LEEDS YEAR OF CULTURE 2023

Letting Culture Loose:

LEEDS 2023 IMPACT AND EVALUATION REPORT



Front Cover: My LEEDS 2023, Moortown
Photographer: Addictive Media

At a Glance

This report is a review of LEEDS 2023: Year of Culture and its value to the city, its communities, and beyond. Commissioned by the Leeds Culture Trust, it focuses on the Year's impact - on people, on the culture sector, and the local economy – as well as its legacy. Its main purpose is to inform stakeholders and wider audiences about the Year's achievements, and crucially, to share learning for the future.

Context

LEEEDS 2023 was conceived as a city-wide celebration of creativity, developed in response to the withdrawal of UK cities from the European Capital of Culture competition. The programme set out to showcase Leeds as a cultural city of international standing, broaden participation in culture, and strengthen the city's creative economy. Over twelve months, more than a thousand events and activities were delivered in partnership with cultural organisations, artists, communities, schools, universities, businesses, and international collaborators.

Achievements

The Year achieved many of its ambitions, including:

- **High levels of participation,** with thousands engaging with Leeds' cultural offer for the first time, and significant involvement of underrepresented communities.
- **A community-centred approach** that extended reach across the whole city.
- **A strengthened cultural sector**, enriched by investment in emerging artists, and new partnerships.
- A post-Covid **boost to tourism.**
- **Innovation in accessible and inclusive** approaches to producing and presenting.
- A commitment to **environmental sustainability**, through greener practices and commissions raising climate awareness.

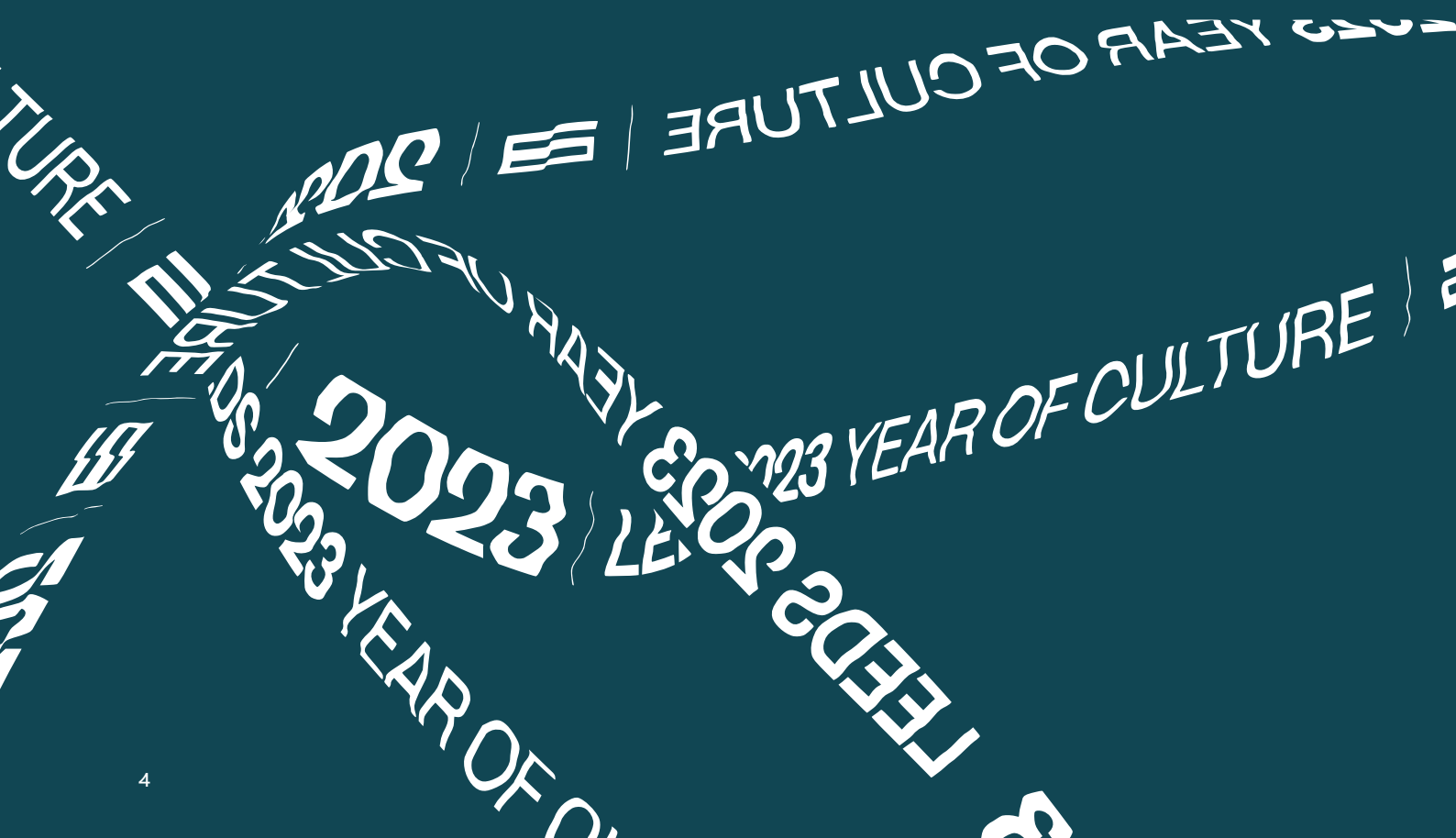
Conclusions

Delivered against a backdrop of unprecedented challenges, LEEDS 2023 showed what can be achieved through agility, adaptability, and partnership. By combining high-profile international commissions with grassroots community projects, the programme generated a legacy of empowered creatives, stronger partnerships, and renewed civic ambition.

What Next?

Recommendations for the city include:

- **Establishing a new strategic creative partnership to drive collaboration and place-making.**
- **Targeted investment in community-led creativity and emerging artists.**
- **A significant programme of collaborative public events, echoing LEEDS 2023 on a smaller scale, to sustain momentum and legacy.**
- **Embedding a unified, collaborative cultural place-making plan within the city's Inclusive Growth Strategy / Best City Ambition.**


2023 YEAR OF CULTURE
LEEDS 2023

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LEEDS 2023 YEAR OF CULTURE
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Introduction

LEEDS 2023 was a year-long cultural programme which invited people from the city and beyond to get involved, come together, make their voices heard and be part of a lasting legacy. People would be watching Leeds, and LEEDS 2023 wanted to make sure what they saw was a vibrant, contemporary city with a creative vision for the future. The year was designed to resonate with communities across Leeds while making new connections nationally and internationally. The evidence suggests that LEEDS 2023 did much to create a new confidence and sense of possibility.

Leeds Culture Trust commissioned this independent report to distil the learning from LEEDS 2023 and make it count towards realising that possibility. It cannot – and does not try to – document the whole story nor of course reflect the colour and excitement of being there, or its creative achievement. But it should give a sense of the impact it had and the process by which this was achieved, with the intention of suggesting what could come next for Leeds, and contributing to wider learning about the delivery and benefit of major events.

Having adopted the Centre for Cultural Value's Cultural Evaluation Principles[1], we have tried to be authentic and true to the purpose of learning and knowledge-exchange they encourage. We have tried to avoid the hyperbole that often frustrates the readers of evaluation reports and have thought about those "future hosts [who] can better benefit from the wealth of experience developed."[2] In other words, we have tried to sift through a large amount of data to report accurately and usefully on activity and impact but with the emphasis firmly on learning for the future. Where possible and important, we have tried to draw helpful conclusions about cause and effect, and what works. Equally, we have avoided judgemental criticisms which have little or no bearing on the future.

Much of the hoped-for impact of LEEDS 2023 will of course take longer to realise and inevitably this report focuses on immediate outcomes. Nevertheless, we hope the learning gained after a decade of hard work, good will and great ideas will inform future thinking on the role and contribution of culture in the city.

Penny Mills & Anne Torreggiani

On behalf of the wider evaluation team

1 https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/our-work/evaluation/evaluation-principles/
2 European Capitals of Culture: Success and Long-term Effects Study, Garcia, B., & Cox, T. (2013), Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Debt B: Structural and Cohesion Policies



About This Report

The purpose of this independent report commissioned by Leeds Culture Trust is to distil the learning from LEEDS 2023 and help maximise its long-term impact. It gives an overview of what happened, explores the impact of the Year of Culture and, in light of this, seeks to understand its legacy. It is authored by Penny Mills and Anne Torreggiani, The Audience Agency, with the University of Leeds.

The Summary section is a condensed version of the full report and follows a similar structure. If you are interested in a particular topic in the Summary, find out more in the corresponding Chapter and section in the longer report. An overview of research methods is given in the Appendices.

The full report includes:

- an exploration of the context for LEEDS 2023 in Chapter 1
- an overview of what happened and how during the year of culture in Chapter 2
- an analysis of if and how outcomes were achieved in Chapter 3
- and finally, a consideration of what could or should happen next to realise its full value in Chapter 4

Waking The Artist
Photographer: JMA Photography



The Awakening
Photographer: JMA Photography

SUMMARY

An Overview

LEEDS 2023 was a 365 day 'Year of Culture' made with the people of Leeds. Conceived as a landmark year of surprising and original creative experiences in partnership with the city, it brought together the dynamic arts and community sectors with its business and academic organisations. Letting Culture Loose – the tagline for the year - invited people to "get involved, make their voices heard, and be part of this lasting cultural legacy of innovation, excellence and ambition in the communities and cultures of Leeds" (LEEDS 2023 Business Plan).

This all took place following 10 years of planning and preparation, through a series of unprecedented challenges including the Covid-19 pandemic.

The programme that emerged was a "three-part act of storytelling for and with the city, telling a new narrative about Leeds and its cultural strength" (Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO LEEDS 2023) and phased across the year as:

- Part 1: Awakening – revealing the city and its people to itself and to the world.
- Part 2: Playing – encouraging everyone to explore, discover and play in the city.
- Part 3: Dreaming – firing people's imagination to dream of new possibilities and stories as the baton for culture was handed back to the city and its citizens.

Many ways in

Recognising that 'culture' means different things to different people, the programme was designed to offer a wide choice of distinctive pathways for engagement and to celebrate the cultural heritage and stories of all the city's diverse communities. Original, artist-led activities took place in all 33 wards. Some were led by local artists, some by international ones, and many through a collaboration between the two. There was something on offer every day of 2023. Over 1,000 volunteers were involved in every aspect.

The intention was to redefine 'culture' to reflect better the range and variety of cultural forms which those communities create and enjoy, and to open doors for creative talent at all stages, from the work

Left: WOW Barn Festival
Photographer (left): Lucille Moore
Right: Mother Goose Cabaret





of children, young people and community members to world class artists. Where artists were invited to reflect the richly diverse cultures of Leeds. Activity was broadly organised across three Strands:

- Produce: 12 original, large-scale Signature Projects commissioned and produced by LEEDS 2023, made possible by having a Year of Culture.
- Partner: projects delivered with and by other organisations with the support of LEEDS 2023 enabling them do things they were otherwise unable to do.
- Promote: putting Leeds and its diverse cultural offer on the map through increased advocacy, profile, visibility and growing civic confidence.

A collaborative approach

Devised and delivered in partnership with local, national and international artists, cultural and voluntary organisations, the programme was multi-art form and interdisciplinary. It incorporated public, visual and digital art, literature, a variety of performance, broadcasting, architecture, food and sport. Events and activities took place in community spaces and parks and more traditional venues, as well as site-specific work produced in unexpected indoor and outdoor locations across the city.

The team intended that their approach should be collaborative and participative, making connections between artists, between communities between aspects of the programme. Creative learning and participation criss-crossed the programme, with a priority on young people, pathways for emerging creatives, and increasing opportunities for people under-represented or marginalised in mainstream art.

Chapter 2 of this report explores in more detail what happened and how it was delivered.

LEEDS 2023 Volunteer



Headlines

Animating the city

There was a LEEDS 2023 activity somewhere in Leeds every day in the year

1,712
in person events took places across all

33
wards of the city

- Over **700** artists and creatives
- **700** jobs created to deliver the year
- **808** placements, internships and work experience
- **1,008** volunteers
- **33** Neighbourhood Hosts
- Joined by partners from **54** different countries
- **5** Higher Education Partnerships
- **75%** artists found new ways of engaging or collaborating with audiences and communities

Engaging people

LEEDS 2023 brought new cultural experiences to a diversity of communities:

2,302,808
recorded in-person engagements

- **3,256,752** estimated engagements with broadcast projects
- **257,473** engagements with digital projects
- **228,046** in-person engagements in run-up activities, pre-2023
- Public art estimated to reach **1.8million** passers-by
- **73%** of Leeds households took part in some activity
- **28%** of audiences for the major events were people who rarely engage with culture
- **65%+** of Leeds schools engaged

Creative learning and engagement

Opportunities for learning and development, formal and informal, were integrated across the whole programme and approach

- **228** schools took part – **34,251** in-person engagements among pupils
- **398** Community engagement events and activities – **59,943** in-person engagements
- **77** Youth Voice events and activities – **867** in-person engagements
- **157** Skills and Talent events and activities – **1,784** in-person engagements
- **527** Creative Learning events and activities – **36,623** in-person engagements

= total

1,651
events and activities

133,519
in-person engagements

Leeds Language Week
Photographer: JMA Photography



Responses & impacts

Social and cultural value

- **46%** audiences said that it was the first time they'd tried something like this
- **54%** of active participants said it was the first time they had attended a cultural/creative event
- **94%** of audiences rated events and activities positively
- **95%** of audiences for Signature Project events and 96% of active participants agreed events felt inclusive and 'where everyone is welcome'
- **95%** of survey respondents said that engaging with LEEDS 2023 had a positive impact on their wellbeing fulfilling at least one of the "Five Ways to Wellbeing"
- **85%** of audiences and 82% of active participants agreed that taking part made them 'proud to live in Leeds'
- People from Leeds' least arts-engaged communities took part in more activities on average than those from other parts of the city

Cultural and creative sector

- **86%** of artists and creatives and 99% of Cultural Partners involved agreed 'I was able to achieve my vision and ambition as part of LEEDS 2023'
- **72%** of artists and creatives, 82% of Cultural Partners, 'collaborated in new or different ways with artists and creatives'
- **74%** of artists and creatives, 79% of Cultural Partners, 'engaged or collaborated in new and creative ways with audiences, participants and/or communities'
- **59%** of artists and creatives, 81% of Cultural Partners, 'did a project I would not otherwise have had the opportunity to deliver'

Economic value

- The main events of the 12 Signature Projects had an economic impact of £13.6 million for the city
- **6.4%** increase in visitors to the city in 2023 compared to 2022

"Beautiful day allowing audience creativity"

Hibiscus Rising Audience

“Learned things about Leeds as well as myself”

Making a Stand Audience

The WOW Barn Festival
Photographer: Lucille Moore



Background

Originally conceived as a bid for European Capital of Culture (ECoC) under the theme "Weaving us Together" the year of culture was initiated by Leeds City Council, to celebrate Leeds' heritage alongside a dynamic and diverse contemporary culture. It had considerable cross-party, sector and public support.

"Doing it anyway"

Leeds was obliged to change tack, however, after Brexit and the European Commission's decision to remove from the UK the right to host the competition. The city, again with wide-ranging support, took the bold move to 'do it anyway' and run the proposed year of culture outside of any formal designation. It nevertheless continued to be European and internationalist in its approach.

A new charity, the Leeds Culture Trust was formed to deliver the year-long celebration. Ruth Pitt was appointed as the inaugural Chair in 2018 and Kully Thiarai as Creative Director and CEO in 2019, taking up post in January 2020.

Vision

Their vision for LEEDS 2023 built on the original aims of the Capital of Culture Bid Book, including to 'embrace equality and tackle the disconnection in a two-tier city'. It was a vision of future-focused, creative transformation with an eye on Leeds' longer term strategy, growing out of the vision of Leeds as a leading creative centre, international in outlook and able to bring cultural, social and economic benefit to all its citizens.

"Our Year of Culture is designed to wake up our senses and reveal our city in brand new and surprising ways; in ways perhaps that you never expected or noticed previously. We know that when this city speaks it has a proper story to tell. And it is our ambition to be the spotlight and foghorn for all the glorious creativity that is behind every door, in every home: broadcasting the brilliance of Leeds beyond the region and to all of us who live and work in the city."

Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO, LEEDS 2023 Business Plan

"A thriving Leeds where creativity fuels opportunities for everyone"

Vision, LEEDS 2023 Strategic Plan

Ambition

LEEDS 2023's strategic aims focused on transforming the city through culture, building capacity, getting more and different people involved, and, latterly, playing a role in the city's post-Covid regeneration. In this sense, its aims were aligned with Leeds City Council's Corporate Plan and its Inclusive Growth Strategy.

It would do this by bringing additional resource, visibility, ambition to Leeds' already thriving cultural scene, by being uncompromising about best practice in access and inclusion, and by taking creative risks. Building community, championing diversity and authentically representing the people of Leeds were key principles.

Challenges

Shortly after the Creative Director took up post in January 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March, coinciding with the launch of a period of research and development intended to pave the way for the delivery year. The majority of this activity was delivered remotely or digitally for almost two years.

The resource challenges of working outside the formal ECoC designation were compounded by the social and economic turmoil of the pandemic, while lockdowns disrupted preparations at critical moments. The UK Government's Covid-19 action plans from March 2020 were followed by the Recovery Strategy published in May 2020, and the launch of the Culture Recovery Fund in July 2020. In short, LEEDS 2023 was developed in a situation of unprecedented uncertainty. While achievements should be seen in light of this situation, it is also instructive to mark some of the adaptations and creative solutions it prompted.

Chapter 1 of this report goes into more detail about the background and context of LEEDS 2023.

LEEDS 2023 Strategic Aims

- To unlock opportunities for everyone to find enjoyment and live their best life through participating in creative activity.
- To boost engagement in culture particularly among people who face barriers because of their experience or circumstances.
- To lead and showcase cultural transformation.
- To play an active role in the city and region's social, economic and cultural recovery from the pandemic.
- To create a diverse, inclusive and values driven organisation that can effectively deliver LEEDS 2023 and its legacy.



Hibiscus Rising, Yinka Shonibare CBE
Photographer: David Lindsay

Impacts

Looking at the whole sweep of Year, the overall impression is of an event that had a genuinely catalytic effect, bringing promised additionality to the city in a distinctive way. LEEDS 2023 pointed the way to a more pluralistic future for the cultural sector. It did this by unearthing hidden assets, opening doors for emerging artists, overlooked audiences and new collaborators, and by building new connections between them all. It modelled how cultural organisations, artists and activists, can take the lead in their communities with a range of innovations from access and inclusion practice, to addressing climate change.

This is not to say that LEEDS 2023 did not experience challenges. The constant uncertainty, as a result of the pandemic and financial pressures, took its toll sometimes undermining relationships, disrupting long-lead development, and putting a lot of strain on the team.

Strong alignment with Leeds Best City Ambition, capital developments and other regional events (like Bradford 2025) look set to help LEEDS 2023 continue to make a strategic impact across the city and region.

Exploring outcomes

For the purposes of the evaluation, stated aims, objectives and KPIs were bundled into 11 major outcomes in terms of social and cultural value, sector development, economic value and environmental sustainability.

Find out more about LEEDS 2023's impact in each of these areas in Chapter 3.

Looking forward

Recommendations the City is exploring include:

- A new strategic creative partnership to drive future collaboration and place-making.
- Development of community-led creativity, supporting pathways for emerging artists and the evolution of the city's Creative Skills Festival.
- Significant collaborative public events, echoing LEEDS 2023 on a smaller scale, to catalyse collaboration and legacy.
- Ongoing assessment of the LEEDS 2023 legacy over the longer term.

46% said that it was the first time they had 'tried something like this'. **28%** of audiences for the major events were people who rarely engage with culture.

Participation

LEEDS 2023 delivered on ambitions, to bring new cultural experiences to a diversity of communities: members of 73% of Leeds households participated in some way. Total in-person audience engagements were well above 2 million. Levels of satisfaction were consistently high, people felt welcome, lots of people came to several events. Audiences were diverse and representative of the population: people of the Global Majority were represented in higher proportions compared to the profile of the population of Leeds, as audience members and participants, as were disabled people taking part in creative projects.

There was a mix of regular and new audiences. At events, **46%** said that it was the first time they had 'tried something like this'. **28%** of audiences for the major events were people who rarely engage with culture. People were positive about the big ideas LEEDS 2023 wanted to promote – like being inclusive, exploring the city, and thinking about new ways to tackle climate change. **94%** of audiences rated events positively.

Learning

Success in widening reach into communities is a notable achievement attributed to the value and effort placed on access, inclusion and representation. These considerations were central to the delivery of the year, in principle and practice. The commitment to getting beyond the city centre and 'meeting people where they are' paid off: it attracted a lot of people who don't usually engage with arts and culture, in some of Leeds most deprived neighbourhoods. Making things happen in each of the city's 33 wards and with artists and creatives based across Leeds was widely regarded as a critical success factor.

This approach had its own risks, however, as it meant LEEDS 2023 was less visible nationally, to visitors and other stakeholders.

"Students were made to feel responsible and valued."

Teacher

More opportunities for children and young people

LEEDS 2023 created a range of new creative opportunities for young people. **228** schools filled **34,251** workshop places with their pupils. This work was strengthened with CPD for 250 teachers and knowledge exchange across a matrix of educational funders and partners. 808 young people got a boost to their career development through placements, internships and work experience.

Learning

Bringing many different institutions together, using the whole programme to create learning opportunities, and long-lead planning time were all seen as success factors. Importantly, this work has led to the restructure and reanimation of the Local Cultural Education Partnership which is taking this work forward as 'Leeds 33'.

Wellbeing and citizen satisfaction

95% of survey respondents said LEEDS 2023 had a positive impact on their wellbeing[3] - through opportunities for everyday creativity, learning and active involvement, or connecting with others and volunteering. People reported increased confidence and personal growth. **Over 85%**[4] of stakeholders and audiences agreed that the activity they were involved in made them 'proud to live in Leeds'.

Learning

LEEDS 2023 worked hard to ensure volunteering and participation was as inclusive as possible and the 'for, by and about Leeds' approach - exploring history and stories specific to Leeds, and creating collective moments for and with communities - all resonated. Opportunities for volunteers to engage came in waves. This sometimes resulted in support being underpowered.

3 Base (weighted): Audiences 2,585, Active Participants 257, Volunteers 100
4 Base (weighted): Audiences 1,910, MOE 2%, Active Participants 186, Artists 76, Neighbourhood Hosts 26, Staff 60, Volunteers 70

LEEDS 2023 worked with over **700** artists and creatives, emerging, local, national and international, and in addition to the twelve Signature Projects delivered in partnership, facilitated a strand of **64** Partner projects.

A stronger sector

LEEDS 2023 had a strong mission to add value to the sector, introducing new international influences, working with different people in new ways, offering opportunities for artists and organisations to develop their practice and careers. LEEDS 2023 worked with over **700** artists and creatives, emerging, local, national and international, and in addition to the twelve Signature Projects delivered in partnership, facilitated a strand of 64 Partner projects. 50% of Cultural Partners reported 'increased capacity as a result of involvement'[5] - including resources, funding, skills development or additional jobs, and one in five reported forging new relationships.

Learning

Partners particularly valued being able to experiment and collaborate – especially internationally and with community involvement. Some partners, especially smaller organisations, expected more support, e.g. with budgets and marketing, than LEEDS 2023 was able to offer.

A sector more representative of Leeds' communities

The wider LEEDS 2023 community of artists, creatives and staff were representative of Leeds: 25% of artists[6] and creatives and 18% of staff[7], apprentices and placements were Global Majority, compared to 19% in the Leeds' population. 18% of artists and creatives, and 16% of staff, apprentices and placements identified as D/deaf or disabled compared with 17% of Leeds' population. 3% of artists and creatives, and 5% of staff, apprentices and placements identified as non-binary. 75% of artists and cultural organisations 'found new and creative ways of engaging or collaborating with audiences, participants and/or communities'.

Learning

These figures compare favourably with the diversity of the cultural workforce across the UK today[8]. Success in this area might again be put down to the way the team prioritised access and inclusion in principle and practice across all aspects of their work, alongside the Council's longstanding commitment to support and enable creative and cultural opportunities across the city. The Programme was developed across all wards and developed by working with artists and people embedded in those communities – amongst others, the Neighbourhood Hosts who supported and championed all aspects of the programme. Successful as these programmes were, feedback also suggests they were under-resourced (time and money) and there is important learning here for those looking to develop the approach.

5 Base 78
6 Base: 125
7 Base: 110
8 Culture is Bad For You, Brook, O'Brien, Taylor, demonstrates that the cultural sector has the least diverse workforce of any sector

Most staff felt their career prospects had improved, **44%** expected to be based in Leeds going forward.

New professional opportunities

Between LEEDS 2023 and its partners, over 700 additional jobs were created to deliver the Year, three quarters of employees lived in Leeds. LEEDS 2023 also created opportunities for people to develop their careers, including the Neighbourhood Hosts and Early Career Music Promoters.

Most staff felt their career prospects had improved, 44% expected to be based in Leeds going forward. 86%[9] of artists and 81%[10] of Cultural Partners involved agreed 'I was able to achieve my vision and ambition'.

Young and emerging artists, producers and organisations were able to develop their ideas and projects. 51% benefiting from R&D grants identified themselves as emerging artists. 808 young people gained through training, apprenticeships or work experience: 73% found out about new creative career options, 80% 'felt inspired' by their involvement.

Learning

The broad range of opportunities for development for artists, creatives and students reached across age ranges and communities. Although the growth of the creative sector following years of culture is often short-lived, new capital projects in Leeds and other initiatives in the region mean growth may be sustainable.

Infrastructure development

LEEDS 2023 leaves a legacy of public art and new ways of animating public spaces, including beyond the city centre. The annual programme of festivals has grown and the City is committed to ongoing investment in public spaces.

LEEDS 2023 created an intangible infrastructure of new relationships and new knowledge. This legacy may be the most valuable asset for new, incoming institutions, like the National Poetry Centre, for the Royal Armouries 10-year growth plan, and Leeds 33 (Local Cultural Education Partnership) and advocacy for the British Library North.

Stakeholders believe that LEEDS 2023 gave inspiration for regional cultural initiatives, including Kirklees Year of Music 2023, Culturedale 2024, Wakefield's 'Our Year' 2024 and on to Bradford 2025.

Learning

Despite the pressure on resources, LEEDS 2023's strategic role in filling specific gaps in provision is seen by stakeholders as critical to long-term impact. Similarly, full integration of the legacy into the city's Best City Ambition and Inclusive Growth Strategy is regarded as the key to making a lasting impact.

9 Base: 124
10 Base: 79

"It's changed the identity of Leeds, to show that Leeds has a multiplicity of identities, not a static culture, but one that can and will change over time."

2024 stakeholder interview

Positioning of Leeds

73% of Cultural Partners[11], thought LEEDS 2023 had 'improved the city's cultural profile'. Media attention was significant and mostly positive: with 2,150 pieces of editorial reaching an estimated circulation 481,959,050. Further profile was attracted through digital and broadcast partnership projects: digital communications saw Leeds appear on the ING Media Investment Opportunity 2023 report as one of the 'UK's Most Talked About Cities'. The city also hosted 80+ cultural leaders including the EU Ambassador and a number of conferences were held throughout the year.

There was, nevertheless, criticism from stakeholders about the level and visibility of the Year in the media and across the city.

Learning

Although many media-supported projects were produced, the lack of a single large Media Partner hampered development of a significant national profile. Lack of resources and of an official designation were no doubt responsible for not meeting perhaps overly high expectations for visibility and profile. These findings may also highlight the tension between achieving at an embedded local level and making a big splash at a national one.

Continued, long-term investment in culture

LEEDS 2023 raised £13.2 million (mixed public, private and commercial) to match the £10.6 million core investment put up by Leeds City Council for a total budget for the development and delivery of the year of £23.8 million. Further investment was also leveraged into Partner organisations.

Leeds organisations saw 20% uplift in regular funding from Arts Council England for 2023 – 2027. Channel 4 decided to relocate their HQ to Leeds, while several national cultural organisations did the same. Growth of an additional 2,700 jobs in the cultural, leisure and tourism sectors is expected as a result. LEEDS 2023 may have been an influencing factor in these new developments.

Learning

It is still hard to predict with any accuracy if and by how much LEEDS 2023 will have helped to future-proof investment in culture in Leeds, especially since attention moved to Bradford 2025. But there are major strategic opportunities to lever the LEEDS 2023 approach, especially in achieving Leeds' Inclusive Growth Strategy and catalysing further collaborative, cross-sector working across the city.

11 Base: 77

Leeds organisations saw 20% uplift in regular funding from Arts Council England for 2023 – 2027.

Growth in the visitor economy

Visitors figures increased by 6.4% in 2023, a significant increase on the year before, with total visitors exceeding pre-Covid levels[12] and major 'Signature Projects' brought an estimated £13.4 million to the city. Although the ambition to increase visitors by 10% on previous years was not met, LEEDS 2023 was effective in re-animating public spaces in the city and local community centres. It is still too early to know if, and by how much, it has triggered long-term growth in the visitor economy.

Learning

Again, Covid-19 pandemic and the following economic downturn no doubt played a part on several levels. The hiatus between the closure of Welcome to Yorkshire in 2022 and the launch of the West Yorkshire Visitor Economy Partnership did not help. In this environment, however, it also seems unlikely that a strategy with such a strong focus on cultural regeneration would also be able to deliver on tourism. This should perhaps have been anticipated in the redrafting of plans.

Environmental sustainability

LEEDS 2023 made a strong environmental commitment and considerable effort to minimise its carbon footprint. Working with Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL), they raised the debate about climate change and built sector skills and confidence. They offered free training for 287 cultural professionals, and modelled innovations in reducing, re-using and recycling. Events and debates about the climate emergency resonated with audiences rather than alienating them.

LEEDS 2023 helped SAIL move from being volunteer-led to having a staff of four. Leeds cultural infrastructure is also left stronger with a power supply from the electric grid in City Square and access to sustainable power sources or low energy equipment, suppliers with sustainable credentials and expertise and a blueprint for future sustainable events.

Learning

As with other areas of commitment, their approach to sustainability was a major and constant consideration – across the programme, operations, organisational culture. Learning is now available for the sector and is being used across the region.

12 Leeds City STEAM model economic impact data provided by Leeds City Council for reporting

Legacy & What Next

"It may take up to 10 years... we need to get on with what comes next, while the ideas are still fresh, while there's still momentum."

2024 stakeholder interview

The LEEDS 2023 team achieved most of their goals, explicit and implicit, and either exceeded or made progress in all the 11 outcomes identified at the start. Success was more marked in areas related to local engagement and regeneration, rather than in the visitor economy and national profile. In nearly all areas, of course, value will be realised over the long-term.

Learning to build on

"Doing it anyway"

In retrospect, there were pros and cons of "doing it anyway", outside the Capital of Culture designation. On the downside, it limited access to funds, requiring a huge effort from the team to raise additional income. Without core costs covered in advance, artistic projects took much longer to confirm, the lack of certainty frustrating all involved. Stakeholder expectations were still aligned to a Capital of Culture project, with a budget nearly 3 times the size. The lack of official designation also made it impossible to attract a major media partnership, with knock-on effects in terms of national reach and awareness.

On the plus side, it gave the brand a great kickstart. And some argue that being outside the constraints of the designation allowed certain freedoms, to adopt a wider definition of culture, to be more flexible and agile, to experiment and innovate. It also gave inspiration to others in the region, notably Bradford 2025.

Too much with too little?

The question has to be asked whether "doing it anyway" forced LEEDS 2023 into trying to do too much with too little, in a time of escalating crisis. Instead of cutting activity, resources for each were simply reduced, with the effect that time and budget were often stretched very thin. Some stakeholders believe that it could have been more upfront about the impact of reduced resources on its ability to deliver so many elements of the original Bid Book.

Inclusive, resilient leadership

Many stakeholders highlighted the importance of the leadership team and their approach, living and modelling the collaborative, inclusive, artistically-led values they wanted LEEDS 2023 to embody and promote. This made LEEDS 2023 what it was and justified the decision to deliver the Year through an arms-length organisation.

Local creativity, global view

LEEDS 2023 provided a platform and opportunity to local, and in many cases hitherto marginalised, artists and creatives who were largely enthusiastic about the new international connections it brokered. The international dimension was a tonic for established and emerging artists and organisations alike – a boost of diverse ideas, perspectives, practices, meaning-making. This local-global approach modelled a different, more outward-looking, open-to-different ways of working, set to bring lasting benefit.

Innovation

LEEDS 2023 took a pioneering approach in several areas including:

- Community-embedded programme development initiatives like MY LEEDS 2023, the Neighbourhood Hosts and Hidden Stories projects demonstrated latent demand in a lot of communities who rarely engage with Leeds' cultural offer. They showcased a spectrum of place-relevant, community-embedded practice which could be further developed and adapted to many different situations.

- Access and inclusion: the team committed to a holistic approach, tackling all barriers to engagement from physical access, transport, cost, relevance and representation, baking in better access across all aspects of the operation, and exploring questions of social justice as part of the programme.

- Sustainability: there was a commended drive on environmental sustainability, working with Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL) to model better practice in the cultural sector, including innovations in reducing the impact of productions, supply chains, and thought-provoking programming.

- Education Partnership: LEEDS 2023 showed what the cultural sector can do to support an over-stretched education system with curricular enrichment that teachers and schools valued and inspired the constitution of Leeds 33 (Local Cultural Education Partnership). It raised the debate about youth-led work, and also showed what the career progression bridge between higher education and the sector might look like (including catalysing the National Poetry Centre in its early development, alongside support from the University of Leeds and Leeds City Council).

- Producing: useful and replicable approaches included processes for robust project development, enabling potential projects to be developed in an agile and adaptable way before they were greenlit. Approaches to international collaboration and cross-sector partnership working are also notable developments for Leeds.

A new matrix

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the cultural infrastructure was a newly extended matrix of relationships, showing the way forward for a different kind of strategic co-operation, involving local artists and organisations.

In most of these cases, useful learning – about what worked and what could have worked better – is already being shared, and should form part of future initiatives in Leeds and across the mega-event community.

Developing the legacy in Leeds

LEEDS 2023 effectively demonstrated how culture can raise the City's game, especially in terms of regeneration through artist-led, locally-rooted and internationally-inspired activity. The baton is now handed back to the City to continue what the Year of Culture started.

LEEDS 2023 showed how partners could come together to plan a shared future. While the reinvigorated Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEP) is already taking forward the legacy, there is currently no vehicle for the wider creative sector.

While the City did not make specific financial provision for a LEEDS 2023 legacy, the Leeds Inclusive Growth Strategy uses it as a point of reference for collaborative, cultural place-making in Leeds. This will also help consolidate the significant opportunities of upcoming capital developments.

The Council also reorganised its arts funding stream – Leeds Cultural Investment Programme, to fund projects which carry on the spirit of LEEDS 2023 – that is, cross-sector, community-led events, international partnerships, developing practice to help the sector continually innovate and build capacity.

Recommendations

In conclusion, and echoing the views of stakeholders, we recommend:

1. Establish a strategic partnership involving major institutions, local artists and wider creative sector – independently led and strategically placed. Invest in cultural mapping and ongoing insight to continually understand and evidence Leeds' cultural ecology and establish comprehensive baselines.
2. Through this, develop a unified, collaborative cultural place-making strategy.
3. As part of this strategy, consider development of collaborative, centrally co-ordinated support for community-led creativity, building on the Neighbourhood Hosts model delivered.
4. Consider supporting pathways for emerging artists, including community based ones who represent the diversity of Leeds population and closer collaborations with the city's Higher Education Institutions to enable talent retention and progression initiatives for the city's creative graduates. Evolve the Creative Skills Festival.
5. Consider an annual or biennial collaborative public event, echoing LEEDS 2023 on a smaller scale, to catalyse ongoing strategic work which is inclusive and community-based.
6. Linked to this, the sector to continue to support and develop ideas with Leeds 33 (the Local Cultural Education Partnership) to help consolidate and grow cultural education in the city.
7. Track it: build in long-term review of the LEEDS 2023 legacy, ongoing.

"It took a collective act of imagination and 'defiance' to deliver LEEDS 2023 for and with the city's citizens, and with the support and partnership of many, many people. LEEDS 2023 sought to redefine culture and transform the ways in which culture could connect and include people of all ages, all communities to explore their own creativity and discover the city afresh. These ambitions were realised beyond expectations, under an extraordinary set of circumstances, thanks to the courage and boldness of everyone involved."

Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO



The WOW Barn Bootcamp
Photographer: JMA Photography

Chapter 1: BACKGROUND

An exploration of the context for LEEDS 2023



My World, My City, My Neigbourhood: Civic Skateboarding
Photographer: Tim Dunk

1.1 The Road to LEEDS 2023

Origins

Leeds City Council first brought together a partnership of cultural and other organisations in 2014 to plan a bid to become European Capital of Culture (ECoC), and host a high-profile, year-long festival of culture in 2023. It developed under the theme "Weaving us Together" and was to 'embrace equality and tackle the disconnection in a two-tier city', to celebrate both its heritage, and a dynamic and diverse contemporary culture.

Enthusiasm for the bid

The development process was led by the Council's arts team and involved extensive consultation with an enthusiastic public - a poll in the Yorkshire Post, for example, indicated support from 70% of its readers. The success of Leeds hosting the Tour De France's Grand Depart in 2014 boosted the city's confidence. There was wide support for the proposal across the Council, with a strong proviso that any programme had to be city-wide and relevant to all its communities.

In 2015 an independent Steering Group was set up to develop the bid, chaired by Sharon Watson, with representation and support from the three main political parties. A call-out for programme ideas resulted in more than 100 project proposals, a number of which would feature in the final LEEDS 2023 programme.

Bidding in itself helped raise the cultural profile of the city (for instance, Leeds started appearing in visitor destination guides). Hundreds of people were involved in development of the 60-page Bid Book.

Brexit

2016's Brexit vote did not seem relevant at first: the Council had taken advice, many non-EU countries had successfully applied. In July 2017 the Council approved the Bid Book with cross-party support and committed a contribution of £12 million.

Just days before the team were due to be interviewed by the judges, the European Commission announced that the UK was no longer eligible for the competition, and excluded Leeds and the UK's other bidding cities (Belfast and Derry, Nottingham, Dundee and Milton Keynes). Appeals to the Commission failed and Leeds had to decide what to do next.

Public support for the bid remained strong and in January 2018, a Conservative motion to continue with the bid was proposed and passed unanimously at a Full Council Meeting.

Going it alone

The following months saw the set-up of Leeds Culture Trust as an independent charity, at arms-length from the local authority, to drive the project forward.

The independent spirit and good-humoured defiance of the decision to go it alone arguably did good things for brand Leeds.

Here was an upbeat, post-Brexit story which seemed, for once, to unite instead of divide.

But it meant that LEEDS 2023 would neither benefit from the investment which comes with an ECoC designation nor be a full member of the growing family of UK mega-events (UK City of Culture and other nationally planned place-making and cultural events).

From the outset, then, LEEDS 2023 had a comparatively low level of upfront investment and was without the infrastructural support that comes as part of these programmes. It was a poor relation, linked into both the European and UK networks but without the capital to participate fully.

Challenges, resource constraints and uncertainty

Further unprecedented challenges lay ahead in the shape of the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns and the subsequent cost of living crisis. Cross-party support cooled slightly as this crisis hit, and Council funding reduced from £12 million to £10.6 million in 2021.

Even so, LEEDS 2023 continued with its ambition and a commitment to the original scope and managed to attract a good deal of support and investment from funders and businesses, across sectors.

In total, LEEDS 2023 was delivered with a core budget of £23.8 million, nearly a third of the original Bid Book budget, and less than half the average for an ECoC. In other words, it was a relatively small budget for a mega-event, especially one committed to a full, year-round programme.

But there was little compromise on the overall vision, despite the ongoing financial challenge caused by the unpredictable pressures on investors. The usual questions of 'if', 'how much' and 'when' investment would come in were much harder for Leeds Culture Trust to answer. This necessitated juggling three potential budget horizons (£15, £25 and £32 million) all the way through the planning stages.

The net effect was a constant state of uncertainty as to the potential scale and scope of projects, requiring difficult decision-making to balance the financial bottom line with reaching for the highest creative ambitions, and living the strong values that underpinned the brand.

In summary, the combined challenges of working outside a formal designation and the spread of the pandemic at a critical moment in research and development meant that LEEDS 2023 was created in a situation of unprecedented uncertainty. Its achievements in terms of both impact and process should be seen in this light.

13 https://coventry21evaluation.info/strategy-reports/final-evaluation-report/
14 https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6312a17a-1b6a-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
15 https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/research/institutes/culture-place-and-policy-institute/report/cultural-transformations-the-impacts-of-hull-uk-city-of-culture-2017.pdf
16 https://warwick.ac.uk/research/partnerships/place-based-research/impact-value/researchresources/derry_eval.pdf
17 https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/ecoc-2011-evaluation_en.pdf
18 https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/capitals-culture-2007-08-evaluation_en.pdf

Mega-events budgetary context:

Budgets vary, with European Capital of Culture (ECoC) budgets up to over €100 million, and UK City of Culture budgets up to £40 million.

- **Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture:** £15 million allocated from UK government, estimated operating budget £40 million
- **Coventry 2021 UK City of Culture** £40.6 million for the management and delivery of the programme, and indications of an additional £71.7 million for improvement of Coventry's cultural and heritage assets, at least in part due to the designation.[13]
- **Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018 ECoC** budget for the delivery €104.6 million including €5.3 from the public sector.[14]
- **Hull 2017 UK City of Culture** raised £32.8 million to deliver the project, including £27 million public commitment.[15]
- **Derry Londonderry 2013 UK City of Culture** budget for delivery £17.8 million.[16]
- **Turku 2011 ECoC** total delivery 2006 to 2012 €55.5 million.[17]
- **Liverpool 2008 ECoC** total £122 million over 6 years (highest ECoC to date).[18]

Light Night Leeds
Photographer: Ant Robling



Timeline

LEEDS 2023 was ten years in the making. As well as the key role of Leeds City Council, support throughout came from businesses, institutions and residents across the city.

It is important to note that another critical resource constraint on the development of the year of culture was lack of time. The timeline from 2017 onwards, was initially disrupted by the ECoC decision-making process, then compounded by successive pandemic lockdowns at a crucial stage, just after appointment of the CEO. The countdown for events of this scale is always rapid but the situation for LEEDS 2023 was acute. Many aspects, especially in the planning and development stages, were affected by the need to go at an incredibly fast pace, while constantly adapting to changes in the environment.

The Awakening, Carnival dancers
Photographer: James Phillips



2013

Leeds City Council's Executive Member for Leisure and Skills and Chief Officer for Culture and Sport consulted widely about bidding for ECoC 2023 designation

January 2014

A supportive response, led to an open meeting attended by circa 300 people augmented by other debates and radio phone-ins and on social media

22 January 2014

Leeds City Council Executive Board accepted recommendations to submit a bid to become ECoC 2023

March 2015

Leeds City Council confirmed intention to bid for 2023 ECoC.

December 2016

DCMS opens UK competition for ECoC

October 2017

Leeds City Council adopted LEEDS 2023 bid to "aim to develop a 100% local and 100% international programme." Support starts to come in from businesses and institutions.

November 2017

The European Commission cancelled the ECoC competition for UK bidding cities as a consequence of Brexit negotiations.

January 2018

Leeds City Council decided to 'do it anyway', to host an independent 'Year of Culture' 2023, at a full Council meeting with cross-party support. The ECoC Leeds Independent Steering Committee and Chair initially oversaw the revised plans.

June 2018

Leeds Culture Trust established as the delivery vehicle for LEEDS 2023 entering into a grant agreement with the Council, and with an independent Chair, Ruth Pitt and board.

August 2019

Leeds Culture Trust was incorporated as a charity with a grant agreement with Leeds City Council to March 2024.

January 2020

Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO

March 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a national lock down.

May 2021

LEEDS 2023 'Letting Culture Loose' launched with a programme of R&D, Seed Commissions and community engagement

7 January 2023

LEEDS 2023 Year of Culture launched with the opening show, 'The Awakening', in Headingley Stadium.

LEEDS 2023 Executive Team

Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO

Emma Beverley Director of Programmes.

Chris Ansell Head of Creative Learning and Engagement. Richard Coram Director of Finance and Operations. Abigail Scott Paul Director of External Relations and Strategic Partnerships. Claire Hutchinson Head of Communications and Marketing. Sarah Jane Mace Head of Experience Design

1.2 About Leeds

"We've spent long enough being quiet about it, so now's the time to shout about culture, perform it, make it and imagine it every day on every street, in every part of the city "

LEEDS 2023 Business Plan

Leeds is located right in the centre of England, the biggest city in the Yorkshire and Humber region, and at the centre of the Leeds City Region, which is one of the five local authority areas in West Yorkshire.

Leeds and its citizens

Leeds' 33 wards make up the UK's 7th largest city by population, estimated at just over 822,500 in 2022, part of the wider Leeds City Region with around 3 million people. The population increased by 8.1% between 2011 and 2021, a higher increase than the English average (6.6%), and than that of the wider Yorkshire and Humber region (3.7%).[19]

Around one half of the population is under 45 years, much in line with national averages. While Leeds is not a super-diverse city, more than 1 in 5 people are of the Global Majority (including mixed or multiple ethnicities, people in Leeds come from around 140 different ethnic groups and 170 languages are spoken).[20] 105 (of 482) neighbourhoods are in the top 10% of most deprived areas nationally, and 148 in the top 20%. 29% of school children are eligible for the Deprivation Pupil Premium.

In this context, LEEDS 2023 looked to develop a programme with broad intergenerational appeal, and to put a spotlight on its rich diversity and overlooked parts of the city.

Economy

According to Leeds City Council, it is the UK's fastest growing city and the main driver of the City Region with a £64.6 billion economy and a workforce of 1.37 million. Leeds has one of the most diverse economies of all the UK's main employment centres. Financial and business services account for 38% of total output – which make it the largest financial services centre in England outside London – while other key sectors include retail, leisure and the visitor economy, construction, manufacturing and the creative and digital industries.

Over 32,000 VAT-registered businesses are based in Leeds and more than 6,000 small and medium-size enterprises, which account for more than half of employment. The number of mid-size and large companies and organisations based in Leeds is significantly above the national average. Leeds is also one of the UK's foremost centres for fast

19 ONS figures https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/E08000035/ https://observatory.leeds.gov.uk/population/#/view-report/63aeddf1d7fc44b8b4dffcd868e84eac/___iaFirstFeature/G3

20 https://www.leedsculturepprogrammes.org.uk/leeds-culture-strategy-2017-2030/context

business growth, behind only London and Cambridge.[21] It has a relatively high ratio of public to private sector jobs.

The city is home to three internationally recognised universities, including one Russell Group, two conservatories, has one of the largest further education colleges in the UK and Europe's largest teaching hospital trust.

Over the next ten years, the City Council forecast that its economy will grow by 21% with financial and business services set to generate over half of GVA growth over that period. More than £3.9 billion has been invested in large scale development projects over the last decade and there is a further £7.3 billion worth of development under construction and in the pipeline. The centre of the city in particular is changing rapidly as development of the South Bank meets the need for more homes.

Leeds is the biggest city in the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Area and one of the six core cities in the 'Northern Powerhouse', putting it in a strong position to shape and benefit from devolution, innovative enterprise partnership and redistributed infrastructure development.

Part of LEEDS 2023's role was to contribute to perceptions of brand Leeds as a thriving and creative economic centre, in connection with the City Council's Strategy for Inclusive Growth.

International profile

As we heard from a number of stakeholders in interviews, there was a shared view that by the early 2010s Leeds had not promoted itself as effectively as other major metropolitan centres on a world stage. Its cultural profile was low on the international scene, even if its universities, businesses, cultural organisations and individuals had strong international connections. Its successful bid to host the Tour De France's Le Grand Depart in 2014 shed a new light on Leeds, as a city confident to put on a show. This was developed further by events like World Triathlon Series and major conferences.

Primarily a day-visit destination, Leeds City Council visitor data reported that in 2019 Leeds attracted 30.42 million visitors, only 10% of whom stayed overnight.

In 2021 Leeds was announced as the home of the UK's first National Infrastructure Bank (NIB), cementing the city's position as an important financial centre in the world and as a new hub for driving global green finance and investment. Similarly, its developing digital technology sector, worth more than £6.6 billion, is putting Leeds on the global map.

LEEDS 2023 was part of this story, designed to raise the city's distinctive identity and cultural profile beyond the UK, and to strengthen international connections.

21 https://ereproperty.com/news-and-insights/why-leeds-should-be-your-next-investment-location/
22 https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/partner/article/leeds-the-uk-financial-powerhouse-planning-a-digital-future-at-the-heart-of-europe

"Culture is what we do and who we are, encompassing a broad range of actions and activities which have the capacity to transform, challenge, reassure and inspire, giving a place and its people a unique and distinctive identity."

Definition of culture, from Leeds Cultural Strategy 2017-30

Leeds' cultural sector

Leeds has a well-developed cultural ecology and a City Council which has traditionally been a positive support and champion. It is the only regional city in England with permanent theatre, ballet, contemporary dance and opera companies of national and international standing, a national museum, a world-class conservatoire, as well as companies who are pioneers in their own fields. The quality and quantity of parks and outdoor spaces compare favourably with other cities across Europe. It has the most concentrated collection of sculpture in the world and the largest number of dance organisations outside London.

Already the home of Channel 4, since 2019, it is preparing to welcome the National Centre for Poetry and working to deliver British Library North as an international hub for the written word.

The Cultural Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030 ramped up expectations of what culture could and should be doing for the city. Consultation began in 2017 and the emerging Strategy was linked both to wider civic priorities and aligned with the principles set out in Agenda 21 for Culture,[23] a framework devised by the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) International Committee on Culture which articulates how cities can use culture to respond to global challenges and deliver on human rights.

The Strategy set out an ambitious, forward-looking approach, based on an inclusive definition of culture, and thinking big about its potential value to Leeds and its citizens.[24] The Strategy gave impetus to the ECoC bid and informed the shape of LEEDS 2023. Post Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, LEEDS 2023 was increasingly regarded as a critical way of getting Leeds back on this particular track and it sat as a cornerstone of its 'Best City Ambition'.

23 https://www.leedsculturepprogrammes.org.uk/leeds-culture-strategy-2017-2030/context

"Culture has the opportunity to become the golden thread that runs throughout all policy areas, unifying our collective ambitions and delivering on our vision for Best City 2030." [25]

The three pillars of the 'Best City Ambition' are health and wellbeing, inclusive growth and zero carbon. It is evident that these were powerful forces shaping the LEEDS 2023 approach and programme.

By the Autumn of 2023, however, Leeds City Council faced major budget challenges and was engaged in identifying significant measures to balance its books, the results of which process could impact the legacy development for LEEDS 2023.[26]

Total investment in Leeds by Arts Council England in 2019/20 was £25,754,877 in the funding cycle prior to LEEDS 2023's planning and delivery, but had risen to just under £30 million in 2024, making it the city with the highest level of regular funding from Arts Council England outside London.

LEEDS 2023 had a strategic remit to bring additionality to an already thriving cultural sector, to leverage its assets, boost its visibility, and bring nourishment and inspiration.

24 Who is culture for? | Culture Programmes (leedsculturepprogrammes.org.uk)
25 https://www.leedsculturepprogrammes.org.uk/leeds-culture-strategy-2017-2030/context
26 Leeds City Council considering range of significant new measures to meet ongoing budget challenge

1.3 Aims & Ambitions

"Our Year of Culture is designed to wake up our senses and reveal our city in brand new and surprising ways; in ways perhaps that you never expected or noticed previously. We know that when this city speaks it has a proper story to tell. And it is our ambition to be the spotlight and foghorn for all the glorious creativity that is behind every door, in every home: broadcasting the brilliance of Leeds beyond the region and to all of us who live and work in the city."

Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO

Big ideas: Vision, Mission, Values and Change

The final vision for LEEDS 2023 built on the original aims of the ECoC Bid Book, including: to "embrace equality and tackle the disconnection in a two-tier city" and to "provide a physical and virtual environment to explore the role of culture in tackling inequalities, connecting communities and transforming the physical and mental health of a diverse, modern European city."

It was a vision of future-focused, creative transformation with an eye on Leeds' longer term strategy, growing out of the vibrant cultural offer that already existed there. It was a vision of Leeds as a creatively leading-edge city, international in outlook and able to bring bringing benefit to all its citizens.

Its strategic aims focused on building capacity, getting more and different people involved, and, latterly, playing a role in the city's post-Covid regeneration. In this sense, its aims were aligned with Leeds Best City Ambition and its inclusive growth strategy.

It would do this by bringing additionality: adding resource, visibility, ambition to Leeds' thriving cultural scene, by modelling future practice in access and inclusion and championing diversity, by building community and representing the people of Leeds, by taking creative risks.

These aims were further divided into 21 more detailed objectives and impacts, some of which were 'smart' and measurable while others were more indicative and represented the kinds of activities LEEDS 2023 intended to include. They reflected both the dominant narrative of, "tackling inequalities, connecting communities", and the standard financial impacts expected of mega-events, such as boosting the visitor economy.

There were further KPIs for different stakeholders, creating a complicated matrix of potential measures of success and indicators, difficult to focus on and not apparently helpful at either an operational or fully strategic level.

Vision, Mission, Values

Vision: A thriving Leeds where creativity fuels opportunities for everyone.

Mission: To deliver a transformational year of creative experiences connecting and benefiting people now and into the future.

Values

- **We're compassionate:** we've a big heart and we look out for each other; we believe we're stronger together.
- **We're bold:** we're not afraid of using our spirit, imagination and creativity to make a difference.
- **We're confident:** we're Leeds! We've got this!
- **We're inventive:** there's no rule book; we'll seek out fresh ideas and new ways of doing things.

Strategic Aims

- To unlock opportunities for everyone to find enjoyment and live their best life through participating in creative activity.
- To boost engagement in culture particularly among people who face barriers because of their experience or circumstances.
- To lead and showcase cultural transformation.
- To play an active role in the city and region's social, economic and cultural recovery from the pandemic.
- To create a diverse, inclusive and values driven organisation that can effectively deliver LEEDS 2023 and its legacy.

In this evaluation, we reference indicators where relevant, but take the structure from the 11 'ambitions' or outcomes set out in the theory of change finally adopted.

A Theory of Change

The LEEDS 2023 Business Plan made the confident claim:

"Many aspects of our lives will change in the coming years, but culture and creativity will help us express what we want and work out how we get it. It will give us permission to test new ways of living, thinking, being. It's time for us to take our global place in history."

The Business Plan was already in place and many KPIs already set when a 'theory of change' was developed with the evaluation team appointed relatively late, in May 2022.

This theory of change distilled aims and objectives, and simplified stated ambitions, showing how different activities and aspects of the programme were planned to contribute to lasting positive change.

Given time pressures, the evaluation team were not able to conduct an expansive consultative exercise, nor involve stakeholders in setting measures of success. This was then a pragmatic exercise, done at speed, post R&D, to refine outcomes and impacts, and make the evaluation deliverable.

The Gift, City Without Seams
Photographer: Ant Robling



Outcomes

The outcomes LEEDS 2023 aspired to align with those articulated in Creating The Golden Thread – An ambition for major events in the UK,[27] the report published in 2023 by Spirit of 2012 which seeks to define a common set of potential mega-event outcomes. For this Report, we have aligned with the framework it proposes, to help make the link between the evaluation of LEEDS 2023, and that of recent and future major events.

Outcomes are articulated as follows within this Report, and are explored in greater depth in Chapter 3:

Social and cultural

1 There is a sustainable growth in cultural participation amongst the citizens of Leeds, regardless of their experience or circumstances.
2 There are more opportunities for children and young people to learn and develop their creative skills and cultural careers.
3 Contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of our citizens, there is a growth in citizen satisfaction and improved quality of life linked to creative opportunities.

Cultural and creative sector

4 There is an even stronger and more visible cultural sector.
5 The sector is more representative of and connected with its diverse communities.
6 There is job growth in the cultural and creative sectors and more artists and cultural professionals choose to live and work in the city.
7 There will be physical legacies in sculptures and murals and it will pave the way for new infrastructure such as the British Library, the National Poetry Centre and East Leeds Pavilion.

Economic

8 There continues to be long-term investment in culture in Leeds and the region.
9 There is a positive change in perceptions of Leeds as a city and an increase in its national and international profile.
10 There is growth in the visitor economy in Leeds and West Yorkshire – and Leeds ranks higher on the list of cultural destinations to visit amongst domestic and international travellers.

Environmental sustainability

11 LEEDS 2023 also made a commitment to tackle climate change, to embed sustainability into planning and delivery and evaluate its impact.

27 https://spiritof2012.org.uk/insights/creating-the-golden-thread-events-legacy/

1.4 The Evaluation Approach

The Audience Agency (TAA) was commissioned in 2022 by LEEDS 2023 to design and deliver the evaluation in collaboration with researchers based at the Centre for Cultural Value at the University of Leeds.

In line with smaller budgets and a compressed timeline, the evaluation was somewhat lighter touch than those for other mega-events, such as Coventry City of Culture. It was delivered on a smaller budget by a much smaller team, and this had an impact on the depth and scope of the data collected and analysed.

This section offers an overview of the approach and method; more details are included in the Evaluation Methodology Appendix.

Approach

The evaluation strategy was to assess the impact of LEEDS 2023 overall, so not all events and activities were explored in the same depth and the evaluation relied on a combination of cross-cutting primary quantitative research and a number of qualitative or subject-specific 'deep-dives', and more detailed analysis of selected events and activities.

The evaluation team worked with LEEDS 2023 to build an understanding of the shape of the programme and how it was being developed and delivered, expressed as an outline theory of change. Linked to this, an evaluation plan was designed to help steer the evaluation over a packed 18-month period of R&D and diverse events, and to build an understanding of effects and their cause. It took a multi-layered research and data-gathering approach, aligned to the style and complexity of the programme, to understand both process and impact, if and how expected and unexpected outcomes were achieved and their implications.

The approach aligns with and contributes to the increasing body of work on the outcomes and impacts of major cultural events.

Cultural Evaluation Principles

We looked to the Centre for Cultural Value's Evaluation Principles in the design of the framework, the selection of methods, and the style and emphasis of reporting. In this sense, we strived in particular to listen to many voices, to be purposeful and focused on learning and future action, to prioritise resources in pursuit of this purpose, to be transparent and ready to share.

Baselines and context

Prior to issuing the tender for a full evaluation, an 'Audience Baseline Research' report was commissioned in 2021 from the agency QA Research, which carried out a population survey of Leeds residents. It was intended to provide baselines from which city-wide progress against a number of – but not all –impacts could be measured over 2023 and beyond. In the end, although the survey was repeated on a more limited basis in summer 2023 (with a focus on LEEDS 2023 brand awareness and perceptions), resources for a full, post-event population

survey were not available.

The Audience Agency was also commissioned to produce a detailed bespoke segmentation of Leeds population (based on national Audience Spectrum profiling and segmentation system). Detailed segment portraits, and ward by ward profiles, were used by the communications and marketing team for planning and targeting.

The Report also draws on contextual data drawn from Office for National Statistics population data, in particular the 2021 Census, and benchmarks for cultural engagement using the Audience Spectrum[28] profiling and segmentation tool.

Methods and data

The Audience Agency managed a programme of quantitative audience research beginning in the second half of 2022, throughout 2023 and including a final survey in 2024 to audiences for LEEDS 2023 to help assess city-wide impacts. Quantitative surveys were designed for audiences, active participants, artists and creatives, volunteers, staff, teachers/ pupils, apprentices and placements and Cultural Partners. Surveys were delivered using online and in-person data collection methods aiming for representative samples for each stakeholder group across the whole year (not at event or project level). A series of interviews and facilitated discussions were delivered following the end of the year with LEEDS 2023 staff and stakeholders.

Partner projects were provided with guidance on delivering audience surveys, however, few provided data. The majority of data collected is therefore representative of engagement or involvement with the Produce strand, including Creative Learning and Engagement activities, with reported impacts from the wider group of Cultural Partners on their projects. The Leeds Culture Trust team supplied a variety of metrics on activities, engagement, funding, and other resourcing.

This comprehensive quantitative exercise was complemented by 6 additional 'deep-dives':

- A qualitative study of WOW Barn barnraisers' experience (Centre for Cultural Value Post Doctoral Researcher).
- An in-depth analysis of the impact of LEEDS 2023 in 5 wards including interviews and discussion groups (The Audience Agency).
- A qualitative study of artists' experiences (Centre for Cultural Value Post Doctoral Researcher).
- An exploration of the co-creative and Neighbourhood Hosts practice (Horizons Institute, University of Leeds, Post Doctoral Researcher).

28 https://audiencespectrum.org/en

- An economic impact study by BOP Consulting following on from initial 2019 assessment.
- An environmental impact assessment, by Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL), who partnered with LEEDS 2023, including drawing on audience data collected through quantitative methods above.

Reporting

The reporting schedule included quarterly updates, data reports on each of the Signature Projects and compilations for funders Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the British Council, as well as this Report covering the evaluation of the whole year for LEEDS 2023 stakeholders, including Leeds City Council.

Open Innovations produced a live dashboard, available to view online, which was updated throughout the LEEDS 2023 year which recorded delivery and engagement metrics.

Resourcing

As for other elements of the programme, the evaluation was delivered with fewer resources and on a tighter timeline than is customary for recent Cities of Culture. It has been delivered by a smaller team, with lower budget and was commissioned less than a year ahead of the launch. The approach is therefore somewhat lighter touch.

The small evaluation team was, however, swiftly integrated into and supported by LEEDS 2023. Four people formed the core evaluation team at TAA, all part-time, with occasional support from specialists in the wider TAA team. They covered design, planning, coordination, qualitative stakeholder research, data collection and aggregation, analysis and reporting, supported by part time coordination from within LEEDS 2023 team. Limited amounts of fieldwork were delivered by staff, volunteers and paid for fieldworkers. However, the Leeds Culture Trust team was pro-active in gathering monitoring data for specific stakeholder groups – requesting surveys project by project, and in sending out survey links using their lists and systems to audiences.

Thanks

Thanks are due to all those who contributed to the evaluation: everyone who responded to a survey, interviewees, people on site collecting data and feedback, Cultural Partners and the staff at LEEDS 2023 who were vital to the delivery of this evaluation and added enormous value.

Evaluation team

Led by Penny Mills at The Audience Agency, with support from colleagues at University of Leeds: Professor Ben Walmsley, Dr Emma McDowell, Post Doctoral Researchers Dr John Wright, Dr Robyn Dowlen and Dr Alex De Little and the Centre for Cultural Value, BOP Consulting and members of The Audience Agency research and consultancy team.

The Gift, City Without Seams, with Keith Khan
Photographer: Ant Robling





Front Cover: Nest
Photographer: JMA Photography

Chapter 2:

CULTURE LET LOOSE - LEEDS 2023 IN ACTION

A brief overview of what happened and how during the LEEDS 2023 year of culture



LEEDS 2023 was a full 12-month 'Year of Culture' taking place over 3 'Seasons' from January to December. It was preceded by a period of R&D and discrete projects over 2021 and 2022 which paved the way for the delivery year.

Created by the charity Leeds Culture Trust, formed for the purpose of delivering the year of culture, LEEDS 2023 was produced by a team of circa 125 people, and supported by a huge number of artists, creatives and partners from across sectors, volunteers and stakeholders.

The programme was multi art-form and interdisciplinary, incorporating public art, digital art, broadcasting, food and sport, with events and activities in schools, heritage sites, community spaces and parks across the city's 33 wards. It was, in their own words, collaborative, participative, community based and artistically-led.

Activity was broadly organised in three Strands, acknowledging the interests of different stakeholders, and the three different ways in which it brought additionality to Leeds' existing creative assets, projects and people.

- **Produce: original projects commissioned and produced by LEEDS 2023.**
- **Partner: activities delivered with and by other organisations with the support of LEEDS 2023.**
- **Promote: putting Leeds and its wider cultural offer on the map.**

Sokunge
Photographer: Ant Robling

2.1 Programme Concept & Approach

LEEDS 2023 clearly references the emerging programme blueprint for cities of culture but here we draw out the approaches the creative team adopted in efforts to give it its own personality.

Ringing the changes

'We're inventive' was one of the LEEDS 2023 core values and the creative team tried to ensure this was reflected in the programming approach, designed to broker new collaborations, and to frame the city in new ways. Rather than duplicating existing offers or ways of working, they wanted to add value and encourage novel ways of doing things. To this end, all projects were original and began life as artists' ideas. This emphasis on the new was also manifest in activities designed to listen to unheard voices, connect unknown creatives and spotlight lesser known parts of the city.

The international dimension

The ECoC principle of bringing additionality from international connections remained a feature of the programme. The creative team looked to bring new international perspectives, connections and relationships to the programme from the outset, seeing these in support of – rather than in opposition to - its mission to put local diversity front and centre.

For, by and about Leeds

The team wanted LEEDS 2023 to look and feel like a year of culture that could not have been delivered anywhere else, rooted in the city's rich industrial and post-industrial heritage, and connected to its communities. They wanted both to embrace how Leeds could get better at celebrating its assets, and confront more difficult issues, for discussion and debate. Looking outward would inspire new perspectives on what is to be found inside the city. Artists were supported to collaborate with specific communities to create works which reflected their heritage or lived experiences. A range of inter-sectoral partnerships would help them to reach further and deeper, creating multi-layered associations across the city.

A collaborative and cross-cutting approach

Another important principle was that all projects should weave together different types of activity. This meant not just international artists working hyper-locally, but large scale commissions integrating artist-development, learning opportunities for children and young people, active participation, everyday creativity and volunteer involvement. Similarly, projects should involve different kinds of collaborators and partners, in new combinations, from across the city, nationally and internationally, leaving behind a new matrix of connections.

Many ways-in

They set out to create 'many ways-in' to the programme, a strategy evolved to help engage a broad cross-section of citizens. R&D projects prior to the year refined understanding of how different people seek out different ways-in, as creatives, participants or audiences. Projects were

therefore designed to be multi-faceted, offering such entry-routes. Potential experiences ranged from opportunities for quiet contemplation to mass mobilisation and celebration. Participation might mean raising a barn, painting a tile, performing or joining a debate.

Committed to access and inclusivity

The team strove to prioritise access and inclusion in principle and practice. All LEEDS 2023 staff, volunteers and other stakeholders received training in inclusive practice, in an attempt to ensure that the planning of everything – from programming to engagement, from on site to digital experiences - was informed by an access-aware, intersectional philosophy.

Most events were either free or affordable and, though most were ticketed, evidence suggests the service was efficient and user-friendly. Events took place in locales across the city, so that there was something happening in everyone's neighbourhood at some point in the year, as well as in the city centre.

Access to the work, events and venues was planned and delivered with the support of an Access and Inclusion Officer, an Access Advisory Group and trained volunteer Access Champions.

Survey findings suggest that LEEDS 2023 largely met its intention: people experienced few barriers and recognised the year as genuinely inclusive, in practice and spirit.

1 Year, 3 Seasons

The celebration was promoted as three Seasons giving the year a narrative structure. The three-season model was also a pragmatic device, enabling the creative team to manage the uncertainty and shifting resources noted above.

Part 1 'Awakening' introduced a unique programme of events, showing a new side to the city, including a major launch event. Part 2 'Playing' signalled a shift to opportunities to participate all over the city, while Part 3, 'Dreaming' moved towards the finale event and included a number of events which explored alternative futures.

Full programme details and further information and discussion can currently be found at:

https://leeds2023.co.uk/

https://medium.com/@LEEDS2023

LEEDS 2023 - Wikipedia

LEEDS 2023 - YouTube

LEEDS 2023 results on SoundCloud

2.2 Laying the Foundations

Research and development programmes in 2021 and 2022 were designed to initiate collaboration with international artists, seed fund potential projects and enable artists to develop projects authentically with communities. The idea was to provide space for artists to develop creative ideas that would respond more directly to Leeds, creating the global-local alchemy critical to the concept.

Lockdowns and resource challenges caused a good deal of disruption during this period, however, and ate into the time and support available for R&D. Nevertheless, some involved appreciated the investment as it was, and it resulted in a body of project plans and learning which fed into the Year of Culture, especially laying the foundations for work in neighbourhoods.

Seeding ideas

LEEDS 2023 encouraged artists to apply for small grants through open calls for proposals. This approach was important for smaller, hard-pressed organisations and individual artists to develop ideas and produce full project proposals. A selection of these projects were then further supported and delivered during 2023.

During this period, LEEDS 2023 also hosted conversations and debates which explored themes relevant to its ambitions, like The Youth Summit in 2021 on culture with, for and by children and young people.

Towards embedded community practice

22 artist-led, community-based projects were commissioned through the My World, My City, My Neighbourhood programme[30] (MWMCMN), involving 165 artists working in and with communities around the city.

Three of these projects were developed and delivered in 2023 - Civic Skateboarding "Big Weekend", Leeds International African Festival and Mafwa Theatre's Lincoln Green Festival.

Artists were invited to try out something new in a 'safe' and 'inclusive' space through MWMCMN. Some articulated tensions they felt between a duty towards the community and their own creative ambitions. Working with a post-doctoral researcher from the University of Leeds' Horizons Institute during 2022 helped to surface some of these challenges. Attempts were then made to build greater trust between artists and communities for the next iteration, the 2023 project MY LEEDS 2023 and the Neighbourhood Hosts.

The Hidden Stories projects initiated in 2021/2 also supported community organisations and major cultural institutions to develop collaborative new ways of co-creating projects - a case study is included in 2.3.2.

30 The Horizons Institute, University of Leeds, led by Dr Lynn Wray started a study of co-creation across LEEDS 2023 which started with research related to the MWMCMN project, The Audience Agency produced an evaluation report of the project drawing on Dr Wray's findings and additional research. The research was taken up by Dr Alex De Little going on to focus on the work of the Neighbourhood Hosts.

“I really enjoyed being able to travel to Europe to a festival. It was incredibly useful for my practice.” The Awakening Audience

Initiating international relationships

A range of international relationships were brokered in the lead up to the Year, to stimulate knowledge exchange and build confidence in international collaboration. Some resulted in new partnerships and projects to populate the Produce and Partner strand programmes. Meet Leeds Labs invited Dutch artists to the city, For the Public Good, part of Smeaton 300, put creatives and academics in touch to address climate change concerns in a project developed by the British Council with LEEDS 2023 and Leeds University’s Horizons Institute and Cultural Institute.[31]

Broadening Horizons:

Major international artists were invited to Leeds for the first time during 2021/22, their work exhibited as part of two existing events, Yorkshire Sculpture International and Light Night Leeds. The Team also delivered the cultural programme for the Rugby League World Cup in 2021, hosted in Yorkshire. These pre-activities were important in establishing LEEDS 2023 as a trusted international broker and cultural producer, bringing something different and valuable to the region.

These international projects were supported by the British Council and Hidden Stories by The National Lottery Heritage Fund

31 https://www.leeds.ac.uk/news-arts-culture/news/article/5272/artists-and-researchers-team-up-to-find-sustainable-solutions



Edible Archives: Eating The Corn Exchange. Photographer: Karol Wyszynski

2.3 Produce

In total, LEEDS 2023 commissioned and produced 12 'Signature Projects' plus the long-running Hidden Stories project. Each project integrated a range of creative learning and engagement, skills and capacity building activities for artists, communities and children and young people, demonstrating the 'many ways-in' approach.

Five themes shaped the commissioning process:

1. Untold Stories: projects that revealed or amplified the city's diversity.
2. Original Works and Commissions: projects that bought together collaborators in new and different ways, enabling original work from world class artists and building international collaborations.
3. Radical acts/Radical change: projects that celebrated innovation or provoked and encouraged social change.
4. Playful adventure: projects utilising parks, public spaces and outdoor arts to bring communities and families together.
5. Future Generations: projects that engaged and empowered children and young people, enhanced skills, developed talent and bought in investment to support creativity.

2.3.1 The Signature Projects

The Awakening ..... Page 62
Making a Stand ..... Page 64
Children's Day: Reimagined ..... Page 66
Smeaton300 ..... Page 68
This is a Forest ..... Page 70
Nest ..... page 72
All That Lives ..... Page 74
Hibiscus Rising ..... Page 76
Northern Dreaming ..... page 78
The Gifting ..... Page 79
Hidden Stories ..... Page 80
MY LEEDS 2023 ..... Page 82
The WOW Barn ..... Page 89



The Awakening. Photographer: JMA Photography

"I'm really glad that the submitted artwork was used & displayed! It was lovely seeing everyone's creativity!"

The Awakening Audience

The Awakening

"... was everything it promised to be: a festival atmosphere, a community feel but with global ambitions, celebratory, shimmering Yorkshire rain through pin-point lasers - a spectacular happening."

Simon Armitage, LEEDS 2023 patron, Poet Laureate

The Awakening set the agenda for the year. As for other Signature Projects, it was not just an event 'on the day', but started in 2022 rehearsing community groups and schools, included a ballot which resulted in 2,300 people submitting their own artwork to claim a ticket. It ended with Waking the Artist exhibitions of the submitted artwork, presented in community spaces, schools and The Merrion Centre's Wade House. At its heart was the opening event for LEEDS 2023 at Headingley Stadium, a celebration of Leeds' cultural past, present and future in a live show, directed by LEEDS 2023 Director Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO and Alan Lane, Artistic Director of Leeds-based company Slung Low.

In total the project engaged over 14,600 people, including 168 in the 'Mass Movement' participative performance and involved 59 artists from Leeds and elsewhere who took to the stage, including Corinne Bailey Rae, Simon Armitage and LYR, The Orchestra and Chorus of Opera North, Graft, Inder Goldfinger, Testament, Hope and Social, Jamie Jones-Buchanan, Denmarc Creary, George Webster and many more, hosted by Gabby Logan and Sanchez Payne.

Following the event, audiences generally landed as net promoters: 75% were highly likely to recommend it to others (National Promoter Score 68 - average 60 across Signature Projects),[32] 88% of Leeds residents agreed the event made them 'proud to live in Leeds'.[33]

"I thought the event did something very special - it was moving and unified us all in what could be achieved in a city like Leeds. 'A city full of artists'. I also liked the fact it talked about kindness. Simon Armitage's poem was really powerful and captured the magic of Leeds."

The Awakening Audience

Evidence suggests this opening project was generally well-received among audiences and participants, and media coverage was upbeat, with high scoring reviews.

Supported by Leeds City Council, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Bruntwood, Ticketmaster

32 Base (weighted): 266
33 Base (weighted): 206

Waking The Artist
Photographer: JMA Photography


So here's a simple message
Just in case you might need it
I'm always here to help you
Just call me if you need it.


Part 2

“It’s well made and offers me a restful open space to come and contemplate on my work breaks.” Making a Stand Audience

Making a Stand

Artist Michael Pinsky and environmental architects Studio Bark collaborated to create Making a Stand – a large sculptural forest in Leeds City Square, including 127 x 7 metre high timber fins, and a soundscape recorded by the artist. The public artwork invited visitors to explore their connection with the materials, their life-cycles, and impact on the environment, supported with activations, including those delivered by students of Leeds Beckett University School of Arts faculty, to bring the artwork to life as a centre for creativity, mindfulness and community. A dedicated website told the story of how Making a Stand[34] came together.

It introduced an estimated 1 million+ people to a new cultural experience, 75% of visitors who engaged directly said, ‘it is the first time I have attended a cultural or creative event like this’,[35] and attracted a diverse crowd, including 28% Global Majority audiences.[36]

Comments were generally positive:

“It’s well made and offers me a restful open space to come and contemplate on my work breaks.”
Making a Stand Audience

“It was enjoyable for both me and my daughter. We have learnt things we did not know about.”
Making a Stand Audience

The wood was returned to the supply chain after it was de-installed.

Supported by Channel 4, Arts Council England and Leeds Beckett University

34 Making A Stand
35 Base (weighted): 56
36 Base (weighted): 59

Making a Stand
Photographer (Bottom): Ellen Christina Hancock
Photographer (Top): Tom Joy





“It was a great event full of variety of performances...” Children’s Day: Reimagined Audience

Children’s Day: Reimagined

60 years since the last Children’s Day took place in Leeds’ Roundhay Park, 11 young people co-created a re-imagined version for LEEDS 2023 with creative duo Fevered Sleep. 1,000 school pupils spent the day building the site, making banners expressing their hopes, dreams and demands and learning a song by Emily Levy, composed for the event, performed in the evening alongside spoken word and films by and about children.

Children took the lead and practised skills aligned with the school curriculum:

“The children realised that they could have some agency...that what they had to say, was important...they can have a voice and that their opinion counts.”
Teacher

Feedback suggests it made a big impact on those children participating in activities.

“It was just brilliant. From this event, my child has a new purpose to speak up/ protest for what she is passionate about and has made some great friends.”
Children’s Day: Reimagined Audience

“It was a great event full of variety of performances and videos that represented the cultural diversity of Leeds.”
Children’s Day: Reimagined Audience

Many booked audiences did not however attend the performance itself due to the rain, and the late scheduling of the event at 8pm, too close to bedtime and long after workshops were over.

“It felt like the event was organised with the event in mind, rather than the children... More focus was on the visuals of singing at sunset than on the needs of young families. Our children still had a good time but it was clear to me that the event organisers were not focused how to structure a day for young children.”
Children’s Day: Reimagined Audience

Supported by The National Lottery Community Fund, Arts Council England, Foyle Foundation, FirstBus

The Children’s Day: Reimagined
Photographer: JMA Photography





“Wonderful experience. Educational, welcoming, magical.” Smeaton300, Moon Palace Audience

Smeaton300

A programme of 132 creative events celebrated John Smeaton, the Leeds-born trailblazer of civil engineering, featuring an extensive STEAM learning programme (including CREST Award learning resources) in schools, a family-friendly exhibition at Leeds Industrial Museum, Engineery, creative workshops in community venues, and Moon Palace the mobile observatory - commissioned by Foxglove and LEEDS 2023 and produced by East Leeds Project with Studio Morison, which toured Leeds communities and schools.

Smeaton300 activities and events were opportunities for discovery about the people, places and culture of Leeds, attracting over 9,800 people.

Comments were varied in their praise:

“My 2 grandsons came aged 9 and 7 and absolutely loved it, the 9 year old now is trying to decide if he wants to be an astro physicist or a midfielder for Liverpool... we’ve told him to do both.”
Smeaton300, Moon Palace Audience

But some called for greater transparency and audience focus:

“Be honest and clear with people about what the ‘attractions’ will be.”
Smeaton300, Moon Palace Audience

“Try to be more family friendly & make it more interactive for all ages.”
Smeaton300, Moon Palace Audience

Smeaton300 continued into 2024[37] delivered by Foxglove in partnership with Leeds City Council and University of Leeds Cultural Institute.

Supported by Leeds City Council, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, Bruntwood, Burberry, Scottish Power Foundation

Moon Palace
Photographer: JMA Photography

37 https://smeaton300.co.uk/



“I feel so calm and tingly but also profoundly moved, it’s definitely a very beautiful call to action.” This is a Forest Audience

This is a Forest

A multi-media exhibition, This is a Forest, at MODA, a pop-up gallery in New York Square on Quarry Hill, showcased new work created by interactive arts studio, Invisible Flock, based at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and collaborations with UK and international artists from the Arctic to the Brazilian Amazon - Anushka Athique, Vandria Borari, Nwando Ebizie, Outi Pieski and Jenni Laiti. Together they journeyed across 50 sites in Leeds (in-between, disused or derelict) in an attempt to reclaim a part of the city as a forest - producing sculpture, film, ceramics and installations in response which explored ownership of earth, soil, air and water, asking what land is worth in ecological, health and social terms, as opposed to just financial ones.

The exhibition, visited by 2,500 people, was particularly enjoyed for its family friendliness, learning, and presenting new perspectives.

“It really made me think about how we use space and value nature and it was a lovely antidote to a shopping trip to take time out and relax and have fun.”
This is a Forest Audience

The accompanying Under Our Feet schools programme supported Forest School learning projects and CPD for teachers in Forest School training as well as visits to the exhibition.

Co-produced by LEEDS 2023 and Invisible Flock. Made possible with National Lottery Heritage Fund. Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. Supported by Embassy of Brazil in London and Instituto Guimarães Rosa - IGR

This is a Forest
Photographer: David Lindsay




This is
a Forest
6 October - 26 November 2023

“This was a standout show for me this year, everything about it was moving...” Nest Audience

Nest

Nest was a large-scale theatre production that explored themes of climate crisis and migration and imagined how we might create a better world for future generations.

The performance followed 18 months of collaboration between LEEDS 2023, National Youth Theatre, Compass Collective, Leeds Playhouse and RSPB St Aidan’s Nature Park. It involved over 100 young people, recruited and integrated into Leeds Playhouse youth theatre, in collaboration with Compass Collective which supports the integration of young refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK through the arts. Recruits took part in a free, 10-day acting course and then came together with National Youth Theatre members from across the UK to take part in Nest. Audiences went on a journey across St Aidan’s, led through the site, following the story of Skylar, a teenager in 2050 where climate change is shaking the natural world.

It was the first big commission for writer Emma Nuttall and composer Nicola T. Chang, and the whole production was supported by early career creatives.

As an experience, it offered a sociable walk in a beautiful place that also provoked thoughts about tackling climate change. Around 2,000 people attended and survey feedback was positive:

“I loved being at St Aidan’s as the sun was setting. It was good to be with a wide selection of Leeds people. I am so glad you ended with such a positive message and hopeful atmosphere. It was magical. Well done Leeds.”
Nest Audience

“This was a standout show for me this year, everything about it was moving, imaginative and relevant, the physical environment was a perfect backdrop for the story.”
Nest Audience

Supported by Arts Council England, The David Toguri Bursary Fund, Maria Björnson Memorial Fund and all of National Youth Theatre’s Centre Stage Supporters and Investors in Talent

Nest
Photographer: JMA Photography





“As a Mexican this event was an extraordinary way to celebrate day of the dead.” All That Lives Audience

All That Lives

All That Lives was a 9-day celebration of “those we’ve loved and lost” which took place at Leeds Playhouse, Leeds City College, and Centre for Live Art Yorkshire (CLAY). It celebrated the Day of the Dead with the people of all ages, in collaboration with Zion Art Studio from Mexico, and marked the end of “The Grief Series”[38] – a 13-year project by artist Ellie Harrison. Over 30,000 visitors engaged with this multi-artform celebration of life and death, including visual and digital art, performance, conversation and an invitation to contribute objects to an immersive public “Ofrenda”.

Survey-based commentary suggests that All That Lives struck a chord and promoted a strong sense of community and connectedness.

“I felt very happy and motivated to engage in more cultural and artistic events like this one. Made me think of the value that the arts has in Leeds community and its impact both personal and collective.”
All That Lives Audience

“It made me feel less alone, knowing that other people experience similar grief.”
All That Lives Audience

The project also involved Journey with Absent Friends – a mobile “museum of grief” housed inside a vintage caravan which has collected stories about people who have loved and lost, The Crossing, a resource for planning a funeral celebration, and an exhibition of portraiture photography, What is Left?

Delivered in collaboration with LEEDS 2023, The Grief Series, Leeds City Council and Arts Council England

All That Lives
Photographer: David Lindsay

38 PROJECTS | Mysite (griefseries.co.uk)


PAINT
WITH
PURPOSE


SINFONIA
2023





“Excellent place to come & reflect on things, very family friendly...” Hibiscus Rising Audience

Hibiscus Rising

LEEDS 2023 worked with DOMA (The David Oluwale Memorial Association) and Leeds City Council to realise their ambition to create a public memorial to David Oluwale - who drowned in the River Aire on 18 April 1969 after being systematically harassed by members of the Leeds City Police force. The 10-metre-high sculpture was designed by Yinka Shonibare in the shape of a hibiscus flower, ubiquitous in Nigeria, and with Shonibare’s renowned African inspired batik patterns – bringing associations of joy and healing. The Tetley and DOMA led a city-wide engagement programme and exhibition of designs in 2022. In the brief to Shonibare, DOMA wanted a meeting place that would be playful and attractive to everyone as well as inspiring ‘conscience, altruism and hope’. A long-running project, LEEDS 2023 provided the catalyst and funding push to make this commission happen.

In its initial weeks, it is estimated over 40,000 people engaged with the new sculpture including over 900 through activities which accompanied its unveiling in Aire Park, involving artist talks and walking tours, live music, poetry workshops and an open mic, as well as family-friendly craft activities. Again, survey-based feedback was universally positive:

“...great art representing: a city’s ability to remember positively a vulnerable person who was hounded to death by members of an organisation that should have protected him; a symbol against racism; a symbol for celebrating David Oluwale’s heritage; a joy for the eyes of everyone.”
Hibiscus Rising Audience

“Excellent place to come & reflect on things, very family friendly. It is also very inclusive to everyone. We all enjoyed it. The sculpture is beautiful.”
Hibiscus Rising Audience

“Hibiscus Rising is a great example of how commissioning new work can strengthen ties between arts organisations and their communities and offer new ways of working together.”
Hibiscus Rising: The power of public art | ArtsProfessional

Supported by Art Fund, Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Henry Moore Foundation, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Police

Hibisucus Rising, Yinka Shonibare CBE
Photographer: David Lindsay


Tell us what you think...
THE 2023 DAVID OLUWALE SCULPTURE GARDEN
Introduction
Meet the Maquette
rememberOluwale
West Leeds
Left Bank
South Leeds
Hamara Centre
East Leeds
The Old fire Station
North Leeds
Celebrate migration in Leeds
David was here as a British Citizen - don't know why he came.
or do we?
Sculpture doesn't reflect race - what is a person of colour going to do with reflecting on art?
Yinka Shonibare
Challenge to Change
With Thanks to...





Northern Dreaming

A book developed in collaboration with the British Library featured the work of 18 writers, some high profile like Children's Laureate Joseph Coelho and poet Lemn Sissay alongside early career writers enjoying their first publishing opportunity.

With stories for babies, children and young adults the book was designed to carry readers all the way through their childhood, 15,000 copies were distributed through libraries, children centres, schools and many other avenues as a permanent gift from LEEDS 2023 and the British Library to the next generation. Related storytelling sessions took place across Leeds Libraries and schools.

Supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, Leeds Libraries

Northern Dreaming
Photographer: JMA Photography



The Gifting

LEEDS 2023 came to an end with The Gifting, a co-production between LEEDS 2023, Slung Low and The British Library at Versa Studios in Holbeck. A story-telling ceremony in which the past collided with the present and welcomed in the future – audiences put on headphones to enter into a surprising world to experience 12 interwoven stories inspired by the Year of Culture. 2,700 audience members were taken through a mix of promenade theatre and song in an hour-long performance of "folklore, magic and promise", with new music by RashDash and stage design by artist Keith Khan. Audience responses were positive, though some found it hard to follow:

"It was such a magical event. I loved the little touches to include the audience, we lit candles, sung & ate sherbert!"
The Gifting Audience

"Amazing experience, so imaginative and immersive and warm hearted ... showcased the best of Leeds our beloved home city in a very real way without cliche or over sentimentality."
The Gifting Audience

"It is engaging, magical and provides moments of interaction and connection that had the crowd laughing out loud and hugging. A really fitting way to celebrate the Year of Culture – less an ending, more about looking forward."
Review: The Gifting at Versa Studios - South Leeds Life

"The spectacle and music were fantastic. The stories themselves were sometimes hard to understand."
The Gifting Audience

Supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, West Yorkshire Combined Authority



The Gifting Photographer: JMA Photography

"It made me realise there are multiple creative ways that history can be reimagined and reinterpreted, which engages us with our heritage, and leads to new ideas."

Any Work that Wanted Doing Audience

2.3.2 Participatory project case studies

Hidden Stories

Hidden Stories was a programme of events, exhibitions, recordings, workshops and performances that celebrated Leeds' diverse heritage with artists, researchers, communities and heritage organisations across Leeds bringing untold stories to life.

Eight partner organisations were supported to lead a project with a view to developing their practice, taking on a larger scale or longer term project, building relationships with communities in new and sustainable ways, and identifying new funding opportunities.

- Leeds Civic Trust diversified participation in Heritage Open Days with grants for creative activities to enhance the offer and through operating a hub out of the Corn Exchange – both of which are set to continue.
- Milim, the Jewish Festival of Words, devised a play from oral histories about 1940s/50s teenage hang out Cantors fish and chip shop partnering with arts organisations for the first time.
- Harewood House brought international artists Lucy + Jorge Orta to deliver a community and artist-led public meal for 200 people to discuss environmental issues and the politics of food – a major international artistic project for the heritage site.
- Lens Lab with Mill Hill Chapel developed City Stories: Common Ground, a photography exhibition with faith groups from across the city.
- Gill Cranshaw curated an exhibition at Leeds Industrial Museum: Any Work That Wanted Doing, responding to the stories of disabled mill workers with eight artistic commissions from disabled artists.
- The Royal Armouries worked with LGBTQ volunteers to re-interpret their collections.
- Edible Archives developed a project with Leeds Corn Exchange and Feral – Leeds Goth Night - Eating the Corn Exchange which explored the venue's history as a meeting place for subcultures in the city, which integrated the under-represented voices of Global Majority and Queer people.
- Thackray Museum of Medicine and Sable Studio worked with 16-21 year olds on Culture Club (Unwrapping Our Stories) to explore stories in the museum's collections - transforming the museum with a club night filled with creative activities and speakers sharing their perspective on the Museum's collections.

Hidden Stories
Photographer: JMA Photography

"Seeing the museum through their eyes ... has helped us see the stories we've missed and the work we still have to do to make the museum a truly representative organisation. We're still on a journey but the project has been a genuine catalyst for change."

Thackray Museum of Medicine Partner

"There was genuine care and thought put into the project, as well as extensive research to centre the subcultures and communities of Leeds. Overall it was a multi-sensory interactive experience involving some delicious mushroom tacos and a very clever way to associate a pleasurable snacking experience with the alternative history of Leeds!"

Eating the Corn Exchange Audience

Partner organisations appreciated the added value that the projects brought to their work and gave extremely positive feedback, commenting especially on having both enough time to work in a properly embedded way and sufficient resources to develop their projects.

"Gill, a disabled artist herself... was the right person to be developing this project...it would never have happened if we as a museum had led on it."

Any Work that Wanted Doing Partner

Supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England

In partnership with Edible Archives, Gill Crawshaw, Harewood House, Leeds Civic Trust, Lens Lab Leeds, Milim, Royal Armouries Museum, Thackray Museum of Medicine



"The real highlights came from meeting the other neighbourhood hosts and the skills and network we can share with each other."

Neighbourhood Host

MY LEEDS 2023

LEEDS 2023's commitment to be relevant and engaged with all 33 of its wards was principally realised through the MY LEEDS 2023 project. Informed by R&D in 2021/2, it was a multi-faceted project driven by a 'Neighbourhood Host' in each ward.

The project introduced a different model, informed by an interest in Asset Based Community Development and taking inspiration from the Fun Palaces model, it followed on from the hosts programme Coventry 2021 had used but made it more about the wider city.

Neighbourhood Hosts

Creatives and activists were recruited as Neighbourhood Hosts through an open call. With training provided by LEEDS 2023, they devised events or activities for their wards which made up the MY LEEDS 2023 Summer programme from June to August 2023. Hosts also met regularly as a group and formed a supportive peer network, capitalising on their diversity of experience and backgrounds.

Hosts worked with a local 'anchor organisation' for support and made connections in their wards to devise a new event or work in partnership with an existing event. Many also worked with other partners such as local traders or craftspeople.

Each Neighbourhood had a budget of £3,000 to commission creative activity, usually from an open call.

Neighbourhood Hosts were charged to celebrate the culture and creativity of Leeds, and 81% agreed that they were able to achieve their aims, and the majority perceived their events to have been inclusive, accessible and relevant to their communities.[39]

"[the work of the Neighbourhood Host] encompasses a holistic approach to community building, encompassing cultural enrichment, social connectivity, and the celebration of individual and collective talents."

Neighbourhood Host

The events left a legacy of connectivity between communities, artists and organisations. Hosts also developed skills and experience in devising and delivering community-led activity – including applying for funding.

Significantly it modelled a new platform for communities and creativity:

"I enjoyed it, but would never have thought of going if we hadn't been invited to demonstrate our culture through music and dance."

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer Active participant

"The Senegalese Community in Leeds are looking forward to getting involved in this kind of project or activity again in the future."

MY LEEDS 2023 Active participant

39 93% strongly agreed or agreed 'I felt that the project was inclusive and accessible', 85% agreed 'The project felt relevant to my community'. Base: 27

LEEDS 2023 Neighbourhood Hosts
Photographer: JMA Photography



"As a neighbourhood host this has allowed me to see that I can with the help of others from my community fill in the gaps where we need help and support for those that need it most."

Neighbourhood Host

"Demonstrated that there are many skills in the community, gave them an opportunity to try new things and left a legacy in the ward."

Neighbourhood Host

But the experience of hosts was not all positive. Alex De Little (post doctorate researcher, University of Leeds), carried out a longer-term study of the programme and notes that it experienced its share of overall challenges due to constraints on time and budget:

"Despite the project's initial aim to employ co-production and asset-based community development (ABCD) models, time constraints and the delivery-focused nature of the festival format led to a shift to producing 33 events."

Comments from Neighbourhood Hosts reflect these concerns, with many feeling under-supported by a stretched team (explored below). De Little goes on to conclude however that the Programme:

"Nevertheless.... [It] successfully created a network of individuals with strong community ties, eager to continue their cultural work locally."

There was a clear appetite for more opportunities like these. The project gave agency to community-based practitioners to identify gaps and opportunity, and crucially, access to resources and practical support:

"I think my work as a Neighbourhood Host helped to highlight the desire for more community events like this in the ward. As well as helping to forge new connections and collaborations between artists, workshop holders and community groups."

Neighbourhood Host

Building on the success of this project, a further funded project supported more work with a smaller group of Neighbourhood Hosts.

The Neighbourhood Hosts initiative was profiled in the Inclusive Growth Network's report 'Culture and creative industries: A catalyst for inclusive growth'

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer

Events varied in content and scale, and audiences were drawn from both the local population and elsewhere in Leeds. The further events were from the city centre, the more local their audiences were. The programme included enhanced editions of existing annual events and festivals, which reported larger audiences and more engagement as a result of being part of MY LEEDS 2023 Summer. Some of the new events were a big hit and are set to continue in years to come, including Calverley and Farsley's Spinning Tales and Bramley Community Arts Festival.

Much was learned and shared by Hosts about this giant, multi-dimensional experiment. Insights were added to those from the My World My City My Neighbourhood projects, and combined, this learning forms a key legacy, supporting the idea of developing a community-led arts playbook for the future.

Produced and commissioned by LEEDS 2023.

Supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, Leeds Community Foundation: The Mohn Westlake Arts Engagement Fund.





Top: MY LEEDS 2023 Summer, Otley
Photographer: Ant Robling
Top: MY LEEDS 2023 2023 Summer, Moortown
Photographer: Addictive Media

“The event has inspired me to be more involved in my local community.”

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer Audience

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer in Five Wards

Armley Extravaganza, by Host Kimberly Frangos with Armley Helping Hands, was a new event of free, family fun with performances, creative workshops, storytelling, poetry reading, a silent disco and short film about Armley in partnership with Leeds Youth Opera, New Wortley Writing Group, local bands and stallholders.

“Happy vibes.”

“Met new people, friendly atmosphere.”

Armley Extravaganza Audiences

“Well planned.”

“I feel this event is very artistically orientated.”

“Family friendly.”

Spinning Tales Audiences

Calverley & Farsley’s Host Alaina Dunne, took inspiration from the textile industry with Spinning Tales, an opportunity for the community to collaborate with artist Sophie Jones to make a huge tapestry, hosted at its anchor organisation Sunny Bank Mills.

Gipton & Harehills Creative Showcase, showcases local talent alongside workshops at The Old Fire Station organised by Host Kelly Hamilton and anchor organisation Space 2.

“Keep the event going, poor area so kids don’t get this experience otherwise.”

“Everyone was really friendly and welcoming and I got to find out about new creative projects in the area.”

“I felt that it was relevant.”

Gipton and Harehills Creative Showcase Audiences

"It helped me to notice and learn more about an area that was already familiar."

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer Audience

"Leeds is a great place to live and experience many things."

"Because it is great to see the community engaging with an event that had been put up for local artists."

Walk on Aire Audiences

Hunslet & Riverside: Walk on Aire led by Host Karen Peters, and anchor organisation Hamara Healthy Living Centre, took wellbeing as its theme – offering free drop-in yoga sessions, a history and sketching walk and a wellbeing and mindfulness tour on the river, stand up paddleboard sessions for beginners and dance performances.

Little London & Woodhouse: Cultural Bloom organised by Host Damanjit (Jita) Kaur with anchor organisation Woodhouse Community Centre involved a cultural community parade at Kirkgate market with floats, performances, music and dance representing the diversity of the community – an opportunity to share heritage, traditions and aspirations.

"Warm and welcoming. Good to see women's skills and culture platformed and centred. Also to see people of different ages involved."

Cultural Bloom Audience

These events generated real social and community benefit for their audiences and participants. People reported a strong sense of belonging, possibility and optimism about working together to make a difference. They also created an appetite for future activity, of getting involved, or volunteering.

"old friendships were renewed and it seemed easy to interact with local groups who were represented there."

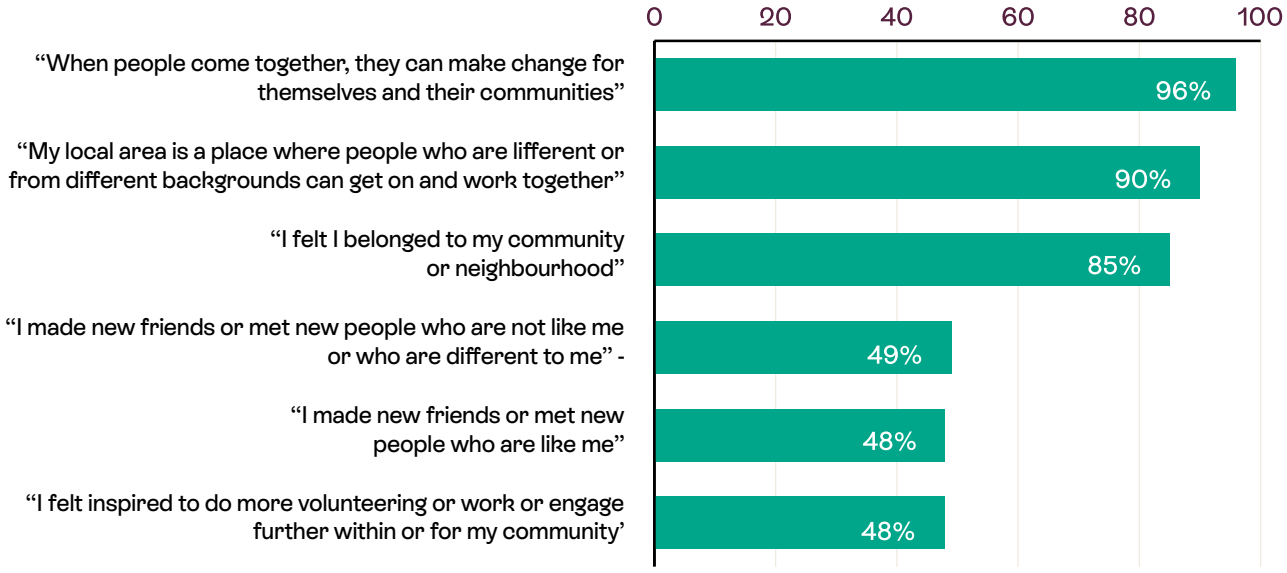
MY LEEDS 2023 Summer Volunteer

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer boosted audience's sense of belonging: 85% agreed 'I felt I belonged to my community or neighbourhood',[40] compared with 61% of the population in the National Community Life Survey for England who say they generally feel this way.[41]

40 Base (Leeds resident audiences): 205, MOE 7%

41 Office for National Statistics Community Life Survey question: 61% of people aged 16 and over said they felt they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood very or fairly strongly, Base: 93,527

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer audiences social impacts



Base: 201~205, MOE 6~7%

The Neighbourhood Hosts experience and MY LEEDS 2023 Summer demonstrate a latent interest for projects which celebrate community creativity providing a platform for new experiences and developing new skills.

The Gift – A City without Seams

Also part of MY LEEDS 2023, The Gift brought a motif which captured its spirit to each of the 33 wards. Designed by Keith Kahn in consultation with the Neighbourhood Hosts, each was turned into a unique textile artwork by Burberry on the jacquard looms in their mill in Keighley. All are now on display in community spaces and were celebrated at MY LEEDS 2023 Summer events and a city-wide event. 87% audiences agreed that The Gift 'captured the spirit of the community it was made for.'[42]

42 Base: 138, MOE 8%

The WOW Barn

The Women of the World (WOW) Foundation came to Leeds with a completely new idea: going outdoors and giving women and non-binary people agency, through the opportunity to raise a barn, and develop skills - which became a place of debate, including about under-representation in the construction industry. The WOW Barn became a centre of activity inviting Leeds communities and residents to get involved, starting with 253 as Barn raiser - 84% of them said it made them proud to live in Leeds,[43] while 96% thought it had a positive impact on their wellbeing.[44]

- "Think-Ins" were held online and in person across the region to shape the programme.
- "Dream Builders" created tiles at community workshops with local artist Emma Hardaker to be displayed on the barn.
- 8 "Wowsers" (16-18 year old women and non-binary people), developed a programme of events on activism.

"You've helped me grow as a young person and the fact that you took on the role of listening to us as young people when not many people do inspires me! You're my inspiration!!"

Wowser

- 253 professional and trained novice Barn raisers took 24 hours to raise the barn.
- The WOW Barn hosted two weeks of events, including schools workshops, an event on cultural education policy and a day long WOW Festival.
- A series of discussions, comedy gigs and performances were programmed in the evenings.

"I loved the event, I believe conversation is key to bring about change. Everything Suhaiymah* discussed and put to the guests resonated and drove me to keep bringing conversations to the fore, keep attending conversations and events like this. I would love to see more events like this, that aren't afraid to bring difficult and sensitive conversations into the broader realm."

The WOW Barn Festival Audience

* Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan is a writer, poet and educator disrupting understandings of history, race, knowledge and violence and led an event at The WOW Barn.

The project brought different communities together and helped develop skills: WOW Festival audiences came from across generations, from 16 – 75 years, 86% women and 4% non-binary people,[45] and 15% of Barn raisers were of the Global Majority[46] and 13% disabled participants.[47]

43 Base (Barn Raisers): 25, MOE 19%
44 Base (Barn Raisers): 49, MOE 5%
45 Base (weighted): 118
46 Base: 49, MOE 11%
47 Base: 47, MOE 10%

“I like the fact that it wasn’t in the city centre....in a place that was more diverse, in a community that was more diverse. That all felt very positive.”

The WOW Barn raiser

Barn raisers felt valued and celebrated the inclusive and diverse community of women and non-binary people brought together by the project. Although, the reality of attempting a build in 24 hours resulted in differential experiences for those on different shifts and left some of the participants feeling disempowered by how it had been organised.

“I met women who I never would have spoken to, and that proved to me: it doesn’t matter how different you are, you all walk in and go, ok, let’s get this done. That was really nice.”

The WOW Barn raiser

“I know that there were definitely women on the build, who would not have been there if it wasn’t women only or women and non-binary – it gave them confidence.”

The WOW Barn raiser

“I know that they said because there was so many of us that there would be time to chill out and chat and take stock of what you’re doing, but that was most of the shift. We didn’t get to complete our section, as well.”

The WOW Barn raiser

“I’m recapturing skills and interests that I’d lost in recent years.”

The WOW Barn raiser

The Barn has been gifted to Kirkstall Valley Development Trust to be rebuilt on their site, Kirkstall Valley Farm, and used as a teaching facility.

The WOW Barn was supported by West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Leeds City Council and Arts Council England. Delivered in partnership with Civic Engineers and Leeds College of Building. ‘One Way or Another’ delivered in partnership with The Space. Original concept commissioned by UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK with funding from UK Government

The WOW Barn
Photographer (Top): Tom Joy
Photographer (Bottom): Theia Photographic





"The project allowed us to work cross-culturally and internationally with new artists and organisations, and... contributed to the significant opportunity to film and broadcast on iplayer to a large, national audience base."

Opera North Requiem: Journeys of the Soul

2.4 Partner

"Partner" was all about adding value to Leeds' already thriving cultural scene. The team strived to do so by forging new and crucially international connections and by helping to consolidate or scale existing activities, and sometimes by opening new avenues. There were also opportunities for those outside the cultural establishment to connect.

The Partner strand included new commissions, co-productions and projects co-developed during the LEEDS 2023 R&D phase. 64 local, national and international partner-led projects received funding, support and/or promotion from LEEDS 2023 and were delivered over the course of the year.

New connections, new collaboration

The Partner strand included multi-partner projects which brought new artists to Leeds to explore the essence of the city. For example, The Popeye Collective, artist Freddie Yauner, architect Kiran Gil, creative communications consultant Eddie Blake and the arts festival Compass Live Art all worked together with different communities to identify the flavour of Leeds and then produce a rhubarb-based ketchup, "Leeds Sauce".

Some of the most important new collaborative connections were international.

Enabling networks, such as the Meet Leeds Lab, bore fruit in terms of co-created projects, which partnered Leeds-based creatives with artists from around the world:

- Knaive Theatre and KL Shakespeare Players connected the eateries of Leeds to the kitchens of Kuala Lumpur.
- Netherlands based artists took up residencies in Leeds.
- The EU National Institutes for Culture IN SHORT film festival visited Leeds for the first time.
- Opera North and Phoenix Dance Theatre collaborated with South African partners Jazzart Dance Theatre and Cape Town Opera to present a re-imagining of Mozart's Requiem alongside a new commission by Neo Muyanga, After Tears. Requiem was screened on BBC Four and made available on BBC iPlayer in partnership with The Space.
- R and B's Ntantu partnered with Lagos singer-songwriter Browny Pondis – linking Leeds and Nigeria.
- Leeds Art Gallery was introduced to a number of artists from The Netherlands and went on to work with artist Katja Hetimann.
- The Tetley worked with Dutch artist Afra Eisma to create Splashdown, a unique exhibition for an early-career artist, funded by Mondriaan Foundation and the Netherlands Embassy in the UK, alongside LEEDS 2023.
- Transform, having become an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in the lead up to LEEDS 2023, was able to deliver its most significant international collaboration with Brazilian artist collective MEXA who presented a vivid reimagining of Homer's Odyssey.

"I'm really grateful that they've actually put this on and it doesn't just belong to one community it belongs to everyone in Leeds."

1001 Stories participant

"The Afra Eisma was our most popular show, it managed to be international and cutting edge, but also really family friendly. And that's a difficult thing to achieve- and we managed to do it through the LEEDS 2023 support...It became our most popular exhibition ever, with 65,000 people through the door."

The Tetley

"Developing a project of this scale in our home city was only possible thanks to the support of LEEDS 2023. Usually our work takes us away from Leeds and to make this production with members of our immediate community as well as partners across the Pennines was very special. Thank you, it has been a real pleasure working with you."

Slung Low

Profiling the Leeds' cultural community

The Partner strand was also designed to realise opportunity for Leeds' established cultural community, by championing it, and putting in extra resources in some cases. It supported annual festivals like the South Asian Arts-UK 12th Summer Solstice festival at Leeds Corn Exchange who created a music-filled experience coinciding with World Music Day and International Yoga Day.

Annual events programmes enhanced their local engagement - Light Night Leeds [48] was able to mount the lighting up of the Meanwood Trail, a significant community asset.

Established Leeds companies were able to work at a bigger scale. Slung Low's Noah's Flood, involving 180 school children and an original score (for recorders, wind machines, an organ and mugs), was presented at both LEEDS 2023 and Manchester International Festival 2023 and was profiled on BBC Radio 3s Music Matters.

1001 Stories by The Performance Ensemble was another example, one of the original ECoC bid book projects developed over 4 years. A mass-participation reminiscence and oral history project, it gathered stories from older people, including those from the most deprived and least engaged communities in Leeds. 130 creatives were involved (including 30 from China and Hong Kong), 84 community organisations and over 1,200 stories were shared by 600 people. An estimated 5,000 people have connected with the project online so far. The final celebration was a 10-day Takeover of Leeds Playhouse by older people, including a performance, 'Sinfonia', inspired by the stories which 4,000 people came to see. Again, it was delivered by a multi-lateral partnership, of Leeds Playhouse, Leeds Older Peoples' Forum and Leeds Museums and Galleries.

48 21 Events You Have to Do at Light Night LEEDS 2023 | Leeds-List

Public Art

Partnerships supported a range of major public art projects, both temporary and permanent, to leave an impression all over the city – from murals to installations, digital and physical. East Street Arts commissioned three A City Less Grey murals, one by artist Add Fuel and inspired by Leeds' ceramics heritage on a former pub in Mabgate. The Tetley commissioned st.itch, by Goan artist Afrah Shafiq, sited at Leeds train station. The streets of the city centre were also the canvas for an augmented reality experience, 'Guardians of Leeds', conceived by South African poet and artist Xabiso Vili.

Education partnerships

The Partner strand helped broker new collaborations between Leeds' cultural and educational institutions. Leeds City College created what they described as a rare opportunity to engage with students not usually engaged with the arts. Out of 3,000 involved, half were not studying creative arts.

"It opened doors within my organization... We did projects in engineering, a portrait project with 300 healthcare students, a sculpture project with 500 childcare students... LEEDS 2023 gave me a reason to go out and push open doors across the other campuses and departments and say: Hey, come on, let's do something creative. Because it's 2023. It was really valuable."

Richard Lee - Assistant Principal Creative Arts Leeds City College

Leeds Language Week, co-ordinated by Leeds LCEP, brought together University of Leeds, Leeds Young Film, Leeds Music Education Partnership, Stephen Spender Trust, INTO Film, Goethe Institute, Institut Francais, British Council and others. The project engaged over 3,000 learners. Again, LEEDS 2023 brokered this multi-partner initiative, enabling all parties to pool resources to achieve a big splash and high impact, supported by Leeds LCEP. The international connections will now be integrated within the programme for future years.

University partnerships

Partnership was not only about producing work, but exploring possibilities in collaboration with academics. The University of Leeds was a key player in the development of LEEDS 2023, and the initial ECoC bid, including Centre for Cultural Value and its Cultural Institute, as a partner in its cultural education activity. Additionally, the University's Horizon Institute funded post-doctoral research into the co-creative aspects of the programme.[49] Leeds other Universities were also significant partners, as producers and programmers in collaboration with LEEDS 2023 and their own students – Leeds Beckett, Leeds Trinity and Leeds Arts and Luminate Education Group.

Partnership embedded

Partnership was an important element of LEEDS 2023, with the team dedicated to creating opportunities for bringing organisations and artists together, both to spark new ideas and build on existing ones. In addition to cultural partners delivering work across the programme, 700+ artists and creatives were involved. Some have commented that the LEEDS 2023 team were able to achieve much because they were not partisan and 'doing it for Leeds'.

Not all potential partnership projects came off and some people interviewed expressed frustration that proposals did not get commissioned or were reduced in scope. Overall however, the partnership strand added value to LEEDS 2023 helping it to reach further and deeper. It benefitted the cultural establishment but also invited new artists, activists and supporters to produce as part of LEEDS 2023, including a diversity of communities and nurturing of potential new cultural leaders.

49 https://www.leeds.ac.uk/horizons-institute/dir-record/profiles/19722/helping-to-deliver-a-cultural-showcase

2,172
Pieces of editorial in total, including:

196
National

190
International

2.5 Promote

"Promote" was about raising the profile of Leeds as a place with a great cultural offer, a creative spirit and therefore as a good place to live, work and invest. This was delivered through a communications and storytelling campaign aiming to generate new profile for the city and its cultural offer.

Brand

The campaign was led by LEEDS 2023 External Relations Team with support from Anita Morris Associates and Visit Leeds. The Letting Culture Loose identity was developed by Yorkshire based brand agency Peter & Paul. Aiming to raise Leeds' profile as a vibrant cultural destination. The LEEDS 2023 website integrated an API from their 'Leeds Inspired' website so that it represented the widest range of cultural activity in the city during the year. Story-telling put the city's less well-known artists and communities in the limelight.

Media coverage

A significant challenge noted by the Team and many stakeholders, was the lack of a full media partnership. In recent rounds, UK Cities of Culture have enjoyed a strong partnership with the BBC which has profiled them as a national initiative and in turn leveraged other forms of media and financial support. But the "doing it anyway" model put them outside the potential to add to the BBC's broadcast schedule and while it was broadly supportive, lack of dedicated programming probably had a negative effect on national awareness of the year and scope of media attention.

LEEDS 2023 nevertheless attracted a lot of media coverage locally, nationally and internationally and from a wide range of related trade press

43% of the media coverage in 2023 was positive in tone, with just 2% negative, and the remainder assessed as neutral.

National and international profile

LEEDS 2023 attracted some big internationally recognised names which helped raise its global profile. Corinne Bailey Rae and Simon Rix, both born in the city, along with Poet Laureate Simon Armitage, were patrons of LEEDS 2023. Corinne Bailey Rae and Simon Armitage helped launch the year at the opening event at Headingley Stadium, bringing both a local and national profile to the year.

Projects, in partnership with national broadcasters and agencies, showcased Leeds stories. The Space partnered with Sky Arts, Arts Council England, LEEDS 2023 and Studio 12 (Leeds City Council), to commission films about Leeds by diverse artists and four films were selected for screening on Sky Arts in December 2023. LEEDS 2023 partnered with the British Council for 'An International Gathering of Poets', which involved eight hours of BBC broadcasts and live performances by Leeds based and international poets over a weekend, plus 20 broadcasts on Radio Leeds.

1,047
Local

540
Regional

193
Trade

Challenging perceptions

Media coverage highlighted LEEDS 2023's potential to shift perceptions of the city. The Telegraph, for example headlined its article in anticipation of the opening event, "Why Leeds is having a renaissance as the cultural capital of the north" following: "It could have been accused of being a sleeping giant as far as culture is concerned – until now..." and gave 'The Awakening' opening event 4 stars.

The Financial Times, syndicated to economic publications around the world, referenced the work of LEEDS 2023 in its story "Homebuyers feel the lure of Leeds, Yorkshire's unofficial 'city of culture'", noting that Leeds has a strong shopping, music and arts scene.[50]

Global media profiled individual projects, such as Moon Palace, Keith Khan's partnership with Burberry and the Yinka Shonibare sculpture.

"I think it also really brought press, international attention in a way that, certainly an organisation our size rarely manages to hit. For us, it's had a real impact."
The Tetley

Community profile

As a new organisation, LEEDS 2023 had to establish relationships with communities quickly and this presented its own challenges, particularly when it came to connecting with neighbourhoods where many people rarely engage with mainstream cultural activities. The City Council and other partners helped to broker introductions but there was a shared view that the slow-burn awareness-raising required was affected by the compressed timescales and successive lockdowns. The Neighbourhood Hosts were instrumental in providing a route to reaching local communities. While projects had to work hard to reach a diversity of the city's residents:

"...extensive marketing through both Opera North and LEEDS 2023 reached a wide audience across all Leeds boroughs. Additional outreach work from our Community Partnerships team brought in more disadvantaged groups from outlying areas."
Opera North: As You Are

Projects found ways to tap into communities and reach audiences beyond the usual suspects..

"We brokered links with people from different communities... via a range of regional community-led whatsApp groups including a group of Latin and South American migrants and of PTA groups. We know this was key to reaching such a high number of young people."
All That Lives

50 https://www.ft.com/content/49ae3ea1-1cda-4031-8ba2-29a4638e8537

2.6 Creative Learning & Engagement

The Creative Learning & Engagement Team designed, delivered and brokered an extensive programme of opportunities for children and young people (CYP) and adults involving over sixty partners. In line with the LEEDS 2023 emphasis on inclusive practice, they were keen to work in a youth-led way wherever possible and to advocate for this approach through their work – including producing a toolkit for the sector on integrating youth voice into arts projects and festivals.[51] This included activities within Signature Projects as well as cultural education, skills development and community engagement activities.

Activities included sharing emerging insight, convening conversations for knowledge exchange and highlighting opportunities for cultural education through conferences and CPD opportunities for 250 teachers and education professionals.

Cultural education

A wealth of activities took place in education settings, significantly boosting existing provision over the year. This included school trips, production of classroom resources, and artist-led workshops alongside major participatory projects. All activities took inspiration from LEEDS 2023 programme content and responded to the curriculum, including STEM, humanities, citizenship and engineering as well as arts subjects. It also recognised the financial challenges of schools by offering transport and in-school activities. Projects included:

- Facilitated visits to 3 exhibitions by internationally renowned artists.
- Opportunities for performing in the 'Yorkshire School Dance Competition', 'Authors Abroad Slam Poetry Competition', 'Youth Music Celebration Concert' and other events.
- 'Feel the Music', a concert created with, by and for D/deaf pupils.

Significantly, the programme worked closely with Leeds agencies and was instrumental in the development of Leeds33, the re-structured Local Cultural Education Partnership.

Career development for young people

The programme also focused on creative career opportunities for young people. It kicked off with the Youth Summit in 2022, delivered with and by young people, bringing them together with the cultural sector to share knowledge and explore opportunities. Out of this, the 'Youth Voice Toolkit' was created, offering advice on young people-led arts and culture initiatives, and providing a framework for projects in 2023.

51 https://leeds33.com/leeds-2023-youth-voice-toolkit/

The Team also identified a lack of opportunities for work placement and professional development for young people studying on creative courses, and responded by providing a wide range of new openings:

- 800+ young people benefitted from hosted and organised internships, placements and industry events.
- 11 young people took part in Early Career Music Promoters, a year-long programme offering experience in the music industry, delivered in partnership with 'Come Play with Me'.[52]
- Lift the Lid:23 Voices, delivered in partnership with Creative Lives, delivered two 10-week courses for 23 participants aged 16-25 years in journalism and podcasting, related to the LEEDS 2023 programme.
- A grants scheme enabled young people to lead creative social impact projects.

These mechanisms gave a boost to the career potential of young people in school and further education – and brought their voices and perspectives into LEEDS 2023 and the wider cultural sector. They also modelled new solutions and established partnerships for future delivery.

To ensure a legacy, work with children and young people was **supported by a partnership between Leeds Culture Trust, University of Leeds, Leeds City Council, Leeds Cultural Education Partnership and Leeds Learning Alliance, funded by Arts Council England.**

Community engagement

The team also supported everyday creativity projects and community-led programming, producing the MY LEEDS 2023 project including training and supporting the Neighbourhood Hosts. They shared their learning with Leeds City Council, Voluntary Action Leeds and Leeds Community Anchor Network, in order that these new ways of working could be incorporated into future work.

52 https://www.cpwm.co/

"I've had a brilliant time. Made a couple of good friends. Learned a lot about Leeds and its history. I would recommend it! Very supportive people at all the events I participated in."

LEEDS 2023 Volunteer

2.7 Making it Happen

Leeds Culture Trust was set up as an independent charity in 2018 to be the delivery vehicle for the Year at the instigation of the Council. As such it was bound to the Council through its funding agreement but on an arms-length basis. The Trust appointed Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO in 2020.

This is one of a number of Year-of-Culture governance models - others include Council-led, Partnership-led and run by an existing company or organisation - and there is some debate as to the most effective. Leeds adopted this model in the hope of finding a good balance between independence and Council support, and of building a fresh, new coalition, free of historical baggage.

People and processes

Leeds Culture Trust employed 125 people over its period of operation plus 418 freelancers. Its aim was to build a strong team for the duration able to accrue knowledge and experience and nurture relationships over years.

A full list of Leeds Culture Trust chairs, trustees and leadership team is included in the Appendices.

Capacity was stretched throughout for a variety of reasons and the team had continued challenges recruiting at a level to match the ambition and complexity of the programme, a problem partially mitigated by training more junior staff and working with freelancers.

Volunteers

Volunteers had an important role to play. Taking learning from previous events, two key principles were applied. The first was that volunteers should have choices about how, when and where they gave their time, and the second that their work should clearly complement or supplement that of paid staff rather than replace it.

1,008 volunteers, drawn from across Leeds and of all age ranges, were recruited and trained in waves from late 2022. A simple application and assessment process was put in place. Once accepted, volunteers registered themselves on the Rosterfy online system and managed their own volunteering activity. A dedicated team at LEEDS 2023 matched requests for help from project teams and partners with individual volunteers. Additional training was provided for Access Champions and data collection and other specific tasks. Some adjustments were needed in the initial stages, as there were more volunteers recruited than jobs to do. So, a minority of volunteers were unsatisfied, which resulted in some adjustments to the volunteer remit and process by the LEEDS 2023 team.

"It felt great to familiarise myself with the culture of Leeds."

LEEDS 2023 Volunteer

Expenses were offered to all volunteers and this was seen as a positive, although some felt that the flat fee might have made volunteering inaccessible for less affluent people.

Of all the roles volunteers played, the most valued (by all stakeholders) were those supporting the visitor experience.

Systems and processes

As a completely new organisation, the team had to set up a large number of systems and processes at speed – from staff induction to ticketing, volunteer co-ordination to project management - and many more besides. These were refined as the year got under way and while good solutions were achieved, some "building the plane while flying" was as inevitable as it was challenging.

This is perhaps one consequence of the dedicated organisation model, and some stakeholders commented that LEEDS 2023 might have benefitted by leaning into the Council's established systems. Either way, the team achieved much in the compressed post-Covid period and developed

LEEDS 2023 volunteers
Photographer: JMA Photography



some smart approaches to ambitious programming in uncertain times.

This includes their approach to assessing and green-lighting projects which was applied across Signature and Partnership projects. Each project was scrutinised from the perspectives of funding, legal, accessibility, health and safety and sustainability by an oversight panel. At an appropriate point, the oversight panel would recommend it - and its scale and scope - to the Leeds Culture Trust General Purpose sub-committee who would then greenlight it or not in the context of the wider year of culture. This process ensured that on a tight and shifting budget and timeframe, informed decisions were made in a timely way, and projects were appropriately modelled and feasible. We should note the process was far from popular with some project partners, particularly smaller organisations, whose expectations were not met.

Marketing & Communications

It was intended that the communications function should work across the whole operation, in step with artists, producers and partners (see 2.5 Promote).

Resource constraints limited promotional activity to PR, a comprehensive website, and campaigns for Signature Projects and selected partner projects. As a result, partners and in-community promotion were vital in building audiences. Partner feedback suggests that expectations of the marketing effort exceeded what the team were actually able to deliver within budget.

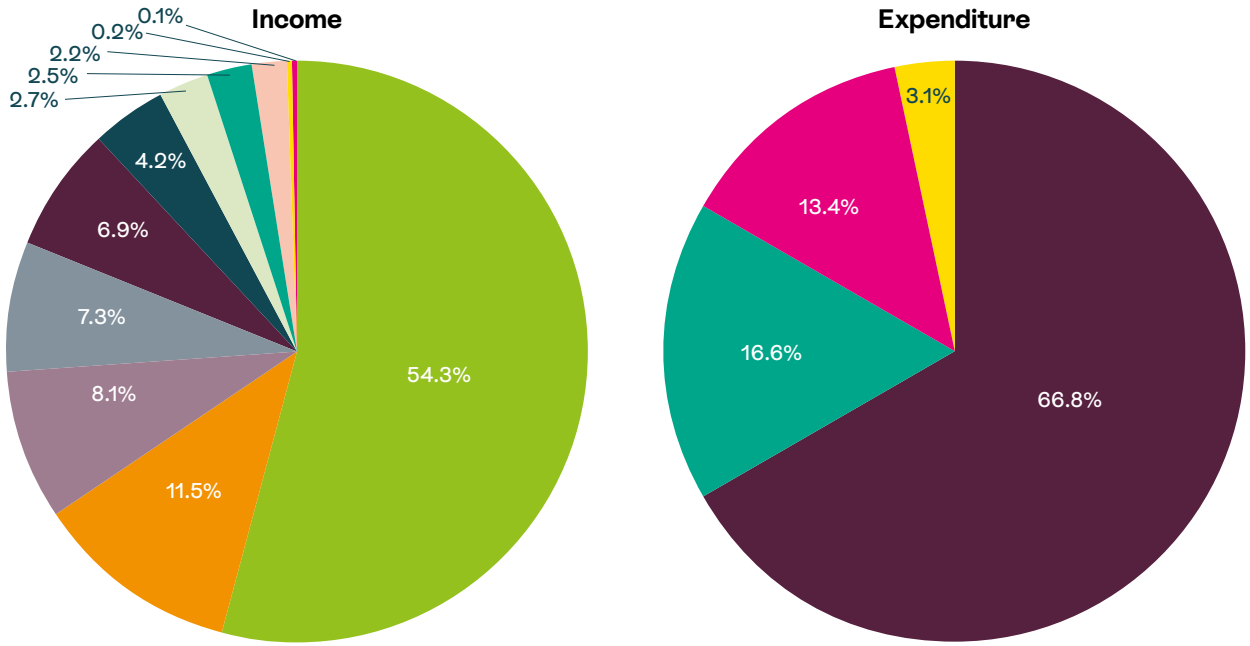
Marketing and communications was designed to keep the attention on the LEEDS 2023 brand through Signature Project campaigns, and differing levels of promotional support for Partnership projects (only constrained by media band-width, ability to achieve equality of attention-share and internal resources). Working with Neighbourhood Hosts and community-based partners enabled targeting of specific audiences.

The dedicated website was developed for LEEDS 2023 covering the whole programme – Produce, Partner and Promote – the latter involved integrating listings for all cultural activity across Leeds for the year (as listed in Leeds Inspire).

- **LEEDS 2023 website 1,196,574 views**
- **366,422 Social media engagements with content (X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube)**
- **823,071 video views (X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube)**

Finances and funding

Total turnover for Leeds Culture Trust £23.8 million



- Leeds City Council
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Arts Council England
- Theatre Tax Relief (HMRC)
- Donations
- Earned Income
- Educational Institutions
- Misc
- Sponsorship
- Trusts and Foundations

- Programme
- Marketing
- Fundraising
- Support

Leeds City Council funding of £10,665 million comprised: £3.2m Business Rates Pool; £3.389m Gainshare; £4.075 net cost to Leeds City Council.

Partner Strand projects leveraged additional investment for their projects, in addition to, in some cases, funding from Leeds Culture Trust. A sample of Partners indicated that they attracted additional funding from public and private sources and Trusts and Foundations.[53]

53 Base: 46



The Gifting
Photographer: JMA Photography

Chapter 3:
TRANSFORMATION - IMPACT & OUTCOMES

An overview of if and how outcomes were achieved



The Awakening, Corinne Baily Rae
Photographer: JMA Photography

LEEDS 2023 set out to get more and different people involved in culture and creativity and in doing so, to build capacity, change perceptions, and help transform the city. The team determined to do this in ways both inclusive and accessible as well as inventive and risk-taking, with the aim of showing how the future of culture in Leeds could be creatively leading edge, international in outlook while bringing benefit directly to all its citizens.

This chapter explores in detail if and how LEEDS 2023 achieved what it set out to. The emphasis is on learning to take forward, not just on what worked but on understanding why some things worked well, and why others did not.

Evidence combines to suggest LEEDS 2023's overall mission to, "deliver a transformational year of creative experiences connecting and benefiting people now and into the future", was for the most part fulfilled, at least during 2023. It offered a full year of original events and activities, and 'many ways-in' to them for the citizens of Leeds. The programme took place all over the city - schools, parks, street corners, a Barn and tents, shopping centres, in cultural venues, heritage places and community spaces. Survey data tells us that it spoke to residents, communities, artists and creatives, many of whom had previously been left out of the conversation. Qualitative and quantitative evidence show that, in most cases, those involved felt welcomed, stimulated and inspired, their wellbeing was enhanced through connecting with others, volunteering, active participation, learning and discovery. Feedback also suggests the Year had an overall positive effect on the cultural sector and has been transformational for cultural education in the city.

Achievements at the local level, however, may have been at the expense of those goals associated with boosting the visitor economy, which were not reached.

In this chapter, we track the year's progress against all 11 of LEEDS 2023 impact areas, across:

Social and Cultural Value 3.1

Cultural and Creative Sector 3.2

Economic Value 3.3

Environmental sustainability 3.4

3.1 Social and Cultural Value

3.1.1 Participation

There is a sustainable growth in cultural participation amongst the citizens of Leeds, regardless of their experience or circumstances.

By most measures of success, LEEDS 2023 did well in terms of audience and participant engagement. Total audience numbers were well above the 2 million mark, much in line with other mega-events of similar duration.

Levels of satisfaction were high; audiences were diverse in terms of demographics and habitual propensity to engage. Many core ideas – like being inclusive and exploring the city – were recognised and appreciated.

LEEDS 2023 had 2,302,808 in-person 'engagements', that is interactions with a performance, artwork or other creative opportunity by audiences and active participants.

Importantly, the citizen engagement target was met, with members of 73% of Leeds' 341,466 households participating in some way, suggesting that activities which rooted the year of culture in the communities of Leeds paid off.

" It was such a magical event. I loved the little touches to include the audience, we lit candles, sung & ate sherbet! Also the price was very welcome, It seemed low enough to be accessible to a lot of people."

The Gifting Audience

This future-focused outcome, however, was to drive up engagement over the longer term, with a particular emphasis on addressing historic inequality, "regardless of experience or circumstances", a principle the team took to heart, evidenced across many aspects of their approach.

Sustainable growth

However, the confusion caused by the pandemic meant that no definitive, pre-year baselines were set from which 'growth' could realistically be measured. Further, the implication is of sustained growth beyond the timescale of LEEDS 2023 itself and into the future. For these reasons, we explore achievements in participation in a broad sense.

New audiences

46% audiences (and 54% of active participants) said that it was: the first time I have attended a cultural or creative event like this',[54] while 51% audiences (and 49% of active participants) said it was: the first time I have visited this venue, place or space in Leeds. These numbers were only slightly higher for audiences in the 'less culturally engaged' Audience Spectrum Groups than for audiences in the higher and medium engaged segments.

"This is the first time I've visited an event like this and thoroughly enjoyed it, well done."

Making a Stand Audience

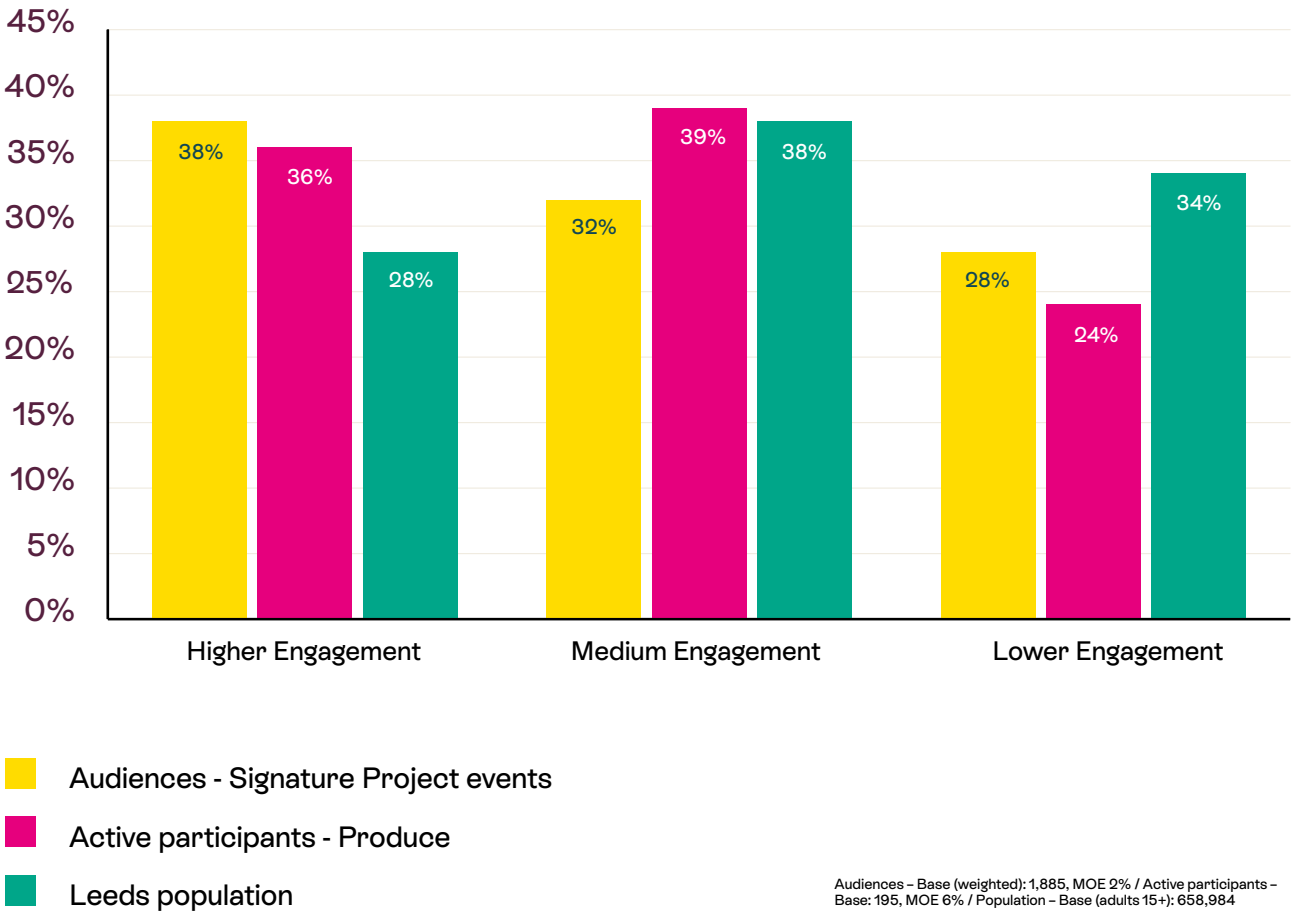
34% of Leeds' adult population [55] come from these Audience Spectrum Groups,[56] or put another way, are people who are much less likely to engage with public or publicly funded arts and culture. The usual profile of audiences in Leeds (across funded venues for 2019/20) includes circa 19% from these Groups.[57] LEEDS 2023 performed significantly better, attracting high numbers: 28% of audiences (across all events profiled [58]), up to 42% for some events, were from less engaged Groups, as were 24% of active participants.[59]

And once people had engaged, they came back. On average, people engaged with 4 events across the year,[60] a far higher frequency of engagement over 12 months than for UK theatres, for example (on average people attend the same theatre circa 1.2 times per year[61]). 40% of active participants had engaged with more than one event or activity in person, and on average they engaged with over 3 events or activities.[62]

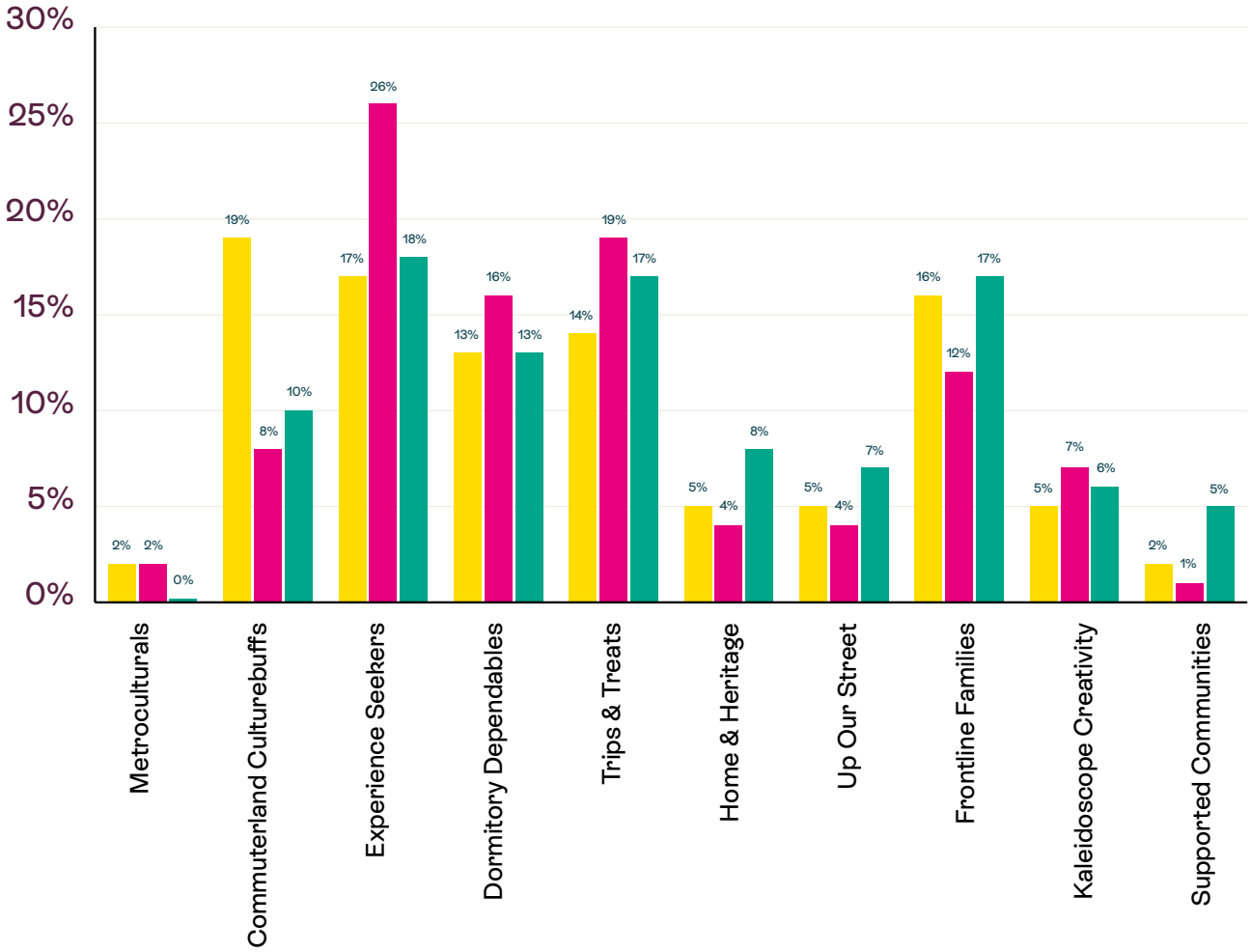
These statistics are echoed in the perceptions of partners, a reasonable majority of whom[63] felt that LEEDS 2023 had 'increased audiences, including from those facing barriers' to a large or some extent.[63]

54 Base (weighted): 2,481, MOE 2% (Base: 240, MOI 5%)
55 Base: 658,984
56 Audience Spectrum is a profiling system which uses multiple data sources to estimate people's propensity to engage arts and culture based on their post-code. Read more in the Appendix.
57 Source: Audience Answers. Base: 74,415 bookers.
58 Data was collected across nearly all events in the Produce Strand and larger partner project, through ticketing and/ survey. This figure represents surveyed audiences at Signature Project events
59 Base (weighted): 1,885, MOE 2% (Base: 195), MOE 6%
60 Base: 778
61 Source Audience Answers
62 Base: 92
63 60%, Base: 76

The profile of LEEDS 2023 audiences, by Audience Spectrum Group



Audiences – Base (weighted): 1,885, MOE 2% / Active participants – Base: 195, MOE 6% / Population – Base (adults 15+): 658,984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Commuterland Culturebuffs
Experience Seekers
Dormitory Dependables
Trips & Treats
Home & Heritage
Up Our Street
Frontline Families
Kaleidoscope Creativity
Supported Communities

Satisfaction and enjoyment

In this context it matters greatly that people had a good time. Overall satisfaction with the experience of engaging with LEEDS 2023 was high, with 94% of audiences,[64] and 95% of active participants,[65] rating their engagement experience as 'very good' or 'good'. People also rated the staff and volunteers they encountered very highly – again 95% of audiences thought they were 'very good' or 'good',[66] significantly higher than they rated facilities (including food and drink) which people rated 'very good' or 'good' at a more predictable 81%.[67]

We did not observe any effect whereby people in any particular demographic or Audience Spectrum Group had a significantly better or worse experience. This said, people in the less engaged Groups gave an average Net Promoter Score of 71,[68] compared to an average of 61 from people in the highly engaged Groups[69] (though note, highly engaged audiences tend to give lower NPS scores).

People were asked about their hopes and expectations, as part of research commissioned in advance of the year,[70] especially paying attention to differences of opinion by Audience Spectrum Group. It seems that high expectations were met – and post-event feedback was equally positive across the Groups.

"Hearing stories rooted in Leeds, which involved landmarks I knew but stories I didn't was very enriching. It was such a powerful way to learn about the city's history and about different perspectives."
The Gifting Audience

"The whole experience has been a good opportunity to learn and grow. I have learnt new things about myself and my heritage. I have taken part in the events throughout the day and enjoyed all of them."
Hibiscus Rising Audience

"Great opportunity to visit places that are not usually accessible to the public in Leeds. Great to see that pieces used previously for The Awakening entry have been made into full scale live pieces."
Waking the Artist Audience

64 Base (weighted): 2,362, MOE 2%
65 Base: 252, MOE 6%
66 Base (weighted): 2,517, MOE 2%
67 Base (weighted): 2,200, MOE 2%
68 Base: 454
69 Base: 881
70 A bespoke Audience Spectrum population segmentation for Leeds was delivered by The Audience Agency

Regardless of experience or circumstances

Audiences and active participants came from across age ranges, ethnicities and identities, all parts of the city and, as we have seen, all Audience Spectrum groups.

We have already noted the significance of a high proportion of less engaged Groups but LEEDS 2023 also did well with middle-engaged groups, so that the overall audience profile mapped far closer to that of the population than for most cultural offers, including national benchmarks for arts engagement.[71] Among the projects which attracted the highest proportion of less engaged Groups were: Children's Day: Reimagined, All That Lives, MY LEEDS 2023 2023 and Smeaton300 events,[72] underlining known factors influencing less engaged groups, namely the importance of family friendly programming and going beyond the city centre, 'meeting people where they are', to a hyper-local level.

Across generations

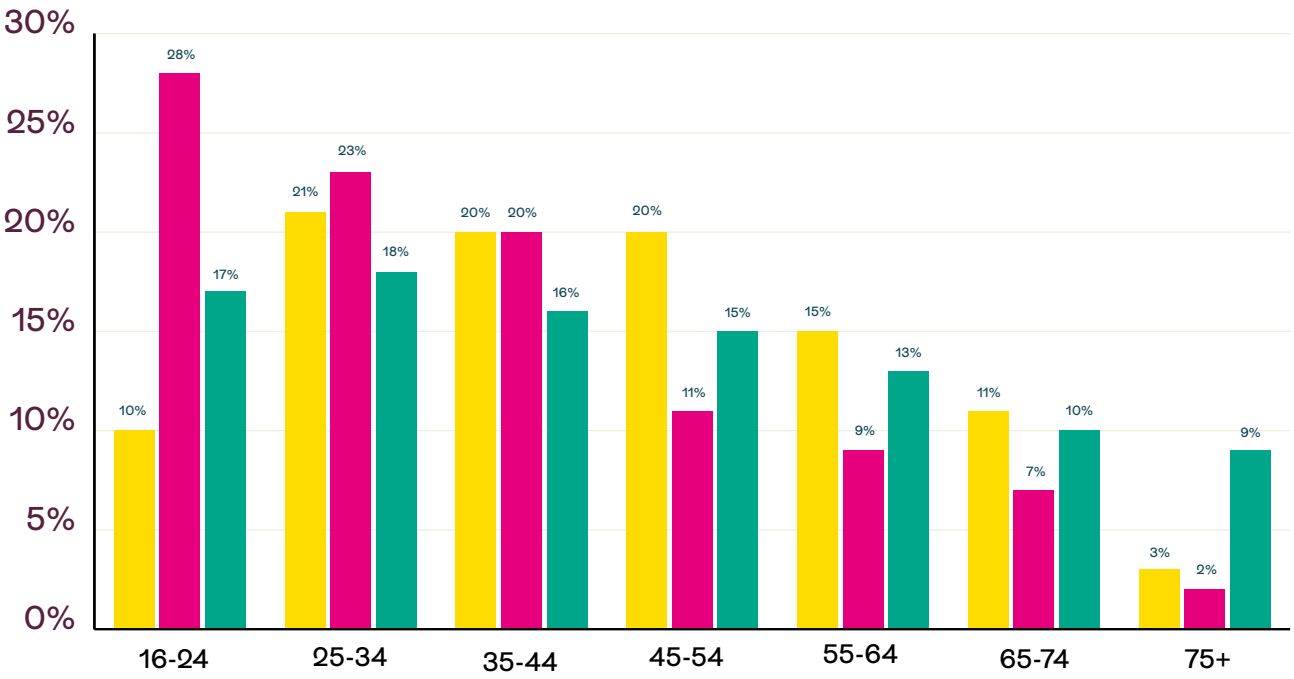
The wide range of activities catering to different age groups, or deliberately designed with intergenerational appeal, did mean that all generations were represented. The WOW Barn, for example, brought Barn Raisers from 4 different generations together – the youngest being 16, the oldest 75.

Audiences and events were tailored to different communities across the areas of the city. In the central Leeds ward of Little London and Woodhouse, 59% of audiences were in the 16-34 years age-range[73] (38% of resident adults are full-time students). But in Calverley and Farsley, where the population is much older, 31% audiences were in 55+ years age-brackets.[74]

Active, creative participation was particularly attractive to younger adults: Under 35s made up over half all active participants[75], compared to one third of audiences.[76]

71 Audience Spectrum profiles can be found at https://audiencespectrum.org/en
72 Children's Day – 39% of surveyed audiences from lower engaged segments. Base (weighted): 33
All That Lives – 42% of surveyed audiences from lower engaged segments. Base (weighted): 215
MY LEEDS 2023 – 31% of surveyed audiences from lower engaged segments. Base (weighted): 886
Smeaton300 – 28% surveyed audiences from lower engaged segments. Base (weighted): 148
73 Base: 61
74 Base: 42
75 51%. Base: 254, MOE 6%
76 31%. Base (weighted): 2,573, MOE 2%

Audiences and participants by age-group



Audiences – Base (weighted): 2,573, MOE 2% / Active participants – Base: 254, MOE 6% / Population (16+) – Base: 658,468

Family friendly

The comprehensive offer for families and family friendliness was popular and much commented on. Survey respondents were however vocal about occasions which fell short: a mixed response to Children's Day: Reimagined and elements of Smeaton300 are rare examples where people felt activities were not suitably family-first in the way they were organised and communicated.

"Be honest and clear with people about what the "attractions" will be."

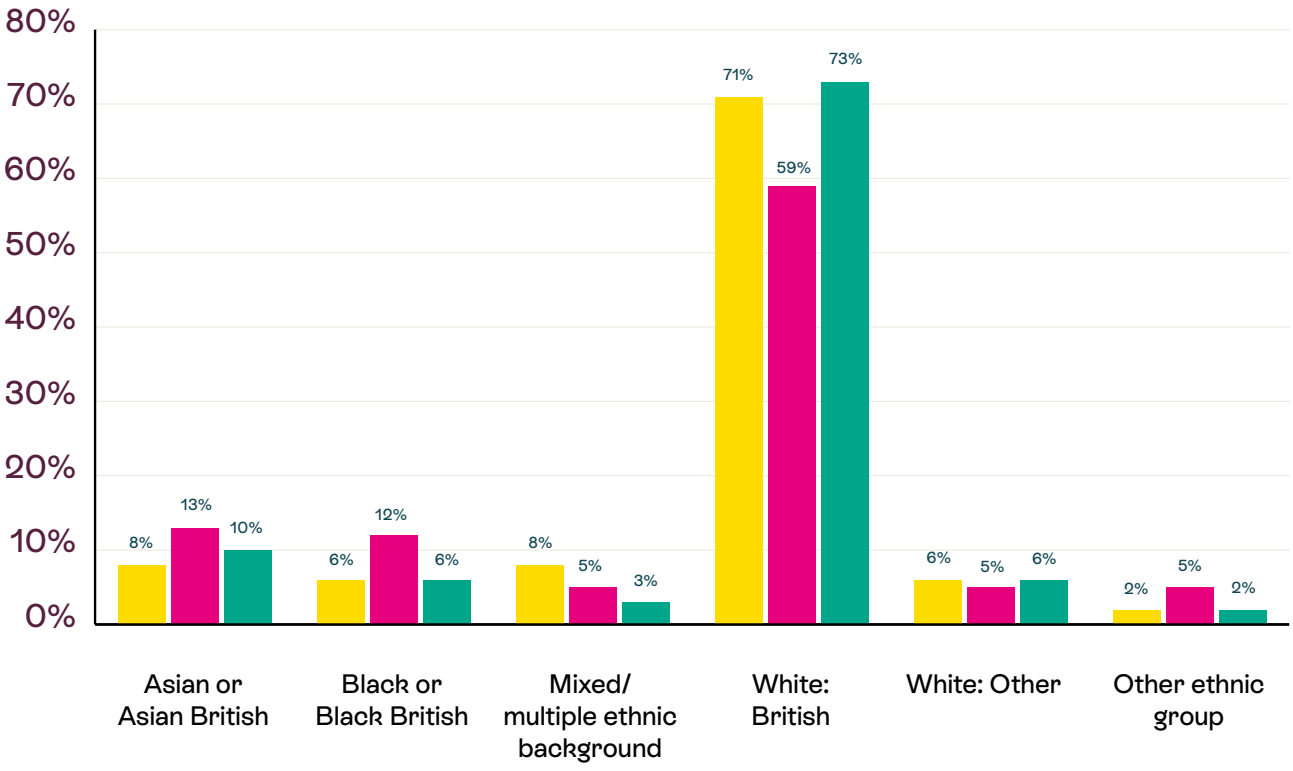
Smeaton300, Moon Palace Audience

"Try to be more family friendly & make it more interactive for all ages."

Smeaton300, Engineery exhibition Audience

Global majority audiences

Historical survey[77] data suggests that people of the Global Majority are generally under-represented among audiences in Leeds (based on combined data from a majority of Leeds main venues). Audiences for LEEDS 2023, however, were broadly representative of the city's ethnic population profile: in fact the most recent Office for National Statistics figures suggest that 21% of Leeds population are of the Global Majority,[78] compared with 24% of the audience for Signature Projects[79]. The Global Majority proportion of active participants was even higher, at 35%.[80]



Audiences – Base (weighted): 2,431, MOE 2% / Active participants – Base: 245, MOE 6% / Population - Base: 811,953

77 Audience Finder 2016 – 2021, Audience Answers
78 Base: 811,953
79 Base (weighted): 2,431, MOE 2%
80 Base: 245, MOE 6%

Disabled audiences and participants

12% of audiences identified as disabled,[81] which is higher than the arts survey data available from Leeds' organisations in 2021.[82] However, it is lower than the Office for National Statistics measure for West Yorkshire, which counts 17% of people in the region as disabled[83]. Notably 18% of active participants were disabled[84] which suggests that pro-active work with Leeds' disabled community in connection with participatory projects made a significant impact.

The high commitment to access – universally and for disabled people – was frequently noted in surveys and feedback and seemingly had an overall effect on how people viewed LEEDS 2023.

"My husband uses a stick ... we were looked after so well with the guide directing us down the path and looking out for us as it got dark. Also, he needed to sit for a rest on a bench so another guide noticed and made sure that he had a chair. Thank you so much for that."

Nest Audience

"It was immersive, exciting, thought-provoking, and lots of facilities were provided for people with different needs. There was great pre-show info about access and parking and providing shuttle buses was a good feature."

Nest Audience

"We visited with my autistic daughter. The team supporting the event were amazing when it came to informing us about the accessibility options. My daughter made use of the chill out room for 20 minutes. She listened to the performance whilst she was in there. It made such a huge difference to her being able to enjoy the performance. We all thoroughly enjoyed the event and felt it was a new and interesting experience for us all."

The Gifting Audience

Gender

Women were greatly over-represented: 68% audiences and 80% active participants identified as female. While arts benchmarks consistently show women out-numbering men, this was a larger disparity. 1% of audiences and 3% of active participants identified as non-binary, and 1% of active participants described their identity in another way.[85] These figures perhaps reflect programme choices – particularly within the participatory programme – deliberately designed to engage with particular communities and explore issues of historical exclusion.

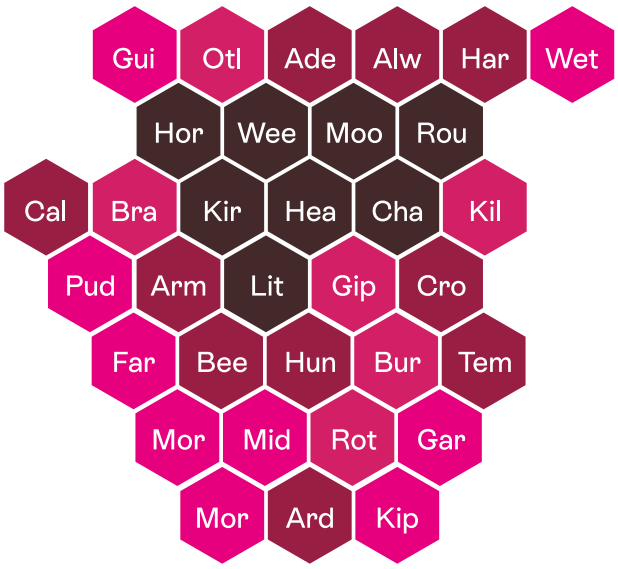
81 Base (weighted): 2,424, MOE 1%
82 Audience Finder 2021 benchmark for Leeds based cultural organisations
83 Office for National Statistics Census 2021 asks, 'Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?', the LEEDS 2023 surveys asked, 'Do you identify as a D/deaf or disabled person, or have a long-term health condition?', the data is therefore not directly equivalent.
84 Base: 241, MOE 5%
85 Base (weighted): 2,471, MOE 2% (Base: 248, MOE 5%)

Across Leeds

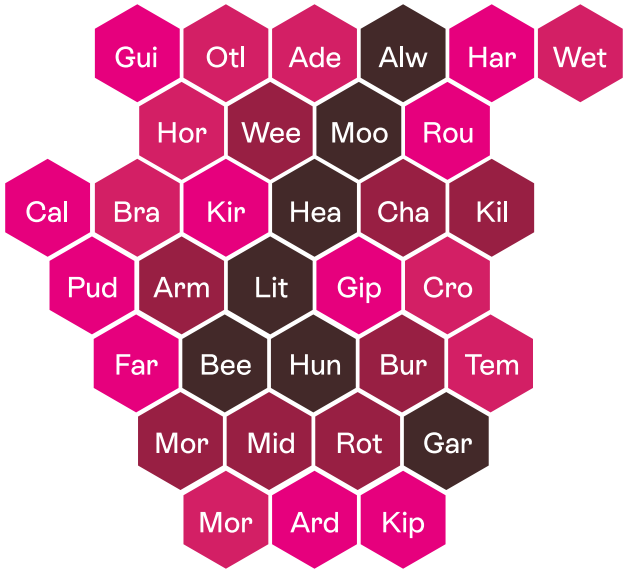
Audiences were very much local. 80% of audiences for Signature Project events came from Leeds[86] and, as noted earlier, three quarters of Leeds households were engaged. Survey data also demonstrates that audiences and participants were drawn from across the whole city, and from a number of historically underserved wards.

Signature Project events which took place outside the city centre attracted very local audiences, between 10% and 20%[87] living in the ward where each event took place.

Audiences and active participants per ward



Events and activities per ward





Cha	Chapel Allerton
Hea	Headingley & Hyde Park
Rou	Roundhay
Wee	Weetwood
Mor	Moortown
Lit	Little London & Woodhouse
Kir	Kirkstall
Hor	Horsforth
Alw	Alwoodley
Hun	Hunslet & Riverside
Bee	Beeston & Holbeck
Ade	Adel & Wharfedale
Tem	Temple Newsam
Cal	Calverley & Farsley
Bur	Burmantofts & Richmond Hill
Kil	Killingbeck & Seacroft
Arm	Armley
Rot	Rothwell
Har	Harewood
Gip	Gipton & Harehills
Otl	Otley & Yeadon
Bra	Bramley & Stanningley
Gar	Garforth & Swillington
Kip	Kippax & Methley
Cro	Cross Gates & Whinmoor
Ard	Ardsley & Robin Hood
Far	Farnley & Wortley
Mor	Morley South
Mor	Morley North
Gui	Guiseley & Rawdon
Pud	Pudsey
Mid	Middleton Park
Wet	Wetherby

86 Base (weighted): 2,575, MOE 2%
87 Base (weighted) 2,575 MOI 2%

Ward level analysis

These findings are further corroborated by in-depth analysis of audiences from a selection of 5 of Leeds' 33 wards, which suggest that the de-centralised approach of projects like MY LEEDS 2023 was significant in engaging people "regardless of experience or circumstances." Armley is, for example, a ward with a high number of less engaged Audience Spectrum Groups, but the year of culture managed to build an audience here, 75% of whom were from less engaged groups and 24% from Global Majority backgrounds (vs 15% Armley's population).[88]

Similarly, Gipton and Harehills is the ward with the highest levels of deprivation of any in Leeds, and the lowest proportion of people likely to engage with cultural institutions. Nevertheless, LEEDS 2023 attracted audiences and participants here; the data indicates that audiences in Gipton and Harehills took part in nearly twice as many LEEDS 2023 programme activities as the average. 97% were from less engaged groups,[89] and 90% of them agreed that: 'I discovered something about the people, places and culture of Leeds at the event',[90] compared to 78% of audiences overall.[91]

Recognised as inclusive

It also seems that the inclusive values and the measures LEEDS 2023 put in place were noticed and appreciated by audiences and active participants. 95% of audiences for Signature Project events agreed events felt inclusive and 'where everyone is welcome';[92] 96% of active participants thought the same about participatory activities.[93] Interestingly, spontaneous feedback on this subject was common in survey 'other' comments, and came through in interviews. In analysis of qualitative data this emerges as one of the strongest recurrent themes, with people attributing the inclusive feel to a variety of things – from friendly helpful staff to the wide choice of activities, to active messaging and communications.

"Good work and thank you for recognising the diverse culture in Leeds."

The Awakening Audience

"I really loved the inclusiveness of this meeting new friends from such diverse backgrounds and abilities and getting together to perform a fantastic piece of art to a live audience will stay with me for a long time. We worked hard and helped and encouraged each other having many laughs and memories along the way. Love to do it all again."

The Awakening Active participant

88 Base: 47
89 Base: 30
90 Base: 29
91 Base (weighted): 2,489, MOE 2%
92 Base (weighted): 2,495, MOE 2%
93 Base: 231, MOE 6%

MY LEEDS 2023 Summer, Gipton & Harehills
Photographer: Ant Robling


TEA

There were an estimated 257,437 engagements with digital projects and 3,256,752 with broadcast projects.

"It was a great event full of variety of performances and videos that represented the cultural diversity of Leeds."
Children's Day: Reimagined Audience

"I felt comfortable, respected and valued."
Making a Stand Audience

"Staff very friendly and welcoming made for a very relaxed experience where people could share views and experiences."
Smeaton300, Moon Palace Audience

Digital engagement

Several projects had a digital dimension, although the promised 'digital year" was scaled back and the opportunity for creative digital engagement was in the end modest.

Nevertheless, the LEEDS 2023 digital team supported Cultural Partners, such as for Making a Stand's accessible site, and the augmented reality experience, 'Guardians of Leeds', conceived by South African poet and artist Xabiso Vili. The Creative Learning and Engagement team produced resources for schools resulting in 298 engagements with digital resources. An experimental mapping-led interactive site,[94] telling stories of activity across LEEDS 2023 and offering a range of trails, was trialled alongside the main site but content was not developed across the year, and no analytics were available.

Just 3% of audiences for Signature Projects surveyed said that they engaged with activity or events digitally or online.[95] However, digital reach was maximised through broadcast partnership projects, such as with The Space, Sky Arts, Studio 12 (Leeds City Council) and the BBC, profiling Leeds through the eyes of its emerging creatives.

Participation: Conclusions

Together, these findings suggest that LEEDS 2023 seeded the potential for long-term growth in arts engagement and participation among the people of Leeds. People, far beyond the usual arts suspects, tried things for the first time – and the vast majority enjoyed it when they did. Audiences were genuinely diverse, by a number of definitions.

The different and sometimes pioneering approaches LEEDS 2023 took to achieve this represent important learning about engaging people "regardless of experience or circumstances". Although it is difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between each of the initiatives and this effect, all the evidence points to the fact that a combination drove the equitable pattern of engagement achieved. If we also look to evidence from other mega-events and programmes, such as Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme, we can infer that the following factors contributed to achieving this outcome. In particular:

94 https://mapme.com/interactive-map-example/immersive-culture-map/
95 Base (weighted): 2480

LEEDS 2023 achieved much by getting beyond the city centre and 'meeting people where they are'. This approach has its own risks – the fun stuff is potentially less visible to the great and the good, the arts establishment and the media. But it paid off in terms of achieving impressive representation across the city, and in particular in communities that rarely engage with culture. Take Gipton and Harehills: just a short walk from the thriving cultural life of the city centre, it still has the lowest levels of arts engagement. LEEDS 2023 took seriously the knowledge that to engage communities not in the habit of mainstream arts, opportunities need to be right on the doorstep, and located events and activities there – and in other corners of the city, in places where people congregate like Kirkgate Market - to good effect.

But location isn't everything and MY LEEDS 2023 and the Neighbourhood Hosts strategy, designed to animate locally relevant creative ideas, also seem a critical success factor.

LEEDS 2023 took seriously the idea of creating an international event which was relevant to and inclusive of the people of Leeds. Everyone had inclusion training, access services weren't just nice-to-have, they were offered as standard. They invested in communities from the outset and championed unsung creatives from those communities, giving them a platform and resources. Those seeds often grew into experiences which celebrated the city in its own way, and showed how culture can galvanise a whole city in a way that was recognised and valued.

Hidden Stories and learnings from MY LEEDS 2023 tell us a lot about the potential of investing well and over the long-term in community-based creative development for the sake of increasing cultural participation and all the benefits it brings. The learning from these projects may form one of the most important legacies of the programme.

3.1.2 Children and young people

There are more opportunities for children and young people to learn and develop their creative skills and cultural careers.

The programme of work devised for children and young people was a significant cornerstone of LEEDS 2023, providing new intelligence and a wide range of new creative opportunities for young people during 2023. Just as significantly, it has contributed a legacy for future exploitation.

Cultural Education

Again, there were no specific baselines from which to measure progress but the Creative Learning & Engagement team appears to have delivered added value and new opportunities, giving a major boost to cultural education throughout the city. This includes some big numbers:

- **228 schools**, including from all Leeds **33 wards** – engaged in some way
- **30% of pupils** in the schools engaged are eligible for Deprivation Pupil Premium, compared to 29% of pupils across all schools in Leeds
- There were **34,251 engagements** by school pupils in person
- **298 engagements** with digital resources by schools
- **250 teachers** and education professionals attended 2 conferences

Teachers rated schools activities highly, in particular for the opportunities they provided pupils; 95% agreed that sessions 'gave pupils a new or different experience', and 94% thought they 'encouraged creative expression in pupils'.[96] Over three quarters of teachers rated their overall level of satisfaction with the session as 9 or 10 out of 10, with 10 being 'extremely satisfied'.[97]

"The pupils had the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a completely different environment. They were able to interact with unfamiliar adults in an unfamiliar space. They were able to experience and use high quality equipment appropriately. They were made to feel responsible and valued."
Moon Palace Teacher

Activities were also highly rated by teachers for giving opportunities for pupils to contribute: 90% thought they were good for 'engaging pupils of different abilities and interests, and with different needs'.[98]

"The children realised that they could have some agency that their voice could be heard, and that what they had to say, was important, especially the fact that when they went around a park, they had children who were on the microphones talking, as well. The children got to see that children can have a say in things, they can have a voice and that their opinion counts."
Teacher

66% of surveyed partners said they successfully engaged young people in formal education in their projects,[99] and 61% engaged young people outside of formal education[100] in creative activities during the year.

Cultural & Creative Careers

As well as working in and with schools, the team created and managed a lot of opportunities for over 800 young people interested in creative careers, including work experience opportunities, working with the universities and trialling industry-specific internships. This was complemented by the Leeds Creative Skills Festival, which started in the run-up in 2022, and then again in 2023 and 2024.

The opportunities proved successful as the team listened carefully to partners and students and addressed specific challenges, such as giving sufficient time for recruitment, more effective communications with students, and offering quick industry briefing sessions as an alternative to time-consuming internships.

Every student who was involved in a placement or work experience benefitted from a reflection and development session – which helped them identify key skills and knowledge areas developed and to make more confident career choices.

"Not only have I been able to grow personally from this experience, but my prospects of my future career have certainly grown. It was amazing to have experience working with the busy dynamics of a creative office, and without a doubt my time on this placement has been a catalyst of my future growth."
Student Placement

96 Base: 80, 79
97 76%. Base: 79
98 Base: 80
99 Base: 69
100 Base: 71

"LEEDS 2023 gave me an opportunity to stretch and grow. I was trusted to take creative control and I delivered to the best of my abilities. I was so proud to tell people about the project I was working on and to get feedback saying that it was worth it."
Creative Learning and Engagement Graduate Intern

A proportion of young people on work experience did however report that they felt somewhat under-supported which echoes the team's acknowledgement that resources were stretched to manage such a high volume of placements.

More Opportunities for the Future

As well as contributing opportunities like these in-year, the team generated the components of a legacy, including new intelligence relating to gaps in provision and guidelines for young-people led cultural activity.[101] They modelled new ideas, such as working with emerging artists and using the programme to augment learning cross-curriculum. Such practices could be adopted at scale supporting teachers and cultural organisations to develop their practice along similar lines. LEEDS 2023 created a new matrix of partnerships and collaboration between industry, culture sector, funders (including Arts Council England), universities and schools, able to continue this work into the future.

This form of capacity building was appreciated by stakeholders in the cultural sector. 60% of Cultural Partners agreed LEEDS 2023 met expectations and 'enhanced cultural education in Leeds'.[102]

"The model adopted for the Festival was new to us (within the school day as opposed to a weekend activity). It allowed us to trial new methods of engagement with schools. The 'Inspire' Sessions (again, a new model of engagement) allowed Phoenix Dance Theatre and Northern School the opportunity to showcase their work - feedback from schools indicates that this worked."
Yorkshire School Dance Festival

Children & Young People: Conclusions

LEEDS 2023 certainly generated more opportunities for children and young people to learn and develop their creative skills and cultural careers and importantly they did so with an eye on the future.

At a time when cultural provision in schools is under threat, the extra boost and innovation LEEDS 2023 was able to contribute was highly valued. In this, school relationships were critical and, as a new organisation, LEEDS 2023 was aided by a close working relationship with Leeds City Council, University of Leeds and Leeds

101 https://leeds33.com/leeds-2023-youth-voice-toolkit/
102 Base: 77

Beckett University and the Local Cultural Education Partnership.

Similarly, Leeds institutions offer courses in the creative industries for thousands of students, but LEEDS 2023 demonstrated how much more could be done to create career progression routes by offering opportunities to gain real world experience. Again, strong partnerships were important, but so was taking the lead from young people.

The team put a particular emphasis on knowledge exchange, through conferences, events and networking which produced a natural legacy of shared learning, ideas and relationships. Critically, it was built into the plan that the restructured and rebranded Local Cultural Education Partnership Leeds' 33 would be positioned and tasked to take this legacy forward, and in a way that relates directly to Leeds City Council's priorities for children and young people. They have also passed the baton to the Bradford 2025's Creative Engagement team. This all points to opportunities being sustained and developed over time.

Photographer: Franco Amponsah Duah



3.1.3 Wellbeing

Contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

There is a growth in citizen satisfaction and improved quality of life linked to creative opportunities.

LEEDS 2023 took a broad view as to how culture can improve lives, from creating joyful moments, to myriad opportunities for everyday creativity, learning and active involvement, making connections within and between communities, and inviting people to fall in love with their city again.

There is good evidence that LEEDS 2023 had positive impacts on wellbeing but as there were no pre-existing baselines nor preferred system of measurement relating to 'quality of life' nor 'citizen satisfaction' for Leeds, it is difficult to make a cogent case for growth in the strictly measurable sense. To compensate, we introduced the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework into surveys and evidence gathering.

Developed by the New Economics Foundation in 2008, this well-documented framework is now commonly used to help understand how quality of life may be improved. It proposes 5 ways in which subjective wellbeing can be boosted: through making social connections, being or getting active, personal awareness and mindfulness, through learning and giving.

We use this lens to understand how well LEEDS 2023 delivered on quality of life, and why.

Wellbeing scores for audiences and active participants

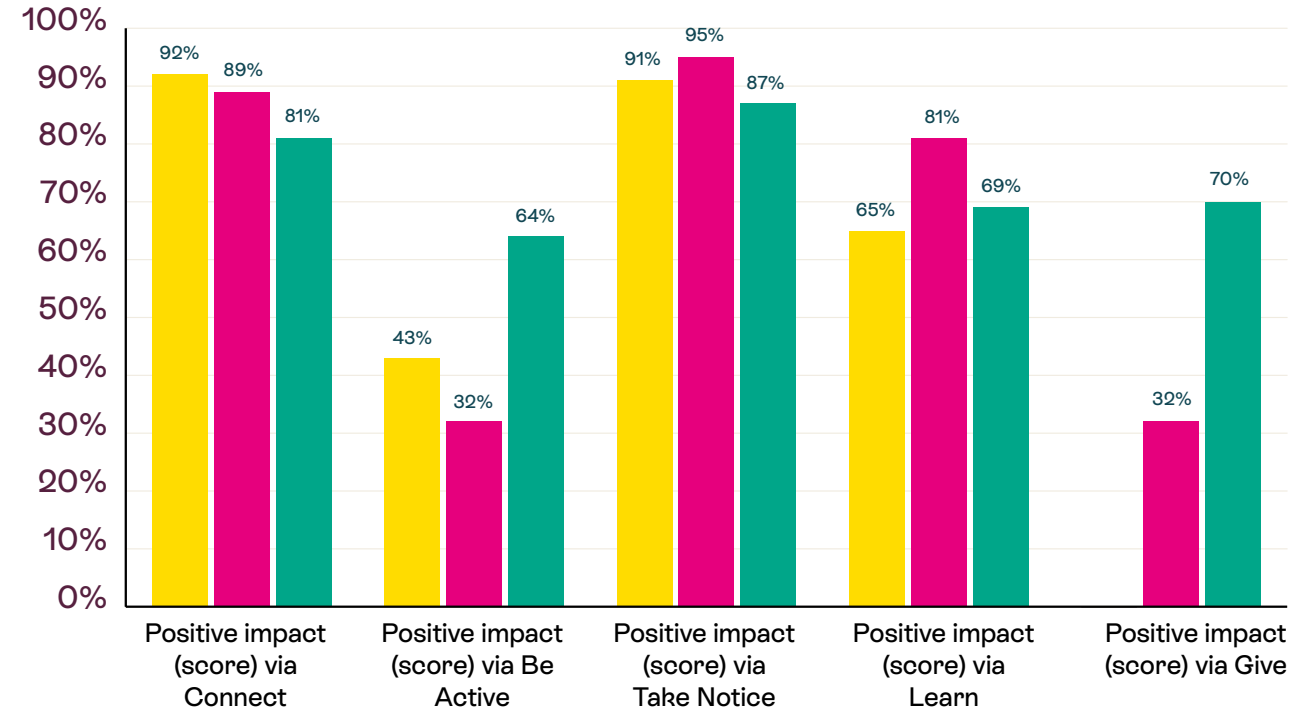
Survey questions asked the extent to which respondents agreed with statements which related to the different ways wellbeing can be improved. The scores in the charts below represent the combined responses for questions related to each of the Five Ways to Wellbeing.

On average across audiences active participants and volunteers, 95% of respondents said that engaging with LEEDS 2023 had a positive impact on their wellbeing in at least one of the Five Ways to Wellbeing.[103]

Connect

Social connection forms a key part of the wellbeing mix and LEEDS 2023 provided an extensive and varied raft of opportunities. As we have seen, creating opportunities for communities to connect or work in partnership was part of the essential

103 Base (weighted): Audiences 2,585, Active Participants 257, Volunteers 100



LEEDS 2023 approach and this resonated with all stakeholders, as audiences, participants and volunteers all scored the positive impact of connecting highly.

Audiences particularly felt a sense of connection which stayed with them following an event.

"It was fantastic. What a super community feeling it generated. The inclusivity was exceptional! To see children and adults of different backgrounds and needs performing and attending in the audience was excellent."

The Awakening Audience

"Good to get out and walk with other people in such a lovely environment in the evening. Very atmospheric. Feeling of community."

Nest Audience

"I thought the event did something very special - it was moving and unified us all in what could be achieved in a city like Leeds. 'A city full of artists'."

The Awakening Audience

For active participants, benefits were more about working together with others. 94% agreed, 'It felt good to be part of a group taking part in something together'.[104] Comments expanded on this referencing a common purpose and meeting people they would not usually get to know.

"I really loved the inclusiveness of this, meeting new friends from such diverse backgrounds and abilities and getting together to perform a fantastic piece of art will stay with me for a long time. We worked hard and helped and encouraged each other having many laughs and memories along the way. Love to do it all again."
The Awakening Mass Movement Active participant

The work of the Neighbourhood Hosts and volunteers was also the glue which connected positive impacts for individuals to positive impacts for the communities of Leeds.

Be Active

Often linked to the health benefits of physical exercise, 'being active' also encompasses creative 'workouts' through active participation and everyday creativity. LEEDS 2023 generated many more such opportunities than usual and especially outside the city centre. Positive impacts were particularly felt in less privileged wards. In Hunslet and Riverside, a ward with high levels of deprivation for example, survey data was indicative of higher levels of agreement with, 'it was good to spend time being physically active' at an event (94%),[105] compared to 79% for LEEDS 2023 audiences overall.[106]

Satellite activities which happened in and around projects and events were particularly valued. Such opportunities to be creative started with the submission of artwork for The Awakening opening event, and continued throughout the programme and were always highly-valued, 84% of active participants agreed, 'I was able to do something creative'.[107]

"Beautiful day allowing audience creativity."
Hibiscus Rising Audience

"I met wonderful people in this event, connected with my roots (Mexican) and expressed my creativity through the workshops."
All That Lives Audience

Take Notice

Many of the comments related to the opportunity to 'take a moment', reflect or relax. Audiences and volunteers scored this second highest after 'connect' in the wellbeing scores while it was the most positive effect for active participants,

"I loved how calm the space made me feel. Life can feel pretty exhausting & this was a lovely way to unwind and be immersed in nice sensory experiences."
Waking the Artist exhibition Audience

104 Base: 232, MOE 6%
105 Base: 15
106 Base (weighted): 2,482, MOE 2%
107 Base: 231, MOE 6%

"I come here for my break and it's easy to just sit here."
Making a Stand Audience

"My daughter loved having the freedom to build and play. I found the speeches and films inspiring and moving."
Children's Day: Reimagined Audience

Learn

65% of audiences felt that learning something new through LEEDS 2023 had had a positive impact on their wellbeing through learning related to discovery of the people and places of Leeds.

The programme included a strong theme of learning about Leeds, its heritage, people, lesser known stories and hidden corners. This resonated with everyone. 70% of active participants, 78% of audiences and 88% of staff, apprentices and placements all felt they had 'discovered something about the people, places and culture of Leeds' through engaging with the programme.[108]

"Truly enjoyed it – me and my children learned things about Leeds as well as myself."
Making a Stand Audience

"The whole experience has been a good opportunity to learn and grow. I have learnt new things about myself and my heritage."
Hibiscus Rising Audience

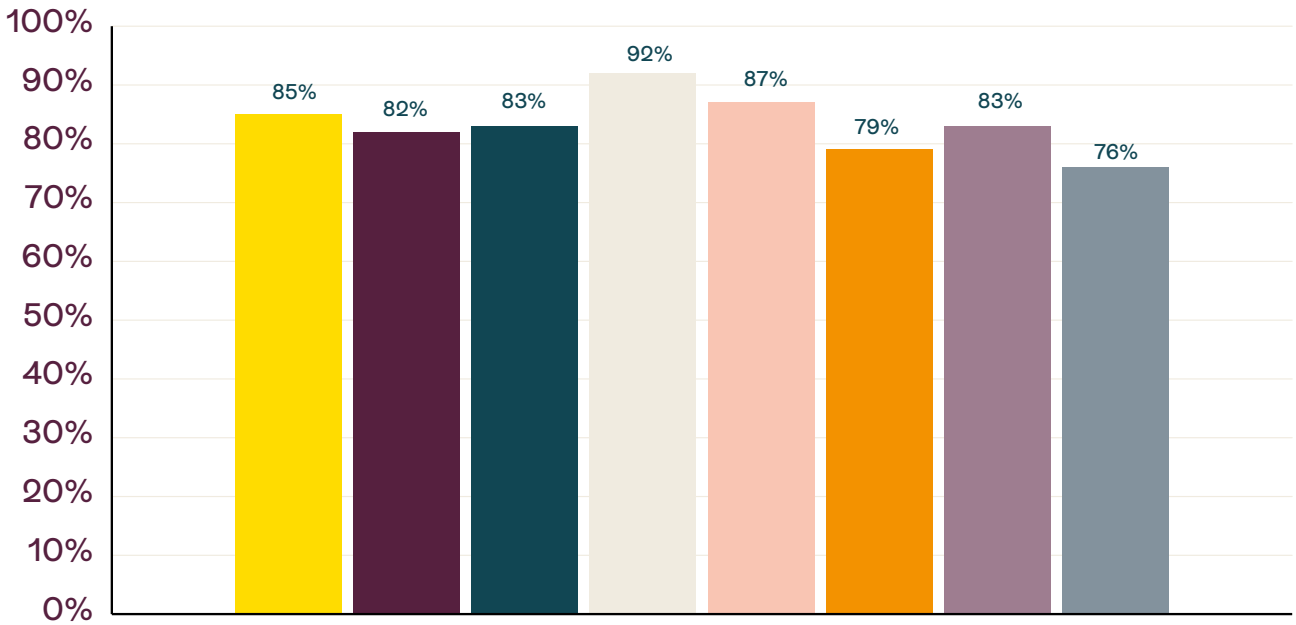
Pride in Leeds

Among other things, this contributed to an enhanced sense of pride about living in Leeds: 85% of audiences and 82% of active participants agreed that the activity they were involved in made them 'proud to live in Leeds'.[109] These findings show a significant increase on those from a baseline survey delivered in 2021 which found that only 76% of the Leeds population were 'proud to live in Leeds'.[110] A sense of pride was highest for Neighbourhood Hosts, 92% of whom said their involvement made them proud to live in the city. [111]

108 Active participants – Base: 251, MOE 6%; Audiences – Base (weighted): 2,489, MOE 2%; Staff – Base: 60, MOE 13%
109 Base (weighted): 1,910, MOE 2% (Base: 186, MOE 7%)
110 Audience Baseline Report for LEEDS 2023, Qa Research, 2021
111 Base: 26

LEEDS 2023 Stakeholder Sense of Pride

This chart shows the proportions of Leeds residents who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with this statement. 'My involvement in LEEDS 2023 made me proud to live in Leeds', or 'I am proud to live in Leeds', across the surveys delivered to different stakeholders.



Strongly agree or agree

'My involvement in LEEDS 2023 made me proud to live in Leeds' / 'I am proud to live in Leeds'

- Audiences - Signature Project events
- Active participants - Produce
- Artists & Creatives survey
- Neighbourhood Hosts final survey
- Staff, apprentices & placements exit survey
- Volunteers midpoint survey
- Volunteers final survey
- Population baseline survey

Audiences – Base (weighted): 1,910, MOE 2% / Active participants – Base: 186, MOE 7% / Artists – Base: 76, MOE 11% / Hosts – Base: 26 / Staff – Base: 60, MOE 13% / Volunteers midpoint – Base: 125, MOE 9% / Volunteers final – Base: 70, MOE 12% / Baseline – Base (weighted): 832

LEEDS 2023's influence on increasing levels of pride in its citizens is further corroborated by a population brand awareness survey which took place part way through 2023 which found that 57% of the population felt more proud to live in Leeds as a direct result of LEEDS 2023. Many comments reference the inclusive values promoted and pride in Leeds "doing it anyway":

"A real improvement in the city centre with the new art work."
LEEDS 2023 resident

"Amazing experience, so imaginative and immersive and warm hearted ... showcased the best of Leeds our beloved home city in a very real way without cliche or over sentimentality."
The Gifting Audience

"... it was so good to see Leeds being shown positively instead of the Grim up North stereotype. I am also a lifelong artist and I actually cried when I saw the outdoor art gallery and we found our own work! I am involved in providing the celebration for my area and I think it is long overdue for Leeds to show we value and can produce exciting public art."
The Awakening Audience

"I have special needs and my mum assisted me at all the training and at the event, we were made to feel very welcome and looked after by all the organisers/volunteers at the event. It certainly made us proud to be part of this and to live in Leeds. Thank you to all involved."
Mass Movement for The Awakening Active participant

Give: volunteering

Volunteer programmes have become an essential component in the mega-event blueprint and LEEDS 2023 followed suit, developing their programme based on learning from other cities of culture, in order to maximise the wellbeing effects for people giving their time. While only 9% were new to volunteering per se, 66% were new to doing so in a cultural context.[112] The top three reasons people gave for wanting to become a volunteer for LEEDS 2023 chimed with the core ambitions of the year:

- 87% 'it sounded like an interesting opportunity'
- 75% 'to celebrate culture and creativity in Leeds'
- 60% 'to do something new/out of the ordinary'[113]

"To help others and put something back into society."
Volunteer

"Having recently returned to Leeds, I thought this was a great way to reconnect with the city."
Volunteer

112 Volunteers final survey – Base: 100, MOE 6%
113 Volunteers final survey – Base: 100, MOE 7%

Nearly all volunteers reported experiencing the benefits of volunteering on their wellbeing, including related to 'giving', alongside the other ways of wellbeing.[114] 87% agreed, 'When people work together, they can make change for themselves and their communities',[115] whilst 53% agreed that 'they felt inspired to do more volunteering/ work in or for their community',[116] an encouraging indicator given the overall decline in formal volunteering.[117]

"I've had a brilliant time. Made a couple of good friends. Learned a lot about Leeds and its history - I would recommend it! Very supportive people at all."
Volunteer

LEEDS 2023 inclusive values mattered here too and ensured it was also able to attract a diversity of volunteers in terms of lifestage, social and cultural background (25% Global Majority).[118] Excellent access also meant disabled people were able to participate fully as volunteers.

"Been life-changing for me. Became disabled this year and was very low before volunteering. Volunteering showed me I can still be 'me' again but with a different focus."
Volunteer

Wellbeing: Conclusions

There is good evidence that taking part in LEEDS 2023 experiences had a positive impact on quality of life. People who participated reported increased confidence and personal growth, and it triggered many new friendships and social connections. This is all very much in line with generic findings about mega-events.[119]

Beyond this, LEEDS 2023 worked hard to ensure participating and volunteering were as inclusive as possible – e.g. making sure access was good for disabled people, and providing expenses for volunteers. The 'for, by and about Leeds' approach – exploring history and stories specific to Leeds, and creating collective moments for and with communities – all resonated. It had a demonstrable impact on people taking pride in the city. Their work asks questions about what the city could do next in terms of wellbeing-related cultural policy, especially in addressing key topics like social isolation and under-representation which are earmarked in wider strategies.

114 92% 'Positive impact on wellbeing via any of the above', 70% 'Positive impact via Give' – Base: 100, MOE 7%
115 Volunteers final survey - Base: 100, MOE 10%
116 Volunteers final survey – Base: 97, MOE 9%
117 https://www.dsc.org.uk/content/whats-going-on-with-volunteering-trends/#:~:text=Both%20formal%20and%20informal%20volunteering%20are%20declining&text=For%20the%20year%20in%20which,so%20in%20the%20past%20month.
118 Volunteer monitoring data – Base: 199, MOE 6%
119 https://spiritof2012.org.uk/insights/creative-pathways-to-wellbeing/

3.2 Cultural and Creative Sector

3.2.1 A stronger sector

There is an even stronger and more visible cultural sector

LEEDS 2023 set out to develop capacity in the sector by offering opportunities for artists and organisations to develop their practice by trying out new things. It had a strong mission to add value to the sector as a catalyst, introducing new international influences, new methods, working with different people, and creating a little more time and space to do things differently. They also took very seriously the job of boosting and showcasing Leeds' hidden culture and put considerable effort into doing so.

The evidence strongly shows that they did a good job on these fronts.

New ways of working

Artists and creatives reported a range of new opportunities as a result of being involved in LEEDS 2023:

- 72% 'collaborated in new or different ways with artists and creatives'
- 74% 'engaged or collaborated in new and creative ways with audiences, participants and/or communities'
- 59% 'did a project I would not otherwise have had the opportunity to deliver'[120]

Cultural Partners reported similarly:

- 82% 'found new ways of collaborating with artists and creatives'[121]
- 79% 'found new and creative ways of engaging or collaborating with audiences, participants and/or communities'[122]
- 81% 'did a project they or their organisation would not otherwise have had the opportunity to deliver'[123]

Those involved with the two-year Hidden Stories projects, for example, were particularly positive about these effects and the way in which they were encouraged to adopt more inclusive and people-centred practices.

82% organisations thought involvement in LEEDS 2023 had increased their reputation or profile locally.[124]

"This piece allowed us to extend the project, turning it into something much more subversive... the funding allowed us to integrate additional elements, work with new partners and enhance the audience experience."

Sylvan Quiet, NOVAK x LEEDS 2023 for Light Night Leeds, Leeds City Council

120 Base: 123, MOE 8%
121 Base: 71
122 Base: 69
123 Base: 79
124 Base: 78

Pioneering access practice

An example is the approach to access which LEEDS 2023 modelled, many aspects of which have now been absorbed into the working practices of Leeds organisations.[125]

The approach was planned and delivered with the support of an Access and Inclusion Officer, an Access Advisory Group and trained volunteer Access Champions. An Access Auditing Framework was embedded as part of project planning which identified barriers and found solutions.

Pioneering practices which emerged included:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) sourced to suit needs, including for wheelchair users on a building site and safety boots that fit orthotics.
- A 'chill out' tent (complete with beanbags, fairy lights and ear-defenders) devised in partnership with Leeds Autism Services.
- Visual Stories provided for a range of events and activities.
- Experiences designed for neurodiverse people.
- A "tactile universe" mirroring the visual one in Moon Palace, with Braille inscriptions and a link to audio of what the planet sounds like when it rotates.
- Moon Palace was also made particularly glittery and scented with raspberries (the smell of space) to offer a fully inclusive experience.
- Studio Bark worked with Purple Patch Arts to devise a bespoke relaxed, experience within 'Making a stand' aimed at learning disabled and neurodiverse communities, which explored tree life cycles and rain, and the history of architecture.

Cultural Partners were encouraged and supported to offer accessible experiences and appreciated the additional support, such as being able to hire the 'chill out' tent. Devices like detailed 'what to expect' information, and expert visitor experience teams on the ground showed how accessible practice can have universal impact. In short, LEEDS 2023 introduced both a new range of access services, and a new way of developing access solutions.

New partnerships and relationships

LEEDS 2023 supported, catalysed or otherwise facilitated new relationships and partnerships which produced new and original work delivered as stand-alone projects or activities integrated into many of Leeds long-standing cultural events and venue programmes. The overall effect was to create a dynamic creative environment - 95% of Leeds based artists and creatives involved agreed 'I felt inspired by those

125 https://www.leedsculturepprogrammes.org.uk/resources-access-arts-leeds-2023-legacy

working around and with me"[126] – and a matrix of new relationships.

- 85% of the Cultural Partners worked with Leeds based organisations[127]
- 57% of delivery organisations (who worked with Cultural Partners) were Leeds-based; 43% were based elsewhere [128]
- 83% of Cultural Partners worked with new organisations or forged new relationships through their projects[129]
- 53% of the partnerships represented new relationships, whilst 47% had previously worked together[130]

"Huge thanks to everyone @LEEDS_2023 for supporting some keys events at the lit fest. The support has enabled us to create what we think is the best lineup yet."
@LeedsLit

"The work is exhibited in a pub, it has the opportunity to hang for much longer than it would in a one month gallery show... I chose the venue because the people running it were open to how I wanted to work."
Hands-on

Relationships were developed between local, national and international artists and creatives. Each type of relationship brought a different strength to a project. 83% of artists and creatives reported they developed new local (Leeds) relationships, 36% national relationships and 18% international connections.[131] And 68% of Cultural Partners reported new local relationships, 52% national and 52% international connections.[132]

By the end of 2023, the legacy of such partnerships was already clear: in 45% of partnerships, the Cultural Partners and delivery partners were keeping in touch about potential future projects, whilst in 21% of partnerships there was a specific future project in mind, and 10% were already working on the next project.[133]

"The partnership [with LEEDS 2023] allowed us to expand our reach, enhance our offerings, and contribute meaningfully to the cultural landscape of Leeds."
From Artists Stories - Research by Dr John Wright, Research Associate for the Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds

New international connections were particularly valued and projects like Meet Leeds Lab, which invited Dutch artists to the city, resulted in a series of new projects for LEEDS 2023 but also stimulated knowledge exchange and new confidence in international collaboration.

"My performance at Jazz at HEART was innovative in that it meant an international jazz ensemble could be programmed in a community-based, grass roots venue. This has not been done before since international acts usually aim to be programmed at the more commercially focused Leeds venues."
Sam Newbould Quintet

A lot of these international collaborations

126 Base: 72, MOE 11%
127 Base: 71 (Cultural Partners)
128 Base: 106 (partnerships)
129 Base: 71 (Cultural Partners)
130 Base: 111 (partnerships)
131 Base: 120, MOE 7%
132 Base: 78, 76, 75
133 Base: 136 (partnerships)

were developed remotely during lockdown and demonstrated new and perhaps more sustainable models for creative collaboration.

"We were really happy to have achieved 2 successful digital residencies collaborating with KL Shakespeare Players involving communities in Leeds and Kuala Lumpur ...We developed innovative ways of working online across time zones and have developed strong relationships which will last into the future."

Knaive Theatre, Restaurateur of Leeds

Supporting emerging artists

Emerging artists and small, lesser-known companies were involved across all this work. They were particularly supported by projects which provided seed funding and encouraged prototyping. The World in Our City, City in Our World programme in 2021, for example, provided an innovative and highly successful new structure. It partnered five Leeds based artists with artists from around the world to develop ideas that could be realised in Leeds and in the collaborating countries in 2023. Likewise For the Public Good project provided opportunities for international exchange and exploration between artists and academics to address climate change concerns using digital technologies.

"Overall it has been a great platform to experiment with something new and to foster relationships between Leeds and India."

Creative Technologist - For The Public Good

"the approach felt novel to me with its open-ended outcome style."

Creative Technologist - For The Public Good

LEEDS 2023 also hosted Broadening Horizons, an artist development programme for 20 international and Global Majority artists in West Yorkshire.

"I got to experience an incredible opportunity of an international research trip which gave me huge."

Artist - Broadening Horizons

"... Enabled me to develop practice methods that were much more suited to my changing access needs and circumstances. I believe that this time and project has given me a much clearer vision of my practice, especially in group-based and community settings."

Artist - Broadening Horizons

The connections between the artists and the communities in which they were working were profound, as described in Dr John Wright's research project – Artist Stories.

Seven artists who were commissioned by LEEDS 2023 related 'stories' about their projects. Throughout, there was a strong emphasis on the interrelationship between the neighbourhoods in which they were working and the projects they developed. This situated form of practice provided a rich texture to the artists' stories and highlighted their deep understanding of communities of place.

One artist described this as a "deep love", noting that it went further than simply an association with a locality and was about their shared heritage with others. In this instance their community of place was intrinsic to the way they convened their activity and the distinctive interrelationship to the cultural activities within the year of culture.

Artists expressed a deep sense of care for the work they developed, the people they collaborated with, and the visitors, audiences, participants and citizens who engaged in their projects. Notably this included the LEEDS 2023 volunteer team, with one artist stating that "our events would not have been the same without the dedication of the LEEDS 2023 volunteers."

Research by Dr John Wright, Research Associate for the Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds Artists Stories. [134]

134 Communities of place are places where people live, work, visit or spend a continuous portion of their time.

Scaling up

Organisations also had the opportunity to make work at scale in their home city and for some artists resident in Leeds this was their first opportunity to present work there.

"Being part of one of the partnership projects for LEEDS 2023 was a game changer for us in being able to deliver at the scale that the project required...and as a team led by a largely global majority and female creative team...We developed new ways of merging disciplines of circus, parkour, acrobatics and spoken word... not often seen in outdoor arts and at this scale. We have not yet seen Afrofuturism and spoken word explored within the circus arena - or a piece that explores so many influences in terms of African and Caribbean heritage through the lens of Afrofuturism, African folklore and sound system culture."

Ancient Futures Unlimited Theatre & Upswing

"We were grateful for the level of funding and the support to work with Martin Clarke, Production Manager (freelance), introduced to us by LEEDS 2023...We wouldn't have usually been able to produce such an artwork with our team's hours and small freelance pool."

The Tetley, Afrah Shafiq: st.itch

Some projects developed with seed funding were also scaled up in size or scope, which helped to build artists' confidence and experience as well creating a pipeline of interesting work for the Year.

Mixed Experience

In his qualitative study of artists' experiences, Dr John Wright (Centre for Cultural Value Post Doctoral Researcher) however concluded that the artists had had a mixed experience: "while they enjoyed the profile and professional development afforded by LEEDS 2023, they also experienced a lack of care at times".

While some artists felt they had received a high level of support, others highlighted issues - like poor communication, delays in contracting, a lack of fundraising support, mismanaged expectations - usually due to pressures on staff time and high staff churn.

Several artists suggested that LEEDS 2023 programming was over-stretched and that fewer, more considered and fully funded events could have been more effective.

A key finding of his research was the tension between the short-term demands of project-funded, time-limited festivals and artists' needs for longer term sustainability: "...nearly all the artists mentioned that it could raise profiles, but they also had strong reservations around its effectiveness in developing sustainable cultural ecosystems."

A stronger sector: Conclusions

Overall, it seems LEEDS 2023 did deliver on its promise to help build a stronger sector. 67% of Cultural Partners reported that they benefitted: from increased capacity as a result of involvement - whether resource, funding, skills development or additional jobs.

Beyond this, by encouraging and creating the right conditions for experimentation – especially in terms of international collaboration and community involvement[135] – much was achieved and the opportunity valued by the 700+ artists and Cultural Partners.

They increased the visibility of many who had previously worked beyond the mainstream view, importantly championing smaller companies, emerging LGTBQ, Global Majority and disabled artists, often fast-tracking them into the limelight through brokering new relationships. In doing so, they devised their own new ways of working and models – like Hidden Stories and The World in Our City, The City in Our World, which deserve to be repeated and scaled in their own right and could contribute much to the mega-event blueprint.

However, some local artists felt strongly that LEEDS 2023 had drained resources which could have been used to nurture things already happening around the region.

All this asks questions about how the LEEDS 2023 experience and learning can strengthen the cultural sector in Leeds over the longer-term and how, in particular, further progression routes for artists can be opened up and new partnerships and relationships capitalised.

135 Base: 78



100 days to go
Photographer: JMA Photography

3.2.2 A more diverse sector

A cultural sector that is representative of and connected with its diverse communities

This outcome covers two essential characteristics of the LEEDS 2023 model for capacity development. The first was to bring locally based artists, especially those from communities historically under-represented in the cultural sector, to the fore. The second was to promote more people-centred, community-linked practices. By doing so they were able to add value to the sector and ensure the programme and its legacy helped to make Leeds' cultural offer more inclusive and relevant into the future.

As we have seen in the previous section, the team encouraged and nurtured emerging Leeds-based artists, especially through slow-burn R&D projects prior to 2023. They also championed and funded community-based artists and created new platforms for celebrating their work. While there were specific initiatives to effect this outcome, LEEDS 2023's inclusive way of being and doing also helped.

Over two thirds of the Cultural Partners recognised that LEEDS 2023 boosted the visibility, representation and participation of Leeds' diverse communities.[136]

Working with communities

Programmes like MY LEEDS 2023 and Hidden Stories, and the Neighbourhood Hosts helped to keep the interests and creative talent of different communities on the top of the Year's agenda, alongside inspiring cultural organisations to work in a people-centred way.

"We developed enriched knowledge and understanding of working with artists who are willing to describe themselves of the Global Majority and make creative work connected to their ancestor stories. In turn we explored and became more confident in making connections with these artists and their work for family creative fun or within teaching and learning within formal learning settings."

Leeds Museums and Galleries - Leeds Art Galleryx HMI x LEEDS 2023 - Feeling Her Way/ Weight of Words Programme

A wide definition of culture

The programme invited people to pitch their own ideas of culture and integrated sport, food and more, creating touchpoints for diverse communities and creatives. This was part of the idea behind "letting culture loose": by embracing faith groups, drag clubs, sports centres and restaurants, unlikely collaborations and initiatives emerged.

136 Base: 78

The idea was to enable a wide range of potential partners to make culture "there for the taking". Local business North Brewing Co mounted "beer collaborations" to celebrate culture across the city, for example. Civic Skateboarding's "Big Weekend" - the the first street skating event permitted by Leeds City Council - included dedicated sessions for marginalised genders and the LGBTQIA+ community.[137]

As one Neighbourhood Host commented: I learned that the definition of culture is not exclusively about the arts, and that not all events work in all areas'.

Inclusive commissioning

Many commissions, though all fully artist-led, were planned to speak directly to under-represented communities, as a result of their subject matter, the lived experience of artists, track record of a company or partner organisation. Nest attracted a high number of disabled participants working in partnership with community organisations and Leeds Playhouse, for example, and there were many other examples:

"Working with the GRT [Gypsy, Roma, Traveller]... are often excluding from traditional cultural contexts, but as a result, we were able to develop a new way of community co-design... we are now developing other creative ideas together."

Spin Arts, Queenie and the Pooka

"Creating a closed residency with Jija Sohn for the QTIPOC [Queer, Trans and/or Intersex Person of Colour] community, in partnership with House of Flava, offered a way to engage a community who usually face many multiple barriers. Putting in place a "braver spaces" policy, involving a safe space coordinator and shifting expectations around production, enabled a space for something new to happen."

Yorkshire Dance Performing Gender: Dancing in Your Shoes

"My project entailed a rich and healing engagement with audiences, whose lives mirror, to varying degrees, that of mine, and who wish to discuss their cultural practices in a meaningful way in a safe place."

Art and Marriage

In the partner survey, opportunities to build new and more diverse connections, and to work in a more inclusive way were among the benefits of LEEDS 2023 which respondents valued most highly. 82% of partners agreed they were able to find, 'new ways of collaborating with artists and creatives', and 79% 'new and creative ways of engaging or collaborating with audiences, participants and/or communities'.[138]

"The project enabled me to dedicate time to outreach and engagement within censored communities, working closely and collaborating with creatives/activist/artists from the start."

Sayang: Si Polan

137 https://civicleeds.com/ https: www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xcHt-MDI2s

138 Base: 69 and 68

Leeds International African Arts Festival has emerged from a LEEDS 2023 seed fund process and had its second edition in 2024. Ndidi Nkwopara is an author and life coach and the creative and entrepreneurial force behind the Festival. With a background as a community worker and educator, Ndidi collaborated with emerging and established African writers, curating an anthology of lived experiences.

Selected as one of 40 Festival Managers for Atelier New York, Ndidi has gone on to engage in international discourse on the transformative power of arts and culture in addressing contemporary challenges. Her journey exemplifies the profound impact of leveraging community engagement and creative expression to bring about positive change.

"LEEDS 2023 gave the underserved African community a platform. Part of the overall vision for the year of culture was around awakening the creative giant within – and it did, in so many of us, including me. It's been life changing."
Ndidi Nkwopara, established Leeds International African Arts Festival

Forgotten Battles, Royal Armouries
Photographer: Rob Freeman



A representative community

All these approaches combined to help ensure that the wider LEEDS 2023 community of artists, creatives, staff, apprentices and placements were genuinely representative of Leeds, as compared with general trends in the cultural workforce. Many came from the city, and were as ethnically diverse as the population of Leeds: 32% of artists and creatives[139] and 18% of staff, apprentices and placements[140] were Global Majority, compared to 21% in the population. 18% of artists and creatives,[141] and 16% of staff, apprentices and placements[142] identified as D/deaf or disabled person with a comparable figure of 17% in Leeds' population.[143] 3% of artists and creatives,[144] and 5% of staff, apprentices and placements[145] identified as non-binary.

More diverse sector: Conclusions

LEEDS 2023 took active steps to champion and promote local and emerging artists and built trusting relationships with them. Despite the frustrations of some (3.3.2 Supporting Emerging Artists) about a stretched team, the majority praised the support of the LEEDS 2023 team and 78% of artists and creatives said they had 'increased my reputation or profile locally'.[146]

It is perhaps one of its most significant achievements that it built both a community and a programme which felt, looked and sounded like the many cultures that make Leeds the city it is today. They did it by unearthing and supporting upward of 700 different creatives and artists, and by trusting in their creativity to develop ideas and responses which were authentically representative of, and connected with, Leeds' diverse communities.

They also modelled inclusivity to others, and their innovations in accessible and community-led practice are already being adopted.

As we have observed elsewhere, the comments of participating creatives and audiences suggest that it was not just what they did, but how they did it that mattered. The consistency and depth of their commitment to access and an intersectional approach fostered trust and mutual respect, making LEEDS 2023 itself a diverse creative community.

This community is a key asset that LEEDS 2023 leaves in its wake and supporting it to grow and develop must be a priority for legacy building.

139 Base: 123, MOE 8%
140 Base: 109, MOE 8%
141 Base: 120, MOE 7%
142 Base: 108, MOE 7%
143 Office for National Statistics Census 2021 asks, 'Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?', the LEEDS 2023 surveys asked, 'Do you identify as a D/deaf or disabled person, or have a long-term health condition?', the data is therefore not directly equivalent.
144 Base: 125, MOE 9%
145 Base: 110, MOE 9%
146 Base: 120, MOE 7%

3.2.3 New professional opportunity

There is job growth in the cultural and creative sectors and more artists and cultural professionals choose to live and work in the city.

LEEDS 2023 was regarded by stakeholders as an opportunity to increase the creative workforce in the city. Further, and despite the now notorious difficulty mega-events seem to have in leaving an employment legacy, there was also an expectation that it would be able to develop the creative job market into the long term.

Employment

Between LEEDS 2023 and its partners, at least an additional 700 jobs were created to deliver the year.

Leeds Culture Trust employed 125 people over the full period of its operation, plus 808 apprentices & placements and 418 freelancers. Over three quarters of staff, apprentices and placements lived in Leeds, 43% of whom had no previous experience of working in the creative or cultural industries.[147]

LEEDS 2023 was a space for established and emerging cultural professionals to develop their experience. 77% were motivated to get involved 'to learn something / develop skills'.[148] 75% felt encouraged to develop a career in the cultural and creative sectors as a result of their involvement,[149] and just under half expected to stay and work in the sector in Leeds.[150] LEEDS 2023 had also helped staff, apprentices and placements to develop their networks – in Leeds, nationally and internationally - over half saying they thought this would be useful in their future careers.

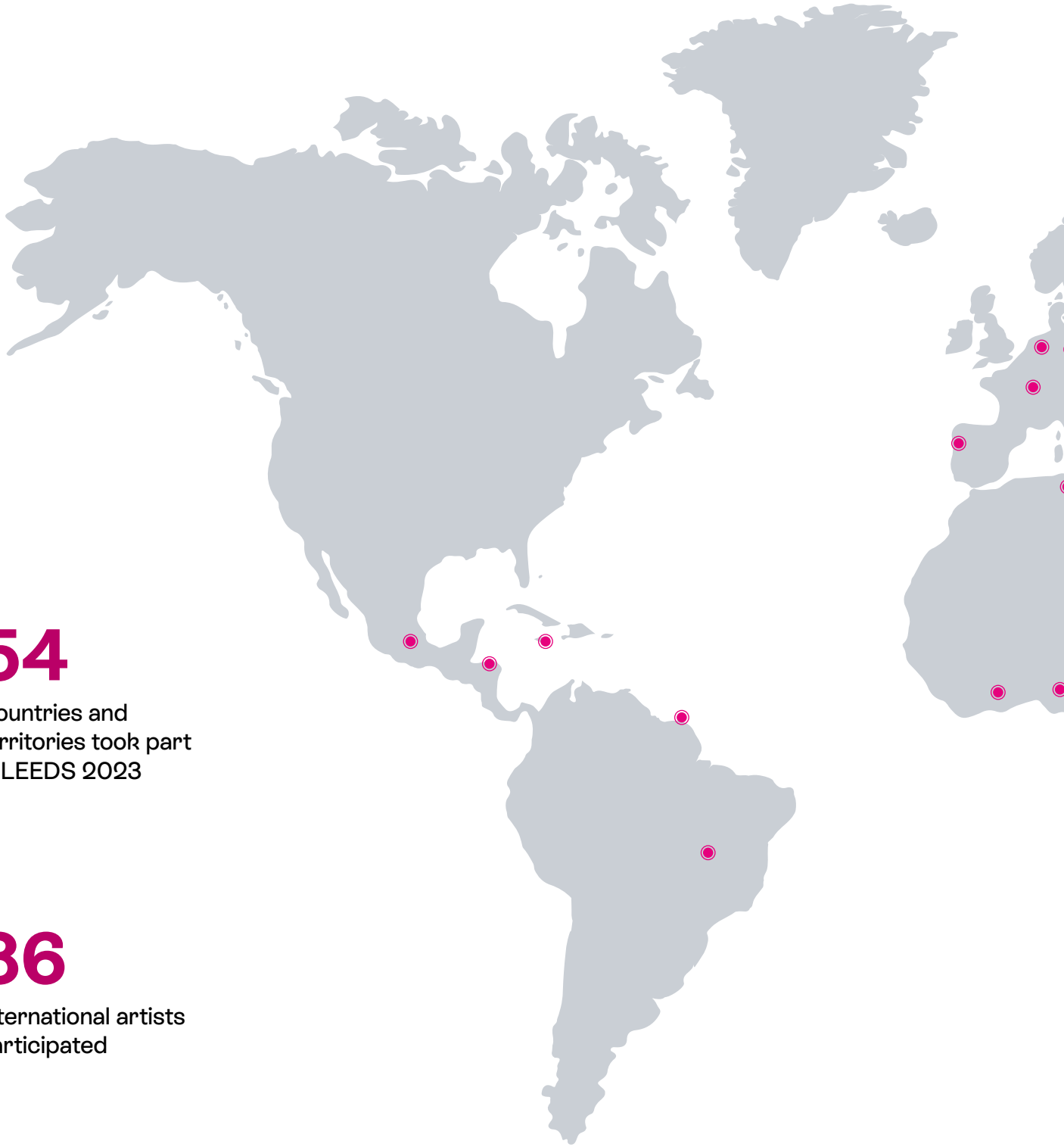
The team was augmented by 1,008 volunteers who gave their time directly, two thirds of whom, as we have seen above, thought they would go on to volunteer for other cultural activities in future.

These numbers were boosted by the Cultural Partners: 1,234 people were involved in delivering these projects, including 318 full-time roles (228 of whom were freelancers or contracted).[151] Cultural Partners also offered 35 apprenticeships, training opportunities or work placements, as well as engaging 727 volunteers of their own, aside from the LEEDS 2023 volunteer programme.[152]

Priority was also given to procurement benefiting Leeds based organisations, further boosting the value of LEEDS 2023 in the city.

147 Base: 60, MOE 13%
148 Base: 60, MOE 9%
149 Base: 60, MOE 12%
150 Base: 18, MOE 23%
151 Base: 45
152 Base: 32, 41

With over 175 languages spoken, Leeds is one of the UK's most culturally exciting and diverse cities. This is one of the city's greatest strengths.



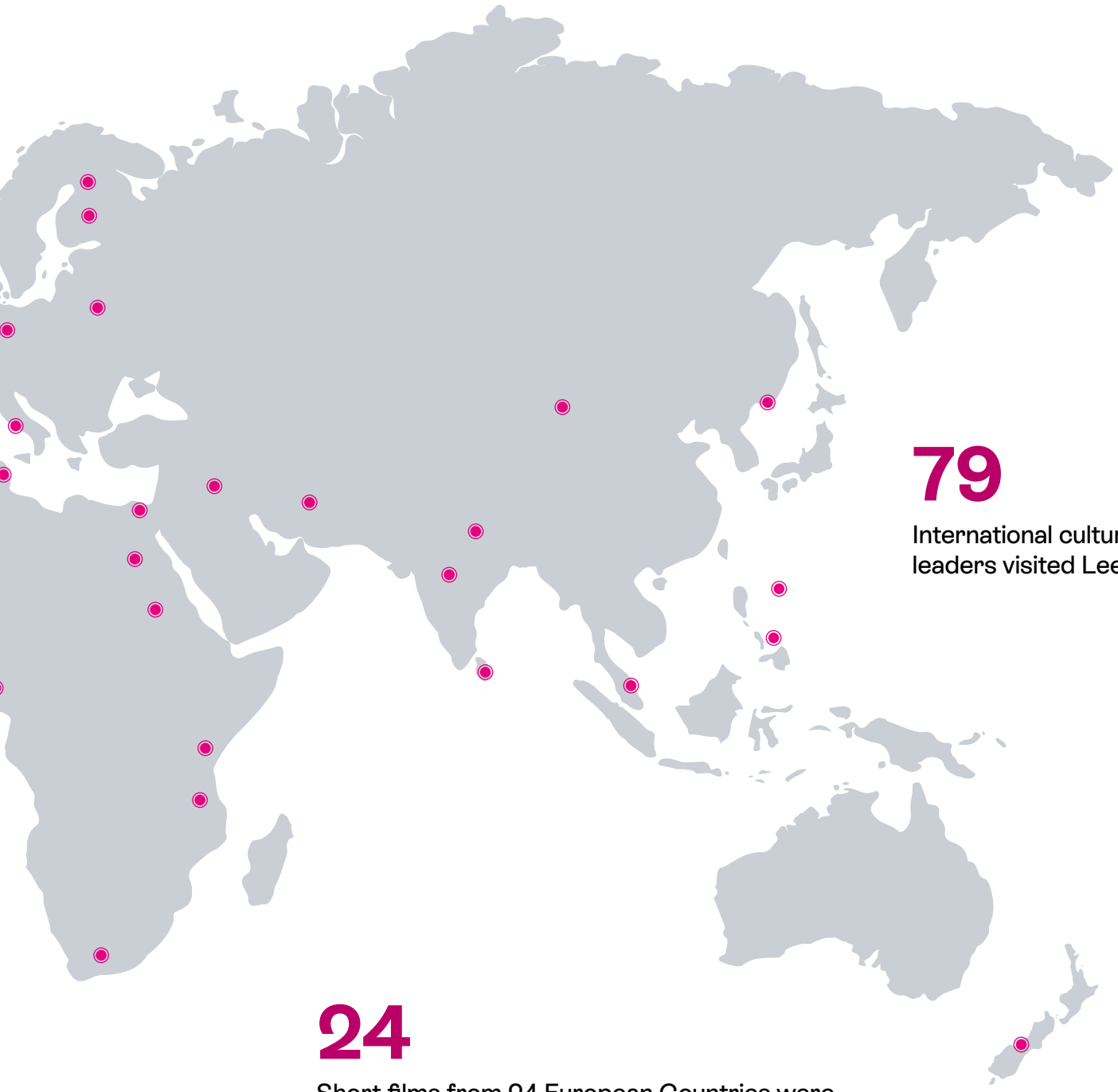
54

Countries and territories took part in LEEDS 2023

86

International artists participated

By using the lens of Leeds's diaspora to connect people and communities, the Year of Culture has helped create a whole new world in the city.



79

International cultural leaders visited Leeds

24

Short films from 24 European Countries were presented as part of EUNIC: In Short with the Europe Union Delegation to the UK.

Professional opportunities

LEEDS 2023 offered a valuable career boost for Leeds-based artists. 41% of all artists involved, and 51% of Leeds-based artists, identified themselves as emerging or just entering the profession,[153] 23% were doing some other kind of training, education or professional development.[154] Around a third reported that they did not have access to suitable, affordable professional development opportunities;[155] LEEDS 2023 filled that gap, at least temporarily, and the new opportunities offered were taken up particularly by people who had left or were operating outside an educational environment.

The Leeds-based artists in John Wright's study mostly felt that local, place-based investment in existing solutions might have served their careers better. One artist articulated this point: "The ideal alternative [is] longer term funding at a meaningful level and for core development rather than 'new' projects (the holy grail!!!)."

Realising ambitions

86%[156] of artists and creatives and 99%[157] of Cultural Partners involved agreed 'I was able to achieve my vision and ambition as part of LEEDS 2023'.

"Our partnership with LEEDS 2023 has been beneficial... The experience has been a learning opportunity, contributing to the professional growth of our team and enhancing our ability to organise community activities."

Leeds Chinese Community School, Chinese Dance and Language Workshop and 'Taste of China' Workshops

"Increase my visibility in the place-making environment, the built environment and community engagement and consultation arena."

Artist or creative working in MY LEEDS 2023

"All the artists' stories give a sense that the commissioned projects have produced a personal and lasting set of learnings and professional development. One artist said: "I never imagined wearing the hat of a creative producer. Another reported that they had started an ongoing dialogue with Leeds City Council as a result of their project and presented at an international conference."

Research by Dr John Wright, Research Associate for the Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds Artists Stories

153 Base: 124, MOE 9% (Base: 72, MOE 12%)
154 Base: 124, MOE 7%
155 Base: 118, MOE 9%
156 86% strongly agree or agree. Base:124, MOE 9%
157 81% achieved to a large extent, 18% to some extent. Base: 79

Supporting cultural producers

LEEDS 2023 supported young and emerging artists, producers and organisations to develop their ideas and produce project plans. There were a range of targeted development programmes, e.g. for Global Majority Artists, or Early Career Music Promoters. Projects gave a wide range of artists and creatives a 'first' – an exhibition, a partnership or an opportunity to scale up or work with an established company or institution.

Career entry

Through LEEDS 2023 placements, internships and work experience programme, 808 young people gained experience and insight into the sector. Survey data indicates 85% discovered new areas of the cultural/ creative industries that they were not previously aware of and 94% 'felt inspired' by their involvement.[158]

Professional stress

The organisation had high standards for staff welfare and fair working practices - especially because the ambition was to promote the cultural sector as a career choice to new entrants. Despite these intentions, working for LEEDS 2023 proved highly stressful for some. High profile, high impact events generally make for high stress working environments, loved by some and loathed by others. Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that many people found the experience of working at LEEDS 2023 pretty demanding, possibly above and beyond what was to have been expected. Staff met challenges with ingenuity, flexibility and a lot of hard graft. But for some, this took its toll and staff comments express mixed feelings about the experience.

"Whilst I've enjoyed elements of working here, mainly the colleagues and friendly, hardworking individuals that are the heart of this organisation, I have found the environment challenging and have often not looked forward to coming to work.

It was a fantastic experience, but it requires a resilience and stamina as its incredibly fast paced and requires a high level of emotional labour."

Staff, apprentices & placements

Directors reported a high level of staff churn. As noted elsewhere, time and resource pressures also meant the team was stretched thin, making for patchiness in where and how they could apply their efforts. While Cultural Partners, placements and volunteers were quick to praise the support and expertise the staff team offered, some felt that time pressures left them short-changed.

"Support was good however due to changing staff it often meant starting from square one every time something needed attention."

Neighbourhood Hosts Study

"I don't think there were enough staff to avoid people slipping through the net. There were a few of us who were just expected to get on with it and always seemed to be chasing for support and answers."

Neighbourhood Hosts Study

158 Placements / Apprentices / Internships. Base: 34

Neighbourhood Hosts gained much in terms of professional development, but many felt they had to put in more time than their paid 6 hours a week. Hosts on average spent over 13 hours per week working on LEEDS 2023[159], not including additional training and cohort meetings. This was challenging as many were managing the role alongside other jobs or caring responsibilities.

Again, this tells a story of ambition, but also of trying to do a lot with not quite enough.

Future career opportunity

Most staff, apprentices and placements felt their career prospects had been improved: 57% said they had succeeded in increasing their personal reputation or profile, 69% in improving their employability in the cultural / creative sector, and a large minority 47% had developed their leadership skills.[160] 73% discovered new areas of the cultural / creative industries that they were not previously aware of[161] and 80% 'felt inspired by my involvement with LEEDS 2023'.[162] 44% expected to be based in Leeds going forward.[163]

"Working for LEEDS 2023 was an absolute pleasure as they proved extremely supportive in developing my personal skills and were always welcoming, so I always felt like a contributing member of the LEEDS 2023 community."

Staff, apprentices & placements

"I am continuing my professional journey in supporting people who are driven to support others, and to lead change in the world, to do so while being their very best, healthiest, most hopeful selves - across sectors."

Staff, apprentices & placements

The 33 Neighbourhood Hosts developed skills in the heart of their own community, and many of them represent particular career success stories, going on to start or further develop roles in the cultural or community development sectors, sometimes continuing as an ambassador and/ facilitator in their area more informally.

"[Our Neighbourhood Host] did an amazing job organising and I saw her confidence build each day despite the odds! Fabulous delivery and support from LEEDS 2023."

Staff, apprentices & placements

Hosts were also able to support and encourage each other on these career journeys thanks to the trusting relationships they had developed through their peer support and cohort learning network. The professional development aspect of the Neighbourhood Hosts programme was the most valued by Hosts themselves, with many rating the network as the most important element. Some felt that the more formal skills development ingredient should have been more tailored, given the breadth and diversity of Hosts' experience.

159 Base: 27
160 Base: 58, MOE 8%
161 Base: 60, MOE 13%
162 Base: 60, MOE 13%
163 Base: 18, MOE 23%

At the end of 2023, anecdotal evidence was strong that the LEEDS 2023 team were using their experience in new roles, including as a community radio facilitator at Chapel FM, director/producer for Sunny Bank Mills and music educator at Opera North, in turn bringing value to those organisations. Some have joined the growing mega-event community, some have found new international opportunities. Others were inspired to continue their education, e.g. doing a PhD at University of Leeds in the School of Performance and Cultural Industries.

Professional opportunity: Conclusions

Whether or not increases in the creative workforce will be sustained, however, remains of course to be seen. In the immediate term, team members and partners who benefitted from employment or skills development through LEEDS 2023 have gone on to roles with Bradford 2025, and, looking ahead, Leeds is anticipating the arrival of some major new cultural institutions who will benefit from an upskilled workforce. And it seems there is more to play for with greater cultural devolution on the horizon. Leeds currently has the edge over many UK cities in terms of its newly boosted creative workforce and capacity for cultural placemaking.

However, sustained investment and tailored programmes will be required to reap the potential rewards.

3.2.4 Creative infrastructure

There will be physical legacies in sculptures and murals and it will pave the way for potential new infrastructure such as the British Library, the National Poetry Centre and East Leeds Pavilion.

LEEDS 2023 leaves a legacy of public art, murals, newly developed public spaces and new venues. The programme of annual festivals and events continues to grow, and LEEDS 2023 has demonstrated the value of the city's commitment to investment in public spaces beyond the city centre. LEEDS 2023 marked the city's cultural ambition and paved the way for an increase in Arts Council England funding (see below (3.4.2) and the potential arrival of The National Poetry Centre and British Library North.

LEEDS 2023 also leaves an intangible legacy to the city in the form of a new dynamism in the creative sector, apparent in relationships, ways of working and a stock of ideas and learning.

Winners and Losers

Some Leeds-based artists expressed concern however that LEEDS 2023 was happening alongside the loss of some of the city's important small venues. This includes closure of The Tetley, following non-renewal of the lease (the producing organisation which was based there continued as Yorkshire Contemporary), Sheaf Street, and Aire Place Studios, while Seagulls and Open Source were left at risk. Although people accepted that multiple factors contributed to these closures and LEEDS 2023 was not directly responsible, there was concern about its real legacy: "the year of culture has done nothing to develop legacies in those terms but has also not generated any debate about it." (John Wright, Artists' Experiences of LEEDS 2023)

A legacy of relationships

More community hubs and groups are now working with artists and creatives; volunteers want to do more with cultural organisations; museums are collaborating with communities; and international artists are embedded with cultural organisations small and large. New ways of embedding creativity across the city are evident in murals representing Leeds' cultural heritage and in an expanded annual events calendar.

Sector interviewees confirmed that LEEDS 2023 has been an influence on the sector talking and working together – like the re-launch of its Local Cultural Education Partnership as 'Leeds 33', which signals new ambition to boost cultural education on the back of their achievements.

New process blueprints

LEEDS 2023 developed a number of useful models and approaches, from the young people-led toolkit, to pioneering innovations in access, and multi-partner project models.

Compass Live's research on co-creativity[164] during 2023 offers an interesting deep-dive.

Organisations are already building on community-led approaches: Royal Armouries are working with the LGBTQ+ community to influence their exhibitions and Thackray Museum working with younger people.

The Neighbourhood Hosts model

This approach, as we have variously noted, helped to make sure LEEDS 2023 was everywhere in city – and the city was everywhere in LEEDS 2023. It was an important innovation, held up as an interesting, embedded model with potential to support longform place-making events. It was one of the key ideas LEEDS 2023 contributed to Culture Next, the network which supports current and former ECoC candidate cities to create successful culture-led urban development programmes and policies.

Hosts were aware of being part of a pioneering initiative and were mostly generous in their feedback. Nevertheless, they did experience challenges.

"Emails often went unanswered, it was clear we were not being prioritised amongst other deadlines... It seemed obvious the staff were running over capacity and we did not want to further burden them. Feedback from the community was not heeded and although in sessions we were able to talk about this, nothing was furthered or addressed"

In the Neighbourhood Hosts Study, Dr Alex De Little (Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds) observes that the programme could have achieved greater and more lasting community impact with sufficient resources. A programme like this, he suggests, requires longer time to develop, a greater investment in research and engagement, and more support on the ground, including for Hosts as individuals, if it is to drive transformative co-creation.

Now what?

As comments show, hosts and others had to field the 'now what?' question without a clear answer. A perennial challenge for most time limited programmes, this question was frequently asked by communities with next-stage ideas and inspiration but a lack of resource or infrastructure to realise their potential.

The problem started early, within the otherwise successful community-based projects like My World My City My Neighbourhood, MY LEEDS 2023 and even Hidden Stories. In each case an 'output' emerged from a creative and collaborative process, an event or artwork, some in the spotlight of the LEEDS 2023 main programme. But there was limited legacy opportunity for newly built community relationships after the events themselves.

Now what? still presents as a significant challenge – not just within the model – but for artists and communities left hanging, now that LEEDS 2023 has moved on. New found skills, understanding or experience count for something, but what shape of infrastructure is now required?

164 Making With - Compass Live Art / Compass Festival

Creative infrastructure: Conclusions

LEEDS 2023 has boosted the city's tangible infrastructure, having opened up new venues like Headingley Stadium and RSPB St Aidan's Nature Park and other community venues to cultural activity, and demonstrated the possibilities for the city's public realm developments such as City Square, as well as paving the way for new national organisations. The annual programme of festivals and events – like Leeds African Arts Festival, Leeds Lit Festival, Leeds Jazz Festival – will continue on a stronger footing. Similarly, and despite the loss of important small venues, other organisations have consolidated their position, adopting new practices, benefiting from increased profile or revenue streams – The Performance Ensemble and Transform, for example, became Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations 2022-2027.

They are all part of a city which now has bolder creative ambitions and the wherewithal to achieve them: more experience and skills, a diverse new workforce, a mature network of collaborative relationships within the city and internationally, new neighbourhood connections, and dynamic integration with its universities and City Council.

LEEDS 2023 created an intangible infrastructure of new relationships and new knowledge. This may be the most valuable aspect of its legacy, making the ideal foundations for a more joined-up and strategically aligned approach to creative place-making and culture-led regeneration.

3.3 Economic Value

Accelerating growth through culture

Leeds is a city with a strong economy, constantly in development. As outlined in Chapter 1, it is growing as the UK's second centre for finance after London, is experiencing growth in other industries, and has benefitted from physical development, such as the new South Bank. The Creative Industries are also economically important, with a direct GVA contribution to Leeds of nearly £2 billion. [165]

The ECoC bid consolidated other initiatives to strengthen its cultural sector as complementary. Leeds bid successfully for the Tour de France Grand Depart in 2014 and attracted Channel 4 to bring its HQ to the city. Strategies to open up public spaces were underway. The development of the National Poetry Centre and potential of the British Library North are significant new assets for the city. The key economic role of LEEDS 2023 was to capitalise on these other investments, providing what many stakeholders in interviews referred to as a 'spring-board'.

Potential Economic Impact

This perspective was reflected in an analysis of the potential economic impacts of LEEDS 2023, commissioned from BOP Consulting in 2021.[166] Its report noted that, despite having significant cultural assets and nationally recognised companies, Leeds lagged behind comparative UK cities in terms of the performance of its visitor economy.

Drawing on evidence of impact from UK Cities of Culture and European Capitals of Culture, and taking into account the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the BOP Consulting Report identified three key opportunities, which were then included in the LEEDS 2023 outcome framework:

- Boost to the creative industries, tourism and sport through visibility: leverage assets through increased media coverage and improved perceptions (see 3.4.1).
- Increased investment and job growth: the potential to close the gap on Leeds performance in the Creative Industries, compared especially to Greater Manchester's, via greater access to funding or networks (see 3.4.2).
- Visitor economy: an increase in visitor numbers and spend. BOP predicted a return on investment of 6 to 1 for Leeds, based on the uplifts in visitor spend (see 3.4.3).

165 GVA figures derived by combining GVA-per-worker from the Annual Business Survey (ABS) and employment data from BRES – both published by the ONS
166 'Measuring the impact of LEEDS 2023' (March 2021) Reporting to LEEDS 2023 by BOP Consulting

BOP also noted the other known indirect economic potential for years of culture, without putting a specific value on them, especially for the city to capitalise on regional and national priorities, and thereby attract additional investment. These included:

- Making a contribution to public policy in relation to physical health, wellbeing and social cohesion, mitigating the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health and supporting educational catch-up.
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority's prioritisation of job creation in tourist, creative industries and sports sectors and to increase productivity by creating jobs in sectors with above average earnings (the creative sector salary on average is £40,000 compared to a West Yorkshire average of £28,000).
- Inspiring people to take up study or consider work in the creative industries, giving a boost to Leeds' higher education sector.
- For the cultural sector, which economy might benefit through an increased public interest in attending or participation.
- Strengthening national institutions relocating out of London and creative programmes supporting the recovery of high streets.

As we have seen in the sections above, LEEDS 2023 made efforts to contribute to all these agendas and, in Chapter 4, that they represent some of the best legacy opportunities.

Measuring impact

Based on these top-level estimates, BOP forecast that LEEDS 2023 could generate as much as £100 million direct and indirect additional impact for the visitor economy in-year. However, BOP have noted that estimates were not tested against the specifics of the full strategy and programme. Its analysis was also based on a model that benchmarked against Years of Culture that benefitted from a designation (whether European or UK), whereas LEEDS 2023 did not benefit from such a designation. Moreover, this was benchmarking against programmes which focused on a series of headline events (not long-running projects). Accordingly, the estimated indicators were somewhat ambitious and not intended as KPIs.

We should also note that, the full range of tools and data sources needed to measure impact across the whole of LEEDS 2023 were beyond the evaluation brief and resources available. Importantly, much of the economic benefit anticipated would be expected to be realised over the long-term and needs to be tracked over the next five to seven years.

3.3.1 Profile of Leeds

There is a positive change in perceptions of Leeds as a city and an increase in its national and international profile.

BOP's analysis of the foundational requirements to support a city's economic growth indicates that increasing profile and changing perceptions are critical. As the original bid documents highlight, this was one of the key goals of the ECoC bid. There was a city-wide ambition for Leeds to raise its profile in a national and international context. Following on from other city-wide development initiatives, it was felt that culture was a vital lever in boosting Leeds' profile, but could be doing more.

"I think LEEDS 2023 can help grow, connect and consolidate our city's creative side, encouraging people to work together towards a common aim and see Leeds' profile grow as a unique hub for culture." [167]
The Yorkshire Post

New Narrative & Profile

The Promote strand of LEEDS 2023 set out to change perceptions by introducing a new narrative about Leeds, linked to the spirit of "doing it anyway", a city with hidden creative depths, encapsulated in the film 'Letting Culture Loose: a film about quiet greatness', by Sodium Films.[168] The brand aimed to encapsulate the ambition to, "help reframe the idea of 'culture' and a visual identity that will promote Leeds as an incredible cultural city".[169] This story was told in a press campaign and energetic PR, with 2,172 pieces of editorial reaching an estimated circulation of 707,296,446 amounting to over 2.2 million unique views per (UVM) month - representing a substantial online reach for coverage. The 'Letting Culture Loose' brand maintained momentum through the year, and seemed to cut through in a crowded market over an extended period of time. There were strong local media partnerships with the BBC and Yorkshire Evening Post for key moments across the year, for example the high-profile ticketing process for the opening show, The Awakening (with audience members asked to submit their own original artwork to a ballot to secure tickets and have their artwork be part of the show), all of which contributed to creating significant profile and shifting the perception of what LEEDS 2023 had to offer.

The media reach was local, national and international with The New Zealand Times commenting on the Leeds 'Epic Opening Ceremony' and Channel 4 reporting live from Headingley Stadium on the night of the opening saying Leeds is,

167 https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/leeds-2023-to-help-create-powerhouse-of-culture-across-north-of-england-as-corinne-bailey-rae-and-kaiser-chiefs-simon-rix-announced-as-patrons-3249556
168 Letting Culture Loose — Sodium Films
169 How we arrived at 'Letting Culture Loose' | by LEEDS 2023 | Medium

"Refusing to be quiet, the unofficial capital of Yorkshire, proudly having its say."

"If the opening ceremony of LEEDS 2023 is anything to go by, the city's year of culture will be loud, expressive and incredibly diverse."

Robyn Vinter, The Guardian

"Little surprise, then, that its opening show should rise, Phoenix-like, from what were less than auspicious circumstances" Leeds defies the odds and the rain."

Mark Brown, Daily Telegraph

Further profile was attracted through digital and broadcast partnership projects, such as with The Space, Sky Arts, Studio 12 (Leeds City Council) or the BBC profiling Leeds through the eyes of its emerging creatives.

The city also hosted 80+ cultural leaders including the EU Ambassador and remained a key partner of the ECoC family through the Culture Next programme. Several cultural and creative industries sector conferences were attracted to Leeds for their 2023 editions. The LEEDS 2023 team were prolific in their responses to invitations to talk about and advocate for culture and LEEDS 2023 nationally and internationally. Leeds City Council also got the chance to promote the city's cultural events and activity at MIPIM in Cannes which focused on culture and cities.

LEEDS 2023 helped the city sell its assets, including Leeds' rich cultural and creative heritage and its character as a forward thinking city at the core of its narrative. Audience surveys showed an increase in pride in the city with 85% [170] stating that the event or activity had made them proud to live in Leeds. There was also a high level of discovery (78% of audiences[171]) about the people, places and culture of Leeds through engaging with the programme.

Although some stakeholders interviewed expressed a degree of disappointment with what they perceived as a lack of large-scale popular events, the sector generally felt it had brought Leeds to the world's attention. 73% of Cultural Partners, for example, though it had 'improved the city's cultural profile'.[172]

Criticism was nevertheless levelled at the lack of visibility in the media and through public campaigns. There is no doubt, that while media relationships were strong, the lack of a single large Media Partner hampered development of the LEEDS 2023 national profile. The absence of this and the door-opening effect of an official designation were probably responsible for not meeting expectations for the profile of the year – which under such circumstances may have been set too high. These findings may also highlight the tension between achieving at an embedded local level and making a big splash at a national one.

170 Base (weighted): 1,910, MOE 2%
171 Base (weighted): 2,489, MOE 2%
172 Base: 77

Corporate investment

The focus on Leeds and its culture provided a platform for conversations about the impacts of culture for attracting wider investment in the city.

The ING publication ranks Key and Core cities across the UK according to their digital visibility, and correlates this with soft power, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) output and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows – producing a combined benchmark. In 2023 Leeds was ranked number 8 on share of online conversations, after London, Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham and Newcastle, and it was ranked second in the ING Media Investment Opportunity ranking. The 2024 report recognises that consistently, 'The UK's most digitally visible cities are capitalising on culture to drive investment'. Leeds maintained its ranking into 2024 at number 9 for share of online conversations.

Other business opportunities which came Leeds' way continued its position as a major conference destination, including UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum which generated £5.5 million in economic return for the city in 2022 and for 2023 the focus was on 'Culture as a catalyst post Covid'.

Perceptions of Leeds: Conclusions

In a competitive market, cities need vehicles to talk about themselves and continually 'sell their assets'. Despite challenges, it seems LEEDS 2023 did deliver on that need, cutting through with a strong narrative.

"It's changed the identity of Leeds, to show that Leeds has a multiplicity of identities, not a static culture, but one that can and will change over time."

2024 stakeholder interview

However, with attention moving rapidly to Bradford 2025, there has been limited post-analysis media to draw on or leverage. Leeds will now need to take proactive steps to sustain its cultural profile if it is to capitalise on LEEDS 2023.

3.3.2 Investment

There continues to be long-term investment in culture in Leeds and the region

In addition to bringing immediate investment as a result of the year of culture, the ambition was for LEEDS 2023 to help the city increase the level of investment in culture over the longer-term.

While we know how much investment LEEDS 2023 attracted, it is of course still too soon to call what the long-term effect will be.

Funder investment in LEEDS 2023

The original goal was for a £35 million programme with around one third coming from the Council but it soon became clear, post Covid-19 pandemic, that this was too ambitious in a challenging fundraising climate, as even the City Council had to reduce its contribution by 15% from £12 million to £10.6 million, in the context of helping to address growing financial pressures.

Against this backdrop, funder investment was still significant. Leeds Culture Trust attracted a total of £13.2 million funds in addition to Leeds City Council's £10.6 million investment. Arts Council England invested £1.6 million in LEEDS 2023, National Lottery Heritage Fund £2.7 million and West Yorkshire Combined Authority £1.4 million (see 2.7.5), and the Trust raised the remainder through a variety of Trusts and Foundations and private or corporate channels, alongside a substantial £400,000 from the British Council to support international connections.

National funding across the city

There was an increase in Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding in the period - 54% of which allocated to major organisations with national reach and employing over 100 people, the remainder to smaller organisations. Total regular funding for Leeds based organisations went up by 20%, from £350,976,574 for 2018-22 to £420,744,948 for 2023-26. This included three new NPOs.

Although NPO applications were made in 2022, we can still speculate that the prospect of LEEDS 2023 may have contributed to this uplift. Two new NPOs, The Performance Ensemble and Transform, delivered Partner Strand projects for LEEDS 2023 taking the Leeds ACE NPO number to 25 organisations (compared to 34 in Manchester). We should note as context that Arts Council England attempted in this funding round to distribute a higher percentage of its Portfolio funding outside London and the South East.

The number of successful applications for all other kinds of Arts Council England funding, however, fell from 122 to 98, despite the number of applications increasing from 255 to 315. This may represent an air of positivity for the sector going into 2023 which was not matched by Arts Council England. It may even suggest a cannibalising effect, noted in other major events, in which LEEDS 2023 soaked up any additional available funds.

National Lottery Heritage Fund investment in Leeds totalled £11 million between 2019/20 and 2023/24, including three grants in the £250,000 - £5 million bracket. 103 applications were received by The Heritage Fund since 2019/20, of which 71 were successful. There are no benchmarks to compare this 'win rate' to.

City and regional funding

Leeds City Council has a longstanding commitment of investing in and supporting cultural and creative activities in the city through its arts@leeds and Leeds Inspired cultural grants programmes. Through these schemes, investment totalled £1.8 million in 2022/23. These funding programmes were reviewed during 2022 to bring them together under one programme and in 2023 the Leeds Cultural Investment Programme (LCIP) was launched. With a boost from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), administered by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, funding provided through the LCIP increased to £2.07 million by 2024/25. Alongside this, Arts Council England provided additional support to enable the council to explore a cultural compact model for the city as part of the LEEDS 2023 legacy.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) investment has been significant across a number of 'years of culture in the region', including funding for The WOW Barn as part of LEEDS 2023. In parallel with LEEDS 2023, WYCA launched its 'You Can Make It Here' programme - a £2.3 million package of skills and business support for the region's creative industries, including capital grants to increase accessibility for disabled artists and audiences to venues and events.

Increase in jobs in culture, leisure and tourism

In their 2021 Report, BOP recommended a focus on closing the gap between Leeds and Manchester in terms of performance in the Creative Industries. While Leeds employed more people in this sector (nearly 26,000) than Manchester (over 24,000),[173] Leeds population is larger at circa. 800k compared to Manchester's 550k, per capita therefore Leeds Creative Industries sector is under-performing in comparison. However, Greater Manchester out-performs West Yorkshire, with the sector contributing over £5 billion in GVA to Greater Manchester, compared to nearer £3 billion for West Yorkshire, indicating that there is a significant economic potential to the city region from a strengthened creative sector.[174] BOP concluded that Leeds might expect to benefit from 2,300 extra jobs in the Creative Industries as a legacy of LEEDS 2023 with a rate of specialisation in these sectors equivalent to that of Manchester. However, this will be for the City to monitor going forward.

Collecting this data was beyond the scope of this evaluation brief but we strongly recommend that growth in creative jobs in particular are tracked by the city in future analysis.

Cultural investment: Conclusion

Leeds City Council's investment in LEEDS 2023 leveraged a considerable level of match

173 Based on Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES), Office of National Statistics (ONS) data.
174 GVA figures derived by combining GVA-per-worker from the Annual Business Survey (ABS) and employment data from BRES – both published by the ONS.

funding, in a period of economic turmoil. LEEDS 2023 also reinvested in partners and sector development its partners were able to attract additional investment for a range of projects. It is harder to make the case that it helped increase funding for others independently of the Year, and, like other major events of this scale, may even have cannibalised some funding.

In comparison, Coventry raised £40.6 million for UK City of Culture 2021 for the management and delivery of the programme, and indications of an additional £71.7 million for improvement of Coventry's cultural and heritage assets, at least in part due to the designation.[175] Hull UK City of Culture 2017 raised a total of £32.8 million to deliver the programme.[176] However, given the different definitions, data and impact measurement models used, making comparisons is of limited value. Further, the context differs significantly as, by comparison, both Coventry's and Hull's culture sectors were historically under-invested. Both cities also had the advantage of a relatively uninterrupted development period of several years (although Coventry was ultimately significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic). Nevertheless this hints at the value of a City of Culture designation over "doing it anyway".

Future investment

It is still hard to predict with any accuracy if and by how much LEEDS 2023 will have helped to increase long-term investment in culture in Leeds.

Opportunities may have reduced. Regional and national funders have of course shifted their focus to Bradford 2025 and it is still difficult to know if this is likely to detract or consolidate LEEDS 2023's investment legacy.

On the other hand, there are strategic opportunities to lever the sector development LEEDS 2023 has achieved. The two major capital projects already in place may have benefitted from additional profile. Its legacy will be critical in Leeds' ability to make the most of cultural devolution, given how strongly it modelled potential approaches to inclusive cultural place-making with local involvement and decision-making. This could be well supported by West Yorkshire Combined Authority's particular focus on the role of culture in wellbeing and economic growth.[177] Similarly, its legacy of partnership and collaboration also paves the way for the creation of a place-based partnership model with potential to unlock investment in a changing economic and political context.

The Year delivered on Leeds' Inclusive Growth Strategy priorities, connecting and strengthening communities, and showcasing the potential of the city centre and local high streets,[178] alongside promoting Leeds as a global destination for people to visit, live, work, study and invest in.

Realising the benefits of potential legacy in any intentional way will of course require an active strategy underpinned by an investment framework supported by the city and West Yorkshire region.

175 https://coventry21evaluation.info/strategy-reports/final-evaluation-report/
176 https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/research/institutes/culture-place-and-policy-institute/report/cultural-transformations-the-impacts-of-hull-uk-city-of-culture-2017.pdf
177 https://creativecommunities.uk/culture-and-devolution-cc/culture-devo-wyca/#:~:text=In%20the%20West%20Yorkshire%20Devolution,natural%20and%20cultural%20assets%20to
178 https://www.inclusivegrowthleeds.com/our-big-ideas

3.3.3 Visitor Economy

There is growth in the visitor economy in Leeds and West Yorkshire – and Leeds ranks higher on the list of cultural destinations to visit amongst domestic and international travellers.

The LEEDS 2023 ambition for the visitor economy was two-fold: first, it aimed to generate an increase in visitors and visitor spend in-year, second to trigger long term growth. A LEEDS 2023 KPI used the BOP estimated potential increase of 10% in visitor numbers during 2023 (versus 4% with no LEEDS 2023), and 4% growth year-on-year thereafter.

Going in to 2023, Leeds' visitor economy had been making a steady recovery since the pandemic and trends were set to surpass 2019 visitor figures. Visitor research in 2022[179] commissioned by Leeds City Council indicated that Leeds was the fifth most likely destination for a city break or day trip by UK residents.[180] Around 50% said that aspects of the cultural offer were important in their decision to visit. For those who had visited Leeds before, ratings were relatively high for its cultural offer, compared to those for other large cities, and particularly high for its shopping and food and drink offer. People who had not visited lacked awareness of what Leeds has to offer, many identifying it simply as a 'Northern industrial city'. In economic terms, Leeds is primarily a day visitor destination, attracting 9% overnight visitors to the city in 2023, a figure which has not increased since 2019.

Increases in visitor numbers

In fact, 2023 actually saw 31.68 million visitors to the city[181] - an increase of 6.4% on 2022, and of 4.2% on 2019. This surpassed the 30.42 million 2019 pre-pandemic figure. This is slightly below the rate of increase estimated by BOP but represents an acceleration in recovery post Covid-19 pandemic.

The number of visitors was fairly evenly distributed across the year, with slightly larger proportions in the second half of the year – which could be attributed to LEEDS 2023, but also to other factors such as the return of the Christmas Market to Leeds.

20% of audiences for LEEDS 2023 Signature Project events were from outside Leeds, including 9% from outside West Yorkshire.[182] Just 3% audiences stayed overnight.[183]

179 Visit Leeds Online Survey 2022 - Final.pdf sample of 2,136 respondents
180 In a sample of which 43% were resident in Yorkshire and Humber
181 Source: Leeds City Council - STEAM model tourism economic impact data
182 Base (weighted): 2,454, MOE 1%
183 Base (weighted): 1,422, MOE 1%

It was not possible to collect data to assess the impact of LEEDS 2023 on general visits to the city. Future visitor surveys would ideally measure the impact of LEEDS 2023 on people's decisions to visit and on their choice of activity and length of stay.

Visitor Spend

In 2021, BOP forecast that visitors might bring additional direct and indirect revenue of £114 million in 2023, rising to just over £140 million by 2030. As part of this evaluation, BOP undertook an ex-post analysis of the economic impact of 12 Signature Project events at LEEDS 2023. These events attracted 146,257 visitors and a gross economic impact of £13.6 million on the city. This gross economic impact captures visitor spending, as well as associated organisational [184] and multiplier [185] impacts. Visitor surveying assessed the motivations of visitors to LEEDS 2023, allowing the impact of spending by visitors that would have been in Leeds in any case to be discounted from the gross economic impact figure of £13.6 million. This process reveals a net economic impact figure from these 12 Signature Projects at LEEDS 2023 of £9.1 million. This is substantial economic activity in Leeds that would have not occurred without LEEDS 2023 – nonetheless, this figure understates the net economic impact of LEEDS 2023, as it does not capture the impact of visits to any of the other events and activities under the LEEDS 2023 banner (a study on this scale was beyond the resources available for the evaluation).

"Leeds is rising - on the pitch and in the rankings. Leeds United's return to the Premier League coincides with the city's leap from 68th to 47th on Resonance Consultancy's list of Europe's best cities. Building on the momentum of its 2023 Year of Culture, Leeds is seeing major investment in infrastructure and hospitality."[186]

Confidence as a Cultural Destination

The uplift in visitor numbers may be attributable to the boost to its profile. LEEDS 2023 attracted the attention of national and international media, and was recommended as the place to go in 2023 in various publications. For example the NZ Herald labelled Leeds as, 'the capital of cool', saying LEEDS 2023 should be on everyone's hit list, and there were similar recommendations in publications such as National Geographic and the Rough Guide. The Guardian picked out the 12th Summer Solstice Asian Music Festival, a Partner project, for its, '10 of the best free festivals in the UK'.

There are indications that visitors from outside West Yorkshire had positive experiences which changed their perceptions of the city. [187]

184 Organisational spend in Leeds on these 12 Signature Projects.

185 Increased supply chain expenditures in Leeds associated with visitor and organisational spend at these 12 Signature Projects.

186 https://www.worldsbestcities.com/rankings/europes-best-cities/ Resonance Consultancy, a global advisor specializing in tourism and economic development for cities and destinations, has released its updated list of the best cities in Europe. The annual list features UK cities such as London, Edinburgh, and Leeds, and ranks them based on various criteria, including liveability, sustainable infrastructure, transportation, culture, airports, and GDP.https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/lifestyle/leeds-top-100-european-cities-5117802?page=3

187 [3Indicative data of visitors to the city from outside West Yorkshire – 70% 'LEEDS 2023 felt like an inclusive year of culture where everyone was welcome' Base: 43 and 63% changed perceptions in a positive way of 'there are lots of opportunities to get involved in creative and cultural activities in Leeds' Base 42.

Visitor Economy: Conclusions

The economic impact analysis only looked at the 12 Signature Project Events. Based on this analysis alone, BOP Consulting note that the return per engagement was relatively high – with gross economic impact on West Yorkshire per attendee at these 12 Signature Project Events of £146. As we have noted, we were not able to include any data for the 60+ Partner projects and many other participative activities, including much public art, and we can only speculate therefore how much the total additional visitor revenue for all of LEEDS 2023 there might have been.

To realise the potential visitor economic impact forecast at the outset required a large increase in overnight visits and spend across the city. This was arguably out of line with the core values of LEEDS 2023 and the nature of its locally focused programme. This challenge was of course compounded by a host of other factors, from changeable weather and transport strikes to a cost of living crisis, as well as the lack of formal designation or and the major media partnerships this might have attracted.

As we explored in 3.1 and 3.2, the LEEDS 2023 strategy placed a (successful) emphasis on local – and local-global - engagement, an approach which perhaps had the unintended effect of compromising efforts to entice visitors from outside the region. This despite the energy the team put into building their national and international profile. As BOP noted, however, there are economic benefits to the social cohesion, community development and civic pride generated, though these impacts are harder to quantify in terms of short-term return on investment. Nonetheless, the ex-post Economic Impact Assessment did quantify £9.1 million of impact on Leeds that would not have occurred in 2023 without LEEDS 2023.

There are also indications that LEEDS 2023 was a driver for post-Covid recovery: 50% of Cultural Partners thought it 'played an active part in the city and region's recovery'.[188]

The future for cultural tourism

As noted, it is too soon to call what the impact of the softer drivers on the visitor economy will be. We recommend that Leeds track important indicators, including visitor perceptions and the numbers of out-of-region audiences to organisations across the city in future. In 2024 interviews, however, most stakeholders said they felt that the year had shown Leeds in a new light and demonstrated the potential of its new public spaces to attract people.

City Council officers suggest that there is now a greater confidence in city centre programming, LEEDS 2023 having shown that increases in footfall, dwell-time and spend are all highly achievable. This is helping to maintain investment and, in their view, represents an opportunity for the cultural sector to get involved in animating city centre areas. Several stakeholders talked about the importance of getting a strong and collaborative cultural tourism strategy in place while the brand is still in the public imagination.

188 Base: 77

3.4 Environmental Sustainability

LEEDS 2023 made a strong commitment to embed sustainability into its planning and delivery and evaluate its impact. Climate change and its impact on places and people was also a theme for debate and exploration through the Programme. Furthering their overall aim to add value to the sector, they modelled novel ways for the sector to tackle climate change and its impacts.

Their key partner was Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL),[189] the charity dedicated to creating a zero carbon/zero waste future for the creative and cultural industries of West Yorkshire. SAIL helped develop and deliver a comprehensive plan and systematic process, integrated into LEEDS 2023's project planning cycle, to assess and limit the impact of transport, power, materials and waste. Staff and stakeholders all completed carbon literacy training, the value of which was visible in a range of creative solutions found to environmental challenges. Advocacy for sustainable practices among partners and sector colleagues included free training for 287 cultural professionals across the city.

Environmental impact

SAIL produced a dedicated report which includes details on the approach they developed for environmental impact measurement.

Overall, the Carbon Footprint of the Signature Programme was estimated at 500.49 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2e) and of the Leeds Culture Trust operations 96 tCO2e. SAIL point out that carbon footprinting is an inherently inaccurate process, and as such is difficult to benchmark.

Innovative measures to reduce impact

The LEEDS 2023 team took an holistic approach to minimise its own impacts and those of its supply chain. Innovative measures included:

- Suppliers were closely scrutinised in the procurement process to ensure they had ethical standards and materials were from sustainable sources.
- In energy terms, grid connections (as opposed to use of generators) were prioritised across 75% of Signature events, including installing a new grid connection and substantial power supply in City Square for Making A Stand.
- Use of Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) reduced potential emissions, compared to using diesel by 91%.
- Work at sites such as RSPB St. Aidan's for Nest was carefully planned with experts to avoid impacting the natural environment and wildlife.
- There was an emphasis on reducing, reusing and recycling which extended to returning the wood for Making a Stand to the supply chain, finding a new home for The WOW Barn and recycling fencing.
- Use of shuttle buses to reduce car emissions and heavy traffic in neighbourhoods for Signature Project events.

189 https://wearesail.org/

- Using only local food suppliers – and providing plant-based options – for LEEDS 2023 produced events.
- Thoughtful coordination with partners and venues, such as retaining the water ballast used at The Awakening event for watering the pitch afterwards.

Creative response

Climate change and climate justice were themes across many LEEDS 2023 projects. For the Public Good explored these questions through a collaboration between five academics and artists from Kenya, Turkey, India, Zimbabwe and Ghana, using digital technologies and AI. Signature Projects, This is a Forest, Nest and Children's Day: Reimagined, also brought the climate debate to the fore, and demonstrated the power of creative responses to change thinking and inspire action.

"It made me consider the issues and the possibility for doing things differently, if systems would allow!"

This is a Forest Audience

"Brings to life the challenges of affecting land use change for nature/environment in Leeds and beyond. Shows how using culture/art can be helpful in shifting people's mindset."

This is a Forest Audience

"Keep trying new events like this outside using our outdoor landscapes and provoking people (I am very much not in arts sector) to think and feel."

Nest Audience

As a result of engagement with these projects, 74% of audiences for Making a Stand 'discovered more about sustainable practices and climate conscious construction materials' [190] and 67% of Nest audiences, 'have thought more about how I can contribute to tackling climate change'.[191]

Sustainability: Conclusions

LEEDS 2023 addressed the challenges of producing events and activities in a sustainable way head on, despite the extra effort and in some cases budget required, modelling emerging practice and inspiring other organisations to follow suit. A significant body of learning is now available for the sector and is being used across the region. LEEDS 2023 helped SAIL, a unique regional organisation to move from being volunteer-led to having a staff of four and being appointed as the designated environmental sustainability partner for Bradford 2025.

Leeds cultural infrastructure is also left stronger with grid power in City Square and access to suppliers with new tools and expertise.

Climate change was a key curatorial theme, and the programme showcased imaginative ways of engaging the public with these issues, which clearly resonated with rather than alienated audiences.

190 Base: 167
191 Base: 120



Harewood House Party Weekend
Photographer: Tom Arber

Chapter 4: LOOKING FORWARD

A consideration of what could and should happen next to realise LEEDS 2023's value.



Looking back from the vantage point of 2025, we can see that the LEEDS 2023 team achieved many of their goals, explicit and implicit. There were plenty of surprises along the way – unexpected successes, inventions in the face of adversity, some things were much tougher than expected, not everyone agreed about what success actually looked like. But, as explored in the previous Chapter, overall they made good progress in all key areas identified at the start.

In nearly all, of course, the real prize is the long-tail, the difference LEEDS 2023 will continue to make in the years to come. We hope that the process of evaluation begun here will also continue.

Not least because the greatest collective value may well lie in what was learnt, if our many stakeholder interviewees are to be believed. Everyone involved learned a lot – about themselves, their practice, their collaborators, neighbours, the city, and many new possibilities.

In the period since LEEDS 2023, we have talked to the outgoing team as well as people in the city[192] who can take on the legacy now that Leeds Culture Trust is being wound up. Most were optimistic about these possibilities.

This Chapter is about the collective, future-focused learning that Leeds as a place and other major events can use, and about what could happen next.

Expectations have been raised, latent demand discovered, ideas are waiting to be realised. There is a sense that now everyone has had time to reflect and digest, it's time to move things forward.

> "It may take up to 10 years... we shouldn't be obsessing about the details of the Year itself now – we need to get on with what comes next, while the ideas are still fresh, while there's still momentum."
>
> 2024 stakeholder interview

Left: Making a Stand
Photographer Ellen Christina Hancock

192 See Appendix for a list of stakeholder interviews

4.1 Learning

"LEEDS 2023 will deliver a rich and diverse programme with mass impact and global reach, alongside work that is intimate and local, harnessing the creativity of our citizens through community embedded programmes.

We will all come together in our different ways to encourage our city and our people to dream and conceive a better future where we can all thrive."

Kully Thiarai, Creative Director and CEO, LEEDS 2023 Business Plan, 2022

The bigger picture

The detailed analysis in Chapter 3 tells us a lot about the impact of LEEDS 2023 but in a piecemeal way which is perhaps to do it a disservice. The team often talked about working in an 'intersectional way', by which they meant not just recognising staff, partners and audiences as having many identities, but developing a strategy where smart and inclusive approaches were designed to achieve many ends. We cannot, for example, attribute their success in engaging diverse new audiences to any one approach but to several – from relevant programming to the innovation of the Neighbourhood Hosts.

The sum of the parts

So, looking at the whole sweep of the Year, the overall impression is of an event that had a genuinely catalytic effect, bringing promised additionality in its own distinct way. Leeds already had a brilliant collection of established cultural 'crown jewels'. LEEDS 2023 had a different function: to point the way to a more pluralistic future for the cultural sector. It did this by unearthing hidden

assets, opening doors for emerging artists, seeking out overlooked audiences and new collaborators, and making connections between them all, and with the wider world. This called for projects which were nurturing, generous, playful and co-operative. The model was distributed, and to some extent decentralised. The big moments were celebratory, congregational and hospitable, bringing Leeds together and inviting new friends from around the world in.

A matrix approach

We could think about this as being a 'matrix approach'. We have written variously in this report about LEEDS 2023's role as a broker, but it did more than that. It also inspired a new, more international and inclusive matrix of relationships and partnerships, and challenged them to rethink what purpose culture should have in cities and neighbourhoods in the future. It modelled how cultural organisations can take the lead in their communities with a range of innovations from future practice in access and inclusion, to how to address climate change.

All this generated relationships, methods, ideas and ambitions which are already being adopted and adapted organically. Some, however, deserve more systematic development, as explored in section 4.2.

"It moved the psyche of the city into a new phase, that's what's so powerful – a seismic shift in mentality and pride in what you can achieve."

2024 Stakeholder interview

Chapter 3 explores in detail how outcomes were achieved and some of the learning along the way. In this section, we outline overall insights, including the views of stakeholders in hindsight.

"Doing it anyway"

Some stakeholders speculated that working outside the constraints of being a designated City or Capital of Culture had enabled LEEDS 2023 to take a more 'intimate and local' approach. Though in retrospect, feelings were mixed about the pros and cons of "doing it anyway".

Cons

On the downside, people felt that being outside the camp did limit access to additional funding, and commented on the 'olympic effort' to get additional funding to match the City's own investment.

"When they said 'do it anyway', no-one had anticipated how challenging the environment was going to become, with the pandemic, its impact on the economy and cost of living etc., it took incredible ambition and determination from the team."

2024 Stakeholder interview

The budget originally proposed for the ECoC was nearly 3 times larger than the actual one for LEEDS 2023. In the view of the City Council, the profile from winning the ECoC competition would have made the original target achievable. In particular it would have attracted significant, largely unrestricted lottery and national government funds automatically. Without the designation, the team had to raise funds piecemeal for individual projects as evidenced by six

different funding applications that were made to Arts Council England.

This was not only significant in terms of scale but also in terms of timescales. Without the core costs provided in advance by the lottery and government, artistic projects took much longer to confirm, the lack of certainty resulting in frustration for the team and for the artists and partner organisations involved.

The lack of the Capital of Culture 'title' also made it impossible to attract a major media partnership, with knock-on effects in terms of national reach and awareness.

There was a consensus that this was a significant setback, with likely effects in terms of attracting tourists and audiences from outside the region – the numbers of which were low compared with Cities or Capitals of Culture. Whilst the team developed many international partnerships, some stakeholders also believe the title would almost certainly have brought more, and more high-profile, projects to the city.

Pros

On the plus side, "doing it anyway" gave the brand a great kickstart and helped in the repositioning effort, characterising Leeds as confident, independent and just a little bit maverick.

Some stakeholders at the City Council believe the decision also had a positive effect on the wider region, with some towns and cities deciding to create and deliver their own year, others considered this as a recovery mechanism emerging from the pandemic and it inspired Bradford (who had bid for ECoC in 2004) to bid for UK City of Culture. Alongside this, Channel 4 relocated their HQ to Leeds.

Most significantly, perhaps, it allowed certain freedoms. Being flexible and agile was particularly important to the team in navigating uncertainty. This was easier outside the constraints of the designation, the burden of reporting, and having to keep to plans set in a Bid Book written long before Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. It also meant not having to have a 'European dimension' to every project, and left room for a much broader definition of culture, such as being able to include sport.

The team felt they had more freedom to experiment and pilot, which is important given the value of innovation in the legacy, and a kind of boldness:

"doing it anyway meant there was sort of something to prove, so we possibly pushed harder to make challenging things happen – e.g. Hibiscus Rising which just wouldn't have happened otherwise."

2024 Stakeholder interview

Some wondered if there were unrealised opportunities too. For example, to reconceive 'A Year of Culture' as something that would become annual, or biennial.

Too much with too little?

In conclusion, the question has to be asked whether "doing it anyway" forced LEEDS 2023 into trying to do too much with too little, in a time of escalating crisis. Instead of cutting areas of the programme and operation, resources for each were simply reduced, with the effect that time and budget were often stretched very thin (examples include reduced partner strand budgets, limited support for Neighbourhood Hosts, a lighter marketing operation, unrealised digital ambitions, and an overburdened team).

Some stakeholders believe that LEEDS 2023 could have been more upfront about the impact of reduced resources on its ability to deliver so many elements of the original Bid Book. It should have been more realistic about its capacity to deliver a major boost to the visitor economy, alongside a well-distributed, locally embedded programme. Even if these are compatible ambitions, should the event of the Covid-19 pandemic have driven a more decisive downscaling? Some suggested that more could have been done to piggy-back existing infrastructure, and to manage partner expectations.

This was also a common theme in artists' feedback as Leeds University's John Wright reported in his deep-dive study of artists' experience:

"[there] was a sense that the LEEDS 2023 programming was over-stretched and lacked coherence. Several artists suggested that fewer, more considered and fully funded events could have been more effective."
Artist

Inclusive, resilient leadership

Many stakeholders highlighted the importance of the leadership team and their approach, living and modelling the collaborative, inclusive, artistically-led values they wanted LEEDS 2023 to embody and promote. People also remarked on the fact that they had managed to overcome a lot of hurdles and worked through challenges 'relentlessly'. Praise for Kully Thiarai in particular, was universal:

"their achievement was formidable, and Kully incredibly resilient and committed."
2024 Stakeholder interview

People admired her strong vision and capacity to keep to, "True North", while building a generous and inclusive community with many different voices, on her ability to build bridges and inspire people.

"to bring people from very different sectors and backgrounds – like developers, artists, local business - to the table and get them excited about something led by culture."

"It was important that Kully was always out and about talking about Leeds culture - but not from one particular artform or company perspective - as an advocate for Leeds."
2024 Stakeholder interviews

In sum, stakeholders who were promoters felt that this artistically-led and values-driven way of working made LEEDS 2023 what it was, and justified the decision to deliver the Year through an arms-length organisation.

Local creativity, global view

In sector surveys and interviews in-year and subsequently, there was praise for the platform and opportunity it offered to local and in many cases hitherto marginalised artists and creatives. Those artists themselves appreciated the practical support and the emotional encouragement - being seen, heard, validated, trusted. Partner organisations welcomed being introduced to a whole new talent pool through active and sometimes new ways of collaborating, and the prospect of being part of a wider, more inclusive community in future.

In a similar way, the sector was enthusiastic about the new international connections LEEDS 2023 brokered. People valued being introduced to new creative partners they would not have found on their own, and they also appreciated learning how to collaborate internationally and being supported to do so.

But the context was clear, this was not pursuing international connections for their own sake. It was about international as a tonic – a boost of diverse ideas, perspectives, practices and meaning-making. It showed how international collaboration can refresh and renew practice and help make sense of your own place and community. Visiting artists valued the invitation to the real city – to work closely with communities. The feeling was mutual. Emerging artists in particular appreciated these new horizons.

"[LEEDS 2023 funding} allowed us to commission an international company, which is a new way of working for our organisation. It was tremendously successful and a lot of learning came from the experience which we will be carrying forward for future international commissions. This project also allowed us to try an innovative model of working with local artists through the micro-commissions."
Transform MEXA - Pumpitopera Transatlantica

This approach was modelling a different, more outward-looking, open-to-difference way of working, as well as producing some high-profile work and appreciated experiences. The sector got it and liked it; local artists want more of it. It seems that this hyper-local/ global approach should form part of the legacy.

Key innovations

Some of the most important learning came as a result of taking a pioneering approach in areas of strategic importance. We have described many of these in details through this report, so to summarise, key innovations which invite future attention include:

Community-embedded programme development

MY LEEDS 2023 and the Neighbourhood Hosts programme (2.3.2 and 3.3.3) located the centre of creative gravity around the fringes, in each of 33 communities across the city, distributing leadership and leaving space for each to make LEEDS 2023 their own. A win-win-win, It brought the benefit of on-the-ground feedback to LEEDS 2023, a tailored and locally relevant offer to each ward, and career and/ personal development opportunities for the Neighbourhood Hosts themselves. It was the most mentioned and admired initiative of the whole Year (though room for improvement was noted), and is already being shared as a model, ripe for

development and adaptation, not least as part of Bradford 2025. The Hidden Stories project (2.3.2) tested a slightly different model which some found to be even more effective thanks to longer lead times.

Importantly, these initiatives also demonstrated potential interest among communities 'less engaged' with mainstream culture, and showcased a spectrum of place-relevant, co-creative practice which could be adapted – building on the city's commitment to Asset Based Community Development.

Access

The team committed to an holistic approach (3.1.1), thinking about access across all aspects of the operation and as a question of social justice to be explored in the programme. All staff were trained and empowered to find on-the-ground solutions, like the touring chill-out tent, a place for prayer and meeting the safety and access needs of the WOW Barn's Barn raisers on a construction site. Projects – like Moon Palace – invited artists to take inspiration from facilitating access. As a result resources on access in the arts are available for the sector. [193]

Sustainability

There was a commended drive on environmental sustainability, working with Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL) to model better practice in the cultural sector, as captured in SAIL's report. This included innovations in reducing the environmental impact of productions, managing supply chains, and thought-provoking programming and content that framed the climate emergency and local-global climate justice in compelling ways.

Education partnership

LEEDS 2023 showed the breadth and depth of what the cultural sector can do to support an over-stretched education system, providing much needed, cross-curricular enrichment at scale which teachers and schools valued (3.1.2). They profiled the role of young people in shaping public culture and shared this insight with the sector. In this student city, they also showed what the career progression bridge between higher education and the sector might look like, by piloting a range of different work experience models.

Producing

It also scaled a number of innovations relevant to event producers. Though not universally popular and sometimes flawed in terms of communications, the process for 'greenlighting' potential projects enabled speedy but sound, and many-voiced decision-making in a fast-changing situation. It enabled ambitious programming in a financially volatile situation and was a key method for managing the uncertainty of late funding decisions. It also meant great ideas which had worked as pilots, seed-funded within a community setting (as in My World My City My Neighbourhood), could be developed and scaled. Similarly, the team developed replicable approaches to international collaboration, like Meet Leeds Lab and some new digitally-enabled methods building in sustainability.

193 https://www.leedsculturepprogrammes.org.uk/resources-access-arts-leeds-2023-legacy

These innovations are an important part of the legacy, with further potential to be optimised and capitalised.

A networked approach

As we have noted, and especially in 3.3.4, perhaps the most significant contribution LEEDS 2023 made to the cultural infrastructure was to show how the culture sector's matrix of relationships could be extended – locally, by including a much greater diversity of Yorkshire-based artists, by working at community level, and globally by making international connections. Work under the Partnership Strand (2.4) was ambitious in scale and interdisciplinary. As such, it was appreciated by participating organisations, and for adding value in a tailored way, developed through collaboration, rather than top-down. Unusual partnerships were brokered too: LEEDS 2023 introduced new businesses, creative agencies, voluntary sector, educational institutions and venues interested in collaborating to the cultural sector in Leeds. Some have observed that LEEDS 2023 also created more of a partnership between the City administration and the sector.

This intangible infrastructure forms an important legacy. We note that comparison with other core cities, and Manchester in particular informed Leeds' ambition for growth that led to the Year of Culture. Manchester's Creative Industries contribute more to the region's GVA than Leeds',[194] one of the facts which informed Leeds' ambition for growth. A key difference between Manchester and Leeds is the way in which the cultural sector operates at civic level. Manchester's cultural organisations have a strong track record[195] of strategic collaboration and policy development, in close proximity to the City. The attitude of Manchester City Council towards the sector is considerably less – to quote a stakeholder – 'paternalistic'. The same person emphasised the need for a shift away from this more traditional approach in Leeds and was optimistic that LEEDS 2023 could be the catalyst. Another:

"we need to change the way the cultural sector perceives the role of the Council – not just a place for handing out grants, the Council can't be the only problem-solver, they need to be a partner, alongside the sector."

2024 Stakeholder interview

Leeds Culture Trust may have provided the first step towards a different kind of strategic alliance. This is already working well in relation to cultural education. LEEDS 2023 gave a new impetus – and new ideas – to the Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) that has now reformed and rebranded as Leeds 33 and is already building legacy. Knowing that the LCEP was in place and new Higher Education partnerships on board, also meant that partners were thinking in concrete and strategic terms long before the end of 2023. So far, however, Leeds Culture Trust is winding down and no specific plan for a formal sector alliance is in place.

4.2 Developing the Legacy in Leeds

LEEDS 2023 effectively demonstrated how culture can raise the city's game, build its profile and put it on the map. The baton is now handed back to the city to continue what the Year of Culture started.

Some stakeholders expressed concern about not taking action while there is still momentum. Attention and resources in the region are diverted to Bradford 2025 and, in Leeds itself, to major new capital projects (National Poetry Centre and Royal Armouries), alongside continued work towards the British Library North. There is a risk that the legacy of LEEDS 2023 will be eclipsed, in particular leaving the work started in communities and with local artists and organisations in the air. The long-term impacts hoped for – including growth in regional GVA thanks to an enlarged and strengthened creative sector – are unlikely to be achieved through an organic process alone, and demand a concerted and strategic effort.

Leadership and resource

But who can pick up the baton?

The Council does not see this as its sole responsibility. The point of LEEDS 2023 was to build a cultural network that could 'come together to plan a shared future' and take forward the brand, ideas and other assets.

The cultural organisations we spoke to were in broad agreement with this idea. A conduit for a wider network could lend impetus but would require a level of finance to get beyond the informal knowledge exchange that currently exists.

There is scope for continued shared learning and collaboration across local authorities and regions including across West Yorkshire following three 3 years of major cultural celebrations, and as One Creative North (published May 2025) charts a blueprint for growth and developing creative ecologies across the north of England.

The City was not able to make specific financial provision for legacy development. Any idea of such provision imagined during the early ECoC bidding phase pre-Covid, evaporated under the financial pressures of global events. Like many, Leeds City Council is juggling the financial challenges of over a decade of cuts to local authority budgets.

In spite of these pressures, the Council reorganised its long-established arts funding programmes, launching a single framework in 2023 in readiness for the post-LEEDS 2023 legacy period – Leeds Cultural Investment Programme. This has been designed to give attention to projects which carry on the spirit of LEEDS 2023, support and develop the city's strong cultural offer and deliver benefits to the city's residents and visitors. In shaping a LEEDS 2023 legacy, the Council also calls for sector development to align with the lessons of LEEDS 2023, and has undertaken to "identify gaps where further capacity building is required." As such, its intentions seem to be in tune with the critical aspects of LEEDS 2023's potential legacy.

Inclusive Growth Strategy

Similarly, the LEEDS 2023 approach showed itself to be uniquely suited to delivering on the "9 Big Ideas" [196] of Leeds City Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy (IGS)[197] – one of three pillars of the Council's corporate strategy, 'Best City Ambition'.[198] The IGS is Leeds City Council's flagship, cross-cutting plan for inclusive growth across the city, designed to reduce inequality by 2030. Post LEEDS 2023, culture-led regeneration, could and should be part of this mission. Best City Ambition represents a major opportunity for the cultural place-making of the LEEDS 2023 brand to contribute to the City's ambition.

Strategic partnership

These strategies provide a sound framing to build on the LEEDS 2023 legacy. But Leeds needs a collaborative vehicle to move things forwards, and ideally additional resources to invest in its cultural ecology.

There are a number of models – including Culture Central in the West Midlands, Newcastle Creates, and Sheffield Culture Collective and the various forms that other Cultural Compacts and place-based partnerships have adopted.[199] A compact for Leeds might have as its ultimate purpose to help the sector come together with a common voice, provide future-thinking leadership, enable strategic collaboration and thereby build in resilience. It could also help channel funding, and importantly broker partnerships with other sectors. To support this requires investment in collaborative, culturally driven place-making. Building on the legacy of LEEDS 2023 should also be a priority for cultural devolution through West Yorkshire Combined Authority, with its focus on the role of culture in wellbeing and economic growth: LEEDS 2023 provides some of the best blueprints for development.

Recommendations

In conclusion, and echoing the views of stakeholders, we recommend:

1. Establish a strategic partnership, involving both Leeds major institutions, local artists and wider creative sector as an inclusive community.

2. Consult with the sector on the form of an organisation to manage the partnership and collaborative projects – including potential Arts Council England support for a place-based approach, following the learning from the Cultural Compacts programme.

3. Through this, develop a unified, collaborative cultural place-making strategy for the City, including creative projects as part of a tool box to unlock potential in communities and that of the 9

196 https://www.inclusivegrowthleeds.com/our-big-ideas
197 https://www.inclusivegrowthleeds.com/
198 https://www.leeds.gov.uk/plans-and-strategies/best-city-ambition
199 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Cultural_Cities_Enquiry_Case_Studies.pdf

big ideas of the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the frame of the Best City Ambition.

4. As part of this strategy, and given the success of LEEDS 2023's approach to participation, consider development of collaborative, centrally co-ordinated support for community-led creativity, building on the Neighbourhood Hosts model, including offering professional development for community leaders and micro-grants.

5. Work with the city's Higher Education providers and the creative sectors to consider and develop approaches to retaining talent and supporting pathways for emerging artists, creatives and producers.

6. Consider an annual or biennial collaborative event, echoing LEEDS 2023, albeit on a smaller scale, and galvanising a place-based partnership, as a framework for cultural development.

7. Linked into all this, continued investment in Leeds 33 (Local Cultural Education Partnership) as a central hub to bridge a cultural education offer, drive adoption of some of LEEDS 2023 innovations, develop a joined-up strategy for creative additionality across primary, secondary, further and higher education.

8. Track It: build in evaluation of the LEEDS 2023 and follow-up strategy, to understand return on investment, support new initiatives and contribute to overall learning about major events. The planned Cultural Impact Survey, conceived to 'evidence the benefits of culture to Leeds', could be an excellent channel if suitably long-running, year-on-year. Such work would provide an up to date evidence base for identifying further opportunity.



This is a Forest
Photographer: David Lindsay

Appendices

Project Governance and management
Partner strand projects
Evaluation methodological notes
Funders

Project Governance and management

Leeds European Capital of Culture 2023 Independent Steering Group

Sharon Watson, Principal of the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, at the time of the bid Artistic Director of Phoenix Dance - Chair
Councillor Judith Blake
Councillor Dan Cohen
James Brining
Mohammad Dastbaz
Frank Finlay
Councillor Steward Golton
Nicola Greenan
Anita Morris
Karen Sewell
Selina Thompson
Kenneth Tindall
Godfrey Worsdale
Anamaria Wills

Chairs of Leeds Culture Trust

2023-2024 – Frank Finlay
2022-2023 - Gabby Logan MBE
2019-2021 - Ruth Pitt

Trustees (including their start dates)

Current Trustees

Christopher John Brown - 25 May 2023
Richard Coram (Secretary) - 16 September 2022
Prof Frank Finlay - 28 January 2019

Sharon Louise Gladish - 19 November 2019
Cllr Jonathan David Pryor - 20 October 2021
Barbara Woroncow OBE since - 16 March 2017

Former Trustees

Keith James Arrowsmith - 11 June 2019
Cllr Judith Vivenne Blake - 19 March 2019
Cllr Daniel Andrew Cohen - 19 March 2019
Susan Linda Hoyle - 21 October 2019
Jamie Daniel Peter Jones-Buchanan - 23 May 2019
Gabrielle Nicole Logan - 1 December 2021
Sanchez Joseph Payne - 19 November 2019
Ruth Angela Pitt - 28 January 2019
Ian Thompson - 21 October 2019
Sharon Monica Watson - 19 November 2019

LEEDS 2023 Executive Team

Abigail Scott Paul - Director of External Relations and Strategic Partnerships
Emma Beverley - Director of Programmes
Richard Coram - Director of Finance and Operations

LEEDS 2023 Heads of Department

Chris Ansell - Head of Creative Learning and Engagement
Claire Hutchinson - Head of Communications and Marketing
Sarah Jane Mace - Head of Experience Design
Carl Foster - Head of Visitor Experience
Tom Reilly - Director of Production
Carys Taverner - Head of Production
Dania Muller - Senior Producer
Martha Rose Wilson - Executive Producer
Katie Atkins - Head of Volunteering
Niamh Byrne - Head of Placements and Student Opportunity
Sally Roads - Head of Finance
Sofi Lundgren - Head of Development
Zoe Martinez - Head of Operations
Hannah Dean - Head of HR
Helen Oldroyd - Executive Assistant

Partner Strand projects

Season 1:

Arts Foundation Future Awards (Promote/Partner)
Captain Boomer Collective: IKEN, Shop of Opinions
Compass Festival: Leeds Sauce
EUNIC: IN SHORT Film Festival
Knaive Theatre: Restaurateur of Leeds (British Council)
Leeds Lit Festival
Matty Bovan / Leeds Beckett : RUN (Promote)
Northern Ballet: Goldberg Variations
Opera North: As You Are
Slung Low: The Magician (Warehouse)
The Performance Ensemble: 1001 Stories & Sinfonia

Season 2:

Babeworld: No Home Advantage
Casey Orr: Saturday Town Exhibition
Chemnitz Makers Fair 2023 (Bradford 2025)
Gracefool Collective: Kick-Off (Leeds Dance Partnership)
Jamaica Society Leeds: Out of Many Festival (2022 & 2023)
Keira Martin & Spin Arts: Queenie & the Pooka (Leeds Dance Partnership)
Leeds Art Gallery: Sonia Boyce (Exhibition)
Leeds Jazz Festival
LS-TEN: Northern Roll (Netherlands)
Opera North: Mozart Requiem (British Council)
SAA-UK: Summer Solstice (Music)
Slung Low: Noah's Flood
The Tetley: Afra Eisma (Netherlands)
Yorkshire Dance: Encounters
Yorkshire Dance: Jija Sohn (Netherlands)

Season 3:

20 Stories High: High Times & Dirty Monsters
AgeOfThe: Visions in the Map
ArtAngel
BBC's Contains Strong Language: International & Local Poets
Bettersongs: The Chronicles of the Rothwell Temperance Band
Daily Life Ltd: Epic Domestic, The Tetley (We Are Unlimited)
East Street Arts: A City Less Grey (3 x murals, one each Season)
East Street Arts: Netherlands Artist Exchange
Katja Heitmann: Motis Mori Corpus, Yorkshire Dance and Leeds Art Gallery (Netherlands)
Leeds Art Gallery: Sonia Boyce (Howard Assembly Rooms Event)
Leeds International Film Festival (Netherlands)
Leeds/Lille Hip Hop Artist Exchange TBC
Light Night
Lydia Cotterill: Brightside
Meet Leeds Lab Antrianna, Leeds Art University, (Netherlands)
Meet Leeds Lab Archie Hyde, Sunken Studio (Netherlands)
Meet Leeds Lab Boris TBC, (Netherlands)
Meet Leeds Lab Mees, Opera North, (Netherlands)
Meet Leeds Lab Monika Loster, Sunnybank Mills (Netherlands)
Meet Leeds Lab Naema, HPBC, (Netherlands)
Meet Leeds Lab Sijas, East Street Arts (Netherlands)
Meet Leeds Lab Simone Bennet, WYFS, (Netherlands)
Ntantu: 2 Worlds, 1 Voice (British Council)
Peter Spafford & Space 2: Unsung Sports
Rivers of Hope, Thames Festival CLE Schools Programme
Sayang: Si Polan x 2 (British Council)
Slung Low: The Magician (Everyman Screening)
The Performance Ensemble: Symposium Event October
The Tetley: Afrah Shafiq (British Council)
Transform Festival (Netherlands x 2)
Transform Festival: MEXA
Unlimited Theatre & Upswing: Ancient Futures
Jazz at HEART
Someone

Methodological notes

The LEEDS 2023 evaluation used quantitative data collected from different stakeholder groups – including surveys for audiences, active participants, artists/creatives, Neighbourhood Hosts, volunteers, cultural/creative partners, staff, apprentices and work placements.

These collection methods were carried out on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

Post-year, an additional e-survey was sent to those engaged with the year to gather reflective feedback and also to increase demographic information. The contact list was drawn from mailing lists, booker details and survey respondents.

In the remainder of this section, we provide some information on the following aspects of the methodology:

Sample sizes

Engagement figures

Calculating the percentage of Leeds Households engaged

Calculating wellbeing scores

Weighting of survey responses

Calculating engagement figures

Sample sizes

- Audiences: 2,585
- Active participants: 257
- Volunteers: 185 (mid-point survey), 100 (end of year survey)
- Artists and creatives: 126
- Neighbourhood Hosts: 27
- Cultural partners: 79
- Staff, apprentices and placements: 261 (recruitment monitoring), 111 (monitoring survey), 60 (exit survey)
- Post-year engagement survey: 696

N.B: throughout the report the weighted sample sizes and margin of error (MOI) are included as footnotes against percentage results for individual questions.

Engagement figures

Engagement figures used the following sources of information:

- Number of tickets issued (tickets were issued for both paid and unpaid events and activities).
- On-site/at activity head counts (for The Awakening entry gate count).
- Sign-ups and registrations for participatory and learning activities and projects.
- Estimated figures for engagement with public realm activity or public art used information provided by security personnel and sampled head counts (with subsequent calculations to provide an estimate across all days of activity).

Partner strand organisations provided engagement figures to the LEEDS 2023 team.

All engagement figures were collated in a master events Airtable contributed to by members of the LEEDS 2023 team for all activities and events.

Figures are only included where one or more of these methods could be used to provide an accurate or reasonable estimate of engagement.

Calculating the percentage of Leeds Households engaged

This figure was calculated using a number of data points:

- Total audience and participant engagements across the Produce and Partnership programmes.
- Total engagements via schools activity.
- Percentage of attendances from Leeds residents within the survey sample of audiences and participants and ticket bookers, based on use of postcodes.
- Average number of events attended and average number in household who engaged, using results of a post-year LEEDS 2023 e-survey delivered in January 2024.
- Leeds Census data – total households, households with dependent children.

This data was used to estimate the number of households attended and therefore the percentage of Leeds households who attended.

Calculating wellbeing scores

Wellbeing was assessed through relevant survey questions to all stakeholder groups related to the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' actions – Take Notice, Keep Learning, Be Active, Connect and Give.

Respondents were asked to respond on a five point scale from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree' against a series of statements related to each of the 'Five Ways'. Results were calculated for the proportion of the respondents that reported a positive impact (i.e. 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree') against each of the five areas. Additionally, the proportion of respondents who had a positive impact in at least one of the five areas was calculated.

Weighting of survey responses

Weighting has been applied to the survey dataset for audiences in relation to the size of the audiences for the different Signature Projects and for the post- year e-survey.

This ensures that when these are brought together into overall figures for elements of the programme or overall LEEDS 2023 figures that the figures are representative of the audience profile.

Audience Spectrum

audiencespectrum.org/en

Audience Spectrum is a geo-demographic profiling and targeting tool that segments the UK population by their attitudes towards culture, and by what they like to see and do. It is an accurate segmentation tool for the cultural sector, and provides a common language for talking about audiences.

Profiling the population at a household and postcode level, Audience Spectrum is used daily by organisations - including theatres, museums, galleries, festivals and touring companies - in their audience development, programming, marketing and media planning. Available to organisations through profiling, data tagging and licensing, Audience Spectrum is designed to be truly actionable.

The Audience Agency delivered tailored, Leeds and LEEDS 2023 specific, Audience Spectrum profiles to support the planning and delivery of marketing and communications for LEEDS 2023. Primary qualitative research explored the attitudes and preferences of each of the Audience Spectrum groups and sub-groups which make up the majority of Leeds population (adding to the existing depth of insight within the segment profiles) and an Audience Spectrum profile was provided for each of Leeds 33 wards.

Stakeholder interviews – Leeds City Council

Cllr Dan Cohen

Cllr Jonathan David Pryor

Martin Farrington, Director of City Development Leeds City Council (previous),

Jane Walne, Chief Officer Operations, Active Leeds and Culture, Leeds City Council

Eve Roodhouse, Chief Officer Culture and Economy (previously)

Angela Barnicle, Director City Development, Leeds City Council (current)

Pam Johnson, Head of Culture Programmes, Leeds City Council

Thank you to all those who contributed and offered their feedback and views for the evaluation of LEEDS 2023.

Principal Partners

Leeds City Council

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Project Funders

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

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LEEDS YEAR OF CULTURE 2023

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