

# University Engagement in Festivals: Top Tips and Case Studies



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# Introduction

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Festivals are a growing part of the UK's cultural life, occurring annually and representing a full range of topics, including science, arts, film, literary and child/family-oriented. The way in which they generate excitement and a sense of community around particular aspects of culture has proven to be popular with audiences.

As a result, festivals can offer a valuable opportunity for students and higher education institutions to engage the public with their work, and to promote the activity and benefits of higher education. They enable students and staff to encounter members of the public face to face and make use of diverse formats for public engagement, including talks, discussions, workshops, hands-on activities, performance, educational sessions in schools, and much more.

Student participation in festivals offers a wide range of benefits. For the students, it provides opportunities to develop transferable skills for future careers, in some cases contributing to degree accreditation. For the festival organisers, students are often indispensable, as they fill a broad range of roles from stewarding, performing, blogging and event evaluation, bringing enthusiasm and knowledge from across the disciplines each year.

There are some festivals organised by universities themselves, as well as those put on by other organisations. The resource required for a university to organise its own festival is usually substantially larger than may be required for participation in an external festival. However, universities should not think that participation in an external festival is likely to be an easy or cheap route to an audience. Well-structured and large-scale university outreach initiatives at major festivals require considerable time and resource from the university, including winning the support of the festival management to arrange the partnership.

The following top tips and case studies give some examples of how universities, and students in particular, can work with festivals to engage the public.

The term 'educational festival' is also used in places to make it clear that the focus is on students volunteering to share their knowledge and skills with visitors.

In addition to directly invited contributions, the top tips and case studies draw upon contributions from 47 UK festival organisers (representing a full range of topics) and 108 students who had volunteered at Festivals in the UK, collected using two web-based surveys from September – November 2010. A report of the results of these surveys is also available, and can be downloaded from [www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how-we-help/our-publications](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how-we-help/our-publications)

The survey of festival organisers asked them to give an indication of the number of members of the public who attend their festivals. Taking the mid-point of the audience number ranges would give an indicative total of 1.048 million people who attended festivals with some educational and public engagement content represented in this survey.

For more information on this resource, please contact [nccpe.enquiries@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:nccpe.enquiries@uwe.ac.uk). Details of the authors can be found in the [Acknowledgements](#) at the end of this report.

# 1. Involving Student Volunteers in Festivals

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*“They [students] will be the ones pushing the boundaries of these festivals and making them fresh and new for years to come.” Student ID 129 (University of Plymouth)*

## Introduction

Festivals covering all sorts of topics, from science and technology, to arts, performance and culture, almost always rely on the input of committed and enthusiastic volunteers. Some smaller festivals are entirely volunteer-run. These top tips are aimed at festival managers, whether based at a university or at an external festival, who are thinking of recruiting students to help engage the public at a festival.

## Top tips

### 1. Two-way process:

As a festival organiser, it is important to have a clear idea of what the festival wants to get from student volunteers and the reasons why students might be volunteering ensuring there are benefits for both sides. Consult students about what they can offer and hope to get from the experience so that students are not just unpaid labour, but bring something new to the festival and get something valuable from the experience.

### 2. Training:

A two way process can be developed in the provision of training. You cannot expect students to arrive fully prepared with the requisite skills for the tasks they are assigned. Providing detailed and practically-oriented training can both ensure they are ready and capable of performing the roles you have assigned them, and offers the added value of enhancing their practical skills and knowledge.

### 3. Payment:

If budgets allow, you may consider paying students to take on particular roles. Roles that require specialist skills or those which are integral to the success of the festival should be given priority if payment is a feasible possibility.

There were several survey responses which referred to paying students for their involvement in festivals. The general conclusion from festival organisers is that if students are paid, it enhances the reliability of the assistance they can provide.

### 4. Roles for student volunteers:

There are numerous roles that student volunteers can play, assisting in the smooth running and overall visitor experience for the whole festival. These could include:

- speaker/performer
- help develop programme
- workshop/activity leader
- staffing a stand
- box office
- front of house
- hospitality
- press office
- using online media

## Benefits to the festival

*“Each student workers/ volunteers has their own unique background and experiences, which are valuable to accomplishing a diversity and eye-catching festival.”* **Student ID 71 (no university given; presented at a science festival)**

- Extra time to deliver your festival, often for the cost of volunteer expenses only
- Knowledge and skills
- Passion and enthusiasm
- Innovative events, new approaches and fresh ideas
- Affect the ‘face’/overall impression of the festival
- Make the festival more accessible and engaging, e.g. using the language skills of international students
- Provide a personal point of contact for visitors
- Intergenerational interaction
- Ambassador/role model for their subject
- Community interaction



Photo: Jonathan Lewis

*“Our students are one of our most important resources. They are great role models for young people. The festival benefits from students sharing their enthusiasm for their subjects with the public.”* **Organiser ID 32 (Wildscience - the Dumfries and Galloway Science Festival)**

*“it's important that visitors receive an authentic view of the student experience rather than be presented with a marketed response. The students speak their minds regarding their courses and we feel that visitors respect that.”* **Organiser ID 19 (no festival given)**

## Benefits to students

*“It definitely gave me a taste for working with, and explaining scientific concepts to groups of young people. In fact, I went straight out and applied for teacher training and start my placement as a trainee secondary school science teacher in September!”* **Student ID 41 (Manchester University and Imperial College London)**

- Share expertise – they want to inspire the public and make a difference
- Make ideal ambassadors for their subject and your festival
- Career progression
- Learn new skills, improve CV
- Networking
- Improved communication skills and increased confidence
- Social interaction
- Festivals can provide free tickets for student volunteers which enables them to attend events they might otherwise not have attended, enjoy the experience and learn about educational festivals
- Students may have fun, and meet new friends

*“They learn from experience and develop self-confidence as a result of delivering a successful public-facing festival. They also build valuable contacts in the process.”* **Organiser ID 68 (Cultural Exchanges, De Montfort University)**

*“We don't exclusively recruit students - all of our positions, both paid and unpaid, are open to anyone. However, they tend to appeal to students who are looking for short-term experiences that match their ambition and add value to their CV. We find that students who seek out these experiences tend to be enthusiastic, pro-active and able to apply initiative, which is particularly important during the festival when things are frantic!”* **Organiser ID 31 (Cheltenham Science Festival)**

## Issues to be aware of

### **Student commitments:**

- Students' priorities are different from festival organisers – with the pressures of coursework, and paid work
- Festival dates may clash with university terms, exams etc

### **Reliability and work ethic of student volunteers:**

- *“With staff you have a good idea of work ethic in advance. With students it's not always so clear on how they'll react in the environment. Otherwise, the students have been great.”* **Organiser ID 19 (no festival given)**
- Some volunteers may not turn up to fulfil their role in the festival – so festival organisers may consider over-recruiting to guard against that possibility.

## Useful links

- NCCPE, [Working with Student Volunteers](#)
- Volunteering England, [‘Good Practice Bank’](#)
- [Student Volunteering Week](#)

## ***Recruiting Student Volunteers for Festivals***

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### **Different approaches to recruiting students**

1. Many festival volunteers will have volunteered previously in other roles and for other organisations – so it's a good idea to go through volunteering and student action groups, including the following at universities:
  - RAG
  - Student Volunteer centre
2. Most student volunteers want to share their particular knowledge and expertise, so taking a subject-specific approach to recruiting can be very effective:
  - Ask relevant university departments to let their students know
  - Contact student societies
  - Make use of organisations like STEMnet – and other subject specific networks, eg membership organisations
3. To recruit volunteers for more general posts, using a generic approach can work very well:
  - Generic email to all students, or sub-groups which you can access
  - Local or student papers
4. Use social media:
  - Festival and university websites
  - Facebook and Twitter
  - If you are looking for students to help write reports on your festival, investigate blogs by student writers
5. The majority of student volunteers will be participating in order to increase their job prospects, so recruit these proactive students through university career provision:
  - University job site and careers service
  - Student job centre

# Training Student Volunteers for Festivals

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*Training “should be an amazing way of getting them some experience they want but without any training they have sometimes struggled to pull together the best events”*

**Organiser ID 21 (no festival given)**

*“Believe more should be done to train volunteers beforehand and communicate what to expect from the role.”* **Student ID 155 (Leeds Metropolitan University)**

## Introduction

One of the main factors in students volunteering at festivals is the desire to acquire new skills and further their practical knowledge, and so it is important that throughout their volunteering experience they are provided with the opportunity to do this. One of the main ways of enabling this is through training.

Developing learning and development programmes should be a two-way process – developing skills for volunteers and ensuring smoother running of the festival and a better visitor experience.

## Top tips

- 1. Volunteers need to understand the aims and objectives of the wider festival and their role within it:**
  - This helps your volunteers to feel part of the wider festival
  - Develop understanding of the importance of volunteers and discuss what to expect from the role
  - This should allow volunteers to provide a better and more knowledgeable service for all visitors
  
- 2. Your festival will need to provide training in health and safety:**
  - How to prepare and monitor risk assessments
  - Knowledge of first aid provision for your festival and emergency process
  - Security briefing
  - Protection of children and vulnerable adults
  - Tour of festival sites
  
- 3. Volunteers may need training in communication skills:**
  - How to engage visitors effectively
  - Confidence building and getting over nerves
  - How to deal with difficult customers and complaints
  
- 4. Peer mentoring:**
  - If possible offer the opportunity for new volunteers to pair up with those that are more experienced

**5. Provide a pack of written information – ‘how to’ guides:**

- Key contacts and emergency numbers
- Health and safety information and risk assessment
- What to do in case of emergency
- Volunteer rota with names and contact details for other volunteers as well as staff
- Maps and venue information
- Festival programme

**6. Use existing resources where possible:**

Web-based resources can offer valuable and free guidance that you can draw upon, or point out to student volunteers, for example:

- [NCCPE](#) method for [Engaging Presentations](#)
- [NCCPE](#) guide to [Understanding Audiences](#)
- [ISOTOPE](#) toolkit: [how to run a science cafe](#), which is an activity well-suited to the festival context.
- [ISOTOPE](#) toolkit: [how to give an effective public lecture](#).

## Issues to consider

### Time and staff constraints

Training all of your festival volunteers can be very time intensive – it is necessary to find a process that balances the level of knowledge needed with the amount of staff time available for training.

*“Our quality would increase still further if we could afford to train them for longer, especially in aspects of communication / language.”* **Organiser ID 48 (Edinburgh International Science Festival)**

### On the job training

To an extent, training your student volunteers is dependent on them using their own initiative and learning on the job – it is not possible to train in all aspects of festival volunteering. You need to provide enough information to enable them to learn for themselves during their volunteering experience.

*“One key aspect about successful public engagement is that one must not become too tongue tied or intimidated once one finds oneself in front of a crowd of strangers. Try to stay relaxed and open, even if all eyes are suddenly on you. This is difficult to practice in a training environment. To an extent one has to learn this from experience.”* **Student ID 122 (no university given)**

### Training staff in how to work with volunteers

It is also vital that you provide training for your professional staff in how to work with student volunteers – highlighting the benefits they bring, and the constraints they might be facing – course work, exams, paid work in addition to volunteering etc.

*“In my experience, more needs to be done to train the professional staff in how to value and work with volunteers in the right way.”* **Student ID 155 (Leeds Metropolitan University)**

### **Possibility of networking events**

A driving factor in students wanting to volunteer at festivals is the perceived social opportunities it will provide.

- Is it possible to assist with this with a pre- or post-festival networking group?
- Consider facilitating a forum for volunteers to share their experiences together using social media like Facebook or Flickr.

### **Retention of student volunteers**

Students are a transient population, and whilst they may be able to volunteer for one or even two years, it is unlikely their involvement with a festival will run beyond this. This causes issues requiring recruitment and training of new students each year.

*“Using students, you have to train up new people year after year, and there is no retained knowledge within the team.”* **Organiser ID 73 (Cheltenham Music Festival)**

Are there ways to capture and store the experiences and knowledge learnt from your volunteers for use in future years?

- Evaluation of volunteer experience and capture this knowledge, feeding into future written guides and training provision
- Forum for volunteers to share their experiences
- Invite past volunteers back in future years as peer mentors

### **Evaluating volunteer training**

As part of a wider festival evaluation process it is vital to ensure feedback is collected from student volunteers regarding the training they were given, asking if they felt sufficiently prepared for volunteering, and what could be improved for future years.

Further guidance on evaluation can also be found in section [5. Evaluating Educational Festivals](#), and on the [ISOTOPE website](#).

*“student behaviours and attitudes are noted and become part of the overall festival experience for an audience member.”* **Organiser ID 89 (Guildford International Music Festival)**

## 2. Effective Co-operation between Festivals and Universities

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### Introduction

Within the festival landscape, more festivals are organised by arts organisations, councils, charities, companies and partnerships than are organised by universities, so there are numerous opportunities to get involved with festivals which are organised outside a university.

The key benefits to a university of working with an externally-organised festival are that festivals can provide a route to a public audience as well as experience in public communication for its staff and students. The university may then be one many organisations taking part in a festival.

If a university plays a significant role in a festival, by providing student performers, or scientific speakers, as well as hiring or lending venues, the university might seek to be represented on the steering group for the festival. This may bring with it an expectation of financial contribution from the university.

Collaboration with an externally-organised festival does mean that a university will not have to bear the full load of marketing and organising the festival, which would be the case if the university organised the festival itself.

### Benefits to the festival of university engagement

- University departments, staff and students can be event organisers or significant contributors to events, providing:
  - Expert knowledge and world class research
  - Student role models
- University venues for free or at reduced rates
- Artists, speakers and performers from within the university
- University can help to recruit student volunteers – which is much more likely if they are an active partner
- There is a marketing opportunity to all university staff and students
- The festival and HEI may be able to pool some resources including staff time and funding
- A larger, joined-up city approach is possible in some areas
- The university reputation and community standing can help a festival

*“The promotion, the financial backing and the name of the university behind the festival which has helped attract sponsors, funders and increased ticket sales”*  
**Organiser ID 26 (Animex)**

## Top tips

- Ensure top level buy-in from university management to enable staff and students to dedicate time to the festival and to free up possible funding

*“Universities are provided with a lot of opportunity and profile when involved in the festival. I would ideally like to secure some funding from them or more strategic buy-in, such as staff being allowed to provide their time to assist with festival plans.”*

**Organiser ID 53 (Manchester Science Festival)**

- The festival is unlikely to be a priority for the university – so there is the need to make it as easy and quick as possible for them to take part. This is particularly important if the festival is organised externally from the university
- The university will be likely to have different aims and objectives from the festival organisers for being involved – there is a need to meet these aims and ensure they fit with wider festival objectives to ensure university buy-in
- If a wide-ranging partnership is sought, find that contact within each department or institution within the university who will champion involvement in the festival

*A “challenge that remains (although less and less) is persuading universities of the value of public engagement. There are exceptions, again, but sometimes you really have to search hard for that one person who is willing to champion public engagement and see the value of their academics’ participation in the festival”*

**Organiser ID 31 (Cheltenham Science Festival)**

- If possible ask for a university representative to sit on the Festival Board or Steering Group
- A partnership agreement is useful to make clear what each partner will do and contribute to the running of the festival (see [NCCPE guide to working in partnerships](#))
- Universities can work at a slower speed in communication projects than festival organisers with their fixed event deadlines – universities will need as much lead in time as possible
- A good idea could be a forum or network to enable the festival and university to learn from their experiences working together, improve collaboration and share best practice

*“I would like to be able to collaborate more efficiently with universities. We have had some great successes working with individuals in this university department or that one, but sharing best practice or rolling it out to give others the same opportunity can be difficult, simply because of a lack of clarity about where to go.”*

**Organiser ID 31 (Cheltenham Science Festival)**

- High quality involvement from universities to match what is happening in the wider festival sector

*“I’d like to see greater commitment to professionalism in the areas of science communication from the universities. This would involve providing training and*

*evaluation tools. I do not see the quality of what the institutions are providing rising. If science festivals continue to grow they will want to (and may have to) improve their quality. If the universities do not come with them and raise their game, the universities will eventually not be part of science festivals - unless they are run by a university.”* **Organiser ID 48 (Edinburgh International Science Festival)**

## Issues to consider

- Universities and HEIs are idiosyncratic – each one will need to be approached and the relationship managed in a very personal and specific way

*“we often find that each university works in a different way, so something that has been successful with one won't necessarily work for another”* **Organiser ID 31 (Cheltenham Science Festival)**

- There can be a lack of communication between different parts of the university and any external organisations

*“co-ordination of the different relationships with a university is a problem. Universities tend to be huge and bureaucratic, and departments do not interact with each other very well so, instead of dealing with a university centrally, we're often dealing with several different departments as if they were separate organisations.”* **Organiser ID 31 (Cheltenham Science Festival)**

- Constraints of university branding rules and the impact this might have on promotional materials
- There might be an assumption that with a university as a partner, the festival will no longer be in need of further financial support

*“As the festival is linked to the university some funders/sponsors have assumed we have enough money to run the event without their help.”* **Organiser ID 26 (Animex)**

- Constraints of term dates and student and staff commitments in terms of teaching, course work, exams etc.

## Useful links

- NCCPE guide: [Working in Partnership](#)
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council – Inspiring Learning: [‘Building creative learning partnerships’](#)
- Big Lottery Fund Good Practice Guide: [‘Working in Partnership’](#)
- Employers Organisation for Local Government: [‘Making the most of partnership working’](#) toolkit

# 3. Organising Stands/ Drop-in Events at Festivals

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*“The CHaOS stall is always full during the Cambridge Science Festival and the interactive nature is a big draw for children and parents.” Student ID 55 (Cambridge University)*

## Introduction

Many educational festivals have stands which are staffed by people who can communicate about topics of interest enabling students and staff to communicate research. At a science festival, this might consist of a large room or rooms or outdoor space where members of the public can walk around an exhibition area, and interact with scientists and students who have hands-on activities on table-tops for them to try, alongside temporary poster exhibits.

Staffed stands might also be found at a food festival, or a mix of ‘activity stations’ might be found in a museum or arts and humanities department taking part in an arts festival. The benefit for members of the public visiting the festival is that they can interact with a number of different explainers, and seek out topics of interest to them and their families. These stands are also a good way for students and academics to interact with a wide range of visitors and to gain communications experience.

These stands will usually be brought together under a banner and the event needs to be well planned, with interesting content, and located and marketed to reach a wide range of potential visitors.

## Benefits of interactive stands

- Provides an engaging and accessible route into specialist subjects for visitors.
- Hands-on activities really appeal to young people and families; and can be made exciting for adult visitors too, allowing children and parents to learn together.
- Interactive stands usually provide short, exciting demonstrations that allow visitors to dip in and out of what they find interesting.
- Student demonstrators can be more accessible for teenagers as they provide a less traditionally academic front to a subject.

*“I think having students on hand at a science festival makes it easier to talk to other students that come to see the talks / stands etc. We are closer to their age and closer to their educational level so can remember what the visiting students are currently learning. I think volunteer students offer a good interface that appears less scary than talking to a leading lab head or lecturer.” Student ID 126 (University College London)*

- These staffed, interactive stands enable active engagement and learning instead of passive viewing.
- They can be an easy route to igniting someone's interest.
- Allows students to provide personal contact and tailor their communication to the amount of time the visitor wants to spend.
- Offers learning opportunity for demonstrators; enables them to gain experience in communication – confidence building and allows them to share their passion for their subject.
- An easy way of ensuring high volume of visitors are able to see and do a lot.

## Issues to consider

### Health and safety

- Risk assessments are necessary for hands-on activities; and a staff member will need to assess these.
- All demonstrators must be fully trained
- Need for enough staff to effectively manage each demonstration

*"I was working at one of many experimental "stations", where a helper/volunteer is necessary at each for both health and safety and educational reasons. I think contribution is very important on an individual level (i.e. visitors really need someone there to explain the science, and make sure children are using equipment safely)"*

**Student ID 64 (Cambridge University)**

### Demonstrators' communication skills

- Need for training to ensure volunteers are comfortable and confident engaging in such a public and potentially high pressure context
- Provide training on how to deal with questions they can't answer, etc.
- There could be the opportunity for peer mentoring from more experienced colleagues

## Useful links

- NCCPE Guide: [Planning an Engagement Activity](#)
- NCCPE Method: Posters and Exhibitions
- Research Councils UK: ['Dialogue with the public: practical guidelines'](#) See Chapter 5: Ways of encouraging dialogue within traditional formats pp. 15 - 23

# 4. Marketing Educational Festivals to the Public

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## Introduction

The festival organisers who completed the survey for this project worked at festivals attracting visitor numbers from 100,000 and more (e.g. Glastonbury Festival) to smaller festivals attracting between 1,000 and 5,000 (e.g. Parklife Festival, Leeds).

In setting the objectives for a public engagement festival, organisers will want to consider their target visitor numbers alongside other key planning information such as the size of budget and staff team, and the capacity of venues.

Marketing a new festival will probably be more expensive and time-consuming than marketing subsequent annual festivals, if the festival is repeated. If a festival becomes known in its locality and perhaps further afield, visitors who wish to return or tell friends will keep themselves actively involved with the next festival through visiting web pages, subscribing to Facebook and Twitter updates and looking out for the festival in local media.

A number of key tasks in marketing a public engagement festival are set out below.

## Types of marketing

### Printed publicity, i.e. Programmes, flyers, posters

- Visually they need to be as engaging as possible for your target audience
- Distribute as widely as possible – Council distribution services, voluntary and community services, libraries, schools, businesses, hotels, shops, pubs etc.

### Website and email

- Promote festival in run up to, during and after festival on website
- Make your website as interactive as possible
  - Photos, podcasts, comments from last year
  - Online activities or downloads
  - Downloadable festival programme
  - Suggested day planners for different subject interests during festival – i.e. recommended family events etc
  - Forum for visitors to leave comments, feedback
- Begin to build up a mailing list of interested public
  - Enable public to sign up online
  - Send out regular e-bulletins detailing festival developments
- Develop reciprocal links with partner organisations' websites
- Email promotional material
  - PDF of programme with highlighted events
  - Send to all contacts including voluntary and community networks, local business forums, schools etc.

### **Social media**

- Create a Facebook page for your festival and make photos, videos and links available. Use other Facebook links to find fans for your festival – for instance if the festival is organised by a university, can it be advertised on the university’s Facebook page? Update the Facebook page regularly with news about the festival and reply to comments and questions.
- Create a Twitter account for your festival and update this with news about festival. Follow Twitter users including other institutions related to your work, and local media. Use any hashtags which may help Twitter users find you if they are interested in your topic.

### **Blogging**

- In the run up to and during festival, student volunteer bloggers could provide a personal insight into organising a festival, and a behind-the-scenes look. This allows people to attend festival virtually if they cannot be there.

*“When I attended CSF on behalf of UCL and blogged about the talks I attended and the feel of the festival, I think it was very well received with people who were otherwise unable to attend the festival.”* **Student ID 126 (University College London)**

### **Schools promotion**

- Send programmes with highlighted school-friendly events to all local schools
- Use Council ‘school bag’ schemes if possible, where flyers for educational activities may be delivered to all schools
- Consider presentations in school assemblies

### **Interactive promotion**

- Offer a stand with eye catching activities in shopping centres/market squares
- Investigate the possibility of leaflet handout in city centres
- ‘Science busking’ – promoting festival in public spaces

*“I also took part in the science busking, where I went round pubs drumming up interest for the festival. I feel this had a very positive impact on the festival as I later saw some of the people attending talks after I had recommended.”* **Student ID 147 (no university given)**

*“We have trained volunteers to go out science busking, which is a fantastic way of getting lots of science out onto the streets to engage the unsuspecting public.”* **Organiser ID 53 (Manchester Science Festival)**

## **Using student volunteers and university connections**

In weeks prior to festival, consider using student volunteers to help with a final marketing push:

- Emails to all relevant local interest groups, societies etc
- *The networks of other students they are able to access.”* **Organiser ID 68 (Cultural Exchanges)**
- Help with distributing flyers and programmes
- Update all local event listing websites

Ask university contacts to promote to all staff and students:

- Distribute posters, flyers, programmes
- Email alert to all staff, students

Targeted marketing:

- If a festival offers varied events, it is possible to group them by subject matter and promote them that way to relevant interest groups

## Useful links

- NCCPE Guide: [Marketing your public engagement activity](#)
- NCCPE Guide: [Working with digital technologies](#)
- NCCPE Method: [Podcasting](#)
- Economic and Social Research Council: [‘Promoting the Event’](#) guidelines
- Tourism Network North East: [‘Marketing your event’](#) guidelines
- Volunteering England: [‘Introduction to marketing’](#) toolkit
- Wales Tourist Board: [‘Festivals and events toolkit’](#)
  - For specific information on Marketing, PR and websites see pages 23, 28-9, 32-33, 40, 53
- Research Councils UK: [‘Dialogue with the public: practical guidelines’](#)
  - See Chapter 4: Marketing and Publicity pp15 - 23

# 5. Evaluating Educational Festivals

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## Introduction

Evaluating a festival is important to find out whether it is achieving its aims and objectives. Quantitative indicators such as numbers attending are useful, as well as 'cost per visitor' and/or value of tickets sold. Qualitative feedback regarding what visitors have learned can also be captured in a number of ways. The particular role which student volunteers have to play in a festival could also be evaluated through asking visitors for their views, and asking students for their feedback.

## Top tips

**Evaluation should be a continual process** which runs from the very first planning stages of festival through to completion, so it is important to have in place a process by which evaluation continuously feeds back into process.

**Set overall aims and objectives** for your festival. Evaluation should always refer back to these, and mark progress against their completion.

### Set specific outputs and outcomes

- i.e. visitor numbers, visitor satisfaction, visitor learning outcomes
- Assess yourself against these and consider investing in independent or peer evaluation

**A mix of evaluation methods** can be useful to capture the range of festival impacts, including quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. Tools can include surveys (on-site and online), interviews, observation, focus groups and more.

**It can be valuable to measure cumulative effects** of festival participation over several years by both audience members (if they return) and among the academics and students who take part.

- You may want to measure how festival participation has impacted on academics and students.
- You could also measure outcomes like the economic impact of the festival, and its environmental impact.

## Evaluating visitor experience

### Attendance figures

- Tickets bought
- Wrist bands
- Clickers on door
- Reports from event organisers
- Head counts
- Data from evaluation forms
- 'Guesstimate' through observation of numbers and a combination of the above methods

### **Evaluation form – traditional method**

- Only ask for information you will actually use in your festival evaluation
- Offer an incentive to complete – prize draw
- Consider different forms for children and adults
- Provide an online version as well as paper form – much easier and quicker to collate the information
- Student could volunteer during the festival taking visitors through the survey and completing the forms. New technology means this may be done through hand-held electronic devices and not always on paper.

**Making the evaluation process fun**, interactive and relevant to the mission of the festival may enable richer qualitative feedback. This could include:

- Comments books/walls
- Video evaluation
- Artistic feedback from visitors
- Consider focus groups to provide more in-depth feedback and to be part of a public consultation process prior to the next festival

## **Who else you should collect feedback from?**

### **Feedback from student volunteers**

- Volunteers will have been ‘on the ground’ throughout the festival – they can be good judges of visitor satisfaction from passing comments and the ‘atmosphere’ at an event
- It is important to know if volunteers feel they were sufficiently trained/prepared for volunteering
- It may be possible to do this at a social networking/thank you event
- This also shows volunteers that you value their contribution and input

### **Feedback from event organisers**

- It is important to gauge what the individual event organisers within a larger festival thought of the overall festival co-ordination – this enables any possible problems to be picked up and tackled in future years
- Any specific issues with their events
- Visitor numbers they counted

### **Feedback from speakers/performers**

- Likely to have time constraints – so need to make evaluation as easy and quick as possible – perhaps a quick phone call can get the feedback you need

### **Feedback from all festival staff**

- Important to take on comments from all members of staff, to get a rounded overview of how the festival ran

## **Case Study Example - Evaluation Approach**

For the Cambridge Science Festival and arts, social science and humanities-oriented Cambridge Festival of Ideas, a two-tiered system of evaluation has been developed in consultation with Dr Eric Jensen as external evaluator.

On-site 'postcard'-size feedback forms are used to gather the high level response of a broad range of festival visitors. This on-site form is used to gather a snapshot of the characteristics of festival attendees and their general response to the festival. These respondents are then invited to complete a much more detailed web-based questionnaire hosted on the website [wufoo.com](http://wufoo.com).

This approach minimises the administrative burden of organising and entering data from the questionnaires because the online form automatically downloads the data into Excel. This approach allows for both breadth and depth of evaluation data collection.

With a well-designed evaluation form, basic information can be gleaned through a straightforward summary of the responses from festival visitors. However, for more in-depth assessments of the value of the festival for visitors, its impact on visitors and the reasons for the relative effectiveness or ineffectiveness of particular aspects of the festival, a more rigorous form of data analysis is needed.

In the case of these two festivals, an external public engagement researcher with extensive methodological expertise is commissioned to conduct this rigorous analysis and author a detailed report on each festival. However, with training in social scientific research methods, you can conduct this full-scale analysis yourself.

The key advantage of employing a rigorous and systematic form of data analysis within the evaluation process is that key patterns can be identified that can more effectively guide the development of improved practice for future iterations of the festival. Moreover, a rigorous approach of this kind is far more persuasive to both internal and external agencies or departments seeking evidence that your festival is having the impacts you claim it is.

## Useful links

- For examples of evaluation forms please see the Appendix.
- NCCPE Guide: [Introduction to Evaluation](#)
- Research Councils UK Guide for [Evaluating Public Engagement Activities](#)
- The Museum and Libraries' Association's '[Inspiring Learning for All](#)' which may help to identify benefits people may gain from cultural interaction. These Generic Learning and Social Outcomes are used across the cultural sector, and could be a good start for any evaluation process.
- Renaissance East of England: [Evaluation Toolkit](#)
- York and North Yorkshire Festivals: [Festival and event evaluation toolkit](#)
- 2009 Cambridge Science Festival: [External Evaluation Report](#)
- Further guidance on [evaluation](#) can also be found on the [ISOTOPE website](#)
- Guidance on particular research methods can be found in Jensen, E. and Holliman, R.(2009) 'Investigating science communication to inform science outreach and public engagement' in *Investigating science communication in the information age: implications for public engagement and popular media*, pp.55 - 71, Editors: Holliman, R., Whitelegg, E., Scanlon, E., Smid, S. and Thomas, J., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# Case Studies

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## Introduction

With the aim of inspiring other festival organisers, public engagement co-ordinators, student volunteering staff, academics and students to develop their own practice of public engagement through festivals, and to involve student volunteers, five case studies are presented below. These case studies highlight different aspects of the ways in which students and universities can be effectively involved in festivals with a public engagement aspect.

Within the case studies are more detailed descriptions of the types of roles students performed at festivals. The survey answers from festival organisers and student volunteers highlighted a number of types of student involvement in festivals. 56.5% of students said they had performed more than one type of role at a festival.

The types of roles students had performed included:

- Helping develop the festival programme
- Performing artist
- Speaker
- Workshop or activity leader
- Another education role: (e.g., staffing a stand and speaking to visitors)
- Box office / Ticketing
- Front of house / Stewards
- Production: sound, lights, staging etc.
- Hospitality (e.g. bar roles or catering)
- Press office or other publicity-related role

The five case studies below illustrate particular formats of university, and student, participation in festivals. These formats were selected as of potential interest to festival organisers, public engagement co-ordinators, student volunteering staff, academics and students among others in reflecting on and planning their own festival public engagement activity.

1. Festival work as part of student courses – e.g. in events management
2. Festivals as showcases for student performance
3. Science festival organised by external organisation with university involvement
4. Student involvement at festival co-ordinated by student society
5. University participation in an externally-organised cultural festival

# 1. Festival work as part of student courses - e.g. in events management

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## Introduction

Survey responses from three festival organisers and five students presented cases of university courses which involved event organisation as an integral and/or assessed part of their course.

Although a small proportion of the total responses, this format of student involvement in a festival is presented in light of the need for improved training: few student respondents had received detailed practical training or guidance for the roles they fulfilled at other festivals. Presenting an example of accredited festival practical experience may highlight some areas of training which could be provided to students engaging the public at other types of festival too.

The responses concerning accredited participation in festival delivery all concerned arts festivals rather than science festivals. Overall, 69% of the students in the survey had volunteered at science festivals and 41% had taken part in other arts or general cultural festivals.

Science festival managers and students indicated that science festivals did give an opportunity for learning and practising science communication skills, but no example was given in the survey of science festival participation being accredited as part of science communication courses.<sup>1</sup>

Two universities were represented in the research which offer degrees in arts and events management: De Montfort University, Leicester and Leeds Metropolitan University.

The case study from De Montfort University gives some insight into the large-scale nature of festival organisation within a university course structure, and into the roles and experience of students within the Cultural Exchanges Festival.

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<sup>1</sup> Students studying science communication, often at postgraduate level, do have the opportunity to perform roles at festivals which could be reflected upon and assessed as part of their course: examples could be found among students at University of the West of England <http://scu.uwe.ac.uk/> and the Open University <http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/qualification/f48.htm> among others.

## *Cultural Exchanges Festival, De Montfort University*

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### **Overview**

**Who:** The Cultural Exchanges Festival in Leicester is organised by students at De Montfort University as part of their degree course in Arts and Festivals Management. It attracts around 4,000 members of the public.

**What:** A unique student-run week-long cultural festival. Students have the opportunity to perform all types of roles in running this festival in order to gain worthwhile experience in the marketing, promotion and implementation of a successful festival.

**Why** The students involved in delivering the Cultural Exchanges Festival participate as one aspect of the third year of an Arts Management degree at De Montfort, taking up the opportunity of an Events Management module.

**Where:** De Montfort University, Faculty of Humanities

**When:** Annually over ten years – usually end February / beginning March

### **Project description**

The Cultural Exchanges Festival in Leicester is organised by students at De Montfort University as part of their degree course in Arts and Festivals Management. It is an assessed part of their undergraduate degree and provides valuable practical experience. It has been taking place since 2000 and attracts around 4,000 members of the public each year. It offers a mix of guests and speakers from the arts, media, literature, politics and film. The main programme is often complemented by workshops, day conferences and performing arts events. Speakers and artists at the festival have included film directors, academics, comedians and musicians.

Approximately twenty students are picked after a rigorous interview process, to put together 3 teams: operations, administration and marketing. Within these teams, the kinds of roles the students fulfil include programming, box office, staffing stands, front of house, sound/light/staging production, hospitality and catering roles.

In the early stages, their tasks include:

- Programming - generating ideas for the festival, researching and inviting speakers and performers
- Overseeing health and safety and technical requirements
- Organising hospitality for guests
- Designing and distributing promotional material
- Preparing press releases and conducting interviews



During the events, the student teams are expected to:

- Look after hospitality for guests
- Co-ordinate stewards
- Conduct interviews
- Ensure the festival runs as smoothly as possible

All volunteer stewards get hands-on experience at Cultural Exchanges events, and get a full health and safety briefing from qualified staff.

De Montfort University helps to provide venues for free, provides artists, speakers and workshop leaders, and is the route by which the students are recruited to deliver the festival.



## Purpose

- Providing practical experience for students in event management
- Linking town with gown and showcase the work of the faculty of humanities
- Ensuring that the public attendees at festival events find them interesting and enjoyable, while reaching as broad an audience as possible, with most events being free

## What worked well

- Students grow from the experience and their employability increases as a result

*“To be able to assist with the planning, running and evaluation of a major arts festival as part of the course was amazing; and very beneficial. . . I was the given the role of team manager of the marketing team. My aim was to manage, plan, monitor and review the work of the marketing team, ensuring all deadlines are stuck to, as well as assisting team members with activities when needed. Being able to manage a team of people and to be able to market the festival allowed me to explore my skills under the guidance of the professional tutors. Universities aim to teach students skills and the knowledge to be able to carry out a specific role or purpose. We learnt these in our first and second year of the degree: the Cultural Exchanges festival allowed us to apply these skills and theories learnt to professional working practice. . . I aim to be a manager of a major theatre one day. As soon as I graduated, I was offered a front of house position at Leicester’s brand new theatre, ‘Curve’. After training, I will hopefully become a department supervisor, and possibly within the next year, a manager. I believe my experiences with Cultural Exchanges have helped me prepare for my career.”* **Sam Coombs (Cultural Exchanges student team 2008)**

- Inter faculty connections have grown and developed, for example between Humanities and Arts and Design
- Higher profile for Humanities courses and in particular Arts and Festivals management
- Members of the public view the university as having a role within the wider community

*“I liked the pioneering way it connects with the audience- it’s as inclusive as possible.” Andrew Motion (Cultural Exchanges speaker 2008)*

## What didn’t work well

- University systems and protocols mean the festival has needed to overcome internal bureaucracy
- Suspension of teaching for the week in the faculty means student attendance declines
- Student attendance from other faculties could be better

## Resources Required

- Director of festival required
- Staff time in supervising students as part of their course. Student time input is based on the scheduled teaching hours for the module.
- Budget of £10k provided. This is supplemented by box office receipts for certain events and a small amount of revenue from adverts and sponsorship.

## Top tips

1. Enthusiasm and commitment from the staff team to go above and beyond the norm is important.
2. Support from academic colleagues and key members of the university hierarchy is also vital.
3. Programming process requires belief and luck in securing high-profile artists and engaging events, though making the programming process as democratic as possible enhances the range of ideas and contacts.
4. Avoid programming by committee, as it will take too long and a full consensus on the festival’s possible content is unlikely to be reached: a small number of individuals need to lead the programming.

## Contact

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## 2. Arts Festivals as showcases for student performance

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### Introduction

30% of the student responses were from volunteers at arts festivals (performing arts, visual arts and film). 14% of students had taken part as a performing artist, sometimes with a linked role in educational outreach.

For example, at the University of Surrey, all students in the Music Department taking performance modules assist and manage events throughout the year, including at the Guildford International Music Festival, run from within the university. The festival organiser reports that “Students gain insight into professional artists' working processes. They network and make useful contacts. They develop professional capabilities. They extend their own experiences, perceptions, expectations. They develop confidence, problem solve, gain real-life experience for CVs, future jobs, etc.”

A student from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama reported on her experience volunteering at a performing arts festival

*“I had just completed a post-graduate diploma in arts management and wanted to gain as much work experience as possible . . . Volunteers at the festival where I worked proved to be the face of the festival, as they are present at every single event as the front line of staff representing the organisation”*

Below, a case study on the City of London Festival’s relationship with the Guildhall School of Music and Drama outlines the types of experience students have through becoming involved with that festival’s programme of performance and outreach.

## *City of London Festival*

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### **Overview**

**Who:** The City of London Festival, working with Guildhall School of Music and Drama involving students as performers, event administration, in front of house and stewards. The festival reaches thousands of members of the public.

**What:** A diverse celebration of the arts, founded in 1962 to revitalise the cultural life of the City. The festival management team work with students from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, to ask them to make an artistic response to the festival's themes and gain experience in performance. It also involves students in planning and delivering a year-round programme of arts projects in schools and community groups in the City of London and its surrounding boroughs.

**Why:** The students take part in order to gain events experience and to work with the festival team on joint education outreach initiatives, this enhances their professional experience to help them gain skills and knowledge for future employment, while benefiting visitors old and young to the festival and reaching new audiences.

**Where:** Various venues in the City of London

**When:** June and July each year

### **Project description**

The City of London Festival, founded in 1962, is an annual celebration of the arts in the historic heart of London. For three weeks each midsummer, the festival animates the unique buildings and outdoor spaces of the City with an extensive artistic programme ranging across many kinds of music, dance, visual arts, film, walks and talks: more than 50 ticketed performances and a further 100 free events outdoors.

The festival has long had an association with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama - firstly because of geographical proximity but also because of a desire on the part of the festival to engage fully with other City-based organisations. In addition, the Principal of the School is one of the Trustees of the festival, ex officio. Students are involved in the festival in a number of ways:

#### **Volunteer opportunities**

The festival relies upon a team of volunteer stewards to assist with front-of-house duties for our events. The volunteer programme is open-access, but we recruit heavily from within the Guildhall School, as well as City University (which offers an arts management degree programme).

#### **Lunchtime concerts**

We present a series of lunchtime concerts during the festival, programmed in partnership with the Guildhall School (with the Director of Music, Head of Chamber Music and Head of

Keyboard Studies). Twelve hour-long recitals, given by Guildhall School students, are promoted within the main festival programme as part of our Free Events series.

### **Free Winter Concert series**

As part of a free lunchtime concert series, running from January - March, which the festival administers on behalf of the City of London Corporation, a performance opportunity is given to one of the ensembles from the Guildhall School's prestigious jazz studies programme.



### **Other artistic programme opportunities**

Where possible, other projects are developed in partnership with the Guildhall School, both for performers and composers. For example, the 2008 festival had a French theme, and so a composition project linking the Guildhall School with the Paris Conservatoire was organised by the festival. A series of exchange visits resulted in a suite of new works which received their premiere during the summer's festival activity, performed by a student ensemble with performers from both institutions. In 2010, Guildhall School pianists took part in the opening event of the festival, when the specially-commissioned work 21 Piano Nocturne by Richard Causton was performed by 21 pianists on 21 pianos in the Guildhall Yard, as part of the Chopin 200 celebrations.

### **Outreach and collaborative opportunities**

The festival also engages with the Guildhall School's Connect programme of professional music leadership and outreach, with a number of joint education initiatives each year. The development and outreach programme, Guildhall Connect, won a Queen's Anniversary Prize in 2005 and became the Guildhall School and Barbican Creative Learning Division in 2009, bringing together the work of Guildhall Connect and the Barbican Education Department.

Students at the Guildhall School taking modules in Performance Matters, Professional Studies and Collaborative Skills gain knowledge and skills needed by professional musicians. Students are supported in gaining understanding of the contexts in which musicians work. Areas explored include health and well-being, performance psychology, collaboration and communication skills. Students taking optional electives have opportunities to undertake inter-disciplinary and cross-sector projects. These have included visiting, performing and leading workshops in schools, community groups, hospitals, prisons and performing at major London venues.

## Purpose

- Involving one of the nearby major educational institutions in the City of London Festival helps with the festival's aims to showcase the cultural aspect of the City
- Involving students in developing and delivering the artistic programme, and providing them experience in performance and outreach, linked to taught and assessed modules within their course
- Providing students with the opportunity to gain events experience in a professional context
- Involving students in joint education outreach initiatives

## What worked well

- Music students have the chance to perform at a world-class, highly regarded festival and their voluntary roles look good on their CVs.
- Student performers can provide a strong artistic response to the festival's themes and bring originality and new perspectives.

## What didn't work well

- The festival falls within the end-of-year exam period for the conservatoire, so the timing of projects isn't always great
- Frustrating lack of administrative 'savvy' on behalf of some students

## Resources Required

Staff time is required to teach and supervise students taking professional studies and collaborative skills as part of their course; and festival staff time is required to manage the performance programmes which involve students, as well as administrative and event steward volunteers.

## Contact

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# 3. Externally organised Science Festival with University involvement

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## Introduction

Science festivals were well represented in the survey, with 42.6% of festival organiser responses and 69% of student volunteer responses concerning festivals of science, technology and/or nature.

Some science festivals in the survey are organised by universities or Higher Education Institutions (e.g. Glasgow University Science Festival, Cambridge Science Festival) and some are organised externally to universities but with university participation (e.g. Brighton Science Festival, Edinburgh International Science Festival).

One festival manager running a science festival external to a university, but with university involvement suggested that more could be done to train staff and students in science communication skills:

*“I'd like to see greater commitment to professionalism in the areas of science communication from the universities. This would involve providing training and evaluation tools. I do not see the quality of what the institutions are providing rising. If science festivals continue to grow they will want to (and may have to) improve their quality.”*

Another science festival organised outside a university sought greater buy-in from the ‘core administration’ of the university to find more staff and students to take advantage of public engagement opportunities offered by the festival.

The following case study gives an example of a science festival working to gain the involvement of universities and students, as well as other partners including research institutes and business.

## *Oxfordshire Science Festival*

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### **Overview**

**Who:** The Oxfordshire Science Festival is led by a steering group within which Science Oxford, the public part of the Oxford Trust, plays a leading role.

**What:** The Oxfordshire Science Festival brings together organisations offering public engagement with science throughout the county with about 100 events on offer during National Science and Engineering Week. It includes science exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations, interactive experiments and discussions.

**Why:** Science Oxford is trying to encourage more public engagement with science in the area and encouraging pursuit of science and enterprise by young people in particular. An important aim is also to build capacity and the community of people working on public engagement with science.

**Where:** Throughout Oxfordshire

**When:** The Oxfordshire Science Festival takes place during 3 weeks in March, overlapping with National Science and Engineering Week.

### **Project description**

The Oxfordshire Science Festival takes place during 3 weeks in March, overlapping with National Science and Engineering Week. The festival offers events for young children right through to adults. There are events for professional scientists and people with an interest in science, however most events are aimed at the general public who want to have fun and perhaps explore a topic that is important to them such as climate change, music or sport.

Formats for events include science exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations, interactive experiments and discussions. An open-access part of the festival is 'Science in Your World, held in a central city square, and involving students and scientific staff in encouraging people to try activities such as 'How much electricity can you create by riding a bicycle?' and 'Do you think you can make a magnet float on thin air?'

The Oxfordshire Science Festival works with local universities, the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University. The festival uses PhD students to deliver events, and often as the experts who converse with the public. They also make use of larger numbers of undergraduates to volunteer at events, be runners and help out.

PhD students staff stands at a one-day event in centre of town and at the University of Oxford Museum, and events at Oxford Brookes. Postgraduate students also give some of the talks during the festival. Often it is a group leader or professor who suggests particular PhD students, so the more senior academics are the route into recruiting these postgraduates as volunteers.

Up to 40 undergraduates help as runners and evaluators. These undergraduates are often gaining their first experience of public engagement. They are volunteers but the festival pays their expenses.

## Purpose

- The Oxfordshire Science Festival is an opportunity for organisations throughout the county to engage the public with contemporary scientific and technological developments through lectures, discussions, debates and interactive activities.
- Universities, along with research institutes and businesses, are among the key organisations the festival involves.
- Students can provide expertise through postgraduates staffing stands and giving talks. Undergraduates are more usually involved as runners, stewards and evaluators, giving them a taste of public engagement.

## What worked well

The expertise, enthusiasm and approachability of student volunteers (graduates and undergraduates). A huge diversity of scientific topics can be tackled at the festival with the volunteer involvement of university staff and students.

*“I gained insight into how large-scale events are organised and how the public can be encouraged to engage with science.”* **University of Oxford student**

*“The festival was hard work but thoroughly enjoyable and it gave me a great many new skills to transfer to other future roles. It also gave me confidence in my own abilities.”* **University of Oxford student**

## What didn't work well

With any group of volunteers, there will always be a problem with reliability, as some may not be able to make it on the day.

The relationship between the Oxfordshire Science Festival and the universities in Oxford needs to be further developed – negotiating the administrative systems in the universities can be complex for an external organisation.

## Resources Required

- Co-ordinating time required from members of the steering group.
- Different scientific departments at the University of Oxford tend to want to interact in different ways with the Science Festival. It can be time-consuming to find the appropriate resources therefore to bring the public engagement events to fruition for the benefit of the public. There's not really been mapping so far of where public engagement with science activity is happening across the University of Oxford.

- More core funding for the festival would help build the involvement of more student volunteers and university involvement. The festival team consider that public engagement funding may be increasingly channelled to academics as part of their research grants (e.g. recent EPSRC funding change), so the compartmentalisation of public engagement activity may increase – it's not clear where strategic funding for initiatives such as the Science Festival will come from.

## Top tips

### 1. Be aware that each institution has different systems and specific needs.

Understanding the administrative geography of a large, complex organisation like the University of Oxford can be challenging as it is not straightforward to find the decision-makers who can help facilitate the university's involvement with the Oxfordshire Science Festival. The relationship with Oxford Brookes University is simpler as it has one department with media relations, outreach, student recruitment in it, so they interact with the festival and that department provides a single source of funds for the festival. The External relations team at the University of Oxford which deals with media and Government relations tends just to advise on contacting scientific departments, rather than taking a specific decision to engage with the Oxfordshire Science Festival.

### 2. Involve the university at a senior level in the festival, e.g. steering groups.

A senior steering group for the Oxfordshire Science Festival should help gain institutional buy-in, to be accompanied by greater academic staff and student involvement too. Marcus du Sautoy, Professor of Public Understanding of Science at University of Oxford does advise the festival. He has profile, but not a budget for public engagement activities nor a position which entails management of public engagement activities across the university.

### 3. Provide training to help develop communication skills

The PhD students who have taken part have been good communicators for the most part, probably as they are fairly self-selecting and/or recommended by academics. If early-career people in science are keen and have a positive attitude, the festival team can work with that and tweak it.

## Contact

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## 4. Student involvement through a student society

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### Introduction

Students who became involved in festivals reported that they had been recruited by a number of means: including emails via their department or faculty, or through pro-actively approaching a festival themselves, or getting involved through a student society or organisation.

Word of mouth recommendations and emails from friends and lecturers all helped to build a sense among some students that volunteering at a festival would be a worthwhile experience.

Several examples were provided of students organising their own events as part of festivals, including the long-standing example from Cambridge Hands-on Science.



## Cambridge Hands-On Science

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### Overview

**Who:** Cambridge Hands-On Science (CHaOS), a student society at the University of Cambridge.

**What:** Crash, Bang, Squelch event, a hands on science presentation for all ages.

**Why:** To inspire young people and members of the public to be interested in science.

**Where:** At the Cambridge Science Festival and around the UK with a Summer Roadshow.

**When:** Annually in March (at Cambridge Science Festival), and annually each summer for the Roadshow.

### Project description

CHaOS involves student volunteers in presenting hands-on activities for visitors of all ages at the Cambridge Science Festival at an event called Crash, Bang, Squelch and in locations throughout the UK with a Summer Roadshow, in addition to other events in schools throughout the year.

CHaOS started running the Crash, Bang, Squelch event at the Cambridge Science Festival over a decade ago. It was formed by students who wanted to organise events at the Cambridge Science Festival, so that they could share their enthusiasm for how science works with visitors of all ages.



CHaOS is registered with the university as an official student society. This means that it has to have a management committee and senior treasurer (a member of university staff) to oversee the accounts. The committee is made up of students, and a President and other committee positions are elected each year. The society can apply for small grants within the university as well as raising funds from external sponsors, including the Wellcome Trust, Medical Research Council and Royal Society of Chemistry.

Students who are involved with the CHaOS committee plan the Crash Bang Squelch and other events at the Cambridge Science Festival, including talks and demonstrating at the Physics Open Day as well. They recruit more students as demonstrators, oversee the production of risk assessments, prepare necessary props and equipments to be used for hands-on demonstrations (e.g. mixing cornflour and water to demonstrate how the mixture can seem to be either solid or liquid when fingers are poked into it, or a fist hits it).

Those students who demonstrate for one day only at the Crash Bang Squelch event receive a health and safety briefing and training in how to demonstrate and involve visitors in the

hands-on experiments. Training is provided by the CHaOS committee members, many of whom have been involved for several years as undergraduates and postgraduates at the university. More recently, external trainers in science communication have also been brought in, found through the British Interactives Group among science centre staff.

The President of CHaOS is registered as an event co-ordinator within the Cambridge Science Festival system – this means that he or she receives notification of deadlines for submitting details about the event they will offer for the Science Festival and s/he is invited to the twice-yearly event co-ordinators' meeting. The festival organisers check risk assessments produced by CHaOS and sometimes get involved with arranging access to university venues for the student society, although these are now long-standing arrangements.

Another activity by CHaOS is its summer roadshow, which takes place over several weeks each summer, visiting schools, country shows, town halls and so on. They aim to visit towns and villages which don't have science museums or centres, to share enthusiasm for science with visitors of all ages who don't have frequent opportunities to experience science as part of a cultural or leisure offering.

Each Crash Bang Squelch event and roadshow is evaluated, with forms handed to young people and families who attend. Questions are asked about whether visitors enjoyed the event, or found it average, or poor. Practical questions are also asked regarding how long visitors spend touring all of the hands-on activities. Learning from the evaluation is taken on board in planning the next annual Crash Bang Squelch event, including practical arrangements such as improving timed entry to the popular event.

## Purpose

- To take science to new audiences, and to inspire interest
- To give students the opportunity to learn science communication skills through offering hands-on activities to visitors
- To develop transferable skills for students useful either if they continue in academia or seek employment in science communication
- To provide the Cambridge Science Festival with one of its student-run elements

## What worked well

*"Fantastic. Lots of hands on experiments and enthusiastic students"* **Audience Member**

- Over 2,000 members of the public of all ages take part in hands-on demonstrations at CHaOS's Crash Bang Squelch event during the Cambridge Science Festival each March and around 100 student demonstrators volunteer.
- Training in how to do the hands-on demos is provided, and communication tips.
- Student volunteers reported that they gained:

*"people skills"* **(Student ID 54)**

*"Greater confidence in explaining science to younger children. An appreciation of how committee's and festivals are organised and interact with schools by observing the committee mailing list."* **(Student ID 55)**

*“Communicating complex ideas to the public in a straightforward way; event organisation” (Student ID 69)*

## What didn't work well

We have a relatively small fire limit in the teaching labs we use, which controls the number of people who can attend; we were full half an hour after opening, and ran out of timed tickets for the rest of the day in about an hour. This meant our front desk spent most of the day telling people that we were too full, and we found it difficult to prevent a queue that spontaneously formed for our event blocking one for another family event that used the same door entrance. This year we're bringing in a rope of the queue and extra signs to make it clearer for everyone!

## Resources Required

- Scores of hours of student committee members' time in the run-up, plus a supply of hands-on kit which has been created over the years.
- Around 100 student demonstrators giving up a day.
- Risk assessments which have been produced and are looked at each year.

## Top tips

### For student volunteers:

1. CHaOS runs events where the public get a chance to meet young scientists and to talk to them about their subject. It might sound obvious, but just saying hello is the best place to start!
2. After that, I usually ask if they want to have a go with whatever science toy I happen to be looking after. Most members of the public will be keen to try with your help, at which point you can explain the science behind your experiment.
3. Don't use technical words without deliberately explaining what they mean, and add any cool facts you happen to know. Once you've finished the experiment you can wave goodbye and talk to the next family- remember to smile and say hello again!

### For organisers:

1. Most of the work behind Crash, Bang Squelch was designing and building the experiments. If you're thinking of starting now, why not use mostly experiments designed by others and add a few of your own? There is lots on the internet- if you look on the demonstrator section of the CHaOS website you should be able to find links to ours.
2. Apart from a good venue, the other thing you'll need is lots of keen volunteers. We find that if you make it easy for people to get involved many are willing to give up a day of their time.
3. Most of our recruitment happens via student/ department email lists: we send a short description of our event in the email, and then get potential volunteers to click on a link

to sign up via an online form. Having all this in one spreadsheet makes it fairly easy to deal with the admin for 100 ish volunteers- much easier than 2 or 3 emails per person!

## Contact

**Name:** Lia Chappell

**Name of organisation:** Cambridge Hands-On Science (CHaOS)

**Email:** [contact@chaossience.org.uk](mailto:contact@chaossience.org.uk)

**Website:** <http://www.chaossience.org.uk>

# 5. University participation in cultural festival

## *Glastonbury Festival and University for the Creative Arts*

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### Overview

**Who:** University for the Creative Arts (UCA) at Glastonbury Festival.

**What:** Staff and students offered workshops and demos for the public aimed to represent the green spirit of the festival, in terms of innovations in sustainability, traditional craftsmanship and forerunners in new technology.

**Why:** UCA first attended the festival in 2009 to celebrate attaining University status and to increase overall brand awareness. In 2010 and 2011, the goals were to extend visibility of student work, to publicise the diverse range of courses to a wider audience within a contemporary arts context, and to highlight the student experience. The project also supports the university's outreach and widening participation agendas.

**Where:** Glastonbury Festival.

**When:** June 2009, June 2010, June 2011

### Project description

In 2009 the University for the Creative Arts was the first university to have a stand at Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts, repeated in 2010 and 2011. The Glastonbury Festival has over 100,000 attendees each year.

The University for the Creative Arts offered free activities such as photo sessions, screenings, a daily documentary, free film, free internet access, public wi-fi, hands on craft trials, interactive artworks, a bullet rig, demos and information on their art, design and media courses.

The project was led by 20 staff and students from the Farnham and Epsom locations of the university, as well as the Students' Union. Students acted as: performers, workshop leaders, stewards and carried out production duties in lighting, sound, painting, crafts, and staging.

At the 2011 festival, students got involved with offering life/figure drawing lessons; a fashion photography studio; recycled jewellery workshops; an oversized 3D weave which will grow from a piece of string to a work of art; and interactive canvases where guests can show their artistic skills with paint. There were nightly screenings of animation, experimental films and computer games made by current UCA students.

Students gained skills in video production, animation and engaging with the public through creative workshops, developing knowledge and gaining confidence and experience which can help with finding future employment.



## Purpose

- Engaging with the festival attendee community and building a model for future engagement.
- Profile raising of University of the Creative Arts.
- Supporting UCA's outreach and widening participation agendas.
- Showcase of UCA student work in creative arts, with the aim of securing future opportunities.
- Opportunities for student employment.
- Attracting and working with corporate partners and sponsors.
- Supporting UCA's core values: sustainability, creativity, collaboration, respect and distinctiveness.

## What worked well

Some students have been offered jobs, others have had their work viewed on the Glastonbury home page with hundreds of thousands of viewings. They also bring ideas for engaging, creative activities in performance, film, art and design that staff wouldn't think of. Our presence worked in a sense of brand awareness of the University of the Creative Arts and supporting the objectives mentioned in the introductory section of this text.

Feedback from audience members:

*"Awesome – one of the best stands at Glastonbury. So helpful!"*

*"Wonderful presentation of accountable creativity!"*

*"How great to see an educational establishment creating awareness of itself at Glastonbury. You might be the first but I bet many will follow – what an excellent idea!"*

## What didn't work well

The least popular activity we offered was the evening cinema on the main music nights (Saturday and Sunday); this was to be expected as the festival comes alive during the headline acts and most visitors are at the main stages. During these times the cinema did attract viewers, but not in great numbers.

## Resources Required

- Very specific to what was offered; in our case: photo studios, ceramics, paint, lights, chairs, IT etc. Also the camping equipment and building staff accommodation took considerable time and effort.

- Planning and manpower.
- Financially, attending the festival wasn't expensive; most equipment we have on campus and all staff and students gave their time for free.
- Security of equipment.

## Top tips

1. Collaborate with suppliers and industry, we gained sponsorship (mostly prizes for our competitions) from Apple, Sub TV, Calumet and Vodafone.
2. Measure your impact: e.g. direct recruitment (if that is your goal), increased brand awareness (visits to your website), formal and informal feedback.
3. Hope for the best, plan for the worst – specifically regarding health and safety, weather, and security.
4. Don't be too corporate and don't try and sell things to people, the festival environment isn't a recruitment event.

## Contact

**Name:** Tim Savage

**Name of organisation:** University for the Creative Arts

**Email:** [Tsavage@ucreative.ac.uk](mailto:Tsavage@ucreative.ac.uk)

**Website:** <http://community.ucreative.ac.uk/index.cfm?articleid=28502>

# Acknowledgements

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This work derives from a study of the role of student volunteers and universities in festival-based public engagement. The research was commissioned by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), and was funded in part by the NCCPE's vInspired students project. A report on the research can be downloaded from:

[www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how-we-help/our-publications](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how-we-help/our-publications)

The NCCPE's vision is of a higher education sector making a vital, strategic and valued contribution to 21<sup>st</sup>-century society through its public engagement activity. It works to help support universities to improve, value and increase the quantity and quality of their public engagement and embed it into their core practice. The NCCPE is part of the national Beacons for Public Engagement initiative, funded by the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust.

The NCCPE has been funded by v, the National Young Volunteers Service, to run the vInspired students project, which aims to provide evidence of the benefits of volunteering and to encourage universities to recognise the value of student volunteering as part of their core activity.

For more information about the NCCPE and vInspired students, please go to :

[www.publicengagement.ac.uk](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk)

## About the authors

**Nicola Buckley** is Head of Public Engagement at the University of Cambridge. She helps to convene the UK science festivals network and is a member of the European Science Communication Events Association and the British Arts Festivals Association. As well as managing the team delivering the annual Cambridge Science Festival, she founded the annual Cambridge Festival of Ideas in 2008, which engages the public with arts, humanities and social sciences research. Her co-authored chapter on 'Science Festivals' is forthcoming in 'Successful Science Communication' (Cambridge University Press). She can be reached at: [nicola.buckley@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:nicola.buckley@admin.cam.ac.uk).

**Joanna McPhee** is a Development Officer at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge and was formerly a Festivals and Outreach Officer at the University of Cambridge. She helped to initiate the Cambridge Festival of Ideas and managed that Festival for two years.

**Dr Eric Jensen** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick (<http://warwick.academia.edu/EricJensen>), where he leads a new MSc programme in Science, Media and Public Policy. He is co-editing and contributing to the forthcoming book *Culture & Social Change: Transforming Society through the Power of Ideas* (Information Age). He can be reached at: [e.jensen@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:e.jensen@warwick.ac.uk).

# Appendix

## *Examples of Postcard Evaluation Forms*

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### Cambridge Science Festival

#### Science Festival 2010 – Evaluation Form

**Thank you for your help – your feedback will help us to improve and develop the Science Festival.**

Please list the events / venues you attended

Did the Science Festival meet your expectations? What did you like and what didn't work so well?

#### **PTO**

Are there any topics or themes you would like to see covered in future years?

If you are willing, please give the first four digits / letters of your postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Please give us your email address if you would like to hear about future public events at the University of Cambridge:

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Would you be willing to participate in further online evaluation of the Science Festival?

Yes  No

Everyone who takes part in the online evaluation will be entered into a prize draw to win a copy of the book *The University of Cambridge: an 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Portrait*

*Your email address will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. We will only contact you*

*1) regarding the University of Cambridge and Cambridge College public events, if you have indicated you would like to receive updates*

*2) for evaluation purposes, if you have indicated you are willing to participate in further evaluation of the Science Festival*

*We will not share or transfer the information you have provided.*

Please hand this form to a steward or send it to Office of External Affairs and Communications, The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1RP.

# Cambridge Festival of Ideas



## Festival of Ideas 2010 – Evaluation form

*Please complete one form for the whole of your party.*  
Please list the events you attended:

**Overall impression of the events attended:**

- Very Good     
  Good     
  Average     
  Poor     
  Very Poor

**What did you like**

**and what didn't work so well?**

**Are there any topics or themes you would like to see covered in future years?**

**How did you hear about the Festival of Ideas this year?** (Please tick all that apply)

- Already on mailing list   
  Poster     
  Local press     
  Local interest group  
 Work     
  Library     
  School     
  Family / friend / word of mouth  
 Online     
  Connected to the University

**How far did you travel to the Festival?**

- 0-5 miles     
  5-10 miles     
  10-20 miles  
 20-50 miles     
  50-100 miles     
  100-200 miles  
 > 200 miles

**PLEASE TURN OVER**

**Please indicate the ethnic origins of all people in your party:**

	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese	Mixed	White	Other
<b>No. of people</b>	....	....	....	....	....	....

**Please indicate the age and genders of all people in your party:**

	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
	yrs	yrs	yrs	yrs	yrs	yrs	yrs	yrs	yrs	yrs
<b>No. of females</b>	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
<b>No. of males</b>	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

**Would you describe yourself or anyone in the group you visited the Festival with as disabled?**

- Yes       No

**Please give us your email address if you would like to hear about future public events at the University of Cambridge:** .....

**Would you be willing to participate in further online evaluation of the Festival of Ideas?**

Yes  No

Everyone who takes part in the online evaluation will be entered into a prize draw to win an iPod Touch or Amazon voucher.

*Your email address will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. We will only contact you*

*1) regarding the University of Cambridge public events, if you have indicated you would like to receive updates*

*2) for evaluation purposes, if you have indicated you are willing to participate in further evaluation*


*We will not share or transfer the information you have provided*

Please hand this form to a steward or send it to: Festivals and Outreach Assistant, Office of External Affairs and Communications, The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1RP

Thank you for your feedback which will help us to improve and develop the Festival of Ideas

## Example of Stand Alone Evaluation Form

Here is an example of an evaluation form that could stand on its own if necessary, although it was in fact used for the 2009 Cambridge Science Festival in conjunction with an extended web-based questionnaire.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE 100 YEARS 1809-2009		Cambridge Science Festival - Visitor evaluation form	
		Thank you for your help in telling us what you think – this will help us to plan future Festivals.	
Which event did you attend?: _____		Date and approximate time you are completing this form: _____	
1. Please rate the event you attended (please circle) Excellent 5 4 3 2 1 Poor			
2. What did you think of the event? _____			
3. Please tell us about your suggestions for future Festivals. _____			
4. How did you hear about the Festival? _____			
5. Have you been to the Festival before? (please tick) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>			
6. Approximately how far have you travelled to the Festival (in miles)? _____			
7. Do you have any connection with the University of Cambridge?			
Please tick			
<input type="checkbox"/>		No	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Yes, I am a current or former member of staff	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Yes, I am a current or former student	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Yes, a member of my family is a current/former member of staff or student	
8. Please indicate your highest completed level of education		10. Gender (please tick)	
Please tick		Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		11. Do you consider yourself to be disabled? (please tick)	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		12. Ethnic origin	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Please tick	
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		White	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Mixed	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Asian or Asian British	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Black or Black British	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Chinese	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Other	
9. What is your year of birth? _____		13. Please give us your email address if you'd like to hear about future public events at the University of Cambridge: _____	
14. Would you be willing to participate in further research seeking your perspectives on the Science Festival and your views about the role of science in society? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		If yes, Name _____ Email _____	
Your email address will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. We will only contact you			
1) regarding the University of Cambridge public events, if you have indicated you would like to receive updates			
2) for evaluation purposes, if you have indicated you are willing to participate in further research about the Science Festival			
3) We will not share or transfer the information you have provided.			
Please hand this form to a steward or send it to: Marielle Smith, Office of External Affairs and Communications, The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP.			