COBALT

Cobalt Studios: Social & Cultural Impact (2024)

Introduction

Hello, Kate here, founder & creative director.

After another year of very solid graft and long hours, it's important to us and reassuring to see our impact turned into data.

We are a **community interest company,** and our mission is to make culture affordable and accessible to ALL. This is not just a statement that we say because it sounds nice – we need to be sure this what we actually do, and being transparent with our impact in an important part of how we operate. So, we hope that you will have time to explore some of the figures we compiled.

Some of the takeaways for us are...

- We saw **bigger audience numbers** despite slightly less events, over 22,000 people visited Cobalt, so events are getting busier;
- Our average ticket price was very affordable, at an **average of £8.37**;
- We strongly feel that continuing to offer people the option to **choose what they feel is most affordable to them** really works, and we are grateful to see a good amount of people do choose the middle or top tier options
- We were blown away and grateful for all the generous and positive comments – some of them made us cry and laugh, and we are **listening to the feedback**. We know we need more toilets and a green room, and we will continue to raise money to make infrastructure improvements.

Introduction

Most importantly, you told us, and we also know ourselves that we can and must continue to **drive up diversity** – Cobalt is a space well-used by lots of communities who feel safe and welcomed here compared to other places, we know this because our audience survey tells us this again and again. However, we still don't see the breadth of diversity in our programme always reflected in the audience, and this remains a high priority for us to address.

We have ideas to address this with **important outreach work** and via a **membership scheme,** which will prioritise some of the communities we believe would benefit from the space but don't come here yet. As always, this requires funding and more staff, and if you look at our accounts on Companies House, you will see the last set of accounts showing another loss.

We continue to try and increase our **financial scope** with plans for the backyard, funding applications, looking for a fairy benefactor and balancing our books with more options for patrons to support, our audience to choose higher ticket prices etc whilst ensuring that we remain accessible for those that need it – we know that the cost of living (or maybe we should say the pressure of capitalism and greed) continues to turn the screws tightly for those that aren't money led. It's a delicate balance & at times precarious, but ultimately under the fragility our roots and our network seem to grow a little stronger each year.

And finally, lastly – we have been working towards a **possible new project** for late 2025, no announcements yet until it's a 100% a goer – but keep your fingers crossed for this one as it will increase our impact significantly on the visual arts side of what we do!

Thank you for reading this and for all your support – Cobalt would literally be nothing without all the brilliant people who come here in so many shapes and forms.

How much culture did Cobalt provide & support in 2024?

10.7
Days of Free Mentoring Support

100
Marginalised Community Focused Events

197
Music Events

55
Arts Events

6
Student Research Interviews

3
Paid Internships

78
Live Performances Recorded

861
Hours of Culture

1
Paid Music Residency

20
DJ Mixes Recorded

1
Support Artist's Residency & Exhibition

IRO
500
Free Co-Working Hours

155
Community Engagment Events

245
Total Events

23
Free Venue Hires

14
Affordable Artist Studios

7
Free hires for filming/ photo shoots

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Was Cobalt affordable in 2024?

We offered free use of the venue for **23 seprate events** to enable others to make their cultural event affordable and accessible.

72 (29.4%) of our events were **donation-based** or had an honesty box option.
We operate a **sliding scale system** for the majority of our ticketed events.

COBALT

Average Ticket Price

£8.37

Spring	£7.84
Summer	£8.31
Autumn	£8.97

FreeTickets

3608

Donation Tickets

1111

‘Surviving’ Tickets (up to £10) sold

8676

‘Driving’ Tickets (£11 - 13) sold

3848

‘Thriving’ Tickets (£14 and more) sold

3461

How much do we contribute to the cultural economy?

Cobalt Studios: Social & Cultural Impact (2024)

£90,119

Paid to Artists & Musicians

£106,985

Paid to Cobalt staff, technicians & other freelancers

COBALT

What income do we have for the venue?

Director's Voluntary Hours
(worth IRO £72K)

4800 Hours / £72,000

Community Volunteering

250 Hours

COALT

Total Ticket Sales

£142,615

Bar Sales (after VAT & sale costs)

£124,514

Fundraiser Donations
(Ben Reid's Ben on A Bairn's Bike campaign and Interstellar Strut's fundraiser party)

£4,812

Youth Music Grant
(to support us in building accessible youth music studios in the backyard)

£15,000

PRS Grant
(to install equipment for filming live performances & support us in developing a YouTube channel)

£7,500

The Building

Co-Working

Studios

Venue

COBALT

Do we own the building?

NO

We wish we did! More than anything...



£30,600 Our rent per annum

25 Years Our remaining lease

NCC have given us a provisional price to buy the building, which takes into account all of the self-building we have done to improve it – we currently have no idea how or where to raise the money. All suggestions and wealthy benefactors welcome to get in touch…

Our hope & dream is to make Cobalt a ‘forever project’ – a sacred space for culture that can’t be touched by capitalism or financial predators.

COBALT

How many people benefitted from Cobalt in 2024?

(2024) Cobalt Studios: Social & Cultural Impact

1431

Artists

(24% increase from 1148 in 2023)

22,007

Audience

(20% increase from 18,284 in 2023)

COBALT

Is Cobalt diverse?

In 2024 we made opportunities for:

535	Female Artists
749	Male Artists
89	Non-Binary & Gender Non-Conforming Artists

A quick Google search confirms gender inequality in the music industry is still way too prevalent - we are proud of being almost 50% men v 50% women & gender non-conforming.

Gender proportions of festival acts:
30% female, **58%** male, **3%** non-binary, **7%** mixed

The female:pressure FACTS report (March 2024)

Women and non-binary people claimed **less than 5%** of producer and engineer credits across the top 50 streamed songs of last year.

Fix The Mix Annual Report (April 2023)

Writers singed to 106 UK music publishers:
14.18% female, **85.82%** male
Artists signed to 2019 UK labels:
19.69% female, **80.31%** male

The Gender Gap Report (2019)

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L.A.D's: Our support for Female & Gender Non-Conforming DJs

L.A.D's (Ladies and Decks) is our in-house programme of workshops, open decks sessions, socials and club nights. It is aimed at providing educational and peer support opportunities for female & GNC people, as well as uplifting female & GNC DJs and artists.

L.A.D's workshops & open decks sessions are held regularly during our event seasons. With support from Amplify Hire, we provide 3 sets of DJ decks for attendees to practice on, guided by volunteer mentors. The sessions also usually feature a panel or informal presentation, delivered by local female & GNC DJs – topics have ranged from DJ software, mixing records, music production, to event promotion and navigating the music industry.

In 2024, we have also invited 2 guest artists – NikNak and Nono Gigsta – to deliver a L.A.D's session.

COBALT

In 2024, Cobalt offered:

8

L.A.D's Workshop/Open Decks sessions
delivered by local female & gender non-conforming DJs.
Equipment provided by Amplify Hire.

2

L.A.D's Masterclass Sessions
delivered by female & gender non-conforming artists, touring internationally and within the UK.

26

Paid DJ sets at Cobalt
19 headline sets and 7 support sets played by L.A.D's residents and female & gender non-conforming DJs.

33

Paid DJ sets at Ernest Cafe Bar
played by L.A.D's residents. For a number of artists, this was their first paid and/or public DJ performance, and has since led to more bookings at other venues.

All L.A.D's workshops are free to attend, with an option to donate. Our L.A.D's Presents club nights are offered at a more accessible price point and/or with discounts to workshop attendees.

Our support for New Music

One of the core parts of our mission is contributing to the creation of new music by providing the resources and safe space for artists to develop & present new work. In 2024, we offered:

68

New Music events
This includes our FRESH event series, improvized music event series 'Making it Up', open mic events, jazz jams, new release/label launches & Yoshino Shigihara's performance at the end of her residency.

1

Paid Artist Residency
In June 2024, we hosted Yoshino Shigihara for a 5-day artist residency. Throughout the her week at Cobalt, Yoshino collaborated with local musicians and visual artists, ultimately producing 6 brand new musical pieces, a series of risograph prints and interactive visuals. The residency culminated with a live performance showcasing this work, including a live improvision piece featuring Cobalt's Open House improvisation group.

COBALT

'I feel like this space gave me the confidence to try out new material and to be present whilst playing and it was a truly magical experience.'

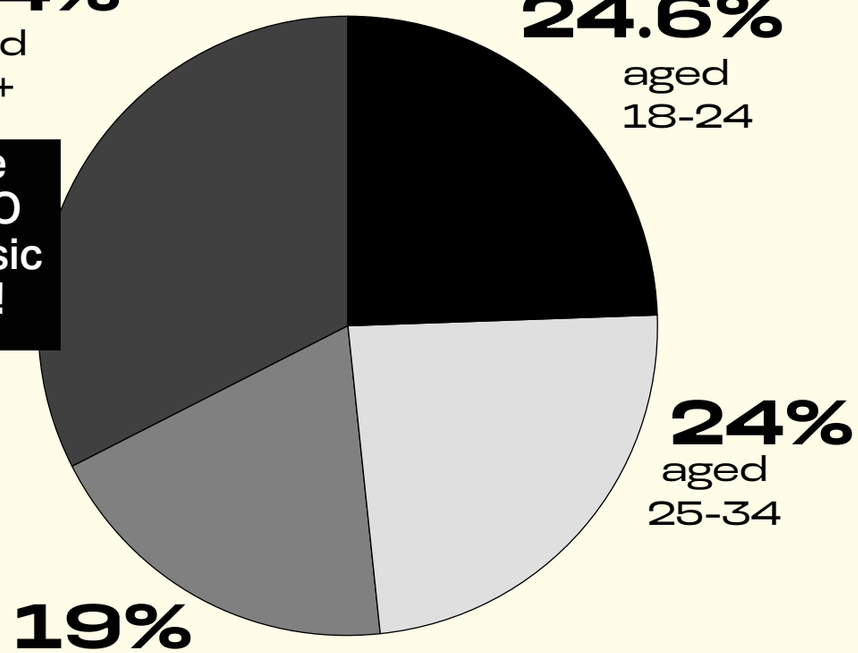
'As an artist I can say that it is insanely difficult to sustain a career in music at the moment, the musicians are struggling, the venues are struggling. Cobalt is a place that treats artists with respect, pays fare fees - in this way helping artists to sustain a career, or make rent ha- and be able to keep playing, keep working on their craft. If we lose such venues as Cobalt, we are wiping out new music in general.'

'Spaces like Cobalt give artists a place to experiment, a place to hone their art if they are at the beginning of their career, and a place to connect to new audiences. Audiences can experience something new in welcoming surroundings.'

'Cobalt is an fantastic venue offering an unique and safe environment to share new music.'

'So cool that you're able to create an environment that is contagiously creative!'

A glance at our demographic in 2024



...so you're NEVER TOO OLD for music & dancing!

we resonate with this and would love to do more training/ work around neurodivergence & creativity

9.5% are Disabled

32.5% are Neurodivergent

35% consider themselves part of the LGBTQIA+ community

8.5% are Non-cis-gender

COBALT

This is not big news to us & we have been trying hard to change it, but we need help...

6% identify as any other cultural heritage than White British

This was big news to us...

58% self-identify as coming from a working class background

36% felt they did not grow up with good access to culture

the remaining 40% of respondents come from all over the North East but also well beyond, one person came from Kenya!

60% come from Newcastle

[Cobalt Studios Audience Survey (2024 Retrospective); n=179]

We asked our audience...

Why do you come to Cobalt?

93%
agree places like Cobalt help tackle social isolation & mental health difficulties

76%
to connect with others & be part of a wider community

61%
because it's good for their mental health & wellbeing

86%
to access quality culture

2%
To work (in a studio or co-working)

37%
to learn things & be creative

72%
to dance

[Cobalt Studios Audience Survey (2024 Retrospective); n=179]

'I suffer with terrible anxiety and Cobalt is the only place i feel comfortable to have a dance.'

'It's local and it's Independent and I like that it's not too big.'

'Because it's my favourite venue and I feel safe there.'

'Best sound in Newcastle.'

'[I come to Cobalt to] be in a friendly, trouble free great safe place.'

'To have new experiences. I trust Cobalt to programme interesting artists and know they (you) care about music and art and have great taste.'

'Community, good music, the ability to be yourself without judgement.'

'It is one of very few places that incubate creativity at the grassroots level. '

'Good grub, to discover new artists, to support a venue that's doing the right things, to see the toilet exhibition grow.'

'It's the only place in Newcastle that brings in the djs that I love on the regular. Every single weekend is a vibe. The space is perfect, the staff are the best. It's the only club space where I feel 100% comfortable.'

'Supporting queer joy is important to me.'

'I enjoy Thursday Fresh. Music always interesting. Food tasty, plentiful and cheap. I am told you also put on the best club nights in town!'

We asked our audience...

Is Cobalt accessible?

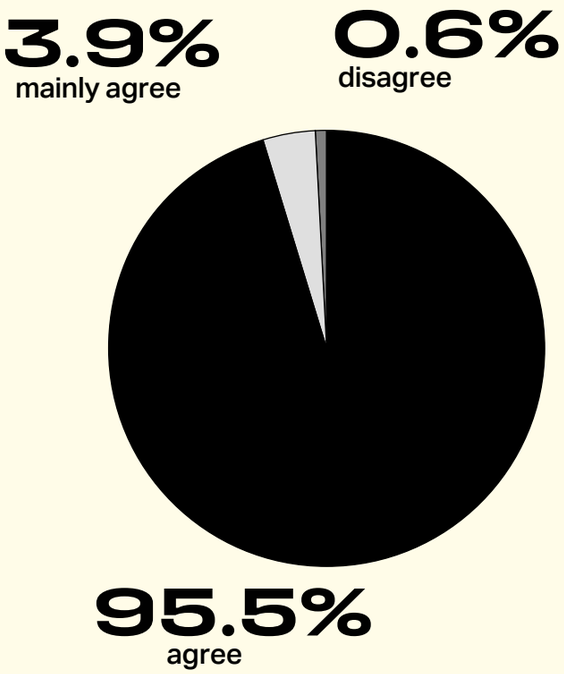
Of the comments from those who found Cobalt mainly or not accessible to their needs:

somebody said a **neurodivergent friendly night or space** would be cool

we wonder what this might look like? Reach out… Let us know, we are listening.

toilets were mentioned a lot

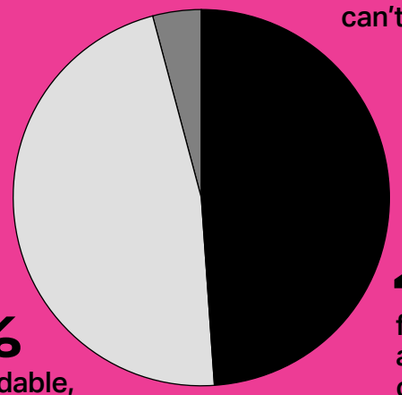
we really want to get these better, we know we need more and some of you want GN options while others prefer gender separate.
However, we are out of space to sort this out, and major building work is needed to improve this. We promise we will try to address this as and when we can afford to... Please buy lots of tickets & drinks so we have more money in the system, fill in surveys that help us with funding or introduce us to a fairy benefactor!



Is Cobalt affordable?

Our respondents said...

I like the 3 tier ticket offer. It feels very accessible and makes you feel generous if you pay thetop level and ok if you can only afford the bottom level.'



Is Cobalt a safe, inclusive and diverse space?

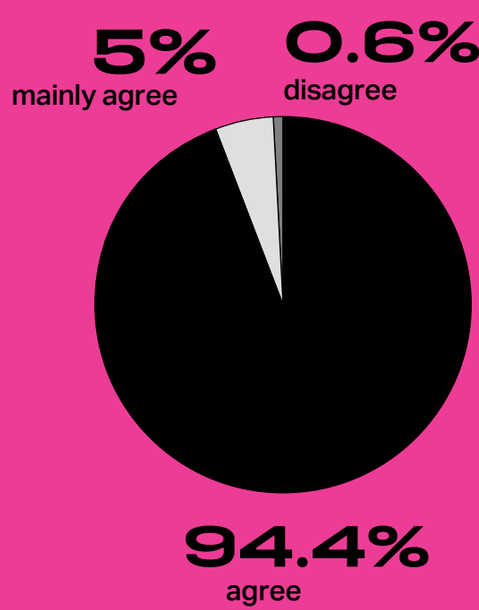
Our respondents said...

'Fairly diverse for the area, feels like some events can disproportionately skew white middle class compared to the city as a whole.'

'This can depend on events placed, sometimes certain events change the inclusivity of a crowd however this can't be managed by cobalt and is normally out of the control of Cobalt as to who attends events.'

'I have never felt safer in a club space. Your focus on safety over judgement has been immensely contributory to the relaxing and fun experience I've had every time I come!'

'Cobalt is the most accepting club I've ever been to in the whole UK.'



[Cobalt Studios Audience Survey (2024 Retrospective); n=179]

What does Cobalt bring to the city?

In a few words of our community...

‘Culture, vision, independence. That thing that you love about Newcastle's music scene that you can't put your finger on? That's Cobalt.’

‘Absolutely essential grass roots music and culture.’

‘You bring unique, diverse events and artists. Stuff that I'd usually have to travel to London or Manchester for. I'm very grateful for it.’

‘Top tier underground scene, showcasing diverse artists.’

‘Brings back the love of music without phones.’

‘Unique accessible space with excellent programming.’

COBALT

‘A place where my creativity finds a place to be inspired and my nervous system rests. It means everything to me.’

‘Electric events that create a sense of cultural becoming.’

‘Everything. Without Cobalt there is no bar set for what actual night life culture should represent.’

‘Freedom to be the woman I am.’

‘Cobalt brings diversity and something completely unique to Newcastle with a focus of music. Without Cobalt Newcastle would be boring, and to be honest I probably wouldn’t live here if there wasn’t a grassroots venue like Cobalt.’

‘Cobalt is a place for the people, by the people.’

‘There is nothing like it, if Cobalt stopped running events, I would stop going out.’

‘Really is the core of the underground electronic music scene in Newcastle and attracts international talent that would otherwise never have visited or maybe even heard of the scenehere. Artists want to come back to play at Cobalt because of how great and inclusive thevenue is. Without Cobalt the scene in the North East would lack a lot of heart and originality.’

‘Real club culture.’

‘Access to an abundance of cultural displays. There are so many new genres of music I’ve discovered and grown to love and there’s a great sense of respect for the acts and generally everyone there.’

‘It brings art that is of a global calibre to our doorstep, things like Harness bring nights that could only be found in mainland Europe to Newcastle.’

‘A safe space for people of all ages to be themselves.’

‘I wouldn’t still be in Newcastle if Cobalt, Ernest and the broader Ousburn area didn’t exist.Cobalt brings culture, community and a place to go that is not really available anywhere else inthe city.’

‘What a special place you’ve created and a beacon of hope for the UK nightlife scene. Bravo and I have no doubt it will just keep getting better - the vision and execution is exemplary.’

‘Thanks so much for an incredible time - really something special and totally unique. Our minds were blown.’

‘It's a beautiful space run by people who very genuinely care about music/the arts, their local community and the community of artists who pass through. Also, a venue that cooks for all artists, staff & crew and encourages them to eat together and connect is a rare and very welcome thing in the UK!’

‘Cobalt was the first gig I did with this project where I felt valued.’

‘High quality venues such as this are becoming increasingly rare. Protecting this space is essential.’

COBALT

‘Everyone was lovely and the whole experience felt so professional and respectful of us as artists. For a 'grassroots' venue it felt how I’d like to be treated in most venues - amazing food(!), community, amazing music and respectful and curious people.’

‘It is the most welcoming environment we’ve ever had in the UK as artists.’

‘Music venues like Cobalt keep the dream alive.’

‘Cobalt is exactly the kind of venue I love playing the most. The whole experience is so positive that it allows you to focus entirely on the performance and giving a good experience to the audience. Keep doing what you're doing, the music scene needs you!’

‘Not gonna lie, I envy the people that get to eat your food around this time of the year! Thank you for feeding us and welcoming us to Newcastle. It was unforgettable and I hope to come back soon! ’

COBALT

‘It was ace meeting you all - thanks for your wonderful hospitality and showing us around your amazing city. The band were blown away by how lovely you all were.’

‘[It] was one of my favourite nights in a very long time, it’s a very special club you have there…’

‘The whole experience of playing here has been so heartwarming, inspiring and amazing. I felt so well looked after and supported ,the food was incredible. The crowd were respectful and full of open energy. The staff were all so kind and attentive. I’m so grateful for the opportunity to play at Cobalt. I feel like this space gave me the confidence to try out new material and to bepresent whilst playing and it was a truly magical experience. Thank you so much!!’

‘Saturday was honestly everything we dreamt of, absolutely perfect .’

COBALT

‘You guys are an outstanding venue, such a lovely team and you take care of artists so well!It's always a highlight for me to come and play here.’

‘It was such a sweet night! The crowd was so appreciative at the end and my friends who came loved your space. <...> Honestly, you’re really onto something special, Someone should write a documentary about Cobalt!’

‘It was honestly such a delightful gig - as soon as we walked in we recognised the care, determination and attention to detail that’s always most evident in DIY community spaces. <...> we were so grateful to end our tour with incredible hospitality, homecooked food and a very enthusiastic pin-drop audience.’

‘Thank you for being such a wonderful welcoming space for live music.’

COBALT

‘The arts are being squeezed by terrible government choices, and grassroots and independentvenues like yourselves are what allows smaller acts to perform!’

‘Cobalt is helping keep experimental music alive! It gives hope to artists like me to keep doingwhat Im doing and that there's people out there that believe it is worth something/worth payingus as artists for.’

‘It's a breeding ground for massively important UK talent.’

‘The world needs places like here to cultivate a creative community to give confidence to thosewho feel like they need a safe space to explore their own creative journey inside and out. Cobalt is a space not just full of inspiration, opportunities events, but also a space for me, personally, which reignites my creative spark and helps build self-esteem. Without places like this, I think it would deeply impact peoples health and wellbeing as well as their happiness .’

COBALT

‘It's not merely a space where art is consumed, but a platform where it is cultivated and nurtured. It's the collective creative spirit of Newcastle, where boundaries blur, and acceptance thrives. It is <...> a space that radiates creativity, a sanctuary that embraces diversity and a community beacon that unites under the shared banner of artistic expression.’

‘The UK needs grassroots music venues to support the next generation of musicians and the music industry. Open studio days shows us behind the scenes at Cobalt and the possibility of earning a living as an artist. Great to have a co working space available locally and network with locals.’

‘A unique creative atmosphere that provides a place for artists to develop and audiences to engage.’

COBALT

‘Cobalt Studios is one of the greatest clubs and spaces in Europe at the moment. And EVERYONE involved should be very proud. The future of clubbing. Dripping with soul and love. No bullshit. No try hard... No hype. The DNA is real. Almost wholesome but always intuitive and pure. <...> every dj should be literally fighting to play here. at ANY cost. a holy grail outpost. They will talk about this place in 50 years time.’

‘You bring an actual proper club venue that cares about curated proper DJ sets from some of the finest there are right now, and without it Newcastle would be massively without that culture, which is some of the most vibrant and meaningful cultural expression and participation there is.’

‘Raves and dance events are becoming a lot more commercial and are attracting the wrong audiences of people who are there for drugs and violence. Fortunately, places like Colbalt exist to give a safe space for people who just want to dance, enjoy the music and live life peacefully with other like minded people.’

COBALT

‘It means everything to me: a place I can be myself, it’s a place I feel seen and loved, and without Cobalt I don’t know what I would do. I love this place so much and everything it brings to Newcastle! Honestly it saved my life coming to Cobalt, it’s such a loving accepting place and everyone that works there makes sure you’re safe. Cobalt is the place I visit for gigs and clubnights and I wouldn’t want to go to any other place in Newcastle! All in all it means the world to me having Cobalt still running.’

‘A home when I’m away from home, a family when I’m away from family, a place melting pot ofculture and creativity.’

‘It goes beyond being a venue, its a catalyst for opportunity and community.’

‘Cobalt has provided some of my most precious memories over the last 5 years and makes me feel part of the community whenever I go.’

COBALT

‘Cobalt is such an important venue for underground music that pushes the forefront of eclectic sounds. Your focus on diversity and inclusivity makes it a hub for likeminded people to let their hair down and express themselves. Compared to the rest of the North East, there are a few banging venues but I think Cobalt has really nailed it.’

‘You make it possible to see so many artists that I can't imagine would entertain playing anywhere else in the city.’

‘A truly authentic place that lives and breathes for real culture. A safety haven for people thatare different in a town boiling over with overpriced nonsense drinks and vapid themes, Cobalt is one of a kind!’

‘Incredible talent for extended sets which would otherwise not be available in Newcastle. An inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, what I’d imagine raving to be in 90’s.’

COBALT

‘[Visiting Cobalt] literally changed my life as a POC growing up in the north it was really tough and a lot of venues we were made to feel unwelcome and didn’t feel part of the scene. We didn’t know you guys existed until someone recommended Ernest and at the end of the night someone else put a Cobalt band around my arm. I was literally blown away when I entered. Love the place.’

‘A completely refreshing space that brings more diverse background and culture than any other space in Newcastle/England that I have been to. Incredible bookings and music taste and the most friendly environment for a club/dance space for people of all backgrounds and gender and culture.’

‘This last year was the first time I went to Cobalt and it was amazing, I thought Newcastle only had sticky clubs with sing along music and this really opened my eyes. Everything from the music to the lights really made the space feel transformative and introduced to some great music.’

COBALT

‘Brings roots music, brings a venue like no other with artists that you’d never get the chance to see usually or that you might never heard of! It brings culture and to many people I know Colbalt is a second home.’

‘Cobalt feels like a home. You go there and everyone is happy to see you - even if they don’t know you. It’s just a wonderful accumulation of wonderful people and the fact it is so accessible for everyone makes it such an important venue.’

‘A safe, welcoming space! I’ve never been to a venue that genuinely feels like family, everyone is so kind!’

‘Your staff are second-to-none. Such a welcoming and supportive venue with excellent attention to detail with regards to customer safety and enjoyment.’

COBALT