a diverse group of stakeholders, including early career professionals, seasoned practitioners, and higher education representatives.

Participants have engaged in tailored workshops designed to enhance their understanding of effective policymaking processes and the nuances of policy research. These training sessions not only provided essential knowledge but also facilitated networking opportunities, enabling participants to form valuable connections that are crucial for ongoing collaborative ventures in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Many participants have expressed a newfound confidence in their ability to influence policy and lead change within their organisations. The training initiatives have also acted as a catalyst for participants to actively engage with real-world challenges, such as homelessness and health disparities. The emphasis on co-production and shared learning not only strengthened the capacity of individual leaders but also laid the foundation for a robust community of practice that enhances collective impact across the region.

## KEY METRICS



36

POLICY TRAINING  
SESSIONS

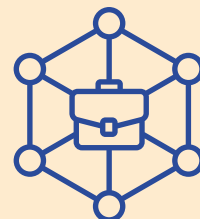


SEVEN

UNIVERSITY TRAINING  
SESSIONS







ECOSYSTEM  
IMPACT

## SUPPORTING REGIONAL ACTIVITY THROUGH FUNDING

Funding gained by Y-PERN has significantly advanced regional initiatives aimed at fostering educational growth and community development.

### Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP) 'Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund'

A major success of Y-PERN has been more than doubling the original investment into the region to facilitate academic policy engagement through the £5M ESRC-AHRC-Innovate UK funded 'Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership' (YPIP).

Part of UKRI's work to create opportunities and improve outcomes across the UK, YPIP looks to build off Y-PERN and YU infrastructure and bring together devolved governments, local authorities, businesses, and communities to harness the power of research and innovation in addressing local challenges: focusing on access to data, inclusive growth, and sustainable living.

In January 2025 YPIP launched a £800k 'Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund' to support community groups across the region. Over 200 applications were received covering the 5 fund themes and from across the 4 sub-regions of Yorkshire.

### KEY METRICS



**THREE**  
WORK PACKAGES



**200+**  
APPLICATIONS FOR  
THE CIFY FUND



**£800K**  
FUNDING POT



**TWENTY  
TWO**  
PROJECTS FUNDED



YPIP REVIEW CIFY  
PANEL SESSION

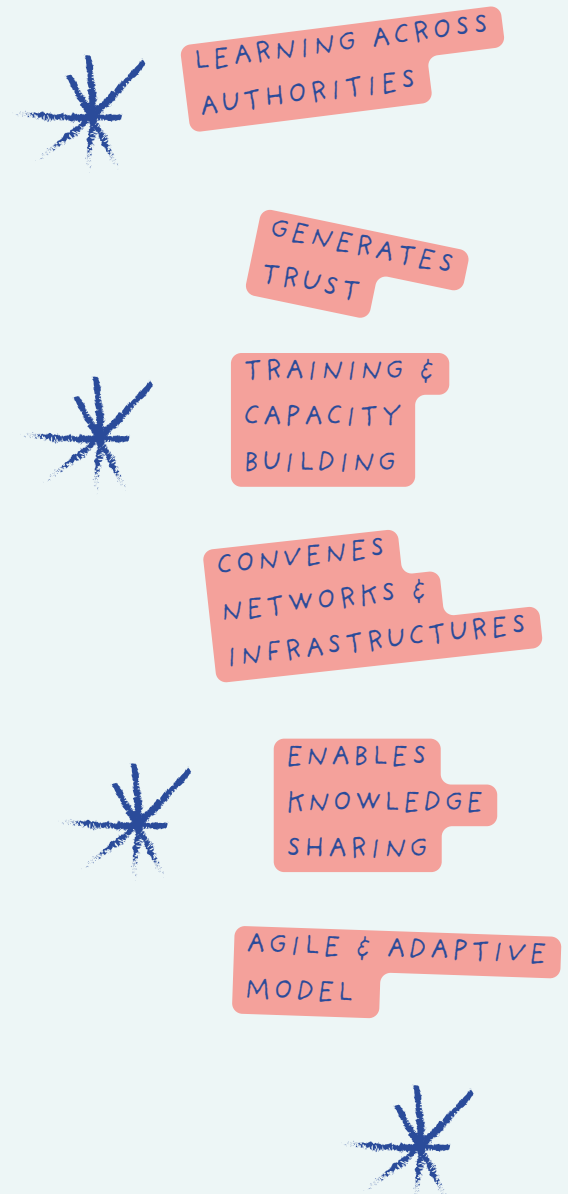


## Y-PERN EVALUATION FINDINGS



### BENEFITS OF THE APPROACH

The Y-PERN project evaluation report describes significant benefits of the approach:



"Y-PERN is distinct within the academic policy engagement landscape in that it brings together an especially broad range of university and authorities through a **'network of networks' approach** across a diverse (economically, socially, geographically) region. Other academic policy engagement programmes have either targeted a more tightly defined geography, or have had disciplinary or activity-based focus which might operate regionally or locally as well as nationally but through bespoke engagements.

A model of this nature, where diverse organisations are brought together to create shared value at scale, is especially important at this critical point where devolution and the prospect of local government reorganisation presents institutions and authorities with opportunities to operate with greater strategic autonomy but in the context of considerable resource pressures.

Our findings indicate that **the policy fellow role is crucial, as is a knowledge brokerage approach and Yorkshire Universities' contribution**. We found early signs of impact on policy development, with higher education also emerging as **an effective alternative to consultants** in certain contexts.

Our evaluation has also identified that foregrounding the "offer", could further help secure engagement and easy navigation by stakeholders. This would mean acting as a point to bring together the policy challenges and the research and analytic capacity across the region and offering ways of working that help crack these challenges – whilst at the same time "hiding the wiring" of the networked networks."

**- Dr Bridget Sealey, Stephen Meek and Claire Packman (with advisory support from Prof Kathryn Oliver), Sealey Associates**

## NEXT STEPS FOR Y-PERN

Y-PERN will enter its transition year in 2025-2026, working with partners to secure a sustainable model for academic policy collaboration for Yorkshire & Humber for the long-term.

Drawing on our lessons from the first three years, and further embedding into Y-PERN the core principles of co-ownership and co-design with our partners, we will continue to support our federal model by:

- Supporting our partners across Yorkshire & Humber's four **sub-regions** to develop models which work for them
- Convening partners at a **Yorkshire & Humber** scale to enhance opportunity for learning & collaborating
- Connecting our collective expertise at a **national** scale, by working with key partners like UPEN



*"Unlocking inclusive, sustainable economic growth in all parts of the UK can only be achieved if evidence and analysis guides policy and its implementation. I very much look forward to the continuing impact Y-PERN will have in ensuring our world-leading research enables government decision-makers to learn how to improve lives in the region and across the UK"*

**Emma Lindsell, Formerly Executive Director for Strategy, Performance and Engagement at UKRI**

*"In Leeds the strides we have made to become more research-informed would not have been possible without the expertise of the brilliant knowledge exchange professionals in our academic institutions, supported by the work of the Y-PERN network. Their efforts have helped us connect researchers with policymakers across a range of subjects, taking the Leeds Areas of Research Interest from an initial idea to an approach we now see shaping real change and impact for our communities."*

**Mike Eakins,  
Head of Policy, Leeds City Council**

*"Working with Y-PERN has been invaluable in terms of bringing together academics and the public sector with community groups and smaller projects. The network fosters joint working and we have seen several collaborations come out of it as a result."*

**Lauren Murtagh, Community  
Coordinator, Living with Water**

*"Y-PERN has demonstrated the value of bringing academics and policy makers together. Evaluation, evidence-based approaches and peer review are standard approaches within the academic toolkit. These strengths are particularly valuable in a devolved context, where impartial advice and long-term thinking can help policy move from ambition to action."*

**Professor Dave Petley,  
Vice-Chancellor, University of Hull**

“The research from the Y-PERN is an important step in raising the visibility of the problems of homelessness faced by new refugees and people seeking asylum in West Yorkshire. It will help regional stakeholders, including those in the health and housing sectors, better understand the systemic pressures, data gaps, and critical points where individuals are most at risk.

From a population health perspective, it offers valuable insight into one of our highest-need inclusion health groups, supports upstream prevention approaches, and highlights the need for better local intelligence. These findings will help shape more targeted, equitable, and integrated responses across the region.”

**Maria Storer, Project Manager ,  
Climate Change and Housing and Health,  
NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board**

“Y-PERN has been fundamental to the CA, particularly in helping us to develop our Local Growth Plan. As a newly formed CA, we don't have a large or established data resource in place and its something we're seeking to strengthen as we move forward.

YPERN has helped to fill that gap and ensure our emerging strategies are evidence-led. This has included valuable research and analysis on York and North Yorkshire's productivity performance, a refresh of our Labour Market Analysis and utilising their expertise and knowledge to point to useful research around inclusive growth. YPERN have been there as a critical friend and a sounding board for research needs. I hope this collaboration can continue into the future and ensure that future decision-making remains led by robust evidence.”

**Kate McHugh,  
Research and Evaluation Officer,  
York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority**



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