



Halton Cultural Strategy Consultation Results



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Background

Halton Borough Council are partnering with arts and cultural charity Art Reach to develop a Cultural Strategy for Halton for the next 5 years.

In 2021, the towns of Runcorn and Widnes came together to #CelebrateHalton with a series of cultural, creative and community-led events thanks to securing a year of being Liverpool City Region's Borough of Culture. Working in partnership with Art Reach, a UK based cultural development charity, Halton Borough Council and the local communities created a year-long calendar of celebrations, which are now leading on to bigger ambitions for the local area.

Building on the legacy of the Borough of Culture, a Cultural Strategy will be created to strengthen the arts, heritage, creativity and wellbeing sectors in Halton. In order to ensure that the Strategy is place-specific and responds to the needs and interests of people in Halton, the Strategy will be informed by wide consultation. A series of consultations with community groups, local workers, creative and cultural organisations, stakeholders and the wider public, were undertaken from February to May 2022 to capture local people's thoughts, ambitions and hopes for the future.



Consultation undertaken

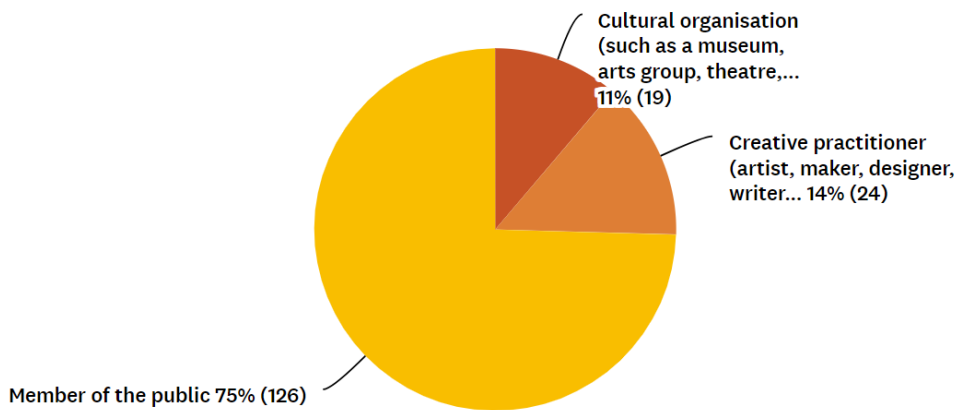
1. Inception meeting with Halton Borough Council staff including Libraries, The Brindley, Visitor Economy
2. Visits and meetings with stakeholders, including:
 - Halton Borough Council elected members
 - Hazelhurst Studios
 - A Place for Us
 - Norton Priory
 - Halton Primary Arts Network
 - Halton Heritage Partnership
 - Cultivate
 - Arts Council England
 - Halton Regeneration Team
 - Leisure Service at Halton Borough Council
 - VCSFE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector)
 - Sci Tech
3. Creative workshops:
 - Public workshop at MakeFest in Runcorn shopping city
 - Public workshop at Widnes market
 - Public workshop at Halton Lea Library
 - Community workshop at Chi Café
 - Community workshop with young people at The Studio
4. Public consultation survey.

Survey results

In the online survey, we achieved a good number of responses from members of the public, demonstrating that we did manage to reach beyond people involved in the cultural sector.

Are you completing this survey as a cultural organisation, a creative practitioner or a member of the public?

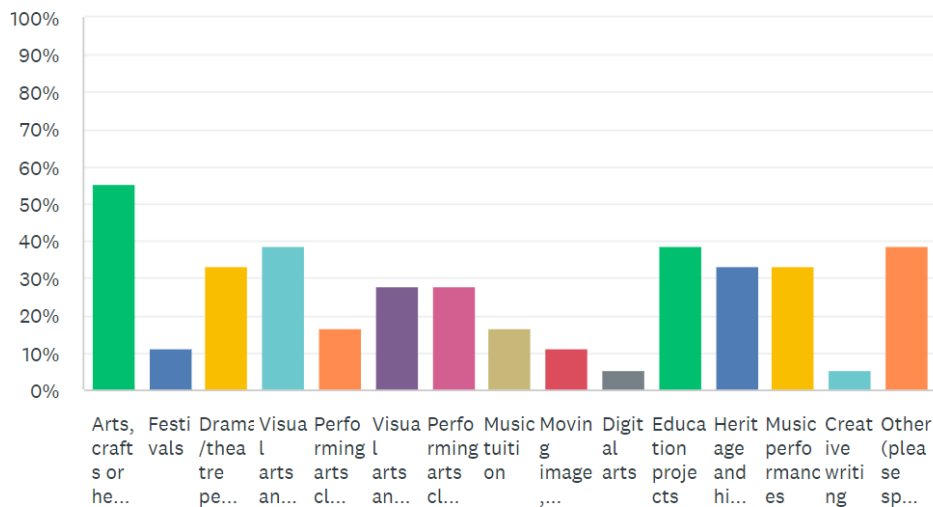
Answered: 169 Skipped: 0



A good variety of artforms and activities seem to be delivered in Halton: though it seems low on Festivals, Digital Arts and Creative Writing.

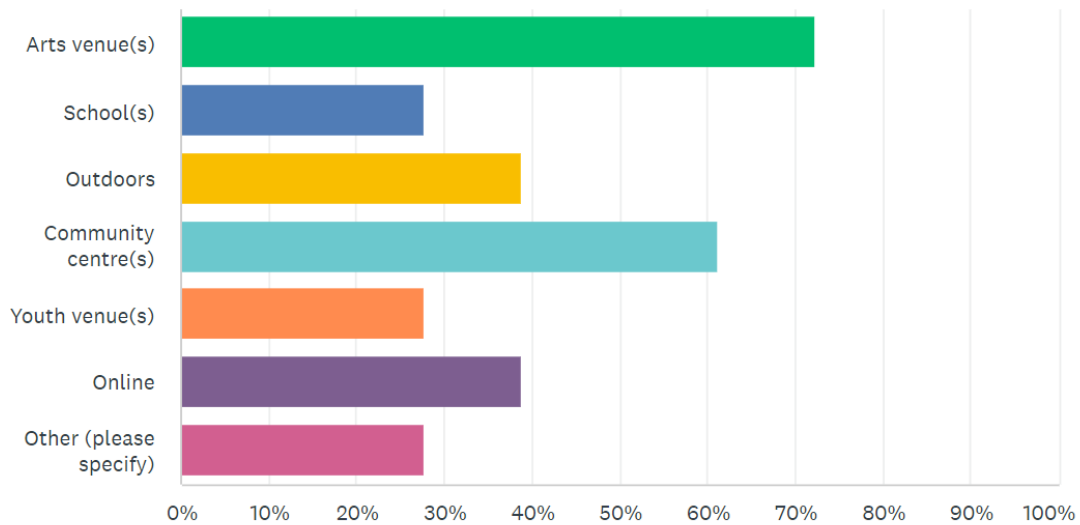
What kind of activities do you deliver?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 151



Where do you deliver this activity? Please indicate all that are relevant.

Answered: 18 Skipped: 151

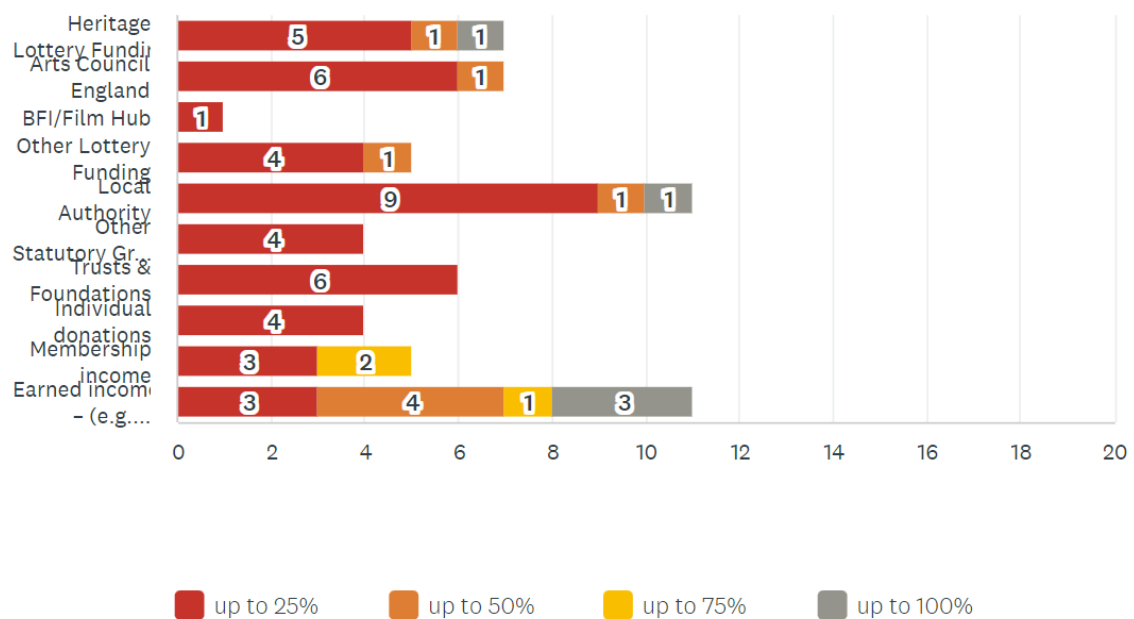


For most cultural organisations in Halton, they do not rely on only one or a few sources of funding, but have a mixture of funding sources. This indicates good resilience within the sector.

8 out of 11 organisation who responded have over 25% of their funding from earned income, and over 75% for 3 organisations.

How are you funded? State the approximate percentage of funding for each category.

Answered: 17 Skipped: 152



How would you describe cultural provision (arts and heritage) in Halton?

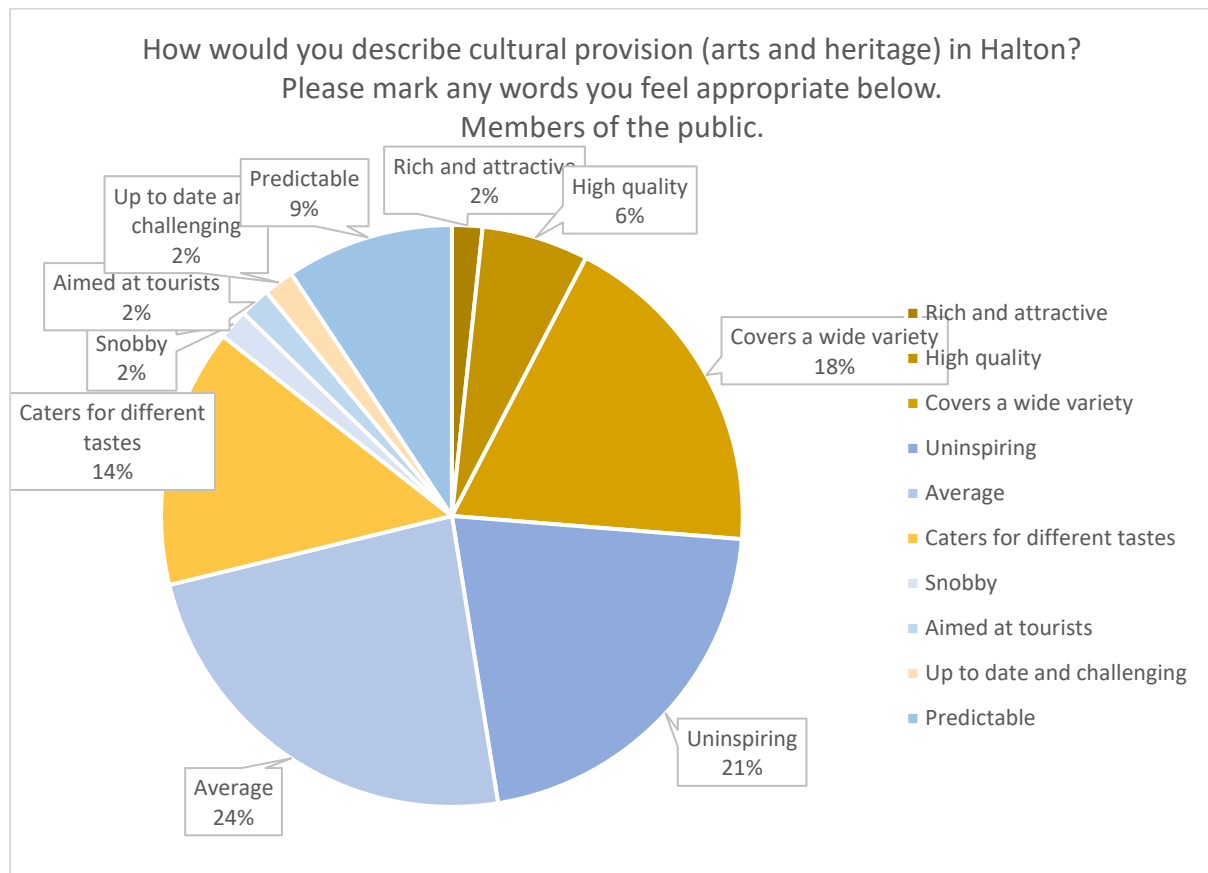
The pie charts below show more positive responses in yellows, with negative or neutral responses in blue.

Members of the public seemed overall more negative about cultural provision than the cultural organisations. When creative practitioners' responses were separated out, their overall responses were close to the members of the public responses.

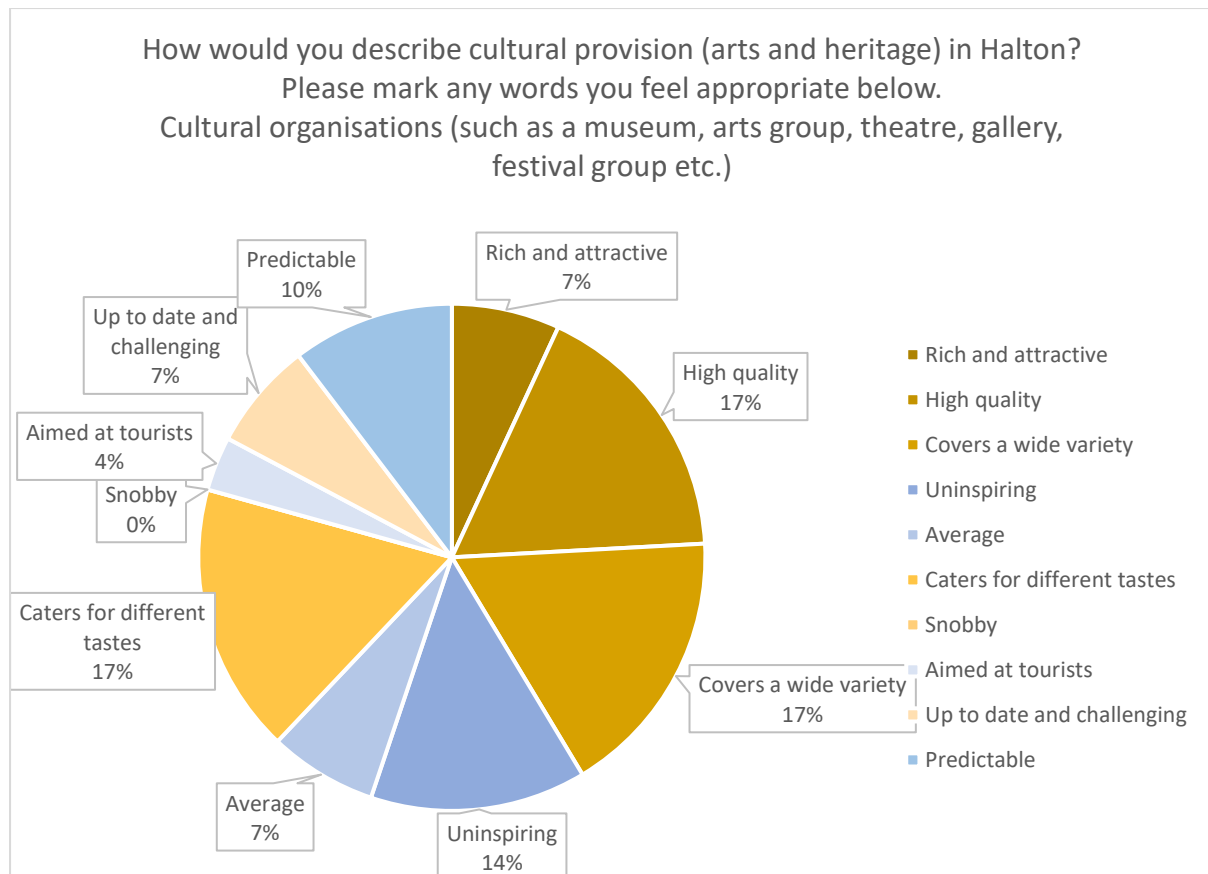
This suggests that the work that cultural organisations are doing is not high in the awareness of members of the public, suggesting that more communication and celebration of Halton's cultural activity is needed to change these perceptions.

In common with all groups, around 17% felt that culture in Halton covers a wide variety (18% public; 17% organisations) and caters for different tastes (14% public; 17% organisations). However, text responses showed that many people said they wanted more variety on offer.

Members of the public said:



Cultural organisations said:



The following questions asked for text responses. We have created word clouds for a quick overview. More detail on the main themes from the text are included in the following section: Themes from survey.

Think about the different creative and heritage activities, events, festivals, venues or creative companies near you. Which ones do you like and why? If you don't get involved with any, please tell us why.



What do you think needs to happen or change in Halton to help make your ideas in the last question take place?



What was the best thing about Celebrate Halton Borough of Culture? For example, was it a sense of pride for Halton, opportunities for young people to get creative, or the buzz it created for the town?



Themes from survey

Survey Question: Think about the different creative and heritage activities, events, festivals, venues or creative companies near you. Which ones do you like and why? If you don't get involved with any, please tell us why.

Places/activities that respondents said they like (in order of popularity):

Norton Priory 26 mentions

The Brindley 24 mentions

The Studio Widnes 17

Libraries 14

Culture HQ 10

Hazelhurst Studios 9

Mako Create 8

Catalyst 8

A Place For Us 4

MakeFest 3

Reasons respondents gave for not getting involved:

Not aware – they feel they don't know what's on offer or how to find out about it.

Not for them – would like to see a better range on offer; there are too many short, one-offs, need more long term activity; lack of ambition.

What do you think needs to happen or change in Halton to help make your ideas take place?

Support from the Council

Dedicated role or department for arts

Investment and funding

Community engagement

Marketing

Affordability

More venues available for community activity

Other – more ambition, variety, balance of events, fresh thinking and new approaches.

What was the best thing about Celebrate Halton Borough of Culture? For example, was it a sense of pride for Halton, opportunities for young people to get creative, or the buzz it created for the town?

Culture HQ in the shopping centre

Didn't know about it

Opportunity for young people

Partnerships

The buzz

Nothing

Opportunities for everyone

Live Music

What would you like to see happen at the next Celebrate Halton Borough of Culture?

More activities for people of all ages

Celebrate local history

Opportunities for local artists

Better marketing

More of the same but bigger!

Community Leadership

Legacy - things that are sustainable beyond the event

Make better use of outdoor spaces

Include the whole Borough

What kind of cultural activity would you like to see happen more regularly in Halton?

Outdoor spaces used for culture – 14

Classes/workshops/clubs – 13

Theatre – 7

Craft/Artisan/Makers Markets – 7

Music concerts – 7

Heritage events – 7

Gallery Space – 4

Music Festival - 3

Art installations/exhibition – 3

Networks - 3

Cinema - 2

Spoken word/literary festival/Poetry - 2

More for older residents – 1

Street Art - 1

Artist studios - 1

Carnival - 1

Photography Competition - 1

Museum - 1

Light events - 1

Vintage rally - 1

Dance - 1

Any Other Comments

Engage the Community in decision making and conversation

Better Communications

Better use of existing assets – link up services like wellbeing with creativity; more variety of shows; address gaps (e.g. no art gallery); use the canal, green spaces and The Studio more for creative events.

More accessible – arts, culture and heritage is for everybody

Across the whole borough

Be more ambitious

Large scale events - to get everyone involved and inspire ambition

More Variety – cover all artforms

Other ideas – revive town twinning initiative to create international links for culture

Themes from interviews

The following themes were identified through interviews and public and community consultation activity. A number of themes were common between both groups.

Themes from stakeholder interviews

Partnership between council and local organisations is needed to drive the strategy

Culture should be higher up the agenda for the Council

The strategy should address how existing assets can be better utilised

The Council should facilitate rather than deliver cultural activity

Make Halton a destination for culture (currently people are going to Liverpool etc.)

Lack of opportunities for young people

Need for accessible platforms for local artists

Loss of skills in the sector due to covid

Need to change the perception of Halton within residents – generate pride in what goes on in their communities

Raising aspirations and celebrating achievements with annual events

Visitor economy and culture should work together

The river is a barrier to people coming to things – activity needs to be spread across the borough

‘Transport Poverty’ in the borough needs to be addressed

Brindley – there is an appetite for more ambitious programming at The Brindley

Themes from Public Consultation

People don’t know what’s happening or where to look to find out

High demand for workshops and classes for all ages

Appreciation of outdoor green spaces

People going outside the borough for cultural activity

Food and drink options wanted alongside cultural activity

Lack of public transport is a barrier

Concern around growing population and core services

Lack of opportunities for young people

Community centres could be utilised for culture

Lack of ambition from public when asked for ideas – lack of stimulation and inspiration

Demand for arthouse type cinema

Dedicated spaces for buskers desired

Widnes town centre not appealing

Words 'culture' and 'heritage' could be a barrier

Programming at the Brindley not appealing to all

Opportunities needed for local artists – low-cost access to equipment, spaces, exhibition opportunities

Demand for multi-use cultural space in Widnes

Council should facilitate not lead on culture

Dedicated role at the Council to oversee culture

Common themes:

- A role for the Borough Council in facilitating cultural activity, supporting local groups more to achieve their aims. A closer working partnership between the Borough Council and local organisations
- Lack of opportunities for young people
- Need to raise aspirations and ambition for culture in the Borough
- A need for more opportunities and platforms for artists
- Transport is a barrier to attending cultural activity and events
- Ambition for more ambitious and diverse programming at The Brindley

Proposals

Our ideas for the key areas that Halton needs to address to strengthen its cultural sector are:

1. Leadership and coordination

- It is clear that there are partnership and network groups in Halton that have ambition and enthusiasm, however they are looking to the Borough Council for steer and facilitation to enable them to achieve their activities. A facilitation role for support and open communication, with close partnership working, will be looked at.
- Cultural activity supports a number of the Borough's other agendas including regeneration, wellbeing, skills development and young people, and Visitor Economy. Therefore, leadership needs to be developed that brings together those that represent these areas to form a Culture Group, with high level leadership at HBC, to drive coordinated developments for culture.

2. Communication

- A really strong campaign to communicate Halton's cultural assets and vibrancy is required. The campaign needs to achieve a number of things: to change the local perception of Halton and create a feeling in residents that Halton is buzzing with cultural opportunities that are high quality; to market Halton as a cultural destination to contribute towards the Visitor Economy, making use of its cultural assets and unique heritage as a draw for visitors to the Borough; to enable local people to easily find a wide range of cultural offers for them to be involved with, with a central place for information where they can find out What's On: this requires coordination across the cultural sector of Halton, linking to the groups and networks discussed above; it also requires a high profile campaign to raise awareness of where this central information can be accessed.

3. Diversity of programming, to achieve diversity of audiences and participants

- Consider outdoor events and festival activity that are accessible to all residents and visitors to Halton.
- Ensure equity of opportunity across both sides of the river.
- Create targeted programmes for young people, involving young people's voices in the decision making.
- Create opportunities for local organisations to "Go and See" projects and activities outside the Borough to support them in connecting with more diverse cultural activities, inspire them, develop networks and new ideas that can be brought back to the Borough for Halton's benefit.

4. Celebration, inspiration, aspiration

- Using outdoor spaces. A strategy for encouraging the use of outdoor space for cultural activity, festivals, events and daily activities such as busking or spoken word performance. Outdoor space is accessible to most people and will help to break down barriers to attending culture, help to introduce new forms of arts to new audiences, contribute towards vibrant town centres and parks which will support the Visitor Economy as well as make Halton a more attractive place for people to live and work. Using outdoor spaces can also provide more opportunities for young people and artists to have a platform for their work. This supports them to develop their skills and experience in their artform.

- Festivals that celebrate the achievements and creativity of Halton's people, and its unique heritage. Events such as the Borough of Culture programme, outdoor festivals and civic events, HPAN's schools' annual performance and exhibitions, and local organisations' activities such as MakeFest should be supported better by media and coordinated marketing, to raise awareness and aspiration. Events should include opportunities to platform local artists and there could be new festival events and heritage projects devised that celebrate unique Halton.