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# THE GREAT EXHIBITION ROAD FESTIVAL

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## Summary report

December 2024

# Introduction

The Great Exhibition Road Festival (the Festival) took place over the weekend of 15 to 16 June 2024. It is coordinated by Imperial College London, in partnership with 15 institutions [1] located on and around Exhibition Road, South Kensington. The Festival returned to the outdoor spaces of Exhibition Road, Prince's Gardens, and around the Imperial College Campus, as well as indoor spaces in partner venues such as the Science Museum and Goethe-Institute.

Activities consist of workshops, talks, performances, and drop-in activities and stalls aimed at both adult-only and family audiences. The theme of this year's Festival was Flourish!, celebrating how science and the arts help people, communities and nature to flourish. The Family Fun zone returned to the Prince's Gardens. The Creative Science zone, for adults, and the NextGen zone, for teenagers and young adults, also returned to this year's Festival.

All activities were free to attend, with some talks and workshops available to book online in advance of the Festival weekend. The 2024 Festival received approximately over 50,000 visitors, the same as in 2023.

## Evaluation

The 2024 evaluation explores who the visitors were and their experiences of the Festival. Views and experiences of activity contributors and volunteers were also explored.

The evaluation followed a similar format to previous years, largely consisting of online surveys for visitors, contributors and volunteers. The visitor survey was distributed via email to those who registered for the Festival via Eventbrite, QR codes linking to the survey were displayed around the Festival venues, on leaflets and festival maps distributed to visitors. It was also delivered via tablet computer to a selection of festival visitors by volunteers. Interactive maps and posters were again implemented on Exhibition Road, and included specific posters for the NextGen zone and the Community hub.

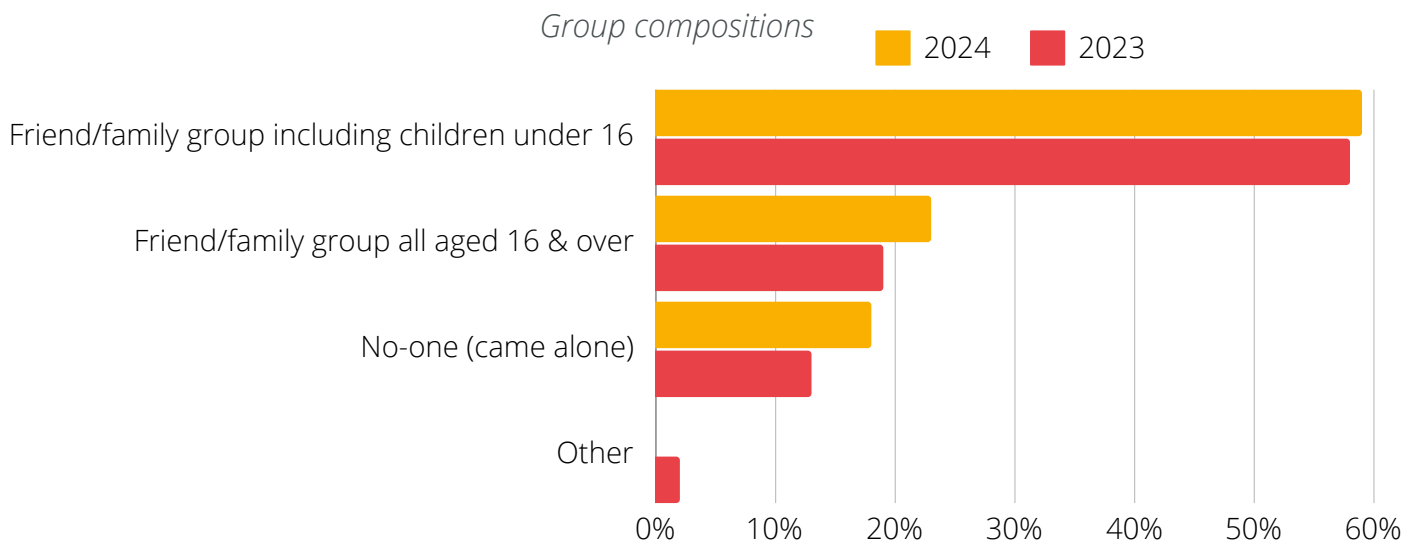
A total of 690 visitor survey responses were received, a decrease from the 1013 collected in 2023 but still higher than the 308 from 2022. The majority of these were received from those who registered or signed up via Eventbrite with 533 confirming they had signed up for the Festival in advance. All percentages in the report narrative have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

# Festival visitors

## Who were the festival visitors?

### Ages and group compositions

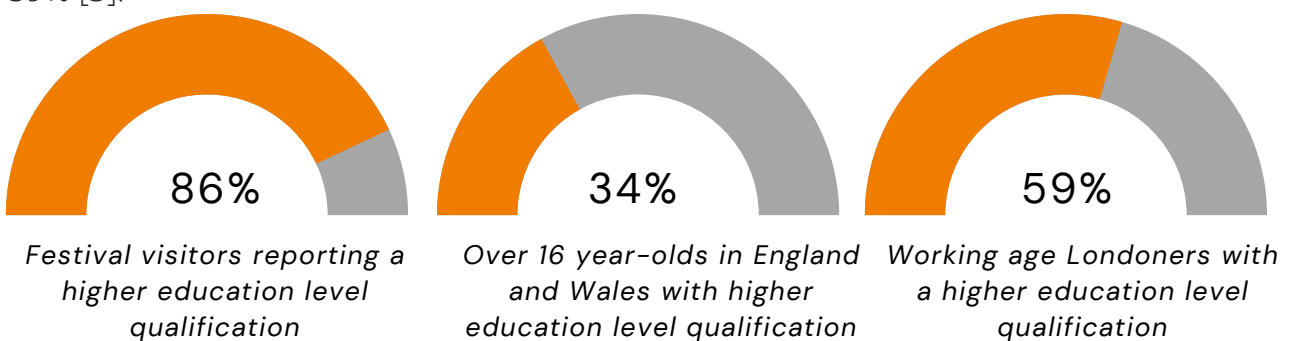
59% of respondents visited the Festival accompanied by children under 16, with 5 to 12 being the most common age range of accompanying children. This is the same as in previous years. 23% were adult-only groups and 18% visited alone. An increase from the 2023 numbers of 13%.



Similar to the 2023 event, 35 to 44 years was the most common selected age range for survey respondents, with 34% selecting it. The second most common age range was 45 to 54 (28%) and 25 to 34 year olds making up 11% of respondents.

### Educational background

The education background profile of visitors is similar to that of previous events. However, numbers of well educated visitors have increased again to 86% following a minimal decrease to 75% in 2023. 54% of respondents reported having obtained a higher-level degree (e.g. Masters, PhD), with 31 % having obtained an undergraduate degree. These numbers remain consistently higher than overall numbers in the UK. 34% of over 16 year olds in England and Wales have a university qualification [2]. It is also higher than working age Londoners with a higher education qualification, which lies at 59% [3].



Focusing specifically on higher-level postgraduate degrees there is an increase in attendants from 2023 where 46% of respondents had a higher-level degree compared to the 54% of this year. This is considerably higher than the 11% of British people aged 20-60 who reported obtaining a postgraduate qualification [4]. This figure is estimated to have risen to 13% in 2021 [5] but the most recent census data did not differentiate between higher education qualifications.

**Disability**

13% of respondents reported that their day-to-day activities are limited to some extent due to a long-term health problem or disability. This is higher than the 8% reported in 2021 but similar to the numbers reported in 2023, and comparable, although lower than the 16% reported in the 2021 London Census data [6].

**Neurodivergence**

In 2024, 16% of respondents stated that someone in their group was neurodiverse. Marginally higher to the 14% in 2023 but comparable to the estimate that 15% of the world population is neurodiverse [7]. 69% answered no, 9% weren't sure and 6% preferred not to say. As neurodiverse audiences were a specific target in 2024, it will be interesting to see how this trend changes over the coming years.

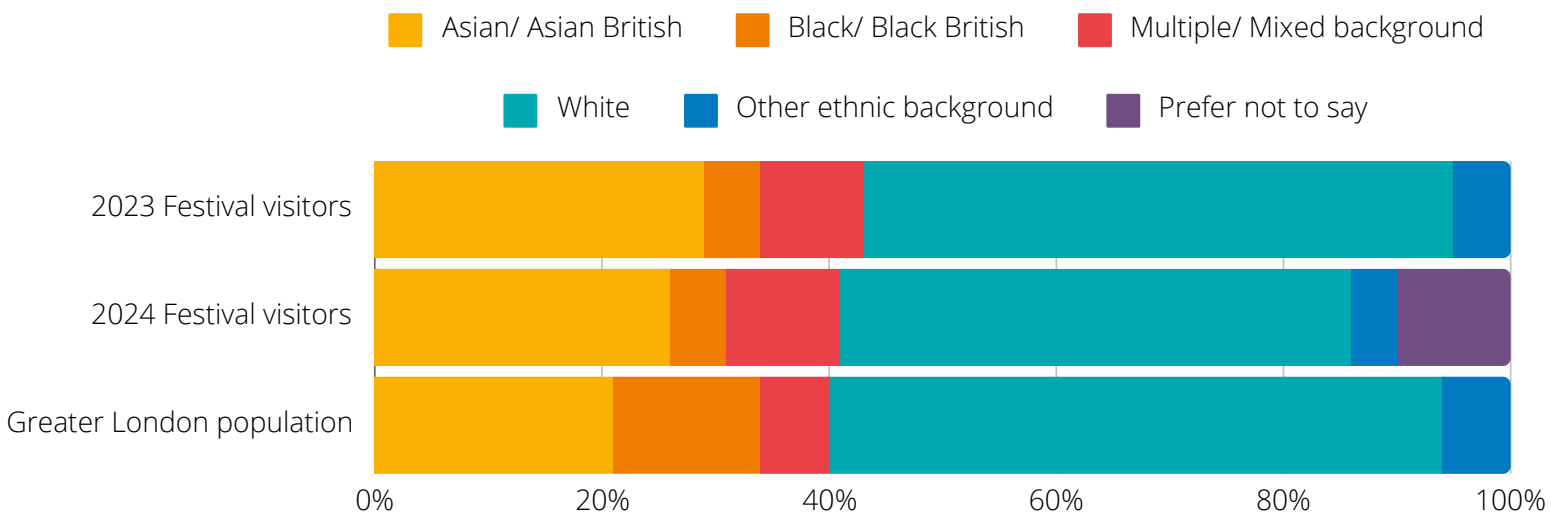
**Ethnicity**

The format of this question was kept the same following its update in 2023 to be more inclusive whilst keeping the specific categories for comparability.

Overall, those from Asian/Asian British and Mixed/Multiple ethnic backgrounds are overrepresented in respondents compared to the Greater London population [6]. Those from Black/Black British backgrounds were underrepresented, whilst the proportion of those from White backgrounds decreased in comparison to 2023.

It continues the downward trend seen in those from White backgrounds attending the Festival since 2022 where 62% of visitors were from White backgrounds compared to 45% in 2024.

*Ethnicity*



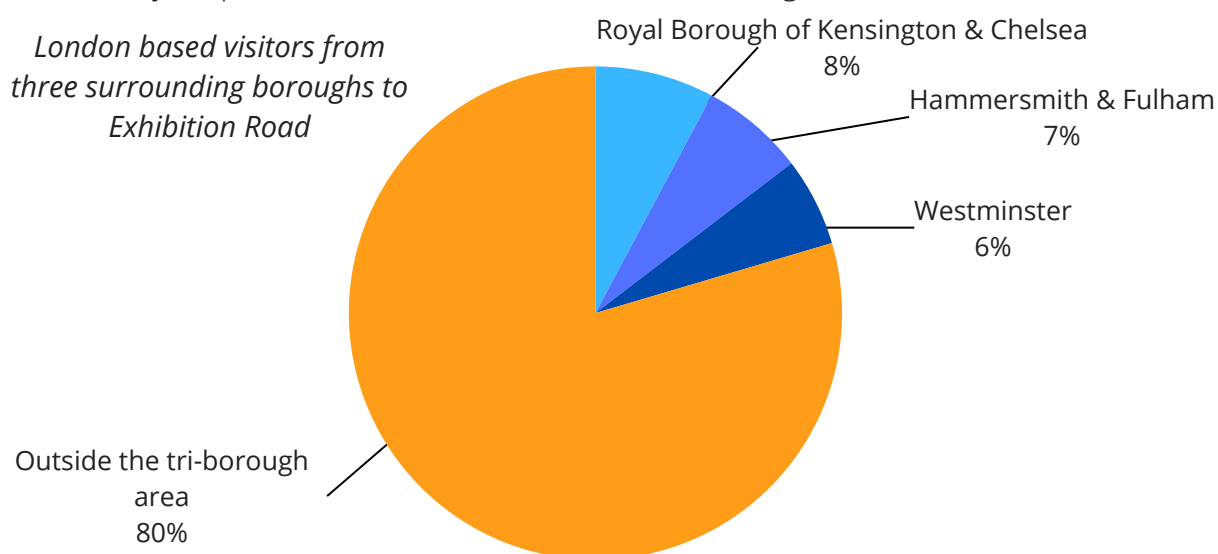
### Sexual orientation

87% of respondents reported that their sexual orientation is heterosexual or straight, with 6% identifying as LGBTQ+, and 7% preferring not to say. This is more diverse than the wider UK population where 3% identify as LGBTQ+ [8]. 89% of the Greater London population identify as heterosexual or straight, with 5% identifying as LGBTQ+ [8]. However, numbers of visitors identifying as LGBTQ+ has decreased from 2023 (9%).

### Geographic distribution

There is a particular interest in visitors from the three surrounding boroughs to the Festival: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Westminster; Hammersmith and Fulham. 15% of respondents indicated they lived in one of these three boroughs, slightly less than in 2023. 8% selected the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, similar to the 7% in 2023.

71% of survey respondents were based in London boroughs.



We also utilised maps on in-event interactive posters to gather responses from a broader group of festival visitors that may not complete the full survey. Visitors completed either a London map, selecting their home borough, a UK Map, or a world map. There were 4415 responses to the world, UK and London maps in total. 45% selected London locations, 18% selected a UK location outside London, and 29% selected a location in the rest of the world.

19% of poster respondents indicated they were based in one of the three tri-borough areas, slightly higher than the 15% of survey respondents. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was the most commonly selected, receiving 9% of responses.

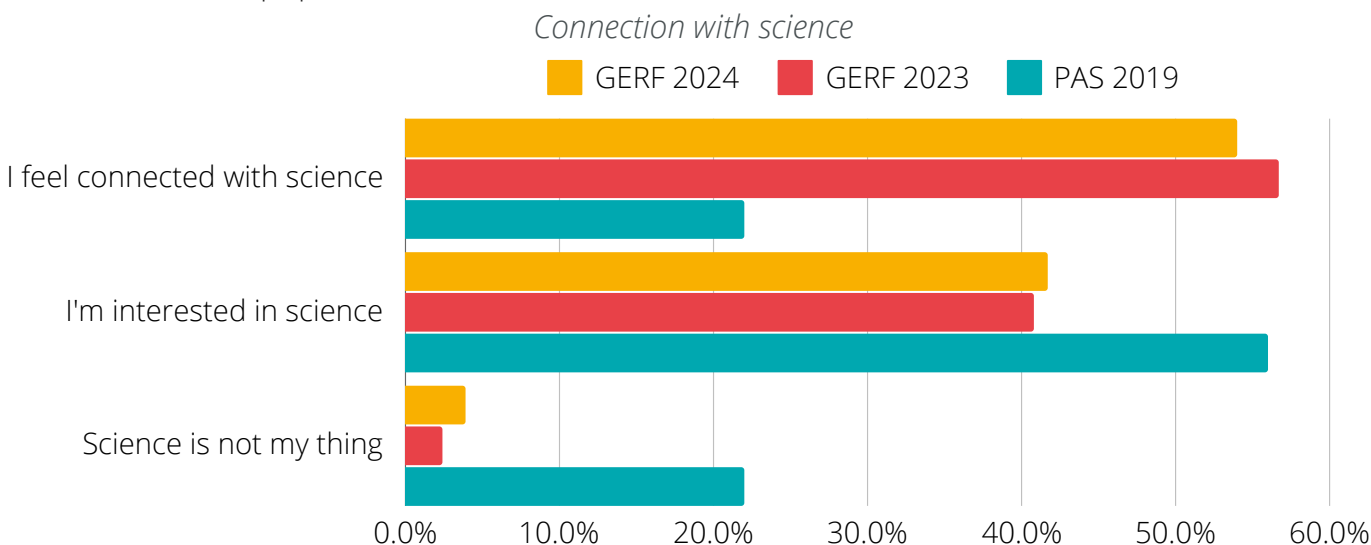
Unsurprisingly, within the UK outside of London, most respondents indicated they were based in the South East, receiving 30% of responses. 16% of responses came from East England and 12% indicated they were based in Scotland. The least commonly selected UK regions were Isle of Man (1%) and North East England (3%).

Of the world regions outside of the UK, 36% of responses were for Asia and 31% were for other areas in Europe. North America received 14% of responses.

## Attitudes and behaviours

### Interest and connection with science

As for previous events, respondents indicated they were much more highly engaged with science than the wider UK population [11]. 54% of respondents indicated an active connection with science, where they seek out science news, events and activities. This is similar to the 57% of 2023 respondents, and comparable to the 58% of 2022 respondents. 4% indicated no interest or connection with science, in comparison to 22% of the wider UK population.



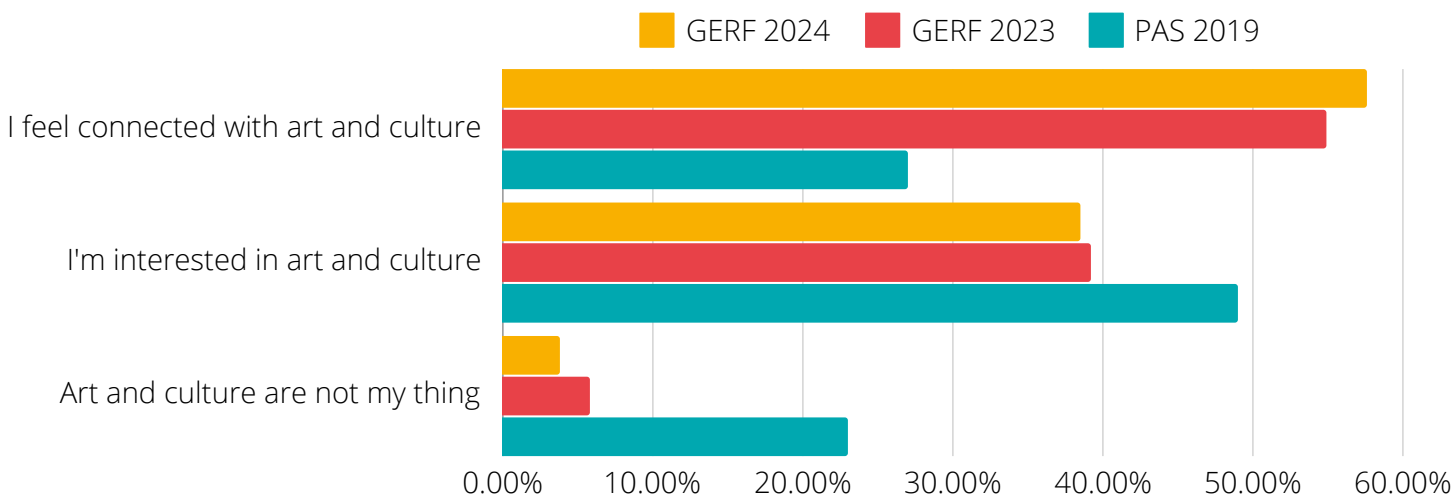
Participants were asked to select one of three options:

- I feel connected with science – I actively seek out science news, events, activities or entertainment
- I'm interested in science but I don't make a special effort to keep informed
- Science is not my thing (NB. In the Public Attitudes to Science survey this option was "Science is not for me")

### Interest and connection with the arts

Respondents also indicated they were more highly engaged with art and culture than the wider population (PAS 2019), and indicated a similar level of engagement with both the arts and sciences. This is similar to both the 2022 and 2021 Festivals.

*Connection with art & culture*



Participants were asked to select one of three options:

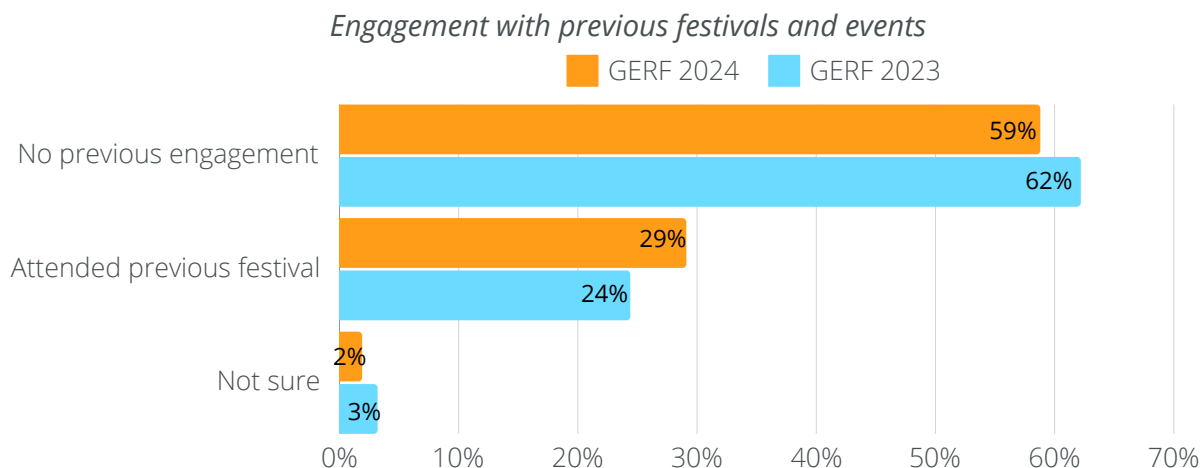
- I feel connected with art and culture – I actively seek out news about art, or art events or activities
- I'm interested in art and culture but I don't make a special effort to keep informed
- Art and culture are not my thing (NB. In the Public Attitudes to Science survey this option was "Art and culture is not for me")

### Previous interactions with festival partners and events

Similar to 2023, 65% stated they did not have any existing connection to a South Kensington based university or visitor attraction (through their own work or study, or that of a family member or friend (67% in 2023, 58% in 2022)). 30% of respondents stated they had been introduced to an organisation they hadn't heard of before, a decrease from 37% in 2023. As in the previous year, Imperial College London was the most introduced organisation, with 29% of respondents being introduced to it, significantly higher than the 18% in 2023 and 2022.

Where there was an existing relationship, the most common connection was again a friend or family member with connections to Imperial or another South Kensington organisation (15%). Being an Imperial alumnus was the second most common connection reported (13% of respondents). This mirrors the trends seen in 2022 and 2023.

59% of respondents had not previously attended a Great Exhibition Road Festival, or any other Imperial events in the past two years. 29% stated they had attended a previous festival, compared to 24% in 2023.



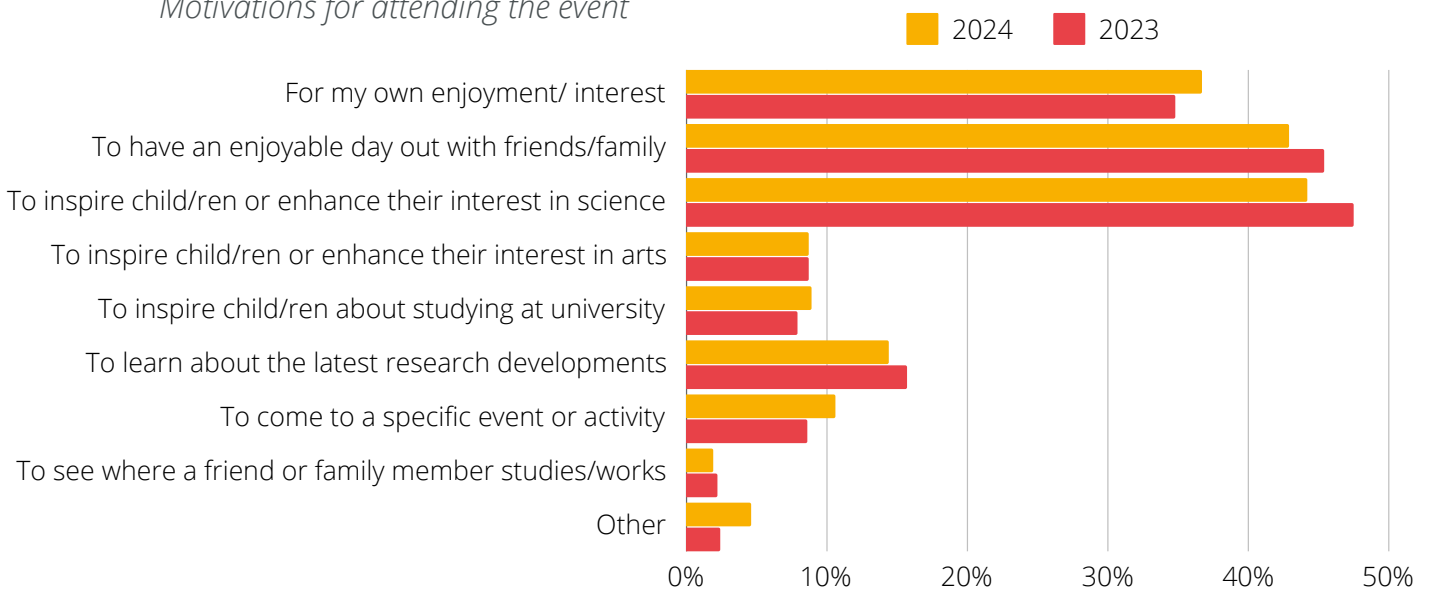
92% of survey respondents were aware of the Festival before they arrived. Of this, 85% came especially to visit the Festival, whilst 7% were visiting the area anyway. 8% were not aware the Festival was happening until they arrived in the area. Of visitors who travelled 1h 30 minutes or more, 81% were aware the Festival was happening and travelled especially for it. 85% of those who were aware the Festival was happening registered online.

88% of those surveyed on the Festival weekend knew the event was happening before they arrived. 61% of them had registered online.

## Why did visitors come?

Inspiring children and enhancing their interest in science was the most common motivation for visiting the Festival, decreasing from 48% to 44% of visitors choosing this as one of their top 2 motivations for visiting. This is closely followed by having an enjoyable day out with friends/family with 43%. These motivators follow the trend of the top two festival motivations in 2022 and 2023. The third most common motivation for visiting in 2024 was for the visitors own enjoyment (37%), which was also the third most common motivator in 2023. Only 14% attended the Festival to learn about latest research developments. NB respondents were able to choose their top two motivations. Again inspiring child/ren or enhancing their interest in arts was not a common motivator, with just 9% of respondents choosing this option, the same as 2023.

*Motivations for attending the event*



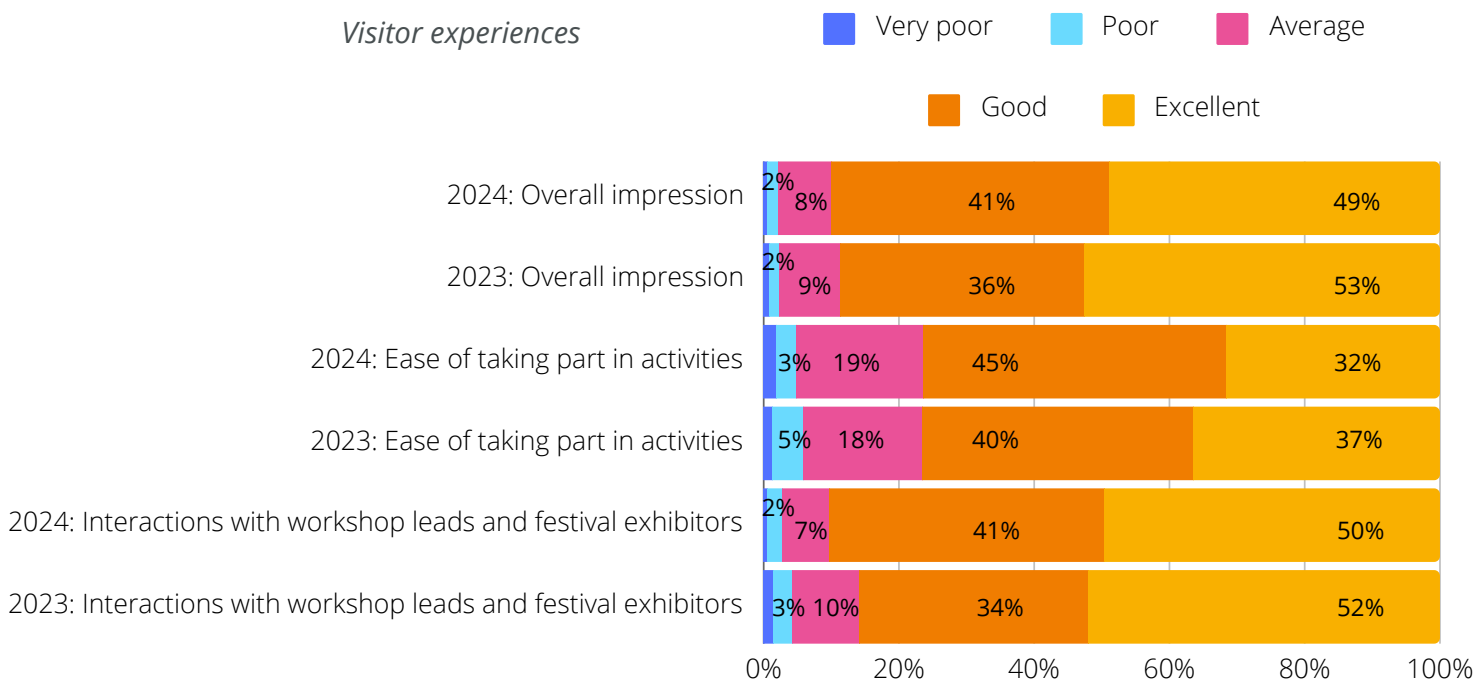
## What was their experience?

90% of respondents rated the Festival good or excellent overall (49% excellent), with 86% agreeing that the Festival felt like something special. This is comparable to the 87% of respondents in 2023 that agreed the Festival felt like something special. 90% stated that they would recommend the event to a friend, similar to the 89% from 2023. 91% agreed and strongly agreed (62%) they would come to the Great Exhibition Road Festival again.

The ease of taking part in activities rated lower than in previous years (76% rating this aspect good or excellent, 89% in 2023). However, interactions with festival exhibitors, workshops leads and/or speakers ranked highly and increased slightly from the rating in 2023. 90% rated these good or excellent (49% excellent) compared with 86% of respondents ranking these excellent or good in 2023 (52% excellent). These interactions were rated most highly by those visiting with children under 16 (92% good or excellent). Those visiting in adult-only groups were least positive about the interactions with festival exhibitors with 87% rating it as good or excellent, still a high percentage overall. Solo visitors had the highest percentage of respondents rating the interaction as excellent with 53% selecting so.



Visitor experiences

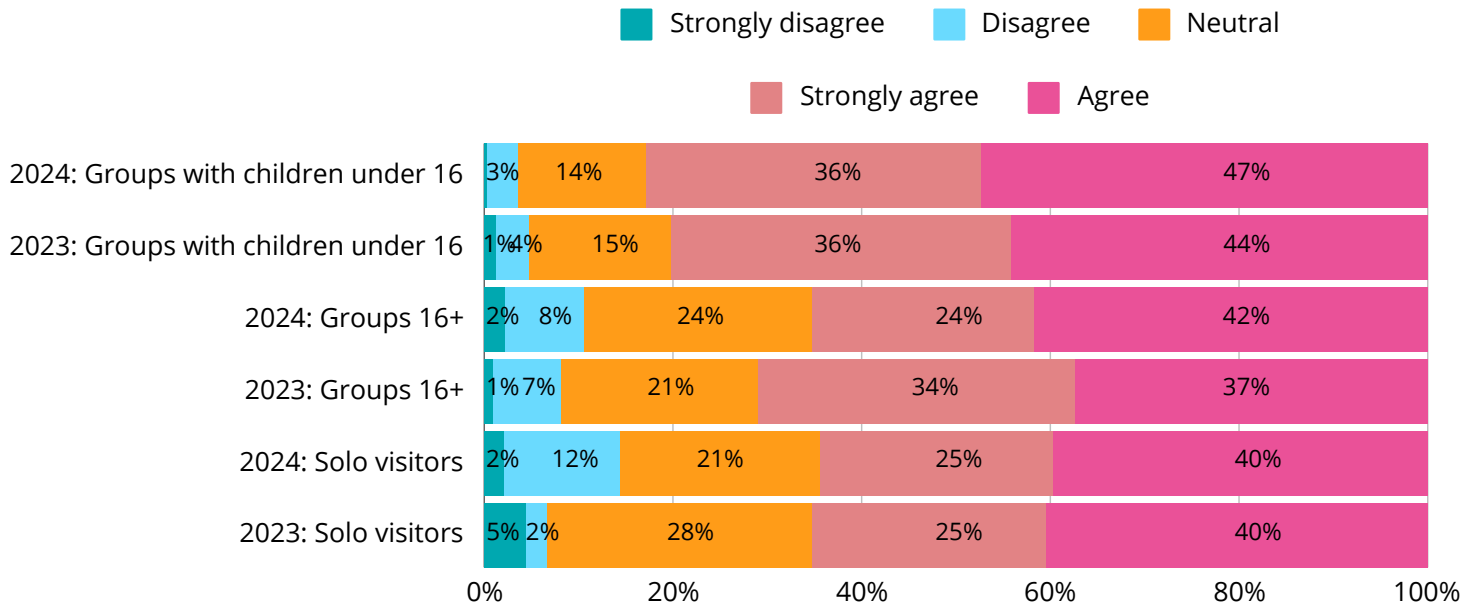


79% of respondents stated they had looked at the festival website before attending, either to browse the activities taking place, or for more specific planning of their time at the festival. Of this, 75% agreed they were able to find all the information they were looking for, and 62% disagreed that the website was difficult to navigate. Comments and suggestions included some confusion about finding specific information, ticketed and non ticketed events and being able to find a map and block timetable. Other comments mentioned general improved navigation and making the website more obvious to navigate.

Responses to the question “I felt encouraged to ask questions or give feedback about work/research I saw” decreased again from 80% in 2023 to 76% in 2024. Those attending in adult-only groups showed the lowest agreement with 75% agreeing or strongly agreeing, this is the same as in 2023 where 76% agreed or strongly agreed. For those visiting alone, 76% agreed or strongly agreed, similar to those visiting in adult groups. This percentage is consistent with previous years, 77% in 2023. Agreement from groups visiting with children under 16 decreased again from 83% in 2023 to 77% in 2024. Groups visiting with children under 16 again had the strongest agreement with the statement “I had the opportunity to participate in something creative”, with 83% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Groups over the age of 16 had the second highest agreement but there is a significant drop, with 65% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were able to participate in something creative.

The least agreement was in solo visitors with 64% agreeing or strongly agreeing to this. Considering that one of the main motivators for visitors over 16 is learning from research, this is difference between visitors with children and without makes sense. Overall, 75% agreed (31% strongly) that they had the opportunity to participate in something creative, the same as in 2023.

Visitor opportunity to participate in something creative



In addition to sticker maps, ‘starburst of opinion’ posters were implemented at the Festival. These included posters asking about the general experience of the Festival (left), as well as specific area posters located in the NextGen Zone (right) and the community centre.

There were 1,488 responses to the opinion poster across the Festival weekend. Across all statements, ‘strongly agree’ was the most commonly selected response. 1160 responses were received on general posters. ‘This event is a great opportunity to: Have fun; Do something new’ received the most agreement on the general posters with 85% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Having fun had 67% strongly agree and doing something new had 61% strongly agree. 78% of respondents agreed that the event was an opportunity to learn something (59% strongly).

When asked about the best thing about the event, responses included the variety of activities on offer, the participatory and interactive nature of activities, interactions with the contributors and volunteers, learning and discussing research (in a fun environment), and specific activities respondents took part in. The future-food, space, and family zones were specifically appreciated. Some respondents felt contributors and volunteers did a good job at engaging people of different ages and pre-existing knowledge. The live music throughout the day was also commonly mentioned as a highlight for respondents.

*“It was amazing how many scientists we got to directly talk to. It made the event fascinating both for my young daughter and for me. She (3yo) really enjoyed all the different activities aimed at children - e.g. the seed planting, the Mars puzzle, making a comet, drawing the landscapes of Venus, ‘launching’ the comet interceptor spaceship etc. Meanwhile I got to talk to the researchers and learned really fascinating new things about the latest science research and its significance. So we were \*both\* very happy and inspired. The combination of very creative and varied children’s activities and the chance to directly engage with the researchers was perfect.”*

*"I loved being able to go into institutions I had not been in to hear lectures in amazing lecture theatres."*

*"The enthusiasm of the students was infectious and my group felt they learned a lot about a wide variety of topics just by drifting through the zones and chatting with the teams. Even the terrible weather couldn't dampen the hard work that everyone put in."*

*"The air of festivities where great research is translated down to the everyday lay person/routine. It gives everyone - esp. children something to think about"*

*"We came with two kids 3 and 7. The researchers on the stalls made it really fun for both of them. 7 year old loves the experiments and getting hands on. 3 year old loved the dancing and more physical activities on the stage."*

In terms of areas of improvement for the festival, suggestions included spacing out activities in both indoor and outdoor spaces more, with respondents mentioning the amount of space to access activities. Although appreciated for entertainment the noise level of the live music was frequently commented on as too loud. Many respondents requested extending the festival, with suggestions from earlier start times and Friday night activities to holding the festival over several weekends or multiple times a year. Respondents also requested more activities for adults and older (10+) children. Improvements to signposting within buildings were also mentioned.

Other respondents commented on queueing arrangements and management for activities. A common suggestion was to provide timeslots for entry to activities to space out crowds better. Affordable and family friendly food options were mentioned again as well. Suggestions for website functionality that shows activities chronologically and enables creation of a bespoke schedule for users. Other website suggestions were on improving promotion and accessibility to pre-bookings. There were also some comments around restricting access to activities for those younger than the activity age range advertised, and a greater amount of seating (near food outlets), and drinks available. Commonly, respondents mentioned the protest on Gaza and how they felt this was inappropriate for the education and family focused event. Finally, emphasis was also given to increased sustainability of the Festival by adding more vegan food options, water refill stations and increased recycling.

*"It was a shame not to see water refill stations or recycling points, given how much emphasis was on climate change and reducing impact."*

*"Some spaces became quite crowded, could one have timed entry to some venues to allow for more space?"*

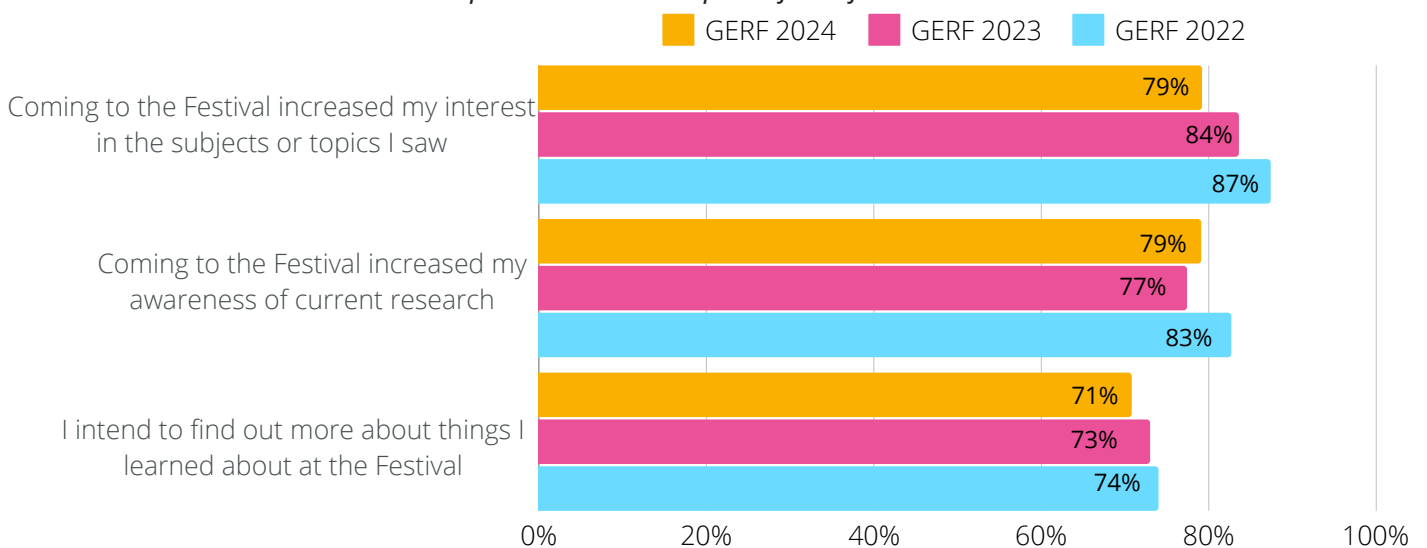
*"Some zones are very popular with long queues, like robots zone and space zone.. it's a pity that we are not able to visit. Pls explore if can open more space so that more people can visit. It will be better to have more chairs/benches around. It's quite tired to walk/stand for the whole day. "*

*"I was really disappointed with the alumni lounge this year. Last years was brilliant - it served as a good base to explore the festival, and it was one of the main reasons my children wanted to return! "*

## What outcomes did visitors experience?

79% of respondents said that coming to the event increased their interest in the subjects or topics they saw, slightly lower to the 84% in 2023, 88% in 2022 and 87% in 2021. 79% said that coming to the Festival increased their awareness of current research, similar to 77% in 2023, and compared to 83% in 2022 and 76% in 2021. 71% stated they intended to find out more about things they learned at the Festival, similar to the 73% in 2023 and 75% in 2022, but lower than the 84% who stated this intention in 2021. At the 2021 event, solo visitors (the most common way to experience the 2021 festival) were the most likely to state they intended to find out more about things they learned at the Festival. The higher proportion of stated respondent intentions in 2021 may be a reflection in the proportional increase of solo visitors at the event. In comparison, 77% of solo visitors in 2024 stated they intended to find out more about the things they learned at the Festival.

*Positive responses around impacts from festival content*



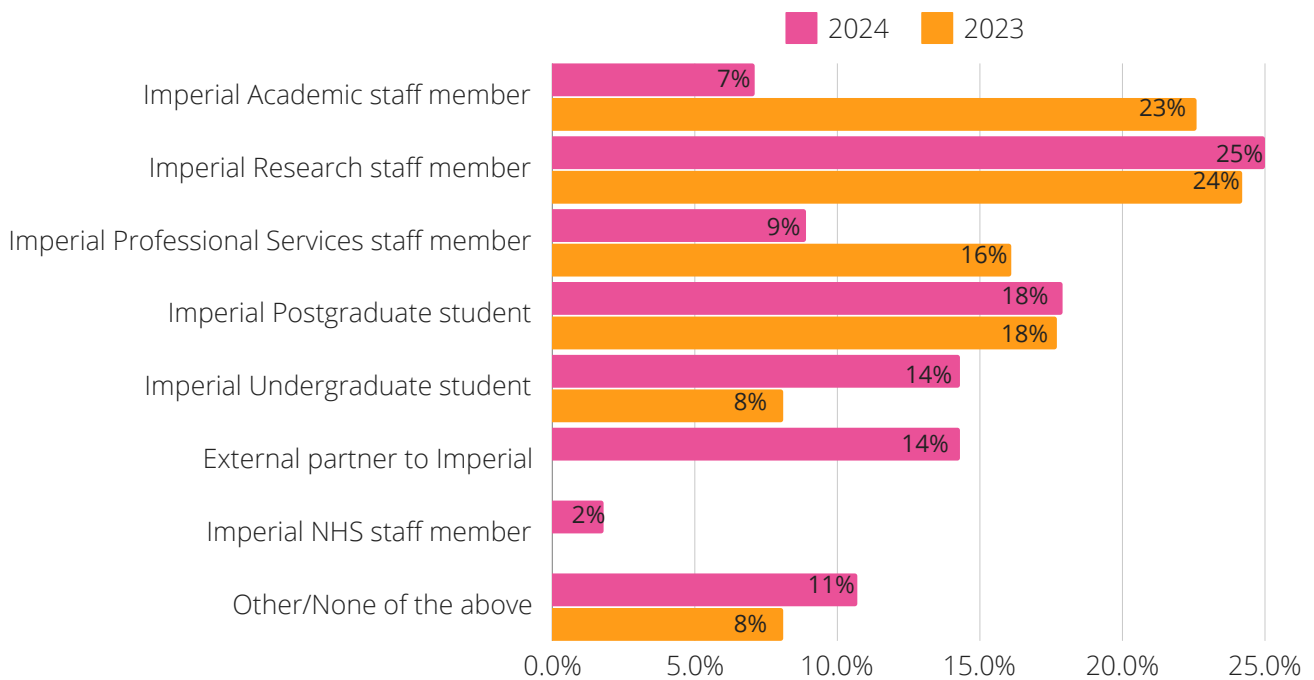
The most common way respondents were made aware of the event happening was through social media, the same as in 2023. 26% of respondents were made aware of the Festival through social media, compared to 31% in 2023. The second most common mechanism for people to become aware of the Festival was through word of mouth, with 20% having been made aware that way.

# Festival contributors

## Who were the contributors?

The proportion of contributors that are Research members of staff at Imperial remained the same as in 2023 (24%), with 25% selecting this option in 2024. Academic staff from Imperial decreased further from 23% to 9% in 2024. The 9% includes the percentage of people who selected 'None of the above' and described themselves as Academic. This year there were two different additional options to select from: Imperial NHS staff member and External partner to Imperial. Those made up 2% and 14% of responses.

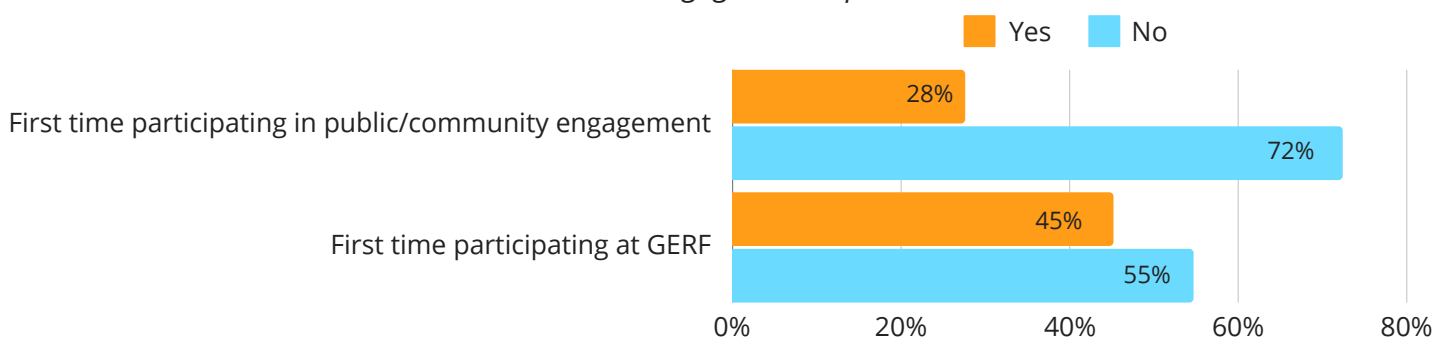
*Contributor roles within Imperial College London*



## Previous experience

Contrary to previous years, contributors were asked about their previous experience on the basis of whether they had any or not and whether they had previously participated at a GERF. The majority of contributors had previous experience with public engagement (72%). Of these 40% of respondents had previously participated at GERF as a contributor. 28% of respondents were new to public engagement and 45% were new to participating at GERF regardless of their prior experience.

*Previous engagement experience*



## What were contributors motivations?

The most common motivation for taking part was to gain experience in public engagement and outreach activities, Many respondents also wanted to share their work and have fun engaging with a wide audience, especially children. Those were the most commonly mentioned motivations and made up 34% of motivations and were mentioned by around half of respondents. On top of these other commonly mentioned motivators were to inspire lay people and because they were invited or encouraged to take part by colleagues, PhD advisors and outreach and engagement staff.

*"Gain experience on public engagement. Had taken part last year as well and I found it a nice way to engage with the public and talk about the research we conduct in a way that is understandable by all ages "*

*"It was recommended by my supervisor but I was excited to get involved in something that combined science and art"*

*"My motivation was two-folded: I believe it is a very important skill to explain the same thing to people from many backgrounds; and we wanted to collect some data for our research which was very successful. My supervisor told me about the festival and Imperial Lates which we also took part in."*

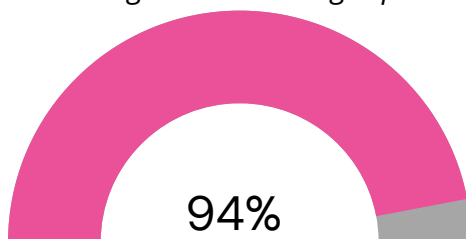
### Aims

Responses to the question 'What were your public engagement aims at the Great Exhibition Road Festival, if applicable? (e.g. What impacts were you hoping to have on visitors to the Festival? What impacts were you hoping to have on your own research or work?)' varied. Similar to 2022 and 2023, the most commonly mentioned aims were knowledge and increase and raising awareness of topic areas. Engaging with different audiences and gaining different perspectives was also commonly mentioned.

Improving their ability to engage different audiences, especially children and communicating their research with non-experts was also a common aim. Making STEM less intimidating and providing children a role model to aspire to were also mentioned.

## What were contributors' experiences?

*A rewarding and motivating experience*



94% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that taking part in the Festival was a rewarding and motivating experience. 86% said they would take part in a future festival, the same as in 2023. 92% said they would recommend taking part to a colleague or peer, an increase from 88% in 2023.

When asked about their main highlight of the event, the most common response was around interacting with audiences at the Festival. Other highlights included experiencing the excitement and enthusiasm of visitors for the subjects, seeing their teams engage with visitors and the overall atmosphere of the days and range of activities available.

*"Seeing the enthusiasm of children for learning about science"*

*"Having some really interesting conversations with people around cancer research and often they would walk away sharing that they felt much more positive for the future after our discussions."*

*"Delivering the engagement activity itself: we had a really good response from members of the public and I built some great connections with the other volunteers."*

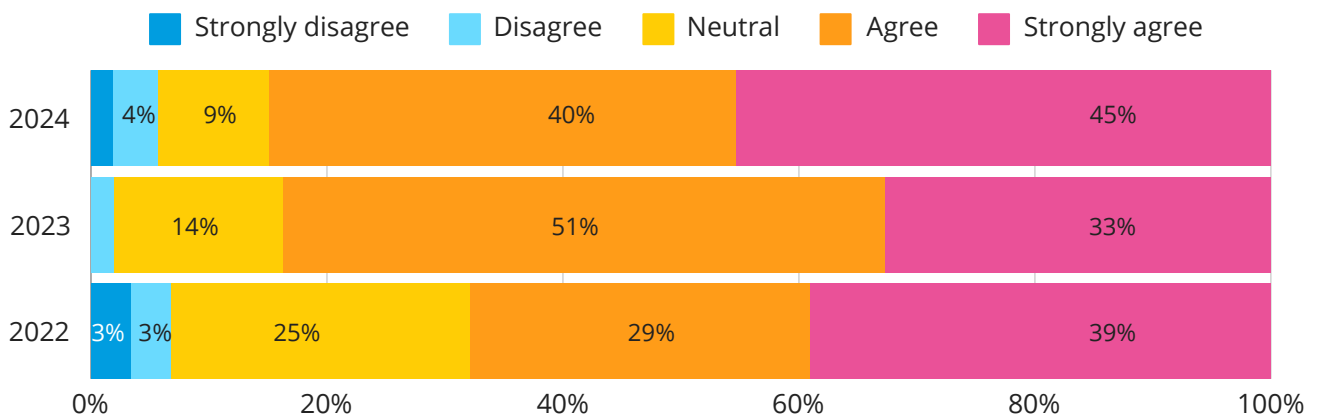
When asked what could be done to improve the event the most commonly mentioned criticism was the lack of space between exhibits and ventilation in indoor spaces. Another criticism was the lack of drinks provided to contributors throughout the day. Many would have appreciated a drink with lunch or the opportunity to help themselves to free coffee and tea, especially on Saturday when the weather was cold and wet.

*"Please provide hot drinks to contributors. I find it extremely surprising that there is no provision for this, and that contributors are expected to pay for this themselves, especially given the high prices charged by the vendors at the Festival. I'm not expecting Imperial to provide barista made coffees, just a simple tea and coffee station with a hot water urn, tea bags, instant coffee, milk, disposable cups etc..."*

### What were contributors' outcomes?

Respondents were asked about potential outcomes both for them personally, and their work. In terms of personal skill development, 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that taking part in the event had enhanced transferable skills such as communication or organisation skills. This is the same as the 84% in 2023 and similar to the 89% in 2022.

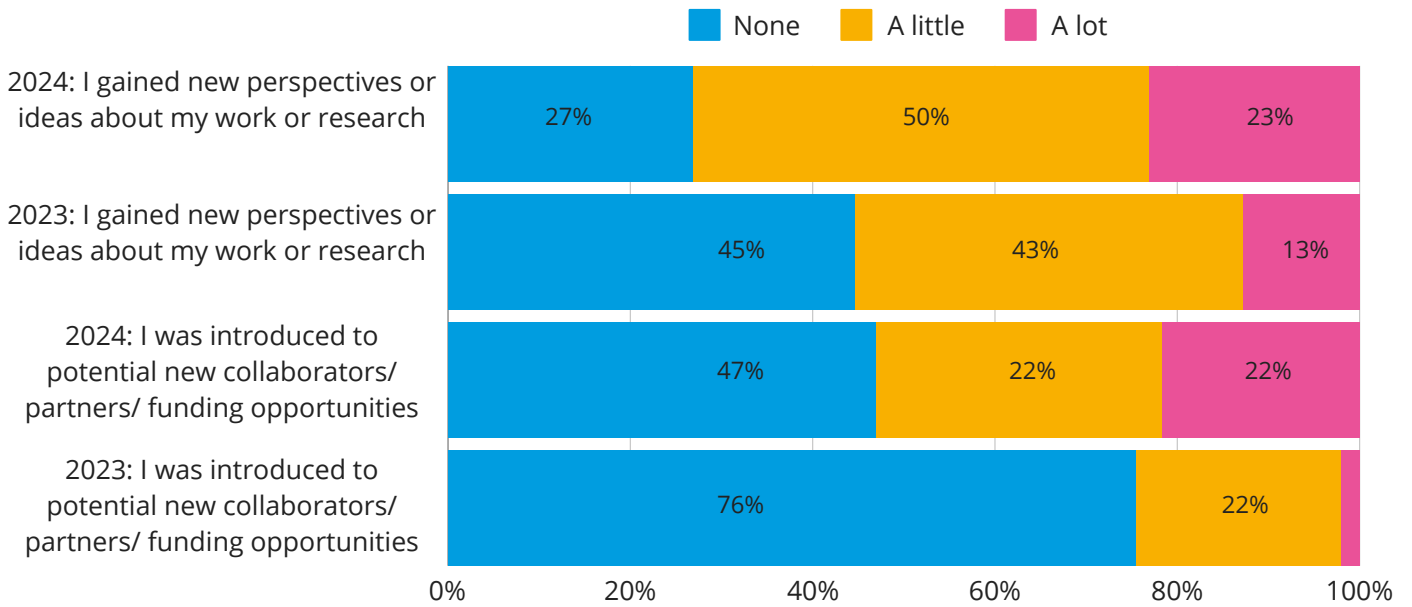
*'Participating in the Festival enhanced my transferable skills'*





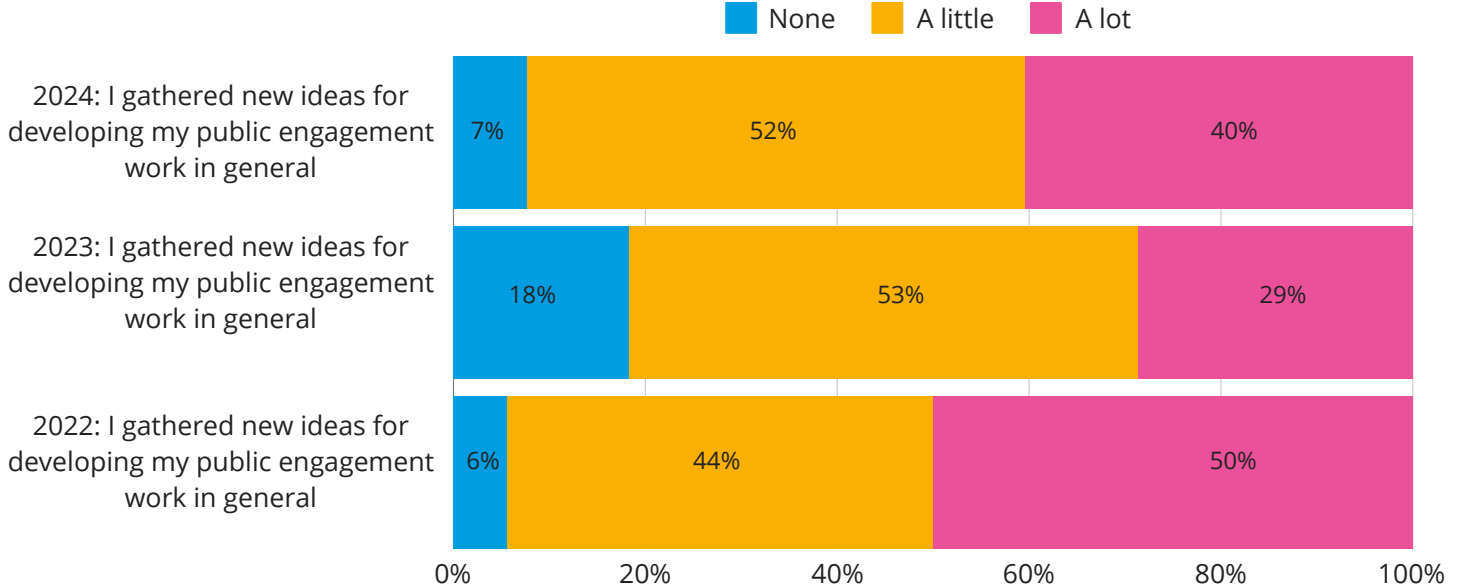
Outcomes for respondents' own work were more positive than in previous years. 73% felt they gained a new perspective on their work through their participation and over half felt they were introduced to new potential collaborators.

*Outcomes for contributors' own work*



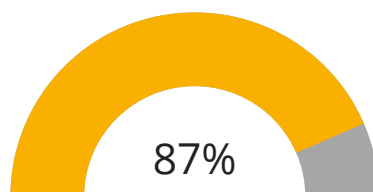
Gaining new ideas for developing their public engagement work in general, gaining new perspectives or ideas, and hearing from those with different insights or experiences were the strongest outcomes for contributors' work.

*Outcomes for contributors' PE practice*



The largest outcome area was gathering new ideas for developing contributors' public engagement work in general with 92% stating their participation helped with this. An increase from 80% in 2023, 87% of respondents said their participation helped them hear from those with different insights or experiences.

*I heard from those with different insights or experiences to me*

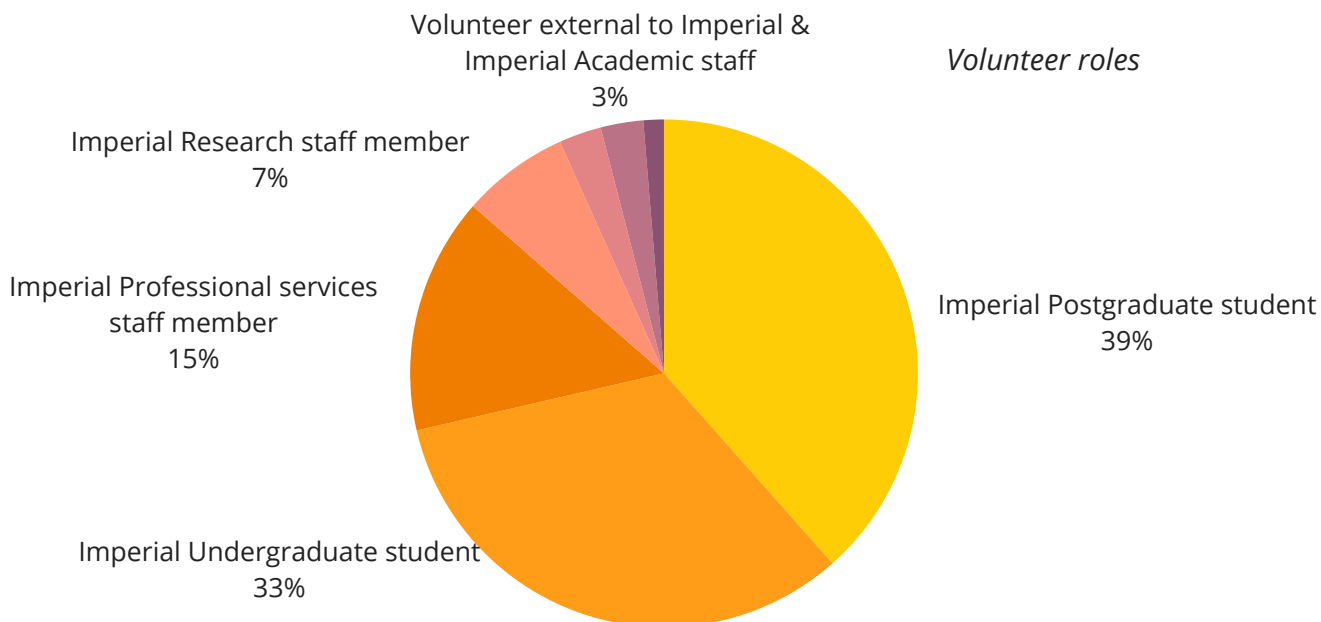




# Festival volunteers

## Who were the volunteers?

Altogether, student volunteers comprised 71% of survey respondents. Of this, 38% were Imperial Postgraduate students, and 33% were Imperial Undergraduate students. Similar to 2023, 7% of volunteers were Imperial research staff members.



59% of respondents had not previously volunteered with Imperial College London. Volunteering at a previous festival was the most common volunteering experience, with 25% having previously volunteered at a Great Exhibition Road Festival. 11% had previously volunteered at a Graduation Day/Ceremony and 8% had volunteered at Imperial Lates. Other experience includes volunteering at open/welcome days.

Respondents had varying roles at the Festival. 85% were based in specific zones, of those 29% were in the Tech Zone. 10% were based on Exhibition road and at the Science Cabaret.

## What were volunteers' motivations?

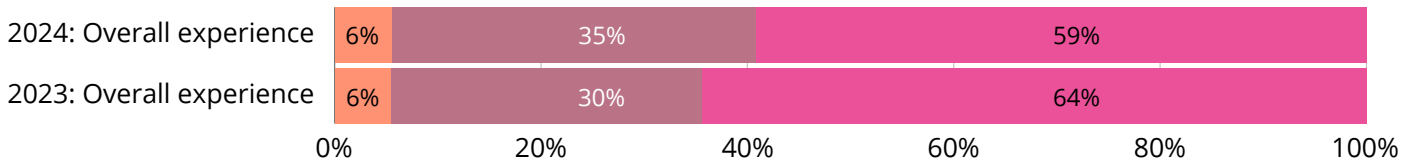
The most common motivation for volunteering at the Festival was to take part in something fun/ enjoyable/ exciting. Several respondents also indicated that supporting Imperial College London and meeting new people were motivations. Volunteering alongside cultural partners and gaining experience for their CV were not big motivators in 2024.

## What were volunteers' experiences?

94% of respondents rated their overall experience as excellent or good, the same as in 2023. 59% rated it as 'excellent' and 35% rated it as 'good'. No areas received a 'poor' or 'very poor' rating in 2024. Although 11% rated the support received during the Festival as 'average'.

*General volunteer experience*

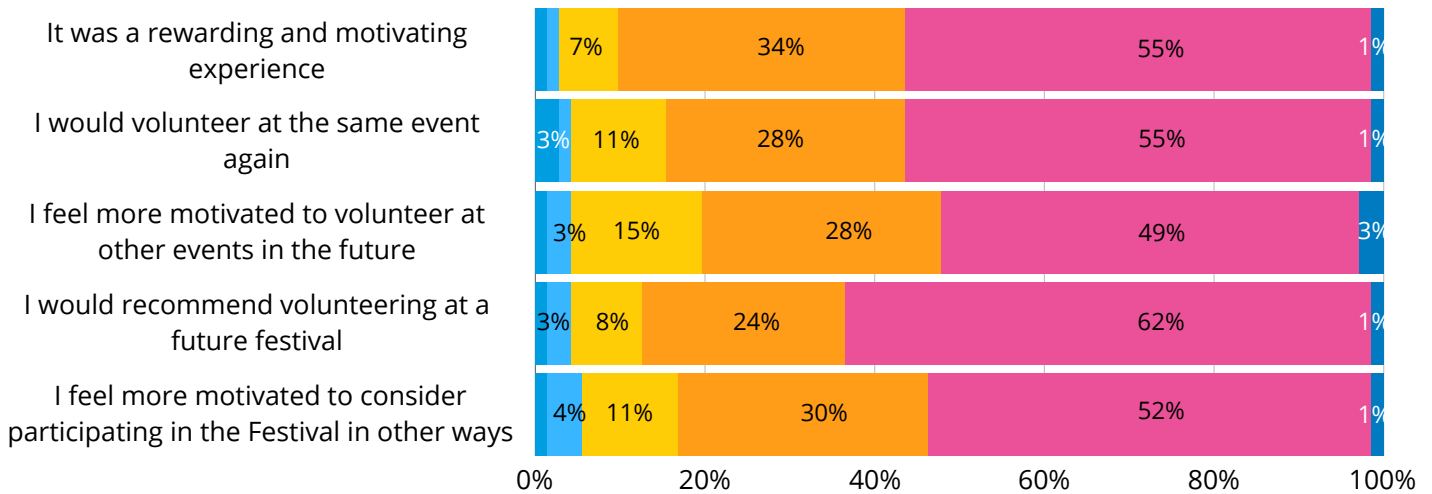
Very poor   Poor   Average   Good   Excellent



86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend volunteering at a future festival, whilst 83% said they would volunteer at the same event again. This is lower than the 94% in 2023 who would recommend volunteering and the 92% in 2023 who said they would volunteer at the same event again. Overall, agreement was lower in 2024 compared to 2023 with more respondents disagreeing and even strongly disagreeing. No respondents strongly disagreed in 2023. 77% agreed or strongly agreed (49%) that the experience made them feel more motivated to volunteer at other future events. Additionally, 82% agreed or strongly agreed (39%) that the experience made them feel more positively about Imperial College London. 89% felt it was a rewarding and motivating experience.

*Likelihood of participation in future events*

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly agree   Not sure



When asked about the best part of their day(s) at the Great Exhibition Road Festival, respondents commonly mentioned the interaction with visitors and seeing their enthusiasm.

“Meeting the community and spending time with them. It was a very satisfying feeling to see them happy during activities”

“Meeting so many people and seeing the amazing research being done at ICL”

“working with children and seeing them light up at the events prepared in family fun zone”

When asked about improvements that could be made many volunteers mentioned more regular breaks to have the opportunity to explore some of the Festival themselves. Clearer descriptions of roles and more detailed briefings on responsibilities prior to the Festival was also commonly mentioned.

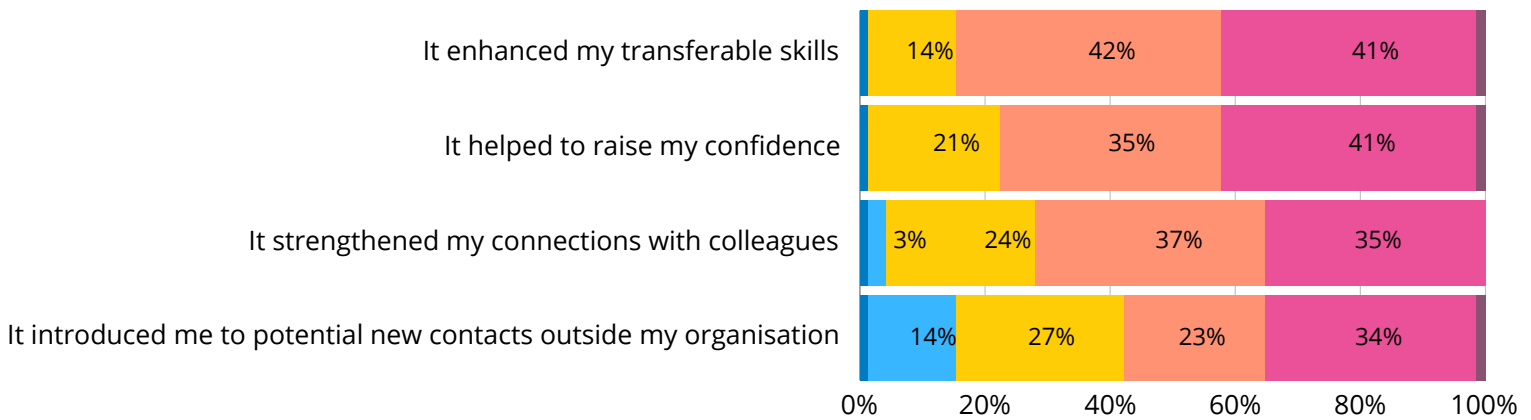
*"Maybe incorporate a break period so that volunteers get to experience other parts of the festival away from their zone."*

*"More clear instructions specific to my volunteering role given before the day itself. More check-ins and breaks allowed."*

### What were volunteers' outcomes?

Enhancing transferable skills such as communication and organisation was the strongest outcome seen, with 83% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing (41%) that the experience contributed to this. 76% of respondents felt the experience raised their confidence and 72% felt it strengthened their connection with colleagues. 56% stated their were introduced to new contacts outside of their organisation.

Outcomes from participating in the Festival



When asked to describe the impacts volunteering at the Festival had on them, or how it might impact them in the future, volunteers commonly mentioned engaging with the public and learning different ways to best communicate. Meeting people from outside of Imperial, being part of a community and having to work as a team was also mentioned.

*"Learn the best way to communicate effectively with different people from various cultures."*

*"Just being a part of the community, not only the Imperial community but working with teams from the local area and being a part of such an incredible blend of science, culture and the arts."*

*"Collaborating with colleagues to ensure the smooth running of our zone. I feel this will be beneficial when I have to work as part of a team in my future profession."*

*"I met people from outside imperial who informed me about available scholarships abroad that I could apply for."*

### Operational feedback

Volunteers were asked about the best way they could be rewarded for their time at the Festival. The most common response was that the chocolate bar and lunch provided were sufficient reward for volunteering. For improvements, Imperial or Great Exhibition Road Festival merchandise was commonly mentioned as well as a 'Thank-you' get together following the Festival weekend. When asked for any general or additional comments, many respondents simply thanked the festival team for organising the event. Other comments mentioned reducing the length of volunteering shifts to make the day less tiring and providing more information on potential roles during sign-up.

*"The chocolate bar was certainly the best reward I have ever had for any such events, so please do keep that up."*

*"A special thank you event after the volunteer, or some snacks and small gifts for those who participate in the volunteer date."*

When asked for any general or additional comments, many respondents simply thanked the festival team for organising the event. Other comments mentioned reducing the length of volunteering shifts to make the day less tiring and providing more information on potential roles during sign-up.

*"Do more of the same - it works well!"*

*"It was a great experience, thank you for the opportunity. However, I think the 8 hour volunteering session is too long. I think it should be broken down into several sessions of max 4 hour per session...I got no breaks other than the 45 minute lunch break and had to stand for the majority of my shift."*

*"If there were nice freebies to give to the visitors, for instance stickers to give to the children, fans or balloons or something low cost that would be a good way for volunteers not at stands to engage with people more. Manning a station with water and cups even."*

*"thank you for doing such a great job and for keep smiling - you're fab!"*

# Summary and recommendations

## Visitors

The visitor profile in 2024, remained similar as in previous years. Groups visiting with children were again the most common way to experience the Festival. Visitors were highly qualified with a higher level of engagement with both science and arts than the wider UK population. As in 2023, the majority of attendees did not have an existing connection to partner organisations and had not attended any previous festivals but were aware in advance that the Festival was taking place.

Visiting to inspire children or enhance their interest in science was the main motivation for visitors alongside having an enjoyable family day out. The first motivator has remained unchanged for several years now, showing a clear trend. Visitors rated the Festival experience as good or excellent and mentioned the quantity of interactive activities and the interaction with contributors very highly. A commonly suggested improvement was clearer signposting and increasing the space stalls and zones had between them to improve ergonomic flow. Requests for more activities for older children and adults were again common as well.

Outcomes relating interest in the topic area decreased from 2023. Only one outcome area increased from 2023 and that was that visitors felt they gained an increased awareness of current research.

## Contributors

Festival contributors felt their experience was rewarding and motivating, with the majority stating they would take part again and recommend participating to a colleague or peer. As a main motivation to take part contributors stated wanting to gain experience in public engagement and outreach and wanting to share their work. Research staff were the most commonly represented group amongst contributors, followed by postgraduate students.

As highlights many described the interaction with festival visitors and seeing their excitement and enthusiasm for the subject areas. Suggestions around improvements focused predominantly on providing more space around stalls and in zones to properly interact with visitors and the wish to have hot drinks provisioned for contributors throughout the weekend.

## Volunteers

The volunteer profile was very similar to 2023 with the majority of volunteers being current Imperial students and research staff comprising a smaller proportion.

Volunteers rated their experience highly and would recommend volunteering at the Festival. As a highlight many described the interaction with visitors and seeing their enthusiasm for the different topic areas exhibited. Suggestions around improvements focused predominantly on allowing more regular breaks for volunteers to sit down or walk around to enjoy the Festival.

## Recommendations

- Consider spacing out activities, especially in indoor areas to allow the crowd to pass through the space better. Within some zones, the space was very crowded making it difficult for those in wheelchairs, with pushchairs or neurodiverse conditions
- Be clearer on ticketed events that are pre-booked and ensuring tickets are checked
- Consider a clearer timetable or zone specific timetable to help people plan their day better. Potentially creating an app for a Festival map and timetable.
- Make areas designated for specific age groups clearer and try reinforce these over the weekend
- Consider staggered openings or entries (zones, tickets, etc)
- Include more sustainable food options and bigger focus on sustainability. Make water refill stations more obvious, reduce single use plastic, recycling, etc
- Improve functionality of website - clearer user journey, clearer on booking tickets, clearer on locations, etc
- Consider providing hot drinks for volunteers and contributors as this was commonly mentioned as a desire
- Consider social event/celebration event for volunteers and contributors to show appreciation for their time and work
- The visitor survey was mentioned to be too long by volunteers working with the evaluation team with visitors getting frustrated by it's length. Consider using a two survey approach with one survey to be completed by visitors on the day that is no longer than 2 minutes. Longer survey can then be sent out following the Festival weekend.