

## Yorkshire Universities' response to the York & North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan consultation

April 2025

### SUMMARY

Yorkshire Universities has responded to the York & North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan consultation and welcomes the publication of the [draft Local Growth Plan](#) — which sets out a ten-year strategy to drive opportunities within growth sectors.

### ABOUT YORKSHIRE UNIVERSITIES (YU):

YU is a regional partnership that has a clear mission to harness the diverse, but complementary, assets and capabilities of twelve higher education institutions for the benefit of local and regional economic growth and development. YU provides an established infrastructure where networks exist to improve skills; to drive innovation; and to extend enterprise and business growth. The world-class research that takes place within Yorkshire's universities is also identifying practical solutions to tackle the complex challenges we face around sustainability, growth, health and inequality.

### RESPONSE

We are very pleased to see the importance of the higher education (HE) sector reflected on the front page of the plan, with 'World-leading research universities' included in a short list of key assets for York & North Yorkshire. Specialist research assets such as the University of York's Centre for Novel Agricultural Products, Institute for Safe Autonomy and Biorenewables Development Centre, as well as York St John University's Health & Wellbeing research group, are rightfully referenced in the plan as being key to the delivery of growth aspirations for priority sectors. However, we believe the plan would benefit from recognition of the broader role of universities in supporting economic growth beyond delivery of research — for example through skills development, business support and civic engagement, all of which have a significant positive impact on York & North Yorkshire's economy. Universities also fuel their local economies as larger anchor institutions, providing jobs and procuring local products and services.

The draft Local Growth Plan clearly identifies sectors that have the potential to drive growth within York & North Yorkshire and highlights local business strengths and research & innovation assets. In places, the plan refers to the connection between York & North Yorkshire and other regions, such as Tees Valley and the Humber. We believe this recognition of the value of connectivity is important in realising the full growth potential of sectors and clusters that span administrative boundaries. We would encourage the Combined Authority to place greater emphasis in the Local Growth Plan on York & North Yorkshire's vital role in enabling growth at a Yorkshire-wide scale.

In line with the aspirations of the [White Rose Agreement](#) there is an opportunity for the four sub-regions of Yorkshire & the Humber to work together, drawing on the collective strength of the region's higher education sector through [Yorkshire Universities](#), to tackle cross-cutting issues and deliver growth at scale.

We welcome the draft Local Growth Plan's focus on interventions to support start-ups, scale-ups and skills. Underpinning this, we see the need for support for the wider innovation ecosystem (as referenced in the section on 'Strengthening the Foundations'), including softer aspects such as mentors and networks. Universities play a key role in fostering dynamic innovation ecosystems. We would like to see greater emphasis placed on the wider innovation ecosystem — and the role of the higher education sector in its development — throughout the Local Growth Plan, as an enabler for the growth aspirations of the key sectors.

Yorkshire Universities agrees that improving the resilience and sustainability of SMEs will be key to achieving the aspirations in the plan. We would encourage the Combined Authority to work closely with universities as partners in the SME support ecosystem. Universities support SMEs in a wide range of ways, including research collaborations, skills development, investment readiness, networks, incubators and accelerators. The University of York and York St John University bring complimentary capabilities and specialisms to support the growth of SMEs. Furthermore, through their membership of YU, these institutions are part of an active regional partnership, enabling them to refer SMEs to appropriate expertise and capability in the HE sector across Yorkshire & the Humber.

We look forward to working collaboratively with our policy partners to ensure that the higher education sector plays a key role both in the successful development and delivery of the York & North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan, and in broader collaborations to deliver growth across Yorkshire.