

# Cumbria Cultural Impact & Advocacy Report: Technical Annex

Baseline survey data, engagement  
findings, impact case studies and a register  
of the cultural ecology

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# Contents

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Introduction and methodology                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 5 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quantitative evidence and methodology — economic output and employment; visitor-economy modelling; creative industries and creative employment; comparative analysis; investment; participation and social-value evidence; definitions and source notes.</li></ul> | 5 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Baseline survey data — the full results of the Cultural Organisations Survey (42 responses), the Independent Creatives and Micro-Businesses Survey (35 responses), and the Business Community Survey.</li></ul>                                                    | 5 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Engagement findings — the complete synthesis of three roundtable sessions held in August 2026, supplemented by targeted stakeholder conversations.</li></ul>                                                                                                       | 5 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Impact case studies — examples illustrating how cultural organisations, programmes and networks contribute to economic growth, skills, health and wellbeing, place, visitor economy and stronger communities.</li></ul>                                            | 5 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A register of the cultural ecology — a working map of cultural organisations, venues, festivals, networks and other assets identified across the county.</li></ul>                                                                                                 | 5 |
| Baseline data: Cultural Organisations Survey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 8 |
| Who responded                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 8 |
| Scale and finances                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 8 |
| Access and audiences                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 9 |
| Infrastructure and place                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 9 |
| Partnerships, outcomes and collaboration                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 9 |

|                                                                                                                  |                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Baseline data: Independent Creatives and Micro-Businesses Survey                                                 | 11                           |
| Who responded                                                                                                    | 11                           |
| Income and financial position                                                                                    | 11                           |
| Geography, infrastructure and collaboration                                                                      | 11                           |
| Cross-cutting insights from the surveys                                                                          | 13                           |
| Baseline data: Business Community Survey (Mentimeter)                                                            | 15                           |
| Engagement findings: roundtable synthesis                                                                        | 21                           |
| 1. Emerging overarching narrative: culture as connective infrastructure                                          | 21                           |
| 2. A distinctive culture of self-organisation and local agency                                                   | 21                           |
| 3. Culture connects hyper-local communities with a global visitor destination                                    | 21                           |
| 4. Culture can tell a fuller story of Cumbria than landscape alone                                               | 21                           |
| 5. Culture is already helping overcome the consequences of rural isolation                                       | 22                           |
| 6. Cultural venues and community spaces should be understood as social infrastructure                            | 22                           |
| 7. A creative talent pipeline exists, but the pathway is fragmented                                              | 22                           |
| 8. The freelance and micro-business economy needs stronger infrastructure                                        | 22                           |
| 9. There may be a case for rebuilding cultural–education brokerage                                               | 23                           |
| 10. Culture contributes to health, wellbeing and public-service outcomes in ways that may<br>be under-recognised | 23                           |
| 11. The sector needs investment in its “connective tissue”                                                       | 23                           |
| 12. The Combined Authority represents a potential strategic opportunity                                          | 23                           |
| Emerging recommendations for discussion                                                                          | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| How this translated into the final advocacy proposition                                                          | Error! Bookmark not defined. |

|                                                                          |                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Emerging narrative for the final report                                  | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Impact case studies                                                      | 25                           |
| Health, wellbeing and healthy ageing                                     | 25                           |
| Skills, creative careers and young people                                | 26                           |
| Inclusive economic growth and the visitor economy                        | 27                           |
| Place, identity and regeneration                                         | 27                           |
| Rural inclusion and stronger communities                                 | 28                           |
| Register of the cultural ecology                                         | 30                           |
| Cultural organisations, venues and networks                              | 30                           |
| Festivals and events                                                     | 32                           |
| 2. Quantitative evidence and methodology                                 | 34                           |
| 2.1 How this report defines culture                                      | 34                           |
| 2.2 How to read the evidence                                             | 34                           |
| 2.3 Direct jobs, economic value and business structure                   | 34                           |
| 2.4 Comparative scale and growth potential                               | 35                           |
| 2.5 External investment and investment leverage                          | 36                           |
| 2.6 Culture as a catalyst for the visitor economy                        | 36                           |
| 2.7 Creative industries and creative employment across the wider economy | 38                           |
| 2.8 Creative skills as growth infrastructure                             | 38                           |
| 2.9 Participation, health, wellbeing and social value                    | 39                           |
| 2.10 Survey and engagement evidence: how to interpret it                 | Error! Bookmark not defined. |

|      |                                                |    |
|------|------------------------------------------------|----|
| 2.11 | Strategic relevance to Cumbria's growth agenda | 39 |
| 2.12 | Key external research and data references      | 41 |



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# 1. Introduction and methodology

This Technical Annex accompanies the **Cumbria Cultural Impact & Advocacy Report**. It provides the detailed evidence base underpinning the main report, recording the research, analysis and methodological assumptions in greater depth. Where the main report draws selectively on this material to build its argument, the annex is intended to provide a transparent account of the evidence from which those conclusions have been developed.

The research combines quantitative economic analysis with primary survey evidence, qualitative engagement, case studies and cultural asset mapping. No single dataset captures the full extent of Cumbria's cultural ecology, so the study uses a number of complementary measures rather than attempting to produce one aggregate figure for the value of culture.

It brings together five bodies of evidence:

- Quantitative evidence and methodology — economic output and employment; visitor-economy modelling; creative industries and creative employment; comparative analysis; investment; participation and social-value evidence; definitions and source notes.
- Baseline survey data — the full results of the Cultural Organisations Survey (42 responses), the Independent Creatives and Micro-Businesses Survey (35 responses), and the Business Community Survey.
- Engagement findings — the complete synthesis of three roundtable sessions held in August 2026, supplemented by targeted stakeholder conversations.
- Impact case studies — examples illustrating how cultural organisations, programmes and networks contribute to economic growth, skills, health and wellbeing, place, visitor economy and stronger communities.
- A register of the cultural ecology — a working map of cultural organisations, venues, festivals, networks and other assets identified across the county.

## How this study defines culture

For the purposes of this study, culture is used as an umbrella term for Cumbria's wider cultural ecology: the organisations, practitioners, venues, festivals, heritage activity, cultural learning and community-led creative activity that produce, present, preserve or enable cultural experiences.

This encompasses formal institutions and businesses alongside freelancers, artists and makers, voluntary and community organisations, networks and informal activity. It includes arts and cultural organisations, museums and heritage, festivals and events, performing and visual arts, literature, film, craft and making, cultural education and participatory and community-led activity.

No single statistical classification corresponds exactly to this wider cultural ecology. Different operational definitions are therefore used for different parts of the analysis.

## The cultural sector and cultural ecology

Where the report refers broadly to the cultural sector or cultural ecology, it uses the practice-based definition above. This is the definition that principally informs the surveys, engagement, case studies and cultural asset register.

The cultural register should therefore be understood as an ecosystem map rather than a business census. It intentionally includes organisations, programmes, venues, festivals, networks and forms of activity that would not necessarily sit within a single Standard Industrial Classification.

## Arts, entertainment and recreation

For the headline measures of direct economic output, the study uses the ONS Arts, entertainment and recreation industry classification, corresponding to SIC divisions 90–93.

This provides a consistent, independently produced statistical measure that can be compared between places and over time. It is, however, broader than the cultural ecology itself, because it incorporates recreational activity

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alongside arts and cultural activity. It is therefore used as a statistical proxy for the wider sector rather than as a precise measure of the value generated by cultural organisations alone.

Direct GVA uses ONS Regional Gross Value Added (balanced) by industry, at current prices. The latest figures used in this study relate to 2024 and are provisional. For county-level comparative analysis, Cumbria is calculated by combining Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness.

Employment within arts, entertainment and recreation is measured separately using the ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES). GVA and employment figures should therefore be read as related measures drawn from different ONS datasets, rather than as a single modelled estimate.

### **Creative industries**

The creative industries are a related but wider economic grouping and are defined using the DCMS Creative Industries classification, applied to ONS UK Business Counts and BRES data.

This captures industries whose economic activity is strongly associated with creativity, skills and intellectual property, including areas such as advertising and marketing; architecture; design; film, television, video, radio and photography; IT, software and computer services; publishing; museums, galleries and libraries; and music, performing and visual arts.

The cultural sector and creative industries therefore overlap but are not interchangeable. The creative-industries analysis is used principally to understand the wider economic ecosystem in which cultural organisations operate and the potential for cultural activity, skills and infrastructure to support future growth.

### **Creative employment and the creative economy**

Creative skills are not confined to cultural or creative-industry businesses. The study therefore also considers the creative economy: people working in creative occupations wherever they are employed.

Creative occupations are identified using the DCMS creative-occupations classification, based on Standard Occupational Classification codes, together with the creative-intensity methodology developed by Nesta. National occupational rates are applied to Cumbria's employment by industry to produce an indicative estimate of creative employment across the economy.

These figures are therefore modelled estimates rather than direct headcounts. Their purpose is to demonstrate the extent to which creative capability is embedded across sectors including architecture and engineering, technology, retail and public administration, as well as within cultural and creative businesses. This follows the approach already set out in the study's quantitative methodology.

### **Culture-associated visitor activity**

The visitor-economy analysis uses a different lens again. It estimates the proportion of visitor activity associated with or motivated by arts, culture and heritage, drawing on Cumbria Tourism's visitor data.

Visitor expenditure associated with that activity is allocated to the sectors in which spending occurs and modelled through Genecon's Cumbria input-output model. This estimates the direct, indirect and induced GVA and employment supported as spending circulates through sectors such as accommodation and food, retail, transport and local supply chains.

These businesses are not being defined as part of the cultural sector. Rather, the analysis measures culture's role in generating economic activity elsewhere in Cumbria's economy.

Visitor-economy effects overlap partly with the direct arts, entertainment and recreation figures and must not be added to direct sector GVA to produce a single total. The annex's existing quantitative methodology explains this modelling approach in more detail.

### **How to read the evidence**

The study deliberately brings together evidence of different kinds and scales. These measures describe complementary dimensions of cultural value and should not be treated as directly additive.

Economic output and employment. Direct GVA and employment refer to arts, entertainment and recreation using ONS datasets. Creative-industries figures use the DCMS industry classification. Creative-employment estimates measure creative occupations across the whole economy and are modelled rather than direct headcounts.

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Investment. Grant and investment figures draw on Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund and 360Giving/GrantNav data. The report also uses an Arts Council England Local Insights benchmark indicating approximately £2.79 of external investment associated with every £1 of local-authority arts and culture expenditure. This is an investment-leverage measure, not an economic output multiplier, and should not be interpreted as implying that the £113m of identified external investment was generated through that calculation.

Visitor economy. Culture-associated visitor spend and resulting GVA and employment are modelled economic effects. The £500m+ visitor-spend estimate and £375.9m associated GVA measure different things and should not be added to direct sector output.

Social and wellbeing value. Estimates of health, wellbeing and heritage value use established national valuation methodologies applied to relevant Cumbria population and participation evidence. These are social-value measures rather than market economic output and should not be added to GVA.

Comparators. Comparative analysis uses common definitions and datasets wherever possible. The 2024 comparison of arts, entertainment and recreation uses the same ONS Regional GVA dataset for Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Cornwall, allowing both absolute GVA and the sector's share of each area's total economy to be compared consistently.

### **A note on the primary research**

Survey figures are drawn directly from responses received during the study. Free-text and multi-select questions have been coded and counted where a clear category emerged. Percentages are based on the number of respondents answering each specific question, which varies slightly because of non-response.

Financial, workforce and engagement totals are aggregated from self-reported figures and should be treated as indicative of the scale represented by respondents rather than as a census of the whole cultural sector.

The Cultural Organisations Survey received 42 responses, while the Independent Creatives and Micro-Businesses Survey received 35 responses. The Business Community Survey had a substantially smaller response base — up to 14 respondents, with around nine answering most questions — and is therefore used as a qualitative snapshot of perspectives from outside the cultural sector rather than statistically representative business evidence. The annex currently makes that limitation clear in its treatment of the Mentimeter findings.

Qualitative findings from roundtables and stakeholder conversations are used to interpret and add depth to the quantitative evidence rather than as representative measures of opinion across Cumbria.

## 2. Baseline data: Cultural Organisations Survey

The Cultural Organisations Survey received 42 responses from across the county. The tables below set out the full results, grouped under five headings: who responded; scale and finances; access and audiences; infrastructure and place; and partnerships, outcomes and collaboration.

### Who responded

| Metric            | Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Total responses   | 42 cultural organisations                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Geographic base   | Westmorland & Furness: 26; Cumberland: 12; County-wide: 2; National/International: 2                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Organisation type | Museum/heritage: 12; Festival/event: 7; Performing arts venue/company: 5; Arts centre: 3; Multi-arts organisation: 3; remainder a single-response mix (gallery, film, church venue, education/training, rural touring, network, studio, citizen-led) |
| Legal structure   | Charity: 21 (50%); Private company: 8; CIC: 6; remainder: 7 (including voluntary organisation, church charity, sole trader, ACE-funded programme, not-for-profit company, local authority)                                                           |
| Years operating   | Over 20 years: 28 (67%); 10–20 years: 7; 5–10 years: 3; 2–5 years: 2; under 2 years: 2                                                                                                                                                               |

### Scale and finances

| Metric                           | Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Combined paid staff              | ~417 FTE across 38 responding organisations                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Combined freelancers             | ~1,731 freelancers engaged annually across 39 organisations                                                                                                                                                 |
| Combined volunteers              | ~1,860 volunteers annually across all 42 organisations                                                                                                                                                      |
| Combined annual turnover         | ~£30.2m across 34 organisations (median £226,000; range £300–£16m)                                                                                                                                          |
| Income model                     | Primarily publicly funded (>75% subsidy): 11; Mixed, mostly public (50–75%): 7; Mixed, mostly earned (50–75%): 6; Balanced ~50/50: 5; Primarily earned (>75%): 4; Entirely earned: 2; other niche models: 7 |
| Top cost pressures (up to 3)     | Staff salaries: 31 (74%); Utilities/energy: 19 (45%); Freelance artist fees: 13 (31%); Materials/production: 12 (29%); Marketing/audience development: 12 (29%); Rent/premises: 10 (24%)                    |
| Workforce/recruitment challenges | Yes: 23 (55%); No: 18 (43%)                                                                                                                                                                                 |

## Access and audiences

| Metric                          | Finding                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Combined annual engagements     | ~1,046,800 engagements across 39 responding organisations                                                                                                                                      |
| Top audiences reached (up to 3) | Local residents: 35 (83%); Young people: 20 (48%); Visitors/tourists: 20 (48%); Schools: 16 (38%); Underrepresented communities: 15 (36%); Older people: 12 (29%); Rural communities: 11 (26%) |
| Outreach beyond primary base    | Yes: 32 (76%); No: 9                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Top barriers to participation   | Awareness: 31 (74%); Transport: 20 (48%); Cost: 12 (29%); Accessibility: 10 (24%); Limited local provision: 6 (14%); Digital connectivity: 4 (10%)                                             |
| Hard-to-reach areas/communities | Yes: 22; No: 18                                                                                                                                                                                |

## Infrastructure and place

| Metric                                             | Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Experience infrastructure limitations              | Yes: 36 (86%); No: 5                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Most significant infrastructure issues             | Storage limitations: 20; Limited public transport: 18; Evening transport: 16; Limited local facilities: 11; Lack of affordable workspace: 6; Lack of rehearsal/performance space: 5; Digital connectivity: 5 |
| Underused cultural/civic assets identified locally | Yes: 25 (60%); No: 14                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## Partnerships, outcomes and collaboration

| Metric                         | Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Most common partner sectors    | Community/civic organisations: 34 (81%); Schools/education: 32 (76%); Local authorities: 28 (67%); Universities/colleges: 25 (60%); Tourism: 19 (45%); Businesses: 17 (40%); Health/NHS: 13 (31%)                                                                          |
| Top local development outcomes | Place identity: 37 (88%); Wellbeing/health: 34 (81%); Community cohesion: 32 (76%); Youth engagement: 30 (71%); Visitor economy: 29 (69%); Skills development: 28 (67%); Rural inclusion: 23 (55%); Environmental sustainability: 16 (38%); High-street vitality: 14 (33%) |

| Metric                                                          | Finding              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| See opportunity for greater collaboration/shared infrastructure | Yes: 37 (88%); No: 4 |
| Willing to take part in follow-up interviews/case studies       | Yes: 39 (93%); No: 3 |

### 3. Baseline data: Independent Creatives and Micro-Businesses Survey

The Independent Creatives and Micro-Businesses Survey received 35 responses from individual practitioners and micro-organisations working across the county. It provides an essential counterpart to the organisational survey, capturing the experience of the freelance and self-employed workforce that underpins much of Cumbria's cultural delivery.

#### Who responded

| Metric            | Finding                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Total responses   | 35 independent creatives and micro-businesses                                                                                                                                                      |
| Practice type     | Freelancer: 13 (37%); Artist/maker: 7 (20%); Small creative business: 6 (17%); Sole trader: 2; other individual roles (producer, author, literary co-ordinator, self-employed, voluntary group): 7 |
| Discipline spread | A wide mix, with clusters in music, poetry/spoken word, visual arts and multi-artform practice; heritage, dance, literature, film and community arts also represented                              |
| Geographic base   | Spread across the county, with clusters in West Cumbria, South Lakes/South Cumbria and Barrow-in-Furness; several work UK-wide or internationally alongside a Cumbria base                         |

#### Income and financial position

| Metric                                      | Finding                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Proportion of income from creative practice | Less than 25%: 13 (37%); 100%: 9 (26%); 50–75%: 7 (20%); 25–50%: 2; more than 75%: 2; prefer not to say: 2                                 |
| Reported annual turnover                    | From effectively £0 (voluntary or retired practice) up to c.£107,000; most reported figures cluster under £25,000                          |
| Top challenges (open text, most cited)      | Access to commissions; affordability; isolation; connectivity; workspace - with funding, health/capacity and sector visibility also raised |

#### Geography, infrastructure and collaboration

| Metric                                                     | Finding                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Transport/geography affects ability to work across Cumbria | Yes: 24 (69%); No: 11                                                                                                     |
| Most-needed workspace/infrastructure                       | Meeting/networking space: 7; Studios: 4; Fabrication/making space: 3; Rehearsal space: 3; Storage: 3; Shared workspace: 2 |

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| Metric                                                   | Finding              |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| See opportunity for greater collaboration/networking     | Yes: 31 (89%); No: 4 |
| Willing to take part in follow-up interviews/roundtables | Yes: 32 (91%); No: 3 |

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## 4. Cross-cutting insights from the surveys

The insights below are drawn from comparing patterns across both the organisational and creative practitioner surveys. Where organisations and individual creatives independently point to the same pressures or opportunities, this is highlighted. They have been updated to reflect the complete datasets.

### 1. Longevity is not resilience

Two-thirds of organisations (67%) have operated for more than 20 years, yet 86% report active infrastructure limitations and 55% face workforce or recruitment strain. Cumbria's cultural institutions are established but structurally under pressure.

### 2. Subsidy dependency is common, not exceptional

The large majority of organisations sit in mixed or majority-subsidised income models, with only a handful earning more than 75% of their income themselves. This leaves the sector disproportionately exposed to public funding decisions.

### 3. The cost squeeze is universal, but shape-shifts by scale

For organisations the top pressures are staff salaries (74%) and utilities (45%); for individual creatives it is affordability and access to paid commissions. It is the same underlying economic pressure surfacing at different points in the ecosystem.

### 4. Transport and geography is the connective-tissue barrier

48% of organisations cite transport as a barrier to audience participation, and 69% of creatives say transport or geography limits where they can work. This is a shared, county-wide constraint.

### 5. Physical space is a shared pain point with a shared solution

Storage limitations top organisations' infrastructure issues (20 mentions), while creatives most want meeting/networking space and studios. This points toward shared-hub models serving both cohorts, rather than separate, parallel solutions.

### 6. The workforce leans heavily on unpaid or insecure labour

Organisations rely on ~1,860 volunteers and ~1,731 freelancers against roughly 417 FTE paid staff, and 37% of surveyed creatives self-identify as freelancers. The sector's delivery capacity is substantially underpinned by unpaid or precarious work.

### 7. Individual practitioners split into two distinct, vulnerable groups

More than a third of creatives (37%) earn under a quarter of their income from their practice - likely a side-practice needing other income - while a quarter (26%) rely on it entirely, fully exposed to sector volatility. Advocacy needs to speak to two distinct financial realities.

### 8. There is a strong, largely untapped mandate for collaboration

88% of organisations and 89% of creatives independently say there is room for more collaboration or shared infrastructure - yet freelancer isolation and organisational silo-working suggest this appetite is not currently being converted into practice.

### 9. Awareness and visibility is as much a barrier as physical access

Organisations rank awareness as the top audience-participation barrier (74%), while creatives cite access to commissions and being seen by industry as core challenges. Visibility runs through the whole pipeline, from audience-facing to career-facing.

### 10. The infrastructure gap may be about activation, not absence

60% of organisations identify underused cultural or civic assets nearby. Combined with the workspace needs creatives report, this suggests Cumbria's problem may be that existing spaces are not matched, funded or made accessible to those who need them.

**Illustrative voices from the survey free-text responses**

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*'Multi-year core funding to match the Arts Council's investment in us.'* - Organisation respondent, on what would most strengthen sustainability

*'In essence, one person (me) does all the work with some support from other members - what will happen when I go?'* - Organisation respondent, on the biggest current challenge

*'Funding for freelancers. Seems you have to be part of a company and, as someone who works in a range of fields, I do not have the support of a team - everything I do is by myself.'* - Creative practitioner respondent

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## 5. Baseline data: Business Community Survey (Mentimeter)

Alongside the two primary surveys of the cultural sector, the study ran a short Mentimeter poll of the wider business community, titled *Culture, Business and Cumbria's Future*. It was designed to capture the demand-side view - how businesses outside the cultural sector perceive the value of culture, heritage and creativity to Cumbria's economy, workforce and identity - as a counterpart to the supply-side evidence from cultural organisations and creative practitioners.

The poll was distributed to the wider business community through the Cumbria Combined Authority, the BEC (Britain's Energy Coast) business cluster, and by Steering Group members sharing it via LinkedIn. It attracted a small number of responses – 17 – and not all completed the full survey. The findings below should therefore be read as indicative and qualitative rather than statistically representative; they are valuable for the perspective they offer from outside the sector, and for the strength and consistency of the open-text responses, which are reproduced here in full.

### Who responded

Respondants were asked to identify the sector(s) that best describe their organisation:

| Sector                              | Responses |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Professional services               | 6         |
| Other                               | 6         |
| Education, health & public services | 5         |
| Tourism & hospitality               | 2         |
| Manufacturing & industry            | 1         |
| Property & development              | 1         |
| Retail & food                       | 0         |
| Land, environment & rural economy   | 0         |

### What makes Cumbria an attractive place to live, work or do business

Asked for up to three words or phrases, respondents returned an overwhelmingly landscape-led picture of Cumbria's appeal. Natural environment terms dominated, with quality-of-life, community and heritage themes present but secondary - a pattern that mirrors the main report's finding that Cumbria's external identity is defined first by its landscape, with culture and heritage as the layer that reveals the fuller story of the place.

Responses grouped by theme (verbatim words shown):

- Landscape & natural environment: landscape, beautiful, natural environment, space, green, scenery, "the scenery", coast, climate, outdoors, clean air, lakes, views
- Peace & quality of life: peace, real, stable
- People & community: people, family, community
- Connectivity: well connected

- 
- Economy & opportunity: tourist hotspot, opportunity, spare cash
  - Heritage: heritage

### How businesses value the cultural offer

Three scaled questions explored how far businesses connect culture to their own success, their workforce, and their current activity. Although the sample is small, the direction of travel is clear and encouraging: most respondents already see culture contributing to their success and already work with the sector - even though few place it at the very top of their priorities.

Contribution to organisational success – 84% respondents reported that Cumbria's cultural, heritage and creative offer contributes to their organisation's success to some degree, including three who said it contributes significantly. Only two said it made no contribution at all.

| To what extent does the cultural offer contribute to your success? | Responses |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Significantly                                                      | 3         |
| Moderately                                                         | 5         |
| Slightly                                                           | 3         |
| Not at all                                                         | 2         |
| Unsure                                                             | 0         |

Importance for attracting and retaining employees – 77% of respondents saw the quality of Cumbria's cultural offer as at least slightly important in attracting and retaining employees. Notably, responses clustered at the "slightly" and "moderately" levels, with none selecting "significantly important" - suggesting the workforce case for culture is recognised but not yet strongly felt, and is an area where advocacy could make a difference.

| How important is the cultural offer in attracting/retaining employees? | Responses |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Significantly important                                                | 0         |
| Moderately important                                                   | 5         |
| Slightly important                                                     | 5         |
| Not at all important                                                   | 1         |
| Unsure                                                                 | 2         |

## Current engagement with the cultural sector

69% of respondents already engage with Cumbria's cultural, heritage or creative sector – four regularly and five occasionally - with a further respondent not currently engaged but interested in doing so. This points to an existing, if under-recognised, base of business–culture collaboration to build on.

| Does your organisation currently work with the cultural sector? | Responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Yes, regularly                                                  | 4         |
| Yes, occasionally                                               | 5         |
| Not currently, but we'd be interested                           | 1         |
| No                                                              | 3         |
| Unsure                                                          | 0         |

## Where culture can make the biggest contribution to Cumbria's future

Asked where culture and creativity can contribute most, respondents pointed above all to opportunities for young people and the visitor economy, alongside a strong seam of comment about identity, storytelling and making more of Cumbria's distinctive heritage. Several responses connected culture to social connection and to the growing value of physical, human and craft experiences in an age of AI. All responses:

- *Unlocking opportunities for young people to earn wages in the sector that support them to life a comparable life to those in other sectors*
- *Attraction of tourists. Opportunity for young people*
- *Highlight out unique features, provide a reason to be for people who don't already live or visit here, create intrigue and controversy, tell different stories.*
- *Reconnecting people to the cultural identity of the place shaped from the heritage of our traditional industries and formative stories*
- *With the advancing technology of AI, people are realizing more that physicality and connection really matters. Engaging with makers and purchasing craft items is key. So is connection with each other.*
- *Share little known perspectives, facts*
- *Create buzz*
- *In its identity. Places like York use its culture and heritage much more effectively and we suffer from a mixed and lack of focused identity. EG we could make so much more of its Roman history,*
- *In making Cumbria a vibrant and diverse place to live and work in.*
- *Broaden our offer*
- *Attracting tourism*
- *Using old buildings proactively and imaginatively. Attract guests from around the world.*
- *Create buzz*
- *Create intrigue*

- *Creative development for young people*
- *Providing social connection*
- *Giving Cumbrian businesses the edge by being more creative and impactful*
- *Don't import urban culture but promote the creativity and cultures we have. Making, innovation, experiences, collections, material, traditions, ecology. Create more unique creative experiences.*
- *Being innovative and different in Cumbria's context is at its core. Working in adversity and isolation with a long tradition of inspiration by landscape, people and place. Shine a light on what we do.*
- *Collective effort rather than piecemeal campaigns. Great places and venues. Independent makers and thinkers.*
- *Opportunity for young people - retaining talent in Cumbria, encouraging people to move to Cumbria for work, film industry location with film studio.*
- *We need creativity involved in businesses - using artists to make impact and engage with people*

### Greatest opportunities for businesses and the cultural sector to work together

On where the two sectors could collaborate, respondents highlighted the social value agenda, the way culture draws in the visitors that sustain other businesses, and the potential to package accommodation, food and cultural experiences together to encourage longer stays and attract talent to the county. All responses:

- *through the social value agenda*
- *cultural sector draws in the visitors that support the businesses*
- *not sure*
- *supporting tourism by having plenty of places to stay and eat an offer, surrounding by lots of wonderful things to do. Perhaps packages of accommodation, food and entertainment to encourage people to stay*
- *collaboration to sell the idea of living and working in Cumbria to attract outside talent*
- *community engagement*
- *knowledge, business and advertising sharing*
- *need a directory*
- *The highstreets - stop viewing culture as something separate from the economy and start treating it as economic infrastructure.*
- *employee wellbeing - linking culture to health and wellbeing outcomes*
- *The creative and cultural sector should be positioned as part of local supply chains, rather than existing alongside them. All businesses need design, marketing, storytelling, digital content etc*
- *Place making and identity of places so they work together to create unique destinations and experiences for visitors and residents. What is needed to make places thrive work residents as well.*

### What would help businesses and cultural organisations work together more effectively

Asked what would enable more effective collaboration, respondents returned a candid and practical list. Alongside the recurring themes of funding and time, two points stand out: a clearer, shared understanding of the explicit value of the cultural capital that businesses can help sustain; and parity of quality and values between partners, so that collaborations are well matched rather than mismatched.

- *"more understanding of the explicit value of the cultural capital businesses can help sustain and develop"*
- *"Funding"*
- *"Time and opportunities"*

- *"Organised structure"*
- *"Equal offerings in terms of quality, and values. Not mismatched, e.g. 5 star hotel, and willow weaving in a mouldy tent for a day!"*
- *"Money. Always money."*
- *directory - more crossover*
- *Develop a shared narrative. Businesses need culture. Connect the dots and conversations around economic growth, community wealth building, workforce wellbeing, place development - collaborate.*
- *focus on shared outcomes - talent retention, attracting talent and investment*
- *stop seeing each other as separate sectors and start seeing themselves as partners in creating prosperous, attractive and resilient places.*
- *arts and culture needs bringing into the fold of the strategic partners group and the business advisory group for the CCA*
- *Match making and open conversation rather than solving a challenge or problem. Artist residencies with businesses or opportunities for tours, talks, mentoring, identifying opportunities e.g. materials*

### Culture's role in a thriving Cumbria in ten years' time

Finally, respondents were asked to imagine Cumbria in ten years, with a thriving economy and high quality of life, and to describe the role culture should be playing. Their answers ranged from culture as the connective heart of belonging and place, through a specific call for a revived night-time and live-entertainment economy - including theatres in Carlisle and Barrow - to culture in schools and informal settings, and culture as the enriching complement to the landscape that first draws people in.

- *"at the heart of bringing people together to strengthen a sense of belonging and connection between people and place"*
- *"A major role bringing industry and future development to Cumbria"*
- *"We need to get theatres in Carlisle and Barrow up and running, with a thriving live music and entertainment scene in all areas of Cumbria. I overheard a family saying that everything closed at 5pm"*
- *"Culture in schools and for young people in informal settings."*
- *"Second to the landscape. I want people to come to Cumbria for the outdoors first, but then be drawn to the craft and culture inspired by that landscape. They should leave enriched!"*
- *"Available to everyone"*
- *I would hope that culture and creativity are no longer viewed as a separate sector, but as a core part of how we generate prosperity, wellbeing and opportunity.*
- *Making county more attractive to live in and higher participation in creative activities*
- *I would hope every Cumbrian town and community has its own distinct cultural identity that helps attract residents, visitors, workers and investors.*
- *A thriving Cumbria would recognise creativity as part of its economic infrastructure, alongside advanced manufacturing, clean energy, food, tourism and defence.*
- *In a thriving Cumbria, culture would not only be viewed as entertainment but as part of the infrastructure that supports healthy communities.*
- *Culture should help ensure that wealth generated in Cumbria benefits local people and communities.*

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- A successful future Cumbria would ensure that every young person, regardless of background or geography, has access to creative opportunities.
  - Culture as a source of Civic Pride - A confident place knows who it is and where it is going. Culture provides the means through which communities express that identity and build pride in place.
  - Integrated into everyday life with equal access and opportunity. Not a luxury or nice to have. Confidence in creativity and its value as part of society, environment and good growth. Diverse.

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## 6. Engagement findings: roundtable synthesis

Three roundtable sessions were held on 10, 14 and 17 August 2026, with separate breakout discussions involving cultural organisations, individual creative practitioners and other stakeholders from across Cumbria. This section reproduces the full synthesis of the strongest themes emerging from those discussions, identifying emerging story points, areas where the qualitative evidence explains or adds depth to the survey findings, issues for the Steering Group, and potential connections between the sector's contribution and the priorities of the new Cumbria Combined Authority.

### 1. Emerging overarching narrative: culture as connective infrastructure

One of the clearest messages across the discussions was that Cumbria's cultural ecology has been fundamentally shaped by the county's geography. Participants repeatedly described a dispersed county made up of individual towns, villages, valleys and communities, in which distance, limited transport and rural isolation can make connection difficult. Against this backdrop, cultural activity performs an important convening role: bringing people together through festivals, village halls, museums, community venues, touring programmes, workshops and informal creative activity.

This extends from long-established communal traditions and local festivals through to contemporary touring networks and mobile cultural provision. Participants described culture's ability to bring people together in places where opportunities to gather may otherwise be limited, and noted that the value of a cultural experience can be particularly significant precisely because audiences are small and geographically isolated.

### 2. A distinctive culture of self-organisation and local agency

A second strong theme was the extent to which Cumbria's cultural ecology appears to be characterised by small organisations, individual practitioners, community-led activity and artist-led initiatives. Participants repeatedly described a "DIY" culture: individuals creating organisations, festivals, projects and opportunities because, without local initiative, the activity might simply not happen. This was seen as producing considerable creativity, experimentation and responsiveness to individual communities.

The ecology was described as encompassing major established organisations alongside a large number of micro-organisations, freelancers and community initiatives. Participants argued that this breadth is central to Cumbria's cultural richness rather than ancillary to it. There is therefore a potentially strong narrative around: necessity → local agency → innovation → community ownership → resilience.

However, participants were equally clear about the downside. The same ecology is highly precarious, with individuals and organisations often sustaining activity through significant personal commitment, unpaid work and repeated fundraising.

### 3. Culture connects hyper-local communities with a global visitor destination

The discussions highlighted a striking duality within Cumbria. At one scale, Cumbria is an internationally recognised destination attracting very significant visitor numbers. At another, cultural organisations are working with very small resident audiences across remote communities. One participant described this as a "macro" international tourism picture alongside "micro" rural audiences.

Cultural organisations therefore often serve several very different functions simultaneously: visitor attractions; local community anchors; employers; educational providers; places for social participation; and producers and presenters of cultural work. Participants also stressed that resident and visitor audiences can have different expectations and appetites, meaning organisations frequently balance the needs of both.

There was interest in how culture could play a stronger role in encouraging visitors to experience areas beyond established Lake District destinations, strengthening the cultural identity of individual places and increasing the local value generated from tourism.

### 4. Culture can tell a fuller story of Cumbria than landscape alone

The landscape was consistently recognised as one of Cumbria's greatest assets and a major influence on its cultural identity and creative practice. At the same time, participants cautioned against allowing Cumbria's external identity to become synonymous solely with the Lake District, natural beauty and heritage.

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The discussions pointed towards a much more diverse cultural geography encompassing West Cumbria and the coast; Barrow and Carlisle; industrial and working-class heritage; contemporary arts practice; distinctive local traditions; landscape and environmental issues; and individual towns and valleys with their own creative identities. Some participants argued that major national and global issues - including energy, environmental change, food, biodiversity and mental health - are experienced particularly vividly within Cumbria and can be explored through cultural practice.

### **5. Culture is already helping overcome the consequences of rural isolation**

A repeated characteristic of Cumbria's cultural model is an impetus to take activity to audiences, rather than assuming audiences can travel to major venues. Participants described rural touring; village halls and community venues; organisations touring their own productions around the county; mobile cultural provision; locally selected performances; and creative programmes delivered directly within communities.

The geography also appears to encourage collaboration between organisations, because audiences are dispersed and organisations can sometimes share productions and programmes without competing for the same audience in the way that neighbouring urban venues might. Village halls in particular emerged as an important existing network of distributed infrastructure, often supported by committed local promoters and volunteers.

### **6. Cultural venues and community spaces should be understood as social infrastructure**

The roundtables repeatedly highlighted the vulnerability and importance of cultural spaces. For smaller towns in particular, participants stressed that once a venue is lost it may be extremely difficult to replace. Unlike a larger city, the closure of one auditorium, arts centre or community venue may mean the permanent loss of that form of provision from a town.

Participants also identified Cumbria's wider network of village halls, museums, churches, community centres, cultural venues, and studios and making spaces as an important - although fragmented - physical asset. There was interest in how these existing spaces could be better connected and used flexibly, including potentially accommodating cultural activity, practitioner development, storage, rehearsal or community use within shared spaces.

### **7. A creative talent pipeline exists, but the pathway is fragmented**

Skills, education and progression emerged as one of the strongest areas for future action. Participants described substantial creative talent and interest among young people, but raised concerns about breaks in the pathway between early cultural participation, school, FE/HE, professional development, paid work and sustainable creative careers.

Specific concerns included reduced opportunities for schools to work with professional artists; limited school budgets; changes to arts provision within higher education; weak progression routes following education; difficulty accessing residencies, exhibitions, commissions and entry-level paid opportunities; and practitioners leaving Cumbria for cities with more developed creative ecosystems. Participants discussed the potential role of the University of Cumbria, although there was not consensus that the University should necessarily lead this agenda. There was stronger agreement that the University, FE providers, cultural organisations and neighbouring universities should form part of a more coherent ecosystem.

### **8. The freelance and micro-business economy needs stronger infrastructure**

The sessions involving individual practitioners highlighted a particularly important tension. Freelancers described limited paid opportunities; significant unpaid time spent developing funding applications; difficulty accessing organisations and commissioners; lack of affordable rehearsal, exhibition and making space; administrative barriers to funding; concern about the accessibility and transparency of some commissioning opportunities; and difficulty balancing creative practice with the requirement to act as fundraisers, administrators and project managers.

At the same time, organisational representatives acknowledged that many organisations would like to employ and commission freelancers more frequently but lack the capacity and unrestricted funding to do so. This suggests that the challenge should not necessarily be framed as organisations versus practitioners. Instead, both are operating within a system with very limited capacity.

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The resilience of freelancers was frequently discussed, but several participants challenged the expectation that practitioners should simply continue to be resilient. One participant asked, in effect, who is looking after the people whose work is sustaining the sector? The report should therefore avoid romanticising precarity.

### **9. There may be a case for rebuilding cultural–education brokerage**

A particularly concrete suggestion emerged around the relationship between schools and creative practitioners. Participants recalled previous models - particularly Creative Futures Cumbria - which provided brokerage between schools and artists, supported administration and funding, and helped create sustained relationships rather than isolated workshops.

Practitioners described the loss of this infrastructure as significant. Current arrangements can require individual artists to raise external funding themselves before being able to offer activity to schools. Participants argued that a renewed brokerage model could potentially benefit schools, pupils, individual practitioners, cultural organisations and the longer-term creative skills pipeline.

### **10. Culture contributes to health, wellbeing and public-service outcomes in ways that may be under-recognised**

Participants described cultural activity creating spaces in which difficult social issues could be approached differently. Examples included work addressing mental health and suicide, alongside wider discussions of culture's contribution to isolation, confidence, belonging and participation. One example described a touring theatre which focussed its activity on mental health, its performances creating conversations with audiences that subsequently encouraged individuals to reflect on and change aspects of their own lives.

More broadly, the discussions suggested that cultural organisations often possess trusted local relationships; accessible community spaces; participatory approaches; and networks reaching groups that formal institutions can find difficult to engage.

### **11. The sector needs investment in its “connective tissue”**

A cross-cutting issue running through the discussions was fragmentation. Cumbria has significant cultural assets, but they are spread across a very large geography and include organisations of very different sizes alongside individual practitioners and informal activity. The strongest opportunity may therefore not always be creating more cultural provision. It may be connecting what already exists more effectively.

This could include networks and convening; cultural brokerage; shared intelligence and data; joint advocacy; collaborative programming; links with education and business; shared marketing; practitioner directories and opportunity platforms; and strategic relationships with public agencies. The roundtables suggest that this coordination function currently relies heavily on individuals and organisations whose core capacity is already stretched.

### **12. The Combined Authority represents a potential strategic opportunity**

Participants themselves identified the arrival of the Combined Authority as a potential opportunity to address the lack of countywide strategic coordination. One discussion explicitly identified the need for clearer leadership and a whole-county vision, and suggested the Combined Authority could provide the scale at which issues such as culture, transport, environment and economic development are brought together.

Rather than primarily making the case that the Combined Authority should support culture, the evidence supports a stronger proposition: Cumbria already has a distributed cultural delivery network with venues, programmes, trusted community relationships and sector partnerships that contribute to outcomes across people, place and economy. The opportunity is to recognise cultural organisations as strategic delivery partners and connect that existing capacity more deliberately to wider ambitions for economic development, skills, health and wellbeing, regeneration, transport, visitor economy and thriving communities.

This positions culture as a strategic delivery partner across the Combined Authority's priority areas. It also aligns with the direction of the two unitary authorities: Westmorland & Furness explicitly connects economy and culture within its Council Plan, while Cumberland's Economic and Inclusive Growth Strategy identifies the visitor and leisure economy and culture as an area of opportunity alongside skills, investment and infrastructure.

| Combined Authority area               | Potential cultural contribution                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economic development and regeneration | Employment, freelancers and micro-businesses; visitor economy; town-centre activity; creative enterprise; attractiveness of place.                                           |
| Skills and employment                 | Cultural education; creative skills; volunteering; career pathways; graduate and talent retention.                                                                           |
| Transport and infrastructure          | Evidence of rural accessibility barriers; cultural activity supporting community hubs; opportunity to connect transport planning with participation and the evening economy. |
| Strategic planning and place          | Cultural and community infrastructure; meanwhile and adaptive reuse; place identity; heritage and place activation.                                                          |
| Health and wellbeing                  | Social connection; mental wellbeing; confidence; prevention; community participation.                                                                                        |
| Environment and climate               | Cultural interpretation of landscape, biodiversity, energy and environmental change; engaging communities in complex issues.                                                 |
| Visitor economy / wider growth        | Destination identity; cultural tourism; dispersing visitors; year-round activity; deeper engagement with Cumbria beyond landscape alone.                                     |

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## 7. Impact case studies

The case studies below illustrate how Cumbria's cultural organisations, festivals and networks are already delivering against the priorities of the new Combined Authority. They are grouped by their leading theme - health, wellbeing and healthy ageing; skills and creative careers; inclusive economic growth and the visitor economy; place, identity and regeneration; and rural inclusion and stronger communities - though almost all deliver across several priorities at once. Each is presented in full.

### Health, wellbeing and healthy ageing

#### Every Brilliant Thing and community touring - Theatre by the Lake, Keswick

**Combined Authority priorities:** Health & wellbeing (lead); rural inclusion; place identity

**What is it?** Theatre by the Lake is Cumbria's mid-scale producing theatre, based in Keswick and reaching audiences across a large rural county. Its award-winning community touring model takes professionally produced work out to village halls and community venues, delivered in partnership with rural touring networks and local wellbeing charities including Every Life Matters and Andy's Man Club.

**What does it do?** Productions such as Every Brilliant Thing - a play about mental health and suicide - are toured into small and remote communities, creating an accessible, non-clinical space in which audiences can talk openly about difficult subjects close to home.

**What difference has it made?** In 2025 the theatre won the UK Theatre Award for Excellence in Touring, and Every Brilliant Thing was shortlisted for a national industry award for community impact. Audience members told the company the work led them to make changes in their own lives and to think differently about their mental health - a meaningful outcome in Cumberland, where suicide rates are significantly higher than the national average.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It shows an anchor cultural institution acting as a frontline partner in prevention and wellbeing, reaching isolated communities that statutory services can find hard to engage.

#### Creative Health and Hope Haven - Everyone Here (Creative People and Places, Allerdale & Copeland)

**Combined Authority priorities:** Health & wellbeing (lead); stronger communities; rural inclusion; skills

**What is it?** Everyone Here is the citizen-led Creative People and Places programme for Allerdale and Copeland, working with some of West Cumbria's most under-served communities.

**What does it do?** It delivers the creative offer within Hope Haven, a Whitehaven-based Neighbourhood Mental Health pilot of national significance, and runs the "Jury for Joy" - a citizens' jury with a £100,000 annual budget that puts local people in charge of cultural spending. After the jury identified transport as the biggest barrier for rural residents, the team hired a heritage exhibition bus to take art directly into ten towns.

**What difference has it made?** The programme has built bespoke pathways into culture for care-experienced and long-isolated residents, with several progressing into training and paid employment. Its mental-health work is now discussed at national conferences as a model for integrating creativity into neighbourhood health, with Theatre by the Lake and Florence Arts among the partners drawn in.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It demonstrates how community-led culture can help deliver a neighbourhood mental-health response in a part of the county facing acute need, while building local leadership and civic agency.

#### Community brass - Drum and Brass, Kirkby Stephen (Eden)

**Combined Authority priorities:** Health & wellbeing / healthy ageing (lead); skills; rural inclusion

**What is it?** Drum and Brass is a small Eden-based music CIC that delivers whole-class brass provision for the Cumbria Music Education Hub and supports community brass-making across a sparsely populated rural area.

**What does it do?** Alongside its schools work, it has nurtured an adult community band at the refurbished Kirkby Stephen bandroom and delivered a "Local Heroes" programme, training participants in community music, mental-health awareness, safeguarding and inclusive practice.

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**What difference has it made?** Fifteen retired or unable-to-work adults - several living with disabilities or neurodivergence, and over half learning an instrument from scratch - have formed a vibrant band and performed in their first brass contest. Participants report improved heart function, better mood, greater resilience and stronger community connection; six people gained qualifications through Local Heroes.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** In a county with a super-ageing population, it shows how a much-loved heritage artform can support healthy ageing, skills and social connection in remote communities where poor transport and the absence of core funding remain the binding constraints.

### Creative connection and wellbeing - BlueJam Arts CIC, Penrith

**Combined Authority priorities:** Health & wellbeing (lead); stronger communities; social inclusion; skills

**What is it?** BlueJam Arts CIC is a Penrith-based community music and arts organisation, founded in 2002, which provides inclusive creative workshops, training and professional and community performance activity for people of different ages and backgrounds.

**What does it do?** Through music, film, performance and digital art, BlueJam works in the community, in schools and from its central Penrith Art Space. Its intergenerational programme is designed to boost wellbeing, improve mental health and build a more connected community, including art-and-wellbeing activity with Penrith and Eden Refugee Network.

**What difference has it made?** Participants describe BlueJam as a rare safe and welcoming space where people can create, connect and rebuild confidence. One participant said that losing the group would leave them isolated and negatively affect their health, illustrating the practical wellbeing value of sustained, accessible cultural provision.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It demonstrates how a small, locally rooted cultural organisation can operate as part of Cumbria's wellbeing and social infrastructure, combining creative participation with social inclusion, confidence-building and community connection in a rural market-town setting.

## Skills, creative careers and young people

### See It To Be It - Cumbria Arts & Culture Network

**Combined Authority priorities:** Skills & creative careers (lead); youth engagement; stronger communities

**What is it?** See It To Be It is an Arts Council Place Partnership project led by Cumbria Arts & Culture Network (CACN), the county's sector-wide network, bringing together cultural, skills and education organisations to help young Cumbrians into creative careers.

**What does it do?** It connects schools, colleges, employers and freelancers to create traineeships, showcases, exhibitions and progression routes, and works with children from primary age upwards to build early awareness of creative careers.

**What difference has it made?** Assembled in 18 months with a queue of organisations wanting to take part, the project has already supported young people into creative traineeships, showcases and full-time employment, and is coordinating the sector so it is more possible for young creatives to stay, live and work in Cumbria. Its needs analysis identified poor public transport, limited progression and rural isolation as the core barriers it is designed to overcome.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It tackles the county's most pressing skills challenge - retaining creative talent - through coordinated collaboration that no single organisation could deliver alone.

### Comics in the classroom - Lakes International Comic Art Festival & BarrowFull

**Combined Authority priorities:** Skills & education (lead); youth engagement; literacy; place identity

**What is it?** Lakes International Comic Art Festival (LICAF), based in Barrow, is a festival and development agency for comic art and a delivery partner in BarrowFull, the town's Creative People and Places programme.

**What does it do?** It embeds comic art in classrooms and community settings, co-produces participatory projects and undertakes research into the impact of comics on learning.

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**What difference has it made?** LICAF holds longitudinal research running since 2021 that evidences the impact of comics in the classroom on both children and teachers, alongside documented benefits for autistic young people and people in prison. Its ambition to make Barrow the UK's first "comic book town" places a distinctive artform at the heart of the town's identity and skills offer.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It shows a nationally distinctive artform improving literacy, enjoyment of reading and engagement among young people in a town where cultural opportunity has historically been limited.

## Inclusive economic growth and the visitor economy

### Potfest - Penrith and the Eden Valley

**Combined Authority priorities:** Inclusive economic growth & visitor economy (lead); skills; place identity

**What is it?** Potfest is an internationally recognised series of ceramics festivals, run for over 30 years from a base in the Eden Valley near Penrith.

**What does it do?** It stages a tiered programme of selling events that allows makers to develop their practice - moving from hobbyist through to professional artist - while drawing visitors from across the UK and beyond.

**What difference has it made?** Over three decades Potfest has brought more than 1,500 ceramics artists into the county and now attracts over 12,000 visitors a year into the Eden Valley, establishing Cumbria as a recognised national and international centre for ceramic art. Around 80% of visitors travel from beyond an eight-mile radius (some from overseas), generating significant local spend, and several of the UK's leading ceramic artists began their careers at its Penrith events.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It converts cultural distinctiveness into visitor spend and creative-business growth, and evidences a maker-development pathway that keeps talent progressing within the county.

### Kendal Calling - Westmorland & Furness

**Combined Authority priorities:** Inclusive economic growth & visitor economy (lead); place identity; wellbeing

**What is it?** Kendal Calling is one of the UK's leading independent music festivals, staged on a rural greenfield site in Westmorland & Furness and sold out every year since 2006.

**What does it do?** It brings tens of thousands of visitors into the county each year, provides a career-building platform for emerging and established artists, and runs an extensive community and charity programme.

**What difference has it made?** Independent auditors estimated the festival's regional economic impact at £23.4 million in 2023. It has donated more than £300,000 to Cumbrian and North West charities and community groups, developed talent pathways with Kendal College, and in 2025 collected and redistributed 5,838 food items to local food banks. Repeated national awards reinforce Cumbria's profile as a creative, welcoming destination.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It evidences the scale of visitor-economy and place-branding value that festivals generate, and underlines the case for a stronger strategic relationship between major events and the new Combined Authority.

## Place, identity and regeneration

### Tale Telt - Keswick Museum

**Combined Authority priorities:** Place identity (lead); stronger communities; rural inclusion; heritage

**What is it?** Tale Telt was Keswick Museum's Cumbria-wide project to seek out, record and celebrate the county's living storytelling heritage, especially the everyday storytellers, family narratives, folklore, myths and local legends that can otherwise go unrecorded.

**What does it do?** From May 2024, Story Researcher Hannah Fox travelled across Cumbria to meet storytellers and record tales in their own voices. The material was shared through a major museum exhibition, a printed newspaper, participatory workshops, audio recordings and transcripts, original stop-motion animations, and live activity at community events and festivals across the county.

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**What difference has it made?** Tale Telt created a lasting record of stories told by Cumbrian people in their own words and voices, while taking the museum's work beyond Keswick to fairs, shows, festivals and community settings. By presenting traditional and adapted tales in audio, written, animated and live forms, the project made the county's storytelling heritage accessible to different audiences and showed it as a living practice rather than a fixed historical record.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It broadens the story of Cumbria beyond its internationally recognised landscape and literary figures, revealing how local voices, humour, folklore and shared memory contribute to contemporary place identity. It also demonstrates how a museum can work countywide, connecting dispersed communities and preserving distinctive cultural knowledge for future audiences.

#### Piel View House - Full of Noises, Barrow-in-Furness

**Combined Authority priorities:** Place & regeneration (lead); environmental leadership; visitor economy

**What is it?** Full of Noises is a Barrow-based music and art organisation specialising in new music and sound art, run by artists who restored Piel View House - a much-loved heritage building in Barrow Park previously earmarked for demolition.

**What does it do?** Since reopening in 2022 it has run concerts, workshops, film screenings, talks and community events, and developed garden and growing spaces with young people from Vision Support Barrow.

**What difference has it made?** The renovated, low-carbon building - fitted with a heat pump, triple glazing and extensive insulation - has welcomed over 10,000 residents and visitors and was featured in the Guardian as a remote venue attracting world-class artists. Regular audiences report positive impacts on their wellbeing and social life, and the organisation has built a national and international profile for Barrow.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It shows culture rescuing and repurposing a heritage asset, delivering low-carbon regeneration and placing an overlooked post-industrial town on the international cultural map.

#### Culture Bazaar - Multicultural Cumbria, Carlisle

**Combined Authority priorities:** Stronger communities & cohesion (lead); place identity; wellbeing

**What is it?** Multicultural Cumbria is a Carlisle-based charity whose Culture Bazaar showcases the art and heritage of the county's growing diaspora communities, curated by the people who have made Cumbria their home.

**What does it do?** It creates safe public spaces for diaspora communities to celebrate and share their culture, and supports people seeking asylum and refugees to integrate - working with schools, libraries and partners including Rosehill Theatre and Tullie House.

**What difference has it made?** Over 1,000 people attend Culture Bazaar each year. Alongside the event, the charity's work with refugees and people seeking asylum helps individuals rebuild their lives, while fostering tolerance, understanding and cohesion across Cumbrian communities.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** As the county becomes more diverse, it demonstrates how culture led by new communities strengthens cohesion, belonging and a fuller, more contemporary sense of Cumbrian identity.

### Rural inclusion and stronger communities

#### Rural touring - Highlights & Arts Out West

**Combined Authority priorities:** Rural inclusion (lead); stronger communities; youth engagement

**What is it?** Highlights Rural Touring and Arts Out West (delivered by Kirkgate Arts & Heritage) are rural touring schemes that bring high-quality professional performance into village halls and community spaces across Cumbria and the wider North.

**What does it do?** Highlights subsidises and curates a twice-yearly menu of shows that local volunteer promoters select and stage in their own communities, supported with marketing and production advice, working across more than 65 village halls.

**What difference has it made?** Highlights works with around 2,000 children and young people each year through schools workshops and events, reaching communities that face economic decline, poor transport and social

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isolation. Locally chosen, professionally produced work convenes people in remote places where the social value of a shared cultural experience is all the greater. It is an initiative driven by committed volunteer promoters at the heart of their communities.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It is the clearest expression of Cumbria's distinctive model - taking culture to communities rather than expecting communities to travel to culture - directly addressing rural isolation and access.

### The Kirkgate Centre - Cockermouth

**Combined Authority priorities:** Stronger communities (lead); place & high-street vitality; rural inclusion

**What is it?** Kirkgate Arts & Heritage is a community-led arts and heritage charity in Cockermouth, operating a 120-seat auditorium with just 2.5 full-time-equivalent staff and around 100 volunteers, and programming into some 20 rural venues across Cumberland.

**What does it do?** It has diversified into a genuine community hub which hosts open-mic and poetry nights, crafting sessions, a three-times-weekly cinema, weddings, wakes and private hires, while sustaining an ambitious arts programme, including the nationwide Freedom Then and Now project.

**What difference has it made?** Reaching over 12,000 people a year, the Kirkgate anchors cultural life in a small town where, once lost, a venue of its kind would never be rebuilt. Its Freedom Then and Now work saw an artist create a community musical inspired by the centre's heritage collection, performed at Cockermouth's Christmas light switch-on to warm public acclaim.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It shows how a fragile, volunteer-powered venue functions as vital social infrastructure, demonstrating the difference between a small town having cultural life or none at all.

### BarrowFull - Barrow-in-Furness

**Combined Authority priorities:** Stronger communities & inclusion (lead); place identity; wellbeing

**What is it?** BarrowFull is the Creative People and Places programme for Barrow-in-Furness - a strictly place-based, consortium-governed organisation designed to increase arts engagement among people who least engage with culture.

**What does it do?** Working across the town in partnership with local charities, schools, the NHS, the University of Cumbria and national arts organisations, it co-creates ambitious cultural experiences shaped and led by local people.

**What difference has it made?** Between 2020 and 2026, BarrowFull generated more than 216,000 creative engagements - 67% from groups who usually least engage with arts and culture, and a further 31% from those with mid-level engagement. Participants describe it as life-changing, from routes back through volunteering after illness and trauma, to a renewed sense of pride in the town.

**Why does it matter for Cumbria?** It evidences culture's power to reach the most under-served communities, build civic pride and change how a working-class, post-industrial town sees itself and its potential.

#### *In the participants' own words*

*Genuinely, BarrowFull has and hopefully will continue to change my life... It's opened my eyes to a world I never thought I'd be involved in, and I view the town differently now - not only a huge sense of pride, but looking at every wall, road and space and wondering what they could be used for. - BarrowFull participant*

*I love how the poems get right past the stigma and speak to the heart. This is exactly what we need - I'm so surprised by the change in them. - Partner venue manager, on Zwiebelfish's Bellwethers project*

## 8. Register of the cultural ecology

The following register maps the cultural organisations, festivals, networks and strategic partners identified during the study. It is offered as a working map of Cumbria's cultural ecology rather than a definitive or exhaustive list, and provides a foundation for the cultural infrastructure mapping recommended elsewhere in the study. Entries are grouped into cultural organisations and venues and festivals and events.

### Cultural organisations, venues and networks

The register records 78 cultural organisations, venues and networks, with their primary sub-category and home settlement where identified.

| Organisation                          | Sub-category / type                                                                   | Location                |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Theatre by the Lake                   | Theatre                                                                               | Keswick                 |
| Brewery Arts                          | Arts Centre                                                                           | Kendal                  |
| Lakeland Arts                         | Museums & Heritage                                                                    | Kendal                  |
| Tullie                                | Museums & Heritage                                                                    | Carlisle                |
| Cumbria Arts & Culture Network (CACN) | Sector Network                                                                        | County-wide             |
| Wordsworth Grasmere                   | Literary Heritage                                                                     | Grasmere                |
| Cumbria Museum Consortium             | Museums consortium - Tullie House Museum Trust, Lakeland Arts and Wordsworth Grasmere | County-wide             |
| Art Gene                              | Visual Arts                                                                           | Barrow-in-Furness       |
| Signal Film & Media                   | Film & Digital Media                                                                  | Barrow-in-Furness       |
| Grizedale Arts                        | Visual Arts                                                                           | Lowick Green            |
| Kirkgate Arts & Heritage              | Theatre                                                                               | Cockermouth             |
| Highlights Rural Touring              | Combined Arts                                                                         | Brough                  |
| Full of Noises                        | Sound Arts                                                                            | Barrow-in-Furness       |
| Prism                                 | Combined Arts                                                                         | Carlisle                |
| Rosehill Theatre                      | Combined Arts                                                                         | Whitehaven              |
| Theatre Factory                       | Theatre                                                                               | Barrow-in-Furness       |
| Everyone Here (West Cumbria CPP)      | Creative People & Places / Community arts programme                                   | Whitehaven/West Cumbria |
| BarrowFull (Barrow CPP)               | Creative People & Places / Community arts programme                                   | Barrow-in-Furness       |
| Eden Valley Artistic Network          | Rural Arts Network                                                                    | Penrith                 |
| Littoral Arts Trust                   | Contemporary Heritage                                                                 | Elterwater              |
| The Dock Museum                       | Heritage                                                                              | Barrow-in-Furness       |
| Keswick Museum                        | Heritage                                                                              | Keswick                 |
| Hawkshead Grammar School Museum       | Heritage                                                                              | Hawkshead               |

| Organisation                              | Sub-category / type                                         | Location          |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Penrith and Eden Museum                   | Heritage                                                    | Penrith           |
| Armitt Library and Museum                 | Heritage                                                    | Ambleside         |
| Lake District Music                       | Music                                                       | Kendal            |
| Drum and Brass                            | Community music                                             | Tebay             |
| Artwork Arts4All CIC                      | Community visual arts / health & wellbeing                  | Barrow-in-Furness |
| Everywhere Everything Everyone CIC        | Community arts / Creative People & Places lead organisation | Whitehaven        |
| Multicultural Cumbria                     | Cultural diversity / community development                  | Carlisle          |
| Land & Sky Media                          | Film / documentary production                               | Kendal            |
| Kendal Parish Church                      | Heritage / music / cultural venue                           | Kendal            |
| Millom and District Local History Society | Local history / heritage                                    | Millom            |
| Carnegie Theatre & Arts Centre            | Theatre                                                     | Workington        |
| BlueJam Arts CIC                          | Community music & arts                                      | Penrith           |
| SoundWave                                 | Community music                                             | Whitehaven        |
| Sunbeams Music Trust                      | Music / health & wellbeing charity                          | Penrith           |
| The Knotted Project                       | Theatre / young people / participatory arts                 | Kendal            |
| The Laal Collective                       | Community arts / participatory theatre                      | Wigton            |
| WordForWord Arts CIC                      | Theatre / Community arts                                    | Carlisle          |
| Dance Ahead CIC                           | Dance / participatory arts                                  | Carlisle          |
| Stomping Ground CIC                       | Community arts / events                                     | Holme             |
| Zwiebelfish CIC                           | Community arts / creative projects                          | Grange-over-Sands |
| Cumbria Opera Group                       | Opera / classical music / performing arts                   | Kendal            |
| Farfield Mill                             | Arts, craft & textile heritage charity                      | Sedbergh          |
| Millom Heritage & Arts Centre             | Museum / Heritage                                           | Millom            |
| Ruskin Museum                             | Community museum / heritage                                 | Coniston          |
| Senhouse Roman Museum                     | Museum / Heritage                                           | Maryport          |
| Kendal Museum                             | Museum / collections / exhibitions                          | Kendal            |
| Eskdale Mill & Heritage Trust             | Industrial heritage / working museum                        | Boot              |
| Maryport Maritime Heritage Trust          | Heritage                                                    | Maryport          |
| Workington Transport Heritage Trust       | Heritage                                                    | Workington        |

| Organisation                                            | Sub-category / type                         | Location        |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| The Coro                                                | Theatre / music / arts venue                | Ulverston       |
| Laurel & Hardy Museum                                   | Film / comedy heritage museum               | Ulverston       |
| Furness Tradition                                       | Folk / traditional culture                  | Ulverston       |
| Helena Thompson Museum                                  | Museum / Heritage                           | Workington      |
| Florence Arts Centre                                    | Arts centre                                 | Egremont        |
| Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway Preservation Society Trust | Heritage                                    | Ravenglass      |
| Moore Arts: Millom                                      | Performing arts                             | Millom          |
| Muncaster Castle Gardens & Estate                       | Heritage                                    | Ravenglass      |
| Old Fire Station                                        | Music Venue                                 | Carlisle        |
| West Walls Theatre / Carlisle Green Room Club           | Community theatre                           | Carlisle        |
| Brougham Hall                                           | Arts/craft studios / heritage               | Penrith         |
| Penrith Players (Penrith Playhouse)                     | Theatre                                     | Penrith         |
| Alston Moor Historical Society                          | Local history / archive                     | Alston          |
| Playful Nature CIC                                      | Participatory arts / nature / wellbeing     | Ulverston       |
| Brantwood                                               | Arts / heritage / Ruskin                    | Coniston        |
| Space2Create                                            | Community arts / wellbeing charity          | Kendal          |
| Threlkeld Quarry & Mining Museum                        | industrial heritage museum                  | Threlkeld       |
| Keswick Alhambra Cinema                                 | Independent cinema / film heritage          | Keswick         |
| Dalemain Historic Mansion & Gardens                     | Historic house / heritage / cultural events | Penrith         |
| Hutton-in-the-Forest                                    | Historic house / heritage / cultural events | Penrith         |
| Mirehouse                                               | Literary / historic house                   | Keswick         |
| Holker Hall & Gardens                                   | Historic house / cultural heritage          | Cark-in-Cartmel |
| Levens Hall                                             | Historic house / heritage                   | Kendal          |
| Lakeland Motor Museum                                   | Independent museum                          | Backbarrow      |
| Rheged Gallery / Rheged                                 | Gallery / exhibitions / creative programme  | Penrith         |
| The Old Courthouse Gallery                              | Gallery / local artists & makers            | Ambleside       |

### Festivals and events

The register records 24 festivals and events, several of which reach communities that lie beyond the county's permanent cultural venues.

| Festival / event                                    | Type                                  | Location              |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| The Lakes International Comic Arts Festival (LICAF) | Festival                              | Kendal                |
| Keswick Film Festival                               | Film Festival                         | Keswick               |
| Kendal Mountain Festival                            | Outdoor / Film Festival               | Kendal                |
| Words by the Water                                  | Literature Festival                   | Keswick               |
| Kendal Calling                                      | Music festival                        | Penrith               |
| Potfest                                             | Ceramics and pottery festival         | Penrith               |
| Ulverston Lantern Festival                          | Participatory/community festival      | Ulverston             |
| Another Fine Fest                                   | Arts / music / community festival     | Ulverston             |
| South Cumbria Musical Festival Association          | Community music / performance charity | Ulverston             |
| Lake District Book Festival                         | literature festival                   | Cartmel               |
| Krankenhaus Festival                                | Music / comedy festival               | Ravenglass            |
| Cockermouth Live!                                   | Annual music and arts festival        | Cockermouth           |
| Cumberlandia                                        | Annual folk festival                  | Workington            |
| Taste Cumbria                                       | Food Festival                         | Cockermouth           |
| Dean Scarecrow Festival                             | Community / Music Festival            | Dean                  |
| Barrow Festival of Colours                          | Arts Festival                         | Barrow-in-Furness     |
| Keswick Mountain Festival                           | Outdoor / Film / Music Festival       | Keswick               |
| Winter Droving                                      | Arts / Community Festival             | Penrith               |
| Dalemain Marmalade Festival                         | Food / Arts Festival                  | Penrith               |
| Forgotten Lands Festival                            | Folk Music Festival                   | Bewcastle             |
| EskFest                                             | Music Festival                        | Eskdale               |
| Windermere Science Festival                         | Science / Arts Festival               | Bowness-on-Windermere |
| Borderlines Carlisle Book Festival                  | Literature Festival                   | Carlisle              |
| Egremont Crab Fair                                  | Heritage / Community Festival         | Egremont              |

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## 9. Quantitative evidence and methodology

This section brings together the quantitative evidence that underpins the main report, including the latest ONS economic series, comparator analysis, visitor-economy modelling, creative-industries and creative-employment estimates, social-value measures and the external research used to interpret the findings. The measures are complementary, describe different dimensions of value and should not be added together unless explicitly stated.

### How this report defines culture

For the purposes of this study, culture is used as an umbrella term for Cumbria's wider cultural ecology: the organisations, practitioners, venues, festivals, heritage activity, cultural learning and community-led creative activity that produce, present, preserve or enable cultural experiences. No single statistical classification captures that whole ecology, so different operational definitions are used according to the evidence being analysed.

- **Cultural sector / cultural ecology:** The broad practice-based definition used through the surveys, engagement and cultural mapping. It encompasses arts and cultural organisations, museums and heritage, festivals and events, performing and visual arts, literature, film, craft and making, cultural education, participatory and community-led activity, together with the practitioners, venues and networks that enable that activity.
- **Arts, entertainment and recreation (AER):** The statistical proxy used for headline direct GVA and comparator analysis. It is defined here as SIC divisions 90-93. It is broader than culture alone because it also includes recreational activity, but provides a consistent ONS measure across places.
- **Creative industries:** The wider economic grouping defined using the DCMS creative-industries classification and applied to ONS Business Counts and BRES. It overlaps with the cultural ecology but also includes sectors such as IT and software, architecture, advertising, publishing and screen industries.
- **Creative employment / creative economy:** People working in creative occupations wherever they are employed, including outside the creative industries. The estimate uses the DCMS creative-occupations classification and the Nesta creative-intensity approach and is therefore broader than employment within cultural or creative-industry businesses.
- **Culture-associated visitor activity:** Visitor activity associated with or motivated by arts, culture and heritage. The modelling estimates spending and the GVA and employment it supports across the wider economy; it does not classify hospitality, retail or transport businesses themselves as cultural.

### How to read the evidence

The analysis combines observed statistics, modelled estimates and self-reported primary research. The following rules should be applied before interpreting or comparing the figures:

- ONS GVA is reported at current prices; the 2024 estimates used here are provisional.
- BRES measures employee jobs rather than the whole workforce and does not fully capture self-employment.
- Modelled estimates, including visitor-economy impacts and creative employment, should be distinguished from observed counts.
- Survey financial, workforce and engagement figures are self-reported and indicative rather than a census of the sector.
- Culture-associated visitor GVA overlaps partly with direct AER GVA and must not be added to it.
- Health, wellbeing, heritage and volunteering values are social-value measures and are not additive to GVA.

### 9.1 Direct jobs, economic value and business structure

Economic output is taken from ONS Regional Gross Value Added (balanced) by industry at current prices. The 2024 estimates are provisional. For county-level comparison, Cumbria is constructed as Cumberland plus Westmorland & Furness. Direct employment uses ONS BRES and business structure uses ONS UK Business Counts.

Arts, entertainment and recreation is SIC 90-93 and is used as a consistent statistical proxy, not as a claim that every activity within those divisions forms part of the narrower cultural ecology.

The latest evidence identifies £153m of AER GVA in 2024 and approximately 5,250 jobs. ONS UK Business Counts identifies around 650 AER businesses, including around 160 businesses in music, performing and visual arts, museums, libraries and galleries. The structure is distinctive: 24% are non-profit, a further 6% are public-sector organisations, and 82% are micro-businesses.

Source: ONS Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry; ONS Business Register and Employment Survey; and ONS UK Business Counts. Cumbria comprises Cumberland (£8.515bn total GVA; £72m AER GVA) plus Westmorland & Furness (£7.656bn; £81m AER GVA). Figures are rounded; 2024 GVA estimates are provisional.

## 9.2 Comparative scale and growth potential

To understand the relative scale of Cumbria's arts, entertainment and recreation economy, the study benchmarks the county against a wider set of comparator areas used in the CIPFA Nearest Neighbours analysis presented during the research. These include North Yorkshire, Northumberland, Cornwall and Lancashire.

Two measures are used. The first compares Gross Value Added (GVA) generated by arts, entertainment and recreation with total economic output, showing the sector's relative contribution to each local economy. The second compares employee jobs in arts, entertainment and recreation with total employee jobs, showing the relative scale of the sector's employment base.

The measures use the ONS Arts, entertainment and recreation classification (SIC 90-93) to provide a consistent basis for comparison. As described elsewhere in the methodology, this is broader than the cultural ecology alone and is therefore used as a statistical proxy rather than a precise measure of cultural activity.

### Economic output

The latest ONS Regional Gross Value Added (balanced) dataset provides provisional 2024 current-price GVA estimates. Cumbria is calculated by combining Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness.

| Area            | Total GVA, 2024 | Arts, entertainment & recreation GVA | AER share of total GVA |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Cumbria         | £16.171bn       | £153m                                | 0.95%                  |
| Lancashire      | £36.563bn       | £412m                                | 1.13%                  |
| North Yorkshire | £19.947bn       | £264m                                | 1.32%                  |
| Cornwall        | £15.262bn       | £237m                                | 1.55%                  |

The comparison indicates that differences in sector scale are not simply the result of the overall size of the local economy. Cornwall's total economy is slightly smaller than Cumbria's, yet arts, entertainment and recreation generates £237m of GVA compared with £153m in Cumbria and accounts for 1.55% of its economic output compared with 0.95% in Cumbria.

North Yorkshire and Lancashire likewise derive a greater proportion of their total GVA from arts, entertainment and recreation. The proportional comparison strengthens the headroom argument. If Cumbria's AER sector represented the same share of county GVA as North Yorkshire, it would generate around £214m, approximately £61m above the current level. At Cornwall's share it would generate around £251m, approximately £98m above the current level. These are illustrative scale comparisons, not forecasts of achievable growth.

### Employment base

ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) data provides a second comparison, measuring arts, entertainment and recreation employee jobs as a share of all employee jobs. GVA and employment are related measures drawn from different ONS datasets and should not be assumed to refer to an identical reference year.

| Area            | AER employee jobs | AER share of all employee jobs |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| North Yorkshire | c.9,000           | 3.2%                           |
| Cornwall        | c.6,000           | 2.6%                           |
| Cumbria         | c.5,250*          | 2.1%                           |
| Lancashire      | c.10,000          | 1.9%                           |

\*Detailed BRES analysis for Cumbria identifies approximately 5,250 jobs; published Nomis profiles round the corresponding figure to c.5,000.

Cumbria therefore sits below North Yorkshire and Cornwall in the relative size of its arts, entertainment and recreation employment base, although slightly above Lancashire. The GVA comparison is more pronounced: among the areas for which the 2024 comparison has been completed, Cumbria currently records the smallest arts, entertainment and recreation share of total economic output.

Taken together, the two measures suggest that the growth opportunity is not only about increasing the number of jobs in the sector. There is scope to increase the scale and economic value generated by Cumbria's cultural and recreational economy, supported by investment in organisational capacity, creative skills and career pathways, enterprise development, cultural infrastructure and stronger connections to the visitor economy.

### Interpreting the comparison

These figures should be read as benchmarks rather than targets or forecasts. The comparator areas have different industrial structures, population profiles and cultural and visitor economies, and matching another area's sector share would not in itself represent an appropriate economic objective.

Their value is in demonstrating proportionality. Cumbria has a substantial cultural offer, but the latest consistent ONS data shows that arts, entertainment and recreation currently forms a smaller part of its economic output than in the comparator areas examined.

BRES measures employee jobs rather than the entire workforce and does not fully capture self-employment. This is particularly relevant to arts, culture and the creative industries, where freelance and self-employed work is significant. The employment comparison should therefore be read alongside the survey and creative-employment evidence elsewhere in this annex rather than as a complete measure of cultural labour.

### External investment and investment leverage

Cultural organisations and projects have attracted an estimated £113m of external investment into Cumbria since 2022 through Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund and national grant-making trusts and foundations recorded through 360Giving / GrantNav. This demonstrates culture's role as a route through which national and charitable investment reaches Cumbrian places and projects.

A separate Arts Council England Local Insights benchmark indicates that every £1 of local-authority arts and culture spend is associated with around £2.79 of external investment attracted. This is an investment-leverage benchmark, not an input-output economic multiplier, and is methodologically separate from the £113m external-investment total.

## 9.3 Culture as a catalyst for the visitor economy

The model starts from Cumbria Tourism's Tourism Volume and Value / Cumbria Visitor Survey (2025), applies an evidence-based estimate of the share of visits motivated by arts, culture and heritage, and derives culture-associated spend for day, overnight and international visitors. That spend is allocated to the sectors in which it is made and run through Genecon's Cumbria input-output model to estimate direct, indirect and induced GVA and employment effects.

Cumbria welcomed 40.7 million visitors in 2025. Genecon estimates more than £500m of annual visitor spending associated with culture, roughly £1 in every £9 spent in Cumbria's visitor economy.

| Visitor type           | Estimated culture-associated spend |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Day trips              | £112m                              |
| Overnight visitors     | £331m                              |
| International visitors | £63m                               |
| Total                  | £500m+                             |

When this spend is allocated to the sectors in which it occurs and run through Genecon's Cumbria input-output model, it is associated with approximately £375.9m of GVA and 9,325 jobs, including direct, indirect and induced effects. The largest effects fall outside cultural businesses themselves: wholesale and retail (£124m, 33%); accommodation and food service (£105m, 28%); and transport and storage (£32m, 9%).

Modelled GVA and jobs are apportioned across the six historic local-authority areas using each area's employment structure in the affected sectors. The area figures therefore indicate relative incidence rather than observed local counts. Location quotients are also used to assess where relevant supply-chain sectors are comparatively concentrated.

| Historic area  | GVA      | % of GVA | Jobs  | % of jobs |
|----------------|----------|----------|-------|-----------|
| South Lakeland | £99.15m  | 26.4%    | 2,667 | 28.6%     |
| Carlisle       | £96.75m  | 25.7%    | 2,255 | 24.2%     |
| Eden           | £56.75m  | 15.1%    | 1,492 | 16.0%     |
| Allerdale      | £55.13m  | 14.7%    | 1,372 | 14.7%     |
| Barrow         | £37.80m  | 10.1%    | 828   | 8.9%      |
| Copeland       | £30.29m  | 8.1%     | 710   | 7.6%      |
| Cumbria total  | £375.87m | 100.0%   | 9,325 | 100.0%    |

The visitor-driven impacts capture some of the same activity as the direct AER GVA figures and must not be added to the £153m direct sector GVA to produce a single cultural-economy total.

## 9.4 Creative industries and creative employment across the wider economy

The cultural sector sits within and supports a wider creative economy. Applying the DCMS creative-industries classification to ONS UK Business Counts and BRES identifies around 920 creative-industries businesses in Cumbria employing approximately 3,500 people. Creative-industries businesses account for around 3.5% of all businesses in the county.

| Creative-industries sub-sector         | Share of Cumbria creative-industries businesses |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| IT, software and computer services     | 34.78%                                          |
| Music, performing and visual arts      | 14.13%                                          |
| Film, TV, video, radio and photography | 11.41%                                          |
| Architecture                           | 10.87%                                          |
| Advertising and marketing              | 9.78%                                           |
| Publishing                             | 5.43%                                           |
| Museums, galleries and libraries       | 3.26%                                           |
| Cultural education                     | 1.09%                                           |

This distribution highlights existing strength in music, performing and visual arts and comparatively smaller representation in film, TV, video, radio and photography. The sector should be read as related to, but wider than, the cultural ecology mapped elsewhere in this annex.

Creative occupations are identified using the DCMS creative-occupations classification based on SOC 2020 codes and the creative-intensity approach developed by Nesta. National occupational rates are applied to Cumbria's employment by industry to estimate creative employment across the whole economy. This is a modelled estimate of creative capability across industries, not a direct headcount of workers employed by creative businesses.

Applying this approach gives an indicative estimate of around 11,600 creative jobs across the wider economy, approximately 4.5% of total employment. The largest concentrations include retail (942), architecture and engineering (742), computer programming (663) and public administration (622). Around 1,000 creative jobs sit in cultural and recreational sectors most closely tied to the visitor and creative economy, with a further 587 in accommodation, food and beverage service and travel agencies.

### Creative skills as growth infrastructure

The local creative-employment evidence is reinforced by national and international research showing that creative capability is relevant well beyond the cultural sector. The UK Creative Industries Sector Plan identifies the creative industries as a priority growth sector. Skills England projects that employment in 30 priority creative occupations will grow by around 416,000 jobs, 27%, between 2025 and 2035, while noting that long-range employment projections are inherently uncertain.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 found that employers expect 39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030; creative thinking ranks fourth among current core skills and is also among the skills expected to rise in importance. Creative PEC and Nesta analysis of 35 million UK job adverts similarly found that demand for creativity is particularly associated with occupations expected to grow and extends well beyond jobs conventionally defined as creative.

Business research also points to a commercial growth association. Forrester Consulting research commissioned by Adobe found that companies fostering creativity were 3.5 times more likely to report annual revenue growth of 10% or more than less-creative firms, 58% compared with 20%. This is correlational business research and should not be interpreted as proof that creativity alone causes revenue growth.

Taken together, this supports the report's "double opportunity" argument: strengthening cultural engagement and education can build creativity, communication, collaboration and adaptability from an early age, while stronger paid progression routes can convert that capability into local employment in both creative industries and the wider economy.

## 9.5 Participation, health, wellbeing and social value

DCMS Participation Survey data indicate that 91% of Cumbria residents engage in arts and culture at least annually and 76% attend at least one cultural event or venue. Applying Green Book-aligned Culture and Heritage Capital values to estimated regular participation, Genecon estimates an annual health and wellbeing value of approximately £243m for Cumbria residents. This is a social-value measure and is not additive to GVA.

Historic England modelling indicates an additional estimated £129m of annual life-satisfaction value associated with day-to-day experiences of heritage assets in Cumbria. Again, this is a complementary wellbeing measure rather than economic output. The organisational survey also records around 1,860 volunteers; the study estimates approximately £1.2m of annual wellbeing value associated with cultural volunteering.

The wider evidence base is strong: the World Health Organization's 2019 scoping review synthesised more than 3,000 studies on the role of the arts in preventing ill health, promoting wellbeing and supporting treatment and management across the life course. The Creative Health Review (2023) similarly argues for creative health to be embedded more systematically in public policy and delivery.

## 9.6 Strategic relevance to Cumbria's growth agenda

The evidence in this annex is intended to support a cross-portfolio proposition rather than a standalone case for cultural funding. Westmorland & Furness Council's current plan places economy and culture together and describes culture as central to place shaping, the creative economy, the visitor offer and health and wellbeing. Cumberland's Economic and Inclusive Growth Strategy 2026-2036 identifies the visitor and leisure economy and culture as an area of economic opportunity alongside skills development, investment and infrastructure. These directions reinforce the case for cultural organisations to be treated as strategic delivery partners across people, place and economy outcomes.

| Growth / delivery challenge     | Relevant cultural contribution                                                        | Evidence in this study                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economic growth and investment  | Direct output and jobs; attracting external investment; creative enterprise           | £153m AER GVA; c.5,250 jobs; c.£113m external investment since 2022                                                       |
| Skills and workforce            | Creative capability; careers brokerage; paid pathways; talent retention               | c.11,600 creative jobs across the economy; fragmented post-18 pathway; See It To Be It                                    |
| Visitor economy                 | Reasons to stay longer, travel more widely and visit off-peak; destination identity   | £500m+ culture-associated visitor spend; c.£375.9m GVA; 9,325 jobs                                                        |
| Thriving places and communities | Cultural venues and programmes as social infrastructure; town activation; rural reach | 78 organisations/venues/networks and 24 festivals mapped; 76% of surveyed organisations deliver beyond their primary base |

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| Growth / delivery challenge | Relevant cultural contribution                           | Evidence in this study                                                                           |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Health and wellbeing        | Prevention, connection, participation and healthy ageing | c.£243m annual wellbeing value from regular engagement; c.£129m heritage life-satisfaction value |

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## 10. Key external research and data references

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