

ESRC Festival Report 2024: Data and feedback collected from the ESRC Festival of Social Science

The Festival of Social Science is a national public engagement event series comprising hundreds of events hosted by dozens of academic institutions. Over 50,000 data points from a variety of sources including attendee surveys, feedback from event organisers and collaborators and web analytics were collected and compiled to produce this report.

This report can be used as a stand-alone document or used to support the accessible delivery of the corresponding slide deck.

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What is the ESRC Festival of Social Science?

The festival of social science is:

- Annual celebration of the social sciences
- UK-wide festival
- Taking place over 3 weeks
- 41 partner research institutions
- 2024's theme was Our Digital Lives

Our partner institutions

The 2024 ESRC Festival of Social Science was run with the following 41 partner research institutions. These institutions are:

- Aston University
- Bangor University
- Bournemouth University
- Cardiff University
- Coventry University
- Durham University
- Institute for Fiscal Studies
- King's College London
- Lancaster University
- London School of Economics and Political Science
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Newcastle University
- Queen's University Belfast
- Royal Holloway, University of London

- Sheffield Hallam University
- SOAS University of London
- Swansea University
- Ulster University
- University College London
- University of Bath
- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- University of Hertfordshire
- University of Huddersfield
- University of Leeds
- University of Leicester
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- University of Northumbria
- University of Oxford
- University of Plymouth
- University of Salford
- University of Sheffield
- University of Southampton
- University of Stirling
- University of Strathclyde
- University of Surrey
- University of Warwick
- University of York

Festival aims

The festival aims to bring social science research to new audiences

ESRC aims for at least 80% of events to be targeted at public and youth audiences and no more than 20% of events to be targeted for non-academic professionals.

ESRC aims for at least 25% of events to be on the 2024 festival theme of Our Digital Lives.

Data gathering

How was data gathered?

Feedback was collected from event attendees and those involved in organising and leading events.

Registrations and attendance were counted by event organisers.

Who was feedback received from?

Feedback was received from:

- 41 partner institutions
- 2993 attendees
- 27 teachers
- 65 non-academic collaborators
- 266 event leaders

Headline facts and figures

A total of 28,172 attendees were recorded, of which 84% were young people and adults and the remaining 16% were children under 16. Additionally, 6,584 podcast downloads were reported and 16,846 additional people were recorded attending larger exhibitions that included festival events.

Data visualisation: Division of adult and under 16 attendees reported by event leaders

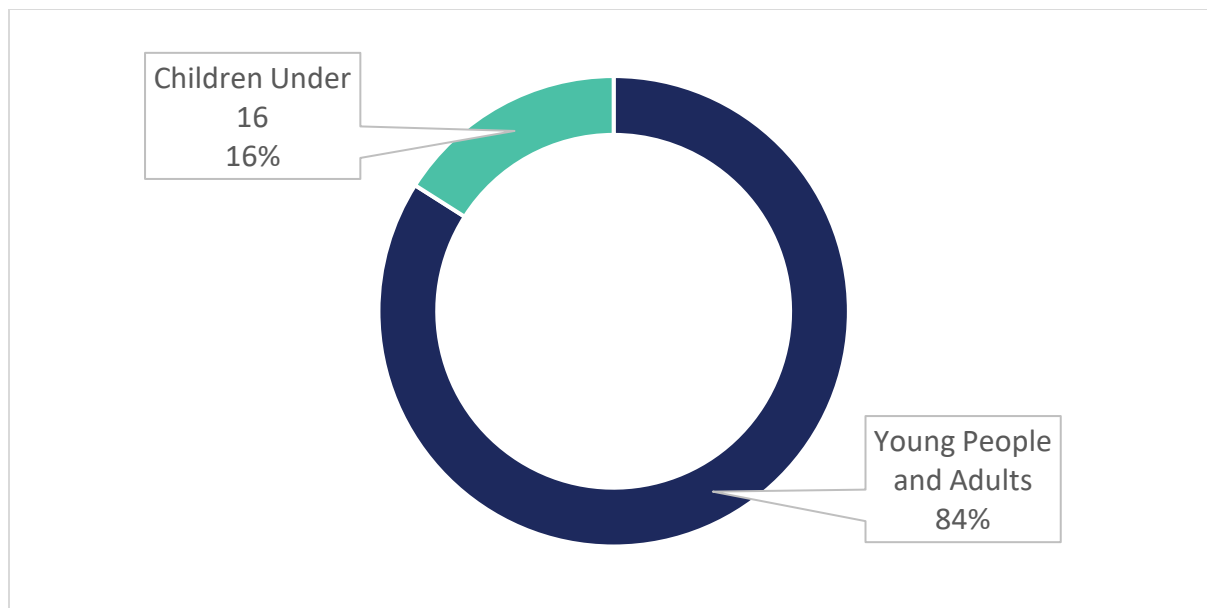


Figure 1: Pie chart showing the division of adult and under 16 attendees reported by event leaders.

Headline facts and figures (continued)

The Festival of Social Science is a truly national festival with events taking place UK-wide in different formats.

There were 355 events run by the 41 academic partner institutions.

Table: Count of events by format

Format of event	Count
In person	281
Online	42
Hybrid	32
Total	355

Table 1: Showing the count of events that take particular formats.

Data visualisation: Count of events in each UK region

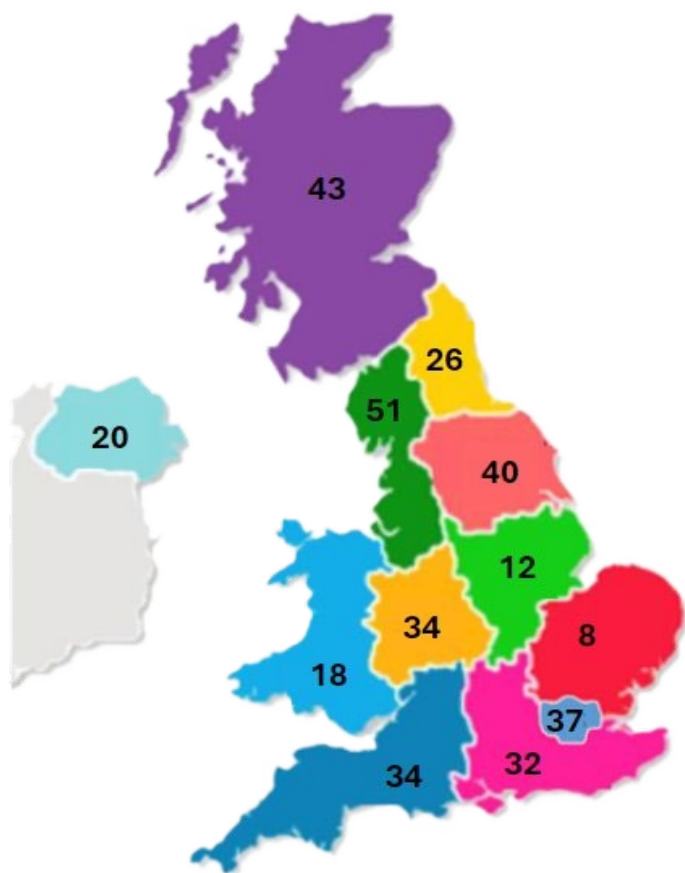


Figure 2: Map of UK with counts of events within each region indicated on the map.

Table: Count of events taking place in each region

UK region	Count of events that took place in that region
London	37
North East	26

North West	51
Yorkshire	40
East Midlands	12
West Midlands	34
South East	32
East of England	8
South West	34
Wales	18
Scotland	43
Northern Ireland	20
Total	355

Table 2: Count of events broken down into twelve (12) UK regions.

The events

Across the national festival, 93% of events were open events (publicly advertised rather than invite-only). 88% of events were targeted at a public (rather than a professional) audience.

Data visualisation: Division of open and invite only events

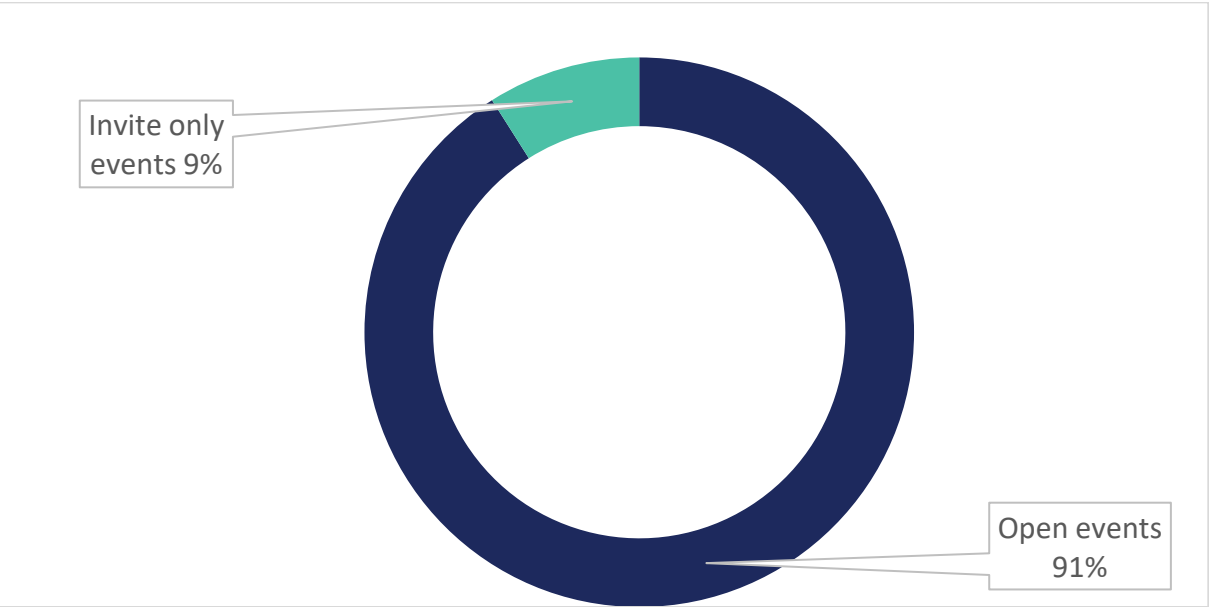


Figure 3: Pie chart showing the division of open and invite only events.

Table: Division of open and invite only events

Type of event	Percentage
Open events	91%
Invite only events	9%

Table 3: Division of events targeting public or professional audiences.

Data visualisation: Division of events targeting public or professional audiences

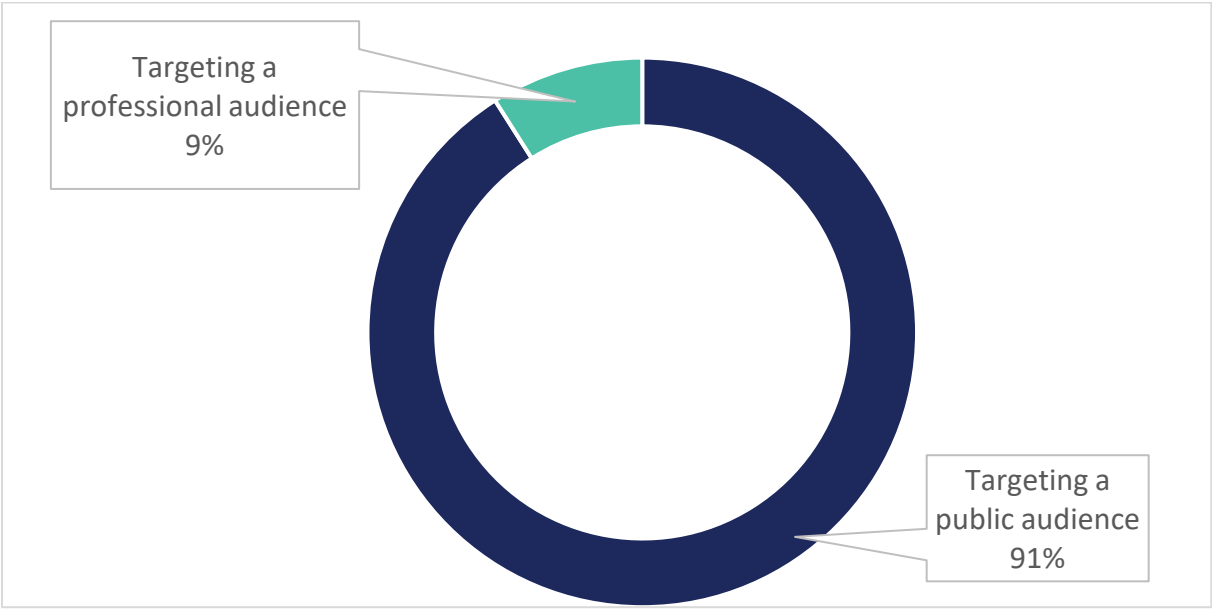


Figure 4: Pie chart showing the division of events targeting public or professional audiences.

Table: Division of events targeting public or professional audiences

Type of event	Percentage
Targeting a public audience	91%
Targeting a professional audience	9%

Table 4: Division of events targeting public or professional audiences.

Data visualisation: Breakdown of types of events that took place

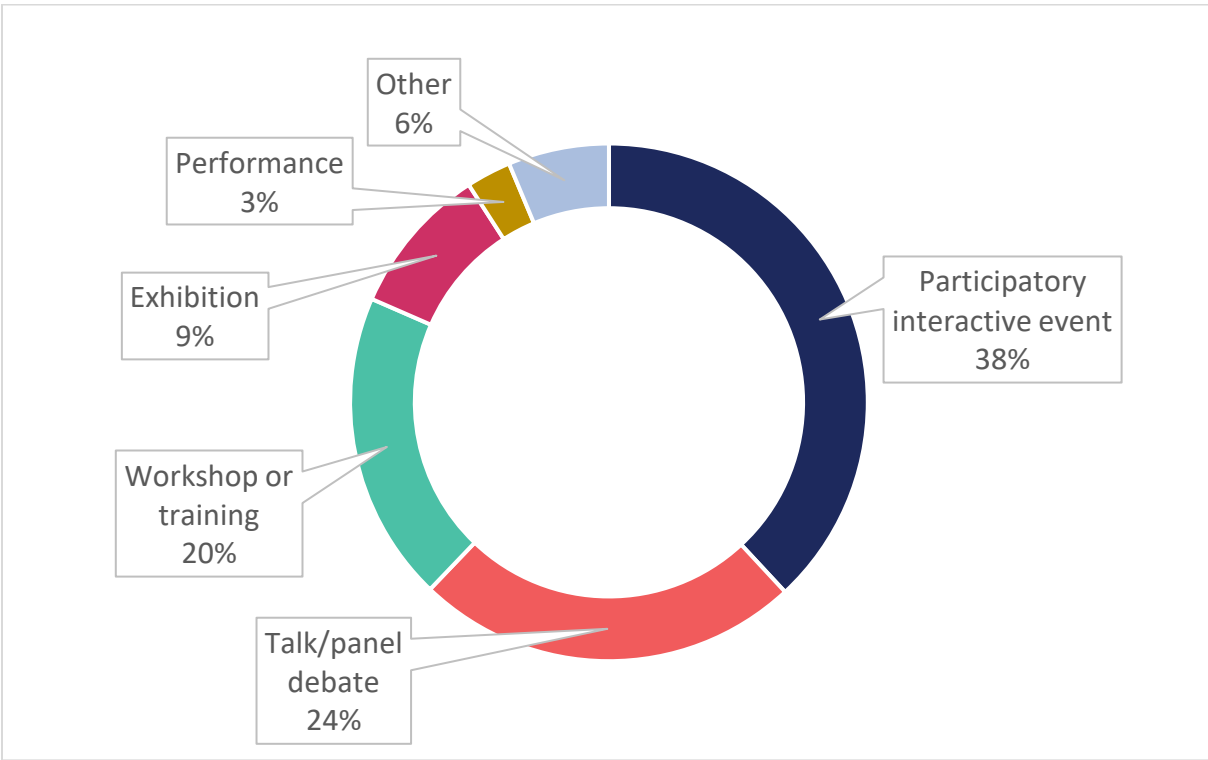


Figure 5: Pie chart showing the breakdown of types of events that took place.

Table: Breakdown of types of events that took place

Type of event	Percentage
Participatory interactive event	38%
Talk or panel discussion	24%
Workshop or training	20%
Exhibition	9%
Performance	3%
Other	6%

Table 5: Percentage breakdown of different types of events that took place.

Popular topics included:

- 54 events on the theme of our digital lives
- 47 events on the theme of health and wellbeing
- 20 events on the theme of equality

How attendees found out about events

Table: Comparison on web traffic between 2022, 2023 and 2024

Metric	2022	2023	2024	22-23 Change	23-24 Change
Unique visitors	25,688	34,429	27,407	34%	-20%
Number of visits	42484	56,445	46,575	33%	-17%
Page views	218,950	289,560	209,423	32%	-28%

Table 6: Counts of website visitors, visits and views in 2022 and 2023 and percentage increase between years.

Table: Top referring websites

Website URL	Total number of referrals
http://facebook.com (Facebook)	1,312
https://t.co (Twitter)	1,102
https://www.ukri.org	1,960
Outlook referral links	1,100

Table 7: Count of the number of web traffic referrals for each of the four top referring URLs.

Data visualisation: Breakdown of how attendees found out about events

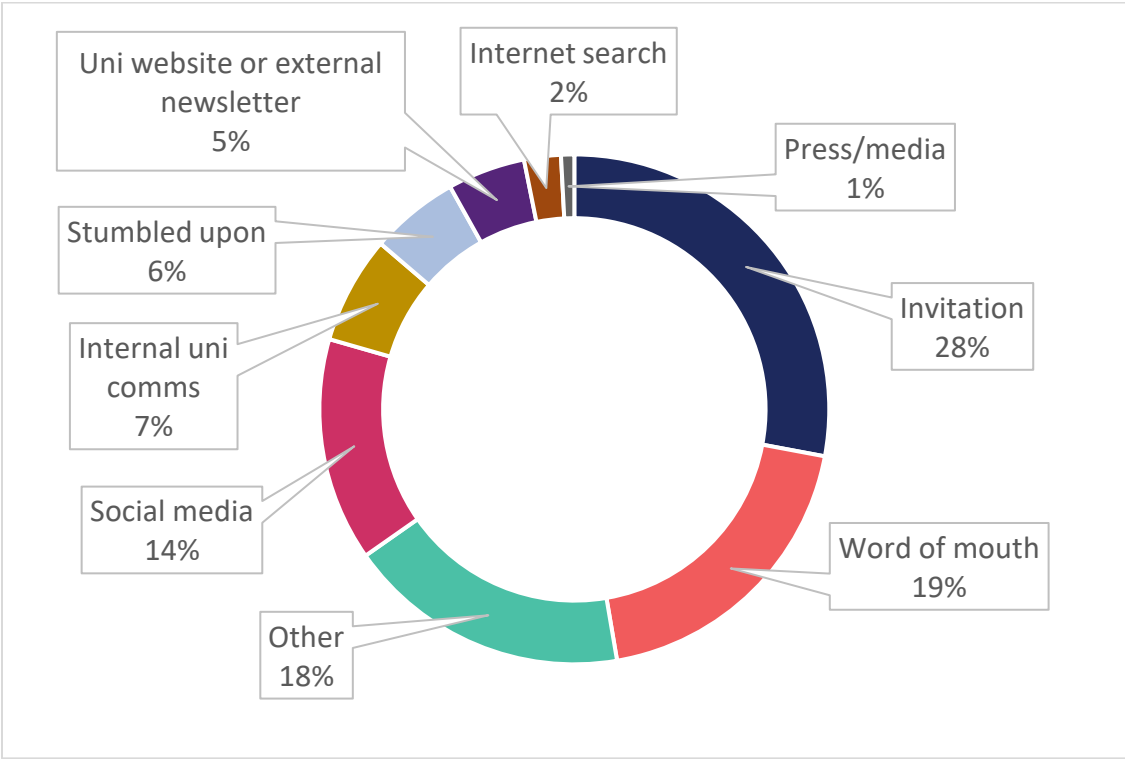


Figure 6: Pie chart showing the breakdown of how attendees found out about events.

Table: Breakdown of how attendees found out about events

Communication channel	Percentage
Other	18%
Invitation	28%
Word of mouth	19%
Social media	14%
Internal university communications	7%
University website	5%
Internet search	2%
Stumbled upon	6%
Press/media	1%

Table 8: Percentage breakdown of what communication channels attendees used to find out about events.

Who attended festival events?

- Demographic data was collected to measure representation across key groups at festival events

Data visualisation: Breakdown of age of attendees

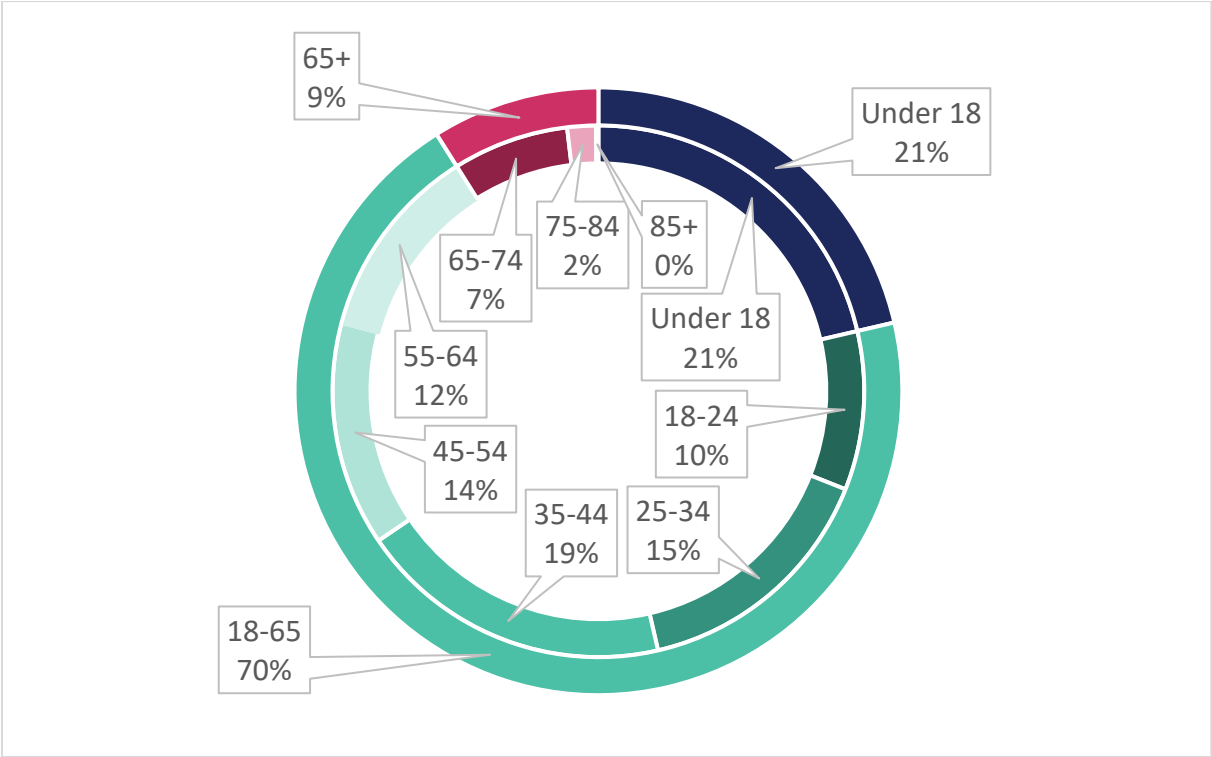


Figure 7: Multi-level pie chart showing a percentage breakdown of the age of attendees.

Table: Breakdown of age of attendees

Age bracket	Percentage
Under 18	21%
18-24	10%
25-34	15%
35-44	19%
45-54	14%
55-64	12%

65-74	7%
75-84	2%
85+	0%

Table 9: Percentage breakdown of age of attendees into age brackets.

Data visualisation: Breakdown of ethnicity of attendees

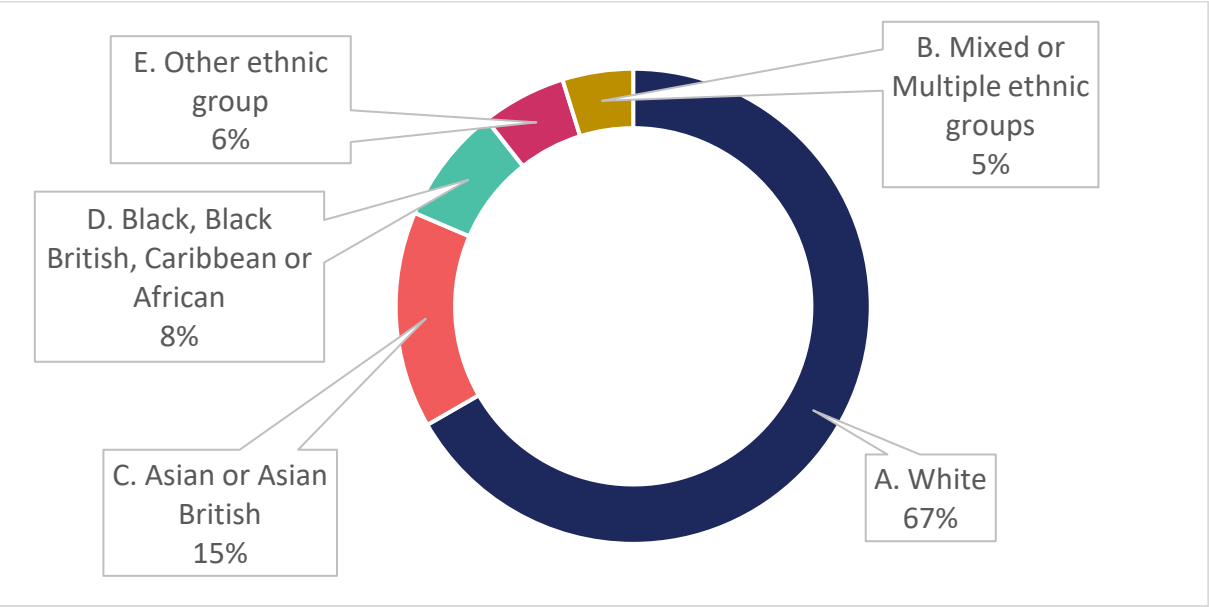


Figure 8: Pie chart showing percentage breakdown of self-reported ethnicity of attendees.

Table: Breakdown of ethnicity of attendees

Ethnicity as reported	Percentage
White	67%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	5%
Asian or Asian British	15%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	8%
Other ethnic group	6%
Prefer not to say	<1%

Table 10: Percentage breakdown of self-reported ethnicity of attendees.

Data Visualisation: Breakdown of gender of attendees

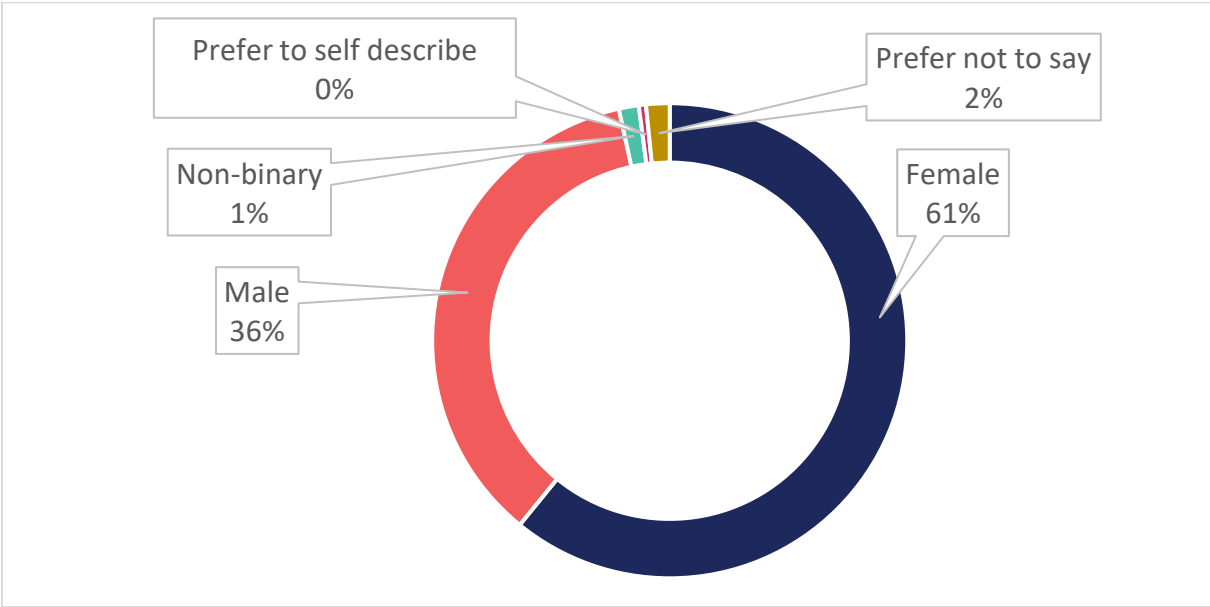


Figure 9: Pie chart showing percentage breakdown of self-reported gender of attendees.

Table: Breakdown of gender of attendees

Gender as reported	Percentage
Female	61%
Male	36%
Non-binary	1%
Prefer not to say	2%
All other Gender Identities	<1%

Table 11: Percentage breakdown of self-reported gender of attendees.

How often do attendees engage with research and why did they attend an event?

Table: Breakdown of how frequently attendees attend events that relate to academic research

Typical Attendance	Percentage
Seldom/never	22%
Less than once a year	14%
Once or twice a year	22%
A number of times a year	28%
Once a month or more	14%

Table 12: Percentage breakdown of attendees into categories of typical attendance rates.

Table: Breakdown of attendee’s reasons for attending events

Reason for Attendance	Percentage
Because it relates to my job/profession	37%
Because it relates to my studies as a school, college or university student	21%
Out of interest as a member of the public	39%

Table 13: Percentage breakdown of attendees into categories of typical reasons for attendance.

What did attendees think of the events?

- 96% of attendees felt that the event was worth the time and effort of attending, 3% neither agreed nor disagreed and 1% disagreed.
- 54% of attendees agreed that their feelings and/or opinion on the topic in question have changed, 22% disagreed and 24% were not sure.
- 59% of attendees said they plan to make a change or do something that they wouldn’t otherwise have done,16 % disagreed and 26% were not sure.
- 90% of attendees said they plan to share what they’ve learned with others, 5% disagreed and 5% were not sure.

Table: Attendees’ reflections on statements about events they attended

Statement:	Percentage who agree	Percentage who disagree	Percentage who are not sure
I'm glad I attended this event	96%	1%	3%
As a result of attending the event, my feelings and/or opinion on the topic in question have change	54%	22%	24%
As a result of attending the event, I plan to make a change or do something that I wouldn’t otherwise have done	59%	16%	26%
As a result of attending the event, I plan to share what I’ve learned with others	90%	5%	5%

Table 14: Percentage breakdown of attendees’ level of agreement with four (4) statements.

Who collaborated on festival events?

- Over 200 organisations collaborated on events from a variety of sectors

Data Visualisation: breakdown of types of organisations who collaborated on festival events

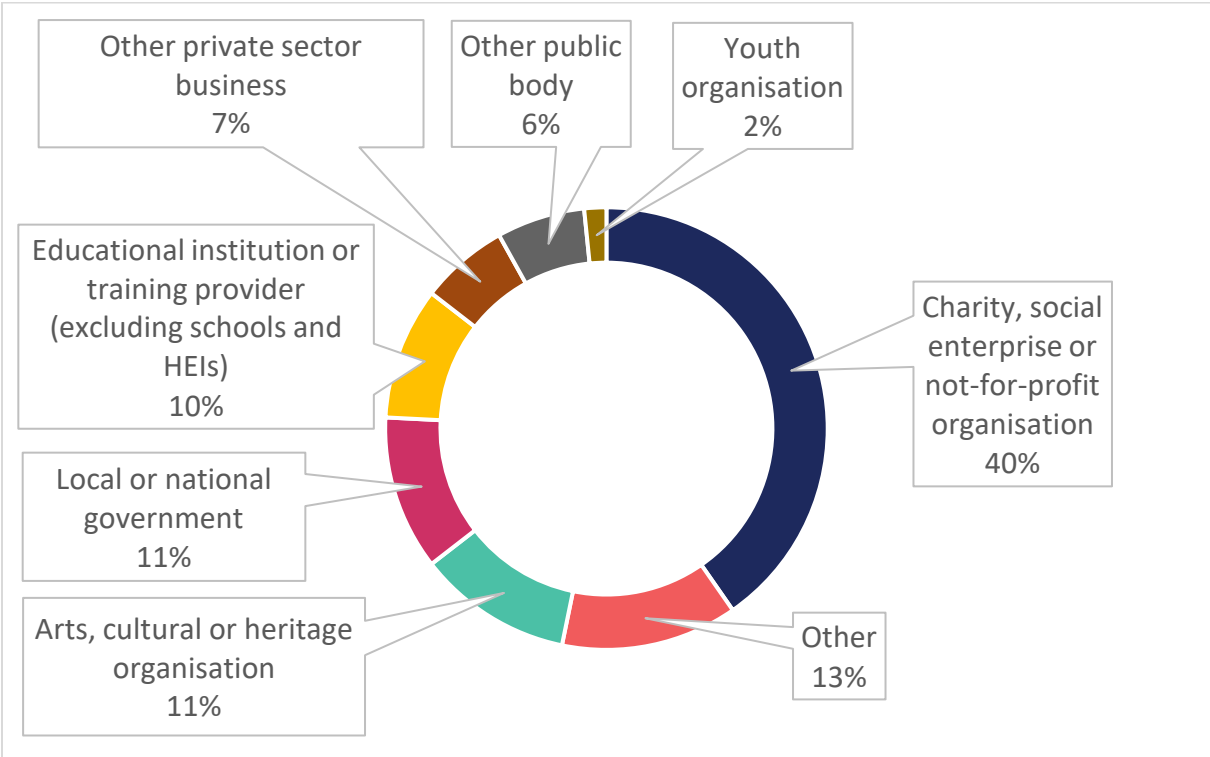


Figure 10: Pie chart showing percentage breakdown of the types of organisations who collaborated on festival events.

Table: Breakdown of types of organisations who collaborated on festival events

Type of organisation	Percentage
Charity, social enterprise or not-for-profit organisation	40%
Other (please specify)	13%
Arts, cultural or heritage organisation	11%
Local or national government	11%
Other private sector business	7%
Educational institution or training provider (excluding schools and HEIs)	10%
Other public body	6%
Youth organisation	2%

Table 15: Percentage breakdown of the types of organisations who collaborated on festival events.

How many schools engaged

A total of 43 schools engaged with the festival. This includes:

- 7 state-funded primary schools
- 2 independent secondary schools

- 27 state-funded secondary schools
- 7 state funded-FE colleges

Feedback collected

Feedback was collected from 13 teachers at state funded schools and 4 teachers from independent schools.

Feedback was received from 13 secondary schools, 2 FE colleges and 2 primary schools.

What did teachers think of the events they attended?

Table: Teachers reflections on statements about events they attended

Statement:	Percentage who strongly agree	Percentage who agree	Percentage of other responses
The event helped the school to achieve an educational aim and/or comply with a statutory duty	70%	26%	4%
The school would be interested in partnering on a similar event in future	71%	29%	0%
My students thought it was a good event	56%	40%	4%
The event helped our school to build or improve an external relationship that will be useful to us in future	58%	29%	13%
The event has been useful for our students	77%	19%	4%

Table 16: Percentage breakdown of teachers' level of agreement with five (5) statements.

What did teachers think of the events they attended? (Continued)

Quotes from teachers

"This session linked well with the themes of the our citizenship class. Going forward, we are also going to get the pupils to deliver their own versions of this session to younger year groups as part of their Modern Studies curriculum."

-Teacher

"The provision of transport made our participation possible."

-Teacher

"Many learners were inspired to come to the university for higher education. Talking about 'where you belong' helped them to trace their roots and appreciate the opportunities Britain has to offer them."

-Teacher

"Students can see how some of the stuff we do at GCSE is closely connected to further study – routes into further study is a key focus for us as a school."

-Teacher

"We (teachers and pupils) have all enjoyed this event with the University. It has been invaluable in building our learners' confidence both academically and holistically outside of a school setting, helping them to visualise their future."

-Teacher

What did non-academic collaborators think of the events?

Table: Non-academic collaborators reflections on statements about events they attended

Statement:	Percentage who strongly agree	Percentage who agree	Percentage of other responses
The event helped our organisation to build or improve a useful external relationship	61%	31%	8%
Would recommend partnering on a Festival of Social Science event to others	73%	23%	4%
Our organisation would be interested in partnering on a similar event in future	74%	24%	2%
The event has been valued by our internal and/or external stakeholders who attended	74%	22%	4%
This event has been useful to us as an organisation	70%	30%	0%

Table 17: Percentage breakdown of non-academic collaborator's level of agreement with five (5) statements.

Why did collaborators work with event leaders?

- Many charities, social enterprises, and non-profits aimed to reach new audiences and engage with relevant communities
- Some other organisations utilised the festival for consultation and networking purposes

BASED ON AMALGAMATION OF RESPONSES FROM NON-ACADEMIC COLLABORATORS

What did non-academic collaborators think of the events? (continued)

Quotes from non-academic collaborators

“The event provided an invaluable opportunity to test and refine our game-based learning tool, with a diverse audience. It allowed us to collect meaningful feedback from families and educators, which is integral to the development of our research and products.”

-Collaborator (charity/not-for-profit)

“Events like this help to break down the stigma and allow people with autism to stop hiding who they are.”

-Collaborator (local/national government)

“The young people who made the posters, their families, and teachers have all visited to see their work exhibited, which is great for their confidence and to create a sense of being part of the library as a space that belongs to them.”

-Collaborator (public library)

“I was thrilled to see participants from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of cybersecurity expertise come together, collaborate, and tackle challenges as a team. It was inspiring.”

-Collaborator (charity/not-for-profit)

“As a museum with a small team of education and public engagement staff, we struggle to deliver a variety of engagement activities for families during half term. The festival allows us to deliver a much bigger activity with engagement from researchers all over the world.”

-Collaborator (arts/cultural/heritage organisation)

What events did non-academic collaborators support?

Data visualisation: Breakdown of audiences targeted by non-academic collaborators

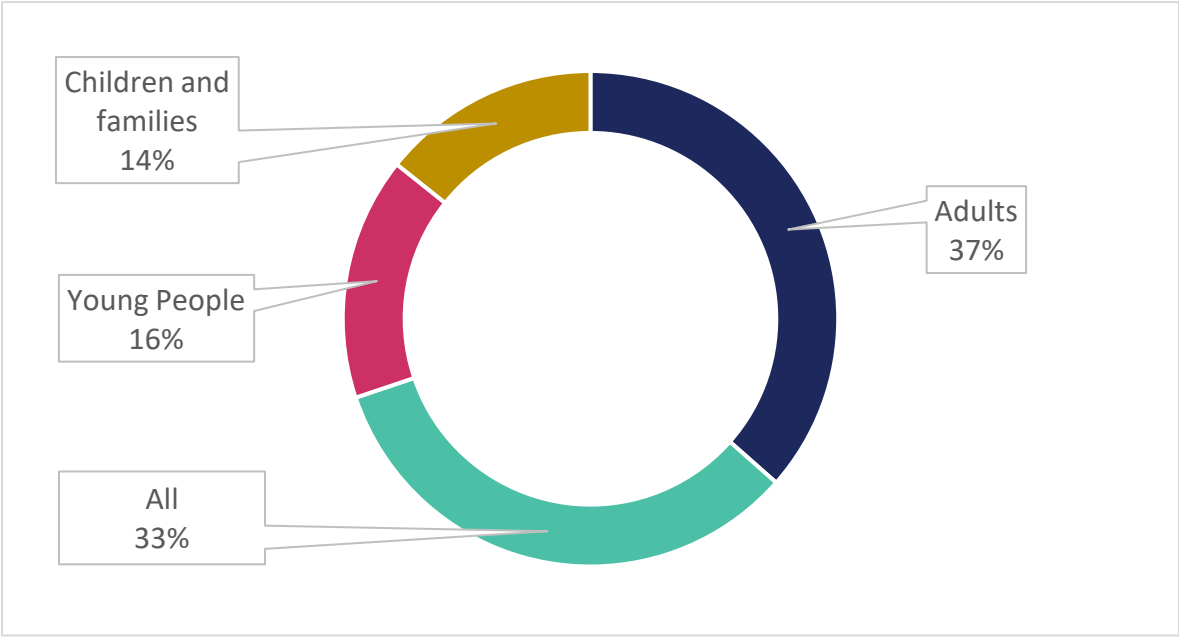


Figure 11: Pie chart showing the breakdown of audiences targeted by non-academic collaborators

Table: Breakdown of audiences targeted by non-academic collaborators

Target audience	Percentage
Adults	37%
All	33%
Young people	16%
Children and families	14%

Table 18: Breakdown of audiences targeted by non-academic collaborators

Data visualisation: Breakdown of types of events delivered with non-academic collaborators

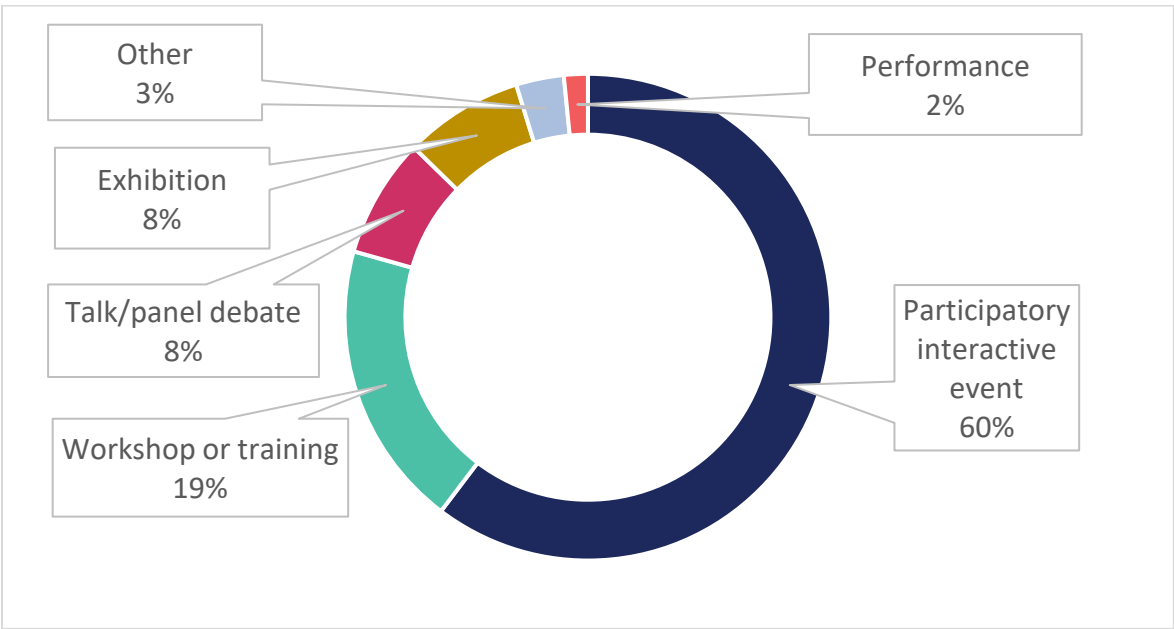


Figure 12: Pie chart showing the breakdown of types of events delivered with non-academic collaborators

Table: Breakdown of formats of events delivered with non-academic collaborators

Format of event	Percentage
Participatory interactive event	60%
Talk/panel debate	8%
Workshop or training	19%
Exhibition	8%
Performance	2%
Other	3%

Table 19: Breakdown of formats of events delivered with non-academic collaborators

Data visualisation: Breakdown of delivery of events (in-person/ hybrid/ virtual) with non-academic collaborators

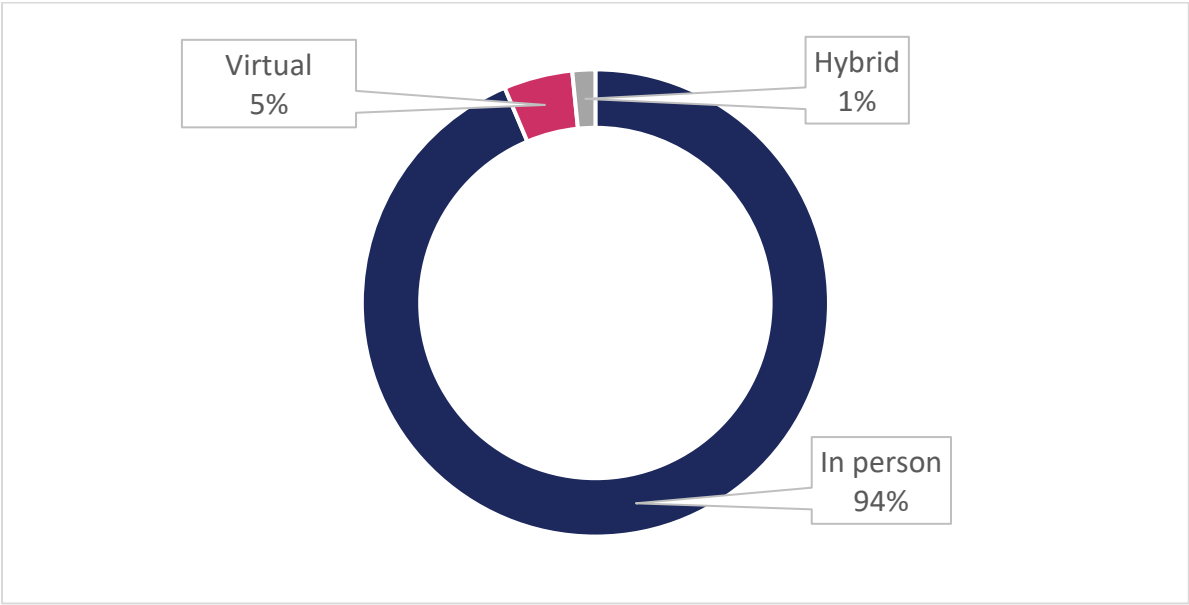


Figure 13: Pie chart showing breakdown of delivery of events (in-person/ hybrid/ virtual) with non-academic collaborators

Table: Breakdown of delivery of events (in-person/ hybrid/ virtual) with non-academic collaborators

Delivery	Percentage
In-person	94%
Hybrid	2%
Online	3%

Table 20: Breakdown of delivery of events (in-person/ hybrid/ virtual) with non-academic collaborators

What were researchers’ experiences of participating in the festival?

Table: Researchers’ reflections on statements about events they organised

Statement:	Percentage who strongly agree	Percentage who agree	Percentage of other responses
Leading an event has helped me to reach a new and broader audience	46%	40%	14%
Would recommend partnering on a Festival of Social Science event	57%	31%	12%
Participating has helped them/their colleagues to develop public engagement skills	47%	41%	12%

Table 21: Percentage breakdown of event leaders’ level of agreement with three (3) statements.

Quotes from researchers

“It was an incredible opportunity to share our research findings with people who had specifically come to find out about it, as well as those who encountered the event by chance.”

- Researcher

“Meeting non-academics and hearing their positive opinions on my research motivated me more than ever to continue.”

- Researcher

“This has helped us develop links with local libraries who are keen for more events like this, and to partner in research, so well worthwhile.”

- Researcher

What were partner institutions’ experiences of participating in the festival?

Table: Reflections of festival teams at partner institutions on statements about events they supported

Statement:	Percentage who strongly agree	Percentage who agree	Percentage of other responses

Participating in the Festival has helped our institution reach audiences that we wouldn't otherwise have reached	23%	55%	22%
Participating in the Festival has helped develop researchers' public engagement skills	32%	65%	3%
Participating in the Festival has given our IAA/Festival team at non-IAA partner the opportunity to work with researchers at our institution with whom we hadn't worked before	10%	57%	33%
Participating in the Festival has increased enthusiasm for public engagement in social science/economics at our institution	20%	47%	33%

Table 22: Percentage breakdown of partner institutions' level of agreement with four (4) statements.

Quotes from institutional leaders

"The funds enabled us to deliver events in high-traffic, centrally located, public spaces where we could reach a diverse audience."

-Institutional leader

"The training was excellent, and our researchers found it very useful."

-Institutional leader

"The festival offers a structured, visible platform where researchers can engage with a range of audiences."

-Institutional leader

"A great opportunity for early career researchers"

-Institutional leader

"Academics and early career researchers have found the opportunity to develop public engagement skills and gain confidence invaluable for their career"

-Institutional leader

"Event organisers consistently reported that the festival was an invaluable learning opportunity to develop new public engagement skills and to broaden their knowledge and confidence."

-Institutional leader

"We were introduced to an SEN specialist FE college who we now have as a named contact"

-Institutional leader

"[We engaged] healthcare professionals, finance professionals, climate change and environmental specialists, education professionals and school staff, law enforcement professionals, and florists!"

-Institutional leader

Videos

Event case study: Mobile with Monsters (Video produced by the University of Glasgow)



Figure 14: Video produced by the University of Glasgow.

[Watch the video about the event "Mobile With Monsters" from the University of Glasgow](#)

Video transcript

[talking to camera] My name is Janos Mark Szakolczai. I'm a lecturer in criminology at the University of Glasgow, with a particular interest in digital society. I have been lecturing, teaching, and coordinating the Digital Society course in Glasgow. I have always been interested in smart devices and how we interact with them in our daily lives.

Rodrigo and I talked about organising a workshop where we could build our own device—not just building it but also using it as a way to express our thoughts, insecurities, and fears related to these technologies. This idea led to the event we created, called "Mobile with Monsters."

We used very simple, child-friendly materials, making it accessible to kids of all ages. The event had children as young as two years old participating, making it a hands-on, arts-and-crafts experience. While making their creations, participants could express their relationships with

digital devices and the concerns they associated with them. Some children envisioned dangers- eyeballs and tentacles emerging from their devices- while others highlighted the fun aspects, adding glossy, colourful designs, unicorns, and images of cats.

The event was not just about highlighting dangers but also about understanding that these devices are not like a TV that you can simply switch on and leave running in the background. They are far more interactive and embedded in our lives, and this awareness was a key goal of our event.

Event case study: Write, Play and Record (Video produced by the University of Glasgow)

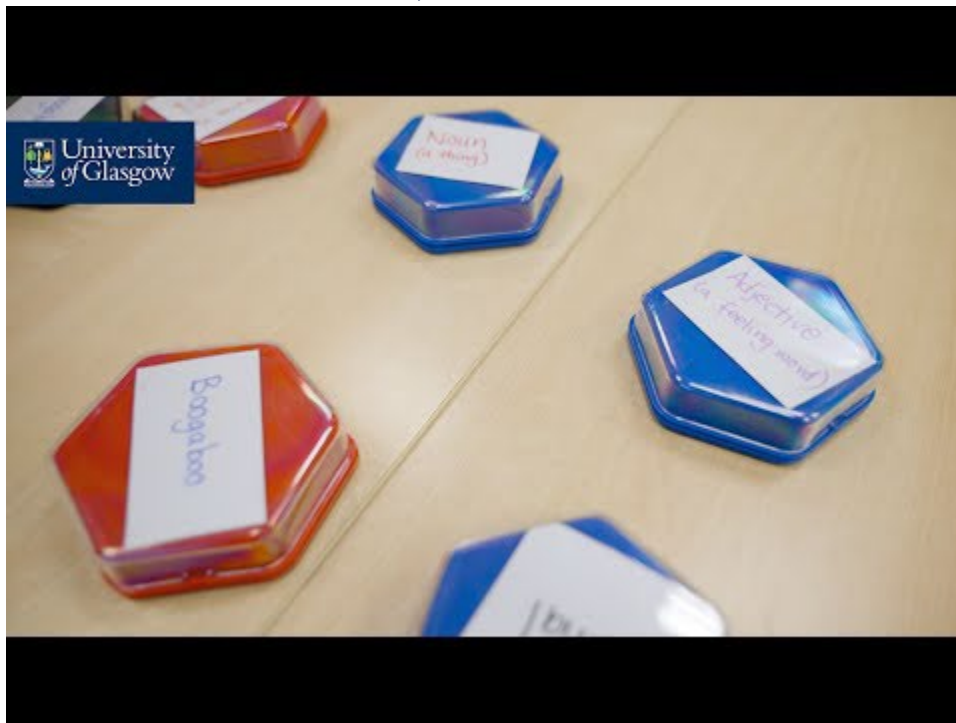


Figure 15: Video produced by the University of Glasgow.

[Watch the video about the event “Write, Play and Record” from the University of Glasgow](#)

Video transcript

[Directed at an audience] She saw—how many? “Twenty hundred”, “twenty hundred” what? A pig. She saw “twenty hundred” pigs running toward the castle. How do you think she felt?

[Talking to camera] My name is Dr. Elizabeth Nelson, and I’m from the School of Education. Our event was called Write, Play, and Record: Interactive Digital Storytelling with Primary School Children.

The idea behind the event was to engage young people in creatively playful story-making, helping them develop their reading knowledge and word recognition. At the same time, we wanted to show that even those who may not feel confident in traditional reading skills can still

be capable readers—whether through reading pictures, interpreting body language, or understanding stories in different ways.

We drew on insights from the children's literature group here, particularly their work on picture books and how words and images interact. Then, we extended that approach to include a digital element, allowing children to engage with technology in a hands-on way as part of their reading experience.

There was a lot of laughter, a lot of joy—crucial elements in learning and playful pedagogies. Those moments of shared fun and creativity were, for us, the markers of an event done well.

[Directed at an audience] She yelled at the top of her lungs. She yelled, "Pigs! Bugaboo! Bugaboo Pigs!"

Data visualisation: Word cloud generated from attendee feedback forms



List of top 20 words by weight in the word cloud

- Really
- Event
- Good
- Interesting
- Great
- People
- Well

- Thank
- Think
- Like
- Enjoyed
- Informative
- Speakers
- Thought
- Time
- Information
- Also
- Useful
- Fun
- Hear

Event photography

Photograph: Pop-up play café



Figure 16: A large purple sign at the entrance of a pop-up play café reads, "Switch Off, Play On! Pop-up play café," along with opening times and event details. The interior features tables with informational materials and attendees engaging with the event.

Photograph: Board games activity at a festival event



Figure 17: Board game activity at a festival event. Participants sit around a table playing the popular game “scrabble”.

Photograph: Tree decorated with coloured lights



Figure 18: Tree decorated with coloured lights as part of a nighttime festival exhibition.

Photograph: Large art display



Figure 19: A large collection of artworks displayed on walls and several folding cafeteria tables. The ceiling is decorated with coloured ribbons.

Photograph: Participants build cardboard models



Figure 20: Two participants wearing fluorescent jackets build models cardboard and pipe cleaners.

End of report