

Biennial report
2025–2026



TRANSFORM

**Transform is 'a resilient act of imagination in a city
determined to forge its path ahead'**

— THE STATE OF THE ARTS

Transform is a festival for 'artists with something to say and intriguing ways of saying it'

- THE GUARDIAN

'one of the most important international festivals in the UK'

- THE STAGE



MEKA, The Last Supper. Photo: JMA Photography

About Transform

Transform is a biennial international performance festival based in Leeds. Every two years, our festival brings together artists from across the globe to present astonishing theatre, dance and performance to audiences in their thousands across the city.

We're a charity, and we work year-round to nurture artists in creating new work and support young people to begin and develop careers in the arts.

Transform began life at **Leeds Playhouse** before becoming an independent company in 2015. **Transform** became an **Arts Council England** National Portfolio Organisation in 2023, and receives statutory funding from **Leeds City Council**.



Eve Scrimton, The Joyride and The Reins. Photo: JMA Photography



Eisa Jocson and Venuri Perera, Magic Artists Photo: JMA Photography

TRANSFORM 25

Spanning theatre, dance, installation, an intimate audio experience, and a co-created outdoor video installation, **Transform 25** assembled genre-defying artists from across the globe to present extraordinary contemporary performance in Leeds.

Our tenth year as an independent performance festival, we were delighted by our best-ever ticket sales, with nine sold out shows and audiences in their thousands.

At **Transform 25** we heard from our audiences how vital they feel the festival is – to the city and to themselves. Thought provoking and inspiring; moving and challenging; our 2025 festival presented world class contemporary performance in Leeds in a way that was affordable, accessible and welcoming.

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- 23** EVENTS OVER
 - 6** DAYS
 - 7** INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATIONS
 - 4** ORIGINAL COMMISSIONS
 - 2** PUBLIC ARTWORKS
 - 1** DOOMSDAY DISCO
 - 9** SOLD OUT SHOWS
 - 75** ARTISTS FROM ACROSS
 - 6** CONTINENTS AND
 - 11** NATIONALITIES
 - 11,631** AUDIENCE MEMBERS
 - 12** HOST VENUES AND
 - 30** PROJECT PARTNERS
 - 122** PARTICIPANTS ACROSS
 - 3** ARTIST-LED WORKSHOPS AND
 - 1** PARTICIPATORY FILMING PROJECT
 - 3** INTERNATIONAL DELEGATIONS
 - 55** VOLUNTEERS AND
 - 10** COMMUNITY CAST MEMBERS
-
- 500** TALK TRANSFORM BADGES
 - 5** BROOMSTICKS
 - 1** WALKING BUS BETWEEN VENUES
 - 160** CELEBRATORY PIZZA SLICES
 - 150** BRIGHT RED CHILLIES
 - 14** METRES OF CAKE
 - 15** ORIGINAL SONGS
 - 48** MEMORIES OF HOME SHARED
 - 30** PEOPLE DINING ON STAGE
 - 2** TRANSFORM HAPPY HOURS
 - 6** MILK BOTTLES USED ON STAGE AT 2AM
 - 180** PARTY POPPERS UNDER SEATS
 - 120** TENNIS BALLS
 - 60** SYMPHONIC ORCHESTRA MEMBERS
 - 1** TRANSFORMATIVE FESTIVAL
-

Featuring

Amrita Hepi with Mish Grigor (AUSTRALIA)
 Ahamfule J. Oluo (USA)
 Basel Zaraq (UK/PALESTINE)
 Dan Daw Creative Projects (UK)
 Eisa Jocson & Venuri Perera (PHILIPPINES & SRI LANKA)
 Eve Stainton (UK)
 Ira Brand (NETHERLANDS)
 Katja Heitmann (NETHERLANDS)
 MEXA (BRAZIL)
 Samir Kennedy & Sean Murray (UK/FRANCE)
 Tiran Willems (SOUTH AFRICA/SWITZERLAND)
 Toussaint To Move (JAMAICA/UK)

Across our workshops programme we also worked with Bakani Pick-Up, and during *Surrender*, our day of performance in collaboration with **performance, possession + automation**, presented work by: Åbäke; Gillian Dyson; Tara Fatehi; Eisa Jocson and Venuri Perera; Samir Kennedy and Sean Murray; Samra Mayanja and Kathy Gray; POPPERFACE and Richard Pye; Imogen Reeve & Co.; Sonia Sandhu; Nicola Singh; Eve Stainton and Florence Peake.

Our mission

Transform's mission is to introduce audiences and artists in Leeds to ground-breaking theatre, dance and performance that connects to the world in powerful, provocative ways.

We enable artists to create the future of performance; generate and welcome new audiences to the arts; and support young people and communities to shape their city and the world.

Our vision

Our vision is for bold, brave international performance to be at the heart of everybody's cultural experience in Leeds, West Yorkshire and the North. We see our festival as an inclusive, energising force for social change, embedded in the cultural life of our city and its people.



MECA, The Last Supper. Photo: JMA Photography

Our values

BOLD

We invite artists and creatives to imagine and realise bold, powerful performance that pushes the boundaries of what's possible in terms of scale, discipline and reach. We produce energising, provocative cultural experiences and embrace different ways of thinking about what performance can be.

BRAVE

We're committed to engaging with different contexts and territories around the globe, and invite audiences to confront ideas and issues relevant to their own lives and to the wider world. We take on challenging issues and subject matters and create a supportive environment where art can spark social change.

CONNECTED

We're deeply rooted in our city and our region, working collectively to make a difference and highlight urgent issues. We're open-minded and collaborative, joining forces with partners locally, nationally and internationally, working together to foster different approaches and ways of making performance happen.

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS

We work in an ethics-led way, deeply aware of and responsible for those we work with, our wider society and our planet. We're committed to running an organisation and a festival that strives for climate responsibility and is social justice aware and orientated.

Why performance?

Live performance offers a unique opportunity for connection. The belief that performance brings people together to experience something shared, in the same moment, is essential to what we do. The electrifying power of both sharing and witnessing art collectively drives our programming.

Our audiences

Assembling audiences of nearly 12,000, **Transform 25** saw 75% of shows sell out in advance, with **27% more tickets** sold than targeted. 39% of audiences at our 2025 festival were new to **Transform**.

The majority of our audiences are based in Leeds, but there's a notable reach beyond our home city. Ticket buyers in Bradford, Wakefield, Huddersfield & Halifax accounted for 14% of our sales in the West Yorkshire region. Beyond West Yorkshire, audiences came from London, Manchester, York, Brighton, Glasgow, Edinburgh and further afield. We also attract international audiences; in 2025 this included visitors from the US, Denmark, Italy and Chile.

Alongside our Pay What You Can model, **Transform** has shown that platforming Global Majority voices and international perspectives across bold and genre-defying performance is a catalyst for bringing new audiences into the arts.

This is particularly clear when comparing our audience data to industry benchmarks for England using the Culture Counts Impact & Insight Toolkit:

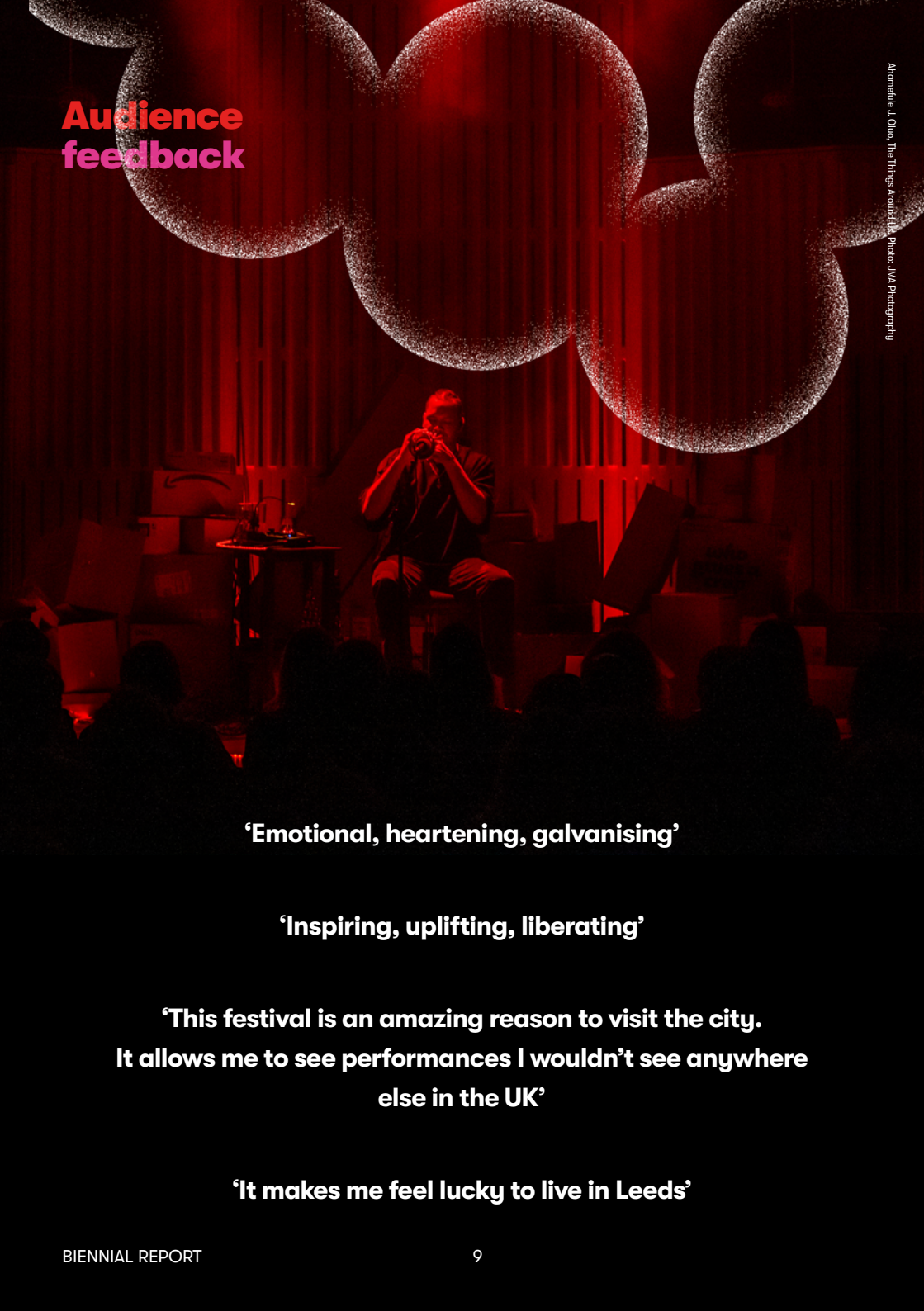
- 36% aged between 16–34 (16% England)
- 75% white (82% England, Audience Finder Performing Arts benchmark 92%), 9% mixed background (3% England), 3% Black British or mixed Black background (3% England), 2% Asian, Asian British or mixed Asian background (4% England)
- 41% LGBTQ+ (13% England)
- 23% disabled (14% England)



Kerjo Hartmann, PERPETUAL, Photo: JMA Photography

Audience feedback

Alfonso J. Oliva, The Things Around Us, Photo: JMA Photography



‘Emotional, heartening, galvanising’

‘Inspiring, uplifting, liberating’

**‘This festival is an amazing reason to visit the city.
It allows me to see performances I wouldn’t see anywhere
else in the UK’**

‘It makes me feel lucky to live in Leeds’

Young Curators

After a public campaign, for 2024-25, we recruited an incredible group of 9 Young Curators aged 18–25 in Leeds. Together they:

- Selected 1 international artwork presented at Transform 25
- Created a public installation at Leeds Kirkgate Market featuring 6 local and international artist contributions, visited by 600+ people
- Presented 3 audience engagement initiatives delivered during the festival
- Collaborated via an international exchange programme with 10 Young Curators in Nairobi

This cohort of Young Curators reported a profound impact on their wellbeing after participating, with positive impacts on their sense of identity, confidence, skills and connection to the cultural life of Leeds.

At the start of the project, 0% reported feeling ‘extremely’ confident – by the end, this had increased to 50% of the group. 91% felt the project gave them access to activities they otherwise wouldn’t have had.

As well as developing participants’ creative networks in Leeds, the project also fostered expanded global perspectives, embedding cross-cultural dialogue and reinforcing the value of international connection.

Transform partnered with **The GoDown Arts Centre**, Nairobi to develop their own version of the Young Curators programme. As part of the **British Council’s UK/Kenya Season 2025**, the Nairobi Young Curators presented a series of interventions in the Dunga Road industrial area including murals, installations and podcasts sessions, and a one-day street festival with an audience of 200 people.

Young Curators feedback



‘It gave me a sense of purpose. Now I have ideas of what I’d like to do, and I don’t feel lost anymore.’

‘I’ve never felt so seen and welcomed in the creative field.’

‘It’s made me think more about having a career in the arts being a possibility for myself’

Artists

Transform 25 assembled artists from all over the world, including Brazil, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Thailand, Palestine, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, the USA and the UK. With six UK premieres and one world premiere at our 2025 edition, **Transform** offers artists a prestigious international platform for cutting edge performance.

Across 23 events, the artists explored everything from pop culture to colonialism, working class stories, the radical history of Reggae and exploitation of migrant women's labour.

As well as a broad geographical spread, with 55% of artists from the global south and 45% from the global north, our programme brought together artistic companies with diverse lived experience.

- 58% of the companies were queer led, and 25% of these were either trans or non-binary led
- 67% Global Majority led
- 17% disabled led

We endeavour for Transform to be a global leader in artist care, ensuring artists at our festival feel supported and welcomed.

- 100% of artists rated their experience excellent or good
- 88% said the festival exceeded their expectations



Samuel Mojumilo performs at Surrender. Photo: JMA Photography

Artist feedback



Aurita Heqi with Mish Origo. Photo: JMA Photography

‘It is always an honor for us to be part of this festival. We feel so connected to Leeds, despite the distance, and it was truly a blessing to feel the audience’s energy and to imagine how extraordinary it is to reach viewers so far from our home country.’

‘The festival is doing a phenomenal job!’

‘Transform 2025 was a very welcoming, well produced and high-quality curated festival’

‘Everyone was sincere, professional, kind, enthusiastic, caring, welcoming, competent, generous, and made us feel fully supported so we could focus on delivering the best show possible.’

Engine Room

Engine Room is our strand of artist development work, offering artists, primarily from the North of the UK, the support to realise their ambitious ideas at pivotal moments in their careers.

Over the two-year festival cycle, **Transform** co-commissioned four new projects by standout artists, driving their development through financial support, guidance and residencies in the city.

CASE STUDY

FREE, TOUSSAINT TO MOVE (JAMAICA/UK)

Leeds' very own **Akeim Toussaint Buck** presented *Free*, a joyful, immersive dance show that celebrates Reggae and its radical history. Presented to a sold-out audience, this show was co-commissioned by **Transform** in partnership with **Sadler's Wells** and **ARC Stockton**. A national commission with major partners of a Leeds artist, this show demonstrates how we support artists to develop trailblazing work for national stages, whilst embedding local audiences. *Free* integrated a community cast, who joined the performers in an immersive dance show blending original dub music and jazz influences.

'Free is also a vital work for the younger generations of future Black dancers who will see people that look like themselves, performing this show.'

-DANCE ART JOURNAL



Climate Conscious Practices

As well as implementing climate conscious approaches into our everyday working practices, such as travelling via train where possible and conducting much of our show research via video documentation, **Transform** works to embed climate conscious thinking on a strategic level.

UK-WIDE PROGRAMMING

Over the last few festivals, we've worked in partnership with a network of UK partners to co-present international work, lowering the carbon imprint of our presentations in Leeds and ensuring wider benefit for audiences beyond the city. For our 2025 edition we worked in partnership with a multitude of presenters across the UK and Europe to build tour schedules that minimised the carbon impact for the international presentations, including for Amrita Hepi's *RINSE*, travelling from Australia, and MEXA's *The Last Supper*, travelling from Brazil.

TRAVEL ON FOOT

Transform 25 also saw the first iteration of our 'Walking Bus', a walking route between venues led by a member of the Transform team, with the aim of encouraging travel on foot. Audiences were receptive, with 25 people taking part, so we'll look to expand this initiative for our next festival. We'll also further embed a climate conscious approach by building walking time between venues into our schedule planning.

Financial Model

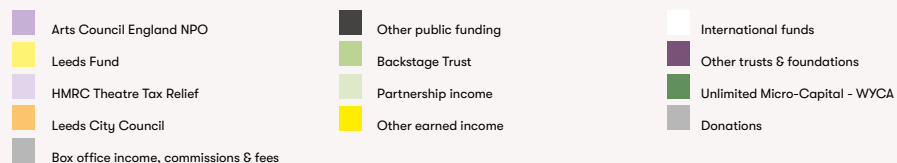
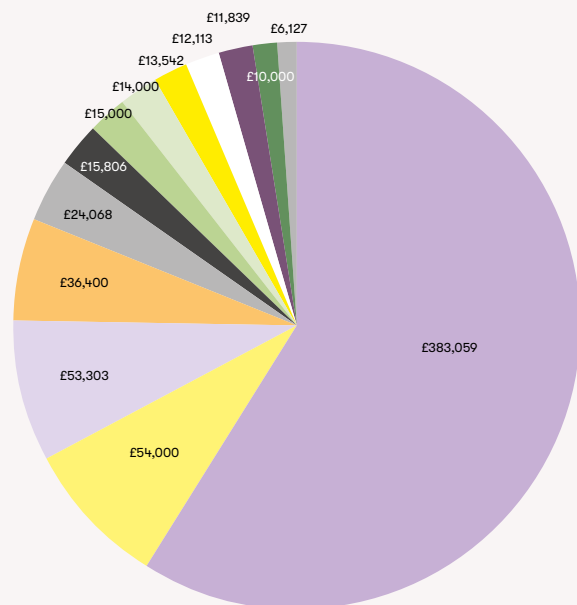
Transform is a biennial festival and thus operates a two-year budget model to better represent the financial context.

Transform income 2024/25 and 2025/26 (Combined)

INCOME YR 1 £319,808

INCOME YR 2 £329,449

Pounds (£)

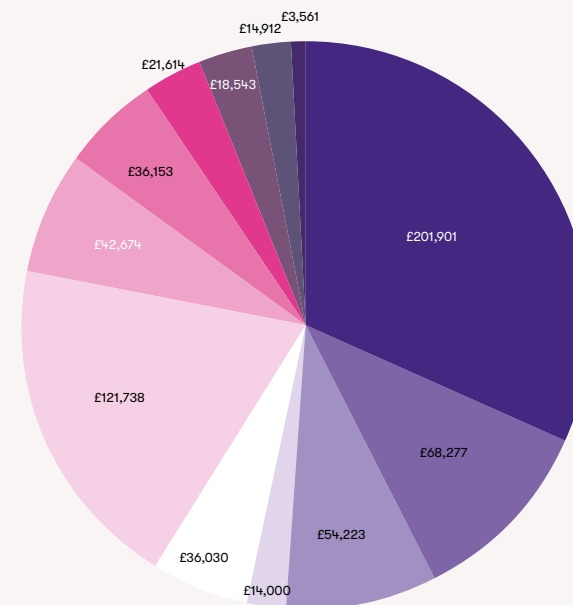


The visual summary below represents the combined income and expenditure over two financial years – 2024/25 and 2025/26 – to account for the organisation's 'development year' and 'delivery year', both which play a vital role in the realisation of the festival.

Transform expenditure 2024/25 and 2025/26 (Combined)

EXPENDITURE YR 1 £218,986

EXPENDITURE YR 2 £414,640



*A proportion of Core Team salaries is allocated to Artistic Programme, Young People and Artist Development costs

Partners

Transform 25 was supported using public funding by Arts Council England and funded by Leeds City Council & UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

We work with a variety of other partners to make our festivals and projects happen.

With thanks to...

VENUES

Carriageworks Theatre; Howard Assembly Room; Leeds Playhouse; Leeds School of Arts, Leeds Beckett University; Leeds Kirkgate Market; Outlaws Yacht Club; stage@leeds, University of Leeds; Stanley & Audrey Burton Theatre; Testbed; The Warehouse in Holbeck; Yorkshire Dance

UK FUNDERS

British Council; Backstage Trust; Leeds Community Foundation; Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; Unlimited

INTERNATIONAL FUNDERS

Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia; The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the UK

CO-PRESENTING & CO-COMMISSIONING PARTNERS

Battersea Arts Centre; Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts; Take Me Somewhere; Tramway; performance, possession + automation (pp+a); UK Research and Innovation – Arts and Humanities Research Council; Light Night Leeds; Yorkshire Dance; Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture; IETM

EDUCATION PARTNERS

Leeds Beckett University; University of Leeds

BECOME A PARTNER

If you want to be part of making our next festival happen in October 2027 – as a partner, sponsor, a volunteer, a trustee, an artist, a young person or as a member of our team – come and say hello: info@transformfestival.org



★★★★★

‘a week of international dance and performance that on its first night had small venues packed with a buzzing crowd’

- THE GUARDIAN

'always thoughtful, inspiring and exciting'

- YORKSHIRE POST

Front: Trian Williams, Back: Jodie, Photo: JMA Photography



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