19 March 2024

Dear Mayoral Candidate

Yorkshire Universities' Five Key Asks ahead of the Mayoral Elections in Yorkshire

Yorkshire Universities' (YU) core mission is to widen and deepen the contribution of higher education (HE) to the region's growth, well-being and prosperity. In Yorkshire, we have one of the largest and most diverse regional HE eco-systems outside London. The sector contributes £8 billion per annum in output to Yorkshire's economy, and it sustains 63,700 people in employment.

Our twelve members – Leeds Arts University; Leeds Conservatoire; Leeds Beckett University; Leeds Trinity University; Sheffield Hallam University; University of Bradford; University of Huddersfield; University of Hull; University of Leeds; University of Sheffield; University of York; and York St John University – collectively have 220,000 students enrolled, with 75,000 graduating each year.

YU is a firm supporter of devolution. Our Memorandum of Understanding with Yorkshire and Humber Councils provides a unique framework to work strategically in partnership with local government, including Mayors and Combined Authorities, within and across the region.

In this open letter, written on behalf of the YU Board of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, we outline **Five Key 'Asks'** of candidates standing in this year's three Mayoral elections in Yorkshire. We would encourage you to support these, and to feature them in your programmes should you be elected.

Our Five Key Asks are:

1. **Champion Yorkshire as the region to invest, to live, to work, and to learn**
   o Bringing Yorkshire's HE sector directly into the heart of strategies and plans designed to encourage business to invest, create jobs, and expand trade with the region.
   o Using our world-class cultural assets and creative industries to promote Yorkshire.
   o Working with YU to attract more government jobs and roles into the region.
   o Joining YU's campaign to make Yorkshire the preferred destination for UK and international students to study, which requires a national immigration policy that enables universities in Yorkshire to attract and retain international students and staff, that would bring in new talent, drive economic growth, and inject international money directly into local communities.

2. **Lead the efforts to create more sustainable and inclusive growth, attracting more well-paid and secure jobs into the region**
   o To fulfil this ambition, we want Mayoral candidates to identify and introduce new funding and financing mechanisms to increase and sustain public and private investment into the region's physical and social infrastructure.
   o In particular, Mayors should lead the case for building better transport connections within the region, and to other key markets, elsewhere in the north of England, and in London and the South East.
   o Encouraging the expansion of inclusive recruitment practices across the region, through business support functions, building on the experience contained in the Regional Inclusive Recruitment Guide published by YU.

- o Backing the recommendations in the new Health White Paper, published by YU, with Health Innovation Yorkshire and Humber, and the NHS Confederation, to embed health, and climate goals, in local and regional strategies, plans and investment decisions.
- o Creating and implementing evidence-informed strategy and policy by working directly with the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN) and Yorkshire and Humber Policy Innovation Partnership (Y-PIP).

3. **Support the contribution of Yorkshire's universities to the regional skills, education, and training landscape**
   - o This would include ensuring that strategies and plans consider the whole tertiary skills system, including the value of graduate talent, a focal point of YU's ongoing work to strengthen graduate retention and utilisation in Yorkshire.
   - o Encouraging and incentivising, using devolved and national funding, stronger collaboration between HE and further education to tackle skills gaps in key areas, including education, digital, health and social care.
   - o Championing the value of transferable skills and the opportunities presented by non-linear study and careers support.
   - o Achieving greater regional influence over Local Skills Improvement Plans, and the Lifelong Loan Entitlement.

4. **Create a new culture of business, enterprise and entrepreneurialism**
   - o This would involve building on the Investment Zones and Freeports programmes, encouraging targeted, longer-term, expansion, and creating clusters of high productivity and innovation.
   - o Encouraging government to provide long-term, well-funded, research budgets, and partnering with YU to attract more place-based research and innovation investment into the region.
   - o Using regional start-up, spin-out, and scale-up funding to drive a step-change in entrepreneurial innovation, including engagement with, and support for, groups and individuals currently under-represented in enterprise.
   - o Supporting the roll-out of more 'patient' and angel investment funds into programmes that nurture and boost graduate enterprise.
   - o Using devolution to secure longer-term and cohesive planning and time horizons for local and regional economic development funding provided by government.

5. **Improve students' experiences of living and studying in Yorkshire**
   - o This would include supporting the case for a fair and sustainable funding system for HE, including student finance, to help provide a quality experience for all students.
   - o Working with the region's universities, and local partners, to improve access for students to affordable and good quality housing and transport services.
   - o Making the case to government to provide more direct support, through the maintenance system, to students to help alleviate immediate cost-of-living pressures.

Yours sincerely

Professor Karen Bryan OBE, Reg FRCSLT, PhD, BSc.
Chair, Yorkshire Universities and Vice-Chancellor, York St John University