

# 2023

**Cultural Institute  
Annual Review**

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# 2024



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

# Cultural Institute

## Annual Review 2023/24

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**Our mission is to mobilise the power of culture, creativity and artmaking to connect people and foster positive change.**

The Cultural Institute team has:

- Extensive knowledge and networks in the cultural sector
- Expertise in generating interdisciplinary, collaborative research
- Expertise in brokering high quality experiences for students in the cultural sector
- Creative producing skills, including commissioning and supporting artists to deliver their best work

**This has been an exciting year for the Cultural Institute, as we established a new way of working, expanded our team, and set a baseline for future activities.**

We worked closely with the Dean for Cultural Engagement, Professor Ben Walmsley, to develop a new Cultural Engagement Strategy, outlining our vision, mission and priorities for the next three years (see page 24). We were energised by the impact of connecting researchers with artists and creatives, as demonstrated by CAKE (see page 7). Our goal remains to create a 'third space' where true innovation emerges from open-ended, interdisciplinary exploration between researchers, artists and cultural workers in our region.

**£48<sub>k</sub>**

Funded **11** research projects with LAHRI, Horizons Institute and LMG, totalling **£48,086**

**14**

Launched **14** new artist-researcher collaborations

**11**

Funded **11** research projects with LAHRI, Horizons Institute and LMG\*

**23**

Created substantial paid employment for **23** students through sector partnerships

**94**

Worked with **94** cultural organisations and artists on **12** projects

**357**

Held **13** events with **357** attendees

**2+2**

Supported **2** existing partnerships (Opera North and Leeds International Piano Competition) and formed **2** new ones (Bradford 2025 and National Poetry Centre)

**140**

Engaged **140** local residents and **24** community organisations in the WoW Park project

**6.9<sub>k</sub>**

Enhanced cultural programmes, reaching an estimated audience of **6940**

**3.9<sub>k</sub>**

Interacted with over **3,900** people via web, social media, and blogs

**£10.4m**

Actively supported UKRI bids from the Faculties of Arts Humanities and Cultures, Social Sciences and Leeds University Business School totalling **£10.4m**. Bids funded by UKRI amounted to **£5.4m**.

# 1

## Fostering impactful research and knowledge exchange & nurturing our regional cultural ecology

The Cultural Institute invested in new research relationships through funding opportunities, sandpits, and workshops.

A significant development this year was the activation of collaborations in Bradford, supporting the University's relationship with Bradford 2025, and the CAKE (Creative Artistic Knowledge Exchange) programme.

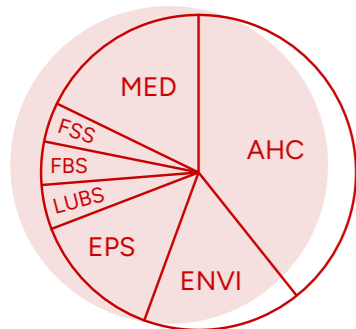
We funded 11 early-stage research projects involving researchers and community or arts partners, with approximately £5,000 allocated to each, through the Ignite and Sapling funding programmes. The Sapling programme was a collaborative effort with LAHRI supported by RIS. Additionally, the Collections Research Fund, with Leeds Museums and Galleries, supported three researchers working with curators and collections. Maria Hussain, Associate Professor at Leeds University Business School, led a project on Muslims in the North, which was a runner-up in the Diverse Forms of Research Activity category at the Research Culture Awards.

We delivered two **Leeds Creative Labs** – creative research residencies that pair artists with researchers; one in partnership with Bradford Producing Hub, on Creative Health, and the other with the School of Civil Engineering as part of the Smeaton300 programme. For research activity with **Bradford 2025** see [page 22](#) on institutional partnerships.

“... I thought it was brilliant to be surrounded by experts and people passionate about the circular economy. I was sat on a table with some academics, and it was good to hear their thoughts and be reminded of the theoretical concepts behind the more practical aspects. It was also useful to see the diversity of cultural organisations in the local area – it was useful to be reminded that other cultural orgs outside of other museums can be good contacts. I came away very awe inspired and keen to get moving with exchanges.”

— **Circular Economy workshop participant** (see Ignite Fund, right)

47 arts organisations and academic reps from across all faculties at the University of Leeds



Engaged academics across all 7 faculties

- AHC, 24
- MED, 11
- ENVI, 10
- EPS, 8
- FBS, 3
- LUBS, 3
- FSS, 2

## Leeds Creative Labs Follow-On Fund: Reproductive Futures

Dr Zoe Tongue (Law), and visual artist Herfa Martina Thompson, participants in the Leeds Creative Labs: East Street Arts edition (2022-23), received £3,000 from the Cultural Institute's Follow-On Fund to continue their work on reproductive technology and utopian futures. The fund supported a workshop and an exhibition at East Street Arts.



Follow-On Fund © Wes Foster

## CAKE

CAKE is the Cultural Institute's knowledge exchange programme, working with a broad range of diverse arts and cultural organisations in West Yorkshire, spanning different scales and artforms. Arts/cultural professionals and researchers equitably explore themes of importance, aiming to deepen and expand thinking, practice and research.

Three workshops took place this year with overarching themes of co-creation and the arts and climate change and eco-anxiety. As a result of these conversations, two postgraduate projects with Yorkshire Dance and The Tetley were initiated, and 13 CAKE partners presented their organisations at the Culture at Leeds fair, connecting with students on campus.



CAKE © Cultural Institute

## Ignite fund – Circular Economy

The Circular Economy in the Arts project, funded by the Ignite fund, delivered a workshop exploring circular economy practices within West Yorkshire's creative and cultural sector. The event brought together 23 stakeholders and identified 268 potential resource exchanges, ranging from theatre props to warehousing space. Of these, 190 exchanges involved items no longer needed by one party but desired by another. Immediate outcomes included Northern Ballet donating equipment and expertise to the Seagulls paint charity, which saved significant costs and enabled a new decorating workshop. Following the workshop, eight organisations joined Sustainable Arts In Leeds' (SAIL's) Circular Economy Working Group.



SAIL's Circular Economy Workshop, Ignite Fund © Pip Tuffin SAIL Project Assistant



Ellie Harrison & Alex Torku, Leeds Creative Labs: Smeaton300  
© Skywall Photography

"If I had designed the perfect professional development opportunity for myself at this stage of my practice, I couldn't have done better than Smeaton [Creative] Labs." — **Ellie Harrison, artist and Smeaton300 Creative Lab participant**

## Reflections from CAKE

"I gained a deeper understanding of the University and the various ways in which cultural organisations might collaborate with Schools or individuals on research projects or student engagement."

— **David Collins, Northern Ballet**

"Unique and invaluable insight into how the University is set up, the vast nature of its research and specialisms, [and] how open the University is to collaboration and sharing." — **Helen Pheby, Yorkshire Sculpture Park**

"Meeting experts whose own work is so impressive, and who could help us realise our ambitions around reducing carbon emissions and making a positive contribution in terms of the work we make in the future."

— **Sally Egan, Leeds International Piano Competition**

"I would say that almost all of the challenges identified chime with things Pyramid has experienced with one funder or another over the last few years. It is really useful to have those challenges articulated in this way, and to know that other organisations in Leeds (of all sizes) face similar challenges. I will be forwarding this [summary] paper on to our Board of Trustees as I think it will be helpful in framing many of the discussions we have about our vision as an organisation." — **James Hill, Pyramid of Arts**

# 2

## Transformational Student Education

Working with academic staff and alongside Student Welcome, Student Success, Lifelong Learning, Work-Based Learning and Partnerships, and Arts, Humanities and Cultures' employability teams, we make sure students have access to world class learning opportunities with our cultural partners on campus and in the city.



Culture at Leeds Fair © Cultural Institute

**602** students attended targeted events facilitated by the CI

**19** Paid student opportunities including 2 years in industry

## Connecting students with leading cultural organisations



Ashruta Mani © Frances Marshall

The Leeds International Piano Competition is one of the world's best-known music competitions, attracting exceptional young pianists from around the globe. In the year running up to the 2024 competition, our institutional partnership has led to paid internships, year in industry placements, volunteering roles, and career-focused events.

"The opportunity to liaise with professionals in the classical music industry across the globe has been highly rewarding. As we are a small team, I have had the chance to work with other departments and learn a lot about the industry beyond just my role as production assistant. The consistent collaboration between senior staff members and student interns has created a very encouraging environment to work in." — **Ashruta Mani, Production Assistant at Leeds International Piano Competition (BA Music year in industry placement)**



Hannah Guy © Katherine Lacey

## Creative opportunities for student practitioners

Light Night 2023 provided a valuable opportunity to work with students on 'Light Can Also Rhyme', inspired by Zaffar Kunial's poem 'Crystal Avenues,' commissioned earlier in 2023 as part of the Inspired By Bragg cultural programme. This large-scale light and sound installation was the focal point of Light Night on campus, attracting 1400 visitors. Undergraduate Hannah Guy worked with technician Katherine Lacey to develop the projection-mapped content, responding to the themes of the poem, and music composed by School of Music student Ashruta Mani.

"Thank you so much for facilitating such an exciting opportunity yet again – easily my favourite project I've been involved with as an undergrad." — **Hannah Guy, BA Fine Art**



Brandon Hinds © Opera North

## Connecting students with leading cultural organisations

Three DARE Interns joined Opera North for 20-day bursaried internships. A final-year BA Liberal Arts (International) student worked in Chorus Management; a second-year BA Theatre & Performance student joined Facilities Management; and a second-year BSc Biotechnology with Enterprise student worked with the Projects team, supporting performances in the Howard Assembly Room, and later gaining casual employment in Stage Management and Artist Liaison.'

"Getting to work with this team has been such a fulfilling learning experience [...]. I developed several skills in event management and planning, but also had the opportunity to work with the tech and film departments. I received training in stage managing and artist liaison, which I can utilise directly in future work. I feel a lot more confident in the idea of pursuing a career in the arts following my studies..." — **Brandon Hinds, DARE Intern, Howard Assembly Room Projects Support**

Cathleen LeGrand  
© Cultural Institute

## Putting skills into practice with cultural partners

Through our Summer 2023 CAKE programme, we facilitated two project placements for PhD students to support The Tetley (now Yorkshire Contemporary), and Yorkshire Dance through applied research. Cathleen LeGrand undertook a feasibility study into the future use of Yorkshire Dance's building:

"I completed international ethnographic fieldwork for my doctoral work and I was glad to test out those data collection techniques and conduct authentic research in settings that interest me. [Supporting initiatives such as this] is a meaningful role that universities should play in their wider communities." — **Cathleen LeGrand, PhD, School of Media and Communication**



# 3

## Enhancing the staff and student experience on campus and nurturing audiences through cultural activities

This year we developed a fun and inclusive environment on campus by creating cultural experiences that help to engender a sense of belonging and community.

The main vehicles for this were Light Night and the Smeaton300 programme. Additionally, we collaborated with Opera North to present a family-friendly performance of *Little Listeners: Cinderella*, which featured a short opera and a related craft activity, as well as a free performance for staff by the critically acclaimed Ladies of Midnight Blue, also presented by Opera North, as part of the annual staff festival.

Light Night © Katherine Lacey



### Light Night

In 2023, the Cultural Institute produced, coordinated, and commissioned work for Light Night on campus. This featured various installations, including a map of refugee and migrant journeys, a retro gaming-inspired performance, and self-playing pianos. These were created in partnership with stage@leeds, Clothworkers Centenary Concert Hall, and Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery, with contributions from Leeds International Piano Competition and The Highrise Project. The Cultural Institute also commissioned 'Light Can Also Rhyme' (see page 11). We welcomed over three times the number of visitors compared to the previous year.

## Smeaton300

In January 2024, the University of Leeds launched its year-long Smeaton300 partnership, in collaboration with Foxglove, to celebrate the legacy of Leeds-born John Smeaton, the UK's first civil engineer. Timed for the 300th anniversary of Smeaton's birth, we worked with colleagues in the School of Civil Engineering, and cultural production, on a series of events for staff, students and the city of Leeds.

The Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery commissioned Iranian-born artist Mohammad Barrangi responding to Smeaton300's Find Our Way Home theme to create new work drawing on his personal experiences of migration and disability. After spending time in Special Collections, and with various researchers, Barrangi created 'One Night, One Dream, Life in the Lighthouse', a mixed media exhibition. The exhibition drew considerable press coverage, including BBC Radio 4's Front Row, and The Guardian.

"His amazing works reminds me of my childhood. I am a refugee from Iran and studying in Leeds Uni." — **Exhibition Visitor**

"My three-year-old loved listening to the story of Lily and then spotting the unicorn zebra – like being inside a dream and showing him what art can be – a connection to story and feelings." — **Exhibition Visitor**

In February, Leeds Industrial Museum hosted the first-ever off-campus Be Curious, the University's public engagement festival, with Smeaton300 as its theme. In May, Be Curious on campus had a dedicated Smeaton300 area, featuring eight research-inspired activities. Moon Palace mobile observatory and artwork, developed as part of LEEDS2023 with students and staff from the School of Physics and Astronomy, returned to campus. Additionally, visitors crafted jellyfish from recycled materials with artists Immortal Bloom, which will be featured in the 2024 Light Night installations on campus.



Mohammad Barrangi's One Night, One Dream, Life in the Lighthouse © Justin Slee, University of Leeds



Top: Be Curious © Dustin Smith  
Bottom: Moon Palace © Cultural Institute

**8**  
**Researchers**  
researchers involved  
in projects across  
three faculties

**2500**  
**Participants**  
250 at Leeds  
Industrial Museum,  
2000 on campus

**2893**  
**Visitors**  
To the Mohammad  
Barrangi exhibition &  
dance performance



# 4



“It is welcoming. It’s a gentle affair with high impact.”

— Resident at listening post

“I’ve lived here all my life, and this park can be scary at night in particular, and here we are on an event that drifts into the evening where everyone is together, having a good time, looking after each other.”

— Resident

## WoW Park

Building on Dr Anna Barker’s research into safety in public parks, the Cultural Institute explored how art and cultural interventions could make Woodhouse Moor more welcoming and inclusive, particularly for women and girls.

The project involved co-designing community-led artistic interventions with local people and organisations, focusing on real-time feedback and iterative design. This approach trialed a new model where art and community collaboration drive meaningful change in urban spaces. Street Space, a social enterprise specialising in collaborative design, led the community engagement, while the Cultural Institute brought these creative interventions to life.

The project aimed to influence policy discussions on urban public spaces and guide future park planning for Leeds City Council. By collaborating with the Council, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, and local stakeholders, it ensured its insights contributed to wider regional and national conversations. Recommendations from the WoW Park project will be incorporated into future developments for Woodhouse Moor as part of the Council’s ‘Parks on a Page’ strategy. Key elements like the civic toilet initiative and wayfinding posts will be implemented, addressing the Council’s limited capacity for community engagement.





Wow Park © Sophie Okonkwo



Wow Park © Cultural Institute

## Wow Park Partners

Leeds City Council, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, School of Law

## Collaborators

Street Space, The Community Collaborative Design Group, Hyde Park Football Club and Young People, Hyde Park Source, Elders Connect, The Moor Market, Leeds Muslim Youth Forum, Left Bank, St Augustine's Wrangthorn Church, Hyde Park Book Club, Rainbow Junktion, All Hallows Leeds, Unity Day

"Hearing different perspectives has been really good – local and student voices. Love a community project."

— **Co-design group member**

"I liked hearing other people's perspectives – it's good to hear different angles and thoughts". "My daily interactions with the park have changed, I've become more aware."

— **Co-design group member**

## Wow Park: In Numbers

### Feedback Collected

**53** pieces of structured feedback

**22** pieces of verbal feedback

### Public Engagement

**1** local engagement lead hired

**144** direct engagements

**450** postcards distributed

**24** community organisations consulted

**98** pieces of community feedback

### Collaborative Design

**12** local residents in co-design team

**3** design workshops

### Creative Interventions

**9** new community week activities/installations

**100+** attendees at Celebration Event

### Community Engagement

**3** student ambassadors actively engaged

**6** local organizations hosted stalls

**4** local artists performed

# 5

## Institutional Partnerships

The Cultural Institute manages a number of existing and new institutional partnerships, each completely different.

This year we helped to develop treasured existing partnerships, including the DARE programme with Opera North and the Leeds International Piano Competition. While the partnership with LEEDS2023 came to an end, we were excited to establish two new partnerships with the National Poetry Centre and Bradford 2025.



Keisha Thompson © Benji Reid

### DARE

We established new working and communications groups to further develop the DARE programme with Opera North. Now in its 17th year, this award-winning collaboration, spans a wide range of research and student activities, including Holocaust Memorial Day, International Women's Day concerts, and the DARE Liberty Lectures. Opera North's *Green Season* spurred new collaborations with researchers and students, with a commitment to embed new ways of reducing carbon emissions and to creatively engage the public with the climate crisis. Other highlights included the announcement of the new DARE Prize winner, Keisha Thompson; academic in residence, Katie Gardner; and a sandpit focused on *Madame Butterfly*.

"The most beneficial part of my placement at LEEDS2023 is the people I've met. Whether that is inside or outside the organisation, it's been invaluable expanding my network."

— **Richard (Politics and Social Policy, Year in Industry)**



Piano planter, University of Leeds Campus  
© Cultural Institute

"The University of Leeds has been an incredible supporter and champion of LEEDS2023 from the beginning of our journey. Working together, we have unlocked opportunities for children and young people from across the city. We have benefited from the university's expertise in projects like Moon Palace ... and there has been a brilliant engagement from their student population."

— **Abigail Scott Paul, Director of External Relations, LEEDS2023**

## Leeds International Piano Competition

The University of Leeds supported LIPC to prepare for its 2024 competition, held and broadcast partially on and from our campus. LIPC developed their global leadership of music competitions around gender parity and environmental sustainability and continue to build outstanding media partners globally. Their local creative engagement went from strength to strength, working for example with local community groups on creating beautiful piano planters. Our students provide pivotal support and innovation to the competition, for example this year researching and reducing its carbon footprint. (See also student engagement, [page 10](#).)

### LEEDS2023

The University of Leeds' partnership with LEEDS2023 created significant opportunities in research, education, and outreach. Highlights included Moon Palace mobile observatory and a study into the My LEEDS2023 Neighbourhood Hosts, a project exploring residents' stories and culture, funded by the Horizons Institute and led by postdoctoral research fellow Alex De Little. The collaboration spanned local and global impacts, demonstrating effective teamwork and innovative approaches.



NEST, LEEDS2023 © JMA Photography

"I am thrilled to be working with the Cultural Institute on the development of the National Poetry Centre. Our collaboration has been inspiring and deeply rewarding so far, and I'm excited to see how the partnership will continue to flourish as we bring this visionary project to life."

— **Nick Barley,**  
**Director of NPC**



The Bradford 2025 team © Bradford 2025

'The relationship not only contributes directly to the Bradford 2025 programme but also establishes longer term partnerships which will positively impact Bradford and the region in the future.'

— **Dan Bates, Chief Executive, Bradford 2025**

## National Poetry Centre

Significant development of the National Poetry Centre, a legacy project of Poet Laureate and Professor of Poetry Simon Armitage, in collaboration with Leeds City Council and Arts Council England, included the announcement of Treasury support and the appointment of Director Nick Barley. The team, supported by the University working group chaired by Dean Ben Walmsley, is developing a creative programme alongside the capital development of Trinity St David's Church.



National Poetry Centre, Artist's Impression © National Poetry Centre

## Bradford 2025

Kickstarting research relationships ahead of Bradford 2025 City of Culture.

we collaborated with the University of Bradford and Horizons Institute to deliver a programme of events, including workshops and sandpits focussed on culture, climate, and community (agency and belonging). As a result, Horizons Institute pump-prime funding now supports three new projects. A new partnership with Bradford 2025, emphasising student employability and research, was approved in February, with Partnership Manager Abby Dix-Mason leading the collaboration.



Somali Village © Cultural Institute

### Case Study 1

## A Somali Village in Colonial Bradford

Our dedicated Bradford-focused Sapling project saw Associate Professor of Islamic History, Dr Fozia Bora (Languages, Cultures and Societies) collaborating with the Anglo-Somali Society, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Everyday Muslim, Bradford 2025, University of Bradford, and Bradford Literature Festival. This project critically revisits the stories of sixty Somali people who lived in a walled compound 'Somali Village' in Lister Park as part of the 1904 Great Exhibition, attracting nearly 350,000 visitors. By centring British Somalis in the public reinterpretation of this history and addressing issues including the white ethnographic gaze and "looking back" as an act of resistance, this project creates both research and cultural outputs.



Children's Day Reimagined, LEEDS2023  
© Fevered Sleep

### Case study 2

## P.L.A.Y (Participation, Learning and Arts for Youth)

A one-year youth arts activity programme led by LEEDS2023 in partnership with the Cultural Institute, supported by Arts Council England. P.L.A.Y brought together a wide range of activities engaging young people of different ages across formal and informal education, spanning various contexts and art forms. It was a unique, one-off investment in the creative engagement and leadership of young people in the city. The University of Leeds, Leeds Cultural Education Partnership, Leeds Learning Alliance, and Leeds City Council partnered with LEEDS2023 to explore how to best ensure the learning and legacy of this investment.

"Our position at the heart of the region is hugely important to us and our partnership with Bradford 2025 will forge even closer connections between the two cities and universities."

— **Professor Hai-Sui Yu, Interim Vice-Chancellor and President at the University of Leeds**

# 6

## Cultural Engagement Strategy

The University of Leeds adopted a new Cultural Engagement Strategy in February 2024. It sets out a vision of how culture, creativity and artmaking provide essential and unique opportunities for the University to realise its aim of making a positive difference in the world.

The Cultural Institute is one of the engines that helps deliver this strategy, working alongside many cultural producing partners in Schools and Institutes within the University. Building the foundations for audience development and programming, working with expert consultants, and collaborating with all our cultural producing partners on campus, this initiative will establish a shared approach to the University's cultural programme and include a new website and box office.

“Culture and creativity are the absolute backbones to our lives and the ways in which we interact with other people. And that’s why this Strategy is so important for the ways in which we teach our students.” — **Professor Karen Burland, University Academic Lead: Student Opportunities and Futures**

“The Cultural Engagement Strategy is fundamental to the university strategy and to our ambitions as a great university.” — **Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Jeff Grabill**



© Justin Slee



Cultural Institute Summer Celebration  
© Cultural Institute

### Aims

- Foster impactful research and knowledge exchange in and with the cultural sector to nurture our regional cultural ecology and make a positive difference in the world
- Support the delivery of a transformative student education
- Enhance the staff and student experience on campus
- Nurture audience, community and public engagement through cultural activities

The strategy describes driver for change around equity, diversity and inclusion, environmental sustainability and coherence, and distinctiveness and visibility.

“Leeds is an amazing city full of really rich cultural organisations. It’s really exciting to think about the possible ways in which the cultural industries and a university can collaborate more closely together.” — **Hannah Robertshaw, Creative Director, Yorkshire Dance**

# Partners & artists we've worked with this year

## Institutional Partners

Bradford 2025  
LEEDS2023  
Leeds International Piano Competition  
National Poetry Centre  
Opera North – DARE programme

## CAKE partners

Balbir Singh Dance Company  
Common Wealth  
Compass Live Art  
East Leeds Project  
East Street Arts  
Festival of Thrift  
Foxglove  
Highrise Project  
Hyde Park Book Club  
Interplay Theatre  
Invisible Flock  
Leeds Heritage Theatres  
Leeds International Film Festival  
Leeds Museums & Galleries  
Leeds Playhouse  
Mafwa Theatre  
Mind The Gap  
Music Leeds  
Northern Ballet  
Performance Ensemble  
Phoenix Dance Theatre  
Pyramid  
Sable  
SAIL  
Slung Low

South Asian Arts UK  
Space2  
Street Space  
Super Friendz LTD  
Thackray Museum of Medicine  
The Hepworth Wakefield  
The Tetley  
Transform Leeds  
tutti frutti productions  
Word Up North  
Yorkshire Dance  
Yorkshire Sculpture Park

## Artists supported

Mahshid Alavi  
Mohammad Barrangi  
Tabitha Bast  
Immortal Bloom  
Joanna Byrne  
Alice Gilmour  
Vanessa Grasse  
Hannah Guy  
Ellie Harrison  
Shivani Jatar  
Katherine Lacey  
Alex De Little  
Ashruta Mani  
Alison McIntyre  
Sam Metz  
Ozzy Moysey  
Holly Rowan Hesson  
Geraldine Snell  
Andi Walker  
Sue Walpole

## Sector networks and organisations

Cultural Consortium Leeds  
Culture Network North  
Arts Council England  
West Yorkshire Combined Authority  
Leeds City Council  
Leeds Learning Alliance  
Leeds33  
Leeds Arts Health Wellbeing Network



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