

Bradford 2025 UK City of  
Culture & University of Leeds

# Partnership Review



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



In partnership with:

**BRADFORD 2025**  
UK City of Culture

# Contents

<b>04</b>	Partnership in Numbers
<b>06</b>	Introduction
<b>08</b>	Student Placements
<b>11</b>	Experiential Learning
<b>24</b>	Research
<b>30</b>	Summary

“ For me, the most surprising thing about Bradford 2025 was the vastness of it all, how grand and vibrant and colourful it has been. When I look back to find the commonality I would say it's about being people driven and bringing people together. — Ishleen Kaur, Bradford 2025 Intern / MA Digital Design Futures

# Partnership in Numbers

475

student engagements  
with the partnership

31

in-curriculum  
student projects

25

artists engaged in  
the partnership

6

conferences  
supported

53

university staff  
engaged

12

funded research  
projects

5

faculties engaged  
in the partnership

64

Bradford 2025 events  
supported by students

233

student volunteering  
hours

57

community research  
participants

4

Bradford 2025 paid  
student placements

# Introduction

Inclusive partnerships are embedded in our mission to deliver an impactful UK City of Culture programme; a year that makes residents proud to 'be Bradford' and people around the world want to engage with the incredible talent, history and creative heart of the district. Our partnership with the University of Leeds has produced a wealth of academic research, interdisciplinary collaborations and student experience that have all supported the realisation of those core aims. Supported by the Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team, the partnership has connected with teams across the organisation – from Programming and Production through to Creative Engagement and Participation – and extended its impact further through collaborations with the University of Bradford and other external partners.

The depth of these relationships has led to a rich body of work including new evaluation methodologies, additional sustainability development, creative responses to the programme and community research projects that will all reach well beyond 2025. I am delighted that, through this partnership, we have created a fantastic foundation for longer term collaboration between Bradford's creative, research and learning communities and the University of Leeds.

— **Shanaz Gulzar, Creative Director, Bradford 2025**

As institutions like the University of Leeds continue to rethink the civic role they play in their communities and wider regions, partnering with Bradford UK City of Culture 2025 presented a golden opportunity to engage our student and staff communities in creative initiatives connected to Bradford and its wider district.

With over 80 researchers and artists keen to engage in the run up to 2025, we witnessed a strong appetite for interdisciplinary collaboration and for creating local impact, alongside new ideas, generosity and creativity. This report is like a tapestry, weaving layers of activity into a powerful picture of a bespoke, co-created, collaborative approach. It demonstrates that partnering with this impressively successful City of Culture has enabled us to engage our students and researchers with the people and institutions of Bradford, develop new expertise, make new partners, and do so in a meaningful way. We hope that this is just the beginning of our long-term commitment to collaborate across our diverse region, to improve lives, and help to make both our brilliant cities better than the sum of their parts.

— **Wieke Eringa, Director of the Cultural Institute & Professor Ben Walmsley, Dean of Cultural Engagement, University of Leeds**



Installation view of Nnena Kalu's presentation at the Turner Prize 2025, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery. Photo © David Levene

# Student Placements

Bradford 2025's ambition to design a meaningful cultural programme for audiences, artists and communities aligned with the University's long-term commitment to create transformative learning opportunities for students and build positive relationships in real-world settings.

Year in Industry and paid internship placements were a core pillar of the partnership, providing an important mechanism for students to take on roles supporting programme delivery with Bradford 2025 Cultural Learning and Evaluation teams. University staff and students were encouraged to be fleet-of-foot and identify engagement potential in the rapidly developing programme to connect student research and in-curriculum opportunities throughout the year. The depth of learning experiences that flourished through the partnership reflects the generous collaborative approach of Bradford 2025, the University and our external partners.

## Cultural Learning Team Placement

Keen to broaden her experience in the work environment, School of Geography undergraduate, Evie Facer-Floate, joined Bradford 2025 on a Year in Industry placement. Based with the Cultural Learning Team, Evie worked with artists, producers, community partners and commercial stakeholders across a range of projects.

The [Bradford 2025 x Penguin Books](#) partnership was a placement highlight for Evie who oversaw the selection and distribution of over 4,000 books donated to all 43 state secondary schools in the Bradford district, including SEND settings and alternative provision. The project was a valuable introduction to the complexities of partnership working and a supportive workplace culture helped Evie take on new responsibilities, "Bradford 2025 has been that positive role model for me when it comes to future careers. I know what being a good manager looks like now."



Evie Facer-Floate



Penguin Books Bradford 2025  
© Karol Wyszynski

Guided by her manager Evie led on the delivery of How to Get Published with Penguin Books, a creative industry panel event at Loading Bay with guest editors and published authors.

"It felt like a proper accumulation of everything I'd learned throughout my year. I was talking to teams across Bradford 2025 – audiences, production, programming. And at the same time, I was making sure Penguin were happy with the copy, advertising it to the right groups, booking the venue, finding a day. All the things that go on behind the scenes of an event."

Stepping back into university life highlighted the different skills Evie learned on placement, particularly managing deadlines, writing and research methods. Overall there has been a significant shift in Evie's confidence and optimism for the future. "My biggest takeaway from the placement is the confidence I've built and being able to take those experiences into other areas. Instead of being daunted I'm excited for this next chapter."

“ We ensured Evie had a broad portfolio of projects to work on including some that sat within her subject specialism of Geography, such as Wild Uplands and Bradford on Foot, and some that would stretch her skills, notably the Penguin Books Partnerships. Her readiness to learn and take initiative meant that Evie soon became a much-valued member of the team, so much so that we secured additional budget and she was employed by Bradford 2025 beyond the end of her placement. — Rhiannon Hannon, Director of Engagement and Learning, Bradford 2025

# Student Placements

## Evaluation Team internships

Isla Paterson, PhD Candidate, School of Languages, and Isheen Kaur, MA Digital Design Futures, began paid internship roles with the Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team in January 2025. As well as supporting the team's broader evaluation programme, both students were invited to focus on their chosen research interests in the Bradford 2025 [Story of Change](#) impact strategy.

"Close working with the University opened doors to new opportunities that might not otherwise have been available to us as a UK City of Culture. This included opportunities for placement students working within the Evaluation Team providing both additional capacity and focused research in specific themes within the Bradford 2025 delivery."  
— Gail Smith, Evaluation Manager, Bradford 2025

## A Cultural City of Sanctuary

Isla chose to expand on their PhD research skills and apply them in a more community orientated context. Their evaluation focus explored how the programme was delivering accessible creative opportunities for people seeking sanctuary in the Bradford district, which had recently become the first ever [Cultural City of Sanctuary](#).

Working closely with the Evaluation Team and Stand & Be Counted Theatre Company, Isla supported community workshops for people seeking sanctuary to create an immersive sound installation as part of The Railway Children. During Refugee Week, Isla evaluated [What Will We Do Without Exile?](#) a multi-sensory installation at The Beacon housed in a refugee tent designed by Palestinian artist Basel Zaraq. Commissioned as part of Moomin 80, the installation invited audiences into the space to spend time imagining life beyond occupation and war.

Isla's interest in working with sanctuary organisations was developed further when they joined the University of Bradford Sanctuary Research Group and participated in research workshops with academics and community leaders. Since completing the Bradford 2025 internship Isla has started work with a community placemaking social enterprise in a role that directly builds on their experiences in Bradford.

“It was great to get out of my comfort zone and start to work with sanctuary organisations like Stand & Be Counted. Helping to facilitate creative sessions and going out on group trips meant that I learned to be flexible and respond to the needs of the people there, rather than going in with a fixed idea of what was going to happen.”  
— Isla Paterson, Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team Paid-Intern and PhD Candidate, School of Languages



Basel Zaraq What Will We Do Without Exile? Bradford 2025 © Nida Mozuraite

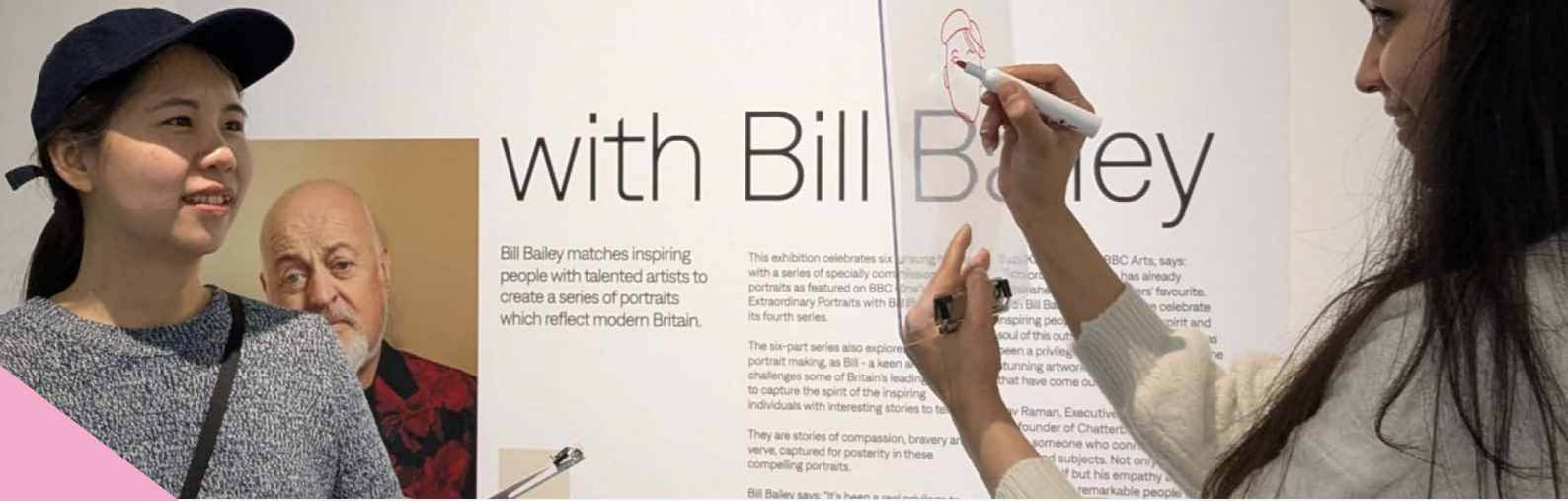
## Illustrating creative connections

Learning about the wide-ranging qualitative research being developed by Bradford 2025 prompted paid-intern Isheen to apply her creative design skills to the process. Focussing on the district-wide [Our Patch](#) creative community programme Isheen drew live workshop illustrations to build connections with project participants and talk about their creative activities. The illustrations helped pave the way for deeper participant insights and gave Isheen the confidence to continue with her creative evaluation approach. "The highlight for me has been connecting with people through evaluation, having real conversations and being authentic, rather than just trying to get information out of someone." Isheen is currently engaged with new community and design projects in Liverpool and Manchester that expand on the creative evaluation approach she developed with Bradford 2025.

Our Patch © Isheen Kaur



# Extraordinary Portraits



Yun Ci Liu (Poe) and Antara Malhotra © Nicola Murray

## Experiential Learning

### Extraordinary Portraits

MA Art Gallery and Museum Studies students Antara Malhotra and Yun Ci Liu (Poe) worked with Fourth Idea Studio co-founder and Bradford 2025 freelance creative Nicola Murray to design an interactive exhibition experience for Extraordinary Portraits with Bill Bailey. The Extraordinary Portraits exhibition, delivered in partnership with the BBC and Chatterbox production company, was hosted at Loading Bay and visited by over 11,000 people in just three weeks. Antara and Poe [designed playful, accessible activities](#) for visitors to create their own portraits which were shown in the main exhibition space and layered together, creating a vibrant and evolving display of 1200 drawings.

Poe returned to Keelung, Taiwan in Autumn 2025 and founded CirCurate artists' studio. Since establishing the new venue, Poe has embedded Bradford 2025 audience engagement learning into her curatorial practice, recently leading a creative sharing session reflecting on her work with Nicola. "The way Nicola prioritised audience engagement in the Extraordinary Portraits exhibition and thought about audiences has definitely shaped how I've approached curating since." Fourth Idea Studios and CirCurate are exploring opportunities for creative online exchanges in 2026 that help artists and designers in Keelung and Bradford to find new ways of connecting and sharing creative practice.

### Footsteps student research

“ The opportunity for an undergraduate student to develop a live research brief was extraordinary. Aya had to negotiate diverse communication approaches, overcome setbacks and unexpected changes to the plan, and find a way to succeed. She experienced immense personal and professional development, pushing herself out of her comfort zone and becoming more confident and capable as a result. For the whole exercise to happen in our local area and Aya's hometown made it even more special. — Hughie Brown, Programme Manager, BA Global Creative Industries

Aya Rose, BA Global Cultural Industries, was awarded Footsteps funding to research access to live music in Bradford. The opportunity to work on a student led research brief, arrange interviews and review data was an important milestone in Aya's professional development.

“I grew up in Bradford and returning there as part of the UK City of Culture was especially meaningful, it allowed me to reconnect with the city from a professional and academic perspective. Working on a live research brief strengthened my understanding of the cultural and creative industries in a real-world context, particularly around music, place, and creative labour.”

— Aya Rose, BA Global Cultural Industries, School of Performance and Cultural Industries



Aya Rose

# Experiential Learning

## Young Curators Insight Day at Impressions Gallery

Young Curators is an award-winning Impressions Gallery programme supporting young adults to become Bradford's future creatives. In 2025 the Young Curators produced [Make Yourself at Home](#), a major Bradford 2025 exhibition combining newly commissioned photography with archival material sourced from Bradford residents to explore a collective sense of home.

Twelve students participated in the peer-to-peer Insight Day that was co-designed with Impressions Gallery and the University of Leeds Faculty of Arts Humanities and Cultures (AHC) Employability and Careers. The day included an exhibition tour led by the Young Curators who shared their experiences of collaborating with established photographers, developing community partnerships and installing the exhibition. The students and Young Curators heard creative careers talks from the Impressions Gallery team and took part in group exercises together to discuss career challenges and opportunities for finding work in gallery settings.

Student applications to take part in the Insight Day came from from Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Culture, School of Maths and Leeds University Business School. Thirteen of the 18 applicants identified as being part of a widening participation cohort. This was a new partnership with Impressions Gallery and participant feedback reflected the friendly and engaging discussions, with all students choosing to stay at the gallery beyond the workshop session.

“ We targeted recruitment for the Young Curators Insight Day at students from a widening participation background to ensure they could benefit from the facilitated conversations, creative connections and career support on offer. We hope to develop this relationship with Impressions Gallery further and work together again on employability and experiential learning activities.

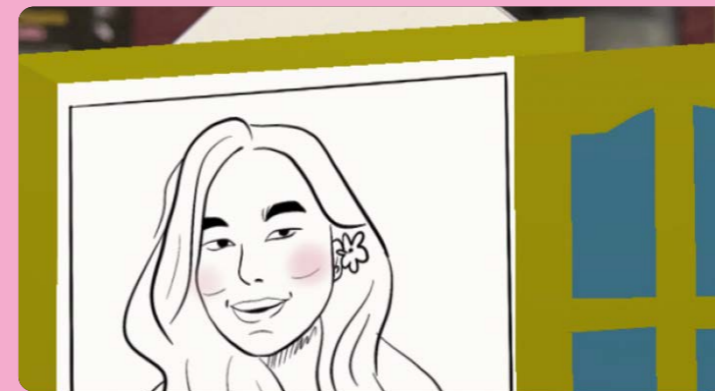
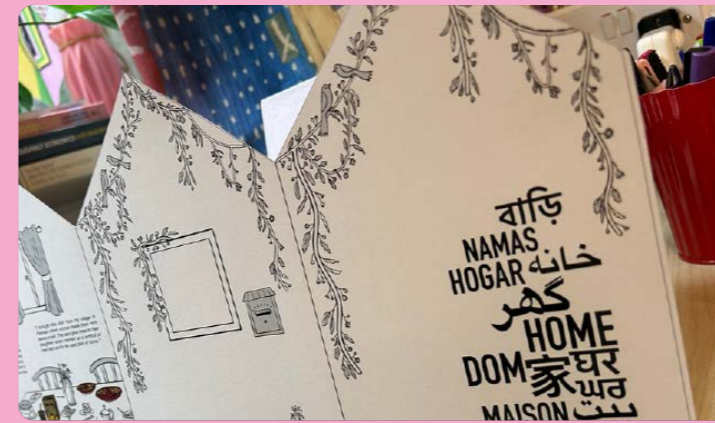
— Becky Kidner, Senior Employability & Placements Officer



Young Curators © Yasmeen Soudani



“Isheen’s involvement with the Meet Our Mother’s project was a genuinely valuable opportunity, allowing her to engage meaningfully with place-based storytelling, community voices, and professional creative practice. The experience clearly supported her growth as an emerging practitioner and demonstrates the strength of partnerships that connect students directly with industry and community led initiatives.”  
— Vanessa Walker, Deputy Programme Manager,  
MA Digital Design Futures



© Isheen Kaur

## Augmented Reality brings family food stories to life

“ It was exciting for us to have an artistic response and digital design research project happening in tandem with Meet Our Mothers. A lot of the creative exploration happening ‘on the ground’ with the augmented reality components to our cookbook was mirrored by Isheen’s own creative process, exploring how animation and augmented reality could tell stories of food, community and belonging. On a personal level, it was particularly significant for me to be able to have been part of this partnership opportunity having studied my undergraduate degree at the University — a real full circle moment! — Florence Simms, Bradford 2025 Creative Technologist / University of Leeds Alum

[Meet Our Mothers](#) is a collection of intergenerational family recipes shared by Bradford residents, connecting people to the places that feel like home. Led by artist Deepa Mann-Kler, the Bradford 2025 project wove together recipes and family food stories, bringing them to life in a beautifully designed book featuring portrait photography and Augmented Reality (AR) experiences. Digital Design Futures student, Isheen Kaur, created a 3D design-led response to Meet Our Mothers for her specialist project to explore ideas around memory, experiences of adaptation and making a new home. Isheen reviewed the Meet Our Mothers recipe collection and conducted further interviews with people who are first, second and third generation migrants and who shared favourite objects that held significant memories. A prototype installation, inspired by the shape of a pitched roof house, brought together stories, objects and recipes through illustration, sound and AR. The project was supported by Bradford 2025 Creative Technologist and University of Leeds Alumni, Florence Simms. Isheen’s prototype design was showcased at The Beacon at the Meet Our Mothers book launch.

# Partnership Collaborations: Sustainability

“ The partnership with the University of Leeds and University of Bradford was invaluable as we were able to work with academics and professionals to verify our data framework and ensure academic rigour and best practices were applied in carbon accounting and reporting. Through connections made at the University of Leeds we are also exploring the legacy of this data set and the value it holds to support future years of culture, as well as the wider events sector, to support with benchmarking, target setting, and further decarbonisation. — Jamie Saye, Executive Director and Mary Lawrence, Lead Consultant, SAIL

The partnership supported Bradford 2025’s sustainability strategy through interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, professional staff and students. This work was cross-institutional bringing together academics from the universities of Bradford and Leeds to problem solve and test developing sustainability systems and data analysis.

## Sustainable event delivery

Reducing the environmental impact of cultural events is a core ambition of Bradford 2025, delivered in partnership with sustainability organisation, SAIL. A carbon data repository was developed to support consistent data capture and analysis across Bradford 2025 events and operations.

A working group, led by the [University’s Positive Impact Partnership in Sustainability Services](#), used a peer-review approach to support the framework’s development. The cross-institutional collaboration brought together SAIL, the Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team and researchers from the Universities of Leeds and Bradford to assess areas including energy consumption, procurement supply chains and audience travel behaviour.



Above: The Beacon Bradford 2025 © Andrew Bengtson  
The Beacon is run on an efficient hybrid generator converting more of the available fuel into electricity, reducing overall carbon dioxide  
Left: Sustainability Awards © University of Leeds Sustainability Service

The collaboration has also been shared across teaching and sector events. Sustainability Project Officer Siobhan Macguire presented the sustainability framework to 50 Osaka Summer School students, and SAIL co-founder Jamie Saye joined a panel discussion with colleagues from the School of Earth and Environment and the Faculty of Biological Sciences at the University of Leeds’ Sustainability Awards.

Colleagues from the National Cultural Data Observatory (NCDO) and Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team are exploring how the NCDO and SAIL data sets might be aligned and integrated. This ongoing work offers the potential to build an even broader data set, standardising measurements for audience engagement, economic impact and decarbonisation in the creative sector.

## Sustainable venue research

The collaboration with SAIL created further opportunities for students from the School Of Earth and Environment to research sustainable event models in local and temporary venues. Student fieldwork and research, facilitated by the Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team, took place at Bradford 2025 venues, The Beacon and Loading Bay.

# Partnership Collaborations: Turner Prize 2025

## Turner Prize 2025 Education Partnership

[Turner Prize 2025](#), hosted at Bradford's Cartwright Hall Art Gallery between September 2025 – February 2026, exhibited the work of four shortlisted artists Nnena Kalu, Rene Matić, Mohammed Sami, and Zadie Xa. The winning artist, Nnena Kalu, was announced in December 2025; commended by the judges for her lively translation of expressive gesture into captivating abstract sculpture and drawing.

The [University of Leeds Turner Prize 2025 education partnership](#) with Bradford 2025 and Yorkshire Contemporary provided students with real-world cultural sector experience through live briefs, creative industry talks, and public events with artists, researchers and cultural professionals. The partnership was underpinned by a strong internal collaboration between the University's School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies and Libraries' Cultural Collections & Galleries with student engagement led by Nichola Cassé at the Cultural Institute.

“ We have really valued engaging with the work of the shortlisted Turner Prize 2025 artists through the partnership in ways which will encourage creative and meaningful engagement across multiple communities.

— Professor Joanne Crawford,  
Head of Fine Art, History of Art  
and Cultural Studies

Below: The Grinder (2023), Mohammed Sami.  
Installation view at Turner Prize 2025, Cartwright Hall  
Art Gallery. Courtesy Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture  
© David Lindsay



“ These events brought new, contemporary art-engaged audiences to our campus Galleries. They offered a very special opportunity for our existing audiences to connect with this prestigious international event held in Bradford. Hosting these compelling discussions with artists, sector professionals and our local community supports our focus on enquiry-led programming that is relevant, thought-provoking and sparks curiosity and inspiration for our audiences.

— Layla Bloom, Head of Public Programme & Cultural Engagement, Cultural Collections & Galleries

## In conversation at Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery

Over 130 people attended two 'In Conversation' panel events hosted at Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery. Responding to the works of the shortlisted Turner Prize artists, the first event, hosted by Yorkshire Contemporary Turner Prize 2025 Co-Curator Michael Richmond, invited panellists Alice Clayden, Alison McIntyre, Aicha Merez, Sarah Roberts and Tim Steer to discuss 'notions of care' in art practice. The second event explored how diasporic memories are represented in art by artists and institutions and was hosted by Head of School Joanne Crawford with panellists Rudy Loewe, Shanaz Gulzar, Tamsin Hong and Karanjit Panesar. The discussions are available to hear on Cultural Collections and Galleries podcast 'Gloves Off'.



1. Cultures of Memory © Rowland Thomas  
2. Notions of Care © Yasmeen Soudani

## Curators Talk with South Square Centre and Yorkshire Contemporary

[Yorkshire Contemporary](#) Curator / Turner Prize 2025 Co-Curator, Michael Richmond and [South Square Centre](#) Programme & Gallery Manager, Domino Pantoni-Oakley presented at a Careers Insight event on campus attended by over 90 students. During the talks, they shared different experiences of working across a range of roles - from curating and event production to partnerships with communities and heritage institutions. As well as career highlights, students heard about the challenges and barriers Domino and Michael had experienced. The truthful accounts of working in the cultural sector were appreciated by many attendees who found Michael and Domino's honesty accessible and helpful to hear. Following the Curators Talk four students have proactively made connections with South Square Centre to explore future work opportunities.

“ Please can we have more of these events in future? Super interesting to hear from Michael's experience in galleries and Domino's experience across different sectors, running her own gallery and now working with community arts and heritage! Would love to hear more.

— Event Attendee

# Partnership Collaborations: Turner Prize 2025

“Partnering with the University of Leeds through the Cultural Institute provided Yorkshire Contemporary with an extraordinary opportunity to build on the platform provided by hosting Turner Prize 2025 in Bradford. The University’s world-class expertise, reputation, spaces and students afforded us the chance to curate a fantastic public programme as well as make meaningful connections to students through talks, tours, creative opportunities and a placement. The partnership allowed us to make the most of the Turner Prize in furthering academic and artistic exchanges in ways we hope will continue to develop as we look ahead to our future programme. — Michael Richmond, Curator, Yorkshire Contemporary

## Behind the scenes

History of Art student and Cultural Institute Year In Industry placement, Edie Wright, assisted Yorkshire Contemporary’s curatorial team on the Turner Prize 2025 exhibition installation. Edie was encouraged to learn about all aspects of the install at Cartwright Hall Art Gallery and felt she gained real insight, particularly when the nominated artists were on site working with the curators.

“I learnt a lot about all the work that goes into preparing for an exhibition from the software the curator uses, to the physical preparation of the space and hanging the artwork. I’ve made good connections with the Yorkshire Contemporary team who were eager to get me involved and make sure I was fully contributing to the install” — Edie Wright, BA History of Art / Project Management Assistant Intern

## OUR TURN: Bradford Art Show

OUR TURN visual arts festival was delivered by South Square Centre in partnership with Bradford 2025, Yorkshire Contemporary and Bradford Producing Hub. The festival, programmed in response to Turner Prize 2025 included the [Bradford Art Show](#) exhibition at Loading Bay and featured the work of more than 100 Bradford artists. Third Year Fine Art and Cultural Studies student, Ella Brereton took on an Exhibition Assistant volunteer role to support the Bradford Art Show curators, including University of Leeds Alum Kerry Harker. Ella was involved in all aspects of the exhibition including cataloguing, selecting and hanging the artworks. The experience influenced the focus of Ella’s final year dissertation and her decision to explore locational identity within the Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture.

“It’s been inspiring to witness the creative energy within Bradford and contribute to such an important cultural moment” — Ella Brereton, BA Fine Art and Cultural Studies / Bradford Art Show Exhibition Assistant

Below: Ella Brereton at Bradford Art Show © Yasmeen Soudani



Installation view of Zadie Xa’s presentation at the Turner Prize 2025, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery. Photo © David Levene

## Sound response

BA Music students were invited to create compositions in response to the Turner Prize 2025 exhibition. Working in a visual art context was a new experience for the music students who took part in a bespoke Curator Tour of the exhibition before deciding which artist’s work they would explore in their composition.

Responding to Zadie Xa’s work, Genevieve Dean reflected on Korean heritage through a soundscape featuring the Gayageum (가야금), a traditional Korean stringed instrument. Filip Jesionowski’s composition was inspired by Mohammed Sami’s *The Grinder* (2023), using strings to evoke a menacing, chaotic atmosphere without human voices and echoing Sami’s absence of figures. Louie Chandler Beavis produced a dub-inspired track celebrating queer culture, incorporating samples built from spectrograms of Rene Matic’s photography.

## University of Leeds Turner Prize 2025 Engagement

19

students visited  
Turner Prize  
2025 Preview

90

students attended  
Curators Talk

4

sound compositions  
created

34

students joined Turner  
Prize 2025 Curator Tour

9

In Conversation  
guest speakers

2

podcasts created

133

attended In  
Conversation events

8

events supported  
by students



Feelings Wheel (2022-25), Rene Matic. Installation view at Turner Prize 2025, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery. Courtesy of the artist, Arcadia Missa, London and Chapter NY, New York. Photo © David Levene

# Research

“ Bradford 2025’s evaluation strategy is grounded in proven approaches and guided by the Centre for Cultural Value’s Evaluation Principles. The University of Leeds partnership has facilitated exciting research and evaluation collaborations with academics and students from a range of disciplines; contributing valuable insights to the evaluation of Bradford 2025 and wider learning for UK Cities of Culture — Helen Bewsher, Evaluation Director, Bradford 2025

Bradford 2025 created a platform for new interdisciplinary community research with academics from the University of Leeds, University of Bradford and Bradford artists. Twelve runway projects – funded by Horizons Pump Prime, the Sapling Fund and Leeds Creative Labs – were developed in the lead up to and during 2025. The projects explored questions concerning creative health, access to nature and localised narratives in a community research context. Existing, long-term partnerships, including the National Data Observatory and Child of the North, have accelerated ongoing research, connecting with Bradford 2025’s growing body of data and wide network of cultural evaluation partners.



© Leeds Creative Labs, Edie Wright

## National Cultural Data Observatory

Post Doctoral qualitative researcher, Dr Clare Danek, School of Performance and Cultural Industries, led on the [National Cultural Data Observatory \(NCDO\)](#) Case Study to investigate the different ways that cultural organisations were collecting and accessing evaluation data during Bradford 2025. The long-term ambition of NCDO, led by the Centre for Cultural Value and The Audience Agency, is to build a shared, intelligent data platform for the arts, culture and heritage sectors. Clare’s research, supported by the Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team, accompanied the design and build of a Bradford 2025 NCDO prototype observatory that will test evaluation data analysis at local and regional levels.

## Child of the North

The [Child of the North](#) campaign on arts and creativity, led by Professor Mark Mon-Williams, sets out a simple but powerful argument that creative opportunity in childhood is a determinant of life chances. During 2025 the campaign worked with Bradford 2025 to build national awareness of children’s unequal access to art and culture and its impact on well-being, education and health. The Bradford 2025 programme offered a once-in-a-generation research opportunity for Born in Bradford, the National Data Observatory, and Child of the North to connect a range of data sets that have the potential to transform how cultural experiences are measured.



Sing Dance Leap © Eilly Welford for Bradford 2025, Royal Ballet and Opera, Opera North, Northern Ballet

“ If successful, this work could place cultural policy on the same evidential footing as preventative health or early-years education interventions. The potential implications extend far beyond Bradford. If researchers can demonstrate measurable improvements in child wellbeing, education or health linked to cultural engagement, the consequences for public policy would be substantial. — Professor Mark Mon-Williams, University of Leeds / Director of Born in Bradford Centre for Applied Education Research

## Leeds Creative Labs x Bradford Producing Hub

Leeds Creative Labs is a programme for interdisciplinary academic and artistic collaboration led by the Cultural Institute. Working in partnership with Bradford Producing Hub [six artist-researcher pairings were supported](#) to explore innovative approaches in creative health. Bradford artist Sue Walpole and University of Leeds PhD candidate, Morgan Thomas were subsequently awarded Cultural Institute Follow On Funding to develop their Creative Labs project Illuminating Minds and explore interactive experiences that make complex neural processes accessible to a wider audience.

## Creative Health Exchange

Dr Jess Johansson, University of Leeds / Bradford Institute for Health Research, joined the Bradford 2025 Creative Health steering group contributing to sector led events including the Creative Health Exchange conference at Bradford Arts Centre. Fran Coard, Leeds Arts Health and Wellbeing Network / Cultural Institute, co-hosted a session at the conference with creative health practitioners, artists and researchers exploring consortium approaches to a West Yorkshire Creative Health System.



Creative Health Exchange Bradford 2025 © Haider Mahboob

# Research

## Horizons Institute

“ The real excitement lies in our combined potential, with closer working relationships and a true sense of collaboration rather than competition, and how this can be harnessed for the good of the Universities, and crucially, for the district of Bradford.

— Dr Karina Croucher, University of Bradford

The Horizons Institute, supported by the Cultural Institute, facilitated two research sandpits with Bradford 2025, and the University of Bradford exploring ‘connections to nature’ and ‘culture’s role in agency and belonging’. The sandpits, attended by over 80 researchers and artists, resulted in five Horizons Pump Prime research applications. Three projects were awarded funding: The [Energy of Intention](#) exploring ideas around community wellbeing, [Muslims in the North: A Soundscape of Stories Untold](#), and [Reimagining Relationships with Urban Nature](#). The projects, managed by Horizons Research Manager Dr Dave Riley, were delivered throughout 2025, working with 57 research participants in community settings across the Bradford district.

“This work generated new connections and understandings between our two universities about what collaborative, place-based and people-powered research looks like. Seeing academics, artists and community members come together to celebrate and reflect on their joint work at the November sharing event was a particular highlight.”

— Inés Soria-Donlan, Research Manager, Horizons Institute

© Joslin McKinney



Cultural Institute

Bradford 2025 Partnership Review

## Partnership research engagement

# 12

funded research projects

# 57

research community participants

# 80

Horizons sandpit attendees

# 29

community research workshops

## Reimagining Relationships with Urban Nature

An overgrown patch of land in Shipley provided the focus for creative workshops in set design, re-wilded filmmaking, biodiversity mapping and creative writing. The project, led by Professor Joslin McKinney with University of Bradford Professors Ute Kelly and Vadim Grinevich, David Amuzu Natural England Senior Officer and artist Joanna Byrne, explored how the space was perceived by the local community and whether negative perceptions could be shifted through creative investigation.

Working alongside the creative team research participants were invited to notice the smaller environmental details of the overlooked space and relate to it more sympathetically. David Amuzu observed in the biodiversity workshop that people began to understand nature as an active presence, describing it as ‘the best teacher, teaching us what nature recovery is about, what should be done, how it should be done and how the future will look like.’

By the end of the project there was a sense of empathy and reconnection with the site and an appreciation of how perceptions of the wasteland had moved from being seen as a derelict space to one of beauty and strength.

“ The themes that emerged were seeing symbolism and meaning in nature’s resilience. One participant commented – Sometimes life feels like concrete. You can see no way through it, and yet, a tiny, fragile plant can push through. — Joanna Byrne, Lead Artist

## Somali Village project

“ The collaboration with the University of Bradford is crucial to the project and shows how much stronger research can be when folks from different institutions bring their complementary interests and areas of expertise together. It has been exhilarating to be on this learning journey together with our Bradford colleagues. — Professor Fozia Bora, School of Languages, Cultures and Societies, University of Leeds

[The Somali Village research project](#), led by Professor Fozia Bora and Professor Chris Gaffney (University of Bradford), explores new perspectives on the experiences of the Somali community at the centre of Bradford’s Great Exhibition in 1904. Staged across Lister Park, the exhibition’s most popular attraction was the so-called ‘Somali Village’, which drew over 350,000 visitors who paid to see Somali people perform daily activities.

Following initial support from the University’s Sapling Fund, the UK City of Culture context offered a valuable opportunity to amplify and build awareness of this significant moment in Bradford’s history. During 2025 the project team delivered Somali Village sharing events at Cartwright Hall Art Gallery and The Beacon in Lister Park, alongside archaeological excavations led by the University of Bradford. The project is featured on BBC Sounds, BBC local news and the TV programme, Digging for Britain.

In 2025 the Somali Village project became a formal charity, led by trustee Zainab Nur, to advance research, education, heritage, and cultural learning with the Somali diaspora in Britain and elsewhere, from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Nine University of Leeds student researchers have supported archive development, workshops and event delivery. [A Somali Village activity pack](#), part of Bradford Made’s Local Stories for Learners resources is freely available for use by educators.

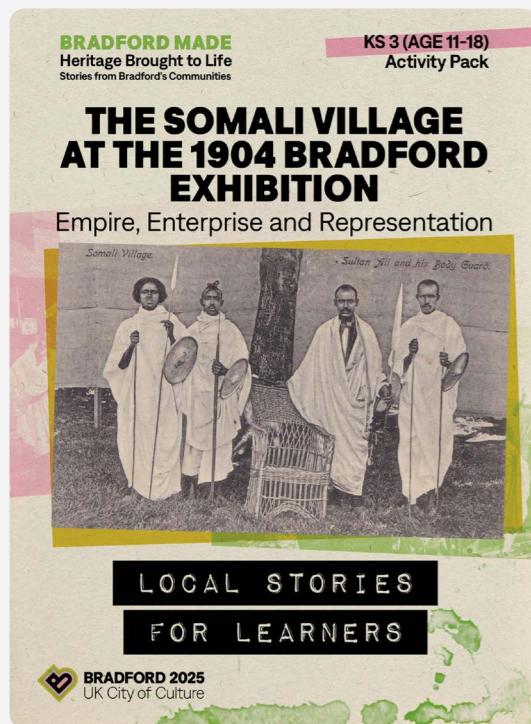


Our Patch Gathering Bradford 2025 © Karol Wyszynski

## Dawn Cameron PhD scholarship

“ Whilst its focus is Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture, my research will be of interest to, and relevant to, scholars, cultural planners, policy makers and creative practitioners across the UK and beyond. — Dawn Cameron, PhD Researcher, University of Leeds

Researcher and cultural sector evaluator Dawn Cameron was [awarded a PhD scholarship](#) in 2024 with the School of Performance and Cultural Industries to investigate how four pillars of enquiry – ‘culture’, ‘race’, ‘place’ and ‘community engagement’ – are imagined and operationalised in a UK City of Culture. Now mid-way through her research, Dawn’s fieldwork is primarily focussed on Our Patch, Bradford 2025’s major district wide community engagement programme where she led a series of anonymised interviews. Further research has been supported with qualitative and quantitative cultural data sets from the Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team. Although pairing the demands of fieldwork with the pace of the Bradford 2025 programme has been a challenge, Dawn comments this has “also lent a sense of immediacy to the research rather than relying on reflections after the fact.” In February 2026 Dawn joined a guest panel at Shared Ground: The Our Patch Gathering conference where she reflected on the scalability of socially engaged practice in the context of a rapid delivery environment.



Bradford Made: Bradford 2025 / Somali Village image courtesy Yahya Birt Collection

# Summary

“ Our partnership with Bradford 2025 underscores our desire for research and education at the University of Leeds to have a regional impact and our plans to strengthen our relationships with civic partners. — Professor Shearer West, Vice Chancellor and President, University of Leeds

The breadth of research, student learning and civic engagement in this review reflects the phenomenal Bradford 2025 cultural programme that centres community, creativity and belonging. Our partnership has benefited from a flexible approach that has tested different ways of collaborating throughout the year, leading to over 470 student engagement opportunities, 12 funded research projects, and more than 30 student projects – all supported by over 50 members of University staff. Much of that work, such as paid placements and funded research, was designed into the partnership from the outset, whilst other projects were initiated independently by academics, students and producers throughout the year and looped into the wider opportunities of the Bradford 2025 partnership umbrella.

Aligning academic calendars with the turbo charged programme delivery of Bradford 2025 was sometimes a challenge. Opportunities to engage with the programme rarely had the luxury of conventional lead-in times and it was necessary to operate under the premise of ‘blink and you’ll miss it’. Academics, University staff, students and researchers have shown brilliant dexterity and understanding in seizing those moments that enabled them to connect so widely with Bradford 2025 and create meaningful learning experiences for everyone involved.



Bradford Progress Bradford 2025 © Karol Wyzynski

This was mirrored in Bradford 2025’s open and generous working culture where our Year in Industry students, paid interns and volunteers were supported to discover new learning opportunities, career paths and creative networks. Likewise, our multi-layered work with the University of Bradford has supported research delivery across a range of disciplines, allowing each institution to lean into its strengths and further develop on-going research projects including the National Cultural Data Observatory, Somali Village project and Child of the North.

Through University of Leeds investment new connections have been nurtured between individual artists, researchers and students; longer term collaborations have been established between Bradford and Leeds institutions, cultural organisations and communities; and ongoing academic research will contribute to the evaluation of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture. There is a reciprocity embedded in these relationships that has foregrounded personalised learning, collective innovation and civic responsibility and set the scene for further exciting collaborations and between Bradford and Leeds. — Abby Dix-Mason, Cultural Institute Partnership Development Manager, University of Leeds

Saba Siddiqui (University of Leeds Alum,  
School of Design), [A Well Deserved Cuppa,  
2025](#), Practice Bradford at Loading Bay  
Photo: Yorkshire Contemporary © Jules Lister

With many thanks to Bradford 2025, the University of Leeds  
Partnership Steering Group, University of Leeds staff and  
students, the University of Bradford and our external partner  
organisations, artists and community participants who made  
this partnership possible.



➤ [leeds.ac.uk/cultural-institute](https://leeds.ac.uk/cultural-institute)  
✉ [culturalinstitute@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:culturalinstitute@leeds.ac.uk)

📷 [@UniLeedsCulture](https://www.instagram.com/UniLeedsCulture)  
in [Cultural Institute @  
University of Leeds](https://www.facebook.com/CulturalInstitute@UniversityofLeeds)

