

Cultural Manifesto – 2026

Introduction

Culture belongs to everyone. TUC North East, Yorkshire and Humber (TUC NEYH) seeks public and political support for this Cultural Manifesto for the region, which has been drafted by the TUC Yorkshire and Humber Creative and Leisure Industries Committee (CLIC).

The Cost of Living crisis, climate emergency, the impact of Brexit, seismic technological change (AI) and pressures on public service broadcasting mean the manifesto's demands for increased public investment, decent pay and conditions, equality of access, and regional fairness are more urgent than ever.

Article 27 of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights says, of culture:

- Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
- Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which they are the author.

National and international issues

■ **Cost of living crisis:** The cost of living crisis has left the creative industries and arts venues suffering from increased costs and cuts to income. The government must support the sector and those who work in it. Recent surveys (2024-25) show a growing proportion of freelance arts workers earn below the National Minimum Wage. Freelances, whatever their trading status, would benefit from a basic income guarantee.

■ **Brexit:** We support the government's commitment to improving the UK's trade and investment relationship with the EU by removing trade barriers and helping touring artists. Transportation and other problems affecting touring need to be resolved. Work advertisements asking EU passport holders only to apply must be opposed. Rejoining Creative Europe should be considered.

■ **Public Service Broadcasting (PSB):** Events at the end of 2025 showed that the BBC was in crisis and needs urgent reform. This must include protecting independent and viable PSB free from government interference, and increased investment based on a universal funding method, subject to public debate during the BBC Charter Review.

Strengthening the PSB remit for impartial, regulated broadcast news is critical as the viability of regional print and online news

outlets is uncertain. TUC NEYH supports the NUJ News Recovery plan.

(<https://tinyurl.com/nujnews-recovery-24>)

■ **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The government must recognise the threat to creators from rapidly expanding generative AI. Copyright law must be strengthened so that creatives can ensure that their intellectual property is protected from unlicensed harvesting of their work for model training. Practices must be transparent and include ethical AI safeguards, especially in public funding. CO₂ emissions from AI are a threat and must be minimised.

■ **Public funding for arts and culture must be equitable:** Arts funding as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product remains low and must be raised to at least the European average level. There remains a huge imbalance in public funding for the arts between London and elsewhere in England. This must be redressed without cuts or disruption to London-based arts organisations. Arts provision in rural areas needs to be increased.

■ **TUC NEYH urges increased investment in arts subjects at higher education level.**

■ **Climate emergency:** The arts' positive role in facing up to climate change needs to be supported; the negative environmental impact of cultural activities must be minimised.

Sustainability must be integral to cultural policy frameworks, not an add-on.

(<https://www.culturedeclares.org>)

- **#FixStreaming:** Royalties for performers and creators from streaming are woefully inadequate. The government must work with the industry and trades unions to agree an equitable, sustainable and transparent model for royalty distribution from streaming. The practice of buying out creators' rights must cease. (<https://tinyurl.com/MU-fixstreaming>)
- **Regeneration:** TUC NEYH values culture's role in sustaining shopping areas, supports USDAW's Retail Recovery Plan and endorses bringing closed buildings into creative use.

Local and regional government

We seek endorsement of these policies by local authorities, elected mayors and combined authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). We also call on all candidates standing for election to public office to support these policies.

- **Defend and when possible increase local authority (LA) spending on libraries, arts, art display spaces, heritage and culture:** While LA funding has been drastically reduced, public investment in the creative and leisure industries attracts at least twice as much private sector expenditure. In this region, levels of LA investment in arts, museums and heritage vary hugely between local authorities. LAs and LEPs should seek new and creative ways to support arts and culture such as collaborative working, shared funding, innovation, experimentation, specialised business and project support.
- **Maintain and regularly update a comprehensive arts, heritage and culture strategy for each authority:** This should actively support live performance including the night time economy, live venues, and festivals. LAs must encourage street performance and provide supportive busking guidance. Arts and culture must also be at the heart of regeneration. Evidence shows that Arts Council and LEP funding is more readily available where there is LA investment and a

Rehabilitation of existing buildings should be preferred over redevelopment.

(<https://tinyurl.com/usdaw-retail-recovery>)

- **Stadium Ticket Levy:** TUC NEYH calls for union involvement in the development of a Stadium Ticket Levy to support small venues.
- **Government support for the arts** should include sectoral tax relief, the Independent Film Tax Credit (IFTTC), theatre, orchestral and museum tax relief and business rates relief. Tax relief should be extended to choirs. Companies receiving tax relief must provide decent pay and working conditions.
- **All funding opportunities must be promoted to and accessible to grassroots organisations.**

clear strategy for the sector. A comprehensive strategy is crucial to securing additional funding. In the context of devolution, regional co-operation between LAs in developing arts, heritage and culture strategies is essential.

- **Encourage good employment and engagement practices in arts, heritage and cultural organisations that receive public funding:** LAs should use their powers to help eradicate low pay, poor working conditions and discrimination from the sector, for employees and freelancers alike. Public funding must be contingent upon all client organisations becoming accredited Living Wage employers and formally recognising the appropriate trades unions, entering into collective bargaining in good faith, adhering to applicable trade union agreements, and fully complying with health and safety legislation. Funded arts and cultural projects should differentiate between amateur, community and professional roles and ensure professionals are always properly remunerated.
- **Ensure that wherever possible local public investment in the arts is spent locally, benefits local workers and local communities and meets local needs and wants:** We call on LAs to include grant conditions that promote regional casting and local rehearsals in live performance and recorded media. Local workers should be employed in the

construction, development and maintenance of the cultural infrastructure and local artists should be employed in publicly funded theatres and concert halls.

■ **Equality and education:** We call on LAs to support the creative industries' efforts to improve the diversity of the sector's workforce. Every child and young person should have access to a strong cultural education. We welcome the government's National Plan for Music Education and the curriculum review's recognition of the importance of the arts as an intrinsic part of the curriculum. School students are entitled to study creative, artistic and technical subjects at all levels and we call on

LAs and Academies to support the education of the cultural workers of the future. Curricula need to be decolonialised.

■ **Lobby central government:** Public investment in the arts continues to be threatened by cuts to LA funding and the current schools assessment regime. We call on LAs to lobby central government for increased public investment in a thriving regional creative and leisure industries sector, and to protect and enhance arts education. Lobbying should focus on investment and support for the creative and digital sectors across government departments.

Employment in the creative and leisure industries

Far too often, the creative and leisure industries are blighted by poor working conditions, pay levels less than government minima, harassment and bullying, and even an expectation that professional arts practitioners should work without pay. Such practices must be eradicated.

Many workers in the sector are freelance or self-employed, with fewer legal rights than employees. Like employees however, such workers deserve decent pay and conditions and dignity and respect at work. Creative individuals should be free to choose and pursue freelance or staff career paths sure of equitable remuneration and employment rights.

We express solidarity with the efforts of all union campaigns to end low pay and no pay.

Organisations and individuals employing or engaging creative individuals must:

■ **implement trade union agreements to provide adequate remuneration.** While government minima need to be rigorously enforced, Living Wage Foundation pay levels

for all workers should be regarded as the minimum (<https://www.livingwage.org.uk>). Freelances should be paid equivalent fees. TUC NEYH supports Artists Union England's (AUE) Good Practice Charter. (<https://tinyurl.com/aue-gpc>)

■ **recognise trades unions and encourage employees and workers to join unions.**

■ **maintain high health and safety at work standards** including clear policies opposing harassment, discrimination and bullying at work with effective procedures for reporting, investigating and resolving complaints in line with ILO Convention 190.

■ **uphold all employment legislation**, extend it to cover freelance and self-employed workers and strive to improve terms and conditions.

■ **support regional casting and rehearsals** to increase opportunities for local performers to be considered for and participate in work in Yorkshire and the Humber. For casting or rehearsals outside the region, travel and subsistence expenses must be paid.

Culture belongs to everyone

Barriers to participation in culture on grounds of class, low income, age, disability, gender, race, ethnic or national origin, sexuality, caring responsibilities or other personal characteristics must be removed:

■ **Equality of access:** For audiences and performers/creators, including - public investment to make ticket prices to live performances affordable;

- continued 'free' access to libraries and museums;
- affordable, convenient and reliable public transport to encourage participation.
- **Equality of opportunity:** The growing economic exclusion of poor and middle-income earners from the cultural industries and from participatory arts projects must be reversed.
- **Discrimination = injustice:** People should be able to create, perform and enjoy art without fear of discrimination or persecution.

Cultural venues, promoters, and industry partners must ensure that practitioners and events promoting hate speech and discrimination are not given a platform. More must be done to encourage the broadest possible range of creative voices, venues and forms. TUC NEYH supports union initiatives such as BECTU's Theatre Diversity Action Plan and the Stage Sight campaign. (<https://tinyurl.com/bectu-tdap> <https://www.stagesight.org> <https://tinyurl.com/equity-dignity>)

The creative and leisure industries are IMPORTANT

- TV, film, reading, music, cabaret, comedy, circus, digital arts and technology, journalism, creative writing, theatre, dance, visual arts, modelling, creative use of materials and more provide millions of livelihoods.
- Arts and cultural education enhance job prospects in a fast-changing digital world.
- Arts and culture entertain, educate, challenge and encourage creativity.
- Arts and culture improve well-being, mental health and bring joy.
- Arts participation enhances community cohesion and reduces social exclusion.
- Arts and culture generate wealth.
- Culture is a catalyst for regeneration.
- Arts and culture bring positive change.

The sector is SUCCESSFUL and must be empowered

- Culture, media and sport remains a fast-growing sector of the UK economy. For 2023, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) estimated the sector's value to be £220.3bn - 9.3% of Gross Value Added (GVA). The UK's creative industries supported around 2.4 million jobs.
- The music industry has performed particularly strongly. According to UK Music's *This is Music 2025* report, music contributed £8bn to the UK economy in 2024, music exports generated £4.8bn, and the music sector provided 220,000 jobs. (www.ukmusic.org)

About the TUC YH Creative and Leisure Industries Committee

The TUC YH CLIC encourages participation by all trades unions. Those involved so far include Artists' Union England, the BECTU sector of Prospect, Equity, the Musicians' Union (MU), NASUWT, National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and UNISON.

The CLIC welcomes comments on this manifesto and may be contacted by e-mail at NorthEastYorkshireHumber@tuc.org.uk To join the CLIC's mailing list, please opt in at <https://eepurl.com/dvPQs9>.



EQUITY

