Insights Report:

FEEDBACK FROM THE COBALT COMMUNITY



2nd June 2026

SUMMARISING TWO WEEKS OF SURVEYS, CONVERSATIONS, AND IDEAS FROM FEEDBACK FORTNIGHT @ COBALT

An independent evaluation by Bright Impact CIC

Cobalt's Impact Story: A cultural hub of community & connection

For many residents in the North East, finding a place that offers both quality culture and a sense of belonging can be a challenge. People face barriers accessing mainstream arts - venues can often be unaffordable, feel elitist or exclusionary, particularly for minority groups. However, an independent evaluation by Bright Impact CIC, a creative research social enterprise, has revealed that Cobalt, a creative venue based in Newcastle's Ouseburn area, is breaking down these barriers to become a vital "third space" for its community.

The report highlights Cobalt's unique ability to engage an incredibly broad and inclusive demographic. It's audience proudly reflects diverse ages, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Notably, 26% of audience members identify as neurodivergent, and 25% identify as LGBTQIA+ - the latter being significantly higher than the 5% recorded in the national census.

By purposefully cultivating a safe, affordable, and accessible environment, Cobalt has become a space individuals who might otherwise feel out of place in conventional nightlife or cultural spaces.



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Cobalt's Impact Story: A cultural hub of community & connection (Continued)

Cobalt is making a positive cultural and social impact in the local area. According to the findings:

- **The top reasons** people come to Cobalt are to **access quality culture, connect with a community,** and **get a mental health boost.**
- **93%** of respondents explicitly stated that **visiting Cobalt has a positive effect on their personal well-being.**
- **Almost everyone (97%) reported being introduced to new music** at Cobalt.
- **People describe leaving the space feeling "*uplifted*," "*inspired,*" and "*full of joy,*"** with many noting that it acts as a necessary source of hope that helps them feel better about the world.

As one audience member beautifully captured in their feedback:

"Cobalt is my home away from home".

Another said:

"It's a welcoming community space where we can support each other, boost each other up, and be creative together."

Cobalt proves that independent venues are not just about entertainment - they are essential pillars of regional identity, connection, and community wellbeing.

Key Insights

#1 Cobalt engages a broad demographic, welcoming a diverse mix of ages and sexual orientations, alongside neurodivergent individuals and those from working-class backgrounds

#2 Overall, the majority of Cobalt's audience come from Newcastle, particularly the Ouseburn area. But people travel from outside of the city for club nights.

#3 It's a safe, accessible and inclusive space - and it's affordable for many.

#4 Audience feedback is overwhelmingly positive, and also includes few ideas about what would make it even better.

#5 Most people come to Cobalt for quality culture, community, or a mental health boost.

#6 Regardless of the event, the majority of Cobalt's audience have positive feelings when they're there.

#7 An impressive 93% told us that Cobalt boosts their personal well-being.

> *A great alternative venue full of surprises*

> *Cobalt brings an uplifting, safe and inclusive environment to the region... It makes the arts accessible to people that may not otherwise be able to access and afford these experiences.*

> *I think it brings a safe space for person of colour*

Introduction

An Independent Evaluation: Feedback Fortnight @ Cobalt

Bright Impact CIC was commissioned to do an independent review of Cobalt, which centred around running *'Feedback Fortnights'* between 14-28th March and 15th - 31st May.

The Objectives

We wanted to

- **Understand the "Cobalt Experience"** - capturing what people think about Cobalt and its role in the local creative community.
- **Identify opportunities for learning & Improvement** - identifying practical ways to improve accessibility, inclusion, and the physical environment.
- **Demonstrate social and cultural Impact --** providing evidence to show funders, partners and other supporters about the difference that Cobalt makes to people's lives, the community and the cultural scene in the North East.

The Approach

As well as standard audience surveys, we piloted a range of creative research methods designed to be accessible, engaging and fit with the ethos of Cobalt (for example post cards and graffiti walls). This ensured that the voices of audience members were captured authentically, without disrupting the creative energy of the space.

The Intention

The insights shared in this report provide more than just numbers; they tell a story of community. By providing a snapshot of the social and cultural value created through this community, we hope this evidence supports Cobalt to continue to learn and grow; championing diverse local talent whilst remaining a place of culture, creativity and community.

The Authors: Dr Jami Dixon from **Bright Impact CIC** designed the research with data collection, analysis and writing support from Nela Blinkhorn (read more about Bright Impact CIC in the Appendix).

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COBALT'S REACH

We're in our 50s and love all types of music. Some club venues seem only for young people, whereas the club nights here are very inclusive to older clubbers.



Cobalt's audience

Key Insight #1

Cobalt engages a broad demographic, welcoming a diverse mix of ages and sexual orientations, alongside neurodivergent individuals and those from working-class backgrounds



Around **25%** of Cobalt's audience identify as LGBTQIA+, which is significantly higher than the 5% identifing as this in the 2021 Census.



26% identify as neurodivergent. It is believed that around 15% to 20% of the UK population is neurodivergent.



Around **30%** identify as being from a working class background. Because of the way the question is asked, it's difficult to compare this to other data.

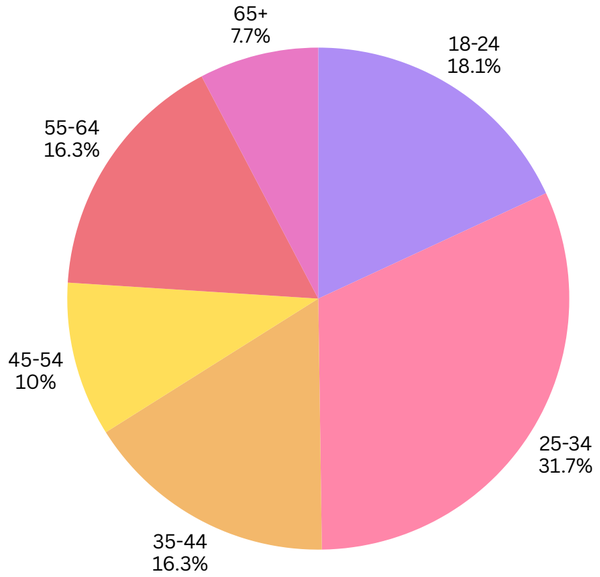


Almost **8%** identify as disabled, which is lower than the 20% of people in Newcastle (2021 Census).



9% identify as a person of colour or Global Majority. Although not a direct comparison, 20% of the Newcastle population identified with an ethnic group other than White British in 2021.

Age of respondents who completed the survey (n=221)

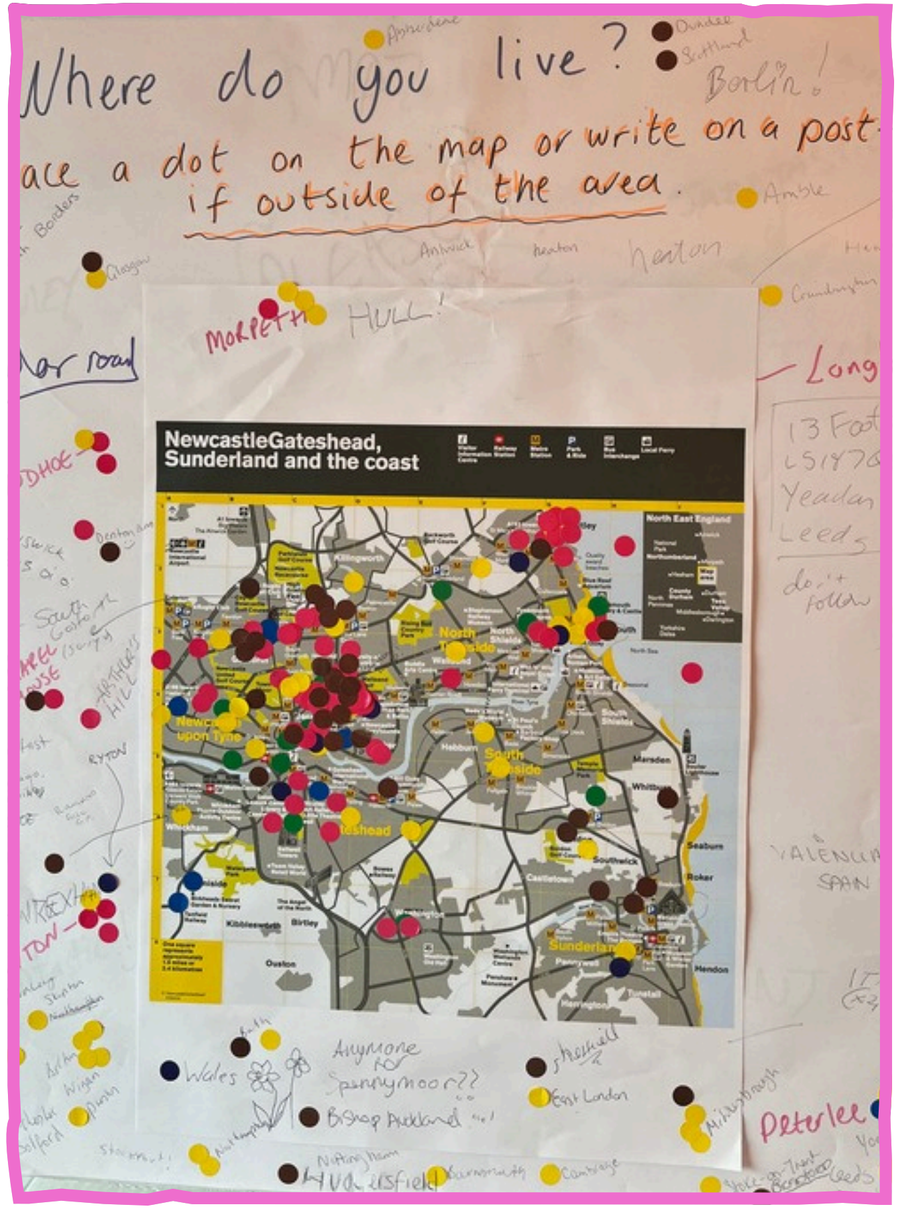


Cobalt's audience cont...

Key Insight #2

Overall, the majority of Cobalt's audience come from Newcastle, particularly the Ouseburn area. But people travel from outside of the city for club nights.

- Learning events and workshops (purple dots) typically attracted a hyper local audience from the Ouseburn and Newcastle City area.
- Club nights attracted an audience from the furthest afield, with people coming from across the UK, including London, and internationally (e.g. Spain).



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AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

A space to be creative without judgement.

It's my favourite place to let loose and everyone needs to let loose, especially in a safe beautiful place.

A welcoming place to enjoy music you wouldn't normally listen to, with stranger you wouldn't normally say hi to in the street.



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What do people think about Cobalt?

Key Insight #3

It's a safe, accessible and inclusive space - and affordable for many.

(see page 17 for more on this)

94% think Cobalt is a safe and inclusive venue

92% think it's accessible for their needs

90% think Cobalt is an affordable venue, though qualitative feedback suggests that prices are more of a challenge for students

Joyful place to be in with wonderful community.

A safe and comfy place to be, with awesome music.

A great creative space to feel part of something positive.

New music that helps me explore my own feelings, people are so friendly and easy to talk with, owners and staff are lovely, food is great.

Connection with like-minded people, warm , friendly and very welcoming space,relaxed environment.

A great alternative venue full of surprises.

Vibrant hub for small artists to showcase their music in a friendly venue.

Crucial for bringing and improving the arts in the region.

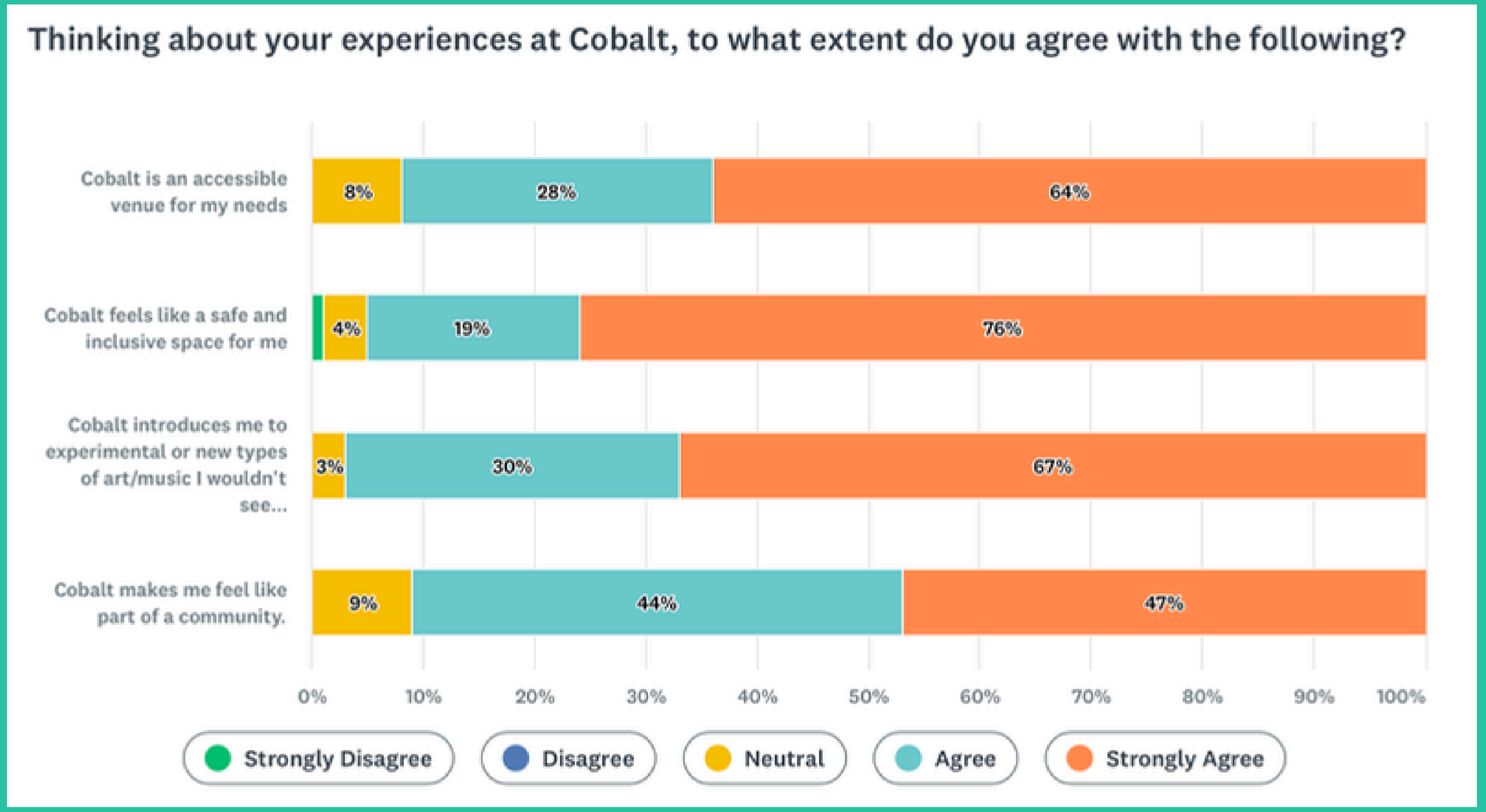


Figure 1: *A* graph showing audience responses to questions about feelings of safety, accessiblity, inclusivity and community.

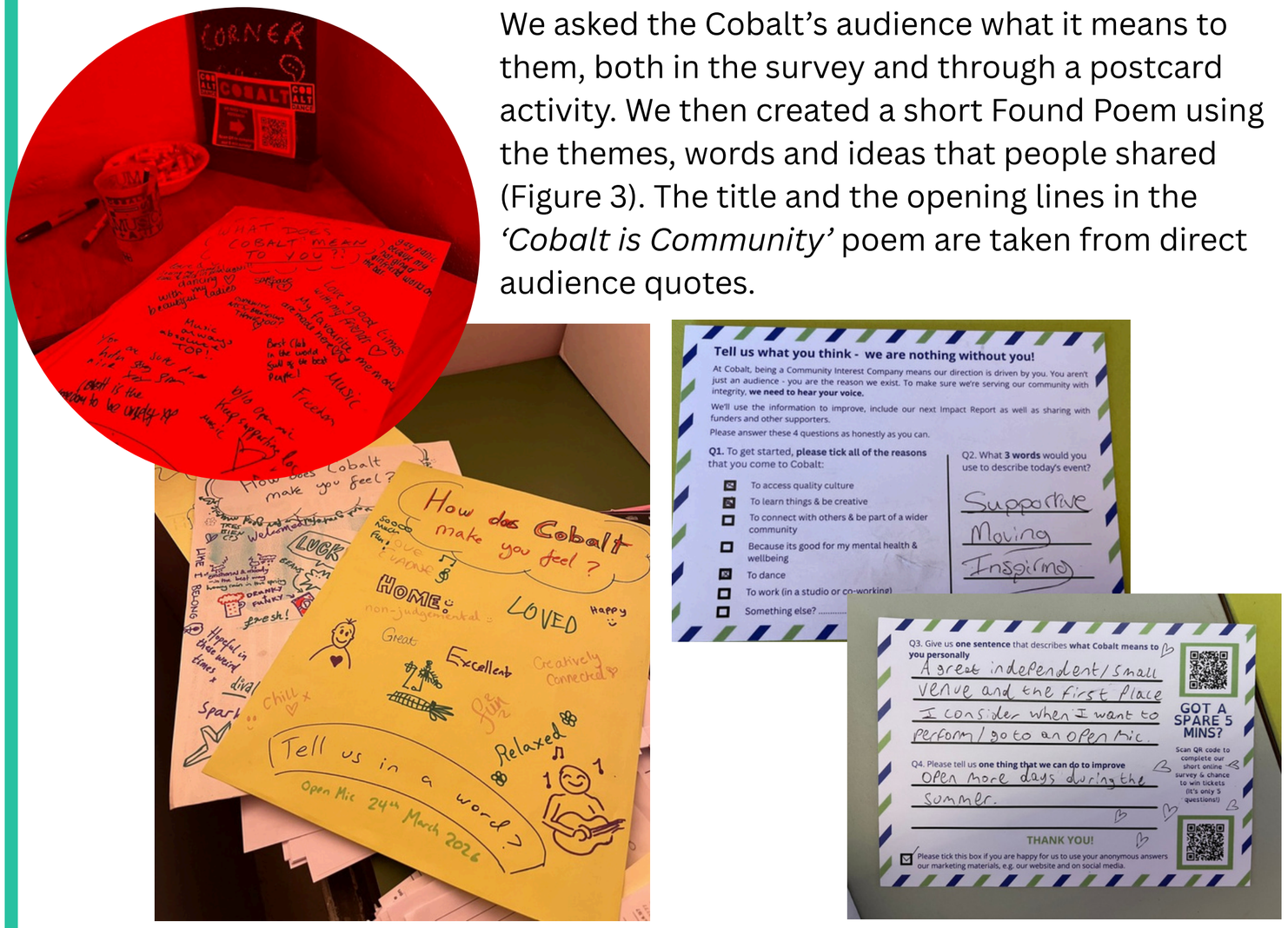
How people describe Cobalt



Figure 2: *A word cloud created from the "What 3 words would you use to describe Cobalt?" question on postcards*

What Cobalt means to their audience

We asked the Cobalt's audience what it means to them, both in the survey and through a postcard activity. We then created a short Found Poem using the themes, words and ideas that people shared (Figure 3). The title and the opening lines in the *'Cobalt is Community'* poem are taken from direct audience quotes.



Cobalt is Community

Cobalt is joy, Cobalt is community
A safe space
For peace
Belonging
Relaxing
And new and varied music too.

It's a great place to dance
Where I have the freedom to be me
Full of open-minded people
Where I don't feel like an outsider
My weekly creativity fill.

I have good times with my friends
And meet new people too
It's unexpected fun with lots of variety
Many memories made.

Without it, I'd feel lost
Less culturally engaged with the arts
Keep doing your thing!

Figure 3: A Found Poem created from audience feedback

How could Cobalt improve?

Key Insight #4

Audience feedback is overwhelmingly positive, and also includes few ideas about what would make it even better.

Although the majority of feedback is positive, people have made a few suggestions (in no particular order):

1. Programming & Scheduling.
Some desire more frequent events and specific genres. It's worth noting that Cobalt already have a full programme of events, and without additional capacity would struggle to add more events without additional support or funding.

2. Communication & Outreach.
A couple of people feel the venue could benefit from wider promotion and more detailed information regarding specific event line-ups, particularly outside of Ouseburn. At the moment, Cobalt produces and distributes a seasonal programme and advertises on social media; they will consider some of the suggestions made.

3. Facilities & Infrastructure.
A few people focused on minor physical adjustments to the building, toilets and parking for cyclists were mentioned. The lift not working was flagged as a wider accessibility challenge (though worth noting that Cobalt needs to secure around £40k to replace it). Some people attending seated events would have liked more space for dancing. Other feedback focused on outdoor seating, temperature control and the desire for food options (e.g. crisps), particularly for day time events.

4. Professional Development & Support.
A handful of artists would like deeper involvement with the venue through residencies and guidance on the "behind-the-scenes" aspects of the industry. This is helpful information for Cobalt and could inform future funding priorities.

You're doing great as you are.

As someone who travels a distance to be able to access more earlier in the day.

Seats outside in the street as it's a no vehicle access.

Fixing the lift should be your priority if you want to be actually accessible and inclusive.

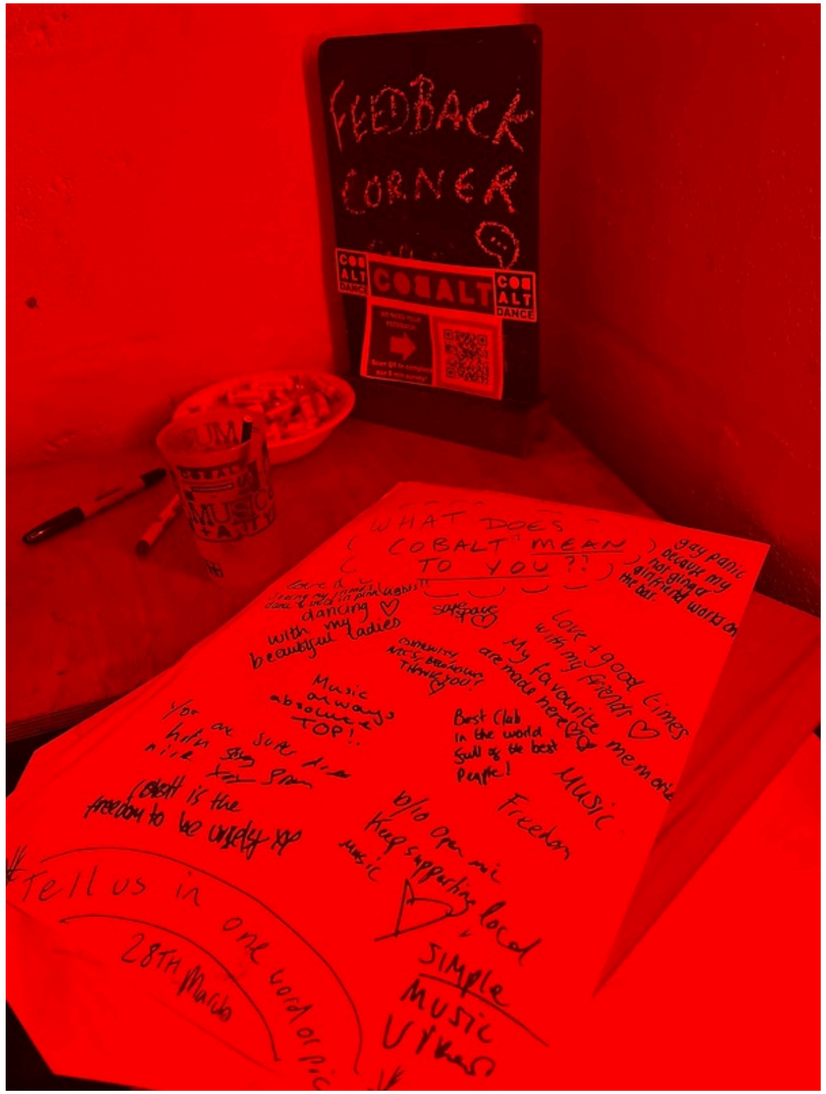
A hook on the toilet door to hang my coat.

CULTURAL IMPACTS

> *Seeing lots of different types of people in one room makes me happy.*

> *Community and safe space and inclusive in these difficult and challenging political times.*

> *Great access to music from upcoming artists.*



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Why do people come to Cobalt?

Key Insight #5

Most people come to Cobalt for quality culture, community, or a mental health boost.

There are other reasons too vary, depending on event (Figure 4).

64% **come to connect with others and be part of a wider community**

55% **come because it's good for their mental health and wellbeing**

42% **to dance**

People told us the other reasons they come to Cobalt, not captured in the graph, include: music, food and supporting independent venues.

Vibes and sensational food.

To support live music and independent venues.

Food and music.

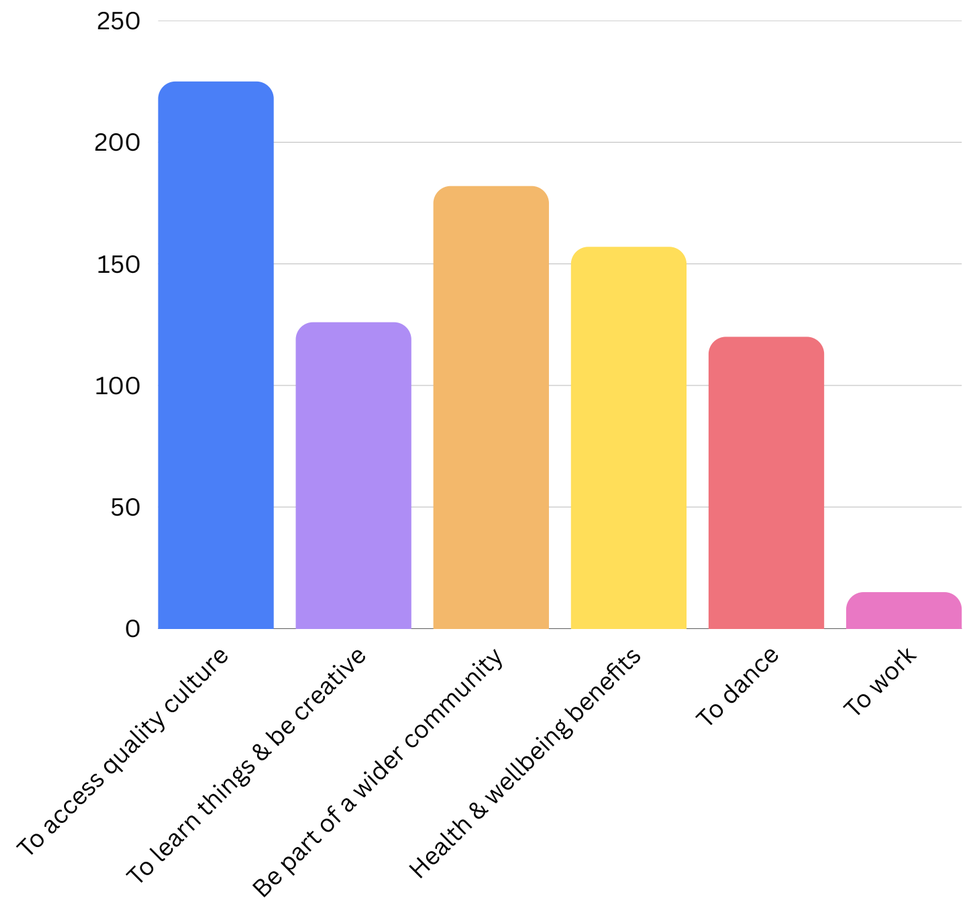


Figure 4: A graphs showing why people come to Cobalt, collected through surveys and postcards (n=283)

Increasing access to culture

A recurring sentiment from the feedback postcards is that Cobalt lowers the barriers to culture. Whether through its "no-pressure" atmosphere for performers or its pricing, it is seen as a rare resource that remains affordable and accessible to everyone.

The venue is also highly valued for its "*global*" and "*unusual"* line-ups. 97% are introduced to new music at Cobalt (Figure 1) . Some audience members contrasted Cobalt with other venues, noting that it curates talent and genres, from techno nights to international acts, that cannot be found elsewhere in the local scene.

A catalyst for creativity and talent

Cobalt serves as an incubator for both amateur and professional artists. It is described as an inspiring space that encourages experimentation, discovery of local talent, and the growth of the Newcastle arts scene.

There is a strong sense amongst its audience that Cobalt is "*essential*" to the local ecosystem. It is viewed as a pillar of the North East's cultural identity, providing a necessary platform for the "*full spectrum*" of artistic expression.

"Cobalt is one of the best independent art venues in the UK."

Audience Member

"Valuable! A wonderful varied community resource & affordable."

"It allows me (and others) to play music in a relaxed, no-pressure environment."

"Having an affordable space to experience and share art / music that is very diverse & different."

"A base for my community to see artists that you can't see at other venues"

"There is no other venue , as a 69 year old , that I can go and be made to feel so welcome, so part of any event and so equal as I do at Cobalt and I love you for it".

SOCIAL IMPACTS

It gave me something outside of work that wasn't a bar, but also allowed me to relax. I wish I'd discovered these events sooner and I'll be coming to more in the autumn season. They've had a huge impact on me, allowed me to be creative and relax but around people, without intense socialising or pressure to be good - such as classes.

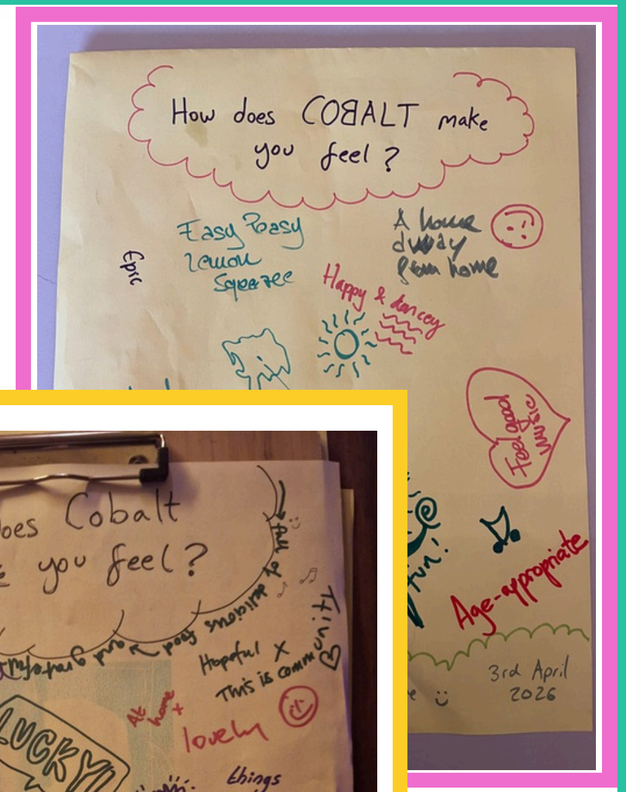


How do people feel at Cobalt ?

Key Insight #6

Regardless of the event, the majority of Cobalt's audience have positive feelings when they're there.







A hub for community & connection

The audience feedback paints a picture of a venue that functions as a *"cultural home"* - a place that balances high-quality, diverse programming with a grassroots, inclusive ethos that makes art feel approachable rather than elitist.

At the same time, Cobalt is frequently described as more than just a venue; it is seen as a hub of connection and community. Cobalt's audience view it as a safe, inclusive environment where people can meet like-minded individuals, build friendships, and feel a sense of belonging. This evidence suggests that Cobalt functions as a "third space" - somewhere that isn't home or work, but a vital third pillar of life that provides identity and belonging.

"It's my home away from home."

-Audience Member

A safe space

Several respondents highlighted that Cobalt provides a safe space for specific groups, such as the queer community, who might not feel as comfortable in more mainstream venues. It's also seen by artists that perform there as a space they feel comfortable experimenting in.

"It's so important to have a welcoming community space where we can support each other, boost each other up, and be creative together."

"A hub for culture in the art & performing scenes & a place to build community."

"A space for likeminded people to meet and connect."

"It's a safe space to connect to a hidden queer community."

"It means creativity, community and a lifeline."

The Well-being Benefits

Key Insight #7

An impressive 93% told us that Cobalt boosts their personal well-being.



This finding is inline with other research that shows attending live music and participating in cultural activities has a significant positive impact on mental, physical, and social well-being (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2024). Engaging with arts and culture is one way of improving quality of life. Many people also described coming to Cobalt as a source of hope, optimism and joy, with some saying that it helps them *"feel better about the world"*.

> ***Dancing is so good for the soul. Cobalt offers the space for dancing without eyes or judgement. It is so free. I can be whoever I want to.***

> ***I usually come for live music gigs. It's always a great experience, and I come away feeling uplifted and part of a community here in Newcastle.***

> ***Almost every time I visit Cobalt, I have a conversation - big or small - with someone new...Cultivating spaces like that is something money can't buy.***

> ***Always leaving feeling better about the world and glad that places like this exist.***

> ***Watching performances and dancing at gigs at club nights gives light and energy to my life...I love being able to explore my curiosity and be surprised. Much joy. I often come alone if my friends are busy or working but I don't want to just sit at home and watch telly and I never regret it, always a highlight of my week :)***

Conclusion: What's next?

Looking ahead to the rest of 2026, Cobalt will use feedback from this report to focus on 3 critical areas.

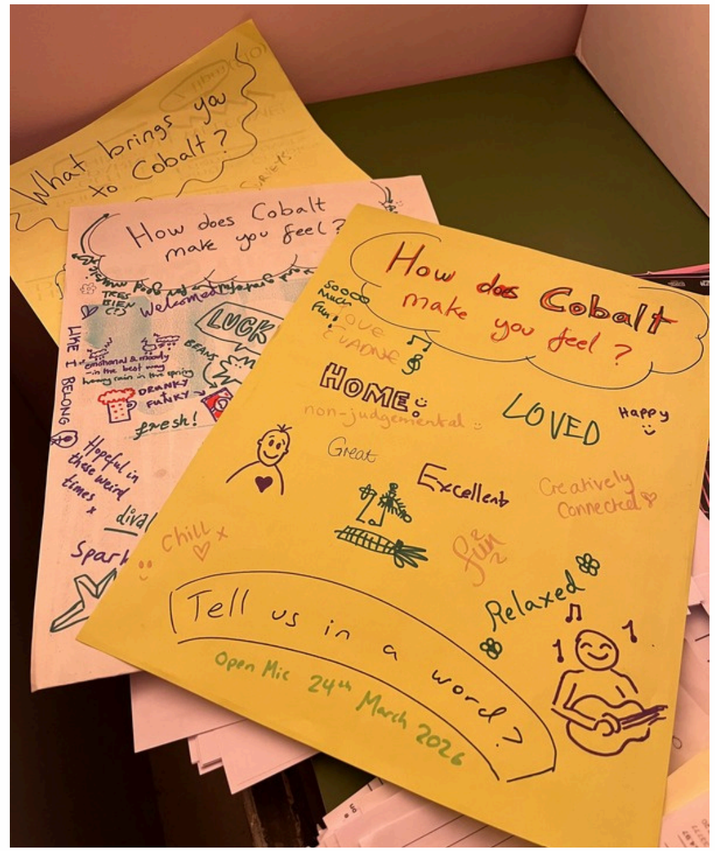
1. Diversifying the audience
While the programme proudly showcases artists from the global majority, this isn't always reflected in the crowd.
The Ask: Are you in touch with groups, individuals, or communities from the global majority who would benefit from Cobalt, but are perhaps unaware of what they offer?

2. Community music & youth workshops
Cobalt has secured funding to take music into the community, specifically through DJ and electronic production sessions for 18–25-year-olds (focusing on female and gender-non-conforming people).
The Ask: Do you have links to community or youth groups very close to Cobalt who would benefit from these sessions?

3. Long-term sustainability
To be truly sustainable, Cobalt would like to buy the building.
The Ask: Do you know anyone with a deep passion for culture, community, and the North East who might be able to help?

How to help: send an email to hello@cobaltstudios.co.uk

Watch this space for the next Feedback Fortnight!



For more information about what's on at Cobalt, visit: https://cobaltstudios.co.uk

APPENDIX

RESEARCH DESIGN

A Creative Approach

Bright Impact CIC designed and delivered a mixed-methods approach to this evaluation combining quantitative methods (such as the audience survey) with creative methods (such as graffiti walls, maps and post cards). This ensured that the voices of audience members were captured authentically, without disrupting the creative energy of the space. Data were collected by Dr Jami Dixon and Nela Blinkhorn throughout the main feedback fortnight, with additional surveys completed in May 2026.

We offered a range of ways for people to engage with Feedback Fortnight :

Map - asked people to put a dot on where they live. n=141

Post cards with 3 key questions. N=55

Graffiti wall with open questions "*how does Cobalt make you feel?*" that people could draw or write one word responses to. N=6

An online audience survey (promoted through social media and in-person through QR codes). N=238



For more information about creative approaches to research, evaluation and impact reporting contact jami@brightimpact.co.uk

About Bright Impact CIC

All too often evaluation feels like a burden or an unhelpful add-on. It's often something people put off, or just do if they have to. People often associate 'doing it' with sending out questionnaires or feedback forms. But it doesn't have to be this way!

Bright Impact CIC is a creative research social enterprise on a mission to cultivate creativity and joy in evaluative work. We help organisations do things differently, celebrating diverse ways of knowing, being and doing in the process. We believe that designing evaluations should start and end with the people involved at the centre. They should be rooted in curiosity and a commitment to making the world a better place, not extracting data and writing reports.

Our work mainly involves working with funders, charities and social enterprises who are interested in using creative methods as a way to understand their impact, demonstrate it and help centre voices of the people that matter most. Although we're a relatively new social enterprise in this space our Founder, Dr Jami Dixon, has over 20 years of experience working in social research and evaluation, and our associates bring additional specialist expertise and experience.

Our social mission all about creating opportunities for young people to gain research and evaluation experience, with the ultimate goal of diversifying the profession. For many young people, social research and evaluation aren't even on their radar as a career. Not because they wouldn't be great at it, but because no one ever told them it existed. That's why access and visibility matter. If young people can't see a pathway into research and evaluation as a career, we risk missing out on incredible talent and perspectives that our sector urgently needs.

We're working to change that, by **creating real, hands-on opportunities for young people to explore what evaluation looks like in practice, build confidence, and strengthen their CVs**. It isn't just about skills; it's about representation. When evaluators reflect the diversity of the communities we serve, our insights are richer, more nuanced, and more just.

We know we can't do this alone. As a small social enterprise, **we rely on collaboration with funders, organisations, and fellow evaluators who share this vision of a more inclusive field.** If this is you, then get in touch jami@brightimpact.co.uk