

Bradford—  
Arts Centre

kalasangam

# Annual Review 2024/25





# Our Vision

## Across the Arts, Across Cultures, At the Heart of Bradford

Bradford Arts Centre, formerly known as Kala Sangam, is an intercultural arts hub which aims to reflect the diversity of contemporary Britain through the work we present, the artists we support and the communities we engage.

Specialising in South Asian arts and culture, most of our work takes place in our Arts Centre in the heart of Bradford (between Bradford Cathedral and The Broadway Shopping Centre) with our outreach activities extending regionally and nationally.

We aim to bring people and communities together to create and experience high-quality, diverse art, to increase understanding and awareness of different cultures, and to provide talent development pathways for young people and emerging artists into a career in the arts.

Focusing primarily on music and dance, all artistic, education and outreach activity delivered by Bradford Arts Centre aligns with at least one of our programming strands.



## This Is Bradford

Putting Bradford Arts Centre at the heart of arts delivery in the city, we offer rehearsal space, development support and performance opportunities to local artists and companies. We also bring work to Bradford which addresses societal issues for the city or is relevant to one of its many communities.

## South Asia Now

We programme work by South Asian artists and organisations or that showcases artforms from South Asia. A priority is placed on presenting work which develops the artform or is created by British people of South Asian descent.

## British Diversity

To ensure we are at the forefront of what it means to live in modern Britain, we support the creation of work which looks at cultural heritage in this context or is actively diversity-focussed. This strand also covers work that fuses together different artforms, styles and cultures.



# Summary

**I am very proud to present the organisation's 2024/25 Annual Review.**

This year has been a transformational one for the company.

Throughout 2024/25 we have been hard at work delivering a comprehensive redevelopment of our Arts Centre, to change it into a modern, accessible, welcoming space. We would like to thank all our Capital funders, and we are grateful to the Arts Council and Bradford Council for their continued support for our year-round programme.

We would also like to thank everyone who attended one of our off-site performances this year, or who booked a space at our temporary home at Bank House for commercial or artistic activity. As our new building has slowly been revealed over the year, we hope you are as excited as we are about getting back into St Peter's House.

The year was our last operating as Kala Sangam, with the company becoming Bradford Arts Centre in July 2025. We remain exceptionally proud of the organisation's history and we look forward to celebrating and showcasing South Asian and contemporary performance in our new building with both new and returning audiences.

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Shagufta Bibi.

**Shagufta Bibi**  
Chair of the Board





# St Peter's House Redeveloping



In April 2024, work began on transforming our home at St Peter's House. We secured £7.9m of investment from Department of Culture, Media and Sport's Cultural Development Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Bradford 2025 and Foyle Foundation to create a bigger, more accessible venue.

Reclaiming spaces previously occupied by Bradford Council, the work has created a new 170-seat theatre, five new dance studios, additional space for conferences and events, and a permanent home for BCB Radio.

As well as a new, welcoming front entrance, access throughout the building has been significantly improved, including lift access to all floors for the first time, a new statement central staircase leading through the building, a Changing Places facility and accessible toilets on every level.

Working on a listed building presented its challenges, but our main contractor Simpson and the Capital design team – led by our CEO, Head of Finance and Capital Project Managers Turner & Townsend – have successfully delivered the project within allocated budgets and on time to play a major role in Bradford's year as UK City of Culture.

In September 2024, we welcomed Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy for a tour of the site (seen above with CEO Alex Croft and former Chair of the Board of Trustees Jasbir Athwal DL).



With building work underway, for the duration of 2024/25 we relocated our offices to Bank House in the centre of Bradford.

Bank House was a great temporary home, providing not just office space for us and our tenants, but a 150-seat hall and meeting rooms that enabled us to maintain commercial hires - securing much needed income.

A second hall meant we were also able to continue to provide studio space to artists throughout the year, ensuring companies and individuals were able to create, develop and rehearse dance and theatre work, feeding directly into our off-site programme of performances and supporting events across Bradford's City of Culture year.



We were delighted to show our founders Dr Shripati Upadhyaya and Dr Geetha Upadhyaya OBE around the site part way through the building process.

# Kalasangam at Bank House



# Artistic Programme

We presented 20 performances in 2024/25 at venues across Bradford. All performances aligned with at least one of our programming strands (South Asia Now, This Is Bradford, British Diversity) and 60% featured South Asian artists or artforms.

We started the year with an intimate performance of Vijay Venkat's *Jazz Fusion* at the Bradford Club, followed by *CROWN/تاج* at Mind the Gap – this Persian inspired work featured live music as well as traditional Whirling.

Unbound Dance Theatre premiered their first show, *Fireflies at Dawn*, at the Alhambra Studio in June. This ground breaking work brings Blind/ Visually Impaired people together with dancers to challenge expectations about what people living with sight loss can do.

We supported both Bradford South Asian Festival and Tech Styles to deliver their weekends of events at venues around the city.

Across the year we partnered with Yorkshire Dance to support both their *Ageless Festival* and the *No Dress Code Scratch Night*. *Ageless* is a celebration of movement at any age and features performances as well as workshops and community activities. Alex Corwin was part of the selection panel for the *No Dress Code Scratch Night* and performers included Bradford-based Zoe Katsilerou.



We returned to Bradford Club for a performance of Latterhand's *Beck* – featuring video and music, this was a celebration of the Bradford Beck which runs through the city. We partnered with Ilkley Literature Festival to welcome Safiya Kamaria Kinshasa for a performance of *Cane, Corn & Gully*. Combining poetry and choreography in a unique way, Safiya's powerful work gives voice to Black women, particularly those who were enslaved.

We headed over to Pictureville for an evening of music with Qaisar Mahmood Qawwal. Maya Productions brought their *Super Chefs* show to Marshfield Primary for two performances celebrating the joy of cooking and food.

We held our annual *Arts Iftar* at Bank House and were joined again by Feversham Girls School's Nasheeds Choir for a beautiful performance against a backdrop of live calligraphy from Razwan Ul-Haq.

As part of the development of his new show, Antonio Bhurkhar turned our studio at Bank House into an installation exploring sustainability and traditional African fabrics. We returned to Mind the Gap for the UK premiere of *Madhavi* by Amritha Jayakrishnan. Ahead of her performance, Amritha delivered a workshop to introduce Mind the Gap students to Bharatnatyam dance.

Our final show of the year was the sharing of a new play by Kirsty Smith, *This Girl Did*, which tells the forgotten history of Women's cricket in Bradford.

**"I love the Kala Sangam Arts Iftar, it's genuinely one of my favourite events that I look forward to every year. I'm truly grateful to have been part of such a meaningful and memorable gathering."** - Audience member

**"It meant the world to be able to present what is a work so deeply rooted in South Indian dance and poetry for the first time in the UK. It was doubly special because the last two years for me have been a complete 180 in terms of moving out of my corporate career and into the arts full-time so to have the support of an organisation like Kala Sangam really makes a huge difference and impact!"** - Amritha Jayakrishnan





# Artist Support

Over the year we provided more than 100 days of studio time to 18 artists. 50% of the artists supported were South Asian or working in South Asian artforms.

We gave space to 11 artists from Bradford and 70% people using our studio fit within our British Diversity programming strand.

We continued our Samanata commission partnership with Jaivant Patel Company, with Raimu Itfum receiving the second award. He spent a week in our studio developing his first show.

Our support has helped artists, including Natalie Davies, Bradford South Asian Festival and Ella Tighe, unlock over £250,000 of funding from Arts Council England and Bradford 2025.

We have continued to offer developmental support for other organisations, including Maya Productions for their Routes to Roots project and Womenzone for the Sufi Music Heritage Project.

In April 2024, we held our first session with our newly appointed Artist Advisory Group. Comprising nine artists working across a range of artforms, including dance, theatre and even opera, the group now meet regularly to offer oversight and guidance on our programme and artist development offer.

We welcomed Rhythmosaic and Bradford South Asian Festival as new Associate Companies, alongside Mobius Dance. We will continue our support for Jaivant Patel Company and Company of Others as Partner Companies.



**"Kala Sangam have been absolutely integral throughout my journey as a theatre-maker! They've provided me with invaluable time and space to work on producing content for touring and to develop new work. I'll be forever grateful for the support they have given me and continue to provide".** – Lydia Murray

**"I got to breathe in the space, connect with the wonderful team, explore my play through text and tactile form. To have that week to just be a paid artist and create work out of an authentic place, given the license to do so was a privilege."** – Raimu Itfum



**More than 2300 people saw performances as part of our On Tour programme, with an average attendance of 71% capacity – taking us above pre-Covid levels for the first time.**

69% of our audience came from Bradford postcodes (up more than 10% from the previous year) and 48% identified as non-white British. 29% were Asian/ Asian British.

13% of our audience identified as something other than heterosexual, 10% as deaf or disabled and 13% as neurodivergent.

We continued to provide a positive experience for audiences, even while working off-site: 95% of people rated us as Good/ Very Good value for money, 98% said the quality of our welcome was Good/ Very Good and 98% rated the overall experience as Good/ Very Good. When asked how likely they are to recommend Bradford Arts Centre to friends and family, people are scoring an average of 9.5 out of 10.

# Audiences



# and Communities Education

## Schools

20 schools or colleges visited us in 2024/25, 15 of which have engaged with us previously. We worked with 3,217 students and delivered 98 workshops/events.

Our 4th annual Schools' Takeover included 12 local primary schools, the majority of whom are from the BD3 area of Bradford. With our building closed, part of the takeover was hosted at local secondary school Carlton Bolling. Over 700 Key Stage 2 children participated in a range of art activities from Disco Freestyle to Puppetry.

**"Both sessions were interactive, fun and well instructed. The children were engaged and learning lots of new skills. They were encouraged to choreograph their own routines, fostering independence and leadership"**

- Teacher, Dixons Marchbank

**"Both workshops were brilliant. Our students and teachers learnt lots of new things and enjoyed the whole learning experience."** - Teacher, Thornbury Primary Leadership Academy

**"It was great to share different cultures and provide our students with new experiences."**

- Teacher, High Craggs Leadership Academy.



In January we worked with Interplay Theatre to bring their new show, *Drift*, to Coop Academy Delius for a special accessible performance for children with complex mental and physical disabilities.

**"The opportunity Kala Sangam provided for Interplay to visit our Academy was truly exceptional. Through the magic of live theatre, Interplay brought the story of *Drift* to life, creating an unforgettable experience that empowered and inspired our pupils. It was an experience that will be remembered by both our pupils and staff alike. Thank you."**

- Aimee Helie, Coop Academy Delius

Other education activities include our continuing work with Carlton Bolling's Arts Council students, who commissioned a piece of work for Bradford Arts Centre by local artist Eve Wright.

## Classes

Our Bollywood dance classes continued to run at Bank House, in partnership with Zoobin Surty Dance Company, with a total of 33 classes throughout the year and just over 250 participants.

We also introduced a new Kathak dance class in partnership with Bradford Arts Centre Associate Company, Rhythmosaic. These classes started in September 2024 and are for beginners aged 5+. We held 17 sessions with a total of 89 participants.

We worked with Ravenscliffe Youth & Community Centre throughout the year, delivering several art-based workshops including a graffiti mural on one of the doors to their centre. We delivered a total of 7 sessions, with 84 children and young people participating.

## Volunteers

41 volunteers contributed 694 hours of time to our projects across the year. This included working on our archive and supporting the Arts and Heritage Officers to deliver workshops and activities.





# Arts and Heritage Project

In a year of transformation, we continued to place community at the heart of everything we did. Through an ambitious two-year Arts & Heritage Community Project – funded by DCMS Cultural Development Fund and the National Lottery Heritage Fund – we worked in partnership with Keighley Creative, South Square Centre and Bloomin' Buds Theatre Company to deliver a rich programme of creative activity across the Bradford district.

Each organisation hosted a dedicated Arts & Heritage Officer, embedded within their team, creating a unique network of four Hubs. Together, we co-created artwork through workshops, exhibitions, performances and heritage projects that reflect the stories, identities and cultures of some of Bradford's most underserved communities.

## Project Highlights

There were 3,222 participations across 203 sessions delivered at the four Hubs:

- 1,351 at Keighley Creative
- 761 at Bradford Arts Centre
- 665 at South Square Centre
- 445 at Bloomin' Buds Theatre Company

## Community Impact

- 97% of participants said the Hubs were welcoming and accessible
- 93% felt the activities were relevant to them and their interests
- 83% felt more connected to their cultural heritage
- 90% said the project made them feel proud to live or work in Bradford
- 94% gained new skills or knowledge through participation



## Voices from the Community

**"I take my dancing very seriously... cultural dancing is important."**

- Young participant, Roma Voices, Bradford Arts Centre

**"Nice feeling to see your work displayed... gives a sense of importance."**

- Participant, Keighley Creative

**"I really enjoyed the self-portrait session. I also loved the painting; it was a new thing in my life which has been granted to me. A good step. I would like to try poetry in the future."**

- Participant, South Square Centre

**"It gets me out of the house, and I enjoy the groups I go to and I like the people there."** - Participant, Bloomin' Buds Theatre Company

The year laid the foundation for a lasting legacy of creativity, connection, and cultural pride across Bradford's communities. As we move into the final phase of the project, we look forward to sharing the artistic responses to heritage that have emerged from this deeply collaborative work and to welcoming our communities into Bradford Arts Centre in 2025.



# Room Hires

Our temporary home at Bank House offered a number of great spaces for corporate event hire. Over the year, we welcomed many regular bookers – including Bradford Council and Bradford Teaching Hospitals – along with plenty of new ones, such as West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Bradford 2025. We had over 300 bookings.

We were also able to offer office and studio space to our long-term tenants, Dance United Yorkshire and Freedom Studios, and regular weekly sessions for Bradford Friendship Choir and Voiceability.

Overall, we were able to generate more than £83,000 from hires income during our time at Bank House.



As well as continuing to deliver all our regular events and activities, throughout 2024/25 the team was hard at work preparing for our transition to Bradford Arts Centre in summer 2025.

Design agency Out Of Place created the visual identity for the new brand, which was launched for the first time in September 2024 on the beautiful hoardings erected to protect the building during redevelopment works. The artwork also included specially commissioned poetry by Kamal Kaan, Nabeela Ahmed, Kirsty Taylor and Kemmi Gill, and a timeline of Bradford Cathedral's history. Out Of Place also started work on our new website and a suite of brand design assets.

We appointed Alex Wilson from Memory Dance to create a Kala Sangam Archive. With the support of Archive Assistants, he has catalogued, preserved and digitised materials from the first 30 years of the organisation's history along with information about the history of St Peter's House as Bradford General Post Office.

# Planning for Bradford Arts Centre



Our Patrons

David Lascelles Earl of Harewood  
Lord Patel of Bradford OBE

Honorary  
Lifetime President

Dr Geetha Upadhyaya OBE

Our Board:

Jasbir Athwal DL	Chair
Sufyan Dogra	Trustee
Amrit Gata-Aura	Trustee (until February 2025)
Caroline Harrison	Treasurer
Sameena Hussain	Trustee
Jenny Jowle	Trustee (until January 2025)
Marie O'Reilly	Vice Chair
Rashmi Sudhir	Trustee
James Wilson	Trustee

The Board has appointed Jez Arrow (Head of Finance) as Company Secretary

Our Staff:

Jez Arrow	Head of Finance
Gemma Bailey	Arts & Heritage Officer – South Square
Fay Beesley	Education & Outreach Officer
Sidra Bi	Bookkeeper
Ellie Cansdale	Arts & Heritage Officer – Bloomin’ Buds
Alex Corwin	Programme & Marketing Manager
Alex Croft	Creative Director
David Dearlove	Facilities Assistant & Caretaker
Philip Henegan	Facilities Assistant
Claire Hudson	Arts & Heritage Officer
Mohammed Iftikar	Facilities Manager
Lauren Kelly	Arts & Heritage Officer – Keighley Creative
Mo Khan	Facilities Assistant
Fahana Khan Pushpa	Archive Assistant
Nathan McGill	Archive Assistant
Haider Mahboob	Facilities Assistant
Steve O’Connell	Head of Commercial
Amer Sarai	Head of Community Engagement
Dave Searle	Theatre Technician (freelance)
Jess Swift	Marketing Officer
Grace Wilkinson	Arts & Heritage Officer – Bloomin’ Buds
Alex Wilson	Archivist

Artist Advisory Group:

Diana Abankwah, Neil Balfour, Leah Francis, Kavya Iyer, Kamal Kaan, Divija Mellaly, Maddie Morris, Ella Tighe, Hardeep Sahota

In May 2024, Alex Croft and Jez Arrow were invited to attend the Buckingham Palace Garden Party to celebrate the arts sector. As well as meeting the King, it was a chance to catch up with many friends and colleagues from across the sector.

Over the year staff have taken part in First Aid, Self Defence and Carbon Literacy Training.

Alex Corwin and Jess Swift attended the Arts Marketing Association Annual Conference.



Alfred Kumwenda – Volunteer

Volunteering for Bradford Arts Centre was an amazing opportunity. The project taught me about helping communities. Everyone was supportive and talented, which made working with the team and projects worthwhile. It was also amazing to see the community love their city of Bradford in different types of projects and how every project is special in many ways.



Jess Swift – Marketing Officer

My highlight of the year would absolutely have to be the Qawwali at Pictureville. It was my first time ever seeing a Qawwali performance, and everyone had told me how great they are. I was completely blown away by the sound and vocals, and loved seeing everyone up clapping and singing along.



Lauren Kelly – Arts and Heritage Officer (Keighley Creative)

I thought Fireflies At Dawn was really inspiring and inclusive. I’ve never seen a show like that before and changed how I think about dance.



Mo Khan – Facilities Assistant

My highlight of the year was the Arts Iftar. I was fasting myself so it was really special to have everyone including all my colleagues join in. It made me feel like it was more of a close community and understanding and it was really special to me. I loved watching the performances as it's something I’ve never really seen at an Iftar before.

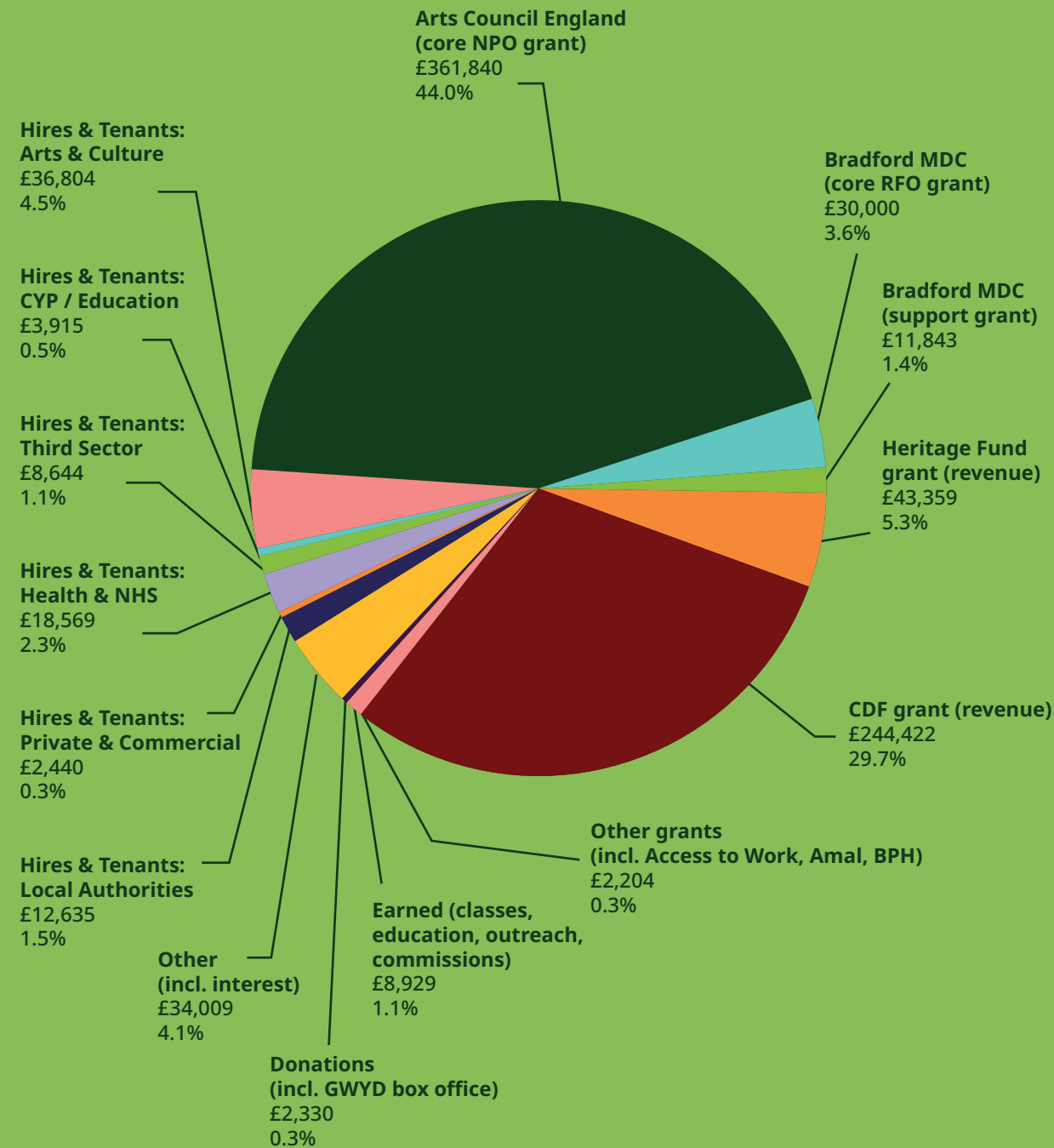




# Finance

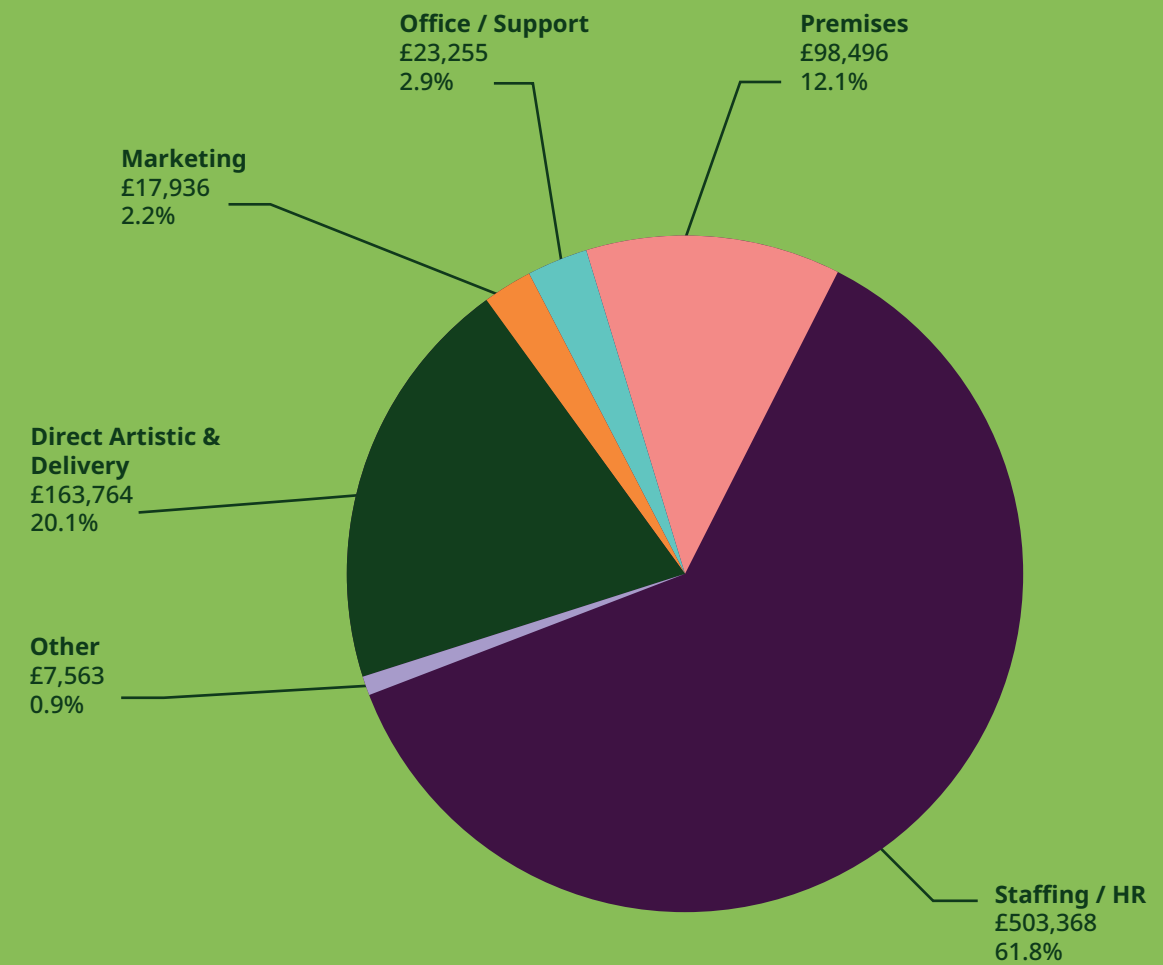
## Income: £821,943

excludes Capital grant funding of £2,800,360



## Expenditure: £814,382

excludes Capital Building Depreciation of £52,009



### Core Funders:



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



*City of*  
**BRADFORD**  
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Project Funders:



**Esmée  
Fairbairn**  
FOUNDATION

**JERWOOD  
ARTS**

### Capital Project Funders:

Supported using public funding by



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**BRADFORD**  
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL




**Garfield Weston**  
FOUNDATION



**FOYLE FOUNDATION**







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**For more information:**

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**Social Media: @bdartscentre**

**Bradford  
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