

Mela 2025- Showcasing Cultural Diversity

Project Report

NLPG 00801400



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

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PRESTON CITY MELA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Preston City Mela would like to express its sincere gratitude to the many organisations and individuals whose unwavering support ensures the success of this vibrant celebration year after year.

From dedicated volunteers and creative performers to community groups, cultural partners, and local businesses—your contributions are the heartbeat of the Mela. Whether through planning, grants, artistic collaboration, or behind-the-scenes logistics, each of you plays a vital role in bringing this event to life.

Your commitment not only makes the Mela possible, but also strengthens our shared vision of unity, diversity, and cultural pride in Preston. We are deeply thankful for your continued partnership and look forward to many more years of collaboration and celebration.

Funding Bodies:

Arts Council of England (ACE) Northwest - *We are grateful to ACE for their funding and invaluable guidance. Without their continued support, the Mela programme simply wouldn't be possible. Special thanks to **Angela Chappell** -Relationship Manager ACE for her advice and support.*

Preston City Council – For funding Mela and special thanks to **Richard Baxter** -Events Manager Preston City Council for his advice and support.

Partner Organisations:

- University of Central Lancashire (Aamina Desai and the Students), for their exceptional creative designs to support Mela programme.
- We extend our sincere thanks to our Mela Outreach partners, Kendal Festival (Annette Ritson and Vicki Wright) and Light Up Lancaster (George Harris and Julie Brown) for offering Mela artists the opportunity to showcase their talents beyond Preston and connect with new audiences. Your support helps amplify our reach and celebrate cultural creativity across the region.

Evaluation Team:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| - Mruga Ghodke | - Ahaan Ram |
| - Manav Gandhi | - Yakshesh Nandwana |
| - Saira Ali | - Radhika Agrawal |
| - Samit Nayi | - Abhinandana Kodanda |
| - Kim Graham | |

Mela Board and Co-opted Members:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| - Shreya Ghodke | - Abhinandana Kodanda |
| - Kim Graham | - Jay Acharya |
| - Nardeep Singh | - Gurcharan Singh |
| - Samit Nayi | - Suraya Bashir |

Mela thanks **Chris Davis**, outgoing director, for his dedicated service and commitment for Mela over the years.

We sincerely thank our artists, volunteers, stewards, Community stallholders, for making the Mela possible. Your collective passion and commitment continue to drive the success of the Mela and enrich Preston's cultural landscape year after year.

INTRODUCTION

Preston City Mela returned to the heart of Preston city centre on 23rd August 2025. Free and open to all, the event aims to celebrate the vibrancy and diversity of not only Preston but also Northwest communities through a dynamic showcasing of dance, music, art, food, and heritage. With a strong community focus and the only Mela programme in Lancashire.

The meaning itself of Mela is centred around meeting, coming together, the blend of unique and diverse aspects of our society - creative, resilient, spiritual. The role of Mela in highlighting and harmonising cultural understanding is longstanding with Preston City Mela now in its 28th year of providing a large-scale social event to the Northwest region.

This year the Mela content was built around our core mission objectives:

MISSION OBJECTIVES

- **Promote, develop and retain** South Asian art forms in Preston and across the Northwest
- **Showcase** local artistic talent
- Utilise South Asian arts, South Asian arts, as a key enabler to **promote community cohesion**, breaking down cultural differences and engaging people from all walks of life.
- **Contribute** to a vibrant and diverse City offer, linked to Preston's main cultural programme.
- Establish a **quality cultural arts offer** for Preston and Northwest.
- Contribute to the positive **health and wellbeing** of our visitors engaging in our activities.

For 2025, the Mela ACE funded programme (reference NLPG 00801400) consisted of the following:

- Mela Main Event Showcasing Cultural Diversity held on 23rd August on Preston Flag Market
- Developing Organisation & People - UCLan Design Student project
- Outreach Programmes- Kendal Torchlight Festival & Light Up Lancaster Festival.

In addition, Mela was involved in three other outreach events in Preston funded directly by the organisers, these included:

- Egg Rolling (Preston City Council)
- Lancashire Encounter (Preston City Council)
- Spring Fair (Let's Grow Preston).

Images are captured through the Visual Evaluation: <https://prestoncitymela.co.uk/pcm2025>

This report sets out the 2025 Mela journey, and the contribution / impact of South Asian arts towards the three ACE core outcomes:

- Creative People.
- Cultural Communities.
- A Creative and Cultural Country.

UCLAN DESIGN STUDENT PROJECT

The BA (Hons) Textile Design is part of the School of Art, Design and Fashion at the University of Central Lancashire. The Textile Design course is a broad course that covers a wide range of practical textile skills from weaving through to surface pattern design. The course actively participates in live briefs with industry and the community to encourage students to develop their professionalism and employability skills.

Students attended a workshop facilitated by Gulab Singh, to explore ideas and gain inspiration of South Asian arts and heritage. The project included using textiles to create designs for the main Mela event and some students also design and delivered a workshop on the day. The project ran as a 4-week live brief that consisted of 20 total teaching hours and 36 hours of independent student study time. The brief aimed to ensure a contribution from every student. Those producing outcomes that directly delivered against the brief were awarded with a higher presence in the outcome project.

The student cohort is drawn from the locality, throughout the UK and internationally. Students and the School of Art, Design and Fashion benefited greatly from an enhanced connection with the diverse communities of Preston. The project also helped students integrate within the Preston community in general.

Students were given the opportunity to showcase their work at a high-profile event in the public realm which could be said to lead to increased recruitment and greater awareness of the courses in the School of Art, Design and Fashion.

COURSE LEADER PERSPECTIVE:

As Course Leader, Mela was keen to gain insight into the benefits, learning and engagement with the programme. Aamina Desai provided feedback on this.

- *Engaging with the Preston City Mela has been such a formative element of our Textile Design course. Our current Y1 Textile Design cohort consists of 10 students drawn from the locality and throughout the UK and ranges from age 18 to 47. Both the students and our School have benefitted immensely from an enhanced connection with the diverse communities of Preston, and the event has inspired them to integrate within the Preston community in general.*
- *The project has brought a cross-cultural focus for our students to increase their awareness of South Asian art and design and has introduced a good understanding of South Asian artists practice to the group, inspiring them with the bold colours, intricate shapes and bringing a fascinating historical and cultural context to their work.*

- *The project has given our students the opportunity to showcase their work at a high-profile event in the public realm and has granted them the opportunity to work to a tight timescale, liaise with a client and answer a commercially led brief. At a further benefit to the course, exposure at the Mela event may lead to increased recruitment as it would lead to greater awareness of the courses in the School of Arts and Media.*
- *Students who were involved at the event gained increased confidence in their leadership and public interaction skills. They were filled with positivity seeing their ideas shared with the wider community and have been inspired to think ambitiously in future projects.*

STUDENT FEEDBACK:



The Mela project was a lovely expression of an Asian community living locally. On the event I especially enjoyed lovely dance performances with colourful outfits. Atmosphere was buzzing!

Frankie Gidman

Being able to make decorations for the Mela was such a fun experience as well as being able to share them with the public. I loved exploring south Asian culture whilst looking into all the different art styles from each country. It was a great opportunity to learn new forms of design and to be able to make so many different pieces for the event.

Freya Hatfield

The day was vibrant, festive and our workshop was extremely busy thanks to the hordes of visitors on the day. Thank you so much for such a wonderful event on Saturday!



LIST OF DESIGNS AND MERCHANDISE CREATED FOR MELA EVENT

- 6 Lengths of bunting from recycled fabrics.
- 4 lengths of fabric tassel hangings from recycled fabrics.
- 80 screen printed bookmarks based on motifs in South Asian cultures for distribution to visitors at the Mela event.

- 20 hand drawn and laser cut stencils based on cultural motifs for use in the canvas bag stencil activity at the Mela event.
- 15 hand cut and pressed foam stamps for use in the canvas bag stencil activity at the Mela event.
- 3 hand cut and painted decorative photo frames for visitors to interact with at the Mela event

The students organised a creative workshop stall to run at the Mela event for public to get involved with creative practice. They produced stencils and stamps to use in a canvas tote bag decorating activity. Based on the number of tote bags decorated and distributed on the day, the stall attracted 120 visitors who took part in the workshop.

Thanks again for such a wonderful opportunity! We'd love to be involved again if the event goes ahead next year

STUDENT NAMES ENGAGING WITH MELA PROJECT: Y1 COHORT 2024-25

Chloe Calvert

Frantiska Gidman

Darby Hindmoor

Emily Morris

Amy Du Feu

Tamzin Lambert

Carolanne Fish

Shannon Holt

Freya Hatfield

Hannah Waddington

Chloe Forshaw

Course Leader: Aamina Desai BA (Hons) Textile Design

MELA EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

As part of the 2025 main programme, Preston City Mela conducted a comprehensive evaluation to capture audience experience and assess event impact. This process involved three distinct questionnaires designed to gather feedback from attendees, workshop artists and stallholders. Collecting this feedback enables the Mela to demonstrate alignment with ACE objectives, assess the quality and reach of the event, inform future investment decisions, and identify key areas for improvement.

Key focus areas included artistic quality, audience engagement, and the achievement of specific outcomes, linked to ACE Outcomes.

Creative People – Supporting development and expression of creativity

- *Promoting creative opportunities in the local community to people at all stages of their life*

Cultural Communities – thriving through a collaborative approach to culture

- *Improving access to a full range of cultural opportunities wherever people live*
- *support and involve communities in high-quality culture*
- *Connecting people and places, including diaspora communities, nationally and internationally*

A Creative and Cultural Country – innovative, collaborative and international

- *Supporting new types of creative practice, new forms of cultural content and new ways of reaching new and existing audiences and participants*

The key insights from the three different groups surveyed are broken down into the following themes linked to the outcomes above:

- Positive Cultural Engagement
- Cultural Learning
- Suggestions for Improvement

AUDIENCE / PUBLIC FEEDBACK

A total of 123 members of the public were surveyed. Overall, the feedback received is overwhelmingly positive with expressions of positive experiences, highlighting enjoyment of the events' cultural richness and community spirit.

Analysis of the responses can be broken down into the following themes:

- **Cultural Engagement and Learning**
- **Event Impact and Atmosphere**
- **Suggestions for Improvement**

Most respondents were between 25 – 54 years with a significant number also in the 55+ age group. There was a strong turnout of those attending with friends or family reinforcing the events’ social and community-driven nature. Of those surveyed, very few came alone suggesting the Mela is seen as a shared experience or individuals were attracted to the event whilst carrying out their day-to-day activities in the city centre.

This is the first time I'm attending the Mela – I'm blown away

The event attracted a diverse mix of ethnicities, reflecting the multicultural appeal and reach of the Mela which included representation from the following ethnic groups:

- Asian or Asian British forming the largest group
- White British
- Mixed ethnic backgrounds and Black or Black British.

Ethnic Group	Responses
Indian	46
Pakistani	38
Bangladeshi	21
Black African/Caribbean	17
White British	34
Mixed Ethnicity	12
Other Asian (e.g., Sri Lankan)	9
Chinese	6
Middle Eastern	5
No response	7

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING:

- **Celebration of Cultures:** Most respondents strongly agree that the event helped them learn and gain insight about South Asian traditions with the event promoting multiculturalism and diversity.
- **Creative Participation:** Many enjoyed the artistic activities on offer which included henna, rangoli and dance workshops however more hands-on opportunities were welcomed.
- **Community Bonding:** A recurring theme highlighted the Melas’ role in bringing people together across diverse backgrounds, generations and neighbourhoods.

Great place to be one and celebrate culture

Excellent cultural event

Fantastic - shows other cultures and their dress type

EVENT IMPACT AND ATMOSPHERE:

- **Local pride and enjoyment:** Several comments highlighted how the Mela enhances Preston’s reputation as a longstanding multicultural event.
- **Social cohesion:** Promotion of unity and understanding across communities was highlighted in the responses.
- **Positivity:** Fun, Well-organised, friendly and lively were recurring words used to describe the event on the day.

Fantastically well organised – I am proud to have this in my city!

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- **Food Stalls:** One of the suggested improvements was more options for food on the day. Due to limited space available on the flag market only 3 catering vendors could be accommodated (Bites and Beyond, SugarBuds and Tandoor Chai).
- **Larger Venue:** Many of those surveyed preferred the Mela to be held in a larger space as in previous years as many felt the event was too small or crowded, suggesting larger public areas are preferable.
- **Extending Hours:** A strong sentiment emerged around shifting performances to later in the day and extending the event.
- **Improved Advertisement:** More promotion specially around social media to attract wider audiences came in as a strong suggestion.
- **Improved Accessibility:** The location of the event led to individuals calling for better seating and improved stage visibility. These responses were predominantly heard from those in the 65+ age category.

Make it a weekend-long event, hold it more often, and expand the venue

WHAT DID PEOPLE ENJOY THE MOST?

- **Music and Dance Performances:** Samba drummers, folk dances, and live singing were repeatedly praised.
- **Henna and Arts Workshops:** Many enjoyed hands-on activities like rangoli, lantern-making, and printmaking.
- **Stalls and Food:** Cultural stalls and diverse food options were a major draw with many requesting more food stalls at future events.
- **Atmosphere:** Described as “lively,” “fun,” “inclusive,” and “well-organized.”

Love the music and dancing. The dancers were so beautiful!

The Preston City Mela is one of our most cherished cultural events, offering a joyful and inclusive celebration of our city's diversity. It's a chance for families, friends, and visitors to come together, enjoy incredible performances, taste delicious food, and experience South Asian heritage. Preston is truly a special place whether you live here or visit.

Councillor Anna Hindle, Cabinet Member for Culture and Arts at Preston City Council

WORKSHOP ARTISTS' FEEDBACK

There were 25 workshop stalls with 28 artists in attendance, all offering traditional, cultural craft sessions to the public.

A total of 18 workshop holders completed the surveys on the day. The feedback reinforces the Mela's role as a **catalyst for community cohesion**, participation, and cultural pride.

It is clear from the workshop holders that the Mela provides a backdrop to introduce audiences not only to different art forms but also to the simplicity of some of the skills that can be learnt and shared.

Members of the public were keen to get stuck in, regardless of their age or cultural background creating a space for conversation and learning.

Positive Cultural Engagement: Workshop stallholders consistently praised the event for:

- Celebrating South Asian arts and traditions
- Fostered **community bonding** and **cross-cultural dialogue**

The Mela was really amazing and different culture and traditions were fulfilled. I got the golden opportunity to showcase my talents, get more experience and meet new people. Mela helped me to boost my business and people got to know more henna artists available in Preston.

People of all ages seemed to have enjoyed themselves and had a good time. They were interested to try something relatively simple and creative.

We talked about art with people from different communities coming together.

Cultural Learning

- Encouraging intergenerational learning through hands-on activities
- Providing a platform for creative expression.
- Helped **educate attendees** about cultural traditions in a fun, interactive environment.
- Opportunity to showcase how to recycle upcycle items that would otherwise have gone to waste eg fabric and craft items.

Kite making activity is a combination of craft, art & cultural significance. Participant used their imagination & creativity to create kites.

Participants have developed their artistic skills and learnt more about the Islamic art culture. They have had the chance to be creative and express themselves through their

Suggestions for Improvement

- Integrating more cultural performances / showcases from around the world to increase diversity.
- Well organised event

I think, adults and children could take part in our activity and this worked well. I don't think we could improve the experience. The Mela is very well run - thank you.

In future there could be more complex activities suited more towards the older generations e.g. parents to ensure more people can participate in the activity

All was good lovely music and good dancing

COMMUNITY STALLS FEEDBACK

Due to site limitation and capacity, a total of 9 community stalls were in attendance this year. Local organisations were invited to submit expressions of interest for stall space and these were allocated until site capacity was reached.

- Sahara
- Disability Equality Northwest
- Preston Masonic Group
- North West Ambulance Service
- University of Central Lancashire
- Lancashire Constabulary
- Offload Northwest
- Safenet Domestic Abuse Services
- Pukar Disability Centre

A total of 9 stallholders completed the surveys on the day. The feedback reinforces the important role that Mela plays in promoting local services **to a diverse audience**.

Positive Cultural Engagement

- Stallholders fed back on the positive role that Mela has to offer in promoting **multiculturalism, diversity, and community spirit**.
- Many felt their stalls helped with exposure of their services not only with members of the public but amongst other community organisations providing networking opportunities.

Great to see multicultural communities coming together in Preston.

Cultural Learning

- Stallholders noted increased **visibility** for their services on offer.
- Several mentioned the event helped them **connect with new audiences**, especially those unfamiliar with how to access particular services.
- Some saw the Mela as a platform for **networking and community outreach**.

Nice to support something local and good exposure for our work.

Suggestions for Improvement

Stallholders offered constructive ideas to enhance future events:

- **Location:** Whilst some had commented they preferred a larger venue, one of the longstanding stallholders commented that the flag market's central location offered better integration with all communities. The location created an opportunity to attract footfall from passers by who would not have perhaps attended a venue elsewhere.
- **Noise levels:** With the event being held in a somewhat closed location compared to an open area, stallholders noted that the volume of music often made it difficult to speak with the members of the public.

Mela used the design conceived and had 500 tote bags produced, to use as a free incentive for the public to complete the evaluation forms.



Designed by Jayden Das

MELA PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STALL

In addition to the formal evaluation being undertaken on the day with members of the public, artists and community stallholders, Preston City Mela set up a stall for informal conversations with the public, led by Kim Graham. A total of 55 one to one conversations with visitors were held. Kim engaged with the public enticing them with a free Mela bag for their input.

Not all visitors were willing to answer all the questions due to the loud music which made it difficult to hear at times. Questions around age and ethnicity were omitted as Mela were keen to engage in meaningful conversations in a short period of time.

The conversation was centered around what visitors enjoyed the most and how Mela programmes can improve in future.

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT PRESTON CITY MELA?

The most popular source of information for finding out about the Preston City Mela was Facebook. Some visitors were simply passing by and happened to come across the event whilst out shopping. Others had family members performing at the event.

- Facebook (24)
- Word of mouth (13)
- Visit Preston (1)
- Blog Preston (1) and
- Instagram (1).

WHERE HAVE YOU TRAVELLED FROM? CAN WE HAVE YOUR POSTCODE?

From the small sample of those spoken to, most visitors came from PR1 (18) and PR2 (20). Others from PR3, 4 and 5, FY1, FY6, BB1 BL9, LA13. This suggests the catchment for Mela comes from across Lancashire.

HOW DID YOU TRAVEL HERE TODAY?

Most visitors were travelling by car.

- Travelled by car (27),
- bus (11),
- walked (10),
- train (2) and
- cycle (1).

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE FLAG MARKET FOR PRESTON CITY MELA?

Most visitors preferred the Flag Market to the park as the venue to host the Mela due to its accessibility. Its central location meant that it was easy to find and easy to get to. A few people did comment that the park would lend itself to a bigger event and more space to enjoy the day and mitigate the loud music often making it difficult to hold full conversations.

The lack of seating was an issue for some as there was nowhere to sit and relax. This mirrored the feedback obtained from audience surveys.

Car parking in the city center was deemed expensive by a few.

An interesting suggestion that has not yet been explored by Mela, is the inclusion of South Asian specific sports or games.

DO YOU HAVE A WORD OR PHRASE THAT DESCRIBES PRESTON CITY MELA FOR YOU?



SUGGESTIONS FROM VISITORS

Suggestions were made by visitors on improvement of the Preston City Mela website to allow for better communication with potential visitors and to allow for a platform to access information relating in particular to outreach and Mela events. This point will be considered and discussed by the Mela Board during 2025.

The following suggestions were also raised and will be discussed along with wider feedback on event improvements during planning for the 2026 Mela programme.

- To hold an in-between event.
- Help more vulnerable people to get involved.
- Provide seating.

PERFORMING ARTISTS' QUOTES

Performing artists were asked by Samit Nayi and Abhi Kodanda for feedback on their experience of Preston City Mela. These were captured both in short [video clips](#) and quotes, provided in the table below.

Artist	Feedback
Jazzy J (Event Host & Compere)	<i>We've got such an amazing line-up of artists, performers, we've got Bhangra dancers, Gidha dancers, we've got Urooj Qawwal and we have the legendary Sahara where their amazing 'Billo ni tera laal ghaghra'. All right here in Preston City Centre in Flag Market, so what are you waiting for? Come over.</i>
Worldwise Samba Drummers	<i>Oh, that was great. It's our first gig for a few months. We usually have August off, so it's great to come back and have such a great start to the new term. I think the Mela is a great event. It brings people in anyway, but I think there'll be people who didn't realise something was happening on the Flag Market and now it's unmistakable because between the DJ and the Samba Band, everyone knows there's something going on.</i>
Abhinandana Dance Academy (Preston Young Bollywood)	<i>Yes, we enjoyed dancing. I think the best part about it for me was that everyone else was dancing as well with you.</i>
Panfire Steel Band	<p><i>It went really well, actually. It's nice to see some of the bands here as well. We've played a few songs that people might know. We play a lot of Soca and Calypso, and we did some more popular kind of like dance mixes for people. It's a nice vibe for the summer. I really enjoyed it.</i></p> <p><i>The crowd was great, yeah. The guy who's in charge is getting everybody going, so that's always good to see.</i></p> <p><i>I think this is the third or the fourth year we've done this now, so it was nice to be invited back again. And it's a really nice kind of like celebration of the culture as well and we love it happy to be here. The venue it's a different vibe and it's nice because you've got the crowd around you more here,</i></p> <p><i>whereas I think when we've had it in the park more people are sort of milling about and there's different things to see on the stage as well. So yeah, both great, but a different vibe here. Yeah, it's nice.</i></p>
Abhinandana Dance Academy	<i>We had the best atmosphere ever. It feels really good because it brings out the colours, it brings us all together and it's like getting</i>

<p>(South Asian Folk & Heritage Dances)</p>	<p><i>people together and that's what we want. It was a lot of fun; I really enjoyed it. It was the best day ever. Amazing time, amazing. Getting together was the best part. Having all different cultures coming together and making this so amazing. Thank you, Preston. Yeah, from Blackpool. We've performed in many places, Blackpool, we've been to Manchester, we've been to Morecambe, Preston, many times. So, we've performed in many melas in Preston and we've been to a lot of nursing homes to give a bit of courage to the elderly as well. Oh, the crowd is amazing. They are so enthusiastic, and they were cheering for us and they were enjoying every bit, not just our dances, but everything, whatever was going before as well. Definitely, we'll be coming back next year.</i></p>
<p>Urooj Qawwal (Qawali Group)</p>	<p><i>We really liked it; Preston has a great Mela. Everyone really enjoyed our performance, and we really enjoyed it too, thank you all so much. The atmosphere is really good, the crowd, the food and the music. The crowd joined in.</i></p>
<p>Abhinandana Dance Academy (South Asian Contemporary & Diverse Fusion Dances)</p>	<p><i>We enjoyed the performance. The crowd were loving it; there was lots of clapping and lots of new faces in the crowd. It was really good. I think it's really good in the city centre because everyone's nearby and we've seen lots of familiar faces so far, so it's definitely doing well.</i></p>
<p>Gidha (Kikli Dance Academy)</p>	<p><i>It was amazing. The atmosphere here in the town, Preston Town, it's amazing. We love coming back, so it's the third time that we're here, and it's always amazing. Amazing organisation, amazing crowd.</i></p>
<p>PR Dholis</p>	<p><i>We've performed four, five times at the Mela. We enjoy it. We're going to rock the crowd. We're looking forward to it.</i></p>
<p>Dhol Frequency</p>	<p><i>We're all good thank you. It's absolutely amazing. We've been here, I think, it's third year running now. And we're not only doing the Preston Mela performance but also teaching the kids as well. So we're coming from the West Midlands. We've been coming for three years running and we're teaching kids. And the best thing about this Mela is, which I love, is that we're teaching the kids and then we're letting them showcase themselves on their own territory. And which is bringing the youngsters, the young generation into music. Obviously, music, it has no form of religion. Music is worldwide and its so many background kids who are coming from Preston and they're taking part. It's such a big thing because obviously you're not only just teaching them and then</i></p>

	<p><i>they're going away and they've got no direction. The beauty with these classes is you guys are giving them a platform at the Preston Mela which is so big because it's in their hometown where they can showcase their friends which will get more interest as well. There's not a lot of cities or a lot of towns who are doing this so I'm really thankful you guys are giving all frequency the opportunity to get the youngsters off the streets and obviously putting them into something which could develop and lead into something which will help the Preston City and the Preston City Council as well.</i></p>
Punjabi Mascots	<p><i>Preston Mela is lovely, it's a nice day, we've enjoyed it.</i></p>
Red Rose Ragas	<p><i>It was it was nice being part of it. There was lots of music, there was lots of dancing and singing today. It's fun to learn about different cultures, all part of India. It's good that Preston embraces the Indian culture really well. The entire stage was incredible and it's a good program to be part of.</i></p>
Sahara	<p><i>Like I said earlier, and I'm and I'm not just saying this, our set was only 40 minutes, but we've done an hour and plus. Why? Cuz of your love. Honestly, the energy you guys have, the vibe here, fantastic. I just want to just appreciate to the organisers for inviting us over here to perform in front of you guys and of course meet you guys as well. You have been a fantastic crowd. Been a great honour and a pleasure. Thank you so much from Sahara. Thank you.</i></p>

MELA CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION PRESENTATIONS



Preston City Mela focuses on skill development and providing opportunities for cultural experiences. This approach aims to engage young people and individuals from diverse backgrounds, including non-Asians, with Mela activities to promote understanding and social cohesion. The initiative also

aims to foster a sense of inclusion.

The Mela certificate, signed by the Mayor of Preston and the Co-Chairs of Mela, serves as documentation that recipients may include in their portfolio folder to demonstrate their involvement in community activities.

Certificates were presented to **10 UCLan Design Students, Mela Stewards and data collectors.**

Mela Stewards



Mela Data Collectors



- Sahara video message post
- Countdown posts (scheduled run-up campaign)
- Free event promotional post
- Line-up announcement post
- Artist programme post (digital version)
- Site plan post (digital version)
- “That’s a Wrap” post
- Sahara interview video post
- Post-event stalls highlight post
- Post-event performance highlights post

PRINTED MATERIALS (DESIGN + SUPPLIER LIAISON)

- Sourcing, liaising and coordinating delivery with suppliers to include quality check and proofing of all printed items:
 - x50 A4 Certificates
 - x20 A3 Line-up posters (local outlet promotion)
 - x2 A1 Artist programme correx boards
 - x9 A2 Site plan correx boards

FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM CAMPAIGNS

Mela used a range of social media platforms: Mela website, Instagram and Facebook. The Facebook “Pay-Per-Click” was used mostly to highlight the Mela content. The Facebook and Instagram campaign ran for 11 weeks leading to Mela and ended on Sunday 26th August.

A total of 22 adverts were created which promoted Mela performers, workshop artists and community organisations stallholders. Their social media platforms and websites were linked into Mela posts and they were encouraged to re-share adverts on their own platforms, adding great value to the Mela campaign.

The Mela Facebook page promotion worked well too and there are now a total of 869-page likes / followers. Mela also attracted a lot of media attention and had opportunities to interact with national and international press personnel.

Mela Facebook page reached 33,280 people during the core promotion period with 4,045 page visits. A breakdown of the data is provided below:

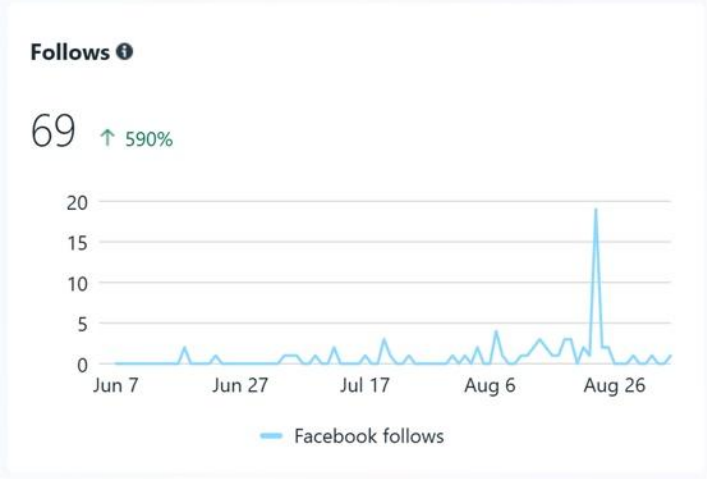


Table 1. Mela has increased its follows by 590% within the 3-month period. Although the numbers are low suggesting more time and effort needs to be applied to increase the follower base.

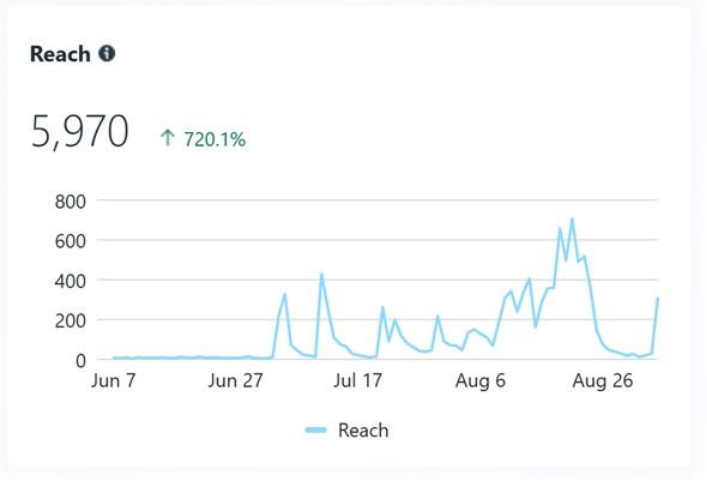


Table 2. Mela has a good reach of almost 6,000 and this again increased by 720% as we approached the main event.



Table 3. There was an increase of 100% in the links however, the numbers start from a low base 144

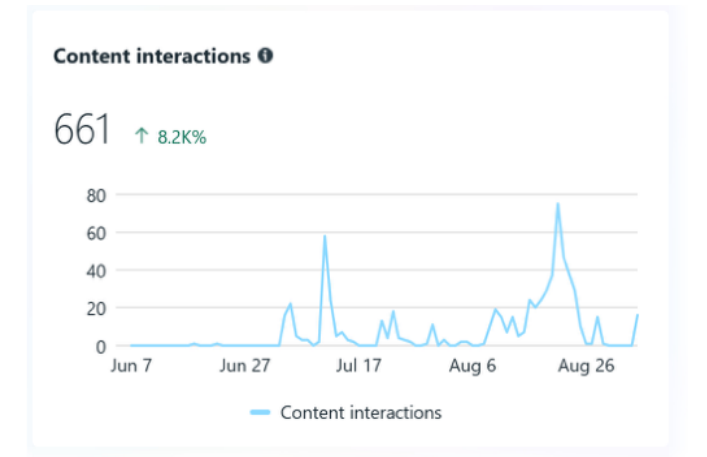


Table 4. Mela content interaction attracted the most engagement once post of artists were uploaded.

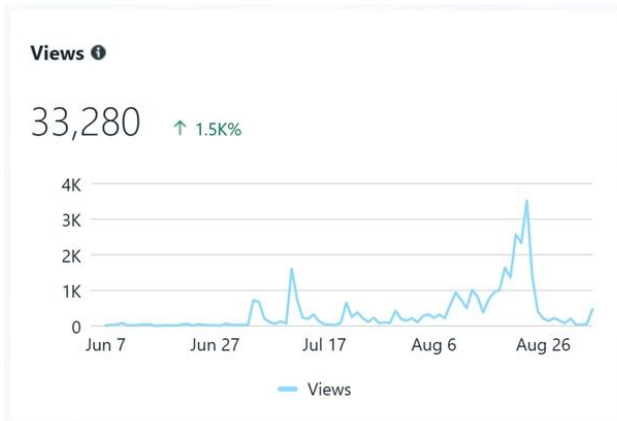


Table 5. Mela achieved excellent views on the platform over 33K well beyond the projection made in the ACE application



Table 6. Mela had over 4K visits an increase of 500%

Mela ensured people awareness and experience of the live event met our projected outcomes.

ACE Measures	Projected Estimates	Actual
As audience members in a physical space	5,500	4,500+
As visitors in a digital space	3,949	33,280
As users of a digital product	200	4,045

KENDAL TORCHLIGHT FESTIVAL 27TH SEPTEMBER 2025

Preston City Mela partnered with Kendal Torchlight Festival organisers to bring a South Asian Arts and cultural perspective to Kendal's 55th Torchlight Festival.

There were 11 traditional craft workshops and 1 performing arts Bollywood dance group (**AK Dance, Bollywood Dancers**) with three performances (11:30am, 12:45pm and 2:00pm).

It was such great fun being able to get involved, was just amazing and we had the best time. Thank you.

Jamie – KAOS Musical Theatre Kendal

WORKSHOP ARTISTS

- **ArteeCraft:** Saree Draping (Shreya Ghodke)
- **ArteeCraft:** Kite Making (Rakesh Ghodke)
- **ArteeCraft:** Flower Garland Making (Devika Lishanin)
- **ArteeCraft:** Traditional Rangoli (Diya Arora)
- **Arts2Heal:** Ebru Marbling (Banu Adam and Volunteers)
- **Brian Whitmore:** Calligraphy
- **Henna Artists:** Manisha Chauhan, Farzana Patel, Viraj Gandhi and Shnehil Patel.

To evaluate the impact of Mela artists' participation at Kendal Festival and to explore future partnership opportunities, Preston City Mela developed a short three-question survey. These questionnaires were placed at craft stalls, allowing visitors who engaged with the activities to share their feedback. A total of 45 completed forms were collected, providing valuable insights into audience experience and the reach of Mela programming beyond Preston.

From analysing the questionnaires, it is clear Preston City Mela has met its objectives for promoting South Asian Arts in different community settings.

The overwhelming response focused on:

- Learning about different cultural through arts.
- Creating new experiences for all groups by engaging in the activities.
- Appetite for more South Asian content at Torchlight and for more performing artists.
- Having Mela activities at Torchlight added to the event experience for the Town.

The participation of Preston Mela brought a rich cultural diversity to Kendal Torchlight, contributing to one of our core aims: to ensure the event is inclusive, accessible, and welcoming for everyone. South Lakeland is not a particularly diverse area, which makes it more important to provide meaningful representation for members of our community who may not often see their heritage reflected in local events. Welcoming Mela artists to Torchlight offers an opportunity for shared experiences—bringing people together to learn from, enjoy, and celebrate a wider spectrum of culture. We believe this enriches the festival and strengthens the community as a whole. The feedback from this year's event was exceptional and the take up of the activities provided and the audience participation in the dancing performances was fantastic. The demand was such that it has produced enquires for a greater number of activities and also collaborations with local groups to create combined performances and activities. We are delighted at the responses and engagement received and hope that we can build upon this programme next year."

The responses to the three questions, although not all completed all three questions, are the following:

1. What did you think are the benefits of having Mela musical, artistic and cultural arts of South Asian communities in the Kendal Programme.

- Really great for cultural diversity and allowing people, especially children to experience different cultures.
- It broadens the cultural experience of a predominantly white community. It offers unique experiences to people of all ages. It makes it accessible to all it challenges stereotypical concepts on office opportunity and understanding.
- Really lovely to widen the cultural experience in a positive way in Cumbria.

2. How would you like to see Mela activities develop in Kendal for future Torchlight Events?

- Activities like these broaden the learning of new cultures and should be shown up torchlight event to showcase other about Mela.
- Definitely more music, we love the Bollywood dance.
- Would love to see more Mela activities.

3. Any other comments about the Mela Content.

- The different activities help people explore and understand other cultures, lots of fun and adds variety to the activities in the town.
- It's fantastic it's our first stop ever this year we knew we had to be on time for our Henna. Thank you for the community that came to Kendal friendly smiles and interesting conversations.
- Mela our favourite part today.
- Mela brings colour, joy and exhilarating energy to Kendal, we love it!

LIGHT UP LANCASTER

Preston City Mela's second outreach collaboration was with *Light Up Lancaster* which took place on the 6th, 7th and 8th November, with a theme of *The Blink of an Eye*. The collaboration also included *Explore Week* - five days of workshops leading up to the event.

The theme was "The Blink of an Eye"

The *Explore Week* activities consisted of 9 Mela delivered workshops at the Storey on Monday 27th October including:

WORKSHOP ARTISTS

- **ArteeCraft:** Traditional Rangoli (Shreya Ghodke)
- **ArteeCraft:** Lantern Making (Rakesh Ghodke)
- **ArteeCraft:** Raffia Flowers (Devika Lishanin)
- **ArteeCraft:** Traditional Rangoli (Diya Arora)
- **Arts2Heal:** Ebru Marbling (Banu Adam and one artist)
- **Brian Whitmore:** Calligraphy
- **Maryam Golubeva:** Islamic Mosaic Paper Art
- **Henna Artists:** Viraj Gandhi and Yogini Patel.

On the evening of 7th November, Abhinandana Dance Academy, Bollywood Dance performed at Plinth Market Square and Bhangra Cise Group and Dhol Players performed on the 8th November. Having performing Mela artist on both dates captured different audiences.

The same questionnaire as Kendal for Lancaster was used to capture the impact of the Mela artists and future partnership working.

These questionnaires were placed at Mela craft stalls for people taking part in activities to complete. There were 23 forms.

Q1. What did you think are the benefits of having Mela musical, artistic and cultural arts of South Asian communities in the Kendal Programme

- *A fantastic opportunity to experience crafts and culture art from a different culture. Such high-quality activities run by enthusiastic and knowledgeable people thank you.*
- *Exposure to multicultural activity in art helps with harmony*

Q2. How would you like to see Mela activities develop in Kendal for future Torchlight Events?

- *This was my first time so more of these activities*
- *To be part of more events in the future*
- *It's been wonderful great to see you again in the future*

Q3. Any other Comments about Mela Contents

- *Thank you for all of the effort going into these events five children with us of age range 2 to 10 and all loved it*

- *Really great range of activities that my young daughter has really enjoyed herself*

From analysing the questionnaires, it is clear Preston City Mela has met its objectives for promoting South Asian Arts in different community setting.

The overwhelming response from this feedback is as follows

1. Having new experiences for children, taking part in the activities
2. More South Asian content at future Lancaster events
3. Learning about different cultural arts
4. Having Mela activities at Lancaster added to the event experience for the Town.

We were delighted to once again welcome artists from Preston City Mela to be part of Light Up Lancaster's Explore Week. Over 2,000 participations in workshops across the week took place, with families enjoying, together, creative experiences. The Mela artists were a highlight of the week, with overwhelmingly positive feedback. People described the activities as 'fun and educational', 'a real asset to Lancaster', 'enriching', 'really welcoming'.

One survey respondent wrote: 'Superb! Wonderful to learn about different cultures and celebrations. A joy to learn such high quality crafts. We are so grateful. Very treasured time together and people running the tables were superb. Such an antidote to screens!'

A high proportion of people said that they were attending this kind of arts event for the first time.

Julie Brown Executive Director Light Up Lancaster

CONCLUSION

Mela Financial Management

The budget for Mela 2025 programme was £53,103 in cash of which £2,500 was from Preston City Council and £850 income generated. In addition, 'Support- In- Kind' was £22,500 of which £10,000 was from Preston City Council and rest from other partners. The total expenditure was £75,576 including the 'In-Kind' resulting in a surplus of £27.

Preston City Mela managed to deliver the whole programme within the allocated budget, demonstrating its ability to manage effectively programme funds.

Mela Input

- Mela had 105 commissions including artists and infrastructure / overheads
- There were 65 freelance workers
- 168 artists across its Mela and outreach programmes

Mela Environmental and Sustainability Commitments

- Preston City Mela has produced its own 'Environmental Policy', which sets out our framework to reduce carbon footprint and where possible to utilised resources for workshop activities that are durable and recycled.
- Most of the Mela workshop materials are sourced locally, except for specialist items such as henna.
- None of the Mela workshops used fossil fuel in delivering their workshops
- Mela outreach programme input, places great emphasis on artists to shared transport, when traveling to the same events.

ACE Outcomes

All elements of the Mela programme were delivered successfully. Our key aims and outcomes have been met, and these underpin the Arts Council of England's core programme outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Creative People
- Outcome 2: Cultural Communities and
- Outcome 3: A Creative and Cultural Country

Mela Key Aims and Outcomes

- Completed University of Central Lancashire Student Design project with artistic designs used to address the Mela site and merchandise provided to public for free as an incentive for completing feedback forms. 10 students took part in this project.
- Promoted South Asian heritage and cultural arts across the Northwest including reaching new audiences.
- Mela artistic input consisted of over 82% of performing artist and 98% workshop artists from the Northwest.
- A total of 85 performing artists took part in the Mela main event and 20 artists in the outreach programme. This showcased traditional dance and specialist musical content.

- Mela workshops involved 28 artists at the Main event and 21 outreach events in Kendal and Lancaster.
- 10 new craft forms were introduced as part of workshops however henna artists proved highly popular with people queuing for a considerable time to take part.

Mela attracted South Asian communities and a broader audience with its inclusive programme. Families joined workshops, giving children new experiences, while the stage events drew a diverse crowd who danced and interacted with artists.

It is estimated Mela programme reached at least 3,500 people at its main event on the Flag market and up to 1,400 people in its Outreach programmes