Lightlab Open Call 2026

An Artist Development opportunity provided by Barnsley Council (Barnsley Bright Nights), Lightpool (Blackpool) and Wigan Council (Light Night Wigan).

OPEN CALL
ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

Barnsley Council, Lightpool Festival and Wigan Council are delighted to announce an incredible opportunity for artists living and/or working in close proximity to Barnsley, Blackpool and Wigan Borough. The programme aims to encourage the development of high-quality light art with artists from a diverse range of backgrounds who may have never worked with light before.

This skills development programme is aimed at adult artists who are motivated and inspired to develop their practice towards creating work that could be commissioned by light art festivals, including Lightpool Festival, Barnsley Bright Nights and Light Night Wigan.

Artists will be supported by sector specialists to develop their ideas and gain knowledge on making and touring light art in festival and gallery contexts. Artists participating will gain practical experience and skills they can build on.

The Opportunity

- Up to 10 artists will be selected to take part.
- 27 & 28 October 2026
    - 2 day visit to Blackpool
    - Inspiration tour of Lightworks, the home of Blackpool Illuminations
    - Masterclasses and talks where cohort meet established artists/producers working in the light festival field
    - Guidance on how to complete a risk assessment and method statement to an acceptable standard.
    - Understanding the light festival industry and what commissioners are looking for.
    - Insight into curating light exhibitions, and challenges of installing different kinds of work.
    - Basic budgeting
    - Escorted visit to Lightpool Festival

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  - Artists Lunch on both days
  - Accommodation provided 27th October 2026

- At the Blackpool visit, all artists will be invited to develop a design to be considered for further R&D
- 20 November 2026
  - 1 day visit to Barnsley
  - Presentation of artists R&D designs including feedback from panel
  - Presentations by established artists
  - Artists Lunch
  - Organised access to Barnsley Bright Nights
  - Accommodation provided Friday 20 November
- 22 November 2026
  - 1 day visit to Wigan
  - Presentations by established artists
  - Artists Lunch
  - Escorted visit to Light Night Wigan
  - Accommodation provided Sunday 22 November
  - 5 Artists chosen to develop their idea further
  - Chosen artists assigned mentor
- Each artist will receive £350 Artist Honorarium; accommodation costs on the dates stated is covered by the organisers.
- 5 Artists will be selected to develop their design and receive a £1,500 fee each and up to 2 days mentoring support.
- Participants are encouraged to make a photo diary to record points of inspiration.
- Post Lightlab there would be a session to reflect on learning and signpost further learning and useful connections.

Learning Outcomes

Expected learning outcomes are:

- Understanding of professional standards within context of light art. This not only reflects excellence of concept and build quality, but also what paperwork is essential.
- Understanding how to complete a risk assessment and method statement to an acceptable standard.
- Having clearer understanding of challenges and opportunities when making this kind of work.

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- Understanding the light festival industry and what commissioners are looking for.
- Understanding where to find out more about important aspects of creating work in this context, like electrical safety.
- Understanding basic budgeting.
- Being inspired to continue their learning and skills development beyond the end of the programme to make work of high quality on their own.

Selection Process

Selection of applicants will be made by the Lightlab team (Lightpool, Barnsley Bright Nights, Light Night Wigan) and a representative from the Light Up The North Network (LUTN). Artists will be selected on the following criteria:

- Competency to develop excellent work.
- Capacity to participate fully in the Lightlab opportunities.
- To develop then deliver R&D work according to the timeframe.
- Openness to collaborate, commitment to a sense of teamwork.
- Preference will be extended to applicants who live or work in close proximity to Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Blackpool, Wigan Borough
- They are over 18.

How to apply

Proposals are welcomed from artists working in all types of contemporary visual art practice, including photography, new media, fine art, artists' moving image, sculpture, crafts, design, site-specific, socially engaged and interdisciplinary practices. We are accepting proposals from artists at early stages of their light art development and are particularly interested in artists who want to experiment, innovate and extend their practice.

Shortlisted artists will engage in an online conversation with the Lightlab team to explore their aspirations for this residency, and what other support may be needed and available.

We want to make sure that our opportunities are accessible to everyone. All artists are actively encouraged to apply and if any aspect of the application process presents accessibility issues for you please contact us.

Proposals should be submitted to: LIGHTLAB

Deadline for applications: 10:00am, Monday 28 September 2026

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Please include a short statement on your current practice with up to 5 images of your work, and a simple outline of what you want to learn if you were to be offered the residency. **Please note we are not looking for existing designs or proposals for installations**; we are interested in how your practice could benefit from attending this development programme. Applications can be made via the Lightpool website in either of the following (only submit 1):

Written text applications - Please submit a Word document or PDF of no more than 4 pages

Video submission - Please submit a brief video, no longer than three minutes

Audio submission - Please submit a brief audio mp3, no longer than three minutes

Helpful prompts/points to consider when applying:

- A simple outline, telling us what you would like to achieve through this programme, artistically and in terms of your development as an artist.
- A statement describing your practice.
- A selection of images such as previous or proposed artwork ideas most relevant to this opportunity
- Contact information.
- Links to your or other relevant website/ and social media

Your privacy and trust are important to us. We will comply with data law, and your personal data will not be shared with anyone and will only be used by the Lightlab selection team to shortlist the proposals.

Access

We want to make sure that our opportunities are accessible for everyone. All artists are actively encouraged to apply and if any aspect of the application process presents accessibility issues for you please contact lightlab@lightpool.org.uk

Applications are also welcomed from artists who are seeking to adapt their practice or return to making work after a period away, including to care for others.

Key Dates

- Closing date to submit applications: **Monday 28 September 10am**
- Participants selection process by Lightlab partners panel: **W/C 28 September**

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- Selected participants notified: **Wednesday 1 October**
- Lightpool Festival **21-31 October**
- Blackpool visit **Tuesday 27 & Wednesday 28 October**
- Barnsley Bright Nights **20-21 November**
- Barnsley Bright Nights visit: **Friday 20 November**
- Light Night Wigan **20-22 November**
- Light Night Wigan Visit: **Sunday 22 November**
- Successful R&D Artists announced **Friday 27 November**

Previous Lightlab artist comments

“The light lab trip was an amazing and inspiring opportunity to be immersed in the world of light art for two days.”

“This two-day trip to the home of Light Art was to – excuse the pun – the highlight of my year.”

“Attending Lightlab has enabled me to establish stronger relationships with local artists, and an opportunity to explore and understand their work.”

“A great opportunity to develop knowledge and expertise.”

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