



# Evaluating Preston City Mela 2023

## June 2023



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

# Preston City Mela 2023 – Evaluation Framework

## Commissioning Evaluation as Part of Preston City Mela

Evaluation has always been part of Preston City Mela, though with 2023 Arts Council England (ACE) funding the Mela Board decided to commission an independent evaluator to support the development of evaluation approaches that would better identify outcomes of the Mela, and would reflect the Board's creative approaches.

Dr. Gavin Turnbull of Phronetix Ltd. was commissioned to support the development of an evaluation framework that would align Preston City Mela's purpose and the ACE outcomes, and could help the Mela Board respond to needs and plan for the future.

Work took place to articulate and localise ACE outcomes in the Preston City Mela context, and to explore a range of tools that could capture different aspects of the Mela story. Aware of the necessity for 'light touch' and creative approaches at large-scale events, proposed tools (resource permitting) included:

- Photography – capturing interaction, skills development, diversity and inclusion, sharing of culture etc. at events
- Interactive tent, enabling people to share their views, experiences and suggestions on a graffiti board / noticeboard
- Quick supported or self-completed survey of attendees – exploring experiences of / learning around the day, demographic information, and suggestions for the future
- Video / audio interviews with performers at events
- Interviews with participants following school / college and other workshops outside main event(s) – exploring outcomes for participants
- Online survey of artists (performers and workshop facilitators) following events and activities – exploring their experiences, perceived benefits / outcomes for participants, reflections of Mela in relation to investment principles, and suggestions for improvement

Given the range of activities, and the different nature and scale of events, it was decided to pilot surveys at the early season Egg Rolling event, with a view to full evaluation deployment at the main summer event.

## An Evaluation Framework: ACE Outcomes in a Preston City Mela Context

Preston City Mela's delivery approach lends itself to many of the ACE outcomes. However, some needed to be made more specific (and measurable) in the Preston City Mela context. To this end, a mapping was developed to identify core Preston City Mela ACE outcome areas (see Table 1 overleaf):

Building on this, we can identify a series of key evaluation questions for Preston City Mela that link to ACE outcomes:

- Did people at all stages of their life have opportunities to develop and express creativity, increasing their participation in creative activities?
- Did children and young people have opportunities to develop their creative skills and potential, inside and outside schools?
- Does the Mela provide a foundation for Preston to thrive through a collaborative approach to culture?
- Is people's access to cultural opportunities improved?
- Does the Mela work with communities, promoting understanding and increasing cultural engagement?
- Does the Mela connect people and places, including diaspora communities nationally and internationally?
- Does the Mela support new forms of cultural content and new ways of reaching audiences?
- Does it strengthen international connections of cultural organisations and creative industries?
- Does it ensure people have increased opportunities to sustain their careers in the creative industries, particularly those who are under-represented?

It is these questions that will underpin evaluation activity, whether in the form of participant or artist surveys, or through interviews, photography or other creative techniques.

**Table 1: Arts Council England and Preston Mela Outcomes**

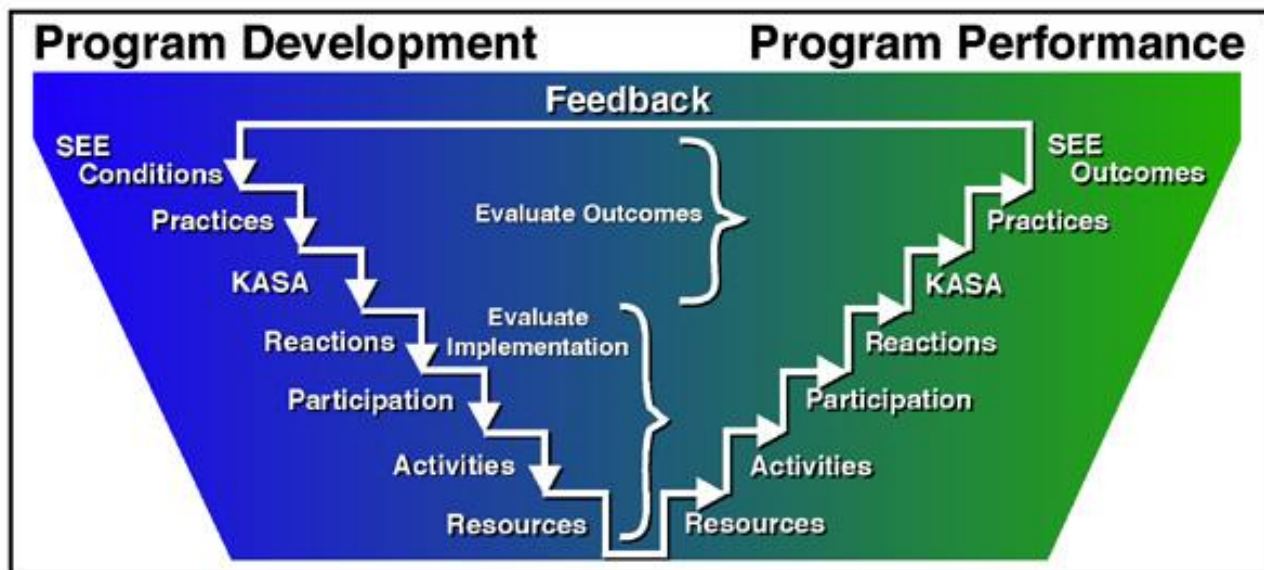
ACE Outcome Area	Core Preston Mela ACE Outcomes
<b>Creative People – supporting development and expression of creativity</b>	
Supporting people at all stages of their lives to design, develop and increase their participation in high-quality creative activities	People at all stages of their life have opportunities to develop and express creativity, increasing their participation in creative activities
Promoting creative opportunities in the local community to people at all stages of their lives	
Providing high-quality early years activities that reach families from a wider range of backgrounds	Children and young people have opportunities to develop their creative skills and potential, inside and outside schools
Widening and improving opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities inside schools	
Widening and improving opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities outside schools	
Improving teaching for creativity in schools	
Supporting children and young people to develop their creative skills and potential	
Developing and improving pathways towards careers in the creative industries	
<b>Cultural Communities – thriving through a collaborative approach to culture</b>	
Improving access to a full range of cultural opportunities wherever people live	People’s access to cultural opportunities is improved by the Mela
Working with communities to better understand and respond to their needs and interests, resulting in increased cultural engagement and the wide range of social benefits it brings	Preston City Mela works effectively with communities, promoting understanding and increasing cultural engagement
Working collaboratively in place-based partnerships to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ support and involve communities in high-quality culture</li> <li>▪ improve creative and cultural education for children and young people</li> <li>▪ improve health and wellbeing through creative and cultural activity</li> <li>▪ build skills and capacity in the cultural sector and grow its economic impact</li> </ul>	Preston City Mela provides a foundation for Preston to thrive through a collaborative approach to culture
Connecting people and places, including diaspora communities, nationally and internationally	Preston City Mela connects people and places, including diaspora communities nationally and internationally
<b>A Creative and Cultural Country – innovative, collaborative and international</b>	
Supporting new types of creative practice, new forms of cultural content and new ways of reaching new and existing audiences and participants	Preston City Mela supports new forms of cultural content and new ways of reaching audiences
Collaborating with other cultural organisations and/or with the commercial creative industries and/or with further and higher education, especially with a view to supporting innovation, research and development, new skills and the use of new technologies	
Strengthening the international connections of cultural organisations and creative and cultural practitioners, including co-production and touring	Preston City Mela strengthens international connections of cultural organisations and creative industries
Bringing world-class culture to audiences in England	
Giving more opportunities to people to start a professional career in the creative industries, especially those who are currently under-represented	Preston City Mela ensures people have increased opportunities to sustain their careers in the creative industries, particularly those who are under-represented
Ensuring people have opportunities to sustain their careers and fulfil their potential in the creative industries, especially those who are currently under-represented	

Additional areas relating to Arts Council England Investment Principles will also be explored, where appropriate, through feedback from artists and other stakeholders – it is expected that further questions around sustainability will be embedded into this process as a strategy is developed and survey tools evolve.

**Activity to Outcomes: Developing and Articulating a Logic Model**

Logic Modelling (aka intervention logic or programme theory) seeks to explain the process whereby activities lead to anticipated (and sometimes unexpected) outcomes. The process can be used in planning, by identifying the necessary steps required to deliver intended impacts and outcomes, and in evaluation, where activities and processes (and the logic model itself) are explored to identify expected and unexpected outcomes from inputs, activities and target populations (see Diagram 1).

**Diagram 1: The Targeting Outcomes of Program (TOP) Model (Bennet & Rockwell, 1995)**



This type of approach underpins the theoretical approach to the evaluation of Preston City Mela. Whilst the specific elements may differ from activity to activity, and type of artist / workshop engaged in, we can map out a general logic model to demonstrate (and later test or explore) how Preston City Mela activities lead to intended outcomes (Table 2).

Preston City Mela evaluation questions are informed by this approach, attempting to explore how activities lead to participant uptake, reactions and changes in knowledge, attitude, skills and aspirations (KASA) in line with ACE outcome areas.

There are limitations to the evaluation approach, with longer-term (distal) outcomes and impacts of activities difficult to identify due to the nature of events, the immediacy of contact with participants at events, and limited scope for further follow-up. This is, however, recognised in the ACE outcome model, with a focus on the provision of opportunities for participation and new skill development – short-term (proximal) outcomes that can be measured / understood at the point of activity (rather than by follow-ups at a later date).

**Table 2: General Logic Model: Preston City Mela**

Input / Resources	Actions / Activities	Context and Target Population	Outputs	Proximal Outcomes (near intervention) Satisfaction, knowledge, skills	Distal outcomes (longer term) Understanding, attitudes, behaviours
Performers Artists / Workshops Coordination / support Food outlets Community stallholders Partner contributions / support (school staff etc.)	Performers - Dancers - Musicians Artist Workshops, including: - Henna - Ebru marbling - Calligraphy - Warli painting - Kite making - Fabric birds - Silk painting - Block printing - Garland making Dhol Workshops (schools) Bollywood Dance workshops (school / college) Pre-Mela music workshops	Preston general public – all ages (all events) Families / children / young people (all events / school events)	Events attended Activities delivered People participating / attending	- opportunities provided to participate in creative activities - people access cultural opportunities and forms of cultural content that are new to them - children and young people develop new skills in creative / artistic area - international perspectives forge links between communities and diaspora communities - activities provide opportunities for artists to promote, sustain, and develop careers in creative industries	- increased understanding and awareness of different communities, promoting cultural awareness and engagement - collaborative approach provides foundation for Preston to thrive culturally - people’s long-term skills, knowledge, and engagement with different cultural and artistic opportunities are improved
Note: Each of the activity elements / project strands could develop a more specific logic model to explore outcomes in more detail. At present, a generic, overarching logic model is presented to show coherent overall contribution to Preston City Mela ACE outcomes.					

## Preston City Mela Events and Activity 2023

### 1. Egg Rolling 2023 (10<sup>th</sup> April 2023)

Preston Egg Rolling is an annual tradition in Avenham and Miller Parks within the city. In 2023 Preston City Mela partnered with Preston City Council and Harris Museum to deliver a range of creative performances and workshops in support of the event.

Inclement weather on the Bank Holiday Monday meant lower than expected numbers attended the Egg Rolling event, and this particularly affected open-air performers. Workshops and other events were, however, generally well attended, with relatively high estimated participation numbers (Table 2).

**Table 2: Estimated participants, Preston City Mela Egg Rolling events and workshops, 2023**

Organisation / Name	Activity / Performance	Participants (estimated)
Abhi Dance Academy	Indian Traditional & contemporary dances	8
ArteeCraft	Warli Painting, Traditional Kite making, Fabric Birds (Fabric Recycling)	100
Arts 2 Heal	Ebru Marbling workshop	120
Bhagyalakshmi Reddy	Henna art	60
Brian Whitmore Calligraphy	Brian Whitmore Calligraphy	100
Farzana Patel	Henna art	60
Gujarat Hindu Society	Dance performance	9
Jane Blackburn Arts	Silk painting workshop	120
Mrs. Viraj Gandhi	Henna art	50
The Twin Violins	Performance	2
Yogini Patel	Henna art	55
Young Preston Bollywood	Bollywood Fusion Dances	20

Source: Artist survey responses. Participants are estimated numbers for each activity.

### Participant Feedback

The Egg Rolling event was used as an opportunity to pilot surveys for participants and for artists to feed back their experiences.

38 attendees agreed to take part in a short survey (self-completed or supported by a member of Preston City Mela staff). Many of these were parents or representatives of larger family groups:

- 92% were aged between 25 and 54 years
- 91% were female
- 82% identified as White (72.6% across Preston)
- The vast majority attended with family members and / or children



When asked to agree or disagree with a range of statements:

- 92% reported having the opportunity to do something artistic or creative (*agreed or strongly agreed*)
- 84% had learnt or tried out new skills
- 79% learnt about different cultures and arts
- 79% reported not usually getting these kinds of arts / cultural experiences in Preston
- 87% agreed / strongly agreed that Preston City Mela celebrates different cultures, arts and experiences

Selected comments from participants suggest that activities demonstrated ACE outcomes around increasing participation in creative activities among local communities, supporting children to be creative, and improving access to cultural activities, and improving cultural education for children and young people:

- “People of all ages and cultures coming together, experiencing new things, mindfulness, and wellbeing, stimulation”
- “My little girl was excited to come and have Henna - she remembered the stall from last year”
- “Lots of fun interactive things to do for the children to enjoy”
- “It increases knowledge and awareness of different cultures”
- “Henna tattoo - enjoyed learning about it”
- “Great new activities for all ages”
- “Celebrating different cultures in our community”
- “It's very diverse and it's lovely to see all different cultures taking part”
- “Brings communities together... ‘harmony’”

Making suggestions for the future, almost half of responses requested ‘more events’, potentially with seasonal workshops or pop-ups in the town centre. It was unclear how many people already knew about Preston City Mela’s wider programme and there may be opportunities for wider promotion in this area. To this end, several attendees also suggested the need to advertise and promote events more.

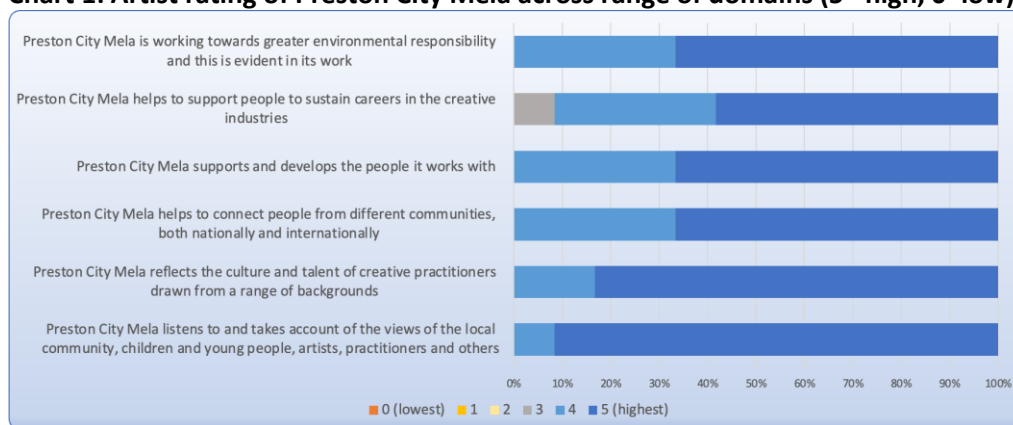
Several attendees also commented on the potential involvement of more cultures at the event, particularly asylum seeker and Eastern European populations of Preston. As Preston City Mela is just one part of the wider event, it was unclear whether this was an issue for the Mela itself, or whether it reflects opportunities for the wider partnership.

### **Artist Feedback**

Compared to the summer programme, the number of artists attending the event was small, and feedback was therefore relatively limited.

Responses did, however, suggest that the Mela was well run and was effective in connecting people from different communities. Asked to rate whether Preston City Mela listens to artists and practitioners, supports careers in the creative industries, helps to connect different communities, and works towards environmental responsibility, artists responded positively in almost all areas (Chart 1).

**Chart 1: Artist rating of Preston City Mela across range of domains (5= high, 0=low)**



Source: Artist survey responses

Comments from artists included:

- “The model as is provides a colourful, engaging and enjoyable number of activities at partner events, and especially at the annual Preston City Mela. It is able to showcase and share quality artistic and cultural activities and creates an informative and enjoyable experience to a broad range of people, providing for educational and well being opportunities and experiences.”
- “Preston mela doing a great job for organising this events and connect people from different communities.”
- “The Mela is always very well run.”

Artists also made several suggestions for future consideration or development:

- “Marquee in the event of a heavy downpour.”

- *“More outreach arts activities would broaden their artistic and cultural reach to different sectors of the community. If possible; develop and link their artists to international exchange programs with their contacts in other countries? Continue to work with ACE and take up opportunities to deliver on strategy aims.”*
- *“Create more opportunities to engage in more festivals, there is much demand and the feedback from the participants is extremely positive across all the activities on offer.”*
- *“Could have more collaborative activities with schools and other community organisations.”*
- *“Perhaps we could have a collaboration of artists or a greater variety of artists.”*
- *“The events and activities could be grown and the infrastructure and support to the organizers could be improved through secured and increased funding. (Much voluntary and dedicated work is supporting these events).”*
- *“Maybe more events”*

### **Final Reflections**

- Despite poor weather conditions, uptake of and satisfaction with Preston City Mela activities was high.
- Performances were worst affected by the weather, and it may be necessary to consider contingencies in case of poor weather to improve the experience for all involved.
- There is good evidence of ACE-related outcomes – engagement with arts and cultural experiences across ages.
- There is demand for more activities and events, and for greater promotion. Awareness of summer events appeared relatively low – there may be greater opportunity for promotion of all Preston City Mela activities and events here (perhaps including social media).
- Multiple delivery bodies at Egg Rolling meant there was some uncertainty among attendees about what activities were being evaluated / were part of Mela. There were also multiple evaluations taking place – this would benefit from greater coordination / collaboration at future events.
- Survey tools seemed reasonably well received – slight revisions were required in layout and content. Some lower scoring of outcomes may have been due to early contact with attendees before they’d had chance to participate in activities. Future data collection to ensure respondents have had an opportunity to engage with activities prior to completing the survey.

## **2. Preston City Mela at Let’s Grow Preston Spring Fair (1st May, 2023)**

Let’s Grow Preston is a local charity promoting horticultural and environmental issues across the city. Every year Let’s Grow Preston hosts a Spring Fair at its community growing project in the Ashton area of the city, with selected Preston City Mela artists alongside other performers (such as bagpipe players and a local community choir).

**Table 3: Estimated participants, Preston City Mela Let’s Grow events and workshops, 2023**

<b>Organisation / Name</b>	<b>Activity / Performance</b>	<b>Participants (estimated)</b>
ArteeCraft	Flower garland making and block printing	150-175
Arts 2 Heal	Ebru Marbling workshop	100-120
Brian Whitmore Calligraphy	Brian Whitmore Calligraphy	75
Farzana Patel	Henna art	unknown
Rohith Bandi	Rapper	unknown
Manisha Chauhan	Henna art	35-45

### **Participant Feedback**



20 people attending the event agreed to complete a survey about their views and experiences of Preston City Mela’s activities at the Let’s Grow event. Of these:

- 84% were female (n=16), 16% male (n=3)
- 75% identified as White or White British (n=15), and 25% as Asian or Asian British (n=5)
- 35% were aged 25-39, 55% aged 40-54, and 10% aged 55-64 (there were also children present as part of families)

- 85% of attendees completing a survey came to the event with their families, 15% with friends

When asked to agree or disagree with a range of statements:

- All respondents reported having the opportunity to do something artistic or creative (*agreed or strongly agreed*)
- All reported having learnt or tried out new skills
- All reported having learnt about different cultures and arts
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed that Preston City Mela celebrates different cultures, arts and experiences
- 75% agreed or strongly agreed that Preston City Mela celebrates their own culture and helps to share it
- All believed that celebrations of arts and creativity like this are important in Preston

Selected comments in relation to outcomes include:

- *"We have been able to have a go at lots of activities we've never done before its been Fantastically Outstanding!!!"*
- *"Learnt about henna and the dancing"*
- *"We enjoyed watching the children trying all sorts of new things"*
- *"Absolutely amazing that there is so much for the kids to do and its all free!"*
- *"Great to see other cultures"*
- *"Great to bring communities together"*
- *"ITS FREE AND CELEBRATES CULTURES, ITS GREAT!"*
- *"Great to see so many people from all backgrounds mixing and having fun"*
- *"It reflects the diverse community we live in"*
- *"It's wonderful to see so many people from all backgrounds together enjoying the park, the music, dancing and crafts"*
- *"Great to have so much on offer for families that's free!"*

90% of respondents gave feedback requesting more sessions / events like this, with one person suggesting a monthly event.

### **Artist Feedback**

A brief artist feedback form following the event suggested that participants taking part in activities were aged from four to seventy years of age.

In addition to learning about the specific skills and techniques of the workshop, artists reported that:

- *"Participants conveyed the activities are very soothing and therapeutic. Parents of young children were amazed to see them engrossed in the activities and enjoyed helping them too."*
- *"Participants are very interested in taking part in new activities and love learning about the new traditions and cultures. They are eager to attend more events and performances and question about where new events will take place etc."*
- *"There were lots of interactions between artists and participants about various cultures and exchanging ideas."*
- *"It brings multiple people across Preston and further together, through the exploration of new cultures, traditions and through entertainment etc."*
- *"Lots of people were very inspired and were asking about calligraphy workshops in the Preston Area"*
- *"I had some veterans who had suffered from PTSD who engaged in the calligraphy and said how much they enjoyed how relaxing it was and how it cleared the mind...They have taken my details and are looking to use these benefits of calligraphy in the future within the group and gardens..."*
- *"I was trying to portray my potential to unknown people. Some audience didn't know about hip-hop music. Now they knew it."*
- *"In addition to the technical skills, participants also developed their creativity, patience, and attention to detail. Overall, the Ebru Marbling workshop was a great opportunity for the public to learn a new skill and connect with their community through art."*
- *"Many [attendees] asked where to source resources and whether further workshops were available whilst a few had visited previous festivals and were keen to take part once again."*

Several artists also collected additional comments from participants:

- *"I love that we have something like this to attend to"*

- *“I am amazed to see my child doing some craft activities away from the gadgets”*
- *“We can easily spend all day, there is so much to see and learn here”*
- *“I would love to practice the skills I have learned today and maybe can start a crafting group in my community”*

Artists also made several suggestions about possible future development:

- *[Calligraphy] “Perhaps more time and space for people to have a go...I only had 2 spaces...Drop in workshops are tricky as people want to have a go there and then”*
- *“Have activities that adults can also participate in alongside their kids.”*
- *“This event needs more saying that it’s free and bigger posters all over event and advertise on social media.”*

### **Final Reflections**

- Whilst there are relatively small numbers of evaluations, there is apparent strength in the feedback received in terms of:
  - Provision of accessible (and free) activities for children and adults
  - Evidence of opportunities for all ages to engage in creative activities, and of interest in taking some of these creative skills forward in the future
  - Evidence of engagement around bringing different cultures and communities together
- With feedback around people wanting to take activities forward, there may be value in providing information about how to access further information or resources
- Given that Preston City Mela activities operate alongside other activities at this event, there is some suggestion that attendees are (understandably) unclear as to what is Preston City Mela and what isn’t. This isn’t an issue in itself, though can make evaluating the PCM strand problematic. There may be value in both promoting and clarifying Preston City Mela at events such as this with a flyer outlining what Preston City Mela is, and what its aims are. This can also help to signpost people to related events.

### **3. Preston City Mela Dhol Training for Young People**

Dhol Frequency created a tailored 12-week course for children and young people in Preston, supplemented by support and mentoring sessions conducted by local dhol players in advance of Preston City Mela.

Participants in the training were aged between 6 and 15 years of age. 71% were male and 29% female.

Both those participating in the training, and parents (where children were younger) reported that they (or their children) had opportunities to be artistic and creative, learnt new skills and learnt more about the musical, artistic and cultural traditions of South Asian communities. Benefits of the sessions included:

*“I have enjoyed learning a new skill and playing the dhol with friends” – Young Person (13)*

*“My daughter has enjoyed playing the Dhol. It is something different for her and has helped with her confidence in trying out new classes.” – Parent / Carer*

*“To learn and play a musical instrument – dhol, which is part of our culture and heritage.” – Parent /Carer*

In addition to the core skills of playing the dhol, participants identified a range of other benefits relating to wider learning, confidence and collaboration with others:

*“xxx has enjoyed learning beats of the dhol instrument. He has enjoyed playing part of a team.” – Parent / carer*

*“I enjoyed that we got many opportunities to perform in front of large audiences around Preston and learnt a new instrument while expanding our musical knowledge about India.” – Young Person (12)*

*“I learnt that you can do anything, because I used to watch my Dad play and think 'how can you do that', but with practice I gradually got better.. I’m thankful for this opportunity as it hasn’t just helped me learn a new instrument, it pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me more confident.” – Young Person (9)*

Additional classes support, mentoring and practice sessions were well received, with 85% saying they were 'very helpful' and 15% 'fairly helpful'. Several parents reported on the well organised sessions, friendly and welcoming approach, with one saying that facilitators *"made each child feel special regardless of ability"*.

Looking to the future, parents and young people would be keen for classes to continue, either enabling the continuation of interest in the dhol that has been generated, or with the addition of other workshops around a wider range of instruments, music or dance (for example, harmonium, table, sitar, bhangra dance classes etc.):

*"Continue to fund and find South Asian musicians to teach the next generation so that these events can continue for many more years."* – Parent

The desire for further progression opportunities was also mentioned, as well as the potential to *"talk about career opportunities in this field so people can take their passion further."*:

*"I would like to continue dhol lessons to a more advanced stage and I hope to keep this talent throughout my life."* – Young Person (9)

The project has highlighted the potential for further music training and workshops. There appear to be opportunities for ongoing music programmes for young people in relation to instruments such as dhol, and other aspects of South Asian musical heritage.

#### **4. Pre-Mela Workshops on Traditional South Asian Music**

In the build-up to the June Mela event, three international artists (drummer Prathap Ramachandra, flute and violin player Vijay Venkat, and vocalist Vamshikrishna) conducted individual workshops with an adult group and a group of children and young people.

16 children and young people aged between 7 and 18 years of age (average = 12) took part in the music workshops. 94% of these were female.

All participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had opportunities to be creative, try out new skills and learn about the musical, artistic and cultural traditions of South Asian communities. Participants also spoke positively about the interactive nature of the workshops, learning about and trying different musical instruments, and finding out more about Indian culture and music. Comments included:

*"Loved learning all about the basics of the three musical instruments and especially being hands on with the flute."*

*"I enjoyed being able to learn these different and unique aspects of Indian culture and music."*

13 adults between the ages of 16 and 64 took part in workshops. 54% were in the 40-54 age group, 55% of those who gave information were female, and all but one identified their ethnicity as Asian or Asian British.

All participants except one (where there may have been an issue in completing the form) agreed or strongly agree that they had opportunities to be artistic and creative, had learnt or tried out new skills, and had also learnt about musical, artistic and cultural traditions of South Asian communities. In many cases, the musical skill went hand in hand with learning and celebration of the cultural context.

*"Learnt more about the nuances of carnatic music and felt good to be one with Indian culture (South Indian). Enjoyed flute very much. Might start learning it."*

*"Helps you connect to your roots.. [and] how to use classical music and cultural traditions in your daily life."*

*"It has opened up a passion [in] my music and [I] loved the way each workshop explained the basics of music and understood it better"*

*"It's okay to experiment and learn something new at any stage of life without having previous knowledge."*

Benefits of both the workshops, and wider Preston City Mela activity were described by both by young people and adults:

*“It gives us a way to celebrate and learn more about different aspects of our culture”*

*“It helps to share the beauty of my culture to people of Preston and my children are born and brought up here.”*

*“Bringing communities together, team work, festive atmosphere.”*

In terms of developments for the future, many participants mentioned the hope for more activities. Broken down, this tended to mean a) a greater number of events, performances and workshops, b) a wider variety of workshops (for example different instruments), and c) more sessions or sessions on a larger scale to involve more members of the community. Several young people spoke about the need for promotion of what’s on, particularly through social media.

As with dhol training, there also appears to be the potential for exploring more sustained education and training around a range of South Asian musical instruments in the local area.

## **5. Bollywood Dance – Archbishop Temple School and Newman College**

Abhinandana Dance Academy worked with 11 contemporary dance students at a Further Education College (Newman College) and a group of 12 students from a secondary school (Archbishop Temple) during April and May 2023, delivering three Bollywood classes at each setting. The majority of students participating were of non-Asian ethnic background.

The Bollywood dances included storytelling, fusion elements with contemporary dances and regional folk dances from India which helped students understand not only the concept of Indian dance but also promoted community cohesion through dance.

For college students (with more background dance experience), each session focussed on Indian Classical, Folk and Bollywood dances. The young women picked up the dances really well but needed fine tuning with the technique. Aspects of storytelling, expressions and footwork were discussed. Music was provided, and the dance routine was videoed to enable them to practice. The project opened doors for introducing South Asian culture through Indian dance to non-Asian background students.

College students performed their dance in front of a large audience at the Preston City Mela event on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2023.



In the secondary school, students had a mix of prior dance experience, with some never previously having opportunities to learn through dance despite being interested. Students were initially assessed to understand their capability to learn basic or intermediate Bollywood dances. Based on that, the training was one Indian dance piece each week giving them time to practice for the rest of the week. Music was provided, and the dance routine was videoed to enable them to practice.

Bollywood to them was a vibrant and a contrasting dance form which made them very inquisitive and enthusiastic to learn with a focus. The group was supposed to perform at the Preston City Mela but unfortunately their exam dates

clashed with the Mela date. We decided to video their dances as a way of documenting their work. Colourful costumes and jewellery was provided to the performers, and students were thrilled to wear those costumes and perform for the videoshoot.

Youtube videos of both groups are available at the links below:

Cardinal Newman College	Archbishop Temple School
<a href="https://youtu.be/x2zPqG_MTBE">https://youtu.be/x2zPqG_MTBE</a>	<a href="https://youtu.be/bDt2q0a4IZQ">https://youtu.be/bDt2q0a4IZQ</a>
<a href="https://youtu.be/ofhXCNyqxH8">https://youtu.be/ofhXCNyqxH8</a>	<a href="https://youtu.be/ivegB6fXsPA">https://youtu.be/ivegB6fXsPA</a>

Feedback from the students included:

*“It was amazing, incredible, the atmosphere was spectacular.”*

*“The new dance style was challenging at first but after practising it helped us expand our dance vocabulary and we started to feel comfortable doing it.”*

*“When we were on the stage it was amazing it made us understand a different culture.”*

Feedback from school staff included:

*“Pupils developed their knowledge and understanding on various types of Indian dance. They learnt key movements, they learnt where the movement originated from and the history behind it... They have deepened their knowledge and understanding of different dance cultures and dance styles. It has also given them the opportunity to work with professionals from outside the education sector.”*

*“We appreciate the opportunity given to the pupils. It has enabled them to be more diverse and learn things in a new way.”*

It was suggested that, within the school group, students could be given greater opportunity to perform what they had learnt. The examination / revision clash with the main Mela event clearly impacted on this.

## 6. Preston City Mela – Main Celebration Event, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2023

The main Preston City Mela celebration event took place on Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> June in Moor Park, Preston. The day involved a programme of 17 performing acts with 105 performers on the main stage and in the park, together with 20 workshops and 25 stallholders from community organisations (some of whom also ran participatory activities such as block printing and disability cycling). The event was also accompanied by a fun fair.

An estimated 5,000 people attended the event, which took place in good weather.

The event was evaluated using several methods to gain feedback from the public, performers, workshop facilitators and community organisations. Approaches included:

- Surveys with a sample of 94 attendees, who received a ‘Preston City Mela goody bag’ for participating.
- Surveys of stakeholders (workshop facilitators, stallholders)
- Video interviews with performers on the main stage
- Event photography

In addition to the overall estimated attendance, workshop artists reported high participation in a wide range of creative arts activities (Table 4). Artists describe the age range of those taking part in activities as being “all ages” or “2 to 80”, though several activities were targeted at those under the age of 18 years.



**Table 4: Estimated workshop participants, Preston City Mela Summer Event, 2023**

Organisation / Name	Activity / Performance	Participants (estimated)
Anna Bailey, The Nest	Mandala Art	80
ArteeCraft (6 artists)	Saree draping, Warli painting, block printing, flower garland making, Rangoli and fabric recycling (rag mats)	500
ArtFull	Birds of paradise - origami	80
Arts 2 Heal	Ebru marbling workshop	150
Bhagyalakshmi Reddy	Henna art	60
Brian Whitmore Calligraphy	Calligraphy	450
Divya Patel	Henna art	Not known
Farzana Patel	Henna art	Not known
Jane Blackburn Arts	Silk painting workshop	120
Manisha Chauhan	Henna art	Not known
Maryam Golubeva	Papercutting workshop	50
Maglila Reynolds	Holistic therapy – Indian head massage	Not known
Mohini Soni	Henna art	100
Nirali Parekh	Henna art	Not known
Razwan Ul-Haq	Calligraphy	Not known
Dragonfly Holistics Beauty	Holistic therapy – Indian head massage	30
Shnehil Patel	Henna art	150
Tapasvi Trivedi	Madhubani painting	Not known
Yogini Patel	Henna art	50
Viraj Ganghi	Bangle making	60

Source: Artist survey responses. Participants are estimated numbers for each activity.

### **Participant Feedback**

94 people attending the event agreed to provide feedback about their experience (and the experience of their family / friends) on the day. Of those completing the survey:

- 78% were female (22% male)
- Ages ranged across the spectrum, with 72% aged between 25 and 54 (note: adults also completed the form on behalf of children / wider family members so young children are not directly represented in this count)
- 67% described their ethnicity as 'Asian or Asian British', with 22% 'White or White British'. Other ethnic groups included 'Black / Black British' and 'Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Group'.
- 77% of respondents came to the Preston City Mela event with family and / or children
- 78% of people came to Preston (or Moor Park) specifically to attend the event, 12% for a trip out, and 10% for other reasons (to meet friends, volunteer / perform, or they live in the area)



It is worth noting that respondents may be more reflective of those taking part in artist workshop activities (compared for example to those attending primarily to watch main stage acts) since this was the area where survey activity took place and 'goody bags' were distributed.

When asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed with a range of statements:

- 92% had the opportunity to do something artistic or creative (65% strongly agreed)

- 77% tried out new skills (54% strongly agreed)
- 88% learnt something about the musical, artistic and cultural traditions of South Asian communities (62% strongly agreed)
- 93% agreed that Preston City Mela celebrates different arts and experiences
- 83% agreed that Preston City Mela celebrates their culture and helps people to share it

Respondents reported a wide range of things they learnt or enjoyed about the event. In some cases this related to a specific activity, performance, or workshop, for example *“Like Qawwali band”, “Paper cutting”, “my kids loved the Arabic writing, making bracelets and the Mandala decorations”, “Food!”*.

Others responded more broadly, evidencing enjoyment and learning in relation to creative activities, new skills, and different cultural music and arts:

*“I love the dancing, food and musical acts.”*

*“I enjoyed all of the performances, especially the children’s performances as it was really good to see their skills.”*

*“A way to see our culture and the wider community come together, and see some wonderful talented artists.”*

*“We loved all the different crafts that we could learn and try.”*

*“Lots of new arts and crafts this year.”*

*“All of the art activities are great. It’s good to learn about a culture that’s different from mine.”*

*“Making new stuff and mixing with people.”*

*“There are loads of new ways of learning and developing new skills.”*

*“We love coming and learning about different cultures. We have done crafts, eaten food we haven’t tried before and danced the day away!!”*

*“We have met lots of lovely people, tried new arts, saw the drummers and the dancers.”*

Benefits were also evident in terms of wider goals of community togetherness, whether in terms of celebrating different and diverse cultures, or simply the opportunity for meeting people and gathering across interests, ages and communities:

*“Mela means get together. Literally it has been a great get together and meeting new friends from all walks of life.”*

*“Great to learn about different culture and celebrate it.”*

*“Everyone is able to come together to celebrate culture and do lots of activities.”*

*“It’s a lovely way to get people in the community out, of all ages.”*

*“Britain needs to know that it was and IS a melting pot of cultures. This is what makes us better and makes Preston a great place to live.”*

*“A good cultural day out in the limited sunny days.”*

*“It’s a great opportunity for the community to meet as it’s outdoors, it’s great for people that are clinically vulnerable.”*

Feedback about the event on social media (Preston City Mela Facebook) also reflected some of these points:

*“Terrific family friendly village fair atmosphere... Great gratitude is due to the organisers. The Mela felt vibrant but safe, informal but well organized – a great cornerstone to a great multi-cultural community.”*

*“We loved it today, thank you to all who organized, the performers and especially the very patient people who show you how to do the crafts. Patience of a saint comes to mind. The lady doing the bookmarks with the dotty patterns was lovely.”*

*“It was amazing... loved art and craft and bhangra music, dancing.”*

Survey respondents were also asked about ways in which the event could be improved or developed in the future. Responses included:

- Carry on / continue next year (multiple responses)
- ‘Bigger and better’ (multiple responses): more stalls / more diverse communities involved / bigger artists / more bands / an extra day
- More / better food stalls
- More events (multiple responses)
- Advertise / promote more (multiple responses) – *“Wonderful organising, but more promotion is needed to bring more crowds in.”*
- More facilities for picnics (multiple responses)
- *“Would love to learn the history of people who came to Preston in the 60's 70's 80's who came from Asia. Their hopes, dreams, difficulties and any discrimination encountered.”*
- *“Why do you have a VIP area?”*

There were also conflicting views about the use of Moor Park. Whilst some thought that it worked well, with more space for activities, others called for it to go back to Avenham Park. Several people mentioned a lack of awareness about the event’s location prior to coming.

### **Performer Feedback**

Mainstage performers took part in brief video interviews after leaving the stage. They were asked about their experience of the Preston City Mela, and about what it meant to them. Responses included:



*“Such a lovely crowd we absolutely enjoyed every single bit of our performance every single bit of being here it's our privilege to be here.” - Giddha Radio Panj Da*

*“It was amazing, it was so much fun as usual and it was great to showcase my culture with people who may not have already experienced before. It was lovely to see people in the audience joining in.” - Abhinandana Dance Academy*

*“It's such an amazing event so vibrant. It's wonderful to play Bollywood music it's what I love the most. People are extremely friendly. Weather was with us. Everybody is having their best time ever. The food and everything around looks amazing.” – Darius Violin*

*“We are from Confucius institute University of Central Lancashire, we are really excited to be joining Preston City Mela. It is a wonderful community festival. You can see the Dragons behind it is fusion of different cultures coming together which is wonderful.” – Chinese Dragon Dance*

*“It is so important to give these art forms a platform like this especially this setting in the park , anybody walking through the park can join in and learn something new about our culture.” – Nirmal Sidhu*

*“Preston is one of the cities in UK with biggest Asian population, so Mela is really important to showcase our culture.” – Dhol Frequency*

*"It's exciting, it's really good that all communities come together, many more artists are set to perform, it should be a good one this year, weather is also looking good." - DJNME*



*"What an amazing experience. The crowd was absolutely fantastic." – PBN*

*"It was such a lovely stage with lovely people in the audience it was really pushing us to give our energy. Lovely experience. The compere was also amazing he really hyped up the audience and he spoke some amazing words about us." – Meghna and Aditi Kuchipudi Graduates*

*"Preston you're absolutely amazing. You guys made so much noise! Preston is number one in the country thank you very much." – Ultimate Bhangra*

### **Artist / Workshop Feedback**

Artist / workshops leads were asked to complete an evaluation of their experience of Preston City Mela after the event. 15 out of the 20 artists provided feedback about their workshops, the event and Preston City Mela:

- 93% agreed (or strongly agreed) that participants had opportunities to take part in quality creative opportunities, access different cultural experiences and learn new skills (note: one response strongly disagreed with all statements but this may have been in error since qualitative feedback does not reflect this, nor highlight any issues / concerns)
- 86% agreed that participants learnt something about the musical and / or cultural traditions of South Asian communities

Whilst responses are expected to be positive in these areas, artists and workshop facilitators also provided additional feedback around the benefits of their activity that included outcomes related to participating in creative opportunities, learning skills, understanding and sharing cultures, collective experiences and mental wellbeing:

*"Taking part in an enjoyable and relaxing activity. Learning new skills, producing quality artwork to take home and share with wider family members and friends. Taking part in the group activity. Gaining self-confidence and a sense of achievement through quality activity with a high standard of art produced. Learning about different cultures and having fun in a safe and enjoyable atmosphere. All participants, without exception were very happy and proud with what they had produced."*

*"Madubani painting workshop benefits to showcase an ancient and popular Indian art form to all ages of participants. It helps the participants from different culture to learn something about the various art forms used in Indian culture and this helps developing and learning new skills of the participants. The younger participants had fun painting their favourite animals/birds and flowers on the bookmarks. The art workshop helps all ages to concentrate and relax. This overall helps their mental health and wellbeing."*

*"People seem to love partaking in my Calligraphy workshops and demonstrations...learning a new creative skill, which in turn helps mindfulness and wellbeing...So many people have asked me if I run workshops in the Preston Area after seeing me working."*

*"Ebru marbling ... provided numerous benefits for both participants and observers of all ages and abilities. For participants, it offered a creative outlet and a chance to express themselves artistically, regardless of their skill level... Participating in Ebru marbling fosters artistic skill-building, allowing individuals to explore their creativity, experiment with colours, and develop a unique artistic style. Moreover, as participants delve into this traditional Turkish art form, they gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures, promoting cross-cultural understanding and fostering a sense of global artistic heritage."*

*"Learning about the art of papercutting, learning new skills, designs, patterns, developing their creativity, socializing, getting inspired, learning to use manicure scissors in a new creative way."*

Participant feedback gathered by artists also reflected this:

*“It is inspiring to witness people of all ages and abilities engage in this art with such enthusiasm and joy. The sense of community and appreciation for creativity that fills the atmosphere is truly heartwarming.”*

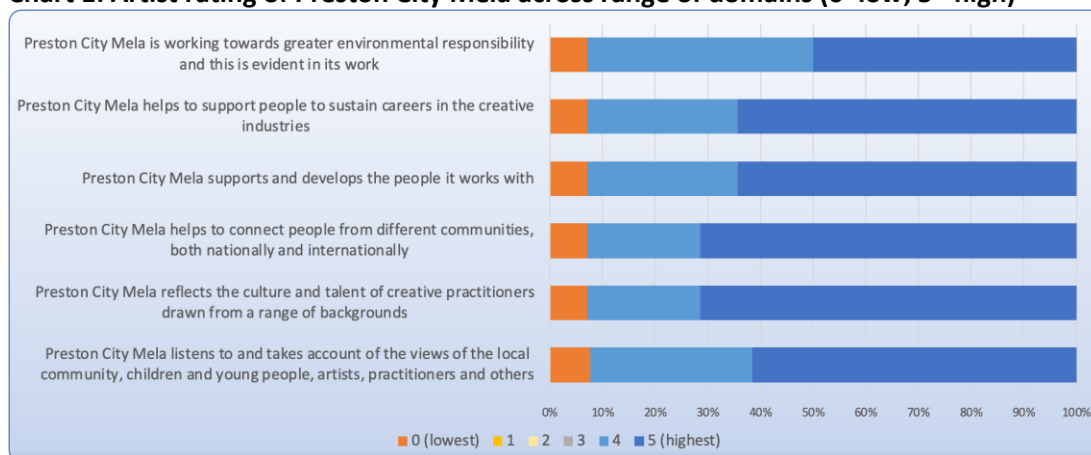
*“Participating in the Ebru marbling was a therapeutic experience. It felt incredibly calming and allowed me to escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. I felt a sense of accomplishment and joy seeing the beautiful artwork I created, and it inspired me to continue exploring my creative side.”*

Artists and workshop facilitators spoke positively about the event, with suggestions for future development / improvement including:

- More time
- *“Felt could have been situated closer and more visible”*
- Adaptations to workshop(s) / programme to enable people to have more of a go at some activities
- Potential for dedicated artist demonstrations
- An exhibition space for people to show work produced in workshops (and other work by artists)
- Improved signage / information about stall times / breaks etc.
- Seating: *“A lot of people mentioned that there wasn't much seating around the stage area, even some temp seating could work?”*
- An international exchange programme: *“Develop a group of artists and other members of the community to share and learn arts forms from South Asia...thus creating a larger pool of people to facilitate the workshop programme and more importantly pass on and preserve the traditional art forms from being lost.”*

Asked about the operation of Preston City Mela itself, almost all responses were positive. Ranking a series of areas from lowest (0) to highest (5), all but one respondent rated the organisation in the two highest categories across each domain (Chart 2).

**Chart 1: Artist rating of Preston City Mela across range of domains (0=low, 5= high)**



Source: Artist survey responses

Whilst scores are high in most cases, the relative differences between scoring varies. This may be an indication that the organisation’s activity (or the communication of that activity to others) around environmental responsibility and support for those it works with could be further enhanced.

### **Community Organisation Stallholder Feedback**

20 stallholders from community organisations and services provided feedback about their participation in Preston City Mela via a survey completed towards the end of the event.

- All respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that Preston City Mela celebrates different cultures, arts and experiences; helps to connect people from different communities; and works well with communities to promote understanding and increase engagement.
- All respondents also reported that people knew more about their service or community provision as a result of being at the event.

- 95% agreed that Preston City Mela was working toward environmental sustainability and this is evident in their work.
- 85% agreed that Preston City Mela listens to and takes account of the views of the local community, artists, practitioners and other stakeholders.

Reported benefits of taking part in the event included:

*“Meeting a whole and diverse range of people in the community we work in. Hearing different views and being able to explain our work.”*

*“Being able to connect with people from differing communities who historically have suffered from health inequalities.”*

*“Diverse communities, gave information and advice about services.”*

*“Engaging with wider communities. Raising awareness of ambulance services. Raising awareness of CPR and how to save a life. Raising awareness of ambulance line academy and volunteering roles. Engaging with other community.”*

*“Exposure to many diverse community and people from Preston as well as surrounding areas. This allowed us to engage with the target audiences for our recruitment process.”*

*“We have spoken to lots of people about the charity, what we fund and who we support.”*

*“Engage with people from all backgrounds to promote our provision and the work we do as a Trust. To build the relationships between the club and the south Asian community.”*

*“The number of people visiting our stand was beyond our expectations, it was great to have such a positive response to the printmaking activity and the work we are doing at the Harris with artist Hannah Sabapathy. There was such an amazingly diverse range of people. In total we counted 439 people who visited the stall, and 150 people had a go at block printing. The art works created were lovely, the children especially enjoyed the printmaking and being able to take their art home.” [Additional feedback received by email]*

Positive feedback was received about the Moor Park venue, with several responses emphasising the accessibility of the site.

Suggestions for future development / improvements included:

- More and earlier promotion – leaflets to services / stallholders in advance
- A site map showing location of participants / better site information (what was available was reportedly very small when printed)
- Need to be closer to stage – people find it too far to walk from stage to stalls
- Have steel band and salsa group on main stage, or at least not competing with PA music
- Potential for electricity points for interactive presentations

### **Final Reflections**

- The Preston City Mela event on June 17<sup>th</sup> was an evident success in many ways, enabling a large number of people across age ranges and cultures to come together; experience and enjoy a wide range of music, art, and activities; have opportunities to develop new skills; and learn more about and share South Asian (and other) culture and heritage.
- Outcomes are evident in the testimonies of attendees, artists and community organisations who held stalls at the event. Beyond the ‘core’ outcomes of creative arts and cultural activity, testimonies also show the wider effects of these activities in terms of wellbeing, confidence-building, community cohesion, and wider awareness of community organisations. There is also some evidence of attendees wanting to take their new-found interests in South Asian creative arts further.
- Many people spoke positively about the event, with a number expressing thanks to the organisers.

- Suggestions for the future (particularly from attendees) often mentioned growth (more sessions, more time, bigger performers, additional food stalls etc.).
- There are some differences of opinion in relation to venue (Moor Park versus Avenham Park) and there may be pros and cons of each, though accessibility is reportedly better at Moor Park.
- The need for more effective promotion and increased awareness about the event, its location, and the layout of event space was raised by attendees, artists and stallholders.
- Suggestions for future developments also included things such as artist demonstration stage / tent, gallery / showcase of art, and potential international artist exchanges.
- Questions about the VIP area – is it in keeping with the inclusive nature of the event?

## Preston City Mela - Evaluation Summary 2023

Preston City Mela is much more than just a celebration day on a Saturday in June. Its artists support wider Preston events, and bespoke activities provide opportunities for people of all ages to get involved in creative activities, learn new skills and gain a better understanding of their own and other cultures.

Preston City Mela activities in 2023 have taken place in community / public venues, schools and colleges, with the culmination of this taking place in June 2023 in Moor Park. The exact number of overall attendees at events is difficult to quantify, but has included:

- An estimated 5,000 people at the celebration event in Moor Park, with many hundreds taking part in art workshops
- Hundreds of people seeing performances and participating in art workshops at Egg Rolling and Let's Grow events
- 23 students from Newman College and Archbishop Temple School taking part in Bollywood dance classes (with one group performing on the main stage at the celebration event)
- 16 children and 13 adults taking part in music workshops in advance of the celebration event
- 14 children and young people taking part in Dhol training

These activities, workshops and events have generated a wide range of outcomes, as evidenced through evaluation activity and other feedback. Linked to its 'core' ACE-based outcomes, this has included:

- People at all stages of their life have had opportunities to develop and express creativity, increasing their participation in creative activities such as playing musical instruments (dhol, other drums, flute, vocals, violin), dance (Bollywood dancing), and arts (including origami, silk painting, block printing, saree draping, warli painting, flower garland making, fabric recycling, henna art, calligraphy, ebru marbling, papercutting, madhubani painting, bangle making and more).
- Children and young people have had the opportunity to develop their creative potential, in schools and colleges through arts activities and Bollywood dance training, and in the community with music / dhol workshops and participation in events.
- People's access to cultural opportunities is improved through Preston City Mela activities, evidenced through feedback from participants and artists. People report not only learning about new arts and skills, but also about associated culture and history. Workshop facilitators are keen to share the cultural context of their art and this is valued by participants.
- Preston City Mela is a valued means of bringing people together, connecting people and places, promoting understanding and increasing cultural engagement. Both Asian and non-Asian people speak of the value of Mela events in sharing and learning from different cultures, as well as in bringing people together from different communities. This is also reflected in feedback from community organisations, who valued the opportunity to engage with communities at the June celebration event.
- Whilst not necessarily a central part of its role, Preston City Mela supports and promotes the work of a wide range of people in cultural organisations and creative industries (particularly among groups who are often under-represented). This takes place through direct support within Mela activities, providing links to wider networks, and through the interest of participants in pursuing opportunities to continue creative arts after events.

In addition to these outcomes, the evaluation provided evidence of wider benefits, including:

- Improved health and wellbeing: some participants in activities report taking part as being 'therapeutic'
- Improved confidence to try new things, and perform in front of people
- Motivation to follow-up training / activities – inspiration to learn and develop new skills

Notably, this takes place in an atmosphere and context of *'family-friendly'*, *'togetherness'* and, perhaps most importantly "fun".

There are always areas for improvement and development, and suggestions for development included:

- Awareness of Preston City Mela, its events, dates, and location is relatively limited. Feedback from across events and stakeholder groups suggests that ongoing engagement through, for example, social media is likely to both increase awareness and further promote creative and cultural engagement across Preston.

- A review of the celebration event layout, seating, and communication / a map might address some of the concerns / suggestions people had regarding the site (walking, seating, food stalls etc.). This could include discussions about the pros and cons of Moor Park versus Avenham Park, to enable mitigation of the negative elements of each.
- Logistical elements relating to specific events or workshops could be reviewed to maximise engagement. This could, for example, include improved contingencies for workshops and artists in inclement weather, demonstration stages, and exploration of different ways of delivering some workshops.
- Where possible, information, signposting or identification of resources for those wishing to take creative arts forward after funded provision. Sustained support for South Asian music, dance and arts activities for children and adults appears to be an issue - this may not be solely the role of Preston City Mela, but there may be scope for promoting or supporting opportunities further.

The role of Preston City Mela beyond 'a sunny day in June' is considerable and appears to be growing, with demands for more and bigger events throughout the year. This evidences the need for these kinds of events and activities, and the effectiveness of Preston City Mela in facilitating them. It does, however, raise issues of the role of Preston City Mela, and its ongoing capacity as an organisation to deliver these demands over the year.