

Festival of Social Science 2012:

An investigation into the outcomes and impact of the Festival from the perspective of organisers

**A report for the ESRC
July 2014**

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Summary

The purpose of this research was two-fold: to capture information about the outcomes and impact of the ESRC's Festival of Social Science 2012; and to trial a method for collecting retrospective data from organisers of Festival events. Data were collected from organisers only; attendees were not asked to contribute feedback. An online survey was used to explore and document the outcomes and impact of the Festival from the perspective of event organisers.

The online survey was distributed directly by the ESRC to 170 organiser contacts, via an emailed web-link. The survey was available for eight weeks, from 21 October to 13 December 2013. After one reminder, a total of 40 completed survey responses were received, giving a response rate of 24 per cent.

Profile of organisers responding to the survey

- Almost all of the organisers responding to the survey (n=37) were university staff, with staff from three voluntary sector organisations also submitting survey responses.
- For 55 per cent of the organisers, the 2012 event was the first time they had taken part in an ESRC Festival of Social Science. Forty-five per cent (n=18) had prior experience of organising ESRC Festival events: half of these (n=9) had organised one previous event, five had organised two to four previous events, whilst three had organised five or more Festival events prior to 2012. Fifty-five per cent (n=22) were taking part in the 2013 Festival.

Support to run 2012 Festival events

- Two-thirds of organisers had received additional support from their own organisations to put on their 2012 Festival event. Mostly, this support was in terms of staff time, but also included the provision of printing, stationery, publicity, advertising, venue hire, refreshments, audio-visual and other technical input. Support offered was almost exclusively in-kind. It was rare for organisations to offer additional financial assistance.
- One-third of organisers reported receiving in-kind support from external contributors or outside organisations, again mostly in the form of staff time.

Organisers' experience of advice and support available from the ESRC

- The three areas where organisers were most likely to seek direct advice and support from the ESRC were: using identity and branding materials (90 per cent, n=36); evaluating events and seeking feedback from audience members (83 per cent, n=33); promoting and marketing events (60 per cent, n=24).

- Although most organisers felt that the advice/support from the ESRC in response to these three areas confirmed what they already knew, around a quarter said that it had enabled them to learn something new or improve their current practice. A small number also indicated that they had shared their learning and/or good practice with others.
- Many other types of advice and support available from the ESRC were not well-used by organisers. The least-used service was the external conference firm: just four organisers out of 40 responding to the online survey said they had used it, and of these, three felt the advice/support confirmed what they already knew.

Benefits of being part of an ESRC-branded event

- Ninety per cent (n=36) of organisers felt that the ESRC brand provided internal and external credibility and a further 75 per cent (n=30) agreed that the ESRC logo helped them gain publicity for their events.
- Others indicated that the ESRC branding of their event was an important factor in engaging external contributors, getting buy-in from colleagues and pulling in external support or support-in kind from their own organisations.

Primary objectives for running a 2012 Festival event and the extent to which these were achieved

- The most popular primary objectives for running events were: to increase awareness and understanding of a specific social science subject or topic; to communicate information about their own organisation/research group and its work; to provide a forum for networking; and to introduce social science to new audiences.
- There were fewer examples of events which aimed specifically to encourage greater participation in social science by young people, or to communicate information about the ESRC and its work.
- Thirty-nine of the 40 organisers who responded to the survey felt that they had fully or partly achieved the objectives they had set for their 2012 Festival events. Just one organiser felt that one of his event's key objectives had not been achieved.

Impact on relationships with external contributors or attendees

- Three-quarters of organisers felt that their events had helped to create new relationships, or to strengthen existing relationships with external contributors and attendees.
- One fifth described other outcomes in this area such as working together on new research applications, the involvement of organisers in external groups and working parties, and follow-on publications and symposia. In a few cases, the events also appeared to act as catalysts for further networking and social media exposure in

relation to the topic, and even as a means for recruiting participants for future research studies.

Impact on development of engagement skills

- Eighty-eight per cent (n=35) of organisers felt that their 2012 Festival event had provided a supportive environment in which to develop and practise skills in organising engagement events.
- Around 60 per cent said that the event had provided an opportunity to try out new resources, or new ways of communicating with non-academic audiences. In addition, about two-thirds of organisers said they had used information gained from, or developed for, the 2012 Festival event to inform the content and delivery of other engagement events.
- Fewer organisers (33%) reported using the event as a platform for increased media coverage of a social science issue or topic, or had made resources relating to the event available online after the 2012 Festival.
- A number of organisers highlighted the role that the 2012 Festival played in providing a supportive environment for early-career researchers, or post-graduate research students, to develop engagement skills.

Impact on research and teaching

- Seventy per cent of organisers indicated that their 2012 Festival event had provided a chance to explore the relationship between research and practice. For 60 per cent, the events had also enabled organisers to get feedback about the actual, or likely impact of their research on non-academic audiences.
- Around half of the organisers said that their events had generated new research questions or ideas for further research, whilst a quarter felt events had precipitated the development of new research funding applications. In eight cases (20 per cent) the events themselves had provided opportunities to collect primary data from participants in relation to a specific research question or topic.
- One-third of organisers had used the 2012 Festival as an opportunity to trial existing research and teaching materials, or to develop new ones, and to inform teaching and other work with students.
- A few organisers had referred to the event as part of an impact case study for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014)¹.

¹ <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

Impact on organisers' relationships within their own organisations

- Three-quarters of organisers said that the event had helped to raise the profile of their research internally. Around half of organisers also felt the event had helped to raise their own personal profile or had brought about new connections with other staff within their own organisation.
- A few organisers noted other outcomes in this area including increased engagement with post-graduate students and early-career academics and new options for collaborative research and teaching with other colleagues.

The contribution of the 2012 Festival to the field of social science engagement

- Two-thirds of organisers responding to the online survey described their 2012 Festival event as an important part of their on-going social science engagement strategy and half explained that as such, they applied to take part in the ESRC Festival every year. Just a quarter of organisers reported having taken part in other science or social science festivals or events in the past two years.
- These findings indicate that for the majority of organisations taking part in the 2012 Festival, this was their main/only form of engagement work and highlights the essential contribution the ESRC Festival is making to the field of social science engagement across the UK.

How might the ESRC continue to document, describe and understand the outcomes and impact of events funded by the Festival of Social Science?

The online survey trialled by this research appears to offer an effective and low-cost method for collecting mainly quantitative data about the outcomes and impact of events funded by the Festival of Social Science. However, the ESRC may wish to consider a broader on-going evaluation framework which could include additional qualitative work to capture the details of 'impact stories', by paying attention to the processes and contexts that led to the impact, as well as the actual details of the impact/outcome itself. It could also be helpful to obtain feedback from attendees were possible.

This research and the previous review of the Festival as a whole² have highlighted that there is an appetite for sharing learning and good practice in doing engagement work. The ESRC may wish to consider its role in supporting networking events amongst those taking part in the Festival and, with the relevant consents, such events may themselves provide opportunities for capturing further qualitative data on outcomes and impacts.

² Wilkinson, C. (2012) The ESRC Festival of Social Science: Learning and Success. http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Festival%20of%20Social%20Science_Learning%20and%20success_tcm8-24004.pdf

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1. Context for the research

The ESRC Festival of Social Science takes place 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. Event organisers can apply for up to £2,000 sponsorship for their event. In 2012, 181 events were held across 40 different UK towns and cities, attracting over 20,500 people to the Festival.

The aims of the 2012 Festival were:

- To encourage, support and create the opportunity for social science researchers to engage with a non-academic audience
- To promote and increase awareness of the social sciences and ESRC's research
- To promote and increase awareness of the contributions the social sciences make to the wellbeing and the economy of the UK society
- To enable the public to engage with social science research
- To engage with teachers and young people to raise their awareness of the social sciences.

Each year the ESRC conduct their own evaluation of the Festival to measure its success against these aims and to highlight improvements that can be made. The evaluation of the Festival 2012³ was conducted using data from post-event questionnaires completed by event organisers and attendees, alongside statistics on web traffic, social media tweets, media coverage and qualitative feedback. The Communication Team produce their own annual evaluation report which presents key findings from the post-event questionnaires, with a focus on the delivery process, event type and location, attendee numbers and profile, objectives for organising an event, motivations for attending an event, impact of the event on attendees' knowledge, awareness and interest of/in social science research and their expected use of event-related-information.

In 2012, the ESRC commissioned an external review⁴ of the outcomes and successes of previous Festivals (2006-2010) and lessons learned from perspectives of event organisers and attendees. Through survey work and qualitative interviews, this review noted a number of outcomes for both event organisers and event attendees. Outcomes reported by organisers included:

- New or developed contact with attendees after the event
- New or developed contact with organisations involved in the event
- New or developed contact with academics who had seen or heard about the event
- More work with others on public engagement activities

³ ESRC (2012) ESRC Festival of Social Science: 2012 Evaluation.

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Festival%20of%20social%20science%20Evaluation%202012_tcm8-27942.pdf

⁴ Wilkinson, C. (2012) The ESRC Festival of Social Science: Learning and Success.

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Festival%20of%20Social%20Science_Learning%20and%20success_tcm8-24004.pdf

- Work with others on research funding applications.

Attendees of Festival events also noted a number of significant outcomes, which included:

- Use of information from events in policy or business work
- Use of information from events in personal activities (eg environmental behaviour, healthcare decisions, etc)
- Use of information from events in own academic work/studies/teaching
- Passed the information from the events to colleagues/friends or others
- Made further contact with people met at the events
- Found out more about the topic covered at the events
- Found out more about the ESRC (eg visited website, subscribed to Society Now, etc).

The organisers and attendees surveyed for both the annual evaluation of the Festival 2012 and the review of pre-2012 Festivals were able to identify some personal, professional and organisational impacts and there was evidence that some organisers use the continuity of the Festival to build up the impact of their events over time. The types of impacts noted for both organisers and attendees included:

- Increased knowledge and understanding of a topic area – for both attendees through participation and by organisers by engaging with attendees and capturing new research data
- Raised awareness of academic research and the ESRC amongst non-academics, including the media
- Increased conceptual development of the relationship between research and practice
- Increased credibility and kudos for the topic and/or event organiser within own institution, leading to other professional and organisational opportunities.
- Improved skills and confidence for engaging with practitioners
- Development of new research through new collaborations and partnerships
- Development of connections with new audience types and new groups of practitioners.

The review recommended that the ESRC should build on the current evidence base relating to the benefits of the Festival by setting up a broader evaluation framework which includes regular collection of data on the outcomes and impact of events funded by the Festival. In particular the review suggested that it would be helpful to capture the learning and outcomes of individual events for attendees and organisers six to twelve months after the Festival. It also recommended that further qualitative work would be beneficial to explore the outcomes of the Festival on attendees in more detail, as well as through more extensive quantitative data collection. Further discussion with ESRC staff revealed that they wished to consider the effects and consequences of engagement with wider audiences which may only appear following a longer period of time and reflection.

In order to investigate these issues further, the ESRC commissioned an online survey to explore and document the outcomes and impact of the Festival 2012, from the perspective

of organisers. A survey tool was developed, using Limesurvey, which built on existing questions used for the annual evaluation and the findings of the 2012 review (see Appendix A for a copy of the questions used in the online survey). It was distributed directly by the ESRC to 170 organiser contacts, via an emailed web-link and was available for eight weeks, from 21 October to 13 December 2013. After one reminder, a total of 40 completed survey responses were received, giving a response rate of 24 per cent⁵. The survey responses were downloaded from Limesurvey to Excel for analysis.

This report presents the findings of the survey and makes recommendations about how an on-going evaluation framework might best be developed to continue to document, describe and understand the outcomes and impact of events funded by the ESRC's Festival of Social Science.

⁵ Unless stated otherwise, individual percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. In some cases this means that percentages will sum to more or less than 100.

2. Findings

2.1. Profile of organisers responding to the survey

We received 40 fully completed responses to the online survey, indicative of a 24 per cent response rate. The main respondents were university staff (n=37), with staff from three voluntary sector organisations submitting survey responses.

In terms of their link with the ESRC, 43 per cent (n=17) of organisers were ESRC-funded grant holders or postgraduate students, 20 per cent (n=8) were members of staff at ESRC-funded investments, whilst 38 per cent (n=15) were representing a non-ESRC funded organisation.

For 55 per cent (n=22) of organisers responding to the survey, the 2012 Festival event was the first time they had taken part in an ESRC Festival of Social Science. Forty-five per cent (n=18) of respondents, however, had prior experience of organising ESRC Festival events: half of these (n=9) had organised one previous event, five had organised two to four previous events, whilst three had organised five or more Festival events prior to 2012. Fifty-five per cent (n=22) were taking part in the 2013 Festival.

2.2. Support to run 2012 Festival events

Although event organisers can apply for up to £2,000 sponsorship from the ESRC for their event, it is recognised that actual costs may be higher and that support 'in-kind', for example in the form of staff time and expertise, is essential to running a successful Festival event. We asked organisers to tell us whether they had received cash or in-kind support from (a) their own organisations, and (b) other, external contributors or outside organisations. We also asked them to tell us more about their experiences of support from the ESRC.

Support from own organisations

Regarding cash or in-kind support from their own organisations, 68 per cent (n=27) of respondents reported that they had received additional support, whilst 32 per cent (n=13) had not. Of those 27 who had received support, the majority (n=23) cited 'staff time' as the key form of support offered. In addition, printing, stationery, publicity, advertising, audio-visual and other technical input were cited by around two-thirds of these respondents as ways in which their own organisations had supported the 2012 Festival. A few organisations provided free venue hire (n=9) or refreshments (n=7) and one university had offered a cash sum towards travel and subsistence for external speakers.

Support from external contributors or outside organisations

Thirty-three per cent (n=13) of respondents said that external contributors or outside organisations had supported their 2012 Festival event in specific ways. For these 13 respondents, the most frequently cited form of in-kind support was ‘staff time’ (n=10). Additional forms of external support included the provision of free venue hire (n=5), printing, stationery, publicity, advertising, audio-visual and other technical input (n=7), and refreshments (n=3). Four organisers had received support from two external contributors, with staff time again being cited as the key form of additional support offered.

Support from the ESRC

The ESRC provides a range of communications advice and support for organisers of Festival events. Some of this is available as online resources, whilst other advice and support is provided directly to organisers by phone or email. We asked organisers to say which forms of advice or support they had used (from a list of 11 types) to help them run their 2012 Festival event, and to indicate how helpful this advice/support had been for them. The results are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Organisers’ experience of communications advice/support available from ESRC



The three key areas where organisers were most likely to seek ESRC advice and support were:

- Using ESRC and Festival identity and branding materials (90 per cent, n=36)
- Evaluating their events and seeking feedback from audience members (83 per cent, n=33)
- Promoting and marketing their events (60 per cent, n=24).

Although most organisers felt that the advice/support in response to these issues confirmed what they already knew, around a quarter said that it had enabled them to learn something new or improve their current practice. A small number also indicated that they had shared their learning and/or good practice in this area with others.

Consistent with the ESRC's own evaluation of the 2012 Festival⁶, support and advice from the external conference firm (Vista Communications) was the least used service: just four organisers out of 40 responding to the online survey said they had used it, and of these, three felt the advice/support confirmed what they already knew.

Despite their low uptake of most of the other forms of advice and support on offer from the ESRC, many organisers reported they had learnt something new and in several cases this learning had been shared with others. We asked a separate question at the end of the survey to gauge organisers' interest in sharing their learning and good practice around engagement (e.g. via networking events or online fora): the vast majority (n=36) said they would be interested to do so, either now or in the future. This is clearly an area where organisers might benefit from further input, or where the ESRC might want to take a lead in the future.

Overall, organisers were very positive about the ways in which ESRC staff support Festival events and many provided unprompted comments to this effect in other sections of the survey, some of which are set out below:

"I think this is a really good scheme - the funding and criteria are accessible, which helps academics experiment with and become initiated in engagement, which is hugely important."

"Thank you for the support."

"The process has been very straightforward. Many funding processes are far too complex, but this one has been well organised, and the communication has been good."

"I would like to thank to the team for their warm and consistent help. I think the ESRC Festival of Social Science is a great opportunity to bring the social sciences to young people. It is a shame however that following such events there is no further research funding opportunities to expand the learning and ideas that come out of this experience."

⁶ ESRC (2012) ESRC Festival of Social Science: 2012 Evaluation.

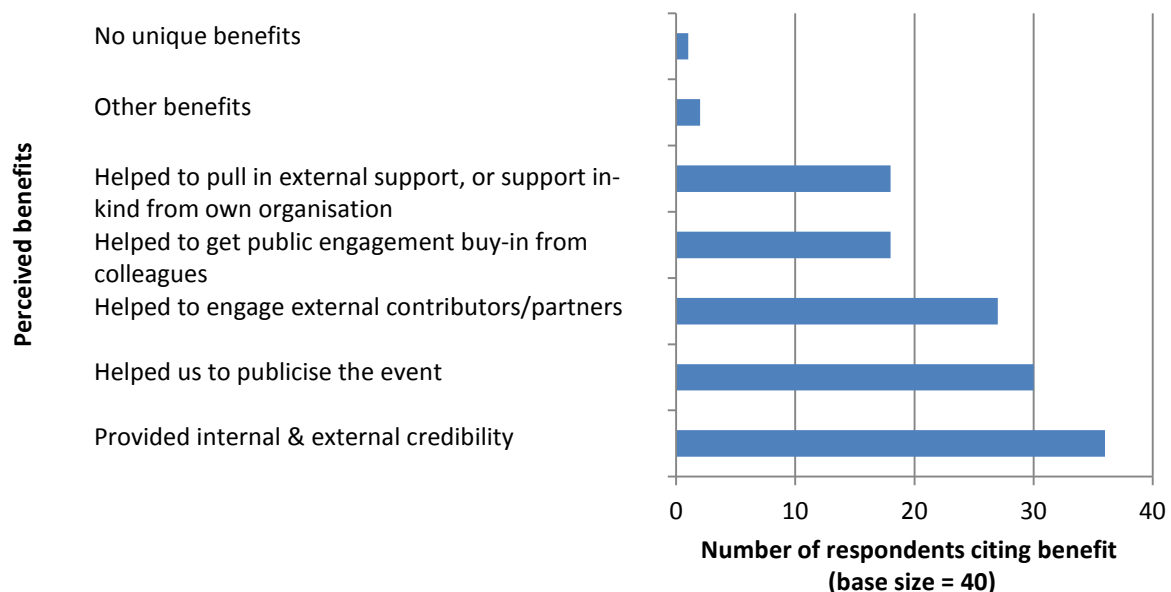
Benefits of being part of an ESRC-branded event

As noted above, ESRC branding materials were well-used by event organisers. We also asked organisers if there were any specific benefits associated with organising an ESRC-branded event as part of the 2012 Festival of Social Science. Only one person said there were none. For almost all organisers, running an event that was part of a wider ESRC initiative had a range of significant benefits, alluded to in the quotation below, and illustrated by Figure 2.

“Being under the ESRC banner reinforces that Social Science is at the heart of the public engagement exercise and the event is part of a national series of events. Together this gave greater weight to the event.”

Ninety per cent (n=36) of organisers felt that the ESRC brand provided internal and external credibility and a further 75 per cent (n=30) agreed that the ESRC logo helped them to publicise their event. Others indicated that the ESRC branding of their event was an important factor in engaging external contributors, getting buy-in from colleagues and pulling in external support or support-in kind from their own organisations.

Figure 2: Benefits of being part of an ESRC-branded event



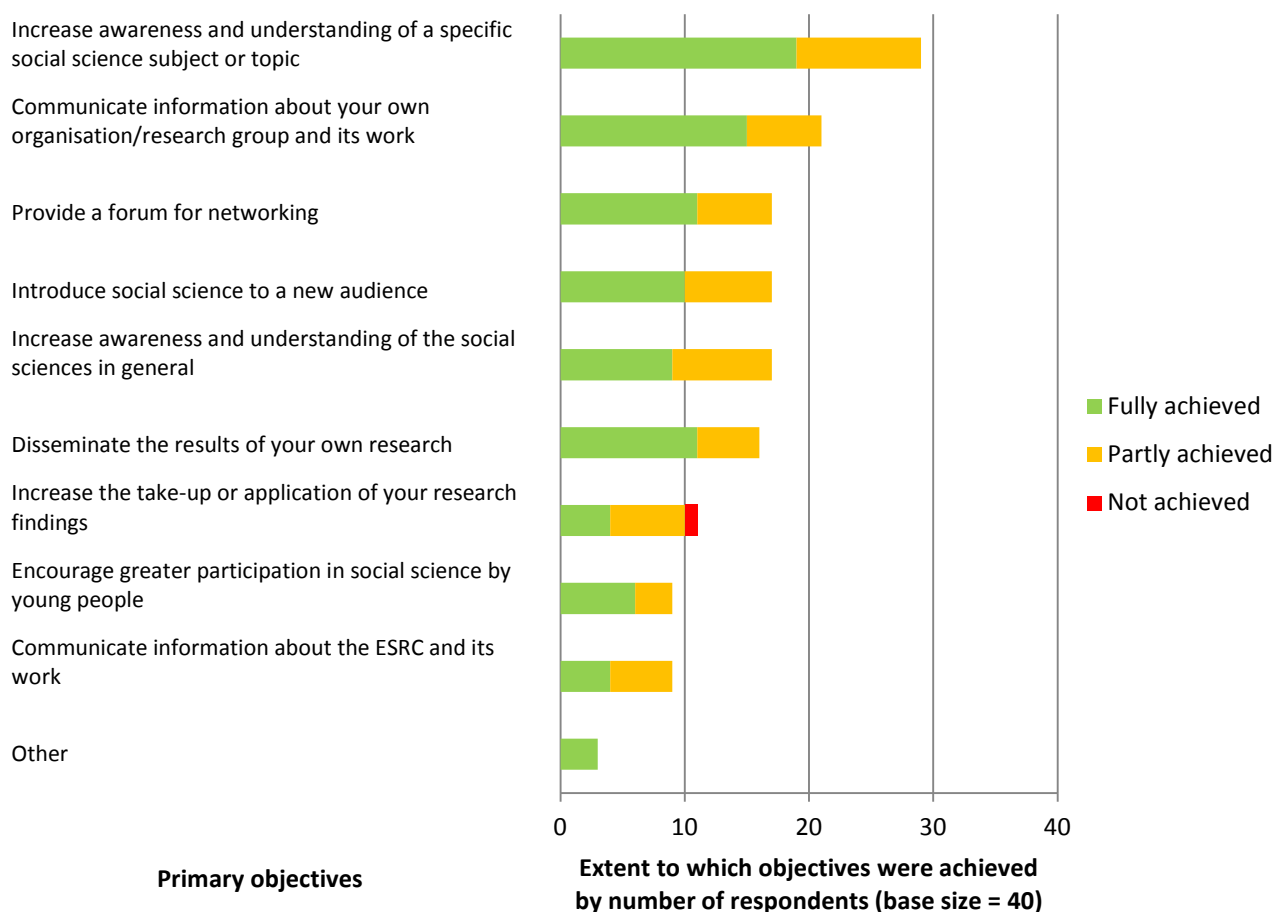
2.3. Primary objectives for running a 2012 Festival event and the extent to which these were achieved

Organisers were asked to state the primary objectives of their 2012 Festival events. They were given a list of nine options (plus ‘other’) and asked to tick all that applied. They were also asked to indicate whether these objectives had been ‘fully achieved’, ‘partly achieved’ or ‘not achieved’, or if unsure, to choose ‘don’t know’. Figure 3 presents the findings relating to this area of the survey.

Overall, 39 of the 40 organisers who responded to the survey felt that they had fully or partly achieved the objectives they had set for their 2012 Festival events. Figure 3 shows that nearly three-quarters (73 per cent, n=29) of organisers had hoped that their events would increase awareness and understanding of a specific social science subject or topic, and that in all cases this objective had been fully achieved (n=19) or partly achieved (n=10). The ESRC’s own evaluation of the 2012 Festival⁷ also found that this objective was the most popular for event organisers.

“The event was very successful. We conducted an evaluation of the event and participants stated that they had gained knowledge and understanding of the topic and the research project. For the majority of participants, who live in an area of socio-economic deprivation, this was the first time they had attended a research dissemination event.”

Figure 3: Primary objectives of 2012 Festival events and the extent to which objectives were achieved



Similarly, the second most frequently cited objective in our survey (to communicate information about own organisation/research group and its work - 53 per cent, n=21), was

⁷ ESRC (2012) ESRC Festival of Social Science: 2012 Evaluation

also the second most popular in the ESRC's own evaluation; and in all cases this objective was fully achieved (n=15) or partly achieved (n=6).

“The event was aimed at the general public, specifically those interested in folk music. In later informal feedback, most people that had attended had no prior knowledge of the ESRC or the work carried out by [our research centre] in that they didn't know either existed, therefore the event succeeded in introducing them to both.”

Organisers were also keen for their events both to provide a forum for networking (43 per cent, n=17) and to introduce social science to new audiences (43 per cent, n=17). The fact that in most cases both these objectives were fully achieved demonstrates the power of the Festival to promote discussion of social science topics amongst non-academic audiences. This was an outcome that many organisers highlighted in their survey responses as the following quotations show:

“This was a really well attended event with some great opportunities for networking and encouragement for people to connect together through our blog. Many of the participants have now attended our 2013 event and other related events throughout the year. The presentation was focused on work in progress rather than disseminating a set of findings.”

“We had a broad audience of non-specialists of all ages including a handful of sixth form students.”

However, in terms of reaching new audiences, several organisers noted the importance of choosing a venue for the event that was perceived as local, or community-based, rather than using a university-owned building.

“The fact that the event was held on the University campus possibly impacted on its ability to attract new audiences. This aspect was only partly successful with the majority of the audience being drawn from the university student body as well as its broader network.”

There were fewer examples of events which aimed specifically to encourage greater participation in social science by young people (23 per cent, n=9), or to communicate information about the ESRC and its work (23 per cent, n=9), although the event described below appeared to achieve both these aims very successfully:

“This was an interactive event which fully engaged year 12 pupils in thinking about the human impacts of climate change, so it certainly raised their awareness and understanding of those issues. We made a point of explaining about the ESRC Festival of Social Science in our introduction to the event and Year 12 pupils also took away an ESRC Festival of Social Science cloth bag which certainly raised their awareness of the organisation.”

A few organisers highlighted the importance of engaging 'gate-keepers' (teachers, parents, youth workers) as well as young people themselves, and finding ways to make social science accessible and meaningful to young people. These issues, and others, may warrant further attention and support for organisers hoping to encourage local children and young people to take part in social science events in the future.

“The interactive day of role play and serious discussion worked well and produced rich and varied debate and discussion. The on-going issue is about recruiting young people and

engaging youth workers, teachers etc as gatekeepers. They also need 'awareness-raising' to why bother involve young people in such events."

It is notable that only one organiser, out of the 40 responding to the survey, felt that one of his event's key objectives had not been achieved.

"We were keen to have policymakers attend in order to bring academic research and practice together. Unfortunately, the majority of people from the policy world who had replied to say they would attend did not. As a result, the audience was largely from the research community, which, while providing a forum for discussion of work, was only a secondary aim for the event."

The key objective, of increasing the take-up or application of research findings was also more difficult for other organisers to fully achieve through their Festival events. This may be due to the inherent difficulty of gauging the longer-term impact of findings on participants who may only have limited contact with organisers after they have attended a Festival event. As two organisers explained:

"The event was successful in getting ordinary people interested in and involved in their communities. The effects of this on these ordinary people are difficult to measure but it has helped me coordinate with community activists in future endeavours."

"The event brought together practitioners from a range of services involved with migrant groups - on the day, engagement in activities and with the research presented was clear, however, the impact of the learning on their practice and the long-term sustainability of the networks developed on the day were not assessed."

Several organisers, however, were able to give examples of immediate take-up or application of their research by external attendees as the following quotations show:

"A local transport company Training Officer acknowledged the need to develop more guidance on use of guide dogs and aspects of disability in their training with bus drivers."

"I received very good feedback from the event, which was encouraging, and one participant wrote to me afterwards to say that it had given her the confidence to join her hospital's patients' council."

2.4. Other outcomes of running a 2012 Festival event

Organisers were asked to indicate whether there were any other significant outcomes of running a 2012 Festival event in terms of:

- Relationships with external contributors or attendees
- Relationships within their own organisations
- Development of engagement skills
- Impact on research and teaching.

Relationships with external contributors or attendees

Seventy-five per cent (n=30) of organisers felt that the event had helped to create new relationships with external contributors and attendees.

“The fact that the festival has been externally funded has enabled more solicitors to participate in ways that would not otherwise have been possible. Participation in events often involves a cost for the participants, which small firms in rural areas are ill able to afford.”
“Accordingly, the fact that we have been able to offer this event gratis has increased involvement, and is therefore likely to ensure that participants will be more willing to participate in future events.”

“It has provided us with a great opportunity to engage with the public and young people in way which we would normally not be able to afford and at a time of year when it is difficult to do so. We are very pleased to be part of the ESRC's Festival of Social Science.”

In addition, 73 per cent (n=29) said that that organising the event had helped to strengthen existing external relationships.

“It helped us consolidate other relations with the [external organisation] who subsequently have been involved in research bids we have successfully won. They have also invited us to participate in work they are preparing.”

A further 20 per cent (n=8) explained that there were other outcomes in terms of relationships with external contributors or attendees which included working together on new research applications, the involvement of organisers in external groups and working parties, and follow-on publications and symposia:

“ESRC KE grant application was successful with one of the external contributors.”

“A member of the organising team now sits on the Fuel Poverty Knowledge Group for [city] Council, helping to develop the city's Fuel Poverty strategy for the next 5 years.”

“We were subsequently invited to host a special issue of [a journal] examining the implementation of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and subsequent legislation. [University] were willing to host an international symposium to discuss this issue and contemporary developments which included a number of participants from Europe and Australia.”

In a few cases, the events also appeared to act as catalysts for further networking and social media exposure in relation to the topic, and even as a means for recruiting participants for future research studies:

“This was a successful event which reached a large number of people, who also cascaded what they learnt to others. The aims were sustained through disseminating and communicating our research through social networking. We were also able to recruit participants for further studies and engage people as participants in further research.”

Relationships within their own organisations

In terms of relationships within their own organisations, 73 per cent (n=29) of organisers said that the event had helped to raise the profile of their research internally.

“It has increased the department’s profile, and has opened new possibilities for further collaboration.”

More than half (53 per cent, n=21) also felt that the 2012 Festival event had helped to raise their own personal profile:

“I won the [university’s] staff award for Research and Knowledge Exchange and this event was a contributing factor to my receiving the award.”

A further 43 per cent (n=17) added that the event had helped to bring about new connections with other staff within their own organisation.

“The success of the event has resulted in the creation of plans for a similar, extended interdisciplinary project on a different historical topic. Applications for external arts funding are currently being formulated.”

A few respondents (n=5) noted other outcomes in this area including increased engagement with post-graduate students and early-career academics and new options for collaborative research and teaching with other colleagues.

“We encouraged younger scholars to apply for these events which have been successfully funded and planned to take place next week [as part of the 2013 Festival].”

“It was an opportunity for staff to work with masters and PhD students who helped to facilitate small group work.”

Development of engagement skills

Responses to the online survey provide strong evidence of the significant impact that the Festival is having on the development of engagement skills, particularly amongst university-based academics. Eighty-eight per cent (n=35) of organisers felt that their 2012 Festival event had provided a supportive environment in which to develop and practise skills in organising engagement events. The role of the Festival in supporting organisers to develop skills in this area was further evidenced by the high proportion who indicated that:

- Their 2012 event had been a space to try out a new approach or technique to communicating social science research (63 per cent, n=25)
- They had used information gained from, or developed for, the 2012 Festival event to inform the content and delivery of other engagement events (62 per cent, n=24)
- The event had been an opportunity to develop new resources to make their research accessible to non-academic audiences (62 per cent, n=24)

“The launch of the [research project] briefing papers at this event was part of a much larger series of grants and research, so it is difficult to detach the impacts of the launch from other things. However, the process of writing, designing and producing briefing papers was provocative and, we believe, worthwhile. It is a technique that I shall use again in other research.”

A number of organisers also made reference to the role that the 2012 Festival played in providing a supportive environment for early-career researchers, or post-graduate research students, to develop engagement skills:

“The event provided an opportunity for a part time PhD student to reflect upon and showcase his study and to develop skills of presenting and responding to questions.”

“I think these are invaluable events that are very underestimated by a number of bodies. I think they are excellent for several reasons. 1. They are flexible in their organisation and the communication of messages about social science to a wide and diverse public, depending on the imagination of those organising them. 2. They are a really excellent way of encouraging younger researchers to apply for an organise events for example to publicise work from recently completed doctoral research. 3. The application form and organising the event are a good way of introducing staff to these. 4. The relative success in obtaining one is very motivating for new researchers. 5. The opportunity to use this event to network with a broader audience is exceptionally good value and builds up good experience for researchers. In my experience I have had young post-docs who I have encouraged to apply for these who have successfully gone on to be awarded seminar series and subsequently further early career fellowships. These grants provide important stepping stones to enable and encourage younger (as well as older) scholars promote their research in an imaginative and publicly relevant way.”

Interestingly, fewer organisers reported using the event as a platform for increased media coverage of a social science issue or topic (33 per cent, n=13), although where this did happen it was viewed as a very positive outcome:

“We were chosen as an ESRC podcast, which was a great experience in itself.”

“It led to several appearances on local radio and also generated good liaison with local newspapers, which led to engagement with local and national community and voluntary groups.”

It is also worth noting that a limited number of organisers (35 per cent, n=14) had made resources relating to the event available online after the 2012 Festival. If the ESRC wishes the Festival to have broader impact, organisers and/or their institutions may benefit from more encouragement to engage with the media and create post-event online resources.

Impact on research and teaching

We asked organisers about the extent to which 2012 Festival events had an impact on their research and teaching activities. Respondents indicated that the most significant outcome in this area was that the events had provided a chance to explore the relationship between research and practice (70 per cent, n=28). For a sizable proportion of organisers, the events

had also enabled them to gauge the impact of their research on a non-academic audience (60 per cent, n=24).

“We had a strong attendance from across academia, public sector, industry, local government and personal interest groups which enabled us to discuss our work and raise awareness across the city. As a result councillors are aware of and using our work, one of the organisers now sits on a local authority knowledge group on the subject, and those working in related areas are working more closely together. It is not possible to completely attribute this to only this event, as others are being held across the city and it would have been good to increase the awareness at a national level as well as local level to, hence only partly achieved.”

It was interesting to note that the 2012 Festival had also led to the creation of new knowledge and ideas, as a direct result of interaction and engagement during events. For example, 22 organisers (55 per cent) felt that their events had generated new research questions, or ideas for further research, ten (25 per cent) believed the events had provided the conditions for generating new research funding applications and a further eight (20 per cent) explained that the events themselves were opportunities to collect primary data from participants in relation to a specific research question or topic.

“We have identified potential contacts for future research and ideas for a network of practitioners.”

A significant proportion of organisers had used the 2012 Festival as an opportunity to trial existing research and teaching materials, or to develop new ones. For example, 35 per cent (n=14) of respondents indicated that they had either used the event to obtain feedback on research materials and outputs aimed at non-academic audiences, or had used information gained from, or developed for, the 2012 Festival event to inform teaching and other work with students.

“The event provided an opportunity to discuss the complexity of the issue in question to a predominantly student audience which they would not have had otherwise.”

“Research - developing new avenues for engagement and collaboration. Teaching - developing postgraduate work on access to justice.”

A few organisers (n=4) said that the event had also provided a platform for piloting a research tool or technique (for example, trialling a set of questions or trying out a participatory technique for involving young people in research). An equally small number (n=4) had referred to the event as part of an impact case study for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014)⁸.

“It is an excellent event that enhances research impact. It is good that innovative approaches to dissemination are supported by the event.”

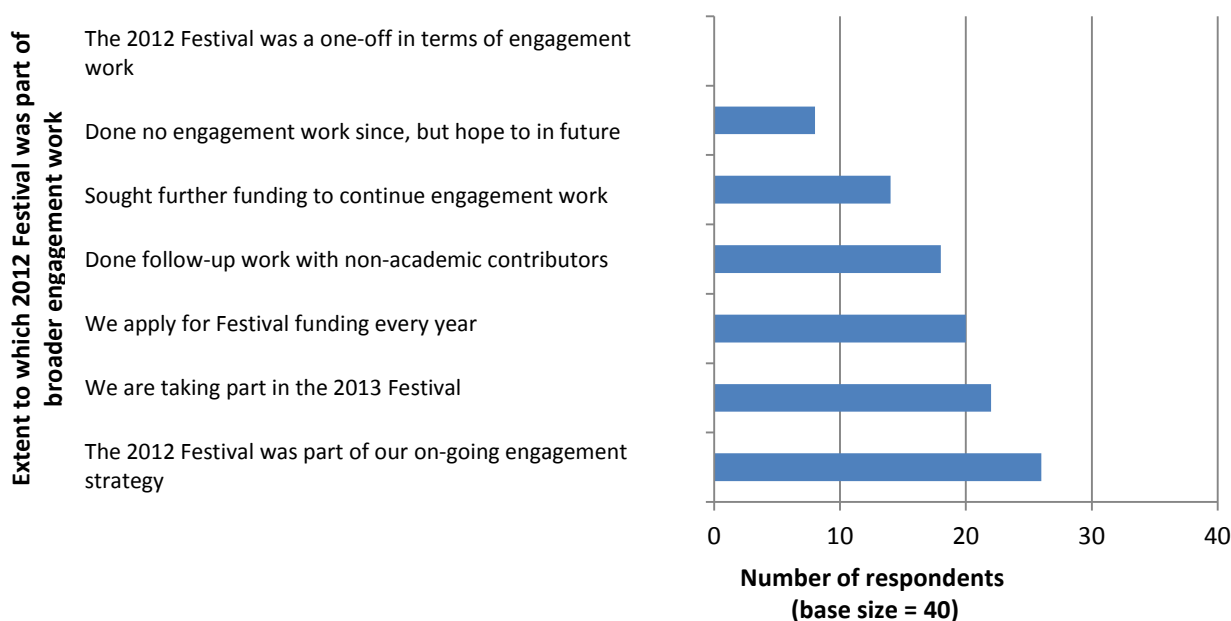
⁸ <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

2.5. The contribution of the 2012 Festival to the field of social science engagement

We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which their 2012 Festival event was part of their broader engagement work. We wanted to find out more about how the ESRC Festival is contributing to the field of social science engagement. We provided organisers with a list of ways to describe the current relationship between their 2012 event and their current engagement strategy, ranging from the event being a 'one-off' to it being an 'important part' of their on-going engagement strategy. Their responses to this question are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows that not one organiser described their 2012 Festival event as a one-off and that all were intending to do more social science engagement work, in some form. Twenty per cent of organisers (n=8) had not done any more social science engagement work since the 2012 Festival, but envisaged doing so in the future. A sizeable proportion (35 per cent, n=14) had sought further funding to develop or continue engagement activities, whilst a further 45 per cent (n=18) reported that they had conducted follow-up work with non-academic partners and contributors since the event.

Figure 4: The extent to which 2012 Festival events were part of respondents' broader social science engagement work



Sixty-five per cent (n=26) of the organisers responding to the online survey described their 2012 Festival event as part of their on-going social science engagement strategy. Significantly, half of all respondents (n=20) felt that not only was the ESRC Festival of Social Science an important part of their on-going engagement strategy, it was also something in which they applied to take part every year. Indeed, 55 per cent (n=22) were taking part in the 2013 Festival (which ran from 2 to 9 November 2013).

In order to get a sense of the role played by the ESRC Festival, alongside any other national or local engagement events, we asked organisers to tell us if they had taken part in any other science or social science festivals or events in the past two years. Just 25 per cent (n=10) had done so, which provides further evidence of the important contribution the ESRC Festival is making to the field of social science engagement.

Findings from the survey indicated that there is strong interest from organisers in sharing learning and good practice in doing engagement work. When asked if they would be interested in taking part in networking events or online forums, 90 per cent per cent of organisers responded positively.

3. Conclusions

This report has presented the findings of an online survey to explore and document the outcomes and impact of the ESRC's Festival of Social Science 2012 from the perspective of event organisers. The purpose of the research was two-fold: to capture information about the learning and benefits of engagement work, one year after the 2012 Festival events had taken place; and to trial a method for collecting retrospective data on broader outcomes. The research collected data solely from the perspective of organisers; attendees were not asked to contribute feedback.

3.1. The outcomes and impact of the 2012 Festival from the perspective of organisers: summary of key findings from the online survey

The findings of this small investigation have confirmed that involvement in the 2012 Festival led to a range of significant and quantifiable outcomes for organisers. These included a wide variety of learning and benefits in the following areas:

- **Relationships with external contributors or attendees** - Three-quarters of organisers felt that their events had helped to create new relationships, or to strengthen existing relationships with external contributors and attendees. One fifth described other outcomes in this area such as working together on new research applications, the involvement of organisers in external groups and working parties, and follow-on publications and symposia. In a few cases, the events also appeared to act as catalysts for further networking and social media exposure in relation to the topic, and even as a means for recruiting participants for future research studies.
- **Organisers' relationships within their own organisations** - Three-quarters of organisers said that the event had helped to raise the profile of their research internally. Around half of organisers also felt the event had helped to raise their own personal profile or had brought about new connections with other staff within their own organisation. A few organisers noted other outcomes in this area including increased engagement with post-graduate students and early-career academics and new options for collaborative research and teaching with other colleagues
- **Development of engagement skills** - Eighty-eight per cent of organisers felt that their 2012 Festival event had provided a supportive environment in which to develop and practise skills in organising engagement events. Around 60 per cent said that the event had provided an opportunity to try out new resources, or new ways of communicating with non-academic audiences. In addition, about two-thirds of organisers said they had used information gained from, or developed for, the 2012 Festival event to inform the content and delivery of other engagement events. Fewer organisers reported using the event as a platform for increased media coverage of a social science issue or topic, or had made resources relating to the event available online after the 2012 Festival. A number of organisers highlighted the role that the 2012 Festival played in providing a supportive environment for

early-career researchers, or post-graduate research students, to develop engagement skills.

- **Impact on research and teaching** - Seventy per cent of organisers indicated that their 2012 Festival event had provided a chance to explore the relationship between research and practice. For 60 per cent, the events had also enabled them to gauge the impact of their research on a non-academic audience. Around half of the organisers said that their events had generated new research questions or ideas for further research, whilst a quarter felt events had precipitated the development of new research funding applications. In eight cases (20 per cent) the events themselves had provided opportunities to collect primary data from participants in relation to a specific research question or topic. One-third of organisers had used the 2012 Festival as an opportunity to trial existing research and teaching materials, or to develop new ones, and to inform teaching and other work with students. Just a few organisers had referred to the event as part of an impact case study for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework.
- **Contribution of the ESRC Festival to the field of social science engagement** - Two-thirds of organisers responding to the online survey described their 2012 Festival event as an important part of their on-going social science engagement strategy and half explained that as such, they applied to take part in the ESRC Festival every year. Just a quarter of organisers reported having taken part in other science or social science festivals or events in the past two years. These findings indicate that for the majority of organisations taking part in the 2012 Festival, this was their main/only form of engagement work and highlights the essential contribution the ESRC Festival is making to the field of social science engagement across the UK.

3.2. How might the ESRC continue to document, describe and understand the outcomes and impact of events funded by the Festival of Social Science?

A secondary purpose of this small research study was to trial a method for collecting retrospective data on the broader learning and outcomes of Festival events, over and above that collected from post-event questionnaires from event organisers and attendees. An online survey tool was developed which delivered a range of mostly quantitative findings relating to key areas of outcome and impact for organisers. The survey provided quantifiable data to document, describe and confirm the range of outcomes reported by both the ESRC's own annual evaluation⁹ and the findings of the externally-commissioned 2012 review of the Festival as a whole¹⁰. Responses to the survey indicate that with one exception, all questions were well-received and well-understood. The response rate of 24 per cent was adequate and met the agreed goal of a response of at least 10 per cent over a four to six week data collection period, following reminders.

⁹ ESRC (2012) ESRC Festival of Social Science: 2012 Evaluation.

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Festival%20of%20social%20science%20Evaluation%202012_tcm8-27942.pdf

¹⁰ Wilkinson, C. (2012) The ESRC Festival of Social Science: Learning and Success.

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Festival%20of%20Social%20Science_Learning%20and%20success_tcm8-24004.pdf

To sum up, the online survey trialled by this research appears to offer an effective and low-cost method for collecting mainly quantitative data about the outcomes and impact of events funded by the Festival of Social Science. Some areas where adjustments to this methodology could usefully be made include:

- Personalised emails may help to improve the response rate
- One year post-event may be too long for full recall of all outcomes – running the survey six to nine months post-event may help to boost the response rate and recall
- One question¹¹ was not answered by any of the respondents indicating it was not understood and thus needs re-wording
- An additional online survey of outcomes and impacts could be developed for attendees
- It may be worth considering additional questions to capture data about the pathways and mechanisms by which outcomes and impacts were achieved, however it is important to be mindful of the length of the survey and the additional burden on respondents: this type of data is better collected through qualitative interviews.

The ESRC may wish to consider a broader on-going evaluation framework which could include additional qualitative work to capture the details of ‘impact stories’, by paying attention to the processes and contexts that led to the impact, as well as the actual details of the impact/outcome itself. This could include, for example:

- Telephone interviews with a sample of survey respondents to follow up responses in more detail
- Case-study work with a four to six events per year to map the nature of outcomes and impacts achieved and the processes and mechanisms through which they are generated.

This research and the previous review of the Festival as a whole¹² have highlighted that there is an appetite for sharing learning and good practice in doing engagement work. The ESRC may wish to consider its role in supporting networking events amongst those taking part in the Festival and, with the relevant consents, such events may themselves provide opportunities for capturing further qualitative data on outcomes and impacts.

¹¹ The question was: “If you hadn’t taken part in the 2012 Festival, would you be doing this on-going engagement work?”

¹² Wilkinson, C. (2012) The ESRC Festival of Social Science: Learning and Success.
http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Festival%20of%20Social%20Science_Learning%20and%20success_tcm8-24004.pdf

Appendix A Text used in the online survey

2012 ESRC Festival of Social Science - outcomes and impact

We are inviting you to complete this short online survey to help the ESRC understand more about the outcomes and impact of the 2012 Festival of Social Sciences. Your views and input are very important to us and will help us to make decisions about the strategic direction and sustainability of the Festival in the longer-term.

The questionnaire can be fully completed in about 10 minutes. You can pause and resume the survey at any time by clicking on the 'resume later' button. When you return, you can resume by clicking on the 'load unfinished survey' button at the bottom of this page.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be treated as confidential and stored securely. No findings will be made attributable to any individual or organisation responding to this survey.

1. What is your institution or organisation name?
2. What is your link with the ESRC? (please select one):
 - I am an ESRC-funded grant holder/postgraduate student
 - I am a member of staff at an ESRC-funded investments (research centre/programme)
 - I am representing an non-ESRC funded organisation
3. What is the name of the event you organised as part of the 2012 Festival of Social Science?
4. Did you receive any cash or in-kind support from your organisation?
 - Yes – please tell us the type of support you received (please tick all that apply)
 - Staff time
 - Venue hire
 - Refreshments/catering
 - Cash sum (please specify value)
 - Printing/stationery/publicity/advertising
 - AV/technical support/recording
 - Other (please explain)
 - No

5. Did you receive any cash or in-kind support to organise the 2012 Festival event from external contributors?

Yes

Who was this external contributor?

What type of support did they supply (please tick all that apply)

- Staff time
- Venue hire
- Refreshments/catering
- Cash sum (please specify value)
- Printing/stationery/publicity/advertising
- AV/technical support/recording
- Other (please explain)

No

6. *Add another contributor*

Who was this external contributor?

What type of support did they supply (please tick all that apply)

- Staff time
- Venue hire
- Refreshments/catering
- Cash sum (please specify value)
- Printing/stationery/publicity/advertising
- AV/technical support/recording
- Other (please explain)

7. Before you ran your 2012 Festival event, what were the primary objectives that you hoped to achieve?

- To communicate information about the ESRC and its work
- To communicate information about your own organisation/research group and its work
- To increase awareness and understanding of the social sciences in general
- To increase awareness and understanding of a specific social science subject or topic
- To encourage greater participation in social science by young people
- To introduce social science to a new audience
- To increase the take-up or application of your research findings (i.e. research into practice)
- To disseminate the results of your own research

- To provide a forum for networking
- Other (please state)

8. To what extent do you feel these objectives were achieved?

Objectives	Fully achieved	Partly achieved	Not achieved	Don't know
<i>List will populate automatically from answers ticked above.</i>	○	○	○	○

If possible, please briefly explain the reasons for these assessments.

9. In addition to your planned objectives for the 2012 Festival event, were there any other significant outcomes in terms of...

- Relationships with external contributors or attendees?
 - Organising the event helped to create new relationships with external contributors and attendees
 - Organising the event helped to strengthen existing relationships with external contributors and attendees
 - There were other outcomes in terms of relationships with external contributors or attendees (please explain what these were)

- Relationships within your own organisation?
 - The event helped to bring about new connections within my organisation
 - The event helped to raise the profile of our research within my organisation
 - The event helped to raise my own personal profile within my organisation
 - There were other outcomes in terms of relationships within my own organisation (please explain what these were)

- Development of engagement skills?
 - The event provided a supportive environment in which to develop and practise skills in organising engagement events
 - The event was a space to try out a new approach or technique to communicating social science research
 - We have used information gained from, or developed for, the 2012 Festival event to inform the content and delivery of other engagement events
 - The event was an opportunity to develop new resources to make our research accessible to non-academic audiences
 - The event provided a platform for getting media coverage of a social science issue or topic
 - After the 2012 Festival, resources relating to the event were made available online

- There were other outcomes in terms of the development of engagement skills (please explain what these were)
- Impact on research and teaching?
 - The event enabled us to gauge the impact of our research on a non-academic audience
 - The event provided a chance to explore the relationship between research and practice
 - The event provided a platform for piloting a research tool or technique (for example, trialling a set of questions, trying out a participatory technique for involving young people in research, etc)
 - The event was an opportunity to collect primary data from participants in relation to a specific research question or topic
 - We used the event to obtain feedback on research materials and outputs aimed at non-academic audiences
 - The event generated new research questions, or ideas for further research
 - The event helped to provide the conditions for generating new research funding applications
 - We referred to the event as part of an impact case study for the REF
 - We have used information gained from, or developed for, the 2012 Festival event to inform teaching and other work with students
 - There were other outcomes in terms of the event’s impact on research and teaching (please explain what these were)
- Other things that have not yet been mentioned (please explain what these were)

10. The ESRC provides a range of communications advice and support for organisers of Festival events. Some of this is available as online resources, whilst other advice and support is provided directly to organisers by phone or email. Please rate your experience of advice and support from the ESRC to organise your 2012 Festival event.

Communications advice and support available from ESRC	Not used	Advice/support was unhelpful	Advice/support confirmed what I already knew	Advice/support enabled me to learn something new or improve my current practice	I have shared my learning and/or good practice in this area with others
Choosing a format for your event	○	○	○	○	○
Planning the programme and booking speakers	○	○	○	○	○
Selecting and booking a venue	○	○	○	○	○

Building a guest list	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating event-specific promotional materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using ESRC and Festival identity and branding materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promoting and marketing the event	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media relations and targeting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Press release template	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evaluating the event and audience feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use of a conference firm (Vista Communications)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Have you organised any Festival of Social Science events in previous years?

No, this was the first Festival event we organised

Yes

- 2011
- 2010
- 2009
- 2008
- 2007
- 2006

12. To what extent was your 2012 Festival event part of your broader social science engagement work? (please tick all that apply)
- The 2012 Festival event was a one-off and we don't intend to do any more social science engagement work at present
 - We haven't done any more social science engagement work since the 2012 Festival, but we envisage doing so in the future
 - Since the event, we have conducted follow-up work with non-academic partners and contributors
 - Since the event, we have sought further funding to develop or continue engagement activities
 - The 2012 Festival event was part of our on-going social science engagement strategy
 - The ESRC Festival of Social Science is an important part of our on-going engagement strategy and we apply to take part every year
 - We are taking part in the 2013 Festival
13. If you hadn't taken part in the 2012 Festival, would you be doing this on-going engagement work?
- No - please explain how the 2012 Festival enabled these activities to take place
 - Yes
14. Have you taken part in any other science or social science festivals or events in the past two years?
- No
 - Yes – please tell us which ones
15. For you, were any of the following benefits associated with organising an ESRC-branded event as part of the 2012 Festival of Social Science?
- The ESRC brand provided internal and external credibility
 - The ESRC logo helped us to publicise an event
 - The ESRC brand helped to get public engagement buy-in from colleagues
 - The ESRC brand helped to engage external contributors and/or partners
 - The ESRC brand helped to pull in external support, or support in-kind from our organisation
 - Being associated with the ESRC brand helped in other ways (please explain)
 - Other (please explain what these were)
 - There were no unique benefits in being part of an ESRC-branded event.

16. Would you be interested in sharing learning and good practice in doing engagement work (e.g. via a networking event or online forum)?
- No
 - Yes
 - Don't know
 - Not right now, but I might do in the future
17. Could we contact you to follow-up your answers in more detail?
- No
 - Yes – please provide a contact name and email address
18. Do you have anything else you would like to say about the ESRC Festival of Social Science?
- No
 - Yes – please write your extra thoughts here.

Thank-you very much for completing this survey.

[Options to submit, print and/or save responses]