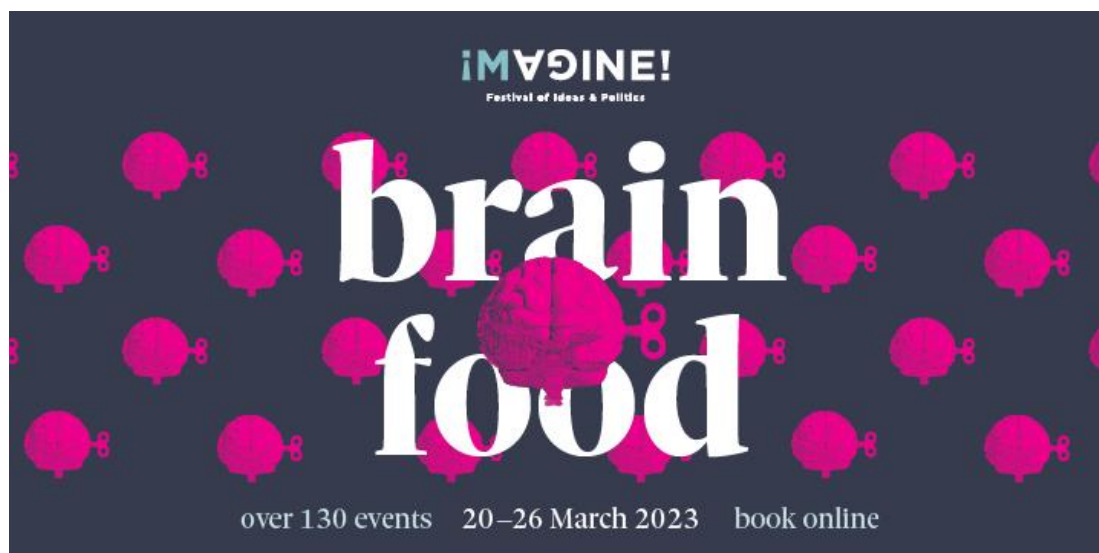


Imagine! Belfast Festival of Ideas & Politics 2023

Evaluation Report



Introduction

The 9th Imagine! Belfast Festival proved to be a very successful project involving **141 events and 257 speakers & performers** during **20-26 March 2023**. The eclectic week of talks, workshops, theatre, poetry, comedy, music, exhibitions, film and tours attracted **a record audience of 37,397** online and in-person attendees - an amazing increase of 306% from the previous festival. The festival explored the theme 'Brain Food: A Feast of Ideas for A Better World' with an attractive range of food related events and visual assets.

Most of the events (54%) were free as the festival rolled out a huge programme including headliners such as the world-renowned intellectual **Noam Chomsky**; American political scientist **Francis Fukuyama**; British environmentalist **Jonathon Porritt**; author and transgender activist, **Shon Faye**; campaigner **George Monbiot**; visual artist **Colin Davidson**; journalist **Sally Hayden** and satirist **Oliver Callan** and a host of other exciting arts, heritage and cultural events with many sold out or oversubscribed.

Musicians included the legendary performer, John Otway; alternative punks, Wood Burning Savages; the acclaimed Australian song writer, Robert Forster; and a special politics and poetry event with leading politicians taking to the stage. Comedy was well represented with Tiff Stevenson and Fin Taylor alongside poets such as Henry Normal and Medbh McGuckian and cabaret performer, Paddy Cullivan.

The unique festival also examined the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the run up to the local government elections with the **premiere of 'Agreement'** a new play by Owen

McCafferty at the Lyric Theatre. A special 'Democracy Day' strand on 24 March focused on citizen activism and the role of local changemakers with a focus on the forthcoming local government elections. We also commissioned a large scale public participation project examining the 'Forgotten Spaces' in the city and Stephen Beggs, as our artist in residence, to deliver a humorous provocation encouraging voter registration. The festival also broadcasted a number of podcasts recorded in front of live audiences, which proved quite successful. These included the BBC Northern Ireland Red Lines and Lesley Riddoch podcasts.

Other events discussed touchstone issues such as how to stop violence against women; climate change; the prospect of a united Ireland; Scottish Independence; regeneration initiatives and poverty themes. Leading commentators such Professor Linda Bauld considered how to prepare for the next pandemic and Professor Jon Tonge discussed why we have so much political instability in Northern Ireland. In addition, we even had a quiz and a special poetry and politics pub crawl to wet the creative appetites!

In developing this festival we hoped to deliver the following outcomes and we are pleased to confirm that we exceeded these targets:

1. A greater appreciation, understanding and exchange by people and communities in Northern Ireland and beyond of local and international political, cultural and reconciliation issues through the organisation of over 100 webcasts and public talks, debates, training workshops, performances and exhibitions for at least 10,000 people
2. Greater public support for reconciliation, cultural diversity, civic activism and deliberative politics in Belfast and Northern Ireland through our festival programme.
3. The promotion of good relations, cultural diversity and the participation of under-represented groups in civic society through the organisation of festival activities, public participation events, blogs, and workshops.
4. The greater facilitation of political and cultural discussion through the engagement of at least 200 keynote speakers and performers sharing perspectives and learning on a range of contentious and difficult issues such as dealing with the legacy of the past, diversity, the climate crisis, and other keynote issues.

We conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the festival through an audience survey involving 401 returns (1% sample). Our survey found that **99% of respondents felt the festival satisfied their expectations**. It was particularly pleasing to find that **57% of audience members were attending a festival event for the first time** and 48% of the sample had never been to the festival venue before, which confirms that **we were able to reach new audiences** and introduce them to new venues and partners. We also asked whether respondents considered themselves to be **disadvantaged** and found that **34%** of the sample considered themselves to fall into this category which suggests were able to significantly engage with vulnerable and less well-off sections of the community.

We also found that **23% of our sample were visiting Belfast and Northern Ireland** with 8% stating they lived in Ireland, 4% came from GB, 5% from rest of Europe and 2% from rest of world. For these out of state visitors, 21% said that attending the festival was the main reason for their visit to Belfast.

We are also delighted with the quality of the performances in our programme, confirmed by audience feedback and media reviews. Several commentators applauded the quality and diversity of our programme and the quirky, innovative range of events we put together. Our unique selling point, as a civic participation festival in Belfast, was recognised in media coverage and our speakers and performers were very appreciative of the platform we were able to provide for them.

Summary

- *Total audience: 37,397 made up of 24,799 in person attendees and 12,598 online. An increase of 306% from the previous year*
- *Audience feedback: 99% of survey respondents felt the festival satisfied their expectations (95% in 2022)¹*
- *New audience members: 58% (60%) of respondents were attending a festival event for the first time and 48% (37%) of the sample had never been to the venue before*
- *Visitors: 21% (12%) of attendees came from outside Northern Ireland. Of these, 21% (13%) stated the festival was the main reason they were visiting Belfast.*
- *Audience spend: Most people spent between £10-19 attending each of our events.*
- *Number of events: 141 with another 3 cancelled due to circumstances beyond our control. 12 were online*
- *Number of performers/speakers: 257 (351)*
- *Number of festival partners: 67 (52)*
- *Number of international participants: 37 (40) with 24 (27) events organised by participants from outside UK & Ireland including Algeria, Australia, Canada, Uganda & USA.*
- *Number of free events: 76 (121) - 54 % (82%) of total events*
- *Average ticket price: £4.10 (£7.8)*
- *Number of venues used: 36 (35)*
- *Media coverage: Total number of clips: 93 (98). Reach: 5,027,802 (4,022,796), circulation 868,688 (874,691), AVE: £180,769 (£181,881), PR Value: £542,306 (£545,644)*
- *Ticket income: £9,951 (£7,082) – 41% increase*
- *Total income: £121,846 (£93,569)*
- *Total expenditure: £120,597 (£93,408)*
- *Surplus £1,249 (£161)*

Background

First established in 2011, the festival is designed to celebrate and support the role of the citizen in the cultural and political life of Belfast. Aimed at engaging people in political/cultural discussion and debate in the broadest sense, it also encourages participation from people not normally involved in politics. The festival is not aligned with any political party or particular interest group and this was successfully communicated to our publics.

This year's festival was organised by an advisory group of approximately 55 partners and delivered by Imagine Belfast Ltd and its Director Peter O'Neill, with a dedicated team of trustees and

¹ Figures in brackets refer to corresponding outturns for the 2022 festival

volunteers. The organisation is registered under the Companies Act 2006, as a private company, limited by guarantee (Company number N1614137) and is also registered with HMRC and the Charity Commission Northern Ireland (NIC101004). We are members of NICVA, Visit Belfast, the International Democracy Festivals Association and the Belfast Festivals Forum.

Mission: The mission of the festival is to provide high-quality showcases for the discussion of contemporary political and societal issues including new ideas on politics, culture and activism.

Aims: Our aims are:

- To organise an inspiring annual programme of performance, discussion and debate.
- To encourage the participation of under-represented groups in political/cultural debate and discussion.
- To stimulate reflection and discussion on difficult and controversial issues.
- To promote free speech, good relations, cultural diversity and equality.

Finance

We are very appreciative of the funding provided this year by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund, VSB Foundation, the Arts Council for Northern Ireland National Lottery Project Fund, Future Screens NI; Linen Quarter BID, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast City Council, Open University Northern Ireland, and the Community Relations Council. We were pleased to attract a new funder this year in Linen Quarter BID. On a budget of approximately £122,000, we were able to deliver a wide-ranging programme, generating a surplus of £1,249. We were able to maximise our ticket income by 40% from last year, which was largely returned to performers. See appendix 3 for further details of our festival income and expenditure.

Programming

The festival employs a mixture of curated and distributed programming models and supports partner organisations to deliver a range of performances, screenings, exhibitions, tours, workshops, conferences, debates and discussions. An advisory group of experienced event organisers and planners assisted with event and speaker suggestions. Over 67 partners were involved in this year's programme and we would like to take this opportunity of thanking them and our funders for helping to make the festival such a success.

We invited the public, artists and partner organisations to suggest and organise events in October 2022 and received a record 114 proposals, most of which we were able to support. We also curated 31 events, managed by the Festival Director, constituting 22% of the total programme. We also had a greater variety of events with more theatre, place-making and exhibitions events compared to previous years. The co-production of 'Agreement' with the Lyric Theatre involved a sell-out run of 30 events and a total audience of over 15,000 which rather distorted our metrics compared to previous years. Our talk with Noam Chomsky and Alan Meban also proved to be very popular and continues to attract viewers on our You Tube channel.

The categories of events, with corresponding figures in brackets compared to our last festival (where applicable), are included below:

- Lectures, debates and talks 21% of total events (24% in 2022)
- Theatre 27% (2%)
- Comedy events 3% (3%)
- Poetry events 4% (4%)
- Discussions and workshops 17% (35%)
- Exhibitions 12% (10%)
- Film screenings 2% (5%)
- Music 3% (8%)
- Tours 3% (6%)
- Performance art 3%. (3%)
- Quizzes 1%
- Outdoor/Place making events 8%
- Podcasts 2%

In addition, we commissioned Stephen Beggs as our artist in residence who worked with us on a **'Vote For Me'** provocation where, acting as the parody election candidate 'Mark Chancer', he performed during the festival week at a number of our events encouraging people to register and vote at the forthcoming local council elections.

We also funded and supported the **'Forgotten Spaces'** online exhibition, competition and in-person seminar which focused our collective imagination for the city. It was curated and led by Meadhbh McIlgorm as a development of her Liminal [space] Belfast project, piloted by the festival last year. The online exhibition, which showed over the month of March 2023, elicited nearly 60 submissions from the public on ideas for what derelict or 'forgotten spaces' could become and why. During the festival week, the online exhibition and competition attracted almost 2,000 unique visitors and it's still getting traction as it is archived on our website.

We were delighted to use several new venues such as the Alexandra's Bakery, Artcetera, Ballynafeigh Community Development Association, the Deer's Head, Empire theatre, Limelight, Shoot Photographic Gallery, Carnegie Oldpark Library, Elmwood Hall and the Grand Central Hotel. As well as the above venues, new partners included the Canadian High Commission; End Deportations Belfast; Glasgow City Council; University of Liverpool; University of Sheffield; Politics in Action; and Scribe Publishing.

The following organisations and venues were involved in the 2023 festival:

Amnesty International; Atheism Ireland; Alexandra's Bakery, Artcetera, Ballynafeigh Community Development Association Bbeyond; British Academy; BBC Northern Ireland; Canadian High Commission; Collaboration for Change; Duncairn Arts Centre; Ulster University; Queen's University Belfast; End Deportations Belfast; The Open University Northern Ireland; Accidental Theatre; Black Box; Blackstaff Press; Cathy Title Media; Carnegie Oldpark; Crescent Arts Centre; Crumlin Road Gaol; the Deer's Head; Democracy Collaborative; Europa Hotel; Involve UK; Feisty Productions Scotland; Future Screens NI; Glasgow City Council; Grand Central Hotel; the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; the John & Pat Hume Foundation; Kabosh Theatre; Linen Hall Library; Linen Quarter BID; Mick Perrin Worldwide; Northern Visions /NVTV; Northern Ireland Foundation; Oh Yeah Centre; Queen's Film Theatre; Inside Ireland; Limin-Alley; Lyric Theatre; Manchester

University Press; No Alibis Bookshop; Politics in Action; Open Government NI; Irish Secretariat; Irish Pen International; Scribe publishing; Shared Future News; Shoot Photographic Gallery; Sheffield Methods Institute; Show & Tell Productions; Slugger O’Toole; Social Change Initiative; South Belfast Eco-Quakers Group; Stratagem; 50:50; The Scoop; Sunflower Bar; 1798 walking tours; Sound Healing Spa; Creative Tours Belfast; Historical Walking tours; Social Farms & Gardens; University of Liverpool; and Vault Studios.

Audience survey

We conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the festival through an audience survey involving 401 returns (1% sample), collecting both hard copy and online responses. We believe there are lots of positives to be gleaned from this survey and the key results/observations are as follows with the corresponding results for 2022 in brackets:

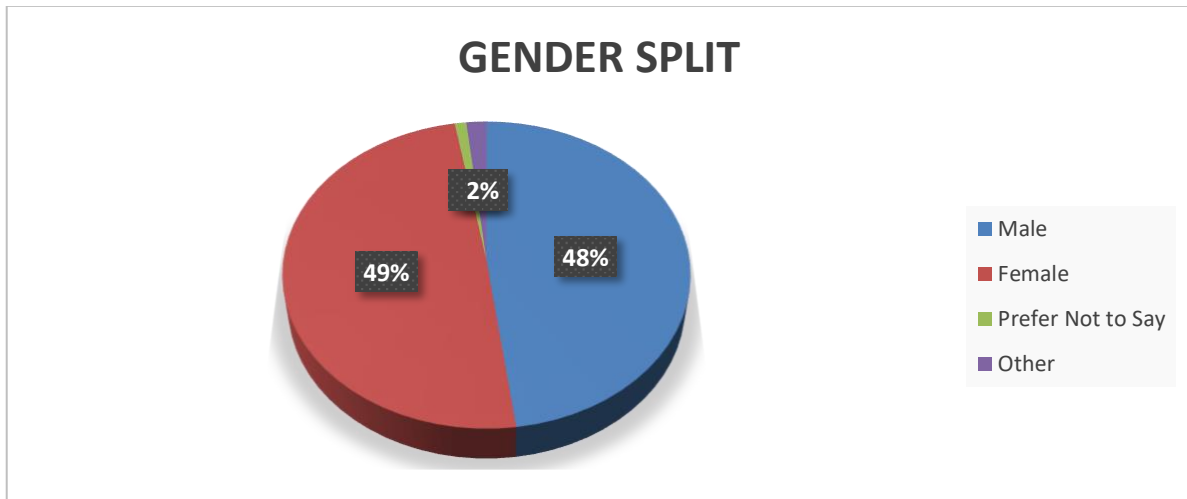
Sample size

401 (316) surveys – 1% sample of the total audience involving 353 hard copy evaluation forms and 48 online survey responses.

Gender

We found a very even representation with 49% (59%) of our audience sample female and male 48% (36%). Two per cent were other and 1% preferred not to say. As detailed in Chart 1.

Chart 1



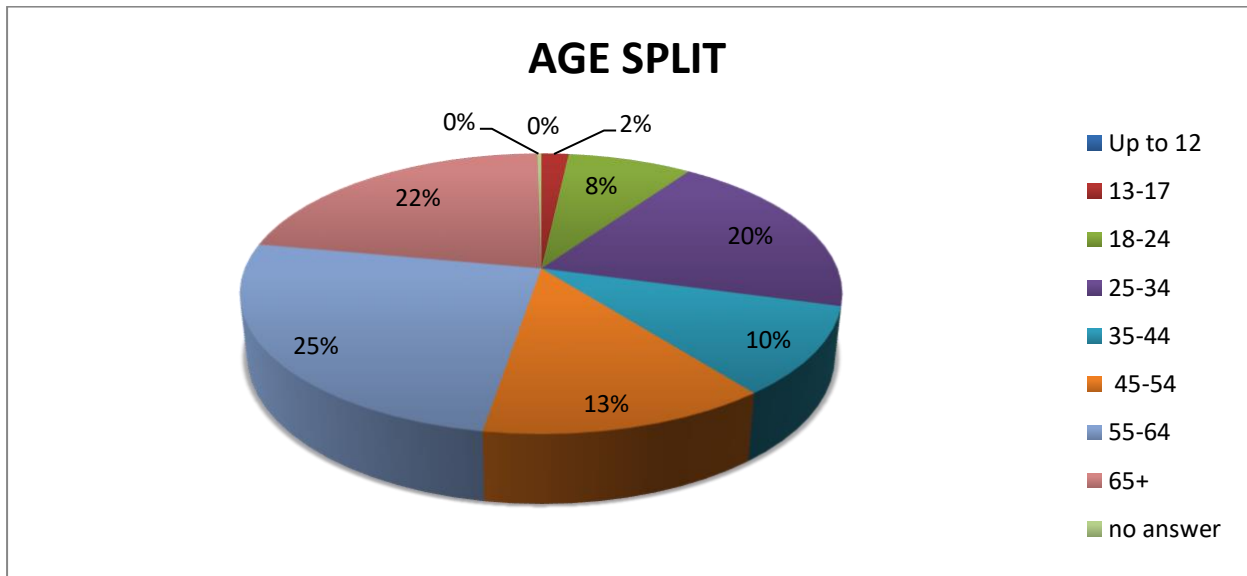
Age profile

We also found in our survey a relatively even age range of attendees but it would appear we attracted a younger audience compared to last year in the 25-34 age group, and many older attendees aged 55 and over, as detailed below and in the following chart:

- 0% aged under 12 years of age (0%)
- 2% aged 13-17 (3%)
- 8% aged 18-24 (13%)
- 20% aged 25-34 (16%)

- 10% aged 35-44 (14%)
- 13% aged 45-54 (19%)
- 25% aged 55-64 (20%)
- 22% aged 65 and over (15%).

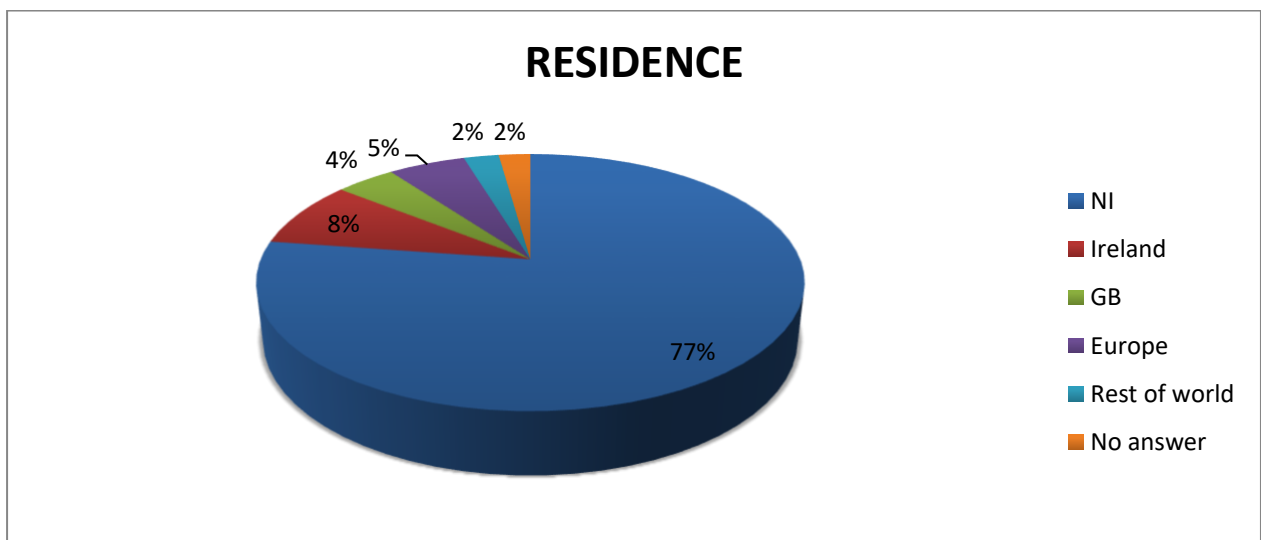
Chart 2



Domicile

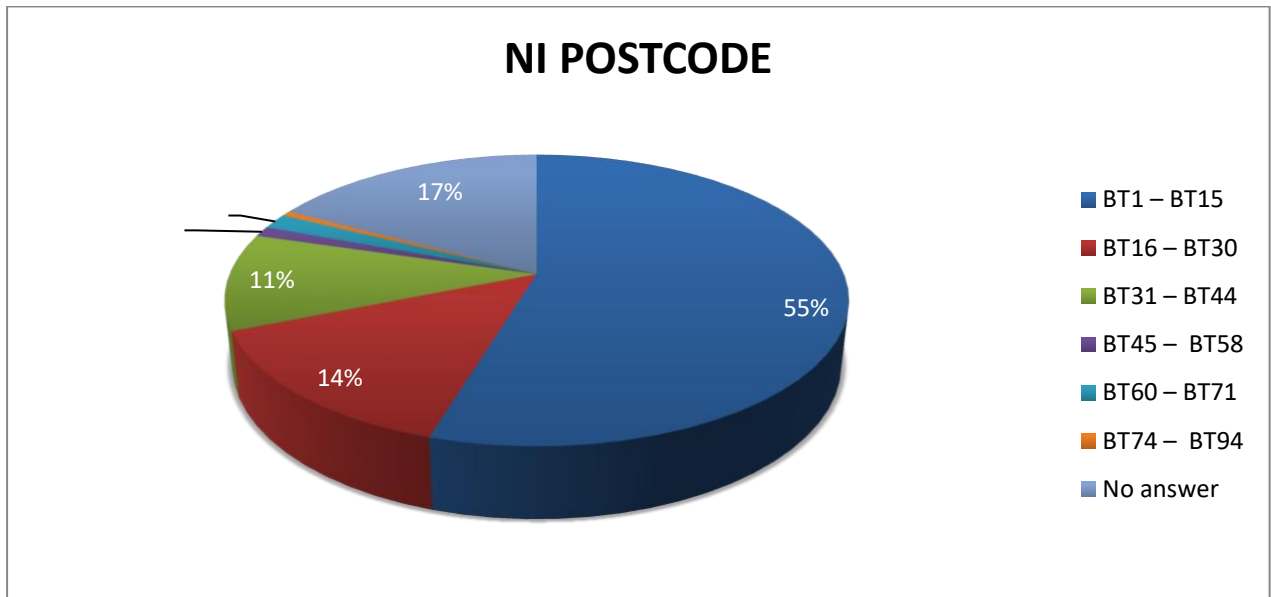
Although most attendees (77%) were still from Northern Ireland (87% in 2022), we attracted more visitors from outside the region compared to previous years. Eight percent stated they lived in Ireland (6%), 4% came from GB (3%), 5% from rest of Europe (4%) and 2% from rest of world (3%).

Chart 3



For those attendees domiciled in Northern Ireland, 55% (68%) were resident in the Belfast area (postcodes BT1-BT15) with good representation found from outside Belfast, as represented in the following table:

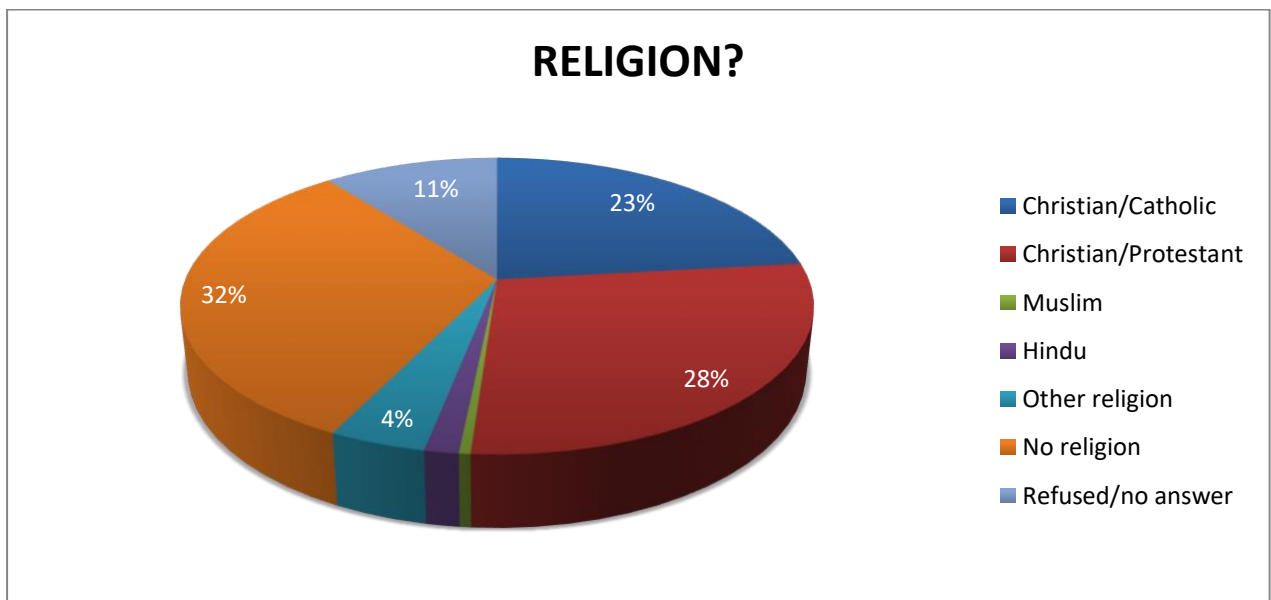
Chart 4



Religion

We found 32% (45%) of respondents stating they were not religious – lower than previous year returns. This year more Protestants 28% (12%) than Catholics 24% (21%) were reflected in our sample with 4% of the sample reporting they belonged to another religious tradition (9%), and 11% (14%) refusing to answer this question or making no response.

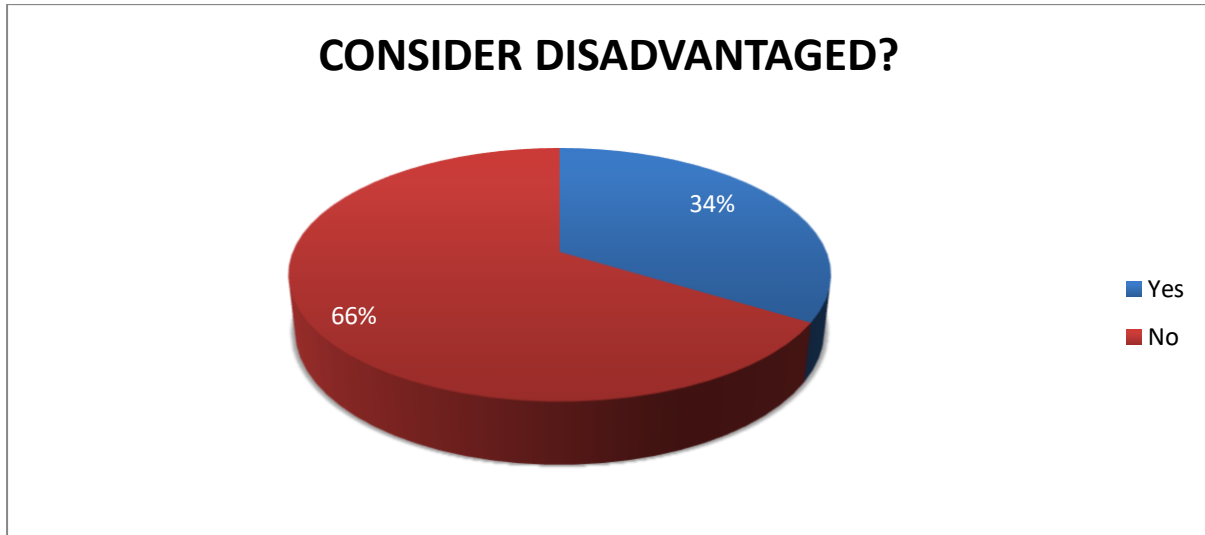
Chart 5



Disadvantage

We also asked whether respondents considered themselves to be disadvantaged and found that 34% (21%) of the sample considered themselves to fall into this category which suggests were able to significantly engage with vulnerable and less well-off sections of the community. See Chart 6

Chart 6



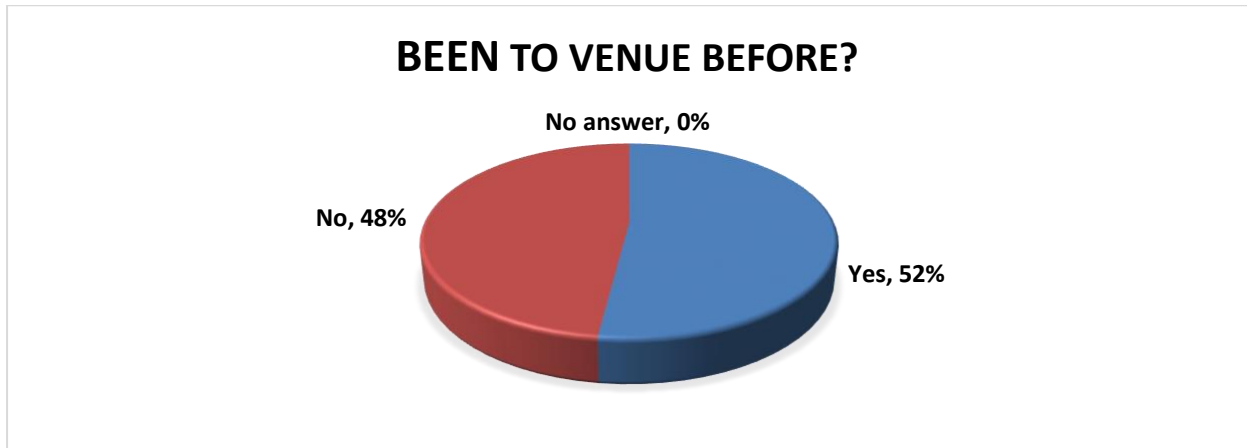
Festival Experience

We were pleased to find that 57% (60%) of survey respondents were attending a festival event for the first time and 48% (37%) of the sample had never been to the venue before. This confirms that we were able to reach new audiences and introduce them to new venues and partners. This feature was confirmed by several event organisers (see appendix 2).

Chart 7



Chart 8



Expectations satisfied

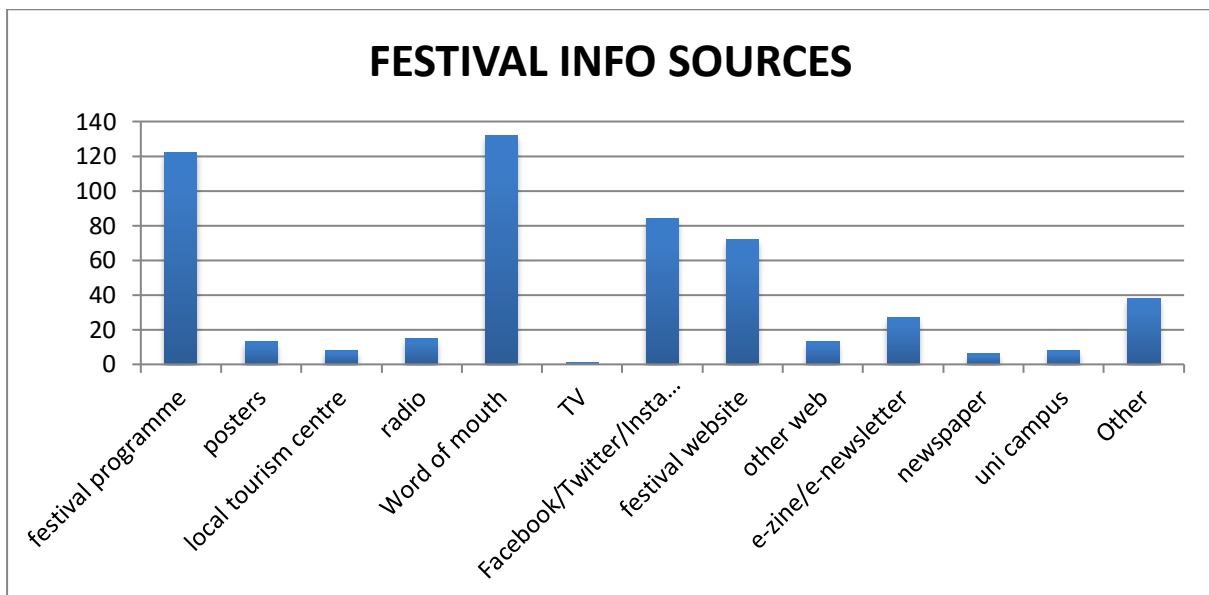
We found that 99% of respondents felt the festival satisfied their expectations with only 1% reporting dissatisfaction (increased from 95% in 2022).

Like last year, 84% of people answered the question '*after attending the festival, would you be more likely to attend other politics-related events*' with 12% saying the same and 4% no answer.

Well informed

People appeared to be reasonably well informed about the festival. 97% (92%) of the sample stated they were either well or somewhat informed prior to attending an event. The information sources used by respondents, in order of popularity, were word of mouth, the brochure, social media and the festival website (similar to previous year evaluations). See Chart 9 for this representation:

Chart 9

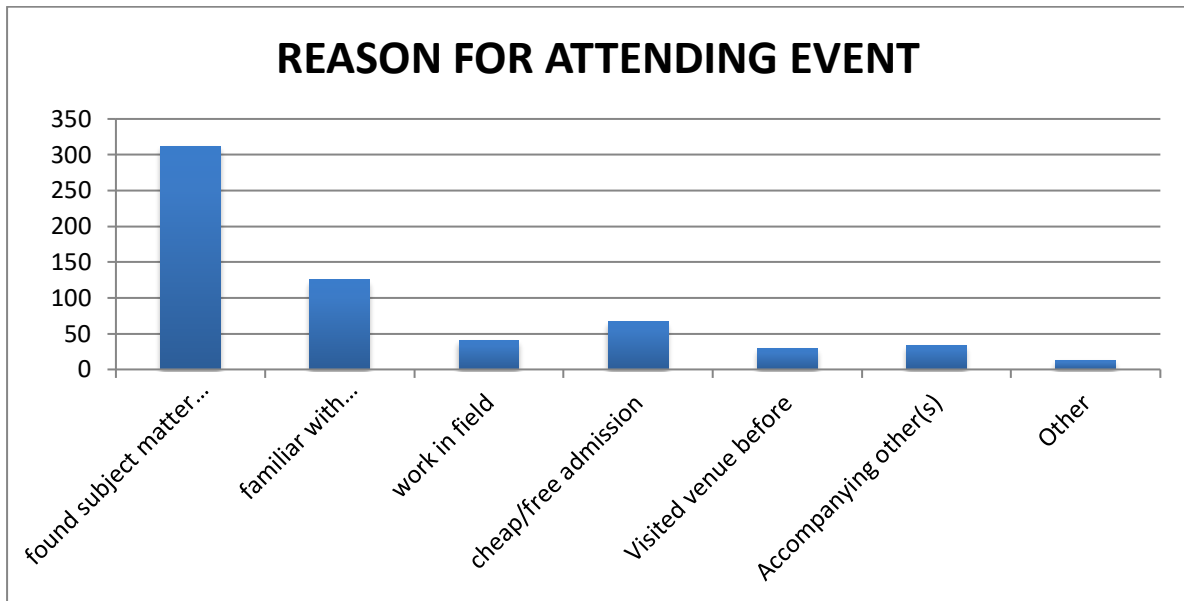


Reason for attending

Respondents overwhelmingly found the subject matter of the event/performance as the main reason for attending the festival. However, familiarity with the speaker/performer was also cited as a factor. Chart 10 describes:

For out of state visitors, 21% of respondents said that attending the festival was the main reason for their visit to Belfast.

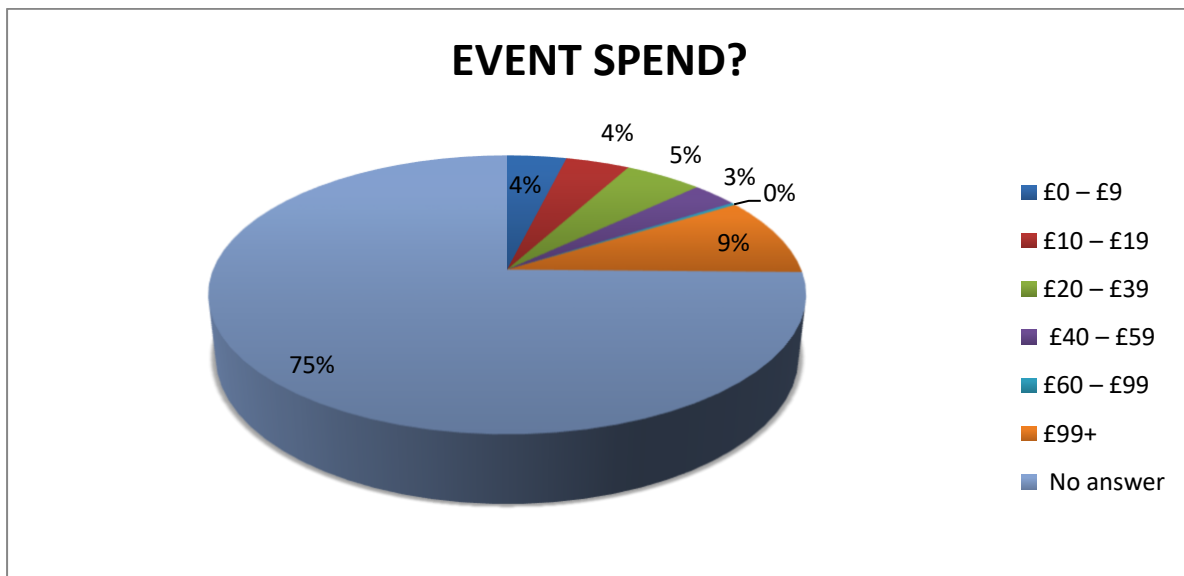
Chart 10



Audience spend

Most people spent between £10-19 attending our events. See below:

Chart 11



Marketing and PR

We implemented a wide-ranging marketing plan which proved to be very successful. This involved the publication and distribution of 8,000 copies of the printed festival programme, a rebrand of the festival website and an extensive outdoor and social media advertising campaign. The design and content of the website worked extremely well with positive audience comments. Once again, the creative input from our design agency RV was positively commented on.

Several venues and event organisers also provided advertising and we were able to negotiate relatively cheap billboards and Adshels in locations across the city with the assistance of the Belfast Festivals Forum, supported by Belfast City Council which greatly boosted the appeal of the festival to new audiences.

As regards our website, we found a significant jump in 25-34 viewing age group at the expense of our over 35 audience. There were also additional audiences pulled in by this year's use of Google Ads – and arguably a new audience given the targeting tactics (ie. targeting for people looking for events to visit, rather than a core 'politics' audience). We also found huge jumps in Facebook and Twitter reach during the festival month and a significant increase in You Tube channel and Mailchimp engagement.

Media coverage

We organised an effective PR campaign with the assistance of Suzanne McDonald from Lemonade Marketing and were able to generate 93 major print, radio, TV and online features with a reach of 5,027,802 (4,022,796 in 2022).

This represented an estimated £180,768.63 (£181,881) Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) in media coverage with a PR Value of £542,305.89 (£545,644). We were able to secure coverage in all the major local media outlets including TV and radio. We generated 93 clips with 50 online, 25 press, 13 radio, 4 blogs and 1 TV mentions (UTV Live) which was similar to previous festivals, though we had larger online coverage this year. See Table 1 for this comparison with previous years. A full media pack documenting this coverage is available on request as we were able to collect and evaluate this coverage through NIMMS.

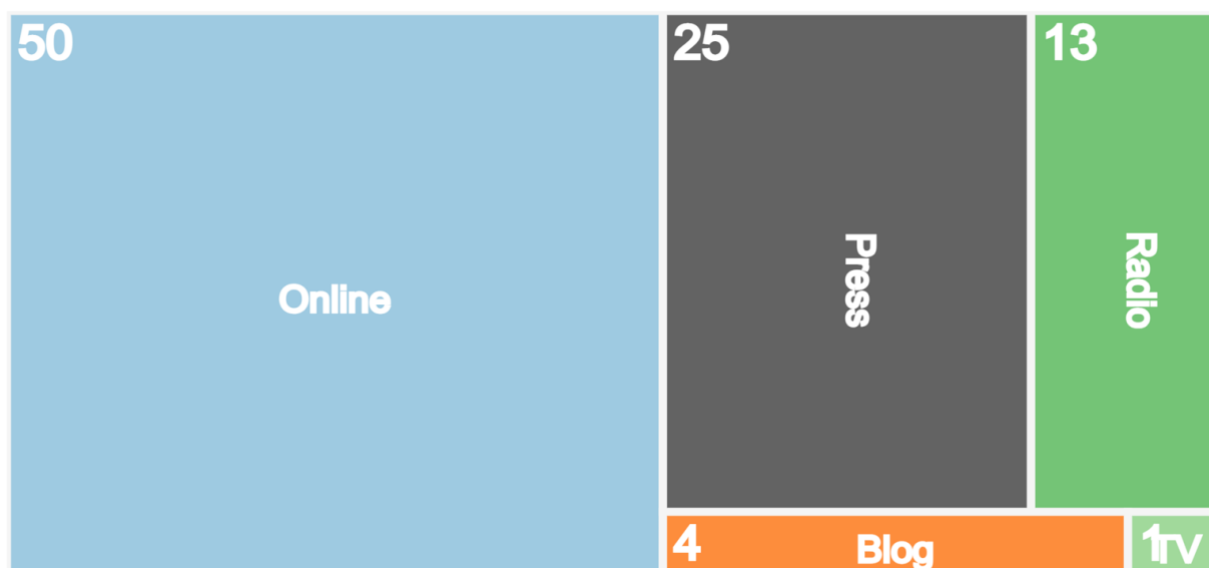
The Irish News was a useful media partner and ran several prominent features. The Belfast Telegraph and BBC Radio Ulster were also important platforms. We are indebted to Alan Meban, Slugger O'Toole, Linen Quarter BID, Shared Future News and NvTV (Northern Visions) for their coverage of the festival. See the following charts for more details:

Summary

- **Total number of clips:** 93 clips
- **Reach:** 5,027,802
- **Online Visits:** 33,828,346
- **Circulation:** 868,688
- **AVE:** £180,769
- **PR Value:** £542,306

Table 1: Media coverage²

	2021	2022	2023
NO. OF CLIPS	87	98	93
REACH	2,624,670.00	4,022,796.00	5,027,802.00
CIRCULATION	536,200.00	874,691.00	868,688.00
VISITS	6,404,286.00	19,033,619.00	33,828,346.00
AVE (£)	104,177.65	218,705.25	180,768.63
PR VALUE (£)	312,532.95	656,115.75	542,305.89



² Definitions: Reach – Opportunities to see; Circulation – Average number of printed publications circulated per edition; Visits – Average monthly visitors to website; AVE – advertising equivalent value; PR Value – AVE x 3 (this is the standard industry equation)

Countries / Buzz

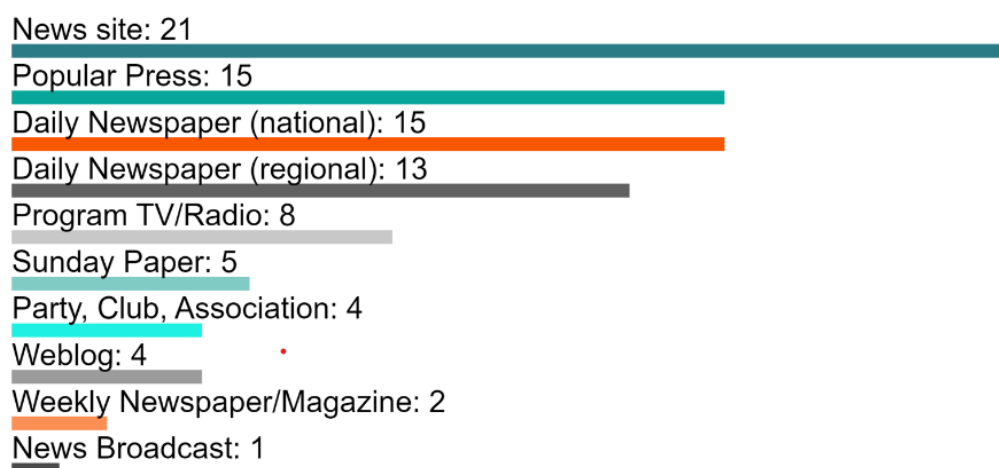
United Kingdom: 81



Ireland: 7



Media types / Buzz



A well-attended media launch took place in the Grand Central Hotel on 2 March sponsored by Linen Quarter BID and attended by the Belfast Lord Mayor Christina Black; the CEO of the Arts Council NI, Roisin McDonagh and participants from other funders and supporters. Members from Wood Burning Savages provided a musical interlude with Stephen Beggs delivering a comedic turn.

Website

We were very pleased with the design and effectiveness of the website (<https://imaginebelfast.com>) provided by RV – the creative team behind our integrated online, print and outdoor design and execution. The ‘Brain Food’ visual treatment in particular attracted lots of positive feedback. We were delighted to post four blogs from contributors on the website and develop a micro site for the Forgotten Spaces project which is now archived on the site.

Overall the site performed very well with a 10% increase in users and 3% in sessions from 2022. In terms of unique visitors, we had a 9% increase and 9.7% increase in the percentage of visits from last year.

Table 2: Website growth

Growth	2022	2023
Users	18,583	20,444
Sessions	28,710	29,611
Unique Visitors	28,074	30,607
# of visits	47,612	52,248

Chart 12: Website Stats 13/02-26/03/23

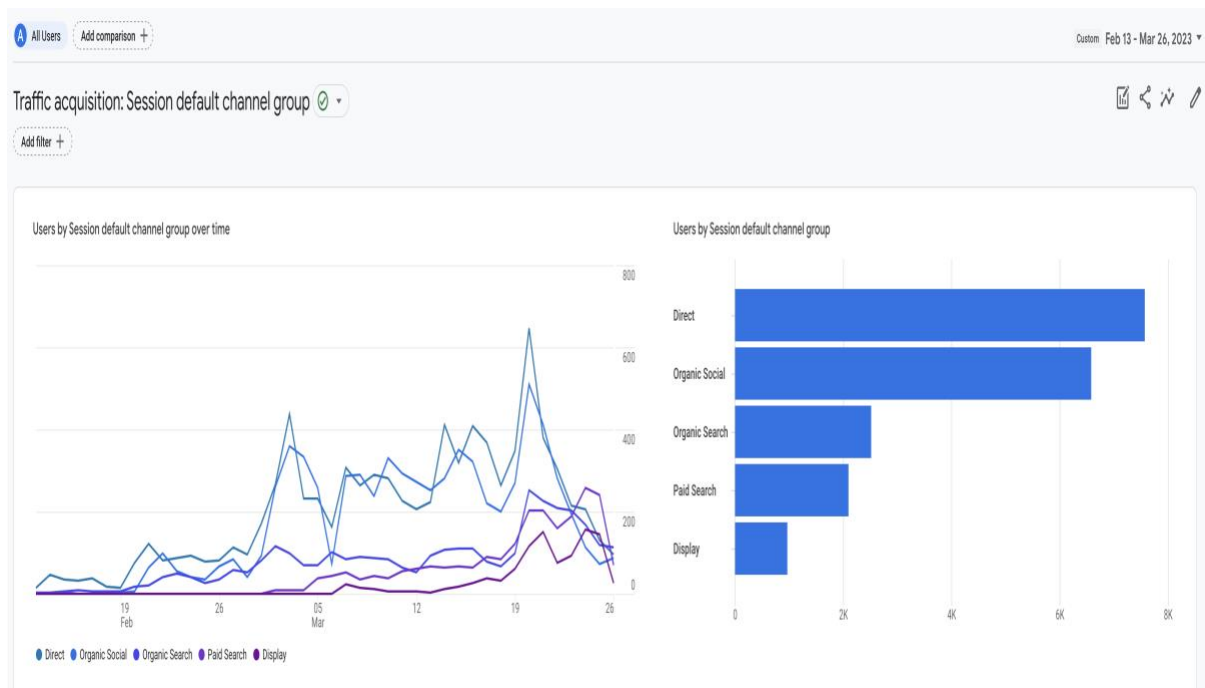
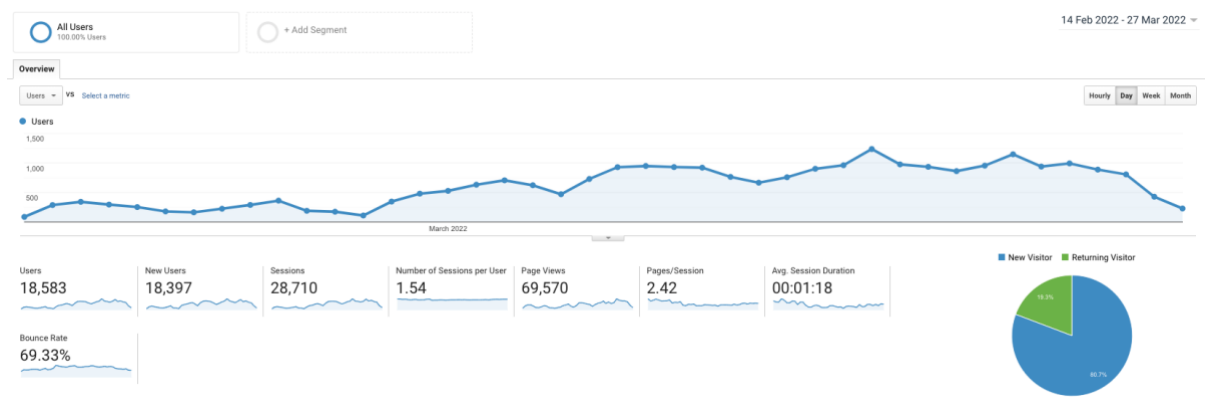


Chart 13: 2022 figures for comparison



As regards demographics, compared to 2022, the gender balance was unchanged with a slight majority of female users - 50.6%. However there was a huge jump in 25-34 viewers at the expense of Gen X-ers.

Chart 14: GA 27/02 to 26/03 Demographics snapshot

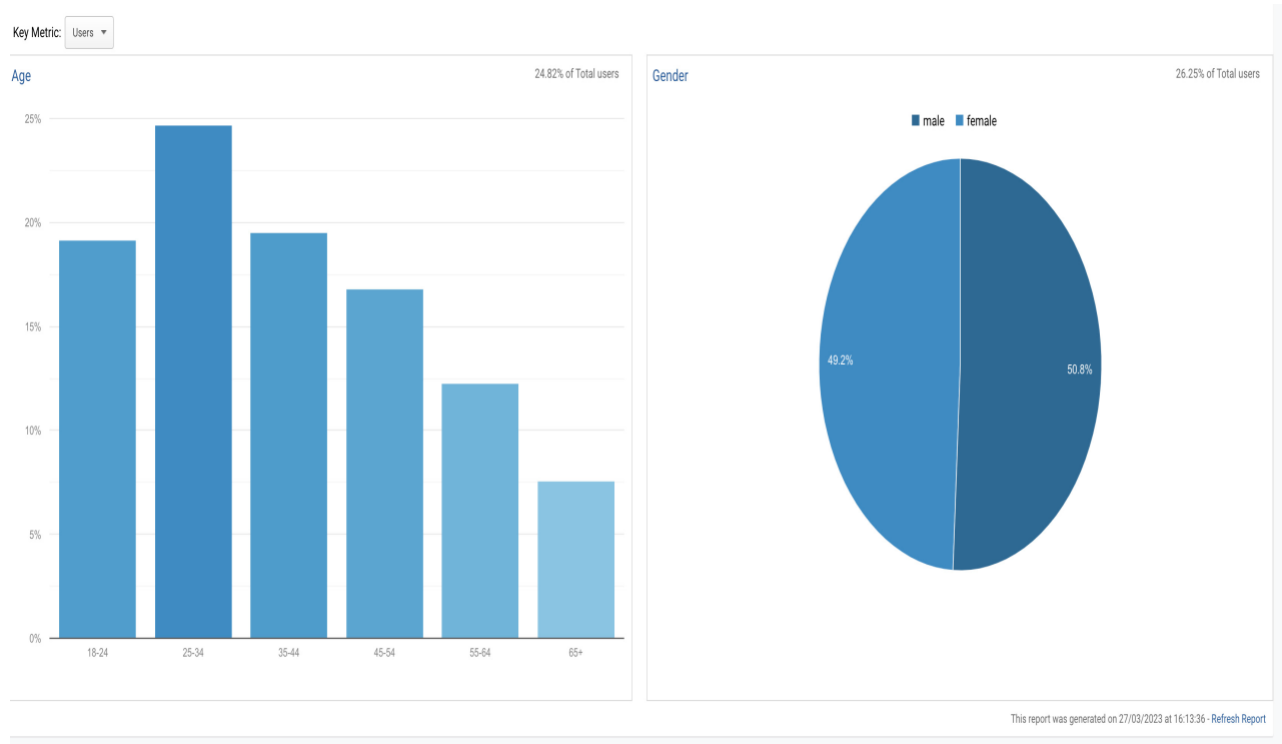
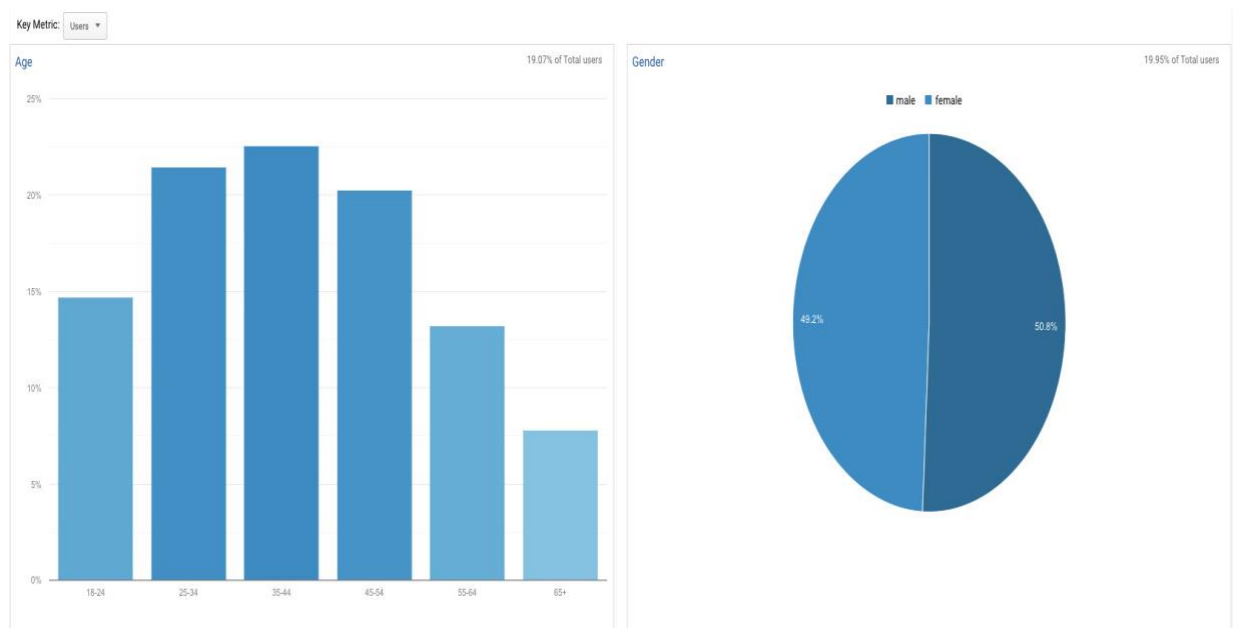
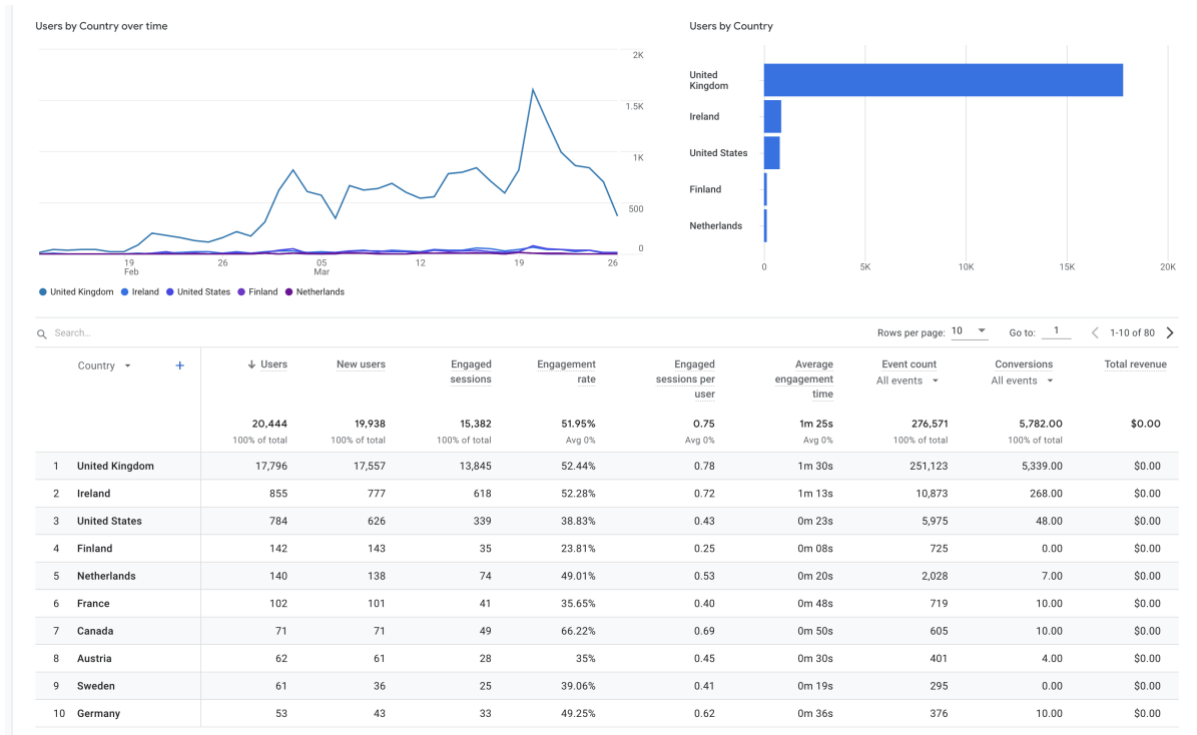


Chart 15: 2022 figures for comparison



The vast majority of our website users were from the UK followed by Ireland, United States, Finland, the Netherlands and France.

Chart 16: GA 13/02 to 26/03 Users by Country



The festival was also successfully promoted through the main social media platforms. Our overall spend this year was a limited budget of £2,236 which delivered over 1 million impressions across Facebook, Instagram, Google Ads and Twitter to highly targeted users as detailed below:

Table 3: Paid social media

Mar 2nd to Mar 25th 2023							
Channel	Spend	Impressions	Clicks	CTR%	Conversions	Cost per Conversion	
Facebook	£ 486	132,082	2,123	1.6%	292	£	1.67
Instagram	£ 618	146,861	2,489	1.7%	368	£	1.68
Google Ads	£ 770	390,407	3,815	1.0%	9,193	£	0.08
Twitter	£ 362	336,568	1,032	0.3%	NA	NA	
Total	£ 2,236	1,005,918	9,459	0.9%	9,853	£	0.23

Table 4: Comparison with 2022

Feb 25th to Mar 25th 2022				
Channel	Spend	Impressions	Clicks	CTR%
Facebook	£ 852	244,946	10,911	4.5%
Twitter	£ 476	130,327	306	0.2%
Total	£ 1,328	375,273	11,217	3.0%

The click through rate was 0.9% on average – lower than last year because Google Ads have a much lower click through rate, which brought the overall average down. The Facebook and Instagram reach was much better this year, with 132,082 impressions delivered across Facebook and 146,861 delivered across Instagram. Link clicks were strong with 4,612 across both channels with a consistent click through rate of 1.6% on Facebook and 1.7% on Instagram. Facebook delivered 292 conversions and Instagram 368 with cost per conversion on Facebook £1.67 and £1.68 on Instagram, so results have been fairly similar on those channels.

Twitter struggled more so on reach, but delivered 336,568 impressions, from which there was 1,032 link clicks. Click through rate was 0.31% and cost per click was £0.35.

Google Ads, in terms of delivery and clicks, performed well. Spend was £770 with £410 of this going on the search keyword campaigns and £359 on the display. 390,436 impressions were delivered with 3,815 clicks to the website. The search campaign had a click through rate of 15.8% which was strong and the cost per click across both campaigns was £0.20.

Organic social media

For **Twitter**, we had a huge increase in impressions compared to last year, posting 118 tweets in March resulting in 524k Twitter impressions, 10.8k profile visits, 972 mentions and 256 new followers. At the time of writing we have 5,468 followers.

Table 5: Twitter organic growth

Growth	Mar 2022:	Mar 2023:
Tweet impressions	247,000	524,000
Profile Visits	29,700	10,800
Mentions	1,000	972
New Followers	261	256

On **Facebook**, we had a huge jump in reach from 28k to 42k (125%) from the same period last year. This also included 5,426 page visits, up 642% on last year. We have 3,411 followers at the time of writing.

On **Instagram** our reach was 43,492 – another huge increase of 2500% and generated 1,808 profile visits -an increase of 686% from 2022. At the time of writing we have 3,015 followers.

Chart 17: Facebook and Instagram organic reach



Ways to help grow your reach

On our **You Tube** channel during the festival month we recorded 17,545 views, a total watch time of 4,500 hours, 347,000 impressions and CTR of 3.2%. The Noam Chomsky interview with Alan Meban was by far the most popular broadcast - currently with 13,715 views. At the time of writing, we have 575 subscribers with the majority located in the USA, followed by the UK.

We sent out 4 mailouts on our **Mailchimp account** with an increased average opening percentage up by 4.1% compared to last year.

Chart 18: Mailchimp performance

March, 2023 (3)

	Imagine 2023 eshot 4 Regular · Imagine! Sent Mon, March 20th 1:14 PM to 2K recipients by you	Sent Classic Builder	36.6% Opens	4.6% Clicks
	Imagine 2023 eshot 3 Regular · Imagine! Sent Tue, March 14th 3:35 PM to 2K recipients by you	Sent Classic Builder	35.1% Opens	3.3% Clicks
	Imagine 2023 eshot 2 Regular · Imagine! Sent Fri, March 3rd 11:49 AM to 2K recipients by you	Sent Classic Builder	34.8% Opens	7.6% Clicks

December, 2022 (1)

	Imagine 2023 Sneak Preview Events Regular · Imagine! Sent Mon, December 12th, 2022 5:27 PM to 2K recipients by you	Sent Classic Builder	36.2% Opens	4.8% Clicks
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Table 6: Mailchimp benchmarking

Opening averages
MailChimp's published opening average for Entertainment and Events is 20.51%
MailChimp's published opening average for Politics is 22.94%
MailChimp's published all-sector opening average is 21.33%
Imagine! 2023 mailings opening average = 35.7%
Clicks
MailChimp's published click average for Entertainment and Events is 2.36%
MailChimp's published click average for Politics is 2.37%
MailChimp's published all-sector click average is 2.62%
Imagine! 2023 mailings click average = 5.1%

In terms of benchmarking, we outperformed MailChimp's published opening averages for Entertainment and Events and Politics. MailChimp's published all-sector opening average is also 21.33% We exceeded these benchmarks with a mailing opening average of 35.7% , much higher than last year 23.4%.

In terms of Clicks, MailChimp's published click average for Entertainment and Events is 2.36% and click average for Politics is 2.37%. MailChimp's published all-sector click average is 2.62%. Our mailings click average is much higher at 5.1% - again much improved on last year's figure 3.7%. We currently have 2,680 subscribers and 3,058 contacts on this system.

The ticketing system provided by Eventbrite worked well with very few queries or complaints. We had looked at other ticketing platforms during the year but because of the high percentage of free events in our festival, other suppliers were reluctant to take us on.

Audience and event organiser feedback

All comments received via our evaluation forms are included in appendices 1 and 2. We are delighted to have received such useful feedback.

Conclusion

I believe the festival was arguably our most successful to date having exceeded all targets and achieving its main aim of providing a platform for new ideas on politics and culture accessible to all sections of the community. We look forward to celebrating our 10th anniversary during 25-31 March next year.

Peter O'Neill
Festival Director
peter@imaginebelfast.com
May 2023

Appendix 1

Audience comments recorded on evaluation forms

Henry Normal-Collective Poems and other Landfill	Event was excellent. Well done, Henry.
	Very Entertaining, great festival.
	Henry was excellent. Also liked the "Vote for Me" guy in the café.
Scottish Independence: Mibbes Aye, Mibbes Naw	Excellent event and a challenging topic. Well done for pulling it together.
	Great to have that external perspective outside of NI politics-good to draw comparison (somewhat!)
	Very focused on subject. Excellent Q&A session.
	Enjoyable and learned a lot of information
Shon Faye: The Transgender Issue	Imagine Belfast are often the trendsetters of modern festivals in NI, offering intelligent discussion and interesting, well-done events
The Pandemic and Preparing for the Next One	Really informative and interesting, concise
	Excellent, thankyou
	Very well-run events
	Great, keep it going. Nearly too much choice. More William Crawley please, and Colin Davidson excellent
	Festival a great stimulus for thinking differently about events in the world. Highlight of this early part of 2023.
	Imagine is an amazing festival
	This event- brilliant speaker
	Found out through word of mouth but perhaps some additional paid-for social advertising. Great event- excellent expertise of speaker
	Very good to get a prominent health communicator to give a personal insight into her experience of an issue affecting all of us
Learning to Disagree Respectfully	To encourage greater audience participation, it might be helpful to ask those speaking from the floor to be brief, and to discourage certain people from speaking several times!
	Event very interesting

	Well done!
	Keep going!
	Very good debate
John Otway: Rock and Roll's Greatest Failure	I enjoyed it!
	Brilliant
	Brilliant event, great artist
	Great event
	I have seen John Otway in concert 20 times
	Very entertaining, very funny
	Always does! (live up to expectations)
	Saw John Otway at Whitla Hall in 1970s, a bit of nostalgia and we like the Black Box
	Intrigued that Mark Chancer was allowed to canvass! Yes, ok, I know he was a performance artist.
Tiff Stevenson	Funny
	All good!
	Very good. Bar closes at 8, sad face.
	Happy anticipation for this show! Lived up to expectations!
John Tonge- Why is there political instability in NI?	Great event!
	Super! Thanks!
	The speaking techniques could have been better. Voice projection, pace of delivery etc.
	An excellent presentation of the most current scenarios
	Someone who really understands his subject
	Very good festival
	The time for questions was too short, and initially the sound was not sufficient, however it was fixed after 10 minutes
	Fantastic event!
	What's not to like? Bonus: had not been to some venues before- will return to them. And Mr Chancer- superb
	Excellent presentation and Q&A
	Festival needs more promotion
	Good informative presentation. Interesting questions from the floor. Length of the presentation was good.

Politics and Poetry	Very good
	Wonderful! Would love to see more of the same!
	Brilliant, thought provoking and stimulating festival
	Poetry- a one liner at the beginning of speeches in parliament or even tweets to keep a standard going
	Beautiful, lovely group sharing. Shall be using this experience in my art- I'm a screenprinter, "Prose to Print". Thankyou!
Transformation of City Hall	Glad to have found it
	Good variety of thought-provoking topics- combination of arts and politics- my interests
	Excellent- great talk, great venue!
	Great festival, very important
	A fascinating mix of intriguing events made accessible
free Energy in the City of Brotherly Love?	Very informative and interesting. Speaker was welcoming and encouraged feedback and questions
	Malin is an excellent, well-informed speaker. It was a shame that noisy building work was going on outside at the time of his talk. He managed the situation very well and projected his voice. I wonder if another room could have been allocated to him, if it was known this work was happening today. The festival is very interesting and diverse. I look forward to attending more events.
	Good event, I will try and go to more
Perils and Prospects of United Ireland	Excellent event!
Democracy in Trouble, Frances Crook	Very interesting. Role of monarchy, executive is select committee reform, House of Lords reform, participatory democracy
	Needed more time for audience questions on such wide-ranging topics
	I felt a little bit unprepared for the breadth of the presentation so I felt the opportunity to discuss was limited. I am pleased to have attended this event. Please have more discussion groups! Thankyou
	Too short, please more time! Insufficient time to give this topic a thorough discussion
	Very pleased to see events like this put on in the city

James Poskett Horizons- A global history of Science	Very engaging and stimulating event
	Fascinating, excellent. This event beyond expectations. Upped my interest in more.
	It's fab. Yes: "Ideas for a better world"
	Little advertising seen in QUB about the festival. Difficult to find the venue for first time visitors
	Great event, very informative.
Hardhat Tour of Carnegie Oldpark Library	Excellent festival- love the range of events on offer and the standard of facilitator is excellent
	Fascinating, great to find out what happens behind locked doors
	Festival very worthwhile
	Came here 50 years ago. An excellent event with a varied programme
	I used the library when a boy. The festival is great- enriching, enjoyable.
	Live somewhat nearby and didn't know much about the building's history. Feel so much more informed after today's event, and will be doing more research into Carnegie and his libraries afterwards. I'll also be following the campaign to restore this particular one to its former glory. I'll be attending a couple of other Imagine festival events and appreciated how varied the programme was.
	Used the library as a child
	Love Imagine!
System Change to create a more democratic economy	Great event- love the discussion aspect. Collaborative.
	Strong event, best feature was the wide variety of speakers/ backgrounds
	Very good!
	Love it!
	Very impressed with the whole programme- we could really use a similar event in Scotland. Really enjoyed the format of this event, getting to closely interact with inspiring people rather than just passively listen in. I feel stirred into action, thank you
Oliver Callan	Wonderful festival- something for everyone
	Great festival
	Website and programme drop-down might benefit from some improvements. I'm sure some of the events would be more attended if they would happen outside working hours

	Brilliant event
	Oliver Callan is amazing!
	Oliver Callan could make more NI jokes
	An excellent festival- wide ranging events
So you want to be a councillor?	I'm just considering (becoming a councillor)
	Really informative and well organised. Great hosts!
	Excellent information, well-delivered
Biddy McLoughlin	Excellent
	(Lived up to expectations) and more
	Great programme of events, great ticket price, great variety of topics
	It's excellent
	Wonderful event- very entertaining
	Brilliant speaker, an hour was not enough
	Excellent evening
	Good to publicise it more
	Fantastic. More festival in relation to mind and body is wanted. ???festival around the world. (251)
	Fab speaker/ story teller
	Very interesting and informative. I look forward to going to more events!
Lee Reynolds- Will democracy die in the algorithm?	Very good, thought-provoking
	Very interesting
Homing in on Human Rights	I've been reading Sally Hayden's book- "My fourth time, we drowned"
	Excellent event. Sally's talk was immensely insightful
	Great event! Would love there to be more of the same! Many thanks!
Jonathan Porritt- Confronting Today's Climate Emergency	Wonderful as always, very relevant to NI agriculture
	Excellent speaker. Thank you so much
	Excellent café style debate. Climate challenges well outlined

Participation, Party Support and Political Attitudes in NI	More time for questions again!
	Very good panel
	It was interesting to see a breakdown of the election results and motivations. Very well-presented and explained. It would be good to see events like this in the future.
	Politics and arts, what could be better!
	I expected no young people, and my expectation was met
	Events need to start at a later time to allow those with jobs to get to them. These events are really only available to academics and old people. You're failing to spark imagination and conversation if only a very narrow band of people can get to the events. More young people.
Rock and Roll Politics	Excellent. I missed a couple of events for personal reasons eg John Otway
	More events at times that school students could go to
	Great to get younger people (school age) to attend
	Very interesting and entertaining
	Steve Richards is very good but he has forgotten that Wales is also part of the UK. Weird he'd talk about UK politics and completely forget one constituent part of the UK, and just refer to Scotland
	Steve Richards is a legend!!
Alternative Protestants and the Spirit of 1798	Please do this and similar events more often every year! Brain Food is what we need in NI but I would suggest you actively aim to attract the young as well- perhaps via QUB students union etc?
	Fergal Whelan " From Dissent to Rebellion". RC Church totally opposed to rebellion in north. Slaughter of non-Catholics in?? Swallowed ?????? Presbyterians were excluded (232)
	Uplifting, stimulating and very necessary event
Red Lines Podcast	Great, thanks!
	Great gig
Garden Gathering	Excellent event, the art element was excellent and a lovely flow and friendly vibe, particularly for a Saturday morning. Met lots of great people
	Fantastic
	Great idea for Imagine festival. Terrific range of events. Might be more diverse and reach out to newcomer communities. Thank you

	Brilliant festival. Belfast needs these spaces to connect, learn and laugh together. This event has been so inspiring. So well planned to involve us all as citizens. Uppa growers!
	Really enjoyed this event, atmosphere was very friendly, open and motivated. Network building was very enjoyable
	Fabulously well-organised event
How not to run a border poll	Brilliant!
	Great event, great discussion. Thanks to speakers and hosts
Reimagining Blackstaff Square	A bit disappointed- speakers not passionate enough. Loved the comment "a square is different things to different people". Must be all inclusive to be successful. Constructive comments- If there is a mic, use it! Don't talk to your computer. Eyeball your audience. Well done to lady presenter trying to direct her partner to the mic. Smiling would add volumes to your presentation.
	Consideration should be given to waste management arrangements, out of hours, off-peak servicing schedules etc.
	Sound system not very effective, blinds needed for windows
	All good- opportunity to deliver something positive in this part of Belfast
	Presentation was informative and nice to see visuals. Concerns over coach access within Blackstaff Square
	Keep up the good work!
A Force like no Other- Colin Breen	Very informative and interesting
Colin Davidson in Conversation with William Crawley	Excellent festival, wonderful helpful staff
Drunken Birds	More non-western and minority voices in the movies. Thank you!
	The movie was terrible, however, I'm sure all the others are amazing. Unfortunately I did not have the chance to attend other events, but the programme looked great
	Was accompanying a friend who said she would like to see this film. I was informed afterwards this was also free admission (a bonus in these present times) and enjoyed the film.
	Enjoyed film. When booking noticed it was free. Happy days since I'm a pensioner and was accompanied by my friend. I originally thought it was a mistake but delighted it was free. Thoroughly enjoyed film

The Magnitude of all things	Exceeded expectation quite significantly
	The film was incredible
	Liked this documentary. Sometimes wish QFT would show things for longer
The Imagine! Festival Politics Quiz	Wasn't aware it was local politics "politics quiz" but still had fun. Love Imagine festival events! I attend something every year
	Love a quiz. We are not going to win but thanks! Excellent, more please.
	Great quiz. Would have enjoyed cemetery tour- so maybe do more than one?
25 Years On: Women and the Good Friday Agreement	The speakers were passionate and informed
	Great event and panellists. Well documented by QUB radio
	Great speakers, moderation could be more confident
	Great line-up of speakers. For this specific event, could have been more specifically tied to the particulars and opportunities of the political moment
	Excellent topics discussed, great panel, very interesting.
	it was good to see young women involved and so passionate but it was shallow in concern to women's role in GF agreement and achievement. Name women, make it real
Southerners in the North Speak Up!	Very enjoyable and great to get other people's perspective on living as a southerner in Northern Ireland
	Brilliant event, well done!
	Really enjoyed the event. My wife has just moved from Dublin to Belfast and we thought the event would be helpful! Did not disappoint!
	Excellent event, wonderful venue! Could do with follow up events to explore topics further
	This was a really enjoyable and interesting event. Great to hear southern perspectives as a relatively recent blow-in!
	Excellent, diverse and inclusive
	Event was really interesting. Speakers were great.
	Really well-run. Friendly venue.
Lesley Riddoch Podcast	Interested in the Scottish/ Irish "political" dimension! All very interesting and challenging. Good to have events spread throughout the day/ evening
	Brilliant festival!

Forgotten Spaces seminar	Very aligned to festival theme. Inspiring to imagine what the art of the possible is for the spaces in our city and hear such creative proposals
	Fab Festival thanks
	Great speakers. Projects talked about were very interesting. Event inspiring to push community projects
	Good presentations. Vote was interesting. Well presented by the MC
	Excellent
	Well organised + very interesting topic. More events like this during the rest of the year. Also not just focussed around Belfast - use venues in other towns & cities eg Bangor
	Really pleased to have participated. Has helped open my eyes to the spaces that are being wasted
General	Imagine {a lot} of Festival by Winston Been I laughed A LOT Almost cried A LOT Saw A LOT of places I thought A LOT Looked A LOT Listened A LOT Talked A LOT Learned A LOT Enjoyed A LOT And Did not pay ... A GREAT DEAL
	Wonderful festival with so many free events
	This is such a unique festival. Long may it continue!
	Stimulating, creative, provocative
	Advertise more! poetry and politics at crescent was great
	Didn't realise there was such a festival in Ireland. Very interesting. Keep up the good work
	Great festival
	Always something different/of interest on the programme.
	Very good

Appendix 2

Feedback from event organisers and funders

Noirin McKinney, Director of Arts Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland:

“The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is delighted to support the Imagine! Belfast Festival of Ideas and Politics, thanks to The National Lottery players. This terrific festival demonstrates the power of the arts to stimulate open discussion on contemporary subjects that affect all of us. The Festival has curated an impressive programme which brings together a wealth of international, national and local artists and speakers.”

Councillor Christina Black, Belfast Lord Mayor:

“My congratulations to Peter O’Neill and his team on curating an incredibly inspirational, entertaining and thought-provoking programme of events for the ninth Imagine! Belfast Festival of Ideas and Politics. Democracy is so important – it’s vital that we have a chance to reflect on, and debate, the important issues affecting our lives and society.”

Paula McFetridge, Artistic Director, Kabosh Theatre. Premiere of Reunion: *“Kabosh has premiered several provocative pieces of theatre over the years with Imagine. We also believe in providing informed brain food to stimulate debate around contemporary issues so it is a partnership of mutual benefit. Without the support of Imagine this premiere production would not have happened. They provided a platform and the investment for the work to happen.”*

Mary McManus. System Change for a more Democratic Economy. *“The Imagine Festival gave Collaboration for Change a platform to bring alternative economic ideas to a new audience with some having travelled from Dublin and Fermanagh just for the event. It created an opportunity for activists to showcase their work and to network with other activists. It allowed us to bring Cllr Matthew Brown from Preston to the event, a world leading figure in Community Wealth Building. Those attending our event told us they were inspired by both Matthew and the local activists who took part. People left feeling hopeful that change for the better is possible. Collaboration for Change is run by volunteers. We would not have been able to do this event without the support of Imagine. Following on from the huge success of the event we now have the confidence to try organising another along similar lines. There is nothing else like the Imagine Festival in Belfast and we were delighted to be part of it.”*

Steve Richards. Rock and Roll Politics Show. *“I perform at many festivals. Imagine Belfast is the best. Events are well promoted, the audiences are engaged and the range of contributors is remarkable. For audiences and performers it is a highlight of the year.”*

Jacky Hawkes Blackstaff Press. A Force like no other with Colin Breen: *“An important part of Belfast’s cultural calendar, and now an annual fixture for us providing a great opportunity to showcase our authors and books. Well run and well received by the audiences”*

Claire Mitchell, author of *Alternative Protestants and the Spirit of 1798* “A fabulous and diverse festival. I loved the space the festival created for conversations about democracy and alternative politics. We need that so much in Northern Ireland. Everything seemed incredibly well organised. The festival brought a mixed audience into the same room. We had loyalists and republicans, PUP, Sinn Féin, PBP, ordinary Protestants, security force families, nationalists and republicans. (I know this from book signing afterwards and messages I received). So I think that was quite unique. I think Imagine made space for a quite unique event here, a Protestant dissenter and an Irish republican having a new type of conversation about Irish politics. I'll definitely write about some of the things I learned from this event.

Dominic Doherty, Politics Quiz: “The Imagine Festival truly encourages and prompts its audiences and participants to consider our recent shared history and our political viewpoints in a new, respectful and non-confrontational manner via its debates, performances and other opportunities for engagement. The Festival enables us all to consider the views that we and others hold in a way that many of us have never previously considered.”

Jason Burke. *History of Belfast City Cemetery*. *The Imagine Belfast Festival has become one of the most anticipated festivals in the Belfast calendar season. The events encourage critical thinking, communication and positivity – more of this can only be a good thing for Belfast.*

Jennifer Dempsey. *Something Great - My Life in the Belfast Circus*. Colorado Theater in Non Traditional Spaces (TINTS) “The Imagine Belfast Festival is unlike any festival in Northern Ireland. It is an important cultural event, bringing in a wide range of performers, speakers and artists with a variety of perspectives on the new Northern Ireland.”

Joe Nawaz, premiere of *Five Days*: “I had such a positive experience of working with Imagine in producing my show. From the initial pitch to programming and performance, Imagine was very supportive, communicated clearly and gave me an amazing platform to showcase this work. It was great to part of such a great festival line-up and I was thrilled at the festival audience reception of the show. It's given me the confidence to develop this show and take it to other audiences.”

Professor Jon Tonge. *Why is there political instability in Northern Ireland?* “The Imagine Belfast Festival offers an outstanding series of events which bring together a vast range of people. Actors, politicians, journalists, academics, business leaders and the public all benefit from a fantastic programme which is based upon interaction above all else. Everyone listens, learns and contributes to a wide-ranging programme which covers a huge range of societal topics that really matter to people. I was thrilled to take part in 2023 with a fabulous, responsive audience from whom I learned a great deal.”

Kate Fletcher. *Change the World in Song*. “The Imagine Festival has something for everyone who wants to engage with the world of ideas, explore ways of increasing their understanding of how systems work, and of how things could be better. Very much a Festival for our times.”

Lee Reynolds. *Will Democracy Die in the Algorithm?* “The spaces for diverse voices and audiences are every reducing but imagine belfast is carrying on the tradition of an open ‘square’ for public discourse.”

Mark Taylor. *Is Culture Bad For You? "I had a great time at the Imagine! festival: we had people attending from academia, from industry, from policy, and from across the general public, who made up an enthusiastic and attentive audience for the first half and an energetic discussion for the second! I'd definitely recommend it for any author."*

Meadhbh McIlgorm. *Forgotten Spaces Online Exhibition (month of March) & Discussion Event . "I always love the Imagine festival. It's been a wonderful collaborator for several years now and this year was more of the same. I'm continually impressed by the range of events spanning art, music, discussion and more. The Imagine festival has something for everyone... ideas and imagination are the key to overcoming/addressing all the challenges faced in our society, yet imagination is a muscle - you need to train and feed it with new concepts and experiences or it weakens. The beauty of Imagine is that using discussion, creativity, debate and craic it engages with the most current and important topics of our time. I'm biased of course but I think it's the most exciting festival in Northern Ireland and maybe even beyond!"*

Medbh McGuckian. *The Thankless Paths to Freedom. "The Imagine Festival, in my experience, is a youthful and go-ahead scene run by people know the Arts and know what they are doing. They treat people with the care that they deserve."*

Patrick Joyce. *Co presenter, The Lesley Riddoch podcast-Live and Scottish Independence-Mibbies Aye.Mibbies Naw. "Imagine Belfast was a really exciting event to be part of. Fantastic to be able to take part in it and soak up the real buzz as both a performer and an audience member. Enjoyed the two events I was part of thoroughly. Great buzz in all the venues I visited. It has made us consider doing live podcasts with an audience given the success we feel of the two you organised."*

Lesley Riddoch: *"I wish Scotland had a politics/cultural festival that's half as frisky as Imagine Belfast. Interested, inquisitive audiences and a great variety of events from all sorts of perspectives."*

Paul Mullan. *The transformation of City Hall. "Speaking at the Imagine Festival enabled me to speak directly to and share my insights to an actively engaged audience which included politicians and others who I had not been able to reach to date."*

Quintin Oliver. *Carnegie Oldpark. "Fabulous – lively, interactive, creative, imaginative!"*

Rosalind Lowry and Tessa Ann. *A Sense of Survival "A really well planned and interesting festival and programme. Excellent communication from the organisers and good PR and marketing. An opportunity to realise a new work that would not have been possible without the festival. This experience has encouraged us to create new work and future collaboration, we are hoping to take the work to Galway and other venues now. The festival gave us an opportunity to realise a new work, to new audiences in a new way. It was a great experience and helped us shape future collaboration."*

Kirsty King. *25 Years On: Women And The Good Friday Agreement. The Scoop News Service at Queen's Radio. "I really enjoyed taking part in the festival. I learnt so many new skills, met new people and was given a platform to discuss a range of important topics to a large audience -an opportunity that doesn't come around very often! The experience has given me valuable skills in event planning and hosting, as well as given me a greater understanding of women's role in the peace process in Northern Ireland, which I will take with me in my work as a student journalist."*

Allan Leonard, Director, Northern Ireland Foundation. *“The Imagine Festival provides a rich opportunity for us organisations working for more participatory democracy to engage with the public on topics of interest and relevance.”*

Ali FitzGibbon, Queen’s University Belfast *“We at Arts Management and Cultural Policy at Queen’s really appreciated engaging with Imagine Festival this year. It is really important to build these programmes of activities to be spaces for thinking and debate. We look forward to taking part in the future. “*

Appendix 3

Imagine Belfast Festival 2023 Income and Expenditure profile (unaudited)

Income

DFAT Reconciliation Fund (Irish Government)	28011
Belfast City Council	10000
Arts Council NI	15000
Future Screen NI	21919
QUB	7000
Open University NI	5000
Ulster University	5000
Community Relations Council	3750
Linen Quarter BID	3574
British Academy	2000
VSF Foundation	10000
Ticket income	9951
Donations	206
Miscellaneous/refunds	435
Total income	121846

Expenditure

Payments to artists / performance fees	39038
Venue/Room hire	10627
Print and design costs	4228
Box office Fees	0
Website expenses / computer costs	432
Website design (capitalise)	6499
Travel, hotels, subsistence etc	4910
Advertising / marketing	21610
Professional fees/insurance	2105
Memberships & subscriptions	1509
Telephone costs	80
Technical support	12628

Transport	1177
Festival director salary, employer pension & NI	13485
Festival director travel and general expenses	886
Equipment	101
Volunteer expenses	530
Committee expenses	124
Hospitality	336
General office expenses	285
Miscellaneous	5
Bank fees	2
Total expenditure	120597
Surplus	1249

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