

Last Orders? Britain's pubs: down, but not out

Yes they can survive! Professor Victoria Wells is Professor of Sustainable Management in the School for Business and Society, University of York, and gave us her thoughts on how pubs can change and prosper as part of a series of YorkTalks 2024.

It has been impossible to avoid recent headlines highlighting the rise in pub closures. In 2023 research found that 2 pubs a day closed in the first 6 months of 2023 and in the last decade, approximately 14,000 pubs have been lost. The reasons for pub closures are multifaceted but recently the cost of living has forced costs up for pubs and consumers creating a vicious cycle of people not visiting pubs and pubs then not being able to cover their costs and stay open.

Pub closures not only affect those who work there but have a knock-on effect on local suppliers and

communities who lose important communal centres, which, especially in the countryside, may be the only ones remaining. Therefore, understanding why consumers visit pubs, and how this can be encouraged, especially alongside increasing costs, is extremely important.

Research with colleagues from the School for Business and Society, the Environmental and Geography department and Northumbria University has examined pub consumer behaviour. Trends in consumer behaviour highlight the importance of no and low-alcohol (NoLo) products and competitive socialising in pubs. With more consumers moderating their drinking and increasing sanctions for drink-driving, NoLo is an important offering that pubs should embrace. Competitive socialising is at the heart of pubs (darts, pool, bar

billboards etc) but has often been sidelined by food offerings; returning to the celebrating and highlighting of these is likely to attract audiences seeking out this style of activity.

Finally, their empirical research, using a foraging perspective, emphasises the need firstly for pubs to understand what the objectives of pub visitors are (food, socialising, entertainment, sport) and from there to deploy changes in, or work carefully with, the four key foraging foci we have identified (location; tangibles, intangibles, food and drink offerings) to meet those objectives.

Consumers engage with pubs, not only on a practical level of what they buy in terms of drinks and food, but also on an intangible level drawing on the atmosphere and becoming part of the experience. All of this must be understood to actively and effectively attract consumers.



Knowledge Exchange Culture

What is it, why does it matter and how are universities improving their Knowledge Exchange (KE) culture?

To answer some of these questions Paul Manners co-director of The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) hosted a webinar to explore Knowledge Exchange Culture and the role of the Knowledge Exchange Concordat.

The session provided an opportunity for people working in different Knowledge Exchange domains to share lessons learned about building support for excellent knowledge exchange and engagement in universities.

Amanda Selvaratnam, Associate Director of Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange at the University, was one of the panel members and offered her thoughts on what research and KE culture means at York. Amanda believes that KE is often seen as an add-on and at York we are endeavouring to develop a research culture where KE is a fundamental part of the research to impact pathway.

Amanda also highlighted how the University was using our KE Concordat action plan as a tool

for improving the support for KE across the institution. By engaging academics and professional services staff in this ambition and improving our support for KE, we are helping align our key activities with the research agenda.

Paul's blog on creating an open, curiosity-driven knowledge culture highlights the following key issues:

- **KE has an image problem – being seen by many as a rather transactional 'add on' activity**
KE matters because academia too often risks being purposeless and self-indulgent, and a strong KE culture challenges this and asks the 'so what?' question.
- **KE is often delivered through relationships**
University staff, students and our partners and stakeholders are crucial in building and maintaining these relationships and we need to invest in supporting, building and developing communication and engagement skills in our staff and students.

- **A KE and engagement mindset isn't always well supported in universities**

Universities need to tackle this collectively, raising the status and recognition of people committed to engaged practice.

- **Culture change takes time**

Changes to University culture will always be slow but there is realistic optimism for a whole system approach to working in more engaged ways to build 'impact intensive' universities.

[Watch a recording of the webinar](#)

If you would like to learn more about KE culture at York please contact Amanda Selvaratnam amanda.selvaratnam@york.ac.uk



Research, Innovation and KE culture

Our panel today are:



Facilitator
Paul Manners,
Director NCCPE,
KEC operational
group



Rory Duncan,
PVC Sheffield
Hallam



Anne
Boddington, PVC
Middlesex
University



Tim Vorley, PVC
Oxford Brookes,
Innovation &
Research Caucus



Martin Davies,
PVC Kingston
University



Amanda
Selvaratnam,
Associate Director
University of York

The Regional Innovation Fund (RIF)

Following an internal call, twenty-four applications were submitted to the Regional Innovation Fund (RIF). RIF was a £60 million fund awarded to universities across the UK to boost support in areas of lower levels of Research and Development and help drive business engagement and regional economic growth.

The applications were reviewed by a panel (Matthias Ruth, Sarah Thompson, Kiran Trehan, Dave Diston, Mark Gunthorpe, Amanda Selvaratnam) and nine applications were awarded funding.

Successful projects included the following.

Professor Gavin Wright and Dr Jared Cartwright (Department of Biology)
Project Title: Scalable Protein Expression Technology

Investment in a large tissue culture incubator to expand and further develop the commercial service for monoclonal antibody production



Professor Miles Elsdon (The Institute for Safe Autonomy)
Project Title: Portakabin Collaboration

To expand the relationship with Portakabin and to develop a business case for a collaborative semi-permanent construction near ISA to incubate and support 10 start-ups in robotics and autonomous systems for up to 10 years.



Professor Bob Doherty (School for Business and Society) and Professor Katherine Denby (Department of Biology)

Project Title: Grow it York - growing capacity

Grow It York, is a thriving urban indoor vertical farm in York City Centre which engages businesses, the public, schools and policymakers, exploring innovative urban and vertical farming methods for environmental and social benefits. Funding was requested to increase the growing capacity from 16 to 24 sqm, to help foster collaborative research with companies and enable events for policymakers, leafy green supply to local businesses, and growers to showcase expertise and form partnerships.



Professor Jeremy Mottram (YBRI)
Project Title: Growing Biomedical Research

The York Biomedical Research Institute aims to consolidate biomedical researchers in York, fostering innovative multidisciplinary research. Funding will support mapping local business needs in biomedical R&D, and collaborating on a building concept plan with the Faculty of Science, local government, and funders. It will also support a showcase day to engage local stakeholders and boost the profile of Biomedical Science in the area.

Professor Vlado Lazarov (School of Physics, Engineering and Technology)
Project Title: NanoCentre Development

The NanoCentre is building strong ties with local industry, including Smith and Nephew (SN), Johnson Matthey (JM), Mitsubishi Chemicals (MC), and Tronox. Funds were requested for capital investment to enhance capabilities for broader industry use.

Alice North, Biorenewables Development Centre
Project Title: Coaching and mentoring programme for bioeconomy businesses

Building on the successful partnership with Anglo American to support 45 businesses with 25 hours of mentoring each and 15 entrepreneurs with business coaching, RIF will enable BioVale to extend this program to York, aligning with the university's commitment to public good and providing an additional 10 mentoring and five coaching opportunities for local SMEs.

Prestigious Green Gown Award for Student Engagement and Finalist in the Green Gown award for 'Research with Impact – Institution'

The University of York has won a prestigious Green Gown award for Student Engagement.

The award for the [Sustainability Clinic](#), initially developed with Student Knowledge Exchange funding from The [Office for Students](#) (OfS) and [Research England](#), gives students the opportunity to work on environmental sustainability challenges with local and regional partners, including charities, schools, heritage organisations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and local government.

The Green Gown judges were "impressed at the scale of engagement" and thought "the project clearly articulated the benefits to stakeholders and serves as an adaptable model for other institutions."

Now running as an academic module at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the Clinic has to date engaged over 300 students and 51 partner organisations. Clinic projects are based around a project brief designed in collaboration with a partner, and have included creating educational materials, developing carbon reduction plans, undertaking biodiversity surveys and developing strategies to increase wildlife diversity.

The Sustainability Clinic was initially piloted through the Community Projects scheme run by the Community Engaged Learning team in Careers and Placements and worked with 766 students and 80 community partners. York now progresses as a finalist for the international awards as a regional winner.

The University of York was also a finalist in the Green Gown award category for 'Research with Impact – Institution' for work led by Professor Jane Hill, to improve the



sustainable cultivation of palm oil. Research at York has contributed to zero-deforestation policies adopted by members of the leading sustainability organisation, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). The Green Gown judges commented that the application was "strong on the policy-related aspects", that they considered it "an excellent initiative, well put together and evidenced" and that the study was "superbly interesting and impactful".

[Find out more about the Sustainability Clinic and the Award.](#)

[Find out more about Improving sustainable palm oil conserves biodiversity and reduces carbon emissions in the tropics](#)



Climate Change, Urbanisation and Gendered Wellbeing

This knowledge exchange project focused on the impact of the overlapping risks of climate change and urbanisation on 'gendered' well-being. Gendered well-being recognises that gender, as a social and cultural construct, plays a significant role in shaping individuals' experiences, opportunities and challenges, which in turn impact their overall well-being.

Using Dhaka, Bangladesh as a case study, and within the context/framework of gendered well-being, this project explored:

- if, and how, the concept of overlapping risks is understood by relevant stakeholders
- how different stakeholders approach these overlapping risks and aimed to identify knowledge
- practice gaps for effective multi-sectoral responses to addressing these overlapping risks

As one of the world's fastest-growing mega-cities, Dhaka is subjected to both unplanned development and extreme climate change vulnerability. The project brought together practitioners, city government and NGO/civil society officials from three sectors: environment, development and health in a multi-sectoral stakeholder workshop to discuss these overlapping risks.

The workshop not only promoted knowledge exchange amongst the participant stakeholders

but also enabled a joint agreement on priority (knowledge and practice) gaps addressing the overlapping risks of climate change and urbanisation.

Outputs from the project include a comprehensive *policy brief* and a *video vlog* and in a parallel development, Dr Anika Haque has been awarded the prestigious 2023 *AXA IM Research Award* for her outstanding work on understanding the impacts of climate change on urbanised and disadvantaged areas in the Global South. The award comes with a research fund of €100,000 to further her impactful research, continuing her mission to build a gender-inclusive, climate-resilient urban future.

This project was funded by the *YESI Knowledge Exchange Fellows scheme* and led by *Dr Anika Haque* (principal investigator) and *Professor Helen Elsey* (co-investigator) in collaboration with Bangladeshi academic partners (*International Centre for Climate Change and Development*) and NGO partners (*ActionAid Bangladesh* and *ARK Foundation*).



The York Policy Engine (TYPE) – Labour Party Conference

The *Cost of Living Research Group* (CoLRG) established in Autumn 2022 brings together expertise from across the University to focus on the drivers of the cost of living, and its impact on the wellbeing of people and communities. This active group has proved a successful model to aid collaboration and knowledge exchange to maximise the potential for policy engagement.

In October 2023, *the York Policy Engine* supported the CoLRG to produce a *report* containing key policy recommendations from the group's research portfolio. The report was launched in October in time for a roundtable held in collaboration with the Northern Health Science Alliance (NHSA) at the Labour Party Conference.

Representatives from the CoLRG shared the evidence underpinning the policy recommendations. This was then discussed with participants including MPs such as Debbie Abrahams MP and Richard Burgon MP, local councillors and key anti-poverty charities and think tanks.

The session was really well attended and generated excellent discussion and follow-up from MPs.

Anthonia James, Head of TYPE and the Academic Director, Professor John Hudson remained at the Conference for its duration to maximise the opportunity to attend other sessions and make valuable connections within the policy community.

As a result of the CoLRG activities, further opportunities have emerged for KE, including collaboration with the Energy Affordability team based in the *Department for Energy Security & Net Zero*. The teams met in November to discuss issues around the health and social impacts of rising energy costs and the efficacy of government mitigations to date.

The CoLRG will also publish work on the Household Support Fund and Homelessness and Fuel Poverty early in 2024.



Photograph: Roundtable event at the Labour Party Conference