

Research and Innovation Podcast: “Gerrin’ on wi’ it” series

Episode 1: “Collaboration brings more strength than going it alone” - Creating Networks That Address Yorkshire's Challenges

Speakers: Paul Hayes and Andy Mycock

[00:00:02] **Lauren:** Hello. “Gerrin’ On Wi’ It” is a podcast series created by Yorkshire and Humble Policy Engagement and Research Network – YPERN - and Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership - YPIP, to explore how networks are transforming policy, research and communities across the region.

In this first episode. Paul Hayes and Dr Andy Mycock introduce the story behind Yorkshire and Humber growing reputation as a trailblazer for collaboration between universities, policymakers, and local communities. This series will highlight the people who are driving real change by working together to tackle shared challenges.

Don't panic if you hear an acronym you're not familiar with; we've included a list in the show notes and other helpful links that relate to the conversation. Enjoy.

[00:00:48] **Paul:** Hello and welcome to the first of a six-part series entitled “Gerrin’ On Wi’ It”, hosted on the Research Innovation podcast at Leeds University Business School. My name's Paul Hayes. I'm Senior Policy Fellow at Leeds University Business School, and I'm delighted to be joined today with my co-host for this series, Dr Andy Mycock.

[00:01:07] **Andy:** Hi, good afternoon. This series is designed to sort share some of the learnings that we've had of two major initiatives. The first being the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network, which is a unique partnership of all the universities and all the local and combined authorities across the Yorkshire region.

It's based on a memorandum of understanding signed between Yorkshire Universities and Yorkshire & Humber Councils in 2021 and Y-PERN, as it's known, then went on to secure further funding from the Economic and Social Research Council through the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership, which is a project looking at how we can better integrate the voices and the views of communities within academic policy engagement and research.

[00:01:54] **Paul:** Uh, we'll be talking jointly to a number of people around the region, around collaboration with universities, with third sector people, with local government people, about how we can go forward.

So, what we want to do today is just basically set the scene for the conversations, what we're going to have and provide, take the areas that we'll be exploring with our guests as

the series goes on. Andy, I mean, the first question is why are we doing this? Always a good question to ask.

[00:02:26] **Andy:** It is the best question of all and, I think in some ways, you know, the work that's been evolving around Yorkshire and Humber over the last decade really has been unique. It's been innovative, it's been in many ways, groundbreaking, but you really get those chances to just sit back and reflect and to be able to just think about: well, what are the lessons that we've learned? What kind of challenges do we still have? And to get to speak to a range of different people been involved in some of the work across the region is a really interesting point in the fact that we can get that sense about, well, this hasn't just simply been work that's been connecting universities or been linked to, you know, particular things that universities do, it's brought in a whole different range of people from different backgrounds to make Yorkshire and Humber one of the most dynamic test beds for, you know, academic policy engagement, regional engagement, and just trying to think about how research and other things that universities do can make people's lives better.

[00:03:27] **Paul:** I would agree with that. Obviously, you and I both come from very different backgrounds. You've got a very wide and varied career in academia. I spent an awful long time in local government. I think we've both seen, you know, the scale of challenges that neither the sector and, for that matter, other sectors such as the voluntary sector can actually achieve alone. And why collaboration becomes increasingly important to look at sort of the shared challenges we've got in the region. Whether they be poverty, whether they be around places that feel left behind, whether they be around growing the economy, whether they be around health.

[00:04:04] **Andy:** I think that's right Paul. And I think, you know, one of the things that's been a real noticeable feature of the work that we've done has been that this work has been based on relationships and on partnership and on collaboration. And I think, you know, you come from a local government background, I from more traditional academic background and we've got people from different kinds of, you know, sectoral backgrounds speaking in the series, but the one thing that we all share is this focus on collaboration and on being, you know, coming together and using our different talents. And I think one of the lessons that we can learn from the past decade or so is that there is that sense in which relationships are based on trust.

It's been one of the biggest learning points that there is this need to be reliable and to think about how you sustain these relationships, to build momentum and to build that sense of shared mission or shared purpose in a way.

[00:05:05] **Paul:** I'd agree with it. That's certainly about sustaining and also around achievement. I mean, you are involved as am I in the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership and the Yorkshire Policy Engagement and Research Network, so YPIP, and Y-PERN which probably in some ways a leading edge in terms of delivering this, bringing together people from local authorities with academia, bringing together members of the

community, members of the third sector around that, and also delivering some quite discreet projects around capacity building.

How important do you think capacity building is?

[00:05:38] **Andy:** I think it's key to the whole thing that we're trying to achieve here. You know, there's been a lot of lessons learned from our colleagues in the health communities, and particularly those working, you know, in the national health innovation, Institute for Health research framework in that they were already looking at how you share and build capacity.

But I think, you know, one of the things that's been a real lesson for us over the last decade is, is that there is capacity within different institutions, but sometimes it's very difficult to bring that capacity together to network it if you want, to make sure that there's that connecting points and that shared sense about how, if you have collective capacity, you can better target that capacity on agreed priorities and I think, you know, in some ways it was COVID that was the point in which there was a real change in the dial on this, that there was that sense in which there was this very rare point in history where we had many of those different challenges in society that linked to disadvantage, into place-based inequalities, and also the meta challenge of a global pandemic.

And there was this immediate response from the university sector, first across West Yorkshire, but then across Yorkshire and Humber more widely. And that connected into to other networks that were already there. The Yorkshire & Humber Councils and the Yorkshire & Humber leaders. You know, they were already networking together. But then you find that there are other networks out there. The N8 community of research universities, the White Rose Consortium. And suddenly you step back and you go, hang on - this means that we can do more together than if we're trying to work independently of it. And I think that sense in which trust isn't just created by meeting and having a nice cup of coffee and a piece of cake at a, you know, a conference or a workshop, it's about that regular connecting on pieces of work that bring transformation. And I think during COVID, in that sense of a point of crisis, that sense of the value of collaboration came through really strongly and it's kind of left an imprint, Paul, in some ways for what's happened since then.

[00:08:03] **Paul:** Oh, completely. I mean, I'm increasingly hearing there's a lot of people on this region, the term "network of networks". There's a lot of networks out there, some of which have been existing in isolation, all doing stuff, and it's how we actually map those out, how we pull 'em together, how we work out actually who's doing what.

And it becomes quite an interesting role for some people in actually being a facilitator and a coordinator and a linker, you know, a gateway into the whole series of networks, you know, some of which you've just described that are actually floating around in this region. And I'm sure the same for other regions, and that we find out who's doing what and then how we can maximize the effort and the capacity that we've got.

[00:08:45] **Andy:** I think you're right Paul. I think that there's this sense in which, you know, just finding out who's doing what was really was one of the most important learning points as Y-PERN came on stream. And is why YPIP's developed. I think there's something else there, which is that, and you'll know this better than many because you've come from local government into higher education, is that our worlds are similar but not the same. There's not a shared language. Our institutions have different cultures the way we work, the way we make decisions. And I think the other thing around that sense of, you know, working on a network of networks basis is it just gives you time, an explanation to go. "This is what we do and how we do it", and it's been remarkable.

You know, you and I were part of a wonderful series of events in West Yorkshire where we brought, you know, leaders from, you know, the local authorities and the combined authority and from universities together. And rather than having a really tight agenda, we just sat people down and said, tell us about what you're up to and the organisation you're from.

And in that very informal, you know, environment, the first thing that came out was a real sense of growing institutional intelligence that people started to understand each of our organisations better, but also, then there started to be work coming out of it and people starting to share challenges. And I remember, you know, one of the main pieces of work that Y-PERN first did, which was looking at early years and childhood, education and supporting young you know, children as they're growing up in those first early years that came out of two people basically sat having a cup of coffee and a piece of cake.

And it makes you kind of think that these relationships matter. But they also need to have an appreciation of that sense in which through partnership and collaboration, you can then go on and do things together.

[00:10:36] **Paul:** Yeah, I would agree with that. And I also would agree with you about understanding the cultures of, as you say, my background's local government. Yours is academia. They're both quite different cultures. And the, yes, it's Venn diagram and they overlap. It's the same with the voluntary and community sector. There's something about the more you engage with someone, the more you are able to put yourself in their shoes and work out where people are coming from because there has been a history. You talk about the pandemic. I had issues and the pandemic where I was working between local government and the voluntary sector and there were tensions.

Those tensions eased as the pandemic went on part to circumstance, but more importantly, because we got to know each other. We got to know where people were coming from, where people's strengths were, what people needed, and I think every group, and the thing about collaboration- which is obviously the point of these podcasts -is around collaboration, brings you more strength than going it alone.

So, you can have five people working on the same agenda, or five organisations or five sectors, but if you bring them together, you achieve an awful lot more and an awful lot quicker.

[00:11:42] **Andy:** I think you're right there Paul and I, I think one of the things that kind of supported and that provided the foundations, if you like, to those relationships building. Was the work that, uh, people like Kirsten England and, and Peter O'Brien at Yorkshire Universities undertook, which was to bring together the senior leaders at, you know, political leaders, chief executives at local authorities, and at combined authorities and the Vice Chancellors and senior leaders in the universities, and get them to come together also and to agree on this idea of collaboration and the signing of the memorandum of understanding between Yorkshire and Humber Councils and Yorkshire Universities in 2021 really was a significant stepping stone to this development of partnership working across the region. And I think what it allowed for was a sense in which there was an institutional buy-in, which went beyond these relationships and gave a certain sense of security and certainty in the idea that it was good to invest both time and capacity and funding in this work, but also that shared sense in which these were different institutions with similar values working together for a joint shared aims. And I think the fact that that memorandum of understanding has been refreshed highlights the success of this model of working, and that we've seen it evolve into things like the West Yorkshire Compact. The fact that we've got now, you know, Tracy Brabin, the mayor of West Yorkshire and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, and they have signed a separate agreement linked to their own economic and local growth priorities, which involves the universities of West Yorkshire, and it highlights that you need architecture to support those relationships. And I think one of the things that has been really interesting to learn is, is that there's a need to continually think about how you adapt, and you refresh those documents, those formal frameworks to respond to the fact that the challenges that face the region are also constantly changing.

[00:13:53] **Paul:** Yeah, I think you made a, a very good, word you used very at the start of this podcast. It was about "sustaining". We've all seen investment in a project that lasts two, three years, it disappears. You know, it's forgotten. It's like it never happened. And then five years later we have to reinvent it. You know, how do we actually sustain collaboration as the day job in all of the sectors, that people know who's out there, people are comfortable with working on them, with them, people work together and people deliver together, and I think that's - not there yet a hundred percent, but it's definitely a challenge. We've definitely come a long way though in mainstreaming collaboration across this region between different sectors.

[00:14:35] **Andy:** I think it gives you confidence as well, Paul. And I think one of the things that has been noticeable about the ambition of this kind of partnership working, it began as an agreement between universities and policy makers, it's evolved and I think that the success of YPIP, the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership, has highlighted that it's not simply been a conversation about people within institutions, but it is between communities and citizens and the fact that, you know, YPIP has focussed

so much on work with its community panel and engaging with communities in developing, not just research, but also shaping policy has meant that it's thick in the conversation. Now, the government call this a triple or a quadruple helix. I don't think we've ever really ever used those terms, although those terms are helpful. We've done it instinctively in this region because it seems to have been the right way to do it.

And I think what we're seeing now is particularly with the current government's focus on economic growth and on, you know, how do you develop local economies, is that it's bringing in the business community into this conversation in a much thicker sense as well. And again, that comes back to some of the, you know, the, the key partners that we've got here, and particularly, you know, Yorkshire Universities and the way in which they have got experience, you know, for over two decades in bringing together people from different backgrounds, different stakeholders, and going, "we've got a job to do here and we're better as a collective, as a competitive partnership than we are if we're working independently".

[00:16:13] **Paul:** That's true. I mean, it's moving on from people talking around a table and going for the coffee, as you say earlier, which is the great starting point, to mobilizing people to do things and actually giving them support and capacity and advice and guidance, and even in some cases, the resources to do things.

I think that is one of the key benefits of having the collaborative culture across this region. Even a, and particularly if we're looking at higher education places that don't have universities, yeah, the Doncasters, the Scarboroughs of this world. It's what can also these sorts of collaborations do for those places. And as we say communities that find themselves or think themselves left behind.

[00:16:54] **Andy:** I think so, and I think, you know, one of the things we do know is that Yorkshire and Humber is an incredibly diverse region. You know, not only in the, where its population is dense or less dense, but also it has coastal, you know, communities. It's got rural communities; it's got large cities and towns. And they really do present, you know, a range of challenges.

You know, the challenges that face policy makers across, you know, the whole of the Yorkshire and Humber region are not uniform or universal in many senses, or that they are very much shaped by the places and spaces that people live and work. And I think one of the things which has really been, you know, an output of the work that we've done over the past decade has been is that in one sense, our governmental partners have got reach across the whole of the region, but in another way, they speak in a very certain way to different communities, whereas we in the university sector have the ability to have different conversations with different stakeholders, with different communities. And when you bring those together, it's a huge organizing and engagement capacity.

And I think as we move on. The challenges of keeping those conversations going are going to be fundamental. You know, one of the things which you know, is a challenge is the fact that this is, you know, this work is funded through different sources and there's a need to make sure that the kind of achievement that we've realised over the last decade, and particularly over the last five years, that that investment in this work continues. It's fair to say that those, that the funding that supports this kind of work won't come from one particular source, that it is aggregating, you know, investment into this work to make sure that it continues. And that's both exciting, but it is a challenge.

[00:18:43] **Paul:** I agree with you on that, particularly given we've had a decade of austerity, a lot of organisations have had this sort of capacity cutback. The university sector itself is undergoing a period of financial strain. The voluntary and community sectors are undergoing a piece of, uh, a period of financial strain. How do we actually maximize the impact and support them in terms of resourcing?

[00:19:05] **Andy:** In that I think also is this challenge around devolution. And you know, one of the things which has really marked both the work of Y-PERN and YPIP has been that over the past five years, we've seen combined authorities evolve across all four regions of Yorkshire and Humber now. So, there are elected mayors in each of the four regions, but at the same time, devolution is not uniform or universal in the way it's been rolled out.

You know, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire are considerably more mature in the fact that they've been established, you know, now for seven, eight years. Whereas we find that the newer combined authorities, well they're still coming on stream. They have less powers, they have less capacity to undertake policy, and they have less funding. And I think one of the things that we've learned in the work of Y-PERN in particular, has been that that means that you have to shape your offer in terms of how you support policymakers in different parts of Yorkshire and Humber to reflect the fact that we have a symmetric devolution. In that work, I think it's going to be the challenge going forward of thinking about, well, what is the Y-PERN effect? And in some ways the Y-PERN effect is about how we can help transfer and scale good policymaking, how we can use research in different parts of the region to support policymakers who have common challenges and some of those have very distinct challenges.

[00:20:32] **Paul:** I think that's the Y-PERN and the YPIP effect that. But again, Y-PERN is mainly focused on local government. YPIP is focussed on communities, but they both, as you say, pull that together to deliver effect on impact and actually getting people to understand each other and going forward to address those challenges together.

[00:20:49] **Andy:** Exactly that. And I think that one of the things which we're starting to learn is, is that central government at times struggles to speak very easily to local government and to combined authorities at the same time. And that we, in the higher education sector, well we've got some capacity to help in, you know, in easing those conversations and in both in organising and facilitating conversations, but also in helping getting policy makers from different, you know, backgrounds to come together.

And I think your work, by the way Paul and that of Kersten England in refreshing the Yorkshire Policy Officer Network, you know, which is now something which meets regularly and brings together Policy Officers from both combined and local office, uh, government. And to meet with academics on a regular basis has been something that's continued to build that sense of shared mission.

[00:21:39] **Paul:** I think if that's, that is something that other places can learn from Yorkshire and Humber, it's bringing that shared uh, people together, bringing those stakeholders, recognizing who's out there and actually supporting and influencing them.

[00:21:51] **Andy:** I think in the way that, just to sort of bring it together and, you know, just to think about, you know, what this podcast series is trying to achieve is that we want to go and speak to people that have made many of the things we've discussed happen. And not only that, we want to get them to get a sense about, well, not only what have we learned, but also what are the challenges going forward.

I think also, and it's something which you know, we say with a certain amount of pride, is that whereas, say, greater Manchester and the West Midlands may be seen by government as the trailblazer combined or strategic authorities. When it comes to academic policy engagement, when it comes to developing partnership and collaborative working between universities, communities, and government, I'd like to say that Yorkshire and Humber is the trailblazer region of England and the fact that so much investment has come to this region to support this work, well, I think that pretty much underlines that we are the innovation region and we are very much developing and driving that work forward. We're not resting on our laurels.

[00:22:59] **Paul:** Absolutely not. Uh, we're coming to the end of our time, so thank you, Andy. It's been a great conversation. You are right in terms of West Yorkshire and Humber as a trailblazer of place is what we want to be. And we will be addressing some of that with different sectors in other parts of this podcast where Andy and I will be talking to other people in terms of around the region about how they've worked in collaboration from their own perspectives and sectors.

So, thanks again, Andy. It's been great.

[00:23:25] **Andy:** Thank you very much. Thanks.