2023-2025 Impact Report

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Welcome from our Co-Chairs

It is with great pride that we introduce this Impact Report which covers our 2023-2025 activities, supported by a National Lottery Project Grant from Arts Council England. It is a testament to the collective power of our light festival network and the dedication of all our members who have contributed their time, knowledge and expertise. This report explores the heart of our mission: to champion emerging artists, foster innovative co-commissions, and share knowledge across the light art sector. Within these pages, you'll discover the benefits

of our network including new and strengthened partnerships, ambitious artworks brought to life, and the nurturing of new and diverse talent through our emerging talent programmes - SHINE, SPARK, and ILLUMINE.

This report highlights the significant knowledge-sharing, professional development, and joint environmental sustainability efforts that define our collaborative spirit. The findings herein will guide our future, allowing us to refine our approach and maximise our impact. We firmly believe our network remains a vital force in the UK's creative landscape, dedicated to growing the light art sector and inspiring audiences through the transformative power of light. Our sincere gratitude goes to our funders, Arts Council England, whose invaluable support makes this impactful work possible.

Abbe Robinson, Senior Producer, Bradford 2025 City of Culture

Phil Hargreaves, Director, Freedom Festival Arts Trust

(Co-Chairs of Light Up The North)

About us

Light Up The North is a network of UK light festivals working in partnership to strengthen the light art sector through collaboration, co-commissioning, and artist development.

Formed to share expertise and resources, the network supports festivals to deliver ambitious work, champion artists, and engage audiences in new and innovative ways. This collaborative approach helps raise the profile of light art, extend its reach, and build a more sustainable and inclusive sector.

Our data

Data shown throughout this impact report represents combined results from eleven Light Up The North members and covers festivals that took place in 2023/24 and 2024/25 winter seasons.

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Our achievements 2023-2025

18 festivals took place

£194,600 invested in commissioning new artworks

2,580 creative opportunities

1.7M+ festival audience members reached, representing over

11% of the northern population

65 presenting days

Estimated **£17.5M** economic impact

386 artworks

318 UK artists and **68** international artists featured

7,218 volunteer hours contributed

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The strength of our partnerships

As a network we give value to our members by fostering collaboration, networking and growth. Established in 2014, we serve as a hub for sharing expertise, driving innovation and supporting excellence across the Northern light festival sector.

Members benefit from co-commissioning and co-presenting opportunities, either through SHINE, ILLUMINE or through member partnerships which significantly expands their capacity to deliver ambitious, high-quality artistic work that might be unachievable alone.

Our quarterly meetings and sub-groups (membership, environment, diversity & inclusion, co-commissioning, artist development) provide regular platforms for knowledge exchange, covering everything from funding strategies to operational best practices. By pooling resources and knowledge, we strengthen the infrastructure of the light art sector, supporting UK and international artists, production staff, funders and emerging talent to link one festival to another, encouraging continuity, growth, and artistic excellence.

“Really valuable to be part of a committed group with whom we can share ideas, good practice, concerns etc. Also useful to get other members feedback about their festival visits, new work etc. The group are incredibly knowledgeable and generous with their time and experience.” Network Members’ Survey Response.

18 Member festivals

36 Individual members

3 Talent programmes

1 Online directory

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Our audience engagement

Our light art festivals are shown in a diverse range of outdoor public spaces, from town centres, to parks and seaside promenades, they offer accessible cultural experiences for all and break down traditional barriers to arts engagement. The 2018 Outdoor Arts report reveals that light festival audiences overwhelmingly report an increased sense of belonging, social connection, and local pride with their town or city. The celebratory atmosphere is key, with entertainment and group attendance driving participation. By requiring no prior knowledge, no specific time commitment, being free to attend,

and taking place in open public areas, our festivals attract and engage diverse audiences.

1.7M+ Festival audiences reached

“Amazing, family-friendly, interesting, exciting, something for all. So well organised and run. Thank you!”

“It was a well-organised event. Engaging for adults and children. Interactive.”

“Great fun for all ages.”

“Very interesting, helpful people and friendly.”

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Supporting emerging artists

We champion artists through our talent platforms and programmes – SPARK, SHINE, and ILLUMINE. These initiatives nurture artists at every career stage, providing vital opportunities for development, collaboration, and visibility within the North of England's light festival network.

Our SPARK programme ignites the careers of early-stage artists venturing into the realms of light-based and digital art for light festivals. Championing inclusivity and diversity, the

programme offers a launchpad for artists to cultivate their skills and forge connections within the vibrant light art community.

Each year, across two weekends in November, up to ten selected artists receive a bursary and travel support to participate in enriching workshops, valuable networking sessions, and insightful talks, timed to coincide with festivals such as Light Up Wakefield, Light Up Lancaster, and Light Night Wigan.

Feedback from cohorts showcases the programme's impact, with overwhelmingly positive responses regarding networking opportunities with fellow artists and experienced professionals, inspiration drawn from festival artworks, and significant skill development in fabrication and festival engagement.

“My participation in the 2023 SPARK programme directly led to developing my light art installation, ‘Rever,’ which has since been on display at Light Night Wigan and Light Night Leeds. It was the key to opening the door to the industry for me.” Jack Cheesebrough, Lighting and Visual Designer, Outpoint Studio

Visit www.lightupthenorth.com/development/spark/ to learn more.

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Championing diversity in the sector

Launched in July 2024 through an open call, our ILLUMINE programme addresses the underrepresentation of Global Majority artists within the light art sector. This programme provides selected artists with a support structure, including a bursary and a production budget, enabling them to research, develop, and present original light-based artworks. ILLUMINE extends beyond financial backing, offering invaluable professional development opportunities such as an induction programme, visits to established light festivals, dedicated mentoring, and extensive networking.

Daksha Patel is our inaugural ILLUMINE artist. Her forthcoming project, ‘Molecular Clouds’, is set to premiere in late 2025 and will subsequently tour our network of member festivals (Light Night Leeds, Light Up Lancaster, Lightwaves Salford and Barnsley Bright Nights) throughout 2025 and into 2026. ‘Molecular Clouds’ is an innovative interactive video projection that delves into critical environmental issues, including climate change and air pollution. The work aims to engage audiences through playful visuals and active participation, fostering a deeper understanding of these urgent global concerns.

“ILLUMINE is a safe space for diverse artists to be seen and visible working in the light art sector and inspire other artists to think - yes I can do this too. The programme will ultimately lead to more interesting and diverse works.” Daksha Patel.

Visit www.lightupthenorth.com/development/illumine/ to learn more.

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SHINE emerging light artists 2023-2024

Our SHINE programme supports new UK-based artists by offering bursaries and professional development from our network. In collaboration with member festivals, in 2023-2024 we successfully commissioned Stevie Thompson's 'Crystal Flowers', a breathtaking installation of 600 handcrafted blooms from recycled plastic bottles, captivated audiences. It has since paved the way for Stevie to continue success with other light artworks like the internationally touring installation - Mycelium Network which has featured at Enlighten 2025, Australia along with other light festivals in Thailand, South Africa, Austria and Sweden.

Axolotl's 'Polyrhythms' offered a fusion of kinetic light and layered percussive sound. Its concentric polygonal forms, synchronised with unique rhythmic patterns, provided both immediate visual appeal and deeper engagement with musical structure. Following this debut, Axolotl has developed and widely toured Autopsy, a multisensory theatrical work, demonstrating significant artistic growth.

“We got together...scroll forward a few months and we were lucky enough to be commissioned by the amazing SHINE programme to create our first piece ‘Polyrhythms’.” Axolotl

Since its launch in 2015, SHINE has supported **31** artists to realise their **28** artworks

Visit www.lightupthenorth.com/development/shine/ to learn more.

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SHINE emerging light artists 2024-2025

In 2024-2025 Emma Gasson's ‘Reflect’ offers a serene and meditative experience. This sensory light installation, spanning a 10-metre stretch of water, utilises subtle lighting to cast fluid, shifting reflections onto adjacent surfaces. The piece beautifully responds to visitor interaction; as people move and disturb the water, the resulting ripples alter the reflected light, creating a gentle, drifting sensation.

“It’s so good to see the public interacting with Reflect, this is exactly what I needed! I want to do more and bigger things. I am super excited to keep going.” Emma Gasson

Matt Tully's ‘Big Yellow Blobs and the Box That Buzzes’ immerses audiences in a surreal and playful digital ecosystem. This immersive playground of light, sound, and interactive

storytelling features a projection-based animation powered by real-time facial recognition. This light art was visionary but unfortunately couldn't be fully realised within the timescale. Matt has been able to test new approaches and technical equipment which will inform the production of future artworks.

2023-2025 SHINE achievements

Commissioning partners: Light Up Leeds, Lightwaves Salford, Illuminate Oldham, Barnsley Bright Nights, Lightpool Blackpool, Light Up Lancaster, BD:Is LiT Bradford, Nightfall Middlesbrough

1,3M+ Estimated audience reached

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Co-commissioning light art

Co-commissioning light art within our network gives significant advantages. Collaboration allows for the sharing of best practices, support for UK and international artists, and ensures artworks reach wider, more diverse audiences through touring.

‘Somnius’, co-commissioned by Lightpool Festival Blackpool, Light Up Lancaster, Illuminate Oldham, Lightwaves Salford, Light Night Wigan and supported by core funds from the network. Presented in different locations like Lancaster Castle, Mesnes Park in Wigan and Blackpool Promenade, it engaged diverse local communities and has since toured internationally,

including to Vivid Sydney.

“This artwork simply wouldn’t exist without the network... Now, we’re looking forward to taking Somnius to festivals around the world.” Gemma Mills, Artistic Director, illumaphonium.

Other successes include Tine Bech’s ‘The World has Gone Pear-Shaped’, a six-metre inflatable pear premiered across Light Night Leeds, Nightfall Middlesbrough, and Illuminate Oldham before travelling to Australia, prompting environmental reflection. I Don’t Love You Anymore’s ‘Matter of the Heart’, co commissioned by Light Up Lancaster, Barnsley Bright Nights, and Lightwaves Salford, fostered community connection via heartbeat-synchronised light boxes. Their ‘On the Curled Clouds’, presented by Barnsley Bright Nights and Light Up Lancaster, offered an immersive digital experience inspired by ‘The Tempest’, exploring power and vulnerability.

8 Co-commissions

28 Festival appearances

102 Presenting days

749K+ Estimated audience reached

Visit www.lightupthenorth.com/development/co-commissioning/ to learn more.

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Co-presenting light art

‘MONAD’ by international artist Anastasia Isachsen, co-presented by Light Up Lancaster, Light Night Leeds, and Lightwaves Salford. This striking large-scale installation, exploring elemental forces through the symbolic circle, captivated UK audiences. Projected onto a fine water mist, ‘MONAD’ appeared as a shimmering 3D display, evoking awe and inviting reflection on life's cyclical nature. Thanks to MediaCity's support, MONAD's time at Lightwaves Salford was extended for an additional two weeks, providing 13,000 more visitors with the chance to experience the light art.

Our network further enriched public spaces with co-commissions like Severi Haapala's ‘A Kind of Magic’ (Light Up Lancaster and Lightpool Festival Blackpool), which playfully explored perception. Stéphane Masson's enchanting ‘I caught a…’ (Lightpool Festival Blackpool and Light Up Lancaster) created delightful illusions within oversized birdcages. Studio Toer's ‘Firefly Field’, co-presented across five festivals, recreated the magic of bioluminescent lights, fostering wonder in urban and natural settings. These collaborations demonstrably expand artistic possibilities and deepen audience connection.

"Initially, the artwork was unaffordable and logistically challenging. By collaborating with Leeds and Salford, we shared trucking and secured a substantial cost reduction, making it feasible for all three festivals. This partnership was mutually beneficial." Julie Brown, Light Up Lancaster

4 Co-presentations

13 Festival appearances

73 Presenting days

1.1M+ Estimated audience reached

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Fostering international connections

Members have been exploring some of Europe’s most inspiring light festivals – gathering fresh perspectives, creative ideas, and practical insights. From large-scale events attracting hundreds of thousands, to smaller, more intimate installations that explore personal and emotional connections, members encountered a wide spectrum of approaches to transforming public spaces and engaging audiences which can be applied to our festivals across the North of England.

We have strengthened our international connections through our ties with the International Light Festivals Organisation

(ILO). Kate Harvey, Director of Project at Artichoke Trust (producers of Lumiere Durham), is the Chair of ILO, and most recently, Jude Jagger, Co-Artistic Director at Things That Go on Things (producers of Light Night Wigan), was appointed to its Board.

The ILO, a global network of light festivals, events, and experts, plays a crucial role in fostering valuable connections and collaborations within the international light art community.

32 visits by our members to **14** international festivals, spanning cities in France, Germany, Croatia, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, and beyond, in addition to **49** visits to **17** UK non-member light festivals

“Research trips … have led to programming artists we would not otherwise have found.” Members’ Survey Response.

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Raising the profile of light art

We elevate the light art sector through several key initiatives. Our free online artist directory showcases artists and their installations to festival and event organisers, promoted through our members and online channels to attract listings and connect with bookers.

Our members have organised two light art conferences: the 2023 Lightpool Creative Conference in Blackpool and the Light Up Conference 2024, held as part of “Our Year – Wakefield District.” Across both events, our members actively engaged with light artists and creatives, discussing key topics such as funding, accessibility, creativity, and sustainability. At the Wakefield conference, we facilitated artist participation by providing 10 access bursaries for attendees to pitch ideas and gain feedback for future applications. Furthermore, our expanding digital networks, including a growing newsletter subscriber base and social media following, are vital. These channels promote our network’s aims, talent development programmes, member festival events, networking opportunities, and wider sector developments, directly connecting with audiences and artists to amplify our passion and impact.

Online Artist Directory launched, with **109** users and **119** registered artworks.

225 individuals participated in our light sector conferences held in Blackpool and Wakefield.

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Lighting the way towards a sustainable future

The Blackpool Illuminations, a free light show since 1879, has transformed into a six-mile spectacle of over one million lamps.

Facing the inefficiency of traditional bulbs, the team began transitioning to LEDs in 1999. Now entirely powered by renewable energy, the Illuminations champion sustainability. This commitment is further demonstrated by the Lightpool Festival, introduced in 2016, which highlights artistic and technological innovation.

“We're using longer-lasting LEDs, which means far less waste. Plus, we can dim the lights without losing the wow factor, cutting down on light pollution. And, crucially, we're now running the whole show on renewable energy. It's about showing real commitment to reducing our footprint.” Richard Williams, Head of Illuminations, Blackpool Council

88% drop in energy costs over ten years, electricity use down by **2/3** due to LEDs.

Separately, artist Ben Everard’s interactive light sculpture series, ‘A Cry for Help,’ addresses declining insect populations. Commissioned by Quays Culture for Lightwaves Salford and RHS Bridgewater, the seven insect-inspired forms (butterfly, bee, moth, etc.) are crafted from recycled materials. Initially dimly lit, the sculptures fully illuminate when approached, symbolizing nature’s potential renewal through human engagement. Exhibited in urban Salford Quays and cultivated RHS Bridgewater, the artwork resonated with diverse audiences, especially families, fostering conversations on

sustainability.

"Measuring the environmental impact of our festival and taking steps to improve sustainability in every aspect, from light art materials to travel options, is crucial. To complement this, we are part of the Light Up The North network and so are driven by a collaborative commitment to environmental responsibility. Integrating art with environmental awareness is a key part of our annual programming and Cry for Help was a perfect fit for this ethos." Kate Doyle, Head of Programme, Quays Culture.

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Looking to the future

Our ambition is to build upon our proven success as a catalyst for growth, innovation, and connection within the creative industries to bring the latest ideas and new technologies to audiences across the North of England and beyond. We will continue to champion the power of shared learning and peer support, fostering an ever-stronger collaborative light network where expertise is freely exchanged and supported.

Looking ahead, we commit to expanding our impactful artist development programmes like SHINE and SPARK, bringing even more new works to light and providing a stepping-stone for emerging talent. We will continue our dedication to inclusivity through initiatives like ILLUMINE, actively working to

diversify the light art sector. We will further empower our member festivals by proactively facilitating ambitious co-commissioning and co-presenting opportunities. By enhancing our online directory and fostering national and international partnerships, we aim to significantly broaden the reach and influence of our network and the sector, ensuring it remains a vital, evolving space where collective action drives the future of light art.

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