

A new era for female
entrepreneurs in York
and North Yorkshire



Enterprise Works

RETHINKING BUSINESS SUPPORT FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

4. CONNECTIVITY



CONTENTS

Transport	7
Public transport	7
Time as the crow flies	10
Green transport	12
Networks	18
Gender and networking in YNY	21
Community and networking	22

ENABLING FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Supporting female entrepreneurs is not only a matter of fairness; it is a major economic opportunity. Women remain underrepresented in entrepreneurship, yet unlocking this potential drives business creation, innovation and inclusive growth. In regions like York and North Yorkshire, where micro and small businesses dominate, enabling more women to start and scale businesses strengthens local resilience and prosperity.

This research shows that women face additional structural and societal barriers; from gendered expectations and caring responsibilities to confidence gaps and the under-recognition of their skills.

Without intentional change in how support is designed and delivered, these barriers will continue to limit both individual and regional potential.

Who are these guides for?

These Guides are for practitioners, policymakers, business support organisations, educators and ecosystem builders who support and shape environments for female entrepreneurs. Created from the *New Era for Female Entrepreneurship in York & North Yorkshire* research, they draw directly on the lived experiences, challenges and ideas for change shared by women entrepreneurs across the region, translating those insights into practical, place-based guidance to help business support organisations better understand and respond to their needs.

How to use the guides

Use each guide as a practical and reflective tool:

- **Read with intent** – focus on lived experiences, not just key findings.
- **Challenge assumptions** – identify where existing support may reinforce barriers.
- **Adapt your practice** – apply insights to programme design, delivery and communication.
- **Embed change** – integrate inclusive approaches at both operational and strategic levels.

The guides highlight key themes such as confidence, visibility, networks and systemic bias, offering practical starting points for discussion, programme development and policy design.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLACE

- Women in rural or less connected areas described feeling “out of the loop” or less visible
→ **Action:** Deliver consistent, locally based support rather than concentrating activity in central locations
- Travel, time and logistics were described as real barriers to attending support
→ **Action:** Offer flexible formats, including shorter sessions and varied timing
- Many described having to “fit support around everything else”
→ **Action:** Design delivery that reflects competing demands, rather than assuming full availability
- Access to opportunities and networks was often shaped by where someone was based
→ **Action:** Strengthen local connectivity so access is not dependent on location
- Digital systems were sometimes described as difficult or inconsistent to use
→ **Action:** Improve usability and consistency across online platforms

4: CONNECTIVITY



Connectivity implies fluidity, but those who took part in this research find that connectivity in YNY can be undermined by infrequency and difficulties in accessing connectors needed for growth.

Local infrastructure and services are important to support businesses. They are key determinants of connectivity. They facilitate client engagement, employee communication and service delivery. They provide mobility in a region.

Connection is also essential for businesses in the interpersonal engagement between networks of entrepreneurs to develop collaboration and open opportunities for growth. But where there are difficulties in accessing networks, this connectivity is reduced.

TRANSPORT

Transport can present a dual challenge: it is inflexible yet subject to frequent changes. For the women interviewed, incorporating public transport into their business and daily lives is particularly difficult. This leads to considerable additional travel time, as they must research alternative routes, deal with driving, parking logistics, traffic delays and disruptions such as cancelled trains or tractors on the road.

“This part of North Yorkshire, even if – because it’s a choice, yes, fine, live rurally, but it’s how you access the bigger places, and that’s, I feel disadvantaged because of that. Particularly for my type of career.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

While women do choose to live in rural areas and outside of cities, there is an acute issue with how women can still live in these areas and access the resources of the cities. This is particularly pertinent when there are infrequent or no services available to urban areas.

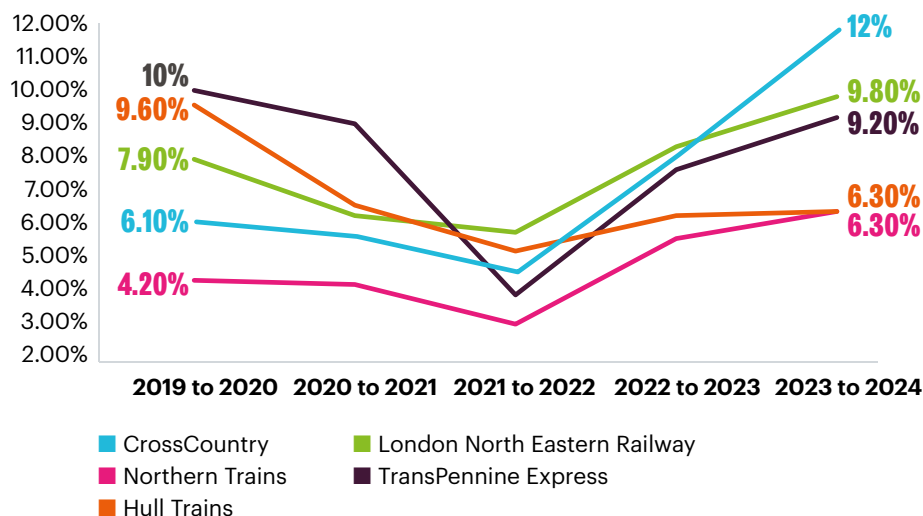
“The village where I live, we don’t even have a bus service, you know?” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

There is frustration from the women that there is a reliance on driving and parking to ensure that women can achieve all they need in their day. This not only adds to commuting time but also incurs additional costs and inconvenience.

“You’ve got the A64 in the middle of it, and the TransPennine Express is not the best train provider, if I’m honest, to the point that when I go anywhere now, I drive to York and park at York and get the train from York, because the Scarborough to York bit is always cancelled, always. So, think we have massive transport issues.” **COASTAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Figure 12: Average cancellation and significantly late by operator data

Source: ORR. (2024). Cancelled and significantly late by operator and sector. Chart: Average cancellation and significantly late by operator data



The limitation of transport from east to west forces individuals to rely heavily on private vehicles, contributing to traffic congestion, environmental concerns and personal expenses associated with car ownership and maintenance.

“East West Transport, there’s just nothing for public transport. I’ve got a client I’m starting work with ... and I know I will have to drive every time, there is just nothing.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

The absence of certain services highlights the overall lack of infrastructure in rural areas. It should be noted that this not only hinders women from partaking in their self-employment but can also impact other areas of life. This can include caring responsibilities and in transporting their families around North Yorkshire to various appointments, school drop-offs etc. Independence of travel is reduced for residents in these areas, putting another burden on women who often act as primary caregivers. This lack of connectivity exacerbates social isolation and economic disparities, particularly for those without access to private vehicles.

“Honest, I’m not kidding, I’ve had two massive fines for car parking, for overrunning, because a meeting has gone on.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Options to pay for parking by digital applications exist in York city centre and have been trialled in Harrogate.¹ Greater digitalisation of the process and clarity on where these apps can be used may provide a remedy to fines and time stresses over parking.

“Car parking is a thing, because if you have to factor in – let’s imagine it’s going to cost you £10 all day to park somewhere, to work on your business, go to this one, go to that one, go to this meeting, see this person, talk to this client...” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

“As an employer, we’re building this and we’re going to create this, but actually, please make sure that all the transport links are there to get people to the job in the first place.” **COASTAL ENTREPRENEUR**

¹ ‘Council Looks to Roll out Smart Parking in Towns’, The Northern Echo, 26 January 2021.

TIME AS THE CROW FLIES

One significant transport challenge highlighted by the women interviewed was the considerable time it takes to travel. Apart from challenges with inflexible parking arrangement, the extensive travel time acts as a major deterrent for women. Given the expansive nature of North Yorkshire, journeys often entail significant time investments.

“One of the barriers that we do have as well, it is that travelling from one place to another. It might only be 20 miles or whatever, but it might take you forever to get there.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

“The benefit we have here is we’ve got a lot of space, but that’s also our weakness because it takes a lot of time to get between places.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

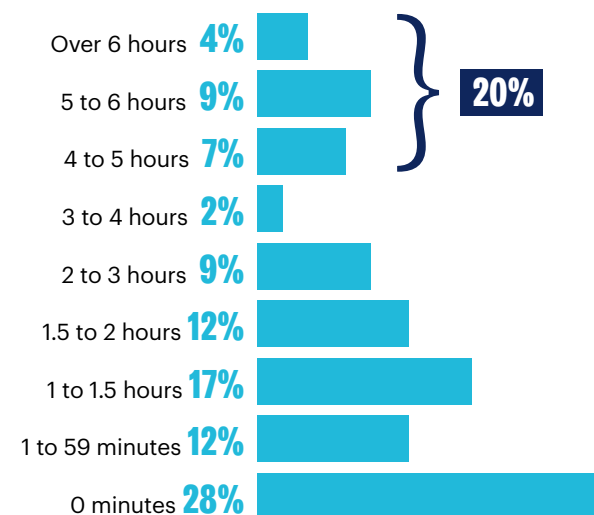
The need to travel long distances to meet clients or conduct business can be time-consuming and financially burdensome, especially when considering the indirect costs of travel, such as lost earning potential while commuting. This indirectly affects the productivity of the region, especially for those who are self-employed or rely on efficient transportation for their livelihoods.

“It’s just, that’s the difference between living somewhere very rural, and it’s so unproductive.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

“So you’ve always got to allow extra time, and it sounds really ridiculous, but when you’re sat in the car, you’re not earning money. You’re not.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Figure 13: In an average week, how long do you, or did you, spend in transit for work?

Source: Survey conducted as part of this research



“Because of the roads or you’re stuck... It sounds ridiculous, but you’re stuck behind a tractor or sheep are getting moved, all these kind of farming ... It’s not like looking on a map, as the crow flies, isn’t it?” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

An anecdote about an MP who came up to North Yorkshire from London highlights how urban areas may underestimate the transportation challenges faced by rural residents. This also echoes previous concerns identified from the women interviewed that those in London just cannot understand the challenges that exists around rural deprivation and infrastructure.

“An MP from London came up, very amusing because we were talking about the difficulties in North Yorkshire, and we said it’s transport, it’s geography and everything. He went, ‘I wouldn’t have believed you other than I’ve just been behind a tractor for nearly an hour trying to get here.’ ... and I said, ‘Particularly from a self-employed perspective, you then really have to quantify is it worth it?’” **COASTAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Despite these challenges, some women adopt innovative approaches to transportation, exploring alternative methods to minimise the downtime typically associated with transit. Access to public transport enables women to utilise travel time more productively, mitigating the trade-offs they would otherwise face while driving. This highlights the potential benefits and incentives of improved connectivity. In urban areas like London, train travel is often considered productive, but this option is not readily available to those in rural regions like North Yorkshire.

“So they’ve got the Coastline, a bus from Whitby to Leeds, and a lot of people go on that now because it’s got excellent Wi-Fi on the bus and you can work on the bus.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

GREEN TRANSPORT

Many of the women interviewed have noted concerns over the environmental impact of driving private vehicles and note that while there is a preference where possible to use public transport, its unreliability makes this unfeasible. Others have turned to green transport and increasingly use electric cars. However, this comes with its own challenges.

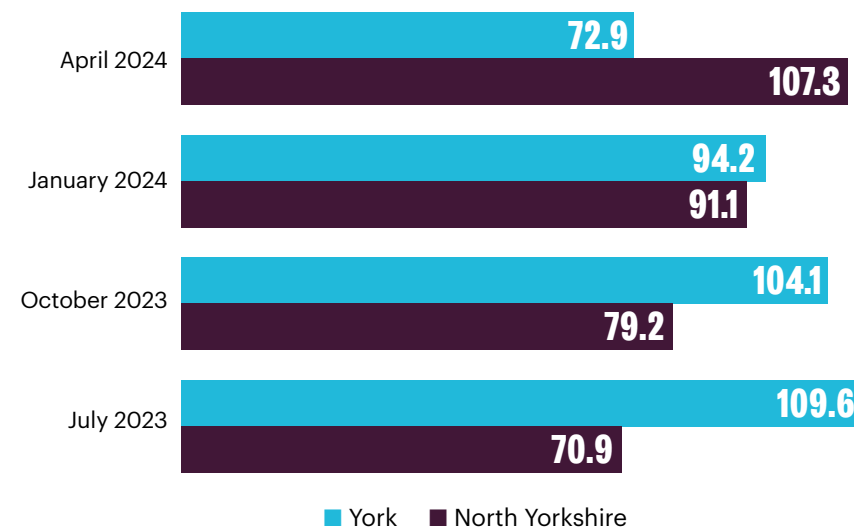
There are practical disadvantages of owning an electric car. There is the need to carefully plan trips due to the limited infrastructure of charging stations. Data demonstrates that in England, 85.2% of public charging devices are in urban settings.²

However, recent data demonstrates that North Yorkshire has a higher frequency of public charging devices per 100,000 of the population. North Yorkshire’s higher rate of public charging devices per 100,000 seems in part due to York’s reduction in public charging devices in tandem with North Yorkshire council’s electric vehicle charging strategy.³

² ‘Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure Statistics: April 2024’, GOV.UK, accessed 21 May 2024.

³ ‘North Yorkshire Council to Make EV Charging Points Available to All’, BBC News, 26 April 2023, sec. York & North Yorkshire.

Figure 14: Public charging devices per 100,000 of population
Source: Gov.uk. (2024). Electric vehicle public charging infrastructure⁴



It is also important to note that while there may be a higher prevalence of public charging devices in North Yorkshire, the geographical scale of North Yorkshire compared to York means that there are implications for getting to local public charging stations. Population density, in this way, may distort the feasibility of using these charging devices.

“One problem that I’ve got is, I’ve got an electric car ... I literally had to work out today, did I have enough mileage on my car to actually get here and back again, and actually, I had a hundred and one other things that I’d need to do on my way back that I can’t do today because I won’t enough miles on my car.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Women identify that there are limited options available to them in terms of charging options and there are not enough in place for the demand.

⁴ GOV.UK, ‘Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure Statistics’.

“ You Google where all your charging points are. Oh, Sainsbury’s, right, okay. So I go to Sainsbury’s, they’re rubbish, but also, they’re all full, so then what do you do?” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Additionally, these results may distort the availability of public charging devices around North Yorkshire. When reviewing local authority data (only available to April 2023 due to abolishment and incorporation into the single authority of North Yorkshire), we see a discrepancy between the former authorities with both Scarborough and Selby having particularly lower rates.

Figure 4: Public charging devices per 100,000 of population
Source: Gov.uk. (2024). Electric vehicle public charging infrastructure



Figure 15: Public charging devices per 100,000 of population (1 April 2024)
Source: Gov.uk. (2024). Electric vehicle public charging infrastructure



In addition to the frequency of public charging devices, Yorkshire and the Humber have a relatively low availability of public 50kW and above charging devices (15.1 per 100,000 population).⁵ Greater wattage chargers can charge cars at a faster rate. While the prevalence of lower wattage in charging devices is evident in London (13 per 100,000 population), this can reflect the shorter distance travelled and the frequency and availability of charging devices. In contrast, those in Yorkshire and the Humber typically have longer distances to travel and need a higher flow of electrical power.

5 ibid

Following similar trends to the availability of any public charging device per 100,000, we see North Yorkshire growing in their prevalence of electric charging devices with 50kW and above and York dropping in theirs.

Figure 16: Publicly available electric vehicle charging with 50kW or above per 100,000 population

Source: Gov.uk. (2024). Electric vehicle public charging infrastructure⁶



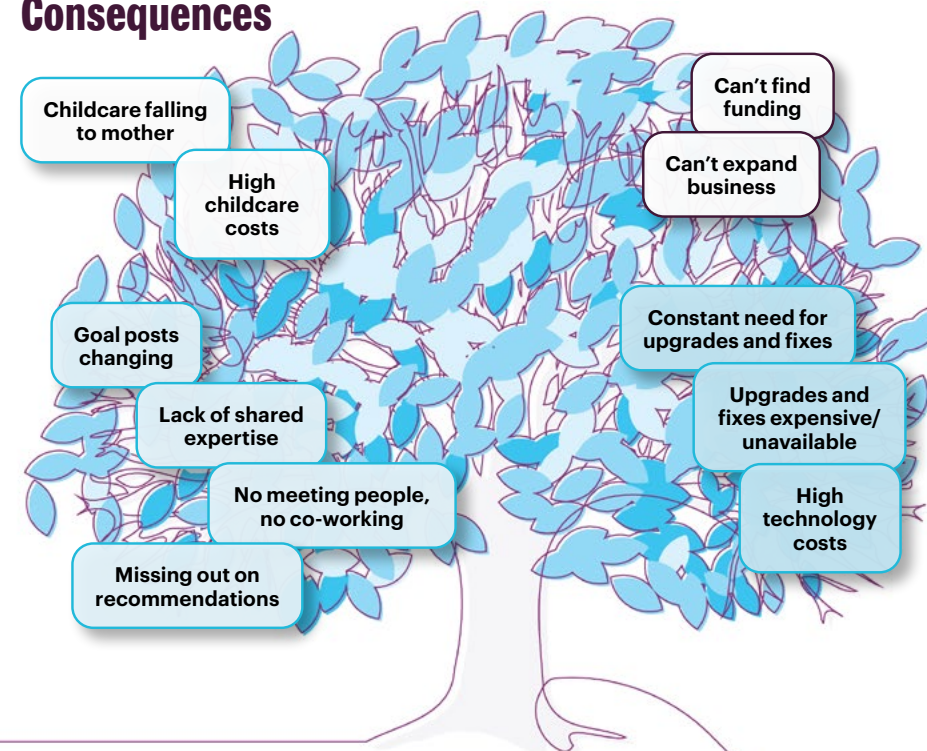
Issues around travel also impact women's business by indirectly impacting on networking opportunities that are necessary for growth. Travelling to bigger areas for networking opportunities is part and parcel of living rurally but the systematic lack of infrastructure to facilitate this movement undermines this opportunity.

“Because even to meet a journalist when they're all in London, or they're all in Manchester, it's that sort of thing, and I don't mind that, but getting to those places from where we are just isn't easy.”

RURAL ENTREPRENEUR

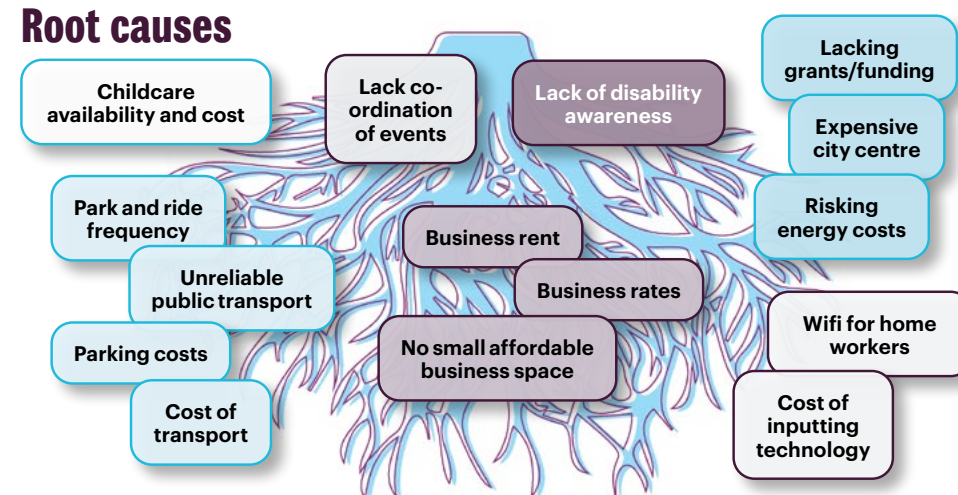
There is also a difficulty in navigating where is best for a networking location when your network is dispersed across a large geographical area. This may result in the selection of bigger cities as hubs of networking, partially due to the practicality that there should be a central train station for members to use and access a city. There is a comparable difficulty in trying to arrange a meet elsewhere given the lack of consistent infrastructure.

Consequences



LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Root causes



Despite the recognised need for charging points, various barriers such as logistical challenges like that of the building types around North Yorkshire make it difficult to develop this infrastructure and end up being quite timely and cumbersome tasks.

“Of infrastructure stuff, which would just make it a challenge to just put in the charging points and get on with it. So even when there is a need or an initiative, there are just other things that seem to block it.”

RURAL ENTREPRENEUR

NETWORKS

Women recognise that cities like Leeds provide numerous networking opportunities, highlighting a stark contrast in the availability of such opportunities in their own setting.

There is an issue identified here with access and time. While you may have the opportunity to network in Leeds every night, this is not feasible for those in YNY, particularly when you add in issues of transport and connectivity.

“I really miss out on the networking opportunities because they are fabulous in Leeds. They really are. You could go out every night and network with people that obviously bring about opportunity, and we just haven't got that here.”

COASTAL ENTREPRENEUR

“I still cover York and Harrogate and we go over to Hull, and a lot of the work that we're doing in the networking is in York and Hull. There's very little here.”

COASTAL ENTREPRENEUR

Successful networking offers several advantages, including access to a wider client base, interactions with diverse professionals, staying updated on industry developments, collaboration opportunities, and avenues for business expansion. Women entrepreneurs view access to networks as indispensable for their business growth and development. If productivity is increased by networking, we need to think about how we can bring or facilitate networking to the women of YNY in a meaningful and proactive way.

Transport

Linked up transport, integrated travel solutions

Transport structure that takes into account how people travel

Childcare

Child care grants for small business owners

Resources

Single point of resource for business skills

Regular workshops about disability

Business 'official' channels to incorporate independent B2B services

Connecting

Tailored support

Events with newbie buddy system

Hybrid networking local

Accessible shared spaces

More creative space to meet and network

Technology

Better information about mobile/wifi connectivity and coverage

Different ways to communicate

Funding for tech, flexible to meet your needs

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

“That's where it's a real challenge if you don't have that network and you just focus on one thing, and you don't have the flexibility to go out and meet other people, then you'll never grow, well, it'll be a challenge to grow. It'll be really tough. That's one way of really expanding knowledge as well.”

CITY ENTREPRENEUR

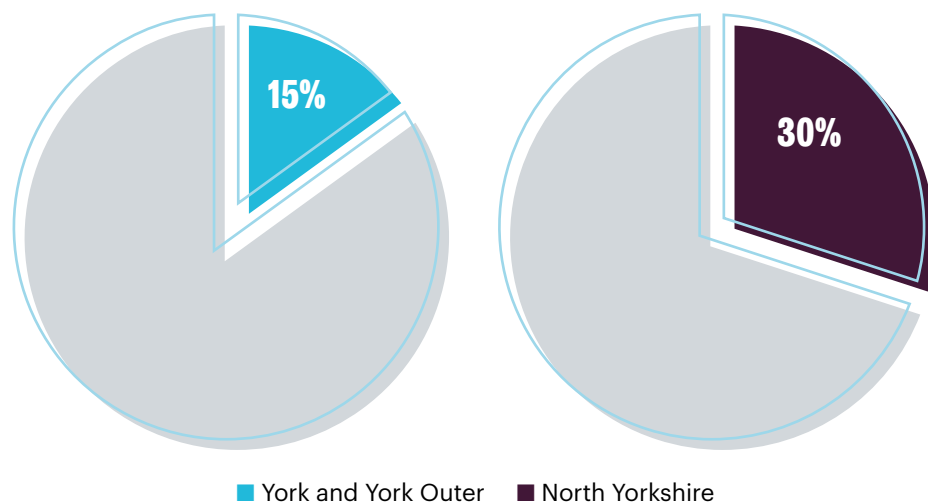
“That also means that information-sharing is limited. It means I don't get to know what's going on out there.”

CITY ENTREPRENEUR

The experiences captured within the focus groups and interviews is reflected within the survey data collected as part of this research. We see that lack of access to a network of entrepreneurs is particularly prevalent for women in North Yorkshire (30%) compared to York and York Outer.

Figure 17: Which challenges, if any, have you faced in your entrepreneurial journey? % selected: I did not have access to or know where to look for a network of other entrepreneurs

Source: Survey conducted as part of this research



While online networking options exist, they are often perceived as less beneficial compared to face-to-face interactions. Indeed, whilst some women spoke about the importance of online events, this was not for everyone.

“You can’t really broaden your network instantly because you’re not getting that face-to-face interaction.” **CITY ENTREPRENEUR**

This inability to find a right time is also exacerbated by other responsibilities that women have. Additionally, the dominant sector within a region may dictate the availability and feasibility of networking opportunities. Women from the Pickering group noted that hospitality is a dominant sector within their region. This means that finding times for networking can be difficult. This is further complicated by school runs, having to travel for childcare facilities and reliance on private transport amongst other barriers.

“Timing is really difficult in Pickering to arrange meetings because you’ve got hospitality working in the mornings and into the afternoons, and then you’ve got people working all day. Then our check-ins start at three o’clock till seven o’clock.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

GENDER AND NETWORKING IN YNY

Culture also impacts on networking for women and for smaller or newer businesses. Networking involves expanding your contacts and in sharing and collaboration. However, there is a tendency to look for developed contacts to be able to do this with. If the gatekeepers exist within the very network, this contributes to a siloed effect of continued growth of a small group of businesses.

“You go networking, people only wanted to talk to successful people. And then even if they were talking to you, they would start ... looking at other people.” **CITY ENTREPRENEUR**

“Recently when I went for a meeting networking meeting with an English friend of mine. I didn’t notice, but she noticed she asked me why. Is no one coming and talking to you, but you are going and speaking to everyone else. And then I was thinking, oh my, I never thought of it, you know. So then is it because of culture, or you’re not white, or I don’t know. I mean, when she put those words in, then I was thinking, yeah, why is it? Yeah. And it is noticed by a white person.

There are challenges associated with being the in the ‘out-group’ of local businesses that manifest in a number of ways. Where “many networking groups feel like men-only clubs”⁷ this can extend to the collaboration and help afforded to you by fellow entrepreneurs, can be present in ‘mates rates’ or even in the way that services can be offered to women business owners. It also shapes experiences of the business owner and how they can engage with their immediate surroundings.

⁷ From survey for this research. Q. When thinking specifically about growth and scaling your business(es), what barriers, if any, have you experienced?

This becomes evident when thinking about renting and using a space. The below quote demonstrates a situation where the interviewee had to bear the financial burden of renovating a building they do not own. This meant a significant financial investment for the entrepreneur. It also demonstrates the power dynamic between tenant and property owner. It raises questions on the equitable distribution of financial resources and the obligations of property owners in maintaining leased spaces.

“If you’re prepared and you know what to expect in that meeting, it’s easy, whereas going to a lunchtime networking in a bar where you don’t know who’s there, there’s no agenda, and you’ve just got to stand up in a room of people and try and make friends.” **COASTAL ENTREPRENEUR**

COMMUNITY AND NETWORKING

The sense of community and networking is tightly interwoven. Women often refer to their network as a community, indicating strong mutual support. However, while there may be a supportive community network, it does not always involve networking with similar entrepreneurs in their sector. This diversity can bring opportunities, but it also limits access to sector-specific knowledge and collaboration prospects. Despite successful networking and strong community bonds among women entrepreneurs, there remains a lack of accessible networks to connect with.

“I think if you changed the word ‘network’ to ‘community’, then I think that’s what I find.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

“I think there is more networking, but there is less network.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Community is important when it comes to local investment and in buying local. This is one way that community networks can support and uphold each other’s businesses.

“Community, it has to be important in these rural areas.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

“Yes, if we support each other, then I think that’s the only way that small businesses, and definitely female small businesses are going to actually thrive.” **RURAL ENTREPRENEUR**

The entrepreneurial space remains predominantly men dominated. Consequently, women often find themselves operating within a male-centric environment, where networking events primarily cater to the needs of the majority. However, this research underscores the unique needs of women in business, which encompass various complexities and responsibilities. The absence of spaces tailored to these needs places the burden on women to create such spaces themselves, diverging valuable time and resources from their already limited schedule.

“There is not enough respect given for the support women give to each other when running their businesses and how they create their own small communities to support each other.” **COASTAL ENTREPRENEUR**

There is an importance in having a community network tailored to the specific challenges and priorities of businesses in an area. While the physical appearance of these spaces may vary, what matters are the outcomes they enable, such as providing vital services, jobs, and well-being to local communities. This highlights the need for customised approaches that recognise the diverse needs of businesses in the YNY landscape.



Research

The original research was conducted by Dr Rebecca Kerr, Y-PERN policy research fellow, with support from Professor Kiran Trehan and Professor John Hudson (Y-PERN academic leads).

Partners

This research was a collaborative piece of research in partnership between the FSB and the University of York. This research was funded by the Yorkshire Policy Engagement Research Network (Y-PERN) thanks to Research England. With thanks to MnAI for the provision of national, contextual data that has enriched the report.



Enterprise Works

york.ac.uk/enterprise-works