

FLUX
ROTHERHAM

CREATING
SHARING
CONNECTING

PHASE 1 EVALUATION 2021-26

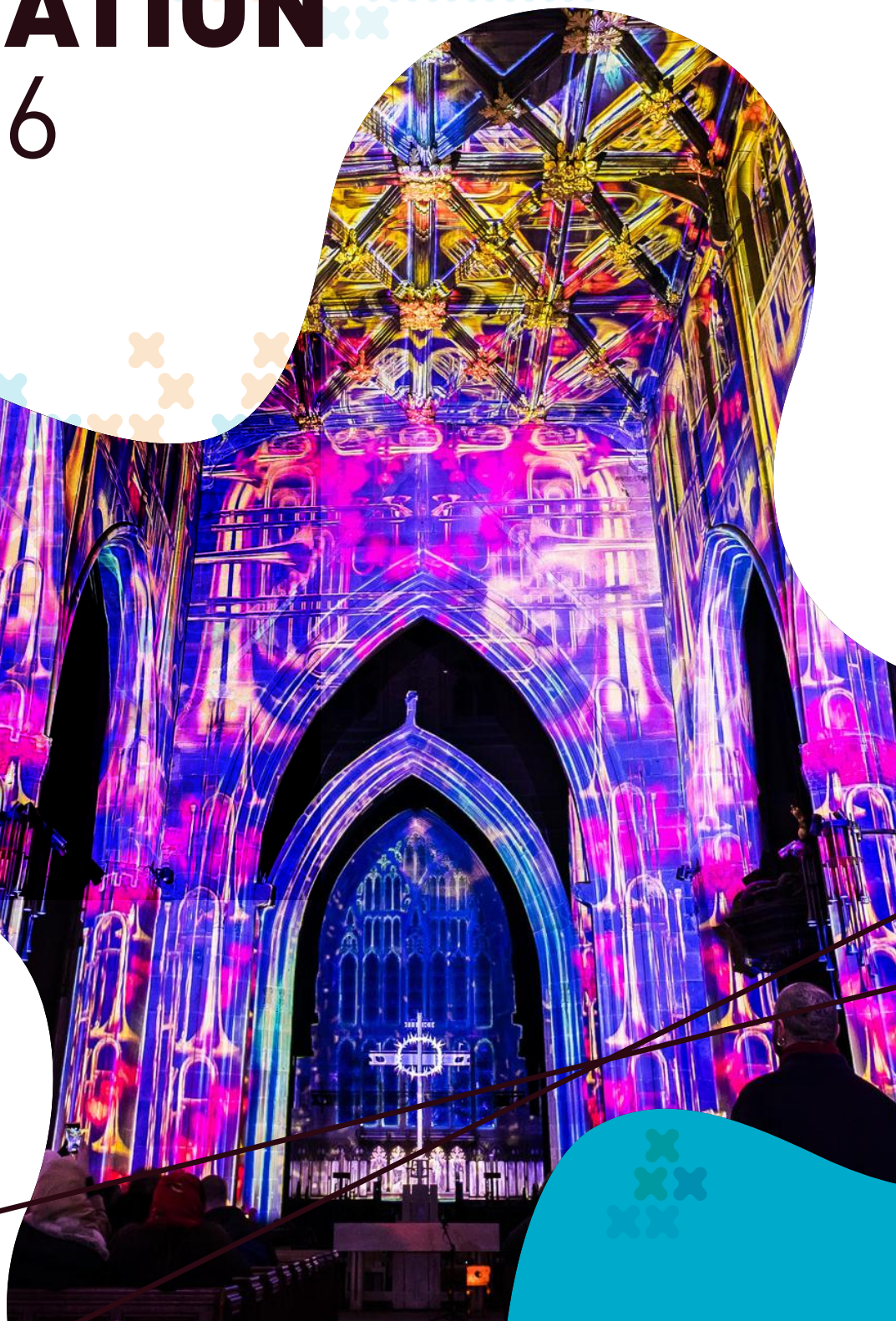
Sue Cook, April 2026



fluxrotherham.org.uk



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



CONTENTS

- 3** Introduction
- 6** Methodology
- 7** Section 1 - Cultivating community engagement and cultural excellence
- 17** Section 2 - To what extent is the aspiration for excellence of art and culture and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
 - 17** Excellence of art and culture
 - 23** Excellence of the process of engaging communities
- 29** Section 3 - What approaches are successful and what are we learning that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture
 - 34** Reflections and Recommendations
- 37** Appendix 1 - Case Studies
- 38** Appendix 2 - Timeline of Activity 2021-26



INTRODUCTION

This evaluation looks at Phase 1 of FLUX Rotherham (FLUX), Rotherham's Creative People and Places Project, 2019-2026. The report draws on the work of the Psychosocial Research Unit, University of Central Lancashire as evaluators for the first three years and my own work from December 2024 to April 2026. FLUX itself has worked on the quantitative data, Section 1.

The report will explore what approaches FLUX has developed in Phase 1, what has worked well, and it will make some recommendations for Phase 2.

It will focus on the enquiry questions for CPPs: *Have more people been actively engaged in culture? To what extent is the aspiration for excellence of art and culture and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved? What approaches are successful and what are we learning that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture?*

It will show how FLUX has learned and evolved over its first 5 years, and how it can use that learning to drive forward its work towards the vision of a shared cultural democracy. FLUX's aspiration is to embed its approach as mainstream practice in Rotherham beyond the lifetime of the CPP funding. This is the story of the first 5 years of that journey.

Sue Cook, May 2026



Arts Council England's Creative People and Places Programme

Creative People and Places (CPP) is an Arts Council England (ACE) funding programme which focuses on parts of the country where involvement in creativity and culture is significantly below the national average. It funds partners in local areas to empower residents to decide what kind of creative activity they want to experience on their doorstep. FLUX is one of 46 Creative People and Places (CPP) programmes currently funded across England.

The programme's three main aims are to:

- ❑ Engage more people in a wide range of arts and cultural experiences as audiences and/or participants
- ❑ Empower communities to lead and shape local cultural provision
- ❑ Ensure excellence and relevance in both the engagement process and the creative and cultural experiences on offer

CPPs take an Action Research approach to community engagement in arts, creativity, and culture; they learn what works best and share that learning. Each CPP sets its own mission, values, and aims.



About FLUX

FLUX is hosted by Voluntary Action Rotherham in its town-centre base. It is managed by a consortium comprising: Ben Walmsley (Independent Chair from 2021-2023); Auriel Majumdar (Independent Chair from January 2024); Shafiq Hussain (Chief Executive, Voluntary Action Rotherham - lead organisation); Matt Butt (Chief Executive, Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance - NPO); Deborah Bullivant (Chief Executive, Grimm and Co - NPO); Victoria Ryves (Head of Culture, Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust); and Leanne Buchan (Head of Creative Programming & Engagement, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council).



The FLUX Phase 1 programme ran from 2019-2026 with the programme proper starting in early 2022. FLUX Rotherham joined the CPP portfolio at the end of 2019 and funding began from April 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

A first director was appointed in May 2020 but left in January 2021. At that point, no other staff had been recruited and minimal delivery and consultation had taken place.

In spring 2021, a new Director was recruited and started in September 2021. Shortly after, a communications officer joined the team in November, and 3 engagement officers joined the team in early January 2022. Between 2023-2026 FLUX also hosted 6 Children's Capital of Culture Trainees and 2 Alumni trainees.

The budget for Phase 1 was £3,000,000 with £2,333,000 coming from Arts Council England and the remaining cash match from consortium partners, other grant funding, earned and in-kind contributions.

During Phase 1 there were four strands of work:

- ❑ **Community-Led Hyper Local Projects**
- ❑ **Amazing Events**
- ❑ **Creative Training and Development**
- ❑ **Rotherham-Wide Community Programmes**

About Rotherham

Rotherham (or Rodreham which in 1086 was said to have a manor, a church with a priest, three ploughs and eight villagers) has a current population of 276,595 across the borough.

The borough is large - it covers 110 square miles. Over 70% is rural - a mix of former pit villages and traditional agriculture although over 50% of residents live in the central part of the borough.

The population is mainly White British with a higher-than-average proportion of Pakistani and Slovak Roma residents.

Across the Rotherham Borough 77.5% of people identified with a White ethnic group, 15.5% as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh, 2.2% as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African, 2.0% with Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, and 2.8% with other ethnic groups.

There has been significant recent growth in Rotherham's economy due to the success of an Advanced Manufacturing Park. The Don Valley Corridor and new Rotherham gateway mainline station will continue this growth.

However, Rotherham town centre needs further regeneration, and culture and leisure are integral to this strategy.

Recent improvements such as a new flagship central library at Riverside, Forge Island (Rotherham's first cinema in over 30 years, new hotel and restaurants), refurbishment of Rotherham Civic Theatre and the highly successful Grimm & Co have made a significant difference, as have large-scale cultural events such as Children's Capital of Culture, Roots, WOW Rotherham and the Winter Festivals.

Rotherham is an Arts Council England Priority Place due to lower levels of cultural engagement. Rotherham's Cultural Partnership Board provides governance and leadership in pursuing Rotherham's cultural priorities through the development and delivery of the Cultural Strategy.

Evaluation of positive impacts by FLUX must be seen in the context of important hard facts about the challenges faced by people who live in Rotherham:

- ❑ **22% of residents live within the 10% most deprived areas in England.**
- ❑ **Some 30,000 people are not working due to health, disability and caring responsibilities.**
- ❑ **Life expectancy in the most deprived areas of Rotherham is 9.9 years lower for men and 9.5 years lower for women than in the least deprived.**
- ❑ **There are significant gaps in healthy life expectancy, meaning people from more deprived communities can expect to live for more years in poor health.**
- ❑ **A significant proportion of Rotherham's population report poor levels of happiness and mental wellbeing. This underpins challenges related to healthy life expectancy and pressure on the NHS, Adult Social Care and CAMHS.**
- ❑ **Child poverty is much higher in South Yorkshire (35%) than the national average (30%).**
- ❑ **Young people living in workless households across South Yorkshire is 5.7% above national average and increasing.**

Community cohesion is currently measured through both hate crime incidence and perceptions of safety. The borough is a combination of small villages and towns still in recovery from the loss of coal and steel.

In the last 20 years, the rise of the populist far right has sown seeds of division between newer global majority communities (particularly Kashmiri, Pakistani and Roma) and the older working class, post-industrial communities. St George's flags are in evidence across many housing estates.

In August 2024, right-wing demonstrations and violence flared up across the UK. In Rotherham, a hotel housing asylum seekers was targeted by 400 far-right protestors and set on fire with people trapped inside. The subsequent investigation has resulted in over 100 people being charged and over 200 years' worth of jail sentences handed to those convicted.



Flux's Vision, Mission, Values and Aims

Flux has a 10-year VISION



By 2030, Rotherham is established as a new cultural democracy, ensuring that everyone has regular and frequent opportunities to experience high quality culture and to explore and express their own creative ambitions, heritage, and identity.

Mission



FLUX will enable a thriving arts and cultural scene in Rotherham. Residents will have more access to high quality creative activity, the existing arts offer will be strong and visible, and our communities will be the driving force in our cultural strategy.

Values



**Community-led and relevant -
Generous and inclusive - Creating positive change - Caring**

Key Aims

More Communities Creating Together

People who (traditionally) do not participate in the arts have many opportunities to get involved. By delivering exciting and accessible activities resonant with residents' lives, FLUX will enable greater collaboration and embed solidarity in community life.

Raising Aspirations

Through skills development, networking opportunities, and exposure to world class cultural experiences, FLUX will elevate creative expectations and enliven confidence in its resident, artist, young people, and partnership forums.

Telling Our Stories

Through new analogue and digital platforms to expand reach and accessibility, FLUX will provide new spaces for residents to tell their stories and present their artworks, fostering a greater sense of pride and belonging in Rotherham.

FLUX also aims to make a contribution to social cohesion, economic growth and community health and well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This report's focus is on the three lines of enquiry at the core of all the CPP programmes. It draws on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and is complemented by a set of Project Case Studies, Appendix A.

FLUX uses a mix of technical data, qualitative evaluation, and local intelligence to guide its programme and understand its impact. Evaluation is a key part of the approach to developing meaningful and relevant projects.

Monitoring and Evaluation reporting is an agenda item at consortium meetings and FLUX continually reflects on the success of its programme in a plan > do > review cycle common to action-learning.

FLUX uses *Audience Spectrum* information to make sure it is meeting its aim to target communities that are least engaged. It evidences the impact of the programme through consistent and reliable metrics drawn from *Illuminate* and the *Impact and Insight Toolkit*.

It has used the Rotherham Data Hub and Public Health team data to access a deeper level data set.

FLUX evidences programme delivery by recording substantial quantitative data: the numbers of people attending workshops; sessions delivered; volunteer numbers/hours; project activity; event attendance; signposting to other services; project partners engaged; and artists commissioned. It also uses audience data and evaluations collected by partners, in particular for larger events.

FLUX employs an external evaluator to collect, analyse, and reflect on qualitative aspects and offer a fresh perspective on the impact of the work. A team from the Psychosocial Research Unit, University of Central Lancashire, was the external evaluator for Phase 1 Years 1-3 and this report draws on that work. Sue Cook took on the role during Year 4 and 5 as FLUX adopted a slightly different approach, appointing an evaluator with a closer understanding of participative art, CPPs, Arts Council England, and the local area. Working closely with the FLUX team, the external evaluator collects and analyses data, monitoring, and feedback; interviews participants, artists and staff; and observes activities and events. The evaluator produces case studies, an annual interim report, and an end of phase report.

FLUX's approach to evaluation has evolved during Phase 1. Using learning from the first years, FLUX's aim over the last 18 months has been for the evaluator to work alongside the team and to connect the evaluation more closely to FLUX's values and day-to-day delivery.

The evaluator has continued to use information captured through existing methods, but has also collected information through regular conversations with the Director, team members and artists, and participant and non-participant observation at events and projects.

The aim of this new approach was to encourage the team to embrace evaluation as an important and valuable part of creative practice and project management, rather than "something someone else comes along to do afterwards". A day-long team workshop facilitated by the evaluator looked at what information is collected and how, the wide range of sources used, different people's roles, what was missing, and what challenges the team faced.

The group talked about observation, making regular time for active reflection, and worked together to create a systematic approach to collecting softer data about how sessions went and how the artists experienced the session. This aspect of the evaluation, working alongside the team, has built a stronger shared understanding of why and how FLUX evaluates its work, and a clearer plan for evaluation in Phase 2.

This includes making sure that all the information gathered is clearly linked to the activity plan and the three key CPP questions; clear roles and responsibilities; and embedding the use of a project evaluation template that can be adapted to each project, using information collection techniques that staff and artists will find both interesting and easy to use.

SECTION 1

Cultivating Community Engagement and Cultural Excellence

This section provides insights into whether more people have been actively engaged in culture through the FLUX programme, responding to CPP Research Question 1: **Is FLUX reaching more people in places where arts engagement has been lowest, and are those experiences meaningful and inspiring?** Drawing on evaluation data from surveys, postcode analysis, and in-depth conversations, it is evident that residents from all 25 wards across the Rotherham borough are engaging with FLUX's community-led projects and large-scale events.

To understand the **big picture** of this impact, the evaluation highlights a total of 435,484 engagements during Phase 1, which includes 372,944 in-person audience members and 33,908 active participants who contributed through hands-on making and creating. By examining the reach of the programme, we can see that while attendance is predominantly local—with 96% of respondents travelling less than 10 miles, and in some programmes 96% of participants travelling less than a mile—audiences are drawn from across the South Yorkshire region.

A significant portion of this audience includes those who are **new to the arts**; in 2023/24, 78% of attendees reported they had not participated in any arts activity in the previous year, a figure that shifted as engagement became more sustained over time. When asking **"what do we know about the people who are taking part?"** the data shows that FLUX is successfully reaching lower socio-economic groups, specifically "Frontline Families," who represent 22% of the local population and form the core audience for much of the hyperlocal community-led projects and Amazing Events.

Finally, this section explores how **building audiences** through marketing has supported this growth and strong reputation. By establishing a recognisable brand and utilising a mix of social media—which accounted for 51% of audience awareness—word of mouth, and tailored hyperlocal strategies like community-specific banners and targeted flyerling has resulted in both regular attenders and new audiences.



THE BIG PICTURE

In Phase 1, there were a total of **435,484 engagements** recorded across both physical and digital activity. This included **28,682 digital audience members** who engaged with digital outputs, such as viewing artworks, creating content, and accessing podcast episodes.



435,484
Engagements



28,682
Digital Audience
Members

In-person activity reached **372,944 audience members** alongside **33,908 active participants** who took part directly in the activity, contributing through hands-on involvement, creating, making, and engaging in activities.



372,944
Audience
Members



33,908
Active
Participants

FLUX delivered **961 activities** achieving borough-wide reach, with residents from all 25 wards in Rotherham accessing and engaging with events and activities.



961 activities
delivered



A total of **1,472.5 volunteer hours** given, with an estimated **value of £17,979.23** calculated.



1,472.5
Volunteer
Hours



£17,979.23
Value of
Volunteer Hours

Cultural participation among local residents has improved significantly, rising from 10–12% below the national average in 2017/18 to just 4% below in 2024/25. This progress has been largely driven by the 2025 Children's Capital of Culture Festival Year, which brought in around £9.6 million of investment and attracted core audiences of 516,000.

While this growth is encouraging and future plans remain ambitious, it is unlikely that participation levels will be sustained at the same rate without similar levels of funding and capacity.

Engagement in the arts is now measured by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Participation Survey from 2023, so the metrics are slightly different from the Active Lives survey which took data from 2017. The DCMS Participation Survey only measures over 16s.



Reach

This section will explore what reach looks like across the FLUX programme as a whole, in **Hyperlocal Community-led Projects**, and in audiences accessing **Amazing Events**.

The 'reach' of the whole FLUX programme goes well beyond the town, spreading both to the surrounding South Yorkshire region and nationally for larger scale events.

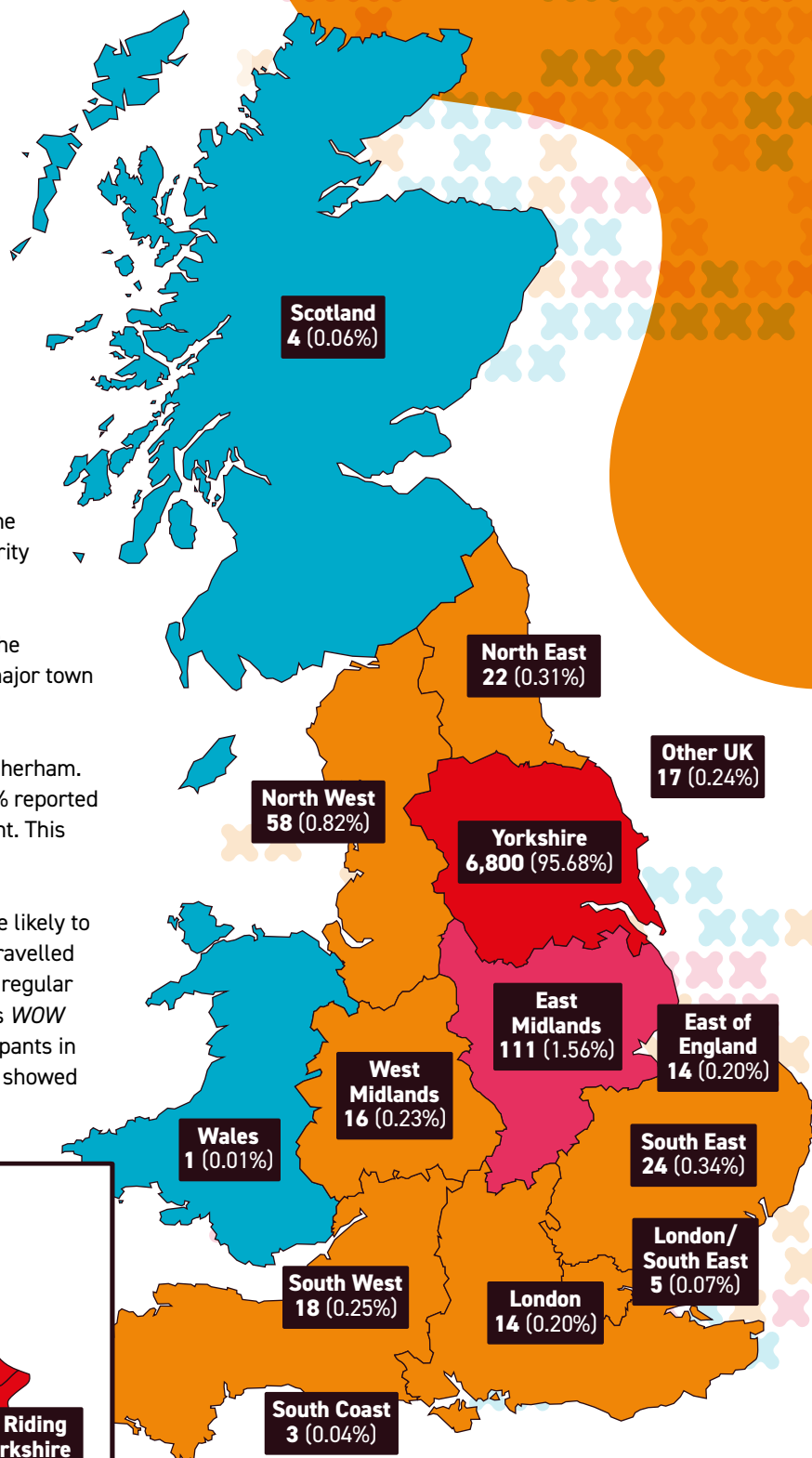
Concentration of Local Audiences

Audiences were drawn from all 25 wards across the borough, with higher participation in targeted priority areas where activity was concentrated.

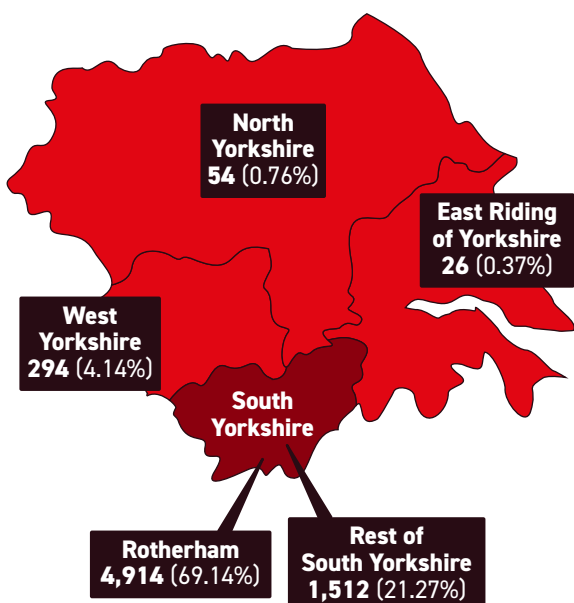
The broader borough-wide spread partly reflects the inclusion of full postcode data from attendees at major town centre FLUX Rotherham events.

Overall attendance was predominantly local to Rotherham. Across survey respondents from 2023 to 2026, 96% reported travelling less than 10 miles to attend a FLUX event. This varied slightly by programme.

Writing participants in Spread the Word were more likely to travel further, though a large majority (87%) still travelled under 10 miles. This is a growing group with loyal regular attenders at 2 main venues. In comparison, FLUX's *WOW Women of the World* programme (96%) and participants in the *Green and Creative* outdoor programme (95%) showed more localised attendance.



Participation in Yorkshire



Hyperlocal and Community Led Projects

Hyperlocal provision played a key role in enabling residents to access cultural experiences on their doorstep, with between 95% and 100% of participants travelling less than 10 miles. This is significantly higher than the national figure of 62% (Arts Council Illuminate).

Many of the projects take place almost on people's doorsteps in the target communities. The team can see children and families coming out of houses onto small green spaces like Cherry Tree Park in Maltby or Keble Martin Green in Wath attracted by unusual happenings - tightropes, puppets or giant pink inflatable tanks. 96% of those attending Maltby circus events and circus themed Maltby community festival 2025 were from Maltby, within a 1-mile radius of the event location.



Amazing Events

Data from the 'Otherham 2025 Winter Light Festival suggests that, despite its scale and central location (S60), audiences are strongly local, with 76% of those surveyed from Rotherham.

There is also clear evidence of audiences travelling in for large events from surrounding community target areas, with 15% attending from Maltby, Thurgroft or Wickersley, and a further 12% from Herringthorpe, Dalton, Ravenfield and Thrybergh.



While this data relates specifically to 'Otherham, similar patterns are reflected across events such as WOW Rotherham and other Winter Festivals, suggesting that audiences engaging with hyperlocal events in specific communities are also willing to travel across the borough to attend FLUX events.

We've never been to Rotherham town centre before, we live in Swallownest (6 miles away). It's nice isn't it! I love the work, the projections, I love the dancing, the lanterns, it's a really happy atmosphere.

Participant at the Winter Light Festival

Partners from Rotherham Museums, Heritage and Archives reported anecdotal increases in audiences travelling to their events, such as heritage weekends at Catcliffe Glass Cone, from areas where FLUX had concentrated projects such as Greasbrough Creates.

FLUX Rotherham and partners regularly cross-promote events, with collaborative marketing showing higher engagement than individual approaches.



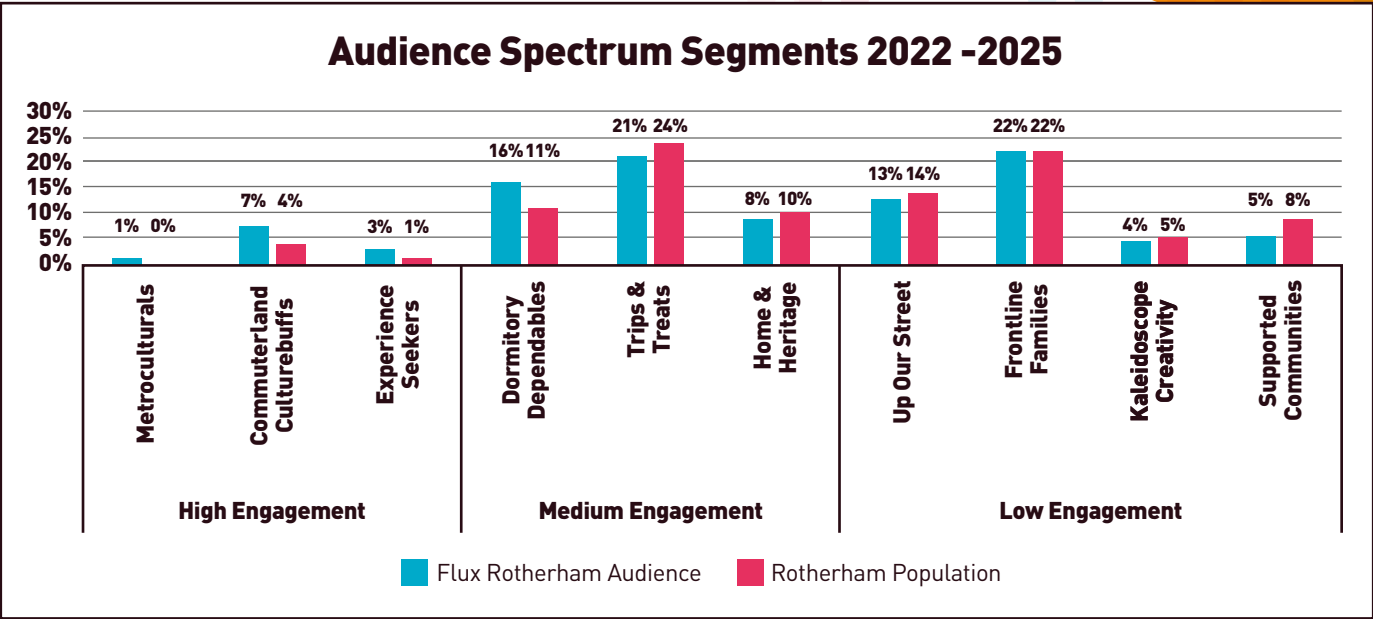
Were people new to the arts?

The evaluation data shows a clear shift in audience engagement, demonstrating that FLUX is successfully reaching people who are new to the arts.

Using a combination of direct audience feedback and postcode analysis aligned with Audience Spectrum segmentation, it tracks both self-reported participation and broader patterns of cultural engagement. In 2023/24, 78% of attendees said they had not engaged in any arts activity in the previous year.

This dropped significantly to 54% in 2024/25 (355 responses) and remained at 54% in 2025/26 (573 responses). This sustained reduction indicates that more people are moving from non-participation into active engagement.

What do we know about the people who are attending events and taking part in activity?



This section looks at FLUX’s Audience Spectrum and demographic data on gender, age, ethnicity, neurodivergent and D/deaf and/or disabled individuals. It explores the implications of this data for understanding and engaging audiences and participants in Phase 1.

Audience Spectrum Summary

FLUX Rotherham’s audience profile reflects a strong and consistent focus on engaging communities from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those living in areas of multiple deprivation where its hyperlocal projects are concentrated. Across April 2022 to March 2025, Audience Spectrum data shows that families sit firmly at the heart of FLUX’s reach, with its overall audience closely mirroring the wider demographic make-up of Rotherham.

The programme most successfully connects with four key segments: Frontline Families (22%), Trips & Treats (21%), Dormitory Dependables (16%), and Up Our Street (13%). This balance highlights FLUX’s dual role, deepening engagement with underserved local communities while also attracting broader, more mobile audiences through large-scale events. While participation patterns vary, the data demonstrates that targeted, locally relevant programming is critical for engaging core groups facing barriers to access, while flagship town centre events extend reach to more experience-led audiences across the borough and beyond.

Frontline Families make up 22% of Rotherham’s population and represent FLUX’s most consistently engaged audience. These households are typically young, low-income, and ethnically diverse, often with limited access to transport, making locally delivered activity essential.

Although arts and culture are not a primary driver for this group, they do engage in accessible, mainstream family experiences such as cinema, live music, and community events. Similarly, the Up Our Street segment, comprising predominantly white British, working-class adults aged 50+, faces barriers to participation, including limited mobility and transport, resulting in lower engagement with cultural venues and activities. Both groups are key targets for FLUX’s hyperlocal work, particularly in areas such as Maltby and the Fitzwilliam estate in Swinton, where access and relevance are crucial to participation.



Trips & Treats, the largest segment in Rotherham (24%), consists of families with more comfortable incomes who enjoy leisure activities and days out, often shaped by their children's interests and social networks. While not strongly motivated by arts and culture, they engage readily with high-quality, accessible events. Dormitory Dependables, another significant segment, are typically older, white British, middle-class households who favour traditional and heritage-based cultural experiences, viewing them as occasional treats rather than regular activities. These two segments are more strongly represented at FLUX's large-scale, town centre-based events, where audiences are willing to travel for standout experiences such as the Winter Light Festivals or Rotherham Show.

Over the three-year period, Frontline Families remained the dominant audience overall, though their proportion fluctuated in response to programming. They accounted for 31% of audiences in 2022/23, dropped to 17% in 2023/24 as larger-scale, destination-style events (such as Museum of the Moon) attracted broader regional audiences, and then rose again to 24% in 2024/25, reflecting the impact of more targeted and locally relevant programming. Trips & Treats remained a strong and consistent secondary audience (15% → 24% → 21%), while Dormitory Dependables and Up Our Street maintained smaller but relatively stable shares. Overall, the data reinforces that while large-scale events are effective in broadening reach, it is sustained, place-based activity that is most effective in engaging FLUX's core audiences and delivering meaningful access to cultural participation.



The postcode analysis for 25/26 has not yet been received. The trends in data are expected to broadly reflect the segments from previous years with similar programming and target areas. This year, however, FLUX placed greater emphasis on engaging Supported Communities, a segment that was previously not explicitly targeted. As part of a project with Sport England, for example, FLUX focused on groups that are the least culturally engaged, including older adults, many of whom have long-term health conditions or disabilities and live in or around social housing in areas like Greasbrough and Rawmarsh.

Gender

FLUX audiences from survey data show as 81% female, 17% male and 2% preferring to self-identify.

While the gender split of FLUX audiences appears more heavily weighted towards women than the local population, this is likely influenced by audience behaviour rather than a true reflection of who attends. Women are typically more likely to book tickets and to take part in surveys, which can skew the data.

When considering observations, especially at larger events, the gender distribution is more balanced, with entire families of all genders and many who are multigenerational, participating in cultural activities.

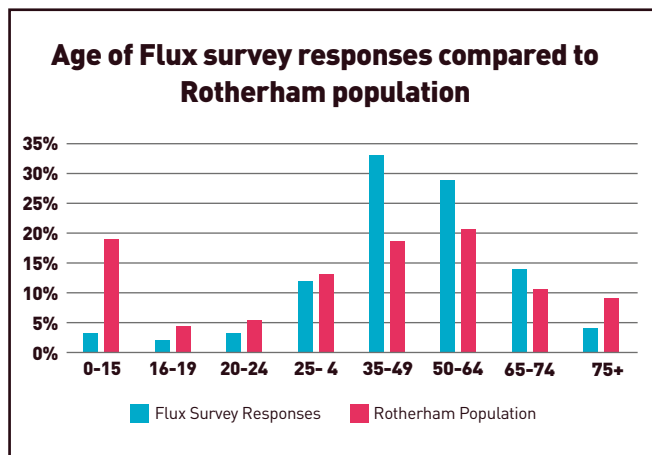
As a result, this imbalance should be understood as a factor of data collection, rather than a definitive picture of FLUX's audience profile.

The *Spread the Word* programme, however, is the exception to this rule, with 54% of those attending this programme identifying as male, 40% as female, and 6% preferring to self-describe.



Age

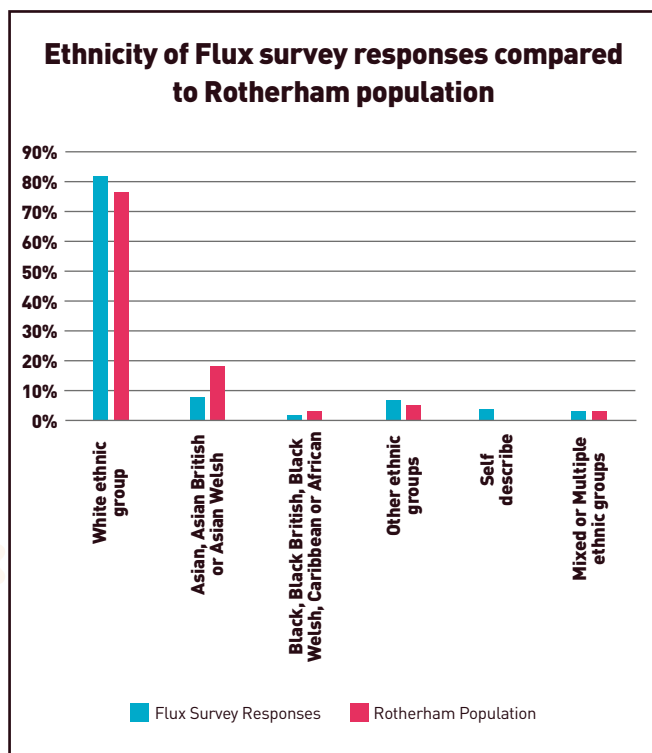
From survey data collected 2023 – 2026, this data set accounts for the removal of responses indicating "prefer not to say" (based on a sample size of 2,030).



In terms of age, the FLUX adult audience is well distributed with participation levels steady from 30-69. From age 70 onwards audiences decrease in line with Rotherham wide population data.

Data is more limited for under 16s as they are not surveyed, however audience spectrum data shows FLUX's highest audience segment is Frontline Families and additionally, for 2025/26, 40% of audiences were children and young people, totalling approximately 29,000.

Ethnicity



From survey data collected 2023 – 2026, 83% of FLUX participants identified as White/ White British, 7% as Asian/Asian British, 4% as any other ethnic group or none of those listed, 3% prefer to self-describe, 2% of people identified as multiple ethnic groups and 1% identified as Black/Black British. This figure accounts for the removal of responses indicating "no answer" or "prefer not to say" (based on a sample size of 1,729).

Across the Rotherham Borough 77.5% of people identified with a White ethnic group, 15.5% as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh, 2.2% as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African, 2.0% with Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, and 2.8% with other ethnic groups.



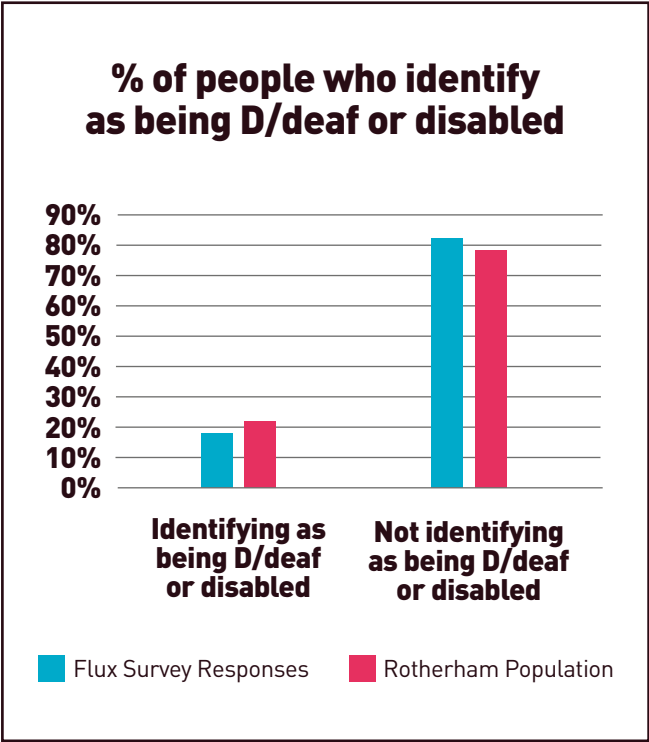
Many of the larger events take place in Boston Castle ward which is the most ethnically diverse ward in Rotherham with almost half of the population being from global majority backgrounds, primarily with Asian heritage.

It is one of three wards with the non-British white population exceeding 6% and Black/Black British exceeding 2%.

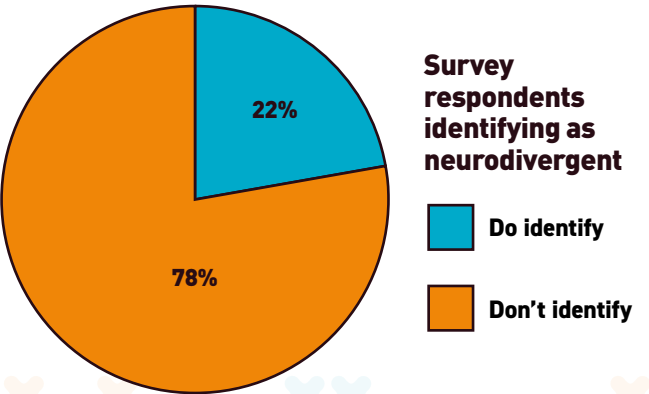
The school age population is more diverse, being one of two wards where White British residents account for less than 50% of the school population. FLUX also has hyperlocal and festival projects in Rotherham East (Eastwood and East Dene) and Rotherham West (Ferham and Masbrough) which both have much higher-than-average global majority populations.



Neurodivergent and D/deaf and/Or Disabled People



From survey data collected between 2023 and 2026, we found that 18% of respondents identified as D/deaf and/or disabled. This figure accounts for the removal of responses indicating "no answer" or "prefer not to say" (based on a sample size of 1,917). Additionally, 21% identified as neurodivergent, with similar adjustments for "no answer" and "prefer not to say" responses (based on a sample size of 1,312). Local population data from the 2021 census reports 9.9% of residents as being disabled and limited a lot, and 11.4% of people were identified as being disabled and limited a little, with a cumulative total of 21.3% of disabled residents.



This valuable feedback highlights the diversity within the engaged community and emphasises the importance of creating inclusive spaces for everyone. FLUX has continued to build on this commitment as Phase 1 of the project has progressed.

What could people see and take part in?

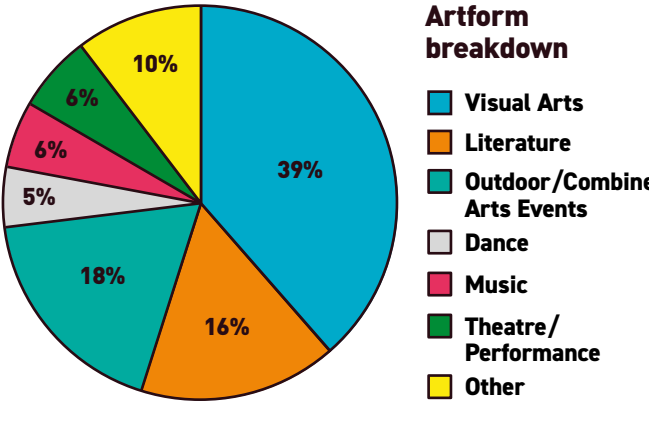
This section will examine the types of art forms engaging Rotherham communities. Two examples from Swinton and Ferham illustrate how these artforms are rooted in their communities and specific to those locations.

Based on community selection and preference, by far the most commonly programmed artform was visual arts with nearly half of activities in this artform. FLUX has consistently seen a high demand for visual arts programmes such as the 2023 large scale textile project - Threads That Connect Us, ceramics in Dishes of Rotherham leading onto the inception of Rotherham Craft Collective, which is fully booked at every session.

There was also a strong bias towards literature and outdoor/combined arts events. Dance, music and performing arts are also represented, and there is strong representation of all of these in the outdoor/combined arts sections.

In all of the outdoor events, there were opportunities for local musicians and performers to showcase their talents, as this has been one of the most requested activities, and a strong local pool of talented performers has been built alongside Rotherham Music and Children's Capital of Culture.

For further information on FLUX's Programme for Phase 1 see the website and project films here



The programming data from FLUX suggests that these experiences are not only well-attended but also meaningful and inspiring for local residents. The strong emphasis on visual arts, literature, and outdoor or combined arts reflects clear alignment with community preferences, indicating that the programme is shaped by what residents actually want to engage with rather than imposed from outside.

Projects rooted in a specific place, such as the pottery projects in Swinton, which are connected to Rockingham Pottery, have experienced extremely high demand. FLUX has had to extend or repeat sessions because they were oversubscribed by 300%. In the summer of 2025, over 1000 local children, young people and their grown-ups took part in circus skills in Maltby after they had been inspired seeing the artists perform on the high wire - this demand spread to other places with other communities asking for sessions.

Importantly, the consistent opportunities for local musicians and performers to showcase their talents strengthen the sense of ownership and representation within the programme. By building on projects with partners like Rotherham Music and Children's Capital of Culture, FLUX is not only presenting art but actively nurturing local creative talent. This reinforces a cycle where residents see themselves reflected in the cultural offer, making it more relevant, empowering, and inspiring.



FLUX places local people at the heart of the programme, celebrating the creativity, heritage and diversity of the borough. From young dancers and musicians performing at Ferham Festival, to handbell ringers and Sudanese drummers on the soundtrack at Rotherham Loves Music, to local poets performing new works at The Civic Theatre, to Morris Dancers at the festival village. FLUX's programming is rich with local talent, living stories, and the vibrancy of all of Rotherham.

"The young people love being able to perform in their communities on such a large stage."

Community member at Ferham Festival

"It's my first time DJing... I'm proud."

Young person after performing on stage at Ferham Festival

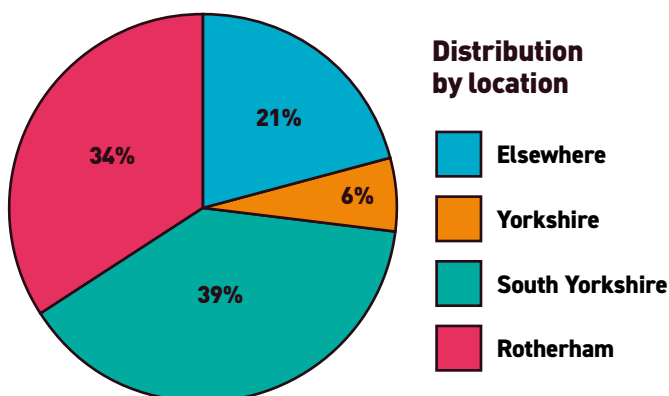
Overall, the breadth of artforms, the responsiveness to community demand, and the investment in local talent all point to a programme that delivers experiences that are both meaningful and inspiring for Rotherham residents.

Where do the artists and creatives come from?

FLUX has developed a large artist pool from across the country and this section will explore **who** FLUX has worked with, how FLUX has **supported and nurtured emerging creatives** and artists, and how this **diversity of artists** has impacted on experiences of events for audiences and participants.

73% of the creatives who delivered across the FLUX programme in Phase 1 were from Rotherham and South Yorkshire. 21% came from elsewhere which means anywhere other than Yorkshire.

The majority of these 'elsewhere' creatives were specialist performers or artists commissioned on the large-scale events such as *Chris Bullzin's* wire walking team or in national touring performances such as *Ockham's Razor* at *UPLIFT Festival* or *Hollie McNish* performing as part of *Spread the Word*.



"The traineeship came at a perfect time for me and was my first real step into a career in the arts. It has pushed me outside my comfort zone and allowed me to grow so much. I have a lot of pride in my hometown now and feel much more connected to Rotherham. I didn't have that before."

FLUX recruited six young creatives aged 16-25 from Rotherham to take part in 12-month paid traineeships as part of the Children's Capital of Culture programme from 2023-2026.

The traineeship programme was transformational for participants, two former Children's Capital of Culture trainees are now working in core roles in the FLUX team, one has gone on to work for RMBC events, one to an internship at Channel 4, one is now an established freelance artist working across South Yorkshire and one is working for Sheffield Theatres.



How does FLUX let people know how they can get involved?

FLUX has established a clear and recognisable brand across all print and asset marketing and across key platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Newsletter) to successfully grow audiences and partnerships.

Data collected from audience surveys between 2022 and 2026, shows that most people heard about FLUX events through social media, with 51% mentioning platforms like Facebook and Instagram, reflecting the continued growth of FLUX's social media following over this period. Word of mouth was the next most common at 17%, highlighting the importance of trust and reputation within local communities. Smaller numbers found out through other routes (8%), FLUX's website (7%), or newsletter (6%). Overall, social media plays a leading role in reaching audiences, supported by a mix of channels that help connect them with local communities.

On multiday events, FLUX commissions high quality, eye-catching footage to attract new audiences in real time, this has proved particularly effective for events such as Rotherham Show (High Wire) and FLUX's Winter Festivals with social media reels reaching a combined total of 140,488 views on those commissioned reels alone.



There are clear peaks in engagement during spectacular events, from 1st January 2026 to 28th February 2026 during the winter festival, views increased across Facebook and Instagram by 811.1% to a total of 509.2K, this is in comparison to the period two months before. This is a similar trend across all the winter festivals and annual Rotherham Show.

Flux's social media channels were set up during phase one, during this time they have grown steadily. Facebook and Instagram channels were set up in September 2021.

On Facebook there are now over 3,000 followers, and on Instagram there are over 1800 followers. The Mailchimp account was set up in January 2022, and by the end of phase one there were a total of 948 subscribers.

LinkedIn has grown slowly during phase one but has been a strong asset in sector/artist/professional engagement, there were over 400 followers by the end of this phase.

Local and regional news coverage has also been strong, with BBC Radio Sheffield regularly featuring FLUX projects, BBC Look North and ITV Calendar covering FLUX's Winter Festivals and The Yorkshire Post covering 'Otherham Winter Light Festival, many stories for Children's Capital of Culture and longform pieces on The Sensational Alzanas.

Rotherham Advertiser have been regular supporters of FLUX, sharing projects and events right across the Borough both online and in print.

Marketing strategies differ based on the event's scale and target audience. For Ferham Festival, a hyperlocal event, a large banner at Ferham Park effectively attracted 24% of attendees, based on 2025 survey data.

In contrast, posters generated only 6% of awareness for Rotherham Loves Music. Additionally, FLUX tailors its approaches for hyperlocal events by collaborating with local venues and partners, sharing information on local Facebook groups and targeting flyers and leaflets to specific community groups or venues such as takeaway restaurants, barbers and boxing gyms.



SECTION 2

To what extent is the aspiration for excellence of art and culture and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?

Excellence of art and culture

The evaluation found sustained evidence of excellence in the creation of the work, its presentation, and in the engagement and experience of both participants and audience. In-depth case studies presenting this evidence are attached to this report at Appendix 1.

On the basis of the information collected by the evaluator, the evaluation found that the work created is **relevant to local communities**, and **led by community members**; the projects are **ambitious and original**, with **high quality artists** and **high production values**; that the delivery is **inclusive and generous**; and that the effect on participants and audiences is **inspiring**, and successful in **driving up aspirations**.



Resonance and relevance, integrity, community-led

FLUX programmes over the first 5 years have offered activity across a wide range of creative forms that resonate and have meaning for local people. They push beyond traditional definitions of art and culture: sewing; spray painting; singing; popular entertainment traditions; social clubs; creative walking; circus daredevils and Roma music.

This approach speaks to the aim of changing people's engagement with culture by offering a creative and alternative vision of what culture is. It makes it possible for local people to create, experience, and try out a wide range of cultural activities where they live. This is part of FLUX's vision of cultural democracy. Across the 5 years, the journey towards a programme that is genuinely community-led is evident.

There are multiple strong examples of FLUX working with communities to produce art of high quality:

At Ferham, sophisticated understanding of the complex local community allowed for sensitive and inclusive multicultural programming for *Ferham Festival*. This showed confidence in engaging community panel members and working with community partners. It was also an important gesture of community cohesion to go ahead with the festival as planned just after the Manvers race riots had happened. It showed FLUX to be determined and committed to the local community.

In 2023, *Spread the Word* writing groups began, led by practicing poets. *"My intention is that we can all create a space together where we share stories with each other. Each of the sessions includes a space to talk to each other as well as some gentle creative writing exercises to help people put pen to paper. You may write a few words; you may write a full poem or even a paragraph describing something important to you."* Vic Leeson, group facilitator.

Later that year, the *Spread the Word* groups exhibited poetry they had written through an innovative display of tea-towels printed with their poems hung up as laundry and toured to libraries. By 2024 the project had developed to the extent that in addition to the groups, 2 regular open mic nights were established.

The feeling in the room where someone gets up to share, it's a shared experience, full of love and encouragement. You get those performances that make you sit up or make you cry.

Katie Matthews, FLUX Engagement Worker



In 2025, an anthology of poetry, *Ourselves Reflected Back*, was produced. Through the whole anthology process - editing workshop and individual critique, open call, editorial selection and professional publishing, through to the launch event where 40 writers read their work on the stage of the Civic Theatre - high standards were expected, enabled through careful support, and achieved.

“The thing I got back from people is they were absolutely chuffed to be able to stand up on a stage in front of people and read out from a book that they were in. It’s a kind of public affirmation of their worth, really. I think a lot of people did feel like that.”

Ray Hearne, Group Facilitator

“The project saw people who might only have attended open mic nights step into a more rigorous creative process, gain confidence, and then stand on a theatre stage at the launch reading work they had refined and worked hard to realise. People were genuinely proud to be part of a quality anthology and to be held to a high standard. They valued that it was something that could be sold and that carried a legacy of quality and creativity for Rotherham and South Yorkshire for years to come. It was not simply a community anthology ticking boxes. It asked people to challenge themselves and go through a professional process. The project demonstrated how much people value being taken seriously as writers. Being asked to edit, refine and meet a standard rather than simply being included without challenge.”

Vicky Morris, Hive South Yorkshire,
Anthology Editor

“I’ve never been published before so it feels fabulous!... It’s so lovely to get feedback from a real editor/ writer who can give me constructive advice.”

Anthology Poet



Ambition and originality

Winter light festivals show a growing ambition to make place-specific work. In 2023, *Luke Jerram’s* installation *Museum of the Moon* was brought to Rotherham Minster attracting audiences of 10,391.

This first winter festival ran for 10 days and was met with really positive feedback. However, from 2025 these festivals move on to commission and co-produce original place-specific works. In feedback, people had said they wanted the opening night every night.

They wanted the walkabouts, workshops, a whole experience, and this just wasn’t feasible within the budget. In planning for the next year’s festival in 2025, the community panel wanted something uniquely celebratory and about Rotherham. The decision was made to reduce the festival length and launch a call for a bespoke commission unique to and about Rotherham.

Expert digital theatre company imitating the dog was selected by the Youth Programming Panel and commissioned to create *Otherham*, a series of original projections based on stories devised by local children.

The scale and technical ambition of the work was impressive, projection-mapping 5 different town centre buildings, creating narrative projections, and attracting large audiences of over 7,000 across 3 nights in challenging winter weather.

“We saw an opportunity to do something at scale in a place that doesn’t usually get that kind of thing. It’s a good size for this kind of event, it has interesting architecture and good surfaces for projection, and it’s a place which sometimes has a darker edge and can be seen to be threatening, especially at night. We wanted to make people see the place differently.”

imitating the dog

In 2026, to produce the score for Rotherham Loves Music -The Moonlit Symphony winter light festival, 223 musicians and singers from 16 local ensembles, plus a scratch choir of 70 local people, recorded original music. This music was the soundtrack for large-scale projections created by Illuminos on the west wall and interior of Rotherham Minster. It reached a live audience of over 6,000 people. Illuminos and FLUX together navigated how to remain authentic and respectful to the musicians in the end result.

We started with the music. We wrote some music for the contributors to work with and built the soundtrack from what they all produced, then built the animation and projection from there. It belongs very much to the musicians who made it, it's Rotherham's own. Our work is always specific to the place it's made; it's site specific and has to have meaning for the local place.

Illuminos

Interviews with artists testify that the approach and ambition of the FLUX leadership and team were highly appreciated:

Everyone was so positive, no-one ever said no to the ambition of the project. We've never worked with a team so positive or willing to make things happen. Doors opened, people said yes. People have been so helpful, they can't do enough, such a nice town. A real can-do attitude.

imitating the dog

Quality of Artists

FLUX has consistently high expectations of the artists it employs. It engages expert artist practitioners whose practice and style of engagement is curious, open to learning and to finding people's stories, who will approach community engagement authentically, and who are committed to inclusion and valuing each participant's contribution.



This means that participants are working with experts in their art form, seeing how they work as artists in their own right, and creating their own work.

This can be both inspiring and demystifying. In longer-term projects, participants create relationships where they start to trust their own creativity and find their voice. Artists' reflections of the process testify to the care with which FLUX co-produces its work:

I wanted to see an interesting thing get made, that people can enjoy, but really, it's the making of and the inventiveness that's come into the whole process that I've found particularly fascinating... One of the unexpected delights with the project has been seeing certain talents flourish.

Jason Turpin-Thompson, Sculptor

The artists worked well, complementing each other, feeling and sensing what was needed and stepping in. So, the flow worked well. No one felt rushed or pushed. The whole event and activity felt gentle, yet packed with options for people.

In terms of my own practice, my versatility worked well. I was able to step in and step it up depending on who wanted what, early years and dancing to teenage choreography to mindful movement, selling the session to a grandparent to come and join in. We had a mixture of eager and reluctant movers but they all moved.

Hayley Beecher, Dance Practitioner

This is their park, we're visitors.

Let's Circus

Production values and core values

FLUX's production values and professionalism are extremely high. *"We shouldn't be disappointed by things."* For large scale events, FLUX consistently uses experienced artists and companies with track record of technical and production expertise.

'Otherham and Rotherham Loves Music are good examples of complicated technical productions, whilst the Maltby week-long *The Sensational Alzanas* residency of *Let's Circus* and *The Great Bullzini*, involved erecting an 11m high wire and bringing a historic showman's caravan to a Maltby playing field for a week. It challenged and then exceeded everyone's expectations.



A determination to proceed in challenging circumstances is a trademark of the FLUX positive approach. At *'Otherham*:

"There was a slight defiance to the Friday night extreme weather from the team. They stayed really calm and offered amazing support to the artists. They said 'Make the best of it for tonight'. They took the stress away from performers."

We Great Ladies

The expertise and experience of *imitating the dog* in staging outdoor digital work was crucial to the success of the event. The technology was designed to be robust and a full technical crew was onsite to sort out issues as they arose.

Together with FLUX, they made early decisions about changes and were able to communicate them to artists and audience so the event ran smoothly and people knew what to expect.

FLUX has nerve backed by skill, strong project management and realistic budgeting. An ability to engage experts, learn quickly and adapt clearly underpins its work. It doesn't forget the point of the work at any stage. Local people are always in mind.

Generous and inclusive

FLUX invests in practical inclusion measures like quiet and sensory spaces, BSL tours, walk-through videos, and engaging access support specialists.

It invests also in safety and security, briefing and supporting volunteers extremely well and adapting its security approach for different community settings.

The development of this practice is clear across Phase 1, with confident good practice now embedded in event planning and delivery. Feedback from audiences at the 2026 winter festival testifies to this:

"We could really see the effort made into making things accessible for families and those with additional needs."

"(My daughter) loved the visuals, being able to feel the music whilst in the queue and sat in the pews. We are really grateful that BSL has been considered."

"I brought my 88 year-old visually impaired grandma, and the sounds and visual effects were brilliant for her. We loved it and also loved the accessibility."

"My son with severe learning difficulties was very happy to see the lights and experience a community event. It wouldn't have been possible to experience it without the FLUX staff team who helped us access this event and recognised autism meltdown."

Several engagement projects have taken place within groups which specifically support disabled people taking part such as 'The Tin Menagerie' at Community Connects in Wath with sculptor Jason Turpin Thomson creating ambitious outdoor artworks which focussed on learning skills and working as a collective.

"I've been doing my creation, it's paid off, it looks very good, it looks beautiful. We've been on a beautiful journey. Every week you don't know what to expect, it's remarkable!"

Participant

Creating positive change - surprising and inspiring people - raising aspirations

The FLUX programme shows people what is possible, whether it's bringing visiting poets or an ambitious high-wire project to Rotherham, changing the way people experience the town centre, or giving people a chance to write, perform and be published.

The power of the arts to bring people together and appreciating what everyone had done was amazing. The whole community working together to create something so powerful was just more than I could have expected.

Rev'd Sue Armstrong, Rotherham Minster



Feedback across a range of large and small events are markedly positive, with audiences describing the experiences as:

Moving, uplifting, empowering, joyful, safe, encouraging, comforting, warm, genuine, magical, fun, inspiring, exciting, entertaining, interesting, different, enjoyable, and friendly.

It completely lifted my mood. It was wonderful to see Rotherham dancing, singing and enjoying the entertainment.

People described a sense of community, pride, and of reclaiming the town centre:

Had an amazing family evening, showing our children Rotherham has some beautiful places and it can be a great community.

It was nice to be in the town and feel safe and positive. I enjoyed chatting to other members of the community.

I enjoyed the sense of community, the performance, and especially that local performers were engaged. I enjoyed the reclaiming of the Town Centre as a place to be.

It was nice to be in the town and feel safe and positive. I enjoyed chatting to other members of the community.

People will talk about and say oh yeah I saw that and it'll start a conversation between two strangers who've never met before but they have that shared experience, that commonality.

There were real feelings of pride amongst the group...a sense of belonging to a much bigger and diverse community.

It's lovely to have something to come to in town, I wouldn't normally come in, it's too rough. We saw it on the news; it was lovely to see Rotherham without something bad attached to it. We're doing it again tomorrow and bringing Dad, aren't we girls? My daughter here, she's 9 and she's never really been in town before, have you. The thing is, it's their town isn't it. It feels really safe and lovely with all these people and kids around, it's brilliant.

There used to be loads of stuff going on in Rotherham coming up to Christmas, it's good to see a bit of life back. It's just been bad news about Rotherham these last few years, all you hear is bad. Needs a bit of cheer bringing back. This is good, people having a nice time together, doesn't matter that it's cold.

For some participants, their engagement has changed their creativity and their aspirations. Their expectations of themselves and of what Rotherham can achieve are higher as a result of their contact with activities put on by FLUX.

I never knew I could do this.

That day you sparked something in me and I have written every day since.

(When you're performing at open mic) you are someone, you are the one, you're not irrelevant.

“ Sometimes you feel like maybe you’re not clever enough or you’re not cultured enough to come to these sorts of events but anyone can come and sit and be immersed in someone else’s art. ”

“ (I felt) proud, as the recording was my first time back at band at 42, as not played since secondary school. ”

“ The hand-bell ringing group had been quite nervous about being recorded and the pressure of having to get it right but, on the day, we just had a real laugh as Matt just kept recording bits! It was really light hearted. I was with several of them when the music began in the Minster....with the handbell ringing! They were amazed at how good they sounded and very proud to be at the very start of the piece, with their own little moment of glory! There was genuine joy! ”

“ We’ve loved it. I’m a teacher and it’s just what you want kids to get out of it. They want to go home and make stuff like this now. ”

“ We’ve got a woman, she’d not written before, until coming to the group. Although she wanted to. She’s a real, proper experimental poet at the age of 70. She’s discovered it, you know... People emerge at any age at all. It’s the circumstances and the conditions in which they found themselves that stop them being creative. ”



FLUX often exceeds people’s expectations of quality

The surprise that audiences often express about the work is notable:

“ It was great to have some local poets and someone better known. Rotherham deserves to have events like this. ”



“ People were so delighted to have such quality and that it was special to them, it was made for Maltby. ”

“ It’s so good, I didn’t expect this. It’s proper. ”

“ Oh, I didn’t expect it to be as good as that. ”

“ We thought outside the Minster was amazing, then we found out we were actually allowed to go inside, and it was astounding, absolutely mind-blowing. ”

“ That was absolutely mint, miss. ”

“ I’m spreading it over two nights. I’ve never seen stuff like this; I love those animals (Ghost Caribou). I might have seen something like it in London but not close up, not like you were allowed to touch it. ”

21 scouts came on a sleepover in the town centre especially to see the festival:

“ Have I seen anything like this? This doesn’t happen in Woodsetts, and I never leave, so no. ”



Excellence of the process of engaging communities

The evaluation has found that FLUX's approach of developing trust and strong relationships with local communities is bearing fruit in excellent engagement practice. It found sustained evidence of excellence in the process of engaging communities.

The evaluation found a variety of approaches: the process of **embedding core values**; taking an **adaptable approach**; trying things out and **learning by doing**; and the development of **community decision making and accountability**. This section presents three examples of approach: **Ferham Roma Young People's Music Project**; **Spread the Word writing project**; and **Green and Creative - FLUX in the wild** and also looks at some of the **Challenges** faced in Phase 1.

Learning what works and embedding core values

In Years 1 and 2, the evaluation found FLUX going through a test and learn process with a number of small projects across the borough. Years 2 and 3 saw FLUX refining its approach on the basis of this learning, embedding core values into the work, and finding a style of engagement that works for Rotherham communities.



An adaptable approach

In Y1, artists working with community groups found they had to adapt their initial plans for the thematic and artistic content of sessions to better match the desires of participants. For example, an artist had planned to produce lampshades with a group of South Asian women she was working with, but the women expressed an interest in making bags out of recycled materials instead. The artist was able to adapt the project, meaning the women were able to produce and take part in a craft they perceived as relevant and useful to them. A different artist, working with a substance abuse recovery group, also had to adapt his project to meet the anonymity needed by participants. Rather than discussing issues around substance abuse in their writing, they chose to focus on the idea of 'landscape' and engage with places which were meaningful to them.

Learning by doing

Some logistical dimensions hindered the success of the Y1 South Asian women's project but provided useful learning. Some planned sessions had to be postponed due to Ramadan, resulting in a lack of continuity and halting progress in artistic technique. While the project was overall a success, with bags being produced and the women being proud of their work, this was clearly an oversight in the planning of the project timeline. Similarly, lead artists found that using email to communicate with groups was not effective: WhatsApp groups with information given directly to participants in their mother tongue worked much better.

In Year 2 FLUX showed progress in its priority principle of Inclusivity and Relevance and in developing co-production practice. The production of Uplift Skate and Art Festival involved extensive consultation with young people before the festival. It employed three young festival makers during development and delivery. Artist's briefs for work in Wath, Canklow and Catcliffe were also co-written by community members. By increasing levels of community consultation and employing co-production principles, FLUX was starting to programme with, not just for, Rotherham's communities.

In Y3, FLUX extended its reach geographically into new areas including Greasborough and Brinsworth. In some areas, such as the White Bear estate in Wath, FLUX started working with a hyper-local approach to develop cultural engagement in places where there was very little activity. FLUX also employed three young Community Producers in a traineeship scheme, providing creative mentorship support. Opportunities for young people to engage in creative programming built local capacity for freelance production and contributed towards sustainability in the local sector.

By Years 4 and 5 there is evidence of clear progress towards excellent engagement process. This is shown in: a more focused programme; greater sophistication and refinement of approach; growing confidence; clear geographical focus; a realistic level of delivery against resources, allowing for careful planning and lead-in; and the development of new areas of work including Green and Creative - FLUX in the Wild, outdoor work with a connection to rural landscape and the rich countryside assets in the borough, and connections into social prescribing.

FLUX has been successful in showing that, if the work is relevant, people will engage. Work in targeted geographical areas is known to be more successful in attracting audiences new to arts, perhaps because people see it as local activity rather than an 'arts' activity. To achieve this, FLUX has worked in villages, neighbourhoods, estates and local parks and alongside local community organisations, faith organisations, schools, and local authority staff.

Community decision making and accountability

FLUX has worked hard to engage in meaningful consultation with communities before and during programming and commissioning stages of events.

Many projects have been co-produced and co-created with local organisations and communities. This has gradually become embedded as the accepted way in which FLUX works with communities: working with what is there; believing that everyone has something to bring; working collaboratively; and sharing ownership of projects. Using people's ideas and building the project around them helps the project to be relevant. It has ensured that local people have the opportunity to shape as well as take part in events. FLUX has been able to build both new audiences and enduring relationships with community groups, all working towards creating a culture of participation and ownership around its programme.

There are some strong examples of Community Panel decision making:

GalleryTown

Phase 1 artists were commissioned from a longlist, selected by the guest curator David Sinclair to a shortlist, and final selection by the Children's Capital of Culture youth programming panel. In Phase 2 of the Gallery Town Programme an open call went out for professional artists to work in partnership with community groups to co-create new artworks. Again, the youth programming panel selected the artists and they were then matched with community groups and schools to design and create new artworks ready for outdoor display on billboards and large outdoor sites.

Otherham Festival

Outdoor artists were selected by a local community panel from the Without Walls touring list. They watched showreels of the engagement happening in other places and matched them with the community's brief for high energy outdoor interaction.

The Community Steering Panel

The Community Steering Panel informed the artist brief for both of FLUX's commissioned Winter Festivals Otherham and Rotherham Loves Music. Once responses had been submitted, a panel made up of members of the Community Steering Panel and the Youth Programming Panel came together to shortlist and then interview creative companies.

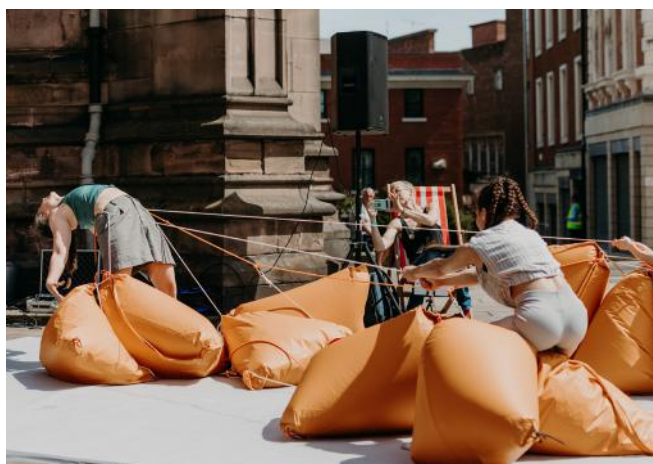
Canklow Mural Project

There were many applications for the Canklow mural project. FLUX created an anonymised display of all the submissions and 34 local residents voted for their top 3, which they then whittled down to their final choice.

Examples: Three projects from FLUX's programme which demonstrate excellence of engagement process

Ferham Roma Young People's Music Project - community-based hyperlocal work - the right artist for the project is important for excellent process

To start off a music project with Roma young people, musician Rian Treanor asked the Relentless (youth group) members at Liberty Church to send him their favourite songs. Amongst what they sent him was what they called 'gypsy folk', some from the 1960s and some contemporary gypsy music. This was the more raw, electronic street music that the young people were listening to. Rian found himself exposed to a whole new musical genre. Significantly, he saw clear connections to Rotherham's music scene when he was growing up.



This connection between hardcore gypsy music and hardcore music in Rotherham does align in a really genuine way.

The right artist was key to successful engagement. He was local and was in part motivated by his own experience of growing up in Rotherham. He understood the communities and had grown up with community tensions.

He already had some experience of working with Roma young people and was able to design and run sessions that engaged them well. His skills and experience, confidence, and ability to work with the intense energy of the group, and a flexible and responsive approach, underpinned the success of the project. He was able to:

Stretch their awareness of what is possible and challenge them.

The artist's approach to the project was closely aligned to his creative practice. It wasn't closely rehearsed or too strict. It was more focused on working together and intuitively responding to each other; improvising live music, embodying the process rather than composing; and not having a set idea about the end result.

The music is a real cultural connection point; the Rotherham music is still handed down to kids now. The Roma kids are so musically talented. There's a real connection to be made between people through that music. In relation to what happened at Manvers and race issues in Rotherham, that could be a quite amazing connection, there's potential in there for sure. Music can really facilitate that integration in a way that people might enjoy and want to do.

Spread the Word - writing groups, people finding their voices

FLUX's creative writing project is dedicated to nurturing and celebrating stories through listening, writing, and sharing.

It aims to help people find their voices, build their confidence, and move towards sharing their work if they want to.

It runs regular writing groups at Mowbray Gardens Library and Swinton Library. Monthly Open Mic nights in the town centre at Grimm & Co and in Wath at Wath Tap offer writers an opportunity to share work with an audience in a supportive environment, attracting audiences of up to 30 to 40 people.



Sessions are led by local poets Vic Leeson and Ray Hearne in 2 local libraries. Each facilitator has their own way of running the session. One session is a writing workshop. It includes sharing information about events and opportunities, a warm-up writing exercise and a main writing session, followed by an opportunity to share what has been written. The other session is more text-based, using poems as the starting point:

“It’s just trying to get people there and just treat them like adults, to believe in their abilities and try to encourage them to believe the same, eventually. There is no methodology. I just talk to them. Talk to people, get them talking, then get them writing, if you can. And the trick is, how do you get them writing? You show them what other people have written, I suppose.”

“Firstly, I fetch in a couple of poems. I put them on a flip chart and then I stick them up on the library shelves. You know, like old fashioned community education. So, I read them, and then we all discuss them. And then we take things out of them, as things that we might write about next time. We take the line’s images, tropes, out of it. One by one, depending on what they see, what they’ve got to say, and then add them to the list of stuff that we might write about. The point is to show them what passes for poetry. It’s a much broader spectrum than people traditionally educated in English schools, are brought up to think.”

“So that they can see that poems don’t have to rhyme. They don’t have to have the same line length. You know, they don’t have to use posh language. They can use swear words. They can use conversation. Trying to suggest that the experience and language of a person from around here is just as valid as anybody else’s. But people don’t believe it. They don’t believe it until you keep immersing them in stuff that people around here have written, you know.”



The facilitation demystifies the writing process. It allows new members to take first steps into writing, and changes it from a solitary activity to something you can do together. For people taking the step into sharing work or performing in public, they are quite literally finding their voice and sharing their story:

“It’s a whole range of what is possible, the written and spoken word. Which is really what underpins it. If what’s firing you up right now is the situation in the Gulf, write about it and let’s hear it. But if it’s that teacher that you hated, well, let’s hear about that as well. It’s about that individual liberation within the collective. Liberation and re-creation of culture. That’s we’re after.”

The participant perspective

“Writing poetry spontaneously is completely new to me. I’d only ever drafted, redrafted, rewritten. I’m inspired by Vic; I’d never have done it otherwise. Whatever I write here, I just keep it.”

“I’m where I want to be and with who I want to be with. At school I really enjoyed writing and poems, some I can still remember. I always had a leaning towards words. I didn’t really have access to culture after school. Now I’m retired and I’m thinking ‘If not now, when’”

“It’s a safe space. I wrote my first poem in response to some very bad news. It just came out of me. I’ve got to be moved by something to write. The news came to be reality, now this is helping with bereavement.”

“I went on a trip, felt a kinship, saw glimpses of people who might be ‘my tribe,’ and here I am.”

“I was challenged by a colleague to write a set of poems about my chemo. The group is a safe space, ‘off my patch’. This is a softer group than the other one I go to, everyone is different, I’m surprised every month.”

People come for all sorts of reasons. Some already see themselves as writers and want to develop, or to engage with other writers.

Others have stories they want to tell. Some are coming back to writing after a long gap, often all their working lives. Others come in response to hard times - bereavement, illness, redundancy. And others come simply because it's something to do and a social connection.

It's a local activity, a friendly welcoming group that's free and in a neutral venue. It's a safe space, you can speak if you want to, but no-one will make you. It's clear that for some people the writing process is a chance to think about things, try and express them on paper, understand them better.

Spread the Word is a key long-term project in the FLUX programme and a good example of excellent process. It offers artistic development for people, light touch but serious and of great quality. It raises aspirations. It's people-centred, gentle, welcoming and positive. In line with FLUX's mission, it enables people to explore and express their own creative ambitions, heritage and identity. It embodies FLUX's core values of being community-led and relevant, generous, inclusive, caring and creating positive change.

Green and Creative - FLUX in the Wild - flexible and welcoming approaches

The artist's reflection on a textile drop-in session really focuses in on the fine detail of engagement within a hands-on making workshop. It reveals the lightness of touch and flexibility of approach.

I was mindful of the journey participants went on and also ensured we didn't overcrowd any one activity at once so engineered a journey that really helped create the flow between activities and the artists.

The range of activities on offer meant people could gently move from one to another. They enjoyed the little hunt and foraging for 'nature's treasure' before using them to make things - understanding the purpose of why they were collecting. It was a really mindful way of them just looking at what was already there and doing something fun with it.

Importantly, they had enough artist resource to take the time to speak to people alongside running the activity session:

A family saw the sign and stopped to get out of the car and come and join in. They were a young family and they stayed and chatted.

One lady came and said she would love to join in but her arthritis wouldn't let her hold a needle anymore but she stayed and chatted a while about things she'd sewn.

Given the three artists there was time to really chat and let people share and talk to us. Lots of men brought their young people and they stopped and chatted and shared about their childhood and growing up in the area. That doesn't always happen so that felt like it added to the overall feeling of calm engagement and a depth that you don't always get at a drop-in session.

This next interaction shows the confidence of the artist to engage with people on their terms, adapting their support. Spotting a 'hover' as a moment of opportunity is a key skill for engagement:

When one (maybe 10-year-old) boy walked past I asked if he wanted to do nature weaving and he looked very unimpressed so I said no worries you can go explore inside the trees, there's lots more things to do, you'll find some good sticks. Towards the end I saw the same boy come back, hovering over by the nature weaving. He wanted some string for his wizard wand. We talked about the best way to tie it together and once he was happy with it, he went off to find leaves to weave into his wand. It was a lovely moment to remind us that children are never too old to play and giving them the freedom to create their own response is so empowering.





This testimony shows the artist really watching and listening to what the participants wants, thinking about what they need as support, engaging them in helping:

“ A few children were interested in the crochet hooks and wanted to learn to crochet. Two of them already knew how to do crochet chains. I managed to teach a few of the right-handed ones. There were a LOT of left-handed children and I got one of the left-handers to teach them. ”

“ Two children completed their braids quickly and wanted to try again so I showed them another pattern and they were interested in learning more so I wrote ‘kumihimo braids’ down for them so they could look it up later. ”

“ One girl kept pulling her needle off her thread so I showed her how to adjust her grip so this didn't happen and suddenly she was on a roll! Her face went from frustration to being lit up with pride in herself. Was lovely to see. ”



Challenges

There have undoubtedly been challenges in the first 5 years. The evaluation finds that none of these challenges show that the FLUX approach or organisation is problematic. FLUX has effectively negotiated these challenges.

1 Some are characteristic of any new organisation or programme: staff recruitment; establishing relationships with existing organisations and cultural partners, and building trust; finding the balance of expectation, ambition and capacity; deciding what data to collect and how to evaluate the work.

2 Some are common to many CPPs: the size of the patch; a diverse demographic; a post-industrial landscape with high levels of disadvantage, disability and poverty; a strong heritage of working-class culture and entertainment that has not been recognised by traditional formal cultural institutions.

3 Some are due to the external environment: community partners struggling for long term funding; embedded negative perceptions of the town; building social capital in times and locations where increasing division and inequality put people at risk.

4 Some of them come with the territory of working as artists with communities: production challenges for ambitious events; some projects are inevitably less successful than others and the team has needed to reflect, refine, reset, and try again. Some of the desired changes are difficult to measure, especially with limited resources. In particular, the sustainability of behavioural change in cultural engagement is challenging.

5 An under-developed cultural sector: despite success with funding across the partnership. Rotherham's cultural sector is still relatively under-developed and the infrastructure remains fragile. FLUX, Wentworth Woodhouse and Grimm and Co have all been established in the last 10 years. The Council's Music, Events, and Museum Services have all undergone rapid transformation programmes and need time and more investment to embed.



SECTION 3

What approaches are successful and what are we learning that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture?

On the basis of the information collected by the evaluator, the evaluation found that the most successful approaches developed by FLUX are an **asset-based approach to cultural development**; working with **core values of care and respect**; working with **optimism, positivity and hope**; working with the **'right' artists and supporting them well**; programming **relevant and purposeful activity**; working with **local heritage**; a **collaborative approach** and **positive leadership** style. All of these are key to FLUX's success in facilitating better public engagement.

An asset-based approach to cultural development

FLUX's overall approach is asset- rather than deficit-based. It works on the premise that there is culture everywhere, using a broad rather than traditional definition of culture, and looking for what is already there and building on it.

FLUX programming shows a recognition of everyday creativity and offers people new opportunities to participate.

It involves engaging local people early in every project. Over the Phase 1 period, early consultation and co-production have become a core part of the way FLUX works with communities. It values people's ideas and builds the project around them.

With FLUX's support, Wentworth Woodhouse has built confidence and expertise in cultural co-production, including co-production with marginalised communities. FLUX has paved the way for community confidence in the cultural sector, brokering authentic collaboration and supporting the building of trust in communities. FLUX has built a precedent for high-quality artistic work, which Rotherham's cultural partners look to as an example of best practice.

**Victoria Ryves, Head of Culture and Engagement
Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust**



A rare opportunity to see what skills were in there already but also to see what we could develop...people really took to the hand skills but then people started to show their own specialities, some people might do better on texture, some people on form work. It's amazing to see what a group can do.

Jason Turpin-Thompson, Sculptor, The Tin Menagerie with Community Connects



Working with core values of caring and respect

At the centre of FLUX's approach are core values of caring and respect. It works hard at looking after participants, artists, and staff. This approach builds trust and creates safety. FLUX has established itself as a programme that cares about participants, listens to them, and involves them in decision-making processes.

People have come to expect a warm welcome and an easy way in to a FLUX event. Participants have noted the importance of organisers' care-based, personal approach, and say that it made a real difference to feel cared for while attending an event in an unfamiliar space. This approach has helped to build FLUX's reputation as positive and inclusive.

Working with optimism, positivity, and hope

I think one of things that's nice about FLUX is there's just a lot of enthusiasm. There's a lot of enthusiasm for Rotherham and for the work and for the communities and people we're working with. It's investing in them and it's investing a lot of resources in them.

Geotone

FLUX projects have an emphasis on fun, enjoyment, pleasure, and social connection. Some projects are deliberately playful. Plug In and Play at Clifton Park created a huge installation, a game painted onto the grass.

We're a collective of artists that create work, playful work on a large scale, all over the place. I hope this installation is a start to how we can use spaces like this a bit differently. Work like this, it just gets people thinking differently. We make spaces to play because you should never stop playing.

Others are elements of larger projects, such as the silent disco at Rotherham Loves Music:

The silent disco was one of the liveliest activities I've ever seen at Rotherham Town Centre events, everyone was living their best lives! It was great to see more and more families getting involved and filling the tent with loads of laughter and dance moves. It was lots of people's first time at a silent disco, and people were loving the different music being played by the DJ. It was lovely to see lots of intergenerational families where the whole group were having a brilliant time.



Working with the 'right' artists and supporting them well

Through Phase 1, FLUX has learned much about the role of the artist in its work and understood much more about what happens between artists and participants in a FLUX project. It has found out more about what makes the 'right' artist for a particular project. It has established a group of core artists for Phase 2 whose practice aligns with FLUX core values and where those values are embedded in the way they work with participants. These artists have experience of working in community settings, understand the place they're working in, and sometimes might be from that area themselves. Some are stalwarts, part of the cultural fabric of Rotherham for many years, some are participants turned artists, and some are a new generation of artists and cultural activists. They are confident in interactions with community members; they believe in people and encourage them to believe in themselves. They have high expectations of what people can do; they expect good things.



As a result of this, FLUX has developed strong approaches to supporting artists. Key points here include being clear about the boundaries of the work, especially important in work with vulnerable people or in sensitive community dynamics.

When local people are genuinely involved in decision making and power is shared, then artists must be confident enough to hold focus on the artistic content and quality in a complicated space. FLUX recognises a duty of care towards artists. They are supported to use their core skills as artists, to stay in role and be empathic but not take on responsibilities that are not theirs.

As the artists in residence, we're just a bit of the front line, and there's a lot that's behind us and you really feel that as a practitioner.

Geotone

There is real strength in the relationship with the artist facilitators. For FLUX, this might mean knowing when to step in and when to step back, and trusting and respecting the artists. For artists, that relationship and way of working is important to the success of the work:

“ (What FLUX is good at is) the production stuff. The value that they give you as a facilitator. So that could be the fact that the rates that they pay you are industry standard rates. And they really value your time, so not only am I paid for the two hours of delivery, but I’m paid to prepare which is so often overlooked. There’s a safety in the way that FLUX holds the project. I can go to FLUX and say, I don’t think this is working or, I’ve had this idea. No-one’s going to be like, what are you talking about? It’s really open. ”

“ As the project has organically evolved, the space for my relationship with FLUX has evolved as well and we feed back and forth to one another, which has just been such a gift. ”



Programming relevant and purposeful activity

FLUX has a broad and inclusive notion of culture that recognises that working-class culture has often been excluded by the art establishment.

It includes amateur and professional artists, craft, making activities. Its projects use a range of artforms and relevance is more important than the artform itself.

The programme includes a mix of large events, local and hyperlocal activity, and longer-term work with groups. There is balance between audience-focused and participation-focused, although all audience-focused work also has elements of participation. All of the programming has elements of co-production and community decision making.

The design of long-term projects offers multiple entry points for people to join in rather than set programmes or courses, facilitators actively welcome new people to the groups, making it easy and comfortable to join in. Frequency and repetition build confidence in FLUX and at an individual level create patterns of engagement.

Early Phase 1 evaluation found that programming needed to resonate with the communities and groups on a practical level to encourage maximum engagement. For example, thinking about how a group meeting might fit into the everyday lives of participant communities is an important part of project design.

For communities in Rotherham suffering the almost complete loss of community spaces for religious, social, cultural and leisure use, an arts group can provide ‘something regular to do’, creating connection with others both within and across communities.

Participants of the *Greasbrough Creates Mindful Movement* group:

“ We danced, some cried, we hugged and we said thank you. Thank you to each other and to the FLUX team for making it all happen. ”

“ Thank you for the joy you spread. Learnt to enjoy life and confidence is coming back. ”

“ Just the answer to winter blues. Hayley makes us feel young and part of the community. ”

“ Meeting like-minded people who have become friends! ”

“ The sessions have helped me to get to know more people and make friends. ”

“ Learned to love myself more! ”

“ It was an emotional round up of the year - but we ended as we began with an Italian life lesson, Tutto Passa, (and a poem written by a friend of mine on just that lesson) a chocolate and ‘chance dance’ where they selected a dance from our greatest hits collection of choreography. They each gave each other an art postcard and a compliment based on something they had observed with evidence. We reflected each other’s good bits and highlighted them - so they could draw on them when they needed them the most.”

Working with local heritage

FLUX has found that creative heritage projects, if they are relevant and meaningful to local people, can be a powerful way of building common ground within communities and across generations. With *The Sensational Alzanas and Other Daredevils* project in Maltby in 2025, bringing artists together with archive material and direct descendants of the Alzanas circus daredevils really brought the stories to life for local people. The project showed the power of creativity and participation in re-imagining heritage and connecting people to their history and their place. Careful engagement with local schools and community organisations led into a week-long residency and culminated with performances at the annual *Maltby Show*, *WE Wonder Festival*, and *Rotherham Show*.



Partnership working with community groups and the local authority supported the delivery of a complex project with many different elements that overcame some technical challenges. By combining archival research with digital storytelling, oral histories, circus workshops, expert engagement from *Let's Circus* and live performance from *The Great Bullzini* high-wire walker, the project brought people together, inspiring local pride and a sense of belonging. The audience found performers' abilities truly amazing. The courage and fearlessness of high wire performers working without a safety net, and the sense of peril it created, resulted in powerful and memorable collective experiences for the audience. Pathé film from the late 40s shows audiences watching the Alzanas with exactly the same facial expressions as conjured by Bullzini and his team 85 years later.

“It brought tears to my eyes and I was so pleased and thrilled to see you up there, because I never thought I would see someone walk the high wire again.”

Julie Fisher (Davis) Granddaughter of Edgar Davis

The learning from this project supports the next ambitious heritage project. Early engagement work has already begun for *Palladiums of the North* based on the history of the Greasbrough Social Club. Greasbrough was a premier venue on the Northern Clubland circuit in the 1960s, in the vanguard of a new entrepreneurial approach to promoting live entertainment in clubs and welcoming top acts.

A collaborative approach

Collaboration with other organisations has underpinned the FLUX activity programme, particularly for large scale events. FLUX has worked hard to listen to what communities say, and built relationships with key individuals and organisations, individual community members or leaders, local councillors, and neighbourhood officers.

FLUX invests the time needed to build strong relationships with local communities, sharing ownership of projects, and acknowledging the contribution of others. At a strategic level, its pro-active approach to asserting the distinctive CPP role in the cultural landscape has led to many instances of successful collaboration. FLUX is sometimes the lead with others supporting, and sometimes it is in a supporting role to other local cultural partners. Embedding creative activities into existing annual events such as *Rotherham Show*, *Ferham Festival* and *WOW Rotherham*, has provided a continuity of presence and profile amongst artists and communities whilst respecting existing community-based cultural offers led by other organisations. This engages people 'where they are at' whilst enhancing the creative aspect of these events.



Rotherham Minster is an example of a partnership that has grown over Phase 1 to see this non-traditional arts venue become a lynchpin of FLUX's town centre events alongside the historic Imperial Buildings, a useful space for workshops and exhibitions, empty shop units and arts venues like *Grimm & Co's Emporium of Stories* and *Rotherham Civic Theatre*.

“It was just great to have our music groups involved; handbell ringers, choir, organ and lots from our Rotherham Minster Connections teams were involved in the scratch choir event. I genuinely believe this is the best thing we've had in the Minster....totally engaging for everyone. A space just to sit and wonder! Having the West door and steps open for the first time in well over 30 years resulted in all sorts of conversations with our older generation too!”

Libraries are also important partners. They are everyday spaces, unthreatening, public, and familiar. Library staff support both artists and FLUX staff:

“For international book day, the guy in the library, said, look, I’ve got this great idea. I want to do an exhibition. And it’ll go on that wall as you walk in. It’s as big as a living room wall. And it’s covered with gold and he’s put poems by everybody, he’s put an illustration and printed them in large print, stuck them up on the board, so it acts as a kind of an advert for the group saying, come along, you could do this. You could write like this. Come along. Tuesday afternoon. Fancy this happening in Swinton a Tuesday afternoon. It’s not like a lot of traditional librarians used to be but leading it, really, leading the attempt to get folk interested. They love it. It’s a small library. We get what, 10 or 11 in. It fills the place. So, in that sense, it’s striving to be a community library. At a time when libraries are being pressured to be all kinds of other resource centres.”

In a different partnership model, FLUX supported Rotherham Young Writers group, one of several South Yorkshire young writers’ groups run through the *Hive South Yorkshire network*.

“The partnership with FLUX enhanced the offer in Rotherham, allowing us to join forces around platforming voices and creating cultural outlets locally. Young writers attended Spread the Word nights every three months and FLUX’s support during this period has helped bring young voices into the Spread the Word network and wider activity in Rotherham.”



Rotherham’s cultural partnership approach supports the FLUX programme:

“The partnership across Rotherham’s cultural sector is something genuinely remarkable. When I began working here at the end of 2021, I wasn’t sure what to expect. I was inspired by the ambition of becoming the world’s first Children’s Capital of Culture, by Grimm & Co’s vision and values, and by the imaginative programming and scale of opportunity at Wentworth Woodhouse. But I couldn’t have anticipated what the following four years would bring. What stands out is the shared positivity and steadfast commitment to Rotherham’s residents, alongside a strong culture of mutual support among partners. This is reflected in ambitious festivals, bold transformations of spaces, joint exhibitions, shared funding applications, deeply rooted community initiatives, and a wide range of opportunities for local young people and creatives. At its heart, this is a true collaboration—one grounded in a long-term commitment to creating meaningful, authentic, and distinctive cultural opportunities for people across Rotherham.”

Helen Jones, FLUX Director

A positive leadership style

Key to successful collaboration is the positive leadership style of the Director. The approach is built on trust, confidence, and clarity of purpose. It shows care about the quality of both process of engagement and the artistic output. It is realistic and honest about resources and at the same time ambitious and open to opportunity. It learns from the unexpected and moves forward, instilling a ‘positive error’ culture in the team. Expecting the best of people has built a positive organisational style and helped to embed values-led working. Modelling good collaborative behaviour, instilling good habits of communication, “showing by doing”, working hard, being present at events, working on the front line, being seen to be part of the team, are all important in building a new CPP. How you do something matters as much as what you do. At FLUX the core values are always in mind. There is no doubt that this confidence is infectious. It has been characterised by partners as “can do, can sort, will listen, has time, and is calm.” FLUX is respectful of consortium roles and expertise, building on their strengths and specialisms, from highly practical skills, community connections, cultural sector specialisms, to strategic policy influence. The wider staff team is committed, understands the area and is able to make sound judgements about what is relevant and appropriate. It keeps FLUX’s purpose and values at heart, and works sensitively in the social and economic situation. The engagement workers all bring different backgrounds, skillsets and artform specialism, together they make a strong team.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



FLUX has been true to its name. It has forged an essential role as broker and co-ordinator and enabler, helping partners and communities 'stitch' together, leading positive change to transform the creativity of people, place and communities." Polly Hamilton, Service Director for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Rotherham Council.

Cultural transformation doesn't happen overnight, it's a long journey, so what we are looking for at this stage, the end of Phase 1, are signs of progress towards FLUX's mission and aims.

A broad definition of cultural democracy might be: **actively participating in the world around us, expressing ourselves.** Believing that **art is not just what 'artists' do.** A recognition that there are **many cultural traditions**, embracing **principles of equality and pluralism** and recognising that there will be **many versions of culture** within one community.



Its aim would be for a cultural life in which everyone is free to participate; where people participate in determining cultural development in the place where they live; and can benefit from greater cultural democracy. The gains are wide ranging: social, political and economic. There is a rapidly increasing research base demonstrating the positive effects of everyday creativity, from improved confidence and self-esteem, to reduced isolation and better wellbeing, and also to stronger engagement in other areas of civic life.

In its report, **Cultural Democracy in Practice**, 64 Million Artists identified five key values as principles to underpin greater Cultural Democracy, summarised briefly here:

- 1 The Leader as key facilitator** - moving away from top-down approaches; inspiring confidence and showing mutual respect; sharing power and opening conversations.
- 2 Agency and permission** - participants have permission to be involved; they have something to contribute and their opinions matter; empowerment, self-expression and collaboration of everyone is centred in the work.
- 3 Valuing everyone** - an equality of expertise, life experience and different perspectives; a mutuality between artists and participants; artists are curious.
- 4 Active participation not consultation** - communities are engaged throughout the process and play an active role in creating their work or event.
- 5 Valuing process and product equally** - the investment in process is usually sufficient to ensure excellent work and strong audience engagement.

The body of this report shows **clear evidence of these five values in the way that FLUX operates** and in the outcomes it has achieved in one-off events, longer-term projects, the journey of individual participants, and group development.

The values show in the way artists work with communities and the way FLUX engages in the local culture sector. They show too in the way some participants have moved from audience to participation and even on to performance and production, and how others have re-engaged with their creative practice after a long gap.



If we look at the skills and characteristics needed to build cultural engagement through this kind of programme we would look for **confidence; the ability to build trust, create cultural appetite and expectation; energy and the dynamism to be a catalyst in communities; a bold approach; a distinctive experience for audiences; strong production skills;** a programme that **makes people feel like they matter and their voices are heard.** As described in Sections 2 and 3 of the report, the evaluation finds strong evidence of all of these.



Over its first 5 years, FLUX has developed a way of working that is bespoke to Rotherham at this point in time. At its core lie FLUX's upfront values that guide the work. It acknowledges complexity, understands and navigates the politics of place, and works sensitively in an environment where health and economic inequalities persist and hostility for some sections of communities has grown.

What has changed?

1. More people have engaged with culture

FLUX has achieved high levels of engagement. There is no doubt that it has succeeded in improving engagement levels through its activities. In Phase 1, the FLUX programme in-person activity reached 372,944 audience members and 33,908 active participants, people who took part directly, through hands-on involvement, creating, making, and engaging in activities. In 2023/24, 78% of attendees reported they had not participated in any arts activity in the previous year, a figure that went down in following years as their engagement became more sustained over time. In all, FLUX recorded a total of 435,484 engagements across its physical and digital activity with a digital audience of 28,682 viewing artworks, creating content, and listening to podcast episodes.

The programme delivered 961 activities and achieved a borough-wide reach, residents from all 25 wards in Rotherham engaged with events and activities.

Figures show that local cultural participation has increased significantly, rising from 10–12% below the national average in 2017/18 to just 4% below in 2024/25.

However, the effect of Children's Capital of Culture Year has on these statistics must be taken into account and it is likely that the participation levels will dip from this without the high level of investment of that year, some additional £9.6m.

2. Social value

FLUX's work has strengthened community voice. It has created many opportunities for social connections, joy and fun. Participants in long-term engagement programmes report increased confidence and feeling happier. The work is firmly asset-based. It has challenged negative external perceptions of Rotherham as a place, whilst acknowledging the complexity of people's lives and challenges they face. People have learnt new skills, improved their everyday wellbeing, gained new social opportunities, made new friends, and have new places to go. They enjoy being part of something. People are proud of the work and of what they have themselves produced. In some projects the work has increased the use of community resources, and given people new perspectives on the place where they live.

3. Amplifying marginalised voices

FLUX's work tells people's unheard stories, unearthing and telling both individual and community stories. In participants, we see increased aspiration and confidence that comes from self-expression, and being heard. People feel valued when their stories are told. Culturally relevant programming has made people feel that their community and culture is valued.

4. Successful models of delivery and programming

At the start of Phase 1 there was a real urgency to get going. There was a slow start to the work with funding awarded in 2019 but delivery not beginning properly until early 2022. Urgency about getting some delivery going led to a somewhat scattergun approach in the first couple of years: "seeing what worked, what people wanted, it's an experiment".

This resulted in a huge volume of events and durational projects as well involvement as a partner in other delivery activity. The volume of workload may have been too high: developing a new team at the same time as delivering multiple projects stretched capacity.

Narrowing the geographical focus and reducing the number of outcomes in the business plan has worked well. This been achieved by refining the activity programme in terms of local neighbourhoods and town centre festivals and events, allowing for deeper work in priority areas and adopting a three-tier approach to FLUX involvement in major events (FLUX community-led events, FLUX partner festivals and FLUX comms and engagement support of Rotherham events).

Reflecting on the pace and number of projects has brought a clearer offer and a tighter focus. Aiming for depth rather than breadth, and holding a distinctive place as a CPP in a busy year alongside Children's Capital of Culture, has ensured that the team delivers quality projects and doesn't try to deliver beyond its capacity.

5. Deeper partnerships and collaborations

The landscape is very different now to when FLUX began. The commitment to culture at leadership level in the local authority is more firmly embedded. The Children's Capital of Culture year has raised Rotherham's profile and ambition. There is a less competitive attitude between organisations. There is more shared ambition, and positivity, and much more experience of working together successfully. Rotherham's cultural offer is more joined-up and collaborative.

FLUX's Director Helen Jones describes the collaboration: *"Following the success of 2025's Children's Capital of Culture, Rotherham's network of cultural partners continues to work much like a relay team. They are sharing creativity, trusted relationships, and 'handing on' local knowledge to keep creative momentum moving across the borough. It is this exceptional level of collaboration – rather than any single effort – that continues to drive optimism and progress in their partnership-working, and a shared responsibility for culture in Rotherham."*

This evaluation finds that FLUX has found its distinctive role. It is respected by partners for its expertise in community consultation, co-creation, co-production and promotion. It is regarded as professional and respectful, hardworking and reliable. There is now a multi-year track record of collaboration on festivals and events, grand and small with a range of partners at borough-wide and neighbourhood levels.

Going forward - recommendations

In Phase 2 the evaluation recommends FLUX should:

- ❑ **Continue to be ambitious and, building on lessons learnt from Phase 1, work at a pace that can be accommodated within capacity to deliver high-quality end results.**
- ❑ **Use what it has learnt about successful approaches in designing projects.**
- ❑ **Maintain the balance: between delivering projects and working strategically; investing in partnerships and leading; and between leading projects and co-creation.**
- ❑ **Adopt evaluation tools consistently across projects and embed reflective practice, making more time for reflection within projects and throughout the year.**
- ❑ **Look forward - consider new policy work on Cultural Vitality led by the Centre for Cultural Value, including Cultural Indicator Suite, a practical framework designed to measure and communicate the holistic everyday cultural vitality of place; better understand how cultural vitality contributes to thriving, resilient and inclusive communities.**

Specifically, it would benefit from taking time to consider:

- ❑ **Who the programme is not yet reaching and why.**
- ❑ **Ways to collect data at un-ticketed public realm events.**
- ❑ **More straightforward ways of differentiating audience and demographic data between programme strands.**
- ❑ **Opportunities to co-produce some creative evaluation methods with participants to measure individual change over time.**
- ❑ **How its aspiration to 'go deeper' with the people already engaged can be evaluated.**
- ❑ **Ways to identify and capture that tipping point where behavioural change around culture doesn't fall back but becomes permanent.**

In summary

FLUX offers people the chance to try a wide range of cultural and creative opportunities. To see and hear new things and to be involved in opportunities to create for themselves, exploring what they can do and what they want to do, and making active choices about their own cultural lives.

This is clear progress towards creating the preconditions for cultural democracy: raising possibilities for people; "naming it theirs"; recognising what they do, their everyday cultural creativity, as culture. Its work animates public spaces and engages communities.

There is a great deal to be proud of in Phase 1 and significant progress has been made. FLUX goes into its next phase 2026-2029 with confidence, trusted partnerships, a strong team, and a track record in quality production and community co-production.

As FLUX matures as a programme it must take seriously questions of succession, sustainability, and legacy. In Phase 2 we need to consider how can we measure how embedded FLUX work has become and how 'sticky' the changes made will be.

Thanks

Thanks go to the whole FLUX team, in particular Helen Jones - Director, Ella Franklin - Research and Evaluation Assistant and Eleanor Beever - Communications and Marketing Officer; to all the artists, participants, and audience members who gave generously of their time to talk to me over the last 18 months; and to Mark Robinson and Ruth Melville for useful and interesting conversations about CPPs.

APPENDIX 1

Case Studies



Green & Creative [🔗](#)



Gallery Town [🔗](#)



WOW Year Round [🔗](#)



Spread the Word [🔗](#)



The Sensational Alzanas and Other Daredevils [🔗](#)



Otherham Winter Light Festival 2025 [🔗](#)



Miner's Strike 40th Anniversary [🔗](#)



Green & Growing [🔗](#)



State of the Arts – Podcast [🔗](#)



Winter Festival 2023 – Museum of the Moon [🔗](#)



WE Wonder Festival at Wentworth Woodhouse [🔗](#)



Rotherham Show [🔗](#)



People's Palace of Possibility [🔗](#)



Ferham Festival in Rotherham [🔗](#)



Creature of Curiosity at Wentworth Woodhouse [🔗](#)



WOW (Women of the World) Rotherham Festival [🔗](#)



PIF-PAF Theatre visits Rotherham [🔗](#)



Rich Wiles – Artist in Residence [🔗](#)



Dishes of Rotherham [🔗](#)



Picturing Maltby [🔗](#)

APPENDIX 2

Timeline of Activity 2021-26

2021

- Initial consultation with groups (3)

2022

- Uplift - Partnered event**
22nd - 24th February
- Textile Stories**
31st February - 30th March
- The Geotone - Residency**
16th - 28th March
- Philosophy in communities**
3rd March - 3rd May
- Women's Euros 2022 Project**
31st May - 30th June - 23rd July
- WOW Festival 2022**
16th - 17th July
- Ferham Festival 2022**
11th August
- Rotherham Show 2022**
3rd - 4th September
- Dishes of Rotherham**
12th October 22 - 18th March



2023

- Threads that Connect Us**
2nd January - 31st March
- Rotherham Creative Network**
19th January 2023 - 30th October
- Picturing Maltby Pop Up Shop**
23rd January - 23rd March
- Uplift 2023**
5th - 7th April
- WOW Rotherham 2023**
10th May
- Ferham Festival 2023**
15th July
- WE Wonder 2023**
28th August
- Rotherham Show**
2nd - 3rd September
- Makers Space at Rotherham Libraries**
23rd October - 30th November
- Spread the Word Sessions at Mowbray Gardens**
24th October 2023 - March 26
- Museum of the Moon**
18th - 30th November



FLUX ESTABLISHED

2024

- ❑ **Roots Parade Carnival Festival and Engagement Workshops**
13th April
- ❑ **Hybrid3 Miner's Strike Audio**
18th April - 7th November
- ❑ **Green and Growing Project Started**
27th April - February
- ❑ **Right to Play project**
3rd May - 8th September
- ❑ **WOW Rotherham 2024**
11th May
- ❑ **Start of regular Open Mic Nights**
20th May 2024 - 26th March
- ❑ **Rian Treanor + Relentless Youth Group**
20th June - 15th August
- ❑ **Eastwood Funfest**
22nd June
- ❑ **Greasbrough Creates Mindful Movement**
1st July 24 - 1st December 25
- ❑ **Uplift 2024**
25th - 27th July
- ❑ **Gallery Town consultation and Installation at Canklow**
30th July - 28th September
- ❑ **Supper Club part of WOW Year-Round**
15th August - 14th November
- ❑ **Ferham Festival 2024**
17th August
- ❑ **WE Wonder 2024**
24th August

- ❑ **Rotherham Show 2024 Festival Village**
7th - 8th September
- ❑ **Rotherham Young Writers**
13th September 2024 - 26th March
- ❑ **Reclaim the Night 24 and Lead Up Engagement**
29th October - 21st November
- ❑ **Community Feast 2024**
25th November
- ❑ **Otherham Film Project**
2nd - 11th December

2025/26

- ❑ **WOW 2025 and Lead Up Engagement**
14th April - 10th May
- ❑ **Gallery Town artwork consultation (Phase 1)**
15th April - 24th April
- ❑ **Greasbrough Creates Sessions**
16th April 2025 - 10th March 2026
- ❑ **Wath Festival**
3rd May
- ❑ **Sensational Alzan's Community Sessions (Part 1)**
12th May - 30th May
- ❑ **Spread the Word Ray Hearne Sessions**
27th May 2025 - 24th March 2026
- ❑ **Maltby Community Festival Alzana's**
31st May
- ❑ **Winthrop Garden Artist in Residence**
3rd - 6th June
- ❑ **Eastwood Funfest**
7th June

- ❑ **Gallery Town Installation Phase 1**
July 2025
- ❑ **Ferham Festival + engagement**
4th June - 5th July
- ❑ **Maltby Summer/Dark Nights**
25th July 2024 - 30th January 2026
- ❑ **Sensational Alzanias Community Sessions (Part 2)**
30th July - 21st August
- ❑ **Community Feast 2025 and Engagement**
11st August - 18th September
- ❑ **Sport England Project**
13th August 2025 - 20th February 2026
- ❑ **WE Wonder Festival and Walk**
30th August
- ❑ **Gallery Town Installation**
September
- ❑ **Rotherham Show**
6th - 7th September
- ❑ **Spread the Word Poetry Anthology Launch**
2nd October
- ❑ **Reclaim the night and Engagement**
3rd November - 27th November
- ❑ **Craft Collective Launch**
8th November
- ❑ **Gallery Town Artwork Consultation (Phase 2)**
13th January - 6th March



- ❑ **Gallery Town Wentworth Woodhouse Portrait exhibition**
31st January - 1st March
- ❑ **Rotherham Loves Music Festival and other engagement Events**
17th January - 13th March
- ❑ **Craft Collective**
2nd - 21st March
- ❑ **Roots 2026**
28th March
- ❑ **WOW Rotherham 2026**
9th May



Co-created arts with the communities of Rotherham

Flux Rotherham creates art projects and events with communities. From festivals filled with music, dance and outdoor arts experiences to exhibitions, creative workshops and conversations. Join us to explore and express your creative ambitions, heritage and identity.

Visit: fluxrotherham.org.uk

Facebook: [rotherham.flux](https://www.facebook.com/rotherham.flux)

Instagram: [flux_rotherham](https://www.instagram.com/flux_rotherham)

LinkedIn: [FLUX Rotherham](https://www.linkedin.com/company/FLUX-Rotherham)



fluxrotherham.org.uk



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

