

External Evaluation Report: The Cambridge Festival of Ideas

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Executive Summary

This report describes key findings from a mixed methods summative evaluation study based on survey data from visitors to the Cambridge Festival of Ideas in late 2010.

Visitor Profile

- The majority of respondents (60.5%; $n=161$) were visiting the Cambridge Festival of Ideas for the first time.
- The overall gender breakdown within these visiting groups was 66.5% ($n=464$) women or girls, and 33.5% ($n=234$) men or boys. Thus, the overall gender distribution for this sample of festival visitors was skewed towards women and girls.
- These results indicate that the profile of visitors to the Cambridge Festival of Ideas is predominately local (85.3% of visitors travelling 20 miles or less) and to a much lesser extent regional.
- The visitor ages most represented are from 40-49, with 5-14 years old children also featuring strongly. 15-29 year olds and 70+ visitors are relatively under-represented in this festival based on the present data.
- While most visitors were attending the Festival of Ideas for the first time, there was substantial cross-Festival attendance. Indeed, the majority of participants had attended the Cambridge Science Festival previously (56.4%, $n=150$), whilst 43.6% ($n=116$) had not. This finding suggests that the success of the Science Festival is having a cross-over benefit for attendance at the newer and less well-established Festival of Ideas. This result may point to the value of other festival cities building upon the success of an existing festival to broaden and extend their engagement into other domains.

The Visit Experience and Satisfaction

- A remarkable 96.2% of respondents had an “overall impression” of the Festival of Ideas that was either “very good” or “good”, while just 0.8% had a “poor” or “very poor” impression of the festival.
- 88.7% of respondents had a positive view of the Festival website, with less than 1% expressing a negative view.
- 92.9% of respondents expressed positive views (‘very good’ or ‘good’) about the helpfulness of stewards and demonstrators, compared to just 1.2% negative views (‘poor’ or ‘very poor’) amongst respondents.
- These results amount to 78.9% positive views about the booking system for Cambridge Festival of Ideas, against 3.7% negative.
- 68.8% of respondents had a positive assessment of the informational signage available around the festival, while 7.9% had a negative assessment of the signage.
- Only 16.9% ($n=45$) of respondents agreed that it had increased their interest, whilst 34.2% ($n=91$) said that it had not. Overall then, only a minority of 16.9% of visitors

reported that the Festival of Ideas increased their interest in going onto a formal course in further or higher education. Yet, this may still be considered a significant accomplishment.

Qualitative Results

- Responses indicate that not only did people feel that they learned a lot from their involvement with the festival, but it also increased their enthusiasm for various topics. Furthermore, it was valuable for locals to learn about their town, the university and to engage with their community and its history.
- Both the diversity of subject matter available at the Festival of Ideas as well as the range of different kinds and levels of activities that were available that were viewed as very positive.
- Respondents highlighted the inclusivity of the Festival of Ideas and appreciated the underlying commitment to reaching out to the broader community that was evinced by the very existence of the Festival.
- Responses indicate that generally, respondents' complaints were a result of organisational or logistical problems or the physical limitations of event spaces in Cambridge as opposed to the actual content of the activities, presentations and events.
- Expressions of the value of the Festival of Ideas experience tend to connect affective impacts such as pleasure and excitement, with a self-reported increase in curiosity and the desire to learn more.
- The Festival evoked enough interest in some visitors that they were willing to invest significant time in pursuing these interests further, and formally.

Introduction: Festival-based public engagement

The role of festivals in public engagement is not well-understood overall. However, there is growing interest in the unique role festivals can play in the public engagement landscape. While some research has begun to be published on the topic of science festivals, learning-oriented festivals with a primary focus on topics other than the natural sciences and technology (e.g. The Cambridge Festival of Ideas) have not been investigated previously using social scientific research methods to understand visitors' views on such festivals.

First, it is important to offer a brief definition of a learning-oriented festival. A defining characteristic of a special event or festival is its transience: 'it would be difficult to induce and sustain the same sense of occasion and excitement if such an event was to be held more frequently' (Derrett, 2004, p. 33). Festivals typically occur annually, and there is potential for their 'reliability' in terms of their annual recurrence on the calendar to make them an event members of the public can expect as a regular feature in their region's events calendar. Learning-oriented festivals have a core focus on the achievements and challenges of particular domains of scholarship, within a limited timeframe. They aim to serve awareness-raising ends and to provide a setting for individuals and groups to experience something out of the ordinary and encounter new ideas.

Indeed, learning-oriented festivals tend to differ from activities provided by museums both due to the time-limited nature of their existence and their focus on current scholarship. Festivals usually bring together a range of events, allowing for a wide range of potential experiences within the festival context. One consequence of this temporality is that a greater commitment can be made by, for example, volunteer university staff and students than would be sustainable for a longer period. For example, many science festivals also have high levels of volunteer participation by active scientists, technologists and engineers (Jensen & Buckley, 2011). Finally, the word 'festival' denotes a special event for visitors, and thus the expectation that the event they attend will be different from other year-round attractions and exhibitions.

The present study comprises an exploratory foray into social scientific evaluation of The Cambridge Festival of Ideas. Key research questions to be addressed through this summative evaluation research include:

- What is the profile of visitors to Cambridge Festival of Ideas?
- What methods of marketing are currently most effective at drawing in visitors to festival?
- How satisfied are visitors with the Cambridge Festival of Ideas overall?
- What do visitors to the Cambridge Festival of Ideas find valuable about the experience?
- What do visitors to the Cambridge Festival of Ideas find problematic about the experience?
- What do visitors feel they have gained from the festival visiting experience?

Methods

This summative evaluation study is based on a small 'on site' survey form that was distributed during the 2010 Cambridge Festival of Ideas by volunteer staff and organisers. The data collection was conducted following a 'saturation' sampling method at major festival hubs and 'sit down' lectures. Thus, the sample may skew towards visitors who attended 'sit down' activities. The most likely sampling bias then would be towards adult-oriented activities, but the sample would otherwise be expected to be broadly representative of the overall visitor population.

The survey has both open-ended (qualitative) and closed-ended questions. The form first asks respondents to indicate the event(s) within the festival they attended. Then they are asked to rate their overall view of the festival event(s) they attended on a five-point Likert scale from 'very good' to 'very poor'. Next, there are two open-ended items: one asking what they liked about the event(s) and the other asking what "didn't work so well". They were then asked "Are there any topics or themes you would like to see covered in future years?". Finally, respondents were asked the closed-ended questions "How did you hear about the Festival of Ideas this year?" and "How far did you travel to the Festival?". The sample size for the survey was 266.

Qualitative data collected from the surveys were rigorously analysed to identify patterns (for discussion of data analysis methods used, see Jensen & Holliman, 2009).

Quantitative Results

The quantitative results provide an initial snapshot of the Cambridge Festival of Ideas visitor population, as well as their level of satisfaction with events they attended during the festival.

Demographic and Geographic Visitor Profile

Gender Distribution of Visitors

Respondents reported on the overall number and gender of individuals in their visiting group (or for themselves if they were visiting alone). The overall gender breakdown within these visiting groups was 66.5% ($n=464$) women or girls, and 33.5% ($n=234$) men or boys. Thus, the overall gender distribution for this sample of festival visitors was skewed towards women and girls.

Geographic Distribution of Visitors

Most visitors lived relatively near to the Cambridge city centre, with the majority of respondents travelling just 0 – 5 miles to attend the festival (58.3%, $n=155$). A further 18.4% ($n=49$) of respondents travelled between 5-10 miles to the Festival, and 8.6% ($n=23$) of respondents travelled between 10-20 miles to the Festival. Another 6.8% ($n=18$) of respondents travelled 20-50 miles to the Festival. A small minority of visitors travelled from much further afield, with 5.6% ($n=15$) travelling 50-100 miles, 2.3% ($n=6$) of respondents travelling 100-200 miles and 1.5% ($n=4$) travelling over 200 miles to attend the Festival. These results indicate that the profile of visitors to the Cambridge Festival of Ideas is predominately local (85.3% of visitors travelling 20 miles or less) and to a much lesser extent regional.

Education

Most of the respondents were tertiary educated, with 43.6% ($n=116$) stating that they had a postgraduate degree, and 40.2% ($n=107$) stating that they had a degree. A small proportion (3.4%, $n=9$) of respondents were still in education. Only 3.8% ($n=10$) was at a GCSE or equivalent level, 7.1% ($n=19$) were at an A-level or equivalent level, and only 1.5% ($n=4$) were below GCSE or equivalent level.

Age Distribution

Respondents were asked to report the age distribution of their visiting group. This section reports in turn how many respondents indicated the presence of individuals of different ages in their visiting party. Only a small minority of respondents had children aged 0-4 years in their group, with only 5.3% ($n=14$) stating that they had 1 person this age, whilst 0.8% ($n=2$) stated that they had 2 people, 0.4% ($n=1$) stated they had 3 people and 0.4% ($n=1$) stated they had five people this age in their group.

13.9% ($n=37$) of respondents reported that there was one 5-9 year old child in their visiting group. Moreover, 5.3% ($n=14$) and 0.8% ($n=2$) of respondents stated that they had two and three 5-9 year olds in their groups respectively.

16.5% ($n=44$) of respondents indicated that there was one 10-14 year old that this was the case in their group. 4.9% ($n=13$) of respondents stated that there were two 10-14 year olds, whilst only 1.1% ($n=3$), 0.4% ($n=1$) and 0.8% ($n=2$) stated that there were three, four and six 10-14 year old children respectively in their group. Thus, from 0-14 years of age, there is a steady increase in participation by age. This pattern changes sharply at the age category of

15-19, which was not well represented in respondents' reports of group characteristics. Only 6.8% ($n=18$) of respondents had one 15-19 year old in their group, whilst 0.8% ($n=2$) and 1.5% ($n=4$) had two and four 15-19 year olds respectively.

A similar pattern of relatively limited representation was evident for the 20-29 year old age category. Only 6.4% ($n=17$) of respondents had one 20-29 year old in their group, whilst 4.5% ($n=12$), 0.4% ($n=1$) and 0.8% ($n=2$) had two, three and five 20-29 year olds respectively in their group.

The numbers increased again in the 30-39 year old age category, with 15% ($n=40$) stating that this was the case in their group, whilst only 3.4% ($n=9$) of respondents had two 30-39 year olds in their group. 1.1% ($n=3$), 1.1% ($n=3$) and 1.9% ($n=5$) stated that they had three, four and six 30-39 year olds in their group respectively.

A greater number of respondents (25.2%, $n=67$) stated that there was a 40-49 year old in their group, with 13.9% ($n=37$) indicating that there were two 40-49 year olds in their group. Only 1.9% ($n=5$), 0.4% ($n=1$) and 1.1% ($n=3$) stated that there were three, four and six 40-49 year olds respectively in their group.

From the peak 40-49 age bracket, there was steady decline in numbers as age increased. 12% ($n=32$) of respondents reported that there was one 50-59 year old in their group, and 6.4% ($n=17$) stated that there were two in their group. 0.4% ($n=1$) of respondents stated that there were three 50-59 year olds in their group. Similarly, 0.4% ($n=1$) and 0.4% ($n=1$) stated that there were four and six 50-59 year olds respectively in their group.

The number of respondents from the 60-69 age group also had less representation in the visitor profile. 9% ($n=24$) and 7.1% ($n=19$) stated that there were one and two people this age in their group respectively. Only 0.8% ($n=2$) and 0.4% ($n=1$) stated that there were three and six 60-69 year olds respectively in their group.

Finally, a small percentage of people over 70 years were represented in the groups, with 4.9% ($n=13$) of respondents stating that there was one person over the age of 70 in their group, and 2.3% ($n=6$) stating that there were two people over the age of 70 in their group. Only 0.4% ($n=1$) of respondents said that there were three people over 70 in their group.

Disabled Visitors

A small percentage of respondents said that they or someone in their group was disabled (7.5%, $n=20$), whereas 91% ($n=242$) did not have a disabled person in their group.

Marketing of the Festival

Visitors heard about the Festival of Ideas through numerous different marketing methods, with no single dominant form of marketing represented. The largest category of responses explaining how respondents had heard about the Festival was because they were already on the University of Cambridge events mailing list (25.2%; $n=67$). The next largest category was word of mouth from family and friends (20.7%; $n=55$), followed by online methods of advertising (19.9%; $n=53$) of participants, having university connections (17.7%; $n=47$) and poster advertising reached 13.9% ($n=37$) of respondents. Smaller percentages of respondents learned about the Festival through 'school' (10.9%; $n=29$), through 'work' (9%; $n=24$), via the local press (8.6%; $n=23$), through the library (6.8%; $n=18$) and simply 'local interest' (3.4%;

$n=9$). Only 10.5% ($n=28$) of respondents said that they heard about the Festival through another unspecified marketing method.

Repeat Visiting and Cross-Festival Attendance

The majority of respondents (60.5%; $n=161$) were visiting the Cambridge Festival of Ideas for the first time. 23.7% ($n=63$) of respondents had attended once before and 15% ($n=40$) had attended in two or more previous years.

While most visitors were attending the Festival of Ideas for the first time, there was substantial cross-Festival attendance. Indeed, the majority of respondents had attended the Cambridge Science Festival previously (56.4%; $n=150$), whilst 43.6% ($n=116$) had not. This finding suggests that the success of the Science Festival is having a cross-over benefit for attendance at the newer and less well-established Festival of Ideas. There is less cross-over with the Open Cambridge Festival. Only 20.7% ($n=55$) of respondents had previously attended the less prominent Open Cambridge Festival previously (79.3%; $n=211$). Overall 64.3% ($n=171$) of respondents had previously attended either the Cambridge Science Festival or the Open Cambridge Festival.

In terms of the different elements of the Festival of Ideas, only a minority of respondents (28.2%; $n=75$) had attended the festival's 'Family Day', while 71.8% ($n=191$) who had not attended. A slightly larger minority of respondents attended Events at Museums (32.7%, $n=87$), although 67.3% ($n=179$) did not. A larger minority still of 38% ($n=101$) said that they attended other Festival of Ideas events in the Cambridge city centre, compared to 62% ($n=165$) who had not. Notably, just (14.3%; $n=38$) attended an event that was outside Cambridge city centre.

The largest category of event attendance in the sample was evening lectures though, with almost half of respondents (49.6%; $n=132$) indicating they had attended such lectures. These statistics may be a further indication that the sample is somewhat skewed away from mixed groups of adults and children and is in fact biased towards adult visitors.

Satisfaction with Festival Visit Experience and Website

The overall impression of respondents was generally very positive, with 66.5% ($n=177$) saying that their overall impression was "very good", and 29.7% ($n=79$) saying it was "good". Only 3% ($n=8$) said their impression was "average" and only 0.4% ($n=1$) and 0.4% ($n=1$) said that their impression was "poor" and "very poor" respectively. Therefore, a remarkable 96.2% of respondents had an "overall impression" of the Festival of Ideas that was either "very good" or "good", while just 0.8% had a "poor" or "very poor" impression of the festival.

Likewise, respondents had very positive views about the Festival of Ideas website, with 46.2% ($n=123$) of respondents stating that it was "very good" and 42.5% ($n=113$) indicating it was "good". Only 10.5% ($n=28$) indicated that they thought the website was "average", with a vanishingly small 0.4% ($n=1$) and 0.4% ($n=1$) stating that the website was "poor" and "very poor" respectively. Thus, 88.7% of respondents had a positive view ('very good' or 'good') of the Festival website, with less than 1% expressing a negative view ('poor' or 'very poor').

Stewards and demonstrators were viewed as helpful, with 60.9% ($n=162$) of respondents indicating that the level of helpfulness was "very good" and a further 32% ($n=85$) of participants saying that it was "good". Only 6% ($n=16$) said that helpfulness was "average", 0.8% ($n=2$) said it was "poor", 0.4% ($n=1$) said it was "very poor". In sum, 92.9% of

respondents expressed positive views ('very good' or 'good') about the helpfulness of stewards and demonstrators, compared to just 1.2% negative views ('poor' or 'very poor') amongst respondents.

Moreover, participants were very positive about the booking system, with 43.2% ($n=115$) saying it was "very good" and 35.7% ($n=95$) saying it was "good". Only 17.3% ($n=46$) of participants thought the booking system was "average", 2.6% ($n=7$) said it was "poor", and 1.1% ($n=3$) said it was "very poor". These results amount to 78.9% positive views ('very good' or 'good') about the booking system for Cambridge Festival of Ideas, against 3.7% negative ('poor' or 'very poor').

Respondents were likewise positive about informational signage available around the Festival, but there was less satisfaction about this area than about other aspects of the festival delivery. 24.8% ($n=66$) saying it was "very good", 44% ($n=117$) saying it was "good" and 23.3% ($n=62$) saying it was "average". Only 6.4% ($n=17$) and 1.5% ($n=4$) thought it was "poor" and "very poor" respectively. Thus, 68.8% of respondents had a positive assessment ('very good' or 'good') of the informational signage available around the festival, while 7.9% had a negative ('poor' or 'very poor') assessment of the signage.

Finally, one possible self-report measure of the impact of the Festival of Ideas is whether it sparked visitors' interest in learning more about the ideas they encountered. One very concrete manifestation of such interest is whether visitors intended to sign up for a formal course of study in further or higher education on a topic they encountered at the Festival of Ideas. The majority of respondents (46.6%, $n=124$) were neutral when asked if the Festival had increased their interest in further or higher education. Only 16.9% ($n=45$) of respondents agreed that it had increased their interest, whilst 34.2% ($n=91$) said that it had not. Overall then, only a minority of 16.9% of visitors reported that the Festival of Ideas increased their interest in going onto a formal course in further or higher education. Yet, this may still be considered a significant accomplishment.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data shed further light on the quantitative findings discussed above. The results discussed below focus in turn on the aspects of the Festival of Ideas that were viewed positively and negatively. Data extracts in this section of the Results identify in brackets whether the respondent is a 'First time' or 'Repeat visitor' to the Festival and the highest level of educational attainment that respondent has achieved.

Positive Aspects of Festival of Ideas Experience

When respondents were asked what they "liked" about the Festival, the majority of responses could be categorised as "variety", "stimulation" or "town/gown". The "variety" category is includes responses focused on the wide range of activities, talks and events for respondents to attend and with which they could engage, as well as their accessibility to the general public:

- Fantastic variety of activities, talks etc of interest to young and old. (We are from eight to seventy years old and enjoyed many things together) (First time; Degree)
- Diverse range of high quality learning experiences for all ages (Repeat visitor; Degree)

As can be seen in these extracts, it was both the diversity of subject matter as well as the range of different kinds and levels of activities that were available that were viewed as very positive.

- Very interesting lectures. Covers very many different fields. Suits almost everybody -- adults, families etc.. (Repeat Visitor; Postgraduate)
- The variety of events. Family opportunities, friendliness, feeling of liveliness, new ideas. Art of dreams was a joy and a very good opening event for us. We took our dreams home with us. The big draw was well aimed at a large range of ages. (First time; Degree)

The "stimulation" category is defined as those aspects of the festival that were interesting, inspired learning and evoked thought and debate. Again, the range of different and engaging activities was also highlighted:

- The range and interest of the Hermione at Home event was truly excellent, made exceptional by the friendly and attentive people assisting on the day. My seven and (almost) six year old thoroughly enjoyed drawing their own skeletons and were encouraged to make detailed observation. I found the talk at the beginning gave me sufficient information to be able to point details out to them and to feel more confident about taking them to the current Ancient Egyptians exhibition at the British Museum. The tour of the graves in the garden sparked their imagination. We found the old photos of the students on our way into the college extremely interesting - and on the way out, my children recognised in one of them the tennis courts where they had previously been told the graves had been found. (First time; Postgraduate)

- Interesting subjects, active events rather than lectures Leaders/speakers actively engaged in reaching their audience (Repeat Visitor; Degree)

The “town/gown” category is defined as that aspect of the festival that engaged both the university and wider Cambridge community, “breaking down the barriers” that are perceived to exist between the broader community and the university:

- In general, the enthusiasm and keenness to include non-university public, old and young. Laudable. Felt very lucky to live in Cambridge and be able to access this level of knowledge and research, and feel that the University was inviting the public into its world. (First time; Postgraduate)

Respondents highlighted the inclusivity of the Festival of Ideas and appreciated the underlying commitment to reaching out to the broader community that was evinced by the very existence of the Festival.

- Town and gown says it all breaking the down the barriers of academic mystery, gives a glimpse into academia show case on-going research of current topics and innovation (Repeat visitor; Degree)
- Appreciation of the wonderful we city we live in, thanks to the university for allowing us (ordinary people who have never experienced university) an insight to the university, fabulous event keep it up, we love it! (Repeat Visitor; A-level)

These responses indicate that respondents were generally very positive about the festival, not only in terms of its content, but also in terms of their own personal development and the engagement of their wider community.

Negative Aspects of Festival of Ideas Experience

When respondents were asked what did not work so well at the Festival, most responses could be categorised as “signposting”, “space” and “target age”. The first category, “signposting” is defined as general directions to events, including information provided in programmes, signs directing people to events, and information provided by stewards:

- Madingley Hall’s lectures were poorly signed and organised, as opposed to last year when they were much better. One lecture on the Sedgwick Site was cancelled at the last moment but no notice was posted on the venue doors and many people including myself sat waiting for something to happen for at least 10 minutes before someone came to explain the cancellation. Though this was posted on the website it is not always possible to check at the last minute. There were many helpers about the site so one of them could have been posted at the lecture room door. (Repeat visitor; none)
- Signage wasn’t particularly good - we got lost trying to find the dancesport demo, despite being given rather vague directions from a steward along the lines of “over there” (which could have meant any one of 4 or 5 buildings - we chose the wrong one). (First time; Postgraduate)
- Signage was not always consistent on different sites. Sometimes a crowd of volunteers ready to help; sometimes nobody on hand to indicate which entrances

etc. Once I was misdirected by a college porter to the wrong venue, and was consequently forced to attend an unexpected lecture (which I enjoyed, however!) Nothing too drastic on the whole. (Repeat Visitor; Degree)

The “space” category of negative aspects of the festival experience is defined as inadequate seating or standing room for attendees:

- The risk lecture in Kettle's Yard was in a completely inappropriate setting, there were FAR too many people for the size of the space, people at the back couldn't hear, and it was a gallery, rather than dedicated room or lecture theatre, so background noise was distracting. (First time; Postgraduate)
- Hundreds of people got turned away from the show and it was a one off event! Why couldn't it have been a three or four night run? It had the interest! (First-time; A-level)
- Everything was very busy and sometimes not enough space for the children to take part in an activity. (Repeat Visitor; Degree)
- The room for the film screening - very small and most people could not see the screen well (First time; Postgraduate)

The “target age” category includes responses that indicated that events misjudged the appropriate target age level. There were comments on opposing sides of the issue of how events should be targeted. Some respondents complained of excessive provision for children:

- You seem obsessed with dumbing almost every event down to be “child friendly” for family attendance. Consequently the events and Ideas (the purpose of the festival) are often trivial to an educated adult. Could we have more advanced events with ideas that challenge and inform adults please? (Repeat Visitor; Degree)
- Re Anglo-Saxon Treasure, we felt that only the lectures later in the afternoon were appropriately geared for adults. Although all the subjects were of interest to us, there was nobody on-site to talk to adults about those subjects. Also the event is marked as suitable for ages 5+ and yet there were children younger than five present at the lectures and who were a disturbing feature. They should not have been present bearing in mind how much there was on the day for the younger participant and so little for the adult (First time; Before GCSE)

In contrast, there were also comments calling for more effective provision for children at the very young end of the spectrum (especially five and under).

- Some items pitched at young children were not successful, even though broached in a friendly way, they were not sufficiently engaging. (First time; Degree)
- Not so good for young children - perhaps more for the under-5s? (First time; Postgraduate)

The responses in these categories indicate that generally, respondents' complaints were a result of organisational or logistical problems or the physical limitations of event spaces in

Cambridge as opposed to the actual content of the activities, presentations and events. This includes the target age category, as better organisation would likely have highlighted for adults and parents whether the content was age-appropriate.

Festival of Ideas: Advertising and Recruitment

Because the present study is exploratory, an open-ended question was included on marketing of the festival to supplement the quantitative item discussed above. Respondents were asked where they were informed of the Festival. The most common responses could be categorised as “print”, such as posters, leaflets, brochures, newsletters or magazines:

- Leaflet/brochure picked up in hairdressers (Postgraduate)
- Festival of Ideas booklet that was in the reception area of my local school (Postgraduate)
- I saw a poster in the library (Degree)
- CAM magazine (Postgraduate)

Responses categorised as “University” and “Cambridge events bulletin”, were also common. This category included references to the Cambridge website, and What’s On Cambridge, as well as alumni mailing lists:

- Cambridge University’s website (First time; Postgraduate)
- I looked on Cambridge University website (First time; Postgraduate)
- What’s on Cambridge (First time; Postgraduate)
- What’s On newsletter (First time; Still in education)
- Cambridge alumni email (Repeat Visitor; Degree)
- Alumni (First time; Postgraduate)

These responses indicate that people learned about the festival from a wide range of sources, but generally online marketing was most significant from Cambridge specific sources of publicity.

Valuing the Cambridge Festival of Ideas: Self-reported impacts

When respondents were asked what they gained from attending the Festival, most responses could be categorised as “Enthusiasm”, “Knowledge” or “Local interest”.

The “enthusiasm” category includes responses that indicate an increased interest in a particular subject or activity, inspiration to pursue something new or forgotten or general stimulation. The following extracts highlight the affective dimensions of the Festival’s impact for these respondents.

- My son is a reluctant reader but loves me reading Wilson's books to him. Seeing her in person, and hearing her talk about her stories has made the writing and reading experience more real and interesting for him. (First time; Postgraduate)
- Intense pleasure, broadening of my horizons, and gratitude for the opportunity to experience this fabulous material. (Repeat visitor; Postgraduate)

Notably, these expressions of the value of the Festival of Ideas experience tend to connect affective impacts such as pleasure and excitement, with a self-reported increase in curiosity and the desire to learn more:

- A feeling of the pleasure of exploring new ideas. Some exercise, physical and mental. Some new avenues to follow in the future. A huge desire to be a student again! (First time; Degree)

There was also evidence that the Festival was viewed as reinforcing and extending existing knowledge or dormant interests.

- Revived my interest in fashion and sewing, now with a recycling element. (First time; Degree)
- My awareness of the topic expanded, I felt very inspired and engaged (Repeat visitor; Degree)

The “Knowledge” category is defined as self-reported increases in knowledge about specific topics, gained as a result of the festival:

- Knowledge of the history and architecture of Cambridge as new residents of the area. A better understanding of some of the departments of the university (with the Science Festival as well) A feeling of sharing in some of the enthusiasm of the students and staff. (First time; Degree)
- A knowledge and interest in mummies that will encourage me and my children to find out more, and get more out of a previously considered future visit to the British Museum. (First time; Postgraduate)
- Increased understanding of areas I have never formally studied. (First time; Degree)

Responses in the “local interest” category were those that indicated engagement with and insight into their local community, the town and the university, and/or its history. For some respondents this local interest was knowledge-related:

- Knowledge about Cambridge (only lived here for 62 years). (First time; GCSE)

More commonly however, increased knowledge about their local area had a strong affective dimension, with words such as “appreciation”, “enjoyment” and “inspiration” appearing in the following data extracts:

- Some interesting insights into the city centre (from the Town and Gown tour) and into the American War Cemetery. We have lived in Cambridge for only 2 years so it is good to learn more and to gain a deeper appreciation of these places. (Repeat visitor; Degree)
- A greater understanding and enjoyment of the history and development of this wonderful city in which I have recently come to live. (Repeat visitor; A-level)

- Inspiration to do more with my local community (Repeat visitor; Postgraduate)

The responses to this question indicate that not only did people feel that they learned a lot from their involvement with the festival, but it also increased their enthusiasm for various topics. Furthermore, it was valuable for locals to learn about their town, the university and to engage with their community and its history.

Self-reported Interests and Intentions

To expand on the quantitative results discussed above, respondents were asked in an open-ended question if they intended to pursue additional interests as a result of attending the Festival of Ideas. The majority of responses about the ways they intended to pursue interests sparked or reinforced at the Festival could be categorised as “education”, defined as an interest in pursuing further education in any capacity:

- I think that I would like to do printmaking perhaps the MA in future years, however if the summer art school runs next year I would be keen to do it (Repeat Visitor; Postgraduate)
- Language courses at Hills Road Sixth Form College; computer training at Parkside Federation; possibly Open University next year (Repeat Visitor; Degree)
- I enrolled on another Open University course (First time; A-level)
- Adult education evening classes (First time; Degree)

These responses indicate that the Festival evoked enough interest in some visitors that they were willing to invest significant time in pursuing these interests further, and formally. Given that this kind of interest is being fostered by the Festival, it may be advisable for festival events to include suggestions for where visitors can go for further information or to develop their knowledge in a more formal setting.

Directions for Future Festival of Ideas Content

Respondents were asked if there are any topics or themes they would like to see covered in future years. There was an extremely wide range of responses that were generally tailored to people’s specific interests. However, in particular, many responses could be categorized as “Literature”, “Science” and “Art”.

Responses in the “literature” category suggest future Festival of Ideas content generally centred on creative writing:

- More creative-writing workshops, more information on how to proceed in the relevant areas of interest covered by the events (First time; Postgraduate)
- I enjoyed the creative writing course and would very much enjoy attending another writing themed course next year. (First time; A-level)

In the “science” category, there was a much wider range of responses, from workshops for children to ethics:

- More science-based workshops for kids would be great. (Repeat visitor; Degree)
- Science and ethics (First time; Postgraduate)
- Genome research etc etc... (First time; Postgraduate)

Responses in the “art” category included design and new media, as well as more traditional forms of art:

- More short art sessions for children during the half term week that would be good to do with your child (especially boys) I would love to try any art technique in a day workshop - monoprinting might be good (Repeat visitor; Postgraduate)
- More art-related workshops and talks on the weekends (Repeat Visitor; Degree)
- Last year we attended some fantastic art sessions and I would like to see these offered again. The afternoon we spent with the ladies at the art centre was one of the best afternoons I have ever spent with my daughter! (Repeat Visitor; Postgraduate)
- Teaching animation programs (Repeat visitor; A-level)

As can be seen in the extracts above, there are a wide range of topics that would be of interest to visitors.

Conclusion

This report identifies the perspectives of visitors on the crucial question of how festivals can best engage publics. This is an exploratory study which therefore relies upon open-ended qualitative data to supplement the quantitative results. The overall patterns in this study show a remarkably high level of satisfaction with the visiting experience at the Cambridge Festival of Ideas. It also highlights various aspects of the Festival that visitors found valuable. A minority of respondents indicated they were so inspired by the Festival experience that they intended to undertake more formal learning through further or higher education.

This report points to the potential value of arts and social sciences-oriented festivals for engaging publics with new ideas. Now that a range of outcomes from the festival visit experience have been identified, future research can begin to test the prevalence of such outcomes through the use of more direct measures of impact.

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