

Record registrations for Culture Durham Meet 2018

Culture Durham's 2018 annual conference on Thursday 22 November attracted a huge turnout, with more than 160 people registered for the event which took place at Durham Cathedral and at Durham University's Palace Green Library.

Attendees gathered in the Chapter House at the cathedral to hear speakers outline the work of the Culture Durham partnership and hear about the partnership's plans for the future while exploring opportunities for the wider creative sector in the region. The event was supported by Durham Cathedral, Durham County Council and Durham University.

The annual conference is the key event in Culture Durham's calendar and those present took advantage of the opportunity to network with representatives of the county's cultural and heritage venues, Arts Council England funded organisations and other key players in the sector. Attendees heard about the extensive range of activities and events due to take place in County Durham in 2019 and how to tap into potential opportunities to develop their own work and businesses.

Exciting year ahead in 2019

"With the county hosting its Year of Culture next year, it's a great time to be working in the cultural sector in Durham," said Culture Durham chair Roger Kelly. "Events like the Cricket World Cup, the Norman Cornish centenary, the opening of the Spanish Art Gallery and Lumiere, the largest outdoor light festival in the UK, are all taking place in Durham over the next 12 months, so you can see that 2019 certainly promises to be an exciting and opportunity-packed year," said Kelly.

Outlining the partnership's work over the past year, Kelly went on to highlight the organisation's key priorities over the coming two years which included advocating the importance of culture to the local economy and regeneration and work to raise the profile on marketing and reputation and develop audiences and programme.

Kelly said that Culture Durham was looking forward to working more closely with the County Durham Economic Partnership, the North East Culture Partnership and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership on the growth of the county's culture offer and addressing skills gaps. The organisation would also promote the opportunities presented by the arts and creative industries as potential careers for young people and continue coordinating responses to major funding opportunities to secure additional external resources for development and delivery of collaborative projects.

"We will collaboratively coordinate programmes and promotion of cultural venues and activities across the county and celebrate good work and best practice, while identifying new ways to promote the county's outstanding heritage and excellent cultural offer, aligning with the region as a place to live and invest," Kelly said.

Greater role for digital

Over the next two years, he also looked forward to greater digital sharing of information about Culture Durham's member organisations through digital channels, exploring the potential for joint ticketing and developing audience diversity, including in local communities across the county. "This is an ambitious agenda, but it is important to maintain and grow the vibrancy of our county. And we hope it will increase the contribution our sector makes to the social and economic wellbeing of our residents," said Kelly.

Organisations represented at the conference included Arts Council England, The Auckland Project, Beamish, The Cobweb Orchestra, Culture Bridge North East, Durham Cathedral, Durham County Council,

Durham County Cricket Club, Durham Creatives, Durham Music Service, Durham University, East Durham Trust, The Forge, Heritage Lottery Fund, Locomotion, North East Cultural Partnership, North Pennines AONB, Northern Heartlands, Redhills, TIN Arts, Ushaw, Visit County Durham and many others who see Culture Durham as a valuable hub to encourage opportunities for collaboration in the cultural sector across the county.

As well as featuring some excellent keynote speakers and highlighting future opportunities, the conference showcased some best practice examples of successful cultural collaborations and hosted a successful cultural exchange market place where attendees were able to discover more about the work of Culture Durham's members as they hosted information stands highlighting their work. Attendees also took the opportunity to view the cathedral's Open Treasure museum and take part in behind-the-scenes tours of Durham University's Bishop Cosin's Library.

Many of those attending the conference, which was organised by Culture Durham, Durham Cathedral, Durham Creatives and Durham University said that that it was the best Culture Durham annual event they had ever attended and delegates departed the World Heritage Site looking forward to an exciting year ahead.