

CULTURE CONSORTIUM LEEDS

A VISION FOR CULTURE IN LEEDS 2025

PLACING CULTURE & CREATIVITY AT THE HEART OF LEEDS' AMBITIONS



OUR MEMBERS



COME
PLAY
WITH
ME

EAST
ST
ARTS



LEEDS ARTS
EVENTS & VENUES



Northern
Ballet



opera
north



RJC DANCE



PHOENIX
DANCE
THEATRE



YORKSHIRE
DANCE



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CULTURE
CONSORTIUM
LEEDS

cultureconsortiumleeds.org

INTRODUCTION

FROM THE CHAIR



Next year, Leeds will celebrate 400 years since it was granted a Royal Charter by King Charles I. Our rich cultural heritage has been a golden thread that's weaved its way through the tapestry of our city's progress – **it's time to put culture front and centre** of our city's ambitions, to **harness its power** and **to re-position Leeds'** cultural offer as we kick off the next 100 years ahead.

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward".

Edward Appleyard
Chair



On average, **every Leeds resident** sees a culture event with one of our organisations at **least twice** in a year.

Leeds is tenacious. This is evidenced in our industrial past, and more recently was demonstrated by our own year-long festival that – despite being originally conceived as a European Capital of Culture Year – brought the city together in a way not seen before, without the need for a mandate other than its own conviction. It's ten years since the bid for Leeds 2023 was first conceived, and whilst it presented challenges in a post-Covid world, its headline numbers highlight a city eager to embrace culture:

- **151,730 total attendees** at Leeds 2023 events (representing 20% of the city's population)
- **1,069 events** held across the city
- **17,766 volunteer hours** delivered by **1,008 volunteers** (representing over £200,000 of gifted time)
- **35,169 school children** taking part from **228 schools** (20% of all school children in Leeds)
- **711 artists engaged** in commissioned or programmed activities and events.

The city's people are even more engaged in our permanent cultural offer. Between 2017 and 2021, 16 Culture Consortium Leeds (CCL) members jointly took part in Economic Impact Assessments which showed that an average of 1.4m visits to Leeds culture organisations per annum were by Leeds people – roughly meaning every resident sees a culture event with one of our organisations at least twice: something to be proud of. ▶



INTRODUCTION

FROM THE CHAIR

Learnings

In spite of these headlines, there are learnings and facts that highlight a different story. Just 2.5% of all visits to those CCL activities were from people living overseas, showing a lack of tourism driven by our cultural offer. Leeds 2023 finished successfully in so many ways, but left the city still feeling like there was a gap in visible leadership to bring the city's culture offer together with a joined-up, world class ambition, despite many of the sector's constituent parts being ground-breaking and enviable in their quality.

We need platforms to **build better relationships with business** to harness the power of culture.

Assets, networks and business

CCL itself is an asset representing 32 organisations that is bringing together key parts of the culture sector, but it has not got the resources to represent the vast array of culture assets across the whole city region from grass roots and freelance artists, to major £20m+ turnover organisations. And we need platforms to bring people together and build better relationships with other pivotal networks and business to harness the power of culture in **place-making, economic development** and **inclusive growth** too. All of this presents an opportunity for the city to define its cultural position on a local, national and international stage, recognising and celebrating the cultural tour de force that it is.



Now is the time to **define and deliver an inclusive ambition for culture.**

The opportunity

Leeds was *The Times*' best place to live in the North and Northeast in 2024, and we know that a city's cultural offer is regularly cited as being one of the top reasons in choosing a place to live and work. Culture itself is an economic powerhouse, contributing £10.8 billion direct GVA a year to the UK economy, with CCL contributing £140m GVA to the city's economy, but we also know that prosperity and success needs to look beyond GDP and GVA to support an economy that everyone can thrive in and contribute towards.

24% of city council wards are in the top 10% of most deprived areas in the UK, but here highlights an opportunity to work together, placing greater emphasis on inclusive growth to improve the lives of people in this city and drive positive social change. Culture can be a key contributor to delivering inclusive growth; we have the assets to deliver this incredible ambition. This in turn makes our city's ambition for culture of paramount importance in changing people's lives for the better.

As we look to celebrate Leeds 400, with growing business interest and capital investment, we must take advantage of this moment in time by defining and delivering an inclusive ambition for culture that reaffirms Leeds as the tenacious city it is. This is why we set out this ambition, to embrace the idea that **people thrive where culture thrives**, and to **place culture and creativity at the heart of Leeds' ambitions.** ■



INTRODUCTION

AMBITION, AIMS & ACTIONS

AMBITION

What we believe &
our vision



Our ambition sets out what we believe and what our vision is for culture in Leeds based on that belief.

It is the culmination of CCL working together to imagine how culture can impact this incredible city, and about the power culture can harness. It sets the tone for the aims we want to achieve, and how we imagine that the aims can be brought to life through tangible and deliverable actions.

AIMS

The change we
want to see



Our ambition will be brought to life through four overarching aims for a wide-reaching culturally-engaged future that has a positive effect and impact on the city and its people.

It places **culture/creativity, commerce, community** and **climate** on an equal footing that will all jointly deliver sustainable growth. Our aims define the actions we will undertake to achieve our ambition.

ACTIONS

How we will
implement change



Our actions set out how we will begin to work towards ensuring that our aims can become reality, and that in turn we can see our ambition come to fruition.

They may develop and change over time. CCL has no formal function to deliver all of these actions, which can only be achieved through working in partnership with others or re-imagining a new culture body for Leeds.

OUR AMBITION

We believe that

**People thrive where
culture thrives.**

Our ambition is to

**Place creativity at the heart
of Leeds' city ambition,
to fuel growth,
for every community,
every business and
every individual.**

AIMS & ACTIONS

CULTURE & CREATIVITY

1

AIM

We want Leeds to be recognised internationally as a **culture-first city**

Leeds is a vital part of the cultural ecology of the UK.

The CCL partners have **12 Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations** (NPOs); one of the **largest local authority-run museum services** in England; and **two nationally designated institutions** directly supported by DCMS among them.

Leeds is widely regarded as the **second city for opera, contemporary dance and literature**.

There are **seven institutions of Higher Education** which includes **the only specialist arts university in the North of England**, the **greatest number of fine art courses** in a UK city and the **only conservatoire for dance outside of London**, and the **largest conservatoire in the UK**.

In spite of this range of cultural riches – of which the vast majority have deeply engaging relationships with their local communities and an incredibly broad breadth of representation – the city is not widely known nationally or internationally for its cultural offer, and across 16 CCL partners that took part in Economic Impact Studies between 2017 and 2021, just 2.6% of all visitors came from overseas.

Actions included in our vision will all contribute towards better defining and positioning Leeds as a culture-first city which will have wide reaching benefits for everyone, such as:

- contributing to inclusive growth ambitions;
- delivering strategic priorities set out in Best City Ambition;
- enabling everyone to take part and contribute towards cultural activity.



ACTION

We will help deliver a **culture strategy** for Leeds and bring stakeholders together



Leeds City Council last published a culture strategy in 2017, six years ahead of its city of culture year. Whilst the ambitions outlined in the strategy remain relevant – such as shifting perceptions of culture and the arts from a cost focus to recognising their societal value, linking culture to identity and daily life, promoting art and creativity within a diverse economy, and celebrating the diversity of our communities and global culture – the strategy lacked integration with key city initiatives like the Best City Ambition and the Inclusive Growth Strategy, neither of which existed at the time. Consequently, beyond serving as a foundation for the Leeds Cultural Investment Programme, the strategy has had limited broader impact.

It was also a strategy designed for delivery by and for the council, and not a strategy drawn together by the culture community or influenced by other key players in making inclusive growth successful – the business community, health and wellbeing network and others.

We will therefore work towards:

1. Developing a new culture strategy that:
 - has buy in and contribution from the whole sector
 - is linked to inclusive growth
 - endorses the principle that everyone can flourish
 - communicates the Leeds offer on a local, national and international level.
2. Creating an environment of joint ambition, no matter what consortia or body is charged with its overall ownership.
3. Building a task force of people from across all networks who can represent Leeds and its cultural strategy in lobbying, wider funding and other political activities.
4. Contributing to the Cultural Heritage Framework, visioning a joint heritage ambition for Leeds.

AIMS & ACTIONS

CULTURE & COMMERCE

2 AIM

We want **business to partner** with culture in Leeds as an attractive investment



Business and culture can be a collaborative powerhouse in creating thriving cities.

By 2028, Leeds' economy is set to have grown by £2.5 billion compared to 2024¹, which will see the city's economic growth rate surpass the UK average with an annual increase in GVA of 1.7%.

Leeds also has a high growth rate in providing new homes, with 4,441 homes built in 2024, 35% higher than the local rate target².

It is also widely acknowledged that culture and creative industries are critical enablers in developing thriving cities. Not only does this provide one of the most cited reasons to move to the city, it also contributes massively to the economy with West Yorkshire having the

fastest growth rate for culture and the creative industries outside London, providing 50,000 jobs and £2bn per annum³. Such reasons are exactly why Channel 4 choose Leeds as its new home in 2018, and why property development is currently enjoying a critical boom.

Though limited and increasingly difficult to obtain, public funding can be a powerful catalyst in attracting substantial private and international investment into the sector by demonstrating market viability and reducing investment risk. Investment not only strengthens the sector and public-private partnerships within it, but also directly supports growth in the UK economy. As public resources are brought under ever greater pressure, we must ensure public investment into Leeds' institutions is used to have the transformative power of leveraging innovative collaborations.

By better understanding the growth impacts that sponsorship, donation and contribution to cultural activity businesses can make, the case for support becomes a win-win for everyone with culture fuelling inclusive economic growth, and business (and more broadly communities) reaping the benefits in investment.

¹ EY UK Regional Economic Forecast 2025

² Leeds City Council

³ Inclusive Growth Network

ACTION

We will amplify the case for culture as a key driver towards **inclusive growth**

In 2023 Leeds City Council launched Inclusive Growth Leeds – a strategy that identified that in order for Leeds to be successful, to grow investment in the city and to advocate and lobby for increased government support, it needs to be a city that tackles inequality and be a place in which everyone can flourish.

Inclusive Growth Leeds is based on three growth drivers: people, place and productivity. There are nine 'big ideas' associated with each area of delivery, however none of them explicitly mention culture as having a key role to play.

In January 2024, the Inclusive Growth Network (IGN) set out their vision for how culture is key to inclusive growth, using the same drivers (though people is replaced by public services), however it also indicates the tools needed to unlock this progress – strategy and measurement, leadership and delivery, partnerships and funding – and identifies five ways to catalyse each of the three drivers.

Aligning a cultural vision to Inclusive Growth is pivotal for its success; this is the only current common language that unites culture, local authority strategy, regional mayoral priorities and government activity.

We will therefore work towards:

1. Using the IGN's model in defining what a culture strategy and activity plan could look like for Leeds.
2. Identifying areas of the IGN model (or Leeds model) which are already being activated across the culture sector, and identify gaps.
3. Setting up ways in which the tools needed to activate the drivers can be established.



AIMS & ACTIONS

CULTURE & COMMUNITY

3 AIM

We want everyone to **value, take part** and **be visible** in culture and creativity

Leeds is a diverse city, and becoming more so:

- The proportion of residents from non-white British backgrounds is now at 26.6%.
- Children in school from ethnically diverse backgrounds has nearly doubled since 2005 to 35.5% in 2020.
- 20.5% of Leeds school students spoke English as an additional language; the top five being Urdu, Polish, Romanian, Arabic and Panjabi.
- 4.3% of the population identified as non-heterosexual.



Yet there are ongoing challenges:

- 6.9% of Leeds' population said their day-to-day activities are limited a lot due to a disability (down from 7.9%), while 9.8% said their day-to-day activities were limited a little (up from 8.9%).
- People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds living in the most deprived parts of Leeds become frail 11 years earlier than white counter parts living in the least deprived areas.
- 24.6% of children in Leeds are living in families on relative low income, a 7.9% increase since the previous census; while the gap between the Leeds and England rate continues to widen.



ACTION

We will celebrate Leeds' **cultures** and **global communities**, and build **representation**

The growing diversity of Leeds needs to be better reflected in the cultural opportunities available to people across all wards of the city, and in the representativeness of the workforce in the cultural sector.

Cultural opportunities must be able to be accessed by everyone in Leeds, whatever their background and circumstances.

We know the power of celebrating culture in every ward of the city from the Neighbourhood Hosts during Leeds Year of Culture 2023; we must embed the legacy of that programme.

We can do this by working together, and by holding ourselves – individually and collectively – to account.

We will therefore work towards:

1. Agreeing and delivering a cross-sector pledge to transform workforce representation in the culture sector across Leeds as part of our ongoing *Let's Talk* programme (see page 20).
2. Reviewing and growing the diversity of the existing Culture Consortium Leeds as part of a new cross-city cultural leadership model (see page 22).
3. Creating a cross-city accessibility framework that shows what everyone can expect when engaging with cultural activity in Leeds.



AIMS & ACTIONS

CULTURE & CLIMATE CHANGE

4 AIM

We want culture to be a key contributor to an **environmentally sustainable future**

CCL believes that culture has a key role to play in tackling the climate crisis.

We align with Leeds City Council's approach to tackle climate change as part of Leeds Ambitions, aiming to achieve net zero carbon emissions as quickly as possible to boost the city's resilience to the changing climate.

We want the culture sector in Leeds to be a national leader in climate sustainability. We are already a recognised centre of excellence with SAIL (Sustainable Arts in Leeds) providing critical support and leadership to help organisations regardless of scale.

In 2025, SAIL launched the Resource Hub – a free-to-use platform that connects creatives with props, set materials, and sustainable event materials, ensuring that resources are reused rather than ending up in landfill. This is just one example of innovation, supporting the cultural sector in Leeds to be a national leader in its approach to tackling the climate emergency.



ACTION

We will commit to a climate action plan to help achieve Leeds' **Zero Carbon** ambition



We believe in taking a cultural response to the climate emergency, committing to truth, action and climate justice.

We will therefore work towards:

1. Programming and curating work which supports communities to connect to, be curious about, and fall in love with the natural world and provide education on combating the climate emergency.
2. Sharing learning, resources and support across the cultural sector to ensure organisations of all sizes can create their own road-maps to carbon neutrality by being active members of SAIL.
3. Ensuring that capital development projects for new and existing cultural buildings in Leeds, place ambition around environmental sustainability at their forefront.
4. Supporting the development of a circular economy which maximises existing resources and reduces waste by sharing, reusing equipment, such as costumes, props and sets.



LET'S TALK

A DIVERSE CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

Let's Talk is a thought-provoking and crucial conversation that delves into the perceptions and realities surrounding the persistent lack of representation of Black and Brown individuals at decision-making tables, particularly at leadership level.



Culture Consortium Leeds is taking collective action to address the stark absence of Black and Brown representation – collectively uncovering the roots of this exclusion and work towards promoting genuine inclusivity and equality in creative spaces and conversation.

In 2024/25 we have:

- Conducted workshop conversation sessions with invited black and brown employees and freelancers across our organisations to discuss the current situation.
- Developed an action plan based on the responses from these workshop sessions and commissioned further investigative work.
- Invested in two consortium organisations' employees to attend the Common Purpose Leadership programme, as well as invited them to join CCL and as a further development opportunity.

Our next stage is to develop a pledge for the consortium in galvanising our commitment to supporting, promoting and empowering Black and Brown organisations across the cultural landscape in Leeds, supported by individual organisation commitments, with an accompanying plan of tangible offers we can make to global majority communities for development, platforming and networking. This will focus on four main areas: Recruitment, Development, Support and Opportunity.

Desired outcomes include:

- An increase in Black and Brown representation across arts/cultural organisations in Leeds.
- An increase in Black and Brown leadership across arts/cultural organisations in Leeds.
- Barriers broken and relationships formed between cultural institutions and diverse communities of Leeds.
- Consultation groups feel listened to and valued.
- CCL members feel confident to develop new approaches to diversify staff.

BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

A JOINT COMMITMENT TO CULTURE

In 2024/25, Culture Consortium Leeds has actioned significant steps to be more outward facing and be more open and transparent in what its activities are. A website launched in Spring 2024, and the consortium opened up enquiries for new members in an effort to be more representative.

This action was an obvious conclusion to two issues: one, that CCL was seen as a closed group of Leeds 'elites', with an ivory tower stature; two, that Leeds lacks a culture network (though has multiple distinct consortia) that can represent or bring together the whole sector.

CCL believe it is important to join the dots between the diverse and substantial culture offering of Leeds, and also that organisations both large and small, and the freelance network, need to have a platform to offer a voice and gain representation.

We will therefore work towards:

1. Establishing a 'map' of culture consortia in Leeds, identifying gaps of representation.
2. Developing CCL or form a new Leeds Culture Network, with tiered, paid membership and a member-elected Board and relevant committees (consultation dependent).
3. Exploring a cultural 'hub' that brings together the culture sector, private sector and local authority, potentially linked to the Leeds Anchors.

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

A NEW CULTURE NETWORK

CCL have identified the need for a more substantial culture network bringing the sector together to include everyone from the freelance community to nationally-supported organisations with joint purpose and ambition. We envisage that, in its structure, it could look like the below:

Culture Board

Around 12–15 culture leaders elected by the Membership, who apply to specific board roles set out in the network's constitution.

Executive Team

Paid staff to deliver the operation of the network, drive its ambitions, issue newsletter and communications, and identify lobbying / investment / engagement opportunities.

Ambition groups

A number of groups chaired by members of the culture board and members drawn from wider membership, with specific areas of ambition delivery and exploration, for example:

- Research & Intelligence
- People Development & Diversity
- Positioning & Partnerships
- Environment & Sustainability
- Health & Wellbeing

Sector sub networks

Opportunities for sector-specific groups to meet and discuss issues of common interest, particularly where no provision currently exists.

Tiered membership

Membership fees would be based on turnover, however all members would be otherwise treated equally with the opportunity to apply for Board positions and to be allocated a vote. A free membership would be available for those just wanting to receive communications, papers or publications, and would also have the opportunity to attend an annual all-member conference day.

A HUB NETWORK

The consortium also supports working with Leeds City Council to establish a cultural 'hub', embracing the idea of a leadership board for culture development, drawn from local government, culture and creative industries, the voluntary sector, higher education and the private sector sitting side-by-side.

We understand the objective may be to work with other consortia and authorities to define the city's Cultural Strategy, and then work to deliver significant broad objectives around funding, city development and inclusive growth as part of Leeds Ambitions.

We imagine such a collective could consist of:

- Lead members of CCL or a Leeds Culture Network, possibly its chair and vice chair(s)
- Chairs of other consortia if CCL does not develop a new network (Music:Leeds, Leeds 33, Libraries in Leeds)
- Leadership representing HE institutions
- Leadership representing Leeds Anchors group (non-public sector members)
- Leadership representing the NHS
- Directors or Chief Officers with culture responsibility from Leeds City Council
- WYCA's Head of Culture, Heritage and Sport

CCL understands the importance of the Team Leeds approach, and embraces the opportunity and potential for culture to have a substantial impact on the development of our city.

CCL IN NUMBERS

OUR IMPACT



These figures represent the economic impacts of 16 CCL members who took part in a study between 2017–20 and are rounded annual averages of data prior to Covid-19.



£145m net economic impact (GVA) in Yorkshire & Humber

£102m additional visitor spending in Leeds



13.5 million people reached through broadcast productions



97 UK toured productions | 32 international toured productions with an audience of 2.2m



JOIN OR SUPPORT US

BE PART OF OUR STORY

Membership is open to organisations with an active cultural offer.

Culture Consortium Leeds is made up of senior leaders of cultural organisations in the Leeds city region; we ask that there is a nominated representative who attends the majority of the meetings to ensure consistency, although of course an alternative person may attend when needed.

Members should have the ability and willingness to become involved in working groups where relevant.

All members are expected to pay the membership subscription, although we do not want fees to be a barrier to attendance.

COULD YOU SUPPORT OUR VISION?

If you are not from a culture organisation but think you can support our vision to place creativity at the heart of Leeds' ambition, we'd love to hear from you.

For all enquiries please email
info@cultureconsortiumleeds.org

Information correct at time of going to publication (August 2025)

All photography © partner venues and their commissioned photographers

1 – Leeds Playhouse (Kirsten McTurnen); Henry Moore Institute;
Thackray Museum of Medicine (Simon Fogal); Young Musicians
Studio at Opera North (Tom Arber); Northern Ballet (Lydia Hutton)
3 – Leeds Art Gallery (Jules Lister)
5 – Howard Assembly Room at Opera North (Tom Arber);
Northern School of Contemporary Dance (David Lindsay)
6 – British Library (Jules Lister)
7 – Leeds Art Gallery (Elly Wellford); RJD Dance
8 – Leeds Conservatoire (Ian Hodgson); East Street Arts
(Wes Foster); Leeds Playhouse
10 – East Street Arts (Michael Godsall)
12/13 – Royal Armouries (Nancy Hopkins); East Street Arts (Doug
Gillen); Leeds Conservatoire (Ian Hodgson); Henry Moore Institute

14/15 – Yorkshire Dance (Brian Slater); East Street Arts
(Hannah Platt)
16/17 – Leeds International Piano Competition (Alfred Mulroy);
South Asian Arts UK; RJC Dance
18/19 – Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Jonty Wilde);
Harewood House Trust
20/21 – East Street Arts (Wes Foster); Leeds Museums & Galleries /
British Library (Jules Lister); British Library (Abbie Jennings)
26/27 – Leeds Arts, Events and Venues (Light Night Leeds,
Leeds Art Gallery)
28 – Leeds Conservatoire (Richard Storrow); Yorkshire Dance
(Paula Solloway); Northern Ballet (Emma Cauldhar); RJC Dance;
Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Jonty Wilde); British Library
(Abbie Jennings)



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