

Preston Creative Sector - draft starter document

BOTTOM 10 CITIES FOR CREATIVE FUNDING ACROSS THE UK

SOURCE: BERLEW.CO.UK

City	Spend per 10,000 people on Arts Council	Funding by council (maximum amount per business for arts development or community events)	Overall Total Index Score
Leicester	£162,976.88	£3,000	33
Southampton	£155,664.25	£2,000	29
Kingston upon Hull	£112,840.40	£5,000	27
Coventry	£108,615.25	£5,000	26
Luton	£38,128.38	£10,000	23
Derby	£110,466.44	£3,000	23
Stoke-on-Trent	£24,772.49	£10,000	20
Rochdale	£79,068.63	£500	12
Wolverhampton	£43,973.12	£2,500	9
Preston (Preston)	£24,250.19	£1,500	3

Introduction & context

In December 2024 Berlew, a design studio, wrote their [Creative Funding Report](#). Confirming something we had long suspected. Culturally we were somewhat 'undernourished'. They analysed arts funding across England, before assessing investment Arts Council England on a regional basis, to understand how much is spent annually, per 10,000 residents, on arts projects and cultural programmes across the nation. Berlew also looked at funding available from the local authority for small and medium-sized business-led art and culture initiatives. The score for these amounts then added up to a total index score - not only were we bottom of the league across the whole of England with 3 points (Manchester at the top had 177 points) but the next worst, Wolverhampton, had 9 points. Three times our score! we were pretty well 'starving'. It's little surprise that we are on your CPP, 'could do better' list. But yet, great art does get made in this city, collaboration within the creative sector does happen and we do have an audience too. Also being at the base gives us a unique vantage point. We have a lot to gain, and the only way is UP.

Conversations around our cities 'creative offer' have been long (30 years for some practitioners & organisations) but have intensified since just before Covid - at this time the Brewtime arts collective (which now has around 1000 members on its Facebook group) was formed around objections to an ill thought out cultural strategy document being bought in via some consultants - who just didn't get the place. Partnerships were formed and the 16 year strategy was re-written (the process facilitated by the Creative Minds organisation), taking us up to the 2032 Guild. Then immediately, Covid hit. Elements from that strategy have formed the basis of this bid (written in red).

Preston is a vibrant city, which celebrates its diversity and its long-standing cultural traditions. It is a city that is not afraid to avoid conformity, and which persistently tests and innovates. Preston's range of cultural institutions, network of independent artists and creative industries throughout the city are committed to a renewed proposition for culture.

The fact that, infrastructure wise, 'desert conditions' have affected the wider public's relationship with arts & culture in the city. As well as damaging the development of the creative providers, the independent sector. There are followers of and participants in 'the scene'. For the none followers though, the cupboard probably looks pretty bare. This combined with the fact that there's no coordinated promotion, no cultural quarter and distractions such as the cost of living crisis. For many the, even limited cultural opportunities in Preston, will go under the radar.

However these conditions, across such a long period, have in some way brought audience & provider together - 'a common struggle' for survival. The various strands of Preston's cultural offer each have a dedicated audience that appreciates their output and understanding of our limitation of scale & reach. This local following appreciates cultural moments when they arise and the sector understands that we therefore need to provide quality & integrity, every time. There is a strong bond & methodology from which to further invite in and build.

Although **coordination, accessibility, promotion, scale, range & confidence** needs to improve. Other 'lean' strengths have emerged from our independent nature and need to survive. We've mutated and developed common traits that we share, which is part of what makes Preston special and makes us Proud of where we are. From the league position we're in, we've honed a good attitude and a useful set of tools, and ultimately it will be done The Preston Way. Stopping the brain drain of people who just couldn't take it anymore (but celebrating the people who've succeed elsewhere) and creating the conditions for people to maybe even return back home.

Through the development of infrastructure, opportunity & resource which will enable our ambitions, we will rise out of the barren years. Creating missing infrastructure that will bolster the fact that even through a difficult period we have:

- maintained a number of diverse public outdoor arts events
- grown independently owned cultural venues
- created great art, craft, music, dance, theatre, film & design
- had commercial success and achieved awards
- developed renowned studios & incubator spaces
- developed 'potato based' social media phenomena
- been home to a Turner Prize winner
- developed practices that specialise in engaging with the 'hard to reach' & co-production
- forged longterm relationships with the Voluntary Sector and other public facing services to survive, like Education & Environmental bodies and in this bids case, **Health**.

A movement which prioritises wellbeing will:

- Acknowledge and address the prevalence of mental health issues amongst our populous, but particularly amongst young people.
- Seek out a range of diverse role models that fit Preston in the 21st Century and resonate across all communities.
- Show genuine care for artists by ensuring work is properly resourced in terms of time and finance.
- Acknowledge and celebrate the green spaces accessible from Preston's city centre and use these as cultural venues.
- Ensure that the contribution of voluntary groups and individuals to the fabric of Preston's arts and cultural life is recognised and respected when celebrating the arts sector.

But we realise that reach & scale has always been an issue - through CPP support, our feral determinedness, our Preston Model operandi and our 'on the ground' partners we will not only give Preston more of what they want culturally. We will also create the infrastructure & mechanisms to sustainably climb UP the league table and stay there.

The UP USP

A sustainable movement will:

- Raise the confidence and profile of Preston's wonderful cultural sector and facilitate stronger collaboration between artists, communities and organisations.
- Highlight the aspirations of all young people for who culture includes gaming, influencers, fashion and self-generated content.
- Create opportunities for young people and support the artists and art forms of tomorrow.
- Invest in and support the development of existing organisations and creatives as well as new and emerging creatives.
- Encourage strong cultural leadership, which understands and continues to accentuate diversity, celebrating a diverse range of voices within, and without, the sector.

As with all Creative People & Places projects, ours also centres around engaging people who are less involved in cultural activities. However, having adapted & survived for so long in the wilderness, our creative eco system (although intimate & fractured) uniquely, has a none-dependent raison d'être and a way of operating that gives us every chance for our action research programme, outputs & outcomes, to develop a pathway towards becoming truly sustainable.

Our Health partners similarly understand about how to operate under restricted budgets and have a deep understanding about the formula for marrying efficiency with quality of provision (cultural inequalities are even more outdone by the phenomenon that is health inequalities, which literally take years off your life expectancy).

This sustainability will be accomplished through:

- adopting Preston Model principles
- the nurturing, development & utilisation of cultural assets already present in the city
- having a Young Practitioners advisory group at the heart of everything we do to future-proof what is created
- the identification of gaps in the infrastructure and 'building into' rather than 'buying in' to plug those gaps
- a green approach to use of materials (recycle & reuse)
- partnering with sectors other than culture to tap into funding, services, facilities, skill sets eg Health, Education and Voluntary sectors
- maintaining open mindedness & encouraging ambition but managing expectation
- encouraging ownership from the ground up

UP - the action research, programme concept

Unleashing Potential (UP as we call it). Does exactly what it says on the tin. But in the context of developing cultural connectivity with Preston residents who don't typically engage with culture. Not only will our

project engage these people, it will foster a much more healthy relationship between them and the creative sector. A relationship where:

- power is shared **and** cordially passed from one to another to enable growth, cohesion, experimentation and bring dynamic
- both inspire each other and share relevance, nurturing two way engagement
- both allow room for challenge & debate that develops understanding and brings positive spice
- they both understand it takes time to build a meaningful connection

THE MANIFESTO

UP is more than a word—it's a declaration, a direction, a dream. It speaks to ambition, resilience, and the power of collective action. For Preston, UP means rising from the bottom, igniting a cultural and creative transformation that builds not just a moment but a movement.

We envision a city where creativity isn't an afterthought but a cornerstone, where the arts inspire, connect, and elevate everyone. Where creativity is a tool to help us connect & share, laugh together, solve problems, relax & feel better, grow and develop confidence & self worth, see progress, get excited, embrace shock & challenge, learn, escape, bring hope in a hopeless situation, understand commonalities & embrace difference, make better decisions and look after Preston.

UP is about nurturing homegrown talent and local audience & participation. Empowering young people to lead the way, and creating opportunities that allow them to thrive here, not just elsewhere. It's about ensuring that everyone—no matter their background—feels the pull of possibility and the joy of belonging to a vibrant cultural community.

UP is upward growth—steadfast and enduring. It's about upskilling, uplifting, and making Preston a beacon for arts and culture, not a place to pass through but a place to come to. It's about turning aspiration into action, creating experiences that resonate, and ensuring Preston's cultural voice rises to be heard loud and clear.

This is our moment to move UP. To elevate. To grow. To create a legacy that will inspire and sustain for generations. The only way is UP.

An ambitious movement will:

- Prize the arts and culture of our diverse communities which will be recognised as part of the whole British culture scene and will be integral and embedded not only at singular or separate events.
- Ensure that recruitment to workforce and structures is diverse and includes under-represented groups to help arts and cultural activity flourish. This includes a broad section of appointments e.g. libraries, museums, events management and representation at senior Board level decision making.
- Welcome experimentation and risk-taking.
- Invest in place making, leisure activities and cultural employment, which makes Preston a healthy, vibrant and enjoyable place to live and work.
- Take a leadership role in redefining what arts and culture means and the role it can play in all aspects of our lives and articulate this at a national level.

This theme represents more than an aspiration; it is a shared commitment to rising together as a city. A Health, Youth, Creative and Voluntary sector Partnership. With this funding, we will not only lift our creative and cultural offering but also foster a transformative shift in how Preston thinks, collaborates, and thrives in the arts.

For decades, Preston's arts organisations have worked tirelessly within communities. However, they've largely operated in silos, each striving for impact but missing the opportunity to amplify their work collectively. For the first time, a broad range of organisations are united under a collective vision: to build a cooperative, sustainable infrastructure for arts & culture - centred around engagement. By fostering

collaboration and breaking down barriers, we will create a cultural ecosystem where ideas, talent, and resources flow freely, driving upward momentum for everyone involved.

Preston has long been seen as an "export city." Our university produces exceptional talent, but many leave for bigger, more vibrant cultural hubs like Manchester, Liverpool, or London. While we embrace the value of exploring opportunities beyond our borders, we also believe in creating a reason to stay—and a reason to return. Preston can and should be a destination for arts and culture: a city where people experience world-class events and activities on their doorstep. This program will not only nurture homegrown talent but also attract visitors from across the UK, elevating Preston as a desirable and dynamic cultural hub. At the heart of "UP" is youth. They are the future, the ones who will grow UP with this transformation. We want young people to not only be participants but drivers of change. By giving our Young Practitioners Group the tools, platforms, and opportunities to lead, we ensure that Preston's cultural rise is sustainable and reflective of the city's evolving needs.

"UP" is rich with metaphorical power—upskill, uplift, uprising, elevate, rise, grow, ascend, float, and soar. These words are not just aspirations; they are actions we will take to reach new heights. We will upskill communities, elevate the unheard, and create opportunities for artistic growth. We will rise together, celebrating Preston's unique character while building something new and bold.