Imperial Festival 2018

Evaluation Highlights
Evaluation Highlights: Imperial Festival 2018

The seventh annual Imperial Festival took place on Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th April 2018. An estimated 20,000\(^1\) visitors attended over the free weekend, as well as a Schools Day on Friday 27th April attended by students and teachers from 9 invited primary schools, and the annual Alumni Weekend programme.

The objectives of the Festival are as follows:

1. To provide public access to our cutting-edge research across medicine, natural sciences, engineering and business.
2. To deliver participatory engagement methods that enable our public audiences to participate in research areas of relevance to them.
3. To help young people to better understand what universities do, in particular Imperial, and to get a positive sense of the Imperial Community.
4. To provide a platform for staff and students to receive wider perspectives on their work from the public, from colleagues across Imperial and from external partners.
5. To provide a rewarding opportunity for a range of staff, students and volunteers to develop public engagement skills.
6. To develop Imperial’s community spirit, by providing enriching experiences for the staff, students and volunteers who get involved.
7. To provide an opportunity for Imperial’s people to discover or collaborate with partners from academic, charitable, community or creative organisations.
8. To improve our income generation model and streamline our event management processes to support the future sustainability of the Festival.

Imperial Festival 2018 was evaluated by Jenesys Associates Ltd. Evaluation methods and numbers of responses can be found in Appendix I. The evaluation covered the experiences and outcomes for the following:

1. Visitors to the Festival - incorporating members of the public plus visiting Imperial staff, students and alumni. (quotes shown in blue)
2. Contributors - Imperial researchers, other staff, students and external providers who delivered and presented activities at the Festival. (quotes shown in red)
3. Volunteers who supported delivery of the Festival. (quotes shown in green)

\(^1\) Estimate based on numbers of programmes/maps issued, observations of numbers in zones and online bookings
1. Visitors

Who came to the Festival?
- Just under one-third of Festival visitors (30.4%) were age under 25, 25.3% were age 35 to 44 and 22.1% aged 45 to 54.
- 64.2% visitors were female and 34.4% male, with 1.4% preferring not to say.
- Visitors came mostly in ‘Friend(s) &/or family group - mix of adult/s and child/ren age under 16’ 57.8%. When asked about the ages of the children in their group, 87.2% visitors were accompanied by children aged 11 or under.
- 55.5% visitors came from London postcodes and a total of 92.7% came from south east England, including London and relevant adjacent postcodes. 2.1% of visitor postcodes were located within 1 mile of Imperial’s White City Campus postcode.
- Over half (58.1%) of visitors were in work, with a further 2.2% reporting that they worked freelance or were self-employed. Of visitors aged 16 and above, 77.4% were either currently in higher education or had been to university.

What was their connection to Imperial (if any)?
- For 75.7% visitors 2018 was their first time at Imperial Festival, which is a notable increase on 54.9% in 2017.
- 68.3% visitors reported no connection to Imperial and 15.3% identified as friend/family of current/former Imperial employee or student. 8.2% of 2018 visitors were current staff or students at Imperial in comparison to 16.7% last year.

What else do they like doing?
- Most of the audience for Imperial Festival 2018 reported that they regularly engage with a range of cultural activities, for example 76.2% said that they visited cultural destinations such as museums and galleries three or more times per year. Notably, 61.6% also engage regularly with public science opportunities, suggesting they have an interest in science.
- Most visitors age under 16 reported that they either love science (61.1%) or like science (33.3%).

What motivated visitors to come to Imperial Festival?
- The most popular way visitors heard about the Festival was through word of mouth (27.7%), which contrasts to 2017 when ‘email from Imperial’ was the most common answer at 56.2%.
- The top three main reasons visitors came to Imperial Festival 2018 were:
  1st: to inspire child/ren about science or enhance their interest in science 58.5%.
  2nd: to have an enjoyable day out 47.0%.
  3rd: to learn about the latest research developments at Imperial 42.3%.

We’ve brought two grandchildren, encouraging them to like science. They’re 6 and 8. Some of it’ll go over their heads, but what we want is for them to feel happy about science.
2. Visitor experience

Overall visitor experiences
- 94.6% visitors aged 16 and over, and 94.4% aged under 16 rated their overall experience at Imperial Festival positively.
- 76.8% visitors rated the ease of finding activities positively and 70.4% rated the ease with which they could take part in activities positively.
- 93.6% visitors rated their interactions with Imperial staff or students positively.

When asked about their highlights of the Festival, visitors mentioned three main aspects:
- Activities that were child-friendly - The interactive stalls, with hands on experiments that lets children understand complex sciences.
- Enthusiasm and engaging nature of Imperial staff and students - The brilliant and engaging staff members running the stalls. Very accessible.
- Breadth of science and activities on show - The wide range of good quality, interesting, engaging activities.

Reflections on the Hands-on Zone

When asked about the new Hands-on Zone specifically, visitors with children under 12 were positive about the activities in the zone and the interactions with staff/students there. Suggestions to improve this zone included having more activities for older children within this age range, commenting that many of the activities appealed to the younger groups.

The Hands-on Zone was brilliant. I went with 3 x 5-year olds and they loved it. The people on the stands were welcoming, enthusiastic and willing to spend time explaining things at a level that 5-year-olds could understand.

Interactions with researchers
- 79.7% visitors had spoken to staff or students about the work or research they were displaying or presenting.
- 40.4% reported that they had provided data or information for a research project.
- 13.0% had signed up for information about future participation in research.

Suggestions for the future

As in 2017 and other previous years, almost all sugestions from survey responses and interviews focused on enhancing the visitor experience through actions to reduce over-crowding and provide clearer information. These included:
- Better layout and improved use of space within Zones.
- More activities or zones that are age-specific (particularly for older teenagers/ prospective students).
- Timed ticketing/timed access to activities or zones.
- Greater detail in the programme and on signs to help find activities.
- Clearer information about onsite requirements or constraints for pre-booked activities.

Perhaps have some ticketed events or some way or making it less chaotic and it also needs to be more accessible for tweens and teens and not just younger children.
3. Visitor impacts

Visitors were whether their experience at Imperial Festival 2018 had an impact in a number of areas:

- 93.2% visitors agreed that the Festival made me feel positively about Imperial College London.
- 88.5% agreed that it increased my understanding of the research/work carried out at Imperial.
- 85.9% agreed that it increased my interest in the subjects or topics I saw.
- 81.1% agreed that I felt encouraged to ask questions or give feedback about the work/research I saw.
- 53.1% reported positive impacts in relation to I now intend to find out more about research/work carried out at Imperial.
- 47.5% were inspired to want to contribute to research/work carried out by Imperial (e.g. take part in research project/s).

Impacts for younger visitors

- 91.4% respondents age under 16 reported that they learnt something new at Imperial Festival and 91.4% also reported that they were more interested in science after visiting the Festival.

Adults who attended Imperial Festival with young people age under 16 were asked to describe any impacts the event had on the children they accompanied. Most were positive and described how children of all ages enjoyed the interactive activities, or were inspired about science and discussing it with others, with some cases where older children were inspired about further study at university.

I brought my daughters aged 10 and 12 - they now both want to study at Imperial! The 12 year old wants to study black holes. They are both inspired about science and the university as a result of the day.

Visitors’ future intentions

- 90.5% of visitors aged 16 and over, and 93.0% of those under 16 would visit another Imperial Festival.
- 95.5% would recommend Imperial Festival to someone else.
- 84.6% wanted to visit another Imperial public event.
4. Contributors

Contributor is the term given to Imperial staff, students and others who delivered activities at the Festival.

Who took part?

- 96.3% respondents to the contributor post-event survey were Imperial staff or students. The most-commonly reported contributor category was ‘Imperial postgraduate student’ at 33.9%, followed by ‘Imperial professional services / support staff’ at 22.9%.
- 25.6% had not taken part in any engagement events in the past three years. Almost half (49.5%) had taken part in schools engagement, 40.0% had been involved in a public talk/lecture and 30.5% at a previous Imperial Fringe (respondents could select more than one option).
- Just under half (48.6%) of all contributors had not taken part in Imperial Festival before this year.

What motivated contributors to get involved?

When asked what motivated them to get involved in Imperial Festival 2018, respondents’ answers fell into four main themes: to explain their research or work to the public (which was also the most common motivation last year); because it was expected as part of their job or role / felt it was their duty to explain their research to the public; positive previous experience at Imperial Festival; and enjoyment.

I wanted to share my lab's research with the public and foster understanding of the importance of plant biology.

Contributors’ public engagement aims for taking part in Imperial Festival fell into three main themes:
- To communicate the societal significance or importance of their research.
- To inspire young people about STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths).
- To raise awareness of their particular research topic or department.

So I think personally that it’s a huge part of our mission as a researcher, to engage with the public and to show science, to show what we are doing in the lab and to keep the door as open as possible. That’s why I do it.

Contributors’ experiences of Imperial Festival

- 92.6% contributors rated their overall experience of Imperial Festival positively.
- 83.2% rated the ‘pre-event briefing and support’ as above average and 82.4% rated the same for ‘support during the Festival’.

In suggestions to improvement, contributors suggested more consistency in briefing and information prior to the event, as well as how the large crowds adversely affected their capacity to engage visitors as they would have liked. That said, contributors welcomed the positive difference that the Hands-On zone made to the congestion in the other parts of the Festival.

Impacts on contributors

Contributors were asked in the post-event survey to describe the main impact that Imperial Festival 2018 has had for them or they expect it to have in future. Their responses fell into three main themes:
- Widening the public reach of their work or research.
- Feeling inspired to undertake more public engagement or outreach.
- Developing skills and experience for future public engagement or outreach work.
I'm just even more keen to do more outreach and engagement activities. I had the best time designing the activity with my lab group and delivering it to the public was so much fun!

Contributors were also asked about a series of personal outcomes:
- 92.6% felt that the Festival was a rewarding and motivating experience.
- 78.0% agreed that it enhanced my transferable skills.
- 75.9% said that it made me feel more positively about Imperial College London.
- 73.0% indicated that Imperial Festival strengthened my connections with my immediate colleagues.
- 68% contributors reported that it strengthened my connections with other Imperial colleagues.

The contributor survey also covered potential outcomes on research:
- 36.0% researchers contributing to the Festival said that they had gained new perspectives on my current research.
- 27.1% said that they had gained new ideas for developing my research in future.

Where contributors cited ‘no’ many mentioned that they had not designed activities with the aim of gaining new ideas or that GDPR had made data collection/public participation at the Festival more difficult.

Many contributors also gained new ideas for developing my public engagement work in general (78.3%).

*Imperial Festival was my first introduction to doing public engagement aimed at children, and gave me some good ideas of what kind of activities are possible.*

Previous participation in Imperial Festival in previous years was shown to have an impact on contributors personally and their public engagement activities (73.5% and 72.9%).

*So we’ve been involved in the festival for a few years now. I think this is at least our fourth year, so some of these ideas or most of them in fact we’ve had as previous festival exhibits apart from perhaps [an activity] which we wrote specifically for the sort of target audience that we knew we’d be getting at the festival. So we had an understanding about the audience I felt.*

**Contributors’ future intentions**
- 87.4% would take part in a future Imperial Festival.
- 85.3% reported that they would recommend taking part to a colleague/peer.
5. Volunteers

Who volunteered at Imperial Festival 2018?
- Over half of the 2018 Imperial Festival volunteer respondents were Imperial students (54.0%), an increase on the 30.4% in 2017. Another 20.0% were staff members at Imperial, which compares to 34.8% in 2017.
- Just over one third (35%, 35) had volunteered at Imperial Festival before 2018.
- The most common reason for volunteering was to support Imperial College London selected by 40.0% volunteer respondents, across all categories. The next most common reason was enjoy myself/have fun at 34.0%.
- Volunteers heard about the Festival through a range of channels; direct email (34.0%) and word of mouth (20.0%) were the most commonly reported forms of communication.

What were the experiences of volunteers?
- When asked about their overall experience, 95.0% volunteers rated it positively, i.e. as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’, which compares to 87.8% in 2017.
- Respondents also rated the sign up process (80.0%), pre-Festival briefing (81.0%) and assigned role during the Festival (76.0%) positively.

For most volunteers, the main highlight was meeting people, which included other volunteers as well as contributors and visitors to Imperial Festival.

My main highlight is that I got to meet so many people from all walks of life. It was very interesting to exchange knowledge and find common ground.

Volunteers also cited satisfaction from helping people.

Getting to help people with their queries as they were lost on campus. As a non-Imperial student this lifted my confidence given I did my best to help them way-finding and providing general information.

Volunteers also play an important role in helping to feed back the experiences of visitors and suggestions for next year. Many volunteers have fed back positive interactions they had with visitors.

The majority of visitors on their way out, purposely stopped by to say “Thank You so much, we had a lovely time!” Other comments, I can remember include: "we had a wonderful day, enjoyed ourselves very much, there is so much on offer: new things to see and learn from, children loved the interactive activities.

What were the outcomes for volunteers?
- 87.3% volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that taking part in the Festival had been ‘a rewarding and motivating experience. Similarly, 64.8% reported that Imperial Festival enhanced my transferable skills.
- 80.3% strongly agreed or agreed with it made me feel more positively about Imperial College London and 81.5% felt more motivated to volunteer at other Imperial events.
- For Imperial staff and students who volunteered at the Festival, 61.5% felt that it strengthened my connections with Imperial colleagues and 86.5% felt more motivated to participate in Imperial Festival in other ways (e.g. on a stand, in a display).
- 79.8% would volunteer at a future Imperial Festival, and 89.8% said that they would definitely recommend being a volunteer at Imperial Festival to others.
6. Schools Day

The pupils who visited Schools Day were Primary Key Stage 2, and many reported positive experiences:

- 96.3% enjoyed visiting Imperial
- 91.4% would like to visit Imperial Festival again (85.1% would like to visit Imperial again in 2017)
- 93.4% learned something new
- 76.5% of pupils said they were more interested in science after Schools Day

Pupil outcomes from Schools Day

Almost all pupils described something they had learnt at Schools Day:

- Learning about disability or disability aids was the most common answer, described in just over one-quarter of cases. About how people with disabilities feel and what their life is like. It’s really hard to balance on one leg. I learned how people with disabilities get exercise and what exercise they can get from bioengineers.
- One-quarter of pupils described an experiment where they had seen leaves change colour and glow under UV light. I learned about glowing materials and how they work and how to make spinach change colour. We saw them make spinach glow red.

When asked what they felt was the best bit about schools day, around half mentioned something they had done or experienced physically, which was often linked to the topic of disability.

The best thing I did today was where you got to do lots of active things: race on crutches and balance on a ball. We learn about fake arms and legs.

Accompanying adults

63.6% of the accompanying adults had not been to Imperial College London before Schools Day 2018.

Adults rated Imperial Festival Schools Day highly, with 100% rating their overall impression and hands-on activities above average. Positive ratings were mainly attributed to the interactive nature of activities; the breath of science covered; and appropriate level at which the content was pitched.

Interactive activities – Child-friendly – Great range of activities.

Accompanying adults said that they learned about the range and variety of research being carried out through Schools Day. They also reported how they intended to use ideas and resources in classroom teaching and extra-curricular activities, such as science clubs.

We have STEM week so will use lots of ideas there. Good ways of putting scientific processes into layman’s terms for the classroom.

One adult, who said they were not responsible for science teaching, intended to use some of the ideas at home with their own family.

Adults reported that students gained increased interest or enthusiasm for science or scientists and greater understanding of the societal relevance of science.

They learned about the technology in the world that can help people and gained enthusiasm about scientists.
7. **Alumni Weekend 2018 feedback**

As in previous years, a programme of events and activities for alumni took place alongside Imperial Festival 2018. The main reasons selected for attending alumni weekend were:
- Take part in an event/events offered in the Alumni Weekend programme.
- Reconnect with Imperial.
- Share Imperial with my friends and/or family.

**Experiences of alumni**
- 85.0% respondents reported that Alumni Weekend met their expectations.
- 84.1% gave an *overall rating* of above average compared to 93.6% in 2017.
- The Alumni Lounge (welcome, facilities information, design etc.) and pre-event communications were also rated above average (82.5% and 76.4% respectively).

**Outcomes for alumni**
- 83.2% respondents selected 7 or above when asked on a scale of 1-10 how likely they would be to recommend Alumni weekend.
- 83.9% agreed that Alumni weekend *made me feel valued as an Imperial alumnus* (73.1% in 2017). 83.2% hope to attend Alumni Weekend in future.
- 80.9% agreed *it strengthened my sense of connection to Imperial*, and 58.0% agreed that *it enabled me to meet and connect with other alumni*. 71.1% agreed it *increased the feeling of community among Imperial alumni*. 
8. Conclusions

Evaluation of Imperial Festival 2018 was very positive, with quantitative and qualitative evidence indicating that it is achieving its objectives and delivered intended outcomes for almost all visitors, contributors and volunteers. The findings presented in this report show that Imperial Festival is an effective public engagement activity that is particularly appealing to families, who are seeking enjoyable shared experiences and who want to inform and entertain and inspire children of all ages. The Festival presents Imperial in a positive light and is well regarded by almost all who visit as well as those who deliver content and act as volunteers.

Imperial Festival 2018 showcased research from all disciplines found at Imperial College London, with science dominating the content. It attracted a large audience who primarily attend to inspire children around science; have an enjoyable family day out; and learn about Imperial research. It also enabled Imperial staff, students and alumni and their friends and families to share Imperial together.

The findings suggest that the promotional channels used this year attracted a greater proportion of visitors who have no formal connection to Imperial than previous Imperial Festivals. The audience that visited Imperial Festival 2018 is culturally engaged and has a strong interest in science.

Visitors rated their experiences highly, although their feedback indicates there is scope to improve the ease with which they locate activities and gain access to participating in activities. Visitors welcomed the opportunity to talk to and engage directly with researchers. The enthusiasm and passion of Imperial researchers were significant success factors in determining the quality of the visitor experience and it is important that researchers feel as well supported as possible to maintain high quality interactions with visitors.

Visitors reported that there is scope for more content that specifically targets young teenagers (i.e. equivalent ages of Key Stage 3 at school) and provides them with an insight into both the breadth of research/study opportunities and what life is like as an Imperial student.

In general, contributors and volunteers were positive about the support they were given before and during the Festival, although the consistency and detail in briefings for both groups could be improved to optimise their experiences.

A majority of visitors, participants and volunteers regard Imperial Festival to be a successful, well-organised event. It should continue in future years potentially introducing more participatory public engagement with research experiences, and with plans for clearer focusing on its purpose, for managing the large numbers of visitors and for further delineating the programme so that all audience groups and age ranges feel there is something for them at the Festival.
Appendix I: Evaluation Methodology

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<td><strong>Festival visitor age under 16</strong></td>
<td>In-event paper questionnaire n=38</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contributor (researchers, staff, students etc.)</strong></td>
<td>Post-event online survey n=109</td>
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<td><strong>Volunteers</strong></td>
<td>Post-event online survey n=100</td>
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<td><strong>All</strong></td>
<td>Observations³ of Imperial Festival by external evaluation team on 28th &amp; 29th April 2018</td>
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<td><strong>Schools day audience</strong></td>
<td>33 teacher questionnaires and 243 student questionnaires (in-event paper questionnaire)</td>
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<td><strong>Alumni weekend audience</strong></td>
<td>107 online survey responses</td>
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² n= denotes valid responses i.e. 3 or more questions answered
³ Observations were broad and noted visitor movements, visitor groups etc. for the Festival as a whole