ESRC FESTIVAL REPORT 2023

Data and feedback collected from the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2023

Abstract

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.

Contents

Festival Report 2023

What is the ESRC Festival of Social Science?

- Annual celebration of the social sciences
- UK-wide festival
- Taking place over 3 weeks

- 42 partner research institutions
- 2023's theme was Lifelong Wellbeing

Our partner institutions

The 2023 ESRC Festival of Social Science was run with the following 42 partner research institutions. These institutions are:

- Aston University
- Bangor University
- Bournemouth University
- Cardiff University
- Coventry University
- Durham University
- Economic and Social Research Council
- 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 2023 festival theme of Lifelong Wellbeing, which links to the lifelong wellbeing agenda, a priority area for ESRC and UKRI.

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?

- 41 partner institutions
- 2803 attendees
- 30 schools
- 181 non-academic collaborators
- 286 event leaders

Headline facts and figures

A total of 44,194 attendees were recorded, of which 84% were young people and adults and the remaining 16% were children under 16.

THIS REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE FROM THE 14,250 ATTENDEES REPORTED IN 2022. HOWEVER, SOME OF THIS INCREASE IS THE RESULT OF OPEN EXHIBITIONS WHICH COUNTED VERY HIGH FOOTFALL. NOTABLY, A SINGLE EVENT RECORDED 15,000 VISITORS AND ANOTHER RECORDED 5,000.

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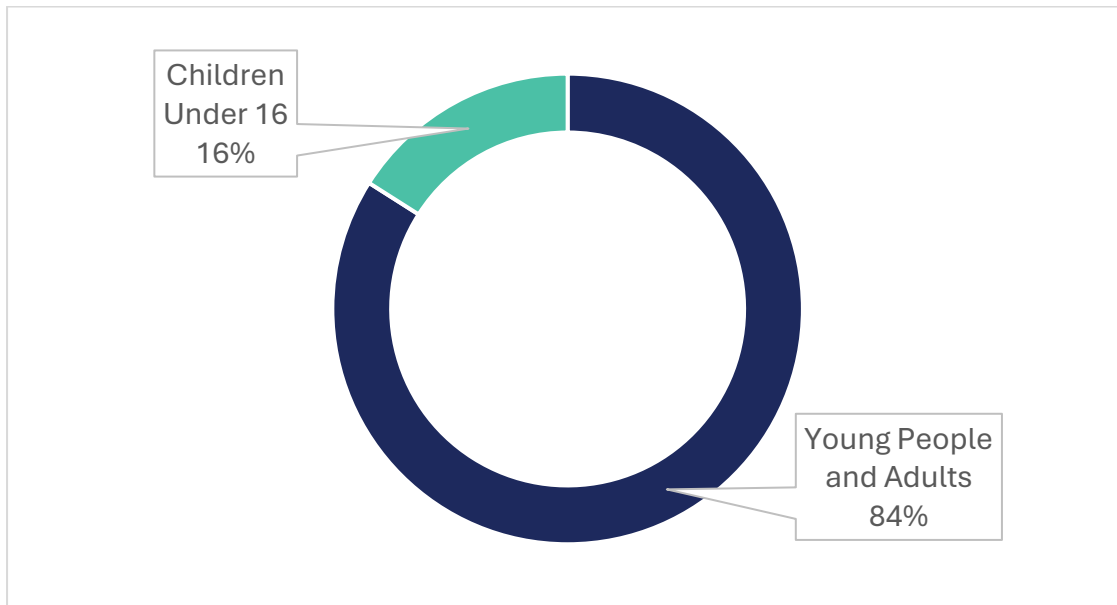
Figure 1: Pie chart showing the division of adult and under 16 attendees reported by event leaders.

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 383 events run by the 42 academic partner institutions.

Format of event	Count
In person	301
Online	47
Hybrid	35
Total	383

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

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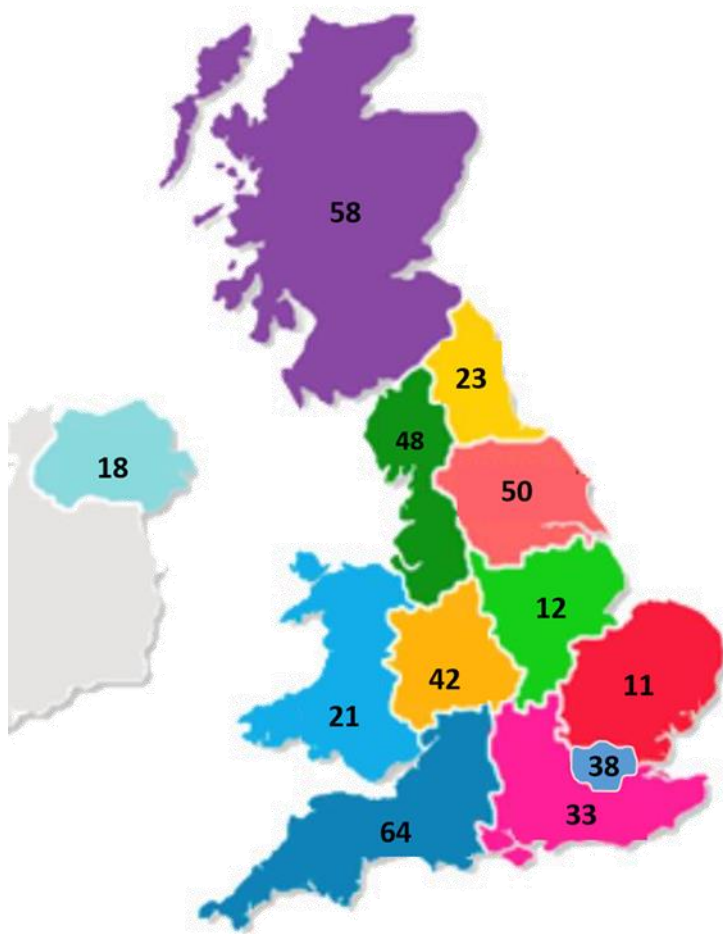
Figure 2: Map of UK with counts of events within each region indicated on the map.

Table: Count of events taking place in each region

UK region	Count of events that took place in that region
London	38
North East	23
North West	48
Yorkshire	50
East Midlands	12
West Midlands	42
South East	33
East of England	11
South West	64
Wales	21

Scotland	58
Northern Ireland	18
Total	**383**

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

Invite only
events 7%
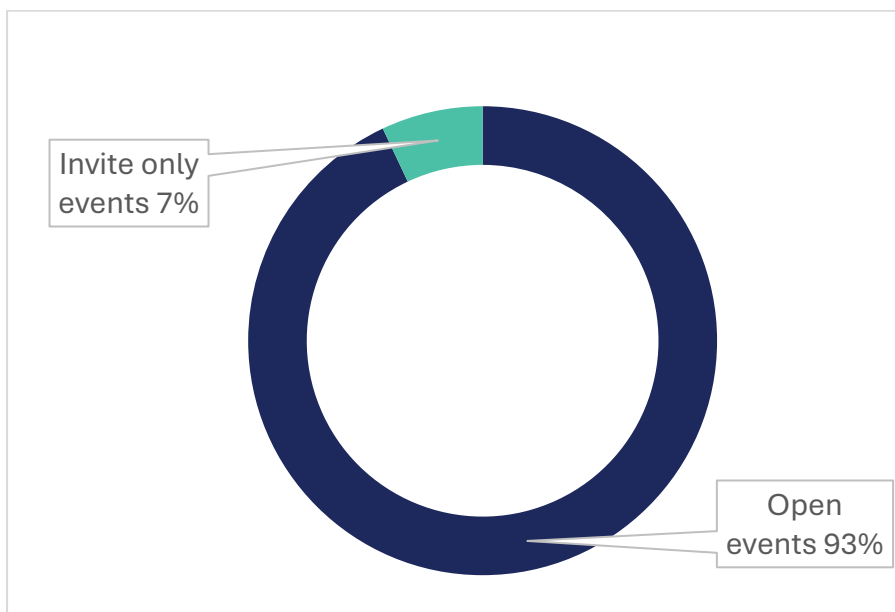
Open
events 93%

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

Data visualisation: Division of events targeting public or professional audiences

Targeting a professional audience 12%

Targeting a public audience 88%
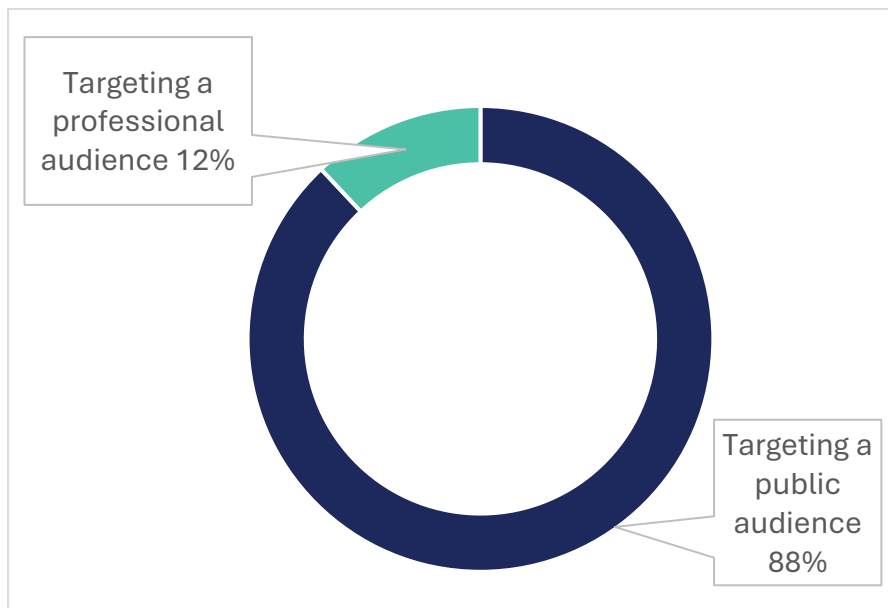
Figure 4: Pie chart showing the division of events targeting public or professional audiences.

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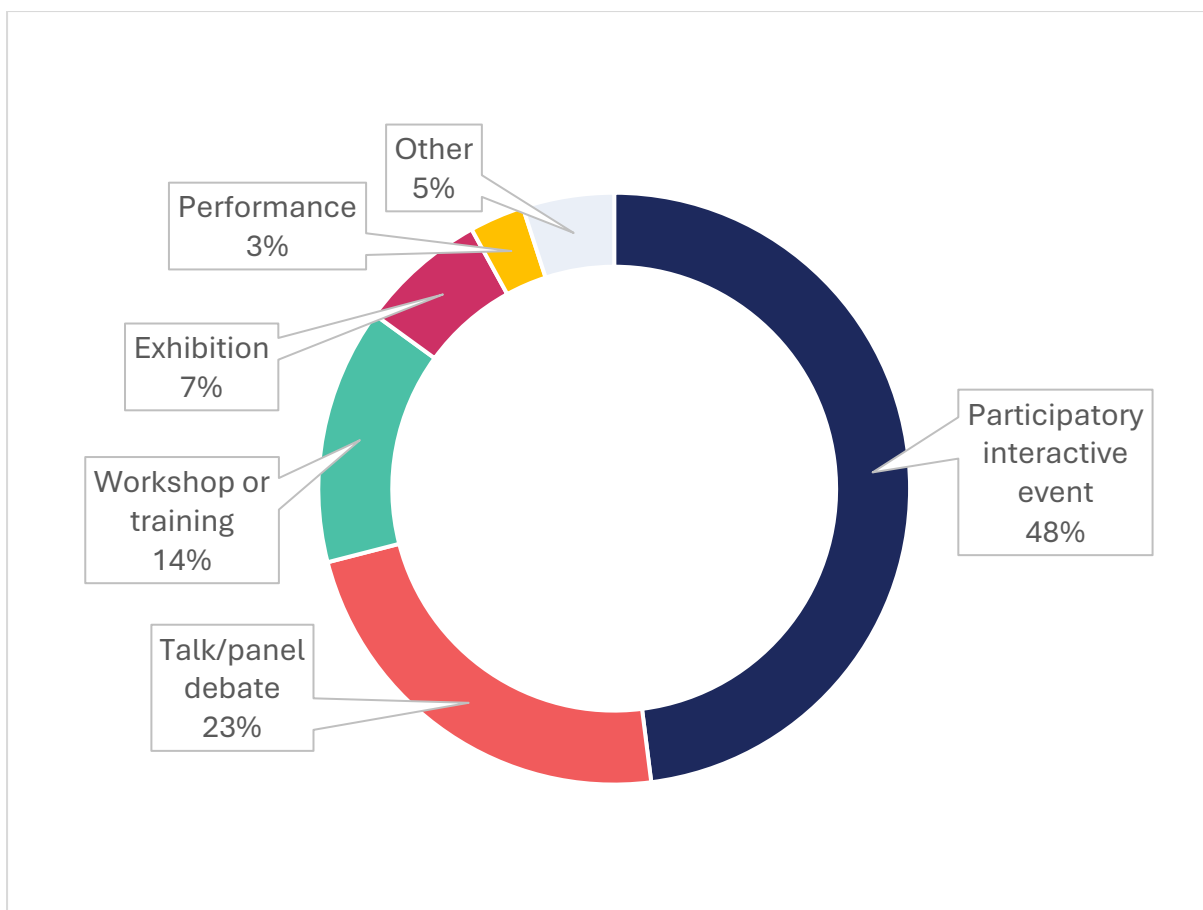
Figure 5: Pie chart showing the breakdown of types of events that took place.

Table: Breakdown of types of events that took place

Type of event	Percentage
Participatory interactive event	48%
Talk or panel discussion	23%
Workshop or training	14%
Exhibition	7%
Performance	3%
Other	5%

Table 3: Percentage breakdown of different types of events that took place.

Popular topics included:

- 237 events on the theme of lifelong wellbeing.
- 87 events on the theme of education and employment.
- 67 events on the theme of identity.

How attendees found out about events

Table: Comparison on web traffic between 2022 and 2023

	2022	**2023**	**Percentage Increase**
Unique visitors	25,688	34429	34%
Number of visits	42484	56445	33%
Page views	218950	289560	32%

Table 4: 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)	3,519
https://t.co (Twitter)	2,818
https://www.ukri.org	1,960
https://www.birmingham.ac.uk	1,547

Table 5: 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
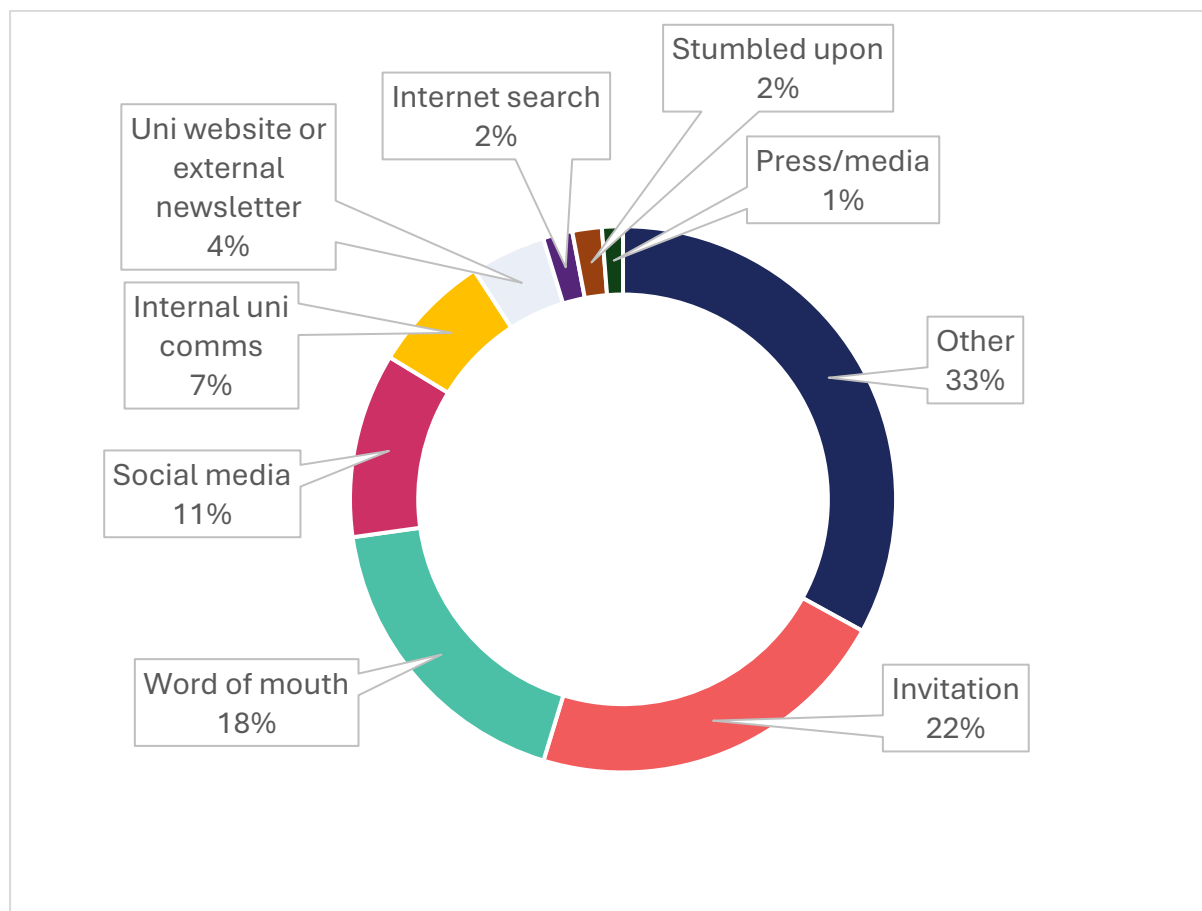
Figure 6: Pie chart showing the breakdown of how attendees found out about events.

Table: Breakdown of how attendees found out about events

Communication channel	Percentage
Other	33%
Invitation	22%
Word of mouth	18%
Social media	11%
Internal university communications	7%
University website	4%
Internet search	2%
Stumbled upon	2%
Press/media	1%

Who attended festival events?

- There has been an increase in BAME representation since 2022.
- There has been an increase in male identifying people since 2022.

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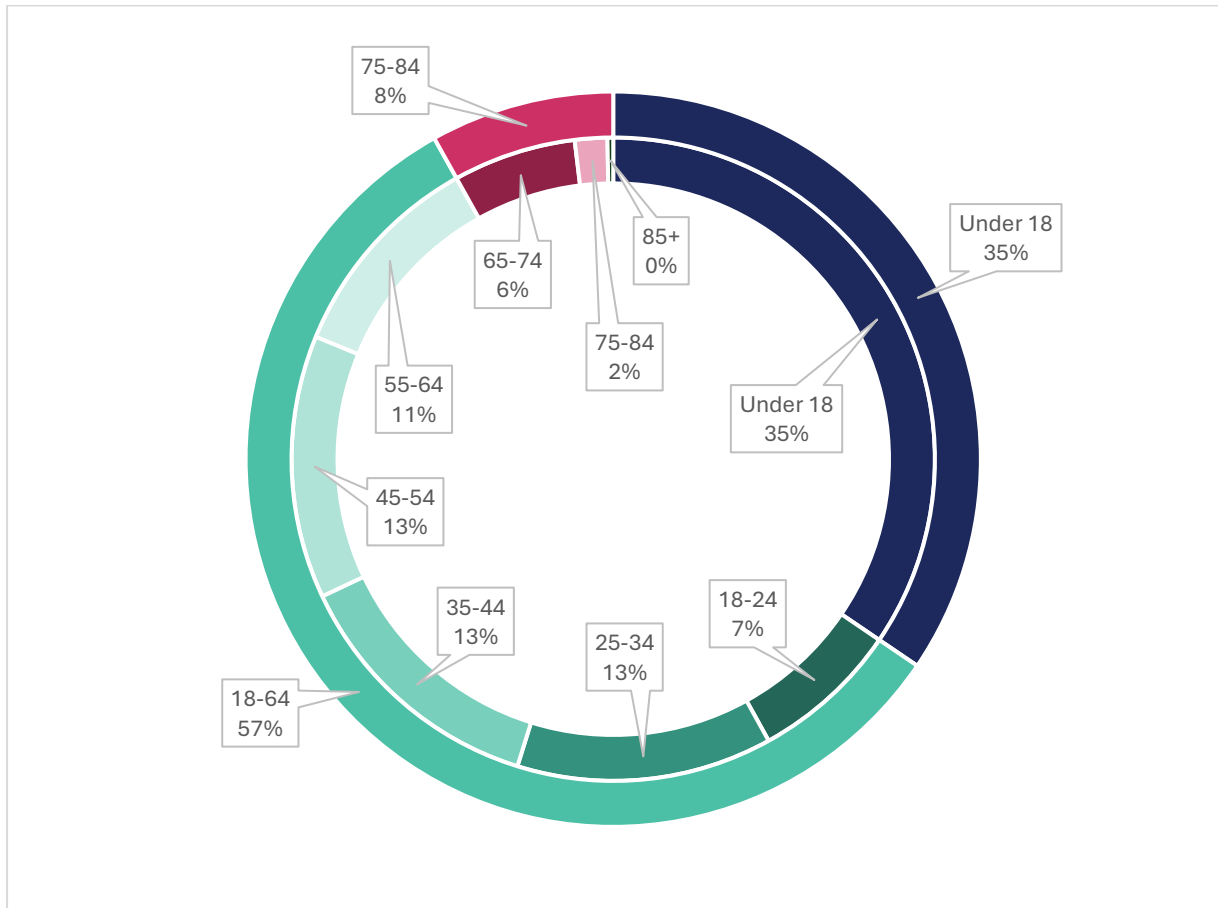
Figure 7: Multi-level pie chart showing a percentage breakdown of the age of attendees.

Table: Breakdown of age of attendees

Age bracket	Percentage
Under 18	35%
18-24	7%
25-34	13%
35-44	13%
45-54	13%

55-64	11%
65-74	6%
75-84	2%
85+	0%

Table 7: Percentage breakdown of age of attendees into age brackets.

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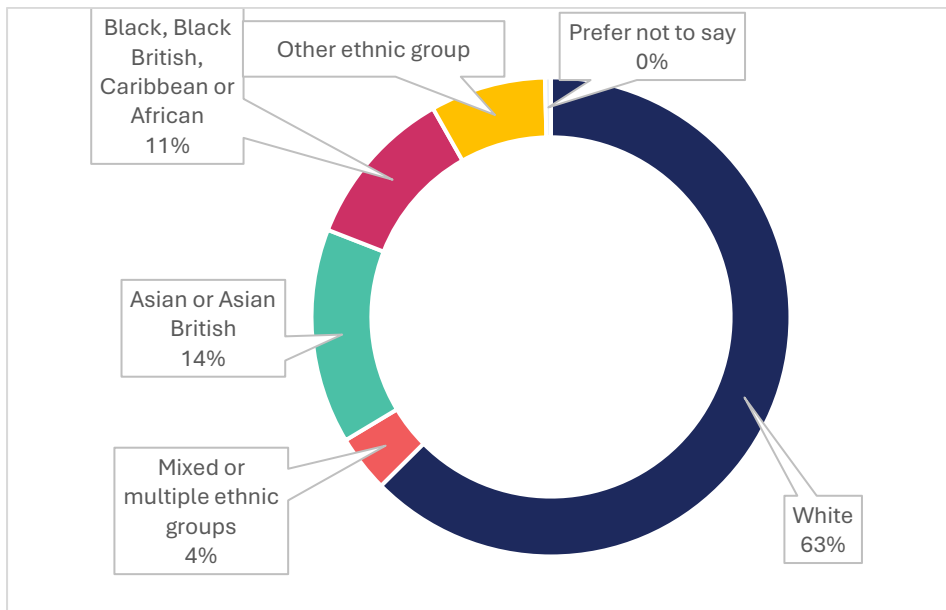
Figure 8: Pie chart showing percentage breakdown of self-reported ethnicity of attendees.

Table: Breakdown of ethnicity of attendees

Ethnicity as reported	Percentage
White	63%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	4%
Asian or Asian British	15%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	11%
Other ethnic group	8%
Prefer not to say	<1%

Table 8: Percentage breakdown of self-reported ethnicity of attendees.

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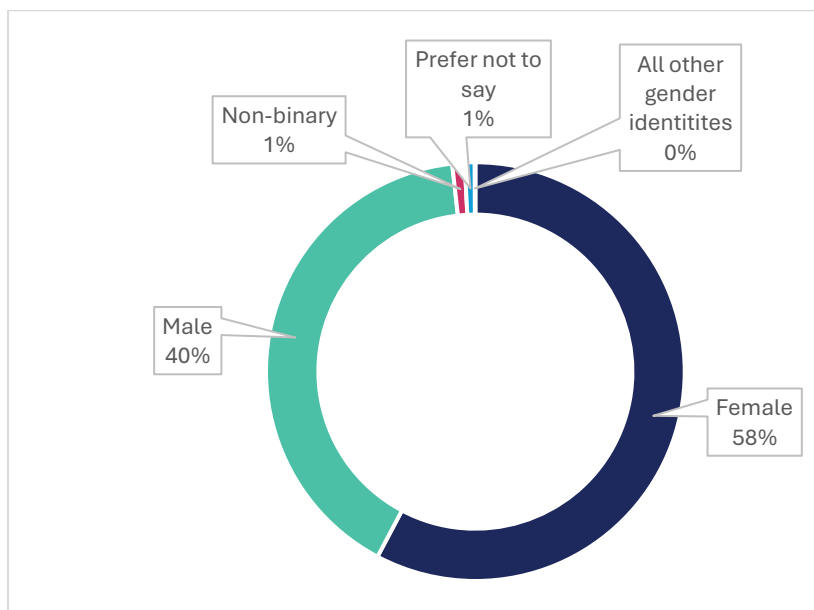
Figure 9: Pie chart showing percentage breakdown of self-reported gender of attendees.

Table: Breakdown of gender of attendees

Gender as reported	Percentage
Female	58%
Male	40%
Non-binary	1%
Prefer not to say	1%
All other Gender Identities	<1%

Table 9: 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	16%
Once or twice a year	23%
A number of times a year	30%
Once a month or more	8%

Table 10: 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	40%
Because it relates to my studies as a school, college or university student	19%
Out of interest as a member of the public	41%

Table 11: Percentage breakdown of attendees into categories of typical reasons for attendance.

What did attendees think of the events?

- 98% of attendees felt that the event was worth the time and effort of attending, 2% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 57% of attendees agreed that their feelings and/or opinion on the topic in question have changed, 20% disagreed and 23% were not sure.
- 62% of attendees said they plan to make a change or do something that they wouldn't otherwise have done,12 % disagreed and 26% were not sure.
- 91% of attendees said they plan to share what they've learned with others, 4% 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	98%	0%	2%
As a result of attending the event, my feelings and/or opinion on the topic in question have change	57%	20%	23%
As a result of attending the event, I plan to make a change or do something that I wouldn't otherwise have done	62%	12%	26%
As a result of attending the event, I plan to share what I've learned with others	91%	4%	5%

Table 12: 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

Educational institution or training provider (excluding schools and HEIs)

Other public body
2%

Professional body or membership organisation
1%

Health or social care provider
6%

Community group
7%

Other private sector business
8%

Local or national government
9%

Arts, cultural or heritage organisation
9%

Charity, social enterprise or not-for-profit organisation
39%

Other (please specify)
14%
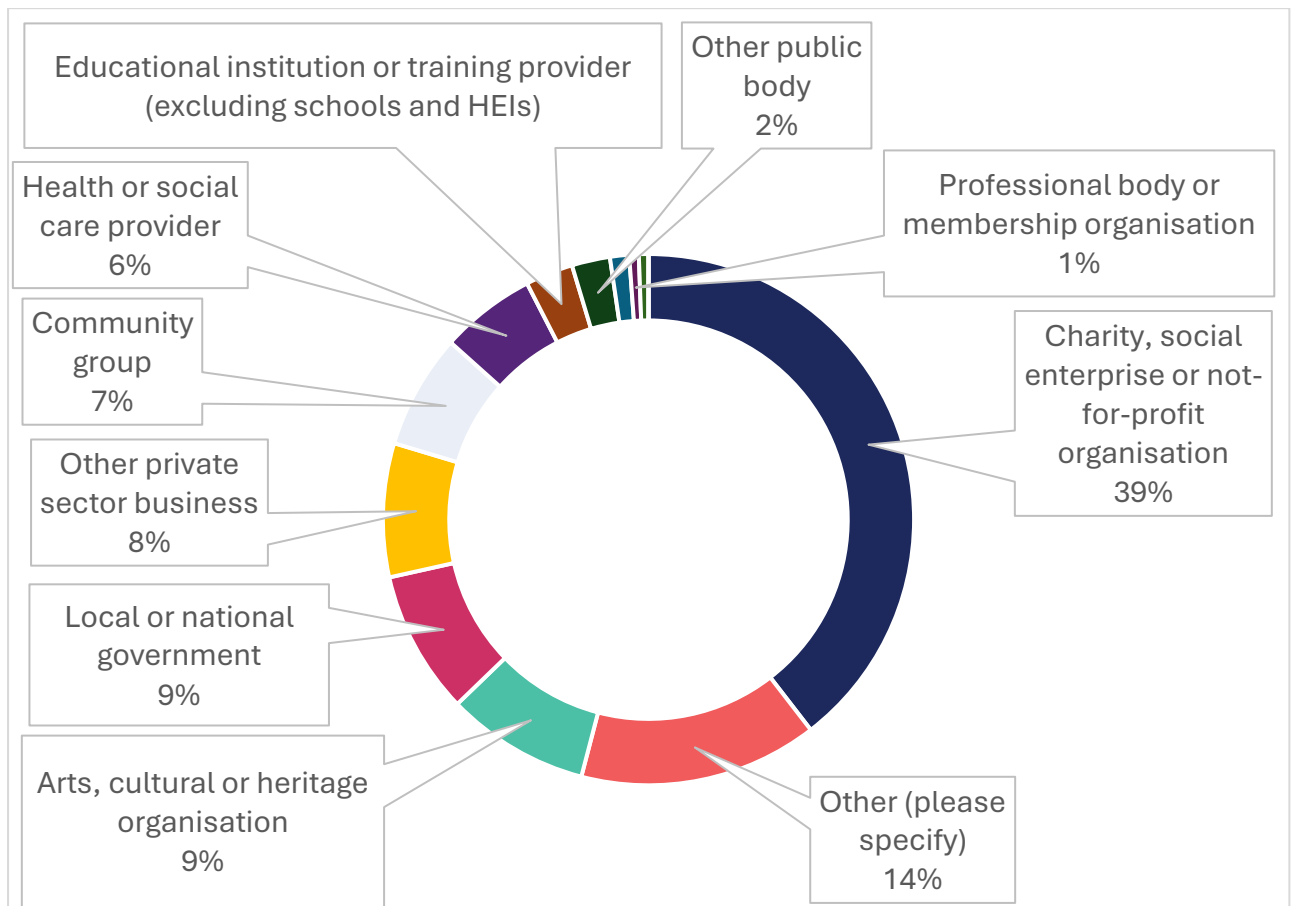
Figure 10: Pie chart showing percentage breakdown of the types of organisations who collaborated on festival events.

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

Type of organisation	Percentage
Charity, social enterprise or not-for-profit organisation	39%
Other (please specify)	15%
Arts, cultural or heritage organisation	9%
Local or national government	9%
Other private sector business	8%
Community group	7%
Health or social care provider	6%

Educational institution or training provider (excluding schools and HEIs)	3%
Other public body	2%
Youth organisation	1%
Professional body or membership organisation	1%
Trade union	1%
Political party	0%
Think tank	0%

Table 13: Percentage breakdown of the types of organisations who collaborated on festival events.

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	53%	41%	6%
The school would be interested in partnering on a similar event in future	62%	38%	0%
My students thought it was a good event	41%	59%	0%
The event helped our school to build or improve an external relationship that will be useful to us in future	44%	48%	7%
The event has been useful for our students	61%	35%	3%

Table 14: Percentage breakdown of teachers' level of agreement with five (5) statements.

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

Quotes from teachers

*"It gave the students invaluable access to their subject but **engaged** them on a higher level and showed the possibilities and **connection** for their in-school learning."*

-Teacher

*"**Student voice** is a key area of our school development plan and it gave pupils the opportunity to develop their ability to converse with others regarding their needs, wants and aims for themselves and **their future**."*

-Teacher

*"The event was fantastic! I think many schools could benefit doing these events in the future to **inspire future generations** of social scientist."*

-Teacher

Concerns raised by teachers

- A small minority of events appeared to have not been designed in **consultation with schools**, resulting in them being poorly suited to the needs – and attention spans – of children.
- Some teachers also voiced concerns that *"Initial information was quite vague in terms of target audience"* and expressed a desire for more clarity from event leaders.

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	53%	41%	4%
Would recommend partnering on a Festival of Social Science event to others	62%	37%	1%

Our organisation would be interested in partnering on a similar event in future	59%	40%	3%
The event has been valued by our internal and/or external stakeholders who attended	62%	37%	1%
This event has been useful to us as an organisation	58%	40%	2%

Table 15: 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 build relationships.
- 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

*"Our charity is a small organisation with reliance on volunteers … .Therefore, opportunities and events such as this are **hugely important and significant**. This provided us with the chance to identify new partner arrangements, network, and **foster key relationships**.*

-Collaborator (charity/not-for-profit)

"There is a real opportunity to build on this and work together further."

-Collaborator (health/social care provider)

*"We massively valued the opportunity to share our project and expertise in this context. We found the support … to be of an above and beyond extremely high standard. We **love to return to the festival next year** with a further session(s).*

-Collaborator (charity/not-for-profit)

*"The ESRC grant enabled us to provide this event free of charge to our service users. We are **determined to find a way to re-create this event** and keep this support going for our families. Thank you so much to ESRC"*

*"Provided an invaluable opportunity to **network** with other orgs and activists to **spark new projects** and campaigns"*

-Collaborator (education/training provider)

What events did non-academic collaborators support?

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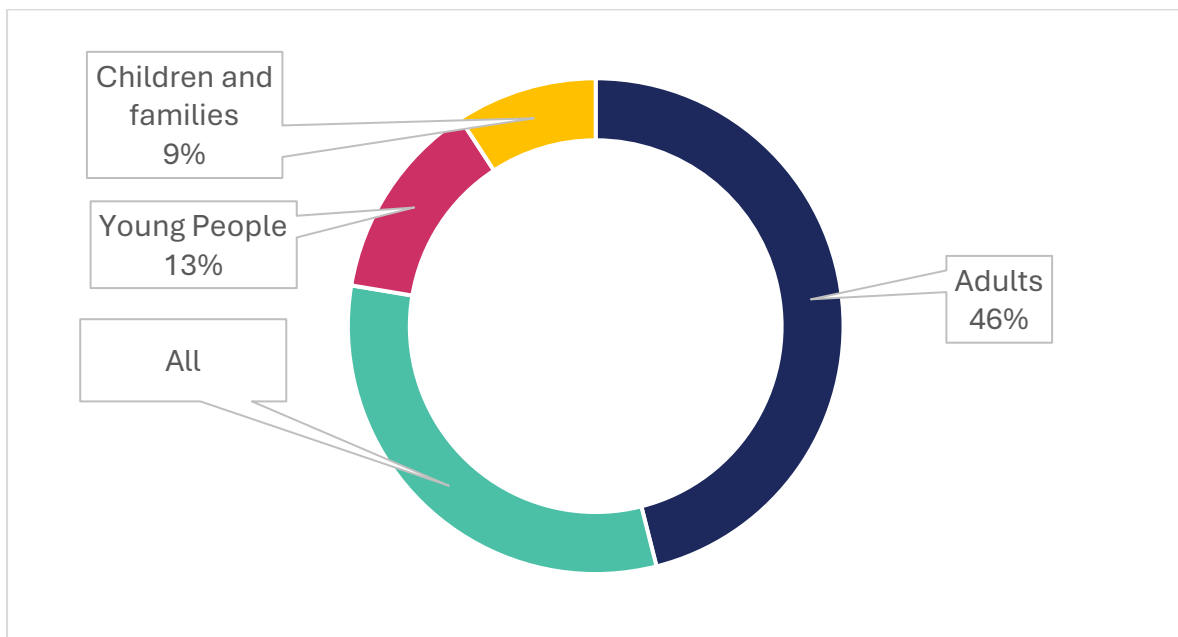
Figure 11: Pie chart showing the breakdown of audiences targeted by non-academic collaborators

Table: Breakdown of audiences targeted by non-academic collaborators

Target audience	Percentage
Adults	46%
All	32%
Young people	13%
Children and families	9%

Table 16: Breakdown of audiences targeted by non-academic collaborators

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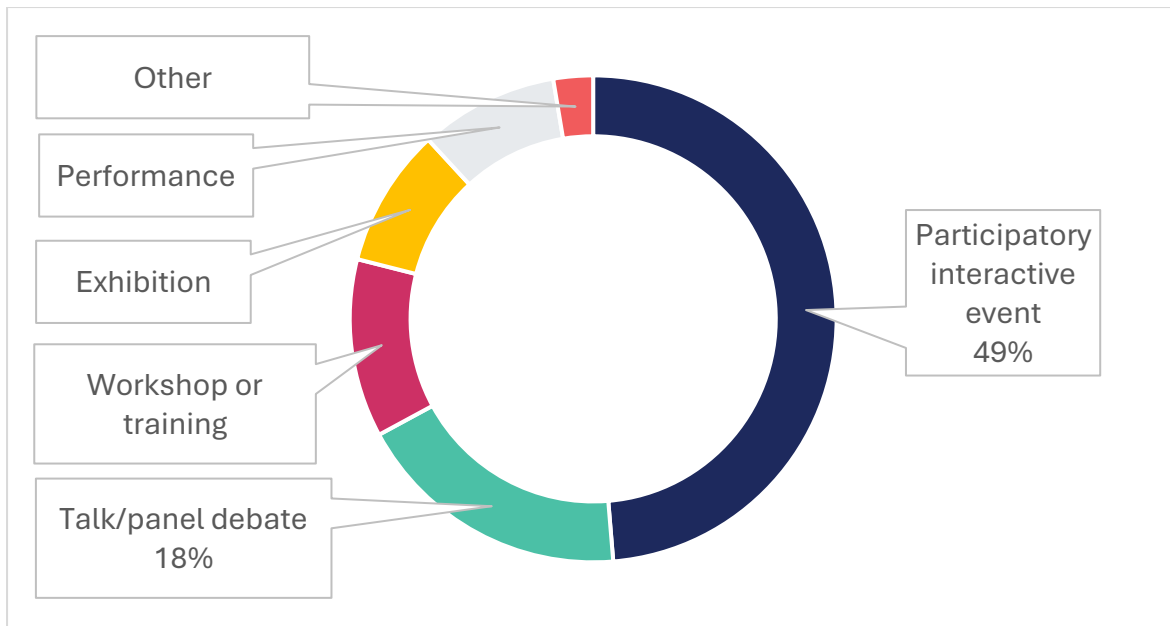
Figure 12: Pie chart showing the breakdown of types of events delivered with non-academic collaborators

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

Format of event	Percentage
Participatory interactive event	49%
Talk/panel debate	18%
Workshop or training	12%
Exhibition	9%
Performance	9%
Other	3%

Table 17: 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
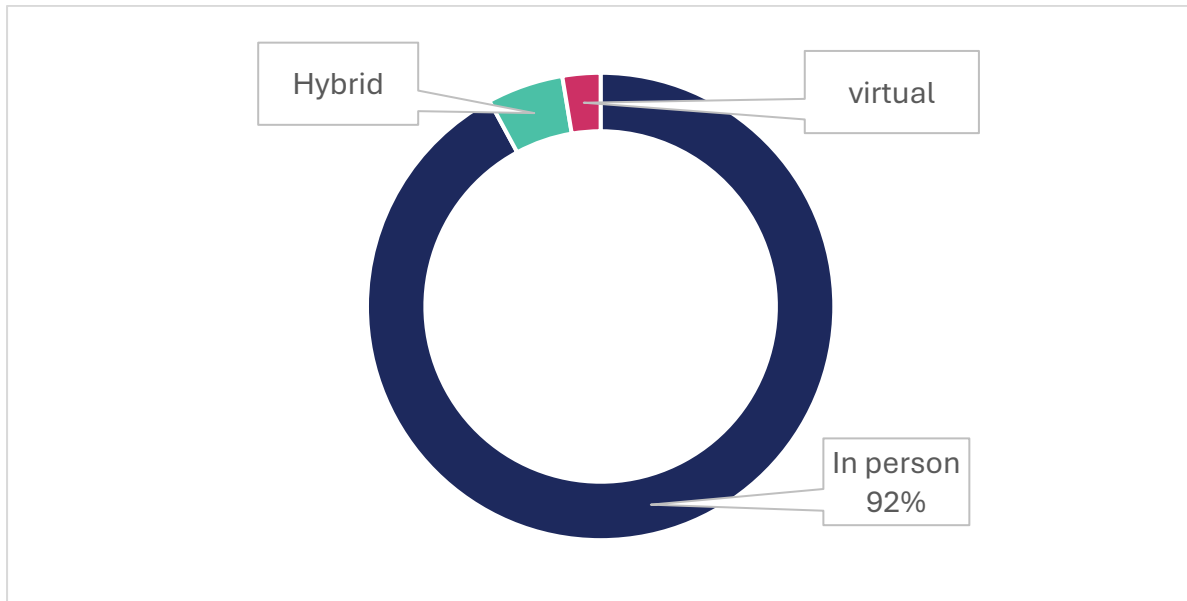
Figure 13: Pie chart showing breakdown of delivery of events (in-person/ hybrid/ virtual) with non-academic collaborators

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

Delivery	Percentage
In-person	39%
Hybrid	15%
Online	9%
Local or national government	9%
Other private sector business	8%
Community group	7%

Table 18: 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	34%	50%	16%
Would recommend partnering on a Festival of Social Science event	54%	39%	7%
Participating has helped them/their colleagues to develop public engagement skills	39%	43%	18%

Table 19: Percentage breakdown of event leaders' level of agreement with three (3) statements.

Quotes from researchers

*"It was a chance to **see and feel impact**. And to meet and interact informally with the group of people we conduct research with."*

- Researcher

*"It was great to run the event as the audience was really **interactive** and willing to participate, discuss, think about the topic and **engage**."*

- Researcher

*"I believe that public engagement in research is really important to raise awareness and **dispel myths about research/researchers** (e.g. that researchers sit in an ivory tower)."*

- 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	16%	59%	25%
Participating in the Festival has helped develop researchers' public engagement skills	38%	50%	12%

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	22%	44%	34%
Participating in the Festival has increased enthusiasm for public engagement in social science/economics at our institution	42%	26%	32%

Table 20: Percentage breakdown of partner institutions' level of agreement with four (4) statements.

Quotes from institutional leaders

"The festival provides our researchers with an opportunity to engage with the public with the support and advice of the ESRC team, which is essential."

-Institutional leader

"I love working on the ESRC festival, and I am always amazed at how great our researchers are when it comes to public engagement."

-Institutional leader

"It helps us to think about how we communicate our overall research programme, rather than just one study, to a wider audience."

-Institutional leader

"A good experience, the training we got from Jamie was spot on and really useful and it was great to get funding."

-Institutional leader

"We have seen steady YOY growth and good engagement with researchers across the institution."

-Institutional leader

"We have strong public engagement focus at the University and the Festival is one of the key events."

– Researcher

"Over the past four years FOSS has shifted institutional interest and awareness of public engagement across all disciplines. It increased levels of awareness of social sciences PE activity, and we have seen this move into arts and humanities activity as a result."

Videos

What is the Festival of Social Science? Video produced by the University of Glasgow

Figure 14: Video produced by the University of Glasgow.

[This link will take you to the video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onT9QkjXIrs) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onT9QkjXIrs)

Video transcript

Welcome to the 2023 Festival of Social Science. I'm Sarah Carter, Head of the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow. At the end of October, the University of Glasgow, along with other institutions across the UK, will participate in the Festival of Social Science. This annual event, led and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, celebrates research and knowledge about humans and society. The festival offers a chance to delve into social science topics ranging from health and well-being to crime, equality, migration, education, and identity. It also highlights how our research can impact everyday lives. This year, the festival will focus on the theme of lifelong well-being, examining mental and physical health across all ages and

celebrating the 75th anniversary of the NHS. Our academics will host a variety of public events, including workshops, interactive stalls, and walking tours. We hope to share our social science research with you. To learn more about the Festival of Social Science and how to get involved, please visit our website. We look forward to welcoming you to our events and sharing more with you. Thank you.

What kinds of events are academics leading? Video produced by the University of Southampton

Figure 15: Video produced by the University of Southampton.

[This link will take you to the video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztgLBBOequ4) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztgLBBOequ4)

Video transcript

My name is Rebecca Limb and I'm a Lecturer in Law at Southampton Law school, specializing in child medical law. The workshop seeks to empower young people by equipping them with the skills, language, and knowledge to access healthcare services as and when required. We will be using literature, arts, crafts, films to achieve this.

My name is Sean Campbell, a Senior Enterprise Fellow in Southampton Business School. I work with academics and the community to link the two more effectively, provide better opportunities for our students, and improve engagements with our towns

and cities. The event, Make your Place, is a place-making enterprise activity that enables pupils, students, local communities, and businesses to develop ideas for products and services that improve their place.

Hello, my name is Helen Carr, I'm a Professor of Social Justice and Property Law in the Law School at the University of Southampton. I teach land law to undergraduate students and my research interests are in how property creates marginal and excluded populations. At the event, we will have discussions about the benefits of access to the countryside and the fragile ecosystems that need to be preserved. We will open it up to a debate to see how ordinary people who want to have access to the countryside feel we should balance out those rights and responsibilities.

I'm Denise Baden, Professor of Sustainable Practice at the University of Southampton. My special interest is finding ways to move beyond preaching to the converted so we can reach a wider audience with sustainable solutions. I hope to engage the public in climate solutions using the tradition of theater as education. The event I'm staging is a dramatic monologue called Murder in the Citizens Jury where we engage the audience in making decisions on what climate solutions we should address.

My name is Dr. Emma Palmer-Cooper, and I'm a lecturer in the School of Psychology with an interest in creativity, well-being, and mental health. Our workshop is looking to demonstrate interesting creative ways, such as coloring-in, that people can do to improve their mental well-being and maintain mental health.

I'm Kiki Messiou, Professor of Education at Southampton Education School. My research focuses on developing inclusive practices and thinking in schools, which informs my teaching. We employ a very innovative approach focused on developing students as researchers. This will be an interesting idea for other schools, teachers, community members, and parents to see how focusing on such an approach can ensure that every child is included in school.

My name's Kate Hough, a Research Fellow based in Biological Sciences. My research is around the biological mechanisms of hearing loss and how the body interacts with hearing devices called cochlear implants. Through the community engagement project, we have found that encouraging conversations around hearing and brain health to be really effective. At our event, you'll find a range of exhibits, a guest speaker, and a panel discussion made up of professionals and people with lived experience of hearing loss.

Hi, I'm Jane Falkingham, Professor of Demography and International Social Policy, and also director of the ESRC Centre for Population Change at the University of Southampton. Understanding population change is really important because it underpins everything we do in public policy. The event we're holding as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences this year is bringing together people interested in local population change, understanding it at the level of the local authority, town, or city.

Word cloud

Data visualisation: Word cloud generated from attendee feedback forms

List of top 20 words by weight in the word cloud

- Event
- Really
- Great
- Good
- Interesting
- People
- Enjoyed
- Thank
- Well
- Like
- Time
- Informative
- Lot
- Hear
- Speakers
- Questions
- Research
- Much
- Also
- Nice

Event photography

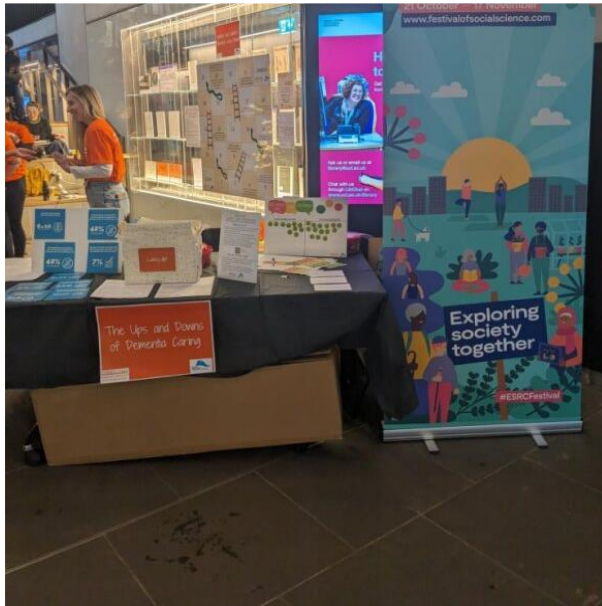## Photograph: Activity stall at University College London event

Figure 16: Picture of an activity stall at a University College London event. The sign reads "The Ups and Downs of Dementia Care", an adjacent banner reads "exploring society together" and volunteer in an orange shirt can be seen in the background.

Photograph: Game activity at University College London event

Figure 17: Picture of an activity at a University College London event. A volunteer and a member of the public stand in front of a display that resembles a "snakes and ladders" board. A display above reads "Snakes and Ladders: Dementia Care Edition".

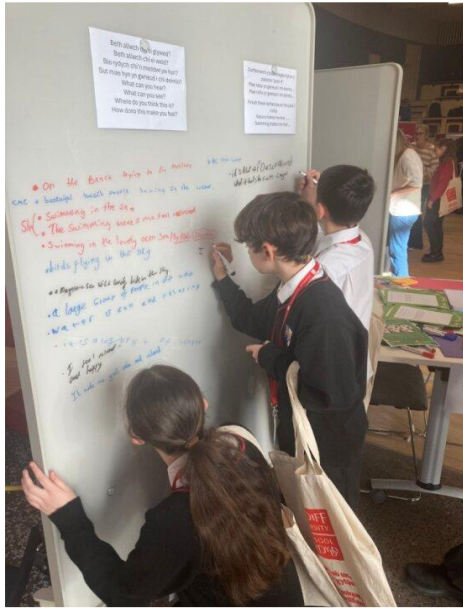## Photograph: Participant responses at Cardiff University event

Figure 18: Picture of a Cardiff University event. Three children in school uniforms writing together on a whiteboard. A display above reads "What can you hear? What can you see? What do you think this is? How does this make you feel?" along with a Welsh translation.

Photograph: Bicycle activity at Cardiff University event

Figure 19: Picture of a Cardiff University event. A child wearing school uniform rides a stationary bike. Another child watches them.

Photograph: Discussion at Cardiff University event

Figure 20: Picture of a Cardiff University event. A group of people sit in a historic room. They turn around to listen to another person standing and speaking.

Photograph: group activity at Cardiff University event

Figure 21: Picture of a Cardiff University event. A group of people stand behind desks in a classroom. They copy a facilitator who is holding their arms up to their sides and their fingers spread apart.

Photograph: Performance at University of Salford event

Figure 22: Picture of a University of Salford event. A sign in the foreground reads "Has your life been touched by dementia? Take a sweet" There are two adults in the background talking to each other.

End of report