ESRC Festival of Social Science 2015 Evaluation

Celebrating 50 years of Social Science

A report for the Economic and Social Research Council - May 2016
Summary

1. ESRC Festival of Social Science 2015: evaluation key points at a glance

   - The ESRC Festival of Social Science is an annual, week-long series of events held across the UK every November.
   - Its purpose is to promote and increase awareness of social science and the ESRC’s research by encouraging researchers to hold events aimed at non-academic audiences.
   - The 2015 Festival took place from 7th to 14th November, supporting 219 named events, held by 62 different organisations, most of which were universities or HEIs.
   - Events were held in ten regions of the UK and across 38 towns and cities.
   - At least 645 social science researchers engaged with non-academic audiences through involvement in Festival events.
   - The Festival reached an estimated audience of 25,500 - a 27% increase on 2014.
   - The estimated potential reach of the 2015 Festival was 16.6 million, which included website traffic (65,862), Twitter reach (2.7 million), press and media coverage (13.8 million) and ESRC publications (47,096).

2. Evaluating the Festival

   Every year ESRC conducts an internal evaluation of the process and outcomes of the Festival against its stated aims, using data gained from attendees and organisers via paper and online surveys.

   For the 2015 Festival, the ESRC collected data from 3,711 festival attendees and 115 event organisers. Work on the analysis and reporting was outsourced to Dr Ruth Townsley, an independent researcher. With reference to evidence from the survey data, events data and statistics relating to funding, web traffic, social media activity and media coverage, the evaluation considered whether the Festival had met its aims and objectives and offers recommendations for 2016.
3. Evaluation findings

Festival programme, funding and staffing

- The 2015 ESRC Festival supported 219 named events, held by 62 different organisations, most of which (87%) were universities, or higher education institutions. Taking repeat events into account, a total of 243 separate events were programmed over the week-long 2015 Festival, a 6% increase on 2014.
- Events were held in ten regions of the UK and across 38 towns and cities.
- In terms of target audiences, 70% of events were aimed at a general audience and 30% were aimed at business, policymakers and civil society. Seventeen per cent of events aimed at the general public were primarily for young people under 20 years of age.
- Of the 219 named events, 80 received their funding directly from the ESRC Festival team, whilst 139 were funded via block grants to 11 Festival partners all of which were HEIs.
- The number of Festival partners funded through block grants has risen from seven in 2014, to 11 in 2015.
- At least 645 social science researchers engaged with non-academic audiences through involvement in 2015 Festival events.

Festival audience – numbers and profile

- The 2015 Festival reached an estimated audience of 25,500; a 27% increase on 2014.
- The Festival attracted significantly more female attendees (61%) than male attendees (37.5%)\(^1\), a trend that has continued for some years.
- Sixty-seven per cent of the audience was aged under 40, and 40% aged 20-40, highlighting the popularity of the Festival with younger people. The proportion of the audience who were aged 20 and under has significantly increased from 7% in 2014, to 27% in 2015. Conversely, fewer people aged 60+ attended the 2015 Festival (8%) than in previous years (10% in 2014 and 16% in 2013).
- In terms of ethnicity, the Festival continues to reach a broad audience across the UK. The audiences almost exactly reflect national statistics in terms of ethnicity for the general population. The majority of attendees (79%) described themselves as White British or White Other (ONS 86%), with 7% Asian/Asian British attendees (ONS 7.5%), 3% Black/Black British (ONS 3.3%), and 10% Chinese/Mixed/Other (ONS 3.3%).

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\(^1\) In terms of gender, 0.6% said ‘other’ and 0.9% did not provide an answer.
Attendees’ experiences of 2015 Festival events

- General attendees and young attendees provided feedback on 132 (60%) of the 219 Festival events.

- In terms of their experiences overall, general attendees rated events very positively for interest, enjoyment, educational value and accessibility, with almost no-one (less than 1%) offering any negative feedback in response to this question. For young attendees, findings were slightly more mixed, but still reflected an overwhelmingly positive audience response overall.

- In terms of outcomes, both general attendees and young attendees were very positive about the difference attending events had made to their knowledge, understanding and interest of the topics covered. Almost all attendees (92%\(^2\)) reported a better understanding of the topic of the event, and a high proportion (84%\(^3\)) felt that the events had also given them more awareness of the social sciences and the benefits to society. Attendees appeared to be motivated by the event to find out more about the topic (81%\(^4\)) and about the social sciences, and many said they would be passing information gained from the event onto others (83%\(^5\)). Both general (81%) and young attendees (85%) were in strong agreement that they would use the knowledge gained from the event in their work or studies.

- In terms of awareness of the ESRC and the Festival of Social Science, young attendees were less likely (29%) than general attendees (63%) to be aware that the event was part of the ESRC Festival, but overall (56%), audience awareness had grown by 18% since last year, when just 38% of all attendees were aware of the connection between the event and the Festival. Both general and young attendees felt they knew more about the ESRC and its work as a result of participating in Festival events.

\(^2\) 93% of general attendees; 91% of young attendees.  
\(^3\) 80% of general attendees; 88% of young attendees.  
\(^4\) 86% of general attendees; 77% of young attendees.  
\(^5\) 90% of general attendees; 77% of young attendees.
The following word cloud\textsuperscript{6} highlights the key words that general and young attendees used to describe their experience of attending 2015 Festival events:

brilliant different discussion educational engaging
enjoyable enjoyed event excellent helpful
informative interactive learning loved
organised people presentations
public questions research science social
speakers students thank you
thought understand useful work

Event organisers’ experiences of the 2015 Festival

- Most of the 2015 Festival events had been organised by individuals representing HEIs. For around two-thirds of all organisers, this was the first time they had run an ESRC Festival event.

- Organisers were asked to indicate the top three objectives of their 2015 Festival events, with reference to a list of eight options. By far the most popular objective was to increase awareness and understanding of a specific social science subject or topic, with just over three-quarters of organisers choosing this option. A significant number were also using the Festival as a means for communicating information about their own organisation or research group and its work (39%), and/or to increase the take-up or application of their research findings (38%).

- Of the 43 organisers who had taken part in previous ESRC Festivals, there was a fairly even split between those who felt their 2015 event had been more effective and those who felt there had been no change. Very few organisers felt their 2015 events had been less effective.

- Almost all respondents (99%) said they would definitely (83%), or possibly (16%), consider running another Festival event in the future.

\textsuperscript{6} Tag Crowd was used to create the word cloud, using free text comments from general and young attendees.
• In terms of the effectiveness of marketing their events, word of mouth and local/in-house digital promotion (web and social media) were most likely to be seen as effective activities. Direct letters of invitations were also successful (though less well-used). ESRC marketing (via the Festival website and flyer) and external press or media mentions were less frequently seen as effective. Overall, organisers valued more tailored, personalised forms of marketing for their Festival events.

• When asked for direct feedback on the Festival’s own marketing tools, the vast majority of 2015 event organisers were satisfied with the website, flyers and branding materials, despite the fact that these were less frequently seen as effective than other more local and targeted forms of promotion and marketing. This may indicate that organisers understand the need for maintaining a national and recognisable Festival brand, whilst also recognising that more localised and bespoke promotional tools are likely to be more effective for their own, individual events.

• In terms of support they had received from the ESRC to plan, promote and run their events, one-third of organisers were wholly positive and felt that no changes or improvements were needed. Two-thirds made suggestions relating to the following areas: more local/regional promotion; more detailed and targeted flyers; more easily navigable website; earlier distribution of promotional materials; more appropriate evaluation tools for use with children and young people; improved retweeting using the Festival hashtag; a Festival blog; a forum for event organisers; providing an information pack with a media strategy for promoting events; offering small, follow-on funding for post-event engagement work; greater online presence and social media activity.

• In terms of a list of potential outcomes and benefits of the 2015 Festival, a large number of organisers agreed that they had gained personal enjoyment, developed skills, used their research findings and tested an idea or developed links with non-academics. Freetext comments also indicated that there were outcomes for organisers in a number of additional areas including: links and relationships with non-academics; links and relationships with other social scientists; development of engagement skills and resources; impact on research and teaching; benefits of being part of a national, ESRC-branded event.

Marketing and promotion through website traffic, social media activity and media coverage

• Festival website traffic – for the period 1st January to 30th November 2015, the total number of page views was 65,862, slightly less than for the same period in 2014 (75,288). The drop in traffic is probably due to both the launch of a new version of the website and the subsequent delay of the online programme (mid-September as opposed to mid-August in 2014).

• Social media - there were 7,903 Twitter mentions from January to November 2015, of which 4,816 were retweets. This represents an increase of 104% since 2014 when 3,881 tweets were sent. The potential overall reach of the ESRC’s Twitter account is
estimated to be around 2.7 million, with an average of 1,717 followers and 2,467 contributors each sending an average of 3.2 tweets each.

- Media coverage - the 2015 Festival had at least 161 media mentions credited to the Festival generally, or to specific event titles, a 30% decrease on 2014. Online coverage was the strongest with 121 articles, blogs or mentions (including international coverage), reaching a potential UK audience of at least 8.1 million people. The Festival continues to be well-reported by regional media with 22 press mentions (23 in 2014) and a few local radio and TV items. In contrast, the 2015 Festival did not appear to achieve any national TV or radio coverage and had very limited national newspaper print coverage. This may be explained by two large news stories breaking during the week of the Festival, and the possibility that some national print and broadcast coverage was not picked up through media monitoring activities.

- The estimated total reach of the 2015 Festival was 16.6 million, which included website traffic (65,862), Twitter reach (2.7 million), press and media coverage (13.8 million) and ESRC publications (47,096).

4. Recommendations for the 2016 Festival of Social Science

Audience numbers, types and geography

- Attract a higher proportion of business, policy and civil society audiences - 30% attended Festival events in 2015; the target was 40%.
- Attract more young people under 20 years of age - 17% of young people attended Festival events in 2015; the target was 25%.
- Attract more young people aged 20-40 – 40% attended events in 2015; the target was 60%.
- Monitor the reduction in attendance by older people aged 60+ and consider how best to promote the Festival to this group if the decline continues.
- Offer more events in Wales (all of Wales, but especially North Wales) and the East of England.
- Consider whether more events should be offered in London.
- Consider whether new partnerships with HEIs in Wales, East of England and London might help with increasing the number of events in those areas.

Brand support and awareness

- Continue to work with event organisers to ensure effective promotion of the link between the ESRC (as manager/funder) and the Festival of Social Sciences.
- Consider additional marketing activities to target specific age groups such as older people aged 60+ and young people under 20.
- Consider more local/regional promotion, in partnership with event organisers and Festival partner HEIs.
• Ensure the 2016 Festival flyer contains sufficient and accurate details to be useful and that the flyer and other marketing are distributed sufficiently early to have an impact on local promotion of the Festival.

Website, social media and media

• Avoid delays in launching the online programme of events for the 2016 Festival.
• Continue to monitor and review the accessibility and navigability of the site, particularly in terms of events listings.
• Consider more active involvement on Twitter (particularly retweeting tweets from event organisers) by the Festival team and ESRC Press Office in the run-up and during the Festival week.
• Review the overall media strategy and coverage of the 2015 Festival, with support from the ESRC Press Office and Digital Communications team.
• Review the effectiveness of media monitoring for the 2016 Festival, including asking event organisers to report media mentions via a survey question about this.

Evaluation

• Ensure that the 2016 surveys of organisers, general attendees and young attendees include questions linked directly to the objectives of the Festival so that all essential data are collected for evaluation purposes.
• Consider additional formats or methods for seeking feedback from young people and parents, and from those who may not wish to complete evaluation forms at the end of an event.
• Add a free text field or ‘other’ option alongside ‘male’ and ‘female for people to self-identify their gender.
• Consider reviewing the survey tools slightly, to iron out some existing inconsistencies and a few unnecessary questions.

5. Concluding comments

The ESRC Festival of Social Science continues to be a cost-effective means of encouraging, supporting and creating opportunities for social science researchers to engage with non-academic audiences. Through 243 events, held across 38 UK towns and cities, the 2015 Festival attracted 25,500 young people and adults. The 2015 Festival offered exceptional value for money and delivered a range of significant and positive outcomes for attendees and organisers.
Contents

1. About this evaluation .............................................................................................. 10
   1.1. The ESRC Festival of Social Science 2015 ......................................................... 10
   1.2. Evaluating the Festival ..................................................................................... 10
   1.3. Aim of this evaluation ...................................................................................... 11
   1.4. Data sources and methods ............................................................................... 13
   1.5. About this report .............................................................................................. 13

2. Festival programme, funding and staffing ........................................................... 15
   2.1. ESRC managed and partner managed events .................................................. 15
   2.2. Target audiences for 2015 Festival events ....................................................... 16
   2.3. Geographical distribution of 2015 Festival events .......................................... 16
   2.4. Number of social science researchers involved in 2015 Festival events ........ 17
   2.5. Funding of 2015 Festival events ....................................................................... 17

3. Festival audience – numbers and profile ............................................................. 18
   3.1. Gender .............................................................................................................. 18
   3.2. Audience type ................................................................................................... 18
   3.3. Age .................................................................................................................... 19
   3.4. Ethnicity ............................................................................................................ 19

4. Attendees’ experiences of 2015 Festival events ................................................... 21
   4.1. Outcomes of 2015 Festival events for attendees ............................................ 21
   4.2. Awareness of the ESRC and Festival of Social Science ..................................... 22
   4.3. Overall rating of 2015 Festival events by attendees ........................................ 23
   4.4. Open comments or suggestions ....................................................................... 24

5. Event organisers’ experiences of the 2015 Festival ............................................. 28
   5.1. Profile of event organisers responding to the survey ....................................... 28
   5.2. Objectives for running a 2015 Festival event .................................................. 28
   5.3. Organisers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their 2015 Festival events ....... 29
   5.4. Organisers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of marketing activities for their events ............................................................... 30
5.5. Feedback from organisers on Festival marketing tools and branding materials ................................................................. 31
5.6. Feedback from organisers on support from the ESRC to plan, promote and run their events .................................................. 32
5.7. Outcomes and benefits of the 2015 Festival for organisers ........................................ 33

6. Marketing and promotion through website traffic, social media activity and media coverage .......................................................................................................................................................... 38
6.1. ESRC Festival website traffic ................................................................................................................................. 38
6.2. Social media activity ............................................................................................................................................. 39
6.3. Press and media coverage ........................................................................................................................................ 39
6.4. Estimated total reach of the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2015 ................................................................. 41

7. Conclusions and recommendations ........................................................................................................................................... 42
7.1. Progress of the 2015 ESRC Festival in meeting its key objectives ........................................................... 42
7.2. Recommendations for the 2016 Festival of Social Science .......................................................................................... 45

Annex A  Questionnaire for attendees .......................................................................................................................... 48
Annex B  Questionnaire for young attendees ......................................................................................................................... 49
Annex C  Questionnaire for organisers .............................................................................................................................. 50
1. About this evaluation

1.1. The ESRC Festival of Social Science 2015

The ESRC Festival of Social Science is an annual, week-long series of events held across the UK every November. The purpose of the Festival is to promote and increase awareness of social sciences and the ESRC’s research by encouraging researchers to hold events aimed at non-academic audiences. Events include debates, lectures, seminars, exhibitions, film screenings, performance and hand-on-events. They are aimed at a variety of audiences, including the general public, young people, policymakers, business and civil society groups and organisations.

The ESRC Festival of Social Science 2015 took place from 7th to 14th November, with 243 separately timetabled events held across 38 different UK towns and cities, attracting around 25,500 people. Through the 2015 Festival, the ESRC aimed to:

- Encourage, support and create the opportunity for social science researchers to engage with non-academic audiences
- Promote and increase awareness of the social sciences and ESRC’s research
- Promote and increase awareness of the contributions the social sciences make to the wellbeing and the economy of the UK society
- Enable the public to engage with social science research
- Engage with teachers and young people and raise their awareness of the social sciences
- Raise awareness of ESRC’s 50th Anniversary
- Achieve continued savings.

The ESRC welcomed applications for the 2015 Festival from anyone interested in running an event to communicate social science research, on the condition that they included a social scientist from a university. In addition to ESRC-funded investments (universities, centres and programmes), other organisations and researchers from the HE and other sectors were encouraged to apply to take part in the Festival. Event organisers could apply to the ESRC for up to £1,000 in sponsorship for their event (ESRC-manged events). In addition, the ESRC awarded block grants to 11 Higher Education Institutions (HEI partners) with the expectation that the same amount be leveraged back into the Festival through matched funding or work in-kind.

1.2. Evaluating the Festival

Every year the ESRC conducts an internal evaluation of the process and outcomes of the Festival against its stated aims, using data gained from attendees and organisers via paper
and online feedback forms. Examples of the questionnaires for attendees, young attendees and organisers are given in Annexes A, B and C.

For the 2015 Festival, data were collected from 3,711 festival attendees and 115 event organisers, but work on the analysis and reporting was outsourced to Ruth Townsley, an independent researcher. Ruth previously undertook research for the ESRC on the longer-term impact of the 2012 and 2013 Festivals of Social Science, which complemented the internally conducted process and outcome evaluation.

1.3. Aim of this evaluation

The main aim of this evaluation was to consider the success of the 2015 Festival in meeting its aims, by assessing its progress against its set objectives which were as follows:

1. Audience numbers, types and geography
   - Sustain audience attendance of 20,000
   - A programme of at least 180 varied individual activities
   - 60% of events are targeted at young people or the general public
   - 40% of events aimed at business, policymakers and the civil society
   - Varied audience by age and ethnicity
   - Good geographical spread of events.

2. General audience learning and actions
   - 80% of events improve audience knowledge about social sciences
   - 75% of audience would use the knowledge they gained from the event in their work or study.

3. Business and knowledge exchange
   - 80% of attendees learned new facts that they can apply to their area of expertise
   - 80% of attendees recognise the importance of public investment in social sciences and its contribution to economic, cultural and societal well-being following the event.

4. Young people
   - 80% of young people intend to use what they have learnt or find out more about the topic
80% of young people are inspired to study and learn about social sciences
80% of young people will feel they have learnt something new
80% of teachers will use what they have learnt in the classroom.

5. Event organisers

- At least 40% of events are run by new event organisers
- At least 40% of participating event organisers are not currently funded by the ESRC
- At least 450 social science researchers engage with non-academic audiences
- All events offer two-way engagement activities.

6. Brand support and awareness

- Promote the Festival to over 800,000 individuals/organisations through publicity material, including Society Now, the Festival flyer and via social media
- 50% of audience aware that the event was part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science
- 50% of audience new to the ESRC and the work of social science
- Raise awareness of ESRC’s 50th Anniversary using 50th branding where possible.

7. New local Festivals

- Co-brand with at least four other festivals (Plymouth, Bournemouth, Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan)
- Achieve 100% matched funding (cash or in-kind from HEI or partners/sponsors) for block funding awarded to HEIs for the local Festivals.

8. Festival website

- The website receives a 20% increase in hits from the previous year (75,288 in 2014).

9. Press and media

- Press coverage is achieved across the national and regional media for the week and individual events, with at least 300 mentions in the print media
- Achieve international press coverage (no predetermined volume)
- Coverage is achieved in two national newspapers, twice on TV, and twice on the radio
• Receive social media coverage, to include 1,500 twitter mentions, including 100 retweets.

1.4. Data sources and methods

Up until December 2015, the Festival team at ESRC designed and managed the evaluation process. This included the following tasks:

• Designing an evaluation strategy and producing guidance on its implementation for event organisers and ESRC colleagues
• Designing, managing and inputting the data from three paper-based survey tools – one for general event attendees; one for young event attendees; and one for event organisers.

By January 2016, the following data sources were available, all designed and collected by the Festival team, or their ESRC colleagues:

• General attendee survey data (2,962 valid responses)
• Young attendee survey data (749 valid responses)
• Organiser survey data (115 valid responses)
• Events data, including number, funding, lead organisation, and other details (219 valid entries)
• Pro-forma questionnaire data from the 11 block-funded HEI partners
• Statistics on web traffic from Google Analytics
• Statistics on social media from TweetReach.

In January 2016, the decision was made to outsource the analysis and reporting of the evaluation data to Ruth Townsley, an independent researcher. These stages of the evaluation were undertaken from February to March 2016 and involved desk-based work, via documentary and data analysis of the existing data sources listed above. A list of data queries was drawn up and agreed with the Festival team: this was used as the basis for analysis of frequencies and descriptive statistics from the quantitative survey data. Qualitative material from the survey responses and interviews were analysed thematically.

1.5. About this report

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback on the success of the Festival from the perspectives of attendees and event organisers. With reference to this material, alongside statistics relating to funding of the Festival, website traffic, social media activity and media

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7 See Annex A
8 See Annex B
9 See Annex C
coverage, conclusions will be drawn about the progress of the Festival in meeting its stated objectives as listed above. The report will also offer recommendations for the organisation and on-going evaluation of the 2016 Festival.

All quotations used in the report have been edited where necessary to ensure the anonymity of respondents.
2. Festival programme, funding and staffing

The 2015 ESRC Festival supported 219 named events, organised by 62 different organisations, most of which (87%) were universities or higher education institutions. Of these events, 204 ran once, 15 ran twice and three ran three times. Taking repeat events into account, a total of 243 separate events were programmed over the week-long 2015 Festival, a 6% increase on 2014.

2.1. ESRC managed and partner managed events

Of the 219 named events which ran during the 2015 Festival, 74 were funded directly by the ESRC Festival team, whilst 145 received funding via block grants awarded to 11 HEI partners. The Festival operates as a ‘distributed model’ whereby the ESRC encourages and supports other organisations to organise, manage and host events, whilst providing funding to some of these.

A component of this distributed approach is the development, since 2013, of satellite Festivals, through partnerships and block funding arrangements with a number of HEIs. In 2014, the ESRC had established partnerships with seven HEIS on this basis. In 2015, this rose to 11 as follows:

- University of Bristol
- University of Sheffield
- Sheffield Hallam University
- University of Aberdeen
- University of Birmingham
- Queen’s University Belfast
- University of Exeter
- University of Plymouth
- University of Bournemouth
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- University of Manchester.

Each HEI was awarded a set amount of funding to distribute to local event organisers. The management of locally-funded events was also devolved to partner HEIs, although individual event organisers were able to contact the ESRC Festival team for advice and support if they wished and continued to be eligible for support with marketing and promoting their events.
As explained earlier, there was an expectation that an equivalent amount of cash or in-kind support would be leveraged back into the Festival by each block-funded partner HEI.

2.2. Target audiences for 2015 Festival events

In terms of target audiences, Table 2 shows that 70% of events were aimed at a general audience and 30% were aimed at business, policymakers and civil society. Seventeen per cent of events were targeted at audience members under 20 years of age.

Table 1: Distribution of 2015 Festival events by target audience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>General public</th>
<th>Young people</th>
<th>Business, policymakers, civil society</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESRC managed events</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner managed events</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3. Geographical distribution of 2015 Festival events

Events were held in ten regions of the UK and across 38 towns and cities. Table 1 shows the geographical distribution of 2015 Festival events and indicates that 94% of events were held outside London which is higher than the Festival objective for 80%.

Table 2: Geographical distribution of 2015 Festival events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK region</th>
<th>Number of named events</th>
<th>Percentage of total events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotland – Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stirling</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland – Belfast</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales – Cardiff, Swansea</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East England – Cambridge, Stevenage, Oxford, Brighton, Milton Keynes, Canterbury, Luton, Margate, Colchester, Bournemouth</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2.4. Number of social science researchers involved in 2015 Festival events

In their original applications for funding or support, the ESRC Festival team asked event organisers to estimate the number of social science researchers involved in their events. From the figures provided, it appears that at least 645 social science researchers had engaged with non-academic audiences (general audience and young people) through their events.

### 2.5. Funding of 2015 Festival events

As explained in section 1.1, funding of 2015 Festival events was split between direct sponsorship for individual events and block funding to 11 partner HEIs to cover the funding of multiple events. Of the 219 events supported by the ESRC Festival, 42 received direct sponsorship, 139 were funded through block grants to 11 partner HEIs, and 38 ran without any direct Festival funding (but received support from the Festival team with planning, promoting and running their events in the same way as the funded events).

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10 Not all event organisers provided data in response to this question.
3. Festival audience – numbers and profile

The Festival team provided an estimate of total audience numbers for the 2015 Festival using actual attendance figures alongside anticipated figures where data were lacking. For the 2015 Festival, a total audience of 25,500 was estimated, a 27% increase on 2014.

The data used to examine audience profile are based on responses to two surveys aimed at (1) general attendees and (2) young attendees aged 20 and under. A total of 3,711 fully completed survey responses were submitted – 2,962 from general attendees and 749 from young attendees, indicating a response rate of 14.5%. The total number of responses received (3,711) indicate that the accuracy of statistics based on this sample have a confidence level of 99% within a margin of error of 1.5%.

3.1. Gender

We asked all attendees responding to the survey to provide some demographic information about themselves. Their answers showed that the Festival attracted significantly more female attendees (61%) than male attendees (37.5%).

This is a trend that has continued for some years – the figures for the 2014 and 2013 Festivals are almost identical to those for 2015 – and is also reflected in audiences attending other, similar Festivals such as the Being Human Festival of the Humanities in 2014.

3.2. Audience type

We also asked general attendees to describe the capacity in which they had attended the event. Forty-three per cent said they had attended as members of the general public, whilst 54% took part in Festival events in their professional capacity. There is no comparator data for 2014 as this question was new for 2015.

This year’s data on audience type, however, reflects a continuing and strong interest in Festival events by business people, policy makers and civil society employees. Indeed, a greater proportion of this audience type attended events (54%) than might have been expected given that only 30% of events were aimed at a professional audience. This may reflect the use of Festival events as a free source of training or as an opportunity for networking and professional development.

11 See Annex A
12 See Annex B
13 2,962 responses were from general attendees (included all age groups) and 749 responses were from young attendees (aged under 20).
14 This response rate has been calculated using an estimated total attendance figure of 25,500 provided by the Festival team.
15 In terms of gender, 0.6% said ‘other’ and 0.9% did not provide an answer.
17 Three per cent did not answer this question.
3.3. Age

Figure 1 shows that there was a good degree of variation in the age of the audience, with 67% aged under 40 and 40% aged 20-40 (20s and 30s), highlighting the popularity of the Festival with younger people.

The proportion of the audience who were aged 20 and under has significantly increased from 7% in 2014, to 27% in 2015. This is an interesting finding since there were fewer events targeted specifically at young people in 2015 (17%) than in 2014 (21%) and may reflect a growing interest in the Festival as a curriculum enrichment activity by schools and teachers.

Conversely, fewer people aged 60+ attended the 2015 Festival (8%) than in previous years (10% in 2014 and 16% in 2013). This may be due to an increase, and more reliance on digital marketing, especially via Twitter which is not as well-used by older people. It is important to keep track of this decline in attendance by older people, since it is a trend that does not reflect their representation in the general population as a whole. Latest statistics from ONS\(^\text{18}\) suggest that the number and proportion of older people is continuing to rise with nearly 18% aged over 64 in mid-2014.

![Figure 1: Age of 2015 Festival audience (base size = 2,962)](image)

3.4. Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, Figure 2 shows that the Festival continues to reach a broad audience across the UK. Festival audiences almost exactly reflect national statistics in terms of

\(^{18}\text{www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/2015-06-25}\)
ethnicity for the general population and the Festival has an excellent reach in terms of Chinese/Mixed and Other ethnic groups. The majority of attendees (79%) described themselves as White British or White Other (ONS 86%), with 7% Asian/Asian British attendees (ONS 7.5%), 3% Black/Black British (ONS 3.3%), and 10% Chinese/Mixed/Other (ONS 3.3%).

Figure 2: Ethnicity of 2015 Festival audience (base size = 2,962)
4. **Attendees’ experiences of 2015 Festival events**

In their responses to the two surveys, attendees provided feedback on 132 (60%) of the 219 events supported by the ESRC as part of the 2015 Festival. Attendees were asked four sets of questions relating to their experiences of these Festival events. First, they were asked about any outcomes of the events they had attended in terms of knowledge, understanding and interest in the topic covered. Second, they were asked about their awareness of the ESRC. Third, they were asked to rate the event overall, in terms of whether it was interesting, enjoyable, educational, relevant and accessible/understandable. Fourth, an open question invited them to share any other comments or suggestions on the event, or the Festival as a whole.

4.1. **Outcomes of 2015 Festival events for attendees**

Audiences were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a list of statements relating to potential outcomes of the events they had attended. Table 3 summarises their responses to these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>General attendees</th>
<th>Young attendees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am more aware of the social sciences and the benefits to society</td>
<td>80% agreed</td>
<td>88% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 43% general public; 54% professional; 3% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a better understanding of the topic of the event</td>
<td>93% agreed</td>
<td>91% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 43% general public; 55% professional; 2% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will find out more about the topic of the event</td>
<td>86% agreed</td>
<td>77% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 41% general public; 56% professional; 3% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will use the knowledge gained from the event in my work/studies</td>
<td>81% agreed</td>
<td>85% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 36% general public; 61% professional; 3% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will pass information gained from the event onto others</td>
<td>90% agreed</td>
<td>77% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 42% general public; 56% professional; 2% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to learn more about social science</td>
<td>73% agreed</td>
<td>77% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 42% general public; 55% professional; 3% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in Table 3 show that:

- Both general attendees and young attendees were very positive about the difference attending events had made to their knowledge, understanding and interest of the topics covered.
• The most popular outcome for all attendees was a better understanding of the topic of the event, with 93% of general attendees and 91% of young attendees agreeing with this statement.

• A very high proportion of all attendees felt that the events had also increased their awareness of the social sciences and the benefits to society (80% general attendees; 88% young attendees).

• Similarly, attendees appeared to be motivated by the event to find out more about the topic (86% general attendees; 77% young attendees) and about the social sciences more generally 73% general attendees; 77% young attendees).

• In terms of passing information gained from the event onto others, significantly more general attendees (90%) than young attendees (77%) indicated they would do so, which may reflect the more specific nature of the learning outcomes associated with events aimed at young people.

• Both general (81%) and young attendees (85%) were in strong agreement that they would use the knowledge gained from the event in their work or studies. Of the general attendees who agreed with this outcome statement, a much higher proportion were professionals (61%) as opposed to the general public (36%), in contrast to other outcomes which were less proportionately diverse. This may once again be reflective of events being used for professional training and development purposes and shows the potential for much wider reach and impact of learning from the 2015 Festival beyond its immediate audience.

4.2. Awareness of the ESRC and Festival of Social Science

Attendees were asked additional questions to gauge a sense of their awareness of the ESRC and Festival of Social Science more generally. As Table 4 shows, prior awareness of the ESRC was low for young attendees (19%), but had increased significantly after they attended events (74%). As in previous years, this may suggest that event organisers are continuing to reach new audiences year-on-year, as opposed to working with groups or schools with whom they have pre-existing connections. Slightly fewer general attendees (68%) than young attendees (74%) felt that they knew more about the ESRC and its work after attending events.

Young attendees were less likely (29%) than general attendees (63%) to be aware that the event was part of the ESRC Festival, but overall this figure had grown since last year, when just 38% of attendees were aware of the connection between the event and the Festival. This may reflect increased efforts by event organisers to use ESRC-branded materials and give-aways, or the prominence of the ESRC’s 50th anniversary logo at events.
Table 4: Awareness of the ESRC and Festival of Social Science

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>General attendees</th>
<th>Young attendees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I had heard of the ESRC Festival of Social Science before this event</td>
<td>The question was not asked</td>
<td>19% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was aware the event was part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science</td>
<td>63% agreed</td>
<td>29% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 40% general public; 57% professional; 3% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now know more about the ESRC and its work</td>
<td>68% agreed</td>
<td>74% agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which 43% general public; 55% professional; 2% other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. Overall rating of 2015 Festival events by attendees

Festival audiences were asked to indicate their overall rating of events in terms of whether they had found them interesting, enjoyable, educational, relevant or accessible/understandable. Figures 3 and 4 show the results for each group of attendees.

For general attendees (Figure 3), events were rated very highly positively in all areas, with almost no-one (less than 1%) offering any negative feedback in response to this question. Event organisers had clearly worked hard to offer experiences that met the needs and expectations of their target audiences.

19 The question area relating to relevance of events was missing from the survey of general attendees.
For young attendees (Figure 4), findings were slightly more mixed, but still reflected an overwhelmingly positive audience response overall. Fewer young attendees found events very enjoyable, education, relevant or accessible and more ticked the fairly or ok options than general attendees did. The responses from young attendees were most mixed in relation to the relevance of Festival events to them: although 73% said events were very or fairly relevant, 21% said they were OK and 5% thought they were not relevant. Overall, though, these results suggest that event organisers had largely pitched the content and delivery of their sessions very well for this audience of young people.

![Figure 4 - Young attendees: overall rating of 2015 Festival](image)

4.4. Open comments or suggestions

Attendees were asked for their comments or suggestions on the event, or the Festival as a whole. A total of 1,272 comments were received from general attendees and 448 from young attendees. We conducted a word cloud analysis\(^{20}\) for frequencies of key words, and combined with a content review of each set of comments, this helped to highlight some of the key points made by general and young attendees.

Figures 5 and 6 summarise 50 key words used by general attendees and young attendees in their comments and suggestions to the Festival team (with frequency count in brackets).

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\(^{20}\) The word cloud analysis tool Tag Crowd was used since it has the flexibility to show frequencies, to group similar words together, to filter using wild-card characters and to exclude unwanted words.

http://tagcrowd.com/
The word cloud above illustrates that general attendees used the following key words to describe the 2015 Festival events: interesting, informative, excellent, enjoyable, useful, brilliant, different, engaging, well organised, relevant, accessible.

The following comments from general attendees illustrate these points:

“A lovely event. Very well organised and thought provoking.”

“Brilliant opportunity to connect with sector and colleagues. More please!”

“Excellent speaker who provided different levels of information in an accessible way. Great variety of expertise in the speaker. Great venue and good food. Thanks!”
“Great fun and very educational. Will look out for the Festival next year.”

“I feel that I have more of an understanding towards research and what benefits it has throughout society.”

Figure 6: Summary of key words used by young attendees in comments and suggestions

The young attendees’ word cloud shows that young people found 2015 Festival events interesting, informative, educational, enjoyable, fun, interactive and engaging; as illustrated by the following comments:
“Enjoyable day. I thought it was going to be boring but it wasn’t.”

“A good experience and a good insight into the University.”

“An interesting day which has developed my understanding towards my A-level course.”

“I enjoyed learning about methods of research and data analysis and it was fun to be part of a social experiment.”

“It gave me an insight into what would be involved if deciding to take up as a degree and found subject interesting.”
5. Event organisers’ experiences of the 2015 Festival

This section examines the findings from the survey of event organisers. The ESRC Festival team contacted all organisers of the 219 events that were supported as part of the 2015 Festival, inviting them to take part in the online survey. A total of 116 fully completed responses were received, indicating a response rate of 53%. Of these responses, 5 related to duplicate events. Once duplicate data were combined or removed, a total of 111 responses were available for analysis purposes. In addition, a small amount of more detailed information was collected from lead contacts at each of the 11 block-funded HEI partners via a pro-forma questionnaire.

5.1. Profile of event organisers responding to the survey

Almost all (107) of the 111 respondents represented universities or other higher education institutions (HEIs), with two private sector organisations and two civil society/voluntary organisations also providing responses. For most (61%) organisers responding to the survey, 2015 was the first time they had taken part in an ESRC Festival of Social Science. Thirty-nine per cent of respondents had prior experience of the Festival having organised events in previous years.

5.2. Objectives for running a 2015 Festival event

Organisers were asked to indicate the top three objectives of their 2015 Festival events, with reference to a list of eight options. Figure 7 below summarises their responses to this question. The Figure shows that by far the most popular objective was to increase awareness and understanding of a specific social science subjective or topic, with just over three-quarters (76%) of organisers choosing this option (67% in 2014).

A significant number (39%) of event organisers were also using the ESRC Festival as a means for communicating information about their own organisation or research group and its work, as they had in 2014 (37%). Interestingly, the proportion of organisers who aimed to increase the take-up or application of their research findings (38% in 2015) has grown from 24% in 2014. It was noted that this objective had declined over the past few years, possible due to a broader range of organisations and organisers taking part in the Festival and thus not having their own research to disseminate. However, for 2015, it appears that a strong research focus has been re-established: certainly HEIs were the majority organisation type represented in the survey of organisers.

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21 See Annex C.
The popularity of the other objectives has remained fairly stable between 2014 and 2015. The objective to communicate information about the ESRC and its work continues not to be a strong priority for event organisers, with just 10% including it in their top three objectives (14% did so in 2014). The focus remains on promoting their own work rather than the role of the ESRC, which given the general rather than academic nature of audiences for the Festival is perfectly understandable.

5.3. Organisers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their 2015 Festival events

The survey questionnaire asked organisers to consider the effectiveness of their 2015 Festival events, in comparison with other ESRC Festival events they had run before. Of the 43 organisers who had taken part in previous ESRC Festivals, there was a fairly even split between those who felt their 2015 event had been more effective and those who felt there had been no change. Very few organisers felt their 2015 events had been less effective.
Organisers’ overall positivity about the success of their events in terms of its *overall quality, audience reaction* and *audience size* may explain why almost all respondents (99%) said they would definitely (83%), or possibly (16%), consider running another Festival event in the future.

5.4. Organisers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of marketing activities for their events

The ESRC Festival team offered various forms of support to event organisers in 2015. These included email notices and communications, telephone and email support and online resources. ESRC assistance with marketing included the Festival website, production and distribution of a Festival flyer, and ESRC branding materials that were sent to each event organiser in advance of the Festival week. In addition, most organisations involved in the Festival also supported the marketing of events through their own website, social media posts, direct letters of invitation, and other forms of promotion. Some event organisers were approached by the press or media for an interview or article.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate how effective they felt a number of these different forms of promotion had been in marketing their events. They were also invited to add their own *other* option to this list if they wished.

**Figure 9: Effectiveness of marketing activities (base size = 111)**

Figure 9 presents organisers’ responses to this question and shows that word of mouth and local/in-house digital promotion (web and social media) were most frequently perceived as effective marketing activities. Direct letters of invitations were also successful (though less well-used). ESRC marketing (via the Festival website and flyer) and external press or media mentions were least frequently thought to be effective. Responses to this question showed that overall, most of the listed marketing activities were well-used by organisers.
These findings appear to highlight that organisers value more tailored, personalised forms of marketing for their Festival events. This was also reflected in their responses to the other option: of the 26 examples of other marketing activities organisers felt had been successful, all of these were specifically targeted towards key groups and potential audiences as the follow examples show:

“We advertised the event using personal existing networks and also had a key NGO network body advertise it on their website.”

“We had three interviews on local radio and an announcement about our event before the showing of the film Suffragette at the local film centre.”

“Students working on promotion with local businesses was most effective.”

5.5. Feedback from organisers on Festival marketing tools and branding materials

The ESRC has responsibility for creating a Festival brand and for helping to promote the Festival and its activities. Specific feedback was sought from organisers about their overall satisfaction with ESRC-provided marketing tools and branding materials. Figure 9 below shows that the vast majority of 2015 event organisers were satisfied with the Festival website, flyers and ESRC branding materials, despite the fact that these were less frequently seen as effective than other more local and targeted forms of promotion and marketing.

These findings show that whilst organisers valued localised and bespoke promotional tools for their own, individual events, they were nonetheless aware of the need to maintain a national and recognisable Festival brand, through central marketing strategies.

“We utilised the pop up banners at each event and these were a very satisfactory way of conveying and reminding audiences of the funder. At each event the flyers provided regarding Society Now were distributed. The posters were of a more limited value.”
“It would be interesting to hear from the ESRC suggestions of things we could do to promote events locally. Possibly based on successes of other institutions.”

5.6. Feedback from organisers on support from the ESRC to plan, promote and run their events

Organisers were invited to provide open-ended feedback on the support they had received from the ESRC Festival team to plan, promote and run their events. A total of 59 separate responses were received, of which around one-third were wholly positive about the support from ESRC and felt that nothing significant needed to be changed or improved.

“I had really useful assistance from the start with the application process, understanding what would happen, and then from the press office picking up our event for a press release in advance.”

“You have done a great job supporting this event, thank-you!”

The remaining two-thirds of responses offered suggestions for changes or improvements in the following areas:

- More local/regional promotion – many organisers asked if there was scope for ESRC to support more local/regional promotion of the Festival.

- Festival flyer – this was felt to be insufficiently detailed to be useful, and organisers suggested regional flyers including details of individual events (times, venues etc.) would be more effective; some organisers also noted typos and inaccuracies.

- Festival website – several people found the website difficult to navigate; could events be presented thematically as well as geographically? There were suggestions the website would benefit from improved promotion to draw attention to the Festival.

- Distribution of promotional materials, and promotion of the programme via the Festival website – the timing of this was thought to be too late to have sufficient impact; could PDFs be made available so organisers can print their own copies in different sizes and distribute these via social media?

- Evaluation – several organisers thought the questionnaire for young attendees was not sufficiently tailored for children and young people and was difficult to understand and complete; add an ‘other’ option or free text field alongside ‘male’ and ‘female’ for people to self-identify their gender; consider additional formats or methods for seeking feedback from children, parents and people who may not wish to complete evaluation forms at the end of an event.

- Use of Twitter – there were comments about the effectiveness of the Festival hashtag with some people noting that their tweets had not been re-tweeted by the ESRC.
• Other suggestions included a Festival blog; a forum for event organisers; providing an information pack with a media strategy for promoting events; offering small, follow-on funding for post-event engagement work and follow-up; greater online presence and social media activity.

5.7. Outcomes and benefits of the 2015 Festival for organisers

The questionnaire developed by the ESRC Festival team offered organisers a list of potential outcomes of taking part in the 2015 Festival. Organisers were asked to indicate what they had gained, by ticking as many outcomes as they wished from this list:

• Developed skills
• Personal enjoyment
• Used research findings
• Tested an idea of developed links with a non-academic
• Tested an idea of developed links with a social scientist
• Other outcomes.

The balance of listed outcomes chosen by organisers in their survey responses is illustrated in Figure 10 below and shows that a very large number of respondents (n=94; 85%) felt they had gained personal enjoyment from taking part in the 2015 Festival. A large proportion of organisers also said that they had developed skills (n=78; 70%), and tested an idea or developed links with a non-academic (n=76; 70%). Sixty per cent (n=67) had used research findings as part of their events and around one quarter (n=31) reported that they had also tested an idea or developed links with a social scientist.

Figure 10: Outcomes of Festival events by number of mentions

- Developed skills
- Personal enjoyment
- Used research findings
- Tested an idea or developed links with a non-academic
- Tested an idea or developed links with a social scientist
- Other outcomes
Organisers were also invited to add their own outcomes to those already listed and 25 people did so. In addition, question 13 of the survey tool asked them for open-ended responses about the main benefits of taking part in the ESRC Festival – 94 people provided examples of benefits. Previous research for the ESRC on the longer term impact of the Festival of Social Sciences has led to the development of a typology of outcomes in the following areas:

- Relationships with external contributors or attendees
- Relationships within own organisations
- Development of engagement skills
- Research and teaching
- Benefits of the ESRC brand.

With reference to this existing typology, and the list of potential outcomes provided in the survey, we examined the open-ended responses regarding additional outcomes and perceived benefits of the 2015 Festival. The findings are set out in the sections below.

**Links and relationships with non-academics**

Around a quarter (26%) of the open-ended comments about outcomes and benefits related to improved links and relationships with non-academics, either as event partners or as attendees. Organisers gave many examples of how their events had helped to create new links with non-academics, or had enabled stronger and enhanced networks and relationships to develop.

> “The event brought together a real range of people from local government, NHSOs, research and community, which made for fascinating discussions, so I learnt a lot from the day itself and I think that I and others will take forward to the new networks and idea.”

Links with schools, teachers, children and young people were specifically highlighted and several organisers mentioned the role of the Festival in raising aspirations amongst young people and encouraging them to consider the social sciences as a university option, or in terms of a future career.

> “It’s fantastic to see secondary school students engage with such an exciting topic from a range of social science perspective and get them to experience a university environment.”

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Links and relationships with other social scientists

Some organisers (about 8%) offered evidence about how their Festival events had helped to bring about new connections with other social scientists, both externally, and within their own organisations.

“It was a way of gaining financial support to deliver an event that links researchers, academics and practitioners together – an opportunity to develop links with other academics as well as practitioners which provides a first step to possibly working together collaboratively.”

Several people felt that the events had helped to raise the profile of their research within their own organisation, in some cases leading to personal reward or recognition such as career progression.

“It helped us to promote ourselves as ‘engaged scholars’.”

Other outcomes in this area included the role of events in creating a new network or community of academics working in a particular area, and for one organiser, the opportunity for some much-enjoyed team building with staff and students involved in the event.

“It increased our visibility in the university, increased our contacts with other academic outside our narrow discipline and offered an opportunity to bring together distinguished speakers to debate on the pressing issues of our time.”

Development of engagement skills and resources

For around 13% of organisers, their Festival events provided a supportive environment in which they and other colleagues could develop and practise skills in public engagement. One person talked about her event being ‘outreach training for myself’ and another explained that the involvement of PhD students in presentations had provided an important platform for them to practise public engagement techniques and activities. Some organisers also described events as spaces to try out a new approach or technique to communicating their social science research, or to develop new resources to make research accessible to non-academic audiences.

“In particular we tested an audience engagement tool that worked well.”

“Enables the realisation of ideas for promoting the social sciences. In this case it created an amazing opportunity for early career researchers to put together an imaginative and exciting event for school students which explored a very topical subject area.”

A few people talked about the on-going legacy of the public engagement resources they had developed for their Festival events.
“We developed material and demonstrations that can be used again.”

Impact on research and teaching

Just over a quarter (27%) of organisers talked about the outcomes of their Festival events for their own, or their colleagues’, research and teaching activities. Most significantly, a large number of people appreciated the opportunity to share and discuss their research with a wider audience. Festival events provided insights into the impact of their research on a non-academic audience and a chance to explore the relationship between research and practice.

“Increased public awareness about child language development and about our Centre. The event also provided an opportunity to recruit families to take part in child language research at our study centres.”

Several people mentioned that their events ‘added impact’ to their academic research and teaching and allowed them to explore approaches to developing more effective strategies for achieving impact.

“The ability to engage with non-academic audiences and to use those interactions to share or test out new ideas and gain other views on the work we are doing. These insights help us to better understand the nature of impact and to craft stronger approaches to achieving it.”

In a few cases, Festival events and the new connections they created, helped to generate new ideas and research directions.

“The need to find an audience and participants meant we needed up thinking about the topic in a new way – more community-focussed. This led to a new direction for the research, emerging from the interest of someone who took part in the event and had been looking for some support to develop her ideas.”

Benefits of being part of a national, ESRC-branded event

Around one-fifth (19%) of organisers referred specifically to the benefits of being part of a national, ESRC-branded event. Around one-third of these comments related to the role of the Festival in co-ordinating public engagement events between and within the organisations involved, so creating a ‘critical mass’ of events during the week of the Festival, resulting in greater impact on public awareness and interest.

“I believe in principle that academic subjects and findings should be made accessible to the public and the relevance of social science made apparent. A national week of events provides a wonderful forum to do this, and is more effective for
demonstrating the depth of social science than ad-hoc, single events by universities.”

Another third of comments were linked to the credibility and prestige afforded by the ESRC name and brand. Many organisers appreciated the value for their event of being associated with the ESRC and believed that the brand had helped them to publicise their events and to pull in support from colleagues and external contributors and/or partners.

“High profile event contributed towards securing the collaboration of the external partners including their willingness to contribute a significant amount of match funding.”

The simple fact of receiving financial support in the form of Festival funding was also a significant factor for many people and enabled engagement with groups who researchers may otherwise rarely reach through their research or teaching activities.

“Having funded space to speak to people outside of the academy – in the community co-production research I lean towards, this is vital.”

“It was great that the funding helped us run the event in London and for free for third sector participants. We would not have had that engagement otherwise.”
6. Marketing and promotion through website traffic, social media activity and media coverage

The ESRC Festival team relies on free promotion opportunities – there is no paid-for marketing to promote the Festival of Social Science’s programme of events. For the 2015 Festival, these opportunities included festival website traffic, social media activity, and media coverage, including cross-promotion through other ESRC publications and communications such as Society Now.23

6.1. ESRC Festival website traffic

The ESRC’s Digital Communications team provided statistics relating to website traffic for the period 1st January to 30th November 2015. This time period included the call for applications in March, the launch of the online programme in September and the launch and run of the Festival itself in early November.24 During this period, the Festival website was re-launched, so statistics have been taken from the ‘old’ site for the period 1st January to 17th September and from the ‘new’ site from 18th September to 30th November.

Summary data about traffic to the Festival website during this period are outlined below:

- 65,862 page views
- Average time on page: 1 minute 11 seconds
- Overall bounce rate25 68.8%.

As in previous years, traffic to the website peaked around periods of marketing activity. There was a peak between April and June when event organisers visited the website to download application forms and view guidance. From mid-September onwards, page views peaked again regularly until the end of the Festival week (14th November).

The total number of page views is slightly lower than in 2014 (75,288). The switch from the old to new website partly explains this drop. The statistics provided by the Digital Communications team show that the major difference between page views in 2014 and page views in 2015 is evident from August onwards. In 2014, the online programme was launched in mid-August which accounted for a peak in traffic. However, in 2015, the launch of the programme was delayed by around a month due to the concurrent launch of the new Festival website. It seems likely that the delay of the programme being launched online

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23 Society Now is the ESRC’s regular magazine about social science research. It is published three times a year and has a circulation of over 15,000. www.esrc.ac.uk/societynow
24 The analysis covers the Festival website only and does not account for traffic statistics for website developed by events themselves or their host organisations.
25 A bounce rate is the percentage of visitors to a website who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page.
accounted for fewer visits to the site during August and thus a lower total of page views overall for 2015.

Given that the use of the website was primarily to download documents and, during the Festival itself, to check events listings, the bounce rate of 68.8% is very respectable. A higher than average bounce rate for all web content is around 56% to 70%, but for news, blogs and events a bounce rate of 70% or higher is more usual.

6.2. Social media activity

Statistics provided by the Digital Team show there were 7,903 Twitter mentions using #ESRCFestival from January to November 2015, of which 4,816 were retweets. This represents a significant increase of 104% since 2014 when 3,881 tweets were sent. The potential overall reach of the Festival via Twitter is estimated to be around 2.7 million, with an average of 1,717 followers and 2,467 contributors each sending an average of 3.2 tweets. On average, the Festival team sent 4.6 tweets per week from January to November 2015, with an average of 13.5 per week from September to November.

Significant retweeters included:

- ESRC – 214 tweets - 844 retweets
- Understanding Society – 75 tweets – 63 retweets
- University of Sheffield Faculty of Social Sciences – 98 tweets – 168 retweets
- Fire_Editor – 37 tweets – 19 retweets
- NatCen – 32 tweets – 85 retweets.

Statistics relating to tweets sent during the Festival week of 7th to 14th November 2015 are as follows:

- Total tweets: around 4,300
- Potential reach: around 1.8 million (1 million in 2014)
- Contributors: around 1,400.

6.3. Press and media coverage

The Festival team provided a spreadsheet listing details of the press and media coverage recorded for the ESRC Festival between 4th November 2015 and 23rd January 2016. The proformas questionnaire to the 11 HEI partners also collected data on press and media coverage. Together these documents showed that the 2015 Festival had at least 161 media mentions credited to the Festival generally, or to specific event titles, a 30% decrease on 2014 coverage which cited 228 mentions. The statistics suggest that overall press and media coverage of the 2015 Festival had a potential reach of at least 13.8 million people.

Figure 11 shows the total recorded press and media coverage of the 2015 Festival by volume. Online coverage was the strongest with 121 reported articles, blogs or mentions,
reaching a potential audience of at least 8.1 million people. Key online articles included one in The Times Online and two in the Daily Mail Online, the latter with a reach of 2.2 million. All three articles related to events focusing on issues affecting children in Britain – childhood obesity and childhood mortality. Several online articles appeared on international news websites, reaching additional audiences in North America, Mexico and India.

The 2015 Festival continued to be well-reported by regional media with 22 press mentions (23 in 2014) and a few local radio and TV items. Coverage included articles in the following key and additional regionals: Press and Journal, Western Daily Press, Manchester Evening News, Yorkshire Post, The Herald (Plymouth), Daily Echo (Bournemouth), Aberdeen Evening Express, The Star (Sheffield). The audience reach for regional media items was around 600,000 people.

Figure 11: Press and media coverage of the 2015 Festival by volume

In contrast to previous years, the 2015 Festival achieved no national TV or radio coverage and limited national newspaper print coverage (mentions in The Sun, The Guardian, the Mirror and the Daily Star). This may be explained by two large news stories breaking during the week of the Festival\(^{26}\). It may also be that some national print and broadcast coverage was not picked up by ESRC’s media monitoring company at the time. Last year’s evaluation suggested that both improvements in coverage and the recording/monitoring of coverage were areas that needed attention for 2015. This recommendation still stands, although we are aware that ESRC has recently changed its media monitoring arrangements, so improvements for 2016 may already be in progress.

It may also be worth asking a specific question about examples of any media coverage in the 2016 organisers’ survey, since organisers may not routinely notify ESRC of media mentions relating to their events. In fact, the 2015 survey picked up one example where an organiser

\(^{26}\) UK: conviction of the murderer of Becky Watts; Worldwide: Paris terrorist attacks.
talked about ‘delivering three media interviews’ but gave no further information about these. The proformas questionnaire to the 11 block-funded HEI partners asked about media and social media coverage and their feedback has been included in the statistics for this section, but the question was not asked of event organisers more widely.

There were seven unsolicited comments received from organisers relating to press and media coverage and the support from ESRC. One person said she was ‘not impressed by ESRC media coverage’ but all other comments were largely positive.

“We also appreciate the interest from the ESRC press office in our event and were pleased they wish to use it as an example of the success of the Festival now the Festival is over. We look forward to seeing this come out!”

Two organisers mentioned the role that the trade press had played in helping to advertise their events and one person would have appreciated more local/regional media coverage, highlighting these media types as areas for further potential input in 2016.

In terms of cross-promotion and coverage of the Festival through ESRC publications, the Festival team reached an estimated 47,096 individuals and organisations through running items about the Festival in Society Now (14,096 copies circulated) and e-newsletters (approx. 8,000) and through local circulation by Festival organisers of the Festival flyer (25,000).

6.4. Estimated total reach of the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2015

The estimated total reach of the 2015 Festival was 16.6 million, which included:

- Website traffic - 65,862 page views
- Twitter reach - 2,700,000
- Press and media coverage - 13,800,000
- ESRC publications - 47,096.
7. Conclusions and recommendations

Using existing data collected by the ESRC Festival team, this report has presented feedback from 3,711 festival attendees and 115 event organisers. It has also provided an analysis of website traffic, social media activity and media coverage of the 2015 Festival.

With reference to this evidence, this final section will draw conclusions about the progress of the Festival in meeting its aims and objectives, and offer recommendations for the organisation and on-going evaluation of the Festival as whole, from 2016 onwards.

7.1. Progress of the 2015 ESRC Festival in meeting its key objectives

The key objectives of the Festival (in italics below) are examined against the evaluation evidence set out in this report. Objectives that have been met, or exceeded, are green, and not met are red. Where there was no evidence available to make an assessment, the objective is blue.

1. Audience numbers, types and geography
   a) Sustain audience attendance of 20,000
   b) A programme of at least 180 varied individual activities
   c) 60% of events are targeted at young people or the general public
   d) 40% of events aimed at business, policymakers and civil society groups and organisations
   e) Varied audience by age and ethnicity
   f) 80% of events held outside London with a good geographical spread across the UK
   g) 25% of events are targeted at young people under 20 years of age
   h) 60% of audience members are aged 20-40

The 2015 Festival reached a direct audience of over 25,500 young people and adults (exceeding its target of 20,000), through a programme of 219 separate, named events (exceeding its target of 180 events).

In terms of target audience, 70% of events were aimed at a general audience (including people of all ages and thus exceeding the target of 60%) and 30% were aimed at business, policymakers and civil society (target of 40% was not met). Seventeen per cent of events were targeted at audience members under 20 years of age (target of 25% was not met).

There was a good degree of variation in the age of the audience, with 67% aged under 40 and 40% aged 20-40 (target of 60% not met), highlighting the popularity of the Festival with younger people.

The Festival continues to reach a broad audience across the UK. Festival audiences almost exactly reflect national statistics in terms of ethnicity for the general population and the Festival has an excellent reach in terms of Chinese/Mixed and Other ethnic groups.
The 2015 Festival ran events across all ten regions of the UK: Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, North East England, North West England, East of England, Midlands, South West England, London, South East England. Ninety-four per cent of events were held outside London which exceeded the objective for 80%.

2. General audience learning and actions
   a) 80% of events improve audience knowledge about social sciences
   b) 75% of audience would use the knowledge they gained from the event in their work or study

Of the 2,962 attendees who responded to the survey, 1,277 (43%) described themselves as members of the general public. Of these, 92% said they had a better understanding of the topic (exceeding the target of 80%) of the event and 67% would use the knowledge gained in their work or studies (target of 75% not met).

3. Business and knowledge exchange
   a) 80% of attendees learned new facts that they can apply to their area of expertise
   b) 80% of attendees recognise the importance of public investment in social sciences and its contribution to economic, cultural and societal well-being following the event

Fifty-four per cent (n=1,596) of attendee survey respondents said they had attended the Festival in a professional capacity. Of these, 92% had learned new facts they could apply to their areas of expertise (exceeding the target of 80%) and 76% were more aware of the social sciences and the benefits to society (target of 80% not met).

4. Young people
   a) 80% of young people intend to use what they have learnt or find out more about the topic
   b) 80% of young people are inspired to study and learn about social sciences
   c) 80% of young people will feel they have learnt something new
   d) 80% of teachers will use what they have learnt in the classroom

Of the 749 young people who completed attendees’ questionnaires, 636 (85%) were intending to use what they had learnt at the Festival in their work or studies (exceeding the target of 80%), and 577 (77%) intended to find out more about the topic. A further 77% (n=576) said they wanted to learn more about the social sciences (target of 80% not met) and 91% (n=684) had a better understanding of the topic of the event they had attended.

No questions were asked in either survey tool relating to whether young people had learnt something new, or whether teachers would use what they had learnt in the classroom, so it was not possible to assess these objectives.

5. Event organisers
   a) At least 40% of events are run by new event organisers
   b) At least 40% of participating event organisers are not currently funded by the ESRC
c) At least 450 social science researchers engage with non-academic audiences
d) All events offer two-way engagement activities

Findings from the 115 event organisers who responded to the organisers’ survey showed that 62% had never run a Festival event before (exceeding the target of 40%) and at least 645 social science researchers had engaged with non-academic audiences (exceeding the target of 450) through their events. However, no evidence was available to ascertain whether the events offered two-way engagement activities, or whether event organisers were currently funded by the ESRC: these questions were not included in the survey and details were not available from other data sources provided.

6. Brand support and awareness

a) Promote the Festival to over 800,000 individuals/organisations through publicity material, including Society Now, the Festival flyer and via social media
b) 50% of audience aware that the event was part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science
c) 50% of audience new to the ESRC and the work of social science
d) Raise awareness of ESRC’s 50th Anniversary using 50th branding where possible

The Festival team promoted the Festival via Society Now (14,096 copies circulated), the flyer (25,000 copies distributed to local organisers), ESRC e-newsletters (approx. 8,000) and Twitter (reach of 2.7 million), giving a potential overall promotional reach of 2,747,096 individuals and organisations, well in excess of the target reach of 800,000.

In terms of objective 6b, 53% of general attendees (n=1,863) and 29% of young attendees (n=220) were aware that the event was part of the Festival of Social Sciences. This represents 56% across the whole sample of 3,711 respondents, indicating this objective was achieved. A further 81% of young people attending Festival events were new to the ESRC and social sciences (objective 6c), but unfortunately this question appears to have been omitted from the general attendees’ questionnaire, so no data are available to assess the objective in full.

The Festival team supplied 50th branding materials to organisers, but there was no information available in the data sources to provide an assessment of whether these helped to raise awareness of the ESRC’s 50th Anniversary.

7. New local festivals

a) To partner with at least four new HEIs
b) Achieve 100% matched funding (cash or in-kind from HEI partners/sponsors) for block funding awarded to HEIs for the local Festivals

The number of Festival partners funded through block grants has risen by four, from seven in 2014, to 11 in 2015. All 11 HEIs were able to leverage significant additional resources for supporting their Festival events in terms of cash contributions or in-kind support (catering, venue, transport, staff time, speaker/volunteer time, etc.). In total around 376% of
leveraged funding was achieved – far surpassing the target for 100% matched funding for block-funded HEI partners.

8. Festival website

   a) The website receives a 20% increase in hits from the previous year (75,288 in 2014)

For the period 1st January to 30th November 2015, the total number of page views was 65,862, slightly less than for the same period in 2014 (75,288). The drop in traffic is probably due to the delay of the launch of the online programme (mid-September in 2015, as opposed to mid-August in 2014).

9. Press and media

   a) Press coverage is achieved across the national and regional media for the week and individual events, with at least 300 mentions in the print media

   b) Achieve international press coverage (no predetermined volume)

   c) Coverage is achieved in two national newspapers, twice on TV, and twice on the radio

   d) Receive social media coverage, to include 1,500 twitter mentions, including 100 retweets.

The 2015 Festival continued to be well-reported by regional media with 22 press mentions (23 in 2014) and a few local radio and TV items. The 2015 Festival did not appear to achieve any national TV or radio coverage and had limited national newspaper print coverage. This may be explained by two large news stories breaking during the week of the Festival, and the possibility that some national print and broadcast coverage was not picked up through media monitoring activities.

In contrast, online coverage was strong, with 121 articles, blogs or mentions, reaching a potential UK audience of at least 8.1 million people and including some international coverage on news websites in North America, Mexico and India.

7.2. Recommendations for the 2016 Festival of Social Science

1. Audience numbers, types and geography

   • Attract a higher proportion of business, policy and civil society audiences - 30% attended Festival events in 2015; the target was 40%.

   • Attract more young people under 20 years of age - 17% of young people attended Festival events in 2015; the target was 25%.

   • Attract more young people aged 20-40 – 39% attended events in 2015; the target was 60%.

   • Monitor the reduction in attendance by older people aged 60+ and consider how best to promote the Festival to this group if the decline continues.

   • Offer more events in Wales (all of Wales, but especially North Wales) and the East of England.
2. **Brand support and awareness**

- Continue to work with event organisers to ensure effective promotion of the link between the ESRC (as manager/funder) and the Festival of Social Sciences.
- Consider additional marketing activities to target specific age groups such as older people aged 60+ and young people under 20.
- Consider more local/regional promotion, in partnership with event organisers and Festival partner HEIs.
- Ensure the 2016 Festival flyer contains sufficient and accurate details to be useful and that the flyer and other marketing are distributed sufficiently early to have an impact on local promotion of the Festival.

3. **Website, social media and media**

- Avoid delays in launching the online programme of events for the 2016 Festival.
- Continue to monitor and review the accessibility and navigability of the site, particularly in terms of events listings.
- Consider more active involvement on Twitter (particularly retweeting tweets from event organisers) by the Festival team and ESRC Press Office in the run-up and during the Festival week.
- Review the overall media strategy and coverage of the 2015 Festival, with support from the ESRC Press Office and Digital Communications team.
- Review the effectiveness of media monitoring for the 2016 Festival, including asking event organisers to report media mentions via a specific survey question about this.

4. **Evaluation**

- Ensure that the 2016 surveys of organisers, general attendees and young attendees include questions linked directly to the objectives of the Festival so that all essential data are collected for evaluation purposes.
- Consider additional formats or methods for seeking feedback from children, young people and parents, and from those who may not wish to complete evaluation forms at the end of an event.
- Add a free text field or ‘other’ option alongside ‘male’ and ‘female for people to self-identify their gender.
- Consider reviewing the survey tools slightly, to iron out some existing inconsistencies and a few unnecessary questions.
Concluding comments

The ESRC Festival of Social Science continues to be a cost-effective means of encouraging, supporting and creating opportunities for social science researchers to engage with non-academic audiences. Through 243 events, held across 38 UK towns and cities, the 2015 Festival attracted 25,500 young people and adults. The 2015 Festival offered exceptional value for money and delivered a range of significant and positive outcomes for attendees and organisers.
Annex A  Questionnaire for attendees

Attendee Questionnaire
7-14 November 2015

We constantly strive to improve the relevance and quality of the ESRC Festival of Social Science and its events. By completing this feedback form you will help to inform the development of future activities.

Event attended: ______________________________________

1. Age group
   □ under 20    □ 20’s    □ 30’s    □ 40’s    □ 50’s    □ 60 or over

2. Gender
   □ Male    □ Female    □ Other

3. Ethnicity
   □ White British    □ Asian / Asian British    □ Black/Black British    □ Chinese
   □ White other    □ Mixed    □ Other

4. Did you attend this event in a professional capacity, or as a member of the general public?
   □ In a professional capacity    □ As a member of the general public

5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

   I am more aware of the social sciences and the benefits to society
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

   I have a better understanding of the topic of the event
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

   I will find out more about the topic of the event
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

   I will use knowledge gained from event in my work/studies
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

   I will pass the information from the event to others
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

   I intend to learn more about social science
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

   I was aware the event was part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

   I now know more about ESRC and its work
   □ Agree    □ Disagree

6. How would you rate the event according to the following criteria?

   Interesting
   □ Very    □ Fairly    □ Neutral    □ Not

   Enjoyable
   □ Very    □ Fairly    □ Neutral    □ Not

   Educational
   □ Very    □ Fairly    □ Neutral    □ Not

   Relevant to you
   □ Very    □ Fairly    □ Neutral    □ Not

   Accessible / understandable
   □ Very    □ Fairly    □ Neutral    □ Not

8. Your comments or suggestions on this event or the Festival as a whole.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Please return this questionnaire to the event organiser, or send it (by 1 December) to:
Festival of Social Science, ESRC, Portobello House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1LJ.
Annex B Questionnaire for young attendees

Young Person Questionnaire
7-14 November 2015

We constantly work to improve the ESRC Festival of Social Science and its events. Please help us to do this by answering the following questions.

Event attended: ____________________________________________________________

1. Gender
   □ Male  □ Female

2. Ethnicity
   □ White British  □ Asian / Asian British  □ Black/Black British  □ Chinese
   □ White other  □ Mixed  □ Other

3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

   Agree  Disagree
   □ I am more aware of the social sciences and the benefits to society
   □ I have a better understanding of the topic of the event
   □ I will find out more about the topic of the event
   □ I will use knowledge gained from event in my work/studies
   □ I will pass the information from the event to others
   □ I intend to learn more about social science
   □ I had heard of the ESRC Festival of Social Science before this event
   □ I was aware the event was part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science
   □ I now know more about ESRC and its work

4. Was the event?

   Interesting  Very  Fairly  Okay  Not
   □  □  □  □
   Enjoyable  □  □  □  □
   Educational  □  □  □  □
   Relevant to you  □  □  □  □
   Accessible / understandable  □  □  □  □

5. Your comments or suggestions on this event or the Festival as a whole.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Please return this questionnaire to the event organiser, or send it (by 1 December) to:
Sue Haystock, Festival of Social Science, ESRC, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1UJ.
Annex C  Questionnaire for organisers

Festival organisers 2015 - feedback survey

About your event

* 1. Event title:

* 2. How many people attended the event?

* 3. Was the size of your audience...?

* 4. What were the objectives of your event? (choose up to three)

   Objective
   - Main objective
   - Secondary objective
   - Additional objective

* 5. Have you organised an ESRC Festival of Social Science event before?
### Festival organisers 2015 - feedback survey

**Past Festival events**

* 6. How effective was this event in comparison with other ESRC Festival events you have run, in terms of the following aspects?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More effective</th>
<th>The same</th>
<th>Less effective</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of the audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall quality of the event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall audience reaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Festival organisers 2015 - feedback survey

#### Event evaluation

**7. Which groups did you target your event towards?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary target</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary target</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional target</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**8. How effective do you feel the following forms of promotion were in marketing your event?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Fairly</th>
<th>Not very</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
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<td>Letter of invitation</td>
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<td>The ESRC Festival flyer</td>
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<td>The ESRC Festival website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local or university website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Press article or ‘what’s on’ listing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>

**9. Please indicate how satisfied you have been with each of the following:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Fairly</th>
<th>Not very</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Festival website</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Festival flyer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branding materials</td>
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</table>
10. Is there anything we could have done to better support you in the planning, promotion or running of your event?
Festival organisers 2015 - feedback survey

And finally...

11. What did you gain by being part of the Festival of Social Science? (check all that apply)

☐ Developed skills
☐ Personal enjoyment
☐ Used research findings
☐ tested an idea or developed links with a non-academic
☐ tested an idea or developed links with a social scientist
☐ Other (please specify)

12. Would you consider running another Festival of Social Science event in the future?

☐

13. What do you perceive to be the main benefits of taking part in the ESRC Festival of Social Science?

☐

14. Do you have any comments or suggestions on how the Festival could be improved, changed and developed?

☐