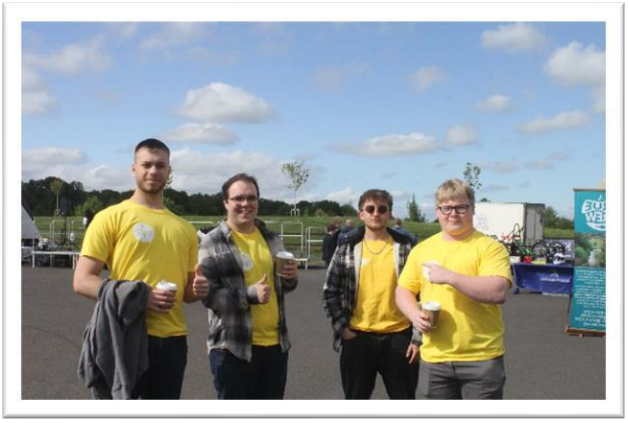
Somerscience 2025

Evaluation report



Laura Romani Whiteland-Smith

Ben Gardiner

19/05/2025

Evaluation report Contents:

Introduction

The Somerscience Festival was held in South Somerset on May 5th, 2025. This year marks the festival's third iteration, exclusively hosted at Haynes Motor Museum. Continuing our mission, we aim to support The Somerscience Trust's goal "to advance the education of the public in Somerset in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and to promote public engagement in all aspects of STEM developments".

The expected outcome for the third Somerscience Festival was to build on the momentum generated in the previous years. Success for the 2025 festival was defined by several key metrics: affording at least 20,000 engagements from young people in South Somerset, enlisting a minimum of 80 contributing organisations, and offering 100 distinct activities. Additionally, we aimed to provide a quality experience for both participants and attendees, surpassing the visitor numbers and demographic profile achieved in prior years – measured by asking for age demographic data in our surveys, and utilising clickers at the entrances to all the rooms in Haynes. Our visitor numbers reached 5000, and although this did not surpass the 2024 data, this may be due to the choice to change the festival to a singular venue. Regrettably demographic data other than age was not collected as volunteers at the doors needed to regulate visitor flow. This year we worked with a team of apprentices at Thales UK on the organisation of the festival as part of their project management development, and as part of our aim to make the festival more sustainable in future years, and we therefore had a further goal to ensure that the apprentice team developed specific skills as a result. Our ultimate goal was to positively influence attitudes towards STEM and STEM careers among visitors, leading to a measurable increase in STEM uptake at GCSE, A/T Level, and interest in STEM pathways after school.

The target audience was the young people of South Somerset and their families as this would address the inequity of access to STEM engagement opportunities found in rural areas and this area, which was in the bottom 10 of 387 Local Authority areas for such opportunities according to the British Science Association's 2022 survey.

Success criteria

1. Afford a minimum of 20,000 engagements by young people from Somerset.
2. Recruit at least 80 contributing organisations and 100 discrete activities.
3. Achieve a quality experience for participants and attendees.
4. Build on the baseline of visitor numbers and demographic profile achieved in 2024.
5. Effect positive change on attitudes towards STEM and STEM careers from visitors leading eventually to a quantitative increase in STEM uptake at choice points and after-school clubs
6. Positively impact the learning and specific skills development of the apprentice organisation team.

Somerscience 2025 quantitative data

- Total visitors at Haynes – 5000 (400 less than 2024) and 53 attended the satellite activities at Carymoor Environmental Centre.
- Age demographic from the survey – 21% were under 18 and 70% were in between the ages of 25-54. However, the survey was likely completed by the parents of festival goers and so gives a skewed impression of the ages. Anecdotally, there were large numbers of young people under 18 attending with their families. Unfortunately, this year we were unable to register every visitor at the door as we needed to maintain visitor flow so accurate demographics are missing.

- Social media reach – 94,995
- Facebook post active engagements – 4500

- 100% of visitors rated the festival between Good and Excellent – an improvement compared to 2024.
- 96% of visitors would recommend the festival to their network.
- 88% of visitors gained more interest in STEM after the festival.
- 59% gained more interested in a STEM career.
- 91% felt the festival had a positive impact on their belief that STEM is relevant to their daily life.
- A shift of 30% was reported in positivity of visitors' attitudes towards stem after the festival (60% to 90%).
- At least 90% of professional contributors reported Good or Excellent:
    - The number of interactions they had with target audience.
    - The level of engagement from the audience.
    - The quality of interactions had.
    - Number of visitors (51% rated this as excellent)

Evaluation approaches

An in-depth review was conducted to evaluate inputs, outputs, outcomes, and assess the longer-term impact. Inputs were gauged through surveys, measuring satisfaction with resources, venues, pre-festival communications, and overall organisation. Volunteers with clickers and clipboards cover the number of contributors and attendees, engagement numbers, and the effectiveness of individual activities.

Outcomes were assessed through intercept surveys and retrospective online surveys, providing quantitative data on changes in attitudes towards STEM. This includes whether visitors are more inclined to engage in other STEM activities, have a better understanding of various STEM components, are more likely to consider STEM subjects or career pathways, and perceive STEM as relevant to their lives.

Qualitative outcome data was gathered through volunteers asking attendees for 3 words to describe their experience or a graffiti wall and coded as positive or negative. To evaluate overall impact, we will look for evidence of increased interest in STEM pathways and destinations, as noted by schools or participating organisations. While recognising that this impact may be challenging to identify in the initial years, we anticipate a cumulative effect as the festival becomes an established annual event.

Programme review

Reviewing the programme reveals 68 planned individual activities and 57 separate organisations engaged; however, on the day, it became clear that many of the billed ‘activities’ were in fact multifaceted, for example Leonardo’s stand comprised of 4 different activities, so it is likely that in fact that there were 85 separate activities.

Visitor count

Volunteers stationed at the festival site entrances used tally counters to record the number of visitors. The final count was 5,000, which is 400 fewer than in 2024. This may be the effect of the reduction to one single large venue. However, due to high foot traffic, it was challenging to count every entrant accurately. Additionally, there was a 3-hour period after volunteer changeover in the afternoon during which entries were not recorded, suggesting that the actual number of visitors was higher than reported. The festival was fully populated between the times of 10am to 3pm when the visitor numbers began to reduce. Shows, talks and workshops were also very well attended throughout the day.

Social media review

- Facebook reach – 94,995
- Facebook engagement – 4,500
- Facebook followers – 1163 – 47% aged 35-44, 29.3% aged 45-54; 89% female, indicating it is likely parents, particularly mums or grandmothers who plan this into family diaries
- 10 LinkedIn mentions
- Some interaction on Instagram but this needs developing in future years

A selection of comments from social media:

“Somerscience is fantastic! All free, loads to do and explore.”

“Our girls really enjoyed it, really brilliant day out xx”

“Had a great time thank you”

“Thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you to all involved”

“My son came with grandad, and they had a great time! Favourite was the Henry Hoover workshop”

“My 5-year-old is playing phage’s v bacteria with his pudding grapes. He wouldn’t have been doing that if he hadn’t been to your event today!”

“Our son had a great day thank you. He said it was even better than last year.”

“Absolutely a huge thanks to Somerscience for being so inclusive and supportive of home educators! It’s great to see organisations like theirs recognising the value in offering opportunities to all learners.”

“Was fantastic – thank you.”

“We enjoyed today so much. Very educational, inspirational and great fun. My children have asked to go back again tomorrow. Thanks for all the staff.”

“Great day. A big thank you to all the volunteers.”

“Absolutely brilliant day, thanks to all the volunteers and businesses.”

“Fabulous once again”

“Great fun”

“It was a really fun and interesting day – thank you! We all learned something and had a good time. Using more of the downstairs rooms and having the one-way system was definitely an improvement.”

“Highlight of the week? Got to be Somerscience – a proper festival of science fun stuff for all sorts and ages. There were a good 5000 people milling around trying stuff and soaking it all up on the day, although truth be told this was the first I’d heard of it …got to be one of the best kept secrets in the southwest…the audience were awesome.”

Email received

Dear all

I realise how busy you all must be after such an amazing event. I attended your festival with my five-year-old son who really wanted to send a message to you. He would like to say:

Thank you so much we enjoyed it so much, it was the best day ever. I loved the Lego area, the harbour simulator, the robots swarm, the geological society and just all of it. Everyone was really friendly, and I loved it. We will definitely come again next year.

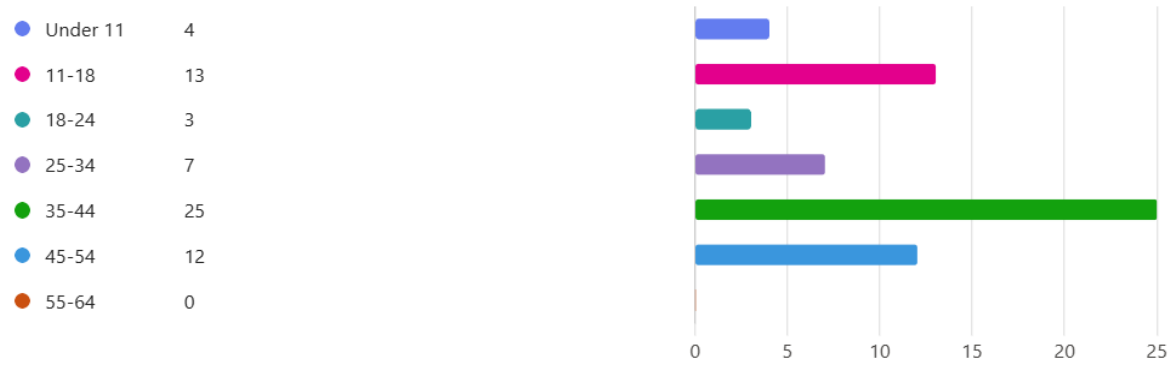
I wouldn’t normally bother people with this sort of thing but he’s not the most communicative kid and he was genuinely struck by how much hard work everyone had done to put on this event.

Sincerely

Visitor survey

There were 64 responses to the visitor feedback survey, which was facilitated by QR code link to a Microsoft Form. QR codes were printed on A5 flyers, which were handed out by volunteers across the festival sites and slotted into the festival brochures. Participation was incentivised with the offer of entry to a prize draw with the opportunity to win a £50 Amazon voucher.

1. What age category do you belong to?

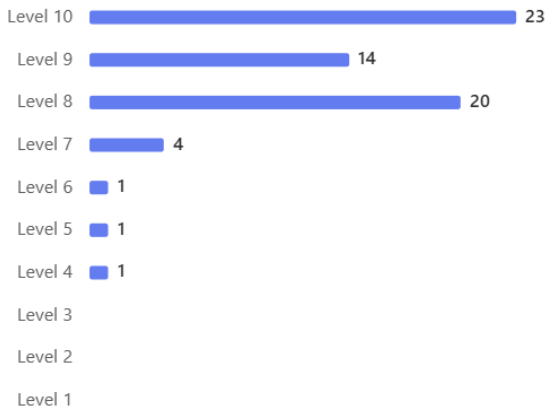


The largest group of respondents to this online survey were from the 35-44 group. In fact, 39% of responses came from 35-54-year-olds. This is more a reflection of the mode of response gathering, rather than the age profile of all attendees; on the day (anecdotal observation) there were more young people in attendance. Other methods were used to capture feedback from the younger attendees e.g. graffiti walls.

2. How would you rate the overall quality of the festival?

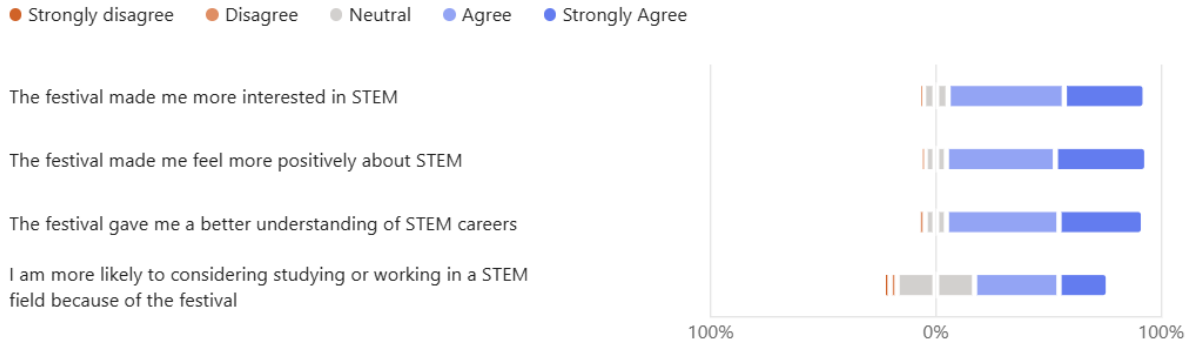
34% responded Excellent this year. The overall 'Good' to 'Excellent' percentage was 100%. This is an improvement from 99%, we also added the 'Excellent' criteria which shows added improvement.

3. How likely are you to recommend visiting Somerscience Festival to a friend, family member or colleague?



This year's score has seen a slight increase compared to last year, which is remarkable given the improved perception of 'quality this year' (Q2). 36% of respondents rated this at 10.

4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about how the festival impacted you?

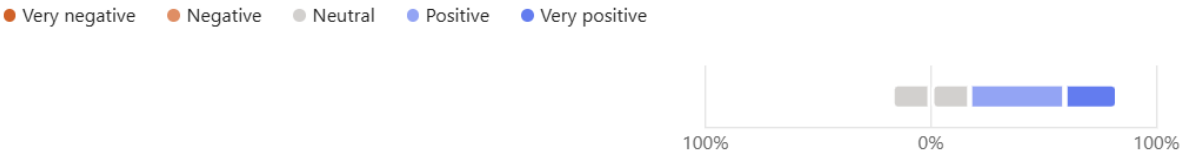


Based on this data, the festival has positively impacted attitudes towards STEM for most. Most pleasingly, 59% said that it made them more likely to consider studying or working in a STEM field, which is up from 47% in 2024, a significant increase. It must be remembered that, since a large proportion of those who completed the survey were parents, they are presumably already in a set career hence the higher amount of ambivalence/not applicable on this measure.

5. How would you describe the impact of the festival on:

A marginally more positive set of responses when compared to 2024. The differences were small, but were improved in each aspect, for example– STEM Careers: 86% positive in 2025, versus 83% in 2024, which suggests that the contributors' offer in 2025 was either more geared towards destinations and careers, or that it hit that mark more effectively. Once again, positively contributing to **success criterion 5**.

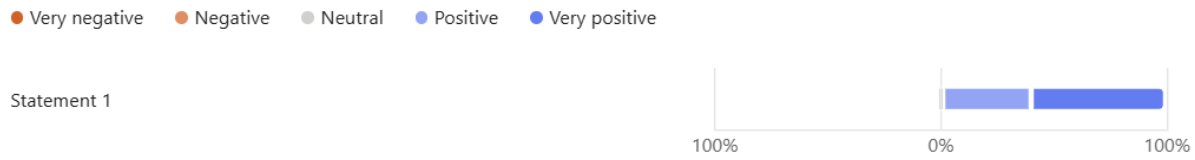
6. How would you rate your attitude towards STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths / Medicine) <u>before</u> the festival?



42% Positive and 23% Very positive this year, compared to 2024 ratings, 42% 'Positive' and 34%

'Very Positive', which could reflect a different set of respondents to the survey or an already heightened effect of previous years' efforts.

7. **How would you rate your attitude towards STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths / Medicine) <u>now</u>?**



There was a marginal increase of scores between the 'Positive' – 'Very positive' range between 2025 and 2024 (98% compared to 96%).

8. **What was your favourite activity at the festival?**

Similar themes to last year, with particular focus on the hands-on activities. Talks were also rated very highly this year although again, this may be an artefact of the profile of survey respondents since talks were really the only activity aimed exclusively at adults.

9. **What if anything would you change/improve for next year?**

Mainly positive responses, the common themes were overcrowding, busyness around stands and more practical activities to engage with.

Out of the 5000 visitors that attended this year, we only received 64 responses. Whilst this is indicative of the themes, it is a small sample, and we will need to give thought to more immediate ways of gauging feedback on the day itself from a wider selection of visitors.

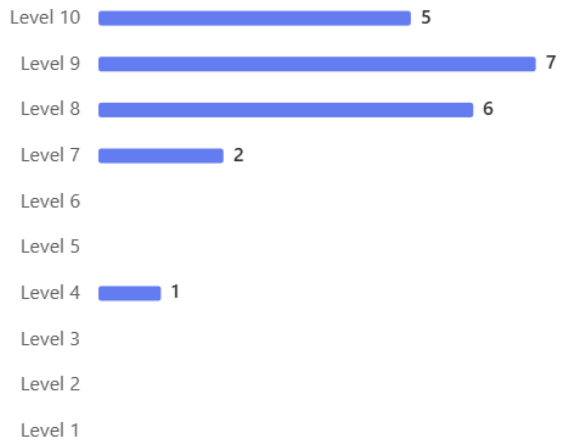
Contributor survey

There were 21 responses from contributors to a Microsoft Form survey, which was shared by email post-festival. A summary of the responses is provided below.

To what extent did the festival meet your expectations?

8.52

Average Rating

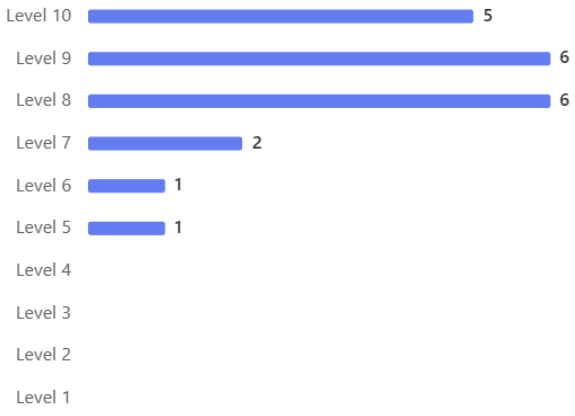


A positive response with a slight increase from last year (8.44). Some stated that it was their first experience of a STEM festival and noted that Somerscience was "busier" and "more interactive" than other STEM festivals that they had attended. Contributors fed back that it was a valuable experience for networking with fellow contributors and attendees. There were a few comments regarding availability of refreshments for a long day of working, suggesting yet again that they hadn't been made aware by their organisation of the joining instructions clearly sent out a month before, explaining what facilities were available and what they should bring, and a few noted that there was limited space for moveability, given the festival organisation and visitor numbers.

The festival was free for contributors. Based on that, please rate overall value for time invested.

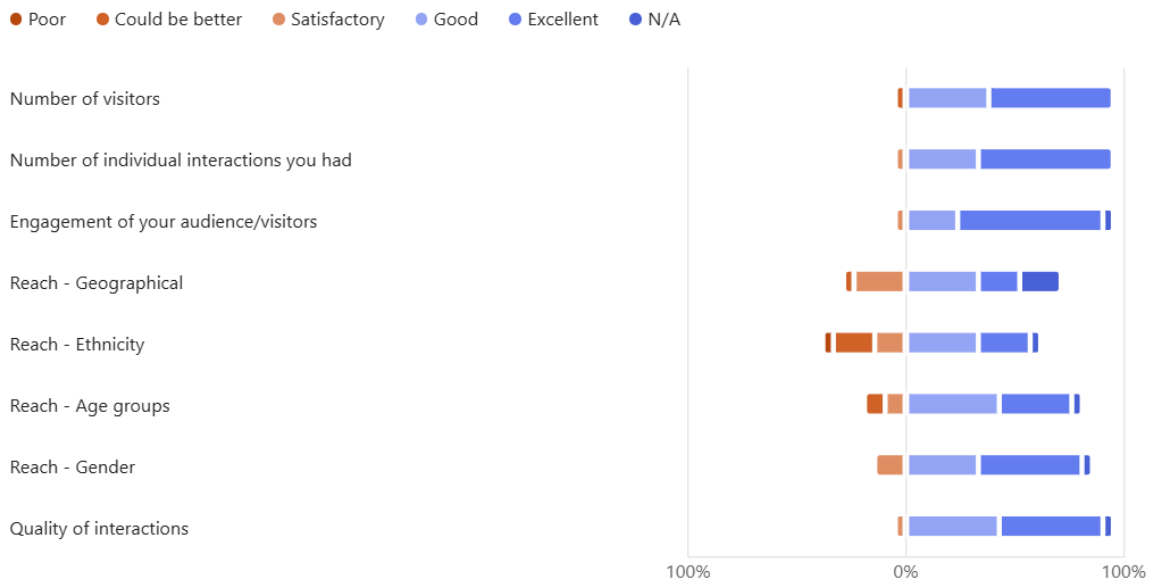
8.43

Average Rating



82% of responses were in the top 3 ratings. This is a marginal drop from last years (8.79). However, there were no ratings below 5.

On the day – please rate the following using the scale below:

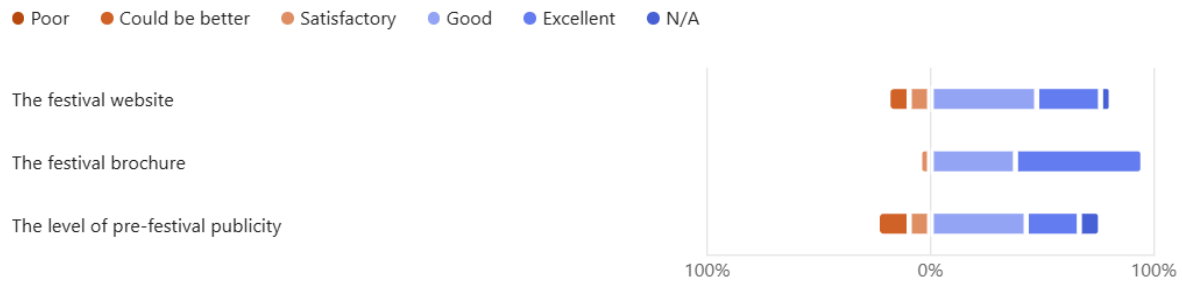


This closely mirrors the results from the 2024 survey. With slight improvements in most of the statements, predominantly in 'number of visitors' and 'number of individual interactions you had'. Many contributors stated that they were not able to ask visitors about ethnicity, age or geographical data. We must acknowledge that Somerscience is a local STEM festival, targeted at rural South Somerset, and the ethnic makeup of our immediate area is more homogenous than most.

Overall – Please rate the following using the scale below:

Both 'the planning of the festival' and 'the execution on the day' were rated highly – at almost 90% between 'Good' and 'Excellent'. The facilities both 'professional' and 'personal' were rated significantly lower at 76% and 71% respectively. Most of these comments were related to the placement and facilities of the stages – citing not having appropriate wind cover or the surroundings of the stages being overly loud – and lack of refreshments for contributors across the day suggestion poor communication of the joining instructions between the organisations and their people attending the event.

Marketing – Please rate the following using the scale below:



Despite high levels of satisfaction, there were suggestions for increased publicity prior to the festival, particularly on social media. This is contentious as there was a widespread and regular social media campaign for three months before the date, which our social media statistics suggest was widely read and engaged with. Furthermore, often it is the case that contributors should cross-publicise it more on their own social media sites, either by original posts or sharing ours. Each year we recommend they do this and yet this does not happen. Nevertheless, with 95% of contributors satisfied with the number of visitors, the need for additional promotion seems unwarranted. Local outreach, Facebook, and school distributions were the primary sources of information about the event, resulting in visitor numbers similar to last year's festival.

Communication and joining - Please rate the following using the scale below:

All ratings achieved 80%+ ranging from 'Good' to 'Excellent', with the notable exception of the 'Initial content specification process'. Detailed feedback revealed that some contributors experienced confusion over activity descriptions, as the initial specification form was perceived to be unclear and non-editable. This led to difficulties in providing required details for activities that had not yet been fully decided. Although these issues were not universally experienced, they did highlight the need for improved clarity and flexibility in future specification processes to ensure all contributors can respond effectively

Testimonials from contributors

Some specific contributor feedback quotes are included below, which again reflect the overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards the 2025 festival:

Inspiring the Next Generation at the Somerscience Festival

Volunteers from Thales in Templecombe spent their day inspiring the next generation to pursue a career in STEM...

The event showcases a variety of STEM organisations through school competitions, workshops, talks, interactive activities and demonstrations. There really is something for all ages - the little ones, the bigger ones AND the grown-ups - and it was completely free! And around 6,000 people visited! Thales colleagues provided their time and some great activities, which allowed visitors to fully immerse themselves into the world of STEM, with the hope of inspiring the next generation to pursue a career in it.

It was a really fun way to spend the day, even though it was a Bank Holiday! I really enjoyed spreading the word about what Thales can offer for early careers. People were often surprised by the breadth of products we were involved in, the fact that we have multiple sites around the UK and that we are not just UK based!" For Thales, the Somerscience Festival is a little more than one day of volunteering. It takes weeks of discussions to ensure the team are able to provide the best experience possible for the visitors on the day. **(Thales)**

This bank holiday weekend, science got a little louder and a lot more fun!

We had a great time at the Somerscience Festival, where our team set up a stand designed to spark interest in the wonders of batteries.

Children had the chance to ask big questions and discover what it's like to be part of a team that's shaping the future through science and innovation.

A huge thank you to everyone who stopped by, chatted with our team and shared in the excitement. We loved connecting with the next generation of curious minds. We hope we inspired a few future scientists along the way! **(Agratas)**

I had great fun at Somerscience festival on Monday running an outreach stall on behalf of the Biochemical Society. We showed >200 young people the joys of biochemistry and had them building models of aspirin and paracetamol to dock into the COX enzyme. We were amazed how quickly some of the 6-year-olds found their way around Pymol- let's hope we see some of them on our course in a few years' time! **(Biochemical Society)**

Meeting the next generation of eDNA ecologists at Somerscience 2025!

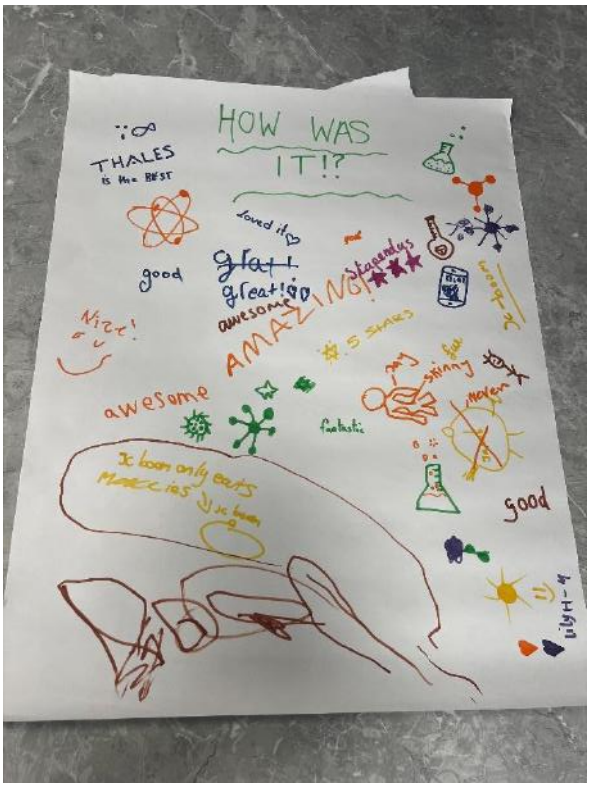
We really enjoyed hosting a hands-on environmental DNA (eDNA) workshop, exploring how molecular tools can help detect rare and endangered species—and of course we included our monitoring of European eel in Somerset ditches.

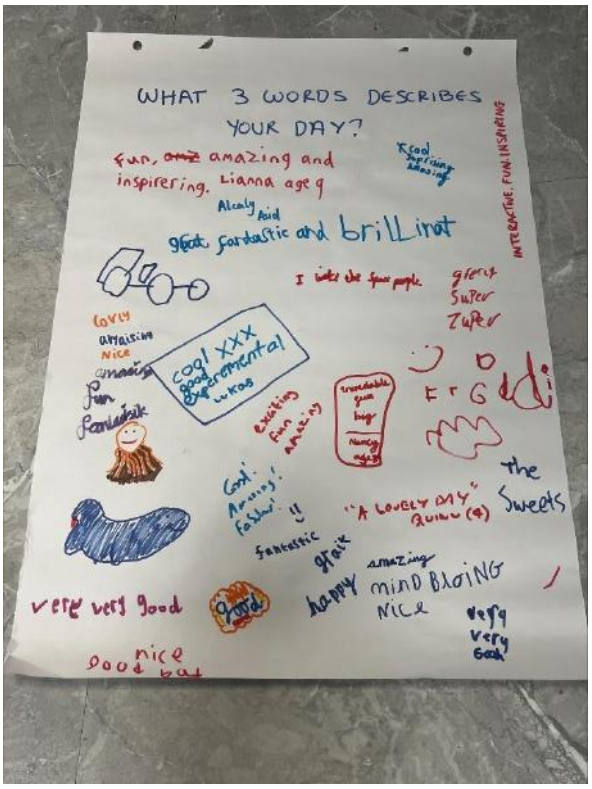
Participants had the opportunity to 'extract DNA from our ponds', understand the principles of species-specific assays, and discuss real-world applications of eDNA in conservation and biodiversity monitoring.

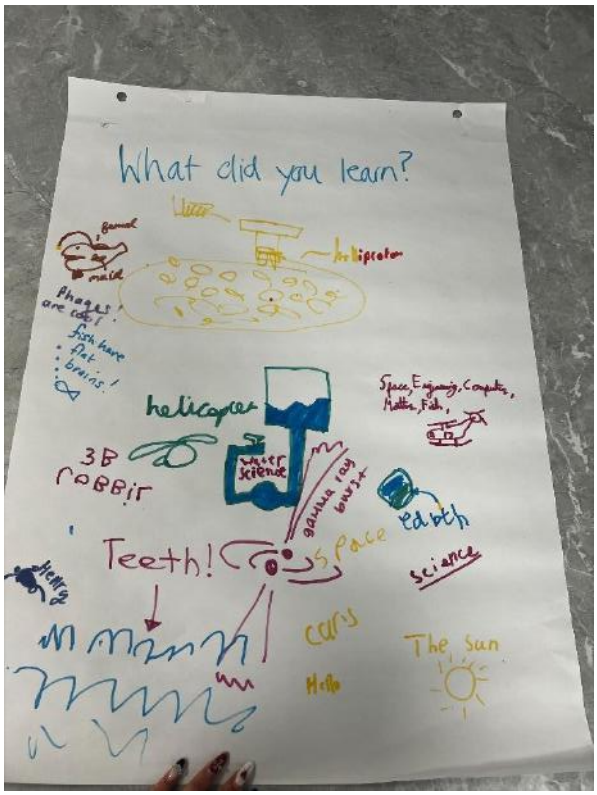
Thank you to everyone who joined us—and to Somerscience for providing a platform to share our research with the wider community. **(The eDNA consultancy)**

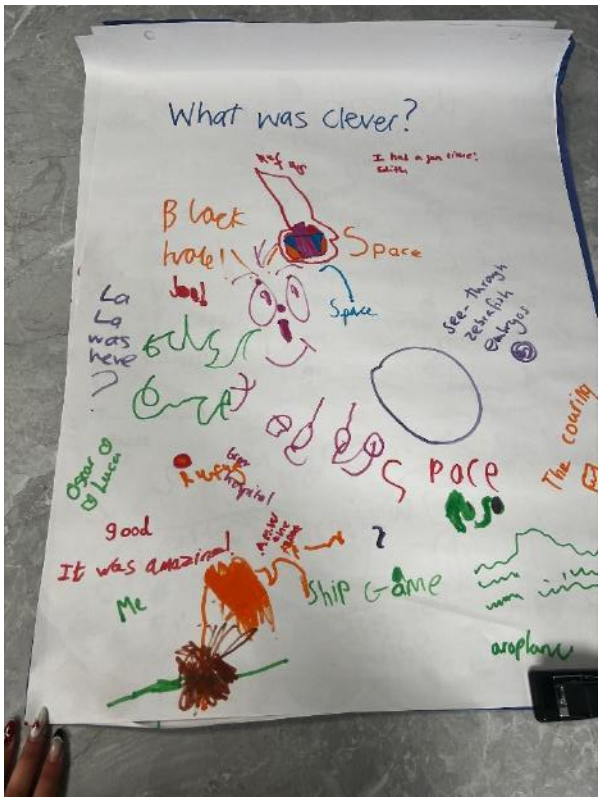
Graffiti Wall

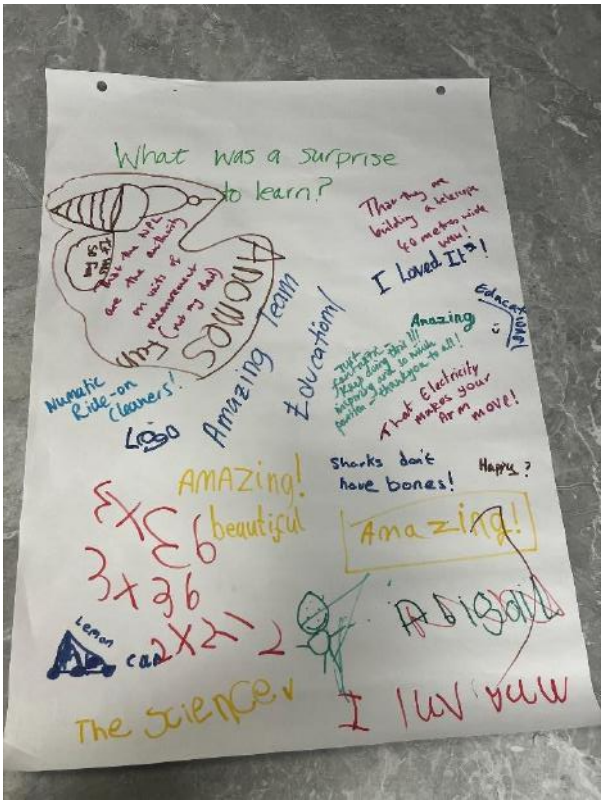
Visitors were encouraged to leave their feedback on a 'graffiti wall' in the reception area at Haynes Motor Museum. A selection of comments from across the demographics is included below:



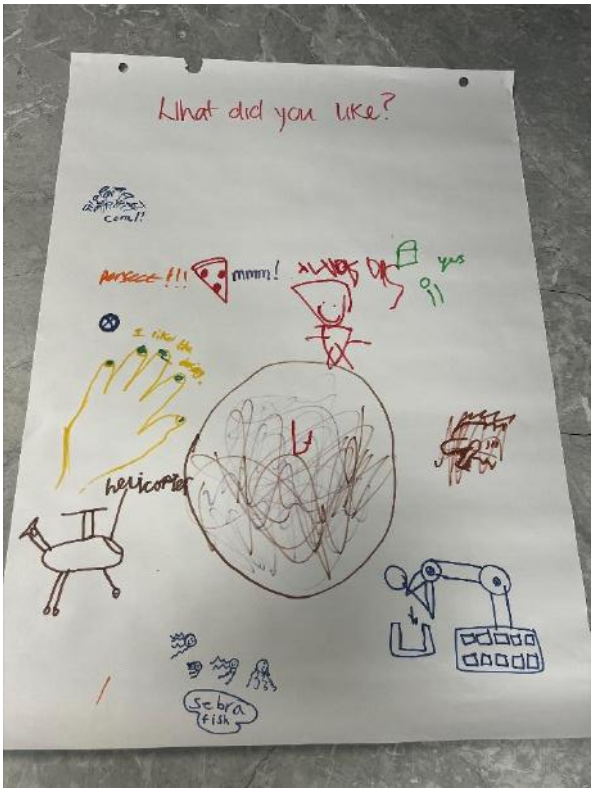


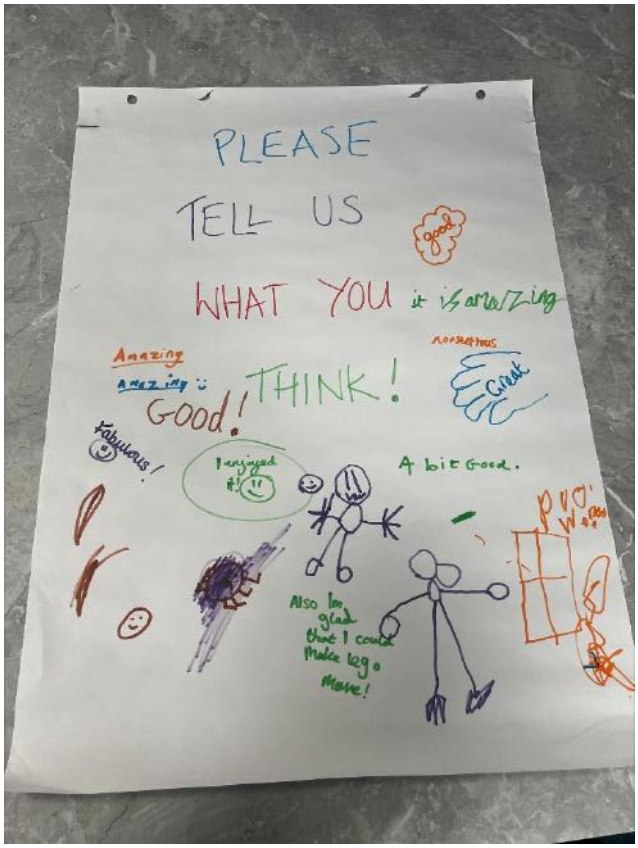


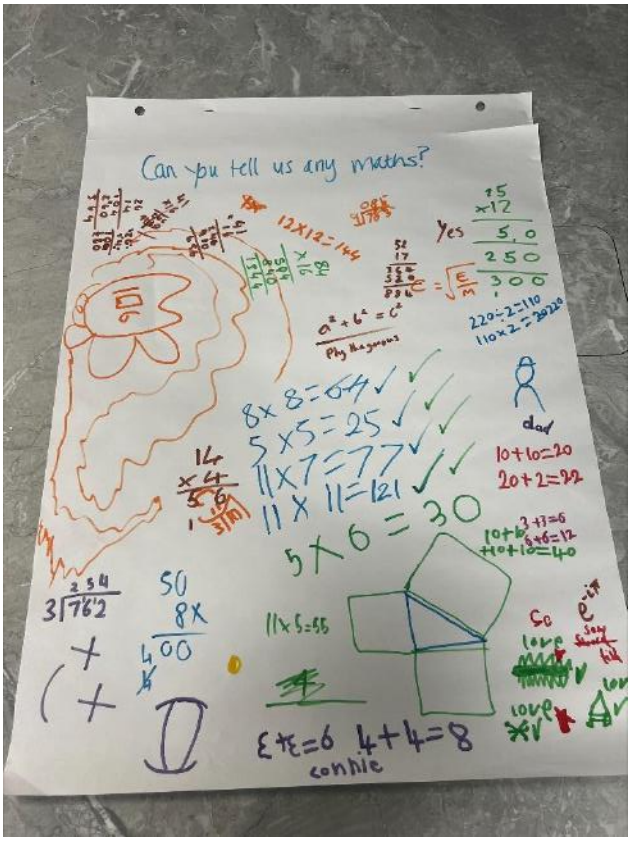

What was clever?
Black hole!
Space
Space
La La was here
Pace
Ship
Game
good
It was amazing!
Me
aroplane

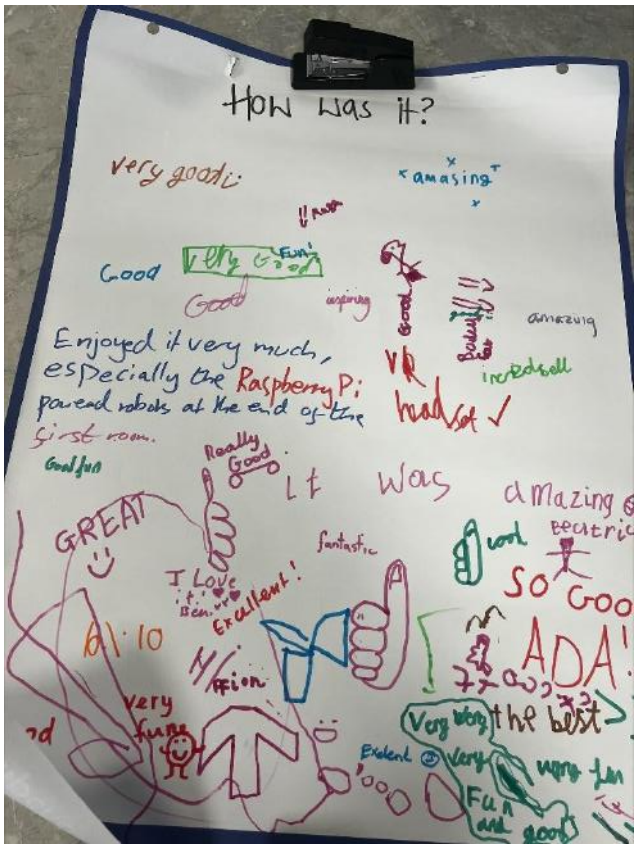

What was a surprise to learn?
I loved it!
Amazing
Education!
Amazing team
Numatic Ride-on Cleaners!
Logo
That Electricity makes your arm move!
AMAZING!
beautiful
Sharks don't have bones!
Happy?
Amazing!
Abigail
The science
I luv you

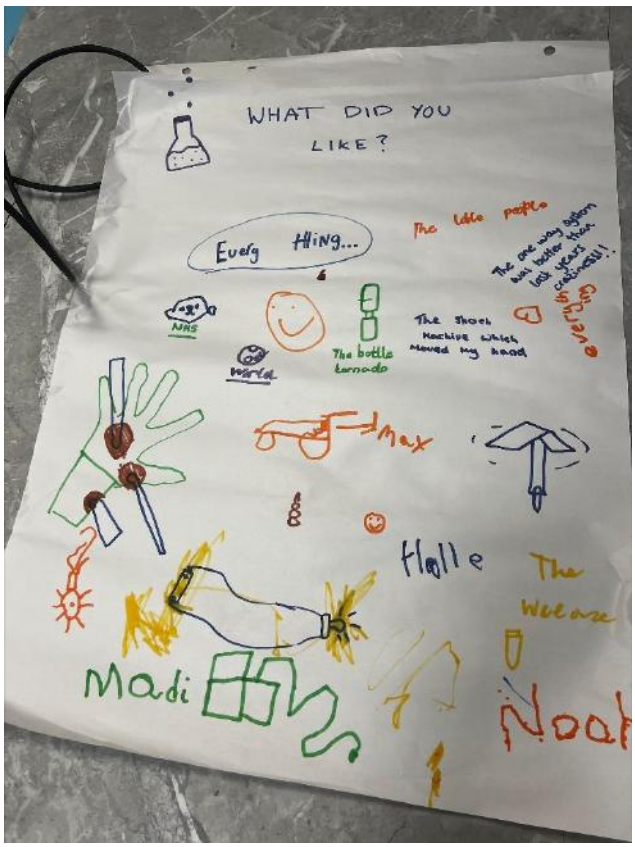

DRAW A PICTURE!
Rover
germ
Sand digging
helicopters
Space Dome

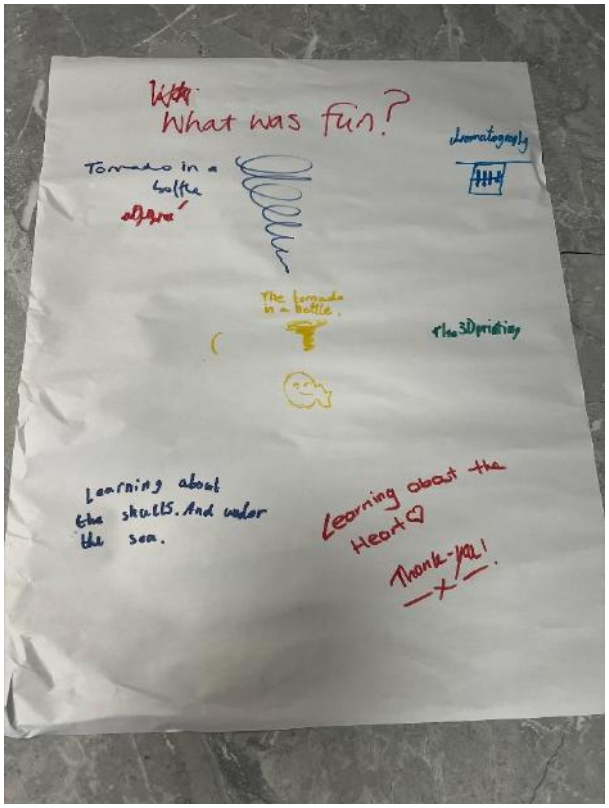

What did you like?
mmm!
helicopter
Zebra fish


PLEASE
TELL US
WHAT YOU
THINK!
Good!
Amazing
Fabulous!
I enjoyed it!
A bit Good.
Also Im glad that I could make lego more!


Can you tell us any maths?
Yes
8x8=64
5x5=25
11x7=77
11x11=121
5x6=30
dad
10+10=20
20+2=22
11x5=55
4+4=8
conkle

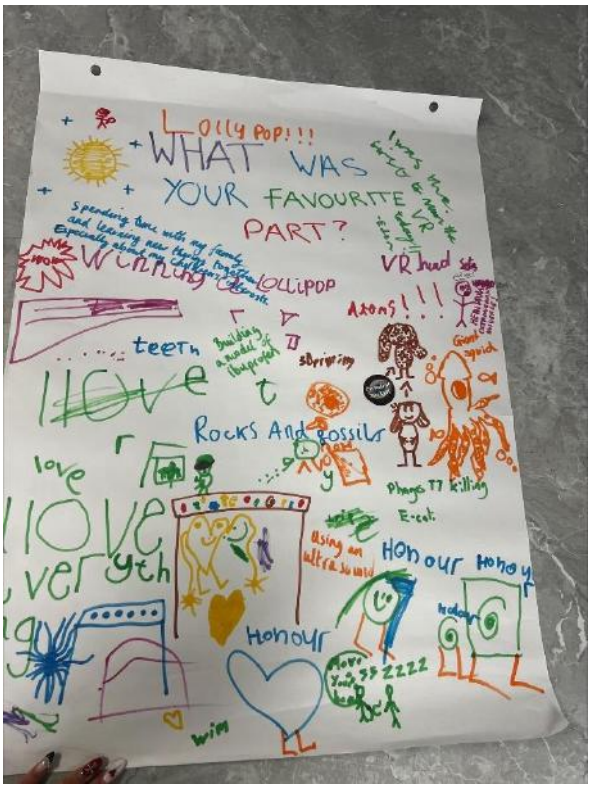

How was it?
very good!
amasing
Good
Enjoyed it very much, especially the Raspberry Pi; pawed robots at the end of the first room.
Really Good
It was
amazing
GREAT
I Love it!
Excellent!
fantastic
SO GOO
ADA!
the best
very fun
Very
Fun and good

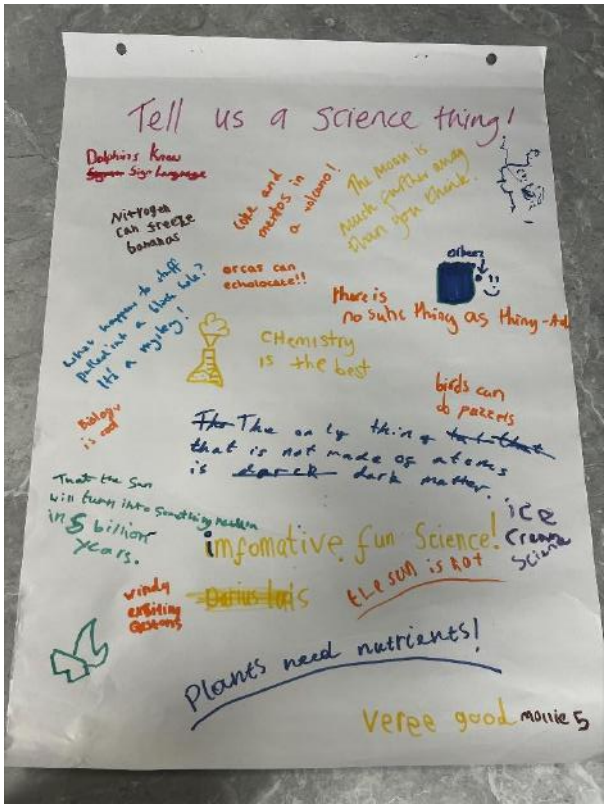

WHAT DID YOU LIKE?
Every Thing...
The little people
The one way bottom was better than last years obviously!!
The bottle tornado
The shock machine which moved my head
Max
Hallie
The
We are
Madi
Noah

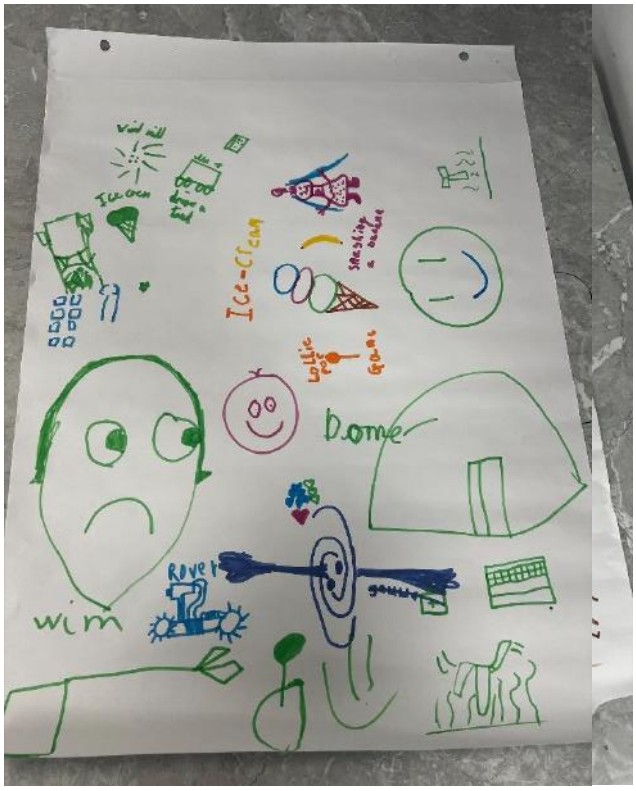

What was fun?
Tornado in a bottle
The tornado in a bottle.
Learning about the skulls. And under the sea.
Learning about the Heart
Thank-you!

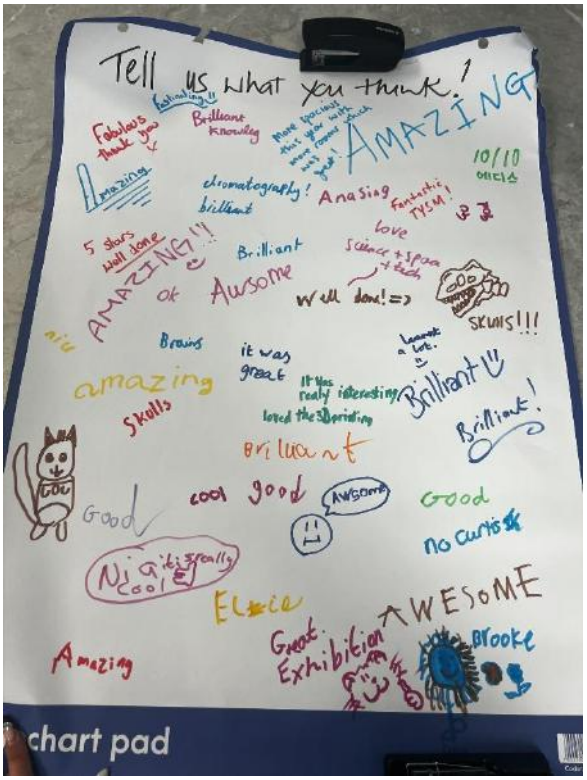

WHAT DID YOU FIND COOL?
robotics
Colouring
VR
Atoms!!
helicopter
The ocean
Space
Helicopter

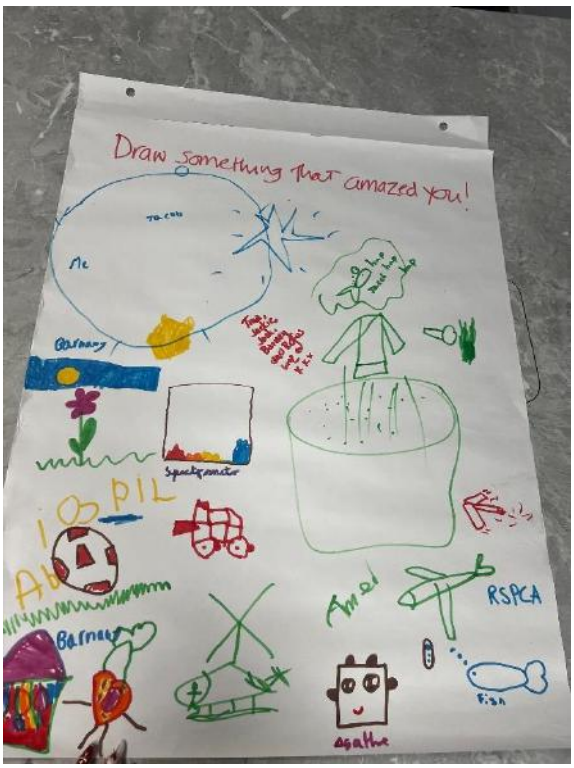

Draw a picture!
EAAT AG


Lolly Pop!!!
WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE PART?
VR head
LOLLIPOP
Atoms!!!
teeth
Rocks And fossils
Honour
Honour
Honour


Tell us a science thing!
Dolphins Know Sign Language
Nitrogen can freeze bananas
Cake and mentos in a volcano!
The Moon is slowly pulling away from the Earth.
orcas can echolocate!!
What happens to stuff Pulled into a black hole? It's a mystery!
There is no such thing as Thing-1 and Thing-2
Chemistry is the best
Biology is cool
birds can do parents
The only thing that is not made of atoms is dark matter.
That the Sun will turn into something molten in 5 billion years.
imfomative fun Science!
ice cream Science
windy exciting Geology
ELEsun is hot
Plants need nutrients!
Verge good Mollie 5


Ice-Cream
Dome
River
wim


Tell us what you think!
Fabulous thank you
Brilliant knowledge
AMAZING
10/10
chromatography!
Brilliant
love
Awsome
Well done!=)
SKULLS!!!
amazing
Skulls
it was great
Brilliant!
Brilliant
cool
Good
Awsome
Good
no curtis
AWESOME
Elsie
Great Exhibition
Brooke
Amazing
chart pad


Draw something that amazed you!
Me
Spectrometer
RSPCA
Barnaby
Agatha
Fish

Three Words

Volunteers were also able to canvas attendees for their 'three words' to describe Somerscience 2025. The main themes are "interesting", "fun", "busy" and "informative". The results of this activity are summarised in the word cloud below:

Conclusion

Based on information from the various modes of evaluation, the judgements against our success criteria, set out prior to the festival are as follows:

Success criteria	Judgement	Comments
Afford a minimum of 20,000 engagements by young people from Somerset	Fully met	Demographic data suggests that 26% of attendees were under the age of 18 (an underestimate as discussed). This yields a rough figure of 1250 "young people". Success criterion 1 targets 20,000 engagements from this group. Which would require interaction with just 16 of the 68 activities on offer.
Recruit at least 80 contributing organisations and 100 discrete activities	Partly met	We had enquiries for closer to 80 organisations, however with the available space and the nature of the activities, the number of organisations was restricted to 60. Of which, 53 were present at the festival.
Achieve a quality experience for participants and attendees	Fully met	100% of visitors completing the survey rated the quality of the event between 'Good' and 'Excellent'. Contributors gave the festival an average rating of 8.52/10 in terms of meeting expectations.
Build on the baseline of visitor numbers and demographic profile achieved in 2024	Partly met	Although visitor numbers remained around 5000, for the scale and nature of the event this year, that considered a good number and was matched well with the activities and event space available.
Effect positive change on attitudes towards STEM and STEM careers from visitors leading eventually to a quantitative increase in STEM uptake at choice points and after-school clubs	Partly met	59% of attendees said the festival made them more likely to consider studying or working in a STEM field. Post festival, 'Very Positive' attitudes to STEM became 59%, an increase of 38%. No work has yet been done on tracking changes to uptake of STEM qualifications or destinations, given this is only year 3 of Somerscience. One to monitor in future years.
Positively impact the learning and specific skills development of the apprentice project team	Fully met	The experience gained by the apprentice project team has been invaluable and has led to a more structured and repeatable process to be developed. Thereby improving the sustainability of the festival over the long term, removing reliance on individuals. Key skills learned: • Stakeholder Management • Communication • Leadership • Design – 2D modelling • Scheduling/Time management

Lessons learned

1. **Space Management for Stands**:
    - Ensuring there is adequate space for the number of stands is crucial. This year we learned the importance of properly planning and allocating space to avoid overcrowding and to ensure each stand has enough room to operate efficiently and comfortably.
2. **Simplified Pre-Festival Communication with Contributors**:
    - The need for improved pre-festival communication was evident. To address this, we recommend improving the information pack for contributors. This pack should include key details about the event, guidelines, schedules, and any other relevant information to ensure all contributors are well-informed and prepared in advance, although the joining instructions are handed out prior to the event – improving or re-wording will be critical for contributor satisfaction.
3. **Location and Facilities for Stages**:
    - Enhancing the location and facilities of the stages is essential for the success of future events. Lessons learned include the need for weatherproofing and soundproofing measures to ensure performances are not disrupted and can proceed smoothly regardless of external conditions with the potential to hold the shows at an alternative venue. This was the first year we had the shows at Haynes, and it may not have been a suitable choice given the feedback received.
4. **Visitor Flow Management**:
    - Improving the flow of visitors is vital to prevent blockages and ensure a smooth experience for all attendees. While the one-way system implemented was more effective, further consideration and planning of flow management strategies are necessary to improve satisfaction from visitors and contributors – as well as facilitating access for volunteers to move around. This may include additional signage, barriers, and designated pathways to better guide visitor movement.
5. **Improving Refreshment facilities**:
    - Streamlined processes for contributors to reach refreshment areas – potential to include options to ensure that there are adequate facilities to accommodate both visitors, volunteers and contributors. This time saving would allow volunteers to take breaks, relax, and refresh, thus maintaining their energy and morale throughout the event and improving overall contributor satisfaction.
6. **Review the evaluation methods**
    - Review the evaluation methods to identify ways to increase the level of engagement in responses, to improve the quality of the evaluation data.

Incorporating these lessons learned into future planning will help in delivering a more organised, efficient, and enjoyable festival experience for all involved, however the impact of the festival is clear in terms of its aims to improve the local population's engagement with STEM.