

A report of the Oxfordshire Science Festival 2017

by Dane Comerford, Festival Director, July 2017



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1. Festival overview

Around 8,000 visitors came to 34 Science Festival events 16-21 June 2017 held in a dozen venues, with 77% visiting the Festival for the first time.

In exit surveys, 85% of visitors rated the event they had attended as ‘good’ or ‘very good’

The Festival website had around 35,000 page views from bookings opening on 3 May to the end of the Festival and made 80,000 Twitter impressions during the same period.

The Festival featured in the *Oxford Mail*, *Oxfordshire PICK Magazine*, *OX Magazine*, *Primary Times*, *BBC Focus Magazine*, *BBC Radio Oxford* and several other blogs and news websites.

Over half of attendees to ticketed/paid events came from Oxford (52%) or Oxfordshire (69%) with London as the next most frequent home for ticketholders.

In keeping with the development of the Festival, more formats and events were programmed to cross traditional disciplinary boundaries. For example:

- Evolutionary biologist **Richard Dawkins** in conversation with computer scientist **Yan Wong**
- **Emily Mayhew** (military medical historian), **Harry Parker** (double-amputee former Captain in the British Army) and **Ross Moy** (Consultant in Emergency Medicine at The John Radcliffe Hospital and Lieutenant colonel in the British Army) talking about military medicine
- Chef **Tom Kerridge** and Professor of Nutrition, **Susan Jebb**, discussing diet and food from a nutritional, creative, sociological and environmental perspective
- Oxford-based publishing house, Rebellion, brought together four prominent Sci-Fi authors and editors to discuss how an understanding of science supports the process of writing science fiction

- A panel of **Marianne Talbot** (Philosophy, University of Oxford), **Piers Millett** (Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford), **Justina Robson** (science fiction author), **Robert Smith** (Global Health & Social Medicine, King's College London) and **Max Jamilly** (Synthetic Biologist, University of Oxford) debated the ethics of synthesising and recoding entire human genomes.

There was a range of event formats in addition to lecture-theatre talks and discussions, including:

- An exhibition of microscopy images displayed in the University Parks;
- two dance workshops to explore the relationships between planetary and solar physics;
- four dry-ice cloud factory workshops;
- several live art interventions across Oxford city centre including a two-metre periscope; and
- two science cabarets, on themes of *Midsummer* and *Contagion*.

Other highlights

In March 2017, Oxfordshire Science Festival asked young people to write a short poem on any topic of science, using any style. We had over 400 entries ranging from limericks and rap to haiku, acrostic poems and poems based on a shape. The winning entries and runners-up were published in a Poetry of Science anthology. These nine poems were performed at the Oxfordshire Science Festival in Oxford Town Hall on Saturday 17 June 2017; <http://www.oxfordshiresciencefestival.com/schools-poetry-competition.html>.

The large hands-on Explorazone in the Oxford Town Hall had 33 different exhibits that were open to the general public 12-5pm on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 June. The Explorazone was also open to an adult-only audience from 6.30-9pm on Saturday when there was a cash bar and entertaining Theremin music; <http://www.oxfordshiresciencefestival.com/explorazone.html>.

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, unable to be present, made a short video message that was screened on Wednesday 21 June during the event highlighting The Ladybird Expert Book of Climate Change and ideas within it. This in-conversation event involved environmentalist **Tony Juniper** and climate scientist **Dr Emily Shuckburgh**; <http://www.oxfordshiresciencefestival.com/our-climate.html>.

2. Team, Partners and Supporters

Oxfordshire Science Festival 2017 was produced in association with Science Oxford. University of Oxford was Principle sponsor. Other sponsors were Oxford Brookes University, Siemens Healthineers (Siemens Magnet Technology) and Diamond Light Source, along with 19 other independent contributing organisations.

At least 350 people were involved in the Festival, including 275 researchers from a range of research, industrial and charitable organisations. Key support came from public engagement staff at University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, along with staff from Science Oxford.

OSF is pleased to have worked with:

- Jo James (independent consultant), who helped identify speakers and shape six events in the programme.
- Blackwell's and Oxford University Press who coordinated a series of six events
- Waterstones, who joined the Festival to support book signings at eight events
- Savage and Grey, who designed the programme
- Matthew Whiteley (Black and Whiteley), event photographer
- Our cohort of 25 volunteers who contributed their time, energy and enthusiasm to help run events at the Festival.

Dane Comerford was Director of the Festival, Cathy Rose was the Festival Events manager, Sarah Gollner was an Intern from Oxford Brooks University working on social media.

The Oxfordshire Science Festival Trustees were:

- Ian Thompson (Chair)
- Jennifer Bardsley
- Bryan Brown
- Georgina Ferry
- Iain Littlejohn
- Lesley Paterson

The Festival cannot happen without the enthusiasm, creativity and skill of everyone involved. We offer huge thanks to those mentioned by name and to those volunteers, event producers or speakers, who we refer to as partners and supporters.

Please look out for the next Festival in October 2018...

3. Marketing

The Festival produced 25,000 copies of a 32-page A5 programme printed full colour throughout on 130gsm silk stock. The OSF2017 programme and A4/A3 posters were distributed using a mixture of:

- Centralised mail-outs using Oxfordshire Libraries, Parish Councils and Community Centres, Oxford Brookes University and University of Oxford;
- Solus mail drops to Oxford residential addresses OX1 1##, OX2 6##, OX3 7##, and OX4 1##;
- Contract leaflet-rack distribution – within every postcode region of Oxfordshire – using the Culture Calling ‘Oxfordshire Arts & Culture’, ‘Oxfordshire Families’ and ‘Oxfordshire Total County’ venues;
- Hand-delivery to cafés, bars and hairdressers in Summertown, Headington, Jericho, Cowley Road and Oxford City Centre; and
- Public (eg. Oxford Green Week), interest group and school events in Oxford.

Electronic versions of the brochure and flyer were e-mailed to individuals, special interest groups, previous Festival attendees, community groups and to partners’ networks.

Twenty lamppost-column banners of four designs, were deployed at six gateway locations around Oxford from early May.



Media coverage

Festival adverts and feature items appeared in the *Oxford Mail*, *Oxfordshire PICK Magazine*, *OX Magazine*, *Primary Times*, *BBC Focus Magazine*, *BBC Radio Oxford* and several other blogs and news websites.

BBC Radio Oxford covered the Festival in the preceding week and while the Festival was live, with items on weekday *Breakfast* and *Drivetime* and over two weekends.

Culture Calling (the UK's largest Arts Marketing specialists with primary activity in Brighton, Bristol, Oxford and London) ran a five-day competition for people to win one of two Family/Group passes for the Oxfordshire Science Festival. There were 554 entries in total.

Example advert for a primary scghool / family audience

<p>8 May, Oxford Mail</p>	<p>13 June, Science Oxford blog</p>	<p>17 June, Oxford Mail</p>	<p>29 June, PMLiVE</p>



June issue 2017, BBC Focus Magazine



May issue 2017, Oxfordshire PICK Magazine



June issue 2017, OX Magazine

4. Events and Activities

There were 34 events in the Science Festival programme, with some not included, that attracted around 8,000 people. Activity can be broadly classified into two groups: events for adults and families, and the Explorazone. The table below lists all Festival events:

Event	Format	Audience	Venue
Saturday 10 June			
Oxford Big Green Day Out	Hands-on	Family / Adult	Broad Street
Wednesday 14 June			
Richard Dawkins in conversation with Yan Wong	Talk	Adult	Museum of Natural History
Friday 16 June			
Faces of Social Media	Talk	Family / Adult	Sheldonian Theatre
Warzone	Talk	Family / Adult	Sheldonian Theatre
Saturday 17 June			
Science Oxford Maker Club	Workshop	Children	Oxford Centre for Innovation
Through the Looking Glass	Exhibition	Family / Adult	University Parks
House of Wisdom	Hands-on	Family	History of Science Museum
A Few Feet up / OxHOS	Hands-on	Family / Adult	City Centre
Explorazone	Hands-on	Family / Adult	Oxford Town Hall
Poetry of Science	Talk	Family / Adult	Oxford Town Hall
The Cloud Factory	Talk	Family / Adult	Oxford Town Hall
The Acoustics of Nature	Talk	Adult	Oxford Town Hall
Explorazone: Adults Only	Hands-on	Adult	Oxford Town Hall
Sunday 18 June			
Cycle Ride to Westmill Wind Farm	Cycle ride	Adult	Meet on Broad Street
Test Drive the Future	Hands-on	Family / Adult	The Cherwell School
A Few Feet up / OxHOS	Hands-on	Family / Adult	City Centre
Explorazone	Hands-on	Family / Adult	Oxford Town Hall
Dance the Universe with "8Minutes"	Workshop	Family / Adult	Oxford Town Hall
The Making of The British Landscape: From the Ice Age to the Present with Nicholas Crane	Talk	Family / Adult	Oxford Town Hall
The Cloud Factory	Talk	Family / Adult	Oxford Town Hall
People Power with Robert Llewellyn	Talk	Adult	Oxford Town Hall
Monday 19 June			
Very Short Introduction: Telescopes	Talk	Adult	Blackwell's Bookshop
Science and Science Fiction	Talk	Adult	Sheldonian Theatre
Sex, Lies & Brain Scans	Talk	Adult	Blackwell's Bookshop
Experimental Cancer Medicine – we do this in Oxford?	Talk	Adult	The Richard Doll Building
Masters of Disaster – Next Gen Earth	Workshop	Family / Adult	St Peter's College
Happy and Healthy Diet with Tom Kerridge and Susan Jebb	Talk	Family / Adult	Sheldonian Theatre

Tuesday 20 June			
Very Short Introduction: Navigation	Talk	Adult	Blackwell's Bookshop
Plastic-free Oxford	Talk	Adult	Turl Street Kitchen
Should We Synthesise Human Genomes?	Talk	Adult	Oxford Town Hall
The Oxford Illustrated History of Science	Talk	Adult	Blackwell's Bookshop
The Contagion Cabaret – a quirky theatrical evening of drama, discussion and disease	Performance	Family / Adult	Museum of History of Science
A Climate of Change with Mike Berners-Lee	Talk	Adult	Oxford Town Hall
Wednesday 21 June			
Very Short Introduction: Weather	Talk	Adult	Blackwell's Bookshop
Mass	Talk	Adult	Blackwell's Bookshop
Ladybird Expert Book of Climate Change	Talk	Family / Adult	Saïd Business School
Midsummer Science Cabaret	Performance	Adult	The Bullingdon
Sunday 2 July			
Cowley Road Carnival	Hands-on	Family / Adult	Cowley Road

Explorazone

Approximately 4,000 people attended the two-day Explorazone, spending between half an hour and three hours in the Town Hall (based on entrance footfall, snapshot counting, ad-hoc questioning and observation.) The dominant audience type was families with young children, but significant numbers of adults without children were also present.

There were 33 contributing exhibits, including 16 from University of Oxford, 4 from Oxford Brookes University, 5 from industry, 3 from non-profit organisations and 5 from research institutes. Teams presented on one or both days and 17 exhibits committed to the adults-only slot on Saturday evening.

Several stand-alone events were planned alongside the Explorazone within the Town Hall:

1. Poetry competition attracting educationalists, families of contributing pupils and those interested in poetry to the readings and prize giving;
2. The Cloud Factory, a popular workshop-style lecture consisting dry-ice smoke effects and explanations of cloud formation (repeated four times);
3. A Few Feet Up, a curious live art performance where two people wandered Oxford (Cornmarket Street, St Aldates and Broad Street) asking people to control and look through a two-metre periscope (repeated six times over the two days);
4. Science Busking with Oxford Hands on Science on Cornmarket Street, St Aldates and Broad Street;
5. '8Minutes', an opportunity to immerse in choreography and astrophysics during a 90-minute dance workshop (repeated twice);
6. Three talks on acoustics, the British Landscape and renewable energy.

5. Visitors and Audience impressions

The main ticket sales platform for the Festival was Eventbrite, with some event contributors choosing to issue tickets by other means. Some events were drop-in and did not take bookings. This meant that visitors planned their visit on different timescales, from weeks in advance to deciding on the day.

Benefits of requiring booking for events are an indication of popularity (and therefore marketing push required) and it presents the opportunity to ask prospective attendees some simple questions about the event they are to attend in the future. Upon completion of the booking process, ticketholders were directed to a short survey, which typically took one to two minutes to complete.

Approximately 500 people completed the pre-Festival survey, with 77% of respondents self-identifying as new to the Oxfordshire Science Festival.

1. Have you booked tickets to the Oxford Science Festival before?	Response Percent
Yes and I have been to previous Festivals	14%
No, but I have been to drop-in events at previous Festivals	9%
Yes, but only for 2017	7%
No, this will be my first time at the Festival	70%
Total responses	97%

The most popular reasons for attending was because a “subject is interesting to me” (84.9%), that an attendee “might learn something new” (76.5%) or that “I enjoy science events” (71.6%). Other key factors were: “I am bringing someone who may enjoy this event” (49.9%); or “The speaker” was the main draw (45.9%).

2. Please tell us why you are coming to this event.	Main reason	Minor reason	Not really
This subject is interesting to me	84.9%	14.6%	0.5%
I might learn something new	76.5%	21.6%	1.8%
I enjoy science events	71.6%	25.5%	2.9%
I am bringing someone	49.9%	16.8%	33.3%
The speaker/s	45.9%	29.4%	24.7%
The social experience	18.2%	34.2%	47.6%
The venue	14.1%	31.3%	54.6%

Of the 90 non-science-enthusiasts (a fifth of respondents) who booked a ticket for the Festival, 94% were new to the Festival and the remaining 6% had only attended a drop-in event before, indicating that the Festival is helping to establish science identity with new audiences.

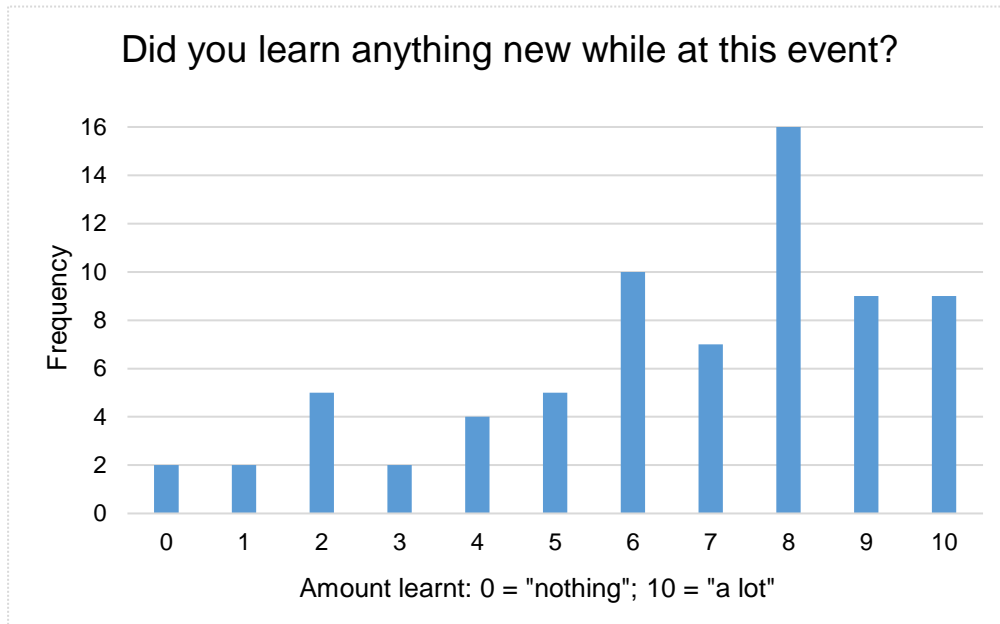
Over half of attendees to paid events came from Oxford (52%) or Oxfordshire (69%). The next most frequent paid-for ticketholder came from London (3%). There was modest UK-wide attraction with bookings and several visitors also coming from Germany, USA, Spain and elsewhere. The table and maps indicate locations below:



Feedback and impressions of events

On-line exit surveys (triggered by an event ending) were completed by 78 people. When asked about the quality of the event just attended, 85% of visitors rated it 'good' or 'very good'.

In terms of learning, respondents were asked "On a scale of 0-10, where 0 = nothing and 10 = a lot, did you learn anything new while at this event?" Answers are summarised below:



When asked who the group leader (survey respondent) came with, responses were:

Alone	40%
With friends	17%
With family (including children aged 0-16)	10%
With family (with everyone over 16 years old)	36%
Other	4%

Events that had a major family profile were the **Explorazone**, **Dance the Universe with "8Minutes"** and **The Cloud Factory**.

The most diverse group compositions came to **Happy and Healthy Diet with Tom Kerridge and Susan Jebb** and **The Making of The British Landscape: From the Ice Age to the Present with Nicholas Crane**. The remaining events, for which there are data, were broadly attended by individuals or in a family group (presumably a couple.)

Happy and Healthy Diet	17% alone	26% with friends	57% with family
British Landscape	36% alone	36% with friends	29% with family
Eight other events	54% alone	2% with friends	40% with family

There is substantial variability and contrast in comments related to events that include too much technical detail, not enough technical detail, about the right amount of technical detail, when describing the quality of events.

A consistent issue was the quality of the sound, which should have been better as the Sheldonian Theatre or Saïd Business School were not inexpensive venues to use. The Festival brought a portable PA system to the Town Hall and the size of the Blackwell's venue meant that sound in these venues was not an issue.

The word cloud, below, is a summary of all words submitted by Festival attendees as comments. An increased font size represents a greater frequency of word use. Some photographs of events are on page 14.



To date, 53 people have completed the survey that is collecting views on what a revised science festival should look like, available via: www.if-oxford.com. The three most popular subject areas to date are Science (83%), Environment (72%) and Technology (66%) and the most popular area to host it is Central Oxford (92%)

The next Festival will return in autumn
to include the weekend 13–14 October 2018

