

**Bradford
Producing
Hub**



**Bradford Producing Hub
Visual Arts Needs Analysis Report**

Research period: Feb 23 – Aug 23

Report author: Alison McIntyre, Visual Arts
Instigator

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INTRO

For the past five months I have been meeting with visual artists, curators, producers and organisations across the Bradford district and across specialisms. This has been made possible through support from Bradford 2025, with whom we are working as a capacity building partner. My report represents conversations with over 90 people, through numerous 1-2-1 meetings, the first Visual Arts Social and events at Keighley Creative and South Square Centre. I've talked to artists at different stages of their careers; some at very early stages or who aren't sure where to start, some who are making all their income through freelance artistic practice, some who are splitting their time between a day job and artistic practice and some who are working full time to fund making art in their spare time. I've also talked with arts organisations, from established organisations like Impressions and South Square Galleries, to smaller or more informal organisations like Fayakunu and Trapezium Gallery.

The visual arts sector in Bradford feels a little neglected, not necessarily because less attention has been paid to it than previously, but because of the additional support and attention that performing and live arts have recently received. Despite this, there has been warmth, generosity and positivity from everyone I have spoken to. No-one has avoided talking about the negatives and challenges of practising as a visual artist in Bradford, but it feels like there is an energy, enthusiasm and determination to work together to create a visual arts sector where everyone can thrive.

Many Bradford artists are very proud of their grassroots and DIY culture, and one question that has come up many times is how we can support and develop a more sustainable visual arts sector, without losing the enthusiasm, warmth, generosity and desire to collaborate that currently exists. Can we create a more sustainable and thriving sector, but avoid making everything shiny, sterile and overly competitive?

"The DIY/grassroots scene is great, and creates amazing small groups who trust each other, but sometimes they don't then trust anyone else, so can quickly become cliques who are suspicious of authority (sometimes with good reason!) so bridging those gaps is always going to be difficult. We need partnerships and ownership, not condescension."

"Being self employed is tough, but money isn't my main concern, or more importantly it's the content of the project that I look at first. I often do things for less or no money if I believe in what it's about, but I do need to earn money obviously and that's increasingly hard"

Whilst visual artists were generally positive about Bradford 2025, some expressed fears of being left out, some confusion about what was available for them and how to approach the team with ideas, as well as worries that there might not be a legacy for local artists and organisations after the spectacle has moved on.

The sector also needs to develop existing and create new arts organisations, especially mid-scale organisations to fill the gaps between grassroots activities and more established organisations; Bradford would benefit from a visual arts NPO in the city that could pull everything together and act as a focal point for all the pockets of brilliant activity happening across the district. In developing the sector we must make sure that we build bridges

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between organisations and artists so that we don't increase existing hierarchies. Instead we need to create opportunities for Bradford artists, make the sector an attractive proposition for artists across the UK to want to become part of, and bring inspiring big names to exhibit in the city.

"Bigger organisations want ownership, but can we develop partnerships where bigger organisations support artists to develop and own their projects?"

"Can we interrogate ourselves at the start of projects, so that all partners have purpose and focus. Why are you here? Why are you doing this?"

Working with communities is also important to a large number of Bradford visual artists, as is creating opportunities across communities for people who may not see themselves as artists, but given the right circumstances could create a sustainable practice. Equal value needs to be given to this work, alongside making individual work for exhibition.

"We need to acknowledge that working with communities, teaching or running workshops is a particular skill that needs to be valued. Sometimes it's just seen as a side job to support your individual practice, but being a good artist doesn't necessarily make you a good teacher or facilitator."

"I want to deliver projects that make space for people's stories"

In my conversations with artists and organisations I asked people to think about what they felt they needed to develop their practice, and what they felt the sector in Bradford needed to thrive. So I have grouped the needs, thoughts and ideas, into Individual Needs and Sector Needs, and it is interesting and helpful to see lots of crossover between the two. You will also find an appendix summarising who I spoke to, so that you can see the reach of the consultation that has taken place over the past 6 months.

"When and how do we manage to call ourselves artists?"

While Bradford Producing Hub is the author and driver of this Visual Arts Needs Analysis, the findings of this report cannot be addressed by BPH alone – this report represents a shared, District-wide, responsibility that will need to be embraced by multiple partners in order to achieve the change that is needed. This process is the start.

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1. INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Conversations began by talking about the artist or organisations work and what they felt they needed to be able to develop their practice. This section summarises some of the needs, requests and challenges individual visual artists face in achieving a successful career in Bradford.

1.1 Professional Support

1. **Opportunities to get feedback** on work through things like portfolio reviews, critiques, critical friend events. These could be connected to galleries (Impressions offer a portfolio review opportunity to photographers, including those who are unsuccessful in applications to exhibit there) or independent events.
2. **Opportunities to get feedback** for people from marginalised communities, or anyone lacking the confidence or experience to go to something called a portfolio review/critique/critical friend event.
3. **Support to write funding bids and proposals**, this was highlighted especially by people with dyslexia/neurodiversity.
4. **Developing skills in marketing, visibility and finding your audience** to understand the difference between them and which is most relevant to your practice.
5. **Understanding the role of Visual Arts Producers:** Visual artists have traditionally worked with curators rather than producers, and whilst there is a lot of cross-over between the two roles, visual artists are now working in many different ways and in many non-gallery locations. These include participatory and community projects, installations, digital and outdoor work, and could benefit from the skills and expertise of Visual Arts Producers. Training needs to be provided to develop producers with visual arts expertise, as well as training for visual artists on how to work with a producer.
6. **Commercial and business development support**
7. **Developing a successful freelance career:** How do you start? How do you survive? What is the balance between making/creating, exhibiting, teaching, workshops, projects etc? How do you avoid working for nothing? How do you get from small to mid-scale to established?
8. **Building confidence, self-belief and value:** Charging the right fees, valuing time, not working for free, shouting about success etc.
9. **Training on managing relationships:** With organisations, in collaborations, working with a team/technicians/fabricators etc
10. **Training on how to write about your work:** Particularly in a way that is inclusive and accessible.
11. **Targeted support for graduates into visual arts careers:** Bradford School of Art primarily, but how do we also attract graduates from other cities to live and work here? It was suggested that Cultural Voice Forum also needs to do more to attract young people and graduates to join.
12. **Subject/artform based training:** That develops learning from college, enables development of new specialisms or supports hobbyists to move into careers.
13. **Learning how to hang an exhibition:** For individuals and non-gallery organisations who want to show work.

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14. **Understanding how to work with communities:** Focusing on organisations and individuals, especially around power, control, responsibility, legacy and balance.
15. **Supervision/care for artists working in communities:** Such as /mental wellbeing/social prescribing.

1.2 Inspiration

1. **Go and Sees for visual arts:** Exhibitions, artist-led spaces, national/international biennials etc
2. **International collaborations:** Develop relationship with the British Council to create international collaborations across disciplines
3. **Local inspiration:** Bring big name artists and exhibitions to Bradford so we don't need to go to Leeds, Manchester or London
4. **Host a contemporary art/sculpture Biennial:** Local, national, and international artists.
5. **Highlight BD talent:** Shout more about local artists who are successful. Don't let the celebration of DIY/grassroots culture make this seem disloyal.

1.3 Connection and Community

Almost everyone talked about a need for connection and community. There was a lot of discussion about whether VA's have a tendency to work in isolation, maybe more than other artforms like drama or music, where collaboration is essential.

1. **Opportunities for collaboration and exchange:** Many people talked about the benefit of collaboration, shared experience and knowledge exchange. These could be cross artform or within specific visual art specialisms.
2. **Share career pathways:** Understanding other artists' process and career progression is helpful, especially as social media focuses so much attention on outcome/product and where artists are right now.
3. **Visual Arts Socials:** These have been well received and people would like more opportunities like this.
4. **Connection in and between studio spaces:** Particularly in artist-led spaces, which have great potential to create connection and community. Artists felt that this needed to be done very intentionally so that the use of studio space isn't simply transactional and a non-hierarchical collaborative culture can be nurtured to support relationships and collaborations between artists, as well as between artists and audiences.
5. **Space to play and experiment together:** This could take the form of 2-3 week residencies/collaborative opportunities/peer to peer support, but importantly shouldn't necessarily have a required outcome. A 'Muck About' fund is necessary to provide financial support for this vital part of artistic process and career development.

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2. SECTOR NEEDS

Beyond their own individual needs, artists also talked about what they felt the sector needed in order to thrive. This mainly focused on buildings, space and gaps in infrastructure, as outlined below.

They also felt that as a district we should be shouting about the visual arts sector as much as we do performing arts, and focus on longer term projects with legacy, not just on big events and festivals.

2.1 Infrastructure/Space

1. **A City Centre Art Gallery:** The need for central, high-quality gallery and exhibition space, with support for local artist, was raised in almost all conversations.
2. **Informal spaces for exhibition/installation:** street galleries, empty shops, shop windows, markets, cafes and bars
3. **A mid-scale experimental art space:** Open to the public, that could incorporate gallery/maker space/studios/shop/events/residencies/international exchanges etc (NDSM in Amsterdam is interesting as a model)
4. **Permanent rather than temporary spaces:** For studios, exhibitions and community projects. Short-term guaranteed space would be better than short notice meanwhile spaces for community or short-term projects.
5. **A maker space:** To include high tech fabrication, 3D printing, woodwork facilities as well as equipment loan. Bradford Industrial Museum are in the early stages of establishing a maker space for public workshops and artist use.
6. **A ceramics workshop**
7. **A print-making workshop:** On a similar model and scale to West Yorkshire Print Workshop and Leeds Print Workshop
8. **A community space for visual arts:** Similar to Common Wealth for performing arts
9. **More Visual Arts Organisations:** There aren't enough visual arts organisations to meet everyone's needs, and existing organisations can't be everything for everyone.
10. **Commitment to commissioning local artists:** The council and organisations should commission local creative practitioners wherever possible.

2.2 Information and Understanding

1. **A visual arts newsletter**
2. **Regular information sessions:** where organisations with gallery/exhibition spaces share information about opportunities, exhibition criteria etc. The events should create a two-way conversation so that organisations can also hear and respond to ideas from artists (maybe every six months).
3. **Clarify commissioning and exhibiting processes:** Visual arts organisations and galleries should have transparent information on their websites about what's happening and how local artists can get involved.
4. **A list of exhibition/gallery spaces:** With criteria, cost, whether they show local artist work
5. **A central online What's On and Opportunities resource**

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2.3 Community and Connection

1. **Create a community of bar and café owners keen to exhibit work:** Support them with training and skills to establish an exhibition programme.
2. **A District-wide Open Show:** That is big and involves the whole district, combining individual and community work. [Manchester Open Show](#) is a good example
3. **District-wide Open Studios** to show the geographic spread of visual artists living and working in the District and highlight local creative communities. This could build on what Saltaire Inspired are already doing with the Saltaire Arts Trail.
4. **Training for arts organisations on how to work with communities**
5. **More visibility for work from marginalised communities**
6. **Encourage cross-cultural attendance at events/launches**
7. **A Visual Arts Symposium:** Bradford could focus on a specialism, maybe textiles, print, sci-art or community arts and deliver a symposium in response. Showcasing local artists as well as bringing in national/international inspiration and expertise.

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NEXT STEPS

There are many positives to build on, including the affordability of live/work space if it can be accessed, enthusiastic audiences, high levels of artistic freedom and lack of ego, a good cultural strategy to which the council are holding themselves to account, and a legacy of big names to build on.

As stated in the introduction: Understanding this shared ownership and allocating responsibility and leadership to those who can make change is the first step:

The findings of this report will be shared widely and become an essential resource in the continued consultation to work with BD25, Bradford Council, Museums and Galleries and other organisations across the district. Through this work we will achieve a strengthened and united aim to bring together power and resources in order to grow and support what already exists, as well as develop new initiatives where possible.

We need to use our collective power to connect with organisations outside the district who we think could bring important expertise and experience into Bradford, to share best practice and support anyone wanting to develop similar organisational models.

Bradford Producing Commits to:

1. Pushing forward the findings in this report in strategic meetings
2. Identifying opportunities for strategic collaboration and funding to address some of the needs.
3. Supporting district arts organisations to be open and transparent about opportunities, commissions and exhibition criteria.
4. Continuing to talk and listen to visual artists and organisations through 1-2-1 meetings., ensuring Bradford Producing Hub continues to be artist-led in our development of the sector.
5. Running quarterly Visual Arts Socials (while funding allows): Developing connection and community within the visual arts sector is a high priority for many, so we will continue to host the quarterly Bradford Visual Arts Social and look at supporting the development of critiques and peer support sessions for visual artists.

A final note from Alison: Thank you to all the visual artists and organisations who have met with me and given your time and thought to this process. It's been a privilege to meet you all and I hope the work we have done together will be the catalyst for a thriving visual arts scene in Bradford that looks beyond 2025 to something we can all contribute to and benefit from.

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APPENDICES

The information on exhibition and studio space below has been gathered during conversations or from online information. Any gaps are where meetings haven't yet been possible, or information is not easily available online.

Current Exhibition Space

(please contact alison@bdproducinghub.co.uk with any details of any exhibition space that isn't on this list)

Organisation	Content	Application/hire details
Impressions Gallery	Contemporary Photography	At least 18 months lead in time More info
Bradford Museums and Galleries	Cartwright Hall, Bradford Industrial Museum, and Cliffe Castle Museum	At least 18 months lead in time More info
Bradford School of Art	Dye House Gallery available for free hire	
Bradford Mechanics Institute	Exhibition space to hire	
Fuse Art Space	Mostly performance but some exhibition space	
Trapezium Gallery	Volunteer run exhibition space in temporary space, available to hire	Currently an 18 month waiting list for exhibitions. More info
Kala Sangam (Bradford Arts Centre from end of 2025)	Mostly performance but some exhibition space	12 months lead in time. Needs to align with <u>programming strands</u> Contact Alex Corwin
South Square Centre , Thornton	Community Arts Space and Gallery	For details on how to apply to exhibit contact Nushin , Gallery and Programme Manager
Apothecary , Thornton	Gallery and print-making studio	
Saltaire Inspired	Arts Trail and Makers Fair	Opportunities publicised on website in run up to events
Bronte Parsonage Museum , Haworth	Programme of artist exhibitions displayed within museum.	Exhibitions have connections to the Bronte's work and landscape. Contact Sassy Holmes for details
Solar Gallery , Ilkley	Commercial fine art gallery displaying work of local and regional artists in gallery space and shop	
Salts Mill	Hockney exhibitions and sometimes less well known artists/projects	

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Holding Space Gallery, Dandelion Cafe	Café with exhibition space	
The Bingley Gallery	David Starley is resident artist, but also exhibits other artists' work.	
The Saltaire Gallery	Commercial fine art gallery and workshop space set up by Nina Hunter/Saltaire Art School.	recently (Oct 23) announced, by not yet open.

Current Studio Space

(please contact alison@bdproducinghub.co.uk with any details of any studio space that isn't on this list)

Studio Name	Info	Cost
Keighley Creative	Studio space and plans for bigger space to include exhibitions. 10 studios currently, but up to 40 in new space.	Most £90 PCM, with largest space at £180 PCM
Wharf Street Studios, Shipley	16 studio and large co-working space. Co-working space also available to hire.	£240-£675 PCM for studio spaces Co-working: 2 days/week £50 Full time £100
Dockfield Road Creative Arts Hub, Shipley	12 studios (4 in communal space)	From £130 - £300 PCM including heating, power, wifi
Salt Works, Shipley	Co-working desk space	PCM for 2 days/week £59 Full time £121
South Square Centre, Thornton	11 studios	From £100 to £200 (1 large £270) PCM
Bank Street, BD1	Temporary Space through East Street Arts. One month notice to leave if space is commercially let.	

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Individual Artists

I spoke to artists for between an hour and 90 minutes each and spoke to 27 individual artists in total.

Age

20-30: 13%

30-40: 21%

40-50: 33%

50-60: 15%

Over 60: 18%

Ethnicity

Global Majority: 23%

White: 74%

Not known: 3%

Gender

Male: 23%

Female: 74%

Non-binary: 3%

Employment Status

Full time freelance: 55.5%

Part time freelance: 30%

Other: 14.5%

Organisations

I spoke to representatives from organisations for between an hour and 90 minutes each and spoke to 17 organisations in total.

Organisation	Role/Artform	Location
Museums and Galleries	Exhibitions/maker space	Across district
Bradford 2025	UK Year of Culture	Across district
Cultural Voice Forum	Supporting artist voice	Across district
Impressions	Photography exhibitions	Bradford
Bradford School of Art	Education/exhibitions	Bradford
Fayakunu	Heritage workshops and artist development/sales	Bradford
Trapezium	Exhibitions	Bradford
HIVE	Workshops/community/artist development	Shipley
People Powered Press	Workshops/community projects/desk space for creatives	Saltaire
Saltaire Inspired	Arts trail, community and artist projects	Saltaire/Shipley
Shipley Print Studio	Workshops, events and membership	Shipley
Young Masters Art School	Education for young people	Shipley

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South Square Centre	Gallery, community projects and studio space	Thornton
Bronte Parsonage Museum	Small exhibition space	Haworth
Keighley Creative	Studio space and gallery space in new building	Keighley
Aire Place Studios	Artist-led studio space with focus on disabled/neurodiverse artists.	Kirkstall, Leeds
Yorkshire Visual Arts Network	Yorkshire support network for visual arts (part of CVAN – Contemporary Visual Arts Network)	Yorkshire-wide

Live/Work Location (artists & orgs)

Bradford: 40%

Shipley: 26%

Keighley: 8%

Thornton: 5%

Cottingley: 1%

Bingley: 1%

Haworth: 1%

Idle: 1%

Across district: 8%

Outside Bradford district: 8%

Not known: 1%