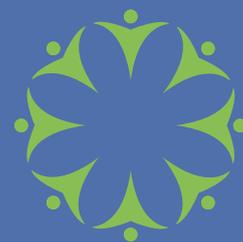


Supporting Graduate Employment and Employability in Yorkshire



Main Report

Yorkshire Universities
May 2022

yorkshireuniversities.ac.uk

 [YorkshireUnis](https://twitter.com/YorkshireUnis)

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Foreword

From the Chair of the Task & Finish Group

In 2020/21, nearly 212,000 students, from over 120 countries, were studying at Yorkshire's universities, of which 68,000 graduated. Our higher education (HE) sector is a major contributor to the region's economy, culture and society, and our students, staff and institutions have demonstrated resilience during the past two years. If we are to recover fully from the impacts of the pandemic and 'level up', as the government proposes, then our students and graduates will be central to these missions.

Universities and partners in Yorkshire already undertake an enormous amount of work, and invest heavily, to support students through their studies and as they move into and beyond graduation. There are many shared issues that graduates, universities and employers face in the region, which gives an opportunity to consider whether more could be done to support graduate employment and employability. This question provided the rationale for the Board of Yorkshire Universities (YU) to establish a Task and Finish Group to look in depth at this issue, to identify

existing good practice, and to propose potential actions that could be progressed collaboratively to address the opportunities and challenges facing graduates and the wider labour market and economy in Yorkshire.

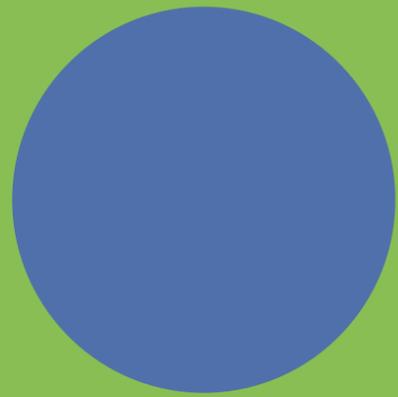
In working together at a Yorkshire-wide level, we recognise the experience, impact and ongoing durability of region-wide working that is distinctive and unique when compared to other regions. Working at scale in a period of limited resources offers the potential for developing more efficient ways of working, based on utilising shared knowledge and understanding, and applying good practice jointly where possible. Working at a Yorkshire level also allows us to support employers to tap into a wider skills base, benefiting from the variety of institutions, and the courses they offer, across the region.

HE institutions recognise the importance of collaboration and partnerships with public, private and voluntary and community sectors, not least in relation to graduate employment and employability. YU provides a valuable mechanism in which to convene universities in Yorkshire. YU's new Memorandum of Understanding with the Yorkshire and Humber Councils Group of twenty-two local authorities and two mayoral combined authorities, also provides a framework in which to widen and deepen these relationships at regional, sub-regional and local levels. In outlining the analysis and recommended actions in this report we seek to balance actions at different geographical scales, recognising both the similarities and distinctiveness of graduate labour markets in different parts of Yorkshire.

I would like to thank members of the Task and Finish Group for their insightful contributions, and expert opinions and ideas. They have, from a provider, employer, and economic development perspective, all demonstrated a shared interest in strengthening the support available to graduates in Yorkshire, and to help drive greater access to graduate level jobs and careers. I am confident that this report will stimulate positive action and impact on the ground.

Professor Karen Bryan OBE
Vice-Chancellor, York St John University
Chair, Yorkshire Universities Graduate Task & Finish Group

Executive Summary





The Yorkshire context

Widening geographical inequalities in educational attainment in England, especially at GCSE and A Level, can, from a supply side, shape the trajectory and impact of graduate outcomes. Yorkshire's graduate retention rate is close to the English regions' average, with a good share of highly skilled posts, across the full spectrum of graduate jobs, available to graduates in the region. However, there is a significant concentration of highly paid graduate jobs in London and the South East, and differences in opportunities between and within regions are compounded by other factors, including household income and ethnicity. Nationally, we are also seeing the increasing prioritisation of broader factors, beyond pay, in graduates' choice of jobs, leading to the growing importance of other factors, such as the quality of life, which underpin place attraction strategies.

In this context, it is important to adopt a nuanced approach that takes account of, but also goes beyond, graduate retention to focus upon improving graduate utilisation to enable more students and graduates to achieve employment and career success in Yorkshire. It is important that there is tailored support for employers, especially microbusinesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to create and sustain good graduate jobs in the region for more people from different backgrounds. Likewise, students and graduates need support to access diverse pathways into graduate employment and to equip them to make the most of the opportunities available and emerging across the region.

Our task and approach

YU convened a Graduate Task and Finish Group, with the aim of identifying and agreeing a series of shared priorities and collective actions that can support graduates into graduate-level employment and improve graduate utilisation in Yorkshire.

Stakeholder roles and responsibilities

Our proposals require the continuing involvement of, and increased collaboration between, a broad range of partners and stakeholders. These actors have varying roles and responsibilities that shape the recommended actions they could take, both individually and collaboratively, outlined across the different priority areas set out in this report.

HE providers:

have a responsibility to support students and graduates into successful outcomes. This involves action from a range of teams and staff across institutions, as well as collaboration between providers where there is potential to improve opportunities in the region for all. The HE sector also has a key role in centring the student voice and ensuring support is co-created.

Local & sub-regional governance institutions:

including Local Authorities (LAs), Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and Metro Mayors, have responsibilities in supporting businesses, skills and economic growth. They are also leaders in placemaking and providing services that make the region a better place to live, study and work. These functions mean they are central to improving graduate employment and utilisation in the region, which, in turn, will support their broader objectives.

Employers:

including businesses, are central to expanding opportunities for graduates across the region and can benefit from graduate recruitment by filling skills gaps and bringing in new talent and ideas that can help spark innovation and growth.

Students & graduates:

should be engaged in co-creation of initiatives to ensure developments are shaped by the diversity of needs, priorities and goals of different students and graduates.

Guiding principles, priorities and recommended actions

An overview of the eight priority areas is outlined below. More details of examples of existing work from across the region and recommended actions to build on this ongoing work can be found in the main body of the report.

A series of guiding principles underpin and inform the recommended priorities and actions in the report:

- Learning from, building on and scaling up existing good practice.
- Sharing knowledge, information and resources.
- Improving coordination.
- Co-creation with students and graduates.
- Building on the brand and identity of Yorkshire and promoting its graduates.¹

1 Readiness for the changing nature of work

Ensure that graduates are equipped to anticipate and adapt to the changing nature of work by investing in enhanced employability and enterprise skills through intra and extra-curricular activities. Help employers understand and adapt to the changing expectations and priorities of graduates.

2 In-study and work experience opportunities

Create more opportunities for students and graduates to engage with employers through internships, projects and placements, etc. Highlight the benefits to employers of engaging with students and graduates, and encourage more creative, low risk opportunities for students to gain experience.

3 Tailored careers and enterprise support

Tailor careers and enterprise support to meet the particular needs and aspirations of specific groups of students and graduates, especially those facing barriers to employment.

4 Models to connect graduates to graduate-level jobs

Create a supportive environment that encourages graduate recruitment and enterprise. Utilise and develop more joined-up, collaborative 'brokerage' models to connect more graduates to good graduate jobs in the region.

5 Common messaging on the value of graduates

Develop common and coordinated messages to employers on the value of working with graduates to encourage graduate recruitment, emphasising the value and transferable skillset of all graduates.

6 Clearer entry points and lines of communication with HE providers

Create clearer and more visible entry points for employers to engage with the diverse activities of the HE sector, including recruitment of graduates, and ensure institutions present a joined-up offer.

7 Aligned strategic priorities and strengthened partnerships

Align strategic economic development priorities and strengthen existing and emergent partnership work around delivering a shared ambition to make Yorkshire a more attractive region to live, work and study in.

8 Data sharing & analysis for effective strategy and action

Build on or create mechanisms to improve the collation, sharing, analysis and interpretation of data to support forward planning and the development and implementation of more effective strategy and action within the region.

Outcomes and implementation

The shared priorities present a renewed opportunity for increased collaboration within the region. We believe that broader commitment and deeper engagement by stakeholders will contribute towards improving productivity, tackling inequalities, and increasing prosperity within Yorkshire. For this to happen, all partners and stakeholders will need to undertake specific roles.

It is important to emphasise that the suggested actions under each priority clearly build on existing and ongoing activity. There are actions that could be delivered at individual stakeholder level with existing resources to improve more joined up working, whilst others would require further scoping and research, substantial coordination and additional resources.

Whilst all stakeholders will be required to continue playing their individual and invaluable roles, YU proposes to establish a work programme as part of its 2022-2025 Strategy to detail the implementation of each priority area. Where appropriate, YU will commission or undertake further research, and encourage more collaborative action to promote and add value to existing work.

Supporting Graduate
Employment and
Employability in Yorkshire

The main report



1. The Yorkshire Context

The Levelling Up White Paper illustrated how social and spatial inequalities have become entrenched in UK economy and society over recent decades, as evidenced within different parts of the educational system.³⁰

The government proposes to encourage more young people to 'stay local'. Whilst measures to enable more people from Yorkshire to study at Yorkshire's universities, to graduate and to live and work in the region – alongside national and international students and graduates – are important, it is vital not to restrict labour market mobility. We need Yorkshire to become a more attractive region for business and enterprise, and to provide greater opportunities and choice by improving the demand side of the labour market to address graduate under-employment and improve utilisation. Supporting graduate employment is crucial to local business, COVID recovery and the levelling-up agenda. Sustained investment, notably in economic and social infrastructure, is necessary to strengthen Yorkshire's economy.¹

Social and spatial inequalities in educational attainment start at an early age.² There is a growing gap in GCSE³ and A level⁴ results between Yorkshire and London and the South East, especially for the top grades, which has worsened since the start of the pandemic. The gap in results between regions is not present in technical qualifications,⁵ highlighting the importance of these options to students. The impact of regional inequalities in secondary education could also be further amplified should further minimum entry requirements to HE, which focus on specific GCSE and A level results, be introduced.⁶

HE providers (and partners) are working hard and investing significant resources to reduce the breadth and depth

at which differentials persist into and shape graduate outcomes. However, inequalities between students have been exacerbated during the pandemic due to limited work experience and networking, reduced social capital and connections, digital poverty, and challenging home environments.

The Yorkshire graduate labour market is relatively strong, and it is expected to strengthen in the future. Leeds has one of the strongest graduate labour markets in the country, and it is one of a handful of cities outside London with the full range of graduate employment options.⁷ Meanwhile, according to Dr Charlie Ball, Sheffield's improving labour market, coupled with cost of living advantages, means that the city is currently one of the best places in the UK for a new graduate to start their career. Whilst Yorkshire has many skilled graduate jobs, and the full spectrum of graduate employment is available in the region,⁸ highly paid graduate jobs are much more concentrated in London and the South East of England.⁹ There are also differences in the volume and location of high-skilled and high-paid jobs across Yorkshire, to such an extent that it is more accurate to talk of a number of different, but overlapping, graduate labour markets in the region.

Geographic labour market disparities have a symbiotic relationship with other drivers of inequality, as students from certain demographics are more likely to stay in their region of study. A report by UPP and the Bridge Group found that graduates who stay in their region of study are more likely to be from lower socio-economic backgrounds (in terms of Index of Multiple Deprivation), more likely to represent the first generation of their family to attend university and are more likely to be mature (25 years old and above on entry).¹⁰ A recent Office for Students' report also highlighted that the geographies of opportunity for graduate employment are compounded by other factors, including household income and ethnicity.¹¹

Place-marketing is central to attracting and retaining graduate talent,¹² as graduates are increasingly prioritising work-life balance and value places with good civic amenities and social infrastructure.¹³ Yorkshire's performance in retaining new graduate workers is similar to the English

regional average, or is higher than the average when London is discounted.¹⁴ A more nuanced understanding of graduate utilisation will underpin interventions to help those who want to stay in the region and find high-skilled, high-paid jobs that align with their priorities and aspirations.

There is a need for stronger engagement between graduates and the private sector, especially microbusinesses and SMEs, given their overwhelming presence in the national and regional economy. There is some evidence that many graduates prefer to work for SMEs but securing a job with these types of business can be difficult.¹⁵ According to Dr Charlie Ball's analysis, about 75% of first-degree graduates in Yorkshire are employed by large organisations, whereas nationally, the figure is 66%. Part of the reason for this is the existence of major public sector employers in the region, such as the NHS and universities.¹⁶ In Yorkshire, as of March 2020, microbusinesses accounted for 88.3% of the total number of businesses and 17.3% of employment, and SMEs accounted for 11.2% of businesses and 28.5% of employment.¹⁷ There has been a large fall in SME engagement with universities since the start of the pandemic, which requires new measures to rebuild and improve interactions.¹⁸ More support for graduate progression into microbusinesses would be helpful, especially in certain sectors of the economy, and it is important to ensure that the nature of these relationships is considered when measuring graduate outcomes and success.

Degree apprenticeships are increasingly recognised as a valuable route to supporting more local people into graduate employment and helping businesses develop talent.¹⁹ In 2019, a joint roundtable between YU and Universities UK highlighted how degree apprenticeships in Yorkshire were helping to: create new, stronger partnerships with businesses; widen participation; meet local skills needs and support talent retention; and raise the profile of priority jobs and skills areas. This is an area of provision that is expanding within Yorkshire. In the 2020-21 academic year, ten YU members provided a total of 11,990 apprenticeship starts, representing a consistent year on year growth in numbers, despite the pandemic.²⁰



2.

Our task and approach

Covid-19 has proved challenging for many young people, especially students and graduates seeking to enter the labour market for the first time or find new jobs. In 2021, YU commissioned Dr Charlie Ball of Prospects Luminare to undertake a bespoke analysis of the current and projected state of the graduate labour market in Yorkshire. The research sparked broad interest amongst YU members and regional partners in identifying possible actions and interventions, across different institutions and sub-regional and local geographies, that could support more graduates to access graduate-level employment.

This report also looks to contribute towards the development and implementation of learning from a body of literature examining how best to support students into successful futures following the pandemic, including the new UPP Foundation Student Futures report, which highlights employability of one of its three key themes.²¹ Emergent interventions or proposals by the Office for Students, in relation to graduate outcomes, also provided a stimulus for YU to examine in closer detail graduate employment and employability in Yorkshire.²² The work is also aligned with the priorities of YU's current Strategy (2019-22), which are designed to support the development, attraction and retention of new talent in Yorkshire.²³

Under the leadership of YU, universities, LAs, MCAs, LEAs and employers in Yorkshire met as a Task and Finish Group to consider how best to support more students and graduates through the challenging times of the pandemic and beyond.²⁴ The aim of the Group was to produce a report on supporting graduate employment and

employability in Yorkshire, including an outline of the proposed implementation of recommended priorities and actions.

The YU Graduate Task & Finish Group held a series of meetings between September 2021 and February 2022 to review existing data and good practice within the region and beyond. Members received expert evidence and opinion from a wide range of sources, which helped with deliberations. We are grateful to the following who provided specific contributions at meetings of the Group: Dr Charlie Ball, Senior Consultant, Labour Market Intelligence, Jisc; Mandy Ridyard, Finance Director, Produmax; Colin Moran, Head of External Engagement, Places for Growth Team, Cabinet Office; Elaine Boyes, Executive Director, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services; Chris Millward, Director of Fair Access and Participation, Office for Students; Kairen Skelley, Head of Business Start-Up, University of Leeds; Emily Johnsen, Relationships Manager, Handshake; and Charles Hardy, University Partnership, Handshake.

Further informed by a consultation process, members of the Group identified a series of priorities where there was a strong belief that wider and more extensive joint action was possible. This provided the basis for the content of this report, alongside discussions on the potential next steps that could be adopted collaboratively within and between organisations.

3. Stakeholder roles and responsibilities

Improving graduate employment and employability in Yorkshire, as well as graduate utilisation, will require increased collaboration between and coordination amongst a broad range of partners and stakeholders, many of whom are already involved in a significant amount of ongoing work in the region. These actors have varying roles and responsibilities that shape the recommended actions they could take to build on their existing work, both individually and collaboratively, outlined across the priority areas of this report.

HE providers:

have an important responsibility to support their students into successful graduate outcomes. They play a key role in equipping students and graduates with employability and enterprise skills, as well as engaging with employers to open up opportunities to gain experience and connections to jobs. This work stretches across institutions, and many departments and teams working in areas including careers, alumni, enterprise, communication, outreach, academia and much more.

It is important that action includes but also extends beyond careers services, and adopts a whole institution approach, so that employability is embedded throughout HE providers' activities. This is essential given the many different influencing voices that students turn to during their studies, such as lecturers who provide support and advice on the skills and experience needed in the workplace, as well as mentoring and work experience, which have been highlighted in the Career2032 report.²⁵ Collaboration across institutions around improving opportunities for graduates across the region is also

a key area with significant potential for increased impact. The HE sector should also ensure that the student voice is central to the development of support for students and graduates through the co-creation and co-production of initiatives.²⁶ Co-creation is essential to ensure that actions meet the diverse needs of the people they are trying to help and are working towards supporting pathways to success as defined by students and graduates themselves.

Local and subregional governance institutions:

are key to this agenda, especially in the context of levelling up and plans by government to empower greater local decision making. MCAs and Metro Mayors, such as Oliver Coppard, Mayor of South Yorkshire, and Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire, can provide visible leadership, support and 'soft power' for graduate employment and employability strategies and plans, acting as advocates for the region with the potential to influence national policy. MCAs are being given increasing powers that are central to graduate employment, including the provision of skills training, business support services and economic development, as well as place-making and place-marketing. Proposed devolution deals in York and North Yorkshire and Hull and East Yorkshire should also provide for new and extended devolved funding and powers across the region.

As business-led partnerships, LEPs bring together actors from different sectors to shape economic development. LAs have responsibilities covering vital public services that impact upon the quality of life and how attractive an area is to live, work and study in, and they also provide business support in their area. LAs are also significant employers of graduates.

The work of this Group is also contributing to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in July 2021 between YU and the Yorkshire and Humber Councils (YHC), which represents twenty-two LAs and two MCAs in Yorkshire.²⁷ The MoU provides a framework in which to widen and deepen relationships between HE and local government at regional, sub-regional and local levels. YU and YHC have published a joint statement on Levelling Up, which includes a commitment to support higher-level skills, graduate-level employment, and graduate utilisation.²⁸

Employers:

have a key role to play in opening up opportunities for experience and employment to graduates across the region, ensuring that opportunities are inclusive and align with the expectations and priorities of graduates. This includes businesses of all sizes and sectors, and other employers including public and third sector organisations.

There are also many opportunities for employers to engage with the HE sector and its graduates, especially through knowledge exchange activities. Graduate employment is, of course, highly beneficial in supporting employers to fill skills gaps and bring in new ideas and talent that can help spark innovation, growth, and development.

Students and graduates:

should be central to all initiatives to improve support for graduate employment and employability. Specifically, it is important that support is centred around helping students and graduates progress into what they consider to be successful outcomes and ensuring support accounts for the diversity of needs, priorities, and goals of different graduates.

It is important not to impose restrictions upon the measurement of graduate success that are centred solely on traditional metrics such as pay or skill level, as there are many reasons why graduates may prioritise other factors. It is important that those who take different career paths, such as choosing to start their own business or pursue creative portfolio careers, are supported, and that those who prioritise factors such as caring responsibilities and staying close to local support networks, can access good and fair working conditions and pay. Students and graduates must be involved in co-creation with other stakeholders to ensure that the diverse range of views of students and graduates are central to shaping the support developed.

These roles and responsibilities form the basis for the actions that are suggested under each priority area.



4. Guiding principles

To address the objective of improving graduate employment and employability, the Task & Finish Group identified eight shared priority areas, each accompanied by suggested actions for a range of stakeholders, which have the potential to be developed further into implementation.

The eight priority areas are underlined by a set of guiding principles that inform the approach, and should be applied to achieve the most impact on improving graduate employment and employability:

- Learning from, building on and scaling up existing good practice.
- Sharing knowledge, information and resources.
- Improving coordination.
- Co-creation with students and graduates.
- Building on the brand and identity of Yorkshire and promoting its graduates.²⁹

5. Priorities and recommended actions

The eight priorities are described in full detail below, each one is supported by examples of existing activity in the region and followed by a list of recommended actions for stakeholders to build on each area, benefitting from increased collaboration and coordination where possible.

1

Priority 1

Readiness for the changing nature of work

Ensure that graduates are equipped to adapt to and anticipate the changing nature of work and employment by investing in enhanced employability and enterprise skills through intra and extra-curricular activities.

Help employers, especially SMEs and microbusinesses, understand and adapt to the changing expectations (e.g., flexible working, ongoing training), and priorities (e.g., work-life balance, value-aligned work) of graduates.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- [Global Professional Award](#) at the University of Huddersfield uses a 'students as partners' approach with routine input into developing and improving the curriculum.
- Encouraging students to take elective modules in other departments, such as [Broadening](#) at the University of Leeds.
- Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) are currently building up the employer facing part of their website to target EDI practices.
- Volunteering opportunities, such as mentoring with local schools through [GROW](#) at Sheffield Hallam University, and [Students into Schools](#) at the University of Leeds.
- Student Union's support for students for skills development and communication to employers e.g., [Leeds Beckett Students' Union volunteering event](#) and the previous Recognise programme at Leeds University Union.

Recommended actions:

HE providers:

to explore opportunities to build on and collaborate across areas of existing action, including: informing potential students of how university study fits in to the context of labour market changes through outreach activities; embedding employability into the curriculum; providing support for enterprise, freelancers and microbusinesses; encouraging elective modules in other departments; supporting the development of soft skills; supporting students to articulate their skills to employers; and continuing to develop opportunities for lifelong learning.

Open up training and events to students from other institutions across Yorkshire, through information sharing between providers. Pooling existing resources in this way would help institutions react to a recent drop off in engagement, build critical mass to attract the best speakers, and widen opportunities to more students.

HE providers and students' unions: to collaborate to support extra-curricular skills development through volunteering and involvement with clubs and societies.

HE providers and employers: to work together to promote best practices within workplaces and to develop new working models such as hybrid and virtual working.

Employers:

to develop and advertise roles that meet the changing priorities of graduates (e.g., hybrid working, flexible hours, ongoing training, and work-life balance).

All:

to work collaboratively to understand what students and graduates prioritise and perceive as success, and how this is evolving. Support employers, especially small businesses with a lack of HR capacity, to develop and adapt opportunities in line with these changes.

Work collaboratively to understand the changing needs of businesses and help students and graduates understand the challenges employers might be facing, such as technology adoption, net zero, ageing workforce, supply chain management, succession planning.

2

Priority 2 In-study and work experience opportunities

Create more in-study and work experience opportunities for students and graduates i.e., internships, projects and placements with employers. Highlight the benefits to employers of engaging with students and graduates and encourage more creative, low risk (short-term, low cost) opportunities for students to gain experience.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- The York & North Yorkshire LEP ran a [COVID Recovery Project](#) where local graduates supported business recovery strategies using digital skills through fixed-term workplace projects.
- The [Humber Internship Programme](#) matches students and graduates with internships in SMEs.
- Since 2013, the Humber (now Hull and East Yorkshire) LEP has worked with the University of Hull to offer one-trimester work placements to third year students studying BA politics.
- Laidlaw undergraduate research and leadership scholarships – at the [University of Leeds](#) and the [University of York](#) – provide students opportunities to carry out paid summer research projects with university academics and other partners.
- Sector specific initiatives including [Bradford Manufacturing Week](#) and [White Rose Industrial Physics Academy](#) connect students with opportunities to gain insights and experience.

Recommended actions:

HE providers:

to expand collaborations between careers and alumni teams to [utilise international alumni networks more effectively](#) and explore opportunities for current students. Consider opportunities for joint projects to support and encourage employers to provide internships and work experience opportunities and see their benefit.

HE providers and employers:

to explore creative ways for students and graduates to engage with employers including: virtual opportunities; live briefs; insight days; embedding short-term regional work placements with SMEs or microbusinesses into core modules; offering industrial projects where (regional) employers set the project challenges.

Employers:

to offer a wide range of opportunities for students and graduates to gain experience and ensure accessible and inclusive practices throughout.

All:

to reduce the barriers for employers, highlight shorter or lower risk opportunities to employers, such as taster sessions, work experience weeks, digital micro-placements, and shadowing. Where possible, subsidise the costs of internships, or placements, to remove a big element of risk, for SMEs and microbusinesses in particular.

Help employers understand the benefits they can gain from tapping into the skills of a diverse range of students and graduates.

Explore opportunities to develop activities at scale, with critical mass behind it, such as the potential to create targeted opportunities encouraging employers to be more inclusive and opening up opportunities with extra support to students from groups facing barriers to employment (e.g. [Go Wales](#) model).

3

Priority 3

Tailored careers and enterprise support

Tailor careers and enterprise support to meet the needs and aspirations of particular students and graduates, especially those facing barriers to employment, e.g., commuters, carers, care leavers, creatives, first-in-family students, students from ethnic minority backgrounds, mature students, international students, disabled students etc.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- [Graduate Workforce Bradford](#), led by the University of Bradford, aims to help boost the job prospects of graduates from ethnic minority groups.
- [Employability and Progression Assistants](#) at the University of Leeds, provides internships for graduates from underrepresented backgrounds to help current students from underrepresented backgrounds gain employment.
- The West Yorkshire Combined Authority's (WYCA) gainshare graduate programme (Skills Connect) focuses on supporting underrepresented groups, [led by Leeds Trinity University](#) with support from GHWY members.
- [Connected Campus – Screen Yorkshire](#) incorporates ten Yorkshire universities forging closer links between students and professionals and companies in the TV and Film industries.
- UniConnect facilitates partnerships between universities around improving access and participation.
- The [BUILD](#) programme in Leeds City Region supports entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups to develop their businesses.

Recommended actions:

HE providers:

to ensure that the full range of careers support available is visible, accessible, and understandable – especially for those who are the first in their family to attend university or those who did not gain a foundational level of understanding of careers services at school, and may struggle to fully engage.

Continue to support the expansion of on-traditional routes into HE and graduate employment, for example by providing foundation years, foundation degrees, degree apprenticeships, thereby creating new opportunities and pathways into HE.

HE providers, MCAs, LEPs and LAs:

to explore opportunities to provide funded support for employers to offer paid placements and graduate roles for students with disabilities or long-term health conditions, or others from widening participation backgrounds who have limited or no prior work experience.

Ensure there are inclusive opportunities for students and graduates through a commitment to strong EDI strategies, setting examples of good practice as large employers.

Employers:

ensure recruitment practices are accessible and inclusive for all opportunities and actively pursue having a diverse workforce.

All:

to actively collaborate to centre student voice and understand what different groups prioritise and view as success. Ensure there is support for graduates who are more likely to stay in the region to access graduate opportunities locally if they wish.

YU:

will facilitate collaboration and collective action to improve ongoing support.

4

Priority 4

Models to connect graduates to graduate-level jobs

Create a supportive environment that encourages increased graduate recruitment and enterprise. Utilise and develop (where not available) more joined-up, collaborative 'brokerage' models to connect more graduates to good, well-paid graduate-level jobs in the region.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- [RISE](#) – Sheffield
- [SkillsHouse](#) – Bradford
- [Skills for Growth](#) – West Yorkshire
- [Specialist Skills Support Programme](#) – York & North Yorkshire
- [Humber Jobs Fuse](#) – Humber
- A range of online portals linked to collaborations and specific to universities.
- Council graduate development schemes e.g. [North Yorkshire County Council Graduate Development programme \(2-yrs\)](#) and [My work, my city, my future – Leeds Council's Graduate Scheme](#).
- Support for freelancers, e.g. [Leeds Conservatoire Agency](#) and [Hallam Freelancers](#).
- [Leeds Arts University's Creatives in Residence scheme](#) to support graduates with the difficulties of trying to set up a new creative project or practice.
- [Help to Grow](#) management training for SMEs provided by university business schools - upcoming sessions are running at Leeds Beckett University, University of Leeds, University of Bradford, and University of Hull.

Recommended actions:

HE providers:

to explore the possibility of pooling resources for joint career fairs, such as for SMEs or for specific sectors or sub-regions.

Be proactive in helping shape the nature of the jobs and support the development of high skilled opportunities for their graduates.

Promote the wide job options available to students and graduates, including the benefits of working with SMEs and in the public sector, and support to explore enterprise, freelance and microbusinesses.

Consider providing graduate training modules that SMEs or microbusinesses could access and cohorts of graduates could be formed from, similar to schemes that large companies would provide. This would encourage small businesses to hire graduates and provide ongoing support through addressing skills gaps.

Provide support to help SMEs and microbusinesses build management and HR capacity through business schools.

HE providers, MCAs, LEPs and LAs:

to expand support for enterprise, freelancers and micro-businesses where this is not yet advanced or accessible.

All:

to look for opportunities to connect graduates to roles more efficiently while still considering the needs of local economies and contexts. For example, explore the possibility of a Yorkshire-wide graduate scheme, that creates a cohort of graduates working in SMEs, there could be a particular focus on sectors (e.g., net zero, space) and industries (e.g. digital), or a focus on a specific type of support e.g., soft skills training.

Encourage the diversification of recruitment practices with graduates in mind.

Provide support to SMEs and microbusinesses without HR capacity and help them to create attractive job roles and adverts.

Develop mechanisms to help employers work directly with universities to address skills gaps.

5

Priority 5 Common messaging on the value of graduates

Develop common and coordinated messages to employers on the value of working with graduates to encourage graduate recruitment. Emphasise the value and transferable skillset of all graduates from all institutions and courses.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- GHWY demystifying working with students and graduates for employers – collecting case studies.
- Guides for employers around internships and employment of students and graduates, such as [Employing graduates - a guide for SMEs by The Specialist Skills Support Programme](#) (University of York) and [Jobs, Internships and Industry Placements Guide](#) (University of Hull).

Recommended actions:

HE providers:

to recognise that there may be competing messages between institutions or across faculties and departments within an institution. These should be aligned and made coherent for employers using accessible language.

Use joint messaging to help employers better understand institutional timelines and expectations of students and graduates who are still learning and gaining experience.

Employers:

to consider the value of recruiting graduates when trying to fill skills gaps and expand. Aim to adopt inclusive recruitment practices and recruit from a wide and diverse pool of graduates.

All:

to help collect and collate case studies from across the region to create a library of resources including short videos. These case studies could be used in a combined marketing campaign to promote the value of recruiting graduates and to allow employers to see the range of opportunities for engagement with students, graduates and HE providers.

Explore the potential for a joint event with HE providers, MCAs, LEPs, LAs and employers, to communicate the student and graduate offer in the region to make more employers aware of the graduate skills they can tap into and how they can benefit from it.

Work together to encourage employers to adopt inclusive recruitment practices and recruit from a wide and diverse pool of graduates. Within this, HE partners to work to ensure the student voice is included in EDI practices and making companies more inclusive (e.g., [De Montfort University model](#)).

Work together with employers to build understanding about the journeys students are taking into higher education, that they are all different and it's not a level playing field. Encourage employers to see the value in students from different backgrounds and expand their understanding of relevant experience, for example, balancing a degree and a job or caring responsibilities will have developed time and project management skills.

Help reduce course and institution bias among employers by facilitating more connections with a wider group of institutions. Challenge employers when considering students who have studied subjects that are perceived as 'not related' and the perception of a 'linear career pathway' and help explore the true skills value of a broader range of subject disciplines, to highlight the value of all degree level study to employers.

YU:

will strengthen its promotion of the evidence for the value of graduates to employer and business productivity and Yorkshire's economy and society overall.



Priority 6

Clearer entry points and lines of communication with HE providers

Create clearer and more visible entry points to help employers (including SMEs and microbusinesses) understand the diverse ways in which they can engage and communicate with HE providers, including recruiting graduates, and ensure a joined-up offer is presented.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- [WYCA Skills for Growth](#) contact point for navigating the education system as a whole.
- [GHWY Employer's Gateway](#) page on higher and degree apprenticeships, GHWY are also working on employer pages highlighting the benefits of working with students and graduates.
- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships are widely available across providers, including at 9 YU member institutions - [University of York](#), [York St John University](#), [University of Huddersfield](#), [University of Hull](#), [University of Bradford](#), [Leeds Beckett University](#), [University of Leeds](#), [Sheffield Hallam University](#) and [University of Sheffield](#).

Recommended actions:

HE providers:

to develop (where this is not yet visible or written in an accessible language) dedicated webpages for business support and engagement and nominate a clear contact point for enquiries to help businesses navigate the different ways in which they can engage with HE institutions and their students and graduates.

Employers:

to consider seeking out and proactively engaging with all areas that universities cover including research, knowledge transfer partnerships, recruitment, course design, degree apprenticeships, contract of services, curriculum development, placements and projects that will lead to enhanced graduate employability.

Larger employers to ensure cross team working within their organisation to fully utilise connections with universities.

YU:

will create a dedicated space on the YU website that would list existing entry points and contacts at member HE providers to help signpost and increase awareness.

7

Priority 7

Aligned strategic priorities and strengthened partnerships

Strengthen existing and emergent partnership work around delivering a shared ambition to make Yorkshire a more attractive region to live, work and study in, recognising that graduate retention and utilisation are strongly linked to other strategies e.g., public transport, healthcare, net zero ambitions, digital infrastructure etc.

Align strategic economic development priorities, such as culture, place-making and place-marketing, inward investment, climate change and sustainability, health, research and innovation etc.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- Regional networks, including [Yorkshire and Humber Academic Health Science Network](#), [Space Hub Yorkshire](#), [Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission](#).
- YU members come together through the YU Regional Development Group and West Yorkshire HE Economic Development Group.
- A [Transforming & Activating Places](#) programme of community-based short placements for social science, arts & humanities students focused on placemaking and community enhancement (University of Sheffield).
- Institute of Technologies in [York](#) (with the involvement of the University of Hull) and in [South Yorkshire](#) (West Yorkshire is in the application process).
- Joint training programmes: the University of York and the University of Leeds are working together on [Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre](#); the University of York and the University of Hull are collaborating on medical training through [York Hull Medical School](#).

Recommended actions:

HE providers:

to develop capacity to be able to engage with joint bidding opportunities to deliver collaborative projects with other providers.

All:

to jointly develop and promote messages to students and graduates about the value of staying and working locally. Highlight the benefits of working with microbusinesses and SMEs in the region given the potential untapped opportunities with the wide range of these companies that are central to the region's economy.

Help recognise that graduates are central to place-marketing, as they are increasingly prioritising work life balance when applying for roles. Work with destination agencies to jointly-promote the region as a 'great place to live, work and study', in-line with the guiding principle of using Yorkshire as a brand and identity.

YU:

will continue to prepare collective responses to national policy consultations and produce research and policy statements on graduate employment and employability.

Continue to promote, as a HE sector and with destination agencies, Yorkshire as a 'great place to live, work and study'.

Continue to facilitate regular meetings between Yorkshire Universities Board Members and regional leaders, including Mayors, LEP Chairs, Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives, to discuss shared priorities, some of which fall under the [YU-Yorkshire & Humber Councils Memorandum of Understanding](#), and to propose new initiatives.

8

Priority 8

Data sharing & analysis for effective strategy and action

Build on or create (where not available) mechanisms to improve the collation, sharing, analysis and interpretation of socio-economic and labour market data and other forms of evidence to support foresight, horizon scanning, forward planning and the development and implementation of more effective strategy and action within the region.

Examples of existing activity in the region:

- Hull and East Yorkshire LEP working with Uni Connect partner Humber Outreach Programme sharing both strategic and operational delivery plans and have cross representation on governance groups. Sharing, for example, benchmarking data in this forthcoming year to enable cold spots to be identified.
- WYCA produce annual in-depth annual labour market intelligence reports and use the skills group of GHWY and the [West Yorkshire Skills Partnership](#) to discuss the analysis in more detail.
- Intelligence on regional skills needs gathered from [Let's Talk Real Skills](#) and WYCA Skills for Growth team. This is shared with GHWY members and offers the opportunity for this information to be used to inform curriculum design and careers support.

Recommended actions:

HE and private data providers:

to explore opportunities to provide sector and skills data analysis that identifies forward looking trends. This could help inform longer term strategy and planning for university careers services as well as senior leadership.

HE providers, MCAs, LEPs and LAs:

to build upon existing and emergent analytical capabilities and capacities to generate analysis and interpretations of the supply and demand factors and the state of the graduate labour market and regional economy. Use data and analysis to inform and shape policy and strategy. Monitoring and evaluating the impacts and outcomes of policy interventions would need to form part of the process.

Jointly prepare analysis to identify which types of students want to stay in or return to the region, analyse skills we are missing from the region and would want to retain. Develop targeted place marketing interventions to encourage students with highly demanded skills to stay in the region.

YU:

will convene employers and employer bodies together with universities to consider skills requirements in specific sectors (e.g., the space industry via Space Hub Yorkshire) to enable universities to proactively consider addressing these through specialised summer skills sessions.

Develop a business case to the Research England Development (RED) Fund with YU members and partners to create a 'Yorkshire & Humber Research & Policy Network' to strengthen academic policy engagement, and to develop a Yorkshire Vitality Index with [Yorkshire & Humber Councils](#).

6. Outcomes and implementation

During the Group's work, a review of existing and emergent good practice was undertaken, and a series of priorities proposed that individual institutions could support and that different networks and partnerships both in situ and in the pipeline could take forward.

It is important to note that the suggested actions under each priority build on existing and ongoing activity. There are actions that could be delivered at individual stakeholder level with existing resources to improve more joined up working, whilst others would require further scoping and research, substantial coordination, and additional resources.

Whilst all stakeholders will be required to continue playing their individual and invaluable roles, YU proposes to establish a work programme as part of its 2022-2025 Strategy to detail the implementation of each priority area. Where appropriate, YU will commission or undertake further research, and encourage more collaborative action to promote and add value to existing work.



Appendix – Members of the YU task & finish group

Thank you to all who participated and contributed to the development of the above report.

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About Yorkshire Universities

Since 1987, Yorkshire Universities (YU) has been the regional voice for higher education in Yorkshire. The twelve members of YU are the universities of Bradford, Huddersfield, Hull, Leeds, Leeds Beckett, Leeds Trinity, Leeds Arts, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, York, and York St John, as well as Leeds Conservatoire.

More information about the work of YU is available at: yorkshireuniversities.ac.uk



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