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The University of Aberdeen has now provided the North-east of Scotland with an annual festival for 15 years.

Since 2013 the annual May Festival has embraced the legacy of Word whilst encompassing a wider set of themes and bringing together experts from a variety of backgrounds to host fun events for all the family. The 2017 May Festival continued to build on this, and as a result, we welcomed more than 14,000 visitors to our beautiful campus.

The 2017 Festival programme again offered more than 150 events spanning many popular themes, including Science, Sport, Music, Gaelic and Food and Drink. The Discover programme which is continually evolving, reflects the changing themes and issues that arise from year to year and showcases our own University projects, giving audiences an insight into some of the world-leading research currently taking place at the University of Aberdeen.

The Festival also allows us to collaborate with local and national initiatives, for instance this year we had events celebrating the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology. It is fitting that we recognise and celebrate these initiatives by highlighting the University’s own assets and infrastructures through joint projects with partners across the city.

The May Festival is the University of Aberdeen’s flagship event, and I am proud of how it engages with communities and allows us to share a wealth of research, learning and cultural activity with schools and members of the public.

The Festival has only been able to grow and flourish every year because of the incredible level of support we receive both internally and externally, allowing us to organise and fund such a magnificent event. On behalf of the University of Aberdeen and our May Festival team, I would like to thank all of our sponsors and partners for their continued support, in particular Total who came on board this year as our Title Sponsor. It is these vital partnerships which allow us to offer such a diverse programme with many free events, ensuring that the festival has something on offer for everyone.

The May Festival once again proved to be a huge success, enjoyed by visitors of all ages, and I am delighted to announce that we are already hard at work organising May Festival 2018.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Principal and Vice-Chancellor,
University of Aberdeen
Since the inception of May Festival in 2013, visitor numbers have grown rapidly year after year attracting crowds of over 13,300 in 2016. And this year’s festival was even bigger and better, attracting 14,100 visitors of all ages. The Festival occupies a unique place in Aberdeen’s festival calendar, it combines artistic excellence whilst at the same time giving its audience the opportunity to engage with contemporary themes and societal issues that the University tackles every day. The Festival also showcases the North-East’s unique landscape, its cultural history and industrial heritage.

This year the programme included more than 150 events spanning popular themes including Word, Music, Science, Environment and Vision. The ever popular Discover strand returned giving audiences the opportunity to gain an insight into the cutting edge research going on at the University. Visitors were also able to immerse themselves in panel discussions on fascinating topics such as ‘What Will it Mean to Argue with a Computer’, ‘Drones & 3D Thermal Imaging of Volcanoes’ and ‘The Science of Swearing’.

The 2017 festival programme also offered events linked to national initiatives such as the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, offering talks, debates and tours, as well as hands on activities at the King’s Dig site. We were particularly excited to be able to host this live archaeological excavation right here on campus, discovering many hidden treasures on the sight of the historic Old Aberdeen Grammar School.

And we were also delighted to be able to expand the programme of themes to include Current Affairs for the first time this year. This allowed us to be able to discover more about some of today’s hot topics such as the new ‘Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016’, as well as discussing with the Rebel Girls, what it means to be a woman in 2017.
May Festival Themes

Discover
This ever-popular theme showcased the best that the University has to offer. Topics this year covered everything from the science of swearing to Viking humour and Aberdeen’s pioneering work in the field of MRI scanning. We also delved into the unseen world with the help of our microscope expert, and found out how drones are used in the study of volcanoes.

Word
The Word events this year showcased local, national and international talent including our own creative writing students, Norwegian novelist Anne Oterholm and Argentinian activist writer Ines Arteta. We celebrated the 90th Anniversary of "Scottish PEN" the writers association, with Neal Ascherson, and welcomed others such as festival favourite Alan Spence, as well as Man Booker Prize 2016 nominee Wyl Menmuir.

Sport
Visitors were able to join the staff of Aberdeen Sports Village on a tour of their fantastic facility, as well as try out a taster exercise class. Kids also burned off some energy taking part in some fun activities on the Kings Lawn.

Environment
Visitors came to explore the environment of the Cruickshank Botanic Garden and enjoy tours and family workshops. The Hall of Mayhem also offered an opportunity to join the Aberdeen Biodiversity Centre team to flex green fingers, try some nest-building and to learn more about the importance of colours and patterns in the animal kingdom.
May Festival Themes

Music
The musical offering at the May Festival this year was bursting at the seams. We saw performances from our very own chapel choir and Baroque Ensemble, as well as the internationally renowned Rose Consort. Visitors were also able to immerse themselves in the James Carpenter Collection; the largest collection of North-East ballads in existence.

History, Heritage & Archaeology
To celebrate Scotland’s Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology 2017 we had a whole host of fantastic events. Visitors came in their droves to see our live archaeological dig site on campus. We also discovered connections between Aberdeen and Robert the Bruce, and learnt more about the Jacobites, the science and study of bones and the history of the University campus.

Science
The science strand was jam packed this year, with some science and magic fun from quantum magician Kevin McMahon and some Murderous Maths from Kjartan Poskitt. There were also interactive discussions around microbiology and infections, as well as how we might soon be arguing with computers.

Vision
From selfies to shadow dance, there was lots on offer this year. A particular highlight was an evening spent with the Scottish Falsetto Sock Puppet Theatre presenting Shakespeare through brilliant comedy sketches, songs and lots of nonsense.
May Festival Themes

Gaelic
Gaelic speaker or not, there were lots of fun family events on over the weekend, giving you the chance to sing songs and learn some new dance moves. We were also joined by Gaelic authors Aonghas Dubh MacNeacail and Seonag Monk.

Food and Drink
As always there was plenty to tickle our taste buds over the weekend. The ever-popular Produce Market returned to Elphinstone Hall, and visitors were able to tour the new Rowett Institute and hear from our scientists about how foods can be reformulated to improve health. Several slow food events also took place, testing out the youngest visitors’ bread and pasta making skills.

Current Affairs
The new Current Affairs strand saw conversations about some of today’s hot topics. The ‘Rebel Girls’ hosted a lively panel discussion addressing what it means to be a woman today, and a team of experts discussed Digestive Health in Modern Day Culture. We also heard from a panel which included the Chair of the new Scottish Land Commission, who discussed the 2016 Land Reform Act and what it means for Scotland.
There were **14,100 visitor interactions** at the 2017 May Festival.

- **47%** of visitors also attended the Festival in 2016, but over half the 2017 visitors were new to the Festival. This demonstrates that the Festival retains audiences year on year but that we also attract new audiences.
- **55%** of visitors said they would **definitely return** to the Festival next year.
- Visitors attended on average a total of **5 events** throughout the Festival.
- **46%** of visitors rated their **overall experience** as **very satisfied**.
- **53%** of visitors were **very satisfied** by the **quality of events** offered at the Festival.
- Most visitors stated that they had heard about the May Festival either through **word of mouth**, the **May Festival website**, the **May Festival Programme** or from a direct **email newsletter**.

### Demographic of age profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 16</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 24</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 34</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 44</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 54</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 64</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Where do you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeenshire</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Scotland)</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The above table indicates an increase from 2016 in the demographics of the under 16 and the 25–34 age group. We are pleased to see that the festival is attracting new and younger audiences more than ever before, as this increase in young people’s attendance had been a specific aim for this year’s festival.
- Compared to 2016, the 2017 Festival attracted more visitors from the local area which shows that our local publicity campaigns have been highly successful. It is important to us to be particularly active within our local community, making the University and what we have to offer more accessible to everyone.
Marketing & Media Exposure

- **29,000** copies of the full colour Festival programme were distributed nationally to cultural hubs such as tourist information centres, libraries, museums and schools as well as through our partners, sponsors and direct mail.
- Targeted events e-zines were sent to over **12,000** events subscribers and **53,638** Alumni.
- **Outdoor advertising campaigns** in the city centre comprised of display pillars and shop window displays, as well as banners and signage across campus.
- **Radio advertising** on local wide reaching, radio station Original 106fm.
- **Extensive broadcast media coverage** on BBC Radio Scotland, shmuFM and Original 106fm, each of which reported live from the Festival. Specifically including a live from campus broadcast of the BBC Scotland’s ‘Out for the Weekend’ show with Fiona Stalker, featuring special guests Sir Tony Robinson and Call the Midwife actress Laura Main.
- Numerous articles in **both local and national press** including *The Scotsman, The Times* and *The Sunday Post*. The Festival was featured online on news outlets and social media including *The Aberdeen Evening Express* and *The Press & Journal*.
- **Feature articles** in North-East subscription magazine *The Leopard* with a circulation of **3,000** readers.
- Our live “King’s Dig” event reached an audience in excess of **140,000** through Facebook with around **48,000** viewing the almost **90 minutes** of live streamed video from the dig site over the week.
- Our social media posts across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram reached an audience in excess of **260,000**, generating **30,000** click-throughs to our website.
- The festival’s Facebook adverts reached **110,000** people, with **1,200** clicking through to our official May Festival website.
- Our snapchat filter had a 50%–65% usage rate across the weekend, with snaps taken reaching **1,500** users.
The Schools’ Festival ran for 3 days this year, offering many exciting, educational events for pupils from several Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Primary schools.

The Festival welcomed little faces from all over the region, attracting schools from the local area including Seaton, Forehill, Kittybrewster, Woodside, Hanover, St Peter’s, Aberdeen School for the Deaf, Scotstown, Kirkhill, Gilcomstoun & Holy Family. Schools from further afield included Rathen, Marykirk, Luthermuir and Newtonhill, who travelled in to the city to attend the Festival and take part in the interactive and fun activities on offer. The May Festival once again proved to be easily accessible to schools in the surrounding areas with all events being FREE of charge.

This year’s programme attracted over 975 pupils from over 15 schools. The programme engaged with youngsters of primary age, with events catering to each level; from Primary 1 through to Primary 7. The pupils participated in an exciting live archeological dig, discovered all about the environment of our guts, as well as the science and archaeology of bones. They also explored and got stuck into the rich habitat of the Cruickshank Botanic Garden, experimented with urban soils around the campus, got musical with pennywhistles and even learned about how genes can impact the health of people, animals, plants and even soil. We also teamed up with Aberdeen Science Centre who hosted science sessions for schools, where pupils were given an insight into forces, and also built and tested their own wind turbines.

The Schools programme had something for every class with a choice of themes that linked easily into their classroom topics and related to the curriculum for excellence.

The Festival team thanks our principal sponsor Total and the many partners involved in the programming including the Aberdeen Biodiversity Centre, Aberdeen Fungal Group, School of Natural and Computing Sciences, Department of Archeology, Knowing from the Inside project, Mudpies, Aberdeen Science Centre, and Gael Music; who all hosted engaging, interactive and fun events that both teachers and pupils enjoyed.

The Schools’ Festival was as popular as ever with the figures to prove it!

**Facts & Figures**

- 100% of teachers rated their overall opinion of the event/workshop as very good or good
- 100% of teachers rated pupils overall enjoyment as very good or good
- 100% of teachers rated the content of the event/workshop as very good or good
- 96% of teachers rated the event/workshop’s relevance to the curriculum as very good or good
- 100% of teachers would recommend the May Festival to other teachers
- 100% of teachers felt that the event/workshop had improved the pupils’ knowledge of the topic
- 87% of teachers advised that they would undertake follow-up events in class

**Comments from Teachers**

Seaton Primary School: *The children really enjoyed the experience, the workshop was the perfect length and worksheet was at the perfect level.* (Nature Ninjas)

Holy Family RC Primary School: *Very good workshop with lots of experimental learning which the pupils really enjoyed.* (Fun with Forces)

St Peter’s RC Primary School: *It was informative and engaging – thank you!* (What’s in my Gut?)
Children’s Programme

27th & 28th May

The Children’s Festival was as packed as ever with over 20 events for children and parents to enjoy. Thanks to the support of all of our sponsors, especially Total, we were able to make the majority of events FREE of charge allowing a great time for all the family.

Thousands of youngsters flocked on to University campus for the Children’s Festival and with a variety of events on offer including: pennywhistle workshops, a nature hunt in the magical botanic garden, historic tours of the campus, face painting, an exploration of the museum collections, fun with maths and music, bread and pasta making and Gaelic workshops, children were truly spoilt for choice.

From the Science and Magic show by magician — scientist hybrid Kevin Quantum, to engaging the senses on a Slow Food Taste Adventure, there was something for every age group to enjoy.

The fantastic Hall of Mayhem was back again for a third year with over 1750 people visiting the popular drop-in sessions. They got to participate in a plethora of hands on activities, including the opportunity to build brush-bot robots, make badges and bracelets, extract DNA from fruit, build and test a wind turbine as well as scan and 3D print their own heads. Families could find out how the immune system fights fungal infections as well as look at the impact of colour and pattern in nature. There were also fascinating demonstrations of the new experimental ‘Fast Field-Cycling MRI’, and fun facts about how we can make our gardens more Bee friendly. The fun also spilled outside onto the King’s Lawn with taster sports sessions with staff from the Aberdeen Sports Village, Face Painting and the opportunity to get musical in the Culture Together Pennywhistle workshops.

Over at the MacRobert Building, visitors were given a multi-sensory food experience at the Slow Food Taste Adventure, where children were encouraged to think about food and why it is important to diversify their diet by experiencing food in an entirely new way, through each of their five senses: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Touching and Tasting.

At the fully booked Gaelic events, visitors were invited to try out some Gaelic games, songs, step dancing and craft activities. The events attracted Gaelic speakers but also welcomed non-Gaelic speakers who were treated to a fun introduction to the Gaelic language.

The King’s Dig & Tours invited parents and children to explore the University of Aberdeen’s historic campus above and below ground level. The guided tours were a great success for those who wanted to enjoy the sunshine and explore the outdoors while receiving a history lesson, and the live archaeological dig on campus gave budding archaeologists a chance to get their hands dirty, and uncover some amazing treasures from the past!

Parents and children alike enjoyed the Murderous Maths and Maths and Music sessions, hosted by charismatic author, Kjartan Poskitt, providing a new comic take on maths and how numbers help to turn noise into tunes.

The children’s programme attendance rate was at a record high this year with over 3,758 visitor interactions. Making the 2017 May Festival Children’s Programme a record breaking one!

Comments from Families

An hour and a half later, my 7 year old was still digging! A new career option unfolds. (King’s Dig)

Totally brilliant and very, very funny. One of the best presentations ever. The PowerPoint was in a class of its own and the content superb. Thank you! (Maths & Music)

Really good & believable. Heart stopping. Definitely would come again. Spectacular, extremely happy we came. (Science & Magic)
Support us!

“Impressed with the variety of events on offer, a truly inspirational Festival”

The University of Aberdeen runs a wide-reaching programme of cultural and educational public events throughout the year, with something to suit all ages and interests.

We would be delighted to talk to you about opportunities to get involved and support our public engagement programme.

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