



BRADFORD
LITERATURE
FESTIVAL

IMPACT REPORT 2023

explore words, discover worlds

bradfordlitfest.co.uk



“ I feel proud to see international stars and speakers congregating on this wonderful northern city for Bradford Literature Festival.

Festival Visitor

”

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“It was like being at an opera, like being in Vienna or seeing a Beethoven concert. You don’t see an Urdu poetry recital with an orchestral background. I didn’t expect Urdu poetry to be like that. We all got goosebumps.”

Festival Visitor, Shikwa

DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Bradford Literature Festival (BLF) delivered an acclaimed programme to record-breaking audiences, providing a platform to explore, interrogate, and better understand the extraordinary times we live in – politically, socially and culturally.

At BLF, we pride ourselves on creating a world-class programme that is not only eclectic and diverse but also, at times, challenging and provocative. Our festival is a reflection of the vibrant city in which we are based, a city known for its youthful population, diverse international communities and its role as a bellwether for the nation's future with its post-industrial economy.

Founded as a safe space for people from all corners of the globe, as well as our local communities, BLF has always been a place to share wisdom, seek mutual understanding and explore new ideas. Our programme remains deeply rooted in the concerns of our local communities while reminding us of our place in a wider, interconnected global society.

In cities like Bradford, the arts and culture are not luxuries but essential components of dialogue between communities. They inspire our children and young people and facilitate social mobility.

Education is the bedrock of progress and BLF is committed to instilling a love for literature and culture in the next generation. Our mission revolves around empowering young minds with the transformative power of words, ideas and creativity, and this year's Children and Young People's (CYP) Programme reached and inspired nearly 70,000 children.

BLF is a tapestry woven with the threads of cultural regeneration, inclusivity and education. We are dedicated to creating a festival that not only celebrates the rich diversity of literature but also serves as a catalyst for positive change in our region and beyond. As we look ahead to the future of Bradford Literature Festival, our commitment to cultural regeneration in the region remains steadfast. We take immense pride in being Europe's most diverse literature festival, a distinction that embodies our core values of inclusivity and global connectivity.

We extend a warm invitation to you to join us on this journey of shaping a brighter and more inclusive future.

Syima Aslam
CEO & Artistic Director
Bradford Literature Festival

BOARD MEMBERS



Sir Richard Lambert

Chair of the Board, Bradford Literature Festival



Dawn Austwick

Former CEO, National Lottery Community Foundation



Ismail Amla

Executive Vice President, NCR Voyix



Syima Aslam

CEO & Artistic Director, Bradford Literature Festival



Dr William Lawrence

Executive Director, Reel Solutions



Professor Aaqil Ahmed

Former Head of Religion & Ethics, BBC and Channel 4

BLF VISION & MISSION

Bradford Literature Festival is an annual cultural festival and year-round outreach programme. We are leaders in social inclusion, accessibility and representation. We deliver exceptional arts and culture for both international audiences and local communities by showcasing trailblazing voices from the UK and beyond. A thoughtful festival, with a point of view and sense of place, our events not only represent our city but also reflect contemporary Britain.

We create spaces that are welcoming and inclusive for all. Our representative programmes give a platform to diverse and marginalised voices and stories to create a supportive space for even the most challenging conversations. To make sure everyone can access our work, we have pioneered 'Ethical Ticketing' – this means our events are free for people who otherwise would not be able to afford to attend cultural events.

We do this because we believe culture, literature and education have the power to change lives.

“BLF puts us on the national & international cultural map. At a closer level, it provides a socially-cohesive service. I'd go so far as to say it helps people's mental, physical & emotional health. I look forward to it every year & feel sorry, but satisfied, each time it's over.”

Festival Visitor

TRACK RECORD SINCE 2014



In the **Top 3**
Largest Literature
Festivals in the UK



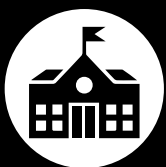
Over **550,000**
Audiences from
30 Countries



50% Audience
and **44% Artist**
Ethnic Diversity



Over **210,000**
Children & Young
People



80% of Primary and
Secondary Schools
Engaged Across
Bradford District



BLF 2023 IN NUMBERS

678

Events



116,225

Audiences



65%

Below UK Average
Household Income



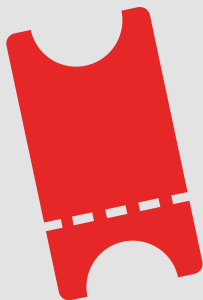
47%

Ethnically
Diverse

85%

Accessed the

**Ethical
Ticketing Policy**



Valued at

£550,000

53%

Local

24%

Regional



22%

National

1%

International

529

Artists



46%

Ethnically
Diverse

63,350

Children &
Young People



UK's Largest

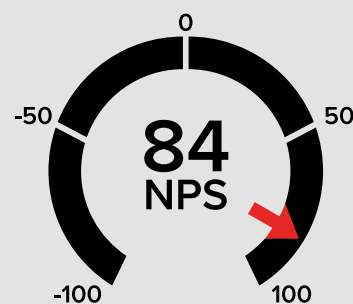
World Book Day
2023 Event



96%

Rated BLF

Very Good/Good



Net Promoter Score

97%

Said

BLF Improves
West Yorkshire's
**National
Reputation**

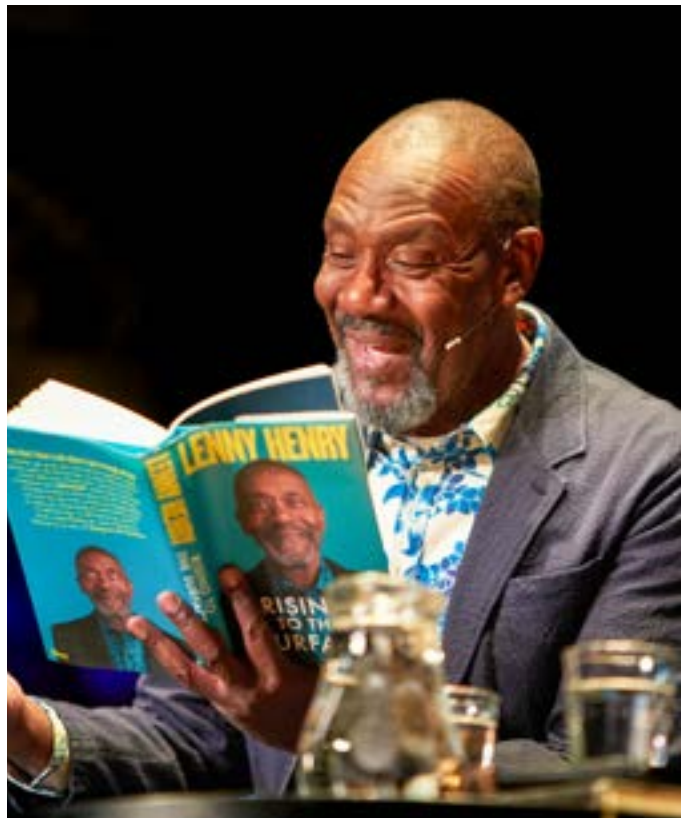
BLF 2023 IN PICTURES





BLF 2023 IN PICTURES





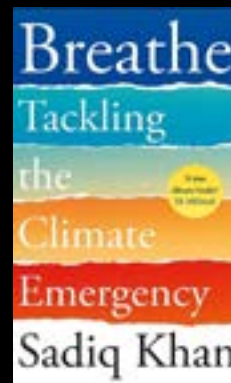
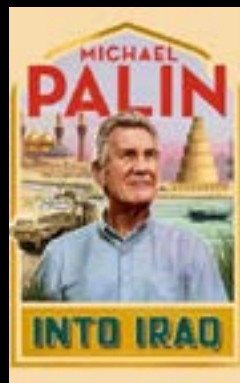
TOP 10 BEST SELLING EVENTS



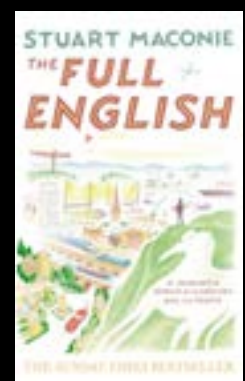
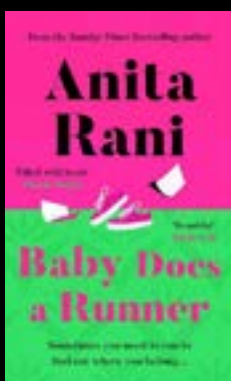
1. **Guides to Goodness: Dalā'il al-Khayrāt** | Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi
2. **Sufiyana Kalaam** | Fareed Ayaz, Abu Muhammad Qawwal & Brothers
3. **An Evening of Comedy** | Reginald D. Hunter, Sophie Duker, Nabil Abdulrashid, Louise Young
4. **Sir Lenny Henry and Lemn Sissay in Conversation**
5. **Sir Michael Palin in Conversation**
6. **Shikwa: A Symphonic Poem** | Rushil Ranjan, Abi Sampa, Manchester Camerata
7. **Jeremy Corbyn: Reflections on Geneva**
8. **The Way of the Prophets** | Professor Abdullah Alkadi, Peter Sanders
9. **Shimmering Light Mawlid** | SHAAM, Shaykh Ahmed Saad, Shaykh Amir Nawa
10. **A Journey Through Bollywood Songs** | Navin Kundra, The 515 Crew



TOP 10 BEST SELLING BOOKS



1. Rising to the Surface, Lenny Henry
2. Into Iraq, Michael Palin
3. My Name is Why, Lemn Sissay
4. Breathe: Tackling the Climate Emergency, Sadiq Khan
5. Undoctored, Adam Kay
6. Baby Does a Runner, Anita Rani
7. Time Come: Selected Prose, Linton Kwesi Johnson
8. Best of Friends, Kamila Shamsie
9. Beeswing: Fairport, Folk Rock and Finding My Voice, 1967-75, Richard Thompson
10. The Full English, Stuart Maconie



MARKETING & ONLINE REACH

ONLINE



664,000
Website Visits



7 Million
Social Media
Impressions

PRINT & OUT OF HOME



11 Million Out
of Home Media
Impressions



60,000 Printed
Programmes
Distributed
Nationally



1.4 Million Reach Across London King's Cross,
Leeds Station, Bradford Interchange and Forster
Square, Saltaire Station, Shipley Station,
Halifax Station, Bradford City Centre



IN THE MEDIA



932 Million Total Press and Media Reach



16 Million
Broadcast



233 Million
Print



681 Million
Online

 **THE YORKSHIRE POST**

THE  **TIMES**

The Guardian

The Telegraph

Daily  **Mail**

sky news

 **Hindustan Times**

Asian VOICE

THE BOOKSELLER
AT THE HEART OF PUBLISHING SINCE 1858

 **COUNTRYFILE**
MAGAZINE

B B C RADIO
YORK

B B C RADIO
SHEFFIELD

B B C RADIO
HUMBERSIDE

B B C RADIO
LEEDS

 **on : yorkshire magazine**
if it's on, it's in

yahoo!
news

 **Player FM**

T&A

BIG
ISSUE

The Mail+

BBC
FRONT ROW

BRADFORD LITERATURE FESTIVAL 2023

Programming a festival to remember

Bradford Literature Festival (BLF) brings together prestigious literary names alongside rising stars, to create a uniquely diverse programme of culture. The sheer breadth of topics and perspectives shared, from fantasy to faith, comedy to qawwali, Bollywood to the Brontës, science to sport and Shakespeare, speaks to BLF's ethos of inclusion, while ensuring that every community, regardless of age or background, finds a place to belong.

In 2023, BLF welcomed 116,225 people to 678 events across the main festival and year-round Education, Community and Children and Young People's (CYP) Programmes. 47% of the total audience were ethnically diverse and 85% accessed events through BLF's unique Ethical Ticketing Policy, removing barriers to cultural engagement.

This year BLF hosted incredible thinkers and artists from across the world. Sir Lenny Henry, Anita Rani, Sir Michael Palin, Adam Kay, Lemn Sisay, Bolu Babalola, Sebastian Faulks and Val McDermid were amongst the acclaimed national artists. International guests included calligrapher Haji Noor Deen from China, renowned scholar Reza Aslan from Los Angeles, USA and world-class musicians Fareed Ayaz, Abu Muhammad Qawwal & Brothers from Pakistan. Other timely events included a

discussion to mark 20 years since the Iraq War and a celebration honouring the 75th Windrush anniversary.

We also delivered more opportunities than ever for emerging artists and those wishing to 'dip a toe' in the ocean of creative practice for the very first time, with open mic sessions, writing workshops and literary agent meet-ups.

BLF's unique cultural curation was showcased in events like Sufiyana Kalaam, Zabava, and a celebration of Nina Simone's lyrical legacy, bringing together diverse cultural traditions in one single evening.

The world premiere of the symphonic interpretation of Allama Muhammad Iqbal's legendary Urdu poem Shikwa, composed by Rushil Ranjan for a 30-piece orchestra, harmonium, esraj and tabla, was a remarkable collaboration that ended with a standing ovation from a sell-out audience. These events reflect BLF's philosophy of artistic expression, shared cultural experiences and cross-cultural cohesion.

Running symbiotically with the festival was BLF's CYP Programme. In fact, 41% of BLF's whole programme was tailored to this audience, with

It was a mind-expanding drug. The spirit, gusto, inventiveness; and through it all such a magnificent multi-ethnic ease, such Englishness. Have we truly found a magic ingredient?

Dudley Fishburn, Ex Conservative MP



nearly a quarter dedicated to Education. In 2023, 278 events engaged 63,350 children and young people, teachers, and caregivers (55% of our total audiences).

The CYP Programme aligned with the national curriculum while addressing topics often neglected in mainstream education. BLF gives students the opportunity to learn about their heritage and identity, nurturing aspirations, wellbeing, and educational success.

Attorney General of Minnesota Keith Ellison, the prosecutor of the George Floyd case, explored lasting change and racial justice as part of the Education Programme; an opportunity described by teachers as 'being part of living history.' By bringing world-class thinkers to young people, we have the power to change lives.

BLF works with community groups year-round. In addition to our externally funded projects, we nurture relationships with groups across Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield, York and nationally.

We engage with a broad range of groups including arts and culture, reading and writing, education organisations, community action, befriending and

belonging, and wellbeing groups.

This year saw 118 community groups access 4,484 free tickets via the Ethical Ticketing Policy to 230 events.

BLF's firm belief is that diversity is not just a tickbox to check; it is the essence of our identity. This belief extends to artists, perspectives, topics, and audiences and it is the reason why the line-up featured 529 artists, 46% of whom were ethnically diverse. This is a testament to our dedication to create a fusion of culture and inclusivity.

A shining example of our commitment to diverse voices was our event with Suhrab Sirat. Now a BBC journalist and poet, he came to the UK as a political refugee with publications in Afghanistan. Performing with a translator, his passionate and electric reading in his native language left the audience in awe.

"I never thought that one day I would stand in front of an audience, read my poetry in its original language and get this much encouragement. It was a real dream come true."

Suhrab's journey embodies the essence of the festival, where diverse voices come together to create a tapestry of culture and inclusivity.

“Always, it feels like Bradford comes alive when the festival comes around. It's a chance to meet people, talk to people, have lots of conversations – conversations about everything, sometimes hard conversations, differences of opinion.”

Festival Visitor



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Building confidence, enrichment and empowerment

Children & Young People

Our journey with children and young people is at the very heart of Bradford Literature Festival (BLF). We recognise the profound impact that literature and culture can have on young minds. Our comprehensive Children & Young People Programme's (CYP) spans a dedicated Early Years Programme, four Literature Unlocked Family Fun Days in City Park, and our Primary & Secondary Education Programme, all aimed at nurturing the next generation's love for words and creativity.

This programme seamlessly blends with the main festival, allowing young audiences to engage with a range of literary experiences.

In 2023, CYP made up 41% of BLF's programme, with 278 events, including 178 festival events and 100 year-round events. A staggering 63,350 children and young people, teachers, and caregivers (55% of our total audiences) were engaged. Therefore over half of BLF audiences were under 21.

With 25% of West Yorkshire's population being under 20 years of age, there is a great need for tailored educational and cultural initiatives. BLF

addresses this by offering opportunities to foster a love of literacy at every age, extending beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Our **Early Years Programme** provides parents with the tools to create engaging, literacy-rich home environments, giving them confidence to build a relationship with stories, books, and music.

We delivered events designed to teach parents valuable baby first aid techniques as well as communicating with their babies through sign, a language babies can understand long before they learn to talk.

The themed **Family Fun Days** in City Park are designed to engage entire families in cultural activities. These events feature interactive performances and craft workshops, accessible to all by being free, un-ticketed, and drop-in.

Children could design their own superhero wrist cuffs or watch stage performances by the brilliant Wrongsemble theatre company with live music, wonderful characters and puppetry.



*This is a one in a million
lifetime experience.*

Festival Visitor



*This festival gives
students the chance
to see themselves as
readers and writers.*

Teacher

*BLF not only helps our
young people with their
education but gives them
life experiences.*

Teacher



*I loved learning facts about
Kashmir. It was interesting
because it's different to what
we do at school. I really
learned lots about my history
- my dad is from Mirpur!*

Pupil

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Raising aspirations and removing barriers

Education Programme

In 2023, we reached an astounding 42,872 children and teachers, representing 68% of our CYP audiences. This outreach encompassed 100 events brought directly to schools, demonstrating our commitment to year-round impact.

The Education Programme, offered free to schools across Yorkshire, is BLF's proactive approach to bridging educational gaps among disadvantaged children and young people. It attracted a number of faith schools, as well as home-educated students from Calderdale, Kirklees, South Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Our engagement with schools in 2023 exceeded pre-pandemic levels, with 78 primary and 25 secondary schools in West Yorkshire participating. This translates to 46% of all primaries and 41% of all secondaries across the Bradford district.

Themed Education Days

At the centre of the Education Programme are themed education days that cover a wide range of topics, from Superheroes to Shakespeare, and from Hitler to Tutankhamun. Designed to complement the curriculum, the themed days offer a cross-disciplinary approach to learning through workshops, live shows and performances by local, national and international authors, artists, activists, poets and experts.

Inclusive Curriculum

BLF's commitment to an inclusive curriculum is more vital than ever. Our programme addresses subjects often overlooked in mainstream education, such as Kashmir Uncovered and the Rise and Fall of the Ottoman Empire.

More than just academic exercises, these sessions provide students with an understanding of their own history, identity and self-worth. By immersing them in topics related to their heritage and global context,

the programme exposes students to new aspirations and diverse perspectives.

World Book Day Celebration

BLF hosted the UK's largest World Book Day 2023 celebration, featuring Sir Lenny Henry, and was attended by over 2,200 children and young people.

Consultation with Senior Leadership

To reach schools historically less engaged with BLF, we conducted face-to-face consultations with senior leadership. This initiative aimed to deepen our understanding of their settings and challenges while identifying the best ways to work with them.

These consultations extended to more than 10% of all primary and 5% of all secondary schools across Bradford District.

Reading Teachers = Reading Pupils

In partnership with Cheltenham Literature Festival, we worked with teachers from nine schools, three of which had never engaged with BLF, inspiring them to read aloud more effectively with their learners.

Free Tickets for Students and Teachers

Teachers across Yorkshire received free tickets to BLF events, empowering young audiences and educators with fresh ideas. This initiative was accessed by nearly 2,200 students and 200 teachers.

In our journey with young people, we demonstrate that their stories matter. We introduce them to creative careers through relatable role models, raise aspirations, and develop vital skills. BLF ignites curiosity, fosters creativity, and instils a lifelong love for literature.



Bradford Literature Festival opens minds and encourages independent thinking. Children become inspired to achieve better.

Festival Visitor



“ We have never ever had the children’s face painted because we couldn’t afford it. I can’t believe this is all free. ”

Festival Visitor



“ Promoting a love of learning and reading is hugely important for our children as it is not something they get from home. ”

Teacher

“ Everybody got involved and just seemed genuinely happy. All different age groups, ethnicity and gender. It was just a really fun and safe space for kids to be kids. ”

Festival Visitor



“ This festival is essential for our school. We need to develop leadership, cultural capital and inspire learners who would otherwise miss out on a wealth of amazing experiences. ”

Academy Director

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Enriching lives and nurturing talent

The internationality of our programme reflects and resonates with Bradford's many communities that hail from all parts of the world, and our work with the city's different communities continues year-round.

Our tiered approach to deepening engagement and building lasting relationships involves consultations, workshops and tailored in-community events. These help us understand how arts and culture translate for different communities.

We identify barriers to engagement and devise ways of removing these obstacles, whether physical or psychological.

Our long-term relationships and confidence-building work with community groups lead to co-curated culturally relevant and high quality events within the festival itself, which the community groups want to attend.

Our work spanned over 25 community groups representing diverse backgrounds, be it class, faith or ethnicity. This included a range of newly arrived conflict-affected communities such as Gypsy Roma and Traveller groups as well as asylum seekers and refugees.

Our engagement spans settled communities too. For example, as a result of consultations and reminiscence sessions with elderly Sikh women, a group of 80 attended BLF's Evening of Bollywood Songs, many of whom were visiting St. George's Hall for the first time.

Similarly, BLF's support for the Ukrainian community's celebrations, marking 75 years in Bradford, led to members of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain to attend Sacred Music for the first time, encouraged by the attendance of Dibrova, renowned for being one of the best Ukrainian choirs in the UK.

Pass the Mic: Open Mic Night

Partnering with young Muslim men at Mary Magdalene Community Church, BLF launched a unique project to create opportunities for self-expression, creativity, and engagement. Our consultations with these young men revealed a passion for music and lyrics, specifically 'spitting bars', a form of self-expression through rap.

Following a series of workshops led by musicians and hip-hop artists including Testament and Inder Goldfinger, the young men co-curated Pass the Mic, a live festival event featuring a collection of popular underground rappers and hip-hop talent. The event validated their passion, recognised their cultural importance, gave them an insight into creative careers and boosted ambition.

Zabava: An Evening of Music and Dance

BLF collaborated with Bradford organisation, Connecting Roma, to present a celebration of traditional yet modern music and dance featuring a line-up of celebrated national and international Romani and Traveller bands and artists.

The sell-out event, held at the Midland Hotel's Princes Ballroom, attracted a very diverse audience and served Connecting Roma's aims of representing the rich heritage of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community.

It's been so special. To have a stage, lights and the chance to do this.

Mary Magdalene Church Youth Member

It's what we wanted, to celebrate and share our communities alongside everyone.

Connecting Roma Representative

“BLF isn’t about one experience or community. It’s about how each one interconnects.”

Festival Visitor



“To be able to access events like this affordably, it feels like a very supportive environment, cultivating that community of knowledge and exchange of ideas.”

Festival Visitor

“To see the Asian community so vibrantly involved in such a wide range of cultural and literary events is fabulous.”

Festival Artist



“I love that community groups are given free tickets, I wouldn’t have attended without this.”

Festival Visitor

IMPACT: SOCIO-ECONOMIC REGENERATION

Bradford Literature Festival is not a typical cultural event; it is a dynamic force that drives socio-economic regeneration, fosters health and wellbeing, nurtures talent development, and expands the horizons of sector development through strategic partnerships.

Beyond celebrating literature and culture, BLF serves as a transformative catalyst, positioning Bradford as a regional, national, and international cultural destination.

BLF's impact is profound when it comes to socio-economic regeneration. The festival actively reaches out to socio-economically diverse audiences through its programming, outreach initiatives, and ground-breaking Ethical Ticketing Policy. This policy removes financial barriers to attending events for those who need it most, ensuring that cultural enrichment is accessible regardless of one's socio-economic or cultural background.

The most recent census in 2021 shows that the disparities are stark. In comparison to the national average, 50% more households in Bradford experience deprivation in four dimensions than the national average, while 16% more people have

no qualification and 22% more people have never worked or are long-term unemployed in West Yorkshire. This makes BLF's mission of change even more significant.

The festival's commitment to reaching the least engaged and culturally literate families, children, and young people is essential.

By offering access to the arts and culture, BLF raises aspirations and empowers the city's youth, ultimately contributing to long-term social and economic regeneration.

This year across the festival, BLF delivered audiences which were 53% local, 47% ethnically diverse, and 65% living in households with incomes below the UK average. 61% of bookable tickets were allocated free under the festival's Ethical Ticketing Policy.

This means BLF is reaching children and young people, alongside the festival's most diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged local communities - people who stand the most to gain, in terms of literacy, oracy and life skills from engagement with arts and culture.

“Yes, I am exiled, but my poetry is a sort of homeland. I never thought that one day I would stand in front of an audience, read my poetry in Persian and get this much encouragement. A real dream come true.”

Suhrab Sirat, Poetry with a Punch



IMPACT: INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL PLACEMAKING

Bradford Literature Festival's influence extends well beyond the city limits, positioning West Yorkshire as an international cultural destination. The festival's international profile, along with its increasing regional and national audiences, drives cultural tourism and stimulates the creative economy.

In 2023, 22% travelled nationally and 1% travelled internationally to attend BLF. By improving perceptions of the city and boosting Bradford and Yorkshire's national reputation, BLF plays a pivotal role in the region's cultural and economic regeneration.

Audience feedback shows 97% agree/strongly agree BLF improves Bradford and Yorkshire's national reputation and positively contributes to Yorkshire's social, cultural and economic regeneration.

The festival's reach is truly global with attendees from across the world, including Australia, Canada, Pakistan, Turkey, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, Europe, and the United States.

Major marketing efforts at national railway stations, including London King's Cross, Leeds, Bradford, and across West Yorkshire, worked to enhance the region's prominence on the cultural map.

We are raising West Yorkshire's national and international profile through partnerships and collaborations, BLF is working with the V&A, British Library, British Museum, Emirates Airline Festival of Literature, Lahore Literary Festival, Toronto International Festival of Authors, Ithra (King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture), Jaipur Literature Festival, and University of California, Los Angeles.

BLF also extends its support overseas, serving as a standard for other cultural organisations in places like Lahore and Karachi.

We are proud to have been independently cited as a key reason for Bradford being awarded the UK City of Culture mantle in 2025, and we look forward to delivering an exceptional festival.

It's a real positive for Bradford that we have the capability to put on a festival like this, have it so well attended, and to be seen with fascination and admiration. To have people travel from London to Bradford is a complete tone shift from what people were thinking about the city a few years ago.

Festival Visitor



IMPACT: CULTURE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Bradford Literature Festival's commitment to talent development is unwavering, delivering multifaceted impact on emerging artists. The festival provides a platform for both emerging and established artists and fosters lasting relationships. BLF's dedication to supporting local talent, alongside national and international figures, creates a diverse cultural experience for all attendees.

Notably, BLF has played a pivotal role in the success of Propel Magazine, now in its third issue, founded by BLF regular Anthony Anaxagorou. The magazine has provided a platform for emerging poets and reached over 10,000 readers online and received submissions from 1,471 poets.

Platforming global languages is vital for developing new talent and diversifying the sector. Suhrab Sirat came to the UK from Afghanistan as a political refugee in 2014 and is now a BBC journalist and poet whose collections have been published in Afghanistan. Suhrab headlined this year's sell-out Poetry with a Punch and was invited to share his poetry in his native language.

In its pursuit of sector development, BLF addresses diversity in publishing by providing insights and opening doors to the publishing industry through events like Meet the Publisher and Literary Agent sessions. These initiatives encourage emerging authors by demystifying career development opportunities in the literary world, inviting publishers from London to travel to the North to experience our emerging talent first hand.

Bradford Literature Festival's impact transcends the confines of a traditional cultural event. It actively promotes socio-economic regeneration, positions West Yorkshire as an international cultural destination, nurtures emerging talent, and drives sector development.

BLF's unwavering commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment continues to transform Bradford and the wider cultural landscape, enriching the lives of countless individuals and communities.

“You're making it possible for stories to be told by working class creatives who have had a difficult journey. It's been such an honour to be part of a prestigious programme in our home town before we take the show to Edinburgh Fringe.”

Katie Mahon, Artistic Director, Bloomin' Buds Theatre Company



CREATIVE ECONOMIC CONFERENCE

Fusing business, politics & creative innovation with global influencers

Founded on the belief that the cultural sector can be the driving force behind the economic and social regeneration of the UK, the annual Creative Economic Conference (CEC) brings together the creative and commercial industries.

The conference serves as a strategic leadership intervention, breaking down silos and sparking debates among leaders from various sectors. It explores how the business and creative sectors can work together to drive innovation, inspire visionary thinking, and grow the economy both regionally and nationally.

We were honoured to host inspiring leaders from the business and creative industries, distinguished politicians, and visionary entrepreneurs such as Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves; US Attorney General Keith Ellison; CEO of the Royal Society of Arts, Andy Haldane; National Chair of Federation of Small Businesses, Martin McTague; Co-Founder of WeTransfer, Damian Bradfield, and many more.

The CEC's inclusivity allows early career entrepreneurs, small businesses, and students to interact with international-level entrepreneurs. This unique blend of diverse expertise fosters meaningful connections and inspires attendees, while opening the door to new networking opportunities.

This year's CEC commenced with a deep dive into our economic landscape, led by Peter Arnold, the

EY UK Chief Economist, who unveiled the refreshed EY ITEM Report, highlighting the strengths of the region and serving as a guide to positioning ourselves as global leaders, particularly in the creative industries.

The panel discussions tackled significant topics, from the future of UK arts and culture amidst a cost-of-living crisis, to the potential impact of railway regeneration in the North of England. These sessions provided unique opportunities to engage in dynamic debates, touching on subjects like the philosophical implications of AI technology, the ramifications of Brexit and new international trade relations.

Recognising the growing role of the film industry in the Northern economy, BLF dedicated a segment to this vital sector. West Yorkshire, notably Bradford, has become a hub for film productions, including major Hollywood Marvel Universe projects and the acclaimed series Happy Valley. To harness this momentum, we hosted a Film Production Day as a platform for filmmakers, industry professionals, and aspiring creatives.

BLF is proud to provide an inclusive platform where students, graduates, early career entrepreneurs, arts practitioners and the public can access an industry-leading conference for free. It is crucial to include these voices in conversations that will shape the future of our economy, while developing skills and ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table.

What an opportunity to have a seat at the table with such world-players in business and the creative arts.

Festival Visitor



BLF VOLUNTEERS

Developing skills, opportunity and social capital

BLF's volunteering scheme is instrumental in developing skills, fostering opportunities, and building capital within the city. Bradford has faced unique challenges in cultivating a culture of volunteering, particularly within the cultural sector. However, the festival nurtures social capital in the city by supporting volunteers from a broad spectrum of ethnically and socially diverse backgrounds and age groups.

This year volunteers contributed 1,338 hours of their time to play meaningful roles in the delivery of the festival. Notably, nearly three-quarters of these volunteers come from ethnically diverse backgrounds, underscoring the programme's inclusivity.

Age diversity is also a hallmark, with 33% of volunteers under 19 and 19% falling in the 35-74 age bracket. This diversity creates opportunities for volunteers to interact with people of different backgrounds and age groups, instilling a greater sense of community and togetherness.

The most compelling testament to the scheme's impact is that **100% of volunteers would recommend volunteering at BLF**, highlighting BLF's offer as a rewarding and fulfilling experience for all participants.

For the volunteers themselves, the scheme has enabled them to develop their employability skills, support new pathways into the arts, boost cultural interests and build new connections. The positive feedback from volunteers reiterates that the opportunity to welcome visitors to their city drives a sense of local ownership and strengthens civic pride.

The BLF volunteering scheme stands as a remarkable example of how volunteering initiatives can transform communities. Its commitment to diversity, skills development, and community engagement has not only benefited volunteers, but has also enriched the cultural sector and instilled a sense of pride in the city of Bradford, with our volunteers continuing to act as ambassadors for Bradford Literature Festival.

I love the festival and I attend every year so I decided to volunteer this time. It means I get to be part of it.

Festival Volunteer

There was an immense level of support from skilled and friendly people.

Festival Volunteer

1,338 Volunteer Hours

74% Ethnically Diverse Volunteers

96% Would Attend More Arts & Culture Events After Volunteering at BLF



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Supported using public funding by
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